

Ensuring Academic Rigour in Assessed Work Policy: Academic Year 2017/18 (semester 2)

Policy

Purpose This document provides the framework for the University's Rigour in Assessed Work Policy and should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- [Regulation 50: Student Discipline](#)
- [Student Discipline Policy and Procedures](#)
- *Academic Integrity and Conduct Guide for Students (to be developed)*

This document is based upon the UK Quality Assurance Agency's (2017) guidance on *'contracting to cheat in higher education: how to address contract cheating, the use of third-party services and essay mills'* which can be accessed [here](#). Indeed, the definitions listed in this document shall be adopted by Heriot-Watt University as our understanding of these terms.

Heriot-Watt University shall commit to the QAA's recommendations on how to tackle contract cheating. The headings are summarised below:

- Education: information and support for students
- Education: training and information for staff
- Prevention
- Detection

We shall align our University to the sector's standards whilst ensuring that our students have the necessary skills, information and support to submit appropriately assessed work.

Scope The policy applies to students studying on all Heriot-Watt University taught programmes of study across all forms of assessment (including examinations) from the start of semester 2 Academic Year 2017/18.

Definitions **Academic Integrity**
This policy uses the International Centre for Academic Integrity (ICAI) definition¹:

'a commitment, even in the face of adversity, to six fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility and courage. From these values flow principles of behaviour that enable academic communities to translate ideals to action'.

Collusion

A form of cheating which occurs when people work together in a deceitful way to develop a submission for an assessment where such input is not permitted. It is distinct from contract cheating in this guidance as collusion does not depend on a fee being paid for the work.

Contract Cheating

A form of cheating where a student submits work to a higher education provider for assessment, where they have used one or more of a range of services provided by a third party, and such input

¹ <http://www.academicintegrity.org/icai/resources-2.php> accessed on 24 October 2017

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is not permitted. The contract with the student can include payment or other favours, but this is not always the case.

- 'Services' may include essays or other types of assignments, conducting research, impersonation in exams and other forms of unfair assistance for completing assessed work.
- 'Third parties' include web-based companies or auction sites (essay mills), sharing websites (including essay banks), or an individual such as a lecturer, colleague, friend or relative.
- 'Input' means that the third party makes a contribution to the work of the student, such that there is reasonable doubt as to whose work the assessment represents.

Essay mill

An organisation or individual, usually with a web presence, that contracts with students to complete an assignment or assignments for a fee.

Plagiarism

Where a student passes off someone else's work, intentionally or unintentionally, as their own, for their own benefit. In this guidance we use the term 'plagiarism' broadly, encompassing contract cheating and collusion as well as other forms of misconduct in order to give contract cheating a discrete meaning.

Sanctions

An outcome imposed in response to, and in order to penalise, contract cheating. Providers will typically use a range of terms here (such as sanction, outcome or penalty) with different descriptors. We are using 'sanction' to reflect the potential impact for students and the potential deterrent value associated with the term. An outcome of withdrawal from a provider or loss of marks in relation to a level of study is an example of a sanction.

Policy Statement

Heriot-Watt University is committed to developing and supporting students' understanding and practice of academic integrity, ethical scholarship and academic conduct in order to uphold its rigorous academic standards. These principles underpin Heriot Watt's aim to produce professionally educated and globally employable graduates.

This policy covers:

- Poor referencing
- Paraphrasing
- Plagiarism
- Collusion
- Self-plagiarism
- Contract cheating

These practices constitute academic offences, which the University takes seriously. Regulation 50, *Student Academic Discipline Process*, and *Academic Integrity and Conduct Guide for Students* provide further details on how the University will respond.

Heriot Watt's commitment to developing students' understanding and practice of academic integrity and conduct focuses on active learning

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outside the disciplinary process. The Academic Support Referral system will provide proactive, positive, structured support for all students in the initial stages of their studies who demonstrate a lack of understanding and poor practice of academic integrity and conduct (see Appendix A).

Implementation The ongoing promotion, development and upholding of academic integrity and conduct is a University-wide commitment which must be implemented consistently and fairly across all Schools and campuses.

