

Guide to the investigative and disciplinary process: procedure for Chairs of Examiners and Proctors

Introduction

The process for dealing with suspected cases of plagiarism distinguishes between academic and disciplinary aspects of the case. Academic assessment is the responsibility of the Examiners whereas discipline is the domain of the Proctors, the University Advocate and the Court of Discipline.

Most cases can be attributed to poor scholarship and so can be addressed by deducting a number of marks proportionate to the level of faulty scholarship following the procedures for examiners which are available online at <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/plagiarism/examiners/>.

This document is a guide to the investigative and disciplinary process which is implemented when the Chair of Examiners/Degree Committee and/or the Proctors decide to call an investigative meeting if there is a suspicion that a candidate intended to gain unfair advantage and so has committed a disciplinary offence.

The investigative meeting

An investigative meeting is required in all cases of suspected unfair means. The purposes of the meeting are to:

- determine the extent of the candidate's own work and identify any unattributed sources;
- identify modifications which might be required to the Examiners' academic assessment;
- decide whether the case should be referred to the University Advocate.

1. Initial steps

The Proctor and Chair of Examiners/Degree Committee should establish which form of plagiarism or collusion is suspected and start to assemble relevant information and evidence for consideration at the meeting.

The Chair of Examiners should summon the candidate to the meeting via the candidate's Senior Tutor, who should be advised of the need to be available throughout the proceedings. The reasons for the meeting, together with copies of supporting evidence and other relevant documentation, should be given to the Tutor, or representative of each candidate. The Tutor or representative may discuss the supporting evidence and other relevant documentation with the candidate.

The Chair of Examiners should ensure that a formal record of all actions and meetings is kept.

2. Timing

The investigative meeting should not be held at a time which might interfere with a candidate's revision or examination performance. In the case of submitted work it should be possible to organise the meeting ahead of the main examination period but otherwise the meeting should not be held until after the candidate's last examination.

If the investigative meeting cannot take place before publication of the class list, the examiners must class the candidate on the basis of the work they have been able to assess. The Chair of Examiners should still consult the University Advocate directly and urgently prior to the Examiners' meeting that determines the Class List.

3. Composition

The following must be invited and attend:

- the Chair of Examiners (who will chair the investigative meeting);
- the Examiner(s) responsible for marking the work;

- the candidate's Tutor, Director of Studies or other individual whom the student would like to accompany him/or her;
- a Proctor.

The group should include at least one man and at least one woman. If necessary, an additional Tutor or member of the relevant Faculty should be invited. The Chair of Examiners may wish to have a note-taker in attendance.

In cases of collusion Tutors or representatives of all the candidates involved should be invited to the meeting and the candidates should all be available during the meeting.

4. Role of the Proctor

- To maintain a University-wide overview of the extent and diversity of incidents in undergraduate and graduate examinations.
- To help evaluate the facts in individual cases.
- To promote equity of treatment across subjects and examinations and offer advice on good practice.
- To refer to guidance on plagiarism and good academic practice issued by the University and/or Faculty Board.

5. Conduct of the meeting

- The Chair should explain the purpose of the meeting.
- The candidate should be given adequate opportunity to offer an explanation when the evidence is considered.
- Where the submitted work is a dissertation, essay or project report any declaration by the candidate regarding its authorship should be cited.
- A formal record of the meeting should be kept.
- In cases of collusion candidates should be brought in separately.

6. Possible outcomes

i. No case to answer: the suspicions of plagiarism or collusion are unfounded

The Chair of Examiners should convey the outcome to the candidate and his/her Tutor or representative in writing and advise them that the examination will proceed as normal.

ii. No intention to gain unfair advantage but evidence of poor scholarship

The Examiners may modify their marking in light of the decision, including adjusting the final mark downward in accordance with the marking and classing criteria to reflect the extent of the poor scholarship.

The Chair of Examiners should:

- convey the outcome to the candidate in writing through the Senior Tutor with the minutes of the investigative meeting and at the same time notify the Secretary of the Board of Examinations/Graduate Studies (as appropriate);
- advise the candidate that the final marks reflect the extent and academic merit of their own work and take account of poor scholarship;
- ensure that the candidate is provided with guidance on correct referencing and how to avoid plagiarism.

