

LTC17D164

Title: *Academic Integrity (Contract Cheating)*
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Issue

An update on the University's plan for combating Contract Cheating as part of a developing Academic Integrity Policy.

Recommendation

Recipients are invited:

- (1) Note the issue of Contract Cheating;
- (2) Note the University's current position on the QAA recommendations of good practice;
- (3) Note the time line of the internal audit of the University's position as conducted by Price Waterhouse Cooper.

Resource Implications

At this stage, resource implications are unclear.

Risk Implications

There is considerable potential reputational risk to the University if a robust strategy is not implemented as quickly as possible.

Equality and Diversity

None apparent at present

Timing of decisions

The implementation of the overall plan depends upon the introduction of a University Policy on Academic Integrity including the embedding of the Epigeum course on Academic Integrity which is planned to be available from 2019-20. There are a number of other elements which can be introduced well before this date.

Further Information

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Background and Discussion

The growing issue of “Contract Cheating”, where a ‘third party completes work for a student who then submits it to an education provider as their own, where such input is not permitted’, has been of growing concern amongst Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) within the UK as well as the rest of the world due to its negative effects impact on the educational integrity of HEIs and the veracity of their awards. In October 2017 the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) published a report entitled Contracting to Cheat in Higher Education: How to Address Contract Cheating, the Use of Third-Party Services and Essay Mills which provided clear guidance on how to mitigate the growing risk of contract cheating. The report received a high level of attention from the media and the University has begun to consider its approach to the recommendations and has produced an action plan against each one, appointing an Academic and Administrative Leads – the Academic Director of Taught Programmes, Clive Matthews, and the Head of Learning and Teaching Quality, Laura Thompson – to be responsible for its development and implementation.

The University’s plan is currently being reviewed by PwC UK as part of an internal audit approved by the Audit Committee Chair and the Chief Resource Officer in January 2018. It is hoped that PwC scrutiny will place UEA well in the vanguard of these issues. The objectives of the audit are to:

1. Provide assurance over the design of the controls currently in place in the plan and cited in the University’s action plan as being relevant to addressing the QAA recommendations to tackle contract cheating; and
2. Provide recommendations for improvement of the University’s current action plan against the QAA report recommendations and oversight of the implementation of the actions.

The PwC audit will concentrate on the following areas:

- Information for students;
- Support for students
- Training and information for staff;
- Regulations and Policies;
- Quality assurance links, reporting and gather evidence and vivas;
- Managing allegations, adjudications and sanctions.

and is due to finish by July 11th 2018.

Reference is made within the University Plan to Epigeum’s *Academic Integrity* Course which is currently under development and to which UEA is one of the contributing development institutions. The belief is that our part in this course and contacts made through it place UEA at a considerable advantage.

Reference is also made to Turnitin’s *Authorship Identity* product currently going through testing. The University’s recent discussions with Turnitin have suggested that this software will be of little value and its main data analytics can be easily replicated through the use of Word’s Readability Analytics.

Attachments

Current University Plan for each of the QAA recommendations.

ATTACHMENT:

Contracting to Cheat in Higher Education: How to Address Contract Cheating, the Use of Third-Party Services and Essay Mills (QAA, October 2017)

Key action points

Information for Students	UEA Plan
Place a positive focus on academic integrity, not just a negative focus on misconduct	Part of development team for Epigeum <i>Academic Integrity</i> course; will need to write a University statement/policy on AI
Give written information to students on the importance of academic integrity, and consequences of cheating	Add something to Student Charter? Write briefing leaflet; LET; for Epigeum <i>Academic Integrity</i> course
Provide information that focuses specifically on the implications of using third-party assistance in cheating	Write a briefing leaflet for students; add material to LET pages on plagiarism.
Information should be included in the student handbook, codes of conduct and programme documentation	P. 16 of current Handbook has statement about plagiarism but nothing specific on Contract Cheating; this is easy to remedy. Is referred to in current Plagiarism Regs (“The commissioning and submission of work as the student’s own, where the student has purchased or solicited another individual to produce work on the student’s behalf.” [§2.3.4]); could require as part of the module information template.
Provide early information, reinforced at appropriate times throughout programmes	Induction programmes; Epigeum <i>Academic Integrity</i> course; reminders in lead up to particular (high risk) assessments.
Consider the effectiveness of student honesty declarations	There is some evidence of beneficial use of “honour codes” so may be worth exploring. Cf. McCabe et al (2002) “Honor codes and other contextual influences on Academic Integrity” + other work by McCabe, Canning (1956) Fass (1986). Add to Terms and Conditions, Student Charter?
Be clear about the measures you use to detect cheating	Use of Turnitin (irrespective of policy adopted); stress that the best detectors are academics. Possible future use of Turnitin’s new <i>Authorship Identity</i> product?

