Rebels Without a Clause: towards an institutional framework for dealing with plagiarism by students

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ABSTRACT   *This paper explores why an institutional framework for dealing with plagiarism by students is necessary and it outlines the main ingredients of such a framework that has been developed at Lancaster University. It defines plagiarism as a form of academic malpractice and frames it as a breach of academic integrity. The framework places a strong emphasis on prevention and education, backed up by robust and transparent procedures for detecting and punishing plagiarism. It is informed by a number of core pillars, including transparency, ownership, responsibility, academic integrity, compatibility with the institution's academic culture, focus on prevention and deterrence and support for and development of students' skills. The key criteria in evaluating the usefulness of such an institutional framework are transparency, appropriateness, fairness and consistency.*

Introduction

Plagiarism involves using other people's words and ideas as if they were one's own, without crediting the source. Students regularly engage in the practice and recent years have witnessed rising interest in and concern about plagiarism by students in higher education in the UK (Larkham & Manns, 2002). The UK has much to learn from the North American experience and literature on the subject (Park, 2003), although most institutions are aware of the need for action. As Zangrando (1992) puts it, 'inaction and silence … represent the plagiarist's fondest havens', and in the context of plagiarism Fialkoff (1993) insists that 'all who participate in the community of inquiry, as amateurs or professionals … have an obligation to oppose deception'.

   Turning a blind eye to student plagiarism is not an appropriate response for a variety of reasons, including fairness to students who do not plagiarize, preserving the academic credibility and reputation of the institution, promoting both the theory and the practice of academic integrity amongst all staff and students, fostering a sense of responsibility amongst students and promoting good study skills and independent learning. Fundamentally, plagiarism involves unacceptable practices, particularly literary theft (stealing someone else's intellectual property and breach of

copyright) and academic deception (in order to gain a higher grade). Both of these are inherently wrong and they also run counter to an ethos of trust and integrity that should lie at the heart of any academic activity.

It has been suggested that 'there is a growing need for UK institutions to develop cohesive frameworks for dealing with student plagiarism that are based on prevention supported by robust detection and penalty systems that are transparent and applied consistently' (Park, 2003, pp. 483–484). Against that background, this paper outlines the context and the main ingredients of an institutional framework for dealing with student plagiarism that was developed at Lancaster University. Whilst 'one size fits all' clearly does not apply in this context and each institution's response to student plagiarism must be informed by institutional culture and context, it is contended that the issues raised here must be addressed and dealt with appropriately, no matter what the institutional setting.

Framing Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a form of cheating or academic malpractice, which also includes cheating in examinations, fabrication of results, duplication and false declaration. A simple working definition of plagiarism would be 'the theft or words or ideas, beyond what would normally be regarded as general knowledge' (Park, 2003, p. 472). A more specifically student-centred definition would be the unacknowledged use of someone else's work, usually in coursework, and passing it off as if it were one's own.

But even these definitions raise questions. For example, within a given discipline who decides what is 'general knowledge' and on what grounds? How much copied text is enough to trigger a 'plagiarism alert', somewhere along a spectrum from the unattributed use of a few words or a single sentence, through to wholesale copying of articles or sources? Again, who decides and on what grounds? How important is intentionality, because theft is a conscious act whereas plagiarism can be accidental (reflecting, for example, a lack of understanding or appreciation of proper ways of citing sources)?

To add to the complexity, plagiarism involves a family of behaviours that a student might engage in (Table I). Unattributed copying from a source text (Type 4 in Table I) is how most people tend to view plagiarism, but the spectrum of behaviours must be recognized and addressed in any institutional framework that claims to be cohesive and comprehensive.

Individual Experience

Many academic staff encounter plagiarism at one time or another in their student's work. For the individual member of staff marking students' work, the discovery can throw up real dilemmas. Am I certain about my claim? Should I report it? Will the punishment be appropriate? Does it look as though the student did it deliberately? If it involves an international student, might it have arisen because of cultural differences? The discovery can also create real practical difficulties for the marker.

