Staff Guidance: Detection and Reporting of Academic Misconduct

This document provides procedural guidance for SoSS staff on the detection and reporting of Academic Misconduct including the various forms of plagiarism as defined by the University. This is an interim document that will be updated for approval by the School Learning and Teaching Strategy Committee following a review of the University Policy in early 2021.

Links to supporting policies and guides:

- University Policy on Ensuring Academic Integrity in Assessed Work: https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/docs/learning-teaching/policies/ensuringacademicrigourpolicy.pdf
- Plagiarism website: https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/students/studies/examinations/plagiarism.htm
- Student Guide to plagiarism: https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/students/doc/plagiarismguide.pdf
- Student Discipline website: https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/students/studies/record/discipline.htm
- University Student Discipline Policy & Procedure: https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/students/doc/discguidelines_nov14.pdf
- Regulation 50: https://www.hw.ac.uk/documents/regulations.pdf

Definitions

Plagiarism is defined as the presentation by a student of work for assessment which is not his/her own, in the sense that all or part of the work has been copied from that of another person (whether published or not) without attribution. Plagiarism is a general term that encompasses a range of activities regarded as academic misconduct by the University; forms of plagiarism referred to in this document and defined by the University, include:

Self-plagiarism is when a student resubmits work that he/she originally completed and submitted for another purpose, without acknowledgment. This is regarded as academic misconduct, unless resubmission was permitted.

Collusion is a form of cheating which occurs when two or more people work together in a deceitful way to develop a submission for an assessment where such input is not permitted. Any student who knowingly permits another student to plagiarise his/her own work is also regarded as having breached the University's disciplinary procedures.

Contract Cheating is a form of cheating where a student submits work for assessment, where they have intentionally used one or more of a range of services provided by a third party. By definition contract cheating applies to students who have actively engaged or employed, i.e. contracted, someone else to do some part of their credit-bearing academic work for them, allowing the student to deliberately pass the work off as their own. The contract element usually involves some sort of financial exchange, but this is not a requirement to be considered as a form of contract cheating. A full definition is provided [here](#).

Roles and Responsibilities

The Director of Learning and Teaching is responsible for overseeing the effective implementation of the School's policy and procedures for ensuring academic integrity.
As detailed in the University Policy it is the responsibility of the School to:

- Provide, and highlight, information in programme and, where appropriate, course handbooks about appropriate referencing styles and academic integrity and conduct
- Ensure that all submitted work is rigorously checked, 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

**Academic Staff:** All academic staff (internal and adjunct) involved in assessment marking activities are responsible for checking all submitted work to identify potential acts of academic misconduct. Any potential cases identified must be reported following the correct reporting procedures (*See Reporting Procedures*).

**Academic Standards Board:** The School’s Academic Standards Boards (one in each campus location) are responsible for implementing the University Student Academic Discipline Policy and Procedures, reporting directly to the University Discipline Committee (UDC).

### Detection of Academic Misconduct

| Plagiarism, Self Plagiarism and Collusion | Turnitin is an effective decision support tool designed to help the marker detect plagiarism in submitted work. The marker must apply academic judgment to make the final decision whether plagiarism has occurred. Turnitin can also be used to gather evidence to help prove that a student has plagiarised another’s work if the source document is accessible via the internet or is already held in the Turnitin database (i.e. previous submissions).

**Similarity Indices:** The Similarity Index is the percentage of the submitted text that matches the text found in other accessible online sources, usually comprising a range of sources. The Index value is not in itself evidence of plagiarism and there is no threshold figure below which we can assume no plagiarism has taken place. The marker is responsible for checking all submitted work regardless of the value of the similarity index. Markers should be aware that:

- Plagiarised content may only represent a small % of the total word count. For example, a few sentences or a paragraph copied from a journal paper that is not referenced is plagiarism but this may represent just a small percentage of the total word count.
- If a student has used hidden text, e.g. invisible quotation marks or any symbol between and joining words, to hinder similarity detection then the similarity index will not reflect the true extent of plagiarised work. Hidden characters (white text against a white page) can be used to block out plagiarised sentences, paragraphs, or entire sections to keep the similarity index at a low value and thus avoid scrutiny by the marker. If Turnitin detects this, then a red flag will appear warning the marker (*see screenshot insert*). |
**Self-Plagiarism** will be detected by Turnitin only if the student’s previous submission was also submitted to Turnitin.