Essay mills offer products at all qualification levels, so avoid focusing entirely on the undergraduate stage.	Induction and study skills at PGT level; Epigeum <i>Academic Integrity</i> course does not distinguish between UG and PGT (or PGR for that matter).
Be aware of the diverse needs of your student body and offer information in a range of formats and languages as appropriate	Languages: not clear that this would be that much more effective than something in English. Further, could be seen to discriminate against certain groups of students, e.g. translating something into Chinese but not Korean or Japanese might be taken to imply that only Chinese students are likely to resort to Contract Cheating. Also an expensive “solution” – how many languages are to be targeted?
Make students aware that, where they are studying on accredited programmes or programmes that lead to professional status, any findings of cheating will be reported to the relevant professional body	Depends on relevant PSRB. E.g. HSC students found guilty of contract cheating only have it logged on their University record whilst MED students have it logged on their University record and also indexed on their GMC record. [Not sure that this is entirely accurate.]
Provide support for students to enable the development of skills in studying, academic writing, use of academic sources, paraphrasing and research	Happens within individual transition/induction programmes; LET resources; Epigeum <i>Academic Integrity</i> course; need to check that LET’s Academic Writing team approach from perspective of academic integrity.
Be mindful of students’ diverse needs, such as where English may not be their first language	Use of LET; English language support; need to check that LET’s Academic Writing team approach from perspective of academic integrity.
Time student support activities relevant to academic integrity carefully; think about when they will be most effective	This happens on an ad hoc basis; need to stress across the University.
Embed the tuition of study skills throughout the curriculum	Do we need to produce guidance on this? Add CSED course?
Think about how to involve students in spreading the integrity message	Ensure we are involved in this year’s International Day of Action Against Contract Cheating (October 2018?) http://contractcheating.weebly.com/ , http://contractcheating.weebly.com/whiteboard-declarations.html ; only Coventry, York, Northampton, Sheffield Hallam and Nottingham Trent appear to have taken part last year; need to ensure uea(su) are closely involved.
Take every chance to reiterate the integrity message	Use of electronic notice boards around University; greater exposure in Hubs; need to integrate with uea(su).

Be clear about the support that is on offer for students who feel under pressure	How can we increase publicity and reach? In class reminders; generic statement in module outline templates; module BB sites; more visible information in Hubs; posters outlining sources of help (e.g. LET); English language support; Academic Advisers; SSS.
Think about how essay mills find their customers, and how students find them	At UEA has mainly been through e-mails (that we know of); need a means for students to report approaches (a hotline?) from essay mills (including Security where materials are being handed out on campus).
Consider working with schools and further education providers to encourage solid academic skills and academic integrity	<p>The UEA MOOC <i>Preparing for University</i> covers this. E-mail from Harriet Jones: "In my PreU Skills programme we show teachers the rules that relate to collusion and plagiarism and the idea is that they take these back and talk to their students about them. The bit that usually surprises them is that it counts whether or not it is intentional. It also shows them how harsh the penalties are, and so drives home how important it is to us.</p> <p>In the online course week 3 is dedicated to plagiarism. We call academic currency, in that your words and ideas have worth that equates to promotion and other sources of income. So in taking someone's ideas and passing them off as your own amounts to academic theft."</p>
Ensure that staff are kept up to date with academic regulations applying to assessment and their responsibility to uphold academic standards and integrity	Updates through LTS Bulletin; CSED regulatory/policy courses; update <i>Senate Guidance on Assessment and Feedback</i> .
Integrate academic integrity into staff training on learning, teaching and assessment design	Epigeum <i>Academic Integrity</i> course has a staff facing component and will be best place for this; MA HEP needs to include something on this; need to increase CSED course coverage;
Place a positive emphasis on academic integrity, ensuring that staff understand the reasons why students might commit contract cheating	Epigeum <i>Academic Integrity</i> course; need for CSED training; policy document on Academic Integrity; update <i>Senate Guidance on Assessment and Feedback</i> .
Provide training to academic staff on the design and use of resilient assessment methods	Need for CSED training; Epigeum <i>Academic Integrity</i> course
Ensure that all relevant staff, especially those involved in any investigation, are	CSED course for plagiarism officers (there is an issue of ensuring people attend); Epigeum <i>Academic Integrity</i> course has explicit section on this.

