



EXAMS

CONTINGENCY PLAN

2025/26

This plan is reviewed annually to ensure compliance with current regulations

Approved/reviewed by	
Date of next review	

Key staff involved in the plan

Role	Name(s)
Head of centre	Ms P Whyte
Senior leader(s)	Ms S Kisten
Exams officer	Mr Z Maharaj
SENCo (or equivalent role)	Ms M Braja

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Purpose of the plan

This plan examines potential risks and issues that could cause disruption to the examination and assessment process at St Aloysius College. 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*, 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 also confirms St Aloysius College 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

Contingency arrangements

In accordance with the regulations (GR 3.17-19), St Aloysius College **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.

St Aloysius College **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.

St Aloysius College **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.

Operating across more than one centre

As the head of centre and/or examinations officer operates across more than one centre, the head of centre will ensure there is suitable senior leadership team and examinations officer support in place so they can meet their obligations across all centres for which they are responsible in relation to recruitment, selection, training and support of staff. The arrangements covered in this contingency plan relate to the following centres:

- St Aloysius College
- St Joseph's Community Centre

National Centre Number Register and other information requirements

In accordance with the regulations (GR 5.3), the head of centre will ensure that St Aloysius College 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.

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

When the Head of Exams is absent during a critical exam stage, the centres written Escalation Process/Contingency Plan is triggered immediately.

Responsibilities – Specifically compliance with JCQ regulations – are delegated to a nominated member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to maintain integrity, security and continuity of examinations.

Escalation Process Actions:

- Immediate Delegation : The SLT member assigned in the contingency plan assumes responsibility.
- External Notification : Awarding bodies must be notified of the key personnel change to ensure continuity of communication, as per JCQ regulations.
- Roles & Responsibilities Transfer :
 - Secure storage & papers : The Exams Officer works with the appointed SLT member to ensure the security of papers.
 - Regulatory Compliance : The temporary lead ensures exam regulations are followed to avoid malpractice.
 - Contingency Management : The senior lead handles tasks like secure destruction of papers, managing, and resolving issues with exams results.

Possible causes of disruption to the exam process

1. Exam officer extended absence at a critical stage of the exam cycle

Criteria for implementation of the plan

Key tasks required in the management and administration of the 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*

Pre-exams

- *invigilators not trained or updated on changes to instructions for conducting exams*
- *exam timetabling, rooming allocation, and invigilation.*

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

- Data manager to follow procedures and practices within the Examinations Officer remit
- Exams Officer to ensure essential information is available to Data Manager and SLT exams
- SLT (exams) to ensure exam policies and procedures are up to date at all times
- SLT (exams) to support Data Manager in absorbing the role of Exams Officer

- Awarding organisations to be informed (if appropriate) to ensure communications and key documents, e.g. dispatch stickers, exam results, are accessible by Data Manager.

2. SENCo (or equivalent role) **extended absence at a critical stage of the exam cycle**

Criteria for implementation of the plan

Key tasks required in the management and administration of the access arrangements process within the exam cycle not undertaken, including:

Planning

- *candidates not tested/assessed to identify potential access arrangement requirements*
- *centre fails to recognise its duties towards disabled candidates as defined under the terms of the Equality Act 2010*
- *evidence of need and evidence to support normal way of working not collated*

Pre-exams

- *approval for access arrangements not applied for to the awarding body*
- *centre-delegated arrangements not put in place*
- *modified paper requirements not identified in a timely manner to enable ordering to meet external deadline*
- *staff (facilitators) providing support to access arrangement candidates not allocated and trained*

Exam time

- *access arrangement candidate support not arranged for exam rooms*

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

o TA (with responsibility for exams) will ensure essential information is available to Examinations Officer and SLT (exams)

o TA (with responsibility for exams) will ensure testing continues to take place as needed; access arrangement applications are made as needed, including any required evidence; and access arrangements are in place as needed

o Exams Officer to ensure exam cycle documents (e.g. timetable, staffing plans, seating plans) are up to date at all times.

3. 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 to mitigate the impact of the disruption

- o Curriculum Leaders to ensure entry data is provided accurately to Exams Officer, to allow pre-release information and papers to be released on time
- o Curriculum Leaders to reorganise staffing, to ensure NEA/coursework can be completed
- o Curriculum Leaders to ensure key data is stored on shared marksheets, in faculty SharePoint so data is always available to fulfil candidates' right to request a review of internal assessment decisions, and to send to awarding organisations.

4. Invigilators - lack of appropriately trained invigilators or invigilator absence

Criteria for implementation of the plan

Failure to recruit and train sufficient invigilators to conduct exams

Invigilator shortage on peak exam days

Invigilator absence on the day of an exam

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- Failure to recruit and train sufficient invigilators to conduct exams
 - Invigilator shortage on peak exam days
 - Invigilator absence on the day of an exam
- Centre actions:
- Examinations Officer to maintain a short list of suitable candidates.
 - Examinations Officer to ensure that capacity is never exceeded on any one day.
 - Examinations Officer to review training procedures regularly and put in place additional training as required.

