Horizon Scanning Report on Academic and Institutional Integrity

A report by Sarah Elaine Eaton and Beatriz Moya, University of Calgary. Commissioned by the N-TUTORR National Digital Leadership Network.

National Digital Leadership Network

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ISBN 978-1-0683806-8-6

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Abstract

This horizon scanning report examines the evolving landscape of academic and institutional integrity in higher education. It traces the historical development of academic and institutional integrity concepts, analyses current international best practices, and forecasts future challenges and opportunities. The report highlights how technological advancements, globalization, and changing educational models have transformed the nature of academic misconduct and institutional responses. Key issues addressed include contract cheating, AI-generated content, and credential fraud. The study synthesizes insights from literature reviews and related documents to provide a comprehensive overview of innovative strategies employed by leading institutions worldwide. These range from integrity-focused curriculum design to generative artificial intelligence. The report concludes with actionable recommendations for higher education institutions to foster cultures of integrity, leverage emerging technologies, and prepare for future challenges. By adopting proactive, holistic approaches to academic and institutional integrity, universities can not only mitigate risks but also enhance their educational quality and global reputation in an increasingly complex and interconnected academic landscape.

Keywords: academic integrity, research integrity, ethics, higher education, trends.

Introduction to the National Digital Leadership Network Report Series

The National Digital Leadership Network (NDLN) is a collaborative initiative designed to support digital transformation across Ireland's Technological Higher Education sector. Established under the N-TUTORR programme with funding provided through the EU's NextGenerationEU initiative, the network was officially launched in November 2024 to provide a national platform for digital leadership and complementary knowledge exchange and strategic collaboration. While the N-TUTORR programme has now concluded, our network continues its work under the guidance of a steering board composed of sector leaders and external experts.

Digital leadership in higher education extends far beyond technical expertise or the adoption of certain tools and platforms: it's about vision, strategy, and culture change. Effective digital leaders ensure that digital strategies and developments align with institutional and national priorities, not only enhancing teaching, learning, research, and administration functions but also upholding academic values, promoting equity, and driving business innovation. In this context, the NDLN fosters collaboration among higher education leaders, policymakers, and practitioners, providing opportunities to share insights, explore emerging challenges, and develop shared solutions.

As part of its work, the NDLN has commissioned a series of horizon-scanning reports authored by leading national and international scholars and practitioners. These reports explore key trends at the intersection of digital innovation, traditional leadership and strategic planning, providing actionable insights to support higher education institutions in aligning these trends and related opportunities with institutional and national priorities. Covering topics such as the evolving role of generative AI in academia, data-driven decision-making, academic integrity, new models of learning and teaching and new ways to plan for financial sustainability, this report series offers timely advice and direction for higher education leaders navigating the interrelated complexities of the digital and post-digital age.

We extend our gratitude to the N-TUTORR programme for its financial support, and to N-TUTORR Co-ordinator Dr Sharon Flynn for her direction and continued support of the network. Thank you also to members of our national steering board and to our external contributors, in particular Professor Lawrie Phipps.

A big personal thank you in addition to my colleagues in the Department of Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) at MTU -- especially Darragh Coakley and Marta Guerra -- whose work has been vital to the preparation and publication of these reports. We are also very grateful to Dr. Catherine Cronin, our chief editor, and, of course, to all our authors whose insights, expertise, and dedication form the heart and foundation of this series.

We invite you to engage with these reports and join us in shaping the future of digital leadership in higher education.

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List of Abbreviations

AI - Artificial intelligence (NB: We have written out the words “academic integrity” throughout for disambiguation.)

BCI - Brain–computer interface

DWT - Digital writing tools

EDIAD - Equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and decolonisation

ENAI - European Network for Academic Integrity

ENRIO - European Network of Research Integrity Offices

HE - Higher education

HEI - Higher education institutions

ICAI - International Center for Academic Integrity

LD - Learning difference/disability

NAIN - National academic integrity network

ND - Neurodivergence/neurodivergent

SaP - Students as partners

Executive Summary

The executive summary presents key findings to provide the reader with a quick yet comprehensive overview of the report's essential content. These points are intended to summarise the report's main conclusions at a glance.

- Academic integrity lies at the heart of educational quality, institutional reputation, and the value of academic credentials. As emerging technologies and evolving social realities create new challenges to maintaining academic integrity, institutions must proactively identify and respond to potential threats.
- Ireland's National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) (QQI, 2019) was an early germinator that began to mature in the early years of the global academic integrity movement. NAIN's work has had an impact not only in Ireland but across the world, effectively establishing Ireland's position as a global leader in academic integrity.
- The evolution from punitive approaches to systemic integrity frameworks marks a fundamental shift in how higher education institutions (HEIs) address academic misconduct, emphasising shared responsibility and ethical decision-making over individual sanctions.
- Institutional integrity in higher education (HE) requires both structural transformation and cultural change, particularly as internationalisation demands standardised practices while respecting diverse educational contexts. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to academic integrity. Balancing standards with personalised approaches to learning requires balancing the institution's standardised needs with the individual needs of the students.
- The authentic and inclusive engagement and buy-in of all community members in crafting and upholding institutional expectations for ethical conduct is critical.
- Any technology can be used ethically or unethically, or even illegally. For teaching, learning, and assessment, we must address both types of technology use, as misuse of technology often results in breaches of integrity or codes of conduct.
- Artificial intelligence (AI) apps can be viewed as "a pauper's tutor" that levels the playing field for those with less financial privilege who cannot afford private tutoring services.

- Globally, HE as a sector has yet to settle on the question of whether it is considered fraud for students to use AI apps to help them prepare applications for admission or for scholarships.
- There can be a difference between who engages in academic misconduct and who gets reported for it, and individuals from certain socio-demographic groups may be over-represented in academic integrity violation data.
- Intersectionality plays a role in academic integrity, as students may have multiple and intersecting identities and experiences that simultaneously compound the risk of academic failure and increase the possibility of academic impropriety or misconduct.
- An inclusive approach to academic integrity does not mean excusing infractions; instead, it means that we make every effort to communicate expectations clearly, hold everyone in the learning ecosystem to high standards of quality, and provide ongoing opportunities to learn while maintaining the integrity of the credentials we award.
- Advanced technologies will continue to challenge our understanding of what it means to teach, learn, and assess ethically. These are complex questions that are unlikely to be solved quickly, but there is an urgency to provide just-in-time actionable guidance that educators and leaders can implement in their daily professional practice.
- As technology continues to develop quickly, a key challenge for institutions and educators is to resist the temptation to view technological developments as an automatic threat to integrity and instead look for ways to incorporate tools and applications in ways that help students bring their best selves to school, to work, and to the world.

