UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
Education Quality and Policy Office

Document cover sheet

Policy name	Policy on the use of Turnitin
Purpose	To outline the usage requirements, benefits and challenges of using text-matching software
Owner	General Board's Education Committee
Contact	Jane Clare
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Policy on the use of Turnitin UK text-matching software

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1. Introduction

To support the detection and prevention of academic misconduct, the University provides access to Turnitin UK for all staff. Turnitin compares the text of submitted work against a database of source material and identifies matching text. The database includes both source material online and through selected publishing partners, as well as previous student submissions from institutions across the world.

This document outlines University policy on use of the Turnitin UK software.

The University of Cambridge believes that academic integrity should be promoted at all levels of study, and in all disciplines, as a central value. Every current and former student is expected to understand and abide by Rules of Behaviour[1] which specifically prohibit academic misconduct. However, the diversity of academic conventions across the institution is such that a restrictive University-wide policy on the use of Turnitin UK would be inappropriate. This document

[1] Statutes and Ordinances 2020, p.189; Chapter 2

therefore establishes general principles and highlights key considerations for developing a local policy.

Further information on academic integrity and misconduct, including definitions, preventative resources, and actions in response, may be found on the Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct website at: https://www.plagiarism.admin.cam.ac.uk/.

2. General Principles

Expectations of good academic practice

Responsibility for promoting good academic practice and awareness of academic misconduct is devolved to the local level. The General Board's Education Committee has outlined the following expectations of Faculty Boards, in all cases and irrespective of use of Turnitin:

1. Students on all courses must be provided with discipline-specific guidance on good academic practice. This will include information about expected or preferred levels of citation in all types of assessed work; avoiding plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct; and distinguishing between acceptable collaboration and unacceptable collusion. All guidance should be consistent with the University's Rules of Behaviour point 4(h).
2. Information about academic integrity, and avoiding misconduct, must be included in induction material and other activities at the start of study. 'Top up' training opportunities should also be considered at relevant times, for example, providing a refresher on citations in the third year when students begin dissertation work.
3. Assessment methods on all courses should be appropriately designed, with safeguards in place to minimise opportunities for academic misconduct.

And, where Turnitin is used, GBEC expects that:

4. Robust and transparent procedures must be in place to ensure that provision of similarity reports does not influence separation of academic judgement from disciplinary aspects.
5. Students must be given clear information at the start of study, and at appropriate junctures throughout the course, of the intended use of Turnitin.

Separation of academic judgement

Under the University's investigative and disciplinary processes, all cases of suspected academic misconduct must clearly separate academic judgement (of the quality and content of the work) from any disciplinary aspects. For example, where academic misconduct is identified, it is appropriate for marks to be adjusted to reflect originality or to require resubmission of the work for a capped mark, but it is not appropriate for any penalties to be applied. Faculties and Departments must ensure that they have robust and transparent procedures in place to ensure that provision of similarity reports via Turnitin does not influence this separation.

Further information on the investigative process and actions to be taken in response to concerns about academic misconduct may be found on the University's Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct website.

About Turnitin UK

Turnitin compares text of submitted work to an online database and generates a similarity report identifying matching text. Where matches are from published sources, the source text is displayed along with the immediate context and links for further detail. Matches to previous student submissions are identified, but source text cannot be seen without contacting the institution where the work was submitted.

The software provides a percentage of matched text but can make no judgement about whether plagiarism has taken place. It can in some cases misidentify correctly cited text as a match, or text which is understandably identical across submissions, such as essay titles. Turnitin offers options for excluding quoted material and bibliographies, but this does not obviate the need for careful checking. **It is therefore crucial that all similarity reports are carefully reviewed to assess whether the work does contain academic misconduct**. In no case may the percentage match be acted upon without reviewing the similarity report in more depth.

