



Academic Integrity Strategies: Student Insights

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Abstract

This paper reports the key findings from two student surveys undertaken at our institution in the academic years 2020–21 and 2021–22. The research was based on the Bretag et al. (2018) student survey undertaken in various Australian universities. After discussions with both Bretag and Harper, we adapted the questions to our context – a Russell Group university in the UK – but included similar questions to enable a comparison, and to find out if there were common themes. The main aim of the surveys was to understand our students’ awareness of what is meant by the term ‘academic integrity’, defined as ‘being honest in your work, acknowledging the work of others and giving credit where you have used other people’s ideas/data’ https://secretariat.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/109/2022/12/academic_integrity.pdf. The responses provided an important insight into student attitudes to academic integrity, their understanding of academic malpractice, and their awareness of the penalties if found to have plagiarised, and if found guilty of contract cheating (Medway et al., 2018; Morris, 2018; Harper et al., 2019). The surveys also identified what students would find useful in developing their understanding of academic integrity, and this underlines the importance of consulting our students. Key findings include gaps in the information provided to students, the need for regular and timely reminders of the principles of academic integrity, and the need for guidance to be written using student-friendly language. The findings informed our recommendations in terms of teaching and learning at School/Faculty level and to policy at University level, to further support student success. In the context of the key issues raised by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Academic Integrity Charter (2020), we discuss examples of best practice currently undertaken at the University of Leeds, on-going discussions regarding developments, and our recommendations for further embedding a culture of academic integrity. We argue that all students should have the same baseline experience and therefore promoting this ethos is the responsibility of all staff who teach and support students.

Keywords Academic Integrity · Contract Cheating · Student Success · Student Surveys · Plagiarism · Malpractice

Introduction

In January 2020, the authors were awarded a University of Leeds Institute for Teaching Excellence Fellowship (LITE) to investigate academic integrity strategies, with a key focus on positive and preventative initiatives. Aware of the increasing incidence of plagiarism and, in particular, the rise in contract cheating, (Draper & Newton, 2017) we wanted to investigate the factors contributing to this and to obtain the insights of our students in order to better understand this complex issue. This research project would also build on some of the findings contained in the 2016 Quality Assurance Agency Plagiarism in Higher Education report which stated that there is a ‘growing threat to UK higher education from custom essay writing services’ and ‘that there is no single solution and that ... organisations ... need to take action on a number of fronts’ (2016:3). However, we also wanted to ensure that we considered ways to positively scaffold students’ learning so that they take a sense of pride in completing their own work and understand the benefits of applying and demonstrating academic integrity in their work. Our strategy was to provide the right support at the right time, and this would require an institutional approach involving a variety of interested parties at the University, including students, with the aim of developing a culture of academic integrity.

Inspired by the findings of the Bretag et al. (2018) survey undertaken in Australian universities, we decided to undertake an institution-wide survey in order to understand students’ awareness and understanding of academic integrity; their experience of being given guidance and being able to access resources; whether they believe enough guidance is provided, how useful it is and what else they would like to see; and their attitudes to academic integrity, plagiarism and malpractice.

This paper explores student perceptions of, and attitudes towards, academic integrity generally as well as specific aspects such as collusion and contract cheating. While we recognise the limiting factors which potentially affected the survey findings, on closer examination the findings proved to be consistent between surveys, current research and discussions with student focus groups. For the purposes of the survey, academic integrity was defined as ‘being honest in your work, acknowledging the work of others and giving credit where you have used other people’s ideas/data’ https://secretariat.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/109/2022/12/academic_integrity.pdf.

Method

The questions were modelled in part on the Bretag et al. (2018) survey but adapted to a UK Russell Group Higher Education context (<https://russellgroup.ac.uk/about/our-universities/>). We designed an online survey using Microsoft Forms, containing thirty questions which were predominantly quantitative in nature. The first section asked about the students’ level of study, their programme of study, their School, their gender, their first language and their status (home, EU or international). The second section used primarily Yes/No/Maybe/Don’t know questions. Where appropriate, dropdown menus with between three and five options were provided to save respondents time. When students were asked to rate any guidance or training, a 3-point Likert scale was used. Later sections used a 5-point Likert scale to explore attitudes and experience. The last question invited respondents to make any

additional comments. In addition to analysing the responses to the quantitative questions, we conducted a thematic analysis of the qualitative data to identify key themes.

