

Terms of Reference

National Academic Integrity Network

Background

Recent years have seen the rise of contract cheating and other forms of online academic fraud in higher education, both nationally and internationally. The facilitation of learner cheating by “essay mills” has been recognised by QQI as a growing threat to the integrity of Irish higher education. A number of steps are being taken to address this emerging challenge. Amongst them is the introduction of relevant legislation. An Amendment Bill introducing changes to the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012¹ was signed into law by the President of Ireland in July 2019. Section 43A of the Amendment Act provides a statutory basis for the prosecution of those who facilitate cheating by learners; who advertise cheating services; and who publish advertisements for cheating services. QQI is responsible for bringing prosecutions under this Section of the Act.

Objective of the National Academic Integrity Network

Whilst the new legislation pertains to all levels of the NFQ (except school awards), QQI will address higher education and training primarily in the first instance, as this is the area considered of highest risk. To this end, the **National Academic Integrity Network** will help QQI to establish the nature of academic misconduct practised in Irish higher education institutions; to identify appropriate measures institutions can take to both prevent and address such misconduct; and to inform dedicated communications strategies and/or enhancement initiatives developed in this area by QQI.

The purpose of the network is to advise and offer guidance on the identification of:

- common definitions;
- the current landscape of academic integrity in Ireland;
- current approaches to the prevention, detection and penalising of academic misconduct and the roles and responsibilities of identifying the roles and responsibilities of the key stakeholders in addressing this issue: HEIs, learners and QQI;
- good practice with regard to prevention of, and addressing suspected and confirmed instances of, academic misconduct reflecting the responsibilities of staff and learners to ensure academic integrity within institutions;
- a working methodology/procedures for the reporting and prosecution of instances of cheating within HEIs that are offences under the recently amended legislation;
- a strategy for HEIs to engage with learners as key partners in the embedding of a positive culture of academic integrity;
- key elements of a dedicated communication strategy for stakeholders;

¹ Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012

<http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/bills28/acts/2012/a2812.pdf>

Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Act 2019;

<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2018/95/>

- areas for dedicated enhancement activity to support a culture of academic integrity in Irish HEIs

The network has a further role in terms of raising awareness of academic integrity and related issues to other relevant stakeholders.

The network may establish working groups for the purpose of meeting these objectives.

Membership

The network will comprise the following members:

- Higher Education Colleges Association
- Irish Universities Association
- Technological Higher Education Association
- Representative from each publicly regulated higher education institution
- Three learners in addition to representation from the Union of Students in Ireland
- QQI staff as appropriate

The network will also invite observers to meetings from time to time as appropriate to its work. QQI will act as secretariat to the network. The Chair will be appointed by QQI in consultation with representatives of the higher education sector.

Meetings

The National Academic Integrity Network will have its inaugural meeting in November 2019. Meetings will be scheduled approximately every four to six weeks until June 2020 and as necessary thereafter.

Communication

Meetings and communications with the network will be managed by QQI. Meeting minutes and any other related information will be circulated to the National Academic Integrity Network as appropriate.

Term of office

The National Academic Integrity Network will initially meet in November 2019 and will continue to meet thereafter as necessary and appropriate. The Terms of Reference for the network will be reviewed in October 2020 with consideration of the implementation of the legislation and the need for the network to continue in order to complete its work, or in the event that it is considered that a long-term consultative/advisory network is required for this area.