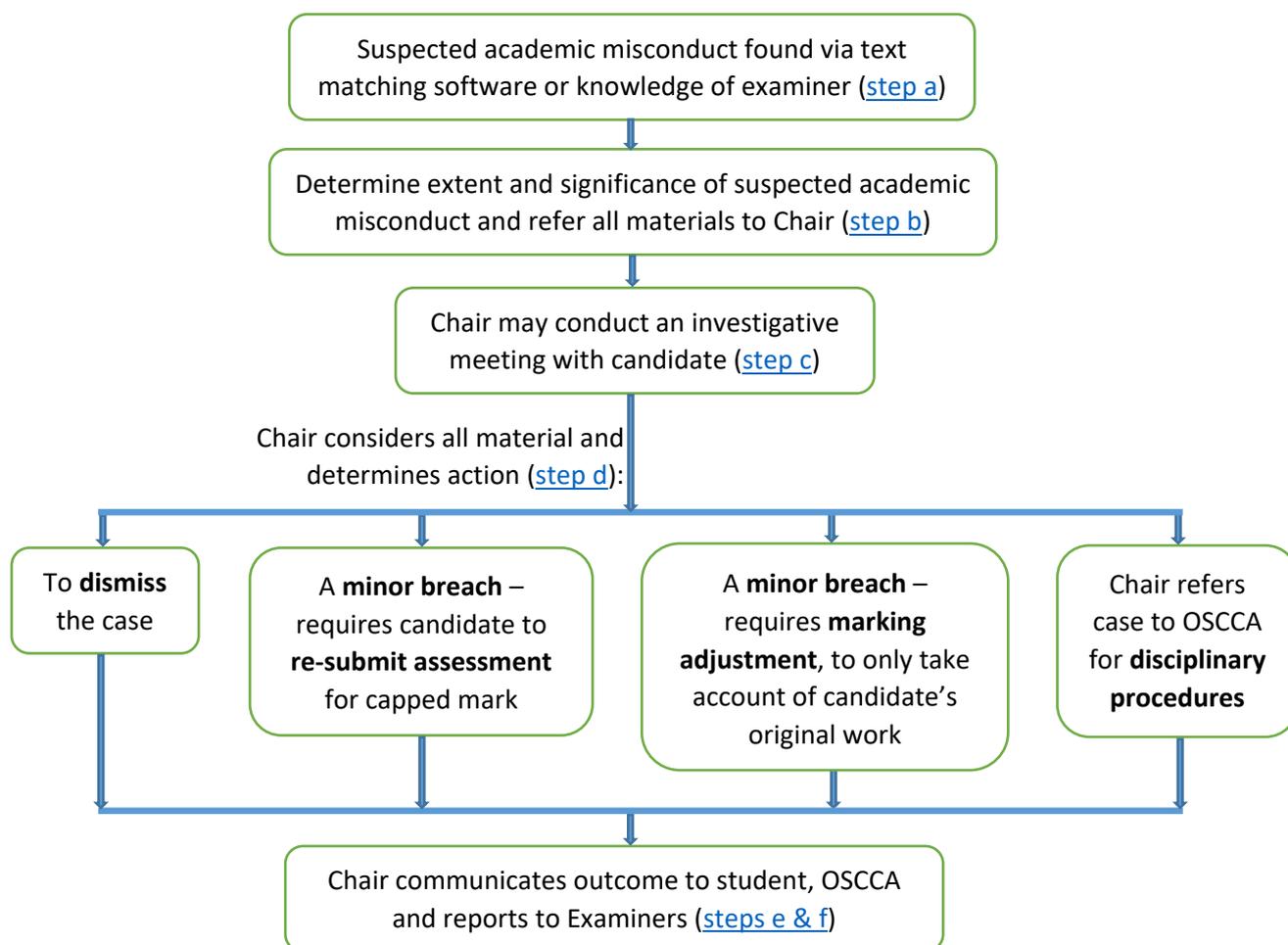


Staff guidance document – Suspected academic misconduct

This guidance outlines the process to be followed for suspected academic misconduct, for example plagiarism, in student’s work submitted for summative assessment. The same regulations and process apply to all students, whether primarily taught or research.

