

CONTINGENCY PLAN

2024/25

This plan is reviewed annually to ensure compliance with current regulations

Approved/reviewed by	
Kirsty Saull	
Date of next review	November 2025

Key staff involved in the plan

Role	Name(s)
Head of centre	Jonathan Smart (Headteacher)
Exams officer line manager (Senior leader)	Kirsty Saull (Assistant Headteacher)
Exams officer	Sally Edwards
Exams assistant	Karen Drexelius
SENCo	Fiona Kane (KS4 SENCo)/Tilly Shale(KS3 SENCo)
Senior leader(s)	Heads of Faculty: Matthew Taylor (Maths); Lucy Gotham (English); Duncan King (Science); Hannah Newton (CARTS); Hannah Williams (MFL); Tom Kane (Humanities); Michelle Woodward (PE); Harkit Sandhu (Business and Computing)

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Purpose of the plan

This plan examines potential risks and issues that could cause disruption to the exams process at King Alfred's. By outlining actions/procedures to be invoked in case of disruption it is intended to mitigate the impact these disruptions have on our exam process.

Alongside internal processes, this plan is informed by the Ofqual (and Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment) **Exam system contingency plan: England, Wales and Northern Ireland** which provides guidance in the publication *What schools and colleges and other centres should do if exams or other assessments are seriously disrupted* and the **JCQ Joint Contingency Plan** for the Examination System in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and the JCQ document **Preparing for disruption to examinations** (Effective from 1 September 2024).

This plan details how King Alfreds complies with the JCQ's **General Regulations for Approved Centres** (5.3 *Centre management*) by having in place for inspection that must be reviewed and updated annually, a written contingency plan which covers all aspects of examination/assessment administration and delivery.

Contingency arrangements

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

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

The plan must cover the following scenarios:

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

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

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

National Centre Number Register and other information requirements

The head of centre will ensure that the centre responds to the National Centre Number Register annual update by the end of October every year which includes providing senior designated contact details (this might include a personal mobile number and/or email address). These must be the contact details of someone who can be reached in an emergency if the centre is closed over the summer and who can mobilise resources to respond to the issue. (GR 5.3)

The head of centre will also ensure that King Alfred's has a contingency to enable the prompt handling of urgent issues only, responds to the awarding bodies' request for information regarding the contact details of a senior member of staff (which might include a personal mobile number and/or email address). This will ensure that any urgent matters which might adversely affect candidates which arise outside of term time, and which potentially put qualification awards at risk, can be addressed by awarding bodies with the support of that member of staff. Heads of centre should ensure that this member of staff has the necessary authority to mobilise resources to provide this support, which might include resolving issues within the centre itself.

Possible causes of disruption to the exam process

1. Head of Centre extended absence at a critical stage of the exam cycle

Criteria for implementation of the plan

The Head of Centre is unable to be on site, or otherwise make decisions, during a critical stage of the exam cycle.

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

- Information and access will be made readily available to the Deputy Head Teacher in charge of Curriculum, in light of the absence of the Head of Centre so that the duties of the Head of Centre may be undertaken by the Deputy Head Teacher in charge of Curriculum.
- Contact will be made with all exam boards by the Examinations Officer to ensure that deadlines etc. are clear and they are aware the centre may need additional advice, guidance and support in meeting these due to the absence of Head of Centre, if and when necessary.

We will also refer to the following for further guidance as and when necessary:

- ▶ The General Regulations for Approved Centres, updated annually by the Joint Council for Qualifications.
- ▶ The Examinations Administration section of the DFE website.
- ▶ Examination Board helplines.
- ▶ The Exams Office section of the Joint Council for Qualifications website.

