

# PLAGIARISM COLLUSION, AND CONTRACT CHEATING POLICY – 2023/24

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## INTRODUCTION

The University of East Anglia expects that all its members, both staff and students, adhere to the principles of academic integrity, which have been defined by the International Center for Academic Integrity as a commitment to the values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage.<sup>1</sup> Academic integrity requires people to use, generate, and communicate in an ethical, honest and accountable manner.

This policy covers those forms of academic deception referred to as “plagiarism” and “collusion” including “contract cheating”. These forms of academic deception are breaches of the concept of academic integrity and breach Regulation 18 of the [General Regulations for Students](#). We will explain what these concepts are, and how we deal with them, below.

### A. DEFINITIONS AND WHY WE HAVE THIS POLICY

#### 1. WHY IS ACADEMIC INTEGRITY IMPORTANT?

The University takes allegations of plagiarism and collusion extremely seriously since such acts:

- threaten the credibility, integrity and standards of the University’s awards if students gain credit for work which is not their own, or which does not demonstrate their own learning;
- cast doubt on a student’s commitment and responsibility to their learning as well as their personal integrity;
- represent an unfair advantage over those students who do not plagiarise or collude;
- represent a serious attack on the values of academic integrity, values that are fundamental to universities and many other institutions.

For these reasons, suspected plagiarism, collusion or contract cheating, at any point of a student’s course, and whether discovered before or after graduation, will be investigated and dealt with appropriately and proportionately by the University. In some cases, an appropriate and proportional response will be expulsion from the University.

#### 2. TO WHOM DOES THIS POLICY APPLY?

This policy applies to all students registered at the University. From now on, we will refer to students as ‘you’ and the university as ‘we/us’.

If you are or were registered on an undergraduate or postgraduate taught programme or undertaking the taught components of professional doctorates, we will follow the procedure explained below.

Matters of plagiarism, collusion or contract cheating relating to the research work of a postgraduate research degree candidate or graduate should instead be brought to the attention of the Head of the Postgraduate Research Service and will be handled under the <Procedures for Investigation with Allegations of Research Misconduct Made against Students>.

If you breached this policy, but have since graduated, the Senate has the authority to reduce the classification of a conferred Degree, or to revoke a Degree, Diploma or Certificate or other distinction conferred by the University.

### **3. WHAT HAPPENS IF I HAVE BREACHED THIS POLICY?**

If we find that you have breached this policy, we will penalise you for that although the level of penalty depends upon a number of things. For students on an undergraduate or a postgraduate taught programme, or who are undertaking the taught components of professional doctorates, the first stage will be a referral to your school Plagiarism Officer. They may hold an investigative meeting and, if they find that you have breached the policy, may impose a penalty. The most serious cases can result in referral to the Senate Student Discipline Committee (SSDC) which has wide-ranging powers including temporary suspension or permanent expulsion. Students on courses leading to a profession may also find that they are held to be unsuited to professional practice, meaning that they have to leave their course and may not be allowed to do a similar course elsewhere.

Some professions such as the legal profession won't let anyone qualify if they have been found guilty of academic misconduct such as plagiarism or collusion although sometimes this depends on whether the breach was accidental or dishonest. This means that breaching this policy can have really serious consequences.

### **4. DOES THIS POLICY APPLY TO FORMATIVE WORK AS WELL AS SUMMATIVE?**

Plagiarism, collusion, or contract cheating in a piece of work that you submit as summative is a breach of this policy and a disciplinary offence. The default position under this policy is that plagiarism, collusion or contract cheating in formative work should not attract a disciplinary penalty, because we believe that formative work is an opportunity for you to understand how to properly use sources and reference your work, and academic integrity as an important value.

However, because of the nature of formative work in some schools, they may choose to apply this policy to formative work. If they do this, it will say so in your assessment briefing. Moreover, where your course is regulated by a Professional Statutory or Regulatory Body, that body might require us to include formative work in this policy too. Again, this information should be in your assessment brief.

In schools which don't penalise formative work, you may nevertheless be sent a letter of warning if they spot plagiarism, collusion, or contract cheating in a formative

submission. This is so you can ensure that you take further steps to understand where you have gone wrong and correct it before any summative submission. However, this is up to the module organiser, and if you cheat in a summative we can discipline you under this policy even if your module organiser hasn't sent a warning letter. Avoiding plagiarism, collusion, and contract cheating is *your* responsibility.

## 5. WHAT IS PLAGIARISM?

Plagiarism occurs when, in an assessment, you use or reproduce material without any or without sufficient attribution to the original source.

When you submit work, it is on the basis that it is your work, and the product of your own intellectual efforts without any form of falsification or fabrication (including fabrication by artificial intelligence software).

This means that you must acknowledge (by referencing) material that is not your own, or which you have used. Put simply, you must reference the sources you use.

You should either quote directly from the source (with a footnote or in-text citation giving the source) or rewrite it in your own words (again, with a footnote or in-text citation). It is not enough to swap out some, perhaps many, words or paraphrase closely. Words can have nuanced meanings and paraphrasing in this way leads to poor quality work, as well as being 'paraplagiarism'.

If you do not reference correctly, you have plagiarised.

Some students plagiarise deliberately but some students do so unintentionally. It's still plagiarism even if it is unintentional, but your intention and motivation is relevant to what penalty, if any, we impose. You can find more information about this below.

You must not invent references. This is particularly serious plagiarism because it will always be a dishonest act.

Note that while you are permitted to use artificial intelligence software to help you understand material and how that can be expressed, you are not allowed to use that software to complete the assessment (or any part of it) for you. If you use artificial intelligence software to complete the work for you, that will be plagiarism. In some cases, it will reach the level of contract cheating, which we discuss below. You should instead consider it as a research tool, and you should ensure that you cite its use by inserting a footnote or endnote which acknowledges that you used such software and what it helped you with.

