

# Academic Policies and Procedures



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**HIGHER EDUCATION**

## **EXAMINATION and ACADEMIC OFFENCES PROCEDURE v7.0**

**HEAAP8**

For SDC Awards

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**SOUTH DEVON COLLEGE  
HIGHER EDUCATION**

**Examination and Academic Offences Procedure**

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Procedure should be read alongside the UCSD Assessment Regulations, which sets out detailed requirements for students and staff on assessment requirements.
- 1.2 These procedures apply to everyone enrolled on a South Devon College undergraduate award, including those attending *ad hoc* or CPD courses whether or not these attract credit and recognised professional CPD hours.
- 1.3 South Devon College reserves the right to apply these procedures in cases where an examination or academic offence is identified after a student has left the institution (i.e. to individuals who are not currently enrolled). This may lead to a decision by South Devon College to revoke the award made to the former student.
- 1.4 Depending on the nature of the offence, cases will be reviewed under either the Academic Offences procedures or the Examination Offences procedures. Where there is doubt as to which procedure is appropriate, advice should be sought from the Higher Education Quality Office.
- 1.5 A student cannot have credit awarded for the module/CPD activity in question, until any allegation relating to an examination or academic offence is resolved.
- 1.6 Students and former students must note that conduct of a nature which would be inappropriate in some professions could require additional disciplinary action. Students whose programme leads to professional registration may be referred to the Fitness to Practise Panels and/or other appropriate professional bodies, and may be required to declare any assessment offence to the professional body upon registration.
- 1.7 Students who are alleged to have committed an examination or academic offence, are strongly recommended to seek independent advice and support from the HE Quality Office.
- 1.8 Any dispute as to the interpretation of these procedures shall be referred to the Dean of Higher Education, Quality & Academic Registrar, whose decision in the matter shall be final.

## **2. Assessment Offences Panels**

2.1 South Devon College reserves the right to refer any case directly to the Vice Principal - Curriculum, Performance & Quality, to decide whether immediate suspension or referral to the Study and Wellbeing Review Policy is required. The decision on whether to refer the case to the Vice Principal - Curriculum, Performance & Quality will take into account matters including, but not limited to, the severity of the alleged offence or any potential risk to the student's health or welfare.

2.2 The composition of the Assessment Offences Panel will be as follows:

- Chair, Dean of Higher Education, Quality and Academic Registrar or designated other.
- Two academic members (normally drawn from a pool of 12 academic staff, nominated by the Chair).
- Deputy Head of Higher Education – Academic Standards and Quality (in attendance in an advisory capacity and to take notes) or designated other.

The Panel will be considered quorate provided that one academic staff member is present, in addition to the Panel Chair and Deputy Head of Higher Education – Academic Standards and Quality.

All members of the Panel will have equal voting rights. A decision will be taken based on the majority vote wherever possible. When required, the Chair shall have the deciding vote.

Where necessary, the Chair of an Assessment Offences Panel may invite a subject specialist to advise the Panel. The nature of the discipline may mean that it is unavoidable that the adviser is from the same department as the student, but the adviser should not have taught the student. The adviser must not take part in the Panel's decision making.

2.3 The Higher Education Faculty office will provide administrative support for the operation of the Panel.

2.4 A Panel member may not consider the case of a student from their own department, or a student they know. Any conflict of interests should be declared to the Higher Education Quality Office.

2.5 The Examinations Panel will meet as required

## **3. Examination Offences**

3.1 Where a student is suspected of having committed an offence in a formal examination, the invigilator will complete an incident report.

3.2 Where a student is suspected of having committed an offence in an in-class test the invigilators will complete an incident report copying it to the Higher Education Quality Office within 5 working days of the date of the test.

