EXTRACT FROM ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE: 11.3.21

21.14 CONTRACT CHEATING

The Committee, at its meeting on 22 October 2020, had considered the annual report on plagiarism and other forms of cheating offences for 2019/20 (Paper No ASQEC/20/25b). It was agreed that, in view of increased prevalence of contract cheating in the sector, faculties, CHERP and the Students’ Union reflect on the latest QAA guidance and report to a future meeting (min 20.59 refers). The second edition of QAA’s guidance [[Contracting to Cheat in Higher Education – How to Address Essay Mills and Contract Cheating](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/guidance/contracting-to-cheat-in-higher-education-2nd-edition.pdf?sfvrsn=6197cf81_24)] was published in June 2020.

Mr Faulkner presented a paper setting out the responses received (Paper No ASQEC/21/6). The background section in the paper outlined the updates provided in the second edition of the QAA guidance, in particular a renewed emphasis upon detection. This section also clarified that the University’s current position was that contract cheating was a disciplinary matter and was not treated as plagiarism. The University had detailed policy and guidance on plagiarism because it was an area where academic discretion was needed particularly as students learnt about proper referencing and academic integrity. That guidance clearly stated that contract cheating was not dealt with through the graduated framework of penalties for plagiarism but through the disciplinary processes for cheating in coursework.

The QAA guidance also contained a recommendation that a designated member of staff be appointed to provide support and guidance and help ensure consistency.

The main emphasis of the joint response from faculties was a desire for a working group to review current arrangements and provide guidance for staff and students drawing on the QAA guidance, with practical support for staff in detecting cheating behaviours. This reflected the QAA’s emphasis on supporting and resourcing staff to detect academic misconduct. It noted the guidance the Ulster University Business School had drawn up for investigatory ‘vivas’ and the student-facing guidance cited from Sheffield Hallam University in the QAA report.

The response from CHERP highlighted their work to promote good practice in assessment design, training in effective design, in particular a course on designing assessment for academic integrity. Members noted CHERP’s willingness to work with others to develop approaches.

The Students’ Union emphasised support for students so that they did not resort to essay mills in desperation due to extenuating circumstances. The 2020 edition noted that during the Covid-19 pandemic essay mills targeted students as they sought to take advantage of uncertainty and anxiety. Ms Parkinson-Kelly advised that she had been involved in earlier drafts through her work with QAA’s Student Strategic Advisory Committee. The Students’ Union would warn students that they were being targeted and reinforce the use of *Studiosity*. The Chair advised that the University had recently expanded *Studiosity* as a tool for final year students mentoring others.

AGREED that:

1. the 2020 guidance be endorsed and that Faculties, CHERP, the Students’ Union and Student Support continue to work to safeguard standards, protect students from exploitation and deter and detect contract cheating and apply disciplinary procedures as required;
2. Learning Enhancement be asked to establish a working group to review guidance and support on contract cheating in the broader context of assessment in an increasingly digital environment.

EXTRACT FROM ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE: 23.10.17

17.87 Contract Cheating

The Committee noted that the QAA had on 9 October 2017 published a report on ‘Contracting to Cheat in Higher Education, how to address Contract Cheating, the use of Third-Party Services and Essay Mills’ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/contracting-to-cheat-in-higher-education.pdf?sfvrsn=f66af681_10>. The report provided useful information and advice to assist staff, students and institutions in educating students in academic practice, and preventing and detecting contract cheating.

It was noted that contract cheating had been explicitly added as an assessment offence under regulation 35 of the University’s Regulations Governing Examinations in 2012 (LTC min 12.82 refers). It should be investigated and dealt with under Section 2 of the Student Disciplinary Procedures for offences other than plagiarism in coursework in accordance with clause 2.1, “Where a lecturer, supervisor or other member of staff suspects that a candidate has committed an offence such as engaging another person to undertake the assessment …”, and not under the process for dealing with offences of plagiarism.

The QAA report recommended that statistics be kept in sufficient detail to allow institutions to undertake effective analysis and establish a baseline in order to respond appropriately to developing trends in academic misconduct. Mrs Wasson reported that incidences of cheating were recorded locally in the Examinations Offices but University-level information was not currently compiled or reported to a committee.

AGREED that:

i) Faculties ensure that the University’s Plagiarism Policy and Procedures and Penalties (2012) continue to be observed and rigorously applied across all programmes;

ii) Faculties consider other faculty reports with a view to taking on board good practice within the University;

iii) Faculties, Access, Digital and Distributed Learning, and the Doctoral College in respect of MRes candidates ensure that all plagiarism offences in 2017/18 are recorded at the time the offence is established and no later than the cut-off date of 7 September 2018;

iv) Faculties, Access, Digital and Distributed Learning, and the Doctoral College provide reports in respect of 2017/18 to the Academic Office by 21 September 2018, including a commentary on issues arising and actions proposed;

v) Faculties take account of the QAA guidance on contract cheating as they review module assessment strategies and the information they provide to students on academic practice and integrity;

1. Student Administration include information on incidents of cheating in examinations and coursework other than plagiarism as part of the Annual Report on Examinations.