MOVING BEYOND PLAGIARISM DETECTION TOWARDS A CULTURE OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

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Background

The advent of electronic detection of plagiarism can lead to an increasing use of punitive measures and the re-inforcement of a very negative approach to academic scholarship. An alternative approach is the honour code system, which originated in the US. Students take a pledge to uphold the principles of academic integrity and in return are awarded certain privileges and responsibilities. These may include examinations that are not invigilated by staff and a student judiciary that polices the honour code. There is a campus-wide focus on the positive promotion of academic integrity and scholarship and less emphasis on penalties and punishment.

The rise in the number of plagiarism-related cases has forced many HEIs into a rapid evolution of policies and practices for dealing with plagiarism. Wide variation in the detail and use of plagiarism policies has been demonstrated at a national level, with concern from the OIA that this could lead to inequality of treatment of students.

The aims of this project were:

1. to conduct a paper and online survey of plagiarism-related policies and practices across the institution

2. to explore the attitudes of staff and students to the ethos of a US-type honour code system by cross-institutional staff and student focus group discussions

Key findings

Honour code system

- Both staff and students generally welcomed the ideas of framing the issue of plagiarism in more positive terms and of promoting good academic practice as a means of plagiarism prevention.

- Not every element of the US honour code system can be effectively transferred to the UK setting, due to the differences between the US and UK education contexts.

- Although both staff and student participants saw the educational benefits of student involvement in the promotion of academic integrity and good academic practice, students displayed more caution and scepticism regarding the implied shift in responsibility.

- Confusion over plagiarism still persists among students.

Analysis of policies

- Local practice varies in the penalties available within the context of the overarching institutional policy.

- Variation is perhaps to be expected given the constraints of the range of factors that need to be considered when assessing the application of penalties to individual cases.

- However, as it can be rightly argued that differential treatment for similar offences is unfair between institutions; the same is true within our institution.

This research has shown that the overarching values and ethos of the US-style honor code could be welcomed in a UK higher education institution. Given the proven effect of a modified honor code to reduce the amount and severity of plagiarism at US institutions (McCabe et al, 2002), this is certainly an area that warrants further consideration by the university. Such a holistic approach must also include a review of policies and practices concerning plagiarism. Our research has highlighted some issues in the implementation of institutional policy on plagiarism that require careful consideration by the institution.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

1. A move to a more **positive approach for the education of students and staff about plagiarism**, focussing on academic scholarship and integrity. This should include shift in the use of language away from plagiarism to academic integrity and academic honesty.

2. The **creation of a code of academic practice** which will be written in such a format as to educate and provide clear guidance for students. This should be created jointly by staff and students.

3. The **creation of a single point of information for staff and students to seek advice on plagiarism** with supporting material to for its promotion and use by all members of the University of Leicester (e.g. Leeds University : http://www.lts.leeds.ac.uk/plagiarism/). Encompassing policy and education to assist in the promotion of consistency of good practice.

4. The implementation of an **institutional-wide strategy to ensure accurate and accessible record keeping of offences and processes** at a local and institutional level, enabling an informed comparison of the range of penalties being imposed. Whilst variation in individual cases is to be expected due to the complexity of issues for consideration, it is essential that this process is monitored and that the Centre receives accurate accounts and records of plagiarism cases collated at the college level.

AREAS FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

1. The **involvement of students on plagiarism hearing panels** at the department level would enable students to be involved in the process of dealing with plagiarism cases, as happens in the modified honor code system.

2. The introduction of **peer instruction** where students are involved in delivering instruction about good referencing or citation practices in their department could be run as an extension of other peer mentoring systems already in process.

1. INTRODUCTION

Recent academic debate on plagiarism has lead to a call for adopting a holistic approach in addressing this issue (Carroll and Appleton, 2001; Freewood, Macdonald and Ashworth, 2003; Park, 2003; JISC Briefing Paper, 2005; Duggan, 2006; Macdonald and Carroll, 2006). Some of the practical suggestions within a holistic framework have been reviewing assessment mechanisms to 'design out' and deter plagiarism (Carroll and Appleton, 2001; Carroll, 2002; Irons, 2005; Walden and Peacock, 2005; Relph and Randle, 2007; Quinsee, Baughan and Boylan, 2007), improving study skills provision to foster appreciation of good academic practice (Carroll, 2004; Quinsee *et al.*, 2007), introducing systematic screening of student work through plagiarism detection software (Carroll, 2004; Heap and Woolls, 2007; Badge, Cann and Scott, 2007) and exploring its pedagogic potential (Barrett, 2007; Flint, 2007; Haigh and Meddings, 2007; Irwin, 2007; Peacock and Sharp, 2007).

Plagiarism, however, is still said to be on the increase in higher education (Park, 2003; Carroll, 2004; Hart & Friesner, 2004; Duggan, 2006; Maurer, Kappe & Zaka, 2006). Along with the important changes to academic practice outlined above, a more global change to academic culture as a whole might be overdue, a change that would safeguard student (and staff) adherence to core academic values irrespective of advances in information technology and sophistication of information handling tools**.**

At the 2006 JISC Second International Plagiarism Conference, the focus among the academic community was clearly on moving towards a culture of academic integrity (e.g. Clarke and Aiello, 2007; Gourlay, 2007; Joice, 2007; McCabe, 2007). Such an academic culture implies a positive representation of the ideas behind the avoidance of plagiarism, and an institution-wide emphasis on upholding these principles and promoting good academic practice. Academic integrity has been a priority at a number of US institutions for some time (McCabe and Trevino, 1993; McCabe, Trevino and Butterfield, 2002), and the commitment to promote it is being increasingly accepted by a growing number of US campuses (McCabe, 2007). The emphasis on academic integrity is often manifested in the adoption and use of *honour codes*, either in their traditional or modified form, which entrust students with significant responsibility for maintaining academic standards.

The US honour code model might provide useful pointers as to how the transition towards a culture of academic integrity can be implemented elsewhere. This model seems to offer a viable alternative to more traditional top-down approaches to ensuring proper academic practice among students. One of the aims of this project was to provide impetus for academic and public discussion of the idea of honour codes and their potential use in the UK by conducting a cross-institutional study of staff and students' views on some of the ideas behind the honour code model.

The second part of this project was informed by an increasing need to standardise plagiarism-related policies within and across institutions (Carroll and Appleton, 2001; Freewood *et al.,* 2003; Baty, 2006; Macdonald and Carroll, 2006; Jones, 2007) as one of the

measures within a holistic response to plagiarism. At the national level, the independent adjudicator for higher education at the time, Baroness Deech, repeatedly called for policy alignment across the sector on several occasions (Baty, 2006; EducationGuardian.co.uk, 2006; Tysome, 2006). With the increasing use of electronic text matching software programmes for plagiarism detection, many HE institutions are making changes to their plagiarism policies to adapt to these new drivers for change. However, plagiarism policies are problematic to write and implement. They need to be flexible enough to deal with a very wide range of different circumstances and yet provide clear guidance to staff and students on what is good and bad practice. The penalty given can depend on the level of study of the student (development phase, undergraduate, postgraduate), the severity and extent of the plagiarism (large chunks of copy and paste, bought or ghost written essays, minor paraphrasing problems or poor note taking), the type of work completed (coursework that counts towards a final module mark or is required for progression, dissertation work where a single piece of work counts directly to the final degree mark), and previous history of the student in terms of plagiarism offences. Dealing with these difficult constraints has led to a range of different solutions with some institutions operating blanket top level policies and others devising complex tariff systems (Tennant, Rowell & Duggan, 2007).

As the Office of the Independent Adjudicator has called for inter-institutional consistency, there is also a place for closely examining intra-institutional consistency. The strong departmental structure of the University of Leicester inevitably means that there are significant variations in locally applied procedures for the detection of plagiarism and in the disciplinary policies followed to deal with suspected cases. Notwithstanding the possibility of litigation on the matter, it is vital that we ensure consistency and fair process in the Leicester context. The second part of this project, therefore, involved conducting a cross-faculty survey to analyse the plagiarism related policies and procedures operated by different departments in order to provide an operating benchmark and a set of recommendations to improve practice in the institution.

This report consists of two parts. The first one focuses on the academic integrity part of the project – it describes the ethos and the elements of the US honour code system, reports on our cross-institutional study which explored the attitudes of Leicester staff and students to this system, and discusses possible implications for introducing honour codes in the UK context. The second part is concerned with the policy side of the project and presents the results of the on-line questionnaire survey into plagiarism policies and practices across the institution.

PART 1. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND HONOUR CODES

1.1. LITERATURE REVIEW

In general terms, the Honour Code System it is a trust-based system that promotes academic integrity and student responsibility for maintaining academic values and standards. Academic integrity is defined as 'a commitment, even in the face of adversity, to five fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility' (Center for Academic Integrity, 2007).

US honour codes vary from institution to institution, but are broadly known as either traditional or modified. Within the traditional honour code system, students take a pledge to uphold the principles of academic integrity and in return are awarded certain privileges and responsibilities. These may include examinations that are not invigilated by staff, a student judiciary (sometimes exclusive) that polices the honour code, and, at the extreme end of a spectrum of practice, an obligation to report cases of academic dishonesty among their peers (McCabe and Trevino, 2002). In recent years a number of US universities have also introduced modified honour codes on their campuses. These incorporate some elements of the traditional honor codes, notably the involvement of students in the disciplinary procedures for plagiarism. However, what is instrumental in effective functioning of modified codes is placing campus-wide emphasis on academic integrity and student involvement in the organisation of training and promotion of academic integrity (ibid).

Research evidence points to reduced levels of academic dishonesty in institutions that use traditional or modified honour codes (McCabe and Trevino, 1993; McCabe and Trevino, 1997; McCabe, Trevino and Butterfield, 2002). Other contextual factors have also been found to influence levels of academic cheating, perception of peer behaviour being the most notable one (McCabe & Trevino,1993; McCabe & Trevino,1997). A large-scale qualitative investigation by McCabe, Trevino and Butterfield (1999) has shown differences in conceptualising academic integrity between students from non-code and code institutions, the latter viewing it as an integral part of academic culture on their campuses. It is believed that a strong institutional culture that promotes core values of academic community, and students' active involvement in this system have positive influences on students' moral development (McCabe and Trevino, 2002) and provides them with a clear ethical stance in the workplace following their university career (McCabe and Trevino, 1993).

Since the honour code model seems to offer a viable alternative to more traditional top-down approaches to ensuring proper academic practice among students, it is important to explore the potential use of honour codes in the UK context. The scarce debate in the UK public arena has reflected mixed reactions. Dr Mike Reddy who is on the JISC PAS (Plagiarism Advisory Service) steering committee has expressed skepticism about the idea of adopting honour codes in the UK, justifying this by his view that UK students, unlike their US counterparts, are more concerned with individual learning rather than being part of the university community (Shepherd, 2007). Isabel Nesbit, the director of Regulations and

Standards at the QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority), does not approve of rejecting the idea of honour codes just because they have come from the US, and believes that such codes can be adopted in UK schools (ibid).

So far, the research-grounded UK response has also been rather limited. One of the few exceptions has been an exploratory study by Clarke and Aiello (2007) from Liverpool John Moores University. They investigated student perceptions of the idea of learning contracts and honour codes by conducting focus groups with home and international students. Although their participants appreciated the idea of a positive value-based approach to their academic practice, they felt that honour codes might not be easily adopted in the UK setting because of their 'too American' tone and style. A recent initiative at Northumbria University has been to draft 'an academic values agreement' for new students in the form of statements describing the university's and the students' commitments to each other. This agreement is not binding at this primary stage (Shepherd, 2007).

We believe that that further academic and public discussion of the idea of honour codes and their potential use in the UK setting is highly necessary. In order for this debate to become productive and influential, it needs to be underpinned by sufficient UK-based research. Therefore, the aim of our cross-institutional study was to explore staff and student attitudes to the concept of academic integrity and the elements of the US honour code system, and to elicit participants' views on the feasibility of applying this system in the UK HE context.

1.2. METHODOLOGY

A series of focus groups with staff and students of the University of Leicester was conducted in the academic year 2007-2008. Recruitment of participants was carried out primarily through the lists of staff and student representatives[1], who were invited to attend focus group discussions and encouraged to inform other staff or students from their departments about our research project. Every attempt was made to ensure consistency in the sampling procedure in order to allow for meaningful comparisons between the staff and student samples.

Overall, 21 staff and 20 students participated. These participants were placed into three subject-specific groups, since anecdotal evidence suggests that there may be significant variation in how plagiarism is viewed within different subject disciplines. The five Faculties of the University of Leicester were assigned to three subject-specific groups in the following way: 1) Faculty of Arts (group A), 2) Faculty of Sciences and Faculty of Medicine and

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[1] University of Leicester TEF (Teaching Enhancement Forum) and TAN (Teaching and Assessment Network) circulation lists in the case of staff, and the Student Union directory of course and faculty representatives in the case of students.

Biological Sciences (group B), and 3) Faculty of Social Sciences and Faculty of Law (group C). There was a staff and a student group for each of these three broad subject areas and each group had two sessions, with a total 12 focus groups conducted between November 2007 and February 2008.

The focus groups were carried out in exactly the same manner for staff and students. The first session sought to investigate participants' views on plagiarism and its prevention through a brainstorming activity and a number of short discussions. Without making any mention of academic integrity or a 'positive' approach to plagiarism on our part, we as investigators and moderators were interested in observing whether our participants would express any ideas or sentiments of this kind of their own accord. Participants were then asked to participate in an exercise comparing and responding to eight written statements about two systems of positioning the issue of plagiarism in the educational context (based on the comparative framework developed specifically for this study).

The second session was more specific and aimed to investigate participants' views on the US Honour Code system and whether they could envisage it working in a UK university. The eight written statements were presented again, this time allocated into two groups, a traditional (current UK practice) and an alternative system (US Honour Code system). The concept of academic integrity was then introduced to the participants. The ethos and the elements of the US Honour Code system were presented in very general terms, by discussing three main areas: values, community approach and student involvement. Along with discussions, a wireless electronic voting system (Keepad/Turning Point) was used to ascertain participants' views on specific aspects of the Honour Code system. Participants were asked to vote to register their views on whether certain aspects of this system were acceptable in principle and whether they felt that they would work in reality in the UK context. The voting process was anonymous but the participants could see their group results immediately after each question they voted on. The purpose of using the electronic voting system was two-fold: as a means of facilitating discussion, and as a means of obtaining some basic numerical measures.

1.3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter summarises the results of the focus groups interviews we have conducted, following the order of the sessions and activities as they were carried out in the course of our research. Sub-chapter 1.3.1. focuses on the first session (the 'Plagiarism' session) and gives a general overview of the themes that came up during the session discussions, while sub-chapter 1.3.2. is dedicated to the second session - the 'Academic Integrity' session.

1.3.1. SESSION ONE: PLAGIARISM

Session One was designed as a preliminary session which aimed at eliciting some general ideas about how plagiarism was viewed across the university and what some of the main concerns associated with it were. We also wanted to see whether, without any direction on

our part, the participants would voice any opinions or sentiments that would resonate with the ethos of the honour code system. The overview that follows is a general summary of the discussions that took place during Session One.

1.3.1.1. BRAINSTORMING: 'PLAGIARISM'

The session started with the introductions of the moderators and the participants, and a brief overview of the project (in very general terms) so as not to bias our participants towards a certain 'agenda' that we may have had. The terms 'academic integrity', 'honour codes' or an 'honour code system' were not mentioned explicitly. The first data collection activity that followed was a brainstorming exercise which served two main purposes: eliciting the associations and/or connotations that the term 'plagiarism' had for the participants (i.e. how it was perceived overall), as well as using this as an 'ice-breaking' activity to put the participants at ease with the moderators and each other. The questions asked were 'What associations do you have with the term 'plagiarism'? / 'What immediately comes to your mind when you think of plagiarism?'.

The 'plagiarism' brainstorming sessions proved to be rather lively (in contrast to the 'academic integrity' brainstorming activities discussed in section 1.3.2.1.) and yielded a wide range of responses including the issues of plagiarism detection, plagiarism causes, assessment design, international students, lack of clarity, inconsistencies, etc. Most of these issues will be discussed further on in this sub-chapter.

What was of particular interest to us in the course of this activity were the 'labels' assigned to plagiarism by the participants: 'cheating', 'stealing', 'copying', 'dishonesty' and 'poor academic practice'. In terms of the emotional associations that the word 'plagiarism' evoked in the participants, the words like 'failure', 'problems', 'bad thing', 'frustrating' and 'worry' were mentioned. Although such negative connotations and associations are perhaps unsurprising, they become particularly meaningful if compared to the results of the 'academic integrity' brainstorming session which are presented in section 1.3.2.1.

