HAGLEY CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

SEMPER FIDELIS

Exam Contingency Plan

Version	4
Date created/updated	October 2025
Ratified by	Local Governing Body
Date ratified	02/12/2025
Date issued	03/12/2025
Policy review date	Autumn 2026
Post holder responsible	Exams Officer
Director / LGB Chairperson	Mr G Taylor Smith

Commitment to Equality:

We are committed to providing a positive working environment which is free from prejudice and unlawful discrimination and any form of harassment, bullying or victimisation. We have developed a number of key policies to ensure that the principles of Catholic Social Teaching in relation to human dignity and dignity in work become embedded into every aspect of school life and these policies are reviewed regularly in this regard.

This Exam Contingency Policy has been approved and adopted by Hagley Catholic High School Governing Body on the 2nd December 2025 and will be reviewed in Autumn 2026.

Signed by LGB representative for Hagley Catholic High School:

G Taylor Smith

Signed by Principal:

J Hodgson

Summary of Changes

Page 4 Additional wording 'reviewed annually by a senior leader and communicated within the centre'
Removal of paragraph "This will allow members of the senior leadership team to act immediately in the event of an emergency or staff absence. 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."
Expanded requirement for alternative sites: now states "alternative site or sites which can be used" rather than just one.
Backup requirement updated: specifies electronic work must be backed up on two devices, including one off-site via the cloud.

Page 5 Wording updated to require completion even if there are no changes to centre details.

Page 6 Heading changed from "Principal extended absence" to "Principal/senior leader(s) with oversight of examination and assessment administration absence".

Page 7 Heading expanded to include "or other key staff essential to the examination process".

Page 8 Additional wording "invigilation trained school staff"
Additional bullet point "In the event of long-term invigilator unavailability during peak exam periods, the Exams Officer should consult with the Principal to explore emergency training options for other centre staff

Page 9 Heading changed from "Cyber-attack" to "Cyber-security".
New requirement: all centre staff must undertake Cyber Security Training annually.

Page 10 Updated to include lockdown procedures alongside evacuation.

Page 11 Heading changed to “Centre may not be able to open for examinations” (previously “HCHS at risk of being unable to open as normal”).

Purpose of the plan

This plan examines potential risks and issues that could cause disruption to the examination/assessment process at Hagley Catholic High 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 Exam system contingency plan: England, Wales and Northern Ireland*** *which provides guidance in the document 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.**

This plan details how Hagley Catholic High School complies with the JCQ's **General Regulations for Approved Centres** (5.3 Centre management) by having in place for inspection that must be reviewed and updated anually by a member of the senior leadership team and communicated within the centre:

- A contingency plan which covers all aspects of examination/assessments administration and delivery

Contingency arrangements

The centre must have an up to date written contingency plan.

The contingency plan must cover all aspects of examination/assessment administration and delivery. Senior leaders must have robust contingency arrangements in place that will minimise the risk to examination/assessment administration and delivery and any adverse impact on candidates.

The plan must cover the following scenarios:

- the head of centre, relevant senior leader(s) with oversight of examination and assessment administration, SENCo (or equivalent role), examinations officer or any other key staff essential to the examination process being absent at a critical stage of the examination cycle
- the potential impact of other events such as flooding which could lead to all or parts of the centre becoming unavailable
- potential issues with the centre's IT systems

As part of the contingency plan the centre must identify an alternative site or alternative sites which can be used if examinations cannot be conducted at the registered address. Larger centres may require more than one potential alternative site or different sites for different Year Groups.

The centre must have at least one senior member of staff (senior designated contact) who is available to manage emergency requests from awarding bodies that are results related during the summer holidays. However, a number of contacts can be provided to reduce the risk of this falling on one individual throughout the summer holidays.

