

Lancaster University

DEALING WITH PLAGIARISM BY STUDENTS ON TAUGHT PROGRAMMES

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

*(original version approved by the Senate 28 May 2003 for implementation from 1 October 2003
Revised May 2009)*

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This framework (and the sanctions within it) applies equally to all assessment submitted by students for examination by the University in all academic taught programmes (UG and PGT).

INTRODUCTION

Plagiarism involves the unacknowledged use of someone else's work, usually in coursework, and passing it off as if it were one's own. Many students who submit apparently plagiarised work probably do so inadvertently without realising it because of poorly developed study skills, including note taking, referencing and citations; this is poor academic practice rather than malpractice. Some students, particularly those from different cultures and educational systems, find UK academic referencing/acknowledgement systems and conventions awkward, and proof-reading is not always easy for dyslexic students and some visually-impaired students. Study skills education within programmes of study should minimise the number of students submitting poorly referenced work. However, some students plagiarise deliberately, with the intent to deceive. This intentional malpractice is a conscious, pre-mediated form of cheating and is regarded as a particularly serious breach of the core values of academic integrity. The University has zero tolerance for intentional plagiarism.

Academic integrity

The core values of academic integrity (honesty and trust) lie at the heart of our academic enterprise, and they underpin all activities within the University. The University values a culture of honesty and mutual trust, and it expects all members of the University to respect and uphold these core values at all times, in everything they do at, for and in the name of the University.

Academic integrity is important because without honesty and trust true academic discourse becomes impossible, learning is distorted and the evaluation of student progress and academic quality is seriously compromised. Consequently, the University is committed to –

- a. defending the academic credibility and reputation of the institution
- b. protecting the standards of its awards
- c. ensuring that its students receive due credit for the work they submit for assessment
- d. advising its students of the need for academic integrity, and providing them with guidance on best practice in studying and learning
- e. educating its students about what intellectual property is, why it matters, how to protect their own, and how to legitimately access other people's, and
- f. protecting the interests of those students who do not cheat.

Lancaster's academic enterprise is rooted in a culture of trust and integrity, and this underpins all aspects of the institution's teaching and learning strategy. Most students do not cheat – they are honest and hard working, and they rightly deserve the trust of their tutors. Cheating, which is a form of academic malpractice, is the exception not the norm.

However, some students do cheat, in different ways and for different reasons. In order to be fair on those who don't and to protect the institution's academic reputation and credibility, procedures are required to reduce the likelihood of cheating, to detect when it is happening, and to deal with those found guilty of it. This regulatory framework deals specifically with plagiarism which, when done intentionally, is a common form of cheating.

Plagiarism can include the following:

1. collusion, where a piece of work prepared by a group is represented as if it were the student's own;
2. commission or use of work by the student which is not his/her own and representing it as if it were, e.g.:
 - purchase of a paper from a commercial service, including internet sites, whether pre-written or specially prepared for the student concerned
 - submission of a paper written by another person, either by a fellow student or a person who is not a member of the university;
3. duplication (of one's own work) of the same or almost identical work for more than one module;
4. the act of copying or paraphrasing a paper from a source text, whether in manuscript, printed or electronic form, without appropriate acknowledgement (this includes quoting directly from another source with a reference but without quotation marks);
5. submission of another student's work, whether with or without that student's knowledge or consent;
6. Directly quoting from model solutions/answers made available in previous years;
7. cheating in class tests, e.g.
 - when a candidate communicates, or attempts to communicate, with a fellow candidate or individual who is neither an invigilator or member of staff
 - copies, or attempts to copy from a fellow candidate
 - attempts to introduce or consult during the examination any unauthorised printed or written material, or electronic calculating, information storage device, mobile phones or other communication device
 - personates or allows himself or herself to be impersonated.
8. Fabrication of results occurs when a student claims to have carried out tests, experiments or observations that have not taken place or presents results not supported by the evidence with the object of obtaining an unfair advantage.

