

Institutional issues in deterring, detecting and dealing with student plagiarism

Introduction

In the 1990s in the UK, the problem of student plagiarism was addressed by telling students they must not do it, then by dealing with the small number who did not comply. Policies and institutional procedures drafted before 2000, designed to cope with this relatively straightforward situation, often did not define what was meant by plagiarism (Stefani and Carroll, 2001) or state how offenders would be dealt with. Post-2000 contributors to the growing literature on student plagiarism in the UK began to investigate a range of issues. The complexity of plagiarism as a concept began to be discussed and explored as well as did a growing number of ways in which students can be deterred from doing it. Park (2003) compiled a helpful summary of what he called an 'extensive' literature (including 151 items in his own bibliography) on 'the causes and consequences of student plagiarism'. His summary covers seven areas including: student and staff understanding of what plagiarism is; attitudes and motivations that are linked to unacceptable behaviours; and what is known about its incidence. He states that 'plagiarism is doubtless common and getting more so' (p. 271).

Student plagiarism is also much discussed outside academic literature. It attracts considerable attention from the media and from lecturers, administrators, students and student representatives. For example, a three-day UK conference on plagiarism in June 2004 attracted 150 delegates from all the groups mentioned above (including international delegates) and media coverage on national radio and television news and in four national newspapers. The conference was featured in the *Times Higher Education Supplement* for two weeks in a row (once as a lead) and provided the freelance journalists who attended with material for an unknown number of subsequent stories. The media in general often gives a platform for those concerned about plagiarism to express their outrage or exasperation that an apparently simple solution is not followed. Recent stories seemed to boil down to the following suggestions:

- 'Make paper mills and ghost writing services illegal'*
- 'Ban mothers from helping with kids' homework'*
- 'Require students to use a programme that logs all the web sites they visit and produces a weekly record for the lecturer to inspect'*
- 'Expel one person as an example to others'*
- 'Just tell students what they should do'*

The academic literature, whilst taking a more considered view of the problem than the popular media, provides little or no guidance as to how best to tackle the problem with the exception of a growing interest in electronic detection tools. Park (2004) notes the lack of studies concerned with ways of dealing with and deterring plagiarism at the institutional level. He then describes policies and procedures at Lancaster University as '...a contribution to the emerging national [ie UK] debate ... to save others from having to invent the same wheel' (p.304). Other contributors who also address institutional issues include: Walker (1998) on procedures at Massey University in New Zealand; Longstaff and Ross (2004) on how the University of Newcastle in Australia reconsidered their entire approach; and McCabe and Trevino (1993) on the use of honour codes in the USA. A few authors compare practices in different institutions, seek general principles and offer good-practice recommendations (see Carroll and Appleton, 2001; Carroll, 2002a; Macdonald and Carroll, in press). In 2004, the Plagiarism Advisory Service (www.jiscpas.ac.uk) published an institutional audit tool designed to alert higher education (HE) institutions to effective and coordinated action through a series of questions that institutions might wish to ask when developing their own framework.

Effective institutional approaches to deterring student plagiarism

Most institutions that decide to reconsider and update their approaches to student plagiarism will have to design their own framework, develop their own approach to detection and implement home-grown procedures to make policies operational. Some have already done

so. This paper seeks to support the efforts of institutions wishing to reconsider the policies and any procedures they currently have. It does so from a conviction that a holistic, coordinated, institution-wide approach is a more effective way to proceed, as any single focus interventions (eg encouraging better detection, making induction compulsory etc) will not have a significant effect on the complex issue of student plagiarism. However, because efforts must start somewhere, this paper specifically addresses issues of deterrence, suggests ways to improve detection and describes realistic procedures for dealing with plagiarism once it has occurred. It keeps the focus on the roles and responsibilities of senior institutional managers in all the matters mentioned, as they are responsible for overseeing the project as a whole and need to be considering the problem from an evidence-based and nuanced understanding of the issues.

1. What can institutions do to deter all students from both intentional and unintentional plagiarism?

Solutions will emphasise course design, effective induction, teaching students the skills they need to meet assessment requirements, and encouraging a culture that supports academic integrity.

2. How can markers become more effective at identifying instances of student plagiarism?

Solutions will include using electronic detection tools such as Turnitin UK, currently managed by the Plagiarism Advisory Service (www.jiscpas.ac.uk) on behalf of the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), as well as other strategies such as better use of in-text cues and requiring students to show evidence as to how their coursework was created.

3. What can institutions do to enforce regulations fairly and consistently for all students and punish those who do not comply?

Solutions arise from reviewing policies and updating procedures so as to manage large numbers of cases, encourage lecturers to use the procedures and thereby result in decisions that institutions can record and defend.

Is plagiarism really a problem? And if so, how big a problem?

