



Joint Contingency Plan

for the Examination System in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

This plan is jointly owned by:

AQA, CCEA, City & Guilds, JCQ, NCFE, OCR, Pearson, WJEC and UCAS.

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Aims of the Joint Contingency Plan

The Joint Contingency Plan is aimed at centres – schools and colleges – and is designed to ensure a consistent and effective response in the event of major disruption to the examination system affecting significant numbers of candidates across several awarding organisations.

All awarding organisations are required to have their own well-established contingency plans in place to respond to such disruptions, and these have been implemented already on numerous occasions.

This Joint Contingency Plan takes into account these processes and procedures and is designed to complement them, not replace them.

The plan will be implemented in the event of major disruption to the system, such as widespread illness, travel disruption, bad weather or power failures. Any actions taken will be subject to the advice of the official agencies dealing with the specific circumstances being faced, for example the police, Environment Agency or Health Protection Agency and will be coordinated, as appropriate, with the Department for Education and qualification regulators Ofqual, Qualifications Wales and CCEA Accreditation.

Implementing the plan will safeguard the interests of candidates while maintaining the integrity of the examination system and safeguarding qualification standards.

The contingencies applied will be selected based on the context of the disruption and have been implemented on several occasions in response to localised issues. They would be applied on a larger scale in response to any widespread disruption at a national level.

The priority when implementing contingencies will be to maintain three principles:

- **delivering assessments to published timetables**
- **delivering results to published timetables**
- **complying with regulatory requirements in relation to assessment, marking and standards.**

If the usual contingencies are no longer sufficient to maintain these outcomes, an identified Crisis Management Team consisting of representatives of all organisations involved will be convened by JCQ to agree the additional actions required

Communications

The scale of the exams, qualifications and testing system in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is huge, involving more than a million learners each year and thousands of centres. It is vital that a system of this size has robust and coordinated contingency plans in place to deal with any major disruption that may affect candidates.

In the event of major disruption, each awarding organisation must notify the regulator of anything that impacts their individual ability to operate. Communication is a key factor in ensuring an effective and consistent response across the agencies involved. This includes communications between the organisations involved in the response and communications to stakeholders such as centres, candidates, parents or carers and the public.

At the first indication of such an event, awarding organisations are required to notify the regulators.

The regulators, Ofqual in England, Qualifications Wales in Wales and CCEA Accreditation in Northern Ireland, will share timely and accurate information, as required, with awarding organisations, government departments and other stakeholders.

The Department for Education in England, the Department of Education in Northern Ireland and the Welsh Government will inform the relevant government ministers as soon as it becomes apparent that there will be significant local or national disruption; and ensure that they are kept updated until the matter is resolved.

Awarding organisations will alert the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service(UCAS) and the Central Applications Office (CAO) about any impact of the disruption on their deadlines and liaise regarding student progression to further and higher education.

Awarding organisations will alert relevant professional bodies or employer groups if the impact of disruption particularly affects them.

The organisations involved in this Joint Contingency Plan are committed to:

- sharing timely and accurate information as required to meet the aims of the plan
- communicating with stakeholders so they are aware of disruption to the exams, the contingency measures being implemented, and any actions required of them as a result
- ensuring that any messages to the public are clear and accurate.

1. Disruption of teaching time in the weeks before an exam – centres are closed for an extended period

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- centres are closed or candidates are unable to attend for an extended period during normal teaching or study supported time, interrupting the provision of normal teaching and learning.

Recommended actions:

Where there is disruption to teaching time and students miss teaching and learning, it remains the responsibility of centres to prepare students, as usual, for examinations.

- in the case of modular courses, centres may advise candidates to sit examinations in an alternative series.
- centres should have plans in place to facilitate alternative methods of learning.

Guidance on emergency planning, with advice on severe weather is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/exam-system-contingency-plan-england-wales-and-northern-ireland/what-schools-and-colleges-should-do-if-exams-or-other-assessments-are-seriously-disrupted>

2. Disruption in the distribution of examination papers

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- disruption to the distribution of examination papers to centres in advance of examinations.

