

National Academic Integrity Network Meeting

15 October 2020, 10:30am to 1.00pm

Microsoft Team Meeting

In Attendance:

Aedin O'Heocha, GMIT; Aine McManus, Griffith College; Aisling Reast, Hibernia College; Brendan Ryder, DKIT; Brid Lane, IBAT; Carmel Brennan, GMIT; Catherine O'Donoghue, AIT; Celine Blacow, IADT; Cora McCormack, AIT; Dajana Sinik, NCI SU; Des Walsh, CIT; Denis Ryan, ICHAS; Finbarr Murphy, IBAT; Fiona O'Riordan, DCU; Frances O'Connell, AIT; Gavin Clinch, IT Sligo; Geraldine Canny, IUA; Gillian Lake, DCU; Grant Goodwin, DBS; Jason Healy, ICD Business School; Jennifer Brennan, NRIF; Jim Murray, THEA; Joyce Senior, UCD; Karolyn McDonnell; Kevin Mitchell, TCD; Lori Johnston, DBS; Lorna Dodd, IADT; Louise Higgins, AIT; Marian Duggan, LIT; Marie O'Neill, CCT; Michael Hall, IT Tralee; Nora Trench Bowles, IUA; Patricia O'Sullivan, HECA; Patrick Connolly, MIC UL; Paul O'Donovan, UCC; Perry Share, IT Sligo; Ross Anderson, UL; Sean Delaney, MIE; Sharon Flynn, IUA; Simon Stephens, LYIT; Sinead O'Connor, NUIG; Siobhan Cusack, UCC; Sue Rackard, UCD; Terry O'Brien, WIT; Thomas Kelly, DCU; Violeta Morari, CIT;

Steering Committee: Billy Kelly (Chair); David Croke RCSI; Yvonne Kavanagh IT Carlow; Kevin McStravock USI,

QQI: Sue Hackett; Bryan Maguire; Karena Maguire; Grainne Mooney; Sarah O'Connell Alison Quinn; Deirdre Stritch; Peter Cullen

Apologies: Aileen Kennedy, IT Tralee; Anne Looney, DCU Inst of Education; Aoife Lynam, Hibernia College; Declan Courell, St Angela's NUIG; Jason Quinn, IT Sligo SU; Kenneth Carroll, TU Dublin; Michelle Millar, NUIG; David Denieffe, IT Carlow; Derek O'Brien, WIT; Elaine Sisson, IADT; Elizabeth Tobin, UCD; Fiona Mitchell, RCSI; Karen Jones, NCI; Lia O'Sullivan, IUA; Lorna Fitzpatrick, USI; Lucien Waugh-Daly, DCU SU; Martina Genocky, USI; Megan O'Connor, TCD SU; Niamh Plunkett, IT Sligo; Orla Thornton, AIT; Roisin O'Connell, THEA; Sarah O'Brien, AIT; Aidan Mulkeen, MU.

1. Opening by Chair and Review of Previous Meeting

At the outset of the meeting the Chair welcomed members.

A summary of the previous network meeting in June 2020 was provided, following which the note of the previous meeting was approved. The Chair referred to the very successful webinar hosted by the Network in September; the webinar was very well attended signaling the high levels of interest in academic integrity and how best to achieve it in the sector.

2. Matters arising not on the Agenda

No matters were recorded.

3. Update from Working Group 1

Yvonne Kavanagh (working group convenor) provided an overview of the group's draft document, which was circulated to members in advance of the meeting: *Introduction to Principles of Academic Integrity and National Lexicon*. This draft incorporated feedback received post the June meeting of the Network with the aim of agreeing a final version for publication before the end of the year.

Feedback at and following the June meeting of the Network had focused on the need to address potential overlap with research integrity, as well as comments on specific areas of content. It was noted that membership of the working group itself has been expanded to include representation from the National Research Integrity Forum.

Next Steps:

Members were asked to:

1. Agree the definitions as listed in the glossary
2. Agree the role of the ENAI definitions/glossary as primary definitions if not listed.

