



**KING EDWARD VI  
SHELDON HEATH  
ACADEMY**

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*Educational excellence for our City*

# **Exam Contingency Plan**

King Edward VI Sheldon Heath Academy

This policy was adopted by the LGB /Curriculum Committee on 14.3.24. Next review due March 2025, or earlier if the need arises.

## Exam Contingency Plan

Centre name	King Edward VI Sheldon Heath Academy
Centre number	20249
Date plan first created	04/03/2024
Current plan approved by	LGB/Curriculum Welfare Committee
Current plan reviewed by	Julie Jones
Date of next review	31/03/2025

## Key staff involved in the plan

Role	Name
Head of centre	Becky Elcocks
Senior leader(s)	Brenda Collister
Exams officer	Julie Jones
ALS lead/SENCo	Lucy Jensen
Other staff (if applicable)	

This plan is reviewed and updated annually to ensure that exam contingency planning at King Edward VI Sheldon Heath Academy is managed in accordance with current requirements and regulations.

## Purpose of the plan

This plan examines potential risks and issues that could cause disruption to the exam process.

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 at King Edward VI Sheldon Heath Academy.

Alongside internal processes this plan is informed by the Ofqual **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', the **JCQ Joint Contingency Plan** for the Examination System in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and the JCQ document **Preparing for disruption to examinations** (Effective from 1 September 2023).

This plan details how King Edward VI Sheldon Heath Academy complies with the JCQ's **General Regulations for Approved Centres** (section 5.3, Centre management) by having in place a written examination contingency plan 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 where the head of centre, examinations officer or SENCo is absent at a critical stage of the examination cycle. The examination contingency plan should reinforce procedures in the event of the centre being unavailable for examinations, or on results day, owing to an unforeseen emergency. The potential impact of a cyber-attack should also be considered.

### Operating across more than one centre

This does not apply to this centre

### National Centre Number Register and other information requirements

The head of centre will also ensure that as a contingency to enable the prompt handling of urgent issues only, responds to the awarding bodies' request for information regarding the contact details of a senior member of staff (which might include a personal mobile number and/or email address). This will ensure that any urgent matters which might adversely affect candidates which arise outside of term time, and which potentially put qualification awards at risk, can be addressed by awarding bodies with the support of that member of staff. Heads of centre should ensure that this member of staff has the necessary authority to mobilise resources to provide this support, which might include resolving issues within the centre itself. (GR 5.3)

### Head of centre absence at a critical stage of the exam cycle

Where the head of centre may be absent at a critical stage of the examination cycle, main duties and responsibilities will be undertaken by Vice Principal and Assistance Vice Principal i/c Exams

## Possible causes of disruption to the exam process

### 1. Exams officer extended absence at a critical stage of the exam cycle

#### 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

#### 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, for example very late arrival, suspected malpractice, special consideration
- candidates' scripts not dispatched as required for marking to awarding bodies

#### Results and post-results

- access to examination results affecting the distribution of results to candidates
- the facilitation of post-results services

#### Other criteria:

Exams manager late or absent on day of an exam

#### Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption listed above

The centre will:

- The AVP with responsibility for exams is immediately notified to liaise with exams officer regarding key priorities for the duration of absence.
- Lead invigilators will oversee exams administration and ensure the security of the exam – they receive regular training to be able to fulfil this duty.
- Two additional centre staff and trained to fulfil the role of the examinations officer and maintain the efficiency of the examination process.
- Key information is securely stored in an area accessible to the above staff in case of an emergency.

## **2. ALS lead/SENCo extended absence at a critical stage of 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

#### Other criteria:

No other criteria identified

#### Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption listed above

##### The centre will:

- One additional centre staff and trained to fulfil the role of SENCo.
- Key information is securely stored in an area accessible to the above staff in case of an emergency.

### **3. Teaching staff extended absence at a critical stage of 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
- Non-examination assessment tasks not set/issued/taken by candidates as scheduled
- 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
- Internal assessment marks and candidates' work not provided to meet awarding body submission deadlines

#### Other criteria:

No other criteria identified

#### Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption listed above

##### The centre will:

- SLT line managers and AVP in charge of Examinations are familiar with key tasks and deadlines.

They work in collaboration with departmental staff, examinations manager and seek advice from the board should this be required to ensure exams related tasks are completed accurate and timely.

- The examinations manager informs AVP in charge of Examinations of any issues that may require further action.

