



# Learner Handbook

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*Dear Learners,*

*Hello and welcome to your course. We are delighted that you have decided to work with DCM Learning as you continue your education.*

*This handbook provides you with the basic information needed to navigate your course and to find the resources that you need in your daily studies. It also has important sections on writing, which is one of the key skills needed to achieve success in your programme assessments. It is important that you familiarise yourself with the information contained in this handbook and to check it first if you have any queries about teaching resources, marks, assessments, and using online resources.*

*It is also important to check your email regularly for messages from our tutors and support staff about your course.*

*We wish you the best of luck in achieving your chosen award.*

*The DCM Team.*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>LEARNERS CODE OF CONDUCT</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>GENERAL INFORMATION</b>	<b>5</b>
WHO TO CONTACT	5
OUR COMMITMENT TO QUALITY	5
OUR COMMITMENT TO YOU	6
DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY	6
<b>STUDY &amp; MARKS</b>	<b>8</b>
ACCESS, TRANSFER AND PROGRESSION	8
DEADLINES & DELIVERY	9
REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION	10
DEADLINE EXTENSIONS	11
GRADING STRUCTURE	11
WHAT MY MARK MEANS	12
APPEALS	12
RE-SUBMITTING FAILED ASSESSMENTS	14
PROGRAMME DEFERRAL/WITHDRAWAL	14
COMPLAINTS	15
<b>ASSESSMENT PREPARATION</b>	<b>16</b>
ACADEMIC INTEGRITY	16
PLAGIARISM: DEFINITIONS	16
PLAGIARISM: PENALTIES	17
WRITTEN ASSESSMENTS	17
Formatting your Assessments	18
Structuring your Assessments	18
Presentation	18
Planning your Essay	19
Avoiding Plagiarism	20

## LEARNERS CODE OF CONDUCT

This code sets out your responsibility, as a learner, to your peers, colleagues, and DCM. By registering as a learner with DCM, you agree to abide by this Learner Code of Conduct.

The Code of Conduct is as follows.

- Every learner shall behave in a manner that ensures that all staff and learners are treated with dignity and respect.
- Every learner shall behave in a manner that ensures that all DCM's property and facilities are used appropriately.
- Every learner shall acknowledge the authority of academic and support staff in the performance of their duties.
- Every learner shall approach his/her academic and professional endeavours with honesty and integrity.
- Every learner shall respect the intellectual property rights in the work others produce individually or in partnership with them.
- Every learner shall comply with his/her academic programme requirements and with all DCM registration, fee, library, use of computer facilities and assessment regulations.
- No learner shall provide false or misleading information to or withhold relevant information from any party regarding his/her academic and professional achievements.
- Every learner shall behave in a manner that does not disrupt the functioning of DCM.
- Every learner is responsible for seeking help from tutors and staff when required, and for using the provided resources to meet the requirements of their programme of study.

# GENERAL INFORMATION

## WHO TO CONTACT

Your point of contact for information or advice depends on the nature of your query.

- For specific questions relating to the content of your course, your first port of call is the tutor who teaches that course, either during class (by asking questions), just after class, or by emailing the tutor with your query or to agree on a time to talk. Your tutor will provide you with their contact details during the course.
- For questions relating to your assessments (submission dates, extensions, appeals etc.) and receiving your award you should contact our QQI Administration team at [admin@dcmlearning.ie](mailto:admin@dcmlearning.ie).
- For technical queries relating to the online portions of your course, you should contact our eLearning Support team at [elearning@dcmlearning.ie](mailto:elearning@dcmlearning.ie).

Email will be one of the most important means of communication outside of your classes. You are expected to use email professionally and refrain from any comments which could be regarded as disrespectful or offensive. Emails can be easily misunderstood and, therefore, it is important to ensure that the message conveys the intended tone (i.e. professional, friendly, courteous).

Emails are monitored during office hours, Monday through Friday, 9 am to 5 pm. Urgent emails will be prioritised so please be patient before sending a follow-up email.

If your query does not fall into any of the above categories you can contact us by phone on 01 524 1338.

## OUR COMMITMENT TO QUALITY

DCM is committed to the compliance of all regulations set down by external awarding bodies we partner with and to the timely revision of all Quality Assurance (QA) documents in keeping with changing guidelines.

