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Examining and improving inclusive practice in institutional academic integrity policies, procedures, teaching and support

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Abstract

This research aimed to analyse inclusive practice in academic integrity in the teaching, support, policies and procedures involved at one UK HE institution. Data was collected through two sets of stakeholder interviews: three students from disadvantaged groups who had experienced academic conduct investigations; eleven staff with key roles in academic integrity (teaching, student support, library, investigations, senior management, Student Union). A third set of data comprised four institutional academic integrity documents which were analysed in terms of meeting Universal Design for Learning principles for inclusion. The four main findings emerging from the study are: academic conduct processes create high levels of anxiety among students, particularly related to perceived judgement; students experience difficulty understanding academic integrity documents which lack consistency and do not meet inclusive criteria; students from certain backgrounds including widening participation, students with a disability and international non-native speakers need more institutional support in order to follow academic conduct processes and assimilate expected practice; there is a willingness among staff to try to develop more inclusive practice. The research findings led to a revised, more inclusive and educative institutional academic conduct procedure. The implication for practice is that attention is urgently needed to improve inclusive approaches to academic integrity.

Keywords: Inclusive practice, Academic integrity, Institutional policies, Teaching, Support

Introduction

Recently, there has been a greatly increased focus on inclusive policies in universities as an essential element of the Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) agenda, in particular related to inclusive teaching and learning (Thomas & May, 2010), with principles suggested for ensuring all learners' needs are considered (Larkin et al., 2014). Inclusion is defined in this study as a means of making Higher Education 'accessible, relevant and engaging to all students' (Thomas & May, 2010, p.50). Efforts to 'level the playing field' by designing inclusive assessment have been strongly recommended (Carroll & Ryan, 2005, p.8) and many researchers call for more attention to inclusive teaching in order to



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improve the student experience (Devlin & McKay, 2018; Wingate, 2015). Some positive steps are being taken; for example, at the researcher's university, guidance for inclusive teaching has been produced using a benchmarking tool. However, so far, the inclusive agenda has not been applied specifically to university practices concerned with academic integrity, including teaching, support and dealing with academic conduct problems. There are many academic integrity issues that connect with inclusion; one of the most concerning is the continued over-representation of students from certain groups, including international students, in academic conduct investigations (Eaton, 2020a; Gray, 2020; Pecorari, 2016). When there is an over-representation of certain groups of students in a 'problem' category, this sets off alarm bells that institutional systems are failing; in this case, education about academic integrity is not reaching all students or has not been made meaningful to all students so that they engage with it, and this can have a serious knock-on effect of lowering student outcomes and completion, demonstrated in recent data (Gov.UK, 2021; Gray, 2020). Urgent action is evidently needed to address this problem through more inclusive practice. Therefore, the goal of the present study is to examine inclusive practice in one UK-based university context in the policies, processes, teaching and support given with academic integrity through three sources of data: the experiences of students who have been through academic conduct investigations, the perspectives of staff in key academic integrity roles and an analysis of institutional academic integrity documents. This data provides insights into inclusive issues that inform revision of academic integrity procedures.

Literature review

The appropriacy, clarity and accessibility of university policies on academic conduct have been a subject of discussion for many years. Two decades ago already, Pecorari (2001) pointed out that institutional academic conduct policies are often hidden from students within long documents or on pages that their attention is not drawn to, and therefore it is understandable that students might be unaware of them. This still seems to remain a problem. Access is one of the five principles of exemplary academic integrity policy identified by Bretag et al. (2011), along with approach, responsibility, detail and support. Subsequent research measuring institutional policies against these principles has continued to find problems with access; for example, Stoesz et al. (2019) observed that academic conduct policies at the 22 Canadian colleges in their study were not straightforward to access and involved searching for links on pages, with perseverance needed to click through an average of 3.5 times from the home page. This result is consistent with the researcher's institution which requires 3 clicks and a download to access the relevant document. A central location for policies is important, but accessibility also relates to the format and presentation of policies in a clear and understandable text, using inclusive language (Nixon, 2004). National recommendations for Australia and the UK respectively stipulate: 'the policy is easy to locate and read, and is concise and comprehensible' (TEQSA, 2017, p.10); 'make regulations and guidance as clear as possible, available in a range of formats and languages' (QAA, 2020, p.7), but it is important to establish whether institutions are putting these recommendations into practice. While very large-scale research examining and comparing institutional policies in different countries has been undertaken in which numerous problems have been found with

lack of consensus and consistency (Glendinning, 2013; Glendinning et al., 2017), further research is currently needed to examine institutional policies from the perspective of inclusion.

