

Malpractice for GCSE, AS and A level in Wales:

Summer 2020 exam series



17 December 2020

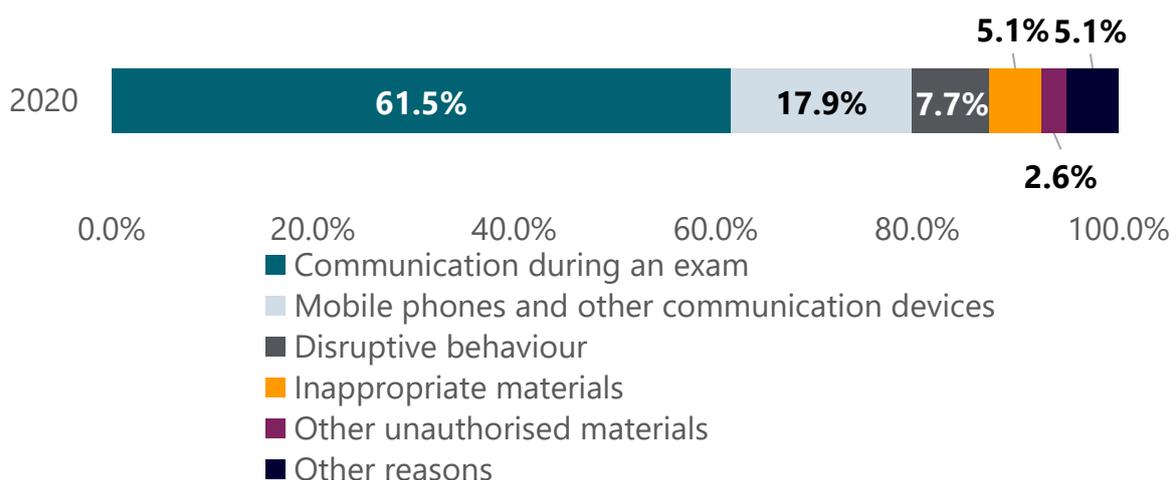
About this release

This official statistics release presents figures on penalties issued by awarding bodies for student, school or college staff, and school or college malpractice, and the offences for which they were issued, for GCSE, AS and A level examinations for the 2020 summer exam series in Wales.

Key points

- Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic there have been substantial changes to the malpractice processes. These changes mean that users should interpret differences between 2020 figures and other series with caution. This release describes the malpractice in summer and additional data is available in the associated data tables. Although there were no exams in summer 2020, some malpractice cases here relate to assessments completed before the summer exams, such as non-examined assessments.
- 55 penalties were issued in summer 2020. Of these 40 were issued to students, 15 to centre staff, and none were issued to centres

Figure 1: Reasons for student penalties



Source: QW data collection from awarding bodies, data available in table 6

Most (61.5%) of student penalties were issued for communication during an exam.

Quick Links	Statistics	Introduction	Glossary	Background
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Introduction

Qualifications Wales regulates qualifications, other than degrees, in Wales. In this release, we present data on the volume of malpractice associated with GCSEs, AS and A levels in Wales for the summer 2020 exam series. The figures represent the number of malpractice incidents, rounded to the nearest 5 to ensure confidentiality, submitted by awarding bodies by 19 November 2020, reflecting the position on 17 November 2020.

From the academic year 2017/18 onwards, we collect and report on data for Wales for general qualifications. Comparisons in this release are made to data collected and published by Ofqual for previous years.

Malpractice

Any breach of the regulations that might undermine the integrity of an exam constitutes malpractice. Examples of malpractice include attempts by students to communicate with each other during an exam, students taking unauthorised materials into an exam, and failure by school or college staff to comply with exam board instructions. It also includes cases involving maladministration, which is defined by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) as the failure by school or college staff to adhere to the regulations of controlled assessments, coursework, examinations and non-examination assessments, or malpractice in the conduct of examinations/assessments and/or the handling of documents such as examination question papers, candidate scripts, mark sheets, etc.

