

Preventing & deterring plagiarism: a policy statement for Access centres

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Preventing and deterring plagiarism: a policy statement for Access centres

1. Opening statement:

OCNSER operates a devolved system of quality assurance and enforcement for issues such as plagiarism. We recognise that many Access centres may well have existing policies and policy statements about plagiarism; there will be no need to replace these. But we will be asking you to check that they are compliant with our policy statement, and amend them where needed. Importantly we are interested in helping centres to develop their practice in handling plagiarism and referencing within Access course teams.

We expect all centres to have a strategy for preventing and deterring plagiarism. This will now become a mandatory aspect of your work as an Access to HE provider, and will be subject to the same level of scrutiny as any other aspect of your Access provision. However, the spirit in which we will enforce this mandatory requirement is very much one of positive advice and guidance. We also believe firmly in sharing good practice in handling plagiarism. More than this, we feel an awareness of plagiarism provides an opportunity for developing strong academic skills that really prepare students for Higher Education. Plagiarism involves a breach of academic integrity – specifically, failing to put into practice a transparent method of using other sources. Therefore, it goes to the heart of true scholarship. In dealing with plagiarism, we are forced to confront issues such as how do we use evidence to support our judgements and evaluations; how do we engage properly with other scholarship in developing our own scholarly practices. If our students avoid plagiarism because they can deal – successfully – with these issues, then they also have a deeper understanding of what it means to be a functioning member of the junior academic community.

2. Plagiarism - a definition:

There are numerous definitions of plagiarism within the academic community, in www documents and in hard-copy. Centres may find it helpful to explore some of these, in order to clarify and extend their own thinking on plagiarism. Nonetheless, all

practitioners need to have their own working definition of plagiarism – shaped around the work they do. In addition, as an AVA, OCNSER is responsible for guiding centres towards a sensible, and effective, implementation of strategies that will prevent, detect and penalise plagiarism. If these strategies are to develop consistently, they need to be based on a commonly agreed definition. Our definition of plagiarism is as follows:

Plagiarism is the use of other people's ideas and concepts¹ in assessed work without proper acknowledgement², so they are passed off³ as if they were the student's own.

3. Further points around definitions:

Centres must also guard against autoplagiarism. Autoplagiarism is subsumed in this definition. Clearly, this does not involve, “other people’s ideas and concepts”: but unacknowledged use of a student’s own previous material is equally dishonest. It usually arises when students attempt to cynically recycle previous work. Beyond the issue of plagiarism per se, this is clearly very bad practice. If there is a genuine reason for referring to previous work, and *building* upon it, then a referencing process should be applied.

4. Access Course Requirements for tackling plagiarism

From our definition of plagiarism, we derive four essential requirements for all Access programmes –

1. Students must understand how to use source material effectively and transparently in their assessment.
2. A common process of referencing, relevant to the programme and the academic discipline, must be correctly applied in assessment.

¹ This includes images, diagrams, scientific data, field observations etc as well as words, phrases and unattributed quotations

² Proper acknowledgement involves the implementation of a referencing system that references sources (“other people’s ideas and concepts...”) at the *exact point* where they are used to develop the student’s own work (by providing in-text citations). “Proper acknowledgement...” does not occur if the referencing system *only* locates the source in a reference list or bibliography at the end of the assessed work.

³ The term ‘passed off/passing off’ is so widely used in definitions of plagiarism that it amounts to common knowledge.

3. In order to prevent inadvertent plagiarism, the programme should encourage students to develop their understanding of plagiarism and referencing by providing appropriate formative learning and resources.

4. Where students commit intentional plagiarism, or persistently fail to apply the referencing system, they will be penalised.

Our Frame-work statement below allows centres to meet these requirements in a sensible and flexible manner.

5. The OCNSER Plagiarism Policy a Framework Statement:

It is not the role of OCNSER to provide a set of rigid 'rules' that must be embedded within centres. However, it is our role to provide centres with a set of guiding principles that put in place a comprehensive strategy for dealing with plagiarism. So the frequency and distribution of formative assessment that introduces students to the practice of referencing is a matter for the centre and the course team, perhaps referring to the moderator and OCNSER development officers for advice and guidance. However, the provision of some kind of formative assessment to develop referencing skills *is* mandatory, as is the provision of some kind of evidence to show this has taken place.

