

Building bridges: Supporting institutional processes and practice in academic writing, feedback and student assessment

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Abstract

The **SIPA** (Supporting Institutional Practice in feedback and Assessment) project at the University of Oxford was initiated and run by the IT Services Department which supports the central VLE and the use of Turnitin. The aims of the SIPA project were to review current use of Turnitin by staff and students; run a pilot project to test the use of GradeMark and PeerMark; develop case studies, support materials and training courses for staff and students; and make recommendations resulting from these reviews. Besides the practical deliverables of the SIPA project, an important requirement was to establish and build relationships with institutional stakeholders. Many other stakeholders and experts, such as the central educational policy unit, the libraries, continuing education and the professional development unit, should be involved in order to build an integrated institutional strategy for academic writing and plagiarism awareness.

This paper charts the course of the SIPA project and will demonstrate some of the deliverables produced. The establishment of an institutional Turnitin User Group and increased promotion of the Turnitin support service at the university appear to have made a positive impact. The use of Turnitin is growing, particularly among administrators using Turnitin for quick checks for suspected plagiarism. It remains a challenge to engage academics in interpreting originality reports, or using GradeMark and PeerMark. The VLE team gained a much deeper understanding of Turnitin and allied products, and has taken the lead in negotiations with both the open source VLE community and the Turnitin suppliers in terms of mutually beneficial cooperation.

Keywords: policy, processes, support, training, Turnitin, GradeMark, PeerMark, Sakai

Background

Oxford University is a research-intensive institution, with traditional and flexible ways of working, in both administration and academia. Administrative and technology tools and systems tend to be initiated and implemented independently in this federated structure, and little is mandated by central management. One of the benefits of such an arrangement is that many software tools in use are open source and can be customised to suit particular needs, including the virtual learning environment (VLE) (Sakai), which is branded internally as 'WebLearn'. One of the challenges of such flexibility is the extent of autonomy enjoyed by faculties, departments and schools, which are free to adopt and implement their own systems for timetabling, submission of examined work, and policy implementation.

The first step in the SIPA project was to pursue a broader institutional understanding of *academic literacy* and start to interrogate the roles and responsibilities of students, tutors and the institution. Oxford University's tutorial system allows an expert 'tutor' – an academic or recognised scholar in the field – to mentor students in a small group situation, focusing on building expertise in the subject discipline. We identified a need for more in-depth guidance for tutors and students in terms of improving students' academic literacy skills. Figure 1 shows our interpretation of the institutional framework surrounding student academic writing.

