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Corporate report

Ofqual delivery report 2023

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Executive Summary

Summer 2023 marked the second step in the return to normal for qualifications, following the pandemic. This meant the return to pre-pandemic grading approaches and standards, as Ofqual had set out in September 2021. Exams and formal assessments operated in the normal way, with specific support for students in a small number of GCSE subjects, alongside protection in grading to reflect the national disruption that students had faced.

Throughout the year Ofqual led significant work through its Results Action Plan to secure greater parity of treatment for students, across different types of qualification. This followed the late delivery of Vocational and Technical Qualification (VTQ) results by some awarding organisations to students in the summer of 2022. Thanks to the efforts of teachers, school and college leaders, awarding organisations (AOs), along with the Department for Education (DfE), UCAS and Ofqual this new approach was successful, with students receiving their results on time. This is rightly a baseline expectation for students and Ofqual has already announced measures to secure these new arrangements for 2024 and beyond.

An important aspect of the new arrangements in 2023 was a single 'results day' for Level 3 qualifications and then at Level 2 a week later. On these 2 days all students' results were reported and celebrated, regardless of the type of qualification. This will continue in 2024 and beyond. At Level 3, that means students taking qualifications including A levels, T Levels and Applied Generals will receive them by the same results day, with the same opportunity to take decisions on how they want to progress. Then a week later, students taking GCSEs, Technical Awards and other performance table qualifications can all expect to receive their qualification results by the same day too. This is an important development in securing greater parity of treatment for all students, irrespective of the type of qualification they take.

The introduction of new T Levels continued this year. Ofqual maintained a high level of scrutiny of the Technical Qualifications within the T Levels to reflect both their newness, and the issues that

arose within particular T Levels in 2022.

The vast majority of end-point assessments (EPA) in apprenticeships are now subject to statutory regulation, following the completion of the transition programme initiated by the Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) in 2020. Where Ofqual is the regulator, apprentices will now be assessed by awarding organisations that have demonstrated that they have the sector knowledge, assessment expertise, governance and resources necessary to deliver assessments to a consistent, high standard. Those apprentices are also protected by recourse to Ofqual if they need it.

Considering all the qualifications addressed in this report, the scale is significant – resulting in the award of more than 7 million certificates to students and apprentices. Ofqual's extensive regulatory monitoring covers a broad range of AOs' processes to ensure that their qualifications are well designed; delivered effectively and securely; and that they are marked and awarded accurately.

This activity is reported here, including the number and impact of assessment material errors, cases of malpractice and maladministration and other delivery incidents. In all instances, Ofqual expects AOs first to take all reasonable steps to prevent such failures and then to address them to negate or minimise any negative effect on students or apprentices, should they occur.

As in any year, and recognising the scale of delivery, issues did arise. However, none was sufficient to cause significant disruption to the overall successful delivery of qualifications to students and apprentices. AOs are now reviewing the incidents that arose this year to inform improvements for 2024 – with a particular focus on the secure delivery of assessment materials to schools and colleges; providing guidance regarding the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools; and preventing assessment material errors.

Introduction

For the first time this year, in line with Ofqual's commitment to promoting parity of treatment for students for all of the qualifications it regulates, Ofqual is producing a combined delivery report which covers general qualifications, vocational and technical qualifications and apprenticeship end-point assessments.

Scope

This report covers all qualifications awarded between 1 September 2022 and 31 August 2023.

The AOs deliver these qualifications in schools, colleges, and other exam centres (referred to as "centres" in this report).

Where reference is made to GCSE, AS level and A level qualifications in this report, however, this relates to assessments in the summer 2023 exam series. All data relates to qualifications taken in England only. The report does not cover the November 2023 exam series for GCSE English language and GCSE maths.

Where the report includes information about Technical Qualifications in T Levels it covers those taken in waves 1, 2 and 3 (see glossary).

It also includes additional Performance Table Qualifications (PTQs) such as Applied Generals, Technical Awards, Extended Project Qualifications, Core Maths, the International Baccalaureate, and the Advanced Extension Award (AEA) and other qualifications that are taken alongside AS and A levels in centres. Throughout the report these qualifications are collectively referred to as additional PTQs.

Information about apprenticeship end-point assessments (EPAs) and Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQ) is also included.

Background

Scale

This report covers the awarding of more than 7 million certifications in total, across all the types of qualifications in the scope set out above.

Ofqual is the statutory and independent regulator responsible for maintaining standards and confidence in qualifications in England. Ofqual recognises 233 AOs, offering a wide range of qualifications which afford students and apprentices of all ages choice and opportunities for progression through their chosen pathways.

Of the AOs Ofqual regulates, 154 offer more than 14,000 VTQs. Of these, 17 AOs delivered assessments for over 400 VTQ PTQs and 3 AOs offered 16 technical qualifications within T Levels this year. For apprenticeship EPAs, Ofqual regulated 147 AOs recognised to deliver 1,635 EPAs. Of these, 133 AOs were actively offering 1,493 EPAs in this period.

Some of these qualifications, such as those included in performance tables, are taken instead of or alongside GCSEs, AS and A levels. Others, such as functional skills qualifications (FSQs) and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), are also used more flexibly, including for progression to further or higher education or progression to employment. Many more VTQs test occupational competency or are used as a licence to practise.

Four Ofqual-regulated AOs, also known as exam boards, award GCSEs, AS and A levels in England. These are AQA, OCR, Pearson and WJEC (Eduqas). In summer 2023 more than 1.2 million GCSE, AS and A level students took 1,460 different question papers (and 3,780 modified papers) and produced approximately 16 million individual exam scripts. These were marked by around 69,000 examiners, and in August the 4 AOs issued approximately 6.3 million certificates,

broken down as follows:

- 5.4 million GCSE results
- 60,530 AS results
- 797,350 A level results

For VTQ PTQs and FSQs, there were more than 1 million certificates issued in the 12 months leading up to and including September 2023. For more detail see Ofqual's [vocational and other qualifications quarterly release](). In spring and summer 2023 alone, AOs issued over 650,000 certificates for VTQ Performance Table Qualifications (PTQs) and more than 240,000 certificates were issued for functional skills qualifications (FSQs).

In addition, around 3,520 students received results for the Technical Qualifications within T Levels. For more details see [T Level Technical Qualification (TQ) results (ofqual.gov.uk)]()

For EPAs, assessments are not undertaken within a fixed period and apprentices can be registered with an AO at any time, typically 6 months prior to the apprentice commencing their EPA. Apprentices can only start their EPA, however, once agreement is reached between the employer, apprentice, training provider and AO that the apprentice is fully prepared. This year, apprenticeship EPA outcomes data was collected from AOs to cover the period March 2022 to end of February 2023. The data showed that 110,575 EPAs were fully completed, and 317,530 individual EPA components were taken by apprentices within this period. For further data see Ofqual's [Apprenticeship End-Point Assessments Statistical Report]().

VTQs have a flexible approach to assessments which supports students to complete qualifications as they need them and means that assessments occur throughout the academic year. Students may take assessments in a variety of different ways. Some students take assessments that are internally assessed (that is, typically set by AOs and marked by centres). Some assessments are externally assessed (that is, set and marked by AOs). AOs require centres to make entries in advance for timetabled assessments. Some external assessments are on demand, giving students the flexibility to take an assessment whenever they are ready.

T Levels

Ofqual regulates the Technical Qualifications (TQs) within T Levels, which comprise the core assessments (core examinations and employer-set project) and the occupational specialism. In the academic year 2022 to 2023, the core assessments of the third wave of T Levels were available for the first time, alongside the core and occupational specialism assessments for first and second wave TQs.

Following issues with the health and science core assessment papers in summer 2022, Ofqual committed to review TQ assessment materials for the subsequent autumn and summer series. These reviews covered all AOs offering all 16 T Levels.

Infographic: the numbers of Performance Table Qualifications, Technical Qualifications within T Levels and End Point Assessments on Ofqual's Register

Supporting the sector

Throughout the year Ofqual met with AOs at policy advisory groups and technical working group meetings to discuss policy development and to monitor AOs' delivery of assessments.

Ofqual also met with centre representative organisations and with individual schools and colleges and training providers via monthly centre reference groups, webinars, and other engagements, to gather feedback about communications from AOs, and preparation for results. Where appropriate, Ofqual shared relevant feedback with AOs so they could address any issues swiftly. Ofqual provided a Guide for schools and colleges: 2023, in which it outlined what was expected from AOs and what centres and their students should expect to happen.

This year the Head of Centre declaration was refined to include a senior designated contact should AOs need a working point of escalation in the run up to delivery of results. These contact details enabled AOs to promptly resolve any outstanding issues and queries relating to results.

In April 2023, Ofqual republished its EPA qualification level guidance and also provided further guidance with the publication of Ofqual regulation of Apprenticeship End-Point Assessment: a guide for awarding organisations to support AOs after the completion of transition from previous EQA providers to EPA regulation.

Apprenticeship EPAs and transition to regulation

In May 2020, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) consulted on a simplified external quality assurance (EQA) system, with the intent to bring all apprenticeship end-point assessments into statutory regulation. This led to a period of transition in which previously unregulated end-point assessment organisations applied to be recognised by Ofqual as AOs. With the completion of this process this year, the majority of apprentices now benefit from a comprehensive programme of EPA regulation that requires AOs to develop assessments that are fit for purpose, valid and reliable.

The transition to Ofqual regulation began in the autumn of 2020 and by the end of August 2023 Ofqual was the regulator of 133 AOs offering EPA. Of these 133 AOs, 21 were newly recognised organisations during the reporting period September 2022 to August 2023.

Chart 1: Scope of EPA regulation increase 2020 to 2023

Chart 1 shows the scope of EPA regulation increase 2020 to 2023.

Infographic: the number of AOs delivering Performance Table Qualifications and Technical Qualifications, as well as AOs with End point Assessments on Ofqual's Register

Providing advice on end-point assessment plan development

IfATE works with employers to develop, approve, review and revise apprenticeships and technical qualifications. It is responsible for developing and publishing end-point assessment plans. Ofqual uses the content of assessment plans to regulate EPA and has provided feedback to IfATE to improve the quality of plans and to support regulation.

Within the reporting period, Ofqual provided feedback to IfATE on 73 newly-developed or revised apprenticeship assessment plans before publication. Some of the most prevalent issues identified included:

• inconsistencies in resit and retake policies

• manageability of assessment timings

• ambiguities and/or inaccuracies within grading criteria

• assessment method clarity and validity

This feedback was in addition to the 434 published assessment plans reviewed by Ofqual during the transition programme.

Ofqual continues to provide advice to IfATE, using the analysis set out above as well as monitoring evidence to inform their work in the development of assessment plans. This is so that they can support AOs to assess apprentices in a sufficiently valid and reliable way. Ofqual also continued to work closely with IfATE's group assessment leads to ensure the programme of monitoring activity informs IfATE's review process, particularly for those plans where compliance poses a risk to an AO's compliance with regulation.

Phase 1: Planning

Awarding Organisation Readiness

Following the delivery of results in 2022 Ofqual wrote to AOs about key aspects of assessment delivery discussed between Ofqual and AOs in annual review meetings which took place during

the autumn. These letters set out Ofqual's areas of regulatory focus and outlined the follow-up work AOs were expected to carry out ahead of future series.

By May 2023, Ofqual had conducted annual readiness reviews with 15 AOs. These AOs, which included the 4 exam boards, cover the majority of the regulated market. Ofqual sought assurances from each AO regarding its:

- governance and capability
- management of a range of operational risks relating to the delivery of its qualifications, such as assessment material production and marking

Ofqual did not identify any serious concerns with AOs' preparations for series delivery. Where Ofqual identified isolated issues within AOs' delivery plans, Ofqual provided them with feedback and required them to strengthen their controls.

Before the Summer series, Ofqual met again with each AO to review their individual preparations and progress against their plans. Ofqual reiterated the types of incidents it expected to be notified about, the requirement to alert Ofqual swiftly and the factors AOs should consider in managing such issues if they arose. The importance of resolving issues quickly and effectively to minimise any impact on students was stressed. Ofqual subsequently wrote to AOs to reaffirm these expectations (see Appendix F).

In addition, given challenges reported in recruiting sufficient examiners in certain subjects in summer 2022, Ofqual monitored marker recruitment for GCSE, AS and A levels closely and sought assurance from the relevant AOs through weekly progress updates from January when contracting activity was underway, until the end of May. Ofqual also monitored marking progress to ensure that results would be delivered on time for these qualifications, activity which is discussed in more detail under Phase 3: Marking.

Between February and March 2023 Ofqual evaluated how a sample of AOs, including the exam boards, were responding to its statutory Guidance on designing and developing accessible assessments, published in May 2022. The evaluation focused on understanding the impact of the guidance on AOs' processes to produce accessible assessments and what further work they may have planned in this area. Many AOs sampled had made, or planned to make, changes to their processes and/or training requirements in response to the guidance. Ofqual invited all AOs to attend a workshop in November 2023 to share current best practice.

VTQ Results Action Plan 2023

In 2021 to 2022 the return to exams and formal assessments for VTQs, as well as the adaptation of some of these, brought additional complexity for centres and AOs. In August 2022 some students did not receive their Level 3 VTQ results when they expected to. Consequently, Ofqual launched a full review to establish and understand the factors that may have contributed to the delay of these results. Following this, the Action Plan: Vocational and Technical Qualification results 2023 was published and the Chief Regulator convened and chaired a VTQ Taskforce of

senior leaders from key organisations to ensure that results students relied on for progression were delivered on time in 2023.

To support centres Ofqual introduced a new [VTQ information hub](#) for exams officers and subject teachers, which brought together the key dates for 2023 (set by AOs) to ensure timely delivery of Level 3 VTQ results used for progression to further study. Ofqual updated and added to its [resources for exams officers and worked with the National Association of Examinations Officers and the wider sector to promote and support the role of the exams officer](#).

