Minutes of National Academic Integrity Network Meeting

10 December 2020, 10:30am to 1.00pm
Microsoft Team Meeting

Attendees:

1. HEI members: AIT: Frances O'Connell, Catherine O'Donoghue, Cora McCormack; CCT College: Marie O'Neill CIT: Des Walsh; DBS: Lori Johnston, Grant Goodwin DCU: Fiona O'Riordan; DkIT: Brendan Ryder; GMIT: Carmel Brennan, Hugh McBride; Hibernia College: Aisling Reast; IADT: Celine Blacow; IBAT College: Brid Lane, Finbarr Murphy; ICD Business School: Jason Healy; ICCHAS: Denis Ryan; IT Carlow: Yvonne Kavanagh; LIT: Pat Donohue; LYIT: Simon Stephens MIC,UL: Patrick Connolly; MIE TCD: Seán Delaney; MU: Susan Gottlober; NUIG: Michelle Millar; IT Sligo: Gavin Clinch, Perry Share RCSI: David Croke; St Angela’s NUIG: Declan Courell; TCD: Kevin Mitchell; TUD: Kenneth Carroll UCC: Siobhan Cusack, Paul O'Donovan; UCD: Joyce Senior, Sue Rackard; UL: Ross Anderson; WIT: Terry O'Brien

Student representatives: DCUSU: Lucien Waugh Daly; NCISU: Dajana Sinik; TCDSU: Megan O’ Connor; USI: Kevin McStravock

Agencies representing HEIs: HECA: Patricia O'Sullivan; IUA: Nora Trench Bowles, Sharon Flynn; THEA: Jim Murray, Roisin O’Connell

NAIN Steering Committee: Chair: Billy Kelly; WG#1: Yvonne Kavanagh; WG#2: David Croke; WG#3: Kevin McStravock

QQI Executive, Steering Committee and invited staff: Alison Quinn, Sue Hackett, Deirdre Stritch; Bryan Maguire; Karena Maguire; Grainne Mooney, Sarah O’Connell, Angela Lambkin (Item 9), Peter Cullen (Item 7)

Apologies: Griffith College, IT Tralee, NCI

1. Opening by Chair and Review of Previous Minutes

At the outset of the meeting the Chair welcomed members and noted and welcomed the participation of new members in the Network.

A summary of the previous network meeting in October 2020 was provided, following which the note of the previous meeting was approved.

2. Matters arising not on the Agenda

No matters were recorded.

3. Review of Terms of Reference for the Network

The Network had committed to reviewing the Terms of Reference for the Network (NAIN) at the end of 2020 to ensure their ongoing appropriateness for 2021. It was
unanimously agreed that there is an enduring need for the NAIN as a standing advisory network on this topic.

The following was agreed in respect of the Terms of Reference:
- The purpose and objectives identified in the ToR still stand.
  - It would be useful to include in the purpose and objectives: ‘Support the development of a consistent national approach (e.g. to institutional policies and procedures) to academic integrity and related matters;
- It was noted that there a duplication in the third bullet point ("the roles and responsibilities of").
- Replace the bullet points with numbers for easier referencing.
- No change will be made at this juncture to the membership of the NAIN, though it may be extended in future.
- The frequency of meetings will be amended to state that the NAIN meets 4-6 times per year.
- There will be no change to “Communication”.

4. Update from Working Group 1
Yvonne Kavanagh, convenor of WG 1 provided a review of the ToR of the working group and welcomed new working group members.

The group has reviewed and updated the draft interim QA Guidelines on Academic Integrity and the Lexicon and Principles of Academic Integrity based on feedback received from NAIN members, including the three representative bodies: HECA and IUA and THEA. Yvonne acknowledged and thanked members for their valuable inputs.

A summary of the updates to the Academic Integrity Principles and Lexicon of Common Terms was provided: this has been made more practical and more focused. To ensure clarity around the role of the documents in relation to research integrity, it is now explicitly stated that the document pertains to situations involving enrolled learners.

The documents are now inclusive of all staff with language amended to include professional support staff, including, for example, librarians. The need to ‘protect’ staff had also been raised in feedback and is reflected in the documents which refer to staff being enabled by their institution to investigate concerns.

Other problems with terminology, for example, use of the term ‘moral’ have also been addressed. The working group is continuing to seek to improve the documents and move away from legalese terms and phrases where possible to plain English alternatives.
Yvonne also provided an overview of work to date on the Interim Academic Integrity Guidelines. It is intended that these will go for high level comment and feedback to external stakeholder groups in February, with a view to responding to comments and having a final version ready for mid-April – our 2nd meeting on April 15th.

5. **Update from Working Group 2**
David Croke, convenor of WG 2 provided a review of the ToR of the working group and welcomed new working group members.

The group had sought to establish an overview of the rate and nature of academic misconduct in Irish institutions from a questionnaire distributed to registrars. The questionnaire, developed by the working group, had previously been agreed by the Network at a plenary meeting.

The data was submitted to QQI, which collated the returns on behalf of the working group, between June and October 2020. QQI aggregated the data and categorised it by HEI type (university; IoT and private and independent providers). The original HEI submissions were destroyed.