Participants

The survey aimed to include a sample of taught students at undergraduate and postgraduate level. A convenience sampling method was used as sending an email to all students was not approved. As outlined in the Ethics Approval application, we asked a combination of LITE Student Education contacts, School Student Education staff, the Academic Integrity Leads' Network and the Students' Union to circulate a link to the survey in an effort to reach as many students across the institution as possible. After our initial experience of the survey not eliciting responses from one particular faculty, for the next survey we monitored responses as they were received, identifying which faculties the respondents were from, and identifying any gaps. We then followed up by asking School contacts to (re-)circulate the survey link.

Survey One, 2020

The first online survey ran towards the end of the first semester (November-December) of the academic year 2020-21. As an incentive, respondents could choose to enter a draw for a £50 voucher – this was administered separately by the LITE support team so as not to compromise the anonymity of the respondents. It is important to bear in mind that the University had expected teaching to be delivered face-to-face on campus in the academic year 2020-21 but an increase in Covid numbers across the UK meant that teaching had to be delivered online. 221 responses were obtained (see Table 1) from undergraduate and postgraduate students in seven of the eight faculties, from all years of study, and from each status category (from a total population of 35,694 taught students). While numerically this was a very small proportion of the total student population (0.62%), it was reasonably representative, albeit that responses from one faculty were missing, as students from each year of study were represented, including both home and international. Having had no data at all previously, even to have a small sample was better than none. In terms of status category,

Table 1 Breakdown of respondents to 2020-21 survey, as a percentage of the total sample

		Percentage of sample (%)
Gender	Female	70
	Male	29
	Prefer not to say	0.45
	Prefer to self-describe	0.45
Status	Home	73
	International including EU	27
Level of study	Year 1	26
	Year 2	19
	Year 3	23
	Year 4	15
	Postgraduate	17
	Other	0.9

73% were home students, 17% were international and 10% were from the EU. 70% of respondents identified as female, 29% as male, 0.45% preferred to self-describe and 0.45% preferred not to say. While 70% of respondents cited English as their first language, 25 other languages were cited, which served as a useful reminder of how international the student body is. The respondents whose first language was not English were from all but one faculty with the highest figure of 26% of respondents from the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences, and 20% from the Faculty of Business, and the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures respectively.

Having established the broad picture from an initial analysis, we were able to analyse the findings in more depth and identify trends (especially during the Covid pandemic) according to specific Faculties and Schools (this is not included in this paper). We then cross-referenced the responses according to gender, undergraduate or postgraduate, year of study, home/EU/international status, and first language. The results presented an important snapshot of students' current understanding, current practice across the University, and insights into potential room for improvement from a student perspective.

Survey Two, 2021

The second online survey (which was a duplicate of the first) ran in December of the academic year 2021-22 and obtained 474 responses (from a total population of 39,606 taught students) from undergraduate and postgraduate students in each of the eight Faculties representing a good sample in terms of discipline (see Table 2). While numerically this was still a very small proportion of the total student population (1.2%), it was double the number of respondents to the first survey and was reasonably representative, given that responses were elicited from each faculty, with students from each year of study, including both home and international. Again, respondents could opt to enter the draw for a £50 voucher. This time around teaching was delivered on campus and it was easier to ask colleagues for their help with circulating the survey. Lessons were learned from the previous survey and although the same contacts were approached for assistance with circulating the survey, we sent follow-up reminders, and we specifically contacted the faculty from which no responses had been obtained to Survey One.

77% were home students, 18% were international and 5% were from the EU. 76% identified as female, 21% as male, 1% preferred to self-describe and 2% preferred not to say.

One of our questions wanted to explore how many languages in addition to English were cited as 'first' language. We were interested in this question because studies have shown that one of the reasons why students cheat in assessments includes 'having a first language other than English' which can cause potential issues such as a 'lack of understanding of assignment requirements, and the perceived approachability of teaching staff' (QAA, 2022:11; Bretag et al., 2018; Morris, 2018). While 75% of respondents cited English as their first language, 31 other languages were cited and those 25% of respondents were from all eight Faculties with the largest proportion at 14% from the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures.¹ This information will be especially valuable when translating academic integrity policy documents, which is a QAA key action point: 'Be aware of the diverse needs of your student body and offer information in a range of formats and languages as appropriate' (QAA, 2022:14).