The centre must ensure that candidates' work is produced electronically it is backed-up and should consider the contingency of candidates' work being backed-up on two separate devices, including one

off-site back-up via the cloud. Appropriate security arrangements must be implemented which protect candidates' work in the event of IT system corruption and cyber-attacks. (GR 3.17-19)

Operating across more than one centre

National Centre Number Register and other information requirements

The Principal will ensure that the centre completes the National Centre Number Register annual update by the end of October every year (even if there are no changes to centre details) which includes providing senior designated contact details (this might include a personal mobile number and/or email address). These must be the contact details of someone who can be reached in an emergency if the centre is closed over the summer and who can mobilise resources to respond to the issue. (GR 5.3)

Principal/senior leader(s) absence at a critical stage of the exam cycle

Where The Principal 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 escalation process.

Possible causes of disruption to the exam process

1. Exams Officer extended absence at key points in the exam process (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.
- Insufficient invigilators recruited and trained.

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 e.g. 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.

Action taken at Hagley Catholic High School to mitigate Exams Officer extended absence at key points in the exam process (cycle):

- Principal (SLT) to assign the above duties to a substitute competent person so that the exam process is not interrupted and continues as normal.
- The Exams Assistant is trained in all of the above tasks and should be involved in ensuring that all duties are completed.

2. Principal/senior leader(s) with oversight of examination and assessment administration 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

- Does not have in place a member of the senior leadership team who will provide support and guidance to the Exams Officer and ensure that the integrity and security of examinations and assessments is maintained throughout an examination series.
- Does not have in place guidance that all local Health and Safety rules are complied with by the school.
- Does not have relevant policies up to date and available for inspection.

Pre-exams

- Inadequate staff recruitment, selection and training.
- Appropriate training to staff not provided.
- Conflicts of interests and awarding bodies not informed.
- Arrangements to co-ordinate and standardise all marking of centre assessed components are not in place.
- NCN register not completed.

Exam time

- Investigation of malpractice not undertaken.
- Exams/assessments not taken under the conditions prescribed by awarding bodies.

Action taken at Hagley Catholic High School to mitigate Principal extended absence at key points in the exam process (cycle):

- In the absence of the Principal the Assistant Head Teacher (Line Manager to Exams Officer) will provide support and guidance to the Exams Officer and ensure that the integrity and security of the examinations and assessments is maintained throughout an examination series.
- In the absence of the Principal and the Assistant Head Teacher who line manages the Exams Officer, the Vice Principal will provide support and guidance to the Exams Officer and ensure that the integrity and security of the examinations and assessments is maintained throughout an examination series.
- In the unlikely absence of all three of the above, the CEO of the Multi Academy Company will provide support and guidance to the exams officer and ensure that the integrity and security of the examinations and assessments is maintained throughout an examination series.

3. SENCO extended absence at key points in 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 their terms of 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.

Action taken at Hagley Catholic High School to mitigate SENCO extended absence at key points in the exam process (cycle):

- Principal (SLT) to assign the above duties to a substitute competent person so that the exam process is not interrupted and continues as normal.

4. Teaching staff (or other key staff essential to the examination process) 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 or other penalty fees being charged by awarding bodies.
- Non-examination assessment tasks (including controlled assessment and coursework) 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.

Action taken at Hagley Catholic High School to mitigate staff extended absence at key points in the exam process (cycle):

- Principal to assign another member of the teaching department to deputise and provide the above information, so that the exam process is not interrupted and continues as normal. This would usually be the second in department if there is one.
- Exams Officer to liaise with this person in place of the absent Head of Department.

5. 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.

Action taken at Hagley Catholic High School to mitigate lack of appropriately trained invigilators or invigilator absence:

- Exams Officer ensures that sufficient number of invigilators are recruited and trained.
- On peak exam days or bad weather days, where there are insufficient invigilators present, invigilation trained school staff will be seconded at short notice to act as invigilators.
- In the event of long-term invigilator unavailability during peak exam periods, the Exams Officer should consult with the Principal to explore emergency training options for other centre staff

6. **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.

