

Malpractice for GCSE, AS and A level: summer 2017 exam series

Background information accompanying statistical
release



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Contents

Information about the statistics.....	3
Purpose.....	3
Geographical coverage.....	3
Description.....	4
Data source.....	5
Limitations.....	6
Quality Assurance.....	6
Revisions.....	6
Confidentiality and rounding.....	6
Status.....	7
Related publications.....	7
Statistical policies.....	7
Glossary.....	7
Useful links.....	7
Feedback.....	8

Information about the statistics

Purpose

This release provides information on reported malpractice associated with GCSE and AS and A level exams during the summer 2017 exam series.

Geographical coverage

This report presents data on malpractice figures in England. Reports published in previous years included data for learners in Wales and Northern Ireland as well. As such, historical figures in this year's report reflect England only data and may therefore differ from previously published figures.

For this, and all other releases for the academic year 2016/17, Ofqual will publish separate data tables for learners in Wales and Northern Ireland without commentary, in addition to data tables and report for England. This is following a [transition arrangement](#) with Qualifications Wales (the regulator in Wales) and CCEA (the regulator in Northern Ireland) whereby the responsibility for publishing data for learners in Wales and Northern Ireland for the academic year 2017/18 and beyond has been passed to Qualifications Wales and CCEA respectively.

Five exam boards offer GCSE and GCE qualifications in England, Wales and/or Northern Ireland:

- AQA Education (AQA)
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)
- Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR)
- Pearson Education Ltd. (Pearson)
- WJEC-CBAC Ltd. (WJEC)

Description

The qualifications covered in this release are regulated by Ofqual, Qualifications Wales or CCEA. Each qualifications regulator publishes conditions¹ that set out the requirements that the exam boards it regulates have to meet. These conditions state that an awarding organisation must take all reasonable steps to prevent the occurrence of any malpractice in the development, delivery and award of qualifications which it makes available or proposes to make available.

Malpractice is any breach of the regulations that might undermine the integrity of an exam, from deliberate attempts by students to communicate with each other during an exam to inadvertent failures by school or college staff to comply with exam board instructions.

The conditions require all exam boards to investigate allegations or suspicions of malpractice and to manage the effect of any malpractice where they have established that malpractice has occurred. They must take steps to prevent reoccurrence and take action against those responsible that is proportionate to the gravity and scope of the occurrence.

In addition, the conditions require the exam boards to have up-to-date written procedures relating to the investigation of suspected malpractice. The exam boards are also required to keep under review centres' arrangements to prevent and investigate malpractice.

Exam boards may investigate any instances of alleged or suspected malpractice in either examined and non-examined assessments, and take action with respect to the students and schools or colleges concerned to protect the integrity of the assessments, or to prevent reoccurrences of malpractice. Schools and colleges should report all incidents of malpractice to the relevant exam boards and cooperate with subsequent investigations. Each case of malpractice, whether reported by the school or college or identified by the exam board, is considered and judged on an individual basis in the light of all the information available, and the outcome should be proportionate with the gravity of the malpractice as determined by the exam board.

Student malpractice

Exam boards will normally impose penalties on students found guilty of malpractice. The penalties for student malpractice vary depending on the type of offence. These penalties can include written warnings, loss of marks, and disqualification from units,

¹ Conditions in [England](#), [Northern Ireland](#) and [Wales](#)

components, or whole qualifications. An individual student can be penalised more than once in an exam series and by more than one exam board.

School or college staff malpractice

Exam boards can also impose penalties on school or college staff found guilty of malpractice. These penalties can include a written warning about the implications of repeating the offence, imposing special conditions on an individual's future involvement in exams and assessments, requiring specific training or mentoring as a condition of future involvement in exams, or suspending an individual from all involvement in delivering that exam board's exams and assessments for a set period. Exam boards can only impose sanctions related to a member of staff's involvement in the administration of their examinations; they cannot impose sanctions relating to a member of staff's employment. It is for centres to determine whether any wider sanction is appropriate (but that is not included in the figures reported here). In the most serious cases, the National College for Teaching and Leadership considers whether a teacher should be prohibited from teaching.

School or college malpractice

Exam boards must investigate and, where necessary, sanction schools or colleges involved in malpractice. Instances of malpractice by schools or colleges can range from actions intended to give an unfair advantage to students in an exam or assessment to ignorance of, or inappropriate application of, the assessment regulations. Where there is evidence that malpractice is the result of a serious management failure, an exam board may apply sanctions against a whole department or the school or college.

Data source

Exam boards submit data to Ofqual for GCSEs, AS and A levels they award in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, other UK regions and overseas. Any provider that does not return a complete set of data within the collection period are contacted to make sure the data is as complete as possible. The exam boards may revise their figures for an exam series in subsequent years.

This was the first year when Ofqual collected anonymised data at individual case level for all malpractice incidents - student, school or college and school or college staff malpractice.

Limitations

There is potential for error in the information provided by exam boards, therefore Ofqual cannot guarantee that the information received is correct. Ofqual compares the data over time and checks for systematic issues. Summary data are sent back to exam boards for checking and confirmation.

Quality Assurance

Quality assurance procedures are carried out as explained in the [Quality Assurance Framework for Statistical Publications](#) published by Ofqual to ensure the accuracy of the data and to challenge or question it, where necessary. Ofqual continuously manages this process by:

- ensuring that data providers are clear about what is required of them – a process helped by ensuring that providers are fully consulted during the initial design phase and for any subsequent change;
- reminding all providers (if appropriate) that, as a condition of them being regulated, all data must be completely accurate;
- being alert to unexpected changes in the data submitted by comparing individual returns over time from the same provider;
- actively challenging any unexpected results with the data providers; and
- having a proportionate data-auditing framework in place, allowing for auditing of providers' information collection, collation and delivery processes as necessary, using a wide range of tools from questionnaires to on-site process audits.

Publication may be deferred if the statistics are not considered fit for purpose.

Revisions

Once published, data are not usually subject to revision, although subsequent releases may be revised to insert late data or to correct an error.

Confidentiality and rounding

To ensure confidentiality of the accompanying data, all figures have been rounded to the nearest 5. If the value is less than 5 (1 to 4), it is represented as 0~ and 0 represents zero values.

Total values of rows or columns are calculated using unrounded figures; the sum of rounded figures may differ from the total reported.

All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number, except where smaller magnitudes are needed for meaningful interpretation. As a result of rounded figures, the percentages (calculated on actual figures) shown in tables may not necessarily add up to 100.

Status

These statistics are classified as official statistics.

Related publications

A number of other statistical releases and publications relate to this one, including:

- [Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2017](#): this release, published by the Department of Education, provides information collected in the January 2017 school census, including the number of schools and students.
- [Statistics: GCSEs \(key stage 4\) collection](#)
- [Statistics: 16 to 19 attainment collection](#)

Statistical policies

The [policies and procedures](#) that Ofqual follow for production and release of its statistical releases are available online.

Glossary

Definitions of important terms used in this release are [available online](#).

Useful links

The [report and data tables](#) accompanying this release are available separately.

Feedback

We welcome your feedback on our publications. Should you have any comments on this statistical release and how to improve it to meet your needs please contact us at statistics@ofqual.gov.uk.

We wish to make our publications widely accessible. Please contact us at publications@ofqual.gov.uk if you have any specific accessibility requirements.



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