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Plagiarism in Examinations

Guidance for Teachers/Assessors

Introduction

1. This guidance note is written for the staff of assessment centres who have responsibility for supervising and/or marking candidates' coursework or portfolio work. It is one of three similar guides produced by the Joint Council for Qualifications, the others being targeted at candidates, and the staff of Awarding Bodies, including moderators and examiners. These guidance notes can be found on the Joint Council Website (www.jcq.org.uk).
2. An analysis of the statistics for malpractice in examinations shows that the incidence of plagiarism is rising. This has been recorded by Awarding Bodies and is a concern of the universities as well.
3. The effect of this rise in plagiarism is to call into question the integrity of examinations generally and, especially those assessment components such as coursework where plagiarism can be undertaken most easily. If coursework is to remain as a viable assessment method, it is the duty of all who are preparing and assessing candidates for examinations as well as those who have an interest in the setting, marking and administration of examinations, to do whatever they can to address and seek to reverse the rise of plagiarism.

Defining plagiarism

4. Before considering what steps can be taken to counter this practice, it is necessary to have a clear idea of what plagiarism is.
6. There are many definitions of plagiarism, but they all have in common the idea of taking someone else's intellectual effort and presenting it as one's own. The Joint Council's *Guidelines for Dealing with Instances of Suspected Malpractice* defines plagiarism as: "*The failure to acknowledge sources properly and/or the submission of another person's work as if it were the candidate's own.*"

7. Mostly, plagiarism refers to copying from published texts whether these are in print or on the internet, but it can also refer to copying from manufactured artefacts, or essays or pieces of work previously submitted for examinations.
8. A strict interpretation of the term “work” in the above definition would include the original ideas, as well as the actual words or artefacts produced by another. Unless the candidate has submitted an extensive and unacknowledged paraphrase (amounting to more than 50% of the total) of another person’s writings, however, the Awarding Bodies will not include paraphrasing under the definition of plagiarism. Instead markers should reflect the incidence of any paraphrasing in the way they apply the markscheme. On the other hand, plagiarism will cover the direct and unacknowledged translation of foreign language texts into English.
9. It should be noted that in the context of the Joint Council Awarding Bodies, plagiarism does not include collusion, that is, working collaboratively with other candidates; neither does it include copying from another candidate in the same examination session. Both of these are defined as different forms of malpractice.
10. By virtue of its definition, plagiarism is restricted to those examination components where students undertake examination work in unsupervised conditions, such as coursework, pre-release work, or the compilation of research notes which can be used in the examination. It can also occur when candidates are permitted to annotate texts and bring these into the examination room.

Why plagiarism is on the increase

11. The reasons why candidates plagiarise are varied, but among them are:
 - a) the candidate’s lack of awareness of the regulations;
 - b) the candidate’s failure to allow sufficient time to produce the work;
 - c) the greater pressures on students to succeed;
 - d) the increased number of coursework components in examinations;
 - e) the candidate’s lack of skill in using source material and/or acknowledging the use of material;
 - f) the greater availability of information on the internet and ease with which this can be copied;
 - g) the encouragement to use the internet freely as a source of information, together with the student’s failure to keep accurate records of web pages accessed;
 - h) the growth of websites providing coursework, either by facilitating the swapping of students’ work, or by providing, for a fee, finished pieces of coursework;
 - i) the idea of a quick solution or short cut appeals to some candidates; particularly if the task does not interest them;
 - j) the candidates plagiarise the work of others because they think their production of coursework during the course will not be monitored.

Preventing plagiarism

12. If you are teacher or assessor entering candidates for a qualification with a coursework component, you must accept the obligation to authenticate the work

which is submitted for assessment. You must confirm that the work produced is solely that of the candidate concerned. **You must not accept work which is not the candidate's own. If plagiarism is discovered prior to the signing of a declaration of authentication the incident need not be reported to the Awarding Body, but you should deal with the matter in accordance with your own centre's procedures.**

13. In order to prevent plagiarism you:
- a) should consider incorporating an awareness raising session on academic honesty in the induction process for new students;
 - b) must ensure that each candidate for GCE, VCE, GCSE & GNVQ is issued with an individual copy of *Notice to Candidates: Coursework and Portfolios* (JCQ document);
 - c) must ensure that each candidate understands the contents of the leaflet; particularly the meaning of plagiarism and what penalties may be applied;
 - d) should reinforce to a candidate the significance of their signature on the form which states they have understood and followed the coursework and portfolio requirements for the subject;
 - e) could require students to sign a declaration that they have understood what plagiarism is, and that it is forbidden, in the learning agreement that is signed at enrolment in some centres;
 - f) should make clear what is and what is not acceptable in respect of plagiarism and the use of sources, including the use of websites. It is unacceptable to simply state Internet, just as it would be unacceptable to state Library rather than the title of the book, name of the author, the chapter and page reference. It is similarly unacceptable to list search engines such as Google, Ask Jeeves etc; candidates must provide details of any web pages from which they are quoting or paraphrasing. Some suggestions on acceptable forms of referencing can be found at the end of this guide.
 - g) should teach the conventions of using footnotes and bibliographies to acknowledge sources. There is no one standard way of acknowledging sources but the use of inverted commas, indented quotations, acknowledgement of the author, line/page number, title of source, indicate that the candidate is using a source. Teachers and students should be aware that when acknowledging sources clarity ensures that there is no suspicion of plagiarism;
 - h) should teach the use of quotation marks when sources are quoted directly (a suggested guideline for the need to put items in quotation marks would be the use of more than six words in unchanged form);
 - i) should set reasonable deadlines for submission of work and provide reminders;

