



Malpractice &
Maladministration
Policy

Malpractice & Maladministration Policy



Introduction

This policy is aimed at our customers, including learners, who are delivering/registered on Focus Awards approved qualifications or units within or outside the UK and who are involved in suspected or actual malpractice/maladministration. It is also for use by our staff to ensure they deal with all malpractice and maladministration investigations in a consistent manner.

It sets out the steps your Centre, and learners or other personnel must follow when reporting suspected or actual cases of malpractice/maladministration and our responsibilities in dealing with such cases. It also sets out the procedural steps we will follow when reviewing the cases.

Centre's responsibility

It is important that your staff involved in the management, assessment and quality assurance of our qualifications, and your learners, are fully aware of the contents of the policy and that your Centre has arrangements in place to prevent and investigate instances of malpractice and maladministration.

A failure to report suspected or actual malpractice/maladministration cases, or have in place effective arrangements to prevent such cases, may lead to sanctions being imposed on your centre (see our Sanctions policy for details of the sanctions that may be imposed).

If you wish to receive guidance/advice from us on how to prevent, investigate, and deal with malpractice and maladministration then please contact us (details below) and we will happily provide you with such advice and/or guidance.

Your Centre's compliance with this policy and how it takes reasonable steps to prevent and/or investigate instances of malpractice and maladministration will be reviewed by Focus Awards periodically through our ongoing Centre monitoring arrangements.

Should an investigation be undertaken into your Centre, the Head of Centre must:

- ensure the investigation is carried out by competent investigators who have no personal involvement in the incident or interest in the outcomes,
- ensure the investigation is carried out in an effective, prompt and thorough manner and that the investigator(s) look beyond the immediate reported issues to assure your Centre that arrangements at the Centre are appropriate for all qualifications,
- respond speedily and openly to all requests relating to the allegation and/or investigation,
- cooperate and ensure their staff cooperate fully with any investigation and/or request for information.

Review arrangements

We will review the policy annually as part of our annual self-evaluation arrangements and revise it as and when necessary in response to customer and learner feedback, changes in our practices, actions from the regulatory authorities or external agencies, changes in legislation, or trends identified from previous allegations.

In addition, this policy may be updated in light of operational feedback to ensure our arrangements for dealing with suspected cases of malpractice and maladministration remain effective.

If you would like to feedback any views please contact us via the details provided at the end of this policy.

Definition of Malpractice

Malpractice is essentially any activity or practice, which deliberately contravenes regulations and compromises the integrity of the internal or external assessment process and/or the validity of certificates. It covers any deliberate actions, neglect, default or other practice that compromises, or could compromise:

- the assessment process;
- the integrity of a regulated qualification;
- the validity of a result or certificate;
- the reputation and credibility of Focus Awards ; or,
- the qualification or the wider qualifications community.

Malpractice may include a range of issues from the failure to maintain appropriate records or systems to the deliberate falsification of records in order to claim certificates.

For the purpose of this policy this term also covers misconduct and forms of unnecessary discrimination or bias towards certain or groups of learners.

Definition of Maladministration

Maladministration is essentially any activity or practice, which results in non-compliance with administrative regulations and requirements and includes the application of persistent mistakes or poor administration within a Centre (e.g. inappropriate learner records).

Examples of maladministration

The categories listed below are examples of Centre and learner maladministration. Please note that these examples are not exhaustive and are only intended as guidance on our definition of malpractice:

- persistent failure to adhere to our learner registration and certification procedures.
- persistent failure to adhere to our Centre recognition and/or qualification requirements and/or associated actions assigned to the Centre.
- late learner registrations (both infrequent and persistent).
- unreasonable delays in responding to requests and/or communications from focus awards.
- inaccurate claim for certificates.
- late learner certification requests (e.g. beyond the certification end date for the qualification).
- failure to maintain appropriate auditable records, e.g. certification claims and/or forgery of evidence.
- withholding or the delaying of information, by deliberate act or omission, from us which is required to assure focus awards of the Centre's ability to deliver qualifications appropriately.
- misuse of our logo and trademarks or misrepresentation of a Centre's relationship with focus awards and/or its recognition and approval status with Focus Awards.
- poor administration arrangements and/or records.
- persistent mistakes in relation to our delivery arrangements.
- failure to adhere to, or to circumnavigate, the requirements of our Reasonable Adjustments and Special Considerations Policy

