

## Guidance on the Authorised University Officer (AUO) role

### 1. Background

[Regulation XVII](#) (Conduct and Discipline of Students) introduces the role of AUO into the disciplinary process.

At a high level, section 7 of the Regulation identifies AUOs as the following:

The following AUOs, and their delegated nominees who may be identified as a case arises, are empowered to arrange and take part in Summary Disciplinary Panels to consider allegations of misconduct made against students:

**a) Heads of Schools and Deans of Faculties**

For breaches of this Regulation occurring as part of an activity forming part of a student's programme of study;

**b) Director of Residential and Sports Services**

For misconduct occurring within residences and as part of University affiliated sports;

**c) The Librarian**

For misconduct concerning the Library;

**d) Chief Information Officer**

For misuse of the University's information systems and network, including non-adherence to the Acceptable Use Policy (<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=16277>);

**e) Director of Campus Life**

For any misconduct described in paragraph 2, normally where action needs to be taken in the place of, or where the misconduct is not covered by, an AUO listed above.

(a), (b) and (e) are the more common roles undertaking disciplinary activity. Schools and Faculties will likely have a higher weighting towards academic malpractice, Residential and Sport Services toward general misconduct and Campus Life a mixture of the two. All areas will operate Summary Disciplinary Panels (less serious cases) but it is only (e) which arranges University Disciplinary Panels (serious cases).

### 2. Who selects AUOs?

The Regulation states that the reference to the roles in section 1 above will also include reference to a delegated nominee. In practice, delegated nominees will be more likely to carry out the AUO role day-to-day.

Local areas should identify a pool of staff to act as AUOs; nominees are not appointed by the Director of Campus Life. It is better for there to be a small network of staff at each local level so that they can support each other, share good practice and spread any work between them.

AUOs can be academic or PS staff:

- For academic colleagues, an AUO tends to be someone already in a position of academic responsibility e.g. Programme Director, Head of Teaching and Learning, Unit Coordinator i.e. someone who acts as a go-to person for colleagues. Academic colleagues can deal with either type of case, but more commonly will be associated to academic malpractice cases. Academic colleagues may wish to talk to their local managers about taking on an AUO role and see how this can be factored into their Work Allocation Model.
- For PS colleagues, student discipline and casework will likely be incorporated into existing job descriptions and team responsibilities. For example, Faculties have Appeals, Complaints and Discipline Officers. Colleagues of suitable grade (G6+) and/or experience (handle student casework) may undertake the AUO role. More commonly, PS colleagues will be involved in general misconduct cases but may move into academic malpractice depending on their experience and/or the type of malpractice. For example, a PS AUO may be able to consider a straightforward case of examination malpractice, like possession of unauthorised materials, but less able to consider a technical case of plagiarism.

### 3. What are the roles and responsibilities of an AUO?

#### a. The Assessment stage

The Assessment stage is described under the [Procedure for the University Disciplinary Panel](#) (“**UDP Procedure**”) and the [Procedure for Summary Disciplinary Panels](#) (“**SDP Procedure**”). AUOs under this section are responsible for reviewing and determining how a case is handled. For most cases, this can be a documentary-based review with a short statement written as to why a case is being referred into discipline. The [Referral Form](#) gives an example of the sort of information that is required to consider a case. Further information on the Assessment stage is available [here](#).

However, it may be that cases are identified as requiring further investigation, such as meetings with parties involved. The more significant a case, and the more complex the needs of the parties involved, the more likely it is a more contact is needed and a detailed report is required. A report should include:

- An introduction to the author and process.
- A summary of case and parties involved.
- Key dates.
- Evidence available, including any witness input.
- Analysis of the information – establishment of facts (what, why, when).
- Conclusions based around the balance of probabilities and with reference to any applicable definitions of misconduct from the Regulation.
- Confirmation of recommended next steps.

This stage should be completed 20 working days from the date the concerns were reported. Additional time may be required in complex cases, but parties should be kept up to date with the case where possible.

#### i. Academic malpractice

Under section 4 (Detection) of the [Academic Malpractice Procedure](#), there are a number of types of malpractice highlighted with recommendations, depending on the type, for initial information gathering and review. AUOs mostly act as a second opinion and a filter, to consider concerns raised by examiners, to help determine whether there is a likelihood of malpractice that needs consideration

through the later stages of discipline e.g. a panel, or if the case seems more likely poor academic practice and so should be dealt with through feedback and marking against the set marking criteria. The depth of enquiry will depend on the type of case, for example:

- **Plagiarism** – this may only require a documentary review of a Turnitin Report, and corresponding sources, to see if there is likely malpractice.
- **Collusion** – where there are a number of students involved, and responsibility for malpractice is unclear, prior to a case going to a disciplinary panel enquiry may need to extend to meeting with the students involved.
- **Contract Cheating** – where there is limited evidence of contract cheating the Academic Malpractice Procedure recommends a viva is held with the student concerned. This should also be held with a subject specialist. The viva is not for assessment purposes, it is used to test the student's preparation and knowledge of the work, to help determine whether the student was the author of it or not.