1.3.1.2. DISCUSSION OF PLAGIARISM

Following this initial brainstorming activity, the rest of the Session One discussion concentrated on three areas: the concerns that our participants may have had in relation to plagiarism, their thoughts on what measures could help prevent plagiarism, and, through a card comparison exercise, their preferences with regard to some of the elements of the honour code system (without mentioning the term 'honour code system' explicitly). As mentioned earlier, this study employed qualitative methodology and we were interested in the range of responses and the richness of comments made by our participants rather than any frequency measures. Inevitably, certain themes came up more regularly than others, and this section outlines some of the main themes generated in the course of our discussions, with the caveat that no claims are made here about statistical significance of the frequencies observed or the generalisability of these observations in a wider context. Also,

some references are made to whether a particular issue seemed to be specific to a certain participant category (e.g. only/mainly to staff or students). Although no statistically meaningful comparisons can be made in the context of such an analysis, such observations could signal some important differences between the participants which may require further exploration in a more structured study.

1.3.1.2.1. PLAGIARISM: CONCERNS

After the brainstorming session, our participants were asked to identify one or two issues that they were most concerned about with regard to plagiarism. It could be argued that answers to this question would be of particular importance to note, since they would tend to reflect some of the most urgent participant concerns which may require primary attention in the context of plagiarism prevention. Again, quite a wide range of issues were raised, but there were three themes that seemed to come up more regularly than others in the participant discussions: confusion, inconsistency and accidental plagiarism.

The first one, *confusion*, came up in *all* student focus groups, and it reflected a range of 'confusions', from being unclear about 'the rules of plagiarism' (StudA1), 'grey areas' (StudC2) and 'the EXTENT to which you reference' (StudB2), to a general point where 'you actually come out of some talks on plagiarism more confused […], and more worried' (StudA1). This may suggest that, regardless of subject area, there should be an emphasis on very clear and explicit explanation of what constitutes plagiarism, as well as an open discussion of problematic grey areas that abound in the complex plagiarism field.

Perhaps it is this very complexity of plagiarism that may have accounted for another common theme, albeit mainly among our staff participants – the concerns over the *inconsistency* of plagiarism policies and regulations: how suspected cases are pursued at different departments, whether distance learning students are/ should be treated differently in this respect, and a lack of clarity in relation to Turnitin procedures. The following comments are quite telling in this respect:

> StaffA5: I think the issue of coordination is quite significant, and that also comes to partly being a centre where students will be doing modules in different departments, and it becomes an issue if different departments are treating the students in different ways.

> StaffC4: Yeah, it's [inconsistency] just such a MASSIVE issue, […] it's a major-major issue for everybody, […] I think there is this kind of inconsistency right across the University between levels of study, between what different departments, different faculties do, and I think to me it's quite a big issue that everyone's doing different things and... […] When I see the problems within our own department between different members of staff, it's just massive.

StaffC2: For me, I think, the whole issue about detection. And also the lack of clarity with the regulations, because it's just certainly in our department, we deal with different cases in different ways, which is not necessarily a bad thing, but each case individual on its merits, but also treated very differently in some respects, and dependant on what level they are, and it's just not clear what we are supposed to do about it.

StaffC4: Turnitin would be one thing for me.

Moderator 1: Yeah, in what way?

StaffC4: How it's being used both within the department and more widely across the university. I think in some ways it's maybe created more problems, or potentially can create more problems, than it solves, but at the same time it's a useful tool. But I think there's a big discrepancy across and within departments of how it's used, and I think it can be quite... in some ways it's quite dangerous in that respect.

All this clearly relates to the second part of this project, the Policy strand, which is addressed in Part 2 of this report.

Finally, a worry over *accidental plagiarism* came up explicitly in *all* student focus groups, as the following excerpts demonstrate:

StudA2: Definitely the accidental problems and [...] just scared of that teacher or tutor will say, 'You plagiarise!', when actually I didn't do that, I didn't quote properly and... will be punished for that.

StudA1: [...] you could be plagiarising and NOT realise it...

StudB2: Accidental plagiarism. Sometimes you remember something and you don't realise [...]

StudB1: Especially if you're doing a topic that's kind of an extension of something you learn in the first year, you've got a kind of a background knowledge that you got a year before that you now kind of think is your knowledge and don't realise that actually it's someone else's.

> StudC1: And it's about whether you might do it accidentally and, you know, the consequences, 'cause you're trying so hard to kind of, you know, 'Look, I'm good enough to do this course, this is what I know...' And then that could all be lost by putting a semi-colon or an author's name in the wrong place...

The worry over accidental plagiarism seems to link with the first concern discussed earlier in this sub-section (which was also almost entirely specific to our student participants) - that of the confusion over referencing conventions and plagiarism in general, which would almost certainly contribute to a feeling of worry (for example, such a misunderstanding may have come through in the last sentence of the comment above where the student seems to equate plagiarism with making some surface mistakes in referencing). As mentioned earlier, this may signal one of the areas in need of urgent attention.

1.3.1.2.2. PLAGIARISM: PREVENTION

The second area that was discussed during the first session was plagiarism prevention: what, in participants' opinion, would particularly help to prevent plagiarism, what measures are already in place at their departments, and whether certain approaches are / seem to be effective in reducing plagiarism.

The most common set of measures already taken by the departments may be summarised under the heading 'education&information'. This includes the plagiarism information in departmental handbooks and/or on-line guidelines, specific instruction on avoiding plagiarism (often in a broader context of study skills development) which can take the form of induction sessions, a practice essay and post-essay formative tutorials, an activity or exercise on avoiding plagiarism (including the Student Learning Centre on-line plagiarism tutorial), a referencing forum or plagiarism help-desk. There were a number of interesting revelations in the process, as the example below demonstrates:

> StaffB3: ...I say to them that when you're writing a piece whatever it may be on, PEE on it, or have SEX on it. Then we have some discussion, PEE is just capitals and basically is if you made a Point, you back it up with your Evidence and then you Explain how that evidence and points fits together in your own words, applied. The SEX bit is the same: if you have a Statement, Evidence and EXplanation of that. Now even if they don't go and look at all the tutorials, you can actually see them starting to develop that kind of skill as it were, you know, in each paragraph making sure all that comes out.

This explanation has been used when educating students about critical writing skills, which, according to the participant who made this comment, seems to have worked in that particular context.

One of the measures which is not currently in common use, but which demonstrates one department's efforts to treat the first 'offence' of plagiarism as an educational opportunity was the use of 'developmental interviews'– post-hoc interviews with students who have plagiarised:

> StaffC3: We tend to hold interviews with students who we think have gone beyond a certain point and ask them... we go through a sort of standard questioning approach, where we ask them what they think plagiarism is, do they think there're any problems with their essays, and then we present them with evidence. But I suppose, depending on the case, we try and use that as a developmental thing as well as a warning thing, to say, 'Look, this is... you cannot do this...'. It's good if that happens to a first-year student, then we'd be more likely to pull them in and say, 'Look, you really got to sort this out, because we don't want you to do this again...'. So it's a developmental thing in that sense.

Overall, even with some positive developments, there was a concern among staff in relation to one-year taught Master's courses and the time constraints that such programmes impose on staff and, most importantly, on the students, and the following comment typifies such concerns:

> StaffB5: But I come back to the Master's situation, […] because of time constraints it's going to be quite difficult to actually find enough time, in my view, to give people appropriate formative exercises, so that they can see exactly what's gonna happen, that they will be caught and how to deal with it, and how to avoid it. I AM concerned about that.

Another important point was made in relation to whether current disciplinary procedures actually 'send a message' they are suppose to be sending to the students:

> StaffB6: I think this issue of letting people know it's very important, because I sit on our exam boards and, you know, occasionally a decision is made and it's said, 'Well, that will be sending a message to the students'. And in fact the students don't know what goes on in an exam board, and I think very often people get caught for plagiarism and for reasons of privacy or whatever it's not then made apparent to the other students that it's been picked up and that people have been penalised. I think there does need to be a feedback that people lower on and later on in the course know that it's happened and it's been dealt with, and what penalties are.

As will be seen later, during the second focus group session both staff and student participants voiced an opinion that the transparency of the system could act as an effective deterrent (see sub-section 1.3.2.2.3.).

The issue of fitness to practice as a possible deterrent came up for particular subjects, for example medicine:

> StaffB3: If they are caught blatantly doing copying or cheating anyway, it's a fitness to practice issue, because we have to register these people, so basically if you're doing it through your course, you will certainly not be registered. And it's basically removal from..., the learning contract has it in there as well, so we'll just bring that to their attention that that's the issue. Hopefully that has some power. (laughter)

The issues of using Turnitin as a deterrent came up in all staff groups (and *only* in staff groups), for example,

> StaffA6: It can be used in fear as well, that's to create fear among the students. Because if you..., I take up your point, I think, which was about either buying essays on the Internet or, perhaps, thinking of submitting an essay from a friend of yours who did the course previously. If you're using Turnitin all the time for every essay than this will pick stuff like that up quite well, so students will become aware, if their essays are going through Turnitin, that, hang on, they might be a bit less willing to deliberately plagiarise.

However, the following comment voiced in the same focus group presents a conflicting opinion:

> StaffA5: I suppose there's always a question about the extent to which we want to do it on the basis of fear, and whether it should be...(laughter) 'We're improving your study skills!'

There was also a concern among staff that using Turnitin would create extra work, which seems to prevent some departments from implementing it. There were also some reservations voiced about the formative use of Turnitin by allowing students to see their originality reports and to have an opportunity to make some changes to their work before submitting it for assessment:

StaffC4: ...I think some staff think that if we do that, then students will use it as a tool to go through what they've done and change the words and the bits that are highlighted.

Moderator 1: Play the system...

StaffC4: Yeah, so in some ways then that staff perception if you're using that as a tool for development or if you're using it as a way to help students cheat more, so it's that again... keep coming back to the same kind of thing.

One strategy that seemed to get students' attention was the following:

StaffC4: One thing that did seem to work was showing... in our teaching sessions we had a Powerpoint slide which showed a Turnitin example. We made up an example that was 99% plagiarised, and that... when you show that in a lecture there's a lot of gasping and, but...

It is arguable, however, to what extent this can target the students that need targeting, as the comment by the same staff participant suggests:

StaffC4: I think that students who probably wouldn't plagiarise, they become absolutely paranoid and the ones who do it anyway seem to ... it doesn't seem to have such an impact. So we had a lot of panicky emails saying, 'Oh, have I plagiarised? Please check my work for me' (laughter), but for people who you wouldn't really have an issue with.

In response to the lack of standardisation in terms of plagiarism policies and procedures across the university (which was discussed in the previous sub-section), some of the suggestions were:

StaffC3: … I think any attempt at standardisation is gonna have to be really sensitive to different subject areas, because they just have different requirements I think, and also different amounts of international students as well, which brings in that issue of different amounts of distance learning, but I think an exchange of best practice and more information about what other departments do would certainly be helpful to everyone who's dealing with this.

StaffC4: I think the new Code of Conduct is quite a good starting point, I think it gives something to work with that's much more structured and maybe it'll get rid of this kind of appeal situation where people are worrying about what will happen, but I don't know,... penalties are much more staged and you can see how to deal with it, it's much clearer, but... we'll have to see…

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Overall, a comment from the Staff Development side sounded quite optimistic in that staff across the university seem to be trying to adapt their practice to reduce opportunities for students to cheat, as the following comment suggests:

> StaffC1: I think academic staff, from discussions that we've had in Staff Development, I think people are being much more careful about the work that they set, so I think things like repeating essay titles, and... To be honest, I remember a few years ago, for a staff development session, looking at some of the essay titles that were available on the web through assessment guidelines and things, and typing them into Google, and thinking 'actually if you've set as an essay title, it sounds awful, but you deserve to get something plagiarised back, because it's just like so obvious'. And I think people are much more aware now of changing things each year, not having the same assessment, and personalising things as well, so, you know, 'Drawing on your own experience of'... So I guess that's the other side, and I think it's not just 'Here's a list of things to do', I think people are actually implementing it.

The measures discussed above were mentioned by our staff participants mainly as a reflection of *it already being done across* the university in terms of plagiarism prevention. Students, on the other hand, when asked about prevention, tended to make comments about what *could or should* be done.

Something that came up in all student focus groups was a concern that there may not be enough provision of plagiarism induction for different student cohorts when necessary. For example, there are no 'reminder' sessions beyond the first year of study for those who may need to refresh their knowledge, or the Erasmus students who join the university in their second or third year may be missing out on appropriate induction:

> StudA3: So set up a group for international students as well, who only come here in their third year or something, or make it open to anyone, so if anyone forgot what they learned in the first year, they can come along...

The timing of the existing induction sessions may not be appropriate in terms of when they are scheduled in relation to essay deadlines,

> StudB5: Well, the thing I found that we had a plagiarism lecture, I know it's like a blanket thing across the university, everyone has had a plagiarism lecture. But we had our plagiarism lecture after we'd handed in our first essay, so then we immediately we went, 'Oh, no, we've all done plagiarism, or badly referencing'. We weren't done for it, but we were panicking about it, so it would be better to have a plagiarism lecture before you write your first essay.

or even across the years of study (for medical students who do not get a chance to write that many essays in the first two years) when the effect of the 'plagiarism' lecture may wear off:

> StudB4: But if you don't USE referencing, you don't understand it and you forget what you were told two years ago or something.

Another student comment highlighted the importance of re-iterating things:

> StudC1: Perhaps a greater rapport between the lecturers, the guidelines and the students, because even though they did give you help in seminars about how to do it, it was just one seminar, and I think when people first handed in their formative assignments, which were obviously not, you know, officially assessed, there was a lot of comments on bibliographies and referencing being wrong, and one of the lecturers remarked, 'Well, people seem to have a hard time following the instructions'... because, ok, we have been taught about it, but, I think, maybe in a kind of re-iterating key ideas MIGHT help...

Based on the above, it seems that provisions for structured 'plagiarism reminders' at key points throughout the academic year would be highly advisable, as well as the importance of not excluding any incoming students (e.g. Erasmus students, students who transfer from other institutions, etc.) from an opportunity to benefit from structured induction on plagiarism.

The topic of worry came up again in student discussions, for example,

> StudA1: Also, as someone who doesn't... I don't knowingly plagiarise, what I said about worry is quite important, because when you come out of the speeches on plagiarism, and you just worry that you're gonna plagiarise, THAT shouldn't be I don't think what you come away with, I think you should come away with the idea..., clear ways of knowing that you're plagiarising, rather than coming away just feeling like, 'Oh no, I might actually do it and not realise it!' And also knowing that if you DO plagiarise and it IS accidental, I always get this feeling that you're gonna be chucked out of university straight away if you even plagiarise a sentence or something, so just... There should be a healthy level of fear I think of it, but MORE...

Also, a particular issue that seemed to evoke certain concerns among students was also the differences between referencing systems (and the ways of interpreting them) which some students found frustrating, as the following comments suggest:

StudB1: ...there's, you know, big institutions outside of uni, there's different ways of referencing, there's different systems to follow, or the markers don't mark by the system we've been taught, there's inconsistency within the marking. So you might stick to what you're taught and still get told off for plagiarising.

StudB1: And it changes as well, like last year I'd finally got it, and then this year they changed the whole system and I was like 'I cannot believe it!', so yeah...

StudB3: It'd be easier if there was one universal board for all referencing, rather than all these mixed ones, you know.

Among other measures suggested by our student participants in the context of plagiarism prevention were the following: being aware of all the opportunities for plagiarism that the Internet provides (e.g. a website like 'Sparknotes' is a very overused website for details of novels), staff referencing their own lectures properly (they should 'preach what they teach') and the benefits of providing examples of plagiarism:

StudA1: ...when you see examples of plagiarism, you recognise it so much more easily anyway in your own work I think, so that suddenly realise that if something looks too much like the original, it's probably that you haven't thought around the topic enough, and you're not actually basing on your own ideas, and it probably means that you have to go back and look at the topic again.

Or, perhaps, the following suggestion by one of the staff participants could be implemented:

StaffB4: Another thing I was thinking of was the idea that all the students in the first year in the first term should write an essay on plagiarism, (some laughter) provided they don't plagiarise the essay.

1.3.1.2.3. PLAGIARISM: CARD SORTING

The last activity that took place during the first session was a card sorting exercise. The participants were given four sets of paired cards and asked to choose the one they prefer in each pair. The cards were based on the conceptual grid developed specifically for our study presented in the table below. This grid summarises two possible ways of positioning plagiarism in the higher education context: the 'traditional' approach and the 'alternative' (i.e. honour code) system.