2. 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 deadlines*
- *sufficient invigilators not recruited*

Entries

- *awarding bodies not being informed of early/estimated entries which prompts release of early information required by teaching staff*
- *candidates not being entered with awarding bodies for external exams/assessment*
- *awarding body entry deadlines missed or late or other penalty fees being incurred*

Pre-exams

- *invigilators not trained or updated on changes to instructions for conducting exams*
- *exam timetabling, rooming allocation; and invigilation schedules not prepared*
- *candidates not briefed on exam timetables and awarding body information for candidates*
- *confidential exam/assessment materials and candidates' work not stored under required secure conditions*
- *internal assessment marks and samples of candidates' work not submitted to awarding bodies/external moderators*

Exam time

- *exams/assessments not taken under the conditions prescribed by awarding bodies*
- *required reports/requests not submitted to awarding bodies during exam/assessment periods, for example very late arrival, suspected malpractice, special consideration*
- *candidates' scripts not dispatched as required for marking to awarding bodies*

Results and post-results

- *access to examination results affecting the distribution of results to candidates*

- *the facilitation of the post-results services*

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

- Information and access will be made readily available to the Examinations Assistant and the Leadership team member linked to examinations in light of the absence of the Examinations Officer so that these tasks may be undertaken by them.
- Additionally, another Examinations Officer within the Vale Academy Trust will be consulted and asked to provide assistance.
- The Examinations Assistant and the Leadership Team member linked to examinations are to be kept abreast of key information, key policies, plans and decisions as they are made by the Examinations Officer so that they are able to step in and continue on if and when necessary (these will also be documented).
- Contact will be made with all exam boards to ensure that deadlines etc. are clear and they are aware the centre may need additional advice, guidance and support in meeting these due to the absence of the Examinations Officer if and when necessary.
- If an insufficient number of invigilators have been recruited, Leadership Team members will be trained to step in as invigilators (and further recruitment of invigilators will be made a top priority)

We will also refer to the following for further guidance as and when necessary:

- ▶ The Key Tasks section of The Exams Office website.
- ▶ The Examinations Oracle and Centre Support Service of the Examination Officers Association.
- ▶ The Examinations Administration section of the DFE website.
- ▶ Examination Board helplines.
- ▶ The Exams Office section of the Joint Council for Qualifications website.

3. SENCo extended absence at a critical stage of the exam cycle

Criteria for implementation of the plan

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

Planning

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

Pre-exams

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

Exam time

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

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

- As the centre has 2 SENCos, the second SENCo (in charge of KS3) will step in, supported by our Inclusion Manager, SEND team and linked leadership team member to ensure the above key tasks are completed.
- If necessary, the centre's trust will be consulted to provide the assistance of an alternative SENCo

4. Teaching staff extended absence at a critical stage of the exam cycle

Criteria for implementation of the plan

Key tasks not undertaken including:

Early/estimated entry information not provided to the exams officer on time; resulting in pre-release information not being received

Final entry information not provided to the exams officer on time; resulting in candidates not being entered for exams/assessments or being entered late/late or other penalty fees being charged by awarding bodies

Non-examination assessment tasks not set/issued/taken by candidates as scheduled

Candidates not being informed of centre assessed marks before marks are submitted to the awarding body and therefore not being able to consider appealing internal assessment decisions and requesting a review of the centre's marking

Internal assessment marks and candidates' work not provided to meet awarding body submission deadlines

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

- Heads of Faculty and TLR holders in each faculty are to oversee entry information to ensure it is provided in time so that all students are entered appropriately, and pre-release information is received
- Heads of Faculty, in conjunction with their Leadership team link and TLR holders, to ensure that all non-examination assessment tasks are set, issued and taken by candidates as scheduled.
- Heads of Faculty and their TLR holders will ensure all candidates are informed of centre-assessed marks before they are submitted to exam boards to ensure they are given the opportunity to consider an appeal and review. They will also ensure said marks and candidate work is provided by the awarding body submission deadlines.

