



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

**ACADEMIC
MALPRACTICE
POLICY**



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1. Introduction

Through all aspects of its taught offer, the Institute upholds strong values of academic integrity, fairness and transparency. Instances of academic malpractice such as plagiarism and collusion are thus seen as a serious threat to the principles and values underpinning the very existence of our institution. The Institute thus takes any such allegations extremely seriously and endeavours to see those responsible reprimanded according to the gravity of their offence.

- Students are required to submit their own, original work for their assessments, meaning that they cannot submit the same work for different assessments.
- DGS operates a zero-tolerance policy regarding plagiarism, self-plagiarism and collusion.
- Under no conditions will proved instances of academic malpractice be tolerated, and no mitigating circumstances will be considered to excuse wilful malpractice.

Evidence of plagiarism, collusion and other forms of academic malpractice can be considered at any point in the student's career, even after completion, and penalties may be also applied retroactively.

The present policy details the terms for the definition of plagiarism, collusion, academic irregularities and other forms of academic malpractice. It also includes terms of reference for the constitution and operations of the IIS's Plagiarism Committee, as well as directions on the formulation of appropriate penalties.

2. Ownership and maintenance

The present policy is owned by the Academic Management Committee, and will be reviewed annually in conjunction with the review of the Student Handbooks, or whenever circumstances requires it. A copy of the version in effect will be published on the Institute's VLE for students and staff access.

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3. Definitions

3.1 **Plagiarism** is defined as the presentation, as part of a student's assignment, of another person's thoughts, texts (either in form or essence) or other forms of intellectual/visual production as though they were the student's own, without clear acknowledgement. In more details:

- The presentation, without acknowledgement, of published or unpublished content either verbatim or in close paraphrase. This also includes the presentation of portions of other assignments previously submitted by the same student (self-plagiarism). Content also includes: Internet websites, downloaded materials, lecture contents and handouts.
- The presentation, without acknowledgement, of summaries or paraphrases of other persons' ideas, judgements, considerations, figures, diagrams, charts, research findings etc.
- The use of verbatim quotations without properly identifying them as such (e.g. via indentation, quotation marks, etc.).
- The collation of a series of short quotes from other authors into a new paragraph(s) without individual acknowledgment.
- The presentation of content written on the student's behalf by a third party.

3.2 **Collusion** is defined as a form of unauthorised collaboration between two or more students in order to produce assignments meant instead to be produced and submitted individually. This must be distinguished from intentionally collaborative assignments, where the coursework is meant to be developed and submitted collectively. In more details:

- Collaboration by two or more students to jointly produce some or all of an assignment with the intention that at least one of them submit it as his or her own original and individual work.
- Collaboration between a student and at least one other person in order to prepare an assignment that will be submitted in the student's name. Support by Academic Advisers, members of the Academic Support Team, lecturers etc. is of course legitimate and encouraged, provided that they do not write any of the assignment's contents (or part thereof) on the student's behalf.
- The submission by a student of work by another student, where the latter has wilfully offered his or her work for such submission.
 - In such a case both students are guilty of collusion.
 - In case the latter student is unaware of the circumstance, the former student is guilty of plagiarism.
- The commissioning of coursework to a third party for a fee (contract cheating).



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3.3 Other forms of malpractice may include: fabrication of data or content; alteration of data, content and citations to the student's advantage; alteration or fabrication of data, content and citations to discredit authors and/or sources.

4. Detection of plagiarism and collusion

4.1 Before the beginning of a teaching cycle, the Academic Management Committee will select and employ an appropriate text-matching software in order to detect potential cases of plagiarism and/or collusion immediately upon submission of written assignments. For assignments delivered in a non-written form (e.g. oral presentations), upon suspicion of plagiarism, the Institute reserves the right to request the student to produce a written transcript to be examined via said text-matching software.

4.1 If no issues are raised in regard to the usefulness of the chosen software, its use is to be considered automatically renewed for the following cycle.

4.2 The software currently in use is Turnitin. All students are required to submit their written assignments through Turnitin, and to attach the generated report to their final submission. The reports are generated by a sophisticated algorithm which compares the submitted piece of assessment against billions of documents available online and/or in electronic format on public and non-public servers (universities, libraries etc.). The search range includes online repositories (e.g. JSTOR, EBSCO etc.); web pages; online libraries and documents; submitted coursework etc. The algorithm searches for exact matches or recurring similarities, and then highlights in different colours areas identical or similar to other documents. A colour-coded summary is then attached, listing the source of original documents bearing similarities to the submitted piece, and including an overall similarity score expressed as a percentage.

4.3 Markers are required to examine such reports and highlight any instances of potential plagiarism in their feedback forms.

