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**REPORT TITLE:** **Plagiarism:** its extent, policy and practice as understood within one curriculum area in Hackney Community College

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**Report For:** **JiscPAS**

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### **Purpose of the Report**

To report on the outcome of a research project as agreed, and funded, by JISCpas.

#### 1. **Background and context**

1.1 Hackney Community College is an inner London general further education College. The curriculum offer covers a wide range of subjects and levels. The policy addressing plagiarism is expressed within the student disciplinary policy. A need to consider how well this is understood, and how to ensure consistency in practice within the organisation, had been identified.

#### 2 **Abstract**

2.1 The project set out to identify existing plagiarism policy and practice within one section of the curriculum with a view to disseminating improvement across the organisation. A literature review considered definitions and policy and practice on plagiarism within post compulsory education and training. The research then explored understanding and present practice relating to plagiarism in the level 3 curriculum as delivered in AS and A2 courses. The definition of plagiarism, how it was experienced and what action should be taken was considered within focus groups of students, teachers and support staff. A questionnaire was used to compare the outcome of these groups with the views of teaching staff across the wider curriculum.

2.2 The main body of the report describes the results under five headings:

- Understanding the definitions of plagiarism
- Previous experience of participants
- Extent and impact on success
- Perceived Consequences
- Avoiding and discouraging plagiarism

- 2.3 The research conclusion and recommendations then address improvement in the application of a College-wide policy, including effective communication and implementation of a shared definition of plagiarism. Recommendations for best practice are highlighted and suggestions made of further research for development of a coordinated, unambiguous plagiarism policy.

### **3 Research methods**

- 3.1 The research involved three phases. Firstly, a literature review was conducted to consider policy and practice as well as commonly used definitions within a post 16 context, although most references related to Higher rather than further education. (see appendix ). The second phase of the research following on from a literature review was based on the elicitation, through focus groups lasting 60 – 75 minutes, of the perceptions of students aged 16-19, their teachers and a range of support staff with regard to a number of themes related to the issue of Plagiarism. The discussion themes were drawn from the research highlighted in the literature review and through the input of a multi-professional task group who also ran each of the focus groups. A number of questions were devised for each theme (see appendix). The questions were piloted within an A2 sociology group and subsequently refined.
- 3.2 The task group decided to offer students and staff gift vouchers to encourage them to participate,
- 3.3 A protocol for the conduct of all discussion groups was agreed based on the experience of the pilot (see appendix), and the discussions with participants were audio taped as unobtrusively as possible. In addition to the task group member convening the discussion, another member of the group observed each meeting and took notes of the issues arising.
- 3.4 Each interview was transcribed and both the transcripts and the notes were analysed by the authors of this report.
- 3.5 For the final phase of the research a questionnaire was also devised which attempted gather quantitative data in relation to the themes and was circulated on the College intranet. The findings from a limited response have been incorporated below.

### **4. Theme 1: Understanding the definitions of plagiarism**

- 4.1 The literature review explored current understanding of the definition of plagiarism. Underpinning any definition is the core notion of “presenting others work as one’s own”. Institutions vary in the detail of definitions that are then developed and it is in the variety of scenarios being covered that lead to a loss of clarity. One area that appears to generate debate is that of how “common knowledge” is defined and used.
- 4.2 Within Hackney Community College the definition “copying other students’ work or other dishonest actions” is in use in the student code of conduct, This definition centres on one scenario and concern has been raised as to whether and how it is being applied.
- 4.3 That plagiarism is morally, and potentially legally wrong, appears as a common understanding in the literature and also in all the college discussion groups. Furthermore, all the focus groups agreed on the core definition of “presenting others work as one’s own”. Three out of five support staff used similar terminology “using others ideas as ones own”. The results of the teacher questionnaire showed that the definition “using someone else’s ideas without a citation” had the highest recognition/agreement of 90%. The lowest recognition was to the definition “acknowledging the author but failing to indicate direct quotations” where the extent of misdemeanor is perhaps unclear.

- 4.4 For students, an immediate line was drawn between copying and getting assistance from friends or relatives and the latter was not seen as plagiarism. However, the sense of defining an unacceptable action was clear and expressed in the use of value based language such as “stealing” ( participant A) or “cheating” ( participant E referring to the words a teacher had used). The use of the word cheating was later described by a teacher as a means of discouraging the behaviour. However, student uncertainty as to what counts as plagiarism was also evident particularly with regard to assistance from friends. Also, actions such as signature forgery to claim EMA or exam cheating were included as examples alongside the more straightforward “use of text without reference”. This uncertainty re-emerged in the later discussion about prior experience of plagiarism. Here, the relationship between the use of ideas and the structure of their presentation was raised, and whether looking at and using another persons structure for the work is plagiarism.
- 4.5 In the group made up of teachers emphasis was placed on the notion of intent, with language such as “deliberately” (participant D) or “blatantly” (participant E) used within definitions. They also described specific action such as “copying word for word” (participant A) or “downloading”. (Participant A C)
- 4.6 The role of the internet was specifically identified by teachers in both focus group and questionnaire. In particular, it was added as “copying from the internet” by one questionnaire respondent, suggesting an understanding of this form of access to the source material being a defining characteristic.
- 4.7 The level of understanding about plagiarism was equal between students and support staff, in that one person in each focus group admitted that they had not previously met the term before. However, within the support staff focus group itself there was a greater variation in understanding and experience. One participant admitted having difficulty defining it, and another to looking it up prior to the discussion. Those who had directly supported learners, in library or IT settings, had a more immediate, and occasionally in depth, understanding of the issue. Awareness was also created by those who had participated in disciplinary proceedings. Appropriate levels of assistance were a key area of discussion when defining the issue for this group.
- 4.8 In most cases the majority of the groups felt that plagiarism was not acceptable. However this was related to the point of discussion with a stronger position being taken during the discussion about definitions. Whether it was felt to be serious, might also reflect the characteristics of this sample particularly those who chose to respond to the questionnaire.
- 4.9 One characteristic of this research is that it is exploring the situation within one part of the curriculum offer, the sixth form centre where the majority of learners are at level 3 ( AS/A2). The approach in other areas may vary according to level. One indicator that this might be the case is present in the teaching staff questionnaire where two respondents felt that plagiarism was acceptable by learners at ESOL entry level 1-3

A key area of concern, which was raised in all three groups, is the appropriate role of assistance by relatives or friends. Several in the student group believed that family help was acceptable, whilst the support staff group were concerned about the level of contribution they are asked to make. It was at this point in the discussion acceptability- that teachers first identified family help as an issue. However, teachers and students did not identify input from outside family and friends i.e. from support staff such as librarians or mentors as a concern.

