Academic Honesty and Misconduct Policy and Procedures

Table of Contents

1 Purpose and objectives 3
2 Scope 3
3 Objectives 3
4 Implementation 4
Student responsibility for academic integrity 5
Plagiarism 5
Cheating 6
Contract Cheating 6
Bribery 7
Examination Academic Integrity / Misconduct 7
Levels and Penalties for Student Academic Misconduct (other than File Sharing) 8
5 Process 9
6 Definitions 11
7 Accountabilities 13

1 Purpose and objectives

1.1 The purpose of this policy is to set out the position of the Engineering College of Technology (ECT) on academic integrity and honesty and the consequences resulting from failing to adhere to these expectations. ECT's approach to academic honesty and misconduct is informed by the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and the QAA Academic Integrity Charter. The policy is aligned with sector practice across UK publicly funded universities and independent providers and is applied consistently across all programmes and delivery modes.

2 Scope

2.1 This policy applies to all ECT students and to all staff involved in teaching, supervision, assessment design, invigilation or academic decision-making.

2.2 The policy applies to all summative assessments and examinations, regardless of format or location, and to any academic work submitted towards an ECT award or credit.

2.3 Allegations of academic misconduct involving staff are not dealt with under the student procedure and will be considered under the ECT's staff disciplinary policy and where relevant, research misconduct procedures.

3 Objectives

3.1 The nature of scholarly endeavour, dependent as it is on the work of others, binds all members of the ECT community to abide by the principles of academic honesty. Academic honesty is an integral part of the core values and principles of ECT.

3.2 ECT regards academic honesty as the foundation of teaching, learning, research and scholarship. It requires its academic staff and students to observe the highest ethical standards in all aspects of academic work. ECT demonstrates its commitment to these values by awarding due credit for honestly conducted scholarly work, and by penalising academic dishonesty and all forms of academic misconduct.

3.3 ECT expects that:

- all academic work claimed as original is the work of the author making the claim
- all academic collaboration is acknowledged academic work and is not falsified in any way (such as when the ideas of others are used, and that these ideas are acknowledged appropriately).
- the ideas, data and work of others are accurately cited and referenced.
- all academic and professional staff involved in learning, teaching and all academic and professional staff involved in learning, teaching, supervision and research promote and model academic integrity

- ECT applies proportionate, educative responses for first low-level cases

3.4 ECT strives to produce ethically and socially aware graduates, capable of applying the skills and knowledge they have developed at ECT to all aspects of their lives, as well as to their academic work. Academic dishonesty undermines the integrity of ECT's academic awards and assessment processes, and damages ECT's reputation. It also reduces the effectiveness of a student's time at ECT.

3.5 The key principles of this policy are that ECT will:

a. Require all students and staff to undertake their academic work honestly
b. On a continuous basis, use a range of approaches to educate students and staff to practise honesty in their academic work and raise awareness of the importance of ensuring ethical behaviour with respect to scholarship and research
c. Take consistent and equitable action to manage dishonest student behaviours by:
    - communicating to students that any piece of academic work can be checked at any time using an appropriate process
    - implementing a common remedial and penalty framework across ECT
    - establishing and applying appropriate, consistent procedures for detecting and investigating alleged academic misconduct
    - providing and communicating the appeal process
d. Handle any allegations of academic misconduct by staff in line with the processes set out in ECT's staff contract agreements. This means the institution will follow the agreed procedures for investigation, disciplinary action, and resolution to ensure fairness and compliance with employment terms.

4 Implementation

4.1 ECT regards plagiarism, cheating. collusion, contract cheating, fabrication or falsification of information or data, bribery, sabotage, impersonation, unauthorised file sharing and other forms of academic misconduct as serious breaches of academic integrity. Students are encouraged to discuss their work and seek support; however, unless group work is expressly authorised, all submitted work must be the student's own.

4.2 Where academic misconduct is established, an appropriate penalty will be determined in accordance with institutional policy, and in consultation with relevant academic and administrative staff. 4.3 ECT will engage staff and students by:

- using appropriate mechanisms to advise staff and students of this policy
- developing educational strategies to promote academic honesty & integrity
- developing strategies that reduce opportunities for academic misconduct, such as plagiarism
- designing strategies to increase student engagement with their study, and their ability to submit their own work
- reviewing these strategies at appropriate intervals.

