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Official Statistics

Malpractice in GCSE, AS and A level: summer 2023 exam series

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Applies to England

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Introduction

This release presents figures on reported cases of malpractice for which a penalty was issued associated with GCSE, AS and A level qualifications in England for the summer 2023 exam series, and historical data going back to 2018. These figures are correct at the time of publication, however, some investigations into cases of malpractice may still be ongoing.

A single malpractice case may involve an individual student, member of school or college staff, or school or college, but may also involve multiple individuals from either within or across these groups. It is possible for cases of staff or school or college level malpractice to include both GCSE and AS and A level qualifications.

The exceptional assessment arrangements put in place in 2020 and 2021 resulted in very low numbers of malpractice cases being reported in those 2 years. This was because many of the more common instances of malpractice, such as taking unauthorised material into an examination, were not relevant. The different methods of assessment used in 2020 and 2021 also mean that numbers of malpractice cases in these years are not comparable to years when exams are sat. For this reason, although we report the number of malpractice cases in 2020 and 2021, no further breakdowns by types of penalty or offence have been presented for these years. This information is available in the [data tables accompanying this report](#).

Changes in cohort size may also affect the overall number of malpractice cases in each academic year. In the summer 2023 exam series there was a 1.2% increase in the total number of [GCSE, AS and A level entries](#) compared to the previous year. GCSE, AS and A level entries increased from 16.7 million in the summer 2022 exam series to 16.9 million in the 2023 summer exam series.

Further information, including definitions and examples of the different categories of malpractice presented within this publication, is available in the [Suspected Malpractice Policies and Procedures document published by the Joint Council for Qualifications](#).

Key headlines



The key headlines for cases of malpractice for which a penalty was issued (proven cases of malpractice), in GCSE, AS and A level qualifications for the summer 2023 exam series were:

1. The number of proven cases of malpractice involving students has increased compared to the previous year. There were 4,895 cases of malpractice involving students in 2023, up from 4,105 in 2022, from almost 17 million GCSE, AS and A level entries (at component level) in both years.
2. For student malpractice, 44.5% of all cases involved mobile phone and other communication device offences. There were 2,180 cases with penalties for this type of offence in 2023, compared with 1,825 (44.5%) in 2022.
3. The number of cases of malpractice involving school or college staff decreased compared to the previous year. 220 cases of malpractice included members of staff in 2023, down from 240 in 2022. Only a small proportion of the total number of staff in England ([over 360,000 full time equivalent teachers and support staff in state funded secondary schools](#)) were involved in malpractice cases.
4. There were 50 cases of school or college level malpractice in 2023, down from 55 in 2022.

Student malpractice

Exam boards may impose sanctions and penalties on students found to have committed malpractice. The penalties for student malpractice vary depending on the type of offence. An individual student can potentially be involved in multiple cases of malpractice and be penalised by more than one exam board if they commit malpractice offences when sitting more than one assessment. A student may also receive one penalty for multiple offences.



Exam series	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Cases of student malpractice	2,635	2,950	20	260	4,105	4,895

In 2023, 4,895 cases of malpractice included students, up from 4,105 in 2022, from almost 17 million GCSE, AS and A level entries (at component level).

In 2023, 4,665 individual students were involved in malpractice cases, compared to 3,985 individual students in 2022.

Types of student malpractice (proportion of cases per offence type)



Type of student malpractice	Percent of cases in 2018	Percent of cases in 2019	Percent of cases in 2022	Percent of cases in 2023
Disruptive behaviour	7.0%	4.0%	5.0%	6.0%
Inappropriate materials	8.0%	15.0%	15.0%	11.0%
Mobile phones	48.0%	47.0%	43.0%	43.0%
Other reasons	18.0%	19.0%	18.0%	22.0%
Other unauthorised materials	16.0%	13.0%	14.0%	13.0%
Plagiarism	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%
Multiple malpractice types	1.0%	0.0%	2.0%	3.0%

The most common type of malpractice reported in 2023 was the introduction of a mobile phone or other communications device into the examination room, the same as in 2022. This category appeared in 44.5% of all cases of student malpractice (2,180 cases in 2023, compared with 1,825 cases (44.5%) in 2022). These figures include cases where multiple offence types took place and therefore differ from the values reported in the previous table (43.1% and 43.4%), where cases involving multiple malpractice types are categorised separately.