Changes since the June version include:

- the addition of an introductory paragraph which provides context on how and why this approach was adopted.
- It is specified that definitions included in the lexicon pertain to academic integrity as it applies to an enrolled learner. Issues pertaining to staff are covered by national research integrity principles.
- The definitions have also been expanded to include one on blackmail, as it was considered important to identify to learners that this is a risk they are exposing themselves to by engaging in misconduct.
- The definition of contract cheating was also expanded based on the feedback received.
- Following Teddi Fishman's presentation at the September Network webinar, the definition of plagiarism set put forward has been adopted on page 21.
- The definition of academic misconduct on p.25 has also been expanded based on OECD definitions.

Yvonne noted that the working group had taken an institutional and developmental approach to the principles and the lexicon, so that readers can dip in and out as relevant to them; however, institutions should adopt the principles and lexicon in their entirety. Network members were asked to submit any remaining feedback by the end of October. The following versions will be circulated to member institutions for consideration and possible adoption at the next plenary meeting on Dec 10th.

The document was very positively received from members. It was suggested that some space should be assigned to authentic assessment and assessment literacy.

3. Update from Working Group 2

Prof. David Croke (working group convenor) presented an overview of the outcome of the Registrar Questionnaire which was circulated to members after the June meeting of the Network. He stressed that feedback was incomplete at this stage and that there will be a further update in December when the data may be fuller.

The purpose of the questionnaire was to try to establish baseline data on the incidence of academic misconduct in Irish higher education; the types of misconduct taking place and how it is being dealt with. The questionnaire was agreed at the Network meeting in June 2020. Data returned was anonymized by the QQI secretariat to the Network and aggregated by HEI type: university, IoT and private provider. The original submissions will be destroyed post this meeting. Members institutions that had not yet responded to the questionnaire were encouraged to do so by the end of October 2020.

David stressed that there are quite a number of issues around the data; understandably, as this is the first time such data has been collected. As a consequence of this, a more detailed analysis will be presented at the December plenary meeting of the Network.

The data was introduced with the following significant caveats: it is clear that HEIs within the Network manage the recording and reporting of incidents of academic misconduct differently. For some member HEIs, this was the first time that such data was assembled centrally, reflecting a distributed approach to the investigation and recording of alleged incidents of misconduct. Some HEIs submitted data for examination infringements only. For some HEIs, 'minor' (e.g. bringing unauthorized items into the exam centre etc.) and 'major' instances of examination infringement are aggregated thus, perhaps, inflating the figures. There was widespread difficulty in interpreting and/or reporting on work-based placement infringements and research misconduct. Contract cheating features so infrequently as to be almost invisible in the data. This may indicate that contract cheating is being captured under different 'umbrella' terms, such as 'plagiarism', or that there is a serious deficit in awareness of contract cheating and how to detect it. A number of HEIs suggested that reporting of academic misconduct be included in the QQI annual institutional quality report (AIQR).

Some of the challenges in extrapolating from the data relate to variation across HEIs in the interpretation of the different categories of academic misconduct - the Lexicon produced by working group 1, under consideration today, could form the basis for consensus building on this.

The incidence of academic misconduct in the HEIs represented in the current data-set is approximately 0.5% of total student enrolment. Examination infringement and plagiarism are the two most common categories reported. For these categories, a substantial proportion of reported cases were investigated formally and sanctions were imposed. Given what we know about rates of contract cheating in higher education globally, the extremely low incidence reported in the data-set may suggest that we are not detecting it well here.

Given that the data strongly indicates that we do not fully know how best to detect contract cheating, it was proposed that the Network the research in this area and develop a best practice guide for using text matching software to detect contract cheating. This could be an action to be pursued by a working group in 2021.

It was noted in discussion that not all plagiarism is an offense; often it's a challenge to academics to train learners in academic writing. It was agreed that having a common lexicon with which to discuss and manage these issues will be key.

It was also noted that some students could be responsible for a number of instances of misconduct and could therefore skew the rates. This possibility was acknowledged. It was explained that the working group has only recently been in a position to aggregate all the data. In light of the possibility for the data to be taken out of context was considered best to present the data as percentages taken from published HEA enrollment data rather than give the raw data. The percentage figures are based on the total number of instances divided by total enrollment numbers. This is thus a very crude first look at incidence of academic misconduct in Irish HE.