There is evidence to support widely expressed concerns that student plagiarism in the UK is common and is probably becoming more so. Park (2004) states 'Students regularly engage in the practice' (p. 291), but in reaching this conclusion, does not refer to any post-2000 studies or to data collected in the UK as few exist. One small study (Kilner, 2004) with 383 respondents drawn from the previous five years' experience in HE labels itself 'one of the most recent and certainly one of the most comprehensive investigations of the issue in the UK' (p. 3). Evidence, therefore, must be drawn from much larger studies in the USA and Australia (CAVAL, 2002; McCabe, 2003). Both lend credence to the presumption that UK teachers and academics should anticipate encountering plagiarism regularly in their students' work and that it is reasonable to expect to encounter at least 10% of students' work that requires attention beyond normal assessment (ie, beyond deducting marks for poor referencing or writing a reminder in the feedback that the student should attribute ideas and quotations from others). Academics, in my experience, generally call this 10% prediction an understatement for the UK in 2004 and suggest reasons for their more pessimistic views.

Plagiarism may be more frequent in some disciplines than in others: eg, in Business because the opportunities abound for accessing pre-existing solutions and in Computing because the students' skills allow for efficient web searches. It may be higher in disciplines such as Architecture or Nursing where writing skills are not seen as integral to the discipline so students are less likely to value and develop the skills early in their programme. It may be more frequent in Law if the number and frequency of sites offering work for sale is an indication of demand. On the other hand, academics view plagiarism as less frequent in courses such as Education where assessment is linked to placement or practice. Some

believe studio-based courses such as Fine Art are less likely to encounter it as teachers track the process as well as assess the final student product (though even here, written work is seen as a different story and the literature records worries about, eg, plagiarism in dance choreography (Stevens, 2002).

Plagiarism may be more common in some teaching methodologies or programme structures. It often is discussed in connection with 'top-up' final year programmes with high numbers of international students who do the first two years in their home country then finish the degree in the UK, often submitting a dissertation after eight months' UK study. Many academics do not think this is sufficient time for students to develop the required skills. Others worry it is more frequent in distance-learning programmes where authorship of coursework cannot be easily authenticated. It may be more common in very large classes.

Plagiarism is certainly more common in students with certain characteristics. Indicative attributes include being new to HE, having a poor academic record, or having previously plagiarised (Whitley and Keith-Spiegel, 2002). Many studies show that the bulk of plagiarism can be attributed to students who do not understand academic requirements (eg, Freewood *et al.*, 2003). Often, students entering further education (FE) or HE have never previously used an in-text citation (eg, students with A-levels or those entering academic study from employment). International students, before enrolling in UK universities, may have been very successful in systems that required them to locate and reproduce answers; many have never attempted a piece of independent writing in any language, let alone an unfamiliar one such as English. Dyslexic students may have developed strategies for generating work based on patching together texts rather than risking a paraphrase. If all these students enter programmes where the 'rules of the game' have changed, they might continue to use tried and tested approaches and thereby, inadvertently, plagiarise. The number of students falling into this category will grow as student cohorts become more diverse due to widening participation, increasing numbers of international students and greater use of different teaching modes (eg distance learning, work-based learning).

Plagiarism may or may not be more common amongst international students compared to those considering the UK to be home. The statistics confirm that international students are over-represented in the statistics of those being punished, but this may be an artefact of detection as the primary tool marker used to spot plagiarism is a change in discourse style (Bull *et al.*, 2001), which is much easier to identify in a non-native speaker. Many authors assert that cultural differences lie at the heart of international students' unwillingness to rewrite experts' words or paraphrase texts. However, assumptions that students' inability to use Western academic conventions is largely due to cultural differences are not supported by the evidence (Errey, 2002), which shows that international students do know what they must do to meet UK requirements; they are aware of plagiarism but unsure what they must do to avoid it. When given support and safe practice, these students can develop skills appropriate to FE or HE work. Yet, when stressed, they often revert to previously familiar ways such as copying or cutting-and-pasting off the web (Angelil-Carter, 2000; Wilson, 1997). Challenges that can trigger unacceptable practice are very diverse including requiring a non-native speaker to write in English, juggling the demands of working and studying, high fear of failure, or trying to meet simultaneous assessment deadlines. It goes without saying that many students facing these (and even more serious) pressures do not plagiarise, but when considering how best to address the problem it is helpful to keep in mind what leads to some disregarding the rules.

Intentional plagiarism

Although students who misunderstand or misuse academic conventions and attribution rules form the majority of plagiarists, those who do so deliberately account for the majority of *concern* about plagiarism. Students who deliberately cheat or engage in fraudulent behaviour are characterised as threatening the values and beliefs that underpin academic work, angering and discouraging other students who do not use such tactics, devaluing the integrity of UK awards and qualifications, and distorting the efforts of lecturers who wish to teach rather than police others' actions.

A minority of students *do* deliberately plagiarise. We can only guess as to the frequency of behaviours such as paying ghost writers, wholesale downloading of coursework, or copying from other students, although the increasing use of electronic detection software such as Turnitin UK (see below for more information) will probably increase knowledge in this area as did an earlier study using it in Australia. In 2002, CAVAL, a university library consortium in Australia, used Turnitin to screen 1,770 pieces of student work from five HE institutions over a range of disciplines and found that 8.8% contained more than 25% of unattributed web-based material. The same study found only two instances (in 1,770) of student work containing more than 75% of unattributed material, most of it from the web though some may have been identified from the Turnitin database (see below). This Australian study is usually interpreted as confirming that a significant number of students misuse citation rules and a very small number commit deliberate misconduct (though some would argue that a quarter of the work being unattributed should be classed as serious plagiarism and others that some fraud cannot be detected by this means).

