

## Academic Misconduct Policy

Policy Ref	VCAG Lead: Director of Academic Services
Approving Body: AQSC & Academic Board	
Date Approved: 24 <sup>th</sup> September 2024	Review Date: Annually; with updates to version if required

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### Policy Statement

Academic misconduct is any action through which a student gains, attempts to gain or attempts to help others gain, an unfair academic advantage in an assessment. This can be through cheating, plagiarism, or collusion, and includes using Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) to cheat, plagiarise or collude.

We investigate and take action against academic misconduct to provide assurance of, and confidence in, the robust academic merit of all our students' awards. The goal of this policy is to ensure no student benefits from misconduct, but at the same time ensure actions are fair and proportionate, so students can learn from their mistakes and be supported to succeed in future.

## Scope

The policy applies to the academic assessment of students studying at the Royal Agricultural University. Students studying at a collaborative partner may have separate procedures specific to the nature of delivery and legal requirements, but should be guided by the principles of this policy.

Academic staff and professional services staff supporting academic delivery or advising students will need to be aware of their responsibilities under this policy.

## Relevant legislation / guidance

[Office for Students Conditions of Registration](#) (conditions B & C)

[Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education Good Practice Framework](#)

[Quality Assurance Agency advice on Academic Integrity](#)

## Policy details

The University will always take action when it is confident, based on reasonable probability and academic judgement, that academic misconduct has occurred. No student should be awarded a mark that is not merited, and a range of penalties, from resubmission to expulsion in the most serious or repeat offences, can be given. However, outcomes from a misconduct investigation may involve additional support and guidance on academic writing skills, referencing or appropriate use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools, to help students improve and avoid repeat offences.

The following examples illustrate types of academic misconduct, but it is not an exhaustive list:

<b>Cheating (including contract cheating)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fraudulently applying for extensions or extenuating circumstances, including falsifying evidence;</li><li>• Copying another student's work in an exam setting;</li><li>• Resubmitting previous work instead of attempting the requested assessment brief;</li><li>• Fraudulently paying someone to write your work for you, contracting / purchasing it from an essay mill, including an online AI service;</li></ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of unauthorised equipment in an exam, e.g. calculator, ear pieces, smart watch / phone;</li> <li>• Taking unauthorised notes/materials into the exam room;</li> <li>• Accessing exam papers ahead of the scheduled exam.</li> </ul>
<b>Plagiarism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paraphrasing material from another source, without correctly referencing the original author, including AI sources;</li> <li>• Referencing unpublished sources, such as from AI, without including copies/images/output as evidence;</li> <li>• Copying material from a publication or internet source, including AI sources, without acknowledging the source within the text and/or references;</li> <li>• Submitting joint work as your own individual work.</li> </ul>
<b>Collusion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intentionally allowing your work to be copied by another student, either in an exam or coursework;</li> <li>• Sending your work to another student;</li> <li>• Undertaking another student's work for them, or sourcing others, including AI, to do it for them.</li> <li>• Assuming the identity of another student in an assessment;</li> <li>• Allowing someone to assume your identity in an assessment.</li> </ul>

Students have a responsibility to ensure they understand these issues, as a lack of understanding cannot be taken as an excuse in defence of academic misconduct. We will, however, take mitigating circumstances, accompanied by genuine contrition, into consideration when determining penalties.

Some students will have received permission via Student Services and/or their Disabled Students' Allowance to use digital support tools, such as Grammarly, as part of their studies. Appropriate use of such approved tools is not academic misconduct, but it is the student's responsibility to ensure they, as with all software, are not misused. Many such tools increasingly use Generative AI and may not be set to alert the user when it makes changes, so extra care must be taken to avoid additional content being added that is not the student's own work. For academic purposes, digital support tools should be used to check individual words or selected parts of paragraphs only, not entire documents. If using such tools on significant portions of text, or on key terminology, always proof read what is produced to ensure it is still your own work and not new information, claims or possible incorrect evidence created by AI. If in any doubt, reference the AI tool in the same way as any other source material.

