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Plagiarism and Cheating Policy & Procedure

Scope

This policy applies to:

- **All learners** (domestic and international) enrolled in any Polytechnic Victoria course or program.
- **All staff** assessing or reporting student academic progress.
- **All forms of assessment** (oral, written, practical, workplace-based, online).

The Academic Manager is responsible for implementing this procedure and to ensure that staff and students are aware of its application and implement its requirements.

Purpose

This policy:

a) Sets out the principles underpinning Polytechnic Victoria's approach to academic honesty and integrity.

b) Identifies responsibilities for all individuals in promoting and upholding academic honesty.

c) Prohibits plagiarism, cheating, collusion, contract cheating, and inappropriate use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools.

d) Prescribes a transparent process for handling allegations of academic dishonesty.

e) Ensures compliance with the Revised Standards for RTOs 2025 — particularly Clause 1.4, which requires that assessment is conducted fairly, consistently, and that the evidence submitted is the genuine work of the learner.

f) Aligns with the ESOS Act 2000, National Code 2018, VET Quality Framework, and other relevant legislation.

Policy

1. All assessment evidence must be the student's own work.
2. Academic misconduct will be addressed fairly, consistently, and in line with procedural fairness principles.
3. Educative measures will be applied for minor/unintentional breaches; firm penalties for serious or repeated breaches.

4. AI-generated or assisted content may only be used with prior permission and must be acknowledged.

Definitions

Term / Misconduct Type / Acronym	Definition
Academic Integrity	The moral code of academia. It involves using, generating, and communicating information in an ethical, honest, and responsible manner.
Academic Misconduct	Conduct by which a student seeks to gain for themselves or another person an unfair or unjustified academic advantage in a course or unit of study, including cheating, collusion, and plagiarism. It may be intentional or reckless.
Plagiarism	Presenting another person's words, work, ideas, images, code, or data as your own without proper acknowledgment. Includes direct copying, paraphrasing without citation, using someone else's work structure, or reproducing content without credit.
Self-Plagiarism	Reusing one's own previous work (submitted for another subject/unit) without permission or acknowledgment.
Cheating	Any behaviour in assessment that seeks to gain an unfair advantage, including using unauthorised materials, impersonation, falsification of evidence, or resubmitting past work.
Collusion	Unauthorised collaboration between learners/students that results in submitted work that is not solely the learner's own.
Contract Cheating	Engaging a third party (paid or unpaid) to complete assessment work on your behalf.
AI Misuse	Use of generative artificial intelligence tools to produce, paraphrase, or structure assessment work without explicit permission and without clear acknowledgement, in breach of instructions.
CRICOS	Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students – the official Australian Government register of all Australian education providers approved to offer courses to overseas students.
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations – former Australian Government department responsible for national policies and programmes in education, employment and workplace relations.
DIAC	Department of Immigration and Citizenship – former Australian Government department responsible for immigration, visas, and citizenship (functions now under the Department of Home Affairs).

ASQA	Australian Skills Quality Authority – the national regulator for Australia's vocational education and training (VET) sector.
NRT	Nationally Recognised Training – training that meets the requirements of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and is recognised across Australia.
ESOS	Education Services for Overseas Students – the legislative framework (ESOS Act) that protects the interests of overseas students in Australia.
Overseas Student	A person who holds a student visa granted under the Migration Act 1958 to study in Australia.

Responsibilities

Learners must:

- Submit original work and acknowledge all sources.
- Not submit previously assessed work without permission.
- Follow approved referencing conventions for their course or discipline.
- Only use AI tools with explicit permission and clear acknowledgment.
- Take reasonable precautions to prevent their work from being misused by others.
- Attend integrity training and seek clarification when unsure.
- Understand and comply with Polytechnic Victoria's plagiarism and cheating policies and procedures.
- Be familiar with and apply the referencing practices acceptable to their school/discipline.
- Ensure that all sources of information are appropriately acknowledged.

Staff must:

- Explain and reinforce this policy to students throughout the course.
- Assess the authenticity of all assessment submissions, including mandatory plagiarism checks.
- Use a minimum of two web search engines and cross-check with other student submissions for detection.
- Educate, model, and support appropriate referencing standards in their discipline.
- Be vigilant in the detection of plagiarism and cheating.
- Provide information about referencing requirements relevant to the discipline area.
- Provide examples of appropriate referencing techniques and practice.

- Ensure that students understand the difference between cooperative learning, group work, and collusion.
- Be aware of, and respect, the practices of different cultures and cultural backgrounds.
- Provide transparent and consistent feedback about referencing issues.
- Set a good example through their own academic practice.

Operations Manager/Admin Manager must:

- Ensure all staff and students are aware of and comply with this policy and procedures.
- Oversee timely investigation and resolution of alleged breaches.
- Maintain confidential, auditable records of all alleged and confirmed breaches.