As a consequence of the Action Plan, the Head of Centre declaration required by all AOs was strengthened to include a senior designated contact. Ofqual also worked closely with UCAS to make sure that data sharing between AOs and UCAS enabled better tracking of results needed for progression.

Access arrangements and reasonable adjustments

In November 2023, Ofqual published official statistics [on access arrangements for GCSE, AS and A level: 2022 to 2023 academic year](#). This includes arrangements provided as reasonable adjustments for students with a disability.

The statistics are compiled using data submitted to Ofqual by exam boards and show an increase in approved arrangements over recent years, including the proportion of GCSE, AS and A level students receiving 25% extra time in their assessments. Ofqual will continue to work with exam boards to better understand the possible reasons for this upward trend.

Assessment material production

Infographic: the numbers of students at GCSE, AS and A level, the amount of GCSE, AS and A level standard question papers and the amount of discrete modified papers produced

Ofqual's Conditions require AOs to produce assessment materials that are clear, appropriate, and fit for purpose. Some qualifications also have additional rules that require them to cover specific subject content, defined by DfE, and certain key abilities set out in Ofqual's rules. It is an AO's responsibility to make sure its papers are free of errors and assess the content and required balance of key abilities stipulated in the specification. Ofqual does not review or otherwise vet the content of question papers before students take them.

AOs typically start production of the assessment materials for upcoming assessment or exam series over a year or more before they take place. These materials include question papers, stimulus materials and mark schemes.

For assessments that are on demand, some AOs use software to generate assessments, from a bank of standardised questions or items, such that each student takes an individualised version of an assessment. AOs tend to update their question banks frequently, adding fresh items to the bank and retiring old ones to ensure the questions are functioning appropriately and to prevent predictability. For EPAs, the required frequency of these question bank reviews is often stipulated within the apprenticeship EPA plan.

AOs produced assessment materials for about 445 unique external VTQ PTQ assessments taken in 2022 to 2023. Additionally, around 700 discrete modified question papers were also produced.

For GCSE, AS and A levels, AOs produced 5,240 unique question papers in 2023. This comprised 1,460 standard question papers and 3,780 unique modified question papers.

In addition, for GCSEs in mathematics, physics and combined science, the government decided that students would not need to memorise all the formulae and equations expected in a normal year in view of the disruption this cohort of students may have experienced. Following consultation, Ofqual changed its rules for these qualifications in 2023 to require exam boards to publish formulae and revised equation sheets for use during teaching and learning, and to include clean copies of these sheets with the exam papers. The rules were included in updated GCSE Conditions. For GCSEs in mathematics, this requirement also applied to exams taken in November 2023.

Changes were also made to GCSE modern foreign language exams following consultations by DfE and Ofqual to remove the requirement for exams to test unfamiliar vocabulary.

Phase 2: Delivery

During 2022 to 2023 more results were awarded than in previous years; more students received their results on time due to the VTQ Action Plan; more T Levels were rolled out and the EPA transition programme was completed.

No large-scale series of exams and assessments passes without incident and while this section of the report summarises these, none were sufficient to pose significant disruption to the otherwise successful delivery of exams and assessments during 2022 to 2023.

Infographic: the number of Performance Table Qualification external assessments taken in summer 2023, the number of Technical Qualification Core components within T Levels taken in summer 2023 and the number of End Point Assessment components taken between March 2022 and February 2023

Infographic: the number of schools and colleges delivering exams and assessments

Reported Incidents

AOs are responsible for managing, and reporting to Ofqual, any issues that may have a potential adverse effect on the delivery of their qualifications. When such issues arise Ofqual monitors the AOs' actions closely, to make sure they do all they can to minimise the impact, if any, on students.

Ofqual's immediate priority during assessment delivery is to make sure students get results that reflect their performance and that are delivered on time. Once results are released, Ofqual follows up each incident with the relevant AO to make sure they are taking appropriate corrective action to prevent recurrence. The cause of each incident, its impact and how effectively it was managed is also evaluated. Ofqual then decides if any regulatory action is necessary.

Information on what the different event types and sub-types presented in the tables below cover can be found in appendix A.

GCSEs, AS and A Levels

Chart 2: GQ incident reports received in summer 2023 and summer 2022

Chart 2 summarises the types of incidents reported for GCSE, AS and A levels during the summer 2023 series, compared with summer 2022.

Note: * This data includes errors in question papers, supporting materials and mark schemes. It does not include assessment material errors reported in the advance information material produced to support students in summer 2022, as this was a unique feature of assessments that year.

Ahead of this summer series Ofqual clarified how AOs should report certain types of incidents, which will have contributed to the increases seen in some categories.

More incidents (295) were reported by AOs in the summer 2023 series compared with summer 2022 (195). This includes a significant increase in the number of notifications made by exam boards of potential security breaches, which were the most common notification, and an increase in reports of assessment material errors (although not all had the potential to impact students). Fewer notifications were made this year regarding exam board delivery failures and marking issues.

Additional Performance Table Qualifications

There were 148 reported incidents concerning additional PTQs in the academic year 2022 to 2023; in the academic year 2021 to 2022 there were 149 incidents reported to Ofqual. A breakdown of the main incidents from 2022 to 2023 compared with 2021 to 2022 can be seen in Chart 3. The 2 most common types of incidents reported in the year 2022 to 2023 were delivery failures (62 events) and assessment material errors (29 events). This differs from the year 2021 to 2022, during which the 2 most common types of reported incident were delivery failures (50 events) and suspected security breaches (36 events).

Note that the data for 2021 to 2022 differs to previous published figures as extra qualifications have been included.

Chart 3: Event types for additional PTQs, 2022 to 2023 compared with 2021 to 2022

Chart 3 shows the event types for additional PTQs, 2022 to 2023 compared with 2021 to 2022.

Note: * 5 of these also affected GCSEs, AS and A Levels and are accounted for in that data.

T Levels

There were 39 reported incidents concerning T Levels in the academic year 2022 to 2023. This is 10 more than the previous year, although there were an additional 6 T Level qualifications available in 2022 to 2023. A breakdown of the main incidents can be seen in Chart 4.

Chart 4: Event types for T Levels, 2022 to 2023 compared with 2021 to 2022

Chart 4 shows the event types for T Levels, 2022 to 2023 compared with 2021 to 2022.

Functional Skills Qualifications

There were 24 reported incidents concerning FSQs in the academic year 2022 to 2023, which is the same number Ofqual received in the academic year 2021 to 2022.

Chart 5: Event types for functional skills qualifications, 2022 to 2023 compared with 2021 to 2022

Chart 5 shows the event types for functional skills qualifications, 2022 to 2023 compared with

2021 to 2022.

End-Point Assessments

There were 100 reported incidents concerning apprenticeship end-point assessments in the academic year 2022 to 2023, which is 68 more than Ofqual received in the previous year. A breakdown of the main incidents from 2022 to 2023 compared with 2021 to 2022 can be seen in Chart 6.

There has been a clear increase year on year from the previous reporting period. This is partly due to the significant increase in the number of EPAs and AOs offering EPAs coming into Ofqual regulation, and partly due to improved understanding of reporting requirements amongst AOs offering EPAs as a result of Ofqual's regulatory activity.

Chart 6: Event types for EPAs, 2022 to 2023 compared with 2021 to 2022

Chart 6 shows the event types for EPAs, 2022 to 2023 compared with 2021 to 2022.

There were 21 reports of other types of events for EPAs in 2022 to 2023. Of the 21 reported 'other' events, 5 were related to the closure of a centre. Three of these were in relation to the same centre, the closure of which was announced in April 2023. Work is ongoing to ensure the affected apprentices are protected and able to complete their EPA. Six of the reported events related to apprentices being made redundant close to or during their EPA period.

EPA Assessment Plan Queries

IfATE is responsible for developing, publishing, and maintaining end-point assessment plans. For the duration of the transition programme, where it was within its regulatory remit to do so, Ofqual supported this process by addressing queries from AOs concerning assessment plans to enable them to deliver valid and reliable assessments to apprentices. The review of assessment plan queries (APQs) submitted by AOs has contributed to the management of issues within EPA regulation, alongside the reporting of incidents. In some instances, this may have enabled the AO to resolve an issue before any negative impact occurred and/or to avoid non-compliance.

From September 2022 to August 2023, Ofqual received and reviewed 291 APQs relating to 151 different EPAs. During this period, 60 AOs submitted APQs and queries were also received from several other stakeholders including 15 from professional organisations, 11 from centre staff and 7 from employers. Chart 7 shows the number of queries submitted within the reporting period, compared to the period September 2022 to August 2023. The number of queries submitted has increased significantly from 197 during the period September 2021 to August 2022 as a result of the completion of EPA transition and the increase in the number of recognised AOs delivering EPAs.

Chart 7: Assessment plan query increase year on year (September to August)

Chart 7 shows the assessment plan query increase year on year (September to August).

Delivery Failure Incidents

Delivery, in this context, includes a range of processes from printing and dispatch of question papers to issuing results and processing appeals. Ofqual requires AOs to deliver their assessments effectively, efficiently and to set timescales. AOs are required to report any actual or potential delivery issue which could have the potential or actual adverse effect on students.

GCSEs, AS and A Levels

During the summer series, AOs that deliver GCSE, AS and A Levels told Ofqual about 46 delivery failure incidents where aspects of the delivery of an exam were or could have been compromised. This was fewer than in summer 2022, when there were 57 such incidents reported. Overall, there was a decrease in the number of cyber-attacks on centres reported which AOs had to respond to, and a rise in the number of notifications of instances of lost or missing scripts. Ofqual expects AOs to notify it of lost or missing scripts (which may cover multiple scripts depending on dispatch method) ahead of the release of results.

Chart 8: Incidents of exam delivery failure in summer 2023 and summer 2022

Chart 8 shows the incidents of exam delivery failure in summer 2023 and summer 2022.

Additional Performance Table Qualifications

Chart 9: Incidents of delivery failure reported in 2022 to 2023 and 2021 to 2022 for additional PTQs, broken down by sub-type

Chart 9 shows the number of delivery failure events reported in 2022 to 2023 for additional PTQs, broken down by sub-type
Note: * 16 of these also affected GCSEs, AS and A Levels and are accounted for in that data too.
Note: ** 11 of these also affected GCSEs, AS and A Levels and are accounted for in that data too.

Missed deadlines and cyber-attacks were the most frequent types of delivery failure reported to

Ofqual by AOs for additional PTQs. AOs were required to notify Ofqual when they did not meet the completion target for one or both checkpoints in the Action Plan to allow for close monitoring of their progress towards completion of the checkpoints, and the subsequent delivery of results on time in August. This was the main cause of the increase of reported delivery failures from 50 in the year 2021 to 2022 to 62 in the year 2022 to 2023.

T Levels

Chart 10: Incidents of delivery failure reported in 2022 to 2023 and 2021 to 2022 for T Levels, broken down by sub-type

Chart 10 shows the number of delivery failure events reported in 2022 to 2023 and in 2021 to 2022 for T Levels, broken down by sub-type.

There were 3 reports of IT failures for T Levels. Two of these were due to centre error or centre IT failure. One was due to a problem with an AO's online assessment platform. The AO promptly took steps to minimise the impact on students and is taking action to prevent recurrence.

Regarding the 3 issues relating to examination disruption, one was due to a delay in centres being able to access a task. The other 2 issues were due to confusion at some centres regarding the assessment or the assessment guidance.

The overall number of delivery failure incidents for T Levels has remained the same for 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023.

Functional Skills Qualifications

In 2022 to 2023 there were 2 delivery failures for FSQs. Both were due to missing scripts and the AOs took steps, such as issuing estimated marks, to minimise negative effects for students. There were fewer delivery failures than in 2021 to 2022 when there were 4 of these incidents.

End-Point Assessments

Table 1 shows the number of delivery failure events reported in 2022 to 2023 for EPAs, broken down by sub-type.

Table 1: Incidents of delivery failure reported in 2022 to 2023 for EPAs, broken down by sub-type

Change to table and accessible view

IT failure	5
Human error	4
Process weakness	4
AO missed own deadline	3
Information error	3
Exam disruption	2
Incorrect content	1
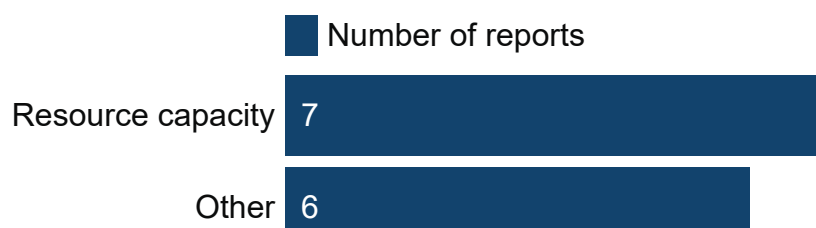
There were 35 reports of delivery failure for EPAs in 2022 to 2023. The highest number of delivery failures for EPAs was due to AO resource capacity issues. Three of these were due to a lack of assessor availability to complete assessments in a timely manner leading to potential deli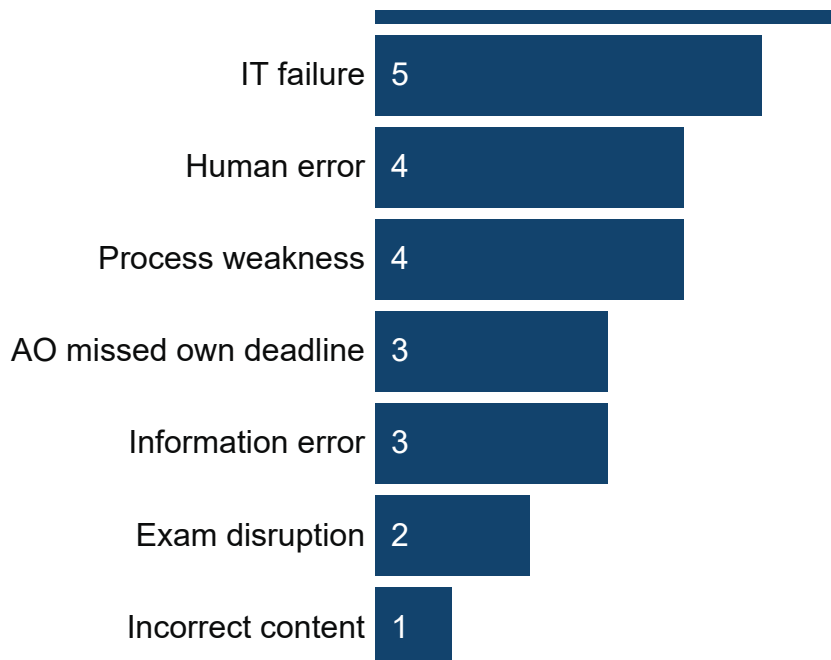very delays. Of the 35 reported delivery failures, 13 related in some aspect to potential non-compliance with the requirements of the end-point assessment plan. Six of these were due to assessment timings not meeting the required timeframe as set out within the plan.

