

**University of Malta**

**Plagiarism and Collusion**

**Guidelines for students, academics, and  
Faculties/Institutes/Centres**

7.5.2010

# Table of Contents

- 1.0 Purpose of this document..... 1**
- 2.0 General provisions ..... 2**
  - 2.1 What is plagiarism? ..... 2**
  - 2.2 Minor and major plagiarism defined and explained ..... 2**
  - 2.3 Academic incompetence ..... 3**
  - 2.4 What is collusion? ..... 4**
- 3.0 Students ..... 5**
  - 3.1 Avoiding plagiarism..... 5**
  - 3.2 Avoiding collusion..... 5**
  - 3.3 Common knowledge..... 5**
  - 3.4 Checklist of good writing and referencing style ..... 6**
  - 3.5 Primary and secondary sources..... 6**
  - 3.6 Self-plagiarism..... 6**
- 4.0 Academics ..... 8**
  - 4.1 Detecting plagiarism and collusion..... 8**
  - 4.2 Reporting suspected plagiarism and collusion ..... 9**
  - 4.3 Reporting collusion ..... 9**
- 5.0 Faculties/Institutes/Centres ..... 10**
  - 5.1 Handling cases of suspected plagiarism and collusion..... 10**
  - 5.2 Educating students..... 10**
  - 5.3 Sub-contracting to the Institute of Linguistics ..... 11**
  - 5.4 Providing in-house training..... 11**
  - 5.5 Faculty/Institute/Centre guidelines ..... 11**

## **I.0 Purpose of this document**

The University of Malta is committed to ensuring that awards made to students are based on work that they have done themselves. Therefore, it takes cases of plagiarism, collusion, and other acts of academic fraud and dishonesty very seriously, and a disciplinary procedure is in place whereby such acts are punishable by reduction or cancellation of marks and may lead to expulsion from the University or the revocation of a degree already awarded.

The University is also committed to ensuring that students are given the opportunity to learn how to avoid accidental plagiarism, although ultimately the student is responsible for his or her actions.

Whenever a student submits work for assessment (whether or not that work counts towards an award), the student is submitting it in his or her own name. The University assumes that the work submitted is the student's own work, except where it is acknowledged through the proper use of quotation, citation, and reference.

This document, approved by University of Malta Senate on the 13<sup>th</sup> May, 2010, acts as a guide for students to avoid plagiarism and collusion; a guide for academics and examiners to detect and report cases of plagiarism and collusion; and an overarching guide for Faculties/Institutes/Centres (FICs) to handle cases of alleged plagiarism and collusion.

These guidelines are intended primarily for text-based works submitted for assessment. Although the plagiarism reporting procedure is intended for any case of plagiarism, these guidelines do not cover referencing, citation, and plagiarism avoidance and detection strategies in works other than the written form, for example, video, photography, music, computer programs, artwork, physical designs, and so on. Individual FICs should draft guidelines to address these issues. FICs may include guidelines to assist with the interpretation of plagiarism, and to provide further information to resident and visiting students of those FICs about approved referencing styles. FICs guidelines must be approved by Senate.

Students and University staff should familiarize themselves with the [University Assessment Regulations, 2009](http://www.um.edu.mt/registrar/regulations/general) (<http://www.um.edu.mt/registrar/regulations/general>) that these guidelines accompany.

### **Acknowledgements**

Text from the following documents, in whole or in part, has been used with permission of the respective authors and copyright holders.

Victor Axiak\*\*, Johann Briffa\*, and Chris Staff\*, 2007, *Guidelines on Plagiarism*, \*Faculty of Information and Communication Technology, \*\*Faculty of Science, University of Malta.

Doreen Spiteri and Grace Grima, [n.d.], *How to Avoid Plagiarism*, Faculty of Education, University of Malta.

## 2.0 General provisions

This section contains information about the University of Malta's definition of plagiarism; the definitions of major and minor plagiarism; examples of plagiarism; reasons why plagiarism should be avoided; and the University of Malta's definition of collusion.

### 2.1 What is plagiarism?

The University Assessment Regulations, 2009 (University of Malta) define plagiarism as “the unacknowledged use, as one's own, of work of another person, whether or not such work has been published, and as may be further elaborated in Faculty or University guidelines”.