TABLE I. Taxonomy of types of plagiarism by students

1. Collusion, where a piece of work prepared by a group is represented as if it were the student's own
2. Commission or use of work by the student which is not his/her own and representing it as if it were. Examples include:
    i.   purchase of a paper from a commercial service, including Internet sites, whether pre-written or specially prepared for the student concerned
    ii. submission of a paper written by another person
3. Duplication of the same or almost identical work for more than one course
4. Copying or paraphrasing a paper from a source text (in manuscript, printed or electronic form) without appropriate acknowledgement
5. Submission of another student's work, with or without that student's knowledge or consent

Can I track down the source that has been copied? Do I have the time and energy to follow it up? Some staff spot plagiarism more regularly than others, either because they look harder or because they are better acquainted with the most commonly used sources. Staff can also be reluctant to accuse students of plagiarism because they feel that it breaks down the relationship of mutual trust between teacher and taught and replaces it with an inappropriate 'Big Brother' surveillance regime that is not conducive to open critical academic discourse and enquiry.

Many students are tempted to plagiarize or do plagiarize and for them both the opportunity and the motive to do so are growing. Copying is certainly much easier now than ever before, in a digital world of computers, word processing, electronic sources and the Internet. Students are faced with many temptations to plagiarize, because many of them now have to work part-time to support their studies, they produce coursework in large quantities and to tight deadlines and they are under mounting pressure to perform well to justify the investment in studying for a degree. Students also often know that their peers engage in plagiarism, and they too are faced with moral dilemmas. Should I blow the whistle on the others, who are gaining marks unfairly? What if it's one of my friends? If I can't beat them should I join them? If my deadline is looming and time is short, how much plagiarism can I realistically expect to get away with without being detected?

Plagiarism by students is clearly a moral maze and a practical minefield, for staff and student alike. In most institutions individual markers have, and feel the weight of, responsibility to detect it and deal with it appropriately. Many universities now recognize the need for a broader and more cohesive institutional approach to dealing with student plagiarism, in order to protect everyone's interests as well as the academic credibility and reputation of the institution.

Towards an Institutional Framework

There is a long history and a wealth of experience of tackling plagiarism in North American colleges and universities, which have used a variety of approaches based on prevention through education and intervention and punishment for violations

(Singhal & Johnson, 1983; Saunders, 1993; White, 1993). Many institutions have adopted proactive strategies to tackle student plagiarism, involving integrated campus initiatives, including honour codes, communication, training, assistance and support for academic staff, disciplinary policies and processes and promotion of academic integrity (Kibler, 1993a; Cole & McCabe, 1996). Mitchell and Wisbey (1995) argue that institutions can make real progress in the struggle against academic dishonesty through appropriate use of both educational and developmental programmes and due process policy responses. Cole and Conklin (1996) claim that students learn from institutions' responses to academic dishonesty and from institutions' expectations about students' response to the dishonesty of others. Despite this accumulated experience in North America, Brown and Howell (2001) point out that there has been little empirical work designed to test the efficacy of measures to reduce cheating behaviour.

Some approaches suggested for dealing with student plagiarism are informed by ways of framing the problem that are more sophisticated than merely dismissing it as cheating, stealing or laziness. These have included a Total Quality Management framework (Burgar, 1994), a student development framework (Kibler, 1993b) and an expectancy theory of employee motivation (Malouff & Sims, 1996). However plagiarism is framed, Raffetto (1985) calls on administrators to create an environment conducive to learning and excellence and to protect against unfair competition for grades.

An institutional approach to dealing with plagiarism by students should set plagiarism clearly into context as a breach of academic integrity, frame it as inappropriate and unacceptable behaviour rather than criminalizing it, embed it into the academic rules and regulations and promote it throughout the institution. An enlightened and positive approach would place the emphasis on prevention and education, backed up by robust and transparent procedures for detecting and punishing plagiarism. If successful, such an approach would create a level playing field on which staff and students can operate, to the benefit of all stakeholders. The key criteria in evaluating the usefulness of such an institutional framework are transparency, appropriateness, fairness and consistency.

