

PREVENTATIVE MEASURES AGAINST ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

1 Background

- 1.1 It is intended that these measures will complement and work in tandem with the recommendations in the Policy on the Conduct of Assessed Work (Academic Good Conduct) and the penalties applied to students found guilty of using unfair means.
- 1.2 The measures are mainly directed at students who are undertaking taught programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level but it is hoped that some measures will be of value to those academic staff concerned with the guidance and supervision of postgraduate research students.

2 Guiding Principle

The measures are underpinned by the principle that the encouragement of best practice and academic good conduct is the most effective way of minimising unfair means.

3 Measures

The measures fall into three categories:

- a) those relating to the induction of students and good teaching, supervision and assessment practice
- b) those relating to the administration of procedures
- c) those relating to staff development/training requirements

4 Induction of students and good teaching and assessment practice

- 4.1 The University should provide a brief and clearly expressed statement to be issued at an early stage to all students outlining the University's expectations of academic good conduct, the definitions of unfair means and the penalties which will result from the use of unfair means; where practicable, all students should be required to sign *or* otherwise indicate that they have received this statement. (This requirement should be included on the induction check list for students.) Furthermore, the Policy on the Conduct of Assessed Work (Academic Good Conduct) should be available on the University website and the fact publicised in the statement.
- 4.2 Schools and *Research Institutes should help develop students' understanding of plagiarism within the subject context and should explore this through interactive subject-based exercises and discussion. This should be done on an ongoing basis from early in the student's programme of study and should take account of the diversity of students' previous learning experiences, including their cultural backgrounds; this support is particularly important for Level M students in view of the penalties. This should be supplemented by a requirement of all Schools and *Research Institutes that they provide each student with written guidance on referencing in written work.
- 4.3 The University should develop on-line self-access materials designed to help students understand the meaning of good academic practice and the avoidance of the use of unfair means in their assessments which will be accessible via Blackboard.
- 4.4 Schools and *Research Institutes should teach students how to engage with their subject, to develop the norms of scholarship and academic writing and to use appropriate referencing methods, fostering an expectation in academic writing of more than regurgitation.

- 4.5 Academic tutors should be encouraged to design plagiarism out by adopting appropriate assessment processes (some examples of the ways in which this may be achieved are attached as Appendix 1).
- 4.6 Schools and *Research Institutes should record any referrals of students to Academic Learning Skills support.
- 4.7 Supervisors of research students should take particular responsibility for giving guidance about literature and sources as well as exemplars of good research practice in the specialist field, advising on the issue of plagiarism (Code of Practice for the Conduct of Postgraduate Research Degree Programmes).

5 The administration of procedures

- 5.1 The University should provide clear instructions in plain English to be read out at the start of every examination
- 5.2 The University should require a standardised proforma, which lists the definitions of unfair means, to be submitted by each student on a taught programme with all assessed pieces of work declaring that:
- the work is their own
 - the work of others used in its completion has been duly acknowledged
 - experimental or other investigative results have not been falsified
 - the student has received, read and understood the University Policy on the Conduct of Assessed Work (Academic Good Conduct).
- 5.3 Research students must submit an equivalent signed declaration of originality (a Declaration 1 form) to verify that the work submitted is their own (as per the Code of Practice for the Conduct of Postgraduate Research Degree Programmes).
- 5.4 The University should require the University Policy on the Conduct of Assessed Work (Academic Good Conduct) to be published in full in Student Handbooks at School level and in the Code of Practice for the Conduct of Postgraduate Research Degree Programmes and, where practicable, for students to sign for or otherwise indicate receipt of Student Handbooks and the Code of Practice.
- 5.5 Assessments Office should produce an annual report to Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee on cases of unfair means.
- 5.6 The University should give serious consideration to improving the effectiveness of processes for ensuring the security of examination stationery and examination papers.

6 Staff development/training

- 6.1 The University should develop on-line self-access materials on preventing/avoiding unfair means, including methods of detection which could be accessed by staff via Blackboard.
- 6.2 The University should develop protocols/criteria for the use of Associate Heads (Teaching) (AHTs) and *Research Institute Directors (RIDs) in determining whether a suspected case of unfair means should go forward for investigation (some suggested criteria are listed in Appendix 2).
- 6.3 The University should provide compulsory training of AHTs, RIDs and Investigators on protocols/criteria and on the new procedure on unfair means to be cascaded to all staff

- within the School to ensure dissemination at School level and consistency of implementation.
- 6.4 The University should facilitate regular meetings of trained AHTs and RIDs to check own practice against that of colleagues. A similar exchange should take place for Investigators nominated by Schools and *Research Institutes. The University should establish a mail base to facilitate this exchange.
 - 6.5 There should be a monitoring and review of the process forming a standard agenda item on the AHTs meeting twice per year and on the agenda of the appropriate research student committee.
 - 6.6 Training in preventative measures should be included as part of the induction programme for all new academic staff and administrative staff involved in assessment. This should include training on assessment procedures and processes and in particular the role of the Senior Invigilator and Invigilator in written examinations.
 - 6.7 There should be staff development sessions offered each year on the Policy on the Conduct of Assessed Work (Academic Good Conduct) itself and on preventative measures. A precedence file of case studies should be maintained to be used for training purposes.

