

QMUL School of Mathematical Sciences

2020/21 Academic Misconduct Guidelines for Staff

(2020/21 Semester B Update)

Due to the open book nature of our online exams and the pressures on students to achieve marks, we anticipate many more instances of academic misconduct this academic year.

Because of the speed that we had to transition to online teaching, the school was ill-equipped for this last May. During this time, cheating was rampant, mainly in the form of widespread collusion on the 24-hour exams. Moreover, some posted exam questions directly to online websites such as *Chegg.com*, and solutions obtained from their hired tutors were shared among several students.

Given our recent switch back to 24-hour exams, we expect to deal with the same issues this year.

However, even in light of this, it is essential to keep in mind that in cases of academic dishonesty, the burden of proof is on us. In other words, we must proceed very carefully with these cases, and we cannot afford to falsely accuse students.

This document gives some guidelines for staff dealing with academic misconduct cases arising from our online exams. Most of the focus will be on how to investigate cases.

Much of the contents of this document come from experiences gained from dealing with a multitude of offences from the 2020 May and LSR exams, as well as the 2021 January exams. If anything in this document is unclear or incorrect, then please do e-mail a.shao@qmul.ac.uk with feedback.

Thanks to Shahn Majid, Robert Johnson, Matt Fayers, and Justin Ward for their input, and for their previous efforts in dealing with academic misconduct cases.

Main People

The following will be primarily involved with academic misconduct investigations:

- *SEB Chair (UG)*: Arick Shao
- *SEB Chair (PG)*: Rosemary Harris
- *Exam Offence Investigator (UG)*: Rainer Klages
- *Exam Offence Investigator (PG)*: Rosemary Harris

1. The General Process

The general procedure for dealing with academic offences is as follows.

First, *before marking your exams*:

(0) Check contract cheating sites for questions from your exam (see the start of section 3 for a list of sites, and section 3.2 for instructions for *Chegg.com*). Inform the *SEB Chair* and the *Exam Offence Investigator* of anything you find, along with the URLs of any pages where they are found.

Next, if you discover instances of cheating in the above or when marking the exam, then the process for dealing with this is as follows:

(1) *Inform the SEB Chair and Exam Offence Investigator*. Provide a clear and detailed description of the allegations. The *Exam Offence Investigator* will then advise on which cases will likely meet the standard of proof that is required for a formal case.

(2) For the cases that you and the *Exam Offence Investigator* decide to take further, then *contact the affected students*, inform them of your suspicions, and obtain their explanations.

(3) *Gather evidence*, and put this in a shared (OneDrive) folder.

(4) Fill an *academic offence form*, and send this to the *Exam Offence Investigator*. Share the folder containing the evidence with the *SEB Chair* and the *Exam Offence Investigator*.

After all the above steps:

- If the SMS decides to go forward with formal charges, then the *Exam Offence Investigator* will forward the form and evidence to the *Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office*.
- At this point, the student(s) will be formally charged, and their marks will be withheld.
- Eventually, the *academic misconduct panel* will issue a decision, based on the testimonies of students, the lecturer, and other investigating staff.

See the upcoming sections for further details on the above points:

1.1. The Academic Offence Form

The *academic offence form* can be found on the *QMPlus Staff Intranet*, under the *Exams* section.

Most of the form should be self-explanatory. A few clarifying points are included here:

- Student ID number/name: It is fine to charge multiple students on a single form. (If you do so, then the allegations will have to be described individually for each student later.)
- Nature of the offence: This is probably one of the following:
 - Collusion: Students working together on exam questions or copying off each other.
 - (Attempted) contract cheating: Outsourcing exam questions to some paid service (e.g. *Chegg.com*, *XpressTutor.com*), and copying solutions obtained from these services.
- Title of Assessment: “Final exam” or “Final exam, LSR”.
- Description of Allegations: The main point is to be *very clear and detailed in presenting the allegations and evidence*. In particular, this will need to be clear to members of staff and the academic misconduct panel who are not familiar with your module.
 - Moreover, if multiple students are charged on this form, then the specific allegations for each student should be described individually here.

1.2. Contacting Students

You should, in your investigation, contact students and obtain their views on the matter.

- This can be done via e-mail, an interview, or both (for more complicated cases).

