# UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

# PLAGIARISM POLICY, PROCEDURES AND GUIDANCE - Taught Courses and MRes (2012)

**1 Policy**

The University’s policy is that plagiarism, whether deliberate or unintentional, is a form of cheating and is unacceptable. It is expected that all students are educated in correct academic practice, including writing and referencing, early in their careers at the University and know what is expected of them and understand the meaning of plagiarism and its consequences.

**Definition of plagiarism**

The University’s definition of plagiarism makes explicit that copying from texts or web or other sources and copying work from other students constitutes plagiarism. It reads:

Plagiarism is the act of taking or copying someone else’s work, including another student’s, and presenting it as if it were one’s own. Plagiarism is said to occur when ideas, texts, theories, data, created artistic artefacts or other material are presented without acknowledgement so that the person considering this work is given the impression that what they have before them is the student’s own original work when it is not. Plagiarism also occurs where a student’s own work is re-presented without being properly referenced. Plagiarism is a form of cheating and is a disciplinary offence.

This definition is given in the University Student Handbook and Course/Subject Handbooks.

**Student declaration**

The standard coursework submission sheet for the receipting of coursework includes an explicit reference to the University’s definition of plagiarism as follows.

*I declare that this is my own work and that any material I have referred to has been accurately and consistently referenced****.*** *I have read the University’s policy on plagiarism and understand the definition of plagiarism as given in the [course/subject] handbook*.  *If it is shown that material has been plagiarised, or I have otherwise attempted to obtain an unfair advantage for myself or others, I understand that I may face sanctions in accordance with the policies and procedures of the University. A mark of zero may be awarded and the reason for that mark will be recorded on my file.*

The submission sheet is available at [www.ulster.ac.uk/academicoffice/Documents&Forms.htm](http://www.ulster.ac.uk/academicoffice/Documents&Forms.htm). The declaration of ownership is automatically generated in *Blackboard Learn [due 2012/13].* It should also be used when assignments are submitted by other electronic means.

**Penalties**

The University’s Policy provides a simple, graduated Framework of Penalties for plagiarism relating the severity of penalties to the number of offences and gives individual, formative advice after the first offence. There are both academic and disciplinary consequences. Disciplinary penalties are not applied until the second offence. Offences are counted cumulatively, regardless of any change of course but do not carry over from undergraduate to postgraduate level.

The framework of penalties for taught programmes and the MRes follows. That for other research degrees is available from the Research Office’s website.

**Monitoring of Policy**

The efficacy of the Policy is monitored by the Learning and Teaching Committee which receives annual reports from the Faculties and the Research Degrees Committee.

**2 Procedure for dealing with plagiarism in coursework in taught programmes and the MRes**

The framework of penalties for taught courses and the MRes and the formal procedure for dealing with cases are incorporated into the Procedures for Dealing with Reports of Alleged Offences in Connection with Examinations and Other Forms of Assessment at section 3. They are distinct from the processes for dealing with cheating in examinations (section 1) and other forms of cheating in coursework (section 2) (see [www.ulster.ac.uk/academicservices/staff/offences.pdf](http://www.ulster.ac.uk/academicservices/staff/offences.pdf)).

Within the framework of penalties, only the most severe outcomes, i.e. those leading to a recommendation for suspension or expulsion from the University, are referred to the University Disciplinary Committee. All other cases are dealt with locally by Faculties, either through the Course/Subject Committee and Board of Examiners in respect of confirmation of reduced or zero marks or by the Head of School for formal letters of reprimand and Deans for fines.

The following procedure sets out what staff should do when they suspect or find plagiarism in coursework. Academic judgement should be exercised in order to determine if, in accordance with the School’s agreed conventions, plagiarism of a very minor nature may be attributed to incorrect referencing technique and should be penalised as such, rather than as plagiarism.

