UK Perspectives of Academic Integrity

4

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Contents

Abstract

Academic integrity has become an increasing preoccupation for UK higher education in recent years. Within the sector, there has been a clear move from the detection of inappropriate practice and punitive responses to more proactive and preventative approaches focussed on the promotion of academic integrity. That change amongst academics, students, and higher education providers (HEPs) has not only benefited widespread academic practice but also contributed to the literature underpinning academic integrity. The competing pressures of widening participation, the awarding of more highly classified ("good") degrees and internationalization have created a complex environment for this change. The accommodation of different learning needs, diverse academic contexts, and educational cultures has driven development of teaching approaches, learning support, and assessment. This chapter focuses particularly on how HEPs across the UK are embedding a culture of academic integrity into the learning and

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teaching environment while also working to "design out" areas of potential compromise in assessment design. This chapter will explore the academic opportunities for development and the challenges faced from the perspectives across the UK.

Introduction

Although concerns around academic integrity are by no means a recent phenomenon, they have become an increasing preoccupation for UK higher education over the last 10 years. These concerns have been fueled by considerations from a number of perspectives, one of the key ones being the perception of increasing numbers of plagiarism cases (Duggan, 2006; Ellis, 2012; Larkham & Manns, 2002; Park, 2003; Trost, 2009) and the ongoing interest in plagiarism by the media as indicated by regular articles in the press (e.g. Grove, 2014). The press play a part in the portrayal of higher education and can contribute to public confidence not only in the student experience but also academic standards and values. The sensationalist language used in some situations such as "hundreds kicked off courses," "academic misconduct rockets," and students being "hauled before the authorities and found guilty" (Brady & Dutta, 2014) can only undermine the confidence of students and the public at large.

The competing market pressures of widening participation, internationalization, and the driver of league table rankings to award more highly classified degrees (so-called good degrees) are among the factors that have added further complexities to the higher education environment. Associated with these is the concept of an "arms race" between the increase in the facility with which copied material may be incorporated within submitted work, whether deliberately or inadvertently, and the increase in the sophistication of the approaches to detecting plagiarism (Badge & Scott, 2009; Ellis, 2012; Park, 2003). Furthermore, there has been the recognition of the need to develop policies that ensure the equitable treatment of students within and between institutions (Badge & Scott, 2008; Carroll & Appleton, 2005; Morris & Carroll, 2011; Tennant, Rowell, & Duggan, 2007).

It is increasingly recognized within the higher education sector that plagiarism is a complex issue that spans a wide range of academic activity. At one end of the spectrum is poor academic practice, where the plagiarism is inadvertent; at the other end are the deliberate attempts to cheat. For example, the purchase of essays through so-called essay mills: organizations that, for a fee, will draft bespoke essays that are guaranteed not to be detected by the standard detection software. As a consequence, there has been a strong driver for moving the approaches from plagiarism per se, namely the detection of inappropriate practice and the application of punitive solutions, to more proactive and preventative approaches focussed on the promotion of good academic practice and the concept of academic integrity. That change amongst academics, students, and higher education providers within the UK has not only benefitted widespread academic practice but also contributed to a richer literature underpinning academic integrity.

Against this background, research in the UK has indicated that both staff and students may often have personalized views of what constitutes plagiarism and that there is the potential for a mismatch between the understandings of staff and students (Flint, Clegg, & MacDonald, 2006). The need to accommodate different learning needs, diverse academic contexts, and educational cultures has contributed to the potential for mismatch but has also contributed to driving forward the development of creative teaching approaches, learning support, and assessment. Furthermore, it is strongly argued that taking a purely disciplinarian approach of having and applying punitive policies is not constructive in the long term. Rather, institutions should aim to develop a culture of academic integrity with the responsibility for embedding that culture lying with academic staff and policy makers as well as students (MacDonald & Carroll, 2006; Park, 2004; Yakvchuk, Badge, & Scott, 2011).