Cut-and-paste plagiarism, however it is viewed, is rising, too. McCabe (2003) reports that in 1999, 13% of US students in large self-reporting surveys reported regularly inserting material off the web into coursework without attribution. In 2003, 41% said they did so (although McCabe does not tell us the extent of their copying as a percentage of the whole work as in the CAVAL study mentioned in the last paragraph). Evidence confirming wholesale downloading of purchased material is circumstantial as this type of behaviour is particularly difficult to detect. For example, a UK website (www.coursework_info), launched in December 2003, offered to trade essays (ie upload three of your own essays and get one free). The site records their daily increase in available essays and showed they were adding over 400 new items per day by April, 2004. By late May, numbers dropped to double figures but at the time of writing, are still rising. This particular site joins many others in the UK that offer to write essays, solve students' maths problems, or provide complete dissertations. The existence of so-called 'cheat sites' is announced regularly in Student Union publications and often is the main theme of journalists writing about plagiarism.

What has caused the rise in deliberate cheating?

Many factors probably contribute to the rise in students who deliberately submit work they have not done themselves as if it was their own work. A decision to plagiarise may be associated with increasing pressures on students arising from, for example, undertaking paid work, heavier coursework load, or lack of personal organisation skills. When stresses rise, students see plagiarism as a reasonable and reasonably risk-free way out of difficulties (Bannister and Ashworth, 1998). One US website that clearly accepts this explanation offers to sell students a more or less instant copy of one of their 36,000 essays with the marketing tag, '...so you can get done and get on with your life' (www.essaycrawler.com). A growing number of entrepreneurs exploit the commercial possibilities of the student market by providing services such as ghost writers or ready-made documents. Perhaps another factor is larger class sizes that leave students with a feeling of 'safety in numbers' when weighing up the risks of being caught. Certainly, larger classes mean fewer opportunities for explaining, discussing and disseminating academic values. However, most commentators attribute the increase in student plagiarism to exponential growth of the web, increasing sophistication of translation programs and word processing itself. When asked, deliberate cheaters report they do it because they can, it's easy, and because they see no reason not to (Burkhill and Franklyn-Stokes, 2004).

Taking action to deal with plagiarism

Both intentional and unintentional plagiarism are unacceptable, though the approaches to tackling them and the consequences for the student are necessarily different. Tackling plagiarism requires action at the national level, at the level of the institution as a whole, at the level of the student's programme of study, and at the level of the individual lecturer or member of staff responsible for decisions affecting the student. Action can start at any point in this interconnected network of activity; however, it will only be fully effective if all aspects are addressed. The key to a holistic approach lies in an understanding of the issue of plagiarism

and a shared sense of responsibility for the problem of student plagiarism and its solution between all levels.

National initiatives

The UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) addressed both assessment and plagiarism when it issued guides to good practice, with the one on assessment (QAA, 2000) specifically charging institutions with the need to ensure their assessment decisions were reliable and robustly defended. In 2003, when the QAA considered what lessons might be learned from the Subject Reviews over the previous decade, they singled out assessment as the area most frequently criticised and most in need of attention (QAA, 2004). Institutional audits are now charged with inspecting how this requirement is carried out and will consider how institutions meet their responsibilities. The QAA is also strengthening and clarifying the role of external examiners who are often the ones who identify plagiarism that the marker has ignored or express dissatisfaction with the way the course team is handling the entire issue.

Another national initiative for dealing with student plagiarism dates back to 2001 when JISC launched and funded the Plagiarism Advisory Service, designed to offer advice and guidance and to host the UK implementation of a US-registered electronic detection service called Turnitin. Both aspects of the service have subsequently contributed to institutional approaches to dealing with plagiarism by:

- Collecting and organising examples of good practice on its website
- Informing practitioners and encouraging their action via workshops, conferences and email discussion lists
- Initiating research in specific areas
- Advocating for institutional change by creating an audit tool
- Improving detection rates through access to Turnitin UK for all HE and FE institutions in the UK. After a slow start, where administrative and legal issues deterred users, the reports generated by Turnitin UK software are recognised as generally useful, authoritative and increasingly comprehensive. (The use of electronic detection at the institutional level will be addressed in more detail later in this paper)

Some national initiatives have been less positive. Media attention, mentioned several times above, probably provokes worry and encourages self-protective behaviour, leading to the paradox of a widespread, national problem that seems to have no local expression because few HE institutions are willing to discuss their own circumstances (Larkham and Manns, 2002). Admitting plagiarism in one's own institution is avoided so as not to threaten the institution's good name or compromise future recruitment. Many institutions keep a low profile lest they be called upon to defend or justify actions, and indeed, too close a look at many colleges and universities would identify procedures that are patchy, uncoordinated or even entirely absent as is often the case when a single high-profile case is reported (eg Baty, 2004; Longstaff and Ross, 2004). It cannot be assumed, however, that by taking action an institution opens itself to criticism of its previous approach. The context, frequency, opportunity and responsibilities surrounding student plagiarism have changed and will continue to change in future. All institutions now need to review how they respond to those changes.