¹ It should be noted that this Faculty had the largest proportion of respondents and is also the authors' faculty.

Table 2 Breakdown of respondents to 2021-22 survey, as a percentage of the total sample

		Percentage of sample (%)
Gender	Female	76
	Male	21
	Prefer not to say	1
	Prefer to self-describe	2
Status	Home	77
	International including EU	23
Level of study	Year 1	24
	Year 2	18
	Year 3	16
	Year 4	15
	Postgraduate	23
	Other	4

Initial findings have enabled us to draw parallels with the 2020 findings. We have been able to identify improvements that have been made as well as areas which require further work.

Findings

Students' Awareness and Understanding of Academic Integrity

This section used primarily Yes/No/Maybe/Don't know questions to find out more about students' awareness and understanding of academic integrity. Asked if they understood what is meant by 'academic integrity', in 2020, 95% indicated that they did, 4% were unsure and 1% said 'no'; in 2021, the responses were very similar. The three who responded 'no' in 2020 were all female; one was an international postgraduate; two were home undergraduates, both in Year 4/5 of study, which is concerning given how close they were to graduating. Of the seven who responded 'no' in 2021, 4 were female and 3 were male; all were home undergraduates. Three were in their first year of study, while one was in Year 2 and three were in Year 4/5.

Asked if they had been given guidance and/or training on academic integrity, in 2020, 77% said that they had and in 2021, 70% said that they had. Asked to rate how useful the training was using a 3-point Likert scale, 24% rated it 'very useful' and 51% 'quite useful'; in 2021, the rating for 'very useful' rose to 36% and for 'quite useful' rose to 60%. A dropdown menu with three options was used to find out who had provided the training - over half of respondents (66% in 2020, 59% in 2021) said that their School had provided this guidance/training while between 25% and 30% said that one of their lecturers had provided guidance. This figure seems lower than institutional practice would suggest. As a follow up we are contacting the Schools that have been highlighted for their consideration.

A dropdown menu with five options was used to ask students where they would look first to learn more about academic integrity. The responses were very similar to both surveys - from the five options listed, the two most popular responses were Minerva (the virtual learn-

ing environment), and the University's Skills@library website. We also wanted to know who students would ask first. From the five options listed on the dropdown menu, the most popular choice in both surveys was the Academic Personal Tutor (APT), selected by 49% in Survey One and 51% in Survey Two. This indicates that students are much more likely to ask their APT rather than one of their lecturers, perhaps because meetings are private and they feel more comfortable asking a member of staff one-to-one rather than in front of their classmates. This was also the most popular response from international students in both surveys. That said, discussing academic integrity is not identified as part of the remit of the APT so this needs further consideration. The second most popular choice in 2020 was 'a friend' and this was selected by 21% of respondents, of whom 85% were home students. It is reasonable to conclude that international students are probably disadvantaged because they do not have access to traditional support structures. In 2021, the second most popular answer was 'one of my lecturers', selected by 21% of respondents. However, only 7–10% of respondents said they would ask library staff. Given the expertise of library staff at many universities, it is a missed opportunity not to direct students to this potentially invaluable source of support.

In response to the question about whether they think there is enough information/guidance/training available, it was encouraging to note that around 90% of respondents chose 'yes' in both surveys. The following responses, which were provided both by respondents who chose 'yes' and those who chose 'no', informed us about what they would like to see:

- A clear guide with examples of what is/not acceptable, including self-plagiarism, to help avoid plagiarism.
- Tutorials incorporated into modules in the run up to assessment deadlines.
- More discussion about academic integrity, for example, in seminars.
- More guidance which is simple and clear and easily accessible.
- More focus on academic integrity in all modules as a reminder.
- More practice with referencing in formative work.
- Workshops/specific lectures on academic integrity with the opportunity to ask questions.

Given that practice between Schools may vary, it is important to ensure that all students are given the same experiences of baseline information. The comments indicate that in addition to online resources, some students would welcome the opportunity to discuss academic integrity with academic or other relevant staff and to clarify their understanding of the requirements.

We wanted to know if students had read the University's policy on academic integrity (Gullifer & Tyson, 2014) – in 2020, 69% said that they had and in 2021, 68% said that they had. Each School has its own Code of Practice on Assessment (CoPA) and the document includes information on academic integrity and academic malpractice. Asked if they had read their School's CoPA, 48% of respondents said that they had in 2020, and 55% in 2021. This indicates that a significant number of students are not familiar with these key documents which suggests a need to ensure that these documents are embedded in Level one, Semester one, so that these documents are also included in the baseline academic integrity knowledge that all students have access to.