Recommendations have also been made to weave an educative thread into academic integrity policies to make them engaging and relevant for students (Morris & Carroll, 2016), but to date, there appears to be little evidence of this in practice. According to Stoesz and Eaton (2020), the Canadian university policies in their study focused disappointingly heavily on investigations and punitive aspects, without attempting to educate, and some even continued to use legal language. Descriptions of academic misconduct as crimes are still evident, despite longstanding criticism of this inappropriate practice in a university context (Leask, 2006; Sutherland-Smith, 2008). Furthermore, evidence of lack of inclusion was demonstrated by Abasi and Graves (2008, p.228) in their finding that university policies could result in mystifying academic writing, creating anxiety and 'perpetuating fear of sanctions' among international students and those less familiar with academic conventions. Policies are needed which take into account the broad range of educational, cultural and economic backgrounds that contemporary students come from (Leask, 2006). One innovative attempt to develop a more inclusive academic conduct policy was made by Reedy et al. (2021) by discussing every detail of the policy in a community of practice group, then transforming it into flow charts to guide staff and students through investigations using creative theming and conversational language. This study has some parallels with Reedy et al. (2021) in recommending the use of alternative and creative visual content such as flow charts to improve communication of policies, but it will also focus on inclusion in the areas of teaching and support in academic integrity.

It has been established that learning about academic integrity takes a long time and requires multiple opportunities for practice (Morris & Carroll, 2016; Stoesz & Eaton, 2020); furthermore, development of competence can be affected by the starting point, academic level, language level, educational background or other contextual factors of students (Davis, 2013). This means it is particularly important to make teaching inclusive to engage students with diverse needs and understandings. Eaton (2022) makes a strong case for educators to take up the responsibility to advocate for equity in academic integrity. However, it remains the case that some students may be treated differently, for example they may encounter staff who believe that plagiarism is an international students' problem only (Mott-Smith et al. 2017). Fass-Holmes (2017) took issue with this view and tested a hypothesis that the numbers of academic conduct cases among international students increase proportional to enrolment increases; his evidence demonstrated the inaccuracy of these automatic associations with international students. Eaton (2020b) goes further to contend that a belief that all international students cheat more, or that students from a certain country cheat more, amounts to systemic racism. Action on racism in academic integrity has been taken in one institution (Calgary) which requires all staff in academic integrity roles to 'acknowledge that particular groups of students are over-represented in academic misconduct reporting' and to 'collect institutional academic misconduct data on racialized minorities in order to identify, prevent, and pro-actively address racial bias in reporting and sanctioning of students who are not white or for whom English is not their first language' (Alberta Council on Academic

Integrity, 2020). This initiative demonstrates an empowering way to engage staff actively in inclusive practice and to re-think approaches to teaching and supporting contemporary students.

Few studies have attempted to examine student experiences of academic conduct processes, particularly from an inclusive perspective. One study that has a similar aim to investigate inclusion is Sanni-Anibire et al. (2021), who highlighted that in addition to international students, other student groups such as those who are first in family to attend university are over-represented in academic conduct investigations. This is important as while a large body of academic integrity literature has focused on international students (for example, Abasi & Graves, 2008; Pecorari, 2016; Tauginiené et al. 2019), research is needed that includes other disadvantaged student groups. As commented above, over-representation in investigations is likely to contribute to the recorded lower rates of academic success and completion by students from widening participation backgrounds such as low-income, mature and carers, as reported in the UK (Gov.UK, 2021). The issues for over-represented students will be considered in the current research, taking the scope of Sanni-Anibire et al.'s (2021) investigation further by including students who reported their own experience of academic conduct investigations. This study also has some parallels with Baird and Dooley (2014), who gathered data from their field notes of academic support meetings and interviews with 14 international students following plagiarism investigations, and 18 interviews with tutors, student services and administrative staff with the aim of revising their institutional policy, although this revision was not reported. This study presents findings from staff in other key academic integrity roles and from students in over-represented groups, both home and international, who had experienced academic conduct investigations, as well as an inclusive analysis of institutional academic integrity documents. The present study thus contributes to research and practice with an example of new findings which subsequently led to an inclusive transformation of institutional academic conduct policy. The research aimed to answer two questions related to inclusion in the institutional context for academic integrity:

- To what extent are the guidance documents, teaching, support and processes related to academic integrity at one UK university inclusive?
- How can the documents, teaching, support and processes become more inclusive?

Methods

The research sought to answer the above questions through investigating the views and experiences of student and staff stakeholders in academic integrity. These were collected through two sets of interviews: with students who had experienced an academic conduct investigation, and with staff who had a key role in academic integrity at the university; in addition, institutional academic conduct documents were analysed. The methods for this investigation were given appropriate scrutiny through the institutional ethics process before being given full approval (registration number 201459). The main ethical consideration related to recruitment of student participants who had been through an academic conduct investigation. It was deemed

inappropriate for students to be given information about research participation by staff at the end of an academic conduct investigation, as this could be a stressful time and it could even be seen as an extension of the investigation. Instead, they were only given information about the study if they chose to take up the option of follow-on support with the academic development team after the investigation had finished (this population consisted of 21 students in the semester under study). In this way, they received information at a time that was assumed to be less stressful and separate to the investigation, in the form of a short description of the study and the researcher's contact details. Thus, the process of recruitment was through students self-selecting to join the study by contacting the researcher. This did mean only a limited number agreed to join (3, a sample of 14% from the targeted population); however, even with a low number of student participants, their input was extremely valuable and detailed. As can be seen in Table 1 below, the participants (A, B and C) provided some non-identifying demographic information, which indicated that they were from student groups who have been found to be over-represented in academic conduct investigations at the institution (international, mature, first in family, learning disability) (Oxford Brookes University, 2021), and were all in their first year of study at the institution. In the interview, they were asked about their experience of the academic conduct investigation and their perspectives about the extent to which academic integrity teaching, support and guidance at the institution were inclusive (see interview questions in the [Appendix](#)).

