



ACADEMIC ADVICE

ALLEGATIONS OF
COLLUSION

What is collusion?

The University [defines](#) collusion as:

“(…) the active cooperation of two or more students to deceive examiners in one of the ways set out in the Regulations governing Student Discipline. You will be guilty of collusion if you knowingly allow any of your academic work to be acquired by another person for presentation as if it were that person’s own work. If you offer to provide work to another student to be passed off as their own you are guilty of collusion”.

Examples of collusion include (but aren’t limited to):

- Copying or using work written by another person.
- Making work available to another person for copying.

What happens if collusion is suspected in my work?

Every department has an appointed Plagiarism Officer. If Turnitin flags up your work as being similar to another student’s work, or an internal examiner suspects collusion has taken place, your work will be sent to the Plagiarism Officer for Stage One investigation. Necessary evidence will then be gathered, either by the Plagiarism Officer or the internal examiner.

If the Plagiarism Officer establishes that there’s no case for collusion, the case will be dismissed. However, if the Plagiarism Officer decides that there’s reason to investigate, you’ll be informed in writing, and will be presented with the evidence. You’ll be asked to submit a written response to the allegation, and you might also have the opportunity to attend a meeting to discuss the situation.

There will be a deadline to make your response by, and if you don’t respond to the allegation on time, the Plagiarism Officer will make a decision without offering you any further opportunity to present your case.

How do I respond to a collusion allegation?

If the Plagiarism Officer asks you to make a written submission to the allegation of collusion, you need to produce a response which explains what has happened from your perspective, detailing the steps you took to prepare the work, and how the collusion allegation may have come about. For instance, is there any reason you know of that your work may have been flagged up as similar to another student's? Be honest in your account, and if the collusion was not intentional, make this clear.

If you've had any mitigating circumstances which have affected the piece of work in question, you should detail this also, explaining what has happened, when it happened and how long it lasted, how you've been affected by the circumstances, and how your studies were impacted as a result. Evidence of the circumstances should also be included.

We also recommend that you explain how you would avoid a similar issue from happening again, giving details of any support you are receiving/would seek in the future. For example, would you take the department's plagiarism tutorial?

If you're required to attend a meeting with the Plagiarism Officer to discuss the allegation, it will also be attended by a member of staff who will be taking notes, and potentially also the internal examiner who reported the alleged collusion. You can take a friend or representative with you as support.

In this meeting you will be given the opportunity to explain what has happened. The Plagiarism Officer may ask a series of questions which you'll be expected to answer. Try not to worry if they appear to be asking the same question more than once, or in a different way – they just want to make sure that they get as much detail as possible. Again, be honest in your account, and be prepared to discuss how the alleged collusion came about from your perspective, any mitigating circumstances, and how things would be different moving forwards.

Whether or not you attend a meeting, you'll need to submit your written response by the given deadline.

What happens next?

Once your response has been submitted and, if necessary, a meeting has taken place, the Plagiarism Officer will review the evidence, your response, and any mitigating circumstances you submit, and make a decision based on their findings. There are four possible outcomes of a collusion investigation:

1. That there is no case and it is dismissed.
2. That collusion cannot be proven, but there is evidence of poor academic practice. In this situation you'll be given a warning, will be advised to seek academic support, and will have to complete an online plagiarism tutorial.
3. That there is evidence of collusion and a departmental penalty will be given.
4. That there is evidence of collusion for which the Plagiarism Officer cannot impose a penalty under the regulations, or that the case is too complex to resolve without a full hearing. It will then be referred to a Student Discipline Panel.

You'll receive notification of the outcome from the Plagiarism Officer, with reasons for the decision, normally within 10 working days of your response deadline. If the case is dismissed, or it has been decided that there is evidence of poor academic practice, the process ends here. However, if you've been given a penalty, you can appeal the decision by submitting a Student Discipline Appeal.

What happens at a Stage One Discipline Panel hearing?

If your case is referred to a Panel hearing at Stage One, you'll be informed in writing and will be asked to appear before the Panel. You'll be given no less than five working days' notice of this meeting.

