Authenticating learners' work – good practice advice for centre staff

Introduction

Centres have always played an important role in maintaining the credibility of SQA qualifications. You can support and encourage learners to have confidence in their own ideas and ability. You must also ensure that learners understand what constitutes malpractice and the potential dangers and consequences of plagiarising content and passing it off as their own work, or misusing technology. Through your practice, you become familiar with a learner's work over time, and your professional judgement is vital in identifying evidence that does not appear to have been produced by the learner.

With the availability of Artificial Intelligence (AI) chatbots, such as ChatGPT, which can quickly produce human-like text, it is important that you are aware of the appropriate authentication steps to take. While AI chatbots may be adept at creating text, they cannot describe how they arrived at that text. Learners *can* answer that question, and that is why discussion with learners is so important.

Resources

This advice draws on the authentication measures already set out in the *Guidance on conditions of assessment for coursework*, *Guide to Assessment* for internally assessed courses, and course specification documents (for NQ and HNVQ). Course specification documents for individual subjects have detailed guidance on authentication and are an important source of information. Assessment (or unit) support packs on our secure website are also a good source of additional information.

Plagiarism

While plagiarism is a long-standing issue, the number of learners who submit work to SQA that is not their own is low. To help keep it low, and reduce the risk of plagiarism (including the use of AI-generated responses) you can:

♦ Raise learners' awareness and understanding about the ethics of submitting work that is not their own and how this affects their learning and their qualifications.
♦ Remind learners about malpractice and the potential consequences of submitting work that isn't their own.
♦ Explain to learners the importance of reading and understanding the coursework flyleaf declaration before signing it, and what the declaration means.
♦ Ensure the conditions of assessment are correctly adhered to.

- ♦ Remind learners that, when they begin work on their assessment tasks, they should work on them independently.
- ♦ Be alert to work submitted by learners that is, in part or in full, uncharacteristic of their typical style or standard of work.
- ♦ Monitor learner progress when drafting submissions through progress checklists or spot checks and/or asking the learner about the work they have submitted (eg how did they come up with the draft? What sources did they use?)
- ♦ Review your centre's internal policy and processes and update where necessary.

SQA has robust malpractice procedures in place which outline that learners who submit work that is not their own risk incurring a penalty, including the potential cancellation of their award.

Authentication – an ongoing process

Where possible, when learners are embarking on any form of coursework, the relevant centre staff member for that subject should discuss the topic of that work with learners individually at an early stage. This helps to ensure that the topic is appropriate for the subject and level, and allows centre staff to immediately become familiar with the likely outputs from that work.

Regular checkpoints or progress meetings with learners will also be important to ensure they are on track. Where appropriate, you should review learners' record of activity (including lab books, previous drafts and research notes) and ask questions.

In summary, for all SQA qualifications, you can:

- ♦ carry out regular checkpoint/progress meetings with learners
- ♦ review learners' record of activity/progress
- ♦ rely on assessor observation
- ♦ regularly review learners' lab books, previous drafts and research notes (where appropriate)
- ♦ review photographs, film or audio evidence (where appropriate)
- ♦ ask candidates to provide an annotated bibliography (where appropriate)

For HNVQs, you can also:

- ♦ Carry out questioning/short spot-check personal interviews. When centre staff have not been able to see the learners perform activities at first hand, it will be useful to ask them questions about what they did and why they did it.
- ♦ Review personal statements (where appropriate). When learners are producing evidence over an extended period of time, they may maintain a diary, log/blog of the planning, developing and reviewing activities they do in the course of the assessment. This record can be used to note successes and problems, and can provide a basis for questioning.
- ♦ Rely on witness testimony in vocational qualifications. Witness testimony can be a valuable source of evidence where it has been produced by a reliable witness.

Internal verification

A good internal verification policy will help centre staff feel supported and assured that they are making the correct judgements and following the correct procedures. SQA's internal verification toolkits and information on malpractice are available at: www.sqa.org.uk/qualityassurance.

Where there is doubt over the authenticity of a learner's work, it must not be accepted for submission. Our *Malpractice – Information for centres* provides guidance on handling instances of candidate malpractice (and what to do if the candidate malpractice is discovered after evidence has been sent to SQA for external marking).

We appreciate your support in maintaining SQA's standards and encouraging learners to have the confidence to realise their ability through their own work.