Limitations

Turnitin can be a useful tool, but in isolation does not offer a full solution to plagiarism and academic misconduct. The software is not a substitute for promoting good academic practice and cannot be treated as a failsafe measure for detecting academic misconduct.

Limitations of Turnitin UK include:

- It cannot recognise when work does not match the known ability and style of a student, so cannot detect contract cheating[2]
- Its search base is extensive but may provide more coverage in some disciplines than in others, and is necessarily limited only to source material available online
- The search base cannot detect matches copied by translation, or images, including graphs or mathematical equations inserted as images
- Turnitin does not detect plagiarism of ideas or methodology

As a third-party system, the University has no control over slow performance during The effectiveness of Turnitin and importance of these limitations will therefore vary significantly between disciplines and levels of study. These factors should form part of the decision on models of use in local processes.

[2] Turnitin does offer a product, Authorship Investigate, which is designed to analyse evidence of writing style over time; at this time the University's Turnitin licence does not support this product.

3. Who can use the licence?

The licence is made available to any member of academic staff across the collegiate institution. This extends to college staff, where they are supervising a university degree or award. Students are not provided with access to the licence, except where this is provided by the course as part of a formative exercise.

It is only permissible to use Turnitin within the University's licence where the check is in relation to one of the University's offered courses of study; it may not be used for checking research prior to publication, or for outreach or admissions purposes.

4. Terms and conditions for using the Turnitin UK licence

The University maintains a site licence for Turnitin UK and provides access to any staff member. The following conditions have been imposed on use of the site licence; these must be accepted by individuals before access is granted:

1. Turnitin UK may only be used for the screening of student work in relation to a course of study at the University of Cambridge; it may not be used for screening commercial or published work.
2. Sufficient guidance about good academic practice in all types of assessment is provided to students on the relevant course of study.
3. Students have been, or will be, notified of the intended use and process for Turnitin UK on the relevant course.
4. The limitations of using Turnitin UK are understood, and the resulting similarity reports will be carefully reviewed and utilised appropriately.
5. Actions taken in response to Turnitin UK similarity reports will be in line with university policy for the Investigation of Academic Misconduct.
6. Records will be kept on the use of Turnitin UK and actions taken in response; these records will be made available to the Office of Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals (OSCCA) for use in any subsequent review action or to help evaluate the impact of the software.
7. Material submitted directly to Turnitin UK will use only examination numbers, or another number created for that purpose; student names will not be used, including in the filename.

5. Considerations for implementation of local policy and practice

As noted above, local policy and practice may vary as a result of many factors, such as level of study, disciplinary differences in types of assessed work, and breadth or limitations of the Turnitin UK source database. This section outlines several issues which aim to assist Faculty Boards in agreeing local practice.

Models of use

Turnitin may be used on either taught or research courses, in any of the following ways:

(a) **Selectively**, when concerns about originality have been raised on a single piece of work
    - Advantages: less resource-intensive; focused intervention; reinforces primacy of examiner judgement
    - Disadvantages: students may feel unfairly targeted; opportunity for bias or lack of equity; does not support a formative learning environment; collusion may be less easily identified

(b) For **blanket screening** of all work, either as a universal check or to provide students with formative feedback on their referencing practice, or both
    - Advantages: can help detect collusion; equitable and transparent system; if used formatively, can provide supportive learning environment
    - Disadvantages: resource-intensive, both in terms of administration and support; could create sense of 'false confidence' and detract from efforts to promote good academic practice

(c) To carry out screening on a **random sample** of student work
    - Advantages: can help to establish view of student knowledge and identify where support may be needed; less resource-intensive than blanket screening but provides a fuller picture than selective screening
    - Disadvantages: students may feel unfairly targeted; identification of issues may require further investigation, negating the resource saving over blanket screening; could create sense of 'false confidence' and detract from efforts to promote good academic practice

Methods of access (technical)

Turnitin UK may be accessed in one of two ways:

- a direct-access account specific to a single user and tied to their CRSid
- creating a Moodle Turnitin Assignment, which will be visible to all those with a 'teacher' category in that Moodle course

Which method is more suitable may depend upon your intended model of use; for example, blanket screening would be more effectively managed via the Moodle integration. However, Moodle will provide a report for each student in the cohort, so is not appropriate for 'suspicion only' scans. In addition, all similarity reports are visible to anyone with a 'teacher' role on the Moodle course, so attention is needed to ensure that all those with access to the reports are aware of limitations and how to appropriately act on any issues raised.

