



Exams: Contingency Plan

Person Responsible:	Mr S Willis	Frequency of Review:	1 Year
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1 Purpose of the plan

This plan examines potential risks and issues that could cause disruption to the exams process at Upper Wharfedale School. 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 the Ofqual (and Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment) **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 document, *Preparing for disruption to examinations* (effective from 1 September 2023).

This plan also confirms Upper Wharfedale School compliance with JCQ’s **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, Exams 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.”

2 National Centre Number Register and other information requirements

The Head of Centre will also ensure that Howard Barton, Assistant Headteacher and Director of Learning for Science and Geography, 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.

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 escalated in accordance with the centre’s written Exams: Escalation Policy. In summary, the duties and responsibilities of the Head of Centre will pass to Howard Barton, Assistant Headteacher and Director of Learning for Science and Geography.

4 Possible causes to disruption to the exam process

4.1 Exams Officer extended absence at a critical stage of the exam process (cycle)

Criteria for implementation of the plan
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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 the post-results services.

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of disruption

General

- The Exams Officer maintains a schedule of tasks that need to be completed. This can be accessed by the Head of Centre at any time.
- The Exams Officer uses relevant Bromcom manuals that might be required at any time throughout the year. These can be accessed by the Head of Centre at any time.
- The Centre's Finance Administrator was formerly the Centre's Exams Administrator and so has knowledge of the exams cycle and can advise the Head of Centre and the Exams Officer's line manager (Howard Barton, Assistant Headteacher) in the running of exams.

Making entries

- The Head of Centre have access to the Bromcom Exams Organiser software in order to make entries.
- As above, the Finance Administrator can provide advice to the Head of Centre regarding making entries.
- Subject leaders and heads of faculty will be asked to check entries in good time of entry deadlines.

Coursework

- Where applicable the subject leader is aware of the deadline and the data that has to be submitted.
- The Head of Centre and/or the Exams Officers' line manager (Howard Barton) will submit coursework marks and check that coursework samples are sent by subject leaders by the required dates.

Exam Period

- In case of absence, the Exams Officer will inform the Head of Centre in good time so that the smooth running of examinations can be ensured.
- A folder will be made up during each exam period detailing which exams are taking place and when, with seating plans, access arrangements information, rooms, candidate lists, attendance registers and invigilator lists and can be found in the exams office clearly labelled.

Exam Papers

- The Exams Officer, the Centre's Business Manager, the Exams Officer's line manager (Howard Barton, Assistant Headteacher) and the Head of Centre have access to the keys to the secure exam storage cupboard.
- Exam papers are set out in the secure storage cupboards in date order so that the following day's exam papers are always easily found.
- Exam packets may need to be opened and re-packed if an exam is taking place in more than one room. This must be witnessed by a second person to check that the correct envelope is being opened – check JCQ guidelines for how far in advance of the exam this may be done.

Script despatch

- Scripts must be packed and either taken to reception for collection in the afternoon or locked up in the exams storage room in the secure cupboards (if it is too late for that day's collection). Parcelforce collect scripts between 12.30 pm and 4.00 pm.
- The exam board attendance registers are stored in exam room drawers – these must be completed and signed. One copy goes into the envelope with the scripts, the other is kept for our own records. Script envelopes need to be used to dispatch the scripts – these are also kept in the exam drawers.
- A yellow label must be stuck on the envelope – these are stored with exam board registers. A Parcelforce despatch form must be completed for each collection, they must be signed by the driver on collection.

Results

- The Head of Centre will access results using the manuals in the Exams Office.

4.2 ALS/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.

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of disruption

- The Exams Officer will closely monitor the access arrangement process in the event of the SENCo having an extended absence.

- The inclusion co-ordinator will liaise with the Head of Centre and centre staff regarding the identification and approval of access arrangements and collation of evidence.
- Specialist advice will be sought from outside agencies if the need arises.

4.3 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.

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of disruption

- The Exams Officer will closely monitor the key tasks undertaken by teaching staff and will liaise with the Head of Centre and other centre staff regarding entry information.
- The Head of Centre will monitor the progress of non-examination tasks, coursework marks and internal assessment marks and ensure steps are put in place to complete these and inform candidates of these within the appropriate timescales.
- Awarding bodies will be informed of any potential issues as soon as possible.

4.4 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.