Cyber-attacks

Notifications about cyber-attacks accounted for a significant proportion of reported delivery failures in the period covered by this report.

Of the 19 cyber-attacks reported that affected delivery of GCSEs, AS and A levels, 16 also affected the delivery of vocational and technical qualifications at affected centres. There was one cyber-attack reported that only affected the delivery of vocational and technical qualifications.

Cyber-attacks have the potential to impact the ability of schools or colleges to deliver qualifications, and loss of access to its IT systems may prevent a centre from being able to submit marks, make entries or conduct assessments. Where individual students at centres are affected, AOs must put in place mitigations to minimise the adverse effect. For instance, AOs may grant extensions for the submission of non-exam assessment data until their IT systems are back online and secure.

All the reported cyber-attacks were directed at schools and colleges, apart from one report of an attempted denial-of-service attack on an AO which was successfully repelled.

Due to the change of parameters in the data for VTQ PTQs this year, it is not possible to make direct comparisons on the volume of cyber-attacks in VTQs with previous years.

In response to the risks around cyber-security, Ofqual continues to share good practice with the regulated community and expects it to continue to manage cyber-risks. Centres are responsible for managing their own resilience in this field although Ofqual encourages all parties across the sector to work together in tackling the evolving risks around cyber-security.

Security breaches

Within this report the term 'security breach' is used to refer to a potential security breach (for example, where procedures are not followed and there is the potential for the assessment to be compromised, even where this is not realised), or an actual security breach (for example, where the content of a live question paper is shared). This means that for some potential security breaches reported to Ofqual, there will have been no evidence that the integrity of the assessment was compromised.

Where a breach happens AOs must investigate the extent of the breach, if any, and take all reasonable steps to mitigate its impact. Security breaches may be intentional, but they can also be accidental. For example, if a student is accidentally given paper 2 instead of paper 1 at their centre, or if results are accidentally released early to students by their centre.

Sharing confidential material on social media

The immediacy of social media and instant messaging applications can make a security breach in one centre more difficult to contain. AOs closely monitor social media to identify where individuals are claiming to share and use their assessment materials. Where necessary, AOs work with social media companies and law enforcement to take down materials to prevent students from being disadvantaged.

Hoax papers on social media

During the exam period individuals on social media claimed to have question papers and mark schemes for sale, frequently uploading a doctored copy of the front cover of the question paper as 'proof' of access. In some instances, sellers were seeking large payments for these hoax papers. Ofqual reminded students in a blog 'Summer exams are starting' that if they see offers of exam questions or papers on social media, they will most likely be fake and not to look at them. Ofqual warned that even accessing fake materials means students could receive sanctions for malpractice from AOs up to and including disqualification from their assessments.

Ofqual also updated exams officer resources, including blogs on keeping mobile phones, smart watches and other internet-enabled devices out of the exam hall alongside analysis of malpractice statistics, to highlight these issues. In addition, as part of our stakeholder engagement Ofqual encouraged representative bodies and other stakeholders, such as The Student Room and Parentkind, to be alert to hoax papers and report them to AOs.

GCSEs, AS and A Levels

Centres normally receive exam papers and supporting materials some weeks before the exams are taken. For GCSE, AS and A Levels, centres must follow the JCQ instructions on conducting

[examinations](#) which specify requirements for the handling and safe storage of assessment materials.

For the summer 2023 series, the exam boards delivered question papers for these qualifications to 5,905 centres in England.

Reported security breaches

Chart 11: Security breaches by category in summer 2023 and summer 2022

Chart 11 shows security breaches by category in summer 2023 and summer 2022.

There were 123 reported security breaches in 2023 for GCSEs, AS and A levels, compared with 35 in 2022 and 68 in 2019. The term 'security breach' is used to refer to an actual security breach or a potential security breach. The largest number of breaches (38) related to question papers being potentially leaked into the public domain immediately prior to the exam.

Any leak of assessment materials is a serious matter, and Ofqual takes any incidents of this nature extremely seriously. Where security breaches are subject to an ongoing investigation by exam boards and the police, they are not addressed in detail in this report.

When there is the potential that the content of a question paper has been leaked prior to the exam, Ofqual expects AOs to identify and investigate the breaches quickly and take steps to prevent the material from being shared more widely. Ofqual also expects AOs to consider if additional security controls should be implemented to safeguard the integrity of the remaining assessments in the series.

One such control introduced by AOs this summer that will have been visible to centres was to reduce the download request window for electronic delivery of question papers from 90 minutes prior to the exam to 45 minutes. This provision is made so that in circumstances such as a centre needing to fulfil a reasonable adjustment for a student, centres can request an electronic version of the paper on the day of the exam, sent through a secure digital download system.

Where AOs' investigations establish the content of a question paper may have been seen by some students prior to their exam, Ofqual closely monitors the approach taken to mitigating any disadvantage to other students. AOs conduct analysis during and after marking, and did not report any evidence this series of their awards being affected by security breaches. AOs must consider appropriate sanctions for any students found to have committed malpractice.

Another 37 security breaches this series were due to centres opening and distributing the wrong exam paper in GCSE, AS and A levels. This compares with 3 cases in 2022; however, this was a historically low figure, with 25 instances reported in 2019. AOs require centres to follow protocols intended to prevent such errors, including having 2 people present when papers are opened. In some of the cases reported, exam papers did not leave the confinement of the secure storage area, but the packet was incorrectly opened and resealed immediately.

Where centre staff open and distribute the wrong exam paper, Ofqual expects AOs to do all they

can to minimise the impact on students and on the security of the paper. AOs may accept the paper the student has sat, even if they sat it on the wrong day, and estimate the missing mark of the paper they should have sat, if the student was unable to sit the correct paper in the same sitting. They will also require students and centre staff to sign confidentiality statements confirming they will not disclose the content of the assessment and centres may receive additional scrutiny to ensure that remaining exams are conducted correctly.

Additional Performance Table Qualifications

Chart 12: Security breaches reported in 2022 to 2023 and 2021 to 2022 for additional PTQs, broken down by sub-type

Chart 12 shows the number of security breaches reported in 2022 to 2023 for additional PTQs, broken down by sub-type.

In 2022 to 2023 there were 14 security breaches linked to additional PTQs, compared with 35 in 2021 to 2022. These ranged from the early release of results to the potential exposure of students to live material. In all cases, AOs conducted their own investigations and acted as needed to minimise the impact on students. Where necessary, centres were placed under increased scrutiny and instructed to improve their procedures or systems to prevent recurrence.

T Levels

In 2022 to 2023 there was one security breach in which assessment materials were leaked in a centre. This was discovered before the official release date of the assessment materials and the AO put in place mitigations meaning students were not unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged. This is one fewer than in 2021 to 2022 when there were 2 security breaches.

Functional Skills Qualifications

Chart 13: Security breaches reported in 2022 to 2023 and 2021 to 2022 for functional skills qualifications, broken down by sub-type

Chart 13 shows the number of security breaches reported in 2022 to 2023 for functional skills qualifications, broken down by sub-type.

The most frequent security breach for both 2022 to 2023 and 2021 to 2022 was the loss of examination papers in transit from the AO to centres, which were due to courier errors. For all cases in 2022 to 2023, the impact on students was managed by AOs scheduling new examinations with different papers and retiring or pausing the versions that were lost in transit. In some cases, the missing papers were recovered, unopened.

End-Point Assessments

Table 2 shows the number of security breaches reported in 2022 to 2023 for EPAs, broken down by sub-type.

Table 2: Security breaches reported in 2022 to 2023 for EPAs, broken down by sub-type

Change to table and accessible view
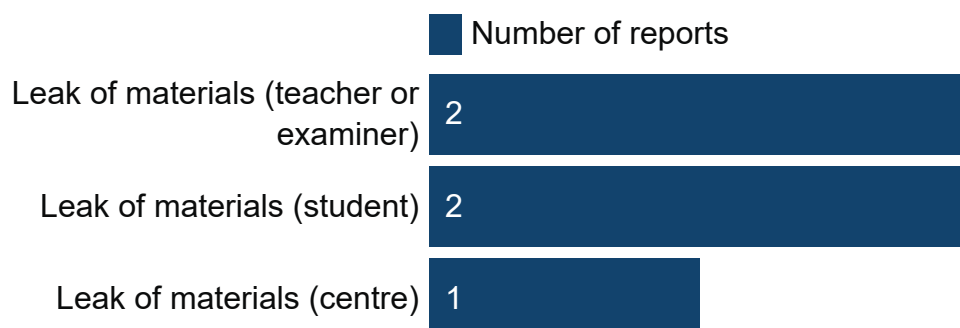
There were 5 reports of security breaches for EPAs in 2022 to 2023. These ranged from breaches caused by human error in which incorrect paperwork was shared with apprentices, to a system error which incorrectly allowed an apprentice access to assessment materials. AOs were required to demonstrate to Ofqual what mitigations they had put in place to ensure that apprentices were not negatively impacted. These mitigations included retiring versions of assessments that had been the subject of the breach and implementing new processes where necessary to prevent re-occurrence.

Assessment material errors

Ofqual's regulatory expectation is for all assessment materials to be error-free and that AOs' quality assurance processes are robust enough to identify and correct any that may be introduced during the setting process. Where errors do happen, AOs must take action to minimise the impact on students, and to review the causes of any errors and explain how they plan to prevent recurrence. Errors identified prior to the assessment can often be addressed swiftly to ensure that a student's ability to answer questions as intended is not impacted and unnecessary confusion and anxiety is avoided. Errors undermine student and public confidence in regulated qualifications.

Students and centres are entitled to expect that assessments are fit for purpose and delivered effectively. To promote transparency, Ofqual publishes figures on assessment material errors reported by individual AOs. However, it should be noted that the number of qualifications offered by AOs differs (see Ofqual's Annual Qualifications Market Report: 2021 to 2022 academic year).

Some errors affect all students, whereas others affect a proportion of those taking the assessment. Depending on the nature of the error, they may also impact a greater or lesser proportion of the total marks available for a qualification. Some errors reported to Ofqual by AOs do not impact on students' ability to respond to a question or task.

Ofqual categorises errors by their potential level of impact on students:

- Category 1 – assessment material errors which could or do make it impossible for students to generate a meaningful response to a question or task
- Category 2 – assessment material errors which could or do cause unintentional difficulties for students to generate a meaningful response to a question or task
- Category 3 – assessment material errors which will not affect a student's ability to generate a meaningful response to a question or task

AOs have several options for mitigating assessment material errors identified before the assessment is taken, such as issuing an addendum or an erratum notice, depending on how close to the exam it is identified.

When an error is identified after an exam, Ofqual requires AOs to try to mitigate the effect of it as far as possible. When the AO has evidence to suggest that the error caused confusion or negatively impacted on students' performance, they might adjust the mark scheme to accept different possible responses. AOs advise examiners to flag any unusual answers or those which suggest students were confused and, depending on the nature of the error, may carry out more detailed analyses of students' responses. Ultimately, where an error cannot be mitigated in a way that maintains fairness to students, AOs might award the mark(s) to all students or discount the question.

In certain circumstances based on the evidence presented, an AO may award special consideration to compensate students whose performance was affected by circumstances out of their control.

GCSEs, AS and A Levels

The majority (97%) of the GCSE, AS and A level question papers produced were error-free. However, there was an increase in the number of assessment material errors (87) compared to summer 2022 (61).

Chart 14: GCSE, AS and A level reported errors by AO

Chart 14 shows the number of GCSE, AS and A level reported errors by AO.

Chart 15: Assessment material errors reported by AO and categorisation of impact

Chart 15 shows the number of assessment material errors reported by AO and categorisation of impact.

Chart 16: Number and severity of errors in different assessment material types

Chart 16 shows the number and severity of errors in different assessment material types.

There were 65 errors reported in the content of question papers. Ten of these were of the most severe type (category 1), which could have prevented students from being able to answer the question, while 13 (category 3) were minor and had no impact on their ability to respond.

Eleven of these errors occurred only in modified papers or modified supporting materials adapted to make them more accessible to students with specific requirements (for example large print or braille paper). As these errors were introduced during the modification process, they did not appear in the standard version of the assessment and had the potential to impact fewer students. All were identified during or after the exam and usually the impacted question was discounted from the assessment.

Chart 17: Point of identification of question paper errors by AO


Chart 17 shows the point of identification of question paper errors by AO.

When errors are identified, Ofqual requires exam boards to provide details of how it intends to mitigate the potential impact on students and prevent similar errors from occurring again in future.