2.1 Where a lecturer, supervisor or other member of staff suspects that a piece of coursework contains plagiarised material it should normally be double marked. The piece of work may also be submitted to the *Turnitin* or other detection system, if it has not already been screened as part of the submission process. The member of staff should also consult texts and other members of staff in order to ascertain if plagiarised material is present.

Staff may wish to ask the student to attend an interview to discuss the piece of work. Best practice recommends that more than one member of staff should be present when interviewing a student. A record of the meeting should be kept. Failure on the student’s part to attend for interview cannot be taken as conclusive proof of plagiarism, although this should be noted on the student’s file.

Where plagiarism is still suspected but not admitted after interview (or if such an interview is deemed inappropriate) it may be necessary to have recourse to methods such as a viva to test the student’s actual knowledge and understanding. Sometimes, staff may choose to wait until a later stage in the assessment process when the student’s overall profile becomes clearer. For longer pieces of work, such as dissertations, the external examiner may be consulted if internal staff are unable to prove plagiarism.

2.2 Where a member of staff is satisfied that there is plagiarised material in a student’s work, he/she should bring this to the attention of the module co-ordinator who should inform the Course/Subject Director.

2.3 The Course/Subject Director may make such further enquiries as may be necessary. As part of this process, the student should be afforded the opportunity to provide further information to explain the occurrence, by way of an informal appeal before the Board of Examiners meets.

2.4 If it is established that plagiarism has occurred, the student should be penalised in accordance with the Framework of Penalties for Taught Programmes and the MRes. The central plagiarism register should be consulted to establish whether the student has offended previously. The student should be informed of the penalty.

2.5 For a first offence, the student should be invited to attend a formative interview, at which the student should be directed to appropriate resources on plagiarism avoidance, including the University’s online study skills resource, *Skills+*. This interview may be combined with the investigatory interview above.

2.6 After a student has received formative advice offences are cumulative and carry over from year to year. Consequently, depending on the proximity of assignments, it may be appropriate to count two or three early instances of plagiarism as one offence. If so, the penalty of a mark of zero for subsequent offences should not be implemented until this formative advice has been given to a student. However, a student who does not attend for interview (1st offence) is deemed to have received formative advice for the purpose of applying penalties.

2.7 All offences (including first offences) and action taken must be recorded on the central plagiarism register within the Student Records Information System and a note placed on the student’s file. (See below - Recording of Plagiarism Offences.)

2.8 When a student fails an assessment following the application of a penalty, the normal consequences of failure apply as set out in award regulations, in addition to any disciplinary penalty.

2.9 The student has the right of appeal as provided for in the Regulations Governing Examinations in Programmes of Study following the meeting of the Board of Examiners, or under the Ordinance on Student Discipline, as appropriate.

2.10 Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) have their own policies with regard to being informed of plagiarism offences. Students on professionally accredited programmes should therefore be made aware, at induction, that any instance of plagiarism recorded against them may be reported to their professional or other body. The PSRB should be informed as appropriate.

**Recording of plagiarism offences**

All offences must be recorded on the Central Plagiarism Register which is accessed through the Banner Student Records System. Plagiarism offences are recorded on the register by the designated member of support staff within the Faculty/School who has general responsibility for inputting information on the Student Records System. This person can query the register on behalf of academic staff. (For those staff, the plagiarism register can be accessed via <http://inb.ulster.ac.uk> [open the ‘My Banner’ folder and go to the ‘Person Comment [SPACMNT]’ folder].)

A record of plagiarism should also be documented in the student’s paper file.

Staff may find the form at Appendix 1 useful for this purpose (available from the Academic Office’s website at [www.ulster.ac.uk/academicoffice/Documents&Forms.htm), I](http://www.ulster.ac.uk/academicoffice/Documents&Forms.htm),%20%20%20I)t can also be passed to the member of staff responsible for entering the information on the register.

As inclusion on the plagiarism register is not a penalty per se, records of offences are not removed from the record. If a student withdraws from one programme and enrols on another, any plagiarism offences are still counted cumulatively.

