

# Procedures for investigating assessment offences in postgraduate research degree awards

Doctoral Academy – September 2023

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# Investigation procedures and penalties for Postgraduate Research degrees

## 1. Expectations

The University considers that all allegations of assessment offences relating to research study undertaken by postgraduate researchers for the purpose of an MPhil or Doctoral level award are serious and must be investigated accordingly. All students of the University, including postgraduate researchers, are subject to the University's published policy about academic integrity and assessment offences.

## 2. Regulations

### **E10 Research Governance, Conduct and Assessment Offences**

- i. Candidates must comply with the University (and/or the approved equivalent collaborative partner institutions) policies and Code of Good Research Conduct as set out in Regulation A5.
- ii. The Director of Studies and supervisory team will ensure that candidates have access to information and training on the University's expectations.
- iii. Allegations of misconduct will be investigated in accordance with the procedures set out in the University's Code of Good Research Conduct and/or the University's Assessment Offences Policy.

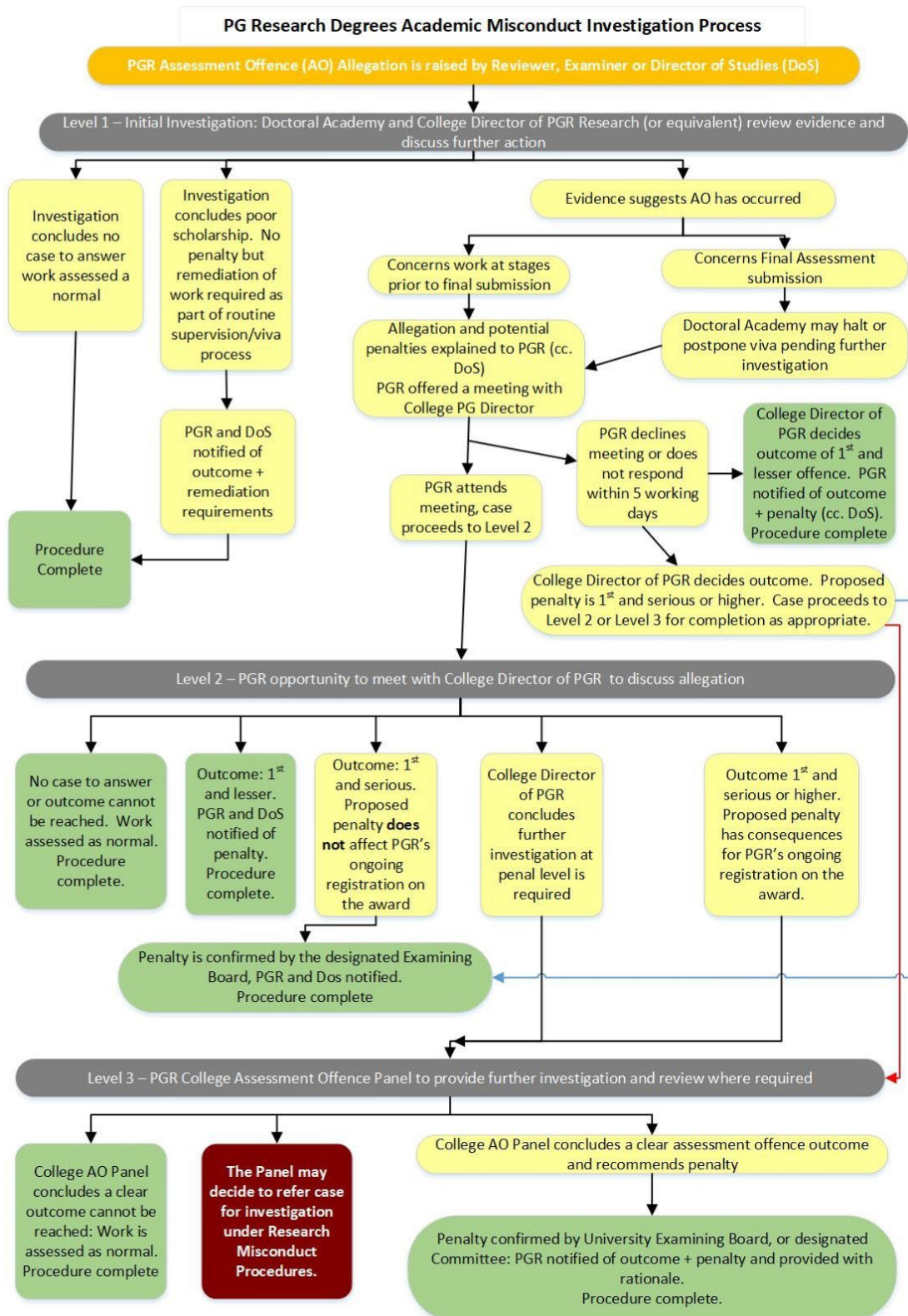
## 3. Scope of the investigation procedures