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of disruption

- In the unforeseen event of the centre is unable to recruit and train sufficient invigilators, support staff within school will be trained and released to conduct exams.
- Invigilators are given their timetables in advance and should all report to the exams office on arrival.
- The folder will detail where they are meant to be and with which candidates.
- Invigilators' hours are organised by the Exams Officer. If an invigilator does not turn up for any reason a member of SLT will stand in for them.

4.5 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 to mitigate the impact of disruption

- If the Exams Officer is unable to identify sufficient/appropriate rooms during the planning period, timetable changes will be made to ensure that appropriate rooming is in place. This is also the case on peak exam days.
- If there is an unexpected incident at exam time preventing the use of a room, the Head of Centre will liaise with other local schools to accommodate the exam – Settle College, South Craven, Skipton Academy and Craven College. Special consideration will be applied for and the students kept secure for the duration of the delay.

4.6 Cyber-attack

Criteria for implementation of the plan

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

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of disruption

Upper Wharfedale School has a Cyber Response Plan and a Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery Plan that detail preventative strategies that protect the centre from cyber-attacks. These include:

- having a detailed Information Security Policy in place that is reviewed on an annual basis
- use of Multi-Factor Authentication in place to maximise the security of the centre's online systems and storage
- keeping all systems and software up to date through the regular installation of security patches and system updates
- not using Remote Desktop Protocols
- having Acceptable Use of ICT that all staff and students must sign and adhere to.

In the event of an incident that may compromise any aspect of the delivery of examinations, the centre's response will very much depend on the nature of the cyber-attack. However, some general actions that will be taken include:

- enacting the Cyber Recovery plan as detailed in the Business Continuity Plan
- contacting Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA) Cyber Emergency Assistance, the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), local police via Action Fraud, Local Authority and if appropriate, the Information Commissioner's Office.
- contacting the awarding bodies to inform them of the incident and how it may compromise any aspect of the delivery of examinations, asking for advice.

If the cyber-attack incident occurs during an examination season, the use of computer technology is likely to be limited to the need to access awarding bodies' secure websites to receive or send information and the use of word processors by a limited number of students who are allowed to use them according to their access arrangements. In these cases:

- the awarding bodies' secure websites could still be accessed in a number of ways, for example, using mobile phone technology as a wifi hotspot to access the internet or accessing them from an alternative location with an uncompromised internet connection;
- the laptops used in examinations are not connected to the internet and the software used for examinations can be installed on any computer;
- work on the laptops is saved locally rather than on servers and is backed up automatically on the computer every minute.

If there is a loss of data or the centre's servers are taken down by the cyber-attack, it could be the case that data and information required for the examinations is not accessible. However, in this eventuality there are several factors that would mitigate against the examinations not being able to go ahead. These include:

- the centre prepares all materials that require use of computers including servers before the start of the examination series, for example, all registers, seating plans and other documentation is printed for the whole examination season;

- the majority of school data is stored in Office 365, a managed Microsoft service that limits the risk of loss and includes backups;
- locally stored data is backed up on a daily basis on the local school servers.

Where data is unavailable from electronic storage, the awarding bodies would be contacted for advice and alternative arrangements would be put in place, even if it meant writing documents out by hand, in order for the examinations to take place.

4.7 Failure of IT systems

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- MIS system failure at final entry deadline
- MIS system failure during exams preparation
- Power outage immediately prior to or during an on-screen test
- MIS system failure at results release time

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of disruption

- In the event of a MIS system failure at crucial times during the exam cycle the ICT Manager will be informed as soon as possible and every step will be taken to reinstate the MIS to working condition.
- Exam boards will be notified in good time and steps will be taken to continue proceedings using manual systems.

4.8 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

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of disruption

If the fire alarm sounds the Exams Officer will immediately enter the main exam room (hall) and note the time of the alarm. The Head of Centre will liaise with the Exams Officer regarding the necessity for stopping the exam and evacuating the building. If the need arises for an evacuation, the normal school Fire Evacuation Procedures for examinations will apply:

A) THE SCHOOL HALL

1. Candidates will stop writing and close their answer booklets.
2. The Exams Officer will remind the candidates of the need to remain in silence and not communicate with any other candidate.
3. Candidates will evacuate the room one row at a time via the fire exit door from the hall. They will take their desk labels with them for identification purposes.
4. One invigilator will go with the first group of students and the second (if available) will go with the second group of students. The first invigilator will take the internal attendance register with him/her.
5. The Exams Officer will be the last to leave the room, having secured the evacuation of all candidates and the room.
6. Candidates will proceed to the bus turning circle and line up in exam room order, leaving adequate space between rows and columns to maintain the security of the exam.
7. The first invigilator will take the register (with the aid of the desk labels for identification) and remind candidates not to communicate with the rest of the school who will be lined up in the tennis courts next to the bus turning circle.

