Online Examination Policy

1. Introduction

In response to the extraordinary circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated lockdown requirements, this policy has been developed so that the sitting of the examinations can be conducted while restrictions persist. This policy may be updated as new information and experience becomes available and will be revised once the current crisis is over. This policy aims to reflect the intention that the examinations proceed on a basis that protects the integrity of the examination while being sensitive to the challenges associated with implementing online examination with specific reference to access to the required technology and an adequate location for examinations to be undertaken. All communication to members is available on the ASSA website for ease of reference. These include frequently asked questions.

2. Scope

This policy applies to the ASSA administered examinations only. Where the administration of examinations or services that relate to the examinations are outsourced, candidates would need to comply with the respective third-party policies and procedures. Candidates may be required to accept third party policies where this is relevant to continue with the examination.

3. Examination governance

The Board of Examiners is the approving authority of the policy as recommended by the Education Board appointed by the Council. The ASSA office is responsible for the implementation of the policy. Examinations will only be marked where the conditions of the policy are met. The results released by the Board of Examiners will be final. The policy aims to enable ASSA to fulfil its commitment in providing education through online examination within acceptable education governance standards taking into consideration mitigating circumstances for candidates leading up to and during the online examination.

The Board of Examiners will consider an appropriate sanction to apply to candidates in the following, but not limited to, instances where examination governance standards are compromised:

- Unable to positively identify yourself when presenting for the examination
- Not being invigilated for the full duration of the examination
- Seeking mitigating circumstances by writing comments on the content that is submitted for marking
- Identification other than candidate number on the content submitted for marking
- Breach of professional conduct as described in this policy document
- Non-adherence to examination rules as communicated to candidates

The Board of Examiners reserves the right to withhold the results of any one candidate or a cohort of candidates where there is an investigation pending that was referred to the Disciplinary Committee; or where an incident reported for mitigating circumstances is still under consideration. Where the Board of Examiners becomes aware of incidents that affects a larger cohort of candidates, it will agree on the most appropriate course of action to minimise the effect on all the candidates. The Board of Examiners may declare the outcomes of an examination to be null and void in exceptional circumstances that warrant such drastic action.

4. Conduct

Candidates are subject to the professional guidance and disciplinary procedures of ASSA. Misconduct or cheating during an examination is a serious offense that will be referred to the Disciplinary Committee for further investigation.

Candidates are required to complete the examination without any assistance from another individual or individuals and may not help another individual or individuals in completing their examination. Candidates that are aware of cheating have a responsibility to report this or risk being found complicit to the act.

Candidates may not access any notes, material, software and/or website content in any form that is not explicitly permitted during the examination. Candidates will be allowed to have a clean exam pad to be used as scrap paper during the examination. Candidates are required to destroy all information as it relates to the examination immediately after the examination is complete.

Persons who are aware of candidates who have cheated, plan to cheat or display suspicious behaviour can contact tip-off@actuarialsociety.org.za. Your identity will be protected. You will be required to furnish enough information to initiate an investigation.

5. Infrastructure

5.1 Technology

It is the responsibility of the candidate to ensure that technology requirements as recommended are in good working order prior to the examination. Candidates must access and practice the software that they will be required to use prior to the examination and make sure that any restrictions to access the examination are addressed in advance of the examination. For virtual examinations this must be performed in the same technical and physical environment that the actual examination will be performed to minimise the risk of something not working.

Candidates are responsible to save work regularly during the examination. Candidates are responsible for uploading the correct content for submission of the examination in the format, size and location as communicated. Once the examination is submitted it cannot be changed or retracted. Where files are uploaded this must be done within the scheduled examination time. No late submission of files will be considered for marking nor files that have been password protected.

Candidates are allowed the use of only one electronic device for the purpose of accessing and completing the examination. Dual screening is not allowed. An external keyboard and mouse are allowed. No Listening and / or transmission devices including, but not limited to earphones, headphones and earplugs are not allowed. A mobile device is allowed only for examinations that require the scanning and uploading of written content in which instance the device must be switched off or be in airplane mode and only accessed at the end of the examination time for the purpose that it is allowed.

Candidates who experience technology failures during the examination must continue as best they can under the circumstances. It is important to keep a log of these issues with supporting evidence where possible to strengthen the evidence when reporting this as an incident after the examination.

5.2 Physical environment

Candidates are responsible for checking that the physical environment in which the examination will be performed is quiet with adequate desk space, lighting, and electrical points to complete the examination. Candidates are not permitted to leave the examination environment during the examination. The examination must be performed in isolation of other people. Candidates may be required to show their physical environment to an online invigilator depending on the method of examination that applies.

In the unfortunate event that a candidate is required to evacuate from the location during an examination, no communication is permitted with anyone else during this period of absence from the examination. The candidate is encouraged to return to the examination and complete it as best possible following the evacuation and to then complete an incident report after the examination.

