

Academic conduct and practice
Frequently Asked Questions

Why have I received an Investigation letter?

At some point during the marking of your work a concern has been raised around the possibility of it containing some form of academic offence. At this stage of our process your work has simply been put forward for an investigation; no academic judgment has been applied yet. As soon as a judgment is made we will take the next steps in notifying you of that decision.

It is possible that the person considering your case, the Academic Misconduct Officer or AMO, decides there is no evidence of an offence. Or, the AMO may determine that there are possible issues within your work that need further discussion. If this is the case, then we will invite you to a meeting to talk about the possible issues in your work. It is at that point that we will be able to tell you what the possible issues are, which assignments are affected and the level of meeting best suited to discussing those issues.

Who can I talk to about this?

As a non-academic department, the College Cases team is unable to state what the issue is with your work. Instead, we recommend that if this raises a concern for you, that you contact the [Wellbeing service](#) (Streatham) or [Student Support](#) (Penryn) for support. Or if you are simply looking for guidance on what you can expect from this process you can contact the Students' Guild Advice Unit advice@exeterguild.com or The Falmouth and Exeter Students' Union advice@thesu.org.uk, as they are experienced in helping our students through this process.

We do understand that this can be stressful, so please do reach out for support if you feel it would be helpful.

How long will this take?

The whole process normally takes up to 60 days, however it is possible that an investigation, including the meeting, can take place in a shorter timeframe.

But I have not done anything wrong. What should I do if I am unsure of what the issues are?

We appreciate it might not always be clear why an investigation has been initiated. However, we are obliged to investigate any suspicion referred to us under this procedure. The University reserves the right to investigate when a possible offence may have occurred to ensure the academic standards of the institution and safeguard the value of your and all students' degrees. Don't worry though, we do not pre-judge cases, so you can depend on us to conduct a fair investigation. It is possible that, after investigation, the officer decides that an offence has not been committed and the case can be dismissed. We would still notify you of this decision in writing, so rest assured that you will hear from us as soon as any decision is reached. It is possible to commit an offence unintentionally and we encourage all students to go back over the work under investigation to check through it. We would also encourage you to retake the Academic Honesty module on ELE before reviewing the work.

If you are still unsure after reviewing the documents, please wait for our next letter where you will be provided with information on any alleged offence, and the evidence for this, if the case is not dismissed at this stage.

Why have my marks been held?

When we are informed that a piece of work is under investigation, we contact your Hub to instruct them to withhold the marks and feedback until the investigation outcome is complete. It may also be that we ask them to do this for further pieces of work once the investigating officer has decided if other assessments need to be considered.

If during the course of your investigation there is a mark release deadline, it's possible that you will see a mark of zero in your transcript. We wish to reassure you that all marks are just place holders at the moment, they are not your final marks.

The marks for some of your assessments will have been held pending the outcome of your investigation, and therefore what you are seeing is just an interim transcript whilst the system awaits the decision on the consideration of marks. Further changes to the mark may be needed once your investigation has been concluded, so please do not worry if you see a mark of zero at this stage.

Hopefully, the above explanation reassures you that the version of your record of marks during any investigation is only temporary.

I've just received an investigation letter, what happens next?

You can expect to receive a second letter from the College Cases team (we aim for this to be sent within 15 working days but at busy times it may take longer). This will update you on the initial decision of the Academic Misconduct Officer, along with details of any next steps and the possible impact of the Officer's decision.

They are obliged to look into the potential evidence of academic misconduct offences in your work before deciding what action, if any, needs to be taken. As this is an academic matter, it requires an academic decision. Therefore, it is not reasonable to expect an immediate response. Please do not contact the Misconduct Officer in your department to try to hurry things along; they will be working as quickly as they can to review the necessary information. They are required to update the College Cases Team as soon as possible with their decision.

In the first instance, the Academic Misconduct Officer needs to confirm whether the evidence found by the University indicates that you may have committed an offence and whether it extends into other pieces of your work. When they have made their judgement, we will contact you on their behalf with an update on the investigation.

What will my second letter say?