Note: The 'mobile phones' category also includes other communication devices such as smartwatches. 'Inappropriate materials' refers to the inclusion of inappropriate, offensive or obscene materials in scripts, coursework or portfolios. The 'other unauthorised materials' category includes non-smart watches, which were prohibited from being brought into the examination room from September 2021.

'Other reasons' include being in possession of confidential material in advance of the examination, copying from another candidate, misuse of or attempted misuse of examination material and resources, as well as other offences.

Types of penalty issued to students (number of cases per penalty type)



Penalty type	Number of cases in 2018	Number of cases in 2019	Number of cases in 2022	Number of cases in 2023
Loss of aggregation or certification opportunity	395	585	735	1,020
Loss of marks	1,405	1,535	2,005	2,215
Warning	865	845	1,390	1,680
Total	2,665	2,960	4,130	4,920

The most common type of penalty issued in 2023 was a loss of marks, with the number of cases resulting in this type of penalty being issued increasing to 2,215 from 2,005 in 2022.

Note: As an individual malpractice case may result in multiple different types of penalties these totals may exceed the total number of distinct malpractice cases.

Number of malpractice cases per student

Individual students can be involved in multiple malpractice cases. In 2023, nearly all students who were involved in malpractice (94.3%) were involved in only one case, similar to 2022 (95.2%). There was a small number of students who were involved in more than one case of malpractice.



Number of cases	Percent of students in 2018	Percent of students in 2019	Percent of students in 2022	Percent of students in 2023
One case	95.4%	93.8%	95.2%	94.3%
Two cases	3.8%	5.3%	3.7%	4.7%
Three or more cases	0.7%	0.9%	1.1%	1.1%

Number of students per malpractice case

Similarly, a single malpractice case can involve multiple students. In 2023, nearly all cases of student malpractice (98.5%) involved only one student, similar to 2022 (98.0%). There were a small number of cases which involved more than one student.



Number of students	Percent of cases in 2018	Percent of cases in 2019	Percent of cases in 2022	Percent of cases in 2023
One student	98.3%	98.4%	98.0%	98.5%
Two students	1.3%	1.1%	1.4%	1.0%
Three or more students	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%

Types of penalty issued to students, by type of malpractice

Note: Penalties for cases of student malpractice vary depending on the type of offence. The categories presented here are broad, and could cover a range of specific sanctions and transgressions. The precise penalty applied depends on the circumstances of the specific case.

The 'multiple types of penalty' category represents cases which resulted in more than one penalty type being applied. Should a type of penalty only occur in cases that resulted in multiple different types of penalties being applied, that type will be counted in the 'multiple types of penalty' category rather than individually listed in the tables and charts presented in the report. A full breakdown of penalty types, including those aggregated into the 'multiple penalty' category, is available in the [data tables accompanying this release](#).

Mobile phones



Penalty type	Percent of cases in 2018	Percent of cases in 2019	Percent of cases in 2022	Percent of cases in 2023
Multiple types of penalty	0.4%	0.1%	0.2%	0.1%
Loss of aggregation or certification opportunity	9.6%	15.6%	13.6%	17.4%
Loss of marks	69.5%	63.0%	67.4%	65.6%
Warning	20.5%	21.3%	18.8%	16.8%

Inappropriate materials



Penalty type	Percent of cases in 2018	Percent of cases in 2019	Percent of cases in 2022	Percent of cases in 2023
Multiple types of penalty	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Loss of aggregation or certification opportunity	5.3%	8.0%	13.3%	14.5%
Loss of marks	32.4%	43.7%	36.0%	13.0%
Warning	61.8%	48.3%	50.7%	72.5%

Other unauthorised materials



Penalty type	Percent of cases in 2018	Percent of cases in 2019	Percent of cases in 2022	Percent of cases in 2023
Multiple types of penalty	0.7%	0.0%	0.3%	0.2%
Loss of aggregation or certification opportunity	17.9%	24.1%	17.6%	17.4%
Loss of marks	53.0%	51.1%	34.8%	37.9%
Warning	28.4%	24.9%	47.2%	44.5%

Disruptive behaviour



Penalty type	Percent of cases in 2018	Percent of cases in 2019	Percent of cases in 2022	Percent of cases in 2023
Multiple types of penalty	0.0%	1.7%	0.8%	0.8%
Loss of aggregation or certification opportunity	9.6%	16.0%	29.1%	25.2%
Loss of marks	42.0%	52.9%	38.6%	40.0%
Warning	48.4%	29.4%	31.5%	34.0%