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

Criteria for implementation of the plan

Exams officer unable to identify sufficient/appropriate rooms during exams timetable planning

Insufficient rooms available on peak exam days

Main exam venues unavailable due to an unexpected incident at exam time

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

6. Cyber security

Criteria for implementation of the plan

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

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

(This will include the required arrangements for cyber security)

(GR 3.21) 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.

Certificates of completed staff cyber training must be downloaded and held on file for inspection. The NCSC training resource provides a certificate of completion of cyber training.

- 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:
 - mandatory MFA 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;
 - 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.
- i) reporting any actual or suspected compromise of an awarding body's online systems immediately to the relevant awarding body

7. 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

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

- (This will include the security arrangements put in place which protect candidates' work)
(GR 3.19) 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.

8. Emergency evacuation of the exam room (or centre lockdown)

Criteria for implementation of the plan

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

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

- Listen carefully to the instructions the invigilators give you.
 - Leave the exam room calmly and stay with the members of staff at all times.
 - Do not talk to other students, either from the exam or from outside – remember that you are still under exam conditions and have to follow the exam regulations.
 - Staff will take you out of the building and you will wait outside until the emergency is over
 - You will not lose any time from your exam. When it is possible to return to your exam room, any time lost will be added onto the end of your exam time.
 - If you break any of the exam regulations during the evacuation procedure, this will be dealt with in exactly the same way as if it had happened in the exam room On the sound of the fire alarm (continuous ring): Students must follow the instructions given by the exam invigilator(s). Exam conditions continue to apply so talking or gesturing to the other candidates is not allowed.
- EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE (INVIGILATORS) What to do if there is an emergency during an exam:-**
- Stop the exam noting the time on the whiteboard and the "Fire Evacuation" sheet.
 - Ask the candidates to stop writing, put their pens down and turn over their exam paper. • Advise the candidates to stay calm and that the exam room will be evacuated.
 - The Exams Officer will make their way to the exam venue.
 - Remind the candidates that they are still under exam conditions and that talking or gesturing to the other candidates is not allowed.
 - Students must leave the exam paper on the desk along with their equipment. They will not be allowed to collect their belongings.
 - Evacuate the students in the exam room row by row (where appropriate). The senior invigilator will assign invigilators to accompany and supervise the students as they leave the room. Each invigilator should supervise no more than 30 students and remain with them at all times
 - Students will be directed to the appropriate assembly point where they will wait in the same order as in the Exam Room. Students should remain in silence and do as instructed by any member of staff
 - DO NOT ALLOW STUDENTS TO RUN.
 - The Exams Officer will provide assistance with the supervision of candidates
 - Once all candidates are evacuated the Exams Officer checks that there are no students remaining in the exam room and closes the fire doors. Other access points to the room must be locked
 - The roll call will then be completed in accordance with the candidate entry list and seating plan
 - The Exams Officer will liaise with a member of the Senior Leadership Team to ascertain the status of the fire evacuation. If the fire evacuation is a drill or false alarm the candidates will be escorted back to the examination room for the exam to be re-started in accordance.

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

Criteria for implementation of the plan

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

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

- Criteria for implementation of the plan
- Centre closed for an extended period during normal teaching, interrupting the provision of normal teaching and learning Centre actions:
- recognise the centre's responsibility to prepare students as usual for exams
- SLT (examinations) to communicate with parents, carers and students about the potential for disruption to teaching time and plans to address this.
- Examinations Officer to advise the Examination Boards as appropriate.
- In the case of modular courses, we may advise candidates to sit examinations in an alternative venue.
- The school should plan to facilitate teaching and learning by an alternative method.

10. Candidates may not be able to take examinations - centre remains open

Criteria for implementation of the plan

Candidates may not be able to attend the examination centre to take examinations as normal because of a crisis

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

- (Centres' contingency plans should focus on options that enable candidates to take their examinations)
 - Consider moving the starting time of the examination for all candidates (see section 6.2 of the JCQ document *Instructions for conducting examinations*)
 - Be aware of the rules for very late arrivals (see section 21 of the JCQ document *Instructions for conducting examinations*)
 - Wherever possible, it is always in the best interest for candidates to sit the examination. However, special consideration is an option where a candidate is unable to sit the examination (see 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

11. Centre may not be able to open for examinations

(Including in the event of the centre being unavailable for examinations owing to an unforeseen emergency)

Criteria for implementation of the plan

The centre will:

- focus on enabling candidates to take their examinations where possible
- take advice, or follow instructions, from relevant local or national agencies in deciding whether the centre is able to open
- contact the relevant awarding body as soon as possible and follow its instructions (this could include implementing alternative arrangements for the conducting of examinations and notifying the JCQ Centre Inspection Service of an alternative site arrangement by submitting the JCQ Alternative Site form online, using the Centre Admin Portal)
- contact the relevant awarding body as soon as possible and follow its instructions
- discuss alternative arrangements with the awarding body if the exam or assessment cannot take place
- prioritise candidates whose progression will be severely delayed if they do not take their exam or timetabled assessment when planned
- communicate with candidates (and where appropriate, parents/carers) any changes to the exam or assessment timetable or to the venue
- Alternative site is St Joseph's community Centre, Highgate
- Apply for Special Consideration if appropriate

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

- (Centres' 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)

(This could include implementing alternative arrangements for the conducting of examinations and notifying the JCQ Centre Inspection Service of an alternative site arrangement by submitting the JCQ Alternative Site form online, using the Centre Admin Portal (CAP).)

