

RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

# Malpractice data for performance table and school-based qualifications other than GCSE and A level for the academic year 2017 to 2018

Malpractice reported for the academic year 2017/18, in vocational and technical qualifications included in 2018 performance tables and with the inclusion of International Baccalaureate and Pre-U qualifications

# Author

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# Contents

<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Summary figures .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Student malpractice .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Type of offence .....	8
Type of penalty issued .....	9
Types of penalty issued for each type of offence .....	10
<b>Centre staff malpractice .....</b>	<b>11</b>
Type of offence .....	11
Type of penalty .....	12
<b>Centre malpractice .....</b>	<b>13</b>
Type of offence .....	13
Type of penalty issued .....	14
<b>Examiner malpractice .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Qualification level analyses .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Additional information .....</b>	<b>16</b>

## Executive Summary

This report presents an analysis of penalties issued for malpractice in vocational and technical qualifications that were included in 2018 performance tables, as well as Pre-U qualifications and International Baccalaureate (IB) qualifications. The data covered in this report was collected from the relevant awarding organisations and spans the 2017/18 academic year.

This data was collected by Ofqual for the first time in 2019. As such the analyses presented here can be considered exploratory in nature. Going forward we plan to collect this data on a regular basis and publish our findings.

The analyses focus on the types of offences committed by, and the types of penalties issued to, students, centre, centre staff and examiners.

The main findings are:

- a total of 1,539 penalties were reported for the academic year 2017/18
- the greatest number of these penalties were issued to students (55%), followed by centre staff (39%), centres (6%). No penalties for examiners were reported
- the majority of malpractice cases resulted in a single penalty
- the number of penalties was greater for internal (non-examined) assessments (64%) compared to external (examined) assessments (36%)
- the number of penalties was highest in performance tasks (68%). This refers to any task that is not a written exam, such as, a presentation or musical performance. The number of penalties was next highest in paper-based exams (19%) followed by online exams (13%)
- the most common type of malpractice for students was plagiarism (46% of student penalties), followed by use of mobile phones or other communication devices (19% of student penalties). The large proportion of malpractice in the form of plagiarism likely reflects the preponderance of internal, coursework-based, assessments in vocational and technical qualifications
- for centres and centre staff, improper assistance to candidates was the most common type of malpractice offence, responsible for 50% of centre malpractice and 75% of centre staff malpractice
- the most common type of penalty issued to students was a loss of marks (44% of all penalties), followed by a warning (39%)
- for centre staff, the most common types of penalties issued were written warning and training (45% and 41% respectively)
- for centres, the most common types of penalties used were 'review and report' and written warning (51% and 31% respectively)

## Introduction

Malpractice is a serious threat to the safe delivery and trust in qualifications, as it undermines the integrity of assessments. It includes attempts by students to plagiarise, and attempts by school or college staff to give too much support (i.e. improper assistance). Ofqual requires awarding organisations to have procedures in place to prevent, investigate and act in relation to malpractice incidences.

It is important for Ofqual as the regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England to have a good understanding of the scale and nature of malpractice and the ways in which malpractice is identified, mitigated and dealt with.

While we routinely collect malpractice data for GCSE and A levels, we have had less routine data on malpractice in vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs). Ofqual decided to collect data on some of these qualifications to give equal visibility to malpractice in VTQs.

The qualifications covered in this report are vocational and technical qualifications that were included in the Department for Education's (DfE) performance tables in 2018. More specifically, these are: Technical Awards, Applied Generals, Technical Certificates and Technical Levels. Also included in this report are Pre-U and International Baccalaureate (IB) qualifications, often referred to as 'Other Generals'. These qualifications were chosen because they are high stakes, school-based qualifications.

This report presents figures on the number of penalties issued in these qualifications for student, centre staff, centre, or examiner malpractice committed in the 2017/18 academic year (1 October 2017 to 30 September 2018), for centres based in England.

It is important to note that the data may not reflect the full extent of malpractice because these cases relate only to instances of reported malpractice where a penalty has been applied.

The figures presented in the report are unrounded. However, small figures for number of offences and penalties (between 0 and 4), are denoted as 0~.

## Summary figures

Data was requested for a possible 733 qualifications, from 23 awarding organisations for student, centre, centre staff and examiner malpractice. In 2017/18, there were 556,561 certificates awarded for all of these qualifications.

Of these qualifications, malpractice was reported for 116 qualifications (16% of all qualifications) by 15 awarding organisations (65% of all awarding organisations) for the academic year 2017/18.

Awarding organisations reported a total of 1,539 penalties for the academic year 2017/18. The greatest number of these penalties were issued to students and centre staff, with 839 penalties (55%) and 606 penalties (39%) issued respectively.