4.4 It must be borne in mind, however, that, in spite of its sophistication, the algorithm is incapable of distinguishing the nature of text similarities. For instance, a quotation will be highlighted by the system as a similarity because the algorithm cannot make qualitative discriminations as a human brain would. For this reason, there is no pre-set "level of alert" in regard to the overall similarity score (e.g. a high score of 40% might be perfectly justified when the piece in question is a textual analysis including extensive quotations). It is then the marker's duty to verify the nature of the highlighted areas (i.e. are they "legitimate similarities"? e.g. quotations, bibliographic entries, etc. or not?). In case some parts of the coursework are highlighted, and there is no explicit mention of their original source in the paper (no reference, bibliographical indication etc.), then the matter deserves to be investigated further in order to



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ascertain whether the student simply did not properly reference his or her work, or if there was a deliberate attempt to pass another's ideas as the student's own.

4.5 Moreover, markers are recommended not to rely on the Turnitin report alone in case they suspect academic malpractice. The fact that a report may not highlight similarities for a given section of text is not per se assurance that the section in question is genuine. Markers are thus invited to make use of their experience and knowledge in order to identify and investigate any suspicious instances.

4.6 Although concerns for plagiarism are normally expected to be raised by markers, further issues can also be put to the attention of the Plagiarism Committee by all parties involved any aspects of assessment, such as the Programme Leader, the External Examiner etc. Such concerns will also be communicated to the markers for the purpose of training and improvement of current practice.

5. Procedure for addressing suspect cases of academic malpractice

5.1 The Academic Management Committee shall appoint a Plagiarism Committee (PC) following the Terms of Reference detailed in Appendix One. The PC will be responsible for investigating cases of plagiarism and/or collusion in accordance with the above definitions, and with the following procedure:

- a. In case markers suspect any instances of plagiarism and collusion, they will nonetheless assess the coursework as if there were no such instances, and assign a provisional mark without applying any penalty for the suspected malpractice. The mark will constitute an important reference point for the PC, enabling them to better understand the impact of the suspect sections on the overall value of the coursework.

Such a provisional mark will be withheld from the student as “Under Investigation for Suspect Plagiarism”, while the coursework feedback can be released at the normal date set for that particular assignment.

- b. While marking, the markers will note all suspect instances in the pertinent section of the feedback form, and will gather the necessary evidence in order to support their claim. Evidence may include: books, articles and other published and unpublished materials, as originals, photocopies or digital files; links to online sources; precise references to unwritten sources such as talks, lectures, documentaries etc. The completed form must be submitted to the Academic Administrator within the normal feedback return deadline for that particular assignment. The marker should have two weeks to provide pertinent evidence.



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It is the markers' duty to collect all the evidence needed by the PC to investigate the proposed instances, and the PC will reach a final decision on the basis of the evidence provided. In case the submitted evidence is deemed insufficient, the PC can ask the markers to provide further materials. Without evidence to support it, the PC is entitled to reject a claim.

5.2 Initial screening of evidence:

As soon as the complete feedback forms are returned by the markers, the Plagiarism Committee shall receive the assignment(s) in question from the Academic Administrator, who will also make the identity of the student(s) known to the PC for the purpose of checking for conflict of interest. The committee will then review the concerns and the evidence presented by the marker(s), together with the relevant Turnitin report(s) and the student's malpractice history (if available), within a turnover period of two contiguous calendar weeks. If such period is interrupted due to planned closures, scheduled holidays etc., or it is deemed insufficient due to an exceptional volume of malpractice concerns, a turnover deadline will be decided in consultation with the Academic Administrator and Special Projects Manager as early as practically possible.

If, **by majority decision**, it is decided that there are no valid concerns or sufficient evidence of plagiarism, collusion or other academic malpractice, the PC will communicate its decision to the AMC, via the Academic Administrator, alongside a note including any recommendations.

If, **by majority decision**, it is decided that the concerns are valid, and that the evidence provided is satisfactory, the Committee is required to reach an overall and firm **majority decision** on the nature of the irregularities under scrutiny via **pondered application** of the criteria in **Appendix Two**, and will communicate such decision to the Academic Administrator by the above-mentioned deadline.

For instance, a given piece of coursework might present few instances of plagiarism (less than 5%, hence Low Level according to Criterion 1), the nature of which is however particularly pernicious (High Level according to Criterion 2). The Committee might legitimately decide that this is a High Level offence regardless of its extent, because of its peculiar gravity.

5.3 The student(s) will then immediately receive from the Academic Administrator the assignments under scrutiny, plus Turnitin report/s, plus a response form which they will have to complete and return to the Academic Administrator within 20 calendar days of receipt. Depending on the student's response appropriate action will be taken as indicated below:

- a. The Student(s) admits Plagiarism / Collusion: The PC will proceed in assigning appropriate penalties;



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- b. The Student(s) admits Plagiarism / Collusion but also requests a hearing: a date will be set for the hearing within 2 calendar weeks of receiving the request; students will here have the chance to put forward any circumstances that can clarify their position and possibly mitigate the PC decision;
- c. The student(s) denies Plagiarism / Collusion: the student(s) will be called to defend their response within 2 calendar weeks; students will here have the chance to put forward critical evidence that, in their belief, might upend the PC's decision.

