

Measuring Attitudes Towards Academic Integrity in Irish Higher Education – Draft Final Report (141124)

QQI Anniversary funded proposals

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1. Introduction

Academic integrity in higher education has been an increasing focus for higher education stakeholders in recent years. In Ireland, this can be seen with the activity of the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) – the funding body for this research – as well as the National Academic Integrity Network, a ‘peer-driven network’, established in November 2019 by QQI.¹ International interest only intensified with the pivot to emergency remote teaching and assessment during COVID-19 (Holden et al. 2020; Eaton and Turner 2020), as well as the advent of ChatGPT in November 2022.

As such, there is a need to deepen our understanding and develop a research base of attitudes toward academic integrity among staff and students in Irish higher education. This project examines the McCabe-ICAI² academic integrity surveys, which have been used in other countries to research students’ and academic staff’s behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs about academic integrity, with the goal of assessing the feasibility of using or adapting these surveys for use in higher education in Ireland.

The proposed approach to a cost-benefit analysis of using McCabe-ICAI surveys in Ireland is informed by a virtue ethics philosophical perspective (Annas 2011), extending the question of academic integrity beyond institutional and/or procedural viewpoints. Virtue ethics, as framed by Julia Annas, considers ethics by analogy with skills, as something that can be developed:

‘Virtue is not a state you achieve and then sit back, with nothing further to do. It is the drive to aspire which enables the learning to come to be able to assess and criticize what has been taught, and to be able to correct the teacher and the context and culture in which he [sic] has been taught [...] virtue is a dynamic, rather than a static, disposition.’ (Annas 2011, p.25)

This philosophical perspective, it can be noted, also aligns with the McCabe-ICAI values-based approach to academic integrity, and draws on a body of work within academic integrity research that focuses on ‘virtue ethics’ approaches to what is consequently termed ‘educational integrity’ (Bretag and Green 2014).

This open perspective avoids reducing ‘costs’ and ‘benefits’ to quantitative or monetary notions, and explores beliefs, attitudes and values. This approach addresses the range of cultural and philosophical

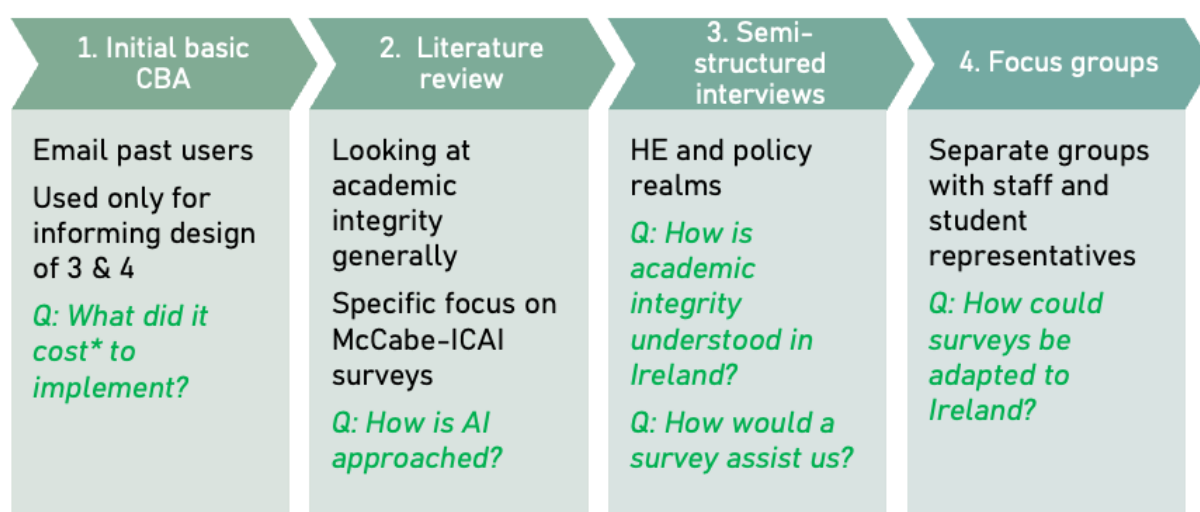
¹ <https://www.qqi.ie/what-we-do/engagement-insights-and-knowledge-sharing/national-academic-integrity-network>

² <https://academicintegrity.org/programs/mccabe-icai-academic-integrity-survey>

underpinnings of academic integrity in what would be a new national setting for the McCabe-ICAI academic integrity surveys, with a view to the diversity of the Irish higher education context. Thus this research team proposed a mixed-method approach with a significant qualitative component and a wider sampling perspective of the responsible actors - beyond those charged with institutional responsibility for quality assurance.

1.1 Project Methodology

Figure1: Project Overview:



This project had a four-part, linked structure through which data was generated: (i) surveys; (ii) a literature review; (iii) qualitative, semi-structured interviews; and (iv) focus groups. Full ethical approval in line with institutional requirements was obtained from the Trinity College Dublin School of Education Ethics Committee for all stages. A summary of the structure is as follows:

- (i) A **survey** of past and current users of the McCabe-ICAI surveys to elicit the views of the relevant institutional actors (faculty and students) at institutions where the surveys has been used in other countries. This addresses not only the financial but also wider costs and benefits. Student and staff feedback on the value of the surveys constitutes a useful evidence base for subsequent research stages.
- (ii) The **literature review** to synthesise scholarly and practitioner views of efforts to measure attitudes towards academic integrity and the impact of these efforts, to understand the factors that may affect implementing the McCabe-ICAI surveys. Literature detailing piloting or implementing the *AIS* itself was specifically addressed. This stage addressed the existing

scholarly knowledge base and findings from the community of practice as it relates to the surveys. This informed the design of the interview schedule, as well as an initial analysis framework.

- (iii) The **semi-structured interviews** with institutional and national stakeholders investigated potential 'costs and benefits' (understood in the broadest sense) of using and/or adapting the McCabe-ICAI surveys for Ireland's higher education sector. The interview schedule design drew on both the surveys and literature review. This stage focused on the Irish context and also helped to identify participants for the next stage of data generation.
- (iv) **Focus groups** as the final data generation stage engaged with actors from within Irish higher education, both academics and students. One focus group engaged academic staff to discuss the McCabe-ICAI Faculty Survey, and a second student focus group considered the McCabe-ICAI Student Survey. A further aim of these was to explore disciplinary differences in attitudes to academic integrity and the capacity of both surveys to assess these. The focus groups were a targeted discussion to assess the feasibility of the use of the McCabe-ICAI surveys and/or the need for their adaptation in the Irish setting.

A broad and purposive sample of staff and students across Irish higher education was taken for the interviews and focus groups. Interviews and focus groups took place primarily online in so far as this suited participants. The analysis required interviews and focus groups to be transcribed, with notes being taken in both as aides to future analysis. Qualitative data analysis software (*NVivo*) served both as repository and tool of analysis for data for the entire research team, and allowed for discussion of the analysis and findings on an ongoing basis. The analytic framework was informed by the intentionally open approach taken to the topic, aimed at eliciting a diversity of understandings rather than simply 'identifying themes' (Bazeley 2009).

2. Literature Review

This brief literature review aims to focus on some of the more recent literature relating to academic integrity within higher education. Given the recent attention given to academic integrity, especially since the shift to emergency online education during COVID-19 led to an increase in concerns around this area (e.g. Ives & Kazan 2024), any attempt to be exhaustive with this body of scholarship would be a considerable undertaking in itself. For instance, the most recent *Second Handbook of Academic Integrity* edited by Sarah Eaton (2024), stands at over 1900 pages, up from the c.1100 pages of the original handbook a decade before (Bretag 2016). As such, the purpose of this review has been rather to inform the design of the interview and focus group stages of this project. To that end, the guiding question here was ‘how is academic integrity approached in the literature?’

2.1 Introduction to literature of ‘academic integrity’

For initial context, it’s worth identifying when academic integrity as a field of study first emerged. Bertram Gallant and Rettinger (2022a; see also Peters 2019) note that research in this area started with research on cheating, deception, and moral development, with large-scale surveys of students undertaken by William Bowers in the United States in the 1960s. Early work showed that cheating could be understood not just as a psychological phenomenon, to be dealt with at an individual level, but as a sociological phenomenon where people are influenced by their surroundings. ‘Moral development research’ allowed for an understanding of academic integrity as a developmental rather than individual moral issue, and this has had a great influence on the field.

The leading scholar of this area during the next period, Donald McCabe, who worked with Bowers to update those early findings, found the results from his research in the U.S. (e.g. McCabe 1992) so surprising that it led him to establish the International Centre for Academic Integrity (ICAI) in order to address issues of cheating and enhance integrity cultures in U.S. higher education. His 1992 paper is indeed a turning point in the field, and the close connection between research and practice is a distinctive feature of work on academic integrity. The year 1992 is of significance for this review, and the 30th anniversary in 2022 meant that a number of significant literature reviews emerged (e.g. in the *Journal of College and Character*, edited

by Bertram Gallant and Rettinger) looking back at three decades of research into academic integrity, which has allowed for a degree of ‘stock taking’ from those working within the field.³

In DeMaio & Dixon’s (2022) contribution to that special issue, they focus on 30 years of research in Australasia (1990-2020), with breakdown of findings according to the perspective of different stakeholders (students, faculty, staff, and HEIs). This paper considers reasons for misconduct according to these groupings. For the first, they note that generally there is a focus in the literature on students, but they also observe a transition in relation to perception of academic integrity from being students’ responsibility towards an understanding that staff and faculty have a responsibility. This echoes the shift to view issues in pedagogical terms (see section 2.2 below for more). While DeMaio and Dixon observe that research can *apparently* identify the kinds of students likely to engage in misconduct in the Australasian context (young males, those who have engaged in misconduct previously, those for whom English as an additional language) they also note caveats. While a central aspect here is the ‘understanding’ of students, in terms of how ‘academic integrity’ is constructed and understood, and the effort to bridge the difference between stakeholders. They note various reasons suggested in the literature for why students might engage in such behaviours (such as time constraints, the behaviour, degree of severity of punishments) which again point towards a broader social and pedagogical context. Along these lines, they also draw together findings on students who do *not* engage in academic misconduct, which is another way of integrating the wider context. The staff or faculty perspective has also been addressed in terms of how academic integrity is constructed, noting some inconsistencies in how this group understand and respond to it. The evidence points toward academic misconduct increasingly being treated as a teaching and learning issue, though with a tension between institutional and individual academic responses. Institutions generally view breaches in legalistic terms through their policies, often with a view to punishment.

In an interview (Peters 2019) Tracey Bretag, one of the foremost scholars of academic integrity, noted that while ‘while student cheating itself is by no means a new problem, the ways that students cheat have dramatically changed in recent times’ (Peters 2019 p.752). Commercial websites target ‘target vulnerable and naïve students, offering ‘plagiarism-free’ assignments for a relatively modest fee’ – whether these are undergraduates, postgraduates,

³ See also <https://academicintegrity.org/about/celebrating-30-years-of-academic-integrity>. Note also Rettinger and Bertram Gallant’s (2022b) chapter on the *next* thirty years of academic integrity research.

up to and including doctoral candidates. The reasons here are that students may be 'time poor' and with inadequate academic/linguistic preparation, and thus easy prey for commercial services. In line with the general view from the field, Bretag stated that the responsibility for academic integrity is not that of students alone, but all members of the academic community, underlining a general need to develop cultures of integrity.

Bretag, who worked in an Australian business school setting, identified that there is a disciplinary aspect here, however, in that academic integrity breaches are considered more common in Business, Engineering, IT. This aspect of disciplinary specific misconduct is supported by McCabe et al. (2006) who explore the prevalence and causes of cheating among graduate business students. The researchers found that graduate business students were more likely to engage in academic dishonesty compared to their non-business peers. Cheating behaviour was found to be associated with perceived peer behaviour, the perceived certainty of being reported by a peer, and the understanding and acceptance of academic integrity policies by both students and faculty. However, regression analysis results indicated that perceived peer behaviour had the most significant impact on cheating behaviour, meaning the perception that other students were cheating had the largest effect on academic dishonesty among graduate business students. The study also explored various factors influencing cheating, such as the severity of penalties, certainty of being reported, and the understanding/acceptance of academic integrity policies. It found that these factors did not significantly influence cheating among graduate business students, suggesting that academic integrity policies may be weaker or less enforced in business programs.

An alternative perspective to these Anglophone perspectives is found in the work of the Hong Kong-based Bruce Macfarlane and colleagues, in their review of academic integrity literature from just under 10 years ago, drawing on 115 articles from 'both western and Chinese literature'. This paper (Macfarlane et al. 2014) is useful given how much literature in this area are drawn from English-speaking countries. In their framing, the authors lean on the Chinese context, noting that the Chinese equivalent word for integrity 'chengxin' can be traced back in part to the Analects of Confucius (Kongzi), and refers to honesty, truthfulness, and sincerity. For the English term, the authors relate this to virtue, and specifically the virtue ethics of philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre. They refer to Altbach (2004) to note the special status of universities in both society and for 'globalisation', understood as meaning 'that integrity failures damage institutional brands and the credibility of higher education systems'. The growth in interest in academic integrity as a scholarly area is linked to increasing number of reported cases which in turn relates to rapid massification of higher education - a massification that is

at the same time is increasingly linked to an internationalisation of higher education systems and institutions.

2.2 From 'dishonesty' to 'misconduct'

In Bertram Gallant and Rettinger's (2022) introduction to their special issue, they write that they asked authors to use the terms 'academic integrity' and 'academic misconduct' rather than 'academic dishonesty' in order to keep the focus on the behaviours rather than implying moral intent behind these behaviours. This signals a distinctive feature of academic integrity as a policy and research field, underlining a central argument from the field which has become generally accepted since its establishment in the 1990s. Conversely, use of words like 'plagiarism' or 'cheating' in the literature can signal research by those outside the field of academic integrity, who are thus unfamiliar with its norms and findings. Bertram Gallant & Rettinger summarise the changes over that period, identifying how not all 'cheating' is rooted in dishonesty, and may be caused by any number of other reasons. Likewise, in the same special issue, Parnter (2022) and Murphy (2022) both note that misconduct is a symptom of a much larger problem, rather than the problem itself.