In his 2004 paper, Park set out a clear case for the development of an institutional framework for dealing with plagiarism which was based on a set of "core pillars" that included the concept of academic integrity:

> The academic enterprise is rooted in a culture of integrity, founded on honesty and mutual trust, and a university should expect all of its members (staff and students) to respect and uphold these core values at all times, in everything they do at, for and in the name of the institution. Academic integrity should be valued and promoted by the institution and it should underpin and inform all aspects of its teaching and learning strategy. (Park, 2004, p. 297)

Despite this early work, MacDonald and Carroll (2006) observed that, in the UK, the increasing awareness of plagiarism initially led to a focus on deterrence, which was based on policies of detection and punishment, especially as detection was being facilitated by the increasing use of text-comparison software (Badge & Scott, 2009; Tennant et al., 2007). As such, institutional practices could be seen as placing the onus on the students to avoid plagiarizing, while the role of the institution was to ensure that students were deterred from plagiarizing by the knowledge that their work was being checked and that significant penalties would be applied where plagiarism was identified (MacDonald & Carroll, 2006). This perception was exemplified in a recent review of the literature, which indicated that "much of the literature is framed in terms of misconduct or academic corruption" (MacFarlane, Zhang, & Pun, 2014, p. 339). This may also engender the risk of an increasing disconnect with the students who, when submitting their work for assessment, may view the plagiarism checking as part of a "big brother" culture rather than a process of developing their writing skills (Gannon-Leary, Trayhurn, & Home, 2009; Penketh & Beaumont, 2013).

In order for academic integrity to thrive as a concept, it requires underpinning by core pillars, in particular transparency and joint ownership (Park, 2004) and that students should recognize academic integrity as something they should value (McCabe, 2001). One end of the spectrum for developing this theme is the honor code system that has been adopted to varying extents by some universities in the USA. Underpinning these codes is the definition of academic integrity, set out by the International Center for Academic Integrity, as "a commitment, even in the face

of adversity, to six fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage" (Fishman, 2013). Honor codes are therefore based on an institutional ethos of academic integrity that involves direct engagement of the student body in promotion of that ethos (McCabe & Pavela, 2005), with the students taking a pledge to uphold those values (McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 2002).

The concept of translating the honor code system into the UK context has been explored, but while there were perceived to be positive aspects, in particular in relation to the promotion of good academic practice, the operational implementation was seen as being problematic, in large part because of cultural differences between the organizations (Clarke & Aiello, 2006; Yakvchuk et al., 2011). Such concerns were exemplified in some of the comments of academic staff who reflected on the increasingly diverse, internationalized nature of UK higher education, associated with large elements being managed at a distance from the "home" campus:

> "Well, you talk about an academic community of shared values, you're assuming that everybody has the same values, and they don't. We have a very open and very diverse academic community. . ."

> "I think in a distance learning context, some of this is quite difficult. . . . " (Yakvchuk et al., 2011, p. 43)

Although honor codes may not have been seen as the way forward, the approaches to assessment, assessment design, and provision of clear guidance for students regarding academic practice have moved significantly in recent years. At the most operational level, this is exemplified in the widespread policy that students are required to sign a statement confirming that assignments they are submitting are their own work. However, perhaps a clearer indicator of a shift in thinking is reflected in the language used by the UK's Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education in its codes of practice. In 2000, the QAA's Code of Practice stated that, in relation to plagiarism:

> Institutions should have effective mechanisms to deal with breaches of assessment regulations and the resolution of appeals against assessment decisions (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education [QAA], 2000; section 6: Assessment of students).

In 2006, this wording was changed to:

> Institutions encourage students to adopt good academic conduct in respect of assessment and seek to ensure they are aware of their responsibilities (QAA, 2006; section 6: Assessment of students).

While the 2013 Quality Code chapter on Assessment is more explicit, including the following expectations:

> Students are provided with opportunities to develop an understanding of, and the necessary skills to demonstrate, good academic practice (QAA, 2013; chapter B6: Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning; indicator 7).

and that:

> Higher education providers operate processes for preventing, identifying, investigating, and responding to unacceptable academic practice (QAA, 2013; chapter B6: Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning; indicator 14).

These expectations have to be addressed explicitly by all high education providers as they engage with the QAA in the Higher Education Review process, which is currently the national system for assuring the quality and standards of higher education provision in England and Northern Ireland (Wales operates a similar system, Higher Education Review: Wales) referenced against the Quality Code. Scotland has a different system of quality assurance: Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR) but this is still referenced against the Quality Code. This will clearly contribute to the driver to ensure there are demonstrably effective systems in place for detecting and acting on breaches of academic integrity but also that this needs to be underpinned by explicit guidance to enable students both to understand what good academic practice is, and to demonstrate that in their academic work. To that effect, many UK institutions now provide specific training and guidance for students in good academic practice, often as a component of study skills training, which is linked to institutional regulatory frameworks (c.f. George, Costigan, & O'Hara, 2013; Onens & Anderson, 2014). Despite these developments, there are still regular comments in the media regarding the inadequacy of training in academic integrity (c.f. Birkhead & Montgomerie, 2014).

