



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is AMBeR?

The Academic Misconduct Benchmarking Research (AMBeR) project.

168 government-subsidised UK HEIs were contacted to request copies of their plagiarism regulations and a 91% response rate was achieved. Regulations were analysed to determine the range of penalties available, and the factors involved in assigning these penalties.

The report, which classifies the range and spread of penalties available for plagiarism, is the first in a series of upcoming studies that aim to assess national plagiarism policy and practice in higher education.

The full findings and an executive summary can be found at <http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/amber/>

What is meant by plagiarism?

Definition: Plagiarism is passing off someone else's work, whether intentionally or unintentionally, as your own for your own benefit.
(Carroll, 2002)

How much of a problem is plagiarism?

- In the first national survey of plagiarism in the UK carried out by Northumbria Learning 97% of the 114 HE institutions surveyed felt that it was an issue for institutions (Davidson, 2004).
- A QCA paper providing information on the issues affecting coursework assessment (QCA, 2005) highlights 'the internet has increased the potential for plagiarism'. It also warns 'Coursework assignments are available on the internet at any level and in any subject'.
- Consultancy in Association with the JISC-PAS (Plagiarism Advisory Service) surveyed 600 recent graduates and 1000 NUS student officers in June 2004 (Freshminds, 2004).
 - Whilst 97% felt plagiarism was cheating, 9% had plagiarised once, and 16% more than once
 - 21% believe plagiarism policies aren't strictly enforced by their institutions,
 - 26% believe policy is not effective in deterring students from plagiarising.

- Professor Don McCabe, leading expert in academic integrity, in a May 2001 study of over 4,500 high school students, found the following:
 - 72% of students reported one or more instances of serious cheating on written work
 - 15% had submitted a paper obtained in large part from a term paper mill or website
 - 52% had copied a few sentences from a website without citing the source
 - 90% of the students using the internet to plagiarise had also plagiarised from written sources.

(The Center for Academic Integrity
<http://www.academicintegrity.org/>)

What has changed to make plagiarism a problem now?

- Plagiarism is not a new problem, but whereas it used to be a local problem, the increase in use of the internet means that billions of documents are now freely available for downloading into an assignment.
- People may confuse freely available with 'free to use' and fail to acknowledge.

Why do students do it?

- Lack of understanding
- Desire for a better mark
- Bad time management
- Different values
- Challenging the system
- Lack of respect for lecturers
- Denial
- Temptation and low perceived risk.
(Park, 2003)



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Student opinions on academic integrity

An independent three-month survey (Bell, 2006), conducted by Malcolm Bell, Academic Advisor at Northumbria University, into student opinions of academic integrity was commissioned by the JISC PAS. Completed in August 2006, 3,200 students gave their views on:

Student understanding of plagiarism:

- 98% of students felt that “downloading or purchasing a piece of work from an essay bank and handing it in as your own work” constituted plagiarism. 97% understood plagiarism to cover “including material taken directly from a website without referencing”.
- 93% felt that qualifications were devalued by students who used bought essays from the Internet.

Confidence in themselves and their Institution in dealing with the issue of plagiarism:

- When asked to rate their own confidence in correctly referencing others' work when incorporating it into their own, 83% of students felt confident or very confident.
- Whilst 4 out of 5 students felt that Institutions dealt with plagiarism seriously, only 47% felt that their tutors would be able to spot plagiarism from the Internet.

Views on electronic detection:

- 87% of students supported the use of electronic detection tools, such as TurnitinUK with a small minority, 10%, feeling that it would make little difference to current practice.
- Perhaps with a view to future practice, respondents felt that the use of such software would help address the issue by discouraging the submission of work which is copied from the Internet but not credited (76%).
- 34% felt that students guilty of plagiarism should be made to re-sit either their module or course whilst 39% suggested a zero mark should be given. 1 in 10 felt that the guilty party should be kicked off their course.

How effective is electronic detection in identifying and solving the problem?

- It can assist as part of a well-defined plagiarism prevention strategy by:
 - Allowing tutors to easily monitor and teach about correct attribution
 - Working as a quality check for screening assignments
 - Operating as a catalyst to raise the profile of correct
 - Producing evidence of malpractice in extreme cases.
- One of the reasons the JCQ give for the rise in plagiarism is that “...candidates plagiarise the work of others because they think their production of coursework during the course will not be monitored” (JCQ, 2005). Detection software can be an effective way to make it clear that an institution is taking this issue seriously.
- 90% of UK universities, the unitary awarding bodies and a growing number of FE colleges use Turnitin (provided by Northumbria Learning) as their plagiarism detection solution.

How can we address plagiarism?

- Institutions should adopt an holistic approach to plagiarism prevention incorporating the consideration of institutional policies and procedures, teaching practice and study skills.
- It is important to engage students in a debate on plagiarism, and how academic misconduct can affect not only their academic careers, but also other students' prospects by devaluing their qualifications.

Plagiarism Debates

The following are a list of debates that are currently common within the sector:

- Appropriate penalties
- Pre Higher Education instruction
- Essay bank advertising
- How effective are current policies?
- Collusion and collaboration – where do the boundaries lie?



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Additional Information

<http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/amber>
<http://www.northumbrialearning.co.uk/newsletter.php>
<http://www.northumbrialearning.co.uk>
<http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk>
<http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/conference2006/>

References:

Carroll, J (2002) *A Handbook for Deterring Plagiarism in Higher Education* Oxford: The Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development.

Davidson, S (2004) *Plagiarism in Higher Education Survey*, Northumbria Learning, www.northumbrialearning.co.uk.

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JCQ (2005) *Plagiarism in Examinations* Joint Council for Qualifications.

McCabe, D. (2001) "Student Cheating in American High Schools", *Educase* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.academicintegrity.org> (Accessed: October 2002).

Park, C (2003) 'In other (people's) words plagiarism by university students – literature and lessons'. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 28(5), pp 291 – 3006.

QCA (2005), *A review of GCE and GCSE coursework arrangements*. Qualifications and Curriculum Authority.

Disclaimer: The above debates are raised purely in the interests of promoting discussion and debate on the topic of plagiarism and in no way reflect the beliefs and attitudes of either Northumbria Learning or the JISC Plagiarism Advisory Service, their customers and their business associates.

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Notes to the editor:

About JISC PAS

The JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee) Plagiarism Advisory Service (PAS) provides generic advice and guidance on all aspects of plagiarism prevention and detection for academics and students to around 700 further and higher education institutions in the UK. The service promotes a holistic approach to plagiarism prevention incorporating the consideration of institutional policies and procedures, teaching practice and study skills. The JISCPAS is managed by Northumbria Learning a wholly open subsidiary of Northumbria University.

About Northumbria Learning

Northumbria Learning is a wholly owned subsidiary of Northumbria University. Maintaining its solid academic roots, Northumbria Learning specialises in providing plagiarism prevention and detection products to a range of academic bodies throughout the UK and Europe. As well as managing the JISC PAS, Northumbria Learning provides Turnitin to the education sector across Europe.