

Policy on the use of Turnitin UK text-matching software at the University of Cambridge

1. Introduction

Plagiarism is defined as submitting as one's own work, irrespective of intent to deceive, that which derives in part or in its entirety from the work of others without due acknowledgement.¹

Responsibility for promoting good academic practice and plagiarism awareness has largely been devolved to faculties and departments as the diversity of academic conventions between disciplines means that a University-wide policy, beyond establishing general principles, would be inappropriate. This document sets out the general expectations of faculties and departments with regard to good academic practice, and provides information about Turnitin UK text-matching software.

2. Expectations of faculties and departments

In all cases, whether Turnitin is used or not, Faculty Boards are expected to provide discipline-specific guidance on good academic practice to include: information about correct citation techniques (of both printed and web-based material), plagiarism avoidance, and how to distinguish between acceptable collaboration and unacceptable collusion. **All guidance should be consistent with the University-wide statement.**

To ensure that the guidance is accessible to all students, it should be posted on the faculty or department's website. In addition, faculties and departments are asked to send the url to the Education Section so that it can be linked to from the central plagiarism website (www.cam.ac.uk/plagiarism).

Faculties and departments are expected to include information about plagiarism and good academic practice in their induction material and activities, and are encouraged to provide 'top-up' training at appropriate times (i.e. on citation techniques as students start to write their dissertations).

Faculty Boards are responsible for ensuring that the examination methods used for their courses are appropriate and that safeguards are in place to minimise opportunities for plagiarism and collusion.

3. Turnitin UK use at the University

a. Background information

The University has purchased a site licence for the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) approved software Turnitin UK. The software is operated by iParadigms Europe Ltd and is widely used throughout the HE Sector.

Trials of Turnitin UK on assessed work were conducted at the University during 2007-8, and a growing number of faculties and departments have opted to use the software since 2008-9.

b. Possible models for use of the software

Turnitin may be used:

- * **formatively** as part of faculty/department-based teaching of good academic practice, by scanning work through the software early in the academic year and going through the resulting originality reports with students and addressing any issues that may arise;
- * to **deter** potential plagiarists and to act as an incentive to following good academic practice;
- * to help Examiners to **detect** the extent and source of plagiarised material in work submitted for assessment.

If faculties and departments wish to use Turnitin in 'detect' mode they should determine whether they wish to use the software: only where Examiners have concerns about the originality of the work; on a systematic or random basis; or to blanket test all work submitted electronically for assessment.²

¹ University-wide statement on plagiarism: www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/plagiarism/students/statement.html

c. Conditions of use

Access to the software will only be granted on receipt and approval of a plan to outline how the software will be used, and to assure the Education Section that:

1. they will obtain the informed written consent of their students in good time in advance of submission, and ideally towards the start of the academic year;
2. they provide sufficient guidance about good academic practice (which might include the formative use of Turnitin UK);
3. they recognise the limitations of Turnitin UK and will review the originality reports carefully;
4. they will not compromise the University's appeals mechanisms;
5. they will keep detailed records of how Turnitin UK is used which can be used in any subsequent appeal or to help evaluate the impact of the software;
6. (for blanket and random screening) they will have robust procedures to separate the screening process from the Examiner's academic evaluation of the work;
7. their use of Turnitin UK will not disrupt the publication of class lists etc;
8. the normal investigatory procedures will apply where Turnitin UK appears to indicate a breach of academic integrity.

Faculties and departments must reapply to use Turnitin UK annually and, as part of the reapplication process, they will be required to review their policy and Turnitin UK usage.³

All students must be given a full explanation of the basis on which their work will (or may) be tested and the implications of submitting their work to the system (in either formative or detect mode). They must sign a consent form before their faculty or department can submit their work to the software.⁴

4. Turnitin UK text-matching software

a. How Turnitin UK works

Turnitin UK is an online service and work must be submitted to it electronically (Word, RTF, PDF and other formats are accepted). No software has to be installed locally.

Turnitin UK may detect direct plagiarism, paraphrasing and collusion as the submitted work is compared with a database of material available online and with a 'private' database of previous submissions.

