



SQA Centre Malpractice Annual Report 2017

This report provides data on SQA's approach to managing centre malpractice concerns. This is the first annual report of centre malpractice and includes data for 2016 as well as 2017.

Centre malpractice is defined as follows:

Malpractice means any act, default or practice (whether deliberate or resulting from neglect or default) which is a breach of SQA assessment requirements including any act, default or practice which:

- ◆ *compromises, attempts to compromise or may compromise, the process of assessment, the integrity of any SQA qualification, or the validity of a result or certificate; and/or*
- ◆ *damages the authority, reputation or credibility of SQA or any officer, employee or agent of SQA*

Malpractice can arise for a variety of reasons.

Some incidents are intentional and aim to give an unfair advantage or disadvantage in an examination or assessment (deliberate non-compliance). Examples might include:

- ◆ *failure to carry out adequate/published internal quality assurance arrangements*
- ◆ *completing assessment work on behalf of learners, or*
- ◆ *falsification of information leading to certification*

Some incidents arise due to ignorance of SQA requirements, carelessness or neglect in applying the requirements (maladministration). Examples might include:

- ◆ *seeking approval to offer a new qualification after the deadline for new approval applications has passed, or*
- ◆ *requesting late certification of learners after a regulated qualification's certification end-date*

Malpractice can include both maladministration in the assessment and delivery of SQA qualifications and deliberate non-compliance with SQA requirements.¹

¹ Malpractice: Information for Centres (www.sqa.org.uk/malpractice) page 5

The data below covers SQA activity across all qualification and centre types and across all assessment methodologies. We log all concerns that are raised and report on them irrespective of the outcome.

Table 1: Summary of concerns across the centre malpractice lifecycle

	Concerns				Following investigation	
Year	Concerns logged	Ongoing	Concerns closed at screening	Concerns concluded following investigation	Finding of malpractice	No finding of malpractice
2016	66	1	33	32	18	14
2017	108	9	23	76	51	25

Table 1 shows that in 2017 a total of 108 concerns were logged, of which 23 were closed at the screening stage. The screening stage is the first stage in the centre malpractice process. Here, SQA staff consider the available evidence and evaluate any risk to the integrity of certification. Where concerns are closed at this stage centres may not be contacted or informed; they may be unaware a concern was raised.

Where an investigation is initiated, centres are informed and involved in the process. In 2017, 76 concerns were investigated to a conclusion. Of these, 51 led to a finding of malpractice. Centres are always informed of the outcome of any centre malpractice investigation.

When a finding of malpractice is made SQA has a range of measures available to safeguard the integrity of certification. These include:

- ◆ a written warning
- ◆ application of required actions to enable certification to proceed
- ◆ withdrawal of approval to offer specific qualifications
- ◆ withdrawal of centre approval status

Furthermore, in order to maintain the integrity of certification, a finding of malpractice may also lead to adjustments to candidate marks which may, in turn, affect their certificated award.

‘Ongoing’ cases have yet to be resolved and may be at pre-screening, screening or investigation stages.

Table 2: Total concerns by qualification type

Year	National Qualifications	Higher National or Vocational Qualifications	Other	Total
2016	46	18	2	66
2017	75	33	0	108

Total concerns include those closed at screening, those ongoing and those concluded.

The National Qualifications category comprises National 1–5, Highers and Advanced Highers, National Qualifications Units, Awards, National Certificates, and National Progression Awards.

The Higher National and Vocational Qualifications category comprises Higher National Diplomas, Higher National Certificates, Scottish Vocational Qualifications, Higher National or Vocational Units, and Professional Development Awards.

The 'Other' category includes anything outwith these groupings of qualifications.

In 2017, 75 concerns were raised in connection with National Qualifications, with 33 raised in connection with Higher National and Vocational Qualifications.

Table 3: Source of concerns

Year	Concern identified by SQA	Concerns identified all other ways	Total
2016	38	28	66
2017	57	51	108

Table 3 shows where all logged concerns originated. Those identified by SQA are those that have been raised as a result of SQA processes or identified by an SQA member of staff or by an SQA appointee through the course of their SQA activity.

'Concerns identified all other ways' include those raised with SQA directly by centres or centre staff, those raised by learners or their parents, or any other third party that raised an issue with SQA.

In 2017, 57 concerns were identified by SQA, with a further 51 identified in other ways.

Table 4: Principle type of malpractice identified in panel finding of malpractice

Year	Failure of administrative systems for assessment and certification	Assessment conditions not applied — level of direction	Assessment conditions not applied — other	Internal assessments not in line with standards	Other security breach	Total
2017	2	34	5	9	1	51

Table 4 shows the principle type of malpractice for those cases where SQA’s Malpractice Panel reaches a finding of malpractice.

The most prevalent principle finding was that ‘Assessment conditions not applied — level of direction’, with 34 out of 51 findings. In all of these cases SQA identified instances where candidates had been given more support than the specific qualification assessment arrangements allowed.

The category ‘Assessment conditions not applied — other’ includes malpractice such as group work approaches where candidate evidence should be generated independently and security breaches where candidates had access to assessments intended to be unseen.

In most instances, the finding that ‘Internal assessments were not in line with standards’ had a secondary finding that internal quality assurance was not in place or not effective.

Other secondary findings include a failure to notify SQA promptly of identified malpractice.

Note: SQA only began categorising by principle finding for the 2017 data.