Our policies and procedures aim to ensure that we deliver high-quality programmes and provide a high-quality service to our learners at all times. They will also assist us to review the effectiveness of the programmes we offer and the service we provide on an

on-going basis. We are committed to developing a culture that recognizes the importance of quality in everything we do.

Our policies and procedures are learner-focused to ensure all learners: -

- Can easily access useful information about all the programmes we offer.
- Are given details about course outlines, progression opportunities, assessment procedures and criteria
- Have the opportunity to give and receive feedback on their experience and achievements
- Have reasonable access to support services including contact with trainers for a one-to-one consultation
- Are treated fairly and respectfully at all times
- Are made aware of the policies and procedures in place to deal with any extenuating circumstances that may affect their progression
- Have access to all relevant QA documentation

## **OUR COMMITMENT TO YOU**

Our commitment to you is to:

- Provide accurate, impartial information to enable you to make an informed choice about the programmes we offer
- Advise you on learning resources to support your learning experience
- Provide you with a welcoming, high-quality learning environment
- Give constructive feedback on your progress
- Give you opportunities to share your feedback with us and be responsive to any concerns you have
- Provide accurate information and support about our assessment processes
- Provide reasonable accommodation
- Deal with complaints fairly and in confidence
- Provide you with access to an appropriate appeals procedure

## **DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY**

Our Equality and Diversity Policy states: -

*“We aim to promote a place of learning and work where all individuals are treated fairly and equally, with dignity and respect at all times irrespective of their Age, Gender, Race, Marital Status, Family Status, Religion, Sexual orientation, Disability or Membership of the travelling community”*

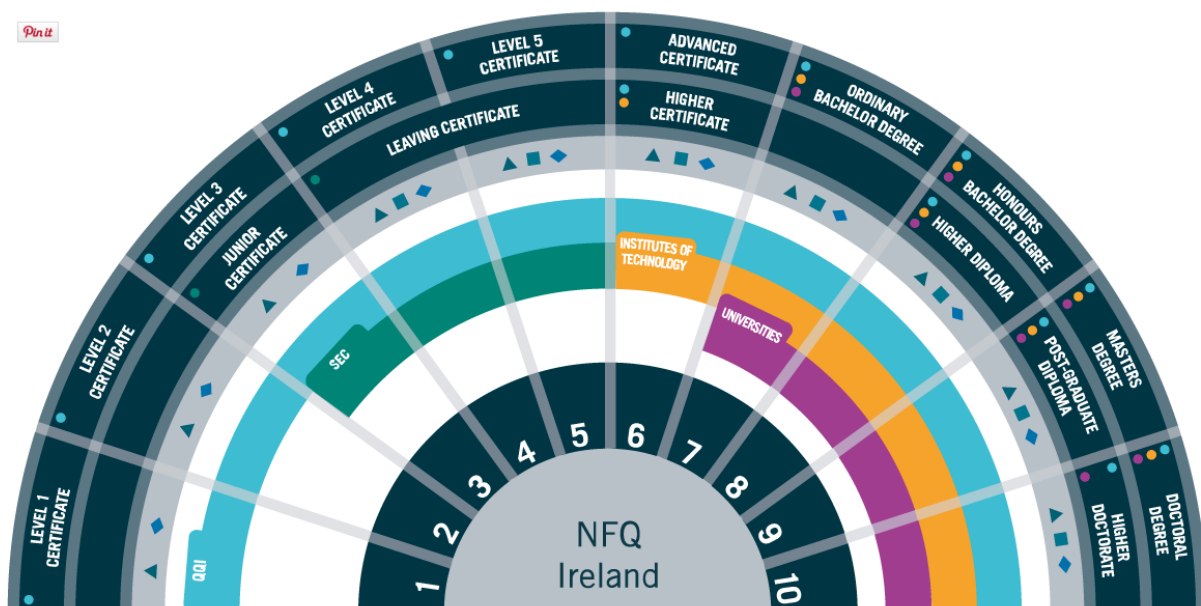
All learners are expected to abide by this policy while taking part in our training programmes.

If any learner feels they have not been treated equitably they should inform DCM immediately.

# STUDY & MARKS

## ACCESS, TRANSFER AND PROGRESSION

We provide learners with advice and information about their transfer and progression opportunities (i.e. ways learners can move to a higher-level course on the NFQ) following the successful completion of a certified course/award.



The NFQ is intended to put the learner at the centre of the education and training system in Ireland. It is important that you are aware of the NFQ, understand what it means for you, and the benefits it can bring.

