Assessment Malpractice SOP

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Summary of Contents
The purpose of the procedure is to define and outline the procedures to manage malpractice in assessment.

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1.0 Change History

Changes to this SOP are documented in Appendix 1 of this document. When reading electronic copies of this document, you can click here to view the change history.

2.0 Background

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) outlines the process for managing malpractice in assessment involving learners or staff across all Awarding Organisations. Its aims are to:

- Identify and minimise the risk of malpractice by staff or learners;
- Respond promptly and objectively to any alleged incident of malpractice;
- Standardise and document all investigations to ensure transparency and fairness;
- Apply appropriate penalties and/or sanctions where malpractice (or attempted malpractice) is proven; and
- Protect the integrity of SERC and the qualifications delivered on behalf of Awarding Organisations.

In order to do this, the centre will:

- Use the induction period and learner handbook to inform learners of the centre's malpractice policy and the penalties for attempted or actual malpractice;
- Show learners the appropriate formats for citing texts, using materials generated through artificial intelligence tools, and referencing other sources;
- Ensure that, where feasible, all written assessments submitted by learners on programmes at Level 3 and above are checked using College-approved plagiarism detection software;
- Require learners to formally declare that their work is their own;
- Ask learners to provide evidence that they have interpreted and synthesised appropriate information, including content generated using AI tools, and have acknowledged all sources used;
- Make individuals fully aware, at the earliest opportunity, of the nature of any alleged malpractice and the potential consequences if malpractice is proven;
- Provide individuals with the opportunity to respond to the allegations;
- Inform individuals of the procedures available for appealing any decisions made;
- Document all stages of any investigation.

3.0 Scope

This SOP applies to all staff involved in preparation, grading and assessment to meet Awarding Organisation requirements and learners undertaking assessments.

4.0 Malpractice Definitions and Use of Artificial Intelligence

4.1 Definition of Malpractice by Learners

Examples of malpractice include, but are not limited to:

- Plagiarism of any kind;

- Submitting assessments that contain substantial sections of unmodified output generated by artificial intelligence tools;
- Collusion, such as working with other learners to produce work that is submitted as an individual's own;
- Copying, including the use of ICT or other technologies to aid copying;
- Deliberate destruction of another learner's work;
- Fabrication of results or evidence;
- False declaration of authenticity regarding the contents of a portfolio or coursework;
- Impersonation by pretending to be someone else to complete work on their behalf, or arranging for someone else to take one's place in an assessment, examination, or test;
- Taking prohibited materials into an examination room.

4.2 Definition of Malpractice by Staff

This list is not exhaustive. Other instances of malpractice may be considered by SERC at its discretion:

- Providing improper assistance to candidates;
- Inventing or altering marks for internally assessed work (e.g. coursework or portfolio evidence) where there is insufficient evidence of achievement to justify the marks or assessment decisions;
- Failing to keep candidate coursework or portfolios of evidence secure;
- Making fraudulent claims for certificates;
- Inappropriately retaining certificates;
- Assisting learners in the production of assessment work in a way that may influence outcomes including producing work on behalf of the learner;
- Producing falsified witness statements, such as for evidence not generated by the learner;
- Allowing evidence known not to be the learner's own to be included in assignments, tasks, portfolios, or coursework;
- Facilitating or allowing impersonation;
- Misusing conditions for special arrangements for example, where permitted support (such as an amanuensis) crosses the line into influencing assessment outcomes;
- Falsifying records or certificates through alteration, substitution, or fraud;
- Making fraudulent certificate claims including submitting claims before a learner has completed all assessment requirements.

4.3 Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to the use of digital tools to generate information and content that may be used in work submitted for assessments leading to qualifications. While the range and capabilities of AI tools are expected to expand significantly in the near future, **misuse of AI in qualification-related assessments constitutes malpractice at any time**.

Lecturers, assessors, and learners should also be aware that AI tools are still under development and may produce inaccurate, biased, or inappropriate content. Critical evaluation of AI-generated outputs is essential.

AI chatbots are a type of AI tool that generate text in response to user prompts or questions. Users can refine or build upon the chatbot's responses through follow-up questions or revision requests. These tools rely on large language models, generating responses based on patterns found in the datasets on which they are trained. They do **not** "understand" content in the human sense, but rather produce statistically likely outputs.

