

Constructing an online Academic Integrity Kit: An institutional approach at QUT

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Abstract: In 2004 the University Teaching and Learning Committee at Queensland University of Technology (QUT) approved a submission from the Working Party on Plagiarism Detection and Discouragement to develop an Academic Integrity Kit (AIK). It was designed to be a standardised approach that facilitates change by bringing the Academic Dishonesty Policy to life, providing resources and educational opportunities for academic staff and students. This is being implemented utilising a learning management system already familiar to both staff and students at QUT, which it is envisaged will increase the diffusion and adaptation of the Academic Integrity Kit. The kit is designed to be used by academics to access learning objects, such as handouts, cartoons, strategies, newspaper articles, that can be embedded in curriculum design and to assist individual's to create rich, relevant learning activities. For students, the kit is designed to remove the mystique and replace it with opportunities to explore the relevance of academic integrity and to develop associated academic skills that are central to graduate capabilities. The student phase of the kit was implemented in November 2004, and is currently undergoing evaluation.

Keywords: Academic Integrity, Plagiarism, Learning management system, Curriculum design.

What is plagiarism?

There are many definitions of plagiarism ranging from descriptions of specific types of plagiarism, such as submitting a friend's assignment to broader definitions which attempt to cover all types of plagiarism activities. Carroll (2002) suggests a definition that is acceptable across a wide range of institutions "Plagiarism is passing off someone else's work, whether intentionally or unintentionally, as your own for your own benefit" (p.9). Dick, Sheard, Bareiss, Carter, Joyce, Harding and Laxer (2002) have suggested an even broader concept of plagiarism based on the rules set for a specific assessment task and the accepted standard of behaviour of the specific institution (p.172).

Whatever the accepted definition of plagiarism is in the circumstance, it is apparent the incidence of plagiarism is increasing in Australian universities, as it is around the world. There are many recent studies which have found the level of acceptance and practice of plagiarism among higher education students to be alarmingly high. To mention but a few, studies by Culwin & Lancaster (2001), Bull & Collins (2001), Dick, Sheard & Markham (2001) and Sheard, Carbone & Dick (2002) identified rates of between 20 and 50 % knowledge of or practice of plagiarism within the surveyed cohorts.

While these rates may be rather alarming, of even more interest is the insight some studies give into what it is that motivates students to plagiarise. Sheard, Carbone and Dick (2002) found that four of the top reasons stated by students as being reasons to plagiarise derive from an apparent lack of knowledge and understanding about what plagiarism is and what can be done to avoid it. Carroll (2002) states that deliberate plagiarising is actually a very rare occurrence. This evidence suggests that a focus on detection of and dealing with cases of plagiarising may in fact have little effect on rates of plagiarism and certainly does little to provide students with effective and efficient means to develop academically sound practices in their own studies.

Further support for the use of an educative approach to tackling the problem of plagiarism is found in a small study by Brown and Howell (2001). They surveyed a group of psychology students about their perceptions of the severity of plagiarism activities. Students received either an educational intervention, a warning intervention or no intervention at all. The study showed that students who received the educational information about plagiarism rated plagiarism activities more severely than those who received warning information or no information at all. There does seem to be ample evidence to suggest an educative approach to combating plagiarism.

A scan of Australian University websites reveals similarity between policies and procedures governing academic integrity, for example Queensland University of Technology (http://www.qut.edu.au/admin/mopp/C/C_09_03.html). There is the perhaps expected focus on punitive

procedures for those caught plagiarising as well as evidence of the promotion of software packages such as Turnitin and CopyCatch which may simplify identifying possible cases of plagiarism.

There is however a growing number of resources which inform both staff members and students about the many elements of plagiarism and outline strategies and means to deter or avoid acts of plagiarism. There are examples of pedagogic design aimed at supporting staff to develop authentic assessment tasks which by their nature reduce the benefit of plagiarism. There is a need for those who are tackling the problem of plagiarism to decide on an approach for deterring plagiarism. Crisp (2004) noted the need to consider the problem of plagiarism as either an “educational issue or a disciplinary issue” (p.1). While institutions must have clear policies on the disciplinary element of Academic Honesty, it seems reasonable to suggest that the current trend in Australia is towards an educative approach to deterring plagiarism behaviour in our higher education institutions, through the provision of programs and resources aimed at educating both staff and students.

The background context for the QUT Academic Integrity Kit

The QUT Academic Integrity Kit is an educative tool aimed at combating this apparent lack of skills and knowledge associated with acting in an academically ethical manner.