#### **4. 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
- Invigilator absence on the day of an exam

Other criteria:

No other criteria identified

##### Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption listed above

The centre will:

- Invigilators are made aware of examinations dates and their commitment as soon as the entry process is completed; this helps them plan for availability.
- Early planning ensures that we are aware well in advance of days where there may not be enough invigilators; where necessary, further appointments are made.
- All invigilators attend training at least two weeks before the examinations start; follow up training is put in place if required.
- For exams of less than 50 candidates, 1 extra invigilator is always booked. For exams between 50 and 150 candidates, 2 extra invigilators are booked. For larger exams, 3 extra invigilators are booked. This helps address potential last minute issues.
- Support staff, such as the librarian, can be used for invigilation (always in the presence of other invigilators).
- If necessary, agency invigilators are organised on the day, however this is a last resort.

#### **5. Exam rooms - lack of appropriate rooms or main venue(s) 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

Other criteria:

No other criteria identified

##### Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption listed above

The centre will:

- (where main exam venue(s) unavailable due to an unexpected incident at exam time) where possible, make use of other available rooms within the centre, prioritising candidates whose progression will be severely delayed if they do not take their exam or timetabled assessment when planned
- identify whether the exam or timetabled assessment can be sat at an alternative venue, in agreement with the relevant awarding body

- (where main exam venue(s) unavailable due to an unexpected incident at exam time) where possible, move to alternative venue, prioritising candidates whose progression will be severely delayed if they do not take their exam or timetabled assessment when planned
- **Alternative venue** details: To be confirmed if this occurs
- communicate with candidates (and where appropriate, parents/carers) any changes to the exam or assessment timetable or to the venue
- **Communication** details: To be confirmed if this occurs
- ensure the secure transportation of question papers or assessment materials to the alternative venue
- (after the exam) consider whether any candidate's ability to take the assessment or demonstrate their level of attainment has been materially affected and, if so, apply for special consideration

Other centre actions:

- Use resources effectively – when required, lessons are re-roomed to facilitate exams.
- Prioritise resources to ensure the smooth operation of the examination process.

## 6. Cyber-attack

### Criteria for implementation of the plan

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

Other criteria:

No other criteria identified

### Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption listed above

The centre will:

- Ensure Network Manager/IT department have back up of data
- Systems for restoring services and recovering data from the back ups are tested and reliable
- In the event of an attack the Academy will enact the 'Incident Management Plan'
- Identify any affected data and notify organisations as appropriate
- Ensure EM has access to awarding sites from home
- Contact the National Cyber Security Centre
- Contact police and Action Fraud
- Inform the DfE by emailing securityenquiries@education.gov.uk
- Inform the relevant awarding organisations

## 7. Failure of IT systems

### Criteria for implementation of the plan

- MIS/IT system failure at final entry deadline
- MIS/IT system failure during exams preparation
- MIS/IT system failure at results release time

Other criteria:

Power outage immediately prior to or during an on-screen test

## Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption listed above

The centre will:

The Academy will address IT issues as follows:

Issuing results -If awarding organisations face delays in meeting the planned schedule for issuing results, they will:

- establish priorities for processing results in line with UCAS and Central Applications

Office (CAO) deadlines

- implement existing contingency plans for disruption to the schedule for issuing results
- in consultation with regulators, assess the level of disruption and consider alternative options for issuing results, dependent upon the nature of the issue
- in consultation with regulators, liaise with relevant organisations (eg UCAS, CAO) regarding candidate progression to further and higher education

Issuing results: if awarding organisations are unable to issue accurate results, they will:

- revalidate results
- reissue results, via alternative format if necessary.

If the Academy is unable to distribute results, the Academy will:

- make arrangements to access results at an alternative site

Share facilities with other schools and colleges o If awarding organisations are unable to offer post results services, they will:

- Make arrangements to provide post results services through alternative methods (spreadsheets)
- Prioritise for candidates going through UCAS.

If MIS failure at the Academy affects final entry deadline, the Academy will work with awarding organisations to ensure timely entries using an alternative format, for example spreadsheets.

If MIS failure during exams preparation, the Academy will use alternative IT software, for example spreadsheets to proceed with exam preparation; all relevant information is regularly backed up in a spreadsheet.

