DIVISIONAL BOARDS, CONTINUING EDUCATION BOARD

Revised plagiarism procedures and completion of plagiarism strategy

Education Committee Circulars Ref 8-16/17

a) Summary

Revised procedures for handling cases of poor academic practice and plagiarism were approved in Trinity Term 2015 and further guidance for examiners on their role in the procedures was approved in Trinity Term 2016. All examining boards will need to be made aware of their role in the implementation of these new procedures which become effective as of 1 October 2016. Alongside these new procedures, a complementary strategy for prevention of plagiarism has been developed.

b) Action required

1. Boards are asked to disseminate to all departments and faculties:
   a. the guidance for examiners on the new plagiarism procedures (Annex A);
   b. the report on completion of the strategy on Plagiarism and Good Academic Practice (Annex B).

2. Departments and faculties are asked to:
   a. ensure that all academic staff appointed to examining boards or as assessors are aware of the new procedures;
   b. ensure as a matter of priority that marking conventions are amended to take account of the new procedures (see Annex A, Level 1, Step 3);
   c. consider the role that good design of assessments plays in discouraging plagiarism;
   d. consider the current induction for students in good academic practice.

c) Background

1. In Trinity Term 2015, the Education Committee agreed to adopt a revised procedure for dealing with cases of plagiarism following a University-wide consultation. The new procedures are part of a wider programme of work relating to the establishment of a comprehensive strategy for the prevention and management of plagiarism. They are intended to operate with greater proportionality and more swiftly, by moving responsibility for dealing with poor academic practice to boards of examiners and suspected plagiarism cases to a newly constituted Academic Conduct Panel, while the most serious cases of plagiarism will continue to be referred to the Student Disciplinary Panel (SDP).

2. In the revised procedures examination boards will be responsible for making an initial assessment of cases and will decide either to deal with the case locally or to refer it on to the

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1 EdC(TT15)092a Response to consultation on procedures for handling plagiarism
Proctors. Examiners will be able to consult with the Proctors for advice on cases without formally referring them.

3. Detailed guidance for examiners on their enhanced role in the revised procedures has been developed, responding to comments made through the consultation process and is at Annex A.

4. Attention is drawn to the need to make an addition to marking conventions in preparation for the implementation of the new procedures. This needs at minimum to let students know that the examiners may deduct marks for poor academic practice (lack of adequate referencing, poor use of citation conventions etc) of up to 10% of the marks available.

5. The new procedures were developed as part of a comprehensive strategy for both preventing and managing plagiarism. The strategy is at Annex B. All resources relating to the strategy, including the procedures for handling cases of plagiarism, can be found on the Education Committee website http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/resources/.

6. Attention is drawn to the role of faculties and departments in preventing plagiarism, both in the design of assessments, and in the provision of training for students in good academic practice. If faculties and departments have not yet made use of the new online course for students at https://weblearn.ox.ac.uk/portal/site/skills:generic:avoidplag they are encouraged to do so.

d) Further Information

Further details are available from Philippa O’Connor, Deputy Director of Education Policy Support (philippa.oconnor@admin.ox.ac.uk and telephone number (2)80707).
Procedure for dealing with cases of poor academic practice and plagiarism in taught degree examinations: guidance for Chairs of Examiners

Introduction

Procedures have been developed for dealing with the full range of situations in which examiners are presented with submitted work for taught degrees that gives rise to concerns about the standard of scholarly referencing and attribution. These will range from students using the wrong type of referencing style, to knowingly trying to pass off the work of others as their own. The procedures aim to deal with this wide range proportionately and without undue delay. Boards of Examiners have a clearly defined role that is strictly academic in nature. The Proctors will take forward investigation for disciplinary action for plagiarism only when cases are referred to them by Chairs of Examiners, and only then when they are satisfied that such action is warranted.

This guidance does not cover cases of poor academic practice and plagiarism in research degrees, as research degree students are advanced students for whom different procedures are appropriate. Cases of suspected plagiarism in research degrees should continue to be referred to the Proctors.