familiar with the concept of contract cheating, and the procedures to be followed when it is suspected	
Consider “authentic assessment”	Need better guidelines on assessment design; CM to write (in conjunction with Moderation policy’s new assessment design and development component (around <u>assignment briefs</u>)). NB It is not possible to design out all opportunities for contract cheating but can make it considerably harder.
Use a mixture of assessment methods	Part of annual course review; Teaching Committees; SSLCs? Important role for (mandatory) Assignment Briefs as part of Moderation policy. NB It is not possible to design out all opportunities for contract cheating but can make it considerably harder.
Don't rely on short deadlines to limit contract cheating	N/A since no such policy.
Think about how to limit cheating opportunities when designing or reviewing courses and setting assignments	New moderation process with new assessment design and development component; annual course review; moderation of assignment briefs. NB It is not possible to design out all opportunities for contract cheating but can make it considerably harder.
Set specific assignments, with 'checkpoints' for research and findings discussions	Formative work; does this need extending? Does this require formative work to be compulsory?
Consider blocking essay mill websites from your IT systems	Possible with relatively little resource implications according to Iain Reeman. Should we be recommending that there be a central (UK/World) up-to-date register of essay mill sites?
Use blocking messages to reiterate information around academic integrity and where the student should seek support if they are struggling	This is possible but will come at a cost since will require purchase of new software – unclear that will add much.
Be alert to advertising methods like posters, flyers and social media, and take steps to minimise/counter them when detected	Relatively little of this at present found at UEA; should we have a standard communication to send out when it does happen? “We are aware that there have been recent attempts to contact our students about”
Make explicit to staff the implications of assisting students to commit academic offences	This is an HR issue. Need to check if there are any policies.
Consider organisation-wide detection methods and document them	Turnitin and batch screening. Use of Turnitin’s new <i>Authorship Identity</i> product?

Cultural change at an organisation may be needed if the problem is not being taken seriously	N/A since UEA has taken this seriously for some time.
Consider the use of vivas for checking authorship of submitted work	There needs to be consultation around this since can be a very resource heavy intervention if required for all.
After setting assessments, use active searching to see whether students are trying to commission someone else to do the work	Will need to seek guidance as to how this is done. CM knows Thomas Lancaster who is the leading expert in this area in the UK.
Consider linguistic analysis tools to complement text-matching software	Turnitin's new <i>Authorship Identity</i> product – how helpful will this be? Will it be worth the cost? Will its use become a hygiene factor?
Get to know your students' styles and capabilities, as far as is possible	Formative work (but need to ensure that all students submit); issue of anonymisation of summative work.
Be vigilant of unexpected peaks in a student's assessment performance	Requires de-anonymisation of course work and access to other marks across modules; who is to be responsible for this – Adviser?
Failure to recognise themes and topics discussed during lectures, and the use of different styles, unfamiliar terms, unusual spelling and formatting, are all indicators that someone else may have written the assignment	Recent research (Dawson & Sutherland-Smith 2017) has shown contract cheating can be identified where a submitted assessment fails to mention department-specific expectations (e.g. a reflective component). NB. the other elements mentioned here will also be found in “normal” plagiarised work.
Consider formal PSRB reporting processes for misconduct on programmes with a high likelihood of professional qualification.	Need to check what the professional Schools have in place here.
Consider whether you have adequate systems in place to allow for whistleblowing - to protect the accuser, as well as the accused, appropriately	Currently the University only has a policy about Public Interest Disclosure (Whistle blowing) for staff. Need to produce such a policy since have received a number of student concerns reporting the use of essay mills by their peers which we have not felt able to act upon. There is a range of policies in the sector which can be used to inform our own policy.

