

Malpractice and Plagiarism Policy (including maladministration)

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Acorn AP is committed to consistent, valid and reliable assessment that meets the requirements of regulatory bodies such as OFQUAL and Awarding Organisations.

Summary

This policy covers the assessment of all learners, whether assessed internally or by examinations, and is derived from regulatory body requirements. Malpractice, also known as academic misconduct, can involve both learners and members of staff.

Malpractice has been defined as ‘any deliberate activity, neglect, default or other practice that compromises the integrity of the assessment process, and/or the validity of certificates’ (The current Ofqual definition of malpractice and maladministration).

Acorn AP will:

- ensure all staff members know and follow this policy and associated guidance;
- deal with cases of malpractice through the learner or staff disciplinary procedures;

- tell learners about the Centre's malpractice policy, making clear that plagiarism is regarded as malpractice and will be dealt with via the learner disciplinary procedure;
- teach learners what plagiarism and collusion are, at the start of each course;
- teach learners how to avoid plagiarism, for example, citation, referencing, etc.;
- ensure staff make clear the extent to which learners can collaborate on assessed work.

Centre staff malpractice and maladministration

Non-compliance, for example:

- failure to follow Awarding Organisation assessment regulations;
- failure to deal with issues identified by Awarding Organisation;
- misuse of the conditions for special learner requirements.

Professional misconduct, for example:

- failing to declare conflicts of interest and follow agreed actions to mitigate such conflicts;
- helping learners to complete assessments;
- tampering with learners work prior to external moderation/verification;
- giving learners access to test papers, supplying answers, etc.;
- allowing evidence, known by the staff member not to be the learner's own, to be included in a learner's assignment/task/portfolio/coursework;
- assisting learners with the production of work outside of the awarding body guidance;
- alteration of mark schemes or assessment and grading criteria;
- deliberate falsification of records, witness statements, certificates, etc.;
- fraudulent certificate claims, for example, claiming for a certificate prior to the learner completing all the requirements of assessment;
- giving information on formal assessment outcomes before the official release of such information by the Awarding Organisation.

Maladministration, for example:

- failure to keep assessment papers or mark schemes secure prior to assessment;
- failure to maintain appropriate records;
- failure to keep learner computer files secure.

Learner malpractice and maladministration

Misconduct, for example:

- failure to follow Awarding Organisation regulations or the instructions or advice of tutors, assessors, supervisors or invigilators;
- misuse of assessment or examination material;
- resubmitting previously graded work;
- any form of impersonation;
- any form of cheating to gain an unfair advantage;
- falsification, fabrication or alteration of results, certificates or assessment evidence;
- taking unauthorised material into assessment rooms;
- obtaining, receiving, exchanging or passing on assessment-related information during assessment sessions;
- behaviour that disrupts or undermines the integrity of assessment;
- deliberate destruction of another person's work.

Collusion, for example:

- unauthorised co-operation between a learner and another person, in or outside of the Centre, in the preparation and production of work that is eventually submitted by one or both learners as the outcome of his or her individual efforts;
- allowing another learner to copy one's own work;
- Learners should not be discouraged from teamwork, as this is an essential skill. However, methods of avoiding collusion, for example, the use of minutes, allocating tasks, agreeing outcomes, etc., are an essential part of teamwork, and the requirement to use such methods must be made clear to all learners.

Plagiarism, for example:

- copying from published text without acknowledging the source;
- copying images, graphs, tables, art, music etc, without acknowledging the source;
- copying small or large sections of assignments from other learners;
- downloading original material from the internet without acknowledging the source;
- imitating too closely an existing work of art or music, design idea or concept.

Plagiarism is where a learner submits someone else's work as if it is their own:

- copying work (artwork, images, artefacts, products, designs, words) from a published source and presenting the copied work as if it were the student's own;
- the use of another person's work (artwork, images, artefacts, products, designs, words), with or without permission, without appropriately acknowledging the source.

Plagiarism is a form of malpractice and academic misconduct. It is wrong, whether done deliberately or accidentally, to claim someone else's work, thoughts or ideas as one's own.

Dealing with Plagiarism

Where plagiarism is suspected, the assessor should have an initial, informal discussion with the learner. It may be that they have misunderstood the brief and acted in error, for example, failing to reference sources appropriately. In such cases the assessor should:

- make sure the learner is aware of the serious consequences of plagiarism;
- arrange for the learner to re-submit the assessment following an appropriate revision of referencing, citation, etc.;
- record the outcomes of the discussion in the learner file.

If the initial discussion fails to lead to a satisfactory outcome, the case must be investigated and dealt with as outlined below, to ensure that the issue is dealt with fairly, consistently and in accordance with the principles of natural justice.

- the learner is presented with all the evidence and given an opportunity to challenge it in front of the person(s) who will determine the allegations;
- all participants must be given appropriate notice of the disciplinary hearing;
- learners must be told about their rights of representation at such a hearing;
- learners have the right to challenge the evidence, especially where it has not been possible to identify the original of the allegedly plagiarized work;
- should the plagiarism be confirmed, appropriate disciplinary action should be taken, with reference to the relevant Awarding Organisation regulations;
- learners have the right to appeal against decisions of the disciplinary panel.

JISC has developed a web site providing plagiarism advice and information, at <http://www.plagiarismadvice.org>. There is further guidance in the Appendix.

Dealing with malpractice and maladministration

Acorn AP views all instances of malpractice and maladministration, including plagiarism, as a serious offence, and will respond to all allegations of malpractice and maladministration in accordance with the relevant Awarding Organisation regulations.

