



Official Statistics

# Background information for malpractice in GCSE, AS and A level: summer 2025 exam series

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Applies to England

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## Provide your feedback

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## About this release

This annual statistical release provides information on numbers of reported cases of malpractice for which a penalty was issued, for GCSE, AS and A level qualifications during the summer 2025 exam series in England. It also includes historical data going back to summer 2022. Cases which were still ongoing at the time of the data cut-off date (12 November 2025), or those where no penalty was issued are not included.

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

## Scope of the release

Figures provided within this release relate to GCSE, AS and A level qualifications taken by students in schools and colleges in England, as well as school or colleges and their respective staff members in England only.

Four exam boards offer GCSE, AS and A level qualifications in England:

- AQA Education (AQA)
- Cambridge OCR
- Pearson Education Ltd. (Pearson)
- WJEC-CBAC Ltd. (WJEC)

## Policy context

## Ofqual conditions

The qualifications covered in this release are regulated by Ofqual. Ofqual publishes [Conditions that set out the requirements that the awarding organisations it regulates have to meet](#).

These Conditions state that an awarding organisation must take all reasonable steps to prevent the occurrence of any malpractice in the development, delivery and award of qualifications which it makes available or proposes to make available. This applies 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; it may also include circumstances where an individual has been negligent or reckless as to the consequences of their actions. Throughout this report, the term 'malpractice' is used to cover both 'malpractice' and 'maladministration'.

The Conditions require each awarding organisation to investigate allegations or suspicions of malpractice and to manage the effect of any malpractice where they establish that malpractice has occurred. They must take steps to prevent reoccurrence and take action against those responsible in a way that is proportionate to the gravity and scope of the malpractice.

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

## Malpractice policy and procedures

The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) is a membership organisation comprising the 8 largest providers of qualifications in the UK. JCQ publishes [Suspected Malpractice Policies and Procedures guidance](#) annually. This guidance details the policies and procedures agreed by the JCQ exam boards for dealing with breach of security and malpractice investigations relating to students, school or college staff and schools or colleges. For guidance specific to summer 2025, see [guidance for the 2024 to 2025 academic year](#).

A breach of the exam boards' regulations that might undermine the integrity of an assessment may constitute malpractice. This can include, for example, acts of plagiarism committed by students while completing non-exam assessment, as well as failures by school or college staff to comply with exam board instructions.

In line with Ofqual's Conditions, and the JCQ guidance, exam boards investigate any instances of alleged or suspected malpractice in both examined and non-

exam assessments and take action where appropriate with respect to the students, members of staff, and schools or colleges concerned, to protect the integrity of the assessments, or to prevent reoccurrences of malpractice. [Schools and colleges are required to report all incidents of malpractice to the relevant exam boards](#) and cooperate with subsequent investigations. Each case of malpractice, whether reported by the school or college or identified by the exam board, is considered and judged by each exam board on an individual basis in light of all the information available, and any sanction should be proportionate to the gravity of the malpractice as determined by the exam board.

## Penalties

Exam boards may impose penalties for those found guilty of malpractice, and the type of penalty imposed varies according to the offence, or offences, committed. A single student, staff member and school or college may be involved in more than one case of malpractice, and similarly a single malpractice case may involve more than one student or staff member. A single malpractice case may also result in one or multiple different types of penalties issued.

This report presents the number of cases resulting in each type of penalty, rather than the number of penalties applied. For most breakdowns, where multiple penalties were issued for a single case, the case would only be counted once, unless the case was reported against more than one category of the specified breakdown (such as more than one offence type when reporting per offence type, or more than one penalty type when reporting per penalty type). For example, if a single case involved 2 students, and both a warning and a loss of marks penalty was issued for each student, when reporting per penalty type, this case would be counted twice: once against the warning category and once against the loss of marks category. See the methods section for more detail on why this approach is used.

Exam boards may impose penalties on students found guilty of malpractice including:

- warnings
- loss of marks
- loss of aggregation or certification opportunity (which includes disqualification from units, components, or whole qualifications, as well as being barred from entering further examinations for a set period of time).