8. The Exams Officer will report to the Head of Centre when all students are accounted for.

Returning to the Exam Room:

9. Candidates will return to the exam room in reverse order. The Exams Officer will go with the first group of students and the second invigilator (if available) will go with the second group and the first invigilator with the last group of candidates.

10. In assessing whether or not to continue the exam the Exams Officer will liaise with the Head of Centre (or his/her nominated deputy) as to whether or not the session will continue. The Head of Centre (or his/her nominated deputy) will take the following factors into consideration:

- The length of time that has passed since the official start time;
- Whether the minimum time for remaining the examination has passed to maintain the integrity of the exam;
- The amount of time left to complete the exam(s);
- Whether there is sufficient time to complete the exam before another session starts;
- Whether continuing the exam will take candidates over the session limit of 3 hours, taking particular care to consider candidates with access arrangements which include extra time.

If the Head of Centre (or his/her nominated deputy) are satisfied that the above conditions have not been breached he/she will ask the Exams Officer to continue the exam.

11. The Exams Officer will ask all candidates to mark their work with an Asterisk (star) so that the exam board can identify where the candidates' concentration was disturbed.

12. The candidates will continue with the exam and be given the full allocated amount of time (including stoppage) for the completion of the exam.

13. Scripts will be submitted to the exam board in the usual manner at the end of the exam.

14. The Exams Officer will apply for special consideration for all affected candidates.

15. If the above conditions cannot be met the Exams Officer will liaise with the Head of Centre regarding a decision to abandon the session.

If the session is to be abandoned, this will be either:

- because of consideration of the criteria above,
- because re-entry to the premises cannot be secured,
- because the risk of communication between candidates, the validation of the exam cannot be guaranteed.

16. The Exams Officer will contact the exam board at the first opportunity and then apply for Special Consideration for all affected candidates.

17. Partially completed papers will be sent to the exam board by the usual means if requested.

If evacuation is unnecessary:

- The Exams Officer will apply procedures (11) – (15) above providing the conditions in (10) above can be guaranteed.

B) ALL OTHER EXAM ROOMS IN USE AT THE SAME TIME AS THE HALL

1. The invigilator in charge of the room will follow procedures (1) – (7) above, immediately evacuating the room and accompanying the candidates to the bus turning circle.

2. The Invigilator will wait for further instruction from the Exams Officer who will communicate with the invigilator at the earliest opportunity.

3. The Exams Officer will apply procedures (8) and (10) – (17) above.

C) EXAMS TAKING PLACE IN OTHER EXAM ROOMS WHEN THE HALL IS NOT IN USE (including on-line exams in the ICT Room)

1. Procedures (1) – (14) above will apply, providing the conditions in (10) above can be guaranteed.

If the lock down bell sounds, the full policy will be adhered to and students will be kept in the exam hall or room, away from doors and windows. A note of the time will be made and the exam board will be notified as soon as it is safe to do so.

4.9 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.
- Centre closed interrupting the of normal teaching and learning

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of disruption

- Where there is disruption to teaching time and students miss teaching and learning, it remains the responsibility of the centre to prepare students, as usual, for examinations.
- In case of modular courses, centres may advise candidates to sit examinations in an alternative series.
- Upper Wharfedale School has plans in place to facilitate alternative methods of learning, through the use of Microsoft Teams and other means of online teaching.

4.10 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:

- Candidates do not turn up for an exam.
- Candidates turn up for an exam that they are not entered for.
- Candidates are entered for the wrong paper.
- Candidates are taken ill during an exam.
- Awarding Body communications systems fail – online exams.
- Candidates are unable to sit their exam due to a power outage in the exam room.

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of disruption

Candidates do not turn up for exam

- Message Reception to ring home: students can be admitted into the exams room up to 1 hour after the published start of the exam when the exam is over 1 hour in duration.
- If they cannot attend the exam, students can be given the opportunity to sit the exam at the next available series and/or special consideration can be applied as long as the adverse circumstances are beyond their control and if the student has met the minimum requirements.

