



Access Centre Handbook Policy Document

Preventing & deterring academic malpractice on Access to HE Diplomas



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1. General Policy statement

LASER operates a devolved system of quality assurance and enforcement for academic malpractice issues such as plagiarism whereby providers of LASER validated Access to HE Diplomas are required to have in place regulations and procedures to deter, detect and if necessary apply sanctions in relation to academic malpractice.

This set of policy guidelines can be used either in lieu of a college's own regulations and procedures if they are not appropriate to Access to HE Diplomas, or to augment an existing set of college policies related to academic malpractice. However, where a conflict exists in relation to any sanctions arising from malpractice, the requirements set out below should take precedence as they directly pertain to the requirements of the QAA Grade Scheme Section E7 and as such represent the base level requirements for the management of incidents of academic misconduct.

LASER believes firmly in sharing good practice in handling academic malpractice. For this reason, we have developed specific guidelines in relation to the new threats presented by AI technology (see guidance for providers included in Annex One). We feel an awareness of issues such as those pertaining to plagiarism, provides an opportunity for developing stronger academic skills that really prepare students for Higher Education. For example, plagiarism involves a breach of academic integrity – specifically, failing to put into practice a transparent method of using other sources. Therefore, it goes to the heart of true scholarship. In dealing with plagiarism and other forms of malpractice, Students are forced to confront issues such as how to use evidence to support judgements and evaluations as well as how to engage properly with other scholarship in developing scholarly practices. If our students avoid plagiarism and other malpractice because they can deal successfully with these issues, then they will also have a deeper understanding of what it means to be a functioning member of the academic community.

2. Academic malpractice - a definition:

There are several types of academic malpractice ranging from cheating in an examination, submitting course work that is written by someone else to the most common of all, plagiarism. This policy guide will focus on plagiarism to illustrate aspects of academic malpractice as this is the most commonly encountered form of academic malpractice reported on Access to HE Diploma courses. However the policies / protocols below can be used in relation to other forms of academic malpractice.

2.1 Plagiarism

There are numerous definitions as to what constitutes plagiarism within the academic community. These definitions will consider the use (and misuse) of information from a variety of sources such as internet websites and hard-copy texts. As noted, a more recent development is the use of AI technology which can provide tailored individual responses to specific questions. Centres may find it helpful to explore some of these definitions of plagiarism and malpractice, in order to clarify and extend their own thinking. Nonetheless, whilst all practitioners need to have their own working definition of plagiarism – shaped around the work they do, as an AVA, LASER is responsible for guiding centres towards a sensible, and effective, implementation of strategies that will prevent, detect and penalise plagiarism. If these strategies are to develop consistently, they need to be based on a commonly agreed definition. Our definition of plagiarism is as follows:

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Plagiarism is the use of other people's ideas and concepts¹ in assessed work without proper acknowledgement², so they are passed off³ as if they were the student's own.

2.2 Auto-plagiarism

Centres must also guard against auto-plagiarism. Auto-plagiarism is subsumed in this definition. Clearly, this does not involve, "other people's ideas and concepts": but unacknowledged use of a student's own previous material that can be equally dishonest. It usually arises when students attempt to cynically recycle previous work. Beyond the issue of plagiarism per se, this is clearly very bad practice. If there is a genuine reason for referring to previous work, and *building* upon it, then a referencing process should be applied.

3. LASER Requirements for tackling plagiarism

From our definition of plagiarism, we derive four essential requirements for all Access programmes –

- Students must understand how to use source material effectively and transparently from a variety of different platforms or sources in their assessment.
- A common process of referencing, relevant to the programme and the academic discipline, must be correctly applied in assessment.
- In order to prevent inadvertent plagiarism, the programme should encourage students to develop their understanding of plagiarism and referencing by providing appropriate formative learning and resources.
- Where students commit intentional plagiarism, or persistently fail to apply the referencing system, they will be penalised.

4. The LASER Strategy for tackling plagiarism and academic malpractice

Introduction

Whilst the frequency and distribution of formative assessment that introduces students to the practice of referencing is a matter for the centre and the course team, the provision of some kind of formative assessment to develop referencing skills *is essential*, as is the provision of some kind of evidence to show this has taken place.

Centres will be expected to show that they are operating an academic malpractice and plagiarism strategy/policy that adheres to the LASER 'General Policy on plagiarism and academic malpractice'.