In particular, when you e-mail the students, you should:

- Inform them of what the suspicious parts are, and which exam questions these involve.
- Ask them for their explanations of what happened.
- Do not accuse them of anything yet, as they have not yet been formally charged.

At this point, you can also interview students via MS Teams:

- The goal the same as for e-mails – obtain students' views for what could have occurred.
- At least two members of staff (including the lecturer) need to be present. The *Exam Offence Investigator* can serve as the second interviewer.
- The lecturer should take the investigative lead, while the second interviewer should take a neutral role to ensure consistency of all the interviews.

The key task is to look for valid alternative explanations for these allegations, that is, for ways that this could have not been an academic offence. For example:

- For a bookwork-type question (e.g. “give a proof”, “state a definition”), a student could have obtained a solution from an online source—in general, this is not forbidden.
- For a computation question, students could have used various online calculators or apps.

1.3. Gathering Evidence

In general, “evidence” for an academic misconduct case could include the following:

- The exam itself and its solutions.
- Students' submitted exam scripts.
- E-mail correspondences with students, if relevant (e.g. students addressing the allegations).
- Data collected from websites such as *Chegg.com*.

The evidence that is required depends on the nature of the offence:

- *Collusion cases*: See section 2.1 for details.
- *Contract cheating cases*: See section 3.1 for details involving *Chegg.com*.

It is likely that you will also have to produce a report for each student:

- This document should summarise the evidence gathered for that student.
- This document should be appropriate to present to students and the *Academic Misconduct Panel*. In particular, any details for other students should be redacted from the report.

2. Collusion

Collusion cases are especially difficult, as students will almost always deny accusations regardless of how obvious the collusion may seem. (In particular, students gain no benefits from confessing.) These tend to end up being your word against those of the students.

Because of the lack of definitive evidence, these cases often require a considerable amount of work. Furthermore, since the burden of proof lies on the School's side, there will likely be many instances of probable collusion that the School cannot pursue.

2.1. Collecting Evidence

Here, we detail the evidence that is usually collected for collusion cases.

(a) *Academic Offence Form*: As mentioned before, the actual allegations need to be clearly stated on the form, separately for each student. Moreover, the form should detail the following:

- Which students colluded together, and on which problem(s)?
- How did they collude? What is the evidence for this?

(b) *Copy of exam and solutions*: This will need to be sent to the *Academic Misconduct Panel*.

(c) *Students' scripts*: The students' exam scripts should also be sent to the panel.

- It would be more useful to only have the parts of the exams in which collusion is suspected.
- For more contentious cases, you may also need to have a side-by-side comparison of the students' answers to a question.

(d) *E-mail correspondences*: Keep track of all e-mail correspondences with students.

- You may have to organise these into a single file, as part of a report.

(e) *Detailed reports*: You will likely have to present reports that organise the above information on a per-student basis. (These reports could be presented to students; in this case, any details involving other students must be redacted.)

2.2. The Investigation

It is our responsibility to be fairly sure of guilt before making formal allegations and pushing for penalties. Again, we cannot afford to make false allegations.

- In particular, once an *academic offence form* is submitted to the panel, students' marks are withheld until the case is concluded. This could delay students' results for months, and it could also delay graduation for final year students.

When interviewing students, ask how they could have innocently produced the suspicious outcome.

- Be particularly mindful of any explanations that could clear students.
- If such explanations do arise, then we will need to act on that.

3. Contract Cheating

There are several websites on which students can have their exam questions answered for them.

(a) *Chegg.com*: This monthly subscription service is the most popular such platform. Here, students can upload “homework problems” to the site, and their hired tutors will usually provide solutions within an hour of the upload. (The solutions are not always correct, but are generally good enough to more than pass an exam.) Note there is a partial paywall in place—you can view all the posted questions, but you cannot see the tutors’ solutions unless you pay the subscription fee.

(b) *Slader.com*: This is similar to *Chegg*, but less popular and more focused on textbook questions.

(c) *Coursehero.com*: This is also similar to *Chegg*, but the main focus is as an online repository for study aids (rather than exam questions). You may find a copy of your lecture notes or coursework assignments here, for example, but this is rather innocent.

(d) *XpressTutor.com*: This operates under a similar idea, but everything (both question and solution) is private between student and tutor. As far as I can tell, we are not able to view whether any of our students have submitted exam questions to their service.