TABLE 1 TWO SYSTEMS OF POSITIONING PLAGIARISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

	Traditional System	Alternative System
Framing the issue of *PLAGIARISM*	in terms of Academic Misconduct	in terms of Academic Integrity
Assumptions regarding responsibility	The University is primarily responsible for maintaining academic standards and for student learning.	Students are primarily responsible for maintaining academic standards and for their own learning.
Assumptions regarding trust	Students put their trust in staff.	Staff put their trust in students.
Plagiarism-related rules	The University sets out the rules and regulations regarding plagiarism and informs students about these rules.	Students are involved in setting out the rules and regulations regarding plagiarism and in informing the student population about these rules.
Statements for signing	Declaration *I confirm that I understand the University's regulations regarding plagiarism and that this is my own work. No part of this work has been copied from any other person's work (published or unpublished), and no part has previously been submitted for assessment.*	Honour Pledge *On my honour, I pledge that this work of mine does not violate the Student Code of Conduct rules on cheating or plagiarism.*

The participants were not presented with the whole grid until the second focus group session, but were merely asked to choose their preferred option for each set and justify their choice.

The first set of cards was about responsibility and the participants were given the following two cards to choose from (all cards were randomly labeled):

TABLE 2 CARDS: ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT RESPONSIBILITY

<u>Card C</u>	<u>Card F</u>
The University is primarily responsible for maintaining academic standards and for student learning.	Students are primarily responsible for maintaining academic standards and for their own learning.

Most of our participants wanted the elements of both and felt that the University should be primarily responsible for maintaining academic standards, but students should be responsible for their own learning.

> StaffA2: …I think these statements need to be cut in two, don't they? They're separate things really.
> StaffA5: And yes, ultimately, we can't make students learn. We can teach them, try and foster their learning, but it's got to come from them.

> StaffB4:…To me, the academic standards, that's a matter for the University overridingly, as an institution, as a repository of a long tradition. And when it comes to LEARNING, at the end of the day that's supposed to be for the individual with the HELP of the institution.

> StudC1: I agree with that, because I feel as though there is both elements, from both of these, that the University kind of gives you a standard bar that you have to meet, but obviously there's a lot of emphasis on students themselves.

There was also an opinion that it changes throughout the university years:

> StudB2: Over time I've definitely become more, I focus more myself on my standards and how I learn, but I think earlier on in the first and second year it is much more for University, 'cause you have lectures and you have a lot of input, but then later on when we go on to placements, it's a lot more down to the amount of work YOU want to do, 'cause you can learn what they tell you to learn, but then there's so much more out there that it's basically up to you.

There were a number of staff and student participants who favoured Card F, but mainly in an ideal world, or with a certain framework provided by staff:

> StudA1: Personally I think that STUDENTS should be primarily responsible for maintaining academic standards, but they should have a framework to work within, because it's difficult to know what the standards are unless you have a framework to work around, so with extra help students should be mainly responsible. And I think that's something that I feel quite strongly about, and something that I see often not being the case in the University.

The second set of cards was about trust:

TABLE 3 CARDS: ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT TRUST

Card G	Card A
Students put their trust in staff.	Staff put their trust in students.

Here, the participants views seemed to range to a larger extent than with responsibility, from a resounding 'no' (notably coming from a student participant),

> StudC2: … Well, trust is good, but control is better kind of thing. Neither should put their trust in each other, they should…, they shouldn't have so much trust that they wouldn't kind of put the reasonable doubt into the work.

to more balanced comments:

> StaffA5: I prefer both, they're not usually contradictory.

> StaffC2: I don't know, I suppose, again, it's a bit of both. It would be nice of both could happen.

> StaffA4: I see these as two issues completely. There're areas where the students obviously put their trust in the staff, and they're different areas where the staff put their trust in the students. Obviously that comes from informing them as to what their expectations are.

> StudB5: It's very ambiguous in that they're both featuring the same kind of thing, that you do need a level of trust between both. 'Cause the staff need to be able to trust the students not to cheat and not to download papers off the Internet, and that kind of system, but of course the students are trusting the staff to make sure they teach them right things and don't go off on a tangent in their lectures, […]. So students do put their trust in staff quite a bit to teach them the right mentality.
> Moderator 1: So you kind of agree with both?
> Participant StudB5: Yeah.

Overall, there seemed to be a general preference for Card G, although some participants tended to reflect on the current situation, rather than express their preferences, as the following comments suggest:

StaffB3: They really look up to us. I think it's very hard to trust... certainly first year, second year students [unclear]. I'll go for G.

StudA1: But the one about 'staff put their trust in students' kind of made me laugh, because (laughter)... my dad works at the university and I KNOW that he comes home almost every night VERY disappointed in the amount of work that students do and the amount of... just everything... I think that, yeah, students do need to put their trust in staff, but staff can no longer put their trust in students to do the amount of work that they're meant to. […] So there's no real trust in the students, and I think rightly so at the moment, because I don't think people are really putting a 100% into their degrees.

StudA3: Obviously both have to work, but I think 'G' is more important, because... In a way the staff are the ones who are...who have the power…

There were also a number of comments that highlighted slightly different aspects, for example, the nature of academic study,

StaffA2: I think 'trust' is a really funny word to use, you know. I think trust to some extent goes against academic standards, cause it should all be about questioning, shouldn't it? I mean, yeah, students should trust staff that they kind of know what they're doing and they can teach them something, but ultimately I'd like my students to question everything I'm telling them, if they can think of something better then great.
StaffA1: Again that's cultural, isn't it? You know, a lot of cultures don't expect to question the staff: staff have said it, therefore, that's the version.
StaffA2: And it's political, as to what you think education is as well, isn't it. Like if it's a liberal education, opening somebody's mind, or if it's about learning facts.

and the desirable outcome of the educational process:

StaffA6: The thing with trust though, you've got to keep it proportionate, haven't you, because I guess there's an element of encouraging individuals to grow and blossom into maturity or ... an outlook that's different when they leave to the outlook they came with, and part of that is giving... trusting people to do particular things and treating them like adults. That's got to be part of the discussion, hasn't it, because if you're gonna treat them like primary school kids, then that won't be appropriate for everyone and where are they going to be at the end of it?

Overall, the general feeling coming from the students was that they put a lot of trust in staff to know the subject, to be up-to-date, and to be fair to them. The important issue of trust will be addressed again in section 1.3.2.2.

The third set of cards was about setting out plagiarism related rules and regulations, as the following table illustrates:

TABLE 4 CARDS: PLAGIARISM RULES AND REGULATIONS

Card H	Card B
The University sets out the rules and regulations regarding plagiarism and informs students about these rules.	Students are involved in setting out the rules and regulations regarding plagiarism and in informing the student population about these rules.

There were quite a few comments stating that it is the role of the University to do it, but with some degree of student involvement:

StaffC3: Yeah, I think the University does set the rules and regulations, I think by and large that's the right way to do it, but there's no reason why you couldn't have the second half of what's going on in 'B' […]. Part of what we do as the University is we introduce students to the world of academic research and what the standards are within that world, so I think it's right that the University explains to them, 'This is what you're expected to do in terms of using other people's work in your own'.

StudA1: …a situation whereby the University works with the students to work out how to be reasonable about plagiarism would be perfect.

StudA3: 'B' would in a way be ideal, obviously you can't just let it be up to the students, because than the students will go, 'No, no, no, it's fine, we can quote (laughter) we can do whatever we want'. […]Obviously the University has to set out the rules, but it's important to get feedback from the students I think.

StudA2: I think definitely students SHOULD be more involved, but of course I don't think we could make the rules because I think we'll just let anything slide (laughter).

StudC1: I'm more with Card 'H', that the University sets out the rules and regulations, because I think that it creates a standardised form, I don't know how much it varies between subjects, but I kind of feel that there is

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no room for negotiation, it is what it is, and if you don't adhere to these rules, then that's it. But your point about that the students could kind of chip in, you know, request a bit more knowledge and teachers, and then choose about referencing and how to avoid... it would be valued I think.

StudC2: What I mean is the University, you come here to study, so it's the University's marking, if you don't like it - tough, but then again the students, they'd pay quite a big sum, so they should have a say on how they should be taught. So I think that the University should be open-minded about the regulations on plagiarism, because if they're not open-minded, the students are not gonna, some of the students are not gonna like it. But if it's left to the students, the students are just gonna make it as easy for themselves...

As can be seen from some of the comments above, students tend to think that if it were up to them, everything would be easier and they would be more lenient than staff. Interestingly, a common opinion among staff was that, in fact, students would be harsher and stricter than staff as the following exchange demonstrates:

StaffB5: Yes, I think what's interesting here is it says students are involved in setting this, which I think is crucial. In MY experience, if you ask students about these sorts of issues, they're incredibly strict and tough, very-very tough, and I suppose that was at the back of what you were thinking about.
StaffB6: It's been the experience in schools over the last few years that if you have a student council deciding on the way the school ought to be run, generally...
StaffB2: is much more draconian (laughter)
StaffB6: Yeah, absolutely, they're much more in favour of school uniform than the teachers are, very often and that sort of thing. And so I think most students actually know about academic standards if you sit down and talk to them about it. They may think they can get away with not sticking to it...

There were, however, s number of staff and students who preferred the other option – giving students the responsibility for setting out the rules and regulations:

StaffA3: 'B' would obviously be preferable […]. Just seems people are always happier if they've had some involvement in decisions that govern their lives really, and they're entitled to do so.

StaffB5: Right, the status quo is H. I think the ideas in B are very interesting and important.

Moderator 2: Why?

StaffB5: Well, I think students taking responsibility for their own education, which is something that came up in earlier, of course this has got to be an inherent part of that process.

[...]

StaffB6: 'Cause I think all the students want to feel that they're getting something valuable out of their time at university... I don't think if we allow the students to set the regulations for plagiarism that they'd choose, you know, they go and do whatever they want, because they can... you know on one level they can plainly see that would devalue their time here. It's one of those dual standards, you know...

At the same time, implementing this in a distance learning context may be problematic:

StaffC4: I quite like, I quite like to be in a situation with card 'B', that you could encourage that kind of communication between students and student population, I quite like that. But again I'm always banging on about the same thing, I think it's quite hard again in the distance learning context, but possible, it's not impossible, you COULD do something.

Also, different cultural and educational experiences may pose extra challenges in terms of the standardisation of the requirements:

StaffA1: And also, nowadays, in certain countries, what we would call plagiarism is actually condoned, is encouraged, and in some ways we got going the same way in Britain. A lot of high school students come through and say 'but we were encouraged to cut and paste from the net', and if the students are then to decide... are they gonna base it on their experience of what we're now doing at high school, which is almost exactly what we're telling them not to do.

There was an interesting comment made by one of the student participants about student involvement in educating other students about plagiarism – something that will be addressed in greater detail during the discussion of the second focus group session in sub-section 1.3.2.2.3.:

StudB4: And also although we have plagiarism lectures about plagiarism, people tend to think it's quite boring, and not really pay attention. Maybe if students were involved in teaching other students about plagiarism, especially PhD students and the Master's students who do it a lot, then maybe that'd have been received better, because it's coming from a peer rather than lecturer or someone quite superior.

Finally, the fourth set of cards related to the statements that students are required to sign when submitting their work:

TABLE 5 CARDS: STATEMENT FOR SIGNING

Card D	Card E
<u>Declaration</u> *I confirm that I understand the University's regulations regarding plagiarism and that this is my own work. No part of this work has been copied from any other person's work (published or unpublished), and no part has previously been submitted for assessment.*	<u>Honour Pledge</u> *On my honour, I pledge that this work of mine does not violate the Student Code of Conduct rules on cheating or plagiarism.*

The majority of the participants favoured the declaration because it is more explicit and it makes clear what the students would be signing up to,

> StaffB6: E is assuming that they've read this Code of Conduct, which I would bet not a single student in this university ever has.

> StudB2: I don't like when something that you're signing refers to something else that's not present at the time, like on E it says the code of conduct rules that students signed, but I won't remember what that is when I was signing it, so I think that D is more clear about what...
> StudB4: Yeah, I agree.

> StudA1: The difficulty though being, if the situation is as it is now, then Erasmus students signing that pledge, plagiarising might not mean ANYTHING to them. […] If I'd have come across a word I didn't know, I mean I would have signed it anyway, to be honest, but at least this one has got the word 'copying', 'another person's work', you can get a vague idea from the words what you're talking about…

> StudA2: No, it's true, I think that card 'E' is a bit woolly, 'On my honour', (laughter) it's like the Brownies or something, 'I pledge', like, you know... And also it rules on CHEATING, 'cause cheating sounds like you're doing it for your own advancement, it's kind of saying... like it's not taking account of 'I could have done it accidentally, oops, don't punish me!'. It's just like 'I haven't..., I'm not cheating deliberately', do you know what I mean? It's not including as much as the formal declaration, so...

StudB4: I think D is better as well, because it says that 'I confirm' and 'I understand', and 'understand' means that you understand something, so you're saying that you KNOW what that is asking of you, rather than just saying, 'Yeah, yeah, I agree'.

StudB5: E is more, you know, 'on my honour', it's while some people might abuse that, in my opinion, some people might not believe that it'd be better for them to get a good mark than to violate their honour in that case, while the declaration is more like a legally binding contract more than anything else.

As can be seen from the comments above, some of them were not necessarily about the sentiment behind the declaration of understanding and the American honouring version (and this sentiment was our primary interest), but about the wording of the statements. Quite a few participants in both (staff and student) cohorts pointed out that the honour pledge sounds 'American' – and this did not seem to appeal to them.

There was a minority who had a preference for the honour pledge:

StaffC4: Yeah, I think the shorter one, the one that we don't use, is … stronger. […]
It's longer [the declaration], and it's not quite so punchy if you like.

StudA3: I think that choice of words in card 'E' is arguable, but I do actually prefer card 'E', because 'D' just says, 'Yeah, we're doing what the rules tell us', but it doesn't necessarily mean that you agree with them, it doesn't mean that you understand them, it just says, 'Yeah, you know, I have no choice, I had to follow these rules so I'm signing it, otherwise they'll let me fail'. But 'E' is more like 'Yeah, you know, I DO feel that plagiarising is wrong, which is why I say 'On my honour', because I don't want to have the feeling that I'd get a good mark for something that wasn't my work, so I quite like 'E', because it shows more that the student actually understands what plagiarising is all about.

However, most of the comments relating to the honour pledge were on the negative side:

StaffC2: I suppose I think if someone's deliberately cheating, they haven't got much honour anyway, so there's no point them saying 'On my honour, I pledge...', 'cause I think they'd sign that and laugh and think 'Oh, ha...', you know, maybe, I don't know...

StaffC1: I think it also... detracts from things where you might want people to say 'On my honour', you know... I know we don't quite say that phrase, but in the court of law or something, where they've got their hand on a Bible, or another tome, and, therefore, I think it's.... [...] weakening...

StudB3: The thing is people aren't stupid, they know that both mean the same thing, that it doesn't matter what you put, it still means the same thing, that you're not gonna plagiarise. I don't think it makes much difference to be honest. But I think 'on my honour' just sounds strange, weird (laughter).

StudC1: ... I think the honour pledge seems a bit too informal and a bit too wishy-washy. 'On my honour'..., students don't really rely much on their honour these days (laughter), they don't care ...

StaffA5: Certainly if the University came up with card 'E', that would be ... somewhat devious.

Some participants also commented on the differences in the perception of honour among people:

StaffC1: Yeah, there's no agreement about what the honour is, so you... we've already got ambiguity and we know that there're tensions about what honour is within society anyway. Is it family honour, is it...? So you've kind of introduced a term that people might read in different ways to start off with...

StaffC2: Some people could take that very-very seriously, much more seriously that the declaration, but other people, I think, might just think, you know, 'really not bothered'...

StaffB5: It's the phrase 'On my honour'. I think it's important, [...] because what happens here is students, you know, after a little while, the first time they do it, they read it, the second time, 'Oh, there it is again', 'Tick, tick, tick, tick', every single piece of work - the box is ticked, and it's meaningless. I just wonder whether 'on my honour' actually hits home in the way that we in the Western world would imply that it should, and I don't mean anything sort of, what's the right word, I'm just talking about understanding what that actually means.

A number of participants pointed out that it would not make much difference which statement was to be signed, albeit giving different reasons:

> StaffA1: I think my problem with both of them would be whatever they say, now I don't see a big difference between them. But how many students would have ever seen the University regulations? Or how many students would have seen the Student Code of Conduct? So unless it actually relates to a paragraph that is also copied out, 'I understand the above paragraph...', from whichever source it comes from, I don't think it really matters...

