The Scottish Sensory Centre

Malpractice Policy

This document sets out the SSC’s procedures for dealing with suspected cases of malpractice in delivery of assessments of SSC’s SQA accredited customised awards. These procedures are necessary for maintaining the quality assurance of the awards and maintaining standards within the SSC.

This malpractice policy is designed to summarise and outline expectations on standards and procedures required of candidates and the SSC. Alongside this policy reference will be made to SQA guidance on SQA.org.uk.

This policy:
• defines candidate malpractice and centre malpractice in the context of SQA assessments.
• sets out the responsibilities of the SSC and the SQA in relation to malpractice.
• describes how to proceed in cases where there is reason to suspect malpractice.

Definition of Malpractice

The term ‘malpractice’ is defined by the SQA as “any deliberate action, neglect, default or other practice that compromises the assessment process or the integrity of an SQA qualification, the validity of an SQA certificate, or the reputation and credibility of SQA”. Obviously any such action would also damage the reputation and credibility of the SSC.

Malpractice may refer to actions by the candidate, by staff of the SSC or by invigilation staff. Instances may occur through conscious and deliberate acts to undermine procedures, though may also occur because of ignorance of SQA’s criteria and procedures, or because of carelessness or forgetfulness in applying them. This policy covers misconduct and maladministration.

Candidate Malpractice

Candidate malpractice means malpractice by a candidate in the course of completing an assessment and can arise in:
• the preparation and authentication of coursework;
• the presentation of practical work;
• the compilation of portfolios of assessment evidence;
• conduct during the assessment.

Examples:
• Collusion: with others when an assessment must be completed by the individual candidate without assistance.
• Copying: from another candidate (including using ICT to do so).
• Frivolous content: producing content that is unrelated to the assessment in question.
• Misconduct: inappropriate behaviour during an assessment that causes disruption to others. This includes shouting and/or aggressive behaviour or language.
• Offensive content: inclusion of inappropriate, offensive, discriminatory or obscene material in assessment evidence.
• Impersonation: pretending to be someone else.
• Plagiarism: failure to acknowledge sources properly and/or the submission of another person’s work as if it were the candidate’s own.
• Unauthorised aids: physical possession of unauthorised materials (including mobile phones, MP3 players, notes etc).

Centre Malpractice

The following are examples of centre malpractice:
• Misuse of assessments, including repeated reassessments contrary to requirements, or inappropriate adjustments to assessment decisions.
• Insecure storage of assessment instruments and marking guidance.
• Failure to comply with requirements for accurate and safe retention of candidate evidence, assessment and internal verification records.
• Failure to comply with SQA procedures for managing and transferring accurate candidate data.
• Deliberate falsification of records in order to claim certificates.

Responsibilities in dealing with malpractice

It is the SSC’s responsibility to ensure all reasonable measures are in place to prevent any malpractice or maladministration. This would include reference to SQA guidance for the design and secure storage of assessment materials, the monitoring of candidates during assessment periods, and the authentication of candidate evidence. Candidates will be asked to sign an SQA authentication sheet with each braille stage submission at time of completion confirming the work is their own, and this applies to the work submitted for the Braille Final Assessment which is also signed by the exam invigilator.

Candidates must be made aware of what constitutes malpractice and plagiarism and the potential outcomes of committing malpractice. This is done when candidates enrol onto the courses and the responsibility for ensuring this occurs sits with the Head of the Centre. Candidates will be given, within the course materials handbook, a summary that defines malpractice and plagiarism and outlines possible consequences. When candidates take the final assessment exam they will be reminded what constitutes malpractice and plagiarism and the potential outcomes of committing malpractice through the exam regulations issued by the SSC and a copy of this will be sent to the invigilator.

Dealing with suspected cases of Candidate Malpractice

The SSC will investigate any allegation of malpractice consistently, fairly and impartially.

During an assessment an invigilator or course tutor may become suspicious that there has been candidate malpractice, either by direct observation during the task (eg, coursework or Final Assessment) or during the marking or verification of assessment materials. This could equally apply to Unit Assessments or to Course Assessments (whether internally or externally marked).
If an invigilator or course tutor suspects malpractice (eg plagiarism or copying), the internal verifier should be alerted in the first instance. The internal verifier should then conduct any further investigation (including candidate interview). At this stage relevant evidence should be gathered, to include candidate assessment materials/scripts, along with a summary of discussion with the candidate. The candidate(s) should be asked to submit a written and signed statement.

In conjunction with the above, the SQA Co-ordinator should complete the Malpractice Investigation Form (Appended) and forward it to the Head of Centre.

If doubt remains over the authenticity of the candidate’s work, or the candidate disputes the outcome of the initial investigation, then further investigation should be carried out by the Head of Centre. The Head of Institute should not be part of the process at this stage as he/she may be involved in any subsequent appeal against the findings.

If it is concluded that a candidate has been guilty of malpractice, then this may prompt disciplinary procedures. A range of sanctions may be applied, depending on the nature of the malpractice and the nature of the assessment.