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

Criteria for implementation of the plan

Failure to recruit and train sufficient invigilators to conduct exams

Invigilator shortage on peak exam days

Invigilator absence on the day of an exam

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

- Examinations Officer is to identify how many invigilators are required on our busiest days (use provisional timetables and estimated entry information to determine this)
- Recruiting more invigilators than is required
- Conduct a review of available invigilators and their availability for each exam series to ensure we have enough for every day examinations are taking place
- Examinations Officer and Examinations assistant to ensure all invigilators receive up-to-date training and have up-to-date DBS.
- Ensuring we always have a spare invigilator in each day (above the number required) to account for last minute absence
- Ensure that all of the Leadership team, and the cover team have undergone up-to-date invigilator training in order to enable them to step in if an emergency arises
- Cover Manager to arrange additional invigilator resource in the case of a shortfall at short notice.

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

Criteria for implementation of the plan

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

Insufficient rooms available on peak exam days

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

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

- The Centre Hall, sixth form auditorium and a range of offices on site will be used.
- Where possible, classrooms will be identified and used with usual classes being re-roomed.
- The Wantage Baptist Church rooms and the Beacon auditorium will be used where there are insufficient rooms on site – the need for these will be identified and booked in advance
- The sports hall and dining hall on west site will be used in an emergency due to an unexpected incident during exam time
- The Leisure Centre hall will also be looked at and considered in case of emergency.

Alternative site details:

Wantage Baptist Church, 6 Mill Street, Wantage, OX12 9AQ

The Beacon, Portway, Wantage, OX12 9BX

King Alfreds Academy, West Site, Challow Road, Wantage, OX12 9DU

7. Cyber-attack

Criteria for implementation of the plan

Where a cyber-attack may compromise any aspect of delivery

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

- Ensure that our Firewalls are up-to-date to combat Ransomware and Malware etc. to help prevent a cyber attack (and that our MIS provider has done the same)
- Ensure that all staff are aware of cyber threats such as phishing emails etc. and know what to do (e.g. check if it has come from a recognised source/genuine email account etc. and flag to the IT department if they are in any doubt) to help prevent a cyber attack
- Ensure that our IT department is compliant with the Department of Education's set of cyber security standards.
- Our IT department will be on hand to assist on the day of examinations with any IT issues affecting exams directly
- Paper copies of key documents required to run the examinations will be kept to ensure they are able to go ahead.

8. Failure of IT systems

Criteria for implementation of the plan

MIS system failure at final entry deadline

MIS system failure during exams preparation

Power outage immediately prior to or during a test using a computer

MIS system failure at results release time

IT system corruption affecting candidates' work

Failure of on-site internet connectivity that allows printing of student work

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

- Our IT department will be on hand to assist with any failures of IT systems.
- MIS contractors will be contacted immediately to repair damage quickly.
- Exam boards will be informed if we are unable to meet final entry deadline and an extension to the deadline will be requested.

- Exam boards will be informed if there is a power outage prior to or during an on-screen test and special consideration will be requested in the event of serious disruption (if it is prior to the test, an alternative venue on our centre's other site may be possible and will be considered if there is time).
- Results will be obtained at an alternative site within the VAT.
- IT to make provision for EDI- A2C.
- Exams office would retain necessary backup hardware, such as alternative laptops and USB sticks, to attempt to solve hardware malfunctions or power concerns at the point of occurrence.
- If in the event of software malfunctions, IT support would be on hand from the in-house centre provided IT Team.
- In the event of a site wide power or internet failure that prevented the centre computers from printing work produced by students, printing support would be obtained at the VAT central offices

9. 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

- All staff to refer to the centre's existing policy for dealing with emergency evacuation of exam rooms.
- Candidates to be kept in examination conditions in the first instance if emergency evacuation takes place during exam.
- Inform exam boards of the disruption and ask for special consideration in case of serious disruption.
- Seek out alternative venues if there is enough time prior to the exam starting (see above regarding exam venue contingency plan at short notice)

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

Criteria for implementation of the plan

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

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

- It remains the responsibility of the centre to prepare students, as usual for examinations.
- Students will be offered online learning with lessons/revision and practice materials provided on Teams and via Eprise to support students' preparation in the lead up to examinations.
- In the case of modular courses, the centre may advise candidates to sit examinations in an alternative series if appropriate.

