



National Academic Integrity Network

Terms of Reference 2021-2022

Background

Recent years have seen the rise of an understanding of the importance of academic integrity within higher education. This raised awareness has been driven by the increase in numbers of online companies, internationally and nationally, offering services to students which facilitate cheating, either with payment for production of assignments - contract cheating - or other similar services, such as file-sharing. The facilitation of learner cheating by these online companies has been recognised by QQI as a growing threat to the integrity of Irish higher education and so a number of steps have been taken to address this emerging challenge. Amongst them was 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.

The National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) is a peer network of higher education institutions and associated organisations established to enable the fostering of a national understanding of academic integrity and what it means in the higher education context. The network aims to inform, educate, support positive behavioural change and explore effective ways to detect academic misconduct.

Objectives

The Network is focused on actively supporting higher education institutions in

- embedding a culture of academic integrity and
- addressing the challenges presented by academic misconduct.

To this end, the Network works to establish the nature of academic misconduct taking place in Irish higher education institutions; to identify and advise on appropriate measures institutions can take to

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/>

inform and educate staff and students, to develop approaches to prevent and address such misconduct; and to inform dedicated communications strategies.

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

- agreed principles of academic integrity;
- a lexicon of common terms and definitions in the field of academic integrity;
- the current landscape of academic integrity in Irish higher education;
- identifying the roles and responsibilities of the key stakeholders in addressing this issue: HEIs, learners and QQI;
- good practice with regard to upholding academic integrity, preventing learners succumbing to academic misconduct through proactive measures, protecting learners from the lure of ‘essay mills’ and other types of cheating services, enabling the detection of suspected instances and sanctioning of proven academic misconduct reflecting the responsibilities of staff and learners to ensure academic integrity within institutions;
- a working methodology and procedures for the reporting and prosecution of instances of cheating within HEIs that are offences under the 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;
- areas for dedicated enhancement activity and capacity building to support the nurturing of a culture of academic integrity in Irish HEIs, e.g., through a series of webinars and other events.

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 comprises nominated members from the following HEIs and organisations:

- Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA)
- Irish Universities Association (IUA)
- Technological Higher Education Association (THEA)
- National Forum for Research Integrity (NFRI)
- A Chair of the Network
- HEI representatives nominated by their Registrar (or equivalent) from each publicly regulated higher education institution, and a number of private colleges which provide QQI awards²
- Irish Centre for International Students (ICOS)
- Psychological Counsellors in Higher Education in Ireland (PCHEI)
- Librarians’ Association of Ireland (LAI)
- Student Affairs Ireland (SAI)
- SU members from public and private HEIs across Ireland
- Representatives from the Union of Students in Ireland
- QQI

The Network may invite observers to meetings/parts of meetings, as appropriate to its work. It may also advise related agencies and departments of work ongoing or recently completed, e.g., DFHERIS, SOLAS,

² A Registrar may nominate as many members as s/he sees fit to ensure that the institution’s interests are best addressed.

HEA, NFETL. QQI acts as the coordinator of the Network and provides administrative support. The NAIN Chair is appointed by QQI in consultation with representatives of the higher education sector.

Governance

Governance of the Network is provided by a Steering Committee comprising the NAIN Chair, Working Group Chairs/ Co-Chairs/ Deputy Chairs, and the QQI Academic Integrity Executive. The Steering Committee meets prior to plenary Network meetings to agree the agenda and to discuss any issues arising and at other times as required.

Meetings

Plenary meetings are scheduled approximately every two months during the academic year. NAIN members are invited and encouraged to actively participate in these meetings. The meeting outcomes are disseminated within their institutions and organisations by the NAIN member(s).

Shortly after each meeting the key points as agreed are circulated by email to all NAIN members. A detailed note of each meeting is circulated at a later stage.

Methodology

The Network may convene working groups to achieve its objectives. Each Working Group has a Chair, a Co or deputy Chair as needed, and holds its own meetings. QQI provides administrative support for the meetings as required.

Each Working Group has its own ToRs which are published on the NAIN website. Working groups produce material for the consideration and agreement of the overall Network membership.

Communication

Meetings and communications with the Network are managed by QQI through the academicintegrity@qqi.ie email address. All communications, including meeting invitations, minutes, news items, etc., are circulated through this address to members and other stakeholders as agreed. QQI also hosts the NAIN webpage: [National Academic Integrity Network \(qqi.ie\)](http://NationalAcademicIntegrityNetwork(qqi.ie)). Information on the NAIN meetings, minutes, meeting agendas, activities, links to upcoming events (and recording of previous events) are published here.

Term of office

The Terms of Reference for the network are reviewed annually in light of objectives for the coming twelve months. Each HEI Registrar is invited to affirm, change or add to their NAIN members at the end of each academic year.



Working Group 1

Terms of Reference (updated Oct 2021)

Identification of Common Definitions and National Good Practice Guidelines

Background

The National Academic Integrity Network was established in November 2019. It identified two priority areas to be addressed by the network and established working groups to further its ambitions in these areas.

