



**Higher Education Services
Academic Integrity
& Misconduct Policy**

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Higher Education Services Academic Integrity & Misconduct Policy

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This policy and procedure apply to students registered at FutureLearn, encompassing all taught modules and programmes at Postgraduate level. This policy does not include those students who are under an OPM sub-contractual arrangement, for example, Brunel University and Roehampton University.

1.2 The objectives of this policy are to:

- Ensure that suspected cases of academic misconduct are handled transparently and fairly.
- Apply appropriate penalties and sanctions in confirmed instances of academic misconduct.
- Promote a culture of academic integrity throughout FutureLearn and respond effectively to related issues to reduce the risk of misconduct.

1.3 The policy is to be read alongside of those of our partners:

- Brunel University (BU) [Academic Misconduct Procedure \(October 2024\)](#)
- Roehampton University (RU) [Student Disciplinary Regulations](#)

2.0 Academic Integrity

2.1 Academic integrity refers to upholding fairness and honesty throughout the assessment process and embracing the principles of responsible scholarship. True scholarship involves researching, understanding, and building on the ideas of others, and it requires students to properly credit and acknowledge those contributions. When a student fails to uphold academic integrity, their work may reflect poor academic practice or, in more serious cases, constitute academic misconduct.

3.0 Academic Misconduct

3.1 Academic Misconduct refers to any action or attempted action that creates, or seeks to create, an unfair academic advantage for oneself or an unfair advantage or disadvantage for others within the academic community. Academic misconduct encompasses a range of behaviours, including but not limited to cheating, attempted cheating, plagiarism, self-plagiarism, collusion, falsification of data, use of third-party services to complete assessments (including artificial intelligence tools), and breaches of research ethics. Such actions are unacceptable as they are dishonest and compromise the integrity and value of the qualifications being pursued.

3.2 Below are examples of academic misconduct. This list is not exhaustive and does not restrict the broader definition; other behaviours may also fall under academic misconduct depending on the circumstances.

- **Infringements of Examination Regulations**, for example, but not limited to; the introduction of prohibited material into the examination; copying from or any communication with any other person during the examination that has not been authorised by an invigilator, the impersonation of an examination candidate or allowing oneself to be impersonated.
- **Plagiarism** is the act of using someone else's words, ideas, or work without proper acknowledgment, and presenting them as one's own within an assessment. This includes copying

from another student, or from any published or unpublished sources such as books, journal articles, internet content, case studies, online learning materials, lecture notes, computer code, images, artefacts, artificial intelligence, and more.

- **Self-plagiarism** refers to the reuse of one's own previously submitted work whether from another module or programme (including outside FutureLearn and the partner university), without permission or proper citation. This includes submitting the same piece of work for multiple assessments or academic purposes.
- **Collusion** involves unauthorised collaboration between two or more individuals, where the resulting work is submitted as if it were the work of a single individual. Examples include submitting another student's work as your own, allowing your work to be copied, or copying another student's work with or without their knowledge. All parties involved may be considered responsible, even if the original author was unaware of the misuse. Collusion is distinct from contract cheating, as it does not necessarily involve payment or external services.
- **Contract Cheating** involves engaging another party paid or unpaid to complete all or part of an assessment on a student's behalf. This includes using essay-writing services, third-party agencies, individuals, or artificial intelligence tools to produce academic work.
- **Falsification of Data** refers to the deliberate fabrication or manipulation of information, including false authorisation letters, fabricated research data, fictitious observations, surveys, or interviews, misrepresentation of participant consent, or distortion of research findings and analysis.
- **Research Misconduct** includes any failure to follow the required ethical procedures, such as conducting research without appropriate ethical approval, or breaching agreed-upon ethical guidelines during the research process.
- **Content Disguise** is deliberately obscuring or concealing the content of an assessment to deceive markers, for example, submitting text as an image or using other methods to bypass plagiarism detection systems, constitutes academic misconduct.
- **Misrepresentation of Word Count** involves intentionally misreporting the word count of an assessment, including through formatting tricks or other deceptive practices designed to give a false impression of meeting word count requirements.

