



**Trinity College Dublin**  
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath  
The University of Dublin

# **A Review Of Arrangements Internationally To Accommodate Examinees Who Are Bereaved Or Ill At The Time Of Scheduled Second-Level School Leaving Examinations**

## **REPORT TO THE STATE EXAMINATIONS COMMISSION**

**Damian Murchan and Evgenia Likhovtseva**

**School of Education, Trinity College Dublin**

**June 2022**



## **CONTENTS**

|                                                                                                                  |    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| SECTION 1 Introduction and context for the review                                                                | 5  |
| SECTION 2 Focus of the review                                                                                    | 7  |
| SECTION 3 Study design and instrumentation                                                                       | 8  |
| SECTION 4 Implementation of the review                                                                           | 12 |
| SECTION 5 Findings from review of literature                                                                     | 15 |
| SECTION 6 Findings from website and document analysis                                                            | 22 |
| SECTION 7 Findings from case studies                                                                             | 42 |
| SECTION 8 Conclusion                                                                                             | 65 |
| REFERENCES                                                                                                       | 67 |
| APPENDICES                                                                                                       | 70 |
| Appendix A. Website analysis protocol                                                                            | 70 |
| Appendix B. Issues addressed in case studies                                                                     | 71 |
| Appendix C. Selected websites consulted                                                                          | 72 |
| Appendix D. Approaches to addressing trauma and adversity faced by students in relation to scheduled assessments | 76 |

## LIST OF TABLES

|                                                                                                                                          |    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| <b>TABLE 1.</b> VARIABLES OF INTEREST IN WEBSITE AUDIT                                                                                   | 10 |
| <b>TABLE 2.</b> VARIABLES OF INTEREST IN CASE STUDIES CONDUCTED WITH EXAMINATION OFFICIALS                                               | 11 |
| <b>TABLE 3.</b> CRITERIA FOR INCLUDING EXAMINATION SYSTEMS IN WEBSITE ANALYSIS                                                           | 13 |
| <b>TABLE 4.</b> EDUCATION SYSTEMS SELECTED FOR INCLUSION IN THE WEBSITE ANALYSIS: BY REGION                                              | 13 |
| <b>TABLE 5.</b> KEY THEMES DRAWN FROM REVIEW OF LITERATURE                                                                               | 16 |
| <b>TABLE 6.</b> OVERVIEW OF APPROACHES ADOPTED BY EXAMINATION SYSTEMS TO ADDRESS OBSTACLES<br>FACED BY STUDENTS IN TAKING EXAMS          | 35 |
| <b>TABLE 7.</b> EXAMPLES OF ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR ALTERNATIVE EXAMINATION ARRANGEMENTS                                                | 38 |
| <b>TABLE 8.</b> NUMBERS OF STUDENTS AVAILING OF JULY AND SEPTEMBER RE-SIT EXAMINATIONS: ITALY                                            | 44 |
| <b>TABLE 9.</b> SUMMARY OF FINDINGS IN RELATION TO ALTERNATIVE ARRANGEMENTS FOR STUDENTS UNABLE<br>TO SIT EXAMS. REASON: SERIOUS ILLNESS | 57 |
| <b>TABLE 10.</b> SUMMARY OF FINDINGS IN RELATION TO ALTERNATIVE ARRANGEMENTS FOR STUDENTS UNABLE<br>TO SIT EXAMS: REASON: COVID-19       | 59 |
| <b>TABLE 11.</b> SUMMARY OF FINDINGS IN RELATION TO ALTERNATIVE ARRANGEMENTS FOR STUDENTS UNABLE<br>TO SIT EXAMS: REASON: BEREAVEMENT    | 61 |

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We wish to thank the State Examinations Commission for sponsoring this study.

We extend our appreciation to examination officials in the Ministry of Education, Italy; the Ministry of National Education and Youth, France; the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, Northern Ireland; and the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Scotland who participated in the case study phase of the review and provided clarification of the broader examinations context and how their systems relate to the objectives of the review. We also thank colleagues in the Association for Educational Assessment – Europe who helped identify officials for inclusion in the case studies.

Our thanks also to staff in the School of Education, Trinity College Dublin and in the Trinity Research & Innovation office who provided assistance to the project.

## **SECTION 1**

### **Introduction and context for the review**

This report describes the findings from a review of how other jurisdictions and education systems address specific issues connected with student access to assessments and certification in the event of serious illness, bereavement or extenuating circumstances connected with the Covid-19 pandemic. The context covers large-scale, high-stakes exit examination settings similar to the Leaving Certificate Examination in Ireland.

One issue that has arisen in recent years in relation to the Leaving Certificate is the extent to which the exam processes are sufficiently flexible to cater for the needs of those students who miss or are likely to miss examinations as a result of serious illness or a bereavement close to the time of examinations. A small number of such cases arise annually, and the State Examination Commission (SEC) has been exploring possibilities for addressing these instances in an appropriate manner, with regard to the needs of students who experience such trauma and adversity and being mindful also of the requirement to maintain robust examination and certification procedures and standards. Specific arrangements to address the issue of students impacted by the bereavement of a close family relative were put in place for the 2019 examination on a pilot basis, as part of the existing Reasonable Accommodations at the Certificate Examinations (RACE) process. This initiative gave eligible candidates the option to defer up to three consecutive days of exams from June to a special exam administration in July, to allow the student to attend the funeral of a close relative during the June exam period.

While the RACE process also facilitates some limited adjustments to the examination environment and timing for students who experience illness during examinations (SEC, 2021a, 2021b), these adjustments focus on providing special accommodations during the exam (for example taking an exam in a hospital setting) or adjusting the schedule of the exam, *on the same day*. Other than the pilot arrangements in August 2019, there have traditionally been no alternative options for students whose medical or other circumstances do not allow them to take the exam on the same day as other candidates in the same subject. Considering the concerns above, arrangements to facilitate a supplementary Leaving Certificate Examination in July 2022 for students who are unable to sit the June exams due to close family bereavement,

COVID-19 illness and other serious illness have been developed by the SEC. The present review aims to inform discussion about the options for planning and implementing alternative arrangements for students who are unable to present for scheduled exams due to unexpected adversity and trauma. The review provides an analysis of how similar challenges are addressed in other examination systems internationally.

The investigation adopted a blended desk-based and empirical methodology, drawing on data gathered from the academic literature, websites and reports associated with ministries of education and examination agencies/awarding bodies, and discussions with key personnel in a number of jurisdictions. The review identifies 19 examination systems sharing reasonable similarity with the Leaving Certificate programme undertaken by Irish post-primary school students and its associated certification. Detailed analysis of information publicly available online explored structural features of assessment and certification systems. This included the purpose and structure of examinations, use of results, timing of assessments, weighting of examinations and coursework if applicable, any policies on alternative arrangements for students unable to sit exams at scheduled times, and the visibility and importance attached to the exams in public discourse. Case study interviews and/or written communication with examination officials in selected systems explored these issues in more detail, especially focusing on procedures and practices underpinning efforts to provide alternative avenues for examination and certification to students who are unable to sit scheduled assessments due to serious illness, bereavement or issues associated with COVID-19. A rapid literature review audited the extent to which issues relating to alternative arrangements for students who miss scheduled high stakes examinations has featured in the academic literature.

This report charts the progress of the investigation and provides an overview of findings. It is hoped that the insights gained from the review will be of assistance to the SEC in developing protocols in relation to the Leaving Certificate Examination.

## **SECTION 2**

### **Focus of the review**

The overall aim of the review is to explore the approaches used in comparable high-stakes examinations systems to ensure that the needs of students who experience significant illness or who are bereaved close to the time of examinations are met. It is expected that the findings of the review will inform consideration by the SEC and other stakeholders in relation to these issues in the context of the Leaving Certificate Examination. Specific research questions were identified and methods by which these questions could be answered were implemented. The research questions underlying the review are reflected in two central lines of inquiry:

- Investigate policies and protocols to accommodate the needs of students who may miss scheduled examinations due to serious illness, bereavement or for COVID-related reasons that are enacted in selected examination systems that are reasonably similar in purpose and structure to the Irish Leaving Certificate.
- Relate arrangements to mitigate the adverse effects of missing examinations due to illness or bereavement, evident in practice internationally, to commentary and analysis in the academic literature.

## **SECTION 3**

### **Study design and instrument development**

A mixed-methodological approach based on a convergent design was employed in the review. Appropriate methods and instrumentation were developed with an emphasis on systematic processes to generate a descriptive narrative and interpretation. This involved methods to support investigation of the questions of interest, through the lenses of (i) review of existing academic literature, (ii) investigation of publicly available policy and protocols, and (iii) capturing the perspectives of key officials directly associated with examination systems. The approaches employed to progress the study through the three ‘lenses’ are outlined below.

#### **3.1 Rapid review of literature**

A rapid review of scholarly literature was conducted to explore the management by examination authorities of issues associated with student absence from high-stakes examinations due to bereavement and serious illness. The review process draws on procedures identified by Garritty et al. (2021) and Khangura et al. (2012) that themselves relate to approaches to systematic literature reviewing by researchers such as Boland et al. (2017) and Gough et al. (2012). Amongst the benefits of rapid reviews in comparison with systematic literature reviews, the approach facilitates an “acceleration in the process of reviewing a body of literature” (Wollscheid & Tripney, 2021, p. 3) “to get evidence to decision makers more quickly.. [and thus]... meet the time-sensitive needs of stakeholders” (Garrity et al., 2021, p. 13). A trade-off in conducting rapid reviews is that conclusions are reached more swiftly by deploying fewer resources in a less ambitious search. However, the process still requires appropriate methodological rigour to limit bias and to ensure transparent reporting of findings. The Rapid Review approach adopted in this investigation focused on two research questions (RQ) aimed at generating a descriptive summary of findings. Questions were:

|     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| RQ1 | To what extent are issues of alternative examination/certification arrangements, based on the grounds of serious illness or bereavement, discussed in the academic literature specifically in relation to national examinations in second-level education? |
| RQ2 | What conclusions can be drawn based on the literature?                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to identify relevant literature drawn from ERIC and Web of Science, two large electronic databases commonly used in the social sciences. Four conceptual elements were used in developing Boolean search strings consisting of relevant words and phrases. Conceptual elements included

- Examination
- Illness
- Bereavement
- System Response

Within each element, specific words and phrases were identified through an iterative process to capture the main words and terms compatible with title, abstract and keyword searches within the electronic databases.

### **3.2 Review of policy and protocols published online.**

An audit was undertaken of websites and other information available online associated with examination agencies where the exam system shares reasonable commonality with the Irish system in terms of the form, function and impact of assessments. The search focused on accommodations or other arrangements provided to students specifically in response to instances where serious illness or close family bereavement made it likely that a student would be unable to present for the exam or part of the exam (including any associated coursework or projects). The process of identifying education systems for inclusion in the website audit and the subsequent content search was guided by two research questions.

|     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| RQ3 | What is the level of similarity between the Leaving Certificate and selected qualifications internationally in terms of weighting given to examinations and coursework/projects and the high-stakes nature of the results for candidates? |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

|     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| RQ4 | To what extent, in what way, and on the basis of what evidence supplied by candidates do examination agencies respond to the needs of students who miss examinations or substantial parts of examinations due to a serious illness or the bereavement of a close relative? |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

A search protocol was developed to capture data relevant to the study in a systematic manner across education systems. This ensured that the search focused on the key variables of interest to the investigation and that the variables were systematically explored across websites and other sources of data. Key variables are presented in Table 1. The full framework is contained in Appendix A.

**Table 1.** Variables of interest in website audit

---

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall nature and structure of upper secondary education</li> <li>• School-leaving qualifications</li> <li>• Purpose of assessment results</li> <li>• Format and timing of assessment</li> <li>• Evidence of policy on any alternative arrangements to accommodate candidates who are unable to attend examinations</li> <li>• Evidence of public and media interest in the examinations</li> </ul> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

---

### **3.3 Case studies in selected examination systems**

Data collection outlined in Sections 3.1 and 3.2 was dependent on the availability of written and/or digital documentation or information provided by examination agencies in relevant education systems or on the availability of analysis and commentary within the academic community. Two issues became apparent at a very early stage of the investigation – there was relatively little detailed information available publicly and interpreting the relevance of the information provided, in relation to the Irish context, was challenging. The website and policy analyses were able to capture, for some systems, the overall intention of alternative arrangements made for students who were unable to present for examinations. Absent from those data, however, was a clear understanding of how the systems work in practice and what

the obstacles and difficulties, if any, are. Thus, a final aspect of the review involved direct consultation with relevant officials in a small number of jurisdictions selected as case studies, through individual online interviews and/or exchange of written documentation in the form of a questionnaire. The direct communication with officials and review of related documentation were structured to help answer the following research questions.

|     |                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| RQ5 | What eligibility criteria govern students' right to alternative arrangements in cases where their attendance for part or all of an examination is challenging or impossible? |
| RQ6 | How are applications for alternative arrangements processed?                                                                                                                 |
| RQ7 | What strengths and challenges are associated with current policy and practice in relation to alternative arrangements, from the perspective of examining agencies?           |

Overall variables of interest in the case studies are included in Table 2. A more comprehensive list is provided in Appendix B.

**Table 2.** Variables of interest in case studies conducted with examination officials

---

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Clarity about the nature and structure of the school leaving examination</li><li>• Role of the exit examination, if any, in selecting candidates for admission to higher education</li><li>• Policy and enabling regulations and procedures adopted to address the needs of students who are unable to attend scheduled examinations due to bereavement</li><li>• Policy and enabling regulations and procedures adopted to address the needs of students who are unable to attend scheduled examinations due to serious illness, to COVID-19 related illness or because of the need to self-isolate</li><li>• Scale of cases annually covered by alternative arrangement policies</li><li>• Strengths and challenges in relation to the process.</li></ul> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

---

## **SECTION 4**

### **Implementation of the review**

Data for this review were collected in two main phases – some scoping work undertaken briefly in January-February 2020 and more focused investigation in late December 2021 to early June 2022. Though the study commenced in January 2020, this was paused at an early stage due to the onset of the pandemic in March 2020. The main data collection phase therefore took place in the first half of 2022. Preliminary data gathered previously in 2020 were updated and merged with more recent information.

#### **4.1 Review of literature**

The review of literature was conducted in the period January to March 2022 using systematic searches of two electronic databases. Potentially relevant studies were identified using Boolean search strings and subsequent manual review of Title, Abstract and Keywords was used to extract studies of closest relevance for more in-depth analysis. Studies of interest were transferred to an Excel database for further analysis.

#### **4.2 Website analysis**

Table 3 outlines the specific selection criteria used to identify relevant examination systems for inclusion in the study. Application of the criteria resulted in the identification of 19 education systems, as presented in Table 4. In some instances, although a system did not meet all the criteria, it was included if some feature looked particularly relevant to the context of the review. Relevant websites from the selected systems were reviewed in relation to the variables of interest in Table 1 and Appendix A. Details in relation to each system were extracted and tabulated to allow comparison. See Appendix C for the list of websites consulted.

**Table 3.** Criteria for including examination systems in website analysis

| <b>Area</b>                     | <b>Criteria</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Administration and Organisation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally administered at the conclusion of upper secondary education</li> <li>• Involvement of a dedicated examination/certification agency or agencies</li> <li>• Emphasis on external assessment of students by independent markers, rather than on internal assessment by students' own teachers</li> <li>• Sufficient information available on website in English language.</li> </ul>                                                                          |
| Format of assessment            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater weighting, on balance, attached to examinations held at fixed time points, than to project work</li> <li>• Significant use of written/constructed response/open examination formats rather than objective formats (multiple-choice, true-false etc)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Impact within system            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large proportion of student cohort taking examination</li> <li>• High stakes attached to examinee performance on the examination, such as in the certification of outcomes of upper secondary education, use as part of employment applications and use as part of application and selection to third level education</li> <li>• Evidence of public interest in the examinations, for example through media reporting of the examinations and/or results.</li> </ul> |

**Table 4.** Education systems selected for inclusion in the website analysis: by region

| <b>United Kingdom</b> | <b>Other Europe</b> | <b>Asia-Pacific</b> | <b>Middle East and Africa</b> | <b>North America</b> |
|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| England               | France              | China               | Egypt                         | New York             |
| Northern Ireland      | Italy               | Hong-Kong           | Israel                        |                      |
| Scotland              | Russia              | Malaysia            | Nigeria                       |                      |
|                       | Czech Republic      | Singapore           | South Africa                  |                      |
|                       |                     | New Zealand         |                               |                      |
|                       |                     | AUS - NSW           |                               |                      |
|                       |                     | AUS - Victoria      |                               |                      |

### **4.3 Case studies**

Based on the findings from the website analysis, a number of examination systems were identified as case studies to be investigated further through interviews with key officials holding responsibility for administering the state examinations. Invitations were issued to representatives who were identified as close to the operation of the examination system and they were invited to speak directly with the research team. Co-operation was secured from relevant officials in each of

- Italy (interview)
- Northern Ireland (interview)
- Scotland (interview)
- France (written response provided)

It was agreed with officials in the French Ministry of National Education and Youth that the information would be supplied in written form.

The data were collected in the period February-June 2022 and transcripts were generated. After checking and cleaning of the transcripts, they were analysed in relation to the questions of interest in Table 2 and cross-system themes were developed.

## **SECTION 5**

### **Findings from review of literature**

A rapid review of available academic literature sought to capture and summarise scholarly debate in relation to the provision of re-sit opportunities or other special arrangements provided for students who missed scheduled high-stakes examinations due to serious illness or bereavement. It is hoped that conclusions drawn from the literature might inform ongoing consideration of similar challenges within high-stakes certificate examinations in Ireland.

The literature is relatively silent on the specific focus of the present investigation, namely how education systems respond to cases of serious illness or bereavement experienced by students at the time of high-stakes examinations at secondary level, a finding reflected also in a trawl of relevant ‘grey’ literature, which includes reports, conference proceedings and policy briefs. Ricketts (2010, p 351) sums up this finding succinctly, noting that there is “no theory of re-sits” in peer-reviewed academic scholarship. Given that Ricketts’ study dates from 2010, the current review, nonetheless, explored for such a theory or evidence of practice in more recent literature, focusing especially on developments over the past decade. Detailed searching of relevant electronic databases using word string techniques confirmed that the literature, in general, says little about logistical, procedural issues in high-stakes school examinations that are of direct relevance to the current investigation. A few related areas attracted some discussion at various stages, discourse frequently aligned with periods of policy review and reform in specific education systems. These related areas are briefly outlined in the next sections with a view to providing a broader context highlighting debate that occurs accompanying any reform, modification or variation to high-stakes examination procedures. Such patterns and common themes evident in related areas may provide additional contextual understanding to efforts in some jurisdictions to accommodate the needs of students who are ill or bereaved at the time of examinations, addressed in later sections in this report. Three related areas are highlighted below: accommodations for students with special educational needs; debate about re-sits as part of the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and General Certificate of Education (GCE) qualifications in some countries in the UK; and

the tradition of repeat or supplemental examinations in higher education. Summary themes from these areas are presented in Table 5 and discussed in more detail below.