*Malpractice data for performance table and school-based qualifications other than GCSE and A level for the academic year 2017 to 2018*

Penalties issued to centres accounted for the remaining 94 penalties (6%). While penalties can be issued to examiners, no such cases were reported.

The number of penalties was greater for internal (non-examined) assessments which had 983 penalties (64% of penalties) compared to external (examined) assessments which had 555 penalties (36% of penalties). There was 1 penalty where the assessment type was documented unknown.

The highest number of penalties were given in performance tasks (any task that is not a written exam) such as, a presentation or musical performance, which had 1,045 penalties (68% of penalties), compared to paper-based and online exams which had 295 penalties (19% of penalties) and 196 penalties (13% of penalties) respectively. There were 3 penalties where the assessment methods were documented unknown. The percentages likely reflect the distribution between non-examined and examined assessments in the qualifications for which data was requested.

The graphs below show the proportion of penalties that were issued for each type of malpractice (student, centre and centre staff), each assessment method (online, paper-based or performance), each assessment type (external or internal) and each assessment schedule (on-demand or sessional) for the qualifications covered in this report.

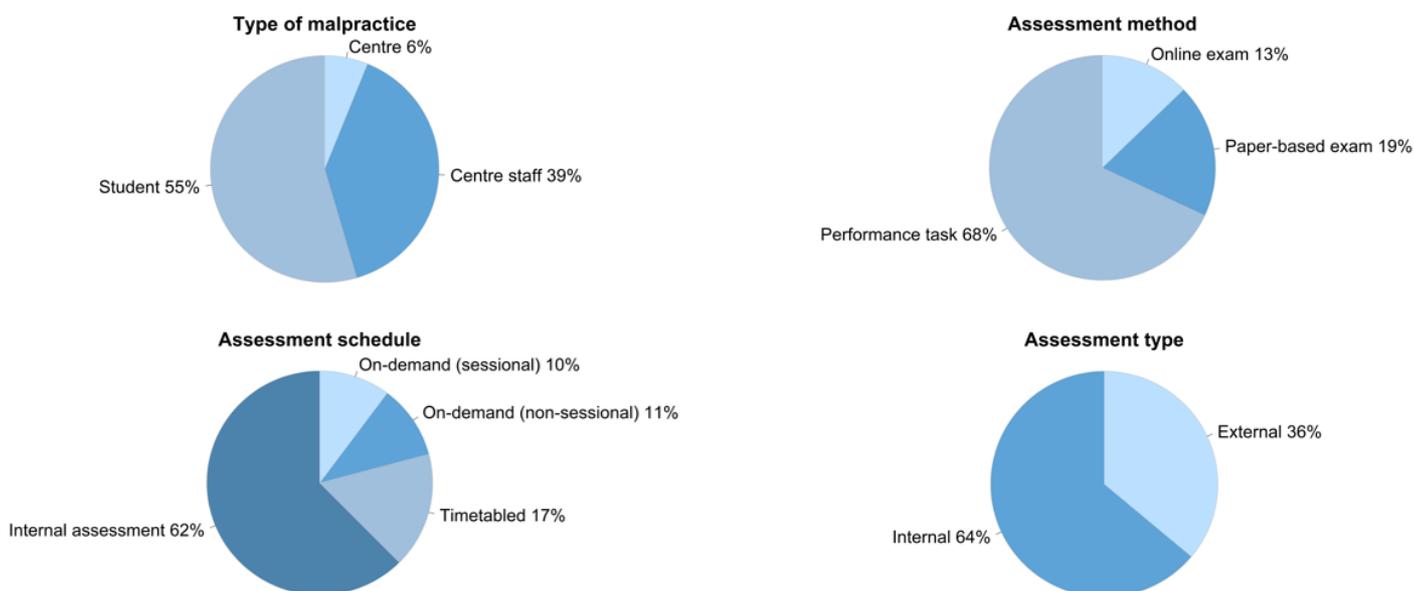


Figure 1: Proportion of penalties issued per malpractice type, assessment schedule, assessment method and assessment type

Note: Figures relating to assessment type and assessment method given here exclude cases where information on assessment type/method is unknown.

*Malpractice data for performance table and school-based qualifications other than GCSE and A level for the academic year 2017 to 2018*

The majority of student, centre and centre staff malpractice cases resulted in 1 penalty. Multiple penalties were more common for centre staff, with fewer than 5 cases resulting in 12 penalties per staff member spread across different cases. The breakdown is shown in the table below.