Candidates turn up for an exam that they are not entered

- Check with Subject leader/SMO.
- Find an exam paper, seat them, amend the attendance list and make an entry. Charge the late fee to the department. If this is a recurring problem, consult the Senior Leadership Team.

Candidates are entered for the wrong paper

- Contact the subject leader to confirm the error.
- Contact the awarding body for a copy of paper if necessary.
- Provide exam paper, seat and amend the entry.

Candidate taken ill during an exam

- The invigilator will ring Reception/on-call member of staff to get help from a first aider.
- Apply for Special Consideration for the student(s).

Awarding Body communications systems fail – online exams

- Contact the awarding body immediately.

Candidates are unable to sit their exam due to a power outage in the exam room

- The Site Manager and ICT Manager will be informed as soon as possible.
- The exam will be re-roomed to rooms with power if possible.
- The exam will be started late within JCQ regulations if power is restored.
- Special consideration to be applied for only if external examinations cannot be taken, and it is the final exam opportunity for the students concerned before cash-in. To be completed within 7 days of exam date.

4.11 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 unforeseen emergency)

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- The Centre is at risk of being unable to open as normal for scheduled examinations.

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of disruption

If there are timetabled examinations scheduled on a day when the Headteacher decides that the school should be closed to staff and students, the following procedures will be implemented:

- Upper Wharfedale School has a team of staff who, should conditions allow, are able to come to School to ensure that timetabled exams may go ahead. In such an eventuality, the school as an examination centre will only open to candidates sitting timetabled GCSE written examinations.
- In order that the school can ensure the correct administration of exams, the team has to include the Exams Officer or a suitably trained member of the leadership team. If these members of staff are not able to get into school the scheduled exam(s) will not run.
- In line with JCQ (Joint Council for Qualifications) guidance, the school will endeavour to be open and, where conditions allow, timetabled examinations will go ahead. If the start of the exam is delayed candidates will be isolated and the exam board will be notified. Special consideration may be applied.

Advice and recommendations from the JCQ state:

“Wherever possible, the examinations should be conducted according to the centre’s published examination timetable” and “it is important to note that rescheduling the examinations is not an option due to the consequences that it would have across the system.”

- In the event that weather is adverse and the school is closed on a day of a scheduled public examination the Headteacher will assess the possibility of key staff being able to attend. If she is confident that key staff are able to attend, the exam will run.
- The school website will be updated to show timetabled examinations are still going ahead and advising of any revised start times. Start times may be delayed for morning exams if a number of candidates are late (permission will be sought from relevant awarding bodies).
- All candidates are expected to make the effort to come in and sit their examination. The decisions regarding travelling to school for an exam rest with individual families, taking consideration of the weather and road conditions locally to them.
- If a candidate is unable to get into school on an exam day as a result of inclement weather, it is imperative that families contact the school as soon as possible to explain that this has occurred. If the Headteacher were

to take a decision that the school has to close, as it is unsafe to open, we would notify the exam board that we had been unable to run the exams that were scheduled for that day.

Alternative venue details

- If the school has to be closed for a prolonged period of time which, by doing so may affect more than one examination, students may need to sit the exam at an alternative venue. The agreed venue for this is The Skipton Academy. Transport for students will be arranged as soon as possible, along with necessary other arrangements such as exam desks and secure transportation of papers.

In the event of the centre having to partially close the centre will:

- consider opening school for examinations and examination candidates only;
- use alternative venues in agreement with relevant awarding organisations (e.g. 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.

4.12 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.

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of disruption

- Awarding organisations will provide centres with electronic access to examination papers via a secure external network.
- The centres will ensure that copies are received, made and stored under secure conditions and should have plans in place to facilitate such an action.
- Awarding organisations will provide guidance on the conduct of examinations in such circumstances.
- As a last resort, and in close collaboration with centres and regulators, awarding organisations will consider scheduling of the examination on an alternative date.

Upper Wharfedale School may also consider:

- sourcing alternative couriers for delivery of hard copies
- receiving examination papers by facsimile if electronic transfer is not possible.

4.13 Disruption to the transportation of completed examination scripts

Criteria for implementation of the plan

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

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of disruption

- Where examinations are part of the national 'yellow label' service or where awarding organisations arrange collections, the centre will seek advice from awarding organisations.
- The centre will not make their own arrangements for transportation unless told to do so by the awarding body.
- For any examinations where centres make their arrangements for transportation, the centre will investigate alternative dispatch options that comply with the requirements detailed in the JCQ *Instructions for conducting examinations*.

