Preventing and Detecting Unauthorised AI Use

Version 1.2 - Issued: 23/11/2026

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Introduction

AI is a constantly evolving field, and Academia is still settling on norms for AI use for learners and faculty. This document, which aims to act as a guide for faculty on the question of unauthorised AI use, will continually evolve to meet new needs and questions around AI. However, one thing will always remain the same is that academic integrity is a core pillar for academic achievement for our learners.

Current thinking perceives stopping unauthorised AI use as a binary of either detection or prevention. Based on IMI's research of AI Detectors, it emerged that learner distress was often a result of policies and thinking that emphasized detection (Giray, Sevnarayan and Ranjbaran Madiseh, 2025). It is this reason, and our use of the Cressey Fraud Triangle in relation to academic integrity, that has made us elect to focus more on preventing unauthorised AI use through multiple different strategies (Cressey, 1953). It is because of this that we also do not recommend the use of AI detectors. Our reasoning for this and these strategies will be explored further below.

However, it is still IMI's and faculty's responsibility to uphold academic integrity and report suspected academic misconduct. As a result of this, we will explore how faculty might notice unauthorised AI use, the common pitfalls of such approaches, and IMI's procedure to Academic misconduct in relation to unauthorised AI use.

Prevention

Why Prevention in preference to Detection?

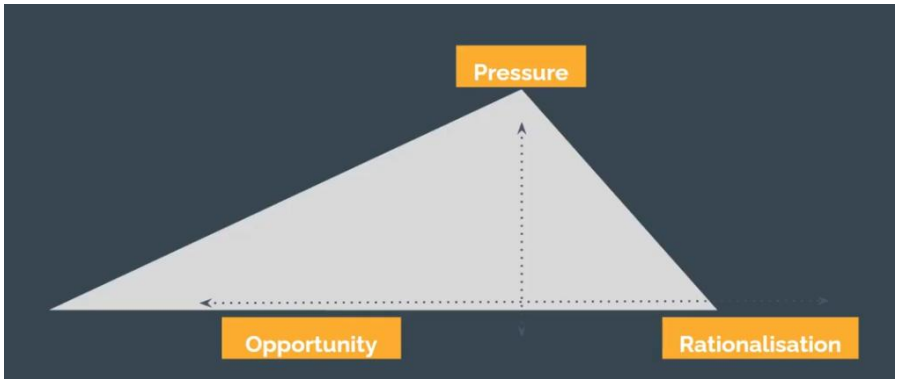
Due to the difficulties of detection, our thinking instead focuses on the prevention. This is influenced by the Cressey Fraud Triangle, and its corners of pressure, rationalisation, and opportunity. This Triangle was originally created to represent what drove people to commit fraud. Dr. Mark Glynn has instead applied it to academic misconduct and what causes learners commit such misconduct (Cursive, 2026).

The three corners represent:

- How learners will feel **pressure** to commit academic misconduct.
    - This pressure can be due to juggling workloads, difficulty in learning unfamiliar skills like referencing, or struggling to find resources.
- How learners will then **rationalise** such behaviour to justify it.
    - This rationalisation can be as simple as learners not realising they were doing anything wrong and deciding to commit academic misconduct because everyone else was or thinking everybody else is doing it.
- How learners with more **opportunities** to cheat, are more likely to take those opportunities.

- This can be seen in the raise of AI related academic misconduct across academia.

The below graphic demonstrates how AI has made the opportunity to cheat that much easier, and it will only continue to do so as it becomes more integrated through our digital systems.



Taken from Dr. Glynn's Webinar, Cursive, 2026

This means it is and will continue to be difficult to detect AI. But what IMI can potentially control is the pressure learners face and the rationalisations they might use. Having initiatives that target these corners of the triangle is one of the best solutions for preventing unauthorised AI use.

A simple way to reduce the pressures on learners is by creating a community of trust between our faculty and learners, rather than creating a policing atmosphere to catch learners unawares. Learners should have the space to ask questions about AI, learn what is permissible, and practice with the AI in the ways they are permitted. This openness and trust will also reduce the chance of rationalise their poor behaviour. The strategies described below encompass this thinking.

Prevention strategies

IMI is already attempting multiple prevention strategies, such as implementing the AI AS Scale to provide a clear communication tool on AI use for learners. This is accompanied by a Learner's Guide to AI Use, which will be strengthened by the eventual creation of an AI Literacy course on Moodle.