Introduction

Academic integrity lies at the heart of educational quality, institutional reputation, and the value of academic credentials. As emerging technologies and evolving social realities create new challenges to maintaining academic integrity, institutions must proactively identify and respond to potential threats. Our horizon-scanning approach is intended to enable HE leaders to anticipate future challenges, develop preventative strategies, and maintain stakeholders' trust in the validity and worth of academic qualifications.

This report aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the historical development and current state of academic and institutional integrity in HE in order to make explicit the evolution of academic integrity. This report also synthesises international best practices in maintaining and promoting academic integrity across diverse educational contexts. Additionally, this work presents an overview of emerging challenges and opportunities related to academic integrity, particularly those arising from technological advancements and changing educational paradigms; it also includes suggestions for addressing these complex issues. Recognising the constantly changing landscape, this guide forecasts future trends and potential disruptions in the field of academic integrity in order to help institutions proactively prepare for upcoming challenges. Overall, senior leaders will find in this report evidence-based, actionable advice for HEIs to enhance their integrity frameworks and practices.

> this work presents an overview of emerging challenges and opportunities related to academic integrity...

Definitions

In this report, we follow the definitions of key terms, such as "academic integrity", as articulated by NAIN (National Academic Integrity Network, 2021). We note that within the NAIN document there is an acknowledgement of the overlap between academic integrity, research integrity, and research ethics. This is aligned with the most up-to-date framings of academic integrity that include and extend beyond student conduct (Eaton, 2024a).

Academic and Institutional Integrity: Past and Present

A brief history of modern academic integrity (1990s-2020s)

Modern academic integrity can be broadly understood through three overlapping periods: the McCabe Years (1990s–2010s), the Bretag Years (2000–2020), and the Global Movement Years (2020s).

The McCabe Years (1990s–2010s) – Prior to the 1990s, academic misconduct was predominantly conceptualised through frameworks of criminality and deviance (Adam, 2016; Eaton, 2021; Fishman, 2016, 2024). This perspective underwent a significant shift with the emergence of the academic integrity movement, spearheaded by Donald McCabe and his colleagues in the United States. Their groundbreaking large-scale survey research generated numerous influential publications throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, fundamentally reshaping the discourse around academic integrity (Rettinger et al., 2024). A pivotal development was the establishment of the Center for Academic Integrity in 1992, which later evolved into the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI) (Eaton, 2021; Fishman, 2024).

ICAI advocates have consistently promoted honour systems and honour codes, though these approaches remain predominantly American constructs that have struggled to gain widespread adoption in other global contexts (Eaton & Christensen Hughes, 2022). Tracey Bretag served as ICAI president (2014–16), with her leadership concluding the same year Donald McCabe passed away.

The Bretag Years (2000s–2020) – Tracey Bretag's influence coincided with and then extended beyond the McCabe Years. Bretag launched the *International Journal for Educational Integrity* in 2005 and began to focus more intently on building academic integrity internationally, effectively destabilising the historical American dominance in the field. The *first Handbook of Academic Integrity* (Bretag, 2016) was published under Bretag's editorship. Bretag's work was further bolstered by significant funding from the Australian government, leading to some of the most comprehensive research to that point on academic integrity policy (Bretag et al., 2011a, 2011b; Bretag & Mahmud, 2016) and contract cheating (see Bretag, 2019b; Bretag et al., 2018; Ellis et al., 2019; Harper et al., 2019).

Meanwhile, in Europe, a group based out of the Czech Republic gathered in 2010 to work with Dr Irene Glendinning from the UK on research focused on plagiarism

across Europe (European Network for Academic Integrity, 2024; Glendinning, 2013, 2016), holding a small conference with Bretag as a regular contributor, starting in 2013. Bretag endorsed the European Network for Academic Integrity (ENAI) and catalysed the development of academic integrity work in Canada, Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East (Eaton et al., 2020). This paved the way for the global movement that would follow. In 2019, Times Higher Education named Bretag as one of the "people of the year" in HE (Lau et al., 2019). Bretag died in 2020, by which time the seeds of academic integrity had taken hold at a global level.

The Global Movement Years (2020s) – Since Bretag's passing, no longer has any single individual dominated academic integrity discourse. 2020 marked the beginning of the global academic integrity movement, with formal and informal organisations, as well as individual students, scholars, and HE professionals and leaders.

> 2020 marked the beginning of the global academic integrity movement...

Looking forward, NAIN is positioned to continue to provide clear direction across the higher education sector as AI continues to develop rapidly.

Upholding Academic Integrity Cultures in HE

This section presents an overview of the shift from individual to institutional responsibility in promoting academic integrity cultures. It also presents guidelines for sustaining academic integrity throughout the educational ecosystem.

From Individual to Institutional Responsibility

The evolution from punitive approaches to systemic integrity frameworks marks a fundamental shift in how higher education institutions address academic misconduct, emphasising shared responsibility and ethical decision-making over individual sanctions.

The traditional approach to academic misconduct has been predominantly punitive and focused on compliance with rules, emphasising sanctions for individuals' behaviours (Bertram Gallant, 2024; Kenny & Eaton, 2022). This approach fails to foster the moral reflection and critical analysis necessary for values internalisation (Sopcak & Hood, 2022; Pavletić & Hammerbauer, 2022), and its emphasis on individual-level interventions has proved inadequate in addressing systemic challenges (Bertram Gallant, 2024; Eaton, 2021). As concerns about academic misconduct intensify, institutions increasingly recognise their responsibility to cultivate ethical decision-making among students.

HEIs are integrating academic integrity values and principles into teaching, learning, and research practices, a move partly motivated by reputational considerations. This requires transformations across structural, procedural, and cultural dimensions (Bertram Gallant, 2024; Kenny & Eaton, 2022). Academic integrity is embedded within HE ecosystems, where institutional operations influence individual behaviour while cultural change towards integrity emerges as a result of ongoing contributions across organisational levels (Bertram Gallant, 2024; Eaton, 2021; Kenny & Eaton, 2022).

Strengthening institutional integrity requires explicit articulation of institutional purposes, provision of appropriate means for community members to achieve these purposes, and alignment of ethical decision-making with these established purposes and means (Bertram Gallant, 2024). Although institutional purposes vary according to organisational cultures, institutions share responsibility for educating graduates who will contribute to local communities (Thacker & McKenzie, 2022). The internationalisation of

HE necessitates standardised academic integrity practices across diverse educational systems (Glendinning, 2017).

