

Honour code systems have been long-established in some American universities, associated with cultures of academic integrity. This study considered the perceptions of students and staff, elicited through focus groups and electronic voting, regarding the potential for implementation of these systems in the UK.

Would honour codes work in the UK?

18 staff and 10 students participated in focus groups to discuss the use of an 'alternative system' (an honour code approach) to deal with plagiarism. An electronic voting system was used to ascertain participants' views on the 12 specific statements.

In an ideal world: To what extent to you agree with the following?
In the real world: Would the following work in a UK University?

1) Community and Behaviour

- Framing the issue of plagiarism in more positive terms;
- Promoting shared values and principles of the academic community as a means of plagiarism prevention;
- Placing a strong campus focus on academic integrity;
- Encouraging all students, staff, and administrators to be responsible for maintaining academic integrity.

2) Operational Issues

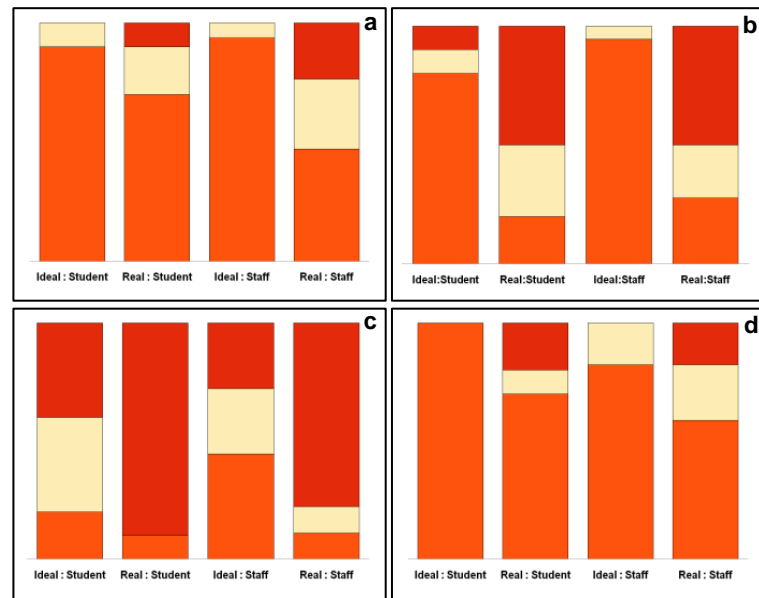
- Having a code of academic conduct;
- Having an honour pledge that students are required to sign;
- Having a non-tolerance clause;
- Having unsupervised exams.

3) Student Involvement

- Student involvement in producing the code of academic conduct;
- Student involvement in peer education and instruction;
- Panel comprised exclusively of students to consider plagiarism;
- Student participation in a panel with staff to consider plagiarism

"We do see this, by the time you're definitely a third-year ... 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."

StudentB8



Strongly agree/ agree neutral strongly disagree/ disagree

Figure 2 Results of voting for real and idea scenarios by staff and students for a) Encouraging all parties to be responsible for maintaining academic integrity b) Promoting shared principles of the academic community to prevent plagiarism c) Having an honour pledge d) Placing a strong campus focus on academic integrity

"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)."

StaffB5

Tentative acceptance?

Whilst the main principles of honour codes were broadly welcomed, implementation in the UK HE context was perceived as problematic. Although both staff and students saw educational benefits in increased student involvement in the promotion of academic integrity and good academic practice, there was a tension between staff who would like to increase the responsibilities of students and the reality of the students' seeming lack of confidence in their ability to discharge those responsibilities. The introduction of students as participants in plagiarism hearing panels and processes was tentatively supported, potentially offering a route to break down the staff-student dichotomy.

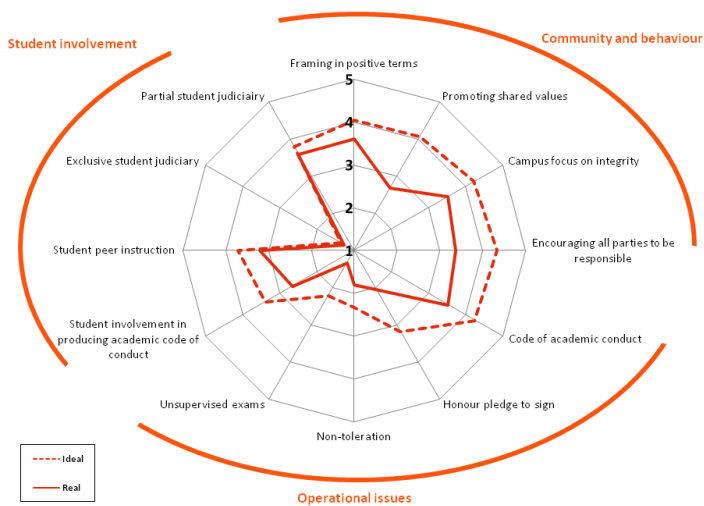


Figure 1 Radar Diagram showing the combined responses of staff and students to the questions asked comparing the ideal and real scenarios. Aggregated scores were used ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree)

"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..."

StudentB6