However, there are variety of methods faculty can do that will help reduce the pressures and rationalisations that can lead to a learner using AI in an unauthorised way.

Communication

Verbal Explanation of the AI AS tier and Assignments

While each assignment has the AI AS tier clearly stated in the handbook, it is important to also tell learners verbally of which AI AS tier they are allowed to work in.

Have Conversations About AI with Learners

Ask how learners use AI in their own work, consider the limitations, risks, and benefits of it. Explain how AI can hallucinate, create fabricated references, and the importance of fact checking.

Emphasise the Value of Original Thought

Encourage learners to recognize that their unique voice, creativity, and critical thinking are invaluable and irreplaceable when completing assessments. By using AI beyond the permissible tier, they are lowering their own chances to learn, build new skills, and develop their own understanding.

Transparency

Model Responsible AI Use

One of the best ways to learn is through watching others, so demonstrate responsible AI use by being transparent in your AI use and correctly citing AI. Citation of AI is covered in both the Faculty and Learner Guides on AI Use.

Encourage Learners to Ask Questions

Encourage learners to reach out with questions, especially questions on specific examples of what constitutes unauthorised AI use. This is an evolving topic, and new circumstances will continue to arise. It is better for learners to ask, than to go ahead and possibly commit academic misconduct.

Resources

Emphasise the Library

The library is here for learners, providing multiple resources on studying, academic writing, referencing, and finding resources. Learners are also able to avail of One-on-One academic support sessions, library drop-in hours, and in-class presentations. If these supports lighten the pressures that learners face, they will be less inclined to use AI in an unauthorised way.

Point out IMI Support staff

The library isn't the only support, as other faculty, the programme Director, the Programme Coordinator, and other support staff act as a network to help with any issue that learners might be facing.

Encourage them to Undertake the Academic Induction Moodle Course

While this course doesn't focus fully on AI, it is a great introduction to Academic topics such as Academic Writing, Academic Integrity, and Referencing. Again, these supports are invaluable to learners and make balancing all the assignments and readings all that easier.

Detection of Unauthorised AI Use

Unauthorised AI Use

Based on the research undertaken on AI detectors, what came to the forefront was potential learner distress regarding accusations of Unauthorised AI use. We hope to reduce this stress by following our ***Policy and Procedure on Academic Integrity*** when considering potential learner unauthorised AI use. This policy's framework will be simplified and described below but with specific reference to Academic Misconduct involving unauthorised AI use to hopefully guide faculty in what to do in each step. If wanting more specific details for each step, the ***Policy and Procedure on Academic Integrity*** should be consulted.

The beginning steps of this framework will apply to any faculty that come into contact with Learner assessments, later stages will apply only to PDs.

Detection

The first step in this framework is Detection, which will apply to any faculty that come into contact with Learner assessments. Once a potential case of unauthorised AI is suspected, faculty will then raise their concern with the PD at the earliest possible opportunity.

Below explains our reasoning as to why we do not use AI detectors but also offers practical indicators of unauthorised AI use that faculty may use in conjunction with their own judgement.

IMI's View on AI Detectors

IMI currently does not recommend the use of AI detectors to detect AI generated work. This is based on QQI's guidance regarding AI detectors, which advises against

such tools, as these "systems cannot be relied upon to detect use of GenAI accurately or consistently" (NAIN, 2023, p. 17). This if further supported by our own research on AI detectors, displayed below.

SWOT Analysis – AI Detectors	
Strengths **Deterrent –** May deter learners from using AI and improve academic integrity. **Convenience –** Offers a quick way to analyse a large number of submissions and lessening the burden on staff and faculty.	**Weaknesses** **Inability to distinguish between impermissible versus permissible AI use –** Due to the nature of IMI's own AI AS scale, and its allowance of some AI assisted editing, AI detectors would not be able to tell what AI was allowed and what wasn't. **Unverifiable probabilistic estimates** – In controlled scenarios, AI detectors are fed known Human generated text and known AI generated text, which allows for a verifiable answer. However, in real life scenarios, that verifiable answer is not possible. AI detectors can then not act as an "independent, objective verification" (Bassett *et al.*, 2026, p. 2). **False Positives –** Where an AI detector will erroneously flag a human made text as AI generated. This is particularly common if a learner was to use a formal style of writing (Deep *et al.*, 2025. p. 17). **Bias and non-native English speakers** – There have been multiple studies that demonstrate AI detectors' bias in flagging non-native English speakers as AI generated (Ardito, 2025; Deep et al., 2025).