**Table 5.** Key themes drawn from review of literature

| <b>Area of focus</b>                                            | <b>Key themes identified</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Accommodations for students with Special Education Needs        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dissemination of guidelines on types of accommodations and how they are implemented</li> <li>• Studies exploring the efficacy of various types of accommodations.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Re-sit opportunities as part of GCSE and A-level qualifications | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used in modular qualifications to facilitate students wishing to improve their grades</li> <li>• Students applying for re-sits generally display lower levels of performance than their peers</li> <li>• Multiple re-sits train students to get a grade, but not to learn</li> <li>• Evidence of many students at GCSE not attaining better grades in re-sits</li> <li>• Re-sit practices have been largely discarded.</li> </ul>                                                                           |
| Re-sits in higher education                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Debate about appropriateness of re-sits for students seeking to enter high-responsibility professions such as medicine</li> <li>• Re-sits can offer an unfair advantage to the students undertaking the supplementary assessments</li> <li>• Provision of opportunity for multiple re-sits may negatively impact students' initiative</li> <li>• The majority of cases involving special considerations (alternative assessment, re-sits) relate to students' health issues, physical or mental.</li> </ul> |

### **5.1. Accommodations for students with disabilities and Special Education Needs (SEN)**

Addressing and compensating for the challenging circumstances facing students with disabilities and other special educational needs (SEN) is widely discussed in the academic literature. Though not of direct relevance to the present investigation, its dominance of the narrative around examination accommodations and adjustments is noteworthy. Such

alternative or additional arrangements seek to provide students with an examination environment that parallels the environment for all students generally but that takes into account also the specifics of the students' challenges. Many education and high-stakes examination systems have adopted guidelines and regulations that help students and examination officials navigate issues of disability and SEN in relation to examinations in an inclusive manner. The guidelines on Reasonable Accommodations at the Certificate Examinations (RACE) (SEC, 2021a, 2021b) and the Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments (JCQ, 2021a), covering key secondary school examinations in Ireland and the UK respectively, reflect similar system approaches to accommodating students with disabilities internationally in relation to accessing exams. The UK guidelines, for example, provide 19 separate access arrangements and adjustments that can be granted to individual students taking examinations for a wide range of general, technical and vocational qualifications, including A-levels and GCSE examinations.

In the academic literature there is a broad discussion on accommodations for students with disabilities and learning difficulties. Murchan and Shiel (2017) distinguish between accommodations and modifications, noting that whereas accommodations do not change the construct being assessed (for example, mathematical fluency), modifications may do so. They identify five categories of accommodation and modification employed by examination systems to help students with disabilities access assessments and examinations. These include variations in relation to: the content of the assessment; the format of the assessment; how students demonstrate learning; scheduling of the assessment; and the exam environment. Providing additional time to complete an examination (an accommodation) is one of the most common adjustments for the students with specific learning difficulties (SpLD) in the exam settings (Lovett, 2011) and research suggests that time adjustments are effective for speeded tests, where extra time allows students with SpLD to improve their grades (Duncan & Purcell, 2020; Rogers et al., 2016). This equalising effect, it is concluded, results from students with SpLD having the opportunity to "normalise their performance" to that of their typically developing peers (Duncan & Purcell, 2020, p. 451). Despite the intuitive logic of accommodations, however, some research suggests that not all students who are targeted benefit in the ways anticipated. For example, Rogers et al. (2016), while noting positive effects of additional time in examinations on students' performance, highlighted more ambiguous effects in relation to students who are permitted to present work orally (rather than in writing) or who are allowed to take examinations in low-distraction examination environments. Despite extensive discussion in the literature on the above and related topics, these studies do not have

a direct relevance to the themes of responding to the needs of students who are absent from examinations due to illness and bereavement occurring close to the time of the assessment.

## **5.2. Provision of opportunities to re-sit assessments as part of GCSE and GCE A-Level examinations**

In examinations for GCSE and A-Level examinations in parts of the UK, students have had opportunity in some instances to re-sit the exam in order to achieve a higher grade. However, in 2013, Ofqual (2013) reviewed the re-sit policy for A-level examinations, which were normally held during the winter sessions in January. This decision was based on the idea that a ‘re-sit culture’ would give hazardous advantages to students who always had a “second chance” (2013, n.p), but did not perform well during the main set of examinations.

Furthermore, many students enrol in further education colleges in the UK after secondary school without holding a GCSE Grade 4 or above in English and Mathematics especially. Many of these students opt to re-sit the GCSE exams in order to secure higher grades in the subjects as a pathway to employment or higher education. However, the likelihood of success (in terms of improved grades) is far lower than many candidates expect, with no more than one-third of students improving their grade by age 19 (Impetus-PEF, 2017). Rodeiro and Nadas (2012) noted that students who choose to improve their GCSE grades through re-sits offered within schools under the former modular GCSE subject structure were, on average, weaker than those who did not. Before the reform in 2015, students were able to re-sit components of A-level exams to improve their grades but this practice was discontinued due to perceptions that unlimited re-sits undermined the overall aim of the A-level qualifications for “certification and selection” purposes (Scott, 2012, p. 447). It was felt that allowing multiple re-sits to facilitate students in improving their grades set students on the path of the “narrow focus of grade reward” rather than “development of learners autonomy” (Scott, 2012, p. 447).

## **5.3. Repeat and supplemental examinations in higher education**

The peer-reviewed academic literature speaks in a limited way to challenges associated with exam re-sits in higher education settings. Ricketts (2010) highlights debate about the interpretation of re-sit results in undergraduate medical education due to the nature of the medical profession itself, arguing that re-sits can lead to false positive errors, which allow

students to pass when that outcome is not appropriate. This may have harmful long-term effects for individuals and for society, given the need to ensure that doctors acquire knowledge and skills in specialised subjects. As one way of ameliorating possible problems, Ricketts proposes adaptive testing, combining the results of re-sits with other information that “we have about students” in the form of alternative assessments (p. 353). Reviewing re-sits at the undergraduate clinical level, Pell, et al., (2009) argue that re-sits can offer an unfair advantage to students undertaking the supplemental assessments, at the expense of those who sat only the main exams. An alternative offered is that staff teaching on medical courses should allocate more time and resources to help students process learning materials during the period of teaching and learning, in recognition that students, including those on medical courses, have different learning capacity and require differentiated teaching.

Ostermaier, Beltz and Link (2013), investigating the effect of re-sits on learners’ initiative, concluded that the opportunity to avail of re-sits can motivate students to allocate additional time to study for such exams. However, they highlighted a systemic challenge that, overall, re-sits can reduce the imperative to study for the main exam, because students always have a second chance to pass the exam. Linking with the observation on re-sits for GCSEs discussed earlier, Ostermaier et al., found that the extended opportunity to re-sit an exam may cause the student to ‘lose motivation and perform even worse as they retake the exam’, because of the prolonged effects of procrastination (p.24). This is reflected also in the work of Arnold (2017) who found that re-sits do not necessarily result in improved academic results subsequently by students in higher education. Whereas the foregoing situations highlight re-sit protocols as a response to students’ failure to achieve a passing grade on exams, higher education institutions also offer exam accommodations for students with disabilities, special educational needs, and other challenges at the time of exams. The majority of such cases are connected with health issues, both physical and mental (Jenkins, 2021). Higher proportions of female students apply for special consideration and full-time students are more likely to apply for special considerations than part-time students (Jenkins, 2021).

## **5.4. Conclusions from literature review**

Two questions of interest underpinned the review of literature:

- RQ1 To what extent are issues of alternative examination/certification arrangements, based on the grounds of serious illness or bereavement, discussed in the academic literature specifically in relation to national examinations in second-level education?
- RQ2 What conclusions can be drawn based on the literature?

The present review found a fairly straightforward answer to the first question. The most striking finding from the literature review is the dearth of research and scholarly commentary on the issue of student illness and other *ad misericordiam* reasons that might cause students to miss high stakes exams. Despite a review of a broad literature, the investigation revealed almost no commentary on this specific topic. Reasons for this are unclear and include, of course, the possibility that the review methods simply missed some studies, given the rapid nature of the processes employed and the timeframe involved. Other lines of inquiry in the study suggest that such challenges routinely arise for students and examining/awarding bodies. It appears that system responses are firmly located within organisational structures, that themselves may perhaps place significant emphasis on data security and robust protection of individuals' privacy. The processes may be difficult to 'see' unless one is actively impacted by or operationally involved in the process of high stakes examinations. The academic community may simply be external to these structures and not, therefore, in a position to undertake research on the processes that are employed. This is explored further in analysis of some interviews/questionnaire conducted as part of the present review.

An obvious conclusion from the answer to the first question is the need for further research, building on the current review, thus addressing Research Question 2. Data elsewhere in the present study point to important processes enacted in many high-stakes examination systems. In some cases, such as in countries in the UK, significant amounts of data are gathered internally by awarding bodies on the instances of student trauma and adversity in relation to exams, a process known as *Special Consideration* or *Exceptional Circumstance*. Some of this is presented in summary form in reports from the exams regulator Ofqual (see for example, Ofqual, 2019a). In 2019, there were 590,855 requests for special considerations across GCSE, AS and A level exams in England, of which 92% were approved, representing 3% of all assessments (Ofqual, 2019b). The majority of requests were for post-exam adjustments to

marks for students who sat the relevant assessment component (coursework or external assessment) but who felt that some variable over which they had no control had compromised their performance on the day. Some students, however, are absent from the assessment for some accepted reason and therefore can avail of imputed awards generated by the awarding body, based on existing data held about the student. Such cases represent a very small proportion of special consideration cases, ranging between approximately 17,000 and 25,000 annually between the years 2015 and 2019, typically constituting 3 to 5% of special consideration approvals. However, it is noteworthy that even with the data from Ofqual, it is difficult to gauge the full impact of special considerations as data are grouped for GCSE, AS and A level exams. Given the challenge for a regulatory body like Ofqual in securing clearly interpretable data from awarding bodies, it is, perhaps, not surprising that peer-reviewed literature focusing on the process of alternative examination arrangements is difficult to find.

## **SECTION 6**

### **Findings from website and document analysis**

#### **6.1. Introduction**

The website analysis conducted as part of the review drew on information publicly available on the official websites of education ministries and/or examining/awarding agencies in several education systems, along with other policy- and practice-related material encountered as part of the analysis. The website analysis sought to:

- Identify education systems that share reasonable commonality with the Irish system in terms of the form, function and public perception of examinations.
- Provide an overview of the key elements of assessment evident within each system.
- Identify for each system if, when, and how arrangements are in place to accommodate the needs of students who are ill or bereaved at the time of high-stakes examinations.

The websites, along with related sources signposted from websites, proved a rich source of data in getting a broad understanding of the structure of examination systems internationally and the place of the examinations and second-level school qualifications within public discourse. Some aspects of the systems are clearly outlined online; others are not. Systems differed in the volume and clarity of information provided about the variables of interest in this study, as reflected in Table 1 earlier, and also in the extent to which Research Questions 3 and 4 could be answered. Greater clarity was evident in relation to the overall structure of the examination systems, the qualifications provided to students, and the format of assessment. Analysis of the websites of some major media organisations in some of the systems provided additional evidence about the place and importance of the school leaver examinations in public discourse. The provision of information was more uneven in relation to Research Question 4, probing the extent to which examination agencies respond to the needs of students who miss examinations due to illness or bereavement and the specific regulations and protocols underpinning any such policy. However, the website review overall provided relevant insights at scale about a selected number of education systems, many of which share some features with the approach taken to senior cycle certification in Ireland. Where data were not available on websites, a range of

explanations are possible. In some cases, the websites or sections of them, or related web links are not available in the English language (for example, Russia, China, France and Italy). In other cases, relevant information and documentation about alternative arrangements in the case of illness, bereavement and other *force majeure* issues may be available to schools and students through separate dissemination channels within national education systems. It was intended that additional granular detail based on a sub-sample of the systems would be captured through the case study phase of the study, and the website analysis proved very helpful in identifying some interesting countries to be included in that aspect of the review.

## **6.2. Key features of the education and examination systems**

Online material from 19 countries or separate education systems were reviewed. This illustrated a broad range in terms of the size of population served by upper secondary education and the way in which curriculum and assessment/examinations are structured. Most of the countries reviewed certify student achievement at the end of upper secondary education using formal assessments, frequently in the form of examinations, and the results achieved have significant influence on students' future educational pathway. Like Ireland, some countries such as England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and China adopt external assessment practices where the development and scoring of student work is undertaken by external markers. Other countries do it differently, involving students' own teachers in the grading, for example in Italy. An overview of the structure of the examination system in a selection of countries is provided below. Numbered sources indicated in the system descriptions below are available in Appendix C.

|                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Australia - New South Wales</b> | Students who have satisfactorily completed Years 11 and 12 at secondary school are awarded the Higher School Certificate (HSC). To be eligible, students must meet HSC course requirements and sit for the statewide HSC examinations. <sup>1</sup> The HSC is managed and developed by the New South Wales Education Standards Authority (NESA). A final mark in each subject is determined by a combination of school assessments conducted throughout the HSC component of a course, and |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

---

<sup>1</sup> [Ace.nesa.nsw](http://Ace.nesa.nsw) (n.d)

externally administered final examinations typically held in October or November.<sup>2</sup> Students must complete at least 12 units of preliminary courses and 10 units of HSC courses, including English, to receive the HSC. The results of the HSC are available in December.<sup>3</sup> Approximately 60,000 students sit the HSC English exam every year.<sup>4</sup>

**Australia -  
Victoria**

The Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) is awarded on behalf of the State Government of Victoria to students upon successful completion of Years 11 and 12 and allows entry to tertiary institutions.<sup>5</sup> The examination is managed by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA). Students in Year 12 are assessed using school coursework and external examinations. To achieve the VCE a student must successfully complete 16 units. Depending on the subject, these may be school-based assessments and/or external assessments (examinations).<sup>6</sup> The exams may be administered in written, oral, performance or in an electronic formats. The examination period is spread over several months in July, September and October.<sup>7</sup> In addition to the VCE students also take the General Achievement Test (GAT), which measures general knowledge and skills in written communication, mathematics, science, technology, humanities, the arts and social sciences. The VCE results are released in December of every year.

**China**

The Gaokao is a high-stakes examination organised by the National Education Examinations Authority, an agency operating under the Ministry of Education. The provincial education authorities are responsible for managing Gaokao student applications, for conducting the examinations, managing enrolment and setting policy according to provincial needs under the guidance of the Ministry of Education.<sup>8</sup> The Gaokao (高考) is administered to Chinese students in their final year of

---

<sup>2</sup> [Ace.nesa.nsw](http://Ace.nesa.nsw) (2019)

<sup>3</sup> [Educationstandards.nsw.edu](http://Educationstandards.nsw.edu) (n.d)

<sup>4</sup> [Educationstandards.nsw.edu](http://Educationstandards.nsw.edu) (n.d)

<sup>5</sup> [VCAA](http://VCAA) (n.d)

<sup>6</sup> [VCAA](http://VCAA) (n.d)

<sup>7</sup> [VCAA](http://VCAA) (2022)

<sup>8</sup> [OECD](http://OECD) (2016)

high school over three days in the beginning of June. The examination comprises three parts: multiple choice, open-answer questions and an essay. Student grades are based entirely on the results of the examination and Gaokao grades are used as a selection mechanism by higher education institutions. Every year over nine million students in China take the Gaokao.<sup>9</sup> The results of the exam are published towards the end of June, depending on each province.<sup>10</sup>

**Czech Republic** Upper secondary education can be either general or vocational, and normally lasts for four years (grade 10-13).<sup>11</sup> The Maturita examination (*maturitní zkouška*) is the national upper secondary school qualification which allows students to enter higher education. After passing the Maturita examination, students receive a certificate with grades for each examination, an overall evaluation of the examination and a statement of the level of education achieved.<sup>12</sup> There are two parts in the Maturita examination, which consist of compulsory and non-compulsory subjects. The compulsory subjects include Czech language and literature. The second compulsory subject is a choice between a foreign language (English, French, German, Spanish, and Russian language) or mathematics. All assessments are structured in the form of a didactic test, containing various types of tasks within it. For example, a foreign language didactic test consists of two parts, listening and reading, which also includes one task dealing with testing grammar and vocabulary. The student must register for the Maturita examination by 1<sup>st</sup> December for the spring term and by 25<sup>th</sup> June for the autumn examination. Spring term examinations are held from early May to early June and the autumn exam is administered in September.<sup>13</sup>

**Egypt** Egypt has the largest education system in the Middle East and North Africa Region.<sup>14</sup> At the end of secondary education (12<sup>th</sup> grade), students

---

<sup>9</sup> [That's Mags](#) (2021)

<sup>10</sup> [UCAS](#) (2018)

<sup>11</sup> [Mzv.cz](#) (n.d)

<sup>12</sup> [Eacea](#) (2022)

<sup>13</sup> [Eacea](#) (2022)

<sup>14</sup> [The World Bank Blogs](#) (2019)

are awarded the *Thanaweya Amma* (General Secondary Education Certificate) on the basis of their performance in a high-stakes examination administered in June each year.<sup>15</sup> The examination is managed by the Ministry of Education. This certificate confirms the completion of high school. The examination results are also used for entry to Egyptian public universities. The *Thanaweya Amma* is a series of standardised tests, using multiple-choice format.<sup>16</sup> The exams are electronically graded. In 2021, 650,000 students sat the examination.<sup>17</sup> Examination results are released in the middle of August.<sup>18</sup>

## **England**

England's system of public examinations is based on the General Certificate of Education (GCE) - Advanced level (A-Level). The A-level is a high-stakes examination, administered at the conclusion of upper-secondary school and taken by a large cohort of 746,000 students.<sup>19</sup> A-levels are developed and administered by different Awarding Bodies (examination boards). In England, these include Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA), Oxford, Cambridge and RSA (OCR) and Edexcel (Edexcel Pearson – London Examinations). Awarding bodies are regulated by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) and the bodies align their practices with regulations developed by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ). A-Levels in England were reformed between 2015 and 2018, transitioning from a modular to linear structure. This means that all A-Level exams are taken in one sitting as a set of terminal exams, and there is no coursework set for the majority of subjects.<sup>20</sup> A-level results are issued in the beginning of August every year. The results are widely used as part of selection to higher education and for hiring decisions by employers.<sup>21</sup>

## **France**

The Baccalauréat (“le Bac”), an external examination organised by the French Ministry of Education, is taken by students at the conclusion of

---

<sup>15</sup> [Egypt Education. Info](#) (n.d)

<sup>16</sup> [Ahran](#) (2021)

<sup>17</sup> [Ahran](#) (2021)

<sup>18</sup> [Egyptian Streets](#) (2021)

<sup>19</sup> [Ofqual](#) (2019)

<sup>20</sup> [Ofqual](#) (2018)

<sup>21</sup> [UCAS](#) (n.d)

upper secondary education.<sup>22</sup> In 2019, a total of 743,594 candidates took the French Baccalauréat with 398,153 (53.5%) taking the Baccalauréat Général, 155,661 (21%) the Baccalauréat Technologique and 189,780 (25.5%) the Baccalauréat Professionnel.<sup>23</sup> The majority of French students passing the Baccalauréat Général and the Baccalauréat Technologique go on to higher education. The Baccalauréat Professionnel is primarily designed for students going on to further education. The examination is administered each year in March and June and consists of a written or oral component or a combination. Since 2021 new regulations have changed the balance between the final exam and continuous coursework: 40% weighting applies to continuous assessment graded by teachers during the penultimate and final year in school and 60% applies to examinations administered in the final year.<sup>24</sup> The examination results are issued early in July.<sup>25</sup>

## **Hong-Kong**

At the end of secondary education students in Hong-Kong sit the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE), administered and graded by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA).<sup>26</sup> The HKDSE is a high-stake examination, taken by 49,779 students in 2021.<sup>27</sup> The exam schedule is spread over three months (March, April and May). The final mark for the HKDSE is based on a combination of the external examination and an element of school-based assessment (SBA) and the weighting of examination to SBA varies from subject to subject.<sup>28</sup> The terminal exam combines different types of prompts including multiple-choice, short questions and structured essays. The results of the HKDSE are used as a selection mechanism by higher education institutions and by employers such as the Civil Service

---

<sup>22</sup> [Education.gouv.fr](https://www.education.gouv.fr/) (2022)

<sup>23</sup> [UCAS](https://www.ucas.ac.uk/) (2021)

<sup>24</sup> [Education.gouv.fr](https://www.education.gouv.fr/) (2022)

<sup>25</sup> [Education.gouv.fr](https://www.education.gouv.fr/) (2020)

<sup>26</sup> [HKEAA](https://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/) (2021)

<sup>27</sup> [HKEAA](https://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/) (2021)

<sup>28</sup> [HKEAA](https://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/) (2013)

and industry. The results of the examination are available in the third week of July.<sup>29</sup>

## **Israel**

School leavers in Israel are awarded the *Teudat Bagrut* (Bagrut Certificate), taken by approximately 85,000 students at the end of second-level education.<sup>30</sup> Performance on the exam is used, in part, for employment selection, entry to higher education and acceptance into specific military units. Examination for the Bagrut takes place twice a year, in winter or summer. The Bagrut is awarded by the Ministry of Education, but examinations are prepared by two non-profit organisations – the Centre of Educational Logistics and the Szold Institute. Examination formats vary according to the specific subject. Certain exams are oral, but the majority are written tests.<sup>31</sup> Overall results on the Bagrut Certificate are based on a combination of external examination and a grade provided by schools, generated from school-based assessment of modules. In addition to the Bagrut, Israeli students must also complete the Psychometric Entrance Test (PET). The PET is primarily an aptitude test, and consists of multiple-choice questions and a written task.

