

Academic Misconduct Policy

This policy also includes the procedure to be followed for dealing with suspected cases of academic misconduct in examinations, coursework and dissertations. The policy also includes guidance for academic staff.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Academic Misconduct Policy applies to all assessments and examinations undertaken at SOAS by any student registered for a SOAS award or module including taught, research, intercollegiate and visiting students etc. This Policy does not apply to validated students as these students are subject to the regulations and policies at the partner institution at which they are registered.
- 1.2 The Academic Misconduct Policy does not apply to students registered for distance learning programmes which are operated under the regulations of the University of London External Programme.

2. Academic Misconduct

2.1 Academic misconduct definitions

Conduct which constitutes academic misconduct is set down in the [General and Admissions Regulations for Students](#) under regulation 21. This includes but is not restricted to the following:

- (a) introduction of non-permitted materials into an assessment or examination
- (b) removal of an examination script or examination stationery from the examination room unless explicitly authorised
- (c) any attempt to confer or gain access to the examination script or other assessment of another candidate
- (d) any attempt to tamper with an examination script after the completion of the examination
- (e) impersonation or attempted impersonation of a candidate
- (f) plagiarism in any assessed work as defined by the School regulations on plagiarism (including self-plagiarism – see 2.3)
- (g) falsification or misrepresentation of data, results, references, evidence or other information
- (h) contract cheating (work produced by third parties, i.e. ghostwriting, essay mills or other sources)
- (i) proof-reading of assessed/examined work which is deemed to have gone beyond the normal correction of spelling or punctuation to a degree whereby the work may not be considered to be the student's own
- (j) any other conduct likely to give an unfair advantage to the candidate

2.2 Referencing

Students must always follow appropriate referencing guidelines when producing work for assessment. Direct quotations from the published or unpublished work of others must always be clearly identified as such by being placed inside quotation marks, and a full reference to their source must be provided in proper form. A series of short quotations from several different sources, if not clearly identified as such, constitutes plagiarism just as much as does a single unacknowledged long quotation from a single source. Equally, if students summarise another person's ideas and judgements, they must refer to that person in their text as the source of the ideas and judgements, and include the work referred to in their bibliography. Failure to observe these rules may result in an allegation of plagiarism. Students should consult their tutor or supervisor if they are in any doubt about what is permissible.

2.3 Plagiarism definition

The definition of plagiarism is set down in the [General and Admissions Regulations for Students](#) under regulation 21. All work submitted as part of the requirement for any assessment of SOAS must be the student's own work and expressed in their own words and incorporate their own ideas and judgements. Plagiarism - that is, the presentation of another person's thoughts or words as

though they were the student's own – must be avoided and all work must be referenced using approved referencing procedures. Students must also be aware of self-plagiarism (see 2.5)

Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the following:

- (a) The verbatim (word for word) copying of another's work without appropriate referencing
- (b) The close paraphrasing of another's work by changing a few words or altering the order of presentation, without appropriate referencing
- (c) Unacknowledged quotation or paraphrases from another's work or from the student's own work
- (d) Self-plagiarism - Unacknowledged re-use of a student's own work, for instance by using whole or part of an essay written for one module (either at SOAS or another institution) for another module. This would result in a student gaining credit twice for the same piece of work (See 2.5).
- (e) Collusion – this occurs when two or more students collaborate in the preparation and production of work which is submitted by one or more of the students as their own work (unless this is permitted, i.e. a group assignment)
- (f) Contract cheating – the use of essay writing mills etc. (See 2.8 and 2.9).

2.4 Major and minor plagiarism and poor academic practice

The categories of plagiarism include, but are not limited to, the following:

(a) Poor academic practice

- Incorrect, inadequate or confused citation likely to be caused by a student's lack of experience of academic writing at the beginning of their studies.

(b) Minor Plagiarism

- A small amount of paraphrasing, quotation or use of diagrams, charts etc. without citation. If the plagiarised sections contain critical ideas which are key to the assignment, then this would constitute a major case.

(c) Major Plagiarism

- Extensive paraphrasing or quoting without proper citation of the source
- Lifting directly from a text or other academic source without reference (where material is taken directly from a text of other source the cited material should normally be demarcated with quotation marks and the source should be cited).
- Contract Cheating - The use of essays from essay banks, either downloaded from the internet or obtained from other sources such as essay mills
- Presenting another's designs or concepts as your own
- Continued instances of what was initially regarded as poor academic practice or minor plagiarism despite warnings having been given to the student concerned
- Collusion between two or more students.