- The centre will ensure the secure storage of completed examination scripts until collection.

4.14 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 bodies

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of disruption

- Awarding organisations will generate candidate marks for affected assessments based on other appropriate evidence of candidate achievement as defined by the awarding organisations
- Where marks cannot be generated by awarding organisations candidates may need to retake affected assessment in a subsequent assessment series.
- It is the responsibility of the Head of Centre to communicate this immediately to the relevant awarding organisation(s) and subsequently to students and their parents or carers.

4.15 Centre unable to distribute results as normal or facilitate post results services

(including in the event of the centre being unavailable on results day owing to unforeseen emergency)

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 to mitigate the impact of disruption

Distribution of results:

- The centre will make arrangements to access its results at an alternative site, in agreement with the relevant awarding organisation.
- The centre will make arrangements to coordinate access to post results services from an alternative site.
- The centre will share facilities with other centres if this is possible, in agreement with the relevant awarding organisation.
- The centre will arrange for the results to be collected from an alternative venue and communicate this to students via the school website and any other means possible.

Facilitation of post results services:

- The centre will arrange to make post results requests at an alternative location.
- The centre will contact the relevant awarding organisations if electronic post results requests are not possible.

The agreed venue in both the above cases is The Skipton Academy.

5 Further guidance to inform procedures and implement contingency planning

5.1 DfE

Meeting digital and technology standards in schools and colleges

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

5.2 Ofqual

What schools and colleges and other centres 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 written contingency plan, to mitigate any incident they may 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

Disruption to assessments or exams

In the absence of any instruction from the relevant awarding organisation, the school or college should assume that any exam or timetabled assessment should take place if it is possible for it to do so. This may mean having to relocate to alternative premises.

Alternative arrangements should be discussed 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 [JCQ’s notice to centres on exam contingency plans](#) and [JCQ’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

1. Review your contingency plan well in advance of each exam series.
2. 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

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 students, parents and carers 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.

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 to the relevant awarding organisation 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.

Steps the awarding organisation should take:

Exam planning

1. Establish and maintain and at all times comply with an up-to-date written contingency plan.
2. Ensure that the arrangements in place centres and other third parties enable them to deliver and award qualifications in accordance with their conditions of recognition.

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 are able to 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

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 student misses 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:

- [JCQ'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 for 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

(Ofqual guidance extract above 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) <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>)

5.3 JCQ

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.

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 a 'contingency sessions' for examinations, summer 2024. This is consistent with the qualification regulators' document *Exam system contingency plan: England, Wales and Northern Ireland*: <https://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 of 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 is agreed to reschedule the examinations and the affected candidates will be expected to make themselves available in such circumstances. The decision regarding the rescheduling 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.

(JCQ guidance above taken directly from **Instructions for conducting examinations 2023-2024** (<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

- <http://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

- www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/general-regulations

Guidance notes on alternative site arrangements

- www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/online-forms

Guidance notes for transferred candidates

- www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/online-forms

Instructions for conducting examinations

- www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/ice---instructions-for-conducting-examinations

A guide to the special consideration process

- www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration/regulations-and-guidance

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

- www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/general-regulations/

Information for centres affected by RAAC – the delivery of non-examination assessments and the special consideration process

- www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/non-examination-assessments/

GOV.UK

Emergency planning and response: Exam and assessment disruption;

- www.gov.uk/guidance/emergencies-and-severe-weather-schools-and-early-years-settings
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

Wales

School closures: examinations

- gov.wales/school-closures-examinations

Opening schools in extremely bad weather and extreme hot weather:

- www.gov.wales/opening-schools-well-childcare-and-play-settings-extreme-bad-weather-and-extreme-hot-weather

Northern Ireland

Exceptional closure days

- www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/exceptional-closure-days

Checklist for Principals when considering Opening or Closure of School - exceptional closure of schools

- www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/checklist-exceptional-closure-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:

1. Further ransomware attacks on UK education by cyber criminals - NCSC.GOV.UK
2. Mitigating malware and ransomware attacks
3. Offline backups in an online world
4. Backing up your data
5. Practical resources to help schools improve their cyber security
6. Building Resilience: Ransomware, the risks to schools and ways to prevent it
7. School staff offered training to help shore up cyber defences - NCSC.GOV.UK