

Malpractice for GCSE, AS and A level: summer 2018 exam series

Annual

Published: 13 December 2018

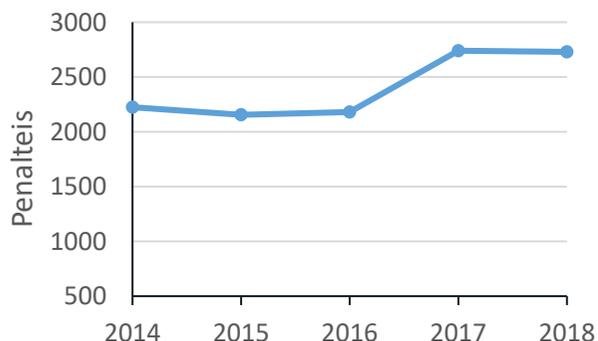
Coverage: England

Official Statistics

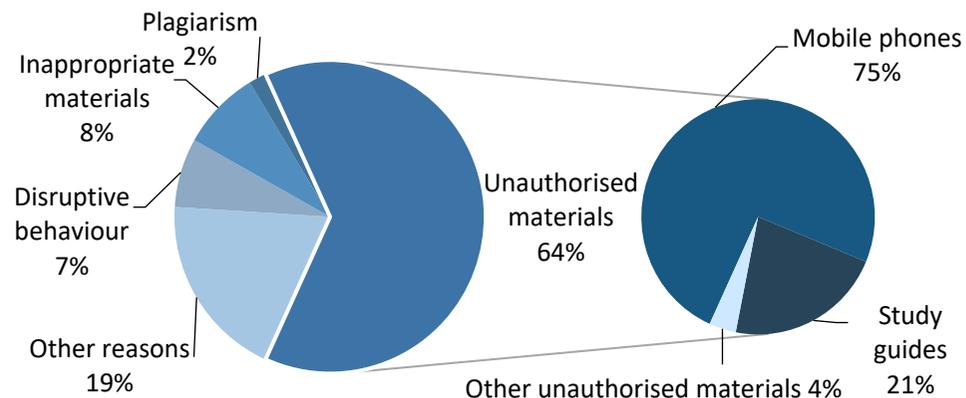
This release presents figures on penalties issued by exam boards for student, school or college staff, and school or college malpractice for GCSE, AS and A level examinations for the 2018 summer exam series in England.

Number of penalties issued to students remains stable

2,735 penalties were issued to students in 2018, similar to the number of penalties in 2017 (2,740), and representing 0.02% of entries.

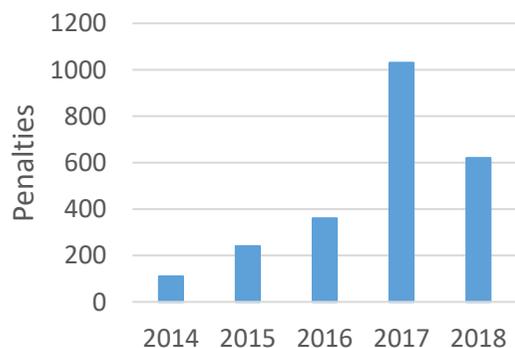


Mobile phone: main reason for student penalties

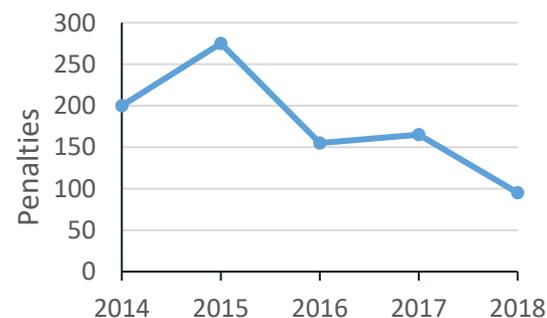


Number of penalties issued to school or college staff decreases

620 penalties were issued to staff, down from 1,030 in 2017. This involves a very small proportion of the total number of staff in England (nearly [350K](#)).