2.5 Self-plagiarism

The definition of self-plagiarism is set down in the [General and Admissions Regulations for Students](#) under regulation 21. Work submitted for one module may not be used for another module without acknowledgement and prior approval by the module convenor. Where students draw on their own previous written work, whether submitted for their current degree, or for a previous degree or qualification, this must be clearly stated and referenced accordingly. However, reproducing large sections of an assignment in a later assignment may be deemed self-plagiarism even where this has been referenced correctly. Reproducing large sections of an assignment in this way would mean that the student would be gaining credit twice for the same work. To avoid this, students are advised not to copy work from one assignment to another and to avoid attempting assignments which may have too much overlap. If students are unsure of the requirements they should speak to their tutor before attempting the assignment.

2.6 Repeat offences

Where students have committed repeat offences then later offences will be treated more severely than the first offence. A second offence can only be described as such when any previous offence has been notified to the student and any associated investigation has been undertaken and the outcome notified to the student. Where this is not the case, such an offence should be considered to be a 'joint first offence' i.e. where a student submits three assignments at the same time and has no prior offences.

2.7 Mitigating Circumstances

Mitigating circumstances are often submitted as a defence in cases of academic misconduct. Whether mitigating circumstances are taken into account will depend on the case:

(a) The student can demonstrate that they were unaware of what plagiarism meant.

Students are expected to take responsibility for their own learning, to familiarise themselves with academic misconduct and plagiarism policies and to access academic support when necessary. Where students have been informed correctly about what plagiarism is and how it should be avoided it will be very difficult for a student to make a successful case that they were unaware of plagiarism.

(b) Mitigating circumstances. The School has provisions to support students experiencing difficult circumstances through the [Mitigating Circumstances Policy](#) which provides eligible students with additional time to complete assessments without penalty. The School also makes available support and reasonable adjustments for disabled students. Students are expected to make use of these facilities when appropriate. Therefore, mitigating circumstances will not normally be considered as extenuation for academic misconduct. The only exception would normally be a student who could produce documentary medical evidence to show that at the time of the offence their state of mind was such that they were genuinely unable to manage their conduct and/or to distinguish between right and wrong. In such a case, the penalty indicated in 5.2 and 6.2 may be justifiably moderated.

2.8 Contract cheating (also known as ghost-writing)

Contract cheating is where a student has obtained an essay or other work from another source such as an essay mill. In some cases there may be compelling evidence to support that it is likely contract cheating has occurred, for example where Turnitin identifies near identical essays submitted at other institutions. However, it may be that the academic marking the work has serious concerns as to whether the student had actually written the work submitted. Where there is a suspicion, the process in 2.9 should be used to determine whether it is appropriate to submit to the formal academic misconduct investigation process and is not in itself, an allegation of academic misconduct.

A number of factors might contribute to a suspicion of contract cheating such as:

- (a) The level and style of English is significantly better and/or different to previous work or contributions in class
- (b) The style of the work changes throughout the assignment
- (c) Differences in font/formatting in parts of the assignment
- (d) Misuse/change of personal pronouns
- (e) Out of date/unusual references/bibliography

2.9 Process for investigating contract cheating

This process should be used where the marker has suspicions of contract cheating but does not yet feel there is sufficient evidence to go immediately forward to the formal investigation stage in section 3 of the procedure. Where the marker is satisfied that there is already reasonable evidence

to suspect contract cheating, this process may be skipped and the matter directly referred to 3.0 of this procedure for formal investigation. The investigation as set out here is not an allegation of misconduct but rather is an attempt to obtain a full understanding of the situation.

- (a) The marker should compare the assignment to one or two of the student's other assignments
- (b) The marker should discuss their findings with another academic to see whether their concerns are shared
- (c) If the concerns are shared a meeting should be arranged involving:
 - The academic raising the concerns
 - The student (who may be accompanied by a friend if they wish)
 - A Department Student Support Officer to take notes of the meeting
- (d) The student should be asked to bring their notes used in the preparation of the assignment, any draft versions of the assignment and any readings they have used so that they can demonstrate how they worked on the assignment
- (e) The meeting will be held informally and will not be adversarial. It is an information gathering exercise.
- (f) In the meeting the student can be asked questions about:
 - What made them choose the topic
 - The content of the work (questions should be of an appropriate level to the module concerned)
 - What sources were used
 - Whether they had discussed their work or shared it with other people beforehand
 - Whether their approach to this assignment had been different to their usual approach
 - Any other relevant questions
- (g) If at the end of the meeting the marker is satisfied that the submission is the student's own work no further action should be taken. The student should be written to by the nominated person in the Department to confirm that the matter will not be taken further.
- (h) Where, following the meeting, the marker still suspects that contact cheating may have occurred the notes of the meeting and the findings should be passed to the Examinations and Assessments team in the Registry to conduct the formal investigation as set out in Section 3 of this procedure.

