



## Quality Assurance Handbook PART A1

### **POLICY No.6: Academic Impropriety & Assessment Malpractice Policy**

#### 6. Purpose of Policy

Policy No.6 aims to ensure all stakeholders are aware of FIT's commitment to academic excellence in apprenticeship provision. FIT takes the academic integrity of its programmes seriously and seeks to promote high standards of academic practice and minimise and respond appropriately to the use of unfair means in assessment.

##### 6.1 Policy Scope

This policy covers all academic activity conducted by Apprentices while active in a Tech Apprenticeship programme. Academic integrity means honesty in academic work, being fair, open, and honest about academic work submitted for assessment, including information on research methods and data used. Academic integrity is not only important to off-the-job programme elements but rather more crucial for the overarching activities of an apprentice developing critical skill sets in the promotion of their career goals.

##### 6.2 Overarching Considerations

FIT recognises that Tech Apprenticeships are designed as practical programmes of skills acquisition, however, completing the required assessed elements includes acknowledging the work of others and giving credit where other people's ideas have been used. It also means avoiding any means which will provide an Apprentice an unfair advantage over other apprentices completing that or similar assessments. Good research practice is a key transferable skill and of utmost importance to FIT in the broader holistic development of a well-rounded Apprentice.

##### 6.3 Policy Statement

FIT believes in a strategic approach to academic integrity that is explicit and shared with staff, apprentices, and other stakeholders. Notably, positive academic practice techniques are a core feature of Apprentices' initial induction, which covers critical facets of FIT requirements, including

information relating to plagiarism and assessment malpractice. Various policies and procedures acknowledge the importance of incorporating academic integrity into all teaching, learning, and assessment approaches, including assessment design and implementation, support for Apprentices, pedagogical approaches, teaching techniques, and programme development. Tutors will consider the types of academic misconduct possible within various assessment modes. These include but are not limited to work-based assessments, written examinations, essays, online assessments, digital and media-based assessments, group work, and any form of collaborative working.

Concerning the multisite delivery of Tech Apprenticeship, FIT promotes a sustainable and scalable approach to maintaining high levels of academic integrity. The FIT Registrar has primary responsibility for implementing policies and procedures relating to upholding high standards of academic integrity.

## 6.5 Academic Misconduct and Assessment Malpractice

FIT regards academic misconduct/impropriety as any cheating that occurs in relation to a formal academic exercise submitted/undertaken during participation by an apprentice in a Tech Apprenticeship programme. FIT takes all reported incidences of academic misconduct seriously and seeks to ensure that they are dealt with efficiently and appropriately, including instances of assessment malpractice.

### 6.5.1 Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the most common and best-known example of academic misconduct. It is increasingly problematic due in part to the prevalence of broad discipline-specific content available on the internet. Plagiarism is the presentation of another person's work as the apprentice's own, without proper acknowledgment of the source, with or without the creator's permission, intentionally or unintentionally.

### 6.5.2 Falsification

Falsification is an attempt to present fictitious or distorted data, evidence, references, citations, or experimental results and or to knowingly use such material.

### 6.5.3 Cheating

Cheating is any attempt to obtain or to give assistance in an examination or an assessment without due acknowledgment. This activity includes submitting work that is not one's own.

### 6.5.4 Collusion

Collusion is a form of plagiarism. It is an unauthorised and unattributed collaboration of apprentices in a piece of assessed work.

#### 6.5.5 Personation

Personation is the assumption of another person's identity with the intent to deceive or gain an unfair advantage.

#### 6.5.6 Deceit

Deceit is dishonest to achieve an advantage. For example, by resubmitting one's own previously assessed work.

### 6.6 Detecting Academic Misconduct

FIT will investigate any suspected case of academic misconduct/impropriety noted to the Registrar by an apprenticeship employer or ETB partner. Processes may include tutor evidence or the use on behalf of FIT of anti-plagiarism detection software such as Turnitin or Ukunda. Apprentices who present with a possible case of academic misconduct/impropriety will be provided ongoing apprentice welfare and supports while FIT investigates the matter.

Any Apprentice found to have committed a case of academic misconduct/impropriety will subsequently complete academic integrity training specified by the FIT Registrar. FIT advise Apprentices that in cases where a submitted assessment element is found to be a case of academic misconduct/impropriety, this may have a bearing on the capacity of the apprentice to achieve a Merit or Distinction Award classification in their QQ Advanced Certificate award. FIT reserve the right to notify QQI of the pertinent details should a case present involving a suspected commercial contract cheating website, i.e., apprentice use of *'commercial essay mills.'*

#### 6.6.1 Plagiarism Detection Software

FIT's LMS integrates a plagiarism detection function, which tutors utilise as a tool to detect potential instances of plagiarism in work submitted to FIT. The software scans assessment submissions uploaded to FIT's LMS by Apprentices as per the submission timescales noted by tutors. In recent times, the capability of plagiarism detection software has increased exponentially to the point where findings noted in the product FIT utilises generally provide a solid basis to determine if an instance of academic impropriety has occurred. Apprentices are advised throughout programme induction activities to be mindful that this infrastructure is in place and will be utilised by all tutors.