### **What do we mean by 'material'?**

We mean all forms of attributable intellectual property (published or not) including, but not limited to, words, scientific formulae, program code, music, research data, tables, graphs, diagrams, images, web content and audio-visual resources as well as ideas and concepts. The sources of such content may include, but are not confined to, books, articles, theses, working and conference papers, posters, internal reports, plans or designs, your own previously published or assessed work, and teaching materials (e.g. lecture slides or handouts).

### **Case study A**

*Student A submitted work that was very similar to some published sources but denied that they had plagiarised. The disciplinary panel decided that this similarity could not have arisen by chance and that Student A had therefore copied some sources and was dishonest in denying that. However, Student A was very worried about their family in their home country, as the family were experiencing significant difficulties and Student A was a long way away. The Senate Student Discipline Panel thought that this had affected Student A's judgment and rather than applying the starting point penalty of suspension, they decided that Student A would receive a mark of zero for the work and be sent to reassessment where their mark would be capped so that the maximum grade they could achieve would be the pass mark.*

### **Case study B**

*Student B was a master's student. In their first semester, they submitted a piece of work that contained large sections of work from Wikipedia and published journal articles, which had not been referenced. At the disciplinary panel, Student B said that they were new to the UK higher education system and were undertaking many hours of paid employment, affecting their ability to attend classes. As a result, they fell behind. The Senate Student Discipline Panel suspended Student B for one semester, which meant that they had to redo the first semester the following year. In consideration of the student's financial difficulties, the panel timed this suspension so that the student did not incur a full year of extra fees, by allowing them to finish out the second semester. This helped make the outcome proportional to the breach. The Panel also noted that the student would not be able to pursue a career in their chosen profession as they did not accept students who had committed plagiarism, due to the dishonesty involved. This was an additional consequence that the student paid.*

## **6. WHAT IS SELF-PLAGIARISM?**

Self-plagiarism is when you reuse material that you've already submitted for a summative assessment here or at another institution, or you submit for a summative assessment some material that you have previously published. The effect of self-plagiarism is to mislead the reader into thinking that your work is new, when in fact it is (or part of it is) old. That would be dishonest and contrary to accepted academic conduct.

For you as a student, self-plagiarism is a missed opportunity to expand your knowledge and writing skills and to add to the pool of knowledge. Where a student can write two similar pieces of work, but another student cannot, there is also an issue of fairness between students.

It is not self-plagiarism to cite or refer to your own published work. However, the copyright in academic publications is more likely to be held by the publisher than the writer, meaning that it can breach their intellectual property to actually reuse any material from that work – even if you wrote it.

Some schools may allow students to resubmit work that they've previously submitted, for example by giving students the ability to revise and resubmit. If your

assessment briefing says you are allowed to revise and submit, then doing so would not constitute self-plagiarism.

## 7. WHAT IS COLLUSION?

Collusion is when you and someone else work together to produce work that you or they submit for an assessment. This might involve interacting (in person, by phone, email, messaging, social media, or any other way) with another person (or company) to complete the assessment task, such as by sharing answers or parts of answers. It can also involve ~~deliberately~~ attempting to collude with another person (or company), even if no collusion happens in the end.

All students are encouraged to improve their academic work by learning from others and some students will also have reasonable adjustments for a disability or specific learning difficulty that provides them with specialised help. It is important to distinguish this from collusion. When we consider whether something is collusion, we will ask ourselves whether your submitted assessment is the product of your own intellectual efforts, following a learning process, or whether you have tried to obtain an advantage dishonestly by submitting work that is partly or wholly done by someone else or the product of their intellectual efforts.

In some modules, group work or the sharing of sources will be allowed. If it is allowed, then your module organiser will let you know in the assessment briefing. Unless you are told explicitly by your module organiser that you can work with another person(s) then doing so would be collusion. You must ask if you are unsure what is and is not permitted.

Module organisers must use their assessment briefs to set out what level of collaboration is permitted and what is not permitted (see <<https://www.uea.ac.uk/documents/20142/1370399/guidance-note-on-groupwork.pdf>>).

It is possible to commit both plagiarism and collusion. For example, if you copied another student's work and they knew you might do that, this would be plagiarism by you, and collusion by you both.

### **Case study C**

*The module organiser found significant similarities between the work submitted by two students on the same module who sat the same 24-hour online exam. In fact, their exam papers were virtually identical except that a few words had been changed in one, which suggested a deliberate intent to cheat. The students denied that they had colluded. The Senate Student Discipline Panel found that on the balance of probabilities ('more likely than not') the students had colluded by working together during the exam (although they could also have colluded by one sharing their paper with the other). It gave the students a mark of zero for the work, and were not allowed to reassess, meaning that they failed the module. In some cases, where the module is core or compulsory, this would mean that they would have to leave the course.*

## 8. COLLUSION USING SOFTWARE OR WEBSITES

You must not use language-specific auto-complete or language prediction models for assessments in language modules (as this defeats the purpose of the assessments, which are to assess your language skills).

In other modules, the assessment brief may specifically prohibit the use of certain technologies where this would also defeat the purpose of the assessment.

## 9. WHAT IS CONTRACT CHEATING?

Contract cheating occurs when your assessment has been completed for you partially or wholly by a third party or by artificial intelligence software. The third party might be a friend or family member, another student or an academic or a commercial provider sometimes referred to as an 'essay mill'. It is contract cheating whether you pay them or not and whether you acknowledge this source or not.

Contract cheating may also involve a student uploading an assessment question to a website so that it can be answered, partly or wholly, by others or by artificial intelligence, or where such answers are capable of providing an academic advantage to any student. Even if your question is not actually answered, it would still be contract cheating as you have intended to cheat. Uploading a question in this way would also breach Regulation 16 (Intellectual property, data protection, and copyright) of the [General Regulations for Students](#).