Cullen (2022) takes a much closer look at this shift in institutional policy terms, with a movement from 'punitive' to 'educational' approaches to academic misconduct. A general trend is observed in policies that reframe misconduct in terms of 'teachable moments' and 'learning experiences'. Cullen here makes a clear distinction between educational and restorative justice approaches on the one hand, and judicial systems and punitive sanctions. Noting the role of aforementioned 'moral development frameworks' in underwriting the reframing, Cullen also identifies the 1990s as bringing the first efforts since the 1960s to understand the scope of cheating in US higher education. Following that research HEIs, saw a need to respond with policies. From this, the author concludes that HEIs must define academic misconduct and establish processes by which they respond, in order to focus on maintaining and strengthening the trust between faculty and students. This did not imply that there should be no sanctions, but institutions should treat academic misconduct as a teaching and learning issue.

Further to this perspective on institutional policies, Moriarty and Wilson (2022) take a philosophical approach, arguing for a normative philosophical ethical stance to underpin integrity policies in higher education. They draw on the political philosophy of John Rawls, specifically the framework he set out in *A Theory of Justice* to expand on some of the points

other researchers into academic integrity often leave implicit. While noting the institutional pressures and organizational logics underpinning a 'legalistic process' (pp. 21,22) in higher education – for instance 'perceived liability reduction' – the authors note that in the contexts they examine, 'legalisms have overtaken forgiveness'. As such, the authors argue for 'competing core values' of 'consistency and fairness, humanity and justice' when designing academic misconduct policies. Here too, the concept of 'restorative justice' is identified as underpinning this approach (p. 27), and they draw on the work of Howard Zehr to set out three main pillars of this concept:

- (1) focusing on the harm and resulting needs primarily of the victim, but also the community and the offender,
 - (2) the obligations of the offender to repair the harm as best as possible, and
 - (3) the engagement or participation of all of these stakeholders in the justice process.
- (Zehr 2014, p. 5)

This stands in contrast to the more standard punitive, legalistic approach that is more often found in university and education policies. For the institution considering how to have virtues underpin integrity policies, Moriarty and Wilson recommend that 'things need to occur before a policymaker can move forward: evaluate your current policy for what it actually does, and survey the stakeholders of your institution on where they fall on the balance between our virtues' (p.29). Generating data to understand a given context (e.g. through surveys of students or staff) then can be an important element of introducing 'a strong academic integrity policy not simply focused on rights and process' (p. 30).

Finally, Macfarlane et al. (2014) note that 'academic integrity', notwithstanding the shift from the older, punitive vocabularies, may nevertheless have a problematic aspect in that it has come to be regarded exclusively as a proxy for discussions of the 'conduct of students, notably in relation to plagiarism and cheating' (p. 340). For the purposes of their own paper, academic integrity is understood as referring to *academics*, and they define it as 'the values, behaviour and conduct of academics in all aspects of their practice (teaching, research and service)' (p. 341). Academic integrity thus must continue to be understood as affecting not just students but the academic community, and it's possible to push Macfarlane et al.'s argument even further, to note the role of administrative, professional, and management staff in creating holistic communities with restorative and educational responses to academic integrity.

2.3 Modality – online education

The increasing importance and prevalence of online modalities of higher education has led to a considerable body of research on this area as it relates to academic integrity. Indeed, it has transformed the image of what breaches of academic integrity look like:

The once-dominant image of cheating in higher education as a test-bank file cabinet in a frat house basement has been rendered quaint by a booming industry of commercialized websites that market themselves as providing “study help” and “tutoring” services while facilitating contract cheating and the unauthorized distribution of colleges’ and universities’ proprietary teaching and learning materials. (Harris et al. 2020, pp.419-420).

In response to this transformation, a considerable body of research has grown, in order to address a popular assumption that breaches of academic integrity are more common in online modalities of higher education than ‘face-to-face’ or in person modalities. An overview of just this literature would itself be a significant undertaking, but for the purposes of our study of research approaches to academic integrity in Ireland, it’s worth noting that findings from a variety of national contexts and disciplinary settings suggest that this assumption of academic integrity breaches being more common to online education is incorrect (e.g., Harris et al. 2020, Burgason et al. 2019).

An important point to frame the attention given to online academic integrity in recent years is the experience of moving to what Hodges et al. (2020) term ‘emergency remote teaching’ during the COVID-19 experience. This event has lent considerable urgency to issues relating to academic integrity, and a plethora of studies and ‘rapid reviews’ have sought to respond to questions raised during the wide range of experiences and COVID-19. Maryon et al. (2022) provide a useful overview of recent examples of this kind of literature. Unfortunately many of these studies seem to have been undertaken without an awareness of or connections to the significant existing literature on academic integrity. For instance, Gamage et al. (2021) note the importance of resourcing and preparation for academic staff, as well as what they term ‘innovative assessment design’ and ‘low stakes’ assessment tasks - suggestions that aren’t hugely divergent from the kinds of recommendations scholars of academic integrity have made in recent years. Another interesting review of research undertaken during the COVID-19 period highlights the need for researchers and health professionals to research the connections between academic integrity and mental health, as the ‘connections have yet to be fully explored and understood’ (Eaton and Turner 2020).

More generally in discussions of academic education, there has been research relating to online assessment, which Holden et al. (2021) explore in their review of the literature in this space. They address this issue across the four 'levels' of the student, the institution, the medium of delivery (what this section of our literature terms 'modality'), and the assessment itself. As with much other research on academic integrity more widely, there is a focus on student motivation, and here reasons for engaging in behaviours which might violate academic integrity in the online setting include external pressures, lack of motivation, and perceived low risk. In terms of motivation, the authors suggest that there is a need for further research in the overlap of student demographics and the modality of online education and assessment. Of most interest to educators and policy stakeholders, however, is the matter of how prevalent academic misconduct is in the online environment, and here they are somewhat more hesitant than others, noting that there are 'mixed findings', as a consequence of which they call for 'further research that examines assessment type, field of study, and student demographics' (2021 p.10).

It can be helpful to consider an example of kind of work being undertaken in this space, however, in order to see the kinds of issues that arise. Kyle Burgason, Ophir Sefiha and Lisa Briggs (2019) take a comparative focus on both 'face-to-face' and online courses and how the students enrolled in these courses understand academic misconduct. The study aimed to compare the prevalence, techniques, and perceptions of what the authors frame as 'cheating' among face-to-face students and a novel group of respondents comprising both online undergraduate students and practicing professionals in the field of criminal justice. The researchers conducted the study in the spring of 2015, so well in advance of the COVID-19 crisis, surveying criminal justice students in both face-to-face and distance learning courses at a mid-sized Southeastern U.S. university. All students at the university, regardless of their learning mode, were expected to follow the Academic Integrity policy, which defined and prohibited cheating, plagiarism, and facilitation. The university also emphasized academic and personal integrity through its 'Community Creed', a kind of honour code posted and distributed throughout campus. The distance learning students tended to be older, as acceptance into the online program required at least one year of full-time employment in a criminal justice-related profession. Additionally, many of these students enrolled in one or two courses per semester, whereas face-to-face students usually took full-time coursework.

The results revealed important distinctions between face-to-face and distance learning students' perceptions and behaviours. For instance, face-to-face students were more aware of cheating behaviours on the part of their peers, particularly as the frequency of cheating accounts by peers increased. Both groups admitted to engaging in actions considered

'cheating', such as looking at notes during an exam, but there was a lack of consensus on what behaviours constituted cheating. Interestingly, distance learning students were more likely to view certain cheating behaviours as more serious violations of academic integrity than face-to-face students. Techniques of cheating were also explored, with both groups using similar strategies, though in person students reported higher incidents of cheating across various activities. Distance learning students were more likely to utilize a second computer during exams, possibly due to limited oversight and the need to access information remotely. To reduce cheating, the study suggests implementing alternative assessment methods, such as writing-based and collaborative assignments, which limit reliance on traditional testing. Instructors should communicate clear expectations regarding academic integrity and consequences for violations. There is a clear difference here, however, between 'online' and 'in person' students and programmes (also discussed by Hart and Morgan 2010) on the one hand, and on the other the increasingly hybrid learning environments that have emerged in the wake of COVID-19.

2.4 International dimension

In a significant review of work on academic misconduct among international students, Ceceilia Parnter (2022) summarises research into the role of culture in understanding this group of students. The role of culture on research related to academic misconduct is explored, highlighting the differences between constructions of the 'East' and 'West'. This paper notes that much research on academic integrity can be understood in the wake of the so-called 'globalization' of higher education and an increase in international student numbers, but that studies in academic integrity research often focus on 'domestic' students, and may not be generalizable; indeed US/European approaches to teaching and learning methods could in fact be exceptional rather than the norm. Here Parnter's literature review of international students and academic integrity identifies a clear 'Western perspective', noting an East/West dichotomy in the literature, and drawing on the work of Ali et al.'s (2021) description of a 'colonial pattern of current research on international misconduct' in the U.S., U.K., Australia, etc. Parnter frames international students as 'at risk' for academic misconduct, however, and critiques the mainstream media's role in sensationalizing academic misconduct may have negative consequences for international students. An initial point is how academic integrity itself is conceptualised, since there can be variation in terms of how phenomena such as collaboration can be conceptualised to include peer collaboration, family assistance, and contract cheating, and how this variation can have implications among international students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Understanding academic expectations in students' home

and host countries is thus essential, which can be viewed in larger terms as a responsibility of HEIs that wish to recruit students from such backgrounds.

Parnther notes that how the literature views culture is seen as influencing interpretations of academic misconduct, Hofstede's "Cultural Dimension Framework" is suggested as one way to explore this (e.g. 'collectivist' or 'individualist' societies), for instance in how certain Asian cultures may in certain instances view synthesis rather than direct reference as disrespectful. Differences between different countries' policies/procedures are relevant and may imply a need for national/regional systems of accountability. Language and communication barriers have also been identified as other significant factors contributing to academic misconduct, since students who face challenges in understanding academic requirements due to syntax, multiple meanings, cultural differences, and tempo may resort to unauthorized assistance, leading to plagiarism. Cultural variations in the concept of plagiarism are evident, with some cultures viewing it as a less serious offence.

Parnther notes that future research and practice might include developing tools to measure academic integrity more effectively, addressing group collaboration and collusion issues, and exploring language-based interventions to prevent plagiarism and communicate policies better. Additionally, there is a need for equity-based interventions to consider implicit bias and divergent cultural traditions in promoting academic integrity among international students. Teaching and learning approaches that integrate cultural perspectives can also play a crucial role in preventing academic misconduct. Parnther stresses the importance of understanding cultural values and norms, without imposing Western ideals on other cultures. Research should consider local contexts and educational systems to address academic misconduct effectively.

A further point worth making in the context of international students is offered by Carmela De Maio and Kathryn Dixon's (2022) paper on thirty years of research into academic integrity in Australasia, where the authors note that despite what they term a 'myopic focus' (p.7) on those from non-English-speaking backgrounds (perhaps due to the influence of media representation as Parnther alluded to), English-speaking students are empirically just as likely to be involved in 'integrity breaches'. The issue here revolves around the kind of specific behaviours (e.g. citation behaviours, text-based practices) which have been given attention.

Greer Murphy's literature review from 2022 drills further into the language dimension of academic integrity. Murphy identifies how the literature describes multilingual students as not being understood or supported, and how their abilities and needs are not engaged with by

academic integrity scholarship. In noting this, 'integrity research' is framed as operating with a distinction between 'declarative knowledge' (knowing that) and 'procedural knowledge' (knowing how) – so international students learning in a setting that requires an additional language, may know that academic integrity is important but may not know how to make sure their work does not slip into misconduct. Often the kind of education students have received in English as an additional language tends to be didactic, rather than the kind of thesis-driven, critical or argumentative writing required in higher education. As such, literacy training may not be sufficient to help students 'follow through on a desire to practice academic honesty and integrity' (p. 78). As a result of this, for some students 'integrity can feel like a game they are destined to lose' (p.78). Taking examples from research on Japanese international students, translation issues were identified as influencing results of questions that sought to understand those students' views of academic integrity. As such, Murphy notes a need to be careful in researching academic integrity with international students, and cautious in interpreting whatever results are generated.

The 'holistic approach' or virtue ethics approach to academic integrity which many scholars of the field advocate for (e.g. Bretag and Green 2014) would also suggest that it is beneficial to consider the international dimension of academic and professional staff also. In their study of the role of 'faculty member', Gottardello and Karabag (2022) give attention to the role academic staff have in encouraging integrity in their students, exploring faculties of economics and management schools in six different countries (one of which was Ireland). Here it was noted that the cultural background of academics clearly influenced their perception of their roles. For instance, in Ireland, Italy, and Sweden, it was the view of academics that their role with respect to academic integrity was to provide guidance specifically in terms of assignment writing. Those three countries, described as the most 'individualistic', and 'lowest power distance countries' (p.539), the role of 'teaching ethical standards' (p.537) was deemed to be highly important by the academics surveyed,. These aspects are brought together in the following quote:

We can think for example that faculty members in Spain and India do not consider that their role is to promote integrity because it would mean taking a responsibility that is not theirs, and so would damage their relationship with superiors who hold power. On the contrary, countries like Sweden, Italy, and Ireland with strong individualism emphasize 'self-sufficiency' which, together with the low power distance, leads to a feeling of egalitarianism since power and authority are decentralized.

The authors explore the interactions between the 'ideal' and 'actual' roles of academics, and specifically what are the implications of the international make up of academic bodies of staff,

and this shows the significance of researching and understanding how academics themselves construct their view of their role.

2.5 Methods of Studying Academic Integrity

There has been a variety of both quantitative and qualitative approaches taken in the literature to understand academic integrity across a range of dimensions. In a review of the literature from 2014, questionnaires or surveys (such as McCabe-ICAI) are found to be just one possible method, alongside interviews, focus group observation, documentary analysis, historical research, case studies, critical reflection, and self-reflections (Macfarlane et al. 2014, pp. 347-350), with questionnaires and documentary analysis 'dominat[ing] the literature' (p. 352). An interesting aspect of this review is that it considers both Chinese and what it terms 'western' scholarship on academic integrity. For the conceptual framing of the analysed papers, many 'combine empirical analysis with some form of conceptual framework often derived from the literature on ethical theory', such as 'utilitarianism, Kantianism, virtue theory and rights theory'. In terms of the Chinese literature contrasted with 'the international literature as a whole', Macfarlane et al. describe it as entailing 'limited empirical work' with more of a reliance on 'the reporting and criticising of ethical "incidents", often calling on professors to improve their moral conduct' (p. 352). The authors identify an issue in the literature as they claim there are obstacles to considering academic integrity due to what the authors describe as a 'post-modern consideration concerning cultural differences that it is either not feasible or inappropriate to seek to identify a set of norms that have universal legitimacy' (p. 352). Instances of where there are such efforts to define norms is rarely research based.