## **8. Emergency evacuation of the exam room (or centre lockdown)**

### Criteria for implementation of the plan

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

Other criteria:

### Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption listed above

The centre will:

- refer to and invoke its (exams) emergency evacuation policy/procedure in line with JCQ's 'Centre emergency evacuation procedure' (or its (exams) lockdown policy)
- contact the relevant awarding body as soon as possible and follow its instructions
- where accommodation is limited, prioritise candidates whose progression will be severely delayed if they do not take their exam or timetabled assessment when planned
- (after the exam) consider whether any candidate's ability to take the assessment or demonstrate their level of attainment has been materially affected and, if so, apply for special consideration

Other centre actions:

No other actions identified



## 9. Disruption of teaching time 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

Other criteria:

No other criteria identified

### Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption listed above

The centre will:

- recognise it remains the responsibility of the centre to prepare students, as usual, for examinations
- facilitate alternative methods of learning
- communicate with candidates (and where appropriate, parents/carers) information relating to alternative methods of learning
- **Communication** details: The centre to communicate with parents, carers and students about the potential for disruption to teaching time and plans to address this.
- take advice offered by the awarding body regarding alternative arrangements for conducting examinations that may be available
- take advice offered by the awarding body on the options for candidates who have not been able to take scheduled examinations
- advise candidates, where appropriate, of the opportunities to take their exam or assessment at a later date

Other centre actions:

- Make all efforts to keep the centre running, especially during examination periods. o Take advice, or follow instructions, from relevant local or national agencies in deciding whether the Academy is able to open.
- Prioritise for candidates who will be facing examinations shortly and especially for those whose progression will be severely delayed if they do not take their exam or timetabled assessment when planned.
- Use technology to provide distance learning support to all candidates.
- Advise candidates, where appropriate, to sit examinations in the next available series. o Use alternative local venues for support teaching.

## 10. Candidates may not be able to take examinations - centre remains open

### Criteria for implementation of the plan

- Candidates may not be able to attend the examination centre to take examinations as normal

Other criteria:

No other criteria identified

### Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption listed above

The centre will:

- take advice offered by the awarding body on the options for candidates who have not been able to take scheduled examinations

- discuss alternative arrangements with the awarding body if a candidate misses an exam or loses their assessment due to an emergency, or other event, outside of the candidate's control
- identify whether the exam or timetabled assessment can be sat at an alternative venue, in agreement with the relevant awarding body, ensuring the secure transportation of questions papers or assessment materials to the alternative venue
- communicate with candidates (and where appropriate, parents/carers) any changes to the exam or assessment timetable or to the venue
- **Communication** details: The centre to communicate with relevant awarding organisations at the outset to make them aware of the issue. The centre to communicate with parents, carers and candidates regarding solutions to the issue
- consider whether any candidates' ability to take the assessment or demonstrate their level of attainment has been materially affected and, if so, apply for special consideration

Other centre actions:

- The Academy will invoke this contingency plan and will liaise with awarding bodies and other agencies. This will focus on options that enable candidates to take their examinations.
- The Academy will liaise with candidates to identify whether the examination can be sat at an alternative venue in agreement with the relevant awarding organisations.
- Candidates, where possible, will be given the opportunity to sit any examinations missed at the next available series.
- The Academy will apply to awarding organisations for special consideration for candidates where they have met the minimum requirements.
- Communicate with parents, carers and students any changes to the exam or assessment timetable or to the venue.
- Communicate with any external assessors or relevant third parties regarding any changes to the exam or assessment timetable.

## **11. Centre may not be able to open as normal during the examination period**

(including in the event of the centre being unavailable for examinations owing to an unforeseen emergency)

### Criteria for implementation of the plan

- Centre may not be able to open as normal for scheduled examinations

Other criteria:

No other criteria identified

### Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption listed above

The centre will:

- take advice, or follow instructions, from relevant local or national agencies in deciding whether the centre is able to open
- contact the relevant awarding body as soon as possible and follow its instructions (This could include implementing alternative arrangements for the conducting of examinations and notifying the JCQ Centre Inspection Service of an alternative site arrangement by submitting the JCQ Alternative Site form online, using the Centre Admin Portal (CAP).)
- contact the relevant awarding body as soon as possible and follow its instructions
- discuss alternative arrangements with the awarding body if the exam or assessment cannot take place

- follow guidance provided by the awarding body on the conduct of examinations in such circumstances
- where accommodation is limited, prioritise candidates whose progression will be severely delayed if they do not take their exam or timetabled assessment when planned
- communicate with candidates (and where appropriate, parents/carers) any changes to the exam or assessment timetable or to the venue
- **Alternative venue** details: To be confirmed if this occurs
- **Communication** details: To be confirmed if this occurs
- consider whether any candidates' ability to take the assessment or demonstrate their level of attainment has been materially affected and, if so, apply for special consideration