## **Italy**

In Italy the final examination at the conclusion of secondary education is the Diploma di Esame di Stato (*State Examination*, formerly known as Diploma di Maturità - "maturity diploma"), organised by the Ministry of Education.<sup>32</sup> The State Exam is a school exit exam,<sup>33</sup> administered in several stages from April to June, with over 460,000 candidates. The exam is comprised of written tests and oral interview.<sup>34</sup> Examination grades (50 points maximum: traditionally 15 for the first test, 10 for the second and 25 for the oral interview) are combined with a coursework grade (50 points) awarded by schools, to generate the final grade.<sup>35</sup> The

---

<sup>29</sup> [HKEAA](#) (2021)

<sup>30</sup> [Campus-studies](#) (n.d)

<sup>31</sup> [Ministry of Aliyah and Integration](#) (2019)

<sup>32</sup> [UCAS](#) (2018)

<sup>33</sup> [Vivo Scuola](#) (2022)

<sup>34</sup> [Studio Cataldi](#) (2022)

<sup>35</sup> [Ministry of Education](#) (2022)

results of the exams are published in mid-July, after the final oral interview examination.

## **Malaysia**

The influence of British examination practices are evident in the Malaysian system. Malaysian school leavers take the *Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia* (STPM), which is equivalent to the GCE A-level qualification in the UK, or “Form Six”.<sup>36</sup> The STPM is a high-stakes exam, overseen by the Malaysian Examination Council (MPM), under the auspices of the national Ministry of Education. The results of the exam are used as part of admissions processes by public universities in Malaysia. The exam is semesterised, administered at three time points annually.<sup>37</sup> The final score on a subject for each student is an aggregate of school-based assessment (20-40%) and a final exam (60-80%).<sup>38</sup> The STPM takes 18 months to complete. Approximately 90,000 candidates took the examination in November 2017.<sup>39</sup> For students who sat the exam during 2020, final results were available in July 2021.<sup>40</sup>

## **New Zealand**

The National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), administered by the New Zealand Qualification Authority, is the national qualifications for senior secondary school students.<sup>41</sup> There are three levels of NCEA certificate, depending on the difficulty of the standards achieved. At each level, students must achieve a certain number of credits to gain an NCEA certificate. Credits can be gained over more than one year. In general, students work through levels 1 to 3 in years 11 to 13 at school.<sup>42</sup> Examinations take place in September, October and November. The final award is achieved based on a combination of internal school-based coursework undertaken during the year and external examinations. The NCEA is recognised by employers, and used for selection by universities and polytechnics, both in New

---

<sup>36</sup> [Courses Malaysia](#) (n.d)

<sup>37</sup> [Permohonan](#) (2022)

<sup>38</sup> [Edu Advisor](#) (n.d)

<sup>39</sup> [New Straits Time](#) (2017)

<sup>40</sup> [The Star](#) (2021)

<sup>41</sup> [NZQA](#) (n.d)

<sup>42</sup> [NZQA](#) (n.d)

Zealand and overseas.<sup>43</sup> In 2020, there were 163,936 students enrolled in years studying for the NCEA.<sup>44</sup> Certificates for students are available from January.

## **New York**

The Regents examinations are centralised high-stakes examinations, administered by the New York State Education Department (NYSED). A Regents Diploma (or Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation) requires the successful completion of the appropriate 22 units of credit. Students wishing to earn a Regents diploma must complete the 22 units successfully and pass four Regents exams (seven exams for Advanced) or NYSED approved alternatives, one in each discipline (English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies) and one pathway.<sup>45</sup> The specific format of examination papers varies by subject. All exams have multiple choice and open-ended questions.<sup>46</sup> A Regent Diploma can be established as a part of high school graduation requirements in some schools. In 2018-2019, over 90,000 students graduated with a Regents Diploma. Regents examinations are administered three times annually, in January, June and August.

## **Nigeria**

In Nigeria, there are several types of exit qualifications available to students at the end of secondary school. The most popular award, taken by approximately 1,600,000 examinees, is The West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), administered by The West African Examinations Council (WAEC).<sup>47</sup> <sup>48</sup>The Council conducts two series of WASSCE examination every year: for school candidates in May/June and for private candidates in November/December and January/February. The structure of the examination paper varies by subject and is based on the content of the national curriculum of each member country of the WAEC. The WASSCE tests four core subjects—English, mathematics, integrated science, social studies, and three or

---

<sup>43</sup> [NZQA](#) (n.d)

<sup>44</sup> [NZQA Statistics](#) (2020)

<sup>45</sup> [NYSED](#) (n.d)

<sup>46</sup> [Schools New York](#) (n.d)

<sup>47</sup> [West African Examination Council \(WAEC\)](#) (n.d)

<sup>48</sup> [All Africa](#) (2021)

four elective subjects.<sup>49</sup> The WASSCE certificate is based on students' performance in the examination only, with no coursework component and results are used for selection to institutes of higher education, in conjunction with two other tests, the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) and the Post UTME. The WASSCE results for summer session are available in August, the results for autumn and winter sessions are published in February.<sup>50</sup>

## **Northern Ireland**

Northern Ireland largely shares the same purpose, model and structure of upper-secondary examinations and qualifications with England. Approximately 28,000 students take AS and A-Level exams annually.<sup>51</sup> In Northern Ireland, the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) regulates A-level examinations and qualifications and CCEA aligns its practices with regulations developed by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ).<sup>52</sup> The results are normally issued in early August every year.<sup>53</sup>

## **Russia**

In Russia, secondary school graduates take The Unified State Exam (*Yediniy gosudarstvenniy ekzamen*, EGE), a high-stakes examination organised by the Federal Service for Supervision in Education and Science (Rosobrnadzor).<sup>54</sup> The main examination period starts in May and lasts until late June. Every year, approximately 724,000 students sit the EGE.<sup>55</sup> This is a fully exam-based qualification and coursework is not included. The structure of the examination is similar in every subject, consisting of three components: Part A: a multiple-choice questionnaire; Part B: open-answer questions; Part C: an essay (either a problem-solving task or a science experiment). The EGE serves as an entrance examination for the Russian university system. For every

---

<sup>49</sup> [Educational Assessment in a Time of Reform: Standards and Standard Setting for Excellence in Education](#) (2019)

<sup>50</sup> [Vanguardngr](#) (20212)

<sup>51</sup> [BBC](#) (2021)

<sup>52</sup> [CCEA](#) (2022)

<sup>53</sup> [Department of Education](#)(2021)

<sup>54</sup> [Fipi](#) (n.d)

<sup>55</sup> [Interfax Russia](#) (2021)

examination, the results are published on different days, but normally within two weeks after every examination.<sup>56</sup>

## **Scotland**

In Scotland there are several types of qualifications associated with the final years in second-level education that can be used for university entry, apprenticeships and employment. The main qualification for entry to Scottish universities is the *Highers* taken by students in the fifth year of the six-year long secondary education cycle.<sup>57</sup> Students also have an option to take *Advanced Highers* at the end of sixth year<sup>58</sup>. The Advanced Highers are mainly needed for college entry outside Scotland. Both qualifications are awarded by the Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA). Approximately, 26,795 students sit Advanced Highers annually.<sup>59</sup> Highers and Advanced Highers are administered in April to June annually and each subject has its own distribution between examination and coursework.<sup>60</sup> The results are issued in early August each year.

## **Singapore**

Students in Singapore take the Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (GCE A-Level), an examination with a structure and purpose comparable with the British A-levels.<sup>61</sup> Approximately 14,000 students take the examination annually and results of the GCE A-Level are widely used for university enrolment and employment opportunities.<sup>62</sup> The qualification is managed by The Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board (SEAB), together with the Ministry of Education, Singapore (MOE) and Cambridge Assessment International Education. The examinations are administered by SEAB.<sup>63</sup> The structure of the examination varies from subject to subject, but is generally based on terminal exams, with some case studies, source-based studies and school-based assessment of

---

<sup>56</sup> [Ria Novosty](#) (2021)

<sup>57</sup> [SQA](#) (2019)

<sup>58</sup> [The Complete University Guide](#) (2021)

<sup>59</sup> [SQA](#) (2021)

<sup>60</sup> [SQA](#) (2022)

<sup>61</sup> [SEAB](#) (n.d)

<sup>62</sup> [UCAS](#) (2019)

<sup>63</sup> [SEAB](#) (2022)

practical subjects, especially science. The GCE A-Level exam is administered over a relatively long period, from May to December, with different subjects spaced at wide intervals during this period. The results are usually released at the end of February of the following year.<sup>64</sup>

### **South Africa**

The South African secondary school graduate examination is the National Senior Certificate (NSC). This is developed by the Department of Basic Education and nine provincial examination departments and administered from October to December. The NCS is a high-stakes examination taken by approximately 500,000 students annually.<sup>65</sup> In order to receive the NSC a student must have gained 130 credits exclusively in Year 12.<sup>66</sup> The main purpose of the exam is to certify successful completion of second-level education and results are used in selection for university entry and employment. The structure of examination papers varies from subject to subject and generally include multiple choice and open items and essays. The NSC award is based on a combination of internal school-based assessments (25%) and examinations (75%).<sup>67</sup> Results of examinations are available in February.<sup>68</sup>

## **6.3. Approaches to dealing with student absence from exams**

Alongside identifying structural commonalities and differences in how education systems organise and implement student assessment at the end of upper secondary education, the website analysis revealed that systems differ also in how they address the needs of students who have difficulty in presenting for examinations at the scheduled times. Specific country-level detail about the approach taken in each education system, drawn from the website analysis, is presented in Appendix D. Readers are referred to this appendix for a comprehensive description of policies and practices. The review also sought additional detail in relation to a number of case study systems, outlined in Section 7 of this report.

---

<sup>64</sup> [SEAB](#) (2022)

<sup>65</sup> [Department of Basic Education](#) (2021)

<sup>66</sup> [The University of Queensland](#) (n.d)

<sup>67</sup> [Matric College](#) (n.d)

<sup>68</sup> [Matric College](#) (2022)

Summarising the information from Appendix D, a number of broad categories were identified as outlined in Table 6. The summary highlights different types of trauma and adversity contexts, two of which are important to distinguish. First, for some students, the problem is that having taken the assessment or examination, they feel that they have underperformed due to some extenuating circumstance, for example mild illness, recent bereavement, or other unexpected and unpredictable circumstance such as witnessing a road traffic accident on the way to the exam. Requests for a remedy on the basis of such reasons are addressed in some systems by the adjustment of marks subsequent to grading (post-exam adjustments), to compensate for the unforeseen personal difficulty. Such practices are common within the UK.

A second major category of trauma and adversity involves personal situations that result in a candidate being unable to present for examination for all or some components of examinations. Reasons for absence might be hospitalisation, serious illness, bereavement of a close family member, or other unexpected event. In such cases, a mark or marks are missing, without which students will receive no result or a result based on an incomplete assessment of their learning. This latter case is the prime focus of the present review and Table 6 includes some examples of contexts and how examination systems respond. In some systems, for example, China, there is no remedy for such situations and the student must await the next administration of the test, usually the following year. However, many systems do make provision for such absences. In France, Italy, Israel, Russia and South Africa, students can, with permission based on a review of the reason for the absence, take a re-sit exam, though the timing of the exam may or may not provide results in time to help students use them to enrol in universities that year. Other education systems, such as countries in the UK, provinces in Australia, Singapore and Hong Kong use different processes to generate a grade to replace the missing grade. Some systems use statistical algorithms if they can draw on existing test data; others utilise additional evidence of students' learning, requested from the school. In the sample of systems investigated, though practices differ in how student absence from exams is addressed, most systems try to address the problem and avoid students being left without a high school grade for the subject that year and having to repeat the following year. The present review found that the dominant remedy adopted by education systems involved some form of derived grade generated either statistically or using additional information about the student supplied by the school.

**Table 6.** Overview of approaches adopted by examination systems to address obstacles faced by students in taking exams<sup>1</sup>

| <b>Obstacle / Reason</b>          | <b>Approach / Solution</b>                         | <b>Illustrative countries/systems</b>                                                                         | <b>Key features and observations</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Illness                           | Special venue provided to candidates               | China, Hong Kong                                                                                              | Hospitalised students may take exams on the actual day of the scheduled examination. In the case of China's Gaokao exam, there is no alternative provision for students beyond the timetabled exam day.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Illness, COVID-19, Improve grade. | Students may re-sit exam without waiting 12 months | Egypt, France, Italy, Israel, Malaysia, Nigeria, South Africa, Russia, Czech Republic                         | Students can re-sit exams if they miss one or more subjects. Arrangements include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional days added to the main examination schedule timeline, e.g., immediately after the end of the final exam in the session These are considered 'catch-up' sessions, for example in France (June/July), Italy (July), Russia (June).</li> <li>• Supplementary exam sessions established outside main examination timeline. Early September in France and Russia; June in South Africa (7 months after main November exam). Students may re-sit all exams or individual subjects.</li> <li>• Some systems offer 'rolling' series of exams, during year: 3 annually in Malaysia, 2 in Nigeria, 3 in New York – Regents). Retake exams in next scheduled session.</li> <li>• Re-sits are arranged only for those students who either did not attend or failed examinations on core subjects – such as national language and mathematics.</li> </ul> |
| Illness, Bereavement              | Post examination adjustments and derived grades    | England, Hong-Kong, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Singapore, Australia (Victoria, New South Wales), New Zealand | Students eligible for post-examination adjustments if they suffer temporary injury, illness or other indisposition at the time of their examination/assessment that means they (i) underperform in a test they sat or (ii) miss an exam or part of an assessment. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the case of (i): Upward adjustment of marks on a sliding scale 'tariff' between 1 and 5% of total mark available for the piece of work (prevalent in UK systems).</li> <li>• In the case of (ii): Generation of a derived grade, such as a z-score based on the student's relative performance in other component(s) of the assessment Student</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

|          |                                   |                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|----------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|          |                                   |                                 | <p>must have already completed some components of the assessment, for example 25% or 40% of the total assessment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generation of an imputed grade based on alternative/additional information about the student's achievement and ranking in class, provided by the School or from an available aptitude test (e.g. Scotland, Hong Kong, Victoria)</li> <li>• Generation of an imputed grade based on a moderated school-based assessment mark (New South Wales; Singapore—for Covid)</li> </ul> <p>Where post-examination adjustments are used, grades are typically published at the same time as the grades for the main cohort of examinees.</p> |
| COVID-19 | Same-day arrangements             | China; South Africa; Nigeria.   | COVID-19 patients and close contacts allowed take examinations in medical facilities or isolation venues at the exam centre on the day in which an examination takes place.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| COVID-19 | Students exempted from exam ("E") | New York (Regents Examinations) | "Exemption" was a new category for the January 2022 exams. Where exams were cancelled (by the Board of Regents), students were assigned an 'E' (Exemption) on transcripts, thus fulfilling the requirements for being awarded a Regents Diploma. Students can opt to take the exam in a future administration if they wish. However, even if they don't take that option, they still are awarded the Diploma.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

<sup>1</sup> Data based on review of examination agency websites, related online links and official reports. See Appendix C for list of websites

As evident from Appendix D, it is not always possible to categorise an examination system as dealing with the difficulty in only one way as the ‘remedy’ is not always identical from system to system and sometimes multiple remedies are offered within an individual system. The level of detail in publicly available sources about policies and procedures varies from system to system. One example of this relates to the eligibility criteria for students applying for some type of alternative or additional examination arrangement due to illness or bereavement. Published protocols in some systems offer reasonable detail in this regard. For example, the Joint Qualifications Council (JCQ, 2021b) outlines a variety of ‘acceptable reasons’ on which students may be awarded a ‘special consideration’ tariff of between 1 and 5% on their grade to compensate for underperformance, as summarised in Table 7. Eligibility criteria for securing a derived score where a student has missed an exam are less clearly prescribed. Similar available criteria are presented for New Zealand also, governing permission to seek the award of a derived grade on the basis of temporary illness at the time of examinations.

