Guidance on Proof-Reading of Written Submissions for Assessment

1. Introduction

1.1 This document sets out guidance for students, academic staff, academic support staff, and proof-readers on acceptable practice regarding proof-reading of written work by students for summative assessments including dissertations and doctoral theses.

1.2 The University recognises that, whilst it is important for our students to develop their skills to proof-read and edit their own work, students may also wish to seek additional input from a proof-reader to provide technical advice on spelling, language and grammar prior to submission of the final draft for the summative assessment.

1.3 In the context of this Guidance it is important to set out the distinction between proof-reading and formative feedback. Proof-reading is a process that identifies recommendations for technical corrections to the text (e.g. on spelling, grammar, language and consistency) of the final version of a piece of work that is to be submitted for summative assessment. It may be carried out by the student themselves, a peer (another student or colleague), a friend, a family member or a professional proof-reader. Formative feedback (which may also include advice on spelling, grammar, referencing, clarity and structure as well as feedback on the content) is carried out by academic staff and/or academic support staff and requires active engagement by the student in developing the work further for the summative assessment.

1.4 A student’s work must represent their own effort and understanding of the topic being assessed. It is not acceptable for proof-readers to make material changes, such as rewriting passages or correcting incorrect statements or formulae, to the student’s work.

1.5 Reasonable adjustments will be provided for disabled students where these have been identified as part of a needs assessment undertaken by Disability Services and approved by the Director of Academic and Corporate Governance. This may include the use of a proof-reader who can identify and correct disability-related errors in spelling, punctuation, typing and grammar. In such cases, the proof-reader may annotate the student’s work using the Track Changes and/or Comments facility within Word.

1.6 Students may wish to use assistive technology that is available on the University’s network or is freely available to download to support independent proof-reading. Assistive technologies for proof-reading are available as part of the University’s suite of software and additional links and resources are provided at:

http://www.dundee.ac.uk/disabilityservices/resources/usefullinks/assistivetechnology/

2. Acceptable use of proof-reading services

2.1 Proof-readers may check written work for errors in the text and make suggestions for corrections. They may not edit a student’s writing or suggest changes to formulae, ideas, discussion or structure. Where proof-readers are annotating a Word document the Comments facility should be used rather than tracking changes. The only exception to this is described above in paragraph 1.5.

2.2 Specifically proof-readers may:

- identify spelling, punctuation, typographical and grammatical errors;
• identify formatting errors and inconsistencies;
• identify areas of text that are poorly structured so that the meaning is unclear;
• identify minor formatting errors, such as inconsistencies or ordering, in the referencing; and
• identify errors in the labelling of figures, diagrams, graphs or charts.

2.3 Specifically proof-readers may not:
• rewrite content where the meaning is unclear or ambiguous;
• correct facts, calculations, equations, coding, formulae, figures, graphs and charts;
• make additions to the content or remove content;
• rearrange text or paragraphs to improve coherence;
• make changes to ideas or discussions;
• change the content to align with a word limit;
• alter a referencing system;
• relabel figures, diagrams, graphs or charts;
• make stylistic corrections;
• reformat the work; or
• translate any part of the text.

2.4 Students have overall responsibility for the quality of their submitted work and it is up to them to decide on whether to take a proof-reader’s advice. The use of a proof-reader cannot be used as mitigation for any deficiencies in the quality of the final submission.

2.5 Where students wish to use a professional proof-reading service they should provide the proof-reader with a copy of this Guidance on Proof-Reading of Written Submissions for Assessment and ensure that the proof-reader accepts the expectations laid down by the University. It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that the service they use complies with this Guidance. Students must also keep copies of the proof-read work showing the suggested changes in case of any challenges brought forward by assessors who have concerns about non-compliance with the Guidance.

2.6 Meeting the cost of a professional proof-reading service is the responsibility of the student. Students are advised to agree the cost and the timescale with the proof-reader in advance.

2.7 Undergraduate and taught postgraduate students should only use proof-readers for summative assessments and not for formative assessments. Research students may use proof-readers for the final version of their thesis but never for submitting formative work such as draft chapters for review by the supervisors.

2.8 For certain assessments, for example where the learning outcomes include a student’s linguistic ability, the use of a proof-reader may not be permitted. Under such circumstances this should be clearly stated in the student handbooks and assessment guidelines.

2.9 Where students have had their work proof-read by another party it would be a normal courtesy for this to be acknowledged in the final written submission. This would normally be in the Acknowledgements section for a thesis or dissertation, or part of the coversheet or as a note for other submitted work depending on School/Discipline practices.

Approved by the Learning and Teaching Committee, 27 September 2016