

Research for the Report of the Independent Commission on Examination Malpractice

The background

In early 2019, The Student Room was approached by JCQ - the Joint Council for Qualifications - to research exam malpractice among young people. To understand the scale of the problem of things such as mobile phone and social media use during exams, and to suggest possible solutions, JCQ launched a year-long inquiry led by Sir John Dunford, who was briefed to collect evidence and provide recommendations.

TSR Insight has access to The Student Room audience of 2.7 million registered users and 10 million monthly visitors, making it the largest online student community in the UK. The team at TSR Insight applied its considerable expertise and experience, helping reveal the authentic student voice on this important issue.

The meeting

A meeting was arranged between Sir John with Julie Vincent and Hope Dade from TSR Insight, and Pete Langley from The Student Room. Pete said:

“Sir John is highly respected in the sector as someone with considerable experience and a passion for improving educational provision. It was therefore a huge honour to work with him on this project.”

Hope Dade from TSR Insight explains.

“The meeting was very positive and really interesting. Sir John wanted to reach students and understand their views, which we were able to facilitate. We agreed on the scope of the project and that a comprehensive survey would be the primary way to gain a deeper understanding of the issues.”

Following the meeting, Julie Vincent, Insight Director at TSR Insight, provided a research proposal which was accepted, and the work commenced.

The survey

Hope explains the methodology used:

“The quantitative survey ran from January to February 2019. The population of interest was young people aged 16-19 across the UK, currently in education, from year 12 to the first year at university, also including those who have recently left education or were in a gap year. Respondents were required to have recently experienced exams or assessments relevant to JCQ, including GCSE, A’ Levels, and vocational qualifications.”

Because of its unique position with The Student Room Group, TSR Insight was able to recruit the right target audience, reaching them through emails and links featured in relevant The Student Room forums. This research allowed JCQ to access a broad range of students to hear their views. The researchers designed questions using simple, straightforward language and the survey was anonymous. Julie Vincent explains:

“Our approach allowed a geographically dispersed sample and as the subject matter was sensitive, respondents would feel able to be honest as their feedback was anonymous. In this way JCQ was able to understand what was really going on.”

The results

TSR Insight achieved a sample of over 1800. The survey contained four themes: teacher and staff behaviour, mobile phones and social media use, misuse of access arrangements, and standard forms of malpractice including plagiarism. There were 37 questions asked in total and the results of the survey formed a core part of the final report, providing direction and a solid base of insight from young people. The final results provided JCQ with an authentic insight into young people's perceptions of malpractice.

Working together

TSR Insight is in a unique position to talk to members of The Student Room community and to uncover their honest opinions. Pete Langley, Study Help Product Director the Student Room, explains:

"It is essential for our young members to trust us, to feel safe to be themselves, to know we will look after them and their data responsibly. We are an ethical organisation, providing a valuable service for our online community of millions of students, we give them a place to express themselves honestly, to find the support they need as they navigate through their time in education."

The project was a great example of collaborative working, between TSR Insight, The Student Room and JCQ, as Julie explains:

"We really like to work in partnership with our clients and for them to be confident to recommend us. TSR Insight provides the authentic student voice through The Student Room community and on behalf of the commission we were able to dig deeply to provide insight into the reality of exam malpractice."

Sir John explains how TSR Insight's market research provided an important part of the report:

"The report of the Independent Commission on Exam Malpractice was strongly based on evidence. This was obtained from exam professionals and stakeholders, also from surveys of key groups. TSR Insight conducted a survey of 1800 young people and this was designed in collaboration with the Commission. TSR Insight were thoughtful and professional in their approach, and their research contributed valuable evidence and insight to the final report."

The published report

The finished piece of work: '**Report of the Independent Commission on Examination Malpractice**', was published by JCQ in September 2019 and it included TSR Insight's report in full in the appendices.

TSR Insight's important contribution was noted at the launch, with an audience that included senior leaders from Ofsted, Ofqual, teaching unions and other stakeholders.

The report is available to [download from here](#) and the BBC reported on the launch [here](#).

For further information about TSR Insight and the market research and insight solutions it offers, visit the website at www.tsrinsight.com.