

## 14. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY PROCEDURE

This section of the Student Regulations Framework applies to all taught programmes of Plymouth Marjon University, whether undergraduate or postgraduate, and to all research degree students.

### 14.1 Academic Integrity

1. Academic Integrity relates to ethical practice in all areas of academic activity and professional conduct. Academic Integrity is guided by adherence to agreed principles that ensure fairness and create an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect. It assumes a level of honesty and rigour that enables academic activities - such as teaching, learning, assessment and publication - to function for the benefit of all members of the University and the external community.
2. Plymouth Marjon University seeks to foster an intellectual and ethical environment based on the principles of academic integrity. Students who embrace academic integrity understand that there are conventions of academic practice which both display and ensure academic integrity and that they must:
  - properly acknowledge and cite all use of the words, results or ideas of others.
  - properly acknowledge all those who have contributed to a piece of work.
  - ensure that all work submitted as their own as part of an assessment or other academic activity is produced without the aid of impermissible materials or impermissible collaboration.
  - ensure that data and results are obtained by ethical means and reported accurately without suppressing any results inconsistent with their interpretation or conclusions.

- treat all other students in an ethical manner by neither facilitating academic dishonesty by others nor obstructing their academic progress.

It is necessary to follow these principles in order to ensure that:

- everyone is given credit for their ideas, words, results, and other academic activity.
  - all student work is fairly evaluated and no student has an inappropriate advantage over others.
  - each student's intellectual and professional development is ensured.
  - each student is supported towards a successful transition to graduate employment and future careers, as employers will expect graduates to have acquired the attitudes and behaviours that academic integrity demands.
  - the reputation of the University for integrity in its teaching and research is maintained and enhanced.
3. The acquisition of relevant study skills such as effective note-taking, ability to critically evaluate other writers' theories and concepts and presentation skills will help students to understand these conventions.
  4. Failure to adhere to these principles leads to poor academic practice. It can also lead to an offence of academic misconduct and, in serious cases, can threaten the reputation of the University. Every member of the University community therefore has a responsibility for ensuring that the highest standards of academic integrity are upheld. The sanctions that will be applied where academic misconduct has been established, which can ultimately involve the cancellation of credit and/or expulsion, are set out below.

## 14.2 Academic Misconduct – general principles

1. The University recognises three particular areas of misconduct, as follows:

- Personal misconduct
- Professional misconduct
- Academic misconduct

Academic Misconduct is defined in greater detail below. Personal and Professional Misconduct are the subject of separate procedures (see Section 15 of this Framework). A particular case of alleged misconduct might span more than one of these areas.

2. The University is committed to safeguarding the standard and integrity of its awards by the prevention and/or detection and punishment of academic misconduct in assessed work. Accordingly, students are expected to display academic integrity by not acting in any way which is likely to gain unfair academic advantage in an assessment; where a student acts in this way, an offence of academic misconduct has been committed. **Regardless of their intentions, any student who breaches these regulations will be considered to have committed academic misconduct.** Academic misconduct can be investigated at any time, and where it is proven after an award is made the University reserves the right to withdraw that award.
3. Cases of alleged academic misconduct are dealt with by way of a three-stage process. At each stage, additional and more severe penalties become available; the cancellation of credit becomes available at the third and final stage. In the case of repeated misconduct, the University reserves the right to escalate a case of misconduct to a subsequent stage.
4. Every student is assigned to a School and is accountable to the Director/Dean of that School. This will be the School in which the majority of a student's programme of study is based.
5. All students will be invited to attend the interviews associated with these procedures. Where attendance is not possible, then correspondence may be

used in place of the interview and the procedures may be modified to reflect this, subject to the agreement of the Academic Standards Officer.

6. The University determines allegations of academic misconduct on the basis of the balance of probabilities, supported by reliable evidence, rather than the criteria of beyond reasonable doubt which applies in criminal cases.

