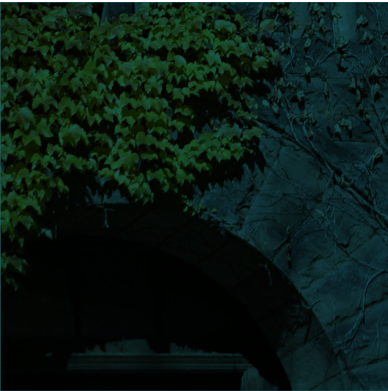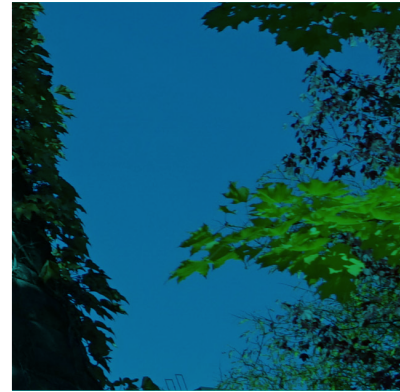# Combatting Academic Corruption and Enhancing Integrity: **Inventory of Key Questions for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Organizations**

Inventory | August 2019

ABOUT CHEA

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) serves its member institutions through its advocacy for the value and independence of accreditation, its rigorous and demanding standards for the effectiveness of U.S. accrediting organizations, its service as an authority and repository of actionable research shaping the future of accreditation and quality assurance and its leadership and commitment to quality in higher education nationally and internationally.

Background

Academic corruption in its different forms is not a new phenomenon. The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) has been active in addressing this area for a number of years. In cooperation with UNESCO, it issued an *Advisory Statement on Discouraging Degree Mills* (2009).[1] The document was prepared for the *2009 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education* and had an impact on the Communiqué the Conference adopted.[2]

As academic corruption expanded further, far beyond degree and accreditation mills alone, CHEA's International Quality Group (CIQG), working closely with UNESCO's International Institute for International Planning (IIEP), issued another publication, an *Advisory on Combatting Corruption and Enhancing Integrity in Higher Education*, in 2016.[3] As follow-up to the *Advisory*, CHEA/CIQG raised awareness about its findings through webinars, articles and *Policy Brief*s. Finally, based on the findings and recommendations of a CIQG-commissioned worldwide Survey on *Policies and Actions of Accreditation and Quality Assurance Bodies to Counter Corruption in Higher Education* (Glendinning et al., 2019),[4] CIQG is taking steps to encourage additional action by quality assurance bodies to fight academic corruption.

The major findings of the 2019 survey are:
- There is evidence of significant corruption in higher education.
- Awareness of academic corruption is greater in some regions or countries than others.
- Most current quality assurance methods are unlikely to uncover academic corruption.

Purpose of the Inventory

Based on the evidence demonstrated by the Survey that quality assurance/accreditation bodies, with a few exceptions, play a limited role in combatting academic corruption, the purpose of this Inventory is to provide ideas and suggestions to quality assurance bodies to further engage and assume greater responsibility in this area. The Inventory is based on the recommendations provided in the Survey, the *Advisory Statement* and suggestions from additional experts.

---

[1] https://www.chea.org/chea-unesco-statement-to-discourage-degree-mills-higher-education
[2] https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000183277
[3] https://www.chea.org/2016-iiep-ciqg-advisory-statement-effective-international-practice
[4] https://www.chea.org/sites/default/files/2019-03/CHEA_Corruption%20Exec%20Summary-FINAL-underline_0.pdf

Key Questions and How to Proceed: How Quality Assurance Combats Corruption in Higher Education

Recommendation 1. Review the quality assurance body's terms of reference and standards in the light of the Survey and, if necessary, negotiate changes and further resources to more effectively address corruption and malpractice in higher education.

Key Questions

a. Does your organization have a working definition of "academic corruption?"

b. Is scrutiny for academic corruption required as part of your standards or policies when examining
- Campus climate or culture
- Student support services
- Faculty expectations of student behavior?

How to Proceed

A working definition of "academic corruption" may be developed from the description used in the CHEA-IIEP *Advisory Statement* of 2016, framing "academic corruption" as intentional actions of individuals or groups rather than misconduct through accident, incompetence or ignorance. Examples of corruption include bribery, cheating, nepotism, plagiarism, selling credentials, selling or giving grades unaccompanied by appropriate student work, selling admission, degree mills.

Quality assurance bodies can work with higher education (HE) providers to include attention to academic corruption in internal quality assurance practices.

What is considered "academic corruption" varies by country and region. However, given that most quality assurance bodies are country-based, adapting scrutiny to what is considered "corruption" by country is not a difficulty.