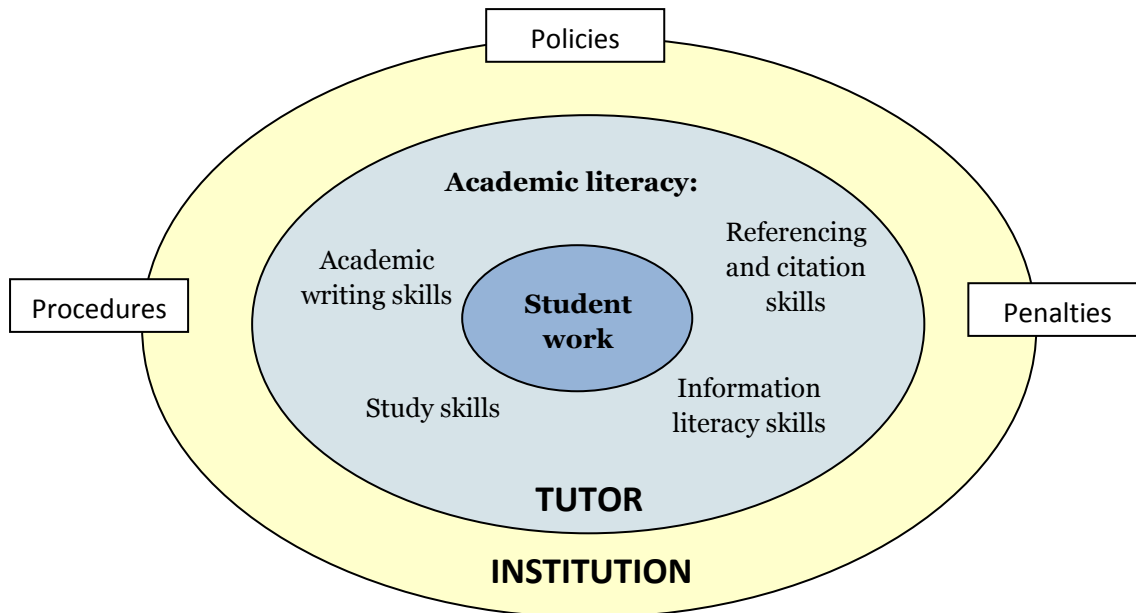


Figure 1: Student work under the guidance of a tutor, within an institutional framework

The need for the SIPA project

In 2007 the university ran a pilot project in one department on the use of Turnitin, resulting in the decision to purchase an institutional TurnitinUK licence. The university supports and encourages the use of Turnitin, not just by examiners for summative student work (to help detect intentional plagiarism), but also as a formative tool to support tutors in helping students improve their academic writing, paraphrasing, referencing and citation skills. The provision of formative guidance to students in working with their tutor, supervisor, or lecturer, as well as with language, library and IT specialists is encouraged. The IT Services Department provides support and training in the use of the VLE (WebLearn), as well as the Turnitin suite of products (Originality Check, GradeMark and PeerMark).

Following on from the 2007 pilot project, three needs were identified:

- Formalise the implementation of Turnitin, GradeMark and PeerMark across the institution;
- Address the lack of clear policy from the central administration regarding plagiarism procedures and guidance for faculties and departments;
- Design and develop staff and student training sessions and support materials on plagiarism awareness and the use of Turnitin.

The SIPA project was scoped and funded to employ one learning technologist for a period of 18 months in order to address the above needs. Before the project was launched, members of the VLE team assessed and summarised the ‘state of play’ at the university in terms of how Turnitin could be used and the type of decisions that users would need to make due to alternative paths available to them.

Due to the devolved nature of decision making at the university, staff may choose whether to use Turnitin via the VLE integration (the WebLearn Assignments tool), or directly via the TurnitinUK web interface (<http://submit.ac.uk>) (See the relative advantages and disadvantages listed in Appendix A1.) For direct use of Turnitin, staff members request an instructor account from the central Turnitin administrator in IT Services. The institutional policy does not allow students to submit their work to Turnitin independently – it must be done under the guidance of their tutor, lecturer or supervisor.

Figure 2 shows the decision points that a staff member should consider before embarking on the use of Turnitin.