Assessment offence allegations made against postgraduate researchers (PGRs) registered on an MPhil or doctoral level award (including those who are also members of University Staff or affiliated Staff) will be investigated under the University's Academic Regulations and Procedures as follows.

1. Assessment offence allegations made against PGRs relating to the assessment of taught elements of the award for which UWE credit is awarded (for example, taught modules) will be investigated in accordance with part D10 of the University Regulations and procedures relating to taught programmes within this policy.
2. Assessment offence allegations made against PGRs relating to the assessment of the research project, the thesis or the critical commentary (MPhil/DPhil by publication), or any other element of research undertaken directly relating to the award, will be investigated under regulations at D10 and E10 and the procedures described below. The investigation will align with the principles of the University Code of Good Research Conduct as appropriate.
3. Allegations of research misconduct relating to any other area of research with which the postgraduate researcher is connected will be investigated under procedures set out in the University Code of Good Research Conduct. In addition, the investigating College

Director of PGR or PGR Assessment Offence Panel Chair may also refer an assessment offence case for consideration under the University's Research Misconduct Procedures at any stage where there are clear grounds to do so.

#### 4. Diagrammatic summary of investigative procedures



## 5. Assessment offence penalties

### Summary of applicable penalties for proven assessment offence cases in MPhil and doctoral level awards

The penalty tariff is designed with due regard to:

- the intent to deceive
- the proportion of the material affected
- the extent of previous skills support training having been undertaken
- any previous offences having been recorded against the candidate by the University at any level of study, but particularly at Masters level 7 and Doctoral level 8.

Offence Outcomes	Nature of the Offence committed	Normal penalty to be applied, or range of penalties where there is more than one available.
<b>Poor scholarship</b>	Incomplete, inaccurate or missing citation in a small number of instances.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Details of areas for concern are included in written feedback and sent to both the candidate and the Director of Studies (DoS), who must meet to agree a plan of action to improve the candidate's understanding of good academic practice and any further training needed.</li> <li>• All examples must be rectified within the work concerned.</li> <li>• Poor scholarship within a thesis submitted for final examination will be raised as part of the viva process and will require correction and / or amendment as appropriate.</li> <li>• No offence will be recorded on the candidate's student file/record.</li> </ul>
<b>First and lesser offence</b> (Not applicable for offences found in a thesis submitted for final examination)	Evidence shows plagiarism or other assessment offence of a minor nature in terms of volume with very little significance to the piece of work overall.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• College PGR Director issues a formal written warning to the candidate copied to the DoS, advising that further offences will be deemed 'serious' and may result in a severe penalty being applied from the range described.</li> <li>• The offences is recorded candidate's student file/record until graduation.</li> <li>• Candidate and DoS must meet to agree an action plan as above which will be subject to College/School research degrees committee scrutiny as appropriate.</li> <li>• All examples must be rectified within the work concerned.</li> </ul>

