

Academic Misconduct Procedure

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Note: All policies must be read in conjunction with all other SOAS policy, procedure and guidance documents. Printed copies of policies may not be the most up to date, therefore please refer to the policy pages on the SOAS external website or intranet for the latest version.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 SOAS values a culture of honesty and expects all members of the University community, students and staff, to understand and uphold academic integrity.
- 1.2 Consistent with the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA's) 'whole community' approach stating that all members of a higher education institution's community are responsible for ensuring that academic integrity is upheld and embedded, markers should make a positive effort to identify instances of academic misconduct and where required make referrals to this procedure. This is a responsibility issuing from their academic employment and an essential part of maintaining the credibility of SOAS awards and of delivering a high-quality learning experience.
- 1.3 The Academic Misconduct Procedure 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 procedure 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.

2. Academic Misconduct

2.1 Academic misconduct definitions

Academic misconduct is defined as a student attempting – whether successfully or not – to gain an unfair advantage for themselves (or another student) in the form of a higher mark than they would otherwise have achieved without this unfair advantage.

Conduct which constitutes academic misconduct includes but is not restricted to the following:

- (a) introduction of non-permitted materials into an assessment or examination, including remote examinations
- (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 (before the examination) 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 University regulations on plagiarism (including self-plagiarism – see 2.6)
- (g) falsification or misrepresentation of data, results, references, evidence or other information
- (h) contract cheating (presenting other people's work as one's own by using work produced by third parties, i.e. ghost writing, essay writing services or other sources)
- (i) editing by a third party of assessed/examined work to a degree whereby the work may not be considered to be the student's own
- (j) use of generative AI software/technology/tools (ChatGPT or similar) in summative assessments to an extent that the work may not be considered to be the student's own (unless previously approved by the University in respect of the particular assessment)
- (k) 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

All work submitted as part of the requirement for any assessment at 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 guidelines. Students must also be aware of self-plagiarism (see 2.6).

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 2.6).
- (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 services etc. (See 2.7)
- (g) Unauthorised use of generative AI software/technology/tools (See 2.8).

2.4 Major and minor plagiarism

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

- (a) Minor Plagiarism
 - A small amount of paraphrasing, quotation or use of diagrams, charts etc. without citation or adequate attribution. If the plagiarised sections contain critical ideas which are key to the assignment, then this would constitute a major case.
- (b) 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 writing services
 - 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 **Poor academic practice**

The University distinguishes academic misconduct from poor academic practice, which can often be the result of inexperience or lack of knowledge. Poor academic practice is incorrect, inadequate or confused citation that is not intended to be a contravention or an attempt to gain unfair advantage and is likely to be caused by a student's lack of experience of academic writing at the beginning of their studies. Markers shall use their judgement to decide if poor academic practice or academic misconduct has occurred and, where it is the former, should follow the process below:

- (a) In instances where the marker decides that the student work displays poor academic practice rather than academic misconduct, the marker will handle the matter in accordance with the normal assessment and feedback processes. Depending on the circumstances and the application of their academic judgement, the marker may decide that because of the poor academic practice there should be a reduction of the mark awarded or that the affected parts of the assessment are disregarded and the remaining work marked as normal. The marker must inform the student of the poor academic practice and why it is unacceptable. The Department should record a note of poor academic practice in the appropriate part of the student record system.
- (b) Where there is a repeated instance of poor academic practice by the student, they will be required to meet with the Head of Department and advised that further instances of poor academic practice may lead to a referral to the procedure in section 3 of this policy.
- (c) A referral should also be made to section 3 in instances where the marker decides that the amount of affected text is too large to be handled by disregarding it.

2.6 **Self-plagiarism**

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 can 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.

2.7 **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, and has presented that work as their own. 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 refer the matter as a suspected academic misconduct.

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

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

2.8 **Generative AI/software technology**

Where a student is suspected of using generative AI software/technology/tools to assist in writing their assessments, to an extent that the work may not be considered to be the student's own (unless previously approved by the University in respect of the particular assessment), the process in 2.9 of this procedure should be followed to determine whether there are sufficient grounds for an academic misconduct referral to be made.