The University treats contract cheating as a distinct and especially serious form of misconduct since engaging a third party to complete your work can only be a deliberate, intentional action. It is likely that you will be referred to Senate Student Discipline Committee and that the referral will be about both contract cheating and Regulation 16. It is very likely that a student engaged in contract cheating will be expelled from the university.

In 2022, the UK Parliament made it a criminal offence to offer commercial (paid) contract cheating services. While a student won't be prosecuted for aiding and abetting this offence by hiring a contract cheater, they may find themselves caught up in proceedings against the service.

### **Case study D**

*Student D submitted a piece of computer coding. The module organiser had several reasons to suspect that the work was not the student's own work, but had been commissioned. Student D admitted that they had hired someone to write the work for them. Although the Senate Student Discipline Panel accepted that the student had been finding things stressful, this did not affect Student D's judgment about right and wrong. The panel applied the starting point penalty which was expulsion from the university. This also meant that the student's visa was withdrawn and they had to leave the UK.*

### **Case study E**

*A lecturer received an email from someone outside the university who reported that he had been hired by Student E to write Student E's essay, and he complained that he had not been paid. The person attached the student's essay as evidence. Student E admitted to having hired this person, and said they had paid them and were being*

*blackmailed for more money. The Senate Student Discipline Panel expelled Student E from the university.*

## 10. ONLINE EXAMINATIONS

Where a student is alleged to have committed plagiarism, collusion, or contract cheating in an online assessment, this policy will apply.

In addition to understanding that plagiarism, collusion and contract cheating constitute misconduct, you should also ensure that you understand how you must behave in an examination (see General Regulation 20.1 and 20.2 of the University's [General Regulations for Students](#)).

## B. AVOIDING PLAGIARISM, COLLUSION, AND CONTRACT CHEATING

### 11. HOW YOU CAN AVOID PLAGIARISM AND COLLUSION

In this section we provide some guidance on how you can avoid plagiarism and collusion. If you have any questions about anything written here, please ask your academic adviser.

#### ***Preventing plagiarism before you start***

You must ensure that you understand the nature of plagiarism and collusion as outlined in this Policy and (in the case of postgraduate research students, the <Code of Practice for Research Degrees>). Your school must offer you training, but if you do not understand something, the obligation is on you to ask for further guidance. We will treat all students as understanding plagiarism, collusion, and contract cheating.

If you join a course or module late and have missed the training, you must make sure you catch up on the training. This is your responsibility.

You must also ensure that you understand any discipline-specific conventions (e.g. referencing styles, which may vary from school to school). In particular, if you are taking a module outside your home school, you must carefully check whether the rules and expectations are different.

Some plagiarism is the result of pressure of time or poor note taking. You should ensure that you plan your work and make use of the extenuating circumstances policy or a break in studies if relevant. When you make notes, ensure that you note the original source and page number so that you don't inadvertently pass someone else's work off as your own.

#### ***When writing***

You should avoid:

- Copying work in whole or in part from another student
- Reproducing your own previously submitted work (unless expressly permitted; see 'self-plagiarism' section)
- Downloading/buying essays from the Internet

- Using artificial intelligence software to help write your work. You may only use it as research to help understand material and to demonstrate different ways of writing, and ensure you cite it
- Patchwork writing – cutting and pasting different sources together, especially when you use very few sources a lot
- Non attribution – not referencing the ideas/research of others if you paraphrase a source
- Incomplete referencing or mixed referencing systems
- Inventing references
- Hidden quotation – ensure that for direct quotes you use quotation marks
- Using a proof-reader who does not follow the policy on proof reading.

You should avoid including a large amount of text from the same source. Even if it is appropriately referenced, and thus not plagiarism, doing this will mean you won't have included your original voice, ideas, or critical comment on your sources, and those contribute to your mark.

Unless your assessment briefing says you cannot, you *can* use websites that help your written English, such as through identifying where your writing can be made clearer or where your grammar or punctuation needs correcting. However, do be aware that these sites are rough tools - they are not always correct and sometimes they can lead to paraplagerism (paraphrasing too closely). Use them only to prompt you to check your work more thoroughly and as an indication that you may want to seek help on your written English from the Learning Enhancement Team in Student Services.

### ***When can I use a proof-reader?***

The full policy can be found at <<https://my.uea.ac.uk/departments/learning-and-teaching/students/academic-cycle/regulations-and-discipline/plagiarism-awareness>>

Here are the key parts:

Proof-reading is the systematic checking for and identification of errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar and sentence construction, formatting and layout in the text of a student script. The script might be an essay, report, project, dissertation, thesis or any other form of written assignment. A student should proof-read their own work but may also ask third parties to do so.

You may use a proof-reader unless your assessment briefing says that they are not permitted. The university trains some proof-readers and at the link above you can find the list of Approved Proof Readers. You can use another proof-reader, but these proof-readers have been trained in these rules. Note that you must never ask another student who is studying, or who has studied, the same module or assessment task as you to act as your proof-reader, as that would be collusion.

A proof-reader must not materially amend text in such a way that the meaning of the original is changed. It is also inappropriate for a proof-reader to comment on the quality of analysis or understanding of content. Where there is a lack of clarity in the meaning of a passage, the proof-reader may indicate this in their comments and

provide guidance in respect of the alternative ways in which the passage of text could be understood by a reader (but not provide suggested corrections).

***A proof-reader may:***

- identify a spelling mistake or typographical error
- identify poor grammar with an indication of what the error is (e.g. “tense”)
- point to formatting errors
- flag errors in the labelling of diagrams or figures
- highlight a sentence or passage that is overly complex or where the intended meaning is unclear and include an explanation of the reason why the sentence or passage is unclear or what the alternate interpretations might be
- note errors in cross referencing.