Students' Attitudes to Long-range Planning

This section of the survey asked five questions about students' attitude to planning, using a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging from 'always' to 'never'. We wanted to corroborate existing research which suggests that there is a significant link between a lack of planning and poor academic practice (QAA, 2016; Yu et al., 2017). In terms of regularly reviewing their class notes even when an assessment is not imminent, a similar proportion (about 30% in both surveys) said 'sometimes' as said 'rarely'. Asked whether they are usually still working on an assignment the night before it is due, 17% responded 'always', 31% 'usually' and 25% 'sometimes' (similar in both surveys). Whether this is due to workload and/or having several deadlines at the same time is not clear. However, the link between poor planning/time management is something that could be included in discussions with the students.

Students' Experience of Academic Integrity as part of Their Learning

This section focused on the students' experience and asked them to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with seven statements, using a 5-point Likert scale, to find out if academic integrity was discussed in seminars/lectures, whether guidance was provided by their lecturer, and whether 'contract cheating' and its consequences were mentioned. We particularly wanted to know whether class time is spent discussing academic integrity matters. Regarding being able to approach teaching staff for assistance about academic aspects, the response rate was about 75% to both surveys for 'agree' and 'strongly agree'. This suggests that we should encourage colleagues to continue to discuss academic integrity matters as part of teaching time in lectures, seminars, tutorials and/or lab sessions before assessment submission deadlines, and to make this part of the teaching so that students see the link with each module and they have an opportunity to talk about it and ask questions. Similarly, while about 66% of respondents to both surveys felt that teaching staff ensure students understand what is required in assignments, this is where academics could focus on developing the academic skills required, such as referencing, to ensure best practice for the upcoming assessment. Asked whether teaching staff have explained the University's academic integrity policy and the consequences of breaching it, around 65% responded positively in both surveys. This suggests that more clarity is required regarding whose responsibility it is to ensure students are aware of the policy. Directing students to the relevant website and/or document is not the same as discussing it as part of the module. Student feedback suggested that a workshop focusing on assessment and academic integrity requirements would be welcome. When it came to being taught how to reference, the majority (about 55%) responded that this was not their experience. We also wanted to know whether colleagues actively discuss contract cheating and again the majority (about 60%) responded that this was not their experience.

The responses have informed us about where greater clarity is required regarding, for example, the role and responsibilities of the APT, module leaders and teaching staff. It is clear how we can better support students and the first step is to provide uniform guidance.

Students' Attitudes to Academic Integrity, Plagiarism and Malpractice

The last section explored students' attitudes to academic integrity, plagiarism and malpractice. Asked whether they thought academic integrity — defined as 'being honest in your work, acknowledging the work of others and giving credit where you have used other people's ideas/data' — is important, 98% of respondents answered 'yes' in both surveys, 1% said 'no' and 1% said 'don't know'. They were asked to give reasons for their answer.

The reasons given by those who felt that academic integrity is important fell broadly into the following five categories. Firstly, some simply felt that these are University rules and regulations and there are serious consequences for flouting them. Secondly, others saw this as an important element in ensuring the value of their degree, and implied within this is the reputation of the University –

“If university is about learning and developing academically and on a personal (investment into your future) then plagiarism or anything similar cheats you and your fellow students out of the very essence of what university can provide”.

Thirdly, some recognised the opportunity to show their hard work as well as their ability, knowledge, skills and the progress they had made –

“so that it is clear what is other people's work and what is your own critical analysis”.

Next, a number of students identified a sense of honesty, and this was cited several times along with 'theft', 'stealing', 'immoral', 'unethical', 'dishonest' 'shameful', 'respect' and 'acknowledgement'. Finally, a sense of fairness was another theme, and the following comments reflected the maturity of some of the respondents about their purpose for being at university and the importance of submitting their own work,

“It means that everyone is assessed fairly on their own work, not on somebody else's.”

“There's no gain in your development for breaching academic integrity. If you're at uni just for a grade then you're here for the wrong reasons. It's inherently wrong to cheat and doesn't do anyone any favours.”