Exam boards may impose penalties on school or college staff found guilty of malpractice including:

- a written warning about the implications of repeating the offence
- imposing special conditions on an individual's future involvement in exams and assessments

- requiring specific training or mentoring as a condition of future involvement in exams
- suspending an individual from all involvement in delivering that exam board's exams and assessments for a set period

Exam boards can only impose sanctions related to a member of staff's involvement in the administration of their examinations; they cannot impose sanctions relating to a member of staff's employment. It is for schools and colleges to determine whether any wider sanction is appropriate (but that is not included in the figures reported here). In serious cases, we expect the exam board to consider whether to refer a case to the Teacher Regulation Authority to determine if a teacher should be prohibited from teaching.

Instances of malpractice by whole schools or colleges can range from actions intended to give an unfair advantage to students in an exam or assessment to ignorance of, or inappropriate application of, the assessment regulations. Where there is evidence that malpractice is the result of a serious management failure, an exam board may apply sanctions against a whole department or the school or college. Exam boards may impose penalties against a whole department, a school or college found guilty of malpractice including:

- a written warning to the head of the school or college advising of the malpractice and warning that further action may be taken should there be a recurrence or subsequent malpractice at the school or college
- a review of the school or college's procedures for the conduct or administration of a particular assessment, or all assessments in general, followed by reporting back to the exam board on improvements implemented by a set date
- approval by the exam board of specific assessment tasks where these are normally left to the discretion of the school or college
- additional monitoring or inspection to take place in relation to the assessment delivery of school or college's qualifications
- restricted access to examination and assessment material; distribution and collection of completed scripts may be supervised by an exam board officer
- independent invigilators may be appointed for a specified period of time to ensure the conduct of assessments is in accordance with the published regulations
- suspension of student entries for selected or all subjects for a specified time, or until a specific matter is resolved
- withdrawal of approval for the school or college to offer one or more qualifications
- withdrawal of school or college recognition or approval meaning that the school or college will not be able to deliver or offer students the respective exam board's qualifications

## COVID-19

The summer 2021 exam series was cancelled as part of the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the different arrangements in place in this exam series, it has not been included in the report. For information on malpractice in the years prior to 2022 see [earlier published reports](#).

In 2022, exams and other formal [assessments went ahead with some planned adaptations](#) intended to recognise the disruption to education caused by the pandemic. This may have had an impact on the trends observed in 2022.

In 2023, exams and other formal [assessments went ahead with a return to pre-pandemic standards](#), with protection built into the grading process to recognise the disruption that students had faced. This may have had an impact on the trends observed in 2023.

## Artificial intelligence (AI)

Forms of malpractice can change with technological advancements, and the categorisation of offences is regularly updated to reflect these changes.

In 2024, the reporting of plagiarism offences was split for the first time into those including the misuse of AI and those not including the misuse of AI. Prior to 2024, plagiarism including and excluding the misuse of AI were grouped together in a single category: "Plagiarism unacknowledged copying from published sources including the internet incomplete referencing".

## Data sources

All data used within this release was supplied to Ofqual by the exam boards that offer GCSE, AS and A level qualifications in England. Malpractice data was submitted in line with our [Malpractice: guide to the data submission process](#). For this release, the data cut-off date was 12 November 2025.

The malpractice figures reported are correct as of the above date, however some investigations into cases of malpractice may still be ongoing or may begin after data has been collected.

Prior to the 2025 data submission, exam boards were asked to revise their figures for the previous exam series alongside the current submission, for example to provide an update on previously pending cases. From 2025 onwards, exam boards were no longer asked to do this due to the small proportion of ongoing malpractice cases reported each year. For context, excluding those where no penalty was issued, only 1.6% of all reported cases for summer 2025 were still

ongoing at the time of the data cut-off date.

The number of component level entries for GCSE, AS and A level combined are also presented in this release to provide context for the number of malpractice cases. These figures are taken from the data exam boards submit to Ofqual each autumn, structured according to [our published guidance](#), and published in our [entries and late entries statistics](#). The cut-off date for this data was 1 October 2025.