Level 1: procedures for Examination Boards

If a marker, or a Turnitin report generated in the course of examination procedures, raises concerns about the proper attribution of a passage or piece of submitted work, the matter will be reported to the Chair of Examiners. The Chair will compile and retain any evidence and decide whether or not the case is one which may be dealt with by the Board (poor academic practice) or whether it is one that requires reference to the Proctors for investigation and possible disciplinary action. The Chair may consult the Proctors in cases of doubt.

The following step-by-step guidance is provided in order to assist the Chair with this decision.

Step 1

If the concern has been identified by a high Turnitin score, follow the separate guidance on interpreting Turnitin reports (Appendix 1) to establish the report's accuracy.

If the concern has been identified by a marker, examine the source the marker has referred to; or in the case of suspected collusion or copying between students, examine all pieces of work giving rise to this concern.

Step 2

Consider the characteristics of the concerning passage(s).

Characteristics of cases to be dealt with as poor academic practice

In all cases dealt with wholly by the Examination Board the extent of the material under review must be a relatively small proportion of the whole. Small will be in the context of the length of the work but as a guide it will not exceed 10%.
If the case is then best described by one or more of the criteria below, on balance this is likely to indicate a case of poor academic practice and can be dealt with by the Examination Board.

- The material is widely available factual information or technical description that could not be paraphrased easily.
- The passage(s) draws on a variety of sources, either verbatim or derivative, in patchwork fashion. This is likely to indicate poor English/poor understanding rather than an attempt to deceive.
- Some attempt has been made to provide references, however incomplete (e.g. footnotes but no quotation marks, Harvard-style references at the end of a paragraph, inclusion in bibliography)
- The passage is ‘grey literature’ i.e. a web source with no clear owner
- The student is not known to have previously received a marks deduction for poor academic practice or been referred to the Proctors for suspected plagiarism. (This will only be relevant for Honour Schools examined in Parts, or master’s courses with multiple submission deadlines.)

**Thresholds for reference to the Proctors**

If the concerning passage(s) meets any of the criteria below, this is likely to indicate that referral to the Proctors is warranted.

- The extent of the material under review is a substantial proportion of the whole.
- The material contains passages of analysis or research data that is clearly the intellectual property of the original author.
- The passage(s) exhibits heavy reliance on one source which may indicate plagiarism of ideas/arguments.
- There is evidence that the student has copied the development of an argument (which may not be verbatim quotation – it could involve paraphrasing a line of argument or sequence of points).
- There is evidence of copying or collusion between students.
- The student has previously received a marks deduction for poor academic practice or has been referred to the Proctors for suspected plagiarism in the same or earlier programme of study.
- The submission clearly infringes rules on resubmitting material (autoplagiarism) for examination.

**Step 3**

Where the Chair finds that the matter can be dealt with by the Board, assessors will mark the work on its academic merits. The Board will then deduct marks for derivative or poorly referenced work according to a pre-determined scale set out in the marking conventions. Boards are free to operate marks deductions of between 1 and 10% (maximum) of the marks available for that particular piece of work. In practice, it will often be difficult to operate very fine-grained distinctions and it is acceptable for examination boards to exercise their judgement within a small range of ‘bands’ e.g. on a 100 point scale a Board might judge cases to fall in one of three bands for which 3, 6, or 10 marks are deducted. Where the
consequence of the marks deduction would result in failure of the assessment and of the programme (i.e. no resit opportunity) the case must be referred to the Proctors.

Where the Chair finds that the matter should be dealt with by the Proctors, the Chair should follow the steps outlined in Level 2 below.

Step 4

For their academic development, students should be informed that marks have been deducted for poor academic practice if they have further examinations to take during their course (for example if it is a preliminary examination, a part of a FHS examination before the final year, the qualifying examination for MPhil, or early examinations for other master’s courses), and an explanation should be given of where and how in their work this was evidenced. This feedback should be provided via the Chair of Examiners to the Senior Tutor in the case of undergraduates, or the Course Director in the case of graduates. Students should also be reminded of the disciplinary regulations concerning plagiarism.