While offences are not carried over from undergraduate study to postgraduate study, any information regarding plagiarism offences by students who have completed their undergraduate study at the University will still be held on the student’s file and may be supplied as part of a reference to inform a postgraduate admission decision, but should not be taken into account in dealing with plagiarism following enrolment on the postgraduate course.

The register is used for monitoring plagiarism in the University and contributes to the analysis made by Faculties and the Research Degrees Committee for their annual reports to the Learning and Teaching Committee.

**3. Guidance for Staff**

Each Faculty/School is expected to discuss and agree its interpretation of the University’s policy in light of subject conventions to ensure a common understanding and consistent application of policy and procedure, and to consider how it will deal with such matters as minor occurrences in small pieces of work. It should ensure that staff are aware of and apply the policy and follow the procedure. The framework allows scope for academic judgement. When, in the academic judgement of staff and taking account of the Faculty/School’s agreed approach, the plagiarism is of a very minor nature and may be attributed to incorrect referencing techniques, it may be penalised as such, in accordance with the assessment criteria, rather than as plagiarism.

The topic of plagiarism is discussed in the University’s Assessment Handbook where a range of resources is identified.

**Information for students**

Course/subject teams should consider the adequacy of their current arrangements for advising students on writing and referencing skills and the University’s plagiarism policy. Advice on plagiarism should include reference to the definition of plagiarism, the use of electronic detection systems, an interview if plagiarism is suspected, and the penalties which apply. The standard summary which appears in the University Student Guide is given at Appendix 2.

The following are general guidelines to good practice. It is important that an holistic approach to plagiarism is taken, striking an appropriate balance between formative and punitive measures.

* Students entering the University in first year may not be aware of what constitutes plagiarism. As new students may come with a variety of educational experience, or may be returning to learning after several years, they should receive comprehensive guidance on plagiarism and writing and referencing skills.
* The University’s definition of plagiarism should appear prominently in student literature and other resources provided, including the Course/Subject Handbook. Advice should include subject-specific guidance on plagiarism and correct referencing practices as these may vary from subject to subject;
* At induction, students should be introduced to academic life. This should include guidance which spells out exactly what constitutes plagiarism by giving subject-specific examples, as well as the consequences in relation to progression, drawing on the Framework of Penalties.
* Guidance should not be confined to the time of initial induction but should be reinforced throughout the first year, and in subsequent years.
* The VLE should also be used to disseminate information on plagiarism. Reference should be made to the University’s general study skills resource, *Skills+*.
* In setting assignments, consideration should be given to the extent to which the task set allows students scope to plagiarise. For example, the rubric of an assignment should discourage students from reusing material from their own earlier work unless they are developing a theme, e.g. from proposal to final output, or legitimately citing earlier work involving themselves.

**Turnitin**

Students formally consent to the submission of their work to electronic detection systems at enrolment. The University has a University-wide licence to use *Turnitin,* which is an internet-based application designed to assess the degree of originality in a piece of written work. *Turnitin* is fully integrated with Blackboard. The University’s Guidelines for the Use of Turnitin (2016) are available at Appendix 3.

*Turnitin* provides evidence of similarity and is not the sole means of detecting or confirming possible plagiarism. It cannot be relied on exclusively and requires academic judgement. Large plagiarised sections tend to be exposed fairly easily but other lesser material may be more difficult to detect. In some subjects, where extensive quoted material is commonly provided, the originality reports are not always useful but various filters can be engaged or disengaged and this can greatly affect the result. School and subject-specific training for staff is therefore strongly recommended.

Support for staff is provided through the Office for Digital Learning.

While use of the *Turnitin* system by academic staff is voluntary, the University strongly encourages it. It is up to the individual member of staff, in accordance with Faculty/School policy, to determine whether all work should be submitted or just a sample or suspicious work. Its use is recommended in at least some work at all levels within taught programmes. (It is used routinely for all assessment material submitted for research degrees.)