Another challenge identified as holding for researchers in this area relates to the effects of 'social desirability reporting' or SDR, which is the tendency of respondents to give answers or opinions that do not paint themselves in a negative light. The authors suggest this as the reason why questionnaires 'are the dominant methodology used in researching academic integrity since it is easier to control for SDR using a questionnaire than in interviews where the presence of the interviewer is a key factor' (Macfarlane et al. 2014, p. 352)– although no methodology can eliminate SDR entirely. In a study looking at commercial contract cheating exclusively through the methodology of self-report surveys (Curtis et al. 2022), the matter of SDR is again at the forefront. The authors found that 2.46 more students admitted to commercial contract cheating when researchers did not rely on a normal self-report survey. They did this by recruiting 4098 students across 12 institutions in Australia, to be allocated either to a control group completing a normal survey, or a 'Bayesian-Truth-Serum (BTS)' group

where participants were told that a donation would be made to a charity of their choice. Those in the BTS group were told that the donations made on their behalf would be higher the more truthful their answers, with the aim of overcoming SDR. This paper argues that by ‘incentivising truth-telling’ the researchers were able to find that almost two and a half times more participants admitted to submitting ghost-written assignments than those in the control group (1851). While SDR was still in play and not eliminated completely via this methodology, it was at least addressed in an interesting way.

2.6 Using McCabe-ICAI Surveys to Research Academic Integrity

There is a wealth of literature that relies on the McCabe-ICAI surveys themselves (e.g. Hart and Morgan 2010, Bretag et al. 2014, Sattler et al. 2015, Harris et al. 2020), which is not surprising as the surveys were developed as much as a tool for researchers as they were for generating data for HEIs to understand their culture and climate of academic integrity.

Indeed, it has arguably become *the* tool by which researchers seek to understand academic integrity in higher education (Rettinger et al. 2024). It is worthwhile to consider what researchers have managed to do with the data generated by the surveys, as a way of understanding some of its affordances.

Looking to one such paper in some detail, there is the large-scale study by Tracey Bretag and colleagues (Bretag et al. 2014), which elicited 15,304 respondents to the McCabe-ICAI student survey at six Australian HEIs. This study aimed to assess students' awareness of academic integrity, their knowledge of academic integrity policies, and their satisfaction with the information and support they received regarding academic integrity. It also aimed to explore the differences in responses among various student cohorts, including domestic and international students, and postgraduate research students. Key findings related to the awareness of academic integrity, with a majority of student respondents demonstrating a good awareness of academic integrity and knowledge of academic integrity policies at their respective universities. However, a small percentage of respondents had little prior knowledge of academic integrity and needed more targeted support. Overall, students expressed satisfaction with the information and support they received regarding academic integrity, though there was a discrepancy between information provision and support and training, with some students indicating a need for more hands-on and engaging activities related to academic integrity. Only a very small percentage of students (1.3%) had personal experience with the academic integrity disciplinary processes in their institutions. International students reported proportionally more incidents of academic integrity breaches and penalties compared

to domestic students. There was also uncertainty among some students about the fairness of the breach process, suggesting a need for better communication of investigation outcomes. The study highlighted the importance of a holistic approach in communicating and educating students about academic integrity. It calls for universities to align academic integrity policy, practice, and processes, involving all stakeholders, including teaching staff and students, to foster a culture of academic integrity. The authors emphasize that a genuine and holistic commitment to academic integrity is essential to promoting ethical behaviour among students. By understanding students' awareness, satisfaction, and experiences related to academic integrity, the authors argued that higher education institutions can develop targeted strategies to communicate, educate, and support students effectively in upholding academic integrity principles.

Another example of the kind of work undertaken, relying on the McCabe-ICAI surveys is Hart and Morgan's (2010) study of academic integrity relating once again to among students both in online and traditional classroom-based nursing programs. The focus here was on concerns about potential 'cheating' and dishonesty in online education, particularly in nursing programs, and the study compares the self-reported (in the McCabe-ICAI student survey) cheating behaviours of students in both program formats. The results here were that (in line with Burgason et al. 2019) students in the traditional classroom cohort reported higher levels of cheating than students in the online cohort. Collaborative cheating behaviours were more prominent in the traditional classroom setting. In contrast online students demonstrated higher awareness of academic integrity policies compared to their traditional classroom counterparts. This might be attributed to the need for independent information-seeking in the online environment. Here, the study highlighted that the concerns about cheating in online education might not be as significant as previously assumed, but the authors suggested that 'a survey to measure academic integrity specific to the online environment should be developed' (Hart and Morgan 2010, p. 500). This paper illustrates that notwithstanding concerns about SDR, significant findings could still emerge.

Another paper that focused on the online environment more recently is by Laura Harris and colleagues, which looked at self-reported 'cheating' behaviours of students in online courses at a large institution primarily serving adult learners, to compare them with findings from large-scale studies of academic integrity among traditional-age college students conducted by Donald McCabe. The study's objective was to determine if students at the large online university are more likely to engage in cheating than their traditional-age counterparts at residential institutions. The researchers found – again – that students in online courses were no more likely to engage in most forms of cheating than the traditional-age students in

residential institutions. Additionally, the study discovered that students' age inversely correlated with the likelihood of engaging in academic misconduct; older students, such as adult learners, were less likely to engage in misconduct compared to younger students. The methods section describes the survey conducted at the large online university to collect data on academic integrity perceptions and behaviours. While the response rate was low, it still yielded a sizeable sample, making it one of the largest surveys on academic integrity from a single institution, particularly among working adult students in online higher education. Crucially, however, as there is a large body of existing research in this area, this also lent depth to the comparisons which were possible.

A final useful reference in this space is a chapter by David Rettinger and colleagues (2024). Rettinger is the current President of the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI), and this chapter is a detailed overview of the history of the McCabe-ICAI survey and its underlying principles, considering over thirty years of the McCabe-ICAI student surveys to advance various lessons and recommendations for their implementation. For instance, under 'recommendations for collaboration', they note that

'The McCabe survey is a tool for academic integrity professionals everywhere, and it can assist institutions and academic integrity offices in strategic planning. However, no individual or office is an island, and those using the survey results will need to rely on institutional partners to administer the survey.' (Rettinger et al. 2024)

Other institutional partners include offices of institutional research, information technology units, teaching and learning units, and student services. Another important lesson that Rettinger and his ICAI colleagues highlight is that once the survey data has been generated, 'work is just beginning' since '[h]ow the results are used impacts the survey's usefulness for each institution', for instance by considering data in the light of comparator institutions.

2.7 Summary of Literature Review

This brief overview of the literature sought to address the question 'how is academic integrity approached in the literature?' It did so by noting a rich body of scholarship in this space, going back many decades, which informs how academic integrity practitioners and researchers themselves have come to conceptualise the field. It is crucial to be aware of this literature and the 'misconduct' perspective which has emerged, as without this, academic integrity research cannot be properly understood. Indeed the very research tools which this research project considers, the McCabe-ICAI surveys, were constructed with this 'misconduct' perspective in mind. Various aspects of higher education were briefly discussed, such as increasing internationalisation and the diversity of the student body that attends this, as well as a greater

reliance on the online higher education modality, in order to sensitise the research team to the kinds of issues that might arise in the course of interviews.

The question of the possible methods or tools for studying academic integrity in higher education was also touched on, and served to identify some of the specific methodological concerns that might arise in the course of interviews with participants. As well as this, the rich body of scholarship that draws on results of McCabe-ICAI surveys is also significant for the Irish academic integrity community of practice, and should be attended to if the higher education sector in Ireland decides to proceed with deploying these surveys.

3. An Initial Cost-Benefit Analysis

This chapter addresses the second aim of the project, which was to understand how the McCabe-ICAI Academic Integrity Surveys have been used in other institutional settings, and evaluate the costs and benefits of doing so in Ireland. The hope for this aspect of the project was to have some clarity on what the financial and wider resourcing implications would be at the institutional level, if Irish HEIs were to implement the McCabe-ICAI surveys. The guiding question here, then, was 'What does it cost to implement the McCabe-ICAI surveys?'

To this end, a written survey in the form of a series of questions (see the Appendix [below](#)) was circulated via email to current and past users of the surveys (facilitated by McCabe-ICAI, with two responding out of eight contacted). It was initially intended that findings from these emailed surveys could be used for analysis and presented in this report for external consumption, but due to delays with the institutional ethical approval process, this was not possible. Instead, the this analysis fed directly into the design of the interview and focus group schedules, so these responses were still beneficial for the research design of the project's subsequent research stages.

While the project as a whole was designed to maintain as open a perspective as possible, in order to avoid reducing 'costs' and 'benefits' to exclusively quantitative or monetary notions, nevertheless that question of monetary cost is of relevance to any broader attempt to understand the implementation of the McCabe-ICAI surveys to the Irish context. The simple answer here is that, narrowly conceived, the cost per higher education institution is the price of annual of the International Centre for Academic Integrity, namely \$650 per annum for 'institutional membership', and \$600 per annum for 'affiliate membership' (for non-profit organizations and associations).⁴

The former allows for one lead representative to ICAI, and 19 secondary representatives, while the affiliate membership allows for one lead representative and five secondary representatives. Those organisations who wish to join ICAI, must agree to its 'fundamental values' which states: 'My institution shares the six fundamental values of academic integrity (honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage) as defined and described by ICAI and work/s to advance these values through our professional activity'.

⁴ <https://academicintegrity.org/institutional-affiliate-membership-application>

3.1 Semi-structured Interview on Costs and Benefits

In order to explore the question of ‘costs’ understood somewhat more broadly, subsequently, a semi-structured interview was undertaken with a member of the McCabe-ICAI implementation team at an institution (‘University A’) which had recently used the surveys for the first time in their institution. This interview drew on the same questions which had previously been circulated via email (contained in the Appendix [below](#)), addressing costs and issues arising in implementing the surveys. Here the point about membership in ICAI was noted as the initial cost of implementing the surveys in that institution. Beyond this, there was also the matter of ‘incentivization’ for participation in the online surveys, which went toward prizes where participants would be submitted for draws.

The next question in terms of costs was trying identify the number of hours dedicated to meetings related to all issues that had a bearing on the implementation of the surveys. This could be understood in terms of: (a) all meetings which needed to take place between University A and the ICAI, (b) all meetings that needed to take place at the senior management level of University A, (c) all meetings that needed to take place with University A’s academic integrity committee. These meetings addressed matters such as survey design, implementation, analysis, and discussion of results. As our interviewee noted, if the work done on the surveys had taken the shape of ‘billable hours’ the costs could have been considerably higher. As it was, all these meetings were part of the existing role expectations of those involved. Another point here was that as University A decided to modify the questions or items within the McCabe-ICAI surveys, this also added time and costs to the process.

Prior to implementation, there were a number of issues that needed to be addressed. These included getting institutional ethical approval for the McCabe-ICAI surveys. This took some time, and it is worth noting here that in the Irish context there may be some implications relating to GDPR that Irish HEIs must address, which have not previously been a concern for users of these surveys based in e.g. North America. University A also needed to get institutional approval for the ‘incentivization’ approach which they ultimately took.

In terms of the kinds of issues that needed to be addressed in the implementation process, various matters needed to be taken into consideration, such as the optimal time of year to roll out the surveys. The plan had been to roll out the survey in Spring in order to allow for analysis over the summer, which would enable reporting in Autumn. Ultimately that timeline was missed, but it was possible to roll it out the survey in early Autumn, which still left time for some reporting, but not the ‘fuller picture’ which would have been ‘an absolutely complete analysis’.

The plan at University A had been to use the findings from the surveys in an institution-wide 'academic integrity week', and as such, the planning when to implement the survey relates to the use institutions wish to make of the findings.

In terms of the use made of the findings by University A, the initial point that was raised was that there were surveys about academic integrity being sent out to all staff and students was itself significant. This was not just in raising awareness among those who had not considered academic integrity with any great thoughts, but also in signalling a commitment on the part of University A at the institutional level, such that it 'raised awareness of issues of academic integrity, but also raised awareness of the institution's desire to listen and to make informed decisions based on data.' Indeed, within the institution itself, the results of the surveys were interpreted as offering a basis on which decisions could be made in terms of allocation of resources, and the kinds of issues that should be attended to. In this context, it was noted by University A that having other institutions using the surveys could also be useful for purposes of 'benchmarking'. Similarly running the survey over a number of years could also be beneficial in terms of providing 'longitudinal' data on the basis of which comparisons could be made not just across institutions, but across time. University A suggested, however, that for them as an institution, doing 'a full survey every year would be enormous overkill', suggesting even every two years might be too frequent.

Related to the question of frequency, there is also the question of how much time is required to make change and to observe the effects of the changes made: 'because it takes time to make changes on foot of surveys, in other words, you need to leave enough time before *assessing* the impact to actually *make* an impact.' As well as this, another challenge was that the real challenge for an institution is finding the resources to implement changes, and to follow up the changes – 'in a sense, collecting your data is the easy bit. The harder bit is to make sure that you're taking actions on the basis of that data.' Nevertheless, within an institution such as University A, it became easier politically to argue for resources on the basis of the data the surveys generated. At a sectoral level too, however, having such a 'sectorally mandated' instrument would also potentially help a group of institutions, such as Irish HEIs, to argue for a much-needed increase in resources.

4. Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi-structured interviews with institutional and national stakeholders were to be the primary mode of generating data in order to investigate the potential ‘costs and benefits’ (understood in the broadest sense) of using and/or adapting the McCabe-ICAI surveys for Ireland’s higher education sector. The interview schedule design drew on both the surveys and literature review. This stage focused on the Irish context and also helped to identify participants for the focus groups. The interview team consisted of Angeliki Lima, John Walsh, and Andrew Gibson.

