

Procedure for Research Degrees¹ if plagiarism or collusion is suspected

University definition of plagiarism

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.²

Candidates are expected to have read the University-wide statement on plagiarism and to follow the discipline-specific guidance about referencing techniques and other academic conventions issued by their faculty or department in all work submitted for assessment.

Procedure for Examiners

The procedure for dealing with suspected cases of plagiarism distinguishes between academic and disciplinary aspects of the case. Academic assessment is the responsibility of the Examiners whereas discipline is the domain of the Proctors, the University Advocate and the Court of Discipline.

The following procedure should be followed if you suspect plagiarism or collusion in work submitted for assessment.

1. Determine the extent and significance of any material that you consider to have been badly referenced, plagiarised, or to derive from collusion with other students. Compile and retain all evidence for future reference by the Degree Committee, and in case the matter is pursued by the Proctors or disputed by the student.

Evidence could include: extracts from primary or secondary sources; work submitted by other students; TurnitinUK originality reports; and text matches identified by Google.

2. Your independent report should consist of an assessment of the academic merit of the material that you believe to be the candidate's own work **and** an account of your suspicions. Where possible keep the two elements separate and provide an academic report accompanied by a supplementary report on the suspected plagiarism. Complete your independent report **before** contacting the other Examiner to discuss the work.

Bear in mind that originality is a key element in a research dissertation:

- sources must be adequately acknowledged, and,
- where the candidate has worked in collaboration the contribution of other workers must be clearly indicated.

3. Send your report(s) to the Secretary of the Degree Committee in advance of the oral examination. If you have not already discussed the case with the Secretary of the Degree Committee, you should do so now. S/he will consult the Secretary of the Board of Graduate Studies about how to proceed.
4. Proceed with the oral examination concentrating on the academic aspects of the dissertation: the oral should not be a disciplinary hearing.

You may request that an independent chair is appointed. S/he will clarify the basis on which the oral is conducted and his/her record of the oral may be used as evidence that this has been the case.

You should not try to discover the candidate's intentions in producing work that is apparently inadequately referenced – that is for the investigative meeting to explore. You should however probe the candidate about the parts of the work that you suspect are not original. Open-ended questions about how their views relate to those of X or Y, or who contributed which parts of shared experimental work, maybe helpful in this respect.

¹ This procedure covers examinations for the PhD, MSc, MLitt, EngD, EdD, CPGS and MPhil by thesis and oral only.

² *Statutes and Ordinances 2011*, p.196

5. Submit to the Degree Committee both:
 - a joint report on the oral examination and a recommendation of the outcome in the normal way, based solely on the extent and academic merit of the candidate's original work;
 - a joint supplementary report covering the single issue of the alleged plagiarism.

Even where the candidate admits some degree of misconduct at an oral examination the Examiner's report must also contain a strictly academic assessment of the quality of the candidate's work that does not take into account any doubts or concerns that they may have regarding the candidate's honesty or intent.

It is important that the Examiner provides an assessment of the extent and significance of the allegedly plagiarised material because the merit of any part which can be attributed to the candidate's original work is potentially material to:

- determining in the course of any disciplinary proceedings the student's motive and intention;
- the penalty which may be appropriate in his or her case;
- [in the event that disciplinary proceedings are not initiated or the University Court finds the relevant charge not proved] the Degree Committee and the Board of Graduate Studies' ability to complete the academic process.

6. If use of unfair means is suspected the Secretary of the Degree Committee, in consultation with the Proctors and the Secretary to the Board of Graduate Studies, will call an investigative meeting with the candidate (for further information see the [Guide to the investigative and disciplinary process](#)).
7. The Chair of the Degree Committee will ensure that the final award (allocated on the basis of the oral examination and other supporting evidence) and any further action is approved collectively by the Degree Committee and recorded in the minutes.

Further information

The University's plagiarism-related policy and guidance is online at: www.cam.ac.uk/plagiarism. This includes:

For staff and Examiners

- The General Board's requirements of Faculty Boards and equivalent bodies
- Flowchart of the process for handling suspected cases of plagiarism and collusion for Research Degrees
- The investigative and disciplinary process: procedure for Chairs of Examiners and Proctors
- University policy on the use of Turnitin text-matching software

A separate procedure applies for examinations other than Research Degrees.

For students

- University-wide statement on plagiarism
- Discipline-specific guidance issued by faculties and departments
- Proctorial notice on plagiarism
- 'University Discipline' entry in the Student Handbook

Contacts

Contact details for the Proctors are online at: www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/proctors/

The Secretary of the Board of Graduate Studies (Catherine.Maxwell@admin.cam.ac.uk) is available to offer procedural advice.