It is recognised that it is not possible to submit certain types of work to the *Turnitin* system, for example artefacts or visual images.

The University allows students to use *Turnitin* to check their work before submission.

**Collusion, contract cheating and plagiarism in examinations**

Collusion, where a student has supplied material to another student, is technically plagiarism on the part of the recipient, but not on the part of the supplier. However, both parties should be dealt with in accordance with section 2 of the disciplinary procedures for cheating (Procedures for Dealing with Reports of Alleged Offences in Connection with Examinations and Other Forms of Assessment). The plagiarism offence is recorded on the register.

‘Contract cheating’ is a process whereby students engage others to complete work on their behalf, often in return for payment. For example, students may advertise their assignment requirements on dedicated websites. Any such detected cases, as well as other offences where it is established that work has been completed by third parties, should be dealt with under section 2 of the disciplinary procedures for cheating.

Where a student is considered to have copied another student’s work in an examination, this form of plagiarism is dealt with under section 1 of the Procedures for Dealing with Reports of Alleged Offences in Connection with Examinations and Other Forms of Assessment.

AGF July 2016 (Turnitin guidance revised 2016)

APPENDIX 1

**UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER PLAGIARISM REGISTER**

**PLAGIARISM OFFENCE RECORD AND INPUT DOCUMENT**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Student’s Name |  | | |
| Registration Number |  | | |
| Undergraduate/Postgraduate  offence |  | | |
| First/second/subsequent offence |  | | |
| School |  | | |
|  |  | | |
| Module code and title |  | | |
| Module Co-ordinator |  | | |
| Type of assignment |  | | |
| Date assignment submitted |  | | |
| Date plagiarism detected |  | | |
| Date of interview |  | | |
| Interviewer(s) |  | | |
|  |  | | |
| Narrative comments and penalty imposed |  | | |
|  |  | | |
| Form completed by |  | | Date |
| Date recorded on register |  | By | |

APPENDIX 2

**UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER**

**PLAGIARISM POLICY AND PROCEDURES (TAUGHT PROGRAMMES AND MASTER OF RESEARCH)**

The University has a formal policy and procedures for dealing with offences of plagiarism in coursework. It is important that you read the following information.

DEFINITION OF PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is the act of taking or copying someone else’s work, including another student’s, and presenting it as if it were your own. Plagiarism is said to occur when ideas, texts, theories, data, created artistic artefacts or other material are presented without acknowledgement so that the person considering this work is given the impression that what they have before them is the student’s own original work when it is not. Plagiarism also occurs where a student’s own work is re-presented without being properly referenced. Plagiarism is a form of cheating and is a disciplinary offence.

Advice on proper referencing practices is given early in your course. If you are concerned about referencing techniques, please draw the matter to your Course/Subject Director so that you may receive extra advice.

STUDENT DECLARATION OF OWNERSHIP

When submitting coursework the following declaration of ownership will appear on the coursework submission sheet (or electronic equivalent):

*I declare that this is my own work and that any material I have referred to has been accurately and consistently referenced****.*** *I have read the University’s policy on plagiarism and understand the definition of plagiarism. If it is shown that material has been plagiarised, or I have otherwise attempted to obtain an unfair advantage for myself or others, I understand that I may face sanctions in accordance with the policies and procedures of the University. A mark of zero may be awarded and the reason for that mark will be recorded on my file.*

ELECTRONIC DETECTION SYSTEM

At the discretion of the module co-ordinator, coursework may be submitted to an electronic detection system in order to help ascertain if any plagiarised material is present. At enrolment you have given your consent to your work being submitted to electronic detection systems.