Recommended actions:

- awarding organisations to source alternative couriers for delivery of hardcopies.
- awarding organisations to change the timing of the distribution to earlier or later than originally scheduled
- awarding organisations to provide centres with electronic access to examination papers via a secure external network. Centres would need to ensure that copies are received, made and stored under secure conditions and should have plans in place to facilitate such an action. Awarding organisations would provide guidance on the conduct of examinations in such circumstances.
- as a last resort, and in close collaboration with centres and regulators, awarding organisations to consider scheduling of the examination on an alternative date

3. Candidates unable to take examinations because of a crisis - centres remain open

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- candidates are unable to attend examination centres to take examinations as normal.

Recommended actions:

- centres to invoke centre contingency plan. **This must focus on options that enable candidates to take their examinations.**

Information on what schools and colleges and other centres should do if exams or other assessments are seriously disrupted can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/exam-system-contingency-plan-england-wales-and-northern-ireland/what-schools-and-colleges-should-do-if-exams-or-other-assessments-are-seriously-disrupted>

- Awarding organisations will ensure that any applications for special considerations as a result of disruption will be reviewed across awarding organisations to ensure consistency of decision making

4. Centres are unable to open as normal during the examination period

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- centres unable to open as normal for scheduled examinations.

Recommended actions:

- centres to invoke centre contingency plan, **which must focus on options that enable candidates to take their examinations**. As part of their general planning for emergencies, centres should cover the impact on examinations. The responsibility for deciding whether it is safe for a centre to open lies with the head of centre. The head is responsible for taking advice or following instructions from relevant local or national agencies in deciding whether their centres is able to open.

Information on what schools and colleges and other centres should do if exams or other assessments are seriously disrupted can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/exam-system-contingency-plan-england-wales-and-northern-ireland/what-schools-and-colleges-should-do-if-exams-or-other-assessments-are-seriously-disrupted>

- Awarding organisations will ensure that any applications for special considerations as a result of disruption will be reviewed across awarding organisations to ensure consistency of decision making

5. Disruption to transporting completed examination papers

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- delay in normal collection arrangements for completed examination scripts/assessment evidence.

Recommended actions:

- where examinations are part of the national 'yellow label' service or where awarding organisations arrange collections, centres should seek advice from awarding organisations and should not make their own arrangements for transportation unless told to do so by the awarding organisation.
- for any examinations where centres make their own arrangements for transportation, centres should investigate alternative dispatch options that comply with the requirements detailed in the JCQ Instructions for Conducting Examinations.
- centres to ensure secure storage of completed examination papers until collection.

6. Assessment evidence is not available to be marked

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- large scale damage to or destruction of completed examination scripts/assessment evidence before it can be marked
- completed examination scripts/assessment evidence does not reach awarding organisations

Recommended actions

- awarding organisations to generate candidate marks for affected assessments based on other appropriate evidence of candidate achievement as defined by the awarding organisations
- where marks cannot be generated by awarding organisations candidates may need to retake affected assessment in a subsequent assessment series.

7. Disruption to the scanning process – where completed examination papers are being scanned in preparation for on-screen marking

Criteria for implementation of plan

- scanning process disrupted beyond acceptable levels resulting in a risk to the delivery of results by scheduled dates.

Recommended actions:

- awarding organisations to implement their existing contingency plans for disruption to on-screen marking process
- awarding organisations to revert to alternatives form of marking
- prioritisation of scanning to be based on results dates.

8. Markers unable to mark examination papers according to marking schedules

Criteria for implementation of plan

- markers are unable to mark examination papers resulting in a risk to the delivery of results by scheduled dates.

Recommended actions:

- awarding organisations to re-allocate scripts to available markers
- awarding organisations to recruit, train or re-standardise qualified additional markers
- awarding organisations to consider the proportion of marking required to be completed for grade boundary setting
- prioritisation of marking to be based on results dates.

9. Difficulty in meeting results schedule

Criteria for implementation of plan

- significant inability to meet schedule for publication of results.

Recommended actions:

- awarding organisations must notify the regulators of any such instance
- awarding organisations to establish priorities for results processing
- awarding organisations to implement existing contingency plans for disruption to the results processing schedule
- awarding organisations to assess level of disruption and consider options for issuing results in alternative format(s)
- awarding organisations and regulators liaise with relevant organisations (ie UCAS, CAO) regarding process of candidate progression to further and higher education.