Institutional integrity initiatives engage various groups in upholding, promoting, and maintaining accountability for agreed-upon standards and values (Eaton, 2021). Ethical academic practices include appropriate citation of sources and transparency in technology use, whereas deceptive practices such as contract cheating, data falsification, fraudulent publishing, grade inflation, and plagiarism undermine genuine achievement (Bretag, 2013; Rogerson, 2024). Failure to reconcile conflicting perspectives regarding institutional purposes can compromise institutional integrity (Bertram Gallant, 2024), requiring educational leaders to "set the conditions for change" (Kenny & Eaton, 2022, p. 578).

Strengthening Institutional Integrity

The authentic, inclusive engagement and buy-in of all community members in crafting and upholding institutional expectations for ethical conduct is critical. This endeavour can be achieved through a variety of means. Three foundational elements are highlighted:

- Participative creation and implementation of clear institutional statements, practices, processes, and policies that highlight institutional values
- Presence of high-impact educational opportunities that mobilise individuals, groups, and networks to develop knowledge and skills with regard to academic integrity
- Active support of senior leaders that enhances institutional responses in navigating challenges to academic integrity

Highlighting Institutional Values

Participatory approaches to academic integrity can promote greater engagement among various individuals and groups in educational communities much more effectively than a top-down approach. As an example, facilitating and promoting student engagement in academic integrity policy development sends a clear message that students' voice and contributions matter (Richards et al., 2016). Involving everyone empowers all educational actors within an institution, which could lead to greater moral coherence (Bertram Gallant, 2024).

The five core elements for exemplary academic integrity are access, approach, responsibility, detail, and support (Bretag et al., 2011a; Bretag et al., 2011b). These

elements provide a framework for developing policy, procedure, and professional practice.

Exemplary policy is easy to locate and communicate inclusively, explaining in plain language how to deal with misconduct cases, which helps staff members frame their decision-making to tackle situations locally in their courses or units (Birks et al., 2020, Eaton, 2021). Effective academic integrity policy includes information on when it was approved through governance processes, how long it is in effect, and when it will undergo regular review and revision. Exemplary policy also communicates explicitly an institutional commitment to supporting academic integrity as a shared responsibility (Kenny & Eaton, 2022). It involves everyone in the process by stating the roles that each member of the community plays in fostering institutional values, promoting accountability, and learning at the same time (Bretag & Mahmud, 2016). Such policy can effectively guide behaviour because it provides clear information about the institution's expectations, actions that could be regarded as breaches of academic integrity, and procedures for dealing with such breaches; general descriptions are avoided, as they do not help ensure consistency (Guruge & Kadel, 2023). As for breaches, policies aligned with this framework are up to date with emerging academic integrity challenges (e.g. contract cheating) and include concrete plans to tackle them (Glendinning, 2017). Academic integrity policy, under this guide, outlines services and resources that all community members can access to develop their understanding and skills with regard to academic integrity (Sefcik et al., 2020).

As for clear and consistently applied policy, integrating effective quality assurance mechanisms and procedures for addressing academic misconduct cases can help prevent the emergence of more challenging issues. All agreed-upon rules must be adequately enforced (Bens, 2022; Dawson, 2020). A "set it and forget it" approach (Eaton, 2021, p. 65) should have no place in a learning institution committed to academic integrity. Letting one small ethical issue slide could lead to future indifference to ethical matters and, ultimately, to the devaluation of academic qualifications (Bertram Gallant, 2024; Glendinning, 2017). Students being exposed to scandals in the media or to situations within institutions that are not adequately addressed may incentivise further academic misconduct. Most importantly, heavy workloads, perceived lack of time and support, and fear of potential threats or of provoking negative consequences in one's own or others' lives (Birks et al., 2020; Hamilton & Wolsky, 2022) could lead to circumventing institutional norms; for this reason, the members of educational communities require access to streamlined and supportive processes.

Other measures to enhance policy implementation include scheduling regular programme reviews to explore the state of academic integrity in an institution and

devise timely adjustments as needed (Thacker & McKenzie, 2022) and implementing a cross-campus survey (e.g. the Scorecard in Academic Integrity Development) to ascertain that consequences for breaches of academic integrity are fair and proportional (Glendinning, 2017).

Developing Academic Integrity Knowledge and Skills

It is also critical for there to be high-impact educational development opportunities for everyone to cultivate academic integrity knowledge and skills. Educational development should aim to address community members' academic integrity gaps, because such understanding grows from both individual experiences as well as interactions with individuals and groups. Creating ongoing opportunities for professional and educational development shows an explicit commitment to integrity. In institutions providing high-impact educational development opportunities, ethics training has a special place and is equally relevant to other lenses (e.g. economic or legal), enabling community members to adequately integrate these elements into their everyday decision-making processes (Bertram Gallant, 2024; Bretag, 2013). At the same time, these educational initiatives encompass activities that help participants explore how they can understand the ethical implications of their practices and how they can develop practical skills in line with institutional policy. Acting ethically requires ongoing access to decision-making opportunities that develop meta-cognitive skills (i.e. recognise academic integrity knowledge and skills and learning gaps and devise strategies to bridge them) (Bertram Gallant, 2017), leading to developing a "personal academic integrity philosophy" (Sefcik et al., 2020, p. 41).

Similarly, high-impact educational development sheds light on how to deal with disciplinary challenges; for instance, some individuals and groups may require more guidance on collaboration and collusion, while others may need more education on dealing with plagiarism (Sefcik et al., 2020). Hence, generic one-shot tactics focused on information sharing are insufficient, because academic integrity values must be built into practice and take into account disciplinary nuances (Bens, 2022; Birks et al., 2020).

> academic integrity values must be built into practice...

Current research shows the critical role faculty play in crafting cultures of integrity by being role models and helping increase student engagement through intentional course design (Almutairi, 2022; Bretag, 2013; Comas-Formas et al., 2021; Hamilton & Wolsky, 2022). Courses based on active learning pedagogies – such as

problem-based learning, experiential learning, and peer learning – aligned to learning outcomes and assessments that highlight academic integrity values, can help to deter cheating because learning in such environments is a more transformative experience that involves critical collective reflections about academic integrity expectations (Bertram Gallant, 2017). In such courses, academic integrity values are continuously modelled (Kenny & Eaton, 2022).

In contrast, depersonalised teaching and learning can lead to disengagement, which can create conditions which result in cheating behaviours (Birks et al., 2020; Bretag et al., 2018). As educators' choices can have a lasting impact on students, the provision of courses or workshops for instructors (e.g. contingent faculty, teaching assistants, and tenured faculty) should be a priority for upholding cultures of integrity (Brooks, 2024; Eaton, 2021).