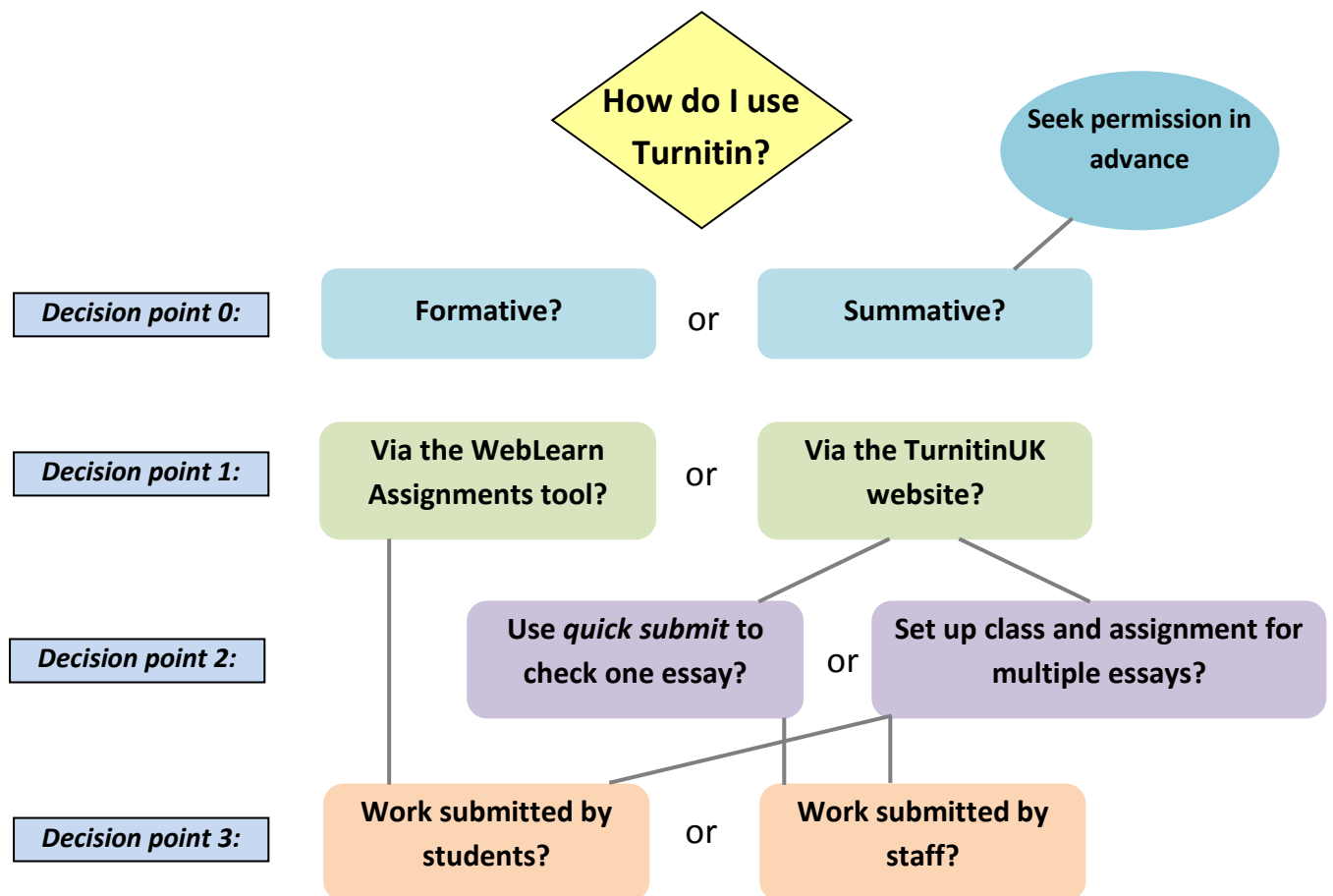


Figure 2: Decision points for staff members to consider in using Turnitin

Figure 2 shows that various options are available for staff to consider when embarking on the use of Turnitin as an originality checking tool. If using the WebLearn Assignments tool, the assignment must first be created by the staff member, students should already be enrolled as site members, and then they can submit their essays. If using TurnitinUK, staff members may either:

- use the **quick submit** mode (in order to submit a small number of essays)
 - essays are submitted by the staff member
- or set up a **class** (in order to accept essays from a group of students)
 - essays may be submitted by the students or by the staff member, but the class and the assignment must first be created by the staff member.

Methodology: The SIPA project

As a consequence of the 2007 pilot project and in order to address the needs that emerged from it, the **SIPA (Supporting Institutional Practice in feedback and Assessment)** project was initiated in late 2011. The project was run by the IT Services department (Academic IT group) which supports the central VLE (WebLearn) as well as the use of Turnitin. Funding was acquired to appoint a learning technologist for a fixed term of 18 months to concentrate on delivering the required outcomes. The project was run and managed according to a formal (but ‘light touch’) project management methodology.