Examples

Some QAA bodies have definitions and standards related to academic integrity (e.g., TEQSA, Australia available at https://www.teqsa.gov.au/latest-news/publications/guidance-note-academic-integrity).

The Higher Education Commission of Pakistan has a plagiarism policy and mechanisms to deal with plagiarism available at: http://hec.gov.pk/english/services/faculty/Plagiarism/Pages/default.aspx.

Recommendation 2. Make explicit the commitment to reducing corruption.

Key Questions

a. Does your organization have a public commitment to reducing academic corruption?

b. If yes, in what form?

c. Does your organization make the existence and effective implementation of HE institutions' anti-corruption policies a condition of external quality review processes?

How to Proceed

Quality assurance bodies can make an explicit commitment to reducing academic corruption through a variety of practices such as establishing standards, policies or procedures that, for example:

- Call for HE providers to routinely check for evidence of academic corruption.
- Offer HE providers with suggestions or tools to identify and remove academic corruption.
- Encourage HE providers to develop and implement policies and practices that include fighting academic corruption as part of their academic values.
- Help HE providers elaborate anti-corruption policies.
- Make the existence and effective use of anti-corruption policies a pre-condition of External Quality Assurance (EQA) processes.
- Are explicit that ongoing academic corruption can result in an HE provider's failure to provide quality education to students.

Example

University Eldoret, Kenya, has a solid anti-corruption policy which defines forms of academic corruption and proposes measures and structures to fight them (https://www.uoeld.ac.ke/sites/default/files/uoe_downloads/anticorruption/UoEAntiCorruptionPolicyVersion-1.0.pdf).

Recommendation 3. Ensure scrupulousness about transparency, accountability and integrity in every aspect of activities.

Key Questions

a. How accountable to the public is your organization in terms of transparency and integrity of your own activities?

b. Other CHEA/CIQG research[5] has demonstrated that although the level of transparency of accreditation of quality assurance bodies has increased, in most cases it is difficult to access this data. Does your organization have a commitment to assure the transparency of its operations, especially protection against academic corruption?

c. If so, provide examples.

How to Proceed

A quality assurance body can assure that its routine self-scrutiny and self-improvement efforts include attention to providing clear and accessible information to the public about its work, including how the organization carries out its commitment to transparency not only in addressing the quality of its HE providers, but also the effectiveness of its own operation, including protections against academic corruption.

Recommendation 4. Remain vigilant and be prepared to challenge HE providers about any corrupt practices that may undermine quality or standards.

Key Questions

a. How prepared is your organization to challenge HE providers about corrupt practices?

b. If so, can you provide examples?

How to Proceed

Given that corrupt practices in higher education often first come to light via popular media, a quality assurance body can institute a routine scan of key media – websites, newspapers, social – to learn of discussions of alleged or actual academic corruption. The organization can then review the information, discuss with the HE provider involved and determine future action, if any.

---

[5] *Quality Assurance and Public Accountability*, by Dorte Kristoffersen, CHEA/CIQG Publication Series (https://docs.google.com/gview?embedded=true&url=https://www.chea.org/sites/default/files/pdf/PAR-Feb15-FINAL.pdf).

Recommendation 5. Monitor and respond to suspicions of misconduct and academic corruption in any part of quality assurance operation and area of responsibility.

Key Questions

a. Is your organization proactive in monitoring suspicions of misconduct and academic corruption in its activities?

b. How does it address these suspicions?

c. Please provide an example.

> **See recommendation #3.**

Recommendation 6. Arrange that site visits at short notice be used to counter potential "gaming" of the process of quality assurance or accreditation by HE providers.

Key Questions

a. Do you arrange site visits with short notice to HE institutions?

b. How successful are these in discovering corrupt practices that may be concealed in visits pre-arranged in advance?

How to Proceed

Some quality assurance bodies use unannounced visits to HE providers as a means to reaffirm quality or address any concerns about corrupt practices, including discussions with professional staff about any incidences of academic corruption.

Example

The Accrediting Council for Continuing Education and Training in the United States has a policy of unannounced visits (http://s3.amazonaws.com/docs.accet.org/downloads/Doc%2011%20-%20 Final%208-19.pdf).

Recommendation 7. Provide support for developing education and research quality and standards and for helping HE providers to address academic corruption.

Key Questions

a. Does your organization provide support to HE providers for developing educational and research quality standards?

b. If yes, what form does this support take?

How to Proceed

Quality assurance bodies can model standards or provide templates that reflect expectations to assure sound education and research standards.

Examples of support can include awareness-raising activities through workshops and seminars, academic writing courses and simulation exercises.

