

Malpractice policy

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NCRQ malpractice policy and procedure

Version 2.0

What is malpractice?

Malpractice can take several forms, and is not just limited to deliberate acts. It can be committed not just by current students but also former students and third parties.

Before you submit any assessment you will be asked to declare that you have read this policy and that you agree that all submitted work is wholly your own. We take this statement extremely seriously, and we will take any false declaration into consideration if evidence of malpractice is uncovered in your assessments.

Examples of the different types of malpractice are given below:

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the act of taking someone else's work and passing it off as your own. This includes incorporating either unattributed direct quotations or substantial paraphrasing from the work of others.

It is important to cite all sources whose work has been drawn upon and reference them fully.

Plagiarism can be intentional or inadvertent – but an offence still exists. You cannot use other people's ideas, words, images or data in your assignment unless you provide full details of your sources. However, using another student's work is always unacceptable even if this is referenced, and will result in severe academic and professional penalties.

NCRQ takes plagiarism very seriously, and it can attract severe academic penalties which may impact on your professional career.

Examples of plagiarism include:

- expressing someone else's ideas without giving a reference. This includes ideas that are quoted directly and those that are expressed in your own words.
- using somebody's exact words without quotation marks and a correct reference
- expressing ideas using some of your own words but neglecting to significantly change the author's original version

It is important to be especially careful when taking ideas from internet sources – much of our plagiarism cases come from students who have copied paragraphs from online policies or documentation.

Ignorance of referencing cannot be accepted as a mitigating circumstance, and will be viewed just as seriously as those who intentionally seek to plagiarise.

Tips:

- Make sure you reference all the external sources that you have used.
- NCRQ does not require specific academic referencing to be used (eg Harvard or Oxford referencing, etc).
- It should be clear both which parts of the work have been copied (eg using quotes, a different font, a number reference, etc), and where it has come from.
- The nature of NCRQ assessments will often require sections of guidance documents to be included in assessments. This is quite acceptable – as long as it is referenced.

Collusion

Collusion is when two or more people combine to produce a piece of work for assessment that is passed off as the work of one student alone. It also includes attempts to collude with others.

Sharing ideas is an excellent way to learn, as you can bounce ideas off each other and find alternative points of view. However, copying from other past or present students is never acceptable.

Examples of collusion:

Student A allows student B to copy their work. Both students will have committed malpractice and both will be penalised.

Acceptable:

- ✓ Asking a student how to approach an assignment
- ✓ Sharing ideas about how an assessment has been tackled
- ✓ Asking a student for help understanding a concept
- ✓ Explaining theoretical principles and advice on general sources

Unacceptable:

- ✗ Asking for a copy of a completed assessment (regardless of whether it is used)
- ✗ Giving another student a copy of your completed assessment
- ✗ Asking another student for feedback from a completed assessment
- ✗ Giving another student a copy of your assessment feedback
- ✗ Posting a question (even if edited to change facts) about an assessment on an online forum

Tips:

- You should be confident that every sentence of your assessment is your own (unless it is a fully referenced quotation) and you should be able to fully explain concepts, if asked, in your validation interview.
- Do not show your assessments or feedback to others.
- If you agree to help other students, do so by improving their understanding, not by giving them the answer. Alternatively, tell them to plan in advance and contact their tutor who will be happy to help them.
- If in doubt, speak to your tutor. You will not be penalised for asking your tutor a question, even if they are not permitted to answer.
- The NCRQ Student Support Forum is moderated and considered a “safe space” for advice. You are encouraged to use this as a forum for help and support. If you ask for or give away too much information in this forum, your post will be edited without penalty unless it is a serious or repeated offence.

Cheating

Cheating is any attempt to gain an unfair advantage in an assessment by dishonest or deceptive means.

Examples of cheating include:

- buying material or paying another person to complete an assignment, or using editors, translators or proof-readers who contribute significantly to the content
- forgery, bribery and falsifying data
- commissioning an assessment from a third party
- obtaining assessment material without authorisation
- asking another student for a completed assessment
- impersonation of a student - pretending to be someone else or arranging for another to take one's place in an assessment or validation interview
- fraudulent claims for reasonable adjustments or special consideration

Disclosure

Unauthorised disclosure is an example of malpractice that is of particular importance to NCRQ because of the assignment-based approach to assessments.