Working Group 1 will:

- Review annually the agreed *National Principles and Lexicon of Common Terms* and *Academic Integrity Guidelines* for the purpose of recommending updates where appropriate;
- Collate current approaches to the prevention of academic misconduct; the identification, detection and management of suspected cases of academic misconduct and penalties for proven cases of academic misconduct including a review of the international guidance available, in order to identify and disseminate national good practice guidelines.
- Collate current approaches to the management and embedding of academic integrity in order to identify and disseminate good practice guidelines on Institutional Support Structures which promote Academic Integrity
- Explore the intersection of Assessment Practices and Academic Integrity and advise the NAIN accordingly.

Membership

The Working Group is convened by the Co-Chairs, Dr Yvonne Kavanagh, Assistant Registrar, Carlow IoT and Aisling Reast, Hibernia College.

The current members of the Working Group are:

WG1: Co Chair: Yvonne Kavanagh, IT Carlow; Co-Chair: Aisling Reast, RCSI as of Dec 2021; Ross Anderson, UL; Ken Carroll, TU Dublin; Niall Daly, MUSU; Mary Goode TUS Midlands; Jason Healy, ICD; Eva Juhl, MTU

Cork campus; Hugh McBride, GMIT; Michelle Millar, NUIG; Caoimhe O’Carroll, USI; Frances O’Connell, TUS Midlands; Fiona O’Riordan, DCU; Perry Share, IT Sligo; Angelica Riskey, UL; Brendan Ryder, DkIT.

Network members may nominate other members to the working group based on need and expertise.

Meetings

The working group meets at least five times a year or more frequently if required.

Communication

Meetings and communications with the National Academic Integrity Network are facilitated by QQI. Meeting minutes and any other related information or outputs produced by the working group are circulated to the National Academic Integrity Network as appropriate. Final outputs of the working group are ratified by the National Academic integrity Network before wider circulation. For efficiency, changes to the scope of the working group or its activities may be approved by the Chairs in between plenary meetings of the Network.

Term of office

The working group met initially in January 2020 and has continued to meet thereafter as necessary and appropriate. The Terms of Reference for the Network have been reviewed and revised in October 2021 and will continue to be reviewed and revised with consideration for the need for the working group to continue in order to complete its work, or in the event that it is considered that its work needs to be extended.



Working Group 2

Terms of Reference (updated Oct 2021)

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

Background

The National Academic Integrity Network was established in November 2019. It identified two priority areas to be addressed by the network and established working groups to further its ambitions in these areas.

Working Group 2 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;
- Collate/establish and share/disseminate/publicise/champion best Academic Integrity practices in Irish HEIs.

Membership

The Working Group is convened by the Chair, Violeta Morari. The current members of the Working Group are:

WG2: Chair: Violeta Morari, MTU Cork campus; Clare Austick, USI; David Croke, independent; Susi Gottlober, MU; Louise Higgins, TUS Midlands; Cora McCormack, TUS Midlands; Aine McManus, Griffith College; Catherine O'Donoghue TUS Midlands; Aedin OHeocha, GMIT; Joyce Senior, UCD; Des Walsh, MTU Cork campus.

Network members may nominate other members to the working group based on need and expertise.

Meetings

The working group meets at least once every two months or more frequently if required.

Communication

Meetings and communications with the National Academic Integrity Network are facilitated by QQI. Meeting minutes and any other related information or outputs produced by the working group are circulated to the National Academic Integrity Network as appropriate. Final outputs of the working group are ratified by the National Academic integrity Network before wider circulation. For efficiency, changes to the scope of the working group or its activities may be approved by the Chair in between plenary meetings of the Network.

Term of office

The working group met initially in January 2020 and have continued to meet thereafter as necessary and appropriate. The Terms of Reference for the Network are reviewed regularly with consideration for the need for the working group to continue in order to complete its work, or in the event that it is considered that its work needs to be extended.



Working Group 3: Communications

Terms of Reference

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 2012 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.

Purpose of the Communications Working Group

The Communications Working Group will:

- develop a communications plan to support the work of the Network in raising awareness of academic cheating and related issues **amongst students** across the full Higher Education sector. These communications will complement existing initiatives within individual institutions to promote a culture of academic integrity for their staff and students
- advise on and develop student-centred communications activities to support the recommendations and activities of other Network working groups.

Membership

The Communications Working Group is convened by the Co-Chairs, Megan O’Connor and Iain MacLabhrainn. The current members of the Working Group are:

WG#3 (23 members excl QQI): Co Chair: Megan O’Connor, USI; Co-Chair: Iain MacLabhrainn, NUIG; Kathy Bradley, SAI; Carmel Brennan GMIT; Niall Daly, MUSU; Lorna Dodd LAI; Curtis Donnan, UUSU; Beverley Genockey, TCDSU; Martina Genockey, USI; Kate Goodman DCUSU; Nuala Harding, TUS Midlands; Robert Jordan TUS SU Limerick; Thomas Kelly, DCU; ; Laura Elisa Jimenez Madrigal NCI Int Std; Derrie Murray ICOS; Sarah O’Brien, TUS Midlands; Ryan O’Callaghan, DBS SU; Roisin O’Connell, THEA; Jim O’ Mahony,

MTU Cork campus; Connor O'Reilly NCI SU; Lia O'Sullivan, IUA; Paula Seth PCHEI; Mariana Braga Vasconcellos CCT College SU.

QQI Executive: Gráinne Mooney, Duncan Keegan, Sue Hackett

Other parties may be invited to contribute to working group sessions as required.

Reporting Structure

The Communications Working Group will report directly to the NAIN Steering Group and provide updates to the Network as required.