## 5. Theme 2: How have participants experienced it previously?

5.1 Most participants in the focus groups and 70 % of questionnaire respondents had encountered instances of plagiarism. For students the experience was usually at school, but only one described it as personal experience. Initially what was being described were instances of where someone was caught, and only in some cases did the student go on to describe their own behaviour where they were not caught. Examples included, verbatim copying from a text book for GCSE course work, copying in an exam, taking coursework from the internet and submission of identical work for English coursework

5.2 It was at this point that some students began to play down the severity of the incident by considering mitigating factors. One justification used was that plagiarism was needed as a strategy to catch up, after missing a part of a course. Once exceptions had been referred to in this way, the discussion then returned to definitions- with an exploration as to where learning ended and plagiarism began. Gradations in severity were suggested, on the basis of "how much" has been copied or the need to make sure that work appears slightly different from your friends. A distinction between copying ideas and copying a structure was made.

5.3 The discussion acknowledged the severity of plagiarism in an exam, and also explored whether plagiarism can be proved. Where regular warnings had been given by teachers then awareness of these issues was high

5.4 The perceived importance of the scenario- where two students submit identical work- has led to the current definition of plagiarism used within the student code of conduct. Two participants in the teacher focus group had this as an example which may indicate its extent; however, it may also show that this is an easy occurrence to spot. The examples given in the discussion group were wide ranging as participant D noted

"Just about every aspect of the activity came up"

These included, using another's coursework from the previous year, downloading from a web site, copying from textbooks, getting another to write a personal statement as well as submitting identical work

5.5 A number of issues arose as teachers described the action they had taken. The most common action was to ask the students to re-submit, but this was complicated where it was not known who had copied from whom. In one case the teacher had taken action against both learners, until the person who had copied the work owned up.

Requiring resubmission had usually been seen as sufficient and appropriate action. Students were sometimes warned that a second instance might lead to being withdrawn from the course. As the discussion progressed a harder line began to be developed, with terms such as "deliberate deception" (participant D) and "same as cheating in an exam" (participant C) used. Whether sanctions should be more severe from the start, and the fact that plagiarism may be more prevalent when using course work to make a final assessment, were raised as issues.

5.6 Underlying the discussion were some references to how procedures were working. One concern was how to manage the reaction of students, who were often in denial. A verbal test of honesty was described, exploring the learner's knowledge of the ideas presented in copied work. One participant (C) felt that the college policy was unclear, another (A) that if the practice was not checked early then it tended to grow through the year.

5.7 Although the questionnaire asked staff whether they had encountered plagiarism by

students in this college, and 70% had, it did not explore which type of plagiarism had occurred. The practice was not confined to students, with 40% of staff in the questionnaire having observed plagiarism by staff and one person noting it from a manager.

- 5.8 Support staff had fewer recent examples of plagiarism, and most described not usually being in a position to diagnose its occurrence. One participant (B) recalled having had a friend copy work without permission at school. One participant (A) who worked on student disciplinary procedures could only recall one instance involving plagiarism over several years. The most extensive examples were given by participant (D) who had worked in a university library and had observed the actions of teaching departments e.g. re the plagiarising of dissertation and (B) who had observed the action of a teacher at this college. One person (C) had seen their own work plagiarised by a previous manager.
- 5.9 At some point, all the groups considered the motivation for plagiarising. Participant A in the teachers group summed up two characteristics which make a student vulnerable to committing plagiarism: that of an academically weaker learner in a group and/or someone who has missed parts of the course. These characteristics also occurred in examples given in the other groups.

## **6. Theme 3: Extent and impact on success**

- 6.1 The student group were to some extent confused over the definition of plagiarism, when estimating the extent to which their own or others' work contains material not credited to another author. For example, they took shared ideas around, for example, a particular narrative to mean plagiarism, even when the written text may not necessarily have been referred to. Respondent D. for example, cited Harry Potter and the Worst Witch stories as similar texts, i.e. by inference, the former drawing upon the latter without crediting it i.e. plagiarising. Respondent E commented that they had heard in English, that there were only seven key narratives thus making it impossible not to plagiarise. However, confusion aside, the general consensus was that approximately 10% of their work contained material not credited to other authors. Respondent B, though confused, put it as high as 40% and respondent D 25%. There was also a general agreement that everybody plagiarises to some extent, and indeed it was difficult not to. The ease by which relevant material can be found via the Internet was cited as a key factor. However, there was some disagreement over whether plagiarising has an impact upon learning. One respondent actually felt that plagiarising enhanced their learning. They understood others' work better when contextualising it within their own.
- 6.2 The only negative impact alluded to was that the ease by which students can access others' work has made them lazy and disinclined to conduct original research. Respondent D. commented that young people today, 'use their minds' much less than in the past and a further consensus emerged that something needs to be done with the new generation to make them think for themselves more. Within the teachers group, respondent D. also commented that, in their opinion, there is a general decline in people's creative and critical faculties as a result of relying on plagiarism.
- 6.3 There was general agreement among the teachers that plagiarism is fairly widespread. They estimated that between 10% and 20% of coursework, in particular, contains unaccredited material. What was of particular concern was the extent to which it appeared to be tolerated. The main reason for this was pressure of work. Respondent F commented that a significant amount of plagiarised work 'gets through' as they simply haven't time to check with each student, whether they can elaborate upon the terminology they have used. Interestingly, the teachers group

picked up on the theme of impact. They felt that plagiarised coursework contributes to higher success rates and is part of the general utilitarian culture, which sees education as a means to an end. That is, in terms of “a culture of credits”, whereby grades mean places in university or college or in the workplace. Allied to this, they also felt that plagiarism continues to go unchecked, because the consequences might have an impact on funding or success rates, especially as there are funding implications when students are withdrawn from a course.

