

Introduction

Purpose of the guide:

All One Awards recognised Access to HE providers must have clear procedures for maintaining academic integrity in each diploma which they offer. The purpose of this document is to give guidance on how each provider's assessment practice can meet

- the criteria for academic integrity set down by QAA and One Awards and
- the needs of the diverse range of students studying on Access to HE Diploma courses

For some time plagiarism has been the focus of much discussion and debate by assessors and moderators. Plagiarism was generally considered something which students did, despite the best efforts of assessors. However, recently the focus has changed to a wider perspective in which all those involved in learning, teaching, assessing, moderating and management have a role to play. This wider perspective comes under the heading of academic integrity and everyone has a role in ensuring that the opportunities for infringement are minimised and practice is improved.

Benefits:

It is intended to:

- provide guidance on maintaining academic integrity
- enable all those involved to have standard terms of reference
- develop a common understanding of the requirements to encourage good practice
- support a standardised approach to maintaining academic integrity, within and between providers.
- encourage academic integrity which not only adheres to QAA and One Awards requirements, but also meets the needs of students
- provide the information and guidance which assessors need to develop their assessment strategies.
- provide the means by which assessors and course teams can put together a comprehensive, valid and reliable set of assessments.

Intended audience:

- Centre staff responsible for quality assurance of the Diploma
- Assessors.
- Internal Moderators.
- Diploma Moderators.

The QAA Access to HE Diploma (The Diploma) Guide to maintaining academic integrity in assessment



Mapping to QAA and other One Awards documents:

- QAA Grading Scheme Handbook, Section E.
- One Awards Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the QAA Access to HE Diploma.

A useful definition of academic integrity is:

A concept which brings together ways in which academic standards are maintained through reducing the opportunities for cheating or plagiarism and encouraging the highest standards of honesty and rigour in academic work.

The different perspectives:

Students typically find it a real challenge to understand the principles and rules of assignment writing and referencing. They are frequently under time pressure to complete assignments by the hand-in date. They may feel that the assessor does not set a good example, frequently using material in class or on handouts which is not referenced to source and that there is a lack of consistency in the approach by different assessors particularly new, possibly inexperienced, assessors who have been appointed after the start of the unit. They may feel that there is insufficient support, both academic and personal.

Many though, do find that the support and guidance they receive, including that from support staff e.g. librarians, helps them enormously. They see the benefit of study skills, including note taking and essay and report writing.

Assessors often find it a challenge to write assignment tasks which are in context, rather than just repeating the assessment criteria in question form. They may not ask questions which reflect the demands of the assessment criteria e.g. “explain” becomes “describe”, which may encourage students to copy and paste from the internet. Frequently staff do not appreciate that assessment criteria can be contextualised. They may be under the impression that because they have apparently addressed the topic of academic integrity with students there is then no excuse for its infringement

Internal moderators may not have the confidence or authority to challenge suspected cases. They may not recognise a standard policy across all units in the diploma, resulting in an inconsistent application of acknowledging sources.

However, attendance at One Awards standardisation and training events, the use of on-line resources and internal staff development activities enable assessors and moderators to explore these challenges and to develop the skills, knowledge and practice to maintain academic integrity.

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Where does the main responsibility lie on an Access to HE Diploma?

Is it with students, assessors, moderators or managers?

Students

- Access to HE students come from a wide range of educational and cultural backgrounds
- many have experienced an educational system which has not allowed them to achieve their potential
- many are uncertain and lacking in confidence about what they can achieve.
- typically an Access course lasts for one year with the first level 3 assignments handed in by late October
- they have little time to adapt to the new challenges of assessment.

Assessors, moderators and managers on the other hand can significantly influence the understanding students have of the QAA grading model, the assessment schedule and timetable, assessment methods, the content and demands of assignment briefs, the processes involved in making assessment judgements, the management of resubmissions and representations, internal moderation and the availability and quality of academic and personal support for students. All of these areas play a part in creating an environment in which the likelihood of breaches of academic integrity are minimised.

There would appear, therefore, to be a strong argument that the maintenance of academic integrity lies largely with the educational professionals, rather than with the student. The students do certainly have a role to play and a responsibility, but they are not the drivers, they are the recipients who are learning how to maintain the academic integrity of their work in Higher Education.

What should students understand by the term academic integrity?

It is important that providers clarify their view of what is expected and what is not acceptable. Ways can then be devised in which students are given a basic understanding of the concept and practical guidance on their role in the maintenance of academic integrity.

How do we think that the design of the assessment strategy and assignment briefs have an impact?

For an Access to HE Diploma programme, while students should be aware of how they can take responsibility for upholding academic integrity, assessors, moderators and managers should ensure that assignment design reduces as far as possible the opportunities for infringement of academic integrity. The principle of removing the temptation should apply, not providing the opportunity to transgress and then criticising and applying penalties when it is taken.

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It is therefore important to take the following into account.