Students with a Reasonable Adjustment Plan (RAP) from Student Services should complete and attach the RAP declaration with each assessment at submission, to demonstrate permission to use such tools (this will remain anonymous for assessments where anonymous marking is standard).

An increasing number of language translation tools use Generative AI and students should be aware there is an increased risk of such tools creating new content and/or changing the

intended meaning when supplementing between languages. Teaching, learning and assessment at RAU is delivered in English, and students are held responsible for work submitted in English, even if it has been converted from a different language. If in any doubt, reference the AI language tool in the same way as any other source material.

Investigation into suspected academic misconduct follows the preferred format advised by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), except where specific staff roles or organisational structures differ:

Source: QAA Academic Misconduct Penalties Advice for providers, September 2021



Any proven academic misconduct will be recorded on a student's

file for the duration of their studies.

### Initial Academic Misconduct Investigation

Academics will utilise a variety of techniques to identify potential academic misconduct, including electronic indicators from Turnitin and their own judgement. No misconduct will be deemed proven, and no penalty will be applied, based solely on electronic indicators from Turnitin or other software. The academic marking the assessment, or where relevant second marker, has discretion to determine whether or not there are sufficient grounds to refer it for further investigation, and may seek a second opinion from the relevant Module Leader or Programme Leader.

Once a potential academic misconduct case is raised by the relevant academic, an investigation will then be initiated by the nominated Academic Integrity Investigator (usually the Academic Quality Officer for Student Casework & Policy). The academic will provide the Academic Integrity Investigator with the assessment submission which is to be investigated, as well as a completed Academic Misconduct Reporting Form, the Assessment

Brief, Similarity Detection and Generative AI reports from Turnitin (where applicable) and any other relevant evidence. The academic is expected to clearly indicate the grounds for suspicion.

The Academic Integrity Investigator will undertake an initial investigation to determine whether there are grounds to proceed or to dismiss the case. If proceeding, the student will be informed of the case raised about their assessment, which may, if the evidence is compelling, include an indication of probable outcomes. The student will be invited to make a statement/response to the allegation. The Academic Integrity Investigator will take the student's response into consideration when finalising their initial investigation and preparing recommendations.

Once the initial investigation is concluded by the Academic Integrity Investigator, a decision will be made, in consultation with the Director, Head or other Academic Services Manager, on the next steps which can be: a dismissal of the case; referral to an Academic Misconduct Panel hearing; or application of a discretionary penalty.

A discretionary penalty can be applied where the misconduct constitutes an academic misdemeanour, such as: inadequate referencing; small sections of unattributed quoting, paraphrasing or AI content; credible mistaken use of AI corrective software. The Academic Integrity Investigator is also authorised to apply a discretionary penalty if: it is a first offence with no intent to deceive; and/or if the student has responded by admitting to the academic misconduct, indicating regret and an intent to avoid making such a mistake again.

Potential outcomes for discretionary penalties can include one or more of:

- Formal written warning
- Advice or training provided on good academic practice (with conditions on proving it has been acted upon)
- Removal of unauthorised content from the assessment, or unauthorised content excluded from marking
- Receive a mark of zero
- Resubmit or resit a module with an uncapped\* or capped mark (40%)

\* Uncapped reassignments will only be granted in exceptional circumstances, at the discretion of the Academic Integrity Investigator, and only where there is no perception of advantage over other students.

If a student chooses to dispute a discretionary penalty, if a case is deemed to be a serious offence, or if the Academic Integrity Investigator is unable to reach a decision, academic misconduct reports will be referred to an Academic Misconduct Panel. Academic Misconduct Panels have authority to set more severe penalties than those given as a discretionary penalty.

### Academic Misconduct Panel

Academic Misconduct Panels will consist of:

- Chair: a senior member of staff drawn from the Deans of subject, Professors, Associate Professors, other academic leadership roles (excluding Pro Vice-Chancellors), Director of Academic Services or Head of Academic Quality

- Member: Any of the above not already acting as Chair, or a senior member of academic staff
- Secretary: a member of the Academic Quality team, who may have also been the Academic Integrity Investigator

Members of the Panel must not be involved in the delivery of the module for which academic misconduct is being investigated. All panellists will be required to declare any potential conflicts of interest.