The second set of interview data came from eleven members of staff, all known to the researcher and selected for their key roles in academic integrity (academic conduct investigations, academic support for students, librarian support, teaching, senior management of inclusion and assessment, Student Union). Depending on their roles, they were asked about their views on how academic integrity is taught, how students are supported with academic integrity, and how academic integrity problems are processed (see interview questions in [Appendix](#)). They are identified by their roles in Table 2 below. Staff participants represented teams of 5–15 people, apart from teaching staff who obviously represented a far greater number (approximately 1,200 at the researcher's institution). A relatively large number (4) came from the academic development team because, as the main support for students with the academic conduct process, they were very engaged in the research topic and volunteered or recommended others' participation.

The interviews from both sets of participants were audio recorded and transcribed, then the data was analysed together for emerging themes. Four areas emerged relating

Table 1 Student participants

Student participant	Ethnicity	Learner profile	Course	Year of study at this university
A	Black African	Mature, learning disability, carer	UG Nursing	First
B	White British	Mature, learning disability, first in family to attend HE	UG Nursing	First
C	Asian	EFL speaker, international	PG Education	First

Table 2 Staff participants

	Participant university role
1	Academic development staff 1
2	Academic development staff 2
3	Academic development staff 3
4	Academic development staff 4
5	Librarian
6	Teaching staff 1
7	Teaching staff 2
8	Academic conduct investigator
9	Senior manager
10	Student Union officer 1
11	Student Union officer 2

Table 3 Guidance and process documents

	Document
1	Letter to students to request they attend an academic conduct investigation
2	Definitions of cheating
3	Academic conduct procedure
4	Student support webpage about academic integrity

to inclusion which will be discussed below: anxiety about judgement; difficulties perceived by or about specific student groups; efforts to make teaching and support more inclusive; difficulty with understanding documents.

The final set of data came from an analysis of four guidance and process documents as set out in Table 3 below: the initial letter to students; definitions of cheating; the procedure; a student support webpage. The documents were analysed using the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) guidelines (CAST, 2018), which have become popular as a means of building in inclusion to make materials accessible to all, rather than adapting them later for some; this means that where they are used, students do not need to disclose a disability. UDL guidelines were chosen because of their global reach, their recent adoption by the institution in this research, and their clear and relatively simply expressed components that can be looked at individually. The four guidelines for the principle of 'comprehension' ('activate or supply background knowledge; 'highlight patterns, critical features, big ideas and relationships'; 'guide information processing and visualisation'; 'maximise transfer and generalisation') (CAST, 2018) were selected as most relevant for this analysis.

Following the researcher's analysis of the documents using these UDL guidelines, interrater analysis was provided by a colleague with a lead institutional role in inclusion.

Results

Results from both student and staff interview data will be discussed under the four emerging themes related to inclusion of: anxiety about being judged; sense of belonging and the perspectives of students from different groups (students with disabilities, from widening participation and international backgrounds); efforts and challenges to provide inclusive support; difficulty understanding documents. Following the interview data, an analysis will be made of academic integrity documents in terms of UDL principles for inclusive practice.

Anxiety about judgement in the process

One of the main themes from student data was high levels of anxiety about the academic conduct investigation process, which started with the notification letter they received to request they attend an investigative interview (see document analysis).

“I was afraid, I was scared, I was nervous, I was worried a lot that is this going to be the end of my career because I always wanted to achieve this career all of my life, when that letter came, I kind of felt like ‘Is this the end?’ I didn’t know what to do, really.” (Student A)

All three students explained their perception of academic conduct breaches as crimes being investigated and their anxiety at being judged in a legal way as powerless suspects:

“It was the most difficult process I’ve ever gone through in my life in the sense that you’re sitting there and the person that is investigating and speaking to you, the way that she’s talking it’s more like accusing you of doing something, and that made me feel just very, very bad, I was crying.” (Student A)

“I felt really alone in the academic conduct process, my tutors said we can’t discuss with you because it is an official investigation, it just made me doubt myself.” (Student B)

“I am in trouble, I am so scared, I can’t ask anyone, and I am totally alone, just waiting for them to decide judging me.” (Student C)

An academic development team member explained the negative impact of judgement even beyond the investigation:

“Our ethos is an unconditional positive regard, so we are really not judging people; this is especially important in academic integrity because (students) are facing a lot of pre-judgment: A student was talking about her personal circumstances, and how her children would view her, because getting onto a degree was this great success, ‘mum at university’, now it was almost like she would have to tell her children she was a criminal.” (Academic development staff 1)

Anxiety about judgement also connected to students’ viewpoints of aspects of their own profiles which will be discussed below.

Different group perspectives on managing academic integrity

Many participants noted difficulties with academic integrity from the perspective of belonging to a particular group. One student connected their self-reported disability with failure and feeling like giving up due to the investigation.

