

Public Examination Contingency Plan

Last Review: March 2023
 Next Review: February 2025 or as regulations change
 Committee: Teaching & Learning

Purpose of the plan

This plan examines potential risks and issues that could cause disruption to the management and administration of the exam process at JCoSS. By outlining actions/procedures to be invoked in case of disruption it is intended to mitigate the impact these disruptions have on our exam process.

Alongside internal processes, this plan is informed by scenarios contained in the *Exam System contingency plan: England, Wales and Northern Ireland, which provides guidance in the publication 'What schools and colleges and other centres should do if exams or other assessments are seriously disrupted'* and the *JCQ Joint Contingency Plan for the Examination System in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and the JCQ notice Preparing for disruption to examinations (effective from 11 October 2021)*

This plan complies with JCQ general regulations (section 5.3) in that:

The centre agrees to “have in place a written examination contingency plan/examinations policy which covers all aspects of examination administration. This will allow members of the senior leadership team to act immediately in the event of an emergency or staff absence;”

Causes of potential disruption to the exam process

A range of scenarios are listed below, though the list can never be exhaustive.

1. Exam officer extended absence at key points in the exam process (cycle)
2. SENCo extended absence at key points in the exam cycle
3. Teaching staff extended absence at key points in the exam cycle
4. Absence of Head of Centre or SLT member with oversight for exams
5. Invigilators - lack of appropriately trained invigilators or invigilator absence
6. Exam rooms - lack of appropriate rooms or main venues unavailable at short notice
7. Cyber-attack
8. Failure of IT systems
9. Emergency evacuation of the exam room (or centre lock down)
10. Disruption of teaching time in the weeks before an exam– centre closed for an extended period
11. Candidates at risk of being unable to take examinations– centre remains open
12. Centre unable to open as normal during the exams period
13. Disruption in the distribution of examination papers
14. Disruption to the transportation of completed examination scripts
15. Assessment evidence is not available to be marked
16. Centre unable to distribute results as normal

The School's response to each is set out below.

1. Exam officer extended absence at key points in the exam season

Criteria for implementation of the plan

Key tasks required in the management and administration of the exam cycle not undertaken including:

- *Planning*
 - annual data collection exercise not undertaken to collate information on qualifications and awarding body specifications being delivered
 - annual exams plan not produced identifying essential key tasks, key dates and deadlines
 - sufficient invigilators not recruited and trained
- *Entries*
 - awarding bodies not being informed of early/estimated entries which prompts release of early information required by teaching staff
 - candidates not being entered with awarding bodies for external exams/assessment
 - awarding body entry deadlines missed or late or other penalty fees being incurred
- *Pre-exams*
 - Invigilators not trained or updated on changes to instructions for conducting exams
 - exam timetabling, rooming allocation; and invigilation schedules not prepared
 - candidates not briefed on exam timetables and awarding body information for candidates
 - confidential exam/assessment materials and candidates' work not stored under required secure conditions
 - internal assessment marks and samples of candidates' work not submitted to awarding bodies/external moderators
- *Exam time*
 - exams/assessments not taken under the conditions prescribed by awarding bodies
 - required reports/requests not submitted to awarding bodies during exam/assessment periods e.g. very late arrival, suspected malpractice, special consideration
 - candidates' scripts not dispatched as required to awarding bodies
- *Results and post-results*
 - access to examination results affecting the distribution of results to candidates
 - the facilitation of the post-results services

Centre actions:

- Another member of staff, with support from SLT, will take over full Examinations Responsibilities.
- That member of staff will be fully conversant with Exams Office Calendar, JCQ Regulations and the SIMS MIS System.
- Additional support will be gained from the Borough Network Group and Awarding Body Help Desks.

2. SENCo extended absence at key points in the exam cycle

Criteria for implementation of the plan

Key tasks required in the management and administration of the access arrangements process within the exam cycle not undertaken including:

- *Planning*
 - candidates not tested/assessed to identify potential access arrangement requirements

- centre fails to recognise its duties towards disabled candidates as defined under the terms of the Equality Act 2010
- evidence of need and evidence to support normal way of working not collated
- *Pre-exams*
 - approval for access arrangements not applied for to the awarding body
 - centre delegated arrangements not put in place
 - modified paper requirements not identified in a timely manner to enable ordering to meet external deadline
 - staff (facilitators) providing support to access arrangement candidates not allocated and trained
- *Exam time*
 - access arrangement candidate support not arranged for exam rooms

Centre actions:

- Deputy SENCo will assume responsibilities of the SENCo, with support from Assistant SENCos, staff i/c for Access Arrangements and the Exams Office.
No students will be allowed any access arrangement without prior testing and online approval, except in an individual emergency situation and only after Awarding Body approval via their Support Desk.