AI chatbots can perform tasks such as:

- Answering questions
- Analysing, improving, and summarising text
- Authoring essays, articles, fiction, and non-fiction
- Writing computer code
- Translating text from one language to another
- Generating ideas, prompts, or suggestions for a given topic or theme
- Producing text with specific attributes (e.g., tone, sentiment, or formality)

Use of AI tools by learners is only permitted when explicitly authorised by their lecturer and within the rules and regulations of the Awarding Organisation. Where AI use is approved, learners must clearly demonstrate that the submitted work is their own and must acknowledge any use of AI as a source of information.

Learners are not permitted to copy and submit AI-generated content as their own original work. Doing so constitutes academic malpractice.

4.4 Acknowledging AI Use

Where AI tools have been used as a source of information, the learner must submit the following in an Appendix with their assignment:

- The name of the AI source used and the date the content was generated e.g., ChatGPT 3.5 (https://openai.com/ blog/chatgpt/), 25/01/2023

- Provide a copy of the prompts/question(s) and computer-generated content for reference and authentication purposes, in a non-editable format (such as a screenshot) and provide a brief explanation of how it has been used.

- Each new prompt/question and response will need a separate appendix.

4.5 Misuse/Covert use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The following are examples of the **misuse or covert use of AI**. This list is not exhaustive:

- Copying or paraphrasing sections of AI-generated content such that the work no longer represents the learner's own original contribution;
- Copying or paraphrasing entire responses produced by AI tools;
- Using AI to complete parts of an assessment in a way that undermines the demonstration of the learner's own analysis, evaluation, or calculations;
- Failing to acknowledge the use of AI tools when they have been used as a source of information;
- Providing incomplete or inadequate acknowledgement of AI tools;
- Submitting work with intentionally incomplete or misleading references or bibliographies.

Any learner who engages in the misuse or covert use of AI tools where generative AI is used in assessments without proper authorisation and/or without appropriate acknowledgement will be considered to have committed malpractice. Such cases will be managed in accordance with the procedures set out in Sections 6.0 and 7.0, and in line with relevant Awarding Organisation policies.

4.6 Guidance for Detecting Plagiarism and/ or misuse/ covert use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

While the detection of plagiarism or the misuse/covert use of AI tools is not an exact science, there are several indicators that may raise initial concerns when reviewing and marking learner work. Suspicion may be prompted if a submission contains any of the following:

- Content that is only loosely or vaguely related to the assessment brief;
- Formatting that does not follow specified requirements (e.g. inappropriate headings, irrelevant sections, or unrelated datasets);
- Inconsistencies in formatting, such as changes in font type, colour, or line spacing, or the presence of coloured backgrounds behind text;
- Use of multiple or inconsistent referencing styles within the same submission;
- Noticeable variations in the learner's writing style throughout the document;
- Use of vocabulary or phrasing that is atypical for the individual learner;
- Unusual spelling or grammar errors, including Americanised spellings or idioms;
- Irregular or inconsistent use of punctuation (e.g. semicolons, quotation marks, or inverted commas);
- Outdated, irrelevant, or incorrect source information.

Where feasible, written assessments for Level 3 programmes and above should be submitted through College approved plagiarism detection software. Exceptions should be agreed by the programme team and recorded through normal quality assurance processes.

All evidence, both from software tools and professional judgement must be reviewed holistically by the team when assessing potential malpractice.

5.0 Procedure to Prevent Malpractice by Learners and Staff

To support the prevention of malpractice, the following measures will be implemented:

- **During induction**, and through the Learner Handbook, learners will be informed about the risks of malpractice and the associated penalties for both attempted and actual incidents;
- All learners enrolled on **Level 3 and above programmes** must complete the **'Learner Guide to Artificial Intelligence'** induction module;
- To minimise potential malpractice, learners will be introduced to the appropriate formats for citing texts and acknowledging other sources of information. They will also be informed that they may be required to provide evidence demonstrating how they have interpreted and synthesised source material, including content generated by AI tools;
- Course teams should, where appropriate, set topical and specific tasks for centre-devised assignments, to encourage original content that is less likely to be replicated by AI models trained on historic data;
- A learner declaration of authenticity will be required for all work submitted for assessment, confirming that the submission is their own original work;
- Staff should **conduct verbal checks**, where appropriate, to ensure that learners understand their submitted work and that it reflects their independent effort. These checks could include the use of formative assessments;
- Staff should, where appropriate, use classroom activities and formative assessments to confirm that learners have developed the knowledge and understanding required for the assessment;
- Staff should **review intermediate stages** of learner work to confirm it is progressing in a planned, timely, and authentic manner;
- Staff should **allocate supervised class time**, where appropriate and practical, for learners to complete substantial portions of their work. This allows staff to authenticate each learner's full submission with confidence;
- Staff should **not accept questionable work.** If there is suspicion of unacknowledged use of AI tools or signs of plagiarism, further investigation must take place. Accepting such work without inquiry may constitute staff malpractice and could result in sanctions;
- Staff will receive briefings on malpractice risks and associated penalties during curriculum development sessions, standardisation events, and relevant training activities.

