



Academic integrity for assessments affected by COVID-19

Executive summary

1. Whilst COVID-19 provides very significant challenges for the entire community, the University is committed to upholding the academic quality and standards of the degrees it awards. Central to maintenance of academic quality and standards is **academic integrity**; this is based on a common understanding and application of **values** and **expectations**.
2. One impact of COVID-19 is that for the remainder of this academic year students will be undertaking assessments remotely and without the usual invigilation procedures. Concerns have been expressed within the University community, including amongst and between students and staff, that academic quality and standards may be compromised should the altered nature of assessments impact upon academic integrity within the community.
3. This document seeks to provide clarity on the expectations of students and staff with regards academic integrity through COVID-affected assessments this academic year. It applies to all students registered on programmes of study leading to taught undergraduate and postgraduate level awards of the University of Bristol. It also covers, where appropriate, visiting and occasional students who submit work to the University of Bristol for assessment. The values of academic integrity are upheld by academic and professional services staff.

A. Policy and Regulation

4. The existing [University policy on academic integrity](#) states that “*Academic integrity includes the values of trust, respect, fairness and honesty in your work. Bristol prides itself on its academic scholarship and aims to develop a strong academic community throughout the whole of the student body.*”
5. Members of the University are expected to act with academic integrity. The University of Bristol [Student Agreement](#) expects students to “*act with academic integrity in all aspects of your studies, evidencing your independent thought, presenting accurate data, complying with ethical obligations and clearly referencing other people’s ideas.*”
6. This document considers cheating in examinations, tests or other assessments, cheating being defined as “*Attempting to gain an unfair advantage in an examination or test, including through impersonation, collusion, and procuring work from a third party.*”
7. Expectations regarding [Academic integrity](#), including in relation to assessment, are outlined within [University Regulations and Code of Practice for Taught Programmes](#), and include the following:
 - 3.1 *Students and staff are expected to commit to the values of academic integrity and to uphold high standards. The core values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage form the foundations of the University’s approach. Academic integrity is integral to university study and academic life.*
 - 3.2 *Students are responsible, with appropriate guidance, for adopting academic integrity in all areas of their studies, including in relation to assessment. The academic integrity approach*

contributes to students' personal and intellectual development within a community and culture of learning.

3.3 The University combines developing and nurturing academic integrity with a recognition that transgressions undermine its core values. Academic misconduct is taken seriously, and suspected transgressions are investigated, with a set of penalties available when academic misconduct has been proven (see sections 2-4 of the [Examination Regulations](#)).

8. For the forthcoming COVID-affected exam season the **values** outlined within the University's academic integrity policy have been reviewed and **expectations** reiterated as follows:

8.1 **Honesty** - underpins academic integrity and is a prerequisite for the values of trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. Intellectual and personal honesty starts with the individual and extends through a community and culture of learning. Staff and students are honest with themselves and with each *other*.

In terms of the upcoming assessments honesty is key.

You can expect the University to: *Acknowledge that the majority of assessments through the remainder of the academic year are not as originally planned, and seek to apply consistency and fairness in the assessments you will undertake whilst also maintaining academic standards.*

The University expects you to: *Demonstrate intellectual and personal honesty in your preparation for and undertaking of assessments. This also applies to formative assessments which are designed to support your study in subsequent years.*

8.2 **Trust** – results from a basis of honesty. A community and culture of learning fosters and relies on mutual trust between staff and students to encourage and support the free exchange of ideas. Trust is developed through the clear and consistent application of standards and behaviour. Communities built on trust enable co-operation by creating an environment where staff and students treat each other with fairness and respect.

You can expect the University to: *Operate under the assumption that most students will not seek to gain an unfair advantage from remote non-invigilated assessments. A range of standard procedures will be used to identify possible academic misconduct which will subsequently be investigated.*

The University expects you to: *Follow the guidance for an individual assessment as to what is allowed and what is not allowed, and to conduct yourself in such a way that you are not seeking to gain an unfair advantage.*

8.3 **Fairness** - is essential for a community and culture of learning, where transparent and reasonable expectations, including through accurate and impartial assessment, are applied equitably. Consistent and just responses for transgressions in academic integrity forms a part of fair treatment. Staff and students behave fairly in their interactions with each other within a culture of respect.