The framework described here was developed by a working party at Lancaster University, taking into account experience from other institutions, lessons from the literature (Park, 2003) and widespread consultation with staff across the institution. The working party sought to move the plagiarism discourse beyond just detection and punishment and to situate and embed it in a cohesive framework that tackles the root causes as well as the symptoms of plagiarism as a family of behaviours.

The framework incorporates 'joined-up thinking' on the broader strategic issues surrounding plagiarism. It specifies roles and responsibilities for the different 'stakeholders' (Table II), codifies steps in the procedure (Table III) and defines the sanctions and penalties (Table IV) that are to be used consistently and transparently. Full details of the framework are available online (at ihttp://www.lancs.ac.uk/users/celt/plagiarism/plagiarism_summary.doc). But, behind the visible detection and sanctions lies a commitment to prevent and deter plagiarism, which lies at the very heart of this strategic institutional approach.

TABLE II. Roles and responsibilities

Academic Marker. Each academic marker is responsible for detecting plagiarism in coursework, reporting it to the relevant Academic Officer and producing evidence in support of the claim.

Academic Officer. Each department designates one senior academic member of staff, to be known as the Academic Officer, who takes responsibility for the investigation and treatment of plagiarism in coursework. A deputy Academic Officer is also designated. The duties of the Academic Officer include reporting cases of plagiarism to the Student Registry, checking a student's plagiarism record held by the Student Registry and keeping a written record of all cases of alleged plagiarism, including the evidence presented and the outcome.

Student Registry. Designated members of the Student Registry are responsible for record keeping for all alleged and detected cases of academic malpractice, including plagiarism in coursework and cheating in examinations. The duties of the officers, or approved alternates, include keeping a written record of all cases, including reports from Academic Officers and from cases heard by the Standing Academic Committee. They are also responsible for giving information and other support to Academic Officers to assist them in discharging their duties; communicating information between departments about academic malpractice as appropriate; and offering assistance to Academic Officers about the content of the warning letter appropriate to the stage reached.

Students' Union. Any student who is alleged to have been involved in an act of academic malpractice has access to Students' Union support and advice at all stages in the procedures. Appropriate Students' Union staff may accompany the student in any meetings or correspondence with the department and/or the Standing Academic Committee.

Standing Academic Committee. The Standing Academic Committee of the Senate hears cases relating to first or second offences where the student does not accept the decision of the Academic Officer and hear cases relating to third and fourth offences.

Pillars and Premises

The framework is built on a number of pillars or premises, which informed and underpinned the discussions about the most appropriate way to design, codify and implement such a framework within the particular culture and context of the institution.

A critically important pillar is transparency. To be effective, any framework for dealing with student plagiarism must be open and transparent. All staff and students must have ready access to information about it and it must be widely disseminated within the institution. Brown and Howell (2001) have shown how student perceptions of the seriousness of plagiarism as an academic problem can be changed by institutional policy statements on cheating and plagiarism. Explicitness in how plagiarism is dealt with is a key ingredient in this quest for transparency. In support of this, the university has developed and published a clear set of guidelines that define plagiarism and give relevant examples of what it covers and explain why plagiarism is unacceptable. The guidelines also explain how plagiarism can be detected and outline the institutionally agreed penalty system for plagiarism; what it

TABLE III. Steps in the procedure

The following steps are to be followed in the sequence set out; the steps may be concluded at any point in the procedure.

