Guidance on academic sanctions

This document aims to give guidance to Chairs of Boards of Examiners, although many of the principles would apply elsewhere.

**Guidance on ‘Minor’**

Chairs of Boards of Examiners look at cases that are regarded as negligible or minor. No definition of ‘minor’ is given because there are so many factors to take into account. What can be given is a broad description, to be interpreted with discretion taking into account other factors. If there is any doubt, please contact the Student Progress Service for advice. In this document reference will be made to cheating in general and plagiarism in particular. It should be understood that this is always alleged cheating or plagiarism until a formal decision is reached.

- **Starting point:** the work affected is equivalent to less than 25% of a 10 credit module. In other words, the student has gained by cheating less than 25% of the marks for a 10 credit module (or something equivalent to this). The appendix lists some examples of equivalent amounts. More will be said on the meaning of ‘work affected’ in due course.

Factors that render alleged misconduct more serious:
- A repeat offence. [A repeat offence should not be regarded as minor.]
- Theft of another student’s work. [Theft should not normally be regarded as minor.]
- The extent of the offence.
- An intention to deceive.
- Premeditation.
- Dishonesty during the investigation. [Denial after presentation of evidence, attempt to cover up, attempt to blame others, feigned misunderstanding of rules.]
- Lack of remorse.

Factors that render alleged misconduct less serious:
- A lack of understanding of the rules.
- No intention to deceive.
- Little premeditation.
- Honesty and openness during the investigation.
- Genuine remorse.
- Mitigating circumstances.

The lists of factors presented here are not meant to be exhaustive.

**Plagiarism**

In what follows it is assumed that (possible) plagiarism (the unacknowledged use of another person’s work) has been identified in a piece of work. Broadly speaking, a ‘piece of work’ is regarded as work marked as a single entity. It might be, for example, one item of coursework out of many, a section of a project, or a single essay possibly comprising the entire assessment of a module.
1. The Chair of the Board of Examiners has to decide whether the irregularity is negligible, minor or major. In this context ‘work affected’ is the plagiarised part, so the starting point is to ask: is the plagiarised part worth less than 25% of the marks for a 10 credit module? Ideally, you need to have two marks in mind: a mark for the work as presented (i.e., before any suggestion of plagiarism), and a mark that would have been awarded if other people’s work had been acknowledged appropriately. Sometimes these marks will be precise, particularly if the work affected is a small part of the assessment. If the difference between the two marks corresponds to 25% or more of the marks for a 10 credit module (or the equivalent) then you should contact the Student Progress Service. At other times the marks will be approximate, or perhaps the work has not been marked at all, but in most cases a broad estimate of the difference will enable you to decide whether the irregularity is negligible, minor or major, particularly when you take other factors into account.

If you decide that an irregularity is minor, then you will need to bear in mind the second mark (the mark that would have been awarded if other people’s work had been acknowledged appropriately). This is the mark that would be returned if you decided to take no further action. We could refer to this as the Reduced Mark. Some possible approaches to obtaining this mark are listed below.

- Calculate a precise mark.
- Conclude that the work would have essentially no value: a corresponding mark would be 0.
- Conclude that the work would have some value, but not up to a pass level: a corresponding mark would be 20.
- Conclude that the work would have some value, a bare pass: a corresponding mark would be 40 for work up to Level 6 and 50 for work at Level 7.
- Assign a grade boundary mark: 50, 60 or 70.
- Assign a mid-grade mark: 45, 55 or 65.

2. The second step is to decide on a sanction. In other words the student potentially suffers a penalty in addition to the Reduced Mark calculated in Paragraph 1 above. The penalty might well be an additional mark reduction, but it might also involve a resubmission and it might involve a requirement to seek guidance on plagiarism. We shall come to the resubmission and guidance shortly, but we begin with the possibility of an additional mark reduction.