***A proof-reader must not:***

- rewrite passages of text in order to clarify meaning
- rewrite formulae, equations or computer code
- change the words or figures or notation used by the author (except to identify the correct spelling of the word used)
- rearrange passages of text, sequence of code or section of other material
- reformat the material
- contribute additional material to the original
- check calculations or formulae
- re-label figures or diagrams.

Students who elect to use a proof-reader (whether a friend or a professional service) must retain copies of all draft material sent to the proof-reader, showing their original material. Similarly, copies of the annotations/corrections made by the proof-reader must also be retained. Failure to retain copies of such drafts or to produce them when requested to do so as part of any plagiarism/collusion investigations may weigh against a student in any subsequent plagiarism meetings or in any investigations into Misconduct in Research.

***When to use a reference***

You should add a reference any time you use material from someone else’s work in your writing (whether that be in exact words, or the ideas, data, theories, findings or research that resulted from someone else’s work). This includes:

- When quoting directly from another source (and use quote marks too)
- When reporting in your own words an idea, theory, research or findings from another source (paraphrase)
- All material taken from all sources, published or unpublished, written or pictorial, printed or online, etc.
- When you include a table, diagram, or image taken from another source
- When you re-work data taken from another source into a diagram etc.
- When you have used artificial intelligence software to help understand material.
- To give authority, justification or evidence to a statement which might be contentious
- To show the breadth of your reading, and how well informed your opinions are.

-If in doubt, include a reference.

### ***When to paraphrase***

It's fine to rewrite things in your own words but you should reference the original source of the idea, and you should avoid close paraphrase such as swapping out every few words (we call this 'paraplagiarising'). In such circumstances either write it completely differently or use a direct quote. Some uses of paraphrasing are:

- When you can communicate ideas more succinctly in your own words
- When exact wording is not crucial to your analysis
- When you want to summarise several authors (agreeing or disagreeing) on a single issue
- To show you have understood the source to a high level
- To put a badly expressed or convoluted source in a more comprehensible form
- To leave out detail unnecessary to your point

### ***Avoiding collusion***

Check the assessment briefing to see if group work is allowed. Unless it is, you should ensure that you prepare your summative work alone (including both research and writing) and do not share it with anyone else apart from someone allowed under the proof-reading policy.

### ***Avoiding contract cheating***

Contract cheating is always dishonest as it involves an intent to cheat. Remember that it can have very significant long-lasting repercussions on your life and it is always better to choose the honest route, which may include seeking an extension, taking a leave of absence, or reassessing.

### ***Seeking help***

Sometimes, students commit plagiarism, collusion, or contract cheating because they feel under pressure or have personal problems. There is always an alternative to deliberate or careless plagiarism, collusion, or contract cheating, such as making a request for an extension, seeking advice from your module organiser or your adviser or supervisor, or the Learning Enhancement team in Student Services, or applying for an interruption to studies. Unless you commit plagiarism by accident it is always a deliberate choice and thus dishonest.

## **12. SCHOOL TRAINING OBLIGATIONS**

All Schools must provide students with training on plagiarism, collusion, and contract cheating, including the consequences of breaching this policy, and preferred referencing styles and expectations. Any live training provided must be recorded or supplemented by an online resource (to enable late joiners to access the training and students to continue to access it throughout their studies).

## **13. HOW SCHOOLS SHOULD USE ASSESSMENT BRIEFS**

There are significant differences between academic disciplines in assessment expectations, such as sharing sources, working in groups, and submitting drafts. This means that it is impossible to draft a policy that captures all of these practices. In order to respect these differences and provide clarity to students, assessment

briefs should set out the certain specific issues relating to this policy. A simple template brief which prompts module organisers about these things is available.

## **C. INVESTIGATING SUSPECTED CASES**

### **14. ROLE OF THE PLAGIARISM OFFICER**

The Head of each School must appoint a Plagiarism Officer (who shall not be the Head of School) who is responsible for investigation into potential breaches of this policy. The Plagiarism Officer must consider alleged offences committed by students enrolled on the module(s) offered by the Plagiarism Officer's School.

A deputy plagiarism officer may also be appointed and when we refer to Plagiarism Officer in this policy we mean that person too.

Where an allegation of plagiarism and/or collusion concerns a module not in a School in which the student is registered, the Plagiarism Officer of the School 'owning' the module shall deal with the allegation and, during the investigation, will keep the Plagiarism Officer in the School in which the student is registered informed of the status and outcome of the case.

### **15. WHAT THE MARKER SHOULD DO**

If a marker suspects plagiarism and/or collusion and/or contract cheating, they should continue to mark the work as if they had no such suspicion, keeping a separate copy of the annotated work as evidence. The marker should return the marked work to the LTS team (or for students on professional doctorates, the professional doctorates team in the PGR service) with a note that the matter has been referred to the Plagiarism Officer.

The marker should then notify their School Plagiarism Officer and provide a note of the reasons for the suspicion and any supporting evidence already to hand, such as a text-matching report and/or copies of sources plagiarised. This is to help the Plagiarism Officer to decide whether an investigative meeting is required. If there is no supporting evidence, this does not preclude a referral as the Plagiarism Officer can then seek evidence and run a text-matching programme.

Note that sometimes referrals may be sent to the Plagiarism Officer other than from a marker, for example through reports from other students.

### **16. WHAT THE PLAGIARISM OFFICER SHOULD DO**

The Plagiarism Officer will receive the information from the marker or other referrer and make such further investigations as may be required.

The Plagiarism Officer must call an investigative meeting in cases where there is a reasonable suspicion that there has been a breach of this policy that would be of medium or high level, or if they do not have sufficient information to decide.

If the suspicion, taken at its highest, may constitute a medium or high level offence, the Plagiarism Officer may also collect other work completed by the student, whether

produced for modules located in their own School or produced for modules delivered by other Schools.

