Contingency Plan 2026/27

This policy is reviewed annually to ensure compliance with current regulations

Effective from 1 September 2026

Approved/reviewed by	C. Walker
Date of next review	September 2027

Key staff involved in the exams policy

Role	Name(s)
Governors	
Head of centre	**Gary Kynaston**
Exams officer line manager (Senior Leader)	**Connie Walkers / Tim Bridle**
Exams officer (EO)	**Lucie Hrabankova**
ALS lead/SENCo	**Paulina Wajler**
SLT member(s)	**Chris Wilson, Hodo Isse, Jessica Adolphus, Shaun Flitton**
IT Staff	**Bekim Kastrati, D'mello Anthony**
Site Staff	**Anthony Raftery, Julio Pena Vera, Kamel Meziane**

Purpose of the plan

This plan examines potential risks and issues that could cause disruption to the examination and assessment process at Hammersmith Academy. By outlining actions/procedures to be invoked in case of disruption it is intended to mitigate the impact these disruptions have on our processes.

Alongside internal processes, this plan is informed by the Ofqual (and Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment) 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 guidance Preparing for disruption to examinations.

This plan also confirms Hammersmith Academy compliance with JCQ's General Regulations for Approved Centres (GR 5.3) that:

- The centre has in place for inspection that must be reviewed and updated annually by a member of the senior leadership team and communicated within the centre... a contingency plan which covers all aspects of examination/assessment administration and delivery
- The centre's contingency planning **must** include succession arrangements for members of staff involved in examination and assessment administration

Contingency arrangements

In accordance with the regulations (GR 3.31-36), Hammersmith Academy must have in place, and at all times comply with, 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.

Hammersmith Academy 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.

Hammersmith Academy must ensure where 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.

National Centre Number Register and other information requirements

In accordance with the regulations (GR 5.3), the head of centre will ensure that Hammersmith Academy responds to 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.

Head of centre/senior leader(s) with oversight of examination and assessment administration absence at a critical stage of the exam cycle

To ensure the smooth and effective management of examinations in the event of the Head of Centre's absence during the critical stage of the examination cycle, with the main duties and responsibilities escalated in accordance with the center's written escalation process.

When the Head of Centre becomes aware of their potential absence during the critical stage of the examination cycle, they must immediately inform their immediate supervisor or a designated deputy, if available.

Deputy Head of Centre or Designated Deputy:

- If a Deputy Head of Centre has been appointed, they should assume the role and responsibilities of the Head of Centre during their absence.
- If there is no Deputy Head of Centre, a designated deputy should be appointed to fill in for the Head of Centre during the critical stage.
- The Deputy Head of Centre or designated deputy should be familiar with all the center's documentation and procedures related to the examination cycle.
- It is essential to ensure that all examination-related documents and instructions are readily accessible to the Deputy Head of Centre or designated deputy.
- The Deputy Head of Centre or designated deputy should inform the relevant staff, examination officers, and any relevant stakeholders about their new role and responsibilities during the Head of Centre's absence.
- They must establish clear lines of communication with all staff involved in the examination process to ensure that any issues or concerns are promptly addressed.
- The Deputy Head of Centre or designated deputy should be aware of the center's contingency plan for various examination scenarios.
- They should be prepared to make informed decisions and take appropriate actions in case of unexpected situations, such as technical issues, candidate emergencies, or security breaches.

- During the Head of Centre's absence, the Deputy Head of Centre or designated deputy is responsible for ensuring that all examination-related activities are conducted in compliance with the center's policies and guidelines.
- They should maintain meticulous records of all examination-related activities and incidents during this period.
- Regular reporting to the Head of Centre, or the immediate supervisor if applicable, is essential to keep them informed of the examination cycle's progress and any issues that may arise.
- In the event of any significant issues or emergencies that require escalation beyond the Deputy Head of Centre or designated deputy's authority, the center's written escalation process should be followed.
- This may involve contacting higher authorities, examination boards, or relevant external agencies as defined in the center's escalation process.