The NFQ is a system of ten levels. It incorporates awards made for all kinds of learning, from initial learning to Doctorate, wherever the learning is gained. For example, the Irish Junior Certificate is at NFQ Level 3, apprenticeship qualifications are at NFQ Level 6, the Honours Bachelor Degree is at NFQ Level 8 and the Doctoral Degree is at NFQ Level 10.

The NFQ provides a structure (a framework) to compare and contrast the level and standard of different qualifications. This helps you to make informed decisions about your qualification choices and to consider what options might be available for your further studies. The NFQ also makes it easier for you to explain to others what



qualifications you hold, or are studying for. This becomes very important when you are considering further learning or when you are applying for a job - at home or abroad.

Information about the transfer and progression opportunities for our programmes are available on the appropriate programme page on our website [www.dcmlearning.ie](http://www.dcmlearning.ie).

If the transfer and progression opportunities are dependent on any particular attainments (e.g. where a learner must achieve a distinction in an award to progress to the next level) this will be highlighted also.

This information will also be included in the brochure for that programme which is available to download from our website or on request from our support staff over the phone or via email.

Our support staff and trainers are trained to be familiar with the NFQ and can advise on the opportunities for transfer and progression following the successful completion of one of our programmes.

### **Further Reading:**

- Visit <http://www.nfq-qqi.com/> for an interactive version of the NFQ.
- Visit [http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/Higher-Education-Links-Scheme-\(HELS\).aspx](http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/Higher-Education-Links-Scheme-(HELS).aspx) for information about HELS (Higher Education Links Scheme) which provides systematic progression opportunities for learners to first year of higher education programmes based on FET(QQI) Level 5 and 6 awards, through the CAO (Central Applications Office).
- Visit <http://qsearch.qqi.ie/WebPart/Search?searchtype=recognitions> for information about NARIC Ireland, which provides advice on the academic recognition of a foreign qualification by comparing it, where possible, to a major award at a certain level on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)

## **DEADLINES & DELIVERY**

When you start your course you will be given a date for submitting your assessments via email by our support team. The deadline for completing and submitting your assessment will vary depending on your chosen course and the date you enrol.

All assessments must be submitted on or before this date if they are to be graded.

Detailed instructions on how to submit your assessments will be provided within your assessment brief. You should read this document thoroughly.

You must keep copies of all your work, including notes, either in physical or electronic format. Occasionally an external examiner may decide to re-examine work submitted previously. It is, therefore, important that you retain copies at least until you receive your certificate. Please ensure that you have at least two separate electronic backups of any work that you have submitted for assessments.

All assignments submitted will go through our assessment procedure: -

- Internal Assessment
- Internal Verification
- External Authentication
- Final approval by our Results Approval Panel

You will receive a statement of results, via email, once it has been approved by our results approval panel.

Following the appeals period (7 days), your results will be submitted to QQI and your certificate requested.

## **REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION**

We aim to accommodate all learners, following our Equality and Diversity policy to help ensure they can successfully participate in our training programmes and will be able to demonstrate their achievements for assessment purposes.

If you require a reasonable accommodation you will be asked to complete a reasonable accommodation request form outlining the reasons for which you are requesting the accommodation. Please note that medical notes or other supporting evidence may be required. The decision to allow a request will be approved by the QA Officer and once approved, these circumstances will not affect your grade.

Reasonable accommodation will only be approved if we can make an adaptation that does not affect the standards of the given award such as: -

- Rest periods during programme delivery
- Modifying programme materials e.g. presentation slides/handouts/assignment sheets

- Using a sign-language interpreter
- Using a scribe or reader
- Assistive technology
- Extended time to complete assignments

[Click here to use our online form to request reasonable accommodation now.](#)

## **DEADLINE EXTENSIONS**

If you are ill, suffered a bereavement, or other serious circumstances beyond your control prevent you from completing an assessment on time, you should request an extension as soon as possible.

You will be asked to complete an extension request form outlining the reasons for which you are requesting the extension. Please note that medical notes or other supporting evidence may be required. The decision to allow an extension request will be approved by the QA Officer and once approved, these circumstances will not affect your grade.

To be eligible for a possible extension you must submit your request before your assessment submission date. If you fail to request an extension before this deadline and you would still like to submit your assessments there will be an administration fee of €90.