Aims of the project

The aims of the project were to:

- review current use of Turnitin by staff and students; review how Turnitin is used by other UK higher education institutions;
- run a pilot project to test the use of GradeMark and PeerMark;
- develop case studies, support materials and training courses for staff and students; and
- make recommendations resulting from these reviews.

Project management methodology

At the time, IT Services was running a ‘light-touch’ project management methodology – i.e. an internally agreed methodology that suited the requirements for the management and delivery of projects based on IT service provision. A project brief, budget and project plan were submitted and approved, and monthly monitoring reports were submitted to the senior management team.

Project deliverables

The project deliverables included new features and enhancements to WebLearn (the Assignments tool and Turnitin integration), as well as the design, development and delivery of institutional-specific support documentation, advice materials and training for users – academics, administrators and students.

Besides the practical deliverables of the SIPA project, a most important requirement was to establish and build relationships with institutional stakeholders, in order to continue and consolidate the work already begun. The project team work with various stakeholders and experts, such as the central educational policy unit, the libraries, continuing education and the professional development unit, in order to begin building an integrated institutional strategy for academic writing and plagiarism awareness.

Project activities (work packages)

Various standard project management methodologies such as PRINCE2[®] may refer to ‘product-based planning’ or ‘work packages’ (SPOCE, 2013). In the SIPA project we decided to manage the

project by monitoring progress on the following nine 'activities' which were distilled from the aims of the project:

1. Review current use of Turnitin by staff and students at Oxford University
2. Review Turnitin support, use and strategy at other UK universities
3. Pilot GradeMark and PeerMark
4. Develop a communications strategy for plagiarism prevention and Turnitin use
5. Design and develop new training courses (5)
6. Design and develop case studies in using technology to support assessment and feedback (6)
7. Recommend improvements to the WebLearn Assignments 2 tool
8. Develop help documentation, user information and guidance
9. Produce reports

The activities were managed using an Excel[®] spreadsheet, with a column for each of the nine activities, divided into milestones. Due dates were shown in red, and as each milestone was completed, the respective cell in the spreadsheet was shaded. The simple example shown (Figure 3) may offer a useful tool for other learning technology teams in managing similar projects – a skill that is often assumed, but seldom developed in practice.

		Activities					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
		Review of current use of Turnitin by staff and students at this university	Review of Turnitin support, use and strategy at other UK universities	Pilot GradeMark and PeerMark	Develop a Communications Strategy for Plagiarism prevention and Turnitin use	Design and develop (5) new training courses	Design and develop (6) case studies at Oxford in using technology to support assessment and feedback
		Develop questionnaire 30 Nov	Draw up list of contacts at other institutions 23 Dec	Identify contrasting departments/interested parties 28 Feb	Identify key stakeholders 15 Jan	Identify and name courses as per database requirements 31 May	Explore and finalise a suitable 'look & feel', layout, format for case studies 28 Feb
		Pilot questionnaire 30 Nov	Conduct visits or video conference sessions with them 31 Mar	Conduct preliminary workshop 15 Apr	Meet with key stakeholders in divisions, administration and libraries 31 Mar	Write and submit course descriptions 30 Apr	Identify cases 30 Apr
Milestones	Study relevant papers/questionnaires from other institutions ongoing	Write report on each contact session - notes in WL team wiki 30 Apr	Conduct GradeMark pilot Apr-June	Advertise Plagiarism/Turnitin User Group and set up site in WebLearn 31 Jan	Schedule new courses with IT Learning Programme 30 June	Draft case studies in collaboration with subjects 31 Aug	
	Conduct review 31 Mar		Conduct PeerMark pilot Apr-June	Set up mailing list for Plagiarism User Group and schedule meetings 31 Jan	Design learning activities/ex 31 July		
	Write some preliminary recommendations to inform project 30 June			Design and produce adverts for promotion of courses and WebLearn front page 31 Mar	Compile course handbooks 30 Sept		

Figure 3: Spreadsheet to manage activities, milestones, due dates and completion

The spreadsheet proved to be a useful yet simple tool for monitoring progress on the project and the required deliverables. It served as a working document in monthly meetings between the project manager and the learning technologist, and provided input into the monthly monitoring reports.