3.3 Allegations of suspected assessment misconduct identified before the submission of a summative assessment will be handled in accordance with the Student Disciplinary Procedure.

3.4 The following are examples of poor academic referencing that are not typically considered academic misconduct and would not normally require formal referral or further investigation. However, markers are expected to reflect such poor academic practice in the grade awarded and through constructive feedback:

- The majority of the work is clearly the student's own, but small sections lack appropriate attribution or referencing.
- These sections do not reference external sources, yet they have not been flagged by the similarity checker as matching previously published content.
- Writing that lacks clarity, is poorly structured, or is expressed in a confusing manner.
- Heavy dependence on a limited range of sources, despite a low similarity score in the similarity report.
- Inconsistent or incorrect application of accepted referencing standards.
- Frequent use of direct quotations from sources that are properly cited both within the text and in the reference list.
- Minor formatting, typographical, or citation errors in the reference list.

3.5 A high overall similarity percentage does not automatically indicate academic misconduct. The content of the match should be reviewed to understand how it was constructed and whether it reflects legitimate academic work.

4.0 Offence of Academic Misconduct

4.1 A student is considered to have engaged in academic misconduct if, either individually or in collaboration with others, they obtain or attempt to obtain an unfair advantage or academic credit through inappropriate or dishonest methods. Academic misconduct is viewed as a serious breach of policy. Any student found to have committed such an offence will be subject to penalties, as outlined in section 8 for validated partnerships and section 1.3 for franchise partners.

- Academic misconduct occurs when a student seeks to secure, or helps another to secure, an unfair benefit or credit in an assessment.
- Whether or not the student intended to commit academic misconduct is not relevant to the Panel's decision on whether misconduct has occurred.
- However, if applicable, the student's intent may be considered by the Standing Academic Misconduct Investigatory Panel when determining the appropriate sanction or response.

5.0 Reporting Suspicions of Academic Misconduct

5.1 All student assignments must be submitted electronically. FutureLearn routinely uses the similarity system to screen submitted assessments for potential plagiarism as part of its standard academic integrity process. There is no specific similarity percentage that is automatically deemed acceptable. Even submissions with low similarity scores may be subject to review if concerns about originality arise. Additionally, academic staff, both markers and examiners, are expected to remain alert to signs of academic misconduct during the assessment process.

5.2 For programmes taught in languages other than English, different plagiarism detection tools or systems may be used as appropriate.

5.3 Students are permitted to upload a preliminary version of their work before the final deadline. It is highly recommended that they use this opportunity as part of their learning process prior to submitting the final version.

5.4 If an internal marker, external reviewer, or any other party involved in evaluating student work suspects either during the assessment period or afterward, including after grades have been confirmed or a qualification awarded that a student may have engaged in serious academic misconduct, the matter must be formally investigated. The suspicion should be accompanied by relevant evidence.

5.5 Instances of weak academic practice are not classified as misconduct. These should be addressed by the marker through written comments and evaluated using standard marking procedures, with attention given to the originality of the work.

5.6 If there is concern that a student may have outsourced their assessment to another individual or service, possible indicators include:

- Metadata from the submitted file (e.g., document properties showing a different author than the student).
- Comparisons with the student's typical writing style.
- Proof of use of an essay writing service.

- Similarity analysis, where applicable.
- Records from an oral examination conducted to gather further evidence (viva voce).

5.7 Should a marker raise concerns about potential misconduct, the student's work must still be evaluated and graded based on its content. Feedback should reflect the overall quality of the submission, regardless of the allegation. If the student is later found not to have committed misconduct, the original grade and feedback will remain valid. For BU and RU the assessor should follow their standard processes as laid out in section 1.3.

5.8 If exam invigilators suspect cheating during an exam, they must follow the established examination procedures. They are required to document the incident in their report and include any relevant evidence.

