



Guidance Note: *Academic Integrity*

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What is academic integrity?

Academic integrity is defined as: *'a commitment, even in the face of adversity, to six fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage. From these values flow principles of behaviour that enable academic communities to translate ideals to action'* (International Centre for Academic Integrity, 2014).

For the purposes of the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015* (HES Framework), academic integrity is: *'the moral code of academia. It involves using, generating and communicating information in an ethical, honest and responsible manner'* (Monash University, 2013). The term 'ethical scholarship' has a similar meaning.

Research integrity is a subset of academic integrity, which can be defined as *'the trustworthiness of research due to the soundness of its methods and the honesty and accuracy of its presentation'* (Singapore Statement on Research Integrity, 2010).

Academic misconduct or research misconduct generally refers to a breach of academic integrity. Cheating, plagiarism, and fabrication or falsification of data are examples of such breaches. A provider's policy framework should cover the preservation of academic integrity by both staff and students.

Relevant Standards in the HES Framework

The principal Standard concerned with academic integrity is in Part A, Section 5.2 of the HES Framework on Academic and Research Integrity, which sets out four broad requirements for a provider; in summary:

- ▶ to have policies that promote and uphold academic and research integrity and policies and procedures which address allegations of misconduct
- ▶ to take action to mitigate foreseeable risks to academic and research integrity
- ▶ to provide students and staff with guidance and training on what constitutes academic or research misconduct and the development of good practices in maintaining academic and research integrity, and
- ▶ to ensure that academic and research integrity are maintained in arrangements with any other party involved in the provision of higher education.

Section 4.2 on research requires providers (if they undertake research) to have a research policy framework that is designed to achieve resolution of allegations of misconduct in research, among other matters (Standard 4.2.1).



Under Section 6.2 on Corporate Monitoring and Accountability, the governing body of a provider is required to ensure that the occurrence and nature of misconduct and breaches of academic or research integrity are monitored, and that action is taken to address underlying causes (Standard 6.2.1j).

Similarly, Section 6.3 on Academic Governance makes it clear that academic bodies of the provider are responsible for maintaining oversight of academic and research integrity, including the monitoring of potential risks (Standard 6.3.2d).

Section 7.2 on Information for Prospective and Current Students requires providers to give information on and expectations of academic integrity to students before their acceptance of an offer (Standard 7.2.2d). On admissions, appropriate credit for prior learning is a provider requirement under Standard 1.2.2b.

Section 7.3 on Information Management requires providers to prevent unauthorised or fraudulent access to private or sensitive information, including information where unauthorised access may compromise academic or research integrity (Standard 7.3.3b). One example of this would be unauthorised access to students' academic records. Standard 7.3.3c also obliges providers to document and record responses to allegations of misconduct and breaches of academic or research integrity. This can be the basis for analysis and identification of recurring issues.

Part B of the HES Framework on provider categories, sets out the requirements for use of the title 'university'. Any provider seeking to use the title 'university' as an Australian university must have particularly systematic, mature internal processes for the maintenance of academic standards and academic integrity.

Intent of the Standards

The overall intent of the Standards in relation to academic integrity is to ensure that all the academic activities of the provider, including those carried out in collaboration with other bodies, uphold internationally-accepted norms of integrity and honesty in scholarly work. Academic integrity is fundamental to the success and credibility of higher education globally. Providers therefore need to treat Section 5.2 on Academic and Research Integrity as defining the basic and essential requirements for credible operation as a higher education provider.

As part of their authority to award formal qualifications, higher education providers have obligations to ensure integrity is maintained in all aspects of the process, including: marketing, admissions, teaching, student assessment, the awarding of grades and approval for students to graduate with a qualification. Courses of study need to be of an appropriate level and volume of learning. All staff and students have obligations to uphold academic integrity.

Breaches of academic integrity in regard to courses of study include:

- plagiarism and failures of correct acknowledgement practice
- contract cheating or paying for another person to prepare an assignment
- submitting (for assessment or review) work prepared by another person
- collusion, such as copying of other peoples' work
- all forms of cheating in exams



- offering or accepting bribes (money or sexual or other favours), e.g. for admission or for grades, and
- fabrication or falsification of information.

Any of these practices undermine the integrity of assessment of students' work and thus place the credentialing authority of the provider at risk and, in consequence, its reputation as well.

Staff of a provider need to employ correct acknowledgement practice in their teaching when they are using text, images, videos and other artefacts sourced from others. The academic integrity of a course of study may be questioned if unacknowledged use is made of external materials.

Integrity in research can be defined as 'good research practice and conduct'. Many aspects of good practice have been codified in the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (2007)¹.