Possible updates in the second letter include:

1. The investigation is dismissed, and no further steps will be taken. In which case, your work will be returned for marking and your Hub will provide you with the marks and feedback for any assessed pieces that had been under investigation. Please note, the standard three-week turnaround for marks and feedback is superseded by this investigation so there may be a short delay in receiving your marks.
2. The Officer deems it is necessary for you to attend an academic honesty workshop, which covers less serious concerns of poor academic practice, and no penalty will be applied to the work in question this time.
3. The Officer investigating the work determines that the issues identified in your work are sufficiently serious to warrant further discussion. You are invited to attend a meeting. There are three types of meeting, depending on the nature of the suspected offence and findings of the Academic Misconduct Officer:
 - Discipline Level Meeting – concerns raised over poor academic practice, with possible penalties ranging from Tariff A to B
 - College Level Meeting – concerns raised that may be either poor academic practice **or** academic misconduct, with possible penalties ranging from Tariff A – D
 - University Level Meeting – concerns raised that may relate to severe academic misconduct offences. Such a case would be referred to the University Student Cases Team. These are very rare, but more serious in nature so we would look to provide additional support if this were to apply in your case.

What might I be found guilty of and what penalty/penalties might be imposed?

It is important to remember that you might not be found guilty of anything and that your case maybe dismissed after the initial investigation or you could be found not guilty after further discussion and the meeting has taken place. However, in the event it is deemed that a student has committed an offence, a penalty is applied. A full list of the Tariff, Description of Offence and Penalty options can be found [here](#). College Cases meetings only look at penalties up to and including Tariff D. If an AMO, during the point of investigation, believes that you have committed an offence that is potential Severe Academic Misconduct (Tariff E to G), your case will be referred to a University Committee of Academic Enquiry overseen by the University Cases team.

What is the role of an Academic Misconduct Officer (AMO) and Senior Academic Misconduct Officer (SAMO) in College Cases meetings?

Generally, there is one AMO for each Discipline and one SAMO for each College. The AMO is a named academic member of staff within a Discipline (or department), who acts as a main point of contact for any

marker who needs to report a concern about an assessed piece of work. The AMO will then look at these concerns in more detail to decide if the suspected offence needs to be referred to the College Cases team for formal investigation. The AMO will then liaise with the SAMO in their college to agree the nature of the suspected offence and the appropriate level of meeting required. This ensures that all students receive parity of treatment, no matter what discipline they belong to.

As part of their roles, the AMO and SAMO also chair the meetings within this process. An AMO will normally chair a Discipline level meeting, and they are also likely to run the Academic Honesty Workshops for their Discipline. Whereas a SAMO normally acts as chair for the College level meetings.

For a list of the University's Academic Misconduct Officers, please click here: [AMO List](#)

What does the College Cases team do?

We work closely with Academic Misconduct Officers (AMOs) and Senior Academic Misconduct Officers (SAMOs), and with other student support teams such as your Hub or Info Point. Our role is to collate and distribute documentation and information to those with a verified business need, following procedures set out in [Chapter 12 of the Assessment Progression and Awarding Handbook 'Academic Conduct and Practice'](#).

The College Cases Team is part of the wider Student Cases team, and our aim is to support you through the process of academic conduct, appeals and complaints procedures at Discipline and College level. With regards to academic misconduct, we are your primary point of contact for any concerns around the process itself, and we will also signpost you to other teams if we think that they are better able to support you or answer your questions.

Should I contact the College Cases Team with my concerns?

You are welcome to email the College Cases team with any enquiries you have. However, in many instances we will have to redirect you to another team if they are better able to respond to your queries.

For example, your Hub is best placed to answer any enquiries you have about your programme of study, such as marks for a piece of coursework or exam, a submission issue, or your course in general. A list of Info Points and Hub contacts can be found [here](#).

And the Wellbeing team is best placed to support you with matters relating to your health and support with your studies. They can arrange appointments with AccessAbility or the Welfare team to discuss adjustments to student support. To contact them please see the [Wellbeing service website](#) or the FXPlus website: <https://www.fxplus.ac.uk/students/student-services/student-support-living-support-and-wellbeing-teams>.

For independent and impartial support, students are encouraged to contact their Guild or Union:

For students studying at the Streatham or St Luke's Campus you can contact The Students' Guild Advice Unit at advice@exeterguild.com.

