

Academic Misconduct Policy

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This policy and procedure is subject to The Equality Act 2010 which recognises the following categories of individual as Protected Characteristics: Age, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion and Belief, Sex (gender), Sexual orientation, Disability.

Alternative Format

This policy is available in alternative formats, to request this, please email marketingcampaigns@mkcollege.ac.uk

Version Control

Version Number	Author	Approver	Date approved	Next review date
1	Group Director Quality	Group Leadership Team	03/12/25	Nov 27

Change log

Version Number	Summary of changes
1	New policy

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1. Introduction

The College recognises that student achievement must be based on robust, fair assessment and verification activities. When students achieve at Milton Keynes College stakeholders should be confident in the credibility of these achievements. It is vital that students and staff share a consistent understanding regarding what constitutes potential plagiarism, collusion and cheating and the potential consequences of such malpractice.

The College expectation is that all staff have the expertise to make fair and consistent grading decisions for all students when assessing and moderating assessment decisions. The policy requires active commitment from all staff assessing on all programs to validate that student work is original and to take consistent action when plagiarism, collusion or cheating is suspected.

2. Policy Statement

The aim of this policy is to ensure consistency and fairness when dealing with potential plagiarism, collusion, and cheating. This policy aims to ensure:

- The assessment process is valid, rigorous, and reliable.
- Student work that is accepted for assessment is original to that student.
- Students understand what plagiarism, collusion and cheating are and how these are relevant to them.
- A consistent approach when dealing with potential cases of plagiarism, collusion, or cheating.
- Support and to enable student success.
- The assessment and investigation processes meet the requirements of relevant Awarding Organisations

3. Academic Misconduct

Academic misconduct refers to any action by a student that gives them an unfair academic advantage or compromises the integrity of the assessment process. The following are categories and examples, not allowed by the College:

3.1 What is Plagiarism?

Plagiarism is a form of cheating and is classed as academic misconduct. If a student is found to have plagiarised, then they have committed a serious academic offence.

Plagiarism comes in many forms but ultimately means attempting to pass off someone else's work or ideas as the student's own. The most common forms are:

- Copying another student's work (past or present)
- Copying or paraphrasing from textbooks, journals, or magazines
- Cut/copy and pasted material from the Web, including use of artificial intelligence to create work for submission
- Taking someone else's work, images or ideas and passing it off as your own. This could include taking work, images, or ideas generated by Artificial Intelligence (AI) and passing it off as your own.
- Copying course material or lecture notes
- Copying information from sources or generated from sources which may include the internet and AI
- Using diagrams, images, or course notes without acknowledgement of their source
- The misuse of sources outside the College
- Employment of a professional ghost-writing individual or company or anyone else to produce work for the student.

3.2 How is plagiarism identified?

Assessors provide the best safeguard against plagiarism, and additionally using electronic detection systems e.g., Turnitin. Indicators to an assessor or internal quality assurer (IQA) of potential plagiarism could include:

- Assignments that contain unfamiliar words
- Use of plagiarism detection software such as Turnitin.
- A written style of a far higher standard or noticeably different than that demonstrated previously.
- An unexpected rise in the quality and accuracy of work
- Use of texts familiar to the assessor but not referenced.
- Use of American spelling or unfamiliar terminology
- Differences in the level of performance between assignments and activity completed under uncontrolled conditions.
- Learner being unable to explain what they have written about when questioned.
- Changes in the font, text size or colour during a piece of written work.

3.3 What is Cheating and Collusion

Cheating is an attempt to deceive College/Awarding Organisation assessors, examiners and/or external verifiers and includes but not exclusive to:

- Providing or receiving information about the content of an examination before it takes place, except when allowed by the Awarding Organisation.
- College staff giving excessive help to learners in writing an assignment or writing any of it for them.
- Someone impersonating or trying to impersonate a learner or attempting to procure a third party to impersonate oneself.
- Learners using materials that are not permitted.
- Assistance, or the communication of information, by one learner to another in an assessment where this is not permitted.