Polytechnic Victoria must:

- Make accessible to staff and students the legislation, policies, and procedures concerning plagiarism.
- Establish processes to support the consistent implementation of plagiarism-related procedures.
- Provide processes for students to appeal decisions arising from plagiarism or cheating.
- Provide student support through information on acceptable referencing techniques.
- Support the use of appropriate referencing techniques.
- Maintain confidential records of previous breaches.

Examples of Plagiarism

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

a) **Recycling:** Resubmitting the same or substantially the same work for assessment in the same or different units, unless approved by the trainer.
b) **Fabrication of data.**
c) Engaging another person to complete an assessment, whether for payment or otherwise.
d) Collusion with other students to submit joint work without authorisation.
e) Using unauthorised materials or devices in assessments.
f) Copying from other students during assessments.
g) Inappropriate use of electronic devices to access information during assessments.
h) **Using AI tools to generate whole or partial content for assessments** and submitting it without acknowledgement, permission, or critical personal input.

- Example: Submitting an essay written entirely or partially by an AI chatbot and claiming it as original.
- Example: Using AI to rephrase or paraphrase large sections of text to disguise copying.

Prevention Strategies

- Inclusion of plagiarism education in orientation and student handbooks –
    - All new students receive a formal briefing during orientation outlining what constitutes plagiarism, self-plagiarism, collusion, contract cheating, AI misuse, and other forms of academic misconduct.
    - Real-life examples are provided to illustrate different forms of plagiarism and their consequences.
- Access to referencing guides and examples.
- Assessment design that minimises opportunities for plagiarism
    - Assessment tasks are designed to require application of personal workplace or simulated project experience, making direct copying less feasible.
    - Where possible, assessments involve practical demonstrations, role-plays, oral questioning, and scenario-based projects.
- Encouragement of draft submissions for feedback.

Consequences of AI-related Plagiarism

Use of AI-generated content without disclosure is treated as serious misconduct. The same consequences apply as for other forms of plagiarism, including:

- First instance: Written warning, required resubmission or alternative assessment, academic counselling.
- Subsequent instance: Second written warning, resubmission with a cost of $200 per unit, possible fail grade in the unit.
- Continued or severe breaches: Possible cancellation of enrolment for repeated misconduct.

Students are expected to:

- Disclose when generative AI tools are used to assist their work.
- Only use AI tools where explicitly allowed by the trainer.
- Acknowledge any AI-generated input appropriately, e.g., 'This summary was generated using [AI tool] and edited by the student'.

Procedure

8. Procedure – Detailed Process for Handling Plagiarism and Cheating

This procedure outlines the **mandatory step-by-step process** to be followed by all staff when plagiarism, cheating, collusion, contract cheating, or AI misuse is suspected.

Stage 1 – Detection

1. **Mandatory Originality Checks**
   - All assessment submissions (written, online, or uploaded via LMS) **must** undergo plagiarism checking.
   - Trainers/assessors must:
     - Use at least two different web search engines (e.g., Google, Bing) to search for matching text or materials.
     - Compare the submission with other student work from the same cohort and previous intakes.
     - Use any additional approved plagiarism detection tools available.

2. **Indicators of Potential Misconduct**
   - Significant sections of identical or near-identical text to an existing source without proper acknowledgment.
   - Inconsistent writing style or vocabulary within the same document.
   - References that do not match the in-text citations or appear fabricated.
   - Content misaligned with the learner's demonstrated language proficiency.
   - Unexplained file metadata showing third-party creation.
   - Work that mirrors AI-generated patterns without acknowledgement.

3. **Evidence Collection**
   - Save copies of:
     - Search results, similarity reports, and matched source material.
     - The original student submission in its original format.
     - Notes from comparisons with other student submissions.
   - Mark and highlight suspected copied sections in the document.
   - Maintain a secure evidence file for each case.

Stage 2 – Initial Student Notification and Meeting

1. **Written Notification**
   - Send the student a written notice of the suspicion, including:
     - The nature of the allegation.
     - The evidence (examples of suspected copying or misconduct).
     - The relevant section(s) of this policy allegedly breached.
     - Date, time, and location (or online link) for the meeting.
     - Their right to bring a support person or student representative.

- Minimum 2 working days' notice to prepare.

2. **Meeting Conduct**
   - Trainer/assessor presents the evidence.
   - Student is given the opportunity to explain:
     - How they prepared the work.
     - Whether they used any assistance (human or AI).
     - Why specific similarities exist.
   - Discussion outcomes:
     - Minor referencing issues or academic skill gaps: Provide academic counselling and redirect to referencing support (no penalty applied).
     - Likely intentional misconduct: Proceed to Stage 3.

Stage 3 – Escalation to Admin/Operations Manager

1. **Referral Requirements**
   - Trainer/assessor compiles:
     - Completed Plagiarism Investigation Record.
     - All collected evidence.
     - Notes from the initial student meeting.

2. **Manager Review**
   - The Admin/Operations Manager:
     - Reviews the evidence and context.
     - Determines offence category:
       - **First offence** (minor/moderate breach).
       - **Second offence** (repeat breach).
       - **Severe breach** (deliberate, large-scale plagiarism, contract cheating, falsification).
     - Applies penalties according to Section 8.4.