The development of the kit followed a significant exploration of the issues, constraints and current state of play at the university by the Plagiarism Detection and Discouragement working party of the University Teaching and Learning Committee.

A mapping activity was undertaken to summarise and communicate the issues and the flowchart in Figure 1 highlights the intersections between detection and discouragement strategies identified. The working party discussed the need for a balance between detection and discouragement of plagiarism and identified a range of initiatives and issues that were relevant in these domains and to the considerations of the working party. The items in the “bubbles” in figure 1 it felt must be considered to varying degrees in relation to both the prevention and detection issues including the software solutions that might be adopted by QUT.

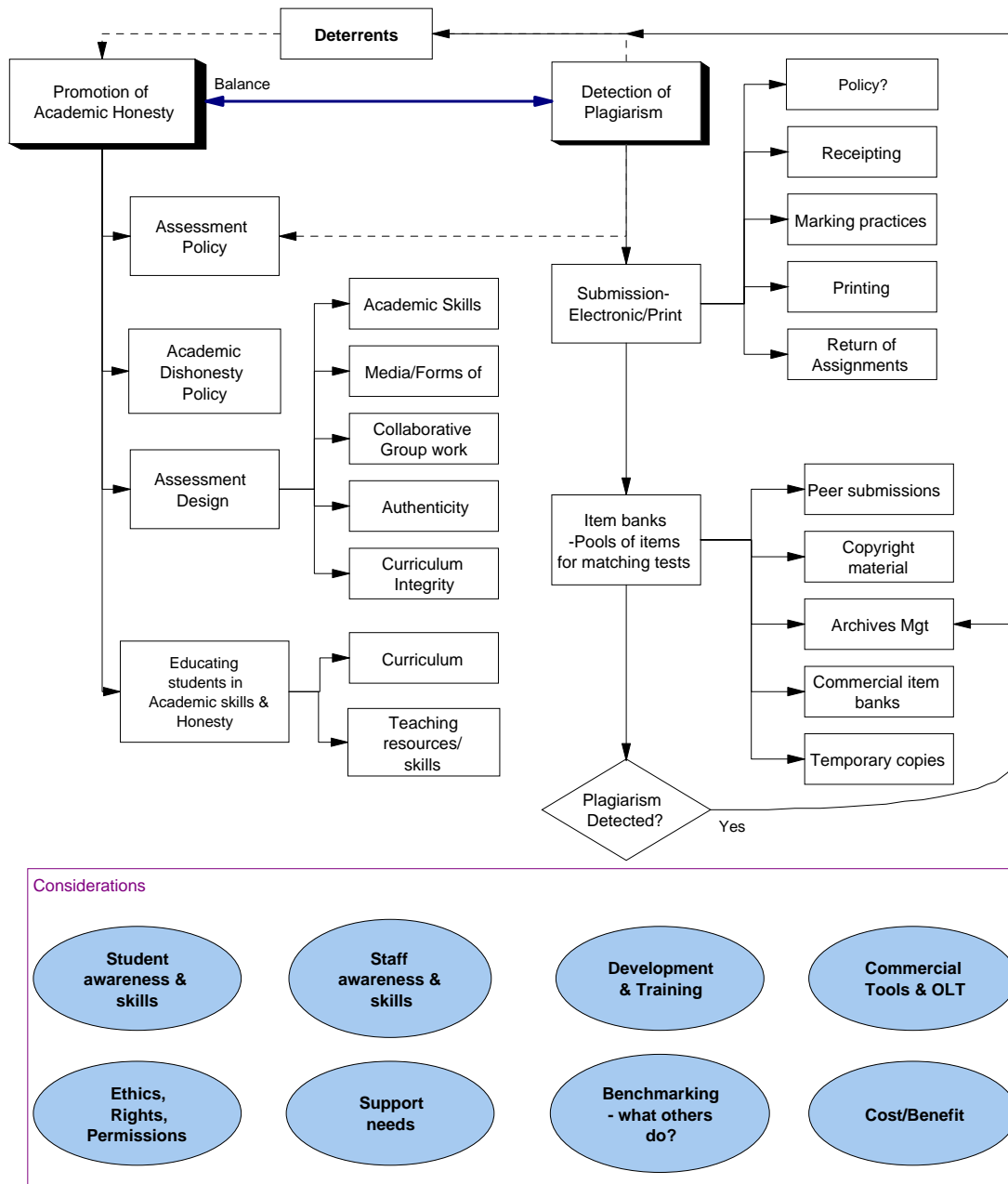


Figure 1. Degrees of prevention and detection

How an academic honesty kit fits into the overall strategy for fostering academic honesty

QUT advocates the addressing of academic integrity in a proactive way by:

- developing specific plans for improving the campus’ climate of integrity;
- creating opportunities for campus-wide dialogue; and
- fostering ownership by students and staff.

