Medical School Graduate Research Committee  
Plagiarism Policy Document for Postgraduate Research (PGR) in the Medical School

The Medical School is committed to training PGR students to the highest standards and in line with skills and attributes as identified in the Researcher Development Framework (for more information see http://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers/1218/Postgraduate-researchers.html). The ability to produce a piece of academic work (for assessment or publication) without the use of unfair means is one of the ways in which students can demonstrate that they have acquired and applied these skills and it encompasses all 4 domains of the Framework. Any use of unfair means in this process is dishonest and means that the student cannot demonstrate that they have acquired these skills.

The University of Sheffield defines unfair means as follows:
"The basic principle underlying the preparation of any piece of academic work is that the work submitted must be your own work. **Plagiarism**, submitting bought or commissioned work, **double submission (or self plagiarism)**, collusion, facilitating the use of unfair means and **fabrication of results** are not allowed because they violate this principle. Rules about these forms of cheating apply to all assessed and non-assessed work.

Plagiarism (either intentional or unintentional) is the stealing of ideas or work of another person (including experts and fellow or former students) and is considered dishonest and unprofessional. Plagiarism may take the form of cutting and pasting, taking or closely paraphrasing ideas, passages, sections, sentences, paragraphs, drawings, graphs and other graphical material from books, articles, internet sites or any other source and submitting them for assessment without appropriate acknowledgement."

(For more information about other forms of unfair means and further advice to students please see http://www.shef.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.40934!/file/student_guidance_on_unfair_means.pdf)

In order to help PGR students acquire the appropriate academic skills when producing their written work and to avoid unintentional plagiarism the School Graduate Research Committee (SGRC) has developed the following Policy:

**Training and Detection**
1) All students in the Medical School will receive **compulsory** training as to what constitutes plagiarism as part of the Postgraduate Induction Course (PIC). A copy of the policy will be included in the Induction pack provided to new students so that they are aware of the School Plagiarism Policy and its guidelines.

2) All Supervisors will be made aware of the School Plagiarism Policy.

3) Students will be advised to avail of the opportunity to self-submit key pieces of work (i.e. literature review, transfer report, final thesis) once to Turnitin, or an equivalent software in draft form without records being created so that they can decide for themselves whether they have plagiarised in their work based on the Turnitin report and the School Policy guidelines.

4) All final submitted documents will be submitted to Turnitin by the PGR Programme Administrator prior to release for marking. The technical plagiarism highlighted/statistics generated by Turnitin will be used as an indicator rather than a definitive test to define whether plagiarism has occurred or not, and will not be used to steer actions. Subsequent analysis of the report and the piece of work by the PGR Tutors and Unfair Means Officer will determine whether a case of potential plagiarism needs to be investigated.
5) The following will be exempt from charges of plagiarism:
   • Sections of Materials and Methods descriptions where strings of reagents/materials are listed.
   • In Methods sections, where protocols are reproduced verbatim from another source, which may or may not be previously published, the sections should be prefaced with the statement: ‘The following method was taken from ……… (reference).’ These statements will be scrutinized to ensure attribution has been adequately made.
   • Statements of fact such as ‘disease x is the 2nd leading cause of death in the UK’ will not be subject to plagiarism charges provided they do not constitute more than 10% of the entire document as identified by Turnitin and are properly referenced.

6) The main use of Turnitin will be to identify plagiarism of ideas: regions of similarity in text will be scrutinized for content to determine whether ideas have been taken from published work and presented as the student’s own.

7) The ownership of work cited as one’s own and therefore not subject to plagiarism assessment in respect of new submissions will have to be justified by students to the Head of Department. This may arise in the case of multiple authored published work being used by a single author (i.e. a student) as a direct source for a submitted piece of work. The judgment as to the contribution made by a student in this situation will be made by the Head of Department and the document would then carry a statement verifying that the Department was happy that the uses made of previously published documents were commensurate with the contributions made by the student to those works.

**Procedure when Use of Unfair Means is suspected**

If there are concerns that a submitted piece of work may have been prepared using unfair means based on the above criteria and after thorough scrutiny of the document against sources highlighted by the Turnitin report, assessment of the piece of work will be delayed. The student will be informed of the concerns and invited to an informal meeting with a members of the SGRC (PGR Tutor, Unfair Means Officer and PGR Programme Administrator) to discuss the piece of work. The student may be accompanied by their Personal Tutor, or a friend if they wish, for moral support only. The aim of the meeting will be to discuss the work and decide on whether plagiarism has occurred or not. The tone of the meeting will be educational and non-punitive.

At the end of the meeting a decision will be made between the student and members of the SGRC on whether plagiarism has occurred or not.

If it is agreed that
i. **plagiarism has not occurred:** the meeting will be recorded only and the piece of work will be released for assessment.

ii. **plagiarism has occurred:** the meeting will be recorded and a formal warning issued to the student. The student will also be expected to resubmit the piece of work, free from plagiarism, in a timely fashion.

OR

iii. **If no agreement is reached,** the student will be issued with a formal warning and the failure to reach an agreement is recorded. The student will also be expected to resubmit the work, free from plagiarism, in a timely fashion.

The student’s supervisors will also be informed of the outcome of the meeting.
If the outcome of the meeting is option ii or iii above:

In addition to discussing what plagiarism is during the meeting with the Unfair Means Officer and the PGR Tutor, the student will be advised to discuss any concerns they may have about plagiarism with their supervisors, PGR Tutors or Personal Tutor. In addition, the student will be expected to undergo remedial training. This could comprise one or more of the following: Attendance at the plagiarism awareness session delivered as part of the PIC; Completion of the online plagiarism awareness module offered in Information Skills Resource.

The student should record in PebblePad the training they do as well as a reflective entry on how they view their submission/Turnitin report in light of their new training.

In addition, students will be advised in writing that if they do not admit using unfair means and/or do not accept the Medical School’s action, they may submit an academic appeal to The Student Conduct and Appeals Office within 14 working days of the date of the letter confirming the action to be taken. This course of action does have serious implications to the student eg that if referred to a Discipline Committee, a higher penalty could be imposed.

If a student is suspected of plagiarism a second time

If a student has received a formal warning as a result of the meeting above, and then submits a piece of work which raises concerns about plagiarism again, they will be informed of the concerns and invited to attend for a meeting as above. In this second meeting, the PGR Lead will attend along with the Unfair Means Officer. Where the outcome of the discussion is that plagiarism is judged to have occurred on a second occasion, this will trigger disciplinary action via central University and Student Services.

The School's general approach to this Policy is one of education, but with a firm stance of non-tolerance for the use of unfair means and repeat offenders once the issues have been fully explained to students in feedback sessions. The emphasis is on the best interest of the PGR student experience in the School, avoiding students pointlessly rewriting documents to avoid plagiarism charges and at the same time providing information concerning the real dangers in this area.

Useful sources

Tutorial on Plagiarism awareness in Information Skills Resource (University login required):
https://librarydevelopment.group.shef.ac.uk/shef-only/info_skills/plagiarism.html

Plagiarism quiz
http://librarydevelopment.group.shef.ac.uk/showcase/quizzes/mc_plag_quiz.html

Citing in a literature review
http://librarydevelopment.group.shef.ac.uk/shef-only/research/lit_review.html