

Joint Contingency Plan

for the Examination System in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

This plan is jointly owned by:

Ofqual, DCELLS, CCEA, AQA, Edexcel, OCR, WJEC, City & Guilds, JCQ, DCSF, DENI, QCDA and UCAS.



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Contents

Aims of the Joint Contingency Plan	2
Communications.....	3
Background and Ownership	3
1. Disruption of teaching time – centres are closed for an extended period	4
2. Disruption in the distribution of examination papers	4
3. Candidates unable to take examinations because of a crisis - centres remain open	5
4. Centres are closed during the examination period	6
5. Disruption to the collection of completed examination papers.....	7
6. Disruption to the scanning process – where completed examination papers are being scanned in preparation for on-screen marking	7
7. Markers unable to mark examination papers according to marking schedules	8
8. Difficulty in meeting results schedule	8
9. Centres are closed on results day	9

Aims of the Joint Contingency Plan

The Joint Contingency Plan is designed to ensure consistency of response in the event of major disruption to the examinations system affecting significant numbers of candidates across several awarding organisations. All awarding organisations have their own well-established contingency plans in place to respond to such disruptions, and these have been implemented already on numerous occasions. This joint contingency plan takes into account these processes and procedures and is designed to complement them, not replace them.

It will be implemented only in the event of major disruption to the system and any actions taken will be subject to the advice of the official agencies dealing with the specific circumstances being faced, for example the police, Environment Agency or Health Protection Agency.

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

The contingencies applied will be selected based on the context of the disruption.

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

Communications

The scale of the exams, qualifications and testing system in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is huge, involving more than a million learners each year and thousands of centres. It is vital that a system of this size has robust and co-ordinated contingency plans in place to deal with any major disruption that may affect candidates.

In the event of major disruption, communication is a key factor in ensuring an effective and consistent response across the agencies involved. This includes communications between the organisations involved in the response and communications to stakeholders such as centres, candidates, parents or carers and the public.

The organisations involved in this Joint Contingency Plan are committed to:

- sharing timely and accurate information as required to meet the aims of the plan
- communicating with stakeholders so they are aware of disruption to the exams, the contingency measures being implemented and any actions required of them as a result
- ensuring that any messages to the public are clear and accurate.

Background and Ownership

The Joint Contingency Plan was first developed in 2006 and has been updated regularly since then. It is jointly owned by Ofqual, DCELLS, CCEA, AQA, Edexcel, OCR, WJEC, City & Guilds, JCQ, DCSF, DENI, QCDA and UCAS. Ofqual acts as the central point of contact for the Contingency Plan and convener of the Crisis Management Group. While Scotland operates a different examinations system, the Scottish Qualifications Authority has been involved in the compilation of the plan to ensure its approach adopts the same principles of fairness, transparency, evidence and integrity.

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

1. Disruption of teaching time – centres are closed for an extended period

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- centres are closed or candidates are unable to attend for an extended period during normal teaching or supported study time, interrupting the provision of normal teaching and learning.

Recommended actions:

Where there is disruption to teaching time and students miss teaching and learning it remains the responsibility of centres to prepare students, as usual, for examinations.

- in the case of modular courses, centres may advise candidates to sit examinations at an alternative series
- centres should have plans in place to facilitate alternative methods of learning. Guidance on supporting learning if centres in England close for extended periods is available on the Teachernet website:

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/educationoverview/severeweather>

2. Disruption in the distribution of examination papers

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- disruption to the distribution of examination papers to centres in advance of examinations.

Recommended actions:

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

3. Candidates unable to take examinations because of a crisis - centres remain open

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- candidates are unable to attend examination centres to take examinations as normal.

Recommended actions:

- centres to offer candidates an opportunity to sit any examinations missed at the next available series
- centres to apply to awarding organisations for special consideration for candidates where they have met the minimum requirements. If a candidate chooses not to sit an examination without a legitimate reason they should be aware that special consideration rules will not apply.

JCQ guidance on special consideration can be accessed through JCQ website.

http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams_office/access_arrangements/regulationsandguidance/

4. Centres are closed during the examination period

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- centres are unable to open for scheduled examinations.

As part of their general planning for emergencies, centres should cover the impact on examinations. The responsibility for deciding whether it is safe for a centre to open lies with the head of centre. The head is responsible for taking advice, or following instructions from relevant local or national agencies in deciding whether they are able to open.

Recommended actions:

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

5. Disruption to the collection of completed examination papers

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- normal collection arrangements for completed examination scripts have failed.

Recommended actions:

- centres to ensure secure storage of completed examination papers until collection
- centres to seek advice from awarding organisations and normal collection agency regarding collection
- centres to investigate use of alternative carriers and ensure proof of dispatch.

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

Criteria for implementation of plan

- scanning process disrupted beyond acceptable levels resulting in a risk to the delivery of results by scheduled dates.

Recommended actions:

- awarding organisations to implement their existing contingency plans for disruption to on-screen marking process
- awarding organisations to revert to traditional form of marking.

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

Criteria for implementation of plan

- markers are unable to mark examination papers resulting in a risk to the delivery of results by scheduled dates.

Recommended actions:

- awarding organisations to re-allocate scripts to available markers
- awarding organisations to recruit, train or re-standardise qualified new markers
- prioritisation of marking to be based on results dates.

8. Difficulty in meeting results schedule

Criteria for implementation of plan

- significant inability to meet schedule for publication of results.

Recommended actions:

- awarding organisations to adjust processing schedule to issue results in electronic form only
- awarding organisations to establish priorities for results processing
- awarding organisations and regulators liaise with relevant organisations (i.e. UCAS, CAO) regarding process of candidate progression to further and higher education.

9. Centres are closed on results day

Criteria for implementation of plan

- candidates are unable to collect examination results in person as centres are unable to open.

Recommended actions:

- centre to make arrangements to access its results at an alternative site
- centres to use alternative venues for distribution of results to candidates
- centres to share facilities with other centres if this is possible.

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