Possible causes of disruption to the exam process

Exam officer extended absence at a critical stage of the 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 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:

- ***Ms Connie Walker, the Deputy Headteacher, with extensive knowledge of the examination processes will take over the EO duties.***
- *SLT to nominate a 'deputy' to cover the role / task. This would usually be the Exams Assistant. Extra help could be called on from the Lead Invigilator*
- *Extra Hours should be allocated to the 'deputy' to ensure there are sufficient hours to cover the work required*
- *Extra help could be sought by networking with staff from other local centres*
- *Refer to www.theexamsoffice.org for detailed instructions on all exam procedures. (A Valuable source of information)*
- *Relief staff to be given access to secure storage procedures, including key codes for the doors, usernames and passwords for the staff network and exams websites*
- *Always report long term absence to the Exam Boards so they are aware of the situation. They are quite often prepared to help and can be flexible with deadlines etc. in these circumstances*
- *EO to ensure Exam Cycle, policies and procedures are up to date at all times*

SENCo (or equivalent role) extended absence at a critical stage of the 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:

- *SLT to nominate a 'deputy' to cover the role / task.*
- *SLT to appoint qualified assessor to test candidates in place of the SENCo.*
- *Approval from exam boards and exam arrangements could be passed to the Exams Office – with sufficient warning and planning time.*
- *Lead TA to arrange student support during all exams.*

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/late or other penalty fees being charged by awarding bodies
- Non-examination assessment (including controlled assessments and coursework) 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:

- *Deputy Head to ensure departmental continuity by requesting an alternative member of the takes responsibility for the actions above.*

Invigilators - lack of appropriately trained invigilators or invigilator absence

Criteria for implementation of the plan

Key tasks not undertaken including:

- 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:

- *First check availability of other invigilators who said they were available for that slot.*
- *Check 'freed staff' to see if there is anyone else available who has not been used from that teaching period.*
- *Check with cover to see if they have any free staff.*
- *See if it is possible to amalgamate any of the access arrangement rooms to release an invigilator.*
- *As a last resort, call upon SLT to invigilate.*

Exam rooms - lack of appropriate rooms or main venues unavailable at short notice

Criteria for implementation of the plan

Key tasks not undertaken including:

- 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 expected incident at exam time

Centre actions:

- *A Clear rooming plan for exams should be determined at the beginning of the Academic year.*
- *Room bookings must be made early enough in advance to ensure there are sufficient rooms for exam students.*
- *If there is an emergency on the day, the free room calendar must be checked first and moves made accordingly.*
- *If all students are in exams at any one time, then the rooms used by that Year group in that period, should be free and can be booked for exams.*
- *If no possibility of any free rooms, refer to SLT for advice.*

Cyber security

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

- (This will include the required arrangements for cyber security)

(GR 3.38) Ensure there are procedures in place to maintain the security of user accounts by:

a) ensuring that all members of centre staff who access awarding bodies' online systems undertake annual cyber security training.

The training must include:

- the importance of creating strong, unique passwords for all accounts;

- keeping all account details strictly confidential;
- the critical role of Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) in protecting against unauthorised access;
- how to properly set up and use MFA for both centre and awarding bodies' systems;
- an awareness of all types of social engineering/phishing attempts;
- the importance of staff quickly reporting any suspicious activity, events, incidents and encouraging a safe and supportive reporting culture.

A record of completed cyber security training must be held on file for inspection. This record could take the form of a certificate, a paper checklist, a spreadsheet-based checklist or a Learning Management System (LMS) report.

b) developing and maintaining a comprehensive cyber security policy for the centre. The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) provides resources to assist centres in creating such policies;
c) implementing and enforcing robust security measures, including:
    - where available, MFA must be used for all accounts and systems containing exam-related information, including those that interface between awarding body and centre systems, to enhance security and protect sensitive data. Where MFA is not available on the centre's systems, an equivalent multi-layered security approach must be in place. For example, strong log-in controls, access and monitoring controls and secure storage so that exam-related data is protected in line with cyber security best practice.
    - regularly reviewing and updating security settings to align with current best practices;
d) updating any passwords that may have been exposed
e) setting up secure account recovery options
f) reviewing and managing connected applications
g) monitoring accounts and regularly reviewing account access, including removing access when no longer required
h) ensuring authorised members of staff securely access awarding bodies' online systems in line with awarding body regulations regarding cyber security and the JCQ document *Guidance for centres on cyber security*