Table 3: Mitigations to errors in standard question papers

Change to table and accessible view
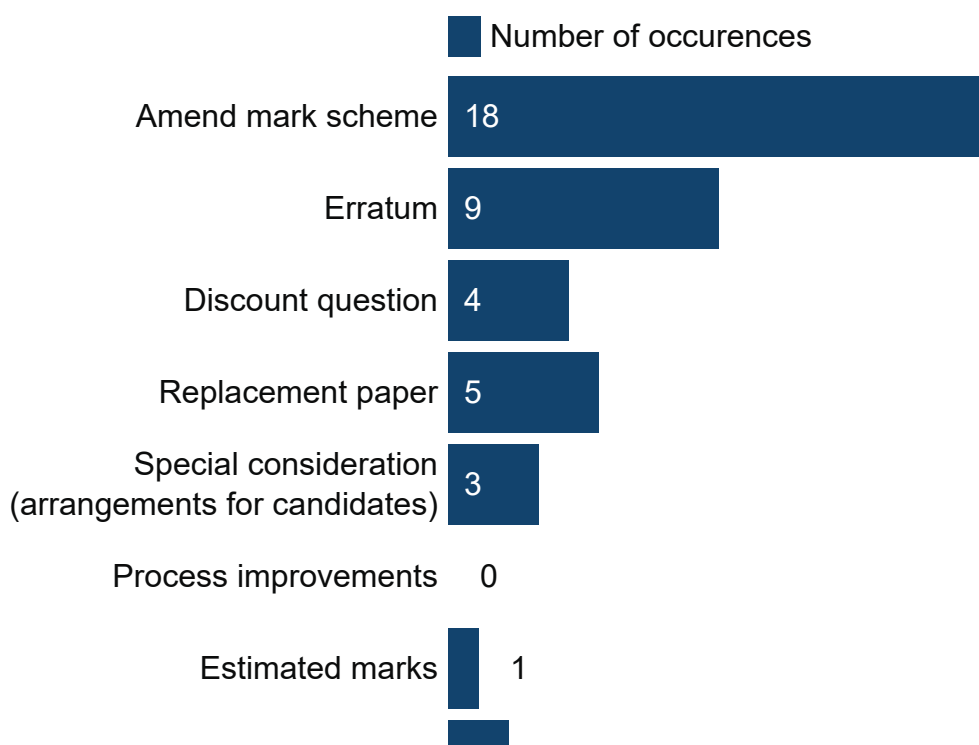
Vocational and Technical Qualifications

Most of the question papers produced for VTQs were error-free. However, there was an increase in the number of assessment material errors during the academic year 2022 to 2023 (51) compared with the academic year 2021 to 2022 (31). As with GCSE, AS and A levels, not all errors affected all the students taking the assessments or had the potential to impact on their performance.

Additional Performance Table Qualifications

Chart 18: Assessment material errors reported in 2022 to 2023 for additional PTQs, by AO

Chart 18 shows the number of assessment material errors reported in 2022 to 2023 for additional PTQs, by AO.

Assessment material errors were the second largest event type for additional PTQs during 2022 to 2023.

Chart 19: Assessment material errors reported by AO and categorisation of impact

Chart 19 shows the number of assessment material errors reported by AO and categorisation of impact.

In 6 of the cases relating to category 1 errors (the most serious category of error) the AOs declared non-compliance and, in all cases, where necessary implemented mitigations to minimise negative effects on students.

Chart 20: Point of identification of assessment material errors for additional PTQs by AO

Chart 20 shows the point of identification of assessment material errors for additional PTQs by AO.

For many vocational qualifications, including T Levels, there are often assessment 'windows' during which assessments take place. These span a longer period than exams, sometimes a

matter of weeks. AOs have a number of options for mitigating assessment material errors, depending on whether different centres have started the assessment once the AO becomes aware of the error.

T Levels

Chart 21: Assessment material errors reported in 2022 to 2023 for T Levels, by AO

Chart 21 shows the number of assessment material errors reported in 2022 to 2023 for T Levels, by AO.

Chart 22: Assessment material errors reported by AO and categorisation of impact

Chart 22 shows the number of assessment material errors reported by AO and categorisation of impact.

Chart 23: Point of identification of assessment material errors for T Levels by AO

Chart 23 shows the point of identification of assessment material errors for T Levels by AO.

The 3 question paper errors were all category 2 and the AOs put in place mitigations where needed. The front cover instruction error was due to the misattribution of questions which assessed the quality of written communication and was a category 1 error. Most of the assessment material errors were in supporting materials, and all of these were category 2 errors. AOs put mitigations in place and reviewed their own processes as necessary.

Functional Skills Qualifications

There were 3 assessment material errors in functional skills qualifications reported to Ofqual between 1 September 2022 and 31 August 2023. All of these were category 2 errors. In all cases, mitigations were put in place to minimise the impact on students. Where necessary, AOs reviewed their own processes and committed to strengthening these to avoid recurrence.

Chart 24: Point of identification of assessment material errors in FSQs by AO

Chart 24 shows the point of identification of assessment material errors in FSQs by AO.
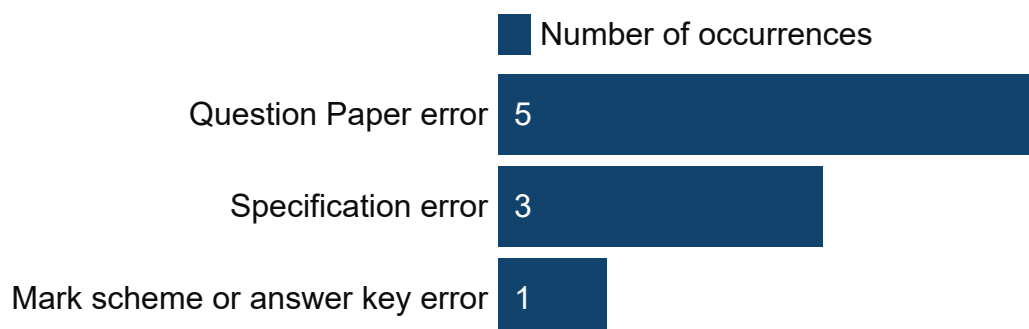
Many functional skills qualifications offer 'on demand' assessments, meaning that centres can choose when students complete an assessment. Consequently, assessment material errors may be identified and reported at any point during an assessment's lifetime. Depending on when a centre has entered students, this could be before, during or after they have completed an assessment. Therefore, mitigations applied by AOs will necessarily vary depending on the circumstances of different students.

End-Point Assessments

Table 4 shows the number of assessment material errors reported in 2022 to 2023 for EPAs.

Table 4: Assessment material errors reported in 2022 to 2023 for EPAs

Change to table and accessible view

Number of occurrences

	Number of occurrences
Question Paper error	5
Specification error	3
Mark scheme or answer key error	1

There were 9 reported assessment material errors for EPAs in 2022 to 2023.

Table 5 shows the number of assessment material errors reported by categorisation of impact.

Table 5: Assessment material error reported by category

Change to table and accessible view

Number of occurrences

	Number of occurrences
Category 1	3
Category 2	6
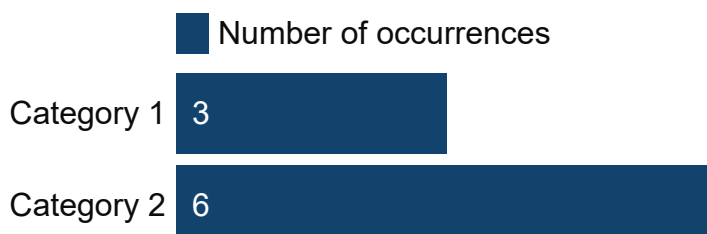
Two of the category 1 errors were within question papers; in both cases the AOs implemented mitigations to ensure that apprentices were not disadvantaged. The remaining category 1 error was a specification error, in this instance the AO identified inconsistencies within assessment documents across a range of EPAs. Work is ongoing by the AO to complete a full review and moderation activity of the EPAs. The category 2 errors identified were varied and included typographical errors within assessment materials and issues caused by inconsistencies within the

assessment plan which led to errors.

Malpractice and Maladministration

Everyone involved in the delivery of an assessment has a role to play in preventing and reporting malpractice, so that users of qualifications can be confident that individual students' outcomes genuinely reflect what they know, understand, and can do. Ofqual takes all allegations of malpractice extremely seriously.

Ofqual's rules apply to instances of both malpractice and maladministration. Maladministration generally constitutes mistakes or poor process where there has been no intention on the part of the person responsible to do any harm. By contrast, malpractice will generally involve some form of intent.

AOs must investigate all allegations of malpractice and maladministration where there are reasonable grounds to suspect that malpractice or maladministration has taken place. AOs require centres and examiners to report all suspected incidents and to co-operate with any subsequent investigation. Where proven, the AO will act against those responsible.

AOs do not have to tell Ofqual about all cases of alleged malpractice or maladministration. They are obliged, however, to tell Ofqual about the most serious potential issues which they believe could either invalidate the award of a qualification or could affect another AO, as well as those that might affect public confidence, or which include a substantial number of students.

GCSEs, AS and A Levels

In summer 2023, AOs reported 15 allegations or suspicions of serious malpractice in GCSE, AS and A levels, compared with 5 in 2022 – 8 concerning centres or centre staff, 6 concerning students, and one regarding an examiner. Six of the 8 cases involving centres or centre staff resulted in action being taken against the members of staff, 2 of the cases are still being considered. Of the 6 cases involving students, 2 cases are still ongoing, 3 students received a loss of marks or disqualification, and in one case no malpractice was proven. The single case involving an examiner resulted in their suspension.

Ofqual has issued [Malpractice in GCSE, AS and A level: summer 2023 exam series Official Statistics](#).

AI creates risks to assessment delivery. For the first time this summer AOs reported to Ofqual instances of student malpractice involving AI. These occurred primarily in subjects with Non-Examined Assessment (NEA) and were either initially reported by centres or identified by their moderators. These are included within the Ofqual official statistics for Malpractice for GCSEs, AS and A Levels, under the offence of plagiarism ('unacknowledged copying from published sources including the internet incomplete referencing').

AOs use a range of approaches, including detection software, to identify the use of AI. Where malpractice through plagiarism is confirmed and students receive a sanction, AOs may review

other papers or qualifications taken by that student to determine whether similar malpractice has taken place. Ofqual also requires this information to be shared with other AOs that the student may have taken qualifications with.

Ofqual contributed to the guidance JCQ introduced for the academic year 2022 to 2023 on AI use in assessments for Teachers and Assessors. Over the past year Ofqual has met regularly with AOs to discuss malpractice involving AI.

Ofqual will be reviewing whether more granular data on malpractice involving AI can be collected in future years.

Additional Performance Table Qualifications

During 2022 to 2023 AOs reported a total of 15 malpractice cases concerning additional PTQs, compared with 12 in 2022 to 2021. Ten of these cases were concerning centres or centre staff, 4 were related to student malpractice and one concerned a member of AO staff.

In all cases, AOs have investigated and applied penalties, as appropriate. Where necessary, AOs have required centres to conduct their own reviews into their malpractice procedures.

T Levels

During 2022 to 2023, AOs reported a total of 9 cases for T Levels, compared with 3 cases in 2021 to 2022. Of these cases, 5 related to student malpractice and 4 related to centre malpractice.

For the 5 incidents of student malpractice, AOs conducted investigations and where appropriate, applied penalties. For the 4 cases of centre-led malpractice 2 were centre maladministration. In the other 2 cases sanctions were applied.

Functional Skills Qualifications

During 2022 to 2023 AOs reported a total of 7 malpractice cases concerning functional skills qualifications, compared with 8 during 2021 to 2022. Of these cases, 6 concerned centres or centre staff and one was related to student malpractice.

Malpractice was the most common incident reported to Ofqual for FSQs during 2022 to 2023. In all cases, where the claims were upheld, penalties were applied or, if necessary, measures were put in place to prevent recurrence.

End-Point Assessments

During 2022 to 2023 AOs reported a total of 10 malpractice cases concerning EPAs. Of these cases, 4 concerned centre staff, 4 related to apprentice malpractice and 2 concerned assessors. For the 4 cases of centre staff malpractice, one was confirmed to be malpractice by a centre staff member. This did not cause any negative impact for apprentices; however, the AO sanctioned the centre. Of the 4 incidents of apprentice malpractice, 2 were upheld and a penalty applied to the apprentices. For the 2 reported events of assessor malpractice, one was confirmed as maladministration.

Vocational and technical malpractice data

AOs notify Ofqual about the most serious cases of suspected malpractice which have been reported in the sections above. Ofqual also collects data from AOs on the number of malpractice cases investigated, including offence type and any sanctions applied. During 2022 to 2023 there were approximately 1,600 malpractice cases which had at least one penalty issued for VTQ PTQs (Applied Generals, Tech Awards, Tech Levels and Technical Certificates). This is a decrease compared with 2021 to 2022 when there were more than 1,700 cases.

There were around 700 malpractice cases which had at least one penalty issued for FSQs in 2022 to 2023. This is a decrease compared to 2021 to 2022 where there were around 900 cases.

Whistleblowers

In addition to malpractice cases investigated by the AOs, Ofqual also receives direct reports of alleged malpractice relating to centres and AOs from students, teachers, parents, and others.

Ofqual is [designated as a prescribed body for whistleblowing](). As in previous years, whistleblowing data for April 2023 to March 2024 will be reported in Ofqual's 2024 Annual Report and Accounts.

Anyone can raise concerns they have about exam or assessment-related wrongdoing with Ofqual. Ofqual raises allegations with the relevant AOs and follow up to make sure that the allegations are properly investigated and, where appropriate, that sanctions are applied.

Ofqual investigates any concerns reported to it regarding an AO, taking action where it finds that an AO has not acted as required by Ofqual's rules.

GCSE, AS and A levels

For summer 2023, 28 individuals who were concerned about malpractice in their workplace (whistleblowers) raised allegations with Ofqual, compared with 22 reports in 2022. Ofqual also received 96 concerns of malpractice raised by others, compared with 98 in 2022. Of the 96, 37 were from students and members of the public reporting alleged exam paper leaks on social media.

