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Academic Misconduct Policy

This policy defines what is considered to be Academic Misconduct by STC Higher Education and describes the measures that apply once misconduct is identified.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Definition

STC Higher Education defines **Academic Misconduct** as malpractice committed by a candidate during the course of any assessment. Definitions of most common types of Academic Misconduct are listed in the table in Section 2 of this document.

1.2 Summary

All work submitted for an assessment must be the candidate's own work. It is an offence for any candidate to be guilty of, or party to, collusion, plagiarism, misuse of AI or any other act which may mislead the examiners and moderators about the development and authorship of work presented in assessments. This includes misleading examiners and moderators about the sources of information included in an assessment.

All academic writing must fully acknowledge all sources of information used in preparing the work being submitted. This includes acknowledging all written and electronic sources. For all qualifications awarded at STC, it is expected that candidates will use Harvard-style referencing standards.

Candidates must not take any means of accessing information into an examination room, unless the rubric for that examination explicitly states that this is allowed. This includes:

- All internet-connected devices – computers, tablets, smart phones, etc.
- Mobile phones, pagers or other messaging devices
- Books, journals, or notes.

Where it is absolutely necessary to take any such materials into the room, they must be left with the invigilator (and, if an electronic device, switched off) prior to the exam commencing.

Unless explicitly permitted and/or required in the specification or an assessment itself, candidates must always work alone on preparing their assessments.

2. TYPES OF ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

STC identified 5 types of academic misconduct: collusion, plagiarism, impersonation, exam misconduct and fabrication of results.

Collusion	<p>The preparation or production of work for assessment jointly with another person or persons. The only exception to this is when group work is explicitly permitted by the specification and/or assessment guidance.</p> <p>An act of collusion is understood to encompass those who actively assist others as well as those who derive benefit from others. Where joint preparation is permitted but the work is not in fact a joint production, the submitted work must be produced solely by the candidate/s making the submission. Where joint production or joint preparation and production of work for assessment is specifically permitted, this will be published in the appropriate assessment rubrics.</p>
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Plagiarism	<p>The use, without acknowledgement, the intellectual work of others, and the act of representing the ideas or discoveries of another as one's own in written work submitted for assessment.</p> <p>To use AI to answer questions, copying or paraphrasing sections of AI-generated content, copying or paraphrasing whole responses of AI-generated content, failing to acknowledge use of AI tools when they have been used as a source of information, incomplete or poor acknowledgement of AI tools and submitting work with intentionally incomplete or misleading references or bibliographies.</p> <p>To copy sentences, phrases or even striking expressions without acknowledgement of the source (either by inadequate citation or failure to indicate verbatim quotations) is plagiarism. To paraphrase without acknowledgement is also plagiarism. Direct quotations must be either in quotation marks, or indented, and directly acknowledged.</p> <p>The failure to correctly reference the work of others is deemed to be plagiarism regardless of whether this occurs intentionally or through ignorance of referencing requirements.</p>
Impersonation	<p>Occurs where someone other than the candidate prepares the work submitted for assessment. This includes purchasing or commissioning essays from third parties (including essay writing websites and other students) or asking someone else to sit an examination.</p> <p>Candidates who attend an examination without their student ID card or other acceptable form of photo-ID will not have their script marked until their identity has been confirmed.</p>
Exam Misconduct	<p>Includes having access, or attempting to gain access, to any books, websites, networks, memoranda, notes, unauthorised calculators, or any other material which has not been supplied by the invigilator or authorised in the rubric on the front of the examination paper.</p> <p>It also includes aiding or attempting to aid another candidate or obtaining or attempting to obtain aid from another candidate, or any other communication within the Examination Room.</p>
Fabrication of results or observations	<p>The reporting of artificial data from practical activities carried out by the candidate, or the use of artificial observations to support a hypothesis/conclusion.</p>

STC deems all instances of academic misconduct as serious failures to respect the integrity and fairness of the assessment process.

2.1 Poor Academic Practice

Poor Academic Practice is the term used by STC to describe circumstances in which a candidate is judged to have committed Academic Misconduct, but either through extenuating circumstances or a lack of severity it is not easily classifiable under any of the types of misconduct listed above. In cases of Poor Academic Practice, a more severe penalty is deemed inappropriate, and therefore STC may decide to instead issue a warning, or to cap the candidate's mark at the pass boundary (40%). This is in agreement with our partner institutions.