"It was a very nerve-wracking time. Obviously when you get told that your work's being investigated, I felt really bad. I was really shocked, I thought I was really failing and doubting my ability, I had a recent diagnosis of dyslexia, and I didn't feel I could carry on, and it really did upset me and I went into work feeling terrible. No one was able to give me any support and help me understand. I just want to focus on my studies, it was giving me a lot of stress and making me lack concentration." (Student B)

Staff participants were also concerned about the difficulties for students with self-reported disabilities both getting support and managing academic conduct investigations:

"Students who are dyslexic can be very scared to come into the library. We can't change the whole library system, but we can present a friendly face, that's what we try to promote: 'ask for help, we're here to help you.' Once a student makes contact with us, I think we are inclusive, we will do whatever it takes to get that student to a comfortable position, whether it's 10 minutes, half an hour, an hour." (Librarian)

"Offering education instead of referral would be more inclusive, especially for students with mental health issues and disabilities, ...it's not fair because a lot of them come from school where they have never learned any of this, they get a referral, then suddenly they end up with zero and then this messes up their whole year." (Academic conduct investigator)

The above comment underlines the inequality in the starting points for some students without prior learning opportunities, which can lead to negative outcomes. It is also acknowledged that while students with self-reported disabilities could request support with their studies from the institutional disability team, academic integrity is not specifically supported by this team. There is evidently a strong case for providing more joined-up support.

Further comments from students and staff related to coming from particular widening participation backgrounds confirmed how this impacted on managing academic integrity demands.

"It is quite overwhelming when you have been out of education for a while, trying to take in the dos and don'ts." (Student B)

"If you fit the profile of widening participation students, so you're first in family to go to university, lower socio-economic, different reasons, there's a possibility that you might not feel that you deserve to be there, or you might not belong, you're less likely to ask for help, because you're going to try and fly under the radar, which would mean that you'd be more likely to mess up and maybe get it wrong in the assignment process, and then also not ask for help if referred." (Academic development staff 2)

"I'm worried about the undergraduates who might not have had the experience of a library, with public libraries closing down, so they don't know what it is for. The wid-

ening participation students, one was struggling with her work and really uncomfortable, and said to me 'I don't belong here.' (Librarian)

"Our more marginalized students, so that's our international students, students from broadening participation backgrounds, non-traditional students, are the most susceptible because they're the least familiar with these concepts." (Student Union 1)

One international student provided a powerful insight into how they felt their identity and position made them unable to follow expected practice:

"I have a lack of knowledge about plagiarism, as an international student, I still need to learn how to write an essay properly. I am told just 'check this site' and I don't know what I am supposed to do. I am a Master's student, so I should know but I don't, and I can't ask, it's very bad. I couldn't ask those kinds of questions to the Professor and I'm in trouble now, I'm so scared I will fail." (Student C)

One member of teaching staff connected nationality and culture with academic conduct problems:

"Students who have difficulty tend to have a different academic culture, especially India or China, concentrated in their first year or postgraduate." (Teaching staff 1)

As discussed in the literature review, care must be taken to avoid stereotyping and racism in associations of academic misconduct with particular nationalities, but there is clear evidence that certain ethnicities, particularly from the broad groups of Asian and African students, are over-represented in investigations (Oxford Brookes University, 2021).

Student belonging and staff attempts to provide inclusive teaching and support

A strong theme emerged connecting investigations of academic conduct with students' sense of a lack of belonging. One staff participant pointed out the damage caused by early investigations:

"If you get an academic conduct referral in your first few months at university, you are immediately going to feel like an outsider, you're immediately more likely to disengage, the punishments and shame are really, really damaging to students and have a long-term impact." (Academic development staff 3)

All student participants commented on how they wanted support and understanding, and felt that providing this was the university's responsibility:

"We are here to learn, we want them to support us to get through." (Student A)

"The university needs to enhance people's understanding and make it clearer." (Student B)

"I need more opportunity to learn how to write the essay and discuss what is wrong with my writing." (Student C)

At the same time, staff participants were keen to elaborate on their current attempts or future intentions to be inclusive in their teaching and support, and therefore to increase students' sense of belonging:

“We work really hard to make sure that the session itself is inclusive, it has that kind of confidentiality and non-judgementalism about it, and that’s a really important counter to the quite officious tone of an academic conduct letter.” (Academic development staff 3)

“I think you have to try and meet people exactly where they are and not where you think they ought to be.” (Academic development staff 1)

“Sometimes students are almost in a hole, not given advice until too late, the advice is accessible, but they are not directed enough to it, we need to do more in that respect.” (Teaching staff 2)

“We’ve got some of the mechanisms for inclusion that are routinely used, the subject committee structures, the module meetings, the program meetings, calibration meetings for marking, but I think we need to maintain a good critical self-aware reflective space around what our expectations of academic practice, citation, referencing when it comes to cultural difference and educational difference of background.” (Senior Manager)

“So, we receive the referrals, and we act according to the procedure, and we write in our invitation to interview ‘let us know if you need any special requirements for the meeting’. But we don’t check, as we get so many referrals. We are looking at the documents we send with the disability team to see what we can do to make them more inclusive.” (Academic conduct officer)