 - 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

Alternative site(s) details:

12. Disruption in the distribution of examination papers

Criteria for implementation of the plan

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

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

- The centre will:
- liaise with awarding bodies regarding the provision of electronic access to examination papers via a secure external network and will ensure when copies are received/made these are stored under secure conditions
- follow guidance provided by the awarding body on the conduct of examinations 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.

13. 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

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

- where examinations are part of the national 'yellow label' service or where awarding organisations arrange collections, the centre will seek advice from the relevant awarding organisations and will not make its own arrangements for transportation unless told to do so by the awarding organisation for any examinations where the centre makes its own arrangements for transportation, investigate alternative dispatch options that comply with the requirements detailed in the JCQ document Instructions for conducting examinations
- Scripts must be stored securely until such time transport is confirmed.

14. Assessment evidence is not available to be marked

Criteria for implementation of the plan

Large scale damage to or destruction of completed examination scripts/assessment evidence before it can be marked

Completed examination scripts/assessment evidence does not reach awarding organisations

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

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 organisations

Centre actions

- 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 awarding body, inform candidates they may need to retake the affected assessment in a subsequent assessment series.

15. Centre unable to distribute results as normal or facilitate post results services

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

Criteria for implementation of the plan

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

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

The centre will:

- make arrangements to access its results at an alternative venue (St Joseph's Community Centre), in agreement with the relevant awarding body
- make arrangements to coordinate access to post-results services from an alternative venue
- contact the relevant awarding body if electronic post-results requests are not possible inform candidates of any alternative arrangements in place for the distribution of results and the facilitation of post-results services.

Further guidance to inform procedures and implement contingency planning

DfE

Meeting digital and technology standards in schools and colleges

Cyber security standards for schools and colleges

Ofqual

What schools and colleges and other centres should do if exams or other assessments are seriously disrupted

This document was updated in October 2023 to include Ofqual's final decisions on long-term resilience arrangements, and the Department for Education (DfE)'s guidance for education settings with confirmed reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC),

In addition to this guidance, you will need to be aware of your specific responsibilities for local and national school preparations and contingencies. You should also follow advice from relevant public health bodies.

Contingency planning

Awarding organisations are required to establish, maintain and comply with an up-to-date 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

You may also wish to see the JCQ's notice to centres on exam contingency plans and JCQ's notice on preparing for disruption to examinations in England, Wales and Northern Ireland for qualifications within its scope.

Steps you should take

Exam planning

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

1. Contact the relevant awarding organisation and follow its instructions.
2. Take advice, or follow instructions, from relevant local or national agencies in deciding whether your centre is able to open.
3. Identify whether the exam or timetabled assessment can be sat at an alternative venue, in agreement with the relevant awarding organisation, ensuring the secure transportation of questions papers or assessment materials to the alternative venue.
4. Where accommodation is limited, prioritise students whose progression will be severely delayed if they do not take their exam or timetabled assessment when planned.
5. In the event of an evacuation during an examination please refer to JCQ's Centre emergency evacuation procedure.
6. Communicate with students, parents and carers any changes to the exam or assessment timetable or to the venue.
7. Communicate with any external assessors, invigilators or relevant third parties regarding any changes to the exam or assessment timetable.

After the exam

1. Consider whether any students' ability to take the assessment or demonstrate their level of attainment has been materially affected and, if so, apply to the relevant awarding organisation for special consideration.
2. Advise students, where appropriate, of the opportunities to take their exam or assessment at a later date.

3. Ensure that scripts are stored under secure conditions.
4. Return scripts to awarding organisations in line with their instructions. Never make alternative arrangements for the transportation of completed exam scripts, unless told to do so by the awarding organisation.

Steps the awarding organisation should take

Exam planning

1. Establish and maintain, and at all times comply with, an up-to-date, written contingency plan.
2. Ensure that the arrangements in place 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

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 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 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 days: Northern Ireland 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, 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

(Ofqual guidance extract above taken directly from the Exam system contingency plan: England, Wales and Northern Ireland - **What schools and colleges and other centres should do if exams or other assessments are seriously disrupted** (last updated 7 May 2024) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/exam-system-contingency-plan-england-wales-and-northern-ireland/what-schools-and-colleges-should-do-if-exams-or-other-assessments-are-seriously-disrupted>)

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 sessions' for examinations, summer 2026. This is consistent with the qualification regulators' document *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 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.

(JCQ guidance above taken directly from **Instructions for conducting examinations** 2025-2026
<http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/ice---instructions-for-conducting-examinations>, section 15, Contingency planning)

JCQ Joint Contingency Plan www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/other-documents

JCQ Preparing for disruption to examinations 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

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

A guide to the special consideration process www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration/regulations-and-guidance

Guidance for centres on cyber security (Effective from November 2023; 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 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 www.ncsc.gov.uk/section/education-skills/cyber-security-schools

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