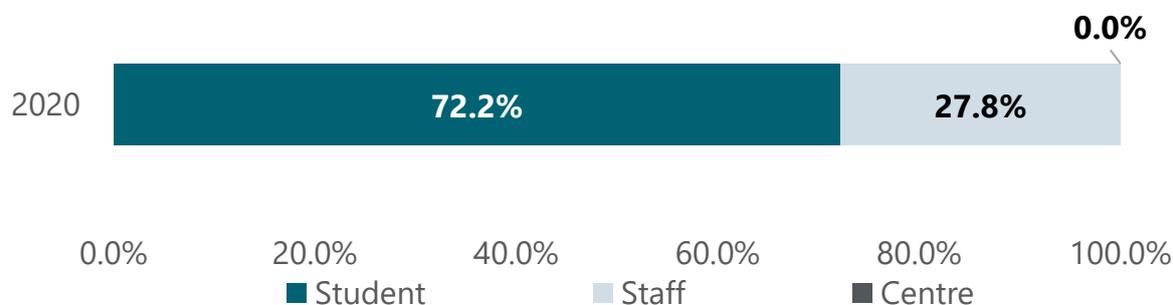
We require exam boards to have procedures in place for dealing with malpractice conducted by students, school or college staff or others involved in providing a qualification. JCQ publishes [policies and guidance](#) on malpractice that give procedures for dealing with suspected malpractice. Further information about malpractice and our requirements can be found in the [background notes](#).

Statistics

Student Malpractice

How much student malpractice was there?

Figure 2: Student/Staff/Centre penalties summer 2020



Source: QW data collection from awarding bodies, data available in tables 6, 12, and 16

55 penalties were issued in summer 2020. Of these 40 were issued to students, 15 to centre staff, and none were issued to centres.

All of the 40 penalties issued to students were related to GCSE qualifications, none were related to GCE qualifications. The 40 penalties for GCSE qualifications represent 0.004% of all GCSE entries, around 4 penalties for every 100,000 entries.

In summer 2020 40 individual learners received penalties. Each of these received a single penalty.

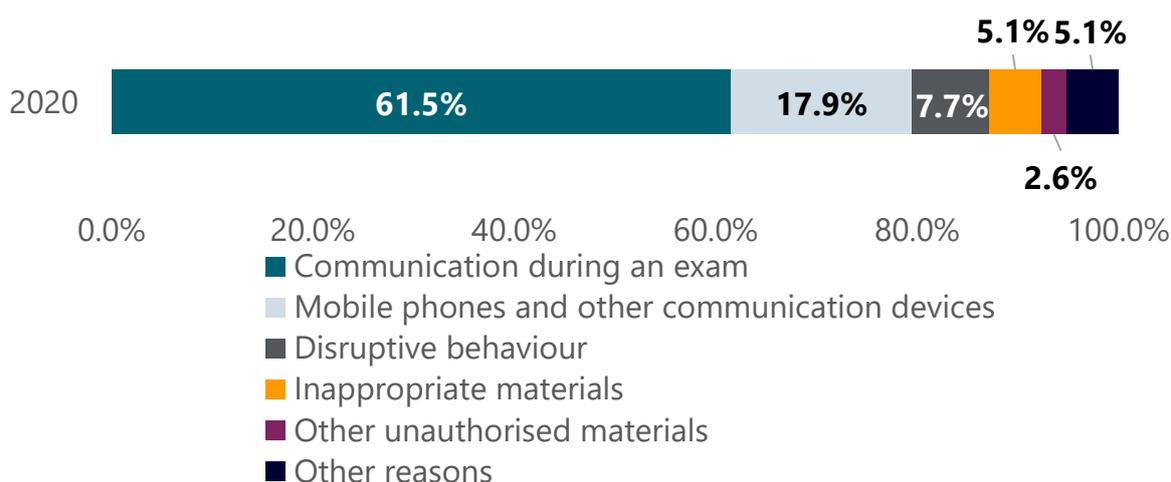
What is the most common type of student malpractice?