- the assessment calendar – the timing of assignments across each diploma, not just in individual units.
- the assessment strategy – the assessment methods used and the rationale behind their selection.
- the assignment brief –
 - a) the tasks clearly linked to the achievement of the assessment criteria
 - b) the wording of the tasks placing them in an appropriate context
 - c) the word count being appropriate for the evidence required to meet the assessment criteria
 - d) contextualisation of the grade descriptors with clear and unambiguous guidance on how they will be judged
 - e) the time between hand out and hand in.

Examples:

A number of scenarios follow which are designed to provoke discussion and debate, but which ultimately will help you decide how you might write a policy on maintaining academic integrity in your organisation.

Questions to consider:

- which of the following activities breaches academic integrity and why?
- which of the following activities do not breach academic integrity?
- where does the responsibility lie, if academic integrity is compromised?
- what action could be taken in cases where academic integrity is compromised to reduce the chance of it happening again?
- to what extent does the timing of the infringement during the course influence your actions?

For the first scenario possible issues and actions have been suggested, *in italics*.

1. It is a student's first graded assignment. The tasks in the assignment brief are straight forward questions with little context. A student copies a paragraph word for word from a book without acknowledging the source and hands it in as part of an assignment. They cannot hand in the completed assignment unless they sign the authenticity declaration confirming it is all their own work and that they have acknowledged sources appropriately, this they do.

Issues

- *It is an infringement of academic integrity i.e. Plagiarism*
- *The tasks are straight questions so are easily inserted into a search engine for an internet search.*
- *They feel that they have actively researched to topic and that they could not have expressed the information any more accurately or concisely.*
- *They sign the authenticity statement because they have to and they may have little idea of its significance.*
- *It is the students first graded assignment so they may have no previous practical experience of the assessment process in operation.*

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Actions

- Review the wording of the tasks and the process of internal moderation
 - Review the assessment calendar.
 - Review the process by which students are prepared for their first assignments, particularly with regard to referencing sources and the implications of signing the authenticity statement.
 - Review the demands for referencing in the first assignment.
 - Consider whether the student is required to resubmit the assignment in their own words, without penalty, as a first infringement of academic integrity, or resubmit with the normal rules applied. In the case of a graded assignment there should be no potential for grade polishing. The resubmission, in either case, should just be of the material originally used.
2. In preparation for an assignment the assessor introduces students to a range of different opinions on the topic in question. The material provided is referenced to source and the students practice in groups, debating one view against another. They also have the opportunity to evaluate the sources having been provided with the bibliographical details and some background on the authors. A student incorporates into their assignment several ideas from well-known experts in the field which they had researched themselves. They explain the significance of these ideas and the relevance to the assignment task, which itself is contextualised into a scenario which is relevant to the unit. The sources are listed in the bibliography. They sign the authenticity declaration confirming it is all their own work and that they have acknowledged sources appropriately.
3. A student submits an assignment in which about 50% of the assignment is composed of direct quotes which the student acknowledges, giving the sources in the assignment and including them in the bibliography. They relate the quotes to the task with their own explanation and justification for their inclusion.

Question: Might your response be different if it was an English Literature assignment and not a Human Biology one for example?

4. In a science unit a student copies and pastes a diagram from the internet into their assignment. They acknowledge the source in the assignment and include it in the bibliography. They sign the authenticity declaration confirming it is all their own work and that they have acknowledged sources appropriately.

Question: Might your response be different if the diagram is used to enhance the explanation, being only used as a summary of information and a focus for the student's own analysis or evaluation?

5. In an assignment a student repeatedly copies and pastes sections of text, which are presented as "paragraphs", each of which is separately referenced to its source. The sources are listed in the bibliography. The arrangement of the "paragraphs" is logical and appropriate to the task. The content is relevant to the task and addresses the assessment criteria. The student has demonstrated skill in selecting the correct information and presenting it in such a way that the tasks are addressed. The sources have been acknowledged. They sign the authenticity declaration confirming it is their own work and that they have acknowledged sources appropriately.

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6. The diploma team have been involved in writing the diploma assessment strategy (AP1), and developing the diploma assessment plan (AP1) and assessment timetable. They have been careful to include a range of appropriate assessment methods and avoided the bunching together of assignment hand in dates. They have recognised that the student is involved with the whole diploma and not just with individual units. The documents are robustly internally moderated and some issues have been accepted and immediately actioned. A similar process is completed for the unit assessment plans (AP4s) and for the assignment briefs (AP3s).

A new member of the course team is inducted into the QAA quality model and views the online One Awards resources. They are allocated a mentor with current experience of the QAA and AVA requirements, who supports them in their new role.

The students have a comprehensive programme of learning about study skills techniques and the principles and rules of upholding academic integrity. They are thoroughly prepared for the assignments with class activities mirroring, but not copying, the tasks which they have to complete. They have the opportunity through a software package to check their work for plagiarism before finally submitting it for marking.

A student uses a search engine during research to find information on the internet. They then copy the text, but make small changes by replacing a few words and changing the order of words in sentences. The source is included in the bibliography. They sign the authenticity declaration confirming it is all their own work and that they have acknowledged sources appropriately.

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