USE OF TURNITINUK PLAGIARISM DETECTION SOFTWARE

**Introduction**

The University makes it clear in its Unfair Practice procedures in its on-line Academic Guide and templates for College Handbooks that plagiarism is taken seriously and that plagiarism detection software may be used. The main software in use at the University is TurnitinUK. TurnitinUK can be accessed via the Blackboard e-learning platform and may also be used separately if the assignment has not been submitted via Blackboard. Please see the Knowledge Base Tab on any BlackBoard screen for further details.

Upon enrolment students must agree to the following statement: “I acknowledge that any work submitted electronically during the period of my enrolment at Swansea University may also be submitted via electronic plagiarism detection software.”

It is acknowledged that TurnitinUK may not be suitable for some types of assignment at present, however the providers are amenable to suggestions that improve the software; such suggestions can be made via the BlackBoard team of the University.

However TurnitinUK is only one of the tools used for detecting plagiarism. It is also possible to use ‘Google’ searches where some phrases from the work may be entered as a search term. Assignment markers may recognise differences in writing style both between and within assessments. Similarly markers may, through their own knowledge of their discipline, recognise unacknowledged extracts from published texts.

**Use of TurnitinUK as a Learning Tool on avoiding plagiarism**

TurnitinUK may be used as a learning tool for formative assessments only (not summative). Normally this should be restricted to students who have recently commenced their programme of study at Swansea. Where it is used as a learning tool guidance should be offered to students about the interpretation of originality reports, with particular reference to any errors that the student may have made. Where the student is clearly struggling with the principles and practice of appropriate attribution of sources, it is recommended that they are referred to their subject librarian for specific guidance. Academics should also consider referring students to the Academic Success Programme for more targeted support.

Academics should also be aware of the limitations of the TurnitinUK software – most importantly that the TurnitinUK database which acts as a cross-reference is not fully comprehensive and that subject staff may well need to use other means of providing evidence in cases of alleged plagiarism. Also that the use of compulsory inclusions (such as declarations), the inclusion or exclusion of references, the inclusion of assignment titles etcetera may affect the overall Similarity Index, (the percentage that matches to published sources). Thus, each script will require knowledge of the assessment, and may require an individualised interpretation of the similarity index.

**Marking assignments and when to look at the TurnitinUK Originality Reports**

All assignments should be marked anonymously **before** any reference is made to the percentage match within the Similarity Index. If marking is being undertaken through Grademark, this information is made available to the marker at the time of marking, who may refer to and scrutinise the percentage match once marking is complete.

There is an optional facility which allows the user identification to be anonymous in TurnitinUK until after a set “post date” (generally the post date should be the date on which first marking is completed). If anonymity is used then it is not possible to match a plagiarism report to a paper until after the set post date. Exceptionally an instructor or administrator can
reveal a report’s identity but will be required to give their identity, and reason for doing so, to provide an audit trail should it be needed later.

Once the assignment is marked, the marker (if using Grademark) or module convenor (for other modes of submission to TurnitinUK) should then check the percentage indicated within the Similarity Index. As stated previously, a level of interpretation is required – it is not sufficient to only look at the identified percentage match. For example a match of 3% in a dissertation of 20,000 words equates to 600 words, which may be unacceptable.

**Interpretation of the Originality Reports**

The originality reports are not straightforward to interpret. A particular phrase may be highlighted as plagiarised, but on inspection by subject staff, it is clear that there are very limited ways in which one could describe a particular piece of equipment/research finding for example. False positives also include repeat wording of assignments, quoted material, references to URLs. The matched sources may also change according to the reports chosen. It may not always be possible to discard 1% matches as these could also be found in other sources.

Above all, it must be academic subject staff who do the interpretation and not administrative staff. Subject staff are best placed to determine if the work in question is indeed plagiarised, poorly referenced or poorly paraphrased. Subject staff can also detect whether a piece of work has been plagiarised, in part or whole, based on their own experience, even if the TurnitinUKUK report indicates otherwise. (This is because of the limited data source of the software). **Above all, it must be emphasised that the academic judgment of staff with the relevant subject expertise must be paramount in cases of alleged unfair practice.**

Examples of interpretation and further guidance can be found on the Turnitin User Group area of the BlackBoard platform.

Further guidance is available to staff on the interpretation of Originality Reports resulting from the use of TurnitinUK software. In the first instance, please contact your College Unfair Practice representative.

**Determining an Acceptable Level of Originality**

It is extremely difficult to determine an acceptable level of originality. TurnitinUK uses a traffic light colouring system with 0-24% as green, indicating limited amounts of matched text detected. It is suggested that as a guideline Colleges should examine work above this threshold, as well as a random sample below the threshold. Some Colleges may wish to apply lower thresholds and the exact percentage used as a threshold for further investigation should be at the discretion of the Board of Studies, e.g. taking into account issues such as the level of study, the type of question set etc. Review of originality report results should only be done after marking of the assignments.

As noted above, the TurnitinUK database is not infallible. It will only cross-reference submitted work against work already in its database, or work which it can access through collaborative agreements.. An originality report may therefore be misleading and those with low percentage levels may still contain elements that are indeed plagiarised from other sources. It is therefore crucial that subject staff mark assignments anonymously first and only then cross-reference to the Originality Report. Staff may also want to discuss their suspicions with colleagues or examine other sources if they suspect plagiarism, e.g. simple ‘Google’ searches may reveal relevant work.
Administrative Issues arising from using TurnitinUK

TurnitinUK provides administrative help in that receipts for submission of work are issued and that staff know exactly when work is submitted and can therefore apply penalties for late submission (extenuating circumstances of course being taken into consideration according to College procedures). In some Colleges, hard-copy versions of assignments are mandatory, yet no receipt is issued for hard copy since the electronic receipt upon submission of the assignment via TurnitinUK is deemed acceptable evidence. Caution should be taken to ensure that students are fully aware of the procedures for electronic submission, since there have been cases where errors have occurred and that while the student received a ‘receipt’ it was simply to acknowledge the ‘storage’ of their assignment and not its actual ‘submission’.

Where marking is done using hard copy paper submissions random checks should be made to ensure that the paper a student has submitted to TurnitinUK is the same as the marked paper copy.

Where TurnitinUK is being used as the main means of submission then Colleges must download the assignment documents by the end of each academic year. Tools are provided by TurnitinUK to download all the papers in a single zip file. These electronic documents must be securely stored in the same way and for the same length of time as paper copies would have been (see policy on retention of assessed work).

It is also worth noting that as most HEIs in the UK subscribe to the JISC Plagiarism Advisory Service, then those HEIs will also be using TurnitinUK, as this is the platform provided through the Service. This enables the academic to request information from other HEIs should matches exist to work submitted by students in other HEIs.

As with other cases of student misconduct, it is important that Swansea University has consistently applied penalties for plagiarism across all Colleges. Reference should be made to the Unfair Practice guidelines and regulations and any advice should be sought from the Unfair Practice Coordinator in the Academic Registry.

Guides on Avoiding Plagiarism

Each College is required within its Student Handbook to provide guidance to students on avoiding plagiarism and proper referencing. This ideally, should be supplemented by inclusion in study skills modules and in student induction. Extra advice and support for students is provided through the subject librarians, or from the Academic Success Programme.