Academic Misconduct

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Purpose

Academic integrity is fundamental to the values of Open Awards, the Access to Higher Education Diploma, Apprenticeship gateway procedures and qualifications within the UK. This policy outlines our expectations regarding academic conduct and specifies prohibited practices such as plagiarism, collusion, content theft or harvesting, contract cheating, proxy testing, fabrication and the acceptable use of generative AI. All Providers must ensure their learners (including apprentices) understand and adhere to this policy to ensure quality, validity, reliability and academic excellence.

Scope

This document is applicable for the following Open Awards products:

Ofqual and QiW regulated qualifications and units	☑
Access to HE Diplomas	☑
End-point Assessment	☑
Quality Endorsed Courses	☑
Badge of Excellence	☑
Online Learning and Courses	☑

Definitions and Prohibited Practices

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the act of presenting another person's work, ideas, or intellectual property as one's own without proper acknowledgment. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Copying or paraphrasing text, code, images, or other materials without citation.
- Submitting another student's work as one's own.
- Failing to reference sources appropriately.

Providers should have clear policies outlining the implications of learners found to plagiarise and Open Awards will consider any example found during our checks as malpractice.

Collusion

Collusion occurs when two or more learners collaborate inappropriately on work meant to be completed independently. This includes:

- Sharing answers or assignment content without authorisation.
- Allowing another learner to copy work.
- Working jointly on individual assessments unless explicitly permitted.

Open Awards expects Providers to have appropriate safeguards in place and to ensure that learners understand and can explain any work submitted.

Content Theft or Harvesting

Content theft or harvesting involves the unauthorised copying and use of Open Awards original work by a third party. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Content scraping of confidential or copyrighted material by an automated tool etc., to be used directly or adapted for use without permission.
- Copying (e.g., screenshots, photos) of confidential or copyrighted material with the intention to gain an unfair advantage or facilitate others to gain an unfair advantage.

Open Awards acknowledges that learners may not understand that copying and posting of assessment items onto websites etc., is content theft. Providers must have robust invigilation arrangements in place which meet Open Awards requirements and also advise their staff and learners that content theft is not acceptable. Providers should have clear policies outlining the implications for learners found to undertaken content theft. Providers should also be vigilant to their staff copying confidential assessment materials without Open Awards permission for any reason, (e.g., to support learners prepare for assessment, or for financial gain). Open Awards will consider any example found during our checks as malpractice.

Contract Cheating

Contract cheating involves a student outsourcing their work to a third party and submitting it as their own. Contract cheating normally involves the learner paying for the outsourced work, which may be offered as a commercial service. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Hiring or commissioning others to complete academic work.
- Purchasing essays, reports, or other assignments.
- Using online platforms or 'essay mills' to obtain completed work.
- Using online platforms to answer or check answers to examination or assessment questions.
- Purchasing guidance or a service to allow the learner to bypass assessment security measures.

Open Awards acknowledges that learners may not understand that using online platforms to answer or check answers to examination or marked assessment questions is cheating and expects all Providers to advise their learners on when it is acceptable. (e.g., practice assessments provided by Open Awards). Learners found doing this without Provider express approval may have their qualification revoked. acceptable Providers should have clear policies and procedures in place to ensure learners are aware of the potential consequences of contract cheating and be vigilant to indicators of contract cheating.

Proxy Testing

Proxy testing involves the deliberate act of a third party undertaking an assessment on behalf of a learner; the third party may be paid or unpaid for this act. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Impersonating the learner by physically attending the assessment or logging into a test platform using the learner's credentials.
- Colluding with Provider staff/ invigilators to use fake identification to deliberately bypass security measures.

Open Awards expects Providers to have appropriate safeguards and checks in place, including measures to ensure authenticity of learner work submitted.

Fabrication

Fabrication involves the deliberate inclusion of false, non-existent, incorrect or misleading details within submitted evidence. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Falsifying data or information, such as experimental data or statistics.
- Including false or non-existent citations to provide the appearance of academic credibility.

Open Awards expects Providers to educate learners that fabrication has on academic integrity and implement appropriately robust marking/ assessment procedures to identify and investigate indicators of fabrication.

Acceptable Use of Generative AI

Generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, Krok, Gauthmaths, DeepSeek, Bernie Bot, Perplexity AI, Open AI, Microsoft Copilot, Tabnine etc must be used ethically and in accordance with academic integrity principles. Learners may use AI to gain understanding particularly of complex theories or additional research materials as it is recognised that it can be a useful tool. It is also recognised that AI is increasingly used within the workplace and may be normal practice for learners to use to undertake or contribute to common occupational activities. Providers must have an AI Policy or equivalent policy that references acceptable use of AI.

The following guidelines apply:

- AI-generated content must be properly attributed and used in line with assessment guidelines.
- AI may not be used to generate entire assignments or assessments unless explicitly permitted.
- Learners must ensure that AI-assisted work maintains academic rigor and originality.
- The misuse of AI to fabricate, manipulate, or deceive is considered academic misconduct.

Consequences of Academic Misconduct

Learners found guilty of academic misconduct will be initially dealt with according to the Providers policies and procedures. Should Open Awards discover or suspect academic misconduct though our quality assurance checks we will raise this as an Error or Incident and manage with the Provider in line with our Malpractice procedures. Providers should note that award of qualifications cannot be made until the matter is investigated and concluded to Open Awards satisfaction. Providers should also note that the scope of any investigation will consider potential risk to public confidence in Open Awards qualifications and ensure we meet our regulatory requirements.

Providers must have their own policies in place and learners must be aware of the potential consequences of such malpractice.

Review

This policy seeks to ensure fairness, reliability, validity and maintain academic standards. Learners are encouraged to seek guidance from their Provider if they are uncertain about expected academic practices and expectations.

This policy is reviewed every two years or when additional guidance or best practice is published. The next formal review is April 2027.

Related Policies

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- Open Awards Provider Handbook
- Malpractice and Maladministration Policy
- Open Awards AI Policy
- Complaints and Appeals

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