An additional mark reduction should reflect the seriousness of the plagiarism, taking into account the factors listed at the start of this document. The new mark is combined with other assessment components (if appropriate) to arrive at a Provisional Module Mark. It should be made clear to the student that if a resubmission is required, there is no opportunity to improve the module mark for the current attempt.

- For the least serious offences, the Reduced Mark calculated in Paragraph 1 might be a sufficient sanction.
- For more serious offences, it is recommended that the mark for the work is reduced to a grade boundary or to 0 or 20. The reduction should reflect the seriousness of the plagiarism.
If the proposed additional mark reduction corresponds to 25% or more of the marks for a 10 credit module (or the equivalent) then you should contact the Student Progress Service. A substantial mark reduction would suggest a major irregularity.

Take care over mark reductions that would trigger an unexpected module fail. Some modules have certain components on which failure triggers a fail mark for the module, for example failure in one component might lead to a maximum module mark of 39. It would be unfair to reduce the component mark to a fail mark without considering the impact on the module mark.

- It would be permissible to decide on a mark reduction which moved a component mark from a pass to a fail, and to add a decision that this should not automatically trigger a fail mark for the module on this occasion.

**Example of a module failure triggered by a reduction in coursework marks.** The 20 credit module XYZ2000 has a coursework component worth 20% of the module (and an exam worth 80%). The Degree Programme Regulations stipulate that the coursework must be passed, and that a student failing the coursework cannot have a module return mark greater than 39. A student is initially awarded 55 on the coursework, but this is reduced to 45 when work copied from another student is struck out. You decide that the irregularity is minor and (taking all circumstances into account) that an additional reduction to 20 would be appropriate. However the student has an exam mark of 75. If you used a coursework mark of 45, the module mark would be 69. In normal circumstances a coursework mark of 20 would lead to a module mark of 39, so the effect of the coursework mark reduction would be 30% on a 20 credit module (equivalent to 60% on a 10 credit module). **You can make a decision** that for this particular student the coursework mark will be 20 but the module mark is not restricted to 39, and in this example it would be 64. The justification would be that the student’s coursework has reached the required level, it is just the sanction that leads to a coursework mark less than 40.

**Note:** In the example above, if instead the student is initially awarded 45 on the coursework, reduced to 35 when the copied work is struck out, then a fail mark on the module would be justified if this what happens to students who score 35 honestly.

3. In almost every case there will be a need for some sort of written warning.
   - If the plagiarism is negligible, the warning can be in the form a formal caution. This does not remain on the student’s record although it remains as evidence of formal advice on future conduct.
   - In other cases the student should receive a formal written warning as to their future conduct. This warning will remain on their record. The Chair of the Board of Examiners should **not** issue a final written warning – a final warning can only be issued by Student Progress Service or a Disciplinary Committee.

4. There is an option to require resubmission of the piece of work in which plagiarism has occurred. It is anticipated that resubmission will often be required, but it is not compulsory. A resubmission allows the student to demonstrate that they understand how to produce work without plagiarism. However there will be situations where resubmission would not achieve anything significant or where resubmission is not feasible. If resubmission is not required, then the Provisional Module Mark should be used as the Return Mark for the module.
Resubmission should not normally be used in a way that allows a student to improve their mark on the current attempt. An honest student might struggle with an assignment and submit work that receives a low mark; they live with the academic consequences. A dishonest student should not be treated more favourably than an honest student. However the mark on resubmission might, in certain circumstances, be used in a subsequent attempt. [The term ‘attempt’ is used in the sense of the formal assessment attempts, so if a student has plagiarised a 1st attempt, then the resubmission mark might count towards the resit.]

If resubmission is required, then the student is required to achieve a specified level on the resubmission in order to proceed on their degree programme. Normally the specified level will correspond to the pass mark for the module, but a lower level could be specified in some circumstances.

• If the student achieves the specified level on resubmission, then they may proceed on their degree programme (subject to normal academic requirements being met) and the Provisional Module Mark should be used as the Return Mark for the module.