“If the work is not yours and you cant [sic.] prove it then your degree wont [sic.] necessarily be yours because assessed pieces are intended to access YOUR understanding of the content not googles [sic.]”

We were keen to identify the characteristics of those who had responded that academic integrity is not important. In 2020, the two respondents who felt that this was not important were both female international students, one undergraduate and one postgraduate. Neither provided a reason for this answer later in the survey when invited to comment further. In 2021, five respondents answered 'no' - four were female, one was male, and all were home undergraduate students (one Year 1, two Year 2, one Year 3 and one Year 4/5). Three provided reasons for their answer as follows:

“Science is based around facts, often facts found online are difficult to power phrase [sic.]”

“It is important, but a lot of the articles you reference have unreferenced stolen ideas, so it’s not very consistent.”

“I feel as though it is often over valued, especially in our first assignments.”

In 2020, two students responded ‘don’t know’ - one male, one female, both home undergraduates. One added,

“Sometimes I don’t see the point if I’m not selling it or publishing it as my own work. I do get it though like you shouldn’t give an idea and then fail to reference it so it looks like it’s your own idea.”

The other explained,

“haven’t done enough work/reading to be sure/have a strong opinion on it”.

In 2021, five responded ‘don’t know’ – all were undergraduates, three were male, four were home students. Three provided reasons for their answer:

“I agree to some extent, but at the same time I’d argue that more importance is put on that than actually making an argument yourself, because you’re too worried that you may be saying something that has been said by someone else.”

“I think its [sic.] important to show where you got your information from and how you came to certain conclusions, but I think at some point a line has to be drawn as to when something needs to be cited.”

“It should only be important for big exams, similar to how cheating is treated at GCSE or A level.”

The next question was included to gauge students’ understanding of the University’s policy on academic integrity. Students were asked to indicate whether they thought specific scenarios constituted ‘malpractice’ (i.e. not good practice) and, if so, to rate how serious it was, using a 4-point Likert scale i.e. not malpractice, minor malpractice, moderate malpractice, or serious malpractice.

- The vast majority identified that not listing their references is malpractice – most thought moderate, some thought serious — and similarly that not using their own words when referring to sources is malpractice – responses were split evenly between moderate and serious — regardless of the reason in the given scenario i.e. rushing to meet the deadline.
- While the vast majority of respondents also identified ‘working together to write an assignment and submitting almost the same piece of work’ as malpractice, it raised the is-

sue of collusion. As we will subsequently discuss (Campbell et al., [forthcoming](#)), this is an area requiring clarification in terms of the definition, the policy and current practice.

- The next scenario about a student getting help with an assignment from a friend or family member proved less clear cut. The extent of the ‘help’ was not clarified in the scenario. Responses to the 2021 survey rating this as serious malpractice were 8% higher than in the 2020 survey, while responses indicating that this was not malpractice fell by 6% compared to 2020. One student commented,

“Obviously, if somebody’s friend writes whole passages of the essay, that’s serious malpractice, but if the “help” is just bouncing ideas around or brainstorming then that isn’t much different to how full-time academics work with each other.”

- Opinion was split regarding whether asking a friend or family member to proofread their work was malpractice, and this scenario seemed to be the most controversial. Between 42% (2021 survey) and 46% (2020 survey) felt that this did not constitute malpractice. When we cross-referenced gender, 13% of males were more likely to consider that this was not malpractice. One student commented that,

“Proofreading of a peer’s assignments is a critical part of critical thinking and learning of material. You learn better grammatical and linguistic skills particularly for ESL students who may struggle with their own writing.”

Another student felt it was impossible to prevent,

“Though I do think students who have friends/family who can proofread their work for them is an unfair advantage, I don’t think there’s any real way to catch this out or prevent it?”

Another student also felt this should be acceptable for students whose first language is not English,

“I see little wrong with an international student who does not natively speak English having a friend proofread, and I think that it is unfair to penalise them for doing so as long as the essay’s actual content and ideas are their own work (perhaps a middle-ground solution on this would be to offer a university-run proofreading service for international students?).”

This is an interesting idea which we support. However, this would be with the proviso that any such service should be available to all students. Others felt more strongly and argued that this should be reviewed,

“I also think the fact that asking for a bit of proofreading from someone else is technically malpractice ...[is] a ridiculous policy and should be changed.”

“I think this is a silly rule”.