Number of penalties issued to schools or colleges decreases



95 penalties were issued to schools/colleges, down from 165 in 2017, involving just over 1% of centres.

At a glance

Page

Student malpractice

Malpractice penalties among students have remained stable since 2017. Introducing unauthorised materials into the examination room, particularly mobile phones, remains the main reason for penalties.

3

School or college staff malpractice

Staff malpractice penalties have decreased since 2017, having previously continued to increase since 2014. A very small number of teachers are involved.

5

School or college malpractice

Centre malpractice penalties have decreased since 2017. Centre malpractice affects a very small proportion of centres.

7

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Comments and feedback are welcome.

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Malpractice

In this statistical report, Ofqual presents data on malpractice for GCSE, AS, and A level exams during the summer 2018 exam series in England.

A breach of the regulations that might undermine the integrity of an exam may constitute malpractice. It includes attempts by students to communicate with each other during an exam, and failures by school or college staff to comply with exam board instructions.

We require exam boards to have procedures in place to prevent, investigate and act in relation to malpractice conducted by students, school or college staff or others involved in providing a qualification. The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) publishes [policies and guidance](#) on malpractice that set out procedures for dealing with suspected malpractice as well as definitions for the categories of malpractice listed within this release.

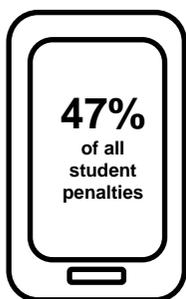
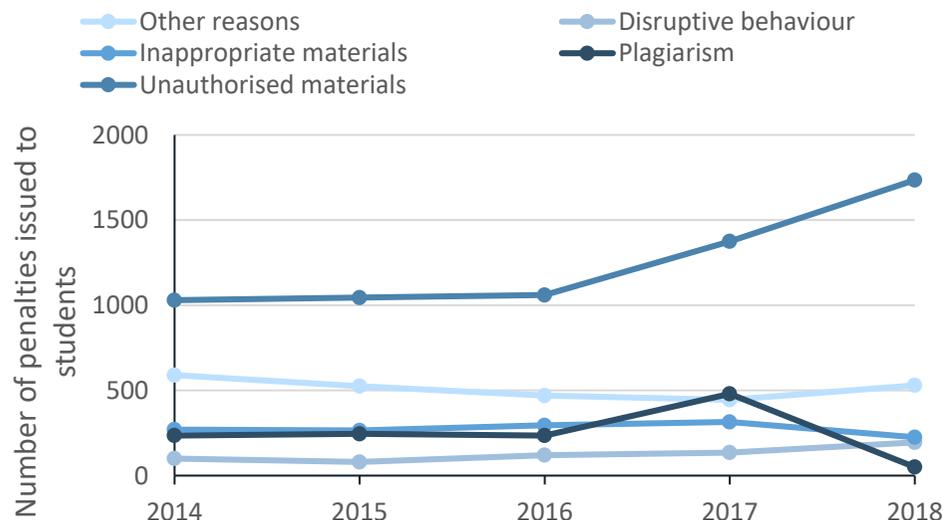
In this release, all figures are rounded to the nearest 5 to ensure confidentiality of data. Further information on this release is available in the [background information](#) as well as [data tables](#) accompanying this report.

Please note that the figures for summer 2017 published in this release are different from those published in the last release as some exam boards have recently submitted revised 2017 figures. This was to capture the cases that were still in process when the data was originally reported.

Student malpractice

Exam boards may impose sanctions and penalties on students found to have committed malpractice. The penalties for student malpractice vary depending on the type of offence. An individual student can be penalised more than once and by more than one exam board if they commit malpractice offences when sitting more than one assessment. A student may also receive one penalty for multiple offences.

