

Contingency plan for the examination system in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

This plan is jointly owned by Ofqual, DCELLS, CCEA, AQA, Edexcel, OCR, WJEC, City & Guilds, JCQ, DCSF, DENI, QCDA and UCAS.

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Introduction to the contingency plan

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 schools and colleges. It is vital that a system of this size has a robust and co-ordinated contingency plan in place to deal with any major disruption that may affect candidates.

All awarding bodies 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.

Aims of the Joint Contingency Plan

The Joint Contingency Plan is designed to ensure consistency of response in the event of major disruption to the examinations system affecting significant numbers of candidates across several awarding bodies.

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

It will be implemented only in the event of major disruption to the system and 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.

In the event of a crisis being declared, all organisations involved will provide timely, accurate information to centres, students, parents and the public detailing any action they need to take regarding examinations.

Future actions

The Joint Contingency Plan is a living document and is subject to regular reviews and amendments by the involved parties to ensure it continually represents the latest experiences and expertise to ensure appropriate responses to disruption to the exams, qualifications and testing system.

If any situation causing disruption to the system escalates to a point where current contingencies are no longer sufficient, the identified Crisis Management Team, consisting of representatives of all organisations involved, will be convened to agree additional actions required.

Background / Ownership

The Joint Contingency Plan was first developed in 2006 and has been updated regularly since then. The agencies involved are Ofqual, QCDA, CCEA, WJEC, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (England), the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (Wales), the Department of Education (Northern Ireland), JCQ, the unitary awarding bodies, UCAS and Higher Education institutions. While Scotland operates a different examinations system, the Scottish Qualifications Authority has been involved in the compilation of the plan to ensure its approach adopts the same principles of fairness, transparency, evidence and integrity.

1. Disruption of teaching time – schools and colleges are closed for an extended period

Where there is disruption to teaching time and schools and colleges remain open but either:

- a) Individual students miss teaching and learning time, or
- b) Significant numbers of students miss teaching and learning time,

then business as usual will apply.

<i>Recommended contingency</i>	<i>Criteria for implementation of the contingency</i>	<i>Other possible actions</i>
<p>Schools and colleges to facilitate alternative methods of learning.</p> <p>Guidance on supporting learning if schools and colleges close for extended periods is available on the following links.</p> <p>England - teachernet www.teachernet.gov.uk/emergencies/planning/flu-pandemic/</p> <p>Northern Ireland – Department of Education http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/85-schools/5-school-management/schools-management-31-swine-influenza.htm</p>	<p>Schools and colleges are closed for an extended period during normal teaching time, interrupting the provision of normal teaching. Implementation to be decided at school or college level.</p>	<p>In the case of modular courses, schools and colleges may advise candidates to sit examinations at an alternative series.</p>

2. Disruption in the distribution of examination papers

(Any arrangements for the distribution of question papers must be secure)

<i>Recommended contingency</i>	<i>Criteria for implementation of the contingency</i>	<i>Other possible actions</i>
Awarding bodies to provide schools and colleges with electronic access to examination papers via a secure external network. The Examinations Officer would need to ensure that copies are received, made and stored under secure conditions.	Crisis disrupts the distribution of examination papers to schools and colleges.	Awarding bodies to fax examination papers to recognised schools and colleges if electronic transfer is not possible. Awarding bodies to source alternative couriers.

3. Candidates unable to take examinations because of crisis (schools and colleges remain open)

Candidates are only eligible for 'special consideration' if they have a medical certificate or have been advised by their school or college not to attend an examination. If a candidate chooses not to sit an examination they should be aware that special consideration rules will not apply. Schools and colleges should make sure that candidates are clear about the requirements.

<i>Recommended contingency</i>	<i>Criteria for implementation of the contingency</i>	<i>Other possible actions</i>
Schools and colleges to apply for special consideration for candidates where they have met the minimum requirements. JCQ guidance on special consideration can be accessed through JCQ website. www.jcq.org.uk/exams_office/access_arrangements/regulationsandguidance/	Candidates are unable to take examinations as normal.	Schools and colleges to offer candidates an opportunity to sit any examinations missed at the next available series.

4. A school or college is closed during the examination period

<i>Recommended contingency</i>	<i>Criteria for implementation of the contingency</i>	<i>Other possible actions</i>
Schools and colleges to discuss with relevant agencies whether they are able to open for examinations only.	If a school or college is closed.	<p>Schools and colleges to use alternative venues.</p> <p>Awarding bodies to be flexible regarding alternative venues for examinations, taking the advice of relevant agencies, e.g. Environment Agency, Health Protection Agency.</p> <p>Schools and colleges to share facilities with other schools and colleges if this is possible.</p> <p>Contingency 3 above to be followed</p>

5. Disruption to the collection of completed examination papers

<i>Recommended contingency</i>	<i>Criteria for implementation of the contingency</i>	<i>Other possible actions</i>
<p>Schools and colleges to seek advice from normal collection agency.</p> <p>Schools and colleges to ensure secure storage of completed examination papers awaiting collection.</p>	Normal collection arrangements have failed.	Schools and colleges to investigate use of alternative carriers and ensure proof of dispatch.

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

<i>Recommended contingency</i>	<i>Criteria for implementation of the contingency</i>	<i>Other possible actions</i>
Awarding bodies to implement their existing contingency plans.	Scanning process disrupted beyond acceptable levels.	Awarding bodies to revert to traditional form of marking.

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

<i>Recommended contingency</i>	<i>Criteria for implementation of the contingency</i>	<i>Other possible actions</i>
Awarding bodies to negotiate increased allocation with available markers.	Markers unable to mark examination papers.	Awarding bodies to recruit, train or re-standardise qualified new markers. Prioritisation of marking based on results dates.

8. Difficulty in meeting results schedule

<i>Recommended contingency</i>	<i>Criteria for implementation of the contingency</i>	<i>Other possible actions</i>
Awarding bodies to adjust processing schedule to issue results in electronic form only.	Significant inability to meet results schedule.	<p>Regulators to work with awarding bodies to ensure the integrity of the awards.</p> <p>Invoke the UCAS Crisis Management Plan including engagement with UUK and GuildHE.</p> <p>Consider changing results schedule</p> <p>Awarding bodies to establish priorities for results processing.</p>

9. A school or college is closed on results day

<i>Recommended contingency</i>	<i>Criteria for implementation of the contingency</i>	<i>Other possible actions</i>
School or college to make arrangements to access its results from an alternative site.	If a school or college is closed.	<p>Schools and colleges to use alternative venues.</p> <p>Schools and colleges to share facilities with other schools and colleges if this is possible.</p>