Before the hearing you can submit a written statement and any supporting evidence and mitigating circumstances to the Secretary to the Panel, which will be made available to the Panel. If you wish you can also call for witnesses to give evidence at the hearing, as can the Panel. All parties will have the chance to ask the witnesses questions, through the Chair of the Panel. You may also be accompanied to the meeting by a friend or representative. If you want, a member of staff from the Advice Service can attend with you as moral support.

The hearing will be held in closed session, and according to Senate Regulation 11, will proceed as follows:

- The person (if any) presenting the case against the student shall set out the allegations and evidence in the case, answer questions from the Panel and student, and may call witnesses;
- The student (or person representing him or her) shall respond to the disciplinary charge(s) against him or her, answer questions from the Panel and the person (if any) presenting the case against him or her relating to the case, and may call witnesses;
- The Panel may call any witnesses not called by the other parties;
- The presentation of any closing statement by the person (if any) presenting the case against the student;
- The presentation of any closing statement by the student (or person representing him or her).

A decision will then be made according to the evidence presented, and you'll be informed of the decision and the reasons for this decision, in writing, usually within five working days of the hearing. This will also be forwarded to your Head of Department, Personal Tutor, the Authorised Officer, and the person presenting the case against you (if any).

What are the penalties for collusion?

There are four categories of penalty for collusion, each with different characteristics and actions, as well as poor academic practice, which isn't a disciplinary offence. It's ultimately the decision of the Plagiarism Officer whether a penalty is applied, and what category the collusion is classed as.

- **Poor academic practice** is usually found for first offences occurring in your first semester. Examples of poor academic practice may involve (but isn't limited to) limited collaboration between students as evidenced by structure, source or copied text (including where the written work is original throughout).

If poor academic practice is found, you'll be given a formal warning and advised to seek academic support. You will also have to undertake the University's online plagiarism tutorial.

- **Category 1** collusion would usually be found in work which is a first offence. Examples of Category 1 collusion include (but aren't limited to) collaboration between students as evidenced by structure, sources or short blocks of copied text (including text where minor linguistic changes have been made), or similar bibliographies. A short block may be as small as two continuing lines.

Short blocks of copied code, other computer files or experimental results copied from another student also counts as collusion.

Penalty: For Category 1, the penalty will be a mark of zero for the particular assignment. If the module outcome based on this mark is a fail, you will be able to resubmit the assignment, for a capped module mark.

- **Category 2** collusion would usually be found in work which has a significant proportion of copied material. Examples of Category 2 collusion include (but aren't limited to) collaboration between students as evidenced by structure, sources, significant or numerous blocks of copied text (including text where minor linguistic changes have been made), or similar bibliographies.

Blocks of copied code, other computer files or experimental results copied from another student also counts as collusion.

Penalty: For Category 2, the penalty will also be a mark of zero for the assignment. If the module outcome based on this is a fail, you may be required to resubmit the assignment for progression purposes, but the mark remains a zero. If the zero mark does not result in failure of the module, your module mark will be reduced by a further 10% of the maximum mark available.

- **Category 3** collusion would usually be found in a repeat offence (where a Category 1 or 2 penalty has been applied on a previous occasion), however if you've had no opportunity to act on advice arising from an earlier offence (e.g. due to close submission dates), it won't be treated as a repeat offence. The characteristics of Category 3 offences are the same as those in Category 1 and Category 2.

Penalty: The penalty for Category 3 collusion is the same as for Category 2, but if this penalty does not automatically reduce your degree class, then your degree classification at the end of your degree will also be reduced by one class. If you're an undergraduate student, and this results in you not obtaining an Honours degree, or if you're a postgraduate student and you fail, then you will have your case considered by a disciplinary panel.

- **Category 4** collusion is the most serious level of offence, for example if you've purchased an entire piece of work to pass off as your own, have solicited to do so, or have multiple repeat offences. Cases such as this will be referred to Panel.

For more detailed information on penalties, and what characteristics apply to each category, refer to [Senate Regulation 11](#), point 11.137.

How do I challenge a penalty?

