Academic Malpractice: Procedure for the Handling of Cases

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Introduction

1. *Academic malpractice* is any activity – intentional or otherwise - that is likely to undermine the integrity essential to the qualifications offered by ICA. It includes plagiarism, collusion, fabrication or falsification of results, and anything else that could result in unearned or undeserved credit for those committing this offence. Academic malpractice can result from a deliberate act of cheating, but may be committed unintentionally through failures to cite materials adequately. Whether intended or not, all incidents of academic malpractice will be treated seriously by ICA.

   - *Plagiarism* is the presentation, intentionally or unwittingly, of the ideas, work or words of other people without proper, clear and unambiguous acknowledgement. It includes the copying of the work of any other person, including another candidate, and the submission, in whole or in part, of a candidate's own work where, for example, such work may have been previously submitted for a different assessment. The latter case is known as self-plagiarism.

   - *Collusion* is when a candidate or candidates collaborate with another candidate or candidates, as an individual or group to gain a mark or grade to which they are not entitled. Candidates who allow another candidate to copy their work are also committing collusion and both the copier and the provider of the work are liable to be penalised.

   - *Fabrication* or *falsification* of data or results by individual candidates or groups of candidates is the presentation or inclusion in a piece of work of figures or data, which have been made up or altered and have no basis in verifiable sources; potentially, this may involve other instances of academic malpractice.

2. No circumstances justify academic malpractice, and a penalty must always be applied. Although candidates may present evidence of mitigating circumstances (it will always be the case that evidence of mitigating circumstances will be assessed, however, it is up to a disciplinary panel to decide whether they may be taken into account when determining the penalty to be applied), it must always be borne in mind that candidates are encouraged to bring such circumstances to the attention of ICA at the earliest possible opportunity. This will enable ICA to consider offering appropriate help; this is in accordance with the Policy and Procedures on Mitigating Circumstances. Lack of time, or too much work, do not constitute mitigating circumstances.

3. ICA is obliged, when determining a penalty to be imposed as a consequence of academic malpractice, to take account ‘the consequences which the penalty will have for the academic progression of the candidate concerned’.
Assessing the Severity of Academic Malpractice

4. Each case is different, and disciplinary panels are expected to use their judgment in deciding the seriousness of an offence and deciding whether there are circumstances that might affect the severity of the penalty. Panels must attempt to ensure consistency of treatment between cases, making and recording a judgement about what is a proportionate penalty. Panels must ensure that the penalty chosen does not have consequences for academic progression owing to their disproportionate impact.

5. Factors to take into account when determining the penalty and its proportionality include the following:
   - The candidate’s level of study: the more advanced and experienced the candidate (the more serious the offence)
   - The proportion of the piece of work that was subject to malpractice (the higher the proportion, the more serious the offence)
   - The credit rating of the piece of work (the higher the rating, the more serious the offence)
   - The candidate’s previous history (a subsequent offence, occurring after a candidate has already received a warning or a penalty for academic malpractice, is more serious than a first offence)
   - The degree of intention to deceive in the piece of work in question (which might be assessed by, for example, efforts to change wording, poor referencing or lack of referencing of plagiarised material, evidence from earlier drafts), but also in the hearing itself by failure to tell the truth.

6. The judgement made on any case shall give details of the relevant factors taken into account, stating the degree to which they contributed to the decision and will state the Panel’s intentions in terms of the impact of the penalty on progression/degree awarded. It will also refer to any other matters taken into account; for example, any mitigating circumstances, so that precedence and best practice may be established. The written record will also be important in the event that the candidate makes an appeal concerning the disciplinary process/outcome.

Dissertations/Long Essays/Project Reports/Theses

7. If academic malpractice is suspected in an essay, case-study, portfolio or similar piece of work, the work should continue to be marked or assessed to gather evidence of the extent of the alleged malpractice. The formal examination process should then be suspended and the result withheld pending an investigation.

8. The examiner(s) should submit a brief report, identifying the possible malpractice to ICA who will undertake the investigation as described below (paragraph 18).
Oral Examination

9. On the rare occasions that academic malpractice is first suspected during a viva the examination should continue. Part of the purpose of the viva is to explore the extent to which the research is the candidate’s own work, particularly in disciplines where collaborative work in large groups is the norm.