All learners are entitled to at least one extension for each programme they are enrolled in. Multiple extensions, for a single programme, will result in additional fees OR you may be asked to postpone your enrolment until you are ready to complete and submit your assessments.

[Click here to use our online form to request an extension now.](#)

[Click here if you need help completing the extension request form.](#)

## **GRADING STRUCTURE**

The grading at the higher education (HE) level is quite different from what learners experience in secondary school. For example, while 90%+ might have been achievable in school, top grades in HE are more typically in the low/mid-70s, and will only go above 80 for outstanding work.

Numerical marks are translated into grades as follows:

Under 50%	Unsuccessful
50 – 64 %	Pass
65 – 79 %	Merit
80 – 100%	Distinction

## WHAT MY MARK MEANS

Work in assessments is marked using the following standards. Note that these are broad criteria and each programme will also have more specific criteria, which will be provided within your assessment brief.

**Distinction (80% +)** The answer contains all relevant information and has a coherent, logical and precise argument. The answer shows a deep understanding of the course material and how to apply it. It also shows evidence of having carried out additional reading, being able to show the pros and cons of the course materials and associated theories and offer alternatives based on solid research.

**Merit (65 - 79%)** The question is approached confidently, the issues are identified, evidence and reading are used and some awareness of broader issues is displayed. The answer shows that you can apply that knowledge to real-world situations (use practical examples) but lacks the critical analysis of a distinction answer.

**Pass (50 – 64 %)** There is a solid answer which grasps the material but does not always recognise the broader implications. Whilst it shows some intelligent application and understanding it lacks a clear grasp of the critical analysis required.

**Unsuccessful (Under 50%)** Little, if any, evidence of a grasp of the basic course material – a simplistic approach to the question, disorganised, insufficient material and awareness of reading. May well contain errors of fact and understanding.

## APPEALS

If you feel that the marks awarded at the end of the assessment process do not accurately reflect the quality of your work, you may appeal against the decision.

All appeals must be received within 7 days of receiving your statement of results.

You will be asked to complete an appeals form outlining the reasons for which you are requesting the appeal. Before completing the form you should review your feedback, review your assessments and prepare a coherent academic argument as to why you feel the grade awarded was incorrect. Your argument must be specific to the parts of the assessment which you believe are marked incorrectly.

All appeals are subject to an administration fee of €90 which must be submitted with your application. If your appeal is successful this fee will be refunded.

The following appeal requests will not be processed:

- Requests where the learner has not viewed their assessment  
or
- Requests which do not outline the exact points with which the learner disagrees  
or
- Requests where there has been a failure to identify the specific part of the assessment which is believed to have been marked incorrectly  
or
- Requests, where a coherent academic argument as to why the grade awarded is incorrect, is not provided.

A review will not be undertaken for reasons such as the following:

- Disappointment with the grade awarded
- Assertions that the grade does not reflect the work effort
- Results are borderline for a higher degree classification

When we receive an appeal from a learner our QA Officer will appoint a new Internal Assessor (i.e. not the Internal Assessor that marked the original assessments) to reread the assessments and make amendments to the original marks where appropriate. This may mean that the final result will increase or decrease.

The results of the appeal will be communicated to the learner via email within 10 working days.

[Click here to use our online form to request an appeal now.](#)

[Click here if you need help completing the appeals form.](#)

## **RE-SUBMITTING FAILED ASSESSMENTS**

If you are unhappy with the grade you have received OR you have made an appeal that was unsuccessful you can choose to amend your assessments and re-submit them.

All re-submission requests must be received within 7 days of receiving your statement of results or the results of an appeal.

All re-submission requests are subject to an administration fee of €90 which must be submitted with your application.

Once a re-submission has been agreed upon and the fee has been paid we will issue you with a new submission date for your assignments.

We will also arrange a call with your tutor to review the feedback on your original assessments and to advise on areas of improvement.

[Click here to use our online form to request an assignment resubmission now.](#)

[Click here if you need help completing the assignment resubmission form.](#)

## **PROGRAMME DEFERRAL/WITHDRAWAL**

We are aware that your academic progress can be affected by personal circumstances. Something may happen that has an impact on you personally and, therefore, on your academic progress. If any factor or circumstance has a significant effect on you and your studies you should get in touch with us immediately.