10. Awarding organisations unable to issue results as planned

Criteria for implementation of plan

- awarding organisations unable to distribute electronic results due to failure of systems facilitating results delivery
- awarding organisations unable to distribute hard copy results

Recommended actions:

Where results are due to be issued electronically:

- awarding organisations to implement existing contingency plans for disruption to the issuing of results
- awarding organisations transmit results via alternative electronic formats
- awarding organisations issue hardcopy results.

Where results are due to be issued in hardcopy:

- awarding organisations to facilitate communication of results via secure web-based platforms.

11. Centres are unable to distribute results as normal or facilitate post results services

Criteria for implementation of plan

- centres are unable to access or manage the distribution of results to candidates, or to facilitate post results services.

Recommended actions:

Distribution of results:

- centre to make arrangements to access its results at an alternative site, in agreement with the relevant awarding organisation
- centres to make arrangements to coordinate access to post results services from an alternative site
- centres to share facilities with other centres if this is possible, in agreement with the relevant awarding organisation.

Facilitation of post results services:

- centre to make arrangements to make post results requests at an alternative location
- centres to contact the relevant awarding organisation if electronic post results requests are not possible
- awarding organisations to review the post results deadlines

Summary of responsibilities in the event of disruption to examinations

- JCQ is responsible for coordinating across awarding organisations, including convening the crisis management team
- Regulators (Ofqual in England, Qualifications Wales in Wales and CCEA Accreditation in Northern Ireland) are responsible for sharing timely and accurate information, as required with awarding organisations, government departments and other stakeholders

Awarding organisations are responsible for:	Examination centres are responsible for:
	Preparing plans for any disruption to exams as part of centres' general emergency planning
Ensuring centres receive examination materials for scheduled examinations	Preparing candidates for examinations
	Ensuring examinations and assessments are taken under the conditions prescribed by awarding organisations
	Ensuring, where relevant, that assessment materials and candidate work are stored under secure conditions
	Deciding whether the centre can open for examinations as scheduled and informing relevant awarding organisations if the centre is unable to open
Advising centres on possible alternative examination arrangements and declining/approving proposals for alternative examination arrangements	Exploring the opportunities for alternative arrangements if the centre cannot open for examinations and agreeing such arrangements with the awarding organisations
Evaluating and declining/approving requests for special consideration	Judging whether candidates meet the requirements for special consideration as a result of any disruption and submitting these requests to the relevant awarding organisations
	Assessing and liaising with awarding organisations in the event of disruption to the transportation of papers
Marking, moderating and grading candidate work	
Issuing results to centres on scheduled dates	The distribution of examination results to candidates

Useful information

Owners of this plan	
AQA	www.aqa.org.uk/
CCEA	www.ccea.org.uk
City & Guilds	www.cityandguilds.com
NCFE	www.ncfe.org.uk
OCR	www.ocr.org.uk/
Pearson	www.qualifications.pearson.com
WJEC	www.wjec.co.uk/
UCAS	www.ucas.ac.uk/
JCQ	www.jcq.org.uk
Regulators	
CCEA	www.ccea.org.uk/regulation
Ofqual	www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual
Qualifications Wales	www.qualificationswales.org
Government	
DfE	www.education.gov.uk/
DENI	www.deni.gov.uk/
Welsh Government	https://gov.wales/.uk
Useful documents	
Ofqual three-country guidance on what schools and colleges and other centres should do if exams or other assessments are seriously disrupted	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/exam-system-contingency-plan-england-wales-and-northern-ireland/what-schools-and-colleges-should-do-if-exams-or-other-assessments-are-seriously-disrupted
JCQ access arrangements, reasonable adjustments and special consideration	www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration/regulations-and-guidance
JCQ instructions for conducting examinations	www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/ice---instructions-for-conducting-examinations
DfE guidance on dealing with disruption to teaching and learning	http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/emergency-planning/a0069425/advice-on-severe-weather
DENI guidance on dealing with disruption to teaching and learning	www.deni.gov.uk/exceptional_closures_checklist.pdf