

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*
SCA Briefing Sheet
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This Briefing Sheet summarises the changes to the University's policy and procedures for dealing with incidences of academic misconduct that have been developed by the Standing Committee on Assessment (SCA) through discussion and consultation during academic years 2005/06 and 2006/07.

The Academic Misconduct Policies and Procedures booklet has been revised during the 2006/07 summer vacation and copies of the new edition are now being sent to departments and other relevant sections of the University. All new cases of academic misconduct should be handled according to the new procedures.

In revising the procedures the SCA has recognised the expertise in dealing with cases of academic misconduct that has built up within departments, and acknowledged the administrative complexity of dealing with cases under the previous procedures. The revisions are designed to improve process flow, provide new routes for handling minor cases of academic misconduct, introduce minimum penalties for more serious case, and to clarify a number of issues regarding academic marks and penalties.

The main changes are:

1. Improved flow of processes

- i) Previously, Chairs of Boards of Examiners were required to report any case of academic misconduct to the Chair of the Standing Committee on Assessment, and await advice on the appropriate course of action. The new procedures allow the Chair BoE to determine whether there is a case to be answered, consulting with the Chair of the SCA only if advice is required. Following procedures set out in the booklet, the Chair BoE can also decide on the appropriate course of action to be taken by conducting a preliminary investigation of the objective facts of the case (the student is not interviewed as part of this process).
- ii) External examiners will no longer take part in investigating subcommittees, although they should be kept informed of any investigations.
- iii) At the conclusion of a case, there is now a single point of reporting, to the Assistant

Registrar: Student Progress, Mrs Rosemary Goerisch, who will then forward the reports to the appropriate University committees.

Most cases will be forwarded to the SCA and considered under reserved business. Cases with the following outcomes will be forwarded to Special Cases Committee or the Board for Graduate Schools, who will arrange a hearing:

- cases with Penalty Points of 5 or more levied;
- cases where the incidence is a second offence of misconduct;
- other cases where the SCA determines that a hearing is necessary.

2. Minor offences of academic misconduct

In order to reduce the burden of processing academic misconduct cases and to deal with minor cases in a proportionate way, new routes have been developed for minor cases. These will not count as "formal offences" of academic misconduct, in contrast to those pursued through the full procedures.

2 (a) Misconduct in formative work

From October 2007, academic misconduct in work that does not count towards an award, or a transcript mark, or a progression decision need not normally be addressed using the full misconduct procedures. In these instances the student should be warned by their department of the unacceptable nature of academic misconduct and the potentially serious consequences that will follow from misconduct in other circumstances, and the department should take the opportunity to educate the student regarding discipline-specific academic practice, for example using on-line plagiarism awareness materials to support this. There is no need to inform the SCA about incidents of this type, although departments should place a note on the student's file that can be considered in any subsequent case of misconduct.

Exceptions to the above might occur if a student has been dishonest in the course of their misconduct to the extent of creating a breach of faith with the University, or raising questions about the student's fitness to practise in professional contexts.

Queries relating to any of the issues in this Briefing Sheet should be addressed to Rosemary Goerisch (ext 4040) rag501@york.ac.uk, Assistant Registrar Student Progress.

Departments should be vigilant, nonetheless, for academic misconduct in all assessed work.

2(b) Formal warning system

The new procedures introduce a system of formal warnings, administered within departments, to cover first offences of academic misconduct in work which does contribute to the award, or a mark on the transcript, or a progression decision, but where the proportional contribution of the affected work to the award is less than 0.5%.

In these cases, students will be invited to a meeting with the Chair if the Board of Examiners, given the formal warning in writing and verbally, and required to undertake academic misconduct awareness training. The work involved will be given an academic mark, a record of the offence will be kept, and the incident must be reported to the SCA. Although the case will not be regarded as a "formal offence" of academic misconduct, it may be taken into account should there be a subsequent offence of academic misconduct.

If the offence turns out to be more serious than initially suspected, or the student contests the case, then the full procedures can be invoked. Students will have the right to be accompanied to the meeting with the Chair of the Board of Examiners, and a standard template that has been devised by the SCA for the warning letter appears in the revised booklet.

The formal warning procedure has been designed to be sufficiently robust to be applied to cases of collusion as well plagiarism.

3. Introduction of a minimum penalty for formal offences of academic misconduct

Where an incident of suspected academic misconduct cannot be pursued as a minor case under 2.A or 2.B above, the full procedures must be invoked; if misconduct is found, the student will be regarded as having committed a formal offence. The full procedures are close to those used in the previous system. However, to avoid the possibility that a negligible penalty might result, the new procedures establish a minimum final penalty of 0.5 points, even if the proportional contribution to the affected work to the final award would be less than 0.5%.

4. Penalties for second formal offences

The normal penalty for a second offence of academic misconduct should be termination of

registration. However, when considering penalties in such cases, Departments should bear in mind the proportionality of this sanction in relation to the nature and magnitude of the two offences concerned.

5. Forms of academic misconduct

The current procedures do not acknowledge all types of academic misconduct. The revised booklet now includes procedures for determining academic marks for fabrication, cheating and personation, in addition to those for plagiarism from the public domain; plagiarism from another student, or collusion.

Awareness and Detection

It is important that students are made aware at an early stage of the nature of academic misconduct and the University's policies.

An online plagiarism awareness module has been developed by Epigeum, and the materials have since been adapted by a working party chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Trevor Sheldon, with the inclusion of contextual examples from various departments. The following departments are piloting the materials for use by University of York students in 2007:

- Computer Science
- Philosophy
- Politics
- Health Sciences

and possibly also the departments of Biology and Electronics.

The University is also investigating the scope for the development of a Mandarin version of the materials.

In addition, colleagues may like to know that the Yorkshire VLE now incorporates the SafeAssignment plagiarism detection package, which allows a batch of assessments to be checked for plagiarism. The Safe Assignment service is available to all staff, whether they are delivering a VLE project or not. Staff wishing to use the service should contact the E-Learning Development Team (rw23@york.ac.uk) in the first instance for instructions on how to use the service. Note that an electronic copy of a piece of work is needed in order to run a file submission.

The SCA would value feedback from any Departments using the SafeAssignment tool.

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