Senior responsibilities for dealing with plagiarism

Quite junior staff have led institutional efforts to deal effectively with the growing problem of plagiarism. However, starting at the top with the Vice Chancellor or Head of the college encourages ownership and can help to establish the underlying cultures and beliefs that shape the framework for dealing with student plagiarism. I would argue strongly that the framework needs to start by putting the emphasis on teaching and on valuing students' learning rather than on detecting and dealing with offenders.

Actions and responsibilities of the Vice Chancellors or Head

1. Establish the culture and overall values, placing academic issues at the centre of the discussions and any changes

2. Appoint a named person responsible for ensuring the institution is dealing effectively with student plagiarism
3. Ensure policies and procedures are appropriate to the current situation
4. Require systems for keeping records of all incidences and what action has been taken; identify the person or people responsible for monitoring and reviewing data; identify how and where the resulting information will be discussed
5. Take steps to improve detection rates, including access to electronic detection tools
6. Create communication systems that allow consultation, discussion and dissemination of information

Placing the emphasis on deterrence and assessment

Deterring plagiarism will always be more effective than detecting it once it occurs, and significantly less time-consuming than pursuing and punishing offenders. 'Catch and punish' approaches are self-defeating in that they absorb huge amounts of staff time (Carroll, 2002b), do not lessen the overall incidence of plagiarism, and deflect students from a focus on learning to one devoted to not breaking rules or not getting caught (Cole and Kiss, 2000). This point is often made but the rhetoric is seldom followed with suggestions as to actions which might tip the balance in favour of students complying with academic requirements and encouraging them to adopt academic values and beliefs which prohibit plagiarism. Senior managers have a key role in putting in place mechanisms for delivering the list below, for checking they occur, and for creating the culture that assumes they will.

Actions to encourage academic integrity include:

1. Providing staff and students with clear explanations of what is valued (integrity, honesty, wide-ranging research, choosing and using others' ideas etc) and why academic conventions are important. Students should encounter the information in printed material, discuss it with teachers, and see staff treating each other in accordance with the principles. Staff model integrity themselves when they cite sources in their lectures, talk about selecting and using authoritative sources to support an argument, and reward students who do the same by creating assessment criteria that recognise the issues.
2. Defining plagiarism and collusion in everyday language, including examples of acceptable and unacceptable practices and behaviours.

Definitions themselves have changed in the last ten years with less emphasis on theft and plunder, citing the Latin origins of the word *plagiarism*, and more likely on the word's contemporary meaning of academic malpractice. Treating plagiarism as a crime or a moral issue is less helpful than a focus on students' behaviour. Students do not automatically buy into the values that underpin UK HE views about academic integrity and honesty. On the contrary, many studies show they do not (Bannister and Ashworth, 1998). However, students (and teachers) can be expected to comply with the rules and, eventually, many do come to accept their underlying cultural beliefs and assumptions.

Although definitions have become more student-centred, many authors describe students' difficulties with understanding definitions of plagiarism (Freewood *et al.*, 2003), even ones that are apparently terse and simple such as:

unacknowledged use of someone else's work, usually in coursework, and passing it off as if it were one's own. (Park, 2004, p. 292)

Complications arise because the definition contains words that, in themselves, have tacit meanings. Students look at the definition and wonder 'How does work become "my own?"' 'Which work of others must I acknowledge – all of it or is common knowledge exempt and what is common knowledge?' 'Must I do it in oral presentations?', and so on. Students understand the definition by practice, feedback and discussion as they become familiar with academic culture and the community of practice in the context of their own discipline.

3. Induction that stresses both academic integrity and the way the university or college plans to defend it; student responsibilities for upholding academic values.

Induction can do little more than alert students to their responsibilities. It cannot teach the skills they need to comply. But it is an important starting point.

4. Active teaching of the skills students need to meet assessment requirements.

For writing, students need more than instruction in referencing. They need to learn study skills such as: note-taking that preserves the link with the source; paraphrasing and summarising; using in-text citations. In technical areas, students need to know the difference between copying the model and applying it. Students in creative subjects need help to know how to draw on others' ideas and reshape them.

5. Active steps to identify those who do not comply with the values underpinning academic integrity or who do not follow academic regulations.

In 2004, this means senior managers should take a view about how, where and by whom plagiarism will be detected and what should happen once it is identified. Much of the rest of this paper deals with how to ensure policies and procedures designed to deal with incidences of plagiarism can be changed to reflect the changing nature of the problem. Before moving to this area, it is useful to consider detection from the viewpoint of senior managers' responsibilities.