- 6.4 There was widespread agreement that the approach to plagiarism within the college is inconsistent. Respondent C. suggested that students should be taught about citation at the beginning of their course and about the unacceptability of cheating and of, real consequences. However the general consensus suggested that it was not so much that plagiarism went unnoticed and indeed this was confirmed by teachers, who responded to the questionnaire who felt that it was either likely or very likely to be caught in over half of cases. The problem was in their view that nothing was ever really done about it. Respondents pointed out that cheating was even tolerated in some public examinations, and so by inference, little action on plagiarism could really be expected.
- 6.5 The members of the support staff focus group had little actual experience of identifying plagiarism. But they did notice a reluctance among students to submit work in their own words that had not been reworked with the help of someone perceived to be more articulate than they. This lack of confidence was seen to be at the root of student motivation to plagiarise. The suggestion was made that there is a culture of plagiarism through a lack dialogue about the acceptability of original writing, however flawed it may be technically

## **7. Theme 4: Consequences**

- 7.1 The questionnaire respondents clearly felt that plagiarism had a significant impact upon learning. Over 80% felt that it was very likely or likely that student’s learning experience was being reduced. The students themselves felt that plagiarism had an impact upon their development. In particular, they were concerned that higher education would require more independent study and research as would higher level occupations. In such situations, it was suggested by one respondent the individual might not have the skills to cope. Respondent F in the teachers group went as far as to suggest that increasing levels of plagiarism are in part responsible for the reducing levels of basic skills in the workplace and in higher and further education. Respondent B. reiterated an earlier comment regarding a perceived loss of creative and critical faculties which if continued unchecked could lead to a kind of moral dullness or stupidity where anything goes as long as the perpetrator gets what they want. Respondent C recognised that the consequences for individuals in higher education are increasingly likely to be negative ones, given the capacity for HE institutions to employ scanning technology.
- 7.2 Members of the support group were more vocal regarding the wider consequences of plagiarism at higher levels of the educational system in particular where genuine skill acquisition is essential to health and safety. Respondent D. for example, highlighted the consequences at a doctor or lawyer, lacking true knowledge and understanding of an area of work.
- 7.3 All of the groups alluded to a progressive tendency for society to stagnate as creativity and originality are reduced through increasing tendency to plagiarise. All groups seemed to consider the issue on this wider societal level in an apocalyptic or dystopian way rather to the neglect of education and the individual and to issues of progression and capability. However, it was widely perceived that plagiarism is a problem for both the education system and society and that the consequences may

include less creativity, less individuality and fewer high level skills all to the detriment of the wider society

## **8 Theme 5: Avoiding and discouraging plagiarism**

- 8.1 Students' feelings about what the college is currently doing to discourage plagiarism were mixed. One student had clearly been informed during the induction period for one of their courses. A clear outline had been provided by their teacher about the potential consequences of plagiarising, from initial verbal warning to more serious sanctions to eventual exclusion. Others did refer to verbal warnings, but most felt that the college was doing very little and, if anything, encouraged plagiarism by leaving students too much to their own devices, either due to staff absence or due to too much whole group teaching.
- 8.2 The student group focused on strategies, which they felt would help reduce the level and need to plagiarise. The need arose, it was argued, from the fact that staff were sometimes absent and unavailable to provide guidance on coursework. Under such circumstances, the Internet was seen as a surrogate teacher, and inevitably provided opportunities to copy and paste sections of text, which were later claimed to be the students original work. The solutions suggested by students were all fairly similar. They proposed that staff spend more time in one-to-one academic tutorials and small group work, where students could share their ideas and teachers could provide direction. Students could more directly seek advice and guidance such that they would not need to seek this elsewhere. Plagiarism would therefore not be 'necessary' as the students would be able to complete their work without additional input. As respondent C. commented 'the more confident you are, the less tempted you are to go somewhere else and the more you understand something the less you need to go plagiarise'.
- 8.3 The questionnaire highlighted a lack of awareness of formal college policy with regard to plagiarism among the staff. 80% of staff were unaware that any policy existed. All the respondents overwhelmingly supported students being formally taught about plagiarism and how to avoid it in tutorials. A large majority, 75%, believe students should receive a guidance meeting on their first offence. Opinion on verbal warnings and requirements to resubmit were more evenly spread for first and second offence. Opinion shifts in how to deal with serious offences with 85% supporting formal disciplinary procedures.
- 8.4 Overall, teachers appear to prefer to initially deal with plagiarism on a case by case basis relatively informally but are prepared to support strong disciplinary action for serious breaches. Written responses within the questionnaire highlighted the need to treat cases on an individual basis, with sensitivity, i.e. given the diverse needs of our students. The motivations to plagiarise are wide-ranging and therefore strategies to deal with it require a pastoral emphasis, initially before initiating any formal disciplinary procedures
- 8.5 There was a strong consensus among the staff focus group that the college did very little to support staff with regard to dealing with plagiarism and as a result staff were left to their own devices. Many staff dealt with plagiarism in a professional manner, but on an individual basis and most members of the group seemed unaware that plagiarism was included within the student code of conduct. Only respondent F. commented that they had seen reference to plagiarism in college policy documents. However, it was clear that most staff did not feel the college was doing enough. Respondent B commented that plagiarism policy should be highlighted during induction and the consequences spelled out at the beginning of the course. There was widespread condemnation of the college's disciplinary procedure and its failure to resolve problems arising from student indiscipline quickly enough. This procedure

was seen to be inadequate, particularly through a perceived bias against permanent exclusion due to funding implications. Respondent D felt that the college should invest in technology to assist staff with the recognition of plagiarised work, and that policy should be developed, which is appropriate and speedy

- 8.6 The focus group of support staff was largely unaware of anything that the college is actually doing to formally address plagiarism. Several members through their work as librarians had come across software being used in Higher education effectively. They felt that the college should purchase such software in order to prepare students for the future reality that they would probably be required to submit work for scanning prior to its assessment. In terms of addressing the morality issues, it was also suggested that students should be made more aware through induction of the ethical issues.
- 8.7 There was also some discussion related to the lack of cultural capital many of our students face, due perhaps to their background or where adult learners are concerned because of the many years that they had been outside the education system. There was some criticism of the curriculum areas giving insufficient attention to developing essay writing skills, again inviting students to compensate for their deficiencies in this regard by copying the work of other more proficient writers. Respondent D also highlighted failings in the methods of assessment often used, and proposed alternatives. For example, using pre-release material to prepare for written assessments under exam conditions.