Action taken at Hagley Catholic High School to mitigate lack of appropriate rooms or main venues unavailable at short notice:

- Exams Officer ensures that sufficient number of exam rooms are available for the planned exam season, if main venues unavailable, where possible, make use of any 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.
- If the exam rooms are not available, the Exam Officer will inform each awarding body with which exams are due to be taken with as soon as possible. The responsibility for deciding whether it is safe for the school to open lies with the Principal;
- The Principal is responsible for taking advice, or following instructions from relevant local or national agencies in deciding whether the School is able to open;
- If possible, the school will open for examinations and examination candidates only;
- Alternatively, the school may use other venues (namely Haybridge High School) in agreement with relevant awarding bodies.
- Candidates will be informed of changes via Year group briefing where possible and/or via email or teams. Parents/carers informed via email.
- If using an alternative venue, the exams team will ensure the secure transportation of question papers or assessment materials.
- After the exam consideration will be given to 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.

7. Cyber-security

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- Where any incidents might compromise any aspect of assessment delivery, such as a cyber-attack

Action taken at Hagley Catholic High School to mitigate the impact of the disruption:

- Annual Training will take place reviewing risks and weak points and on awareness of all types of social engineering/phishing attempt. All centre staff will undertake Cyber Security Training annually;
- Provide training on the importance of creating strong unique passwords and keeping all account details secret;
- Enable additional security settings wherever possible;
- Update any passwords that may have been exposed;
- Set up secure account recovery options, review and manage connected applications and monitor accounts.
- Regularly review account access including removing access when no longer required.
- Upon the notification of a suspected incident members of the Emmaus Catholic MAC ICT Support team would invoke the Emmaus MAC Incident Handling Policy including Cyber Response Plan – this document provides a framework and guidance for managing and responding to ICT incidents across the MAC IT infrastructure, minimising impact and putting measures in place for essential ICT to be maintained.

- Authorised staff will have access where necessary to a device which complies with awarding bodies multi-factor authentication (MFA) requirements to enable them to securely access awarding bodies online systems in line with JCQ requirements.
- Report any actual or suspected compromise of an awarding body's online systems immediately to the relevant awarding body.

8. Failure of IT systems

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- IT system corruption affecting candidates' work.
- 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.

Action taken at Hagley Catholic High School to mitigate failure of IT systems:

- Exams Officer to contact relevant awarding bodies to agree alternative methods of transferring the data.
- Liaise with Centre IT Support and Arbor.

9. Emergency evacuation of the exam room (or centre lock down)

Criteria for implementation of the plan

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

Action taken at Hagley Catholic High School to mitigate the impact of the disruption:

- Invigilator to follow the emergency evacuation/lockdown procedure (all invigilators trained and guidance available in all exam boxes).
- Where accommodation is limited, prioritise candidates whose progression will be severely delayed if they do not take their exam or timetabled assessment when planned.
- Exams Officer to make a full report of the incidents and action taken and send to the relevant awarding body.
- Where candidates are unable to return to the building, the Exams Officer to contact the awarding body for advice.
- 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.

10. 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.

Action taken at Hagley Catholic High School to mitigate the impact of the disruption:

- Recognise it remains the responsibility of the centre to prepare students, as usual, for examinations.
- The Principal with the SLT will facilitate alternative methods of learning, alternative venues or both.
- Communicate with candidates (and where appropriate, parents/carers) information relating to alternative methods of learning.
- Prioritise candidates who will be facing examinations shortly.
- Advise candidates, where appropriate, to sit examinations in the next available series.
- 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.
- The Principal to communicate with parents, carers and candidates about the potential for disruption to teaching time and the plans to address this.

11. Candidates at risk of being unable to take examinations - centre remains open

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- Candidates at risk of being unable to attend the examination centre to take examinations as normal because of a crisis.