The number of students with results issued and the number of schools or colleges that issued results, also included in the release, comes from [the data exam boards submit to Ofqual each summer](#) that contains information on provisional grades awarded to students in England. The reported number includes students who received unclassified (U) or not awarded results (X and Q; for example, if a student was absent), in addition to passing grades. These results are included because those students or schools or colleges may still have had a penalty issued from a malpractice case. The summer results data included provisional results and had cut-off dates of 6 August 2025 for AS and A levels and 13 August 2025 for GCSEs.

Once published, figures within this release are not usually subject to revision, unless an error is discovered (which would be dealt with according to our [corrections and revisions policy for official statistics](#)).

## Data quality and areas of uncertainty

### Data quality

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

For more information on our data sources, and how we ensure quality in our statistical releases, see our [statement on administrative data sources](#) and [quality framework for statistical publications](#) (both found on our [policies and procedures](#) page).

### Reporting cases

The figures reported throughout this release refer to the number of distinct cases of malpractice (see methods section for more detail). A single malpractice case

may involve an individual student, member of school or college staff, or school or college. Cases may also involve multiple individuals from within or across these groups.

In 2024, we provided exam boards with guidance on what is meant by 'linked cases' and when we would expect cases to be linked in the data they provide to us. We ask that acts of malpractice which are explicitly linked (for example, 2 candidates suspected of colluding together or committing disruptive acts together, or a centre staff member and candidate suspected of working together to commit malpractice) should be allocated the same malpractice case identifier. Acts of malpractice which are not explicitly linked should be allocated different malpractice case identifiers.

We are aware that it may not always be possible for the exam boards to link cases, particularly those where a degree of judgement may be needed to decide whether or not cases should be linked. As such, there may be some underreporting of the number of linked cases, which would also result in some overcounting of the number of distinct cases. However, from discussions with exam boards, we do not believe the impact of this to be significant.

## Methods

### Changes to methodology

In this release, we count the distinct malpractice case identifiers reported by exam boards. This is different from reports published in, and prior to, 2022, where the number of penalties applied were reported (more than one of which may have resulted from a single case). As a result, historical figures published in this release may differ slightly from those in releases published prior to 2022.

We count distinct malpractice cases rather than the total number of penalties to reflect the fact that penalties are listed against each offence type in the source data, and therefore if the same penalty is reported for each type of offence, it may be unclear from the data whether the individuals involved in that case were penalised once for the case overall, or once for each offence type. For example, an individual may have committed 2 types of offence as part of one case but, if a warning was listed against both offence types it is unclear in the data whether the individual was issued with one or 2 warnings. Likewise, if the penalty was a disqualification, this may only have been applied once, despite the student having committed multiple offence types as part of the case (and therefore having that penalty listed multiple times in the data).

Only full-course GCSEs are included in the malpractice figures and number of students reported, in addition to AS and A levels. In previous releases of these

statistics, short-course GCSEs were also included but these have now been removed. This has meant that some historical figures have changed to a small degree (for example less than 1% for overall number of cases) compared with previous releases. Figures on the number of entries are aggregated in a way that means that short-course GCSEs cannot be removed.

## Methodology used in this release

Because a single malpractice case might span one or more component, qualification, qualification type, type of malpractice, offence type and penalty category, a single malpractice case may be counted against one category, or more than one category, depending on the breakdown provided. For example, if a malpractice case only included one student who committed a single offence in one qualification, but 2 different types of penalty were issued, this would be counted as one malpractice case in all breakdowns except for the breakdowns that count the number of malpractice cases per penalty type, where the case would be counted twice: once for each type of penalty issued.

As breakdowns are not published for individual components or qualifications, this detail is removed from the analysis early on. Instead, throughout the release, individual malpractice cases spanning multiple components or multiple qualifications are only counted once. Similarly, only Table 2 in the accompanying data tables counts the number of malpractice cases per qualification level (GCSE and AS and A level); for all other breakdowns, qualification level is removed and individual malpractice cases involving more than one qualification level are only counted once.

