Academic Conduct Policy

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Introduction

This Academic Conduct Policy helps to maintain high standards of academic integrity within The Open University by defining behaviour considered to be academic misconduct and what the consequences of this behaviour might be. This is important so that we can uphold the value of The Open University degrees and safeguard the University's reputation to the benefit of all students and staff.

To have academic integrity at The Open University means that:

- you are committed to honest study practices and shared values that ensure your work is a true expression of your own understanding and idea;
- you give credit to others where their work contributes to your understanding;
- you engage in good academic practice involving essential academic skills such as keeping track of where you find ideas and information and attributing and referencing these accurately in your work.

This matters because as members of the University community, we are all committed to openness and honesty in our words and actions. These values are essential to academic study and research. When we act with integrity, we receive the credit that we deserve for our work and others receive the credit for theirs. This ensures that no students have an unfair advantage, for example by receiving credit for work that is not their own.

Compliance with national quality standards

Higher Education providers have an obligation to ensure that the qualifications they award meet nationally agreed standards, including the Office for Students Conditions of Registration and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Quality Code. Academic misconduct breaches these national quality standards so cannot be permitted.

Any improper activity or behaviour which may give you, or another student, an academic advantage in an assessment is considered an act of academic misconduct and is unacceptable in an academic community. You must take responsibility for the academic integrity of your work by developing good academic practice, which includes asking for clarification where necessary.

The Open University considers the following practices to be academic misconduct:

- Plagiarism
- Self-plagiarism
- Enabling plagiarism
- Collusion
- Contract cheating
- Unauthorised use of generative Artificial Intelligence and automated tools
- Falsification
- Misconduct in an exam

Any allegations of student misconduct (academic or non-academic) will normally be dealt with in accordance with the Code of Practice for Student Discipline.

Your tutor can offer advice on maintaining good academic integrity and your student support team can advise on the implementation of policy (you can find all contact details on StudentHome).

Scope

What this policy covers

This policy covers academic conduct that undermines the academic reputation and integrity of The Open University. For all other disciplinary offences please see the Code of Practice for Student Discipline.

The Academic Conduct policy applies to all registered or formerly registered students of The Open University as defined in the Academic Regulations, including the groups outlined below:

- Access students
- Undergraduate students on a module only
- Undergraduate students on a qualification
- Postgraduate taught students
- Apprentices

- Microcredential learners
- Alumni

Please read through and familiarise yourself with this policy. You may need to return to it at different times during your study.

You should refer to the Academic Conduct pages on StudentHome for more guidance and links to resources containing advice on how to develop good academic practices and avoid academic misconduct. Please note you will need to sign in to access the Academic Conduct pages. You can also check the resources available to you within your module materials. If you still need advice, you should contact your tutor for further support.

What this policy does not cover

This policy does not cover postgraduate research students, who should refer to the Plagiarism and Research Misconduct Policy and the Research Code of Practice for further information.

Support and Information

How to contact us

If you have any queries about this policy, please Contact Us. Welsh-speaking Students are welcome to speak with us in Welsh on +44 (0) 029 20 020 354.

Help Centre Articles

Academic Conduct

Policy

1. Policy Purpose

1.1. Academic assignments exist to help you learn and to demonstrate your own knowledge and understanding. Grades and comments from your tutors on your assignments show how fully you have demonstrated this and give you credit for your learning.

1.2. Good academic practice is the process of preparing and submitting your academic work independently and honestly, using your own words; using the appropriate academic style and with all sources fully attributed according to academic requirements.

1.3. The objectives of this policy are:

1.3.1 To set The Open University's expectations of students in adopting good academic practice and academic integrity;

1.3.2 To define what The Open University considers to be poor academic practice and offences relating to academic conduct;

1.3.3 To explain what will happen when poor academic practice is found, or an academic conduct offence is committed and how this will be dealt with.

2. Policy Principles

2.1 The Open University aims to encourage you as a student to develop academic integrity by teaching you about good academic practice. This will be done as part of the modules you study, and your tutor will also support your skills development in this area. You can also access information about this from the Academic Conduct pages on StudentHome which contains more guidance and links to resources containing advice on how to develop good academic practices and avoid academic misconduct.

