

Policy and Procedures for the Formal Review of SCFHS Examinations

This document outlines the policy and procedures for the formal review of SCFHS examinations. It is intended for candidates, chairs and members of examination committees, and SCFHS staff.

I. Policy

Formal reviews of examinations are conducted only on the basis of alleged significant irregularities in the evaluation process, not because of alleged errors in content.

The distinction between content and process is of the utmost importance, and must be addressed first by all concerned. For review purposes, process irregularities are considered relevant only when serious enough to affect materially the candidate's performance. Formal review does not involve subject matter experts nor re-evaluation of performance by any mean.

II. Purpose

Formal reviews of examinations are part of the evaluation and quality improvement system used by the SCFHS. They provide a means to investigate the circumstances of the written, clinical or other type of examination administered to one or several candidates, and to ascertain that the process was carried out under conditions appropriate to the conduct of an examination as determined by the SCFHS rules and regulations.

III. Principles

1. Examiners in a given specialty are appointed as authorities on content. Their judgment relative to the correctness of a candidate's answers is not open to challenge, otherwise the review would become a content-oriented discussion between experts.
2. When the examination committee rule that a candidate did not answer correctly a sufficient number of questions, and therefore did not achieve the objectives being tested or reach the required standard of competence, the candidate may well disagree with their decision, but that belongs in the realm of content and does not constitute grounds for review.
3. On occasion, deviations from the stated format or conduct of the examination may be unavoidable and irregularities may occur that do not result in any unfairness or significantly affect the performance of the candidate.
4. Candidates are not allowed to approach examination committee chairs or members to appeal examination results. Such actions will initiate a formal investigation and possible referral to the SCFHS grievance/disciplinary committee for disciplinary action.

IV. Process of a Formal Review

There are three pathways to initiate a formal review

1. **Immediate notification of the local examination authority by the candidate** If one or several process irregularities as defined earlier are found to occur in the course of an examination, they should be brought immediately to the attention of the responsible authority (i.e., administrative supervisor or an invigilator).
Examiners and staff of the Assessment Administration, as well as candidates, may initiate such action. The person in charge may then contact the Director of Assessment Operations (AOD) for immediate advice, who is empowered to take immediate measures to correct the irregularity, whenever possible.
In any such case, a written report must be sent as soon as possible to the Executive Director of Assessment. When that step is taken as early as possible in the course of events, this affords an opportunity to resolve most concerns or irregularities to the complete satisfaction of the candidate(s). This does not preclude further requests for review on the part of the candidate concerned.
2. **Reviews originating within the Assessment Operations Department (AOD)**
If the AOD becomes aware of any irregularity, it will initiate the appeal mechanism on behalf of one or several candidates. In such a case, the procedure described in this document shall be adhered to, but no fee shall be required from the candidate involved. The AOD may initiate a formal review at any time, even beyond the deadline stated for candidates. Whenever possible and desirable, the candidate or candidates potentially affected by such a review should be notified by the Director of AOD at the most opportune time. Under exceptional circumstances where an obvious and manifest error in the procedure has occurred, the Executive Director of Assessment will initiate a review and make the appropriate recommendations to the Chair of the Examination Committee, which may include awarding a pass standing to a candidate.
3. **Reviews initiated by a candidate submitting a written request**
 - a) A candidate wishing to request a formal review must notify the AOD in writing within 14 days of the exam date.
 - b) Before submitting a request for formal review, the candidate must ensure that it is a process irregularity, not a content issue. Types of procedural allegations may include: insufficient time allotted for examination, delay in examination start time, disruption during examination, faulty examination equipment, or other similar issues related to examination process
 - c) The request must explain, completely and in detail, all of the circumstances surrounding the alleged process irregularity, and
 - d) An administration fee is required to be paid by the candidate initiating the request.
 - e) The Director of AOD shall acknowledge receipt of the request. A request for a formal review that does not include the required administration fee and form within the time set out above shall not be processed or considered.

Performing reviews initiated by candidates submitting written requests

Step I: Review by the Executive Director of Assessment:

Within 10 business days of receipt of a request for a formal review, **the Executive Director of Assessment shall evaluate the request and conduct any enquiries** that he or she may deem useful, and **provide a non-binding written opinion** to the candidate as to whether or not the grounds for a formal review alleged by the candidate are founded and, if so, what remedy should be accorded, if any.

Within 7 business days of the date appearing on the non-binding written opinion letter referred to above, **the candidate shall advise the Executive Director of Assessment, in writing, whether or not he or she wishes his or her request to be considered further by a Formal Review Panel.**

If the candidate advises the Executive Director of Assessment that he or she does not wish the matter to be considered by a Review Panel, the request for formal review will be considered withdrawn. In such circumstances, the Executive Director of Assessment shall reimburse half the required administration fee.