This document constitutes the University Guidelines referred to in the definition of plagiarism. The FIC Guidelines that apply to specific study-units are the guidelines of the FIC offering the study-unit.

### 2.2 Minor and major plagiarism defined and explained

The following definitions have been formulated to clarify the distinction between minor and major plagiarism established in Regulation 41 of the *University Assessment Regulations, 2009*. They are intended to be used as **working definitions of minor and major plagiarism** within a dynamic allowing students a time-period<sup>1</sup>) during which to master the conventions of the referencing systems in their respective disciplines. The definition of **major plagiarism** is meant to cover what is generally understood to be prototypical plagiarism (significant unacknowledged borrowing), whereas that of **minor plagiarism** covers offences that could be construed as plagiarism but may be the result of **academic incompetence**<sup>2</sup>, thus bringing into question the intent to deceive. Minor plagiarism also includes instances of unacknowledged borrowing whose contribution to a piece of writing is considered to be of little significance, with the proviso that repeated instances may escalate into a major offence.

Major cases of plagiarism include:

1. Significant unacknowledged copying of text, diagrams, tables, images or other material from any published or unpublished material, lecture slides or handouts, whether such material is in manuscript, print or electronic form.
2. Acquisition of work, designs, or concepts (including buying or commissioning work from third parties/professional agencies) prepared by one or more others and presenting the work in whole or in part as the student's own work.
3. Significant amounts of patchwriting (i.e. changing only some of the words, or the order of the words, or redrawing diagrams, etc.) with or without citation. Patchwriting should not be confused with paraphrasing, which is the appropriate (and acknowledged) rewriting of ideas present in a source text in the student's own words and should be actively encouraged as a feature reflecting maturity in academic writing.

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1 It is important that students are given the opportunity to learn how to write and reference correctly, normally during the first semester of undergraduate studies. Postgraduate students who wish to refresh their writing and referencing skills may be guided by their Faculty/Institute/Centre to attend a relevant taught study-unit offered by the Faculty/Institute/Centre itself or by the Institute of Linguistics.

2 As postgraduate students are expected to be able to write and reference correctly, “academic incompetence” does not apply.

4. Examples of major plagiarism include:

- a. Copying text or a diagram from another source, failing to enclose the copied text within quotation marks, or taking somebody else's ideas, and failing to correctly acknowledge the source of the text, diagram, or ideas.
- b. Purchasing a paper or report from a 'paper mill'; paying others to prepare an assignment but then submitting the work under your own name.
- c. Copying text but replacing some words or changing word order, whether or not the source is correctly acknowledged; re-drawing diagrams and failing to acknowledge the source.

Minor offences of plagiarism include:

1. Individual in-line citations lacking corresponding entries in the references section, or failure to compile a references section.
2. Demarcated text without in-line citation or instances of incomplete or inconsistent in-line citation.
3. Incorrectly written entries in a reference list, when this results in the reader's inability to create a correspondence between the entries in the reference list and in-line citations.
4. Inconsistent citation style, when this results in the reader's inability to identify sources.
5. Unacknowledged borrowing that does not contribute significantly to the text in question.

### **2.3 Academic incompetence**

Written work, such as an essay, an extended essay, a report, a dissertation, and a thesis, usually consists of a logical sequence of claims. You claim that some problem exists; you claim some facts about the problem; you claim that there have been previous attempts made by others to solve the problem; you claim that the approach you are taking works; and so on. An unsubstantiated claim is a claim without evidence to support it. Evidence to support your claims can be provided either by referring to the same claims substantiated by others, or because you have the data and results to back up your own, original, claims.

If you rely on other sources to provide the evidence for any claims that you make, then you need to inform the reader where the original claims, and evidence supporting them, are made. You can do this by including a citation immediately following the claim in your written work. Further information about correct citation and referencing is in Annexe I.

