

# Centre guidance: Dealing with malpractice and maladministration

## Document summary

This guide is for all Pearson approved centres.

This guide helps your centre understand:

- What malpractice and maladministration mean
- How to prevent it
- What to do if you suspect an issue
- How Pearson investigates concerns
- What actions Pearson might take

You can use this as the basis for your centres own malpractice policy.

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# Pearson Education Ltd – our mission and values

Our purpose is simple: to help people realize the life they imagine through learning. We believe that every learning opportunity is a chance for a personal breakthrough. That's why our c. 18,000 Pearson employees are committed to creating vibrant and enriching learning experiences designed for real-life impact. We are the world's lifelong learning company, serving customers in nearly 200 countries with digital content, assessments, qualifications, and data. For us, learning isn't just what we do. It's who we are. Visit us at [pearsonplc.com](https://www.pearsonplc.com).

We are regulated by the UK qualifications regulators Ofqual (England), CCEA Regulation (Northern Ireland) and Qualifications Wales (Wales). Our regulatory policies are integral to our approach and articulate how we meet regulatory requirements. These policies are designed to support centres and students and set out clearly our approach to the design, delivery, and award of Pearson qualifications and services.

# 1. What does this guide cover?

- 1.1 This guide is here to support you in delivering Pearson qualifications with confidence. It covers all our general and vocational qualifications including GCSE, International GCSE, AS/A Level, International AS/A Level, Pearson English International Certificate (PEIC), BTEC, Higher National (HN), T Level, Apprenticeship Assessment, End Point Assessment (EPA), International Certificate, Functional Skills, NVQ, ESOL and Self-Regulated Framework qualifications.
- 1.2 Please read this alongside the [JCQ Suspected Malpractice Policies and Procedures](#) to ensure compliance and best practice.

# 2. What this guide is for

- 2.1 To maintain centre approval, you'll need a published malpractice policy for Pearson qualifications. This guide can help you create your malpractice policy. Your policy should clearly explain how your centre manages cases of maladministration, learner malpractice, staff malpractice, and how you escalate incidents to Pearson. Your policy must also explain how you will deal with internal appeals regarding malpractice decisions. You can find help for your policies here: [Centre Guide to Policies & procedures](#)
- 2.2 If you're considering reporting suspected malpractice or maladministration, you'll find more guidance in the [JCQ Public Interest Disclosure Act \(Whistleblowing\) document](#). If you'd like to report an incident or discuss your concerns, please email our Investigations team at [pqsmalpractice@pearson.com](mailto:pqsmalpractice@pearson.com). You can report concerns to us anonymously if you prefer. We treat anonymous reports as seriously as named ones, though investigations may be more challenging without a named source. Individuals should be aware that Pearson cannot guarantee an individual's identity will not become known during or after the investigation. Please note:
  - 2.2.1 Centre staff may speculate about who has reported the allegations once an investigation begins.
  - 2.2.2 In some cases, we may need to share details – for example, in response to subject access requests under data protection law, with regulators (such as Ofqual, the Security Industry Authority (SIA) and the Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA)), or with the police.
    - 2.2.3 Pearson is not a prescribed body under the Public Interest Disclosure Act (PIDA) 1998, so cannot offer the protections described in the Act. For more

details, please see the [JCQ Public Interest Disclosure Act \(Whistleblowing\) guidance](#).

- 2.3 Maintaining the integrity of our qualifications is vital. Malpractice and maladministration can harm learners and undermine public confidence. That's why we take every allegation seriously and investigate as fully as possible. Proven cases may lead to sanctions (see section 7.1).
- 2.4 There are regulatory criteria set by the UK qualifications regulators (Ofqual, Qualifications Wales and CCEA Regulation) that govern how we investigate and manage the effects of malpractice and maladministration. Our Investigations team works independently and objectively, with authority to review matters across Pearson and approved centres. They investigate:
- non-compliance with JCQ regulations;
  - non-compliance with our qualification specifications and delivery requirements; and
  - other suspected instances of maladministration and malpractice.
- 2.5 Please respond openly and promptly if we contact you during an investigation.