Disclosure of any assessment brief, assessment material or assessor feedback, or parts of them, would be an unauthorised disclosure. This can be of significant consequence to large number of students, and require an assessment to be recalled from circulation.

Unauthorised disclosure can also be investigated and sanctions applied to former students and third parties.

Examples of unauthorised disclosure include:

- posting parts of an assessment question on a public forum
- emailing a copy of assessor feedback to another student
- offering hints to another student based on assessor feedback

Disclosure of assessment material, completed assessments, or assessor feedback - even after you have completed your qualification - is both academic and professional malpractice. In addition to academic sanctions, it is likely to result in a report to the relevant professional bodies (e.g. IOSH) with a request that your membership is withdrawn for professional misconduct.

Detection

NCRQ has various systems in place for the detection of malpractice. This includes the use of plagiarism detection software for all submitted assessments. Tutors and assessors are also trained to identify suspicious activity, and validation interviews are conducted to ensure the validity of a student's work is verified. There is also automated and manual proactive monitoring of social media and online professional forums for assessment discussions.

NCRQ holds copies of all past assessments within our database, and every new assessment is automatically scanned against these. We are able to detect instances of copying, collusion, and plagiarism from assessments that were submitted many years previously. All students should be aware that more than a single sentence copied from another student will be unacceptable, and be particularly careful if they have come to NCRQ through word of mouth from colleagues, partners, friends or family.

Students are welcome to advise the student support team of their connection to another student at any point during their studies. This may help us ensure that differing assessments are provided, so as to reduce the risk of academic malpractice.

Reporting

Any student or third party may report suspected malpractice to NCRQ by contacting their tutor or student support team. All reports will be treated in the strictest of confidence.

All allegations of academic malpractice will be investigated in order to protect the integrity of our qualifications.

Anonymous reports of malpractice will also be acted upon only if there is supporting evidence, or if the nature of the report warrants it.

Investigation

If you are suspected of academic malpractice, NCRQ has a duty to investigate it on a case-by-case basis. You will be notified of this via a physical letter posted to your home address. In some instances, you may find that your myNCRQ account has been locked. Please note that our student support officers are unable to see the contents of any letter sent to you. This is to ensure that your case is treated with the utmost confidence. They can advise on the process of malpractice investigation, but will be unable to discuss any specific details of your case.

In some instances, you will receive feedback from the assessors that your assessment has been referred due to a pending investigation. This indicates that an investigation has commenced and that you should shortly receive your formal notification letter. Please call student support if you do not receive this.

Initial notification

The initial letter from NCRQ will outline the allegations made against the individual and advises them of the next steps. It includes:

- the fact that an allegation has been made against them
- which assessment is under investigation
- the facts of the malpractice (e.g. the source material identified)
- the opportunity to provide a response to the allegations
- the timeframe in which a representation must be made
- the next steps, and when to expect a response
- if any immediate action has been taken, such as suspension
- the malpractice policy, with a request to re-read this.

Rights of those under investigation

- To be informed in writing of the allegations that are being made against them
- Exactly what part of the policy they are suspected of breaching
- Exactly what evidence is being used against them
- Know that there may be a sanction placed on them, should the malpractice allege be proven
- Have the opportunity to make a representation
- Be informed of the next steps, and a timeframe within which a decision should be made regarding the outcome
- Be able to appeal the decision.

Representations

Those under investigation will be advised to contact malpractice@ncrq.org.uk with any representations they believe are relevant to the case. On receiving these, NCRQ will respond that they have been accepted, however we are unable to engage in correspondence regarding the specifics of the case.

Representations must be received within 10 days of the notification letter.

Once representations have been received, the case will be heard by the next Malpractice Panel. This will typically be within three weeks.

The Panel will convene and consider:

- the facts of the malpractice
- the representations the accused has provided and whether there are any mitigating circumstances
- the accused's previous academic record (not applicable for plagiarism from another student)
- whether there has been any previous adverse malpractice. NCRQ has the right to investigate all previously submitted assessments under additional scrutiny and may use this also as evidence to a) support a finding of malpractice; and b) affect the sanctions imposed
- appropriate and proportional sanctions to be imposed

Malpractice Panel

- The work of the Malpractice Panel is confidential.
- The student under investigation is not permitted to be present.
- The Panel will take into consideration the allegation, the accused's previous academic record, and any representations made.
- The Panel will include at least one tutor, assessor, malpractice co-ordinator and a member of senior management.
- Those sitting on the panel must not have prior knowledge of the student under investigation.

