Plagiarism and Research Misconduct Policy

Postgraduate Research Students

The Open University

Contents

The Open University

Summary of policy

Plagiarism is a form of cheating. It is the act of taking or copying someone else's work, ideas, or intellectual property, including another student's, and presenting it as if it were your own.

This policy defines plagiarism in the context of an Open University research degree. It sets out how incidences of plagiarism and other research misconduct committed by postgraduate research students will be investigated and provides a simple graduated framework of penalties when plagiarism or other research misconduct is confirmed.

Summary of significant changes since last version

This is a new policy document.

Scope

Who this policy covers

This document applies to postgraduate research students registered with The Open University, including those based at partner institutions.

Postgraduate students and their supervisors are therefore required to understand and comply with this policy.

Who this policy does not cover

This document does not apply to students studying taught undergraduate modules and qualifications or postgraduate students registered for taught qualifications, or studying modules that form part of a taught qualification. There is a separate Plagiarism policy for taught students.

Related Documentation

This document supplements The Open University's Research Code of Practice.

Refer to the following documentation in conjunction with this document:

- Research Code of Practice
- Research Degree Regulations

The following policy documents are cross-referenced from this document:

- Procedure for dealing with Allegations of Research Malpractice or Misconduct
- Complaints and Appeals Procedure

The Open University Student Charter Principles

This policy aligns with the following Open University Student Charter Principles:

- Principle 1: We treat each other with dignity and respect
- Principle 4: We work together to secure the University's mission and to promote the University's values

Commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at The Open University

Policies are inclusive of all Open University Students, Learners, Enquirers and Alumni, regardless of age, civil status, dependency or caring status, care experience, disability, family status, gender, gender identity, gender reassignment, marital status, marriage and civil partnerships, membership of the Traveller community, political opinion, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, socio-economic background, sex, sexual orientation or trades union membership status.

Safe Space Reporting

The Open University is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive environment in which everyone feels safe and is treated with dignity and respect. Unlawful discrimination of any kind across The Open University will not be tolerated. Safe Space Reporting is available through an online tool through which staff, students, learners and visitors are encouraged to report incidents of assault, bullying, harassment, hate crime, or sexual harassment. It also provides information about what you can do if these incidents happen to you, or to someone you know, and where you can find support.

Introduction

The [Research Code of Practice](#) sets out the standards that govern the conduct of research at The Open University. It lists plagiarism as an act of research malpractice or misconduct, i.e. an act or behaviour which falls short of the standards required to ensure that the integrity of The Open University's research is upheld.

This policy defines plagiarism in the context of an Open University research degree. It sets out how incidences of plagiarism or other research misconduct committed by postgraduate research students will be investigated and provides a simple graduated framework of penalties for when plagiarism or other misconduct is confirmed.

You should read through this policy and procedure carefully. For specific advice on how this document applies to your own research, upgrade, thesis and/or personal circumstances, seek advice from your supervisors and/or [the Graduate School](#).

Policy

1. Purpose

The objectives of this policy are to:

1.1.1 Define plagiarism as it relates to postgraduate research students undertaking an Open University research degree.

1.1.2 Set out the principles and procedures by which incidences of apparent or alleged plagiarism or other research misconduct will be investigated.

1.1.3 Set out the penalties for confirmed incidences of plagiarism or other research misconduct.

1.1.4 Indicate the appeal mechanisms that are available.

2. Policy principles

The Open University's Research Code of Practice (paragraph 1.3) states that:

'Research at The Open University is based on the principles of **high standards**, **honesty**, **openness**, **accountability**, **integrity**, **inclusion** and **safety**. The University expects high standards of personal conduct from all those engaged in research, and its research environment is one where excellence and high ethical standards are promoted.'

Paragraph 9 lists plagiarism as an act of research malpractice or misconduct, i.e. 'a behaviour or an action that falls short of the standards required to ensure that the integrity of The Open University's research is upheld'.

As a postgraduate research student, you are expected to:

- be familiar with the Research Code of Practice
- undertake plagiarism avoidance training and research integrity training, prior to upgrade

- understand and apply at all times the principles of correct academic practice and research integrity, seeking advice from your supervisors where you are unsure
- understand the definition of plagiarism set out in this document
- understand the definition of research misconduct set out in section 9 of the Research Code of Practice
- understand the consequences of plagiarism, and other acts of research misconduct.

Whether plagiarism is committed intentionally or unintentionally, the University considers it to be research misconduct and the consequences set out in this document will apply.

