

Academic Integrity Charter for UK Higher Education



Introduction

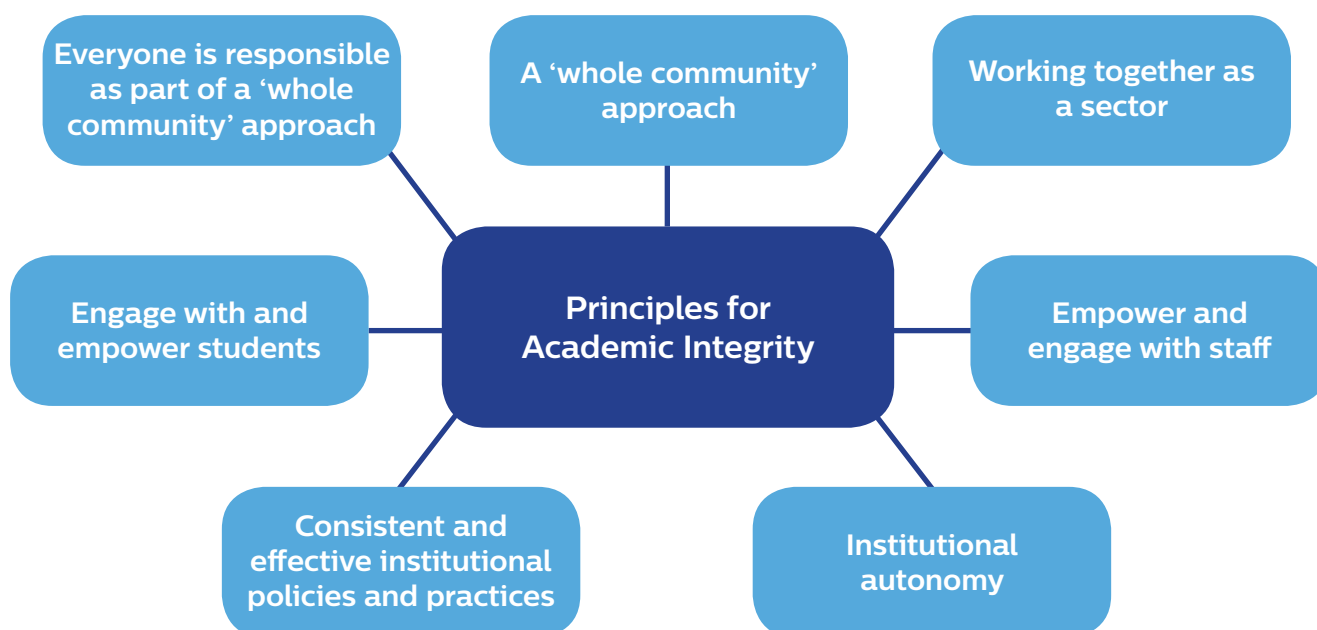
The UK's higher education sector has a world-class reputation, founded on high standards and outstanding quality. Academic integrity is a major contributor to this. However, academic misconduct is a growing problem globally, and presents a threat to the reputation of higher education worldwide. It takes a wide variety of forms including the use of essay and degree mills, plagiarism, collusion between students and forged or altered qualification certificates. This Charter represents the collective commitment of the UK higher education sector to promote academic integrity and take action against academic misconduct.

Students who commit academic misconduct, especially if they deliberately cheat, risk their academic and future careers. The implications, however, go far wider than higher education. It is a societal issue. Graduates could enter the workforce without the necessary skills, knowledge and competency, with potential public health and safety implications.

This Charter is intended to provide a baseline position upon which UK providers, as autonomous institutions, can build their own policies and practices to ensure that every student's qualification is genuine, verifiable and respected. It has been developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) with the support of the [Academic Integrity Advisory Group](#).

The Academic Integrity Advisory Group provides expert advice and opinion, on behalf of the sector, on actions, policy development and activity that will protect academic integrity in the UK. It consists of expert academics and organisations, sector agencies, student representatives and individuals working to protect academic integrity. Representatives of UK governments, regulators and funders sit as observers.

Principles for Academic Integrity



Academic misconduct is unacceptable.

These principles are intended to guide the implementation of academic integrity policy development and practice in UK higher education institutions.

Principle 1: Everyone is responsible as part of a ‘whole community’ approach

All members of a higher education provider’s community are responsible for ensuring academic integrity is embedded and upheld.

Principle 2: A ‘whole community’ approach

Academic misconduct takes many forms and happens for many reasons, intentional or unintentional. A higher education provider’s response cannot, therefore, be one-size-fits-all. Detection and penalties are important, but they cannot provide the whole solution.

