UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT UPDATE

1. **PURPOSE OF THE PAPER**

> The purpose of the paper is to provide members of UEC with an update on the volume of academic misconduct cases investigated during each academic year over the last 6 years.
>
> Members are asked to discuss the paper and data in *Appendix A*.

2. **PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY /FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED**

	Board/Committee	Date
Previously considered/approved by	N/A	
Further consideration/ approval required by	N/A	

3. **RECOMMENDED ACTION**

> Members are asked to discuss the paper and data in *Appendix A*. The Committee is asked to consider any issues identified and any possible implications for the maintenance of academic integrity more generally, and to make recommendations for any further work required to support policy in this area.

4. **OVERVIEW**

4.1 The University has in place a Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Academic) that defines categories of disciplinary offences and sets out the procedures to be followed in academic misconduct cases.

4.2 Various iterations of the Code have been approved by the University Court. The version used in 2021/22 was approved in summer 2020, with its use starting in 2020/21. The Code is reviewed regularly as any issues with the current Code are identified, such as the need for a new category like contract cheating, or issues on clarity of the wording of the Code. A revised version of the Code will be used for new cases relating to the 2022/23 academic year.

5. DATA

5.1 *Appendix A* provides an analysis of academic misconduct cases for academic years 2016/17 to 2021/22, with the second tab in Appendix A showing cases by School. Table 1.1 below shows the total cases of academic misconduct and is also shown as a percentage of the student population head count. Table 1.2 provides a summary of the cases: the numbers and category of misconduct.

Table 1.1 Total Cases of Academic Misconduct &
as a Percentage of Student Population Head Count

	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17
Total cases	409	210	166	136	77	76
As % of Population headcount	1.82%	1.01%	0.87%	0.77%	0.48%	0.49%

Table 1.2 Cases of Academic Misconduct, By Type of Misconduct

	2021/22	% + or -	2020/21	% + or -	2019/20	% + or -	2018/19	% + or -	2017/18	% + or -	2016/17
Plagiarism	356	*90*	187	*27*	147	*48*	99	*80*	55	*-21*	70
Collusion	45	*137*	19	*111*	9	*-40*	15	*275*	4	*400*	0
Cheating	2	*n/a*	0	*-100*	6	*-71*	21	*17*	18	*200*	6
Contract Cheating	6	*200*	2	*-33*	3	*100*	1	*0*	n/a	*0*	n/a
Ethics	0	*-100*	2	*100*	1	*100*	0	*0*	0	*0*	0

5.2 Table 1.2 shows:

5.2.1 In any year the majority of cases of academic misconduct relate to plagiarism. Since 2018/19 there has been a rise in cases of plagiarism, with a particularly steep rise in cases in 2021/22 (90%), the majority being first cases of plagiarism (81%);

5.2.2 With regards to contract cheating in 2021/22 there have been six cases, whereas in the previous 3 years, there were six cases in total.

5.3 Table 2 shows the volume of student cases split by their 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 Cases of Academic Misconduct, By UK/EU/International

Domicile Group	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17
UK	87 (0.62)	54 (0.41)	27 (0.24)	36 (0.34)	29 (0.29)	29 (0.3)
EU	37 (1.68)	22 (0.79)	15 (0.48)	27 (0.8)	15 (0.45)	20 (0.65)
Int	285 (4.58)	134 (2.81)	124 (2.74)	73 (1.9)	33 (1.11)	27 (1.07)

5.4 Most significantly the table shows that the volume of cases involving international students has almost doubled. As a proportion of the total cases, international students make up 70% of all cases.

5.5   It is not clear why there are increases in the numbers of academic misconduct cases and it is important not to make assumptions about the reasons. It is possible that the impact of the changes to the delivery of education as a result of Covid-19 has played a part, particularly a lack of in person contact with teaching staff and others as part of the overall experience and the move to online assessment methods.

5.6   Areas where the University has enhanced its support of students in 2021/22 include:

5.6.1   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:

- An infographic on Academic Integrity (for students and also for staff to use in course materials)
- An Academic Integrity: a guide for students

In addition, an Academic Integrity Intern+, based in CAD, has been appointed to:

- Research approaches to academic integrity in Higher Education institutions in Scotland
- Work with student focus groups to identify possible factors that might lead to student engagement with contract cheating, for which ethics approval is underway.

5.6.2   At a local level individual Schools provide information on plagiarism and referencing in their course and programme handbooks. Any changes to the Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Academic) are conveyed to Schools following approval by the Senate and Court.

5.6.3   Students who are struggling with their academic writing skills can contact the SLS or access the online resources in Achieve and Achieve+ for information and advice. SLS offers workshops on academic writing skills and on avoiding plagiarism. Students can seek general support prior to submission of an assessment but, to avoid compromising academic integrity, SLS will not work directly with them on the writing of the assessment.

6.   FURTHER INFORMATION

6.1   Further information is available from Gillian Mackintosh (Director of Academic & Online Education) or Yvonne Gordon (Deputy Academic Registrar) (y.gordon@abdn.ac.uk).

09 December 2022
Freedom of Information/Confidentiality Status: Open