

# Plagiarism Issues in Theses

Guidance from the Graduate School and the Registry

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 It is important that students learn to properly attribute and acknowledge the work, data and ideas of others because plagiarism is research misconduct. Where research degree examiners suspect that a thesis contains minor plagiarism, this will be explored with the student during the viva. However, where research degree examiners suspect that a thesis contains major plagiarism, the viva will be postponed until an investigation under the Procedures for the Investigation of Research Misconduct is concluded. The outcome of that investigation will determine the next steps for the student.

[Research misconduct | Research and Innovation | Imperial College London](#)

- 1.2 When it comes to research degree theses (PhD, EngD, MPhil and MD[Res]) there are considerable grey areas, that require academic judgement. This document is intended to provide guidelines for students, supervisors and examiners on such matters.

## 2. College requirements

- 2.1 The College requires all research students to complete mandatory plagiarism awareness training by the Early Stage Assessment. The training provided to students, although taken in the early part of their research programme, remains accessible through Blackboard as a resource which can be referred to at any time. The course is available at:

[Online courses | Study | Imperial College London](#)

- 2.2 In addition to the mandatory training, the College also requires all Early Stage matching software. Guidelines for departments on how to implement the use of Turnitin for ESA submissions are available at:

[Turnitin Guidance | Study | Imperial College London](#)

- 2.3

### 3. Common issues

#### Materials and Methods

- 3.1 There are certain sections of a thesis that can show high similarity when put through Turnitin, for example, Material and Methods sections from the same discipline. This may be because of the limited number of ways in which a particular method can be accurately described. However, when interpreting the Turnitin similarity report, assessors should be able to determine whether the student has simply copied or edited another writer's text, or whether the student has written their own text that happens to share similarities with other descriptions in the field.

data or writing. It is therefore not acceptable simply to copy and paste methods into a thesis, nor to edit text to avoid similarity with another publication.

#### Re-use of previously published work

- 3.2 A common query is whether students can re-use their own work (for example material from a previous publication that they have written) as part of their thesis submission. In general it is acceptable academic practice for a PhD student to include in their thesis material that has been previously written and published by themselves (including figures and text): they should make it clear that they themselves have published this previously and reference appropriately. However, they must not include material written by others (including their supervisor) without proper attribution, even if they are authors on the publication.
- 3.3 It must be remembered that a thesis is more than a collection of publications. There may be considerable similarity between sections of a thesis and a publication, however, the level of detail and the nature of the discussion in a thesis is different than that in a journal publication.

academic regulations state:

[A series of papers, whether published or otherwise, is not acceptable for submission as a thesis.

Research work already published, or submitted for publication, at the time of submission of the thesis, either by the candidate alone or jointly with others, may be included in the thesis. The published papers themselves may not be included in the body of the thesis, but may be adapted to form an integral part of the thesis and thereby make a relevant contribution to the main theme of the thesis.

Publications derived from the work in the thesis may be attached as supplementary material to the thesis.]

- 3.4 It is also not acceptable to reproduce material that has been submitted for an