**Collusion** between two students on the same course is usually easy to detect if both pieces of work are marked by the same marker. Normally a feeling of déjá vu is the first indicator. However, Turnitin should also identify similarities between two submissions on the same course whether they are submitted in the same year or not.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Contract Cheating</th>
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<td>There are several red flags that staff should look out for that may indicate a student has submitted work that is not their own and that they have obtained from a third party. The indicators of potential contract cheating include the following:</td>
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**The student’s submitted work:**

- **Unexpected Content.** An answer or essay where only general terms are used, general topics are described, and the answer does not correspond to the themes and topics discussed during lectures and tutorials, is an indication the work might have been commissioned.
- **Document Properties.** Downloading the submitted document (without saving) and checking the document properties (>file>info) will reveal the name of the original author, who last modified the document, and the total editing time. If the author or the person who last edited the document is not the student then you should Google the name, this may identify them as a freelance academic writer. Freelance writers often advertise their services via LinkedIn or may be found via ResearchGate.
- **Professional template.** Freelance writers will have a set template they reuse. Look for unusual use of headers, headings, cover and content pages, use of images etc... Sometimes two students on the same course will purchase an assignment from the same source and will be identical in many ways.
- **Inconsistencies in Quality.** There may be mistakes in the cover page that seem inconsistent with the quality of the assessment content. Sometimes all the student must do before submission is change the information on the cover page and they sometimes do this poorly.
- **Exclusive use of contemporary references.** Some assignment writing services tend to use references from the last three – five years, although this may be good practice, it is unusual to see our own students doing this.
- **Suspicious Reference list.** Sources that are not common in your discipline, not appropriate or from very specific types of journals, e.g. open access only, can be a red flag. Freelance essay writers might not have access to library resources, and this will impact the sources they use.
- **Use of English Language.** A student whose first language is not English, who produces work that is grammatically perfect incorporating uncommon words in appropriate and effective ways, could indicate that the work is not their own.
- **Inaccurate citations.** Freelance writers take shortcuts to get work done as quickly as possible. The writer will write the assignment and then use Google Scholar to insert some contemporary citations at the end of sentences. Often these citations can be incorrect and do not fit with the text.

**The student’s record:**

- **Attendance.** Those who have not attended lectures or tutorials regularly are most at risk of resorting to contract cheating.
• **Inconsistent Performance.** Check for consistency in student work where possible. If their marks suddenly shift up a band or two, their writing style changes, or similar, this might be an indication they have commissioned the work.

**The assessment question/s:**

• Something as simple as **searching for your assignment titles online** may reveal if they are available to students through dedicated companies where students can commission answers.

• If cheating is suspected in any of the student submissions, then Google the assignment / exam question. This may reveal that the question or paper has been posted online by a website selling solutions to individual questions. Staff should not pay to obtain any of the assessment/exam solutions offered by an agency.

**Additional guidance on contract cheating:**


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**Reporting procedures**

**Plagiarism detected via Turnitin.** When the marker detects any form of plagiarism using Turnitin and is satisfied that they can access plagiarised source documents (published work, the work of other students or work previously submitted by the student) as evidence to support a case, they should notify the Course Leader immediately and complete the **Incident Report Form**. The form should be submitted, together with supporting evidence to the administrator or clerk of the local Academic Standards Board (ASB).

**Collusion:** In suspected cases of collusion, both parties involved must be reported to the ASB using separate Incident Report Forms together with supporting evidence, clearly indicating the connection between the two pieces of submitted work.

**Contract Cheating:** Where there is strong suspicion or evidence of contract cheating the marker should notify the course leader and immediately report the case to the Chair of ASB via email and copy the HW Student Conduct Office (conduct@hw.ac.uk). The University Conduct Office will, where appropriate, approach any third party (e.g. online sellers of assessment solutions) and seek their assistance in providing details about the submission. All obtained evidence will be made available to the School ASB and University Committees.

In cases of suspected contract cheating where there is insufficient or no evidence, the Chair of ASB or the University Student Conduct Office may request that the student attend a viva to establish authorship. The viva will be arranged and chaired by the Course Leader and attended by at least one other member of academic staff, normally a Programme Director or a member of the departmental L&T leadership team (DUTP or DPTP).

Often contract cheating is identified and initially reported anonymously by **whistle-blowers** directly to the Student Union, for example. In these instances, the University Conduct Office will investigate the allegation and notify the School of any evidence gathered.