All other incidences of research misconduct, as defined in section 9 of the Research Code of Practice, that involve a postgraduate research student, will also be investigated according to the procedure and penalty framework set out in this document.

3. Definition of Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the act of taking or copying someone else's work, ideas, or intellectual property, including another student's, and presenting it as if it were your own. The term plagiarism applies if you present any ideas and materials such as texts, data, created artistic artefacts without the correct acknowledgement.

An act of plagiarism is committed if any person, that is considering a piece of your work, is given the impression that they are reading your own original work when it is not the case.

Plagiarism also occurs where your own work is re-presented without being properly referenced.

Acts of plagiarism can be sub-divided as follows:

Copying

The use of any published or unpublished source material, including but not limited to text, data, created artistic artefacts without the correct acknowledgement is copying. Direct copying of text must be accompanied by acknowledgement including quotation marks and page numbers. Plagiarism is also copying another student's unpublished work with or without their consent.

Collusion

Plagiarism by collusion refers to two or more students presenting work prepared jointly and without acknowledging this collaboration e.g. one student presenting collaborative work but implying it was their own independent work.

Duplication

Also known as 'self plagiarising' is the use of a piece of work that has been used for credit elsewhere. Examples would be the verbatim presentation of your peer-reviewed and published text in your thesis without appropriate citation; the use of data obtained during a first degree or Master's degree in your Doctoral thesis.

Purchasing

This refers to buying materials from the internet, or otherwise paying someone to produce materials, and presenting them as your own within a supervision session, in a presentation, in a poster, during upgrade, in a published or unpublished paper, in your thesis, or in examination.

4. Definition of Research Misconduct

An act or behaviour which falls short of the standards required to ensure that the integrity of The Open University's research is upheld. Definitions and examples of research misconduct are listed in section 9 of the Research Code of Practice.

Procedure

This procedure sets out how allegations of postgraduate research student plagiarism or other research misconduct (as defined in section 9 of the Research Code of Practice) will be investigated. It provides a simple, graduated framework of penalties when plagiarism or other research misconduct is confirmed.

Penalties will take into account the severity and impact of the plagiarism or other research misconduct, the extent and number of offences.

Where plagiarism or other research misconduct is confirmed, the University will take action in each case.

1. Responsible

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research, Enterprise and Scholarship) is the University's named person responsible for the investigation of allegations of research misconduct, including plagiarism. This officer has delegated responsibility for investigating research misconduct involving Open University postgraduate research students to the Graduate School Director.

The investigation process will be supported by the Graduate School.

2. Reporting concerns

Most cases of postgraduate research student plagiarism or other research misconduct are detected by the supervisors, the upgrade assessors or the examiners.

Legitimate concerns should be reported, without prejudice, in writing, to the Graduate School.

Where the research is in the public domain, for example, published in a journal, presented at a conference, or published on Open University Online, it may be brought to the University's attention by an external academic through The Open University's published research integrity procedures, in which case the University's research integrity officer will notify the Graduate School.

3. Fairness

The University will investigate allegations of postgraduate research student plagiarism or other research misconduct fairly and without reference to individual characteristics, in accordance with its commitment to create an

inclusive University community which treats all students and staff with dignity and respect.

4. Student support

At the request of the Graduate School, the Faculty Associate Dean Research or delegate, will appoint named individuals to support a student during the investigation process when an allegation of plagiarism or other research misconduct is made.

5. Prior to upgrade

5.1 You are required to undertake the Graduate School's plagiarism avoidance training, and its research integrity training.

5.2 If your supervisor or a third party identifies that you have plagiarised, or committed another form of research misconduct at any time before your upgrade assessment, in:

- your written work,
- a presentation (in oral or in written form),
- a poster,

you will receive a verbal warning from your supervisors and you will be asked to rectify the matter.

5.3 You must rectify the matter immediately and undertake the Graduate School's plagiarism avoidance and/or research integrity training again, as applicable.

5.4 You will be required to confirm in writing that you have rectified the matter, and undertaken the relevant training.

5.5 Your supervisors, or Affiliated Research Centre (ARC) research degree coordinator, where applicable, must inform the Graduate School that you have plagiarised, or committed another form of research misconduct, but have rectified the matter and undertaken the relevant training.

5.6 A record of the incident, that you have rectified it and undertaken relevant training will be kept on your student file for the duration of your registration.

5.7 Serious cases, such as having purchased text from a third party, will be referred to the Graduate School Director and investigated according to the procedure set out in section 6 below.

6. During upgrade

Your upgrade assessment requires you to write a report, make an oral presentation and discuss your work in a mini *viva*.