Other centre actions:

- invoke this contingency plan which will focus on options that enable candidates to take their examinations. The responsibility for deciding whether it is safe for a centre to open lies with the head of centre.
- open for examinations and examination candidates only, if possible
- use alternative venues in agreement with relevant awarding organisations (eg share facilities with other centres or use other public buildings if possible)
- apply to awarding organisations for special consideration for candidates where they have met the minimum requirements
- offer candidates an opportunity to sit any examinations missed at the next available series, if possible

## **12. 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

Other criteria:

No other criteria identified

### Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption listed above

The centre will:

- liaise with awarding bodies regarding the provision of electronic access to examination papers via a secure external network and will ensure when copies are received/made these are stored under secure conditions
- follow guidance provided by the awarding body on the conduct of examinations in such circumstances
- understand that as a last resort, and in close collaboration with centres and regulators, awarding organisations will consider scheduling of the examination on an alternative date
- communicate with candidates (and where appropriate, parents/carers) any changes to the exam or assessment timetable or to the venue

Other centre actions:

No other actions identified

## **13. Disruption to transporting completed examination scripts**

### Criteria for implementation of the plan

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

Other criteria:

No other criteria identified

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption listed above

The centre will:

- where examinations are part of the national 'yellow label' service or where awarding organisations arrange collections, seek advice from the relevant awarding organisations and will not make its own arrangements for transportation unless told to do so by the awarding organisation
- for any examinations where the centre makes its own arrangements for transportation, investigate alternative dispatch options that comply with the requirements detailed in the JCQ **Instructions for conducting examinations**
- ensure the secure storage of completed examination scripts until collection

Other centre actions:

No other actions identified

#### **14. 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

Other criteria:

No other criteria identified

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption listed above

The centre will:

- liaise with the awarding body to determine if candidate marks for affected assessments may be able to be generated based on other appropriate evidence of candidate achievement as defined by the awarding body
- where marks cannot be generated by awarding body, inform candidates they may need to retake the affected assessment in a subsequent assessment series

Other centre actions:

No other actions identified

#### **15. Centre unable to distribute results as normal (including in the event of the centre being unavailable on results day owing to an unforeseen emergency) or facilitate post-results services**

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

Other criteria:

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption listed above

The centre will:

- make arrangements to access its results at an alternative venue/share facilities with another centre if this is possible, in agreement with the relevant awarding body
- make arrangements to coordinate access to post-results services from an alternative venue
- **Alternative venue** details: To be confirmed if this occurs
- make arrangements to make post-results requests at an alternative location
- contact the relevant awarding body if electronic post-results requests are not possible
- inform candidates of any alternative arrangements in place for the distribution of results and the facilitation of post-results services
- **Communication** details: Information shared via social media and school website

Other centre actions:

No other actions identified

## **16. Any other cause of disruption to the exam process**

Cause of disruption

No further causes identified

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption listed above

Not applicable

## Changes 2023/2024

(Updated) Under **Purpose of the plan** by adding: this plan is also informed by: the JCQ document **Preparing for disruption to examinations** (Effective from 1 September 2023).

(Changed) This plan also confirms [centre name's] compliance with JCQ's **General Regulations for Approved Centres** (section 5.3) that the centre has in place a written examination contingency plan 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. (To) This plan also confirms [centre name's] compliance with JCQ's **General Regulations for Approved Centres** (section 5.3) that the centre has in place a written examination contingency plan 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 where the head of centre, examinations officer or SENCo is absent at a critical stage of the examination cycle.

(Changed) Under **Operating across more than one centre**: As the head of centre and/or exams officer operates across more than one centre, the head of centre will ensure there is suitable support in place, so they can meet their obligations in relation to the recruitment, selection and training of staff across the centres for which they are responsible (To) As the head of centre and/or examinations officer operates across more than one centre, the head of centre will ensure there is suitable senior leadership team support in place, so they can meet their obligations across all centres for which they are responsible in relation to recruitment, selection, training and support of staff.