These definitions apply to work in whatever format it is presented, including written work, online submissions, groupwork and oral presentations.

Why is a plagiarism framework needed?

Plagiarism should not be tolerated for three main reasons –

1. It involves unacceptable practices, particularly literary theft (stealing someone else's intellectual property, and breach of copyright) and academic deception (in order to gain a higher grade)
2. It prevents the student who plagiarises from knowing how well they have performed (by yielding a false grade), thus denying them the opportunity to learn lessons, improve their study skills, and improve their knowledge and understanding
3. If plagiarism goes undetected and unpunished, it effectively penalises and can demoralise those students who do not plagiarise

The University regards plagiarism as unacceptable because it undermines the core values of academic integrity (honesty and trust). It is a breach of the University Regulations, and is liable to be pursued by appropriate disciplinary action.

A student who knowingly assists another student to plagiarise (for example by willingly giving them their own work to copy from) is also guilty of academic malpractice, and will be dealt with under existing University Regulations.

PREVENTING PLAGIARISM

Focus of prevention

In the context of plagiarism, prevention involves three key areas –

1. the education of students:
 - a. by raising awareness of the positive and negative reasons why they should not plagiarise (positive reasons including getting reliable feedback on their progress and learning, upholding core values of academic integrity; negative reasons including risk of being caught and penalised)
 - b. by advising them, at multiple points in the programme of study and in a clear and accessible manner, how to make sure that they do not plagiarise by accident (e.g. by employing appropriate note-taking and essay-writing skills, adopting proper procedures for quotations, citations and referencing, careful use of paraphrasing, etc)¹
 - c. by providing appropriate study skills advice, both generic and subject-specific, to inform students about best practice in note-taking and writing assignments, and provide opportunities for formative feedback
 - d. for the majority of undergraduate students, by placing the main focus on first year students (who often have undeveloped study skills, lack of practice and culturally different practices) but reinforcing it through years two and three. Students entering directly into second year would need appropriate support following entry.
 - e. for taught postgraduate students, by providing advice on plagiarism at the start of the programme and emphasising the need for academic integrity throughout their period of study, and in all contexts
2. the careful design of appropriate assignments by staff to enable students to demonstrate their achievement of expected learning outcomes and reduce the potential for sloppy academic practice or deliberate plagiarism.. Plagiarism can be effectively designed out, for example by varying assignment tasks from year to year; making them course-specific and locally relevant, and linking assignments specifically to particular course material.
3. making students aware of the penalty system for plagiarism – what it covers, when it applies, how it works, what penalties could be applied, that it is an institution-wide procedure and is applied consistently, and why it is necessary to have this penalty system (to ensure consistency across the University and fairness to students)

Components of prevention

Key components in the prevention strategy include -

1. **Institutional commitment:** there must be a firm commitment by all stakeholders in the University to educate all students about plagiarism and consistently apply the framework.
2. **Promotion of core values:** the University should include its position on academic integrity as one of the key values to be communicated through relevant publications.

¹ To be fair on students, there is a need for greater consistency of academic practices and expectations between departments, and for each department to make clear to its students (through all appropriate means, including course handbooks and web sites) how it expects them to use quotations, cite sources, paraphrase material, and construct bibliographies