PLAGIARISM OFFENCES

Where a member of staff suspects that your coursework contains plagiarised material, you may be asked to attend for interview to discuss the piece of work. A record of the meeting will be kept. You may also be required to undertake an oral examination on the content of your work. If plagiarism is found to have occurred, you will be penalised in accordance with the Framework of Penalties for Plagiarism Offences in Taught Programmes and the Master of Research. A note will be placed on your file and the offence will be recorded on the central plagiarism register.

PROFESSIONAL BODIES

Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies have their own policies with regard to being informed of plagiarism offences. If your course is professionally accredited you should be aware that any instance of plagiarism recorded against you may be reported to your professional or other regulatory body.

FRAMEWORK OF PENALTIES

*Framework of Penalties for Plagiarism Offences in Taught Programmes and Master of Research.*

**FRAMEWORK OF PENALTIES FOR PLAGIARISM OFFENCES IN TAUGHT PROGRAMMES AND MASTER OF RESEARCH**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1ST OFFENCE** | **2ND OFFENCE** | **3RD OFFENCE** | **4TH OFFENCE** | **PLAGIARISM DETECTED AFTER GRADUATION** |
| Reduction in marks based on exclusion of plagiarised work.  Formative interview with module co-ordinator and/or lecturer. | Mark of zero for assignment containing plagiarism.  Interview with Head of School and/or Course/Subject Director and/or lecturer.  Formal letter of reprimand from Head of School. Copy placed on student file. | Mark of zero for assignment containing plagiarism and maximum mark of 40% (UG) or 50% (PG) for coursework element[[1]](#footnote-1).  Case referred to Dean with recommendation of reprimand and fine not exceeding the maximum amount permitted under the Ordinance on Student Discipline at the time of application of penalty.  Interview with Dean.  Formal letter of reprimand from Dean. Copy placed on student file. | Mark of zero for module.  Case referred to University Disciplinary Committee with recommendation of suspension (1 semester or 1 year as advised by Faculty) or discontinuation of studies at the University.  Outcome recorded on student file. | The award may be revoked. |

**FRAMEWORK OF PENALTIES FOR PLAGIARISM OFFENCES IN RESEARCH PROGRAMMES (EXCLUDING MRes)**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **INITIAL ASSESSMENT**  **(100 DAY VIVA)** | **CONFIRMATION ASSESSMENT** | **THESIS** | **PLAGIARISM DETECTED**  **AFTER GRADUATION** |
| Plagiarism will generally be dealt with by a verbal warning.  The student will be asked to resubmit the report.  A record may be placed on the student file.  The student may be referred to the University Disciplinary Committee. | The student will be required to resubmit the report for further assessment.  The student will be interviewed by a senior member of staff (normally the Research Institute Director or the Head of the Research Graduate School).  A record will be placed on the student file.  The student may be referred to the University Disciplinary Committee. | Examiners will be asked to examine the thesis and to make an academic judgement on it, taking into account the nature and extent of the plagiarism. If the thesis is deemed worthy of the degree, it must be resubmitted with all plagiarised material eliminated.  The student may be referred to the University Disciplinary Committee.  Depending on the extent and nature of plagiarised material in the thesis, the examiners may recommend discontinuation of studies at the University.  A record will be placed on the student file. | The award may be revoked. |

APPENDIX 3

**GUIDELINES for the use of turnitin at ulster university**

Turnitin is originality checking software and has been used to detect potential instances of plagiarism and incorrect referencing at Ulster since the early 2000s. Ulster has an institutional licence for the software, with single sign on from within Blackboard Learn.

The University’s primary focus for using the software is to support Ulster’s Plagiarism policy[[2]](#footnote-2) which states that: “It is expected that all students are educated in correct academic practice, including writing and referencing, early in their careers at the University and know what is expected of them and understand the meaning of plagiarism and its consequences”.

To support this aim - Turnitin is available to all staff and students, through Blackboard Learn integration, and should be used to:

* help improve students understanding of academic writing with the aim of reducing instances of plagiarism.
* improve student understanding of academic integrity.
* support discussions about the academic integrity of a submission.
* aid the detection of plagiarism where an individual student is suspected of plagiarism.