This work may be screened using the software irrespective of whether or not the whole batch of the past assessment papers was screened at the time. If the outcome of that investigation is reasonably considered to be medium or high level, the Plagiarism Officer should proceed to an investigative meeting.

## **17. USING TEXT-MATCHING SOFTWARE AND AI-SCREENING TOOLS TO DETECT PLAGIARISM**

We use text-matching software and tools that screen for the use of text written by artificial intelligence to help us find cases of plagiarism, collusion, or contract cheating on our undergraduate, postgraduate and taught doctoral assessments. This is software that searches submitted work for matches against text contained in its databases or identifies work that is likely to have the characteristics of something not written by a person. Your work may at any time be subject to screening in this way.

We do not use this software to screen any parts of the thesis or research work of postgraduate research students except where this is explicitly approved via a concession request submitted via the Postgraduate Research Service to the Associate Pro Vice Chancellor UEA Doctoral College, for example in certain cases of alleged misconduct in research.

The text-matching software will identify text that is the same as other work, whether that is another student's work or something available online or a published book or journal article. It can also find work that is similar, or which has some words swapped out.

However, the report produced by the software requires careful interpretation since appropriately referenced texts or common turns of phrase will be highlighted alongside potentially plagiarised materials. This means that schools should ensure that their plagiarism officer(s) are trained in how to use text-matching software and how to interpret these reports; and schools should not send reports to students without explaining how to interpret them or what is being alleged.

Screening tools are capable of detecting the use of artificial intelligence to write material. As with text-matching software, the results need interpretation.

Where a school wishes to use batch screening for a module, it should screen all summative submissions and not simply a sample. This does not prevent a particular student's work being screened as part of an investigation into whether they have breached this policy where this is already suspected. Such screening may include past submissions.

Module organisers can make it possible for students to submit a draft submission for the purposes of screening, so that students can eliminate any problematic material before summative submission. If a module organiser decides to do this, then students must be provided with information on how to interpret the reports. However, module organisers may choose not to allow draft scans in this way.

## **18. WHAT THE LTS TEAM OR PGR SERVICE SHOULD DO**

Where the marker has returned marked work with a note that a breach of this policy is suspected, the LTS team (or for students on professional doctorates, the professional doctorates team in the PGR service) should send the student a letter confirming that the matter is under investigation. The relevant LTS team, PGR office, or research integrity team may provide support, for example by arranging for evidence to be provided by third parties (some websites will provide evidence of which students have used them to cheat) or other submissions that the Plagiarism Officer cannot access.

The LTS team (or for students on professional doctorates, the professional doctorates team in the PGR service) must also ensure that the Board of Examiners is aware that the student's marks for that module cannot be compensated or approved until the case is resolved.

Where the Plagiarism Officer has a reasonable suspicion that there has been a breach of this policy that would be of medium or high level, the LTS team (or for students on professional doctorates, the professional doctorates team in the PGR service) should arrange an investigative meeting, notify the student, and arrange for a member of the team to attend the meeting as secretary.

### **How long will this take?**

There are a number of stages to an investigation, from initial suspicion to referral and investigation, the holding of an investigative meeting and potentially referral to Senate Student Discipline Committee. During this period, you will not be able to have the marks for the relevant module approved by the Board of Examiners and nor can the Board compensate the mark. While the process may take several months, we will try to deal with the situation as quickly as we can alongside our other obligations. If information is needed from an external third party, this may cause further delay.

## **D. THE INVESTIGATIVE MEETING AND AFTERWARDS**

### **19. CASES ASSESSED AS BEING AT LOW LEVEL**

Where the Plagiarism Officer, utilising the grid, is reasonably confident that the case is a low level incident, then they will apply the educative penalty outlined at 31. There is no requirement that there be an investigative meeting.

Guidance: Plagiarism Officers should note that where a student is alleged to have breached this policy in relation to a reassessment, the effect of a finding of plagiarism may be a fail with no right to reassess, and that this may include low level cases where the effect of a remark is to bring the work below the pass mark. For this reason, plagiarism officers should carefully consider whether to hold an investigative meeting in cases which may fall into this category, and to carefully consider the overall proportionality of the outcome.

### **20. OTHER CASES**

Where the Plagiarism Officer has a reasonable suspicion that the case is medium or high level, or where the Plagiarism Officer has insufficient evidence to decide, they must call a virtual or in-person investigative meeting with you.

## 21. PREPARING FOR THE INVESTIGATIVE MEETING

No fewer than 5 working days before the meeting, your LTS team (or for students on professional doctorates, the professional doctorates team in the PGR service) will send you a summons to the meeting and, where appropriate, some or all of the evidence on which they intend to rely at the meeting. This evidence might include:

- Your work
- Copies of any sources you've used (which may include similar work by other students, published articles, internet sources etc.)
- A report using text-matching software, showing the similarities to sources
- An explanation of how to understand the report (which must be sent if the report is sent)
- [A report about the potential use of artificial intelligence software](#)
- A note by the marker or module organiser explaining their concerns
- The assessment briefing.

An investigative meeting should be held as soon as possible after the School Plagiarism Officer has determined that one is required.

Sometimes we will have meetings held by one plagiarism officer (plus marker or module organiser, and secretary) and sometimes we will have two plagiarism officers (plus marker or module organiser, and secretary). We will try to have two officers where we can do so, but it is more important that we process cases as soon as possible, as delay can affect your progression on your course. The secretary is someone from your LTS team/professional doctorates team who will take the minutes of the meeting. The marker or module organiser should also be in attendance.

You **must** attend an Investigative Meeting if one is called. You are required by Regulation 13 of the [General Regulations for Students](#) to do so. Your LTS team/professional doctorates team will try to schedule the meeting outside your timetabled teaching, but this may not be possible. In the event of a clash with your timetable or other obligations, then unless the timetable shows an examination or course test, you are expected to attend this meeting. Exceptionally, a meeting can be rearranged for other good reasons, such as a hospital appointment.