Minor plagiarism usually involves cases where the student has used his/her own words by correctly paraphrasing or delimiting words that are others' (e.g., by enclosing them inside quotation marks), but where some references and citations are incomplete or inconsistent. As incomplete, inconsistent, or incorrect referencing means that an examiner may be unable to refer to the sources where the claims you make are substantiated, this constitutes minor plagiarism (at best), and academic fraud, in which claims are simply invented by the student and the reference to the source is deliberately obfuscated (at worst).

The University acknowledges that it may take time for students to master the skills of paraphrasing,

referencing, and citation. For this reason, instances of minor plagiarism which occur in the first year of undergraduate studies may be treated as **academic incompetence**.

## 2.4 What is collusion?

Collusion occurs when two or more students collaborate to produce work, where such collaboration is not permitted. The exact limitations on permitted collaboration depend on the nature of the work involved and on its assessment and should be made clear in writing as part of the assignment description by the examiner concerned. The examples below indicate the range of acceptable behaviour, but should not be taken as a comprehensive list:

1. In supervised examinations, it is expected that students work individually, and no sharing of ideas or material is allowed; only reference to permitted resources is allowed (such as the text book in an open-book exam) when indicated in the rubric of the exam paper.
2. In home assignments, unless otherwise specified, it is expected that students work individually, and no sharing of ideas or material is allowed; however, reference to publicly available information is permissible (with appropriate citation).
  - a. If a home assignment is an individual assignment, students are permitted to communicate orally such that the problem assigned is understood - however, students are not permitted to share material.
  - b. If a home assignment is specifically group-work, it is generally accepted that the work involved will be divided equitably between the students working together; however, students are still expected to collectively take responsibility for the content of their work, and therefore to know and understand the work produced by their team-mates. It is not permissible to have students who do not make a sufficient contribution, or who fail to allow their team mates to contribute. Also, communication between teams is generally not allowed, except for oral communication such that the problem is understood (as in point 2a above). If students working in a group are expected to submit individual work for assessment, then students must acknowledge which aspects of the work are the results of group effort and which are their own. **It therefore follows that the students take individual responsibility for the individually submitted contribution, but collective responsibility for the aspects of the submitted work that required a joint effort.**
3. In individual project work, each student is assessed on his or her own contribution; however, the nature of the work often demands assistance from others. Such assistance must be acknowledged, so that the student's individual contribution may be properly assessed.

Any authorized deviations from the limitations of permitted collaboration as specified in the assignment description must be documented by the study-unit co-ordinator.

Examples of collusion include but are not limited to:

1. 'Borrowing' an assignment written by another student and basing your assignment on the borrowed one.
2. Sharing results of experiments/work performed by others and incorporating them into your own work as though you had performed the experiments/work yourself.
3. Sharing solutions to problems, or other sections of a report or assignment.

4. A number of students colluding on an assignment intended to be performed as an individual assignment, such that each student works on a part of the assignment but submits individual reports covering the work performed by all colluding students.

## **3.0 Students**

### **3.1 Avoiding plagiarism**

The document “How to Avoid Plagiarism” annexed to these Guidelines is intended as a self-help resource for students to learn how to avoid plagiarism. The resource consists of several examples of how to produce a piece of one’s own writing based on other sources and do it in such a way that plagiarism is avoided. Students will learn how to paraphrase, summarize, quote and provide a reference so that sources are rightfully acknowledged. Lists of words and phrases that help writers to perform these actions are provided, together with a template for taking notes of readings and organizing references.

### **3.2 Avoiding collusion**

Always assume that unless you are clearly instructed otherwise in writing, work that you produce for assessment must be the result of your own individual effort. It is normally acceptable to discuss problems verbally with fellow students; to suggest sources of information; and for a proof-reader to correct grammatical errors in written work. Please remember that your lecturer is also a valuable source of information, and can give you advice.

When you are allowed to collaborate with your fellow students, you will normally be part of a team. You may, subject to any restrictions imposed by the lecturer and/or study-unit co-ordinator in charge of the assignment, share work with your team-members, but work must not be shared between different teams.

