BUSINESS CONTINUITY POLICY

Vocational Training Services Care Sector Ltd (VTS) is committed to providing a high-quality education & training delivery service throughout Essex and into the surrounding counties. We are a small independent training provider delivering peripatetic, work-based education & qualifications (mainly apprenticeships) to learners of all ages. Training predominantly takes place on employers' premises; however, learners do attend one of our offices from time to time to attend learning sessions and sit online assessments.

Integral to our ongoing success is the need to have contingency plans in place in case of a minor/major incident, emergency or hazard which would potentially affect our usual operations.
This document sets out our approach to ensuring the continued delivery of our services to employers and learners, should such an incident occur.

HOW WE CURRENTLY OPERATE OUR SERVICES:

We provide an education delivery service (predominantly apprenticeships) peripatetically throughout Essex and into the surrounding counties. We meet individually with learners at their places of work to carry out learning sessions and complete observations. We also use remote learning sessions with learners utilising video calling such as zoom or teams. Our team of tutor/assessors are mainly home based and are provided with a laptop and company telephone. Our administration department which provides all the backup services and information to our tutors, plus carries out all the processing of learner records are based in our offices at Westcliff on Sea, Essex. The majority of our business operations (including the creation and maintenance of learner portfolios) are carried out electronically, but we still have a small number of paper learner files. All our operations now utilise secure 'cloud based' platforms.
From time to time, learners need to attend our office to sit online assessments in functional skills and as part of their End Point Assessment.

CRITICAL TO ENSURING CONTINUITY OF OUR OPERATIONS:

Critical factors which we need to ensure so that our services can continue:

- Tutors can continue to meet with learners to deliver learning sessions and observations
- Access to learners' portfolios and learning resources is uninterrupted
- Learners can continue to take online assessments
- Effective arrangements in place to replace learner observations if necessary
- The administration department can continue to function fully to support our services and process learner records
- A secure internet service so that our business systems continue to operate correctly and access to learner files is maintained
- Safety of and access to the remaining learner paper files
- Transparent and effective communication between the senior leadership team (SLT) and all staff to ensure that everyone is informed and knows what is expected of them in the event of an incident.

POTENTIAL THREATS TO THE CONTINUITY OF OUR OPERATIONS:

Short Term/ minor threats:

Risk – medium to high-risk threats include

- Short term temporary staff absence due to illness
- Weather conditions making travel difficult – snow, flooding etc
- Temporary loss of power and/or internet services
- Temporary loss of access to cloud-based business systems
- Breakdown of assessor/tutor laptop or phone
- Breakdown of business equipment in the office

Longer term/ serious threats:

Risk – low risk threats include

- Major disruption to IT systems causing loss of data/data breach
- Any other major national incident, for example pandemic, causing widespread disruption to daily life and work

Risk – low to very low risk threats include

- Major disruption to Westcliff office through fire or other incident, rendering the building unusable and causing irretrievable damage to office equipment/ files etc.
- Office rendered unusable for the purposes of learner testing

WHAT WE HAVE IN PLACE GENERALLY TO MITIGATE MINOR/SERIOUS THREATS:

Data & IT security:

- We are accredited to Cyber Essentials, ensuring that our data & IT systems are operated according to certain standards. We will maintain our accreditation on an annual basis
- We only subscribe to recognised 'cloud based' platforms which guarantee security, safety and storage of data and demand secure, password protected and unique access for each user. Most of our critical business systems are managed in this way, including learner portfolios and our financial records.
- Our learner 'paper files' plus all other critical business information has been scanned to electronic format and is stored in our cloud-based system and backed up via our IT company.
- Our approach to data & IT security is underpinned by our Data Protection Policy which is reviewed annually and updated as necessary
- We engage the services of an IT support company with a guaranteed response time of 4 hours during normal business hours, ensuring any issues we have with equipment or data is addressed quickly

Communication:

We have an open and transparent approach to communication within VTS. We utilise different methods of communication to ensure that staff, learners and employers are fully informed of important changes which may affect them. In the event of an incident causing a potential threat, we can:

- Reach staff quickly via mobile phone, text message or email
- Communicate quickly and effectively to all staff at once via video meeting
- Ensure our website is updated immediately
- Immediately put a message on our main telephone enquiry line
- Update our social media accounts regularly
- Keep our learners & employers updated via our regular newsletters or email

Flexible operating locations:

All staff can work effectively from home if necessary. The SLT and admin team have full access to all cloud-based platforms which house the business functions of VTS. Tutors staff have full access to all cloud-based platforms necessary for effective learning delivery (learner portfolio, learning resources, initial assessment, apprenticeship standards). Remote learning sessions for learners have been operated very effectively during the COVID 19 pandemic and both learners and employers have full remote access to their learning portfolios and resources.