• If the student does not achieve the specified level on resubmission, then they may not proceed on their degree programme. Further guidance is given later.

There will occasions when the module is failed, sometimes as a consequence of failure on the plagiarised assessment, sometimes as a consequence of failure on another component of assessment, and sometimes both. If the module reassessment is quite distinct from the plagiarised work, for example because reassessment is exam-only or because an essay is set on a different topic, then the resubmission remains entirely separate from the reassessment.

There will be occasions when resubmission would normally be (either the whole of or part of) the reassessment for the module. In such cases the resubmission can form, or be part of, the reassessment. You should then clearly advise the student that the resubmission requirement is both a sanction and (either the whole of or part of) the reassessment for the module. If you are deciding on a sanction before the module has been completed, you should advise the student that the resubmission will become a reassessment if a reassessment is required. Note that a requirement to resubmit and reach a prescribed level is often a stronger requirement than a normal reassessment, because for example it rules out passing by compensation or proceeding carrying a failed module, and it rules out informal compensation from other assessment components. However there will be cases where a requirement to resubmit achieves little more than a reassessment, and in such cases you are free to conclude that a resubmission sanction would serve no purpose.

There will be cases in which the student is already on their final attempt. In such cases resubmission can be required, but it cannot count towards a reassessment, and it cannot improve the student’s mark on the module. If this means that the student necessarily fails the module, then successful resubmission will allow the student to be considered in the same way as other students who fail on the final attempt at the module. Note that failure on the final attempt at a module does not necessarily prevent progression or the recommendation of an award. For example, a final year undergraduate student could fail up to 20 credits and still qualify for a degree.
However there are circumstances where the module failure means that the student cannot progress or receive an award; in these circumstances it would be pointless to require resubmission.

5. Failure to achieve the specified level on resubmission means that a student may not proceed on their degree programme. There follows some discussion of what this means in practice.

The Student Progress Service should always be advised when a student has not met the specified level on resubmission. Such a failure can be seen to represent a further assessment irregularity. Student Progress Service will assess the seriousness of this failure. Depending on the SPS assessment, one of the following could occur:

- No further action.
- A revised deadline for resubmission.
- A sanction determined by SPS.
- A Student Disciplinary Committee hearing.

6. A requirement to seek guidance on plagiarism. An additional sanction may be a requirement that the student read the documents on plagiarism on the Right-Cite web site, and that they complete the online tutorial. It is the student’s responsibility to complete this action but there is no requirement to record the completion.

In order to stress the importance of the Chair of the Board of Examiners making a judgement on the seriousness of the case, on its merits, here are three examples.

Example A. Student A submitted an essay which constituted the entire assessment of a 10 credit module. Substantial plagiarism was indicated by Turnitin (60 – 70%). The initial mark (prior to the discovery of plagiarism) was estimated as a bare II.2. The value of the work with appropriate referencing (i.e., the Reduced Mark) would be low and was given as 20%. On investigation it was concluded that the student did not understand either the meaning of plagiarism or the low value that would be placed on the work with appropriate referencing. There appeared to be no intent to deceive. The student openly described their working practices, using internet sources, copying and pasting. Moreover the student experienced significant family difficulties which partly explain their failure to read the degree programme handbook. In the light of this the offence is regarded as minor. The module mark was reduced to 0 – this was the Provisional Module Mark. The student was required to resubmit and to attain the pass mark, the resubmission constituted a second attempt on this module. The student was required to read the documents on plagiarism on the Right-Cite web site, and to complete the online tutorial. Student A also received a written warning as to their future conduct.

Example B. Student B submitted an essay which constituted 10% of the assessment of a 20 credit module. Substantial plagiarism was indicated by Turnitin (60 – 70%). No initial mark was available, but a brief look suggested a below average mark. The value of the work with appropriate referencing (i.e., the Reduced Mark) would have been very low and was given as 0%. On investigation it was concluded that the student fully understand the meaning of plagiarism, having attended a seminar on plagiarism in the week before submission. The student copied and pasted from internet sources, and then undertook some editing in order to disguise the plagiarism. The student lied throughout, changing their story repeatedly. The
mark for essay could not be reduced below 0. The offence was regarded as warranting a more serious sanction and was therefore forwarded to the Student Progress Service.