### 6.7 Managing and Sanctioning Academic Misconduct

FIT classifies three categories of academic misconduct/impropriety offenses. The penalties that will be applied depend somewhat on the offense category. Categories include:

1. Minor or Technical Misconduct (poor academic practice without intent to cheat),
2. Moderate Academic Misconduct (dishonesty and misleading of tutor/assessors),

3. Severe Academic Misconduct (extensive evidence of cheating or clear evidence of intent to deceive).

#### 6.7.1 Minor and Moderate Academic Misconduct/Impropriety

Minor and moderate misconduct/impropriety will be managed at an employer or ETB level. However, presenting cases of suspected cheating, collusion, and plagiarism will be notified by the tutor or employer to the Registrar. In cases where insufficient evidence is presented in conjunction with a specific case, the Registrar will deem that the Apprentice does not have a case to answer. In these instances, FIT will not retain a formal record of the matter.

In plagiarism-related cases, where the Registrar and a tutor deem that on the balance of probability that academic impoverishment<sup>1</sup> has occurred rather than academic impropriety, the Apprentice will be requested to complete a class on academic writing. However, the Registrar will keep a formal record of the case should another incident occur at a later juncture.

Any persistent case of minor or moderate misconduct/impropriety will be notified to the Registrar. Minor cases will include poor academic practice/impoverishment. For example, typical instances could consist of a minimal and relatively insignificant case of poor referencing, incorrect (or an absence of) attribution for copied work inserted in an assignment, or a small amount of work copied from another assignment and not adequately referenced.

Moderate misconduct/impropriety covers misconduct that would, had it remained undetected, have resulted in the apprentice's dishonesty misleading the tutor/assessor. The volume and significance of the unacceptable elements in the submission are key factors - but not necessarily the only factors in determining the level of the offense. Assignments of this nature submitted by Apprentices could show some similarities to that of another apprentice, whether the other Apprentice is aware or not. Resubmission of another assignment previously submitted by an Apprentice, if found, may constitute a case of moderate academic misconduct/impropriety.

#### 6.7.2 Severe Academic Misconduct/Impropriety

Severe Academic Misconduct may include one or more of the following:

- Fabricating results or data,
- Purchasing a pre-written essay online or engaging in activity with commercial contact cheating website(s),
- Copying of large swathes of online text without context or adequate referencing.

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<sup>1</sup> Academic impoverishment happens when a student's educational experiences have not provided them with sufficient opportunity to gain the necessary academic skills and development as they ought to have had.

### 6.7.3 Sanctions for Academic Misconduct/Impropriety

#### *First and Second Offence*

The Apprentice's assessment will not be taken as a valid submission for grading purposes and will be assigned a failed grade. The tutor will request the Apprentice to resubmit their assessment submission, portfolio, etc., based on a new brief. Apprentices involved in a first or some second cases of suspected academic misconduct/impropriety will complete assigned academic integrity training. The Registrar will document the instance in the Apprentice's file, where it will remain until the Apprentice either completes or withdraws from their programme.

Any records kept for the medium term for institute/FIT-wide trends relating to academic misconduct will not include any personally identifiable information.

#### *Third Offence*

If an Apprentice is found guilty of a third violation of academic misconduct/impropriety, FIT may terminate the Apprentice from the apprenticeship programme, notifying their employer accordingly. Apprentices should note that this action would likely have a consequence on their continuation of employment, as Apprentices are employed based on an employment contract of apprenticeship. In such instances, the Apprentice will receive a transcript noting the completion of the programme's constituent elements, i.e., modular elements not presented in cases where academic misconduct/impropriety was identified/found. In instances that don't lead to termination, the Apprentice will complete assigned academic integrity training and resubmit their assessed element. The Registrar will document the instance in the Apprentice's file, where it will remain until the Apprentice either completes or withdraws from their programme.

### 6.7.4 Composition of Academic Misconduct/Impropriety Committee

In suspected moderate or severe cases of academic misconduct/impropriety, FIT will convene an Academic Misconduct/Impropriety Committee. The committee will comprise the Registrar as Chairperson, the module tutor or delegate, and the Apprentice's employer-provided they indicate to attend in advance of the meeting session.

FIT advise Apprentices that these meetings convene at fixed points throughout the year, which may interrupt the regular completion times of a programme. In cases proven to constitute academic misconduct/impropriety, the committee will outline an appropriate penalty, including resubmission/completion of the assessment submission or termination from the programme in severe cases. In addition, the committee will make a finding that academic misconduct has occurred or that academic misconduct has not occurred, specifying in each instance the type of misconduct/impropriety as noted in *Section 6.5*. In cases where academic misconduct has not occurred, FIT will not record the matter on the Apprentice's record. Following the finding of the

Academic Misconduct/Impropriety Committee, Apprentices will have five working days to appeal to the Director of Academic Affairs. An appeal of a decision/outcome of the committee is not a rehearing of the process. The Apprentice must outline in writing either an error or irregularity in the processing of their appeal.

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