

Media Release

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Report of the Independent Commission on Malpractice

A high-level Independent Commission investigating exam malpractice is today announcing moves to protect the system better against abuse.

In July 2018, the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) announced an Independent Commission on Malpractice to be chaired by Sir John Dunford. The Commission started work in September 2018 and is today releasing the report into its findings.

The Commission has found that the system in the UK works well and there is a very low level of malpractice. However, the Commission has found many ways in which the system can be improved, good practice encouraged, and malpractice better prevented.

The Commission has made a number of significant recommendations, including the banning of all watches in exam rooms and a new, single definition of malpractice, both of which should be achievable in a short time period:

- The Commission is aware of the sophistication of internet-enabled devices. Alongside the current ban on mobile phones in examinations, the Commission recommends that awarding organisations ban all watches in exam rooms. Examinations officers and invigilators are often unable to distinguish between smart and non-smart watches. A total ban on all types of watches, as well as other internet devices, removes any possibility of candidates having non-sanctioned internet access during exams.
- Awarding organisations have several definitions of malpractice and maladministration. The Commission finds this confusing and unnecessary. It is therefore recommending that a single definition of malpractice be used.

Other important recommendations are that:

- Heads of exams centres (school heads, college principals and workplace bosses) should build an ethical culture in which staff and exam candidates work together to prevent malpractice taking place.
- The documentation produced by JCQ is unnecessarily dense and confusing and the Commission urges a radical re-think of the format and accessibility of JCQ's publications.
- JCQ and awarding bodies should improve communications with exam centres, including to governing boards.
- Data on malpractice in vocational and technical qualifications should be improved and the JCQ Centre Inspection Service should be expanded to cover centres doing vocational and technical assessments.
- Data on access arrangements and special considerations should be improved and further research carried out in order better to level the playing field between candidates with disabilities and others, in line with the Equality Act 2010.
- Awarding bodies should step up their use of technology in order to combat technological malpractice proactively – e.g. tracking packs of papers and monitoring the web.
- The system should prepare for future changes in exams and assessment, with the government encouraged by the Commission to fund research into the barriers to extending digital and e-assessment.

Sir John Dunford, Chair of the Independent Malpractice Commission said:

“I thank the Commission members for contributing their time and expertise to this inquiry. The views we have gathered were wide-ranging and gave the Commission a mass of evidence on the current situation and how malpractice could be reduced.

“Underlying the Commission’s recommendations is our belief in the need for an ethical approach to the conduct of examinations by all concerned, including staff and students.

“The system works well and there is a low level of detected malpractice. Nonetheless, there is much that can be done to improve the situation and prevent malpractice taking place. In all walks of life, there is a small proportion of dishonest people and the education system is no exception. There is a lot more that can be done to prevent malpractice by both staff and candidates.

“Most instances of candidate malpractice involve the possession of mobile phones in the exam room and this number can be greatly reduced through better prevention systems. The proliferation of smart watches, which are often hard to detect by invigilators, has led the Commission to recommend a ban on all watches (as is already done in some schools and colleges).

“I thank the JCQ and the awarding organisations for their support of the Independent Malpractice Commission and look forward to our recommendations improving and refining the UK’s examination system.”

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Notes to Editors

1. The Report of the Independent Commission on Malpractice will be available on the JCQ website on Tuesday 10 September. Printed copies are available by email request to commission@jcq.org.uk
2. The JCQ press contact is Jon Waldren on 0207 227 0671 out of hours 07905683816 pressoffice@jcq.org.uk