It is the responsibility of the student to:

- be aware of, understand and consult the *Academic Integrity and Conduct Guide for Students* when preparing work for submission
- use the appropriate referencing style for the subject as outlined in the programme handbook
- be aware that all submitted work will be rigorously checked for academic integrity
- present their own work for submission, demonstrating academic integrity, ethical scholarship and academic conduct in accordance with University regulations, policy and guidance
- engage with the Academic Support Referral system as necessary

It is the responsibility of each School to:

- Provide, and highlight, information in programme handbooks about appropriate referencing styles and academic integrity and conduct
- Promote and maintain the Academic Support Referral system to encourage and develop academic integrity and conduct
- Make rigorous checks of all submitted work, including but not limited to use of academic integrity detection software (e.g. Turnitin)
- Follow Regulation 50 and the Student Academic Discipline Process
- Promote awareness and use of *Academic Integrity and Conduct Guide for Students* to encourage students to seek support and guidance and ensure students are aware of their rights within the discipline process

It is the responsibility of Information Services Directorate to deliver a systems solution which enables:

- Academics to make an Academic Support Referral
- Ensure that our plagiarism detection software is appropriate
- Clear communication between students and Schools through each stage of the discipline process. This consist of three main stages:
 1. Notification to student of alleged academic misconduct issue
 2. Meeting of student with School Discipline Committee
 3. Notification to student of decision, which could be referral to University Discipline Committee

It is the responsibility of the Student Conduct Officer:

- Ensure a consistent and fair approach is applied to all cases of suspected academic dishonesty and misconduct across the University
 - Advise Schools on cases which may be referred to the University Discipline Committee
 - Monitor the volume of academic support referrals and cases of academic dishonesty and misconduct through an annual report to the Student Learning Experience Committee.
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It is the responsibility of the Student Conduct Officer, Liaison Services (Information Services) and the Learning and Teaching Quality Enhancement Officer in partnership with the Student Associations to:

- Provide clear written guidance to students and Schools of what constitutes academic dishonesty and misconduct through developing, and maintaining, the *Academic Integrity and Conduct Guide for Students*

It is the responsibility of the University Discipline Committee, on behalf of Senate, to:

- Consider all cases of major academic dishonesty and misconduct referred by Schools and apply appropriate penalties in all proven cases
- Monitor the effectiveness of this policy in line with Regulation 50

Consultation The following people and Committees have been consulted in the development of this policy:

- Student Learning Experience Committee
 - Head of Academic Quality
 - Student Conduct Officer
 - Learning & Teaching Quality Enhancement Officer
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Appendix A: Academic Support Referral Proposed New Disciplinary Process – Minor Breach of Academic Conduct ('Category C')

1. Category A –Breach of Academic Conduct – University Level (right to appeal)
2. Category B –Breach of Academic Conduct – School Level (right to appeal)
3. Category C - Minor Breach of Academic Conduct - Referral for academic support (new 'category' of process to support the development of the student's academic writing skills – no appeal)

What is considered as a Minor Breach?

A Category C case will not be considered a disciplinary offence.

A minor breach of academic conduct is when, on balance, the act or the result is due to carelessness and/or neglect in the application of assessment guidelines. The outcome means that work submitted by a student (whether assessed or not & whether in written, electronic form or orally) has not met the purpose of the assessment and compromised academic integrity.

Minor breaches of academic misconduct will usually only be considered in relation to the initial stages of an undergraduate degree (most commonly first year) and the initial stages of a postgraduate degree (most commonly first semester). A minor breach of academic conduct may therefore only be applied for students who are in the first year of their undergraduate programme or for postgraduate students, in the first semester of their programme. Only in exceptional circumstances may a student out with these conditions have a case categorised as a Minor breach and be referred for academic support.

Examples of Minor breaches of academic conduct are:

- (i) incorrect, inconsistent or inadequate referencing which may have resulted in minor plagiarism;
- (ii) over reliance on paraphrasing which may have resulted in minor plagiarism;
- (iii) copying material which has resulted in minor plagiarism.

Examples of what Academic Support Referrals would involve are:

- University Power Hours which promote and encourage submitting coursework with academic integrity
- School-specific sessions or workshops which promote and encourage submitting coursework with academic integrity