## **9. Conclusion**

- 9.1 The results of the research into behaviour and understanding within this curriculum area indicates that the organisational culture at the college is one where plagiarism is recognised as an issue and acted upon by teaching staff albeit in a fairly inconsistent manner. However it is also apparent that there is a need to increase the detail within policy, improve understanding across the organisation and increase resources and support provided to teaching staff and learners. At this point in time the organisation might therefore be said to be moving from the recognition stage of the JISCpas roadmap to the implementation stage.
- 9.2 There is evidence in this research that learners are influenced both by prior experience, often in school and at GCSE level, and by standards set by teachers. Within college, activity which puts the policy into practice will need to reflect the needs of learners at different levels.

## **10 Recommendations**

- 10.1 That the momentum created by this research is sustained by the creation of a cross curricula plagiarism task group.
- 10.2 To ensure that plagiarism is referred to by name within the code of conduct.
- 10.3 To revise and expand the definition used within the code of conduct. A suggested definition might read “copying or using the work of others and presenting it as ones own, without acknowledgement”.
- 10.4 For the code of conduct to refer to more detailed guidance in a separate document. This would include use of the most common examples described within this report such as copying from a classmate, downloading from the internet etc.
- 10.5 That all documentation accompanying work for assessment has an authentication statement which outlines the consequences of copying or plagiarism which students are required to sign

- 10.6 That this separate document includes a policy which has swift sanctions and SMART actions for serious or repeated breaches of plagiarism policy
- 10.7 That teaching staff are trained to respond to instances of plagiarism sensitively according to the diverse circumstances of our learners
- 10.8 That reducing the likelihood of plagiarism is recognised as a potential benefit from improvements in other areas of support. These include advice about “catching up” strategies for when classes are missed, or as a benefit of accurate initial assessment.
- 10.9 That training materials for learners are created for use in induction and tutorials to address both the ethics and consequences of plagiarism.
- 10.10 That these sessions use scenarios that appear in this research and lead to sessions which teach students how and when to cite others work.
- 10.11 That teaching teams delivering coursework sessions explore ways of providing one to one academic tutorials with each student.
- 10.12 That recognising and responding to acts of plagiarism be included in the induction and training of teaching and support staff
- 10.13 That responsibility for implementing plagiarism policy is included in appropriate job descriptions and activity monitored by line managers.
- 10.14 That the College should explore technological solutions to prepare students for Higher Education

## 11 Action plan

Action	Who	Target date
Presentation of the research report to SMT and HOS	AP 14-19 LRS manager	Oct 07
Formation of plagiarism task group to address action plan	AP 14-19 LRS manager senior curriculum manager	Oct 07
Revision of definition of Plagiarism	Plagiarism task group	Nov 07
Creation of draft extended plagiarism policy	Plagiarism task group	Nov 07
Disseminate policy for wider discussion and implementation	Task group	Nov 07
Inclusion of plagiarism in tutorial/induction support materials	AD student services AP 14-19 LRS manager	Dec 07
Inclusion in Induction/ training	Training manager senior curriculum manager	Dec 07

## Appendices to the report.

Plagiarism: its extent, policy and practice as understood within one curriculum area in Hackney Community College:

### Appendix 1) Literature review

#### **Definitions of Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is an issue that has been identified and acknowledged as a danger to the educational sector around the world. However, there remains a lack of clarity over exactly what the term means. The importance of deterring plagiarism though continues to, arguably, enlarge as increasing provision of information through electronic mediums continues to lead to concerns that plagiarism is rising and will continue to do so.

Therefore, many institutions now include in their student codes of conduct a warning that plagiarism will not be accepted. These definitions do vary, for example, Indiana University's reads:

"Plagiarism is defined as presenting someone else's work, including the work of other students, as one's own. Any ideas or materials taken from another source for either written or oral use must be fully acknowledged, unless the information is common knowledge. What is considered 'common knowledge' may differ from course to course.

- a. A student must not adopt or reproduce ideas, opinions, theories, formulas, graphics, or pictures of another person without acknowledgment.
- b. A student must give credit to the originality of others and acknowledge indebtedness whenever:
- c. Directly quoting another person's actual words, whether oral or written;
- d. Using another person's ideas, opinions, or theories;
- e. Paraphrasing the words, ideas, opinions, or theories of others, whether oral or written;
- f. Borrowing facts, statistics, or illustrative material; or
- g. Offering materials assembled or collected by others in the form of projects or collections without acknowledgment" (Indiana University, 2005).

Clearly the issue of what constitutes 'common knowledge' is an issue with this definition.

An alternative approach, to Indiana's, is that of South Africa's University of Pretoria which focuses on what may be plagiarised:

"You commit plagiarism when you present someone else's ideas - published or unpublished - as if they were your own. People's ideas may be contained in  
Written text articles, books, dissertations, theses, newspapers, magazines, notes, course material, co-students' projects, e-mail messages, data, computer code, everything on the Internet, etc. Visual text books fine art, graphics, photographs, etc.  
Multimedia products websites, video productions, films, CDs, design projects, etc.  
Music compositions, lyrics, CDs, music or sound bites on the Internet, etc.  
Spoken text speeches, audio recordings, lectures, interviews, etc." (University of Pretoria, 2004).

In the UK, many educational institutions have their definitions available online. These are sometimes hosted by the library as part of research skills information or as part of the central student code of conduct. The JISC Plagiarism Advisory Service (JISCPAS; Duggan, 2003) offers much advice regarding the issue including a case study of how plagiarism has been tackled at Oxford Brookes University, which includes the below literature review:

"Definitions of plagiarism, collusion and misconduct

Although definitions of academic misconduct in general and plagiarism in particular are universally regarded as important, the latter are difficult to devise. Evans (2000) comments, 'Everyone seems to know [plagiarism] is wrong, including those who commit the offence, but few know how to completely define it and its kissing cousin, copyright law'. He lists various types of plagiarism such as auto-plagiarism (failure to cite oneself), self-plagiarism (submitting the same document several times) and cryptomnesia where hidden memory plays a key role. A common source of confusion arises from many people's tendency to confuse plagiarism with other forms of academic misconduct and cheating (Franklyn Stokes and Newstead, 1995, helpfully list 22). Often, 'plagiarism' covers everything a student should not do at university.