Review your regulations, policies and procedures to see how fit they are for dealing with contract cheating	The Regs on Plagiarism already refer to Contract Cheating: “The commissioning and submission of work as the student’s own, where the student has purchased or solicited another individual to produce work on the student’s behalf.” [§2.3.4]; Senate Student Disciplinary Committee Regs provide clear instruction about the penalty for Contract Cheating: “Where the offence of plagiarism arises from the purchase of course work, <u>the normal penalty is permanent exclusion from the University</u> and mitigating circumstances would not normally reduce this penalty” (emphasis added).
Signal a strong commitment to academic integrity through your institutional values, mission statement, and strategy	Learning and Teaching Strategy already to be reviewed next year – add suitable adjustments to text; Academic Integrity Policy; introduction of Epigeum <i>Academic Integrity</i> course; review of Senate Guidance on <i>Assessment and Feedback</i> .
A common approach across the provider is needed	This is covered by two previous action points of this section.
All members of the academic community, including the provider’s leadership, should work to the same values and definitions, policies and procedures	Unclear why this is needed given the first two action points of this section
Provide clearly worded statements to articulate what is deemed as acceptable and unacceptable practice, as well as the consequences and sanctions for breaching academic regulations	This is already pretty much the case. There is some work on Regs and Policies to remove confusing quasi-legalistic language.
Academic regulations, policies, procedures and sanctions should be supplemented by accessible guidance for students and staff	This is already the case.
Be aware of the diverse needs of the student body and offer guidance in other formats and languages	Languages: not clear that this would be that much more effective than something in English. Further, could be seen to discriminate against certain groups of students, e.g. translating something into Chinese but not Korean or Japanese might be taken to imply that only Chinese students are likely to resort to Contract Cheating. Also an expensive “solution” – how many languages are to be targeted?
A holistic strategy, supplemented by regulations that are detailed and specific to individual actions, will provide a robust institutional commitment to uphold academic integrity	This is already the case.

Regulations should ensure that all suspicions and allegations of academic misconduct are reported to a designated agency or officer	This already happens – e.g. Plagiarism Officers
Link academic integrity to an institution's quality assurance cycle to ensure regular scrutiny, monitoring and review	Will need to add this as part of upcoming reviews
Examiners should not deal with the case independently as this would be likely to give the accused person grounds for appeal	Not permitted by Regs.
Have an explicit procedure to follow to report a suspicion of academic misconduct, determining who to report to and how to report it	This already happens.
Provide a check list of typical and admissible evidence to support an allegation to help guide people wishing to raise concerns	Happens in certain areas (e.g. extenuating circumstances) but not in this; the QAA's checklist is weak but possibly sufficient for "reasonable doubt"
Consider using vivas as a normal part of the assessment process	<p>Seven reasons for using oral assessment: (1) The learning outcomes demand it; (2) It allows probing of the students' knowledge; (3) It reflects the world of practice; (4) It improves learning; (5) It suits some students; (6) The meaning of questions can be clarified; (7) It helps to ensure academic integrity.</p> <p>Disadvantages: (1) Undue anxiety; (2) Hearing or speech difficulties; (3) Time consuming; (4) Lack of anonymity (5) Bias; (6) Lack of familiarity with vivas; (7) Need for recording; (8) Articulatness vs knowledge.</p>
Academic regulations should clearly state additional assessment measures for suspected cases of academic misconduct	Unsure what this means.
Vivas should be chaired by someone independent of the allegation, but appropriately experienced and trained, to ensure objectivity and fairness	This already happens.