The intended sample for the project was to ensure representativeness in terms of (i) academics and policy actors, (ii) in institutional terms, and also (iii) in individual terms of career stage, professional role, and discipline of the academics interviewed. The primary focus was on academic staff (i.e. those involved in teaching and research), though a number of professional and administrative personnel were also interviewed. While a comprehensive sample of policy actors was hoped for, ultimately due to constraints on the side of participants and the research team, ultimately three policy stakeholders were interviewed. It is worth noting, however, that some of the academic participants as part of their professional roles could be regarded as overlapping with the ‘policy stakeholder’ group due to some of their administrative and professional responsibilities.

Table 1: Overview of interviews conducted

Interviewees	No.
Academics	18
Professional/Administrative	3
National system-wide actors	3
<i>Total interviews</i>	24

In institutional terms, there was range of types of higher education institutions represented, namely universities, technological universities, private institutions (i.e. non-HEA funded), and one college of education. These were also geographically representative, being drawn from Leinster, Munster, and Connacht.

Of the N=18 academic interviewees, 12 were from broadly AHSS disciplines, and 6 from STEM. In terms of career stage, 6 were in leadership roles (e.g. Dean), 5 had Department- or School-level leadership roles, and 7 were in course or module-coordinator roles. It was

expected that these career stages would roughly map on to the titles of professor, associate professor, and assistant professor, which was broadly the case.

4.1 Understandings of Academic Integrity

A central part of this project was to elicit how academic integrity is understood and constructed across a range of institutions. Specific questions to this end sought to identify how interviewees framed academic integrity, and what resources they relied on in defining how they understood this concept. It could be as restricted and specific as 'trying to ensure that students don't cheat' (INT03), or in 'that narrow sense to be very closely related to assessment' (INT04). Plagiarism was a common concern, as were other aspects of problematic behaviours. One interviewee reflected on this to note that 'it's always a more negative note, the misconduct is what matters rather than the learning' (INT24). Others noted the existence of a 'narrow procedural definition' in order to put it into conversation with a 'broader sense' of 'honesty [...] students taking responsibility for the work they submit for assessment'; while that appears to keep the discussion in the relatively narrow space of cheating and assessment,

'Academic misconduct breeds a kind of mistrust in a university campus. If it's prevalent it means that teaching staff members don't trust students and in turn, if students feel that mistrust is there, they in turn don't trust academic teaching staff members. So that really results in this unpleasant environment of surveillance, where one group is set against another, where the opposite should be the case. Academic staff members and learners should be working together for each others' mutual benefit.' (INT04)

Also noteworthy is that some interviewees also questioned what they perceived as the general perception of academic integrity as relating more or less exclusively to students, whereas it could equally be a matter of: 'one's own contribution, whether it be researcher outputs, whatever materials is produced is your own and clearly identified as such, and that it's also clearly referenced where your materials are coming from and where the ideas are coming from' (INT23). Another interviewee framed it as 'a certain set of values that you bring to your teaching and your research, and that you perform your various academic roles with reference to those values' (INT21). Another interviewee noted that their understanding came to be developed as part of their job, or rather jobs, as they had moved institution multiple times. Each move involved a staff induction session or training specifically that included aspects of academic integrity, from the perspective of the individual academic as researcher: 'how you report your own work using other sources, how you collected your data as well, ethics in the

data collection and how to ethically collect, analyse, manage and store data' (INT06). For that interviewee, research ethics was relevant to how they approach and think about academic integrity, 'expanding' and 'enhancing' that understanding. Such a vision of general involvement in academic integrity (which will be returned to [below](#) in the discussion around responsibility) allows for a rather more expansive definition, which does not refer only to students, but includes all those in higher education:

'Academic integrity is a commitment to adhere to principles of ethical and responsible behaviour in everything that we do. To give credit for work that has been done to not claim credit for work that is not being done, to follow through on commitments that we make through our work. It really is around adhering to the core principles of ethically responsible behaviour in everything that we do.' (INT22)

Another way of framing academic integrity saw some interviewees refer to their own educational experiences. This could go back to early years, as one policy stakeholder made reference to their experiences in the school setting: 'it was important to me that if I learned something, if I was demonstrating my learning of something, that it was genuinely my own work' (INT08). Another interviewee used their own experience in order to illustrate how academic integrity is not a straightforward matter, however, even for Irish students going from second level to third level:

'my initial introduction to the world of plagiarism was as a first year undergraduate and we were all terrified. I remember that one offending student received a zero, which was so harsh and really affected his grade. This is somebody who probably would have had a first in his degree and came out with II.1, and did go on to become an academic, so it mattered to him what his grade was going to be. I think it's very difficult because when we're in secondary school, certainly in my case, I memorised reams and reams of textbooks and produced in my exams, reams and reams of textbooks. Word for word, literally word for word, then you move from that into first year of university. And suddenly that's not what you do anymore. But nobody educates you how? Well, how do I do the new thing? I have absolutely zero practise of writing sentences. Everything I do has been regurgitated. (INT21)

This lengthy quote is offered as it shows how that interviewee contextualised academic integrity with reference to the usually straight-forward category of plagiarism, to show how the Irish Leaving Cert mode of 'regurgitating' content is problematic as soon as one enters higher education.

Academic integrity policy (which will be returned to [below](#)) was for many participants central to how they had developed their understanding of academic integrity. This could have

emerged in the course of taking on a professional role within an institution where they had responsibility for this. Prior to such engagement, awareness could be 'limited to the regulation around academic misconduct, which didn't even mention the word integrity really, except to say that it was important to have' (INT22). Upon becoming involved in the academic integrity community in their institution, this in some cases led to participants engaging with the academic integrity community nationally, through QQI or NAIN, as such individuals became part of the policy development through this involvement (and NAIN's lexicon and guidelines were noted by a number of interviewees as an important source of their understanding of this area). Having a policy allowed some individuals to make clear reference to academic integrity as understood and agreed upon in the policy, in order to define what is and what is not academic integrity:

'We make a distinction here between poor academic practice and academic integrity. The two, of course, aren't the same. You can have poor academic practice whereby you reproduce other people's material, but appropriately cited, which technically is not plagiarism. But on the other hand, you can produce similar material without writing it, which *would* be plagiarism so and making sure they understand that distinction between poor academic practise and plagiarism, is quite important. And we do that from.' (INT17)

As this quotation illustrates, having a policy to refer to may mean that how academic integrity is understood could potentially be reduced to a specific issue (the phenomenon of plagiarism in this case), where a wider range of issues can be gathered under such a heading.

Others found an analogy with other areas based on their own experience and expertise in order to create their understanding. For instance, one interviewee, at a senior level in their institution, who had worked previously in industry, specifically the field of pharmaceuticals, made reference to 'quality assurance' and 'auditing in accounting' (INT01). For that interviewee, there were clear parallels between the kinds of requirements necessary in the highly regulated environment of pharmaceuticals, and 'monitoring student performance within our awards' at the senior management level. Another interviewee also referred to the notion of 'standards by which people in academia hope to hold themselves, or to hold their systems to in order to make sure what we're in compliance with ethics and best practice' (INT07).

Others noted that an awareness of academic integrity was part of their ongoing development as an academic, and sensitisation to norms in their own discipline as they had to talk to students about requirements for assignments and so on. One interviewee explained it as an 'understanding that has come through context – I can't remember a time when somebody would have explained it to me directly' (INT07). This self-defined and generated sense of

academic integrity could also be discipline-specific, however. One interviewee noted their PhD thesis in philosophy had considered integrity as a concept, but noted that it's a 'whole can of worms', and that interrogating integrity as it relates to virtue 'sounds bonkers, and no one really wants to hear that within an academic integrity community, but I think it's quite important' (INT02).

This leads to the point about how what is stated in an institutional policy may lead to framing academic integrity in specific ways, where it might be more accurate to note how academic integrity overlaps with a range of issues. One participant explained their own questioning on this issue thus:

'I think partly because it's easy to have very straightforward policies about [plagiarism], whereas other aspects of academic integrity can be more difficult to pin down or there's aspects that may fall under academic integrity and may fall under general 'good behaviour'. I'm not 100% sure sometimes whether when we're talking about academic integrity that would include things like having appropriate and respectful relationships with your colleagues and with students. But then I think sometimes the lines can be blurred between academic integrity policies and more general policies.' (INT07)

4.2 Academic Integrity Issues and Responses

As might be expected, a wide range of issues as they relate to academic integrity were discussed, primarily in terms of the 'cases' that interviewees themselves had encountered. A question here is to what extent the examples being given are broadly 'representative' of the kinds of issues which arise, or to what extent they are in some way striking, 'weird and wonderful' (INT22) as one interviewee put it. As one way of framing this point, one interviewee stated that in terms of 'breaches' of the academic integrity policy, students bringing phones into exams remained the primary reason specific cases were brought through the academic integrity process in their institution. As such, the examples outlined here might fall to either extreme of that continuum, from relatively common, to more rare. Another aspect here is the kind of courses academics might teach, and the class sizes, which means at the individual academic level, there will be some variation, whereby larger courses might imply the responsible academics encounter more instances of academic misconduct. Even here, however, one academic contextualised this as still only being a 'small percentage' (INT02) of a class. A final point here would be that depending on the role an individual in a HEI has with respect to academic integrity, they will be exposed to a variety of issues, such that those with institutional responsibility will encounter more 'severe' examples, since the academic integrity

processes and policies dictate that cases not requiring escalation' can be handled at the School, discipline, or 'unit' level.

Disciplinary differences were identified, so that certain kinds of breaches of academic integrity were more common to some areas compared to others. This could be a consequence of the kinds of assessments being used, and one interviewee based in a Business School noted that 'the nature of the discipline is more akin to training than, say, exploration within arts and science, and as a result of that you do tend to get potentially more breaches of academic integrity' (INT02). The disciplinary aspect was also highlighted by a policymaker as having a bearing on this issue as it relates to the extent to which certain disciplines or courses have internationalised, and the kinds of issues that arise there.

Perhaps the most common way to categorise the examples which arose in the course of interviews would be the kind of response that alleged breaches of academic integrity might provoke were they to become known. As such, another continuum would be the 'severity' of the alleged instance of academic misconduct, from minor to more serious. Instances of relative minor cases which might arise could be 'a sentence here and there written similarly to the way somebody else wrote a sentence' (INT01), which is the kind of borderline practice that might not be regarded as 'plagiarism'. Beyond this are obvious instances of plagiarism in terms of 'cut and paste' (INT05), which this interviewee further noted arose as an issue with the advent of the internet as a 'common' practice, and one which was shared by 'both academics and students', and so is a clear example of an academic integrity issue for higher education as a whole, and not just students. Language here could be framing issues in terms of 'petty stuff' (INT02).

ChatGPT as a representative of generative A.I. more widely came in for discussion, and with higher education in a 'transitional moment' (INT15), and a lack of clarity on what is to be done, but with a variety of possible uses being made of this family of tools. The tension here was between the positive potential of generative A.I. and the possibility of misuse: 'Because you want to be encouraging learners and also staff within institutions to learn how to use AI, but what's an ethical use of it? When is it permitted and is it not permitted, when is its use cheating and when is it not?' (INT08). As such the question could be one of 'inappropriate' (INT14) use of tools like ChatGPT, rather than a binary. Another interviewee made analogy here with another technology: 'It's a bit like social media. When it started first there were very few guidelines or parameters to control it. Once guidelines and legislation and parameters are established, I think it might be more manageable and acceptable. So we're at a turning point at the moment' (INT13). There is also the issue of how to know whether something is indeed

an example of text from ChatGPT, as it can be ‘almost impossible to prove the use of these services, So what we focus on is, well, can the student prove that this is their own work? And can they prove the process of developing this this response to the assignment?’ (INT14). More broadly, other tools such as Grammarly and Wordtune, and the integration of generative A.I. into Word and Powerpoint makes the question of academic integrity much less ‘straightforward and simple’ (INT05) than five years ago.

The question of ‘detection’ also came up for discussion, in the context of one interviewee noting that they were aware of the phenomenon of ‘contract cheating’ but had not encountered it themselves. They then followed up by this to say ‘I’ve never identified a person engaged in contract cheating, maybe they have and I don’t know, but I’ve never *detected* or spoken to a person about contract cheating – so I might be a bit naïve at the moment’ (INT05). Another example offered was where a student had apparently pasted materials into an assignment, but it was not possible to identify the actual source text, but was only identified because there was a mismatch between the content areas. This point about detection also adverts to the fact that institutions and academics rely on specific detection tools (e.g. *TurnItIn*⁵), which are themselves not foolproof and have limitations. One interviewee from the professional support side of his institution also shared an opinion that in their view ‘lecturers are not reporting (issues) because they’re not sure themselves [...] it may be a case that people don’t want to be caught out by what they don’t know’ (INT10). As a consequence of this, the interviewee suggested that ‘only very, very rare instances I’ve come across since I’ve taken up this role in where lecturers would have gone to the trouble of actually looking at where the essay came from or how that particular piece of text was put together’ (INT10). This shows, then, how entangled questions such as ‘detecting’ examples of breaches may be.

One point raised in the course of interviews was the extent to which it is possible to ascertain the intent behind actions or behaviour leading to academic integrity issues, if indeed this is possible. From the perspective of an academic teaching a course it may look ‘wilful’ (INT02). Another interviewee elaborated:

‘Sometimes it’s sometimes you don’t worry too much about it, or you talk to the student and say, “look, this, this isn’t doing much for your writing”. But other times it’s clearly unacceptable or cynical, and you have to engage in disciplinary processes.’ (INT05)

Malicious intent did not arise as a general suspicion however. The wider pressures being faced by students were suggested as being ‘far more likely’ to be the reason: ‘they’re under huge pressure with their mental health, financial difficulties, caring responsibilities, they’re trying to

⁵ <https://www.turnitin.com/>

get through their bloody course and they just made a bad decision under huge stress' (INT21). Another interviewee explained their view of the issue in similar terms, but framing as a wider societal transformation, and the need for a responsible approach to academic integrity as a sector, with respect to:

'the rising diversity in our system and what that actually means. If we want a higher education system that represents the diversity of the Irish population, then we have to realize that that means that there's incredible pressures on these kind of new learners coming into the system that weren't there before. (INT20)

As another interviewee noted, this may be due to education that students have as it relates to norms and requirements at third level, and perhaps third level in Ireland specifically:

'probably the kindest way to say is in most cases it tends to be with new students and a lack of understanding rather than a deliberate attempt to mislead or misconduct, in terms of how stuff will be referenced, what is your own work, what and how you can draw and others work. A lot of it simply is a misunderstanding of the discipline.' (INT23)

This framing in terms of 'new' may mean those new to higher education (i.e. making the transition as school leavers, or entering higher education later in life as adults), new to a discipline, new to graduate or higher education, but also finally new to higher education in Ireland as international students. Here most clearly academic integrity becomes an educational or pedagogical matter.