A number of factors might contribute to a suspicion of the use of generative AI. This includes but is not limited to:

- Quotations: there are quotations that do not exist and are not taken from the referenced sources
- Vagueness: vague with regards to topics that were explicitly discussed in class and lectures and/or does not answer the question
- Context: the context of the quotations and sources used, particularly when the quotes cannot be verified
- Repetitions: there are significant repetitions - for example, introducing authors multiple times in the assignment, repetitions of sources in the bibliography
- List of sources/bibliography: extensive list of sources provided in the bibliography but not referenced/cited throughout the assignment.

2.9 **Process for establishing whether prima facie concerns about contract cheating OR the unauthorised use of generative AI ought to be taken further**

This process should be used where the marker has suspicions of contract cheating or unauthorised generative AI 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 or the unauthorised use of generative AI, this process may be skipped and the matter directly referred as a suspected academic misconduct. 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 who raised the concerns
 - The student (who may be accompanied by a student representative, fellow SOAS student or a member of the SOAS wellbeing team if they wish)
 - A 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 generative AI was used at any stage in researching or preparing the assessment
 - Whether their approach to this assignment had been different from 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 determines that there is reasonable evidence that contract cheating or unauthorised use of generative AI may have occurred, the notes of the meeting and all supporting evidence will be provided in the referral for suspected academic misconduct.
- (i) If the student fails to attend the meeting, then the student will be offered one further date and offered the opportunity to provide a written statement. If the student does not respond or fails to attend, the University will conclude that the student has chosen not to contest the allegation, where no reasonable explanation has been provided. A review of the evidence will be completed and, if there is reasonable evidence, the University will refer the matter as a suspected academic misconduct.

2.10 Repeat offences

Where students have committed repeat offences, later offences will normally 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.

2.11 Mitigating circumstances

Mitigating circumstances are sometimes submitted as a defence in cases of academic misconduct. The University 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.

Mitigating circumstances will not be considered as extenuation for academic misconduct. The only exception is in the exceptional event that a student was in a state of mind that they were unable to distinguish between right and wrong at the time of the offence, supported by documentary medical evidence. In such a case, the penalties indicated in sections 5 and 6 may be justifiably moderated.

2.12 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.

2.13 Scope of the procedure for research students

- (a) With respect to potential misconduct by research degree students, a procedural distinction is made between potential misconduct in the way the research has been conducted and academic misconduct in the research output. This procedure concerns suspected misconduct in research output, whereas the University's 'Investigating Allegations of Research Misconduct' policy governs potential malpractice in research practice and wider research ethics.
- (b) Where a research student who is also a member of staff at SOAS is suspected of academic misconduct in their research degree, these procedures shall normally apply irrespective of any action taken by Human Resources in the context of staff disciplinary procedures.

2.14 Nomination of Chairs of the Sub Board of Examiners

Departments shall be responsible for providing details to the Student Casework team of the names of the Chairs of the Sub Board of Examiners at the beginning of the academic year. Provisions must be made by departments for delegates to be available if the Chair is unavailable.

3. Suspected academic misconduct process

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 proven on the balance of probabilities, or the candidate admits culpability.

3.2 Investigation of academic misconduct

The initial responsibility for detecting instances of suspected academic misconduct in all forms of assessment rests with each individual marker. The academic marker shall work in conjunction with the module convenor when a concern is identified. They will use their academic judgement to decide whether the matter is poor academic practice or academic misconduct.

3.3 Referral of the suspected academic misconduct

When there is reasonable evidence to suspect an academic misconduct the academic member of staff will complete the Academic Misconduct Form via the Student Information Desk (SID). The reporting academic member of staff must complete all the required fields on the SID form and attach all the relevant evidence collected to support the allegation (for example the Turnitin report, meeting minutes, the student's draft notes).

Collusion: Where one student has been accused of copying from another, both students should be investigated, and two academic misconduct 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.

Deadlines: Cases of suspected academic misconduct should be reported by the Department within 28 calendar days of the assignment submission date.

3.4 Student Notification

The Student Casework team will notify the student of the suspected academic misconduct, providing the relevant evidence in support of the allegation. The student will be provided with 7 calendar days to respond to the matter.

