

Centre Malpractice Annual Report 2025

This report provides information on our approach to managing centre malpractice concerns in 2025.

Centre malpractice referrals for 2025 should be seen in the context of returning to well-established awarding procedures.

Note: From 1 February 2026, Qualifications Scotland became fully operational, replacing SQA and becoming the new national awarding body. This document references SQA as it concerns delivery in 2025.

Our approach to centre malpractice

Our approach depends on the qualifications affected. Concerns relating to most of our qualifications are governed by the processes described in [Malpractice: Information for Centres](#).

The small minority of concerns relating to qualifications externally regulated by Ofqual or Qualifications Wales are handled in line with the [Malpractice policy and procedures for Qualifications Scotland Qualifications regulated by Ofqual and/or Qualifications Wales](#).

We define malpractice as any act, default or practice (whether deliberate or resulting from neglect or default) that is a breach of Qualifications Scotland requirements, including any act, default or practice that:

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

Malpractice can arise for a variety of reasons:

- Some incidents are intentional and aim to give an unfair advantage or disadvantage in an exam or assessment (deliberate non-compliance). Examples might include:
 - completing assessment work on behalf of learners; or

- falsification of information leading to certification
- Some incidents of malpractice are unintentional. We define unintentional malpractice as ‘maladministration’, which includes incidents that arise due to ignorance of Qualifications Scotland requirements, carelessness or neglect in applying the requirements. 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 deliberate non-compliance with Qualifications Scotland requirements and maladministration in the assessment and delivery of Qualifications Scotland qualifications.

The information in this report covers activity across all qualification and centre types and across all assessment methodologies. We log all eligible concerns that are raised and report on them irrespective of the outcome.

Summary of concerns across the centre malpractice lifecycle

The overall information for centre malpractice in 2025 should be seen in the context of returning to well-established awarding procedures.

Our specialist officers and malpractice panels took risk-based decisions, after considering the available information, to identify the appropriate response to specific centre malpractice concerns.

Those responses included closing the matter without further investigation, bringing the matter to the attention of the centre for action locally, or initiating investigations, either centre-led (devolved) or led by us, as applicable (see [Malpractice: Information for Centres](#) for more information).

Table 1 — Overview of concerns at National Qualifications (NQ) and Higher National and Vocational Qualifications (HNVQ)

Year	Concerns logged	Ongoing concerns	Concerns closed at screening	Concerns concluded following investigation	Finding of malpractice following investigation	No finding of malpractice following investigation
2021	88	2	49	37	34	3
2022	207	10	138	59	45	14
2023	212	9	147	56	42	14
2024	424	5	314	105	75	30
2025¹	410	9	269	132	82	50

Table 1 shows that in 2025 a total of 410 concerns were logged, of which 269 were closed at the screening stage. Of these, 133 concerns were brought to the attention of the centre for action locally.

The screening stage is the first stage in the centre malpractice process. Expert Qualifications Scotland staff consider the available evidence and evaluate any risk to the integrity of certification. If concerns are closed at this stage, centres may not be contacted or informed; they may be unaware a concern was raised.

The table indicates that the number of concerns logged has varied over the last five years. This reflects the changes to how our qualifications were assessed during the COVID-19 pandemic, with 2024 seeing the return of full course assessment for the first time since 2019. The increase in numbers of concerns logged in 2024 and 2025 reflects the re-introduction of coursework in a number of subjects and levels with the overall totals close to the total recorded in 2019 (421 concerns logged).²

When an investigation is initiated, centres are informed and involved in the process. In 2025, 132 concerns were investigated to a conclusion. Of these, 82 led to a finding of malpractice. Please note that a small number of these findings are still within the appeal period, meaning centres may exercise their right to ask us to reconsider our decision.

¹ [Malpractice policy and procedures for SQA Qualifications regulated by Ofqual and/ or Qualifications Wales](#) applied to eight of 410 referrals and two of 132 investigations in 2025.

² Figures for 2019 can be found in earlier reports available on [our 'Reporting malpractice concerns' web page](#).

Centres are always informed of the outcome of any centre malpractice investigation. If there is a finding of malpractice, the head of centre has the right of appeal — the procedure is set out in our publication [The Appeals Process](#).

The 82 investigations that concluded in a finding of centre malpractice related to around 6% of the centres registered to deliver SQA qualifications by the end of 2025.

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

Table 2 — Concerns by qualification type

Year	NQ	HNVQ	Total
2021	53	35	88
2022	174	33	207
2023	179	33	212
2024	391	33	424
2025	364	46	410

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

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

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

Table 3 — Source of concerns

Year	Concerns identified by SQA staff, including appointees, during marking and quality assurance processes	Concerns identified in other ways	Total
2021	27	61	88
2022	160	47	207
2023	167	45	212
2024	370	54	424
2025	357	53	410

Table 3 shows where all logged concerns originate. Those identified by SQA have been identified because of our processes or raised by a member of staff or by an appointee carrying out their duties.

Concerns identified in other ways include those raised with SQA directly by centres or centre staff, those raised by learners or their parents or carers, or any other third party.

Table 4 — Principal 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	Other	Total
2021	13	2	7	0	11	1	34
2022	10	21	7	1	5	1	45
2023	5	21	6	3	5	2	42
2024	11	32	20	1	10	1	75
2025	7	45	16	4	9	1	82

Table 4 shows the principal type of malpractice for those cases where the panel reached a finding of malpractice. A malpractice panel decision can include findings across several centre practices. There is a degree of subjectivity in defining the principal type of finding in unique and complex circumstances.

The most prevalent principal type was failure to apply specified assessment conditions in terms of the level of direction provided to learners. This comprised 41 findings related to NQ and 4 relating to HNVQ.

Measures required as a result of malpractice investigations in 2025

When a finding of malpractice is made, we have a range of measures available to safeguard the integrity of certification. These include:

- providing specialist support to ensure compliance within the centre
- applying required actions to enable certification to proceed
- increased quality assurance monitoring
- withdrawing approval to offer specific qualifications
- withdrawing centre approval status

Furthermore, to maintain the integrity of certification, a finding of malpractice may also lead to adjustments to learner results (including those only awarded either 'Pass' or 'Fail') which may, in turn, affect their certificated award.

For any concern, a centre malpractice panel considers recommending or requiring remedial or improvement actions on the part of the centre as part of its decision-making process. The measures most frequently mandated to safeguard the integrity of certification are to require the centre to develop a plan to address the malpractice identified. This is often monitored by us to confirm full implementation, and/or to increase the level of quality assurance scrutiny for the affected area.

In many of the instances, centres acknowledged the problems that had arisen and identified their own comprehensive improvement actions. In these cases, we were satisfied that the centres had taken sufficiently robust steps and did not require any additional actions. Additionally, we may mandate more than one action in some instances if there is a finding of malpractice across multiple practices within the centre.

Qualifications Scotland reserves the right to mandate measures even where an investigation did not conclude in a finding of malpractice. This is often where we have judged that practice has fallen short of best practice, but not to the point of malpractice.

We continue to work with centres to prevent, identify, investigate and mitigate any concerns of possible malpractice, as described on [our 'Reporting malpractice concerns' web page](#).