Supporting RVC staff and students in avoiding plagiarism

- **a document produced by the RVC plagiarism working party, March 2012**

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Overview

The purpose of this document is, firstly, to provide a list of recommendations with regards to providing adequate training of all students at the RVC so that they are best equipped to avoid plagiarism. Secondly, recommendations are made with regards to staff training so that they can better understand the problems associated with plagiarism and best support students in avoiding it. Thirdly, recommendations are made for the compulsory submission of high-stakes assignments via plagiarism detection software. Finally, recommendations are made for the uniform detection and handling of plagiarism across the college, in line with existing Academic Misconduct policy.

Overall recommendations

- All students, course leaders, internal examiners and relevant course administrators should receive training about plagiarism, how it may be avoided using appropriate referencing techniques, and the role and use of plagiarism detection software.

- Training about plagiarism is to be compulsory for all RVC students.

- The use of plagiarism detection software should be made a compulsory part of the assessment process for written assignments across all courses (undergraduate or postgraduate, and taught or research-based) at the RVC, from the start of the 2012-13 session.

- Detection of plagiarism will continue to be the responsibility of academic staff; plagiarism detection software is an aid in this process.

- Instances of plagiarism (intentional or unintentional) should be handled in accordance with the recommended actions in the RVC's Academic Misconduct document. The RVC Working Party will produce a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document for staff as a quick guide to the RVC's Academic Misconduct policy as it pertains to plagiarism, including what to do if plagiarism is suspected.

1. **Student training (plagiarism, appropriate referencing techniques and use of plagiarism detection software)**

   - Every RVC course should have basic mandatory training in place for students in terms of what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. This may be face to face and/or online, depending on the nature of the course and what course leaders feel is appropriate.

   - A record of training should be kept for all students.

   - It is proposed that the basic mandatory training on plagiarism, referencing and using plagiarism detection software, takes place in the first year of study (undergraduate or postgraduate), in an online format. [This resource is now available on Learn (RVC's Moodle site) as a mandatory 'Referencing and plagiarism' test in the 'Academic Skills' course. Students are required to attempt the test as many times as required to gain a minimum pass mark of 75%, and are given detailed feedback on their choices. Their highest score will be stored in the system as evidence that they have received appropriate training.]

   - Depending on the nature of the course, training during the student induction process alone may be considered insufficient. Instruction in how to avoid plagiarism, and use of plagiarism detection software, should be revisited throughout students' training in preparation for major pieces of submitted coursework, as course leaders consider reasonable and appropriate.

   - All students should have easy access at all times to a formative plagiarism detection test site, which they can use to detect inadvertent plagiarism prior to submission of work. [This is currently available via the 'Academic Skills' course in Learn.]

2. **Staff training in plagiarism and plagiarism detection software**

   - All course leaders, relevant course administrators and staff responsible for individual in-course assessments will be required to attend training about plagiarism, the use of plagiarism detection software and inspection of originality reports, and what to do if plagiarism is suspected. [This will be provided by Learning Development staff in 2012, with input from e-Media staff and course leaders who already have experience in using plagiarism detection software.]
   The decision of which staff to train should be left to individual course leaders in consultation with relevant support staff. It is also recommended that at least one member of examinations staff is trained in using plagiarism detection software, in terms of advising on individual cases where plagiarism is suspected

   - Examiners of relevant coursework (see section 3) should receive training about plagiarism,

the use of plagiarism detection software and the inspection of originality reports.

- All Academic and Academic Related staff should also have access to a formative detection site, with accompanying guidance notes, to check their own work for unintentional plagiarism.

3. Use of plagiarism detection software for assessment

- In every RVC course of study, all major assessed pieces of coursework should be screened for plagiarism using plagiarism detection software.

  o This screening is to be conducted as appropriate for the respective courses. Course directors should formulate a policy (for student training and plagiarism detection software use in assessment) appropriate to their course, in consultation with Learning Development staff. How the review of originality reports is to be implemented should be agreed by the course leaders and management committees, as resources allow.

  o Course leaders will also decide which pieces of assessed work need screening; as a rule, any written assessment that contributes to the students' final mark for the year/course should be screened.

  o Students will be required to submit their work electronically via the plagiarism detection software; each course will have its own plagiarism detection submission links for individual assignments in Learn.

- If a hard copy of the assignment is also requested, students will be required to submit a signed declaration that the hard copy is identical to the version submitted via plagiarism detection software (and ideally document the Overall Similarity Index (OSI), though it is recognised that this is not always possible as it can take 24 hours to generate this data from the time of submission to the plagiarism detection software).

Compliance with the policy needs to be enforced with regards to students: (1) completing the initial online training, and (2) submitting major pieces of work through plagiarism detection software, with the accompanying signed declaration if hard copy submission is also requested. It is suggested that students not complying with these measures should be identified and a note kept on each student's file for later review in cases of suspected plagiarism. Students should also be advised that failure to complete the online training or to submit major pieces of work through detection software may result in that student's progression through the course being delayed. This information will need to be included in the individual course regulations and student handbooks.

Detection and handling of plagiarism offences

- Responsibility for the detection of plagiarism (as indicated, for example, by changes in writing style) rests with academic staff/examiners; plagiarism detection software is an aid in this process. It is considered good practice if each originality report is physically inspected for evidence of plagiarism, independent of the OSI.

- No minimum or maximum OSI will be considered an 'acceptable' delimiter in identifying cases of plagiarism, as advocated by the JISC Internet Plagiarism Advisory Service:

A high similarity index does not necessarily mean that a piece of work has been plagiarised, as the software does not discriminate between unacknowledged and correctly referenced text, however it is possible, once the report has been returned, to exclude material which has been properly cited. Ultimately, the software should be used as a tool to assist tutors to determine whether a student may have plagiarised, and should not be viewed as a replacement for academic judgment.

(Northumbria Learning Ltd., 2006-7)

- The handling of cases of plagiarism should continue to be carried out in accordance with the RVC's Academic Misconduct document. To help staff to understand and comply with this document, the plagiarism working party will develop a set of easily accessible FAQs comprising what to do if they suspect plagiarism and how to seek advice.

Recommended ACTIONS

- Where required, individual course regulations will need to be modified as soon as possible,

  a) to make plagiarism training mandatory for students, and b) to make submission of in-course assessments to plagiarism detection software a mandatory part of the assessment process.

- For each course, student and staff training on plagiarism and use of plagiarism detection software is to be clearly documented, and the submission and screening process of assessed pieces of coursework clearly laid out.

Reference

Northumbria Learning Ltd. (2006-7). "Tutor Turnitin UK FAQ." Retrieved 29 January, 2012, from http://plagiarismconference.org/documents/tipsheetsv3/tp07_TutorTurnitinUKFAQ.pdf