3.5 Stage 1 - Chair of the Sub Board of Examiners Decision

Following receipt of the student's response or following the 7-calendar day period, the matter will be presented to the Chair of the Sub Board of Examiners (or their nominee) to review and confirm the outcome. This will normally be within 10 working days of receipt of the matter. Suspected academic misconducts for MPhil/PhD students will always be referred to the Academic Misconduct Panel (AMP).

3.6 Stage 1 outcome

The student will be informed of the outcome from the Chair of the Sub Board of Examiners within 5 working days. If the student disagrees with the outcome, they can request that the matter is referred to the AMP, the deadline to submit this request is within 5 working days of receipt of the stage 1 outcome.

4. Stage 2 Academic Misconduct Panel (AMP)

- 4.1 The AMP 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. One of the members will be asked to act as Chair of the AMP. The Student Casework team will act as Secretary and ensure a record is kept of the proceedings. The Secretary is not involved in the decision-making process.

- 4.2 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, will be sent to the student by the Secretary at least 5 working days prior to the AMP.
- 4.3 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 3 working days prior to the hearing.
- 4.4 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 Student Representative, a fellow student or a member of the SOAS Wellbeing Team. Their companion can be there to provide moral support but is not permitted to address the panel. Legal representation is not required and will not be permitted. The name and details of the companion must be sent to the Student Casework team at least 3 working days before the meeting of the AMP.
- 4.5 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.
- 4.6 The allegations will be presented by the Chair of the panel and the student will be asked to reply to the allegations. Witnesses will not normally be called but may be asked to attend if necessary. The panel may ask questions of all those called before it and the student may raise questions through the Chair of the panel. Cross-examination by the parties is not permitted. The panel shall retire to consider its findings. If necessary, an adjournment may be called.
- 4.7 A decision will be reached by majority verdict of the panel. Individual votes of the panel members shall remain confidential.
- 4.8 The panel may consider the case by email correspondence in certain circumstances. In these circumstances, the student will be informed in advance and given the right to submit written representations to the panel.
- 4.9 The student shall be informed of the outcome in writing by the Secretary within 10 working days of the panel and can request a copy of the public panel minutes. The student can appeal the decision if they believe their circumstances meet the available grounds as set out at section 7.

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.

A third repeated offence will automatically be referred to an Academic Misconduct Panel (AMP), with the penalty available as stated at 5.4 and 6.4 if the case is proven.

Code	Taught Degree Penalties
1	Formal Warning kept on file of the academic misconduct case. Re-submit the relevant piece of work with corrections & explanation*/resit the exam by a specific deadline for an uncapped mark . Module mark not capped .
2	Re-submit the relevant piece of work with corrections & explanation/resit the exam by a specific deadline for a capped assignment mark, at the minimum pass mark. Module mark is uncapped . The student must include 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.
3	Re-submit the relevant piece of work with corrections & explanation/resit examination by a specific deadline for a capped assignment mark. Module mark capped at the minimum pass mark. The student must include 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.
4	A mark of 0 assigned for the assignment and the student is required to resit a new piece of work for a capped assignment mark, at the minimum pass mark. Module mark capped at the minimum pass mark. The student must include a covering summary of their understanding of academic misconduct and what they have learnt to demonstrate an improved understanding of good practice.
5	A mark of 0 assigned for the module. The student is required to repeat the module in the next academic year (this may affect progression). The module mark will be capped at the minimum pass mark. The student must include a covering summary of their understanding of academic misconduct and what they have learnt to demonstrate an improved understanding of good practice.
6	Withdrawn from the University and barred from re-entry.

5.2 Allocation of penalties for taught degrees

UG YEAR 1/ Foundation	<u>1st Offence</u>	<u>2nd Offence</u>
Minor	1-2	2-4
Major	2-4	3-5
UG YEAR 2	<u>1st Offence</u>	<u>2nd Offence</u>
Minor	2-3	3-5
Major	2-4	4-6
UG YEAR 3/4	<u>1st Offence</u>	<u>2nd Offence</u>
Minor	2-4	3-5
Major	4-5	5-6
PG Taught	<u>1st Offence</u>	<u>2nd Offence</u>
Minor	2-4	3-5
Major	4-5	5-6

5.3 The above table is to provide guidance as to what penalty is appropriate for misconduct. Normally the University will not depart from this. In exceptional circumstances, a more lenient or severe penalty may be imposed if it is appropriate to do so. Any claim of ignorance or carelessness will not be accepted as a basis for mitigation of a penalty.