> StaffA6: If you don't understand what plagiarism is it's meaningless anyway. If you're gonna get them to sign anything, you'd be better of having a sheet that said... in a study skills session or whatever, saying 'Please identify the plagiarism examples'. And then once they're competent at that then they can say 'I understand what you mean by plagiarism', a declaration...

> StaffA6: And in a way it relates to the penalties anyway, doesn't it? Because if someone's deliberately plagiarising then a declaration or understanding what plagiarism is doesn't matter so much, does it?

> StudB1: But personally I wouldn't plagiarise, so signing either of these wouldn't be a problem for me…

There was a suggestion to combine the two statements,

> StaffB4: Well, it could be a combination of the two actually, introducing the honour concept.

> StudA3: You should just put the last bit of the first one at the bottom of that (laughter), and this one's shorter or so. You know, choice of words doesn't have to be that exact choice, but I like the idea that it shows more of your own understanding of the rules... and accepting them.

and also, irrespective of which statement was being used, to write it out and sign it, rather than passively ticking and signing:

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StaffA2: And we did that when I was an undergraduate and it did make you think a lot more really, 'cause you had to stop and read what you were writing.

The last activity in Session One was asking the participants to divide the eight cards into two groups and justify their decisions. This was to do with the top-down and bottom-up approaches, or University- vs. student-led systems, and the following explanation highlights the themes that most of our participants could see quite clearly:

StaffC3: The first group I've got here is the ones that stressed the University leading the student, I suppose, and saying, 'Students trust us to tell them what to do, we set the rules, we tell them exactly what plagiarism is, and they tell us that they haven't done it, and that it's our responsibility to sort that out', I suppose, whereas the second lot I suppose is more student-led, students have their own responsibility for this, they can be involved in setting the rules, we don't give them as much detail on the pledge and we trust them to know what they're supposed to do and what they're not supposed to do, to get on with that and so…

There were some interesting comments made during this activity, and some exchanges from the discussion about responsibility in staff group B are presented below:

StaffB5: But it's more than focus, isn't it? This is about students taking responsibility,
StaffB1: Yes.
StaffB5: and I think that is absolutely CRUCIAL with respect to plagiarism, and it's inability to get the message and the damage that we've talked about that can happen to individuals if they refuse to take responsibility. It's crucial. There are difficulties with the student responsibility issues, I think because in the black-and-white statements that are written on here I have some reservations, for example, the one we've talked about academic standards. But the sentiment is certainly interesting.

StaffB3: It's that, similar again, that one set has students in the driving seat of it. But I think also by being overseen really by the University, I don't think the University could totally let go of standards, and leave them to a body... But it's the new world, isn't it, giving them more control, but then it's whether you trust them.
StaffB6: And you got responsibility to wider standards than just the university standards.

StaffB3: Yeah, we get people coming in looking over our shoulder all the time, you want to know that YOU are in control to some degree. 'Cause there is SOME element of giving students some control over some issues, but I think totally let go...

StaffB1: When they go out and work in the big wide world, certainly if they're working in some Geology and I suspect the same with Engineering, as you say also, and Medical field, there's always somebody there, somebody monitoring them. They never are going to be actually probably as free as they are at university to influence the system, I suspect. Unless they go perhaps back into university themselves eventually.

StaffB4: Yet I agree that so much as with good parenting and good schooling, the essence is to give those who are learning responsibilities, so that they see that there's responsibility on their shoulders and they will react to it. If we DON'T give them responsibilities, don't make themselves responsible for their own actions, they're going to be reacting like little children for some time.

StaffB1: Fundamentally we have a learning and teaching strategy in the university and learning is actually emphasising already the students' responsibility for their learning.

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The first focus group session was quite general and exploratory and, as such, it generated a wide range of comments on different aspects of the plagiarism issue, whereas the second session which is discussed in the next sub-chapter was much more focused and specific.

1.3.2. SESSION TWO: ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The second focus group session aimed specifically at exploring the views of our staff and student participants on the elements of the Alternative System[2] and on the feasibility of introducing them in the UK HE context. In order to present the main elements of the honour code approach in a systematic manner, a general Alternative System Framework was designed to reflect the main features of the honour code approach:

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[2] The term 'Alternative System' was used during the focus group activities instead of the 'honour code system' to avoid any bias that the connotations of the latter may have provoked. In this sub-chapter, the two terms are used interchangeably.
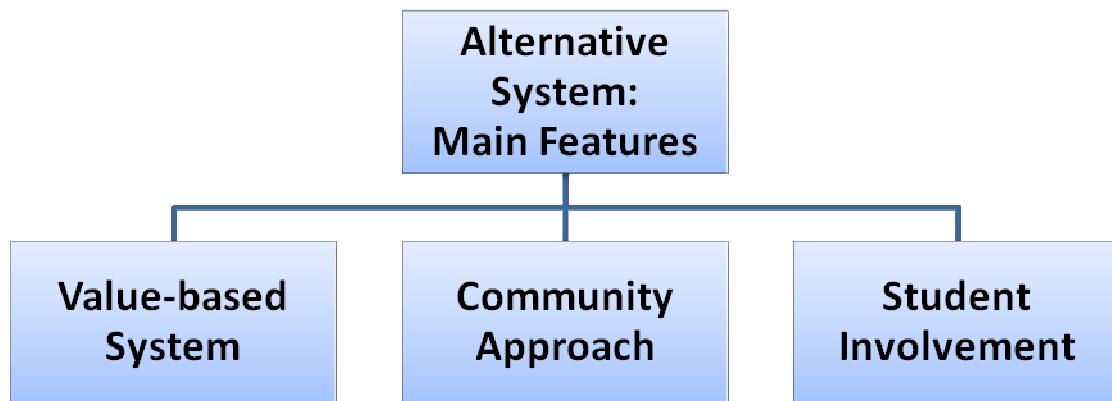
FIGURE 1 ALTERNATIVE SYSTEM FRAMEWORK

This framework largely informed the voting categories used in the second part of Session Two. This sub-chapter presents and discusses the results of the second focus group sessions.

1.3.2.1. BRAINSTORMING: 'ACADEMIC INTEGRITY'

Similarly to the first focus group sessions, a group brainstorming activity was held at the beginning of each Session Two. The participants were asked 'What do you understand by 'Academic Integrity'?' / 'What does the concept 'Academic Integrity' mean to you?'. These brainstorming sessions were much shorter than 'plagiarism' brainstorming activities and they produced quite different results. On several occasions, staff and students alike found it difficult to define what academic integrity meant or come up with any associations this term evoked in them. Overall, the issues mentioned by the participants included honesty (the most common reply), giving credit, respect, professionalism, maintaining standards and intellectualism. As can be seen, this is in stark contrast with the results of the brainstorming for 'plagiarism', the concept that was generally perceived in very negative terms (see section 1.3.1.1.).

Apart from getting some insight into how the two terms were perceived and responded to by the participants on a cognitive and emotional level, we were also interested to see to what extent our participants' 'free' comments during the 'academic integrity' brainstorming activity would map onto the three elements of the Alternative System from our Alternative System Framework. The comments our participants gave during brainstorming relate to the first, *Value* element, of the Alternative System, while the other two, *Community Approach* and *Student Involvement*, did not seem to be accounted for during the brainstorming sessions. This is perhaps understandable if we consider the *Value* element as the 'What?' element of the framework (i.e. what this system is about and what values it promotes), and the other two elements, *Community Approach* and *Student Involvement*, as the 'How?' elements (i.e. how the system works in practical terms). While some attempts to understand or define the concept of academic integrity were made by our participants (the 'What?' element), it is not surprising that the 'How?' elements were not flagged up during the brainstorming discussions (as UK HE is not yet at the stage where we would be thinking about the practicalities of introducing this system and/or ensuring its effective functioning).

In contrast, a lot of comments raised during the 'plagiarism' brainstorming sessions could be related to the 'Hows' of dealing with this issue (e.g, detection, assessment, inconsistencies in the regulations, etc.).

1.3.2.2. DISCUSSION OF THE 'ALTERNATIVE' SYSTEM

After the brainstorming activity, the elements of the Alternative System were presented to the participants under the three broad headings corresponding to the Alternative System Framework: 'Value-based system', 'Community approach' and 'Student Involvement'. Each of these areas and its elements were then discussed in a free format before the electronic voting took place. In what follows, the quantitative results for 12 questions obtained through the voting process are presented, interspersed with the relevant participant comments from the free discussion stage. Each of the 12 questions was asked twice, the first time preceded by the following phrase: 'In the ideal world: To what extent do you agree with the following?', and the second time by 'In the real world: Do you think that the following would work in a UK university?'. In this way the participants could indicate to what extent they agreed with a particular idea in principle and whether they thought it could work in practice in the UK context.

Although the participants were asked to respond to each question using a 5-point Likert scale, their answers are grouped into three areas in the tables in this section: SA/A (strongly agree / agree), N (neither agree nor disagree) and SD/D (strongly disagree / disagree), as this helps to present the results in a more clear and straightforward way.

1.3.2.2.1. ALTERNATIVE SYSTEM: VALUE BASED APPROACH

Within this broad category, the following five elements were explored in terms of their potential role in preventing plagiarism: framing plagiarism in more positive terms, promoting shared values and principles of the academic community, a code of academic conduct, an honour pledge and unproctored exams. The following table shows the results obtained for the first of these elements.

TABLE 6 FRAMING PLAGIARISM IN MORE POSITIVE TERMS

Q1. Framing the issue of plagiarism in more positive, rather than negative, terms						
SITUATION	SA/A (%)		N (%)		SD/D (%)	
	Staff	**Students**	**Staff**	**Students**	**Staff**	**Students**
IDEAL	88	60	0	20	12	20
REAL	83	50	6	10	12	40

As this table suggests, the idea of framing plagiarism in more positive terms was quite well received by staff, while students on the whole seemed somewhat more sceptical, particularly in the real world scenario. Two comments in support of this idea, from a staff and student participant respectively, are presented below:

> StaffA5: Sometimes it's very EASY to speak about plagiarism all in terms of misconduct, and I can see that there is some advantage in trying to suggest... push the argument that what this is designed to do is to help improve study skills, how we present work…

> StudA5: The way that it was given across in my lecture […] they just assumed, 'Right, you ARE gonna try it, we know you're gonna try it, just know' […]. So I prefer if they just from the outstart … [say], 'Let's get academic, you're here to be academics, do your research, get involved'…

Similarly to the results of the plagiarism discussions presented in section 1.3.1., the theme of worry and fear resurfaced again in the discussions of the Alternative System:

> StudA7: I think the top one, the 'less negative - more positive', I think that's really good, 'cause I think a lot of people when you first read about plagiarism, when you first come to university…

> StudA6: strikes a fear

> StudA7: Yeah, and then you've got word limits, and then it just gets really..., instead of looking at coursework and thinking, 'Oh, this is gonna be quite simple', you get really paranoid…

The following comment, however, highlights a contrasting view:

> StudB8: I know it's a good way to see the whole plagiarism... and respecting other people in a positive light, but it's... If people aren't gonna be worried about not being punished, then there's not gonna be any motivation for them to... I know that's what you're trying to do, the motivation is of HAVING the integrity, of HAVING the respect…

> StudB7: It's just not realistic.

> StudB8: but not for a long time will you be able to get students to think like that. It's not gonna be a 'turn on a switch' though, you start one year, it's gonna take years of building up.

Similar scepticism was repeatedly echoed in most focus groups with regard to other elements of the Alternative System and this theme will be revisited again further on in this sub-section. The idea of 'not being worried about being punished' in the student exchange above was counterbalanced in another student focus group by the following comment about a possible motivation for trying (or not trying) to 'get away with it':

> StudA7: I think if there are also people who are gonna try it, if you just come down really hard from the beginning, and they think, 'Oh, is that all you gonna do?' Then it won't deter most people, but I reckon if it's just presented in a positive way, then I suppose people wouldn't think, 'Oh, I can get away with it'.

In terms of balancing out enthusiasm and scepticism over the suggestion of a more positive representation of ideas behind plagiarism, the following comment perhaps offers a possible solution,

> StudB8: I think the idea of academic integrity, sort of getting that across, as well as the University's regulations on plagiarism, I don't think one could take the place of the other, but I think that as a little thing to go on top with it, like to introduce a positive, but reinforce by the negative if you see what I mean.

At the same time, academic integrity being 'a little thing to go on top' may not reflect fully the whole ethos and scope of the Alternative, aka honour code, System.

The second element of the value category received the following distribution.

TABLE 7 PROMOTING SHARED VALUES AND PRINCIPLES OF THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

Q2. Promoting shared values and principles of the academic community as a means of plagiarism prevention						
SITUATION	SA/A (%)		N (%)		SD/D (%)	
	Staff	**Students**	**Staff**	**Students**	**Staff**	**Students**
IDEAL	94	80	6	10	0	10
REAL	28	20	22	30	50	50

This was one of the situations where the difference between the ideal and real scenarios was quite noticeable. Participants on the whole welcomed this idea, but were quite sceptical as to whether this would help in preventing plagiarism in reality. The following comment is quite telling in this respect:

StaffA3: I think it is kind of hard to vote on it, because there're kind of two bits to it. I have no issue with PROMOTING those, I'm very happy to promote them, but if you're asking whether we think they would WORK in terms of actually PREVENTING plagiarism, I don't think they WOULD work. I think we should still promote them, but I don't think it would work.

Perhaps one of the reasons for such scepticism may be the commercialisation of higher education and the growing emphasis on the product, rather than the process, that higher education can offer, as the following comments suggest:

StaffC6: I think commercialisation of higher education has made this almost impossible to foster really, you can't have it both ways, either you're marketing or selling a product, or you're generating community-shared values.

StaffB7: I think the students have changed as well. Maybe years ago you could have said that the vast majority of students who were able to come to university may have cottoned on to this academic community and a life in academia […]. But I think now it's just a stepping stone to other things to them, and so it's a means to an end, it gives them a piece of paper which they can use to get a job, and that's all they're interested in, so […] many of those students will not really get on board with the idea of the academic community and […] I don't think they will really GET it…

StaffC6: This idea of community is very... top-down if you like. Very few students I think are committed to being academics or being a member of their academic communities, especially since the universities have become so commercialised. They're BUYING something, and if you can get a free gift or if you can pick something up for free on the way out, then that's nothing to do with shared values at all I think, it's getting a product. And especially within the internationalised student body, heavily internationalised, where there're probably, I don't know, but there must be in the thousands of graduate overseas students here, who are here for a very short period, and the academic community means very little I would have thought.

The last comment brings in the issue of international students, or indeed students from diverse cultural backgrounds, which is echoed and expanded on in the following quotation in relation to a possible discrepancy between different value systems:

StaffC5: Well, you talk about an academic community of shared values, you're assuming that everybody has the same values, and they don't. We have a very open and very diverse academic community, even from student onwards, and it's not just Leicester. Leicester is particularly diverse and representative of different education systems, within the same country as well, so it seems interesting […]. People might say they do, but then they don't.

The third element that was discussed under the values category was the adoption of a code of academic conduct, which would contain clear and explicit regulations for both students and staff with regard to appropriate academic behavior. Again, the idea itself was accepted quite well, but in terms of its impact in reality our participants tended to be more cautious.

TABLE 8 CODE OF ACADEMIC CONDUCT

Q3. Having a Code of Academic Conduct						
SITUATION	SA/A (%)		N (%)		SD/D (%)	
	Staff	**Students**	**Staff**	**Students**	**Staff**	**Students**
IDEAL	88	90	6	10	6	0
REAL	45	50	44	40	11	10

One of the possible explanations for this could be that this is not necessarily a novel idea (except for the regulations for staff perhaps) and the UK higher education status quo includes having codes of practice of different kinds in operation. The problem of plagiarism, however, is reportedly on the increase (see Introduction), and, as a result, our participants may have had reservations about the effectiveness of such codes in preventing academic dishonesty and plagiarism.

The fourth element under this category, an honour pledge, has generated the following response:

TABLE 9 HONOUR PLEDGE

Q4. Having an honour pledge that students are required to sign						
SITUATION	SA/A (%)		N (%)		SD/D (%)	
	Staff	**Students**	**Staff**	**Students**	**Staff**	**Students**
IDEAL	44	20	28	40	28	40
REAL	11	10	11	0	78	90

The main difference between an honour pledge and a 'normal' statement or declaration that students may be required to sign is the presence of a moral element, either explicit or implicit. As can be seen from the table above, 90% of the student participants did not think that having such a pledge would help in preventing plagiarism in reality (as opposed to 40% in an ideal situation). Similarly, there was a marked discrepancy between the ideal and real situations among staff.

