

National Academic Integrity Network

Note of Meeting of 23 January 2020

In Attendance: Billy Kelly (Chair);

Hibernia College, DKIT, Athlone Institute of Technology, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, IBAT, Limerick Institute of Technology, THEA, CIT, National College of Ireland, TU Dublin - Tallaght, Ulster University Students' Union, Dublin Business School, Athlone IT, CCT, IoT Sligo, Dublin Business School, NUI Galway; Irish Universities Association, UCC, HECA, UL , IUA , IT Carlow, ICD Business School

Apologies:

Dublin City University, Maynooth University, Institute of Technology Tralee, Griffith College Dublin, Trinity College Dublin, Irish Universities Association, Technological Higher Education Association (THEA), University of Limerick, NUI Galway, GMIT, UL, IADT, Athlone Institute of Technology, Letterkenny Institute of Technology, Carlow Institute of Technology, Irish College of Humanities & Applied Sciences, Waterford Institute of Technology, Cork Institute of Technology, University College Dublin.

Apologies:

1. Opening by Chair and Review of Previous Meeting

At the outset of the meeting the Chair welcomed members, particularly those attending their first meeting of the network, and provided specific points of information on its purpose for their benefit.

A summary of the inaugural network meeting was provided, following which the note of the previous meeting was approved.

2. Matters arising not on the Agenda

No matters were recorded.

3. Terms of Reference for the National Academic Integrity Network

An overview was provided of the discussion held at the previous meeting on the role and terms of reference for the network. A revised draft ToR reflecting feedback at the inaugural meeting was circulated in advance and reviewed by members at the meeting. The ToR were approved by members.

4. Proposed Network Projects for 2020

The Chair provided the background to the selection of particular project areas for the network i.e. discussions held at the inaugural meeting of the network in November 2019. Two broad project areas have been identified for actioning by the network:

Working Group 1, Identification of Common Definition and National Good Practice Guidelines, will:

- Identify and agree common definitions and establish a national lexicon to be agreed by the larger network;
- Collate current approaches to the prevention, detection and sanctioning of academic misconduct and review the international guidance available in order to identify and disseminate national good practice guidelines.

Working Group 2, Establish the nature and extent of current academic misconduct in Ireland in order to develop prevention strategies and identify areas for dedicated enhancement activity, will:

- 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

Both working group conveners, Yvonne Kavanagh and David Croke provided an overview of the ToR for their respective working groups (which had been circulated in advance of the meeting) and highlighted their objectives for their groups for the next meeting of the network. It is intended that working group 1 will have completed work on a taxonomy for academic integrity at that point and that working group 2 will have prepared a benchmarking survey for Irish higher education providers that will help establish the current landscape nationally.

Members confirmed their satisfaction that the two project areas identified represent the critical areas to be addressed in the first instance and that the number of projects is appropriate. The Chair advised that ToR may be further elaborated upon and the working methodologies of the groups determined by the working groups themselves as fit and appropriate.

An overview was then provided of the steps taken to date in assigning members to preferred project areas. Membership of working groups was confirmed as follows (deputies to be appointed):

Working Group 1 - Identification of Common Definition and National Good Practice Guidelines:

Yvonne Kavanagh, Carlow IoT (Convenor)
Aisling Reast, Hibernia College
Brendan Ryder, DKIT
Frances O'Connell, LIT
Jason Healy, ICD
Ken Carroll, TU Dublin
Kevin McStravock, USI
Michelle Millar, NUIG
Nora Trench Bowles, IUA

Ross Anderson, UL
Seamus Lennon GMIT

Working Group 2 - Establish the nature and extent of current academic misconduct in Ireland in order to develop prevention strategies and identify areas for dedicated enhancement activity:

David Croke, RCSI (Convenor)
Aine McManus, Griffith College
Celine Blacow, IADT
Des Walsh representative Violeta Morari, CIT
Eileen Buckley Dhoot, IBAT College
Joyce Senior, UCD
Lori Johnston, DBS
Lorna Fitzpatrick, USI
Louise Higgins; Catherine O'Donoghue and Cora McCormack, Athlone IoT
Siobhan Cusack, UCC

The network was informed that further student representation on both the network and the working groups is sought and members were asked to consult with colleagues and student groups within their institutions to determine how this might be achieved. The Chair stressed that success is having an academic culture where students have a deep awareness and understanding of the issues and are, consequently, less likely to engage in academic misconduct of whatever form. Achieving this success will require a strong student presence on the network and its working groups.