6.1 If it is suspected that you have plagiarised any material in any of the upgrade activities, or committed another form of research misconduct, your supervisors, or your ARC research degrees coordinator, where applicable, will inform the Graduate School and the Associate Dean Research or delegate from your Faculty. The Graduate School Director will ask for the upgrade process to cease immediately and inform you of this in writing.

6.2 If the suspected plagiarized material, or other research misconduct is identified during the mini *viva*, the upgrade assessors must immediately cease the mini viva and inform the Graduate School, via your ARC research

degree coordinator, where applicable. The Graduate School Director will subsequently confirm to you in writing that the upgrade process has ceased and the reason for that.

6.3   If necessary, plagiarism detection software, submissions from your supervisors, your upgrade assessors or other relevant third parties, may be used in order to determine whether an act of plagiarism, or other research misconduct has taken place.

6.4   You will be interviewed by the Graduate School Director and the relevant Associate Dean Research or delegate.

6.5   If it is confirmed that plagiarism or other research misconduct has taken place, the Graduate School Director and the Associate Dean Research or delegate will decide, in discussion with your supervisors or ARC research degree coordinator, where applicable, whether to:

- permit you a second opportunity to undertake upgrade activities
- de-register you for failure to complete upgrade successfully.

The decision will take into account the severity and impact of the plagiarism, or other research misconduct, the extent and number of offences.

6.6   You will be notified in writing of the findings of the investigation and the decision of the Graduate School Director and the Associate Dean Research or delegate in respect of penalties.

6.7   If you are permitted a second attempt at upgrade, you will be required to rectify the plagiarism or other research misconduct detected, and to

undertake the plagiarism avoidance training and/or research integrity training again, as applicable.

6.8 You will be required to confirm in writing that you have rectified the plagiarism or other research misconduct and undertaken the relevant training.

6.9 A record of the incident and the outcome will be kept on your student file for the duration of your registration.

7. Prior to thesis submission

After upgrade confirmation, any plagiarism or other research misconduct, during the research process, in your thesis, in a publication or presentation at a conference, that is detected by your supervisors, or another individual, is a serious matter.

7.1 Your supervisors, or other internal members of The Open University research community, where relevant, or the ARC research degree coordinator, where applicable, must inform the Graduate School and the Associate Dean Research or delegate from your Faculty if plagiarism or other research misconduct is suspected. If the suspected plagiarism or research misconduct is detected by an academic external to the University, the notification may come through the University's published research integrity procedures, in which case the University's research integrity officer will notify the Graduate School.

7.2 If you are supported by a UK Research Council stipend, the investigation will be reported to the relevant Research Council at this stage.

7.3 The Graduate School Director will appoint a panel comprised of two senior academic members of University staff to investigate the allegation. One panel member will have subject expertise in the area of the thesis and one will be from outside the Faculty where you are registered. Where an internal member of academic staff with expertise in the area of the thesis is not available, the Graduate School Director may appoint a member of academic or research staff with such expertise from another UK Higher Education Institution.

7.4 The panel members must declare in writing to the Graduate School Director that their appointment involves no conflict of interest, seeking advice from the Graduate School Director if unsure.

7.5 The panel will seek a written submission from the individual making the allegation.

7.6 The panel will ask you to respond in writing to the written submission within 10 working days.

7.7 The panel will review the written evidence. It will interview in separate sessions, the individual making the allegation, your supervisors, and you. It may choose to interview other relevant parties if the case requires it.

7.8 The panel will report its findings to the Graduate School Director.

7.9 The Graduate School Director, will consider the report and, if a finding of plagiarism or other research misconduct is confirmed, will decide whether to:

a) permit you to rectify the plagiarism or other research misconduct and continue your registration.

b) de-register you for and breach of the terms and conditions of registration.

The decision will take into account the severity and impact of the plagiarism, or other research misconduct, the extent and number of offences.

7.10 You will be notified in writing of the findings of the investigation and the decision of the Graduate School Director in respect of penalties. This communication will be copied to your supervisors and the Associate Dean Research or delegate in your Faculty, and your ARC research degree coordinator, where applicable.

7.11 If the individual who raised the allegation is someone other than your supervisor, the findings of the investigation will be notified to them in writing.

7.12 If you are in receipt of a UK Research Council stipend, the findings of the investigation will be reported to the relevant UK Research Council.

7.13 The University will take whatever steps are necessary to correct the public research record, should plagiarism or other research misconduct be confirmed and any work arising from your research project be in the public domain.