“I think the current procedure is grossly un-inclusive - it’s like calling the cops, instead of just knocking on your neighbour’s door and asking them to be quiet. Sometimes students don’t know and don’t learn unless they have tripped up and learnt from their mistakes.” (Student Union 2)

“I do think the university could do more to distinguish between students cheating and not fully understanding how things work.” (Student Union 1)

“I feel a responsibility to help them understand; my mantra is always to help them not be in this position again. There should be some scope to make the first breach developmental.” (Academic development staff 4)

The above comments from staff participants indicate a wide range of ways in which they attempted to be inclusive: by ensuring confidentiality, by trying to empathise with the student, by directing them more to guidance, by reflecting more on expectations, by involving other teams, by distinguishing more between cheating and not understanding and by introducing a developmental step. As stated in the introduction, there is a current emphasis on improving institutional inclusion and the above comments demonstrate important efforts by staff and the university to provide inclusive teaching and support, though also an acknowledgement that more needs to be done.

Difficulty understanding academic integrity documents

All three student participants reported significant difficulties with making sense of academic integrity documents.

“The guidance is like a lot to take in especially if you are going through that emotional process. I have got my own family, I am working to support them, I have a

learning disability, I'm in my first year, we don't know much about anything and we're still trying to find our way. I'm a deer in the headlights. I go to bed worried about what is going to happen." (Student A)

"I found the documents very overwhelming, a lot of information and to me it wasn't really clear, there was pages and pages, it reminded me of a work policy, it would have been easier for me to understand with bits in bold and bullet points." (Student B)

"I couldn't understand the information because these sites don't help you to understand. I am struggling right now." (Student C)

These reflections by students are very revealing about the difficulties they face with understanding the documents in terms of length and format. One of the teaching staff participants also acknowledged the difficulty with the range of terms used across the documents:

"The terminology is difficult. 'Academic integrity' I suspect is lost on a lot of students and 'cheating' is such a hard word." (Teaching Staff 2)

This is an important point, as using a range of terms in different documents adds an unnecessary level of complexity for students and makes it harder for them to see the connections between the different documents: for example, there is no obvious link in the document titles 'definitions of cheating' and 'academic integrity advice'. The documents will be discussed in terms of meeting inclusive standards in the analysis below.

Document analysis

Following the interviews, four institutional academic conduct documents were measured against the UDL principles of comprehension as the most relevant to student interaction with the documents. This UDL principle comprises of four 'checkpoints': 'Activate or supply background knowledge'; 'Highlight patterns, critical features, big ideas, and relationships'; 'Guide information processing and visualization'; 'Maximize transfer and generalization' (CAST, 2018), as set out in Table 4 below.

Firstly, in terms of supplying background knowledge, long introductions containing warnings about breaches were provided in documents 2 and 3. Three of the documents contained links to at least one other of the four documents, but none contained links to all three. No links to the other three documents were provided in document 3, the academic conduct procedure.

Secondly, regarding patterns, critical features and relationships, document 4, the advice page, seemed to meet the checkpoints by organising advice as 'our top tips' with links to other advice by the same team. Documents 2 and 3 were organised with bold headings for each theme or section, but relationships were not that clear; for example, document 2 states that the library has a helpful leaflet on referencing, but no link is given. Document 1 lacked patterns and discernible relationships with other information; confusingly, the only section in bold related to the investigative team's own processing delays.

Thirdly, all of the documents seemed to be limited in terms of guiding information processing. Document 1 was vague and omitted any indication of what was alleged

Table 4 Academic integrity documents analysed by UDL features of comprehension

UDL feature of Comprehension Documents	1. Activate or supply background knowledge	2. Highlight patterns, critical features, big ideas and relationships	3. Guide information processing and visualisation	4. Maximise transfer and generalisation
1. Letter to request students' attend investigative interview	Contains links to documents 3 and 4, but not 2	Highlights the investigator's time limitations in bold	Is organised in paragraphs Contains links to documents 3 and 4 Does not have an explanation of what student is alleged to have done	Contains links to documents 3 and 4 Offers to answer emails
2. Definitions of cheating	Contains introduction paragraph with warnings of being expelled or losing degree Contains link to document 3 but not 4	Presents in bold the name of each breach. States that the Library has a leaflet but no link. Student Conduct Regulations are mentioned but link is in another part of this document	Presents title in large black box like document 3 Different definitions are listed with Roman numerals Uses legal terms Contains some repetition	Contains links to UK academic integrity charter – broader network (not mentioned elsewhere)
3. Academic conduct procedure	Includes an introduction of one page with 7 points. Does not contain any links to other documents	Lists policy details with subheadings of introduction, general approach, breaches, penalties, starting procedure, interview, conduct committee, appeal, procedural matters, appendix	Presents title in large black box like document 2 Different parts of procedure are listed with ordinary numbers Document consists of 12 pages	Contains link to Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (not mentioned elsewhere)
4. Academic integrity advice	Contains link to document 2 but not 3	Document is organised in blocks with four top tips. Contains some links to further study guidance by the same team	Document is set out with bold titles; categories do not match definitions of cheating fully, or procedure (documents 2 and 3)	Contains link to the Support team who created this document and advice about how to contact them

against the student. Documents 2 and 3 contained the title in a very large black box, which shows some consistency across the two documents, but this kind of visual highlighting could also contribute to anxiety, and the relationship between the two documents was unclear. Document 2 listed definitions of cheating using Roman numerals, which could be confusing or at least not memorable for students, while document 3 was very long, consisting of 12 pages. Document 4 was set out with bold titles, but the topics for these titles are not consistent with the full list in document 2, nor the procedure in document 3. The lack of sufficient guidance for information processing seems likely to make the documents difficult to follow, especially for international students who are L2 speakers of English and students with a disability.