If you want to appeal a Stage One decision you can do so at Stage Two by submitting a Student Discipline Appeal form. This must be submitted within 10 working days of notification of your Stage One decision.

When appealing a Stage One decision you must demonstrate your grounds for appeal. The grounds fall under six categories:

- **Evidence of procedural irregularities** in the conduct of the Stage One investigation.
- **Evidence not fully considered** at Stage One.
- **Evidence of prejudice or bias** in the conduct of the Stage One investigation.
- That the **decision is unreasonable**
- That the **penalty given is excessive**.
- **Evidence of new mitigating circumstances**, where there is good reason that it could not be put forward at Stage One.

On the form you must complete your personal details, select your grounds for appeal, and explain your case. You will need to demonstrate your reasons for appealing on these grounds in as much detail as possible, and provide evidence of such. You should also state whether you're appealing the finding, the penalty, or both. If appealing under mitigating circumstances, you will also need to explain why you weren't able to provide such evidence at Stage One.

Once you've completed the form you will need to submit it, to be received by the deadline, to the Secretary to the Senate Student Discipline Committee, along with your evidence. Their email address is studentconduct@le.ac.uk or it can be posted to:

Secretary to the Student Conduct Group
Quality Office
Fielding Johnson Building
University of Leicester
University Road
Leicester
LE1 7RH

If you're unable to meet the deadline, you will need to state why on your appeal form. The Secretary will then review your appeal to establish whether there is good reason for it being submitted late.

What happens next?

You'll be contacted within five working days of submitting your appeal to confirm that it has been received. It will then be referred to the Chair of the Senate Student Discipline Committee, who will assign a 'designated member' from the Committee to review your case. This member will have had no prior involvement with your case.

The designated member will then review your appeal, and any documentation relevant to 'Stage One', and make a decision. They may determine one of three outcomes:

1. That your appeal does not demonstrate enough new evidence, complexity or uncertainty to warrant a full hearing, and that the Stage One decision should stand. In this case your appeal will be dismissed, and there will be no further opportunity to appeal.
2. That there is clear evidence of procedural irregularity at Stage One, or that the penalty was excessive. In this situation, action will be taken to remedy the procedural irregularity, or the penalty will be reduced. There will be no further chance to appeal, unless procedural irregularity took place at Stage Two.
3. That there is enough new evidence, complexity, and/or uncertainty for the case to require a full hearing.

You'll be informed of the outcome within 15 working days of your appeal being received, with reasons for the initial Stage Two decision.

What happens before a panel hearing?

Before the hearing, with at least 5 days notices, you'll receive a written notice telling you:

- The nature and grounds of your appeal.
- The date, time and place of the hearing.
- The mode and membership of the Panel.
- The name of the person (if any) who will present the case against you, and if possible, the names of witnesses who are expected to attend the hearing.
- Information on the hearing process and order.
- Notice that previous and new evidence may be considered.
- The right of the Panel to proceed in your absence, or to determine that the appeal is abandoned, if you fail to attend the hearing.
- Confirmation on whether the Panel will consider any additional evidence.

A friend or representative can attend the hearing with you, and if deemed necessary the Plagiarism Officer may also attend to present the case against you. The Chair of the Panel can also request any written information they feel is relevant to the case, and if you want you can submit a written statement about the allegations, or any supporting evidence, to the Secretary to the Appeal Panel, before the panel.

You, the Chair, and anyone presenting a case against you can also nominate witnesses to attend the meeting, and the Chair will decide whether to accept the nominations.

If you wish to submit any written information, nominate a witness, or take a friend or representative with you, you must inform the Secretary as soon as possible.

What happens at a panel hearing?

There are several stages to a panel hearing. Firstly, you'll be given the opportunity to present your appeal, and evidence. You will then be asked questions by the Appeals Panel, and if there is one, the person presenting the case against you.

If there's a person presenting a case against you, they'll be next to present their case, and will also be subject to questions, from the Appeals Panel and from you.

After this, the Appeals Panel can call any witnesses who haven't yet been called.

The person presenting the case against you will then give their closing statement, and you will then give yours.

What happens next?