You **must** bring with you any evidence you want to use to challenge the allegation of plagiarism, collusion, or contract cheating. If you have any mitigating circumstances you **must** bring evidence of those. A mitigating circumstance is one that makes the breach less serious than it would otherwise be, and is related to your personal circumstances. You can see what sort of things we may treat as mitigating any breach at paragraph 30.

If you tell the Plagiarism Officer or LTS/professional doctorates team in advance that you do not intend to attend, they can cancel the meeting. If you just do not turn up, then the meeting will be ended. However, the Plagiarism Officer will still deal with your case. If you do not turn up without a very good reason, we will treat you as having admitted that you have breached the policy and will apply a penalty or refer you to Senate Student Discipline Committee. You will also have missed out on your chance to tell the Plagiarism Officer about any mitigating circumstances.

If you are referred to Senate Student Discipline Committee, the fact that you did not turn up will be relevant, because it would be a breach of another regulation, Regulation 13, as well as a breach of this policy.<sup>2</sup>

## **22. BRINGING SOMEONE WITH YOU**

If you want, you can bring a Companion with you to the meeting. The Companion must have no connection with the allegations and therefore no material interest in the situation, and must not be a member of academic staff. Many students bring a Student Union advice worker.

You must tell the LTS team (or for students on professional doctorates, the professional doctorates team in the PGR service) no later than 2 working days before the meeting of the identify and status (for example, Student Union advice worker) of the Companion. If you don't tell the team within this timescale, the Chair of the meeting may decide that you are not allowed to bring a Companion at all.

Your Companion cannot answer questions for you ([your testimony](#)), but can present your arguments on your behalf and provide you with help and support. It's your responsibility to tell your Companion about the date, time, and location of the meeting, and they cannot attend unless you also attend. The Companion may be excluded from the hearing if they are so disruptive as to impede the conduct of the hearing. In such a case, or if they fail to attend, the Plagiarism Officer will decide whether or not to continue with the hearing without them.

## **23. AT THE MEETING**

The meeting will be chaired by your school's Plagiarism Officer. If the School Plagiarism Officer is also your Module Organiser or internal marker, then the Deputy Plagiarism Officer (where a School has made such an appointment) or a Plagiarism Officer from another School will act as Plagiarism Officer for the case.

The marker or module organiser will set out the allegations and they and the Plagiarism Officer(s) will ask you about them. They may ask you a series of questions to examine your understanding of the subject matter of the work you have submitted.

Note that where the allegations are of collusion, the meeting may involve the inclusion of other students alleged to be involved in the same breach, or may involve you being recalled after the panel has had the opportunity to speak to other students.

You will have the opportunity to respond to the allegations and to raise any mitigating circumstances. If you deny the allegation, it will be referred to Senate Student Discipline Committee for a formal hearing and decision. If you admit the allegation, the chair will ask you about what led you to breach the policy, and it will ask you about certain things that will help decide what penalty to apply, such as your experience of the UK higher education system and any mitigating circumstances.

When they have finished hearing from you and the marker/module organiser, the Chair will ask you both to leave. The Plagiarism Officer(s) will then decide on the

balance of probabilities whether or not you have breached this policy.<sup>3</sup> Another way of saying this is ‘is it more likely than not that you have breached this policy?’

#### **24. WHAT IF YOU ADMIT BREACHING THE POLICY?**

It is almost always better to admit it if you are, indeed, guilty. This is for several reasons. First, some breaches of this policy are inadvertent/accidental and that is less serious than deliberate cheating. In this situation, denying it just adds an element of dishonesty that makes it more serious. For some professions, it's dishonesty that's the important thing in deciding whether you can join the profession. Second, an early admission of guilt and an expression of remorse are relevant to the level of penalty to be applied. Thirdly, if you deny the allegation the case will be referred to Senate Student Discipline Committee which will hold a panel hearing about the case and has more serious penalties available, and may, if they find you have breached the policy, view denial as evidence that you are not remorseful and may do the same thing again. We strongly recommend that you seek advice from the Student's Union Advice Centre if you want to discuss your options.

If you have denied the plagiarism and change your mind about that after the meeting, you can let the Plagiarism Officer know within 5 working days of the meeting. If you do this, the Plagiarism Officer will treat this as though you had admitted the breach during the meeting and when deciding the appropriate penalty will give you credit for an early admission of guilt.

#### **25. AFTER THE MEETING**

The Plagiarism Officer(s) will decide whether you have breached this policy. If they decide that you have, they will consider the outcome grid at paragraph 30 of this policy to help them decide the level of the breach (low, medium or high). If they classify the breach as low or medium level, they will apply an appropriate penalty. The LTS team/professional doctorates team will write to you and tell you the penalty and about how to appeal.

They will refer the matter to Senate Student Discipline Committee and will not impose a penalty themselves if:

- they classify the breach as high level, or
- they cannot decide whether the policy has been breached or not because the matter is complex, or are worried about the proportionality of the outcome in the particular circumstances; or
- you have denied the breach.

If there is more than one Plagiarism Officer at the meeting and they cannot agree, the decision shall be treated as a single-Plagiarism Officer decision by the Plagiarism Officer from the school that owns the module, and the second Plagiarism Officer's view as a moderation (see 'Moderation of single-Officer decisions').

#### ***Head of School adjudication***

In all cases, the LTS team (or for students on professional doctorates, the professional doctorates team in the PGR service) will send the Head of School the minutes of the meeting and the draft outcome letter. The Head of School may override that classification and/or outcome. Without limiting this discretion, this may

be appropriate if there are relevant confidential considerations relating to the module or you which are unknown to the Plagiarism Officer(s).