Even if this idea appealed to some participants, particularly in the ideal world situation, the main argument against it seemed to be the difference in the perceptions of honour among individuals and different degrees of importance that people would place on the concept of honour:

> StaffA6: Yeah, I don't... what is honour these days? I don't know, I'm not quite so sure...

> StudB6: I think also it'd differ between student to student, whereas the university rules and regulations are the same for every student, but someone's perception of their honour is gonna be vastly different to someone else's, so there's not consistency as an imposed one.

Some participants were sceptical about the whole idea of signing statements – that it may not mean a lot to students and that signing something does not imply understanding it or agreeing with it:

> StaffC6: The principal thing is understanding what it means, isn't it? You can sign anything, you know, 'Do you agree to blah blah'- 'Yes', tick, you know, 'let's get the thing'. It's understanding what it means...

> StudB8: Signing a piece of paper won't..., at the end of the day it doesn't mean everything to people. At the beginning of uni, when you send a piece of work in, you sign you're not gonna cheat, so you're not gonna plagiarise, but yet people will still sign it even though they have plagiarised.

> StudB7: I think in the IDEAL world like you've said here where you're assuming that people will follow... Again, it's cute, you know, but...

Additionally, some student participants noticed an intrinsic contradiction of the whole situation of we-trust-you-but-sign-this-please,

StudB8: And also in the ideal world you're saying that you trust the students, but you're still making them sign something, so that's gonna send mixed messages.

StudB9: Yeah, it's contradicting what you're saying in the first place.

while others observed that (seemingly) less rigid regulations may be sending wrong messages to students:

StudC1: I think it's the same for the honour pledge as well. If you put a lot of trust in students to kind of do it right, they may not view it as serious, they may be more likely to cheat or not be asked, it's just what I think.

StudC4: It seems like a bit of a less rigid system, so there'll be probably a lot of discretions, they're not easy to stick to, whereas if you've got clear-cut rules and a clear declaration, you know what you're signing up for.

StudC1: And if it's work that counts as well, it kind of puts across the message that it doesn't matter, or, well, it could be like an important essay or an important exam, and then if you're asking people to just kind of pledge or trust each other on their honour... I don't know, I just don't think it would work really, especially if it's serious work.

On the whole, similarly to the participants of Clarke and Aiello's study (2006), there was a feeling in a number of our focus groups that pledges of this kind sound 'too American' and may not be suitable in the UK context due to their explicit sentimentality.

The final element in this category, unproctored exams, has generated a rather negative response among the participants, as the table below suggests.

TABLE 10 UNPROCTORED EXAMS

Q5. Having unproctored exams						
SITUATION	**SA/A (%)**		**N (%)**		**SD/D (%)**	
	Staff	**Students**	**Staff**	**Students**	**Staff**	**Students**
IDEAL	22	0	17	30	61	70
REAL	0	0	11	0	89	100

As can be seen from this table, *all* students disagreed or strongly disagreed that this could work effectively in reality, and the following comment typifies their views:

StudB9: The last bit, I don't quite agree with it.

StudB7: It's just being naive.

StudB9: It is being naive. I don't think it's a right idea.

StudB8: It's quite optimistic to think if you instil a student body with respect for one another and other people's academic work, you can trust them in the exam, sit there, not look or cheat. Although that's what you want society to be like, I don't think it's possible.

StudB9: It's a very idealistic situation. It won't go the way the way we'd expect it to go.

Notably, the theme of fairness with regard to other students came up quite strongly in student comments:

StudA7: If someone did cheat, it wouldn't be so much the moral side of it, it would just be unfair in terms of someone who maybe isn't good at exams, but still tried really hard and didn't cheat gets an ok mark, but someone who just cheats gets a really good mark.

StudB9: And it all gets unfair then to people who wouldn't cheat, so there's a chance of people, even when we don't have any invigilators, somebody who would cheat would DEFINITELY do better in exams than a person who wouldn't cheat and wouldn't do...

Moderator 1: Ok, so it's unfair on other students...

StudB9: Yeah, it depends on your own personal ethics and personal conscience as well.

Interestingly, one of the staff participants from law discipline offered a somewhat contrasting view, suggesting that uninvigilated exams may work in a competitive environment:

StaffC5: On the mutual trust, in particular unsupervised exams, my experience is that this will only work because the students police themselves and each other. So in a very COMPETITIVE environment, where they know that their results are going to be compared to those of the next person, they will not let them do it.

The subject area of law stood out on another occasion, which will be discussed further down in sub-section 1.3.2.2.3.

In the following sub-section, however, the second broad theme that underpins the ethos of the Alternative System - the community approach - is discussed in detail.

1.3.2.2.2. ALTERNATIVE SYSTEM: COMMUNITY APPROACH

The second major element of the Alternative System, the community approach, implies creating a context where everybody takes responsibility for maintaining academic standards and the whole university functions as a community of practice. This involves, among other steps, placing a strong campus-wide focus on the issues of academic integrity. The majority of our participants (100% in the case of students in the ideal world scenario) supported this idea, as the following table illustrates.

TABLE 11 CAMPUS FOCUS ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Q6. Placing a strong campus focus on Academic Integrity						
SITUATION	SA/A (%)		N (%)		SD/D (%)	
	Staff	**Students**	**Staff**	**Students**	**Staff**	**Students**
IDEAL	83	100	17	0	0	0
REAL	55	70	28	10	17	20

As pointed out by the following participant, however, such campus-wise initiative may prove difficult in a distance learning context.

> StaffC4: I think in a distance learning context, some of this is quite difficult. It's not impossible and I think we can do something, but obviously a strong campus thing, you have to try and create that at a distance which is very hard to do if not impossible.

Creating an effective community largely depends on whether all members of that community are prepared to take responsibility for its successful functioning. The table below illustrates our participants' views on including all members of the university in the 'academic integrity circle'.

TABLE 12 MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Q7. Encouraging all parties (students, staff, administration) to be responsible for maintaining Academic Integrity						
SITUATION	SA/A (%)		N (%)		SD/D (%)	
	Staff	**Students**	**Staff**	**Students**	**Staff**	**Students**
IDEAL	94	90	6	10	0	0
REAL	45	70	33	20	22	10

The idea was received quite well in an ideal scenario; however, in terms of it making a realistic difference to plagiarism prevention in the UK context, the participants, particularly staff, were more sceptical. The following comment illustrates one of the possible concerns:

> StaffB5: The other thing that I was thinking about here, which is exactly what the word 'responsibility' refers to here. We still HAVE to have a system for identifying plagiarism, and who is going to do that? And it didn't seem obvious to me that students would necessarily, I'm not sure I trust the students enough to identify plagiarism (laughter).

This comment implies the issue of staff-student separation, which can be quite contradictory to the whole idea of a community and equal treatment of its members. We wanted to find out what our participants felt in this respect, and in a free discussion stage of the second focus group session they were prompted to voice their views on the idea of moving away from staff-student dichotomy towards a more equal relationship.

Their views seemed to be quite wide-ranging. Some students felt that it was already happening and that it was a good idea:

> StudB9: …but out here we work together which shows that the respect is, as an individual, on an equal level as them [staff], we're not below them, we're not above them, we're on the same eye level as them pretty much. […] And when they respect you I think it makes learning a bit more fun as well. If they're gonna force it down your throat, after a little while everybody is gonna start rebelling...

> StudB6: 'Cause they become more personal with you and you want to learn from them, because they're basically your friend, and they're sharing their knowledge with you, they're not talking at you anymore, they're talking with you.

Some student participants emphasised the difference between school and university in this respect,

> Stud B7: You move into university and you're an adult, and you should be treated as an adult, and in my eyes you're on the same level as them, adults.

while others pointed to a transition towards a community *throughout* the university years:

> StudB8: We do see this, by the time you're definitely a third-year you see that, no matter if you're an academic or a student, you're basically not on par, but they treat you as an equal, as a peer, rather than them being someone in authority. So definitely, but it's instilled in us from the first year that as you build up through uni you're more of a community, not as a hierarchy anymore.

Interestingly, staff comments on this issue seemed to single out certain departments/subjects where 'staff-student dichotomy' is less of an issue, as the following comments of the geology and medicine lecturers respectively demonstrate:

> StaffB1: I like the idea, it's kind of what we try to aspire to in the department. [...] We have field trips, so the staff and students do all know each other very well as a result of that, and we actually say to them [...] they're actually working in a community, and where there's collective responsibility. So I kind of like it, but I know also, working in that system, there're problems as well. Doesn't make the problems go away.

> StaffB3: We work close to our students both academically and in a clinical workplace as well, so we're really... what we feel is very close-knit relationship, we don't ever want that 'us and them', although there is a demarcation line when there's a need to, they understand THAT.

The idea of the existence of a 'demarcation line' between staff and students and its inevitability featured in most participant groups. For example, the following exchange took place in a session with the staff from the subject area A (Arts and Humanities):

> StaffA6: There's always gonna be a relationship between staff and students that necessarily has to be unequal, isn't there? You can talk about a community approach which to me gives some kind of sense of shared values and shared ownership over things, but it's always gonna be the University that carries out the administration or does the marking [...]. I get the sense that this kind of approach couldn't necessarily be very real, you know, it'll always perhaps be a kind of a feeling, or touchy feely...

Moderator 2: Feels too fluffy?

StaffA6: Yeah, perhaps, and ok, let's create this illusion when we're talking about plagiarism, but really we know what the relationship is between staff and students, and it's never gonna really be like that.

StaffA3: It would work if we weren't all about giving people certificates, wouldn't it? It would work if we were some kind of community, that we're all together and we're learning, and working, and...

Student comments with regard the existing 'staff-student dichotomy' reflected their need for guidance,

StudA6: I like the idea of a community approach, but most likely when you come to university, you don't know what to expect, and I think having staff is important […]. I think that's necessary, you say 'us and them', I mean more than becoming equal, I think you do need that slight separation, because at the end of the day we are learning, we're under their wing, we come in knowing nothing, and we need to go out and sort of know everything.

StudC1: It seems a good idea, I just think that there's always gonna be a divide between staff and students, because the staff have obviously... they're a lot more qualified, and more knowledgeable.

StudC3: But you want someone to tell you what to do, 'cause I know we're supposed to be more grown-up now and stuff, but I still think there's someone you go to and talk to...

even for being 'disciplined',

StudC4: …by having separate people, like by having the staff and having you, it kind of makes the rules more enforceable if that makes sense, more stricter. Like 'if I don't follow these rules, something'll happen', whereas if you're all together, it kind of takes that scare element out of it...

and a realisation that large student numbers may exacerbate the 'demarcation' element:

> StudA7: I think it's also numbers, I don't know how many people are in my department, but I think there must be loads more students compared to the staff.

It was generally felt, from the students' comments, that there was a need there to get a sense of direction from somebody senior. Such expectations are perhaps natural among students new or relatively new to the university. Interestingly, this was not the case in our sample where only one out of ten students taking part in the second focus group was a fresher. Five students were in their second year at university and four were finalists. This observation may provoke interesting questions about levels of student maturity and, hence, their actual ability to take more responsibility for their learning and for maintaining academic principles and standards – something that underlies the whole honour code movement.

On the whole, throughout the discussions of the community approach element of the Alternative System, there was a notable feeling of concern among the staff participants over the difficulties of creating a large institution-wide community in the academic context:

> StaffB5: … the community - where does it end? And it's much easier to foster a community spirit amongst a fairly small group of people, all know each other as you said.

> StaffB8: MY impression is that, instead of working towards a community, we're actually working away from it. Very big intake, particularly on a medical course, means that students are actually working within themselves against the system, rather than coming towards this sort of model, which is all working together. […] I think that students see themselves isolated actually from the institution, and so they find their identity within their group.

Some of these concerns will be addressed again in the next sub-section which looks at the third main characteristic of the Alternative System - student involvement.

1.3.2.2.3. ALTERNATIVE SYSTEM: STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

Under the broad theme of student involvement the following elements were explored: the process of producing or re-writing a code of academic conduct, peer education, student judiciary (both exclusive and partial) and a no-toleration clause. The table below shows the participants' views on student involvement in the production (or re-writing) of a code.

TABLE 13 PRODUCING/RE-WRITING THE CODE

Q8. Student involvement in producing / re-writing the Code of Academic Conduct						
SITUATION	SA/A (%)		N (%)		SD/D (%)	
	Staff	**Students**	**Staff**	**Students**	**Staff**	**Students**
IDEAL	50	30	44	30	6	40
REAL	40	20	13	20	47	60

It can be noticed from this table that this idea was better received in the ideal rather than real situation, and that staff seemed to be slightly more enthusiastic than students in this respect. The following exchanges may shed some light on why our student participants may have felt that way:

> StudA7: I think it's just how, how would you ever get consensus over..., and more so when even students among themselves disagree...

> StudA5: It is possible, but you got to find the right group of people with the right motivation, right time, so it could, as far as I'm concerned, it could, but it could quite easily not.

> StudA6: At the end of the day, it's an academic institution, if they've got rules set, I think that's fair enough, whereas students who come in, we're all gonna have different..., we would want different things in different ways...

> StudB9: We should be able to give in our own opinions, but they shouldn't listen to everything we say.

> […]

> StudB9: At the end of the day they have to make the decision, 'cause they're more mature in these fields than we are, they've definitely had more experience in ways how things work.

> StudB9: I think it'll get too chaotic if the students, everybody is running the whole place.

> StudB6: Because then it's ... students running their own education (laughter). That's not education, that's just...

> StudB7: Yeah, just be crazy!

While a lot of the students appeared to be quite skeptical and self-critical in relation to this element, some staff participants seemed a bit more tolerant and could see some benefits of the process of student involvement in the process of code development:

StaffB8: I think there's some merits in getting students to consider for themselves how they would feel about their material being used, and so the re-writing could be a useful exercise. They might see it as a waste of time since it would be done year on year, and so they might just plagiarise the results of the last years (laughter).

The partly tongue-in-cheek note towards the end of this comment reflects a more general concern expressed by our participants across different focus groups that 're-inventing the wheel' every year would not be sustainable, and that re-negotiating the rules would require a significant amount of work, which may not be practical.

This element, however, does not necessarily have to be interpreted in this particular way, and our participants were advised accordingly. If the idea of student involvement in the production of a code of academic conduct (or a statement on academic integrity, or something similar) were adopted, the first stage of this process would perhaps involve students getting together and working out the principles themselves - similarly to the University of Virginia example in the US. What happened there then was that the fact about student involvement in the initial writing of the code became instilled in the student psyche and entrenched in the wider university policy, and has been passed down to other student generations, i.e. it is now perceived as a common history among the student body.

This example may be seen as quite extreme for the UK context, but what could work here would be perhaps some re-negotiation or re-adjustment of the rules done on a regular basis (annually, biannually, etc.) in consultation with the students (and with staff/academic advisors present to avoid any misunderstandings). As participant StaffC3 noted, such involvement would 'make the students more aware of what the code is', so the whole process may be seen as primarily pedagogical and as a way of getting students on board.

The second element discussed under this category was student involvement in educating their peers about plagiarism. The results of our participants' voting are presented below:

TABLE 14 PEER EDUCATION

Q9. Student involvement in peer education and instruction						
SITUATION	SA/A (%)		N (%)		SD/D (%)	
	Staff	**Students**	**Staff**	**Students**	**Staff**	**Students**
IDEAL	88	20	6	70	6	10
REAL	68	0	13	70	19	30

As this table suggests, there was quite a noticeable difference between the staff and student participants, particularly in the real world scenario where nearly 70% of staff (as opposed to 0% of students) were in favour of the idea. Interestingly, the majority (70%) of students (in both ideal and real situations) indicated neutrality, rather than explicit opposition, to the idea of peer education. The main concern that seemed to guide their choices in this respect was a fear of possible misinterpretation of the regulations and of the consequences of being either on the giving or the receiving end of the peer education process, and the following comment typifies this:

> StudC3: I suppose it is a good idea, but then there's problems […] if you've interpreted it the wrong way, then it's not fair on either person, 'cause that's how, if I've interpreted it one way and someone could have interpreted it another way, have I taught them, but if it is a member of staff doing it, then it's just that one person doing it, so it's all on them really. I don't think it would be fair on, if I was telling someone how to cite a case, it they did it wrong and blamed me for it, then I wouldn't feel that it was fair on me, that I was the one who got to blamed for it.