Good practice includes:

- intellectual honesty in proposing, performing, and reporting research
- accuracy in representing contributions to research proposals and reports
- fairness in peer review
- collegiality in scientific interactions, including communications and sharing of resources
- transparency in conflicts of interest or potential conflicts of interest
- protection of human subjects in the conduct of research
- humane care of animals in the conduct of research, and
- adherence to the mutual responsibilities between investigators and research participants (National Research Council of the National Academies, 2002).

Breaches of research integrity include:

- plagiarism
- falsifying or fabricating data
- deliberately omitting data to obtain a desired result
- using data from other researchers without due acknowledgement
- representing observations as genuine when they are not, and
- misleading attributions of authorship.

Other actions that may be considered breaches of research integrity include the conduct of research in ways that seriously deviate from accepted standards, or in ways that are dishonest, reckless or negligent. A failure to obtain required prior ethical or regulatory approval, or a failure to conduct the research project in accord with an approved ethical or regulatory protocol may also constitute a breach.

¹ The *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* was under review at the time of writing this guidance note.



Academic integrity is such a core requirement of higher education that it must be defended at all points where a breach could occur. The intent of the Standards is for providers to consider all potential risks to academic integrity, in learning and teaching, and in research, and take steps to control these risks (Bretag et al., 2011).

Providers need to ensure that their policies, practices and systems for academic integrity cover both staff and students, and that they address collaborative activities as well. They also need to ensure their institutional culture reinforces a commitment to academic integrity.

No matter how good a provider's systems are, there will inevitably be instances of academic or research misconduct by staff or students. Experience has shown that a minority of students will plagiarise, collude, submit work that is not their own, or try to cheat in exams. It is also the case that the means by which cheating occurs are continually becoming more technologically sophisticated.

In response, many higher education providers require commencing students to take a short course on academic integrity. Institutions also use text matching software to help students to learn good practices in correct referencing and to deter plagiarism. Fundamentally however, promoting and upholding academic integrity relies on the honesty and commitment of individual staff.

Sections 4.1 on Research and 4.2 on Research Training set out requirements that are designed to help providers to avoid research misconduct, while Section 7.3 alerts providers to the need to have accurate and highly secure information systems in order to protect against practices such as the changing of students' grades or leaking of questions prior to an examination.

Risks to Quality

The central focus of the Section on Academic and Research Integrity, and of TEQSA, is the need for providers to control risks to the credibility of their qualifications and institutional reputation. If a higher education provider loses its reputation for integrity, its continued existence is jeopardised. Reputational damage to one provider may also lead to damage to the Australian higher education sector.

As indicated above, there are many areas of a provider's operations that can lead to academic or research misconduct. For these reasons, and because of the potential of even a single incident to inflict major reputational damage, both the provider's governing body and its academic governance bodies need to monitor the effectiveness of practices and systems, and to be alert to new forms of academic misconduct. The ever-increasing availability of internet and digital technologies (including smartphones), and of electronic academic content, expands the potential for new forms of academic misconduct. For this reason, providers need to be aware of the capabilities and potential of emerging technologies, and of the issues these may cause for the protection of academic integrity.

The risks of breaches of academic or research integrity may be magnified in arrangements with other parties such as research collaborations or joint awards, and especially in instances where a provider's qualifications are being delivered through a third party. While the provider may have robust policies and practices in place to protect academic integrity, those of the partner institution also need to be congruent, compatible and equally robust. The details in this regard must be thoroughly worked through before agreements are entered into.

Breaches of academic or research integrity tend to be high profile in the media (not only in the academic media), which reflects the seriousness with which the global academic



community takes its commitment to honest, ethical scholarship. In many cases, an allegation or series of allegations will trigger the spotlight of public attention.

Inevitably, breaches of academic or research integrity, even inadvertent breaches, will occur in the life of any established higher education provider. A provider that does not address such breaches with due care or attention, or that mishandles the processes, may inflict further reputational damage on itself. A provider's processes for addressing allegations of academic or research misconduct need to respect the principles of fairness, natural justice, and confidentiality for interested parties.

It takes courage for a lone individual to raise concerns over academic or research misconduct. Providers will need to consider whether their institutional culture allows confidential opportunities for any concerns to be raised and addressed. They may need to implement processes to protect whistle-blowers.

What will TEQSA look for?

This part of the guidance note covers the full extent of the Standards, and corresponding evidence that TEQSA may require, in relation to academic and research integrity.

For new applicants seeking initial registration and course accreditation, TEQSA will require evidence to be provided in relation to all relevant Standards.

For existing providers, the scope of Standards to be assessed and the evidence required may vary. This is consistent with the regulatory principles in the TEQSA Act, under which TEQSA has discretion to vary the scope of its assessments and the related evidence required. In exercising this discretion, TEQSA will be guided by the provider's regulatory history, its risk profile and its track record in delivering high quality higher education.

TEQSA's case managers will discuss with providers the scope of assessments and evidence required well ahead of the due date for submitting an application.