Stage 4 – Outcomes and Penalties

A. First Offence – Minor/Moderate
- Written **First Warning Letter** (signed by Admin Manager).
- Mandatory academic counselling.
- Resubmission of the same task or an alternative equivalent assessment.
- No re-assessment fee for first offence.

B. Second Offence – Repeat Breach
- Written **Second Warning Letter** (signed by Operations Manager).
- $200 per unit re-assessment fee.

- Resubmission required.
- Possible "Not Yet Competent" (NYC) outcome if original work not submitted.

C. Severe Breach – Deliberate/Contract Cheating

- Immediate NYC for the unit.
- Referral for potential suspension or enrolment cancellation under Student Misconduct procedures.

Stage 5 – Record Keeping

- All documentation (letters, evidence, investigation records) stored in the **student's administration file**.
- Cases logged in the **Academic Misconduct Register** including:
  - Student details.
  - Date of offence.
  - Nature of breach.
  - Evidence reference.
  - Penalty/outcome.
  - Resolution date.
- Records retained in line with RTO record-keeping requirements.

9. Appeals

Right to Appeal

- Students can appeal if they believe:
  1. The process was not followed correctly.
  2. The decision was based on incorrect or incomplete information.
  3. The penalty is disproportionate to the breach.

Appeal Lodgement

- Appeals must:
  - Be submitted **in writing** within **7 calendar days** of the decision.
  - Be sent to the Student Administration Department.
  - Include:
    - Student's name, ID, course, and unit.
    - The decision being appealed.
    - Grounds for appeal (process, decision, penalty).
    - Supporting evidence (drafts, source material, communications).

Appeal Review Process

1. Appeal acknowledged in writing within **2 working days**.
2. Review conducted by an **independent staff member** not involved in the original decision.
3. Review includes:
   - Examination of original evidence.

- Consideration of the student's submission.
- Verification of procedural fairness.

4. Student may be invited to provide further clarification in a meeting.
5. Outcome determined and communicated **within 7 calendar days**.

Possible Appeal Outcomes

- **Upheld:** Decision overturned, penalty removed or reduced.
- **Dismissed:** Original decision and penalty stand.
- **Partially upheld:** Finding of misconduct stands but penalty adjusted.

10. Forms and Templates –

1. First Written Warning Letter

- Purpose: Formal notice of first breach.
- Content:
  - Date of issue.
  - Student details (name, ID, course, unit).
  - Description of offence and evidence summary.
  - Reference to policy clauses breached.
  - Required actions (e.g., resubmission).
  - Resubmission deadline.
  - Consequences of further breaches.
  - Right to appeal and appeal process.

2. Second Written Warning Letter

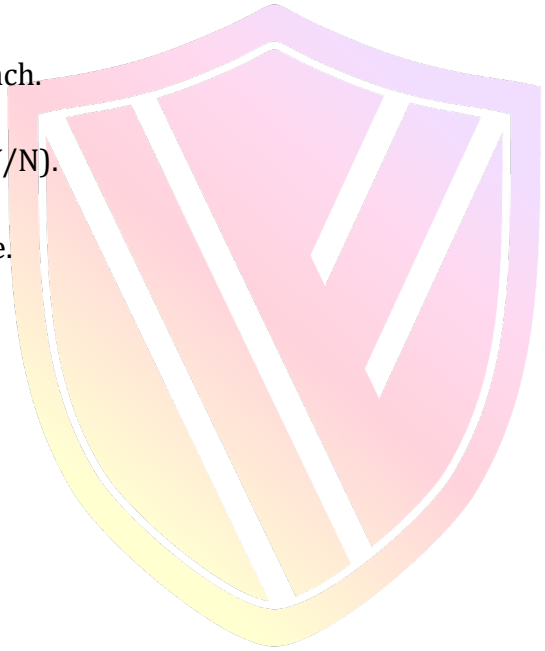
- Purpose: Formal notice of second breach.
- Content:
  - Reference to previous breach and date.
  - Detailed description of new breach and evidence.
  - $200 per unit re-assessment fee notice.
  - Possible NYC or enrolment cancellation.
  - Right to appeal and appeal process.

3. Plagiarism Investigation Record

- Sections:
  - Student details.
  - Unit and assessment details.
  - Date and method of detection.
  - Evidence summary (attach supporting documents).
  - Trainer meeting notes.
  - Escalation date.
  - Final decision and penalty.
  - Signatures of trainer and manager.

4. Appeal Lodgement Form

- Sections:
  - Student details.
  - Decision being appealed.
  - Grounds for appeal (tick box: process, decision, penalty).
  - Supporting evidence list.
  - Student declaration and signature.
  - Date lodged.

5. Academic Misconduct Register

- Fields:
  - Student name/ID.
  - Course/unit.
  - Date of offence.
  - Misconduct type.
  - Summary of breach.
  - Penalty applied.
  - Appeal lodged (Y/N).
  - Outcome.
  - Case closure date.