    Authorised staff will have access, where necessary, to a device which complies with awarding bodies' MFA requirements.

reporting any actual or suspected compromise of an awarding body's online systems immediately to the relevant awarding body

Criteria for implementation of the plan

Key tasks not undertaken include:

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

Centre actions:

Exams Officer will work with IT and contact the relevant Awarding Body to seek further guidance. Senior Leaders will monitor the situation and take any action required as directed by the Awarding Bodies.

Access to exam site & official documentation

Exams Officer has master key to building and Exams Office where hard copy of documentation/evidence is kept in safe. The school's general Cyber Attack process is to immediately

contact our insurers who will instigate their Cyber Attack Response Plan and instruct us on the actions required.

Access to pupil data concerning special considerations

SENCo has hard copies filed on-site. The network is backed up in the cloud.

Administration of ongoing exams (timetabling, organising resources and submitting paperwork)

Exams Officer has hard files for timetabling and resources. All that can be continued remotely. The network is backed up in the cloud.

Teacher Strike

Centre actions:

If the teacher strike occurs, students are the priority and the examination will run with skeleton support and invigilators.

Failure of IT systems

Criteria for implementation of the plan

Key tasks not undertaken include:

- IT system corruption affecting candidates' work
- MIS system failure at the final entry deadline
- MIS system failure during exams preparation
- Technical failure or power outage immediately prior to or during an on-screen examination
- MIS system failure at results release time

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

- (This will include the security arrangements put in place which protect candidates' work)

  (GR 3.36) Ensure where candidates' work is produced electronically that 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... Implement appropriate security arrangements which protect candidates' work in the event of IT system corruption and cyber-attacks.
- *All Exam entries should be made well in advance of the deadline to avoid this issue in the first place. If the entries are left to the last minute and there is an IT failure, firstly ring the relevant exam boards to explain (They may give you an extension, but get that in writing).*
- *Try to access SIMS through another computer i.e. from home, or another SIMS user*
- *Check that the IT department are aware of the exam results days to ensure smooth running of downloads.*

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

Disruption of teaching time in the weeks before an exam– centre closed for an extended period

Criteria for implementation of the plan

Key tasks not undertaken including:

- 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 actions:

- *Where there is disruption to teaching time and students miss teaching and learning, it remains the responsibility of centre to prepare students, as usual, for examinations.*
- *Centre should have plans in place to facilitate alternative methods of learning.*

Centre may not be able to open for examinations

Criteria for implementation of the plan

Key tasks not undertaken including:

- Centre unable to open as normal for scheduled examinations
- 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.

Centre actions:

- *The Centre's contingency plans must focus on enabling candidates to take their examinations if the centre is at risk of not being able to open as normal.*
- *Centre to open for examinations and examination candidates only, if possible.*
- *Centre to use alternative venues in agreement with relevant awarding organisations (e.g. share facilities with other centres or use other public building, if possible)*
- *Centre may offer candidates an opportunity to sit any examinations missed at the next available series.*
- *Centre to apply to awarding organisations for special consideration for candidates where they have met the minimum requirements.*

The decision on whether it is safe for a centre to open lies with the head of centre who is responsible for taking advice or following instructions from relevant local or national agencies. Special consideration is an option if all other avenues have been exhausted and candidates meet the published criteria. The relevant awarding body should be contacted if additional support or guidance in the event of disruption to examinations is required.

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 because of a crisis

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

- *Centres' contingency plans will focus on options that enable candidates to take their examinations*
- *The contingency plan designates (Cambridge School, W12 0SP) as the temporary exam venue in compliance with JCQ regulations. The location has been assessed and confirmed to meet the requirements*

The Headteacher will consider moving the starting time of the examination for all candidates (see section 6.2 of the JCQ document Instructions for conducting examinations). The rules for very late arrivals my apply (section 21 of the JCQ document Instructions for conducting examinations). Special consideration is an option where a candidate is unable to sit the examination (Chapter 4 of the JCQ document A guide to the special consideration process). The relevant awarding body should be contacted if additional support or guidance in the event of disruption to examinations is required.