1. All Academic Markers are expected to make a positive effort to identify possible plagiarism and they must inform their students of the procedures for detection.
2. The Academic Markers refer the relevant material to the Course Convenor for checking when suspected plagiarism has been identified.
3. The Course Convenor annotates any plagiarized material and submits a report, including a hard copy of the source used by the student, to the Academic Officer in the department.
4. The Academic Officer conducts an investigation of the alleged plagiarism and gives the student an opportunity to discuss the allegation.
5. The Student Registry reports to the Academic Officer whether the student concerned has previously been found guilty of academic malpractice.
6. The Academic Officer arranges a meeting of a panel, if necessary, to discuss the allegations further with the student, including any admission of plagiarism, and to set out the likely penalties. The panel is chaired by a non-member of the department nominated by the chairperson of the Standing Academic Committee and, in addition to the student and the Academic Officer, it includes either the Academic Marker or the Course Convenor. It may also include a person nominated by the student as friend, who also acts as a member of the panel.
7. If the Academic Officer concludes, on the basis of discussion under 4 or 6, that plagiarism has occurred, she/he automatically applies the appropriate penalty (Table 4) without discretion and informs the student in writing.
8. The Academic Officer makes a report to the Student Registry on a special report form supplied for that purpose.

covers, when it applies, how it works, what penalties could be applied and why it is necessary to have it (to ensure consistency across the university and fairness to students).

Closely related to transparency, and equally important, is the matter of ownership of the framework. All stakeholders within the institution must understand and appreciate why the framework is necessary and how it protects their own particular interests. They must be willing to work with it and support it for the greater good of the institution. This demands a commitment to embed the framework in the institution's policies and procedures and would normally require changes to regulations.

With ownership comes acceptance of responsibility by both staff and students. Staff are primary custodians of academic quality, integrity and credibility within the institution and their commitment to both the principles and the practice of the framework is essential. Saunders (1993) has called for staff to create 'an environment in which students are both encouraged and supported to excel, rather than allowed to simply follow a path of least resistance', and this requires active engagement by staff with the anti-plagiarism agenda. Student engagement is also essential. Caruana *et al.* (2000) found links between academic dishonesty and anomie (the lack of social or economic standards) amongst students. They concluded that

TABLE IV. Scale of sanctions and penalties

First offence. The Academic Officer determines whether action requiring a plagiarism warning has taken place. For a minor first offence, the academic marker indicates and sets aside the sections involving the plagiarized text. For a major first offence, the student is required to repeat and resubmit the work, and is eligible to receive only the minimum pass mark appropriate to the piece of work. If the student refuses or fails to repeat and resubmit the work, a mark of 0 is recorded. The student in any case receives the appropriate warning letter.

Second offence. If a second alleged offence has been detected, the Academic Officer declares that a mark of 0 has been awarded to the piece of work concerned and that the student has no right of reassessment. The Academic Officer sends the student the appropriate warning letter, confirming the decision and advising the student of the consequences of any further offence.

Third and fourth offences. Third and fourth offences are considered by the Standing Academic Committee and are treated as a serious academic offence under the University Statutes. If the student has been found to have committed either a third or fourth offence, the Academic Officer shall refer him/her to the Standing Academic Committee with the recommendation that she/he be permanently excluded from the university.
The Standing Academic Committee, having considered the evidence for a third offence, has the authority to confirm the recommendation for permanent exclusion or to impose one of the following penalties:

1. to permit the student to repeat the work, subject to receiving only the minimum pass mark appropriate to the piece of work;
2. to award 0 for the work in question;
3. to award 0 for the whole coursework or dissertation;
4. to award 0 for the unit or course module;
5. to award 0 as under 4 and, where the inclusion makes no difference to the class of award, to recommend that one class lower than the one determined by the arithmetic be awarded;
6. to exclude the student permanently from the university, where the offence is detected before the final assessment is completed;
7. not to award the degree, where the offence is detected after the final assessment has been completed.

If the Standing Academic Committee has previously overturned a recommendation for exclusion for a third offence, and a fourth offence by that student is detected, the Committee will call a further hearing to consider the recommendation for exclusion of the student from the university and/or non-award of the degree.

universities need to encourage development of an internalized code of ethics amongst students.

