

SUSPECTED ACADEMIC OFFENCES

Receiving notification of a suspected **academic offence** can feel very scary and can often come as a bit of a shock but it is not an unusual occurrence and, in many cases, is all part of the process of learning how to write academically.

WHAT IS AN ACADEMIC OFFENCE?

"**Academic Offence**" is an umbrella term that is used to describe a variety of different issues that may occur in academic work; particularly where it may be deemed that a student has gained an unfair academic advantage over other students. These issues can range from not using the correct referencing style, colluding or working too closely with other students, using AI in ways that have caused you to gain an advantage over your peers, or, in the most serious cases, buying or deliberately copying the work of others.

You can also commit an academic offence by submitting false data; a false extenuating circumstance claim or failing to get the correct ethical approval for your work.

Even if the issue has occurred without intention or from failing to understand the academic conventions required, you can still be found to have committed an offence.

If there is a concern that a student may have committed an academic offence (whether intentionally or not) it is important that the University investigates and where necessary takes action to ensure that no student has gained an academic advantage over any other student.

WHY HAVE I BEEN ASKED TO ATTEND A MEETING?

An academic offence meeting is your opportunity to respond to any allegation being investigated. A final decision about an allegation cannot be made until you have been given a chance to respond to the concerns. This is done by scheduling a meeting and giving sufficient notice of the date of the meeting,

However, a decision can be made without you present if you do not attend. You can also choose to submit a written response to the allegation if you do not wish to attend the meeting.

It is important to note that **being called to attend a meeting does not necessarily mean you have committed an academic offence**. The purpose of the meeting is to investigate the allegation against you. Firstly, the adjudicator needs to understand the circumstances of the situation to decide whether an academic

offence has occurred. They may need to ask questions to understand more about your case and to gauge your understanding of what has happened.

If the adjudicator feels that on the 'balance of probability' there is evidence to suggest an offence has been committed, they will then need to determine an appropriate penalty. When deciding on a penalty the adjudicator will take into consideration the following factors:

- the severity of the offence (e.g., how much work is impacted)
- the nature of the offence (e.g., was there any intention to gain an academic advantage, did you know that you shouldn't work with another student or did you deliberately set out to cheat)
- whether you have been honest and upfront in the meeting (e.g., have you given plausible explanations for how similarities in your work may have occurred).
- whether it is a first offence or a subsequent offence
- whether there are any mitigating circumstances that may explain how an offence occurred (e.g., mistakes in referencing due to being ill at the time of writing the work). Mitigating circumstances are not an excuse for committing an offence but help to explain how something might have happened.

WHO IS MY MEETING WITH?

Most initial Academic Offence investigations will be carried out by an Academic Offence Adjudicator in your department, unless the allegation is about a formal examination or you are a postgraduate research student. The Adjudicator should not be someone who has been involved in the teaching of the assessment or supervision of the work in question. Departmental Adjudicators are able to issue a fixed range of penalties or may decide to refer a case to a Faculty Adjudicator if further investigation is necessary or if the allegation is of a more serious nature.

A Faculty Adjudicator is responsible for considering cases relating to formal examinations, cases involving Postgraduate Research students or cases that have been referred to them by the Departmental Adjudicator. The Faculty Adjudicator has a fixed range of penalties they can apply. They can also make a referral to an Academic Offence Committee. An Academic Offence Committee have the full range of penalties available to them.

Any meeting may also be facilitated by a member of university staff acting as a secretary/administrator.

The Adjudicator or Committee are required to do the following when investigating a suspected offence:

- give you written notification that an allegation is being formally investigated;
- invite you to attend a meeting, giving at least 5 working days notice of the meeting time and date and access to any relevant evidence
- check whether you have had any previous academic offences before making a final decision;
- decide whether the allegation is also a breach of the Student Code of Conduct or a Professional Suitability concern (for specific courses such as Nursing) and if so, ensure appropriate action is taken via discussion with the Student Progress Team;
- keep a record of how the concern was raised and how the allegation was investigated;
- provide a written outcome of the investigation to you, your department and the Student Progress Team. The outcome notification should include a summary of the allegation, your response and the reasons for any decisions made and provide you with details of your right to appeal the outcome

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE OUTCOMES OF AN ACADEMIC OFFENCE?

The Adjudicator(s) will first need to decide whether, on the balance of probability, there is enough evidence to suggest an Academic Offence has been committed. If they decide there is not sufficient evidence, then the allegation will be dismissed and no further action would be taken. Your work should be marked as normal.

If it is determined that an offence has been committed, the Adjudicator will need to decide on a appropriate penalty. There are a total of 9 penalties available to the Adjudicators.