Level 2: procedures for the Academic Conduct Panel

Examination Boards will refer cases to the Proctors’ Office if the Chair has made a decision that a case exceeds the criteria for dealing with Level 1.

Step 1

The Chair should first summarise the case for the Proctors indicating the relevant sources, extent, and seriousness of the plagiarism. A report printout from Turnitin is insufficient on its own and will be returned to the Chair for analysis and summary. In cases of students suspected of colluding or copying from each other, the Chair should examine the work of both the students involved, so that the nature of the apparent collusion can be established. All materials should be securely submitted to the Proctors’ Office. Support will be provided by a caseworker in the Proctors’ Office who will ensure all relevant materials are collated and presented.

Step 2

The case will be given initial consideration by one of the Proctors who will determine whether it is a case that should be referred back to the examiners to deal with at Level 1 (in cases where the Chair has asked for advice), a suitable case for the Academic Conduct Panel, or one that is so serious that it should be directed to the SDP. Cases where it is likely that the outcome would result in failure of the whole degree will always be referred to the SDP.

Step 3

If it is decided that the case should proceed to the Academic Conduct Panel, the student’s consent will be sought, offering the alternative of referral to the SDP. The student will be notified as soon as possible by the Proctors’ Office that their work has been referred to the Panel, except in circumstances where they are currently undertaking examination. In these cases, steps should be taken to delay notification to the student, and to notify the student at a time that will not interfere with ongoing exams.

Step 4

An interview with the student will be conducted between the Proctor and the student with a note-taker as part of the preparation for the Panel meeting; this may be by telephone, email
questions, or other means of telecommunication. If, during the interview, the student admits a breach of the regulations, the Proctor may offer the student the option of the matter being concluded without further meetings. The Proctor will arrange for the Panel to agree a penalty by email correspondence (the Panel may not impose a penalty which is more severe than the Penalty recommended by the Proctor, and the student will have the right of appeal as set out under Appeal process below). Otherwise, paperwork for the Panel including a note of the interview, will be provided to the student who will be given a minimum of three clear days to submit any further information for inclusion.

Step 5
The Proctors will convene a meeting of the Academic Conduct Panel. The ACP will consist of three people: one of the Proctors; a person who has previously served as Proctor (preferably from the most recent Proctorial team for continuity) or as a member of the SDP; and a member with relevant subject expertise (but not a member of the Examination Board). The Panel will be convened as necessary to deal with plagiarism cases referred to it. The Panel will consider cases within one month of referral by the Examination Board.

The student, supported by a friend or a Senior Member, will be invited to attend the meeting, but the Panel may go ahead without the student if they are unable to attend. The Panel may require the student to attend, or be available by telecommunication.

The Panel will have a range of outcomes available to it:

- Finding plagiarism has not occurred
- Directing that the student has support and training
- Deduction of marks for the piece of work: examiners will conclude examination
- Submission awarded 0% - resubmission required in order to conclude examination but mark not capped
- Submission awarded 0% - resubmission required in order to conclude examination and mark capped
- Serious Academic Misconduct - Referral to the Student Disciplinary Panel

The Panel cannot give a penalty that would result in the student failing the whole degree.

Appeal process

The student will be able to appeal a decision of the Academic Conduct Panel by sending a written appeal within fourteen days of receiving the Panel's written decision. Two members of the Academic Conduct Panel with no previous connection to the case will consider the appeal, and this will normally be a paper-based exercise.

The student will not be able to appeal a referral to the Student Disciplinary Panel; in such cases they will have the right to apply for permission to appeal to the Student Appeal Panel following the outcome of the Student Disciplinary Panel.