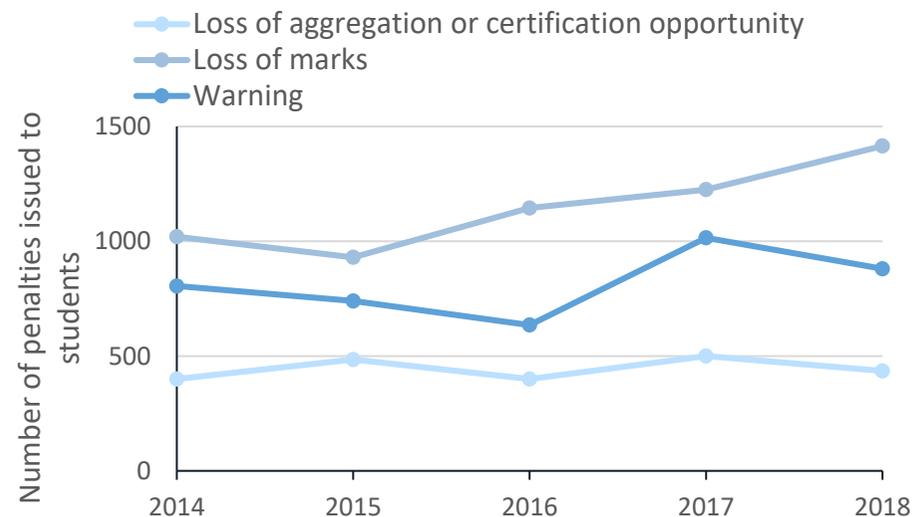
Categories of student malpractice



The most common type of malpractice reported in 2018 was the introduction of unauthorised materials into the exam room, which, in most cases, was a mobile phone or other electronic communications device. This has increased by 26% in 2018 compared to 2017. Mobile phones accounted for 47% of all student penalties (1,295 penalties in 2018, compared with 1,060 in 2017 – a 22% increase).

The largest decline in categories of malpractice was seen for plagiarism, which decreased by 90% compared with 2017. This may be due to a fall in the number of non-exam assessments in GCSE subjects, particularly computer science, compared to last year. Those boards with the largest entries in these subjects have seen the biggest declines in this category.