Table 1: Number of penalties issued by malpractice category, summer 2020

Malpractice category	Number of penalties issued	Percentage of total penalties
Communication during an exam	25	61.5%
Disruptive behaviour	*	7.7%
Inappropriate materials	*	5.1%
Mobile phones and other communication devices	5	17.9%
Other reasons	*	5.1%
Other unauthorised materials	*	2.6%
Plagiarism	0	0.0%
Total	40	100.0%

Source: QW data collection from awarding bodies, data available in table 6

Figure 3: Proportion of penalties issued by malpractice category, summer 2020

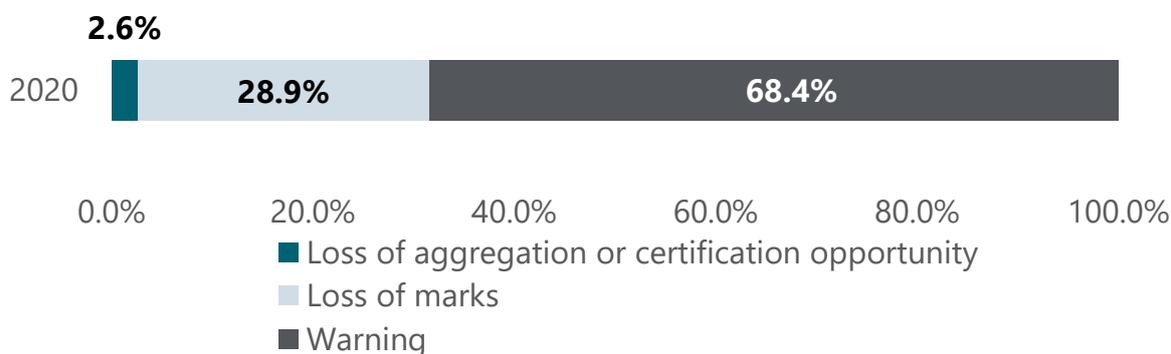


Source: QW data collection from awarding bodies, data available in table 6

Over half (61.5%) of all malpractice offences for which a penalty was issued in summer 2020 were for communicating during an exam. The second and third most common malpractice categories were mobile phones and other communication devices (17.9%) and disruptive behaviour (7.7%), respectively.

What is the most common type of student penalty?

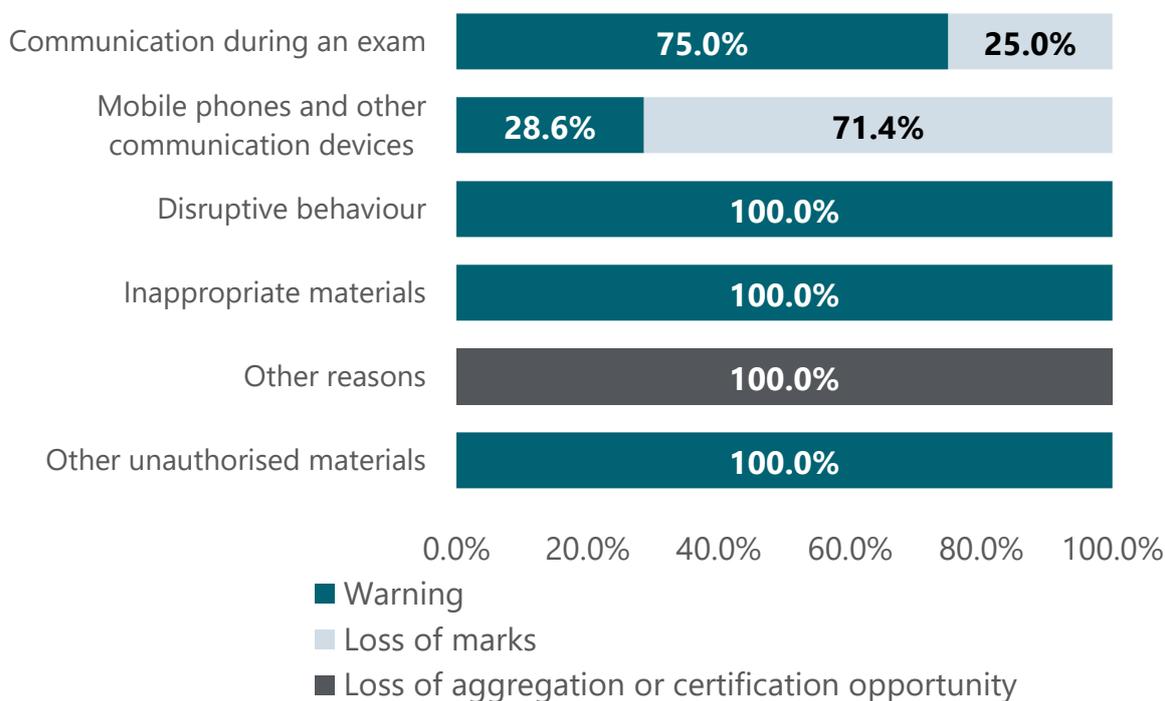
Figure 4: Proportion of penalties issued by penalty category, summer 2020