5.4 Following any hearing, having reached a final decision on the gravity of the offence, the Committee shall then assign an appropriate penalty, as per the scheme in **Appendix Three**.

5.5 The final decision in regard to the gravity of the offence and related penalties will be communicated to the student by the PC via the Academic Administrator within 2 calendar weeks from the hearing or from the student's admission of plagiarism. A short report will then be transmitted by the PC to the Academic Management Committee for informative purposes only.

6. Appeals

Students have the right to appeal to the Academic Management Committee **only against a penalty and not against the outcome of the investigation**, unless able to produce additional evidence not otherwise available before.

The AMC will examine the appeal within 2 weeks from receipt, together with the pertinent coursework, evidence and PC report and reach a unanimous decision on whether:

- a. To confirm the PC decision
- b. To ask the PC to reconsider the agreed penalty
- c. To amend the PC decision in any or all parts

The decision of the AMC is final and no further appeals are permitted.

7. Records

A record of all plagiarism cases, and ensuing PC decisions, will be kept by the Academic Administrator. Access to such records is automatically granted to the members of the serving PC. Other accesses can be authorised, on a case by case basis, by the Head of Department only.



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Appendix One

Plagiarism Committee Terms of Reference

1. Purpose and composition

To investigate cases of plagiarism, collusion and other forms of academic malpractice in accordance with DGS's Academic Malpractice Policy.

The Plagiarism Committee will be comprised of three members, at least one of whom must be external to DGS, and a fourth on reserve in case of conflict of interest, who will all be selected from a pool of appropriately qualified permanent IIS staff. Members of the Academic Management Committee (AMC) cannot sit on the Plagiarism Committee. Membership of the committee will be on a rotating basis. Members will serve for periods of three consecutive academic years at a time.

The Plagiarism Committee is constituted as a committee of peers, and no Chair is defined by these Terms of Reference. However a Chair should be nominated by the Committee itself to ensure smooth running and adherence to the process.

2. Criteria for selection of the Plagiarism Committee pool members

- a. Appropriate academic experience: at least 3 years of continuous service in an academic position at the IIS or other UK HE institution; or at least 5 years of cumulative service at the IIS or other UK HE institution;
- b. Relevant teaching experience: at least 2 continuous years of teaching at the IIS or other UK HE institution within the last 5 academic years;
- c. Experience of academic conventions, writing and publishing;
- d. Suitable subject expertise.

The AMC may propose new names to be added to the pool at any point during the academic year.

3. Criteria for selection of the serving Plagiarism Committee members

- a. Availability for the required period of service;
- b. Absence of current or foreseeable conflicts of interest;
- c. Current and forecast workload compatible with service.

The AMC must propose names for a new Plagiarism Committee no later than 4 weeks before the currently serving committee ends its office.

4. Responsibilities of the Plagiarism Committee

In keeping with the DGS Academic Malpractice Policy, the Plagiarism Committee (PC) will be responsible for:



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- a. Reviewing assignments regarding which concerns of academic malpractice have been formally raised. The PC members will review the papers together with the relevant text-matching software report, submitted evidence and analysis thereof, and in accordance with the criteria set in the DGS Academic Malpractice Policy;
- b. Identifying the validity / severity of the offence(s);
- c. Conducting a hearing of the relevant student(s) when necessary;
- d. Deciding an appropriate penalty for the offence(s) in keeping with the penalty guidelines.



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Appendix Two: Criteria and Guidelines for Determining the Nature of the Irregularity

Criterion 1 Student experience and awareness	Low Level <i>The student is reasonably unaware, or marginally aware of the Institute's policy on plagiarism and collusion</i>	Medium Level <i>There is no reason to doubt that the student is aware of the Institute's policy on plagiarism and collusion, while minor misunderstanding may persist</i>	High Level <i>There is no reason to doubt that the student has full awareness of the Institute's policy on plagiarism and collusion</i>
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student was not able to receive guidance on plagiarism and collusion (e.g.: plagiarism sessions conducted by Academic Support as part of induction programmes); did not have access to pertinent policies; received contradicting information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student has received adequate information and has access to pertinent policies The student might be in the early stages of learning (less than one year in HE in UK) The student demonstrates ambiguity in their understanding of the pertinent policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student has received adequate information and has access to pertinent policies The student is at an advanced stage of learning (more than one year in HE in UK) The student has been investigated for plagiarism or collusion before
Criterion 2 Nature of irregularities and intention	Low Level <i>The coursework shows instances of poor academic practice, however without clear fraudulent intention</i>	Medium Level <i>The coursework shows instances of malpractice, with plausible fraudulent intention</i>	High Level <i>The coursework shows clear instances of malpractice, with clear fraudulent and/or malicious intention</i>