2.2 Demonstrating good academic practice ensures that anyone who reads your work can easily identify your own thoughts and ideas on a subject and can distinguish these from the thoughts and ideas of others.

2.3 Academic integrity is an all-encompassing term. In this context, The Open University uses it to define the good academic practice you use to demonstrate your learning within your subject or programme of study, and how you put this learning into practice through your assessed work. It allows others to assess fairly the extent of your learning progression and encourages everyone to respect and acknowledge the work of others.

2.4 When submitting assessed work, you should ensure that this is written in your own words. The work you submit for assessment must remain a true reflection of your own learning, understanding and ability.

You may use assistance, including assistive technologies and digital tools, according to the rules set out in sections 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7 below. However, this type of help must not change the content or meaning of your work and must not replace your own thinking.

It is academic misconduct where the substantive content of your work is no longer your own, whether that content is supplied by another person, a service or an automated tool.

2.5 Examples of permitted assistance that do not normally need to be acknowledged, unless your module materials confirm otherwise, include:

- correcting minor errors such as spelling or punctuation
- making changes to, or providing support with, formatting or layout
- changing the way you format your sources, for example putting your reference list into an approved format.

You must not use another person, assistive technology, or an automated tool, including generative AI, to create, develop or materially change the content of assessed work, unless the relevant module or assessment guidance clearly allows or requires this.

2.6 If your module allows you to use assistive technologies and digital tools, including generative AI, you can use them in the following ways:

- suggesting or making minor changes to your writing, such as correcting grammar, as long as this does not change the substance, argument or solution of your work
- using the tool as a starting point to suggest areas to research

You must explain which parts of your assignment were affected and how the assistance was used. You must acknowledge any use of generative AI regardless of which category of generative AI use your module or assignment is in.

2.7 For the purposes of this policy, non-permitted use of assistive technologies and digital tools includes, but is not limited to:

- generating all or part of an assignment
- developing or expanding arguments or ideas
- planning content
- rewriting, paraphrasing, or summarising content in a way that replaces your own work
- finding or correcting factual errors or calculation mistakes
- suggesting an outline or structure for your assignment
- altering the structure or organisation of the work in a way that changes its meaning or argument
- generating visual or audiovisual material including tables and diagrams.

Where use of assistive technologies and digital tools is explicitly permitted by the module:

- you must follow the requirements set by the module or assessment materials
- you must clearly acknowledge how you used the assistance, in the way specified in the module materials.

You must make sure that any work you submit:

- is your own work, and
- shows your own understanding of the learning outcomes being assessed.

2.8 Academic misconduct occurs when you submit work that does not represent your own understanding, knowledge, or ability.

This includes situations where:

- work has been produced, created, or materially altered by another person or by an automated tool
- assistance has been used in a way that is not permitted under sections 2.6 and 2.7.
- the use of automated tools or assistance has not been acknowledged where required
- the work submitted prevents an accurate assessment of your achievement of the learning outcomes.

Academic misconduct may occur whether the use of assistance was intentional or unintentional.

You are responsible for ensuring that:

- you understand the requirements set out in this policy (if you need help interpreting the policy please contact your Student Support Team)
- you follow any module or assessment-specific instructions about using tools and assistance
- the work you submit can be relied on as an accurate reflection of your own learning.

With the exception of 2.5, you must clearly acknowledge any use of generative AI regardless of which category of generative AI use your module or assignment is in. You must explain how you have used the tools and which parts of your assignment they were used for, using the reference style set out in the module materials. If you do not, this may be treated as academic misconduct.

3. Offences regarded as academic misconduct

This section outlines various behaviours that The Open University considers to be academic misconduct.

Academic misconduct covers a range of behaviour including using material that is not your own unique and original work to gain some form of benefit or enabling others to do so.

It can be caused by anything from poor study skills and a lack of understanding of what is expected at your level of study to straightforward fraud in the form of intentional cheating.

Throughout this section, reference to ‘work’ or ‘content’ includes:

- any material generated by an individual or automatically, including text, illustrations, graphs, data, computer code, information on forums, websites or social media;
- material generated using automatic tools such as large language models (LLMs), paraphrasing tools, language translation software or mathematical solution generators;
- any other content or information which is not your own original work, whether published or unpublished.