Table 1: Number of penalties issued per malpractice case according to malpractice type: student, centre and centre staff member

<b>Number of penalties</b>	<b>Student</b>	<b>Centre</b>	<b>Centre staff</b>
<b>1</b>	684	40	103
<b>2</b>	74	0~	55
<b>3</b>	0~	8	24
<b>4</b>	0~	0	22
<b>5</b>	0	0~	0~
<b>6</b>	0	0	19
<b>7</b>	0	0	0
<b>8</b>	0	0	0
<b>9</b>	0	0	0~
<b>10</b>	0	0	0
<b>11</b>	0	0	0~
<b>12</b>	0	0~	0~

Note: There were 60 centre staff penalties excluded from the table as the unique staff identifier was unknown. They are included in the rest of the analyses.

## Student malpractice

Awarding organisations may impose penalties on students found to have committed malpractice and the type of penalties issued vary depending on the type of offence. An individual student can be penalised more than once and by more than one awarding organisation if they commit malpractice offences for more than one assessment. A student may also receive one penalty for multiple offences.

### Type of offence

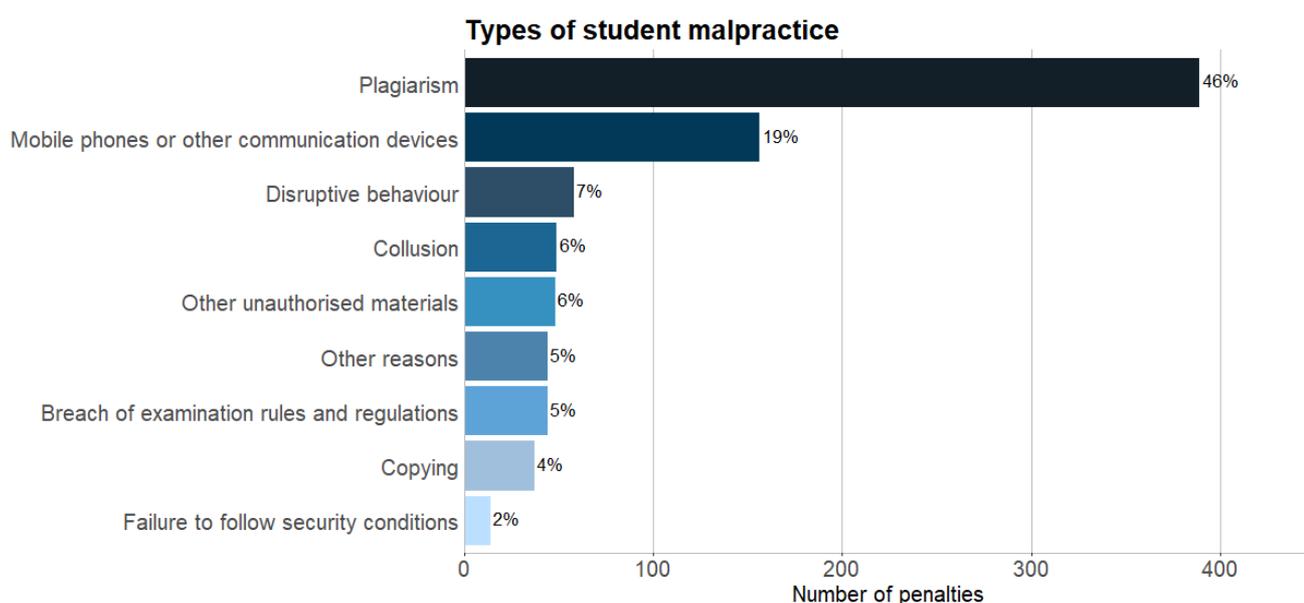


Figure 2: Number of penalties issued to students for each offence type

There were 839 penalties issued to students for malpractice in VTQ subjects in the academic year 2017/18. The most common type of malpractice reported was plagiarism, which accounted for 389 (46%) of all student penalties, followed by use of mobile phones or other communication devices (19% of student penalties). The large proportion of malpractice in the form of plagiarism likely reflects the preponderance of internal, coursework-based, assessments in VTQs.

#### Notes:

1. 'Other unauthorised materials' mentioned in the chart refer to notes, study guides, personal organisers, and personal stereos such as MP3s or iPods.
2. 'Breach of examinations rules and regulations' mentioned in the chart may refer to, for instance, a student not complying to instructions given by an invigilator, such as continuing to write after being told to stop.
3. 'Disruptive behaviour' mentioned in the chart refer to a range of behaviours that would be considered disruptive. This includes calling out, turning around and causing noise as well as provocative and offensive behaviour such as rude comments, taking another's possessions or assault to staff or property.

## Type of penalty issued

The most common type of penalty issued to students in 2017/18 was a loss of marks, which accounted for a total of 368 (44%) of the penalties issued.

This was followed by 325 warnings (39% of the penalties issued to students) and 146 instances of loss of aggregation or certification (17%).