Plagiarism is a teaching, learning and assessment issue and requires an effective approach to assessment that fosters authentic assessment tasks and innovative teaching practices coupled with consistency and clarity in policies and practices.

Communication with students on these policies and practices is imperative in order that a proactive approach to the development of appropriate ethical behaviour and a culture of academic integrity is fostered and promoted. The retention of the status quo in assessment practices coupled with a

university strategy that is primarily a “detection” based one in a reactive and punitive manner would do nothing to solve the problems but rather simply act to disguise them.

Software detection devices that may be adopted will likely assist in detection of plagiarism, however it will certainly not address the core issues of improving assessment and teaching approaches. No software solution will automate the process to the point of removing the need for constant vigilance by academics. Significant policy issues must be addressed before any software tools are adopted.

Associate Professor Jennifer Radbourne (2002) aptly concludes in her paper “Plagiarism – can preventative measures and a commitment to the value of learning by academics and students reduce plagiarism in classrooms?”:

A study of plagiarism in higher education is far more than improving strategies for detection and prevention. It is more to do with promotion of the value of the learning and the development of the generic attributes of higher level thinking, communication, ethical and social behaviour and self assessment. The reemphasis on student learning and teacher reflection through preventative measures will contribute to changing student attitudes. It is vital that the pressures of competitive environment and the technological changes in higher education do not counter this need for attitudinal change. In order to decrease plagiarism academics must work on all fronts: monitoring and managing environmental influences, promoting the value of learning and assessment, reflecting on teaching strategies, and establishing rigorous penalty systems that are equitable and effective.

These principles provided a platform on which to base the development of an Academic Honesty Kit. Additionally, the Kit builds on and supports staff and students’ interpretation and understanding of QUT Policy and values in respect to:

- plagiarism statements listed in all unit outlines (Policy E/2.1)
- procedures for academic dishonesty (Policy C/9.3)
- the development of graduate capabilities, in particular *valuing and promoting truth, accuracy, honesty, accountability and the code of practice relevant to the discipline or professional area* listed under the graduate capability of *Social and ethical responsibility and an understanding of indigenous and international perspectives* (Policy C/1.3).

From these values also flow principles of behaviour that enable academic communities to translate ideals to action. The Academic Honesty Kit assists in this process by providing:

- models of best practice and opportunities for exercises and practice in a safe environment
- guidelines on the appropriate approaches to paraphrasing, referencing, academic writing, clear definitions, note taking, mining text for authority and expressing opinions
- student centred information related to academic honesty including links to appropriate resources, support for how/where to seek advice and procedures to follow if a case of academic dishonesty is alleged
- the use of academic originality tools as a learning device, eg. submission of drafts for review and feedback
- related calendared events, eg. workshops on academic writing, drafting, editing and referencing, as well as schedules of available learning advisers to access for support
- information about integrated and sequential assessment and electronic detection strategies in practice for the purpose of promoting responsibility and respect for integrity in their professional practice.

The Implementation of the Kit

Integrating the kit into the standard online learning environment was achieved through the university Learning Management System known as the Online learning and Teaching (OLT) system. Through this system, a network of links to each subject and its web site could be established from one point and thus enable access, currency, accuracy and utility of the resources in the kit.

Source materials

The sourcing of materials occurred within a very specific context. The Academic Integrity Kit was to be a self-contained environment accessible by a diverse range of students and staff across the whole university. Content was to be appropriate in terms of coverage of the topic and was to incorporate

interactive components for users. The Kit was to be released as a Stage 1 resource with the intention of adding resources and interactive components in future phases of the project. The project was minimally funded with a very small budget allotted to meeting possible copyright requirements. It was not considered possible, at this stage, to fund the development of original material for the Kit.

The Academic Integrity Kit was to be built using materials available from already existing information kits, tutorials, quizzes and such like. These resources were to be sourced evaluated and nominated for inclusion. Copyright would then be sought for chosen resources and those which were able to be used freely would be included in the kit. Materials were sourced to populate two distinct areas of the kit namely information and strategies for students and information and strategies for staff members. Both areas of the Kit were to be as interactive as the limited budget allowed with possibilities for expansion and updating built in.