3.1 Plagiarism

3.1.1 Plagiarism is using someone else’s ideas or work and presenting it as your own.

3.1.2 Plagiarism may include:

- copying other people’s work if you provide a source but do not give a specific quote with a clearly defined beginning and end;
- summarising or paraphrasing in your own words the ideas or information taken from a source without citing that source.

3.1.3 If you submit an assignment that contains work that is not your own, without clearly indicating this to the marker (fully acknowledging your sources using the rules of the specified academic referencing style), you are committing plagiarism, and this is academic misconduct.

3.1.4 Plagiarism could occur in a piece of assessed work by:

- using a choice phrase or sentence that you have come across or translated from another source;
- copying word-for-word directly from a text or other source without using quotation marks;
- poorly paraphrasing or translating the words from a text or other source very closely, using much of the original wording;
- using ideas, concepts or data from a source without citing that source;
- using text downloaded from the internet, including that exchanged on social networks; copying or downloading figures, photographs, pictures, or diagrams without acknowledging your sources;
- copying comments or notes from a tutor;
- copying from the notes or assignments of another individual;
- copying from your own notes, on a text, tutorial, video, or lecture, that contain direct quotations;
- using content obtained from websites or tools which either make other students' assignments available, or provide solutions to assessed tasks (thereby enabling plagiarism);
- obtaining content from other sources, including other students, private individuals, assignment writing sites (so called 'essay mills') or other online tools and submitting it as your own.

It is important to understand that if you do not acknowledge fully the sources that have contributed to and informed your work, you are misrepresenting your knowledge and abilities. Since this may give you an unfair academic advantage in assessment it regarded as academic misconduct.

3.2 Self-plagiarism

3.2.1 The reuse of significant, identical – or nearly identical – portions of your own work without acknowledging that you are doing so is sometimes described as ‘self-plagiarism’. Self-plagiarism is not encouraged at The Open University and may in some circumstances be seen as an offence and be investigated or penalised under the Code of Practice for Student Discipline.

3.2.2 You can’t usually gain credit for submitting the same work twice so if you repeat work which is substantially the same as another assignment you may not be awarded marks for it, unless the assignment asks you to use, review and redraft your earlier work.

- If you do re-use submitted work, in whole or in part, you must cite that work as having been used in the assessment of a previous assignment or module.
- If you defer a module and resubmit work from a previous TMA in a subsequent presentation of the same module you should note this at the end of your TMA.

3.3 Enabling plagiarism

3.3.1 Enabling plagiarism is anything which might encourage or enable other students to commit plagiarism, including:

- posting your work or that of other students onto a website or social media platform;
- allowing other students to read through your draft or finished assignments before they have completed and submitted their own work;
- offering answers to assignment questions posted by other students online or on social media;
- making available, selling, or advertising for sale your work or that of others in any form or by any means (such as print, electronic, recording or otherwise);

- posting assignments, exam questions, or Open University assignment guidance materials onto a commercial website or social media platform that offers tailored third-party answers.

3.3.2 Enabling plagiarism is considered academic misconduct regardless of whether the work you shared was a draft, incomplete or finished piece of work or whether the work includes marks, comments or other materials produced by a tutor, supervisor or other marker, and whether or not you intended to enable or encourage plagiarism. The only exception is where prior consent has been given by The Open University in writing.

3.4 Collusion

3.4.1 Collusion is working with one or more other individuals to produce a piece of work that you submit as if it is your own work or allowing other students to use any part of your work as if it is their own.

3.4.2 Collusion can include:

- asking another person to produce assignment material for you;
- working together with other individuals to produce an assignment, unless the assignment guidance asks you to do so;
- sharing research or results from experiments which are meant to be conducted individually;
- discussing the assignment with other students in too much detail or working together to prepare or share your work, including drafts and notes, such that the work submitted by each individual is very similar, for example in sources used, structure or wording;
- altering another student's assignment or allowing other individuals to alter your assignment by changing the content or meaning of the work or correcting facts or calculations within the assignment.

3.4.3 Working together with other students on a piece of work that will be submitted for individual assessment is not permitted and can lead to all the students involved being investigated for academic misconduct.