Centres will be expected to show that they are operating a plagiarism strategy that is based on the following principles:

5.1 Prevention

- In the early stages of an access course, there must be some discussion of plagiarism with students, and the disciplinary process that the centre uses to penalise students who are caught plagiarising.
- There must also be a clear statement about the referencing system that the course requires students to use.

- Course handbooks/guides (hard copy and www) must include information about the centre's plagiarism policy and the referencing system.
- Resources to help students understand the referencing system must be available.
- The assessment process must include referencing.
- It must also include some formative tasks to help students develop good practice in referencing.
- All assessments that contribute to a final Unit grade or mark which indicates achievement thereof, must be accompanied by a signed statement (either on an assignment coversheet or as part of a signed contract between the student and the centre) authenticating the submitted work as being entirely the student's own⁴.
- Feedback must always include comments on referencing.

5.2 Detection

- Course teams and course leaders must implement a training process whereby all assessors are informed about the plagiarism policy within the centre.
- Course teams and course leaders must ensure all assessors are informed about the referencing system the programme needs.
- All assessors must report incidents of plagiarism to course team meetings.
- Reporting incidents of plagiarism should be a standing agenda item for course team meetings.

⁴ For example "I declare that this assignment is all my own work and the sources of information and material I have used (including the internet) have been fully identified and properly acknowledged as required.

- Internal moderation must include consistency in implementing the centre's plagiarism strategy, and the referencing system.
- Serious incidents of plagiarism should be reported to the moderator for the programme immediately.

5.3 Deterrence

- Serious incidents of plagiarism should always result in a disciplinary process.
- This must contain a right of appeal.
- It must be conducted by managers at the centre, in conjunction with the course team, to maintain impartiality.
- It must correspond to other disciplinary processes within the centre.

5.4 Penalties

Centres must operate a fair and transparent disciplinary process; OCN SER operates a devolved system of quality assurance and enforcement for issues such as plagiarism. Therefore the following penalties are a suggested set of guidelines for centres to incorporate within their own regulations which specifically relate to the achievement of units of, or the final Diploma qualification on an Access to HE course.

- **First serious⁵ incident:** the work concerned cannot contribute to achievement of a unit. Student must submit a new piece of work to achieve the unit.
- **Second serious offence:** The centre must contact their AVA appointed Access external moderator to notify/discuss the

⁵ The definition of serious will rest in the hands of the Access Course Team within a centre. We would strongly advise centres to agree criteria for deciding what constitutes a serious breach of the policy on plagiarism. Such a definition should include reference to the frequency of the breach within a given piece or pieces of work, the magnitude of the breach (is it just a few lines etc or a large section?), reference to evidence of intent or otherwise by the student in breaching the policy and evidence of whether the individual has been specifically advised about the issue if plagiarism with reference to his/her own submitted work since starting the course.

case. A summary report should be made and kept on the student's file. The student is not allowed to achieve the Unit which relates to the assignment containing the plagiarism. This may prevent the student from gaining the Access Diploma (e.g. it is a mandatory unit or there are no other unit/credits available within the Diploma title. In these circumstances the centre must urgently notify the AVA

- **Third serious offence:** The centre and the external moderator must submit a summary of the offender's behaviour with a recommendation to bar such a persistent offender achieving the Access to HE qualification on which s/he is enrolled. The AVA will convene a special panel drawn from its Access to HE Quality and Development Group to make a final decision within 5 working days of receipt of the report.

7. Useful Links

University of Kent, Academic Integrity

<http://www.kent.ac.uk/uelt/ai/>

The OWL at Purdue

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/>

The Plagiarism Advisory Service

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

The University of Leicester

<http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/ssds/slc/resources/writing/plagiarism/plagiarism-tutorial/?searchterm=plagiarism%20tutorial>

Learn Higher

<http://www.learnhigher.ac.uk/learningareas/referencing/resourcesforstudents.htm>

Turnitin

<http://turnitin.com/static/index.html>

Copycatch

<http://www.copycatchgold.com/>

Plagiarism.org

<http://www.plagiarism.org/>