It was further agreed that whatever success there is nationally in identifying plagiarism, collectively, we are very weak in identifying contract cheating. That is the challenge going forward.

4. Draft Interim Academic Integrity Guidelines v2

Yvonne Kavanagh (working group 1 convenor) opened by thanking working group members for their input to the draft interim Academic Integrity Guidelines, which were circulated in advance of the meeting. It was stressed that this is not a final document, but a draft to be dissected and improved by members. It is hoped that based on feedback received, the working group can present the final version to the December meeting of the Network for adoption.

National and international best practice was reviewed so that the guidance already available in this area could be collated as appropriate to an Irish context. In particular, the [QAA Guidelines](#) and [TEQSA Toolkit](#) were important sources. The draft guidelines acknowledge that there is national policy in place in some areas and respects the autonomy of institutions.

The draft guidelines offer advice to HEIs on ways in which academic integrity can be cultivated and embedded locally. They elaborate on ways to encourage behaviours and attitudes to support that into the core of the HEIs. Guidance is set out under four key headings: upholding academic integrity; preventing academic misconduct; detecting academic misconduct and dealing with academic misconduct.

Members were asked to circulate the draft guidelines within their institutions and ensure that they receive attention and discussion at appropriate places so that an institutional response can be submitted by 3rd November 2020 at the latest. Key questions to consider are whether there are things that have been missed or that need to be tightened up before the guidelines are finalized. Thereafter, working group 1 will update the guidelines and a final version will be submitted to the December meeting of the Network for agreement and publication in January. It is intended that the guidelines will, in some cases, inform local institutional guidelines or, conversely, that local policies may inform the guidelines.

5. Update from Working Group 3

Kevin Mc Stravock (working group convenor) provided an overview of recent activities and plans of working group 3. Outputs are designed to complement existing initiatives within HEIs. Current membership of the group includes student representatives from DCU; NCI; IoT Sligo and UCD, as well as USI. Members are also drawn from HEIs, the representative bodies and QQI. Kevin thanked members for their really positive advice and inputs to date.

It was confirmed that working group 3 has signed off on a communications strategy aimed at learners, the focus of which is to:

- Establish awareness of the negative impact of contract cheating
- Encourage students to access institutional academic support services
- Encourage good academic conduct amongst students

It was noted that students often find themselves resorting to contract cheating services because they are under pressure. Communicating the supports available to students may be a more successful prevention method than simply admonishing that such services are illegal.

The initial focus of the group's activities and outputs is on raising awareness amongst students. The group has engaged a communications agency to undertake the initial development of student facing video content. The first draft of the video has been received and it is hoped that a final version will be ready for circulation next week (National Academic Integrity Week). The video focuses on communicating the threat posed by contract cheating and QQI's new powers whilst also recognizing the pressures that many students face. The group will also be developing some draft messages both for HEIs and students' unions, which could accompany the sharing of the resources.

The focus going forward will be looking at the pressure points in the academic year where learners may be more susceptible to approaches by these services. The group also intends to develop our understanding of student awareness and motivations – to that end, focus group sessions with learners will be held in November.

The approach being adopted by WG 3 was warmly and widely welcomed, especially the intention to identify and address the pressure points for students. TCD shared an approach it's taking to ensure that learners aren't overburdened with assessment at any particular point, and confirmed that it is happy to share the toolkit when developed.

It was affirmed that the work of this group is utterly central to what the Network is about. Identifying and addressing misconduct is important, but what's really important is the embedding of a positive culture of academic integrity amongst staff and learners.

QQI will circulate the video and resources to all Network members on behalf of the working group. Members were encouraged to give their support in ensuring that both resources are widely disseminated within HEIs and to their learners.

6. Data Protection Issues Arising from Invigilated Online Exams

The issue of how to ensure the integrity of online exams and how and whether these should be invigilated was raised at the Network webinar in September. In particular, the issues associated with invigilating online exams, such as learner privacy, etc. were raised. The Network invited Dr Peter Cullen, Head of Research and Standards at QQI to present an overview of policy initiatives in the area of assessment currently as it may pertain to this issue.