For Students studying at the Penryn Campus you can contact The Falmouth and Exeter Students' Union at advice@thesu.org.uk.

We do understand that this can be stressful, so please do reach out for support if you feel it would be helpful and remember that you are assigned a Personal or Academic Tutor at the beginning of each academic year who you can speak to about these matters if you wish. Many departments also have Senior Personal Tutors, so speak to your Hub if you would like to be able to contact them.

Please note that whilst we cannot discuss details relating specifically to your case we can advise on the general process so if you have any questions or concerns, please contact the College Cases Team in the first instance.

What are the possible offences?

There are a variety of offences that can be investigated. The most common of these are:

- The use or possession of unauthorised materials
- Obtaining an examination paper ahead of its authorised release.
- Attempting to impersonate or impersonation of another individual, due to be sitting a specific assessment.

- Collusion
- Fabrication
- Falsification
- Plagiarism
- Misrepresentation
- Coercion

What are the different levels of misconduct?

Misconduct is said to have taken place when student has not been academically honest. This can be intentional or unintentional. The University has developed three levels of severity to reflect this. Determining what category an offence falls into is an exercise of academic judgement. The categories are:

- Poor academic practice
- Academic misconduct
- Severe academic misconduct

What do these terms mean?

There are different definitions of these terms and in each case we will explain to you, in relation to your own work, what they mean for you, but broadly speaking:

What does 'academic honesty' mean?

Academic honesty means always giving full credit for any other people's contributions to our own achievements (i.e. by full and correct referencing) and never falsifying the results of any research

What is '[Poor Academic Practice](#)'?

Poor academic practice may arise from lack of understanding of academic protocols or a misunderstanding of expected academic conventions of the Discipline.

What does '[Academic Misconduct](#)' mean?

Academic misconduct is defined as an act, or failure to act, that gives, or aims to give, an advantage if undetected, or any behaviour which may deceive those setting, administering and marking a piece of work. The definitions of potential academic misconduct offences can be found [here](#).

What is '[Severe Academic Misconduct](#)'?

Severe academic misconduct may be a second offence, or involve evidence of extensive plagiarism or cheating, or clear evidence of behaviour, which is designed to deceive those setting, administering and marking the assessment and/or behaviour designed to obtain advantage on the part of the student.

Why have I been invited to an Academic Honesty Workshop?

The piece of work in question will have been attached along with the invite to this meeting for your information. The issues in this assessment will have been judged not serious enough to warrant a formal misconduct hearing. No penalty will be awarded, and the meeting is purely educational. If you are called to a workshop you are expected to attend. The markers may have found issues with your approach to writing, such as poor paraphrasing, or the way you have undertaken referencing may not be correctly formatted to your Department's referencing style. In learning how to correct these you can improve the quality of your future work and help to avoid further suspicions of misconduct in the future. The workshops are often more informal, group meetings, and you will have the chance to ask any questions about writing assignments that you may have. We, in College Cases, will keep a record of students who have attended this workshop (and those who have chosen not to); there are no punitive outcomes, but failure to attend may result in issues remaining unaddressed in your work, and if suspicions of poor practice or misconduct are identified in your future work then it will have to be dealt with more seriously, so it really is worth attending the workshop in the first instance. Please see [Section 6 Appendix B of Chapter 12 - Academic conduct and practice](#) for more details.

Why have I been invited to a Discipline Meeting?

This formal Discipline level meeting is normally chaired by the Academic Misconduct Officer for your Discipline, who will be discussing alleged offences described under Tariff A and B. As part of the meeting invite, the College Cases team will attach each piece of work under investigation, and any supporting documentation relevant to the suspected offence. This might include possible sources of plagiarism, for

example, or a summary report written by an expert witness, showing where highlighted sections of your submission are cause for concern. This is to ensure that you fully understand why the work is being investigated and to present you with the opportunity to submit a defence to the panel of the meeting, either in writing or in person. The letter also invites you to provide a written statement, call witnesses, or have a supporter with you on the day of the meeting. An Administrator from College Cases will also attend to take notes of the meeting (minutes). The AMO will discuss the alleged offence with you and they may seek clarification as to how the errors have occurred within your work. During the meeting, the chair will want to hear from you about how you created your work, what processes you normally use to create your work and what you understand about academic honesty. This meeting is your chance to tell the panel anything that you think is relevant about the concerns with your work. You will be given an opportunity to explain your actions and, if appropriate, will be provided with advice on how to address these issues.