**Table 7.** Examples of eligibility criteria for alternative examination arrangements

|                | <b>England<sup>1</sup></b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>New Zealand<sup>2</sup></b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                | <b>Criteria warranting post-exam adjustment to mark<sup>3</sup> (1-5% tariff)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <b>Criteria warranting generation of imputed/derived grade<sup>4</sup></b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <b>Criteria warranting generation of imputed/derived grade<sup>4</sup></b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Illness</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Terminal illness of the candidate/partner/carer</li> <li>• Life-threatening illness of candidate or member of immediate family</li> <li>• Major surgery at or near the time of the examination</li> <li>• Severe disease</li> <li>• Recent illness of a more serious nature, organ disease, broken limbs, flare-up of a severe congenital/medical condition or a psychological condition, physical assault, trauma before an examination</li> <li>• A severe or permanent body injury occurred at the time of examination</li> <li>• Illness at the time of the examination: broken limb on the mend, concussion, effects of pregnancy (not pregnancy per se), extreme distress on the day of an examination (not simply exam related stress)</li> <li>• Stress or anxiety for which medication has been prescribed</li> </ul> | <p>Criteria are less clearly defined than for post-exam adjustments but are related to them. General criteria include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At least 25% of the total assessment must have been completed.</li> <li>• Temporary illness or accident at time of exam</li> </ul> <p>Heads of Exam Centres review the reason for absence and decide whether to support it. Responsibility is on Exam Centre to provide request to awarding body. Signed evidence to support the request must be retained in School and available for inspection.</p> | <p>Negative effect on candidate due to significant temporary illness, injury or trauma. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gastroenteritis</li> <li>• Notifiable disease such as measles, whooping cough</li> <li>• Life-threatening illness (meningitis)</li> <li>• Concussion symptoms</li> <li>• Hospitalisation for serious condition</li> <li>• Injuries to arm or hand</li> </ul> |

*A review of arrangements internationally to accommodate examinees who are bereaved or ill at the time of scheduled second-level school leaving examinations.*

|                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Bereaved</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Death of close family member within 2 months of exam</li> <li>• Very recent (1 month) death of close friend/distant relative</li> </ul>                             | <p>General criteria include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At least 25% of the total assessment must have been completed.</li> <li>• Bereavement at time of exam</li> </ul>                                                                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Death of close family member, e.g. parent, sibling, grandparent</li> </ul>                                                                  |
| <b>Other Reason</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very serious &amp; disruptive crisis/incident near exam time</li> <li>• Witnessed distressing event on the day of exam</li> <li>• Recent crisis/incident</li> </ul> | <p>General criteria include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At least 25% of the total assessment must have been completed.</li> <li>• Domestic crisis at time of assessment</li> <li>• Representing country at international sporting or other event</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bridge closure with no alternative route to get to exam</li> <li>• Representing country at international sporting or other event</li> </ul> |

<sup>1</sup> JCQ (2021b)

<sup>2</sup> NZQA (online). <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/assessment-and-moderation-of-standards/managing-national-assessment-in-schools/derived-grades/>

<sup>3</sup> Candidate has taken the exam and feels that they have underperformed for specific reasons. If the reason matches one or more of the eligibility criteria, a post-exam adjustment to the score is made by the relevant examination authority to compensate for the difficulty experienced during the exam.

<sup>4</sup> Candidate has missed or is given permission to miss the exam and is entitled to receive an imputed grade (for example z-score or grade generated from alternative assessment evidence).

## **6.4. Conclusions from the website review**

Two research questions underpinned the audit of websites and related digital resources:

- RQ3 What is the level of similarity between the Leaving Certificate and selected qualifications internationally in terms of weighting given to examinations and coursework/projects and the high-stakes nature of the results for candidates?
- RQ4 To what extent, in what way, and on the basis of what evidence supplied by candidates do examination agencies respond to the needs of students who miss examinations or substantial parts of examinations due to a serious illness or the bereavement of a close relative?

In relation to question 3, the review found a wide variety of assessment cultures in the systems sampled, though an attempt was made to identify systems that display characteristics and practices reasonably similar to Ireland. Many of the systems share with Ireland an emphasis on externally developed and externally graded examinations, though combinations of examinations and school-based coursework are common internationally. This is evident in the weighting given to coursework and external exams in systems such as France, Israel, Australia, Hong Kong, Malaysia and New Zealand. The high stakes attached to the Leaving Certificate is reflected also in most of the systems reviewed as part of this investigation. There are other systems, including some in Europe, where the high school exit exam, though important in certifying school completion, is only one component of university admissions systems and thus represent lower stakes.

In relation to question 4, the website analysis found evidence of widespread awareness across examination systems of the challenges facing students who miss exams for ‘acceptable reasons’ and of efforts undertaken to mitigate the impact of such absences. Mitigating efforts vary, with a few systems offering alternative opportunities to students to sit exams later while the majority of systems draw on other data to generate a grade so that students can be certified with their peers. The analysis also reveals that there are three common approaches used by examination systems in response to the needs of students who miss exams due to illness, Covid-19 or a recent bereavement. The first approach deals solely with special arrangements for students whose illness at the time of the exam mean that they cannot attend the scheduled examination centre but who can take the exam at another location. Students in this category can sit their exams in special venues, such as hospitals, other allocated facilities or even at home. Such

special arrangements, are however, not sufficiently flexible to accommodate students who simply cannot take the exam at the scheduled time or close to it, on the same day, due to illness, bereavement, or other justifiable reason. The second approach allows students to re-sit missed exams within an allocated timeframe after the main cycle of examinations. The timeframe varies from system to system and can range from within a week to 6 months after administration of the main examination. The third and most frequent approach draws on various types of post-examination adjustments. These involve calculation of a derived or imputed grade for the missed component, based on statistical methods or review of coursework grades and/or samples of student work supplied by schools. The website analysis suggests that supporting documentation or evidence is generally required to support applications for alternative arrangements or certification. This can include medical reports/statements from a qualified medical practitioner in the case of illness. In many instances, details of the actual documentation required and procedures are, however, sparse in the websites and associated reports and thus the report next outlines the findings from four case studies that revealed greater levels of detail about many of the issues explored in the websites.

## **SECTION 7**

### **Findings from case studies**

Three case studies were undertaken through interviews conducted with one examination official from each of Italy, Northern Ireland and Scotland. A fourth case study is based on written responses and related website links supplied by examination officials within the French Ministry of Education. Each official works closely with the examination in that system that most closely mirrors the Leaving Certificate in Ireland and has a solid working knowledge of the variables of interest to the present investigation. Findings from the case studies provide a clear context for the purpose and administration of the high-stakes assessments leading to secondary school graduation certificates. The next sections of the report provide a contextual overview and summary of alternative examination arrangements in each of the four systems.

#### **7.1. Case Study: Italy**

##### **Overview**

Students exiting high school take the *Diploma di Esame di Stato*, known as the State Examination, regulated by the Ministry of Education's Office for State Examinations. Certification of student achievement in high school is based on a combination of teacher-assessed coursework and examinations. The weighting has evolved in recent years and is currently a 50:50 split. The exam (weighted 50%) consists of three parts normally, a nationally prepared exam in Italian, scored in schools; a second set of examinations covering other subjects, developed and scored in schools; and an oral examination, developed and scored in schools. Examinations are typically held during mid-June. Thus, the bulk of the assessment is undertaken and scored locally in the school. Each school establishes an Examination Commission (exam board), that oversees the process of examination preparation and scoring locally, guided by advice from regional educational authorities. The School Commission traditionally included some teachers from other local schools as external members, with an external chair. As a result of COVID-19, this was replaced by an internal commission but retaining the external chair. Grades on what was formerly known as the Maturita Examination

(now State Examination) attest to students' achievement in relation to the curriculum. Most universities and other higher education institutions set their own admission criteria for enrolment, frequently using their own admission tests. Results on the State Examination may be taken into account for some courses of study. However, applicants must provide the University with a copy of their High School Diploma before registration. Diplomas are based on the State Examination (weighted combination of continuous assessment and examination results) and are issued to students by the school.

### **Alternative arrangements**

Students who miss components of the June State Examination (*Main Session*) have the option to re-sit missed elements in early July (*Supplemental Session*), immediately after the main exams and/or early September (*Extraordinary Session*). Missed exams may be taken in July or September; a missed oral is only available again in September. Students who sit the July supplemental receive their results at the same time as students from the main session. The flexibility of the re-sit system is facilitated by two factors: (i) each school's Examination Commission is responsible for the preparation, administration and scoring of the re-sit and (ii) numbers of students applying for re-sit opportunities nationally are very small and thus only a handful of schools and teachers are involved.

### **Eligibility criteria**

For exam absences due to illness, including COVID-19, a medical certificate is typically required, provided by the student's own doctor or a specialist, depending on who is treating the patient. The certificate is provided to the School Commission. The Ministry of Education does not provide a list of criteria to schools; the decision about the student's fitness to attend an exam is largely left to the doctor and schools generally implement the doctor's advice. Student re-sit requests due to bereavement fall within a general policy of *Serious and Attested Impediment Cases*. Students can use a wide range of reasons to justify absence from exams and these are heard on a case-by-case basis by the School Commission. The school may require documentation to support the case, or in the absence of documentation, the student, if over age 18, or in other cases, the parents, must formally 'attest' to the reason for the absence. Arrangements for students with COVID-19 or symptoms of COVID are expected to be similar to those for other illnesses in 2022 – re-sit opportunities are available. However, in the case of

the oral examination, students may opt to take the oral online, if they are sufficiently well to do so.

### **Application process**

Requests for permission to re-sit examinations, for whatever reason, must be lodged with the school within one day of the end of the June examination session. Medical certification is required to support applications due to illness. Medical certification and/or the result of a COVID test is required for cases based on COVID.

### **Scale, strengths and challenges**

Few re-sit cases occur. Table 8 highlights case numbers for the period 2016 – 2018 that indicate negligible numbers of re-sits provided in schools, relative to the overall exam cohort. The figures include cases due to illness and other impediment cases. Reasons for the low numbers are unclear, perhaps linked to the school-based nature of the examinations system in general and the possibility for flexibility built into schools' own examination timetables. The interviewee felt that the re-sit system works well and is subject to little comment from regional education officials or in society.

**Table 8.** Numbers of students availing of July and September re-sit examinations: Italy

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Total candidates</b> | <b>Supplemental session (July)</b> | <b>Extraordinary session (September)</b> |
|-------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 2016        | 503,452                 | 567                                | 295                                      |
| 2017        | 505,686                 | 582                                | 291                                      |
| 2018        | 509,307                 | 438                                | 189                                      |

Source: Ministry of Education, Italy.

## **7.2. Case study: Northern Ireland**

### **Overview**

Adopting examination regulations established by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) for all awarding bodies in the UK, the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) offers A-level qualifications to students in Northern Ireland. Examinations are centrally developed, administered in examination centres (normally schools) and graded by teachers and other staff hired by CCEA. Teachers do not mark the work of their own students. For students intending to go to universities, two sets of examinations constitute the ‘full’ A-Level. In Year 13, students take the Advanced Subsidiary (AS) followed by the A2 exams in Year 14. Coursework components have been largely discontinued and assessment is based on terminal exams administered annually during May and June, with results available to universities through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) in early August. Universities typically incorporate the complete A-Level qualification (AS + A2) in their selection processes and points are allocated for each subject, aggregated over Years 13 and 14.

Within each year, two or more assessment points (exams) contribute to the year grade, representing the retention of a modular approach to A Levels where two or three modularised components are assessed during one assessment period. These are typically both completed in the examination session during May-June. Weighting across the two exams varies, generally close to 60-40 or 50-50. This means that the ‘full’ A-level consists of marks drawn from a minimum of four assessment components, two in Year 13 and two in Year 14. This modular element to A-levels becomes important when dealing with situations where a student is absent for an examination. It means that students would be quite unlucky to miss all the components in a subject entirely.

### **Alternative arrangements**

Traditionally and in keeping with similar regulations adopted in England and Wales, CCEA has responded in two ways to students who experience trauma and adversity such as illness and bereavement during scheduled assessment components. Alternative arrangements are granted on the basis of what is termed *special considerations*.

- A post-exam adjustment or ‘tariff’ of between 1% and 5% can be added to a student’s marks in cases where a student sits an exam but feels that some issue over which they had no control impacted negatively on their performance.
- A missed paper calculation is generated in cases where a student misses an exam component due to an unforeseen and/or challenging issue outside the control of the individual. Whereas an alternative arrangement is made in the case of missed assessments, CCEA insists on the integrity of the learning, i.e., that the student must have sufficiently covered the full course of study. This is important in preserving the integrity of the qualifications, especially for recognition by universities for admissions purposes.

These approaches are common within the UK, although Scotland has a different method of generating a missed paper calculation, based on additional information supplied by the school. Post-exam adjustments are applied to the impacted component by the addition of the marks equivalent of the percentage tariff granted to the student. For example, if the component (exam) is worth 240 marks overall, for the student granted the top tariff of 5%, twelve marks (5% of 240) are added to the mark awarded for the work.

The missed paper calculation is of more interest to the present review. This is a statistical exercise in which a z-score is calculated to model what CCEA thinks the candidate would have received if they sat the missed component, based on the outcomes of what the candidate received in other components for which marks are available and in relation to the outcomes of all other students in the cohort. It is an algorithmic adjustment based on assessment data already held by CCEA. This can include, for example, results in other components in the current year (if in Year 14) or data from the Year 13 AS exams. The availability of existing data is crucial to generating a missed paper calculation. If no existing AS or A2 data is available for the student, it is not possible to calculate a mark and there is no option but to repeat the missed component at the next available sitting, usually the following year. However, in many instances some data exist, and these are used. For students to be eligible, JCQ normally specifies that a minimum of 40% of the assessments must have been completed. This threshold has been lowered to 25% for the 2022 exams as one contingency to deal with COVID-related absences from exams, and the lower rate will apply also to all requests for missed paper calculations, regardless of the reason (illness, bereavement, exceptional event etc.). The effect of this is that where, over the course of Years 12 and 13, a student has taken assessments that

constitutes one quarter of a full A-Level qualification, he/she is eligible for a missed paper calculation that can therefore provide a full A-level grade. This might be that over the 2 years, the student sat one of four assessments and a grade is generated to reflect the three missed exams.

For 2022 also, a number of additional and exceptional measure have been introduced.

- More time is provided between the administration of components within subjects. A minimum of 10 days was provided to separate two components/exams in the same subject. This was designed to ensure that somebody who is ill or self-isolating during the first exam should be recovered or virus-free by the time of the second exam. Thus, they would be more likely to meet the criteria of having 25% of the qualification, for the purposes of a missed paper calculation.
- Reserve series exams in every subject. Termed a ‘reserve series’ students who miss an exam have the option to re-sit components in examinations beginning immediately after the main series concludes in June. The reserve series begins on 20<sup>th</sup> June and will offer students who missed earlier exams a full opportunity to take the tests. It is expected that results will be available at the same time as the main results (early to mid-August). This reserve series is planned on a once-off basis for 2022, in response to the threat of COVID. However, students who miss exams for any acceptable reason are eligible to apply. The reserve series will be run in a decentralised manner, in exam centres/schools and it is not expected that sizeable numbers of students will opt to re-sit (estimated at approximately 30 students overall per subject)
- Where students with COVID symptoms feel they are well enough to take scheduled exams, centres/schools will make whatever isolation arrangements are possible to accommodate them in isolation rooms in the centres.

### **Eligibility criteria**

Given the focus in this review on cases where exams are missed due to adverse events, the description below is restricted to eligibility for missed exam calculation (available every year) and the reserve series (2022 only).

Eligibility falls within a broad category termed “acceptable absences.” This criterion must be interpreted by the Head of Centre (usually School Principal) who notifies CCEA. Having been assessed previously in relation to a sufficient proportion of the qualification (40% normally, 25% in 2022) is foundational to any award of a missed paper calculation. Unless that threshold has been met, an award cannot be given.

CCEA does not provide an exhaustive list of criteria to exam centres who make the determination in relation to granting an alternative arrangement. Centre Heads are asked to consider ‘acceptable absences’ and these can include:

- serious illness
- death of a family member or other close person
- funeral of an immediate family member

It is up to Centre Heads to judge whether the reason for the absence is *acceptable* or not. They can draw on a variety of information and evidence, such as awareness of an underlying medical condition, a period of hospitalisation, knowledge of the family structure and context. CCEA does not specify any particular documentation to be gathered/retained and does not, as a matter of course, request to see documentation. Instead, schools, if requested, should be able to justify the decision using whatever evidence they have. Such requests might come as part of an Exam Centre Inspection Service that is part of the arrangements governing the licensing of Exam Centres by CCEA. Inspectors can subsequently request further explanation of the basis on which a missed paper calculation was requested. Medical certification is not specifically required by CCEA and there is some evidence that requiring medical certificates to support special considerations in relation to examinations could place undue pressure on the capacity of medical practitioners.

### **Application process**

Local processing of applications is a key feature of the approach to special considerations overseen by CCEA. Applications from students are made to the school who makes the initial determination and then must apply to CCEA, indicating the school’s support for the application, within three days of the missed component. CCEA’s main task is to confirm that the minimum proportion of the assessments has been met to qualify for a missed paper

calculation. The details of the specific reasons for the request are left at the discretion of the Head of Centre/School. The same process will apply in the case of requests to partake in the special series/repeat exams in 2022. Within three days of a missed exam, the school must inform CCEA whether a student is requesting a missed paper calculation or permission to attend the re-sit.

Where a school does not support a student in making a request for special consideration to CCEA, students may appeal the decision to the Governing Body/Board of Management of the School. Once this stage is exhausted, CCEA may become involved in further review of the case.

### **Scale, strengths and challenges**

Numbers applying for special consideration due to missing exams are deemed by CCEA to be relatively small and manageable, perhaps 350 to 500 students per year where any student may have multiple requests across a number of subjects. In 2019 approximately 56,000 separate applications for special consideration were received overall, involving about 16,000 students. These applications covered all contexts such as post-examination adjustments and missed paper calculations. It is believed that bereavement constitutes a very small proportion of the cases.

According to CCEA, the system is well understood and accepted by schools, students and parents who recognise tariffs and missed paper calculations as custom and practice. There seems to be acceptance of the need to have some level of assessment data (40% normally) on which to base a z-score and the fact that this is common practice in some other areas of the UK offers reassurance. Parents/students are typically satisfied that something can be done to rectify a missed exam. Where some unease may arise is more in allocating tariffs (1-5%) where some parents have suggested that a particular trauma might merit a higher tariff than the one granted.

### **7.3. Case study: Scotland**

#### **Overview**

Students in secondary school take a set of exams called *Highers* during May in Year 5, the penultimate year in school, typically focusing on five subjects. Results on the *Highers* are used as part of selection mechanisms by higher education institutions in Scotland. Students remain in school for another year (Senior 6) and some take additional qualifications (*Advanced Highers*), though these are not typically required by Scottish universities. Students may, for example, add some Advanced Highers if they intend applying to certain university courses in England. The qualifications and examinations system is overseen by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) who develop the examinations, oversee their administration locally in schools, and arrange marking using external graders.

#### **Alternative arrangements**

As with practice in other systems within the UK, alternative arrangements are available for students in Scotland who experience unexpected challenge in attending exams or demonstrating their achievement in them. The policy is referred to as the *exceptional circumstances* procedure, in many ways analogous to the policy of *special considerations* in Northern Ireland and England, but different in other important ways. Traditionally, students could apply some weeks before an exam and, if granted exceptional circumstances, alternative evidence of learning and an estimated grade generated by their teacher was reviewed by SQA, with a grade assigned based on the review. This represents a significant difference in comparison with Northern Ireland, England and Wales where a grade calculated to replace missed assessment components is generated using statistical procedures resulting in a grade based on the student's estimated z-score within the distribution of scores. The Scottish system is predicated on a policy of "demonstrated attainment" where a grade cannot be assigned in the absence of evidence to support the judgement. Consequently, for students who feel they underperform on an exam, due to an illness for example, the Scottish system requires that alternative evidence of students' learning be reviewed so that a mark can be assigned. In Northern Ireland, a tariff of between 1 and 5% would be assigned. Similarly, for students who miss an assessment component, SQA will not provide an overall grade without first reviewing graded samples of the student's work provided by the school. In Northern Ireland, such a scenario is typically handled by calculation of a z-score.

Exceptional circumstances can be granted for a variety of reasons including absence from exams due to serious illness, COVID-related problems and bereavement, amongst others. The ‘solution’ is the same, regardless of the reason, i.e. ‘appointees’ nominated by SQA examine a portfolio of students’ work, retained by teachers, and award a grade on that basis. Grades generated through the exceptional circumstances procedure are provided at the same time as grades for all other students.

