

NCTJ Malpractice and maladministration policy

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1. Purpose

This policy ensures consistent handling of malpractice and maladministration cases related to NCTJ qualifications, end-point assessments, or services. It provides guidance for reporting, investigating, and addressing such issues.

2. Scope

The policy applies to:

- NCTJ staff and representatives: All staff and representatives involved in the development, delivery, and support of NCTJ qualifications and services.
- Learners: Individuals undertaking NCTJ qualifications, units, or end-point assessments.
- Centres: Organisations approved to deliver NCTJ qualifications and end-point assessments.

3. Definitions

Learners: Encompasses students, apprentices, or distance learners, at any stage of their journalism training.

Centres: Encompasses training providers, HEIs, FE colleges and commercial centres.

Malpractice: Actions that deliberately contravenes regulations and compromises assessment integrity, and/or the validity of certificates, and/or the reputation and credibility of the NCTJ. Malpractice may include a range of issues from such as cheating, falsifying records, or providing unauthorised assistance. It may also include circumstances where an individual has been negligent or reckless as to the consequences of their actions. Malpractice also covers misconduct and forms of unnecessary discrimination or bias towards individuals or groups of learners. See appendix 9.1 for examples of malpractice.

Maladministration: Non-compliance with administrative regulations and requirements within a centre. Maladministration covers poor processes, or negligence, without harmful intent. It may involve some degree of incompetence or ineptitude, or may result from carelessness or inexperience. See appendix 9.2 for examples of maladministration.

4. Policy Statements

4.1 Principles

Centres must prevent and address malpractice and maladministration effectively, following NCTJ guidance.

The NCTJ will review all reported cases promptly and ensure investigations are fair and thorough. The NCTJ will also take all reasonable steps to prevent any adverse effect from occurring as defined by our regulators.

Proven cases may lead to sanctions, invalidation of certificates, or other appropriate actions.

This policy is underpinned by the following principles:

Integrity: Protect the credibility of assessments and qualifications.

Fairness: Investigate cases impartially and with due process.

Transparency: Maintain clear communication during investigations.

Prevention: Support centres in avoiding issues through training and guidance.

4.2 Roles and responsibilities

NCTJ centres: Prevent malpractice/maladministration, report issues, and cooperate with investigations. A centre's compliance with this policy and how it takes reasonable steps to prevent and/or investigate instances of malpractice and maladministration will be reviewed by the NCTJ periodically through our ongoing centre monitoring arrangements.

Learners: Comply with assessment rules and avoid misconduct.

NCTJ staff: Investigate cases, provide guidance, and enforce compliance.

Head of awarding: Oversees investigations and ensures adherence to policy.

5. Procedures

5.1 Reporting concerns

Anybody who identifies or is made aware of suspected or actual cases of malpractice or maladministration at any time **must immediately notify the NCTJ**.

Allegations must be submitted in writing with supporting evidence. All allegations must include (where possible):

- Centre's name, address and number
- Learner's name and NCTJ URN number
- Centre or NCTJ personnel's details (name, job role) if they are involved in the case
- Details of the NCTJ course/qualification/end-point assessment affected or nature of the service affected
- Nature of the suspected or actual malpractice/maladministration and associated dates
- Details and outcome of any initial investigation carried out by the centre or anybody else involved in the case, including any mitigating circumstances

In addition, we ask that the person making the allegation declares any personal interest they may have in the matter at the outset.

If a centre is conducting their own investigation into the incident, they must ensure that staff involved in the investigation are competent and have no personal interest in the outcome of the investigation. Centres **must immediately inform the NCTJ** of any suspected malpractice or maladministration related to NCTJ qualifications, assessments, or services. This ensures all investigations are thorough and meet regulatory requirements.

A failure to report suspected or actual malpractice/maladministration cases, or have in place effective arrangements to prevent such cases, may lead to sanctions being imposed on your centre (see the NCTJ's sanctions policy for details of the sanctions that may be imposed).

If a centre wishes to receive guidance/advice from the NCTJ on how to prevent, investigate, and deal with malpractice and maladministration, they should refer to our Malpractice and Maladministration Guidance for Centres which is available on our website. If you require further support, then please contact us (see section 8) and we will happily provide you with additional advice and/or guidance.

If an investigation is undertaken, the NCTJ will inform the head of the centre involved. For learner malpractice, the centre may be asked to investigate alongside the NCTJ, while ensuring confidentiality for the person reporting the issue if required.

Those being investigated will be notified in writing via email, usually within seven working days of the investigation being opened and given the chance to provide evidence or respond to findings through statements, interviews, or relevant materials.