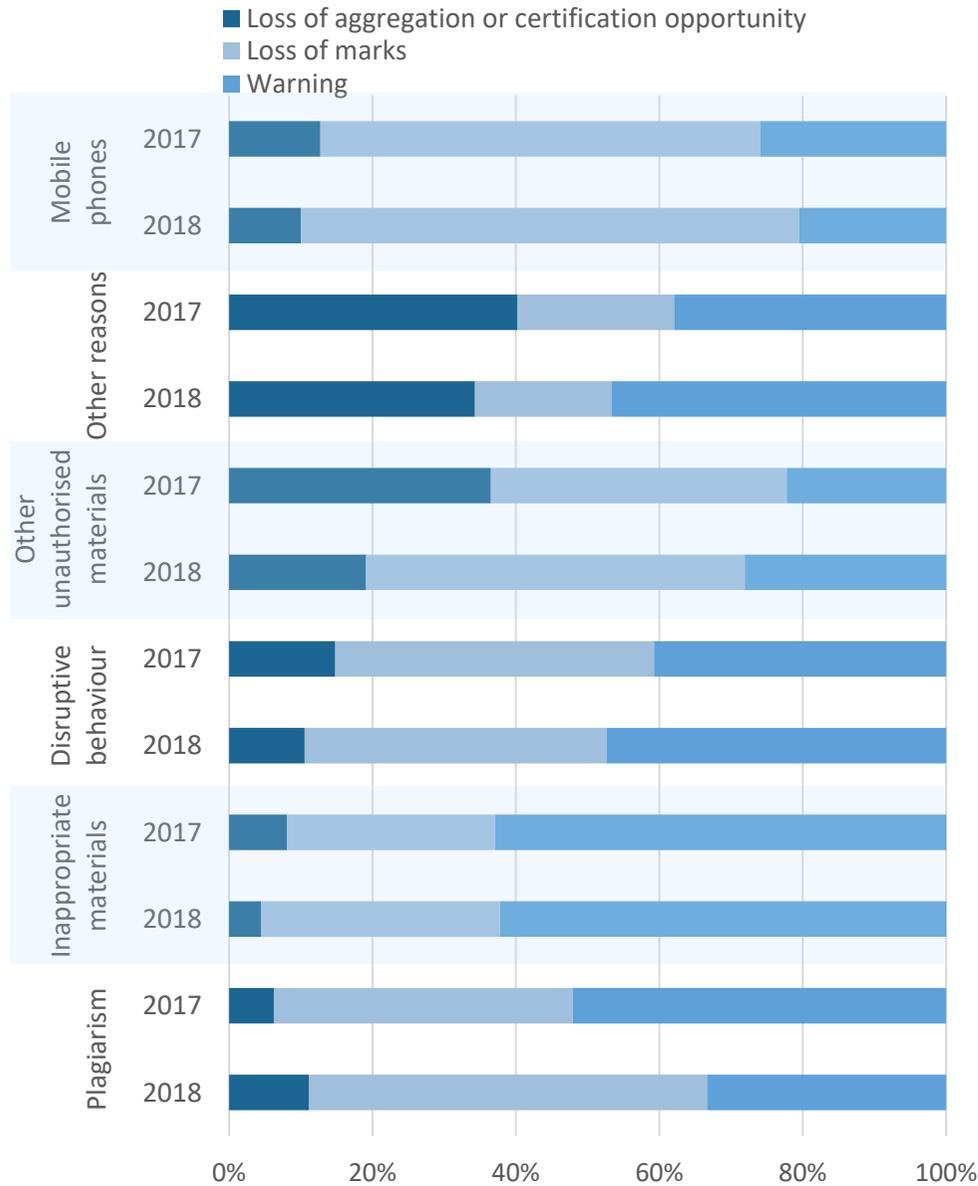
Types of penalty issued to students



The most common type of penalty issued in 2018 was a loss of marks. This has increased by 16% compared with 2017 while two other types of penalties have gone down (see below). The total number of penalties has remained similar between the two years.

Penalty type	2017	2018	Change
Loss of marks	1,225	1,415	▲ 16%
Warning	1,015	885	▼ 13%
Loss of aggregation or certification opportunity	500	435	▼ 13%
Total	2,740	2,735	

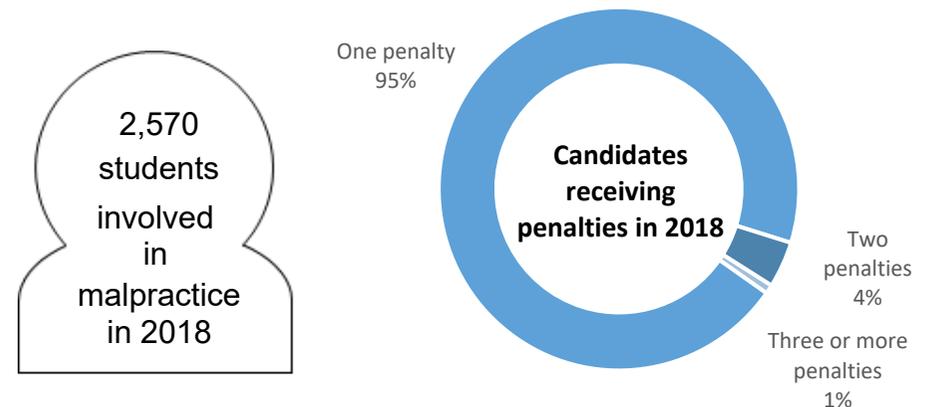
Types of penalty issued to students, by malpractice category



Penalties for student malpractice varied depending on the type of offence. A warning was the most common type of penalty where a student was found to have included inappropriate, offensive, or obscene material in scripts, coursework, or portfolios. Students found with mobile phones were more likely to lose marks. The trends in penalties for student malpractice were similar to last year for most types of penalty, with the exception of plagiarism which showed a decrease in the proportion of candidates issued with warnings. The categories presented here are very broad, and each case is judged upon its individual circumstances.

