

Academic Integrity Policy - *for staff use*

Owned by:	Academic Registrars Department
Maintained by:	Quality and Standards
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Academic Integrity Policy for Staff

1. Precepts

- 1.1 As an academic community, all students and staff at the University of Westminster are expected to demonstrate the highest standards of academic conduct.¹
- 1.2 The University's expectation is that all grades obtained by students must result from the student's own efforts to learn and develop. Credit is awarded as a result of assessments which are designed to demonstrate that a (given) student has fulfilled the learning outcomes in a module. For all individual assessments, the work completed must demonstrate the student's own learning. For group assessments, the expectation is normally that students should indicate the extent of their involvement in a given project.
- 1.3 There are specific examination regulations which define acceptable behaviour in formal scheduled examinations and other time-limited assessments. These are set out in [Section 10 and Section 7](#) of the Handbook of Academic Regulations.
- 1.4 The overarching principles set out in this policy apply to all forms of assessment, and the specific requirements relating to referencing and plagiarism refer specifically to coursework and other forms of written assessment.
- 1.5 Any academic work which is not completed in accordance with these guiding principles and regulations may be defined as poor scholarship, or academic misconduct.
- 1.6 This Academic Integrity Policy – for staff seeks to draw a clearer distinction between poor scholarship (e.g. incorrect or inadequate referencing as a result of students' lack of understanding) and academic misconduct (e.g. copying sections from sources in a way which presents them as a student's own work, buying essays, taking notes into exams), and there is also an emphasis from "offence" to "good practice" and from 'catching' to 'educating'.
- 1.7 The Policy provides a framework within which Colleges have considerable flexibility in precisely how they approach the detection of academic misconduct. The policy also includes some requirements with which all Colleges must comply, including, for example, the use of referencing guides and text matching systems with students at an early point in their course.

2. Plagiarism: Poor Practice or Intention to Cheat?

- 2.1 The University's Academic Regulations define various types of Academic Misconduct. Of these, Plagiarism is by far the most significant, making up the majority of all reported cases.
- 2.2 Plagiarism (see definition in Section 10 Academic Misconduct) is an aspect of academic misconduct that has grown in significance with advances in online technologies and publishing. If carried out intentionally, cheating and plagiarism have the objectives of deceiving examiners and this threatens the integrity of the assessment procedures and the value of the University's qualifications. It is unethical

¹ See also QAA Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education Section 6: Assessment of Student – September 2006

to try to gain an unfair advantage over other students, and for this reason the University imposes strict penalties on those students who intentionally contravene the Assessment Regulations, which includes students shown to have plagiarised.

- 2.3 The University's position on Generative AI software such as ChatGPT, DALL-E and other tools is very much the same that it holds for all technologies and techniques used by students to commit forms of academic misconduct. The University expects its students to submit work that is original to them and demonstrates their independent thought, whilst clearly acknowledging all of the sources that they have consulted in compiling their assignment. AI tools can be used in ways to support students in developing their assignments and to support the development of critical thinking skills with the guidance and encouragement of educators. AI tools may be used to help with grammar and spelling when writing or as a search tool to research assignment topics and even to help structure an assignment. Equally, assignments could be set that explicitly challenge students to critically evaluate and reflect on articles that are written by ChatGPT and other generative AI models.²
- 2.4 Unlike other forms of misconduct (e.g. exam cheating) there are more complex issues related to plagiarism. It is not always a student's intention to cheat, even if they are technically found guilty of plagiarism and the extent of plagiarism (therefore, the seriousness of any 'offence') can vary considerably from one case to another.
- 2.5 In addition, the high profile that plagiarism has is often too focused around 'plagiarism detection systems' (text-matching software) and associated punitive measures. However, there are other aspects of plagiarism clearly linked to learning and teaching which must be addressed at institutional and local level and these include most particularly:
- ensuring consistent provision of guidance on referencing to students on all courses.
 - supporting students in raising their understanding of plagiarism.
 - assessment design to minimise the likelihood of plagiarism arising.
- 2.6 The University considers plagiarism to be a serious issue but takes the view that an educational approach to prevention is the priority, with detection mechanisms necessary but forming only part of an overall formative approach to an understanding of plagiarism in the early stages of an undergraduate course. Accordingly, the University is committed to:
- helping students to understand plagiarism through a programme of education and support starting in the months before they are due to start at the university and continuing after they join the institution.
 - tailoring support to international students, who may bring different understandings of good academic practice from different educational cultures.
 - using text-matching software to assist the educational process and where appropriate to highlight potential instances of plagiarism that might lead to disciplinary action.
 - ensuring students are treated equitably and consistently in relation to university policy on plagiarism and assessment misconduct.
 - ensuring that staff have a clear and common understanding of policy and procedure, and that implementation is consistent with institutional policy.

² [Position Statement on AI.docx \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

3. Supporting students to avoid plagiarism

- 3.1 Support for students can be provided in a number of ways (e.g. through the provision of tutorials (face to face and online), clear and consistent information (online text based and oral) and through the use of text-matching services³ which show where students' assignments include text which is identical to that in another document.
- 3.2 The University has already made available an online course on plagiarism and referencing and an Introduction to Generative AI course. This course is regularly updated, and all module and course handbooks **must** make reference to it through the standard handbook plagiarism statement. Students can access the plagiarism course once they start their studies at the university anytime under the 'Learning Resources' tab in Blackboard. Prior to arriving at the university students will have access to a broader online course about Academic Success. This course includes a section on academic integrity that includes an introduction to plagiarism.
- 3.3 Academic integrity is addressed as part of induction in all courses at all levels of study, is inbuilt as part of the curriculum in taught courses and is considered as part of annual progress reviews for research students.
- 3.4 All module handbooks and course handbooks **must** contain the agreed standard statement about the University's policy on plagiarism. .
- 3.5 The use of text-matching software provides a valuable opportunity to demonstrate to students the way in which the University expects their work to be referenced and to demonstrate the type of un-attributed text which may prove problematic. At Westminster all students on taught courses (Levels 3 – 7) **will** be exposed to text-matching software in their first year as part of the formative stage of their course (including the online tutorial referred to in 3.2) to help them understand plagiarism and to monitor the quality of their own work. This will encourage students' sense of ownership and autonomy as learners.
- 3.6 Turnitin and Safe- Assign, text-matching systems used by the University, may be used in a formative, developmental way to assist students in understanding the appropriate use of sources and raising awareness of plagiarism. This may help students to develop their authorial voice, particularly when students discuss Turnitin originality reports with tutors, supervisors or other academics.

