

ASSESSMENT AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY – AN IRISH PERSPECTIVE

Edith O'Leary¹, Noelle O'Connor¹

¹*Technical University of the Shannon, Ireland*

Abstract

Assessment is deemed a vital part of all university studies and is thought to be the '*single biggest influence on how students approach their learning*' (Rust et al., 2005). Assessment 'of, for and as' (O'Neill, 2019) learning certainly demonstrates how assessment should support active 'student-centred' approaches to assessment that engage students. The Trinity Education Project referred to *transformational changes occurring in education, some are the effect of developments in technology and globalisation and others are a result of the changing needs and expectations of students, employers and society at large* (Trinity Education Project, 2016). Such change, points to the institutional approach and response required to embrace this "*seismic shift in thinking*" (Bovill, 2019), the National Forum Enhancement Theme 2016-2018 referred to Ireland adopting and promoting "*innovative, engaging, collaborative, learner-oriented and integrated*" (O'Neill, 2019: 18-123) approaches to assessment. Such challenges and changes have been identified by the European Commission. "*We must prepare students to cope with the unknown and build their capacity to learn when the props of a course – curriculum, assignments, teachers, academic resources – are withdrawn. What, then, does that imply for what and how we assess?*" (Boud et al., 2020). Why has academic integrity come under attack in the way we assess? Since the outset of the pandemic the transformational move to online and blended learning has seen an increase in recourse to contract cheating services and opportunities by students. The response by the Irish Government to this growing industry known as 'Essay Mills' was the enactment of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training)

(Amendment) Act 2019. This legislation provides a statutory basis for the prosecution of those who facilitate learner cheating. Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is the body responsible for bringing prosecutions under this section 43a of the Act. Those convicted of an offence under s.43a may receive a fine of up to €100,000 and/or imprisonment for a term of up to five years. The National Academic Integrity Network is a peer driven organisation established in November 2019 by QQI. It actively supports higher education institutions to effectively engage with the challenges presented by academic misconduct, embed a culture of academic integrity among providers and develop national resources and tools for providers to address the challenges presented by academic misconduct. It was established in response to a threat to academic integrity and reputational damage to the Irish educational system. Kohlberg's (1972) writings are of particular interest to the author as a lawyer and adult educator in law and in the application of the cognitive developmental thinking in legal professional development and 'to development in domains other than justice reasoning, across the life-span, and at the workplace' (Commons et al., 1989). As educators, we have a duty of care to guide students as they move through a series of assessments. A practical example is formative low stake assessment, each more successively sophisticated and structured to make sense of experience and embrace deep learning that incorporate patterns of thinking of previous assessments into the newly acquired one of maturation for and as learning to build skills for high stake summative assessment. The National Professional Development Framework (National Forum, 2016) is underpinned by core

values. By embracing these values that contribute to teaching, learning and scholarship in higher education academics can create an awareness and embed such values in assessment to shield and protect academic integrity rather than embarking on costly litigation with no ultimate winners. A vision for student success in Ireland (National Forum,

2019) aims to provide students in higher education with the opportunity to fulfill their potential and realise their aspirations and become creators of and contributors to new knowledge while becoming community engaged, ethically and morally conscious, professional, competent and equipped to flourish in a global world.

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