### **Eligibility criteria**

As in Northern Ireland, detailed criteria for exceptional circumstances in the case of missed exam components are not typically provided, beyond general advice about the types of cases to consider along with some illustrative requests. Heads of exam centres are asked to ensure that requests due to *personal circumstances* align with one or more of the following reasons: *Medical condition, COVID-related absence, Bereavement, Domestic circumstance, Exceptional absence*. Some example requests are provided in relation to medical conditions:

- The candidate is admitted to hospital and is unable to attend the exam.
- The candidate experiences severe vomiting the night before an exam and is unable to attend the exam.
- The candidate is too unwell to sit the exam due to mental health issues
- The candidate becomes unwell between two exams on the same day, or between two separate papers of the same exam, and is unable to attend the second exam/paper
- The candidate becomes unwell during an exam and this prevents them from completing the paper for this reason. (SQA, 2022, p. 4)

Heads of exam centres (usually school principals) receive applications from students and/or parents and a decision is reached at local level. Cases supported are forwarded to SQA for approval.

For 2022, SQA linked requests for exceptional circumstances for students who may need to self-isolate to the public health guidance at the time of the exams. If the public health advice means that a student has to self-isolate, that constitutes grounds for exceptional circumstances.

### **Application process**

Similarly to the practice operated by CCEA in Northern Ireland, the SQA delegates much of the processing and decision making in relation to exceptional circumstances to exam centres. Heads of centres process the applications from students and apply, on behalf of cases they support, to SQA for approval. Requests need to be submitted, with a supporting statement from the Head of Centre, within 10 days of the exam being held. Students may be asked by the school to supply medical certification (which may be from their own doctor) as part of the application, but this is processed and retained by the school and the documentation is not shared with SQA. SQA can request additional information and documentation, but this is unusual, and cases supported by the school are typically granted.

### **Scale, strengths and challenges**

Approximately 500,000 individual grades (subject grades in the Highers) are issued each year by SQA, of which about 4000 (less than 1%) have been reviewed due to exceptional circumstances. This is considered a manageable number. Successful operation of the system involves a lot of trust amongst the parties involved – students, schools, medical professionals and the SQA.

Some potential challenges exist for the successful operation of the exceptional circumstances policy in Scotland. All teachers of exam classes are expected to retain a folder of information demonstrating students' achievement across the entire course. Evidence might include graded and annotated mock tests, graded samples of student work and homework. Teachers' grading of such work frequently aligns with the grading scale used in the Highers (A to D). Maintenance of the portfolio or folder of work involves some effort for teachers but SQA feel that the burden is not excessive, given the benefit to students should they experience unexpected and unavoidable challenge in the exams. Similarly, there is a burden on the system as SQA examiners must review the work of students who have been granted exceptional circumstances (reflected in about 4000 individual grades annually, each one involving a folder of material). Typically, this involves senior examiners working within tight deadlines to provide marks at the same time as the main results are published, in the first or second week of August. Despite these difficulties, there seems to be considerable public support for the system of demonstrated attainment, reflecting, perhaps, a cultural acceptance of how the system operates, in the same way that there is cultural acceptance of prevailing systems in other countries such as Northern Ireland and Italy. There are some benefits in systems such as Northern Ireland and England

where the statistical adjustment based on z-scores means that the *special considerations* system can operate at high volume. Nonetheless, the fact that the literature review conducted as part of this study found scant evidence of research or commentary in relation to trauma and adversity policies and practices internationally lends support to the interpretation that the public in most education systems are reasonably happy with how the systems operate.

School principals have voiced their difficulty sometimes in adjudicating on requests for exceptional circumstances on the grounds of bereavement, lodged in the weeks in advance of the exam. Knowing whether students might actually be sufficiently recovered or distanced from the bereavement some weeks later is a cause of uncertainty for principals and the advice from SQA in 2022 was to encourage the students to take the exam if possible and reassess the request much closer to the exam date. Cases where a funeral and bereavement coincide with an exam are considered easier to evaluate and fall clearly within the exceptional circumstances policy.

## **7.4. Case Study: France**

### **Overview**

Three main forms of the Baccalauréat are offered to students at the end of the upper secondary education: General, Technological and Professional. The General Baccalauréat, offered in academically- or technologically-oriented schools called lycées, is typically required for admission to public universities, where a passing qualification is generally sufficient for enrolment. The more competitive *Grandes Écoles*, elite higher education institutions, typically employ additional locally-developed entrance examinations to select applicants, many of whom have already been enrolled for two or more years in specialist preparatory courses or in universities. Students in the Baccalauréat programme study a range of subjects over two years (Première - 5<sup>th</sup> year; Terminale – 6<sup>th</sup>/Final year), including French, Civic and Moral Education, and optional subjects. In addition, students take an oral test that may cover topics encountered in their optional subjects. There has been a major reform of the Baccalauréat in recent years designed to simplify a complex set of individual programme tracks and reduce the number of assessments. In general, the reforms have resulted in weighted grades consisting of continuous assessment worth 40%, spread over the two-year Baccalauréat programme and a terminal exam worth 60%, administered at the end of the final year. Terminal exams for specialist subjects are held in March with exams in compulsory subjects held in June. Results are issued to students early in July.

### **Alternative arrangements**

There are arrangements available for students who miss components of Baccalauréat examinations due to serious illness, isolation due to COVID-19 or bereavement. Supplemental examinations, held normally in August or early September, are available and students receive results usually by the end of September. For any students taking supplemental examinations, places in university that they secured provisionally through the national *Parcoursup* application system for pre-enrollment in higher education, are retained until the results of the supplemental tests are published.

### **Eligibility criteria**

Eligibility for supplemental examinations is covered under a general policy of ‘*force majeure*’ that includes a range of possible unexpected challenges that complicate students’ attendance at

exams. Applications are considered on a case-by-case basis. In the case of absence due to serious medical cause, documentary evidence in the form of a medical certificate from the treating doctor or from an independent doctor is required. In relation to COVID-19, under national regulations from March 2022, students must self-isolate if they show symptoms or if they test positive for COVID-19, even without symptoms (<https://www.gouvernement.fr/info-coronavirus/isolement>). Isolation periods are 7 days in the case of completely vaccinated people and 10 days for people who are unvaccinated. These regulations mean that students cannot attend Baccalauréat exams if they are required to isolate but they can apply for supplemental exams (<https://www.education.gouv.fr/reussir-au-lycee/examens-2022-les-reponses-vos-questions-340337>). Cases based on bereavement require application by the student to justify the absence and must include documentation to support the case, such as a letter from a doctor or death certificate of the family member. Specific eligibility criteria are not identified.

### **Application process**

Requests for permission to avail of supplemental exams are submitted by the student to the chief education officer in the regional education office – the *Academie*. The *Academie* has oversight responsibility for all public education (primary, secondary and university) within a defined geographic region. Within the *Academie*, the examinations and entrance examinations division processes the application, that must be made immediately after the missed component or by 10<sup>th</sup> July for exams missed in June. Decisions are communicated to students at least one month prior to the supplemental exams. Appeals are heard only where further supporting documentation of relevance can be provided to the regional chief education officer.

### **Scale, strengths and challenges**

Detailed data are not available on specific reasons for availing of replacement exams, whether due to illness, bereavement or other cause. Approximately 0.5% of candidates availed of the service in 2019, typically taking between one and four exams each. Annually, approximately 550,000 students take the General and Technological Baccalauréat exams. The system has been in place for many years as a service to students to help them avoid having to wait another year to take the missed Baccalauréat exams.

## **7.5. Conclusions from case studies**

Tables 9, 10 and 11 provide an overview of information gleaned from each case study. The data suggest some commonality of approaches across systems to providing alternative arrangements for students who miss exams, regardless of the reason for the application. Systems typically review such cases under broad policies to address instances of ‘reasonable’ non-attendance at examinations. In three of the systems reviewed there is reliance by examination authorities on local judgement in relation to applications. Responsibility for granting some type of alternative solution is devolved to the local exam centre where, it is assumed, the Head of Centre applies reasoned judgement to all applications. In France, these decisions are taken at a higher regional educational level by civil servants employed by the government. Ultimate responsibility rests with the chief education officer based in the regional education office who oversees the content and organisation of schools and universities within the district. National agencies do not specify in minute detail the criteria, types of illnesses or relationship of student to deceased persons. Interpreting of the merit of cases is left up to the Head of Centres/Schools in Italy, Northern Ireland and Scotland. In these cases exam centres function on behalf of the examination authority and are subject to inspection/review of all procedures employed, including protocols for granting alternative arrangements. In France, where the chief education officer of the regional *Academie* evaluates the force majeure cases, minute criteria are not published.

**Table 9.** Summary of findings in relation to alternative arrangements for students unable to sit exams. Reason: Serious illness

| Variable of Interest                | Examination System                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                     | ITALY                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | NORTHERN IRELAND                                                                                                                                                      | SCOTLAND                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | FRANCE                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Title of policy/protocol</b>     | <i>Impediment cases</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <i>Acceptable absences</i>                                                                                                                                            | <i>Exceptional circumstance (EC)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <i>Force majeure</i>                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Alternative solution offered</b> | <p>Two re-sit examination sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Session 1 (Supplemental Session) begins in early July, immediately after the main exam session.</li> <li>• Session 2 (Extraordinary Session) takes place in the beginning of September</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Missed paper calculation (z-score)</li> <li>• Opportunity to re-sit in <i>Reserve Series</i> of exams (2022 only)</li> </ul> | <p>School provides estimated grades and alternative evidence to SQA who generate a grade. For 2022, EC not granted as readily (by Centres) prior to exams. Students advised to wait to see if they can take the exams. Decision taken closer to exam.</p> | <p>Supplemental examinations, usually administered in early September. Exams cover the core subjects of French, Philosophy, the Grand Oral and various subject specialisms.</p> |
| <b>Eligibility criteria</b>         | Education Ministry does not provide any guidelines on what can be considered as serious illness.                                                                                                                                                                                   | ‘Serious illness,’ but this is not specified.                                                                                                                         | Some illustrative guidance provided to Centres about categories of illness                                                                                                                                                                                | Education Ministry does not provide guidelines on what can be considered as serious illness.                                                                                    |
| <b>Time frame for application</b>   | On day after missed exam at the latest.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Within 3 days of the missed exam.                                                                                                                                     | Within 10 days after missed exam.                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Immediately after missed component or by 10 <sup>th</sup> July.                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Who makes decision</b>           | School’s Examination Commission (group established in each school).                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Head of the Exam Centre (Principal).                                                                                                                                  | Head of Exam Centre (Principal); normally accepted by SQA.                                                                                                                                                                                                | Chief education officer of the regional education office.                                                                                                                       |

*A review of arrangements internationally to accommodate examinees who are bereaved or ill at the time of scheduled second-level school leaving examinations.*

|                                         |                                                                                    |                                                                         |                                                                                                         |                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Number of cases arising annually</b> | < than 1 in 1000 (438 cases nationally in 2018). Includes all reasons for absence. | 350-500 students annually. Includes all reasons for acceptable absence. | < 1%. Approximately 4000 grades annually awarded annually through EC. Includes all reasons for absence. | Approximately 0.5% in 2019. Includes all reasons for absence. |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|

**Table 10.** Summary of findings in relation to alternative arrangements for students unable to sit exams: Reason: COVID-19

| Variable of Interest                | Examination System                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                     | ITALY                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | NORTHERN IRELAND                                                                                                                                                      | SCOTLAND                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | FRANCE <sup>a</sup>                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Title of policy/protocol</b>     | <i>Impediment cases</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <i>Acceptable absences.</i><br>Exam centres in hospitals also                                                                                                         | <i>Exceptional circumstance (EC)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                          | <i>Force majeure</i>                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Alternative solution offered</b> | Two re-sit examination sessions:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Session 1 (Supplemental Session) begins in early July, immediately after the main exam session.</li> <li>• Session 2 (Extraordinary Session) takes place in the beginning of September</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Missed paper calculation (z-score)</li> <li>• Opportunity to re-sit in <i>Reserve Series</i> of exams (2022 only)</li> </ul> | School provides alternative evidence to SQA who generate a grade. For 2022, EC not granted as readily (by Centres) prior to exams. Students advised to wait to see if they can take the exams. Decision taken closer to exam. | Supplemental examinations, usually administered in early September. Exams cover the core subjects of French, Philosophy, the Grand Oral and various subject specialisms. |
| <b>Eligibility criteria</b>         | Positive PCR test for COVID-19                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Reviewed under <i>acceptable absences</i> policy, as for serious illness.                                                                                             | Criteria mirror public health guidelines in relation to self-isolation at time of exams.                                                                                                                                      | Students must isolate if they have <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Symptoms of COVID</li> <li>• Positive COVID test (even without symptoms).</li> </ul>         |
| <b>Time frame for application</b>   | On day after missed exam at the latest.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Within 3 days of the missed exam                                                                                                                                      | Within 10 days after missed exam.                                                                                                                                                                                             | Immediately after missed component or by 10 <sup>th</sup> July.                                                                                                          |

*A review of arrangements internationally to accommodate examinees who are bereaved or ill at the time of scheduled second-level school leaving examinations.*

|                                         |                                                                                    |                                                                                                              |                                                                                                         |                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Who makes decision</b>               | School's Examination Commission (group established in each school).                | Head of the Exam Centre (Principal), with reference to the Centre's capacity to manage self-isolation cases. | Head of Exam Centre (Principal).                                                                        | Chief education officer of the regional education office.     |
| <b>Number of cases arising annually</b> | < than 1 in 1000 (438 cases nationally in 2018). Includes all reasons for absence. | 350-500 students annually. Includes all reasons for acceptable absence.                                      | < 1%. Approximately 4000 grades annually awarded annually through EC. Includes all reasons for absence. | Approximately 0.5% in 2019. Includes all reasons for absence. |

<sup>a</sup> Data on COVID-19 accessed from <https://www.education.gouv.fr/reussir-au-lycee/examens-2022-les-reponses-vos-questions-340337>

**Table 11.** Summary of findings in relation to alternative arrangements for students unable to sit exams: Reason: Bereavement

| Variable of Interest                | Examination System                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                     | ITALY                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | NORTHERN IRELAND                                                                                                                                                      | SCOTLAND                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | FRANCE                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Title of policy/protocol</b>     | No specific policy on bereavement. Addressed under <i>Impediment cases</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <i>Acceptable absences.</i>                                                                                                                                           | <i>Exceptional circumstance (EC)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                          | <i>Force majeure</i>                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Alternative solution offered</b> | Two re-sit examination sessions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Session 1 (Supplemental Session) begins in early July, immediately after the main exam session.</li> <li>• Session 2 (Extraordinary Session) takes place in the beginning of September</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Missed paper calculation (z-score)</li> <li>• Opportunity to re-sit in <i>Reserve Series</i> of exams (2022 only)</li> </ul> | School provides alternative evidence to SQA who generate a grade. For 2022, EC not granted as readily (by Centres) prior to exams. Students advised to wait to see if they can take the exams. Decision taken closer to exam. | Supplemental examinations, usually administered in early September. Exams cover the core subjects of French, Philosophy, the Grand Oral and various subject specialisms. |
| <b>Eligibility criteria</b>         | Judged on case-by-case basis                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Death of a family member or other close person</li> <li>• Funeral of immediate family member</li> </ul>                      | Recent death of a close family member or friend.                                                                                                                                                                              | Education Ministry does not provide guidelines in relation to bereavement.                                                                                               |
| <b>Time frame for application</b>   | On day after missed exam at the latest.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Within 3 days of the missed exam                                                                                                                                      | Within 10 days after missed exam.                                                                                                                                                                                             | Immediately after missed component or by 10 <sup>th</sup> July.                                                                                                          |

*A review of arrangements internationally to accommodate examinees who are bereaved or ill at the time of scheduled second-level school leaving examinations.*

|                                         |                                                                                    |                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                         |                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Who makes decision</b>               | School's Examination Commission (group established in each school)                 | Head of the Exam Centre (Principal)                                                                                  | Head of Exam Centre (Principal); normally accepted by SQA.                                              | Chief education officer of the regional education office.     |
| <b>Number of cases arising annually</b> | < than 1 in 1000 (438 cases nationally in 2018). Includes all reasons for absence. | 350-500 students annually (includes all reasons for acceptable absence). Absences due to bereavement deemed minimal. | < 1%. Approximately 4000 grades annually awarded annually through EC. Includes all reasons for absence. | Approximately 0.5% in 2019. Includes all reasons for absence. |

Three questions of interest underpinned the case studies:

- RQ5 What eligibility criteria govern students' right to alternative arrangements in cases where their attendance for parts or all of an examination is challenging or impossible?
- RQ6 How are applications for alternative arrangements processed?
- RQ7 What strengths and challenges are associated with current policy and practice in relation to alternative arrangements, from the perspective of examining agencies?

Systems in the case studies avoid use of highly specified eligibility criteria, opting instead for broad indicators and leaving interpretation of the criteria to local discretion either at exam centre (school) level (Italy, Northern Ireland, Scotland) or at the level of the regional education office (France). Scotland offers the most concrete advice to Heads of Centres through some illustrative examples. Officials observed developments in relation to COVID-19 carefully through the 2021-2022 school year, adopting a flexible approach in keeping with the unpredictable nature of the virus and were mindful of the potential for changing public health advice as the 2022 exams neared. Eligibility for alternative exam arrangements due to bereavement is typically based on the interpretation of the head of centre and flexibility is evident. The number of cases seems to be very small.

In relation to RQ6, three of the case study systems leave much of the processing and decision-making to senior staff in the exam centres/schools. Students apply to the school and, where the application is supported locally, a request is made to the relevant national exam agency. Refusals of such requests from centres seem rare. The level of documentation required to support each request varies, but whatever documentation is required is processed and retained at school level. In France, application for supplemental examinations due to *force majeure* reasons is made to the chief education officer of the regional education office who is responsible for the administration of schools and universities within a specific geographic area. Relevant document must be forwarded with the application.

Officials in all four systems identify benefits and some challenges with the approaches adopted (RQ7). The system in Italy seems to attract very few applications and it is reported that the system works well. In Northern Ireland, approaches to mitigating the impact on students who miss exams seem generally well supported amongst stakeholders. Scotland's system, based on the need to actively review samples of students' work to generate a grade, seems generally to

have the support of stakeholders. However, the system may place some burden on teachers and schools to gather alternative assessment data for possible review by SQA while the workload on SQA appointees tasked with reviewing material supplied by schools is not insignificant, especially as results are expected to be issued at the same time as the main results to students. In France, alternative arrangements are provided for in national education regulations and serve a key function in ensuring that students do not have to wait unnecessarily for another year to gain a Baccalauréat qualification. The numbers availing of the supplemental examinations seem relatively modest.

## **SECTION 8**

### **Conclusion**

One set of challenges associated with high-stakes examinations in primary and second-level education, well instanced in the international research literature, relates to the pressure on students and teachers to succeed on tests and examinations, along with the overall impact, positive and sometimes negative, of the exams themselves on educational practice. This review confirms another set of challenges facing a sub-set of examinees who, for a variety of reasons unrelated to academic achievement, are unable to take the exams at the scheduled times due to temporary illness, recent bereavement or other limiting factor of an immediate but passing nature. The topic of the review is relatively under-investigated within the peer-research community and the literature provides little quantification or discussion of the extent of the problem and the methods adopted to address it. Most of the knowledge and understanding in relation to this area resides, it seems, within examining/awarding bodies, whether national, regional or more local. It is there, where students and schools interface with agencies who run examinations, that the cases emerge and need to be addressed.

