

Malpractice Policy

Introduction

This policy is aimed at our internal quality assurance and training staff, learners and partners who are delivering for or on behalf of Digital Marketing Mentor on their programmes or courses, and who may be involved in suspected or actual malpractice/maladministration. It is also for use by all Digital Marketing Mentor staff to ensure they deal with all malpractice and maladministration investigations in a consistent manner.

It sets out the steps staff, 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.

Responsibility

It is important that all staff and learners are fully aware of the contents of the policy and we have arrangements in place to prevent and investigate instances of malpractice and maladministration.

Learners may be asked to declare that their work is their own, and to provide evidence/acknowledgment of any sources used.

Staff should ensure learner records are auditable, accountable and up to date. This will enable IQA, staff monitoring and robust systems that are open to any investigation that is conducted.

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 Digital Marketing Mentor
- 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.

Examples of maladministration

- Persistent failure to adhere to our learner registration and certification procedures.

- Persistent failure to adhere to Digital Marketing Mentors recognition and/or qualification requirements
- Late learner registrations (both infrequent and persistent)
- Unreasonable delays in responding to requests and/or communications from Digital Marketing Mentor
- Inaccurate claim for certificates
- Failure to maintain appropriate auditable records, e.g. certification claims and/or forgery of evidence
- Withholding of information deliberately from us which is required to assure active examples of malpractice
- Failure to carry out internal assessment, internal moderation or internal verification in accordance with our requirements
- Deliberate failure to adhere to our learner registration and certification procedures.
- Deliberate failure to continually adhere to Digital Marketing Mentors recognition and/or qualification approval requirements.
- Deliberate failure to maintain appropriate auditable records, e.g. certification claims and/or forgery of evidence
- Fraudulent claim(s) for certificates
- Intentional withholding of information from us which is critical to maintaining the rigour of quality assurance and the standards of qualifications
- Collusion or permitting collusion in exams/assessments
- Learners still working towards qualification after certification claims have been made
- Plagiarism by learners/staff
- Copying from another learner (including using ICT to do so).

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 the Directors of Digital Marketing Mentor. In doing so they should put them in writing/email and enclose appropriate supporting evidence.

All allegations must include (where possible):

- Learner's name and registration number
- Digital Marketing Mentor staff members name and job role - if they are involved in the case
- Details of the 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 Digital Marketing Mentor or anybody else involved in the case, including any mitigating circumstances

The Directors will then conduct an initial investigation prior to ensure that staff involved are competent and have no personal interest in the outcome of the investigation. In all cases of suspected malpractice and maladministration reported we will protect the identity of the 'informant' in accordance with our duty of confidentiality and/or any other legal duty.

Confidentiality and whistleblowing

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 contact details to us, we understand if you are concerned about possible adverse consequences. Therefore you may request that the Directors do not divulge your identity.

While we are prepared to investigate issues which are reported to us anonymously we shall always try to confirm an allegation by means of a separate investigation before taking up the matter with those the allegation relates.

Responsibility for the investigation

In accordance with regulatory requirements all suspected cases of maladministration and malpractice will be examined promptly by Digital Marketing Mentor to establish if malpractice or maladministration has occurred and will take all reasonable steps to prevent any adverse effect from the occurrence as defined by the awarding body and Ofqual. We will acknowledge receipt, as appropriate, to external parties within 48 Hours. The Directors 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 to lead the investigation and establish whether or not the malpractice or maladministration has occurred, and review any supporting evidence received or gathered by Digital Marketing Mentor.

Notifying relevant parties

Where applicable, the Directors will inform the appropriate regulatory authorities if they believe there has been an incident of malpractice or maladministration which could either invalidate the award of a qualification or if it could affect the awarding organisation. Where the allegation may affect the awarding organisation and their provision we will also inform them in accordance with the regulatory requirements and obligations imposed by the regulator Ofqual. 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.

Investigation timelines and summary process

We aim to action and resolve all stages of the investigation within 10 working days of receipt of the allegation. 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 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.
- To evaluate any action already taken

- To determine whether remedial action is required to reduce the risk to current registered learners and to preserve the integrity of Digital Marketing Mentor and the qualification.
- To identify any adverse patterns or trends.
- The investigation may involve a request for further information from relevant parties and/or interviews with personnel involved in the investigation. Therefore, we will:
- Ensure all material collected as part of an investigation must be kept secure.
- 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 co-operate 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 withhold a learner's, and/or cohort's, results.

Where a member of Digital Marketing Mentor staff is under investigation we may suspend them. The Directors 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

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 the Directors. The report will:

- Identify where the breach, if any, occurred.
- Confirm the facts of the case.
- Identify who is responsible for the breach (if any)
- Confirm an appropriate level of remedial action to be applied.

We will make the final report available to the parties concerned and 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 will also inform them of the outcome – normally within 10 working days of the 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 report will be agreed by the Managing Director, along with the relevant internal managers and appropriate internal disciplinary procedures will be implemented.

Investigation outcomes

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

- Minimise the risk to the integrity of certification now and in the future

- Maintain the awarding bodies confidence in the delivery and awarding of their qualifications.
- Discourage others from carrying out similar instances of malpractice or maladministration
- Ensure there has been no gain from compromising the standards of our company, or of the awarding body

The action we take may include:

- Imposing actions in order to address the instance of malpractice/maladministration and to prevent it from recurring
- In cases where certificates are deemed to be invalid, inform the Awarding Organisation 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 let the affected learners know the action we are taking and that their original certificates are invalid and ask – where possible – to return the invalid certificates to Digital Marketing Mentor.
- Informing relevant third parties (e.g. funding bodies) of our findings in case they need to take relevant action.

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

If the relevant party (ies) wish to appeal against the decision to impose sanctions, please refer to Digital Marketing Mentors Complaints Procedure.