



St Mary's School
CAMBRIDGE

Examinations: Contingency Policy

This policy is the responsibility of the Exams Officer.

This policy is updated annually in line with JCQ General Regulations.

Last reviewed: February 24

Next Review: September 24

Purpose of the Plan

This plan examines potential risks and issues that could cause disruption to the exams process at St Mary's School. 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 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 Examinations System in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland and the JCQ document Preparing for disruption to examinations (effective from 1 September 2023).

This plan also confirms St Mary's School compliance with JCQ's General Regulations for Approved Centres (section 5.3) that the centre has in place:

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 where the head of centre, examinations officer or Head of Language and Learning 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, or on results day, owing to an unforeseen emergency. The potential impact of a cyber-attack should also be considered.

National Centre Number Register and other information requirements

The head of centre will also ensure that St Mary's School as 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.

Causes of potential 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 deadlines;
- sufficient invigilators not recruited and trained.

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

- 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 e.g. very late arrival, suspected malpractice, special consideration;
- candidates' scripts not dispatched as required 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:

- Line Manager, Emma Hall, to delegate the roles above to appropriate members of staff.

2. 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;
- 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;
- modified paper requirements not identified in a timely manner to enable ordering to meet external deadline;
- staff providing support to access arrangement candidates not allocated and trained.

Exam time

- access arrangement candidate support not arranged for exam rooms.

Centre actions:

- SENCO line manager to liaise with Exams Officer over SENCO absence;
- SLT to arrange a cover SENCO to complete the tasks above.

3. 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 submission deadlines.

Centre actions:

- line Manager and Exams Officer to liaise with remaining teaching staff.

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:

- recruitment and training is done in advance;
- exams Officer and Senior Invigilator to cover absences or shortages by liaising with 'staffcover' and teachers of examination classes. NB: Must make sure that these staff have all been invigilator trained.

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:

- in an emergency the Sports Hall and appropriate classrooms could be utilised for examination purposes;
- for smaller exams Mary Ward House could be used;
- Head of Centre/Exams Officer liaises with other schools re availability of their rooms.

6. Cyber-attack

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- MIS system is affected by a cyber-attack;

Centre actions to mitigate the impact of the disruption

- iSAMS, now cloud hosted, is backed up every hour of every day, 52 weeks a year, with backups stored onsite and offsite for an added layer of security;
- network Manager/IT department to facilitate the restoring of the backups;
- systems for restoring services and recovering data from the backups are tested and reliable;
- in the event of an attack the Centre will enact the 'Crisis Management Plan';
- contact the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC);
- contact the local law enforcement and Action Fraud;
- inform the DfE by emailing: securityenquiries@education.gov.uk.

7. Failure of IT systems

Criteria for implementation of the plan

- MIS system failure at final entry deadline
- MIS system failure during exams preparation
- MIS system failure at results release time

Centre actions:

- iSAMS, now cloud hosted, is backed up every hour of every day, 52 weeks a year, with backups stored onsite and offsite for an added layer of security; exams Officer and IT Manager to liaise with examination boards as to appropriate action;

- check that the IT department are aware of the exam results days to ensure smooth running of downloads.

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:

- invigilators and Exams Officer to ensure emergency evacuation plan is followed, maintaining the integrity of the exam (See Emergency Evacuation Policy);
- candidates to be held separately avoiding contact with the main body of pupils, thus ensuring that candidates do not communicate with one another. The Exams Officer and invigilators to maintain security of candidates throughout the evacuation or the relocation to another venue;
- exams Officer to liaise with Head of Centre and to inform awarding bodies;
- arrangements made for examinations to be moved to Mary Ward House.

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:

- Headmistress, Governors, SLT to take necessary action;
- centre to communicate with parents, carers and students about the disruption to teaching time and provide appropriate work;
- centre to revert back to remote learning over Teams.

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.

Centre actions:

- centre will communicate with relevant awarding organisation to make them aware of the issue. Consideration would be given on an individual basis as to why they were unable to attend the examination centre. Special consideration may be applied for;
- looking into whether the candidate can take the exam at home will be considered – invigilator to take paper to the candidate and stay and invigilate.

11. 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:

- centre to open for examinations and examination candidates only, if possible;

- centre to use alternative venues in agreement with relevant awarding organisations, (e.g., share facilities with other centres or use other public building. Mary Ward House could also be used);
- centre may offer candidates an opportunity to sit any examinations missed at the next available series;
- centre to apply to awarding organisations for special consideration for candidates where they have met the minimum requirements;
- centre could implement 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).