2.10 Confidentiality

The School will treat all correspondence and documentation relating to any proceedings as confidential and will only discuss the information with third parties where this is a necessary part of the investigation process.

2.11 Retrospective investigation of allegations

Allegations of academic misconduct will be investigated as soon as it is practical to do so. Investigations can be conducted after a mark has been formally published or an award made if credible evidence comes to light which suggests misconduct may have taken place at the time of the assessment. SOAS may rescind a mark or revoke an award in accordance with the [General and Admissions Regulations for Students](#) if, upon completion of this procedure, misconduct is proven.

3. Procedure for Investigating Academic Misconduct

3.1 Status of allegation

In all proceedings in relation to academic misconduct, a student will be presumed innocent of the charge until the contrary is proved on the balance of probabilities or the candidate admits culpability.

3.2 Investigation of academic misconduct

Where a candidate is suspected of academic misconduct, the following procedure should be followed. There are 6 stages to the formal part of the investigation which will be conducted by the Registry:

Department Level

- (a) **Plagiarism Recording Form:** The academic raising the case should complete a Plagiarism Recording Form and pass this on to the appropriate Department Support Office along with a copy of the Turnitin report (if applicable) and any other documentary evidence they have collected in support of the case. If the student has used another student's assignment (at SOAS or another college), this should be requested through Turnitin. Once the essay has been received the tutor should review the source essay to see if there is a case to answer. ***The Registry will not obtain evidence on the Department's or student's behalf.***
- (b) **Paperwork and evidence:** The Department Support Officer will check the paperwork is complete and contact the academic if further information is required. If the Turnitin report is not provided, the Department Support Officer will download a pdf version from Moodle.
- (c) **Collusion:** Where one student has been accused of copying from another, both students should be investigated and two Plagiarism Recording Forms will need to be completed. Turnitin matches assignments against each other in the order they were submitted to Turnitin so it cannot ascertain which one of the students copied the other.

Registry Level (Examinations and Assessments Team)

- (a) **Stage 1** –The Examinations and Assessments Team forward the case to the student for comment. Once the student has responded, the case moves to Stage 2 except for MPhil/PhD students. Due to the complex nature of research degrees, all cases of academic misconduct will be fast-tracked to Stage 5 and referred to an Academic Misconduct Panel.
- (b) **Stage 2** – The documentation along with the student's response will be sent to the academic making the allegation along with a recommended outcome and penalty (if appropriate). Once the academic responds, the case moves to Stage 3.
- (c) **Stage 3** – The documentation along with the student's response and the academic's response will be sent to the appropriate Chair of the Sub Board of Examiners to confirm the outcome. If it is not confirmed, further discussion must take place between the marker and the Chair. If it is confirmed, the case moves to Stage 4.
- (d) **Stage 4** – The student is informed of the outcome and given 10 calendar days to accept or refute the outcome. A non-response will be treated as an acceptance of the outcome. If the student refutes the outcome, they can request a hearing with the Academic Misconduct Panel (AMP) and the case moves to Stage 5.
- (e) **Stage 5** – An Academic Misconduct Panel will be organised to hear the case. The student will be informed beforehand that the AMP involves a re-investigation of the case and the original outcome may be upheld or a less/more severe penalty may be imposed. The student has the right to ask for a review of the outcome under the Review Stage of the School's [Appeals Policy](#) and the case moves to Stage 6.

- (f) **Stage 6** – The student may ask for a review of the decision under the School’s [Appeals Policy](#). This does not involve a re-investigation of the case and the review will only be permitted on limited grounds as defined in the School’s Appeals Policy.