Guidance relating to formative assessment is available on the University’s [Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct website](#)¹.

Action to be taken following suspected academic misconduct



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¹ See the document “Plagiarism and good academic practice: notes for Supervisors, Directors of Studies and Tutors”

1. What is academic misconduct?

Academic misconduct includes any practice that may unfairly advantage a student's academic assessment. One type of academic misconduct is plagiarism, defined as submitting as one's own work that which derives in part or in its entirety from the work of others without due acknowledgement. The University outlines many potential forms of academic misconduct within its University Discipline Regulations² (in 2018-19 this included the Statement on Plagiarism³), including:

- Copying someone else's work, both words and ideas
- Quoting or paraphrasing someone else's work without due acknowledgement
- Buying or commissioning work from others, or not attributing research contributed by others
- Self-plagiarism, using one's own work submitted for publication or assessment elsewhere without due attribution

2. What action can a Department take?

Whilst all academic misconduct is in breach of the University's disciplinary regulations, it is accepted that there are occasions where there may be an attempt to acknowledge the source but that this is not done correctly, or a candidate has misunderstood the referencing requirements, or breached them in some minor way. These examples could be viewed as **minor breaches** of the regulations. Where a Chair of Examiners or Degree Committee determine that a **minor breach** has taken place, this can be taken into account within the marking process (without a punitive sanction).

Where a **minor breach** is found, the Chair shall take one of these two courses of action, in addition to ensuring that the candidate is provided with feedback on the assessment, the importance of academic integrity and how to avoid plagiarising in the future:

1. Making an **academic mark adjustment** relating to the proportion of work that was plagiarised, so that the mark awarded reflects the extent and academic merit of the material believed to be the candidate's own work. The academic mark adjustment should not include a penalty to reflect disciplinary aspects of plagiarism or a student's supposed intent to deceive. The nature of such adjustment may vary by discipline and mode of assessment, but should always remain in proportion to the plagiarised work; OSCCA is available to provide support and guidance.
2. Only where possible within the course of study, offering the candidate the **opportunity to resubmit the piece of work with capped mark, for example the minimum pass mark**. This option is particularly relevant where the student would otherwise fail the assessment. For research students, this would be implemented in the option to revise and resubmit.

3. Identifying suspected academic misconduct

The University offers access to text-matching software, which can support Departments in identifying text copied from elsewhere. Individual Examiners or supervisors may also identify possible copied text independently, as a result of their subject knowledge. In this way, suspicions of academic misconduct may be generated either directly by examination staff, or through routine evaluation of text-matching reports separate to the formal examination process. However it may be identified, the procedure to be followed is identical.

² <https://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/so/2018/chapter02-section19.html#heading1-19>

³ <https://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/so/2018/chapter02-section19.html#heading2-17>

Examiners have a responsibility to ensure that marks are awarded for assessments with academic integrity. A process for assuring assessments are free from plagiarism must be in place, although there is no requirement to utilise text-matching software in the identification of plagiarism. It may, however, assist in gathering evidence for investigative or disciplinary meetings. Text matching software requires careful interpretation of reports; a low percentage of text matching which occurs in a block without any acknowledgement of the source may be suspected plagiarism. A high percentage of text matching, providing it has been properly acknowledged, may be an assessment of low original contribution but it will not include plagiarism. Staff members can find out more about text-matching software on the University's [Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct website](#).