Findings and discussion

Review current use of Turnitin by staff and students at Oxford University

The first activity in the SIPA project was to seek current users of Turnitin at Oxford University and to find out how they use the system. A short questionnaire was sent to all staff members with a Turnitin instructor account. A total of 20 replies were received from 70 instructors (response rate of 28.6%). The following data was gathered:

Question	Responses
1. Please give us your comments about whether and how Turnitin is useful to you	20 open comments
2. In what ways do you use Turnitin? (You may give more than one response) A: Using Quick Submit for individual papers B: Creating a class and assignment in Turnitin directly (via the submit.ac.uk website) C: Using the Assignments tool in WebLearn	A: 15 responses B: 2 responses C: 1 response
3. What is your primary role? A: Academic staff and/or researcher B: Administrative staff	A: 11 responses B: 9 responses

The responses to question 1 were largely positive, although one respondent reported that they had been unsuccessful in using the system and would have appreciated more support. Another reported that it took them a long time to learn to use Turnitin. There was thus some indication of the need for training and support. Positive responses were of the type to be expected when Turnitin is used as a plagiarism detection tool, e.g.

Yes, very useful. As a science tutor, I find my students were relying heavily on both internet sites and text books. I have been able to discover how much material they are pulling from which sources.

I have found it quite good, very useful especially the quick submit, not up to date on some of the latest papers published but ok.

People who opt to use TurnitinUK directly (see Figure 2) are a mix of academic staff, researchers and administrators; they clearly use it via Quick Submit to quickly scan papers for evidence of possible plagiarism. It should be noted that the low response to question 2C (number of people using Turnitin via the VLE integration) is unsurprising in this context, since the sample consisted of staff members with instructor accounts in the direct TurnitinUK service. VLE users were not surveyed, since VLE use was not part of the project brief.

Frequent users of TurnitinUK direct were identified by looking at Turnitin Instructor statistics. Follow up discussions with them revealed that administrative staff are frequently asked to submit papers to TurnitinUK direct on behalf of academics or examiners. There appeared to be widespread disparities between departments in terms of policy and processes regarding the use of Turnitin for either formative or summative purposes.

Review Turnitin support, use and strategy at other UK universities

In order to investigate current and recent activities in the field of academic integrity and support interventions, the project team began by engaging with support agencies in the UK, such as the Higher Education Academy, JISC and PlagiarismAdvice (<http://plagiarismadvice.org>). We attended workshops hosted by ASKe (the Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange) at Oxford Brookes University (www.brookes.ac.uk/aske) and found helpful guidelines such as those written by Carroll and Appleton (2001), Morris (2010), and Morris and Carroll (2011).

We visited a selection of higher education institutions within our region to investigate how they use Turnitin and implement academic integrity support interventions. Most of the institutions consulted provide access to Turnitin only through integration with their institutional VLE. Administrative staff at Oxford University use Turnitin directly, which requires a Turnitin instructor account and specific training and competence in setting up classes, assignments and submission options via the Turnitin web interface. We found that other institutions tend not to run formal Turnitin training courses for staff, but rely on training materials and webinars provided by the Turnitin vendors.

Due to the fact that Oxford University colleges and departments enjoy a significant level of autonomy, the Turnitin service is offered, but is not mandatory. Thus usage tends to be on a fairly small scale (around 7,000 student papers per year), compared to other institutions where the software is used routinely and annual processing of around 70,000 papers may be the norm.

Pilot GradeMark and PeerMark

As part of the SIPA project, GradeMark and PeerMark (included in the Turnitin suite of software tools) were piloted on a small-scale pilot in early 2013. Participants were sought amongst academic staff by sending out email invitations and news bulletins. Although several potential users expressed an interest, they did not all participate actively in this part of the project for various reasons. For example, one user thought he might use GradeMark, but then he decided to continue using the Track Changes and commenting features in MS Word to assess his students' essays.