In recent years, there has been a strong drive to increase the numbers of international students studying in the UK. This is partly financially driven but also responds to international demand. Diverse academic cultures, associated with the pressures of living in a different country, may contribute to the issues around academic integrity (Walker, 1998), and the situation may be compounded for students taking taught masters programs for which the students are in the UK for relatively short periods of study (typically 12 months). Thus, there is very little time for developing embedded approaches to academic integrity, especially since the first summative assessments contributing to award outcome may be scheduled relatively soon after programme commencement.

Concerns in the sector around these issues have driven the development of technologically based approaches to promoting good practice, teaching citation, and good writing skills and most HEPs now use these to some extent. Presessional provision to support the development of English for academic purposes is now widespread in conjunction with academic success programs to support students. Weller (2012) has explored international students' writing practices and argues that teachers overlook the process of enquiry in working with students and that there should be a focus on reading-to-write and approaches to source usage, rather than writing practices themselves, as being more supportive of learning.

The Role of Assessment Design

As well as providing appropriate and timely training for the student body, another key approach to reducing the risk of breaches of academic integrity rests firmly with the ways in which academic staff approach curricular and assessment design, in effect to "design out" areas of potential compromise (Carroll & Appleton, 2001). Engaging the students before they begin the assessment is key to supporting the production of work from them, in whatever format, that is original, evidence-based, and authentic.

Promoting academic integrity through course assessment and design can be challenging for academics and students. Designing curricula which not only meet program and module outcomes, but also sequence learning and support incremental development, is fundamental. Structuring assessment to promote academic integrity rather than falling back on the use of stereotyped assessments with recycled assessment tasks is part of effective and efficient practice, working in ways which are both sustainable and inclusive. An example of such a proactive approach is the Program Assessment Strategies (PASS) Project, which was supported by the Higher Education Academy (HEA, 2013b). This drew together six universities (Bradford, Leeds Metropolitan, Northumbria, Oxford Brookes, Exeter, and Plymouth) in a series of workshops to explore the principles of Program Focussed Assessment (PFA). PFA is the designing of assessment to ensure that the key learning outcomes of a program are specifically addressed, the intention being to shift the balance of assessment from the individual module to the level of the program as a whole (McDowell, 2012). PFA, therefore, encourages the adoption of assessments that require the student to integrate information from different sources rather than focusing on factual content and so can address the acquisition of higher order skills and limit the risk of plagiarism (McDowell).

The notion of "prevention" rather than punishment has gradually been adopted across the sector, embracing a proactive rather than reactive approach. The effect of that has been a catalyst for innovation, using approaches such as designing assessment tasks that do not facilitate copying. Examples of such assessments include the use of individual experience or specific data sets (evidence or experimental work) as the basis of the assessment or a requirement for the students to undertake practice-based or lab-based assessments or oral exams. Simple approaches include creating assessments that require the use of action verbs such as create, rank, compare, select, justify, and that avoid terms such as list, identify, or summarize as the latter lend themselves to copying. Ensuring the currency of assessment tasks is also helpful as the work of others dates quickly, and so time-specific assessment necessitates engagement with the issue rather than reliance on materials generated by others. Evidence-based assessment similarly promotes authenticity by enabling learners to work from specified sources, improving their understanding of Academic Integrity. Simple but consistent explanations in advance to enable students to see how the work/task relates to learning and links to the grade awarded are effective in enhancing learning, promoting learning engagement, and reducing the risk of inappropriate academic practice (Carroll & Appleton, 2001; Higher Education Academy [HEA], 2010).

The balance between encouraging individual effort and developing collaborative skills is familiar across many disciplines where the difference between good collaborative practice and the risk of collusion are made clear. In order to enable students to improve their academic practice they need to understand the nature of the collaboration involved in the activity they have been set. For example, it is more useful to explain the expectation that students work together to enable them to understand concepts and their application by discussion and exploring alternative ideas than to issue definitions and expect the students to grasp this way of working and to avoid collusion in so doing. When such terms as "working too closely with others" are used, students may find it hard to understand what that means, whatever their experience and/or learning culture (Thomas, 2012). Thomas has highlighted concerns around genuine confusion amongst students regarding the notion of collusion, how it can be difficult to differentiate from collaboration or co-operation, and how to appropriately cite sources (the issue of collusion is explored in detail by Sue McGowan in section 2 of this volume).