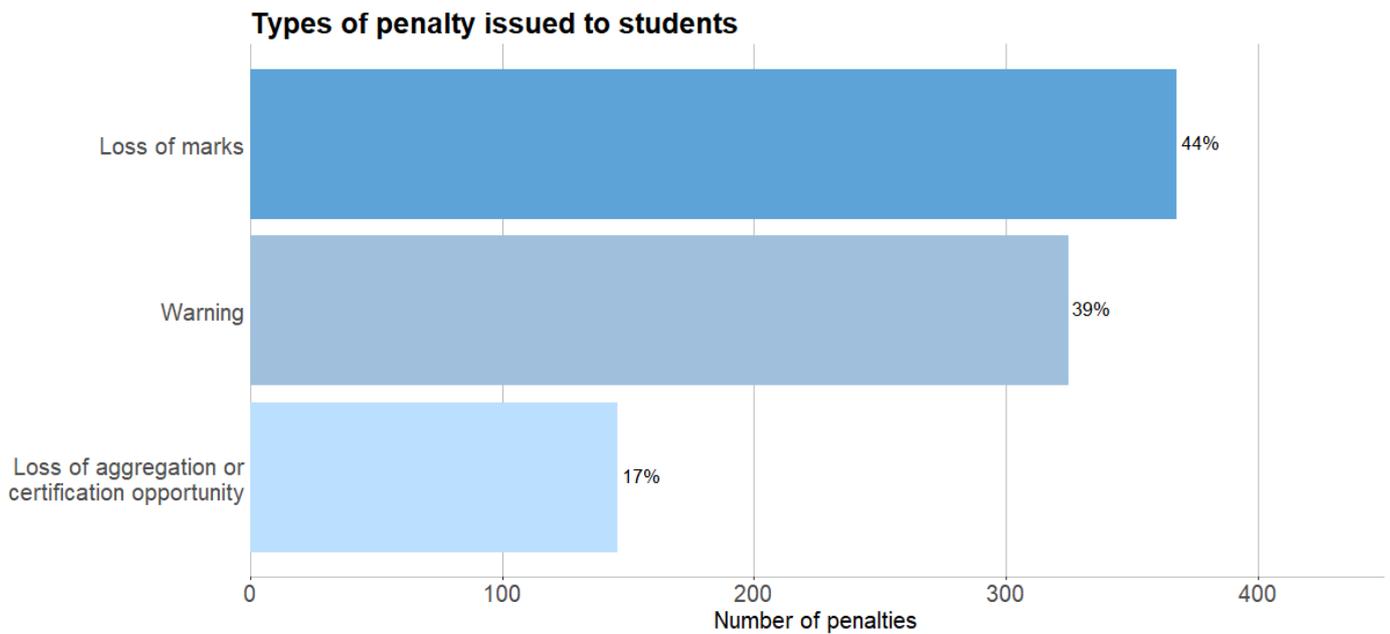


Figure 3: Number of penalties issued to students for each penalty type

## Types of penalty issued for each type of offence

Penalties for student malpractice varied depending, to some extent, on the type of offence. For instance, students found with mobile phones or other communication devices were more likely to lose marks, whereas a warning was the most common type of penalty for students failing to follow security conditions or taking part in disruptive behaviour.