<p><b>All other offences</b> including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First and serious offence</li> <li>• Second/subsequent offences</li> <li>• <b>All</b> offences detected within the thesis after its submission for final examination, other than instances of poor scholarship.</li> </ul>	<p>Evidence shows plagiarism or other assessment offence that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is not extensive and is of relatively minor significance to the piece of work or thesis</li> <li>• <b>or</b></li> <li>• Is extensive amounting to a considerable portion of the piece of work or thesis, or there are numerous occurrences throughout the work</li> <li>• <b>or</b></li> <li>• Is significant and compromises the academic integrity of piece of work or thesis as a whole</li> <li>• <b>or</b></li> <li>• The candidate has committed a second/subsequent offence, where a proven previous offence has also been recorded against them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affected material is redacted within the work and the designated Examining Board permits the assessment to go ahead.</li> <li>• <b>or</b></li> <li>• The candidate is required to resubmit the work or thesis for assessment in a manner and within a timescale approved by the designated Examining Board, no further resubmission outcome permitted.</li> <li>• <b>or</b></li> <li>• The candidate is required to withdraw by the designated Examining Board and their registration is terminated, no resubmission is permitted. The candidate will not qualify for the award on which they are registered.</li> <li>• <b>and/or</b></li> <li>• The candidate is referred for investigation under the University Research Misconduct Procedures.</li> <li>• In all cases the offence will be recorded on the candidate's student file/record and included in future academic references.</li> </ul>
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## 6. Roles and responsibilities

### The Doctoral Academy will:

- Provide advice to staff members on whether a suspected assessment offence should be referred to the PGR assessment offence process.
- Provide guidance and advice to individual PGR candidates who have been referred to the assessment offence process.
- Take an active role in monitoring and analysing assessment offence data and provide guidance on suitable investigative actions within the scope of the policy.

- Provide support and regulatory guidance to the College Director of PGR or Panel throughout an assessment offence investigation.

**The College Director of PGR (or equivalent) will:**

- Be responsible for implementation and compliance with the policy within the College in so far as it applies to postgraduate research and PG researchers.
- Take an active role to identify and promote good practice in relation to the detection and deterrence of assessment offences within postgraduate research.
- Facilitate the formation of College PGR assessment offence panels where required and support the College Dean of Research and Enterprise who will chair College PGR AO panels.
- Facilitate communication of the investigation outcome to all relevant parties in conjunction with the Doctoral Academy.

## 7. Initial allegation – an offence is suspected

- A person who considers that a postgraduate researcher (PGR) has committed an assessment offence within research work submitted for assessment or review must report the allegation in writing as soon as possible to the Doctoral Academy. Preliminary evidence to support the allegation should also be included. The Doctoral Academy will liaise with the Director of PGR (or other designated person) for the College in which the PGR candidate is registered.
- Where the allegation concerns work submitted for the Progression Examination the viva may need to be postponed while the investigation is taking place. The Doctoral Academy will inform the PGR candidate of this.
- Where the allegation concerns work that has already been submitted by the PGR for final assessment (ie., the thesis or critical commentary) the Doctoral Academy PGR Assessment Manager, or equivalent, will liaise with the College Director of PGR to determine whether it is necessary to suspend the final assessment process or postpone the viva voce examination while further investigation of the allegation is carried out.

## 8. Initial investigation (Level 1)

- The College Director of PGR and the Doctoral Academy will consider the preliminary evidence and carry out additional investigation to determine whether there is a case to answer, and if so the likely seriousness of the offence.
- If there is the potential for a conflict of interests the allegation will be investigated by another member of the College Research Degrees Committee (or equivalent body), or by the Director of PGR for another College.

### **No case to answer**

- If the Director of PGR decides that there is not case to answer the investigation process will cease. No offence will be recorded on the PGR candidate's student record.

### **Poor Scholarship**

- If the Director of PGR decides at this preliminary stage that the issue is one of a poor level of scholarship, they will inform the PGR candidate and their Director of Studies (DoS) of this in writing. The work must be corrected as part of ongoing supervision and the DoS will provide advice and guidance to the candidate on good research practice and discuss what further training should be undertaken.
- Where poor scholarship is identified in work submitted for final assessment this will be addressed as part of the viva process through required amendments.
- In either event no offence will be recorded on the PGR candidate's student record.

