

Definition of Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a form of academic misconduct, using ideas or the work of another person and presenting it as your own work either wholly or in part, without due acknowledgement of the original source of the material through appropriate citation.¹⁻² Plagiarism can also include re-using your own work without citation.³ Whether deliberate or accidental (as in the case of carelessness or poor academic discipline), plagiarism undermines scholarship, is a form of academic misconduct and conflicts with the ethos of Royal College of Physicians of Ireland (RCPI).⁴

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish standards for the conduct of public health reports (PHRs) that are submitted for Membership of the Faculty of Public Health Medicine (MFPHMI) Part II examination, to include instructions for candidates on anti-plagiarism checking as part of the submission process and to provide a framework for effective, fair, confidential, consistent and timely processes in the event of suspected plagiarism being made against a candidate.

Scope

This policy applies to:

- Submitting work copied extensively with only minor textual changes from books, journals, or any other source.²
- Paraphrasing or summarising ideas or work of others without due acknowledgement of the original source.²
- Failing to cite all original sources. ²
- Self-plagiarism: presenting a piece of one's own work without reference to the original material.²
- Representing collaborative work as one's own plagiarism, whether intentional or not, is a form of misconduct.²
- Plagiarism applies not just to text but also to other formats such as graphics, tables, formulae, or any representation of ideas in print, electronic or any other media, in addition to computer software and algorithms. ⁴

- Collusion, where work is permitted to be copied/presented without appropriate attribution, is a form of plagiarism by both parties. Collusion also applies where a joint effort is presented by an individual without due recognition of the input of others.⁴
- In some cases, particularly in the professional academic arena, plagiarism may also be a breach of copyright, which may expose the copier to civil and/or criminal proceedings if within the timeframe of the copyright. Plagiarism may also relate to unpublished material, such as the notes of others, which may not be covered by copyright.⁴

To avoid plagiarism candidates should correctly cite and reference their submissions to RCPI. Referencing acknowledges the books, articles, websites, and any other material used in the writing of PHRs. Please see the *Checklist Pre-submission of FPHMI Public Health Reports* document that is available on the RCPI [website](#) for guidelines on references and citation.⁵

Turnitin

Turnitin, similarity detection service, is used at RCPI to check for instances of possible plagiarism in candidates' work. Turnitin can be accessed through the Brightspace platform. This integration ensures that all submitted PHRs are automatically checked against the Turnitin database which is one of the entry requirements for the Part II examination. After the submission, the results will be illustrated in a Similarity Report that highlights any matches found and the overall percentage of matched text (known as the 'Similarity Index') By default the 'filter and settings' panel in the Turnitin will be set to exclude bibliography, quotes and sources which are ≤ 10 words.

Any work submitted by the candidate (or by RCPI on the candidate's behalf) is saved in the RCPI institutional repository which is its own private database. **The first three resubmissions will generate a new Similarity Report straight away. It is important to note that after three attempts, a 24-hour wait is enforced to generate Similarity Reports for all subsequent resubmissions.**⁶ This delay is automatic and allows resubmissions to correctly generate without matching to the previous draft. Candidates should therefore plan ahead to ensure that they have enough time to generate the initial report, make amendments if required and to generate the final Similarity Report.⁶

Interpreting the Similarity Report

It's important to note that Turnitin doesn't definitively identify plagiarism. When a document is submitted to Turnitin, it compares the text in the document against its database of electronic materials and the internet. Turnitin's databases contain vast amounts of web content, previously submitted assignments, periodicals, journals and publications. Turnitin also has an Institution paper repository function, which allows for candidate's submissions to be checked against papers previously submitted to RCPI. Turnitin identifies areas of similarity between the submitted report and other reports within the database which must then be reviewed.

- The Similarity Report generated by Turnitin is examined thoroughly by the Convenor of exams and the RCPI Exams Coordinator.
- A Similarity Index Score of greater than 30% is cause for concern and will be reviewed for potential plagiarism. However, it does not always necessarily indicate that plagiarism has occurred.
- The overall similarity score is less of an importance:
 - If the individual score for each highlighted text is >3% from one particular source, this will be highlighted as a potential instance of plagiarism
 - In order to mitigate the above risk of suspected plagiarism, the 'filter and settings' panel in the Turnitin will be set by the Exams Co-Ordinator to default to the following:
 - a) Exclude quotes
 - b) Exclude bibliography
 - c) Exclude sources which are ≤ 10 words
- Any instance of a high similarity score will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.
- Account of the context and nature of each instance of a high similarity score will be taken into consideration by the Convenor of Exams and the Exams Co-Ordinator.
- Appendices may contain published tools, papers or presentations that may generate a high similarity score. Where this situation arises, once the content is appropriately referenced, it will not be considered plagiarism.