5.4 In the event of a third repeated offence that is proven, the student will be withdrawn from the University and barred from re-entry. A mark of zero will be awarded to the affected assessment.

6. Penalty tariffs for research degrees

6.1 Penalties for research degrees

If plagiarism is suspected in the 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
A	Formal warning kept on file and student required to amend errors.
B	Upgrade work to be rewritten and resubmitted, for reconsideration.
C	Student not permitted to upgrade to PhD, but may continue for MPhil
D	Thesis to be revised and resubmitted, without second examination (viva).
E	Thesis to be revised and resubmitted for examination (viva).
F	Lower level award is given (i.e. MPhil rather than PhD). The student will still be required to address plagiarism/misconduct in the submission.
G	Withdrawal from the University and barred from re-entry.

6.2 Allocation of penalties for research degrees

<u>Upgrade</u>	<u>1st Offence</u>	<u>2nd Offence</u>
Minor	A-B	C/G
Major	B-C	G
<u>Thesis/ Viva</u>	<u>1st Offence</u>	<u>2nd Offence</u>
Minor	D-E	E-F
Major	E-G	G

6.3 The above table is to provide guidance as to what penalty is appropriate for misconduct. Normally the University will not depart from this. In exceptional circumstances, a more lenient or severe penalty may be imposed if it is appropriate to do so. Any claim of ignorance or carelessness will not be accepted as a basis for mitigation of a penalty.

6.4 In the event of a third repeated offence that is proven, the student will be withdrawn from the University and barred from re-entry.

7. Appeals

7.1 After receiving the written outcome of the academic misconduct process, a student may submit an appeal against this decision based on the process below no later than 10 working days of receiving the written outcome from the AMP.

7.2 An appeal is not a re-hearing of the case that has been previously presented. An appeal is a review of the decision reached, and may be lodged on the following grounds only:

- There is new material evidence which the student was unable to provide, for valid and over-riding reasons, for the original AMP
- There is documented evidence of bias on the part of members of the AMP
- The penalty applied has exceeded that available to the AMP
- The academic misconduct procedures were not complied with to the extent that the outcome is likely to have been different had the procedures been complied with.

7.3 The appeal must state the ground(s) of appeal and provide supporting evidence, this should be provided to the Student Casework team. The Student Casework team will complete a review and decide if the student's appeal is valid. If the appeal is not deemed valid, the student will be sent a 'completion of procedures' letter explaining the decision and the available recourse to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA).

7.4 If the student's appeal is valid the matter will be referred to a senior member of academic staff to complete a review of the appeal application.

- 7.5 The appeal and information reviewed and considered at all steps of the procedure will be presented to the senior member of academic staff, upon a consideration of the information they will have the available outcomes:
- Dismiss the appeal and uphold the original decision; or
 - To amend the penalty imposed; or
 - Uphold the appeal and refer the matter to a new constituted AMP.
- 7.6 If the matter is referred to an AMP the process, as noted in section 4, will be followed.
- 7.7 The student will be provided with the outcome within 10 working days of the decision and the letter will confirm the next steps available for the student. If the appeal is dismissed, this will include a 'completion of procedures' letter.

8. Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) review

- 8.1 A student who has reached the end of the appeals procedure and is dissatisfied with the outcome may elect to submit a request for the University's decision to be reviewed by the OIA, which is a body independent of the University. More information about the OIA is available here: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/students>.
- 8.2 A student who wishes their case to be reviewed by the OIA can request a 'completion of procedures' letter when the end of the procedure has been reached.

9. Equality and diversity

- 9.1 In operating this procedure, the University is committed to fulfilling its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. In order to ensure that students with disabilities are treated no less favourably than other students within this process, the University shall take positive steps including reasonable adjustments. Such adjustments can include permitting representatives to speak on behalf of the student or extending timescales for submitting appeals. The decision to approve such adjustments shall be proportionate, and subject to approval by the Head of Student Casework.

10. Confidentiality

- 10.1 The University will comply with its obligations under current UK Data Protection Law and 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.