A central pillar is the core value of academic integrity. The academic enterprise is rooted in a culture of integrity, founded on honesty and mutual trust, and a university should expect all of its member (staff and students) to respect and uphold these core values at all times, in everything they do at, for and in the name of the institution. Academic integrity should be valued and promoted by the institution

and it should underpin and inform all aspects of its teaching and learning strategy. Kibler (1994) stresses the importance of appropriate communication within an institution about academic dishonesty and the promotion of integrity. The university has accepted the need for an explicit policy that communicates the positive value it places on academic integrity and that states why academic integrity (in teaching and research) is valued and what will be lost if it is not valued and supported. As a matter of principle, the university has a clear commitment to defend its academic credibility and reputation, protect the standards of its awards, ensure that its students receive due credit for the work they submit for assessment, advise its students on the need for academic integrity and provide them with guidance on best practice in studying and learning and protect the interests of those students who do not cheat. In promoting core values of integrity, the university recognizes the need to convince students that academic integrity is something to be valued (McCabe, 2001) and the need to encourage students to adhere to principles (and even sign a pledge) of academic integrity, supported by procedures that discourage cheating (Alschuler & Blimling, 1995). One means of encouraging students to adhere to the principles of academic integrity that has been widely adopted in North America (Park, 2003) is to require them to sign a pledge or declaration that the work they submit is their own and has not been plagiarized. The framework described here requires each student to sign at least one academic declaration each year for every department to whom they submit coursework and it allows each department discretion over how many times they wish to see a signed declaration, up to and including on every piece of work.

The effectiveness of implementing the framework will clearly be influenced by its compatibility with the academic culture of the institution. Thus framing is also a critical pillar. The framework is essentially positive in its ambitions; it is designed to promote academic integrity and good academic practice throughout the institution. It also seeks to be equitable; it applies to all coursework submitted by students for examination by the university in all academic programmes other than research degrees and it must be adopted by all departments and sections. Consistency is created through a common definition of plagiarism, set into context, and through a cohesive and systematic way of dealing with it. The rhetoric is important too, because this framework consciously treats plagiarism as unacceptable or inappropriate behaviour, rather than criminalizing it and/or treating it within a legalistic discourse.

Alongside framing is the pillar of focus. This framework puts the emphasis on prevention and deterrence backed up by robust detection and sanctions. Although Diekhoff *et al.* (1996) found that the strongest deterrents on student cheating were embarrassment and fear of punishment, Gerdeman (2000) urges institutions to 'establish an environment where dishonesty is viewed as unacceptable and where any possible benefits are outweighed by risks of being caught and peer disapproval'. Staff inevitably have a central role to play in prevention, with a responsibility to set appropriate assignments in order to reduce the likelihood of giving students the opportunity to plagiarize or of rewarding them for doing so. Carroll (2002) has shown how plagiarism can be effectively designed out, for example by varying

assignment tasks from year to year, making them course-specific and locally relevant and linking assignments specifically to particular course material.

Another important pillar is the supportive and developmental nature of the framework for students. This works in various ways, including raising student awareness of the positive and negative reasons why they should not plagiarize (positive reasons including getting reliable feedback on their progress and learning and upholding core values of academic integrity; negative reasons including risk of being caught and penalized). It also works by advising students how to make sure that they do not plagiarize by accident (e.g. by appropriate note taking and essay writing skills, adopting proper procedures for quotations, citations and referencing, careful use of paraphrasing, etc.). The framework requires the provision of appropriate and accessible study skills advice and assistance, both generic and discipline-specific, to inform students about best practice in note taking and writing assignments and provide opportunities for formative feedback. The need for such a developmental role is underlined by numerous studies that have demonstrated how student plagiarism often reflects inadequate understanding of proper note taking and citation techniques (Wilhoit, 1994; Roig, 1997; Landau *et al.*, 2002) and lack of sensitivity to why cheating is wrong (Partello, 1993). Provision of adequate and appropriate study skill support is particularly important for non-native speakers and students from different cultures, which have different notions of respect for authority (Park, 2003).