**Level 3: Student Disciplinary Panel**

The Student Disciplinary Panel will deal with the most serious cases of plagiarism, and those referred to it by the Proctors or the Academic Conduct Panel because the likely outcome would be failure of the whole degree.

**Thresholds**

In addition to those cases referred to the Student Disciplinary Panel by the Academic Conduct Panel as described above, the Proctors may refer cases to the Student Disciplinary Panel directly after receipt from the examiners and after their investigation, but will only do so in what appear to be very serious cases. This is likely to include cases of apparent deliberate deception such as purchase of submissions from an essay mill or ghostwriting service, students with a history of plagiarism, very extensive plagiarism.

**Outcomes**

The Panel will have a range of outcomes available to it including:

- Submission awarded 0% - no opportunity to re-submit i.e. failure of programme
- Award classification reduced
- Failed award
- Expelled from institution and failed award
- Removal of a degree (in cases of former students)
- Additionally, any of the outcomes available at Level 2
Appendix 1 to Annex A

Interpreting Turnitin reports

- Interpreting Turnitin reports is a nuanced skill

- The ‘Originality Report’ (displayed within the software as the ‘Document Viewer’) indicates the percentage of words in the document that have been found to match existing electronic sources. The percentage is known as the ‘Similarity index’, measuring the amount of similarity with other sources.

- Turnitin cannot identify text that may have been copied from books (or any other sources) that are not available in electronic format. Even then, there are limits to the databases that Turnitin has access to for searching purposes – there may be some electronic journals or databases that do not have partnership agreements that allow Turnitin to search their content.

- Turnitin can match only electronic text, not equations, computer programs, images, tables, diagrams or pictures. Check the sources of any surrounding text to see whether the diagrams etc are also copied from the same source.

- The list of all submissions shows a visual ‘traffic light’ indicator next to each one, according to the extent of the match percentage:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Icon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0%--Blue icon</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-24%--Green icon</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-49%--Yellow icon</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-74%--Orange icon</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75-100%--Red icon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- There is no recommended ‘threshold’ as to what scores might be acceptable or unacceptable. Each case needs to be evaluated individually, taking into consideration the nature of the subject matter (e.g. in a Law essay it may be acceptable to cite legal cases without using quotation marks), the nature of the assessment task (e.g. the cognitive level of the task), and any other factors relevant to the particular task.

- A high percentage match should not be taken as an automatic indicator that there is a problem with the work; the list of matches may include correctly referenced sources, reference lists, declarations of authorship etc.

- There is a filter in the online report which can filter out correctly quoted material (only double quotation marks are recognised), and reference lists. A list of references may also be filtered out but must be preceded by the heading ‘References’, ‘List of References’, or ‘Bibliography’ in order for Turnitin to recognise it – the filter then ignores everything that follows that heading. Note that if the references are within a formatted table in MS Word, it will not be recognised as a list of references:
A match of 0% may be suspicious. In the normal course of writing, one would expect at least some matches of short, commonly used phrases. A score of exactly 0% may indicate that the writing has been electronically manipulated to disguise words and confound the software (e.g. it is possible to insert 'non-displaying spaces' within words, which will make the words unrecognisable to the software).

- Double check that sources have been attributed correctly and not lumped together e.g. multiple articles from same website may show up as a single large match.

- Sources should be checked to ensure there is no misattribution e.g. a report may have been syndicated and published on different website, causing Turnitin to identify a different source from the one referenced by the student.

- Where the Turnitin report shows a match with work submitted to another university, check if there may be a third source that both students may have copied from.

- For privacy reasons, Turnitin does not allow access to student papers from other universities if these have been found as a match. Permission needs to be requested from the respective university to that piece of work, if required. This can be done through the online interface, by clicking on the match in question and then clicking on the name of the institution:

- If a match is found between two student papers (say, Student A and Student B), it is not possible via the software to identify who copied from whom. That is, the paper of the 'plagiarist' may have been submitted and saved to the Turnitin database before that written by the original author. Any such case should be referred to the Proctors for further investigation.

