LSE policy on the use of Turnitin

1. Introduction

1.1. This policy defines the use of Turnitin within LSE. It establishes the general principles and minimum School- wide expectations of the use of Turnitin as a student academic writing development tool, highlighting considerations for developing local policy around the use of Turnitin in addressing academic misconduct and promoting good academic practice across LSE.

1.2. This policy has been developed by an extended Working Group, which was established following the Education Committee's endorsement (October 2021) of the School-wide use of Turnitin as a student academic writing development tool. It was agreed that this would provide equity among the LSE student body and dissuade, as far as possible, the unauthorised use of Turnitin, both within and outside of LSE.

1.3. The policy should be read in conjunction with the regulations around academic integrity and misconduct. More information on academic integrity and misconduct can be found on the following [Academic Discipline webpages.](#)

2. About Turnitin

2.1. Turnitin is a service that matches text from student-submitted work against its extensive databases of previously submitted student assessments (submitted to either LSE or other institutions that also subscribe to Turnitin), websites and academic papers.

2.2. Turnitin produces a similarity report and a score (%) of matched text. The similarity report contains any matches to sources along with the relevant links.

2.3. Turnitin offers staff the ability to investigate any concerns about the originality of a submission. It can also help students identify where their writing requires development, particularly regarding the use of sources, citation, referencing and paraphrasing.

2.4. Further information about the limitations of Turnitin, the Turnitin UK licence, student consent, removing papers from Turnitin UK and dealing with paper view requests is available in Appendix 1.

3. Use of Turnitin within LSE

3.1. It is understandable that, due to disciplinary differences and Turnitin's limitations (see Appendix 1), it is not possible to establish a School-wide policy for the use of Turnitin across LSE. Therefore, Departments have control and responsibility for developing their local policy for the use of Turnitin, which should be agreed by their Departmental Teaching Committees (DTCs), or any other appropriate equivalent Departmental committee, and clearly communicated to students. The Departmental policy (as set out in Appendices 2 and 3 below) should be shared with the Student Regulations Team (ssc.plagiarism@lse.ac.uk).

3.2. It should be made clear to all students within each Department how Turnitin is used within the Department. This should include a rationale for the way in which it is used within the Department (see 'Models for using Turnitin as a student academic writing development tool' below).

4. Principles of using Turnitin

4.1. This section puts forward a specific set of School-wide principles around the use of Turnitin.

4.2. **Principle One:** Turnitin is not a plagiarism checker

4.2.1. Turnitin is a text-matching tool, **not a plagiarism detection tool**. Turnitin provides a useful indicator to markers of the extent of matched text within a document, but it cannot determine what those matches mean (i.e. whether a case of academic misconduct/plagiarism).

4.2.2. Where required, both the similarity report and the score (%) must be carefully examined by the subject expert (i.e. academic teaching staff). Turnitin is no substitute for academic knowledge and judgement, and it is for the subject expert to determine where matched text has been correctly or incorrectly referenced and to identify cases of possible academic misconduct/plagiarism.

4.3. **Principle Two:** Interpretation of Turnitin similarity reports is an academic teaching staff responsibility

4.3.1.   The interpretation of Turnitin similarity reports is the responsibility of academic teaching staff (subject experts) within the Department. Professional Services staff can be involved in the management of reports, for example to remove irrelevant matches (e.g. matches where student submissions all share a common cover sheet, random small matches etc.) as well as ensuring that Turnitin is enabled correctly within the Moodle activity settings. Only the subject expert and/or delegated teaching staff within the Department can make a judgment about whether matched text has been correctly or incorrectly referenced and whether academic misconduct is likely to have occurred.

4.4.   **Principle Three:** Marking must not be based on a Turnitin similarity report and score (%)

4.4.1.   The marking process should be undertaken without accessing the Turnitin reports until a final mark has been agreed for the assessment in question.