Plagiarism



Penalty type	Percent of cases in 2018	Percent of cases in 2019	Percent of cases in 2022	Percent of cases in 2023
Multiple types of penalty	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	1.1%
Loss of aggregation or certification opportunity	14.6%	14.5%	7.0%	19.6%
Loss of marks	54.2%	68.1%	59.3%	48.9%
Warning	31.2%	17.4%	32.6%	30.4%

Other reasons



Penalty type	Percent of cases in 2018	Percent of cases in 2019	Percent of cases in 2022	Percent of cases in 2023
Multiple types of penalty	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	0.4%
Loss of aggregation or certification opportunity	31.4%	37.0%	31.8%	32.2%
Loss of marks	20.0%	28.4%	24.8%	25.4%
Warning	47.3%	33.4%	42.1%	42.0%

Staff malpractice

Exam boards may impose penalties for malpractice committed by an individual member of staff at a school or college, for example a teacher or an invigilator. An individual member of staff can potentially be involved in multiple cases of malpractice, and a single malpractice case may involve more than one staff member.



Exam series	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
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Cases of staff malpractice	380	330	20	30	240	220
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In 2023, 220 cases of malpractice involved members of staff, down from 240 in 2022.

In 2023, 300 individual members of staff were involved in malpractice cases, compared with 285 individual members of staff in 2022. Only a small proportion of the total number of staff in England ([over 360,000 full time equivalent teachers and support staff in state funded secondary schools](#)) were involved in malpractice cases.

Types of staff malpractice (proportion of cases per offence type)



Type of staff malpractice	Percent of cases in 2018	Percent of cases in 2019	Percent of cases in 2022	Percent of cases in 2023
Breach of security	19.1%	15.9%	9.5%	10.4%
Deception	0.8%	0.9%	2.1%	1.4%
Failure to comply with regulations	2.9%	1.5%	2.5%	0.5%
Improper assistance to candidates	25.1%	20.7%	28.1%	20.8%
Maladministration	49.2%	57.3%	50.0%	57.5%
Failure to co-operate with an investigation	0.0%	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%
Multiple malpractice types	2.9%	2.7%	7.9%	9.5%

The most common type of staff malpractice for which a penalty was applied in 2023 was maladministration (the failure to adhere to the regulations of examinations and non-examination assessments), the same as in 2022. This category appeared in 66.5% of all cases of staff malpractice (145 cases in 2023, compared with 135 in 2022), including cases where multiple offence types took place.

Note: 'Failure to comply with regulations' refers to a failure to comply with regulations for access arrangements, reasonable adjustments, and/or special consideration.

Types of penalty issued to staff (number of cases per penalty type)



Penalty type	Number of cases in 2018	Number of cases in 2019	Number of cases in 2022	Number of cases in 2023
Special conditions	70	50	55	15
Suspension	45	30	40	15
Training	110	40	30	50
Written warning	275	245	170	180
Referral to TRA (Teaching Regulation Agency)	0	0	Fewer than 5	Fewer than 5
Total	505	365	300	260

The most common type of penalty issued to staff in 2023 was a written warning, with the number of cases resulting in this type of penalty being issued increasing to 180 from 170 in 2022.

Note: As an individual malpractice case may result in multiple different types of penalties these totals may exceed the total number of distinct malpractice cases.

Number of malpractice cases per member of staff

Individual members of school and college staff can be involved in multiple malpractice cases. In 2023, all staff members involved in malpractice (100%) were involved in only one case, the same as in 2022.



Number of cases	Percent of staff members in 2018	Percent of staff members in 2019	Percent of staff members in 2022	Percent of staff members in 2023
One case	97.8%	99.5%	100.0%	100.0%
Two cases	2.2%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Three or more	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%

cases

Number of members of staff per malpractice case

Similarly, a single malpractice case can involve multiple staff members. In 2023, the majority of cases of staff malpractice (74.7%) involved only one staff member, down from 86.0% in 2022.



