Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in assessments: Case Studies

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Case Study: AI used to prepare for an exam

Scenario

Elliot is preparing for an NCFE Level 1/2 Technical Award in Business and Enterprise exam. At home, several days before the assessment, he uses ChatGPT to help revise key topics, generate potential quiz questions and test his understanding. He writes some revision notes based on what he has learned. Elliot then sits the exam under normal invigilated conditions with no access to AI or the internet. After the exam, he tells a tutor that he used AI to help him revise and asks whether this was against the rules.

What the rules say

JCQ's restrictions focus on the work submitted for assessment and on whether the learner used AI in a way that means the assessed response is no longer their own. For exams completed under close supervision, AI tools must not be accessed during the assessment. However, the document is also clear that the main concern is protecting the authenticity of the assessment evidence itself.

Judgement

This is **permitted**. Elliot used AI as part of his revision and preparation before the assessment. He did not use AI during the exam and the answers he submitted in the exam were his own unaided responses under exam conditions.

Outcome

- No malpractice has occurred on the basis of this scenario.
- The centre may still wish to remind learners that revision support is different from assessment support, and that AI must never be used during an invigilated external assessment.

Key message

Using AI to support private revision before an exam is different from using AI during the exam. The prohibition applies to the assessment itself and to any submitted work that is not genuinely the learner's own.

Case Study: AI notetaking during a professional discussion

Scenario

Callum is completing an NCFE apprenticeship end-point assessment professional discussion online via a Teams call. Before the discussion begins, he opens an AI-powered meeting assistant on his device. The tool generates a live transcript, identifies key themes and produces prompts on screen to help him answer. The Independent Assessor notices Callum repeatedly pausing to look at another part of his screen. When asked, Callum explains that he is not “asking AI for answers” and is only using it to help keep track of the conversation.

What the rules say

NCFE’s core position is that work submitted for assessment must be the learner’s own and must reflect their independent work and thinking. AI misuse includes using AI to complete parts of an assessment so that the work no longer reflects the learner’s own analysis or response. NCFE guidance also states that for assessments undertaken under close supervision with no permitted internet access, learners must not be able to use AI tools while completing the assessment.

Judgement

This is **not permitted**. Although Callum describes the tool as passive support, it is influencing the assessment by providing prompts, summaries and live assistance during the discussion. The responses can no longer be treated as wholly independent.

Outcome

- This should be treated as malpractice because prohibited AI assistance was used during the professional discussion.
- The centre and assessment staff should also review whether the platform controls and learner instructions were sufficient to prevent access to unauthorised tools. Centres must put arrangements in place to prevent misuse, and ensure staff understand the risks associated with AI tools.

Key message

For assessments such as professional discussions, learners must respond without AI assistance. This includes “passive” AI tools such as transcription, summarisation or prompting software where these support the learner during the assessment itself.

Case Study: AI used to generate assignment structure

Scenario

Rhys is completing an NCFE Level 2 Diploma in Adult Care internal assessment. He is struggling to organise his response, so he asks an AI chatbot to suggest a structure for an assignment about safeguarding responsibilities. The AI tool produces a simple outline with headings such as introduction, key duties, reporting concerns, and conclusion. Rhys then writes the full assignment himself in his own words, using his notes, class materials and workplace examples. In his reference list, he records the AI tool used, the date, briefly explains that it was used to suggest a possible structure, and includes a screenshot of the chat.

What the rules say

In many coursework and non-examined assessment contexts, JCQ permits learners to use source material including the internet and AI. This is provided they do not copy it as their own work, properly acknowledge it, and still submit work that is their own. JCQ also states that where AI tools are used as a source of information, the learner must show the name of the AI source, the date generated, retain the prompt/output, and explain how it was used.

Judgement

This is **permitted**, provided the qualification’s requirements do not assess the learner specifically on how to structure written work. In this scenario, Rhys used AI only to support planning, then created the actual assessed content independently and acknowledged the AI use appropriately.

Outcome

- The work can be accepted for assessment if the Assessor is satisfied that the submitted content is Rhys’ own and that the learning outcomes have been independently demonstrated.

Key message

AI support with planning or structure may be acceptable in internal assessment if the learner writes the substantive response independently, the learning outcomes are still met by the learner's own work, and the AI use is clearly acknowledged.

Case Study: "Internet allowed" does not mean unrestricted AI use

Scenario

Sophie is completing an NCFE Level 3 Applied Science controlled assessment. The Qualification Specific Instruction Document allows internet access during a supervised research stage. Sophie assumes that because the internet is allowed, she can also use an AI chatbot to generate explanations of scientific methods. She includes some of the AI-generated material in her write-up and lightly edits it before submission. When questioned, she says she believed AI was allowed because online research was allowed.

