

University of Birmingham

Revisions to the Code of Practice on Plagiarism

Topic and purpose of the paper

- 1 APRC is requested to **consider** and, if thought appropriate, **approve** a number of revisions to the Code of Practice on Plagiarism as summarised in this paper and included in full in Appendix 1, to take effect from the academic session 2011/12. The existing Code of Practice is attached in Appendix 2 for comparison purposes.

Proposal Outline

- 2 It is proposed that section 4 of the existing Code (Initial Procedure) and section 5 (Plagiarism Interviews) are revised to allow for one single plagiarism meeting, thus removing the requirement for an initial meeting followed by a plagiarism interview.
- 3 It is proposed that a new penalty is added to section 7 (Penalties for Moderate Plagiarism) to allow Schools to request a re-submission of an assignment for marking and capping at the pass mark. In addition requests have been made for penalty 7.1.1 (d) to be removed (allowing resubmission for marking as a first attempt).

Background and consultation

- 4 Requests for revisions to the initial procedure (Code of Practice section 4) were first raised at the Plagiarism Forum in November 2010. A small working group was subsequently set up to discuss potential changes and formulate a process that would be less time consuming and less prone to duplication. The working group consisted of representation from each College and also from the Guild of Students. Proposals from the group were fed back to the March 2011 meeting of the Plagiarism Forum and endorsed by the members present. The working group discussed many options for revising the initial procedure and concluded that a simplification of the procedure was paramount. Thus a single plagiarism meeting has been recommended.
- 5 Penalties were raised as an issue at the last Plagiarism Forum in March 2011. School plagiarism contacts made a particular request that a penalty allowing a student to resubmit a piece of work to be marked and capped at the pass mark should be re-instated. It was also felt that any reference to removal of plagiarised sections for resubmission for marking as a first attempt should be removed from the Code. This was perceived as an unfair

advantage for students allowing another attempt to gain an uncompromised mark (as currently reflected in penalty 7.1.1 d).

- 6 As part of the consultation process Legal Services were invited to scrutinise draft revisions and comment on the proposals. Following a review of the proposals Legal Services had significant involvement in further re-drafting and in particular looking at the right of appeal in plagiarism cases.
- 7 The current right of appeal (7.2) allows a student to submit an appeal in accordance with the Code of Practice on Primary Appeals Procedure, based on a procedural irregularity or new evidence. Legal Services carefully considered how appropriate the Primary Appeal Procedure is for cases of plagiarism, and felt that it did not really allow for a challenge against a penalty. The Primary Appeals Procedure is heavily weighted towards the consideration of mitigations processes, which are not relevant for cases of plagiarism.
- 8 Initially the working group suggested that if a student rejects a penalty for moderate plagiarism they should be referred to a College Misconduct Committee for consideration as a non summary offence in accordance with the Code of Practice for Misconduct and Fitness to Practise Committee. Again, this was not felt to be a legally appropriate route and was viewed to be unduly harsh for a student accused of moderate rather than serious plagiarism.
- 9 After much consideration and input from Legal Services it was concluded that a route of review should be put forward as the most viable and appropriate option for students wishing to challenge the handling and outcome of their case. However, this is not proposed as a next step for students simply unhappy with their penalty. There must be adequate reason for a request for review and the Head of School (or nominee) will carry the authority to reject a request if it is presented with insufficient grounds. The full right of review is set out in section 8 of the revised Code (Appendix 1). The working group were consulted by email on the recommendation from Legal Services for a route of review.

Specific changes set out in the Code and arguments to support proposals

- 10 As a result of the revisions suggested for the initial procedure and plagiarism interviews, the Code has needed re-ordering to accommodate the new procedure. Much of the original text has been reused where appropriate to retain the familiarity of the Code. The Code will subsequently read as follows:

	Title	Change	Summary
1	Principles	No change	No change
2	Guidance	No change	No change
3	Detection of Plagiarism	Inclusion of paragraphs 3.4 and 3.5 (formally 4.1 and 4.2 in original Code). Text remains the same.	Re-numbered
4	The Plagiarism	New section	New

	Meeting		
5	Categorisation of Plagiarism	Now a separate section, text remains the same.	Re-numbered
6	<i>Consequences of a finding that plagiarism has occurred</i>	<i>New section including much of the original content from the section formally titled 'outcome of Plagiarism Interviews'</i>	Revised with new title
7	Penalties for Moderate Plagiarism	Revised. New penalty added (7.1.1 (a), other penalties re-ordered as a result. Penalty formally referred to as 7.1.1 (d) removed	New penalty inserted (appendix 1, 7.1.1 (a)) Penalty 7.1.1 (d) removed
8	Review	New section	New
9	Group-based Work or Study and Collusion	No change	No change

- 11 The proposal for one 'Plagiarism Meeting'
The current requirement for an initial meeting, followed by a plagiarism interview for cases of serious plagiarism or moderate non-summary offences, was felt by the working group to constitute a duplication of process. Requests were made to remove the requirement to hold an initial meeting with a student suspected of plagiarism. Instead, the group proposed that all cases of plagiarism (low, moderate and serious) could be dealt with by one plagiarism meeting, to be referred to as the 'Plagiarism Meeting'. The group also felt uncomfortable with the perceived informal element of the initial meeting and conveyed a preference for a more formalised single meeting. Thus, sections 4 and 5 of the Code have been revised and re-written to accommodate the single meeting, resulting in a new section, 'The Plagiarism Meeting' (Appendix 1, section 4).
- 12 Penalties for Moderate Plagiarism
Following specific requests from Forum members, the following penalty has been added to the revised Code:

'Resubmission of the assignment in question, with the resultant mark being capped at the lowest possible grade that would signify a minimum pass within the relevant pass structure' (Appendix 1, 7.1.1 a)
- 13 Members of the Forum expressed a request for penalty 7.1.1 (d) of the existing Code to be removed:

'the work may be submitted for marking as for the first time following removal of all plagiarised sections and their replacement with legitimate text'.

The working group felt this penalty was too lenient and constituted an unfair advantage to students who had been through the plagiarism process as a first attempt placed them in the same category as students who had not been found to plagiarise.

14 Review

In lieu of a Primary Appeal it is proposed that a student may request a review of their case. A student may request a review of:

- a) The finding that plagiarism has occurred;
- b) The assignment of a category of plagiarism;
- c) The penalty applied to a finding of moderate plagiarism.

The grounds for requesting a review are set out in paragraph 8.1 of the revised Code and are as follows:

- a) That there has been an administrative irregularity or procedural failure.
- b) That new evidence is available which was unknown to the student at the time of the Plagiarism Meeting.
- c) That the categorisation assigned or penalty applied is disproportionate.

The full right of review and associated procedure is set out fully in section 8 of the proposed Code. A review will take the form of a fresh Plagiarism Meeting to be conducted by 2 new members of staff. The Head of School carries the authority to accept or reject a request for a review based on the grounds presented by the student.

- 15 It was agreed at the Plagiarism Forum in March 2011 that the Student Conduct and Appeals Section will provide template letters to accompany the revised process. These will be written and circulated prior to the start of the 2011/12 academic year.

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