

An institution-wide approach to reducing plagiarism in a UK university

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Abstract:

Sheffield Hallam University, one of the UK's largest, has recently changed its approach and regulations regarding identifying and managing plagiarism across the institution of approximately 30,000 students. The academic staff had lost faith with the way the university managed academic misconduct. There was particular dissatisfaction with the range of sanctions administered in cases where an allegation of misconduct was proven. The feeling among academics was that students were 'getting away with cheating', and therefore change was needed. This poster presents the key policy changes, including publication of a Code of Academic Conduct, and outlines how these changes were designed and enacted. Principles of the approach are as follows:

- Procedural fairness and natural justice, i.e. that the process and outcome is morally right and fair;
- The burden of proof remains with the University;
- Judgements regarding allegations are decided on the balance of probabilities;
- The process rests on academic evidence-based judgement.

Key changes have been made, which include a new code of academic conduct. This asserts that "the university is committed to developing a culture of good academic conduct, and ensures that all assessments are conducted fairly and equitably. Furthermore, the code adds that academic conduct plays an important role in students' intellectual and professional development, as well as in their successful transition to graduate employment and future careers. It is also an ethical standard by which the academic community operates" (Sheffield Hallam University Academic Conduct Regulation, 2017/18).

There are now also raised expectations on academics in regards to awareness raising and deterrence of academic misconduct; a focus on academic practice, revised language and definitions, a simplified set of sanctions and a clear message on the consequences of contract cheating, which we now regard as severe academic misconduct, and if proven, is likely to lead to expulsion from the university.

Keywords: academic conduct, cheating, plagiarism, regulation policy.