**Example C.** Student C submitted an essay which constitutes 10% of the assessment of a 10 credit module. Substantial plagiarism was indicated by Turnitin (40 – 50%). No initial mark was available. The value of the work with appropriate referencing (i.e., the Reduced Mark) would have been low and was given as 20%. On investigation, the student fully admitted plagiarism and acknowledged an intention to deceive. The student apologised and promised not to repeat the offence. The offence was regarded as minor. The mark for the essay was reduced to 0 – this would be combined with an exam mark to yield the Provisional Module Mark. The student was required to resubmit the essay and to attain the pass mark. Provided the student achieved a pass mark on resubmission and provided they did well enough in the exam, they would pass the module at the first attempt. The student was required to read the documents on plagiarism on the Right-Cite web site, and to complete the online tutorial. Student C also received a written warning as to their future conduct.

**Collusion or Allowing work to be copied**

The Procedure for Assessment Irregularities gives as an example of an irregularity “Permitting another student to copy work” – this could be within an examination but we shall return to that under Examination Irregularities below. Permission does not need to be explicit, it can be tacit. Knowing that another student is likely to copy and turning a ‘blind eye’ to that possibility constitutes permission. In this context ‘work affected’ is the work copied by another student, so the starting point is to ask: is the work copied equivalent to less than 25% of a 10 credit module?

Faced with a student admitting they gave access to a piece of work, but claiming that they did not give permission for it to be copied, it is necessary to decide whether permission (either explicit or tacit) is more likely than the explanation given by the student. Some factors in this decision will depend on the details of the assessment. Others will depend on advice readily available to the students prior to the incident. For example, was explicit advice to avoid ‘lending’ given in induction and in the programme handbook? Does the hand-in sheet include a specific statement that the work has not been made available to another student in a manner that would allow it to be copied?

If it is found that one student has permitted a piece of work to be copied it will be necessary to decide upon a sanction, taking into account the factors listed at the start of this document. In this instance there will be an initial mark for the piece of work. It is unlikely that resubmission will be part of a sanction, but a mark reduction is permissible.

- For the least serious offences, a mark reduction might be unnecessary.
- For more serious offences, it is recommended that the mark for the work is reduced to a grade boundary or to 0 or 20. The reduction should reflect the seriousness of the offence.

If the mark reduction corresponds to 25% or more of the marks for a 10 credit module, then you should contact the Student Progress Service. A substantial mark reduction would suggest a major irregularity.
Take care over mark reductions that would trigger an unexpected module fail. [See the plagiarism guidance above.]

In almost every case there will be a need for some sort of written warning. (See Paragraph 3 under Plagiarism.)

Here are three examples illustrating different approaches.

**Example D.** Students D and X were discovered to have submitted very similar essays counting 20% of a 10 credit module. On investigation the students gave the same account. They met for coffee to discuss ideas and references for the essay. After half an hour D remembered that he had a lecture and left the essay with X for an hour, *for reference purposes only*. X had to leave before D returned and ended up keeping the essay overnight, in which time he decided to copy the essay, making editorial changes to make it look different. When challenged, D was horrified to hear that his essay had been copied. No reference to collusion was made at Induction and the degree programme handbook stated only “You must not allow another student to copy your work.” D was adamant that he had not allowed X to copy his work, he was merely allowing X to see the references and the structure of the essay. It was concluded that, on the balance of probabilities, D had not given permission for his work to be copied. He was therefore not guilty of an Assessment Irregularity. However, in the outcome letter Student D was told to take care in future to avoid providing any opportunity for another student to copy his work. [X was dealt with as a plagiarism case.]