A holistic, whole community approach by a higher education provider, including its students, is an effective model for promoting trust and confidence in independent learning and minimising academic misconduct.

This approach often combines elements of the following: education and support for staff and students; limiting opportunities to commit academic misconduct; deploying institution-wide detection methods; case reporting and data collection to improve practice; and clearly stated institutional values.

Principle 3: Working together as a sector

Academic misconduct is an issue that can affect the integrity of all higher education providers and have a severe impact upon the reputation of the entire UK sector.

Sector collaboration can address this including by sharing best practice, collaboration on benchmarking or working together on issues of mutual concern – such as, sharing intelligence on essay or degree mills that are targeting their students or staff. By combining knowledge, experience and resources, the academic integrity of the overall UK sector can be maintained and strengthened.

Principle 4: Engage with and empower students

Higher education providers can support their students by ensuring that they have a reasonable and continuing opportunity to learn about their policies and processes in an accessible manner and through a variety of formats (for example, through handbooks, course inductions, introductory materials, teaching).

Students are responsible for the integrity of their own learning, and decisions to break codes of academic conduct (for example, by using an essay mill) are ultimately their own. However, providers can work to ensure that students have as much knowledge as possible about, and are supported in the development of, academic integrity and the possible consequences of misconduct – including the impact on future careers.

Teaching and other frontline staff can be role models for academic integrity principles and appropriate academic behaviour; they actively involve and engage students and student representative bodies in these matters in order to support their development. Providers can consider ways in which student academic integrity ‘champions’ could be recognised and supported.



Principle 5: Empower and engage with staff

Frontline teaching and professional staff have a critical role to play in deterring and identifying incidents of student academic misconduct. Higher education providers can consider ways in which academic staff members could be given formal roles and recognition to 'champion' staff academic integrity.

Providers can proactively communicate their academic integrity policies to staff and develop a framework that describes the processes that need to be followed when misconduct cases are identified.

Tools and resources to detect and deter breaches such as best practices in course delivery, course design and assessment, and admissions verification and technology can be made available to teaching and professional services staff. This could include providing training and development for staff.

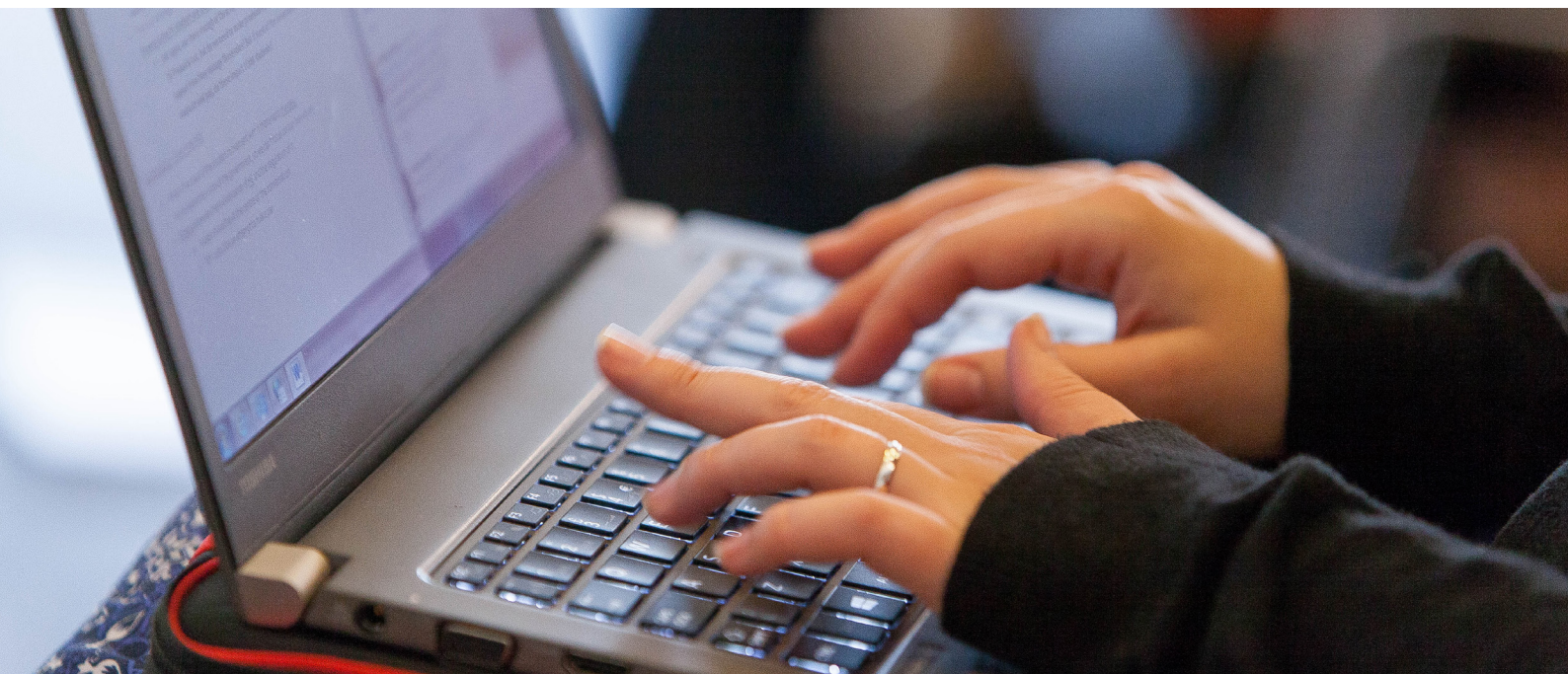
Principle 6: Consistent and effective institutional policies and practices