Individual students, members of school and college staff, and school or colleges can be involved in multiple malpractice cases. While the number of malpractice cases per student and school or college are presented in this release, unique identifiers for staff members are not shared across exam boards meaning that the number of malpractice cases per staff member cannot be provided.

To determine the number of malpractice cases per individual student, or school or college, we first look for distinct combinations of malpractice case identifiers and individual identifiers, (unique candidate identifiers for students and national centre number codes for school or colleges). The distinct number of malpractice cases are then counted per identifier.

A single malpractice case can also involve multiple students or members of school and college staff. Similar to the above, to determine the number of individual students or school and college staff members involved in a single malpractice case, we count the number of distinct students or staff member identifiers contained within each case. We are able to count staff members here as staff identifiers should be unique within the data supplied by each exam board and cases do not cover multiple exam boards.

In the small number of malpractice cases where the individual identifier is unknown, for example where a malpractice case was reported to an exam board prior to an entry being made, these are not included in the counts of malpractice cases per student or school or college, nor are they included in the counts of students or staff members involved in a single malpractice case. This is because a known identifier is necessary to identify unique individuals and schools or colleges within or across malpractice cases. These cases are however included in all other counts presented in this release.

## Appropriate use of the statistics

While the number of component level entries is included for context, to give a sense of scale, direct comparisons of the number of entries with the number of malpractice cases should not be made, particularly including the calculation of proportions or percentages. This would not be appropriate because entries are made per student and component, whereas a single malpractice case may involve multiple students, or cover more than one component or qualification, meaning that any direct comparisons are not valid.

The total number of malpractice cases should not be calculated by summing the number of malpractice cases provided in the various breakdowns reported in the data tables. This is because in some breakdowns, cases may span multiple categories (for example if one student malpractice case was reported against more than one offence or penalty type), which would lead to over counting if the figures were summed. For the same reason, caution should be applied when comparing figures from across different tables as different breakdowns may count cases according to different categories, also producing different totals when summed.

## Quality assurance

The way we work with our data suppliers to ensure data quality at source is described in our [statement on administrative data sources](#). We also carry out our own quality assurance procedures as explained in our [quality framework for statistical publications](#), to ensure the accuracy of the data and to challenge or question it, where necessary. Publication may be deferred if the statistics are not considered fit for purpose.

## Confidentiality and disclosure control

To ensure confidentiality of the published accompanying data, figures have been

rounded to the nearest 5. If the value is less than 5, it is represented as “fewer than 5” and 0 represents zero malpractice cases.

Where individual rounded values have been presented in a table along with their sum total, this total may be slightly different to the sum of the individual rounded values. This is because the total has been calculated using the original unrounded values.

We also use unrounded values to derive percentages. Percentages are then rounded to one decimal place. Due to this rounding, percentages may not always add to up exactly 100%.

For more information, see our [rounding policy for statistical publications](#).

## Related statistics

See [Statistics at Ofqual](#) for other statistical releases and interactive visualisations.

For malpractice statistics relating to Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, see:

- [Qualifications Wales](#)
- [CCEA](#)
- [SQA](#)

## Useful links

[Report and data tables](#) accompanying this release.

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

[Policies and procedures that Ofqual follow](#) for production and release of its statistical releases.

[Make a freedom of information \(FOI\) request](#) to access official information.

## Official statistics designation

These statistics are classified as Official Statistics.

Our statistical practice is regulated by the [Office for Statistics Regulation \(OSR\)](#). OSR sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the [Code of](#)

[Practice for Statistics](#) that all producers of official statistics should adhere to.

You are welcome to contact us directly at [data.analytics@ofqual.gov.uk](mailto:data.analytics@ofqual.gov.uk) with any comments about how we meet these standards. Alternatively, you can contact OSR by emailing [regulation@statistics.gov.uk](mailto:regulation@statistics.gov.uk) or via the OSR website.

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