Investigating Plagiarism – a guide for staff

The School of Medicine accepts the policy of Leeds University on plagiarism as laid out on the University’s web site at http://www.ldu.leeds.ac.uk/plagiarism/ and wherever possible uses the procedures, definitions and policies listed on the Office of Academic Appeal and Regulation site http://www.leeds.ac.uk/secretariat/student_cases.html.

This document describes how a member of staff who suspects a student has plagiarized a piece of work should proceed, where they can obtain support and where they should refer any cases they feel they cannot handle themselves.

STAGE ONE – DETECTION
Most suspected cases of plagiarism are derived from two sources: 1) automated scanning of pieces of work submitted through a Turnitin enabled area of the VLE or 2) recognition of work, or of an inappropriate or inconsistent style of writing, in a piece of work marked by a member of staff, although it is not unknown for a student to inform the School about the actions of a colleague.

STAGE TWO – CONFIRMATION
Whilst it is not essential to have a Turnitin report, it is useful to produce one if one does not yet exist, or you do not have direct access to it e.g. the plagiarism was detected on marking, or the work was submitted through a module in the VLE to which you do not have access. Note that if you submit a piece of work to Turnitin which is has already seen, a match of 100% will be reported. You should only do this if you are an experienced Turnitin user and know how to exclude matches from the report. If you are unsure, contact your local Turnitin expert.

STAGE THREE – INTERPRETATION OF THE TURNITIN REPORT
This is not a simple matter. Although Turnitin produces a nice, simple numerical result, it is important to understand that a high figure does not necessarily confirm plagiarism (it can be due to unusual quoting style, or the use of a pro forma in the setting out of assessments) and that a low figure does not necessarily exclude it – if a student buys an essay from an external source, or copies from a source which has not been loaded into Turnitin, there may well be a low match. It is also important to realize that the order in which pieces of work are submitted will affect the match score; if Student A copies from Student B, the plagiarism will be noted when the second piece of work is submitted, regardless of to which student it belongs. It is therefore important to keep an open mind at this stage and to consider investigating the two students in parallel.
STAGE FOUR – RESPONSE
At this point you will have to decide whether you feel your initial suspicion of plagiarism is justified. From this point on, it is very important that the procedures recommended by the University are followed. These are described in detail on the section of the OAAR website which deals with cheating, plagiarism and fraudulent or fabricated coursework at [http://www.leeds.ac.uk/secretariat/student_cases.html](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/secretariat/student_cases.html)

If you believe the student is likely to have submitted a piece of work which has been plagiarized, you should contact the School of Medicine Plagiarism Committee (contact details are available at [http://www.medicine.leeds.ac.uk/plagiarism/](http://www.medicine.leeds.ac.uk/plagiarism/)) who will discuss the case with you. If further investigation is required, you will be invited to attend the interview with the student and kept informed of any decisions. If you cannot attend, it is important that you select an appropriately informed deputy who knows the student and the course.

STAGE FIVE – FORMAL INVESTIGATION
It is better for the student if all official contact comes from members of staff with whom they are familiar, and your unit will therefore be asked to handle all correspondence with the student and to arrange an interview in a familiar location. The Plagiarism Committee will guide you in this. Pro forma letters of invitation to interview and of the common outcomes are available from the Plagiarism Committee and use of these will help you conform to the University protocols. Although official notification must be given in writing, it is quite acceptable, and more humane, to speak to the student directly if you wish.

The investigation can be timetabled to avoid placing unnecessary burden on the student (in relation to other submission deadlines, placements etc.) but must adhere to University policy. Your knowledge of your course is vital in managing this process. University guidelines require that the student is given at least three working days’ notice. This can be in person or by e-mail but must be confirmed in writing and to allow for postal delivery it is usual to give seven days’ notice. A letter should be sent to the students registered term address, but you should consider writing to their home or placement address in addition to this if appropriate.

The meeting will be attended by at least three members of University staff1 who will form the Investigative Panel. These will include the Academic Integrity or substitute to lead the meeting, a representative of the course and a member of support staff to minute the meeting.

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1 In clinical courses, a member of NHS staff with an honorary University contract is considered to be a member of University staff for this purpose.
The location for the meeting should preferably be one with which the student is familiar. The student may bring a supporter who may talk to the student, but who should not address the Panel directly.

The Panel will explain to the student the University definition of and policy on plagiarism and will specify which piece of work has been brought to the attention of the Committee. The Panel will also present any evidence which is has gathered, including an explanation of the Turnitin report (if present).

The student is then asked to respond to the allegation of plagiarism.

If the student admits to the allegation, they will be given an opportunity to explain their actions, after which they will be asked to withdraw while the Panel considers the penalty.

If the student denies the allegation, the Panel will then ask them to explain why their actions do not constitute plagiarism and, if necessary, further questions relevant to the investigation.

At the end of this process, the student should again be asked if they admit to the allegation.

If the student now admits to the allegation and this is their first offence, they will be asked to withdraw while the Panel considers the penalty.

If the student still denies the allegation, OR this is a second or subsequent offence OR the Panel regards the offence as particularly serious, the student should be informed that the case will be referred to the Committee on Application. The student can then be dismissed. The Panel will decide an appropriate penalty to recommend to the Committee on Application and the chair of the Panel will make this recommendation in writing. If the student has accepted the allegation and it was a first offence, then a report of the outcome of the meeting must be sent to the student within 14 days, and this letter should also be copied immediately to the Office of Academic Appeal and Regulation. A copy should also be kept in the students permanent file (and the student should be informed of this) so that any future repeat offence can be recognized as such. If the student has not accepted the allegation or the case has been referred to the Committee on Application, a letter confirming this should be sent to the students registered address within 14 days. This letter should NOT describe the penalty recommended to the Committee on Application. All further investigation will be handled by the Committee on Application and in the interim the student should return to their normal duties on the course as if they had been absent from the assessment i.e. they may continue to attend teaching or assessments but cannot progress until the matter is settled by the Committee on Application.
STAGE SIX – MOVING ON

It is important to support students after the investigation has concluded (or while it continues), regardless of the outcome. If the structure of the course means that you are unlikely to have future direct contact with the student, you should make sure that the appropriate other agencies are involved – personal or course tutors, or the Student Support Team for undergraduate students (http://www.leeds.ac.uk/medicine/support/). Most students will never repeat their offence if given appropriate support, education and guidance.

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