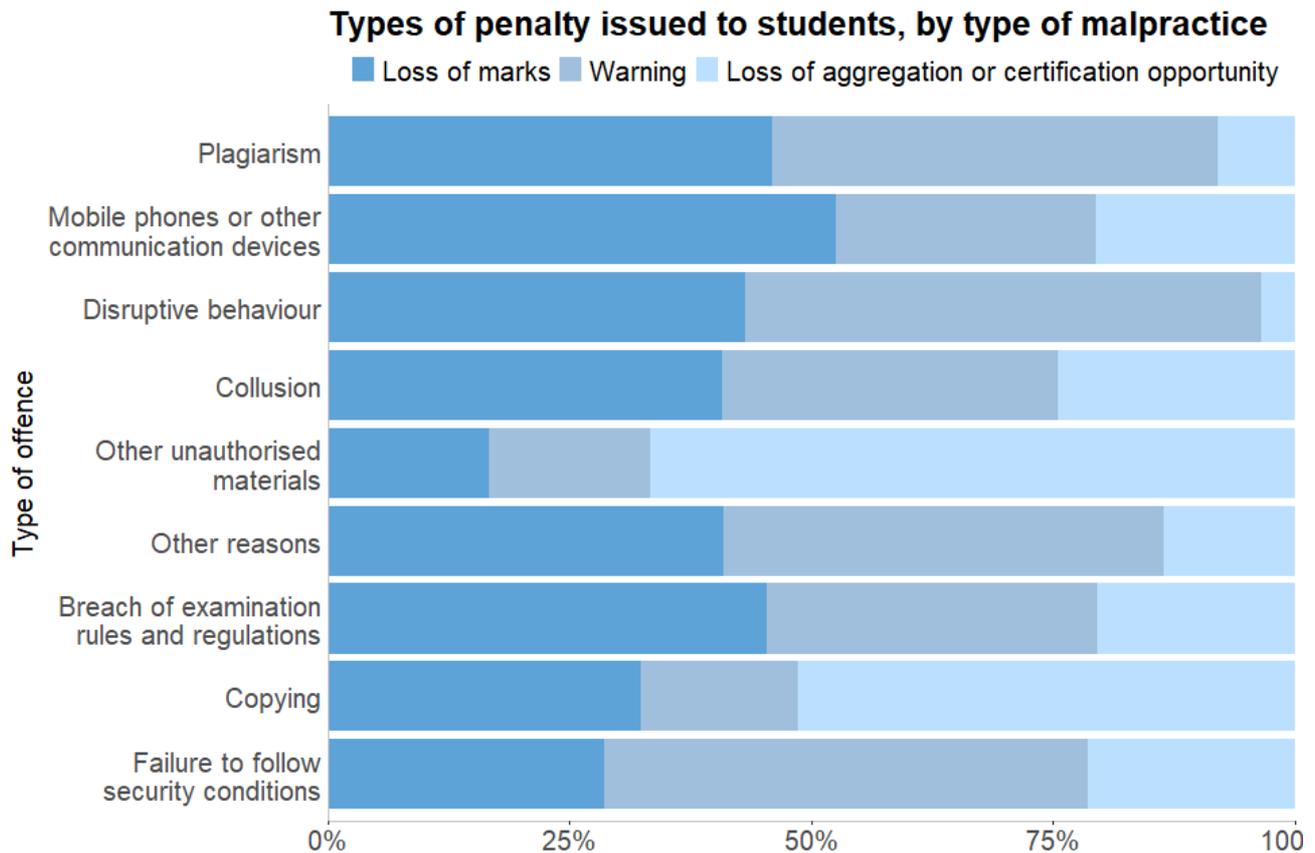


Figure 4: Type of penalties issued to students for each offence type

## Centre staff malpractice

Awarding organisations may impose penalties for malpractice committed by an individual member of staff at a school or college, for example a teacher or an invigilator. More than one penalty can be imposed for a single offence.

### Type of offence

There were 606 penalties issued to centre staff. The most common type of offence was 'improper assistance to candidates'. This is where staff provide a candidate or a group of candidates with a potential advantage by giving assistance beyond that which is permitted, such as providing candidates with prompts. This accounted for 453 (75%) of all centre staff penalties.