- For the scenario about contract cheating, 99% of students in both surveys recognised that the buying of work constitutes serious malpractice. It would be useful to understand why 1% think otherwise. An analysis of the responses indicated that there was no specific group of students who think that contract cheating is either not malpractice or is a minor or moderate form of malpractice – the seven respondents (from both surveys) were male and female, home, EU and international, undergraduate and postgraduate. What they did have in common is that they all said that they understood what is meant by ‘academic integrity’.

The penultimate question was an open question about the University’s penalties if a student is found to have plagiarised. The responses revealed significant differences in awareness about the penalties and ranged from having no idea, to receiving a warning, to being required to redo the assignment for a capped mark or for a mark of zero, to being expelled. A handful of responses suggested that providing support would be appropriate, for example, with more guidance about how to conduct research, explaining how Turnitin works and being able to submit a draft piece of work to Turnitin, and more guidance on self-plagiarism. One student commented on the difficulty they had experienced due to their disability trying to read the rules on plagiarism,

“I think if there was a table with short simple sentences this would be much more accessible to people like myself as a lot of text can be both tiring and confusing to read.”

Another felt that more guidance in Year 1 would have been helpful,

“I think it would be useful for first years to get more guidance on how to reference, paraphrase and quote properly.”

Another suggested making students aware of the penalties in documents other than the regulations,

“I don’t think students are ever informed about the consequences or penalties that occur, all we know is it shouldn’t be done and how to not do it. However, for those who do not read the protocols then they never know. i believe more pressure should be on mentioning consequences in order to show the seriousness of plagiarism at university.”

One student argued in favour of a more lenient approach for first time offenders,

“I think there needs to be more sympathy or at least a baseline of empathy for students who commit some form of malpractice, especially for their first offence.”

The final question asked students what the penalty is if a student is found to have contract cheated. Again, the responses revealed differing levels of awareness. The lack of clarity regarding the penalty underlines the need for students to understand the seriousness of this breach of academic integrity and the serious penalty which is therefore applied i.e. exclusion.

Discussion

The intention of this paper is not to provide a ‘world view’ but a localised snapshot at our institution. The survey faced certain challenges including COVID and industrial action. However, from the data collected, we could focus on several key areas and in terms of feedback to Schools, it could be employed as a useful starting point for wider discussions among staff and students. Also, it was noticeable that the key points raised during the surveys highlighted across the years, were also replicated within different student focus groups. As already mentioned, the sample size is small (695 responses in total) and this is recognised as one of the limitations of the research. While students from a range of disciplines responded, the responses cannot be considered as representative of the student body as a whole. With not being able to contact all students at the institution with an invitation to take part, those who responded chose to do so. As is often the case with voluntary surveys, considerably more females than males chose to respond. A detailed statistical analysis has not been conducted and therefore the responses to the surveys have not been compared on this basis. That said, we think the findings make a valuable contribution to how the guidance and training on academic integrity for students can be improved, and provide important insights into student perspectives, and the resources which they would like to see.

One of the key findings of the 2020 student survey was that students identified a gap in being informed about academic integrity issues, including contract cheating. Every year students are required to sit and pass an online tutorial about academic integrity. This serves as an important introduction to the definition and the basic requirements. However, it is clear that there is a need for the consistent reinforcement of academic integrity principles throughout a student’s degree programme. Where possible it would be beneficial to have different tutorials incorporated into core modules at each level of undergraduate study, and tutorials or workshops specifically for postgraduate students who have a very short time in which to become familiar with the requirements. This would have to be adapted for those degree programmes without core modules at levels 2 and 3. The tutorials should cover a range of aspects, some of which would act as reminders and reinforcement, and should be taken in each semester, after teaching has started and before submission deadlines. While the term ‘academic integrity’ is often introduced at induction, so many aspects of university life are covered in this very short period that it is not the right time to go into detail. Feedback from students suggests that they are ready to learn more once they are preparing for their first submission deadline. Mid-semester and pre-examination period reminders would also promote an institutional approach and a more consistent student experience. A low cost but high benefit point of action would be to consistently direct students to library resources for further information. Since this survey was undertaken the University has redesigned the online academic integrity tutorial. This is rolled out to students in every year of study. Skills@Library (working with the Academic Integrity working group) has also designed extra resources available to students throughout their time at the University. These include specifically designed video tutorials.