There was some use of GradeMark and feedback about the tool from participants was mixed. Some of the feedback implies that GradeMark is unsuited to the Oxford tutorial system which enables small group engagement and verbal discussion of essays with peers and the tutor, rather than written feedback. However, the tool might be used successfully in certain cases, for example, in postgraduate taught courses which require written assignments. For this reason, the SIPA project suggested that GradeMark is worth further promotion as a feedback tool.

PeerMark is a tool to support student review of each other's papers in a peer learning situation. Peer learning is nothing new or special (we learn informally from our peers on a regular basis), and indeed, peer learning is an integral part of the Oxford tutorial system. The formal practice of peer teaching, peer learning and peer assessment gained momentum in higher education from the 1960s (Goldschmid & Goldschmid, 1976). Those authors refer to the broad concept of "peer teaching situations [which] require total involvement of 'tutee' and 'tutors' alike" (p. 12). Such a practice would need to be carefully considered and implemented by a lecturer as part of their overall teaching and learning strategy, particularly if they envisage using electronic tools to support the provision of peer review feedback.

The PeerMark tool allows a lecturer to specify how students should be grouped and how their peers' papers should be allocated for review. The review is based solely on students responding to review questions set by the lecturer, and does not include the option to allocate a mark or grade to the papers reviewed. In contrast with GradeMark, which is used quite extensively at other UK HE institutions, little evidence of PeerMark usage was found, nationally or at Oxford. The product itself appears to be in an early stage of development, subject to expansion of its user base. The Turnitin Help Desk responded on 18 March 2014 with the following information:

Unfortunately it is not possible to attach a rubric into the Peer review, or for a student to grade other students work in PeerMark. Also there is [sic] no available PeerMark walkthroughs at the moment.

The verbal interaction and discussion in face-to-face, small-group tutorial sessions at Oxford means that there is currently little need for an electronic tool such as PeerMark. Furthermore, existing tools in WebLearn (e.g. Assignments and Forum Discussions) can easily be adapted to conduct peer review exercises, if a lecturer wishes to make use of peer learning.

Both GradeMark and PeerMark have several features that would be best explained during formal training sessions; however, academic staff frequently have little time to attend formal courses. The SIPA project therefore concluded that one-to-one consultation on request is adequate to meet current needs at Oxford in terms of using these tools.

Develop a communications strategy for plagiarism prevention and Turnitin use

A Turnitin marketing and communications strategy was produced with the aim to:

- Support more widespread adoption of Turnitin across the university, particularly through integration with the WebLearn Assignments tool ;
- Raise awareness of the Turnitin service and associated products GradeMark and PeerMark.

Arising from the strategy, the project established a number of methods to promote and support plagiarism awareness and the use of Turnitin, namely:

- Formal and informal face-to-face training sessions offered by IT Services
- Consultation and support to individual staff members on request
- Turnitin Blog (<https://blogs.it.ox.ac.uk/tii/>) (publicly available)
- Oxford University Turnitin User Group (face-to-face meetings once per term, with a website for university staff members)

More details of these channels and initiatives are provided in the End of Project report (IT Services, 2013).

Design and develop new training courses

Two three-hour teacher-led courses for staff were developed. The courses include the fundamentals of using Turnitin, interpreting Turnitin originality reports, using Turnitin via the WebLearn integration, and WebLearn assessment tools for formative testing. The courses are presented once per term and have accompanying course handbooks with detailed self-study exercises.