- The Originality Report can be refreshed in the online Document Viewer. If this is done at a later date, it may yield a different score to the one first generated (due to the dynamic nature of content on the internet). Therefore a copy of the Originality Report should be downloaded at the time of the investigation, as evidence of matches found at one particular point in time.
Plagiarism and Good Academic Practice: report on completion of strategy

Introduction

1. In Trinity Term 2013, Education Committee considered the University’s policies and procedures for the prevention and management of plagiarism. Several areas were identified for improvement and a proposed programme of work was agreed that encompassed both short-term improvements to practice and far-reaching issues of definition and changes to legislation.

2. At its meeting in week 8 Trinity term this year, the committee received the following report setting out the areas of work that have now been completed.

Prevention of plagiarism: academic staff

3. Academic staff members play an important role in demonstrating to students that academic integrity is practised and valued. The Oxford Learning Institute (OLI) has developed a new resource aimed at tutors regarding the role of pedagogy in preventing plagiarism. This can be found at http://www.learning.ox.ac.uk/support/teaching/resources/plagiarism/.

4. Staff can also help discourage plagiarism through the design of the assessments that they set. OLI has produced a guide to help departments and examiners think about and improve their assessment design, both for new courses and existing ones. This has been incorporated into Education Committee’s Policy and Guidance on new courses and major changes to courses (including closure) which can be found at http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/pgnewcourses/.

5. Both these new resources have been made widely known via departmental and academic committees.

Prevention of plagiarism: student information

6. Information about plagiarism on the Oxford Students Website has been revised to improve its clarity and comprehensiveness https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/skills/plagiarism?wssl=1.

7. The Proctors’ Disciplinary Regulations for Candidates in Examination have been revised using consistent language with the Oxford Students Website, making an explicit link between the two, and clarifying what kind of behaviour is unacceptable and likely to lead to penalties http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/288-072.shtml.

8. The information in The University Student Handbook (formerly the Proctors’ and Assessor’s Memorandum (PAM)) is consistent with all other sources and directs students to both the Oxford Students Website source, and the online course.
Prevention of plagiarism: training for students in good academic practice

9. In MT 2014, Education Committee endorsed the provision of an online course for the prevention of plagiarism. The course was developed by Epigeum, a company specialising in online training courses, and is hosted in Weblearn embedded alongside other course resources and linked to further information on plagiarism. It can support monitoring of completion, and certification for those departments or faculties (or potentially colleges) who want to ensure that all their students have completed the course. The new online course does not eliminate the need for departmental guidance, particularly on subject-specific citation conventions, but it considerably strengthens Oxford’s implementation of a plagiarism strategy, and demonstrates that all students have access to quality tuition on good academic practice and the avoidance of plagiarism whenever and wherever they need it. The course will also benefit from regular oversight and updating by Epigeum.  
https://weblearn.ox.ac.uk/portal/site/skills:generic:avoidplag

10. Current policy places responsibility on departments and faculties for providing an induction session and written material on plagiarism for all students. In Trinity term 2015 divisions, departments and faculties were asked to ensure: that course handbooks and websites included the University’s definition of plagiarism and a link to the Oxford Students Website guidance on plagiarism; that appropriate subject-specific guidance on academic good practice was provided along with relevant study skills advice and a style guide to inform students of good referencing practice. This requirement is now incorporated in the University’s template for course handbooks (which is contained in the Policy and Guidance on course information  
http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/pandgoncourseinformation/)  In addition departments and faculties were advised that induction sessions should always incorporate sessions on good academic practice and the avoidance of plagiarism with appropriate study skills support. They were further strongly advised to direct their students to complete the new online course within the context of their academic induction.