In accordance with the regulatory requirements and obligations imposed on the NCTJ by our regulators Ofqual, Qualifications Wales, CCEA and the Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA), the NCTJ will inform the appropriate regulatory authorities if we believe there has been a serious incident of malpractice or maladministration which could have an adverse effect.

In accordance with these same regulatory obligations, where we have cause to believe that an incident of malpractice or maladministration may affect a centre, awarding organisation or end-point assessment organisation undertaking any part of the delivery of an NCTJ qualification or end-point assessment, we will inform that centre, awarding organisation or end-point assessment organisation. If we do not know the details of organisations that might be affected we will ask the appropriate regulatory authority to help us identify relevant parties that should be informed.

If malpractice or maladministration is confirmed, the NCTJ may work with third parties to take appropriate action.

For proven malpractice involving disclosure of confidential assessment information by a centre, the Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA) or equivalent may be notified. In considering whether or not such a referral is appropriate, the NCTJ will consider whether:

- Whether the staff member involved is regulated by the TRA or other teaching regulator
- The seriousness of the incident and the sanction imposed by the NCTJ

If the person responsible is not regulated by the TRA, other relevant professional regulators may be informed.

5.2 Investigation process

All cases are reviewed by the head of awarding.

The NCTJ will acknowledge receipt of an allegation within two working days.

We aim to action and resolve all stages of the investigation within **20 working days** of receipt of the allegation. If interviews are required as part of the investigation we will aim to action and resolve all stages of the investigation within **20 working days** of the date of the interview. Please note that in some cases the investigation may take longer, for example if a centre visit is required. In such instances, we'll advise all parties concerned of the likely revised timescale.

All investigations are conducted fairly, reasonably, and legally, ensuring unbiased consideration of all relevant evidence. The main objectives are to:

- Establish the facts and identify any irregularities.

- Determine the cause and those involved.
- Assess the scale of the issue.
- Review any actions already taken by the centre.
- Decide if further steps are needed to protect learners and maintain the integrity of qualifications or assessments.
- Determine if action is needed for previously issued results or certificates.
- Collect clear evidence to support any necessary sanctions, in accordance with our sanctions policy.
- Identify any patterns or trends to prevent future issues.

The investigation will involve gathering evidence from relevant parties, which may include interviews. The NCTJ will:

- Securely store all materials collected during the investigation.
- Retain records and documentation leading to sanctions for at least five years.
- Keep records of cases involving invalid certificates or legal actions until all appeals are resolved, plus an additional five years.
- Require full cooperation from all parties involved in the investigation.

If interviews are required during the investigation these will be conducted by the head of awarding, supported by a senior NCTJ manager or board member/chief examiner. If the head of awarding is unavailable or under investigation, another qualified senior manager will lead. Interviewees may bring someone for support, but this person cannot actively participate or answer questions on their behalf. Interviews can be held in person or remotely via Zoom.

If a visit to a centre is needed, the NCTJ will arrange a date and time in writing. Visits will be led by the head of awarding, or a qualified senior manager if they are unavailable or under investigation.

The NCTJ will not cover fees for legal advisors accompanying interviewees.

The NCTJ may impose sanctions on learners or centres at any stage of a suspected or confirmed malpractice or maladministration case, as outlined in the NCTJ sanctions policy, to safeguard learners and the integrity of qualifications or assessments.

The NCTJ may also withhold individual or group results for courses, qualifications, apprenticeships, or assessments during the investigation. If a case is complex or lacks cooperation from those involved, the NCTJ may consult regulatory authorities to determine the next steps.

If an NCTJ staff member is under investigation, they may be suspended or reassigned until the matter is resolved.

5.3 Investigation outcome

After an investigation, the NCTJ will prepare a written report. Where appropriate, the report may be sent to the relevant parties involved in the investigation to check the factual accuracy, with agreed amendments made as needed. The report will:

- Identify any breaches
- Confirm the facts of the case
- Determine responsibility for the breach (if any)
- Recommend appropriate remedial actions

Upon completion of the investigation, a final letter or email will be shared with relevant parties. The full report will be made available to the relevant parties on request, and will be made available to the regulatory authorities and other external agencies, as required. However, the NCTJ may choose not to share the report with third parties, such as learners affected by centre malpractice/maladministration but not under investigation. In all circumstances, third parties affected by the investigation will be notified of the investigation progress and outcome.

If an independent third party reported the case, they will be informed of the outcome, typically within 10 working days, though some details may be withheld to protect confidentiality or legal obligations.

For internal investigations involving staff, the report will be reviewed by the chief executive and relevant managers, and appropriate disciplinary procedures will be implemented.