Candidates may not be able to take examinations during the examination period because of a crisis (E.g. School Fire Emergency)

Criteria for implementation of the plan

Key tasks not undertaken including:

- Candidates are unable to attend the examination centre to take examinations as normal

The Academy will contact and seek advice from the DfE, LA and the Awarding Bodies.

In the event of a school fire during exam periods, the following contingency plan has been devised to ensure the continuation of exams, comply with JCQ regulations, provide adequate seating arrangements, facilitate printing of exam papers, communicate with students, and arrange transportation to the new venue.

Safety and Evacuation:

- Immediately upon detection of a fire, the designated fire alarm will be activated.
- All students and staff will follow the school's established evacuation procedures and assemble at the designated meeting point outside the school premises.

- Emergency services will be notified promptly to address the fire situation and ensure the safety of all individuals.

Temporary Exam Venue Selection:

- The contingency plan designates (Cambridge School, W12 0SP) as the temporary exam venue in compliance with JCQ regulations. The location has been assessed and confirmed to meet the following requirements:
- Seating Arrangements: 200 chairs and tables have been confirmed to be available, allowing for a minimum distance of 1.25 meters between each student, adhering to social distancing guidelines.
- Adequate Facilities: The temporary venue possesses appropriate lighting, ventilation, and necessary amenities to ensure a suitable exam environment.

Printing and Exam Paper Supply:

- The designated printers located at (Cambridge School, W12 0SP) will be made available to print the required 200 exam papers. These printers are known to be operational and capable of handling the expected workload.
- Exam papers will be sourced from the designated examination board, following the established procedures and guidelines outlined by JCQ regulations.

Communication and Student Notification:

- The school's emergency communication system will be promptly activated to reach all students and their designated emergency contacts.
- The following steps will be taken to inform students and their parents/guardians about the situation and the new exam venue:
- SMS/Text Messages: Students and parents/guardians will receive SMS/text messages detailing the fire incident, instructions regarding the new exam venue, and any additional relevant information.
- Email Notifications: A comprehensive mass email will be sent to all students and parents/guardians, providing detailed information about the fire incident, the new exam venue, and instructions for the day.
- Phone Calls: A dedicated team will make phone calls to students' emergency contacts to ensure they receive timely information about the fire incident and the new exam venue.
- Notice Boards & website: Notice boards within the school premises will be updated with information regarding the fire incident, the new exam venue, and any additional instructions.

Transportation to the New Exam Venue:

- Arrangements will be made with local transportation providers, including buses and taxis, to transport students from the school to the new exam venue.

- A fleet of buses will be on standby at the school premises to shuttle students to the temporary exam venue. The transportation team will ensure adherence to safety protocols and provide clear instructions to students.
- Students will be organized into groups based on their exam schedules and/or classes to streamline the transportation process and ensure efficiency.
- Staff members will be assigned to accompany each group of students and facilitate a smooth transition to the temporary exam venue.

Other actions:

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

Disruption in the distribution of examination papers

Criteria for implementation of the plan

Key tasks not undertaken including:

- Candidates are unable to sit exam due to wrong paper being delivered.
- Examination papers not delivered to school on time. Centre actions:
- Centre will check all exam papers upon arrival in school and will alert the appropriate Awarding Bodies of any discrepancies.

If this happens on the day of the exam, contact the Exam Boards immediately. Awarding organisations to provide centres with electronic access to examination papers via a secure external network. Centres would need to ensure that copies are received, made and stored under secure conditions and should have plans in place to facilitate such an action. Awarding organisations would provide guidance on the conduct of examinations in such circumstances, as a last resort, and in close collaboration with centres and regulators, awarding organisations to consider scheduling of the examination on an alternative date.