11. 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

- The centre will take advice offered by the awarding body on the options for candidates who have not been able to take scheduled examinations.
- If a candidate is not able to take an examination, they are only eligible for special consideration if they have a medical certificate/letter or have been advised by their centre not to attend an examination. JCQ guidance on special consideration can be accessed through the JCQ website.

- The centre will communicate with candidates (and where appropriate, parents/carers) any changes to the exam or assessment timetable or to the venue as needed.
- If a candidate chooses not to sit an examination, they must be made aware that special consideration rules will not apply.
- The centre will focus on options that enable candidates to take their examinations (referencing the JCQ document *Preparing for disruption to examinations*). With enough notice and medical evidence, certain reasonable adjustment regarding the condition in which an examination is sat may be made in order to facilitate the taking of examinations, if and where possible.
- The centre will discuss alternative arrangements with the awarding body if a candidate misses an exam or loses their assessment due to an emergency, or other event, outside of the candidate's control.

12. Centre may not be able to open as normal during the examination period

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

Criteria for implementation of the plan

Centre may not be able to open as normal for scheduled examinations

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

- It remains the responsibility of centres to prepare students, as usual, for 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.
- The centre to open for examinations and examination candidates only, if possible. Where accommodation is limited, the centre will prioritise candidates whose progression will be severely delayed if they do not take their exam or timetables assessment when planned.
- Alternative centres should be considered in the event that candidates cannot come to school.
- Centre may advise candidates to sit examinations in an alternative series where possible.
- The JCQ Centre Inspection Service should be notified of any alternative site arrangement (submitting the JCQ Alternative Site form online, using the Centre Admin Portal (CAP)).
- Special Consideration can be used where candidates are unable to achieve a result due to one of the above factors.
- An exam result can be generated by the awarding body, based on factors such as a child's performance on other assessments in the same subject.
- We will ensure that we have identified the contingency series - identified as GCSE/ A level days in the event of sustained national or local disruption during the summer series.
- The centre will communicate with candidates (and where appropriate, parents/carers) any changes to the exam or assessment timetable or to the venue through our MIS system using electronic communication that can be run from a workstation off site should that be required.

Alternative venue details:

The Centre would move exams to our other site: King Alfred's, West Site, Challow Road, Wantage OX12 9DU. (Other schools within our Academy such as Larkmead, Faringdon Road, Abingdon OX14 1RF could be approached if necessary).

13. 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

- 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.

14. 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, centres should seek advice from awarding organisations and should not make their own arrangements for transportation unless told to do so by the awarding body
- For any examinations where centres make their arrangements for transportation, centres should investigate alternative dispatch options that comply with the requirements detailed in the JCQ *Instructions for conducting examinations*.
- Centres to ensure secure storage of completed examination scripts until collection.

15. 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

- 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.

16. 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

Distribution of results:

- Centre to make arrangements to access its results at an alternative site (West site or other VAT site), in agreement with the relevant awarding organisation .
- IT setting up A2C access for EDI results transfer.
- Centre to make arrangements to coordinate access to post results services from an alternative site
- Centre 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 (West site or other VAT site)
- Centre to contact the relevant awarding organisation if electronic post results requests are not possible to make alternative arrangements

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

- 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 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 October 2023) 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

"15.1 The qualification regulators, awarding bodies and government departments responsible for education have prepared and agreed information for schools and colleges in the event of examinations being seriously disrupted. This jointly agreed information will ensure consistency of response in the event of major disruption to the examinations system affecting significant numbers of candidates.