Examples of malpractice

The categories listed below are examples of Centre and learner malpractice. Please note that these examples are not exhaustive and are only intended as guidance on our definition of malpractice:

- denial of access to premises, records, information, learners and staff to any authorised Focus Awards representative and/or the regulatory authorities,
- deliberate misuse of our logo, brand, name and trademarks or misrepresentation of a Centre's relationship with Focus Awards and/or its recognition and approval status with Focus Awards,
- deliberate failure to continually adhere to our Centre recognition and/or qualification approval requirements or actions assigned to your Centre,
- intentional withholding of information from us, which is critical to maintaining the rigour of quality assurance and standards of qualifications,
- deliberate failure to carry out internal assessment, internal moderation or internal verification in accordance with our requirements,
- the unauthorised use of inappropriate materials / equipment in assessment settings (e.g. mobile phones),
- a loss, theft of, or a breach of confidentiality in, any assessment materials.
- insecure storage of assessment materials,
- inappropriate circulation/distribution of assessment materials,
- unauthorised amendment, copying or distributing of assessment materials.
- inappropriate assistance/support to learners by Centre staff (e.g. unfairly helping them to pass a unit or qualification),
- deliberate failure to adhere to, or to circumnavigate, the requirements of our reasonable adjustments and special considerations policy,
- plagiarism by learners/staff,
- copying from another learner,
- cheating by learners/staff,
- personation - assuming the identity of another learner or having someone assume their identity during an assessment,
- collusion or permitting collusion in assessments,
- deliberate contravention by learners of the assessment arrangements we specify for our qualifications,
- fraudulent claim for certificates and/or deliberate submission of false information to gain a qualification or unit,
- false records,
- deliberate failure to adhere to our learner registration and certification procedures,
- deliberate failure to maintain appropriate auditable records, e.g. certification claims and/or forgery of evidence,
- learners still working towards qualification after certification claims have been made,
- selling certificates for cash,
- selling assessment details,
- extortion,
- fraud,
- threatening or abusive behaviour that threatens the safety of staff and/or is intended to put undue influence on the outcomes of an assessment/award.

Process for making an allegation of malpractice or maladministration

Anybody who identifies or is made aware of suspected or actual cases of malpractice or maladministration at any time must immediately notify Focus Awards. In doing so they should put them in writing/email and enclose appropriate supporting evidence.

All allegations must include (where possible):

- Centre's name, address and number,
- learner's name and Focus Awards registration number,
- Centre/Focus Awards personnel's details (name, job role) if they are involved in the case,
- details of the Focus Awards course/qualification affected or nature of the service affected,
- nature of the suspected or actual malpractice and associated dates,
- details and outcome of any initial investigation carried out by the Centre or anybody else involved in the case, including any mitigating circumstances.

In addition we ask that the person making the allegation declares any personal interest they may have in the matter to us at the outset.

If a Centre has conducted an initial investigation prior to formally notifying us, the Centre should ensure that staff involved in the initial investigation are competent and have no personal interest in the outcome of the investigation. We would expect that such investigations would normally involve the Head of Centre (if there is an investigation into allegations of malpractice or irregularities against the Head of the Centre or the management of the Centre then such investigations should be carried out by an independent source). However, it is important to note that in all instances the Centre must immediately notify Focus Awards if they suspect malpractice or maladministration has occurred as we have a responsibility to

the regulatory authorities to ensure that all investigations are carried out rigorously and effectively.

Confidentiality and whistle blowing

Sometimes a person making an allegation of malpractice or maladministration may wish to remain anonymous (although it is always preferable to reveal your identity and provide us with your contact details). However, if you are concerned about possible adverse consequences that may occur should your identity be revealed to another party then please inform us that you do not wish for us to divulge your identity and we will work to ensure your details are not disclosed.