What happens at a College meeting?

This formal College level meeting is usually chaired by the Senior Academic Misconduct Officer and it means that concerns have been raised over suspicions of poor academic practice and/or academic misconduct. The meeting will consist of a panel of three, which will include at least one other academic member of staff from the College. The Panel will hear concerns with your work for alleged offences up to and including Tariff D. An Administrator from College Cases will also attend to take notes of the meeting (minutes). As part of the meeting invite email, the College Cases team will attach each piece of work under investigation, and further supporting documentation to explain the reasons for the suspected offence. This might include possible sources of plagiarism, for example, or a summary report written by an expert witness, showing where highlighted sections of your submission are cause for concern. This is to ensure that you fully understand why the work is being investigated and to present you with the opportunity to submit a defence to the panel of the meeting, either in writing or in person. The letter also invites you to provide a written statement, call witnesses, or have a supporter with you on the day of the meeting. It may be that the Panel wants to hear from a member of staff who understands the assessment(s) being considered, but if a member of staff does attend the meeting in this capacity, you will have the opportunity to hear and respond to everything that is said by them. We will inform you in the meeting invite letter if a witness has been called. During the meeting, the panel will want to hear from you about how you created your work, what processes you normally use to create your work and what you understand about academic honesty. This meeting is your chance to tell the panel anything that you think is relevant about the concerns with your work. You will be given an opportunity to explain your actions and, if appropriate, will be provided with advice on how to address these issues.

What happens if I cannot attend the meeting?

If you are not able to attend the meeting, the Panel will discuss your written statement (if you have provided one) and will come to a judgment of the basis of the evidence available to them. A copy of the notes from the meeting (minutes), along with the outcome will be emailed to you within ten working days of the meeting. Please see [Section 12.19 of Chapter 12 - Academic conduct and practice](#) for more details. Whilst the academic misconduct meeting is a formal meeting, it is also considered to be an educational opportunity so it will be most valuable to you if you can attend.

If you have a disability or need reasonable adjustments to be made in order to attend a meeting, you can respond to the meeting invitation email and the administrator who has contacted you will consider how you can be supported.

I am unable to attend the meeting. Will it still go ahead without me?

Please note that as per 12.2.6 of the [procedures](#) you cannot prevent any hearing from taking place through non-attendance at a meeting, providing reasonable steps have been taken to give you the chance to attend or to submit a statement. Therefore, should you fail to join the meeting via the link given to you at the specified time, we will proceed with the meeting in your absence. Please note, we do not normally rearrange meetings even in the event of technical issues preventing a student from joining the online meeting, therefore you may wish to also submit a supporting statement to ensure that the Panel / Chair is still able to consider your situation.

What if I feel unsure about attending a meeting at Discipline or College level?

You are not obliged to attend. However, it is helpful if the Panel are able to speak with you and ask you questions, and it will also allow you to ask any questions you have, or give information directly in response to the Panel's questions. If you are concerned about your understanding and answering questions during the meeting, you might have a supporter with you. The supporter is there for moral support so they are not able to answer questions for you, but they can explain if something is unclear. They do not have to be in the

same place as you and, if you choose to be accompanied by a supporter remotely, we can set up a video link to facilitate this. In the meeting we will ask for your supporter to give their name and nature of their relationship to you for the meeting notes. More information on the role of the supporter can be seen below.

Can you discuss my case with third parties such as my parents?

I am sure you will appreciate that for data protection purposes we are only able to discuss your case with members of the University who have a genuine business need to know, and we cannot discuss these matters with third parties without your written consent. If you would like someone to be able to speak with us on your behalf, such as a parent or personal tutor, please email the College Cases Team in advance to confirm that you give consent for us to discuss your case. If any third party contacts us requesting such information we are only able to respond to them in general terms regarding the University procedures, but not about individual cases.

As such, when it comes to having a supporter at your meeting, we assume that in inviting them you are happy for them to be privy to the information discussed therein. Please note it is your responsibility to forward any information you deem relevant in order for them to support you, such as a meeting location or video link, or possible copies of the work in question. We will not do this for you.