3. Teaching staff extended absence at key points in the exam cycle

Criteria for implementation of the plan

Key tasks not undertaken including:

- *Early/estimated entry information not provided to the exams officer on time; resulting in pre-release information not being received*
- *Final entry information not provided to the exams officer on time; resulting in:*
 - *candidates not being entered for exams/assessments or being entered late*
 - *late or other penalty fees being charged by awarding bodies*
- *Internal assessment marks and candidates' work not provided to meet submission deadlines*
- *Candidates not being informed of centre assessed marks before marks are submitted to the awarding body and therefore not being able to consider appealing internal assessment decisions and requesting a review of the centre's marking*

Centre actions:

- Head of Faculty and their SLT lead will be used to gather necessary information to ensure that a teacher's absence does not disrupt any students' entries/examination submissions.
- If appropriate Awarding Bodies will be approached to request extensions for submissions

4. Absence of Head of Centre, or of SLT member with oversight for exams

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- *Head of Centre is unable or unavailable to exercise key responsibilities at critical times (e.g. certifying documentation, conducting investigations, Results Day, etc)*
- *SLT Member with oversight for exams is unable or unavailable to carry out role*

Centre actions:

- Head of Centre responsibilities will be delegated to a named member of the Senior Leadership Team, with notification to the Chair of Governors, and to Awarding Bodies or other agencies as required
- Responsibilities of the SLT member will be transferred to another member or members of SLT

5. Invigilators: lack of appropriately trained invigilators, or invigilator absence

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- *Failure to recruit and train sufficient invigilators to conduct exams*
- *Invigilator shortage on peak exam days*
- *Lead Invigilator absence on the day of an exam*

Centre actions:

- Experienced and trained Supply Agency Invigilators will be employed in advance and on the day if/when shortages occur.
- Pre-trained internal non-teaching staff will be used if necessary to the commencement of the exams period.
- At least one experienced Invigilator will be deployed in every venue in overall charge.

6. Exam rooms: lack of appropriate rooms or main venues unavailable at short notice

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- *Exams officer unable to identify sufficient/appropriate rooms during exams timetable planning*
- *Insufficient rooms available on peak exam days*
- *Main exam venues unavailable due to an unexpected incident at exam time*

Centre actions:

- Public examinations will take priority over other activities in the school on the day of exams – if necessary lessons will be moved out of suitable classrooms to other venue to make way for exams and/or arrangements would be made to accommodate non-exam students to make way.
- If the school is unable to open for an External Examination then alternative accommodation would be sought with emergency JCQ and Awarding Body approval.

7. Cyber-attack

Criteria for implementation of the plan

Where a cyber-attack may compromise any aspect of delivery of public examinations

Centre actions:

- Should a cyber-attack occur during a public examination series, the Awarding Bodies must be immediately informed.
- JCoSS will follow and regularly review National Cyber Security Centre advice for support in cyber security preparedness and mitigation work and will use the NCSC's free Web Check and Mail Check services to help protect from cyber-attacks.

8. Failure of IT systems

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- *MIS system failure at final entry deadline*
- *MIS system failure during exams preparation*
- *MIS system failure at results release time*
- *Access Arrangement: Failure of the network during an examination.*

Centre actions:

- Should MIS systems fail at any time SITTS Helpdesk should be informed of the issue and then direct access to Awarding Body secure websites will be used.
- Should exam equipment fail, the time of failure should be noted. Replacement equipment and/or login should be used and any time lost will be added to the end of the exam.
- Invigilators should then inform the Exam Office and incident logs completed in order to forward to Awarding Body. If the work is irretrievable due to this failure, the Awarding Body should be contacted immediately and advice will be given.

9. Emergency Evacuation of the exam room (or centre lock down)

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- *Whole centre evacuation (or lock down) during exam time due to serious incident resulting in exam candidates being unable to start, proceed with or complete their exams*

Centre actions:

- SLT would refer to the JCoSS Exam Emergency Evacuation and Exam Lockdown Policies

10. Disruption of teaching in the weeks before an exam – centre closed for an extended period

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- *Centre 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*

Centre actions:

- The centre would communicate with parents, carers and students about the potential for disruption to teaching time and plans to address this.
- If the Centre were unable to open for an extended period, then Alternative Site arrangements would be put into action for Exam Year students
- Exam Year students would be provided with home-based and online materials for study and revision as per the Remote/Blended Learning Policy
- In either event parents and students would be communicated with as appropriate.