¹ This includes images, diagrams, scientific data, field observations etc as well as words, phrases and unattributed quotations

² Proper acknowledgement involves the implementation of a referencing system that references sources ("other people's ideas and concepts...") at the *exact point* where they are used to develop the student's own work (by providing in-text citations). "Proper acknowledgement..." does not occur if the referencing system *only* locates the source in a reference list or bibliography at the end of the assessed work.

³ The term 'passed off/passing off' is so widely used in definitions of plagiarism that it amounts to common knowledge.

The policy that follows can either be used to supplement or inform the development of a centre's own academic malpractice procedures. However, it should be seen as setting out the core requirements of any Centre devised academic malpractice policy.

LASER General Policy on plagiarism and academic malpractice

A) Prevention

- In the early stages of an access course, there must be some discussion of plagiarism and academic malpractice with students with direct reference to the disciplinary policy and process that the centre uses to penalise students who are caught in such activity.
- There must also be a clear statement about the referencing system that the course requires students to use.
- Course handbooks/guides (hard copy and www) must include information about the centre's plagiarism/ academic malpractice policy and the referencing system.
- Resources to help students understand the referencing system must be available.
- The assessment process must include referencing and it must also include some formative tasks to help students develop good practice in referencing.
- All assessments that contribute to a final unit grade or mark which indicates achievement thereof, must be accompanied by a signed statement (either on an assignment coversheet or as part of a signed contract between the student and the centre) authenticating the submitted work as being entirely the student's own⁴.
- Feedback must always include comments on referencing.



B) Detection

- Course teams and course leaders must implement a training process whereby all assessors are informed about the plagiarism/ academic malpractice policy within the centre.
- Course teams and course leaders must ensure all assessors are informed about the referencing system the programme needs.
- All assessors must report incidents of plagiarism/ academic malpractice to course team meetings.
- Centres may employ technology to investigate potential incidents of plagiarism (such as Turnitin) but this is not mandatory. Where technological platforms suggest

⁴ For example "I declare that this assignment is all my own work and the sources of information and material I have used (including the internet) have been fully identified and properly acknowledged as required.

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plagiarism may have occurred in some form, the Centre should not rely solely on this as an indicator of guilt. Such incidents should still be properly investigated by staff.

- Reporting incidents of plagiarism/ academic malpractice should be a standing agenda item for course team meetings.
- Internal quality assurance must include consistency in implementing the centre's plagiarism/ academic malpractice strategy, and the referencing system.
- Serious incidents of plagiarism/ academic malpractice should be reported to the LASER External Quality Assurer for the Access Diploma course immediately.

C) Deterrence

- Serious incidents of plagiarism should always result in a disciplinary process.
- This must contain a right of appeal.
- It must be conducted by managers at the centre, in conjunction with the course team, to maintain impartiality.
- It must correspond to other disciplinary processes within the centre.



D) Penalties / Sanctions

i. Introduction

Centres must operate a fair, transparent and consistently applied disciplinary process.

The following sanctions are a suggested set of penalties for centres to employ which specifically relate to the achievement of units, and/ or the final Diploma on LASER validated Access to HE Diploma courses.

ii. How to deal with incidents of plagiarism or academic malpractice in assessed work contributing to achievement of an Access Diploma

Teaching staff should share their own assessment practice with regard to the detection and response to examples of plagiarism to ensure consistency across different tutors and subjects. This shared practice must include a common agreement on what constitutes actual academic malpractice in relation to plagiarism and/ or other irregularities within assessed work.

Formative assessments should be used in the early part of a course to support students in understanding and avoiding plagiarism. Where a student commits plagiarism in formative assessments it is important that written feedback is given that clearly identifies the exact nature of the plagiarism in order that they understand what they have done and also how and why they should not repeat this error. The student must also be required to acknowledge receipt of this feedback and indicate how the plagiarism could have been avoided. The feedback should contain a warning that further incidents of plagiarism could result in sanctions being applied.

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Tutors should use their academic and professional judgement with regard to subsequent minor incidents in formally assessed summative assignments where for example a student may have omitted to correctly cite or reference the inclusion of external text *etc.*, but where there was no intent to deceive or pass off the work as their own.

iii. Dealing with incidents of academic malpractice

a) 'Serious' Incidents

Whilst the definition of serious will rest in the hands of the Access Course Team within a centre, the criteria for deciding what constitutes a serious breach of the policy should include reference to:

- the frequency of the breach within a given piece or pieces of work (e.g. is it persistent or just a one off?),
- the magnitude of the breach (e.g. is it just a few lines etc. or a large section?)
- evidence of intent or otherwise by the student in breaching the policy (e.g. is it a clear that the student set out to pass off work as his/her or is it accidental?)
- evidence of whether the individual has already been specifically advised about the issue of plagiarism with reference to his/her own submitted work since starting the course (either in formative and/or summative assessments).

b) Sanctions

Sanctions should only be applied where a student breaches the policy after having received guidance and formative support in the early part of the course.