The software makes no judgement about whether a student has plagiarised, it simply shows the percentage of the submission that matches other sources. In many cases the software highlights correctly cited references or 'innocent' matches. Therefore, Examiners must carefully review originality reports to assess whether the work does contain plagiarism.

Originality reports highlight text which matches other sources and, where matches are to published sources or material from students in the same examination, displays the matching text and its immediate context. Matches to unpublished material submitted by other institutions are highlighted, but the source text can only be seen after contacting the other institution for the author's permission. Originality reports for individual essays are generally available within minutes: a full dissertation may take up to an hour.

The software offers options for excluding quoted material and bibliographies, but these must be activated manually for each report and are not always effective so do not obviate the need for careful checking of the report to distinguish between innocent matches and plagiarism.

² See 6a for some of the advantages and disadvantages of different ways of using Turnitin UK in 'detect' mode.

³ See Section 8 for information about how to apply to use Turnitin UK.

⁴ See Appendix A for a template of the student information and consent form.

b. Turnitin UK's search base

Turnitin UK checks the content of each submission against:

- * previous submissions to Turnitin UK;
- * webpages, including an archive of deleted/changed pages;
- * public domain material from sources such as the Project Gutenberg collection;
- * selected subscription services, including a number of journals.

c. Limitations of Turnitin UK

Turnitin UK can be a useful tool but does not offer a solution to plagiarism. The software is not a substitute for good academic practice in teaching correct citation techniques, nor in recognising when work does not match the known ability and style of a student. There are also significant gaps in its search base. For example, Turnitin UK cannot:

- * detect plagiarism from books or 'older' sources which are not available on the Internet;
- * search password-protected essay banks;
- * detect work which is plagiarised by translation from a non-English source;
- * search all electronic journals;
- * detect plagiarised mathematical equations.

Therefore, the effectiveness of the software will differ between disciplines based on whether their critical source material is included in Turnitin UK's search database. Furthermore, a student who is determined to plagiarise could avoid using sources which are included in the Turnitin UK database or, if given access to the software, could feasibly finesse their wording until plagiarism is undetectable.

In addition, Turnitin UK:

- * is resource intensive (both in training users and submitting and interpreting assignments);
- * cannot identify plagiarism of ideas;
- * requires significant manual interpretation of reports to distinguish between innocent matches and plagiarised material;
- * cannot identify ghost-written essays that use wholly original material;
- * can become slow at peak times because the system slows as usage increases;
- * might expedite the decline in handwriting essays as a skill (if overused);
- * will not help to teach discipline-specific citation techniques.

In practice, the importance of these limitations is likely to vary significantly between academic disciplines. Individual faculties and departments should take these factors into consideration in deciding what, if any, use they wish to make of Turnitin UK in assessing the originality of students' work.

5. Key issues for faculties and departments

a. Informed student consent

Faculties and departments must obtain a signed declaration from students in good time in advance of submission to confirm that they have read and understood the student information and consent form (see Appendix A) and agree to the screening of their work as described therein. Ideally consent should be obtained at an appropriate time at the start of the academic year i.e. during an induction session on good academic practice, or when dissertation titles are agreed. Students should be asked to reaffirm their consent each academic year.

It is also advisable to explain the benefits to students of using the software. For example, unless students specifically opt out, submitted material is retained on the Turnitin UK database and subsequent submissions are screened against it. This offers protection against future attempts to plagiarise their work. Students should not normally be permitted to opt out of their work being submitted to the software unless commercial sensitivity is at stake.

b. Intellectual property rights and copyright

The University understands that Turnitin UK does not infringe students' intellectual property rights which will continue to reside with the original owner (normally students, with the exception of some collaborative or sponsored research projects). Turnitin UK claims to have no interest in acquiring intellectual property rights for the submitted material. However, it does need a licence to reproduce student submissions:

- * to assess them for originality;
- * to retain a copy of them for comparison at a later date with future submissions.

As this goes beyond the usual limited copying of assessed work by the University, it is necessary to obtain students' consent by the time of submission (see Section 5a above). It may be worthwhile consulting the Staff Student Liaison Committee or student representatives before introducing the software and explaining the situation fully to them.