We have different pathways available to learners who experience difficulties with progression. The intention is to facilitate learners to continue with their studies or to exit where they wish to do so. These pathways include: -

- I want to finish my studies, and I do not want to resume them for now
- I want to take some time out of my studies and then resume
- I want more time to complete my studies and assessment
- I want to leave but I don't want to talk to anyone or submit any forms

Learners should take great care to ensure that they are aware of the progression (i.e. impact on your assessment results) and fee implications of any course of action they take.

It is also important to note that where a learner does not inform DCM that they are leaving or taking a break using the required procedure, then the DCM assumes that they are still a learner. This is called “unofficial withdrawal.” This means that fees build up and assessments are considered not to have been submitted even though the learner has left.

A learner with outstanding fees will not be permitted to register in a subsequent programme until the outstanding fees are paid in full. Also, learners with fees owing may not be presented for certification, and will not be issued with academic transcripts or any other official credentials.

The range of options provided to you is intended to ensure that you have some pathway open that is useful to you and you do not need to leave without a conversation with DCM.

[Click here to use our online form to defer your course now.](#)

[Click here if you need help completing the course deferral form.](#)

## **COMPLAINTS**

DCM strives at all times to provide an excellent and efficient high-quality service to its clients and learners.

However, in recognition that errors or exceptions can occur, DCM is fully committed to ensuring that learners’ complaints are considered and resolved in a sympathetic, timely, fair, consistent and equitable manner. The overall aim of this procedure is to guide to resolve complaints should they occur and prevent reoccurrence.

Our staff aim to deliver the best possible service to you in an effective, efficient and caring manner. However, if you are unhappy with the service you receive, please contact us.

Depending on the nature of your complaint you may wish to speak with your tutor directly or you can contact our QQI Administrators ([admin@dcmlearning.ie](mailto:admin@dcmlearning.ie)) or our eLearning Support Team ([eLearning@dcmlearning.ie](mailto:eLearning@dcmlearning.ie)). All of our team are training in complaint handling and will direct your query to the appropriate person.

# ASSESSMENT PREPARATION

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

DCM expects your work to be of the highest academic integrity. We want you to be proud of your learning, your achievements and your chosen training provider, DCM. Your reputation as a learner, and the reputation of DCM, depends on upholding high academic integrity standards.

Academic Integrity has been defined as ‘*a commitment, even in the face of adversity, to six fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage. From these values flow principles of behaviour that enable academic communities to translate ideas to action*’ ([ICAI, 2013](#)).

As a learner, you are responsible for the academic integrity of all assessments that you submit. Your assessments should include clear evidence that the work has been produced by you alone.

Each assessment you submit must include a “Declaration of Originality” which states that the assessment is entirely your own work and all sources are credited. A template for this will be provided to you.

Please read our full [Academic Integrity & Plagiarism Policy](#).

## PLAGIARISM: DEFINITIONS

Within an academic context, plagiarism is considered one of the worst possible offences as it constitutes intellectual theft.

DCM defines plagiarism as follows:

*It is the deliberate act of taking and using another person’s work as your own. It includes absent references, reproducing the work (even with small changes) of another, taken from books, journals, articles, TV programmes, the internet, lecture notes and so on. It also includes self-plagiarism, i.e. submitting own work for more than one assessment, copying another person’s work, with or without his/her consent. Also included is collusion where a group of people collaborate or collude to present an assessment or a substantial part thereof when the examiner required individual research and outcome.*



Plagiarism includes presenting extracts (edited or not) from another source but only referencing (giving a source for) the last sentence. The best rule of thumb (and your best protection) is that when you're not sure if a source needs to be acknowledged with a reference, then you should acknowledge it. You can never have too many references. If you are still not clear what plagiarism is, ask your lecturers,

## **PLAGIARISM: PENALTIES**

Copying is quite easily detected by our assessors and tutors through search engines and the use of online submission services such as Grammarly, and examples are discovered during every assessment period.

There is always a penalty.

- In very minor cases (for instance, minor occurrence of poor referencing), offenders will be deemed to have failed the assessment and will be required to repeat the work, perhaps with additional assessments being required. Note the resubmission of assessments will incur a fee.
- Very serious offenders will be automatically excluded from their course and will not be allowed to resubmit their assessments.

## **WRITTEN ASSESSMENTS**

Although we often take it for granted that we can write, it is important to realise that academic writing poses a unique set of challenges. Putting together a good academic essay involves not only the presentation of facts and figures but also requires that you use that information to construct convincing and coherent arguments. Very few people have an innate ability to do this – it is a skill that must be learned through practice.