Suspected Plagiarism Review Procedure

Where a suspected instance of plagiarism has been detected, an initial assessment will be undertaken, and if there are grounds for concern, the candidate will be informed in writing by the RCPI Exams Coordinator that their report is under scrutiny as suspected plagiarism. At this point, the RCPI Exams Coordinator will encourage the candidate to link in with their trainer and note the supports available to them including discussion with the National Specialty Director and the Health & Wellbeing Team within the RCPI. The candidate will be invited to reply to the allegation of suspected plagiarism, within five working days from its receipt.

The Convenor of exams will then refer the case to the Plagiarism Review Committee, with a short report outlining the grounds of suspicion, a copy of the PHR and any supporting evidence (Similarity Report and a response from the candidate).

The Plagiarism Review Committee will investigate and report on the suspected case of plagiarism to the Convenor of exams within 10 working days from its receipt. The Plagiarism Review Committee may decide any of the following:

- That plagiarism has not occurred, and the candidate's application will be accepted. Candidate is to be informed in writing by the RCPI Exams Coordinator about the outcome.
- That plagiarism has occurred, and the candidate's application will be rejected. Candidate is to be informed in writing by the RCPI Exams Coordinator about the outcome and is directed as to where to receive advice about academic integrity for future submissions. All instances of confirmed plagiarism will be noted at the PHMEC and RCPI Examinations Committee meetings, without naming the candidate.

The Plagiarism Review Committee recognises the importance of maintaining confidentiality when handling cases of suspected plagiarism, and candidate's anonymity will be maintained as far as is possible during any investigation.



Sanctions

Where an allegation of plagiarism has been proven, the penalty imposed by the Plagiarism Review Committee includes rejecting the candidate's application and withdrawing them from the Part II sitting. This submission will count as one of their three attempts at the Part II examination. Resubmission at future sittings will be permitted.

Appeals

Details of the appeal procedure can be found in the [Appeals Policy](#).⁷



Reference List:

1. University of Cambridge. Good academic practice and avoiding plagiarism [Internet]. Cambridge: University of Cambridge [(undated); cited 2023 August 2nd]. Available from: <https://libguides.cam.ac.uk/plagiarism/whatisplagiarism>
2. Royal College of Physicians of Ireland. Regulations and Information for Candidates – Membership of the Faculty of Public Health Medicine of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland – Part I, II and III [Internet]. Dublin: Royal College of Physicians of Ireland [updated 2023 May; cited 2023 August 2nd]. Available from: https://www.rcpi.ie/Portals/0/Document%20Repository/Exams/Faculty%20of%20Public%20Health%20Medicine/MFPHMI%20Amended%20Regulations%20-%20May%202023.pdf?ver=0IfkO9HCva36_jlQxxdWvQ%3d%3d
3. University of Oxford. Plagiarism [Internet]. Oxford: University of Oxford [(undated); cited 2023 August 2nd]. Available from: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/skills/plagiarism>
4. University College Cork. Plagiarism Policy [Internet]. Cork: University College Cork [updated 2021 April; cited 2023 August 2nd]. Available from: [PlagiarismPolicy2021v4.pdf \(adobe.com\)](#)
5. Royal College of Physicians of Ireland. Checklist pre-submission of FPHMI Public Health Reports [Internet]. Dublin: Royal College of Physicians of Ireland [updated 2021 November 11th; cited 2023 August 2nd]. Available from: [Checklist for drafting of Public Health Reports 2023.pdf \(rcpi.ie\)](#)
6. Turnitin. Feedback Studio Student [Internet]. Turnitin [(undated); cited 2023 August 2nd]. Available from: <https://help.turnitin.com/feedback-studio/turnitin-website/student/student-category.htm>
7. Royal College of Physicians of Ireland. Appeals Policy [Internet]. Dublin: Royal College of Physicians of Ireland [March 2022]. Available from: <https://www.rcpi.ie/Learn-and-Develop/Examinations/Examinations-Policies-and-Procedures>