



## Reference Number: AQ\_28

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# Academic Misconduct Policy

### Revision History

Version	Last revised	Next review date	Policy Owner	Notes
1.0	15 January 2014	30 June 2015	James Stephenson	For publication. Replaces PD14, CEAZ01 and Appendix B of PD34
1.1	22/01/2015	30 June 2015	James Stephenson	Additional appendix added
AQ_28-a01	10 June 2015	30 June 2016	James Stephenson	Reviewed
AQ_28-a02	January 2018	30 June 2019	Matthew Baldwin	Full review and update
AQ_28-a03	31 January 2019	30 June 2020	Matthew Baldwin	Minor clarifications
AQ_28-a04	19 December 2019	30 June 2021	Matthew Baldwin	Added clarification regarding self-plagiarism

# Academic Misconduct Policy

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Definition

NCC Education defines **Academic Misconduct** as malpractice committed by a candidate during the course of any assessment, including both those completed in controlled environments and coursework. It may also be termed **Candidate Malpractice**. 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, 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 NCC Education qualifications, it is expected that candidates will use Harvard-style referencing standards. Where work is produced under examination conditions it is sufficient to acknowledge the source without providing a full reference.

For detailed guidance on the correct procedures for maintaining the security and integrity of examinations, Centres should consult NCC Education's *Instructions for Conducting Examinations* document. However, candidates should be aware of the following requirements:

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 watches, 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.

### 1.3. Scope of policy

This policy document applies to the following NCC Education qualifications:

- Level 2 Award in Computing
- Level 3 International Foundation Diploma for Higher Education Studies
- Level 3 Diploma in Computing
- Level 3 Diploma in Business
- Level 4 Diploma in Computing
- Level 4 Diploma in Business
- Level 4 Diploma in Business IT

- Level 5 Diploma in Computing
- Level 5 Diploma in Business
- Level 5 Diploma in Business IT
- Level 7 Diploma in Business Management
- BSc (Hons) Business Computing and Information Systems (awarded by the University of Central Lancashire)

Candidates studying for the BA (Hons) Business Administration, awarded by the University of Worcester, should consult the University's *Procedures for Investigations of Cases of Academic Misconduct*.

## 2. Types of Academic Misconduct

<b>Collusion</b>	<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 joint production is not, the submitted work must be produced solely by the candidate 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>
<b>Plagiarism</b>	<p>The use, without acknowledgement, of 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 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 occurs intentionally or through ignorance of referencing requirements.</p>
<b>Impersonation</b>	<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>
<b>Exam Misconduct</b>	<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</p>

	communication within the Examination Room.
<b>Fabrication of results or observations</b>	The reporting of artificial data from practical activities carried out by the candidate, or the use of artificial observations to support a hypothesis/conclusion.

For further information on the many different types of plagiarism and academic misconduct, please see the Turnitin White Paper entitled *The Plagiarism Spectrum*.<sup>1</sup>

NCC Education 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 NCC Education 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 NCC Education may decide to instead issue a warning, or to cap the candidate's mark at the pass boundary (40).

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. 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

NCC Education 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 re-using 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 NCC Education

Allegations of Academic Misconduct may be raised by Centres (see Section 4 below), by NCC Education markers and moderators, or by whistleblowing. NCC Education will investigate all allegations of Academic Misconduct.

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

NCC Education review all available evidence in order to establish if Academic Misconduct has occurred. Where an allegation of Academic Misconduct is supported by the evidence, NCC Education must establish whether the issue is confined to one candidate's work or is more prevalent in the cohort. In order to establish this, NCC Education may need to request

<sup>1</sup> [http://pages.turnitin.com/rs/!paradigms/images/Turnitin\\_WhitePaper\\_PlagiarismSpectrum.pdf](http://pages.turnitin.com/rs/!paradigms/images/Turnitin_WhitePaper_PlagiarismSpectrum.pdf)

a further sample of locally marked work from the Centre, up to and including submission of the full cohort, or may require the Centre to re-check the cohort for evidence of Academic Misconduct.

In some cases, Centres may be required to interview candidates as part of the investigation process. In such cases, NCC Education will write to the Head of Centre setting out exactly what information is required. Centres are expected to comply with any such requests in a prompt manner, and failure to comply with any requests as part of an investigation will be deemed to be Malpractice on the Centre's part, as defined in NCC Education's Malpractice and Maladministration Policy. Candidates are also expected to comply fully with any investigation.

NCC Education holds 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 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 *Post-Results Services Process*.

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. NCC Education holds the right to rescind an award if evidence of Academic Misconduct arises at a later date.