If the investigation confirms that malpractice or maladministration has or is likely to have taken place, the NCTJ will take appropriate action to:

- Protect the integrity of certification now and in the future
- Maintain public confidence in NCTJ qualifications and assessments
- Discourage others from carrying out similar instances of malpractice or maladministration
- Prevent recurrence of the issue

- Ensure there has been no gain from compromising our standards.

Actions will be proportionate to the severity of the issue and may include:

- Requiring a centre to address the issue by set deadlines and prevent recurrence
- Imposing sanctions on centres or learners, communicated with rationale under the NCTJ sanctions policy
- Invalidating certificates, notifying affected parties and regulatory authorities, and ensuring they are withdrawn and records amended. The NCTJ will also ask the centre to inform affected learners of the action we are taking and that their original certificates are invalid and ask the centre – where possible – to return the invalid certificates to the NCTJ.
- Adjusting qualification or assessment processes to prevent future issues
- Informing relevant third parties, such as regulators or other organisations, of findings in case they need to take relevant action in relation to the centre or learner (s)

In proven cases involving centres, the NCTJ may charge fees for re-sits, reissuing certificates, or additional visits, based on current fees at the time of the investigation.

The head of awarding will document any lessons learned and share them internally to prevent future incidents of malpractice or maladministration.

5.4 Appeals

Relevant parties unhappy with the investigation outcome can appeal through the NCTJ appeals process.

The person submitting the appeal should do so under stage 1, section B of the NCTJ's appeals policy, available on our website. The appeal must be submitted in writing **within two weeks** of being informed of the outcome of the investigation. If a centre appeals on a learner's behalf, they must have the learner's written consent.

5.5 Remote exams

Remote exams are available to national learners and apprentices, and to individual learners on accredited courses on a case-by-case basis only, if they are unable to travel to sit their exams at their centre.

Remote exams on the NCTJ's Cirrus platform are proctored using Proctorio, while non-Cirrus exams are invigilated remotely via Zoom and a centre invigilator.

The NCTJ assessment team reviews any suspicious activity flagged by Proctorio or Zoom recordings. Suspected malpractice is escalated to the head of awarding for further review to determine if an investigation is needed.

If an investigation is required, the head of awarding will conduct in line with the requirements detailed in this policy.

Learners will be offered the opportunity to view any evidence held in Cirrus/Proctorio/Zoom and to discuss this evidence with the NCTJ, even in cases where a learner interview is not required, in the interests of transparency and fairness. Proctorio footage will not be shared to protect assessment security and NCTJ copyright.

Learners found to have breached remote exam procedures will be immediately disqualified from the assessment, even without suspected malpractice. Appeals against disqualification can be made under Section B of the NCTJ's appeals policy.

5.6 Protecting your identity

If you report malpractice or maladministration, you can request to remain anonymous. While we prefer that you provide your identity and contact details, we will respect requests for confidentiality.

Anonymous reports will be investigated, but we will try to confirm the allegations through a separate investigation before addressing them with those involved. Each report will be handled sensitively, and we will determine an appropriate response.

- We will try to keep your identity confidential if you request it, but we cannot guarantee this. Your identity may need to be shared with:
 - The police or law enforcement agencies to investigate or prevent crime.
 - The courts if required for legal proceedings.
 - Others third parties, such as Ofqual, if legally necessary or relevant to the investigation.
- Investigators will inform you if your identity must be disclosed.
- A whistleblower should be aware that others might figure out their identity based on the nature or details of the disclosure, even if their identity is not directly revealed.

For more information, refer to the NCTJ whistleblowing policy.

6. Regulatory references

UK regulators require all awarding organisations to establish and maintain their compliance with regulatory conditions and criteria. As part of this process, policies that relate to NCTJ's status as an awarding organisation will reference any conditions and criteria that they address.

This policy addresses the following regulatory criteria and conditions:

Regulator	Regulatory document	Conditions of Recognition
Ofqual	General Conditions of Recognition	A8, C2, D3, D4
CCEA	General Conditions of Recognition	A8, C2, D3, D4
Qualifications Wales	Standard Conditions of Recognition	A8, C2, D3, D4

7. Review arrangements

The NCTJ will review this policy annually as part of the NCTJ's annual self-evaluation arrangements and revise it as and when necessary, in response to customer, learner or regulatory feedback.

If you would like to feedback any views, please contact us via the details provided at the end of this policy.

This policy will be reviewed in September 2025.

8. Contact us

Any queries in relation to the contents of this policy, please contact our head of awarding.

