

## Student Assessment Irregularities Procedure (Academic)

This procedure is applicable to **all** registered and partnership students and should be read in conjunction with the [Student Discipline Policy](#).

It sets out what you can expect if you are the subject of an Assessment Irregularities investigation.

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### INTRODUCTION

Newcastle University has a [Student Charter – Rights and Responsibilities](#) that sets out the University’s expectations for the standards of conduct of ALL of its students. These academic values are essential to the integrity of an academic community and you are expected to :

- Maintain high standards of academic conduct and honesty
- Familiarise yourself with and applying the guidance provided on good academic practice, including the avoidance of plagiarism and other academic misconduct (for example, the purchasing or misuse of the work of others)
- Ensure that your submitted work is your own and that you acknowledge appropriately any use made of the work of others (as recommended on the [ASK webpage](#))
- Abide by the [Exam Rules and Guidance](#).

Students are reminded that University disciplinary investigations are civil cases and the standard of proof required is ‘on the balance of probabilities.’ This means that the Chair of the Board of Examiners, Case Officer or Student Disciplinary Committee will make a reasoned judgement as to whether or not an incident is likely to have happened, based on the evidence available to them.

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### SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

We understand that being involved in an investigation into Assessment Irregularities can be a stressful experience. You may find it helpful to seek support and advice via the following services:

- [Student Health and Wellbeing Service](#)
- [Student Progress Service](#)
- [Student Advice Centre of the Students’ Union](#)

If you are required to attend any meetings throughout this process, you may choose to be accompanied by a friend or supporter. Please see the [guidance on the role of a friend or supporter](#). We strongly encourage you to access this support.

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### TERMINOLOGY (see Appendix 1 for types of Assessment Irregularity and Appendix 2 for likely sanctions)

**Authorised Person:** an employee of the University who is authorised to undertake disciplinary investigations. This is usually a colleague from the Student Progress Service (Casework team/Examinations Office) or the Chair of the Board of Examiners (Level 1), and the Academic Registrar (Level 2). The Authorised Person may nominate another senior colleague with appropriate knowledge of the Assessment Irregularities procedure to act on their behalf.

**Chair of the Board of Examiners:** an academic colleague responsible for overseeing assessment and award process within a specific programme of study.

**Disciplinary Convenor:** A member of academic staff appointed by the University Education Committee to convene Student Disciplinary and Disciplinary Appeal Committee hearings. The Disciplinary Convenor may nominate a deputy, drawn from the Student Disciplinary Panel, to act on their behalf.

**PGR Panel:** For postgraduate research degree programmes, both the Project Approval Panel and the Annual Review Progress Panel are deemed to be equivalent to the Board of Examiners for taught programmes.

**Sanction:** a penalty that is imposed on a student when it is decided that there has been behavioural misconduct. See *Appendix 1* for a list of examples of misconduct and their likely sanctions.

**Student Disciplinary Committee:** a Committee made up of three independent senior members of staff whose role is to assess evidence presented to them and decide on an outcome and any related sanctions. Members of Student Disciplinary Committees undergo extensive training on numerous topics relating to disciplinary cases.

**Student Disciplinary Appeal Committee:** a Committee made up of two independent senior members of staff who were not involved in the original investigation and a Students' Union Sabbatical Officer, whose role is to assess an appeal against a Disciplinary decision or sanction.

**Student Responder:** The student who is the subject of an investigation into the reported misconduct (including assessment irregularities).

Where reference is made in this procedure to any named University role, this is intended to include their nominees.