Student penalties

In 2018, a total of 2,570 individual students were issued with penalties for malpractice compared to 2,610 in 2017. Individual students can receive multiple penalties for multiple offences. In 2018, the majority of penalised students (95%) received one penalty, similar to 2017. There were a small number of students who committed more than one offence and received a penalty for each of these offences.



Staff malpractice

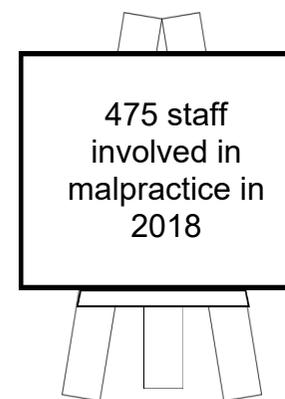
Exam boards may impose penalties for malpractice committed by an individual member of staff at a school or college, for example a teacher or an invigilator. More than one penalty can be imposed for a single offence.

Categories of staff malpractice



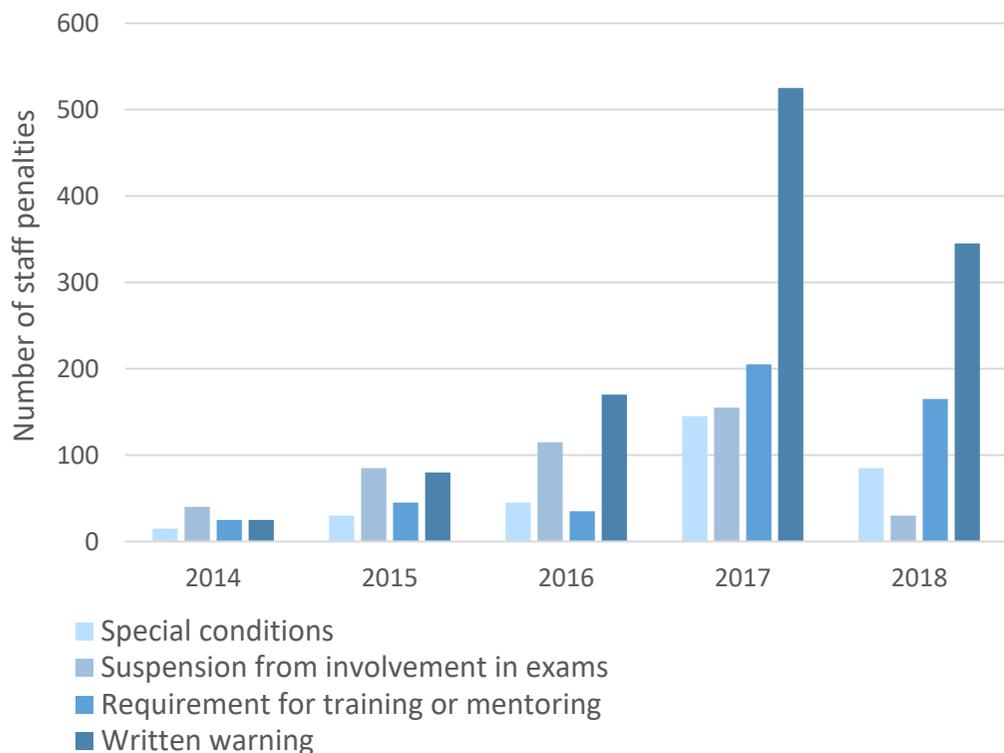
620 penalties were issued to 475 members of centre staff (from 325 centres) in 2018 (compared to 1,030 penalties issued to 825 members of staff at 520 centres in 2017), a decrease of 40% in the number of penalties. Decreases in offences were seen across all categories.

The largest proportion of offences were for maladministration (the failure to adhere to the regulations of non-examination assessments). Improper assistance to candidates remains the second most common offence. Instances of deception fell to less than 5 in 2018, compared to 25 in 2017, and no cases of failure to co-operate with an investigation were recorded this year.



