Education update – Monday 8 January

(Below is a summary of some of the main education news stories from the last week. They do not reflect the opinions of *The Exams Office*)

Sharp rise in exam malpractice by school staff

The number of penalties given to school and college staff for exam malpractice has risen by 149% this year, figures published by Ofqual reveal.

In total, there were 895 penalties issued to school and college staff for malpractice with GCSEs and A levels in 2017, compared with 360 in 2016 – a rise of 149%. The number of penalties issued to students has also increased by a quarter – from 2,180 in 2016 to 2,715 in 2017, according to Ofqual's report.

Introducing unauthorised materials into the exam room, in particular mobile phones, was the main reason for student penalties, Ofqual reveals. Plagiarism, which was the second largest category of student malpractice, accounted for 17% of penalties.

Ofqual's findings include:
- 2,715 penalties were issued to students in 2017, up from 2,180 compared to 2016 and representing 0.015% of entries (compared to 0.011% in 2016).
- Having access to a mobile phone was main reason for student penalties.
- 895 penalties were issued to staff, up from 360 in 2016. This still involves a very small proportion of the total number of staff in England (350K FTE staff).
- Exam boards are more likely to issue formal written warnings for similar offences rather than informal advisory notes this year.
- 120 penalties were issued to schools or colleges, down from 155 in 2016.
- The actual number of penalties issued to schools or colleges is small given the overall number of centres (over 5,000).

For more details visit the TES website and download Ofqual's Malpractice for GCSE, AS and A level Summer 2017 report

AQA admits breaking rules on enquiries about exam results

The AQA exam board has admitted that it failed to follow rules over enquiries of GCSE and A-level results earlier this year. It broke several regulations over how and when grades should be changed, and is being forced by Ofqual to take action to ensure it complies with the rules, it has emerged.

An undertaking by AQA states that Ofqual "identified increases of marks and grades" from this year's GCSE and A-level exams. These were "considered to be inconsistent with fully compliant application" of the rules, known as Reviews of Marking and Moderation, it adds.

It continues: "Ofqual investigated this issue and concluded that AQA had not acted sufficiently to change reviewers' behaviours and practices". English language GCSE was a particular area of concern for the regulator, Tes understands.

The exam board will change the way it trains and monitors its reviewers, according to the undertaking – which is a legally binding agreement. This will include making it clearer "the circumstances in which changes of marks are appropriate, and in which they are not". AQA will also ensure that its reviewers "have completed the mandatory training stipulated by AQA".

The improvements need to be in place for papers reviewed after last month's GCSE resits, with the exam board to review its progress and report back to Ofqual by 15 March next year, outlining how it will apply the "lessons learnt" when reviewing papers from next summer's exams.

For more details visit the TES website

GCSE grade changes increase by 52% - mostly due to GCSE English

The number of GCSE grades changed at a marking review this year has increased by 52%, with over 25,000 more changes than in 2016. This year, 73,840 GCSE grades were changed compared with 48,430 last year. Only 3% more GCSE exams were sat this year.

Ofqual said the rise "stemmed principally from an increase in the number of successful review requests in new and legacy versions of GCSE English language and English literature".

It was partly ascribed to the increase in entries to GCSE English this year, which happened because fewer students took alternative qualifications such as BTEC.

The majority of changes were by one grade, and just half a per cent of all challenges resulted in a change of two grades or more. This is, however, five times last year's figure, when just 0.1% skipped upwards by two grades.

Sally Collier, Ofqual's chief regulator, said that some of the exam boards had "not done enough" to change old practices and "meet new rules around reviews of marking" this year.

For more details visit the Schools Week website

More than half of exams officers undertake an additional role

A survey conducted by *The Exams Office* has revealed that more than half of exams officers undertake an additional role.

From 1206 responses, 626 (51.9%) of examination officers indicated that they undertook another role in addition to that of examination officer. This suggests that there is a misconception in many centres over the significance of the examination officer role and the work which examination officers have to undertake at non-exam times.

From the 1206 examination officers surveyed, 28.3% (341) manage/administer school data, 7.5% (91) are responsible for organising cover in the event of teacher absence, and 3.8% (46) have a teaching responsibility - further evidence of an increase - and return to - teaching examination officers.

Only 9 examination officers surveyed were involved in the SEN department or the access arrangements process beyond an administrative role.

For more details visit The Exams Office website

One in six exams officers fail to receive an annual appraisal

***The Exams Office's* 2017 survey has revealed that 1 in 6 exams officers do not receive an annual appraisal.**

Encouragingly, the vast majority of examination officers – 98.4% (1187 from 1206 surveyed) – have a line manager.

However, only 82.8% (999) of examination officers had an annual appraisal/performance review during the 2015/16 academic year. This reveals that 1 in 6 (17.2%) examination officers received no appraisal or performance review during the last academic year.

Even from those who were line managed, 15.8% did not receive an annual appraisal or performance review.

For more details visit The Exams Office website