Number of staff members	Percent of cases in 2018	Percent of cases in 2019	Percent of cases in 2022	Percent of cases in 2023
One member of staff	73.3%	80.2%	86.0%	74.7%
Two members of staff	20.2%	15.5%	12.0%	19.5%
Three or more members of staff	6.5%	4.3%	2.1%	5.9%

Types of penalty issued to members of centre staff, by type of malpractice

Note: The 'multiple types of penalty' category represents cases which resulted in more than one penalty type being applied. Should a type of penalty only occur in cases that resulted in multiple different types of penalties being applied, that type will be counted in the 'multiple types of penalty' category rather than individually listed in the tables and charts presented in the report. A full breakdown of penalty types, including those aggregated into the 'multiple penalty' category, is available in the [data tables accompanying this release](#).

Maladministration



Penalty type	Percent of cases in 2018	Percent of cases in 2019	Percent of cases in 2022	Percent of cases in 2023
Multiple types of penalty	11.1%	4.1%	9.6%	13.6%
Special	3.0%	3.1%	3.7%	0.0%

conditions

Suspension	3.0%	2.6%	1.5%	0.0%
Training	6.6%	3.6%	3.7%	12.9%
Written warning	76.3%	86.6%	81.5%	73.5%

Improper assistance to candidates



Penalty type	Percent of cases in 2018	Percent of cases in 2019	Percent of cases in 2022	Percent of cases in 2023
Multiple types of penalty	49.5%	20.5%	44.3%	30.5%
Special conditions	3.0%	26.0%	7.6%	0.0%
Suspension	8.9%	13.7%	7.6%	1.7%
Training	6.9%	9.6%	7.6%	10.2%
Written warning	31.7%	30.1%	32.9%	57.6%

Breach of security



Penalty type	Percent of cases in 2018	Percent of cases in 2019	Percent of cases in 2022	Percent of cases in 2023
Multiple types of penalty	32.5%	15.5%	31.2%	15.6%
Special conditions	2.5%	15.5%	3.1%	0.0%
Suspension	5.0%	12.1%	3.1%	0.0%
Training	2.5%	3.4%	0.0%	6.2%
Written warning	57.5%	53.4%	62.5%	78.1%

Deception



Penalty type	Percent of cases in 2018	Percent of cases in 2019	Percent of cases in 2022	Percent of cases in 2023
Multiple types of penalty	33.3%	50.0%	37.5%	20.0%
Special conditions	0.0%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Suspension	66.7%	0.0%	62.5%	0.0%
Training	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%
Written warning	0.0%	25.0%	0.0%	60.0%

Failure to comply with regulations



Penalty type	Percent of cases in 2018	Percent of cases in 2019	Percent of cases in 2022	Percent of cases in 2023
Multiple types of penalty	36.4%	0.0%	25.0%	0.0%
Suspension	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	0.0%
Training	0.0%	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Written warning	63.6%	80.0%	62.5%	100.0%

Failure to co-operate with an investigation



Penalty type	Percent of cases in 2019	Percent of cases in 2022	Percent of cases in 2023
Multiple types of penalty	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Suspension	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%

Written warning

100.0%

50.0%

0.0%

School or college malpractice

Where there is evidence that malpractice is the result of a serious management failure, an exam board may apply sanctions against a whole department or a school or college.



Exam series	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Cases of school or college level malpractice	135	120	15	5	55	50

There were 50 cases of school or college level malpractice in 2023, down from 55 in 2022.

Types of school or college level malpractice (proportion of cases per offence type)



Type of school or college malpractice	Percent of cases in 2018	Percent of cases in 2019	Percent of cases in 2022	Percent of cases in 2023
Breach of security	17.6%	23.0%	37.0%	25.0%
Failure to comply with regulations	4.4%	3.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Improper assistance to candidates	2.9%	0.8%	0.0%	3.8%
Maladministration	75.0%	71.3%	55.6%	65.4%
Failure to co-operate with an investigation	0.0%	1.6%	1.9%	0.0%
Multiple malpractice types	0.0%	0.0%	5.6%	5.8%

The most common type of school or college level malpractice in 2023 was maladministration (the failure to adhere to the regulations of examinations and non-examination assessments, the same as in 2022. This category appeared in (35 (71.2%) of all cases of school or college level malpractice in 2023), compared with (35 (61.1%) of all cases of school or college level malpractice in 2022), including cases where multiple offence types took place.