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## ASSESSMENT IRREGULARITIES PROCEDURE

There are three levels at which an assessment irregularities decision may be considered:

- **Level 1: Local Resolution**  
Most reports of misconduct are dealt with locally in the first instance. The Examinations Office or the Chair of the Board of Examiners for the Student Responder's programme of study may investigate the reported assessment irregularities and decide on appropriate action to be taken.
- **Level 2: Formal Investigation**  
Where the reports of assessment irregularities are considered to be more serious, where there are repeated incidents or perceived dishonesty, or where there has been a lack of engagement with the Level 1 process, the case can be forwarded for a formal investigation to take place. A Disciplinary Case Officer will be appointed to investigate the case and the outcome will be determined by the Academic Registrar after consideration of all the available evidence.
- **Level 3: Student Disciplinary Committee**  
Where the Academic Registrar determines that a case is sufficiently serious, the case will be referred to a Student Disciplinary Committee for further consideration.

See: *Appendix 1 and 2: Examples of assessment irregularities and likely sanctions*

## What happens first?

- When a report of misconduct is made against you, an Authorised Person or Case Officer will be appointed to your case.
- If the case is being investigated at Level 2 of this procedure, you will be provided with the name of a colleague in the Student Progress Service who will act as Case Officer for your case.
- If you have a disability or support need, the University will consider whether reasonable adjustments, or other arrangements, need to be put in place for you while your assessment irregularity case is being considered.
- You will be informed of the reported assessment irregularity in writing and will be given an opportunity to make a written statement in response to the report.
- You may also be invited to attend an interview to discuss the circumstances reported. This will give you the opportunity to provide your version of events, provide clarification, and present any mitigating circumstances that you wish to be considered.
- You may be accompanied by a friend or supporter as discussed in the 'Support and Guidance' section above.
- Non-verbatim notes will be taken of any meetings you are asked to attend, but meetings will **not** be recorded. You will be provided with a copy of the notes of any meetings you attend, with the exception of formal hearings (for example, Student Disciplinary Committees or Student Disciplinary Appeals Committees).
- You are expected to respond to the details of the report and be present in person at any interview or hearing to which you are invited. However, if you fail to engage or attend, without good reason, the University may proceed in your absence.
- If you withdraw from the University while the investigation into the assessment irregularity is still ongoing, the case will normally be concluded in your absence.
- If your programme of study leads to professional registration and an assessment irregularity is found to have occurred, you may also be subject to an investigation under the [Fitness to Practise procedures](#).
- If the reported assessment irregularity relates to an award which has already been conferred (i.e. if your degree has already been awarded), please familiarise yourself with the [Procedure for Revocation of a Degree or other Distinction conferred by the University](#).
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If you are a member of staff who has discovered a suspected assessment irregularity, please consult the [Assessment Irregularities Guidance for Staff](#)

### Level 1: Local Resolution

Most reports of minor assessment irregularities are considered and determined by either the Chair of the Board of Examiners for the Student Responder's programme of study, or the Examinations Office.

The Chair or another nominated academic colleague will invite you to provide a written statement in response to the allegations made against you and may invite you to an interview to discuss the reported assessment irregularity.

Following the interview, and considering all the evidence available to them, the Chair/Examinations Officer will decide on an appropriate outcome, which may include sanctions being imposed on the Student Responder.

You will be informed, in writing, of the outcome of your case by the Chair/Examinations Officer and will be given details of how to appeal any decisions you are unhappy about.

Under some circumstances, the Chair/Examinations Officer may decide it is more appropriate for your case to be referred to Level 2 of this procedure. These circumstances include where:

- The reported irregularity is more serious than initially understood;
- The case involves repeated or persistent assessment irregularities;
- The Student Responder has not engaged fully with the Level 1 investigation.

### **Level 2: Formal investigation**

Where the reported assessment irregularity is more serious, there have been repeated or persistent instances of assessment irregularities or perceived dishonesty, or the Student Responder has not engaged fully with the Level 1 process, a Level 2 formal investigation will take place.

If you are being investigated under Level 2 of this procedure, a Case Officer from the Student Progress Service will be appointed to investigate the case and you will be invited to submit a written statement in response to the suspected assessment irregularity. You may also be invited to attend an interview with the Case Officer.

When the case has been determined, you will be informed in writing whether misconduct has been found, along with any relevant sanctions that are being imposed on you. You will also be given details of how to appeal any decisions you are unhappy about.

