UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

CODE OF PRACTICE ON PLAGIARISM

Index of points

1. Principles
2. Guidance
3. Methods for distinguishing plagiarism
4. Determining whether plagiarism has taken place
5. Categorisation of plagiarism and available penalties

1. Principles

1.1 These procedures are concerned with how the University deals with student plagiarism, that is the un-attributed (or incorrectly attributed) use of existing source material in academic work submitted for assessment. More detailed information on what constitutes plagiarism and why it is so damaging to a University is contained in the separate document "Guidance for Students on Plagiarism".

1.2 Plagiarism may arise in a number of differing ways within an academic context, including the copying of the work of another student, the reproduction of course materials, notes or data, the cutting and pasting of material derived from the World Wide Web and the direct transcription of the contents of a textbook or journal. In each of these examples, and in general with plagiarism, the problem will lie with the lack of proper referencing to the source material being used.

1.3 Plagiarism will, in most instances, be dealt with at principal academic unit level. A principal academic unit may do one of the following:

1.3 .1 counsel the student and warn as to their future conduct;

1.3 .2 require the work to be resubmitted for a capped mark;

1.3 .3 adjust the mark for the work to an appropriate level (including 0);

1.3 .4 adjust the mark for the relevant module to an appropriate level (including 0);

1.3 .5 refer the case for consideration by the College Misconduct or College Fitness to Practise Committee.

1.4 Each principal academic unit will have in place a nominated member of staff (the Plagiarism Contact) who will serve as a source of advice on plagiarism for staff and as a means whereby information on this topic may be disseminated effectively.

1.5 In the most severe cases (including instances of serial plagiarism), the principal academic unit may decide to refer an allegation of plagiarism to the College Misconduct or College Fitness to Practise Committee.

1.6 At all stages of the above processes, the University will observe the principles of natural justice.

1.7 The University will provide guidance drawing attention to the responsibility of each individual student to ensure that the referencing conventions applicable to study at Birmingham are understood and acted upon at all times.

1.8 The University will ensure that students have access to the appropriate levels of support, counselling and advice and that staff receive regular briefings and support.

2. Guidance

2.1 Each principal academic unit should distribute written guidance to students on what constitutes plagiarism, particularly within a subject-specific context, and on how to reference work properly. This will normally consist of the University document "Guidance for Students on Plagiarism", supplemented by subject or programme-specific information. Ideally, local guidance should be provided as paper copy so that students may retain this for easy reference, but principal academic units may place this guidance on their web site provided it is emphasised to students that they must regularly consult this when preparing assignments.

2.2 Particular emphasis must be placed on the provision of guidance during the induction process. This should then be reinforced during the year as appropriate.

2.3 The University has adopted a standard referencing convention based on the Harvard system. Where a principal academic unit wishes to make use of an alternative referencing system it may do so, but must ensure that all students submitting assignments for the relevant modules are made aware of the local referencing standard.

2.4 Principal academic units should seek to develop students' referencing skills throughout the duration of their studies.

2.5 Use of Learning Agreements by principal academic units is generally considered to be good practice as these provide a mutually beneficial framework for staff and for students. Where a principal academic unit makes use of a formal Learning Agreement on the avoidance of plagiarism, students should be advised specifically of the requirements relating to this, prior to signature.

2.6 Principal academic units may also consider the routine use of assignment cover sheets within which students certify that their submitted work has not been plagiarised. These can provide a useful reinforcement of the University's position with regard to proper referencing.

2.7 Where a programme makes use of group-based work or study, any methodology to be used for the purposes of ultimately disaggregating the individual and the collective inputs for assessment purposes must be specified in advance. This should be done in respect of each participant by the relevant member of staff. Particular attention should be paid to ensuring that all students involved understand the boundaries between legitimate collaboration and plagiarism.

3. Methods for distinguishing plagiarism

3.1 The University reserves the right to use all means at its disposal to detect plagiarism where it arises. All submitted work will be liable to scrutiny in order to identify any plagiarised element

3.2 Where a principal academic unit uses plagiarism detection software, it will advise the students concerned in advance as to how this process will be undertaken and to the particular submission requirements (if any) involved.

3.3 Where a system of software detection selected by a principal academic unit indicates that individual student permission should be obtained, the principal academic unit will normally be expected to seek this. Permission may be both requested and granted by electronic means.

