

# STUDENT GUIDANCE

## ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT PANELS

### Why have I been invited to attend an Academic Misconduct Panel Meeting?

This document will outline the academic misconduct panel process and explain why you have been invited to a panel meeting. We have described the process below so that you know what to expect and where you can find more information and support for each stage of the case.

We do understand that receiving an allegation of academic misconduct can be a shock and cause anxiety. Please do take the time to read through this guidance carefully as it should address any questions you may have and help to reassure you that you will have every opportunity to address the allegation before any decision is made. At the end, you will also find details of the other University services that can support you at this time.

Please read this document carefully and if you have any questions which have not been addressed below, contact [AcademicMisconduct@rhul.ac.uk](mailto:AcademicMisconduct@rhul.ac.uk). Do not contact individual staff members on MS Teams. All communications should be via the above email address.

### What is academic misconduct?

Academic misconduct is anything which is against the rules which govern the assessment of work, and includes things like plagiarism, commissioning and collusion. There are definitions of all these words in the Regulations on Academic Misconduct which you can find located in your case file.

### Why is my work being investigated?

The University takes allegations of academic misconduct very seriously as academic integrity is central to our reputation and the value of your degree. The University will always investigate when there's an allegation of misconduct.

We have received an allegation of misconduct relating to one of your assignments. The Department Chair of the Academic Misconduct Panel has reviewed this allegation and your submission and determined there is sufficient evidence to warrant further investigation. The Chair has therefore requested that you attend a meeting in order to discuss this allegation further.

### How do I know what is being investigated?

In your case file you will find several documents which you are advised to read carefully.

**Request to Investigate** – this document outlines the details of the allegation. The statement on this document will outline the type of misconduct alleged and explain the marker's concerns.

**Student Submission and Turnitin/ Similarity Report** – this is a copy of your submission and identifies where the similarity software has highlighted sections of text that have matched to unreferenced or incorrectly referenced online sources or other student papers.

**Matched Sources** – the marker may have provided additional sources from which they believe you have taken material, and which is incorporated into your assignment without the correct referencing or acknowledgement.

**Marker's Statement** – where the marker has identified concerns regarding your submission, they may have provided a more comprehensive report listing the details in a separate statement.

You are advised to read these documents carefully as they will show you where things may have gone wrong and this is what you will be asked about in the meeting. If you remain unclear as to what the allegation is, you are advised to meet with your personal tutor before the meeting.

### **When and where will the academic misconduct panel meeting take place?**

The Academic Investigations team will arrange a date for your meeting to take place. They will take your timetable into account so you won't miss any teaching and you will have at least seven days' notice. All meetings will take place via MS Teams.

When assessments are submitted towards the end of the academic teaching period and possible academic misconduct is identified during the marking process, you may be invited to attend a panel meeting outside of the published teaching weeks, or even during the examination period. It is important that you make every effort to attend the meeting as your mark (and possibly your progression or award decision) will remain unresolved until the academic misconduct procedure has concluded.

Whilst the Panel will try and keep the meeting as informal as possible to make you feel at ease, Academic Misconduct panels are a formal meeting, and you must ensure that when you attend the online meeting that you are in a suitable private and quiet location.

### **What if I can't attend the meeting?**

You are expected to attend the panel meeting but if you can't, and have a good reason for this, please let the Academic Investigations team know and they will try and rearrange it, (although it's not always possible). You will need to provide evidence to explain why you are unable to attend.

Please respond to the meeting invitation as soon as possible so that arrangements can be made. Confirmation of attendance **MUST** be made 24 hours in advance of the meeting. If you do not respond in time, or you can no longer attend and do not give the panel 24 hours notice, then the meeting will proceed in your absence and the panel will make a decision based on the information available to them at the time.

If you cannot attend the meeting, and it is not possible to re-schedule, you may be invited to submit written representations for the panel to consider in your absence. We will give you guidance on how to approach your statement and the type of information we advise that you provide to the panel so that they can make an informed decision in your absence.

The meeting will take place at the scheduled time, and you must submit your statement by 5pm the day before. You are advised to contact the Academic Investigations team with your evidence as soon as possible if you are unable to attend, so that you have sufficient time to prepare your statement for the panel.