Where it is determined that the reported assessment irregularity is sufficiently serious or complex, the case will be referred to a Student Disciplinary Committee instead, to be considered under Level 3 of this procedure.

### **Level 3: Student Disciplinary Committee**

More complex and/or very serious assessment irregularities cases will be investigated by a Student Disciplinary Committee, which is made up of three senior members of staff who have had no prior involvement with the case. The Student Disciplinary Committee will hold a hearing to consider the evidence, and the Student Responder will be asked to attend to answer questions and respond to the evidence presented.

You will be informed in writing within 5 working days of interview and/or receipt of a statement if your case is to be heard by a Disciplinary Committee. You will be notified in writing of the constitution of the Student Disciplinary Committee. If you have any concerns about the impartiality of any member of the Student Disciplinary Committee, you may write to the Head of the Student Progress Service within 5 working days to request a review of the Committee membership by the Disciplinary Convenor.

After considering all the evidence available, the Disciplinary Committee will determine an appropriate outcome, which may include sanctions. There is a defined list of possible sanctions that are appropriate at this level. (See: *Appendix 2*)

You will be informed of the outcome in writing after the hearing and will be issued with a letter stating the full reasons for the decision within 10 working days. You will also be given details of how to appeal any decisions you are unhappy about.



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## Student Disciplinary Appeals

You have the right to appeal against any decision or sanction imposed on you.

Appeal requests must be submitted in writing to [casework@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:casework@ncl.ac.uk) within 21 calendar days of the date of either the Outcome letter or the Statement of Reason, whichever is later.

You should carefully consider your reasons for appeal so that you can explain why you are appealing. Your reasons should include at least one of the following:

- New material evidence is available that was not previously reasonably available;
- Procedural irregularity (i.e. you feel that this procedure was not correctly followed);
- Bias or prejudice (i.e. you feel that the investigation was prejudged or unfair in some way);
- Excessive or inappropriate sanction (i.e. you believe that the sanction imposed on you is not proportionate to the determined irregularity);
- The decision was one that no reasonable person/committee could have reached on the evidence available.

The Disciplinary Convenor will review your case and decide whether or not your appeal meets the grounds to be admitted. If the Disciplinary Convenor agrees that there are grounds for appeal, the appeal will be considered as follows:

- **Level 1 or 2 cases**

The Disciplinary Convenor will appoint a member of the Disciplinary Panel who was not involved with the original case to consider your appeal. They may call a Disciplinary Appeal Committee hearing if they believe this would give more appropriate consideration to the case.

- **Level 3 case**

The appeal will be considered by a Disciplinary Appeal Committee and you will be invited to attend an appeal hearing. The Disciplinary Convenor will decide whether a full re-hearing is required or only a reconsideration of the sanction.

If the Disciplinary Convenor determines that there are no grounds to your appeal, the appeal request will be dismissed.

When a Level 1 or 2 case appeal is considered by a Disciplinary Panel member, or when a Level 3 case appeal is considered by a Disciplinary Appeal Committee, the outcome of the appeal may confirm, change or remove the original disciplinary outcome: if a Disciplinary Appeal Committee is only required to reconsider sanctions, the outcome of the appeal may only confirm or change the original sanctions.

When an appeal hearing is convened, the arrangements will be as for a Student Disciplinary Committee hearing, except that the Disciplinary Panel member or Disciplinary Appeal Committee members will not have been involved with any earlier considerations.

If the Disciplinary Convenor determines that there are no grounds to your appeal, the appeal request will be dismissed. The decision of the Disciplinary Convenor, Disciplinary Panel member or Disciplinary Appeal Committee is final. At that point the procedures of the University will be exhausted and you

will be issued with a Completion of Procedures letter.

### **What if you are not satisfied with the final outcome once all University procedures have been completed?**

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) runs an independent scheme to review student complaints. The University subscribes to this scheme. If you are dissatisfied with the outcome offered by the University, you can seek an external review by submitting a complaint via the [OIA website](#).