Source: QW data collection from awarding bodies, data available in table 8

The most common student penalty was a warning (68.4%) followed by loss of marks (28.9%) and loss of aggregation or certification opportunity (2.6%).

Figure 5: Types of penalties issued to students by malpractice category, summer 2020



Source: QW data collection from awarding bodies, data available in table 10

The relatively small number (40) of student penalties in summer 2020 means it is difficult to make robust interpretations of penalty type across offence type.

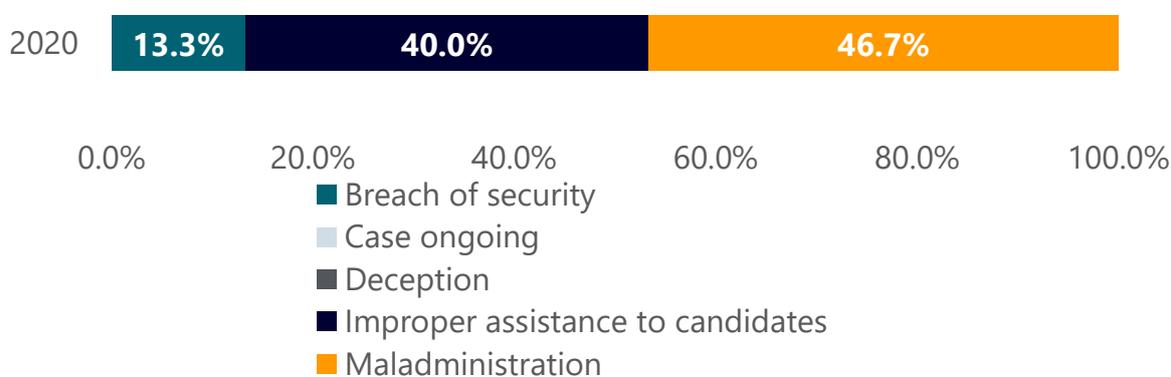
Centre and centre staff malpractice

How common is centre and centres staff malpractice?

Malpractice offences can also be committed by centres. Examples of this type of malpractice include failing to keep examination material secure prior to an examination, providing improper assistance to candidates and maladministration. In this scenario penalties can be applied against centres and/or centre staff.

55 penalties were issued in summer 2020. Of these 40 were issued to students, 15 to centre staff, and none were issued to centres.

Figure 6: Types of centre staff malpractice, summer 2020



Source: QW data collection from awarding bodies, data available in table 12

Of the penalties issued to centre staff in summer 2020 46.7% were for maladministration, 40.0% were for improper assistance to candidates and 13.3% were for a breach of security.

GLOSSARY

Awarding body

An organisation that develops qualifications, specifies and monitors assessments and issues awards to learners, formally recognising the learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences), following an assessment and validation procedure.

In other parts of the UK these are known as awarding organisations or exam boards.

Malpractice

Malpractice means any act, default or practice which is a breach of an awarding body's regulations, or which does one or both of the following:

- compromises, attempts to compromise or may compromise the process of assessment, the integrity of any qualification or the validity of a result or certificate;
- damages the authority, reputation or credibility of any awarding body or centre or any officer, employee or agent of any awarding body or centre.

Malpractice includes maladministration and non-compliance with the regulations.