5.9 Any concerns identified during the grading process will first be reviewed by a Programme Leader, who will decide whether the issue warrants a formal misconduct allegation.

6.0 Viva Voce Meetings

6.1 Where concerns are raised through BU and RU partnerships the partners process will be followed. For validated provision FutureLearn reserves the right to conduct viva voce meetings to fact find further where an allegation of misconduct has been made. If there are doubts about the originality of a student's submission such as suspected outsourcing of the work (e.g., ghost writing, use of essay-writing services, or AI-generated content) or manipulation of data, the student may be invited to participate in an oral interview (viva voce) to confirm they are the true author.

6.2 The student will be informed of the scheduled date and time for the interview, along with comprehensive guidance on how to attend and what to expect during the session. They are allowed to bring a companion, such as a friend, family member, or student advocate. If a mutually acceptable date cannot be arranged within 10 working days, or if the student does not attend without valid reason or prior notice, the matter will be escalated to the Standing Academic Misconduct Investigatory Panel, which may reach a decision based on the available evidence.

6.3 The interview will be led by a subject specialist, typically the individual who raised the concern and another academic staff member not connected to the allegation, who will serve as the chair. The chair is responsible for ensuring the meeting is respectful and that the student is treated justly. During the session, the student will have the chance to discuss their work, and may be asked questions about the sources, concepts, and arguments presented. A representative from the Quality team will record the proceedings.

6.4 The purpose of the interview is to collect information and not to determine the final outcome. If, after the meeting, doubts persist, a formal accusation will be made, and the case will be forwarded to the Standing Academic Misconduct Investigatory Panel. The student will then receive further instructions from the Quality team.

7.0 Academic Misconduct Panel

7.1 All reported cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be gathered by a designated member of the Quality team, who will be tasked with organising a meeting of the Standing Academic Misconduct Investigatory Panel. This panel is responsible for reviewing the claims, investigating, and deciding on any appropriate sanctions. The panel typically consists of a Quality team representative serving as the meeting secretary and recording the minutes and two academic staff members, one of whom will be the Academic Integrity Officer acting as Chair. If necessary, an impartial third party may be added to the panel to provide an independent perspective.

7.2 Each student involved will receive a personalised notification outlining the specific concerns raised and inviting them to respond formally. This response may be submitted in writing, via phone, or through a face-to-face meeting with the panel. The communication will also include a link to the full academic misconduct policy. These notifications are generally sent at least seven days prior to the scheduled panel meeting.

7.3 Students who choose to attend the Standing Academic Misconduct Investigatory Panels in person may bring a companion such as a friend, adviser, or student representative, who is permitted to speak on their behalf. However, they are not allowed to be represented by a legal professional (e.g., solicitor or barrister) acting in an official capacity, only in a supportive role.

7.4 Students must notify the Quality Team at quality@futurelearn.com to confirm whether they plan to respond verbally, submit a written statement, or decline to respond to the allegation. If they intend to be accompanied, they must provide the name of their companion in writing before the meeting. The panel will make every reasonable effort to obtain a response from the student. Normally, the panel will not proceed with a case unless the student has acknowledged the allegation or has been clearly informed that the meeting will go ahead without their input. If a student fails to attend after confirming their intention to be present, and all reasonable efforts to reach them have been made, the panel will continue in their absence.

7.5 In cases involving collusion, hearings are typically held separately. However, students attending the panel may request that their case be considered alongside others involved.

7.6 The Standing Academic Misconduct Investigatory Panel is responsible for:

- Reviewing the evidence supporting the allegation.
- Deciding whether the claim is valid.
- Determining appropriate sanctions if the allegation is upheld.
- Documenting findings and recommendations that may inform future staff development, assessment procedures, or institutional practices.