Learner Testing (Alternative sites) & Learner Observation arrangements:

Learner online testing mainly happens via remote invigilation within the learner's workplace premises or home; minimising disruption should an event happen at our office. If a learner requires one of our test rooms in the event of disruption at one of office, we could quickly switch any testing arrangements to remote invigilation taken at another suitable premises. We have excellent links with several large employers with suitable rooms on their premises which we can use if necessary. Should any of these circumstances arise, VTS would support and fund transport arrangements for learners to be able to get to these alternative sites. Most of our testing is now conducted remotely so any disruption in the office will not affect the test taking place.

Arrangements are in place to replace learner observations with employer expert witness statements, if there is a major incident preventing us from attending the workplace (for example the COVID 19 pandemic). Again, this ensures that apprentices are able to progress to their End Point Assessment within expected timescales.

HOW WE WILL RESPOND SPECIFICALLY TO MINOR/SERIOUS THREATS:

Minor threat, medium to high risk:

- Short term temporary staff absence – one of the SLT will make suitable arrangements. For example, if a tutor is unwell and unable to attend a learning appointment, the learner and employer will be informed ahead of the planned appointment.

- Inclement weather conditions – if travel is in advised, learning appointments should be switched to remote sessions and admin will be advised to work from home.
- Temporary loss of power/internet/cloud-based platforms – one of the SLT will liaise immediately with the relevant organisation to restore services ASAP, should this not be timely staff can work remotely from home and access everything required to do their job.
- Breakdown of tutor or office equipment – should be reported immediately to one of the SLT who will arrange for repair/replacement ASAP.

Serious threat, low risk:

- Major IT disruption/ data breach – one of the SLT will engage the services of our IT company straight away to assess the extent of the issue. Once known we will inform any relevant organisation (including the ESFA) as necessary and work with our IT company to redress the situation.
- Another major national incident, for example pandemic. As demonstrated by the COVID 19 pandemic, we are equipped to operate entirely remotely, with all staff working from home if necessary and business operations continuing uninterrupted.
- Interruption to or permanent cessation of VTS's ability to deliver apprenticeship training. Potential causes of this could be:

  1. Loss of a major employer contract
  2. Serious intervention by an awarding organisation or End Point Assessment Organisation
  3. ESFA removal of VTS from the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers (RoATP), potentially due to financial or qualitative (Ofsted, minimum standards) intervention, or failure to maintain RoATP status

We would take the following approach to deal with this:

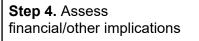| Critical activity	Details
Step 1. Understand the extent and impact of the loss, and identify employers / apprentices affected	Extract data from Learner Management Information System to identify which employers/apprentices are affected.
Step 2. Assess impact on employers / apprentices affected	Engage with ESFA and other provider/s to identify a wind-down / continuity plan for existing employers /apprentices.
Step 3. Make arrangements for IT access and permissions to learner evidence and progress records	Arrange appropriate access to Learning Assistant for relevant personnel.
Step 3. Assess impact on staff	Identify if the loss will impact on staffing capacity requirements

Step 4. Assess financial/other implications	Identify and plan for risks and mitigations

Serious threat, low to very low risk:

- Major disruption to Westcliff office rendering it unusable with damage to equipment and files – the SLT will immediately instruct all staff to work from home. Learning delivery for learners would be unaffected as this is only dependant on cloud-based software. Administrative function would need securement of IT equipment from our IT company and then they would be able to work from home. VTS has a contingency cash fund which it could use to purchase any software or new equipment necessary to restore working function in this timescale.

<u>IMPACT OF THE MITIGATIONS WE HAVE PUT IN PLACE AND OUR PLANNED RESPONSE TO A MINOR/SERIOUS THREAT OR INCIDENT:</u>

We have analysed our business operations, considered potential threats to the delivery of our services, both minor and serious and put mitigations in place to avert the risks. We have also planned specifically our responses to certain scenarios. As a result of this, we consider that we have addressed and have effective mitigations in place for the critical factors identified on page 1 of this document. In all scenarios our learning delivery services would continue uninterrupted. In the event of a very serious incident at our Westcliff office, we consider the maximum disruption to the full administrative function of VTS would be 1 working day.

<u>EMERGENCY CONTACTS</u>

In the event of an incident, any member of staff, learner or employer may contact any of the emergency contacts listed:

- Emma Henigan, Managing Director, VTS - 01702 353557 or 07712 887607
- Shannon True, Office Manager, VTS – 01702 353557 or 07984 065560
- Rosie Hamilton Quality and Operations Manager – 01702 353557 or 07958297199
- Education & Skills Funding Agency – Service Centre 0370 2670001

<u>REVIEW AND VERSION CONTROL</u>

This policy is reviewed annually and update as necessary.

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Next review:	July 2026
Created by:	Emma Henigan
Position in Company:	Director

Signed:	*Emma Henigan*

Emma Henigan (Jul 23, 2025, 2:42pm)

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