Outcome

Once the Malpractice Panel has convened, the student will be notified by letter of the outcome.

This letter will include:

- the agreed facts of the malpractice investigation
- the evidence that was taken into consideration at the panel
- the sanctions imposed
- the right to appeal

Each case is different, and the Malpractice Panel is expected to exercise their judgement in deciding the seriousness of an offence and deciding whether there are aggravating or mitigating circumstances which can then affect the severity of the penalty

Panels will ensure consistency of treatment between cases, making a judgement about what is a proportionate penalty and ensuring that the penalty chosen does not have consequences for academic progression which are disproportionate in impact.

However, unless there are mitigating circumstances, the starting point for malpractice will be suspension from taking NCRQ assessments.

Where a suspension or exclusion from qualifications is imposed, there will be no refund of any fees paid.

Ignorance of the requirements of this document are not taken into account, and sanctions will be applied even if the malpractice was unintentional.

Additional notes

Pending grades. No other grades can be released once an investigation is commenced. For instance, if a student has plagiarism uncovered in their HSD2.4 assessment, but has HSD2.3 marks awaiting release, these will be frozen until the investigation has been closed.

Pending assessments. If there are outstanding assessments due for submission, the deadline for these is 'paused' for the duration of the investigation. If the student is cleared of all allegations, they will be allowed an extension equivalent to the number of days of the investigation.

Sanctions

The purpose of a sanction is to:

- minimise risk to the integrity of the assessments
- maintain confidence in the qualification
- ensure that there is nothing to gain from breaking regulations
- deter others

Sanctions can include, although are not limited to:

- complete exclusion from the course and any future qualification
- temporary suspension – duration to be determined by the panel
- revoking a previously awarded qualification or unit
- capping qualification grades at a pass
- capping assessment grades at a pass
- sharing the findings of the Malpractice Panel with an employer where the qualification is funded by them
- sharing the findings of the Malpractice Panel with a professional body (eg IOSH, IIRSM) with a recommendation to revoke / refuse membership of the grounds of professional misconduct
- sharing the findings of the Malpractice Panel with the police with a recommendation for prosecution for fraud (where clearly attempting to gain a qualification through deception) or copyright theft (where disclosing copies of assessment material or tutor comments)
- requiring resubmission of an assessment (requiring the payment of the relevant fee)
- an extended validation interview with a tutor
- a formal warning that any future contravention will result in a more serious penalty

The Schedule to this Policy illustrates the benchmark sanctions to be imposed for various types of offence.

Appeal

A student has the right to appeal against the outcome of a malpractice investigation. Such appeals must be lodged within 10 days of notification of the malpractice investigation outcome.

Please see the NCRQ Appeals Policy for details of this process, including the grounds for appeal and fees payable.

Guideline sanctions for malpractice

These are starting points for the Malpractice Panel, and the actual outcome is at the discretion of the Panel, taking into account all of the circumstances and aggravating and mitigating factors.

Note that the following will not be classed as mitigating factors:

- that the individual did not intend to cheat
- that the individual has an otherwise unblemished academic record
- that the individual could face discipline at work or lose their job
- that the individual regrets their actions

The following sanctions relate to a single instance of malpractice. Where malpractice is present in more than one assessment, the sanction will be escalated significantly.

Minor Offence:

| Offence | Suggested Sanction |
|---|--|
| Copying web-based sources without reference/in text citation. Total copied material below 20% of the document. Singular instance. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warning that further breach could result in full suspension • Reminder of referencing policy • Resubmission of assessment if redaction of plagiarised material would result in a fail |
| Public collusion (incl. online forums), where the student is attempting to extract information regarding assessments, although no response has been provided (<i>therefore no advantage to the student</i>). Singular instance. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate suspension pending investigation • Malpractice policy sent out • Warning that further breach could result in full suspension • Request to remove the posts immediately • Assessments to be marked with additional scrutiny |
| Public collusion (incl. online forums), where a current student responds to another's request for information with specific examples or personal feedback. Singular instance. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate suspension pending investigation • Malpractice policy sent out • Warning that further breach could result in full suspension • Request to remove the posts immediately. |
| Public collusion whereby there is a study group and feedback/assessments have been proven to be shared, though no copying/plagiarism has occurred. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Malpractice policy sent out • Warning that further breach could result in full suspension |

