Northumbria Research Link

An Investigation into the attitudes of academic librarians towards Internet plagiarism of HE students using a Delphi study

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This presentation will outline the findings of a study undertaken to investigate the attitudes of academic librarians towards Internet plagiarism by Higher Education students in the United Kingdom. A Delphi study – with its potential to yield rich qualitative data – was chosen as the most appropriate research tool for the study. A Delphi study is defined by its distinct stages. Key components include securing a sufficient number of qualified participants followed by the iterative process of preparation and distribution of questionnaires, analysis of responses and feedback to participants. For the purposes of this research qualified participation consisted of academic librarians who possessed the knowledge and/or practical experience of teaching about plagiarism and the Internet.

The first round of the Delphi study comprised of 8 open questions concerning

- Definition of plagiarism
- The role the internet has played in student plagiarism
- Where responsibility lies in terms of combating student plagiarism
- The role of the librarian
- What skills librarians possess that help to confront Internet plagiarism
- The role of librarians in individual HE institutions – with examples
- Partnership working to tackle Internet plagiarism
- Use of technology to tackle Internet plagiarism

A unique feature of the Delphi method is the provision of controlled feedback between rounds allowing panellists to 'review, comments, react, agree or disagree' with their peers (Howze and Dalrymple 2004, p.175). The questions for the second round of the study were constructed from the information provided from the first; thereby allowing greater consideration and discussion of the topic.

Structured and systematic analysis of the data collected from both rounds of the Delphi study was undertaken using coding, classification and content analysis which identified the following key categories, themes and patterns:

- **Definition of plagiarism -** Plagiarism is viewed as a multifaceted term and therefore is not easily definable. However, at its most basic level it could be defined as taking the work of others and presenting it as one's own work.

- **Role of the Internet -** Respondents were unanimous that the Internet has made it easier to plagiarise.

- **Roles and responsibilities of academic librarians -** Opinion was divided concerning the roles and responsibilities of academic librarians in addressing and combating Internet plagiarism. While it was viewed as a natural extension of a librarian's role, there was disagreement on the extent of the role and whether this should be limited to education rather than detection.

- **Skills of the librarian -** A number of relevant skills were identified that have been utilised by librarians to combat Internet plagiarism the most frequently

cited were the librarian's knowledge of correct referencing procedures and their ability to find online information. This guidance was provided by taught sessions, workshops and online tutorials.

- **Active collaboration between librarians and educators -** The potential for active collaboration between librarians and academics was seen as vital by all respondents. There was clear agreement on the distinction between their roles: librarians were viewed as plagiarism educators rather than detectors.

- **Role of technology -** The role of technology proved to be the most divisive in the Delphi study. Agreement could not be reached as to whether digital technology, particularly Turnitin, presented the most effective method to deter plagiarism or whether the introduction of technology could foster a lack of trust between students and academic institutions. However respondents were agreed that plagiarism software did not tackle the root of the problem on plagiarism.