4. Academic Misconduct Panel (AMP)

- 4.1 Under Stage 5 of the Academic Misconduct investigation procedure, students have the right for their case to be heard by an Academic Misconduct panel.
- 4.2 The Academic Misconduct Panel will consist of a minimum of three members of academic staff, with no prior involvement in the case, from the pool of staff nominated annually by the Heads of Department to sit on misconduct and appeal panels. One of the members will be asked by Examinations and Assessment Manager to act as Chair of the AMP. The Examinations and Assessments Manager or their nominee will act as secretary and ensure a full record is kept of all proceedings. The secretary is not involved in the decision-making process.
- 4.3 The date of the hearing is to be confirmed with the student. Written notice of the hearing, together with the documentary evidence to be considered, and the names of any witnesses to be called, will be sent to the student by the Secretary at least **14 calendar days prior to the AMP**.
- 4.4 The student may present documentary material or call witnesses in their defence or in mitigation. However, documentary material for consideration by the Panel must be sent to the secretary of the Panel, to arrive at least **7 calendar days** prior to the hearing.
- 4.5 The student is expected to present their own case and answer the Panel’s questions. The student has the right to be accompanied to the AMP by a companion who can be a family member, a friend or member of the Students’ Union who is there to provide moral support but is not permitted to address the Panel. Legal representation is not required and will not normally be permitted. The Chair of the AMP may in exceptional circumstances permit legal representation where the student can demonstrate a compelling reason for needing such representation. The name and details of the companion must be sent to the Examinations and Assessments team in the Registry at least **7 calendar days** before the meeting of the AMP.
- 4.6 The student will have the right to be present throughout the hearing except when the Panel retires for its deliberations when only the Panel members and the secretary will be present.
- 4.7 The allegations will be presented by the Chair of the Panel and the student will be asked to reply to the allegations. Witnesses may then be called. The Panel may ask questions of all those called before it and the student may raise questions through the Chair of the Panel.
- 4.8 The Panel shall retire to consider its findings. If necessary an adjournment may be called.
- 4.9 A decision will be reached by majority verdict of the Panel. Individual votes of the panel members shall remain confidential.
- 4.10 The student shall be informed of the outcome in writing by the Secretary within **7 calendar days** of the panel and will be provided with a copy of the notes from the Panel.

5. Penalty Tariffs for Taught Degrees

5.1 Penalties for taught degrees

Although some penalties refer to cases of plagiarism, all penalties can also be used for other cases of academic misconduct including examination offences where this is considered appropriate by the Chair of the Sub-board of Examiners or the Academic Misconduct Panel.

In awarding penalties in accordance with the tariff below, attention should be given to the student's overall profile in order to avoid unintentional consequences arising from the penalty. Where a penalty results in the award of a 'fail' mark, that fail will be condonable in accordance with the Taught Degree Regulation 11.16 unless the AMP specifically advises to the contrary.

A third repeated offence will be dealt with more severely and will automatically be referred to an Academic Misconduct Panel (AMP).

Code	Taught Degree Penalties
1	Formal Warning kept on file of academic misconduct cases.
2	Plagiarised sections of work are disregarded and assessment marked on the basis of the non-plagiarised content only (this may result in a fail mark for the assessment and/or overall for the module).
3	Re-submit the relevant piece of work with corrections & explanation*/resit examination by a specific deadline for a capped mark. Module mark not capped.
4	A mark of 0 awarded for the assignment/examination and the student is required to resit a new piece of work for a capped mark. Module mark not capped.
5	Re-submit the relevant piece of work with corrections & explanation*/resit the exam by a specific deadline for a capped mark. Module mark capped.
6	A mark of 0 assigned for the assignment and the student is required to resit a new piece of work for a capped mark. Module mark capped.
7	A mark of 0 assigned for the module. Student is required to repeat the module in the next academic year (this may affect progression). The module mark will be capped.
8	Degree class to be reduced by one class. The student will still be required to complete a new assignment/resit exam to replace the one where the misconduct occurred. (If the reduction of the class results in a fail, the student must repeat a new module for a capped mark in the following year). This will delay progression and award.
9	A lower level award is given (i.e. PG Dip rather than masters). The student must complete a new assignment/resit the exam to replace the one where the misconduct occurred.
10	Dismissal from the School.

*For penalties 3 and 5 where the student is required to resubmit the same piece of written work with corrections. The student should include with the rewritten work a covering summary of the changes made to the work and the reasons for these changes in order to demonstrate an improved understanding of good academic practice.