We will always aim to keep a whistleblower's identity confidential where asked to do so although we cannot guarantee this and we may need to disclose your identity should the complaint lead to issues that need to be taken forward by other parties. For example:

- the police, fraud prevention agencies or other law enforcement agencies (to investigate or prevent crime, including fraud)
- the courts (in connection with any court proceedings)
- other third parties such as the relevant regulatory authority (e.g. Ofqual).

The investigator(s) assigned to review the allegation will not reveal the whistleblower's identity unless the whistleblower agrees or it is absolutely necessary for the purposes of the investigation (as noted above). The investigator(s) will advise the whistleblower if it becomes necessary to reveal their identity against their wishes.

A whistleblower should also recognise that he or she may be identifiable by others due to the nature or circumstances of the disclosure (e.g. the party which the allegation is made against may manage

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to identify possible sources of disclosure without such details being disclosed to them).

Once a concern has been raised we have a duty to pursue the matter. It will not be possible to prevent the matter being investigated by subsequently withdrawing their concern as we are obliged by the regulators to follow-up and investigate allegations of malpractice or maladministration.

In all cases, we will keep you updated as to how we have progressed the allegation (e.g. we have undertaken an investigation) and the whistle-blower will have the opportunity to raise any concerns about the way the investigation is being conducted with the investigator(s). However, we will not disclose details of all of the investigation activities and it may not be appropriate for us to disclose full details of the outcomes of the investigation due to confidentiality or legal reasons (e.g. disclose full details on the action that may be taken against the parties concerned). While we cannot guarantee that we will disclose all matters in the way that you might wish, we will strive to handle the matter fairly and properly.

Please see our Whistleblowing Policy for further information in relation to our whistleblowing arrangements.

Responsibility for the investigation

In accordance with regulatory requirements all suspected cases of maladministration and malpractice will be examined promptly by Focus Awards to establish if malpractice or maladministration has occurred and we will take all reasonable steps to prevent any adverse effect from occurring as defined by the regulator Ofqual, however, where any such Adverse Effect occurs, Focus Awards will mitigate it as far as possible and correct it.

All suspected cases of malpractice and maladministration will be passed to the Head of Quality Assurance and we will acknowledge receipt, as appropriate, to external parties within 48 hours.

The Head of Quality Assurance will be responsible for ensuring the investigation is carried out in a prompt and effective manner and in accordance with the procedures in this policy and will allocate a relevant member of staff (e.g. a member of our quality assurance team) to lead the investigation and establish whether or not the malpractice or maladministration has occurred, and review any supporting evidence received or gathered by Focus Awards.

At all times we will ensure that Focus Awards personnel assigned to the investigation have the appropriate level of training and competence and they have had no previous involvement or personal interest in the matter.

Notifying relevant parties

In all cases we will tell the person who made the allegation who will be handling the matter, how they can contact them, what further assistance we may need from them and agree a timetable for feedback (see the above section on 'Confidentiality and whistleblowing for possible limitations in relation to the feedback and the section below – 'Investigation timelines and summary process – for details of our anticipated response times).

In cases of suspected or actual malpractice or maladministration at a Centre, we will notify the Head of your Centre involved in the allegation (except when the Head of Centre or management is under investigation; in which case communication will be with your independent source) that we will be investigating the matter.

In the case of learner malpractice, we may ask your Centre to investigate the issue in liaison with our own personnel. We will only ask the Centre to investigate the matter where we have confidence that the investigation will be prompt, thorough, independent and effective.

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In all cases we may withhold details of the person making the allegation if to do so would breach a duty of confidentiality or any other legal duty.

We may engage and communicate directly with members of Centre staff who have been accused of malpractice if appropriate (e.g. the staff member is no longer employed by the Centre) and/or communicate directly with a learner or their representative (e.g. if there is a contradiction in the evidence provided during an investigation or where the Centre is suspected of being involved in malpractice).

Where applicable, the Head of Quality Assurance will inform the appropriate regulatory authorities if we believe there has been an incident of malpractice or maladministration, which could either invalidate the award of a qualification, or if it could affect another awarding organisation. In particular we will keep them informed of progress in large and/or complex cases.