You can expect the University to: *Provide clear guidance on what is and is not acceptable for each assessment and work to ensure that no student is disadvantaged through their individual circumstances. The "no detriment" policy of the University should ensure that no student is severely disadvantaged by completing summer 2020 examinations in difficult circumstances. The University will continue to apply its normal procedures in cases of academic misconduct.*

The University expects you to: *Follow guidance on assessments, and not to seek to gain an unfair advantage over others.*

- 8.4 **Respect** - fosters active, open engagement with a diversity of opinions and encourages an interactive and co-operative learning community. Respect is reciprocal and involves staff and students showing respect for themselves, through facing challenges with integrity, and showing respect for others by valuing diversity of opinion and appreciating the need to challenge and refine ideas. Developing a culture of respect is an individual and collective responsibility.

You can expect the University to: *Respect the fact students are undertaking assessments under particularly unusual and stressful circumstances this academic year, and will assess in a compassionate manner whilst also seeking to maintain academic standards. The University will also respect the fact that assessment arrangements should be inclusive so that alternative exam arrangements are implemented and effects of geographical location, caring responsibilities, restricted access to technology and the internet, etc, are minimised.*

The University expects you to: *Respect efforts of fellow students and the University by not seeking to gain an unfair advantage.*

- 8.5 **Responsibility** - for sustaining a community and culture of learning requires staff and students to protect the personal and collective integrity of their work. Personal and shared accountability combine in upholding academic standards. Holding on to those high standards in all circumstances requires courage to succeed.

You can expect the University to: *Provide the guidance and support you require to prepare for and undertake online assessments and submit assignments to clearly specified deadlines. The University will maintain existing high standards and quality of the degrees it delivers, using appropriate assessment design so students can demonstrate attainment of learning outcomes allied with varied and sophisticated methods to quality assure assessments within this COVID-affected academic year. Wide-spread academic misconduct has the potential to affect perceptions of the quality of degrees the University awards.*

The University expects you to: *Behave in such a way during the exam season that perception of the quality of the degree you are undertaking is not compromised as this will affect not only you but also other students on your degree programme, and the reputation of the University more widely.*

- 8.6 **Courage** - and determination are required to apply the values of academic integrity. Courage is the capacity to act in accordance with one's convictions even in challenging situations. A community and culture of learning rests on and fosters integrity and courage as mutually dependent characteristics. Staff and students not only make decisions with integrity, they must also have the courage to follow their decisions with action.

You can expect the University to: *Demonstrate courage in trusting students to themselves behave with academic integrity throughout forthcoming assessments and, should it be required, in investigating possible instances of students seeking to gain an unfair advantage and applying penalties as outlined in Examination Regulations.*

The University expects you to: *Show courage to resist temptations to seek to gain unfair advantage and to discourage others from doing so.*

B. Routine Practice

9. The University already has routine practices in place to detect and deal with cheating by students and these will continue to be applied as appropriate. These practices include:
 - Plagiarism checking through Turnitin.
 - Marking processes where markers can spot very similar answers.
 - Reviews of mark distributions as carried out by Exam Boards. In the current situation it will be particularly important to compare assessment outcomes against expectations.
10. Scaling – Current policy is (in most cases) not to scale results. This will be maintained so that students can be reassured that their marks will not be affected by marks obtained by other students.

C. Additional Actions for the Current Emergency

11. Provide a statement on the nature of the assessment

Where the assessment has changed from an invigilated examination to an alternative form of assessment students must be given an explicit statement as to the nature of the exam (summative or formative), what resources they may use, time allowed, and what degree of collaboration (if any) is acceptable. Student focus groups run by the SU found that there was a degree of uncertainty as to what might be allowed that added to exam stress, and the QAA webinar reported that stress is a contributory factor in tempting students to cheat.

12. Cover Sheets

A statement will be included on the cover sheet of any online or “take-home” assessment detailing what is allowed. This will ensure that this information is available at the point the assessment is taken. For example:

“In line with University principles for open-book types of assessment, students will be able (if they wish, within the time constraints) to look up resources during the exam in notes, textbooks and online.

Collusion between students is not permitted. In these exceptional times we trust you to honour this requirement. Any instances of collusion that the University becomes aware of will be viewed as cheating and will be taken very seriously.”

13. Vivas

In order to quality assure assessments Schools may hold a viva in which a student is invited to talk through their examination paper. This may be particularly useful in subjects where a high degree of similarity could be expected in answers to questions. A viva would aim to provide a check on the student’s understanding. Being invited to a viva would not be an accusation of cheating and would not be entered on a student’s record. However, if appropriate, academic misconduct proceedings could be initiated following a viva.

14. Transcript

The University is currently (May 2020) consulting on the best solution for the presentation of transcripts of marks recorded during the period affected by Covid-19. The University will seek a solution which is broadly comparable with any approach agreed nationally by universities. The University will publish its policy on the website and notify students as soon as possible.