5.2 Allocation of penalties for taught degrees

UG YEAR 1	<u>1st Offence</u>	<u>2nd Offence</u>
Poor Practice	1	n/a
Minor	1-3	2-5
Major	2-5	4-7
UG YEAR 2	<u>1st Offence</u>	<u>2nd Offence</u>
Minor	2-5	3-6
Major	3-6	5-10
UG YEAR 3/4	<u>1st Offence</u>	<u>2nd Offence</u>
Minor	3-6	4-8
Major	5-9	6-10
PG Taught	1st Offence	2nd Offence
Poor Practice	1	n/a
Minor	2-6	4-8
Major	5-9	6-10

The above table is to provide guidance as to what penalty might be appropriate for misconduct. However, depending upon the specific circumstances of a case, a more lenient or severe penalty may be imposed, if the Chair or Panel consider it appropriate to do so.

6. Penalty Tariffs for Research Degrees

6.1 Penalties for research degrees

If plagiarism is suspected in the actual thesis the examination process must be stopped immediately even if this is on the day of the examination. The case will be referred to the plagiarism investigation process.

Code	Research Degree Penalties
1	Formal warning kept on file and student required to amend errors.
2	Upgrade work to be rewritten and resubmitted, for reconsideration.
3	Student not permitted to upgrade to PhD, but may continue for MPhil
4	Thesis to be revised and resubmitted, without second examination (viva).
5	Thesis to be revised and resubmitted for examination (viva).
6	Lower level award is given (i.e. MPhil rather than PhD). The student will still be required to address plagiarism/misconduct in the submission.
7	Dismissal from the School.

6.2 Allocation of penalties for research degrees

Upgrade	<u>1st Offence</u>	<u>2nd Offence</u>
Poor Practice	1-2	n/a
Minor	1-2	2, 3, 7
Major	2-3	3, 7
Thesis Viva	<u>1st Offence</u>	<u>2nd Offence</u>
Minor	4-5	4-6
Major	5-7	6-7

The above table is to provide guidance as to what penalty might be imposed for academic misconduct. However, depending upon the specific circumstances of a case, a more lenient or severe penalty may be imposed if the Panel considers it appropriate to do so.

7. Appeal

- 7.1 After receiving the written outcome of the Academic Misconduct process a student may submit an appeal against this decision based on the [Appeals Policy](#) within **21 calendar days** of receiving the written outcome. There are limited grounds on which an appeal can be raised and these are outlined in the [Appeals Policy](#)
- 7.2 At the end of the School's Appeal procedure, you have the right to submit a request for the School's decision to be reviewed by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) runs a free, impartial and independent scheme to review student complaints. SOAS University of London is a member of this scheme. If you are unhappy with the outcome of your Appeal, you may be able to ask the OIA to review it. You can find more information about the OIA, what it can and cannot look at and what it can do to put things right here: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/students>
- 7.3 You normally need to have completed SOAS internal review procedures, before complaining to the OIA. SOAS will send you a letter called a "Completion of Procedures Letter" (COP) when the end of the procedure has been reached and there are no further steps that you can take internally. If you have received a decision outcome with which you are not satisfied, you can request a COP letter. You can find more information about Completion of Procedures letters and when you should expect to receive one here: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/providers/completion-of-procedures-letters>
- 7.4 A student wishing to submit their case for independent external review to the OIA must do so within 12 months of receiving the 'Completion of Procedures' letter.

Appendix A – Academic Staff: Designing Out Opportunities for Plagiarism

A1 Avoid recycling assessment tasks

An increasing number of cases of plagiarism are being detected in which students copy essays from a student who took the module in a previous year. This is made easier if the same essay titles are used unchanged.

A2 Redefine learning outcomes

The more analytical and creative tasks, the less easy it is for students to find ready-made essay answers on websites. This is fostered by using learning outcomes (and hence assessment tasks) requiring student to analyse, interpret, assess, evaluate, quantify, contrast, disaggregate, integrate, synthesis etc. These contrast with learning outcomes relating to gathering and listening information. Avoid 'standard' essay titles.

A3 Avoid excessive overlap between coursework topics and examination questions

Sub-Boards should ensure that examination questions do not reproduce coursework topics too closely. This process of checking should be carefully carried out. It is undesirable that students should obtain credit for the same work twice.

A4 Use a variety of assessment techniques

Consider the use of individual seminar presentations, group presentations, presentations in relation to an ISP, in-class supervised tests, including open book tests.