This international student dimension was discussed explicitly by another interviewee, which allowed for some consideration of just what is the issue under discussion. One interviewee reframed the point about how issues arise in terms of 'confidence':

So a simple example is international students who don't trust their English. Good students, hard working, but lack confidence in their English and therefore maybe copy an entire passage and put it in, and that can happen again. Then *TurnItIn* shows it up and you don't know what the motivations behind it are. (INT09)

There is a flattening of context that comes with the reliance on detection software, which will never be able to explain the reasons behind a possible 'breach' of academic integrity. It also maps on to some of the discussion in the literature about how academic integrity needs to be understood in different ways depending on the linguistic context and background of those involved. Here too there are issues of assessment design and the responsibility of academics and institutions to draw on the research as to what kinds of assessment are 'vulnerable to plagiarism – whether its intentional or otherwise' (INT14). As another interviewee noted, there's a wider question about how much money institutions make from international students, with increased class sizes and increased fees:

‘the outrageous fees that are charged by the university equates sometimes to a family’s entire salary for the year. So some of them are really strapped financially and they have one year in which to excel and get the highest mark they can get [...] the notion of academic integrity to them seems very idealistic and to some extent hypocritical because we don’t provide I don’t provide the resources to them that their fees warrant.’ (INT15)

A way of gathering together some of the above issues is in the nature of the response taken by an academic. One interviewee expressed it thus:

‘90% of the times I’ve stumbled across as academic integrity [issues] it’s been something that I’ve just dealt with. You either dock them a few percent, you get them to write another essay, or you get them to redo an assignment. In some instances you’ll fail them, but it will usually only have been one particular assignment. It’s rare that things have been elevated.’ (INT02)

That things are to be moved to the next level follows a common practice across interviewees and institutions, that of ‘triaging’ (INT10) at the individual academic level, and/or the school level, and then moving up the line from there. As a possible response to this question of knowledge of whether something counted as an issue, however, another interviewee noted that in their institution, where there was a question mark over whether something counted as an academic integrity issue, colleagues could submit their question to a Microsoft Forms document, which created a kind of ‘register’ of issues being encountered for that institution. This might prove an important potential resource institutionally, without requiring that knowledge of such issues only arises when a case is being ‘escalated’ through academic integrity policy processes.

Finally, here, it is also worth highlighting that the notion of ‘due process and the presumption of innocence until proven otherwise’ (INT10) was highlighted as a principle which had to be maintained throughout all discussions of such issues. This is the policy or legalistic equivalent of the pedagogical responsibility to educate students about disciplinary, institutional, and academic norms, as well as ensuring assessments are appropriate and responsive to the shifting contexts in Irish higher education.

4.3 Responsibility and Support - Existing Resources and Policy

As a general point about responsibility, it was common among interviewees to suggest that everyone in higher education institutions have a responsibility, from academics directly

involved in teaching, to staff in academic support. This could be a problem, however, since while 'the easy answer is everybody has responsibility for it, which usually means nobody has responsibility. If everybody has responsibility, nobody in particular has responsibility' (INT05). One interviewee framed the issue instead as a 'division of labour':

'The student ultimately has responsibility for their own behaviour. The academic or the lecturer has responsibility for the content of the module, the assessment of the module. I think that's where most of it lives, it's between the teacher and student. Then I do think that the institution does have a role within the division of labour, but it is more abstract and it's kind of trying to delineate [between this and that]' (INT02)

Another interviewee drew on their disciplinary background, to explore the question in some depth:

'philosophically speaking, from my perspective, responsibility is something that is a whole community thing. You know that everyone has their rights within the community and everyone therefore has responsibilities within the community. But obviously a lecturer in a classroom has a greater responsibility than the students within their classroom because the lecturer has more power in that situation. And then the same is true for managers or more senior members of staff. And then even within the students, there are students who might be more senior students or might have specific roles of responsibilities. So if there's student demonstrator or something, they have more responsibility.'

They concluded that recognising these differences allows one to argue for a 'more devolved perspective of responsibility [which] is more useful and more truthful in some ways' (INT07). Another interviewee suggested that what is required is some clarity conceptually on whether responsibility for academic integrity is a matter of getting students to 'subscribe to a set of norms that we ourselves aren't so clear on' or whether it's an 'interpersonally calibrated set of principles that are agreed on – but I think that takes time, it takes effort, it takes real thought conceptually' (INT12). A more focused response from one senior member of their institution, however, related responsibility to the disciplinary aspect, since for them their 'starting point is always the School. Because of the discipline variations I need to understand at the School level what's the core issue here' (INT22).

One interviewee from the professional and support side of his institution personalised the question of responsibility in terms of their own role:

'I meet colleagues around the university since taking this job, and they say "oh, you're responsible for all of this." I always think, well no, it's not solely my responsibility. I have a managerial role effectively and an investigative role to some extent. But the responsibility is everyone's in an academic community. That goes back to this idea

that academic integrity is a really fundamental value of academia and of any university, and so everyone should know about it, be aware of it and know how to recognise breaches of it. That means both students and teaching staff as well.’ (INT04)

One interviewee pushed the question of institutional responsibility further, to question what more institutions might be able to do more broadly to support students by ensuring a supportive learning environment.

‘Even something like accommodation. Should universities be making student accommodation available at a price that students can afford so they don’t have to spend 40 hours a week working in a job which means that they can spend more time studying, which means they’re less likely to buy something off the Internet when they’re under pressure.’ (INT05)

In terms of where academics go for support, there was variation depending on the institutional setting. Specific academic integrity policies were highlighted as a starting point for processes of responding to breaches of academic integrity. Across the board a kind of graduated response was common among participants, depending on the context of the case of academic misconduct encountered. This might be in terms of a ‘tariff system’ (INT10) for issues, allowing for distinguishing ‘minor offenses up to the very grave offenses and looking at a scaled approach to dealing with these’ (INT08). This also ensured that academic misconduct is being *not* dealt with exclusively in terms of disciplinary procedures. So an individual academic might deal with it themselves initially, where as one academic framed it, is ‘something fairly straightforward and I don’t feel personally threatened or anxious about dealing with it’ (INT07). Moving from this, then, they might discuss issues with colleagues and peers more informally. When it was regarded as being necessary to move things beyond this, a case of academic misconduct might be escalated when an issue is more complicated. That process could be understood as moving from ‘informal’ to ‘formal’ processes (INT11). In such circumstances, it might be ‘beyond what the School can deal with – something that could lead to more severe consequences’ (INT23).

A variety of possible contact points for support with academic integrity issues were identified, such as Heads of Schools, teaching and learning committees, research committees, or chairs of these committees within Schools. At the higher institutional levels, Registrar’s offices were consistently identified as important. Some institutions had an ‘academic integrity advisor’ across an institution, as well as communities of practice, which in one HEI involves ‘about 30 members of the community across all programmes, but also our digital learning and design team, programme directors, heads of department, the library, and so on’ (INT14). Specific centres for academic practice or teaching and learning were another possible source of

information and clarity in terms of the appropriate response. It is also noteworthy that professional and administrative colleagues were highlighted as being significant (e.g. faculty managers, faculty executive teams, exams office, among others). While academic integrity could be understood as a shared responsibility across the board, it was noted that 'it would be a statement if the institution also had somebody who was in charge of academic integrity, as a kind of 'academic integrity ombudsman' (INT22).

More broadly, the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN)'s work in terms of developing guidelines was highlighted, as well as also their role in arranging a webinar series. Other resources were identified, however, specifically in terms of the scholarship of academic integrity, and reference was made particularly to scholars such as Phillip Dawson (Deakin University), Cath Ellis (University of New South Wales), Kane Murdoch (Macquarie University), all of whom have contributed to QQI events. This highlights that for academics, scholarship and peer reviewed research is also a highly regarded and respected source of information and guidance.

4.3.1 Academic Integrity Policy

As policies for academic integrity were a focus of this project, participants were asked about these, as has been set out, in response to a variety of factors, which arose in the course of interviews, for example the advent of ChatGPT, which one interviewee described as having 'exploded across the sector' (INT11). COVID-19 in 2020 was also highlighted as a relevant event, which 'brought an issue that was festering into the light' (INT15). Prior to this, however, there were policies that related to academic integrity, although these were largely focused on the specific issue of plagiarism: 'There have always been policies about plagiarism and cheating and students are reminded of those policies at the start of term and before exams. (INT03). There had been no great policy development up until recently, however, and the language of 'plagiarism' was dominant in such policies. The change or 'harmonising' of language was identified as being able to encompass 'quite familiar breaches of academic integrity like plagiarism, contract cheating, to more recently familiar forms like using generative AI, to ones that are less familiar, such as falsification of data in ideas, fabrication, things like this' (INT04). As another participant framed it, their institutional policy is 'deliberately not confrontational, deliberately not adversarial [...] the environment is intended to be a more collegial and supportive one' (INT09).

In terms of how policies were developed, this was framed in terms of institutional college structures, with academics being involved through their roles as Deans, or on Faculty committees, University-level councils, and so on. This was often in terms of commenting on

drafts of policies. More widely, the activities of NAIN and QQI were identified, in terms of guidelines, but a need for further developing these was highlighted, since they were described by one interviewee as 'fairly skeletal' and so have to be made 'more institutionally specific' (INT02). Higher level policies (for example at the European Union level) were alluded to as not useful at a practical level in terms of 'immediate application but rather for 'the overall context' (INT14).

In considering recent policy development, there's the matter of how such policies are perceived by academics. A degree of flexibility was noted as being desirable, specifically as this relates to the academic setting: 'one of the things I always say about education is that you can't always be black and white just because you have it written in that policy, there has to be some flexibility within that policy to adhere to the spirit of the policy, a flexibility to deal with unique circumstances.' (INT01). Indeed, some academics preferred to avoid getting involved with academic integrity processes, in order to

'sort these things out locally and keep away from the university policy [...] you just deal with the issues locally, you deal with them far away from policy because they're not serious, it's just human fallibility, we make silly decisions sometimes. I don't see the need to haul someone over the coals, I don't see who would learn from that' (INT21).

This suggests a perception of policies that might not reflect the content of the policies which have in fact been rolled out. Others noted explicitly that their policies did allow for 'more redemptive approaches [...] not just punishing, but giving learners the opportunity to redeem themselves' (INT08).

This does, however, point towards some vagueness in terms of what resources or policies were in existence, for instance one respondent noted that 'there are probably handbooks and policy documents that I would double check' (INT07). Another, not involved in academic integrity policies noted that: 'I think we probably have a school plagiarism policy. It's probably on the mysterious school intranet. But no, I am not *au fait* with the details of the plagiarism policy, and no doubt [the university] have a much more detailed version and I am not *au fait* with it' (INT21). Another stated more starkly that 'the policies are widely available, but let's be fair, probably widely ignored' (INT09). Elsewhere, knowledge of the policies and resources was linked by an interviewee to the prominence of their role in their institution, and that prior to having a leadership responsibility for this area, their 'awareness would have been really limited' (INT22).

Another issue in establishing familiarity with policies was related to institutional change, as recent mergers of institutions in the last decade had the potential to lead to some confusion

about where to go for clarity. That aspect of structural change meant that while there was awareness of the existence of a responsible ‘academic integrity person’ who might also be working on a policy, the specific content was not yet public to all, thus leaving academic integrity ‘in limbo’ (INT05). Others noted that there might be training available in terms of academic integrity, ‘that I haven’t completed and it’s still pending in my inbox just because I have to prioritise other things’ (INT06), which puts academic integrity policies and training into perspective for some as just one issue among a range of professional demands in an increasingly intensified academic working environment.

Specific activities were highlighted as a way bridge the gap between policies and what academics themselves do. Monthly lunchtime sessions were one route to communicating recent developments in the space among colleagues, but also including students. Such activities were important to combat what one interviewee termed ‘misinformation’ (INT11) that can result from colleagues discussing academic integrity issues amongst themselves. A number of interviewees had a role as ‘academic integrity advisor’, whose role was to communicate the content of policies to colleagues in their school or department.

4.4 Views on the McCabe-ICAI Surveys

A primary focus of this project was the question of the McCabe-ICAI surveys. It’s worth noting that there are two surveys, one of students and another of academics. Generally respondents gave their views on the student surveys, but some findings of the staff survey are separated out [below](#). The first topic in this part of the interviews related to what participants thought the surveys disclose.