* Research Institutes are in the process of being disbanded with activities being transferred to Schools.

Appendix 1

Some methods of assessment which help to minimise the possibilities of plagiarism

Plagiarism can be minimised by:

- a) asking for assessment artefacts that do not already exist, for example:
 - changing the assessment tasks each time the course is taught
 - the setting of tasks that refer to local or recent events, current ideas, in-the-news people the addition of specific requirements e.g. “using book x as well as a range of other texts”, “using primary data gathered from interviews”
 - the requirement for unusual formats (not always essays) such as annotated book lists, posters, dialogues between fictional characters, reflective writing
- b) tracking the process the student pursues when producing the assessment, for example:
 - assessment of the process of producing the final product, rather than just assessment of the final product
 - the requirement that drafts are submitted with the final product;
 - the requirement that major references, articles are submitted
 - the use of some observed tasks, in-class tasks or supervised tasks;
 - the requirement that an assignment has built in planning stages (Outline in Week 4, bibliography in Week 7 etc.)
- c) using a design strategy which links assessments so that, for example, concepts have to be understood at one stage before the next stage of the assessment can be completed;
- d) building in authenticity checks such as random or partial vivas, open book tests, exams that require more than memorised answers, ad hoc assessments
- e) using assessment methods which deter cheating:
 - the requirement for analysis, evaluation, reflection on practice rather than simple regurgitation of knowledge and factual information
 - the assessment of group tasks in ways that recognise individual contributions
 - the requirement for variable components to assessments such as the application of a common theory to specific situations (e.g. “personality theories applied to my own”, “urban design in Headington”, “Death in Byron’s poems and Six Feet Under” “this legal aspect in case x”)
 - the personalising of the task e.g. providing data unique to the student, individually negotiated tasks
 - the linking of assessed common tasks (“solve these problems”) with an authenticity process such as a viva or exam
 - the use of formative assessment to coach good writing practice and referencing techniques, especially in the early parts of courses

Appendix 2

Protocols and criteria for dealing with cases of suspected plagiarism

- 1 When presented with a case of suspected plagiarism, it may be useful to distinguish between:
 - misunderstanding
 - misuse
 - misconduct
- 2 If cases of misunderstanding are arising schools should examine the support offered to, and provided for, students as outlined above.
- 3 Cases which clearly fall into the category of misconduct will automatically invoke the full weight of the unfair means and plagiarism procedures. Cases falling into the other two categories may be handled in a different way with a view to preventing re-occurrence. However, where misuse, for example in the form of poor academic practice or recurrent inability following instruction to apply proper referencing techniques, becomes habitual, it may be considered to constitute misconduct.
- 4 In determining where a particular case falls, it may be helpful to take account of the following:
 - the extent
 - the student's level and prior experience
 - the conventions of the discipline
- 5 In considering the extent, it is sometimes possible to quantify, if approximately, how much plagiarism has taken place as a proportion of the unit of assessment, both in terms of the piece(s) of work concerned and of the module of which it forms a part. . A rule of thumb used in other institutions such as Oxford Brookes suggests that 15% be considered as the very upper limit of tolerance and that below that the advice to a tutor may be a) to award a lower mark on the ground so failure to respect norms of academic good practice and/or b) appropriate counselling of the student with a record kept on file.
- 6 Consideration of a student's level and prior experience takes account of the fact that the clear majority of plagiarists are students who may not yet have had sufficient opportunity to familiarise themselves with and to implement the standards of academic practice required in UK HE institutions. Schools should take into account that this may apply to international students and also, for example, to students who have entered university through APEL, Access, vocational qualification or other routes with less preparation than, for example, the traditional 'A' level route. If on investigation at AHT or RID level it can be shown that plagiarism has occurred for genuine reasons of misunderstanding and/or lack of clear instruction it suggests that action to be taken should be remedial and admonitory rather than punitive, with expectations as to future conduct clearly set out and understood.
- 7 The norms of academic practice are not uniform across all disciplines. Conventions in biological sciences are different from those in, say, business studies. This is why it has been recommended that one form of prevention should be subject specific exercises designed to teach the norms of the discipline. If plagiarism has arisen out of failure to understand the conventions of a discipline, it again suggests that action should be remedial rather than punitive, at least in the first instance.