

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
 QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE
ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT UPDATE (2022/23)

1. PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

This paper will provide members of the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) with an update on academic misconduct cases across the University.

This paper contains detailed data on academic misconduct cases (*Appendix A refers*) received prior to and during the 2022/23 academic year, in addition to an analysis of emerging trends.

Members of the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) are asked to **discuss** the paper.

2. PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY /FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED

	Board/Committee	Date
Previously considered/approved by		
Further consideration/ approval required by	Quality Assurance Committee	13 Dec 2023
	University Education Committee	16 Jan 2024

3. RECOMMENDED ACTION

The **Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) / University Education Committee (UEC)** is invited to **discuss** the paper, in particular the data outlined in *Appendix A*.

4. OVERVIEW

- 4.1 The University has in place a [Code of Practice on Student Discipline \(Academic\)](#) (hereafter referred to as ‘the Code’) which defines categories of disciplinary offences and sets out the procedures to be followed in instances of academic misconduct.
- 4.2 The Code is regularly reviewed as any issues with the current Code are identified, such as the need for new categories of academic misconduct, for example, and in line with recent developments in academic integrity, with the most recent version approved in June 2023 to take account of the prevalence of artificial intelligence. The version used in 2022/23 was approved by the University Court in June 2022, with its use starting in 2022/23. A revised version of the Code, incorporating the use of artificial intelligence tools as a form of plagiarism, will be used for new cases relating to the 2023/24 academic year.

5. ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT**5.1 DATA AND TRENDS**

- 5.1.1 *Appendix A* provides a detailed analysis of academic misconduct cases since 2016/17. *Tables 1.1 and 1.2* below provide high level summary information on academic misconduct cases. Table 1.1 details the total cases of academic misconduct (and shown as a % of the total student population headcount), and Table 1.2 provides a summary by type of case (including the percentage increase or decrease on the previous year).

Table 1.1:

Academic Misconduct Cases by Academic Year							
	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17
Total	288	409	210	166	136	77	76
% of Population Headcount	1.28%	1.82%	1.01%	0.87%	0.77%	0.48%	0.49%

Table 1.2:

Academic Misconduct Cases by Type of Misconduct													
	2022/23	% + or - ¹	2021/22	% + or -	2020/21	% + or -	2019/20	% + or -	2018/19	% + or -	2017/18	% + or -	2016/17
Plagiarism	223	-37	356	90	187	27	147	48	99	80	55	-21	70
Collusion	42	-7	45	137	19	111	9	-40	15	275	4	400	0
Cheating	11	450	2	n/a	0	-100	6	-71	21	17	18	200	6
Contract Cheating	12	100	6	200	2	-33	3	100	1	0	n/a	0	n/a
Ethics	0	n/a	0	-100	2	100	1	100	0	0	0	0	0

5.1.2 The total number of academic misconduct cases has decreased in academic year 2022/23 from those received in academic year 2021/22, however, cases are higher than was seen in the period up to 2020/21. However, the percentage of the student population with academic misconduct cases is low (1.28%).

5.1.3 The following specific trends are also noted:

- In any year, the majority of cases of academic misconduct relate to plagiarism. Since 2018/19, there has been a rise in the number of cases of plagiarism, with the steepest rise in 2021/22 (increase by 90% based on 2020/21). Though, this figure has fallen by 37% in 2022/23 to 223 cases. While the number of cases in 2022/23 has decreased, the numbers remain high, and are increased upon previous years (excluding 2021/22).
- Cases of contract cheating, whilst still relatively small in number, have doubled between 2021/22 and 2022/23.
- Cases of cheating (as defined in Section 3.5 of the [Code of Practice on Student Discipline \(Academic\)](#)) have also risen to 11 cases, whereas in the preceding year, there were 2 cases. This can largely be attributed to the return to on-campus exams following the Covid-19 pandemic.

5.1.4 Table 2 below shows the number of cases split by domicile group as a UK, EU or International Student. The figure in brackets is the percentage against population headcount for that domicile group.

Table 2

Academic Misconduct Cases by Domicile							
Domicile Group	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17
UK	68 (0.49%)	87 (0.62%)	54 (0.41%)	27 (0.24%)	36 (0.34%)	29 (0.29%)	29 (0.3%)
EU	12 (0.71%)	37 (1.68%)	22 (0.79%)	15 (0.48%)	27 (0.8%)	15 (0.45%)	20 (0.65%)
Inter	208 (3.07%)	285 (4.58%)	134 (2.81%)	124 (2.74%)	73 (1.9%)	33 (1.11%)	27 (1.07%)

5.1.5 Most significantly, Table 2 shows, that while the number of cases for international students has fallen, it remains high and the cohort with the largest proportion of cases. As a proportion of the total cases in 2022/23, international students make up 71.88% of all cases.

¹ % + or – represents the percentage increase or decrease upon the previous year's data.

5.1.6 While the number of cases has decreased since 2021/22, the numbers for 2022/23 remain high. It is important not to make assumptions about the reasons. The reasons for the high number of submissions remain unclear.

5.1.7 The University has increased its support of students, particularly in relation to academic integrity, across academic year 2022/23. It is possible that this work across the University is attributable to the decrease in cases seen in 2022/23. Most notably, this support includes:

- Information and training on good assessment practices continues. The University's [Student Learning Service](#) (SLS) has developed and is delivering workshops and offers online resources (in Achieve and Achieve+) with an increased focus on academic integrity in assessments.
- The SLS/Centre for Academic Development (CAD) have produced: (i) an [infographic on Academic Integrity](#) (for students and also for staff to use in course materials); and (ii) an [Academic Integrity: a guide for students](#).
- Enhancement of information provided to staff and students with respect of academic integrity, led by the Dean for Educational Innovation and supported by the Centre for Academic Development. Information provided on the [Staff](#) and [Student](#) webpages, as well as targeted social media campaigns by the Experience, Engagement and Wellbeing teams and enhanced induction materials, have increased awareness of matters of academic integrity to students.
- The Dean for Educational Innovation and Centre for Academic Development have also been providing opportunities for staff to engage in discussions around the importance of authentic assessment; including why it is better to redesign assessment to 'design out' opportunities for academic misconduct. These opportunities include discussion panels, the Micro-Credentials course delivered in preparation for the start of teaching, and Learning and Teaching Network sessions.

5.1.8 Members of the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) are invited to **discuss** the paper, in particular the data outlined in *Appendix A*.

7. FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information is available from Ruth Taylor (Vice-Principal (Education)), ruth.taylor@abdn.ac.uk or Liam Dyker (Acting Assistant Registrar (Academic Services)), liam.dyker2@abdn.ac.uk.

27 November 2023

Freedom of Information/Confidentiality Status: Open