

Call for evidence

Teachers' involvement in developing exam papers



Disclosure of confidential information about the content of an exam before it is taken is a form of malpractice that damages public confidence and, if not found and dealt with, can be unfair for students.

[Our rules](#) require awarding organisations to take all reasonable steps to prevent such disclosure and secure the confidentiality of exam papers and other confidential assessment materials. An awarding organisation must investigate any suspected or alleged breach of confidentiality and take appropriate action against those responsible. It must also take all reasonable steps to prevent such incidents recurring. We have published [guidance to support awarding organisations](#) as they decide how to comply with these rules.

While we expect any conflicts of interest to be well managed, our rules do not prohibit awarding organisations engaging active teachers from writing and reviewing individual exam questions or whole papers.

We are now [inviting evidence](#) from pupils, teachers and other interested parties to inform our review of:

- the balance of the benefits and risks of current practice, whereby some question writers and exam paper reviewers are also teachers; and
- whether the current safeguards associated with this practice are sufficient or could be strengthened.

Please to respond to this [call for evidence](#) by: **5pm on 31st October 2017.**

Background

Awarding organisations contract with people who have relevant subject and assessment expertise to write individual questions or whole exam papers. Many will be teaching the subject. Teachers are also engaged to review questions or papers written by others.

Despite the safeguards in place, we hear of a very small number of allegations or suspicions that teachers who have contributed to exam paper development have disclosed confidential information to their students or their colleagues. These may be reported by a student, teacher or parent, or identified by an awarding organisation's monitoring. There might also be instances where confidential materials are disclosed which are not found or reported. Such allegations or suspicions are investigated by the relevant awarding organisation and in some cases evidence is found that substantiates them. Where it is identified that confidential material has been disclosed employers should determine what disciplinary action should be taken against the teacher. Where a teacher has been referred to the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL), on the grounds of serious misconduct, the NCTL will determine whether the case is serious enough to investigate and whether it may be appropriate for the teacher to be prohibited from teaching

Where an awarding organisation finds that confidential information about an exam has been disclosed to students, it will usually adjust the way in which the grades given to those students are calculated. Such adjustments are made so students are not advantaged or disadvantaged by their teacher's actions.

It is clearly unacceptable for anyone to disclose confidential exam information. During the summer 2017 exam period two cases were widely reported in the media of such disclosure to their students by teachers involved with developing exams.

There are significant advantages to involving practising teachers and trainers in the writing of question papers. They are uniquely placed to predict how students of differing abilities will respond to questions, supporting the appropriate targeting of papers. They are also a readily available source of expertise, so awarding organisations do not have to employ permanent in-house subject experts.

However, we are now reviewing the relative benefits and risks of teachers being involved with developing exams and the effectiveness of the safeguards that are used to prevent or reduce the risks of disclosure.

The nature of the evidence we are seeking

We are inviting [contributions to our review](#) from anyone who has relevant insights or experiences to share.

We particularly wish to hear from people who:

- have been involved in developing exam materials
- have taught alongside colleagues who had access to confidential assessment materials before the exams were taken
- were taught by teachers who knew, or said they knew, what was going to be included in specific exams

We would particularly like to hear your views on:

- the relative benefits and risks of teacher involvement in developing exams for qualifications they teach
- the effectiveness of the safeguards used to prevent disclosure
- the ability of a teacher who knows the content of an exam to disregard that when preparing their students for the same exam
- how current safeguards could be strengthened

We would also like to hear from you if you have insights into, or experiences from, other sectors and/or other countries that you believe would be relevant to our review

All information submitted in response to this call for evidence will be used only to inform our review. We will not investigate any specific complaints or allegations you raise.

If you want us to look into a specific incident you should provide us with details using our [normal complaints or whistle-blower procedures](#). You should be aware of our limited ability to investigate incidents that are not recent.

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We will provide the qualifications regulators in Northern Ireland and Wales – CCEA and Qualifications Wales – with a summary of the evidence we receive.