Fourthly, for maximising generalisation, all documents contained some links, some with emails; document 1 linked to 3 and 4, and also offered to answer emails; documents 2 and 3 linked to outside organisations, although they were not mentioned elsewhere or explained; document 4 provided links to the academic development team and how to contact them. However, as previously mentioned by a teaching staff participant, it is noticeable that different words are used across the 4 documents ('investigation', 'academic conduct', 'cheating', 'academic integrity') so the inconsistency could be confusing. The documents were also all located on different pages of the institutional website.

It seems clear that improvements are needed to meet the UDL principle of comprehension and to make the documents 'accessible, engaging and relevant' to all students (Thomas & May, 2010). In addition to the above analysis, a key limitation of the documents is that they are only available as text. Alternative forms of document communications including visual image representation of academic integrity (for example, Reedy et al., 2021) have not yet been developed at the institution. In order to focus on UDL analysis, a further limitation is acknowledged that the documents were not examined through other forms of accessibility such as screen reader analysis using the Ally tool.

Discussion

The findings highlight issues about academic conduct processes and support of students with academic integrity that clearly connect to problems with inclusion. The high levels of anxiety reported by student participants related to academic conduct investigations concur with those found in similar studies (Abasi & Graves, 2008; Baird & Dooley, 2014; Tindall et al. 2021). Anxiety related to students' perception of being judged is very likely to impact negatively on their sense of belonging at university, but this could be mitigated if legal terms were avoided in documents and instruction. As previously discussed, many educators have advocated avoidance of any term that suggests academic integrity is a legal matter (Leask, 2006; Pecorari, 2001; Sutherland-Smith, 2008), yet in the eyes of some students and staff, there are continued associations between academic breaches and lawbreaking. As commented by a member of the academic development team, academic conduct investigations can have an immediate impact on making students feel like outsiders, perhaps partly because they are made to perceive they have broken the rules of the system. However, an academic conduct investigative process should not resemble a criminal investigation; as articulated by Blum (2009), any academic conduct breach is a breach of social norms in an academic setting, not a crime. Changes are therefore urgently needed to the collective framing of academic integrity processes.

One positive and inclusive recent recommendation is to use the ‘aspirational language of integrity’ rather than cheating or misconduct, and connecting this to building community (McNeill, 2022, p.494).

The student participants in this study, who were all in their first year of study and belonged to groups that are over-represented in investigations, explained the problems they had with understanding documents and following the process of an investigation. Given that the student participants were recruited after seeking support, it is acknowledged that they may have been more inclined to focus on the challenges they experienced. However, the finding seems to confirm the student problems with academic integrity documents and processes found in other studies, for example, student anxiety in connection with reading academic integrity procedures recently reported by Sanni-Anibire et al. (2021). Furthermore, research based on multiple student interviews has emphasized that students can easily be confused by university regulations in long documents that contrast sharply with their lives outside academia, as they are used to navigating short texts and instant free sharing of media (Blum, 2009). It is notable that students in the current research connected their difficulties with their group identity: ‘we don’t know much about anything’, as well as finding the regulations impenetrable: ‘the documents (were) very overwhelming...it wasn’t really clear, there was pages and pages’ and ‘these sites don’t help you to understand’. Furthermore, student C’s reflection about needing more than links to understand supports the assertion from Baird and Dooley (2014) that problems for international students in following university regulations can increase at postgraduate level when they are expected to demonstrate a higher level of academic writing and skill with source use and may be more heavily penalised for breaches. As Baird and Dooley (2014) also observe, giving a link or simply directing them to a policy does not guarantee they will access or use it, so more support, such as guidance from an academic conduct advisor to help through the process would be useful.

In addition, the student comments about length, lack of clarity and confusing terms, and the document analysis itself, reveal problems with inclusion in terms of lack of introduction and guidance to help information processing, inconsistency across documents and unhelpful layout. If they are unable to process the guidance, students may not know what they do not know or not notice their difficulties, until a breach is found in their work (Barrett & Malcolm, 2006). To maximise student comprehension of academic integrity documents, more efforts could be made to work on connections and consistency, as focused on and actioned by Reedy et al. (2021). Clearer communication and support would benefit all students and thus help to improve inclusive practice, as advocated by Baird and Dooley (2014) and Mott-Smith et al. (2017).