How does the College Cases Team liaise with my Hub?

The Hub are one of the teams who are deemed to have a business need to know details of an investigation. When we are informed that a piece of work is under investigation, we contact your Hub to instruct them to withhold the marks and feedback until the investigation outcome is complete. It may also be that we ask them to do this for further pieces of work once the investigating officer has decided if other assessments need to be considered at College or Department level. Once a meeting has taken place, we also inform your Hub of the outcome decision and give them instructions about details of any penalty that a piece of work has incurred. Your Hub will also get in touch with you regarding resubmission details if you have been asked to resubmit a piece of work by a specific deadline.

Who can I go to for support in these meetings or during the wider process?

The Students' Guild Advice Unit (Exeter) and The Falmouth and Exeter Students' Union (Penryn) Campus can offer independent, confidential and impartial information, advice and support to students involved in University procedures:

Exeter: advice@exeterguild.com

Penryn: advice@thesu.org.uk

The University also offers a Wellbeing Service who can offer you support if needed:

Exeter: <http://www.exeter.ac.uk/wellbeing>

Penryn: <https://www.fxplus.ac.uk/students/student-services/student-support-living-support-and-wellbeing-teams>

Can I bring someone to my meeting, what is a supporter?

You are permitted to invite a supporter to attend your meeting with you, but please note, they are not permitted to attend the meeting in your absence.

The supporter can be a member of the University, or Guild of Students/Falmouth and Exeter Students' Union. They can be another Exeter student or someone in your household. Alternatively, you might consider asking your personal tutor or a module convenor if they would be willing to act as your supporter. The role is defined as follows in the TQA under Section 12.3.5 of [Chapter 12 - Academic conduct and practice](#): "the Supporter is there to provide moral support to the Student and to support the student with asking and answering questions during the meeting. They may also take notes of the meeting for the Student. The Student is expected to speak from themselves, and there is no automatic right for the Supporter to address the Committee. Should a Supporter act beyond this definition, then the Chair **may** suspend the meeting and ask the Supporter to leave, in the event that the Student is unable to continue the meeting in the absence of the Supporter, then the meeting will continue in the absence of the Student, based on the verbal evidence heard to date and the written documentation. Should the Supporter be asked to leave this meeting, this will not affect the attendance of others at the meeting such as the marker, any witness or College Representative."

If you decide to bring a supporter, you must notify the College Cases Team at least one working day before the meeting as this helps us to prepare appropriately for your meeting. If you do not notify us of your wish

to include another participant then they would not normally be permitted to join the meeting, and additional attendees would only be permitted at the discretion of the Chair of the meeting.

Why am being asked if I want to provide a written statement?

There is no obligation to provide a written statement. However, some students find it helpful to know that they have submitted something in writing before the meeting, especially if they are anxious about the situation and worry that they might not be able to express themselves clearly in the meeting itself. It can also be helpful if you are worried that you might not be able to attend the meeting, and in such situations we recommend that you submit a written statement for the Panel to consider in your absence.

A written statement can help you to organise your thoughts and you may then also refer to your statement at the meeting to prompt your memory if necessary. A written statement usually contains your perspective on the situation and any information that you feel might be useful for the Panel to know when considering your case. It can also include details or evidence of how you produced the pieces of work in question, if you think that would be helpful, but it is not essential and you needn't write a statement at all if you do not want to.

If you do decide to submit a written statement this should be sent to the College Cases team at least one working day prior to the meeting date.

You may also consider contacting the Students' Guild Advice Unit who can offer support and guidance regarding this matter. In the past they have summarised writing a statement as such: *providing a written statement in defence of allegations is helpful to all concerned. It will help clarify what happened and why and put events into a timeline. It will help anyone considering your case to see what may have happened and prepare any questions ahead of a meeting being called.*

Can I record the meeting?

Please be aware, the use of electronic audio recording equipment will not normally be allowed and would only be permitted at the discretion of the Chair of the meeting. You will receive a set of minutes from the meeting so it is likely that the information you need to refer back to will be adequately recorded there.

How long will the meeting last?