Educational opportunities should also aim to promote integrity assessment practices among educators. These practices include deep engagement with students to facilitate comprehension of assessments and their rationale (Bearman & Luckin, 2020; Bertram Gallant, 2017; Mitchell & Parnther, 2018). Assessments also need to be framed by educators, including connections with students' levels of preparation, prior knowledge, and course learning outcomes (Brooks, 2024).

Another practice is integrating academic integrity knowledge and skills in the assessments in order to help students understand expectations (Mitchell & Parnther, 2018). Assessments could be explicit in their focus on writing and academic skills. Educators could also prioritise assessments that engage students in higher-level cognitive tasks, such as evaluative judgement (Dawson, 2020). Most importantly, assessments should be designed to be fair (Kenny & Eaton, 2022); thus, it is recommended that educators acknowledge students' external pressures, maturity levels, and academic integrity skills (Birks et al., 2020; Bretag et al., 2018).

Reflecting on restrictions authentic to the discipline is another point of consideration with regard to fairness. Dawson (2020) poses that when educators set restrictions they should ask themselves, "Does this restriction apply to professionals in the discipline as they complete this task?" (p. 136).

Even when proactive measures to prevent breaches can simultaneously promote academic integrity cultures, cheating cannot be avoided entirely and could occur due to multiple factors; for instance, students perceiving opportunities to cheat in courses, feeling dissatisfied with their course, or identifying inconsistencies in policy application are more prone to such behaviours (Birks et al., 2020; Bretag et al., 2018). For institutions where instructors are involved in addressing academic

misconduct, support and resources must be provided (e.g., handbooks, syllabus templates), especially to contingent staff who might not be familiar with or could feel puzzled by institutional policy and procedures (Birks et al., 2020; Hamilton & Wolsky, 2022).

The exploration of academic integrity understanding in staff members – for example, through educational development opportunities – includes creating space for a diversity of perspectives and offer safe spaces for critical reflection (Mitchell & Parnther, 2018), as well as provide the consistency necessary to ensure that policy is fairly applied on campus (Glendinning, 2017). In some contexts, staff training could also integrate how to deal with teachable moments in which academic misconduct is seen as the starting point for learning (Bertram Gallant, 2017).

Action and Influence of Senior Leaders

Senior leaders can impact institutional culture by creating conditions for improved understanding of institutional academic integrity policy in their communities by ensuring community members have access to it, creating reminders, and helping its implementation. In line with policy, senior leaders can cultivate relational approaches and mechanisms to promote academic integrity, for instance, by fostering a developmental approach that recognises students' prior knowledge of academic integrity when they enter their institutions. Such knowledge could turn into a baseline for future improvement – instead of generating a fear response in the students (Hamilton & Wolsky, 2022).

Consequently, a greater focus on promoting strong relationships between staff and students facilitates preventative measures (Bretag et al., 2018). Leaders can highlight how giving attention to process instead of outcomes fosters academic integrity cultures. It is within teaching and learning processes that more profound dialogues about ethical issues could happen. These dialogues could untangle potential confusion, enhance comprehension of the possible impact of any decision, and build relationships where respect for others is protected (Bens, 2022; Brooks, 2024).

Senior leaders can also analyse how their HEIs might inadvertently condone unethical behaviours or how cultural factors could underlie unethical actions (e.g., extreme emphasis on measurements and individualism). Ethics should be at the core of compliance processes. There is a need for awareness of how inequities and the commodification of education may aggravate deceptive actions, such as contract cheating (Bretag et al., 2018; Thacker & McKenzie, 2022). Preventative strategies such as more personalised teacher–student ratios and high-quality education conceived as a public good can helps students develop workplace and democratic skills (Comas-Formas et

al., 2021; Scarrit, 2024). Similarly, as the demographics of students entering HEI become more diverse, more initiatives are needed to provide a prompt and robust response to unethical behaviour, (Bretag, 2013). Institutions that prioritise academic integrity must put resources in place to support it (Mitchell & Parnther, 2018), and senior leaders are critical, as they have the power to make this a priority.

Leaders should also support research, inquiry, and scholarship in academic integrity that involve individuals and groups both inside and outside HEIs in helping develop more suitable approaches (Glendinning, 2017; Kenny & Eaton, 2022) that challenge, for instance, views of education as "a product to be bought" (Bretag et al., 2018, p. 1838), where the focus of getting a credential is higher than the learning process itself. In other words, leaders not only set the expectation for ethical conduct, they can also be champions of integrity by creating opportunities for others to engage in the work in meaningful and constructive ways.

The work of senior leaders extends beyond institutional boundaries through ongoing engagement with national and international networks that exert influence, and they could help organisational access to administrative and management support, knowledge mobilisation, and collaborative partnerships (Hackett et al., 2024). Learning from others how to engage in academic integrity policy development, and how to effectively detect and deal with academic integrity breaches, contract cheating, or the unethical use of generative AI, can be beneficial. Collaboration across various levels of the HE sector can also promote greater consistency and become a catalyst for strengthening responses that will uphold academic integrity (Mahmud, 2024; Sefcik et al., 2020).

One last recommendation for leaders is to anticipate future trends and issues (as explored in this report and elsewhere). Reactive responses are unhelpful and can leave institutions out of balance, as we have seen with the emergence of generative AI (Dawson, 2020).

Technological Advances and Their Impact on Academic Integrity

This section focuses on technology-facilitated cheating (i.e., e-cheating) in teaching and learning environments, such as contract cheating, file sharing, and the unethical use of digital writing tools (DWT) and generative AI. Specific insights about this kind of cheating are also provided in this section concerning inequality issues and the nuances of proctoring. This section also addresses cheating practices embedded in qualification processes and those related to research settings. A set of specific recommendations is provided for each type of technology-facilitated cheating.

Cheating in Teaching and Learning Settings

Any technology can be used ethically or unethically, or even illegally. For teaching, learning, and assessment, we must address both types of technology use, as misuse of technology often results in breaches of integrity or codes of conduct.

Digital transformation presents new challenges for education, as it can push boundaries of acceptable behaviour. In light of these changes, reflections around the possibility of identifying actual students' individual performance and achievement must be at the centre of dialogues in HEIs to protect the assessment process from deceptive practices that could ultimately hurt the value of certifications (Rogerson, 2024). Some academic integrity breaches associated with HE are contract cheating, file sharing, and the unethical use of generative AI. These are described in more detail below.