Sometimes, definitions leave out the broader context. Many definitions only address writing whilst others refer to 'work' as in phrases such as 'passing off someone else's work as your own', to include constructions, music, photographs, unpublished documents, and others' ideas gained through working in a group. A minority of definitions include the concept of gaining a personal reward from others' work in settings other than assessment such as when one seeks to enhance or improve one's personal and/or professional reputation by using others' work without acknowledgement. Finally, some definitions of plagiarism include a disclaimer about motives, pointing out that the action is unacceptable whether it was intentional or accidental, i.e. arising from fraud or misunderstanding.

Another difficulty is that some definitions include an exemption from citation rules for 'common knowledge' but few define this concept despite the fact that common knowledge to a professional sociologist, for example, and a first year undergraduate differ greatly. Indeed, one of the characteristics of becoming a part of the discipline is taking on the knowledge base in that field. Citation rules also vary between different types of writing or dissemination. For example, a reflective piece will need referencing differently from a published journal article. An exam seeks to test knowledge and affirms that the student 'knows' and is therefore in possession of that piece of information. In coursework, the information can only be 'borrowed' from whoever really owns it and this needs signaling in a citation. Dissemination methods also have an impact. A researcher with a well recognised research profile can stand up in a conference and say, 'Research shows....' but when her talk is included in conference proceedings, she may be asked to cite the source of this very general statement (or she may not depending on the editor's style notes). Finally, different disciplines have very different rules for citing others' ideas. Biologists and Historians, asked about plagiarism, can and do engage in heated arguments about their diverse approaches.

Few definitions in handbooks admit any of these subtleties yet any or all could come into play once an accusation has been made. Articles by Franklyn-Stokes and Newstead (1995); Bannister and Ashworth, (1998) and Macdonald (2000) all include typical quotes from students expressing their confusion" (Carroll et al, 2001).

The lead author of the Brookes research's own book on the subject states a simple definition of plagiarism, "plagiarism is passing off someone else's work, whether intentionally or unintentionally, as your own for your own benefit", but admits each part of the "definition merits further clarification" which takes a number of pages to do (Carroll, 2002). Plagiarism can be seen as an example of "harmful and immoral conduct" in that

"some scholars extract work and purposely fail to acknowledge the source. Such conduct can create the false impression among readers and referees that the work represents the author's 'own' unique view. At the same time, not providing the references hides the original work from other workers" (Bin, 1999:236).

An issue of cultural background has also been identified with regards to plagiarism. That "copyright is an alien concept in many countries" leading to the case being than even though some (international undergraduate) "students can clearly define the concept of plagiarism,

they are unable to apply the principles in practice” (Hurley et al, 2006:).

However, one study into the effects of the introduction of electronic reserves at Universities stressed that there is little “evidence of plagiarism [as a result of introducing the reserves], which could result from ‘cut and paste’ functions” (Dugdale, 1999:190). The same report, however, stressed how “as more students are drawn from only using recommended texts to others, the more difficult this might be to detect” as staff will perhaps not be able to spot cut and pasted sections from materials they are less familiar with (Dugdale, 1999:190). Since Dugdale wrote, the kind of plagiarism from electronic sources she discussed has been increasingly tackled by technology. The JISC financed *TurnItIn* system is now used by around 85% of UK universities both as a deterrent to, and to catch, attempts to plagiarise (JISC Plagiarism Advisory Service, 2007).

### **Existing research on post-compulsory education plagiarism**

The JISCPAS website offers a considerable amount of information for institutions to help them understand and deal with plagiarism issues. This goes beyond making use of *TurnItIn* to advice including how to change organisational culture toward one of academic integrity. JISCPAS have also financed a report into plagiarism issues regarding Higher Education (HE) provision in a Further Education (FE) setting (Duggan et al, 2001). For a predominantly HE focus Carroll (2002) covers many issues surrounding plagiarism from definition to deterring, detection and punishment. The consideration of FE, however, would seem to be fairly rare amongst research on the topic. From what is available, it is although apparent plagiarism is often tackled as part of the wider issue of Information Literacy (IL) within both levels of education.

The needs of those students for whom English is a second language have been identified as potentially particularly acute as it has been found such groups have “difficulties grasping these issues [plagiarism, academic integrity and intellectual property law]” (Hurley et al, 2006). Hurley’s study found that an understanding of the issues was only built up by imbedding the plagiarism issue into work surrounding referencing styles and search plans. Indeed, there have been examples of where skills for research (i.e. IL) and information technology skills are taught together with the “understand[ing of] the ethical considerations of information, such as copyright and plagiarism” an expected learning outcome (Mackey et al, 2005:546). The issues taught during the section of the course where “how to properly document sources using a professional style guide such as APA” is discussed (Mackey et al, 2005:547). The American University whose experience Mackey outlines, makes use of “three web based tutorials developed by the University Library, including Evaluating Internet Sites 101, Researching 101, and Plagiarism 101” in addition to teaching time.

A study at Leeds Metropolitan University found that some teaching staff were opposed to using electronic information sources as students “copy like mad, they plagiarise like mad”, another concern being students’ “ability to assess and critically evaluate the information” (Hewitson, 2002:49). The Leeds Met. research perhaps pointing to why Information Skills and plagiarism have often been bracketed together.

At Texas A&M University their way of dealing with Plagiarism included instruction to students through an “Academic Integrity Seminar:  
The Aggie Honors System Office oversees the standards of academic integrity...and manages the process of honour code violations for the University. Any student accused of plagiarism at A&M, depending on the severity of the offence, may be required to participate in an Academic Integrity Seminar, part of which includes a joint 4-hour instruction session taught by the Libraries' Instructional Services unit and the University Writing Center. Given the sensitivity of the topic and the many types of plagiarism (and often accidental plagiarism) that can occur, students often arrive with very mixed emotions, embarrassed, and sometimes have little desire to participate in class. The

objectives in the two Aggie Honor instruction sessions were to:

- create a fun and interactive environment to help motivate students, who did not necessarily want to be in attendance, to participate;
- create a comfortable environment in which students could anonymously participate (given the sensitivity of the topic);
- assess students' background knowledge of information literacy standards and practices (how, why, when to cite information); and
- Ensure that students leave with a basic knowledge of library services and resources and where to get help in order to assist them with future writing assignments" (Hoffman et al, 2006:).