### **The evidence suggests an offence has occurred**

- Where the evidence suggests that an offence has occurred it is for the College Director of PGR to determine both the volume and significance of the suspect work to the research project as a whole, and the seriousness of any offence.
- In doing so they may consult colleagues with subject or technical expertise to assist in the investigation. Individuals called upon in this way will be unconnected with the PGR candidate or the research project concerned.
- In the case of work submitted for final assessment the PGR Director may also consult the appointed PGR examiners where this is appropriate (ie., where the examiners have had sight of the work).
- From this point onwards the PGR candidate's Director of Studies (DoS) and supervision team will play no part in the investigation, other than to provide information or evidence as required by the College Director of PGR.
- The nature and complexity of allegations about doctoral level work means that this investigation stage may take some time. Where the investigation is likely to take more than 10 working days from the date the allegation is received, the Doctoral Academy will write to the candidate (cc the DoS) to explain this and provide an estimate of when the investigation stage is likely to be concluded. Updates will be issued if the investigation takes significantly longer than estimated.

### **Informing the candidate and invitation to discuss the allegation**

- When the Level 1 investigation stage is complete the College Director of PGR will write to the candidate to explain the allegation and the potential penalties that may be imposed. The candidate will be invited to meet with the Director of PGR to discuss the allegation. The candidate will have five working days to respond to this letter.
- The letter will be sent to the candidate's UWE email address and by post to their registered address.



- The letter will signpost the candidate to University sources of support and advice including the Student Union Advice Centre and Wellbeing Service support.
- If the candidate declines the meeting or does not reply without good reason, the Director of PGR will move to consider the outcome of the investigation and the proposed penalty, forwarding the case for further review or confirmation if the seriousness of the offence requires it. The candidate will have no further opportunity to meeting to explain their actions or submit further evidence at this stage.
- If the candidate confirms they wish to attend the meeting the case proceeds to Level 2.

## 9. Meeting between the candidate and the College Director of PGR (Level 2)

- The University will give reasonable notice of the meeting, normally a minimum of five working days. The candidate may be accompanied by a friend or adviser from the Student's Union Advice Centre; however, they will not be able to speak on the candidate's behalf.
- A face-to-face meeting is preferred, but the meeting can be conducted online where necessary. The meeting may be recorded.
- A member of the Doctoral Academy will attend the meeting to advise on regulatory matters and in the absence of suitable recording equipment will take a written note of the proceedings for subsequent circulation to attendees.
- The College Director of PGR may also invite another member of staff with subject or technical expertise who may also put questions to the candidate about the work under scrutiny.
- The candidate will have an opportunity to present any additional evidence or mitigating explanation at this point. The Director of PGR will review the evidence, including any mitigation, and will consider the nature and extent of the offence.

### **The outcome decision**

- The candidate may be advised of the likely outcome and proposed penalty at the meeting if it is appropriate to do so but will receive written confirmation of the outcome from the College Director of PGR within ten working days.
- Where it is found that there is no case to answer the process will stop and no offence will be recorded on the candidate's student record. Assessment of the work may then resume as normal.
- Where the offence is found to be first and lesser this outcome confirmation will comprise a written warning to the candidate, copied to the Director of Studies.
- Where the offence is found to be first and serious, but the penalty proposed will not affect the candidate's ongoing registration on the award the designated Examining Board will subsequently confirm the penalty in writing.
- Where the offence is found to be first and serious or higher and the proposed penalty has consequences for the candidate's ongoing registration on the award, or where the College Director of PGR concludes that further investigation is required,

the case will be referred to the College PGR Assessment Offence Panel and proceed to Level 3.