Contract Cheating

Contract cheating is a "form of academic misconduct when a person uses an undeclared and/or unauthorised third party, online or directly, to assist them to produce work for academic credit or progression, whether or not payment or other favour is involved" (National Academic Integrity Network, 2021, p. 14). Estimations based on self-report studies suggest that 6–16 % of HE students might be involved in contract cheating (Bretag et al., 2018; Comas-Formas et al., 2021). The combination of market logic, transactional approaches to learning and the ease of exchanging goods and services has led to the emergence of contract cheating (Bretag et al., 2018). Forms of contract cheating include non-commercial, which does not involve a monetary exchange and includes unallowed support from friends and family members, and commercial, which occurs after a monetary payment or an equivalent. Although the notion of paying someone to do an assignment or taking on an assignment for someone else is not new, the expansion of e-commerce has enabled the growth of a business that facilitates connecting customers and contractors, for instance, through micro-outsourcing sites. Contractors include "business opportunists, internationally qualified academic ghost writers, career academic ghost writers and previous graduates" (Lancaster, 2019, p. 83). Contract cheating services go beyond writing essays and can include taking quizzes and examinations as well (Birks et al., 2020)

Commercial contract cheating interactions are framed by two main models: the request and gig models. While the former is initiated with a customer request and providers compete for service provision, the latter model starts with the customer placing an order to a specific provider who can either accept or decline. Some salient aspects of contract-cheating providers are that they have a strong online presence in the form of essay mills or outsourcing sites, the costs of the services have progressively reduced, their products are marketed to bypass text-matching software, and they incite cheating with promises of originality and confidentiality (Birks et al., 2020; Comas-Formas et al., 2021; Lancaster, 2019, 2020).

Specific recommendations for addressing contract cheating include:

- Help increase awareness in educational communities about the risks of contract cheating (e.g., scams and blackmail) and the mechanisms contract cheating companies use to reach students (e.g. social media algorithms) (Birks et al., 2020; Lancaster, 2019)
- Include contract cheating explicitly in institutional academic integrity policies and procedures (Stoesz & Eaton, 2020; Stoesz et al., 2019)
- Promote assessment designs that ensure external writers' incapability of attaining passing scores (Curtis & Clare, 2017) while avoiding putting unnecessary pressure on students (Gray, 2022)
- Offer guidance to staff members for identifying and addressing potential contract cheating (Gray, 2022; Morris, 2018; Yorke et al., 2021). International experts share their knowledge of contract cheating through webinars, podcasts, masterclasses, and ongoing educational development opportunities, and these can provide staff members with avenues to learn how to detect contract cheating, manage breaches, and inform students about the risks of engaging with it (Birks et al., 2020; Hackett et al., 2024; Morris, 2018)
- Leverage inter-institutional collaboration to support new legislation that could make contract cheating services illegal (Draper & Newton, 2017; Newton & Lang, 2016; Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, 2020)

File Sharing

The act of swapping files to gain an unfair advantage while "[avoiding] a learning exercise" (Rogerson, 2024, p. 788) has also grown in sophistication with internet developments. Nowadays, there is a massive commercial industry that promotes the exchange of academic work, asking students to trade their work in exchange for access to files, where they pay a fee for downloading access or submit files in exchange for compensation (Eaton, 2021; Rogerson & Basanta, 2016). The file-sharing administrators present these spaces as help for students, but in reality they enable academic misconduct. Furthermore, some files placed on these sites might not have been submitted by their authors, but by third parties without their authors' consent (Rogerson, 2024). Hence, they have been called the "business of crowdsourced plagiarism" (Dixon & George, 2021, p. 292). To address this, experts have called for the need to devise mechanisms (e.g. a custom search engine) to identify "compromised academic material" (Dixon & George, 2021, p. 300) posted on file-sharing sites, and for the reviewing of student work in detail to alert staff to the presence of bibliographic mash-ups (Rogerson, 2024).

Specific recommendations for addressing file sharing include:

- Ensure students have access to information about file sharing and staff support to learn about the sites they should avoid in the interest of learning with integrity (Roberts, 2024)
- Sustain efforts to constantly update and adjust assessments (e.g. make them personalised) so these are not vulnerable to being recycled and shared online (Birks et al., 2020; Dawson, 2020)

Unethical Use of Digital Writing Tools (DWT)

Cheating with DWT involves using such tools when they are not allowed or for plagiarism purposes. DWT is a broad category encompassing machine translation, digital writing assistants, and automated paraphrasing tools. Machine translation emerges from developments with neural-machine translation models that have eased the processes of transforming text into different languages with higher accuracy levels, not only bringing benefits like offering ways to express ideas or clarify understanding but also opening new doors to translation plagiarism (Roe et al., 2023). Digital writing assistants were designed to help students write by offering suggestions on structure, length, and tone. They can help develop language ability, but at the same time they demand attention, as they could potentially mask actual performance (Roe et al., 2023). Automated paraphrasing tools use techniques such as synonym substitution to provide alternative versions of texts;

however, they can also be used to circumvent text-matching software (Birks et al., 2020).

A specific recommendation for addressing the unethical use of DWT:

- These tools can provide learning opportunities and promote equity; thus, banning them is not a viable option; instead, focus on educating students on allowable uses of such technology that do not impact the achievement of learning outcomes or fall into textual or translation plagiarism.

Unethical Use of Generative AI

Large language models, such as ChatGPT, are capable of generating content that resembles what humans can produce.[1] One significant issue with these technologies is that their use can be untraceable, as the compositions of chatbots bypass text-matching software detection or are not consistently recognised as such by human raters. Most importantly, these technologies are now ubiquitous, and measures to prevent their use can be circumvented (e.g. a student with a data plan will have access to a chatbot even campus Wi-Fi is disabled). For this reason, educators worldwide are concerned about the potential of generative AI to mask individual attainment. A related issue is the potential overreliance on such technology, which might impact students' cognitive, comprehension, explanatory, and writing skills development (Merine & Purkayastha, 2022).