The spectrum of activities within the umbrella term ' plagiarism' must be recognized and dealt with appropriately. For this reason, the framework distinguishes between two levels or types of plagiarism for the first offence (only), which are dealt with slightly differently (Table IV). A minor first offence covers things like poor referencing, unattributed quotations, inappropriate paraphrasing, incorrect or incomplete citations or up to several sentences of direct copying without acknowledgement of the source. A major first offence is larger and more serious; it covers things like copying multiple paragraphs in full without acknowledgement of the source, taking essays from the Internet without revealing the source, copying all or much of the work of a fellow student with or without his/her knowledge or consent and submitting the same piece of work for assessment for more than one course.

Detection

Many students do not view cheating counter-measures or the risk of being caught and punished for plagiarism as serious enough to cause them to change behaviour and stop cheating (Hollinger & Lanza-Kaduce, 1996). Deliberate plagiarizers play Russian Roulette, weighing the benefits of cheating against the risk and the consequences of being caught. One of the strongest deterrents is a robust system for detecting plagiarized work that is appropriate, fair, transparent and well publicised and consistently used.

The traditional vehicle for detecting plagiarism by students has been marker vigilance. Common tell-tale signs include similarity to other students' work, uncharacteristically high quality work for that particular student, familiar passages and

changes in voice, tone or emphasis throughout an assignment. However, relying solely on marker vigilance places a great onus of both practical and moral responsibility on the individual marker, who is held accountable as custodian of the academic integrity and reputation of the institution. There is also no doubt that some markers are more vigilant than others and some are better able to recall or trace sources than others. The playing field for students is thus far from level, which inevitably compromises equity of treatment and academic standards.

One solution to this problem of lack of equity has been the development of digital detection systems, which use document source analysis to compare the text of documents for matches. Early systems used text scanning computer programs to compare student submissions (Stone, 1992), and they anticipated more sophisticated and more accessible Internet-based detection systems. Since students often cut and paste text from the Internet, modern detection systems check those sources for matches (Brandt, 2002). Digital detection is inevitably much quicker, easier and consistent than any human marker could ever hope to be. Simple approaches use advanced web search engines, like Google, that have very fast and accurate search capabilities (Silverman, 2002).

More sophisticated online plagiarism detection services have developed in recent years, the best-known of which is Turnitin.com. Developed in 1998, its potential was quickly recognized by a number of universities in North America (Dalton, 1999; Foster, 2002). In 2002 Turnitin won a contract with Britain's Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) to serve more than 700 higher education institutions in Britain (Johnston, 2002).

For a fee, or with an institutional subscription, academic staff can submit student essays over the Internet to Turnitin which will then search its database, which contains many millions of documents, including the contents of online paper mills and web sites, for duplicates. Where matches are found, the software returns an annotated document that includes the URL of source documents (Young, 2001; Anonymous, 2002). Naturally, this still leaves the academic marker with responsibility for deciding how to deal with the detected plagiarism, but it takes away much of the practical burden of spotting plagiarism and finding the sources that have been used.

Despite the promise of quick and efficient detection, concerns have been raised about the emergence of this 'whole gotcha industry' (Howard, 2002). Some staff fear that routine plagiarism checks might breed an atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust, which could undermine the very intellectual fabric of the academy. There are concerns, too, about violation of students' rights, including copyright (because the whole of the student's paper is copied to the service's database) and intellectual property rights (because Turnitin keeps the student's paper, whether or not it was plagiarised), and about potential invasion of student privacy (particularly if uploading to the digital detection software is done without the student's knowledge or consent) (Ardito, 2002; Foster, 2002).

More broadly, many academics are reluctant to take on the role of what Silverman (2002) describes as 'plagiarism buster'. As Howard (2002) puts it, rather graphically, 'in our stampede to fight what some call a "plague" of plagiarism, we risk

becoming the enemies rather than the mentors of our students; we are replacing the student–teacher relationship with the criminal–police relationship'.

