Case Study 9: University of Hertfordshire

Making Regulations Work in an AI Landscape

What issue were we trying to address and why?

With the availability of Generative AI resources to support academic study and assessment submissions, it was important to set parameters for use of, and expectations around Generative AI that are consistent across the University, but nevertheless respect subject discipline differences. Both staff and the Students' Union were asking for a clear, accessible policy. In the case of staff, they wanted sufficient flexibility to take account of the appropriateness of Generative AI use within their subject discipline and relevant employer expectations. At the same time, we wanted to send out a strong message to staff about the importance of reviewing assessment design to minimise student opportunity to make inappropriate use of Generative AI resources.

The regulatory framework had to be suitable for a diverse student population and a range of assessment types. Proof-reading tools are often heavily replied upon by our international students. It was also necessary to reflect in the regulatory framework that unauthorised use of Generative AI, including incorrect referencing of AI resources in assessment, can give rise to academic misconduct offences of varying degrees of seriousness ranging from poor academic writing skills to cheating.

What we did

We made the following amendments to the Academic Integrity and Assessment sections of the University's undergraduate and taught postgraduate academic regulations, we:

(i) changed the definition of plagiarism. As unauthorised use of Generative AI is in many cases impossible to prove, we extended our definition of plagiarism to say that plagiarism is presenting 'another person's work or content generated by an AI source as your own work (whether deliberately or unintentionally) without acknowledging the source fully'. This enables a focus in academic misconduct cases on whether the work is the student's own rather than how it was developed with evidence based on whether the student has no knowledge or understanding of the submitted content. The approach also allows unauthorised use of Generative AI to be dealt with proportionately when it is considered that plagiarism has occurred through poor academic writing skills rather than cheating.

(ii) drew a distinction between authorised/unauthorised use of Generative AI, taking on board the wide use by students of proof-reading tools. There are three alternative options for staff to adopt in assessment rubrics:

a. the student is expressly permitted to use Generative AI tools in the creation of content and also to proof-read their work; or

b. the student is permitted to use Generative AI tools to proof-read their work but not permitted to use Generative AI tools in the creation of content for their work. This category will apply irrespective of the fact that the grading criteria include credit for English and grammar subject to (c) below; or

c. the student is expressly prohibited from (i) using Generative AI tools for the creation of content and (ii) from using Generative AI tools or a proof-reader or a proof-reading service for proof-reading. This category will apply only where all, or the majority of marks, are allocated for the proficiency of the use of language, including spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

(iii) changed our regulations on the conduct of assessments to require staff to make explicit to students in each assessment brief, which of the categories in (ii) above applies to the assessment. The University's assessment regulations were also amended to state that assessments must be designed in a way that minimises the opportunities for academic misconduct and unauthorised use of AI, and that staff can only authorise use of Generative AI tools in assessments where, prior to the assessment, students have been taught about the appropriate use of Generative AI, including how to reference and how to navigate privacy, General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and ethical considerations.

Who was involved

We consulted with our Students' Union, School Academic Integrity Officers, our Assessment Experts Group, academic staff attending workshops led by the Centre for Education and Student Success and Associate Deans of School Academic Quality and Learning and Teaching.

Measures of success

Our measures of success were (i) that students and staff expressed satisfaction about the clarity of the University's position on Generative AI; (ii) that those staff who wanted to allow their students to use Generative AI in producing their work for assessment were able to, whilst those who felt that it was not ever/always appropriate to student learning in their discipline for students to access Generative AI resources, could make the use of Generative AI resources unauthorised; (iii) a reduction in the number of academic misconduct offences relating to alleged unauthorised use of AI; (iv) providing a sense of urgency to ensure that staff re-designed their assessments to embrace the advent of Generative AI.

How do you plan to develop the intervention/activity?

Regular updates and reminders about Generative AI developments and University policy around Generative AI including its impact on learning, teaching are included in University-wide communications. Our Centre for Education and Student Success has been leading on workshops for staff and students in all Schools and an important part of the training has been to ensure knowledge and understanding of, and compliance with, our regulatory

framework. Given the rapid development of Generative AI, we recognise the need to monitor and to regularly obtain feedback on whether our regulatory framework is fit for purpose.