One set of responses was that the McCabe-ICAI surveys could provide ‘an overall picture’ (INT19). This could take the form of the ‘what the culture actually is around academic integrity in an institution’ (INT18). This could be considered in terms of ‘a snapshot of what is the current attitude or opinion towards a particular thing at a particular time’ (INT13), a ‘high-definition snapshot’ (INT02), or a ‘clear picture of an area that [is informed currently] by anecdotal evidence’ (INT04). Surveys such as these were also described by another interviewee as providing a ‘snapshot’, but this was then compared to other approaches, such as hour-long interviews, which could elicit ‘a completely unmanageable amount of information, hundreds of thousands of hours of detailed transcripts’ (INT07), which makes surveys a ‘really valuable’ way to generate data ‘without massive teams of researchers’ (INT20). The specific benefit of Irish data in this space (in the context of a lot of research from e.g. Australia) was also

identified. It was also noted as being beneficial in terms of developing student awareness 'and the importance of complying with regulations that are in place in any HEI' (INT01). Further benefits arose from one interviewee who noted that there was a need for data with more specificity or granularity than that at the aggregated, institutional level:

'I know that every module I teach, there's problems, right? Those problems could be one of the things that we don't have a sense of at a school level, at a subject level. What would be the extent of those problems across the school at postgraduate versus undergraduate, whether there are certain types of modules where this this is problematic more than others.' (INT15)

When participants were asked about what they might be interested in from the McCabe-ICAI surveys, an interviewee from the professional or support side of their institution raised the point about disciplinary norms:

'I'm interested to hear about the different disciplinary norms with respect to academic integrity. So what does a student in disciplines that are very different to my own, a student in biochemistry or a student in podiatry or mathematics, what they hear from their lecturers about what constitutes good academic conduct and poor academic conduct? Beyond that, I think that certain academic areas themselves, even beyond just the student-lecturer relationship, have different dispositions towards academic integrity. [...] I think it comes from disciplinary norms, the way that certain uh disciplines view the relationship of a person's research to all of those that that came before, researchers that came that came before. Different citation practices, different ways of acknowledging academic labour. I think that's fundamental.' (INT04)

Another academic framed this point in terms of 'different research traditions, methods, and disciplinary boundaries' (INT06). This aspect also arose with respect to the 'challenges' to academic integrity, which one Head of School suggested were 'very specific to disciplines, and in talking to colleagues around [institution] about this issue and about how they see best to deal with it, it's very clear that the different disciplines have got very different views on how best to approach it' (INT23).

When offering an evaluation of the benefits of the surveys, there was some equivocation however. One participant who had in-depth knowledge of the McCabe-ICAI survey of students responded that 'it has good things and it has bad things' (INT22). Likewise, another noted that 'the approach of using a kind of large scale methodology, like any methodology, there's pros and cons. The really good thing is that you can get big, large-scale quantities' (INT20). Another noted that 'as to whether that's going to give you a God's eye view of student conduct and/or misconduct, I'm not entirely sure that's what it's going to do' (INT02).

The specific implications of the Irish context, and where the surveys have been used previously come in for discussion, as one interviewee noted:

'I think it's interesting that it hasn't been used in Europe much, and I can understand why. I mean obviously the way education is structured in the US, Canada and Australia is a bit different. It's much more sort of a modular system where people have majors and minors and they can choose their academic pathway more. But it's a different structure with credits and all those sorts of things, so obviously to bring that survey into the European or the Irish context, the language and the way it talks about the university is very different.' (INT05)

A policy stakeholder who had looked at the structure of the surveys observed that

'the language didn't strike me as being alien to an Irish academic context, but obviously need to be some tailoring of some of the questions around. the terminology being used for different years of study or different levels of study, or different types of institutions [...] At no point did I say "this wouldn't work in Ireland".' (INT03)

Another interviewee noted that what had been the Irish Survey of Student Engagement⁶ was an added bonus and gave the academic integrity surveys 'good context' (INT20), perhaps for an Irish comparative element. More broadly, another interviewee noted that the McCabe-ICAI surveys also allowed for international comparisons: 'So if we were say "look Australia have adopted this approach" or "America has adopted this and this approach" and we can use that as kind of a barometer, we'll presumably get different results or maybe similar ones' (INT02).

In terms of rolling out the surveys in Ireland, one interviewee suggested that it would be desirable to reduce the content of the surveys:

'by about 50% in the hope that we would get reasonable information, but obviously its value to ICAI is the extent to which the data you provide allows a comparison across institutions so you can start to see patterns and if you make enormous changes like that, you lose that functionality'. (INT22)

This shows that there are some tensions in terms of there being a number of audiences for the surveys, namely between institutions who want to use the surveys to discover something about academic integrity in their own institutions (for whom brevity might ensure greater student engagement), and researchers such as ICAI who draw on different HEIs' surveys in

⁶ <https://studentsurvey.ie/> The survey, formerly referred to as ISSE, is paused for 2024 in order to conduct a review and redesign of the survey. The most recent ISSE did also include a question relating to academic integrity however.

order to research academic integrity as a general phenomenon (for whom completion and comparability across institutions is a concern). One respondent went in the opposite direction to suggestions of cutting the survey, however, and suggested that the student survey should be regular, 'twice a year at a minimum, at the start of the academic year and at the end of the academic year, just to get a sense' (INT13), though this participant noted they came from a 'quantitative' background and saw the benefit of regular surveys.

In terms of how the surveys could be used, a clear use which mapped on to the intent behind ICAI's design of these surveys, was to generate data that might provide 'benchmarks or comparatives' (INT03). In this sense, for one academic developer in the academic integrity space, they noted that it would be 'very helpful for me and for people in my position, and universities who are getting more serious about dealing with academic integrity [...] to design more targeted communication activities to students' (INT04). Similarly, another respondent suggested the surveys' use to 'establish benchmarks, run a campaign afterwards, and see what happens the next year' (INT09). More broadly, the surveys were considered as being useful for 'starting conversations or identifying very obvious problems' (INT07). Other views of the institutional use was seen by a member of administrative or professional staff as providing 'a better picture so that we can develop better tools' and as a 'catalyst for developing approaches' (INT02), and by another as folding in with their processes of 'programmatic review' (INT11), or 'annual quality reports' (INT18).

One respondent framed using the results in terms of answering the question of 'where you want to go' or 'what is the ideal institution that has the maximum possible academic integrity' (INT06), but that this would differ by institution. A specific use here could be to elicit student perception and the academic or faculty view, providing 'some information on how to bridge that divide a little bit' (INT18). Even in the context where there is what a participant described as a 'holistic' approach to academic integrity in their institution, there would be benefits to an approach which was 'driven by data' (INT15). One academic interviewee not involved in academic integrity from a research or administrative perspective, however, suggested that students themselves would find even the questions of the survey along with reflecting on some of the specific items 'enlightening' (INT21) – a benefit to students as individuals which was less common among those working in academic integrity. It was also noted that the surveys would be a part of being more 'transparency' within institutions, including students in the conversation. It was also suggested that data from surveys on students would be important in the recent context of responding or reacting to COVID, ChatGPT, and so on:

'there's a real danger of a knee jerk reaction where we say, "well, we have to all go back to everyone doing exams." Then we'll take all of the innovative stuff we've done

with continuous assessment over the last 10 years, and we forget about that. We'll just imprison [students] for three hours and go back to the dinosaurs, to the Stone Age.' (INT22)

Finally, the sectoral level also emerged as a potential use-case for the surveys, with a policy stakeholder noting that 'agencies can look at what we're doing and how we might need to support institutions and their constituents to support the members of those communities' (INT08). This was also discussed by another policy stakeholder who suggested that while there is a lot of international research relating to academic misconduct internationally, there's a relative dearth in Ireland, notwithstanding the work of NAIN in this space:

I think it would be important for us to have a national conversation about what [academic integrity issues] mean for the integrity of the awards that we're giving out, the validity of the assessment modes' (INT20).

4.4.1 Observations on the McCabe-ICAI faculty survey

With specific reference to the 'faculty' survey, one participant noted simply that it would be 'interesting to get a sense of how do my colleagues feel, what are their overall attitudes about [academic integrity]' (INT13). In discussing the survey for academic staff or 'faculty', another respondent identified a specific benefit in terms of individual professional development, when starting as an assistant professor or lecturer:

When you start off, it might be interesting to get just a sense of their understanding for starters. So, Question 11, "what particular safeguards, if any, do you employ to encourage integrity and reduce cheating in your courses?" You could easily frame that as "What would you employ? What would you do?" So there's ideas and options there for people. They'll read these, discuss their views, remind students and so on. I think they'll actually read those and go "I never thought of that".' (INT16)

Another noted a similar point about being a 'junior member of staff', and comparing experiences to see whether they are 'typical of other staff members in the institution' (INT07). Such an approach to the staff survey could potentially be integrated into existing structures of professional development. Staff responses could then be used at various levels (faculty, department) to gauge faculty understanding of academic integrity as a phenomenon, and knowledge of policies. It was also suggested that data from the surveys would be beneficial for training sessions with staff more generally, 'to have that kind of statistical piece behind it and to be able to refer to recent research' (INT14).

In terms of issues with the faculty survey, one Head of School who is not involved in the academic integrity space more generally suggested that academic staff might struggle with aspects of the questionnaire, identifying Question 5⁷ for instance, where the survey seeks to elicit knowledge of institutional policies, and as such there may be ‘an assumption there of a level of knowledge’ (INT14) which is in fact absent. Another participant also noted potential sensitivity in the use made of the staff or faculty survey, to ‘be very careful in terms of academic freedom’, as this related to academics, unions, and staff, that the survey is ‘seen as a learning approach’ (INT16) as opposed to an assessment of staff. This highlights the need to maintain the spirit of the McCabe-ICAI surveys in the context of academic integrity research generally, and to prevent findings being misused in a managerial or authoritarian manner.

4.4.2 Risks or drawbacks with the McCabe-ICAI Surveys

A targeted focus of the interviews sought to draw out potential pitfalls or drawbacks of the McCabe-ICAI surveys, and the responses varied from the general (surveys as a whole) to the specific. One respondent noted that they considered surveys generally to be ‘of limited use’ and that they should ‘come with a health warning’ (INT17). Another noted that while they considered the McCabe-ICAI Surveys themselves to be ‘a really useful tool, but it would be a bit dangerous for an institution to rely too heavily on the output of a survey like that’ (INT07). As another participant framed this:

‘Sometimes you get data sets that perhaps aren't giving the full picture, and the big piece for something like plagiarism and academic integrity, I would imagine is a contextual piece. You might look at the numbers in front of you in black and white, but that's not telling the full picture. So it will be very important to be very aware of the case by case contextual piece around each instance of it and making sure that there's a full understanding what's there exactly.’ (INT11)

This ‘context’ dimension was also highlighted using anthropological terminology to say that survey is ‘a thin description of a certain phenomenon, and what we need to progress properly is a thick description’ (INT12). It was noted however by another participant that ‘the McCabe study as it currently sits is 30 years in the tweaking and 30 years in the making’ (INT02) and that it would continue to be improved. As another interviewee explained their views ‘the value

⁷ ‘When and where, if at all, do you discuss your institution’s policies concerning the following (including course, unit, and/or department-wide specifications, where applicable) with your student?’. Note that this question does allow for the response ‘Do not discuss’, and the previous item (Question 4) in the survey also allows respondents to the faculty survey to respond ‘I have not learned or been informed about my institution’s policies re: academic integrity or student cheating’.

for me would very much outweigh the drawbacks' (INT09). Nevertheless, specific issues were identified by participants.

Issues relating to the sample emerged as a common concern among respondents. This would need to be carefully approached, in order to have what one policy stakeholder described as a 'a statistically relevant picture of what's going on':

'All students are different and there's a number of different student cohorts. I would imagine it would need to be a reasonably large sample, carefully weighted to take into account different cohorts and there may well be differences across different academic disciplines or fields of study.' (INT03)

An issue that also arose was the question of social desirability bias, and whether respondents would self-report on behaviours or actions honestly, 'because they're going to be asked to admit to doing things that are seen as wrong' (INT04). Another interviewee also framed this matter as a 'methodological issue. Who's responding to the particular surveys? How honest are they being to particular surveys?' (INT02). Likewise, it was suggested 'that 'there is a significant potential for people to feel that they know what the right answer is and what the expected answer is and to deliver that' (INT14). A final matter of sample relates to self-selection of participants in any kind of research, in that 'sometimes you don't get the people that you want [...] the students, and equally staff who don't value the system, they don't tend to be the [people] who will take part' (INT09). As a specific point related to participation, being able to make discipline-specific distinctions also was noted as a sampling issue, since it might not be possible or valid to elicit 'meaningful' (INT09) findings without having a large enough samples from which to generalise.

In terms of the wider context of researching higher education in Ireland, one academic interviewee identified issues with participation, referring to what had been the Irish survey of student engagement: 'we generally try and not survey students too much. For that reason. You know, I mean, obviously the Irish Survey of Student Engagement is something that we want students to engage with and we put a reasonable amount of effort into that' (INT01). This is a point that several interviewees noted, explicitly referring to 'survey fatigue' (INT03, INT04, INT06) or that people are 'over surveyed' (INT15). This was expanded upon by other respondents, referring to the 'consistent issue of students getting so many surveys', with module surveys, graduate surveys, national level surveys like the ISSE, so the challenge would be to see where McCabe-ICAI 'fits without being overkill' (INT18). It was suggested, however, that having QQI involved could help with 'participation levels' (INT01), as well as linking the roll-out of the surveys to something like 'academic-integrity week' (INT18) within institutions.

In terms of research design and tailoring the surveys, another interviewee noted a kind of tension between what might be ‘unique about the Irish third level environment’ (INT02) on the one hand, and having something general enough to be able to elicit data informed by international comparisons. It was also noted (similar to the observation about ‘knowledge’ as it related to the faculty survey [above](#)) that it’s ‘really important that the respondents are well briefed on why are they doing this, and what’s the purpose of this’ (INT08). Questions of research design and the language being used were also identified, and the need for ‘cultural sensitivity’ as emphasised so as to avoid question formulations that might have ‘a potentially discriminatory function’ (INT22).

Some interviewees moved beyond the specific methodological issues, however, to question the entire focus of the surveys. A participant who considered the survey in terms of purporting to address ‘attitudes’ noted that:

‘with empirical work based on attitudes, I think that attitudes most certainly require unpacking and if we’re looking at cause and effect or even we’re trying to establish causality, it’s just looking to the outcome of how your attitudes manifest. It might miss out on the reasons as to why your attitudes are the way they are.’ (INT12)

Another respondent was critical of what they interpreted as a broad focus on morality, which they framed as

‘maybe is more of an American thing than an Irish or a European thing, this idea that that there’s some sort of moral issue. I think the ethical side of things, I think people in Europe subscribe to the ethic that you can have an ethical position around academic integrity, but I think once you start getting into morality, that’s a very American sort of thing, and they have ‘honour codes’ and they have all that sort of stuff in America and it’s very much about “the good and the bad”.’ (INT05)

4.5 Alternatives to the McCabe-ICAI Surveys

A question that sought to put the McCabe-ICAI in a wider context of researching academic integrity asked participants about what alternatives to a survey might be useful. The responses varied from making changes to the existing survey: a discussion of the kinds of research required to interrogate this topic (i.e. qualitative versus quantitative approaches); the need for alternative approaches (such as conversations, pedagogical interventions focus groups); and a mixed-methods approach.