3.4 Where, in relation to 3.3 above, a student withholds their permission, the reasons for their objection should be set down in writing for consideration by the principal academic unit.

3.5 Principal academic units must ensure that the appropriate procedures are in place to review, monitor and quality-assure reports generated by any software detection system prior to any related referral for further action.

4. Determining whether plagiarism has taken place

4.1 Where a member of staff considers that a student's work contains plagiarised material, they will first determine the level of seriousness. A number of factors will be taken into account in this initial assessment, including:

4.1 .1 the proportion of the assignment affected;

4.1 .2 the academic level;

4.1 .3 any previous recorded instance of plagiarism.

4.1 Advice should be sought where necessary from the principal academic unit's nominated Plagiarism Contact (see 1.4 above) and staff are encouraged to discuss suspected cases with the contact.

4.2 Staff are expected normally to deal sympathetically with low-level plagiarism (see 5.1.1), particularly during the first year of an undergraduate programme. The provision of specific guidance at tutorial level and without punitive sanction may be considered to be a possible response to most first offence plagiarism. Nevertheless, plagiarism may be dealt with punitively at any time where it is considered to have been either:

.1 deliberate, on the balance of probabilities, and therefore an attempt to deceive; or

.2 at a point where it is reasonable to expect the student to have learnt the appropriate referencing skills; or

.3 when the student has received earlier guidance with regard to the attribution of source material.

4.3 Where a member of academic staff considers that the instance of plagiarism is such that it is likely to be dealt with punitively, they should consult with the principal academic unit's Plagiarism Contact and a joint decision reached on any further action. The following steps should be taken as soon as possible if the joint decision is that further action is necessary:

4.3 .1 The student should be informed in writing (with a copy sent to the student's University email address where appropriate) of the allegation of plagiarism that has arisen. The letter to the student should clearly

indicate that an instance of proven, extensive plagiarism is a potentially serious matter that could ultimately affect their position as a student at the University. In addition, the letter should invite the student to lodge a response to the allegation within five working days of receipt (although an appropriate adjustment will be necessary if the letter is being sent abroad). The letter should ensure that the student is aware that their response may include a written explanation and that the response must indicate whether the student agrees to attend for interview. Any interview to be held should then normally take place within ten working days of the date of the original notification letter;

4.3 .2 Where a student does not wish to, or is unable, to attend an interview, the principal academic unit must use an appropriate means of communicating with the student, in lieu of an interview, in order to obtain a detailed response concerning the allegation of plagiarism. For example, email and written correspondence are both suitable methods as these provide a permanent record of the points raised by both sides. Principal academic units should not discuss the allegation by telephone with the student concerned;

4.3 .3 Any interview should be conducted jointly by two members of staff. This may include the Plagiarism Contact, the member of staff who identified the instance of suspected plagiarism or another member of staff with experience in this area. One person should take the notes of the meeting. During the interview, the reasons for suspecting that plagiarism has taken place should be given and the student invited to explain their position and, if necessary, to refute the allegation. The student may be accompanied by a "friend" if they wish (i.e. another member of the University, including the Guild of Students);

4.3 .4 If the student, at the conclusion of the interview conducted under the terms of 4.3.3 maintains that no offence has taken place, the assignment in question should be referred for review to a further member of staff, who will have access to all documentation involved in the case, and who shall confer with the Plagiarism Contact and the member of staff who identified the instance of suspected plagiarism;

4.3 .5 If the result of this review determines that no significant plagiarism has occurred, then no further action should be taken. If the review confirms that, based on the academic judgement of the balance of probabilities involved, plagiarism has taken place, the principal academic unit should then proceed to place the case in the appropriate category (as laid out at 5.1);

4.3 .6 The notes of any interview should be retained on file by the principal academic unit and a copy of these forwarded to the student;

4.3 .7 In those cases where the student indicates they wish to attend an interview but when the suspected plagiarism arises at a point where the student is unable, for good reason, to attend – this is likely to be late in the Summer term or during the Summer vacation – then any decision on progression or degree outcome must be suspended until the student is available to be interviewed and a position reached as to whether there is a case to answer;

4.3 .8 Where an allegation of plagiarism involves group-based work or study (see also 2.7 above), any interview should normally be conducted with all members of the group present if it has not been possible in advance to identify the individual student(s) concerning whom there are particular concerns. Having investigated the circumstances, the principal academic unit would expect then to be in a position to be able to differentiate between members of the Group and to be able to avoid the imposition of a group penalty;

4.3 .9 If a student fails, or refuses, to respond in writing to a letter sent under 4.3.1 within five working days of receipt (or pro rata reasonable adjustment if abroad) or fails to attend an interview arranged under 4.3.1, the assignment in question should be referred for review to a further member of staff, who will have access to all documentation involved in the case, and who shall confer with the Plagiarism Contact and the member of staff who identified the instance of suspected plagiarism.