3. **Explicit policy:** the University must communicate the positive value we place on academic integrity and state why we value academic integrity (in teaching and research) and what we will lose if we do not value and support it; e.g. we should-
 - a. discuss the core values of academic integrity during Intro Week talks with incoming students
 - b. work with LUSU and colleges to endorse the message and promote greater awareness
 - c. provide guidance in the Essential Guide to define and promote best practice
4. **Transparency and dissemination:** the framework must be widely publicised within the institution, to all staff and students. This should explain the core values of academic integrity, define plagiarism and give relevant examples of what it covers, explain why plagiarism is unacceptable and outline the detection and penalty systems. Appropriate methods include -
 - a. institutional posters on display in departments and in the colleges
 - b. information available via LUVLE (and other virtual learning environments)
 - c. inclusion in course and programme handbooks of guidelines and a plagiarism policy statement
 - d. departmental advice as to what plagiarism is and how to avoid it, e.g provided via departmental tutors or a dedicated study session. This advice is particularly important during the first few weeks of Part I but also valuable at other points in the programme, e.g. prior to the dissertation/project
 - e. advice available via College Tutors
 - f. publicity materials to be produced by LUSU
5. **Poor academic practice versus malpractice:** this Framework recognises that a clear distinction must be drawn between inexperienced academic study and writing skills (especially among first year undergraduates and international students) and wilful cheating and deception. The former requires remedial teaching and only the latter deserves severe penalties. The framework allows a distinction between minor and major offences with different procedures and penalties (but both would carry a requirement that the student seeks appropriate study skills advice). Multiple offences are more likely to be deliberate, so the penalty system recognises this.
6. **Educating students about best practice:** to help students learn best practice in academic writing, each department should provide them with discipline-specific annotated examples to show work which is clearly plagiarised, work which is acceptably paraphrased and work which is correctly referenced. These examples could be made available through LUVLE or the departmental websites.
7. **Support for academic study skills:** the framework requires the university to provide adequate and appropriate study skills support for students, particularly support designed to promote best practice in academic writing. It also requires information on the study resources and support available being made explicit in core publications, e.g. the Essential Guide.
8. **Staff awareness and training:** all tutors (departmental and college) should be aware of and clear about the plagiarism framework and procedures, and appropriate training should be made available by the university to facilitate this.
9. **Setting assessments:** assessments should be set in such a way that plagiarism becomes difficult to implement, e.g. by using local or specialised case materials for analysis, avoiding widely available case material, requiring multiple case studies or material from multiple sources to be included in student work, etc.
10. **Supporting non-native speakers:** whilst recognising that all students can engage in plagiarism, the University needs to provide adequate and appropriate resources (staff and equipment) particularly to support non-native speakers in their study and writing skills; e.g. staff refer a student to language support staff where there are particularly severe cases;

scope for a University-wide 'essay writing skills' course that might be highly recommended for all non-native speakers and (as a remedial course) for all students who demonstrate difficulties in essay writing.

11. **Academic integrity declaration:** each student should be required to sign at least one academic declaration each year for every department to whom they submit coursework, and each department should have discretion over how many times thereafter they wish to see a signed declaration, up to and including on every piece of work. The University has agreed a standard form of words for the declaration, and every department and taught programme should use it.

DETECTING PLAGIARISM

The primary responsibility for detecting plagiarism in student work rests with the individual marker, who should be alert to the possibility of finding plagiarism in students' work, and who must always use their specialist knowledge and academic judgement in deciding what is and what is not acceptable within that subject. For example, in many subjects it is difficult to decide what is common knowledge and what should be attributed to sources, which is where the marker's expert judgement is exercised.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Academic Officer

Each department or equivalent shall designate one senior academic member of staff, to be known as the Academic Officer, who shall take responsibility for the investigation of and subsequent action where appropriate for plagiarism in coursework at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. A deputy Academic Officer shall also be designated. The duties of the Academic Officer shall include reporting cases of plagiarism (major offences) to the Student Registry, checking a student's Academic Practice record held by the Student Registry, and keeping a written record of all major cases including the evidence presented at the hearing and the outcome.

Academic Marker

Each academic marker identified as such by a department or equivalent shall be responsible for detecting and reporting on suspected plagiarism in coursework to the relevant Academic Officer, and for producing evidence in support of such a claim.

Student Registry

Designated members of the Student Registry shall be responsible for record-keeping for all alleged and detected cases of academic malpractice, including plagiarism in coursework and cheating in examinations. The duties of the officers, or approved alternates, will include keeping a written record of all cases, including reports from Academic Officers and from cases heard by the Standing Academic Committee, giving information and other support to Academic Officers to assist them in discharging their duties; communicating information between departments about academic malpractice as appropriate; and offering assistance to Academic Officers about the content of the warning letter appropriate to the stage reached.