### **3.3 Common knowledge**

Normally, you must provide citations to works that verify claims that you make. However, when your claims are common knowledge, it is not necessary to provide a citation. Knowledge is common knowledge when it is well known. How can you find out if knowledge is well known? For example, if you are able to find at least 10 peer-reviewed publications that write about the knowledge without citing a source, then you can too. If you are in doubt, then provide a citation. Note that just because some knowledge is common knowledge it does not mean that you can freely use the words written by another person to describe it. You must still use your own words. For instance, if you are asked to describe a process that is commonly known in your field, you cannot simply copy somebody else’s description of it and present it as your own (i.e., without quotation marks if copied and/or without citation). However, you may describe the process in your own words, without including a citation. Also, just because the exact same text appears without reference on multiple Web pages does not mean that you too can copy and use the same words without quotation marks. Just because somebody else has plagiarized does not mean that you can too.

FICs are encouraged to explain how to identify 'common knowledge' in the FIC Guidelines.

### **3.4 Checklist of good writing and referencing style**

Students may find the following list useful to check if their work is written to the standard expected by the University of Malta. Please be aware that making 'mistakes' may invite an investigation into whether or not the work has been plagiarized.

1. Does the written work have a references section (either as footnotes or endnotes), if one is required by the nature of the assignment?
2. Does each bibliographic entry in the references section have an identifier so that it can be referred to from the main body of text?
3. Are the entries in the references section written consistently?
4. Is there in-line citation wherever it is needed?
5. Do all citations that appear in the main body of text correctly refer to entries in the references section?
6. Is the citation style consistent?
7. Are all claims made either common knowledge or substantiated? A claim can be substantiated by either citing a source that verifies the claim, or by referring to a chapter/section in the student's written work that contains the substantiation.
8. Is all the information provided pertinent to the assignment question, or does the written work go 'out of point'?
9. Is the writing style consistent? If not, you may have been too closely reliant on the wording in/phraseology of your sources.

### **3.5 Primary and secondary sources**

Primary sources are generally the sources that make an original (substantiated) claim or observation, or are the first to publish data (e.g., in the form of a census).

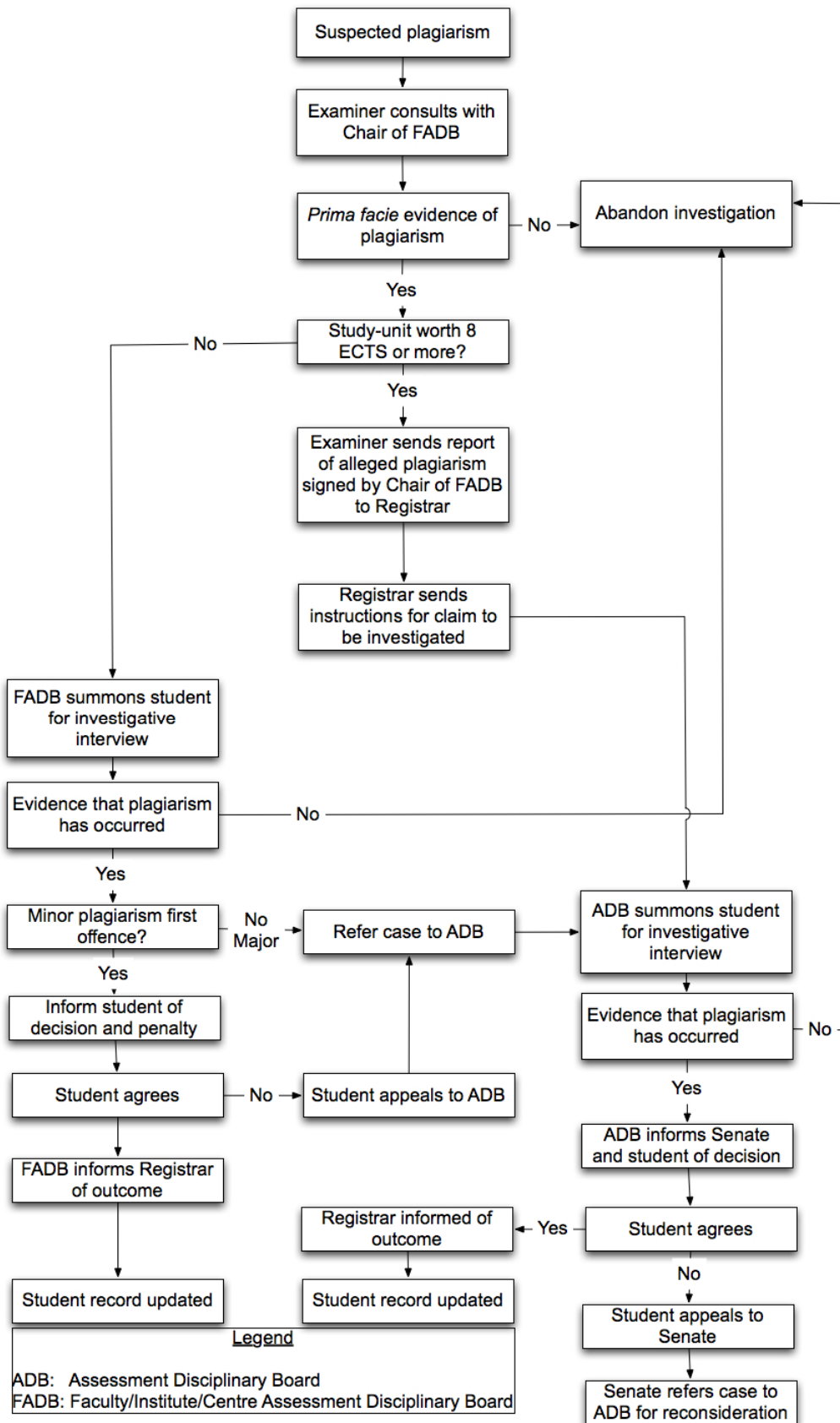
Secondary sources are those sources that contain a second-hand account of the information with reference to the primary source.