Action taken at Hagley Catholic High School to mitigate the impact of the disruption:

- The Exams Officer with Line Manager and Principal will focus on options that enable candidates to take their examinations (referencing the JCQ document Preparing for disruption to examinations)
- The Exams Officer is to communicate with relevant awarding bodies at the outset to make them aware of the issue and will take advice offered by the awarding body on the options for candidates who have not been able to take the scheduled examinations
- The school to investigate alternative arrangements for candidates to take their examinations in liaison with and agreement of the awarding bodies and ensuring secure transportation of question papers or assessment materials to the alternative site.
- The Principal 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 material affected, if so, apply for special consideration.

12 Centre may not be able to open for examinations as normal during the examinations

- Hagley Catholic High School unable to open as normal for scheduled examinations.

Action taken at Hagley Catholic High School to mitigate the impact of the disruption:

- The Exams Officer with Line Manager and Principal will focus on options that enable candidates to take their examinations.
- If the school is unable to open as normal for examinations, the Exams Officer will inform each awarding body with which examinations are due to be taken, as soon as is possible and discuss alternative arrangements with the awarding body if the exam or assessment cannot take place.
- The responsibility for deciding whether it is safe for the school to open lies with the Governing Body. The Governing Body with the Principal is responsible for taking advice or following instructions from relevant local or national agencies in deciding whether the school is able to open.

- If possible, the school will open for examinations and examination candidates only.
- Alternatively, the school may use other venues (namely Haybridge High School) in agreement with relevant awarding body (e.g. share facilities with other centres or use other public building, if possible).
- The Principal / SLT are to advise the Exams Officer in a timely manner of the full postal address of any alternative accommodation which affects the full cohort. This will enable the Exams Officer to submit the information to all the relevant awarding bodies to request permission.
- Where accommodation is limited, prioritise candidates whose progression will be severely delayed if they do not take their exam or timetable assessment when planned.
- For certain candidates, the school may be able offer an opportunity to sit any examinations missed at the next available series.
- The school may also apply to awarding bodies for special consideration for candidates where they have met the minimum requirements.
- All arrangements would be agreed with the awarding body before being put in place. In such instances, details would be communicated to candidates via the school's website, email and text facilities. Staff involved in exams (including invigilators) would be contacted by email, telephone and text.

13 Disruption to exams in a pandemic

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- Centre closed or candidates unable to attend for an extended period during normal teaching or study supported time, interrupting the provision of normal teaching and learning and exams due to a pandemic.

Action taken at Hagley Catholic High School to mitigate the impact of the disruption:

- The Principal with SLT to facilitate alternative methods of learning following Hagley Catholic High School's Remote Education and Online Policy.
- The Principal, SLT and Exams Officer to follow all DFE, Ofqual and JCQ guidelines relating to exams and keep abreast of all changes.
- The Principal, SLT and Exams Officer to follow all relevant awarding bodies guidelines.
- The Principal to communicate with parents, carers and candidates the arrangements for online learning and the situation with regard to exams and ensures the information is widely shared via school website and relevant means.
- Should exams take place, ensure that Hagley Catholic High School procedures 'Considering Health and Safety while conducting exams in relation to a pandemic' are followed.
- Exams Officer to keep invigilators updated with latest guidelines and trained appropriately.
- If relevant, the Exams Officer to apply for special consideration.

14 Disruption in the distribution of examination papers to Hagley Catholic High School

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- Disruption to the distribution of examination papers to the centre in advance of examinations.

Action taken at Hagley Catholic High School to mitigate the impact of the disruption:

- The Exams Officer will communicate with awarding bodies to organise alternative delivery of papers. They may provide secure electronic access to the papers, or they may source alternative couriers to deliver hard copies of examination papers to the school;
- Copies received would be stored under secure exam conditions and guidance from the awarding body will be followed on the conduct 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

15 Delay in collection arrangements for completed examination scripts

Criteria for implementation of the plan

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

Action taken at Hagley Catholic High School to mitigate the impact of the disruption:

- The Exams Officer is to communicate with relevant awarding bodies at the outset to resolve the issue.
- School would seek advice from awarding body regarding yellow label service examination papers and will not make its own arrangements for transportation unless told to do so by the awarding body.
- Alternative dispatch options to be investigated that comply with requirements detailed in JCQ Instructions for Conducting Examinations for exams where the school makes their own arrangements for transportation under guidance from the awarding body.
- In all instances, exam papers would be stored under secure conditions until collection.