Types of penalty issued to schools or colleges (number of cases per penalty type)



Penalty type	Number of cases in 2018	Number of cases in 2019	Number of cases in 2022	Number of cases in 2023
Additional monitoring or inspection	10	5	0	Fewer than 5
Review and report	35	60	30	35
Withdrawal of centre recognition	Fewer than 5	5	Fewer than 5	0
Written warning	105	65	30	25
Withdrawal of approval for a specific qualification	0	Fewer than 5	0	0
Total	150	135	55	60

The most common type of penalty issued to schools and colleges in 2023 was a review and report, with the number of cases resulting in this type of penalty being issued increasing to 35 from 30 in 2022.

Number of malpractice cases per school or college

Individual schools or colleges can be involved in multiple malpractice cases. In 2023, all schools or colleges involved in school or college level malpractice (100%) were involved in only one case, the same as in 2022 (100%).



Number of cases	Percent of schools or colleges in 2018	Percent of schools or colleges in 2019	Percent of schools or colleges in 2022	Percent of schools or colleges in 2023
One case	97.8%	99.5%	100.0%	100.0%
Two cases	2.2%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Three or more cases	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%

Types of penalty issued to schools and colleges, by type of malpractice

Note: where a year is not shown in these graphs, this indicates that there were no cases of malpractice where a penalty was issued for the specific offence in that year.

The 'multiple types of penalty' category represents cases which resulted in more than one penalty type being applied. Should a type of penalty only occur in cases that resulted in multiple different types of penalties being applied, that type will be counted in the 'multiple types of penalty' category rather than individually listed in the tables and charts presented in the report. A full breakdown of penalty types, including those aggregated into the 'multiple penalty' category, is available in the [data tables accompanying this release](#).

Maladministration



Penalty type	Percent of cases in 2018	Percent of cases in 2019	Percent of cases in 2022	Percent of cases in 2023
Multiple types of penalty	5.9%	10.3%	6.1%	10.8%
Additional monitoring or inspection	3.9%	1.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Review and report	14.7%	41.4%	66.7%	56.8%
Withdrawal of approval for a specific qualification	0.0%	1.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Withdrawal of centre recognition	1.0%	3.4%	3.0%	0.0%

Written warning	74.5%	42.5%	24.2%	32.4%
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Breach of security



Penalty type	Percent of cases in 2018	Percent of cases in 2019	Percent of cases in 2022	Percent of cases in 2023
Multiple types of penalty	20.8%	14.3%	8.7%	33.3%
Additional monitoring or inspection	12.5%	7.1%	0.0%	6.7%
Review and report	25.0%	28.6%	13.0%	33.3%
Withdrawal of centre recognition	0.0%	10.7%	4.3%	0.0%
Written warning	41.7%	39.3%	73.9%	26.7%

Failure to comply with regulations



Penalty type	Percent of cases in 2018	Percent of cases in 2019	Percent of cases in 2023
Multiple types of penalty	16.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Additional monitoring or inspection	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Review and report	33.3%	50.0%	100.0%
Written warning	50.0%	50.0%	0.0%

Failure to co-operate with an investigation



Penalty type	Percent of cases in 2019	Percent of cases in 2022
Review and report	50.0%	0.0%

Withdrawal of centre recognition	50.0%	0.0%
Written warning	0.0%	100.0%

Improper assistance to candidates



Penalty type	Percent of cases in 2018	Percent of cases in 2019	Percent of cases in 2023
Review and report	50.0%	100.0%	50.0%
Written warning	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%

Contextual information

In this statistical release, Ofqual presents data on malpractice in GCSE, AS, and A level assessments during the summer 2023 exam series in England. The data may not reflect the full extent of malpractice because these cases relate only to instances of reported malpractice where a penalty has been applied.

Exams were cancelled in 2020 and 2021 following the closure of schools and colleges to most students, as part of the response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This will have affected the number of cases and types of malpractice.

Any breach of the exam boards' regulations that might undermine the integrity of an assessment may constitute malpractice. This includes bringing into the exam room unauthorised material or mobile phones, and failures by school or college staff to comply with exam board instructions.

Ofqual requires exam boards to have procedures in place to prevent, investigate and act in relation to malpractice by students, school or college staff or others involved in the assessment of qualifications. The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) publishes [policies and guidance on malpractice](#) that set out procedures for dealing with suspected malpractice as well as definitions for the categories of malpractice listed within this release.

In this release, all figures are rounded to the nearest 5 to ensure confidentiality of data. Further information on this release is available in the [background information and data tables](#) accompanying this report.

User feedback

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

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