### What if I have mitigating circumstances?

You should let the panel know if there were particular circumstances which affected you while working on the assessment in question. If the panel decide that your work shows evidence of academic misconduct your circumstances will not excuse this but, if you provide evidence, the panel may take your situation into account when deciding which penalty to apply. Please submit any evidence you want the panel to take into consideration to [AcademicMisconduct@rhul.ac.uk](mailto:AcademicMisconduct@rhul.ac.uk) by 5pm the day before your meeting.

We strongly recommend that you disclose any circumstances that affected you at the time of the offence as you will not be able to provide this information at a later date in support of any appeal against the penalty decision.

### Is there any advice or support available?

The Students' Union Advice Centre have advisers who are specially trained and can even attend the meeting with you. They can't speak on your behalf but can help you work out what to say beforehand and give moral support at the meeting. Their advice is free and impartial, and they can also provide guidance on submitting a written statement. Their contact details are below.

### Can anyone attend the meeting with me?

The Students' Union Advisors have trained advisers who may be able to attend the meeting with you. If you prefer, you can bring a friend or supporter with you, providing they are also a member of the University (student or staff). They can't represent you or speak for you but can provide support and help you make sure you say everything that you want to at the meeting. If someone will be attending with you, please let us know at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting so that an invitation can be sent with a link to the meeting.

### What happens if I do not respond to the meeting invitation?

If you do not respond to the allegation in writing or attend the meeting, we will assume that you do not wish to contest the allegation. The panel will decide the case in your absence, based on the information and evidence available to them.

### What should I do now?

You must respond to the email sent to you inviting you to the panel meeting and:

1. Confirm that you will be attending the meeting. A calendar invitation and link to Microsoft Teams will then be sent to you; and
2. Submit any evidence you want the panel to consider to [AcademicMisconduct@rhul.ac.uk](mailto:AcademicMisconduct@rhul.ac.uk) **no later than 5pm the day before your meeting is due** to take place.

You are expected to respond to the invitation to confirm your attendance at least 24 hours before your meeting is due to take place.

## What to expect at the Academic Misconduct Panel Meeting

### On the day of the meeting

On the day of the meeting, we suggest you try to find a quiet and private location where you can check your computer, internet connection and camera equipment. We recommend you start the panel meeting a few minutes early so that you can be calm and prepared when the panel join you. We also suggest that you have the allegation documents and your work open and readily accessible so that you can refer to them in the meeting.

If you have any questions beforehand, you can always email the Academic Investigations team who are happy to help, or the Students' Union advisors if it's about the details of your case.

If you are running late on the day, the panel will wait 5 minutes and if you have not arrived, we will hold the panel in your absence, unless we have received contact from you.

### What to expect

Although academic misconduct allegations are taken seriously and this is a formal University process, the meeting will be quite informal and the panel will try and make it as comfortable as possible for you. Remember, you can ask a Students' Union Advisor or a friend who is also a student to accompany you if you want. There will be 3 people from the University in your meeting: a senior academic from your school or department (they will chair the meeting), another academic and someone from the Academic Investigations team who will be taking notes. The academic members of staff will be the ones asking questions and who will make the decision about whether misconduct is proven.

In some circumstances the academic who reported the allegation may be invited by the Chair to attend the meeting to clarify certain aspects of the allegation. Please note that they will not be present for or included in the outcome discussion and judgement made by the Panel.

### What is the purpose of the meeting?

The purpose of the meeting is to make sure you understand the allegation, and to give you the chance to explain what has happened. The meeting is also your opportunity to ask the panel questions and to seek clarification on your academic practice.

### What will I be asked at the meeting?

At the beginning of the meeting you will be asked whether you understand the allegation, whether you have attended induction lectures about academic misconduct and completed the 'SS1001 Academic Integrity' Moodle course. You will also be asked questions about how you approached your work and whether anyone helped you. You will be given the chance to ask any questions you have. At the end of the meeting the Chair of the panel will summarise what was discussed, will explain the next steps in the process and advise you of any potential penalties.

### Why is the meeting recorded?

We will make an audio recording of the meeting for the purposes of creating a written record of the discussion, which will be sent to you for approval after the meeting. The recording will be held on your case file and deleted once your case has been closed and any appeal period is at an end. The

recording will not be made available to you, and you will not be allowed to take your own recording of the meeting.

## What to expect after the Academic Misconduct Panel Meeting

### What happens next?

Once you have left the meeting, the panel will discuss your case and reach their decision (this part of the meeting will not be recorded). The Panel has two decisions to make:

1. Is academic misconduct proven on the balance of probabilities? (In other words, is it more likely than not to have occurred); and
2. If so, what penalty is appropriate.