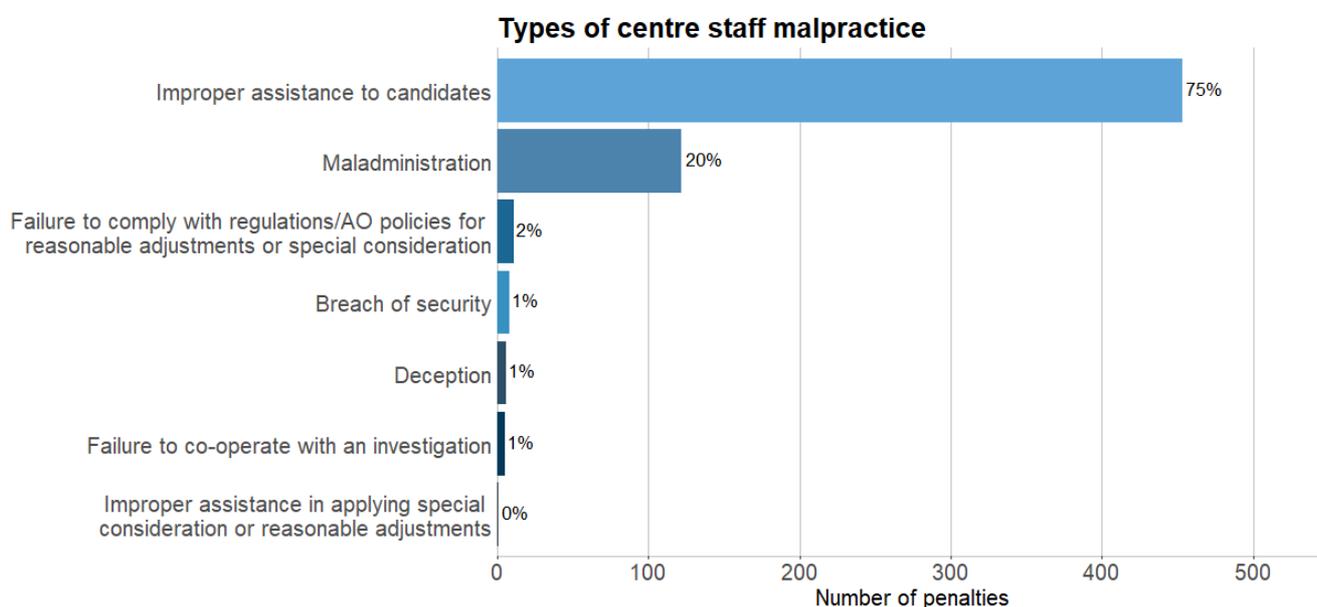


Figure 5: Number of penalties issued to centre staff for each offence type

## Type of penalty

A written warning and training were the two most common penalties issued to centre staff in 2017/18, accounting for 274 (45%) and 248 (41%) penalties issued to centre staff respectively.

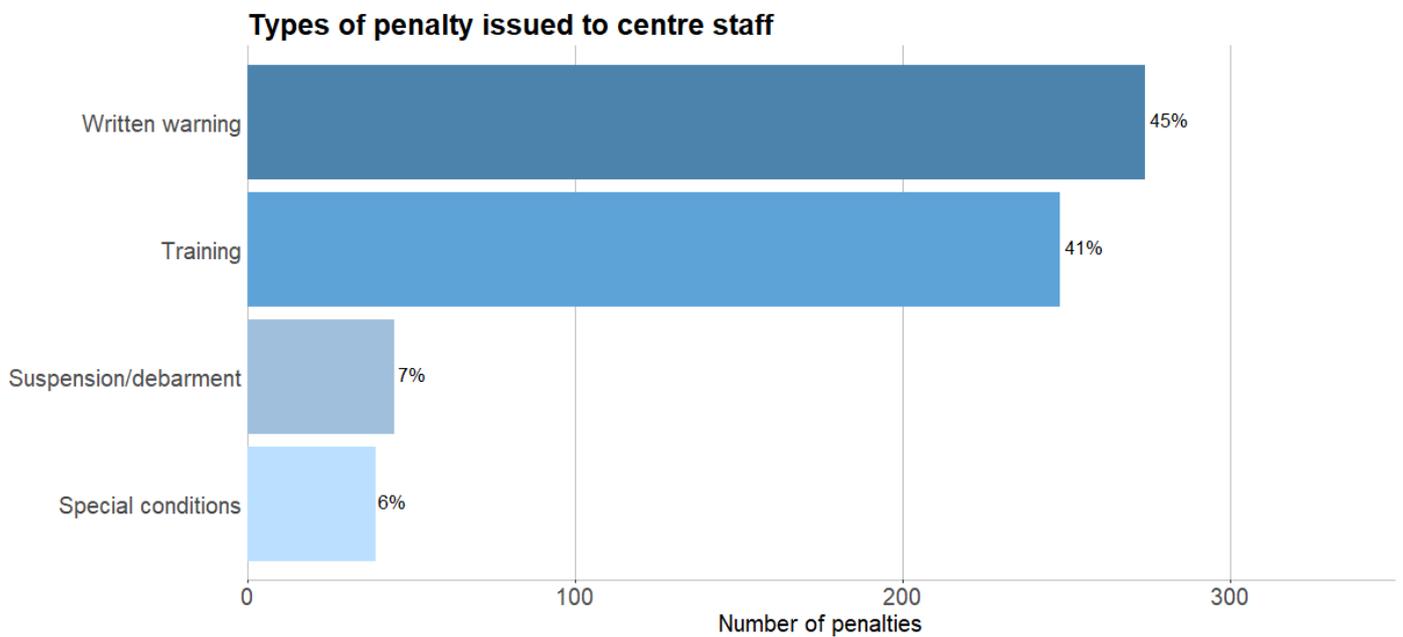


Figure 6: Number of penalties issued to centre staff for each penalty type

## Centre malpractice

Where there is evidence that malpractice is the result of a serious management failure, an awarding organisation may apply sanctions against a whole centre.

### Type of offence

There were 94 penalties issued to centres in the academic year 2017/18. Improper assistance to candidates and maladministration (such as failing to adhere to the regulations regarding the conduct of assessments) were the most common types of offence. They accounted for 47 (50%) and 37 (39%) of all centre penalties respectively.