Through a search of online resources maintained by a variety of examining agencies in 19 education systems, many with reasonable parallels to the Irish Leaving Certificate, this study has found evidence of the existence and prevalence of the problem and efforts to address it. Approaches adopted vary from system to system but can be grouped in three broad categories. These include: making alternative arrangements for students to sit the exam on the same day, perhaps in another location or at a slightly amended time; allowing students to take a parallel exam on another day, close to the day of the exam or well after it; or drawing on additional evidence about the student's learning or circumstances to generate a grade. Case studies, based on interviews with key officials in three education systems and a detailed questionnaire with officials in a fourth system, provided more granulated insight into the logistical practicalities of establishing and maintaining systems to address the contexts where students experience 'reasonable absence' from exams. Responses highlighted the significant efforts made to mitigate the problem for students who are absent from exams while at the same time assuring the quality and credibility of the qualifications. The four systems vary somewhat but share one

feature. It appears that whatever approach is employed within a system, stakeholders engage with the agreed process, judging it as a reasonable effort to ameliorate the challenges faced by students.

It is clear that practices vary internationally, and education systems take a variety of factors into account. Many recognise especially the particular challenges faced by students in relation to serious illness, bereavement of a close family member and issues associated with COVID-19. Most but not all education systems investigated in the present review seek to mitigate the effects of such absences and help students avoid having to retake the missed exam in the next scheduled session, normally the following year in the case of school-leaver examinations. Of the systems comparable to Ireland that provide some type of alternative arrangement for students, some form of adjusted or derived grade is the most common approach. This review identified very few systems, similar in terms of the structure and particularly the purpose/function of the Leaving Certificate, that provided supplemental exams for students in a timeframe that facilitated entry to higher education in the same year. Each system adopts its position and practices based on the unique cultural and logistical contexts, and it seems that approaches adopted are generally supported within each system.

Systems probably have much to learn from each other's experiences in this area. This is evident in systems within the UK where, although education systems and awarding bodies operate relatively independently of each other, an agreed framework published by the Joint Council for Qualifications fosters common understanding and communication across the systems. The relative absence of an easily accessible academic literature on the topics explored in this review is noteworthy and reflects, perhaps, the invisible nature of processes adopted. Such processes are certainly not invisible or unimportant to the many students who avail of alternative arrangements across countries. Nor are they unimportant to their parents, teachers and officials working in the examination agencies. However, the approaches remain relatively unseen in the broader educational policy and research community, and it is hoped that the present research will help examination systems everywhere, including Ireland, learn from each other.

## REFERENCES

- Arnold, I. (2017). Resitting or compensating a failed examination: does it affect subsequent results? *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 42 (7), 1103-1117.
- Boland, A., Cherry, G. & Dickson, G. (2017). *Doing a Systematic Review: A Student's Guide*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Sage Publications Ltd.
- Duncan, H. & Purcell, C. (2020) Consensus or contradiction? A review of the current research into the impact of granting extra time in exams to students with specific learning difficulties (SpLD), *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 44 (4), 439-453.
- Garritty, C., Gartlehner, G., Nussbaumer-Streit, B., King, V. K., Hamel, C., Kamel, C., Affengruber, L., & Sevens, A. (2021). Cochrane rapid reviews methods group offers evidence-informed guidance to conduct rapid reviews. *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*, 130, 13-22.
- Gough, D., Oliver, S., & Thomas, J. (2012). *An introduction to systematic reviews*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Impetus Private Equity Foundation (2017). *Life after school*. London: Author.  
[https://www.impetus.org.uk/assets/publications/Report/2017-03-14\\_Impetus-PEF-Confronting-Crisis.pdf](https://www.impetus.org.uk/assets/publications/Report/2017-03-14_Impetus-PEF-Confronting-Crisis.pdf)
- Jenkins, P. (2021). Patterns of special consideration requests at a UK university: reasons given and associations with demographic factors. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*. DOI: [10.1080/02602938.2021.1956428](https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2021.1956428)
- Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) (2021a). *Adjustments for candidates with disabilities and learning difficulties. Access arrangements and reasonable adjustments*.  
[https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/AA\\_regs\\_21-22\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/AA_regs_21-22_FINAL.pdf)

*A review of arrangements internationally to accommodate examinees who are bereaved or ill at the time of scheduled second-level school leaving examinations.*

Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) (2021b). *A guide to the special consideration process. General and vocational qualifications.* [https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Guide\\_to\\_spec\\_con\\_process\\_2122\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Guide_to_spec_con_process_2122_FINAL.pdf)

Khangura, S., Konnyu, K., Cushman, R., Grimshaw, J., & Moher, D. (2012). Evidence summaries: the evolution of a rapid review approach. *Systematic Reviews* 1 (10).

Lovett, B. J. (2011). Extended Time Accommodations: What Does the Research Say? *Communique. The Newspaper of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)*, 39 (1), 14–15

Murchan, D. & Shiel, G. (2017). *Understanding and applying assessment in education*, London, SAGE Publications Ltd.

New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) (online). *Long-term illness, ongoing conditions or trauma.* <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/assessment-and-moderation-of-standards/managing-national-assessment-in-schools/derived-grades/4-candidates/long-term/>

Ofqual (2013). *Ofqual announced changes to A levels.* <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20141031170242/http://ofqual.gov.uk/news/ofqual-announces-changes-to-a-levels/>

Ofqual (2019a). *GCSE, AS & A level summer report 2019.* [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/852440/GQ-Summer-Report-2019-MON1100.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/852440/GQ-Summer-Report-2019-MON1100.pdf)

Ofqual (2019b). *Special consideration in GCSE, AS and A Level: summer 2019 exam series.* <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/special-consideration-in-gcse-as-and-a-level-summer-2019-exam-series>

Ostermaier, A., P. Beltz, & Link, S (2013). *Do University Policies Matter? Effects of Course Policies on Performance.* VfS Annual Conference 2013 (Duesseldorf): Competition Policy and Regulation in a Global Economic Order 79924, Verein für Socialpolitik / German Economic Association. <https://ideas.repec.org/p/zbw/vfsc13/79924.html>

Pell, G., Boursicot, K. & Roberts, T. (2009) The trouble with resits ... *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 34 (2), 243-251.

- Rickets, C. (2010). A new look at resits: are they simply a second chance? *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 35 (4), 351-356.
- Rodeiro, C. & Nádas, R (2012) Effects of modularity, certification session and re-sits on examination performance, *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 19 (4), 411-430.
- Rogers, C. M., Lazarus, S. S., & Thurlow, M. L. (2016). *A summary of the research on the effects of test accommodations: 2013-2014*. NCEO Report 402, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.
- Scott, E. (2012). Short-term gain at long-term cost? How resit policy can affect student learning, *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 19 (4), 431-449.
- Scottish Qualifications Authority (2022). *Examination exceptional circumstances consideration service: General information*. [https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files\\_ccc/nq-2022-exceptional-circumstances-general-information.pdf](https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/nq-2022-exceptional-circumstances-general-information.pdf)
- State Examinations Commission (2021a). *Reasonable accommodations at the 2022 certificate examinations. Guide for students*. Athlone, Ireland: Author. <https://www.examinations.ie/misc-doc/BI-CA-9514424.pdf>
- State Examinations Commission (2021b). *Reasonable accommodations at the 2022 certificate examinations. Instructions for schools*. Athlone, Ireland: Author. <https://www.examinations.ie/misc-doc/BI-CA-68723624.pdf>
- Wollscheid, S. & Tripney, J. (2021). Rapid reviews as an emerging approach to evidence synthesis in education. *London Review of Education*, 19 (1), 1-17. <https://ucl.scienceopen.com/hosted-document?doi=10.14324/LRE.19.1.32>

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A. Website analysis protocol

|   | Category                                | Detailed investigation in relation to                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|---|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | System description                      | Overview of system                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 2 | Upper secondary qualifications          | A. Name of Qualification<br>B. Purpose of Qualification<br>C. Approx. number of students tested annually<br>D. Name of Examining body                                                                                                                          |
| 3 | Use of results                          | Use of results for entry to higher education and employment                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 4 | Stakes                                  | Low/medium or high stakes attached to exams                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 5 | Examinations                            | A. Timing in year<br>B. Format<br>C. Structure of the examination<br>D. Grading                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 6 | Coursework                              | Coursework – format and weighting                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 7 | Policy on Alternative Arrangements (AA) | A. Evidence of policy on AA<br>B. Eligibility criteria to grant AA<br>C. Nature/Format of AA<br>D. Timing / scheduling of AA and results<br>E. Regulatory basis for AA<br>F. Scale of system / Number of cases<br>G. Challenges evident in operating AA policy |
| 8 | Public interest                         | Public interest/engagement in examination system                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 9 | Key points for research                 | Extract issues of note to the research questions                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

## **Appendix B. Issues addressed in case studies**

### **I Structure of school leaver examination and link with university admissions**

- Timing of exams
- Publication of results
- Role in selection to higher education

### **II Alternative arrangements where student has difficulty attending exams due to illness**

- Nature of alternative arrangement provided – on-the-day solutions; derived grades; re-sit/supplemental exams. When are results provided to students?
- Eligibility criteria for availing of a re-sit or derived grade in cases where a student misses an exam due to illness
- Evidence/documentation required when applying for alternative arrangement
- Description of application process
- Number of cases presenting annually
- System administrators' experience of providing alternative arrangements.

### **III Alternative arrangements where student has difficulty attending exams due to COVID-19 related issues**

- Existing infectious disease protocols as part of examination arrangements
- Procedures planned for dealing with students who will be unable to attend examination centres or special venues on scheduled day
- Evidence/documentation required when applying for alternative arrangement
- Description of application process
- System administrators' experience of providing alternative arrangements.

### **IV Alternative arrangements where student has difficulty attending exams due to bereavement**

- Nature of alternative arrangement made – on-the-day solutions; derived grades; re-sit/supplemental exams. When are results provided to students?
- Eligibility criteria for availing of a re-sit or derived grade in cases where a student misses an exam due to bereavement
- Evidence/documentation required when applying for alternative arrangement
- Description of application process
- Number of cases presenting annually
- System administrators' experience of providing alternative arrangements.

## **Appendix C. Selected websites consulted**

1. NSW Government (n.d): <https://ace.nesa.nsw.edu.au/higher-school-certificate>
2. NSW Government (2019): <https://ace.nesa.nsw.edu.au/ace-8069>
3. NSW Education Standards Authority (n.d):  
<https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/hsc/results-certificates>
4. NSW Education Standards Authority (n.d):  
<https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/hsc/about-HSC>
5. VCAA (n.d): <https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/assessment/results/Pages/vce-certificate.aspx>
6. VCAA (n.d):  
<https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/studentguides/myvce/Pages/HowVCEWorks.aspx>
7. VCAA (2022): <https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/administration/Key-dates/Pages/Future-examination-periods.aspx>
8. OECD (2016): <https://www.oecd.org/china/Education-in-China-a-snapshot.pdf>
9. That's Mags (2021): <http://www.thatsmags.com/china/post/13965/explainer-gaokao>
10. UCAS (2018): <https://qips.ucas.com/qip/china-gaokao>
11. The World Bank Blogs (2019): <https://blogs.worldbank.org/arabvoices/egypt-why-collaboration-matters-success-education-reform>
12. Egypt Education. Info (n.d): <https://www.egypteducation.info/tests/thanaweya-amma.html>
13. Ahram (2021): <https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/50/1201/422189/AlAhram-Weekly/Egypt/Thanaweya-Amma-woes.aspx>
14. Egyptian Streets (2021): <https://egyptianstreets.com/2021/08/18/a-first-in-decades-no-full-marks-and-low-gpas-in-thanaweya-amma-results/>
15. Ofqual (2019):  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/825429/A-Level-infographic\\_current\\_3.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/825429/A-Level-infographic_current_3.pdf)
16. Ofqual (2018): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-the-facts-gcse-and-a-level-reform/get-the-facts-as-and-a-level-reform>
17. UCAS (n.d): <https://www.ucas.com/further-education/post-16-qualifications/qualifications-you-can-take/levels>
18. Education.gouv.fr (2022): <https://www.education.gouv.fr/reussir-au-lycee/la-voie-generale-au-lycee-9749>

19. UCAS (2021): <https://qips.ucas.com/qip/france-baccalaureat-general-assessed-from-2021>
20. Education.gouv.fr (2020): <https://www.education.gouv.fr/baccalaureat-tout-savoir-sur-la-session-2020-308372>
21. HKEAA (2021): <https://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/en/hkdse/introduction/>
22. HKEAA (2021): [https://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/DocLibrary/HKDSE/Exam\\_Report/Examination\\_Statistics/dseexamstat21\\_1.pdf](https://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/DocLibrary/HKDSE/Exam_Report/Examination_Statistics/dseexamstat21_1.pdf)
23. HKEAA (2013): [https://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/DocLibrary/Media/Leaflets/SBA\\_pamphlet\\_E\\_web\\_re.pdf](https://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/DocLibrary/Media/Leaflets/SBA_pamphlet_E_web_re.pdf)
24. HKEAA (2021): [https://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/DocLibrary/Media/PR/PR\\_Arrangements\\_for\\_Release\\_of\\_2021HKDSE\\_Results\\_E.pdf](https://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/DocLibrary/Media/PR/PR_Arrangements_for_Release_of_2021HKDSE_Results_E.pdf)
25. Campus-studies (n.d): <https://campus-studies.co.il/bagrut/about-israeli-bagrut/>
26. Ministry of Aliyah and Integration (2019): [https://www.gov.il/BlobFolder/generalpage/education\\_guides/en/edu\\_en.pdf](https://www.gov.il/BlobFolder/generalpage/education_guides/en/edu_en.pdf)
27. UCAS (2018): <https://qips.ucas.com/qip/italy-diploma-di-esame-di-stato-conclusivo-dei-corsi-di-istruzione-secondaria-superiore>
28. Vivo Scuola (2022): <https://www.vivoscuola.it/Schede-informative/Esame-di-Stato-conclusivo-del-secondo-ciclo-di-istruzione-esame-di-maturita>
29. Studio Cataldi (2022): <https://www-studiocataldi-it.translate.goog/articoli/43551-esame-di-maturita-2022.asp? x tr sl=it& x tr tl=en& x tr hl=en& x tr pto=sc#par1>
30. Ministry of Education (2022): <https://www-miur-gov-it.translate.goog/-/scuola-firmate-le-ordinanze-con-le-modalita-di-svolgimento-degli-esami-del-primo-e-del-secondo-ciclo-bianchi-sono-frutto-del-confronto-e-della-condivi? x tr sl=it& x tr tl=en& x tr hl=en& x tr pto=sc>
31. Courses Malaysia (n.d): <https://coursesmalaysia.com/study-advice-and-tips/options-after-secondary-school/sijil-tinggi-persekolahan-malaysia-stpm>
32. Permohonan (2022): <https://www-permohonan-my.translate.goog/kalendar-peperiksaan-stpm-tarikh-takwim/? x tr sl=ms& x tr tl=en& x tr hl=en& x tr pto=sc>
33. Edu Advisor (n.d): <https://eduadvisor.my/stpm/>
34. New Straits Time (2017): <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2017/11/298362/90000-candidates-sit-stpm-year>
35. The Star (2021): <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2021/06/27/stpm-results-out-on-july-1>

36. NZQA (n.d): <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/>
37. NZQA (n.d): <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/understanding-ncea/how-ncea-works/>
38. NZQA Statistics (2020): <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/About-us/Publications/stats-reports/NCEA-Annual-Report-2020.pdf>
39. NYSED (n.d): <http://www.nysed.gov/curriculum-instruction/diploma-types>
40. Schools New York (n.d): <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/learning/testing/ny-state-high-school-regents-exams>
41. West African Examination Council (WAEC) (n.d): <https://www.waecheadquartersgh.org/>
42. All Africa (2021): <https://allafrica.com/stories/202111230275.html>
43. Educational Assessment in a Time of Reform: Standards and Standard Setting for Excellence in Education (2019): [https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=uxu\\_DwAAQBAJ&pg=PT27&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=uxu_DwAAQBAJ&pg=PT27&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false)
44. Vanguardngr (2022): <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/02/waec-results-48-61-obtained-credits-in-english-maths-3-others/>
45. BBC (2021): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-58152067>
46. CCEA (2022): <https://ccea.org.uk/post-16>
47. Department of Education (2021): <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/weir-announces-dates-ccea-2021-examination-results>
48. Fipi (n.d): <http://fipi.ru/ege>
49. Interfax Russia (2021): <https://www.interfax-russia.ru/view/ege-po-planu>
50. Ria Novosty (2021): <https://ria.ru/20210610/rezultaty-1736539876.html>
51. SQA (2019): [https://www.sqa.org.uk/files\\_ccc/Guide\\_to\\_Scottish\\_Qualifications.pdf](https://www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/Guide_to_Scottish_Qualifications.pdf)
52. The Complete University Guide (2021): <https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/student-advice/what-to-study/choosing-scottish-highers-and-advanced-highers>
53. SQA (2021): <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/98677.html>
54. SQA (2022): [https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files\\_ccc/nq-2022-exam-timetable.pdf](https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/nq-2022-exam-timetable.pdf)
55. SEAB (n.d): <https://www.seab.gov.sg/home/examinations/gce-a-level>
56. UCAS (2019): <https://qips.ucas.com/qip/singapore-singapore-cambridge-gce-a-level>
57. SEAB (2022): [https://www.seab.gov.sg/docs/default-source/schoolexamrulesregulations/gcenoa\\_level\\_school\\_candidates\\_rules\\_and\\_regulations.pdf](https://www.seab.gov.sg/docs/default-source/schoolexamrulesregulations/gcenoa_level_school_candidates_rules_and_regulations.pdf)

58. Department of Basic Education (2021):  
<https://www.education.gov.za/2021NSCEExamReports.aspx>
59. The University of Queensland (n.d): <https://future-students.uq.edu.au/sites/default/files/2020-03/south-african-senior-certificate-info-sheet.pdf>
60. Matric College (n.d): <https://www.matric.co.za/national-senior-certificate/>
61. Matric College (2022): <https://www.matric.co.za/get-matric-certificate/>

## **Appendix D. Approaches to addressing trauma and adversity faced by students in relation to scheduled assessments**

### **Provisions to mitigate trauma and adversity, with associated eligibility criteria**

#### **AUSTRALIA - NEW SOUTH WALES (NSW)**

##### ***Illness leading to absence:***

A student needs to submit a separate application and supporting evidence for each exam or exam component affected. Applications must be accompanied by evidence of the illness or misadventure.<sup>69</sup> A student will receive a moderated school assessment mark.

If a student misses an entire exam and the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) declines his/her illness/misadventure application, the student will receive no result for that course and it will not appear on his/her NESA record.

Illness/misadventure applications are for cases where an illness or misadventure:<sup>70</sup>

- occurs immediately before or during a Higher School Certificate (HSC) exam, which was beyond the student's control, and
- prevented a student from attending or diminished his/her exam performance.

If a student applies for illness/misadventure, she/he will need to include advice from a relevant independent party, for example a doctor or police officer, to show why the student could not attend the exam. The document should be:

- specific to the date and time of the exam
- submitted with the Illness/Misadventure form

A student must lodge the illness/misadventure application for HSC written exams with NESA shortly after that exam. For performance exams or submitted works, a student must apply within one week of the exam, performance or submission date. The school principal must sign the application. If the application is approved, the student will receive whichever is higher of either:<sup>71</sup>

- his/her exam mark for performance exams or submitted works or
- a mark calculated from any existing assessment mark, from an estimated mark or other unaffected components of the student's exam.

