

March 2023

Dear Colleague

As a school leader you will be very aware of the increase in the many opportunities social media provides for everyone involved in the delivery of examinations and assessments to communicate in restricted groups, or publicly to a much wider audience.

Whilst there are positive aspects to these developments, unfortunately they also have the potential to facilitate additional areas of concern.

In consequence, CCEA considers it important to remind centres and centre staff of the application of Joint Council for Qualifications [JCQ] '*Suspected Malpractice: Policies and Procedures: 1 September 2022 to 31 August 2023*' to communication via social media. The list below provides guidance on its usage in relation to examination and assessment matters.

In this document, JCQ defines malpractice as:

'any act, default or practice which is a breach of the Regulations, awarding body requirements and/or established procedures and which:

- gives rise to prejudice to candidates; and/or
- compromises public confidence in qualifications; and/or
- compromises, attempts to compromise or may compromise the process of assessment, the integrity of any qualification or the validity of a result or certificate; and/or
- damages the authority, reputation or credibility of any awarding body or centre or any officer, employee or agent of any awarding body or centre.' (Section 1, pg2)

The JCQ document also recognises that malpractice may not relate solely to sitting an examination and that novel or unexpected forms of malpractice may emerge as technologies and the nature of examination centres change (Section 1, pg3).

In the event that CCEA becomes aware of the use of social media in such a manner that could be considered a breach of JCQ's definition of malpractice, it may be investigated in accordance with the JCQ document.

For this reason, and to remind and protect all involved, we ask that you share this guidance, and the relevant JCQ document, with those within your centre involved in the work of examinations and assessments.

In addition, we would ask you draw their attention to the following:

- It is important that, in the use of social media, either as private individuals or as members of online education communities, individuals must take care to ensure they are not posting messages that may fall within the scope of examination and assessment malpractice as defined by the JCQ.
- Awarding organisation contractors (i.e. examiners and/or moderators) should never be contacted directly by centres/centre staff unless they have been asked to do so. This position includes attempted contact by social media. Contractors act, not as individuals, but under contract on behalf of the awarding organisation. CCEA has processes in place for dealing with decisions made by the awarding organisation and these must always be followed to ensure transparency and fairness for all candidates.
- If suspected malpractice using social media is reported, it may be investigated by CCEA, in accordance with the JCQ document, and a sanction(s) may be imposed on individuals and/or centres. Potential sanctions for malpractice are published in the JCQ document, *Suspected Malpractice: Policies and Procedures*, (Section 8, pg25) and can include the exclusion of an individual(s) in the delivery or administration of examinations and assessments for a defined period or, in extreme cases, the removal of examination centre status from a school.

While the purpose of this guidance is to remind centres and their staff of the applicability of JCQ document to communication via social media and online, CCEA wishes to make clear that it does not intend to unnecessarily restrict online discussion concerning matters of examinations and assessments; only communication that may fall within the JCQ definition of malpractice.

This position also accords with the responsibilities of centres (Section 5) of the *JCQ General Regulations for Approved Centres*.

CCEA would also like to emphasise that we have always valued the positive and professional relationships with your centre and staff and hope everyone finds this guidance useful, given the rise and prevalence of social media forums for communication purposes.

We wish you and your students well as we commence the Summer 2023 examination series.

Yours sincerely



Michael Crossan
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