Staff malpractice

Types of penalty issued to staff



Penalties issued to staff have gone down this year for all types of penalties (see the table below). Written warnings continue to be the most common penalty issued to staff, despite a 34% reduction compared to 2017.

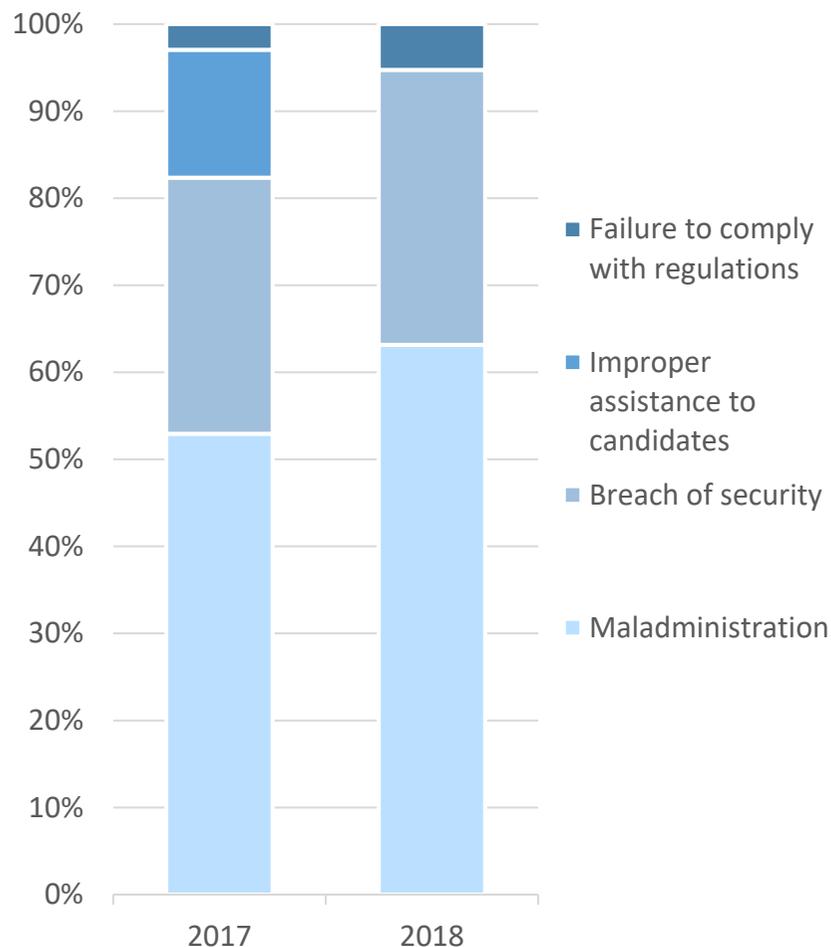
Cases of members of centre staff being suspended from involvement in exams have decreased by 82%, falling to 30 cases in 2018 compared to 155 in 2017.

Penalty Type	2017	2018	Change
Written warning	525	345	▼ 34%
Requirement for training or mentoring	205	165	▼ 20%
Special conditions	145	85	▼ 44%
Suspension from involvement in exams	155	30	▼ 82%
Total	1,030	620	▼ 40%

School or college malpractice

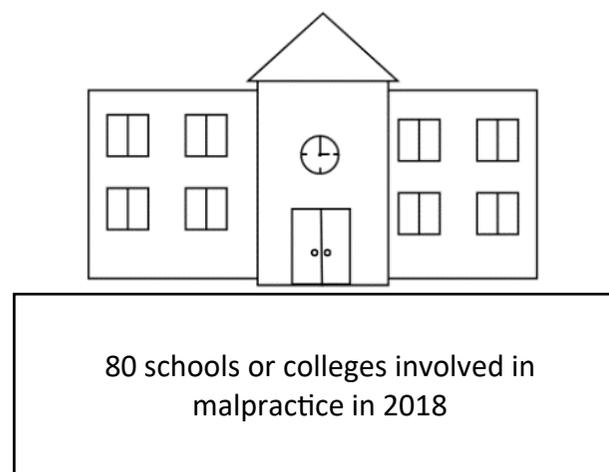
Where there is evidence that malpractice is the result of a serious management failure, an exam board may apply sanctions against a whole department or a school or college.