### What penalty can the Panel apply for academic misconduct?

If the panel find that misconduct has occurred, there are a range of penalties they can impose:

1. Deduct 10% marks from the assessment;
2. Cap the assessment at the pass mark (only possible if the work has been given a provisional pass mark);
3. Award a mark of zero for the assessment;
4. Award a mark of zero for the component;
5. Award a mark of zero for the module.

The panel's decision will depend on things like the seriousness of the misconduct, your level of study and, whether there was any obvious intention to cheat. They will also consider your responses in the meeting, what steps you have taken to address your understanding, your provisional mark and the impact the penalty will have on your academic status. They will take all these factors into account, as well as any individual circumstances you have disclosed.

As a guide, typically a first offence of extensive plagiarism, collusion or duplication, will mean that you are given a mark of zero for the assessment. If the offence is less extensive and you have demonstrated an attempt to comply with good academic practice (for example referencing,) a lower penalty may be warranted. Second (or subsequent) offences, those that are deemed very serious or are of a grave nature (such as commissioning), will be referred directly to the Senior Vice Principal (or their nominee), who will decide the penalty to be applied. If this is the case you will be given further details of this process at the time.

### Major or a minor offence?

The Regulations on Academic Misconduct make a distinction between minor and major offences, and this is to recognise that good academic practice is something that is learned and that many students can fall into the trap of committing an offence through a lack of understanding. It is expected that students undertake this learning in the first year of their academic studies at the University. Students are expected to take advantage of all of the learning opportunities and resources offered by the University to ensure they adopt good academic practices as early as possible in their academic studies.

An offence can only be considered as a minor offence in a student's first year of study at the University (as outlined in Section 1 (7) of the Regulations). A student can commit a maximum of two minor offences and any further offences will be automatically deemed a major offence. However, the

decision is not based solely on your level of study and a first offence by a first-year student can still be a major offence.

The procedure for considering an allegation is the same for both major and minor offences and it is up to the panel to determine the level.

### **What if this was not my first offence?**

The Panel will first decide if the offence has been proven. If it has, the Academic Investigations team will tell the Panel if you have committed any previous offences as this information is relevant to the decision about which penalty is appropriate. The general principle is that penalties escalate in severity with each subsequent offence. However, there are other factors which will be considered by the panel.

If the current offence is a second minor offence, the panel will apply a penalty which reflects the extent of the misconduct. This may be at the same level as the first minor offence, or it may be a more severe penalty. If it is a third offence, and your previous offences were both minor, then it is likely that the panel will take the same approach, however the offence will be classified as 'major', as described above.

If this is a second major offence, the case may be referred to a Senior Vice Principal (or nominee) for a decision. The panel will consider the nature of the offences committed and decide whether the offence is 'grave' or indicates a concerning pattern of behaviour. If it is a serious or grave offence, the panel will refer your case to a Senior Vice-Principal, or their nominee, to decide a penalty. If the Panel deem the second major offence to be at the lower end of the scale or have limited impact on your assessment, the panel may decide to impose a penalty without referring the case to the SVP. The penalty will reflect that a repeat major offence has occurred and is likely to be at the more severe end of the range of penalties available to the panel.

The above is for guidance only, and you should note that the panel will consider a number of factors when making their decision, as outlined above.

The panel will also look at the timing of your previous offence to see whether you have had time to learn from your previous experience. If they decide that you have not, the panel may deem your second offence to be 'concurrent' with the first. This means you had not had an opportunity to address your understanding and academic practice. In this case the panel will not apply the automatic escalation in penalty described above. However, since each case is decided on its own facts, this does not mean that the same penalty will necessarily be applied.

You should note that, if you have attended a panel meeting, or received a penalty through the Chair Imposed Penalty process at any point previously in your studies, this will be taken as your learning opportunity and the panel will therefore apply the escalation in penalty for all subsequent offences. This means that, if you are being considered for two offences *at the same panel meeting* having already received a penalty previously, the escalation in penalty will be applied to the second offence and then again to the third.

### **When will I find out the outcome?**

Soon after the meeting the Academic Investigations team will email to let you know that a note summarising the meeting and what was discussed has been uploaded to your case file. You will be asked to approve the meeting notes for accuracy as quickly as possible. You will have the chance to note your own amendments or clarifications. However, the panel will not review any additional material or comments at this point.