Effective detection

In the end, detection can only be the responsibility of the individual marker who encounters it in student work who, in turn, cannot perform this role without institutional support and active encouragement to take responsibility for spotting student plagiarism. Effective detection, therefore, starts not by considering the methods to use but by considering the context in which they are applied. In order to effectively detect plagiarism, the marker must know how to use a range of strategies well; must believe that he or she is acting fairly by identifying student plagiarism rather than punishing students who have not had an opportunity to learn the requisite skills; must view the process as worth the effort in that the result will be relatively painless and valued by the institution; and must trust the systems to deliver fair and realistic outcomes. Park (2004) confirms that many turn a blind eye because they judge that few if any of these conditions are in place.

Another approach markers often use when identifying unacceptable student work is to not react to it as *plagiarism*. Instead, they handle the case as an assessment issue via loss of marks or feedback mentioning the importance of citation. Even where this is appropriate, perhaps because it is only a small amount of plagiarism or the student is at the beginning of their programme, this implicit approach may not alert students to the unacceptable nature of their work.

Given the complex situation just described, electronic detection on its own will not have an impact on either informing markers of the need to explicitly label unacceptable practice or to encourage markers to use a system they do not trust. This is one reason amongst several why encouraging more UK HE institutions to use electronic detection has proved relatively problematic. In 2001, JISC identified one tool, Turnitin software, as the most suitable for detecting student plagiarism electronically. JISC ran a year-long pilot study of its utility in five HE institutions and, in 2002, made the tool available at no cost to all FE and HE institutions in the UK. Many saw electronic detection as the most appropriate response to a problem caused by technology. The answer, in their view, lay in a technological solution. However, uptake was slow in the first two years then began to rise steeply as administrative issues were resolved. The most significant predictor of institutional uptake of Turnitin UK software is probably management encouragement to invest time and energy into implementing its use in their own institution followed by putting in place suitable support mechanisms. The following steps appear to be significant:

1. A careful evidence-based attempt to improve the use of all forms of detection by all markers.

This means ensuring staff are effective at using reactive methods which rely on assessor vigilance or judicious and skilful use of web search engines such as Google. Many staff need information about what to look for because the majority rely on spotting changes in discourse style as the single trigger for suspicion. Though common, noting when the text changes in style, level or complexity cannot produce fair practices as it risks overlooking native-speakers who use even a modicum of care in making minor alterations to others' work, is ineffective against deliberate fraud, and probably leads to identifying proportionally more plagiarism in non-native English speakers.

2. Institution-wide introduction of electronic detection tools for more equitable reactive checking and for pro-active screening.

The two most commonly used tools in UK HE and FE (though neither is very widespread) are CopyCatch for detecting collusion, especially in large cohorts with multiple markers (www.copycatchgold.com), and Turnitin UK software. The latter functions by searching the web, comparing submitted work to a self-managed database containing an extensive and growing list of subscription, copyright protected and text-based sources, and checking against a database of previously submitted student work. The final database (ie of previously submitted student work) offers the potential for creating a national resource to check whether students are trading or selling their own work for subsequent submission. Though it is important that such services comply with all relevant Data Protection and Intellectual Property Rights, legislation guidance on using Turnitin UK software can be found on the Plagiarism Advisory Service website (www.jiscpas.ac.uk) which also hosts the detection service. The JISC-managed email discussion group (www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/PLAGIARISM.html) is effective at exchanging experience and suggestions for solving problems.

3. Quality assurance measures for ensuring staff and students use detection software appropriately and skilfully.

This will include staff development when detection tools are originally introduced plus regular updates for relevant staff. As issues change rapidly, there needs to be a nominated person with responsibility for tracking national and international developments and ensuring the institution keeps in touch with evolving practice. The nominated person can be located in any of a number of places – educational development, the Library, information systems, or the Registry. He or she will need resources ensuring the wider functions can be achieved, including time to provide advice and guidance to others in the institution.

Where Turnitin UK software has been adopted, institutions have used a variety of approaches. Some are screening large cohorts; others do so randomly. Some offer access to students as a tool for learning how to use referencing and acceptable paraphrasing. All ensure that students know about what and how their work will be inspected. Using the tool on its own, without adopting a range of measures to ensure a holistic and supportive institutional framework, is not good practice and could threaten both students' engagement with their learning and their relationship with the institution. Finally, using detection to potentially increase the number of cases identified will not lead to more effective handling of plagiarism if the resulting procedures for pursuing cases are not in place and if staff do not believe students are treated fairly by being informed and taught how to comply with academic conventions and regulations. The main focus of the remainder of this paper, therefore, will be on putting in place policies and procedures which staff and students experience as fair and that staff are willing to use.

Is the current policy appropriate? Are the current procedures realistic and effective?

If policies have not been reconsidered in the last three years, there are strong arguments for having a review. If the policy predates 2000, a fundamental overhaul is almost always required because, as outlined in the introduction, the problem of plagiarism and the means for dealing with it have changed fundamentally. In either case, a review of policies and procedures would be warranted if any of the following were identified:

- No clear mechanism for alerting students to their responsibilities for complying with academic regulations and upholding academic integrity.