Turnitin can be configured to allow test submissions which are not retained by the system, and so have no copyright implications.

c. Data protection

Material submitted to Turnitin UK will be identified by students' examination numbers, or a unique identifier created specifically for this purpose. Therefore, personal data, such as students' names, will not be used.

Under the Data Protection Act, faculties and departments are legally obliged to tell students if their personal data is to be used in a way which is not covered under existing contractual arrangements. The University can confirm that iParadigms Europe is a member of the 'safe harbour regime' which means that the European Union is satisfied that the data is appropriately protected.

d. Resource implications

Faculties and departments should consider the resource implications of adopting Turnitin UK, as significant training and support is likely to be needed, both in how to submit work to the system and in how to interpret the reports. The primary Turnitin UK contact within each faculty or department will take responsibility for training other users within their institution.

Faculty Boards should issue guidance to Academic Integrity Officers or Examiners on how to use the software and interpret the reports. Trials indicate that five to ten minutes is needed to review each originality report and decide whether further action is needed.⁵ The time that Turnitin UK takes to generate the report should also be factored in; this can range from a couple of minutes to upwards of an hour, depending on the length of the work and the number of users in the system.

⁵ See section 6d for the process to be implemented if plagiarism is identified.

6. Using Turnitin UK in 'detect' mode for assessed work

a. Advantages and disadvantages of different ways of using Turnitin UK in 'detect' mode

The following information is intended to provide a starting point to help faculties and departments to form local policies on the use of Turnitin UK in 'detect' mode and is not a comprehensive list.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Testing suspicious cases only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * This is likely to be the least resource intensive option. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Students whose work is screened may complain about the equity of the system. The faculty or department would need to ensure that its procedures are robust and transparent so that students do not feel unfairly targeted, for example due to their cultural background. * This option would be less effective as a deterrent than blanket screening.
Blanket screening assessed work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Blanket screening could help to detect collaboration between peers. * This could be viewed as a more equitable system than the other options, and would provide a more effective deterrent against plagiarism and collusion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * This would be by far the most resource intensive method, both in terms of administration and training/support. * Turnitin UK has considerable limitations and blanket screening could create a sense of false confidence and detract from efforts to promote good academic practice which might be more effective.
Systematic or random screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * This method would be less resource intensive than blanket screening. * Random or systematic screening could help to establish whether there is a plagiarism problem. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Students whose work is screened may complain about the equity of the system so the faculty or department would need to ensure that its procedures are robust and transparent. * This option would be less effective as a deterrent than blanket testing.

b. Electronic and/or hard copies

Work must be submitted electronically to Turnitin UK. Some faculties and departments may require work to be submitted in hard-copy as well as electronically (to reduce printing costs) and in these cases students should confirm on the declaration form that both versions of their work have identical content. If hard copies are not collected students must keep an electronic copy of their work until the results are published.

c. Process of submitting reports

Faculties and departments are responsible for determining how work is submitted to Turnitin UK and for ensuring that adequate records are kept. It may be that Examiners are permitted to scan suspicious works themselves, having consulted the Chair of Examiners or Senior Examiner as appropriate. Alternatively, suspect papers could be processed by an administrator, and the resulting originality reports forwarded to the relevant Examiner. The latter option would be less resource intensive in terms of setting up permissions and training new users.

For blanket and random screening, faculties and departments should nominate a member of the Examining Board to act as 'Academic Integrity Officer' who will scrutinize the originality reports to judge which should be referred to the Examiners for further investigation. This will ensure that the Examiners' judgment of academic quality remains independent of Turnitin UK reports, and that the two will be brought together only where there is strong prima facie evidence of plagiarism/collaboration.

It is advisable to use a consistent file naming structure so that the course and student's examination number are immediately evident, i.e. PPSPtllXXXX.

Faculty Boards should issue guidance to Examiners at an early stage to specify how Turnitin UK can be used and the process for submitting reports. Faculties and departments should also ensure that the Examiners or Academic Integrity Officer know how to interpret the originality reports and who to contact with any queries.

d. Process if plagiarism is identified

As explained above, the Academic Integrity Officer or Examiners must carefully review originality reports and decide whether any part of the document has been plagiarised. If Turnitin UK does not identify plagiarism but the Examiner still suspects malpractice he/she should investigate further using alternative methods e.g. Google or consulting secondary sources.