4. Supporting staff in assessment design

- 4.1 It is anticipated that teaching teams would wish to use assessment strategies that discourage plagiarism. A clear picture of the alignment between what students should learn (the learning outcomes), teaching and learning approaches and assessment, helps in efforts to 'design out' opportunities for plagiarism. Variety in assessment types and seeking very individual submissions should allow students to demonstrate what they have learned and how it relates to them in their specific learning context. Online guides in support of assessment can be found at:

³ the university has 2 coursework submission and marking systems (Turnitin and Blackboard Assignment) that offer different functionalities (e.g. one has superior tools for group work assessment and moderation of work that is marked online). Each system has its own text match checking tool.

- PlagiarismAdvice.org, initially known as the Plagiarism Advisory Service - Resources <http://www.plagiarismadvice.org/resources>
- The University also recommends the following key text:
- Carroll, J. 2013, A Handbook for Deterring Plagiarism in Higher Education – Second Edition, OCSLD ISBN 1 873576 74 9

5. Approaches to the detection of plagiarism

- 5.1 The University acknowledges that a number of approaches may be used by individual staff in detecting potential instances of plagiarism. For example, in some cases a marker may recognise specific passages from books or articles (hard copy or online) and/or may use the Google search engine (or equivalent) to check for previous publication of assessment item content. If the authenticity of the submission is being questioned the viva procedures as described in Section 10 of the academic regulations should be used. The viva will investigate how the student produced their assessment and establish whether the student is the author or if they had had assistance from a third party or Generative AI.
- 5.3 The University uses the term ‘text-matching software’⁴ because these systems are only a tool to detect potential plagiarism; they are not ‘plagiarism detection systems’. Academic judgment is required to determine whether or not a student may have plagiarised.
- 5.4 Where text-matching software is used, it should be used for entire cohorts within a course or module, rather than being used to check the work of individual students.
- 5.5 Guidance for staff on creating and marking assessments via Turnitin is provided via online via Blackboard click on [Help and Support](#).
- 5.6 Guidance for staff to identify and investigate academic misconduct is provided via the [Academic Misconduct SharePoint](#) site.
- 5.6 In order to ensure that the University can reassure itself that a consistent approach to the detection of plagiarism is being taken, in addition to those representatives nominated to investigate allegations of plagiarism (see 7.2 below), each College Teaching Committee should identify one member with particular responsibility for College policy on guidance to students and the detection of plagiarism.

6. An educational approach to ‘first time plagiarism’

- 6.1 The University recognises that many students may need time to learn new referencing conventions at an early stage in their course and that, other than in the most explicit cases of cheating, it may not always be appropriate to penalise students severely on the first occasion that they are found to have plagiarised in an assessment.
- 6.2 An educational approach to first-time cases of plagiarism is better for the student and for the University in the long term. The Table of Penalties has been devised to ensure all first offences are treated equally.
- 6.3 It remains for the Module Leader to determine whether the work constitutes poor scholarship (in which case it would be marked on its merits, discounting the poorly

⁴ the university has 2 coursework submission and marking systems (Turnitin and Blackboard Assignment) that offer different functionalities (e.g. one has superior tools for group work assessment and moderation of work that is marked online). Each system has its own text match checking tool.

referenced/plagiarised sections) or plagiarism (in which case it is dealt with as an academic misconduct case and would have a penalty applied).

7. Reporting Plagiarism & Penalties for Plagiarism

- 7.1 The University's approach to plagiarism prevention, detection and reporting should be consistent across all Colleges, both to ensure that the University's academic standards are maintained and in order to ensure fair treatment for students on all courses.
- 7.2 The responsibility for detecting and reporting plagiarism resides with the markers for each assessment. However, once reported to Academic Standards it is the joint responsibility of the Academic Standards team to record the allegation and to conduct any investigation which may be necessary.
- 7.3 The University's Academic Regulations set out the process to be followed and the potential penalties which may be applied in cases where a student is found guilty of academic misconduct.
- 7.4 The penalty imposed on a student found guilty of plagiarism may depend on one of the following factors:
- The extent of plagiarism within the piece of assessed work.
 - Whether the student had previously been found guilty of plagiarism
- 7.5 In order to ensure that reported allegations of plagiarism are handled consistently and fairly across all Colleges a Table of Penalties has been devised for use by academic staff and representatives responsible for handling cases of alleged plagiarism⁵.
- 7.6 Staff development sessions are delivered to College representatives nominated to investigate alleged cases of plagiarism.

Links to resources and further information

[Position Statement on AI.docx \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

[Artificial Intelligence Policy \(westminster.ac.uk\)](#)

[Guidance on the acceptable use of Generative AI \(Word\)](#)

[Academic Misconduct Offences \(sharepoint.com\)](#) – for staff

[Academic misconduct | University of Westminster, London](#) – for students

[QAA briefs members on artificial intelligence threat to academic integrity](#)

⁵ [Academic regulations | University of Westminster, London](#)