The Academic Misconduct Panel will be provided with all information relevant to the alleged offence, including any statement given by the student in defence of their work. The Panel will remain impartial and consider each case in a fair and consistent manner, in accordance with the University's regulations.

The Academic Integrity Investigator will write to the student concerned, and provide a copy of the Turnitin / Generative AI report (as applicable) as well as details of the alleged offence. The student will be invited to attend an Academic Misconduct Panel, which will take place at least seven days after invitation.

The student is required to confirm their attendance at least two days before the Panel is held. **In the event that the student cannot attend, does not respond to the meeting invitation, or does not wish to attend, the Panel will proceed in the student's absence.**

The student may be accompanied to the Panel by a member of the Student Services team or a Students' Union Officer, who may counsel the student during the Panel, but cannot speak on their behalf. Requests for any other individual to attend will be considered entirely at the Chair's discretion. Legal representation and recordings are not permitted under any circumstance.

During the Panel meeting, the student will be provided with a summary of the alleged academic misconduct, and will be invited to provide their response in defence of their work. The Panel will ask the student questions on their research, methodology and specific content of the work, in order to determine whether misconduct has, within reasonable probability, taken place.

In the event a group work assessment being reported for academic misconduct, all group members associated with the assessment will be investigated and invited to attend a Panel hearing. It will be at the Chair's discretion whether the group are questioned together or separately.

The Panel will consider each case fully, taking due account of the evidence provided and any explanation given by the student. The Panel will make a unanimous decision on whether any academic misconduct, on the balance of probability, has taken place. If the Panel determines that it has taken place, a penalty will be applied.

### Penalties

The Academic Misconduct Panel will retain the right to exercise their discretion when awarding penalties, but will be guided by the Academic Misconduct Tariff & Penalties set

out below in [Appendix 1](#). The penalty will take account of: the student's level of study; the credit value of the assessment; any previous history of academic misconduct; and the extent of academic misconduct which has occurred.

**Purchasing content from an essay mill or by any means, without full disclosure and citation within the assessment, or selling content to other students for their assessments, will lead to expulsion from the University.**

### Reassessment

Academic misconduct allegations for resit (referral) submissions will follow the same process as first sitting submissions, as listed above. However, in situations where there is insufficient time remaining in the academic year, timelines for investigation and Panel stages may be reduced in the interests of retaining an opportunity for a student to progress into the next academic year on time.

If academic misconduct is alleged for a resit (referral) submission, and subsequently proven in an Academic Misconduct Panel, the minimum penalty applied for the work will be 0% and resubmission for a capped mark (40%) will be required. Such resubmission may not be possible within that academic year.

### Appeals

The student cannot appeal against the academic judgement of Panel members in reaching their decision based on the evidence available to them at the time. However, the student has the right to appeal the decision of the Academic Misconduct Panel if they can demonstrate that one or more of the following grounds for appeal has been met, and provide evidence in support of their appeal:

1. That new and relevant evidence has become available, which was not available at the time of the Academic Misconduct Panel.
2. That there was a relevant and significant procedural irregularity within the academic misconduct process, which casts reasonable doubt on the decision reached.
3. That the penalty applied by the Panel was unreasonable or unfair.

Any request for an appeal which either does not meet grounds for appeal, or is submitted late, will not be considered and will be dismissed.

To submit an appeal, the student is required to complete the [Academic Misconduct Appeals Form](#) and submit this to [conduct@rau.ac.uk](mailto:conduct@rau.ac.uk). The appeal must include supporting evidence and be submitted within two weeks of notification of the outcome of the Academic Misconduct Panel.

If it is determined that grounds for an appeal have been demonstrated, a senior representative of the University (who was not involved with the original investigation) will chair an Appeals Panel, supported by at least one other member of academic staff. Membership of the Appeals Panel will exclude any staff who were involved in the original Panel, although secretariat responsibilities may be the same.