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## Appendix 2) Questionnaire.

### Plagiarism Teaching Staff Questionnaire

This questionnaire is part of a small development project about plagiarism which has received funding from JISCpas. The results from this questionnaire will be used alongside the information from three focus groups to inform action designed to improve college policy and support teaching practice.

There is a prize draw with a £20.00 voucher for one entrant

There are 5 sections in this questionnaire which should only take a few minutes to complete, as most responses are tick boxes.

#### 1 What do you understand to be plagiarism?

"Plagiarism might be defined as presenting someone else's work, e.g. from books, the Internet, reports etc, including the work of other staff, as one's own."

1.1 Which of the following do you think of as plagiarism? *Please tick as many boxes as appropriate.*

a) Summarising a text without acknowledgement of the original source	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Using unacknowledged quotations which are more than 3 words in length	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Using someone else's ideas without a citation	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Using someone else's tables or data	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) Acknowledging the author but failing to indicate direct quotations	<input type="checkbox"/>
f) Using quotation marks but not providing a citation	<input type="checkbox"/>
g) Using contributions or help from a friend or relative	<input type="checkbox"/>
h) Using unacknowledged sources in worksheets or handouts for use in class	<input type="checkbox"/>
i) Others? Please add here.....	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### 2. Prior experience

2.1 In your experience at this college have you ever been aware of an act of plagiarism by,

*please tick as many boxes as appropriate.*

a) A student	
b) A member of staff	
c) A manager	

*Please continue onto next page.*

**2.2** Have you ever been aware of plagiarism in another organisation?

Yes		No	
-----	--	----	--

**2.3** Are you aware of any of the following actions having been taken as a result of plagiarism by a student on a course you were involved in delivering?

*Please tick as many boxes as appropriate*

a) A verbal warning	
b) Marked as failed for that piece of work	
c) Direction to re-submit	
d) Disciplinary action	
e) Suspension	
f) Expulsion from course	
g) Other (please specify)	

**2.4** Do you check work submitted to you for plagiarism?

Yes		No	
-----	--	----	--

*If "no" please go to question 2.7*

**2.5** If yes, how do you detect it? *Please tick as many boxes as appropriate*

a) Personal experience and intuition	
b) Informants	
c) Internet search	
d) Checking original sources	
e) Plagiarism detection software (Please specify)	
f) Other (Please specify)	

**2.6** Which of the above do you consider to be the most effective? *Please put in appropriate letter.*

**2.7** To your knowledge has your work ever been plagiarised and if so by whom? *Please tick as many boxes as appropriate*

a) Student	
b) Manager	
c) Colleague	

*Please continue onto next page.*

### **3. Extent and impact on success**

**3.1** How serious do you consider plagiarism to be in the following teaching situations: *please tick only one box on each line*

	Very serious	Of some concern	Not serious	acceptable
a) ESOL entry levels 1-3				
b) ESOL levels 1 and 2				
c) Entry or foundation course work				
d) Level 1 assignments				
e) Level 2 assignments				
f) Level 3 assignments				
g) Level 4 assignments				
h) Examined course work				
i) Class work				
j) Home work				

*Please continue onto next page.*

### **4. Consequences**

**4.1** In your view, how probable are the following consequences from plagiarism? *Please tick only one box on each line*

	Very likely	likely	possible	unlikely
a) A student getting caught on their current course at this college				
b) A student getting caught on a course in the future e.g. in another organisation				
c) A student's learning experience being reduced				

d) An individual not actually having the skills or knowledge they claim on a CV				
---	--	--	--	--

*Please continue onto next page.*

### **5. Developing our policy and practice**

**5.1** Are you aware of the College's Plagiarism Policy or procedures?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
-----	--------------------------	----	--------------------------

**5.2** Where do you think you can find the policy? *Please tick as many boxes as appropriate*

	I believe the policy is located in
a) College student handbook	
b) Staff code of conduct	
c) VLE	
e) College Intranet	
f) Official communications	
g) Work procedures	
h) Departmental practice	
i) Other - please specify	

**5.3** Where do you think the policy should be published?

--

*Please continue onto next page.*

**5.4** How should plagiarism be addressed in practice? *Please tick only one box on each line*

	For all learners	First offence	Repeat offence	Serious offence
a) Tutorial lesson about this issue and its				

consequences				
b) Tutorial input on avoidance strategies eg. Citation techniques				
c) Guidance meeting with supportive emphasis on culture of honesty				
e) Verbal warning				
f) Requirement to re-submit				
g) Failure of the assessment with no chance to re-submit				
h) Formal disciplinary procedures				
i) Other action				

*Please continue onto next page.*

Do you have any other comment?

If you would like to be entered in the prize draw please enter your full name here:

The draw will be made at the end of July 2007.

Thank you for your cooperation and time in filling in this questionnaire.

Please return the completed form to John Blyth  
Curriculum Resources Librarian

Room L009  
 The Learning Centre  
 Hackney Community College  
 Falkirk Street  
 London  
 N1 6HQ

Tel 020 7613 9285  
 Or  
 Ext 7285 for internal callers

## **Appendix 3) Questionnaire findings**

### **Plagiarism Teaching Staff Questionnaire July 2007: summary of results**

This questionnaire is part of a small development project about plagiarism which has received funding from JISCpas. The results from this questionnaire will be used alongside the information from three focus groups to inform action designed to improve college policy and support teaching practice.

An online questionnaire was put on the College Intranet and printed format was issued to staff at the College's one day conference.

**Total responses: 20**

**Results are in percentage and number of respondents.**

The questionnaire has 5 sections.

#### **1 What do you understand to be plagiarism?**

1.1 Which of the following do you think of as plagiarism?

j) Summarising a text without acknowledgement of the original source	85%	17
k) Using unacknowledged quotations which are more than 3 words in length	65%	13
l) Using someone else's ideas without a citation	90%	18
m) Using someone else's tables or data	70%	14
n) Acknowledging the author but failing to indicate direct quotations	45%	9
o) Using quotation marks but not providing a citation	60%	12
p) Using contributions or help from a friend or relative	50%	10
q) Using unacknowledged sources in worksheets or handouts for use in class	65%	13
r) Others? Please add here..... Copying or extensive borrowing from somebody else's work e.g. another student's	10%	2
<b><u>Written comments</u></b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Copying from the Internet?"</li> <li>• "Photocopying directly without acknowledgement"</li> </ul>		

- The respondents have a high awareness of what plagiarism is, only 1.1e scoring less than 50%

## **2. Prior experience**

**2.1** In your experience at this college have you ever been aware of an act of plagiarism by.

d) A student	70%	14
e) A member of staff	40%	8
f) A manager	5%	1

- Responses to 2.1 would indicate that plagiarism is widespread amongst students at 70%
- However, it should also be noted that 40% of respondents have noticed plagiarism amongst staff; so it's not just a student issue and any policy/solution would also have to include staff.