Staff participants also seemed to be aware of this problem, as well as of the wider issues of institutional responsibility and accountability:

> StaffB1: The only thing that just worries me slightly if there are some misunderstandings that actually get propagated or mistakes that get propagated, I think there needs to be some checks and balances in that process somewhere. [...] the University in a sense also has legal obligations as well, to make sure that students are actually not just complying with its own code of conduct, but also actually with the laws as they apply in the UK.

In spite of the above mentioned concerns, some of our participants were also aware of the potential pedagogical value of a peer education process, and not only for the 'recipient', but also for the 'educator':

> StaffB1: … I think peer learning is good. The students actually often learn a lot themselves by having to explain something to somebody else, and that gets passed down.

> StudA5: I think student involvement would increase their awareness of things, which is important, and also I think, for example, myself, if I was working or something to do a presentation to people maybe, for example, on plagiarism or something like that, I think I'm more likely to act in that way as well after putting the effort in for it, more likely to act how I should.

Interestingly, the idea of 'plagiarism anonymous' also came up in two staff focus groups:

> StaffC7: I think the idea of the involvement in peer instruction is very interesting, there's two ways I could go, how to plagiarise, how not to plagiarise (laughter). However, I think that it is often extremely effective when you have the students talk to the students, especially if there was some kind of... You know, if you had somebody who had actually experienced the process, kind of do a 'plagiarism anonymous' kind of meeting idea, I think that kind of process could be quite useful in many ways.

Given potential pedagogical benefits of the peer education process, students perhaps could be equipped with certain tools of helping each other with proper referencing and avoiding plagiarism, and relevant institutional or departmental frameworks could be developed in this respect (peer mentoring systems of various kinds, although not necessarily relating to plagiarism, already exist at a number of departments at Leicester university). At the same time, such provisions would probably need to include a staff mentoring component to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the student-led educational input.

The next element discussed under the category of student involvement was student judiciary. The participants were asked to cast separate votes with regard to two types of judiciary: an exclusive student judiciary where students run the whole judicial system entirely by themselves (as in some US models mentioned in chapter 1.1.) and a partial student judiciary where the system involves both staff and student presence. The voting results for the two situations are presented in the two tables below.

TABLE 15 EXCLUSIVE STUDENT JUDICIARY

Q10. Exclusive student judiciary						
SITUATION	**SA/A (%)**		**N (%)**		**SD/D (%)**	
	Staff	**Students**	**Staff**	**Students**	**Staff**	**Students**
IDEAL	0	0	0	0	100	100
REAL	0	0	0	0	100	100

TABLE 16 PARTIAL STUDENT JUDICIARY

Q11. Partial student involvement in judiciary						
SITUATION	**SA/A (%)**		**N (%)**		**SD/D (%)**	
	Staff	**Students**	**Staff**	**Students**	**Staff**	**Students**
IDEAL	86	60	7	20	7	20
REAL	81	40	13	30	6	30

The first table is rather self-explanatory – staff and students were unanimous in that they disagreed with the idea of an exclusive student judiciary. Their views on a partial student judiciary, however, were quite different, although students were still more cautious about it than staff. Both staff and students felt that there was a need for student voice in plagiarism hearings - a voice of somebody who is in 'the same shoes' as the 'accused' student:

> StaffC6:Yeah, sometimes I'd like to have, 'cause we have quite a lot of these plagiarism hearings, sometimes I'd like to have a student voice in there, just to put a brake on some colleagues to say, 'Understand our perspective on this!'

> StudB9: But it's necessary for students to be somehow to be involved as well, for him or her to share their own opinion on the basis of... from a students' point of view. […] I don't think they [staff] will be able to justify how the student's feeling a 100 percent, so a bit of an input from a students' point of view I think is necessary.

> StudC4: I don't agree with the solely student judicial sort of thing, but definitely if you had a panel of three and one was a student, you get a student perspective, 'cause whenever I hand my essays in and I'm like, 'I think I've footnoted it, and I've quoted it, and I've put the books in, but what if I'm wrong?' And if you've got a student they must have felt the same way [...]. But I would never have a wholly student one, some academic, and maybe just one or two students.

Some staff commented on the possible educational value of student involvement in judicial hearings (similarly to student involvement in the code production discussed earlier),

> StaffA2: But the student role in the judicial system could be a good thing […] learn more from it, like the people who've done the plagiarism might sort of take on board the criticisms more or the punishment more, I think.

while others showed concern over the embarrassment (or 'face saving') issues this may involve, particularly for students from certain cultural backgrounds:

> StaffC6: With such a large proportion of our, particularly my own students, being Chinese and Asian, so much face at stake here. You couldn't possibly introduce a student into that system, it would be just so embarrassing that anybody knew about it. But somebody from another department, maybe somebody from the Student Union, maybe…

Indeed, the issues of other students' *knowing* something or somebody (e.g. if somebody you know may be aware of your plagiarism hearing, or you may be asked to judge somebody you know, etc.) seemed to be a major source of unease for students in our focus groups, as the following exchange suggests:

> Moderator 2: What about students sitting in judgement of other students?
>
> StudA5: Oh, I really don't know about it at all.
>
> StudA6: No.
>
> StudA7: That'd be a bit weird. It sounds good when you first see it, and then you realise that if it's someone you know or is someone that you know of, then you don't really want them to know that…
>
> StudA5: If the outcome, say, for example, my academic career, if it's dependant on, say, I don't know, how many students really would not be happy with that at all.
>
> StudA7: That's definitely where you'd want just lecturers or whatever, just sitting in on that.
>
> StudA5: So you said partial or may be a mixture, I wouldn't necessarily mind that, but if it was just students, really would not be happy.

Along with possible embarrassment, the comments towards the end of the exchange above seem to signal another issue, something that, in fact, a lot of our student participants appeared to share – a concern about students' impartiality, a worry that student judgements would be much less standardised than those of staff and everything would depend on individuals and their agendas, even to the extent of, as participant StudA6 said, a 'personal vendetta':

> StudA7: Yeah, it's just like how would you ensure that that person wasn't doing it out of personal beliefs…

> StudC3: I'm not sure about the STUDENT role though, I don't think it's anything to do with anyone else, I think there should just be… your teachers who were sorting it out, I don't think it's got anything to do with your fellow students.

> […]

> StudC1: No, I agree with you about having students involved as well, because if the worst came to the worst, and you were brought up in front of a hearing, and then somebody on your course sat there who you know socially or you might be friends, or enemies and stuff, I think it'd make things a bit more complicated.

> StudC3: 'Cause it could be, like your worst scenario kind of thing, 'cause there ARE people in your class you don't get on with, and if it was them, they're gonna obviously go against you, so I don't think it should be students on 'cause it could cause bias, so I think it should just be… I can see why the students should be on, 'cause they're writing the same essays, but just the thing where they could be biased towards you 'cause they don't like you, or they've got something against you, or something like that.

There was also an understanding among some of our student participants that students would not necessarily have enough experience to exercise their powers of arbitration, as the following comment illustrates:

> StudB6: They won't be able to judge another student because they don't have the experience of past students and what they've done, so I'd be probably more scared of a student body judging me than I would of an academic body…

Interestingly, there seemed to be somewhat conflicting comments about the level of 'seriousness' that student involvement would bring into judicial procedures:

> StaffA6: I think it was mentioned earlier that students are likely to be harsher and stuff in these kinds of things...

> StudC3: I'd feel worse sitting in front of all staff, I think, 'cause it's more serious. 'Cause whenever you introduce students into something, I think it takes a level of seriousness off it, I don't know... That's my opinion of it, I think that they should.

Perhaps the following student comment, which was a response to the last statement by participant StudC3, summarises a possible internal 'conflict' which some students may have with regard to the judicial procedures of this kind. On the one hand, in theory, such procedures need to be perceived as serious and thus having a deterrent potential, but, on the other hand, if you yourself ended up in that situation, having a 'humane' element (in the role of another student who would be on your side) would be desirable:

> StudC4: I can see what you're saying, but if it was someone else in it, and you wanted to do it for the deterrent, yeah, I'd want it all academics, but if it was ME, I'd rather have a student on that panel who could stand up for me in a sense. And it just depends on who you are in this situation, what you want...

It does not mean, however, that all our participants assumed that a student member on the panel would automatically have an advocate role (or wanted them to have such a role):

> Moderator 2: Ok, do you think, if students were involved, would they be... do you want them to be on... supporting the student, for example?

> StudB9: No, on the panel.

> StudB6: Yeah, so be able to make their own minds up.

> StudB7: Yeah, they'd kind of be for or against.

The no-toleration clause, the final element of the Alternative System that our participants voted on, received the following distribution of opinions:

TABLE 17 NO-TOLERATION CLAUSE

Q12. No-toleration clause						
SITUATION	**SA/A (%)**		**N (%)**		**SD/D (%)**	
	Staff	**Students**	**Staff**	**Students**	**Staff**	**Students**
IDEAL	19	20	19	30	62	50
REAL	13	20	6	0	81	80

As evident from this table, there was a spread of opinions on this issue among the participants, although the majority seemed to have gravitated to the 'disagree' end of the scale. Some of the comments are presented below:

StaffA3: Sounds quite Big Brotherish to me...

StudA7: I don't think that no-toleration clause would work at all. I don't think anyone's gonna...

StudA5: Perhaps a minority would, but overall I don't see that working in any way, shape or form.

StudB9: The no-toleration clause, that's unfair. Nobody would want to tattletale their peers, but you've got to study with them for 3 years, you're gonna be working with them, nobody would want to do it and put yourself in a corner like that.

[…]

StudB9: Yeah, it takes a lot of guts to actually go and stand up to your friend or whoever...

StudB6: I'm not happy about…[that] it's not addressed at the moment, so to make students aware that they CAN, they're unhappy about another student's behaviour or performance, or however they're acting, they can go and bring it up anonymously.

StudB9: Yeah, but to have it anonymously is ok, but to have it as a particular clause, it's just, it's a bit too strong.

The last exchange, particularly the words of participant StudB6, contains some degree of leeway in a seemingly strong student opinion of not 'tattletaling' each other: it seems to suggest that some students may wish to flag up certain peer activities that they may perceived to be wrong or improper. Among other factors, student choices to tell or not to tell on their peers would depend on their perceptions of and attitudes to plagiarism and plagiarisers, and that is the question that one of the staff participants formulated explicitly:

> StaffA4:   It'd be interesting to know how students perceive fellow students who plagiarise really. Do they see them as doing something bad, or do they just perceive them as just 'get away with it and good luck to them'?

Although our student participants were not asked this question explicitly by the moderators, some of their comments reflected (at least to some extent) what they felt about this and whether they would be prepared to report their peers for plagiarism. The comments relating to this were wide-ranging and highlighted a number of points, for example, losing respect for the person who cheated in exams (but still not turning them in),

> StudB9: … when they're cheating a bit in exams and all, and I saw it, I wouldn't really say much about it. I would lose respect for that person, but I don't think I'd go up to somebody…

pointing to the existence of certain implicit in-group pressures among students,

> StudC1:   Probably there's tensions among the students as well, I don't know what you call it..?, 'Don't tell on me' kind of like school mentality.

not interfering unless somebody's cheating affects you directly,

> StudB6:   At the end of the day another students' behaviour won't really affect, unless it does affect, it probably won't affect you and your work, unless that person's is cheating on you would bring it up, but to get involved with it might not be...

> StudB9:   Yeah, 'cause it's gonna prolong you for ever and it just puts you on bad terms with that person as well, unless that person is plagiarising what I've written, like steals my essay or something like that, then I would surely throw a fit about it and do something about it, but when it's not harming me to the extent of where it's costing me a lot of things, I wouldn't really want to get involved in something, 'cause it's just becomes an issue for you.

feeling angry or annoyed,

> StudB6: I don't know if by third year you've worked so hard for stuff, if you'd see someone doing that I'd be REALLY annoyed!

> StudB9: It's totally unfair, definitely, yeah.

> StudB6: If you've done SO much hard work I think the clause would almost be more 'You should tell that person that you've seen them do it', and they gonna turn themselves in sort of thing...

> StudC3: It would wind me up though, if I knew that someone had copied something and they were going to get away with it, so I would probably tell anyway, just to start with.

and at the same time being aware of possible moral dilemmas involved:

> StudC4 (in response to StudC3's point above): The only problem you'd have is if it was your friend…

Some participants felt quite strongly about the difference between *volunteering* to report an incident of cheating, and *having an obligation*, i.e. being forced, to do it regardless of the context:

> StudB9: Yeah, but in this case you're just forced to go and do something about it, and go up to an authority...

> StudB6: Yeah, but it's down to your own institution, you don't... it may be your responsibility, but at the end of the day you don't have to tell if you don't want to.

> StudB9: Yeas, so that's the thing, I want it as an option, not as a forced thing.

The following excerpt raises some additional issues that may complicate the situation, namely false accusations as a result of misinterpreting the situation and seeing cheating where it did not take place (but, because of the no-toleration clause, being forced to report it), or as a result of having personal reasons for getting somebody into trouble (which brings up the impartiality concern again):

> StudB8: Maybe you saw it wrong and maybe that student might have another reason for telling on some other student […].

> StudB9: Yeah, exactly. Look, suppose I had animosity with (name of StudB8) and I saw her cheating, even though there's a chance and even though I didn't see her cheating I'd go and say, 'You know what I DID'. There's no way they can prove me wrong, but I was forced to do it so I did it.

At the same time, one student saw a benefit of having a strong clause of this kind in that it could act as a deterrent:

> StudC3: It would act as a deterrent though if you knew that someone HAD to tell on you, then you wouldn't do it in the first place, 'cause it's just an extra thing on top of you not to do it.

With regard to the no-toleration clause, one subject area seemed to stand out, and this subject area was law. Our law participants seemed to be more willing to take action if they witnessed an incidence of academic cheating:

> StudC4: I think you would do anyway, like when there's something happened in one of our exams, there was a lot of fuss about it, and everyone was straight going to tell, 'cause it's your, I don't know what it's like with everyone else, but Law is really competitive […]

> StudC3: Well, we don't really talk about coursework, 'cause we've been told in the lectures they can tell if we've worked together. So with coursework, 'cause we live together, the only thing we'll talk about is if you don't know how to cite a case, that would be the only question we'd ask. So we don't discuss it in the slightest, even with our best friends.

> StudC4: Yeah, 'cause there's four of us doing the same course in the same year, and not one of us have mentioned what we've put in our essays...

The exchange between these law students echoes the comments of a law lecturer mentioned in the last sub-section about the potential for effective student self-policing in a highly competitive environment and in the context where one's achievements are rated in relation to everybody else's.

The idea of a no-toleration clause also poses interesting questions about whether this would reinforce or undermine the idea of a community. One of the staff members, in response to a comment by her colleague mentioned earlier about the 'Big Brotherish' feel of such a system, noted quite explicitly:

> StaffA2: I don't think that fosters a sense of community, does it?

At the same time, in another staff focus group an opinion was voiced that a situation where students police each other would necessarily require, even if not a community, a certain common ground shared by those involved:

> StaffC5: And that takes me to the other part, which is the no-toleration clause and the student role in the judicial system, and sort of policing of this requires very strong common ground, rather than community, but it requires common ground, which is deeper that just..., it cannot be just in the handbook.

This suggests that, if such a common ground were something that universities wanted to achieve, this would need to be cultivated on a deeper level than merely surface measures such as handbook guidelines. Even if enacted, as some participants noted, such a system would be rather difficult to enforce on a continuous basis and to know whether it is working or not.

An additional element that was discussed under the student involvement category was the publicity of plagiarism statistics. Such a measure would ensure the transparency of the institutional system and procedures by making general information (e.g. the number of plagiarism hearings at a particular department, the results of such hearings in general terms, etc.) publicly available without providing specific details (e.g. student names).

Although there was an opinion that this may have a heavy-handed and a not necessarily democratic feel to it,

> StaffA3: That sounds more on the side of being draconian, just trying to frighten people.

at the same time both sides, staff and students, recognised that it may act as a good deterrent:

> StaffC7: Publicising, all the transparency of the results of plagiarism hearings, yes, I agree totally with that. I HAVE heard of institutions where they do have a 'name and shame policy', and that is a major deterrent, because after all how many of us have had people before us saying, 'Please don't tell anybody, don't let anybody know'. Of course you're not gonna let anybody know, but that's their first concern: 'I don't want anybody to know!'. So the idea of other people knowing can be a very strong deterrent.

> StudA6: I like the last one, because it just gives a greater awareness, if you can see why people have been called in for exactly and the penalties...

> StudA5: It's just a deterrent.

> StudA6: Yeah.