Student responsibility for academic integrity

4.4 When students submit any piece of work, they are agreeing that:

- The work is their own work or the work of the group
- They may be subject to student discipline processes in the event of an act of academic misconduct.
- They further grant to ECT, or any third party so authorised, the right to reproduce and/or communicate (make available online or electronically transmit) the work submitted by that student in order to detect any plagiarism.

Third Party Reporting

4.5 Third parties include current or former students of ECT reporting misconduct by another student, members of the public, or anonymous reporters.

4.6 If a third-party reports an incident of academic misconduct by an ECT student, ECT may decide to investigate the allegation, taking into account the nature of the allegation, and any evidence provided by the third party. If the allegation is deemed vexatious or malicious, it will be dismissed. If the allegation is accepted, ECT will follow the procedures outlined in this policy.

4.7 The student will be informed of the allegation and given an opportunity to respond. The identity of the third party will be kept confidential where possible, unless disclosure is required for fairness or legal reasons.

4.8 The third party will not normally be informed of the detailed outcome, but may receive confirmation that the matter has been addressed.

Plagiarism

4.9 Plagiarism is the presentation of another person's words, ideas, data, designs or work as one's own without appropriate and accurate acknowledgement. It includes, but is not limited to:

a) copying or closely paraphrasing text from any source without citation;

b) using data, images, figures, software code or other materials without acknowledgement;

c) submitting work (in whole or in part) written or generated by another person or by an unauthorised tool;

d) making up, altering or misrepresenting references;

e) self-plagiarism, where work (in whole or in part) previously submitted for credit at ECT or another institution is resubmitted without formal permission.

f) use of Generative AI, machine translation or proofreading tools used beyond the limits set out in the relevant assessment brief or ECT guidance. Using such tools to generate, substantially rewrite or translate assessed work, or to fabricate sources or data, where this is not explicitly authorised, will be treated as academic misconduct.

Plagiarism resulting from poor academic practice

4.10 ECT differentiates between poor academic practice and academic misconduct.

a) Poor academic practice arises primarily from misunderstanding or inexperience (for example, limited incorrect referencing with no clear intention to deceive) and is most likely at early stages of study.

b) In such cases, ECT may provide feedback, guidance or required study skills support instead of recording a formal misconduct outcome.

c) Where conduct is more extensive, repeated, or there is evidence that the student should reasonably understand the requirements, it will be treated as academic misconduct under the levels provided in 4.25 of this policy.

Cheating

4.11 Cheating includes any attempt to gain an unfair advantage in assessments or examinations. Examples include:

a) copying or attempting to copy from another student or third party;

b) using or attempting to use unauthorised materials or devices;

c) unauthorised communication during an assessment;

d) fabricating information, data or results during an assessment;

e) impersonating, or arranging for another person to impersonate, a student in any assessment

Contract Cheating

4.12 Contract cheating constitutes a major Level 3 offence and may lead to exclusion from the programme and withdrawal of an award where appropriate. Contract cheating occurs when a student engages someone else to produce all or part of an assessment task that is submitted as their own work, including arrangements through a third party.

4.13 Third party contract cheating services may include, academic custom writing, private tutors, copyediting services, online labour markets, pre-written essay banks, file sharing sites, paid exam takers, sites disguised as tutoring websites.

Collusion

4.14 Collusion is unauthorised collaboration between two or more individuals in the preparation or production of work submitted for assessment, or assisting another student to commit academic misconduct. This includes sharing work in a way that enables copying, unless explicitly permitted.

4.15 Collusion maybe with another ECT student or students external to ECT.

Bribery

4.16 Bribing, or an attempt to bribe, a person who has influence over any aspect of student's academic performance is both a breach of academic honesty, code of conduct and potentially a corruption matter and considered to be very serious.

4.17 Bribery does not always have to involve money. Any offer to exchange favours or benefits of any kind is also considered bribery.