Implementation of the new framework is in two phases, to allow testing of detection procedures. During phase one (the first year), the approach is pragmatic and maintains the status quo in which primary responsibility for detecting student plagiarism rests with the individual marker, who should be alert to the possibility of finding plagiarism in students' work, and use their specialist knowledge and academic judgement in deciding what is and what is not acceptable within that subject (for example, in deciding what is common knowledge and what should be attributed to sources). Marker vigilance is supported by voluntary use of digital detection software; a combination of two online programs, Turnitin and Copycatch, has been recommended, because the latter is more sensitive to close paraphrasing than the former. During phase one, trials on the use of digital detection software are being undertaken within the institution, to provide evidence on practical issues like resource, staff and training requirements and to inform revision of the framework for phase two (after the first year).

Sanctions and Penalties

A cohesive plagiarism framework requires penalties that are appropriate (in nature and scale), fair, transparent and applied consistently. Plagiarism at large, by non-students, is usually taken very seriously and dealt with accordingly. Common outcomes of confirmed plagiarism include fines, payment of damages, dismissal from post, requirement to make a public apology, retraction of a published paper, withdrawal or non-publication of a book (Neto, 1996; Anonymous, 1999a; Holden, 1999; Brumfiel, 2002). The literature on plagiarism by students (Park, 2003) is relatively silent on the question of appropriate punishment or sanctions, because institutions prefer to tailor their sanction systems to local circumstances. Common sanctions include allowing the student to rewrite the paper in a correct format and then remarking it (Whiteneck, 2002), awarding a 0 mark for the plagiarized piece of work (Anonymous, 1999b) and failing students on the plagiarized assignment (Burnett, 2002). Extreme sanctions, such as permanent exclusion before graduation, failing the student on the whole course or withholding or withdrawing a degree award, inevitably require careful application of watertight procedures and often give rise to legal disputes (Roberts, 1986; Reams, 1987; Mangan, 1997).

Very careful thought was given to what forms of penalties would be most appropriate for different types of plagiarism offence and how the penalties should change with successive offences. The need to have a transparent system was paramount, both to serve as a deterrent and to allow all stakeholders (staff and students) to appreciate the seriousness of the situation. The sanctions deemed appropriate for successive plagiarism offences are summarized in Table IV.

The framework recognizes that a clear distinction must be drawn between inexperienced academic study and writing skills (especially among first year undergraduates and international students) and wilful cheating and deception. The former requires remedial teaching but the latter must be dealt with robustly. Intentionality

is difficult to establish beyond reasonable doubt. Consequently, the framework allows a first offence to receive a relatively light penalty (Table IV), based on 'benefit of doubt', and it requires that the student seeks appropriate study skills advice. Subsequent plagiarism offences are more likely to be deliberate, so the ladder of penalties climbs sharply to reflect a 'zero tolerance' regime.

Devising a ladder of penalties is one thing, operating it consistently across the institution is another. The framework was supported by changes to the university regulations. In cases in which a student fails a module overall because plagiarized work has been awarded a 0 mark (second offence), the student forfeits the normal right of reassessment in that module.

Protecting students' rights throughout the whole process is also vitally important and the framework consciously and transparently addresses this. If the student does not accept the decision of the Academic Officer (for first and second offences), she/he can opt to appear before the Standing Academic Committee. The burden of proof is on the university to show that plagiarism has occurred. In all cases in which exclusion is the penalty for plagiarism (i.e. third and fourth offences), the student has a statutory right of appeal under the University Statutes.

Implementation and Implications

Careful thought had to be given to some important practical matters in order to make the framework 'fit for purpose'. One was reconciling the inevitable tension between prevention and punishment. After a first offence it is assumed that a student who plagiarizes is more likely to do so consciously, which is why the ladder of penalties (Table IV) rises steeply. Students are treated relatively leniently for the first offence only, in order to reinforce the importance of education and prevention within the overall strategy. The need for a consistent basis for counting offences was recognized, given the ladder of penalties. For the first offence only, if a student has submitted more than one piece of work for assessment at the same time and plagiarism is detected in more than one of those pieces of work, this is defined as one offence (the first major offence), because the student would not have had the benefit of the warning letter between submissions. After the first offence, each piece of work in which plagiarism is detected counts as a separate offence.

