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Aims of the Joint Contingency Plan

The Joint Contingency Plan is designed to ensure a consistent and effective response in the event of major disruption to the examination system affecting significant numbers of candidates across several awarding organisations. All awarding organisations are required to have their own well established contingency plans in place to respond to such disruptions, and these have been implemented already on numerous occasions. This Joint Contingency Plan takes into account these processes and procedures and is designed to complement them, not replace them. The organisations that own this plan are those who have a significant interest in assessments delivered in line with the national common examination timetable¹, but where appropriate these contingencies should be applied to other qualifications.

The plan will be implemented in the event of major disruption to the system, such as widespread illness, travel disruption, bad weather or power failures. Any actions taken will be subject to the advice of the official agencies dealing with the specific circumstances being faced, for example the police, Environment Agency or Health Protection Agency.

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

The contingencies applied will be selected based on the context of the disruption and have been implemented on several occasions in response to localised issues. They would be applied on a larger scale in response to any widespread disruption at a national level.

The priority when implementing contingencies will be to maintain three principles:

- Delivering assessments to published timetables
- Delivering results to published timetables
- Complying with regulatory requirements in relation to assessment, marking and standards.

If the usual contingencies are no longer sufficient to maintain these outcomes, an identified Crisis

Management Team consisting of representatives of all organisations involved will be convened by Ofqual to agree the additional actions required.

The national examination timetable applies to GCSEs, AS levels, A-levels and Principal Learning.

Communications

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

In the event of major disruption, communication is a key factor in ensuring an effective and consistent response across the agencies involved. This includes communications between the organisations involved in the response and communications to stakeholders such as centres, candidates, parents or carers and the public. Details of whether specific contingencies have been agreed across organisations will be confirmed on the Ofqual website and proactively communicated to relevant stakeholders.

www.ofqual.gov.uk

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

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

Background and ownership

The Joint Contingency Plan was first developed in 2006 and has been updated regularly since then. It is jointly owned by Ofqual, the Welsh Government, CCEA, AQA, Edexcel, EDI, ICAAE, OCR, VTCT, WJEC, City & Guilds, JCQ, DfE/Teaching Agency, DENI and UCAS. Ofqual acts as the central point of contact for the Contingency Plan and convener of the Contingency Management Group. While Scotland operates a different examinations system, the Scottish Qualifications Authority has been involved in the compilation of the plan to ensure its approach adopts the same principles of fairness, transparency, evidence and integrity. The Joint Contingency Plan is subject to regular reviews and amendments by the involved parties so it continually represents the latest experiences and expertise to ensure appropriate responses to disruption to the exams, qualifications and testing system.

1. Disruption of teaching time – Sendtac Ltd (we) are closed for an extended period

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- We are 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.

Recommended actions:

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

- In the case of modular courses, we may advise candidates to sit examinations in an alternative series. We will follow DfE guidance on emergency planning, with advice on severe weather. This is available on the Department for Education website:

www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/emergencyplanning/a0069425/advice-on-severeweather.

Further advice from the Department of Education Northern Ireland is available under the Useful Information section, page 12.

2. Disruption in the distribution of examination papers

Criteria for implementation of the plan

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

Recommended actions:

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

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

Criteria for implementation of the plan

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

Recommended actions:

- We will liaise with candidates to identify whether the examination can be sat at an alternative venue in agreement with the relevant awarding organisations
- We will offer candidates an opportunity to sit any examinations missed at the next available series
- We will 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. JCQ guidance on special consideration can be accessed through the JCQ website:
www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration/regulations-andguidance

4. We are unable to open as normal during the examination period

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- We are unable to open as normal for scheduled examinations.

A centre which is unable to open as normal for examinations must inform each awarding organisation with which examinations are due to be taken as soon as is possible.

As part of their general planning for emergencies, centres should cover the impact on examinations.

The responsibility for deciding whether it is safe for a centre to open lies with the head of centre. The Principal is responsible for taking advice, or following instructions from relevant local or national agencies in deciding whether they are able to open.

Recommended actions:

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

5. Disruption to the transportation of completed examination papers

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- Delay in normal collection arrangements for completed examination scripts.

Recommended actions:

- In the first instance we will seek advice from awarding organisations and normal collection agency regarding collection. We will not make our own arrangements for transportation without approval from awarding organisations.
- We will ensure secure storage of completed examination papers until collection.

6. 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

Recommended actions

- Awarding organisations to generate candidate marks for affected assessments based on other appropriate evidence of candidate achievement as defined by the awarding organisations
- Candidates to retake affected assessment at subsequent assessment window.

7. We are unable to distribute results as normal

Criteria for implementation of plan

- We are unable to access or manage the distribution of results to candidates, or to facilitate post results services.

Recommended actions:

We will contact awarding organisations about alternative options:

- make arrangements to access its results at an alternative site
- make arrangements to coordinate access to post results services from an alternative site
- share facilities with other centres if this is possible.

Summary of Responsibilities in the Event of Disruption to Examinations

Awarding organisations responsible for:	Examination centres responsible for:
	Preparing plans for any disruption to exams as part of centre's general emergency planning
Ensuring centres receive examination materials for scheduled exams	Preparing candidates for exams
	Ensuring exams and assessments are taken under the conditions prescribed by awarding organisations.
	Ensuring, where relevant, that assessment materials and candidate work are stored under secure conditions.
	Deciding whether the centre can open for exams and agreeing such arrangements with the awarding organisations.
Advising centres on possible alternative exam arrangements and declining/approving proposals for alternative exam arrangements	Exploring the opportunities for alternative arrangements if the centre cannot open for exams and agreeing such arrangements with the awarding organisations.
Evaluating and declining/approving requests for special consideration	Judging whether candidates meet the requirements for special consideration as a result of any disruption and submitting these requests to the relevant awarding organisations.
	Assessing and liaising with awarding organisations in the event of disruption to the transportation of papers.
	The distribution of exam results to candidates.