Chart 25: Nature of whistleblowing allegations regarding GCSE, AS and A levels to Ofqual in summer 2023 and summer 2022

Chart 25 shows the nature of whistleblowing allegations regarding GCSE, AS and A levels to Ofqual in summer 2023 and summer 2022.

Vocational and Technical Qualifications

From 1 September 2022 to 31 August 2023, 40 individuals who were concerned about malpractice in their workplace (whistleblowers) raised allegations with Ofqual, compared with 15 reports in 2022. Ofqual also received 67 concerns of malpractice raised by others, compared with 52 in 2022. In both 2022 and 2023 conduct of examinations and fraud were the most common allegations.

Chart 26: Nature of whistleblowing allegations regarding VTQs to Ofqual

Chart 26 shows the nature of whistleblowing allegations regarding VTQs to Ofqual.

Phase 3: Marking

Current AO practices see the majority of externally-examined components marked by examiners online. Online marking can be by item (an individual question or several related part questions) or at whole paper level, depending on the type of paper. Marking at item level means that many different examiners will mark each student's work.

Every paper has a team of examiners. Before marking starts, examiners are trained on the mark scheme for the paper. They must complete their training satisfactorily before they can start marking, to make sure they understand and can consistently apply the mark scheme. Examiners who do not pass the training will not be allowed to mark.

During marking, every examiner's work is regularly quality checked by their respective AO to ensure their marking is consistent and continues to meet the required standard.

Where marking is online, quality checks include a check each time an examiner logs on to the marking system, as well as random checks while they are marking. If examiners do not mark the quality assurance items to the agreed standard, they will be stopped from marking until their supervising examiner is confident they understand the mark scheme. Where marking is on paper, examiners send samples of their marking to a more senior examiner for checking. If an examiner is not marking to the required standard, but their marking is consistent their marking may be adjusted; if their marking is inconsistent, they will be stopped from marking altogether, and the marking they have already completed will be reviewed.

As in previous years, in 2023 Ofqual attended a sample of AO training events (face to face meetings or held online) to observe the process. Ofqual attended 22 events: 10 for GCSEs and 12 for A levels, as well as 24 events for VTQs in performance tables and T Levels, to satisfy ourselves that AOs' training and standardisation was in line with expectations and the role of the examiner(s) and the processes they were being asked to complete was clear. Any queries from these events were followed up with individual AOs so that Ofqual received the necessary level of assurance for this stage of marking.

Infographic: the number of GCSE, AS and A level scripts, examiners and special consideration requests involved in marking

Monitoring marking and moderation progress

Ofqual required all AOs issuing results in August 2023 to provide data on their progress towards the delivery of these results.

Ofqual applied additional scrutiny to marking progress for GCSE, AS and A levels in summer 2023 and required the relevant AOs to report marking progress data weekly. Ofqual tracked progress both in terms of items (where AOs marked assessments online in this way) and completion of whole scripts.

For VTQs that are used for progression, AOs were required to submit data which enabled Ofqual to closely monitor progress towards release of results.

For GCSE, AS, A level, VTQ PTQ and TQs in T Levels, Ofqual also monitored AOs' marking and moderation progress through fortnightly meetings. Where progress for marking or moderation was slower than expected, Ofqual discussed with the relevant AO the mitigations they intended to put in place.

All AOs completed their marking and moderation of vocational and technical qualifications, GCSE, AS and A levels and TQs in time to issue results. As in previous years when exams took place, a small number of grades were withheld or pending on results days due to ongoing malpractice investigations or unresolved administrative issues. However, this number was lower than in previous years.

Special Consideration

In November 2023, Ofqual published official statistics on special consideration requests for GCSE, AS and A levels in the summer 2023 exam series.

The academic year 2022 to 2023 was the second year in which Ofqual also collected data from AOs about special consideration for VTQs included in performance tables. AOs received more than 18,700 requests for special consideration for approximately 180 Applied General, Tech Level, Tech Certificates and Tech Award qualifications. Of the over 18,700 total requests, nearly 16,000 requests were made on behalf of students who were present in an assessment but whose performance in that assessment was disrupted, and more than 2,700 requests were made on behalf of students who were unable to take an assessment for reasons outside of their control. AOs approved nearly 16,500 of the requests received to mitigate the disadvantages experienced by students.

As with other VTQs, special consideration can be applied for apprenticeship EPAs. AOs are expected to have clear arrangements in place for this provision, however Ofqual does not collect data from AOs related to these requests.

Phase 4: Grading

GCSE, AS and A levels in summer 2023

In September 2022, Ofqual confirmed the approach to grading GCSE, AS and A levels in summer 2023, that results should see a return to pre-pandemic standards with system-level grading protection in place to recognise the national disruption experienced by this cohort of students. Overall results for GCSEs and A levels in summer 2023 were similar to 2019, in line with the policy intent.

On results days in August, Ofqual published resources to help contextualise and explain results. These included interactive visualisations that allow users to explore results information in more detail.

AOs set grade boundaries for these qualifications based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative evidence. As in previous years when exams took place, there was an important role for examiner judgement in reviewing the quality of students' work.

Grade boundaries typically change each exam series to reflect any differences in the difficulty of the assessments. This means that in summer 2023, some grade boundaries were lower than 2019, while others were higher. The approach to grading in summer 2023 had protection built into the grading process so, irrespective of the grade boundaries, students could be confident that across subjects, the national disruption they had faced was taken into account.

Infographic: the number of certificates issued and the breakdown of those certificates into GCSE, AS and A levels

GCSE French and German

Ofqual required AOs to award GCSE French and German more generously in summer 2023, as in summer 2022. This follows the detailed review of an extensive evidence base as part of Ofqual's work on inter-subject comparability and subsequent announcement in 2019 that it would seek to align grade standards in GCSE French and German with Spanish. AOs were required to make an upward adjustment in both French and German at grades 9, 7 and 4. This was considered during awarding and is reflected in the outcomes. Ofqual will review this and consider whether any further adjustments are required in future series.

National Reference Test

The results of the 2023 National Reference Test (NRT) were published on GCSE results day. The results show that, in English, there was a statistically significant downward change when compared with 2017 at grade 4. There were no statistically significant differences in results at any of the other key grades in English or in maths when compared with 2017. These results suggest that performance in English and maths was similar to 2017, the first year of the NRT, apart from

grade 4 in English, where performance was lower than 2017.

There was a return to pre-pandemic grading for GCSEs in summer 2023. There was also protection in place to recognise the national disruption that students had faced during the related programmes of study. While NRT outcomes in English were statistically significantly lower than in 2017 at grade 4, Ofqual's Chief Regulator decided not to implement a downward change because this would be counter to the wider policy intent of providing protection for students.

VTQs in performance tables

For those VTQs that are taken alongside or instead of GCSEs, AS and A levels, and are on the Department for Education's school performance measures, Ofqual asked AOs to reflect on their awarding approaches with a view to returning to pre-pandemic standards in 2023. AOs expected broadly the same quality of work at each grade as they did before the pandemic. Where possible, senior examiners monitored for any evidence of disruption and considered it when setting grade boundaries. AOs have been taking this approach since assessments restarted after the pandemic. This means that students should not be advantaged or disadvantaged if they took assessments early in their course, or at the end.

It is not meaningful to compare the pattern of results of VTQs with previous years, because the number of students taking VTQs alongside their GCSEs and A levels has changed significantly and continues to change.

Some VTQs test occupational competency and/or are used as a licence to practise. For these qualifications, AOs have continued to maintain performance standards from pre-pandemic.

In 2021 to 2022, Ofqual allowed AOs to adapt their assessments, so that students studying VTQs could get the support they needed as we emerged from the pandemic. These adaptations were designed to free up time to recover lost teaching and learning. For many students, results from those assessments were used towards qualifications this year so that students were not disadvantaged.

As with GCSEs, AS and A levels, on results days in August, Ofqual published resources to help contextualise and explain results for PTQs. These included interactive visualisations that allow users to explore results information in more detail.

T Levels

This was the first year that T Levels were based fully on formal assessments, whereas those awarded previously included at least some contribution from teacher assessed grades. AOs were generous in awarding the Technical Qualifications within T Levels, as is the custom with new qualifications, as students and teachers are less familiar with the assessments.

As for other qualifications in performance tables, Ofqual published resources to help contextualise and explain results. These included interactive visualisations that allow users to explore results information in more detail.

Phase 5: Results and Post Results

AOs and centres carry out a substantial amount of preparation ahead of results release, especially for those VTQs that are taken alongside or instead of GCSEs, AS and A levels and are used by students to progress to further or higher education.

Ofqual requires AOs to provide information to students and centres about which results will be released and when, and to work with their centres to maintain confidentiality of results and grade profiles ahead of results days.

See Appendix D for links to resources published by Ofqual to support the sector.

Incorrect results

Ofqual requires AOs to ensure their examiners mark all assessments according to the mark scheme and to issue results that reflect the performance of each student. It is possible for errors to be made, however, and so it is important that when they occur, AOs identify them, and correct them quickly. AOs must also try to mitigate any negative effects for the student created by the incorrect results.

Ofqual takes the issue of incorrect results, regardless of their cause, very seriously. AOs must tell it promptly if they have issued any incorrect results, and must take note of Ofqual guidance on making changes to incorrect results when determining how to rectify this, unless a result has been changed because of an appeal. This guidance explains what AOs should consider when deciding whether to re-issue results to correct an error, including any potential negative impact (for example, if the correct result is lower). AOs must explain to Ofqual how they have considered its guidance.

The numbers of incorrect results that were corrected after a successful review of marking or moderation is reported separately in Ofqual's Official Statistics.

GCSE, AS and A levels

In summer 2023, AOs told Ofqual of 15 instances for GCSEs, AS and A Levels where they had issued results which they later found to be incorrect. Across these 15 instances, 290 centres and 639 students were affected. The reasons for these included AO staff making errors in inputting data, other administrative errors, and errors in IT systems.

Vocational and Technical Qualifications

Between 1 September 2022 and 31 August 2023, AOs told us of 25 instances where they found they had issued results they later found to be incorrect. Twenty of these cases were for PTQs (including other general qualifications), 3 were for technical qualifications within T Levels and 2 were for functional skills qualifications. The reasons for these included administrative errors and IT system errors.

For some TQs in T Levels, Ofqual issued notices to AOs under General Condition H6.2 meaning

that they had to refrain from issuing results until they had provided Ofqual with a statement of assurance confirming that the results for these TQs were valid, reliable, and accurately reflected the level of attainment demonstrated by students in the assessments. Once Ofqual received these assurances, it permitted the release of results.

Lost GCSE, AS and A level scripts

Ofqual collects data from AOs on the number of GCSE, AS or A level scripts (or other assessment materials) which have been lost at any point in the exam process.

Exam scripts can be lost at various points in the process: in a centre before despatch, in transit between centres, markers and AOs, within the AO itself, or at an external scanning bureau.

AOs must notify Ofqual of all instances where a script or other evidence is lost and explain how they will make sure the student receives a fair result. Usually, an AO will issue a calculated grade using the student's performance in other assessments in that subject.

Chart 27: Lost scripts by qualification level, summer 2023 and summer 2022

Chart 27 shows lost scripts by qualification level, summer 2023 and summer 2022.

Note:* the 2022 figures are revised from the summer 2022 report because after its publication, more scripts were found, and AO data was amended accordingly.

After a 12% increase in the total number of scripts lost for these qualifications in 2022, compared with 2019, Ofqual investigated the causes and AOs made process improvements ahead of 2023. The total number of lost scripts in summer 2023 is 40% lower than in 2022 and represents 0.01% of the total scripts marked in summer 2023.

Chart 28: Lost scripts by cause, summer 2023 and summer 2022

Chart 28 shows lost scripts by cause, summer 2023 and summer 2022.

In summer 2023, there was a significant decrease in the number of scripts lost within AOs and a greater proportion of the scripts lost went missing in transit. Ofqual will continue to monitor the number of lost scripts and require AOs to take measures to minimise any script losses.

VTQ Results Action Plan 2023

The Action Plan: Vocational and Technical Qualification results 2023 was published in December 2022, following Ofqual's review into the delays in issuing Level 3 results in August 2022. To protect against the issue recurring in 2023, Ofqual worked closely with 14 AOs who offer Level 3

qualifications used for progression to higher education. The introduction of term-time checkpoints meant that AOs and centres had a common understanding of each student's intention and could track that they were making sufficient progress to achieve a result. AOs also agreed to release results to centres in advance, to give sufficient time for exams officers to check and prepare them for final release. Ofqual closely monitored the progress of every AO in scope as they moved towards completion for each checkpoint, and engaged with them promptly where potential issues arose. After the checkpoints closed, progress towards the issue of results was carefully monitored and this went beyond results day to follow up with AOs where results were not issued, for example, due to withdrawals or deferrals.

More than 378,000 of the Level 3 results in scope for the Action Plan were released to centres before 17 August. A further 7,500 results were issued in addition to those that had been flagged by centres during the checkpoint process. A total of 26,454 results that had been flagged during the checkpoint process as being expected were not, in the event, issued. This was due to changes following the second checkpoint which meant that students were no longer expecting a result in August; in most cases, they had not made sufficient progress to complete all the required units in order to claim their overall qualification result and so their claim had been deferred or was withdrawn by their school, college or centre. In some cases, results had been counted by AOs in the checkpoint data that were not required by students for progression and therefore were not within the scope of the Action Plan.

Of the 26,454 results not issued as originally collated, the top 4 reasons accounted for 97.16% (25,704) of the total – see table below.

Table 6: Reasons for not issuing results within the scope of the Action Plan, summer 2023

Reason description	Reason total	Reason % of total not issued
Centre deferred or confirmed its intention not to claim or cash in certification for student due to incomplete assessment evidence. (For example, the student has failed to compete sufficient assessment evidence to certificate)	10,689	40.41%
AO deferred or did not certificate student due to incomplete assessment evidence. The student has failed to compete sufficient assessment evidence to certificate, and the centre did not confirm the student status	7,280	27.52%
Centre has withdrawn student from the qualification (for example, student has changed courses or left centre)	5,545	20.96%
Late centre claim (that is, requests for qualification result submitted on or after student results day)	2,190	8.28%

While Level 1/2 and Level 2 results were not subject to the same checkpoint process as the Level 3 results, progress towards issuing results that were needed for students to progress to further education was also closely monitored by Ofqual.