In working with academics and administrators in the review of Turnitin use at Oxford, we identified a strong need for student training in academic writing and avoiding plagiarism. Two online tutorials

were already available for students via WebLearn – one was developed in-house and the second (PLATO) was purchased from the University of Derby (2014). Although the Bodleian Libraries at Oxford provide subject-specific workshops for students about referencing skills on request, there was no central provision of student training in academic writing or the avoidance of plagiarism. As one of the outcomes of the SIPA project, a free course for students is now offered once per term incorporating short talks on referencing and the use of citation management software; and academic writing, summarising and paraphrasing. Students are referred to a set of Palgrave Study Skills books (Williams & Carroll, 2009; Godfrey, 2009; Pears & Shields, 2010). The course includes a practical exercise for students to submit a short piece of work to Turnitin and interpret and discuss the resulting originality report.

Design and develop case studies in using technology to support assessment and feedback

Project team members worked with departments and academics to investigate current assessment and feedback practices. Six case studies were produced on using Turnitin, WebLearn and other tools:

1. Turnitin for Admissions: A pilot project at the School of Government, which has since been rolled out by the Graduate Admissions Department to screen the work of all applicants;
2. Using GradeMark for academic undergraduate English modules: Trial use of GradeMark at a neighbouring institution;
3. Is Rogo a viable alternative to QuestionMark Perception? – Medical Sciences Division compares these two online assessment tools;
4. How a tutor uses Turnitin via WebLearn (video/screencast): A Law tutor talks about how she uses Turnitin for student essays and what she looks out for;
5. Online submission of summative work using the Assignments tool in WebLearn: A project to trial the processes and technology for electronic submission of assignments in three Masters programmes;
6. Preventing plagiarism using Turnitin (video): A tutor from the Department of Education describes her actual experience and use of Turnitin, and how it has led to the promotion of responsible practice amongst her students.

The case studies serve as examples of practice around the institution, and as resources during face-to-face training sessions. They are publicly available in the 'SIPA Case Studies' section of the Staff WebLearn Support site (<https://weblearn.ox.ac.uk/info/plag>) and may be of use to other institutions.

Recommend improvements to the WebLearn Assignments 2 tool

The current Assignments tool in WebLearn offers deep integration with Turnitin, including GradeMark and PeerMark. Prior to the SIPA project, it was envisaged that the experimental 'Assignments2' tool might offer improvements to the Turnitin integration options. It turned out that the Sakai-Turnitin upgrade introduced in September 2012 yielded these envisaged improvements. Therefore this project activity was curtailed, since the WebLearn development team decided to remain with the current version of the Assignments tool and not to pursue Assignments2.

A recent development is the Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI) option now offered by iParadigms (the Turnitin suppliers), which our team is currently investigating. This will allow the easy addition of a tool in the VLE that will act as a 'gateway' to the TurnitinUK website, thus making the interaction between Turnitin and the VLE more seamless, while offering full Turnitin functionality.

Develop help documentation, user information and guidance

Support sites providing a number of resources for both staff and students were developed in WebLearn. The site for staff (<https://weblearn.ox.ac.uk/info/plag>) is publically available and includes:

- Consolidated guidance of the use of Turnitin at Oxford University
- SIPA case studies
- Links to Turnitin and plagiarism videos and resources
- Quick guides to using GradeMark and PeerMark

The staff site is fairly well used, with the number of unique visitors averaging around 60 to 70 per month.

The site for students (<https://weblearn.ox.ac.uk/skills/plag>) is restricted to university students and includes:

- Links to the University's tutorials on avoiding plagiarism
- Links to academic good practice guides
- Links to student and tutor videos on plagiarism and interpreting Turnitin reports.

The site is being used by students, but not yet to a large extent, due to the fact that it is still being promoted and wide-scale adoption requires time.

Conclusion

It is worthwhile noting that the educational experience at Oxford University is rather different from that at the great majority of UK HEIs; the face-to-face, small group tutorial system and the emphasis on formal examinations written under examination conditions mean that there is less institutional reliance upon Turnitin, or desire to explore alternative methods and tools to support assessment practices. Nevertheless, the use of Turnitin is growing, not only among administrators using Turnitin for quick checks for suspected plagiarism, but also by the increased number of academics requesting Turnitin instructor accounts. Approximately half of all submissions continue to be directly via TurnitinUK. Communication channels and advertising of the Turnitin service appear to have made a positive impact.