- In the case of internal assessments that do not count towards final course assessments, internal sanctions are likely to apply.
- In the case of final assessments that count towards certification, whether internally or externally marked, the likelihood is that the SQA will be informed. Such communication will be made by the Head of Centre. From that point it is then the responsibility of the SQA to undertake any further investigations and to apply appropriate sanctions.

The SSC will retain a log and records of all instances of suspected and confirmed malpractice for three years. The SQA can request to see these records at any stage in that period.

Candidates should be made aware that they have the right to appeal to the SSC and ultimately the SQA to review a malpractice decision.

**Dealing with suspected cases of Centre Malpractice**

Staff must make every effort to avoid Centre malpractice, and should report any concerns to the Head of Centre. Candidates or other members of the public can report any instances of suspected malpractice to the SQA, who will then investigate the matter.

The internal verification process should be used to ensure that the required conditions for assessment are in place and that correct assessment and resulting records are completed and retained.

Following investigation of any allegation raised internally, a Malpractice Investigation Form (Appended) should be completed by the Head of Centre. This must then be forwarded to the SQA.

The SQA may:
- choose to take no further action;
- refer it back to the Head of Centre for further investigation;
- choose to investigate further themselves;
- in extreme cases, forward to a third party (eg, the Police).
If further investigation is prompted by the SQA, they may:
• require the Centre to conduct an independent investigation;
• require the Centre to advise them of any actions the Centre proposes to take;
• withhold the issuing of certificates until the conclusion of the investigation or permanently, where the outcome of the investigation warrants it;
• apply an appropriate action to minimise the risk of malpractice in the future.

In conducting an investigation, records and documentation should be retained for three years. Records should include:

• a report containing a statement of the facts, a detailed account of the circumstances of alleged malpractice, and details of any investigations carried out by the Centre into the suspected case of malpractice;
• written statements from the centre staff and candidates involved;
• any work of the candidate(s) and internal assessment or verification records relevant to the investigation;
• details of any remedial action undertaken to ensure the integrity of certification going forward;
• any mitigating factors that should be considered.
**Appeals against Malpractice decisions**

In the case of either candidate or centre malpractice decisions following investigation, there remains the respective right of the candidate or the centre to appeal the decision reached.

**Appeals against Candidate Malpractice decisions**

During an investigation the Centre should ensure that the candidates are aware that they can appeal a decision where a case of candidate malpractice has been upheld.

This includes the right to appeal within the Centre, as well as the option to take this to the SQA should the Centre’s appeal procedures be exhausted.

If a candidate disagrees with the Centre’s decision following investigation, they may appeal in writing to the Head of Institute. This appeal should include a written account of why the candidate thinks that the Centre’s decision is wrong. The Head of Institute will then initiate an investigation into the case.

Should a candidate be unhappy with the outcome of an internal appeal conducted by the Head of Institute, they have the right to appeal to the SQA.

Candidates have a right to appeal to SQA where:
- the centre has conducted its own investigation and the candidate disagrees with the outcome;
- SQA has asked the centre to conduct an investigation and the candidate disagrees with the outcome;
- SQA conducts its own investigation and the candidate disagrees with their decision.

A candidate’s appeal to the SQA must be submitted, in writing, to an SQA Director within ten working days of being notified of the decision of any internal appeal.

The appeal must include a written account of why the candidate thinks that the centre’s decision is wrong, and this account must address the reasons for the original decision given by the centre. Any evidence submitted to support this claim must be relevant to the case being made.

**Appeals against Centre Malpractice decisions**

Following investigation, a decision on centre malpractice will be made by the SQA’s Malpractice Panel. If the Centre disagrees with the Malpractice Panel’s decision, the Centre can appeal. The Head of Centre will have the right to appeal.

The Head of Centre should first contact the relevant SQA Manager within ten working days of receiving notification of the Malpractice Panel’s decision to agree a time to discuss the matter. If, after this discussion, the Head of Centre is not satisfied, an appeal can be raised with an SQA Director who was not involved in the Malpractice Panel’s decision.
Malpractice Investigation Report Form

(Completed by the centre’s SQA Co-ordinator, and forwarded to the Head of Centre following investigation.)

SSC (Centre No 309033)

Qualification title:

Date of issue:

Unit code(s)/name:

Level:

Candidate(s) involved
(if appropriate):

Staff involved
(if appropriate):

Area of concern:

Our findings, based on these investigations, are as follows: (attach additional documentation if required):

Signature: .............................................. Date: ..............................................

________________________________________________________________________________
To be completed by the Head of Centre

I confirm that all individuals involved have been notified about the above issue and have been given opportunity to comment.

Where appropriate, a signed statement from each individual is available.

The individuals involved have been notified of these findings and have been given further opportunity to comment. All parties are aware that this information will inform any decision made by the Centre, or the SQA regarding any application of sanction.

Signature: .......................................................... Date: ..................................................

Position: ........................................................................................................

This form along with any supporting documentation/evidence is to be returned to SQA as soon as possible after the investigation into potential malpractice.