4.18 Serious cases may also be dealt with under ECT's Student or Staff Codes of Conduct.

Falsification of Information

4.19 Falsifying any information, including fabrication of data, is a breach of academic honesty.

4.20 Falsification of information includes, but not limited to:

- Misrepresenting qualifications, results, or personal details.
- Inventing or distorting data, arguments, quotations, or references.
- Impersonating someone else.
- Omitting or hiding important data in reports or presentations.
- Misleading research subjects or falsifying experiment details.
- Using another person's login credentials without permission.

Sabotage

4.21 Sabotage involves disrupting or destroying another person's work so that the person cannot complete an academic activity successfully.

4.22 Sabotage may include:

- installing malware, spyware, viruses or other damaging software in ECT's computers or another person's computer
- colluding with others to falsely accuse them of academic dishonesty
- disturbing experimental setup or calibration of equipment arranged by another person
- destroying academic resources to prevent other students from completing their work successfully
- revealing confidential data or experimental results from another person's project or procedures to others.

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Examination Academic Integrity / Misconduct

4.23 ECT may use remote invigilation/proctoring software for some online examinations. Students will receive clear advance information about the technology used, data collected, how it will be stored and for how long, and who can access it. Flagged behaviour will always be reviewed by an appropriately trained member of staff before any allegation is made. Examples of indicators that may trigger review (such as extended loss of webcam visibility, additional persons present, or suspected use of unauthorised materials) will be published in guidance to students.

Proctoring alerts or “flags” are indicators only and will never on their own be treated as proof of misconduct. An appropriately trained member of staff will review the recording and context (including any technical or accessibility issues) before deciding whether there is a case to answer.

Examples of indicators that may prompt review (e.g. extended loss of webcam visibility, other persons present, suspected use of unauthorised materials) will be published separately in guidance.

Any decision on misconduct will be made on the balance of probabilities, based on all available evidence.

Levels and Penalties for Student Academic Misconduct (other than File Sharing[1])

4.24 ECT recognises that students develop their understanding of academic integrity over time. Minor errors at an early stage of study may be treated as poor academic practice and addressed through guidance rather than formal penalties.

Levels

4.25 The levels of academic misconduct have been divided into three categories:

Level 1 – minor

Normally first offence, early stage of study.

- Limited impact and typically arising from poor academic practice.
- Examples: small amount of unattributed text; minor referencing errors.
- Decision-maker: Learning Support Officer + Lecturer

Level 2 – moderate

More extensive and/or repeated misconduct; student should reasonably understand requirements.

- Examples: moderate plagiarism; inappropriate collaboration; misuse of approved tools beyond given limits.
- Decision-maker: Programme Leader in consultation with Compliance and Risk Manager. May refer to Panel if complex.

Level 3 – major

Deliberate, systematic, or serious breach that threatens academic standards.

- Examples: contract cheating, exam cheating, major plagiarism (especially in dissertations), fabrication or falsification of data.
- Decision-maker: Academic Misconduct Panel appointed under authority of Academic Board

Penalties

[1] Found in the Digital Teaching and IT Acceptable Use Policy

4.26 Penalties should consider the level of academic misconduct and the contributing factors. Consideration is to be given to the experience of the student and previous concerns.

4.27 Penalties will be proportionate, consistently applied, and aligned to sector guidance, taking into account the level of misconduct and relevant factors. Repeated offences will result in more serious consequences. Available penalties may include one or more of the following:

- **Warning** – Formal notice to the student.
- **Learning Support** – Mandatory guidance or training.
- **Resubmission** – With grade cap
- **Alternative Assessment** – To ensure integrity.
- **Zero Mark** – For the assessment item.
- **Module Fail** – Option to re-enrol later.
- **Programme Exclusion** – With or without re-enrolment option.
- **Qualification Withdrawal** – For severe cases.

5 Process

5.1 The Programme Leader refers the suspected misconduct to the Learning Support Officer (LSO), or vice versa. Initial evidence is gathered, e.g. via similarity detection software (Turnitin) reports, assignment reviews or proctoring software (IRIS) data.