[If applicable] a recommendation should be made to the Board of Graduate Studies in the normal way, except that it should include a statement about the alleged plagiarism, how it has been investigated and the outcome.

iii. Unfair means suspected

Where it is evident that there was a deliberate attempt to gain an unfair advantage, or that the facts are unclear or disputed, or the offence is extensive, the Proctor will refer the case and all supporting evidence to the University Advocate.

The Chair of Examiners should advise the candidate and his/her Tutor in writing that the case has been referred to the University Advocate and that any recommendation made by the Examiners' Meeting/Degree Committee may be modified by the results of any ensuing disciplinary proceedings.

The Proctor should refer the case to the University Advocate with the following supporting evidence:

- a record of the departmental interview/oral examination [if one was held];
- the minutes of the investigative meeting;
- the submitted work with the relevant sections highlighted as well as any other evidence compiled by the Examiners;
- [in cases of plagiarism] a copy of the original material from which the work was allegedly plagiarised;
- [in cases of collusion] all relevant material which gave rise to the allegation of collusion;
- relevant local guidance which was issued to candidates;
- a copy of the relevant marking and classing criteria;
- any declaration form submitted with the assignment regarding the originality of the work;
- any additional information or mitigating evidence provided by or on behalf of the candidate.

The Examiners' meeting (or Degree Committee as appropriate)

The candidate's marks should be reported to the Examiners' meeting/Degree Committee in the usual way alongside the minutes of the investigative meeting. The candidate must be classed on the basis of the classification scheme, and marks awarded to reflect the extent and academic merit of the work judged to be the candidate's own contribution: further marks should not be deducted or withheld pending a decision of the University Advocate or hearing of the Court of Discipline.

Note for Research Degrees if it is recommended that the candidate would fail the examination

If the outcome of the academic assessment of the candidate's own work is that s/he would fail the examination the Degree Committee should inform the Proctors and Secretary of the Board of Graduate Studies of the outcome of the academic assessment and include a statement about the alleged plagiarism (including how it has been investigated and the outcome).

The Advocate would not normally take the case further as it will rarely be in the University's interest to institute disciplinary proceedings against a person who has failed to obtain a degree for academic reasons. However, the University may seek to do so in particularly serious cases, where, for example, the person already holds a Cambridge degree.

The Examiners may consult the University Advocate directly and urgently if they wish a charge to be laid before the Class List is published (Statutes and Ordinances BVI para 16), in which case it is likely that an investigative meeting will be required.

Possible decisions of the University Advocate

1. Not to pursue the case

This may be because the candidate has failed, in which case the examination process can be concluded.

If the Advocate decides not to pursue the case, or the Court of Discipline subsequently finds the relevant charge not proved, the decision is final. The Examiners must not substitute any suspicions of their own and are not empowered to subsequently impose any form of penalty.

2. To interview the candidate before determining whether the case should be taken to the Court of Discipline

The candidate's Tutor should be present at the interview.

3. To charge the candidate and bring the matter before the Court of Discipline

i. If the case is proved

The Court will determine an appropriate penalty which may include:

- deprivation of membership of the University;
- disqualification from admission from a qualification;
- lowering the classification;
- failure.

Where the Court determines that the candidate should receive a lower classification or should fail, a Notice will be published in the next suitable edition of the Reporter.

In the event that the student is deprived of membership of the University, or disqualified from admission to a qualification, there will generally be no need for the academic assessment process to play any further part at this stage. However, a candidate who fails to be awarded the qualification as a result of these disciplinary proceedings may seek a Review in the normal way.

ii. If the court finds the charge not proved

The Examiners' Meeting (or Degree Committee as appropriate) and Board of Examinations (or Graduate Studies as appropriate) can proceed to conclude the examination process, but they should then do so on the basis that there is no question of the student intending to use unfair means. These bodies must be careful to avoid substituting suspicions of their own or of the examiners in place of the decision of the University Advocate or the decision of the Court.