6. Assessment

The Principal Examiner of each subject, in consultation with the Education Board, is responsible to ensure that the assessment method applied is effective and that it provides candidates with a test environment for fair assessment. The candidate experience and operational risks, including but not limited to fraud risk, are carefully considered for each subject in selecting the most appropriate assessment method. The assessment method is therefore adaptive and subject dependent.

6.1 Instructions

Examination instructions will be sent to candidates and must be read with due care. It is essential that candidates participate in the preparation sessions that will be scheduled in advance of the actual examination to become familiar with the software and the overall experience that can be expected on the day of examination.

6.2 Time allocation

The Board of Examiners determines the time allocation of the examination for each subject including the amount of additional time to be allocated where there is enough reason to do so based on the assessment method. Candidates with approved extra-time will retain the additional time granted. Candidates must adhere to reading time as directed in the examination instructions. Submission of online examinations must be completed and submitted within the time allocated. No late submissions of examinations scripts will be accepted.

6.3 Identification

Candidates may under no circumstances share their username and password with any person at any time. Sharing this information compromises your identity for the purpose of examination. Candidates will be required to positively identify themselves in person and by photographed identity at the beginning of an examination. Candidates must be identifiable for the duration of the examination. Make sure that there is adequate lighting to identify you if you are being proctored. Hoodies and caps are not permitted. Head coverings for religious or cultural reasons are permitted.

Candidates must not write their name on content provided for examination. Examinations papers are assessed anonymously and for this purpose candidates must use their candidate number issued for the examination.

6.4 Invigilation

Candidates need to access the online examination through the ASSA Examination platform. Invigilation is mandatory for all examinations for the full duration of the examination. All examinations will default to a virtual invigilation by ASSA contracted service providers. Candidates will be required to have head and shoulders visible on a webcam with a microphone turned on throughout the examination.

Alternative face-to-face invigilation with the necessary technology will be made available to candidates where this is possible and depending on the level of lockdown. ASSA will communicate to candidates, options around this, in advance of the examination.

7. Incidents

An incident is a major unexpected event that is not in the control of the candidate that occurs at the time of examination and that has a significant and material adverse effect on the candidate's performance of the examination. This includes, but is not limited to technology failures, victim of crime and violence or medical emergencies. Candidates are expected to adjust for and manage to minimise the effect of any pre-existing conditions and circumstances.

In addition to operational incidents, Candidates are required to self-report any deviation from the examination policy and rules as communicated; that was unavoidable as observed during the examination. Mitigating circumstances in determining the sanction will only be considered for candidates who have self-reported an incident.

Candidates are not allowed to write or type comments seeking mitigating circumstances from the marker on the content provided for marking. Mitigating circumstances must be requested through the incident management framework that is assessed independent to the marking of the examination.

Candidates will be required to complete the candidate incident report immediately after the examination but no later than 24-hours after the examination including evidence in support of the incident. Only candidates who have attempted the assessment are eligible for consideration of mitigating circumstances as it impacts the outcome of the assessment.

Information provided in the reporting of an incident will be treated sensitively and will remain confidential. Mitigating circumstances will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Board of Examiners.

8. Recourse

Candidates can apply for a refund in line with the refund policy. Late deregistrations will be subject to a penalty. Candidates have the right to appeal the outcome of an examination in accordance with the appeal policy that is subject to counselling. Where operational disruptions were the result of technological failures under the direct or indirect control of ASSA, ASSA will apply appropriate recourse to impacted candidates.

Version Control

Policy owner	Education Board
Author	Education Office

Version	Date issued	Reference	Changes
v1.0	5 May 2020		New policy
v2.0	28 Aug 2020		REVISION: From learnings of the first semester that did not result in any substantive changes, but rather emphasises content with improved clarity. Implementation content was moved to the technical requirements document. The definition of incidents was expanded to include self-reporting of examination rule deviation. Recourse is aligned to current procedures and practices already in place.
v2.1	13 Oct 2020	6.3 (p1)	CHANGE: ASSA Learning platform to ASSA Examination platform
		5.1 (p3)	ADD: Listening and / or transmission devices including, but not limited to earphones and headphones are not allowed.
v2.2	24 Mar 2021	5.1 (p2)	ADD: Files must be uploaded within the scheduled examination time allocated. AMEND: No late submissions of files will be considered for marking nor files that have been password protected.
		5.1 (p3)	ADD: earplugs are not allowed.
		6.2 (p1)	AMEND: Time allocation is determined by the Board of Examiners.
		6.3 (p1)	ADD: Candidates must be identifiable for the duration of the examination. Make sure that there is adequate lighting to identify you if you are being proctored. Hoodies and caps are not permitted. Head coverings for religious and cultural reasons are permitted.
		7. (p5)	AMEND: Mitigating circumstances will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Board of Examiners.
		General	Sequencing of paragraphs changed to better facilitate reading.