

Plagiarism and Research Misconduct Policy

Postgraduate Research Students

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1. Introduction

UCEM is committed to excellent research supported by the Code of Practice chapter on Research which promotes good conduct at all stages in its research process and research of the highest quality. Good academic practice and academic integrity are central to the values promoted by UCEM. It is important that all UCEM Postgraduate Research (PGR) students are assessed on their own ability and that no student is allowed to gain an unfair advantage over others, or to diminish the quality or academic standing of an academic award.

This policy defines plagiarism and misconduct in the context of a research degree award. It sets out how incidences of apparent or suspected plagiarism and other research misconduct committed by postgraduate research students will be investigated and the penalties that will be applied. It also outlines the appeal mechanisms that are available.

UCEM will endeavour to ensure that information is available to you at all stages of the procedure in appropriate formats, and that, where you have a declared disability, any reasonable adjustments are made to the associated proceedings to accommodate your needs.

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 UCEM Graduate Research School.

2. Scope

The procedure applies to postgraduate research students registered with UCEM where The Open University (OU) is the awarding institution.

This procedure does not cover students registered on taught programmes at UCEM who should instead refer to Academic Misconduct Procedure (taught provision).

UCEM reserves the right to investigate a case of plagiarism or research misconduct of a student that has been awarded or graduated if the plagiarism or research misconduct occurred during the period that they were registered with UCEM.

3. Commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

This policy is inclusive of all UCEM 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.

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4. Policy principles

UCEM's Code of Practice chapter on Research states that:

'Both UCEM and its researchers should promote and maintain an environment which fosters and supports research of high ethical standards, mutual co-operation, professionalism, and the open and honest exchange of ideas. Fostering a culture where good conduct in research is promoted while inappropriate conduct is identified and addressed'.

As a postgraduate research student, you are expected to:

- be familiar with UCEM Code of Practice chapter on Research;
- 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 definitions of plagiarism and research misconduct set out in the sections 5 and 6 below;
- understand the consequences of plagiarism, and other acts of research misconduct.

Where plagiarism is committed intentionally or unintentionally, UCEM 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 6 below, that involve a postgraduate research student, will also be investigated according to the procedure and penalty framework set out in this document.

5. 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 text, data, created 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 they are reading your 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.

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Plagiarism is also copying another student's unpublished work with or without their consent. This includes content created by generative artificial intelligence, which is not cited or referenced, with the intention of convincing the reader it is your own work.

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 PGR 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.

6. Definition of Research Misconduct

The definition of research misconduct used throughout this Policy has been taken from the Concordat to support Research Integrity ¹, namely: *'research misconduct is characterised as behaviours or actions that fall short of the standards of ethics, research and scholarship required to ensure that the integrity of research is upheld. It can cause harm to people and the environment, wastes resources, undermines the research record and damages the credibility of research. The Concordat recognises that academic freedom is fundamental to the production of excellent research. This means that responsibility for ensuring that no misconduct occurs rests primarily with individual researchers.'* ¹

Thus, research misconduct includes:

- a. fabrication: making up results, other outputs (for example, artefacts) or aspects of research, including documentation and participant consent, and presenting and/or recording them as if they were real.
- b. falsification: inappropriately manipulating and/or selecting research processes, materials, equipment, data, imagery and/or consents.
- c. plagiarism: using other people's ideas, intellectual property or work (written or otherwise) without acknowledgement or permission.
- d. failure to meet legal, ethical and professional obligations, for example:

¹ [Updated FINAL-the-concordat-to-support-research-integrity.pdf](#)

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- i. not observing legal, ethical and other requirements for human research participants, animal subjects, or human organs or tissue used in research, or for the protection of the environment;
 - ii. breach of duty of care for humans involved in research whether deliberately, recklessly or by gross negligence, including failure to obtain appropriate informed consent;
 - iii. misuse of personal data, including inappropriate disclosures of the identity of research participants and other breaches of confidentiality;
 - iv. improper conduct in peer review of research proposals, results or manuscripts submitted for publication. This includes failure to disclose conflicts of interest; inadequate disclosure of clearly limited competence; misappropriation of the content of material; and breach of confidentiality or abuse of material provided in confidence for the purposes of peer review;
 - v. failure to follow protocols contained in ethics approvals and unethical behaviour in the conduct of research;
 - vi. failure to obtain appropriate permission to conduct research with ethical implications.
- e.** misrepresentation of:
- i. research findings and data, including suppression of results/ data or knowingly, recklessly or by gross negligence presenting a flawed interpretation of data;
 - ii. the ideas or the work of others, whether or not for personal gain or enhancement;
 - iii. involvement, including inappropriate claims to authorship or attribution of work and denial of authorship/attribution to persons who have made an appropriate contribution;
 - iv. interests, including failure to declare competing interests of researchers or funders of a study or any other conflict of interest that may appear to compromise or appear to compromise the integrity of research findings;
 - v. qualifications, experience and/or credentials;
 - vi. publication history, through undisclosed duplication of publication, including undisclosed duplicate submission of manuscripts for publication.
- f.** deliberately attempting to deceive when making a research proposal.
- g.** improper dealing with allegations of misconduct: failing to address possible infringements, such as attempts to cover up misconduct and reprisals against whistle-blowers or failing to adhere appropriately to agreed procedures in the investigation of alleged research misconduct accepted as a condition of funding. Improper dealing with allegations of misconduct includes the inappropriate censoring of parties through the use of legal instruments, such as non-disclosure agreements.
- h.** inciting others to commit research misconduct or facilitation of research misconduct through concealment.
- i.** submitting a vexatious accusation of research misconduct.