4. Procedure to be followed for suspected academic misconduct

Step	Action
a)	Determine the extent and significance of any suspected academic misconduct within the assessment. This exercise should be undertaken by an academic, although an initial review of a text-matching report may be undertaken by an experienced administrator. Full records of the investigation must be kept and the investigation should not be discussed with other examiners.
b)	<p>Referral and evidence</p> <p>Where there is suspected academic misconduct, the Examiner or Administrator should refer the case, including all investigation materials, to the Chair of Examiners or Chair of Degree Committee. All candidates involved in the case should be referred.</p> <p>The evidence referred should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A copy of the candidate's submitted assessment; • A copy of any text matching report; • A copy of any source material (where not included in a text matching report); • The local guidance and information about plagiarism provided to candidates undertaking the course and assessment – including any declaration that the candidate signed to confirm the work was their own; • A copy of the marking criteria for the assessment.
c)	The Chair will consider all of the information and may choose to hold an investigative meeting with the candidate. The purpose of an investigative meeting is to provide the candidate with an opportunity to respond and answer questions regarding the suspected academic misconduct; it does not have a punitive or disciplinary element.
c)1	<p>Timing</p> <p>The investigative meeting should not interfere with a candidate's revision or examination performance; avoid organising a meeting just before an assessment deadline or examination. For example, not in an undergraduate student's examination period or just before a PhD student's viva.</p> <p>If the investigative meeting cannot take place before publication of the class list, the examiners must contact OSCCA. It may be necessary to suspend classing the candidate until after the investigation and any subsequent Discipline Committee.</p>
c)2	<p>Attendees at the investigation meeting</p> <p>The following persons should be invited to attend:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Chair of Examiners/Degree Committee, or designated deputy (who will chair the investigative meeting);

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Examiner(s) responsible for marking the work; • the candidate (or all relevant candidates in the case of suspected collusion though they will be invited into the meeting individually) and any representative the candidate may wish to attend; • the candidate’s Tutor, Director of Studies or other individual whom the student would like to accompany him/or her; • a note taker; • a member of OSCCA to provide procedural advice (refer to section 7). <p>The group should include people of more than one gender. If necessary, an additional Tutor or member of the relevant Faculty should be invited.</p> <p>In cases of collusion, Tutors or representatives of all the candidates involved should be invited to the meeting one at a time but all candidates should be available for the duration of the meeting.</p>
c)3	<p>Informing the candidate of the meeting</p> <p>The Chair of Examiners should invite the candidate (or candidates, in the case of suspected collusion) to the meeting and copy in their Senior Tutor. The communication should include the following (a template is available from OSCCA):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the purpose of the meeting (outlined above), the outcome of which could lead to disciplinary action; • the reason why the meeting has been called (what is suspected); • copies of the evidence outlined in step b; • The candidate can be accompanied by a Tutor, DoS or other supporter • The candidate may choose to be accompanied by a legal representative in addition to a supporter; however, because the meeting is not disciplinary in nature and cannot impose any disciplinary penalties (albeit that there may be a referral to the disciplinary procedure), legal representation for the student is not normally deemed necessary; • The candidate will have an opportunity during the meeting to provide an oral account of what has happened and may provide written documentation if they wish. Any information that is provided by them, may be used to inform or support future disciplinary action; • A note taker will be present and the candidate will have an opportunity after the meeting to comment on the notes of the meeting.
c)4	<p>During the meeting</p> <p>During the meeting, the Chair should ensure that the following takes place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone in attendance should introduce themselves; • The Chair should explain the purpose of the meeting; • The Chair should explain the possible outcomes of the meeting and explain that the investigative meeting itself is non-disciplinary in nature, but that any information provided during or as a result of the meeting may be used to inform or support future disciplinary action, including the formal record this meeting; • The Chair should outline the allegation, including any additional further details of the suspected plagiarism; • The Chair should provide an opportunity for the candidate to give an oral account of their behaviour and any reasons for the behaviour; • The Chair should provide an opportunity for discussions or queries between the Examiners and Candidate;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the end of the meeting, the Chair should explain the next steps (that the Candidate will receive a letter with the outcome of the investigation, and timing of such) and the candidate should be given a final opportunity to provide any further statement.
c)5	<p>Record of the meeting</p> <p>A detailed, formal record of the meeting should be taken, and attendees given 7 days to review and comment on the formal record. Any changes agreed by the Chair may be made to the formal record, otherwise comments will be appended to the formal record.</p>
d	<p>Possible outcomes</p> <p>Following consideration of all of the evidence (including the investigation meeting, if one has taken place), the Chair will determine whether:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The case is dismissed, with no action; There is a minor breach of academic misconduct. The Chair should choose either to require the candidate to re-sit the assessment for a capped mark or that the academic mark to be awarded to the candidate reflect only the candidate's own original work (see Section 2 above: '<i>What action can a department take</i>'); The case should be referred to OSCCA for consideration under the disciplinary regulations.
e	<p>Decision to the candidate</p> <p>Following the Chair's determination and within 7 days of any investigative meeting, if one has taken place, the Chair should provide the following information (a template is available from OSCCA):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirm the circumstances that led to the investigation; Outline the investigation that has taken place; Attach a copy of any material that the candidate has not been provided with (this will not apply if there has been an investigative meeting); Confirm the Chair's decision and the next steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No action: the examination process will proceed as normal; Minor breach: the action that will take place, as determined by the Chair and in line with '<i>What action can a department take</i>' (see Section 2 above); Referral to OSCCA: that the candidate will be contacted by OSCCA in the next two weeks to confirm the next steps of the disciplinary process.
f	<p>The Chair will communicate the outcome to the candidate, examiners and OSCCA within 7 days of the decision being made. Where a case is referred to OSCCA, all of the evidence should be provided to OSCCA in addition to a copy of the student's examination results and classing criteria.</p>

