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Supporting academic integrity: approaches and resources for higher education

Case studies and perspectives

The Educational Development Associate Initiative: an organisation-wide approach to plagiarism prevention

Patrick Baughan, Senior Lecturer in Educational Development
Learning Development Centre, City University London

Background and context

A number of universities have organised school- or faculty-based schemes, focusing on student study skills and plagiarism prevention. This case study summarises the *Educational Development Associate (EDA) Initiative* undertaken over a three-year period at City University London, a multi-campus institution organised into seven schools. The University has well-established policies concerning academic practice and conduct issues, as well as various support services. However, the wider context has changed, with a number of factors possibly creating more opportunities for academic misconduct to occur (for example, see Ashworth, Bannister and Thorne, 1997; Sunderland-Smith, 2008). We had no data to suggest an upsurge in cases at the University, but we felt a need for a more pro-active approach as we wanted all students to understand what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. Development of the initiative was also guided by literature on plagiarism prevention and assessment design. This included material on student writing (Stefani and Carroll, 2001), guidance about assessment approaches (Falchikov, 2004; Pickford and Brown, 2006), and, particularly, advocates of a *holistic approach* to plagiarism prevention (Carroll, 2007). Such studies, along with information about schemes used by other institutions, were valuable in guiding our work.

Brief account of the EDA Initiative

The starting point was to establish a steering group, which included membership from departments and central services across the University, as well as the Students' Union. The group confirmed the need for a longer-term initiative to be developed, with the following aims: to promote good study skills by way of positive, student learning methods; to work across the *whole* University; and to achieve the above by way of a series of schools-based projects. Three projects were devised, to be implemented by a network of Educational Development Associates (EDAs), existing staff who were paid a responsibility allowance for taking on this role:

Learning activity project – EDAs worked with Programme Directors to develop formative learning activities for students to work through during their first term. Activities comprised short, programme-specific exercises in which students were given the opportunity to practise study skills and learn how they can gain course credit by displaying good academic practice. Examples here include: written exercises; online activities using the University's virtual learning environment; and role plays and group activities

Assessment review project – EDAs worked with staff to refine selected assessments. This was to encourage the use of a wider range of assessment methods to promote deeper level learning among students, and make assessments resistant to plagiarism. EDAs undertook various activities to identify assessment tasks that might be reviewed and discuss alternative approaches; for example, a shift towards group work and students taking a more active role in the assessment process.

Embedding and dissemination project – This involved providing broader support for staff to embed the two previous projects and disseminate key aspects of the initiative within and beyond the University.

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Following up

Students and Programme Directors have commented positively on the initiative, particularly on the student learning approach that it encompassed, and because the views of representatives from the Student Unions' were sought. There were 'pockets of resistance' and some concerns over the first project. More recently, a phenomenographic project has been undertaken to explore variation in *implementer experiences* of the initiative – the EDA perspective.

For further information on this work, please contact the author: p.baughan@city.ac.uk.

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