Another key finding was that the students wanted the information to be delivered in a more student friendly way using student-friendly language. The authors had already identified this when reviewing the institution’s policy. For example, terms such as ‘egregious’ (even though this is explained in a footnote) are not immediately understandable. We recommend that student-facing documents should be (re-) written with students as the audience

in mind. For example, as part of the LITE Fellowship and in response to the survey outcomes, we established a ‘students as partners’ project. Three student partners were tasked with creating resources to better inform students about academic integrity. They decided to create two posters – one about the dangers of essay mills, and another about academic integrity strategies – which they designed, and which used student-friendly language ([LITE Academic Integrity Strategies](#)).

The baseline expectation of all students at the University of Leeds is that they have read and signed the standard declaration of academic integrity both at registration and on submission of coursework. The survey therefore included a question which asked whether the respondent had signed an ‘academic integrity declaration’ when submitting assessed work and, if the answer was ‘yes’, whether they had understood what they were signing.

“I am aware that the University defines plagiarism as presenting someone else’s work, in whole or in part, as your own. Work means any intellectual output, and typically includes text, data, images, sound or performance. I promise that in the attached submission I have not presented anyone else’s work, in whole or in part, as my own and I have not colluded with others in the preparation of this work. Where I have taken advantage of the work of others, I have given full acknowledgement. I have not resubmitted my own work or part thereof without specific written permission to do so from the University staff concerned when any of this work has been or is being submitted for marks or credits even if in a different module or for a different qualification or completed prior to entry to the University. I have read and understood the University’s published rules on plagiarism and also any more detailed rules specified at School or module level. I know that if I commit plagiarism I can be expelled from the University and that it is my responsibility to be aware of the University’s regulations on plagiarism and their importance”.²

In addition, all students undertake (and have to pass) an online academic integrity test in their first semester at the University. This test is ‘compulsory’ and indeed a very high percentage do pass the test. However, although all students are strongly encouraged to take the test, ultimately there are currently no measures in place to enforce this.

Even though respondents were informed that their responses were anonymous, we have to question the very high number of ‘yes’ responses (95% of respondents in 2020-21; 93% in 2021-22) to the question about whether they understood what is meant by ‘academic integrity’. To provide further context for this, given that about 85% of respondents (in both surveys) had completed the online tutorial on academic integrity, and between 70% and 77% confirmed that they had been given any guidance and/or training, it suggests an optimism which may be unfounded, or an eagerness to provide what the respondent thinks is the ‘preferred’ answer, or simply a desire to answer the question as quickly as possible without giving it much thought. We realise that the chance of winning a voucher may have been sufficient incentive for some to complete the survey. Similarly, while between 83% and 88% claim to have understood the academic integrity declaration which they had signed when submitting assessed work online, anecdotal evidence from colleagues who are involved with conducting plagiarism meetings suggests that many students do not read this statement because at that point their focus is on submitting the work successfully. In conclusion, given

² https://secretariat.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/109/2022/12/academic_integrity.pdf

that nearly one third of respondents had not read the University's policy on academic integrity and around half of respondents had not read their School's Code of Practice on Assessment, we must treat the positive responses with a certain amount of scepticism.

Regarding contract cheating, the QAA (2016) report confirmed the rise in the availability of essay mills and the rise in student use of these companies in the UK. The report was obviously written before COVID and the HE (Higher Education) sector's general move from in-person to online assessments i.e. giving students an opportunity to buy answers that was hitherto denied. The QAA guidance (2016) suggested that the HE sector take an educative approach on the one hand but also update their academic integrity policy. Anecdotal evidence indicated that some staff were not in favour of discussing essay mills with students, believing that this would 'give the student ideas'. However, the current research emphasises that it was (and still is) important to make students aware of the threat posed by essay mills (QAA, 2016), that using them was clearly a breach of academic integrity, and that they risked being blackmailed. This should be included in staff training about academic integrity, and teaching staff should be reminded of the importance of incorporating discussion into teaching time.