### 14.3 Definitions of academic misconduct

Examples of behaviour that could be construed as academic misconduct **(please note that these are not exhaustive)** include:

- Plagiarism– when a student takes and uses as their own, the thoughts, writing, visual material or inventions of others without proper attribution (in contravention of the Guidance on Referencing and Scholarship).
- Self-plagiarism - this involves the submission of material already prepared for one assessment task for another such task. A piece of work may only be submitted for assessment once. Submitting the same piece of work twice (or a significant part of it), will be regarded as an offence of 'self-plagiarism'. A student who intends to quote an excerpt from material that has already been submitted for another assessment task should seek the advice of the Module Leader before doing so; any such excerpt must be appropriately referenced (see Guidance on Referencing and Scholarship).
- Unauthorised collusion– when students join together to pass off as the work of one (or a specified number of people) the work of more than one (or a specified number of people). Where students are required to work in groups as part of an assessment, module tutors are expected to make it absolutely explicit in their instructions whether the students should produce common or individual work and the extent of permissible collaboration. Taking a copy of another student's work without their permission also amounts to unauthorised collusion, although sanctions will only apply in such cases to the student who copied the work.

- Cheating– when a student brings books, notes or other material or equipment of value in answering examination questions, or any means of accessing information of value, into the examination room which has not been explicitly authorised: fails to comply with the instructions given concerning conduct in examinations: or obtains an examination paper in advance of its authorised release. Similarly, any student who is authorised to leave the examination room temporarily is not permitted to consult any source regarding the content of their examination whilst absent from the room.
- Contract cheating or ‘ghosting’ – when a student submits work that has been produced in whole or part by another person and/or organisation on their behalf. This may include the purchase of an assessment from an organisation or an individual or an unpaid contribution from a partner, friend or family member, as well as the use of software, services and assistance in assessments which have been specifically prohibited in the assessment specifications. A student who makes available work to another student (of the University or elsewhere) also commits this offence, whether in exchange for financial gain or otherwise
- Fabrication – when a student makes up data or other such content, manipulates content and/or tampers with documentation in order to gain an unfair academic advantage. Fabrication also occurs when a student falsely claims to have conducted experiments, observations, interviews or any form of research which they have not carried out.
- Impersonation – when a student enters into an arrangement with another person who fraudulently represents them at an examination or test. Please note that where an offence of impersonation takes place, both the impersonator (if a student of the University) and the student impersonated will be the subject of misconduct procedures.
- Unethical conduct – when a student fails to gain ethical approval where appropriate, coerces or bribes project participants and/or breaches confidentiality with regard to information on individuals gathered during

data collection, or otherwise breaches ethical codes of practice that are applicable to the student's programme of study.

#### **14.4 Allegations of academic misconduct**

1. Alleged academic misconduct should always be investigated within the School in which the majority of a student's programme of study resides. Where it involves a module located outside that School, appropriate subject-specialist advice should be sought where necessary although, normally, the decision as to whether or not an offence of academic misconduct has been committed can be taken independently of subject knowledge.
2. Staff should refer all cases of alleged misconduct for investigation to the appropriate responsible officer, which will be the Programme Leader/Programme Area Leader. Where a student's programme of study crosses two Schools, this will be the Programme Leader/Programme Area Leader in which the majority of a student's programme of study resides.

#### **14.5 Academic Misconduct – Stage One procedures**

1. Where assessment is undertaken at Level 5 or above, i.e. at a higher level than Year One of an honours degree or a foundation degree (see Section 1.4 of this Framework), the responsible officer must always refer the case to Stage Two (see Section 14.6 of this Framework).
2. Where assessment is undertaken at Level 4, i.e. in Year One of an honours degree or a foundation degree (see Section 1.4 of this Framework) and poor scholarship is identified as the most likely cause of academic misconduct, the responsible officer may permit the assignment to be resubmitted for an uncapped mark. This will normally follow an advisory meeting between the responsible officer and the student.

3. The responsible officer will communicate their decision to the student in writing, normally within five working days of the advisory meeting. As an assignment can be resubmitted for an uncapped mark at Stage One, there is no right of appeal at this stage.

