SERC

Assessment Malpractice SOP

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Responsible Owner:
Deputy Chief Officer, Quality, Excellence and Development

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

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June 2025

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Yes

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Contents

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 students or staff across all awarding organisations. Its aims are to:

- Identify and minimise the risk of malpractice by staff or students;

- 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 all written assessments submitted by students 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 students undertaking assessments.

4.0 Definition of Malpractice by Students

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.

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.

5.0 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 students 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 students is only permitted when explicitly authorised by their lecturer and within the rules and regulations of the awarding organisation. Where AI use is approved, students must clearly demonstrate that the submitted work is their own and must acknowledge any use of AI as a source of information.

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

5.1   Acknowledging AI Use

Where AI tools have been used as a source of information, the student 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 noneditable 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.

5.2 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 student'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 student'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 student 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 8.0 and 9.0, and in line with relevant Awarding Organisation policies.

5.3 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 student 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 student's writing style throughout the document;
- Use of vocabulary or phrasing that is atypical for the individual student;
- 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.

All assignments for Level 3 programmes and above must be submitted through **Turnitin**, where feasible. The decision to use Turnitin rests with the programme team and may be reviewed as part of the College's internal quality assurance processes.

The programme team may also use Turnitin and other electronic checking tools as appropriate. All evidence—both from software tools and professional judgement—must be reviewed holistically by the team when assessing potential malpractice.

Although the detection of plagiarism or misuse/ covert use of Artificial Intelligence tools is not an exact science, there are several indicators that can raise initial suspicions when reviewing and marking student work. Suspicions of plagiarism may be raised if the submission contains:

- Information on topics that is only vaguely linked to the assessment brief.

- Formatting that does not follow specified requirements e.g., inappropriate headings or irrelevant sections or datasets.

- Changes in formatting, e.g., font colour and style, sections with colour behind text, line spacing.

- Different referencing conventions used within a submission.

- Variations in the learner's writing style throughout the document.

- Untypical use of vocabulary for the learner.

- Spelling and grammar errors e.g., Americanised spelling and phrases.

- Inconsistent use of punctuation e.g., the irregular use of the semicolon or inconsistencies in the use of speech marks and inverted commas.

- Outdated or incorrect details.

All assignments on Level 3 programmes and above, are to be submitted using Turnitin where possible. The decision of when to use Turnitin rests with the course programme team. Decisions made may be reviewed as part of the internal College quality mechanisms. The Course team will use Turnitin and any other electronic checking device as appropriate.   All of the evidence must be considered and a professional judgement made by the Course Team.

6.0   Procedure to Prevent Malpractice by Students and Staff

During induction through the student handbook students will be informed about potential malpractice and the penalties for attempted and actual incidents of malpractice. All students enrolled on Level 3 and above programmes will complete, a 'Student Guide to Artificial Intelligence' induction module.

To minimise possible malpractice students will be introduced to the appropriate formats to record cited texts and other materials or information sources and informed that they may be asked to provide evidence that they have interpreted and synthesised appropriate information and acknowledged any sources used.

A declaration from students that the work is their own will be required on material submitted for assessment.

Staff should be informed about potential malpractice and the penalties for attempted and actual incidents of malpractice as part of curriculum development and standardisation events.

7.0   Investigating Malpractice

Where malpractice is alleged an investigation will take place in a form commensurate with the nature of the malpractice allegation. The Head of Centre should be informed and will

support all investigations. Incidents will be investigated within 15 working days of the alleged incident.

For students the Student Disciplinary and Behaviour Policy and the Student and Trainee Disciplinary and behaviour SOP process, recording mechanisms and penalties will be followed. In addition, the Higher Education Academic Misconduct SOP will be followed. For staff the disciplinary procedures will be followed.

The awarding organisation will be informed in writing at the earliest opportunity of any instances of malpractice, attempted acts of malpractice or maladministration, which have the potential to affect the delivery and/or assessment of qualifications delivered. The awarding organisation will be notified at the earliest opportunity and where possible prior to the commencement of the internal investigation. The Head of Centre, or an appointed nominee will inform the awarding organisation of malpractice using the Joint Council for Qualifications processes. This is:

Notification of the appropriate awarding organisation immediately of all alleged, suspected, or actual incidents of malpractice. The only exception to this is candidate malpractice discovered in coursework or non-examination assessments before the authentication forms have been signed by the candidate. If staff malpractice is discovered in coursework or non-examination assessments, the head of centre, or an must inform the awarding organisation immediately, regardless of whether the authentication forms have been signed by the candidate(s).

Notify the awarding organisation(s) whose qualifications are involved in an incident of malpractice using the appropriate Joint Qualification form.

Act as the liaison between the awarding organisation and centre staff by forwarding correspondence and evidence and/or provide staff contact information to enable the awarding organisation to do so.

Speedily and openly make available information as requested by an awarding organisation.

Enforce any actions or penalties required by the awarding organisation.

Maintain good communication with the awarding organisation throughout the process and follow-up.

8.0   Penalties

The penalties for staff relate to the Staff Disciplinary Procedures.

For HE students the Academic Misconduct SOP applies.

For FE Students the Student Behaviour and Disciplinary SOP and Policy applies.

Where a first offence or minor offence is agreed a likely outcome is stage one or two of the process with warnings and requirement for resubmission. Where a major or repeated offence occur gross misconduct and the relevant penalties may apply. There should always be reference to the Awarding Organisation assessment principles and requirements.

9.0   Communication Plan

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

10.0 Review

This procedure 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