(Added new section) **National Centre Number Register and other information requirements**

(Changed) Titles of **possible causes of disruption 1-3** from: absence at key points in the exam process (cycle) (To) absence a critical stage of the exam cycle

(Changed) Title of **cause 10** from: Candidates at risk of being unable to take examinations - centre remains open (To) Candidates may not be able to take examinations - centre remains open

(Changed) Title of **cause 11** from: Centre at risk of being unable to open as normal during the examination period (To) Centre may not be able to open as normal during the examination period

(Added) To centre actions in **cause 11**: This could include implementing alternative arrangements for the conducting of examinations and notifying the JCQ Centre Inspection Service of an alternative site arrangement by submitting the JCQ Alternative Site form online, using the Centre Admin Portal (CAP).

(Reworded) Centre actions in **cause 13**

(Updated where relevant) **Further guidance to inform procedures and implement contingency planning** (Further updated on 07/10/2023 to reflect the update on 05/10/2023 to the **Exam system contingency plan: England, Wales and Northern Ireland**)

(Further updated 16/10/2023) (Added) Under **Purpose of the plan** - Head of centre absence at a critical stage of the exam cycle

(Further updated 10/11/2023) Under **Further guidance to inform procedures and implement contingency planning** to include links to new JCQ publications - *Guidance for centres on cyber security* and *Information for centres affected by RAAC – the delivery of non-examination assessments and the special consideration process*

## Centre-specific changes

Upon review in February 2024, no centre-specific updates or changes were applicable to this document.

# Further guidance to inform procedures and implement contingency planning

## DfE

### Meeting digital and technology standards in schools and colleges

- [Cyber Security Standards in schools and colleges](#)
- [Cyber crime and cyber security: a guide for education providers](#)
- [DfE Cyber Security Guidance - March 2023](#)

## Ofqual

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** (last updated 5 October 2023) [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](http://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)

"This document was updated in October 2023 to include Ofqual's final decisions on long-term resilience arrangements, and the Department for Education (DfE)'s guidance for education settings with confirmed reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC).

In addition to this guidance, you will need to be aware of your specific responsibilities for local and national school preparations and contingencies. You should also follow advice from relevant public health bodies.

### 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.

### 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

You may also wish to see the [JCO's notice to centres on exam contingency plans](#) and [JCO's notice on preparing for disruption to examinations](#) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland for qualifications within its scope.

### Steps you should take

#### Exam planning

Review your 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.

Schools, colleges and other exam centres must speak to the relevant awarding organisations as soon as possible if they are expecting any disruption that might affect the sitting of exams and assessments.

#### In the event of disruption

- Contact the relevant awarding organisation and follow its instructions.
- Take advice, or follow instructions, from relevant local or national agencies in deciding whether your centre is able

to open.

- 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.
- Where accommodation is limited, prioritise students whose progression will be severely delayed if they do not take their exam or timetabled assessment when planned.
- In the event of an evacuation during an examination please refer to JCQ's [Centre emergency evacuation procedure](#).
- Communicate with students, parents and carers any changes to the exam or assessment timetable or to the venue.
- Communicate with any external assessors or relevant third parties regarding any changes to the exam or assessment timetable.

### **After the exam**

- Consider whether any students' ability to take the assessment or demonstrate their level of attainment has been materially affected and, if so, apply to the relevant awarding organisation for special consideration.
- Advise students, where appropriate, of the opportunities to take their exam or assessment at a later date.
- Ensure that scripts are stored under secure conditions.
- 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.

### **Steps the awarding organisation should take**

#### **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.

#### **In the event of disruption**

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

#### **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.

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, depending on their specific policies.

See also [JCO's guidance on special consideration](#)

### **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 [DfE in England](#), the [DfE 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.

### **Widespread national disruption to the taking of examinations or assessments**

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 September 2023, Ofqual and the DfE published [joint consultation decisions on long-term resilience arrangements](#). As in 2023, Ofqual has provided [guidance on collecting evidence of student performance to ensure resilience in the qualifications system](#) for students entering GCSEs, AS and A levels, the Advanced Extension Award and Project qualifications. For VTQs and other qualifications used alongside or instead of GCSEs, AS and A levels, awarding organisations will provide guidance where needed and will contact schools and colleges with more information.

In December 2022, Qualifications Wales published [guidance for contingency assessment arrangements](#) for GCSEs, AS and A levels and Skills Challenge Certificates in the event that a national decision is made to cancel exams. This guidance is still relevant for the current academic year.

The DfE 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 must speak to the relevant awarding organisations if they are expecting any disruption that might affect the sitting of exams and assessments.

The DfE has also issued [guidance for education settings with confirmed reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete \(RAAC\)](#) in their buildings. It includes the need for contingencies for possible disruption to examinations and links to the existing emergency planning guidance.