In order to differentiate between Poor Academic Practice and Academic Misconduct as defined in Section 2, any person(s) investigating must be satisfied that there was no intention to deliberately mislead the markers and moderators, or to knowingly present someone else's intellectual property as the candidate's own work. In cases of suspected plagiarism, there must also be some attempt to reference correctly and the vast majority of the candidate's work must be their own work. Where a candidate fails to reference throughout an entire assignment, this is always deemed to be Plagiarism, even where unintentional and/or due to lack of understanding of referencing requirements.

2.2 Self-plagiarism

STC accepts that candidates may sometimes wish to re-use identical or nearly identical parts of their own previous work. This practice is acceptable, however when reusing content from their own previous work **for which credit has been awarded**, it is important that candidates always acknowledge the origin of this content as they would when citing any other sources.

3. INVESTIGATION OF ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT BY STC

Allegations of Academic Misconduct may be raised by STC, NCC Education or University of Wolverhampton markers and moderators.

For assignments marked centrally by STC, all candidate assignments are uploaded to Turnitin to return an Originality Report. These are reviewed internally prior to any penalty being recommended to the respective Assessment Board.

STC reviews all available evidence in order to establish if Academic Misconduct has occurred. Where an allegation of Academic Misconduct is supported by the evidence, STC must establish whether the issue is confined to one candidate's work or is more prevalent in the cohort.

Partners together with STC hold the right to withhold marks as appropriate beyond the published results release date pending the outcome of any investigation into alleged Academic Misconduct.

Once an investigation is complete, all penalties are confirmed by the respective Assessment Board and communicated to candidates in a Candidate Academic Misconduct Report. The candidate is entitled to challenge this decision by requesting a Post-Results Service, as outlined in NCC Education's published process on https://www.nccedu.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/AQ_45_Post-Results-Service-Policy.doc University of Wolverhampton students are able to lodge an appeal as outlined in section 7 below.

While Academic Misconduct *investigations* usually take place in the period leading to results release, there is no time limit on investigations and the application of appropriate penalties where evidence of Academic Misconduct is present. Our partners hold the right to rescind an award if evidence of Academic Misconduct arises at a later date.

4. ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT IDENTIFIED BY STC

4.1 In Examinations

Cheating during an examination needs to be recorded by the Invigilator in an *Irregularities Report* (see Examinations Policy) and submitted with the *Invigilator's Report*. This report must be submitted along with the candidate's script for marking (for global examinations) or with the sample for moderation (for the local examinations).

4.2 In Assignments

All NCC assignments marked by the local markers are downloaded from Turnitin to obtain an Originality Report. STC reviews all Turnitin reports for all assignments and submitted assessments such as final projects.

If impersonation is suspected, then an interview should be arranged with the candidate. The candidate should be clearly informed of the allegation against them when the interview is arranged. At the interview, the candidate should be asked to explain key parts of their assignment. Candidates unable to explain concepts from their own submission, or simply repeating the contents of their assignment verbatim, should be considered evidence supporting the allegation of impersonation. Should a candidate fail to attend the interview or refuse to answer questions, this will be interpreted as the candidate not wishing to challenge the allegation.

If a marker uncovers any form of academic malpractice in assignments submitted by candidates, penalties must be applied as set out in Section 5 below. Candidates are not permitted to work in groups unless explicitly stated in the rubric for an assessment. Any candidates whose work show an inappropriate level of similarity should have their marks reduced. If a candidate willingly permits a fellow candidate to access and copy their work, both candidates should be penalised.

For every locally marked assessment cohort, STC must complete a ***Candidate Misconduct – Centre Declaration Form***. This form is required to confirm the marker has checked all work for evidence of Academic Misconduct, in line with this policy document. The marker should either indicate that no evidence of misconduct was found by signing Section A or should use the table in Section B to record any misconduct identified and the penalty applied. The completed form must be submitted with every module moderation sample. (this applies to NCC)

4.3 Guidance on reviewing Turnitin reports

Although Turnitin reports give percentage scores, they do require careful interpretation before a penalty is applied. For example, a similarity score of 50% could mean that half of the work is identical to a single other source - which would be clear misconduct. However, it could mean that 50% of the assignment is made up of quotations from 10 different academic sources, and if they are all correctly referenced (and the remaining half of the assignment is original work) then the submission may well be accepted.