Evidence to the contrary, ie that students *are* informed, needs to be concrete, recorded, specific to this issue and applicable to all students. A current legal case challenges one university's claim that putting the notification in student handbooks is sufficient. This position seems unlikely to prevail.

- No citable, specific evidence that the university upholds and encourages academic integrity amongst its staff and students.

Again, contrary evidence would need to go beyond mission statements and general admonitions. Rhetoric on this matter is widespread, action is sporadic and evidence of its impact usually anecdotal.

- Absence of identifiable places in students' programmes where they are taught (rather than informed) the skills necessary to comply with academic regulations and academic writing.

It should be possible to track where the teaching itself happens as well as where students can practise skills and receive safe feedback. General statements about the handbook or availability of online study skills would not be enough to defend the claim that this happens should a challenge arise.

- Little or no data recording the number of cases of plagiarism (both intentional and unintentional) that are occurring.

Data should include decisions made about each case and how the university deals with repeat offences. It should be: recorded centrally for the whole institution; be collected regularly; be reviewed for trends, gaps and 'hot spots'; and result in actions and appropriate modifications to policies and procedures.

- Statistics that reveal a small number of cases detected (or, indeed, no cases at all as in 5 of 110 HE institutions surveyed by the BBC in July, 2003).

What might constitute 'a small number' is difficult to prescribe, but given the 10% presumption stated earlier, an institution of 10,000 students, each doing (for sake of argument) 10 pieces of coursework annually, would be likely to generate 10,000 examples of unacceptable work warranting action beyond reducing marks or commenting on the need for referencing in feedback. In reality, no HE institution in the UK could demonstrate this level of activity and few could cope if they did. Most encounter a fraction of the predicted 10% and much of the 'action' consists of recorded conversations or requirements to complete online skills development sessions. Rates well below even the reduced expectations would be strong grounds for reviewing how procedures impeded detection and/or encouraged informal, local solutions and punishments.

- Evidence of unfair or inconsistent treatment.

This will invariably be the case if individual markers are responsible to initiate action and apply sanctions or punishments.

- No staff development initiatives to ensure all are aware of recent developments in course design, detection and legal responsibilities relevant to deterring plagiarism.

Once an internal investigation has ascertained that any of the above is evident, the senior management should initiate an institutional review of how plagiarism is currently managed.

Reviewing current policy and procedures

A review of policy needs to start with reviewing the literature on plagiarism. Nearly everyone brings personal views and experiences with them when they become involved more deeply in considering the issues of student plagiarism. What they have experienced or have evolved as views may or may not reflect what is generally accepted information or good practice. The Plagiarism Advisory Service website collects relevant articles on its website (www.jiscpas.ac.uk).

As well as looking outside for the wider picture, a review probably needs to look within the institution, too, for local views, issues and problems. Internal investigation will probably duplicate what already exists in the literature but has the benefit of tailoring decisions to local contexts and increasing the likelihood that changes will be accepted. Institutions conduct internal research in a variety of ways. University College, Northampton and the University of Dundee commissioned surveys of staff and student attitudes to confirm to staff that generic research also applied in their own institution. Sheffield Hallam University commissioned a researcher to run focus groups with staff and students and the University of Newcastle (Australia) used external consultants to manage the process. Academics at the University of Central England surveyed other HE institutions (Larkham and Manns, 2002).

Early information-gathering should also identify legal and procedural matters including:

- The need to have separate procedures for assessment and dealing with plagiarism (for legal confirmation of this point, see Nolan (1994) on R v Manchester Metropolitan University). Guidance to Examination Boards should remind Chairs not to revisit or seek to alter decisions, including any penalties, which have been made about plagiarism. (Examiners and Boards can, of course, comment on assessment decisions in general and the means used to ensure they are fair, valid and reliable, including measures for dealing with plagiarism.)
- The level of proof required to pursue a case. Criminal law seeks proof 'beyond reasonable doubt' and a few institutions insist on this level of evidence. For example, some will not proceed unless the source or original is found. Others, quite correctly, note that policies operate under the requirements of civil law where the balance of probabilities determine the outcome. Under civil law, the case would need to be strong enough to withstand challenge but remains an academic judgement that would stand unless it could be shown the charge was vexatious (Carroll and Appleton, 2001).
- Responsibilities under copyright and the Data Protection Act.
- The impact of Human Rights legislation on the requirement for fair, consistent and transparent procedures.

The list is not exhaustive; legal advice is usually sought at some stage and could usefully be done at the onset.

Creating a review group

Institutions that review their policies on plagiarism generally use a cross-university group or working party to track and direct action. (If the policy is not being reviewed, the suggestions below can identify issues relevant to creating a group for ongoing monitoring and review to function as a sounding board and discussion forum for those in the institution with an interest in student plagiarism.)