Some of the developments in various disciplines undertaken on metatasks emanate from the original work of Evans (2000). Using his approach, students work in class without access to technology, learning, and practising the skills of academic sourcing, citation, and replication and then reflecting on their progress. An interesting element of the approach is the use of mind-mapping to enable students to make connections between the conceptual components. This constitutes a multilayered assessment which enables teaching teams to explore the relevance of academic integrity. This style of assessment, its authenticity and immediacy, serve to minimize the opportunity and motivation to plagiarize, collude, or purchase online.

The range of assessment styles which promote engagement and minimize opportunities for misconduct is vast, but examples include online discussion boards, blogging, the use of presentations for differing audiences (oral, written, and group), reflective journals, role plays, and simulations. Authentic assessment styles include setting, papers to work on and prioritize or practical sessions such as timed, objective structure examinations which can be clinical or practice based, often referred to as OSPEs/OSCEs. Active examinations which demand reading, analyzing, interpreting data, or the use of part-seen reports are challenging and require individual engagement by the students with the material. In some disciplines reviewing books/journals/websites/films or media profiles can be particularly useful in maintaining the currency of the assessment and engaging the student in generating an original response.

Essay planning or abstract writing can effectively engage students in real-time assessment as can making or designing something, individually or collectively. A similar effect occurs in oral examination/viva voce or performance or competence-based assessment on the basis of participation and observation. In this context, assessment of the process rather than the product alone can also be useful in ensuring an individual, original piece of work (Carroll & Appleton, 2001). These approaches not only promote authenticity but also obviate misconduct and provide opportunities for enhanced feedback. Concept mapping has become more

mainstream with the development of more appropriate assessment criteria and collective examples continue to extend and develop the repertoire of assessment styles and methods available. An example of this is the use of the "patchwork text" – where students work individually on small elements but then work collectively to create an "overview" summary. (Leigh, Rutherford, Wild, Cappleman, & Hynes, 2012; Surridge, Jenkins, Mabbett, Warring, & Gwynn, 2010). This maintains the integrity of the individual contributions whilst still building group working and collaborative skills. One of the increasing challenges is the existence of sites which encourage sharing of assessment materials and offer opportunities to purchase materials prepared by others. Wallace and Newton (2014) have explored some of the more technological issues impacting on academic integrity. One scenario is "contract cheating" in which students can offer online an assessment brief to which providers "bid," enabling the student to choose the cheapest/fastest/most suited to their needs. Wallace and Newton discuss the frequent suggestion that shortening turnaround times for assessed work provides a means of preventing the use of paid writing services or "contract cheating." Their conclusion is that availability and speed of response from providers is such that this barrier is easily overcome and, more worryingly, that the level of competition for such business is so great that it exceeds capacity. This is a widespread global issue and there is a need for further research to explore this area which is often under recognized and undetected (for a full discussion of these issues, please see chapters by Philip Newton and Christopher Lang (▶ Chap. 19, "Custom Essay Writers, Freelancers, and Other Paid Third Parties"), and Anne Rogerson and Gisella Basanta (▶ Chap. 20, "Peer-to-Peer File Sharing and Academic Integrity in the Internet Age") in Section 2 of this volume).

Consistency of Institutional Policies

Whilst the approaches of promoting academic integrity and designing out plagiarism in assessments indicate a positive direction, there is still a significant need for the sector to establish policies that ensure the consistent and equitable treatment of students within and between institutions (Badge & Scott, 2008; Carroll & Appleton, 2005; Morris & Carroll, 2011; Tennant et al., 2007). Baroness Deech, the then Independent Adjudicator for UK Higher Education, called for greater consistency in the equity of application of penalties across the sector (Baty, 2006). In response, the Plagiarism Advisory Service of the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) established the AMBeR project (Academic Misconduct Benchmarking Research Project), which initially involved a detailed survey of the range of penalties that were being employed by higher education providers (Tennant et al., 2007; Tennant & Duggan, 2008). The report from this survey confirmed the wide range of penalties that were being applied across the sector. Depending on the perceived magnitude of the breach, these ranged from unofficial warnings to expulsion from the program but also included nonacademic penalties such as the imposition of fines. The authors further noted that different institutions might apply similar penalties for very different levels of breach or vice versa. Of even greater

concern, though, is that this evident lack of consistency has also been identified as being problematic at the level of the individual institution. Variations in practice open the door for challenges to imposed penalties where students are able to demonstrate that different departments, within the same institution, impose different penalties for the same breach (Badge & Scott, 2008; Office of the Independent Adjudicator, 2009).