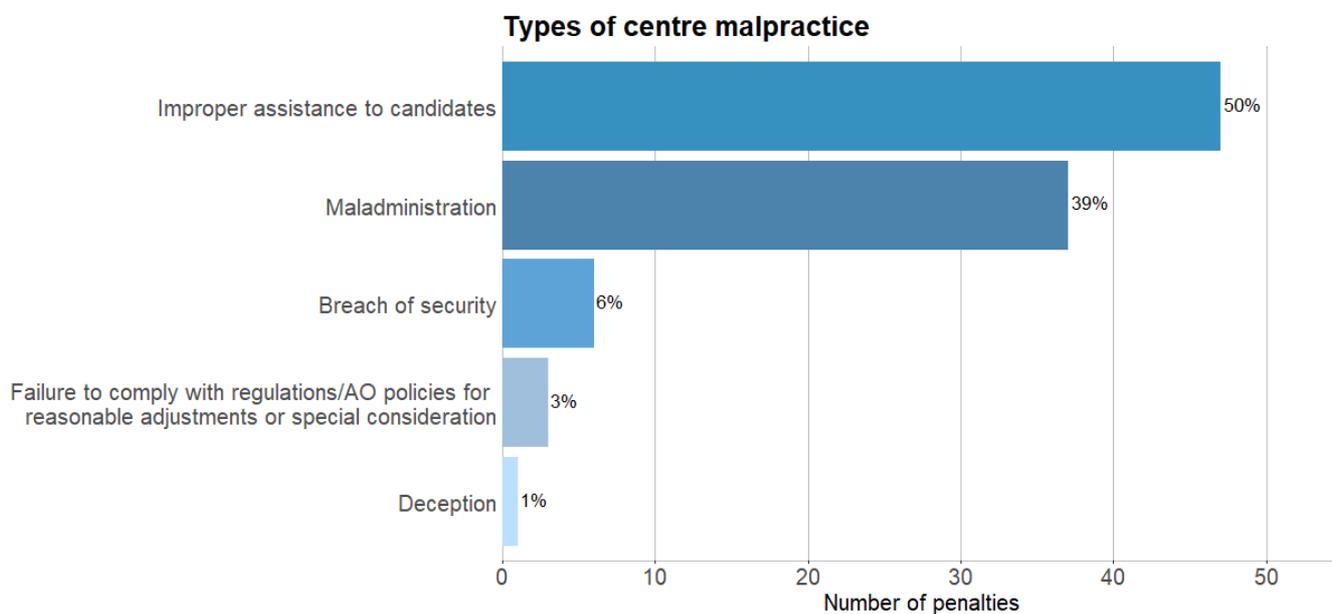


Figure 7: Number of penalties issued to centres for each offence type

## Type of penalty issued

A variety of penalties were issued to centres, in 2017/18, the most common penalty was review and report which results in a review of the centre's procedures regarding examinations/assessments and the reporting of their subsequent improvements. This accounted for 48 (51%) of centre penalties. The second most common penalty issued to centres was a written warning and these accounted for 29 (31%) of penalties.