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Examples	<p>Plagiarism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Referencing or attribution of work is not clear or is inadequate, or has numerous errors Inappropriate paraphrasing Descriptions and data are not properly acknowledged 	<p>Plagiarism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failure to reference and/or cite adequately in order to deliberately represent published content as the student's own work Verbatim copying of phrases, sentences or paragraphs from websites/books/other publications; Writing style is beyond student's current development phase/history 	<p>Plagiarism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large portions of the coursework are copied (from other students without their knowledge or consent or from other sources published or unpublished) Writing style is far beyond student's current development phase/history
	<p>Collusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The students involved misunderstood the purpose of group work or collaboration The suspect assignments show similarities in concept and organisation, but no appropriation of content 	<p>Collusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The suspect assignments show clear instances of content(s) copied between said assignments Coursework was shared/provided with clear intention of copying it 	<p>Collusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The suspect assignments show numerous instances of copied content Coursework was shared/provided with clear intention of copying it; or it was commissioned to a third party internally or externally
			<p>Other Malpractice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fabricated References, data or quotations Quotations/data wilfully altered in order to discredit author
Criterion 3 Extent of irregularities	Low Level <i>Suspect text constitutes less than 5% of the overall word count</i>	Medium Level <i>Suspect text constitutes between 5% and 25% of the overall word count</i>	High Level <i>Suspect text constitutes more than 25% of the overall word count</i>



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Examples			
Criterion 4 Relevance of irregularities	Low Level <i>The suspect text is a marginal contribution to the assignment.</i>	Medium Level <i>The suspect text is a relevant contribution to the assignment.</i>	High Level <i>The suspect text is a crucial contribution to the assignment.</i>
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A side note or minor digression. • An paragraph marginal to the main argument/purpose of the assignment that could theoretically be omitted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A paragraph, idea or description relevant and important towards the main argument/purpose of the assignment • A theoretically or factual premise important for the main argument 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundamental premises, ideas, facts supporting the assignment's main argument • Crucial paragraphs informing the assignment structure and key argument(s)



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Appendix Three: Guidelines for Determining an Appropriate Penalty

Level of offence	Mark Penalties	Disciplinary Penalties
<p>Low: <i>academic shortcomings or misunderstandings to be addressed formatively</i></p>	<p>Plagiarism No mark penalty to be applied by the PC, however the marker(s) will be invited to penalise poor practice in the final mark.</p> <p>Collusion No mark penalty to be applied by the PC, however the marker(s) will be invited to address questionable practice in the final marks of all students wilfully involved.</p>	<p>Plagiarism and Collusion All students involved will be required to attend a seminar organised by the Academic Support unit. Upon participation in the seminar, it will be assumed that the students have acquired complete understanding of the Institute’s Plagiarism and Collusion policy.</p>
<p>Medium: <i>wilful malpractice of limited extent and/or importance; clear evidence of disregard or unjustifiable ignorance of good practice norms; first offence</i></p>	<p>Plagiarism Depending on the nature of the offence, penalties may include (in increasing order of severity):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deduction of marks • Resubmission of a new task without mark capping • Resubmission of a new task with mark capping <p>Collusion (As above, also:)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In case two or more students have collaborated in equal proportions to the production of the assignment, the same penalty will be applied to all; • If the level of collusion varies, the penalty will be assigned proportionally. 	<p>Plagiarism and Collusion Disciplinary penalties may be considered depending on the nature of the offence, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A reprimand letter recorded on the relevant student/s file • Academic probation



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<p>High: <i>wilful malpractice of major extent and importance; clear evidence of contempt for good practice norms; repeated offence</i></p>	<p>Plagiarism Depending on the nature of the offence, penalties may include (in increasing order of severity):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resubmission of new task; mark capped between 60% and 50%• Resubmission of new task; final module mark capped between 60% and 50%• Capping of all modules for the term between 60% and 50%• Capping of the end of year GPA between 60% and 50%• Capping of the final GPA for the whole programme between 60% and 50% <p>Collusion (As above, also:) In case the coursework was purposely commissioned (either internally or externally) the higher penalties are strongly recommended.</p>	<p>Plagiarism and Collusion In cases of particular gravity involving clear contempt for academic good practice and/or a repeated offence, disciplinary penalties are to be considered. These may include the above-mentioned ones, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A permanent note on the student(s)' academic transcript• Suspension of scholarship• Termination of scholarship and enrolment
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