3.3 The alleged offence will be investigated by the Higher Education Quality Office.

- 3.4 If the Higher Education Quality Office completes its investigation and concludes that there is no evidence of an offence being committed, then all records of the allegation will be removed from the student's permanent record and the student will be informed of this in writing.
- 3.5 If the Higher Education Quality Office completes its investigation and concludes that there is evidence of an offence having been committed, in liaison with the Dean of Higher Education, Quality & Academic Registrar, will establish if there have been any other substantiated academic or examination offences, or if any other work submitted by the student is currently under investigation. This information will not be disclosed to the Examination Offences Panel until the student has been deemed to have committed an offence and the Panel is considering the penalty to be applied.
- 3.6 If the Higher Education Quality Office completes its investigation and concludes that there is evidence of an offence having been committed, the Higher Education Quality Office will write to the student by recorded delivery (to both term-time and home addresses) and the student's institution email address. The letter will set out the allegation, provide a copy of the evidence that is to be considered and give the student the opportunity to accept or contest the allegation. The student must notify the Higher Education Quality Office in writing of their intention to accept or contest the alleged offence, normally within 5 working days of the date of the letter/email notifying them of the allegation.
- 3.7 If the student accepts the allegation, all relevant documentation (including information about any other substantiated examination/academic offences) will be circulated, normally via electronic means, to the members of the Panel to determine the outcome. The case will not normally be considered at a formal meeting of the Panel. The Higher Education Quality Office will be responsible for notifying the student and the Programme Lead of the Panel's decision.
- 3.8 Where a student confirms in writing their intention to contest the allegation, the Higher Education Quality Office will write to the student, using their institution email address, to confirm:
- The time and the date of the Panel meeting, and confirmation that the student has already been sent all of the evidence to be considered by the Panel (as part of the letter described in 3.5 above). The meeting will normally take place in the University Centre, in Paignton. The date of the meeting will be no earlier than 5 working days from the date of the letter from the Higher Education Quality Office, to allow the student time and opportunity to collate evidence, arrange for the attendance of witnesses, etc.
  - That the student can appear in person.
  - That the student may be accompanied by another person of their choosing who is a fellow student or member of staff from the UCSD community to the meeting for support.
  - The accompanying person may assist the student during the course of the meeting by speaking and asking questions on the student's behalf. They may take a written record on the student's behalf. (The use of electronic audio recording equipment will not be allowed).
  - A student will not be permitted to be accompanied by an individual external to South Devon College unless the decision of the Panel is to exclude the student from professional registration permanently, without right to appeal, thereby preventing the student from following his or her intended career.

- Alternatively, the student may submit a statement for the Panel to consider if they do not wish to appear in person.
- That the student may call witnesses if they wish. The responsibility for arranging witnesses' attendance is the student's. Students will be required to confirm the identity of any witnesses they will be calling to the Higher Education Faculty Office in advance of the Panel meeting.
- The identity of any witnesses who will be called by South Devon College.
- The membership of the Panel.

3.9 The Panel will consider all of the evidence put before it and will ask questions of both the student and any witnesses relating to the alleged offence in order to establish the facts of the case. The student (or their representative) will have the opportunity to ask questions of any witnesses. If the student chooses not to appear before the Panel then their written statement will be considered by the Panel.

3.10 The Assessment Offences Panel will decide as follows:

- That the allegation is not substantiated and that no further action is required; in this case, the Higher Education Quality Office, in liaison with the Dean of Higher Education, Quality & Academic Registrar, will ensure that all records relating to the allegation are removed from the student's permanent record at South Devon College.

or

- That the allegation is substantiated and that the appropriate penalty will be applied. At this stage, the Panel will be made aware of any previous substantiated offences committed by the student (reference paragraph 3.5 above).

On reaching a decision on which penalty to apply, the Panel will consider and record:

- The magnitude of the advantage gained by the offence, had it not been detected;
- The severity and extent of the offence;
- The student's academic stage, in relation to the institution's expectations about knowledge of good academic practice, academic integrity and personal responsibility;
- The number of previous offences. Second and subsequent offences should incur a penalty of at least one step above that appropriate for a first offence of the same character;
- In the case of multiple offences in an assessment period, the opportunity for the student to learn from the detection of one offence before other assessments are taken.

3.11 The Panel may refer the case to the Code of Conduct or the Study and Wellbeing Review procedures as appropriate, following discussion with the Dean of Higher Education, Quality & Academic Registrar.