Further information may be found at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/exam-system-contingency-plan-england-wales-and-northern-ireland

15.2 In addition, awarding bodies have their own well-established contingency plans in place to respond to disruptions. It is important that exams officers who are facing disruption liaise directly with the relevant awarding body/bodies.

15.3 All centres must have a written examination contingency plan which covers all aspects of examination administration. This will allow members of the senior leadership team to act immediately in the event of an emergency or where the head of centre, examinations officer or SENCo is absent at a critical stage of the examination cycle. The examination contingency plan should reinforce procedures in the event of the centre being unavailable for examinations owing to an unforeseen emergency.

All relevant centre staff must be familiar with the examination contingency plan. Consideration should be given as to how these arrangements will be communicated to candidates, parents and staff should disruption to examinations occur.

15.4 In the event that 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 2025. This is consistent with the qualification regulators' document *Exam system contingency plan: England, Wales and Northern Ireland* - www.gov.uk/government/publications/exam-system-contingency-plan-england-wales-and-northern-ireland

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

15.7 In the event that there is national disruption to a day of examinations in summer 2025, the awarding bodies will liaise with the qualification regulators and government departments to agree the most appropriate option for managing the impact. As a last resort the affected examinations will be rescheduled. Although every effort would be taken to keep the impact to a minimum, it is possible that there could be more than one timetable date affected following the disruption, up to and including the last contingency day. Centres will be alerted if it was agreed to reschedule the examinations and the affected candidates will be expected to make themselves available in such circumstances. The decision regarding the re-scheduling of examinations will always rest with the awarding body. The centre must conduct the examination on the scheduled date unless instructed to do otherwise by the awarding body.

15.8 Where candidates choose not to be available for the rescheduled examination(s) for reasons other than those traditionally covered by special consideration, they will not be eligible for enhanced grading arrangements. Centres **must** therefore ensure candidates and parents are aware of the contingency arrangements so that they may take them into account when making their plans for the summer. However, the awarding bodies will not insist upon candidates being available throughout the entire timetable period as a matter of course."

(JCQ guidance above taken directly from **Instructions for conducting examinations** 2024-2025 <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/

JCQ Notice to Centres - Examination contingency plan/examinations policy www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/general-regulations/notice-to-centres--exam-contingency-plan/

General Regulations for Approved Centres www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/general-regulations

Guidance notes on alternative site arrangements www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/online-forms

Guidance notes for transferred candidates www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/online-forms

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

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

Guidance for centres on cyber security [General Regulations - JCQ Joint Council for Qualifications](http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/general-regulations)

Information for centres affected by RAAC – the delivery of non-examination assessments and the special consideration process [Non-Examination Assessments - JCQ Joint Council for Qualifications](http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/non-examination-assessments)

Further clarification for centres affected by RAAC, Caledonian Modular or similar building issues – March 2024

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: Ensuring the service runs smoothly; Contingency planning

www.gov.uk/government/publications/dispatch-of-exam-scripts-yellow-label-service

Wales

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

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

Northern Ireland

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

Checklist for Principals when considering Opening or Closure of School - exceptional closure of schools
www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/checklist-exceptional-closure-schools

National Cyber Security Centre

The NCSC's free [Web Check](#) and [Mail Check](#) services can help protect schools from cyber-attacks. Two NCSC cyber security services, which are already helping thousands of organisations to protect their websites and email servers from cyber-attacks, are now available to **all UK schools**. Both tools are available free of charge, are quick to set up, and thereafter run automatically. More information is available from the [NCSC website](#).

The Department for Education has been asking centres to review **National Cyber Security Centre advice** following increasing number of cyber-attacks involving ransomware infections. The NCSC information supports centres in cyber security preparedness and mitigation work.

Ransomware attacks continue and the Department is reminding centres to review the NCSC advice and to take precautions. This includes ensuring that you have backups in place for your key services and data.

For ease of reference, the Department has highlighted key links relating to the NCSC cyber security guidance below:

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