Failure by a centre to notify, investigate and report to an awarding body all allegations of malpractice or suspected malpractice in itself. Failure to take action as required by an awarding body and failure to co-operate with an awarding body's investigation also constitute malpractice.

Further information on malpractice and details of the offences that constitute malpractice and the penalties issued can be found in JCQ's [malpractice guidance](#).

Maladministration

Failure to adhere to the regulations regarding the conduct of controlled assessments, coursework, examinations and non-examination assessments, or malpractice in the conduct of examinations/assessments and/or the handling of examination question papers, candidate scripts, mark sheets, cumulative assessment records, results and certificate claim forms, etc.

GCSEs

General Certificates of Secondary Education are available in a wide range of subjects.

GCSEs are the main level 1 and level 2 general qualifications at age 14-16 in Wales.

They can be used as a basis for higher level study or training, or direct entry into employment.

A level

General Certificate of Education Advanced Level, also known as a GCE A level. Qualifications taken, after GCSEs, in a range of subjects, usually taken at age 16-18 and typically a two-year course of study. They are used as a basis for admissions to higher education, further training, or entry into employment.

Advanced Subsidiary (AS)

A qualification that forms the first part of an A level qualification. It may be taken as a free-standing qualification. In Wales and Northern Ireland, it contributes to the A level result. In England, AS qualifications cannot contribute to A levels.

Centre

A body undertaking the delivery of an assessment (and potentially other activities) to learners on behalf of an awarding body. Centres are typically educational institutions, training providers, or employers.

Qualification

An award made by an awarding body to demonstrate a learner's achievement of competence.

BACKGROUND NOTES

On 21 November 2017 the National Assembly for Wales approved the Official Statistics (Wales) Order 2017 which named Qualifications Wales as one of the bodies that are in scope of the Statistics and Registration Services Act 2007. Qualifications Wales operates in compliance with the UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Statistics and has published this statistical release as Official Statistics.

Malpractice

The qualifications covered by this release are regulated by Qualifications Wales. The requirements that the awarding bodies have to meet are laid out in the Standard Conditions of Recognition. Requirements around malpractice are laid out in condition A8, which states the following:

An awarding body must take all reasonable steps to prevent the occurrence of any malpractice or maladministration in the development, delivery and award of qualifications which it makes available or proposes to make available.

Malpractice includes any breach of the regulations that might undermine the integrity of an exam. Examples of malpractice range from deliberate attempts by candidates to communicate with each other during an exam to inadvertent failures by school or college staff to comply with awarding body instructions.

The conditions require all awarding bodies to investigate and manage the effect of any malpractice where they have established that malpractice or maladministration has occurred. They must take steps to prevent reoccurrence and take action against those responsible that is proportionate to the gravity and scope of the occurrence.

In addition, the conditions require the awarding bodies to have up to date written procedures relating to the investigation of suspected malpractice or maladministration. The awarding bodies are also required to keep under review the arrangements that centres have in place for preventing and investigating of malpractice or maladministration.

Awarding bodies may investigate any instances of alleged or suspected malpractice in either internally or externally assessed components and take action with respect to the candidates and schools or colleges concerned to protect the integrity of the assessments, or to prevent reoccurrences of malpractice. Schools or colleges must report all incidents of malpractice to the relevant awarding bodies and cooperate with subsequent investigations. Each case of malpractice, whether reported by the school or college or identified by the awarding body, is considered and judged on an

individual basis in the light of all the information available, and the outcome should be proportionate with the gravity of the malpractice as determined by the awarding body.

Candidate malpractice

Awarding bodies will normally impose sanctions and penalties on candidates found guilty of malpractice. These sanctions and penalties can include a written warning, being issued with estimated marks, disqualification from an assessment component, or disqualification from a whole qualification. The penalty imposed will vary depending on the nature and gravity of the offence.

School or college staff malpractice

Awarding bodies will normally also impose sanctions and penalties on school or college staff found guilty of malpractice. These sanctions and penalties can include 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, or suspending an individual from all involvement in delivering exams and assessments for a set period. Awarding bodies can only impose sanctions related to a member of staff's involvement in the administration of their examinations and cannot impose sanctions relating to a member of staff's employment. It is for centres to determine whether any wider sanction is appropriate (but that is not included in the figures reported here).

