



SQA Centre Malpractice Annual Report 2019

This report provides information on SQA's approach to managing centre malpractice concerns in 2019.

Centre malpractice is defined as:

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

The information 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.

¹ Malpractice: Information for Centres <http://www.sqa.org.uk/malpractice> page 5

Summary of concerns across the centre malpractice lifecycle

Table 1 shows that in 2019 a total of 421 concerns were logged, of which 128 were closed at the screening stage. The screening stage is the first stage in the centre malpractice process. Here, expert 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 2019 285 concerns were investigated to a conclusion. Of these, 171 led to a finding of malpractice.² Centres are always informed of the outcome of any centre malpractice investigation and, where there is a finding of malpractice, the head of centre has the right of appeal.

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

Table 1: Overview of concerns

Year	Concerns				Following investigation	
	Concerns logged	Ongoing	Closed at screening	Concluded following investigation	Finding of malpractice	No finding of malpractice
2017	108	9	23	76	51	25
2018	270	8	27	235	143	92
2019	421	8	128	285	171	114

Total concerns by qualification type

The total concerns given in Table 2 include those closed at screening, those ongoing and those concluded.

The National Qualifications category comprises National 1 to National 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.

² Please note that a small number of these findings are still within the appeal period, meaning centres may exercise their right to ask SQA to reconsider its decision.

Table 2: Qualification type

Year	National Qualifications	Higher National or Vocational Qualifications	Total
2017	75	33	108
2018	222	48	270
2019	367	54	421

Source of concerns

Table 3 shows where all logged concerns originate. 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 by other ways include those raised with SQA directly by centres or centre staff, those raised by learners or their parents/carers, or any other third party that chooses to raise an issue with SQA.

In 2019, 360 concerns were identified by SQA, with a further 61 identified in other ways.

Table 3: Source of concerns

Year	Concerns identified by SQA staff, including Appointees during marking and quality assurance processes	Concerns identified by other ways	Total
2017	57	51	108
2018	207	63	270
2019	360	61	421

Principal types of malpractice identified in panel finding of malpractice

Table 4 shows the principle types of malpractice for those cases where the Malpractice Panel reached a finding of malpractice.

The most prevalent principle finding was that 'Assessment conditions not applied – level of direction', with 88 out of 171 findings. These findings often relate to National Qualifications externally assessed coursework for which assessment conditions are described in SQA Course Specifications and Coursework Assessment Task documents. Over-direction can include malpractice such as provision to candidates of writing frames, templates, model answers, sentence starters, primary and secondary research sources and results, feedback on drafts where these are contrary to required assessment conditions as well as a small number of findings where there had been more direct interventions by centre staff.

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
- ◆ provision of specialist support to ensure compliance within the centre
- ◆ application of required actions to enable certification to proceed
- ◆ requirement for increased quality assurance monitoring
- ◆ 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 results (including those only awarded either 'Pass' or 'Fail' result) which may, in turn, affect their certificated award.

Table 4: Malpractice by type

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	Other	Total
2017	2	34	5	9	1	0	51
2018	13	51	72	5	1	1	143
2019	11	88	60	5	6	1	171

Types of measures required by SQA as a result of malpractice investigations in 2019

Table 5 shows the types of measure that SQA required as a result of a malpractice concern reaching a conclusion. SQA only began collating this information in 2018.

Across the 171 concerns where malpractice was identified, SQA required 115 measures to be taken. The most common measure required was for centres to accept specialised subject support.

The number of measures taken does not match the number of investigations that concluded in a finding of malpractice, as in many of the instances, centres acknowledged the problems that had arisen, and identified their own comprehensive improvement actions. In these cases, SQA was satisfied that the centre had taken sufficiently robust steps and did not require any additional actions to be taken.

In other cases, more than one action was required for an individual concern. For example, SQA decided that a centre should be offered subject specialist support, and that the centre should prepare a written action plan following provision of that support.

SQA reserves the right to mandate measures even where an investigation did not conclude in a finding of malpractice. This is often where practice has been judged to have fallen short of best practice, but not to the point of malpractice. In 2019, SQA took 26 opportunities to support best practice in this way.

Table 5: Measures by type

Type of measure	Malpractice identified	Malpractice not identified
Warning	0	0
Actions required of the centre	3	0
Qualification de-approval	0	0
Centre de-approval	3	0
Adjustment to marks/results	9	0
Quality assurance: future qualification verification selection	10	0
Quality assurance: systems verification selection for centre	5	0
Specialist subject support	56	20
Specialist systems support	4	0
Other — eg a centre action plan	25	6
Total measures required	115	26