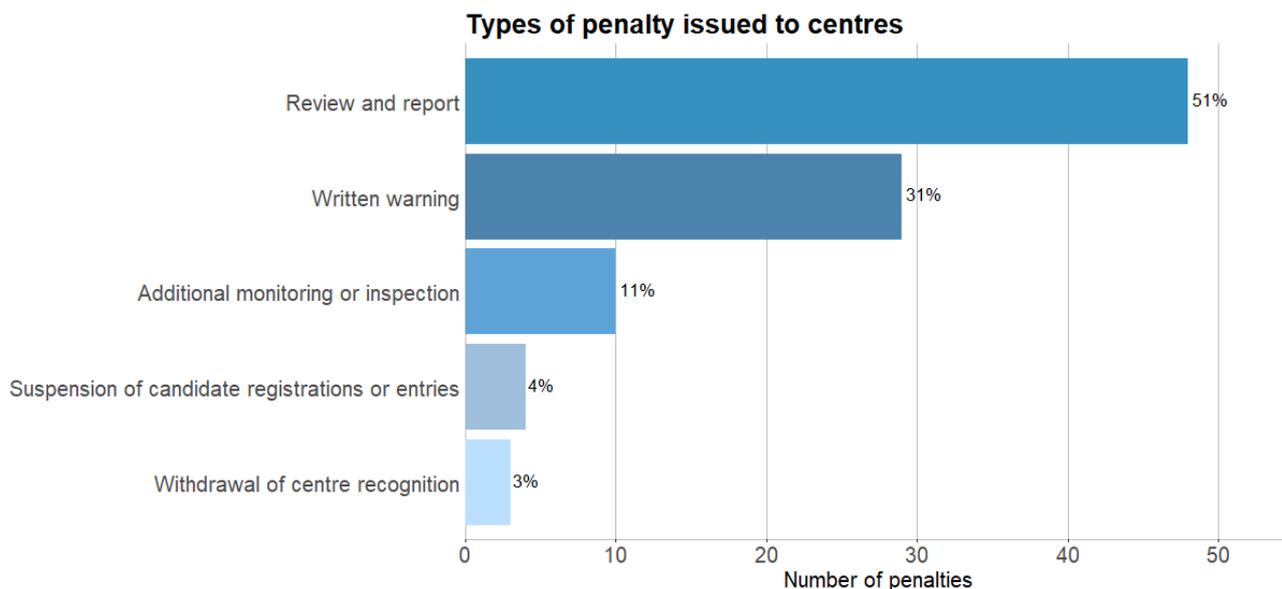


Figure 8: Number of penalties issued to centres for each penalty type

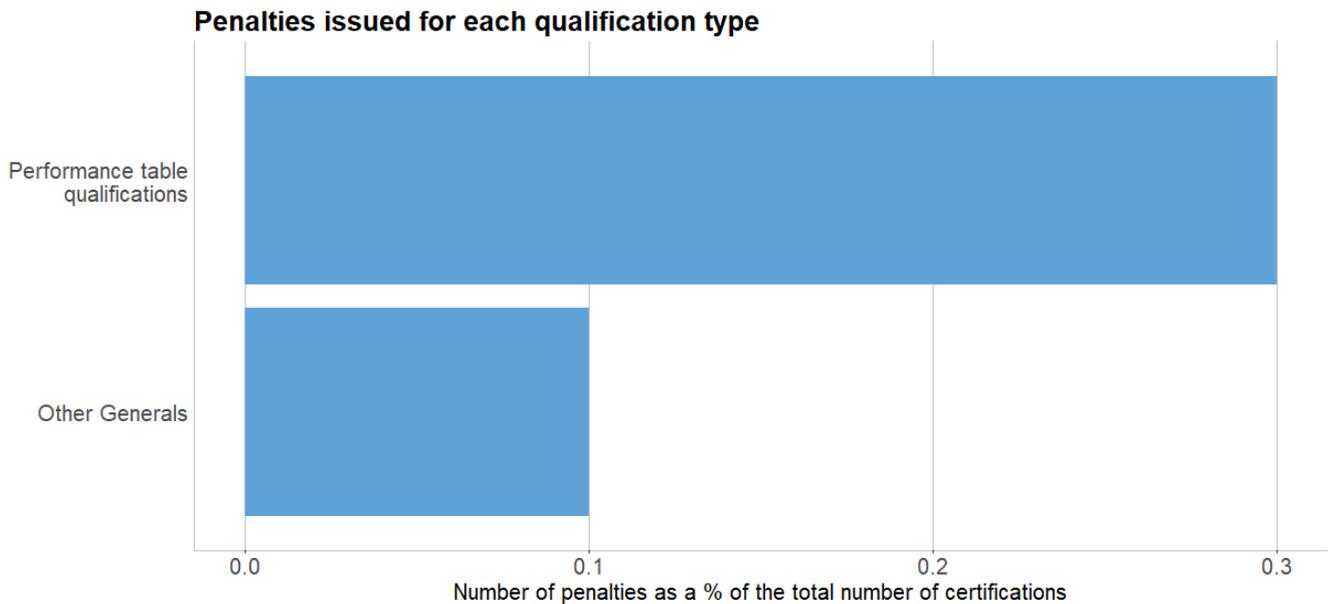
## Examiner malpractice

There were no penalties issued for examiner malpractice in the academic year 2017/18 for the qualifications covered in this report.

## Qualification level analyses

Of the 116 qualifications that reported malpractice, 107 were performance table qualifications (PTQs), and 9 were Other General qualifications. Amongst these qualification types, the PTQs had a larger proportion of penalties relative to their total certifications compared to Other General qualifications (0.3% and 0.1% of their total certifications respectively). The chart below shows this distribution.

Figure 9: Number of penalties issued for each qualification type as a percentage of the total number of certifications



## Additional information

The academic year was derived using the assessment date provided by awarding organisations. In cases where the assessment took place over a number of days, awarding organisations were asked to provide the date the assessment was submitted for grading.

As mentioned earlier, this was the first time that Ofqual collected VTQ malpractice data. Whilst the awarding organisations may be used to submitting vocational quarterly certification data over a period of time, most of the awarding organisations submitted data of this complexity to Ofqual for the first time in this collection. Therefore, data may not be complete or entirely reliable. Our experience with collecting routine data on general qualification is that data quality improves incrementally, over a period of time, as awarding organisations start getting accustomed to our data collections and put systems and processes in place to collect, hold and report data to us. We would therefore urge caution in interpretation of the statistics reported here and should be best treated as estimates.



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