UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
PLAGIARISM COMMITTEE

Brief Guide to the Interpretation of Turnitin® Originality Scores

Turnitin® works by matching computer-readable text in a student's uploaded document with other documents from various sources, which include (a) Turnitin's own global and local repositories of previously uploaded material, (b) various academic full-text paper databases, and (c) the world-wide web in general. It uses the results of matching algorithms to identify potential plagiarism and collusion. Turnitin's matching algorithms do not include image matching.

The Originality Report generated by Turnitin® for each uploaded document needs to be interpreted carefully. This report also includes an Originality Percentage Score which is aimed as a *guide* to assist examiners/lecturers to select those Originality Reports that need more detailed reviewing.

Please take account of the following guidelines when assessing these reports:

1. **There is no percentage threshold score in a Turnitin® Originality Report that separates a plagiarised/colluded document from a non-plagiarised/colluded one.** In line with recommended practice, the University of Malta has not established such a threshold and it would be incorrect to do so. The score provided depends on several factors which include amongst others (a) the search stringency selected during the configuration of a Turnitin® activity, (b) the presence of *verbatim* quotations in the student's document, which could indeed be valid and correctly cited, (c) whether or not Turnitin® has been configured to include or exclude bibliography (please note that there are occasions where Turnitin® still persists to include bibliography even though the specific Turnitin® activity has been configured to ignore it).

2. **Turnitin® Originality Report Scores which are zero or close to zero are suspicious.** These are possibly the result of an uploaded student document which does not contain machine-readable text, or which has been intentionally altered either partially or fully, in such a way as to dissuade the identification of certain parts of the document by Turnitin®. Such Originality Reports should be given special attention and the student document should also be closely studied in order to identify whether this is the case.

3. **Turnitin® Originality Report Scores which are 100% or very high need to be individually investigated.** Such a score could be the result of straight collusion with another student's document (even from past years or from another university), or from the same student's own submission of an identical assignment in a previous year, if the student in question has repeated a year. On the other hand, a high percentage could also be due to the student having previously erroneously uploaded a *draft* copy of his/her document into a *final* Turnitin® area which has been configured to submit the document to a repository.

4. **The whole Turnitin® Originality Report needs to be evaluated.** A decision on the existence or absence of plagiarism or collusion should *only* be taken after having read this report. It is the *academic judgement* of the lecturer/examiner concerned that should be the yardstick which identifies whether a student document has been plagiarised. *The Originality Report is just a guide to help accomplish this.*

5. **In the event of plagiarism/collusion being identified within a student document, the University guidelines should be followed.** Please consult the relevant sections within the current *University Assessment Regulations* and the *Plagiarism and Collusion Guidelines* available at https://www.um.edu.mt/registrar/student-conduct.