First serious incident.

- The work concerned cannot contribute to achievement of a unit.
- The student must submit either a new assignment or re-work the assignment to achieve the unit.
- Academic staff should use their professional judgement to determine whether the nature of the offence merits partial re-writing of an existing assignment or the submission of a completely new assignment.
- A record of the incident and the sanction must be kept by the course team. LASER recommends the use of the Suspected Malpractice Report

Second serious incident.

- A summary report using the Suspected Malpractice Report template should be made.
- A completely new assignment must be re-submitted by the student and a final warning issued stating that any further incident may result in the automatic disbaring of a student from achieving the unit to which the assignment related.
- Depending on the extent and severity of the infringement a further sanction of capping all grade indicators awarded for the assignment at 'Pass' may optionally be imposed.

Third serious incident:

- A further summary report using the Suspected Malpractice Report template should be made with a recommendation to bar such a persistent offender to be prevented from

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achieving the unit to which the malpractice relates and thus be barred from achieving the Access to HE Diploma⁵ on which s/he is enrolled.

- The 'Suspected Malpractice Report' related to the case must be sent to the relevant LASER External Quality Assurer for approval or further action as is deemed necessary by the External Quality Assurer.
- Once the outcome of the 'Suspected Malpractice Report' has been agreed⁶ between the centre and the LASER External Quality Assurer a copy should be sent to the Access Quality Manager.
- The AVA will consider the recommendation in the 'Suspected Malpractice Report' and make a final decision within 5 working days of receipt of the report. AVA officers will consider the report and make a recommendation to the LASER Access Quality & Development Committee for its final approval.



Multiple Submission of Plagiarized work:

It is technically possible that a student may submit two or more pieces of plagiarized work simultaneously and would therefore not have feedback in relation to the first incident prior to the second (or third) being detected. In this instance the AVA would recommend that feedback be withheld in terms of all but one incident of plagiarism. The student would then be immediately informed of the plagiarism / malpractice as per step one above and asked whether they would wish to rework the other assignments (prior to marking / feedback).

If the student openly declares that there is plagiarism / malpractice in the subsequent assignments they should be allowed to rework the assignments in light of the plagiarism. If the student elects to not declare the subsequent plagiarism / malpractice then the protocols appropriate to the number of incidents of plagiarism / malpractice should be applied if plagiarism / malpractice is detected. If the work is already late the Grading Descriptors should be capped to 'Pass'. If the work is not late (on initial submission) then, depending on the severity of the plagiarism, the work may be capped to Pass at the discretion of the Access team if further incidents of plagiarism / malpractice are detected. The reporting process and protocols should be followed in terms of the completion of the Suspected Malpractice Form as per instances of malpractice which are concurrent.

⁵ From 2014-15 onwards the Access Diploma specifications require all Access students to be registered against units to the value of 60 credits within 12 weeks of the start of a course. It is not possible therefore to substitute another unit in place of the unit from which the student has been disbarred. Failure to achieve the unit will therefore result in failure to achieve the Diploma.

⁶ In the event that the external moderator and the centre cannot agree on a final recommendation in the 'Suspected Malpractice Report', then the LASER Access Quality Manager should be contacted.

5. Useful Links

The OWL at Purdue

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/>



University of
Kent | The UK's
European
university

The University of Kent

<https://www.kent.ac.uk/education/academic-integrity/guide-for-students>

Learn Higher

<https://aldinhe.ac.uk/product-category/learnhigher-resources/referencing/>



Learn**higher**

Free teaching & learning resources
for staff in UK higher education

Turnitin

<https://www.turnitin.co.uk/resources/>



Plagiarism.org

<http://www.plagiarism.org/>



Annex One:

Guidance on Use of Artificial Intelligence on LASER validated Access to Higher Education Diploma Titles

Preamble:

