

Policy on the use of Turnitin UK text-matching software at the University of Cambridge (effective 1 October 2016)

1. Introduction

Plagiarism is defined as submitting as one's own work 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. However, Faculties and Departments are urged to consider adopting the use of text-matching software, which may be used as an educational tool, as well as in screening work submitted for assessment.

The University holds a site licence for Turnitin UK. 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, in all types of assessed work), plagiarism avoidance, and how to distinguish between acceptable collaboration and unacceptable collusion. All guidance should be consistent with the University-wide statement¹.

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 Educational and Student Policy so that it can be linked 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 (e.g., 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 Turnitin UK text-matching software. The software is operated by iParadigms Europe Ltd and is widely used throughout the HE Sector.

The University encourages use of the software by all Faculties and Departments in screening of

¹ University-wide statement on plagiarism: www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/plagiarism/students/statement.html
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assessed work. Colleges are also encouraged to consider using the software for educational and formative use.

Turnitin UK may be accessed either directly through the Turnitin website, or via Moodle; more information on accessing the software is available in section 8 below.

b. Conditions of use

The software is available for use throughout the academic year on condition that the Faculty/Department:

1. will provide sufficient guidance about good academic practice in all types of assessment;
2. notifies students of the way(s) in which the software may be used;
3. recognises the limitations of Turnitin UK and will review resulting originality reports carefully;
4. 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;
5. will have robust procedures to distinguish the screening process from the academic evaluation of the work;
6. will not compromise the University's appeals mechanisms;
7. will ensure that use of Turnitin UK will not disrupt the publication of class lists etc.;
8. will initiate investigative procedures in line with University policy where Turnitin UK appears to indicate a breach of academic integrity.

Faculties and Departments must confirm that they accept and will uphold the conditions above when setting up a Moodle Turnitin assignment, or when requesting access for a Turnitin account.

c. 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 reviewing the resulting originality reports with students, addressing any issues that may arise;
- * to **deter** potential plagiarists and to act as an incentive to following good academic practice;
- * to help Examiners/Assessors 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/Assessors have concerns about the originality of the work;
- * on a systematic or random basis; or
- * to blanket-test all work submitted electronically for assessment.

Advantages and disadvantages of '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 have concerns 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. * 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 collusion 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 have concerns about the equity of the system. 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 screening.

4. Turnitin UK text-matching software

a. How Turnitin UK works

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

Turnitin UK compares the text of the submitted work with a database of material available online and with its database of previous submissions. An originality report is produced, which highlights all matching text. Where matches are from published sources, the source text is displayed along with the immediate context. Text matching material from the database of previous submissions is highlighted, but the source text cannot be seen without contacting the institution for the author's permission.

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/Assessors must carefully review originality reports to assess whether the work does contain plagiarism.**

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

b. Turnitin's search base

Turnitin UK checks the content of each submission against:

- * previous submissions to Turnitin UK or any of its global partners;
- * 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;
- * its own database of prior submissions; note that, on request, work may be removed from this database and will not be available for comparison in future checks.

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 matches from books or 'older' sources which are not available on the Internet;
- * search password-protected essay banks;
- * detect work which is copied by translation from a non-English source;
- * search all electronic journals;
- * detect matching images, including graphs and mathematical equations inserted as images.

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

In addition, Turnitin UK:

- * is resource intensive, both in training users and interpreting reports and, if not using blanket submission via Moodle, in submitting the documents to Turnitin (more information on resourcing is available in section 5d below);
- * 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;
- * 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. Informing students

Although it is not required for Faculties and departments to obtain explicit consent from students before submitting the work to Turnitin UK, **students must be given clear information on how the software may be used.** This should be done at the start of the course, in handbooks or induction materials, and reiterated to students appropriately during the course of study (e.g., at the point of submission). Guidance should direct students to the University's plagiarism website for information about data protection, copyright, and removing work from the Turnitin UK database.

A template information statement for use in handbooks is provided as Appendix A to this document.