4.4.2.   The School's advice is to mark without interrogating the reports during the marking process, to avoid the possibility of them directly or indirectly influencing the mark or creating the perception of bias during the marking process. The only way marks can be deducted from summative assessments is by making a formal allegation through the School's [Regulations on Assessment Offences](). If you have any questions about the assessment misconduct process or regulations you can contact the Student Regulations Team via [ssc.plagiarism@lse.ac.uk.]()

4.5.   **Principle Four:** No similarity score (%) threshold should be used within Departments

4.5.1.   The similarity score (%) is flawed. Because of this and the above principle (Three), no threshold should be used within Departments to determine when to investigate an assessment for misconduct/plagiarism. This includes PSS using similarity scores to identify potential cases of plagiarism, which constitutes an interpretation of similarity reports. As outlined in Principle Two, the interpretation of Turnitin similarity reports is the responsibility of academic teaching staff (subject experts) within the Department. As specified in Principle Five, teaching staff are not required to review all similarity reports, only those where, in the course of marking, the marker has any concerns around academic integrity.

4.5.2.   The similarity score (%) of text matches within a report can be misleading (false positives and false negatives) and requires careful interpretation. Sometimes, a high similarity score (%) is the result of lots of tiny matches, none of which indicate academic misconduct/plagiarism, and in other cases a lower similarity score (%) may indicate a case for investigation. For example, a similarity score of 10% may be an insignificant proportion of small, matched text, but it may present cause for concern if that match is contained within a

single section (i.e. 10% in the conclusion section of a short essay). Moreover, essay writing companies (mills, ghost-writers) can produce papers with low similarity scores (%).

4.5.3. The idea of a 'threshold' can cause unnecessary stress and anxiety for students, leading them to focus on gaining a score below the 'threshold' rather than focus on the overall academic quality and originality of their work. The whole community should be aware that there is no ideal overall similarity score (%), nor any % below which an assessment is likely to be plagiarism-free and above which it is not.

4.6. **Principle Five:** Turnitin should be used equitably within a student cohort – blanket use

4.6.1. To ensure equity, Turnitin must be applied universally (i.e. to all submissions within a specific assessment or not at all) – blanket use. Running student work through Turnitin 'selectively' or through a 'random sample' may be seen as unfair, lacking equity, promoting bias, and/or detracting from student efforts to engage in best academic practice. Moreover, it could obfuscate cases of collusion within a cohort – for example, by not identifying all the students who may have colluded – and could be seen as unfair.

4.6.2. **IMPORTANT:** This does not imply that all the similarity reports for a specific assessment need to be reviewed. A report only needs to be reviewed if, in the course of marking, the marker has any concerns around academic integrity.

5. Promoting good academic practice across LSE

5.1. A core LSE principle is that academic integrity and scholarship should be promoted across LSE, at all levels of study and within all Departments. Staff across LSE should endeavour to educate all students about the importance of academic integrity and deter them from committing academic misconduct.

5.2. This section puts forward a specific set of School-wide guidelines around promoting good academic practice both at School and Departmental level.

5.3. Students on all courses and programmes should be provided with:

5.3.1. **Discipline-specific information on academic practice.** For example, guidance on appropriate referencing, paraphrasing and citation, the value of an appropriate bibliography, as well as information about acceptable collaboration and unacceptable collusion.

5.3.2. **Information about academic integrity.** For example, information about academic misconduct and what constitutes plagiarism, as well as information about self-plagiarism. Information should also be given about when it is, and is

not, acceptable for students to collaborate and when it is, and is not, acceptable for students to reuse or expand on previous work such as formative submissions.

5.3.3. **Student training and support on academic practice and scholarship.** For information about student training see 'Student and Staff support' below.

5.3.4. **Clear information on how Turnitin is used within the Department, including its use for student development** (see 'Use of Turnitin as a student academic writing development tool' below).

5.4. To promote academic integrity and scholarship, academic teaching staff and Professional Services staff should:

5.4.1. Consider assessment methods and assessment design that minimise opportunities for academic misconduct and/or collusion. For more information, please visit the LSE Assessment Toolkit, email your Eden Centre Departmental advisors or email eden@lse.ac.uk.