> StudC3: I agree with the publicity thing, 'cause that's why... it could act as a deterrent as well, so if you knew that people have been caught out, and what they've been caught out for as well.

It is worth mentioning another student comment in this respect which, although not made directly during our discussions of the publicity of plagiarism statistics, has a direct link to this and also to plagiarism prevention in general:

> StudB8: … It was quite a while ago I was reading about some guy's research, and he was a really good academic, but he did plagiarism, and hid things, and there was a lot of 'Well, how will this affect the scientific community?', and it was more his really public punishment, and withdrawal of all his research and everything that really made ME hear about it and made the impact.

An important point was also raised about the consistency of departmental plagiarism related records and the need for clarity (also relevant to Part 2 of this report):

> StaffA6: You'd need some context though, wouldn't you?

> Moderator 2: Some context?

> StaffA6: Yeah, because if you're publishing the results, it might be that one department is better at detecting plagiarism, and, therefore, has more cases publicised than some people that don't look too closely.

> StaffA5: And there're obviously cases when you use numbers, sometimes these things are decipherable, it depends on the context.

> StaffA2: We might end up with targets, mightn't we? (laughter)

Finally, it is worth mentioning a comment made one of the staff participants about the inevitable 'us-them' structure even in the student-run type of system:

> StaffC4: One of the issues I would have with this is that, with students being involved, there always gonna be students who aren't involved. You always only gonna have a small group of students who can be on the judicial system, or you're only gonna have a small number of students who can re-write the rules. In some ways, you're recreating a staff-student kind of context where there's gonna be a whole group of students who aren't involved, another 'us and them' a different type of us and them.

The last sub-section in this section looks at some additional concerns that were raised by the participants in the course of our focus group discussions.

1.3.2.2.4. ALTERNATIVE SYSTEM: ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES

During the analysis process, a number of additional themes have been identified in the participant discussions, highlighting several important aspects relating to the adoption of the Alternative System which had not been included in the discussions explicitly. In what follows, the most relevant of these are addressed in the form of the five challenges they represent. Some of them link back to the issues raised in a series of the first focus group sessions during the general discussions of plagiarism (see section 1.3.1.2.).

Challenge 1: Counterbalancing the increasing commercialisation of higher education

The topic of commercialisation of education

and student pragmatism came up again throughout the series of second focus group sessions (notably only among staff members), as the following excerpts suggest:

> StaffA2: And there's a lot of pragmatism, isn't there, in students coming to sort of BUY a degree almost.

> StaffB1: … there are substantial subset of students that are here for certification I think, rather than an education in the traditional sense that we might regard it as. And I think that is a real issue, they will try and find the easiest route through the system.

> StaffB7: What do I need to know to pass this exam?

> StaffB1: Yeah, exactly, yeah, which is not really what we're trying to do.

> StaffB7: Of course not, they don't see it as an education.

> StaffB1: No, no.

> StaffB4: And at the same time we have to bear in mind that great and greater numbers of students are coming to university simply to get the certification. […] So as we had to cater for both what the ideal is, and what the actual, present situation is, and what it should be in the sense of having this from the early beginnings of education, we have to have a bit of the old system and a bit of the new system.

These concerns reflect the staff recognition of the challenges of balancing the 'higher' values underlying the Alternative System against more immediate pragmatic motivations that a lot of students seem to display. It could be argued that this discrepancy needs to be considered seriously if we were to adopt some elements of the honour code system in the UK context, since pragmatism and product orientation would contradict the very basic values underlying this system. The last of the three comments presented above suggests that a combination of both, the 'old' and the 'new' systems, could be a way forward. This comment also underscores the importance of the early stages of the educational process as this in when the process of value development also begins, which brings us to the next challenge.

Challenge 2: Value cultivation: small- vs. large-scale

People develop their value systems long before coming to university, and there are a number of important factors that play part in this process, from a micro-context of the family to a macro-context of society in general. It could be argued, therefore, that (without dismissing the role of HE experience in the process of value development) it may be rather difficult to cultivate certain values in a person throughout their degree if these values have not been instilled earlier, or if society at large is not ready to function on the level of the desired values, and the following comments from staff and student participants suggest:

> StaffB4: …in trying to design a system for the university, in this case our university or a university in general, we cannot separate the concept of academic integrity from the integrity at large and all it entails. […] If that has not been instilled in young children from the very early stage, it's a really large task to try and bend the course of that supertanker, and make it take a tight turn in the high seas.

> StaffB5: In society as a whole where you were saying, integrity is something that comes... as a very small child, but if the whole of society isn't operating in an integrity driven manner, there's no value in it.

> StaffB4: No, but there are institutions, schools to begin with, that have a hand in it..

> StaffB5: The whole system, the WHOLE system has got to embrace this for it to be valuable to the students who are participating, there has to be recognition for it.

> StaffB3: … I think students coming to university, that's still steeped in tradition that it's the academic place and that they'll uphold that [integrity of the university] for me. And, what's the term they use, paradigm shift, isn't it? And that won't just happen, you've got to..., the whole community has got to change it together, you know.

> StudB6: I think it's not just looking at academic integrity, but moral issues and society. If you're gonna be able to teach people that you can't act in an anti-social way, you can't abuse people, you can't go around hurting people, or killing people, or stealing stuff, then you're gonna improve society. It doesn't only just come overnight, it has to be brought over for many decades...

[...]

StudB6: It's something you should instill in people from a very young age, and it would be hard to change people's views. Like with us, we completely don't think it will work, because in 20 years of our life we've been, it's been discipline, and talking about you get punished for things you do wrong...

Moderator 1: Yeah, I take it, it's an important points, yeah.

StudB9: I think it's a gradual process. I think it's also to do with what we've been taught, what values we've been brought up with ever since we've been kids.

StudB6: If you've been brought up with no values, then it's not gonna...

StudB9: Primary schools, secondary schools, what matters is all those things.

StudB6: Having just moral issues and being a good person is not gonna work in someone who's never... doesn't know how to act in that way.

As has been highlighted in the student exchange above, a change such as this (a paradigm shift) 'doesn't just only come overnight' and would take a long time before it can become an integral part of the university system, and even if an ideal may seem unattainable, this does not mean that attempts should not be made to achieve it. The supporters of the honour code system in the US say that one of the benefits of this system is that students who have gone through the universities with such, or a similar, system, would carry the values of that system into the community at large on graduating from university.

Challenge 3: Addressing the issue of plagiarism misunderstanding

As mentioned earlier in sub-section 1.3.1.2.1., one of the most common concerns about plagiarism that our student participants voiced in the first round of sessions was that of confusion over what exactly plagiarism is and/or what is expected of them in terms of referencing, and this concern was echoed again throughout the second sessions by both staff and student participants:

StaffB7: You know, major problem with our taught Master's with respect to plagiarism is one of misunderstanding of what it really means, and secondly the education system which they've come from, where it's acceptable.

StaffC3: … I think most of the cases we have are students that have not plagiarised that badly, but they have stepped over the line, and it's often because they don't... I think they genuinely don't fully understand what they're supposed to do, but they often tend to be the students that don't read the handbook and don't turn up to the lectures.

StaffB5: …I think there's a problem at undergraduate level as well as at taught Master's on exactly what they've been assessed on. […]

StaffB4: What you were saying at the beginning is that they do not know exactly what is expected of them.

StaffB5: Yes.

StaffB4: Aims and objectives sometimes are just an exercise in form filling, rather than expressing something that means something to the students themselves, or sometimes to the teaching staff.

StaffC7: I think it's spot-on that there is just a massive lack on understanding with a lot of the students about what plagiarism is. It's a word that they've heard repeatedly, but I don't think that they understand it in a kind of ethical way, other than a simplistic copying.

StudA7: I don't think most people want to go out of their way to plagiarise, to be honest, I think it takes a lot more effort than it's actually worth, you know, for cheating. So I think it's probably harder to do it than actually to get, say, I don't know, 1st or something. So I don't think most people do it because they're trying to...

StudA5: I think it's just a general lack of awareness really in some cases, because I know MY awareness of it is not great.

StudC4: I don't know, I just noticed a student..., like when I'm going through and trying to cite my cases properly, it's not really about the student involvement, but I'd want a clear set guidelines, set of rules that's really clearly set out, and possibly a talk on it or something. Because when you're quoting from the case or whatever and you put in quotation marks it's obvious, but when you're rewording something that someone's put in a book, it's like, 'How far do I have to reword it? I have to completely change it', and you still footnote anyway, but you don't know how far you need to do that. So, personally, that's all I'd want...

Again, the issue of cultural differences in the perceptions of plagiarism came up,

> StaffC7: … what we found more and more recently, it's not just about plagiarism from the Internet, it's about plagiarism within… between students, about them working together and helping each other. So I think this idea of what does plagiarism mean within different contexts of how people are used to working; compiling a report or writing an essay, some of them have never written an essay as we understand it...

> StaffC5: Again, in Italy, the way you pass an exam is by repeating word-for-word book, and I'm told that in some Asian cultures that is exactly what you do, which is why we then provide additional feedback to the students.

including the differences within the UK - between the 'Internet generation' culture we have now and what used to happen a couple of decades ago:

> StaffC7: I think it's slightly more complicated though, because I think certainly for most people who are, let's say, 28 and over, there wasn't such an issue within their programmes as students with plagiarism. Now the different kind of culture, everybody knew at school exactly what plagiarism was, people didn't earn their GCSEs, their A-levels, their O-levels, their degrees when we had so many Internet prevalent issues. I think it's a different culture of how to do the work now that... because that's not how most of us are used to working, most of us, therefore, don't understand that to such an extent. So I think we always need to understand more about how the students go about the PROCESS of constructing an assessment...

There was also an interesting comment voiced by one staff member about how certain perceptions of plagiarism may prevent students from even familiarising themselves with what this concept means in the UK academic context,

> StaffC6: … I've had a student who plagiarised and I said 'Well, it's in the handbook. First of all, had you ever had a...?' - 'No, I would never plagiarise, I don't need to read the handbook which tells me not to plagiarise, I know I would never plagiarise, 'cause I'm an honest Muslim'. So he never read what does plagiarism mean.

which has been also partly echoed by one of the student participants:

> StudA7: But that's the thing though, 'cause it's like when students think about plagiarism, they don't think about the means of what they're doing. I think it's bit like people use words like 'terror' or something, it has a really big meaning to it, when really there's some really specific things

that academics don't like, like a means to an end sort of thing. And I know people that [...] misquoted something from a source, and they genuinely hadn't done... I knew this girl and she genuinely didn't do it, and it's just she got absolutely grilled by the person who was doing that module, and she just felt really hard done by, because it's like she wouldn't...

This, again, highlights the importance of very clear explanation of the meaning of plagiarism as a concept and of the rules of acknowledging sources appropriately.

Challenge 4: Possibility of students' taking advantage of the system

Another concern that was present in most discussions was a feeling that the Alternative System would lend itself to students' (at least some of them) taking advantage of it (perhaps to a larger extent than they may be doing presently):

> StaffC3: … It seems there's an enormous incentive for students to cheat if you leave it up to them.

> StaffB1: …this is fine in an ideal world. And one of the things that I think we were almost unanimous on last week was that actually students trust us, we don't necessarily trust the students, and we do come across students [...] where it's almost they can't be trusted. And I'm concerned there WILL be students that might well take advantage of this system if it was in place.

> Moderator 2: You don't think they take advantage of the system now?

> StaffB1: I think there's more opportunity for them to take advantage of the system like this. [...] When it's more student focused, I think that the students might look at it from the point of view of 'Well, who's actually checking on this?', so there has to be some checks and balances to make sure the system's working, I think, to be fair to the students that abide by the conduct, and I think the vast majority would.

> StaffB7… when you showed those two alternate systems I sort of looked at it and thought the obvious thing to do is to make a hybrid between the two, because then you've got the University side checking it, but then at its worst you could argue that the Alternative system actually just leads to better understanding in the students of what plagiarism is, [...] if it actually involves more work on their side and an involvement in the regulations [...], then I think they'll understand it better. But I'm afraid there'll be a subset that will take advantage of it.

Again, as mentioned earlier, perhaps a combination of the elements from both systems, at least at the initial stages, could be a way forward.

Challenge 5: Assessment/time dilemma

Current assessment schemes and time constraints, whether together or separately, are some of the factors that may hinder successful implementation of the elements of the Alternative System (and may be exacerbating the plagiarism problem at the moment anyway):

> StaffB5: … it's the assessment scheme that is the difficulty. I would add, with our taught Master's it's something I feel strongly about. We've got these deadlines and they're all moving up against the deadlines, 'You got to get it done, you got to get it done', otherwise there's a huge penalty. […] And it's the assessment scheme that drives this, isn't it?

> StaffB2: I think there's a large aspect of time, these students are often very busy, and by the time you've got them all organised, they're on the next course. I think the turnover and the time involved would be a big consideration.

'Designing out' plagiarism by changing assessment strategies has been receiving increasing attention in academia in the last few years (see, for example, Carroll and Appleton (2001) and Carroll (2002)), and assessment is perhaps one of the areas that would require serious thinking if the elements of the Alternative System were introduced in the educational process.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Along with the numerous points relating to specific elements of the Alternative system discussed earlier in this section, the five challenges presented in this sub-section pinpoint some of the difficulties HE educators would face if such a system were to be adopted. Some of the elements discussed above are similar to what is currently used, as some of the staff and student participants noted, for example,

> StaffC4: …When you see the list like this, actually, a few other things don't look that different to the how we currently operate.

Even if some elements are similar, the present approach to plagiarism seems rather top-down and mainly punitive rather than educational. In the honour code system, the focus shifts from the top to the bottom, entrusting students with more responsibility,

> StaffB5: And what these ideas are sort of bringing in is that the self-regulation sort of goes down to the bottom, further than it does at the moment anyway.

and the issues of referencing and plagiarism are presented more positive terms, highlighting the core principles of academic work and an academic community.

Even if a lot of the issues in question are quite contentious,

StaffB5: But obviously there's a range here down that route that one can go, and […] I think not all of us would accept all aspects of those on one side of the fence or the other.

and the whole process of introducing this system (or some of its elements) is bound to take a long time and, in order to be effective, cannot be done superficially,

StaffB5: It's an education to get to this as much as, you know, 'From now on you're gonna be responsible and get on with it!'.

there are already some individual steps taken in the spirit of this approach,

StaffC7: … And what we're going to do is we're actually gonna do a series of podcasts for the students around these issues more generally than just doing the copying, as part of trying to build a lot of the elements that you're saying about 'TRY to be more positive, TRY to make it about the student community', because what we found more and more recently, it's not just about plagiarism.

and the challenges outlined above do not mean it is not worth trying.

PART 2. POLICY

2.1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education, has repeatedly called for an investigation into the consistency of penalties applied for cases of plagiarism across the sector (Baty, 2006; EducationGuardian.co.uk, 2006). In response to this call, the JISC Plagiarism Advisory Service conducted a survey of UK HEI plagiarism policies and penalties. The Academic Misconduct Benchmarking Research (AMBeR) Project examined the published policies and procedures of 91% of UK HEIs (Tennant, Rowell, & Duggan, 2007). Two scales were constructed to permit numerical analysis of the policies and penalties: a scale of offences and a scale of penalties. Substantial variation in both the penalties available and the regulations used across the sector was demonstrated (ibid). The penalty of expulsion was almost universal (99% of HEIs citing as a possible penalty), with assessment level penalties such as an assessment mark reduced to zero or fail (with or without resit) the next most common penalty. Analysis of the penalty systems showed that institutions could be divided into three groups which related to the type of institution. Group A comprised small specialist institutions with very open policies, allowing for any possible penalty at any possible level/severity. Group B comprised research intensive institutions with loosely prescriptive policies. Group C comprised teaching intensive institutions that commonly had stepped, highly prescriptive policies (ibid). It was clear from this part of the study, that similar offences could produce very different outcomes dependent on the type of institution in which they occurred.

The second phase of the AMBeR study was published in May 2008 (Tennant & Duggan 2008). Response rates were much lower (59%) but still representative of the sector. HEIs were asked to report on the recorded penalties used in cases for plagiarism during one chosen academic year, from the last three years. Many institutions were not able to provide the level of detail requested, particularly on previous history or level of the offence. In the first part of the AMBeR study, 72% of institutions stated that previous history should be taken into account when considering the level of penalty for a piece of work (Tennant, Rowell & Duggan 2007). However, just over a quarter (27.6%) of these same institutions could not supply information on the number of first or subsequent offences in the second part of the study. This highlights the real need for accurate and accessible records to be kept if these factors are to be considered when deciding on penalties.