The scale of collaboration required to deliver these results in a timely manner demonstrates the commitment of the different sector bodies and AOs to ensuring that students who take VTQs are able to use their results to progress to the next stage of their lives alongside their peers taking AS and A levels.

Between July and September 2023, Ofqual evaluated the effectiveness of the Action Plan. Feedback was gathered from teachers, exams officers and senior leaders in schools and colleges and their representative bodies. Ofqual also heard from AOs, JCQ and FAB about their experiences of delivering the Action Plan and areas for consolidation and improvement. Focus groups were held and further feedback was gathered through engagement with stakeholders.

The evaluation indicated support for continuing with one, clearly defined, term-time checkpoint, and support for the earlier issue of results to schools and colleges. There was also support for formally extending these arrangements to level 1/2 and level 2 qualifications, where they are taken alongside GCSEs at Key Stage 4. Ofqual also received positive feedback about the new Information Hub it had created, which was used by subject staff and exam officers to confirm key dates and deadlines for Level 3 qualifications. However, Ofqual also heard that there was a need for even clearer, more streamlined, and more timely communications from AOs.

Following the evaluation, Ofqual announced its measures to ensure students taking vocational qualifications get their results on time in 2024 and beyond.

T Level Results

The reviews of TQ assessment materials for the core exams, the employer set project and the occupational specialism for autumn 2022 identified some question errors and weaknesses in mark schemes, but to a much lesser extent than in summer 2022. Ofqual flagged the question errors to the relevant AOs, which then conducted a review of their other assessments. They were then able to take remedial action, which included re-marking some questions and redoing awarding. This avoided any of the errors or weaknesses negatively impacting on students' marks or grades.

Ofqual carried out further reviews in summer 2023, again reviewing materials from all 3 T Level AOs. The reviews showed further improvements but identified some weaknesses in mark schemes and some areas where additional clarification was sought from AOs. However, Ofqual determined that the issues found in the papers sampled would not have prevented a sufficiently valid form of assessment. Some of the weaknesses in mark schemes had also been identified by AOs through their internal processes and their mark schemes had been updated.

The actions taken by the AOs in response to the review findings included strengthening indicative content in mark schemes and providing additional examiner training on the effective application of marking bands.

End-Point Assessment outcomes data return

In January 2023 Ofqual required all AOs with EPAs on the Register of Regulated Qualifications as of the end of 1 January 2023 to provide outcomes data for their EPAs to cover the period from 1 March 2022 until 28 February 2023. The data provides insight into overall and component-level (assessment method) pass rates and grade distributions within and across standards.

This is the fourth year Ofqual has collected data on EPA outcomes and the first year that this data has been published: Apprenticeship End-Point Assessments Statistical Report: March 2022 to February 2023 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Table 7 shows the broadening of the scope of the outcomes data collection since 2020. The 2023 return provided data for 124,385 apprentices across 388 apprenticeship standards and 121 AOs. This represents a significant increase compared with the equivalent collections over the previous 3 years, reflecting the impact of the completion of the transition programme.

Table 7: Increased scope of component data collections 2020 to 2023

Category	2020	2021	2022	2023
Apprenticeship Standards covered by data collection	32	88	205	388
AOs involved in data collection	22	43	75	121
Apprentices reflected in data collection	11,490	15,090	50,800	124,385

Access to scripts, reviews of marking, moderation, and appeals

GCSEs, AS and A Levels, Extended Project Qualifications and Technical Qualifications within T Levels have specific rules in place regarding access to scripts, reviews of marking, moderation, and appeals. These include requiring that AOs make marked scripts or assessments available to centres prior to the deadline for requesting a review of marking enabling them to make informed decisions as to whether to seek a review.

Ofqual monitors how AOs implement its regulatory requirement to provide centres with to access scripts. Several of the AOs have moved to a self-service model for summer 2023, when previously marked scripts were made available only on request to the AO. This summer AOs reported a significant increase in the levels of uptake of this provision.

In Summer 2023, 1,426,055 GCSE, AS and A level scripts were accessed for 366,490 students. Scripts are requested at component level so more than one script can be accessed for a given qualification grade. Of these, 1,110,180 (76%) of the accessed scripts were for GCSE and 315,875 (24%) were for AS or A level.

Ofqual does not currently collect data on the number of marked assessment material requests for Extended Project qualifications and T Levels due to the size of these cohorts.

If a centre believes there has been a marking error in an externally-marked paper, it can seek a review of marking. AOs only accept review requests through centres (except for private candidates) and require consent from the student. Ofqual requires AOs to accept review requests

directly from private candidates, who may not have the same relationship with a centre as other students.

The 3 post-results services for reviewing students' assessments each AO offers are:

- an administrative error review for an individual assessment
- a review of marking for an individual assessment
- a review of moderation of the centre's internal assessment

An administrative error review is a check to make sure that every question has been marked and the total number of marks is correct.

A review of marking considers the marking of the original examiner to determine whether the marking included any marking errors. The AO also does a full administrative error review. Ofqual regulations require AOs to provide the reasons for review of marking decisions automatically, rather than on request.

AOs operate a priority service which centres can request if a quick response is required, for example because a university or higher education place is at stake. All AOs offer this service for AS and A levels, T Levels and some offer it for GCSEs.

AOs must also carry out reviews of moderation on request. The judgement of the moderator is reviewed using the original sample of students' work, to determine if there were any errors with the initial moderation or with any adjustments made to the centre's original marks because of the moderation.

If a centre has requested a review but is still dissatisfied with the outcome, it can make an appeal to the AO. The AO will review the outcome of the review and/or check that its procedures have been correctly followed.

If a centre still has concerns following the appeal, it can request a review from Ofqual through the Examination Procedures Review Service (EPRS). Ofqual will consider whether the AO followed its own procedures correctly and whether it complied with Ofqual's rules. EPRS does not review students' work.

Ofqual has published official statistics on reviews of marking and moderation in GCSEs, AS and A levels for summer 2023.

Data on appeals will be published in Spring 2024. Ofqual does not currently publish data on reviews of marking and moderation in Technical Qualifications due to the size of the cohort but will consider whether to do so in the future.

Infographic: the number and percentage of grades that were challenged via Reviews of Marking and Moderation, the number and percentage of those challenged grades that were changed and the numbers and percentages of both increased and decreased grades

For all other qualifications, Ofqual requires AOs to permit appeals on the basis that the AO did not apply procedures consistently or that procedures were not followed properly or fairly. AOs must provide for the appeal of:

- the results of assessments
- decisions regarding reasonable adjustments and special consideration
- decisions relating to any action to be taken against a student or a centre following an investigation into malpractice or maladministration.

AOs offering EPAs must also establish and maintain an appeals process to enable the results of assessments to be appealed, however Ofqual does not collect data from AOs related to this process.

Conclusions and next steps

In the 12 months leading up to and including September 2023, AOs issued more than 7 million certificates across the different types of qualifications covered in this report. AOs and centres worked together, sometimes in complex and challenging circumstances, to award results that allowed students to progress on to the next stages of their lives. The Chief Regulator thanks AOs, teachers, and centre staff – especially exams officers – for all their work.

For GCSE, AS and A Levels, the 2023 summer series marked the successful completion of the 2-year plan Ofqual set out in September 2021 to return to pre-pandemic grading. Six million GCSE, AS and A level results were issued to more than 1.2 million students in 369 different qualifications this year, with protection in place to acknowledge the national disruption that students had faced during their qualification programmes of study. This return to a grading standard that is known and understood by teachers, schools, colleges, higher and further education and employers supports good teaching and learning and helps students make the right choices about their future. This upholds the key pillars of Ofqual's statutory objectives, both in respect of public confidence and fairness over time.

Following the implementation of the VTQ Results Action Plan for 2023, students taking Level 3 VTQs received their results when they expected them in August. This meant students were able to progress, confirming their university places at the same time as their peers taking A levels.

Ofqual has announced measures to ensure students taking vocational qualifications get their results on time in 2024 and beyond, building on the effectiveness of this year's procedures. These measures include a term-time checkpoint for Level 1/2, Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications used for progression; the provision of results to schools and colleges in advance of results days and the expansion of the VTQ Information Hub to include information on qualifications offered by a wider range of AOs.

The measures are part of Ofqual's ongoing commitment to ensuring that students taking vocational and technical qualifications have parity of treatment with those taking A levels or GCSEs.

The monitoring and review programme for T Levels will continue in 2023 to 2024. The next wave of T Levels in agriculture, land management and production and legal services will become available to students for the first time in September 2023.

For apprenticeship EPA, the completion of the transition programme in 2023 has brought the majority of apprentices under the protection of regulation. In meeting Ofqual's recognition criteria, AOs have confirmed that they have the capability and capacity to develop, deliver and award the qualifications for which they are recognised. As the EPA sector matures as a regulated market, Ofqual's expectations of quality will remain. The centralised intelligence and evidence from regulation will inform a more focused, thematic approach to EPA regulation moving into 2024. This, coupled with continued collaboration with stakeholders and a co-regulatory approach with AOs, will provide assurance of protection and continuous improvement within the sector to the benefit of apprentices.

Ofqual has since monitored the delivery of the autumn series of VTQ assessments and GCSEs, while also looking ahead to the AOs' delivery of assessments throughout 2024, including the summer series. It has written to the AOs setting out areas of regulatory focus for the coming year and the follow-up work they are expected to carry out ahead of summer 2024, which Ofqual will revisit in their annual readiness reviews. These include:

- for JCQ AOs, adopting enhanced information security controls for ensuring the secure delivery of hard copy and digital question papers
- taking action to reduce the number of errors in question papers and associated assessment materials
- raising awareness among centres and students about the potential malpractice risks posed by use of AI in assessments, and ensuring the robustness of their own controls for detecting it
- embedding and strengthening measures to ensure that students get their results on time
- considering AOs' support for the delivery of assessments and for students in relation to results, including those impacted by RAAC and other related disruption

Appendix A – Data table counterparts for charts and graphs

Data table counterparts for charts 1 to 6

Chart 1: Scope of EPA regulation increase 2020 to 2023

Category	End March 2020	End March 2021	End March 2022	End August 2022	End August 2023

EPAs on Ofqual's Register in delivery	136	240	589	780	1,493
Apprenticeship Standards where EPA is regulated by Ofqual	77	204	402	475	550
Apprenticeship Standards with EPAs on Ofqual's Register in delivery	47	116	251	342	517
AOs with EPAs on Ofqual's Register in delivery	26	41	71	84	133

Chart 2: GQ incident reports received in summer 2023 and summer 2022

Event type	2023	2022
Assessment material error*	87	61
Delivery failure	46	57
Incorrect results	15	17
Suspected malpractice	15	6
Marking issues	0	11
Potential security breach	123	35
Other	9	8

Note: * This data includes errors in question papers, supporting materials and mark schemes. It does not include assessment material errors reported in the advance information material produced to support students in summer 2022, as this was a unique feature of assessments that year.

Chart 3: Event types for additional PTQs, 2022 to 2023 compared with 2021 to 2022

Event type	Number of reports, 2022 to 2023	Number of reports, 2021 to 2022
Assessment material error	29	20
Delivery failure	62	50
Incorrect certificates	1	2

Incorrect results	17	8
Suspected malpractice	15	11
Marking issue	3	6
Potential security breach	14*	36
Other	7	15
Total	148	149

Note: * 5 of these also affected GCSEs, AS and A Levels and are accounted for in that data.

Chart 4: Event types for T Levels, 2022 to 2023 compared with 2021 to 2022

Event type	Number of reports, 2022-2023	Number of reports, 2021 to 2022
Assessment material error	10	8
Delivery failure	12	13
Incorrect result	3	2
Suspected malpractice	8	3
Marking issues	3	1
Potential security breach	1	2
Other	2	0
Total	39	29

Chart 5: Event types for functional skills qualifications, 2022 to 2023 compared with 2021 to 2022

Event type	Number of reports, 2022 to 2023	Number of reports, 2021 to 2022
Assessment material error	3	1
Delivery failure	2	4
Incorrect result	2	6

Suspected malpractice	7	8
Marking issues	0	1
Potential security breach	5	3
Other	5	1
Total	24	24

Chart 6: Event types for EPAs, 2022 to 2023 compared with 2021 to 2022

Event type	Number of reports, 2022 to 2023	Number of reports, 2021 to 2022
Assessment material error	9	2
Delivery failure	35	17
Incorrect certificate	2	1
Incorrect result	17	5
Suspected malpractice	10	1
Marking issues	1	2
Potential security breach	5	1
Other	21	3
Total	100	32

Event type

Assessment material error

Errors in assessment materials that can affect a student's ability to answer questions as intended, or cause confusion and unnecessary anxiety.

Delivery failure

AOs are required to report any actual or potential delivery issue which could impact the validity of the assessment result or delay the issue of results.

Incorrect results

Results issued to students are incorrect, that is, wrong marks or grades because of marker error, IT or system error, administrative error, mark scheme error etc.

Suspected malpractice

Attempts to gain an unfair advantage by either centres or students Note: malpractice also includes maladministration and non-compliance with regulations.

Marking issues

Issues with marking of assessment materials due to marker or administrative error or IT or system error.

Issues relating to marking progress.

Potential security breach

The potential for confidential assessment material to be compromised, even where this is not realised.

Other

Events which cannot be categorised into the above event types.