LU Students' Union

Any student who is alleged to have been involved in an act of academic malpractice shall have access to LU Students' Union support and advice at all stages in the procedures that follow, and

an appropriate LUSU representative may accompany the student in any meetings/hearings or correspondence with the department or the Standing Academic Committee.

Standing Academic Committee

The Standing Academic Committee of the Senate shall hear cases referred by the Academic Officer or where a student appeals a decision taken by the Department. Academic Officers are expected to present the case against the student at the hearing.

The Standing Academic Committee operates on behalf of the Senate, and its decisions are binding on Boards of Examiners.

PROCEDURES AND PENALTIES

The following procedure shall be followed for all cases of suspected plagiarism in any Lancaster University taught programme (UG and PGT). The steps may be concluded at any point in the procedure.

- i. All academic markers shall make a positive effort to identify possible plagiarism and shall inform their students of the procedures for detection.
- ii. The academic markers shall, when suspected plagiarism has been identified, use their judgement to either:-

Define the offence as **minor** (poor practice) and mark the work by setting aside the relevant text.

or

Define the offence as **major** (possible malpractice) and refer the case to the Academic Officer. The marker shall annotate any suspected plagiarised material and shall submit a report, including a hard copy of the source used by the student, to the Academic Officer.

In all cases where an offence, either minor or major, has been deemed to have occurred the student will receive a written warning. Details will be recorded by the department in the LUSI Student Record.

Minor Offence

Minor offences would include poor referencing, unattributed quotations, inappropriate paraphrasing, incorrect or incomplete citations, or up to several sentences of direct copying without acknowledgement of the source. For classification of a minor offence it must be the marker's judgement that the affected text results from poor academic practice rather than a deliberate intent to deceive (the latter would be intentional malpractice, i.e. plagiarism). A minor offence should be dealt with by the academic marker and an appropriate mark given, i.e. the academic marker shall indicate and set aside the sections involving the affected text. The feedback on the written work should make it clear what sections have not been marked and why. The academic marker should offer a meeting to the student to discuss their mark and the action taken.

A minor offence should be recorded on LUSI within the Academic Practice Form and also reported to the Academic Officer for information. For the purposes of the student's record, and for any reporting obligations, it should be clear that minor offences result from poor practice not malpractice and, as such, are not defined as plagiarism (as it is the marker's opinion that there was no deliberate intention to deceive).

If the Academic Officer is informed of a subsequent minor offence then they, or another appropriate member of staff, should meet with the student to discuss the weaknesses in their study skills and identify remedies and/or support. Such a meeting would not be to review or to change the penalty applied to the work, but to identify why the minor offence occurred and identify the requisite support to prevent any repeat in the future.

Three minor offences will be considered equivalent to one major offence (as persistent poor practice following appropriate education is more likely to be deliberate). Upon identification of a possible third minor offence the case shall immediately be referred to the Academic Officer. If the student already has a major offence on record, a subsequent third minor offence should normally be referred to the Standing Academic Committee and handled as a second major offence.

Major Offence

A major offence should be referred to the Academic Officer. A major offence shall be defined as copying multiple paragraphs in full without acknowledgement of the source, taking essays from the Internet without revealing the source, copying all or much of the work of a fellow student with or without his/her knowledge or consent, submitting the same piece of work for assessment under multiple modules and cheating in a class test.