School or college malpractice

Awarding bodies must investigate and, where necessary, sanction schools or colleges and their staff involved in malpractice. Instances of malpractice by school or college staff can range from actions intended to give an unfair advantage to candidates 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 awarding body may apply sanctions against the whole department or the school or college.

Data Source

The awarding bodies that provide GCSEs, AS and A level have submitted information to Qualifications Wales about the number of malpractice cases for each qualification available in summer 2020. The malpractice data submitted only relates to centres located in Wales, regardless of the type of centre. This release covers breakdowns of student, staff and school/college malpractice by type of malpractice and the penalties that are issued in response.

Limitations of data

There is potential error in the information provided by awarding bodies. Therefore, Qualifications Wales cannot guarantee that the information received is correct. Qualifications Wales compares the data over time and checks for systematic issues. Quality assurance procedures are carried out to ensure the accuracy of the data and challenge or question it, where necessary. Qualifications Wales continuously manages this process by:

- Ensuring that data providers are clear about what is required of them and are fully consulted during the initial design and any subsequent change phases;
- Reminding all providers (if appropriate) that, as a condition of them being regulated, all data must be completely accurate;
- Being alert to unexpected changes in the data submitted by comparing individual returns over time from the same provider;
- Actively challenging any unexpected results with the data providers.

The publication may be deferred if the statistics are not considered fit for purpose.

Data has been collected at an appropriate point when it is reasonably complete, this was 19 November 2020 for the summer 2020 series data in this release.

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic there have been substantial changes to the malpractice processes. These changes mean that users should interpret differences between 2020 figures and other series with caution. This release describes the malpractice in summer and additional data is available in the associated data tables. Although there were no exams in summer 2020, some malpractice cases here relate to external assessments completed before the summer.

Comparisons

From 2017/18, awarding bodies have submitted general qualifications data to Qualifications Wales rather than Ofqual. Comparisons to historical Ofqual data should be interpreted with caution.

Geographical Coverage

This release presents data on the number of entries for GCSEs, AS and A levels for the summer 2020 exam series for centres located in Wales. This release does not include GCSEs, AS and A levels taken outside of Wales.

Revisions

Once published, data on the number of entries is not usually subject to revision, although subsequent releases may be revised to insert late data or correct an error.

Completeness of the data

Awarding bodies send Qualifications Wales malpractice data for all regulated qualifications classified as GCSE, AS or A level. Qualifications Wales contacts any awarding body that does not return a complete set of data within the collection period, to make sure the data is as complete as possible.

Rounding and Confidentiality

To protect confidentiality, and in accordance with Qualifications Wales's interim statistical outputs policy, all entry figures are rounded. In the commentary and tables, they are rounded to the nearest 5. Figures fewer than 5 but greater than 0 are replaced with a *. This is to ensure that data does not reveal an individual candidate. All percentages within the commentary are based on actual figures. Figures have been rounded independently and therefore may not sum to the total.

Users of these statistics

These statistics are likely to be of interest to Qualifications Wales, Ofqual, awarding bodies, and the Welsh Government. Other users include government policy officials, academics, researchers and the public. We welcome feedback from users, to gain a better understanding of who our users are over time. Qualifications Wales uses these statistics to ensure that GCSEs, AS and A levels are fit for purpose and are meeting expected standards.

Related statistics and publications

Further statistics on qualifications in Wales, and the UK more widely, can be found in the links below:

- [Qualifications Wales](#)
- [Welsh Government](#)
- [Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation](#)
- [Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment \(CCEA\) Regulation](#)
- [Scottish Qualifications Authority](#)

Useful information

A glossary of terms is available on page 7 to help you interpret this release. You can find information about future publications on the Welsh Government [website](#) and our [website](#). The QiW [register](#) gives information on approved and designated qualifications which are eligible for public funding in Wales.

Next update

December 2021 (provisional).

User feedback

We welcome any feedback on any aspect of these statistics which can be provided by email to statistics@qualificationswales.org

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