Where the allegation may affect another awarding organisation and their provision we will also inform them in accordance with the regulatory requirements and obligations imposed on Focus Awards by the regulator Ofqual and/or seek to undertake a joint investigation with them if appropriate. If we do not know the details of organisations that might be affected we will ask Ofqual to help us identify relevant parties that should be informed.

If fraud is suspected and/or identified we may also notify the police.

Investigation timelines and summary process

Where possible, we aim to complete the investigation within 10 working days of receipt of the allegation. Please note that in some cases the investigation may take longer; for example, if a Centre visit is required. In such instances, we'll advise all parties concerned of the likely revised timescale.

The fundamental principle of all investigations is to conduct them in a fair, reasonable and legal manner, ensuring that all relevant evidence is considered without bias. In doing so investigations will be underpinned by terms of reference and based around the following broad objectives:

- to establish the facts relating to allegations/complaints in order to determine whether any irregularities have occurred,
- to identify the cause of the irregularities and those involved,
- to establish the scale of the irregularities and whether other qualifications may be affected,
- to evaluate any action already taken by the Centre,
- to determine whether remedial action is required to reduce the risk to current registered learners and to preserve the integrity of the qualification,
- to ascertain whether any action is required in respect of certificates already issued,
- to obtain clear evidence to support any sanctions to be applied to the Centre, and/or to members of staff, in accordance with our Sanctions Policy,
- to identify any adverse patterns or trends.

In carrying out any investigation Focus Awards will be sensitive to the effect on, and reputation of, a Centre and/or those members of staff who may be the subject to investigation. We will strive to ensure that the investigation is carried out as confidentially as possible and the organisation/person who is the subject of the allegation will have the opportunity to raise any issues about both the proposed approach and the conduct of the investigation with the investigator(s) during the investigation.

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The investigation may involve a request for further information from relevant parties and/or interviews with personnel involved in the investigation. In any interviews carried out with the person(s) accused of malpractice/maladministration they can choose to be accompanied by a work colleague, trade union representative, or other party.

In addition we will:

ensure all material collected as part of an investigation is kept secure. All records and original documentation concerning a completed investigation that ultimately leads to sanctions against a Centre will be retained for a period of no less than five years. If an investigation leads to invalidation of certificates, or criminal or civil prosecution, all records and original documentation relating to the case will be retained until the case and any appeals have been heard and for five years thereafter, expect all parties, who are either directly or indirectly involved in the investigation, to fully cooperate with us.

Either at notification of a suspected or actual case of malpractice or maladministration and/or at any time during the investigation, we reserve the right to impose sanctions on the Centre in accordance with our Sanctions Policy in order to protect the interests of learners and the integrity of the qualifications.

We also reserve the right to withhold a learner's, and/or cohorts, results for all the Focus Awards course/qualifications and/or units they are studying at the time of the notification/investigation.

If appropriate, we may find that the complexity of a case or a lack of cooperation from a Centre means that we are unable to complete an investigation. In such circumstances we will consult the relevant regulatory authority in order to determine how best to progress the matter.

Where a member of Focus Awards staff is under investigation we may suspend them or move them to other duties until the investigation is complete.

Throughout the investigation the Head of Quality Assurance will be responsible for overseeing the work of the investigation team to ensure that due process is being followed, appropriate evidence has been gathered and reviewed and for liaising with and keeping informed relevant external parties.

Investigation report

If we believe there is sufficient evidence to implicate an individual/Centre in malpractice/ and/or maladministration we will:

- Inform them (preferably in writing) of the allegation,
- Inform them of the evidence we found to support our judgment,
- Inform them that information in relation to the allegation and investigation may be, or has been, shared with the regulators and other relevant bodies (e.g. police),
- Provided them with an opportunity to consider and respond to the allegation and our findings,
- Inform them of our Appeals policy should they wish to appeal against our decision.

After an investigation, we will produce a draft report for the parties concerned to check the factual accuracy. Any subsequent amendments will be agreed between the parties concerned and ourselves. The report will cover the following areas:

- identify where the breach, if any, occurred,
- confirm the facts of the case (and any mitigating factors if relevant),
- identify who is responsible for the breach (if any),
- contain supporting evidence where appropriate (e.g. written statements),
- confirm an appropriate level of remedial action to be applied.