For example, Axisa (2000) makes an original claim and Scolari (2001) repeats this claim and references it, together with an observation about it. In this case, Axisa (2000) is the primary source and Scolari (2001) is the secondary source. However, Scolari (2001) is the primary source for his/her observation about the claim. If a student reads Scolari and repeats Scolari's observation about the claim but cites the primary source (Axisa) only, then that is plagiarism.

### **3.6 Self-plagiarism**

Students are reminded that University of Malta regulations prohibit the submission of the same piece of work for assessment in more than one study-unit without prior permission from the examiner (University Assessment Regulations, 2009, Article 39(1)(b)(ii)).





**Figure 1: Procedure for handling cases of alleged plagiarism**

## 4.0 Academics

### 4.1 Detecting plagiarism and collusion

The University of Malta is providing academics with access to plagiarism detection software. When a student submission is uploaded to the software, the software produces an originality report indicating which parts of the written work may have been plagiarised, together with a list of probable sources.

Academics who make use of the software must verify that the originality report is correct before taking further action (training in the use of plagiarism detection software and the interpretation of the automatically generated originality report will be provided).

The following is a list of characteristics that may suggest that the student has engaged in plagiarism. Of course, on their own they are not sufficient to conclude that the student has plagiarised and so the academic must support a claim by finding one or more source documents that have been plagiarised.

1. Is there a references section (endnotes, footnotes, etc.)? Of course, not every assessable work requires a references section. It would be helpful to students if the description of work to be performed clearly indicates that a references section is not required. In work submitted for assessment for which references are required, academics should ensure that the claims the student makes in the main body of the written work do require citation.
2. Are references in the references section written in such a way that they can be referred to from the main text? Referencing styles require entries to be referable through author names or through a numbering system. If the references are provided in such a way that they cannot be referred to via citation from the main body of the written work, it makes it extremely difficult for examiners/readers to verify the claims contained in the written work.
3. Is the referencing style consistent? It may be the case that students have read and used information from secondary sources, but listed only the primary sources in the references section, using the same referencing style used by the secondary source.
4. Are there in-line citations? Due to the nature of the work submitted for assessment it may be the case that the students are meant to submit their own completely original work (e.g., creative story writing, or observations about chemical experiments students are meant to perform themselves). In this case, it is unlikely that the assignment would require the use of citation and references. However, if there is a references section, then there should be corresponding citations in the main body of the written work.
5. Does the main text contain citations to works not listed in the references section? Sometimes this may be the result of a mistake. Past examples of plagiarism include copying paragraphs from other sources, including the in-line citations contained in them.
6. Is the citation style consistent? If paragraphs, including in-line citations, have been copied from many different sources, it is likely that the citation style will change.
7. Are there unsubstantiated claims? Not all unsubstantiated claims may be evidence of plagiarism. Sometimes, students may believe that the claim is common knowledge. Sometimes, however, students may have copied text from another source and included it in their own work and removed the in-line citations.