- j) should give time for sufficient work to be done in class under direct supervision to allow the teacher to authenticate each candidate's whole work with confidence;
- k) should examine intermediate stages in the production of work in order to ensure that the work is underway in a planned and timely manner;
- l) should introduce classroom activities that use the level of knowledge/understanding achieved during the coursework thereby making the teacher confident that the student understands the material;
- m) could ask students to make a short verbal presentation to the rest of the group on their work;
- n) should explain the importance of the candidate producing work which is their own and stress to them and to their parents/carers the penalties of malpractice;
- o) must take care to ensure that work undertaken in previous years' examinations by other students is not submitted as their own by candidates for the current examination. The safe keeping of such earlier work is of great importance, and its issue to candidates for reference purposes should be carefully monitored;
- p) must not accept, without further investigation, work which you suspect has been plagiarised; to do so encourages the spread of this practice.

Dealing with plagiarism

14. There are three steps in the process for dealing with plagiarism:
 - ◆ keeping watch
 - ◆ confirmation
 - ◆ reporting
15. There are a number of clues that point to the possibility of plagiarism, and you should remain alert to the possibility of spotting these.

Keeping Watch on content

16. You should check a candidate's work for acknowledgement of sources as the work is being completed. Particular care should be taken when candidates submit work without completing intermediate stages.
17. Varying quality of content is one of the most obvious pointers. Well-written passages containing detailed analyses of relevant facts alternating with poorly constructed and irrelevant linking passages ought to give rise to suspicion.
18. Another practice is for candidates to write the introduction and conclusion to an assignment to make it fit the question, and then fill in the middle with work which has been lifted from elsewhere.

19. If the work is not focused on the topic, but presents a well-argued account of a related matter, this could be a sign that it has been used elsewhere. The same applies if parts of the work do not fit well together in developing the response to the assignment.
20. When candidates submit completed work without intermediate stages this can be an indication that the work is not the candidate's own.
21. Dated expressions, and references to past events as being current can also be indications of work which has been copied from out-of-date sources.

Keeping watch on vocabulary, spelling and punctuation

22. The use of a mixture of English and American vocabulary or spellings can be a sign that the work is not original.
23. If the piece contains specialised terminology, jargon, obscure or advanced words, the teacher should ask if this is typical of this level of candidate and reasonable, or is it because the candidate did not write the passage.
24. Is the style of punctuation regular and consistent?

Keeping watch on style and tone

25. Look for differences in the style or the tone of writing. If a candidate uses material from textbooks alongside items from popular magazines the change of tone between the two should be marked.
26. Look at level of sophistication of the sentence structure. Is this the sort of language that can be expected from the candidate? Is the use of language consistent, or does it vary? Does a change in style reflect a change in authorship at these points?

Keeping watch on presentation

27. Look at the presentation of the piece. If it is typed, are the size and style of font uniform? What about the use of headers and sub-headers? Are the margins consistent throughout? Does the text employ references and if so is the style of referencing consistent? Are there any references, for example, to figures, tables or footnotes, which don't make sense (because they have not been copied)?
28. Lack of references in a long, well-written section could indicate that it had been copied from an encyclopaedia or similar general knowledge source.
29. Look out for quotations that run on beyond the part which has been acknowledged.

Confirmation

30. If you suspect that an assignment has been plagiarised, the next step is to try to locate the source.
31. The easiest method is to type a four to six word phrase from the text (preferably one with an unusual phrase in it) directly into a search engine such as Google and perform an “exact phrase search”. If the article was copied from the free, visible web there is a good chance this approach will find it, particularly if a few search engines are tried.
32. Another method is to look through the web-sites that students use, as these are common sources for essays and assignments. Examiners should familiarise themselves with the websites that offer essay distribution or writing services. A list of these is given at the end of this article, but as new sites frequently open this list does not claim to be comprehensive or up-to-date. Use a search engine to find other similar sites. Once on the site a quick search may be all that is needed to locate the source of a suspect piece.
33. If it does not come up through these searches, the piece may have been taken from the “invisible web”, that is, from articles which are not separately indexed to a search engine, although the site itself is. Sites run by newspapers, magazines, on-line encyclopaedias, subject specific sites, and those sites providing help with essays tend to fall into this category, and would have to be searched individually, but again the use of a few well chosen words in a “find” tool could produce results.
34. Computer programmes to detect plagiarism have been available commercially for some time. While at first they were very slow and inefficient, they are now greatly improved and their use is increasing. There are two basic types. The first type requires software to be installed on the user’s machine. This compares a student’s essay to a defined bank of essays such as an institution’s own record of previous students’ work. The second and more sophisticated approach compares a submitted essay to the whole of the web and beyond. The most successful of these tools is called “Turnitin” which is web-based and thus requires no installation. The manufacturers claim that all work submitted to their web-site:

