**Birmingham Newman University Academic Similarity Checking Policy**

The University ensures academic similarity is checked through the use of an online service, currently Turnitin. This service facilitates the checking of student work for matching text on web pages, in electronic journals and in other materials by the production of a Similarity Report.

The following policy statement outlines the principles that should underpin the use of the University’s current online service for checking academic similarity across the University.

**1** **Purposes of checking academic similarity**

Checking academic similarity with the current online service (Turnitin) has the following purposes:

1. To provide a formative pedagogic tool which forms part of subject-area teaching of scholarly writing and referencing conventions in higher education;
2. To monitor and detect the extent and sources of plagiarised material in work submitted for assessment.

**2 Use of academic similarity checking online service**

Electronic submissions are usually submitted using the University VLE. By default, electronic submissions to the VLE are then automatically submitted to the University’s online similarity checking service. There is the option to turn off similarity checking, for example, where not required for certain patchwork assignments. Students are given sight of the Similarity Report after they submit and can make changes in light of the report before their final deadline. They can resubmit as many times as they wish and can receive up to three Similarity Reports per day.

Tutors see the latest Similarity Report when they mark and can opt to mark with Turnitin or to provide feedback in a different way should they wish.

**3 Interpretation and links to the University plagiarism procedures**

The Similarity Report should be interpreted on the basis of an informed academic judgement taking into account the nature of the assignment and the level of the student in order to determine whether plagiarism may have taken place (see section 4 below). Familiarity with the benefits (and limitations) afforded by the online similarity checking service is paramount in this process. Training, advice and guidance is available on the current University’s online similarity checking service, Turnitin (on-line training, guidance and advice is included in our subscription to the service) and from the E-Learning team.

Where academic judgement, based on a reading of the Similarity report, a close inspection of the sources highlighted, and a consideration of the nature of the assignment suggests that there is evidence that a student has plagiarised, then this information should be acted on in accordance with the University’s formal academic regulations with regard to plagiarism (see the [Student Academic Integrity Policy](https://www.newman.ac.uk/intranet/knowledge-base/student-academic-misconduct-procedure/)). It is important to note that while the University’s online similarity checking service is a useful tool for detecting similarity in order to support judgements about possible plagiarism, other methods should also continue to be used. This is particularly important as the University’s current similarity checking service, Turnitin, does not cover all published materials. Turnitin’s current search base includes previous submissions to Turnitin UK; webpages, including an archive of deleted or changed pages; some public domain materials and selected subscription services including a number of journals. However, it does not and cannot search a significant proportion of books or older sources not available on the internet; password protected essay banks; work plagiarised by translation and all electronic journals. Moreover, it cannot detect plagiarised diagrams, images or mathematical equations. As such its effectiveness will differ between disciplines.

**4 Communication, informed consent and intellectual property rights**

Subject areas have a responsibility to provide students with clear guidance on the benefits of using the University’s online similarity checking service, Turnitin, as a formative pedagogic tool for the submission of draft assignments

It is important to state that if students are using Turnitin for pedagogic purposes, unless they specifically opt out, submitted material is retained by Turnitin to supplement their database. Turnitin has a licence to reproduce student submissions (to assess their originality) and to retain a copy for comparison with future submissions. This clearly offers benefits in the form of protection against others’ attempts to plagiarise students’ own work. As such, students are not normally allowed to opt out of their material being retained unless commercial sensitivity is at stake. However, it is important to stress to students that this does not infringe their intellectual property rights to the piece of work; these will continue to reside with the author of the work.

E-Learning has issued guidance for subject areas on how to use the service, interpret its reports and communicate key issues to students.

**5** **Automatic detection of use of Generative AI**

Similarity checking services, including Turnitin, can provide additional functionality to automatically detect use of Generative AI. However, these tools are not reliable, there are online services available to help prevent such tools detecting use of Generative AI, and automatic detection of Generative AI has been shown to identify too many false positives, identifying as many as 1 in 100 samples of writing as using generative AI where none has been used. For this reason, tools for automatically detecting use of Generative AI are not used at the University.

Our approach to addressing use of generative AI is through careful assessment design, declaration of AI use and application of procedures for suspected academic misconduct after repeated malpractice. The guidance here should be read in conjunction with the [AI Guidelines for Learning, Teaching and Assessment](https://newman.topdesk.net/tas/public/ssp/content/detail/knowledgeitem?unid=c2348078950947318af48446f0be6fb2) and [Student Academic Integrity Policy](https://www.newman.ac.uk/intranet/knowledge-base/student-academic-misconduct-procedure/).