ANNEX L: PROCTORS’ GUIDANCE FOR THE USE OF TURNITIN IN UNIVERSITY EXAMINATIONS

Using Turnitin for plagiarism identification and online submission of work

Turnitin is not plagiarism-detection software. It is, according to the University’s IT Services, “an electronic text matching system that can be used to find text matches between students’ submitted work and existing electronic sources, including extensive databases of electronic articles, other student assignments, and the internet”.

Boards of examiners may wish to use Turnitin as one tool in helping to identify potential cases of plagiarism. Points of guidance for this are given below. If examiners or assessors have any concern about the content of a written exercise (or about similarities between several candidates’ work), they should discuss the matter with the chair, who in turn should seek advice from the Proctors. An examiner or assessor should not decide to impose an academic penalty if intentional plagiarism is suspected, and examiners should not use a viva to follow up concerns. Any suspicions must be referred immediately to the chair and thence to the Proctors. The Proctors will normally suspend a candidate’s examination while they fully investigate such cases. The regulations relating to plagiarism and collusion can be found in Disciplinary Regulations for Candidates in Examinations (Proctors’ Regulations 1 of 2003) clauses 3 – 5.

1. Boards of examiners first need to decide whether they want to submit all examined work to Turnitin; randomly-selected samples; or specific pieces where initial marking has thrown up concerns. Candidates need to be advised about the procedure to be followed. This can be done via the examination conventions, course handbook, or other specific communication to candidates from the chair.

2. Special subject regulations need to be changed so that candidates are required to submit electronic copies of their work (in almost all cases, in addition to hard copies). The regulations need to say when, where, and how electronic copies are submitted. Ideally, electronic copies should be submitted on CD-ROM or memory-stick, along with paper copies of work, to the Examination Schools. The electronic and paper copies must have identical content. Where work is to be randomly or selectively screened, these regulations might be expressed in terms of candidates being required to provide electronic copies promptly on request (instead of submitting these along with hard copies).

3. Online submission of work is available via WebLearn. If the examination regulations state that candidates must submit via WebLearn they must not also request that candidates submit a hard copy. If students are requested to submit a hard copy and an electronic copy, this electronic copy should be in the form of a CD-ROM or memory stick. This option is only available to departments who already have this procedure in place. Departments wishing to start using electronic submission must use WebLearn.

4. Users of Turnitin (for submitting papers and reviewing Originality Reports) should make use of the training and support provided by IT Services. Turnitin can be used either directly (via the TurnitinUK website, for which an instructor account is required), or via the Assignments tool in WebLearn. Use of Turnitin on examined material (essays, reports, dissertations, theses) by individuals who have not undertaken training is strongly discouraged, as misuse of the software could compromise a later disciplinary investigation by the Proctors.
Training courses include: Turnitin Fundamentals, and Interpreting originality reports using Turnitin (See the list of courses under 'Plagiarism' at: courses.it.ox.ac.uk/). Before using Turnitin for examined work, it is important that users learn how to carry out the basic software tasks, like how to submit work in such a way that the software does not report ‘matches’ of text which is indented or included in quotation marks; and how to analyse a report so as not to become too concerned about a high Similarity Index which, on inspection, actually consists of a large number of trivial matches. IT Services provide a staff support site in WebLearn (weblearn.ox.ac.uk/portal/hierarchy/info/plag) and termly meetings of the Oxford University Turnitin User Group, where issues and questions about the service can be raised. The Turnitin User Group provides a forum for dissemination of best practice and experience in using the tools in an Oxford context. For further information, see [IT Services] About Turnitin (www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/turnitin/), or contact turnitin@it.ox.ac.uk.

5. Candidates whose work is being screened or might be screened need to certify that the electronic copies of their work are identical to the hard copies. It is not essential to obtain individual approval for screening of work, but it is prudent to make students aware that electronic copies will be or might be screened (especially if the work is to be added to the Turnitin database). This can be covered by a subject-specific statement on the Declaration form which candidates submit. The sample declaration of authorship form is available from www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/skills/plagiarism.
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>Color Icon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0%--24%</td>
<td>Blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%--49%</td>
<td>Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50%--74%</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75%--100%</td>
<td>Orange</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 the 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 websites, 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.