What the rules say

NCFE states that in some assessments internet access may be permitted during research or planning, but learners must submit their own independent work and thinking. AI misuse includes copying or paraphrasing AI-generated content, using AI to complete parts of the assessment, and failing to ensure the submitted work genuinely reflects the learner's own analysis, evaluation or response. The fact that internet access is permitted does not remove those core requirements.

Judgement

This is **not permitted**. Sophie has mistaken access to the internet for permission to use AI to generate assessed content. The submitted material is no longer fully her own independent work.

Outcome

- If the AI-generated material has been copied or paraphrased into the submission so that the work is no longer authentically Sophie's own, she will be investigated for malpractice. Sophie may receive no credit for the relevant sections because the criteria were not independently met.

Key message

Permitted internet access is not permission to use AI tools freely. The decisive test is whether the learner has still produced independent evidence towards the learning outcomes.

Case Study: AI used in research

Scenario

Hannah is working on an NCFE Level 3 Certificate in Supporting Teaching and Learning portfolio assessment about inclusive practice. During the research stage, she uses an AI tool to identify useful themes to explore, such as adaptive teaching, SEND support, and classroom communication. She then verifies the information by checking the references used by the AI tool. She adds more information from centre resources and published guidance that her teachers have signposted her to. She writes her assignment herself. In her submission, Hannah includes a reference to the AI tool, the date used, and a short explanation that it was used as an initial research prompt. She also keeps screenshots of the prompt and output.

What the rules say

JCQ states that where AI tools are used as a source of information, the learner must:

- acknowledge the name of the tool and the date the content was generated,
- retain the prompt/output in a non-editable form,
- explain how it was used.

JCQ also makes clear that learners must verify AI-generated content independently and reference the sources they rely on in their final work.

Judgement

This is **permitted**. Hannah has used AI as a starting point during research, but she has independently checked the information, written the assignment herself, and acknowledged the AI use correctly.

Outcome

- The work can be accepted for assessment, provided the Assessor is satisfied it is Hannah's own and that the learning outcomes are evidenced through her independent writing and understanding.

Key message

Using AI during the research phase only can be acceptable. However, it must be acknowledged, verified, and must not replace the learner's own production of the final assessed response.

Case Study: AI misuse in one part of a non-examined assessment

Scenario

Jacob is completing an NCFE Level 2 Technical Award non-examined assessment independently. Most of his work reflects his usual standard and is supported by his class notes and research. However, one section requiring him to explain and justify a recommendation is noticeably different in style and much more sophisticated than the rest of the assignment. When asked about it by the assessor, Jacob admits he used an AI tool to produce that section the night before submission because he was running out of time. He did not acknowledge the AI use in his work.

What the rules say

JCQ identifies several forms of AI misuse, including:

- copying or paraphrasing sections of AI-generated content
- using AI to complete parts of the assessment
- failing to acknowledge AI when used as a source of information.

Appendix A of JCQ's guidance includes examples where misuse was confined to particular sections or learning objectives, and the consequence was the loss of marks for those affected sections.

Judgement

This is **not permitted**. Although only one section was affected, that section is not Jacob's own independent work and the AI use was not acknowledged.

Outcome

- The affected section should receive **no credit**, or the relevant assessment criteria should not be awarded.

- Depending on the structure of the unit, this may mean Jacob does not achieve the unit or overall qualification outcome, even though the misuse was confined to one part.

Key message

AI misuse does not have to affect an entire submission to be serious. Even one AI-generated section can lead to loss of marks, failure of a criterion, or a malpractice investigation.

Case Study: AI used to create portfolio evidence for an apprenticeship

Scenario

Razvan is completing an apprenticeship portfolio that requires them to submit evidence that demonstrates their knowledge and skills from their workplace experience. Razvan uses an AI tool to help improve the wording, sentence structure, and presentation of work they have written. They then include the AI outputs in their portfolio as evidence of their competence.

Judgement

Not permitted. The portfolio must provide authentic evidence of the apprentice's own knowledge, skills and competence. AI misuse includes using copying or paraphrasing AI-generated text and asking an AI tool to review and improve written work. Using AI in this way prevents the assessor from judging what the apprentice can independently do and explain. Even if the apprentice checks the information and changes the wording, the evidence still needs to demonstrate the apprentice's own knowledge, skills and experience.

Outcome

- The evidence generated by AI should not be accepted as evidence of the apprentice's competence. The learner should not receive credit for any part of the portfolio that has been written or reviewed by AI.
- The centre should use their malpractice process to determine if any of the portfolio can be accepted, what needs to be re-written without AI and what actions should be taken to address the issues with Razvan.

Key message

AI must not create evidence that is being used to demonstrate an apprentice's knowledge, skills or competence.