Example

Council for Higher Education, South Africa publishes articles about academic integrity (https://www.che.ac.za/media_and_publications/che-newsletters/che-newsletter-quality-matters-volume-2-issue-no2-march-2019).

Recommendation 8. Regularly engage with and draw upon expertise within the HE sector to explore ways to discourage academic corruption.

Key Questions

a. Does your organization interact with other HE stakeholders to combat academic corruption?

b. Do these include government, the academic community, policymakers, employers, agencies for monitoring academic corruption?

c. Please provide examples.

See recommendations #8 and #9.

Example

The Quality Assurance Agency of the United Kingdom (QAA-UK) has been working with a range of stakeholders to respond to manifestations of fraud and cheating. QAA is particularly focused on activity that sees individuals or companies gaining financially from the promotion of cheating. (https://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/what-we-do/academic-integrity#).

Recommendation 9. Engage, locally and internationally, with other organizations concerned with quality and standards in order to share effective practices for fighting academic corruption.

Key Questions

a. Is your organization involved in networking activities with relevant bodies at local level, such as the media, to share practices?

b. If so, which bodies are these?

c. Has your organization been involved with sharing experiences and networking internationally with other quality assurance bodies or other organizations dealing with combatting academic corruption or promoting integrity in higher education?

For Recommendations 8 and 9: How to Proceed

Higher education and quality assurance organizations with which an individual quality assurance body might work include, e.g., UNESCO, International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), CHEA/CIQG, Regional Quality Assurance Networks, with which they can engage through conferences, meetings, webinars and other informal communication.

INQAAHE (https://www.inqaahe.org/).
CHEA/CIQG (https://www.chea.org/).
INQAAHE Regional Quality Assurance Networks Page (https://www.inqaahe.org/qa-networks).

Recommendation 10. Take a leadership role in advocating relevant legislation to combat academic corruption at different levels.

Key Questions

a. Has your organization been active in advocating legislation with the following objectives: countering degree and accreditation mills and contract cheating companies; regulating better leadership and governance of HE providers; and providing protection for whistleblowers?

b. Have these activities yielded results in new regulations being adopted?

How to Proceed

Quality assurance bodies can work with government leaders at various levels to raise awareness with regard to the harm of degree mills, accreditation mills and contract cheating companies, the importance of good leadership and governance at HE institutions to fight academic corruption and providing protection for whistleblowers. The purpose is to provide direction and assistance to develop legislation and be part of promoting and enforcing such legislation.

Examples

Nigeria's National Universities Commission publishes lists of degree mills and has interacted with government to bring degree mill promoter to court and prison. (http://nuc.edu.ng/?s=Degree+Mills).

CHEA activities in combatting degree mills helped in the inclusion of a federal definition of "diploma mill" for the first time in U.S. legislation in 2008 (Public Law 110-315). Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008.

India's National Policy on Education has been recently revised to include eradicating corruption in education through organizational revival and effective leadership as a key priority.

Ministry of Human Resource Development (May 2019) National Policy on Education (NEP) 2019, New Delhi, MHRD, p.32. (https://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/Draft_NEP_2019_EN_Revised.pdf).

Transparency International has developed a Best Practice Guide on how to implement its *International Principles for Whistleblowers* legislation into national law. (https://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/publication/best_practice_guide_for_whistleblowing_legislation).

Recommendation 11. Undertake research and consult with members of the HE community, including students, to inform and enhance policies and practices for addressing academic corruption and misconduct in education and research.

Key Questions

a. Has your organization conducted research to inform and enhance policy and practices that address corruption in education and research?

How to Proceed

Quality assurance bodies can identify areas for which additional information about academic corruption is needed, e.g., the extent of plagiarism or contract cheating and undertake this research, perhaps working with other higher education organizations or government or both.

Examples

South Africa Council for Higher Education (CHE) publishes a tool for student quality literacy. (https://www.che.ac.za/media_and_publications/research/student-quality-literacy-and-empowerment).

Recommendation 12. Work with quality assurance bodies that deal with primary and secondary levels of education to minimize tendencies for academic corruption that manifest throughout education.

Key Questions

a. Has your organization formal and informal links with quality assurance bodies in the education sector?

b. Do quality assurance bodies at the primary and secondary levels of education have policies on academic corruption?

How to Proceed

Work with primary and secondary levels of education to identify corrupt practices that find their way into higher education institutions and synergize efforts within the education sector to holistically tackle academic corruption.

1. Work with primary and secondary education quality assurance bodies to foster the development of national policy on academic corruption.

2. Establish a joint monitoring committee with agencies at primary and secondary levels of education on academic corruption for the education sector.

3. Share good practices in combatting academic corruption with other levels of the education sector.