Exploration of both Australian and International university websites was carried out, over a period of several months, and possible resources identified and documented. The team met to evaluate the usefulness of these resources and a selection was made for inclusion in the Kit. The original selection of resources included interactive activities involving academic skills such as note-taking and paraphrasing; test your knowledge quizzes; academic skills tutorials; and information about minimising plagiarism through curriculum design and authentic assessment. Permission to use the resources was sought from these institutions:

- RMIT
- Curtin University
- Simon Fraser University
- Murdoch University
- Empire State College
- Penn State University
- Indiana University
- University of Wollongong

All requests were granted, with no charges, for attributed use of print materials and for linking from the Kit to online tutorials and quizzes.

At this point in the sourcing phase, a decision was made which altered the original concept of the Academic Integrity Kit in a profound way, in terms of both content and design. It became apparent that sourced material was not necessarily the most appropriate for the target group in terms of familiarity/variety of topics. Copyright permission given for use of tutorials and quizzes required them to be used from the original site with a link from the kit. It became apparent that the QUT Academic Integrity Kit could possibly lack cohesion and fail to provide a safe and welcoming environment which would foster familiarity in the users (Hill and Hannafin, 1997). Use of the variety of external resources would also require users to navigate away from the Kit environment.

The focus now changed to customisation of original plagiarism resources and activities derived from publications and sourced material. The impact of this decision on the design of the Kit environment is discussed in the following section. The remainder of the time originally allotted to sourcing materials was now reallocated to customisation of materials.

Design

Once the decision was made to build a customised academic integrity kit the design phase focused on creating an educative online resource that would provide students and staff with opportunities to engage with the content, thus bringing the QUT policy to life and taking on Carroll's (2001) recommendation to "ensure students are taught how to avoid plagiarism with active learning techniques, providing opportunities for discussion, practice and feedback".

The kits design is centred around three broad categories:

1. providing clear appropriate definitions
2. delivering information on how to avoid breaches of academic integrity through engaging activities and skill development strategies
3. outlining detection and disciplinary procedures

There is often a misconception that students and academics understand the definitions centred around academic integrity and that plagiarism constitutes everything including cheating, recycling, fabrication, falsification and collusion. Carroll (2001) states “this is not the case at all and that definitions need to be made explicit”.

QUTs Academic dishonesty policy (9.3.1) outlines the forms of academic dishonesty as follows:

Plagiarism is representing another person's ideas or work (including the ideas or work of another student) as one's own, by copying or reproducing without appropriate acknowledgment of the source. Plagiarism may take the form of direct copying without acknowledgment, summarising without acknowledgment, or developing an idea or thesis from another's work without acknowledging the source. Plagiarism includes paraphrasing another's work, with minor changes but with the essential meaning, form and/or progression of ideas maintained, piecing together sections of the work of others into a new whole, or copying non-word based materials such as musical scores, audiovisual material, art or industrial plans of others. Plagiarism may also extend to using experimental results obtained by another person and representing these as the student's own work. However, there are other actions or practices which undermine fairness in assessment and which constitute academic dishonesty. These might include giving one's own work to another for copying, recycling an item of assessment from one unit or course and using it in another, fabricating or falsifying data, experimental results or sources of information, collaborating with another student about assessable work and representing that as individual work when this has not been contemplated by unit outlines or assessment requirements. It is also recognised that there is an increasing variety of web-based tools which provide assignment completion and assistance techniques, the use of which may defeat the purposes of the assessment item and so be regarded as academic dishonesty.

The definitions provided in 9.3.1 of the policy are wordy and can be difficult to interpret due to lengthy sentences. To give this section of the policy some life we adopted a variety of interactive strategies such as:

- a quiz designed to encourage students to think about what plagiarism, collusion, recycling, fabrication, falsification and collusion mean;
- realistic scenarios and reflective journals;
- quotes from real QUT students and myth busters; and
- practical examples with a question and click response. (see figure 2)