## **14.6 Academic Misconduct – Stage Two procedures**

1. In all cases where academic misconduct is suspected on assessment undertaken at Level 5 or above, and in cases where academic misconduct is suspected on assessment undertaken at Level 4 and the procedures set out in Section 14.5 of this Framework are considered insufficient, the responsible officer will forward the relevant Turnitin Similarity Report to the Director/Dean of School. Where it is suspected in an examination, the principal invigilator will prepare the report in association with at least one other invigilator or member of staff; the responsible officer should then counter-sign the report and pass it to the Director/Dean of School.
2. If the standard of assessed work is completely out of line with that of previous work and/or written in a style that raises credibility issues, thus raising the possibility that contract cheating or 'ghosting' has occurred, the evidence presented to the Director/Dean of School should consist of copies of other work submitted during the academic year in conjunction with the suspect piece/s of work.
3. In cases where, in the opinion of the Director/Dean of School, the potential severity of an offence of academic misconduct identified at Stage Two would justify suspension from the University, the cancellation of credit (covering one or more modules affected by serious academic misconduct) or expulsion they shall refer the matter direct to Stage Three (on the prior advice of the Academic Standards Officer if appropriate), providing a written rationale in the context of his or her incident report.

4. Otherwise, they will impose the following penalties to the student by e-mail, which will attach the relevant supporting evidence:
  - re-submission of work free of academic misconduct to be assessed for a capped mark of 40% (or 50% for postgraduate work) for the assessment.
  - re-submission of work, free of academic misconduct, to be assessed for a capped mark of 0% in the relevant assessment element or, in more serious cases, for the module as a whole; credits will be awarded if a passing standard of 40% (or 50% for postgraduate work) has been reached in the module overall.
5. In response to the e-mail from the Director/Dean of School, the student will have the right to request an interview in person with the Director/Dean of School within ten working days so that they can contest the decision and/or provide additional information. The e-mail must draw the attention of the student to this right, and the decision taken will remain provisional until this period of time has elapsed. It is distinct from the appeals procedure, which can only be invoked after a decision has been confirmed.
6. The Director/Dean of School will normally undertake such an interview in person, although in exceptional circumstances they may also nominate the Director/Dean of another School to undertake this task. The student should be informed of the date, time and place of the interview in writing at least five working days before the hearing and be provided with a copy of these Procedures. Where this deadline is not met, the hearing will only proceed, at the stated date and time, with the student's consent.
7. Should the student fail to attend the interview without good reason, the decision taken by the Director/Dean of School will be confirmed. Such an interview can be scheduled at any time in the calendar year, but reasonable steps will be taken to schedule it at a point in the year when the student would normally be present in the University.
8. The interview will proceed in the presence of at least one other member of the School or Academic Management Office (AMO), as well as any other

witnesses as appropriate. The student may be accompanied by a 'friend', who is permitted to attend to provide advice and quiet support to the student and can be heard only with the agreement of both the student and the Chair. The name and status of any such 'friend' must normally be notified to the AMO no less than five working days in advance of the hearing. The University must grant its consent beforehand for the 'friend' to attend the meeting.

9. The decision letter should normally be sent within five working days of the interview, or immediately if the student has decided not to request such an interview by the deadline. It should be copied to the Academic Standards Officer so that a central record can be maintained.
10. All proven cases of academic misconduct at Stage Two shall be considered as failure of the module, normally requiring resubmission of the work to be undertaken at the normal time for resit work.

## **14.7 Academic Misconduct – Stage Three procedures**

1. In cases where the severity of an offence of academic misconduct identified at Stage Two is potentially such as to justify suspension from the University, the cancellation of credit (covering one or more modules affected by gross academic misconduct) or expulsion, the Director/Dean of School or nominee will provide a written rationale for recommending a formal hearing at Stage Three of the Procedures to the University Secretary and Registrar.
2. In all cases the rationale must state the name(s) of the student(s) against whom the allegation is made and the nature of the alleged academic misconduct, with a brief description of it and all available evidence. It should also include the names of any witnesses who can support the allegation and the name and role of the person signing the report.
3. The University Secretary and Registrar will instruct the Academic Standards Officer to recruit an Investigator, who will be an appropriately qualified and experienced senior member of academic staff from the roster of Student

Casework practitioners approved by Senate.. The Investigator will review the report and seek additional evidence where necessary. In so doing, they may draw upon the support of the Academic Standards Officer where appropriate and proportionate.

4. The investigatory process might involve further interviews with the student, other students and other staff members at the Investigator's discretion. Additional Investigators may be appointed in exceptional circumstances, with one of the Investigators operating as the Principal Investigator for the purposes of reporting to the Panel Chair.
5. The University Secretary and Registrar will also instruct the Academic Standards Officer to convene an Academic Misconduct Panel. Once the Investigator's report is available, the Panel will meet. This Panel shall comprise:
  - An appropriately qualified and experienced senior member of academic staff, from the roster of Student Casework practitioners approved by Senate, who has no involvement with the student (Chair);
  - An appropriately qualified and experienced senior member of academic staff, from the roster of Student Casework practitioners approved by Senate, who has had no involvement with the student;
  - A member of the Executive Committee of the Student Union, normally the President or Deputy President, who also has no involvement with the student.

