

# Joint Contingency Plan

for the Examination System in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

**This plan is jointly owned by:**

**Ofqual, the Welsh Government, CCEA, AQA, Edexcel, EDI, ICAAE, OCR, VTCT, WJEC, City & Guilds, JCQ, DfE/Teaching Agency, DENI and UCAS.**



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## **Aims of the Joint Contingency Plan**

The Joint Contingency Plan 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 organisations that own this plan are those who have a significant interest in assessments delivered in line with the national common examination timetable<sup>1</sup>, but where appropriate these contingencies should be applied to other qualifications.

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.

**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 Ofqual to agree the additional actions required.**

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<sup>1</sup> The national examination timetable applies to GCSEs, AS levels, A-levels and Principal Learning.

## **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 co-ordinated contingency plans in place to deal with any major disruption that may affect candidates.

In the event of major disruption, 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. Details of whether specific contingencies have been agreed across organisations will be confirmed on the Ofqual website and proactively communicated to relevant stakeholders.

[www.ofqual.gov.uk/](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/)

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.

## **Background and ownership**

The Joint Contingency Plan was first developed in 2006 and has been updated regularly since then. It is jointly owned by Ofqual, the Welsh Government, CCEA, AQA, Edexcel, EDI, ICAAE, OCR, VTCT, WJEC, City & Guilds, JCQ, DfE/Teaching Agency, DENI and UCAS. Ofqual acts as the central point of contact for the Contingency Plan and convener of the Contingency Management Group. 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. The Joint Contingency Plan is subject to regular reviews and amendments by the involved parties so it continually represents the latest experiences and expertise to ensure appropriate responses to disruption to the exams, qualifications and testing system.

## **1. Disruption of teaching time – 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 on the Department for Education website:  
<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/emergencyplanning/a0069425/advice-on-severe-weather>

Further advice from the Department of Education Northern Ireland is available under the Useful Information section, page 12.

## **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 provide centres with electronic access to examination papers via a secure external network. Awarding organisations to fax examination papers to centres if electronic transfer is not possible. The Examinations Officer would need to ensure that copies are received, made and stored under secure conditions
- awarding organisations to source alternative couriers for delivery of hardcopies.

### **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:

- centre to liaise with candidates to identify whether the examination can be sat at an alternative venue in agreement with the relevant awarding organisations
- centres to offer candidates an opportunity to sit any examinations missed at the next available series
- centres to apply to awarding organisations for special consideration for candidates where they have met the minimum requirements. Candidates are only eligible for special consideration if they have been fully prepared and have covered the whole course but are affected by adverse circumstances beyond their control. If a candidate chooses not to sit an examination for other reasons they should be aware that special consideration rules will not apply.

JCQ guidance on special consideration can be accessed through the JCQ website: [www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration/regulations-and-guidance](http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration/regulations-and-guidance)

#### **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.

**A centre which is unable to open as normal for examinations must inform each awarding organisation with which examinations are due to be taken as soon as is possible.**

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 they are able to open.

##### Recommended actions:

- centres to open for examinations and examination candidates only, if possible
- centres to use alternative venues in agreement with relevant awarding organisations (e.g. share facilities with other centres or use other public building, if possible)
- centres may offer candidates an opportunity to sit any examinations missed at the next available series
- centres to apply to awarding organisations for special consideration for candidates where they have met the minimum requirements (see item 3 above).

## **5. Disruption to the transportation of completed examination papers**

### Criteria for implementation of the plan

- delay in normal collection arrangements for completed examination scripts.

### Recommended actions:

- in the first instance centres to seek advice from awarding organisations and normal collection agency regarding collection. Centres are not to make their own arrangements for transportation without approval from awarding organisations.
- 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

### 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
- candidates to retake affected assessment at subsequent assessment window.



## **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 traditional form of marking.

## **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 new markers
- 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 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 (i.e. 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 results due to failure of systems facilitating results delivery.

### Recommended actions:

#### **Where results are due to be issued electronically:**

- awarding organisations burn results information to CD and distribute
- 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. Awarding organisations unable to issue accurate results**

### Criteria for implementation of plan

- system error or failure means significant numbers of results cannot be validated as accurate or are issued and found to be inaccurate.

### Recommended actions:

- candidates, centres and stakeholders to be informed of any incorrect results
- manual validation of results
- awarding organisations to issue results via alternative format, if necessary (e.g. hardcopy, CD, etc.)

## **12. Centres are unable to distribute results as normal**

### 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:

#### **Centres to contact awarding organisations about alternative options:**

- centre to make arrangements to access its results at an alternative site
- 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.

## Summary of responsibilities in the event of disruption to examinations

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

AQA	<a href="http://www.aqa.org.uk/">www.aqa.org.uk/</a>	JCQ	<a href="http://www.jcq.org.uk">www.jcq.org.uk</a>
CCEA	<a href="http://www.rewardinglearning.org.uk/">www.rewardinglearning.org.uk/</a>	Ofqual	<a href="http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/">www.ofqual.gov.uk/</a>
City & Guilds	<a href="http://www.cityandguilds.com">www.cityandguilds.com</a>	DfE	<a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/">www.education.gov.uk/</a>
Edexcel	<a href="http://www.edexcel.com">www.edexcel.com</a>	DfE – Exams Delivery Support	<a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/qualifications/examsadmin">www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/qualifications/examsadmin</a>
EDI	<a href="http://www.ediplc.com/">www.ediplc.com/</a>	DENI	<a href="http://www.deni.gov.uk/">www.deni.gov.uk/</a>
ICAAE	<a href="http://www.icaa.com/">www.icaa.com/</a>	UCAS	<a href="http://www.ucas.ac.uk/">www.ucas.ac.uk/</a>
OCR	<a href="http://www.ocr.org.uk/">www.ocr.org.uk/</a>	Welsh Government	<a href="http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/?lang=en">http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/?lang=en</a>
VTCT	<a href="http://www.vtct.org.uk/">www.vtct.org.uk/</a>		
WJEC	<a href="http://www.wjec.co.uk/">www.wjec.co.uk/</a>		
JCQ access arrangements, reasonable adjustments and special consideration	<a href="http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration/regulations-and-guidance">www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration/regulations-and-guidance</a>		
JCQ instructions for conducting examinations	<a href="http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/ice---instructions-for-conducting-examinations">www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/ice---instructions-for-conducting-examinations</a>		
DfE guidance on dealing with disruption to teaching and learning	<a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/emergencyplanning/a0069425/advice-on-severe-weather">http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/emergencyplanning/a0069425/advice-on-severe-weather</a>		
DENI guidance on dealing with disruption to teaching and learning	<a href="http://www.deni.gov.uk/exceptional_closures_checklist.pdf">www.deni.gov.uk/exceptional_closures_checklist.pdf</a> <a href="http://www.deni.gov.uk/action_plan_letter_to_schools.pdf">www.deni.gov.uk/action_plan_letter_to_schools.pdf</a> <a href="http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/85-schools/5-school-management/exceptional-closure-of-schools-due-to-adverse-weather.htm">www.deni.gov.uk/index/85-schools/5-school-management/exceptional-closure-of-schools-due-to-adverse-weather.htm</a> <a href="http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/schoolclosures">www.nidirect.gov.uk/schoolclosures</a>		

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