3.4.4 Discussing the material and ideas you are learning with your tutor and other students is beneficial and is encouraged. However, when you start to write your assignment you must make sure this is entirely your own work and you should not share it with other students.

3.4.5 For some assignments, you may be instructed to collaborate with other students to prepare data, conduct research, or draft work. In these cases, working together is encouraged but you should read the assignment guidance carefully or speak to your tutor to understand which parts of the assignment can be completed in collaboration with others and which are expected to be your own work.

3.5 Contract cheating

3.5.1 Contract cheating is the act of engaging with assignment help services or other online services, to either obtain or make available answers to assignments, assignment questions or Open University assessment resources. Contract cheating can involve either committing or enabling plagiarism.

3.5.2 Assignment help services or other online services can include services which offer a repository of answers to assessment questions (such as uploaded assignments), services which enable you to upload or share assessment questions, and services which allow you to obtain tailored answers to assessment questions, whether or not you pay for these services.

3.5.3 If you use any of the following services you may be investigated for contract cheating:

- Using tailored services to write essays or other types of assignments;
- Using websites which offer access to a bank of essays or answers to assignment questions and submitting any part of these as your own work;
- Engaging others to conduct research on your behalf;

- Posting assignment questions or assessment resources to commercial websites or other services or platforms;
- Requesting answers or solutions to assignment questions from other individuals or services.

3.5.4 Some services may use threats to report you to your institution for plagiarism to extort money after you have engaged with them. If this happens to you, you should always report the incident to The Open University so appropriate action can be taken. The Open University will take this into account in any subsequent academic conduct investigations.

3.6 Unauthorised use of generative Artificial Intelligence or automated tools

3.6.1 Generative Artificial Intelligence (Generative AI) is a type of artificial intelligence which generates content in response to prompts from the user, including text, images and code.

3.6.2 Automated tools include:

- those offering automated answers or solutions to assignment questions, such as equation solvers, large language models (LLMs) or other automated writing tools;
- those which reword or amend existing content such as translation tools, paraphrasing tools, LLMs, or automated re-writing tools.

3.6.3 If you use these tools in your work, you must fully acknowledge any parts of your work where you have used Generative AI technology or automated software tools, including as a starting point or for reference, by specifying the tool and query-text used.

3.6.4 Unauthorised use of Generative AI or automated tools include:

- Use of Generative AI or automated tools without referencing how they were used, including as a starting point to generate reference material, to plan or produce content that appears in your assignment;

- Use of Generative AI or automated tools when this is not permitted in the module assessment guidance;
- Using Generative AI or automated tools in ways that are not permitted in section 2.6 of this policy.

3.6.5 Use of Generative AI or automated tools must be acknowledged using the guidelines for the referencing style specified in your module by specifying the AI tool used, the prompt-text (i.e., the question or instruction given to the AI tool) and the date the information was generated, as well as which parts of the assignment content were affected.

3.7 Falsification

3.7.1 Falsification is a type of deception in which you use information in an assignment that you know or believe to be wrong and present this as true. This may include:

- Providing false citations, for instance referencing a work which doesn't exist or attributing ideas to an individual, piece of work, or other source which doesn't contain those ideas, or citing a work you haven't read;
- Falsifying data;
- Falsely claiming to have conducted experiments or carried out research which you have not carried out;
- Inventing research, evidence, experimental results or other false content.

3.7.2 You are responsible for the content of your work so you must ensure that all your references are accurate and that any content from sources cited in your assignment are included in your reference list.

3.8 Misconduct in an exam

3.8.1 Misconduct in an exam is any behaviour in which you seek to gain an advantage over other students by engaging in inappropriate conduct. A high standard of conduct is expected in all exams. Any misconduct is a serious matter that can result in disciplinary action.

3.8.2 Misconduct in a remote, online and/or uninvigilated exam includes any of the offences listed in 3.1 to 3.5 of this policy You are not normally asked to cite references in a remote exam, but you should take care to write in your own words and not copy from other sources.