**Moderation of single-Officer decisions**

Where the Plagiarism Officer has decided the case by themselves, the LTS team (or for students on professional doctorates, the professional doctorates team in the PGR service) must send the papers and minutes to another plagiarism officer for moderation. If the second Plagiarism Officer considers that the decision is outside the range of fair decisions, he or she must bring this to the attention of the Plagiarism Officer and the Head of the School in which the module sits. The Head of School will then determine how to classify the case and what penalty to apply. When making this decision, the Head shall give weight to and consult with the School Plagiarism Officer, but shall be mindful of the views of the second Plagiarism Officer.

**Referrals to Senate Student Discipline Committee**

The Head of School where the module is hosted will refer the case to Senate Student Discipline Committee if:

- You deny the allegation; or
- The Plagiarism Officer(s) decide that the case is a high level case; or
- The case is so complex that the Plagiarism Officer(s) cannot decide whether you have breached the policy or not or are worried about the proportionality of the outcome in the particular circumstances. This reflects the greater opportunity for SSDC Panels to summons witnesses and cross-examine participants and the wider range of potential penalties. If SSDC subsequently finds you to be in breach of the relevant regulation(s), the Chair of SSDC or the Panel shall take into account, when determining the appropriate penalty, of the fact that the referral was made against a background of complexity and not solely or necessarily because of the seriousness of the allegations.

Note that if you did not attend the investigative meeting, the referral should also be made under Regulation 13 (attendance, engagement, and progress ([General Regulations for Students](#))). If you are also accused of breaching the University’s intellectual property, a referral should also be made under Regulation 16.3.

**26. TIMELINES (WORKING DAYS)**

The following timelines represent good practice and are not mandatory. However, delays may have a serious effect on your progression and wellbeing so we will try to work on each stage as quickly as we can among our other obligations.

Day 0	Investigative Meeting
By day 5	Your deadline to change your mind and admit guilt if you did not do so at the meeting, and still get credit for an early admission
By day 15	Draft meeting minutes to be prepared by your LTS team (or for students on professional doctorates, the professional doctorates team in the PGR service)
	Documents to second plagiarism officer for moderation in single-Plagiarism Officer cases
	Documents to Head of School

	Referral to Fitness to Practise Lead in professional schools
By day 20	Second Plagiarism Officer to send comments to HOS if concerned
By day 25	HOS deadline for reviewing
	The LTS team (or for students on professional doctorates, the professional doctorates team in the PGR service) will draft the outcome letter and finalise the minutes and send them to you
	HOS referral to SSDC (if relevant)

## 27. INTERRELATIONSHIP WITH FITNESS TO PRACTISE PROCESS

Where programmes lead to professional qualifications, if you are found to have committed a High level breach of this policy, the LTS team (or for students on professional doctorates, the professional doctorates team in the PGR service) must refer you to your home School's Fitness to Practise Lead.

This should happen prior to referral to a Senate Student Discipline Committee as the SSDC referral may then include an allegation that Regulation 14 of the [General Regulations for Students](#) has been breached.

## 28. EFFECT ON PROGRESSION

The secretary to the investigative meeting must ensure that the correct mark is recorded for confirmation to the relevant Board of Examiners. The Board of Examiners may be made aware by the Chair of the Board of any marks recorded reflecting plagiarism and/or collusion.

No mark may be confirmed or compensated, and nor may a student be sent to delayed assessment or reassessment, while proceedings relating to this policy (at school or SSDC level) are ongoing.

No Board of Examiners may refer a student to a delayed assessment on a summative component on which the student's marks for that component are the result of the imposition of a penalty for breach of this policy. This is because, as part of their functions, the Plagiarism Officer/SSDC has already considered and weighed mitigating circumstances in the balance when determining the outcome.

However, a Board may offer a student a further reassessment attempt (ie with a capped mark) where all of the following conditions are satisfied:

- The Plagiarism Officer recommend this course of action as necessary to avoid a disproportionate outcome;
- The student would otherwise be required to leave the university by virtue of failing a module with no right to reassessment or compensation;
- But for the imposition of a plagiarism penalty the student would otherwise have been offered a deferred first sit on the basis of their extenuating circumstances;
- The case has not been referred to SSDC.

## 29. RECORD KEEPING

The LTS team (or for students on professional doctorates, the professional doctorates team in the PGR service) must keep a record of warnings in respect of

formative work, in case of further breaches. These records must be made available to the Plagiarism Officers.

For summative work, irrespective of the outcome, the LTS team (or for students on professional doctorates, the professional doctorates team in the PGR service) must retain a copy of the (i) the record of the investigative meeting, (ii) the assessed work in question, (iii) the Plagiarism Officer’s findings and (iv) the penalty imposed on the student’s file. This shall be the case even where a student is found not to have plagiarised or colluded. The student should also be given a copy of these documents.

School Plagiarism Officers shall complete an annual report to the Learning and Teaching Committee of Senate which should include information on referrals made to them, investigative meetings held, and outcomes.

**E. CLASSIFICATION GRID AND PENALTIES**  
**30. USING THE CLASSIFICATION GRID**

The Plagiarism Officer(s) must consider the following criteria which are an aid to decision-making. The weight and relevance of each criterion is a matter of professional judgment, subject to moderation as provided for under ‘Moderation of single-Officer decisions’ and the powers of the Head of School under ‘Head of School adjudication’.

	<b>Low Level</b>	<b>Medium Level</b>	<b>High Level</b>
<b>Experience of the student</b>	Description: The student is within the first six months of higher education in the UK	Description: The student is not within the first six months of higher education in the UK but may genuinely not have fully understood the academic requirements.	Description: The student fully understands the requirements and the rules governing plagiarism and collusion and is not within the first six months.  The student has previously received a warning about plagiarism and/or collusion in a piece of work, <sup>4</sup> and/or has been found to have breached this policy previously <sup>5</sup>

Guidance on experience: Experience refers to the student’s familiarity with the presentation requirements of the relevant academic work. We assume all students are trained and that if they do not attend training they can’t benefit from that lapse under this policy. However, there is a difference between deliberate ignorance and trying but failing to understand. In particular, Plagiarism Officers must be mindful of international differences in the seriousness with which plagiarism is treated.