Opportunities	Threats
Watermarking - One proposed solution is idea of watermarking AI generated content, which "embeds imperceptible yet verifiable patterns during the generation process, enabling systems to trace authorship" (Deep *et al.*, 2025. p. 17).	**System Vulnerabilities** – There are now multiple work arounds for learners to 'humanise' AI generated text, such as websites that compare users' AI generated text to multiple AI detectors so they can improve their scores (Ardito, 2025, p. 13).

How can faculty detect unauthorised AI use?

While IMI is steering away from a policing atmosphere, it is important for faculty to know common indicators of AI use, the logic behind such indicators, and the potential pitfalls of such flags. These pitfalls are included to remind faculty no one indicator is fool proof and that human intuition can be unreliable when identifying AI writing (Waltzer, Pilegard and Heyman, 2024). It is advised the multiple indicators combined with professional judgement be considered when elevating a potential case of unauthorised AI to a PD.

The below table considers the reasoning behind common AI indicators and the potential pitfalls of such indicators.

Indicators of AI Use – a measured approach		
AI Indicator	**Logic**	**Pitfall**
AI Generated Writing Tells - such as: • Uniform Sentence Rhythm • Confident Shallow Claims • Inconsistent voice across sections • Overuse of transitions, hedge words, and qualifiers	Due to the training of AI, it's writing will result in certain common patterns that while palatable for a general audience, can be a tell for AI Generated writing.	However, AI writing is still influenced by human writing, and humans will also be influenced by AI patterns. This means a human may have a writing a style/pattern/tic that is similar to AI.
Assignment is inconsistent with Assignment guidelines	Sometimes AI will not know or follow assignment guidelines, meaning it can be a tell for AI generated writing.	However, a learner also could fail to read or understand assignment guidelines, meaning it is possible this is just human error and not a sign of AI use.
Significant difference between past and present writing style/mastery of subject	Learners may use AI for one assignment and not the other, meaning their understanding or writing style will differ.	However, learners writing styles can improve throughout the module, meaning writing styles can change as they get to practice more.
Turned in assignment has non-existent sources, inaccurate content, and it is debateable if sources support claims.	AI will often hallucinate sources, make grandiose claims, and outright provide inaccurate information. Such use can be reflected in its outputs when checked.	However, learners can also make up sources and information. If an assignment does any of these things, it's good to consider if this type of Academic Misconduct is AI related or not.

Using these indicators and your professional judgement, you may think there is a case to be made of unauthorised AI use. In that case, please let your PD know as soon as possible as they will handle the next stage of the Academic Misconduct process: Investigation.

Investigation

This next step is handled by the PD, in which they will invite the learner to a meeting to discuss the potential misconduct. This is not a disciplinary hearing or an accusation, it is intended to ensure that the learning outcomes evidenced in the assessment have been achieved by the learner, and to investigate a question of possible academic misconduct.

This conversation could include prompts such as:

- How did you come up with your idea?
- How did you research your topic?
- What was the writing process like?
- How long did it take you to complete your assignment?
- How much time did you dedicate towards the editing process?

In making a judgement, no one indicator should be used as a single piece of evidence, but a mix of indicators, faculty judgement, and conversations with the learner to come to a decision.

Outcomes

The PD has three options to choose from after this meeting is done.

- It is believed no academic misconduct took place, but a lack of skill and application of scholarly conventions. This results in:
    - Engaging with the learner to remind them the importance of good academic practice and the academic integrity supports IMI offers
    - The assignment will be graded according to the assessment as normal
- Based on a balance of probabilities, it is believed Academic Misconduct occurred. This results in:
    - Appropriate penalties being applied based on the tariff model in the ***Policy and Procedure on Academic Integrity***.
        - The learner may request a full investigation if they are not satisfied with the end judgement.

- Based on a balance of probabilities, it is believed that Major Academic Misconduct occurred. This results in:
    - A detailed investigation
    - Hearing with the Academic and Professional Standards Committee

Any processes past this stage of the Academic Misconduct framework are explored in the ***Policy and Procedure on Academic Integrity***.

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