7.14 A record of the incident and the outcome will be kept on your student file for the duration of your registration.

8. Thesis examination

8.1 If your examiners suspect plagiarised material, or other research misconduct, then they will inform the Examination Panel Chair who will immediately inform the Graduate School, via your ARC research degree coordinator, where applicable. The Graduate School Director will ask for the examination process to cease immediately and inform you of this in writing.

8.2 If the suspected plagiarised material, or other research misconduct is identified during the viva voce, the Examination Panel Chair must immediately cease the examination and inform the Graduate School, via your ARC research degree coordinator, where applicable. The Graduate School Director will subsequently confirm to you in writing that the examination process has ceased and the reason for that.

8.3 If you were supported by a UK Research Council stipend, the investigation will be reported to the relevant Research Council at this stage.

8.4 The Graduate School Director will appoint a panel comprised of two senior academic members of University staff to investigate the allegation. One panel member will have subject expertise in the area of the thesis and one will be from outside the Faculty where you are registered. Where an internal member of academic staff with expertise in the area of the thesis is not available, the Graduate School Director may appoint a member of academic or research staff with such expertise from another UK Higher Education Institution.

8.5   The panel members must declare in writing to the Graduate School Director that their appointment involves no conflict of interest, seeking advice from the Graduate School Director if unsure.

8.6   The panel will seek a written submission from the examiners.

8.7   The panel will ask you to respond in writing to the written submission within 10 working days.

8.8   The panel will review the written evidence. It will interview in separate sessions, the examiner(s), your supervisors, and you. It may choose to interview other relevant parties, if the case requires it.

8.9   The panel will report its findings to the Graduate School Director.

8.10   The Graduate School Director, will consider the report and, if a finding of plagiarism or other research misconduct is confirmed, will decide whether to:

a) permit you to rectify the plagiarism or other research misconduct and resubmit your thesis for examination/re-examination, as applicable.

b) de-register you for and breach of the terms and conditions of registration.

The decision will take into account the severity and impact of the plagiarism, or other research misconduct, the extent and number of offences.

8.11   You will be notified in writing of the findings of the investigation and the decision of the Graduate School Director in respect of penalties. This communication will be copied to your supervisors and the Associate Dean

Research or delegate in your Faculty, and your ARC research degree coordinator, where applicable.

8.12 The examiners will be notified in writing of the outcome of the investigation and the decision of the Graduate School Director.

8.13 If you were in receipt of a UK Research Council stipend, the findings of the investigation will be reported to the relevant UK Research Council.

8.14 The University will take whatever steps are necessary to correct the public research record, should plagiarism or other research misconduct be confirmed and any work arising from your research project be in the public domain.

8.15 A record of the incident and the outcome will be kept on your student file.

9. Post Graduation

9.1 Any allegations of plagiarism or other research misconduct received after your degree has been awarded will be investigated according to The Open University's [Procedure for dealing with Allegations of Research Malpractice or Misconduct](#).

9.2 If plagiarism or other research misconduct is confirmed, the University may revoke your research degree award. The decision will take into account the severity and impact of the plagiarism, or other research misconduct, the extent and number of offences.

9.3 If you were in receipt of a UK Research Council stipend, the investigation and its findings will be reported to the relevant UK Research Council.

9.4 The University will take whatever steps are necessary to correct the public research record, should plagiarism or other research misconduct be

confirmed and any work arising from your research project be in the public domain.

9.5   A record of the incident and the outcome will be kept on your student file.

10. Right of Appeal

10.1   You have a right to appeal at stages 5, 6, 7, 8 through University's [Complaints and Appeals Procedure](#).

10.2   You have a right to appeal at stage 9 through the University's [Procedure for dealing with Allegations of Research Malpractice or Misconduct](#).

Glossary of terms

Plagiarism

See definition under [section 3](#) of this policy.

Research integrity

Good research practice. Conducting research in a way which allows others to have trust in the research methods used, and the research results. Upholding the professional standards expected of researchers in The Open University. These standards are set out in the [Research Code of Practice.](#)

Research misconduct

An act or behaviour which falls short of the standards required to ensure that the integrity of The Open University's research is upheld. Definitions and

examples of research misconduct are listed in section 9 of the [Research Code of Practice](#)

Further clarification

If you have any queries around the content provided within this document and how to interpret it, please contact your supervisors and/or [the Graduate School](#).

If you have any comments about this policy document and how it might be improved, please [submit these to the Research Integrity team](#).

Alternative format

If you require this document in an alternative format, please [contact the Graduate School](#).

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