---

<sup>69</sup> [Educationstandards.nsw.edu](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au) (n.d)

<sup>70</sup> [Educationstandards.nsw.edu.au](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au) (2022)

<sup>71</sup> [Educationstandards.nsw.edu](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au) (2022)

*A review of arrangements internationally to accommodate examinees who are bereaved or ill at the time of scheduled second-level school leaving examinations.*

***Illness leading to underperformance:***

A student will receive a moderated school assessment mark (see *Illness leading to absence*).

***COVID-19:***

A student will receive a moderated school assessment mark (see *Illness leading to absence*).

***Bereavement leading to absence:***

A student will receive a moderated school assessment mark (see *Illness leading to absence*).

***Bereavement leading to underperformance:***

A student will receive a moderated school assessment mark (see *Illness leading to absence*).

***References:***

New South Wales Education Standards Authority (n.d).

<https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/hsc/rules-and-processes/illness-misadventure>

New South Wales Education Standards Authority (2022).

<https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/hsc/rules-and-processes/2022-rules-and-procedures-guide-before-you-start>

## **AUSTRALIA - VICTORIA**

### ***Illness leading to absence:***

Derived Examination Score (DES). Students who miss one or more exams on the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) in Australia are eligible for a DES if they meet all of the following criteria:<sup>72</sup>

- They have completed the course of study leading to the external assessment and have a result for at least one other graded assessment in the same course.
- They experience the onset of an illness or the occurrence of an injury, personal trauma or serious intervening event in the period before or during a VCE external assessment, that has either prevented them from attending the external assessment or significantly affected their performance during the external assessment.
- They provide independent professional written evidence that demonstrates the illness, injury, personal trauma or serious intervening event has affected their performance in the external assessment or has prevented them from attending the external assessment.

### ***Illness leading to underperformance:***

Derived Examination Score (DES). Illness, injury, personal trauma or serious intervening event has affected their performance in the external assessment. A ‘personal trauma’ may include, but is not limited to, the death, serious illness or an accident involving a family member, or family break-up. A ‘serious intervening event’ may include, but is not limited to, an accident on the way to or at an examination, attendance at a funeral of a family member or other person of close relationship, or the required attendance at a court proceeding.<sup>73</sup>

### ***COVID-19:***

Derived Examination Score (DES). If students are unable to complete any of VCE written examinations due to Covid-19, they can apply for a DES.<sup>74</sup> Before the examination period begins the school has to provide a student with the following documents:<sup>75</sup>

- (i) a copy of a personalised Student Examination/Assessment Timetable listing the date, time and location for each of examinations, as well as the final dates for submitting a DES application for each examination; and where relevant
- (ii) a copy of a Special Examination Arrangements Advice slip for any examination where the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) has approved Special Examination Arrangements.

---

<sup>72</sup> [VCAA](#) (n.d)

<sup>73</sup> [VCAA](#) (n.d)

<sup>74</sup> [VCAA](#) (n.d)

<sup>75</sup> [VCAA](#) (2021)

*A review of arrangements internationally to accommodate examinees who are bereaved or ill at the time of scheduled second-level school leaving examinations.*

A student must not attend an examination if they feel unwell or have any of the symptoms of COVID-19, however mild, including:

- loss or change in sense of smell or taste
- fever, chills or sweat
- cough, sore throat or runny nose
- shortness of breath
- in certain circumstances headache, muscle soreness, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea may also be considered as symptoms.

By attending a VCE written examination, a student is confirming that he/she does not have COVID-19 and does not have any symptoms consistent with COVID-19.

***Bereavement leading to absence:***

Derived Examination Score

***Bereavement leading to underperformance:***

Derived Examination Score

***References:***

VCAA (n.d): <https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/administration/special-provision>

VCAA (n.d): <https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/news-and-events>

VCAA (2021): <https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/students/support/Pages/OtherLanguages.aspx>

## **CHINA**

### ***Illness leading to absence:***

There is no direct policy covering situations that might require special consideration based on grounds of illness, although there is some provision for students who need special assistance during the exam time, such as sitting an exam in a hospital.<sup>76</sup>

### ***Illness leading to underperformance:***

The Gaokao is a point-based exam, which allows some categories of students to get a place at universities even if they miss one exam. It includes minority groups, sportspeople, children of army personnel, and applicants with disabilities.<sup>77</sup>

### ***COVID-19:***

Infected students with mild symptoms had to take the exams solo in isolation rooms in a hospital or special locations.<sup>78</sup> In addition, the government implemented measures based on the level of ‘risk’ of spreading Covid-19. Students were split into different rooms based on their level of Covid-19 risk, with contacts of confirmed cases taking the tests in smaller groups.<sup>79</sup> Students from high-risk areas must wear masks during the tests.

### ***Bereavement leading to absence:***

Students must retake the exam in the next examination cycle, which is in the following year.

### ***Bereavement leading to underperformance:***

Students must retake the exam in the next examination cycle, which is in the following year.

### ***References:***

China Daily (2019): <https://www.chinadaily.com>

Davey et.al (2007): <https://www.researchgate.net/publication>

France24 (2021): <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news>

Supchina (2020): <https://supchina.com/2020/07/09>

---

<sup>76</sup> [China Daily](#) (2019)

<sup>77</sup> [Davey et.al](#) (2007)

<sup>78</sup> [France24](#) (2021)

<sup>79</sup> [Supchina](#) (2020)

## **CZECH REPUBLIC**

### ***Illness leading to absence:***

If students are absent from the examination, with an acceptable cause, they are entitled to re-sit their examination (*Additional term*). Students are entitled to re-sit the common part of the examination, such as Czech language and literature, foreign language and mathematics, as well as a profile part, which includes a wider number of non-compulsory subjects.<sup>80</sup> All re-sits are scheduled in September.<sup>81</sup>

### ***Illness leading to underperformance:***

Specific information not available.

### ***COVID-19:***

Students who are not able to attend their examination due to Covid-19 or quarantine, have an opportunity to re-sit their examination during specially allocated dates.

### ***Bereavement leading to absence:***

If it is considered as acceptable cause of absence a student can be granted an opportunity to re-sit an exam in September.

### ***Bereavement leading to underperformance:***

Specific information not available.

### ***References:***

Cermat: <https://maturita.cermat.cz/menu/maturitni-zkouska>

Cermat: <https://maturita.cermat.cz/files>

---

<sup>80</sup> [Cermat](#) (2022)

<sup>81</sup> [Cermat](#) (2022)

## **EGYPT**

### ***Illness leading to absence:***

Students have an opportunity to retake each test on two additional occasions, in July and August, with the main exam being administered in June.<sup>82</sup> Students also can repeat a year. From 2021, students were required to submit an online form together with proof of special consideration circumstances.<sup>83</sup> School leaver examinations are primarily administered in objective/multiple-choice format.

### ***Illness leading to underperformance:***

Procedures are similar to the case of illness leading to absence.

### ***COVID-19:***

Students who contract the virus during the exam period have the right to postpone their exams.<sup>84</sup> From 2021 exams are held electronically (using tablets) with a printed question paper available to all students. This requires each student to come to the school examination hall only once and then take the rest of these exams at home.<sup>85</sup>

### ***Bereavement leading to absence:***

Re-sit or repetition of a year.

### ***Bereavement leading to underperformance:***

Re-sit or repetition of a year.

### ***References:***

Ahram (2020): <https://english.ahram.org.eg>

Elwatan News (2021): <https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/5650501>

Ahram (2021): <https://english.ahram.org.eg/News>

---

<sup>82</sup> [Ahram](#) (2020)

<sup>83</sup> [Elwatan News](#) (2021)

<sup>84</sup> [Ahram](#) (2021)

<sup>85</sup> [Ahram](#) (2021)

## ENGLAND

### ***Illness leading to absence:***

Students can avail of an imputed/derived grade as part of *special considerations* to accommodate cases where students miss exams due to a temporary injury, illness or other indisposition at the time of the examination/assessment.

General criteria underpinning eligibility for derived grades include:

- At least 25% of the total assessment must have been completed.
- Temporary illness or accident at time of exam.

Heads of Exam Centres review the reason for absence and decide whether to support it. Responsibility is on the Exam Centre to provide a request to the relevant awarding body. Signed evidence to support the request must be retained in the school and be available for inspection. Criteria employed in the case of granting derived grades are less clearly defined than for post-exam adjustments (see below) but are related to them.

### ***Illness leading to underperformance:***

Students can avail of *special consideration* in the form of a post examination adjustment to a candidate's mark or grade to reflect temporary injury, illness or other indisposition at the time of the examination/assessment. These include:

- temporary illness or accident/injury at the time of the assessment;
- bereavement at the time of the assessment (where whole groups are affected, normally only those most closely involved will be eligible);
- domestic crisis arising at the time of the assessment;
- serious disturbance during an examination, particularly where recorded material is being used;
- accidental events at the time of the assessment such as being given the wrong examination paper, being given a defective examination paper or CD, failure of practical equipment, failure of materials to arrive on time;
- participation in sporting events, training camps or other events at an international level at the time of the assessment, e.g. representing their country at an international level in football or hockey;
- failure by the centre to implement previously approved access arrangements for that specific examination series.<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> JCO (2022)

A sliding scale of adjustments to exam grades is applied, with a maximum of 5% down to 1% depending on the seriousness of the event. A range of situations are outlined, for example:<sup>87</sup>

- **5%** the maximum ‘tariff’ awarded. Examples include terminal illness of the candidate/partner/carer, death of the immediate family member (within 2 month of the examination), very serious and disruptive crisis/incident at or near the time of the examination.
- **4%** awarded for life-threatening illness of candidate or member of immediate family; major surgery at or near the time of the examination; severe disease, very recent death (within one month of exam) of member of the extended family.
- **3%** recent death of a close friend/distant relative, recent illness of a more serious nature, organ disease, broken limbs, flare-up of a severe congenital/medical condition or a psychological condition, physical assault/trauma before an examination, recent crisis/incident, witnessing a distressing event on the day of the examination involved. ‘Recent’ is defined as up to four months prior to the examination taking place.
- **2%** illness at the time of the examination, broken limb on the mend, concussion, effects of pregnancy (not pregnancy *per se*), extreme distress on the day of an examination (not simply exam related stress), allowance on last paper taken in a day when a candidate has been entered for three or more examinations timetabled for the same day and the total duration of those papers is more than 6 hours (GCE examinations).
- **1%** noise during examination which is more than momentary, illness of another candidate which leads to disruption in the examination room, stress or anxiety for which medication has been prescribed, hay fever on the day of an examination, minor upset arising from administrative problems.

### **COVID-19:**

Special considerations policy applied. Covid-19 is treated as an illnesses (self-isolating due to COVID-19 exposure or illness). In general examination centres use the contingency framework which describes the principles of managing local outbreaks of COVID-19.<sup>88</sup> Examinations separated by at least 10 days to maximize the opportunity for students to sit at least one paper.

### **Bereavement leading to absence:**

Special considerations policy applied in relation to derived grade.

---

<sup>87</sup> [JCQ](#) (2022)

<sup>88</sup> [Department for Education](#) (2022)

*A review of arrangements internationally to accommodate examinees who are bereaved or ill at the time of scheduled second-level school leaving examinations.*

***Bereavement leading to underperformance:***

Special considerations policy applied in relation to post-examination adjustments.

***References:***

JCQ (2022): <https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021>

Department for Education (2022): <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk>

## **FRANCE**

### ***Illness leading to absence:***

Request for special considerations relate to accident, illness, hospitalisation and other *force majeure* circumstances. Supporting documents (medical certificate, death certificate) should be provided to the chief education officer of the regional education office. Each region has its own procedures and timing regarding force majeure cases. However, there is general agreement that the best time to submit a request is the first day of a student's absence.<sup>89</sup> Supplemental examinations are organised every year in September.<sup>90</sup>

### ***Illness leading to underperformance:***

'Catch-up sessions' are scheduled in July or supplemental examinations in September (depends upon individual circumstances). Some stipulations apply:

- If the student's overall average in a subject is below 8/20, a candidate will not qualify for the Baccalaureate Diploma. She/he will have to repeat their final year. Candidates who fail to get an average score can retake the baccalaureate as free candidates in the following year.<sup>91</sup> However, candidates who pass, but wish to improve their overall score in the Baccalauréat, or in individual subjects, may re-sit the whole diploma the following year, but this is rare.<sup>92</sup>
- For candidates who have an average score ranging between 8 and 9.99/20, there are allocated 'catch-up' orals in July. 'Catch ups' are intended to help a candidate to earn points and reach an average score in their Baccalaureate diploma.

### **COVID-19:**

Request for supplemental examination in September.

### ***Bereavement leading to absence:***

Request for supplemental examination in September.

***Bereavement leading to underperformance:*** "Catch up sessions" or supplemental examination in September (see section on *Illness leading to underperformance*).

---

<sup>89</sup> [Super-bac](#) (2020)

<sup>90</sup> [Ministry of National Education](#) (n.d)

<sup>91</sup> [Super-bac](#) (2020)

<sup>92</sup> [UCAS](#) (2020)

*A review of arrangements internationally to accommodate examinees who are bereaved or ill at the time of scheduled second-level school leaving examinations.*

Further detail in relation to France is available in Section 7 of the Final Report.

***References:***

Super-bac (2020): <https://www.super-bac.com/articles/bac>

Ministry of National Education (n.d): <https://www.education.gouv.fr>

Super-bac (2020): <https://www.super-bac.com/articles/bac/rattrapages-bac/>

UCAS (2020): <https://qips.ucas.com/qip/france-baccalaureat-general-assessed-from-2021>

## HONG-KONG

### ***Illness leading to absence:***

No supplementary examination is arranged for written or practical papers. However, some mitigating contingencies can be arranged for additional oral examinations within three working days after the original date of examination.

Valid reasons to apply for the Special Considerations.

- hospitalisation
- seriously ill (with medical certificate)
- suffering from a highly contagious disease
- clearly unwell in the examination centre and unable to continue
- seriously injured after an accident
- affected by a recent family tragedy
- physically unable to be present in the examination centre for a valid reason.

Missing parts of a subject are covered through the use of constructed results.<sup>93</sup>

A candidate who misses an exam due to an acceptable reason may still be given a result constructed from other information about their level of performance. The student's outcome on other written exam papers for a subject may be used to create a predicted outcome for the missing paper, based on average trends shown over all other relevant candidates. If a candidate misses all parts of an exam, it may be possible to construct a final subject result derived from that candidate's performance in school, on internal assessments and/or mock examinations based on the average trends shown among other candidates from the same school. Upward mark adjustments may be applied on a sliding scale, rarely exceeding 4% of the maximum exam paper mark.

Hospitalised candidates.<sup>94</sup> If a candidate is hospitalised he/she may apply to take the examination in the hospital, provided that the doctor certifies that the candidate is fit to take the examination.

If a candidate is seriously ill and unable to sit the examination, the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) may consider:<sup>95</sup>

- generating an assessed mark on the part of a subject the candidate was absent from, based on the remaining parts/paper(s) that were sat in the same year (only applicable

---

<sup>93</sup> [HKEAA](#) (n.d)

<sup>94</sup> [HKEAA](#) (n.d)

<sup>95</sup> [HKEAA](#) (n.d)

where a candidate was able to sit at least one written paper for the subject concerned)  
or

- generating an assessed subject result if the assessment method above is not possible. The assessed subject levels are based on a comparison between the candidate's academic records in school and those of his/her classmates as well as on his/her classmates' Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) results in the subject(s) concerned. Such assessed subject levels are given only to school candidates whose applications are supported by the school principal and are confined to Grade Levels (bands) 2, 3 and 4 only for HKDSE Category A subjects. No assessed subject level will be given if the assessed level is below Level 2.

The assessed subject level(s) will be annotated on the certificate of the candidate concerned.

### ***Illness leading to underperformance:***

A candidate can apply for special consideration to evaluate results. A candidate has to apply within 21 calendar days after the date of the examination, together with the original copy of the relevant medical certificate.<sup>96</sup>

### ***COVID-19:***

For 2022, it was planned that students could sit their exams even if they have Covid-19 or were in close contact with someone with Covid. Those who test positive for the coronavirus but are in a healthy condition can voluntarily enter a special Covid isolation facility (located at Penny's Bay in the city) to take the exam.

If the candidates are entering the facilities earlier, they can decide on the day itself whether or not to take the paper based on their health condition at that time. However, candidates cannot change their mind — to not take the exam — after looking at the paper. Candidates also have to stay in the facilities until their isolation period is over.

It was planned to have designated taxis to take these students to the isolation or quarantine facilities. If they test positive and decide to take the exam at Penny's Bay, they have to contact exam authorities before 6:30am on the day of the exam so relevant departments can arrange the transport for them to the facilities in time for the paper.

### ***Bereavement leading to absence:***

See terms and conditions on "Illness leading to absence."

---

<sup>96</sup> [HKEAA](#) (n.d)

*A review of arrangements internationally to accommodate examinees who are bereaved or ill at the time of scheduled second-level school leaving examinations.*

***Bereavement leading to underperformance:***

Mitigation measures are not clear in the websites reviewed. But in general, an assessment for special consideration may also be given in rare cases where candidates can prove that they were physically unable to be present in the examination centre due to unforeseeable circumstances (e.g. being trapped in a lift, personally involved in a traffic accident or representing Hong Kong in international events) or where they are overtaken by a family tragedy such as the death of an immediate family member.<sup>97</sup>

***References:***

HKEAA (n.d): [https://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/DocLibrary/HKDSE/Candidate\\_Handbook](https://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/DocLibrary/HKDSE/Candidate_Handbook)

---

<sup>97</sup> [HKEAA](#) (n.d)

## **ISRAEL**

### ***Illness leading to absence:***

Students are eligible to retake a specific topic (subject) in August or repeat it during a winter administration of the Bagrut.

Hospitalised students are entitled to take the Bagrut exam according to the schedule set by the Ministry of Education. If a student is unable to take the test in a school because of his/her medical condition, a candidate is permitted to take the test in the hospital.<sup>98</sup>

Ill students who are confined to home for a period over 21 days, are eligible to apply for an examination setting at home.

### ***Illness leading to underperformance:***

Students may repeat particular exams in order to improve their scores.<sup>99</sup>

### ***COVID-19:***

Examination procedures depend on general guidelines and procedures issued by the Ministry of Health.<sup>100</sup>

### ***Bereavement leading to absence:***

Information is not available in the websites reviewed.

### ***Bereavement leading to underperformance:***

Students may repeat particular exams in order to improve their scores.

### ***References:***

Ministry of Education (2022): <https://edu.gov.il/minhalpedagogy/exams/procedures-towards-exams/Pages/procedures-before-exams.aspx>

Mosinzon (n.d): <https://mosinzon.tik-tak.net/הפנימיה/english/matriculation-certificate/>

Ministry of Education (2022): <https://edu.gov.il/minhalpedagogy/exams>

---

<sup>98</sup> [Ministry of Education](#) (2022)

<sup>99</sup> [Mosinzon](#) (n.d)

<sup>100</sup> [Ministry of Education](#) (2022)

## **ITALY**

### ***Illness leading to absence:***

According to the regulations of the Ministry of Education students having “particular or exceptional” (“particolari o eccezionali”) cases are eligible for supplementary exam sessions in early July and September. However, for the oral examination there is typically more flexibility for students who were absent during an exam. An oral exam may be administered on any day during the scheduled exam period, but they cannot take place beyond a time frame established by each school’s local Examination Commission.<sup>101</sup>

### ***Illness leading to underperformance:***

There is no special guidance provided on this matter.