5. Discussion on How to Maximize the Potential of the Network

Communication

Members were asked to consider in groups how they will ensure that information, resources and materials generated by the network and its working groups will be brought back by them and disseminated within their own institutions, and, conversely, how relevant issues or guidance arising in their institutional contexts will be brought back to the network and / or its working groups as appropriate.

The following comments and proposals were offered by members:

- Members should relay information and recommendations arising from the network into relevant decision-making committees within their institutions, such as, but not limited to, programme boards, disciplinary committees and academic councils etc.;
- All senior committees in HEIs should have academic integrity as a standing item on agendas. Relevant issues can be notified to the network member for communication to the network and / or its working groups as relevant and appropriate;
- Members concurred that there is a need to ensure that communication to and from the network and its working groups doesn't become "siloes" through the registrar's office, but is dispersed more widely within institutions so that academic culture changes. It was suggested that institutional working groups on academic integrity may be one way to get the message out.

- The collation of resources on the QQI website was welcomed. HEIs were invited to submit relevant information and links for inclusion there. Members will signpost the webpage to colleagues in their own institutions;
- It was highlighted that there are two primary audiences within institutions; staff and learners and different, dedicated approaches are required for each. QQI confirmed that it will be initiating a separate communication strategy targeting learners and that it will be working closely with USI on this. Nonetheless, members should consider how best to engage with their own learners on this issue in the interim. Some key messages for learners were identified, including that cheating is not a victimless activity. There are significant consequences for the student themselves, both now and as graduates, as well as the broader damage down to the system and its reputation. It was agreed that key messages and support around academic integrity needs to be provided at induction. It was acknowledged that awareness raising and skills development is also required for staff and staff need to feel enabled and encouraged to report their concerns and suspicions around academic misconduct.
 - Ways of capturing the student voice by the network were discussed. The possibility of including questions on academic integrity in the Irish Survey of Student Engagement was raised, as was a proposal to hold focus groups with students within member institutions.
 - The need to protect student whistle blowers in cheating cases was also raised.
- Members considered how best to develop and support a culture of academic integrity within institutions. Some initiatives were proposed, including the holding of a national academic integrity week to raise awareness. The need to include institutional ethics committees in the conversation was also raised.

Issues to be Considered

Members were also asked to identify, having regard for the ToR of the working groups, any other issues or perspectives that the working groups should bear in mind or address in conducting their work. The following feedback was provided:

- It was highlighted that there is more than one type of student who cheats and that approaches adopted may need to be cognizant of the unintended or accidental plagiariser versus the intentional cheater. Measures put in place by HEIs may still not address those determined to cheat.
- There is value in identifying those categories of learners who may be more vulnerable to academic misconduct, for example, international students, and, less obviously, high achievers who may have perfected a study style at second level which is no longer appropriate in HE.
 - In this context, the issue of transitions from second to third level was discussed, as well as the need for good academic practice and ethics to be instilled within the school system so that learners enter third level appropriately equipped to successfully engage with their studies. It was proposed that the network might engage with NCCA on this topic, perhaps by inviting a representative of the NCCA to attend a meeting of the network.

- The introduction of mandatory induction modules on academic integrity was proposed. Members heard how a provider has already successfully adopted this approach. ICD Business School has incorporated two assignments into the module, which is required for both undergraduate and postgraduate entrants, one focusing on plagiarism and one on critical thinking and independent learning. It was proposed that if study skills sessions are voluntary, they may give the impression that good practice is voluntary also.
- The difficulties faced by staff in identifying contract cheating were discussed, as well as the challenges posed by being reliant on the judgement of the lecturer. It was reiterated that confirming academic misconduct does not require the same burden of proof required in a criminal case, rather it hinges on the balance of probability. QQI will upload relevant information to the Resources webpage on the QQI website.
- It was posited that sometimes the approaches (e.g. to programme design and assessment) adopted by HEIs may be unintentionally triggering an unintended, reactive response from learners. For example, the volume and nature of assessment may steer some learners towards cheating for a variety of reasons, whilst certain types of assessment may be more vulnerable to cheating. Understanding how programme and assessment design might either promote or deter cheating is important and should be shared with colleagues within institutions.