Detection and handling of cases of suspected plagiarism

11. It was agreed that a consistent set of requirements for submission of summative assessments, and a consistent approach by examination boards to their use of Turnitin, should be part of a University strategy on plagiarism. Examinations Panel considered digital submission of assessments for taught courses in Michaelmas Term 2013 and agreed in principle that a central policy on electronic submission for taught degrees should be introduced to remove the current variations in practice, to promote equity of treatment of students, and to make possible the use of a single declaration of authorship. It would also be possible to link the process of submission to online plagiarism resources and encourage better understanding of plagiarism. However, it was acknowledged that, before introducing such a policy, there were substantial issues to be addressed, in particular identifying a system that would support the online submission of 13,500+ assessments a year.
12. The considerable benefit of a robust online submission system for summative work is widely recognised and Education IT Board has this on its list of student administration projects for 2016-17. In the meantime, Examinations Panel has approved the use of Weblearn for submission of summative work and those responsible for examinations requiring digital submissions are now encouraged to make use of this route. Weblearn can be integrated with Turnitin and so facilitates its consistent use. As more departments take up Weblearn as their preferred submission route, it is likely that more will use the option to screen work for text matches. Departments/faculties should contact taughtdegrees@admin.ox.ac.uk to discuss their requirements.

13. The University continues to work within the current policy it has endorsed in relation to the use of Turnitin. This includes use in summative assessment subject to approval by the Proctors. Guidance for the use of Turnitin in formal examinations, where exam boards elect to use it, is published by the Proctors and Education Committee in the Policy and Guidance for examiners and others involved in University examinations http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/pgexaminers/annexel/.

14. Departments may also use Turnitin for formative assessment to help students gain a better understanding of good academic practice. IT Services staff provide training courses and personalised support for departments and faculties wishing to use Turnitin in formative and summative assessment. A piece of work remains to be completed to bring together advice from IT Education Services and Education Committee policy (covering use in admissions, summative and formative assessment contexts) in a comprehensive guide for departments on the use of Turnitin. This will be available from the Education Committee website (http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/resources/) shortly.

15. Interpreting Turnitin reports is one aspect of examiners’ role in detecting and dealing with poor academic practice/plagiarism. Guidance on this role has been approved by Education Committee recently. It will be used and refined as the new procedures for dealing with plagiarism are implemented in 2016-17.

16. New procedures and regulations for dealing with cases of poor academic practice and plagiarism were approved in Trinity term 2016 including guidance on the role of examiners in the process. The new procedures are the result of extensive discussion with previous Proctorial teams and consultation with the wider University. They are intended to operate with greater proportionality, and so improve the time taken to complete the process, by moving responsibility for dealing with cases of poor academic practice to examination boards, and for more serious cases of suspected plagiarism to a new Academic Conduct Panel. The most serious cases, where a potential outcome is expulsion or failure of the whole course, will continue to be referred to the Student Disciplinary Panel. The legislative changes necessary to bring the new procedures into operation from 2016-17 have now been made.
Maintenance of strategy, policies and guidance on plagiarism

17. This report has been adapted as a web resource within the Education Committee website (http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/resources/) and will constitute the University’s approach to the prevention and management of plagiarism. Education Committee will remain responsible for oversight of the approach and for review or amendment of policies. The strategy will be the responsibility of Education Policy Support to maintain and communicate. In summary, the plagiarism-related resources are:

For students:
- Comprehensive information about plagiarism on the Oxford Students Website
- The Proctors’ Disciplinary Regulations for Candidates in Examination on the University Statutes and Regulations website
- Information contained in The University Student Handbook
- Subject-specific guidance in handbooks and induction sessions
- The new online course: Avoiding Plagiarism

For staff:
- OLI guidance on the role of pedagogy in preventing plagiarism
- OLI guidance on plagiarism and assessment design
- Education Committee policies on induction and handbook content
- Guidance on the use of Turnitin
- Procedures for dealing with poor academic practice and suspected cases of plagiarism

Further Information

Further details are available from Philippa O’Connor, Deputy Director, Education Policy Support, (philippa.oconnor@admin.ox.ac.uk, telephone (2)80707).