



Synthesis of Proceedings from the 2019 Quality Promotion Conference Organised by the CHE

Introduction

A Quality Promotion Conference under the theme, '*Promoting Academic Integrity in Higher Education*' was hosted by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) at the CSIR International Convention Centre, in Pretoria, South Africa from the 26th to 28th February 2019.

Two hundred (200) participants from Botswana, Malawi, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe attended the conference. Among the conference delegates were Ms Susan Veldsman (Academy of Science of South Africa); Chief Mabizela (University Education in the DHET); Mr Joe Samuels (South African Qualifications Authority); Mr Vijayen Naidoo (Quality Council for Trades and Occupations); Dr Evelyn Garwe (Zimbabwe Council of Higher Education); Prof Alexander van der Walt (South African Institute of Chartered Accountants); Prof Yahya Essop Choonara (South African Pharmacy Council); Prof Norman Duncan (University of Pretoria); Dr James Keevy (Jet Educational Services); Prof Alwyn Louw (Monash South Africa); Dr Divya Singh (STADIO Holdings Multiversity); Mr Chris Vorster (Southern Business School); Mr Quintus Smit (Academic Institute of Excellence); Prof Edias Mwenje (Bindura University in Zimbabwe); Prof Nixon Kamukama (Mbarara University in Uganda); Prof Richard Bitwe (Democratic Republic of Congo) and Prof Mayunga Nkunya (University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania).

The focus of the conference was to create a conducive environment where participants would meaningfully engage on various issues pertaining to academic integrity. Among the issues discussed were academic integrity and what it entails, its relationship with quality and quality assurance, the need to promote academic integrity and how academic integrity can be promoted in

higher education. Knowledge thus gained would likely assist in promoting and protecting the credibility and integrity of higher education institutions both locally and globally.

The Conference was structured in such a way that it had plenary sessions, a panel discussion session and parallel paper presentation sessions.

Each session had a rapporteur all of whom were from the CHE. The full complement of rapporteurs comprised the following:

1. Christabelle Moyo (Chief rapporteur)
2. Selina Mokatsane
3. Phumzile Dlamini
4. Michael Gordon
5. Luyanda Marhaya
6. Zahida Myburgh
7. Robin Naude
8. Fundiswa Roboshe
9. Louie Swanepoel

This report provides a synthesis of the key points from each session as captured by the various rapporteurs. Further details regarding the presentations can be obtained from the chief rapporteur.

The conference was officially opened by the CEO of the Council on Higher Education (CHE), Prof Narend Baijnath. His welcome and keynote address set the tone for the conference.

1. Key points from the Opening Session

A number of salient points pertaining to issues of academic integrity were raised by the keynote speakers Ms Susan Veldsman, Chief Mabizela and Prof Narend Baijnath.

Some of the key issues raised were as follows:

i) Academic integrity commits to six fundamental values, namely honesty, trust, responsibility, fairness, respect and courage (International Centre for Academic Integrity (ICAI)). The absence of these values results in acts such as examination

cheating, plagiarism, falsification of information, forgery and many other acts of academic dishonesty all of which are a threat to academic integrity.

ii) The culture of academic integrity should be nurtured and not left to chance. Achieving this would require working as a collective. Ethical role models and quality leadership is needed in every higher education institutions for students to emulate.

iii) Incidents of academic malpractices such as plagiarism should be dealt with decisively. One way of doing this is for the DHET to withdraw subsidies on articles published in predatory journals. The Department of Higher Education is partnering with other countries internationally so that the practice cannot be perpetuated elsewhere in the world.

iv) The Academy of Science in South Africa (ASSAf) confirmed its partnership with CHE to publish outstanding papers from the Conference in a themed special edition of the *South African Journal of Sciences* (SAJS), which is a DHET accredited journal. Publication of an article in a peer reviewed journal is an essential building block in ensuring a respected network of knowledge.

2. Panel Discussion Session

The panel discussion session comprised the panel chair Prof Rushiella Songca (University of South Africa) and panellists, Prof Adele Thomas (University of Johannesburg); Prof Gillian Finchilescu (University of the Witwatersrand); Dr Shawren Singh (University of South Africa) and Dr Henk Louw (North West).

The chairperson of the session introduced herself and asked the panellists to do the same and state their affiliations. The chairperson then introduced the discussion topic which was, **Different Forms and Manifestations of Academic Dishonesty and their Effects on the Quality, Credibility and Integrity of Higher Education**. The chairperson proceeded to ask the first question and allowed each panellist up to 3 minutes to respond. The same procedure was followed for questions 2 and 3. The chairperson then invited members of the audience to ask questions or comment on the responses of all panellists or of specific panellists. The chairperson ended the session by thanking the audience.