6. Communications and Media Update

QQI provided an update on media coverage prompted by the inaugural meeting of the network. QQI's communications activities to date have focused on communicating the regulatory changes to the following target audiences:

- **Students** – The USI has agreed to chair a Communications Working Group to devise communications plans and tactics which will have maximum impact on the student body. The communication strategy will aim to raise awareness and encourage behavior change by helping students understand the potential impact on them of cheating and engaging with online academic fraud.
- **Providers of Cheating Services** – QQI is currently identifying organisations and individuals actively engaged in this activity with a view to communicating to them the illegality of their activities.
- **Publishers of Advertising of Cheating Services** – Contact has been initiated by QQI with the main social media platforms and advertisers to highlight their responsibilities under the new legislation.

The establishment of this network provides a platform for providers to come together to better understand academic cheating; highlight current best practice that can be shared within the sector; and develop measures as peers to proactively tackle this issue. Network members will have responsibility for disseminating the outputs of the network and working groups within their individual institutions.

7. Update on National and International Developments

Engagement with Advertisers and Publishers

QQI met and had very positive and constructive discussions with Distilled SCH, operators of www.DoneDeal.ie and www.Adverts.ie. It has been agreed that Distilled SCH will remove all advertisements for cheating services which QQI brings to its attention. Nine such ads have already been identified and removed. A formal process for sharing information on persons placing such advertisements is being developed.

Other advertisers and web platforms have also been approached by QQI. Whilst reluctant to engage on the issue, formal meetings to progress arrangements will be pursued in the coming weeks.

Engagement with Higher Education Institutions

QQI engages in a series of dialogue meetings with the senior teams, including the Presidents, of each public higher education institution. These meetings focus on a range of current matters impacting on quality assurance, and QQI will take the opportunity at meetings this year to highlight the issue of academic integrity and the work of the NAIN and the associated working groups.

MoU with TEQSA

QQI signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, Australia (TEQSA) at the end of November 2019. The MOU has identified a number of areas for collaboration including approaches to dealing with academic fraud and contract cheating in both jurisdictions. It also facilitates information sharing. QQI has similar MoUs and information sharing agreements with other jurisdictions, including the QAA in the UK. These formal relationships may be called upon to access information and / research identified by the network as benefitting its work or that of the sector.

QQI Green Paper on Assessment of Learners and Learning

The QQI portfolio of work across the organization will look at opportunities to highlight and embrace the work of the NAIN on academic integrity. Assessment is a critical feature when considering all aspects of academic integrity and cheating. The QQI Green Paper on Assessment published in 2018 has a chapter on *Academic Integrity in the Context of Assessment (Ch.13)*:

<https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Green%20Paper%20Assessment%20of%20Learners%20and%20Learning%20March%202018.pdf>

The stakeholder feedback on this green paper was published in 2019:

<https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/QQI%20Green%20Paper%20Report.pdf>

QQI plans to progress the assessment agenda in 2020 with further engagement with the HEI community and in association with the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning.

Council of Europe Policy Development

QQI represented Ireland at a Council of Europe platform in Prague and presented an update on Irish developments (28 & 29 November), including the establishment of the National Academic Integrity Network. This meeting heard of the extent of academic malpractice in Europe and the

steps taken by different countries to prevent and detect it. The delegates reviewed a draft Council of Europe policy framework Countering Education Fraud intended to promote ethics, transparency and integrity in education. Ireland has provided feedback on the draft document, about which QQI will keep the network informed.

8. Dates and Locations of 2020 Meetings

The next two meetings of the network will be held on:

- Tuesday, 10th March 2020
- Thursday, 18th June 2020

Both meetings will be held in the Davenport Hotel, commencing at 10:45am and concluding with lunch.

It was also agreed that working groups will convene meetings between times as appropriate and necessary.