	<b>Low Level</b>	<b>Medium Level</b>	<b>High Level</b>
<b>Extent of plagiarism or collusion</b>	Description: Suspect element(s) only minimally impact on the ability to meet the learning outcomes of the assessment.	Description: Suspect element(s) moderately impact on the ability to meet the learning outcomes of the assessment.	Description: Suspect element(s) substantially impact on the ability to meet the learning outcomes of the assessment.
Guidance on extent: The Plagiarism Officer should be guided by the marker/module organiser's view of extent. This is because the extent refers to the ability to meet the outcomes of the assessment and thus is not necessarily the same as the proportion of the work that is plagiarised/the result of collusion.			

	<b>Low Level</b>	<b>Medium Level</b>	<b>High Level</b>
<b>Intent of student to deceive</b>	Description: On the balance of probability, the act of plagiarism or collusion was unintentional.	Description: On the balance of probability, the act of plagiarism or collusion was not intentional but the result of negligence or carelessness rather than an attempt to deliberately deceive.	Description: On the balance of probability, the act of plagiarism or collusion was intentional and knowingly meant to deceive, or the student did not care whether it was likely to deceive.

	<b>Low Level</b>	<b>Medium Level</b>	<b>High Level</b>
<b>Nature of plagiarism or collusion</b>	Description: Poor academic practice relative to the academic task.  Plagiarism For example: Suspect element is incidental to the fundamental argument; referencing or attribution of work is not clear or has numerous errors.  Collusion For example: Misunderstanding of what constitutes	Description: Unacceptable academic practice relative to the academic task.  Plagiarism For example: Suspect element contributes to or supports analysis, argument or conclusions but student's own work can be identified and is of greater or at least comparable significance; Failure to reference	Description: Clear breach of acceptable academic practice.  Plagiarism For example: Suspect element contributes the sole or greater part of analysis argument or conclusion and the student's own work cannot readily be discerned; absence of appropriate attribution.  Collusion

	collective activity.	and/or cite appropriately.  Collusion For example: Copying segments of other students' work; lending own work to another student where a reasonable student would believe that it may be copied.	For example: Whole/substantial parts of the work is copied from other students without their knowledge/consent; the sharing of work or content in the knowledge that it will be copied; deliberate concealment of the collective activity.  Contract cheating
Guidance on nature: Contract cheating must be classified as a high level offence and referred to SSDC. If there are mitigating circumstances, these can be considered at that stage.			

### 31. CONSIDERATION OF MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES

If the Plagiarism Officer(s) decide that you have breached this policy, they may take into account the following circumstances when determining the outcome:

- If you are suffering from an illness or other medical condition affecting your judgement (note that the effect is on your ability to exercise sound judgment about cheating, not merely that you have an illness or medical condition)
- You are suffering from an illness or other medical condition which would exacerbate the effect of any penalty imposed so that it may not be proportionate to the breach
- At the time you were experiencing family or relationship problems affecting your judgment (note that the effect is on your ability to exercise sound judgment about cheating, not merely that they have family or relationship problems).
- You have felt under duress
- You accepted guilt early and have shown remorse.

### 32. THE OUTCOMES TO BE APPLIED

After classification of the offence, the following outcomes should- be applied.

#### ***Low level cases***

The Plagiarism Officer must give you a mark which is based on the work excluding that which has been identified as plagiarism or collusion (or which treats a particular learning outcome as not having been satisfied).

In order to help you avoid plagiarism and/or collusion in future assignments, you should be offered support which may be in the form of an action plan and/or appropriate learning support package. A copy of the action plan/learning package will be retained on your file for as long as you are a student here.

### **Medium level cases**

#### **(a) Plagiarism:**

The Plagiarism Officer must give you a mark which is based on the work excluding that which has been identified as plagiarism or collusion (or which treats a particular learning outcome as not having been satisfied).

#### **(b) Collusion:**

Where two or more students have worked together, the pieces of work will be marked as they stand and the highest mark of those awarded will be divided equally among the number of students deemed to have colluded.

If one student has lent their completed or almost-completed work to the others, the starting point remains equal division of the marks, to reflect the medium level of culpability. However, the Plagiarism Officer may record marks to take account of the effort put in by the student who produced the work, and the lack of effort from the other students who colluded, if they feel that this is merited.

### **High level cases**

Where the Plagiarism Officer determines that the breach is of a high level, the case must be referred to SSDC for determination. Please see 'Effect on Progression' for the consequences for the student's progression in the interim.

### **Recommendation to the Board of Examiners**

In accordance with paragraph 28 (Effect on Progression) the Plagiarism Officer may recommend to the Board of Examiners that you be offered a further reassessment attempt in limited circumstances. This applies to outcomes other than referral to SSDC.

### **Case study F**

*Student F asked a family friend to research their essay, as they were struggling with a number of reassessments. The Senate Student Discipline Panel held that this was contract cheating and that the starting point was expulsion. However, as Student F had very significant mental health difficulties, the panel did not expel them. Instead they gave Student F a suspended expulsion, allowing them to continue on their course subject to a number of conditions including regular contact with their adviser and Student Services, and compliance with all regulations in the future. If student F does not comply, the expulsion will come into effect.*

### **APPEALS**

A student may appeal against a **penalty** (i.e. the level and consequences) applied under paragraph 32 except where they have been referred to the Senate Student Discipline Committee and should do so by completing a Stage One Academic Appeal form within 10 working days of the notification of the outcome setting out the grounds for the appeal.

The appeal shall be heard at Stage 1 of the [Academic Appeals and Complaints Procedure](#).