3.8.3 Misconduct in a face to face or invigilated exam includes the possession of prohibited materials or equipment in an exam, engaging someone to impersonate you in an exam, or seeking to gain advantage in other ways or from other persons as defined in the Exam Policy or Code of Practice for Student Discipline. You should make sure that you are familiar with these before attending the exam.

Procedure

4. Detecting academic misconduct

This section explains how academic misconduct offences are detected and investigated at The Open University.

4.1 Use of similarity detection software

4.1.1 When you submit an assignment (either TMAs, emTMAs, EMAs or remote exams) you are asked to tick a box to declare that the work you are submitting is your own.

4.1.2 The files are automatically run through similarity detection software soon after the published cut-off date. The Open University uses Turnitin to detect matches between your work and the module materials and other online sources, and to detect matches between assignments across current and historical cohorts of students.

4.1.3 When you submit an assignment to the eTMA system you must confirm you have submitted the correct work. Therefore, this will be treated as your final assignment and checked for plagiarism even if you have accidentally submitted a draft (or another document) instead of your final version. If you realise you have submitted the wrong version of an assignment, you can resubmit another version of your assignment before the cut-off date if the assignment hasn't been collected for marking.

4.2 The role of the tutor or marker in detecting academic misconduct

4.2.1 Similarity detection software is checked by module teams in parallel with the marking by the tutor. Tutors do not normally have access to Turnitin reports, so if the module team finds evidence of academic misconduct in the software reports, your tutor may not be aware of it.

4.2.2 Tutors and markers may still be able to identify potential cases of academic misconduct when marking your work. They could identify possible changes in your writing style which may indicate that you have not written the assignment yourself. They can make this judgement by comparing your assignments across a module. There may also be significant differences in content or style within the same piece of work which could suggest that not all the words used by you are your own. They may also be able to identify whether you have used other sources to produce your work such as GenAI that you have not acknowledged.

4.2.3 For EMAs and remote exams, tutors are normally asked to check your work against other TMAs you have submitted during the module to confirm they have no reason to believe the work you have submitted is not your own. This process is called verification.

4.2.4 Tutors and markers are also familiar with module materials and may be able to identify if you are using information from these materials without referencing appropriately.

4.2.5 If your tutor or marker is concerned about possible academic misconduct in your work, they will raise this with senior staff on the module. You may be offered an individual study skills support session or referred to an Academic Conduct Officer (ACO) for disciplinary investigation.

4.2.6 If your case is referred for investigation you may not get a mark for that piece of work until the investigation has concluded.

4.3 The academic conduct process and investigations

4.3.1 After your assignment is run through the similarity detection software, a report is produced which shows matches for each piece of work against module materials, other students' work and/or online sources. These matches are closely studied by a member of the relevant module team.

4.3.2 If there is cause for concern raised either through text-comparison software or by a marker, you may either be referred for study skills support or referred for further review by an Academic Conduct Officer (ACO) within the faculty. This happens alongside - but separate from - the marking process.

4.3.3 If you are referred for study skills support, a disciplinary marker won't be added to your student record, but a note will be made of the referral, including what it was for and what support/information you were offered. If you have been offered study skills support, this will be taken into account if you are found to have plagiarised in future.

4.3.4 If your case is referred to an ACO, this does not mean a decision has been reached about your work. It's the first stage of a process that can have a range of different outcomes. For example, an ACO may find there is no case to answer, or advise you to access study skills support. Or they will decide to issue you with an informal caution or warning, or carry out a disciplinary investigation. If you are given a warning this won't form part of your formal study record, but a record of the correspondence will be kept on your record. This may be taken into account when deciding on a disciplinary outcome if you are referred to an ACO again in the future. You can find more information about what happens when your assignment is referred for an academic misconduct review on the Help Centre page, What happens if your assignment is referred for academic misconduct.

4.3.5 If the ACO decides to conduct a disciplinary investigation, the first step of the process is to alert you to the findings and invite you to respond to the ACO's concerns in writing within 10 working days of receiving the ACO's letter.

4.3.6 The second step gives the ACO time to assess all the evidence to hand and decide whether a breach of the Code of Practice for Student Discipline has occurred and if so, what penalty should be applied. The penalties are set out in the Code of Practice for Student Discipline in sections 3.2 and 3.3.