**2.2** Have you ever been aware of plagiarism in another organisation?

Yes	80%	16
No	20%	4

- Again the answers to 2.2 indicate that the problem of plagiarism is perceived to be widespread.

**2.3** Are you aware of any of the following actions having been taken as a result of plagiarism by a student on a course you were involved in delivering?

b) A verbal warning	60%	12
h) Marked as failed for that piece of work	55%	11
i) Direction to re-submit	80%	16
j) Disciplinary action	15%	3
k) Suspension	5%	1
l) Expulsion from course	5%	1
m) Other (please specify)	Written	
a. Student given an oral, rather than a written assessment.		
b. Viva to test knowledge		

- The less formal approach is more favoured with the teacher directly dealing with plagiarism and a strong 80% directing students to resubmit work.
- Stronger, formal disciplinary action is less supported, or is this because teachers are not aware of the disciplinary action?

- Contrast these responses to what is happening now, to action respondents would like to see happen, with 85% supporting formal disciplinary procedure for serious offences in response to 5.4.

#### 2.4 Do you check work submitted to you for plagiarism?

Yes	75%	15
No	20%	4

If "no" please go to question 2.7

- 75% would indicate that a high percentage of teachers do check for plagiarism
- But a worrying 20% don't, therefore, these students could be getting away with plagiarism.
- CCH policy should be that all work is checked?

#### 2.5 If yes, how do you detect it? Please tick as many boxes as appropriate

f) Personal experience and intuition	65%	13
g) Informants	15%	3
h) Internet search	60%	12
i) Checking original sources	60%	12
j) Plagiarism detection software (Please specify)		
f) Other (Please specify) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Viva"</li> <li>• "Viva to test knowledge"</li> </ul>		

#### 2.6 Which of the above do you consider to be the most effective? Please put in appropriate letter

a) Personal experience and intuition	25%	5
c) Informants		
d) Internet search	30%	6
e) Checking original sources	25%	5
f) Plagiarism detection software (Please specify)		
f) Other (Please specify)		

#### 2.7 To your knowledge has your work ever been plagiarised and if so by whom?

b) Student	40%	8
b) Manager	15%	3
c) Colleague	20%	4

- Again, these responses would show that plagiarism is widespread, particularly if taken into consideration with responses to 2.1 and 2.2

### **3. Extent and impact on success**

#### **3.1 How serious do you consider plagiarism to be in the following teaching situations**

	<b>Very serious</b>		<b>Of some concern</b>		<b>Not serious</b>		<b>acceptable</b>	
<b>a) ESOL entry levels 1-3</b>	15%	3	25%	5	20%	4	10%	2
<b>b) ESOL levels 1 and 2</b>	20%	4	35%	7	15%	3	0	0
<b>c) Entry or foundation course work</b>	25%	5	20%	4	25%	5	0	0
<b>d) Level 1 assignments</b>	40%	8	25%	5	10%	2	0	0
<b>e) Level 2 assignments</b>	45%	9	40%	8	5%	1	0	0
<b>f) Level 3 assignments</b>	70%	14	25%	5	0	0	0	0
<b>g) Level 4 assignments</b>	70%	14	5%	1	0	0	0	0
<b>h) Examined course work</b>	70%	14	15%	3	0	0	0	0
<b>i) Class work</b>	20%	4	20%	4	30%	6	0	0
<b>j) Home work</b>	35%	7	45%	9	5%	1	0	0

- Teachers are more accepting of plagiarism at the lower levels, particularly at ESOL entry levels and increasingly less tolerant at the higher level.
- At levels 3 and 4 none of the respondents have marked “Not Serious” or “Acceptable”
- Indeed, only 10% of respondents thought that plagiarism was acceptable and that was only at ESOL entry levels
- So there is quite consistent opinion in what is found acceptable and very serious.

### **4. Consequences**

#### **4.1 In your view, how probable are the following consequences from plagiarism?**

	<b>Very likely</b>		<b>likely</b>		<b>possible</b>		<b>unlikely</b>	
a) A student getting caught on their current course at this college	30%	6	20%	4	40%	8	5%	1
b) A student getting caught on a course in the future e.g. in another organisation	25%	5	40%	8	35%	7	0	0
c) A student's learning	45%	9	30%	6	20%	4	5%	1

experience being reduced								
d) An individual not actually having the skills or knowledge they claim on a CV	50%	10	35%	7	15%	3	0	0

- The respondents were more or less evenly split between their confidence in students on present courses being caught or not.
- 50% thought it was “Very Likely” or “Likely” getting caught and 45% thought it “Possible” or “Unlikely”.
- It’s interesting to contrast the responses from 4.1a with those from 2.5a,c and d, as that would indicate a majority of teachers are making regular checks; so it should be more likely students are caught

## **5. Developing our policy and practice**

### **5.1 Are you aware of the College’s Plagiarism Policy or procedures?**

Yes	25%	5
No	80%	16

### **5.2 Where do you think you can find the policy?**

	I believe the policy is located in	
a College student handbook	75%	15
b) Staff code of conduct	30%	6
c) VLE	30%	6
e) College Intranet	70%	14
f) Official communications	5%	1
g) Work procedures	5%	1
h) Departmental practice	40%	8
i) Other - please specify	“Walls - I know the rules are posted on my classroom walls.”  “Course handbook”	

- The responses to 5.1 and 5.2 demonstrate a lack of awareness of HCC's plagiarism policy.
- HCC needs to have a coherently written and prominently displayed plagiarism policy
- And, as indicated by the responses to 5.3 displayed in a variety of places