1. This policy sets out the 'formal' position adopted by Laser Learning Awards (hereafter LASER) in relation to the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) by students studying upon LASER validated Access to Higher Education Diploma Titles.
2. AI software is defined within this policy as any software application which is able, through the use of knowledge contained within a digital 'memory', to respond to a given 'question' or 'prompt' with a 'tailored' response. This should be taken to include software such as Chat GPT, which can construct essays in response to a given title, or indeed any other response generated by such a platform.
3. LASER accepts the significant potential of AI as a teaching and learning tool, but also accepts recognizes potential hazards presented in relation to Malpractice and Plagiarism.⁷
4. The LASER *Assessment Handbook* sets out the general expectations in relation to assessment practice within Section 1, which *inter alia*, notes the need for planned assessments to be '*authentic, valid, reliable and consistent, accessible, transparent, fair and accurate*', in reflecting the attainment of the student.
5. The LASER *Academic Malpractice Policy* defines 'plagiarism' as '*the use of other people's ideas and concepts in assessed work without proper acknowledgement, so they are passed off as if they were the student's own*' (see Section 2.1 of the said '*Academic Malpractice Policy*').
6. The ability of AI software to construct detailed and individualized responses to set questions or prompts represents, in the view of LASER, a significant potential threat to the validity and reliability of assessment practice within Access provision. The fact that said AI responses are not copied from a published source or written by another human being does not reduce the core issue which remains that the student is attempting to present material which is not their own as if it were.
7. **Therefore, where AI is used it must be acknowledged as a source in precisely the same manner as any other source used within an assignment and therefore should be referenced and where appropriate made available for consideration by the assessor.**
8. The potential use of AI is not restricted to its use to provide full essays which are claimed as the students' own work. AI should be acknowledged where it is used to provide information or a formatting guide for any part of assessment including where AI content is then paraphrased by the student. Where Centres deem appropriate this may include an inclusion of the 'full text' of AI generated content.
9. Any use of AI which is not acknowledged shall count as **academic malpractice** and shall be dealt with in such a manner as is deemed appropriate as set out in the LASER *Academic Malpractice Policy* Section 4(d).

Artificial Intelligence: Prevention and Detection

10. The potential challenges presented by the introduction of AI software platforms and their possible use within academic malpractice, suggest a need for the development of

⁷ A full discussion of Artificial Intelligence is provided within the LASER paper: '*Artificial Intelligence: Abandon Hope All Ye Who Access Here?*'

- additional safeguards to be considered, when giving planning assessment models for the assessment of unit content.
11. LASER actively encourages Centres to debate and discuss the potential issues arising from AI with staff and students alike, such that there is clear awareness of the challenges that arise from use of the technology within academic faculties and also such that students are aware of how to harness the potential of the software to promote their learning and also when its use constitutes malpractice.
 12. In adhering to the principles set out in Section 1 of the *LASER Assessment Handbook*, it is expected that Internal Quality Assurance within LASER validated Access to HE provision, will consider strategies to minimize the potential for malpractice to be committed via the use of AI within their internal verification processes.⁸
 13. Furthermore, it is expected that Internal Quality Assurance will also consider the possibility for AI generated work to have been included within assessment submission as an aspect of internal moderation processes.⁹
 14. LASER expects Access to HE Providers to have clear processes and protocols set out for investigation of any incidents of alleged malpractice pertaining to AI. Any policies must remain in compliance with the general requirements of the QAA Grade Scheme (see Section E(7)) and the more specific requirements of the *LASER Academic Malpractice Policy* as amended by this guidance. However, said Centre level processes and protocols may provide more detailed guidance for staff and students in relation to the management of investigations where an allegation of malpractice relating to AI is identified.
 15. All judgments pertaining to the alleged identification should be measured against whether evidence both suggests that malpractice occurred and whether said malpractice involved an 'intention' to mislead assessors or was the result of an inadvertent misunderstanding in relation to the need to reference said content. The latter point further reinforces the need for Centres to actively promote awareness of what constitutes acceptable use of AI technologies and conversely what constitutes their misuse.
 16. External Quality Assurers will expect to see matters pertaining to the potential use of AI being given consideration as a part of on-going Internal Quality Assurance. All identified incidents of malpractice involving AI and any sanctions arising from them should be subject to External Quality Assurance and should be agreed by the relevant External Quality Assurer (as is required by Section E(7) of the QAA Grade Scheme Handbook in the case of all incidents of malpractice)

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⁸ For example, the use of 'cross referenced' and / or 'tethered' assessment models as set out in the paper *Artificial Intelligence: Abandon Hope All Ye Who Enter Here?*

⁹ This may be undertaken via a consideration of the work in relation to common 'tells', such as those discussed within the paper *Artificial Intelligence: 'Abandon Hope All Ye Who Enter Here?'*. Where appropriate Centres may also refer to software such as Turnitin which offers a score on the potential probability of inclusion of AI content. However, this should be considered as persuasive in requiring further investigation rather than conclusive of actual malpractice.