Specific recommendations for addressing the unethical use of generative AI:

- Promote examinations on how generative AI systems operate, informing explorations of this technology through an ethics lens and involving students in the process of identifying generative AI's potential for creating biased language, fake content generation, and faulty decision-making (Anson, 2022; Dignum, 2021; Fyfe, 2022; Merine & Purkayastha, 2022)
- Foster a shift from information recall to developing students' capacities to make evaluative judgements about the quality of their performances and those of others (Bearman & Luckin, 2020)
- Learn how to recognise its ethical uses. Generative AI could help create inclusive teaching and learning environments, with people increasingly using generative AI applications for receiving immediate feedback (Bearman & Luckin, 2020), and provide support as an assistive technology

[1]See Pratschke (2024) and Whittle & Ranson (2024), also in the National Digital Leadership Network report series, for further exploration of the use of AI in higher education.

to people with communication disabilities (Dignum, 2021; Hemsley et al., 2023). Likewise, the progressive inclusion of generative AI in the labour market, with its capacity to perform specific tasks more efficiently than humans coalescing with the insight into areas where generative AI cannot substitute humans, could call for reconsidering curriculum and assessment in undergraduate programmes (Bearman & Luckin, 2020)

Cheating In Teaching and Learning Spaces

Academic integrity scholars highlight two critical concerns: inequalities in cheating practices and e-proctoring implementation challenges. Deceptive practices, including contract cheating, file sharing, and unethical use of generative AI "[introduce] dimensions of inequality" (Comas-Forgas et al., 2021, p. 1044). These inequalities manifest between students completing work independently versus those receiving unauthorised assistance, and between those who can and cannot afford such services (Roe et al., 2023). As Dawson (2020) notes, "e-cheating can be bought with a credit card" (p. 6). The digitalisation of academic misconduct creates new forms of educational inequality, as access to cheating services becomes a matter of financial means rather than just opportunity.

> The digitalisation of academic misconduct creates new forms of educational inequality

Although e-proctoring technologies offer solutions for academic integrity, their implementation must take into account institutional values, student privacy concerns, and learner well-being. Institutions must carefully consider how – if at all – to use e-proctoring services, whether through remote proctored exams or AI-supported recordings with or without human oversight. Henry & Oliver (2021) emphasise that outsourced proctoring should align with institutional values and ensure equitable student treatment. Students unwilling to be recorded during online assessments due to privacy concerns should have alternative options, such as in-person testing (Dyer, 2024). Recent cases of student distress as a result of proctoring technology interactions underscore the need to balance academic integrity protection with student well-being.

Cheating in Qualification Processes

Fake Degrees

Fake degrees are degrees from universities that do not exist; hence, this type of misconduct encompasses embezzlement and forgery facilitated by digital platforms.

While most references addressing this issue have emerged in the United States and in connection to HE, it is recognised as a global issue that crosses various educational levels. Fake degrees are provided by degree mills, a commercial industry which sells fake and fraudulent academic credential documents (Eaton & Carmichael, 2023a). Important arguments for giving more attention to fake degrees are that, unlike other kinds of misconduct (e.g. plagiarism due to a lack of academic skills), it is unlikely that it happens due to a lack of knowledge. Moreover, estimations show that the industry behind it has expanded in the last decade (Eaton & Carmichael, 2023a, 2023b).

Specific recommendations for addressing fake degrees include:

- Create robust systems for verification of applicants' credentials – including students and faculty seeking tenure track roles. Some technologies, such as blockchain, show promise in their capacity to verify the legitimacy and authenticity of a diploma or certificate quickly and in inexpensive ways (Castro & Au-Yong-Oliveira, 2021; Carmichael & Eaton, 2023; Eaton & Carmichael, 2023b)
- Produce internal risk assessment plans to effectively address potential cases and carry out internal audits (e.g. programme and curriculum review) (Carmichael & Eaton, 2023; Eaton & Carmichael, 2023b)

Falsification/Forgery/Counterfeiting

This type of misconduct (or crime) is not new, although AI presents new opportunities to fraudsters to use technology for illicit purposes. In HE, a contested topic since 2022 has been the use of AI to write recommendation letters, essays, personal statements, and other documents required for university admissions and scholarships (Coffey, 2024; Nolan, 2023; Satov, 2024; Whitford, 2022). Globally, the higher education sector has yet to settle the question of whether it is considered fraud for students to use AI apps to help them prepare applications for admission or scholarships.

As scholars have noted, wealthy students and their families have long had access to tutors and coaches who can assist with the preparation of applications; AI apps may help to level the playing field for those with less financial privilege (Satov, 2024; Whitford, 2022). In this sense, AI apps can be viewed as "a pauper's tutor" for those who cannot afford private tutoring services.

Because of these equity issues, the use of AI should not immediately be declared misconduct; however, clear guidance is needed for applicants and their families about how AI apps can ethically be used to apply for admissions and scholarships to HE institutions. Guidance is also needed for those who adjudicate applications in order to help

stabilise heated debates among committee members whose individual opinions may differ on whether or how the use of AI should be permitted for such purposes. Such guidance should be nationally consistent and transparently communicated in plain language so as to avoid confusion or ambiguity.

A specific recommendation for addressing falsification, forgery, and counterfeit:

- Establish national-level guidelines on (1) applicants' use of AI for admissions and scholarship applications; (2) adjudicator decision-making in cases when they believe AI has been used in the preparation of applications

Global Trends in Academic Integrity: Best Practices and Opportunities

This section addresses current trends in the academic integrity field, such as including students as partners (SaP), equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and decolonisation (EDIAD); legislation; and the professionalisation of the field. We focus on aspects of academic integrity that have begun and are likely to persist but have yet to fully develop.

Sap in Academic Integrity

There has been an increasing call to include SaP in academic integrity initiatives across HE. This partnership approach advocates for student involvement in all aspects of academic integrity, including policy and procedure development, representation on hearing and appeal boards, development and delivery of educational programmes, and advocacy efforts (Bretag, 2019c; Lancaster, 2022; Moya et al., 2023).

The integration of SaP in policy development, implementation, and governance structures demonstrates institutional commitment to amplifying student voices and recognising their role as future scholars and professionals. Student participation can be facilitated through embedded peer mentoring systems with senior students and clear resource provision outlining roles and expectations. Students' engagement would extend to developing and sharing academic integrity resources with their peers (Mitchell & Parnther, 2018). Institutions must establish robust safeguards to protect students participating in academic integrity boards or serving in ombudsperson roles (Pavletić & Hammerbauer, 2022).

This evolving approach to academic integrity governance represents a significant shift from traditional top-down models to more collaborative frameworks. When properly implemented, student partnerships can enhance policy effectiveness, increase buy-in from the student body, and create more sustainable integrity cultures. These student–faculty partnerships also provide valuable leadership development opportunities for participating students while ensuring policies and procedures remain relevant to the current student experience. (NB: In this report, we have intentionally led by example by including a PhD student, Moya, as a co-author.)

