

## **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, QCA and UCAS.**

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## Introduction to the contingency plan

Examinations are taken by over a million 16 – 18 year-old students across England, Wales and Northern Ireland each year. The qualifications that students gain allow them to move on to further or higher education and employment. The scale of the system is huge with over 21 million GCSE and A level examination papers distributed to thousands of schools and colleges each year and over six and a half million GCSE, one million AS and 850,000 A level grades awarded annually. It is essential that a system of this size has a robust co-ordinated contingency plan in place to deal with any major disruption that may affect candidates.

In January 2006 the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (now Ofqual) facilitated a meeting of representatives from the UK qualifications regulators, the Department for Education and Skills (now Department for Children, Schools and Families), the unitary awarding bodies, UCAS and Higher Education Institutions to agree a joint high level contingency plan that would be implemented in the event of a crisis affecting an examination series. The plan has been updated regularly by the group since 2006. While Scotland operates a different examinations system, the Scottish Qualifications Authority has been involved in the compilation of this plan to ensure its approach adopts the same principles of fairness, transparency, evidence and integrity.<sup>1</sup>

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 whilst maintaining the integrity of the examination system and safeguarding standards. The plan is based on established processes and procedures which centres and others involved in the examinations system are familiar with. The joint plan 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 crisis, for example the Environment Agency, the Health Protection Agency or the police.

All awarding bodies have well established contingency plans in place to respond to disruption to the system. These have been implemented on many occasions, most recently to deal with the effects of the floods in 2007. The plans that are in place are capable of coping with significant levels of disruption to the examination system. This joint plan is intended to complement these, not to replace them. The plan should be used in conjunction with guidance published by JCQ and awarding bodies.

If the situation 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 any additional actions required.

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 that they need to take with regard to examinations. This plan provides useful information for schools and colleges and can be used to assist them with their contingency planning.

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<sup>1</sup> Scotland's awarding body, SQA has been working with Scottish Government and key stakeholders to agree actions to be taken in the event of a pandemic. These plans are based on the joint management framework and align with other awarding bodies to ensure candidates across borders are not disadvantaged.

**1. 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 centres with electronic access to examination papers via a secure external network. The Examinations Officer would need to ensure that copies were 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.

**2. Disruption of teaching time**

<i>Recommended contingency</i>	<i>Criteria for implementation of the contingency</i>	<i>Other possible actions</i>
Schools and colleges to facilitate alternative methods of learning.  Guidance on supporting learning if schools and colleges close for extended periods is available on teachernet: <a href="http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/emergencies/planning/flupandemic/">www.teachernet.gov.uk/emergencies/planning/flupandemic/</a>	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.	In the case of modular courses, schools and colleges may advise candidates to sit examinations at an alternative series.

### 3. Candidates unable to take examinations because of crisis

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 due to centre closure. If a candidate chooses not to sit an examination because they are concerned about infection 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. <a href="http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams_office/access_arrangements/regulationsandguidance/">www.jcq.org.uk/exams_office/access_arrangements/regulationsandguidance/</a>	A crisis prevents candidates from sitting examinations as normal.	Schools and colleges to offer candidates an opportunity to sit any examinations missed at the next available series.

### 4. 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>
Schools and colleges to seek advice from normal collection agency.  Schools and colleges to ensure secure storage of completed examination papers awaiting collection.	Normal collection arrangements have failed.	Schools and colleges to investigate use of alternative carriers and ensure proof of dispatch.

**5. 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 existing contingency plans.	Scanning process disrupted beyond acceptable levels.	Awarding bodies to redistribute personnel and arrange extra scanning shifts.  Awarding bodies to revert to traditional form of marking.

**6. 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 and train appropriately qualified reserve and new markers.  Prioritisation of marking based on results dates.

### 7. A school or college is completely 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>

### 8. Inability to meet results schedule

<i>Recommended contingency</i>	<i>Criteria for implementation of the contingency</i>	<i>Other possible actions</i>
Awarding bodies to prioritise GCE results processing.	Insufficient marks on the system to be able to award.	<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>