4.3.7 The third step will be to write to you with the decision made in relation to your assignment. If a breach of policy is identified, a decision will be made as to whether a penalty should be applied. If no breach is found and the case is dismissed, it will be removed from your student record. You may still be referred for study skills support to help you to improve your academic practice.

4.3.8 If you are found to have used the services of a contract cheating website or are found to have used somebody else to write the assessment for you then you may be referred to the Central Disciplinary Committee (CDC) for investigation.

4.3.9 Academic conduct offences will be investigated as soon as possible after an issue is raised. In some cases, this may mean that an investigation may take place months or even years after the offence was originally committed, for instance if your assignment material is found on an external website some time after it was submitted. You can still be investigated for academic misconduct after you graduate from The Open University. You can continue studying while the referral is being reviewed.

4.4 Use of Additional Assessments in academic misconduct investigations

4.4.1 If there is any doubt that your assignment is your own work, you may be asked to take an Additional Assessment which will be designed to test whether you have written it yourself. Additional Assessment task for academic conduct is normally a live oral assessment, via video conferencing such as MS teams or Zoom, but occasionally a written task may be used instead. When the student is suspected of using GenAI, the assessment must be oral.

4.4.2 The outcome of the Additional Assessment will be one of the forms of evidence an ACO will use to make their decision about the investigation into your case.

4.4.3 If you do not engage with or agree to take the Additional Assessment offered then a decision will be taken without this piece of evidence. This could result in you receiving a zero for the assignment.

4.4.4 If, after investigation, the ACO is satisfied that you have written the assignment then you will be awarded the appropriate score as marked by your tutor.

4.4.5 If, after investigation, the ACO is not satisfied that you have written the whole of the assignment yourself, they will award an appropriate penalty. You may receive zero for the assignment or have marks deducted to reflect that part of your assignment was not your own work.

4.5 Academic misconduct in an invigilated assessment

4.5.1 Invigilators are responsible for making sure face-to-face or online assessments run smoothly and according to The Open University's rules and regulations.

4.5.2 If an invigilator has concerns that you have behaved inappropriately in an invigilated assessment or you have been found with unauthorised materials, they must report this to The Open University. If the misconduct is serious, your case may be referred to an ACO or to CDC.

4.5.3 The invigilator will refer the case to the Academic Conduct team within Tuition, Assessment, Curriculum and Quality who will decide if a case should be referred to the CDC.

If no referral is made to the CDC, we will write to you to remind you of the rules relating to exam conduct.

4.5.4 If your case is referred to an ACO, they will contact you following the procedures above. If a referral to the CDC is made, the secretary of the CDC will contact you directly, as set out in section 7.6 of the Code of Practice for Student Discipline.

4.5.5 Misconduct in a non-invigilated exam will be dealt with under the procedures set out in sections 4.1 to 4.4 above.

5. Penalties for academic misconduct

If you are found to have committed an academic conduct offence, as outlined in section 3, you could be given a warning or a penalty. This section outlines the types of penalties you may receive and the impact on your studies.

5.1 Mark deductions and mark adjustments

5.1.1 Your original marks and feedback for the assignment may be visible on StudentHome before the academic conduct referral process has been concluded. This is because the initial marking of student work happens separately to this referral.

5.1.2 If you are found to have plagiarised any of your assignment and have received an informal caution or warning, it is likely that your score will be adjusted to remove any marks you received on the portion of your assignment that was plagiarised. This is not a penalty but recognises that you can't gain any marks for work which is not your own.

5.1.2 A mark deduction can also be given as a penalty in some cases, usually due to the extent or circumstances of the offence or where there have been prior cases. This may lead to a score of zero being given for the assessment, irrespective of whether the assignment contains any original content.

5.2 Types of penalties

5.2.1 You may receive an informal caution or warning from an Academic Conduct Officer, the module team chair or from the Central Disciplinary Committee (CDC) if they consider an offence has been committed but it is not sufficiently serious to warrant a disciplinary penalty. A note of any informal caution or warning you receive will be made on your student record and can be taken into account if you are referred for an academic conduct investigation in future.

