



Workload implications for tutors

Target audience: Subject coordinators, tutors, sessional staff

Key issue being addressed: The role of tutors in fostering a culture of academic integrity; implications to workload of investigating breaches of academic integrity.

Materials and preparation needed to answer case:

- Remind participants to find and access appropriate policy and academic integrity resources at own institution prior to coming to session.
- Copy of university academic integrity policy, and procedures.
- Separate PowerPoint for facilitator based on 1 or 2 hour session.
- Casual/sessional staff workload agreement

The case

Abstract

A new staff member on a casual contract encounters plagiarism in some assignments. The procedure to address breaches of academic integrity at her university is so onerous and time-consuming that the other tutors advise her to handle the matter herself via a reduction in marks.

Susan¹ is a new tutor on a casual contract at this university. She is paid by the hour for teaching a number of tutorials per week in a core undergraduate subject, marking three assessment tasks, and a couple of meetings with the subject coordinator and the other tutors. In common with many other new tutors, she spends a lot more time than the hours allocated in preparing for her classes and marking the assessment tasks.

In order to meet a departmental deadline Susan marks up to one hundred essays within one particular week, and she finds eight essays that she considers contain serious and different breaches of academic integrity. She completes her marking of all the essays, and annotates the suspect essays with comments aligning with the marking criteria but doesn't give these essays a final mark. Instead, she contacts the subject coordinator to let him know the final marks for her entire student cohort but says that she still has eight essays that she is confident have been plagiarised in some way and that she would now like him to assess these.

The subject coordinator emails her back saying he is shocked by the high number of students plagiarising in Susan's tutorials. He asks her to write a report about each individual suspect essay, and to track down 'proof' that each essay contains plagiarism. After she has done that, he will contact the plagiarism investigative officer in the department to launch a case. This evidence is necessary because at this particular university the investigation officer is not responsible for assembling the evidence only for making a decision about the

¹ All characters in the case are pseudonyms

allegation in collaboration with the subject coordinator. The university policy indicates that a staff member must bring an allegation of academic misconduct by a student to the attention of the subject coordinator once the misconduct has been identified and provide the Subject Coordinator with relevant information and evidence relating to the allegation.

Susan has already spent more time per suspect essay than any other piece of marking, and knows that it will take her more hours of extra time per essay to trace the sources and write a brief report. She is distressed that she has been regarded to be at fault for not instilling appropriate academic integrity standards in her classes.

She consults with her fellow tutors. They all say that they have come across similar cases in the same subject where they are sure a student has plagiarised but decided to simply remove marks for poor referencing for individual essays rather than instigate an academic integrity investigation, because they know how much time and effort is involved.

Questions for discussion:

1. If you were a tutor in this subject, what would you have done?
2. If tutors are responding inconsistently to breaches of academic integrity, what impact does this have on student perceptions of fairness and, in turn, on their cynicism about higher education more generally?
3. If time to investigate breaches was factored into the workload, what do you think would be the impact on the culture of academic integrity at your university?
4. What is the custom and practice of your academic unit in relation to assembling evidence of suspected plagiarism or other breaches of academic integrity?
5. What does policy say about the responsibilities of casual tutors /subject coordinators in relation to substantiating suspected breaches of academic integrity, particularly plagiarism?
6. What does your university policy and industrial awards say about how requirements for sessional staff workload beyond teaching, meeting, marking and student consultation? How can these be reconciled with one another? Do workload allowances for subject coordinators acknowledge their own 'academic integrity' workload?
7. What support is currently available for sessional staff in relation to student assessment in general, and investigating suspected breaches of academic integrity in particular?

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