The following guidance document is based upon the latest Plagiarism Guidance Document produced by the Joint Council for Qualifications.

Introduction

1. This guidance note is written for the staff of assessment centres that have responsibility for supervising and/or marking candidates’ assignments.

2. 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.”

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. 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.

Why do candidates plagiarise?

6. 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;

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 assignments, either by facilitating the swapping of students’ work, or by providing, for a fee, finished pieces of work;

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 work during the course will not be monitored.

Preventing plagiarism

7. If you are tutor or assessor entering candidates for a qualification with an assignment component, you must accept the obligation to authenticate the work 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.

8. 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 understands the meaning of plagiarism and what penalties may be applied;

c) should reinforce to a candidate the significance of their signature on the authentication form;

d) 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.

e) 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. Tutors and students should be aware that when acknowledging sources clarity ensures that there is no suspicion of plagiarism;
f) 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);

g) should set reasonable deadlines for submission of work and provide reminders; supervision to allow the tutor to authenticate each candidate’s whole work with confidence;

h) should examine intermediate stages in the production of work in order to ensure that the work is underway in a planned and timely manner;

i) should introduce tutored activities that use the level of knowledge/understanding achieved during the course thereby making the tutor confident that the student understands the material;

j) could ask students to make a short verbal presentation to the rest of the group on their work;

k) must take care to ensure that work undertaken in previous years’ assignments by other students is not submitted as their own by candidates for the current examination;

l) 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**

9. There are three steps in the process for dealing with plagiarism:

- keeping watch
- confirmation
- reporting

10. 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**

11. 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.

12. 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.

13. Another practice is for candidates to write the introduction and conclusion to an assignment to make it fit the task, and then fill in the middle with work which has been lifted from elsewhere.

If the work is not focused on the task, 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.

14. When candidates submit completed work without intermediate stages this can be an indication that the work is not the candidate’s own.

15. 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

16. The use of a mixture of English and American vocabulary or spellings can be a sign that the work is not original.

17. If the piece contains specialised terminology, jargon, obscure or advanced words, the tutor should ask if this is typical of this level of candidate and reasonable, or is it because the candidate did not write the passage.

18. Is the style of punctuation regular and consistent?

Keeping watch on style and tone

19. Look for differences in the style or the tone of writing. If a candidate uses material from textbooks alongside articles from journals the change of tone between the two should be marked.

20. 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

21. 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)?

22. Lack of references in a long, well-written section could indicate that it had been copied from an text books or similar knowledge source.

23. Look out for quotations that run on beyond the part which has been acknowledged.
Confirmation

24. If you suspect that an assignment has been plagiarised, the next step is to try to locate the source.

25. The easiest method is to type a four to six word phrase from the text (preferably none 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.

26. Another method is to look through the web-sites that students use, as these are common sources for essays and assignments. Once on a site a quick search may be all that is needed to locate the source of a suspect piece.

27. 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 assignments to a defined bank of assignments 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.

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

29. If plagiarism is suspected, conducting a viva voce with the candidate may help a tutor to assess whether the work is that of the student.

30. 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

31. 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.

32. If plagiarism is detected by the centre and the declaration of authentication has been signed, the case must be reported to the Awarding Body. Plagiarism will be treated by CIPS as a form of cheating.

33. The Awarding Body will then consider the case and, if necessary, impose a sanction. 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 up to three years.

**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