

Procedures for investigating plagiarism in research degree work prior to, and within, the submission for a research degree

A Procedure when plagiarism is suspected in a research proposal

The University has approved the following procedures for investigating plagiarism in research degree work. The following sections of the procedure refer to different stages in a research degree candidature.

Faculties/Schools which require the submission of a research proposal or piece of written work with the application for study may wish to use the following procedure to investigate possible cases of plagiarism:

1. Where it is suspected that a research proposal, submitted in support of an application for study, may include material which has been plagiarised the Postgraduate Research Tutor should be informed immediately¹
2. The Postgraduate Research Tutor¹ should appoint an appropriate specialist within the School/Faculty to undertake a screening to determine the extent of the plagiarism (if any). The investigation may include submission of the work to the plagiarism detection service TurnitinUK.
3. Following the School/Faculty level investigation and where it is then determined by the Head of School that the research proposal does include material which has been plagiarised, the School/Faculty should reject the application for study.
4. The School/Faculty should notify Research Student Administration of the outcome of the School's investigation so that a central record of numbers of cases may be held together with information about the specific individual concerned.

B Procedure following an allegation of plagiarism in a transfer report

5. Where it is identified, in advance of the transfer interview, that a transfer report may include material which has been plagiarised the Postgraduate Research Tutor¹ should be informed immediately. The Postgraduate Research Tutor¹ should appoint an appropriate specialist within the School to undertake an investigation to determine the extent of the plagiarism (if any) which should, where possible, include submission of the work through the TurnitinUK detection service.
6. Following the School/Faculty level investigation, where the allegation of plagiarism can not be dismissed the Transfer Panel members must be informed and arrangements then made for the transfer interview to take place and the candidate be given the opportunity to defend the work.
7. The transfer assessment panel should broach the allegation of plagiarism with the student at the transfer interview. If the student admits the allegation, the student should be required to withdraw from the meeting and the panel must determine the seriousness of the offence and determine the appropriate penalty from (8) below. Where the student denies the allegation, the student should be required to withdraw from the meeting and the panel must reach a decision on

¹ Or the Head of School where the Postgraduate Research Tutor has identified the case.

the extent to which the report contains plagiarised material (if any) and determine the appropriate course of action from (8) below.

8. The School may make the following recommendations following the meeting:
 - (i) Recommend transfer to a definite degree category (where the panel is satisfied that no plagiarism has occurred);
 - (ii) Recommend deferral of the transfer decision for a period² to give the candidate the opportunity to revise and resubmit the work for reconsideration by the panel (where the panel determines that the work has been plagiarised but considers that it is a first, minor offence³).⁴
 - (iii) Refer the case for further investigation by the Graduate Board (where the panel determines that a deliberate act of serious plagiarism has occurred and does not feel that option 8(ii) is appropriate, or where it is not the first offence by the candidate);
 - (iv) Refer the case for further investigation by the Graduate Board (where the panel is unable to reach a conclusion on the allegation of plagiarism).
9. Where an allegation of plagiarism is identified immediately prior to the transfer interview, or suspicion of plagiarism emerges during discussion with the candidate during the transfer interview, the panel should continue with the interview and raise the suspicion of plagiarism with the candidate, who should be given the opportunity to defend the work.
10. If the student admits the allegation then the panel must determine the seriousness of the offence and agree the appropriate penalty from (8) above.
11. If the student denies the allegation the panel should defer decision on the upgrade until an investigation has been undertaken. The Postgraduate Research Tutor⁵ should be informed, and an appropriate specialist within the School appointed to undertake an investigation which should, where possible, include submission of the work to the plagiarism detection service TurnitinUK.
12. Following the investigation, the Head of the School must reach a decision on the allegation of plagiarism and determine the appropriate recommendation from (8) above.

Referral to the Graduate Board (see also Section E below)

13. The details of the allegation, plus any supporting evidence obtained as part of the local investigation, must be referred to the Senior Administrator in Research Student Administration for further investigation by the Graduate Board where the panel:
 - (i) is unable to reach a conclusion on the allegation of plagiarism; or
 - (ii) determines that a deliberate act of serious plagiarism has occurred.

² The permitted period of deferral does not extend beyond the first 18 months of a full-time PhD candidature or beyond the first 30 months of a part-time PhD candidature. Similar arrangements apply to most other doctoral programmes.

³ For example as a result of poor scholarship, referencing etc.