A secondary use of Turnitin, which has and continues to become increasingly popular, is for the Electronic Management of Assessment. Turnitin’s Grademark functionality supports online annotation, online marking, reusable comments, audio feedback and digital feedback.

These guidelines set out how Ulster staff use the service and include recommendations to support academic staff and students who use the service.

1. At Ulster University Turnitin is primarily used to encourage students to improve their academic practice.
2. Turnitin is integrated with Blackboard Learn and is available in all modules. Turnitin should be accessed through Blackboard Learn for single sign-on and ease of use.
3. It is acknowledged that there are specialised, subject specific, assignment types which Turnitin cannot check for originality; for example specialist binary file types, graphics, animations, video and non digital artefacts. Ulster staff will therefore apply judgement to decide if Turnitin is appropriate for individual assessments.
4. Ulster staff will be open and transparent when checking students’ work. If an originality report is to be generated and reviewed by the academic team, it will be clearly indicated in the Turnitin submission area and module handbook.
5. There may be occasions when it is necessary to generate a Turnitin originality report to assist in the identification of plagiarised work as part of a formal disciplinary process. In these circumstances, academic staff are permitted to submit papers on behalf of the students.
6. Turnitin is not a substitute for academic judgement on student submissions. Text matching indicated by Turnitin should be used as an indicator and a particular percentage value does not prove instances of plagiarism. The text matches identified in an Originality Report must be reviewed, and judgement applied, to determine:
   1. sources that can be excluded
   2. proper referencing and citation in accordance with University requirements
   3. common terminology in the discipline
   4. the nature of the submission
7. Turnitin will be made available to students, prior to final submission, permitting multiple submissions to check their assignments throughout their course of study. A separate Turnitin submission box (not submitted to the UK repository) should be available for this purpose.
8. Turnitin matches against its database material, this is not guaranteed to identify all instances of potentially plagiarised text.
9. All students should be advised that their work may be made available to third parties (such as Turnitin) for business workflows such as external examining, quality assurance and originality checking.
10. Academic staff should bulk download and back up submissions locally and once marked bulk download and back up any annotated submissions.
11. There may be occasions, beyond Ulster’s control, when Turnitin may be unavailable due to technical reasons. Downtime is rare and normally short in duration. As marking is often a time critical process, it is advised that local backups of your assignments are created for business continuity purposes.
12. If Turnitin is unavailable during submission deadlines, assignment extensions will be permitted until the service is restored. Turnitin settings should be amended to facilitate later submission or a separate submission box can be set up to accept late submissions.
13. The Office for Digital Learning will endeavour to communicate downtime through available channels – all student emails, Blackboard announcements and Twitter. Academic staff are encouraged to use module specific communication channels to notify students of the downtime.
14. If Turnitin is unavailable and you need an alternative submission method there are other options available:
    1. Blackboard Assignment tool
    2. Paper submission
    3. Email submission
15. If Turnitin is unavailable and you need to mark assignments offline, you have three options
    1. Use the iPad app – the Turnitin iPad app stores copies of assignments locally and allows you to mark offline. Marks and feedback will be transferred to Turnitin when the system is restored. You should sync assignments to the app as soon as the submission deadline has passed.
    2. If you have prepared in advance and downloaded all submissions locally you can
       1. mark assignments offline and record marks locally for transfer to Turnitin when service is restored. This process is manual and will be labour intensive.
       2. Use offline annotation tools such as Adobe Acrobat Reader, Word etc – again this process is manual and will be labour intensive.

1. ‘Assignment containing plagiarism’ means the assignment which contains the plagiarised material, and not all the assessments for the module. ‘Maximum mark for coursework element’ refers to the total aggregate percentage mark for all the pieces of coursework in the module. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 1http://www.ulster.ac.uk/academicservices/student/plagiarism.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)