10. The examiners should include in their report the extent of the suspected academic malpractice. The result of the examination should then be withheld and the case referred for consideration of the alleged academic malpractice.

Disciplinary meeting

11. Candidates are given the opportunity to attend a panel meeting. Candidates who are unable to attend in person are offered the opportunity to have their interview conducted via video or teleconferencing facilities (or equivalent). If this is not possible, or the opportunity is declined, or no response is received within a reasonable time frame (bearing in mind the candidate’s location), it is reasonable to hear the case ‘in absentia’.

12. The normal procedure should be followed, with the candidate asked to respond to the allegation. They should be supplied with full details of the case against them and informed of the possible consequences if they are deemed to be guilty of academic malpractice. They should be given a suitable time limit for a response (this may vary according to where they live), and be informed that if they do not respond a decision will be made on the basis of the evidence available to the panel. Once a decision has been made it should be communicated to the candidate.

Previous assessed work confirmed by an assessment board or authority

13. Unless there are very good reasons, there is no expectation that, on the finding of academic malpractice in a piece of assessed work, previous work will be routinely checked. The option remains to review all of the candidate’s assessed work if the investigator determines, through consultation, that it is appropriate to do so.
Turnitin Software

14. To check candidates are working in a fair and academically appropriate manner, ICA uses text comparison software to detect potential cases of plagiarism in work that is submitted for assessment. Turnitin, carries out the equivalent of an internet search, looks for matches between the text included in a piece of work submitted by a candidate with all forms of information and resources publicly available on the internet. The main use of Turnitin is to check for cases of direct copying, and/or not properly referencing various types of source materials. It can also be used to compare each student’s assignments with the module materials and other commonly used or provided references.

15. For each assignment submitted to Turnitin, an ‘originality’ report is produced showing the percentage of text that matches specific websites.

16. These reports will be made available to the assessment team and in some cases they may decide to take the matter further. This may result in some further guidance about academic conduct and support to avoid any further incidents or, if more serious, may result in further action taking place.

17. Depending on the questions being asked and the format of the submitted answer, some level of matching between scripts and with other sources is expected. The Assessment Team will take all such matters into account when reviewing each of the reports and deciding whether a student has plagiarised.

18. ICA will review carefully any assignment where a report contains more than 30% of text matches after the expected level of matching has been removed.

19. The ICA Manager will assess whether or not the evidence suggests that academic malpractice, as defined in paragraph 1, may have been committed.

20. If the ICA Manager judges that the case does not constitute academic malpractice but rather poor academic practice, the matter will be referred back to the tutor or partner organisation responsible for the candidate, with appropriate advice as to how to proceed [advice may include, for example, that ‘poor referencing’ = ‘a poor piece of work’ and should be marked accordingly]. In such instances, it is essential that the candidate is given appropriate feedback and guidance.

21. In determining whether an instance constitutes a repeat (subsequent) offence, penalties applied in a previous programme of study/award shall not be included. Repeat offences are those that take place in work contributing to a single award. A penalty for academic malpractice applied during the course of an advanced certificate programme does not constitute a previous offence in the case of the same candidate who is currently studying for a diploma. After a penalty is applied to an assessment within a programme any further infringement within that programme will be considered a repeat offence.
Appendix 1: Handling Cases of Suspected Academic Malpractice

Assessment team investigates potential academic malpractice identified by an examiner or through Turnitin software.

The designated officer reviews the script, along with any substantive evidence and makes a decision in accordance with ICA policy. At this point the initial review is completed.

Case does not constitute academic malpractice: ICA Manager is informed, the script is fully marked and progresses to the Assessment Board.

Assessment Board meet and draw up feedback and guidance for the candidate and advise them of any panel decision that has been made in regard to their script and the impact this may have on their mark or award.

The candidate has the right to appeal in accordance with ICA procedure.

Case constitutes academic malpractice. All evidence is reviewed before going to the Assessment Board. The candidate is informed that he/she is under investigation for academic malpractice and that a panel will meet on a given time and date where they can provide an explanation.

The panel meet to review the details of the case and to decide the severity of academic malpractice that has occurred and to impose a penalty based upon those described in the ICA’s academic malpractice policy.