The first possible set of alternatives highlighted already was to make the existing survey shorter by about half (INT22), or to 'pare back the initial survey to allow for subsequent ones [...] make it more longitudinal by design' (INT02). This longitudinal element was also identified in terms of making the surveys regular ('twice a year at a minimum' (INT13)).

The 'qualitative' versus 'quantitative' framing may be somewhat artificial, but is useful for drawing a distinction. There were some suggestions of a more quantitative, 'heavy data analytic approach' (INT02), such as looking at IP addresses as they relate to where students have submitted assignments, which might be of relevance for understanding certain issues within academic integrity more broadly, such as essay mills. This quantitative approach was also noted as potentially of interest to policymakers and management: 'people like quantitative indicators, that's what we can show the rest of the world what we're doing, when we have the data' (INT18).

Generally, however, the need for a qualitative approach was emphasised as being a useful alternative: 'the more qualitative, the better' (INT02). Even the interviewee who suggested the benefit of using the McCabe-ICAI surveys twice a year noted that 'the qualitative approach is a lot more effective because you'll get more context and more insight' (INT13), implying the need for supplementary approaches to be made. The qualitative approach to research was also expressed in terms of research design, with 'open' items in a survey being contrasted with 'closed' items:

'If the data is comments written in a comment box I would give them much greater weight than. check boxes where you have a number of choices, because somebody's actually taken the time to express their view on something. I would be much more inclined to give that much greater weight. And I think check boxes where you've got a range of views or opinions about something can be a little bit risky to attach too much weight to those.' (INT17)

Here the approach to data analysis approach would have a bearing, for instance in terms of the 'conceptual analysis' (INT02) that would be possible.

Within this space was also the possibility of more informal discussions which are not recorded, and remain on the conversational rather than research interview level (INT02). This was linked to a need to have a 'change in the culture of universities' and how it would be 'helpful if we create more safe spaces where we can talk about these struggles' (INT06) with colleagues or students. Similarly, a primarily educational approach to academic integrity was suggested, with 'workshops' (INT21), and 'seminars or conferences' (INT04) which would allow for 'a little more of the nuance about views on academic integrity that you won't get in a survey, which is

necessarily more blunt and instrumental'. Specific pedagogic interventions in other institutions were highlighted, such as the use of Lego by academics in an activity to talk to students about academic integrity:

They give them all some Lego and then they construct a snake out of Lego and put the snake in the middle of the table, and then they say to all the students "OK, now you build a snake with the Lego." So the students all build a snake with the Lego. Then they have a discussion and say "well actually, your snake looks very like that snake that's in the middle of the table. Does that mean that you're plagiarising or copying that snake?" Then you can discuss, "well, it's only one way to make a snake", or "the snake has to be long and skinny with a head and a tail, so how can we avoid plagiarising your snake?" It's an attractive way of getting people to talk about copying and originality and all those questions and gets them involved in an interesting and a fun sort of way.' (INT05)

Such a pedagogically grounded approach was also highlighted as being able to address the disciplinary aspect, and variation across different areas which is at the heart of academic practice.

Another suggestion was to introduce focus groups on academic integrity: 'in an ideal world, you'd be able to sit down with small groups of people' (INT05), which another participant described as being 'really useful because somebody says something and that sparks a thought for somebody else, so it generates conversation, it generates reflection' (INT08). The ability to 'drill down a little bit deeper' and getting 'that contextual piece' (INT11) were identified as specific benefits to such an approach. Focus groups were also highlighted as a good way specifically to 'get engagement with students and get students talking' (INT01). A benefit of these also would be that focus groups could use the survey itself as the focus (thus distinguishing this approach from a group interview), as a clear complement to the survey in a mixed-methods approach. An alternative focus for the focus groups could be using 'an actual assessment' (INT14) for participants to discuss. Questions of sampling here were also raised by many participants, and the need for a targeted approach to ensure representation, which is a caveat attending any of the alternative methodologies.

A mixed methods approach was explicitly highlighted as being useful by a number of participants (and this was often implicit in the other alternatives highlighted above). In such a research design, the McCabe-ICAI surveys would be one element. The benefit here could be understood in terms of not wanting to 'rely entirely on one type of data' (INT07) or otherwise to validate findings from the surveys. One interviewee who noted that they came from a 'quantitative' background suggested that such approaches can't exist alone: 'I think you have

to have conversations, you have to have open conversations [...] a mixed-method research approach is the best way to go with this' (INT13). The benefit of a mixed method approach was generally framed as being useful in order to 'contextualise' (INT18) findings from one research method, or to have some 'qualitative input from learners to bring it to life' (INT20).

4.6 Summary of Semi-Structured Interviews

The findings highlighted that interviewees perceived academic integrity as a community wide concern within the university, with several participants explicitly pointing out that it was not simply an issue for students. Participants also pointed to the need for a broadly based, holistic understanding of academic integrity, emphasising how previously academic integrity had been narrowly conceptualised around plagiarism. The level of knowledge and familiarity with academic integrity policies at institutional level varied widely and was related to the role and grade of the interviewee.

Overall the interviewees indicated that they found the McCabe-ICAI survey a valuable resource in informing academic staff and students in relation to academic integrity and addressing the increasing challenges presented by technological change, while cautioning against over-reliance on a single instrument or indeed purely on surveys. There was a strong perception among interviewees that the survey would be useful in an Irish context, although some tailoring of questions would be beneficial and it would be important to use the survey on a complementary basis in conjunction with other approaches such as focus groups. Most participants saw the value of gleaning significant qualitative data from the surveys and the advantages of a mixed methods approach in exploring attitudes to academic integrity. Participants also emphasised the importance of a graduated, holistic approach in addressing challenges associated with academic integrity and framing effective evidence based policies rather than 'knee jerk' responses such as reverting to examinations across the board or adopting a narrowly punitive approach to students. The findings also indicated that participants were concerned to avoid an authoritarian approach to academic integrity at all levels, instead using the McCabe-ICAL survey within a wider academic context informed by research and evolving good practice.

5. Focus Groups

The focus groups were intended to be the final data generation stage engaged with actors from within Irish higher education, both academics and students. Initially it had not been planned to undertake a focus group with students, since the project was aimed primarily at staff attitudes towards academic integrity, but when the opportunity presented itself to engage with some interested students, the research team decided to take advantage of this.

As such, one focus group brought together academic staff from one of the target institutions covered in the semi-structured interviews in order to discuss both the *McCabe-ICAI Faculty Survey* and the *McCabe-ICAI Student Survey*, while the second student focus group considered the *McCabe-ICAI Student Survey*. A further aim of these was to explore disciplinary differences in attitudes to academic integrity and the capacity of surveys to assess these. The focus groups were a targeted discussion to assess the feasibility of the use of the surveys and/or the need for their adaptation in the Irish setting, drawing on the experience and expertise of both academics and students, who may not generally be involved in discussions relating to academic integrity.

Table 2: Focus Groups

Focus Group participants	No.
Academics	8
Students	3
<i>Total</i>	11

This academic staff focus group took place online on 24 May, 2024, and was facilitated by Nina Sen Singh. There were eight participants, all of whom were academic staff. After some initial questions following up on the participants' disciplinary background and context, this group was asked the questions posed in the focus group interview schedule ([below](#)). As noted above, this focus group was to consider both the faculty and student surveys. This student focus group took place on 27 May, 2024, and was facilitated by Nina Sen Singh. There were three participants: one undergraduate and two postgraduate students.

5.1 Academic Staff Focus Group

In terms of initial observations, one participant appreciated that the language in the surveys is quite specific, in that it 'drilled down to examine different types of academic integrity'. That

level of detail might make the survey somewhat daunting to complete, as a number of participants identified there would need to be a degree of interest on the part of respondents, which could mean only those academics or member of faculty who have some interest in academic integrity would engage with the process. More generally, it was observed, that there's a benefit to a faculty survey in so far as it might inform policy and practice. As well as this, there was some discussion of the benefits of the demographic information being elicited at the start of the student survey, in so far as that relates to the increasingly international make-up of the student body in Irish HEIs. Conversely, reference was also made, however, to some of the specificities of the Irish educational system in terms of the 'rote learning' approach which one participant saw as distinctive of Ireland.

In not dissimilar terms to what was suggested in other parts of this project, it was also noted that even discussing academic integrity, exposing students via the survey to definitions of specific items is itself beneficial.⁸ If these definitions could be aligned with those used in other materials to which students are exposed (e.g. institutional modules on academic integrity) this would also be beneficial, especially in so far as such alignment extended to Schools and Departments. Engaging with the definitions could also serve as a timely refresher for students of some of the terms pertaining to academic integrity. The topic of definitions also allowed for discussion of ChatGPT and generative A.I. more generally, and the need to clarify and provide examples of what would be contained in these categories. The pace of technological development and change would also make this challenging, however.

In turning to specific items within the McCabe-ICAI surveys, there was some discussion about how students might interpret terms used, and the implications of ambiguity in terms relating to academic integrity. As such, there might be clarity or a 'clear demarcation between moral and immoral' for specific items such as paying somebody for a result, or asking someone to take an exam in one's place, but not all questions were so cut and dried. For instance, question 18 in the student survey on 'Moral Judgment'⁹ refers to 'receiving unauthorized assistance from

⁸ For instance, the start of the Canadian version of the student survey contains a section titled 'Instructions and Definitions', with the latter explaining the meaning of the following terms: academic work, academic integrity, academic integrity policy, cheat/cheating, paraphrasing, plagiarism.

⁹ The full text of the question is: 'In your opinion, for each of the behaviours described below, please indicate the extent that you personally think the behaviour is **morally/ethically wrong** (i.e. a violation of principles of justice, fairness, rights and the well-being of others)'. The bold for emphasis is in the original text.

another person', and one participant noted that 'a lot of students maybe don't know what "unauthorized" is.' For instance, in the matter of assignments there would be an expectation that students would work on them individually, but 'they would talk to each other about how to do that, and that wouldn't be considered plagiarism' or academic misconduct. The matter of a distinction between what constitutes academic misconduct as opposed to poor academic practice also arose in the discussion of specific questions. There was other discussion about specific questions on the student survey (for example, question 19 'Moral Disengagement', and question 20 'Peers', with participants wanting to know what these questions reveal.

The topic of collaboration was identified as of special significance for a number of participants in the focus group. As such, if the surveys portray collaboration as an act of misconduct, students could be fearful of collaborating or receiving feedback from peers on assignments, which undermines a key component of learning in third level institutions, which should encourage working together. As one participant expanded on this point:

'In one module I was teaching about 45 students, and they were all postgrads that. Probably about 15 to 20% of them thought that they were not allowed to discuss what they were going to do for assignments and that they weren't meant to kind of engage in the very typical sort of collegiate system of discussing what they're working on with their friends, peers and colleagues, which I thought was a bit sad, to be honest.'

As such, there is a danger that students who are 'actually trying to do the right thing end up effectively limiting their experience as students by not engaging with other students'. As another participant noted, 'it's a milestone of academic confidence for students to be able to share a draft of their essay with a classmate, and get their feedback on it [...] This is something I actively encourage my students to do but without it being, you know, misunderstood as collaboration.'

5.1.1 What are academics interested in

The participants in the academic staff focus group were also asked about what they would be most interested in learning from the data generated from the surveys. A summary of their points is as follows. As it relates to the student survey, there was an interest in the motivations of students who 'intentionally' might engage in activities that run counter to academic integrity, and whether this was due to a 'lack of confidence, or procrastination, or feeling overwhelmed'. This also related to identifying where it might be possible to have 'an intervention' or enter into the space of preventing such issues, rather than entering the space of 'punishment'. There was also an interest in the questions that relate to observation and behaviour, since these

sought to address student activities rather than their opinions.¹⁰ These items on the student survey were identified as being significant for developing staff understanding of academic integrity issues since as one participant noted, they focus on ‘what students do rather than what we think they do, because I have lots [about which] to be as suspicious or as naïve as I want to be’. As well as this, the observation question was noted as being useful since it could allow for more open and honest engagement with the questions, since it related to observing others rather than making disclosures about one’s own behaviour. Another participant also suggested that it would be worthwhile to know the ‘level’ at which students discuss academic integrity, i.e. whether it is at the level of an assignment, or in terms of the syllabus, which would also potentially indicate the nature of the response that academics or an institution might take.

In discussing the staff survey, one participant noted that it would be useful in terms of ‘social sensing’, in order to ascertain what academics think their colleagues do. This is beneficial in that academics could have a better understanding of how their colleagues approach issues, an also what is going on in other schools and disciplines. A subsequent point related to this was raised by a participant, who was interested in how colleagues respond to academic integrity procedures and policies, which they described as ‘Byzantine’. Since reporting could ‘potentially be creating a lot of work for yourself’, the participant was especially interested in the items relating to the ‘reporting and integrity’ climate.¹¹ Another participant also mentioned these items, saying that it is ‘really important to find out how engaged staff are.’ There was also interest in the ‘shared understanding in individual disciplines and individual contexts’ which would move discussion out of the generic. In combination with the student survey, then, the staff survey would give a clearer overview of the entire institutional culture.

Participants also identified the benefit of the staff survey as a ‘reflective piece’ and an ‘awareness raising activity in itself’, since engaging with it required some thought about

¹⁰ For instance, question 21 ‘How often have you **observed or had direct knowledge** of students at your school/college/university...’ and question 22 ‘Please indicate whether (and how often, if relevant) you have engaged in each of the following behaviours during the past 12 months here at the school, college or university at which you are currently enrolled’.

¹¹ Question 14 ‘Have you ever ignored a case of potential cheating (academic integrity breach) in one of your courses, for any reason?’. Question 15 ‘If you **have** ignored a case of potential cheating (academic integrity breach) in one of your courses, which if any of the following factors influenced your decision’.

safeguards and procedures¹², ‘so there’s an element where actually it’s not necessarily the results for me, it was actually doing the survey itself was a kind of learning experience’. It also meant that it led to a more systematic engagement with academic integrity by staff, rather than the more ad hoc discussion as it relates to specific issues that might arise: ‘I think encouraging everyone to do the survey is probably in itself a good task, even if the survey itself isn’t perfect because no survey is going to be perfect.’

