

OxfordAQA

Guidance for Schools: Managing Exams During Emergencies and Disruption

September 2026

Purpose of this guidance

This guidance is intended to support Exams Officers and schools in developing their own local procedures for managing emergencies and wider disruption that may affect the delivery of examinations.

It does **not** provide a contingency plan or prescribe exact actions. Schools remain responsible for ensuring that their contingency arrangements:

- Reflect their local context and risks
- Follow instructions from relevant local or national authorities
- Meet OxfordAQA requirements.

This guidance complements the school's existing emergency procedures and must be read in conjunction with the school's contingency plan and invigilation arrangements.

1. What schools should plan for

Schools should consider how their arrangements would operate in the following circumstances:

- An emergency occurring **during** an examination
- An emergency or disruption preventing an examination from **starting**
- An emergency or disruption preventing an examination from being **completed**
- Prolonged or widespread disruption affecting one or more examination days.

Examples may include (but are not limited to):

- Unplanned fire alarms or security alerts
- Extreme weather events
- Transport disruption
- Public health incidents
- Power, IT, or infrastructure failure
- Unplanned building closure or loss of access.

2. Emergency occurring during an examination

Where an emergency occurs while an examination is in progress, schools should ensure their local arrangements include procedures for:

- Stopping students from writing and pausing the examination safely
- Evacuating or securing the examination room in line with instructions from the appropriate authority
- Maintaining close supervision of students at all times
- Preventing discussion of the examination content between students during any interruption
- Securing question papers, scripts, and student work
- Recording the time of the interruption and its duration
- Deciding whether and how the examination can resume
- Reporting the incident to OxfordAQA
- Applying for special consideration where students have been disadvantaged.

Schools should consider how these arrangements apply to both written and on-screen assessments. For on-screen assessments, schools should ensure staff understand how to pause, lock, restart, or securely relocate assessments where required, in accordance with platform-specific guidance.

Schools should also ensure that any students with approved access arrangements or additional needs are supported appropriately during disruption or evacuation.

3. Examinations that cannot take place as planned

Where an examination cannot start as scheduled, or cannot be completed under secure conditions, schools should consider how their arrangements address:

- Who has authority to decide whether the examination can proceed
- How OxfordAQA will be contacted for guidance, including ensuring staff know how to access urgent or out-of-hours contact arrangements where these are available
- How examination materials will be secured
- How students will be supervised, where appropriate
- How student disadvantage will be minimised
- How decisions and actions will be documented.

Schools should not start or continue an examination unless secure conditions can be maintained.

4. Wider or prolonged disruption

Schools should consider how their contingency planning addresses wider disruption affecting examinations across a day or series.

This may include planning for:

- Extended disruption affecting multiple sessions
- The cumulative impact on student well-being
- Communication with students, parents/carers and staff
- Working with OxfordAQA to determine appropriate next steps.

Schools should ensure that safety, examination security, and fairness remain the priority at all times.

5. Supervision and security

Regardless of the nature of the emergency or disruption, schools should ensure their arrangements always address:

- Continuous supervision of students where required
- Prevention of communication about examination content
- Secure handling and storage of question papers and scripts
- Controlled access to examination rooms and materials
- Clear records of actions taken and decisions made
- Ensuring that any students with approved access arrangements or additional needs are supported appropriately during disruption, evacuation, or when an examination resumes.

These principles underpin all emergency and disruption planning.

6. Roles, decision-making, and escalation

Schools should be clear in their local arrangements about:

- Who is responsible for making decisions during emergencies
- When senior leadership must be involved
- When and how OxfordAQA must be contacted
- How advice received will be recorded and followed.

This clarity helps ensure timely, consistent, and well-documented responses.

Schools should also ensure that relevant staff know how to contact OxfordAQA quickly where urgent advice is required.

7. Reviewing and maintaining contingency arrangements

Schools are encouraged to:

- Review their arrangements regularly
- Consider likely emergency or disruption scenarios
- Brief invigilators and relevant staff on expectations
- Update procedures following any incidents or near misses.

This supports confidence, consistency, and continuous improvement.

Checklist: Does your contingency plan cover the following?

Use this checklist to review your local arrangements.

Emergencies during an exam

- ☐ Stopping the exam safely
- ☐ Evacuation or securing of rooms
- ☐ Supervision of students at all times
- ☐ Securing papers and scripts
- ☐ Recording interruptions and timings
- ☐ Decisions about resuming or relocating exams
- ☐ Reporting incidents and applying for special consideration based on guidelines
- ☐ Arrangements for supporting students with access arrangements during evacuation or disruption

Exams that cannot start or finish

- ☐ Clear decision-making authority
- ☐ Including urgent or out-of-hours arrangements where available, or contacting OxfordAQA for guidance
- ☐ Securing examination materials
- ☐ Supervision arrangements where needed
- ☐ Minimising student disadvantage
- ☐ Documenting decisions and actions

Wider disruption

- ☐ Planning for prolonged or large-scale disruption
- ☐ Student welfare is considered
- ☐ Communication with students, parents, and staff
- ☐ Alignment with local authority instructions

Always ensure

- ☐ Examination security is maintained
- ☐ Supervision arrangements are clear
- ☐ Records are retained
- ☐ Staff are briefed and trained
- ☐ Staff understand procedures for pausing, securing, restarting or relocating on-screen assessments
- ☐ Local procedures align with the school's contingency plan, invigilation arrangements and wider emergency procedures