In general terms, a good essay is one which:

- Is well-presented and clear to understand, with a clear structure;
- Displays knowledge of the relevant facts/data;
- Expresses a cogent, coherent and convincing argument;
- Backs up arguments with reference to clearly identified, relevant source material;
- Demonstrates a deep understanding of the subject and, where appropriate, an ability to use abstract theoretical concepts.

You will be provided with an MS Word template for each written assessment you must complete which will give you a guide on how to format and structure your assessments.

Also here are some general guidelines:

### **Formatting your Assessments**

- Pages must be in A4 portrait format and set in a legible serif or san-serif font (eg Arial)
- Font Size: 12 point
- Line Spacing: 1.5 lines
- Page numbering in footer
- The full bibliography should be at the end, including every work referred to, alphabetically by author's surname, with full publication details
- Referencing throughout should be in the Harvard style.

### **Structuring your Assessments**

The structure of your document will vary depending on the assessment and should be shaped by the content of your argument. However, it should generally have a clear beginning, a middle, and an end, and be written in a logical sequence.

Careful paragraphing is essential: each paragraph should deal with a single topic. You should be able to put a (mental) headline on each paragraph that summarises the subject-matter dealt with there. You should group all things you have to say on a particular topic. Don't introduce a particular issue and then leave it for something else, before coming back to it again (or worse still just leave the issue hanging in the air, unrelated to anything else in your essay). This produces a disconnected feel to your essay, is often repetitive, wastes space and ultimately tries your reader's patience.

### **Presentation**

Marks are frequently lost not because the learner doesn't understand the subject, but because they are unable to clearly express that understanding. This often comes down to a failure of presentation: poor writing and poor proof-reading.

Simply running a Microsoft Word spell-check or grammar-check does not constitute proofing as it may not catch everything and may not know the difference between there/their, etc. However, you can do the following to help it pick up mistakes:

- Make sure the language is set to “English (Ireland)” to avoid US spelling errors (This is seen at the bottom left of the screen beside the word count)
- Go to File > Options > Proofing > and make sure “Grammar and Refinements” are selected in the “writing style” option. This will help catch a lot more problems. (In some older versions it is referred to as “Grammar and Style”.)
- Grammarly software can be installed and added to Word to help with further language problems

While the software can help to some degree, the best way is to make sure an essay is readable is to print it out and read it yourself or to have someone else read it for you. Reading it aloud slowly, or having software read it out while you listen is also an excellent way to make sure it makes sense and is free from errors.

## **Planning your Essay**

You can use the following steps to approach your written assessments: -

### **Step 1: Analyse the Question**

- Check key words which define the question: what are you being asked to do?
- Note the word count and marks available for each question

### **Step 2: Brainstorm**

- Use your notes, course materials, Google, Youtube, textbooks etc. to get ideas

### **Step 3: Research**

- Research specific topics generated through brainstorm, note references as you go

### **Step 4: Plan**

- Begin to put your ideas in order within your template
- Check your plan against the question

### **Step 5: First Draft**

- Begin writing your answer in sections (any order), expand your ideas into sentences and paragraphs

### **Step 6: Edit**

- Check that what you have written is on topic, makes sense and answers the question.

- Ask someone to read it aloud for you
- Check spelling, grammar, punctuation and word count

### **Step 7: References**

- Add your references using the Harvard referencing style

### **Avoiding Plagiarism**

Plagiarism can arise from deliberate actions and also through careless thinking and/or methodology. Many cases of plagiarism may be avoided by following some simple guidelines:

- Any material used in your assessments, of any form, that is not the original thought of you, the author should be fully referenced in the work and attributed to its source.
- You can use small sections of material, by either quoting it directly or paraphrasing with an explicit citation of the work referred to in the text, in a footnote, or both. If you do not cite the material it will be considered plagiarism.
- When taking notes from any source, be sure to quote the precise words or ideas and record the precise source for accurate referencing, in-line with the required citation style.
- Although the Internet often offers a wider range of possibilities for researching particular themes, it also requires particular attention to be paid to the distinction between your own work and the work of others.
- Particular care should be taken to keep track of the source of the electronic information obtained from the Internet or other electronic sources and ensure that it is explicitly and correctly acknowledged.

If you are unclear on how to avoid plagiarism you should contact your course tutor for guidance.

You can also use one of the many plagiarism detection tools available online, for example <https://www.grammarly.com/plagiarism-checker>.