5. What should be reported to the final Examiners' Meeting?

The outcome of the investigative meeting should be reported back to the final Examiners' Meeting, or the Degree Committee, as appropriate, before classing or determination of award takes place.

The candidate's marks should be reported in the usual way, alongside the Chair's decision letter if a minor breach has been determined by the Chair. Where classing or award is managed blind, this may require redacting identifying information from the minutes so as to refer to the candidate via blind grade number. The candidate must be classed on the basis of the classification scheme, and marks awarded subject to any action agreed by the Chair and Examiners. Further marks should not be deducted.

Where a case is referred to OSCCA for consideration under the disciplinary regulations, consult OSCCA on whether it is appropriate for classing to take place as normal, or whether this should be suspended pending the outcome of the disciplinary case.

6. Annual reporting on suspected cases of plagiarism or collusion

As above, while minor breaches of academic misconduct may be managed by the Department directly, it is in the University's interests to maintain a central record of the number and types of cases of suspected plagiarism or collusion, and actions taken in response. This will enable the University to carry out vital quality monitoring of the processes and student support.

To this end, Departments will be asked in each year to provide information about:

- The number of suspected cases of plagiarism that were investigated during the year, confirming whether these were found as part of a routine text-matching check, or by assessors/examiners during the marking process;
- The outcome of the investigation, e.g., case dismissed, a minor breach (and if so, what action was taken), or referral to OSCCA;
- Comments or feedback in relation to departmental practice, additional training or student support, or the investigative process.

This information will be compiled by OSCCA and form part of its annual report to the General Board's Education Committee.

7. Contact OSCCA for further support

The Office of Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals (OSCCA) provides support and guidance to all students involved in this process. An investigation does not require the involvement of OSCCA unless it is being referred to OSCCA. However, OSCCA can provide the following support:

- Advice around the process of spotting academic misconduct;
- Initial action to take following suspected academic misconduct;
- The investigation meeting;
- To attend any investigative meetings to provide procedural advice;
- To provide advice on the potential outcomes of an investigation;
- To receive any referrals to the Discipline Committee where, following investigation by the Examiners, academic misconduct is still suspected.

To receive any support or advice, contact OSCCA at OSCCA@admin.cam.ac.uk or 01223 7 65440.

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