5.4.2. Consider staff training opportunities for both academic teaching staff on interpreting Turnitin similarity reports and Professional Services staff on the administration of Turnitin similarity reports. For more information, please see 'Student and Staff support' below.

5.4.3. Review information about academic integrity, academic misconduct and the investigative process related to academic misconduct. For more information, please visit the Plagiarism Guidance information for LSE staff webpage or contact the Student Regulations Team at ssc.plagiarism@lse.ac.uk.

6. Use of Turnitin as a student academic writing development tool

6.1. The School has endorsed the use of Turnitin as a student academic writing development tool across LSE (Education Committee, October 2021). Therefore, **it is compulsory** for all LSE Departments (in which students engage with essay-based assessments) to offer their students the opportunity to use Turnitin to help them develop their writing, referencing, paraphrasing and citation skills.

6.2. **The minimum requirement** within a Department (in which students engage with essay-based assessments) is that students have access to their Turnitin similarity report and score (%) for at least one of their formative essay-based assessments for every year of their studies (the latter is applicable, if students continue to engage with essay-based assessments in their consecutive years of study). Choosing compulsory core courses increases the likelihood that all students on a programme will have the opportunity to use

Turnitin as a development tool regardless of their course selections.

6.3. It is also **compulsory** for students to be offered training in using Turnitin as a student academic writing development tool (if they are engaged with essay-based assessments). Training and support for students can be Department-specific or centrally offered. The timing of training can be determined by Departments according to when they deem it academically appropriate for students. This may be at the start of their studies, but refresher training opportunities should also be considered (e.g. before the dissertation).

6.4. The above is the minimum required for Departments; however, Departments can implement additional student access to Turnitin similarity reports and scores (%) (see 'Models for using Turnitin as a student academic writing development tool' below).

6.5. To account for the multi-disciplinary nature of LSE studies, and to ensure the whole student body has developmental access to Turnitin, the **School recommendation** is the use of Turnitin as a student academic writing development tool for all formative (essay-based) assessments. This recommendation – in addition to the developmental benefits – promotes equity across all students within and between Departments, and deters unauthorised access to Turnitin via external and/or internal sites. Departments should also be aware that students can pay for such services outside of the School, creating inequity within the student body.

6.6. Providing students with access to their Turnitin similarity reports and scores (%) for all their formative assessments should be sufficient to help them develop their writing skills and avoid unintentional plagiarism. Departments may choose to expand access to Turnitin similarity reports and scores (%) for summative (essay-based) assessments. In all cases, Departments must be clear about the rationale for their chosen access model. A template statement for students about how Turnitin is used within a Department is available in Appendix 2.

7. Models for using Turnitin as a student academic writing development tool

7.1. The information below will help Departments make local decisions to develop their local policy relating to the use of Turnitin as a student academic writing development tool. A template grid to support this decision making is available in Appendix 3.

7.2. **Model One:** Use of Turnitin as a student academic writing development tool at **the minimum requirement level** as explained above

Opportunities:
- Allows students to look at and interpret similarity reports for their submissions. In conjunction with the training and support referenced in this policy, it allows students to address referencing and citation issues and improve their academic writing.
- Should reduce the number of assessment misconduct cases related to poor referencing and citation the Department needs to investigate.

Considerations:

- May create anxiety if a submission returns a high similarity score, though the support and training to accompany access should minimise this.
- Requires careful planning at programme level to avoid cases where students may not be afforded the opportunity to use Turnitin as a development tool.

7.3. Model Two: (School recommendation) - Use of Turnitin as a student academic writing development tool **for all formative assessments**

Opportunities:

- Allows students to look at and interpret similarity reports for their submissions. In conjunction with the training and support referenced in this policy, it allows students to address referencing and citation issues and improve their academic writing.
- More frequent use allows students to develop confidence in approaching academic writing.
- More frequent use reduces student anxiety around similarity reports and scores.
- Should, to a greater degree, reduce the number of assessment misconduct cases related to poor referencing and citation that the Department needs to investigate.
- Guarantees that all students who have to complete an essay-based assessment, regardless of multi-disciplinary options, have developmental access to Turnitin.