There is also a “background score” in every Turnitin report. This is caused by text which is shared between many different candidates’ assignments - for example, the wording of the Statement of Confirmation of Own Work, module names, assignment tasks, etc. A typical background score, which can be ignored, is between 22 and 27% for most STC candidates. This is slightly higher (around 35-40%) for computer programming assignments, where legitimate strings of code will also generate matches.

4.4 Turnitin – AI Writing Detection Tool

Turnitin has added an AI writing indicator that has been added to the Similarity Report which shows an overall percentage of the document that may have been AI-generated. The AI writing report contains the overall percentage of prose sentences contained in a long-form writing format within the submitted document that Turnitin’s model determines was generated by AI. These sentences are highlighted in blue on the submission text in the AI writing report.

The percentage generated by Turnitin’s AI writing detection model is different and independent from the similarity score, and the AI writing highlights are not visible in the Similarity Report.

Turnitin’s AI writing detection model only highlights text that is highly likely to be AI-generated. This is to help ensure that students are treated fairly whilst safeguarding the institution’s academic integrity standards. The percentage is interpretive and should not be used as a definitive measure of misconduct or disciplinary tool. STC markers should use this indicative percentage to help them decide how to best handle work that may have been produced or partially produced by AI writing tools.

For AI misuse and Turnitin Detection please refer to the Turnitin in FAQs in using the detection feature: <http://www.turnitin.com/products/features/ai-writing-detection>

STC **must** report any AI generated content percentage over 50% to NCC and carry out a formal investigation to provide details and confirm any suggested actions to be taken.

5. SANCTIONS

The following is a list of sanctions which STC may impose on candidates where evidence suggests that Academic Misconduct has occurred. All alleged instances will always be reviewed and confirmed by the academic partners, who will then officially keep a record of the penalties given.

- **Warning**
Marks are not reduced, but the candidate is issued with a warning against repeating their actions at future assessment cycles, with further escalated sanctions likely to be applied in this event.
- **Mark capped at 40 or 50 (pass mark)**
Marks are reduced to the pass mark (depending on the course), allowing the candidate to pass the assessment component but limiting them from achieving a merit or distinction grade.
- **Loss of all marks for a specific task/section of assignment**
Where Academic Misconduct is identified in only one particular task or section of an assignment, the marks for that task/section may be set to zero.

This penalty is not applicable to examinations, as any evidence of academic misconduct in an exam is a breach of the conditions under which a controlled assessment must be sat, and therefore affects all questions answered.
- **Loss of all marks for an entire assessment component**
Where Academic Misconduct has been identified throughout a particular assessment component, the marks for that assessment component may be set to zero.
- **Loss of all marks for a unit**
Where Academic Misconduct is identified in the same module at consecutive assessment cycles, the marks for all assessment components for the module may be set to zero.
- **Disqualification from a Qualification**
Where severe or repeated Academic Misconduct has been identified, a candidate may be disqualified from a qualification for a period of time. The candidate would then be required to re-register on the qualification, though credit could be transferred from the first attempt.

The table below demonstrates the appropriate penalty to be applied according to the type of offence committed by the candidate.

Type of offence	Penalty
Bringing unauthorised materials into the exam room	Loss of all marks for an entire assessment component
	Loss of all marks for an entire assessment component