The follow-up stage of the AMBeR project was the development of a benchmark tariff which, it was proposed, could lead to much greater consistency in the relationship between severity of the breach and the penalty applied (Tennant & Rowell, 2010). This tariff took account of five criteria that had been identified as being considered most significant across a range of institutions:

1. Previous history;
2. Amount of work plagiarized;
3. Academic level;
4. Intention to deceive; and
5. Value of the work.
   (Tennant & Rowell, 2010, pp. 9–11).

Tennant and Rowell (2010) discussed whether to include consideration of extenuating circumstances as part of the evaluation of the penalty to be applied but concluded that such cases could generally be addressed within the flexibility of the tariff. Critics of the Tariff also noted that it did not address collusion (Tennant & Rowell) but the authors considered that this required further research to examine the particular factors associated with collusion, one example being how to adjudicate over the culpability of a student who had allowed their work to be used by another.

An evaluation of the Tariff undertaken across nine universities revealed that the penalties the institutions had awarded matched the Tariff in about half of cases, with the most common areas of mismatch being related to the severity of the penalty and whether or not resubmission was allowed. Notwithstanding this, the authors concluded that the Tariff represented a useful first step for improving inter-institutional consistency (Scott, Rowell, Badge, & Green, 2012). Although there have been some moves to incorporate the Tariff into institutional policies, other institutions have taken the view that adoption of a broad tariff is inappropriate when the decision relies primarily on academic judgement (Onens & Anderson, 2014).

Professional Development

In parallel with the developments of the QAA Quality Code for Higher Education, the Higher Education Academy has developed the UK Professional Standards Framework ([UKPSF] HEA, 2013a). This Framework has been designed to provide a structure for professional development along with a series of core criteria that teachers are expected to meet, across a range of aspects, to achieve professional

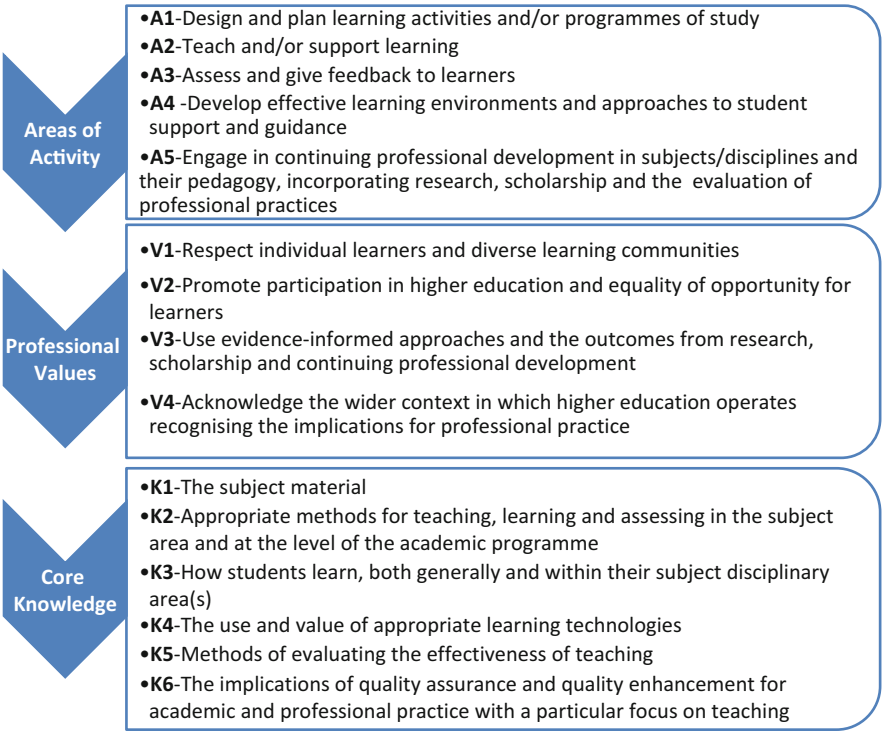

Fig. 1 Adapted from the UK Professional Standards Framework (Higher Education Academy, 2013)

recognition for their teaching practice. These are interrelated with the ethos of developing academic integrity, enabling teachers to identify academic integrity as being fundamental to their teaching and assessment practice as well as their professional values.

The dimensions of the framework are threefold, Areas of Activity, Core Knowledge, and Professional Values, as shown in Fig. 1.

All three dimensions relate closely to the elements of academic practice and integrity but in different ways. At the 2013 HEA conference, "Academic Integrity and Student Development: Exploring dimensions for improving practice," several workshops were aligned to the UKPSF, emphasizing the perceived connection between academic professional development and espousing academic integrity (HEA 2013c).