Considerations:

- May create some anxiety if high similarity scores are repeatedly returned. Additional support and training may be required in such cases.

7.4. Model Three: Use of Turnitin as a student academic writing development tool **for all formative and some summative assessment**

Opportunities:

- All the advantages listed in Model Two (above) apply.
- Where the formative and summative assessments are linked, students will be able to track the development of their writing.
- May further reduce anxiety if they can check their similarity report prior to a summative submission.
- May reduce unauthorised use of Turnitin in relation to summative assessments.

Considerations:

- Extra emphasis will have to be made in all student training that a low percentage score may not exclude them from investigation for academic misconduct. Students will need to be aware that academic judgement is the first indicator of academic misconduct and that either a high or low percentage score can be equally investigated.
- May create some anxiety if high similarity scores are repeatedly returned. Additional support and training may be required in such cases.

7.5. Model Four: Use of Turnitin as a student academic writing development tool **for all formative and all summative assessment**

Opportunities:

- All the advantages listed in Model Three (above) apply.
- Empowers students by positioning them as partners in the learning process, thereby

promoting scholarship.

Considerations:

- All the disadvantages listed in Model 3 (above) apply.
- Where students fail to act as partners (as posited above), zero tolerance of misconduct may have to be applied.

8. Student and Staff support

8.1. This section provides information about the models of student and staff support and training. When considering the support and training needs of their students and staff, departments can choose from the following options:

- **Option One:** Departmental specific support and training, developed and provided by the Department.

- **Option Two:** Departmental specific support and training, developed and provided in liaison with central teams (LSE LIFE for students and Eden Centre for staff).

- **Option Three:** Centrally offered support and training; students and staff directed to the generic offering from LSE LIFE or the Eden Centre Digital Education team.

8.2. **Centrally offered student support.**
LSE LIFE will provide a three-tier approach to supporting students in their use of Turnitin:
- Online, self-access materials
- Workshops
- One-to-one support

8.2.1. **Online, self-access materials.** LSE LIFE will provide an academic integrity module as part of the *Prepare to learn at LSE* online, self-access pre-arrival Moodle module. This module will position the student as a member of the academic community and position academic integrity as a key part of scholarship. It will be interactive, with tasks to complete and mini tests to check learning. The module will include a section on how Turnitin is used, how to interpret similarity reports, and how to use these reports to improve academic writing skills such as paraphrasing and summarising, with an emphasis on how similarity scores (whether high or low) can be misleading. The module will provide a practice Turnitin link – set up so that it does not save submissions to Turnitin's repository – for students to use to check and develop their writing. When using this link, students will be required to accept a statement confirming that they agree to use the link in accordance with their Department's policy on the use of Turnitin.

8.2.2. **Workshops.** LSE LIFE will deliver interactive, task-based workshops on understanding Turnitin reports and using them to improve academic writing

skills. The workshops will be repeated across the academic year.

8.2.3.   **One-to-one support.** Appointments can be booked with LSE LIFE Study Advisers to ask questions about Turnitin and academic writing.

8.3. **Centrally offered staff support.**
Eden Centre (Digital Education team) provides a three-tier approach to supporting staff in the use of Turnitin (interpretation of reports and similarity scores):
- Online, self-access materials
- Workshops
- One-to-one support

8.3.1.   **Online, self-access materials.** The Digital Education team offers online resources for both academic teaching staff and Professional Services staff on the use of Turnitin, including what is Turnitin, how Turnitin is used, how to interpret similarity reports etc.

8.3.2.   **Workshops.** For academic teaching staff, the Digital Education team delivers interactive, task-based workshops on understanding Turnitin and interpretations of similarity reports. They also deliver workshops aimed at Professional Services staff around enabling Turnitin when setting up assignments and the management of similarity reports, including filtering, removing irrelevant matches etc. The workshops are repeated throughout the academic year, and are bookable through the Training and Development System.