### 5.3 Where do you think the policy should be published?

	I believe the policy should be located in	
a) College student handbook	50%	10
b) Staff code of conduct	40%	8
c) VLE	30%	6
e) College Intranet	40%	8
f) Official communications	15%	3
g) Work procedures	20%	4
h) Departmental practice	25%	5
i) Other - please specify	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Student handbook <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Announced as part of induction</li> <li>- Course handbooks/information packs for students</li> <li>- Written in brief on all assessed assignments together with grading criteria</li> <li>- Staff pack at beginning of year</li> <li>- induction pack for new Staff</li> <li>- A4Group and individual Tutorials"</li> </ul> </li> <li>• "Course handbooks and on classroom walls so that attention can be drawn to it as work is given and in the event of plagiarism occurring."</li> <li>• "Student diary."</li> <li>• "Should be advertised on a regular basis via email with a link to Intranet and reading"</li> <li>• "Issued to all staff to provide students with prior to issuing <u>all</u> assignments. Follow this with a Summative Sheet that is issued with <u>all</u> assignments."</li> <li>• "Course handbooks"</li> <li>• "Posters in classrooms and workrooms"</li> </ul>	

#### 5.4 How should plagiarism be addressed in practice?

	For all learners		First offence		Repeat offence		Serious offence	
a) Tutorial lesson about this issue and its consequences	100%	20	0	0	0	0	0	0
b) Tutorial input on avoidance strategies eg. Citation techniques	100%	20	0	0	0	0	0	0
c) Guidance meeting with supportive emphasis on culture of honesty	20%	4	75%	15	0	0	0	0
e) Verbal warning	10%	2	55%	11	35%	7	0	0
f) Requirement to re-submit	10%	2	55%	11	35%	7	0	0
g) Failure of the assessment with no chance to re-submit	0	0	0	0	50%	10	50%	10
h) Formal disciplinary procedures	0	0	0	0	10%	2	85%	17
i) Other action	<p>“Need for tutor to investigate why student is doing this. It could be that the student is not able to do the course work due to being on a programme that is beyond their current abilities or due to dyslexia, low level of literacy etc. Additional support may be required or a reappraisal of suitability of the course. Student may also have missed classes due to absence and this will need to be looked at. “</p> <p>“Supportive meeting - student is depriving self of learning opportunities Reassurance that is able to pass course without, for example in ESOL, achieving perfect English.”</p> <p>“In study skills lesson”</p>							

- All the respondents overwhelmingly supported students being formerly taught about plagiarism and how to avoid it in tutorials.
- A large majority, 75%, believe students should receive a guidance meeting on their first offence
- So there is wide support from teachers that students, in the first instance, should receive instruction on plagiarism as a way of dealing with it.

- Opinion on verbal warnings and requirements to resubmit are more evenly spread for first and second offence.
- Opinion shifts in how to deal with serious offences with 85% supporting formal disciplinary procedures.
- Overall teachers prefer to initially deal with plagiarism through instruction but are prepared to support strong disciplinary action for serious breaches.
- The written responses also lean towards a more sensitive and caring approach

### **Do you have any other comment?**

“I feel strongly that if a student has been wrongly placed on a course, they may well feel tempted to copy and plagiarise. We need to have very good processes for diagnostic assessment and transferring students in the early stages of the programme. We also need to have clear systems for supporting (or not) students who are absent for long periods or frequently. Has the student got the skills to catch up without huge time input over and above tutorial duties from the tutor? Maybe there needs to be a policy or strategy for these situations which are frequent and difficult to deal with.”

“This is a very current topic - my students love to copy and paste from the Internet. I tend to ask for some of their assignments to be handwritten”

“A lot of students are under the impression (they say from tutors) that internet plagiarism is the only way to pass. This is actually true in some cases for 2 reasons: 1) Questions set by tutors are too vague and difficult for the level. 2) Students are accepted on courses which are too difficult for them and they do not have the English lang for. Their own solution is to cheat. These students should be referred back to ESOL/ABE or Foundation Courses.”

- Interesting and insightful comments and points raised
- Overall the responses show a keen awareness and wish to deal thoughtfully with plagiarism
- A good point for HCC to make a start from.

K:\Information Literacy\plagiarism\plagiarism questionnaire responses only\Plagiarism Teaching Staff Questionnaire Summary.doc

## **Appendix 4) Focus Group themes**

### **Focus Group questions**

**There are 5 themes – plus questions and prompts**

#### **1. Definitions/morality**

a) Have you heard of the word 'Plagiarism' What do understand it to mean?

b) In which circumstances do you consider it to be acceptable or not acceptable?

Prompts:

- Re- drafting?
- Help from relatives?

## 2. Prior experience

- a) Have you any examples of situations in your experience where plagiarism has taken place?
- b) What was the outcome if it was discovered?

Prompts:

- Locate and pin down context.

## 3. Extent and impact on success

a) In your experience, what proportion of submitted work would you say contains uncredited material not original to the author.

- i) in terms of your own work or that of your peers (student group)  
 ii) in your observation of others work (Other groups)

b) Where this has occurred, what difference do you think this has made?

Prompt

- What do you think may cause that situation?

## 4. Consequences

What do you think the longer term consequences of plagiarism may be?

Prompts

- The likelihood of being caught due to IT scanning and screening technologies
- Impact on learning

## 5. Avoidance strategies

a) What do you think that the College and its staff are currently doing to address issues of plagiarism?

b) What further action if any, do you feel needs to be taken?

Prompts:

- Culture of honesty, citation procedures, current sanctions

## **Appendix 5) Focus group protocol**

### Running the focus groups

#### Agenda

#### Introductions

- Welcome; Introductions - yourself then the co-facilitator
- Review of goal of the meeting; To consider significance of Plagiarism in the College in order to inform future policy and Action
- Introductions before starting the tape (second in support records on summary sheet or from letter labels handed in at end)

#### Recording the sessions

Interview is taped but names are confidential.

Notes taken by facilitators

To do this we will be using letters. The Respondents merely state their letter before speaking (second in support states letter if they forget)

### **Questions and answers; Explain**

- Review of ground rules; Contributions from all
- This is not a test, opinion and experience as of now.
- Facilitator will ask each question and allow 2 minutes for everyone to jot down their thoughts
- Facilitator takes feedback in rotation (up to 5mins in total) then opens up to wider discussion (up to 5 mins). With each question the person giving initial feedback is rotated

Start tape

Transcripts – not included, available on request

### **References**

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