It is also advisable to explain the benefits to students of using the software. For example, unless students specifically request removal, 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 encouraged to request removal of their work unless commercial sensitivity is at stake.

b. Intellectual property rights and copyright

The University's use of Turnitin UK does not infringe students' intellectual property rights or copyright to their work, which continue to reside with the original owner (normally students, with the exception of some collaborative or sponsored research projects). Use of the software is subject to the [Turnitin UK Usage Policy](#).

Some students, particularly graduate research students, may have intellectual property or copyright agreements with their sponsor in which the sponsor owns the outcome of the research. This does not preclude use of Turnitin, because the rights to the work remain with the owner. However, students whose work is to be checked may need reassurance on this point. It may be worthwhile consulting the Staff Student Liaison Committee or student representatives before introducing the software.

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. As no personal or sensitive data will be transmitted to Turnitin UK, the University's use of the software complies with this requirement. The University has identified 'providers of anti-plagiarism software' in its information to students as organisations with whom data may be shared.

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/Assessors on how to use the software and interpret the reports. Approximately five to ten minutes is needed to review each originality report and decide whether further action is needed. 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.

e. Separation of academic judgment

Under the University's investigative processes, all cases of suspected plagiarism or collusion must distinguish between academic and disciplinary aspects. Faculties and Departments should ensure that they have robust and transparent procedures in place to ensure that provision of originality reports does not influence this separation.

As a result of reviewing originality reports, Examiners or Academic Integrity Officers may determine the extent of student contribution or original content, and marks may be awarded appropriately in proportion to the level of faulty scholarship. This may result in a lower mark than may otherwise have been the case. However, marks may not be deducted for disciplinary aspects or for having attempted to gain unfair advantage; this may only be done by the Proctors, the University Advocate, or the Court of Discipline.

Further information on the investigative process and actions to be taken in response to concerns about plagiarism may be found at www.cam.ac.uk/plagiarism.

6. Using Turnitin UK – practical concerns

a. Electronic and/or hard copies

Work must be submitted electronically to Turnitin UK; scanned handwritten material cannot be recognised. Some Faculties and Departments may require work to be submitted in hard copy as well as electronically and in these cases students should be asked to confirm that both versions of their work have identical content. If hard copies are not collected students should be advised to keep an electronic copy of their work until the results are published.

b. Process of submitting and reviewing reports

Faculties and Departments are responsible for determining how work is submitted to Turnitin UK and for ensuring that adequate records are kept. It is advisable to use a consistent file naming structure so that the course and student's examination number are immediately evident, i.e. PPSPtIIXXXX. Names or personal information should not be used.

It may be that Examiners/Assessors 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 for review. The latter option would be less resource intensive in terms of setting up permissions and training new users. All decisions should be ratified by the Examining Board and External Examiners when confirming final results.

For blanket and random screening, Faculties and Departments should nominate a member of academic staff to act as 'Academic Integrity Officer' who will scrutinize the originality reports to judge which should be referred to the Examiners for further investigation. The Academic Integrity Officer should provide information on the checking process to the Examining Board and External Examiners, and be available to answer queries as necessary.

Faculty Boards should issue guidance to Examiners at an early stage to specify how Turnitin UK may be used and the process for submitting reports. Faculties and Departments are also responsible for

ensuring that those reviewing originality reports have received appropriate training/guidance and know who to contact with any queries.

c. Process if plagiarism is identified

As explained above, reports must be carefully reviewed to determine whether any part of the document has been inappropriately referenced or plagiarised. The use of Turnitin does not preclude further investigation using alternative methods, e.g., Google or consulting secondary sources.

If the Examiner or Academic Integrity Officer decides that there is a *prima facie* case for proceeding further, they must report the matter to the Chair or Senior Examiner who will take action in line with the University's investigative procedure for dealing with suspected plagiarism². The originality report may be used as evidence in the subsequent investigation.

d. 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 normally be revealed to a third party outside Cambridge without the express permission of the student concerned.

e. 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.

f. 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 apply to their Faculty or Department's Turnitin UK contact to request that their work be removed from the database. Faculties or Departments receiving such requests should contact the helpdesk at turnitin@admin.cam.ac.uk.