The written feedback (warning letter) that students receive, supported by the transparent detection system and ladder of penalties, are all designed to work as a package, to educate and deter, and thus to prevent. For each offence the student will be sent a standard, stage-specific, warning letter which serves a number of purposes: it spells out what they have done wrong and why it is wrong; it points them towards appropriate sources of study skills help; it reminds them of the need to discuss their work with academic staff if they are uncertain about how to avoid subsequent allegations of plagiarism; it warns of the serious consequences of subsequent offences and spells out the sanctions that will be applied; it outlines the student's rights.

The framework is rooted in evidence-based decision making. In all cases, the marker must provide evidence to confirm that plagiarism has occurred. Where

possible this should include the student's submitted work annotated and cross-referenced to original sources which have been plagiarized, accompanied by a hard copy of the original source (e.g. a printout of a printed source or web page, with complete URL and date viewed for web pages). For a first offence only, the evidence may take the form of a statement written by the student acknowledging that they have included plagiarized material in the submitted work.

Although there are arguments in favour of varying the sanctions depending on the relative weight of a piece of coursework within the overall assessment for a module, consistency and transparency of treatment for all plagiarism is paramount, both for equity purposes and also to reinforce prevention by deterrence. Departments are given some discretion to define special status for particular assignments (particularly the dissertation and particularly at Masters level), for which the penalty system might be varied. All such cases, and the reasons for them, must be clearly documented in departmental or course handbooks.

Retrospective detection might also create problems. Whilst a department has the right to retrospectively check for plagiarism in any coursework submitted by a student, the penalties would not normally be applied retrospectively (after the work has been returned to the student). The university reserves the right to review work retrospectively and to apply appropriate sanctions if there are reasonable grounds for doing so (e.g. whistle-blowing by fellow students). University Regulations allow for a degree to be rescinded or a degree classification to be changed after it has been awarded.

The decisions and recommendations of the final Exam Board will normally be regarded as the cut-off point beyond which allegations of plagiarism will not be considered and past which no penalties will normally be applied. If the plagiarism detection procedures are sufficiently robust, after an initial transition period (2 years maximum for most undergraduates) once this new framework is introduced, this should provide adequate security for the Exam Board decisions.

The framework also recognizes some difficult questions of equity that arise on graduation and takes a pragmatic line on two of the most important ones. Each department is given discretion to decide whether plagiarism should be mentioned if a request is received (particularly from another university or a professional body) for an academic reference for a Lancaster graduate or whether to report plagiarism to professional bodies. A Lancaster undergraduate with a record of plagiarism who subsequently registers as a postgraduate student at Lancaster will be given a 'plagiarism amnesty', for equity of treatment with other postgraduate students from elsewhere (whose plagiarism record will not necessarily be revealed in academic references or on course transcripts).

Conclusions

All institutions of higher education are confronted with the challenge of dealing appropriately with plagiarism by students and many are devising institutional frameworks and strategies to do so. This paper outlines the core ingredients of one such framework, which places an emphasis on prevention (through education and deter-

rence), supported by sound procedures for detecting plagiarism in students' work and by a robust and transparent system for dealing with it, including a ladder of penalties.

What was clear at the start of the process of developing the framework, and became even clearer as the work progressed, is that the framework must be integrated and cohesive, it must be transparent and applied consistently and it must address a number of key issues. The latter include the need to distinguish between deliberate and accidental plagiarism, to provide opportunities for students to learn from their mistakes and get appropriate study skill help, to clearly define roles and responsibilities for the different participants in the transaction and to have an institutionally based system but one that allows some discretion to markers and departments, where appropriate. Implementation of the framework allows for testing and evaluation of the available digital detection software, without holding up the roll-out of the main elements of prevention, treatment and penalties.

Clearly, each institution must devise a student plagiarism framework that best suits their own culture and circumstances. This framework is offered as a contribution to the emerging national debate within the UK, to save others from having to invent the same wheel and to share experience and lessons more broadly within the sector.

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