## 4. Academic Misconduct Identified by Centres

### 4.1. In Examinations:

Cheating during an examination needs to be recorded by the Invigilator in an Irregularities Report and submitted with the *Invigilator's Report* (see *Instructions for Conducting Examinations* for more information and copies of these reports). 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 assignments marked by Centre markers should be uploaded to Turnitin to obtain an Originality Report. NCC Education strongly recommends that the Turnitin reports for all copies of work are reviewed, however if the report produces a **similarity score of 40% or more**, the assignment **must** be examined for plagiarism and/or collusion by Centre markers.

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 Centre marker uncovers any form of academic misconduct 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, Centres 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 unit moderation sample.

### **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 excellent.

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, unit names, assignment tasks, etc. A typical background score, which can be ignored, is between 22 and 27% for most NCC Education candidates. This is slightly higher (around 35-40%) for computer programming assignments, where legitimate strings of code will also generate matches.

## **5. Sanctions**

The following is a list of Sanctions which NCC Education may impose on candidates where evidence suggests that Academic Misconduct has occurred:

### **1. 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.

### **2. Mark capped at 40 (pass mark)**

Marks are reduced to 40, allowing the candidate to pass the assessment component but limiting them from achieving a merit or distinction grade.

### **3. Loss of all marks for a specific task of assignment**

Where Academic Misconduct is identified in only one particular task of an assignment, the marks for that task may be set to zero. Where plagiarism is found in isolated tasks, but the combined marks for those tasks make up 50% or more of the total available marks in the assessment, the mark for the whole assessment component must 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.

#### 4. Loss of all marks for an entire assessment component

Where Academic Misconduct is identified throughout a particular assessment component (or individual tasks making up 50% or more of the assessment), the marks for that assessment component will be set to zero.

#### 5. Loss of all marks for a Unit

Where Academic Misconduct is identified in the same Unit at consecutive assessment cycles, the marks for **all assessment components** for the unit may be set to zero.

#### 6. 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 at the qualification (subject to the rules laid out in NCC Education's Academic Regulations). NCC Education reserves the right to extend disqualification to all NCC Education qualifications. Any decisions to disqualify candidates from a qualification are at the discretion of the Head of Quality and Compliance.

The table below demonstrates the appropriate penalty to be applied according to the type of offence committed by the candidate. This is not an exhaustive list - NCC Education retains the right to impose penalties as appropriate on a case-by-case basis - but includes the most common types of offences identified and penalised by NCC Education.

Type of offence	Penalty
Bringing unauthorised materials into the exam room	Loss of all marks for an entire assessment component
Attempting to communicate with others in an exam, disruptive behaviour, etc.	Loss of all marks for an entire assessment component
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 NCC Education 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 acknowledgement 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 of assignment
<p>Isolated examples of plagiarism:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Plagiarised text is generic in nature, e.g. definitions, common phrases</li> <li>- Plagiarised text is in key parts of the assignment which should always be the candidate's own work.</li> <li>- 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.</li> </ul>	<p>Mark capped at 40 / Warning (where original mark is less than 40)</p> <p>Loss of all marks for a specific task of assignment</p> <p>Loss of all marks for an entire assessment component</p>
<p>Poor referencing, e.g. citation of sources is attempted but inconsistent, or fails to use Harvard style.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Where poor referencing leads to small amounts of plagiarism occurring</li> <li>- Where referencing is poor, but no evidence of any significant plagiarised content</li> </ul>	<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 (impersonation)	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 unit at two assessment cycles (do not need to be sequential)	Loss of all marks for a Unit

Repeated academic misconduct in any units at three or more assessment cycles (do not need to be sequential)	Loss of all marks for a Unit
Repeated academic misconduct in any units at four or more assessment cycles	Disqualification from qualification

- The table above is not an exhaustive list of offences. Where serious Academic Misconduct occurs, NCC Education may escalate to more severe penalties as appropriate.
- Where a candidate is given warning, if the candidate then commits a similar offence at a subsequent assessment cycle then the penalty may be escalated by NCC Education.

### **AUTUMN 2020 CYCLE – TIME CONSTRAINED ASSESSMENTS**

NCC Education's guidance for students completing Time-Constrained Assessments at the Autumn 2020 cycle states that using other sources is not required or expected, however if candidates do use content from other sources, they must include them in a reference list at the end of their answer booklet. Full Harvard referencing is not required.

Penalties for failure to adhere to these exceptional requirements will be applied in line with the table above (with particular emphasis on mirroring the approach for assignments).

## **6. Information Sheets**

Appended to this policy are four information sheets, which are also made available separately for download from Connect and NCC Education's website. Centres are strongly encouraged to disseminate this information widely and frequently amongst staff and students.

Information Sheets:

- 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