Telephone: 01799 544014

Email: exams@nctj.com

9. Appendices

9.1 Examples of malpractice

Two of the clearest examples of potential malpractice are:

- cheating, or facilitating cheating, in an assessment
- attempting intentionally to manipulate a result so that it does not reflect the learner's actual performance in an assessment

Such action may be taken by the learner themselves, a tutor, a member of centre staff, an exams officer, or any other individual involved in, or with access to, the assessment process. More specific examples of potential malpractice include:

- collusion or permitting collusion in exams/assessments
- plagiarism by learners or centre staff
- copying or paraphrasing sections of Artificial Intelligence (AI) generated content so that the work is no longer the learner's own
- copying from another learner (including using electronic equipment to do so)
- impersonation i.e. assuming the identity of another learner or having someone assume a learner's identity during an assessment
- a learner breaching the rules of the assessment, for example by unauthorised use of inappropriate materials, equipment or technology in assessment settings, such as a mobile phone or the use of generative AI
- failing to reference the source of materials used in the creation of assessments, including where AI tools may have been used
- deliberate contravention by a centre or its learners of the assessment rules and arrangements we specify for our qualifications and end-point assessments
- a breach of confidentiality in assessment materials by centre tutors involved in the development of our exams
- a loss, theft of, or a breach of confidentiality in any assessment materials, including selling assessment materials for monetary gain
- claiming to have and/or offering to share confidential assessment materials and/or presenting hoax materials as confidential assessment materials
- unauthorised amendment, copying or distributing of assessment materials
- centre staff providing a learner with answers, or providing assistance to learners beyond what is permitted
- a learner or centre staff member falsifying a result

- deliberate submission of false information to gain a qualification, unit or end-point assessment, or the creation of false records
- creation or use of a fraudulent certificate by a learner or a fraudulent claim for certificates
- selling certificates for monetary gain
- deliberate misuse of our logo and trademarks or misrepresentation of a centre's relationship with the NCTJ and/or its recognition and approval status with the NCTJ
- deliberate failure by centre staff to carry out internal assessment, internal moderation or internal verification in accordance with our requirements
- denial of access to premises, records, information, learners and staff to any authorised NCTJ representative and/or the regulatory authorities
- deliberate failure to adhere to our learner registration and certification procedures
- deliberate failure to continually adhere to the our centre recognition, apprenticeship delivery and/or qualification approval requirements or actions assigned to a centre
- deliberate failure to maintain appropriate auditable records e.g. certification claims and/or forgery of evidence
- intentional withholding of information from the NCTJ which is required to maintain the rigour of quality assurance and standards of qualifications/end-point assessments
- deliberate failure to adhere to, or an attempt to circumnavigate, the requirements of our reasonable adjustments and special considerations policy
- persistent instances of maladministration within the centre
- presenting or using false identification to register on an NCTJ course, or to sit an NCTJ exam/assessment
- extortion
- fraud
- unreasonable behaviour for any reason, including bullying, harassment, abusive and threatening behaviour
- unauthorised people entering or being present in a learner's environment during remote exams

- navigating away from the exam page and accessing unauthorised materials online during remote exams e.g. websites, or documents in Microsoft Word, Excel, or similar
- suspicious head and eye movements during remote exams which may be indicative of learner malpractice
- learners leaving their desk during a remote exam where this is not permitted in the exam rules and procedures

Please note that the above examples are not exhaustive and are intended as guidance on our definition of malpractice.

9.2 Examples of maladministration

General examples of maladministration include:

- avoidable delay
- mistakes arising from inattention
- faulty procedures
- failure to follow correct procedures
- poor record keeping
- inadvertent failure to take action
- poor communication
- inadvertently giving misleading or inaccurate information

More specific examples of potential maladministration include:

- failure to adhere to our learner registration and certification procedures
- failure to adhere to our centre recognition, apprenticeship delivery and/or qualification/end-point assessment requirements and/or associated actions assigned to a centre
- late learner registrations
- unreasonable delays in responding to requests and/or communications from the NCTJ
- inaccurate claims for certificates
- failure to maintain appropriate auditable records, e.g. certification claims

- failure to adhere to our procedures and requirements for exams/assessments (either for remote or in-centre exams)
- omitting or withholding information from the NCTJ which is required to assure the NCTJ of the centre's ability to deliver qualifications or end-point assessments appropriately
- misuse of our logo and trademarks or misrepresentation of a centre's relationship with the NCTJ and/or its recognition and approval status with the NCTJ
- failure to adhere to the requirements of our reasonable adjustments and special considerations policy
- taking screen shots or copies of NCTJ exam papers, online exam questions, and/or online exam section information

Please note that the above examples are not exhaustive and are intended as guidance on our definition of maladministration.