Membership needs to include people:

- From a range of disciplines. Historians and Biologists and Accountants and Nurses etc must feel their views are being heard or they will find the policy difficult to endorse. Also, members bring discipline-specific aspects to decisions such as the requirements of professional bodies, assumptions as to the purpose of citations, or definition of collusion.
- With a variety of roles: Librarians, administrators from the Registry, educational developers, senior managers and those charged with quality assurance may all have items to contribute. Varied membership should not preclude efforts to elicit views from an even wider range of roles.
- With sufficient inside knowledge and authority (collectively) to address the institution's priorities and influence its future directions. It makes no sense to create a group that evolves an unworkable solution, however ideal.
- With time to devote to the task. Typically, a review group will meet for about 12 months with 18 months not unusual. Meetings tend to be long (two hours or more) as issues warrant discussion and argument needs to reach consensus. Often, the group must work iteratively, returning to previous issues in the light of new information or new understanding.

Activities usually undertaken by a Review Group

Redrafting of policies usually require the group to:

- Seek ideas and guidance from outside the institution, consulting documents and examples from similar institutions and interviewing experienced people
- Identify appropriate punishments
- Collect views and guidance from appropriate people within the institution
- Locate good practice guidelines from the literature, the Plagiarism Advisory Service website and recognised expertise

As drafts are written, the group comments, offers feedback and provides guidance on matters such as:

- The balance of emphasis between academic integrity and valuing students' learning on the one hand and outlawing unacceptable behaviours and punishing offenders on the other
- Whether the goals of the policy will be stated, eg fairness, consistency, transparency, defending all students' efforts, assuring the integrity of awards, etc
- Which aspects of academic misconduct will be covered. This might include different assessment modes (coursework, exams etc) or a range of unacceptable behaviour. When Lancaster University redrafted their policy, they identified five types of plagiarism, listed as:
 1. Collusion, where a piece of work prepared by a group is represented as if it were the student's own
 2. Commission or use of work by the student which is not his or her own and representing it as if it were [examples given]
 3. Duplication of the same or almost identical work for more than one course
 4. Copying or paraphrasing a paper from a source text ... without appropriate acknowledgement
 5. Submission of another student's work, with or without that student's knowledge or consent
(see www.lancs.ac.uk/users/celt/plagiarism/plagiarism_summary.doc)

Other institution's policies mention fabrication, falsification of data, statements about students who allow their work to be copied, and using translation programs.

- Tone and language. Will the policy: address the student directly; use everyday language; provide real life examples? Will plagiarism be described as unacceptable behaviour, as an ethical and moral issue or in terms of crime/ theft?

Informing staff and students

Once agreed (and this often takes a surprisingly long time), a policy needs to be ratified then widely circulated and publicised. If the group has been consulting widely, the new version should not come as a surprise, but it often takes careful planning to ensure everyone knows about the changes. Briefings should be tailored to the recipients' need to know and should stress their responsibilities, especially in regard to the operational procedures (see below). It is important to think about briefing:

- People (Librarians, Registry administrators, lecturers, students, Student Union advocates)
- Responsibilities (course committees, school boards, academic markers, staff unions)
- New staff when they are appointed
- New student cohorts

Finally, information dies quickly and updates will be required.

Ensuring procedures are effective

Effective procedures for dealing with student plagiarism are ones that:

- Staff are willing to use and trust
- Students experience as fair, transparent, consistent and appropriate
- Can be followed without difficulty
- Deliver decisions quickly to (potentially) large numbers of students
- Produce decisions that can be recorded and defended

This is a challenging set of requirements, especially in a climate of anxiety about legal matters in general and plagiarism in particular. It is also one that most procedures in most institutions would not meet easily if at all.

Traditionally, procedures either delegated plagiarism decisions to all lecturing staff or referred them to hard-pressed senior staff such as heads of department or deans. Neither approach is appropriate in 2004. Delegating responsibilities means the person who identifies the plagiarism must also give up time, become a self-taught detective, and deal directly with the student about matters that often become stressful for both parties. Faced with those consequences, many markers (perhaps even most markers) turn a blind eye to plagiarism. They opt for a low mark for the student and a quiet life for themselves, especially if identifying plagiarism is not rewarded and is unlikely to endear them to less vigilant colleagues.

Delegating decisions also makes fairness and consistency difficult or impossible. Unless markers encounter cases regularly, they cannot develop a sense of what is serious and what is not; what to look for to identify plagiarism; and what penalties are appropriate. They must rely on gut feeling and guessing. As an aside, I have tested this last point by presenting over 1,000 people in a range of settings with three hypothetical cases. I asked them to work individually, read each case and to select an appropriate punishment from a numbered list of 12. Once everyone has decided, I ask them to write the number of the penalty or action on a whiteboard. Eleven of the 12 choices of actions to take always appear with varying degrees of frequency (number 12 being 'removal from the university' which does appear from time to time). All the choices attract at least two or three 'votes'. It is normal for several people in a group to read Case 1 and decide an unrecorded conversation with the hypothetical student would be the appropriate action, whilst four or five have the same information and select the action 'zero for the module'. In one group of 37, 17 chose 'require the student to correct the work and resubmit it for a full mark' and two selected 'resubmission of a new task for a capped pass mark'. The decision to award full marks was explained as the most likely to encourage learning. The capped mark was explained by referring to the feelings of fellow students. This exercise demonstrates how individuals create criteria, give them different weights, judge the circumstances according to their own priorities and arrive at a decision

they themselves can justify. Students, however, experience a system that is arbitrary, opaque and unfair.