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We will make the final report available to the regulatory authorities and other external agencies as required.

If it was an independent/third party that notified us of the suspected or actual case of malpractice, we may also inform them of the outcome – normally within 10 working days of making our decision - in doing so we may withhold some details if to disclose such information would breach a duty of confidentiality or any other legal duty.

If it is an internal investigation against a member of our staff the Head of Awarding Organisation will agree the report with the relevant internal managers and appropriate internal disciplinary procedures will be implemented. In some circumstances the police or other external authorities may need to be alerted.

Investigation outcomes

If the investigation confirms that malpractice or maladministration has taken place we will consider what action to take to:

- minimise the risk to the integrity of certification now and in the future,
- maintain public confidence in the delivery and awarding of qualifications,
- discourage others from carrying out similar instances of malpractice or maladministration,
- ensure there has been no gain from compromising our standards.

The action we may take include (this list is indicative only and is not meant to form an exhaustive list):

- impose actions in relation to your Centre with specified deadlines in order to address the instance of malpractice/maladministration and to prevent it from reoccurring such as:
 - undertaking additional/increased visits to a Centre to provide them with a greater level of support and/or monitoring depending on their needs and performance,
 - requiring specific Centre staff to undergo additional training and/or scrutiny by the Centre if there are concerns about their ability to undertake their role in the delivery of Focus Awards qualifications effectively,
 - not permitting specific centre staff to be involved in the delivery or assessment of Focus Awards qualifications (e.g. not permitting an individual to invigilate Focus Awards examinations or assessments),
 - altering the way, and the period in which, centres receive examination/assessment materials from Focus Awards if there are concerns around their ability to maintain the security and confidentiality of such materials,
 - if applicable, appointing independent invigilators to observe an exam at the Centre if there are concerns around the Centre's arrangements and/or the Centre is unable to resource particular exams,
 - appointing independent assessors to undertake assessments at the Centre if there are concerns around the Centre's arrangements or resource levels,
- impose sanctions on your Centre – if so these will be communicated to you in accordance with our sanctions policy along with the rationale for the sanction(s) selected,
- take action against learner in relation to proven instances of maladministration or malpractice such as some or all of the following (which may be communicated to the learner by Focus

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Awards and/or the learner's Centre):

- issuing a written warning that if the offence is repeated further action may be taken,
 - loss of all marks/credits for the related work/unit,
 - disqualification from the unit(s)/qualification,
 - placing a ban from taking any further qualifications with us (e.g. for a set period of time),
- in cases where certificates are deemed to be invalid, inform Centre(s) concerned and the regulatory authorities why they are invalid and any action to be taken for reassessment and/or for the withdrawal of the certificates. We will also ask the Centre(s) to let the affected learners know the action we're taking and that their original certificates are invalid and ask the Centre – where possible – to return the invalid certificates to Focus Awards. We will also amend our database so that duplicates of the invalid certificates cannot be issued and we expect the Centre to amend their records to show that the original awards are invalid,
 - amend aspects of our qualification development, delivery and awarding arrangements and if required assessment and/or monitoring arrangements and associated guidance to prevent the issue from reoccurring,
 - inform relevant third parties (e.g. funding bodies) of our findings in case they need to take relevant action in relation to the Centre,
 - carry out additional, related investigations if we suspect the issue may be more widespread at the Centre and/or at other Centres.

In proven cases of malpractice and/or maladministration by a Centre, Focus Awards reserves the right to charge the centre for any resits and reissuing of certificates and/or additional quality assurance activities/centre monitoring visits. The fees for which will be the current Focus Awards prices for such activities at the time of the investigation.

In addition to the above, the Head of Quality Assurance will record any lessons learnt from the investigation and pass these onto relevant internal colleagues to help Focus Awards prevent the same instance of maladministration or malpractice from reoccurring.

If the relevant party (ies) wishes to appeal against our decision to impose sanctions, please refer to our Appeals Policy.

Contact us

If you've any queries about the contents of the policy, please contact our support team on:

E: info@focusawards.org.uk

T: +44(0)845 8620068