At the same time, one significant finding is that staff participants were making an effort to be inclusive in their practices and were motivated to improve them further, indicating an awareness and a readiness to change. A number of studies have previously been conducted with recommendations for revising institutional academic conduct procedures that have not been able to report that the recommendations were taken up by the researcher’s university (Baird & Dooley, 2014) or a wider group of universities (Stoez & Eaton, 2020a, b). This research is able to report changes made as a direct result of the findings. By involving all of the key stakeholders in academic

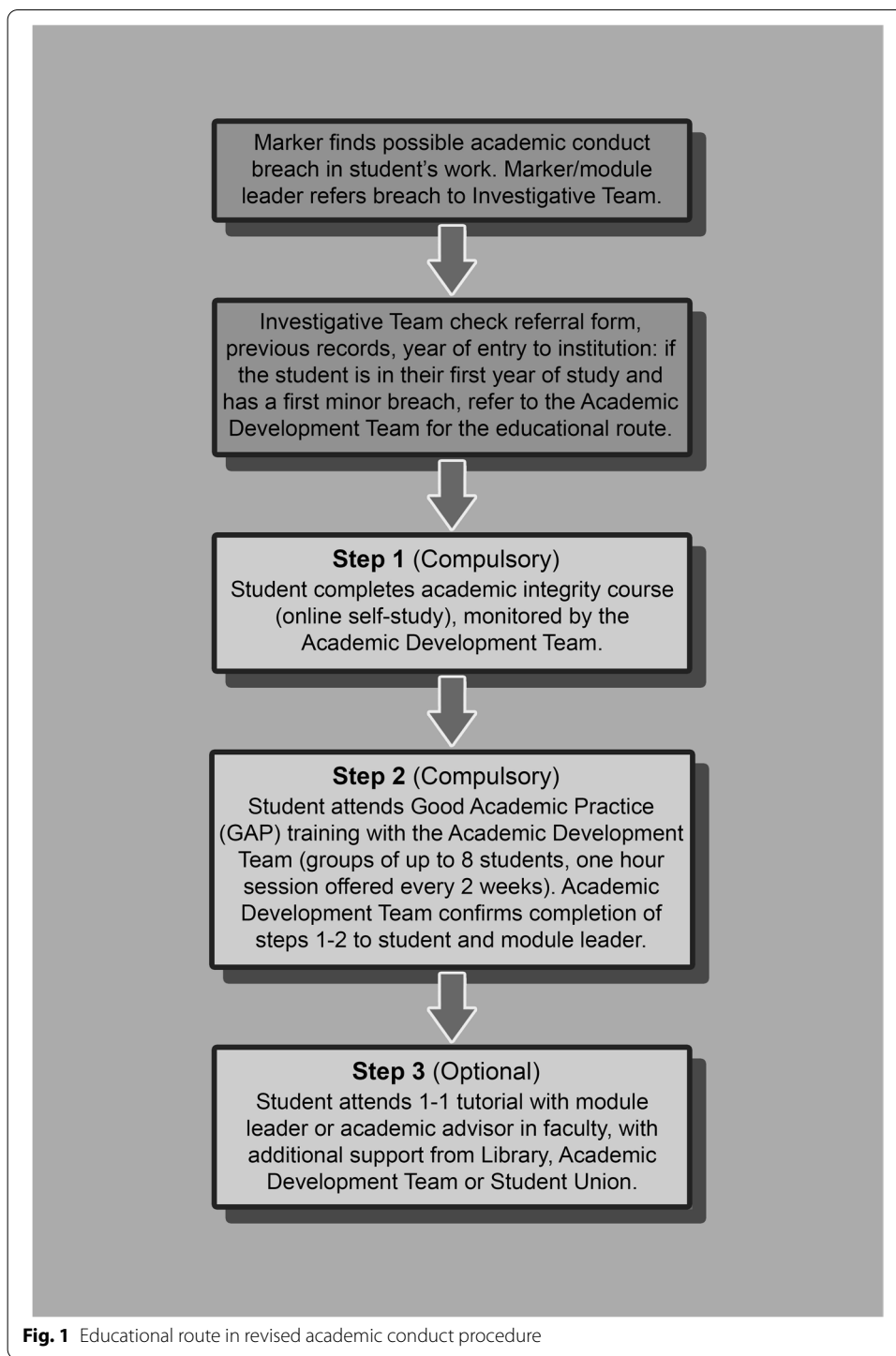
integrity at the institution (students, teaching staff, student support staff, library staff, the academic conduct investigation team, senior management and the Student Union) as participants in this study, the researcher was able to break down the barriers to policy change that can occur from insufficient consultation, engagement or evidence, and to join up the concerns and aspirations of all participants to present a proposal for positive change that was accepted and swiftly put into place. The proposal addresses the inclusion concerns for students in their first year of study (frequently from certain groups) with minor breaches by providing a new educational route with online and direct teaching, no investigation or penalty. The new educational route is illustrated in the flow chart below.