11. Candidates at risk of being unable to take examinations– but centre remains open

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- *Candidates at risk of being unable to attend the examination centre to take examinations as normal*

Centre actions:

- The centre would communicate with relevant awarding organisations at the outset to make them aware of the issue.

- The centre would communicate with parents and candidates regarding solutions to the issue.
- Exams Office would liaise with students to see if Alternative Site arrangements would be appropriate with approval
- The Exams Office would seek guidance from relevant members of SLT and where appropriate Special Consideration would be applied for where appropriate
- Students would be offered the opportunity to sit any exams at the next available series
- If there were to be a disruption due to public transport, then the exam start time would be delayed as far as regulations allow and special consideration would be applied for.

12. Centre at risk of being unable to open as normal during the exams period

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- *Centre at risk of being unable to open as normal for scheduled examinations*

Centre actions:

- Centre would inform each awarding organisation with which examinations are due to be taken as soon as is possible.
- If possible the Centre would open just for Exams Students where Health and Safety allows
- If the Centre were unable to open for an extended period, Alternative Site and/or Remote Learning arrangements would be put into action to support Exams Students with teaching/revision
- Approval will be sought for Alternative Site arrangements for Exams as appropriate

13. Disruption in the distribution of examination papers

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- *Disruption to the distribution of examination papers to the centre in advance of examinations*

Centre actions:

- The centre would communicate with awarding organisations to organise alternative delivery of papers
- Exam paper delivery is logged against the Exams Timetable – if within a week Papers had not arrived, Awarding Bodies would be contacted
- Awarding Bodies would be asked to provide a secure electronic copy that could be downloaded and securely copied on site on the day

14. Disruption to the transportation of completed examination scripts

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- *Delay in normal collection arrangements for completed examination scripts*

Centre actions:

- The centre would communicate with relevant awarding organisations to resolve the issue.
- Awarding Bodies would be contacted to make them aware of the delay
- Courier would be contacted to establish the next earliest possible collection
- Uncollected papers would be placed in Secure Store until collection is possible in line with JCQ requirements.

15. Assessment evidence is not available to be marked

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- Large scale damage to or destruction of completed examination scripts/NEA evidence before it can be marked

Centre actions:

- Head of Centre would communicate this immediately to the relevant awarding organisation(s) and subsequently to students and their parents.
- Appropriate evidence is supplied to Awarding Bodies as requested
- If necessary students retake the assessment at the next possible window
- Parents and students are informed as soon as a resolution is agreed.

16. Centre unable to distribute results as normal

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- Centre is unable to access or manage the distribution of results to candidates, or to facilitate post-results services

Centre actions:

- Centre would contact awarding organisations about alternative options
- Exams Results to be sent out via JCoSS secure email service to students
- Arrangements are made to work from an alternative Centre if appropriate for Results
- Exams Officer to work via alternative means in the preparation of student results and Post Results Services
- Students and Parents able to contact Exams Office via email and mobile for Results and Post Results Services

Causes 8-15 – all scenarios, criteria and specific communications have been taken from the *Joint contingency plan in the event of widespread disruption to the examination system in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*

Further guidance to inform and implement contingency planning

Ofqual

What schools and colleges and other centres should do if exams or other assessments are seriously disrupted

1. Contingency planning

Awarding organisations are required to establish, maintain and comply with an up-to-date detailed written contingency plan, to mitigate any incident they have identified may occur. This includes having communication plans for external parties ([Ofqual General Condition of Recognition A6](#)). Schools and colleges should also be prepared for possible disruption to exams and assessments and make sure staff are aware of these plans

General contingency guidance

- [emergency planning and response](#) from the Department for Education in England
- [handling strike action in schools](#) from the Department for Education in England
- [school organisation: local-authority-maintained schools](#) from the Department for Education in England
- [exceptional closure days](#) from the Department of Education in Northern Ireland
- [checklist - exceptional closure of schools](#) from the Department of Education in Northern Ireland
- [school terms and school closures](#) from NI Direct
- [opening schools in extremely bad weather](#) - guidance for schools from the Welsh Government
- [police guidance](#) from National Counter Terrorism Security Office and partners on preparing for threats

2. Disruption to assessments or exams

In the absence of any instruction from the relevant awarding organisation, you should make sure that any exam or timetabled assessment takes place if it is possible to hold it. This may mean relocating to alternative premises.