5.2.2 A disciplinary penalty will include a mark deduction which may mean your score is capped at the pass mark for your module or reduced to zero. If your score is capped, this will be the maximum mark you can receive for that assignment, but if the plagiarism is extensive the mark you are given may still be lower than the cap. A note of any disciplinary penalty given to you will stay on your student record for the remainder of your studies.

5.2.3 An Academic Conduct Officer can give you a warning, a caution or a disciplinary penalty including a mark reduction. If you are referred to the CDC, they can also impose a further range of penalties according to severity of the offence. Full information about all possible cautions and penalties can be found in section 3 of the Code of Practice for Student Discipline.

5.3 Impact of penalties on your study

5.3.1 Any penalty where your assignment score is reduced could have a detrimental effect on your overall module result and could mean the difference between passing or failing the module. A penalty which reduces the grade of pass you receive for your module could also affect your overall degree classification.

5.3.2 If you are studying within an accredited professional programme, any case of academic misconduct confirmed with the application of a penalty may be reported to the relevant professional body, if this forms part of the required standards for your profession. In some cases, consideration will also be given to whether a Fitness to Practise investigation should be undertaken.

6. Methods of appeal

6.1 Methods of appeal are set out in section 9 of the Code of Practice for Student Discipline.

6.2 You cannot appeal an outcome just because you disagree with it – you can only appeal on the following grounds:

- There has been a procedural error in processing the case;
- If you have new evidence not previously available to the ACO; or
- If the penalty is unreasonable in the circumstances.

6.3 You cannot appeal a warning or an informal caution as this is not a formal penalty. However, if you have evidence that an investigation hasn't been conducted appropriately you may submit a complaint.

6.4 Complaints or appeals relating to academic conduct investigations must be made within 28 days of being sent the outcome letter. There is further information about how to make a complaint or appeal on the StudentHome Help Centre.

Definitions

Academic Conduct Officer (ACO)

Academic staff based within faculties who are specialists in academic conduct and who are disciplinary authorities as approved by the Central Disciplinary Committee (CDC).

Academic integrity

Good academic practice that enables every individual to demonstrate how much and what they have learned within their subject or programme of study, and that they are able to put this into practice.

Additional Assessment

A bespoke assessment which may be offered to you by the Module Results Panel, Module Chair or Academic Conduct Officer if a marker doubts that the assignment is your own work.

‘All my own work’

An interactive resource on OpenLearn, All my own work: exploring academic integrity was designed to illustrate difficulties that students might face in their studies and how to avoid plagiarism and practice good academic conduct.

Assignment help services

These can include services which offer a repository of answers to assessment questions (including essays), services which enable you to upload or share assessment questions, and any other services which allow you to obtain tailored or automated answers to assessment questions.

Automated tools

Automated tools are software or programs which offer automated answers or solutions to assignment questions or which reword or amend existing content. These may include equation solvers, automated writing tools (including Generative AI), translation tools, paraphrasing tools, or automated re-writing tools.

Central Disciplinary Committee (CDC)

Its main functions are to consider serious and repeat offences; to hear appeals against decisions of other Disciplinary Authorities; and to impose penalties proportionately and consistently under the Code of Practice for Student Discipline.

Cite them Right

Cite them Right is a version of the Harvard referencing style which is used for most modules at The Open University. Your module guide will confirm if this is used on your module.

Code of Practice for Student Discipline

The Code of Practice for Student Discipline defines conduct that is generally considered within society as a whole, and at The Open University in particular, to constitute an offence. It also defines penalties, authorities, rights to appeal, and procedural details concerning allegations of misconduct, investigations, disciplinary hearings, and appeals.

Collaboration

Working together with other students to complete a task or achieve a goal. This can include sharing research or outcomes from experiments where the module encourages this, but not jointly working on an assignment where the module makes it clear that it should be submitted by separate individuals and awarded separate marks based on distinguishing a student's unique contribution.

Collusion

Knowingly making any of your academic work available or offering it to another person for presentation as if it were their own, presenting the work of another person as your own for assessment, or working with others to complete an assignment which is meant to be completed and assessed individually.

Contract cheating

A form of cheating where a student submits work to a university for assessment which has been produced using material obtained from a third party or online service. The contract with the student can include payment or other favours, but this is not always the case.