## 10. College PGR Assessment Offence Panel provides further investigation and review (Level 3)

### College PGR Assessment Offences Panel terms of reference

- A College PGR Assessment Offence Panel will be chaired by the College Dean for Research and Enterprise (or nominated representative) and comprise a further two members of academic staff, one of whom will be the College Director of PGR and the other a representative from outside the College who is an experienced research supervisor. In addition, a subject or technical expert nominated by the Chair may be added to the panel.
- No member of the panel will have a connection to the PGR, the supervisory team, or the research project.
- A member of Doctoral Academy staff or the Officer to the Doctoral Academy Sub Committee with responsibility for PGR Regulations will attend the panel to provide regulatory advice.
- The Panel will be convened by the College Dean for Research and Enterprise where the outcome of a Level 2 investigation is not conclusive, or where the proposed penalty has consequences for the candidate's ongoing registration on the award.

### Level 3 panel process

- A face-to-face meeting of the College PGR Assessment Offence Panels is preferred, but meetings may be conducted online where necessary. Meetings may be recorded.
- In the absence of suitable recording equipment, the Doctoral Academy staff member or DASC Officer with responsibility for PGR regulations will take a note of the proceedings for subsequent circulation to attendees.
- The candidate may be invited to a College PGR Assessment Offence Panel meeting. Where Chair of the Panel decides that this is appropriate the University will give the candidate reasonable notice of the meeting, normally a minimum of 5 working days. The candidate is strongly advised to be accompanied at the Panel by a friend or adviser from the Student's Union Advice Centre.
- The Panel may be rescheduled if the candidate has been invited but is unable to attend, but if the candidate declines a second invitation, then it will proceed without their attendance.
- A written statement by the candidate can be considered by the Panel if they are unable to attend.
- The Panel will review the evidence, decide the outcome of the investigation, and identify an appropriate penalty that will be recommended to the designated Examining Board for confirmation.

- The Chair of the Panel will report the outcome decision to the candidate normally within 10 working days of the meeting. The penalty will subsequently be confirmed in writing by the designated Examining Board
- In addition to, or instead of an outcome decision and penalty from the range available at 5. above, the Panel may decide to refer the case for investigation under the University's Research Misconduct Procedures.

## 11. The penalty to be imposed results in withdrawal of registration

- Where the penalty confirmed by the designated Examining Board requires the PGR candidate to withdraw, their registration will be terminated, and no award will be made. In such cases the penalty decision will override any right of the candidate to defend their work at a viva voce examination.

## 12. Additional procedures for the investigation of allegations arising during the final assessment process for PGR awards

- A PGR examiner who suspects an offence may have occurred while scrutinising the thesis or submitted work prior to the viva should contact the Doctoral Academy as soon as possible as at section 5. of these procedures above.
- Where concerns arise once the viva voce examining panel has assembled or during the viva itself the examiner should raise their concern with the Independent Chair who is responsible for the conduct of the viva.
- Following a brief discussion with the examining panel in camera (in private) the Chair will decide whether the viva should continue or, in extremis, should be stopped. The Independent Chair may contact the Doctoral Academy for advice on this point and must contact the Doctoral Academy immediately if it is deemed necessary to stop the viva.
- Where the viva continues the examiners may question the candidate about areas of concern within the thesis/submitted work and this should be clearly recorded in the examiners' outcome report. If at the end of the viva the examiners are not confident that the thesis/submitted work is the candidate's own work, then this should be indicated in the relevant section of the report.
- The Doctoral Academy will liaise with both the College Director of PGR and the Chair of the designated Examining Board to determine the necessary course of action or ensuing investigation as per the procedures described above.
- Where an assessment offence is found to have occurred in the thesis/submitted work after it has been examined but before the degree has been awarded the designated Examining Board may decide to disagree with the assessment outcome decision of the examiners, and delay the award subject to further investigation, or to withdraw the award and terminate the candidate's registration.

- Where a serious assessment offence is found to have occurred in a thesis or submitted work after an award has been conferred, the University reserves the right to investigate further and rescind the award if necessary, and to inform any journal or other publication in which the research contained within the PGR project has been published that an assessment offence or research misconduct has occurred.