The discussion questions were as follows:

<p>Question 1. From your research or experience, what are the different forms and manifestations of academic dishonesty in higher education institutions?</p>
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i) There is an increase in academics cheating by publishing in predatory journals. This act of dishonesty does not only affect the integrity of the individuals concerned but cascades to other stakeholders such as institutions and society.

ii) Most of this plagiarism is internet driven. Academics are lured into the trap of paying money to get their articles published. Also on the increase is ghost writing, where articles are produced by ghost writers for a fee. Such acts of academic dishonesty are a threat to academic integrity.

Question 2: How does academic dishonesty affect the quality, credibility and integrity of Higher Education?

i) Examination cheating transcends from university into private life. Individuals who cheat in universities often end up cheating in real life because the culture of cheating would have been engrained in them. Such graduates do not only tarnish the integrity of the institutions they came from but also puts a dent on higher education itself.

ii) Pressure exerted on students by families creates dissonance between ambition (to attain the qualification) and ethical ways of attaining the qualification (academic honesty). When the pressure to succeed supersedes the process of achieving academic success, students end up engaging in dishonest acts in order to graduate (get a certificate) without gaining knowledge.

Question 3. What do you think should be done to address the issue of academic dishonesty in Higher Education Institutions?

i) There is need for a three-pronged solution to the problem of academic dishonesty. The elements are: having information on what it entails, what needs to be done to curb it and taking action to prevent it.

ii) Universities need to have a quality control mechanism for their Masters and PhD students who go on to become authors or co-authors of papers. The same should be done for academic staff. Manuscripts should be subjected to a peer review process before sending them out to journals for publication.

(iii) Learners and lecturers should not be seen as income generating units. This occurs when there is demand by universities for their postgraduate students and staff to publish extensively in order to get subsidies from the DHET. This creates a problem in that both students and academics will engage in dishonest acts such as publishing in predatory journals for incentives and for promotion purposes. This compromises the integrity of students, academics, institutions, higher education in general and society.

iv) There is need for electronic vigilance in order to curb academic dishonesty. Use of the software Turnitin can help minimise plagiarism but requires people with knowledge to interpret the results and hence the need to capacitate the users of the software so that can use it meaningfully in curbing plagiarism which is one of the major threats to academic integrity.

3. Plenary Sessions

There were two plenary sessions with 2 presentations in each of the 2 sessions. The plenary session chairs were Prof Kethamonie Naidoo and Ms Olivia Mokgatle, both from the (CHE). The plenary presenters were Prof Yusef Waghid (University of Stellenbosch), Dr Divya (STADIO Holdings Multiversity), Dr Evelyn Chiveyo Garwe (Zimbabwe Council on Higher Education) and Prof Mayunga H.H. Nkunya (University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania).

Some valuable points pertaining to academic integrity were raised during the two plenary sessions.

a) Plenary Session 1

i) A point was raised on the need to disrupt the status quo prevailing in Higher Education Institutions through questioning the way things are done in order to allow for development to take place. Doing so would create dissonance in the way things were done previously and how they are currently being done. However, in bringing change, caution should be taken to ensure that there is rhythm.

ii) Higher Education in South Africa can achieve a lot if it were to encompass dissonance, rhythm and ethics.

iii) Critique alone cannot be the solution to problems, dissonance and rhythm should be added to the equation in order to bring meaningful change and restore integrity in higher education institutions.

iv) Examination cheating is a risk to quality and credibility. This is so because graduates that are produced by the universities where cheating is prevalent end up being employed resulting in sub-standard work being produced thereby damaging the integrity of those organisations that employ them.

iv) Examination cheating has moved from passing of notes to the use of cell phones and other sophisticated gadgets. Use of sophisticated gadgets makes examination cheating difficult to detect and hence the perpetuation of this dishonest behaviour by students which in itself compromises academic integrity.

v) Students cheat during examination because they are mainly interested in the outcome (certificates) and not in the processes that they have to go through in order to attain those certificates.

vi) Education is about equipping students with knowledge and skills. However, when higher education institutions produce graduates who only have certificates but are deficient in terms of knowledge and skills, then the nation will be affected in terms of its socio-economic development and the credibility of higher education institutions is affected.

(b) Plenary Session 2

i) Because of free movement of people, there is need for systems to be harmonised. A system cannot be harmonised without quality assurance. Harmonisation goes hand in hand with quality and hence Quality Assurance

ii) Harmonisation cannot happen without benchmarks. Harmonisation in Higher Education entails the establishment of benchmarks upon which Higher Education systems can operate. Doing so will enable higher education institutions to deal effectively with issues relating to academic integrity.

iii) Academic integrity is a continuum ranging from 100% to 0%, 100 denoting absolute academic integrity and 0 absolute academic dishonesty.

iv) Everyone should yearn for a world that is free from academic misconducts, with all players committing to maintaining a conducive environment and a culture of academic integrity among other things.

v) Academic integrity is an indicator of quality, grounded in actions of academic and professional practices.

vi) The role of Quality Assurance Agencies is to advise stakeholders on areas that affect academic integrity, promote academic integrity and set standards and regulations on how this can be achieved.

vii) The integrity of Quality Assurance Agencies is integral in Higher Education systems in that they should maintain quality, be collaborative and show respect to its stakeholders. Quality Assurance Agencies should listen to the voices of all stakeholders.