The evidence required for particular types of application is available from the Application Guides on the TEQSA website.

Providers are required to comply with the Standards at all times, not just at the time of application, and TEQSA may seek evidence of compliance at other times if a risk of non-compliance is identified.

In the first instance, TEQSA will look at the provider's policies and procedures intended to uphold the academic and research integrity of courses, research and research training, and the institutional policies and procedures to address allegations of misconduct, as required under Standard 5.2.1. TEQSA will consider not only the presence of policies and procedures, but also whether or not they are accessible, appropriate for the scale of the provider's operations, known by staff and students, implemented, and demonstrated to be effective in practice.

For providers seeking to use an Australian university title under Part B of the HES Framework, TEQSA will consider the extent to which the provider has systematic, mature internal processes to protect academic integrity.

TEQSA will also seek evidence that the provider is taking preventative action to mitigate foreseeable risks to academic and research integrity through its academic governance arrangements, including the monitoring of potential risks (Standard 6.3.2d). TEQSA will consider whether the provider's corporate governance arrangements ensure that breaches of academic or research integrity are monitored and action is taken to address underlying causes (Standard 6.2.1j).



TEQSA may seek information on the processes used to manage specific cases where an allegation of academic or research misconduct was made, how fair treatment was ensured, the information systems used to record relevant information and how the provider acted on this information to improve its operations (see Standards 5.2.2 and 7.3.3c).

In regard to students, TEQSA will first consider the information provided to prospective students on academic integrity (Standard 7.2.2d) and may consider how academic integrity is maintained in the institution's admission processes, including entry requirements. TEQSA will also consider the extent to which students are provided with guidance on what constitutes academic or research misconduct, and supported to develop good practices. TEQSA will consider the extent to which the provider has effective systems in place to prevent or deter academic misconduct, particularly in regard to the assessment of student work, e.g. for assignments and security of examinations.

As part of this process, TEQSA may seek information on:

- the institutional systems for monitoring, reporting and recording instances of student academic misconduct
- the number and types of incidents of student academic misconduct, and
- whether individual cases were addressed effectively and consistently.

TEQSA may also seek evidence that:

- the provider uses academic integrity breach data to improve practices in teaching and learning, and
- that academic staff, in their learning and teaching roles, have been provided with adequate training and support to ensure that they themselves demonstrate academic integrity.

For providers whose staff engage in research, TEQSA will consider research integrity in the context of applicable Standards on research and external requirements such as *the Australian Code for Responsible Conduct of Research*. TEQSA may seek information on how any students engaged in research training learn about and practice academic and research integrity. Refer to the separate guidance notes on Research and Research Training for further information.

For providers that have arrangements with other parties, TEQSA may explore the ways in which academic and research integrity and accountability for integrity are established, implemented and monitored through management of the partnership.

Finally, TEQSA may examine the security of institutional data systems and the controls that are in place to prevent unauthorised access to them (Standard 7.3.3b).

Scope of assessments

If, as a result of considering the provider's operations, TEQSA is satisfied that the management of academic and research integrity is as required by the HES Framework and that the provider demonstrates knowledge and capabilities in the management of academic and research integrity, TEQSA's confidence in the provider's ability to meet the Standards may increase.

TEQSA accepts that any provider will experience occurrences of academic or research misconduct. It expects each provider to have systems and processes in place to minimise the number of cases and to handle individual matters. If concerns are raised over the



provider's capabilities to control academic integrity risks or to address internal breaches of academic integrity, TEQSA may need to explore the extent to which these concerns reflect any systemic difficulties of the provider. In determining the need or otherwise to explore further, TEQSA will take account of the scale and scope of the provider's activities.

Resources and references

Bretag, T., Mahmud, S., Wallace, M., Walker, R., James, C., Green, M., East, J., McGowan, U. and Partridge, L., (2011), *Core elements of exemplary academic integrity policy in Australian higher education*, *International Journal for Educational Integrity*, Vol. 7 No. 2, pp. 3–12, <<https://www.ojs.unisa.edu.au/index.php/IJEI/article/viewFile/759/574>>.

International Center for Academic Integrity (2014), *Fundamental Values Project*, <<http://www.academicintegrity.org/icai/resources-2.php>>.

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TEQSA (2016), *Explanations of terms in Part A of the HES Framework 2015*, <<http://www.teqsa.gov.au/explanations-hes-framework-terms>>.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) (2016), *Advisory Statement for Effective International Practice. Combatting Corruption and Enhancing Integrity: A Contemporary Challenge for the Quality and Credibility of Higher Education*, <<http://www.chea.org/userfiles/PDFs/advisory-statement-unesco-iiiep.pdf>>.

Version #	Date	Key changes
1.0	19 August 2016	Made available as beta version for consultation.
1.1	11 October 2017	Addition to 'What will TEQSA look for?' text box.