7.7 The following steps outline how panel meetings are conducted:

- The Chair or another panel member will outline the case and present supporting evidence.
- If the student is present either in person, online or by phone the panel may ask questions during the evidence presentation.
- After the evidence has been reviewed, all non-panel attendees will leave the room while the panel deliberates.
- If the panel concludes that the allegation is proven, it will decide on the appropriate penalty or action.
- If the allegation is not upheld but the issue exceeds the threshold of poor referencing the panel may classify it as poor academic practice and recommend suitable measures.

8.0 Actions and Penalties

8.1 If students submit evidence of extenuating circumstances during the course of the investigation, this information will not override the outcome of the academic misconduct decision. However, in rare and exceptional situations, the Standing Academic Misconduct Investigatory Panel may choose to consider such circumstances when deciding on the appropriate response. In these instances, the matter should be referred to the Academic Registrar and Head of Programmes for further review and consideration.

8.2 Penalties are issued depending on where the student is in their learning journey. Where the first two modules focus on academic writing and integrity these can be dealt with within the respective subject areas. Offences other than plagiarism and collusion should be dealt with through a normal process, even in modules which are otherwise probationary.

8.3 Probation Module Penalties include:

First offence of plagiarism	Any/all of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marks cap • Academic integrity tutorial to be completed • Undertake similarity training • Consult referencing guidance on Canvas • Correct work (de-anonymised) and show it to module examiners for checking of referencing as condition of progression
First offence of collusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marks cap • Academic integrity tutorial to be completed 'as if for the first time' • Independent work on a new attempt at the same assessment (de-anonymised), with module examiners checking that it is the student's own work, as condition of progression
Any offence of cheating, false authorship, fabrication	These offences are not treated any differently in a probationary module than in a non-probationary module. These offences should be referred to the Standing Academic Misconduct Investigatory Panel.
Second Offence	<p>Plagiarism or Collusion: Formal Warning</p> <p>False authorship: Dealt with under the Academic Misconduct Disciplinary Procedures.</p>
Subsequent Offences of Plagiarism or Collusion	Treated as a first offence in line with modules which are not probationary and so will be referred to an Investigatory Panel with the normal range of penalties available.

8.4 Academic Misconduct Disciplinary Procedures for non-probationary modules or where plagiarism or collusion is not found include:

		PGT
Serious Cheating	Dishonest breach of assessment regulations where there is sufficient evidence reasonably to infer an intention to gain unfair or inappropriate advantage. (e.g notes found with the student or on the student's body).	0
Cheating/ Serious Breach/ Repeated Breach	The panel may decide, in their academic judgement, to place the work in the compensatable fail range if there is a breach of assessment regulations where an unfair or inappropriate advantage (unintentional or otherwise) could be had or where other students have been disadvantaged by the breach (e.g. mobile phone ringing during the exam, bringing in one's own calculator or other data-storage devices, writing on the exam paper before the exam begins).	Marks Cap 49 *
*Breach	As below but where a student has already received a formal warning.	Mark Cap 59 *

(Second occurrence)		
Breach (First occurrence)	Breach of assessment regulations where no advantage is apparent. (e.g unauthorised materials with no perceivable advantage in a pocket or under table, such as keys or a credit card).	Formal Warning

***Max achievable grade**

9.0 Appeals

9.1 When a student is informed of the outcome of the Standing Academic Misconduct Investigatory Panel consideration of their case, they must be advised that they have a right to appeal by following the [Appeals](#) process. If they are dissatisfied at the end of that process, they may make a complaint to the Office for the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education.

9.2 Students may only appeal against decisions of any Panel making decisions under this policy on the grounds that:

- The procedures set out in this Policy were not followed properly.
- The Panel reached a decision that was not reasonable in all the circumstances.
- New evidence is available which could not reasonably have been brought to the attention of the relevant Panel at the time of its investigation.
- There was bias or reasonable perception of bias during the academic misconduct process.
- The penalty imposed by the Standing Academic Misconduct Investigatory Panel was disproportionate or not permitted under this Policy.

10.0 Monitoring

10.1 This policy will be reviewed and monitored every three years by the Academic Registrar.