## 3. Definitions of malpractice and maladministration

- 3.1 JCQ defines malpractice as any act or practice which is:
- a breach of the Regulations; and/or
  - a breach of awarding body requirements regarding how a qualification should be delivered; and/or
  - a failure to follow established procedures in relation to a qualification;
    - which:
      - gives rise to prejudice to candidates; and/or
      - compromises public confidence in qualifications; and/or
      - compromises, attempts to compromise or may compromise the process of assessment, the integrity of any qualification or the validity of a result or certificate; and/or

- damages the authority, reputation or credibility of any awarding body or centre or any officer, employee or agent of any awarding body or centre.
- 3.2 We must report cases of malpractice or maladministration to the qualifications regulators if we believe an Adverse Effect has occurred. An Adverse Effect means learners may be disadvantaged, standards may be compromised, or public confidence in qualifications is undermined. These cases are rare and usually the most serious we investigate. We also share data on regulated qualification investigations with regulators.

## 4. Ways to prevent malpractice and maladministration

- 4.1 Preventing malpractice is essential to protect learners and maintain trust in qualifications. Here are practical steps you can take:

### Build a strong foundation

- 4.2 Make sure all staff involved in delivering and assessing qualifications have the right skills, experience and training.

### Create a culture of integrity

- 4.3 Everyone – staff and learners – should know that malpractice is not acceptable and feel confident reporting concerns.

### Have a clear policy

- 4.4 Your malpractice policy should set out expectations for staff and learners, covering issues like plagiarism, AI misuse<sup>1</sup>, misconduct in assessments, copying and collusion and access to unauthorised items (such as mobile phones). The policy should explain the steps to be taken by the centre where learner malpractice is suspected in internal assessments before the declaration of authentication has been signed (see sections

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<sup>1</sup> AI misuse is deemed by Pearson and the other JCQ awarding organisations to be a form of plagiarism. AI misuse can involve plagiarising content produced by AI tools and/or incomplete or poor acknowledgement of AI use. More information can be found in the JCQ AI Use in Assessments guidance here: [AI Use in Assessments: Protecting the Integrity of Qualifications - JCQ Joint Council for Qualifications](#)

5.6 and 5.7). The policy should also reference the [JCQ Suspected Malpractice Policies and Procedures](#), making it clear to learners and centre staff that incidents of malpractice will need to be reported to the relevant awarding body and evidence shared (see section 5).

## Ensure learners' work is authentic

- 4.5 Take steps to ensure that learners' work is their own. This could include the following steps:
- For internally assessed units, internal assessors are responsible for checking the validity and authenticity of each learner's work.
  - Use plagiarism and artificial intelligence (AI) detection tools where appropriate.
  - Check work against the learner's usual standard/style and discuss content with them.
  - Require declarations of authenticity for internal assessments and NVQs.
  - Verify learner identities before exams.
  - Where assessment is conducted in a language other than English, the work is verified and authenticated.
- 4.6 It's the Head of Centre's responsibility to ensure that measures have been taken to prevent and identify learner malpractice in internally assessed units, that work submitted is the learner's own, and has been accurately assessed.

## Reduce risks through good practice

- 4.7 Explain your malpractice policy during the induction and in student handbooks, including the sanctions for attempted and actual incidents of malpractice.
- 4.8 Show learners how to cite sources correctly, including AI tools. Learners should not be discouraged from conducting research; indeed, evidence of relevant research often contributes to the achievement of higher grades. However, the submitted work must show evidence that the learner has interpreted and understood appropriate information and has acknowledged any sources used. Further guidance on plagiarism can be found in the JCQ document [Plagiarism in Assessments](#). Guidance on AI use can be found in the JCQ document [AI Use in Assessments: Protecting the Integrity of Qualifications](#).
- 4.9 Install access controls to prevent learners copying.
- 4.10 Provide secure storage for prohibited items during exams. Prohibited items include web-enabled communication devices like mobile phones, iPads, smartwatches, and materials which might provide an advantage such as calculators, notes, watches, and revision materials.