8. Are the claims relevant? Some students who are overly reliant on their sources may include information (copied or patchworked) that is irrelevant to the assignment.
9. Are there turns of phrase that may be considered beyond the student's general writing ability? These, too, are consistent with a student being overly reliant on a source.
10. Is the student's writing style consistent? Consistency in writing style may be difficult to achieve during the student's formative years, or if the assignment is worked upon in a piecemeal fashion. However, it may also be indicative of over-reliance on different sources.

## **4.2 Reporting suspected plagiarism and collusion**

An examiner who suspects that work submitted for assessment contains plagiarism should compile a report identifying the part/s of the work that has/have been plagiarised, and the probable source/s. Students are informed, on enrollment, to submit electronic copies of work submitted for assessment, as well as a hard copy, if instructed to do so. If plagiarism detection software has been used to assist with the process, the automatically generated originality report may be used. The examiner, however, should still verify the automatically generated originality report. An exhaustive coverage of the work submitted for assessment is not necessary, but the more evidence there is, the less likely that the student has made a 'mistake'.

If the student is suspected of major plagiarism, or, in the case of minor plagiarism, if the student is not a first year student, then the examiner should discuss the evidence with the Chair of the FICs Assessment Disciplinary Board to obtain confirmation that there is evidence of plagiarism.

If the student is a first year undergraduate student and the plagiarism is minor, then the examiner can treat the case as an instance of 'academic incompetence' and reduce marks by up to 35% depending on the extent, as writing and referencing style can be a criterion for assessment. It is necessary, in these cases, for the student concerned to be given a copy of the plagiarism report so the student can learn to avoid repeating the error in future assessments. In these cases, the reduction of marks should be confirmed by the Board of Examiners for the study-unit, after consultation with the Chair of the Faculty Assessment Disciplinary Board or his/her delegate.

The reporting procedure for handling cases of major plagiarism (regardless of the year of study in which it occurs) and minor plagiarism (when the student is in the second or subsequent year of studies) is summarized in Figure 1.

## **4.3 Reporting collusion**

All cases of suspected collusion are to be treated in the same way as major plagiarism. An examiner who suspects that two or more students have colluded should describe the evidence in a collusion report; confirm with the Chair of the FICs Assessment Disciplinary Board that collusion has probably occurred; and send a copy of the collusion report, together with the students' work, to the Registrar. Cases of collusion are investigated by the Assessment Disciplinary Board.

## 5.0 Faculties/Institutes/Centres

### 5.1 Handling cases of suspected plagiarism and collusion

The Chair of a FICs Assessment Disciplinary Board is the Dean of the Faculty, or Director of the Institute/Centre or his/her delegate. The delegate need not be a Head of Department, but should be a senior member of the academic staff of the Faculty. In cases of plagiarism when the Dean is the Head of the Department offering the study-unit, the Dean's delegate will chair the FICs Assessment Disciplinary Board. The Dean's delegate is normally nominated at the first FICs Board meeting prior to the start of the academic year. Whenever a FICs Assessment Disciplinary Board convenes, the Chair and the Head of Department should normally be from different departments/divisions in the FICs.

The role of the Chair of the FICs Assessment Disciplinary Board or his/her delegate is to i) confirm cases of academic incompetence brought to his/her attention by the Board of Examiners of a study-unit when academic incompetence is alleged for a first-year undergraduate, and to confirm the proposed reduction in grade for the assessment; ii) give a second opinion of a case of alleged plagiarism brought by an examiner; iii) convene a FICs Assessment Disciplinary Board in accordance with the University Assessment Regulations, 2009.