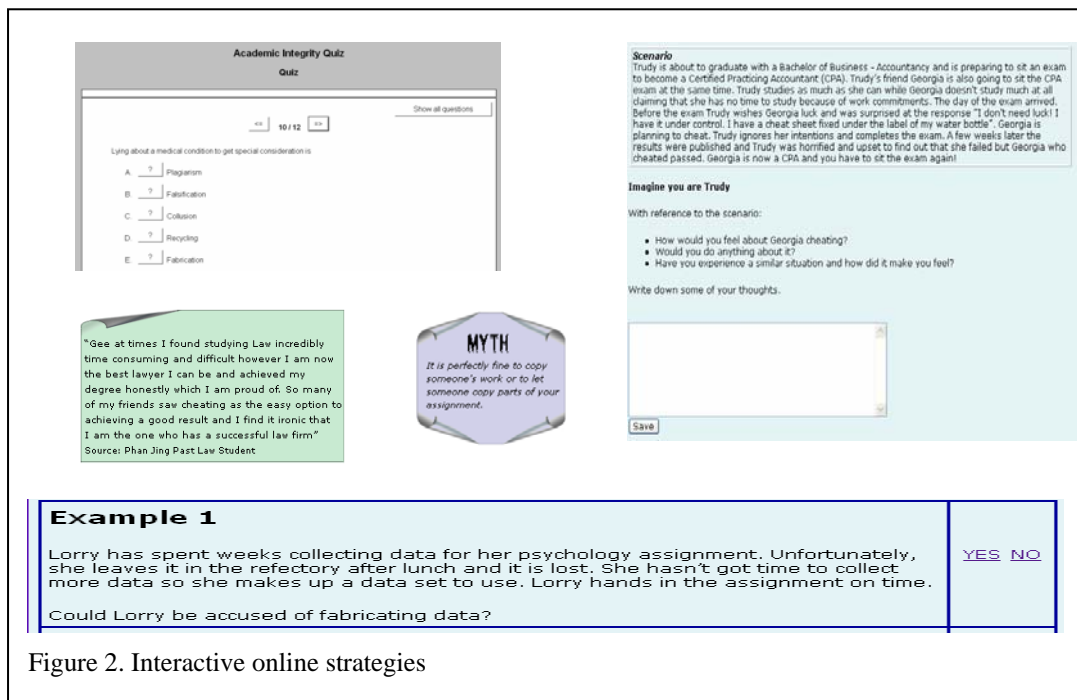


Figure 2. Interactive online strategies

The second category is designed to help students act with integrity while undertaking scholarly work. It provides opportunities for students to develop the necessary skills of summarising and notetaking, quoting, paraphrasing, referencing and group work that will help them avoid committing acts of academic dishonesty. In order to maintain consistency, this section of the kit was designed using the same approach for each skill.

For each academic skill students are given:

- an explanation of what the skill is
- practical activities that encourage students to make judgements and substantiate their judgements about a given situation
- tips for correct use of the skill
- an opportunity to deconstruct a poor example and provide a correct version (see figure 3)
- an opportunity for students to undertake self-reflection

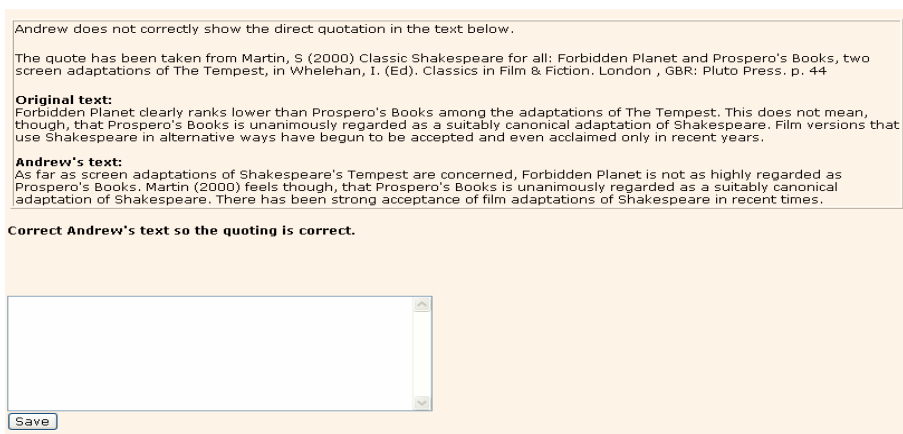


Figure 3. Academic skills deconstruction activity

This section was designed to cover basic information to get students orientated with using academic skills correctly. It is acknowledged that QUT and other universities already have pre-existing resources that provide more detailed information on academic skills which students can link directly to from the kit (CSHE, 2005).