Complaints must be submitted within 12 months of the date of the Completion of Procedures letter.

### **Confidentiality (see [Student Disciplinary Policy](#))**

- The Assessment Irregularities Procedure is an internal and confidential process. It is important that you - and any friend or supporter you choose to accompany you to meetings - respect this confidentiality and treat all information as confidential. Where confidentiality is breached, this may be treated as an act of misconduct.
- The members of staff who will be informed of the progress and outcome of your case will be identified in confidence and disclosed as part of the initial discussion of the case with you

### **Related Documents**

- [The University's Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes](#)
- [Fitness to Practise Procedure – Medical Sciences](#)
- [Fitness to Practise Procedure – Speech and Language Sciences](#)

## Appendix 1 – Types of Assessment Irregularity

An assessment irregularity is misconduct within the assessment process. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- (i) Any breach of the rules for University examinations (<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/exams/rules/>), including: copying from, or conferring with, other students, being in possession of/using unauthorised material or equipment in an examination room, possession of/using a mobile phone/smart watch during an exam, notes within/on a dictionary or other object, causing disruption during an exam (this includes leaving a mobile phone switched on).
- (ii) Impersonating or allowing another to impersonate a student.
- (iii) Introducing examination scripts into the examination process otherwise than in the course of an examination.
- (iv) Permitting another student to copy, verbatim or in substance, formative or summative assessed coursework (this includes providing an opportunity for another student to copy work, even if it was not the explicit intention that the work should be copied). Being party to any act, otherwise than for a bona fide academic reason, allowing the sharing of any such assessed work on a website or in any other medium; the fact that work has already been assessed when it is so copied or shared shall not negate the offence. *The Student Disciplinary Procedures should normally be followed if the student subject to the offence has already received a confirmed mark for the work in question by the Board of Examiners at the point of investigation.*
- (v) The falsification (by inclusion or suppression) of research results.
- (vi) Plagiarism. This is defined as the unacknowledged use of another person's ideas, words or works either verbatim or in substance without specific acknowledgement. For the avoidance of doubt, plagiarism may occur in an examination script as well as in assessed coursework, projects, reports and like work and may involve the use of material downloaded from electronic sources such as the internet. Further, the inclusion of a source in a bibliography is not of itself a sufficient attribution of another's work.
- (vii) Auto (self) Plagiarism. This applies when work (or similar) has already been submitted for an assessment at Newcastle or elsewhere. This may be considered to be an attempt to gain double credit for the same piece of work and is unfair and dishonest. This shall not apply to draft copies of research work; if a student is unsure, they should speak to a member of staff for clarity before submitting work.
- (viii) Contract Cheating/Custom Essay Writing. Defined as procuring or attempting to procure assessed work created by another person which is then submitted as a student's own work. Students are expected to produce their own work and therefore any submission of work by another person constitutes improper means. An attempt to procure such work shall be treated as an attempt to use improper means and may be considered as dishonesty and/or breach of academic integrity.
- (ix) Dishonesty. Any attempted assessment irregularity including that detected before submission of the work, is considered an attempt to use improper means and may be considered as dishonesty. Such dishonesty shall therefore be investigated in accordance with this procedure.
- (x) Breach of Ethical Governance Breach of research ethics is any academic practice which is in contravention of good practice guidelines provided by schools/faculties for considering ethical issues in student research at undergraduate, taught postgraduate or postgraduate research level study

