

## **‘TURNITIN’ Frequently Asked Questions**

In the academic year 2008-2009, the University of East Anglia is introducing some new measures to deal with the problem of plagiarism in assessed coursework. Plagiarism is ‘the unacknowledged use of another person’s work’<sup>1</sup>. When students register at the beginning of the year, they will now be asked to declare that the work they submit for assessment will not contain plagiarised material, and that they consent to the use of ‘TURNITIN’ to detect any plagiarism in their submitted work. In 2008-0, ‘TURNITIN’ may be used in certain level 0, level 1 and postgraduate modules. In order to consent, it is important that you are aware of what this means, and some of the questions frequently asked about ‘TURNITIN’ are answered here.

### **What is ‘TURNITIN’?**

‘TURNITIN’ is a piece of software that has been created as a tool to help universities deal with plagiarism. Its main function is to help lecturers identify plagiarism in students’ assignments and locate the sources of the plagiarised material.

### **How does it work?**

‘TURNITIN’ is essentially text matching software. It compares an electronic copy of a submitted student assignment with its own extensive database. This database includes the Internet (including archived web pages), commercial databases of online journals, newspapers and e-books, and a bank of student assignments already submitted to the ‘TURNITIN’ database. It can thus find matching text, even text that has been slightly altered, and identify where it has come from. It produces an originality report, which shows the lecturer how much of the student work is original, which parts of the work match text in the database, and provides the identified source text with a link to its origin. The two versions can then be compared side by side. ‘TURNITIN’ does not, however, make a judgement on whether that text is plagiarised. Nor does it offer evidence as to whether the plagiarism was intentional or accidental. This is a complex decision and is always made by the Plagiarism Officer in your School who will look carefully at the student’s work in context, and will reach a conclusion based on all the evidence available.

### **Why is the University introducing it?**

The University has a commitment to maintain the standard of the qualifications it awards. This means that it needs to ensure that assessment of students’ work is fair and accurate. Plagiarism, whether deliberate or accidental, undermines accurate assessment and thus the standard of UEA degrees. ‘TURNITIN’ is one measure that the University will use to help it to detect and deal with plagiarism. An electronic tool such as ‘TURNITIN’ can identify plagiarised material and locate the original sources much more quickly and efficiently than before, making the task easier for markers and Plagiarism Officers. This will also ensure that plagiarism is dealt with thoroughly and

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<sup>1</sup> You can find out more about plagiarism at [www.uea.ac.uk/plagiarism](http://www.uea.ac.uk/plagiarism).

fairly. Many other universities in the UK are already using 'TURNITIN', but the University of East Anglia felt it appropriate to run extensive pilot schemes to test out the software and the best way of using it, before implementing it.

### **How will it be used?**

A 'TURNITIN' specialist will be appointed in each School, who will be familiar with the use of the software and interpretation of the originality reports. UEA is using 'TURNITIN' differently to most universities. Instead of routinely using 'TURNITIN' on all assignments submitted for assessment, as happens elsewhere, 'TURNITIN' will only be used when a marker already suspects that an assignment contains plagiarised material. The University does not presume that all students are guilty of plagiarism, and feels that the routine use of 'TURNITIN' could damage the trust it has in its students. Moreover, 'TURNITIN' will only be used in Level 0 and 1 undergraduate modules or postgraduate modules. A list of these modules will be published. Markers will still check for plagiarism in modules at other levels in the same way that they have done for many years. If a marker suspects plagiarism in a piece of student work, the Plagiarism Officer will be asked to investigate further, and 'TURNITIN' will be implemented as only one part of a range of techniques already used. Its role will be limited to the efficient identification of the sources that have been drawn on or copied from in the plagiarised material. This will serve as evidence in the meeting to discuss plagiarism.

### **What if 'TURNITIN' finds plagiarism in my work?**

It will only be used if plagiarism is already suspected, and will simply identify text which matches that in its database. It is very likely that some of this text will be legitimate, for example, if it is part of a properly referenced quotation, and this will be noted by the Plagiarism Officer. If matching text is found, and it is not properly acknowledged, then the Plagiarism Officer will consider 'TURNITIN's originality report as well as evidence gathered using other techniques, and will invite you to a meeting to discuss plagiarism in your work. If you admit that you have committed plagiarism, whether deliberately or accidentally, then a penalty will be imposed, but the severity of this penalty will vary to take into account the extent, seriousness and likely intention of the student. You can find out more about this process in the University's policy on plagiarism. You can also discuss this with a Learning Enhancement Tutor in the Dean of Students' Office, or an advice worker in the Student Union Advice Centre.

### **How can I find out more about plagiarism and how to avoid it?**

Your School will be offering educational sessions on plagiarism and good academic practice, and you can ask your lecturer or adviser if you have further questions. You can look at the University's plagiarism website ([www.uea.ac.uk/plagiarism](http://www.uea.ac.uk/plagiarism)) which has many resources to help you understand this issue. You can also make an appointment for a tutorial with the Learning Enhancement Tutors in the Dean of Students' Office, who can help to explain plagiarism and the techniques you need to learn in order to avoid plagiarism, including referencing, paraphrase and quotation.

## **Who has created 'TURNITIN'?**

'TURNITIN' is a product developed by a company called iparadigms LLC. They specialise in software products for education, to help manage and assess coursework. It is supported by JISC, the Joint Information Systems Committee, which promotes the use of information and communications technology in Higher Education in the UK. The University of East Anglia has purchased a licence to use the 'TURNITIN' software and to access the database that accompanies the program.

## **How can I find out more about 'TURNITIN'?**

You can find more information on the following websites:

JISCPAS, The Joint Information Systems Committee Plagiarism Advisory Service offers support and information about using 'TURNITIN'. <http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/'TURNITIN'uk.php>

The promotional website for 'TURNITIN' is produced by iParadigms: <http://www.'TURNITIN'.com>

iParadigms also produce an education website to help educate students about plagiarism and how to avoid it: <http://www.plagiarism.org/>

You can also ask the Plagiarism Officer in your School or the Learning Enhancement Tutors in the Dean of Students' Office.

## **What if I am not happy about the University using 'TURNITIN' to check my work?**

Remember that 'TURNITIN' will be only one of the many strategies lecturers already use to assess student assignments, and will only be used if plagiarism is already suspected. If you feel that 'TURNITIN' has been used in an unfair way in assessing your coursework, you can speak to your Adviser or a Tutor in the Learning Enhancement Team in the Dean of Students' Office.

**This document is produced by the Learning Enhancement Team  
in the Dean of Students' Office**