5. Categorisation of plagiarism and available penalties

5.1 If, after having considered the student's response or the result of any review conducted in respect of 4.3.4 or 4.3.9, the principal academic unit decides that plagiarism has occurred, it must place the case in one of the following categories based on the exercise of academic judgement and experience in the principal academic unit:

5.1 .1 Low-level plagiarism: this category would normally be restricted to Level C studies or to the early stages of a postgraduate programme and would include any first offence (unless the extent of the plagiarism is such that categorisation at a higher level is required) amounting to inadequate referencing, inclusion of a small amount of paraphrasing or very small amounts of un-attributed or incorrectly attributed copying;

(Categorisation of the offence at this level would not result in the use of direct punitive marking, although capped resubmission – see 5.2 below – may be appropriate where it is considered desirable to reinforce proper citation methods).

5.1 .2 Mid-level plagiarism: this category would normally include any general second offence (unless the extent of the plagiarism is such that categorisation at the Serious level is required), first use of limited "copy and paste" from the Web, first instance of limited, colluded peer copying, auto plagiarism (submission of an assignment identical or closely related to one submitted at an earlier point and for which a mark has been received) or a moderate inclusion of un-attributed or incorrectly attributed copying.

(Categorisation of the offence at this level would result in the use of direct punitive marking. Normally, this would involve a reduction of the mark to 0% for either the assignment or for the relevant module respectively).

It should be noted that repetition of plagiarism would normally increase the respective level of seriousness. It is therefore essential that principal academic units record all instances of plagiarism once it has been agreed that action is required (see 4.3.4 above).

5.1 .3 Serious plagiarism: this category would include any serial offending not appropriate to being dealt with as Mid-level plagiarism (regardless of its extent), as well as any occurrence of extensive and significant quantities of un-attributed or incorrectly attributed copying. It would also include any use of essay sites that involve a commercial transaction and the production of academic work by a third party for gain, in both cases regardless of actual extent. There is also an expectation that plagiarism located within the research element eg the dissertation, project or thesis of a postgraduate programme (both taught and research) would be placed within this category, unless the extent of the plagiarism was considered to be minimal (Automatic reference to the Director of Academic Services: see 5.3 below).

NB Fabrication of data is not dealt with as a plagiarism-related offence, but is covered by the Examination Irregularity regulations.

5.2 Where the case has been categorised as Low-level or Mid-level, an appropriate penalty (where the principal academic unit wishes to apply a sanction) should be determined for eventual submission to, and approval by, the Board of Examiners. The following penalties are available to principal academic units in respect of plagiarism.

5.2 .1 For students on taught programmes of study, or students on research-based programmes of study, where the plagiarism takes place on a taught module taken as part of that programme:

(a) 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 assessment structure. For a number of courses, for example, this would be equal to a mark of 40%;

(b) the downward adjustment of the final mark for the piece of work involved to an appropriate level, including 0, but excluding the use of a negative mark;

(c) the downward adjustment of the final mark for the relevant module to an appropriate level, including 0, but excluding the use of a negative mark.

5.2 .2 For students on research-based programmes of study, the student may submit/resubmit his or her dissertation/thesis for the original qualification with the offending sections/data removed.

5.3 Where a principal academic unit has determined within the categories listed at 5.1 that the offence should be designated as Serious plagiarism, the Head of principal academic unit will refer the case to the Head of College or his duly appointed representative, who shall appoint an Investigating Officer for the case.

5.4 The Investigating Officer shall compile a report as per the Code of Practice on Procedures for Misconduct and Fitness to Practise Committees 3.2.

5.5 The case of plagiarism shall then be treated as a normal disciplinary offence,

and treated as such under the procedures in the Code of Practice on Procedures for Misconduct and Fitness to Practise Committees 3.3 onwards.