The Academic Officer shall conduct an investigation of the alleged plagiarism and shall give the student an opportunity to discuss the allegation. Students accused of plagiarism should be able to review and documentary evidence prior to any hearing, e.g. a Turnitin report or coursework annotated by the academic marker. The Academic Officer shall check in the LUSI Student Record System on the plagiarism form for any previous plagiarism offences. A hearing shall be arranged with the student who should be encouraged to be accompanied by a friend (e.g. a LUSU representative or College personal tutor). The hearing shall include at least one other staff member from the student's department who should take a record of the hearing. The student will be asked to respond to the allegations regarding their work and may also wish to consider if there are any mitigating circumstances which should be made known to the Academic Officer. The Academic Officer may ask the academic marker or course convener to present evidence. After the hearing the student (and his/her representative) and the academic marker will be asked to withdraw to allow the Academic Officer to deliberate the student's response to the allegations made, and to decide on appropriate action. Such actions would normally be as follows:-

- a. if it is determined that there has been no offence, then the academic marker shall be instructed to mark the work normally
- b. if it is determined that there is satisfactory evidence that an offence has been committed, then the Academic Officer shall either:-
 - i. define the offence as minor (i.e. poor academic practice) and instruct the work to be marked by setting aside the relevant sections
 - ii. define the offence as major (i.e. deliberate plagiarism) and, if it is a first major offence, either :-
 - (a) ask the student to repeat and resubmit the work. The resubmitted work shall be eligible to receive only the minimum pass mark appropriate to the student's programme of study. If the student refuses or fails to repeat and resubmit the work, a mark of zero shall be recorded. Where the offence is in connection with cheating in a class test a resubmission is not available and a mark of zero shall be recorded.

- (b) refer the case to the Standing Academic Committee if deemed sufficiently serious
- iii. refer the case to the Standing Academic Committee in the case of a second major offence

The Academic Officer shall send a copy of the outcome letter to the student within one week of the hearing. Details of a major plagiarism offence will be recorded by the department in the LUSI Student Record on the Academic Practice Form.

Where multiple first offences are discovered, after the Senate Deadline (or PG equivalent), the case shall be referred to the Standing Academic Committee.

If the student does not accept the decision of the Academic Officer, he/she shall have the right to appear in person before the Standing Academic Committee (accompanied by a representative if desired).

The Standing Academic Committee

If the student has been found to have committed a second or subsequent major offence (or a very serious first offence, e.g. purchasing an essay, stealing work from another student, etc.), the Academic Officer shall refer him/her to the Standing Academic Committee with the recommendation that he/she be permanently excluded from the university.

If the Standing Academic Committee confirms the offence, the student shall have the right of appeal to the Vice-Chancellor under Statute 21.

The Standing Academic Committee, having considered the evidence for the offence, shall have the authority to confirm the recommendation for permanent exclusion or to impose one of the following penalties:-

- (i) to permit the student to repeat the work, subject to receiving only the minimum pass mark appropriate to the student's programme of study;
- (ii) to award zero for the work in question;
- (iii) to award zero for the whole coursework element for that module (or dissertation);
- (iv) to award zero for the unit or module;
- (v) to award zero as under (iv) and, where the inclusion makes no difference to the class of award, to recommend that one class lower than the one determined by the arithmetic be awarded;
- (vi) to exclude the student permanently from the university, where the offence is detected before the final assessment is completed;
- (vii) not to award the degree, where the offence is detected after the final assessment has been completed.

Where a penalty is applied under (ii) – (iv) and this results in a failed unit or half-unit, the expectation would normally be that the final examination board condones the failure, unless the Standing Academic Committee recommends otherwise.

The student shall have the right of appeal under Statute 21 if either (vi) or (vii) are confirmed.

In particular, for students on accredited degrees the Standing Academic Committee should consider the full impact of their decision when imposing a penalty.

The Standing Academic Committee, having overturned a recommendation for exclusion for a second offence, but a third offence having been detected, shall undertake a further hearing to

consider the recommendation for the exclusion of the student from the university and/or the non-award of the degree.

INGREDIENTS OF THE SANCTION SYSTEM

Prevention

To reinforce the importance of education and prevention within this overall strategy, students will be provided with written feedback.

