



Paul Farrelly MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

22 July 2019

Dear Mr Farrelly,

PQ 268433: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to ensure that schools and colleges follow guidance on exam procedure to minimise the risk of security breaches.

The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP has asked Ofqual to respond to you directly regarding your recent Parliamentary Question. A copy of this response will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

As the regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England, our rules require all exam boards to take steps to minimise the risks of malpractice, to investigate the causes of malpractice where it arises, to effectively manage any adverse impacts of any malpractice that takes place, and to impose appropriate sanctions on those who have committed malpractice. We require exam boards to demonstrate to us how they are complying with our rules, reporting to us any emerging concerns and their subsequent actions. In some instances, the appropriate action for an exam board is to inform the police.

Our full expectations are set out in our General Conditions of Recognition¹, the rules we set for the qualifications and organisations we regulate. They specify the full range of expectations we have, including rules that awarding organisations must have a “written and enforceable agreement” with the schools and colleges that deliver their qualifications. This agreement must in particular include certain provisions, including that it must “set out all the requirements with which the Centre must comply in order to continue to deliver the qualification”, and “establish a sanctions

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ofqual-handbook>

policy to be applied in the event that the Centre fails to comply with these requirements”.

In addition, while it is the exam boards we regulate that put in place detailed requirements for the schools and colleges that offer their qualifications, we recognise we can play a role in the dissemination of information about effective practice. We have written regularly to schools and colleges to emphasise their important responsibilities in this area (most recently in May²) and we have produced a range of resources for exams officers (the school or college staff members who are responsible for the smooth running of exams in the centre) which can be found on the Ofqual website³.

In order to meet many of our expectations in this area, the exam boards choose to specify common requirements through the JCQ (Joint Council for Qualifications), their representative body. JCQ produces a range of documentation for centres – including Instructions for Conducting Examinations⁴, which includes instructions for secure storage of examination materials, and policies and procedures⁵ for centres to deal with suspected malpractice in examinations and assessments. In order to make sure that centres are meeting the requirements set out in these documents, JCQ operates a ‘Centre Inspection Service’ in which a team of inspectors go into schools and colleges to check to see if these rules are being followed.

The exam boards take action where they find serious cases of malpractice or maladministration, including where security breaches occur. We annually publish Official Statistics which present data on malpractice and maladministration for the GCSE, AS and A level summer exam series. These statistics present the national picture in this area and allow us to identify trends and target our activity accordingly. The 2018 statistics are available on our website⁶. Again, in the rare instance that malpractice takes place, we expect the relevant exam board to effectively manage any adverse impacts and to impose appropriate sanctions on those who are found to be responsible.

JCQ has set up an independent commission on malpractice, chaired by Sir John Dunford. The commission is due to report in the autumn. We welcome and support this initiative, and look forward to playing our part in implementing its recommendations.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/letter-to-schools-and-colleges-summer-2019>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/supporting-exams-officers>

⁴ <https://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/ice---instructions-for-conducting-examinations/instructions-for-conducting-examinations-2018-2019>

⁵ <https://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/malpractice/suspected-malpractice-in-examinations-and-assessments-2018-19>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/malpractice-in-gcse-as-and-a-level-summer-2018-exam-series>

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S Collier". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending from the end of the name.

Sally Collier
Chief Regulator, Ofqual