8.3.3.   **One-to-one support.** Appointments can be booked with Learning Technologists from the Digital Education team to ask/address individual questions about Turnitin. Requests for one-to-one training can be made by emailing Eden.Digital@lse.ac.uk.

Appendix 1: Further information about Turnitin UK

Limitations

Turnitin can be a useful tool in deterring and detecting cases for investigation of plagiarism and collusion. The software is not a substitute for promoting good academic practice and cannot be treated as a failsafe measure for detecting academic misconduct. This section outlines some of the potential limitations of using Turnitin which users should be aware of.

1. Turnitin cannot identify matches of images, including diagrams, equations or other representations.
2. Turnitin cannot detect translated text.
3. Turnitin cannot detect and compare student writing styles etc. and detect contract cheating (i.e. essay writing companies, essay mills, ghost-writers etc. In such instances the contracted third party will normally correctly reference any sources meaning they likely have low Turnitin scores).
4. It is possible that in some cases the service may misidentify correctly cited text as a match, or text that it is identical across student papers (e.g. text where quotations are not used yet correctly referenced, or the use of a cover sheet with the submission etc.). Turnitin offers functionality to exclude such matches; however, this does not obviate the need for careful examination.

Turnitin UK licence

Turnitin is available to all academic teaching and Professional Services staff of all LSE Departments. Student access to Turnitin is enabled via the academic teaching and professional services staff.

Turnitin can only be used for the submission of LSE students' work, relating to LSE programmes of study. Turnitin cannot be used to check research and other papers prior to publication, or work of non-LSE students or for admissions or other purposes.

Student consent

Students are not required to give explicit consent for their work to be submitted in Turnitin. The conditions of registration for all students at LSE state

> "all [student's] assessed coursework (essays, projects, field reports, literature reviews, dissertations etc.) will be [the student's] own work i.e. work originally created by [the student] during and for the purpose of [their] programme and may be analysed by text matching software".

However, Departments must provide clear information about how Turnitin is used within a Department. This can be done via student handbooks or any introductory sessions. A template Turnitin statement and student agreement about how Turnitin will be used within a Department is available in Appendix 3.

Use of the service is subject to Turnitin's [Privacy Policy](#), [Usage Policy](#), [EU Data Protection and GDPR Compliance](#), which provides details on the ways data is managed.

Students have the right to request removal of their submitted work from the Turnitin database. While this is possible, we advise you to explain to students that maintaining their work on Turnitin's database offers protection to them against someone attempting to plagiarise their work.

Removing papers from Turnitin UK

Work submitted to Turnitin UK will be stored indefinitely in the Turnitin database. Turnitin can remove

student papers from the standard repository at the request of LSE's Turnitin administrator.

If you require work to be removed from Turnitin's database, you should contact the LSE Turnitin School administrator in the first instance at eden.digital@lse.ac.uk.

Dealing with requests (from other institutions) to view student papers

Matches with other students' submitted work to another institution are only accessible by contacting the institution through which a student's work was previously submitted via Turnitin. In Turnitin terminology this is called a 'paper view request.' LSE already has established guidance for dealing with requests to view student papers.

Appendix 2: Template Turnitin Statement and Student Agreement

[Department name] **Departmental Turnitin Statement and Student Agreement**

The following statement sets out how Turnitin is to be used within [Department name] and the terms by which students agree to use Turnitin.

Students agree to ensuring they have read and understood both:

- the School's Regulations on Assessment Offences and
- the [Department name] local guidance relating to academic writing, including referencing, citation and paraphrasing, available at: [link to Departmental webpage where Department specific information is available]

The [Department name] agrees to use Turnitin as a student academic writing development tool by providing students access to their Turnitin similarity report and score (%) as follows:

[choose one and *delete others as appropriate]*

- for at least one of their formative essay-based assessments for every year of their studies [the number of formative assessments and appropriate course codes should be specified]
- for all formative assessments
- for all formative and some summative assessment [that should be specified]
- for all formative and all summative assessments

The Department's rationale for the chosen approach is [provide pedagogical rationale for the Departmental chosen approach]

[Department name] agrees to provide its students with support and training in the use of Turnitin through:

[choose one and *delete as appropriate]*

- Departmental specific support and training [provide details about how this support will be accessed]
- Centrally offered support and training provided by LSE LIFE. LSE LIFE provides a three-tier approach to training (Online/self-access materials, Workshops and One-to-one support). Please contact lselife@lse.ac.uk for details on training in the use of Turnitin.