When properly implemented, student partnerships can enhance policy effectiveness

Students are a heterogeneous group with multiple identities, experiences, and needs; as such, there is no singular approach to academic integrity that is effective for everyone. This leads us to consider the topic of EDIAD, which we address next.

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Accessibility, and Decolonisation

It is essential to consider questions of equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility and decolonisation (EDIAD) when we talk about academic integrity. This view is shared by the N-TUTORR programme, which already regards equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility as key principles. When it comes to addressing academic misconduct, students have historically been addressed as a homogeneous body, with policies and procedures applied uniformly in the name of fairness and justice.

The topic of international students and English language learners has been discussed at length in the plagiarism and academic integrity literature (e.g. Curtis & Popal, 2011; Leask, 2006; Maxwell et al., 2008). The term "international student" is often used as a proxy to describe students who cheat, who are not white, and who speak English as an additional language (Eaton & Burns, 2018). Research from Australia and the United States has shown that domestic students and international students cheat at about the same rates, but that international students are reported more often and punished more harshly, particularly if they are persons of colour and/or do not speak English as a first language (Bretag et al., 2018; Beasley, 2016). In other words, there can be a difference between who engages in academic misconduct and who gets reported for it, and individuals from certain socio-demographic groups may be over-represented in academic integrity violations data.

It is important for HEIs to build and maintain mechanisms to accurately track socio-demographic data with regard to student misconduct. However, such tracking must be implemented with caution. The goal is not to engage in profiling or hyper-surveillance of students from particular backgrounds, but rather to ensure that possible over-representation of certain demographics among individuals being punished is being addressed while simultaneously providing additional support for at-risk students to help them achieve academic success.

In recent years, the dialogue around academic integrity has broadened to include other categories of equity-deserving students (Bertram Gallant et al., 2015; Bretag, 2019a; Eaton, 2022). In particular, more attention is being paid to neurodivergent (ND) students and those with disabilities, including learning disabilities or differences (LD). There is a paucity of empirical research on the impact of disability or neurodivergence on academic misconduct. Given the overlap between AI and academic misconduct, it is important to recognise that AI apps can have built-in bias that mirrors and perpetuates

biases that exist in society (McDermott, 2024; Gegg-Harrison & Quarterman, 2024). One small-scale study in the United States showed that when so-called AI-generated text detection tools were used to analyse material written by autistic individuals, the tools generated a high-rate of false positives (Gegg-Harrison & Quarterman, 2024). There is currently insufficient research to know exactly how AI might impact ND students or students with LD; however, advocates are urging us to think about how AI can be used to support accessibility, inclusion, and universal design for learning (McDermott, 2024; Noori, 2024).

Decolonisation has also become an important aspect of academic integrity work, in particular the need to disrupt and dismantle harmful practices that have their roots in colonial education practices (Eaton, 2024b; Gladue & Poitras Pratt, 2024; Lindstrom, 2022; Poitras Pratt & Gladue, 2022). Reconsideration of Eurocentric perspectives on academic integrity and inclusion of other ways of knowing (i.e. Indigenous) is also recommended (Poitras Pratt & Gladue, 2022). Academic integrity scholars are actively calling for academic integrity to be decolonised and conceived from a lens embracing multiple perspectives (Eaton, 2024b; Poitras Pratt & Gladue, 2022). For example, using a restorative approach for addressing academic and non-academic misconduct based on principles of inclusive decision-making, active accountability, repairing harm, and rebuilding trust has become a sustainable alternative to a quasi-judicial procedure derived from a quasi-legal policy. Most importantly, the restorative approach shows promise in helping students develop ethical decision-making skills when integrity has been breached (Sopcak & Hood, 2022).

Academic integrity scholars are actively calling for academic integrity to be decolonised

Intersectionality and Academic Integrity

It is important to recognise that intersectionality plays a role in the conversation about academic integrity. Intersectionality is the interaction of different social locations such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, disability/ability, sexuality, age, geography, Indigeneity, migration status, and religion. Intersectionality occurs within a framework of interconnected systems and power structures, such as laws, policies, state governments, political and economic alliances, religious organisations, and the media (Hankivsky, 2014, p. 2).

A student may have multiple and intersecting identities and experiences that compound their risk of academic failure and simultaneously increase the risk that they will commit an act of academic impropriety or misconduct.

Nothing About us Without us: Inclusion as Integrity

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to academic integrity. It is essential to resist discrimination against students of minority demographics and to disrupt myths that students from particular backgrounds are lesser than their peers in some way. An inclusive approach means "proactively making HE accessible, relevant and engaging to all students" (Thomas & May, 2010, p. 5).

Academic integrity experts are calling for more equitable and inclusive approaches to academic integrity that recognise the needs and abilities of individual learners (Davis, 2024; Eaton, 2022; Gagné, 2024; McDermott, 2024). An inclusive approach to academic integrity does not mean excusing infractions; rather, it means that we make every effort to communicate expectations clearly, hold everyone in the learning ecosystem to high standards of quality, and provide ongoing opportunities to learn while maintaining the integrity of the credentials we award.

The principle of "nothing about us without us" originated as a call to action for disability justice (Charlton, 1998) and has evolved into a clarion cry for social justice and inclusion broadly. With respect to academic integrity, this means that those persons impacted by policy and procedure should have a say in the development and application of those policies and procedures. In addition, training for academic professionals and leaders should include, at the very least, implicit bias training, anti-racism, and disability justice training.

Professionalisation of the Academic Integrity Field

To date, there has been limited training for those working in the academic integrity field (e.g. there are no known graduate programmes or continuing professional development certifications). One exception is Epigeum's online training modules for students and staff (Epigeum, n.d.), which is a commercial product developed for a global audience. In addition, globally, there is inconsistency in job titles, responsibilities, and salaries among those who work in academic integrity (Vogt & Eaton, 2022).

However, since about 2020, there has been an increasing number of informal professional learning opportunities for those working in academic integrity, such as webinar series and informal workshops, including those offered by NAIN and ENAI. This points to a nascent professionalisation of the field, but one in which training programmes to become an academic integrity professional have yet to be developed.

For the field to develop, institutions must implement high-quality training for staff and administrators, resulting in a recognised qualification to work as an academic integrity professional or administrator.

Legislation and Policy

Historically, academic integrity policy has its foundations in principles of administrative law, taking a crime and punishment approach: individuals must be held responsible for their decisions and behaviour.