Dr. Cullen noted that assessment and academic integrity are intrinsically entangled. Members were referred to the QQI [Green Paper on the Assessment of Learners and Learning](#) (2018), which draws together a wealth of research in this area. QQI is working towards the development of a work programme on assessment. There are a couple of projects running with the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning on assessment. QQI is also planning a series of bilateral discussion to explore what might usefully be done to enhance assessment quality and literacy amongst staff and students. QQI welcomes suggestions from members and their institutions on this.

QQI recently published a [report on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic](#) on assessment in which academic integrity was raised an issue by many contributors, and online proctoring was raised in particular. Ireland is not alone in this. These issues are being faced in other countries also; for example, QQI had a conversation with partners

in TEQSA on the morning of the Network meeting, in which this issue was also identified as a challenge in Australia. What emerges in the feedback is that discipline areas matter – what works in engineering might not work in law. QQI invited suggestions from members about what should be included in QQI’s work programme in this area.

In discussion, it was noted that while there are some technical measures that can be adopted to help secure the integrity of online exams, the more significant issue is the pedagogical approach taken to teaching and assessment: it is harder to cheat on an assessment designed to probe deep understanding. Some members noted that in moving to take home exams with a longer time horizon, the experience has been that the learning experience is better than when simply looking for the regurgitation of memorized details. It was acknowledged that changing the pedagogical approach to design out certain types of cheating works for some disciplines better than others. It was further noted that the move to online assessment has also offered benefits and opportunities.

It was agreed that the move online has presented challenges and opportunities in terms of improving assessment design. Good assessment design can help mitigate the risk of cheating. Discussion focused on the difficulties presented by online proctoring and ensuring that staff understand its limitations; in some cases, alternative assessment would be a better option.

7. Contract cheating websites

QQI provided an update on contract cheating websites currently learners in Irish HEIs. Members were informed that [Ireland Assignment Help](#) is a website offering learners in Ireland bespoke assignment writing services, which are advertised as being “plagiarism free”. The website offers the option to search recent purchases by HEI in which the purchasing learner was enrolled. A large proportion of Irish HEIs are listed. The site also discloses assignment title; module for which the assignment was completed and date of purchase. It is not clear whether some or all of the listed purchases are *bone fide* or represent a ‘fishing exercise’ on the part of the website, targeting learners who have entered their assignment details into a search engine. The impression that a learner’s peers have already used the site and purchased assignments may reassure and entice some vulnerable learners. There is some evidence already that the information on the websites represents both real and fabricated purchases – only the HEIs named will be able to determine which is the case following local investigations. QQI circulated details of the website by email to Network members and asked that members:

- Share the information with colleagues internally as appropriate;
- Inform learners about the risks of engaging in this kind of activity

- Share generalized outcomes of internal investigations e.g. how many cases of suspected misconduct were identified by virtue of the information available on the site; what if any trends emerge from the data (e.g. are particular learners or discipline areas more vulnerable to this type of misconduct).

QQI also notified members of another website, [Studocu.com](https://www.studocu.com), based in the Netherlands, which encourages learners to upload teaching and learning materials, including past assignments for resale to other learners. QQI has been informed that the website is actively and aggressively targeting learners in Ireland via social media platforms such as Facebook. The text on the website seeks to normalize and legitimize this activity under the guise of learners helping learners to achieve their full potential. Again, the website is searchable by HEI. Members are encouraged to share information about the site with colleagues and investigate whether materials from their HEI have been uploaded to the site.

8. National Academic Integrity week

Sue Hackett provided an update on the inaugural National Academic Integrity Week to be held from Monday 19th October to Friday, 23rd October 2020. This coincides with the International Day against Contract Cheating on Wednesday, 21st October. The programme of events and all registration information is available on the [QQI events page](#). Events will be hosted by a number of Network member institutions, as well as the IUA; QQI and the European Network for Academic Integrity. Members were asked to share the programme with colleagues.

9. Agreement of Forthcoming Meeting Dates

A number of potential dates for Network meetings in the first half of 2021 were identified:

- February 25th
- April 15th
- June 10th / 17th

QQI will circulate a Doodle poll to confirm these dates or identify alternatives.

The next meeting of the Network will take place on Thursday, 10th December via Microsoft Teams. An agenda and further information will follow.