7. Formative use of Turnitin UK

a. Potential benefits

To date, use of Turnitin UK software at the University has generally focussed on detecting non-original content in assessed work. However, other universities use the software formatively 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 plagiarism and act as a platform for discussion about good academic practice and correct citation techniques;
- * demystify the software;

² For further details see: <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/plagiarism/examiners/index.html>

- * identify students in need of extra support at an early stage to help forestall problems.

The University encourages Faculties and Departments to consider formative use of the software and further enquiries are welcome. Colleges are also encouraged to consider formative use.

b. Concerns about finessing plagiarised work

While formative use provides considerable benefit for educating students about citation, 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 formative use of Turnitin UK to non-assessed work, or to a percentage of any assessed work (though this would need to be managed by Faculty/Department staff). However, if a document is submitted to Turnitin more than once, it will automatically get a match of 100%.

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 should first review the conditions of use outlined in section 3c above. There are two ways to access the software, either directly via the Turnitin website or through the University of Cambridge Moodle system.

If using Turnitin UK via Moodle:

1. The Turnitin Assignment tool is available to anyone with a 'teacher' role in Moodle, and guidance on its use is available from the Moodle Team (moodlehelp@uis.cam.ac.uk).
2. When setting up a Turnitin Assignment, the user will be asked to confirm that s/he understands and accepts the University's conditions of use. The user setting up the assignment will be considered the primary contact for that assignment, and will be expected to take responsibility for accessing training/guidance on interpretation of reports, as well as ensuring that any necessary actions are taken in line with University policy.
3. Moodle is only able to provide blanket screening and an originality report will be generated for all work. The Faculty/Department will need to notify students that all work will be screened, and direct them to the University's website for information about the Turnitin UK database. A template statement for handbooks is included as Appendix A.

If using Turnitin UK directly:

1. Accounts may be set up for institutions wishing to use Turnitin UK through direct access. This requires manual upload of student work to the Turnitin UK database by a member of University staff.
2. Requests for an account should be sent to turnitin@admin.cam.ac.uk, providing the name of the primary contact for the account, and confirmation that the Faculty/Department understands and accepts the University's conditions of use. Please note that it may take 3-4 days for the account to be activated.

3. The primary contact will be able to upload submissions to the Turnitin UK site and will be expected to take responsibility for accessing training/guidance on interpretation of reports, as well as ensuring that any necessary actions are taken in line with University policy.

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.

Educational and Student Policy would be happy to provide guidance about developing a local policy on the use of Turnitin UK. Please initially contact Melissa Rielly (melissa.rielly@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.turnitinuk.com.

Help with any aspect of Turnitin is available by emailing the helpdesk: turnitin@admin.cam.ac.uk.

Appendix A

Template Information for students:

Students are responsible for ensuring they have read and understood both the University's Statement on Plagiarism, and the Faculty of [x] Plagiarism Guidance, available at:

- * www.cam.ac.uk/plagiarism
- * [Faculty link to guidance]

The Faculty of [x] uses Turnitin UK to screen student work. Screening is carried out [*delete as appropriate*: only if concerns are raised about the originality of work; via blanket screening of all work in Moodle; or via random screening of a percentage of submissions]. All work screened will be reviewed by the Academic Integrity Officer to determine whether further action may be necessary.

Use of Turnitin UK complies with UK Copyright and Data Protection Laws. Submission to Turnitin does not affect your ownership of the work; the copyright and intellectual property of all work remains with the original owner (normally the student, with the exception of some sponsored research projects). No personal or sensitive data will be transmitted.

Work screened by Turnitin UK will be retained in the Turnitin database for comparison with future submissions; if matches are identified, the full text is not accessible to other institutions, only the matching text. You may request that your work is removed from the Turnitin UK database at the conclusion of the examination process, but this must be done separately for each piece of submitted work. Retaining your work on the database will help to ensure that your work remains protected from future attempts to plagiarise it, will help maintain the integrity of the University's qualifications, and will maximise the effectiveness of the software.

Full details about Turnitin UK and your rights and responsibilities can be found on the University's website, www.cam.ac.uk/plagiarism.

Queries about plagiarism or the Faculty's use of Turnitin UK should be addressed in the first instance to your Director of Studies or College Tutor.