Passing decisions to one senior person can solve some of these problems but creates others linked to delay, unwillingness to burden a manager, and distance from the teaching context. Most of all, however, requiring all cases to be handled by a senior person is just not practical with a large number of cases; case loads can be expected to reach three-figure levels or even more in large institutions. Senior managers need to attend to other matters and plagiarism needs to be treated as an everyday, albeit unwelcome, aspect of academic life.

Creating specialist officers for dealing with plagiarism

An increasing number of institutions have designated specialist officers (or, in the case of Sheffield Hallam University, a panel of specialist officers), located within the school or department, who deal with all cases of plagiarism. Under this system, markers must continue to detect unacceptable behaviour but then pass the case to the specialist who decides whether plagiarism is demonstrated and allocates a punishment from a limited range of options. Oxford Brookes University, where the system has been in place for five years, has 14 Academic Conduct Officers located in the eight academic schools who interview the student, review the case presented by the person who detected it with the student at an interview, decide whether the evidence warrants taking action and, if so, selects one of five actions:

1. A recorded discussion, usually including referral to study skills support
2. A reduction in marks determined by removing the work that was not the student's and marking the remainder
3. Resubmission of a corrected version for a capped passing mark
4. 0% for the piece of work
5. 0% for the module

If the Academic Conduct Officer (ACO) decides the student's misconduct is such that it warrants a penalty more severe than one of the five above, the case goes to a full disciplinary panel convened under procedures outlined in the disciplinary policy. The student can also not accept the decision and opt for a full panel review. ACOs handle the majority of cases within a week to 10 days and only pass on a small percentage to a full disciplinary panel. A full description of the ACO system is available (www.brookes.ac.uk/regulations/student_conduct.html) with an evaluation of its effectiveness (www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocsd2_learnt.html).

At Sheffield Hallam, a similar approach is used with a panel designated at the departmental level and meeting at fixed times in the term. This model is preferred as it encourages shared understanding of criteria and consensual decision making. Its originators also claim it roots the process firmly within an academic rather than policing context.

Lancaster University differentiates between an academic marker who identifies plagiarism, the course convenor who checks the strength of the case, and the Academic Officer who conducts the investigation and allocates a punishment from a stated list (www.lancs.ac.uk/users/celt/plagiarism/plagiarism_summary.doc).

Clarity of roles and responsibilities

Whatever model is used, the responsibilities of all concerned in making policies operational must be spelled out exactly. The following may have a role.

The individual marker's responsibilities include using a range of strategies for detecting plagiarism; producing grounds for identifying the work as plagiarised; providing information to relevant officers; and ensuring actions are completed within a short amount of time.

The course leader's responsibilities include ensuring all students are aware of procedures and of requirements for attribution; and ensuring all markers use consistent means for identifying plagiarism.

A named person needs to be identified as convenor of regular meetings with specialist officers. Unless these people meet regularly, exchange ideas and discuss their practice, they will probably become more and more individualistic in their decisions, losing the benefits of consistency and shared practice. This person will also need to induct newly appointed specialists and ensure they do not have to start from scratch in their understanding of the issues or use of procedures. Meetings need to occur several times a year and to be long enough to allow discussion and consensus to develop.

A named person needs to be responsible for informing and consulting staff and students about the institution's policies and procedures and for collecting, inspecting and making sense of accumulating data on incidence, punishments, and evolving practice. This role usually sits within the quality enhancement centre for the whole university.

Encouraging and building expertise within the institution

Dealing effectively with plagiarism, a complex issue, in a complex institution with a diverse student population will require many people to be involved and active. As their expertise develops, it can be shared and used by others if there are mechanisms for ensuring good internal communication. Expertise is likely to develop (given encouragement) in:

- Course design. For example, colleagues might find it useful to hear how others have designing out easy cheating opportunities or designing in assessment tasks that test students' learning
- Effective induction including involving students in discussions of academic values and beliefs
- Ways to teach students the skills they need to meet assessment requirements. This could include where in the programme these matters are best addressed and appropriate early diagnostic activities for identifying gaps in students' understanding and skills
- Detection, including how best to use the knowledge held by Librarians on locating sources

By creating a systematic and coherent programme for dealing with plagiarism, it will be possible to engage individual academics/lecturers and relevant administrative staff in deterring and dealing with plagiarism, but this must be done using a top-down approach as described here rather than a bottom-up one which relies on individual enthusiasts and accidental discovery. When systems are in place, it will be possible to encourage local consensus as to what the course team or subject means by the word 'plagiarism', how that understanding will be shared with students, and how to encourage a high integrity culture. A key factor in seeing this happen will be the commitment, energy and focus of the senior managers of the institution.

Jude Carroll
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