Increasingly, whistle-blowing is an important mechanism for individuals to report corruption, fraud, and misconduct in science and education. Establishing processes and protections for whistle-blowers can help to ensure the overall integrity of education, science, and the professions (Carrion & Bramstedt, 2024; European Network of Research Integrity Offices, 2023; Nolte et al., 2024). Europe is leading the way globally with regard to whistle-blowing for research integrity (European Network of Research Integrity Offices, 2023), and some of the principles and practices can be easily transferred to academic integrity. Two important documents that can inform academic integrity policy are the UN Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 2021) and the related UN Convention of the Rights of Persons With Disabilities (United Nations, 2006). HE institutions should develop policies and procedures for responding to whistle-blowing, which include protections for those who make legitimate reports of corruption, fraud, and misconduct.

Future Outlook and Potential Impact

Technology is developing at a rate faster than many educators can keep up with. Advanced technologies will continue to challenge our understanding of what it means to teach, learn, and assess ethically. These are complex questions that are unlikely to be solved quickly, but there is an urgency to provide just-in-time actionable guidance that educators and leaders can implement in their daily professional practice.

As nations in Europe and beyond grapple with AI ethics and legislation, educators and administrators must contend with how or if such advanced technologies have a place in teaching and learning. Ireland has been recognised as a leader in AI ethics and in particular for its progressive approach to equity and gender inclusion in higher education (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, 2021; UNESCO, 2024). Currently, Ireland is one of the most progressive countries in the world in terms of responsible, transparent, and ethical AI (UNESCO, 2024).

Long-Term Implications for HEIs

With some exceptions, the majority of children who started school in 2022 will never know a world where AI did not influence their learning either directly or indirectly. Young people who graduated from secondary school in 2023 will be the first generation of university students and professionals with easy and often free access to AI tools.

The rapid advancement of AI and emerging technologies such as neurotechnology and brain–computer interfaces (BCI) presents unprecedented challenges but also opportunities for academic integrity in HE (Eaton, 2023; UNESCO et al., 2023). UNESCO (UNESCO et al., 2023) has signalled that neurotechnology presents the next big ethical challenge for education, and for society as a whole, as direct-to-consumer products become more readily available.

Although AI tools can potentially enable new forms of academic misconduct, they also offer innovative solutions for authentic learning experiences, universal design for learning, and more equitable approaches to education for all students. As technology continues to develop, a key challenge for institutions and educators is to resist the temptation to view technological developments as an automatic threat to integrity and instead look for ways to incorporate tools and applications in ways that help students bring their best selves to school, to work, and to the world.

Recommendations and Conclusion

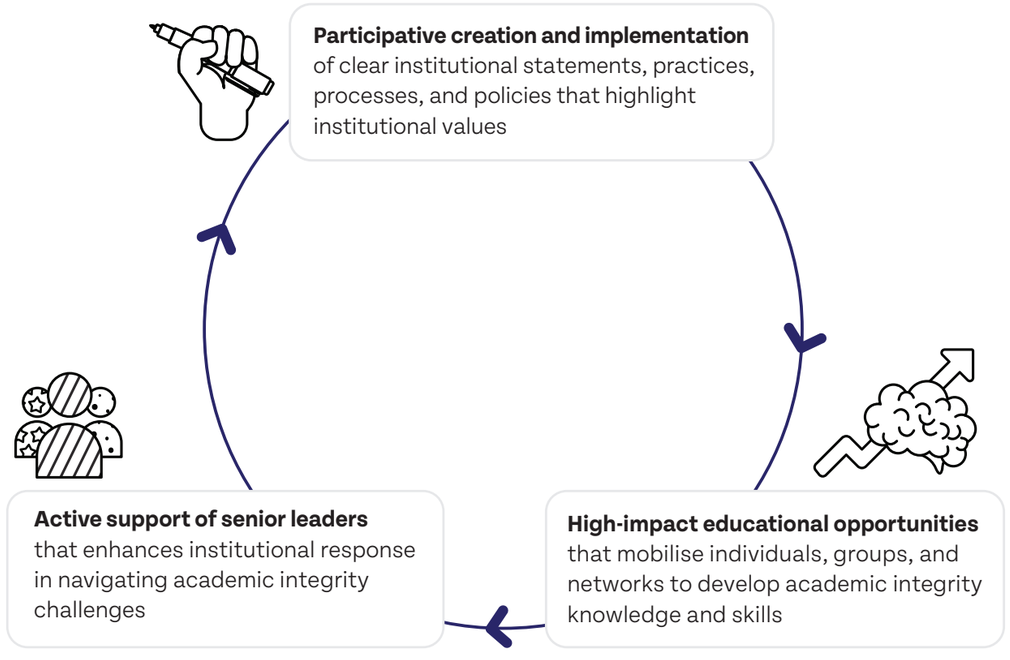
In this section, we provide recommendations based on the report findings for guiding future actions for HE, and Irish technological HEIs in particular. Addressing academic integrity issues effectively should be recognised as a complex endeavour where clear-cut and quick solutions have no place.

Recommendations

To make the recommendations clear and actionable, they are summarised in a dedicated final section. This approach ensures decision-makers can quickly access key suggestions and plan for effective implementation. The recommendations are divided into two parts.

- The first outlines foundational strategies for fostering cultures of academic integrity (see Figure 1 and Section 3, “Upholding academic integrity cultures in HE”, for details).

Figure 1: Foundational elements for upholding academic integrity cultures



- The second focuses on actions to address the challenges posed by new technologies and emerging trends (see Figure 2 and Sections 4, “Technological advances”, and 5, “Global trends”, for more information).

Figure 2: Key recommendations to address the impacts of technology and global trends

Emerging technologies demand a balanced approach from HEIs. While these technologies could bring with them new ways of cheating, they could also make learning spaces more accessible. Thus, the means chosen to address their risks should never be at odds with community members’ well-being.

Students from diverse backgrounds should be included in all aspects of academic integrity, including: policy development and reform; development and delivery of academic integrity training; and opportunities to lead and be involved with advocacy efforts.

High-quality training for staff and administrators should be developed, which should result in a recognized qualification to work as an academic integrity professional or administrator.

HEIs should develop policies and procedures for responding to whistle-blowing which include protections for those who make legitimate reports of corruption, fraud, and misconduct.

Conclusion and Calls to Action

The landscape of academic integrity challenges continues to evolve, demanding pro-active and coordinated responses from all members of the academic community. By implementing the recommendations outlined in this report, HEIs can work to preserve the value of educational credentials while adapting to emerging challenges. To uphold academic integrity will require sustained commitment, resource allocation, and col-laboration across institutional boundaries to protect the credibility and value of HE for future generations.

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ISBN 978-1-0683806-8-6