The following penalties can be issued by a Departmental Adjudicator, a Faculty Adjudicator and an Academic Offence Committee:

- Penalty 1: A formal written warning only

- Penalty 2: Resubmit the unit of assessment making minor amendments to correct referencing and paraphrasing or with affected sections struck out. The work can then be assessed for an **uncapped pass mark**
- Penalty 3a: Resubmit the unit of assessment making minor amendments to correct referencing and paraphrasing or with affected sections struck out. The work will then be marked for a **capped pass mark only**.
- Penalty 3b: Resubmit a dissertation for a **capped mark** with amendments as determined by the Adjudicator, such as amended specific sections, correcting references, paraphrasing or striking out). This penalty can only be applied to Postgraduate Taught dissertations.
- Penalty 4: A mark of zero issued for the unit of assessment. The Board of Examiners can consider offering reassessment in line with the Rules of Assessment, but this is usually for a **capped mark**.

The following penalties can only be issued by a Faculty Adjudicator and an Academic Offence Committee:

- Penalty 5: A mark of zero issued for the unit of assessment with no resubmission or reassessment permitted.

The following penalties can be issued only by an Academic Offence Committee:

- Penalty 6: A mark of zero issued for the whole module with no resubmission or reassessment permitted.
- Penalty 7: No longer eligible to be awarded the full degree. A mark of zero will be issued for the whole module with no resubmission or reassessment permitted. You will only be allowed to complete any current credits you enrolled for and will only be eligible to leave with an Exit Award (excluding an Ordinary Degree)
- Penalty 8: Required to withdraw immediately and no longer eligible for the full degree. A mark of zero will be issued for the whole module with no resubmission or reassessment permitted. The Board of Examiners can consider you for an Exit Award only (excluding an Ordinary Degree) based on the credits you have already achieved.
- Penalty 9: Required to withdraw immediately with no qualification awarded. A mark of zero will be issued for the whole module with no resubmission or reassessment permitted. The Board of Examiners can only ratify any credits already achieved for recording purposes.

There may be further implications of receiving an Academic Offence penalty such as being prevented from studying abroad under the Study Abroad Scheme, being prevented from completing a work placements as part of your

course, being referred to the University Fitness to Practise Procedure (this is only applicable to specific degree schemes).

Following an Academic Offence outcome, you have the right to appeal the decision if you have grounds to do so.

SU ADVICE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ATTENDING AN ACADEMIC OFFENCE MEETING

- Read through the paperwork carefully - make sure you understand what the allegation is and read through any evidence documents you have been sent.
- Read the [Academic Offences Procedures](#) - this document explains the process that should be followed in the meeting, the possible outcomes and important information about the investigation and decision making process
- Read through your work again - check where your references came from and whether you used the correct referencing style. If you can see you have made a mistake you can explain this in your meeting.
- Attend your meeting - wherever possible you should go to the meeting; this is your chance to provide information that may have an impact on the outcome. Whilst a written statement can help, there is no possibility to answer further questions or provide explanations if you don't attend.
- Be open and honest - if you worked with a friend, or received help it is best to be open about this. The decision is made on the 'balance of probability', this means they can make a decision on the most likely explanation of the offence. If there is no plausible explanation provided for similarity you can still be found guilty of an offence. Your honesty and integrity can also be considered when deciding on what penalty to issue.
- Be prepared to talk about any mitigating circumstances - if something happened that may have impacted your work (e.g., personal family issues, illness etc) it is helpful for the adjudicator to know. It can be difficult to talk about these things but it might help to explain how mistakes in your work could occur. These circumstances will not excuse an offence but can make a difference to the type of penalty that may be issued.
- Don't be afraid to get support - SU Advice are a non-judgemental, impartial service and we are happy to assist you through any Academic Offence allegation. We can help you to feel prepared for the meeting and even go with you on the day if you would like us to. If you don't want to talk with us, you can also take another member of the University or Students' Union with you to the meeting. They cannot speak on your behalf but they can be there to provide support and assistance.

HOW CAN SU ADVICE HELP ME?

SU Advice can help to go through the process and procedures with you ahead of any meeting. We can talk through the evidence with you and help you to understand the allegation. We can also attend any meetings with you and support with your right of appeal if you feel you have grounds. If you would like to meet with an adviser, please contact us as soon as possible when you receive notification of the meeting date. We will arrange you an appointment with an adviser before your meeting so that you can ask any questions. We can not guarantee we will have advisers available at short notice so please contact as early as possible.

You can book an appointment by emailing suadvice@essex.ac.uk **and sending us a client information form.** Please attach the invitation email informing you of the meeting and any evidence documents the University provides you with so that your adviser can read through these in advance of meeting with you.