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Procedure

This procedure sets out how allegations of PGR student plagiarism and other research misconduct 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 research misconduct, the extent and number of offences.

When plagiarism or other research misconduct is confirmed, UCEM will take action in each case and where appropriate notify The Open University as the awarding body.

1. Responsible

The UCEM Associate Dean (Research) is the UCEM named person responsible for the investigation of allegations of research misconduct, including plagiarism and will be responsible for investigating cases of suspected research misconduct relating to PGR students.

The investigation process will be supported by the UCEM Graduate Research School (GRS) and where appropriate referred to the OU Graduate School.

2. Reporting concerns

Most cases of PGR 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 OU [Graduate School](#).

Where the research is in the public domain, for example, published in a journal presented at a conference, it may be brought to UCEM's attention by an external academic through UCEM's Research Misconduct Policy, in which case the UCEM Associate Dean (Research) will notify the Graduate Research School. Alternatively it may be brought to the OU's attention through the OU's published [research integrity procedures](#), in which case the OU's research integrity officer will notify the Graduate School.

3. Fairness

UCEM will investigate allegations of PGR student plagiarism or other research misconduct fairly and without reference to individual characteristics, in accordance with its commitment to create an inclusive community which treats all students and staff with dignity and respect.

4. Student support

The UCEM Graduate Research School will appoint named individuals to support a PGR student during the investigation process when an allegation of plagiarism or other research misconduct is made.

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5. Safeguards

UCEM is committed to ensuring that all allegations of plagiarism and research misconduct are investigated thoroughly, fairly, without unnecessary delay, and with care and sensitivity. A presumption of innocence will be maintained until the investigation process is complete.

Information about plagiarism or research misconduct investigations will only be disclosed to those involved in investigating or deciding upon it, or to those offering support.

UCEM strictly adheres to the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018 when dealing with personal and sensitive information (or special categories of personal data under UK GDPR).

6. Prior to upgrade

6.1 You are required to undertake plagiarism avoidance training, and research integrity training.

6.2 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.

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

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

6.5 Your supervisor must inform the UCEM Associate Dean (Research), who, where applicable, must inform the OU Graduate School that you have plagiarised, or committed another form of research misconduct, but have rectified the matter and undertaken the relevant training.

6.6 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.

6.7 Serious cases, such as having purchased text from a third party, will be referred to the UCEM Associate Dean (Research) and investigated according to the procedure set out in section 7 below.

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7. During upgrade

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

- 7.1 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 must inform the UCEM Associate Dean (Research), who will inform the OU Graduate School. The OU Graduate School Director will ask for the upgrade process to cease immediately and inform you of this in writing.
- 7.2 If the suspected plagiarised material, or other research misconduct is identified during the mini viva, the upgrade assessors must immediately cease the mini viva and inform the OU Graduate School, via the UCEM Associate Dean (Research). The OU Graduate School Director will subsequently confirm to you in writing that the upgrade process has ceased and the reason for that.
- 7.3 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.
- 7.4 You will be interviewed by a panel chaired by the OU Graduate School Director which will include representatives from the OU and UCEM including the UCEM Associate Dean (Research) or delegate.
- 7.5 If it is confirmed that plagiarism or other research misconduct has taken place, the OU Graduate School Director and the OU Associate Dean Research or delegate will decide, in discussion with your supervisors or UCEM Associate Dean (Research), 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.
- 7.6 You will be notified in writing of the findings of the investigation and the decision of the OU Graduate School Director and the OU Associate Dean Research or delegate in respect of penalties.
- 7.7 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.
- 7.8 You will be required to confirm in writing that you have rectified the plagiarism or other research misconduct and undertaken the relevant training.
- 7.9 A record of the incident and the outcome will be kept on your student file for the duration of your registration.

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8. 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.