16 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.

Action taken at Hagley Catholic High School to mitigate the impact of the disruption:

- The Exams Officer is to communicate this immediately to the relevant awarding body and the Principal subsequently to candidates and their parents or carers.
- 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 the awarding body, inform candidates they may need to retake the affected assessment in a subsequent assessment series.
- If relevant the Exams Officer to apply for special consideration from awarding bodies.

17 Hagley Catholic High School 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 an unforeseen emergency)

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- Centre is unable to access or manage the distribution of results to candidates, (including in the event of the centre being unavailable on results day owing to an unforeseen emergency) or to facilitate post-results services.

Action taken at Hagley Catholic High School to mitigate the impact of the disruption:

- The Exams Officer is to contact awarding bodies about alternative options and if necessary, in agreement with the relevant awarding body, make arrangements for results to be accessed at an alternative site.
- The Principal with the Exams Officer to consider making arrangements to make post results available at an alternative site.
- The Principal with Exams Officer is to communicate with parents, carers and candidates to inform them of the revised arrangements.
- Exams Officer to contact the relevant awarding body if electronic post results requests are not possible.
- Alternatively, the school may use other venues (namely Haybridge High School) in agreement with relevant awarding body (e.g. share facilities with other centres or use other public building, if possible).

Changes 2025/2026

(Changed) Under heading Contingency arrangements slight change of wording to reflect GR 3.17-19.

(Changed) Under heading National Centre Number Register and other information requirements slight change of wording to reflect GR 5.3.

(Changed) Heading 2. Principal/senior leader(s) with oversight of examination and assessment administration absence at a critical stage of the exam cycle

(Changed) Heading 4. Teaching staff (or other key staff essential to the examination process) extended absence at a critical stage of the exam cycle

(Changed) Heading 7. Cyber security and amended criteria for implementation of the plan.

(Changed) Heading 12. Centre may not be able to open for examinations

(Updated) Under heading below Further guidance to inform procedures and implement contingency planning, relevant links and information has been updated and outdated links/information removed.

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

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.

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.

See also:

- JCQ's notice to centres on exam contingency plans and JCQ's notice on preparing for disruption to examinations

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 experiencing 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 question 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 parents, carers and students 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 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

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

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 students miss an exam or are disadvantaged by the disruption you should ask the awarding organisation about applying for special consideration.

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.

See also:

- JCQ's guidance on special considerations

Wider communications

The regulators, Ofqual in England, Qualifications Wales in Wales and CCEA in Northern Ireland, will share timely and accurate information, as required, with awarding organisations, government departments and other stakeholders.

The Department for Education in England, the Department of Education 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 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 schoolsfrom 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
- Protective security and preparedness for education settings from the DfE
- 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 2025-2026 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.

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 If the head of centre decides the centre cannot be opened for scheduled examinations, the centre's contingency plan must be invoked, utilising the centre's alternative site(s) and the relevant awarding bodies 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 2026. 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

15.6 The designation of 'contingency sessions' within the common examination timetable is for use in the event of national or significant local disruption to examinations. It is part of the awarding bodies' standard contingency planning for examinations.

15.7 In the event that there is national disruption to a day of examinations in summer 2026, 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.

15.8 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. 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

Preparing for disruption to examinations

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

GOV.UK

Emergency planning and response: Exam and assessment disruption

Dispatch of exam scripts guide: 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

Cyber Security for Schools

Cyber security training for school staff