You should discuss alternative arrangements with your awarding organisation if:

- the exam or assessment cannot take place
- a student misses an exam or loses their assessment due to an emergency, or other event, outside of the student's control

3. Steps centres should take

3.1 Exam planning

Review contingency plans well in advance of each exam or assessment series. Consider how, if the contingency plan is invoked, you will comply with the awarding organisation's requirements.

3.2 In the event of disruption

1. Contact the relevant awarding organisation and follow its instructions.
2. Take advice, or follow instructions, from relevant local or national agencies in deciding whether your centre is able to open.
3. Identify whether the exam or timetabled assessment can be sat at an alternative venue, in agreement with the relevant awarding organisation, ensuring the secure transportation of questions papers or assessment materials to the alternative venue.
4. Where accommodation is limited, prioritise students whose progression will be severely delayed if they do not take their exam or timetabled assessment when planned.

5. In the event of an evacuation during an examination please refer to JCQ's ['Centre emergency evacuation procedure'](#).
6. Communicate with parents, carers and students any changes to the exam or assessment timetable or to the venue.
7. Communicate with any external assessors or relevant third parties regarding any changes to the exam or assessment timetable.

3.3 After the exam

1. Consider whether any students' ability to take the assessment or demonstrate their level of attainment has been materially affected and, if so, apply for special consideration.
2. Advise students, where appropriate, of the opportunities to take their exam or assessment at a later date.
3. Ensure that scripts are stored under secure conditions.
4. Return scripts to awarding organisations in line with their instructions. Never make alternative arrangements for the transportation of completed exam scripts, unless told to do so by the awarding organisation.

4. Steps awarding organisations should take

4.1 Exam planning

Establish and maintain, and at all times comply with, an up-to-date, written contingency plan.

Ensure that the arrangements in place with centres and other third parties enable them to deliver and award qualifications in accordance with their conditions of recognition.

4.2 In the event of disruption

1. *Take all reasonable steps to mitigate any adverse effect, in relation to their qualifications, arising from any disruption.*
2. *Provide effective guidance to any of their centres delivering qualifications.*
3. *Ensure that where an assessment must be completed under specified conditions, students complete the assessment under those conditions (other than where any reasonable adjustments or special considerations require alternative conditions).*
4. *Promptly notify the relevant regulators about any event which could have an adverse effect on students, standards or public confidence.*
5. *Coordinate its communications with the relevant regulators where the disruption has an impact on multiple centres or a wide range of learners.*

4.3 After the exam

Consider any requests for special consideration for affected students. For example, those who may have lost their internally assessed work or whose performance in assessments or exams could have been affected by the disruption.

5. If any students miss an exam or are disadvantaged by the disruption

If some of the students have been adversely affected by the disruption, you should ask the awarding organisation about applying for special consideration.

Decisions about special consideration, when it is or is not appropriate, is for each awarding organisation to make. Their decisions might be different for different qualifications and for different subjects.

See also: [JCQ's guidance on special considerations](#)

6. Wider communications

The regulators, [Ofqual](#) in England, [Qualifications Wales](#) in Wales and [CCEA Regulation](#) 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.

7. Widespread national disruption

The governments' view across England, Wales and Northern Ireland is education in 2022-2023 has returned to normal. Schools are open and examinations will go ahead in Summer 2023.

As education is devolved, in the event of any widespread sustained national disruption to examinations or assessments, national government departments will communicate with regulators, awarding organisations and centres prior to a public announcement. Regulators will provide advice to government departments on implications for examinations and assessments, including exam timetables.

In November 2022, Ofqual and the Department for Education issued [decisions following a consultation on the resilience of the qualifications sector](#) for specific examinations awarded in England in summer 2023. Ofqual has published [Guidance for schools, colleges and other exam centres on gathering evidence of student performance](#) for students entering GCSEs, AS and A levels, the Advanced Extension Award and Project qualifications to support resilience in the exam system in England in 2023.