### ***COVID-19:***

Similar to the general procedures on illnesses, candidates are allowed to sit their exams during supplementary sessions. The oral component of the examination can be taken via online platforms.<sup>102</sup>

### ***Bereavement leading to absence:***

Similar to the general procedures on illnesses, candidates are allowed to sit their exams during supplementary sessions in July or September.

### ***Bereavement leading to underperformance:***

There is no special guidance provided on this matter.

Further detail in relation to Italy is available in Section 7 of the Final Report.

### ***References:***

Quifinanza (2019): <https://quifinanza-it.cosa-succede-assenza-prove-maturita>

Studenti (2022): <https://www.studenti.it/maturita-2022-che-succede-se-ti-prendi-il-covid.html>

---

<sup>101</sup> [Quifinanza](#) (2019)

<sup>102</sup> [Studenti](#) (2022)

## **MALAYSIA**

### ***Illness leading to absence:***

For candidates who miss their exams due to illness or other acceptable circumstances additional exam slots can be allocated during the exam period.

### ***Illness leading to underperformance:***

Re-sit can be arranged for candidates who wish to improve their grades.<sup>103</sup>

### ***COVID-19:***

Candidates who are confirmed positive with COVID-19 or who are required to quarantine are not allowed to sit for the exams as long they are under quarantine or sick. They can resume sitting for their exams after they have completed their quarantine and are free of the virus. Re-sits can be arranged for students who have Covid-19 or under quarantine. In 2021, these students had an opportunity to re-sit exams during designated dates.<sup>104</sup>

### ***Bereavement leading to absence:***

For candidates who miss their exams due to illness or other acceptable circumstances additional exam slots can be allocated during an actual exam period.

### ***Bereavement leading to underperformance:***

Re-sit can be arranged for candidates who wish to improve their grades.

### ***References:***

Study Malaysia (2021): <https://www.studymalaysia.com/education>

The Star (2021): <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2021/01/22/covid-19-quarantined-spm-stpm-students-will-be-allowed-to-defer-exams-says-education-ministry>

---

<sup>103</sup> [Study Malaysia](#) (2021)

<sup>104</sup> [The Star](#) (2021)

## **NEW YORK**

### ***Illness leading to absence:***

There is no re-sit/make-up period for Regents examinations. Students who were absent for the Regents exam will not receive a final exam score and may be assigned a zero as their final exam result. Students can retake their exams in the next examination sessions or apply for Exemption (E).

### ***Illness leading to underperformance:***

If a student is not satisfied with their score, they can retake the exam in the next available sitting (the exam is administered three times per year).<sup>105</sup>

### ***COVID-19:***

A student can be assigned an 'E' (Exemption) on their transcript as long as the student has earned a credit with an associated score.<sup>106</sup> This applies to cases where the Regents exams in January 2021 and January 2022 exams were cancelled due to COVID.

### ***Bereavement leading to absence:***

There is no make-up period for Regents examinations. Students who were absent for the Regents exam will not receive a final exam score and may not be assigned a zero as their final exam result. Students can retake their exams in the next examination sessions.

### ***Bereavement leading to underperformance:***

If a student is not satisfied with their score, they can retake the exam next year.

### ***References:***

NYSED (2021): <http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/coronavirus/faq-january-2021-regents-examinations.pdf>

NYSED (2021): <http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/coronavirus/faq-january-2022-exemptions.pdf>

---

<sup>105</sup> [NYSED](#) (2021)

<sup>106</sup> [NYSED](#) (2021)

## **NEW ZEALAND**

### ***Illness leading to absence:***

Candidates who through illness or misadventure have been prevented from sitting exams, or who consider that their performance in an external assessment has been seriously impaired because of exceptional circumstances beyond their control, may apply to the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) to be awarded a derived grade.<sup>107</sup>

Examples of a temporary illness and trauma include:

- temporary illness
- injury
- trauma
- outbreak of notifiable disease such as measles, mumps or whooping cough
- concussion symptoms
- physical disability
- epilepsy, anorexia nervosa and other eating disorders
- chronic relapsing conditions (e.g., glandular fever, Myalgic Encephalopathy (ME))
- ongoing personal trauma.

NZQA reserves the right to decline derived grade applications that do not meet the eligibility criteria.

### ***Illness leading to underperformance:***

Derived grade. Candidates should sit the examination wherever possible. Where the candidate's derived grade application is approved, and they sit the examination, the better result will be awarded.<sup>108</sup> The temporary illness, trauma or serious event must have a clear, visible negative effect on the candidate's performance and/or stopped them from attending the examination. Candidates must provide evidence gathered at the time of the examination or preparation period to confirm their eligibility.

### ***COVID-19:***

Derived grade.<sup>109</sup>

---

<sup>107</sup> [NZQA](#) (n.d)

<sup>108</sup> [NZQA](#) (n.d)

<sup>109</sup> [NZQA](#) (2021)

*A review of arrangements internationally to accommodate examinees who are bereaved or ill at the time of scheduled second-level school leaving examinations.*

***Bereavement leading to absence:***

Derived grade. Examples of bereavement include:

- death of a grandparent
- death of immediate family member.

***Bereavement leading to underperformance:***

Derived grade. Candidates should sit the examination wherever possible. Where the candidate's derived grade application is approved, and they sit the examination, the better result will be awarded.<sup>110</sup>

***References:***

NZQA (n.d): <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/assessment-and-moderation-of-standards>

NZQA (2021): <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/news/changes-to-ncea-assessment-dates-in-2021/>

NZQA (n.d): <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/managing-national-assessment-in-schools/derived-grades/4-candidates/what-is/>

---

<sup>110</sup> [NZQA](#) (n.d)

## **NIGERIA**

### ***Illness leading to absence:***

Options for mitigation are generally not available. A candidate must re-register for the next round of exams in the following term/year. The West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) is administered to ‘School Candidates’ in May/June and is available for ‘Private Candidates’ in November/December.<sup>111</sup> For the purposes of admission to universities, a candidate can combine May/June WASSCE with November/December results.<sup>112</sup>

### ***Illness leading to underperformance:***

Options for mitigation are not available. A candidate must reregister for the next round of exams in the following term/year (see section on *Illness leading to absence*).

### **COVID-19:**

Options for mitigation are not generally available. There is limited opportunity for some candidates taking the exam in hospitals or isolation facilities on the same day as other candidates. A candidate must re-register for the next round of exams in the following term/year (see section on *Illness leading to absence*).

### ***Bereavement leading to absence:***

Options for mitigation are not generally available. A candidate must reregister for the next round of exams in the following term/year (see section on *Illness leading to absence*).

### ***Bereavement leading to underperformance:***

Options for mitigation are not generally available. A candidate must reregister for the next round of exams in the following term/year (see section on *Illness leading to absence*).

### **References:**

Myschoolgist (2022): <https://www.myschoolgist.com/ng/waec-may-june-timetable-free/>

WAEC Nigeria (n.d): <https://www.waecnigeria.org/faq>

---

<sup>111</sup> [Myschoolgist](#) (2022)

<sup>112</sup> [WAEC Nigeria](#) (n.d)

## **NORTHERN IRELAND**

### ***Illness leading to absence:***

Students are eligible for post-examination adjustments termed “missed paper calculation” (z-score). This option is normally available for those students who have completed at least 40% of the assessments in the subject,<sup>113</sup> although the threshold has been reduced to 25% for the 2022 examinations. For 2022, in cases of acceptable absence, for example, a sudden illness on the day of an exam, a student is eligible for a missed component calculation in CCEA examinations if they have completed the following:<sup>114</sup>

- At AS level: 25% of the total assessment for the AS qualification, or
- At A level: 25% of the total assessment for all the A2 units.

A missed component calculation estimates how a student would likely have performed in the assessment he/she missed<sup>115</sup>

- based on the student’s marks in the unit(s) she/he has completed; and
- relative to other students.

For the 2022 examinations students have an opportunity to re-sit their examination in a ‘Reserve Series’ of exams. The Reserve Series (all A2 subjects - mandatory units only) will be administered immediately after the main series in May-June.<sup>116</sup> Normally, students who miss all examinations (and therefore where it is impossible to calculate a z-score) are expected to complete them the following year. In 2022, a student cannot choose both the missed paper calculation and the reserve series options for the same assessment.<sup>117</sup>

### ***Illness leading to underperformance:***

Special Consideration (in the form of a ‘tariff’) is given to compensate for challenges faced where students who sit an exam but feel that some unanticipated personal obstacle has compromised their ability to demonstrate their learning. The tariff can be awarded on a sliding scale between 1 – 5%). Special Consideration is a post examination adjustment to a candidate's mark or grade to reflect temporary injury, illness or other indisposition at the time of the examination/assessment. These include:

- temporary illness or accident/injury at the time of the assessment;
- bereavement at the time of the assessment (where whole groups are affected, normally only those most closely involved will be eligible);
- domestic crisis arising at the time of the assessment;

---

<sup>113</sup> [CCEA](#) (2022)

<sup>114</sup> [CCEA](#) (2022)

<sup>115</sup> [CCEA](#) (2022)

<sup>116</sup> [CCEA](#) (2022)

<sup>117</sup> [CCEA](#) (2022)

- serious disturbance during an examination, particularly where recorded material is being used;
- accidental events at the time of the assessment such as being given the wrong examination paper, being given a defective examination paper or CD, failure of practical equipment, failure of materials to arrive on time;
- participation in sporting events, training camps or other events at an international level at the time of the assessment, e.g. representing their country at an international level in football or hockey;
- failure by the centre to implement previously approved access arrangements for that specific examination series.<sup>118</sup>

A sliding scale of adjustments to the exam grade, with a maximum of 5% down to 1% depending on the seriousness of the event. A range of situations are outlined, for example:<sup>119</sup>

- **5%** the maximum ‘tariff’ awarded. Examples include terminal illness of the candidate/partner/carers, death of the immediate family member (within 2 month of the examination), very serious and disruptive crisis/incident at or near the time of the examination.
- **4%** awarded for life-threatening illness of candidate or member of immediate family; major surgery at or near the time of the examination; severe disease, very recent death (within one month of exam) of member of the extended family.
- **3%** recent death of a close friend/distant relative, recent illness of a more serious nature, organ disease, broken limbs, flare-up of a severe congenital/medical condition or a psychological condition, physical assault trauma before an examination, recent crisis/incident, witnessing a distressing event on the day of the examination involved. ‘Recent’ is defined as up to four months prior to the examination taking place.
- **2%** illness at the time of the examination, broken limb on the mend, concussion, effects of pregnancy (not pregnancy *per se*), extreme distress on the day of an examination (not simply exam related stress), allowance on last paper taken in a day when a candidate has been entered for three or more examinations timetabled for the same day and the total duration of those papers is more than 6 hours (GCE examinations).
- **1%** noise during examination which is more than momentary, illness of another candidate which leads to disruption in the examination room, stress or anxiety for which medication has been prescribed, hay fever on the day of an examination, minor upset arising from administrative problems.

---

<sup>118</sup> JCQ (2022)

<sup>119</sup> JCQ (2022)

*A review of arrangements internationally to accommodate examinees who are bereaved or ill at the time of scheduled second-level school leaving examinations.*

**COVID-19:**

See section on Illness leading to absence.

***Bereavement leading to absence:***

Similar to the circumstances of illness: students can avail of a missed paper calculation or enrol in the 2022 Reserve Series (see section on Illness leading to absence)

***Bereavement leading to underperformance:***

See section on Illness leading to underperformance.

Further detail in relation to Northern Ireland is available in Section 7 of the Final Report

***References:***

CCEA (2022): <https://ccea.org.uk/downloads/docs/ccea>

CCEA (2022): <https://ccea.org.uk/Support>

CCEA (2022): <https://ccea.org.uk/downloads/docs/ccea>

CCEA (2022): <https://ccea.org.uk/downloads/docs/ccea>

CCEA (2022): <https://ccea.org.uk/downloads/docs/ccea>

JCQ (2022): <https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021>

JCQ (2022): <https://www.jcq.org.uk>

## **RUSSIA**

### ***Illness leading to absence:***

A series of re-sit exams are arranged after the main examination session. At the end of June and July (termed ‘reserve days’) a student has the option to retake compulsory and optional subjects.<sup>120</sup> Re-sit opportunities in September are reserved only for two subjects: Mathematics and Russian language.

### ***Illness leading to underperformance:***

Students can retake their examinations in reserve sessions if they provide evidence that they were unwell during the day of the examination.<sup>121</sup> Alternatively a student can retake an exam in April of the following year.<sup>122</sup>

### ***COVID-19:***

Issues arising from COVID-19 are treated in the same way as general illness (see section on Illness leading to absence).

### ***Bereavement leading to absence:***

Bereavement is considered as an event under unexpected circumstances beyond the student’s control, and treated in the same way as general illness (see section on Illness leading to absence).

### ***Bereavement leading to underperformance:***

Such situations are treated in the same way as general illness (see section on Illness leading to underperformance).

### ***References:***

RG (2021): <https://rg.ru/2021/12/18/prikaz834-1479-site-dok.html>

Zaochnik.ru (2022): <https://zaochnik.ru/blog/chto-delat-esli-zabolel-pered-ili-vo-vremja-ege/>

Lancman school (2022): <https://ege.lancmanschool.ru>

---

<sup>120</sup> [RG](#) (2021)

<sup>121</sup> [Zaochnik.ru](#) (2022)

<sup>122</sup> [Lancman school](#) (2022)

## **SCOTLAND**

### ***Illness leading to absence:***

The Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service (EECCS) supports learners who are unable to attend the exam or are prevented from completing the exam due to a personal circumstance beyond their control (such as a medical issue).<sup>123</sup>

### ***Illness leading to underperformance:***

EECCS is not available to learners who have completed the exam, even if they feel they have underperformed due to a personal circumstance beyond their control. Learners who have underperformed relative to their estimate will be eligible for an appeals service.<sup>124</sup>

### ***COVID-19:***

The Scottish Qualifications authority (SQA) monitored public health guidance in relation to COVID-19 in advance of the 2022 exams. Should self-isolation remain a requirement for individuals who test positive, this will be a valid reason for examination absence in 2022.<sup>125</sup>

### ***Bereavement leading to absence:***

See section on Illness leading to absence.

### ***Bereavement leading to underperformance:***

See section on Illness leading to underperformance.

Further detail in relation to Scotland is available in Section 7 of the Final Report.

### ***References:***

SQA (n.d): <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/79042.html>

SQA (n.d): <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/79042.html>

SQA (2022): [https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files\\_ccc/nq-2022](https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/nq-2022)

---

<sup>123</sup> [SQA](#) (n.d)

<sup>124</sup> [SQA](#) (n.d)

<sup>125</sup> [SQA](#) (2022)

## **SINGAPORE**

### ***Illness leading to absence:***

Special consideration (SC), managed by the Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board (SEAB), awards projected grades to eligible candidates. In awarding a grade for these affected candidates, SEAB considers multiple sources of data, such as the candidate's performance in the other papers for the affected subject, in national and school-based examinations. The estimate also includes consideration of the school cohort's performance in national and school-based examinations, to ensure a fair assessment for all candidates.<sup>126</sup> Students who experience medical issues, physical injuries while undertaking the exam or who miss the exam as a result of these issues can apply for special consideration, if they have already sat 50% of the total assessment by weighting of the subject and if supporting documentation is available.<sup>127</sup>

### ***Illness leading to underperformance:***

See section on Illness leading to absence.

### ***COVID-19:***

Candidates who test positive for COVID-19, or who are placed on Stay-Home Notice (SHN) will not be allowed to sit for the examinations. This is in line with the national measures where persons who test positive are not allowed to leave home or their quarantined facilities. They can apply for special consideration through their schools.<sup>128</sup> Students with suspected COVID-19 have to test negative with a PCR test at the start of the quarantine order, and complete a self-swab with antigen rapid test kits (ATR) at home and test negative within 24 hours before each examination paper.

### ***Bereavement leading to absence:***

See section on Illness leading to absence.

### ***Bereavement leading to underperformance:***

See section on Illness leading to absence.

### ***References:***

SEAB (2022): <https://www.seab.gov.sg/docs/default-source>

SEAB (2022): <https://www.seab.gov.sg/docs/default-source/schoolexamrulesregulations>

Ministry of Education Singapore (n.d): <https://www.moe.gov.sg/news/press-releases>

---

<sup>126</sup> [SEAB](#) (2022)

<sup>127</sup> [SEAB](#) (2022)

<sup>128</sup> [Ministry of Education Singapore](#) (n.d)

## **SOUTH AFRICA**

### ***Illness leading to absence:***

Candidates who are absent with a valid reason (medically unfit, death in the immediate family or other special reasons) from one or more external exam papers in Winter, may register for the National Senior Certificate (NSC) June examination sessions.<sup>129 130</sup>

- Candidates can only register for subjects for which they were registered in the November examination.
- Candidates who want to improve their overall achievement status, or only want to improve the achievement of a subject, may register for the NSC June examination.
- In the case where a candidate was absent for one or more papers in the November exam with a valid reason, the candidate has to take all the papers for the registered subject(s).
- In a case where an irregularity is being investigated, provisional enrolment for NSC June examination may be granted to the candidate concerned, pending the outcome of the investigation.
- Candidates who were unable to write or complete one or more of the NSC November examination question papers for reasons other than illness/injury or death in the family, may apply to take the NSC June examination, provided that a written report is submitted by the principal of the school to the Head of the provincial examination department.

### ***Illness leading to underperformance:***

Supplementary examinations are available during May/June where candidates can improve their results or complete outstanding results.

### ***COVID-19:***

If a student tested positive with Covid but feels well enough to write an exam he/she is entitled to sit an exam at an isolated venue that complies with the health and safety regulations and also with the regulations relating to a secure examination.<sup>131 132</sup>

### ***Bereavement leading to absence:***

See section on Illness leading to absence.

---

<sup>129</sup> [Department of Basic Education Republic of South Africa](#) (n.d)

<sup>130</sup> [Department of Basic Education Republic of South Africa](#) (n.d)

<sup>131</sup> [South African Government](#) (2020)

<sup>132</sup> [Daily Maverick](#) (2020)

*A review of arrangements internationally to accommodate examinees who are bereaved or ill at the time of scheduled second-level school leaving examinations.*

***Bereavement leading to underperformance:***

See section on Illness leading to absence.

***References:***

Department of Basic Education Republic of South Africa (n.d):

<https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Documents/Policies>

Department of Basic Education Republic of South Africa (n.d):

<https://www.education.gov.za/NSCExamsSecondOpportunity.aspx>

South African Government (2020): <https://www.gov.za/speeches>

Daily Maverick (2020): <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-11-16-covid-19>

The State Examinations Commission funded the research on which this report is based. Responsibility for the research (including any errors or omissions) remains with the authors. The report reflects the views of the authors and does not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the State Examinations Commission.

Suggested citation for this report:

Murchan, D., & Likhovtseva, E. (2022). *A review of arrangements internationally to accommodate examinees who are bereaved or ill at the time of scheduled second-level school leaving examinations*. Athlone, Ireland: State Examinations Commission.