- 4.11 Use assessment methods that discourage malpractice such as supervised sessions, varied tasks, and oral checks with learners to check their understanding of the work.
- 4.12 Arranging for the assessor to assess work for a single assignment/task in a single session for the complete cohort of learners.
- 4.13 Further guidance is available in section 3 of the [JCQ Suspected Malpractice Policies and Procedures](#).

## 5. What to do when you suspect malpractice or maladministration

- 5.1 Acting quickly helps protect learners and maintain trust in qualifications. Here's what to do:

### Inform the individual

- 5.2 If you suspect a learner or member of staff has committed malpractice, you must let them know as soon as possible – ideally in writing. Make sure they understand the nature of the allegation and the possible consequences if malpractice is proven.

### Report the incident immediately

- 5.3 You must immediately report to us any incident of:
  - Alleged, actual or attempted malpractice by centre staff.
  - Maladministration by centre staff.
  - Malpractice or attempted malpractice by learners.

### How to report

- 5.4 Use the following email addresses:
  - Learner malpractice: [candidatemalpractice@pearson.com](mailto:candidatemalpractice@pearson.com)
  - Centre/centre staff malpractice or maladministration: [pqsmalpractice@pearson.com](mailto:pqsmalpractice@pearson.com).
- 5.5 We treat all reports seriously and handle them with care.

## Suspected learner malpractice relating to internally and externally assessed units

- 5.6 For external assessments: Report all suspected cases immediately. Heads of Centre complete [JCQ Form M1](#) and email it with supporting documents to [candidatemalpractice@pearson.com](mailto:candidatemalpractice@pearson.com).
- 5.7 For internal assessments: Report cases relating to the content of work (i.e. inappropriate/offensive content, copying/collusion, plagiarism (including AI misuse) and/or false declaration of authentication) if the learner has signed the declaration of authentication and cases which do not relate to the content of candidates' work (e.g. possession of unauthorised materials, breach of assessment conditions). Heads of Centre complete [JCQ Form M1](#) and send it with supporting documents to [candidatemalpractice@pearson.com](mailto:candidatemalpractice@pearson.com). If the declaration hasn't been signed, follow your centre's internal malpractice/academic misconduct policy.

## Suspected centre staff malpractice

- 5.8 Heads of Centre must inform our Investigations team before starting any internal investigation. Heads of Centre complete [JCQ Form M2](#) and email it with supporting documents to [pqsmalpractice@pearson.com](mailto:pqsmalpractice@pearson.com).
- 5.9 If we receive allegations from other sources (for example Pearson staff or anonymous informants), our Investigations team will lead the process and may ask the Head of Centre to assist.

## Informing individuals

- 5.10 Heads of Centre or nominees should make learners and centre staff aware of their responsibilities and rights, as detailed in section 5.33 of [JCQ's Suspected Malpractice Policies and Procedures](#).
- 5.11 We treat all reports seriously and will guide you through the process.

# 6. How Pearson investigates malpractice and maladministration

- 6.1 Our goal is to protect learners and maintain trust in qualifications. Here's what to expect if an investigation is needed:

## When we investigate

- 6.2 In some cases – such as allegations involving centre management—we may carry out the investigation directly. Your cooperation and support are essential.

## Who we work with

- 6.3 Our Investigations team will usually liaise with the Head of Centre and may need full access to the centre.

## What the process involves

- 6.4 We may:
- Involve learners and others in the investigation.
  - Contact learners (or their representatives) directly.
  - Contact staff members directly.
- 6.5 This may happen if accounts of events differ. Learners under the age of 18 can be supported by centre staff, parents, or guardians.