**Example E.** Students E and Y were discovered to have submitted very similar essays counting 20% of a 10 credit module. On investigation the students gave the same account. Y had approached E and asked for some ideas on the essay. In response E had emailed Y a copy of his essay. Y decided to copy the essay, making editorial changes to make it look different. When challenged, E was horrified to hear that his essay had been copied. The degree programme handbook stated clearly that students should not pass copies of their work to other students because of the danger of copying. This handbook entry was highlighted during an Induction session on plagiarism. E was adamant that he had not allowed Y to copy his work, he was merely allowing Y to see the references and the structure of the essay. E admitted that he had been present for the Induction session, although he could not recall the collusion reference. It was concluded that, on the balance of probabilities, E had given permission for his work to be copied, albeit tacitly. The original mark on E’s essay was 60%. This was reduced to 40% as a sanction. [Y was dealt with as a plagiarism case.] Student E also received a written warning as to his future conduct.

**Example F.** Students F and Z were discovered to have submitted identical spreadsheets in an assessment counting 10% of a 10 credit module. On investigation the students gave the same account. Z had approached F and asked for help with some aspect of the spreadsheet. In response F had emailed Z a copy of her spreadsheet. Z decided to copy the spreadsheet, without making any changes. When challenged, F was horrified to hear that her spreadsheet had been copied. No reference to collusion was made at Induction and the degree programme handbook stated only “You must not allow another student to copy your work.” F was adamant that she had not allowed Z to copy her work, she was merely allowing Z to see the structure of the spreadsheet, she was expecting no more than would have occurred sitting next to Z in a computer cluster. It was noted that the nature of the spreadsheet assignment was such that being allowed to look at someone else’s spreadsheet would inevitably give all the required answers. Thus looking at someone else’s spreadsheet sitting next to them in a
computer cluster would constitute collusion. It was concluded that, on the balance of probabilities, F had given permission for her work to be copied, she knew full well that she was giving Z the answers. The original mark on F’s spreadsheet was 55%. This was reduced to 0% as a sanction. [Z was dealt with as a plagiarism case.] Student F also received a written warning as to her future conduct.

**Examination Irregularities**

Although examination irregularities would normally be considered in relation to formal University examinations, it is possible that they will arise in School organised examinations, possibly termed ‘tests’. In this context ‘work affected’ is (the whole of) the exam/test, so the question to ask is: is the exam/test equivalent to less than 25% of the marks in a 10 credit module?

You might wish to be aware that in formal University examinations, whilst each case will be treated on its merits, a first offence, admitted at interview, might well attract a sanction of 0 for the exam or module with a requirement to take another exam (and with the intention that the new exam will be marked as a further attempt if necessary).

In determining the seriousness of the offence, the factors listed at the start of this document should be considered. Additional factors that might be taken into account include (but are not limited to):

- The extent to which unauthorised material has been used in the exam.
- The quantity of unauthorised material introduced.
- The extent to which the student has apparently copied from another student.
- Actions taken by the student following discovery (such as hiding or destroying material).
- Aggression towards invigilators.

The ‘least serious’ offences are generally those where the introduction of unauthorised material was accidental and the material was not used.

The Chair of the Board of Examiners can impose a mark reduction for the examination/test.  
- For the least serious offences, a mark reduction might be unnecessary.
- For more serious offences, it is recommended that the mark for the work is reduced to a grade boundary or to 0 or 20. The reduction should reflect the seriousness of the offence.

If the mark reduction corresponds to 25% or more of the marks for a 10 credit module, then you should contact the Student Progress Service. A substantial mark reduction would suggest a major irregularity.

Take care over mark reductions that would trigger an unexpected module fail. [See the plagiarism guidance above.]

In almost every case there will be a need for some sort of written warning. (See Paragraph 3 under Plagiarism.)

There is no expectation that the Chair of a Board of Examiners will require a student to attend another examination/test.
Note that one student copying from another is an irregularity, and so is permitting another student to copy work. As explained under Collusion above, permission does not need to be explicit, although in this context evidence of tacit permission might be difficult to obtain.

