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Exams 2022 and public health advice: a joint message from the Scottish Government and SQA

Friday 22 April 2022

As we move towards the beginning of the formal exam period on Tuesday, we know centres may have questions around public health guidance in relation to COVID-19.

This email provides advance information on the Scottish Government's public health guidance, which is set to change in Scotland from 1 May, as well as an update on the Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service.

Public Health Guidance

For exams taking place before 1 May, the [current public health guidance](#) remains in place with PCR testing available for individuals who are symptomatic, and contact tracing and isolation guidance also remaining in place. Population wide asymptomatic testing (LFD universal offer) ended in mid-April, including in schools.

What is changing from 1 May?

From 1 May, advice to people with respiratory symptoms including COVID-19 will change in Scotland in line with the [Test and Protect Transition Plan](#) published on 15 March 2022. The general public will no longer be advised to seek a test if symptomatic.

From 1 May, people with symptoms of respiratory illness in Scotland, including COVID-19, will be asked to follow general public health guidance which will be available on 1 May. As set out on the [Public Health Scotland website](#), this new guidance will be published on [NHS Inform](#) and will broadly align with the current [UKHSA 'Stay at Home' Advice](#).

In terms of children and young people the guidance will say:

When children and young people with symptoms should stay at home and when they can return to education

Children and young people with mild symptoms such as a runny nose, sore throat, or slight cough, who are otherwise well, can continue to attend their education setting.

Children and young people who are unwell **and** have a high temperature should stay at home and avoid contact with other people, where they can. They can go back to school, college or

childcare, and resume normal activities when they no longer have a high temperature and they are well enough to attend.

Children and young people aged 18 years and under who have a positive test result

It is not recommended that children and young people are tested for COVID-19 unless directed to by a health professional.

If a child or young person has a positive COVID-19 test result they should stay at home and avoid contact with other people for 3 days after the day they took the test, if they can. After 3 days, if they feel well and do not have a high temperature, the risk of passing the infection on to others is much lower. This is because children and young people tend to be infectious to other people for less time than adults.

Children and young people who usually go to school, college or childcare and who live with someone who has a positive COVID-19 test result should continue to attend as normal.

What does this mean for the Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service (EECCS)?

SQA, working with the Scottish Government and partners, has today (Friday 22 April 2022) updated the [Examination Exceptional circumstances Consideration Service guidance for 2022](#) to reflect the above.

As has always been the case, the only supporting documentation that SQA *requires* from the centre in support of an EECCS request is a statement from the head of centre. Given public health guidance, that statement should confirm the individual candidate (or their representative) reported having confirmed COVID-19 or symptoms of COVID-19 before 1 May, or more specifically, having a high temperature (37.8C or greater as per the [NHS Inform website](#)) and feeling unwell from 1 May onwards.

As part of that established process, for COVID-19 related absences (as with any other medical condition) heads of centre will continue to use their professional judgement to determine what documentation (if any) is needed by them to support an Examination Exceptional Circumstance request and hold that documentation locally.

There should be no requirement for an individual to produce evidence of a positive COVID-19 test for the purposes of the Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service. As of 1 May it is not recommended that children and young people (18 years and under) are tested for COVID-19 unless directed to by a health professional.

Learners who are absent from an exam owing to COVID-19 or COVID-19-related symptoms as per the relevant public health guidance, may have an Examination Exceptional Circumstance request submitted for them, by their centre, under the 'personal circumstances' outline reason and the 'covid-related absence' detailed reason.

EECCS – System User Guide

We have also now published an EECCS system user guide which is available on SQA Connect in the 'Guidance for centres delivering National Qualifications' section. This guidance provides detailed instructions, with screenshots, on how to use the system, including how to submit and create an EECCS request and the timelines for doing so. Please also note that you are asked to

identify any learners who are identified as priority, with a conditional offer for university, college or employment in 2022.

Centres play a crucial role in the safe delivery of the Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service, and we are grateful for your ongoing support.

Information for parents, carers and learners

We understand that parents and carers may be anxious about the impact public health guidance may have on whether learners should attend exams if they feel unwell, and we know that many will look to you for advice. To that end we encourage you to use the following information with your networks:

The exams taking place over the next six weeks are a chance for all learners to demonstrate their hard work, skills and knowledge.

Please continue to follow public health guidance, including during the exam period.

The Scottish Government's [current public health guidance](#) remains in place up to and including 30 April. This asks individuals to self-isolate if they are experiencing symptoms of COVID and to book a PCR test.

However, as per the Test and Protect Transition Plan published on 15 March 2022, public health guidance is set to change in Scotland from 1 May.

As set out on the Public Health Scotland website, this new guidance will be published on [NHS Inform](#) on 1 May and will broadly align with the [current UKHSA 'Stay at Home' advice](#) that asks children and young people to stay at home if they have a high temperature **and** feel unwell.

It is important that you speak to the school/college if you cannot attend the exam for any reason so that you get the advice and support you need on next steps.

More information about attending exams can be found in '[Your Exams 2022](#)' on the SQA website.

This message has been sent to SQA Co-ordinators and Heads of Centre in schools and colleges, and other centres delivering National Qualifications. A copy has been provided to local authority Directors of Education, Heads of Education and Quality Improvement Officers / Education Officers, the Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS), teaching unions, and other colleagues across the Scottish Education system.

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