⁴ If upon resubmission the panel determines that the work still contains material which has been plagiarised the School should forward the case to the Graduate Board for investigation;

⁵ Or the Head of School where the Postgraduate Research Tutor has identified the case

C Procedure following an allegation of plagiarism in non-assessed work during a research degree candidature

14. Where plagiarism is identified in other, non-assessed work (for example in the submission of draft chapters to the supervisor) this should be treated by Schools as a learning and teaching issue, rather than a disciplinary matter. As the work is in draft format and is not a submission for assessment it is not appropriate for a disciplinary penalty to be imposed. The Supervisor should inform the Postgraduate Research Tutor and the School/Faculty should seek to resolve the matter through advice, research training and support for the student.
15. Where repeated instances of plagiarism in drafts of work are identified a written warning should be sent to the student by the Postgraduate Research Tutor. This should include a warning that the thesis will be failed should any plagiarised material be identified in the thesis submitted for examination. The student should be asked to sign and return the letter to confirm that s/he understands the implications. A copy of the letter should be sent to Research Student Administration for the student's file.⁶

D Procedure following an allegation of plagiarism in a thesis submitted for examination

16. Where the examiners of a research degree thesis identify evidence of plagiarism within a thesis submission, the examiners should proceed to/continue with the oral examination and broach their suspicions of plagiarism fully with the candidate who should be given the opportunity to defend the work.
17. Following the oral examination the examiners may:
 - (i) Recommend the award of the degree, or other appropriate recommendation (where the examiners are satisfied that no plagiarism has been committed);
 - (ii) Recommend that the thesis be referred for resubmission (where the examiners conclude that an act of plagiarism has been committed but are satisfied that it is a minor offence as a result of poor scholarship);
 - (iii) Recommend that the thesis be failed due to a lack of originality (where it is the conclusion of the examiners that a serious or deliberate act of plagiarism has been committed);
 - (iv) Forward the case for further investigation by the Graduate Board (where the examiners are unable to reach a conclusion on whether an act of plagiarism has been committed).
18. Should the examiners feel that it is not appropriate for the oral examination to proceed the details of the allegation must be forwarded, with further details, to the Senior Administrator in Research Student Administration for further investigation by the Graduate Board.

E Graduate Board investigation of an allegation that work submitted within a transfer report or thesis submission has been plagiarised

⁶ Where repeated cases of plagiarism in drafts of work are identified the Group recommends that it should be mandatory for the thesis submission to be checked through TurnitinUK.

19. Following the receipt of an allegation of plagiarism in either B or D above or after the award of the research degree the Chair of the Graduate Board will:
 - (a) require one of the members of the Board to undertake preliminary screening of the allegation and to report to the Chair of the Board within a period of four weeks on whether the allegations merit further consideration;
 - (b) request the Academic Registrar to inform the individual against whom the allegation has been made and to indicate that one of the members of the Graduate Board has been asked to advise on whether the allegations merit further investigation;
 - (c) if the member of the Board undertaking the preliminary screening advises that further investigation of the allegations is required, appoint a Panel consisting of three members of the Board or of the Groups of the Board, to undertake an investigation.
20. If a Panel is appointed, the Academic Registrar will notify the respondent of the allegation in writing and invite him or her to respond to the allegation, normally within three weeks.
21. The Panel shall determine its own detailed procedure. Specifically, it may:
 - (a) interview the respondent, the initiator and any other parties it chooses
 - (b) widen the scope of the investigation if it considers that necessary
 - (c) seek evidence from other parties
22. If the Panel's preliminary conclusion is that the allegation is upheld, it shall inform the respondent, giving reasons for its view and providing appropriate supporting evidence; the Panel shall offer the respondent the opportunity to provide further explanation and evidence for its consideration.
23. The Panel may continue its enquiries until it reaches a final conclusion on the allegations. A report will then be forwarded to the Chair of the Graduate Board.
24. The Chair of the Graduate Board will then ask the Board to determine the action (if any) to be taken. Such action may include:
 - (a) dismissing the allegations of plagiarism;
 - (b) recommending termination of the candidature;
 - (c) recommending that the examination of the thesis proceed to the viva, in respect of an allegation under D.17(iv) or D.18 above
 - (d) conveying the Panel's findings to any relevant professional body, any relevant grant-awarding bodies, and the editors of any journals which have published articles by the person against whom the allegation has been upheld and to any individual who has received references from the University referring to the award of the degree
 - (e) subject to the concurrence of the Senate, revoking any degree or other qualification which has been obtained

Appeal

25. Any appeal by the respondent against the action determined by the Graduate Board must be addressed to the Vice-Chancellor and formally lodged within 14 days of the Panel's findings being conveyed. Where the decision is subject to the concurrence of the Senate, the appeal must be made within 14 days of the candidate being notified in writing of the Senate's decision. The Vice-Chancellor shall refer the appeal to a senior officer of his or her choosing (one who has not previously had any role in the case); and that person may take such action as he or she deems necessary including, in exceptional circumstances, the instigation of a new investigation ab initio.