Students agree to use Turnitin on the basis prescribed by the Department in this statement.

Students should be aware that where Turnitin is used within the Department, it is applied universally (i.e. to all submissions within a specific assessment or not at all - blanket use).

Students need to be aware that academic judgement is the first indicator of academic misconduct and that either a high or low percentage score (%) can be equally investigated. Therefore, there is no similarity score (%) threshold (whether low or high) within the Department that excludes them from an initial investigation.

As stated in the Conditions of Registration:

> *"Copies of all papers submitted to the software will be retained as source documents in the iParadigms reference database (held in the US) solely for the purpose of text matching against future submissions. Use of the Turnitin UK service shall be subject to such Terms and Conditions of Use as may be agreed between iParadigms and LSE from time to time and posted on the Turnitin UK website."*

Queries about use of Turnitin, academic misconduct or plagiarism should be addressed in the first

instance to your Department [provide details].

Appendix 3: Grid for developing Departmental policy

The table below is designed to aid Departments when deciding upon a local policy for the use of Turnitin.

Requirements flagged as ☑ in points 1-3 below should be applied by all Departments. For points 4 and 5 below, Departments must indicate their choice by ticking the relevant box ☐.

Departments are also asked to complete the details in the Template Turnitin Statement and Student Agreement (Appendix 2) to explain the rationale for the choices indicated in sections 4 and 5 below. These decisions should be determined by the Departmental Teaching Committee or appropriate equivalent Departmental committee.

	Departmental policy /requirement	Departmental Options	Departmental Choices
1	No similarity score (%) threshold should be used within the Department	MUST HAVE	☑
2	Turnitin should be used equitably within a student cohort – Blanket use	MUST HAVE	☑
3	Interpretation of Turnitin similarity reports is an academic teaching staff responsibility	MUST HAVE **Define roles** Please define how interpretation of originality reports will be handled within the Department, by defining the roles/responsibilities of: 1. Academic teaching staff 2. Professional Services staff	☑
4	Use of Turnitin as a student academic writing development tool Choose one of the options	**Departmental options (choose one):** Use of Turnitin as a student academic writing development tool 1. at the minimum requirement as explained above 2. for all formative assessments **(School recommendation)** 3. for all formative and some summative assessment 4. for all formative and all summative assessment	1. ☐ 2. ☐ 3. ☐ 4. ☐
5	Student training provision Choose one of the options	**Departmental options (choose one):** 1. Departmental specific support and training, developed and provided by the Department. 2. Departmental specific support and training, developed and provided in liaison with central teams (LSE LIFE). 3. Centrally offered support and training, students directed to the generic offering from LSE LIFE.	1. ☐ 2. ☐ 3. ☐

Review schedule

Review interval	Next review due by	Next review start
3 years	31/05/27	01/02/27

Version history

Version	Date	Approved by	Notes
1.0	May 2022	Education Committee	
1.1	May 2024	Education Committee	• Changes to wording of principles (One, Four and Five) and Appendix 2 following Education Committee approval of recommendations from first year policy review (21 March 2024). • Changes to formatting to fit with LSE policy template.

Links

Reference	Link
Reguations on assessment offences applicable to all students	[RegulationsAssessmentOffences.pdf (lse.ac.uk)](RegulationsAssessmentOffences.pdf)

Contacts

Position	Name	Email	Notes
Head of Digital Education Futures	Stella Ekebuisi	s.i.ekebuisi@lse.ac.uk	

Communications and Training

Will this document be publicised through Internal Communications?	**Yes**
Will training needs arise from this policy	**Yes**
If Yes, please give details **The Eden Centre Digital Education team will provide staff guidance and training on interpreting Turnitin similarity reports**.	