Delay in collection arrangements for completed examination scripts

Criteria for implementation of the plan

Key tasks not undertaken including:

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

Centre actions:

- *where examinations are part of the national 'yellow label' service or where awarding bodies arrange collections, centre will contact the relevant awarding bodies for advice and instructions*
- *for examinations where the centre makes own collection arrangements, centre will investigate alternative dispatch options that comply with the JCQ document Instructions for conducting examinations*
- *centre will keep completed examination scripts in the secure room until as close to the collection time as possible – ensuring script packages are not left unattended at the collection area)*

Assessment evidence is not available to be marked

Criteria for implementation of the plan

Key tasks not undertaken including:

- 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 organisations

Centre actions:

- *Notify Awarding Bodies immediately.*
- *Awarding organisations to 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.*

Centre unable to distribute results as normal

Criteria for implementation of the plan

Key tasks not undertaken including:

- Centre is unable to access or manage the distribution of results to candidates, or to facilitate post-results services

Centre actions:

- *Centre to notify Awarding Bodies*
- *Distribution of results:*
    - *centre to make arrangements to access its results at an alternative site, in agreement with the relevant awarding organisation*
    - *centres to make arrangements to coordinate access to post-results services from an alternative site*
    - *centres to share facilities with other centres if this is possible, in agreement with the relevant awarding organisation.)*
- *Facilitation of post results services:*

- *centre to make arrangements to make post-results requests at an alternative location*
- *centres to contact the relevant awarding organisation if electronic post-results requests are not possible)*

The contingency plan designates (Cambridge School, W12 0SP) as the temporary exam venue in compliance with JCQ regulations. The location has been assessed and confirmed to meet the requirements.

Further guidance to inform procedures and implement contingency planning

DfE

Meeting digital and technology standards in schools and colleges

Cyber security: core standard

Ofqual

What schools and colleges and other centres should do if exams or other assessments and make sure staff are aware of these plans.

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

- emergency planning and response 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, 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

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 expecting any disruption that might affect the sitting of exams and assessments.

In the event of disruption

- Contact the relevant awarding organisation and follow its instructions.
- Take advice, or follow instructions, from relevant local or national agencies in deciding whether your centre is able to open.
- 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.
- Where accommodation is limited, prioritise students whose progression will be severely delayed if they do not take their exam or timetabled assessment when planned.
- In the event of an evacuation during an examination please refer to JCQ's Centre emergency evacuation procedure.
- Communicate with students, parents and carers any changes to the exam or assessment timetable or to the venue.
- Communicate with any external assessors, invigilators or relevant third parties regarding any changes to the exam or assessment timetable.

After the exam

- 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.

- Advise students, where appropriate, of the opportunities to take their exam or assessment at a later date.
- Ensure that scripts are stored under secure conditions.
- 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

- Take all reasonable steps to mitigate any adverse effect, in relation to their qualifications, arising from any disruption.
- Provide effective guidance to any of their centres delivering qualifications.
- 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).
- Promptly notify the relevant regulators about any event which could have an adverse effect on students, standards or public confidence.
- 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

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 / 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 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: 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 Governmen
- 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

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: https://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 or 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 days sessions' for examinations, summer 2026. 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

15.6 The designation of 'contingency days 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 of 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 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.

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.

Instructions for conducting examinations www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/instructions-for-conducting-examinations-ice/ (with particular reference to section 15, Contingency planning)

Preparing for disruption to examinations www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/general-regulations

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

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; Revised July 2025) www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/general-regulations/

5 tips to get exam ready and stay cyber safe! www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/blogs/

GOV.UK

Emergency planning and response: Exam and assessment disruption www.gov.uk/government/publications/emergency-planning-and-response-for-education-childcare-and-childrens-social-care-settings

Dispatch of exam scripts guide: Contingency planning www.gov.uk/government/publications/dispatch-of-exam-scripts-yellow-label-service

Wales

School closures: examinations www.gov.wales/school-closures-examinations

Opening schools as well as childcare and play settings in extreme 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 – Northern Ireland www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/exceptional-closure-days

Checklist - exceptional closure of schools www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/checklist-exceptional-closure-schools

National Cyber Security Centre

Cyber Security for Schools https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/section/education-skills/cyber-security-schools

Cyber security training for school staff https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/information/cyber-security-training-schools