Appendix B – Informing and Educating Students about Plagiarism

B1 Induction

There are a number of points in the academic year and several levels at which information and instruction about plagiarism and self-plagiarism can be given. These include Welcome Week (School level), the introduction to the Department, and the opening session of a programme or a module. Students should be informed about the *Academic Misconduct Policy* and where to obtain help and advice with referencing.

B2 Level of originality expected in university level work

A good way into this topic is by running through the learning outcomes at the start of each module. These outcomes and the level of creativity and analysis expected in assessments should make clear.

B3 Use of sources – quotation, citation, footnotes, end notes, bibliography

The Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching (CILT) runs sessions on academic skills within departments, covering essay writing and conventions of quotation and citation. These sessions are embedded into core first year modules and can be arranged to take place before reading week in Term 1 to help prepare the students for their first essay. They take up to only half an hour of the curriculum time and benefit the students in term of improving their academic capabilities and informing them of what is expected. In order to make these sessions as subject-specific as possible, the academic skills tutor and the module convenor plan the session together to make sure the needs of the students are correctly addressed.

B4 International students

Module convenors need to be sensitive to the different educational backgrounds of some international students, if they come from a system that gives high regard to accurate memorisation, respect for standard texts, and avoidance of critical comments. Individual help may be appropriate in some cases.

B5 Collusion and joint working

Group presentations are a useful method of assessment, and joint working is a valuable transferable skill. However, module convenors need to give guidance as to the limits of acceptable collaboration in relation to the joint writing of essays.

B6 Self-plagiarism and recycling essays for different modules

It is useful to make clear the reason why self-plagiarism is wrong: it is trying to obtain credit for the same work twice. It is a sign of possibly undesirable overlap in module content if the same essay, largely unchanged, can be submitted for two modules. Module convenors should consider whether they are repeating each other's teaching.

B7 Early diagnostic essay and continued reinforcement of the message

The information about plagiarism given in induction sessions needs to be reinforced and repeated at points through the year. An early diagnostic essay is a useful tool to reveal students with problems of writing as well as those poor citation skills that could if uncorrected later result in a charge of plagiarism.

B8 Contract cheating and essay writing websites

Students should be warned against using other people to write their essays for them. Turnitin can be effective in detecting essays bought from websites (which are often full of plagiarised material).

B9 Turnitin

Students have the opportunity to run their coursework through Turnitin before submission and to access the originality report. This is an important part of the educational process.

Appendix C – Detection of Plagiarism

C1 Human methods

This rests on the knowledge of scholars of publications in their field, and their ability to spot and identify unacknowledged borrowings. The process and the specialised knowledge can be helped but not replaced by electronic means.

C2 Electronic methods

Online submission of coursework through Turnitin is a useful aid to detection. The results of the Turnitin originality reports cannot be applied mechanically and need human interpretation. A high percentage figure does not necessarily imply plagiarism.

C3 Limitations of Turnitin originality reports

They match text that is correctly cited in the coursework and enclosed in quotation marks; they do not match equations, formulae, diagrams or music; they give links to student essays at other universities but do not automatically give access to the text of those essays – and it has not always proved possible to obtain this evidence; they do not reveal high quality (i.e. non-plagiarised) coursework bought from websites or written to order.

C4 Evidence

Whatever the method of detection used, it is essential that the outcome is evidence that will stand up to scrutiny. It is not permissible to proceed on grounds of suspicion alone. Unacceptable grounds (on their own) include the fact that the student has produced work of a higher standard than previously or that the standard of presentation or English is better in some parts of the coursework than others.

Appendix D – Academic Misconduct Guidelines for Academic Staff

D1 Academic Misconduct

Academic Misconduct covers a wide range of actions. Determining misconduct must start from the School's stated expectation that students will undertake their academic assessments with integrity, will follow the guidelines imposed and present work that is fully their own. Where a student steps outside the guidelines or presents another's work as their own this is likely to be considered misconduct under SOAS Regulations.

D2 Identification

The identification of academic misconduct, such as plagiarism and contract cheating, is almost always an academic judgment. This is because only an academic would have sufficient understanding of the conventions of academic writing and the common practices of the discipline being studied to make an informed decision about whether or not the student has acted in a way that is inappropriate. Academic misconduct cases therefore need to be decided using academic judgement, supported by evidence and in accordance with School policy.