David highlighted some important caveats and considerations in interpreting the data:

- 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’ and ‘major’ instances of examination infringement were aggregated thus, perhaps, inflating the figures. (NB: here ‘minor’ refers to bringing unauthorized items into the exam centre etc.)
- There was some difficulty in interpreting and/or reporting:
  - Issues re investigation of incidents (‘Panels’ versus ‘Investigations’)
  - Work-based Placement Infringements
  - Research Misconduct
- Incidence figures represent numbers of incidents; there is no data included on whether individual students were involved in multiple incidents.
- There are some differences by HEI type, but these are difficult to interpret given the preliminary nature of the data.
- The NAIN Steering Group has decided to present the data:
  - as overall figures for the participating HEIs, rather than by HEI type
  - as absolute numbers of incidents
  - as percentages of total student enrolment for the relevant academic year

Key points of note from the returned data include:

- The overall incidence of academic misconduct across the HE sector is 0.5-0.7% of total enrolment.
• Examination infringement and plagiarism are the two most common categories reported.
• A substantial proportion of reported cases were investigated formally and sanctions were imposed.
• Given what we know about contract cheating in HE globally, the extremely low incidence rate reported may suggest that we are not detecting contract cheating.
• Some of the ‘muddiness’ in the data may relate to variation across HEIs in interpretation of the different categories of academic misconduct. The Lexicon being produced by Working Group 1 will form the basis for consensus building and will be very important in introducing consistency and comparability to the recording and collating data of this sort.

Further work is required to tell us more about what types of learner are more likely to be sanctioned. We know from other jurisdictions that some categories of students are more vulnerable to contract cheating than others, but we don’t have enough data nationally to effectively identify / address this in an Irish context.

The questionnaire highlights the need for some consistent guidance on detecting and recording, as well as reporting instances of academic misconduct. The work on raising awareness of academic integrity issues being conducted by the Network may help address this.

6. Update from Working Group 3
Kevin McStravock, WG3 Chair, provided a review of the ToR of the working group and thanked working group members for their inputs.

Kevin shared a student-facing video that was produced by the group. To maximise reach of the video, the group used Facebook advertising in two stages. The cutaway video performed much stronger. There is a need for individual HEIs and their student unions to actively promote the video to their own students – staff should be aware of it as well.

The working group will now plan further dissemination of the campaign at key ‘pinch points’, for example, assessment periods. Students in the switch to continuous assessment feel under more pressure and the aim is to address this positively. It may be the case that pressure on students has been inadvertently increased by giving more assessment.

7. Identification of Work Areas for 2021
Members considered areas that the NAIN could usefully explore further or take action on in the coming year. There was a general consensus that work and guidance is required around assessment as it pertains to academic integrity. Members shared
their experiences of and concerns about designing alternative assessment under the current emergency conditions and the limitations of online proctoring as a defense against academic misconduct. It was acknowledged that there is a misguided perception amongst many, including some academic staff and professional bodies, that online proctoring is a panacea. It was proposed that there may be a value in the NAIN driving forward this conversation as it provides the platform for the key stakeholders to come together and is an unbiased body. It was stressed that it will remain important to include students in the conversation.

QQI will also be working on an assessment project next year. This will include working closely with the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, which allows for a useful synergy with the Network.

Derived from the NAIN objectives, two other possible areas were identified for NAIN activity in 2021:
- collation and review of current institutional policies and procedures informing a national approach. This would assist in developing common approaches across HEIs.
- development of ‘toolkit’ and identification of resources for academic staff aimed at developing skills to identify use of contract cheating/ ‘essay mills’ services by learners.

8. NAIN Enhancement Events
The NAIN Coordinator, provided feedback on NAIN events held in 2020, including the National Academic Integrity Week held in October 2020 and the two NAIN webinars held in September and October 2020. Recordings of both events are available on the NAIN webpage. The events received extremely positive feedback and it is hoped that the successes to date can be built on in 2021.

Members were invited to share ideas for NAIN events and / or webinars for 2021: It was agreed that the National Academic Integrity Week was a very positive initiative and that it should be held again in 2021. It was also agreed that peer learning events would be useful.

9. Updates from related initiatives
a. NARIC fraud project: Angela Lambkin, QQI’s Head of Information Services, updated the meeting on a new Erasmus+ FraudS+ project led by CIMEA (ENIC-NARIC) Italy. The project aims to establish a database of anonymised, confirmed, falsified qualifications and qualifications issued by diploma mills. Project partners include ENIC-NARIC centres of Italy, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden.

Core activities include identification and scanning of fraudulent certificates to a central database and raising students’ awareness on
the phenomenon of fraud in education. Updates on project activity will be provided in due course to the Network.

10. **2021, Q1 and Q2 NAIN Meeting Dates**
The following dates were agreed for NAIN plenary meetings in Qs1 and 2, based on the Doodle Poll feedback:
- **Thursday, February 18th** – 10.30-13.00
- **Thursday, April 15th** – 10.30-13.00
- **Thursday, June 17th** – 10.30-13.00