The Academic Standards Officer, or a nominee, will act as Secretary to the Panel and proceedings may also be recorded, either electronically or by a minute taker, by mutual agreement. The Panel will not meet unless all members and the Secretary are present. The Academic Standards Officer will endeavour to ensure an adequate gender balance in the Panel.

6. The student shall be informed of the date of the meeting of the Panel not less than ten working days in advance; this deadline can only be reduced with the

student's written consent. They will be invited to appear in person but, in exceptional circumstances, the Panel may also hear a case, at the discretion of the Chair advised by the Academic Standards Officer, in their absence. A Panel can be scheduled at any time in the calendar year; however, reasonable steps will be taken to schedule this at a point in the year when the student would normally be present in the University.

7. The student may be accompanied by a 'friend', who is permitted to attend to provide advice and quiet support to the student and can be heard only with the agreement of both the student and the Chair.. The name and status of any such 'friend' must normally be notified to the Academic Standards Officer no less than five working days in advance of the hearing. The University must grant its consent beforehand for the 'friend' to attend the meeting. The student may also choose to call witnesses in his or her defence, including employees of the University where appropriate.
8. The Academic Standards Officer shall normally circulate the list of witnesses to be called, and all relevant documentation, to all parties not less than five working days before the meeting. Where this is not possible, the Academic Standards Officer will advise the student who will have the right to request a postponement. Additional papers supplied by or on behalf of the student will be circulated thereafter with the proviso that, in exceptional circumstances, the Panel may decide to adjourn a hearing in order to secure a written response.
9. The refusal or failure of a student to attend will not invalidate the Panel's proceedings, provided that they have been given sufficient notice as set out above. A Panel can be scheduled at any time in the calendar year; however, reasonable steps will be taken to schedule this at a point in the year when the student would normally be present in the University.
10. At the outset of the hearing the Chair of the Panel shall identify the issues to be determined, the persons entitled to attend the hearing and the documents supplied to the Panel. They will also ask the student to confirm that they have understood the procedures and have no concerns with regard to procedure.

11. The author of the incident report, or a nominee, will then outline the case against the student, before the Chair invites witnesses to give evidence. Members of the Panel may question witnesses directly and the student, or their 'friend', may question the author of the incident report (or nominee) and the witnesses through the Chair.
12. The Chair shall then invite the student, or their 'friend', to respond. The Chair and other members of the Panel may question the student on the statement and/or the documentary evidence. Witnesses may question the student through the Chair.
13. At the conclusion, the Chair shall offer the student the opportunity of making a closing statement (which should not introduce new evidence), once the witnesses have left, before the Panel considers its decision in private. In all cases, the student shall have a right to make a final statement to the Panel before it considers its decision.
14. In addition to the penalties available at Stages One and Two, the Panel may impose any or all of the following penalties:
  - suspension from the University, for a maximum period of one academic session;
  - the cancellation of credit (covering one or more modules) with or without the possibility to retake the modules for a capped or uncapped module mark as determined by the Panel;
  - expulsion from the University (actual or suspended).
15. The resultant Stage Three decision letter will be drafted by the Academic Standards Officer for the approval of the Chair. It shall also constitute the official record of the hearing including, where this is applicable, the reasons for imposing a specific penalty or penalties and an explanation as to why a lesser penalty was unsuitable.
16. The letter will normally be sent to the student within ten working days of the hearing and within forty working days of the commencement of the Academic

Integrity Procedure. If this is not possible, exceptionally, the student will be kept informed. Where a decision has been taken to suspend or expel a student, it will take immediate effect.

17. If the University intends to inform the Independent Safeguarding Agency, the Department for Education or any other Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body of the outcome of any misconduct proceedings, it will include notification of that decision within the decision letter.