We will update this page as necessary, with any further relevant links, should national disruption occur.

### **General contingency guidance**

- [emergency planning and response for education, childcare and children's social care settings](#) from the DfE in England
- [handling strike action in schools](#) from the DfE in England
- [school organisation: local-authority-maintained schools](#) from the DfE in England

- [reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete: guidance for education settings with confirmed RAAC](#) from the DfE 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 as well as childcare and play settings in extreme bad weather and extreme hot weather](#) - guidance for schools from the Welsh Government
- [emergency planning and response guidance for education and childcare settings](#)- guidance for schools and education settings from the Welsh Government
- [police guidance](#) from National Counter Terrorism Security Office and partners on preparing for threats
- [cyber security guidance for schools and colleges](#) from the National Cyber Security Centre"

## JCQ

JCQ guidance taken directly from [Instructions for conducting examinations 2023-2024](#) section 15, **Contingency planning**

"15.1 The qualification regulators, awarding bodies 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.

Further information may be found at: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/exam-system-contingency-plan-england-wales-and-northern-ireland](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/exam-system-contingency-plan-england-wales-and-northern-ireland)

15.2 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.

15.3 All centres must have a written examination contingency plan 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 where the head of centre, examinations officer or SENCo is absent at a critical stage of the examination cycle. The examination contingency plan should reinforce procedures in the event of the centre being unavailable for examinations owing to an unforeseen emergency.

All relevant centre staff must be familiar with the examination contingency plan. Consideration should be given as to how these arrangements will be communicated to candidates, parents and staff should disruption to examinations occur.

15.4 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.

15.5 The awarding bodies will designate 'contingency sessions' for examinations, summer 2024. This is consistent with the qualification regulators' document *Exam system contingency plan: England, Wales and Northern Ireland* - [www.gov.uk/government/publications/exam-system-contingency-plan-england-wales-and-northern-ireland](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/exam-system-contingency-plan-england-wales-and-northern-ireland)

The designation of 'contingency sessions' 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.

In the event that there is national disruption to a day of examinations in summer 2024, the awarding bodies will liaise with the qualification regulators and government departments to agree the most appropriate option for managing the impact. As a last resort the affected examinations will be rescheduled. Although every effort would be taken to keep

the impact to a minimum, it is possible that there could be more than one timetable date affected following the disruption, up to and including the last contingency day. Centres will be alerted if it was agreed to reschedule the examinations and the affected candidates will be expected to make themselves available in such circumstances. The decision regarding the re-scheduling of examinations will always rest with the awarding body. The centre must conduct the examination on the scheduled date unless instructed to do otherwise by the awarding body.

Where candidates choose not to be available for the rescheduled examination(s) for reasons other than those traditionally covered by special consideration, they will not be eligible for enhanced grading arrangements. Centres must therefore ensure candidates and parents are aware of the contingency arrangements so that they may take them into account when making their plans for the summer. However, the awarding bodies will not insist upon candidates being available throughout the entire timetable period as a matter of course."

## **Links to other JCQ documentation**

[JCQ Joint Contingency Plan](#)

[JCQ Preparing for disruption to examinations](#)

[JCQ Notice to Centres - exam contingency plan](#)

[General Regulations for Approved Centres](#)

[Guidance notes on alternative site arrangements](#)

[Guidance notes for transferred candidates](#)

[Instructions for conducting examinations](#)

[A guide to the special consideration process](#)

[Guidance for centres on cyber security](#) (Effective from November 2023)

[Information for centres affected by RAAC – the delivery of non-examination assessments and the special consideration process](#)

## **GOV.UK**

[Emergency planning and response: Exam and assessment disruption](#)

[Dispatch of exam scripts guide: Ensuring the service runs smoothly; Contingency planning](#)

## **Wales**

[School closures: examinations](#)

[Opening schools in extremely bad weather and extreme hot weather](#)

## **Northern Ireland**

[Exceptional closure days](#)

[Checklist - exceptional closure of schools](#)

## **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:

- [Further ransomware attacks on UK education by cyber criminals](#)
- [Ransomware advice and guidance for your IT teams to implement](#)
- [Offline backups in an online world](#)
- [Backing up your data](#)
- [Practical resources to help schools improve their cyber security](#)
- [Building Resilience: Ransomware, the risk to schools and ways to prevent it](#)
- [School staff offered training to help shore up cyber defences](#)