- 3.12 The penalties that can be imposed are set out in the Assessment Regulations. The penalty awarded by the Panel in accordance with the tariff shall be binding upon the Award Assessment Board.
- 3.13 A student on a programme leading to registration with a professional body is likely to be required to declare any substantiated offence with that professional body upon registration. South Devon College may also inform the professional body.
- 3.14 Exceptionally, the Panel may conclude that an offence is so serious that it should be referred to the Vice Principal - Curriculum, Performance & Quality, with the recommendation that the student is excluded from South Devon College.
- 3.15 The Secretary to the Panel will report the Panel's decision to the student, Programme Coordinator and Head of Curriculum in writing within 5 working days of the date of the Panel's decision.
- 3.16 Substantiated offences will be reported to the Subject Assessment Panel/Award Assessment Board.
- 3.17 A student may appeal against the Panel decision, as set out in the UCSD Assessment Regulations.

#### **4. Academic Offences Procedures**

- 4.1 Where a student is suspected of having committed an assessment offence, the module leader will investigate the alleged offence in consultation with the HE Quality Office. Refer to Annex 1 for guidance
- 4.2 If the Module Leader completes the investigation and concludes that there is no evidence of an offence being committed, then all records of the allegation will be removed from the student's permanent record.
- 4.3 If the Module Leader completes the investigation and concludes that there is evidence to suggest an offence being committed, the Higher Education Quality Office will write to the student by recorded delivery (to both term-time and home addresses) and the student's institution email address. The letter will set out the allegation, provide a copy of the evidence that is to be considered and give the student the opportunity to accept or contest the allegation. The student should notify the Higher Education Quality Office in writing of their intention to accept or contest the alleged offence normally within 5 working days of the date of the letter/email notifying them of the allegation.
- 4.4 If the student accepts the allegation, all relevant documentation (including information about any other substantiated examination/academic offences) will be circulated, normally via electronic means, to the members of the Panel to determine the outcome. The case will not normally be considered at a formal meeting of the Panel. The Higher Education Quality Office will be responsible for notifying the student of the Panel's decision.
- 4.5 Where a student confirms in writing their intention to contest the allegation, the Higher Education Quality Office will write to the student to confirm:
- The time and the date of the Panel meeting and confirmation that the student has already been sent all of the evidence to be considered by the Panel (as part of the letter described in 4.3 above). The meeting will normally take place at University



Centre, in Paignton. The date of the meeting will be no earlier than 5 working days from the date of the letter from the Higher Education Quality Office, to allow the student time and opportunity to collate evidence, arrange for the attendance of witnesses, etc.

- That the student can appear in person.
- That the student may be accompanied by a fellow student of their choosing who may assist the student during the course of the meeting by speaking and asking questions on the student's behalf. They may take a written record on the student's behalf. (The use of electronic audio recording equipment will not normally be allowed).
- A student will not be permitted to bring a legal representative to a formal hearing unless the decision of the Panel or Committee is likely to exclude the student from professional registration permanently, without right to appeal, thereby preventing the student from following his or her intended career.
- Alternatively, the student may submit a statement for the Panel to consider if they do not wish to appear in person.
- That the student may call witnesses if they wish. The responsibility for arranging witnesses' attendance is the student's. Students will be required to confirm the identity of any witnesses they will be calling to the Higher Education Quality Office in advance of the Panel meeting.
- The identity of any witnesses who will be called by the institution.
- The membership of the Panel.

4.6 The Higher Education Quality Office, in liaison with the Dean of Higher Education, Quality & Academic Registrar will establish if there have been any other substantiated academic or examination offences, or if any other work submitted by the student is currently under investigation. This information will not be disclosed to the Panel until the student has been deemed to have committed an offence and the Panel is considering the penalty to be applied.

4.7 Written statements will be submitted to the Higher Education Quality Office by the student and any other relevant parties. These papers together with any additional information will be circulated to the Panel, and the student no later than 5 working days before the Panel meeting.

4.8 During the meeting, the student will have the opportunity to present their case. The student's representative may also speak on their behalf.