- 8.1 Your supervisors must inform the UCEM Associate Dean (Research) who will then inform the OU Graduate School if plagiarism or other research misconduct is suspected. If the suspected plagiarism or research misconduct is detected by an academic external to the UCEM, the notification may come through UCEM's Research Misconduct Policy to the UCEM Associate Dean (Research) who will notify the OU Graduate School. Alternatively notification may come through the OU's published [research integrity procedures](#), in which case the OU's research integrity officer will notify the OU Graduate School.
- 8.2 If you are supported by a UK Research Council stipend, the investigation will be reported to the relevant Research Council at this stage.
- 8.3 The OU Graduate School Director will appoint a panel comprised of two senior academic members of OU staff and a senior member of UCEM staff to investigate the allegation. One panel member will have subject expertise in the area of the thesis, and one will be external to UCEM. Where an OU or UCEM internal member of academic staff with expertise in the area of the thesis is not available, the OU Graduate School Director may appoint a member of academic or research staff with such expertise from another UK Higher Education Institution.
- 8.4 The panel members must declare in writing to the OU Graduate School Director that their appointment involves no conflict of interest, seeking advice from the OU Graduate School Director if unsure.
- 8.5 The panel will seek a written submission from the individual making the allegation.
- 8.6 The panel will ask you to respond in writing to the written submission within 10 working days.
- 8.7 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.
- 8.8 The panel will report its findings to the OU Graduate School Director.
- 8.9 The OU Graduate School Director will consider the report and, if a finding of plagiarism or other research misconduct is confirmed, will decide whether to:
 - permit you to rectify the plagiarism or other research misconduct and continue your registration.
 - de-register you for and breach of the terms and conditions of registration.
- 8.10 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 OU Graduate School Director in respect of penalties. This communication will be copied to your supervisors and the UCEM Associate Dean (Research).

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- 8.12 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.
- 8.13 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.
- 8.14 UCEM and OU 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 for the duration of your registration.

9. Thesis examination

If your examiners suspect plagiarised material, or other research misconduct, then they will inform the Examination Panel Chair who will immediately inform the OU Graduate School, via the UCEM Associate Dean (Research). The OU Graduate School Director will ask for the examination process to cease immediately and inform you of this in writing.

- 9.1 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 OU Graduate School, via the UCEM Associate Dean (Research). The OU Graduate School Director will subsequently confirm to you in writing that the examination process has ceased and the reason for that.
- 9.2 If you were supported by a UK Research Council stipend, the investigation will be reported to the relevant Research Council at this stage.
- 9.3 The OU Graduate School Director will appoint a panel comprised of two senior academic members of University staff to investigate the allegation. One panel member will be drawn from UCEM and another from outside UCEM. One panel member will have subject expertise in the area. Where an internal member of academic staff with expertise in the area of the thesis is not available, the OU Graduate School Director may appoint a member of academic or research staff with such expertise from another UK Higher Education Institution.
- 9.4 The panel members must declare in writing to the OU Graduate School Director that their appointment involves no conflict of interest, seeking advice from the OU Graduate School Director if unsure.
- 9.5 The panel will seek a written submission from the examiners.
- 9.6 The panel will ask you to respond in writing to the written submission within 10 working days.
- 9.7 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.
- 9.8 The panel will report its findings to the OU Graduate School Director.
- 9.9 The OU Graduate School Director will consider the report and, if a finding of plagiarism or other research misconduct is confirmed, will decide whether to:

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1. permit you to rectify the plagiarism or other research misconduct and resubmit your thesis for examination/re-examination, as applicable.
2. 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.

- 9.10 You will be notified in writing of the findings of the investigation and the decision of the OU Graduate School Director in respect of penalties. This communication will be copied to your supervisors and the UCEM Associate Dean (Research).
- 9.11 The examiners will be notified in writing of the outcome of the investigation and the decision of the OU Graduate School Director.
- 9.12 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.
- 9.13 UCEM and OU 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.
- 9.14 A record of the incident and the outcome will be kept in your student file.

10. Post Graduation

- 10.1 Any allegations of plagiarism or other research misconduct received in relation to your award after your degree has been awarded will be investigated according to the [OU's Procedure for Dealing with Allegation of Research Malpractice or Misconduct](#) (opens new window).
- 10.2 If plagiarism or other research misconduct is confirmed, your degree may be revoked. The decision will take into account the severity and impact of the plagiarism, or other research misconduct, the extent and the number of offences.
- 10.3 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.
- 10.4 UCEM and The Open 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.
- 10.5 A record of the incident and outcome will be kept on file.

11. Appeals

You have the right to appeal on a decision made with relation to **plagiarism and research misconduct**. Details of the procedure and the grounds for appeal are set out in the Postgraduate Research Student Appeals Procedure.

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12. Related policies

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following:

- Research Degree Regulations
- Research Code of Practice
- Postgraduate Research Student Appeals Procedure
- [OU's Procedure for Dealing with Allegation of Research Malpractice or Misconduct \(opens new window\)](#)

13. Further clarification

If you have any queries around the content provided within this document and how to interpret it, please contact your supervisors, GraduateResearchSchool@ucem.ac.uk and/or OU Graduate School.