The AMBeR studies and other studies (e.g. Jones' (2006) examination of law departments in Scottish institutions) point to a lack of inter-institutional consensus on plagiarism-related policies and procedures. Anecdotal evidence from many institutions and our own experience suggest that intra-institutional diversity also exists. As research in this area is limited, we set out to investigate if these differences at a national level might also be reflected between departments or sections of a single institution.

2.2. Methodology

A survey of local policies was carried out at the University of Leicester, a 'group B' (research led) institution in terms of the AMBeR study. Practical 'operating units' for learning and teaching within the institution were determined by close analysis of the university's internal faculty websites. Clerical staff were contacted in each department, institute, centre or faculty to locate members of staff responsible for dealing with plagiarism. -. The thirty staff responsible for dealing with plagiarism, at a local level, were then contacted individually by email with a request for copies of any plagiarism policies held locally.

The policies and responses received were analysed and an online questionnaire was devised to gather standardised data on plagiarism practices. The questionnaire contained 18 questions and was split into five sections covering roles, policies, electronic detection procedure for handling plagiarism cases and penalties. It was possible for respondents to leave open comments after the majority of the questions to further clarify their answers. The online questionnaire was hosted on an internal content management system - and access required a university username and password. The survey was piloted with one member of staff responsible for devising plagiarism policy and revisions were made to improve the clarity of some questions. The staff identified in the initial survey were contacted again individually by email and asked to take part in the online survey. The questionnaire data was analysed using Microsoft Excel.

2.3. Results and Discussion

The response rate to the online survey was 87% (26/30). The majority of respondents (22) had some responsibility for undergraduate students, but often included other levels of study and distance learners, whilst 4 were solely concerned with postgraduate students. The responses from the 22 participants involved in undergraduate studies were used for further analysis.

Respondents were asked some general questions about the practicalities of dealing with plagiarism in the department. For example, 18 departments responded that TurnitinUK was in use for electronic detection of matching text. Participants were asked to describe how TurnitinUK had been implemented in their department. The majority of respondents submitted all work for scanning (figure 1). Interestingly, no departments offered students the facility to check their own work and some commented that they were not aware that this was practicable.
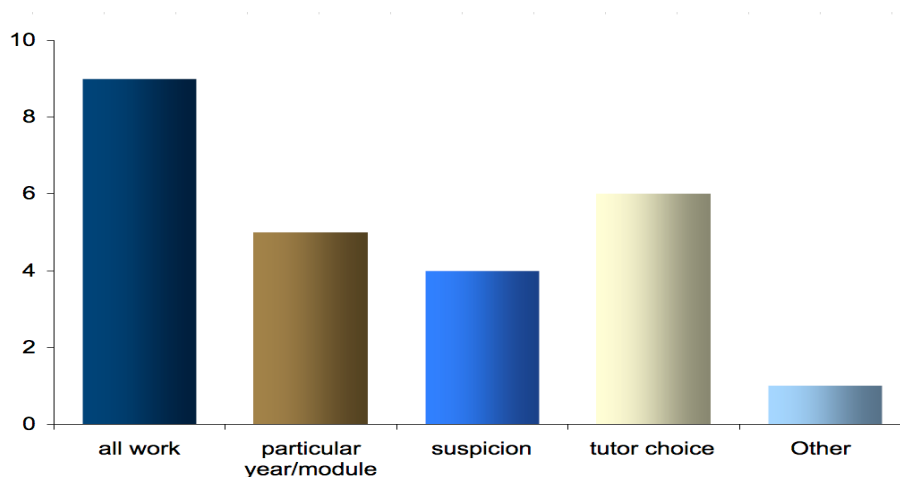
FIGURE 2 COUNT OF THE RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION 'HOW DO YOU SELECT WHICH STUDENT WORK TO SCREEN?' [WITH TURNITINUK]. N=22, RESPONDENTS COULD SELECT ALL THE OPTIONS RELEVANT TO THEM.

Given our suggestion of the difficulties involved with applying penalties, we asked if there were factors taken into account when deciding on tariffs. The majority of departments responded positively (19/22) and many commented that they looked at each case individually, taking into account previous history, level and severity of offence.

In common with other Group B institutions identified in the AMBeR study, the plagiarism policy of the University of Leicester is set at an institutional level and requires consideration of other factors when considering a penalty. This top-level policy allows departments a degree of flexibility up to a maximum suggested penalty. For example, for a first offence, Boards of Examiners may impose a penalty of up to a zero mark for the module. This could encompass a wide range of penalties and still fall within the institutional policy.

An important part of the questionnaire was therefore to ask what documentation respondents used when dealing with plagiarism. The University's Code of Practice on Plagiarism clearly takes precedence, and the Statement on Academic Honesty is used in departmental handbooks. There was great overlap in the documentation used, as shown in figure 2, but local variation is recorded. Nine respondents reported that their policies and practices had been revised or updated within the last two years, demonstrating that this is an evolving area.
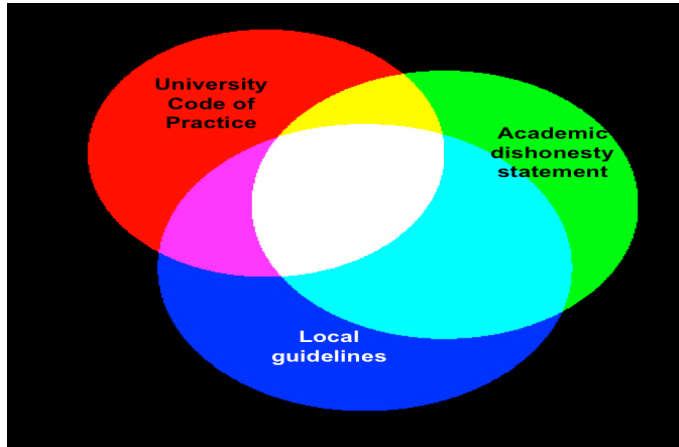
FIGURE 3 VENN DIAGRAM SHOWING THE RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION 'WHICH DOCUMENTS DOES YOUR DEPARTMENT CONSULT WHEN DEALING WITH PLAGIARISM CASES?' (N=22, RESPONDENTS COULD CHOOSE ALL DOCUMENTS THAT APPLIED).

Participants were asked to about the penalties available for use in their department when dealing with plagiarism. A list of 19 penalties was constructed, in line with those used in the AMBeR survey, but that all fell within the institutional policy. These penalties were classified in broad areas of effect, to provide a comparison with the AMBeR scales (see figure 3).
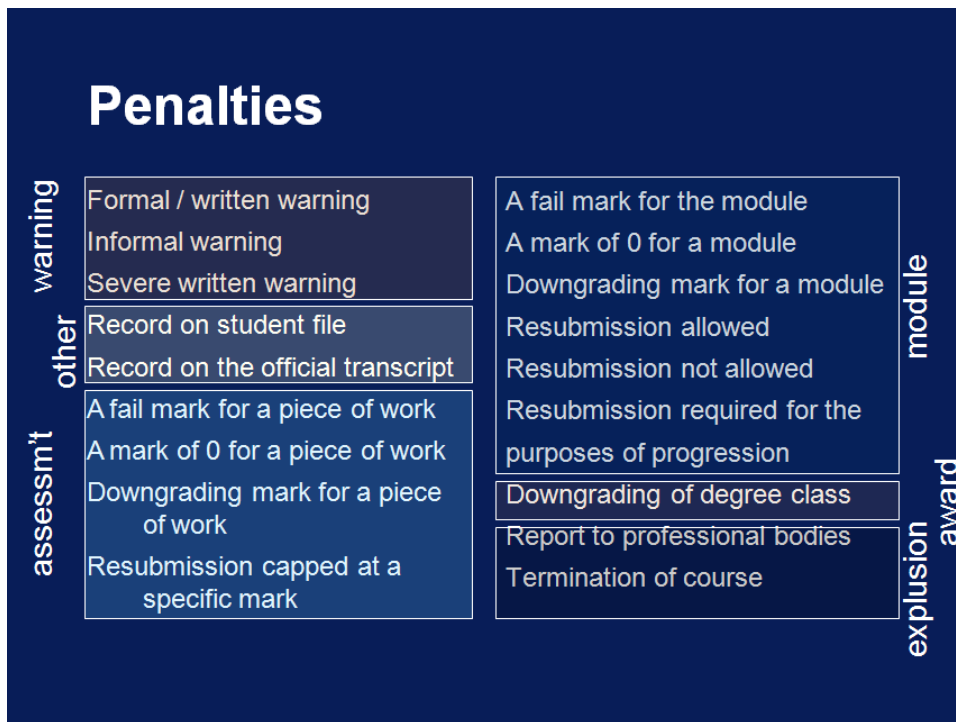

FIGURE 4 DIAGRAM TO SHOW THE POTENTIAL PENALTIES AVAILABLE FOR PLAGIARISM WITH THE INSTITUTIONAL POLICY. PENALTIES WERE GROUPED INTO CLASSES (WARNING, ASSESSMENT, MODULE ETC.).

Participants were asked to state which penalties would be available for use in a first offence of plagiarism. Respondents could choose multiple penalties from the list and an open comment box enabled participants to expand on their choices. Most participants commented that where more than one penalty had been selected as being available, the choice of penalty would depend on the level of the student, the type of work and the degree of the plagiarism. Some penalties may be applied together, such as a written warning and the downgrading of a piece of work and some may come into effect as a consequence of other actions. For example, a fail mark for a piece of coursework may lead to a requirement for resubmission for the purposes of progression.
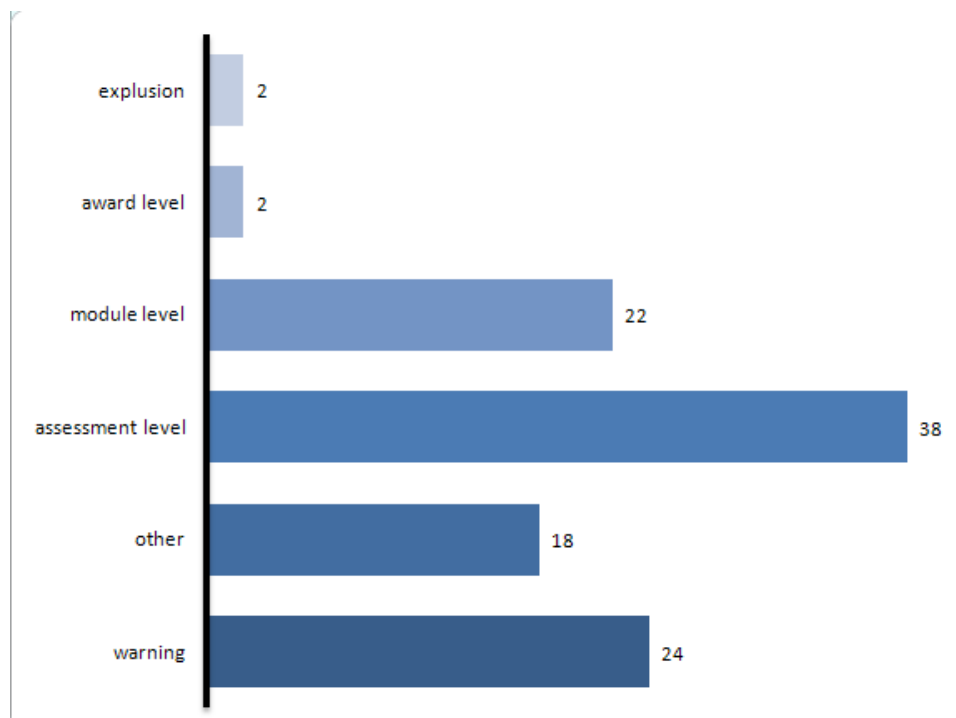

FIGURE 5 SUMMARISED RESPONSES (USING CATEGORIES AS DEFINED IN FIG 4) TO QUESTION 'PLEASE SELECT THE PENALTIES WHICH ARE TO BE USED AT YOUR DEPARTMENT WHEN IDENTIFIED PLAGIARISM CONSTITUTES A FIRST OFFENCE'

The most commonly cited penalties were assessment class tariffs and the second most commonly available penalty was some form of warning (see figure 5). Participants were also asked to choose available penalties for second, third and subsequent offences. However, as several respondents cited that a second case of plagiarism had not been encountered in their department, the data for these subsequent offences was incomplete.

CONCLUSION

Academic Integrity and Honour Codes

One of the key findings that emerged from our research is that both staff and students generally welcome the ideas of framing the issue of plagiarism in more positive terms and of promoting good academic practice as means of plagiarism prevention, which is consistent with Clarke and Aiello's (2007) findings. The participants' feeling was also that not everything can be effectively transferred to the UK setting, due to the differences between the US and UK education contexts. Although both staff and student participants saw educational benefits of student involvement in the promotion of academic integrity and good academic practice, students seemed to display more caution and scepticism about this potential shift in responsibility. This may indicate that in order for such a transformation to be effective, some preparatory work needs to be done with regard to the institutional culture to make sure that students (and staff) are ready for such changes to take place. As one of our staff participants said, 'It's an education to get to this', and this may be a long-term process.

Our results also indicate that the confusion over plagiarism still persists among students, and, although much has already been done in this area at our institution, more effort needs to be made by departments to address this problem. As a future possibility, introducing a code of academic practice as part of a more academic integrity based system could go some way in clarifying the existing misunderstandings.

Although this study was exploratory in nature, its findings have a number of important implications for future research and practice. The fact that our staff and student participants have welcomed the ideas of a positive approach to academic norms points to the need for considering effective ways of implementing these ideas, and some of the elements of the honour code model might be a realistic possibility. Research and practical action in this area would go in line with the work of the newly established AJAIS (Academy JISC Academic Integrity Service) jointly run by HEA and JISC, which seeks to promote a culture of academic integrity (The Higher Education Academy, 2008) and foster the adoption of honour codes in the UK context (Baty, 2007).

It is hoped that our project will stimulate a debate on the issues of academic integrity and honour codes in the HE and FE, provide impetus for engaging both staff and students in promoting good academic practice, and serve as a catalyst in the process of transforming current practice of addressing plagiarism in light of the ethical principles that govern effective functioning of the academic community.

Policy

The policy part of our project demonstrated that where a top-level institutional policy is in place within an institution, local practice does vary in the penalties available. This is perhaps to be expected, given the constraints of working with complex cases and taking into account the range of factors that need to be considered when considering the application of penalties to individual cases.

At the same time, just as students could rightly argue that differential treatment for similar offences is unfair between institutions, the same is true within an institution. The question that needs to be addressed is how practice across different departments and subject areas can be given the flexibility required whilst maintaining a sustainable and consistent judgment process when tariffs are decided. One key to this question is the accurate and accessible recording keeping of offences and processes at a local and institutional level, enabling an informed comparison of the range of penalties being imposed.

The results of our cross-institutional survey of departmental response to plagiarism will be used to stimulate a review of policy and strategy at a university level to ensure fair and consistent treatment within the institution for all students.

Fair policies and consistent practice are an essential part of an overall holistic positive approach to dealing with plagiarism and will begin our move towards working in a culture of academic integrity.

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Appendix: Dissemination (Conferences)

HEA Centre for Bioscience workshop: Preventing and Designing out Plagiarism

(April 8, 2008, University of Leicester).

'Electronic detection of plagiarism'

Jo Badge

Policy evolution and the elusive grail of consistency

Jon Scott

The Second Meeting on Institutional Policies and Procedures for Dealing with Plagiarism

(May 20, 2008, ASKE CETL, Oxford Brookes University).

'Consistent policy into consistent practice: a case study from Leicester University'

Jo Badge – keynote address

3rd International Plagiarism Conference 'Transforming practice for an authentic future'

(June 2008, 23-25, Northumbria University, Newcastle-upon-Tyne)'

'Academic Culture in Transition: Are Honour Codes a Viable Solution?'

Jo Badge, Nadya Yakovchuk, Jon Scott

The Higher Education Academy Annual Conference

(July 1-3, 2008, Harrogate International Centre, Harrogate)

'*Plagiarism Policies: Looking for intra-institutional consistency*'

Jo Badge, Nadya Yakovchuk, Jon Scott

Universities UK Event 'Tackling plagiarism and academic misconduct'

(November 19, 2008, Woburn House conference centre, London)

'Initial research on the potential for changing the academic culture'

Jo Badge, invited speaker, panel member

NUS Higher Education conference

(January 15, 2009, Coventry)

Invited to present a workshop at the first HE conference that NUS had organised.

Discussion of Academic Integrity using voting software (workshop)

Jo Badge, Nadya Yakovchuk