4.9 The Panel will consider all of the evidence put before it and will ask questions of both the student and any witnesses relating to the alleged offence in order to establish the facts of the case. The student (or their representative) will have the opportunity to ask questions of any witnesses. If the student chooses not to appear before the Panel then their written statement will be considered by the Panel.

4.10 The Module Leader should be available at the time of the Panel meeting, should the Panel require clarification on any points of fact.

4.11 The Panel will decide as follows:

- That the allegation is not substantiated and that no further action is required; in this case, the Higher Education Quality Office, in liaison with the Dean of Higher Education, Quality & Academic Registrar, will ensure that all records relating to the allegation are removed from the student's permanent record at South Devon College.

or

- That the allegation is substantiated and that the appropriate penalty will be applied. At this stage, the Panel will be made aware of any previous proven offences committed by the student.

On reaching a decision on which penalty to apply, the Panel will consider and record:

- The magnitude of the advantage gained by the offence, had it not been detected;
- The severity and extent of the offence;
- The student's academic stage, in relation to the institution's expectations about knowledge of good academic practice, academic integrity and personal responsibility;
- The number of previous offences. Second and subsequent offences should incur a penalty of at least one step above that appropriate for a first offence of the same character;
- In the case of multiple offences in an assessment period, the opportunity for the student to learn from the detection of one offence before other assessments are taken.

The Panel may refer the case to the Code of Conduct or the Study and Wellbeing Review procedures as appropriate, following discussion with the Dean of Higher Education, Quality & Academic Registrar.

4.12 The penalties that can be imposed are set out in the [academic regulations](#).

4.13 A student on a programme leading to registration with a professional body is likely to be required to declare any substantiated offence with that professional body upon registration. South Devon College may also inform the professional body about the offence.

4.14 Exceptionally, the Panel may conclude that an offence is so serious that it should be referred to the Vice Principal - Curriculum, Performance & Quality, with the recommendation that the student is excluded from South Devon College.

4.15 The Secretary of the Panel will report the Panel's decision to the student, Programme Coordinator and Head of Curriculum normally in writing within 5 working days of the date of the Panel's decision.

4.16 A student may appeal against the Panel decision, as set out in the Assessment Regulations.

## **Annex 1**

### **1.1 Contract cheating (also known as ghost writing)**

Contract cheating refers to situations in which a student has commissioned or otherwise obtained a piece of work from a third party, such as an essay mill, and submits it for assessment as their own work. This guidance describes how to gather evidence to submit to the formal academic offences investigation, if contract cheating is suspected and conclusive documentary or other evidence is not available. A number of factors might contribute to a suspicion of contract cheating, including:

- a) A level and style of English significantly better and/or different to previous work or contributions in class
- b) The style of the work changes throughout the assessment
- c) Differences in font/formatting in parts of the assessment
- d) Misuse/change of personal pronouns
- e) Out of date/unusual references/bibliography

### **1.2 Procedure for investigating contract cheating**

- a) The marker should compare the assessment to one or two of the student's other assessments, if possible
- b) The marker should discuss their findings with the module leader or another academic to see whether their concerns are shared
- c) If the concerns are shared a meeting should be arranged involving:
  - The academic raising the concerns
  - The student (who may be accompanied by a friend if they wish)
  - The Faculty Registrar or nominee, to take notes of the meeting
- d) The student should be asked to bring their notes used in the preparation of the assessment, any draft versions of the assessment and any readings they have used so that they can demonstrate how they worked on the assessment
- e) The meeting will be held informally and will not be adversarial. It is an information gathering exercise.
- f) In the meeting the student can be asked questions about:
  - What made them choose the topic
  - The content of the work (questions should be of an appropriate level to the module concerned)
  - What sources were used
  - Whether they had discussed their work or shared it with other people beforehand
  - Whether their approach to this assessment had been different to their usual approach
  - Any other relevant questions
- g) Following the meeting, if the marker feels that there are grounds to suspect contract cheating, the module leader should be informed and the findings and notes of the meeting should be passed to the Faculty Registrar to instigate the Academic Offences procedure.