Guidance for centres - Suspected malpractice/ maladministration

Contents

1. Introduction 1
2. Definitions 1
3. Centre responsibilities 2
4. Areas centres need to be aware of 2
5. Reporting concerns 4
6. Reducing the risk of malpractice/maladministration 5
7. Review arrangements 5
8. Contact us 5
9. Appendices 6
   9.1 Examples of malpractice 6
   9.2 Examples of maladministration 8

1. Introduction

This document has been provided by the NCTJ to help illustrate a possible approach to creating a policy to address suspected or actual malpractice and maladministration at your centre. It is not intended to be prescriptive, fully inclusive, nor indicate that this is the only approach acceptable to the NCTJ; nor is it intended to imply that using it will guarantee compliance with the NCTJ requirements.

Each centre is responsible for implementing appropriate internal controls and audit trails. While this document suggests methods for certain activities, its use alone does not confirm compliance. Centres can adapt its contents to assist them with the delivery of NCTJ qualifications and end-point assessments and/or tailor it to reflect internal procedures and operational needs.

The NCTJ's malpractice and maladministration policy is available on our website.

2. 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.

3. Centre responsibilities

Your malpractice/maladministration policy should ensure that all staff and learners understand their responsibility to report any suspected or actual malpractice or maladministration to the appropriate person.

The policy must identify a designated contact responsible for managing and investigating such cases, contingency arrangement should this person be involved, either directly or indirectly, in any such case of malpractice/maladministration.

Your centre must maintain accurate records, including an audit trail of registrations, assessments, verifications, certifications, and evidence related to reported or detected cases.

Examples of such evidence may include

- Attendance records, exam scripts, coursework submissions, exam results etc.
- Any other appropriate documentation and/or correspondence
- Meeting notes
- Witness statements
- Statements from those allegedly involved
- Copies of work suspected of plagiarism

The NCTJ expects centres to ensure the high-quality delivery of NCTJ qualifications and end-point assessments in accordance with NCTJ policies and procedures.

4. Areas centres need to be aware of

Internal Administration

All documentation must be accurate, complete, and submitted on time. Staff must understand and follow all NCTJ policies and procedures for qualifications and assessments. Non-compliance can lead to investigations for maladministration and possible sanctions on the centre or training provider.

Plagiarism

Often learners are asked to work collaboratively, and guidance should be provided about what is or is not acceptable in such circumstances to avoid potential malpractice/ maladministration. For example:

- Learners' work should demonstrate their understanding, produced in their own words unless they are quoting from a referenced source. If asked to explain what is meant by a certain phrase or paragraph, they should be able to do so.
- Learners should always acknowledge, by referencing, any words, ideas or concepts that were originally produced by another person that they have incorporated into their work.
- Although it is often considered good practice to share information, learners should not let other students see their coursework, portfolios or projects as it can lead to accusations of collusion, which in turn could mean that students lose marks or have a submission declared void.

Suggested that ways to reduce plagiarism include:

- Make sure that the learners know exactly what is required in their coursework, portfolio or project. Tutors can provide general guidance on the drafting and development of submissions, however 'detailed advice' on possible improvements is not permitted to ensure that the work remains the learner's own.
- Restricting access to online AI tools on centre devices and networks
- Learners are required to submit a declaration with work for assessment verifying that it is their own.
- Internal verification where a tutor is also expected to verify that the learner has produced authentic work. If a tutor is not confident that a piece of work is genuine and they cannot confirm authenticity, the learner will be awarded zero for the assessment. While tutors may confirm authenticity in good faith, awarding organisations and end-point assessment organisations may take action against a centre or training provider if there is consistent evidence that work carried out by learners is inauthentic. It is therefore essential that the tutor develops confidence in the authenticity of the learner's work prior to the assessment of the finished piece.

<u>Cheating</u>

The following are some known examples of cheating:

- Obtaining sample exams and incorporating answers into live assessments
- Getting someone else to do the work or take the assessment for them
- Copying sections of work in an assessment from notes, a mobile device, generative AI or another learner
- Copying and pasting from the internet
- Giving false information about a source used in coursework, portfolios or projects

Possible signals that may identify cheating:

- The writing style of a single submission, or a passage within a single submission, varies significantly. This may suggest the learner has obtained information from an unauthorised source in an assessment.
- Where a document contains a variety of different physical characteristics (such as changes in font styles and sizes, indentation and line spacing). This may indicate that the work is not the learner's own.
- It may look as if an introductory and/or concluding paragraph directly answers the question, while the main the body of the work is vague and unrelated.
- A default use of American spelling, currency, terms and other localisations
- A default use of language or vocabulary which might not appropriate to the qualification level
- Instances of incorrect/inconsistent use of first-person and third-person perspective where generated text is left unaltered
- A difference in the language style used when compared to that used by a student in the classroom or in other previously submitted work

Please note that the above examples are not exhaustive and are intended as guidance only.

5. 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.

Where a member of centre staff is under investigation you may wish to consider temporarily suspending them or moving them to other duties until the investigation is complete and your internal policy must include information on this course of action should it be necessary.

Where required, a full internal investigation should be carried out by the designated person responsible for dealing with incidents of this nature and the NCTJ kept informed of developments and the initial outcome. This person must have the appropriate competence to carry out the investigation and no personal interest in the outcome.

Your policy should include the fact that the NCTJ may request further information to conduct its own investigation into the reported event.

6. Reducing the risk of malpractice/maladministration

While it's impossible to eliminate the risk entirely, the NCTJ recommends the following steps to strengthen internal processes:

- Ensure staff are familiar with your policies, procedures, and receive regular training or briefings.
- Ensure staff understand and comply with all NCTJ policies and procedures.
- Staff have clear roles and responsibilities and understand what is expected of them.
- Implement and regularly review a documented internal quality assurance procedure.
- Inform learners about their responsibilities regarding malpractice and maladministration, and the consequences of any actions that may risk their potential achievement.
- For remote exams, provide learners with clear instructions on the specific procedures and consequences of breaches, as remote exams carry higher risks of malpractice.
- Accurately record all assessment and internal verification activities, aligning them with your internal quality assurance processes and NCTJ standards and policies.
- Review all registration, application, and certification records internally before submitting them to the NCTJ.

7. Review arrangements

The NCTJ will review this document 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 document will be reviewed in September 2027.

8. Contact us

Any queries in relation to the contents of this policy, please contact the NCTJ

Telephone: 01799 544014

Email: info@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.