Data table counterparts for charts 7 to 10 and table 1

Chart 7: Assessment plan query increase year on year (September to August)

Category	2022 to 2023	2021 to 2022
Number of queries	291	197
Number of AOs submitting queries	60	41
Number of EPAs involved in queries	151	117

Chart 8: Incidents of exam delivery failure in summer 2023 and summer 2022

Event sub-type	2023	2022
Cyber attack	19	26
Missing scripts	12	9

AO missed own deadline	5	8
IT failure	4	5
Process weakness	3	0
Human error	1	1
Conflict of interest	1	1
Information error	1	0
Other	0	4
Incorrect content in question paper	0	1
Resource capacity	0	2
Total	46	57

Chart 9: Incidents of delivery failure reported in 2022 to 2023 and 2021 to 2022 for additional PTQs, broken down by sub-type

Event sub-type	Number of reports in 2022 to 2023	Number of reports in 2021 to 2022
AO missed own deadline	25	6
Cyber attack	17*	14**
Missing scripts	7	5
IT failure	4	7
Process weakness	3	1
Conflict of interest	2	1
Information error	2	2
Human error	1	5
Incorrect content	0	1
Other	1	8
Total	62	50

Note: * 16 of these also affected GCSEs, AS and A Levels and are accounted for in that data too.

Note: ** 11 of these also affected GCSEs, AS and A Levels and are accounted for in that data too.

Chart 10: Incidents of delivery failure reported in 2022 to 2023 and 2021 to 2022 for T Levels, broken down by sub-type

Event sub-type	Number of reports in 2022 to 2023	Number of reports in 2021 to 2022
IT failure	3	4
Exam disruption	3	0
Process weakness	2	1
Incorrect content	1	2
Information error	1	1
Resource capacity	1	0
Collation or printing error	1	0
Human error	0	2
Missing scripts	0	2

Table 1: Incidents of delivery failure reported in 2022 to 2023 for EPAs, broken down by sub-type

Event sub-type	Number of reports
Resource capacity	7
Other	6
IT failure	5
Human error	4
Process weakness	4
AO missed own deadline	3
Information error	3

Exam disruption	2
Incorrect content	1

Delivery failure sub-types

Cyber-attack

Cyber-attack such as a ransomware attack on a centre resulting in:

- potential loss of student NEA work
- loss of access to student NEA work
- loss of access to learning
- issues with submission of NEA work and marks or grades
- inability to access exam results

Cyber-attack on awarding organisation resulting in potential disruption or loss of access to systems.

Phishing attacks attempting to access secure information.

Missing scripts

Loss of completed student exam or assessment question paper scripts (full paper or missing pages) within the centre, the AO or in transit.

Loss of additional material such as continuation booklets, recordings of speaking exams, video recordings, moderation, and mark sheets etc.

AO missed own deadline

Results delay - issues that lead to a delay in the release of results to students, such as due to unresolved malpractice investigations, missing information from centres or marking not completed.

Certification delay - issues that lead to a delay in the release of certificates to centres and/or students.

Reviews of marking, moderation and appeals not completed within published deadlines.

IT failure

AO website or system issues resulting in:

- centres being unable to access material, assessments or results
- examiners being unable to access online systems affecting marking or awarding

Process weakness

Administrative issues resulting in AO processes not being followed, that is, errors made, issues not escalated or missed leading to delays.

Conflict of interest

Examiners or AO staff not declaring a conflict of interest potentially impacting on marking or access to confidential information.

Human error

Administrative or reconciliation issues and errors made by AO staff or examiners not picked up by quality assurance checks.

Information error

Incorrect information provided by AO causing confusion, for example, incorrect information regarding grade boundaries.

Incorrect content

Incorrect information contained in assessment material.

Data table counterparts for charts 11 to 13 and table 2

Chart 11: Security breaches by category in summer 2023 and summer 2022

Event sub-type	2023	2022
Incorrect paper issued for assessment	37	3
Leak of materials (public)	38	2
Leak of materials (centre)	16	10
Results released before results day	14	9
Leak of materials (AO)	9	1
Leak of materials (student)	2	7
Assessment held at incorrect time	4	1
Loss in transit	2	1
Other	1	1

Total	123	35

Chart 12: Security breaches reported in 2022 to 2023 and 2021 to 2022 for additional PTQs, broken down by sub-type

Event sub-type	Number of reports in 2022 to 2023	Number of reports in 2021 to 2022
Leak of materials (centre)	4	9
Results released before results day	3	6
IT system error	2	0
Leak of materials (teacher or examiner)	2	2
Leak of materials (student)	1	9
Leak of materials (other)	1	0
Assessment held at incorrect time	1	1
Loss in transit	0	6
Incorrect paper issued for assessment	0	1
Leak of materials (AO)	0	1

Chart 13: Security breaches reported in 2022 to 2023 and 2021 to 2022 for functional skills qualifications, broken down by sub-type

Event sub-type	Number of reports in 2022 to 2023	Number of reports in 2021 to 2022
Loss in transit	4	2
Other	1	0
Leak of materials (centre)	0	1

Table 2: Security breaches reported in 2022 to 2023 for EPAs, broken down by sub-type

Event sub-type	Number of reports
Leak of materials (teacher or examiner)	2
Leak of materials (student)	2
Leak of materials (centre)	1

Security breach sub-types

Leak of materials (public)

Unauthorised access or theft of live assessment materials.

Sharing of live assessment materials by a member of the public.

Leak of materials (centre)

Centre mistakenly opening question paper packets ahead of required time.

Centre removing question papers from secure storage outside of requirements.

Centre taking question papers off-site without required permission.

Centre accessing, uploading, or sharing assessment material.

Centre releasing students from exam ahead of required supervision time.

Leak of materials (student)

Student sharing confidential content from an assessment they have taken, for example, via social media.

Leak of materials (AO)

Secure assessment material shared or accessed due to IT system issues or incorrect permissions.

Question paper packaging issues resulting in confidential information being visible or packages containing incorrect papers.

Incorrect paper issued for assessment

Centre distributed incorrect exam question paper.

Assessment held at incorrect time

Exam held at incorrect time – ahead of permitted times as per JCQ regulations.

Loss in transit

Exam papers missing due to logistics issue.

Results released before results day

Exam or assessment results accessed ahead of scheduled release date or time due to:

- AO or centre IT system issues
- AO or centre permissions issues
- results released in error

Data table counterparts for charts 14 to 24 and tables 3 to 5

Chart 14: GCSE, AS and A level reported errors by AO

Event sub-type	AQA	OCR	Pearson	WJEC
Question paper error	31	13	13	8
Supporting materials error	8	0	8	0
Collation or printing error	0	0	1	1
Front cover instruction error	0	1	0	1
Mark scheme or answer key error	0	2	0	0

Chart 15: Assessment material errors reported by AO and categorisation of impact

Assessment material error category	AQA	OCR	Pearson	WJEC
Category 1	8	3	2	1
Category 2	22	7	18	7
Category 3	9	6	2	2

Chart 16: Number and severity of errors in different assessment material types

Sub-type	1	2	3

Question paper error	10	42	13
Supporting materials error	1	11	4
Collation or printing error	2	0	0
Front cover instruction error	0	0	2
Mark scheme or answer key error	1	1	0

Chart 17: Point of identification of question paper errors by AO

Awarding organisation	Prior to exam	During exam	After exam
AQA	6	5	20
OCR	4	1	8
Pearson	3	3	7
WJEC	3	1	4

Table 3: Mitigations to errors in standard question papers

Mitigations taken	Number of occurences
Amend mark scheme	18
Erratum	9
Discount question	4
Replacement paper	5
Special consideration (arrangements for candidates)	3
Process improvements	0
Estimated marks	1
Script review (outside of marking)	2

Chart 18: Assessment material errors reported in 2022 to 2023 for additional PTQs, by AO

Type of assessment material error	Cambridge International	City & Guilds	IBO	OCR	Pearson	VTCT	WJEC
Question paper error	1	5	11	1	1	0	0
Mark scheme or answer key error	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Supporting materials error	0	0	0	1	3	0	0
Specification error	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Front cover instruction error	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Collation or printing error	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
NEA error on NEA brief	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

Chart 19: Assessment material errors reported by AO and categorisation of impact

Assessment material error category	Cambridge International	City & Guilds	IBO	OCR	Pearson	VTCT	WJEC
Category 1	1	3	0	1	2	0	0
Category 2	0	3	11	1	4	0	1
Category 3	0	1	0	0	0	1	0

Chart 20: Point of identification of assessment material errors for additional PTQs by AO

Awarding organisation	Prior to assessment	During assessment	After assessment
Cambridge International	0	0	1
City & Guilds	3	0	4
IBO	0	4	7
OCR	0	1	1
Pearson	2	0	4

VTCT	0	0	1
WJEC	1	0	0

Chart 21: Assessment material errors reported in 2022 to 2023 for T Levels, by AO

Type of assessment material error	City & Guilds	NCFE	Pearson
Supporting materials error	1	4	1
Question Paper error	2	1	0
Front cover instruction error	0	1	0

Chart 22: Assessment material errors reported by AO and categorisation of impact

Category	City & Guilds	NCFE	Pearson
1	0	1	0
2	3	5	1
3	0	0	0

Chart 23: Point of identification of assessment material errors for T Levels by AO

Awarding organisation	Prior to assessment	During assessment	After assessment
City & Guilds	1	1	1
NCFE	4	2	0
Pearson	0	1	0

Chart 24: Point of identification of assessment material errors in FSQs by AO

Awarding organisation	During assessment	After assessment
City & Guilds	0	1
NCFE	1	0
OCR	0	1

Table 4: Assessment material errors reported in 2022 to 2023 for EPAs

Type of assessment material error	Number of occurrences
Question Paper error	5
Specification error	3
Mark scheme or answer key error	1

Table 5: Assessment material error reported by category

Category of error	Number of occurrences
Category 1	3
Category 2	6

Assessment material error sub-types

Question paper error

Errors in:

- exam or assessment questions
- on-screen tests
- controlled assessments, for example, science practical instructions

Including typographical and spelling errors; missing words, prompts, brackets, keys, or symbols; incorrect information including data, dates, instructions, translations in modern foreign language papers; incorrect titling.

Supporting materials error

Errors in additional assessment materials, such as preliminary or pre-release materials, teacher instruction materials, glossaries, source booklets, equation or formula booklets, or audio files that may affect students' ability to complete a question.

Collation or printing error

Printing error including:

- missing pages

- missing questions
- missing information in pdf files for centre printing

Collation error:

Question paper pages out of order.

Front cover instruction error

Error in instructions on front cover of question paper (information or instructions only).

Mark scheme or answer key error

Error in the framework for assigning marks.

Specification error

Error in qualification specification.

Data table counterparts for charts 25 to 28 and tables 6 to 7

Chart 25: Nature of whistleblowing allegations regarding GCSE, AS and A levels to Ofqual in summer 2023 and summer 2022

Nature of allegation	2023	2022
Concern raised about own workplace	28	22
Concern raised by others	96	98
Total	124	120

Chart 26: Nature of whistleblowing allegations regarding VTQs to Ofqual

Nature of allegation	1 September 2022 – 31 August 2023	1 September 2021 – 31 August 2022
Concern raised about own workplace	40	15
Concern raised by others	67	52
Total	107	67

Chart 27: Lost scripts by qualification level, summer 2023 and summer 2022

Qualification level	2023	2022*
A Level	119	266
AS	8	22
GCSE	1,070	1,583
Total	1,197	1,871

Note: * the 2022 figures are revised from the summer 2022 report because after its publication, more scripts were found, and AO data was amended accordingly.

Chart 28: Lost scripts by cause, summer 2023 and summer 2022

Cause	2023 (%)	2022 (%)
Scanning or IT issue	4%	17%
Lost within centre	2%	2%
Lost within AO	16%	40%
Lost in transit	79%	40%
Summer total of lost scripts	1,197	2,001

Table 6: Reasons for not issuing results within the scope of the Action Plan, summer 2023

Reason Code	Reason description	Reason total	Reason % of total not issued
N1	Centre deferred or confirmed its intention not to claim or cash in certification for student due to incomplete assessment evidence. (For example, the student has failed to compete sufficient assessment evidence to certificate)	10,689	40.41%
N4	AO deferred or did not certificate student due to incomplete assessment evidence. The student has failed to compete sufficient assessment evidence to certificate, and the centre did not confirm the student status	7,280	27.52%

N2	Centre has withdrawn student from the qualification (for example, student has changed courses or left centre)	5,545	20.96%
L1	Late centre claim (that is, requests for qualification result submitted on or after student results day)	2,190	8.28%

Table 7: Increased scope of component data collections 2020 to 2023

Category	2020	2021	2022	2023
Apprenticeship Standards covered by data collection	32	88	205	388
AOs involved in data collection	22	43	75	121
Apprentices reflected in data collection	11,490	15,090	50,800	124,385

Appendix B – Data table: Number of students (GCSE, AS and A levels) summer 2022 and 2023

Table 8: Number of students who took GCSEs, AS and A levels in summer 2022 and 2023 (England only figures)

Exam series	GCSE (all)	GCSE (age 16)	AS (all)	AS (age 17)	A Level (all)	A Level (age 18)
2023	936,165	643,185	32,735	24, 435	306,495	279,705
2022	898,950	622,495	33,110	25,435	299,710	275,690

Note: figures are rounded to the nearest 5.