The Panel allow themselves a short period of time to prepare before you arrive, so when you join the meeting you can expect the conversation to move forward quite quickly. Typically, a standard meeting will last between 20-40 minutes. However, some cases are more complex or involve more pieces of work, and we also appreciate that for some people the meetings are more stressful, and they would prefer to take their time to reduce their anxiety. Therefore, we try to allow time for this wherever possible. The meetings are intended to be learning opportunities for you so make the most of the time you have in the meeting; there will be time for questions at the end, but if you want to clarify any specific points during the course of the discussion please feel free to do so; the Panel will be happy to advise.

What if I am not happy with my outcome, can I appeal?

Yes, you have ten working days to appeal your outcome decision from the date of the Outcome letter we email you. Details on how to appeal can be found [here](#). You should be mindful of the timeframes involved and the grounds on which you can base such an appeal.

To ensure appeals are considered objectively, they are handled by the University Student Cases team rather than members of the College Cases Team who may have already been involved in your case. Therefore, if you have any questions about submitting an appeal for a review of your Academic Misconduct Outcome, you should contact studentcases@exeter.ac.uk.

What is Turnitin?

Turnitin is a software used by the University to highlight all matches within a piece of work; it does not interpret these matches, hence why academic judgement is applied in all investigations. Not all matches will be of concern to the panel, and other matters additional to the highlighting in the Turnitin Report may be discussed. The academic staff who deal with academic conduct issues are experienced in reading these reports and can separate out useful information from the generic details of a Turnitin report. For instance, all matches with the assignment coversheet will be discounted; they do not indicate evidence of an offence and are therefore not of interest to the panel. Similarly, footnotes, bibliographies, and instances of correctly referenced quotations are likely to also be disregarded, as will small fragments of wording that are likely to be used in many student essays on a specific topic. There are some offences where such things might be relevant, but the Turnitin highlighting alone is not reason for you to worry; it is a tool to help support the investigation and the panel will explain their interpretation of it at the meeting to guide the conversation.

The Turnitin Report for my submission does not show a high similarity score. Why might it still be under investigation?

Not all suspected offences show up in a Turnitin Report. It is used to identify similarity to other sources within Turnitin's database, but it is a technical support solution and not always 100% accurate. The percentage figure for matched text given by Turnitin is often not relevant in our discussion of your case.

For example, a marker may have over usage of material from a source that is not accessible to Turnitin for analysis, or incorrect or missing references to a source not in your bibliography. In such a case, if there is a major source not identified by Turnitin at all, you can expect to be sent that along with the other documentation in advance of the meeting. Even where Turnitin correctly identifies a source it sometimes fails to match all words from that source, for example, they may be out of sequence, or words may switch between US/UK spelling, or individual words may have been changed, etc. preventing Turnitin from accurately analysing the information. In such cases, some of the non-highlighted words may also be of concern.

Furthermore, Turnitin sometimes allocates to different sources sections of words that actually come from the same source.

Whatever the reason behind the matches, and regardless of the final similarity score, you can expect the Panel to explain during the meeting which are the elements of concern in your report.

It is also possible that there may be suspicions of a different offence in your work, not just plagiarism, in which case the similarities in the Turnitin Report may not be pertinent to the case in question. If this is the case then you can expect to be told about the alleged offences in your meeting invitation letter.

Turnitin has identified sources that I have not used, what does this mean for my referencing?

Turnitin automatically assigns each set of words that it finds online to the first source that its algorithms identify. This is not necessarily the source where you originally read the material. In particular, if Turnitin gives the source as 'University of X', we do not assume that you have read another student's essay at that university; most likely, you and the other student have accessed the same source online. Often, Turnitin gives a generic source like a publisher's name (Taylor and Francis online), but the academics dealing with your case are usually able to identify more specifically which source is involved.

There is no specific need for you to prepare for the meeting in detail. However, if you want to understand the Turnitin report and the where the source material has been flagged, we recommend that you google any passages of repeated or sustained highlighting to find the source for them, putting the words in quotation marks in Google to find the exact match.

Glossary

AMO: Academic Misconduct Officer

SAMO: Senior Academic Misconduct Officer

AHW: Academic Honesty Workshop (also known as a PAP Workshop)

AM: Academic Misconduct

PAP: Poor Academic Practice