Direct-access accounts are specific to a single user's CRSid. It is not possible to set up a generic account, for example teachingoffice@cam.ac.uk. These require manual upload of the student submission to Turnitin UK, although bulk uploads are possible.

When requesting a direct-access account, or setting up a Moodle Turnitin assignment, users will be required to agree to the Terms and Conditions outlined in Section 4 above.

Informing students

Students are not required to give their explicit consent to submit work to Turnitin UK. However, they 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 appropriately during the course of study (particularly for multi-year courses). A template statement for use in handbooks is provided as Appendix A to this document and may be modified as appropriate.

While consent is not required, students have the right to request removal of their submitted material from the Turnitin database. It is advisable to explain to students the benefits of using the software; for example, where material is retained within the database, this offers protection against future attempts to plagiarise their work. Students should not normally be encouraged to request removal unless commercial sensitivity is at stake.

It is not permissible to claim that a course of study will use Turnitin software if it has no intention of doing so, and is only claiming it as a deterrent measure. However, courses declaring they will check selectively are not required to run reports if it is not deemed necessary.

Copyright and data protection

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. This is normally the student, in line with the University's Intellectual Property Policy (Statutes and Ordinances 2020, Chapter XIII, p.1069, Regulation 14). 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 the use of Turnitin, because the rights to the work remain with the owner; however, students may need reassurance on this point.

Material submitted to Turnitin UK must be identified by students' examination numbers, or a unique identifier created specifically for this purpose. Therefore, no information which enables students to be identified by Turnitin or third parties will be provided. The University has identified anti-plagiarism software and providers in its information to students as organisations with whom data may be shared for a range of contractual, statutory or public interest purposes.

Use of the software is subject to Turnitin's Privacy Policy and Usage Policy, which provide further details on the ways in which data is managed.

Removing material from Turnitin UK

Work submitted to Turnitin UK will be stored indefinitely in the Turnitin database, unless a specific request to remove is submitted by the University's Turnitin administrator. To maximise the effectiveness of the software, it is hoped that such requests will be kept to a minimum. Erroneous matches (for example if a piece of work is uploaded twice, matching against itself) can be rectified by excluding sources in Turnitin.

If you require work to be removed from the database, you should contact the Turnitin helpdesk in the first instance at turnitin@admin.cam.ac.uk; a form will be supplied requesting relevant information to assist in the removal.

APPENDIX A: TEMPLATE STATEMENT FOR STUDENTS

Students are responsible for ensuring they have read and understood both the University's Definition of Academic Misconduct, and the [Faculty or course] Plagiarism Guidance, available at:

- University Definition of Academic Misconduct: https://www.plagiarism.admin.cam.ac.uk/definition
- [link to website where course or Faculty information is held]

The [Faculty or course] uses Turnitin UK to screen student work. Screening is carried out [*delete as appropriate:* only if concerns are raised about the originality of your work; via blanket screening of all work in Moodle; via random screening of a percentage of submissions]. All work screened will be reviewed 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 will be retained in the Turnitin database indefinitely for comparison with future submissions. 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 it remains protected from future attempts to plagiarise it and maximise the effectiveness of the software.

Further information about your rights and responsibilities can be found on the University's Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct website: https://www.plagiarism.admin.cam.ac.uk/.

Queries about plagiarism, academic misconduct, or the use of Turnitin UK should be addressed in the first instance to your Director of Studies or College Tutor.