

External Assessment Contingency Planning

Introduction

NCFE offers a number of qualifications that include an external assessment component. Many of these external assessments must be completed on a set date and time, or within an assessment window. More information on our published assessment dates can be found on our External Assessment Timetable, available on the delivery and learner support section of our website [here](#).

This publication offers guidance on what a centre should do in any unforeseen circumstances meaning an external assessment cannot go ahead on the published date and time. It also provides guidance on how centres can plan for and deal with severe disruptions and/or emergencies.

Within this guidance, 'severe disruptions' includes but is not limited to:

- serious injury to a pupil or member of staff (e.g. transport accident)
- significant damage to school property (e.g. fire)
- criminal activity (e.g. bomb threat)
- severe weather (e.g. flooding)
- public health incidents (e.g. flu pandemic)
- the effects of a disaster in the local community

Centre emergency planning and response

The Department for Education (DfE) has produced [guidance](#) on emergency contingency planning for disruptions of external examinations. This is a robust outline of considerations for emergency planning for centres across the UK.

Emergency plans should include procedures for determining whether an emergency has occurred, and when to activate the plan in response to an emergency. This should include identifying an appropriately trained person who will take the decision, in consultation with others, on when an emergency has occurred.

The maintenance of plans involves more than just their preparation. Once a plan has been prepared, it must be maintained systematically to ensure it remains up to date and fit for purpose at any time if an emergency occurs.

Please be aware that NCFE may request to see evidence of a centre's emergency planning or process documentation during an external quality assurance visit or centre inspection visit. This must be provided upon request.

As detailed in the emergency planning and response guidance provided by the Department for Education, centres should have their own emergency plans and procedures in place to help staff with effectively responding to emergency situations. However, it may be that multiple organisations can develop a joint emergency plan where the partners agree that, for a successful combined response, they need a formal set of procedures governing them all.



Consideration should be given within any centre contingency planning documentation to situations such as:

- Staffing emergencies, e.g. Invigilator or Learning Support Assistant unable to fulfil their duties in an external assessment.
 - *What contingencies are in place within your centre to deal with such staffing emergency situations?*
 - *Do you have other members of staff on hand who are suitably trained and familiar with all regulatory requirements? Will they be able to step in at short notice?*
 - *It is important to create an effective invigilation team within your centre. Is there opportunity to network with other local centres in the area to access a wider pool of Invigilators?*
- Issues with the assessment room, site or location
 - *What contingencies are in place within your centre to deal with any issues relating to the assessment room, site or location?*
 - *Is there another room within the centre or at a different address where the assessment could take place should any issues arise in the lead up to or on the day of assessment?*
 - *In cases such as these how will you ensure the integrity of the assessment is maintained, ensuring assessment materials are kept secure at all times?*
- Dealing with medical emergencies in an external assessment
 - *What contingencies are in place within your centre to deal with learners who are unwell during an external assessment?*
 - *How will you ensure other learners are not directly affected in these such cases?*

Assessment variations and alternative arrangements

As detailed in our [Regulations for the Conduct of External Assessment](#), for assessments with published starting times, centres are enabled to start assessments by up to 30 minutes earlier than, or later than, the published starting time without the requirement to submit an assessment variation request for approval.

If the amendment to time is greater than 30 minutes, prior approval must be agreed. Centres may request a variation which will be reviewed by the Assessment Delivery team on a case-by-case basis.

Centres may request an assessment variation when they would like to:

- vary the published assessment date or time, beyond the allowed 30 minutes
- move the assessment from the approved location to an alternative site.

If, following the receipt of an assessment variation request, agreement is given to allow the learner(s) to sit the external assessment on an alternative day, then JCQ arrangements apply to this situation and the Centre must arrange suitable supervision of the learner(s).



On the day of set date and time external assessment, if learners are unable to get to the assessment location due to travel problems, or the centre being closed, wherever possible centres must investigate if another suitable venue is available. Where this is not possible, consideration should be given as to whether the learner(s) can be entered for the next available external assessment as detailed in the [External Assessment Timetable](#).

If this is a learner's last opportunity to complete the external assessment due to them leaving school or them re-sitting an outgoing specification, centres must submit a request for special consideration for their request to be considered.

On-demand external assessments

In cases of severe disruption or an emergency affecting an on-demand external assessment (e.g. an external assessment booked on a date and time of the centre's choosing), it is expected that the assessment will be cancelled and rescheduled if, after investigation, the disruption cannot be overcome. This would also apply in the case of any external assessments to be completed using our online assessment platform.

In the case of a Functional Skills paper-based external assessment, we operate a flexible entries process, whereby centres may reschedule the assessment for a different date and time either 5 working days prior to or 5 working days after the originally scheduled assessment date. If the disruption or emergency cannot be overcome within these timeframes the Functional Skills paper-based external assessment must be cancelled and rescheduled for a different date and time.

Set date and time & assessment window external assessments

There are three potential actions NCFE may take when notified of a centre experiencing severe disruption or an emergency affecting a set date and time or assessment window external assessment.

- 1) Reschedule the external assessment using the same assessment paper

This would only be considered under the following circumstances:

- There is only one centre with entries for this external assessment
- All centres with entries for this external assessment are closed
- There is time within the external assessment timetable to reschedule the assessment.*

In such cases, NCFE will work with any affected centres to agree on an alternative date and time for the external assessment. Wherever possible all affected centres would be expected to complete the external assessment on the same rescheduled date.

* Where the assessment is completed within an assessment window, we will also consider allowing an extension to a window in cases of severe disruption or emergency.



2) Schedule an additional external assessment date with a different assessment paper

This would only be considered under the following circumstances:

- Some learners, either from within the same centre or across other centres nationally, had already completed the external assessment on the published date and time
- The affected learners would be significantly disadvantaged if an additional external assessment paper was not provided.

Please note that this would only be considered in truly exceptional cases of widespread national disruption or emergency.

3) Reject the request with no further action

There may be occasions where it is not possible to reschedule an external assessment. In these cases, learners must be entered for the next available external assessment.

Please note: Contingencies applied will always be selected based on the context of the disruption i.e. localised or national issues. Depending on the scale of any issue, we may invoke contingencies on behalf of our centres, particularly in response to any widespread disruption at a national level.

Applying for special consideration relating to severe disruption or emergency situations

Where all viable alternatives have been considered in cases of severe disruption or emergencies, applications for special consideration must be submitted using the special considerations form on our website, in line with our Reasonable Adjustments and Special Considerations policy.

Applications must be submitted **within 7 working days** of the originally published external assessment date.

Contact

Should you have any questions relating to the content of this publication or you require any support or guidance regarding contingency planning for external assessments, please contact the Assessment Delivery team using assessmentdelivery@ncfe.org.uk.