Categories of school or college malpractice



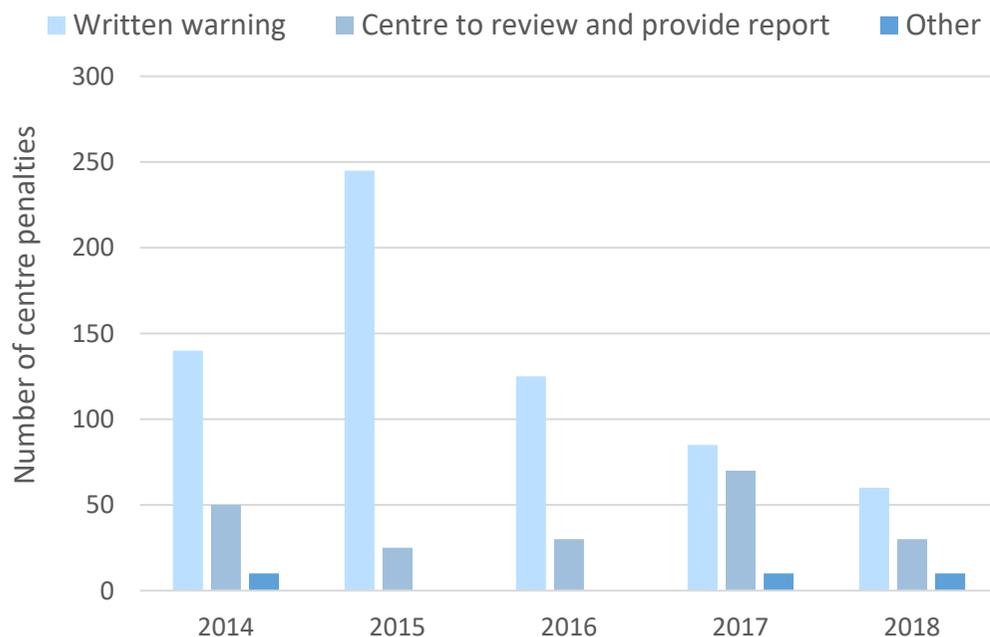
95 penalties were issued across 80 centres in 2018 compared to 165 penalties across 145 centres in 2017. Decreases in malpractice offences were seen across almost all categories. As these represent such a small proportion of the total number of centres (nearly 6,000), it is difficult to draw firm conclusions regarding any reasons for these changes.

The largest proportion of offences in 2018 were for maladministration, followed by breaches of security. There were fewer than 5 instances of improper assistance to candidates in 2018 compared to 25 in 2017.



School or college malpractice

Types of penalties issued

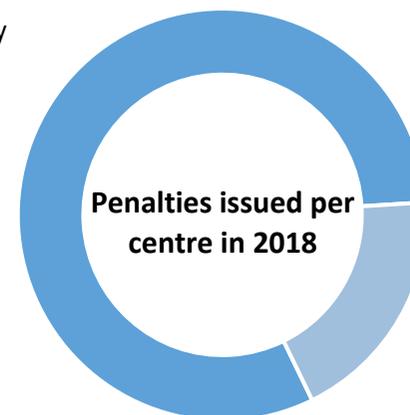


Penalties issued to centres have gone down this year in all categories (see the table below). Written warnings continue to be the most common penalty issued to centres, despite a 32% reduction compared to 2017.

The majority of penalised centres only received a single penalty, and the number of penalties received by any one school or college was never greater than two.

Penalty type	2017	2018	Change
Written warning	85	60	▼ 32%
Centre to review and provide report	70	25	▼ 60%
Other	10	10	▼ 25%
Total	165	95	▼ 43%

One penalty
81%



Two penalties
19%



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