5.1.2 Absences in the ICAI-McCabe Surveys

A final question in the staff focus group related to absences or issues with the text of the McCabe-ICAI surveys. The role of ChatGPT was raised, with a question about that other technologies are being used. As a more general point, a participant suggested that simply talking about generative A.I. is ‘completely meaningless’, since the point is that when they use it ‘students generate content without being able to demonstrate their understanding of the content’, which is different from other tools that might be examples of assistive A.I. which can be a ‘grammar, style and spell checker’. As such, specific items in the survey that ask about what students used were identified as being timely. There was also a point raised about the extent to which students understand certain tools and technologies do in fact involve generative AI, and whether this can be elicited from surveys. As well as this, there was also a point raised about the role of ‘assistive technologies’ for instance as used by neurodiverse students, and how such technologies are used.

In terms of the staff survey, one participant noted an absence in terms of research and the individual academic respondent’s own behaviour. The participant suggested that this was ‘a major problem in academia at the moment, and the fact that that’s completely absent from the whole survey seems a bit odd.’ This participant suggested that there could be scope for items in the survey that addressed the behaviour of academics such as:

‘have you ever kept collecting data until it says what you wanted to say or stopped once you’ve got enough data that proves the point you’re trying to prove? Or have you ever not published something that didn’t get positive results because you thought it might affect your career? All of these things, which are big questions for academic integrity with academics and researchers.

Another participant agreed with the importance of understanding academic integrity in this wider sense referring again to publication: ‘do you publish just to get promoted or do you publish because you want to make a difference?’

¹² For instance question 11 in the staff survey, ‘What particular safeguards, if any, do you employ to encourage academic integrity and reduce cheating in your courses’

5.2 Student Focus Group

The students were asked about what their knowledge was of academic integrity, and the policies that might relate to this. One student responded simply 'I know if I'm being accused of trouble – I'm in trouble, but that's pretty much it', but also noted that they needed to do some more research on this. Another participant agreed that they 'take full responsibility of going out and searching for the info'. There are a lot of resources in terms of course outlines, library resources, and training being promoted on social media: 'the university is doing more than enough to make sure that students are aware', but the 'onus was on you to actually read through the information'. The third student noted that they weren't aware of academic integrity as a term, but were aware of 'plagiarism' as a focus.

Some initial views from students were that the interpretation of academic misconduct may differ between students and lecturers from an ethical or moral perspective, and as one participant stated this point 'it always feels like these formally structured documents are aligned to what my professors might believe'. One participant interpreted certain questions as trying to 'catch you out'. That said, the survey itself could also help students to have a clearer sense of what constitutes academic survey.

In terms of specific items in the student survey, question 18, one participant identified that there are different perspectives on the definition of what is 'morally/ethically wrong' in the survey's language:

So, firstly that definition, the 'i.e. a violation of principles of justice, fairness, rights and the well-being of others'. It takes me back to the conceptualization of ethics or morals. There are different understandings, there are different schools of thought. There's utilitarianism, there's Kantian ethics. So I don't think that like that parenthetical statement offers enough information for me to say, "OK, which school of thought do you subscribe to?" Because if you're looking at, say, Kantian ethics, and we're looking at a principle called 'universalizability', the idea or the notion that if one thing is wrong in a certain context, then it should be universally applicable. If it were to happen in in different parts of the world - I don't think it caters for that. Because in in in one culture it might be acceptable to do a certain thing, whereas in other contexts it's different. So I think the question lends itself to differences in context, in perspectives, and what's deemed to be right and wrong.

This observation is worth quoting at length, as it identifies some of the philosophical presuppositions that deserve interrogation. It is perhaps worthy of note that the 'virtue ethics'

perspective, which might be said to underlie the approach of the ICAI and academic integrity researchers more generally, is not referenced here.

There was further discussion among the students in this group, drawing on specific examples to tease out and explore some of the examples offered in the survey. For instance, there was discussion of taking an exam, and the fact that this implies no collaboration, since an exam is a 'purely individual exercise' - but to apply this to doing written assignments, this can't be said to work in the same way, since 'it naturally happens that you talk to your peers and exchange your results and your ways of solving the problem. It's not like we work together to produce a solution and then hand it in.' This echoes some of the observations made in the staff focus group, also with specific reference to collaboration and its place in higher education.

5.2 Summary of Focus Groups

The level of detail evident in the group discussion indicates that conversations such as these are necessary for both tailoring a survey approach to the Irish institutional process, but also as part of the analysis and interpretation of data that the surveys generate.

The focus groups found broad support among academic staff for using the survey on the basis it would encourage more systematic engagement with academic integrity and that it was perhaps most useful as an educational exercise in addition to gleaning greater information about academic practice. Participants in the staff focus group highlighted a concern with the potential impact of the survey on collaborative work among students, with one participant suggesting that this was already being conflated with plagiarism and this was a point of common concern with the student focus group.

Students were not a focus of the research project, and so it was very beneficial to be able to canvass the views of even three participants. Due to the size of this focus group, and the fact that students were not a primary focus of this research project, the findings in this respect are limited. From this initial conversation, however, we can see that if there is to be further engagement with the McCabe-ICAI surveys, there is urgent need for significant engagement with the student perspective.

A key finding from the focus groups is the need to develop mechanisms for more significant engagement with the student perspective on academic integrity as policies continue to evolve. The limited engagement with students in the focus groups highlighted potential issues in

relation to differing perceptions of academic integrity, with students highlighting different perceptions of academic integrity policies between staff and students which were linked implicitly to the disparity of power within higher education institutions.

Another point which can be identified from the student perspective here is that the group made recourse to specific examples to tease out the implications of different approaches to academic integrity. That can be connected with some of the 'pedagogical' observations made in the semi-structured interviews, in that if the goal of work in the space of academic integrity is to generate understanding on the part of students, perhaps focus groups or facilitated group discussions might be a more appropriate route to take, instead of the individual and individualizing completion of online surveys in isolation.

Finally, with respect to a specific issues such as collaboration, both staff and students noted that there needed to be careful thought and discussion as it relates to collaboration so that the implementation of academic integrity policies does not have an unintentionally restrictive or reductionist impact on creative pedagogical practice or peer feedback among students. This is a pedagogical concern for all those in higher education, and any discussion of such an issue needs to ensure the pedagogical framing is not eclipsed by a focus on negative aspects in terms of breaches of academic integrity.

6. Concluding Summary

Overall we can suggest a number of preliminary conclusions from this research.

Firstly, the McCabe-ICAI surveys were considered useful and beneficial by a majority of participants and where reservations were expressed, these sometimes related to scepticism about surveys themselves rather than the particular instrument being employed. Yet some concerns also emerged about importing assumptions from North American contexts which may have distinctive perspectives on 'morality' or 'honour codes' in an academic setting and more generally about applying Western-centric standards uncritically or indiscriminately to international students from distinct cultural contexts. A common perception which emerged from the findings was the need to avoid reliance on a single approach, with the McCabe-ICAI surveys preferably being used in conjunction with other instruments and as part of a wider process.

It was apparent that knowledge of academic integrity at a conceptual level and particularly engagement with academic integrity policies was variable and there was a recognition of the need for policy development in the area, as long as this was evidence based and gave space for professional judgement by teaching staff.

Many of the research findings reflected issues and concerns raised in the increasingly extensive literature on academic integrity. Participants were in tune with a concern highlighted in the literature that 'legalisms have overtaken forgiveness', expressing wariness of one-sided or punitive approaches which associated misconduct primarily with students. The tensions identified in elements of the literature between individual academic and institutional responses to potential academic misconduct, with the latter being more likely to be more punitive or at least formalistic, was also present in the findings. A notable finding is that policies on academic integrity should be holistic, broadly based and designed to achieve education rather than applying punishment at least in the first instance.

Academic integrity was perceived largely as a key issue for teaching and learning and it is desirable for teaching and learning to address academic integrity in an open and systematic way, while avoiding the pitfalls of reverting to 'one size fits all' approaches, which are apparently tried and tested but may sideline valuable innovations in teaching and learning.

Further research on this important field should include a more systematic exploration of the student perspective. Evolving policy development should incorporate staff and student voice as an integral part of policy formation and implementation, so as to facilitate a culture which values academic integrity and critical dialogue around policy and procedures in this area.

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Appendix 1: Initial Cost Benefit Analysis

1.	What prompted your institution to implement the McCabe-ICAI survey?
2.	Had your institution done anything like this previously?
3.	How many students/staff in your HEI were surveyed for the McCabe-ICAI survey?
4.	What would you estimate to be the overall financial costs for resourcing the conducting the survey?
5.	Were there any aspects of the conducting of the survey that you consider to have been unexpectedly resource-intensive? This could include (but is not limited to): training, allocating extra staff, time spent responding to queries, ethics approval, other unexpected costs, etc.
6.	Can you list 3 impacts of conducting the survey?
7.	Can you list 3 challenges with conducting the survey?
8.	Can you list up to 3 things you wish you knew prior to conducting the survey?

Appendix 2: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule - Academics

1.	Can you please introduce yourself and your role in the institution?
2.	What is your understanding of 'academic integrity'?
3.	Where does this view come from?
4.	Can you give examples of academic integrity issues?
5.	Who do you think has responsibility for academic integrity?
6.	How have you dealt with instances of academic misconduct? Either as an educator, or as a coordinator, administrator, etc.
7.	Who did this involve?
8.	Where do you go to for support in situations of academic misconduct?
9.	What's your awareness of existing resources/policy relating to academic integrity?
10.	Looking at McCabe-ICAI, what do you think these surveys tell us?
11.	Do you think such an approach would be useful?
12.	Would you yourself use the surveys for anything?
13.	Do you foresee risks or drawbacks?
14.	What would you like to know about how students/staff approach academic integrity?
15.	Is there an alternative approach to take when it comes to learning about people's attitudes to academic integrity?
16.	What would you like to see happen in this space?
17.	Is there anything we didn't ask that you think is important?

Appendix 3: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule – Policy Actors

1.	Can you briefly introduce yourself and your role in the institution/agency?
2.	What is your understanding of 'academic integrity'?
3.	Where does this view come from?
4.	Can you give examples?
5.	Who do you think has responsibility for academic integrity at institutional level?
6.	What's your awareness of existing resources/policy relating to academic integrity?
7.	Looking at McCabe-ICAI, what do you think these surveys tell us?
8.	Do you think the McCabe-ICAI surveys would be useful?
9.	Would you use McCabe-ICAI for anything or recommend its use to HEIs?
10.	Do you foresee risks or drawbacks?
11.	What would you like to know about how students/staff approach academic integrity?
12.	Is there an alternative approach to take in exploring attitudes to academic integrity?
13.	What would you like to see happen in this space?
14.	Is there anything we didn't ask that you think is important?
15.	What other comments or observations do you have in relation to academic integrity?

Appendix 4: Participant Information Leaflet for Interviews

Title of Study: A Cost-Benefit Analysis of using the ICAI-McCabe Survey to Measure Beliefs and Knowledge about Academic Integrity in Irish Higher Education: Measuring Attitudes Towards Academic Integrity in Irish Higher Education

Principal Investigator: Dr Andrew Gibson

Co-investigator: Dr John Walsh

Research Assistant: Dr Angeliki Lima

Affiliation: Trinity College Dublin

Introduction: You are being invited to participate in a research study that aims to evaluate the challenges, costs, and benefits of adapting the ICAI-McCabe surveys on faculty and student attitudes towards academic integrity for use in the Irish higher education sector. This information leaflet is designed to provide you with important details about the study to help you make an informed decision about your participation. This project is funded by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) through QQI Anniversary Fund Awards for Projects on Assessment and Confidence in HE Qualifications included in the NFQ (award number TCD20231).

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to gather information and insights from participants regarding their perspectives on academic integrity in the higher education sector in Ireland. The study seeks to understand the implementation and potential adaptation of the surveys in this context. Your participation will contribute to enhancing academic integrity practices and policies in the Irish higher education sector.

Procedures: If you agree to participate, you will be involved in a semi-structured interview that will take between 60-90 minutes. The research team can provide you with further details about the details and answer any questions you may have.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: All data collected during this study will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and anonymity. Your responses will be coded and anonymized to ensure that your identity remains protected. Only the research team will have access to the data, and it will be stored securely in accordance with Trinity College Dublin data protection protocols¹³, and the General Data

¹³ <https://www.tcd.ie/dataprotection/>

Protection Regulation (GDPR)¹⁴. The results of this study will be published, but individual participants will not be identifiable. No identifiable information about you (or any interviewee) will be disclosed. This data will not be passed on to any third parties for purposes other than academic research. Your personal data (audio recordings and transcripts) will be deleted or destroyed five years after the project's completion.

Voluntary Participation and Right to Withdraw: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without providing a reason. Your decision to withdraw will not have any negative consequences. If you decide to withdraw, any data you have provided up to that point will be anonymized and used only for analysis purposes.

Benefits and Risks: Participating in this study involves minimal risk. However, there may be some potential risks associated with sharing your opinions or personal experiences. By participating, you may contribute to the enhancement of academic integrity practices and policies in the Irish higher education sector.

Contact Information: If you have any questions, or concerns, or would like further information about the study, please contact Dr Angeliki Lima (anlima@tcd.ie). The research team will be available to address any queries you may have.

Statement of Consent: By signing the accompanying Informed Consent Form, you indicate that you have read and understood this Information Sheet and voluntarily agree to participate in the research study. You are free to ask questions at any time before, during, or after the study.

¹⁴ <https://www.tcd.ie/dataprotection/GDPR/>

Appendix 5: Focus Group Schedule of Questions

1.1	Looking at McCabe-ICAI, what do you think about this attempt to look at attitudes toward academic integrity?
STAFF	
2.1	What specific questions strike you as interesting?
2.2	What do you think about the definitions provided?
2.3	What specific questions strike you as potentially problematic?
2.4	What information would you want to pull from the responses?
2.5	What do you think needs to be asked that isn't here
STUDENTS	
3.1	What specific questions strike you as interesting?
3.2	What specific questions strike you as potentially problematic?
3.3	What do you think needs to be asked that isn't here?
4.1	Is there anything else you'd like to add?