Teacher involvement in developing exam papers and other confidential assessments – an industry position

Overview

Following the events of summer 2017 and Ofqual's subsequent inquiry into teacher involvement in developing exam papers and other confidential materials, we identified the need for organisations to work together to strengthen safeguards and public confidence in our system and build on the work already done.

This paper represents the views of JCQ, its member awarding organisations that offer GCSEs and GCEs in England, Cambridge Assessment International Education, International Baccalaureate Organization, AoC, ASCL, HMC, and NAHT.

We believe that malpractice undertaken by those who write exam questions and other confidential material seriously damages the integrity of the entire examination system and undermines public confidence. However, the very low number of such instances is due to the professional integrity of the vast majority of question setters (and others involved in the preparation of examination papers) and the current system of support and safeguards.

We endorse the main conclusion in Ofqual's interim report and consultation, which strongly supports the continuing involvement of practising teachers in the examination system. Removing teachers from the process would have significant detrimental effects and expose the examinations system to unacceptable risks.

Since summer 2017, we have reviewed our own safeguards and worked collectively to identify how, as an industry, we can deliver improvements across the whole system. In addition, individual organisations have carried out their own reviews and taken actions.

The actions detailed below recognise there is limited time available for what can be achieved for summer 2018 although some steps are being taken for then. The size and complexity of our system means that production processes are well underway for 2019 and, therefore, some improvements being considered will focus on the medium term i.e. 2020.

What action will be taken?

We will work collectively to:

1. Strengthen confidentiality clauses within contracts by introducing industry-wide principles. The awarding bodies' contracts contain confidentiality clauses that provide those setting exam questions and other confidential materials with a clear understanding of how they use the information they receive and create as part of their role. It is important that all those with confidential information, irrespective of which awarding body they are contracted to, work to the same principles and understand these contractual clauses. We will create industry level principles that will be reflected in contracts issued from September 2018 onwards and published on all our websites.

2.   Improve conflict of interest declarations to the awarding body. These declarations provide awarding bodies with important information that enables them to support question setters and those handling confidential materials in managing any specific conflicts. The awarding bodies will collectively review the structure and content of their declaration forms with a view to assessing the benefits of a common document.

3.   Improve school and college identification of question setters and conflicts of interest. It is important heads of centres are aware of which staff are employed in roles that mean they receive sensitive and confidential information, so they can provide the necessary support and safeguards within their centre.

•   All teachers involved in developing question papers or other confidential materials will be required to inform their school or college that they are working for an awarding body in this capacity.

•   School and college leadership organisations will work with awarding bodies to develop a standard conflict of interest document for centres for the 2018-19 academic year, along with accompanying guidance on how to identify any conflicts and how to support staff to manage them. These documents will need to be completed annually.

4.   Provide enhanced training on managing conflicts of interest for those setting exam questions and other materials. Support and training for those involved in setting exam questions is an essential part of removing malpractice from the system and awarding bodies will provide enhanced training and guidance for all those who hold this role, with an additional focus on support and guidance about handling any conflicts of interest. To the fullest extent possible, this additional training will be made mandatory.

5.   Facilitate school and college based support. Through effective processes, schools and colleges can minimise the risk to themselves and their staff in becoming involved malpractice cases. We will be writing to every Head of Centre, offering guidance on supporting those who have access to confidential material and how to manage the risk of malpractice.

6.   Continue to identify new ways to prevent malpractice and detect it when it occurs. Awarding bodies have in place a wide range of tools with which to identify malpractice. Over the coming months, our technical experts will consider what other statistical monitoring may be possible to enhance this detection. In addition, we all have good policies for individuals and organisations to provide us with information about suspected malpractice which we will build on and continue to make sure those with genuine concerns about malpractice know how to report it.

7.   Make sure everyone is aware of possible sanctions by awarding bodies and the school or college. We believe that sanctions provide an effective deterrent and that the consequences of malpractice should be clear and sanctions consistently applied.   Awarding bodies can terminate a contract when an individual has breached its conditions, which will carry over to any new employment. We will engage with the National College of Teaching and Leadership (and similar organisations in other parts of the UK) to produce guidance for schools and colleges that set out the decision making process for referring proven malpractice cases to NCTL who have the power to ban someone from teaching.

March 2018