

## **Avoiding malpractice and maladministration**

As part of our Winter Conferences, Ofqual delivered a keynote speech at each event which contained information relating to malpractice and maladministration.

Ofqual also highlighted the scale and significance of the exam system and acknowledged the importance of exams officers to the effective working of the exam system and that the role is an all year-round job.

During the summer 2018 exams series, 1.3 million students in almost 6,000 schools and colleges, sat over 2,000 GCSE, AS & A levels exams. This resulted in more than 14.5million scripts being marked by 63,000 examiners –this led to over 6 million results with 5.5% of those being challenged in the post results service.

Without doubt, effective, well-trained and well-supported exams officers play a pivotal role in supporting these students in achieving their academic potential and helping awarding bodies in delivering a system which has the confidence of candidates, parents, staff, centres and employers.

In preparation for the summer 2019 exams series, Ofqual also detailed scenarios which centres must be aware of in order to avoid potential malpractice or maladministration.

They also provided hints and tips to mitigate against these issues...

### **Scenario 1**

After making several late changes to your combined science entries, a number of small packs (5 papers) for all three papers were sent to you in a separate dispatch. This resulted in some of these packs being misfiled and/or incorrectly opened.

### **Advice**

Encourage your subject staff to ensure that entries are made on time and to be realistic about their entries (e.g. tiers). They should also be strongly encouraged not to change entries late in the process (tiers/options etc.).

### **Scenario 2**

A small number of access arrangements students were taking their examination in a separate room. However, as there was only one person invigilating these candidates, they failed to check the question paper packet and handed out the incorrect paper.

The error was realised and the person who handed out the papers, took them away and replaced them with the correct ones, so the students went on to sit the paper they should have sat.

However, because the students had had access to a paper that they shouldn't have had access to, and had sight of the contents, it meant that they weren't then permitted to sit that paper at the scheduled time.

Whilst there was no wider security breach, it did mean that for those students, they could only be assessed on the papers that they had sat.

### **Advice**

Liaise with your SENCO who has responsibility in this area and ensure that exam regulations are followed with a check taking place before a question paper packet is opened. The invigilator must always ask candidates to check that they have been given the correct question paper for the day, date, time, subject, unit/component and tier of entry, if appropriate.

### **Scenario 3**

You are absent due to illness, however, you have given instructions for someone to check the papers and then file them.

The member of staff who is acting as your stand-in, who doesn't have any previous experience of how exams are managed, opens every pack that they had received in that dispatch, looks through them to check that they are all correct and then files all the papers in date order.

Upon your return, you identify that security has been compromised, and you escalate the issue to the relevant awarding body.

As there was no further breach, your centre receives a warning about the protocols you have in place in your centre.

### **Advice**

This scenario emphasises the importance of contingency arrangements – including who would cover for you if you were absent and making sure they understand what is required.

### **Scenario 4**

The incorrect question paper was handed out to candidates –it was a paper they should have been sitting the next week. During the uncertainty, a candidate photographed parts of the question paper and put it on social media.

The relevant awarding body discounted a portion of that paper for all candidates, and the candidate who shared the information was disqualified.

### **Advice**

Check deliveries of confidential materials and place these in their sealed packets in relevant order in your secure storage facility. Always ensure that there are TWO people present to check the correct question paper packets have been pulled from the secure storage facility before packets are opened.

Ensure candidates are appropriately supervised and do NOT have access to a mobile phone in the examination room.

Note-There were sixty-eight Security Breaches in 2018, forty (59%) of these related to papers incorrectly opened or handed out by centres

### **Scenario 5**

You did all the right things and when checking the question paper packages, you noticed through the window on the packages that some had both AM and PM sessions showing for the same exam paper. You checked with the relevant awarding body and were able to identify that some packages had been incorrectly labelled.

By checking early and reporting this to the awarding body, you prevented an incorrect paper potentially being handed out avoiding a potential security breach.

### **Advice**

Check delivery of all question paper packets and query/report any apparent inconsistencies/discrepancies as a matter of urgency to the relevant awarding body. Do NOT open the packages but store packages securely.

### **If things do go wrong...**

Ofqual also provided some excellent advice if things do go wrong. In such instances, exams officers should focus upon three primary concerns:

- Security of assessment
- Validity of assessment
- Fairness to all students

You should contain the issue by keeping the candidates in the examination room and supervised. Contact the relevant awarding body and ensure that you are complying with their protocols.

If there has been a breach of secure materials then get confidentiality statements from the candidates/staff involved, ensuring that you have explained what they are signing and that they are aware of the serious consequences of any breach.

All this confirms the importance of contingency planning and communicating exam regulations to candidates and staff prior to the exams series.