#### ii. Sexual misconduct

Cases of sexual misconduct should be referred to the Division of Campus Life for handling by the Director of Campus Life, rather than locally. It is recommended students are first encouraged to make a disclosure through the [Report and Support](#) platform, initially for support purposes to help students decide whether to make a formal report. The Assessment stage is fulfilled by the [Sexual Misconduct Procedure](#).

#### b. Fast-track

Some non-complex, less serious issues, may be possible to resolve with a recommended outcome, without the need for a full disciplinary panel. This can apply to academic malpractice and general misconduct and there are limits to the penalty range for each type. The student should be written to with a brief explanation around a finding and proposed penalty; this should include reasons for these decisions and recommendations. A student need not accept a penalty but, if they do not, the case should then proceed to a disciplinary panel for full consideration.

The [Guidance on Student Disciplinary Hearings](#), includes some templates that might be helpful.

#### c. Chairing

AUOs will likely need to act as Chairs of Summary Disciplinary Panels. Chairs of University Disciplinary Panels are appointed separately through the Student Conduct and Discipline Committee. Chairs will:

- Need to be familiar with the disciplinary processes and have a good working knowledge of the case under consideration.
- Need to consider any preliminary matters raised before a hearing e.g. a request to adjourn.
- Manage the hearing, including being the main voice at the hearing, introducing it to attendees, announcing decisions etc.
- Produce/approve any notes and outcome letters afterwards.

#### d. Case presenting

Where an AUO refers a case to a disciplinary panel, they may need to attend the panel to outline their preliminary findings and explain why the case has been referred. Case Presenters are less common at SDP level (this may be able to make do with a written statement on the case) but are required at UDP level. Case Presenters need a good working knowledge of the case and also the student; the Referral Form linked to above highlights some areas that panels often want to know about e.g. mitigating circumstances. There is some additional Case Presenter Guidance available [here](#).

e. Panel membership

Beyond the Chair, panels also need members – for SDPs, there are at least two people involved (the Chair and a panel member). For UDPs, a five person panel is aimed for but can proceed with four. AUOs may be asked to act as panel members. This role is less involved than the Chair but is key in supporting the panel to reach a decision on a case.

**4. Key skills**

- Attention to detail.
- Familiarity with the disciplinary process, and associated policies and procedures e.g. Degree Regulations.
- Able to balance institutional expectations with an empathetic approach to students / others involved in casework.
- Confident at making difficult decisions.
- Able to articulate reasons for decisions.
- Cognisant of data protection and confidentiality.
- Time management.

**5. How many cases can I expect to be involved in?**

It is difficult to say as case numbers fluctuate. The Division of Student and Academic Services produced annual reports to Senate with some high-level case numbers. The more AUOs there are, the more likely that cases can be shared around.

Some cases may be straight-forward, and others more complex. For example, it may be relatively straightforward to identify a case as being suitable to refer to a disciplinary panel, such as on review of a Turnitin Report and an examiner's concerns or photographs of property damage. Whereas if the issue is more complex, such as alleged bullying, this may require more due diligence early on in the process, a detailed write up and a longer disciplinary hearing.

Where an AUO is involved at one stage as a decision maker, they should try to avoid taking on any further roles in the disciplinary process which may lead to challenges around a perception of bias – some simple yardsticks are whether you have a close association to the student or have formed a clear view on a case. For example, an AUO who has Chaired a student's hearing already, should not be on the panel for a second offence.

Some roles are not mutually exclusive though and can flow on from each other. For example, an AUO completing a review / investigation of allegations, may later need to act as a Case Presenter to a disciplinary panel.

It is difficult to identify the time commitment involved per case as this will be case dependent. As indicated above, some case reviews may be quick and simple and other less so. Similarly, some

hearings can last an hour whereas some complex cases (such as sexual misconduct) can last a day or more.

## **6. Administrative support**

It is hoped most local areas can provide some form of administrative support to AUOs, whether this be help with writing to students, writing up notes, collating materials etc. However, where this is not available, the AUO may need to do some of their own administration. This means keeping full and accurate records of cases from start to finish.

For UDPs, administration will be provided by the Division of Campus Life, once a case has been formally referred.

## **7. Useful resources**

- Advice and Response [website](#)
- Division of Student and Academic Services [website](#) (Academic Appeals, Complaints, Conduct and Discipline)
- University Data Protection Course and EDI course. See [Essential courses for all new staff](#) tab.
- OIA [Good Practice Framework](#). Of note, see chapter on Disciplinary Procedures. Website includes student case studies.
- Student [overview](#) on student discipline.