Once you have replied to this email and approved the meeting notes you will receive email notification that a letter explaining the panel's decision, the reason for it and the penalty, if any, has been uploaded to your case file.

### **What if I have questions about the outcome letter?**

If you have any questions about what the outcome means for you, you are advised to contact your personal tutor to discuss this. Your personal tutor will be informed of the outcome at the same time as you and they will be expecting to hear from you.

### **How and when will my penalty be applied?**

If the decision of the Panel is that an offence has been proven and a penalty will be applied, we will inform your School of the decision.

Your mark will be uploaded to Moodle (or via the usual process) and the School Administration team will ensure the penalty is correctly applied.

You should allow at least 7 days for your marks and record to be amended following the release of your outcome letter. If your record has not been amended after this time, please contact your School Helpdesk directly.

### **What if the penalty means that I fail the module?**

Even if the penalty decided in your case means that you will fail the module try not to worry. As long as this is your first attempt at the module you will get another chance to attempt the assessment (unless you are a Finalist). However, your mark for a second attempt following academic misconduct will be capped at the pass mark.

It is important that you still complete work for other components (if any) for the module concerned. At the end of the year the Department Assessment Board will look at your overall academic record and advise you of your options for any further attempts.

### **What does it mean if my case has been referred to the SVP for penalty imposition?**

If you have been notified that your case has been referred to the SVP, or their nominee, for a decision, this means that no penalty has yet been decided. The panel have determined that the offence was proven and that either the offence was of a grave nature, or that this was a serious repeat major offence that warrants consideration by a senior member of academic staff.

We understand that receiving this decision can cause anxiety. We have therefore created additional guidance to support you through this process. This will be provided to you in your case file, with your outcome letter that informs you of this referral.

### **Can I appeal the decision made by the Panel?**

It is important to be clear that you cannot appeal the decision of the Panel that an offence of academic misconduct has occurred, since this is a matter of academic judgement. However, you can appeal against the penalty imposed under the Regulations on Academic Misconduct. This means that you cannot challenge the decision made by the panel in determining that you committed an offence, but you can appeal against the severity of the penalty imposed.

There are three possible grounds on which you can appeal against the penalty:

1. that there is evidence of a failure to follow the procedures set out in these regulations which might cause reasonable doubt as to the fairness of the decision (***'procedural irregularity'***);
2. that fresh evidence can be presented which you could not with reasonable diligence have disclosed before the decision was made and which might cause reasonable doubt as to the fairness of that decision (***'fresh evidence'***);
3. that the decision was perverse given the evidence which was available at the time.

You must be able to demonstrate that you meet one of these grounds for your appeal to be upheld.

To submit an appeal for consideration, you are advised to read the information provided on the student intranet: [Make an academic appeal - Royal Holloway Student Intranet](#). You will need to download the form located on these pages and send it to [appeals@rhul.ac.uk](mailto:appeals@rhul.ac.uk) with all your supporting evidence. **You must submit your appeal within 15 working days of the outcome being sent to you.**

Your appeal will be assigned to an investigating officer with no previous involvement in the case who will review the information you have presented and gather all the information regarding your panel meeting. The officer will write to a Senior Vice Principal who has not previously been involved, outlining the details of case and ask them to decide whether you meet the grounds of appeal. The SVP or their nominee, will have a number of options available to them if they determine that you meet the ground of appeal. They can decide:

- (a) to amend or set aside the decision;
- (b) to set aside the original decision and refer the case back for reconsideration ;
- (c) to confirm the decision;
- (d) to convene an Appeals Committee

If you are considering submitting an appeal against your penalty, you are strongly advised to seek advice from both the SU Advice Centre and your Personal tutor. They will help you to determine if you are likely to meet the grounds of appeal. Unfortunately, it can take some time to investigate each case thoroughly and you should allow for around 2 months for your appeal to be considered by the Academic Investigations team.



## Sources of Support

### Academic Support

[Academic Regulations](#) – See in particular the Regulations on Academic Misconduct

[SS1001: Academic Integrity](#) - Moodle course

[CeDAS](#) (Academic skills, including referencing and how to avoid plagiarism)

[Library](#) (guidance and advice on referencing)

Your Personal Tutor

### Personal and Wellbeing Support

[Students Union Advice Centre](#) - advice about the case and support at the meeting

[College Wellbeing Service](#) - can provide emotional support

[Disability & Neurodiversity Team](#) – register for support with any longer term conditional or a specific learning difficulty