You'll be informed of the outcome of the hearing, with reasons for the decision, within five working days. This will come from the Secretary to the Appeals Panel, and will be in writing.

There are several potential outcomes of a Stage Two appeal, these being:

- Confirmation of the Stage One decision.
- Substitute the Stage One penalty with a lower one.
- Find that you were guilty of a lesser offence, and impose a lesser penalty as a result.
- Overturn the decision entirely and remove the penalty.
- Determine that a new hearing should take place.

The Student Discipline Appeal Panel outcome concludes the University's internal procedures. As a result of this you will be issued with a 'Completion of Internal Procedures' letter. This notifies you of your right to submit a complaint to the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator \(OIA\)](#).

You will have 12 months from the date on your Completion of Procedures letter to submit a complaint to the OIA, however we recommend that you send it as soon as possible, as it can take the OIA several months to consider a complaint.

What can the Advice Service do for me?

[Advice Service](#) (formerly known as Education Unit) – Here in the Advice Service we provide advice on academic, housing and signposting issues.

If you want to talk through your collusion allegation, one of our advisors can discuss the situation with you, and explain anything you're unsure of. We can also help you establish what you need to include in your response to the Plagiarism Officer, and check through your account before you submit it.

If you decide to attend a meeting to discuss the allegation with the Plagiarism Officer, one of our advisors can attend the meeting with you as moral support, and take notes during the meeting. We can also meet with you beforehand, to help you prepare for the meeting, and discuss the meeting afterwards to decide on next steps.

At Stage Two, we can advise you on how best to put your case across via your appeal form, and we can check through it for you before you submit it, and provide you with some feedback on how to improve it. We can also assist with working out what evidence to attach.

For a Panel Hearing, we are able to advise you on how to present your case to the Appeals Panel, including helping you to work out what to say, what evidence (if any) you need to attach, and helping you call any witnesses. Again, we can also attend the hearing with you as moral support.

If you're unhappy with the response to the Stage Two Appeal, and you wish to submit a complaint to the OIA, we can also guide you through this process.

Feel free to get in touch with us via our [contact form](#), and we will then get back to you within 2 working days to offer you an appointment, or provide further advice.

Opening hours are 10am-4pm, Monday to Friday.

If your query is urgent you can contact us on advice@le.ac.uk or +44 (0)116 223 1132/1184/1109.

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Advice Service is now closed and will not be offering any face to face meetings or drop-ins. We will still be advising via email and can arrange video calls and phone calls if required. Information about our service changes is available [here](#).

Who else can I talk to about allegations of collusion?

The following people and services may be able to provide more information and support with collusion allegations:

- **Plagiarism Officer** – If you have any questions about your collusion allegation, the Plagiarism Officer should be able to discuss these with you.
- **Personal Tutor/Module Convenor** – Your Personal Tutor or Module Convenor may be able to give you some guidance about what is expected from the department with regards to referencing etc.
- **Quality Office** – If you have any queries about a Panel Hearing, or about your Student Discipline Appeal, the Quality Office (in particular the Secretary to the Senate Student Discipline Committee) may be able to assist. Contact them on qualoffice@le.ac.uk or call 0116 252 2605.
- **Academic Skills Centre** - The Academic Skills Centre provides one-to-one help, advice and online resources for University of Leicester undergraduate and masters students. Email studyhelp@le.ac.uk or visit their website to book an appointment.
- **AccessAbility Centre** - The AccessAbility Centre offers support and practical help for students with dyslexia or other specific learning difficulties; physical, mental health or mobility difficulties; and deafness or visual impairment. To find out if they can offer you support, contact them on accessable@le.ac.uk or call +44 (0)116 252 5002.

Useful Links

- [Senate Regulation 11](#): Regulations governing student conduct and discipline
 - 11.106 Regulation on Academic Misconduct (page 13)
- [University's information about Student Discipline Appeals](#)
(The Discipline Appeal form can be found at this page)
- [Office of the Independent Adjudicator \(OIA\)](#) webpage

Your course handbook may include useful information about referencing.

leicesterunion.com/advice

Advice Service

advice@le.ac.uk

0116 223 1132/1184/1109



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