3.12 Plagiarism and unfair means

The University expects its graduates to have acquired certain attributes. Many of these relate to good academic practice:

- a critical, analytical and creative thinker
- an independent learner and researcher
- information literate and IT literate
- a flexible team worker
- an accomplished communicator
- competent in applying their knowledge and skills
- professional and adaptable.

Throughout your programme of studies at the University you will learn how to develop these skills and attributes. Your assessed work is the main way in which you demonstrate that you have acquired and can apply them. Using unfair means in the assessment process is dishonest and also means that you cannot demonstrate that you have acquired these essential academic skills and attributes.

3.12.1 What constitutes unfair means?

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 and fabrication of results are not allowed because they violate this principle (see definitions below). Rules about these forms of cheating apply to all assessed and non-assessed work.

1. **Plagiarism** (either intentional or unintentional) is using the ideas or work of another person (including experts and fellow or former students) and submitting them as your own. It 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.

2. **Submitting bought or commissioned work** (for example from internet sites, essay “banks” or “mills”) is an extremely serious form of plagiarism. This may take the form of buying or commissioning either the whole piece of work or part of it and implies a clear intention to deceive the examiners. The University also takes an extremely serious view of any student who sells, offers to sell or passes on their own assessed work to other students.

3. **Double submission** (or self plagiarism) is resubmitting previously submitted work on one or more occasions (without proper acknowledgement). This may take the form of copying
either the whole piece of work or part of it. Normally credit will already have been given for this work.

4. **Collusion** is where two or more people work together to produce a piece of work, all or part of which is then submitted by each of them as their own individual work. This includes passing on work in any format to another student. Collusion does not occur where students involved in group work are encouraged to work together to produce a single piece of work as part of the assessment process.

5. **Fabrication** is submitting work (for example, practical or laboratory work) any part of which is untrue, made up, falsified or fabricated in any way. This is regarded as fraudulent and dishonest.

### 3.12.2 How can I avoid the use of unfair means?

To avoid using unfair means, any work submitted must be your own and must not include the work of any other person, unless it is properly acknowledged and referenced. Your ideas are **always** more valuable and meaningful for your tutor than something copied and pasted from elsewhere, no matter how many concerns you have about their phrasing or logic.

As part of your programme of studies you will learn how to reference sources appropriately in order to avoid plagiarism. This is an essential skill that you will need throughout your University career and beyond. You should follow any guidance on the preparation of assessed work given by the academic department setting the assignment. There are several study skills modules available at Levels Zero and One within TILL, and information about referencing should be embedded throughout your studies.

In TILL, you are required to declare that all work submitted is entirely your own work. You are asked to attach a declaration form to all pieces of submitted work (including work submitted online), stating that all the work is your own.

If you have any concerns about appropriate academic practices or if you are experiencing any personal difficulties which are affecting your work, you should consult your personal tutor, supervisor or other member of staff involved.

The following websites provide additional information on referencing appropriately and avoiding unfair means:

The Library provides online information literacy skills tutorials at: [http://www.librarydevelopment.group.shef.ac.uk/](http://www.librarydevelopment.group.shef.ac.uk/)
The Library also has information on reference management software at: http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/library/refmant

The English Language Teaching Centre operates a Writing Advisory Service through which students can make individual appointments to discuss a piece of writing. This is available for all students, both native and non-native speakers of English http://cms.shef.ac.uk/eltc/languagesupport/writingadvisory

Finally, The Academic Skills Hub (TASH resource) offers information about appropriate academic use of sources under the ‘Everyday Skills’ section: http://www.tash.group.shef.ac.uk/

3.12.3 What happens if I use unfair means?

Any form of unfair means is treated as a serious academic offence and action may be taken under the Discipline Regulations. Where unfair means is found to have been used, the University may impose penalties ranging from awarding no grade for the piece of work or failure in a PhD examination through to expulsion from the University in extremely serious cases.

3.12.4 Detection of unfair means

The University subscribes to a national plagiarism detection service which helps academic staff identify the original source of material submitted by students. This means that academic staff have access to specialist software that searches a database of reference material gathered from professional publications, student essay websites and other work submitted by students. It is also a resource which can help tutors and supervisors to advise students on ways of improving their referencing techniques. Your work is likely to be submitted to this service.

For further information, please see: http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/exams/plagiarism and http://www.shef.ac.uk/ssid/procedures/grid.html#discipline

3.13 Referencing systems

All written work needs to be accurately referenced, so the reader can follow your sources, and find out where your ideas have come from. The key information that any reference needs to give is the author, title of the work, date, publisher, and page number. Anything else is useful, but not essential; and if you can put across these central pieces of information, then the details of how you do this are less important. That said, you should try where possible to follow an established style of referencing. There are two main styles used in TILL: the Harvard system (or Author Date system), and Footnote referencing. The Social and Natural Sciences tend to use the Harvard system; whereas the Humanities tend to use Footnotes. Your tutor should make it clear to you
which they expect in written work; and once you are agreed, make sure you stick with the one system in that piece of work.

Sometimes, perhaps to back up what you are saying, you will want to quote from your reading and directly insert a quotation into your work. This is absolutely fine, so long as you acknowledge that what you are quoting has been written by someone else – it is their idea, not your own. Therefore, when quoting in your own work you need to give the reference details of where you found it (usually the author, the name of the book, the place of publication and publisher, the year of publication, and the relevant page number). This is for two reasons. Firstly to acknowledge the work of the author; and secondly, so that people reading your work can trace the reference you have given and are then able to read further than you have quoted, to help them in their work.

As with plagiarism, there are plenty of sources for learning how to reference correctly. The Stella Cottrell text mentioned in the previous section is one place to start; or you could look at Richard Pears’ and Graham Shields’ *Cite Them Right: The Essential Guide to Plagiarism and Referencing*, published in 2004 by Pear Tree Books. The University Library again has detailed information in their “Information Skills” tutorials, and the “Current Students” section of the TILL website can point you to more information.

If you have any questions about referencing and plagiarism, then please contact your module tutor or Programme Director/Co-ordinator for advice. It is better to run the risk of asking what seems to you a silly question, than submit a piece of work that is found guilty of plagiarism.