“is checked against three databases of content:

- *Both a current and extensively archived copy of the publicly accessible Internet (more than 4.5 billion pages updated at a rate of 40 million pages per day);*
- *Millions of published works, including the ProQuest commercial database, ABI/Inform, Periodical Abstracts, Business Dateline, and tens of thousands of electronic books including the Gutenberg Collection of Literary Classics;*
- *Millions of student papers already submitted to Turnitin” [www.turnitin.com]*

A report is then produced which identifies any text that is found to be unoriginal and links it to its original source.

35. The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) offers a similar UK based service. See the bibliography for contact details.

36. In addition to the ability to locate original sources, the use of computer-based detection systems is a powerful deterrent to those who otherwise might be tempted to commit plagiarism.
37. If plagiarism is suspected, conducting a viva voce with the candidate may help a teacher to assess whether the work is that of the student.
38. If an investigation is inconclusive the work in question could be removed and replaced by alternative work whose authenticity is not in doubt. Alternatively the candidate could be given another piece of work to complete under controlled conditions in the centre. This would provide a standard by which to judge the other work.

Reporting

39. If your suspicions are confirmed and the candidate has not signed the declaration of authentication, your centre need not report the malpractice to the appropriate Awarding Body. Centres can resolve the matter themselves prior to the signing of the declarations. Teachers must not accept work which is not the candidate's own. Ultimately the Head of Centre has the responsibility for ensuring that candidates do not submit plagiarised work.
40. If plagiarism is detected by the centre and the declaration of authentication has been signed, the case must be reported to the Awarding Body. The procedure is detailed in *Guidance for Dealing with Instances of Suspected Malpractice in Examinations*; this document is published by JCQ.
41. If plagiarism is suspected by an Awarding Body's moderator or examiner or has been reported by a candidate or member of the public, full details of the allegation will be reported to the centre. The Head of Centre will be asked to conduct an investigation into the alleged malpractice and to submit a written report. The form contained in the document *Guidance for Dealing with Instances of Suspected Malpractice in Examinations* (JCQ/M/01) should be used as a basis for this report.
42. The Awarding Body will then consider the case and, if necessary, impose a sanction in line with the penalties given in the document *Guidance for Dealing with Instances of Suspected Malpractice in Examinations*. The sanctions applied to a candidate committing plagiarism range from a warning regarding future conduct to the candidate being barred from entering for one or more examinations for a set period of time.

Guidance on referencing

A useful guide to referencing can be found on line at
<http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/apppage.cgi?USERPAGE=6320>

- (a) A reference in the text, or as a footnote, should show at least the name of the author, the year of publication and the page number: For example: (Morrison, 2000, pg.29.)
- (b) Candidates must also include a bibliography at the end of their work, which lists details of publications that have been used to research their project. For example:
Morrison, A. (2000) "Mary, Queen of Scots", London: Weston Press.
- (c) For material taken from web pages, the reference must show the precise web page, not the search engine used to locate it. This can be copied from the address line. For example:
(<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/16/sosteacher/history/49766.shtml>)
- (d) For individual works found through the internet, the reference should show the details as in (b), above, plus the URL and the date accessed. For example:
Airey, C. (2004). The State of Play Today [Online] 6th Edition. Available:
<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html> [20th September 2001].

List of websites offering help to students with their coursework

www.a-level-coursework.co.uk
www.courseworkbank.co.uk
www.courseworkhelp.co.uk
www.coursework.info
www.essaybank.co.uk
www.freestudentstuff.co.uk
www.maths-help.co.uk
www.projectgcse.co.uk
www.revision-notes.co.uk
www.sci-journal.org.uk
www.studentcentral.co.uk
www.studyzones.com
www.topcourseworksites.co.uk
www.uk-learning.net
www.essaysdone4u.com

Bibliography, resources and recommended browsing

Papers and websites consulted.

J Barrie Thompson and Simon Stobart: University Research, Plagiarism and the Internet: Problems and Possible Solutions; Published in the proceedings of the Sixth International Conference ETHICOMP 2002; Lisbon: ISBN 972-839, pp607-710.

The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) which is funded by the UK further and higher education funding councils offers a comprehensive plagiarism advisory service, based at Northumbria University. Their website is:

<http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/>

Other useful sites are:

<http://virtualsalt.com/antiplag.htm>

<http://www.plagiarism.org>

<http://www.turnitin.com>