

NEBOSH Ethical Practice Report



NEBOSH cracks down on assessment cheats and fraudulent behaviour

January-March 2021



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Health and safety professionals save lives. There are no easy routes to a NEBOSH qualification; you have to study hard and pass our assessments to demonstrate your knowledge and understanding – that’s why NEBOSH qualifications are valued by organisations and professionals around the world.

Unfortunately, some people cheat to try to gain our qualifications and this happens with all types of assessments, not just NEBOSH. Cheats are not welcome in our community; NEBOSH has strict processes and dedicated experts to prevent and detect malpractice and penalise those who are engaged in it.

What is malpractice?

Malpractice means ‘any deliberate activity, neglect, default or other practice that compromises or could compromise the assessment process, the integrity of a qualification, the validity of a result or certificate, the reputation and credibility of NEBOSH, or the qualification or the wider qualifications community’

Between January and March 2021, NEBOSH issued 599 penalties, including 223 bans to individuals and organisations engaging in fraudulent and unethical behaviour. 51 websites were taken down or had content removed as a result of fraudulent activity and more than 400 social media infringements were reviewed and removed.

In this review, the first quarterly Ethical Practice Report, we publish further information about our ethical practice approach and outcomes.

Investigations

From 1 January to 31 March 2021, NEBOSH identified 597 potential malpractice incidents with investigations spread across all assessment types.

Every potential incident – which can include single or multiple people/organisations – is triaged by our dedicated team to establish the veracity of the incident and determine whether a full investigation is required. NEBOSH then uses a range of tools and techniques to gather evidence and information to determine whether malpractice has taken place, the extent to which it was committed and whether any other parties were involved.

A collaborative approach

Identifying and investigating malpractice is a collaborative effort between NEBOSH, its Learning Partners and its Examiners as learners progress through the learning and assessment process. As an example, learners who take an open book examination must each attend a closing interview; 199 potential malpractice incidents were reported to us by Learning Partners based on the closing interview phase of the assessment process. The closing interview takes place before assessments are marked therefore not all reports progress to an investigation. For example, where a learner performs poorly in a closing interview this can be a cause for concern; however, if they also perform poorly in the assessment then their performance is consistent and not necessarily a malpractice case.

In another case, a comparison of IG2 practical assessments revealed that a group of learners had received support from an unaccredited organisation. When we analysed the assessments, we found that their work contained a large amount of identical content with other learners in the cohort and to other assessments that we had on file from previous investigations. The outcome? Ten learners received a ban.

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By 31 March 2021, 179 investigations had been concluded which resulted in 324 people and 5 organisations receiving penalties and sanctions. A further 178 investigations are ongoing and have continued into subsequent months. About 44 per cent of completed investigations in this period focussed on non OBE units.

Our message to anyone thinking of cheating: 'we will catch you'

NEBOSH's systems detected a recent case where 12 learners had colluded (worked together) in their assessment and produced very similar answers. During the investigation and review process, these people also produced identical evidence protesting their innocence!

Each learner engaged in this was given a three-year ban from participating in a NEBOSH qualification and their work was voided.

Penalties and sanctions

NEBOSH imposes a range of penalties and sanctions to those engaged in malpractice and these will be determined by our dedicated team depending on the severity of the offence and the evidence collected during the investigation process.

Learner penalties

Penalties can include mark reductions, voiding assessment papers and bans ranging from one year to a lifetime and 599 penalties were imposed in this reporting quarter. Note, the number of penalties is greater than the number of learners punished, as one learner can receive multiple

penalties. For example, if a learner has two units voided and receives a ban, that equates to three penalties. 223 bans were also issued:

- 7 were lifetime bans, meaning these learners can no longer associate with NEBOSH or study for its qualifications. Activities that achieved lifetime bans included creating/using fake NEBOSH documentation and attempting to re-sit an exam whilst already under a ban.
- 4 people were issued with a 5-year ban; this is typically assigned when someone tries to use a proxy to sit their exams for them.
- 84 people received a 3-year ban, this could be when answers are identical to other learners, or largely plagiarised.
- 72 people were given a 2-year ban, with a further 56 people being banned for 1 year.
- Bans, including a 3-year ban, were also issued to learners soliciting assistance on social media. In such cases their work is also automatically voided.

Learning Partner penalties

If a Learning Partner is found to engage in malpractice its accreditation can be permanently revoked. NEBOSH also publishes a list of unauthorised agents that is shared with our Learning Partners. Learning is a key part of achieving a NEBOSH qualification and we only accredit and approve organisations that meet our strict standards. Learning Partners must not work with or accept learners from unauthorised agents – doing so could result in a ban or suspension.

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Protecting our reputation online

NEBOSH employs dedicated ethical practice and IPR (Intellectual Property Rights) experts. This means that we also pursue websites, blogs and social media content which publish fraudulent content, falsely promote an association with NEBOSH and sell fake NEBOSH training or certificates. In the three months from 1 January to 31 March 2021, 51 websites were taken down or had content removed for conducting such activities.

Social media

We monitor all types of media, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, TikTok, eBay and YouTube, for activities such as logo misuse, fraudulent certificates for sale, illegal posts and comments, people falsely claiming to hold NEBOSH qualifications, advertising fraudulent courses and/or exams for sale, 'help to answer' videos, and counterfeit guides and papers. Facebook in particular is excellent at cooperating with the removal of fraudulent activity.

We log, investigate and report all content we find; 497 social media infringements were recorded during the quarter with 81% (401) of these infringements successfully investigated and removed.

Whilst NEBOSH take a proactive approach and has dedicated resources, online activity is hard to police. For example, a website owner or social media user can publish a new post or website within minutes. Despite this, we remain committed to finding and removing fraudulent online content.

Reporting malpractice to NEBOSH

If you have any evidence about possible malpractice, please report it to NEBOSH's dedicated team of experts at postassessment@nebosh.org.uk

We review every piece of information and intelligence that is sent to us. Please note, for privacy reasons, we cannot provide an update on individual cases or investigations to you.

Together we can stamp out malpractice and protect the integrity of the health and safety profession.

At a glance: January- March 2021



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**7 LIFETIME
BANS**

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NEBOSH, the National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health,
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