Attempting to communicate with others in an exam, disruptive behaviour, etc.	
Copying from or allowing another candidate to copy from you during an exam	Loss of all marks for an entire assessment component
Directly quoting text from learning materials without appropriate referencing	Warning
Self-plagiarism, i.e. reusing content from the candidate's own previous work for which credit has been awarded without appropriate acknowledgment of the source.	Warning
Evidence of collusion in the work of two or more candidates from the same cohort, with evidence of collusion present in all or the majority of tasks (making up more than 50% of the total mark) in the assessment.	Loss of all marks for an entire assessment component
Evidence of collusion in the work of two or more candidates from the same cohort, with evidence of collusion present in only certain tasks in the assessment (making up less than 50% of total mark).	Loss of all marks for a specific task/section of the assignment.
<p>Isolated examples of plagiarism:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plagiarised text is generic in nature, e.g. definitions, describing established concepts Plagiarised text is in key parts of the assignment, such as analysis and evaluation, which should always be the candidate's own work. Where plagiarism is found in isolated tasks, but the marks for those tasks make up 50% or more of the total marks available in the assessment. 	<p>Mark capped at 40 / Warning (where original mark is less than 40)</p> <p>Loss of all marks for a specific task/section of assignment</p> <p>Loss of all marks for an entire assessment component.</p>
<p>Poor referencing in assignment, e.g. citation of sources is attempted but inconsistent, or fails to use Harvard style.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where poor referencing leads to small amounts of plagiarism occurring Where referencing is poor, but no evidence of any significant plagiarised content. 	<p>Mark capped at 40/ Warning (where original mark is less than 40)</p> <p>Warning</p>
Consistent failure to reference throughout an assessment resulting in severe plagiarism.	Loss of all marks for an entire assessment component.
Commissioning/attempting to commission others to write assessment on the candidate's behalf	Loss of all marks for an entire assessment component
Falsification/alteration of results/data presented in an Assessment	Loss of all marks for an entire assessment component
Repeated academic misconduct in same module at two assessment cycles (do not need to be sequential)	Loss of all marks for a unit

Repeated academic misconduct in any modules at three or more assessment cycles (do not need to be sequential)	Loss of all marks for a unit
Repeated academic misconduct in any modules at four or more assessment cycles	Disqualification from qualification
<p>Examples of AI misuse include, but are not limited to, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copying or paraphrasing sections of AI-generated content so that the work is no longer the student's own • Copying or paraphrasing whole responses of AI-generated content • Using AI to complete parts of the assessment so that the work does not reflect the student's own work, analysis, evaluation or calculations • Failing to acknowledge use of AI tools when they have been used as a source of information • Incomplete or poor acknowledgement of AI tools • Submitting work with intentionally incomplete or misleading references or bibliographies 	

- The table above is not an exhaustive list of offences. Where serious Academic Misconduct occurs, STC and our academic partners reserve the right to escalate to more severe penalties as appropriate.
- Where a candidate is given warning for poor academic practice, if the candidate then commits a similar offence at a subsequent assessment cycle then the penalty may be escalated.

6 INFORMATION SHEETS by NCC Education

There are five information sheets that are available to students and tutors of NCC Education programs. These information sheets are disseminated by STC at the beginning of each academic year, and all tutors and students are advised to comply with the contents. All information sheets are also available for download from <https://www.nccedu.com/policies-procedures/>.

- Academic Misconduct: Guidance for Tutors
- What is Academic Misconduct? Guidance for Candidates
- Avoiding Plagiarism and Collusion: Guidance for Candidates.
- Avoid Plagiarism and Collusion in Coding Units
- AI Use in Assessments

7 GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES by University of Wolverhampton

The University of Wolverhampton offers students a guide: **Academic Misconduct - The Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them: A Guide** which they are expected to comply with. This is available for download on <https://www.wolvesunion.org/pageassets/advice/getadvice/academic/misconduct/Acadecmi-Misconduct-Pitfalls-Guide.pdf>.

Students have the right to appeal an academic decision of the Assessment Boards of the University of Wolverhampton. A **Copy of the Student Academic Appeals Procedure** is available for download on

<https://www.wlv.ac.uk/media/wlv/pdf/Copy-of-StudentAcademic-Appeals-Procedure..pdf>.

In the case of Suspected Academic Misconduct, Faculty is instructed to follow the: **Procedure for the Management of a Viva in Cases of Suspected Academic Misconduct**. This is available for download on <https://www.wlv.ac.uk/current-students/conduct-and-appeals/academic-misconduct/>

8 REFERENCES

NCC Education (2023) *Academic Misconduct Policy* [Available online] https://www.nccedu.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/AQ_28_Academic-Misconduct-Policy.pdf

University of Wolverhampton (2019) *Academic Integrity Policy* [Available online] <https://www.wlv.ac.uk/current-students/conduct-and-appeals/academic-misconduct/>