To help to allay concerns about workload, support services could be available to help to collect the evidence required	This already happens.
Have systems and processes in place for recording evidence from a viva voce	At present notes taken by Secretary to the Plagiarism Panel. Could take audio recordings as well.
Specifically appointed and trained academic misconduct officers may be used on straightforward or routine matters.	Each School has a Plagiarism Officer
The use of a panel to adjudicate on allegations of academic misconduct and appeals from first instance decisions will help to ensure independence, fairness and impartiality	Already in place (including a Plagiarism Officer from another School of Studies not delivering the module under consideration)
Mandatory staff development and training for adjudicators and other panel members will help to ensure a consistent approach to the conduct of proceedings involving alleged academic misconduct	Although CSED training exists (<i>Introduction to Plagiarism and Collusion Policy</i>) as well as <i>Annual Meeting of Plagiarism Officers Secretaries to Panels</i> , attendance is not mandatory and take up for training is not good (but is for the Annual Meeting). Part of a University-wide issue of training for School roles. Need for greater use of online training.
Flowcharts, timescales and quick guides to meeting schedules will help to provide a supportive but timely student experience	Already exist: https://portal.uea.ac.uk/documents/6207125/8576642/plagiarism-and-collusion-staff-guidance.pdf .
A standard approach to the classification of different types of academic misconduct, the associated level of seriousness and the relevant sanction to be applied will help to ensure consistency of decisions across an institution	This already exists with regards to plagiarism; the penalty for contract cheating is clear in Guidelines to SSDC Regs (“Where the offence of plagiarism arises from the purchase of course work, <u>the normal penalty is permanent exclusion from the University</u> and mitigating circumstances would not normally reduce this penalty” (emphasis added)).
Consider using 'on the balance of probabilities' as the standard of proof	This already part of Plagiarism and Collusion Regs: “When making a judgement on the level of the offence, the Panel shall apply the principle of “balance of probability”, weighing-up all the evidence and reaching a judgement on what was the most probable scenario to allow classification of the plagiarism/collusion offence to be set at the appropriate level.”
The institution's stance towards extenuating and mitigating circumstances should be articulated in the regulations,	SSDC Guidelines: “Where the offence of plagiarism arises from the purchase of course work, <u>the normal penalty is permanent exclusion from the University</u> and mitigating circumstances would not normally reduce this penalty” (emphasis added).

policies and procedures, but do not fetter your organisation's discretion in decision making	
Ensure any mitigation applies to the sanction and not to the decision	Already happens? Make clear in the new plagiarism Regs.
For sanctions less serious than exclusion, consider adding an educational element around academic integrity	Will be easier to do with Epigeum <i>Academic Integrity</i> course since can require student to (re)do the course.
Clear, written reasons for panel decisions and sanctions applied will assist the student in understanding the outcome as well as the options for challenge and appeal	Already happens?
Record statistics in sufficient detail to allow effective analysis	What level of granularity?
Statistics and related information can feed into the quality monitoring process and systematic reviews, in order to continue to improve operational policies and procedures	Yes; easy to implement?
The grounds for appeals can be communicated through student and staff guidance, institutional policies, procedures and academic regulations	Already happens including specialist staff in uea(su).
There could be instances where students are involved in the supply of contract cheating services; sanctions to be applied in such situations can be included within the student and staff guidance, and institutional policies, procedures and academic regulations	Yes; should this be added to Student Charter?
Consider including student representatives on decision-making panels for academic misconduct, and involving students in misconduct guidance and policy setting	Neither desirable nor practicable. Reps would need to come through uea(su) since current students would not be appropriate given the confidential information sometimes discussed. There are far too many Plagiarism meetings for uea(su) to sit on.

<p>Regular monitoring and review will show whether existing procedures and sanctions are effective at deterring and detecting academic misconduct</p>	<p>Reports to LTC already exist; do we need greater scrutiny, greater granularity?</p>
<p>Institutions can establish what works in other organisations and apply or adapt that practice to their own situation</p>	<p>UEA have already established various links through University groupings it belongs to and these will be worth developing in this area; a specific set of academic integrity links are also in place through being part of the development team of Epigeum <i>Academic Integrity</i> course</p>
<p>Online, distance learning and transnational education will provide further challenges for an institution in identifying and proving academic misconduct. Where such provisions exist, regulations will need to be extended to cover additional processes that may be required.</p>	<p>Needs looking into.</p>