## **14.8 Right of appeal**

1. At Stages Two and Three of the process, a student has the right of appeal against the decision and/or the penalty imposed on any or all of the following grounds:
  - That the procedures were not followed properly;
  - That the decision maker(s) reached an unreasonable decision;
  - That the student has new material evidence that they were unable, for valid reasons, to provide earlier in the process;
  - That there is bias or reasonable perception of bias during the procedure;
  - That the penalty imposed was disproportionate, or not permitted under the procedures.

Any such appeal must be submitted in writing to the Academic Standards Officer, within ten working days of the date of the letter communicating the decision.

2. The Academic Standards Officer will refer the appeal to an appropriately qualified and experienced senior member of academic staff, from the roster of Student Casework practitioners approved by Senate, who has had no involvement with the student for consideration. The appeal stage will normally be concluded within fifteen working days of the receipt of the appeal; if a delay

is envisaged, the appellant will be notified in writing before the end of the fifteen working day period.

3. If valid grounds to proceed with the appeal are not found, the University's Academic Integrity Procedure will have been exhausted and the Academic Standards Officer will advise the student accordingly.
4. If, however, it is found that there may be additional evidence that could not reasonably have been provided to the original hearing, or procedural irregularities, the Academic Standards Officer will reconvene the original decision-making body with new membership of a similar status. This will always lead to an additional interview or hearing, under the procedures appropriate to the relevant Stage, which will not involve the participation of anyone involved in the original decision. In all such cases, the appeal process may lead to the confirmation, reduction or quashing of the penalty originally imposed, but not to an increased penalty. This re-hearing will be final and there will be no further right of appeal thereafter.
5. The student will be notified in writing of the decision, normally within five working days of the hearing, in accordance with the procedures appropriate at the relevant stage. The decision letter will confirm that the University's Academic Integrity Procedure has been exhausted.

## **14.9 Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education**

1. If a student remains dissatisfied after the appropriate internal processes have been exhausted, they can ask the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) to review their case. For full details please contact <http://www.oiahe.org.uk>.
2. The University must issue a Completion of Procedures letter in order for the OIA to review a case of academic misconduct. A Completion of Procedures letter will be issued automatically where valid grounds for re-hearing the case are not found at the review stage and otherwise on request; however, where a

Completion of Procedures letter is issued before the review stage has been conducted the letter will make it clear that the student has not completed the University's internal processes. All requests for review must be made to the OIA within twelve months of the date of issue of a Completion of Procedures letter.

## **14.10 Annual Report**

Each year, the Academic Standards Officer submits a report on student casework to Senate, detailing (anonymously) general matters or issues arising from recent academic misconduct cases. The Academic Standards Officer will also collate and present anonymised monitoring information with regard to Student Misconduct Panel hearings to Senate on a regular basis. Senate will forward recommendations to other relevant bodies, such as the Board of Governors and the Student Experience Council, so that broad concerns can be shared and appropriate action taken.

## **14.11 Procedures at Partner Organisations**

1. In accordance with the expectations set out in the UK Quality Code For Higher Education and the University's Collaborative Provision Regulations and Procedures, all students registered for the University's awards have the ultimate right to complain to the University, irrespective of where they are studying. This right of complaint, however, is not absolute and is subject to the precise wording of the partnership agreement.
2. The partner organisation, accordingly, should ensure that clear information and guidance with regard to academic misconduct is made available to all students registered for the University's awards. This should include clear information about the sequence of processes involved and make clear the channels through which dissatisfied students can contact the University directly.

3. Once the internal procedures of the partner organisation have been fully exhausted, students who wish to take their case to the University for review should ask the Academic Standards Officer in writing if they are eligible to do so. Students may request a review of the decision on the following grounds only:
  - That the procedures were not followed properly;
  - That the decision maker(s) reached an unreasonable decision;
  - That the student has new material evidence that they were unable, for valid reasons, to provide earlier in the process;
  - That there is bias or reasonable perception of bias during the procedure;
  - That the penalty imposed was disproportionate, or not permitted under the procedures.
  
4. If a case is eligible for review, the Academic Standards Officer will refer the challenge to an appropriately qualified and experienced senior member of academic staff, from the roster of Student Casework practitioners approved by Senate, who has no involvement with the partnership. If the challenge is upheld, the case will be referred back to the partner organisation to be reheard under its own procedures. Otherwise, the University will not refer the case back to the partner organisation to be reheard and the Academic Standards Officer will advise the student accordingly. This will include advice with regard to a student's further right of appeal to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).

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