National Qualifications 2024: Candidate Malpractice Data

On 3 April 2025, under its statutory duty as the regulator for National Qualifications in Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) published information on malpractice in the 2023–24 academic session.

Malpractice terminology

Categories of malpractice

Breach of assessment conditions — Breaching the defined assessment conditions, such as completing work outside of controlled conditions.

Collusion — Colluding with other candidates when the assessment should be completed by individual candidates. Examples of collusion include copying work from another candidate; sharing work with another candidate; and working collaboratively with other candidates on tasks that should be completed individually.

Frivolous content — Producing content that is unrelated to the exam paper, or to any question that is in the exam script or coursework.

Misconduct — Behaviour in the exam room that causes disruption to others. This includes talking, shouting, abusive or aggressive behaviour or language, and having a prohibited electronic device that emits any kind of sound in the exam room.

Offensive content — Content in scripts or coursework that includes vulgarity and swearing that is outwith the context of the assessment, or any material of a discriminatory nature (including racism, sexism and homophobia).

Personation — Assuming the identity of another candidate, or a candidate having someone assume their identity during an assessment.

Plagiarism — Failure to acknowledge sources properly and/or the submission of work that is not the candidate's own (this could be another person's work or work taken from a generative AI source).

Prohibited items — Physical possession of prohibited items (including mobile phones, electronic devices, handwritten notes, etc) in the exam room.

Penalty definitions

Warning — A warning given to a candidate that will be taken into account should there be any future breach of SQA rules.

Warning with revision of marks — Marks awarded for the affected component are amended.

Cancellation of award — Cancellation of the award in which the malpractice was identified.

Cancellation of component — Cancellation of all marks gained from the component in which malpractice was identified.

De-bar — Disqualification from future entries for a defined period of time.

Data

Category	NQ 2024 Number of instances of malpractice by category	NQ 2023 Number of instances of malpractice by category
Breach of assessment conditions	*	0
Collusion	12	16
Frivolous/Offensive content	6	*
Misconduct	*	6
Personation	0	0
Plagiarism *(cases involving use of AI given in parenthesis)***	92 *(31)*	54 *(n/a)*
Prohibited items: mobile telephones	40	38
Prohibited items: notes, etc	19	27
Totals	**173**	**141**

Penalty	NQ 2024 Number of penalties issued to candidates	NQ 2023 Number of penalties issued to candidates
Warning	30	31
Warning — revision of marks	*	15
Cancellation of award	5	13
Cancellation of component	135	82
De-bar	*	0
Totals	**173**	**141**

* The number of penalties is not reported for categories with fewer than five instances, so that individual candidates cannot be identified.

** Reporting on the number of penalties issued for cases that involved the use of artificial intelligence (AI) is new for 2024.