The responses also highlighted particular questions which need to be addressed. A key question is whose responsibility it is to introduce students to academic integrity, and this needs to be clear in establishing the institution's practice. Is it the responsibility of each module leader? This would seem to make sense from a disciplinary perspective so that the students are introduced to the detail of discipline-specific requirements. We must bear in mind the students who are registered on joint honours programmes and may be expected to cope with different requirements according to the different disciplines. Regarding responsibility, it could be argued that having every module leader and/or lecturer discuss academic integrity might be overkill, in which case the requirement could relate to core modules only. However, if each lecturer had to ensure that academic integrity is at least introduced, it would reduce the risk of students missing this information and would deliver greater consistency regarding the student experience across the various disciplines. One recommendation is for this learning opportunity to be mapped at programme level so that it is clear when academic integrity is introduced and when it is developed in each year of study for each programme. Adding this to the programme approval paperwork would ensure good practice and consistency of experience across the institution. Another recommendation is for this to be added to the module paperwork so that again it is clear at a glance at which points in the module different aspects of academic integrity are covered. As we have already commented, it is vital that all students have the same baseline experience regarding academic integrity issues. The University has excellent examples of best practice, and the challenge has to be that all students receive the same baseline experience. The University of Leeds is currently undergoing a curriculum redesign project and academic integrity has a vital role in this redesign.

Collusion is another key area which requires further clarification and guidance (Campbell et al., [forthcoming](#)). The responses related mainly to group work such as projects which are undertaken in small groups, but the assessed work should normally be produced separately and submitted as the student's own work, unless stated otherwise in the assessment rubric. As one student commented, they are likely to work in teams so,

“the whole thing about learning and working in ‘the real world’ is that you rarely do anything alone. Working together with friends and other students even if you turn in

similar assignments (other than proper exams) should not be considered malpractice because it is a collaborative effort and everyone involved improves and learns.”

From these perspectives it would seem clear that an institutional definition of ‘collusion’ is required. This would need to reflect disciplinary differences in order to avoid confusion for students. However, the guidance given to students for online assessments clearly states:

“you should not discuss either the content of the assessment or your answers with anyone else during the time between the release of the assessment paper and the final deadline for submission of answers, as this would be a form of collusion” ([Cheating during a timed online assessment](#)).

We note that the survey was open during December. The above directives would be redistributed during the January examinations. This would support the view that students need constant reminders.

A Summary of our ‘take away’ key Recommendations

We thought it would be useful to provide a summary of our key recommendations as potential takeaways for the potential use of other institutions. All of these recommendations have either been adopted or will be adopted in the near future at the University of Leeds.

For Institutions

- An educative approach to academic integrity.
- The institutional guide about the expectations and requirements regarding academic integrity, including reference to disciplinary differences, is made available by different means to ensure a consistent student experience.
- Embedding academic integrity in relevant initiatives such as student belonging, student success.
- Clarification regarding the distinction between collaboration and collusion.
- Clarification that helping students to develop their understanding of academic integrity and the necessary skills is a shared responsibility i.e. teaching staff, APT, library staff, Students’ Union academic advisors.

For Academics

- A guide for module tutors to discuss with students at the start of a module and before assessment.
- A guide for module convenors on incorporating academic integrity training into their modules.
- Map the different points when academic integrity guidance will be delivered on each programme of study, appropriate to the level of study.

For Students

- Continue to work with students as partners in academic integrity matters.
- User friendly student-facing academic integrity documents in various target languages.
- A workshop for all new international students (one each semester).
- Student-produced videos/guides.
- Clear links to academic integrity resources and support.
- A fast-track approach for taught MA students.

Conclusion

Based on responses to two student surveys conducted in different academic years, it is clear that institutions have a responsibility to ensure that a baseline experience is delivered to students. Specifically, training and guidance needs to be co-designed with students to ensure that the content and the language is student friendly and meets their needs. Regular reminders about the academic integrity principles and requirements should be circulated, particularly before assessment deadlines. Those who teach need to make time for discussions with students about all aspects of academic integrity. Together we need to embed a culture of academic integrity.

In terms of next steps for this research, we need to compare these survey results with those of the Australian surveys. It would be interesting for our survey questions to form the basis of a UK-wide survey should other HEIs be interested in surveying their students. We have since undertaken two staff surveys and will be able to analyse the results and compare them with the student survey data. We will be able to identify any differences in perception between students and staff. Given that the University has undergone a significant redesign in assessment and academic integrity, we would like to rerun the student survey to see if these changes have had a significant impact on students' perceptions.

As a sector, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) need to work with students and ensure the provision of information and support so that the reputation of the award is maintained. Indeed, Higher Education across the globe needs to work together in order to develop global strategies in the face of complex challenges.

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