The third phase revolved around detecting and dealing with instances of academic dishonesty. QUTs policy on academic dishonesty distinguishes between minor and major instances and outlines procedures for each category. The difficulty for students and academics is the interpretation of what constitutes minor or major offences and what penalty should be imposed. During a focus group discussion one academic said “I determine if it is minor or major offence by the amount of direct copying that has taken place, i.e., if 60% or greater is copied then I class it as a major offence. The punishment as per the policy” while another academic said “I don’t assign a percentage cut-off I take other factors into consideration such as the student, the students background and is it a direct copy or a result of poor paraphrasing or referencing skills. Then I make my judgement. I also prefer to re-educate that jump the gun to punish”. As a result of the focus group it became apparent that the interpretation of the policy can be subjective. The information about detecting and dealing with academic dishonesty reflects the QUT policy with the intention of informing students and staff in an interactive manner. For example, in both the staff and student kits a quiz about cases and punishment paths has been developed, opportunities to reflect about the differences between minor and major exist, flow charts have been developed and real life scenarios have been used to help interpret the punitive part of the policy.

The final design phase looked at access and navigation of the site. To ensure maximum exposure to the QUT community the kit can be accessed via all on-line learning and teaching (OLT) sites, the library web site and the teaching and learning support services (TALSS) web site. To ensure students and staff can navigate the kit with ease and clarity image maps and dynamic menus were implemented (see figure 4)

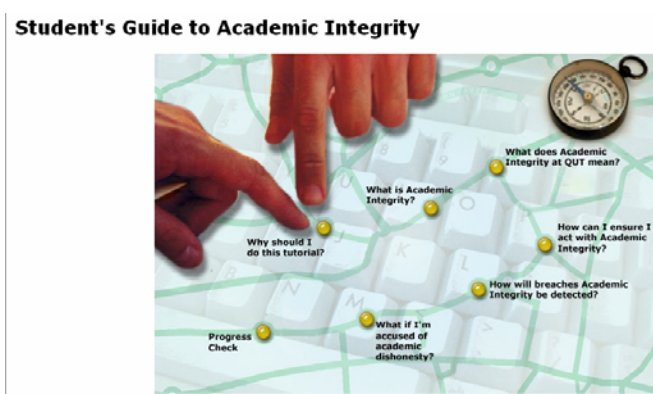


Figure 4. Student entry image map

When designing resources a conscious effort was made to use a conversational tone based on scenarios and real life experiences so that students and staff could interpret the QUT policy and procedures document in a fun and interesting way (Mayer, 2003).

Evaluation

As part of the evaluation process of the first phase of the academic integrity kit it was seen to be vital to gain feedback from across the university and from people external to the university. The kit was sent to a range of people including:

- executive and senior staff;
- academics staff from across all faculties;
- general staff;
- disability services;
- librarians;
- peer advisers;
- students;
- experts such as Jude Carroll.

The group were asked to offer feedback and provide comments on the following questions:

1. Is the 'voice' used suitable for the tertiary environment and is it consistent throughout?
2. Does the kit sufficiently reflect QUT policy and recommendations on academic integrity?

3. Is this usable for lectures/tutorials to introduce the concepts of academic integrity or is more needed?
4. Do you have any other suggestions on how students could engage with the material presented?
5. Are the colours and graphics suitable? Do I need to incorporate more graphs?
6. Are the quizzes suitable?

The feedback obtained will drive the second phase of the project ensuring that the QUT community have ownership in the future development of the kit.

Conclusion

There is evidence to support that plagiarism in Australian tertiary institutions is become widespread with incidence rates increasing. The key to reducing incidences of plagiarism is to adopt a holistic approach that promotes a shared sense of responsibility for the problem at all levels of the institution (Carroll, 2004).

The development of an educative resource that offers specific activities on deterring, detecting and dealing with plagiarism is the first step in fostering a climate of integrity at QUT. A recent study into the use of online resources indicates that unless there is a particular persuasive reason for students to make use of sites such as the academic integrity kit, they will not do so (Grannaway, 2003). It is acknowledged that having an academic integrity kit does not mean that students will engage with it simply because it is there and that future phases of the project needs to focus on developing strategies on how the kit can be embedded within curriculum models.

Future developments will include:

- Inclusion of more activities on each academic skill
- Inclusion of audio segments such as students comments on the issue of plagiarism
- Inclusion of video or animations in order to represent concepts in multiple ways to appeal to the diversity of users learning styles
- Inclusion of handouts for academic staff to embed in their curriculum
- Conduct focus groups meetings with students to ascertain the approaches used and impacts of resources on enhancement of learning and teaching practices

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