If the Examiner decides that there is a prima facie case for proceeding further they must report the matter to the Chair or Senior Examiner who must report the matter to the Secretary of the Board of Examinations and the Proctors.⁶ Any further action would be taken only after consulting the Proctors (and the Board of Graduate Studies in the case of a graduate examination) and after invoking the standard University procedure for summoning the candidate for interview. The originality report may be used as evidence in the subsequent investigation.

e. Third party requests for information about a match

If a report generated by a third party from outside the University identifies a match to a work submitted by a Cambridge student the report will only show the extent of the match and the contact details of the University's Turnitin UK Administrator. If approached, the Turnitin UK Administrator will attempt to contact the student about the matter. The contents of a student's work will not be revealed to a third party outside Cambridge without the express permission of the student concerned.

f. Matches to material submitted from within the University

If a match is found to material submitted from within the University, the Examiners can obtain the full text without approaching the student concerned.

g. Removing material from Turnitin UK

Work submitted to Turnitin UK will be stored indefinitely on the Turnitin UK database unless students specifically request that their work be removed. To maximise the effectiveness of the software it is hoped that such requests will be kept to a minimum. However, once examinations have been concluded, students may at any time apply to their faculty or department's Turnitin UK contact to request that their work be removed from the database.

7. Formative use of Turnitin UK

a. Potential benefits

Use of Turnitin UK software at the University has focussed on detecting non-original content in assessed work. However, other universities use the software as part of training in good academic practice; for example, by scanning a piece of each student's work into the software early in the academic year and going through the resulting originality report with the student. This could have several benefits:

- * raise awareness of accidental plagiarism and act as a platform for discussion about good academic practice and correct citation techniques;
- * demystify the software;
- * identify students in need of extra support at an early stage to help forestall problems.

Further inquiries about using the software formatively are welcome.

⁶ See the Board of Examination's advice for Examiners: www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/exams/examiners

b. Concerns about finessing plagiarised work

If faculties and departments are concerned that unscrupulous students might use the software to finesse work so that plagiarised content is no longer detectable they could restrict the formative use of Turnitin UK to non-assessed work, or a percentage of any assessed work (though this would need to be managed by staff).

c. Logistics

The model of Turnitin use outlined above is likely to represent a significant resource outlay so faculties and departments should consider whether it is likely to be a more effective means of inculcating good academic practice than traditional teaching methods. Whichever option is chosen, faculties and departments must ensure that students fully understand what is expected of them.

8. How to set-up a Turnitin UK account

Any faculty or department wishing to use Turnitin UK must submit a plan to the Education Section to outline how they propose to use the software and comply with the conditions of use stipulated in Section 3c. In the first instance plans should be sent to Katherine Wallington (Katherine.Wallington@admin.cam.ac.uk). If the plan is approved, the Turnitin UK helpdesk at CARET (turnitin@caret.cam.ac.uk), which will also be the base of the University's Turnitin UK Administrator, will then be the contact for all Turnitin UK related queries.

CARET will issue one primary contact within the faculty or department with a UserID and password and direct them to sources of further information. The primary contact will be able to create a site within Turnitin UK for their faculty/department and should take responsibility for liaising with CARET over training, guidance and usage. Requests for further users within the faculty or department must be supported by the primary contact.

9. Sources of further information and support

Faculty Boards will be responsible for issuing guidance on the processes which govern Turnitin UK use at a local level, although they will be expected to comply with the conditions of use outlined in this paper.

The Education Section would be happy to provide guidance about developing a local policy on the use of Turnitin UK. Please initially contact Katherine Wallington (Katherine.Wallington@admin.cam.ac.uk).

The University's plagiarism website (www.cam.ac.uk/plagiarism) contains all University guidance relating to plagiarism, as well as links to useful resources and to faculty/department guidance.

Turnitin UK user guides, FAQs, training videos and related resources are available on the Turnitin UK website: www.submit.ac.uk.

For technical advice about the use of Turnitin UK at the University please contact the Turnitin UK helpdesk at CARET (turnitin@caret.cam.ac.uk).