- Offering a bribe of any kind to an invigilator, examiner or other person connected with assessment.
- Any attempt to tamper with assignment or examination scripts after they have been submitted by learners.
- Staff fabricating or falsifying data or results by individual learners or groups of learners.
- Impersonation linked to assessment or submission.
- Offering a bribe of any kind to an invigilator, a member of centre staff or Awarding Organisation staff
- Submission of work purchased from a third party. For example, from an essay or assignment writing service.
- Introduction of unauthorised material into the examination room.

An investigation will then take place in accordance with the Awarding Organisation guidelines and the College Malpractice & Maladministration Policy and Procedure.

4. Procedure for dealing with academic misconduct including suspected student plagiarism, collusion and cheating:

4.1 Identifying Potential Misconduct

Academic misconduct may be detected through various channels, such as plagiarism detection tools (including similarity and AI-generated content reports), observations made during the marking process, or reports from staff regarding a student's intent or actions.

4.2 Minor Concerns

For less serious issues, the Course Team Leader should address the matter informally with the student, explaining how the behaviour could escalate into misconduct. A record of this conversation should be kept, such as a follow-up email. Examples include incorrect referencing despite an attempt to cite sources, or early signs of collaborative behaviour that could lead to collusion. Where

plagiarism, collusion or cheating is believed to have occurred because of poor academic skills, the assessor will also provide further support in the development of appropriate skills. This could include referring the learner to additional support mechanisms.

4.3 Escalation Process

In suspected cases, the staff member should refer the work to the Course Team Leader. If misconduct is suspected, the Course Team Leader should consult with the Head of School or a senior team member. If both agree misconduct may have occurred, the Deputy Director: Quality should be notified via email, including a summary of the discussion and rationale.

4.4 Withholding Marks

Assessment results should not be shared with the student until the investigation concludes. If the issue arises close to the scheduled release date, the Deputy Director: Quality, should be informed.

4.5 Academic Offences Panel

4.5.1 Panel Formation

Upon notification, the Deputy Director: Quality will convene a panel consisting of a Chair (typically from Senior Management), two additional members (either from the Management Team or experienced Course Team Leaders not involved with the student), and a secretary to record proceedings.

4.5.2 Conflict of Interest

Panel members may opt out if they feel their involvement could lead to bias.

4.5.3 Student Involvement

The Course Team Leader presents the case but does not influence the outcome. The student is notified in writing of the allegation, panel details, and support options. They may attend, bring a support person, submit evidence, or request witnesses with five working days' notice.

4.5.4 Evidence and Meeting Format

All relevant materials are shared with the panel and student in advance. The meeting includes a briefing, evidence presentation, student discussion, and panel deliberation. Outcomes are communicated within five working days.

4.5.5 Support and Adjustments

Students may seek procedural guidance from the Deputy Director: Quality, or emotional support from the Student Support team. Reasonable adjustments (e.g., interpreters or support workers) can be requested.

4.5.6 Decision Criteria

The panel must determine, on the balance of probabilities, whether misconduct occurred. Mitigating factors and potential consequences (e.g., visa implications) are considered.

4.5.7 Penalties

Sanctions range from marking unaffected sections to expulsion. The panel will work through the penalties from the least to the most severe when deciding which to impose. If imposing a sanction which involves the resubmission of a piece of work, the panel should be clear whether this is a fresh chance to undertake the assessment opportunity, or whether this would count as a 'reassessment' or 'rework' opportunity in line with the regulations of the appropriate Awarding Organisation. For cases of plagiarism, the panel should use the points-based system outlined in the 'AMBeR Tariff' (Appendix 1) to identify which series of outcomes could be applied, and then work through the outcomes in the relevant category, from least to most severe when deciding which sanction to impose.

Disciplinary actions may also be considered.

4.6 Academic Misconduct has not been committed:

- No further action to be taken.
- The student to be cautioned about their conduct moving forwards, and a copy of the letter and meeting minutes will be kept on the student's file for future reference.

4.7 Academic Misconduct has been committed:

In all of the instances below a copy of the letter and meeting minutes will be kept on the student's file for future reference.