The Department for Education has updated its guidance on [handling strike action in schools](#) in England in light of the industrial action in 2023. The guidance recommends schools should prioritise the running of examinations and assessments on any strike days, and should review their contingency plans to make this happen. Schools, colleges and other exam centres should speak to the relevant awarding organisations if they are expecting any disruption that might affect the sitting of exams and assessments

We will update this page as necessary, with any further relevant links, should national disruption occur *Ofqual guidance extract taken directly from the **Exam system contingency plan: England, Wales and Northern Ireland - What schools and colleges and other centres should do if exams or other assessments are seriously disrupted**, (updated 30 September 2021)*

<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

16.1 The qualification regulators, awarding bodies, JCQ and government departments responsible for education have prepared and agreed information for schools and colleges in the event of examinations being seriously disrupted. This jointly agreed information will ensure consistency of response in the event of major disruption to the examinations system affecting significant numbers of candidates.

16.2 In addition, awarding bodies have their own well-established contingency plans in place to respond to disruptions. It is important that exams officers who are facing disruption liaise directly with the relevant awarding body/bodies.

16.3 Centres should prepare plans for any disruption to examinations as part of their general emergency planning. It is important to ensure that relevant centre staff are familiar with the plan. Consideration

should be given as to how these arrangements will be communicated to candidates, parents and staff should disruption to examinations occur.

16.4 In the event that the head of centre decides the centre cannot be opened for scheduled examinations, the relevant awarding body must be informed as soon as possible. Awarding bodies will be able to offer advice regarding the alternative arrangements for conducting examinations that may be available and the options for candidates who have not been able to take scheduled examinations.

16.5 The awarding bodies will designate 'contingency days' for examinations, summer 2023. This is consistent with the qualification regulators' document Exam system contingency plan: England, Wales and Northern Ireland - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/examsystem-contingency-plan-england-wales-and-northern-ireland>

16.6 The designation of 'contingency days' within the common examination timetable is in the event of national or significant local disruption to examinations. It is part of the awarding bodies' standard contingency planning for examinations.

Centres must therefore remind candidates that they must remain available until the last nominated contingency date should an awarding body need to invoke its contingency plan.

JCQ guidance taken directly from JCQ *Instructions for Conducting Examinations 2022-2023*
<http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/ice---instructions-for-conducting-examinations>, section 15, **Contingency planning**

JCQ Joint Contingency Plan www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/other-documents

JCQ Preparing for disruption to examinations (Effective from 1 September 2022)
www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/general-regulations/

JCQ Notice to Centres - Examination contingency plan/examinations policy www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/general-regulations/notice-to-centres--exam-contingency-plan/

General Regulations for Approved Centres <http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/general-regulations>

Guidance on *Alternative Site* arrangements and *Transferred Candidate* arrangements

Accessed through secure login to the Centre Admin Portal (CAP) or through the JCQ training site

<http://jqc.training.jcq.org.uk/CAP/Home/Training>

Instructions for Conducting Examinations <http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/ice---instructions-for-conducting-examinations>

A guide to the special consideration process <http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration/regulations-and-guidance>

GOV.UK

Emergency planning and response: Exam disruption; www.gov.uk/government/publications/emergency-planning-and-response-for-education-childcare-and-childrens-social-care-settings

Dispatch of exam scripts guide: Ensuring the service runs smoothly; Contingency planning
www.gov.uk/government/publications/dispatch-of-exam-scripts-yellow-label-service

National Cyber Security Centre

The NCSC's free [Web Check](#) and [Mail Check](#) services can help protect schools from cyber-attacks. Two NCSC cyber security services, which are already helping thousands of organisations to protect their websites and email servers from cyber-attacks, are now available to **all UK schools**. Both tools are available free of charge, are quick to set up, and thereafter run automatically. More information is available from the [NCSC website](#).

The Department for Education has been asking centres to review **National Cyber Security Centre advice** following increasing number of cyber-attacks involving ransomware infections. The NCSC information supports centres in cyber security preparedness and mitigation work.

Ransomware attacks continue and the Department is reminding centres to review the NCSC advice and to take precautions. This includes ensuring that you have backups in place for your key services and data.

For ease of reference, the Department has highlighted key links relating to the NCSC cyber security guidance below:

1. [More ransomware attacks on UK education - NCSC.GOV.UK](#)
2. [Ransomware advice and guidance for your IT teams to implement](#)
3. [Offline backups in an online world](#)
4. [Backing up your data](#)
5. [Practical resources to help improve your cyber security](#)
6. [Building Resilience: Ransomware and the risks to schools and ways to prevent it](#)

[School staff offered training to help shore up cyber defences - NCSC.GOV.UK](#)