Appendix C – Data table: Online vs traditional marking for GCSEs, AS and A levels

Table 9: Data for online vs traditional marking

Qualification	Exam	Papers	Scripts	Papers	Scripts	Papers	Scrip

	series	marked online	marked online	traditionally marked	traditionally marked	marked Total	marked Total
AS or A level	2022	695	2,211,135	140	71,500	835	2,282
AS or A level	2023	695	2,272,950	115	64,875	810	2,337
GCSE	2022	615	13,078,260	75	379,850	685	13,45
GCSE	2023	580	13,358,970	45	309,985	630	13,66
Total	2022	1,310	15,289,395	210	451,350	1,520	15,74
Total	2023	1,275	15,631,920	165	374,860	1,440	16,00

Appendix D – Resources provided for centres and students

To help centres and students better understand how grades would be awarded in 2023 and what their results meant, Ofqual published bespoke resources for centres and students, including but not limited to:

- Guide for schools and colleges: 2023
- Ofqual Student Guide 2023
- A letter to students from Ofqual and UCAS
- Blog: Looking ahead to AS, A level, T Level and level 3 VTQ results
- Blog: Looking ahead to GCSE, Level 1 and Level 2 vocational and technical qualifications results
- Vocational and technical qualifications grading in 2023 - The Ofqual blog
- Level 3 VTQ results Action Plan: measures for 2023
- Level 3 VTQ Action Plan: the road to results - The Ofqual blog
- Guide to GCSE results for England, summer 2023
- Infographic: GCSE results 2023
- Interactive visualisations of outcomes by centre type, variability in school and college GCSE results, GCSE outcomes in England, an interactive map of England showing GCSE results in different subjects by grade and county and GCSE grade combinations Ofqual Analytics
- Research and analysis: The National Reference Test in 2023
- Guide to the 2023 Level 1, Level 1/2 and Level 2 qualification results for VTQs in England
- PTQ outcomes dashboard - level 1, level 1/2 and level 2
- Infographic: vocational and technical qualification results 2023
- Guide to the 2023 Level 3 qualification results for VTQs in England
- Infographic: Level 3 vocational and technical qualifications 2023

- [PTQ outcomes dashboard - level 3](#)

Appendix E – Glossary

Adverse effects and reporting

AOs must promptly notify Ofqual of any actual or potential incident which could have an impact on standards, public confidence in qualifications, or the AO's ability to develop, deliver or award qualifications in a way which complies with Ofqual's rules. AOs must also show how they have mitigated any impact. These are referred to as [Adverse Effects](#) under [Condition B3 of Ofqual's General Conditions of Recognition](#). For apprenticeship EPAs, this is required under [EPA qualification level condition EPA3](#).

Appropriate and prompt management of these events and incidents is crucial to making sure students are treated fairly across qualifications, and between AOs and centres.

Ofqual actively monitors the events and incidents that are reported by AOs to assess the impact of the issues and to evaluate AOs' management of them. This determines not only whether Ofqual needs to take any formal action, but also feeds into the ongoing monitoring of AOs.

Calculated grade

Where a student is absent from an exam for a reason beyond their control, centres can request a qualification award. If eligible, the AO will determine the student's grade for the qualification based on their performance (compared to all students') in other assessments in that subject. AOs refer to this as a 'calculated grade'.

Readiness Review

During the planning phase, prior to the delivery of assessments Ofqual meets with senior staff from AOs to review an AO's plans and assess their readiness for delivering assessments. The focus is how the AO intends to manage its specific risks and how it plans to secure the timely delivery of fair results.

Reasonable Adjustments

These are changes made to an assessment or the way it is conducted that reduce or remove a disadvantage caused by a student's disability. The [Equality Act 2010](#) requires AOs to make reasonable adjustments to assessments for disabled students (defined as those that have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term negative effect on their ability to do normal daily activities).

Special consideration

Where a student's ability to take or perform in an assessment is affected by an event outside of their control, such as illness, injury, or bereavement at the time of the assessment, centres can request special consideration from the AO on their behalf. [A guide to the special consideration process](#) (published by JCQ) allows for percentage adjustments to the mark given for a student's

work, according to a tariff. Changes to the way assessments are taken for students with temporary injury or illnesses are also provided as a form of special consideration.

T Level Waves

T Level qualifications have been made available in different 'waves'. The first wave became available in September 2020 and comprised: Digital production, Design and Development; Education and Early Years and Design, Surveying and Planning for Construction.

In September 2021 the second wave of T Levels were introduced. These were: Digital Support Services; Digital Business Services; Onsite Construction, Building Services Engineering for Construction; Health; Healthcare Science and Science.

In September 2022, the third wave of T Levels were available for the first time. The third wave is made up of: Management and Administration; Finance; Accounting; Engineering and Manufacturing Design and Development; Maintenance, Installation and Repair for Engineering and Manufacturing and Engineering, Manufacturing, Processing and Control. In total, 16 T Level qualifications were available in September 2022.

Appendix F – Letter to AOs ahead of the 2023 summer exam series

Dear Responsible Officer,

As you enter the summer series this letter confirms Ofqual's expectations and how we will monitor your delivery of assessments and results. Many of your qualifications are available to learners in Wales and Northern Ireland, and the regulators in these jurisdictions (Qualifications Wales and CCEA Regulation) share Ofqual's expectations.

Ofqual and exam boards share the desire for every exam series to run smoothly. Where it is relevant to you, Ofqual expects you to have already taken all reasonable steps to identify the risks associated with the summer series and to have appropriate contingency plans in place to prevent or mitigate any Adverse Effect that may arise, and to deal with issues promptly and effectively.

Management of Risks and Incidents

Earlier this year Ofqual met with you to seek assurance on your readiness to deliver assessments this series. Following that review, we wrote to you highlighting a number of areas of risk we had identified for this summer, some of which are specific to your organisation and others which concern all exam boards. Ofqual expects you to manage those risks effectively, and any other risks you may identify over the course of the series.

Timely release of results

In light of the unacceptable failure to deliver some results last year for vocational qualifications, Ofqual has set out additional measures that we consider reasonable steps so that students are issued with their results by your published date under Condition H6.1(b). Ofqual will monitor your

implementation of these measures, however, we would expect a notification via the Portal, should you have any concerns about your ability to meet these measures which lead to the conclusion that there is the potential for an Adverse Effect.

Assessment Material Errors

Ofqual expects exam boards to have processes in place to ensure that assessment material errors are prevented. However, should errors occur, Ofqual considers any assessment material errors in General Qualifications, or in any of the 4 categories of vocational qualifications in the DfE performance tables and T Level qualifications, to constitute a 'substantial error'. These would then be notifiable in accordance with Condition B3. As such, the expectation is that you make prompt notification of all assessment material errors in these assessments, including where an advisory notice, an erratum notice or replacement paper is issued. You should continue to notify Ofqual of errors that come to light after the summer series.

Errors will be categorised using the definitions below:

Category 1 – Assessment material errors which could or do make it impossible for learners to generate a meaningful response to a question and/or task.

Category 2 – Assessment material errors which could or do cause unintentional difficulties for learners to generate a meaningful response to a question and/or task.

Category 3 – Assessment material errors which will not affect a learner's ability to generate a meaningful response to a question and/or task.

Provision of Assessment Materials

Thank you for agreeing to upload GCSE, AS and A level assessments and any additional materials (source booklets, erratum notices, etc) following the exam(s) being sat. For other qualifications, Ofqual will give notice to provide any assessment materials where we identify a need for them.

Assessment Material Security

Ofqual expects exam boards to have contingency plans in place to ensure that assessment materials are securely delivered, returned, and distributed during assessment, marking and the awarding process.

Over the past year Ofqual has seen issues related to the delivery and return of scripts and assessment evidence by postal and courier services. Please ensure that your protocols for delivery, receipt and return of scripts and assessment evidence are read and understood by centres and those involved in marking.

Marker Recruitment, Moderation and Marking Progress

Ofqual understands that all exam boards have established procedures and mitigations to address risks to moderation and/or marking progress. This summer, Ofqual will be continuing to collect marker recruitment and marking progress data for GCSE, AS and A level qualifications, but does not intend to do so for VTQs. However, for either group of qualifications, we would expect a notification via the Portal should concerns about recruitment, moderation or marking for a

particular specification lead to the conclusion that there is the potential for an Adverse Effect.

Indications of when you may consider an issue to be notifiable under Condition B3 could include:

- normal activity to increase recruitment or marking or moderation progress has not resulted in the same progress at the same pace as in previous years
- moderation or marking is not expected to be completed to schedule
- the situation likely requires system level intervention
- the percentage of marks needed to progress the awarding process for a qualification may not be reached on schedule, posing a risk to the timely issue of results

Adaptations

Under the VCRF, awarding organisations are only permitted to make adaptations to their VTQ qualifications and assessments to mitigate any disruption to teaching, learning and delivery of assessments caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Given that the public policy position is clear and pre- pandemic assessment arrangements have resumed in the 2022 to 2023 academic year, we do not expect awarding organisations to make any adaptations to their qualifications or assessments.

We do expect you to have taken all reasonable steps to ensure that centres understand that adaptations for assessments being taken in 2022 to 2023 are not permitted.

Ofqual will be monitoring the action you have taken to ensure that centres do not submit new evidence based on any adaptation for assessments taken after Summer 2022.

However, Ofqual expects awarding organisations offering qualifications which are assessed in similar ways to GSCE & A level to take account of the recently published guidance: Supporting resilience in the exam system in 2023.

Strike Action

There continues to be a risk in both schools and colleges that strike action may disrupt operations in the summer series, including the possibility of closures.

We expect that contingency plans are in place for these eventualities and that you continue to monitor the situation as you approach the series.

Communication with Centres

Ofqual will be paying close attention to the communication exam boards undertake with centres during and after the series, particularly in light of the delayed results experienced by learners in the summer 2022 series for some VTQs.

It is critical to ensure that any communication with centres is:

- clear and actionable
- proportionate
- received by the correct person
- where critical to awarding, followed up to acknowledge receipt and understanding.

Please also ensure that you are aware which students centres are expecting to certificate in summer 2023; this includes meaningful checks on registrations with particular focus on students who require results to progress into higher education.

Notifying us about Events

We remind you that in accordance with the General Conditions of Recognition (GCR), you must tell Ofqual promptly if you believe an event has occurred, or is likely to occur, that could lead to a potential or actual Adverse Effect (GCR B3). Ofqual's Guidance sets out when a notification should be made for an event, and you should have regard to this. Notifications should be made promptly through the Portal.

Ofqual has previously written to awarding organisations to highlight particular types of issues which it considers notifiable, and the expectation that they should make notifications about issues that arise. This year this includes, but is not limited to:

- Any out of the ordinary events, or event affecting a number of centres, which requires specific action by awarding organisations or their centres to address the potential Adverse Effect (for example, unusual disturbance or disruption to the delivery of an assessment).
- We would expect you to inform us where scripts are confirmed missing (for example, destroyed or stolen) once you have completed relevant searches and before the issuing of results, or where this is identified before a review of marking or moderation.
- Any potential for, or actual, media or social media coverage that could have an Adverse Effect. This includes where the volume of coverage causes an exam board to take some form of action to monitor or respond to the potential issues that are being raised.

Should you wish to discuss an issue which you believe Ofqual should be aware of but does not require an Event Notification at that time, you should telephone the relevant contact below or use the 'Contact the Regulator' section of the Portal.

Ofqual aims to minimise any unnecessary and time-consuming exchanges. Therefore, where all relevant information is not available at the time of an event notification, please set out when it is expected that further details will be provided. If the event is complex and it would be easier to have a discussion, we are happy to discuss the matter. You should then provide the necessary notification or information via the Portal.

It is important that the fields on the Portal are completed as fully as possible, and, in particular, that there is a link to the relevant qualification from the Register. In terms of vocational qualifications included in performance tables, it is important that we can accurately identify the relevant titles as being included in these categories when events are assessed and managed. This will help consideration of how you are dealing with any issue and Ofqual's subsequent reporting.

For each Event Notification submitted, you will need to consider whether there has been any non-compliance with the General Conditions of Recognition, the Qualification Level Conditions, and the Subject-Level Conditions.

Following your consideration, you should complete the relevant fields on each Event Notification to confirm whether you are making a declaration of non- compliance or not. Although the fields are not mandatory at the point of reporting an incident, it is helpful to see at the point of notification so

we are able to take this into account when reviewing your approach. In any event, the fields should be completed prior to the Event Notification being closed with the most suitable Conditions being selected.

Ofqual's Approach to Monitoring Delivery

We will acknowledge and continue to monitor any notifications made.

We will leave you to focus on managing the event once we have the necessary information about the nature, scale, and potential impact, and have sufficient assurance that it is being managed appropriately. The event notification will be closed as soon as it is clear that the event itself has been contained, and that any Adverse Effect has been sufficiently prevented or mitigated. Further work may be carried out or action taken after the summer to address any outstanding thematic or compliance issues.

We may intervene if we believe your approach is inadequate, inappropriate or believe that you are likely to breach your Conditions. Depending on the nature of the event and the urgency with which it must be dealt, we may:

Give you the opportunity to review your approach in light of our concerns; and/or

Direct you to take a specific course of action.

Where appropriate, we will monitor your delivery in a coordinated way with the other qualification regulators to minimise unnecessary burden.

Through the GQ Responsible Officers' Regulatory Group (RORG) and VTQ Delivery Oversight & Regulatory Approaches Group (DORAG) we will provide exam boards with interim updates on any observed trends and patterns and discuss collective delivery risks and issues. Organisation specific issues will not normally be discussed at meetings where other exam boards are present.

Ofqual will also hold fortnightly RO meetings with you where we will discuss risks and issues specific to you and may ask for further information on the way in which you have delivered the summer series.

Setting and Maintaining Standards

It will be important to ensure that the awarding of qualifications this summer is as fair as possible to learners. Ofqual will invite you to separate discussions, where relevant.

Observing Standardisation and Awarding

Ofqual will arrange to observe standardisation and awarding meetings as part of our normal cycle of delivery monitoring. Where required we will request the dates, times and locations of awarding and standardisation meetings for summer series exams from you to support this.

Report

In line with Ofqual's normal regulatory approach, a report will be published on the issues that occur during the summer exam series. Where we use your data, we will give you an opportunity to provide feedback on the report's factual accuracy before it is published. We will share a complete version of the draft report (unredacted - so each awarding organisation's data is visible) with all

exam boards, unless concerns are raised about this approach.

Further clarification about any of the expectations outlined in this letter can be provided if required. We wish you every success in your assessment delivery for the remainder of this year.

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