A FICs Assessment Disciplinary Board should be convened when the alleged plagiarism (other than academic incompetence) has occurred in a study-unit worth less than 8 ECTS. In cases when students alleged to have plagiarised are from a Faculty/Institute/Centre other than the Faculty/Institute/Centre offering the study-unit, the Chair of the student's home FICs Assessment Disciplinary Board should attend. The student shall be invited to attend and have the right to be heard and to bring any witnesses in their defence, provided that students who fail to appear before the FICs Assessment Disciplinary Board without justification shall be deemed to have renounced the right to be heard. Following the hearing, the FICs Assessment Disciplinary Board shall reach one of the decisions outlined in Table I. The overall reporting procedure is summarized in Figure I.

<b>Decision</b>	<b>Action</b>
Alleged plagiarism did not occur	No further action
Academic incompetence, rather than plagiarism occurred	Reduce marks for the component by an appropriate amount
Minor plagiarism occurred	i) If this is the student's first offence related to plagiarism then award a grade of 0 to the component in which the plagiarism occurred and inform the student and the Registrar ii) If this is the student's second or subsequent offence related to plagiarism then refer the case to the ADB via the Registrar
Major plagiarism occurred	Refer case to ADB via Registrar

Table I: Decisions that the FADB can reach and action to take

## **5.2 Educating students**

FICs are obliged to provide students with education about good writing and referencing style and how to avoid plagiarism. This should ideally be provided to students during the first semester of their first academic year. Students should be assessed on their ability, and should be provided with feedback to be able to avoid making the same mistakes again.

FICs should explicitly state in their guidelines how this education will be provided. These University guidelines suggest two approaches: in-house provision and sub-contracting to the Institute of Linguistics.

## **5.3 Sub-contracting to the Institute of Linguistics**

The Institute of Linguistics offers Faculty-specific variants of LINI063 – a study-unit worth 2 ECTS credits whose sole purpose is to educate students to improve their writing and referencing styles. As students are utilizing this study-unit to learn how to paraphrase, cite, reference, and avoid plagiarism, students who plagiarise will lose marks accordingly, without being reported to a Disciplinary Board, and will be given feedback so that they may avoid making the same mistakes in future work.

For further information, contact the Institute of Linguistics.

## **5.4 Providing in-house training**

Rather than requiring students to take a 2 ECTS study-unit from the Institute of Linguistics, FICs may decide to add an assessable component to an existing study-unit that is taken by all FICs students during the first semester of the first year of undergraduate studies. For instance, in the existing curriculum all students in a Faculty may take a compulsory 6 ECTS study-unit. It is essential that students are given lectures that specifically cover aspects of LINI063 (ideally, these lectures are constructed in liaison with the Institute of Linguistics). FICs are reminded that a study-unit's contact hours include 5-7 hours of lectures per ECTS as well as a number of hours of seminar/practicals/tutorials. Thus, it may be possible to add content on writing and referencing styles without exceeding the amount of effort required for a student to follow the study-unit and its assessment. To assess the writing and referencing component of the study-unit, students may be given a take home assignment, worth up to one or two ECTS or their equivalent, and they must be specifically informed that the assessment of the assignment is primarily focused on writing and referencing style. The division of marks for this assignment may be 70% for writing and referencing style and 30% for content. Students should be given feedback on their writing and referencing style. A student who plagiarises significantly would lose the 70% of marks allotted to writing and referencing style, but may still be given 30% for content. Such students will be given feedback, but will not be reported to a Disciplinary Board. Note that all students are expected to submit electronic copies of work submitted for assessment in PDF or Microsoft Word format, if asked to do so.

## **5.5 Faculty/Institute/Centre guidelines**

The University Guidelines are primarily focussed on text-based student submissions. Plagiarism can also occur in computer programmes, artwork, music, video productions, designs, etc. FICs that expect students to submit such work must clearly explain to students what constitutes plagiarism and should ideally include training to avoid plagiarism in LINI063 or the in-house equivalent study-

unit.

Additionally, FICs should ideally indicate which referencing systems (e.g., APA, Harvard, numbered, etc.) are acceptable, and how to identify when knowledge is 'common knowledge' and consequently does not need to be cited.

Faculty/Institute/Centre Guidelines must be approved by Senate.