D3 Use of Turnitin for detection of plagiarism

Turnitin is a useful tool and is often the primary source of evidence to substantiate a case of misconduct. But it is only an aid to academic judgment not a replacement for it. Turnitin compares the sequences of words in the student's work against a finite set of reference documents and identifies similarities. It does not take into account things such as the conventions of particular disciplines, the context of the assessment or even where information should be standardised such as in footnotes and bibliographies. Therefore it can never be used as a substitute for the considered assessment of the work by an academic.

There is no minimum Turnitin similarity percentage required to warrant an academic misconduct investigation. Similarly, there is no maximum similarity percentage over which an investigation is required. For example: a high percentage level could be made up by two or three word similarities to disparate sources, e.g. if there is a large amount of similar writing on a specific subject, or very specific phrasing often used within a discipline. It will be up to the academic marking the work to decide whether the student was just using conventional and therefore common language or whether it is likely the work of others was being used without proper acknowledgment

On the other hand, an assignment could have a low similarity level, but upon careful review by the marker be identified to have significant indicators of it not being a student's own work such as strange or inappropriate language, and structure that suggests another type of writing has been repurposed, strange or inconsistent formatting, or significant changes in language in different sections of the work. In regards to long essays or dissertations a low overall match could still constitute a page or more of poorly referenced or plagiarised work. In each case an academic judgment must be reached.

Many cases of plagiarism are clear cut when a Turnitin report is reviewed – i.e. large sections of the work are either closely paraphrased or copied verbatim from one or multiple sources without proper (or any) referencing. In these cases a brief review of the assessment by the academic(s) confirms that it is likely misconduct has occurred.

D4 Contract Cheating

One other thing to look out for is contact cheating. This is where a student purchases an essay or thesis in full.

This can be more difficult to detect than plagiarism, as it is likely the original work of a single person.

However, there can sometimes be indicators that could identify that contract cheating may have occurred. In some instances, this may be indicated by a large number of small similarities linked to a handful of other assignments submitted to a variety of different academic institutions. This is because the ghost writers often repurpose the same essay for several clients. Other indicators could be that the essay is slightly off topic or seemingly seeking to answer a slightly different question to the one set; widespread use of language or terminology that is counter to information or guidance given in lectures or seminar; or the writing is of a level that seems outstandingly low or high for the student's level of study.

Contract Cheating is a highly sensitive matter and must be carefully considered and investigated in accordance with the school's policy (section 2.9 of the Academic Misconduct Policy)

D5 Good Practice in Dealing with Academic Misconduct

Plagiarism and other academic misconduct is often committed by students in their first year (both UG and PG) for their first submission. Often this can be due to students being unsure of correct referencing or academic practice. SOAS' *Academic Misconduct Policy* has been set with this in mind and depending on the facts of the case, appropriate leniency can be shown and students guided to help and support to improve their understanding of good academic writing. Therefore staff should not be reluctant to request an investigation if there is good cause.

If you have any doubt as to whether something constitutes academic misconduct, please consult with fellow academics. Some departments have panels, where each potential case is discussed before putting forward for investigation, which seems to work. If, after discussion you still have queries, please contact the assessments team on the following: exams@soas.ac.uk or on ext. 5095.

Document Version

Valid from	Author	Changes	Published
2015/16	John Peck, Head of Registry and Quality		September 2015
2016/17	Eva Peters, Curriculum & Regulations Officer	Clarification of 5.1 in relation to condoned fails. Approved by ADC 24.05.2016.	September 2016
2017/18	Rebecca Harrison, Academic Registrar	Addition to 2.4 of additional category of Poor Academic Practice; Clarification of 2.7 Mitigating Circumstances; Addition of 2.11 Retrospective investigation of allegations; Revision of 5.2 & 6.2 guidance on penalties.	August 2017
2018/19	Rebecca Harrison, Academic Registrar	Terminology updates in line with restructuring. Clarification of applicability (1.1). Clarification of process regarding contract cheating (2.8 & 2.9). Investigations for MPhil/PhD students (3.2). Change to constitution of Academic Misconduct Panel (4.2) Legal representation (4.5). Clarification of penalties as applied to exams (5.1). Appendix D added. Approved by LTQC 03.05.2018.	July 2018
2019/20	Nadja Abia, Curriculum & Regulations Officer	updated terminology and role changes resulting from OPS restructuring.	September 2019
2019/20	Harriet Chapman, Deputy Curriculum, Assessment and Quality Assurance Manager	Updated the section 7 to provide further details about OIA review process	February 2020