- The work will be marked, omitting any portions affected by the academic misconduct.
- The student will be permitted an opportunity to repeat the assessment, uncapped.
- The student will be permitted an opportunity to repeat the assessment, capped at 40% / PASS.
- The student will receive a mark of zero for the piece of work in question.
- The student will receive a mark of zero for the module in question.
- The student will receive a mark of zero for the module in question and is barred from taking that module again.
- The student is withdrawn from their programme.
- The student is expelled.

All students should be informed of the outcome in writing, within five working days of the panel reaching their decision. Where an outcome includes the release of marks and / or feedback to a learner, the notice of outcome should also make clear to the learner when this will be released by, and via what format.

All decisions of the Academic Offences Panel will then be taken to the next available Assessment Board for approval. Where the Assessment Board does not approve the Academic Offences Panel's recommendation, a student should be informed of this, and the new outcome, in writing within five days of the decision being made.

4.8 Appeals

Students may appeal within 10 working days following the Learner Disciplinary Procedure. If unresolved, they may escalate to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, The Independent Ombudsman Service for Higher Education.

4.9 Joint Allegations

Students involved in group cases are informed of others' involvement but must not attempt to influence testimonies. Panels aim to meet with all students together, though individual outcomes may vary and are kept confidential.

4.10 Previous Offences

Past misconduct cases may be disclosed to the panel to inform decisions, especially if prior warnings were given about specific behaviours.

4.11 Accompaniment at Panels

Students may bring a support person for moral support. Legal representation is only permitted in exceptional cases, subject to Chair approval. Requests for someone to speak on the student's behalf are considered individually.

4.12 Reporting to Senior Management

At the start of each academic year, the Group Director for Quality reports anonymised data on misconduct cases, including trends related to protected characteristics.

Appendix 1 – AMBeR TARIFF

STEP 1 – Award points based on the following criteria.

History

1 st Time	100 points
2 nd Time	150 points
3 rd Time or more	200 points

Amount/Extent

Below 5% AND less than two sentences	80 points
As above but with critical aspects* plagiarised	105 points
Between 5% and 20% OR more than two sentences but not more than two paragraphs	105 points
As above but with critical aspects* plagiarised	130 points
Between 20% and 50% OR more than two paragraphs but not more than five paragraphs	130 points
As above but with critical aspects* plagiarised	160 points
Above 50% OR more than five paragraphs	160 points
Submission purchased from essay mill or ghost-writing service	225 points

*Critical aspects are key ideas central to the argument

Level/Stage

Level 4	70 points
Level 5	115 points
Level 6 or Postgraduate	140 points

Value Of Assignment

Standard weighting	30 points
Large project (e.g. final year dissertation)	60 points

Additional Characteristics

Evidence of deliberate attempt to disguise plagiarism by changing words, sentences, or references to avoid detection **40 points**.

STEP 2 – Award penalties based on the points. Penalties (Summative Work)

In all cases, a formal warning is given and a record made.

280 – 329	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No further action beyond formal warning• Assignment awarded 0% - resubmission required with no penalty on mark.
330 – 379	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No further action beyond formal warning• Assignment awarded 0% - resubmission required with no penalty on mark.• Assignment awarded 0% - resubmission required but mark capped or reduced.
380 - 479	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assignment awarded 0% - resubmission required but mark capped or reduced.• Assignment awarded 0% - no opportunity to resubmit.
480 - 524	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assignment awarded 0% - no opportunity to resubmit.• Module awarded 0% - re-sit required, but mark capped or reduced.• Module awarded 0% - no opportunity to re-sit, but credit still awarded.

525 - 559	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Module awarded 0% - re-sit required, but mark capped or reduced. • Module awarded 0% - no opportunity to re-sit, but credit still awarded. • Module awarded 0% - no opportunity to re-sit, and credit lost. • Award classification reduced. • Qualification reduced (e.g. Honours to no Honours). • Expelled from institution but with credits retained. • Expelled from institution but credits withdrawn.
560+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Module awarded 0% - no opportunity to re-sit, and credit lost. • Award classification reduced. • Qualification reduced (e.g. Honours to no Honours). • Expelled from institution but with credits retained. • Expelled from institution but credits withdrawn.

PENALTIES (Formative Work)

280 – 379	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal Warning.
380+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal warning, with record made contributing to student's previous history.