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:

- centre to discuss alternative delivery of papers to the centre;
- if this happens on the day of the exam, contact the Exam Boards immediately. Awarding organisations to provide centres with electronic access to examination papers via a secure external network;
- the Examinations Officer would need to ensure that copies are received, made and stored under secure conditions;
- centre will check all exam papers upon arrival in school and will alert the appropriate Awarding Bodies of any discrepancies;
- as a last resort, and in close collaboration with centres and regulators, awarding organisations to consider scheduling of the examination on an alternative date.

13. Disruption to transporting completed examination scripts

Criteria for implementation of the plan

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

Centre actions:

- where the examinations are part of the national 'yellow label' service or where the awarding bodies arrange collections, the centre should seek advice from the awarding bodies and will not make their own arrangements for transportation unless told to do so by the awarding body;
- for any examinations where the centre makes their arrangements for transportation, the centre will investigate alternative dispatch options that comply with the requirements detailed in the JCQ Instructions for conducting examinations;
- centre will ensure secure storage of completed examination scripts until collection.) All examination scripts will be stored in the secure storage area of the examination's office.

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:

- immediate communication to be made with relevant awarding body;
- students, parents and carers to be informed;
- awarding organisations may generate candidate marks for the affected assessments based on other appropriate evidence of candidate achievement as defined by the awarding organisations;
- candidates to retake affected assessment at a subsequent assessment window, if possible.

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:

- exams Office to contact awarding bodies for advice;
- arrange to access results at an alternative site, eg home, MWH;
- unable to access results - Exams Officer will contact awarding bodies regarding alternative options (e.g. download results from awarding body secure websites);
- unable to distribute results - the centre will communicate with parents, carers, candidates and HoDs with details of alternative arrangements (eg alternative site – MWH, or online);
- information to be posted on the school website/parent portal;
- alternative arrangements for post-results services to be communicated to parents, carers, candidates and HoDs.

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](#)

[Cyber crime and cyber security: a guide for education providers](#)

[DfE Cyber Security Guidance – March 2023](#)

Ofqual

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

Contingency planning

You should prepare for possible disruption to exams and other assessments and make sure staff are aware of these plans.

General contingency guidance

- [Emergency planning and response](#) from the Department for Education in England
- [handling strike action in school](#) from the Department for Education in England
- [school organisation: local-authority-maintained schools](#) from the Department for Education in England
- [Exceptional closure days](#) from the Department of Education in Northern Ireland
- [Checklist - exceptional closure of schools](#) from the Department of Education in Northern Ireland
- School terms and school closures from NI Direct
- [Opening schools in extremely bad weather](#) - guidance for schools from the Welsh Government
- [Police guidance](#) from the National Counter Terrorism Security Office and partners on preparing for threats

Disruption to assessments or exams

In the absence of any instruction from the relevant awarding organisation, you should make sure that any exam or timetabled assessment takes place if it is possible to hold it. This may mean relocating to alternative premises.

You should discuss alternative arrangements with your awarding organisation if:

- the exam or assessment cannot take place
- a student misses an exam or loses their assessment due to an emergency, or other event, outside of the student's control

See also 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 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.

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 parents, carers and students any changes to the exam or assessment timetable or to the venue.
7. Communicate with any external assessors 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 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

- 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 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.

See also:

- [JCQ's guidance on special considerations](#)

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 [Department for Education](#) 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

The governments' view across England, Wales and Northern Ireland is education should continue in 2021 to 2022 with schools remaining open and that examinations and assessments will go ahead in both autumn 2021 and summer 2022.

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 exam timetables.

We will update this page as necessary, with any further relevant links, should national disruption occur

[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**, (updated 02 March 2020) <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

15.1 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/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 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.

15.5 The awarding bodies will designate 'contingency sessions' for examinations, summer 2024. This is consistent with the qualification regulators' document Exam system contingency plan: England, Wales and Northern Ireland - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/exam-system-contingency-plan-england-wales-and-northern-ireland>

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.

In the event of national disruption to a day of examinations in summer 2024, 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.

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.

(JCQ guidance above taken directly from **Instructions for Conducting Examinations 2023-2024** <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 notice - 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

GOV.UK

Emergency planning and response: Exam and assessment disruption; JCQ Notice to Centres – Examination contingency plan/examinations policy www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/general-regulations/notice-to-centres--exam-contingency-plan/

Dispatch of exam scripts guide: Ensuring the service runs smoothly; Contingency planning
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dispatch-of-exam-scripts-yellow-label-service>

Wales

School closures: examinations [gov.wales/school-closures-examinations](https://www.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 www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/checklist-exceptional-closure-schools

National Counter Terrorism Security Office ProtectUK

www.protectuk.police.uk

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 school improve their cyber security](#)
6. [Building Resilience: Ransomware, the risks to schools and ways to prevent it](#)
7. [School staff offered training to help shore up cyber defences - NCSC.GOV.UK](#)