## Possible actions during an investigation

- 6.6 During an investigation, we may:
- Release results and certificates.
  - Refuse learner registrations or entries.
  - Withhold the release of results and certificates.
  - Modify or invalidate results and certificates.
  - Recall certificates already issued.
  - Withhold test papers if security is at risk.
  - Apply additional quality assurance measures before assessments either on a cohort or individual learner level.

## Other circumstances

- 6.7 If malpractice or maladministration is suspected by a Pearson representative (for example Standards Verifier (SV), Senior Standards Verifier (SSV), examiner, moderator, Independent End Point Assessor (IEA)) or reported by a third party, we will investigate appropriately. Full support from the Head of Centre and staff is required.

## Access to documents

- 6.8 We may need to review documents related to the allegation. In some cases, such as centre staff malpractice, we may also:
- Report the incident to regulators and share actions taken.
  - Notify or share information with other awarding organisations or relevant bodies (see [JCQ Suspected Malpractice Policies and Procedures](#) for details).
- 6.9 We handle all investigations fairly and professionally, and we'll keep you informed throughout the process.

# 7. Sanctions applied by Pearson

- 7.1 Our priority is to protect the integrity of our qualifications and ensure fairness for all learners. If malpractice or maladministration is proven, we will review whether future involvement by the centre, staff member, or learner could put assessments at risk. In serious cases, we may need to take action, which could include:
- Refusing assessment or examination entries from a centre.
  - Withdrawing programme or centre approval.
  - Refusing to issue certificates.
  - Recalling or invalidating certificates.
  - Preventing a centre staff member from delivering Pearson qualifications for a set period or permanently.
  - Disqualifying a learner from the qualification.
  - Restricting a learner from taking Pearson qualifications for a set period.

# 8. Appeals

- 8.1 We want to ensure that decisions are fair and transparent. If you believe a sanction resulting from malpractice or maladministration is incorrect, they can be appealed. Appeals are normally accepted from:
- Heads of Centre (on behalf of learners and/or members of staff)

- Individual members of centre staff (for decisions affecting them personally).

8.2 For full details of the appeals process, please refer to the JCQ document [‘A Guide to the Awarding Bodies’ Appeals Processes’](#).

## 9. Regulatory references

9.1 UK regulators require all awarding organisations to establish and maintain their compliance with regulatory conditions and criteria. As part of this process, policies and guides that relate to Pearson’s status as an awarding organisation will reference any conditions and criteria that they address.

9.2 This guide addresses the following regulatory criteria and conditions:

Qualification regulator or relevant governing body	Regulatory rule or guidance document	Regulatory condition or criteria
Ofqual	<a href="#">General Conditions of Recognition</a>	A8
Qualifications Wales	<a href="#">Standard Conditions of Recognition</a>	A8
CCEA Regulation	<a href="#">General Conditions of Recognition</a>	A8
JCQ	<a href="#">JCQ Suspected Malpractice Policies and Procedures</a>	All sections

## 10. Review date

10.1 This guide will be reviewed in January 2027.

## 11. Useful information

10.2 For further guidance, reference can be made to the following publications:

- [Centre Guide to Policies & procedures](#)

- [BTEC Managing Quality Guides](#)
- [JCQ A Guide to Awarding Bodies' Appeals Processes](#)
- [JCQ Plagiarism in assessments](#)
- [AI Use in Assessments: Protecting the Integrity of Qualifications](#)
- [JCQ Public Interest Disclosure Act \(Whistleblowing\)](#)
- [Withholding results and certificates from learners policy](#)
- [Policy on the removal of programme and centre approval](#)
- For specific queries or matters which are not addressed in the above, our Investigations team can be contacted via email at [pqsmalpractice@pearson.com](mailto:pqsmalpractice@pearson.com).

## 12. Version control

Version	Changes	Date
5.3	Plain English checks throughout	30/1/26