It is often difficult to get beyond the early adopters and 'usual suspects' to generate interest in WebLearn assessment tools and additional Turnitin tools such as GradeMark. Some departments do not use WebLearn since they make use of their own content management system. Of those departments that do, there appears to be a low percentage of academic staff who elect to use electronic tools for assessment purposes.

The GradeMark pilot produced mixed results. Feedback was generally negative from the group who piloted both the WebLearn Assignments2 tool and GradeMark; on the other hand, a user from the Department of Physiology, Anatomy and Genetics reported that she is a "massive fan" of using GradeMark.

The SIPA project produced all the expected deliverables, and more. In particular, the WebLearn team gained a much deeper understanding of Turnitin and allied products, and has taken the lead in

negotiations with the Sakai community and the Turnitin providers in terms of future integration enhancement and mutually beneficial cooperation.

A noticeable impact is that before the project was launched, there was uncertainty about central policies and practices in terms of plagiarism awareness and prevention at the university. As a result of relationships built and initiatives undertaken during the SIPA project, there is now much more clarity in terms of Turnitin usage: the institutional Turnitin user group is active, and IT Services provides technical training to academic staff and a plagiarism avoidance session for students. The central Education Committee has updated their guidance to departments and examiners, and has embarked on a series of further work packages to work to streamline institutional processes.

The wider university has benefitted from the project in terms of better centralised guidance and policy, better information from IT Services ('About Turnitin' and a 'Service Level Description'), better training and support materials, and an active Turnitin User Group. The value of the activities, resources and opportunities provided is notable – previously users in divisions and departments were lacking direction, and now they have representatives on a shared and active user group where they can share ideas, learn from peers, and provide a voice to central authorities.

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Appendix:

Using the WebLearn-TurnitinUK integration

***When do I use Turnitin via the WebLearn Assignments tool and when do I use TurnitinUK directly?
A guide for administrative and academic staff***

Using the WebLearn-Turnitin integration	Using TurnitinUK
Add the Assignments tool to your site and tick the box for Turnitin integration	Use either the quick submit option, or the full class option
Students should already exist in the WebLearn site. If not, it is easy to add participants, by importing course groups from the central database	Staff member must create class and add students by registering their email addresses
Students use their single sign on, which is familiar to them	Students need to make use of new, separate login details (tends to result in queries about lost login details)
Staff member must create assignment in the Assignments tool	Staff member must create assignment in Turnitin
Re-submissions are possible, but at this stage of the integration, only the first one will go through Turnitin	Re-submissions are possible; set it so that re-submissions by the same student before the closing date are not matched against each other
Staff member can specify closing date and closing time	Staff member can specify closing date, but not closing time
Other site maintainers, such as administrators and examiners can see the assignment and Originality Report , depending on permissions in the WebLearn site	Only the staff member (and students, if so specified) can see the assignment and Originality Report

Advantages of using the WebLearn-Turnitin integration

- You do not need to request a separate Turnitin account
- You do not need to create a class in Turnitin
- You do not need to enrol students directly in a Turnitin class - your students can be easily added as participants in your WebLearn site by importing the course group from a central university database
- You do not need to create an assignment in Turnitin – you do this in the WebLearn Assignments tool
- Students make use of their existing single sign on (SSO) login details

- Students submit their own assignments using the WebLearn Assignments tool
- Turnitin **Originality Reports** are delivered back to the WebLearn Assignments tool, for analysis and discussion with the student
- The environment is familiar to students and staff who already use WebLearn

Restrictions on using the WebLearn-Turnitin integration

Students are identified by their single sign on (SSO) login details. Anonymity for examined (summative) work is not enabled. A work-around is to have an administrator act as intermediary: After students have submitted to a WebLearn assignment, the course administrator downloads the files and checks them for anonymity prior to emailing them to the examiners.