Step II: Paper review by a Formal Review Panel

If the candidate advises the Executive Director of Assessment that he or she wishes the matter to be considered further by a Formal Review Panel, **a Review Panel consisting of three members from the Central Assessment Committee** shall be appointed. These may NOT be members of the examination committee in the candidate's specialty, nor faculty members in the candidate's residency program, nor certified in the candidate's specialty. One of the Review Panel members will be designated as its chair.

The Review Panel shall obtain, receive, and consider the request for review and the written opinion of the Executive Director of Assessment as well as all the available and relevant documents and information pertaining to the review. The Executive Director of Assessment, in consultation with the Review Panel, shall set a date for consideration by the Review Panel of the requested formal review.

The Panel's deliberations are carried out under conditions of strict confidentiality. Formal review should not involve re-evaluation of performance by any mean.

Following its review of the matter, the Chair of the Review Panel shall issue in writing a decision and any other relevant information or recommendation to the Executive Director of Assessment, who shall in turn inform the candidate of the result.

The available decision options are as follows:

1. no process irregularity has occurred; or
2. there was a process irregularity, but NOT of such a magnitude that it could affect materially the candidate's outcome of the examination, or
3. there was a process irregularity of sufficient magnitude to affect materially the candidate's outcome of the examination, and
 - a) a repeat examination is allowed at the next examination session of the specialty, or
 - b) a repeat examination is allowed at a special session held for one or several candidates, if such an examination is deemed feasible and valid.

In cases when a repeat examination is granted, the examination subjected to review is to be considered null and must not be counted. The examination fee for a repeat examination shall be automatically waived.

Step III: Oral Hearing by the Formal Review Panel

If the candidate is not satisfied with the decision of the Review Panel, the candidate may request a re-consideration of the matter by way of an oral hearing before such Review Panel, or such other Panel as may be convened if it is impossible or impractical to reconstitute the original review Panel.

Such a request must be made in writing, addressed to the Executive Director of Assessment, and be received within 5 business days of the date appearing on the letter from the Executive Director of Assessment advising the candidate of the decision of the Review Panel.

Such a request for an oral hearing must also be accompanied by set processing fee.

In addition, the candidate must outline the reasons for requesting an oral hearing and the basis upon which the candidate disputes the decision of the Review Panel.

Except under exceptional circumstances, the Review Panel will not consider additional information that was not previously provided, or could not reasonably have been provided, to the Review Panel prior to its initial consideration of the matter.

The Review Panel shall set a date and place for an oral hearing and, through the Executive Director of Assessment, advise the candidate. The candidate shall be entitled to make oral submissions at the hearing.

The candidate may be given information pertaining to the Review, at the discretion of the Panel. The Review Panel may order that information provided by the Executive Director of Assessment not be disclosed to the candidate if, in the opinion of the Review Panel, such disclosure might undermine or otherwise impinge upon the integrity of the examination process.

Following the oral hearing, the Review Panel shall, within 10 business days of the oral hearing, issue its decision in writing. The decision, along with any other relevant information or recommendation, shall be forwarded in writing to the Executive Director of Assessment who shall in turn inform the candidate of the result.

The decision options of the Review Panel following an oral hearing are as follows:

1. The Panel may confirm its original decision; or
2. The Panel may revise or amend its decision or issue a new decision from among the available decision options described above.

Among the factors to be considered by the Review Panel, in exercising its authority and discretion, are whether or not the grounds for seeking an oral hearing is objective, reasonably based and whether or not the alleged matters raised issues of credibility that might warrant an oral hearing as opposed to a paper review.

In cases when a repeat examination is granted, the examination subjected to review is to be considered null and must not be counted. The examination fee for a repeat examination shall be automatically waived.

THERE IS NO PROVISION FOR FURTHER REVIEW BY THE SCFHS OF THE DECISIONS OF THE REVIEW PANEL AFTER THE ORAL HEARING, WHICH ARE CONSIDERED FINAL.

Reporting the Review Panel's decision (paper review or oral hearing)

The deliberations of the Review Panel and the documents used in the formal review are strictly confidential. The Executive Director of Assessment shall forward to the candidate a confidential letter stating the decisions of the Review Panel.

A report of all the cases reviewed will be presented once a year to the Chief Academic Officer, together with the actions taken as a result of the reviews.

Data verification and quality assurance of exam results

A thorough process of data verification and quality assurance of exam results is conducted during and after the exams. A dedicated data verification and quality assurance team carries out the following:

- verification of multiple choice question (MCQ) answer sheets and data transfer
- verification of SOE/OSCE and practical scores and data

As part of the quality assurance process for all exams, questions on the MCQ written exam are subject to a complete psychometric and performance analysis by the SCFHS assessment administration. During this process, questions that were flagged by analysis and for which new evidence emerged between the time of question writing and exam administration are reviewed. As a result of this review process, some questions may be deleted from the final exam score for all candidates by the specialty examination committee as per the SCHFS rules and regulations.

Release of exam results

An estimated 10 business days are required to confirm results for each discipline. There is an appreciation that candidates are eager to receive their exam results, however, one must allow sufficient time for validation.