The Areas of Activity all relate to academic integrity and the prevention of unacceptable practice in terms of curriculum design (A1) and academic practice (A2, A3, A4). Those activities are student facing but there is also the more reflective aspect of requiring the teacher to examine their own practice and development as the foundation for that practice (A5).

In relation to Core Knowledge, the components each have potential application to the promotion of academic integrity and the reduction of unacceptable practice. Subject specialism and disciplinary knowledge form the foundation of teaching and student learning (K1) and so often play a key role in the recognition of inappropriate academic practice. The pedagogic application of core knowledge (K2-5) provides the framework for the development of sound academic practice in the theoretical knowledge, pedagogic intuition, and experience of the teacher. Scope to prevent or reduce inappropriate academic practice so often rests with the design and implementation of elements of the learning experience or the approach taken to quality assurance and enhancement (K6).

The Professional values (V1,2,3,4) are particularly relevant to academic integrity and can support the explanation to students of how the principle works as well as informing teaching and assessment practices. The acknowledgement of the wider context and implications for professional practice (V4) are fundamental to approaches to academic practice and the way in which this and the notion of academic integrity are addressed with students.

Thomas (2012) refers to the idea of becoming "not a man of success, but rather a man of value" (attributed to Einstein) as a reminder that academic integrity is values driven and there lies the greatest opportunity to support students in achieving success. This is endorsed by Crehan and Williams (2013) who propose the notion of academic integrity as a graduate attribute of value in professional development.

The incremental recognition of reflection as a means by which to address, enhance and improve academic practice (QAA, 2012) raises the expectation that teachers will both employ and promote reflective academic practice. Enabling and equipping teachers with the skills to safeguard academic standards is an essential part of the process of the promotion of academic integrity through knowledge, practice, and modeling values. Academic integrity is engendered by the direct engagement of teachers with students, presenting consistent standards that reflect the professional practice of the teacher, to recognize and reward effort and achievement and taking every opportunity to reduce misconduct.

There is risk in "subcontracting" academic integrity development for students through the provision of online courses, promising "evidence" of training to offset legal claims and reputational damage, and these may prevent teachers from working closely with their students on the core academic issues. The importance of collaboration between teachers and students is a concept owned by all teachers, and while online provision is often of excellent quality, positively focussed and accessible to all, it augments rather than replaces the input of the course leader working with the students on each module. The premise of working with students as partners is key here, as it is in everyone's interests to maximize academic integrity and in the spirit of fairness to work to prevent unfair practice. Engaging with students in setting policy, establishing processes and decision making can only serve to embed their sense of ownership and contribute to building a strong value base. Ariely's (2008) work on decision-making, applied more recently to the motivations for academic misconduct, not only offers insights into the problem but is usefully informing policy development across the sector. Policies are merely tools to enable

practice and have limitations. Policies can contribute to culture change but are not the "solution" to promoting academic integrity and responsibility and embedding lifelong values.

Dill and Beerkens (2013, p. 341) assert that "The challenge confronting all nations is to design a policy framework that effectively balances the forces of the state, the market and the academic profession to assure academic standards in universities." This is crystallized in Morris and Caroll's (2011) recommendations designed to encompass the breadth of unacceptable academic practice, the need for flexibility, and the promotion of academic integrity through and beyond policy. The reach and impact of this work has been significant in the subsequent development of UK approaches, and the sector continues to work concertedly to promote academic integrity, drawing together academics across higher education.

Summary

Concerns regarding academic integrity in the UK higher education sector have increased over the last decade along with the recognition that this is a complex issue spanning a spectrum from poor academic practice to deliberate attempts to cheat. Institutional policies initially were often focused on detection and deterrence with the onus being placed on the student to avoid plagiarizing. More recently there has been significant movement towards improving the guidance and training provided for students regarding good academic practice. This has been accompanied by moves to change assessment design to increase the focus on assessing higher-level academic skills, rather than factual content, and thereby also reduce the facility for plagiarism to take place. Academic agencies within the UK such as the Quality Assurance Agency and the Higher Education Academy have leant support for these changes through their guidance and development of professional standards for HE teaching. When instances of plagiarism have been identified, it is important that there should be consistency in the penalties applied, both within and between higher education providers: the work of the Plagiarism Advisory Service, through the AMBeR project and development of a benchmark tariff, has further provided valuable guidance for institutions in developing their policies.

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