

## **Plagiarism and good academic practice: Notes for Supervisors, Directors of Studies and Tutors**

### **University guidance for staff and students**

The University's plagiarism-related policy and guidance is online at: [www.cam.ac.uk/plagiarism](http://www.cam.ac.uk/plagiarism). This includes:

#### For staff and examiners

- The General Board's requirements of Faculty Boards and equivalent bodies
- Staff guidance document for handling suspected academic misconduct
- University policy on the use of Turnitin text-matching software

#### For students

- Definition of academic misconduct
- Study skills and resources to help avoid academic misconduct

### **The role of Supervisors, Directors of Studies and Tutors**

Academic misconduct is unacceptable at any stage of a student's career so Supervisors, Directors of Studies and Tutors play a vital role in educating students about good academic practice and how to avoid academic misconduct.

#### Effective induction

Students arrive at Cambridge with a range of understandings of what constitutes academic misconduct. It is important to ensure that they all understand what is, and is not, acceptable practice at Cambridge as soon as possible.

The University's plagiarism and good academic practice website ([www.cam.ac.uk/plagiarism](http://www.cam.ac.uk/plagiarism)) features a generic statement on plagiarism, as well as related information and resources. Faculties and departments should also publish supplementary guidance about course or subject-specific referencing conventions and expectations of students. Directors of Studies and Supervisors are advised to familiarise themselves with this guidance and should also refer their students to it.

Directors of Studies are encouraged to discuss plagiarism in the context of good academic practice at initial meetings with students, to correct any misunderstandings, to direct them to further sources of information and guidance as necessary, and to discourage the use of commercial essay banks. This initial guidance should be reinforced at appropriate junctures; for example, it would be timely to reiterate the importance of good note-taking and referencing at dissertation planning meetings.

Directors of Studies are also encouraged to ensure that students understand that any work submitted for assessment may be checked via Turnitin UK text-matching software. While not all Faculties and Departments use Turnitin systematically, it is available for ad hoc checks at any point of the academic year. Further information is available on the University's plagiarism and good academic practice website, [www.cam.ac.uk/plagiarism](http://www.cam.ac.uk/plagiarism).

#### Supporting students under pressure

Directors of Studies should advise students that it is better to be open about study difficulties than to resort to plagiarism. It is important for students to recognise that supervisions are for their benefit, and that plagiarising wastes a valuable study opportunity and will make it harder for them to perform well in exams.

Independent learning is highly valued at Cambridge so students need to be encouraged to take responsibility for their learning. However, Supervisors play a vital role in ensuring that students have the necessary study skills to enable them to work effectively. They should give practical advice

about skills such as time management, especially to those students who seem to have difficulty coping under pressure. Simple measures, such as requiring students to show their working, submit early drafts, or complete timed essays, repay the time and attention involved, by encouraging good academic practice and making it far harder for students to plagiarise.

It may also be useful for Supervisors to reflect upon their own practice in the light of the pressures on students. Without compromising standards, they could consider whether their expectations of students are reasonable. For example, are deadlines feasible and, if reading lists are implausibly long, would it be better to advise the majority of students to engage properly with a sub-section of the list?

### Use of web-based sources

Students increasingly use web-based resources as sources for their work. Supervisors should recognise that students' study habits keep pace with available technologies, and be prepared to offer advice about the reliability of such sources, making academic judgements on the information found, and how to use and reference them appropriately. Supervisors should also be aware that the greater availability of materials in digital format increases the likelihood of cut-and-paste note-taking that can later be mistaken for their own words or ideas; students may need advice on note-taking skills from web-based sources.

### Designing plagiarism out of the system

Supervisors are encouraged to vary questions or projects to reduce the likelihood of students reusing work, whether their own or of former students. Setting specific questions and asking students to reflect upon how they tackled the assignment can also help to reduce opportunistic plagiarism by making it harder for students to recycle work.

As above, asking to see early drafts or plans of longer pieces of work and setting timed essays helps to ensure that students have done the work themselves. Supervisors should tell students that their work might be checked if plagiarism is suspected.

### Commercial organisations and essay banks

Students may be tempted to write for commercial organisations or to submit their work to essay banks for financial gain. Directors of Studies are encouraged to remind students that this undermines the academic system, and that working on their own degree would be a far better investment than the short-term (albeit lucrative) profit gained by selling work to such companies. Students who have serious financial concerns should be directed to alternative sources of support – they should not need to resort to selling their work.

### Reporting plagiarism and suspected plagiarism

Proven cases of plagiarism can have serious consequences for a student's academic and subsequent professional career. If Supervisors have suspicions about the originality of a student's work they are advised to discuss their concerns with the student, and then to report the matter to the student's Director of Studies and Tutor, either via supervision reports or directly. The Tutor should liaise with the Senior Tutor to discuss how best to deal with the case. The severity of the disciplinary proceedings will vary according to the type of plagiarism, the stage of the student in their academic career, and the context of the plagiarism.

For non-assessed work an informal warning from the Tutor or Senior Tutor may suffice. However, subsequent cases of plagiarism should be treated more severely; for example, through a written warning or penalty. Suspicions of plagiarism in supervision work must be reported by the Supervisor to the College of the student concerned. Failing to report, and act upon, suspicions gives students a false sense that plagiarism is not a serious matter.

If a Supervisor alerts a Tutor to a case of suspected plagiarism in work submitted for formal assessment by the University, the Tutor should, having discussed the case with the Senior Tutor, convey their concerns in writing to the Office of Student Conduct, Complaints, and Appeals (OSCCA), who may choose to initiate the standard investigative process. Plagiarism in any work

submitted for assessment at the University constitutes use of unfair means, under the University Discipline Regulations ([Statutes and Ordinances 2019, p. 191](#), Discipline Regulation 7, and Rules of Behaviour for Current and Former Students). Plagiarism is both poor scholarship and a breach of academic integrity.

#### Academic integrity and references

Tutors should make students aware that some prospective employers, especially in professions such as Law, specifically ask academic referees whether the student has committed plagiarism. Even if specific requests of this nature are not made, proven cases of plagiarism in assessed and non-assessed work would be noted on the student's record. Students should therefore be informed that committing plagiarism may have serious professional implications as it casts doubts on the integrity of the individual's character.

#### **Document control box**

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