Quality Assurance Handbook PART A1

POLICY No.6: Academic impropriety and assessment malpractice policy

6. Purpose of policy

Policy No.6 aims to ensure that 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 to minimise, and respond appropriately to, the use of unfair means in assessment.

6.1 Policy scope

This policy covers all academic activity by apprentices while active in a Tech Apprenticeship programme. Academic integrity means being fair, open and honest about academic work that one submits for assessment, including information on research methods and data used. Academic integrity is not only important to off-the-job programme elements, and even 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; Completing the required assessed elements also includes acknowledging the work of others and giving credit where others' ideas have been used. It also means avoiding

any means that provide an apprentice with an unfair advantage over other apprentices completing that assessment or similar assessments. Good research practice is a key transferable skill and of utmost importance to FIT in the holistic development of a well-rounded Apprentice. Since 2023, FIT notes a significant increase in the prevalence of AI tools being utilised by apprentices in training, both in the workplace and off-the-job training settings. FIT's Acceptable AI Tools Usage Policy sets out the parameters of acceptable use of these tools and associated AI-driven technologies. **In instances of suspected case(s) of academic impropriety, for the avoidance of any doubt, unacknowledged use of AI for the completion of module-level assessment will be categorised by FIT under headings not merely limited to plagiarism, falsification, and cheating.**

6.3 Policy statement

FIT believes in a strategic approach to academic integrity that is explicit and shared with staff, apprentices and other stakeholders. 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. FIT's 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, and programme development. Tutors will consider the types of academic misconduct that are possible within various assessment modes. These will include, but will not be 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 multi-site 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.

6.4 Academic misconduct and assessment malpractice

FIT regards academic misconduct/impropriety as any cheating that occurs in relation to a formal academic exercise submitted or 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.

6.4.1 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 and through the unacknowledged use of generative AI tools and associated technologies. In the present context, plagiarism is the presentation of the work of another person or entity as the apprentice's own, without proper acknowledgement of the source, with or without the creator’s permission, either intentionally or unintentionally.

6.4.2 Falsification

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

6.4.3 Cheating

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

6.4.4 Collusion

Collusion is a form of plagiarism. In the present context, it is the unauthorised and unattributed collaboration of apprentices in a piece of assessed work.

6.4.5 Personation

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

6.4.6 Deceit

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

6.5 Detecting academic misconduct

FIT will investigate any suspected case of academic misconduct/impropriety noted to the Registrar by an apprenticeship employer or ETB partner. Fact-finding may include evidence from a tutor or the use, on behalf of FIT, of anti-plagiarism detection software embedded in FIT's LMS. Apprentices who present with a possible case of academic misconduct/impropriety will be provided ongoing welfare and supports while FIT investigates the matter.

Any apprentice found to have committed a case of academic misconduct/impropriety will be subsequently required to complete academic integrity training as specified by the FIT Registrar. FIT advises apprentices that, in cases where a submitted assessment is found to include academic misconduct/impropriety, it may have a bearing on the entitlement of the apprentice to achieve a Merit or Distinction Award classification in their QQ Advanced Certificate award. FIT reserves the right to notify QQI of the pertinent details of any case presented that appears to involve the use of a commercial contract-cheating website, i.e., an 'essay mill.'

6.5.1 Plagiarism detection software

FIT's LMS has integrated 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 required by tutors. In recent times, the capability of plagiarism detection software has increased exponentially to the point where findings noted in the product that FIT utilises generally provide a solid basis to determine where 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.

6.6 Managing and sanctioning academic misconduct

FIT classifies three categories of academic misconduct/impropriety offences. The penalties that will be applied depend to some extent on the offence 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); and
3. Severe academic misconduct (extensive evidence of cheating or clear evidence of intent to deceive).

6.6.1 Minor and moderate academic misconduct/impropriety

Minor and moderate misconduct/impropriety will be managed at an employer or ETB level. However, cases of suspected cheating, collusion, and plagiarism will be initially notified by the tutor or employer to the Registrar. In cases where insufficient evidence is presented in 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 probabilities, academic impoverishment[1] has occurred rather than academic impropriety, the apprentice will be requested to complete a class on academic writing. However, should another incident occur at a later time, the Registrar will keep a formal record of the case.

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

Moderate misconduct/impropriety covers misconduct that would, if it had 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 here - but are not necessarily the only factors in determining the level of the offence. Assignments of this nature submitted by apprentices could show some similarities to that of another apprentice, whether the other apprentice is aware of it or not. Resubmission of another assignment found to have been previously submitted by the same apprentice or another one may constitute a case of moderate academic misconduct/impropriety.

6.6.2 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 a commercial contact cheating website(s); or
- Copying of large swathes of online text via the internet or generative AI tool without also providing context or adequate referencing.

[1] 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.

6.6.3 Sanctions for severe academic misconduct/impropriety

First and second offence

The apprentice's assessment will not be taken as a valid submission and will be assigned a failed grade. The tutor will then request the apprentice to submit a new version of their assessment submission, portfolio, etc.. Apprentices involved in a first or 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 information that personally identifies any apprentice by name.

Third offence

If an apprentice is found guilty of a third instance of academic misconduct/impropriety, FIT may remove the apprentice from the apprenticeship programme, notifying their employer accordingly. Apprentices should note that this action would be likely to have a bearing on their continuation of employment, since 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 that were presented where academic misconduct/impropriety was not identified/found. In instances that do not lead to withdrawal from the programme, the apprentice will complete assigned academic integrity training and submit a new assessment. 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.

6.6.4 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 their willingness and intention to attend the Committee's hearing. FIT advises apprentices that these meetings, where required, convene at previously scheduled times throughout the year, which may interrupt the regular completion times of a programme. In cases proven to constitute academic misconduct/impropriety, the Committee will assign an appropriate penalty, including resubmission/completion of the assessment submission or, in severe cases, removal of the apprentice from the programme. In addition, the Committee will make a finding that academic misconduct has either occurred or has not occurred, specifying in each instance the type of misconduct/impropriety (as noted in Section 6.4, above).

In cases where the Committee decides that 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. The appeal of a decision/outcome of the Committee will not amount to a rehearing of the process. Instead, the apprentice must outline in writing that there has been either an error or administrative irregularity in the processing of their case.

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