## Appendix 2 – Likely Sanctions for each Level of Procedure

Level of procedure	Assessment Irregularity Type <i>N.B. This list is not exhaustive</i>	Indicative disciplinary actions/sanctions	Indicative academic sanctions
Level 1	<p>Any <u>minor</u> breach of the rules for University exams, including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- failure to follow invigilator instructions, being in possession of/using unauthorised calculators/dictionaries, causing disruption during an exam (including leaving a mobile phone switched on, opening an exam paper or starting to write before the start of an exam, continuing to write after the exam has ended.</li> </ul> <p>Any <u>minor</u> assessment irregularity reported for submitted coursework including, but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Permitting another student to copy – verbatim or in substance – any assessed coursework (this includes providing an opportunity for another student to copy work even if it was not the intention that the work be copied).</li> <li>- Sharing assessed coursework online via a website or any other medium, other than for a genuine academic reason.</li> <li>- The falsification of research results (including the suppression of data).</li> <li>- Plagiarism</li> <li>- Self-plagiarism</li> <li>- Collusion</li> <li>- Procuring or attempting to procure assessed work created by another person.</li> <li>- Dishonesty (including attempted assessment irregularities detected before the submission of work)</li> </ul> <p>Any <u>minor</u> breach of research ethics.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Caution</li> <li>- Written warning</li> </ul>	<p>A reduced mark (which may be zero)</p> <p>A requirement to resubmit the assessment (or an alternative) within timescales determined by the Chair of the Board of Examiners.</p> <p>A requirement to resubmit a project proposal or progress report within a defined timescale <b>(Postgraduate Research Students only)</b></p> <p>A requirement to make minor amendments to research data or thesis submitted for examination <b>(Postgraduate Research Students only)</b></p> <p>An appropriate and proportionate alternative sanction agreed with the Student Progress Service</p>



<p><b>Level 2</b></p>	<p>Any <u>more serious breaches</u> of the rules for University exams, including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- copying from or conferring with another student; being in possession of/using unauthorised notes/materials in an examinations room; possession of/using a mobile phone or smart watch during an exam; unauthorised notes within/on a dictionary or other object.</li> <li>- Impersonating another student or allowing another student to impersonate you.</li> <li>- Introducing unauthorised exam scripts into the examination process.</li> </ul> <p>Any <u>more serious</u> assessment irregularity reported for submitted coursework including, but not limited to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Permitting another student to copy – verbatim or in substance – any assessed coursework (this includes providing an opportunity for another student to copy work even if it was not the explicit intention that the work should be copied).</li> <li>- Sharing assessed coursework online via a website or any other medium, other than for a genuine academic reason.</li> <li>- The falsification of research results (including the suppression of data).</li> <li>- Plagiarism</li> <li>- Self-plagiarism</li> <li>- Collusion</li> <li>- Procuring or attempting to procure assessed work created by another person.</li> </ul> <p>Repeat or persistent instances of any of the above already considered under Level 1 of this procedure</p> <p>Any <u>more serious</u> breach of research ethics</p>	<p>Any of the above or:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Final warning</li> </ul>	<p>Any of the above or:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A mark of zero for one or more modules</li> <li>- A mark of zero for the future calculation of stage averages and degree classification</li> <li>- A requirement to resubmit the assessment (or an alternative) within timescales determined by the Chair of the Board of Examiners.</li> <li>- A requirement to resubmit a project proposal or progress report within a defined timescale</li> </ul> <p><b>(Postgraduate Research Students only)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A requirement to make amendments to research data or thesis submitted for examination</li> </ul> <p><b>(Postgraduate Research Students only)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A requirement to resubmit the thesis, in accordance with research degree conventions</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Level 3</b></p>	<p>Any of the above where the case is believed to be complex or sufficiently serious to warrant further impartial consideration or repetitive behaviour.</p>	<p>Any of the above or:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Suspension from studies</li> <li>- Deferred Expulsion</li> <li>- Expulsion with immediate effect (with exit award)</li> <li>- Expulsion with immediate effect (without exit award)</li> </ul>	<p>Any of the above or:</p> <p>Being deemed to fail the whole academic year and required to pass the module or stage before being permitted to proceed</p> <p>Being deemed to fail the whole programme and not being permitted to be considered by a Board of Examiners</p> <p><i>The SDC may impose further academic sanctions to those listed as deemed appropriate due to the circumstances of the case</i></p>
<p><i>N.B. The Student Disciplinary Committee may impose further academic sanctions to those listed, as deemed appropriate, due to the circumstances of the case</i></p>			