The Appeals Panel will have access to all documentation concerning the original case, as well as the evidence submitted by the student in support of their appeal. The Appeals Panel will determine whether or not the student is required to present evidence in person.

Following consideration of the case, the Appeals Panel may:

- dismiss the original decision
- uphold the original decision
- revise the original penalty applied

The Appeals Panel will notify the student of the outcome of the appeal in writing, and will include an explanation of their findings. This will then conclude the case and the student will be issued with a Completion of Procedures (COP) letter. If the student remains dissatisfied with the outcome of their case, they have the option of raising a complaint with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, within 12 months of the Completion of Procedures letter. Further details can be found here: [www.oiahe.org.uk](http://www.oiahe.org.uk).

## **Responsibilities**

Academic Quality is responsible for the fair and consistent application of this policy, and for ensuring training materials are available for staff.

Deans and other academic staff line management are responsible for academic compliance, and for ensuring appropriate cover for Academic Misconduct Panels, supported by Academic Services.

Students are responsible for familiarising themselves with good academic practice in assignments, including (where made readily available): assessment briefs via Gateway; Turnitin support guides on Gateway; AI, Education & Authentic Assessments guides on Gateway; APA referencing, plagiarism and copyright guides on Gateway; examinations and assessments guides and codes of conduct in the student handbook and Gateway.

## **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

The University is committed to the fair treatment of our students and this is supported through our [Equality Diversity & Inclusion Policy](#) (EDI).

An Equality Impact Assessment has been conducted and identified mitigations for vulnerable groups potentially at greater risk of committing misconduct, due to disability or language barriers.



## Other related policies / procedures

Relationship to other relevant RAU policies, codes of practice etc. are listed below:

- [Academic regulations and Academic Quality codes of practice](#)
- [Codes of conduct for examinations and tests](#)

## Consequences

Academic misconduct impacts not only on the students directly investigated, but all students expecting a fair and equitable assessment of their cohorts.

Ensuring effective assessment and standards, credible awards only granted to students meeting those standards, and compliance with the OIA are conditions set by the OfS for registration. Failure to meet those standards could lead to a range of interventions, including: additional improvement measures; financial penalties; reduction in tuition fee level; suspension/revocation of degree awarding powers.

## Review

This policy will be reviewed annually and updated as required.

*Last updated September 2024*

## Version control

Version number	Change	Name and job title	Date
1		Michelle Daszko, Academic Quality Officer	November 2022
2	Upgrade from procedure to policy, with significant changes, including coverage of AI	Dan Shaffer, Director of Academic Services	September 2024

## Appendix 1

### Academic Misconduct Tariff & Penalties

**Points will be accumulated in accordance with the following criteria:**

Criteria for allocating points		Points
History	1 <sup>st</sup> offence	100
	2 <sup>nd</sup> offence	200
	3 <sup>rd</sup> or more offence	400
Level of study	Level 4	100
	Level 5	200
	Level 6 or above	300
Extent of plagiarism including the use of Generative AI	Up to and including 25%	100
	Between 26% and 49%	200
	50% and above	300
Use of an essay mill or acting as an essay mill (paid services)		701 + expulsion

**The Panel will consider penalties and additional sanctions based on the points accumulated:**

Points	Penalty	Recommended additional sanctions
0 to 300	Written warning – assessment marked with academic judgement on misconduct content	conditions on completing training on good academic practice
301 to 600	Assessment awarded 0% - resubmission required for a capped mark	
601 to 700	Assessment awarded 0% - no opportunity to resubmit	
701 or above	Module awarded 0% - no opportunity to resubmit or be eligible for academic compensation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Credit removed</li> <li>• Award classification reduced</li> <li>• Qualification reduced</li> <li>• Suspension</li> <li>• Expulsion</li> </ul>

In cases of collusion where one party is not currently sitting the relevant assessment (e.g. assessment sat in previous year; writing assessment for another student), the Panel will consider applying any of the recommended additional sanctions listed above.