Good Academic Practice Collection

A free collection of resources on OpenLearn, the Good Academic Practice Collection sets out how you can develop good academic practice when writing your assignments.

Enabling Plagiarism

Anything which might encourage or enable other students to commit plagiarism, such as making your own work available for other students.

Essay mill

A business that allows customers to access content which provides answers to assignment questions or to commission an original piece of writing on a particular topic which they present as their own work. By doing this they may commit academic fraud.

Falsification

Falsification is a type of deception in which you use information or data in an assignment that you know or believe to be wrong and present this as true.

Fitness to Practise

The procedures which set out how The Open University fulfils its responsibility with respect to students' professional suitability or fitness to practise for training/education and registration with the respective regulatory body. The Fitness to Practise procedures are used in addition to the Code of Practice for Student Discipline.

Formal caution

Issued by disciplinary authorities and permanently recorded on the student's electronic record for as long as that record is held, in line with our Student Privacy Notice.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (Generative AI)

A type of artificial intelligence which generates content in response to prompts from the user, including text, images, audio, video, data and code. This includes large language models or other artificial intelligence programs.

Good academic practice

Making sure that anyone who reads your work can easily identify your thoughts and ideas on a subject and can distinguish these from the thoughts and ideas of others.

Informal caution

A written warning from a module team chair or Disciplinary Authority of the Open University, such as an Academic Conduct Officer. This is not a penalty under the Code of Practice for Student Discipline, but a record of the correspondence will be kept on the student's record. Further misconduct may result in disciplinary action being taken.

Large Language Models

An LLM (Large Language Model) is a specific, specialized type of generative AI built to process and generate human language.

Office for Students Conditions of Registration

The Office for Students (OfS) is an independent public body which regulates Higher Education providers in England. Its conditions of registration govern the rules providers need to adhere to in order to receive government funding and award degrees.

Penalties

A penalty can comprise a range of measures under the Code of Practice for Student Discipline. These are recorded on the student's record and in some cases, where applicable, referred for 'fitness to practise'. Penalties may be imposed by an ACO, a Disciplinary Authority, or the CDC as a result of any breach of policy relating to academic conduct.

Paraphrasing

Using your own words to express someone else's ideas or message without changing the meaning of the original text.

Plagiarism

Using the work of other people to gain some form of benefit without fully acknowledging that the work came from someone else.

Prohibited materials

Relates to materials which are not allowed in an exam room.

Quality Assurance Agency Quality Code

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is an independent charity which works with Higher Education providers in all four nations of the UK and quality assures Higher Education provision in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Quality Code is a refence document developed by QAA on behalf of the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA), in consultation with the higher education sector.

Self-plagiarism

The reuse of significant, identical, or nearly identical portions of your own work without acknowledging that you are doing so.

Serious academic misconduct

Where a student has repeatedly plagiarised, and there is no evidence of improvement in their academic practice and/or where the circumstances of a plagiarism offence is by itself considered to be serious misconduct (such as evidence of contract cheating). Serious academic misconduct cases are referred to the CDC which has the full range of penalties available to it.

Study skills

You may be referred for study skills support to help you improve your academic practice if it has been identified that improvements need to be made.

Warning

A written warning from an Academic Conduct Officer. This is not a penalty under the Code of Practice for Student Discipline, but a record of the correspondence will be kept on the student's record. Further misconduct may result in disciplinary action being taken.

Related Policies and Legislation

- Code of Practice for Student Discipline
- End-of-module assessment (EMA) policy
- End-of-module tutor-marked assignment (emTMA) policy
- Exam Policy
- Online Invigilation Policy
- Fitness to Practise Procedure
- Student Privacy Notice
- TMA and iCMA Policy
- TMA and iCMA Reassessment Policy

Relevant UK quality codes

- UK Quality Code for Higher Education, QAA
- Office for Students Conditions of Registration

About this version

Summary of Significant Changes since last version

- Changes to sections 2.5 to 2.8 have been made to clarify the University's expectations in relation to using and referencing artificial intelligence and automated tools.

Policies superseded by this version

This policy replaces version 1.2 of the Academic Conduct Policy dated January 2026.

Version Information

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