Finally, students could also post their exam questions on free platforms such as *StackExchange*.

3.1. Collecting Evidence (*Chegg.com*)

The good news is that allegations involving *Chegg.com* are usually much easier to pursue:

- There is more concrete evidence to collect, due to the paper trail on *Chegg.com*.
- In light of this, students often will confess to misconduct once the evidence is presented.

There are generally two ways to make use of the information from *Chegg.com*:

- (a) Showing a student copied from a solution posted on *Chegg.com*.
- (b) Showing a student uploaded an exam question to *Chegg.com*.

(a) *Showing a student copied from a solution posted on Chegg.com.*

This proceeds like a collusion investigation, but is more direct, since there is no need to determine who copied from whom. The evidence required is analogous to points (a)-(e) in section 2.1.

- The main evidence consists of showing similarities between the students’ solutions and that found on *Chegg.com*.

(b) *Showing a student uploaded an exam question to Chegg.com.*

Chegg.com is somewhat helpful with helping universities in academic misconduct investigations. They have usually responded fairly quickly with the relevant data (but the information is usually in an inconvenient format). The general process here is as follows:

Step 1: At the end of the exam period, the *SEB chair* will send all the URLs of exam questions (see section 3.2) to *Chegg.com*. Soon after, *Chegg.com* will respond with a CSV file with details of all the queried pages (e.g. name, e-mail, IP address, question asked, solution given).

Step 2: For each entry in the CSV file:

- (a) If there is an e-mail address given, you can try to match that to a student in your module. (In most cases, students are wise enough to use a separate burner e-mail with *Chegg.com*, so this is usually not very helpful.)
- (b) If an IP address is given, then you could try to match this with data in the QMPlus logs; see section 3.3 for details on how to do this.

Step 3: If needed, you should organise the details collected (IP addresses, QMPlus logs, etc.) into a report that can be shown to the accused students in interviews or to the *academic misconduct panel*.

- If the report is to be presented to students, then all personal information for other students must be redacted. In particular, the report cannot contain the names of other students.

3.2 Appendix: Finding Your Exam on *Chegg.com*

As mentioned before, you should check websites such as *Chegg.com* for your exam questions prior to marking. Below are some more detailed instructions for doing this on *Chegg.com*.

Step 1: Search *Chegg.com* for questions from your exam.

- Go to the main homepage, <https://www.chegg.com>, and type some key phrases from your exam questions into the search page.
- For exams in the traditional format, you can use the style file template to your advantage. In particular, a search for “*Question X [Y marks]*” plus a key phrase often produces results.

Step 2: For any exam questions that you find, click on that result to go to the page dedicated to the question. Copy down the URL of that page.

- Once you submit the search query, Chegg then displays a list of all search results. If you see one matching your exam question, then click on it to go to its page.
- On the dedicated page, you can also see if a solution has been posted. However, unless you are subscribed (payment required) and logged in, you cannot view the solutions. (Let the *SEB Chair* know if you need a screenshot of a solution.)
- The bottom of the page sometimes contains “recommended links”. These often lead to other questions from the same exam.

Step 3: After finishing your search, send to the *SEB Chair* a list of all the URLs that you found.

- Please do this as early as possible. We can request further information on these pages from *Chegg.com* for our investigations (*Chegg.com* has been rather quick and cooperative in this regard), and the plan is to submit all these URLs to *Chegg.com* in bulk.

Finally, you should also check other sites briefly for similar instances of contract cheating, but you are most likely to find something on *Chegg.com*.

3.3 Appendix: Dealing with QMPlus Logs

The following is a step-by-step guide for accessing IP address data on QMPlus logs:

- Go to your module page on QMPlus.
- Go to the “*Settings*” subwindow on the bottom right, and click on “*Reports*” => “*Logs*”.
- In the “*Choose Which Logs ...*” window, leave everything unchanged, except for the “*All days*” dropdown window—change this to the date of the exam.
- Clicking “*Get these logs*” gives you a CSV file to download. This contains all the QMPlus events for your module on the exam date.
- Repeat this process for the day before the exam, and for the day after the exam.
- You can now compare the IP addresses in these logs with those in the *Chegg.com* data. If there are matches, then you know who posted the exam questions on *Chegg.com*.