

Title of project:

Evaluation of staff and student experiences of using Turnitin® for formative and summative assessment.

What did you set out to do?

- In 2007, Turnitin was introduced as a formative assessment tool to provide students with feedback when writing text-based assignments. Challenges have included - understanding how to successfully embed Turnitin within modules; how to provide staff and students with training, and how to interpret the “originality reports” that provide the feedback.
- This project explored staff and student perceptions of using Turnitin, and its effectiveness in providing feedback to improve academic writing and reducing academic offences.

How have you achieved it?

- Two cohorts of Biomedical Science students were set a similar essay. In 2007 students used Turnitin and received a 3 hour CAL session (how to use and interpret Turnitin; referencing & citation). In 2006, students had a CAL session (referencing & citation); Staff and student perceptions were obtained through questionnaires and interviews.
- Essay submissions to Turnitin were analysed using a stringent definition of plagiarism to reduce the variability of personal judgement (based on the Indiana School of Education). A case of plagiarism was identified by a paragraph being copied or poorly paraphrased and/or the absence of any acknowledgement of the author.

Did Turnitin improve academic skills and reduce the incidence of offences?

	2006	2007
No. draft submissions	NA	66
No. final submissions	79	76
Cases of plagiarism	57	61
Cases due to lack of acknowledgement	25	52 p<0.05
Cases due to poor writing	47	36

- There were similar numbers of plagiarism cases (**defined stringently**); in 2007 more students failed to acknowledge their evidence sources. Turnitin did not improve academic writing skills.

Did students change their essays after reviewing their draft submissions?

- 4 students improved their draft by substituting in synonyms which broke the text string. Several students produced a worse similarity score by Turnitin identifying copied sections it had missed before. The vast majority of students did not alter their drafts.

Staff and student perception of using Turnitin.

- Students thought Turnitin was helpful but difficult to use and interpret; copying and pasting habits are deeply entrenched at school and college:

“it was acceptable so it was quite a big shock for me coming to this environment where it’s not acceptable”.

- Staff had mixed opinion whether Turnitin helped; staff were unclear of how to interpret the originality reports; there was confusion as to how plagiarism is defined:

“I think people don’t view cut and paste as plagiarism”.

Benefits for students and staff

- This research along with other university initiatives is continuing to explore how to best manage academic offences; using a detection system should be part of a holistic approach that includes having clear university regulations; smarter assessment strategies and academic skills tuition.

Next Steps

- The work has highlighted the need for a clear definition of plagiarism with working examples not just within DMU but nationally. Poor practice is deeply entrenched within schools and colleges, and student transition to higher education needs to be more effectively managed.