For each offence (major and minor) the student will be sent a standard, level-specific, University letter which –

- a. spells out what they have done wrong, and why it is wrong
- b. points them towards appropriate sources of study skills help
- c. reminds them of the need to discuss their work with academic staff if they are uncertain about how to avoid subsequent allegations of plagiarism
- d. warns of the serious consequences of subsequent offences, and spells out the sanctions that will be applied
- e. outlines the student's rights

Evidence of plagiarism

In all cases, evidence must be provided by the marker to confirm that possible plagiarism has occurred. For major offences this should include the student's submitted work annotated and cross-referenced to original sources which have been plagiarised, accompanied by a hard copy of the original source (e.g. a print out of a source printed or web page, with complete URL and date viewed for web pages). For a first major offence only, the evidence may take the form of a statement written by the student acknowledging that they have included plagiarised material in the submitted work.

Weighting of the assignment

Although there are arguments in favour of varying the sanctions depending on the relative weight of a piece of coursework within the overall assessment for a module, consistency and transparency of treatment for all plagiarism are paramount (for equity purposes, but also to reinforce prevention by deterrence).

Departments have some discretion in defining special status for particular assignments (particularly the dissertation, and particularly at Masters level), and for which the sanction system might be varied. All such cases, and the reasons for them, must be clearly documented in departmental or course handbooks.

APPLICATION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE SANCTIONS

Right to resit

Where a penalty is applied under this Framework and the student fails the module overall, the student will only be allowed a re-assessment in that module for a maximum of a pass mark if the penalty was in respect of a minor offence. For a first major offence, the student is permitted to resubmit the work for the maximum of a pass mark, but should he/she still fail the module overall then they are not permitted any further re-assessment in that module.

Condonation

Where a penalty is applied under this Framework and this results in a failed unit or half-unit, (which may be after resit in the case of a minor offence or resubmission in the case of a major offence), then the expectation would normally be that the final examination board condones the failure.

Group Projects

Where plagiarism has been discovered in a group project, wherever possible the individual(s) responsible for plagiarized sections will be identified and treated in the normal manner. If it is not possible to identify individuals responsible, the case will be treated as a major offence and the work given zero. This will apply equally to all members of the group even if individuals in the group have a prior major offence.

Counting offences

A “second offence” means the next case of plagiarism to be confirmed after the student has received feedback on the consequences of the “first offence”. This applies to both minor and major offences.

Retrospective detection

Retrospective work is defined as any work that has been subject to final moderation and/or approval by an Examination Board.

The University reserves the right to review work retrospectively, and apply appropriate sanctions, if there are reasonable grounds for doing so. Where there are reasonable grounds, an Academic Officer should instigate a retrospective review, requiring the student to re-submit assessed work and referring the matter to the Standing Academic Committee with a recommended sanction where appropriate. The Standing Academic Committee can also request the retrospective review of any work in relation to cases referred to it. The existing University Charter allows for it to rescind or change the classification of a degree after one has been awarded.

Final Exam Board

The decisions and recommendations of the Final Exam Board will normally be regarded as the cut-off point beyond which allegations of plagiarism will not be considered, and past which no sanctions will normally be applied.

The Final Exam Board should not revisit plagiarism decisions and attempt to change the penalties already applied.

Right of appeal

If the student does not accept the decision of the academic marker (for minor cases) they should ask for a review by the Academic Officer.

If the student does not accept the decision of the Academic Officer (for major cases or appealed minor cases) s/he can opt to appear before the Standing Academic Committee. The burden of proof is on the University to show that plagiarism has occurred. In all cases the student has a statutory right of appeal under Statute 21.

Reporting of plagiarism histories

Each department will have discretion to decide whether plagiarism should be mentioned if a request is received (particularly from another University or a professional body) for an academic reference for a Lancaster graduate, or whether to report plagiarism to professional bodies.

Amnesty on graduating

A Lancaster undergraduate with a record of plagiarism, who subsequently registers as a postgraduate student at Lancaster, will be given a 'plagiarism amnesty', for equity of treatment with other postgraduate students from elsewhere.

Appendix A: [Malpractice in Undergraduate and Postgraduate Examinations & Coursework](#)

Gavin Brown on behalf of the Plagiarism Framework Review Group
16 June 2009 (Revised)