

NCTJ Sanctions policy

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1. Purpose

The NCTJ imposes sanctions and penalties to learners or centres involved in malpractice, maladministration, or non-compliance to:

- Safeguard the integrity of NCTJ examinations and assessments.
- Maintain public confidence in the qualifications awarded.
- Protect learners from adverse effects due to malpractice.

This policy document should be read in conjunction with the NCTJ malpractice and maladministration policy.

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- Learners taking NCTJ examinations or assessments remotely or in centre.
- Centres and their staff involved in administering NCTJ qualifications.
- Instances arising from complaints, monitoring visits, or regulatory reviews.

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.
- 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
- Sanctions: Penalties imposed on individuals or centres to address misconduct or breaches.

4. Policy statements

4.1 Principles

The NCTJ applies sanctions based on the severity of the offence and mitigating circumstances.

Sanctions are applied flexibly to ensure fair and proportionate outcomes.

Sanctions may be imposed on receipt of an allegation, prior to the instigation of the investigation.

Serious cases of malpractice are reported to Ofqual, which may notify other awarding organisations.

4.2 Roles and responsibilities

- NCTJ: Investigates incidents, determines sanctions, and communicates outcomes. The NCTJ will take all reasonable steps to ensure learners and centres are aware of the relevant policies and procedures, and the potential consequences of any malpractice/ maladministration.
- Centres: Adhere to NCTJ regulations and ensure the integrity of exams and assessments.
- Learners: Comply with examination and assessment procedures.

5. Procedures

5.1 Sanctions for learners taking remote or in centre exams

Level	Example	Possible sanctions (this is not exhaustive)
1 – Minor non-compliance with procedures or regulations with no direct or immediate threat to the integrity of an NCTJ examination.	• Failure to provide the required ID at an exam • Insufficient room or desk scan • Minor disruption lasting a short time; calling out, causing noise, turning around • Isolated incidents of speaking out loud during the examination	• Written warning • Exclusion from the exam due to be sat
2 – A breach of procedures or regulations, or malpractice or maladministration which, if left unchecked, could result in a threat to NCTJ examinations, assessments or the integrity of NCTJ qualifications.	• No attempt to carry out room scan • Plagiarism detected including the use of generative AI • Introduction of unauthorised material to the exam room e.g. prepared notes or use of internet/email where this is prohibited in the exam • Unauthorised use of a mobile phone or possession of any other electronic device during an exam	• Disqualification from the exam • Ban from sitting exams remotely • A ban on sitting future exams in that unit for up to 12 months or longer • A centre financial penalty, in instances of repeated learner malpractice at one centre

Level	Example	Possible sanctions (this is not exhaustive)
	• Beginning the exam before the specified start time • Failing to stop when the exam concludes	
3 – A serious or repeated breach of procedures or regulations, or serious malpractice or maladministration which has jeopardised the integrity of NCTJ examinations, assessments or integrity of NCTJ qualifications.	• Plagiarism detected including use of generative AI • Forgery/Collusion • Unauthorised use of a mobile phone or possession of any other electronic device during an exam • Removal of an exam script from the examination before submission • Evidence of an exam script being tampered with • Bribery	• Disqualification from the exam • A ban on sitting future exams in that unit for up to 12 months or longer • Ban from sitting exams remotely • A ban on sitting all NCTJ exams for up to 12 months or longer • Disqualification from the qualification as a whole (suspension/withdrawal of certification/revoke previous results) • Disqualification from taking any NCTJ qualification in the future • A centre financial penalty, in instances of repeated learner malpractice at one centre

5.2 Sanctions for learners taking other forms of assessment

Level	Example	Possible sanctions (this is not exhaustive)
1 – Minor non-compliance with procedures or regulations with no direct or immediate threat to the integrity of an NCTJ assessment or qualification.	• Isolated incidents of speaking out loud during an assessment • In coursework, collaborative work is apparent in a few areas, but possibly due to tutor advice; learner unaware of the regulations	• Written warning • Exclusion from the assessment due to be sat
2 – A breach of procedures or regulations, or malpractice or maladministration which, if left unchecked, could result in a threat to NCTJ assessments or the integrity of NCTJ qualifications.	• Plagiarism detected including use of generative AI /poor referencing in place • Introduction of unauthorised material to the assessment e.g. prepared notes or use of internet/email where this is prohibited in the assessment • Possession of a mobile phone or any other electronic device during an assessment	• Disqualification from the assessment • A ban on sitting future assessments or submitting further coursework in that unit for up to 12 months or longer • A centre financial penalty, in instances of repeated learner malpractice at one centre
3 – A serious or repeated breach of procedures or regulations, or serious malpractice or maladministration which has jeopardised the integrity of NCTJ assessments or integrity of NCTJ qualifications.	• Plagiarism detected including use of AI • Copying from another learner's script, controlled assessment, coursework, non-examination assessment; borrowing work to copy • Falsification/ forgery: making a false declaration of authenticity	• Disqualification from the assessment • A ban on sitting future assessments or submitting further coursework in that unit for up to 12 months or longer • A ban on sitting all future assessments or submitting further coursework for up to 12 months or longer

Level	Example	Possible sanctions (this is not exhaustive)
	• Collusion: learners' work reflects extensive similarities and identical passages; due to a deliberate attempt to share work • Bribery	• Disqualification from the qualification as a whole (suspension/withdrawal of certification) • Disqualification from taking any NCTJ qualification in the future • A centre financial penalty, in instances of repeated learner malpractice at one centre

5.3 Sanctions for centres and centre staff

Band	Example	Possible sanctions (this is not exhaustive)
1 – Minor non-compliance with procedures or regulations, or maladministration with no direct or immediate threat to the integrity of an examination, assessment or qualification.	• Failure to hold the exam at the notified address • Allowing unauthorised persons to be present in the exam room • Failure to check learner ID • Failure to provide a clock in the exam room	• Additional spot check at the expense of the centre • Written warning • Financial penalty • Action plan
2 – A breach of procedures or regulations, or malpractice or maladministration, which if left unchecked, could result in a threat to examinations, assessments or integrity of NCTJ qualifications.	• Failure to adhere to NCTJ invigilation notes and carry out the required duties as stated • Failure to adhere to NCTJ conditions of exams e.g. not issuing and explaining procedures to learners, allowing multiple learners to be absent from the exam room at any one time, failing to complete appropriate exam documentation correctly • Failure to preserve the integrity of NCTJ exam papers	• Additional spot checks at the expense of the centre • Written warning and appropriate sanctions on centre staff • Action plan • Deployment of independent invigilators • Restrictions on examination or assessment material • Suspension of examination and assessment at the centre for a specified period • Financial penalty

Band	Example	Possible sanctions (this is not exhaustive)
3 – A serious or repeated breach of procedures or regulations, or serious malpractice or maladministration, resulting in a loss of confidence in the centre in administering NCTJ examinations, assessments or qualifications.	• Continuous failure to preserve the integrity of NCTJ assessment or examination material • Failure to co-operate with awarding body requests e.g. to investigate suspected malpractice or maladministration • Failure to implement applied sanctions • Forgery • Bribery	• Additional spot checks at the expense of the centre • Written warning and appropriate sanctions on centre staff • Action plan • Suspension of learner enrolments • Suspension/withdrawal of centre approval or accreditation • Financial penalty

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
CCEA	General Conditions of Recognition	A8, C2
Qualifications Wales	Standard Conditions of Recognition	A8, C2

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 2026.

8. Contact us

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

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