5.2 The LSO and Programme Leader review the evidence and complete the Academic Misconduct Review Report. Decisions are made on the balance of probabilities, based on the evidence available. They assess the likely level of misconduct (Level 1, 2 or 3) based on:

a. Type of misconduct
b. Student's experience
c. Prior history

5.3 The LSO sends the Initial Notice of Academic Misconduct to the student via their ECT email address. This outlines the allegation of misconduct and evidence supporting the allegation. From the first written notification, students must be advised of available support and their right to be accompanied by a friend, adviser or representative (who is not acting as a legal representative in a formal capacity).

5.4 Students will normally be given 10 working days from the date of the Initial Notice to respond. Any meeting with the LSO and relevant staff will normally be held within this period or as soon as reasonably practicable thereafter.

5.5 ECT will normally conclude the investigation and notify the outcome within 25 working days of the Initial Notice. Where deadlines cannot be met for good reason, revised timeframes will be communicated to the student in writing and recorded.

5.6 Once the student has responded, the LSO checks whether the student has had previous warnings or misconduct cases in other modules.

5.7 The LSO can recommend the following actions:

a. If the case is Level 1 (minor), a first offence and the student is within the first study period of their programme, the LSO and Programme Leader will determine the penalty. This will be confirmed by the Compliance and Risk Manager and noted at the Assessment Board.

b. If the case is Level 2 (moderate) or Level 3 (major) a Programme Leader reviews the case in conjunction with the Compliance and Risk Manager who may escalate the case to the Academic Misconduct Panel.

5.8 For Level 3 cases, the Academic Misconduct Panel reviews the case and will determine the penalty.
The Academic Misconduct Panel will be composed of:

- A Chair (Head of Academics and Operations or nominee)
- 1 academic member of staff not previously involved in the case
- A representative from Student Services or Quality and Compliance
- A secretary or case officer (non-voting)

5.9 Panel members will be selected to ensure impartiality, subject expertise and procedural fairness. All members will be trained in academic misconduct procedures. Conflicts of interest must be declared. Students will be informed in advance of the panel composition and may be accompanied by a support person, that is not a legal representative.

5.10 Once the level and penalty have been decided and confirmed, the LSO issues the Notification of Academic Misconduct letter to the student. A report is prepared for the Assessment Board.

The report includes:

- The decision
- The penalty
- The rationale
- The student's right to appeal

5.11 Students may appeal the decision within 10 working days of the date on the Notification of Academic Misconduct letter. Appeals will be reviewed by an independent officer or panel not involved in the original decision. Grounds for appeal include procedural irregularity, new evidence and disproportionality of penalty. Appeals are considered by an independent officer or panel not previously involved, in line with OIA Good Practice.

5.12 If the appeal is unsuccessful, ECT issues a Completion of Procedures (COP) Letter, enabling the student to escalate the case to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). ECT will retain records of academic misconduct cases in line with its Records Management and Data Protection policies and will monitor trends to inform preventative and educative activity.

5.13 Any proposed adjustment to grades are reported to the Assessment Board and relevant academic and administrative staff.

5.14 The Academic Board is provided with a high-level report on the application of the policy and an evaluation is drafted.

6 Definitions

Academic integrity - Means upholding honesty, responsibility, fairness and respect in all academic work, including accurate representation of one's own work, proper acknowledgement of others' work, and compliance with ECT regulations and professional standards.

Academic misconduct - Means any act or attempted act which seeks to gain for oneself or another an unfair academic advantage, or which undermines the integrity of assessment, research or academic standards. It includes (but is not limited to) plagiarism, collusion, cheating, contract cheating, fabrication or falsification of data or information, impersonation, bribery, and sabotage.

Assessment - Means any method used to judge a student's achievement of learning outcomes, including examinations, coursework, projects, presentations, practical/clinical assessments, portfolios, dissertations and any other assessed work contributing to an ECT award or credit.

Bribery - Means offering, giving, requesting or accepting any inducement with the intention of influencing the outcome of an assessment or academic decision.

Collusion - Means unauthorised collaboration between two or more people in the preparation or production of work submitted for assessment, or enabling another student to commit academic misconduct (for example by sharing work in a way that allows copying), unless such collaboration is expressly permitted.

