

2 March 2026

Dear Chief Executive/Managing Director,

I am writing as Chief Regulator of Qualifications to ask that you implement stronger measures to address the two matters of concern set out below.

England's qualifications, particularly GCSEs and A levels, continue to command high levels of public confidence and enjoy a global reputation for quality. This trust depends on the consistent, fair and secure administration of assessments, and on grades that accurately reflect each student's own level of achievement. These are, quite rightly, the expectations of students, parents, employers and all those who rely on qualifications.

I am grateful for the important contribution exam boards make to this through your work.

Where students breach the rules designed to protect the integrity of assessments, sanctions are necessarily severe. In 2025, penalties included 1,125 cases in which students lost the entirety of a GCSE or A level, and nearly 2,000 cases in which marks were deducted.

However, two issues pose a threat to the integrity of those assessments and therefore our qualifications system.

1. Incidence of mobile phones and other devices in exam halls

There has been a noticeable long-term rise in the number of students found to have breached rules on the conduct of examinations in centres. Over the past three years, almost half of the approximately 5,000 malpractice cases reported annually to Ofqual have involved students taking mobile phones or other communication devices into their exams. This not only raises the risk of cheating but also creates unnecessary distraction at a time when students should be fully focused on demonstrating their best performance. Even a low level of cases damages perceptions of fairness and is corrosive to public confidence in the system.

As you know, exam boards offering GCSEs and A Levels hold both individual and collective responsibility for ensuring that schools, colleges and other centres properly communicate and enforce exam security requirements. I must now ask you to strengthen your arrangements so that you can more effectively identify, control and reduce the incidence of this form of potential malpractice.

2. Misuse of artificial intelligence (AI) in non-exam assessment

The second concern relates to the use of artificial intelligence to cheat, particularly in non-examined assessment or coursework that requires extended writing.

Where coursework exists, it is intended to contribute to the learning of students as well as being a method of assessment. The use of AI in coursework deprives students of that intended learning experience, because the work is done by the AI rather than by the student. If use of AI is undisclosed, then the integrity of the qualification is damaged as marks no longer fully reflect the student's own work. Although the number of detected cases reported to Ofqual remains relatively low, there is significant concern among teachers, leaders and others about the real extent of AI misuse.

Exam boards are responsible for assuring the authenticity of student work submitted for assessment. I therefore ask you to take immediate steps to improve awareness of what constitutes misuse and to strengthen deterrence, detection and prevention measures. These measures should include, but not be limited to, a more rigorous approach to candidate and teacher authentication of work.

Protecting confidence

I ask that you write to me setting out the specific steps your organisation will take in response to my concerns, to protect confidence in high stakes qualifications.

In cases where malpractice, whether misuse of AI, taking devices into exams or any other form of potential cheating, is detected, I expect the sanctions you have at your disposal to be fully used to give a strong signal that malpractice will not be tolerated.

Where you intend to act collectively with other exam boards, please make this clear and outline the arrangements you will put in place to ensure effective coordination.

I would welcome these responses at the earliest opportunity but in any case by the end of March so that I can be assured that the necessary actions are being implemented without delay.

Yours sincerely,



Sir Ian Bauckham CBE

Chief Regulator