The procedure starts with referral to the investigative team, but if it is found to be a minor breach in the student's first year of study, the educational route is activated, and students are required to complete an online course followed by a live training session in good academic practice by the academic development team. The usefulness of flow charts to present academic conduct procedures was also demonstrated by Reedy et al. (2021), though for the different roles rather than routes as in Fig. 1 below. The flow chart demonstrates an attempt to make academic integrity procedures more inclusive, returning to Thomas and May's (2010) definition of making HE 'accessible, relevant and engaging to all students', by offering an educational route without any punishment as a first stage for minor breaches in the first year. This revision of the process means that future students in the same position as the student participants in this study will be offered the educational route, instead of an investigation and penalty. It is an attempt to be more inclusive because disproportional representation of certain groups occurs in minor breaches in students' first year of study (Oxford Brookes University, 2021); early results since the policy revision suggest it is reducing the overall number of students who experience academic conduct investigations by one third, and academic development staff confirm they approach educational route teaching sessions by emphasising non-judgmentalism and enabling students to develop their learning (Oxford Brookes University, 2022). Therefore, this revision is also in line with the statement from ICAI (2014) that 'creating equitable and inclusive approaches to learning supports the values of academic integrity.' Furthermore, the creation of the educational route endorses the conclusion drawn by Fudge et al. (2022) that 'a move from a punitive to an educative approach to AI is necessary to build upon a new cultural capital for university study'.

Conclusion

This research has found that efforts to make academic integrity more inclusive are in progress, but more needs to be done. The findings illustrate that students experience extreme anxiety with the process of investigations and have difficulty with understanding the documents. There is evidence that students from certain groups can be at a disadvantage and need more help, and therefore more inclusive approaches to academic integrity are required. Many staff indicated how they wanted to teach and support students more inclusively, though acknowledged current limitations.

This research joins up with other studies calling for an increased educational focus in policies (Reedy et al. 2021; Stoesz & Eaton, 2020), and in addition, recommends



foregrounding inclusive practice in academic integrity teaching and applying UDL principles to policies and support documents.

The research contributes to a greater understanding of inclusive issues in academic integrity. The strengths of this research come from detailed insights gained from students from different groups who had recent experience of academic conduct

investigations, as well as detailed reflections from a wide range of staff stakeholders in academic integrity. The analysis of academic integrity documents using UDL facilitates a clear assessment of inclusive practice and makes the case for more focus on inclusion in documents for students. This study could serve as a model to replicate in other universities to examine inclusive practice in academic integrity. Furthermore, the example presented in this study of research findings used to transform institutional policy to make it more inclusive can be incorporated elsewhere.

The research is limited to one university setting, a small number of student and staff participants and institutional documents. It is acknowledged that the academic integrity documents examined in this research need to be revised through use of UDL principles to become inclusive; in addition, teaching and support of academic integrity would benefit from being assessed according to UDL principles in further research.

Appendix

Interview Questions for members of staff and students.

1. Interview questions for investigations team

1. How does the team support students who are referred?
2. Do you consider the academic conduct referral and investigation process to be inclusive?
3. Can you identify any groups who are referred more than others?
4. Are any students referred more than once? If so, why?
5. Do you have any recommendations to make the academic conduct referral and investigation process more inclusive?

2. Interview questions for academic development team

1. How does the team support students who are referred?
2. Do you consider the academic integrity support is inclusive?
3. Can you identify any groups who attend for academic integrity support more than others?
4. Do any students come to the team for academic integrity support more than once? If so, why do you think this happens?
5. What do you do in the process to be inclusive?
6. Do you consider that there any issues for the university within inclusion related to academic integrity?
7. Do you have any recommendations to make the academic integrity support and processes more inclusive?

3. Interview questions for Librarian

1. What does the library do to help all students understand academic integrity?
2. Do you consider the library support for academic integrity to be inclusive?
3. How does the library team support students with academic conduct referrals?

4. Do you have any recommendations to make the academic integrity support via the library more inclusive?

4. Interview questions for Senior Management

1. Do you consider the Brookes inclusion policy covers academic integrity effectively?
2. Do you consider that there any issues for the university within inclusion related to academic integrity?
3. Do you have any recommendations to make academic integrity polices and practice more inclusive?

5. Questions for Student Union

1. How does SU support students with academic integrity problems?
2. Can you identify any groups who need support with academic integrity more than others?
3. Do you think the university's academic integrity policies and guidance are inclusive?
4. Do you have any recommendations to make academic integrity policies, processes teaching and support more inclusive?

6. Questions for teaching staff

1. What do you do to teach academic integrity?
2. What do you do to support students with academic integrity issues?
3. Can you identify any groups of students who you refer more than others?
4. Do you think some students may be referred more than once? If so, why?
5. Do you consider the teaching, support and processes of academic integrity to be inclusive?
6. Do you have any recommendations for making academic integrity processes, support and teaching more inclusive?

7. Interview questions for students

1. What is your opinion of the academic conduct process that you have experienced?
2. What did you learn from this process?
3. What is your understanding of academic conduct?
4. What is your view of the guidance and policy documents regarding academic integrity*?
5. What teaching have you experienced about academic integrity?
6. What support have you experienced regarding academic integrity?
7. Do you have any suggestions for the university to make academic integrity processes and practice more inclusive?

*Academic integrity is defined as “the approach to study and skills needed to produce good academic work” (Centre for Academic Development).

Abbreviation

UDL: Universal Design for Learning.

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