This may require the Centre:

- to report any suspected malpractice and maladministration involving learners, Centre staff or any other party, to the relevant Awarding Organisation.
- to investigate, in which case the Learner Disciplinary or Staff Disciplinary procedures below will be used.

Staff Malpractice Procedure

Investigations into allegations will be coordinated by the Director of Operations. They will ensure the initial investigation is carried out within ten working days. The investigation will involve establishing the full facts and circumstances of any alleged malpractice. It should not be assumed that because an allegation has been made, it is true. Where appropriate, the person concerned, and any potential witnesses will be interviewed and their version of events recorded on paper.

The member of staff will be:

- Informed in writing of the allegation made against them;
- Informed of outcomes at each step of the investigation;
- Given the opportunity to submit a written statement and to seek advice (as necessary);
- Informed of the applicable appeals procedure, should a decision be made against them;
- Informed of the possibility that information relating to a serious case of malpractice will be shared with relevant awarding bodies, Ofqual and any other professional bodies as deemed relevant.

Instances of malpractice and maladministration that are upheld following investigation, will lead to disciplinary action. This could be in the form of sanctions such as a written warning, relevant training, suspension or dismissal.

Learner Malpractice Procedure

If malpractice is suspected, the learner will be informed, and the allegations will be explained.

The learner will be:

- Given the opportunity to offer their side of the story before a final decision is made.
- Given the opportunity to repeat the assignment if the learner accepts that malpractice has occurred;
- Withdrawn from the relevant examination if the malpractice has taken part during an examination and is found to be guilty.

The awarding body will also be informed of the malpractice.

Appeals

In the event that a malpractice decision is made, which the learner feels is unfair, the learner has the right to appeal in line with the Appeals Policy.

Appendix 1 – Plagiarism: Guidance for staff

A. Approach to plagiarism

It is important to make sure that learners:

- know the Centre's malpractice policy, especially the information about plagiarism;
- know that the Centre's policy is to investigate instances of plagiarism, using the learner disciplinary procedure;
- always cite the sources of ideas and all resources used in a bibliography;
- do not reproduce verbatim or near verbatim extracts from other resources, e.g. textbooks, Internet;
- know that quotations shorter than 50 words (approx.) may be included in inverted commas in the normal run of text, with the source clearly shown in the Bibliography;
- realise that longer quotations should be indented and could be shown in a different font/style – again the source should be clearly shown in the Bibliography;
- try to avoid long quotations where possible;
- try to avoid overuse of quotations in their work;
- use appendices for substantial elaborations, e.g. copies of questionnaires, documents, and newspaper reports;
- place charts, graphs and tables in the main text, numbered and referenced;
- take care with references – the important point to remind learners is to be consistent;
- preserve the anonymity of those who participated in research e.g. questionnaires, psychology experiments.

Examples of minor cases of plagiarism could include a learner:

- receiving undue help in good faith because instructions have been misunderstood;
- copying a couple of sentences or using someone else's diagrams or charts;
- copying small amounts of text from books without direct acknowledgement, but which does not make a significant contribution to the overall work;
- not referencing work properly;
- failing to acknowledge the source of a small section of an assignment;
- infringing the policy when the assessed work does not contribute to final grade.

Examples of serious cases could include:

- copying of text that makes a significant contribution to the work;
- extensive plagiarism of professional works, e.g., more than 100 words;
- buying, selling or stealing work;
- extensive use of information from the internet without acknowledgement;
- using model answers available on the internet;
- using learners' work from previous years;
- undue help from outside of the Centre.

Authenticating Coursework: a teacher's guide (QCA) <http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/qca-06-2377-coursework-t.pdf>

Digital technologies and dishonesty in examinations and tests (Ofqual 2008)
<http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/177.aspx>

Plagiarism guides for students, parents and teachers (QCA 2009)
<http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/downloads/category/129-guidance>

B. Teaching and Learning suggestions for discouraging plagiarism

Use different assignment instruments each year. Learners quickly learn if a tutor sets the same assignments year after year. Learners can also spot cosmetic changes such as tweaking numbers or renaming characters.

Avoid tasks that require regurgitation of information. Instead, create tasks that require individualised answers from learners. For example, ask them to compare or contrast elements, explain how to apply something practically, or assess how well it would work in a different circumstance. Comparison with or application to recent events or circumstances make plagiarism quite difficult.

Make information gathering part of the assignment, e.g., assessing the value or accuracy of web-based information such as Wikipedia or ChatGPT essays, etc...

Research shows that less able learners, those with poor time management skills, and those who read less, are more likely to plagiarise work. Set interim deadlines and check drafts and initial plans, as well as final products.

Consider building reading requirements into the assessment, e.g., production of a reading log, interim fact list from initial reading, etc...

Ensure learners are adequately supervised when using computers (especially when networked) to prevent copying or printing out other people's work as their own.

Support coursework assessment by unseen and supervised work under test conditions.

Make less use of generic assignments in favour of tailored assignments.

Get to know the style of learners' writing/submissions, early in the course.

Compare subsequent work to initial assessment tests.

As far as possible, assess a class group's coursework on a single occasion, to enhance the likelihood of spotting plagiarised passages.

Reconsider assignments that can be purchased, for example, essays. Set a range of assessment tasks instead:

- an annotated list of sources with comments on, for example, reliability of the source, how the information was used, or how it is relevant;
- an outline rather than a finished product;
- the three best web sites or resources that would have been useful had the document been written.

JISC has developed a web site providing plagiarism advice and information, at <http://www.plagiarismadvice.org>