6.0 Investigating Malpractice

Where malpractice is alleged, an investigation will take place in a manner appropriate to the nature and severity of the allegation. The **Head of Centre must be informed** and will support all investigations.

All incidents will be investigated **within 15 working days** of the alleged incident.

Applicable Procedures:

- For **learners**, the *Learner Disciplinary and Behaviour Policy*, the *Learner and Trainee Disciplinary and Behaviour SOP*, and, where relevant, the *Higher Education Academic Misconduct SOP* will be followed, including appropriate recording mechanisms and penalties.
- For **staff**, the College's standard disciplinary procedures will apply.

Communication with Awarding Organisations:

The Awarding Organisation must be informed **in writing at the earliest opportunity** of any instance of malpractice, attempted malpractice, or maladministration that has the potential to affect the delivery and/or assessment of qualifications. Where possible, this notification should occur **prior to the commencement of the internal investigation**.

The **Head of Centre** (or a designated nominee) will be responsible for notifying Awarding Organisations using the **Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ)** procedures, including:

- Notifying the appropriate Awarding Organisation immediately of any alleged, suspected, or actual incidents of malpractice. **Candidate malpractice discovered in coursework or non-examination assessments prior to the signing of authentication forms does not require immediate notification.**
- If staff malpractice is discovered, notifying **the Awarding Organisation immediately**, regardless of the authentication status of candidate work.
- Submitting notifications using the appropriate JCQ forms to the Awarding Organisation(s) involved.
- Acting as the primary liaison between the Awarding Organisation and centre staff. This includes forwarding relevant correspondence and evidence or providing contact details for the relevant staff member(s).
- Promptly and transparently providing all requested information and documentation to the Awarding Organisation.
- Implementing any actions, sanctions, or penalties required by the Awarding Arganisation.
- Maintaining clear, timely, and ongoing communication with the Awarding Organisation throughout the investigation and follow-up process.

7.0 Penalties

The penalties for staff relate to the Staff Disciplinary Procedures.

For HE learners the Academic Misconduct SOP applies.

For FE Learners the Learner Behaviour and Disciplinary SOP and Policy applies.

Where a **first offence or minor offence** is identified, a likely outcome is placement at **Stage One or Stage Two** of the disciplinary process. This may include a formal warning and a requirement for resubmission of the assessment.

In cases of a **major offence** or **repeated offences**, the incident may be treated as **gross misconduct**, and the relevant disciplinary penalties may apply in line with College policy.

In all cases, decisions must be made with reference to the **assessment principles and requirements of the relevant Awarding Organisation**. These principles must guide the classification of the offence and the selection of appropriate penalties to ensure consistency, fairness, and compliance.

8.0 Communication Plan

This SOP will be uploaded to the College intranet and referred to in staff induction and training.

9.0 Review

This SOP will be reviewed annually, or when the need for change has been identified.

Appendix 1: Document Change History

Version	Date	Change Detail
1.1	July 2023	Transferred to new Accessibility Template
1.2	May 2024	Updated with additional information on Artificial Intelligence
1.3	June 2024	SOP minor rewording and reformatting including the use of bullet points for ease of reading. Sections 6 and 7 restructured.
1.4	June 2025	Section 6.0 has been reviewed and significantly amended in line with guidance from JCQ – AI use in Assessments: Protecting the Integrity of Qualifications for Teachers & Assessors AI-Use-in-Assessments_Feb24_v6.pdf
1.5	June 2026	Responsible owner confirmed as Head of Quality Excellence and Development.