**Example G.** Student G was observed apparently copying from another student in an in-course test counting 10% of a 10 credit module. On investigation, some of Student G’s answers appeared to be identical to those of the other student and Student G admitted cheating when interviewed. There was no clear evidence that the other student permitted their work to be copied. Student G apologised and promised not to repeat the offence. The offence was regarded as minor. The mark for the test was reduced to 0 – this would be combined with an end-of-module exam mark to yield the Provisional Module Mark. Student G also received a written warning as to their future conduct.

**Example H.** Student H was found to have notes written on his pencil eraser in an in-course test counting 10% of a 10 credit module. Student H admitted cheating when interviewed, acknowledging that he had planned to use the notes if necessary but had not actually used them. The material on the pencil eraser, although relevant to the module, did not come up on the test. Student H apologised and promised not to repeat the offence. The offence was regarded as minor. The initial mark for the test was 45. It was reduced to 20 as a sanction – this would be combined with an end-of-module exam mark to yield the Provisional Module Mark. Student H also received a written warning as to his future conduct.
Appendix I

The following would be marks gained by cheating that are equivalent to gaining 25% of the marks on a 10 credit module:

a) In an essay comprising the entire assessment for a 10 credit module, marked out of 100, a gain of 25 marks.
b) In an essay comprising half of the assessment for a 10 credit module, marked out of 50, a gain of 25 marks.
c) In an essay comprising half of the assessment for a 10 credit module, marked out of 100, a gain of 50 marks.
d) In an essay comprising half of the assessment for a 20 credit module, marked out of 50, a gain of 12.5 marks.
e) In an essay comprising a quarter of the assessment for a 10 credit module, marked out of 100, a gain of 100 marks.
f) In an test comprising a quarter of the assessment for a 10 credit module, marked out of 100, a gain of 100 marks.

The following are examples of irregularities that, at first sight, **WOULD BE** minor.

a) On a 10 credit module, any cheating on a component of assessment that comprises less than 25% of the module.
b) On a 20 credit module, any cheating on a component of assessment that comprises less than 10% of the module.
c) On a 40 credit module, any cheating on a component of assessment that comprises less than 5% of the module.
d) On a 10 credit module, an essay that comprises the entire assessment, of apparently II.2 quality, that registers a Turnitin score of less than 40%.
e) On a 10 credit module, an essay that comprises the entire assessment, of apparently II.1 quality, that registers a Turnitin score of less than 30%.
f) On a 10 credit module, an essay that comprises half of the assessment, of apparently II.2 quality, that registers a Turnitin score of less than 80%.

The following are examples of irregularities that, at first sight, **WOULD NOT BE** minor.

a) On a 10 credit module, an essay that comprises the entire assessment, of apparently II.2 quality, that registers a Turnitin score of more than 50%.
b) On a 10 credit module, an essay that comprises the entire assessment, of apparently II.1 quality, that registers a Turnitin score of more than 40%.
c) On a 10 credit module, an essay that comprises half of the assessment, of apparently II.2 quality, that registers a Turnitin score of 100%.
d) On a 20 credit module, an essay that comprises the entire assessment, of apparently II.2 quality, that registers a Turnitin score of more than 25%.
e) On a 20 credit module, an essay that comprises the entire assessment, of apparently II.1 quality, that registers a Turnitin score of more than 20%.
f) On a 20 credit module, an essay that comprises half of the assessment, of apparently II.2 quality, that registers a Turnitin score of 50%.
g) On a 40 credit module, an essay that comprises the entire assessment, of apparently II.2 quality, that registers a Turnitin score of more than 12%.
h) On a 40 credit module, an essay that comprises the entire assessment, of apparently II.1 quality, that registers a Turnitin score of more than 10%.
i) On a 40 credit module, an essay that comprises half of the assessment, of apparently II.2 quality, that registers a Turnitin score of 25%.

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