

National Academic Integrity Network

Note of Meeting of 14 November 2019

In Attendance:

Apologies:

1. Inaugural Meeting Opening by Chair

At the outset of the meeting the Chair welcomed members to the network. The purpose of the network was outlined as twofold: there is an immediate need to support implementation of the new legislation prohibiting cheating services, but there is a broader requirement to support the embedding of a positive culture of academic integrity across the sector. He acknowledged that, generally, our current fragmented collective knowledge and understanding of the extent and nature of the problem and therefore of the most effective steps that can be taken to address it poses a national challenge, which the network may be able to address through its activities. The purpose of the network may evolve over time and will be kept under review.

The Chair also indicated that if matters arise during a meeting that could be more usefully dealt with outside of the network they will, nevertheless, be captured and referred to the appropriate party.

2. Matters arising not on the Agenda

No matters were recorded.

3. Proposed Terms of Reference for the National Academic Integrity Network

The draft Terms of Reference for the network were circulated to members in advance of the meeting. Following an overview by the Chair, members were invited to consider the draft version and put forward any changes required. The following amendments were proposed to the current draft:

- The purpose of the network should be expanded to include an explicit reference to engagement with students as key partners in the embedding of a positive culture of academic integrity. It was further agreed that there should be very direct student involvement in the network (and its working groups), not just a representative from USI;
- Amend point 4 to include an explicit reference to the responsibility of staff and students to ensure academic integrity within institutions;

- Add a point that the network has an educational role in terms of raising awareness of academic integrity issues to the general public.

The following role was identified for the Network:

The purpose of the network is to advise and offer guidance to QQI 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;
- good practice with regard to prevention of, and addressing suspected and confirmed instances of, academic misconduct and ensuring institutional staff and students are aware of their responsibilities in this regard to ensure academic integrity within institutions;
- ways to engage with students as key partners in the embedding of a positive culture of academic integrity;
- ways to raise public awareness of academic integrity issues;
- a working methodology/procedures for the reporting and prosecution of instances of cheating within HEIs that are offences under the recently amended legislation;
- key elements of a dedicated communication strategy for stakeholders;
- areas for dedicated enhancement activity to support a culture of academic integrity in Irish HEIs

It was proposed that three network meetings will take place in the first half of 2020, and that additional meetings of sub-groups or working groups will be convened as required. It was noted that the network meetings should take place over a half day. There was support for the development of a website for the network as an information resource and as a tool to inform projects.

There was consensus that the communication of information generated within the context of the network to the wider academic and administrative communities within member institutions and to external stakeholders in Irish higher education and training is of vital importance. It was considered, however, that each member could decide on how best to do this with regard to their own institution.

4. Project areas proposed for Network activity

(i) Project Areas

Group discussion was then held on whether or not the project ideas identified by QQI in advance of the meeting were of broad interest to members. If so, members were asked to select priority project areas for the network to address, or to suggest alternative network projects.

Following group discussion, it was noted that all of the project areas identified were worthy of consideration and that a number of the possible project areas were linked. There was a suggestion that some of the project areas could be conjoined to form subsets of larger projects. Overall, the following priority areas for the network were suggested by members:

- Collate current approaches to the prevention, detection and penalising of academic misconduct in order to identify and disseminate national good practice guidelines;
 - Stage 1 of this project will identify and agree common definitions and establish a national lexicon to be agreed by the larger network;
- Establish the nature and extent of current academic misconduct in Ireland as a benchmarking exercise and in order to:
 - develop appropriate and effective prevention strategies;
 - identify areas for dedicated enhancement activity to support a culture of academic integrity in Irish HEIs

The Chair asked members to identify their interest or that of their institution in participating in either working group directly to QQI via Karena Maguire (kmaguire@qqi.ie). Conveners and deputy conveners were also sought for each working group. Those interested should also contact Karena directly. He affirmed that a diverse group of institutional representatives will be required to capture the full extent of activity nationally and therefore to maximise the effectiveness of each working group.

QQI will draft Terms of Reference for each working group which will be considered by the network at its next meeting in January 2020, along with a working methodology and timelines for working group activity. It was agreed that it is imperative that the working groups be established and commence working as soon as possible.

(ii) Implementation of the Legislation

Two areas of activity related to the implementation of the new legislation were set aside and it was agreed that QQI will seek assistance directly from members or their institutions with regard to:

- Identifying the key elements of a dedicated communication strategy for stakeholders regarding the new legislation and as a means of promoting good conduct;

- Liaising with QQI to advise on the establishment of a working methodology/procedures for the reporting and prosecution of instances of cheating within HEIs that fall within the remit of the Amendment Bill;

The Chair asked that those with relevant expertise or interest in these areas contact QQI via Karena Maguire (kmaguire@qqi.ie).

(iii) Other Business

It was queried whether there should be messages for earlier users of education, particularly for teacher training colleges? While the Junior and Leaving Cert are very explicitly exempt from the provisions of the legislation, it was agreed that the State cannot train learners in one methodology and then expect them to undo this learning on entering higher education. The Network was informed that consultation is currently underway on the senior cycle and the network's activities on academic integrity could feed into that process.

5. Other Business

A deputy Chair is required for the network. Volunteers for this position were sought. Interested parties should contact QQI directly (kmaguire@qqi.ie) by Friday 20th December. A deputy Chair will be appointed at the next meeting of the network in January.

6. Dates and Locations of 2008 Meetings

It was agreed that the next meeting of the National Academic Integrity Network will take place in January 2020. It was suggested that late morning start suits most members best. It has been agreed that the next meetings will take place on:

- Thursday 23rd January
- Tuesday 10th March
- Thursday 18th June

It is proposed that meetings be held from 10:45am, working through lunchtime. Venues will be confirmed closer to the meeting dates.