Higher education providers can clearly define what they consider to be academic integrity, and maintain a suite of academic integrity policies and practices that:

- focus on educative and preventive measures and activities
- have clear terms and definitions that distinguish between different types of academic misconduct through the use of examples that can be understood by students
- establish with transparency the level of penalties or developmental support applicable and proportionate to different types of academic misconduct
- have clear, easy to follow and fair processes for investigating and assessing possible cases
- are subject to periodic review, which can include a review of adherence with the commitments in this Charter.

Principle 7: Institutional autonomy

As autonomous institutions, UK higher education providers are the first line of defence against academic misconduct. They are responsible for promoting and maintaining the quality and integrity of their own provision and securing the academic standards of the awards they offer. In doing so, they protect their reputation. They are in the best position to provide their students with the tools and support needed to promote trust and confidence in independent learning and to avoid academic misconduct.



Pledge



QAA and the UK Academic Integrity Advisory Group invite UK universities and colleges to sign up to the Charter during the academic year 2020-21.

Signing up to the Charter represents an institutional pledge to implement its principles and commitments which include working with staff and students and, in collaboration across the sector, to protect and promote academic integrity, and take action against academic misconduct.

To sign up, visit the [Academic Integrity Charter page](#) on our website. Providers and bodies that sign up to the Charter will be listed on this page.

Through services to our members, QAA pledges to offer training, guidance and support to staff and students in institutions, including through sharing practice from the UK and internationally. By the end of 2021, we will report on emerging sector practice, including how institutions have used this Charter.

External Members of the UK Academic Integrity Advisory Group October 2020

Alex Bols (GuildHE)

Helen Butcher (University of Glasgow)

Charlotte Corrish (Office of the Independent Adjudicator)

Dr Robin Crockett (University of Northampton)

Professor Michael Draper (Swansea University)

Dr Irene Glendinning (Coventry University)

Emmanuel Haruna (QAA Student Strategic Advisory Committee)

Dr Thomas Lancaster (Imperial College London)

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Dr Mike Reddy (University of South Wales)

Alan Palmer (MillionPlus)

Gill Rowell (Turnitin)

Jayne Rowley (Jisc - Prospects Hedd)

Helen Smallbone (Edge Hill University)

Charlotte Snelling (Universities UK)

Lord Storey (House of Lords)

Acknowledgements

QAA and the UK Academic Integrity Advisory Group are very grateful to Universities Australia for kindly sharing their publication [Academic Integrity Best Practice Principles](#) (November 2017) which has assisted us and influenced the development of this Charter.

This Charter has been developed with close reference to the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) – a cornerstone for quality and standards of UK higher education, protecting the public and student interests. The Quality Code provides Advice and Guidance on a number of themes to support new and existing providers to meet its Expectations, Core and Common practices. Its [Advice and Guidance: Assessment](#) includes a guiding principle on academic integrity. The Charter also draws on the Advice and guidance on degree fraud for higher education providers, developed by Jisc's Hedd verification service to combat qualification fraud.

The QAA publication – [Contracting to Cheat in Higher Education: How to Address Essay Mills and Contract Cheating](#) – provides advice and guidance to help higher education providers develop their institutional response to contract cheating and demonstrate their commitment to the principles in this Charter.

Special acknowledgement

In the publication of this charter we would also like to acknowledge the work of stalwarts of academic integrity who have sadly died. Professor Tracey Bretag and Robert Clarke were unstinting in raising awareness of academic integrity, and leading national and international action to combat academic misconduct.