Cheating - Means any attempt to gain an unfair advantage in an assessment or examination. It includes using unauthorised materials or devices, copying from or communicating with another person during an assessment, accessing assessment questions without authorisation, or failing to comply with invigilation or assessment instructions.

Contract cheating - Means where work is procured, purchased or commissioned, in whole or in part, from another person or service (including "essay mills", ghost writers, unauthorised editing services, or unapproved use of Generative AI) and submitted as one's own. Contract cheating is treated as a serious (Level 3) offence.

Fabrication - Means making up data, results, information, citations or quotations and presenting them as genuine.

Falsification - Means manipulating, altering or misrepresenting data, results, information, citations or documentation, including changing marks or feedback, or altering official records.

Formative assessment - Means assessment that does not contribute to a formal result but is designed to provide feedback and support learning.

Impersonation - Means assuming the identity of another person, or allowing another person to assume one's identity, in relation to any assessment or academic activity (including logging in to complete an online assessment on someone else's behalf).

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) - Means the use of Generative AI or similar tools to create, substantially re-write, translate or otherwise produce assessed work. Use is only permitted within the limits set out in the relevant assessment brief or programme guidance. Unauthorised use may constitute plagiarism, contract cheating or fabrication.

Level of offence - Means the categorisation of academic misconduct (e.g. Level 1, 2 or 3) based on its extent, intent, impact, and any prior history, used to guide the selection of a proportionate penalty.

Machine translation and proofreading tools - Means tools (including software and online services) used to translate or edit text. Their use in assessed work must comply with assessment and programme guidance; use that obscures authorship, or introduces text presented as original work where not permitted, may constitute misconduct.

Mitigating circumstances - Means circumstances outside the student's control which have had a significant adverse effect on their ability to engage with learning or assessment. Mitigating circumstances do not excuse academic misconduct but may be considered in relation to penalty where appropriate.

Penalty - Means the sanction applied where academic misconduct is found, in line with the defined levels and approved by the appropriate decision-maker or panel.

Poor academic practice - Means incorrect or inadequate academic practice arising primarily from misunderstanding or inexperience (for example, incomplete or inconsistent referencing with no clear intention to deceive). Poor academic practice may be addressed through guidance and educational measures and may not always be treated as academic misconduct.

Plagiarism - Means presenting another person's words, ideas, data, designs, images, computer code or any other work, in whole or in part, as one's own without appropriate and accurate acknowledgement. It includes close paraphrasing without citation, using AI-generated or third-party text as if it were one's own (where not permitted), and inventing or altering references.

Remote invigilation / online proctoring - Means the use of technology to monitor students taking assessments at a distance, in real time or by later review of recording or event data, in accordance with published ECT procedures and data protection requirements.

Self-plagiarism - Means submitting work, in whole or in substantial part, which has previously been submitted for academic credit at ECT or another institution, without formal permission and appropriate acknowledgement.

Summative assessment - Means assessment that contributes to the formal result or outcome of a module, level or award.

Sabotage - Means acting deliberately to prevent or impair another student's ability to complete academic work (for example, destroying or interfering with their work, data, equipment or access).

Similarity checking / text-matching software - Means software used by ECT to compare submitted work against other sources in order to identify possible plagiarism or other irregularities. Similarity reports are interpreted by trained staff and are one piece of evidence in determining whether misconduct has occurred.

Standard of proof - Means the test used to decide whether academic misconduct has occurred. ECT applies the civil standard of proof: on the balance of probabilities (i.e. it is more likely than not).

Support person / friend - Means a person who accompanies the student to a meeting or panel hearing for support. This may be, for example, another student, a Students' Union representative, a member of staff, or another appropriate person, subject to the restrictions set out in the procedure.

7 Accountabilities

7.1 The Academic Board is responsible for review and approval of this policy. Responsibilities are delegated to officers of ECT for monitoring and reporting trends in academic misconduct to Academic Board, ensuring annual review of the policy with student and staff input; and ensuring alignment with external reference points (QAA, OIA) and relevant professional/ regulatory bodies.

7.2 The policy is to be implemented via induction and training of staff and distribution to students and ECT's community via the website and other publications.

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