4. Parallel Paper Presentations

Below are the key points distilled from the parallel presentations and the ensuing discussions. These are organised under the respective session themes.

Discourses on Academic Integrity and Quality

i) Quality, Excellence and Integrity are the foundation of a credible Higher Education system. Integrity should be linked to the fundamental activities of Higher Education which are teaching, research and community engagement.

ii) Examination cheating can be addressed substantially if there is dialogical engagement and real transfer of knowledge, high order thinking, application and not just recall and regurgitation of facts.

iii) There is usually resistance from academics to Quality Assurance and Management especially when they are told to do more work with very few resources.

iv) There should be opportunities for different functionaries within and across institutions to learn from each other regarding issues of integrity.

(v) There is need to define a shared goal and values of academic integrity in the South African context and then do an analysis of the policy and legislative framework in South Africa. This will help institutions tackle issues of academic dishonesty in a harmonized way.

b) Academic Integrity in Teaching and Learning

i) Students want to be acknowledged for the knowledge they bring to the classroom, to recognise themselves in what is taught, and be actively involved in the teaching and learning process. Doing so enhances the credibility of the processes followed.

ii) Measuring quality by the performance of students in assessments ignores their individuality and negates the process that students follow to be successful which might lead to the credibility of the assessment tools being questioned.

iii) By repositioning an integrative pedagogy, of the kind that elevates human flourishing, well-being and justice, at the centre of all quality assurance and management activities, higher education can be re-membered and integrity restored.

c) Academic Integrity in Curriculum Design and Review

i) Quality assurance reviews provide accessible information to the public and have a positive effect on student pass rates and throughput rates.

ii) Curriculum should be holistically aligned to allow for student participation and should encourage conceptualisation despite personal, cultural and physical differences. Student participation is very crucial has a positive impact in their success rates.

d) Academic Integrity in Assessment and Certification

- i) Assessment is the engine that drives student learning. It is a proxy to measure learning. If assessment is not carried out properly, for example, if there are inconsistencies in marking of assignments and examinations, then the credibility of assessment tools used will be in the spotlight and hence integrity will be compromised.
- ii) Without academic integrity, there can be no trust or reliance on the effectiveness, accuracy, or value of teaching, learning, assessment, research or any public service activities.
- iii) The absence of face-to-face interaction, limited use of varied assessment methods and feedback to help students achieve the targeted learning objectives can affect student achievement which might force students to engage in dishonest acts in order to succeed.

e) Academic Integrity in Research and Publishing

- i) Research integrity policies in universities are paramount as they pave the way for good practices that promote academic integrity.
- ii) The push towards the democratisation of information has been accompanied by the rise of the predatory journal.
- iii) The corporatisation of the university environment can provide perverse incentives to engage in ethically suspect publishing practices.

f) Threats to Academic Integrity and the Impacts Thereof

- i) Constructive interaction between students and staff should take place within the parameters of the core values of academic integrity which are honesty, respect, trust, fairness, responsibility and courage.
- ii) When student and staff engage in illicit relationships, the fundamental tenets of academic integrity are breached.
- iii) Use of sexual favours to influence outcomes of academic assessments is a threat to academic integrity in that those students involved in such relationships gain undue favour over the hardworking ones. Efforts to eliminate this threat should not only focus on academics/lecturers but should extend to students.
- iv) Acts of academic dishonesty do not only affect individuals but have a snowball effect whereby they escalate to other stakeholders such as the class/cohort, institution, economic system, society, national higher education institutions and globally.

g) Institutional Systems and Services for Promoting Academic Integrity

i) The achievement of integrity will require robust quality assurance systems, curbing malpractices in Higher Education institutions, including bribery, collusion, favouritism, nepotism and patronage.

ii) Capacity building programmes and continuous support are crucial elements for technology integration in teaching for both students on the proper purpose and usage.

iii) Integrity can be restored if institutions can introduce innovative practices to improve management and administrative processes.

h) Leveraging Technology for the Promotion of Academic Integrity

i) eLearning aligned to principles of academic integrity can be used to educate students and data provided via eLearning systems can be used to monitor their learning.

ii) Integrating technology and using it meaningfully in teaching and learning, and capacity building could assist in detecting, monitoring and curbing acts of academic dishonesty which in turn leads to promotion of academic integrity.

iii) Building an Enterprise Content Management System containing evidence of quality assurance promotes academic integrity by keeping the history of a programme.

Conclusion

Overall, the conference was a resounding success. It managed to put academic integrity at the centre of the discourse. Presenters spoke with one voice in condemning academic dishonesty in higher education institutions and that there is need to curb it before it worsens. The general feeling among the participants was that there is need for all stakeholders, namely students, academics and professional staff in higher education institutions, to play their part in curbing this menace. Achieving this would require a commitment and collaborative effort from students, academics, non-academics and society as a whole.