Mid-tier Offence:

| Offence | Suggested Sanction |
|--|--|
| Copying web-based sources without reference/in text citation. Total copied material above 50% of the document | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer assessment • Capping resubmission(s) at a pass • Extended validation interview • Explanation of plagiarism and referencing • Warning about consequences of future breaches • Exclusion for a defined period depending on degree of plagiarism and context |
| Public collusion (incl. online forums), where the student is attempting to extract information regarding assessments, although no response has been provided (<i>Thus no advantage to the student</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate suspension pending investigation • Capping unit / qualification at pass • Extended validation interview/phone call with tutor |
| Public collusion (incl. online forums), where a student responds to another's request for information with specific examples or personal feedback | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate suspension pending investigation • Request to remove the post • Exclusion from qualifications for a specified time • Report to professional bodies of professional misconduct |
| A student provides copies of their completed assessment(s) to another student. Some plagiarism has occurred as a consequence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cap unit / qualification at a pass depending on the number of assessments provided (where qualification not awarded) • Report to professional bodies with a recommendation to refuse / revoke membership on the grounds of professional misconduct |
| Collusion with another student to produce a piece of work that cannot be fairly attributed to one or the other OR where one student admits collusion. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referral of all relevant assessments • Capping all re-submissions assessments / qualifications involved at a pass • Extended validation interview |

Major Offence:

| Offence | Suggested Sanction |
|---|---|
| Releasing all/specific elements of the course including assessment material online and/or attempting to sell the material. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate suspension • Permanent exclusion (debarment) from all NCRQ qualifications • Consider copyright / trademark legal action |
| Theft of another student's work (e.g. colleagues / family members, where the first student admits no knowledge of their work being taken.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate suspension • Permanent exclusion (debarment) from all NCRQ qualifications • Consider legal action |
| Copying another student's work. Copied work takes up a minor part of the whole submission, and assessment would pass if copied work removed. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusion for a defined period depending on degree of plagiarism and context • Capping assessment at pass • Revocation of any certificate already awarded |
| Copying another student's work. Copied work either takes up a moderate part (25 to 70%) of the whole submission OR is a minor part of the whole submission but would not pass the if copied work removed. In both cases the student has clearly undertaken some work themselves that demonstrates achievement of assessment criteria. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusion for a defined period depending on degree of plagiarism and context (typically 18 months) • Assessment referred • Capping qualification at pass • Requirement to undertake extended validation interview • Revocation of qualification if already awarded • Report to professional bodies with a recommendation to refuse / revoke membership on the grounds of professional misconduct • Notification to employer where sponsored |

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|---|--|
| <p>Copying another student's work. Copied work either a) takes up a substantial part (over 70%) of the whole submission, or b) there is little evidence of any substantial work / input into the assessment by the student.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusion for a defined period depending on degree of plagiarism and context (typically 3 years) • Unit failed (i.e. require re-enrolment and completion of new assessments for whole unit) • Capping qualification at pass • Requirement to undertake extended validation interview • Revocation of qualification if already awarded • Report to professional bodies with a recommendation to refuse / revoke membership on the grounds of professional misconduct • Notification to employer where sponsored |
| <p>Copying another student's work. Copied work takes up over 90% of the assessment and the student has simply made minor amendments to an assessment previously submitted by another student.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permanent exclusion (debarment) from all NCRQ qualifications • Revocation of qualification if already awarded • Notification to employer where sponsored • Report to professional bodies with a recommendation to refuse / revoke membership on the grounds of professional misconduct • Consider report to relevant police force with recommendation to prosecute under Fraud Act |
| <p>More than one instance of plagiarism from another student</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permanent exclusion (debarment) from all NCRQ qualifications • Revocation of qualification if already awarded • Notification to employer where sponsored • Report to professional bodies with a recommendation to refuse / revoke membership on the grounds of professional misconduct • Consider report to relevant police force with recommendation to prosecute under Fraud Act. |