An exploration of the intersection between academic integrity and policing ethics

Anonymous vignette survey comparing police degree apprentices and non-regulated undergraduates on academic integrity judgments and Code of Ethics endorsement, informing assessment, guidance and ethics education.

Key details

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Police region	South East
Level of research	Masters
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Research context

Academic integrity underpins the credibility of higher education. It signals that assessment outcomes reflect genuine learning. Yet students hold different views about boundaries of where helpful support becomes 'too much', how collaboration should work on individual tasks, and how digital tools should be used and acknowledged. These grey areas matter for fairness and for what graduates can legitimately claim to know. They also matter for public trust in degree standards, especially where graduates move into public-facing roles.

Police degree apprentices study in universities while developing a professional identity guided by the College of Policing's code of ethics. If academic decisions normalise habits like uncritical reliance on tools or vague authorship, that may sit uneasily alongside ethical expectations in

policing, where credibility in reports, statements and decision-making depends on clear methods and truthful attribution. Strong endorsement of ethical principles may align with stricter views of acceptable academic practice. There is currently limited evidence on how these domains intersect during study.

This project explores that intersection by comparing how police degree apprentices and non-regulated undergraduates judge short, realistic academic scenarios (for example, undeclared proofreading, reference accuracy, collaboration beyond instructions and AI-assisted drafting). Using a vignette approach keeps the focus on perceptions rather than confessions, reducing pressure to self-incriminate and allowing students to explain their reasoning briefly. The study also considers whether awareness and endorsement of professional ethical principles relate to stricter academic-integrity judgements and to views about learning and credibility (epistemic authority).

Findings will be reported in aggregate only and used to inform assessment design, student guidance and ethics education. The overarching aim is to build a clearer, evidence-based picture of how students reason about everyday study decisions, and how those judgements connect, if at all, to the professional values expected of future police officers.

Research methodology

This study uses a primarily quantitative, non-experimental, comparative design delivered through an anonymous online vignette survey. The approach focuses on perceptions rather than admissions of personal behaviour, reducing self-incrimination and social-desirability pressure while still yielding comparable, analysable data.

Participants

Two cohorts will be invited:

- police degree apprentices (PCDA)
- non-regulated undergraduates

Sampling will be convenience-based via university channels.

Materials and measures

The survey presents five short scenarios reflecting common academic-integrity dilemmas. After each vignette, participants will be asked to rate acceptability, seriousness, impact on learning and impact on epistemic authority, followed by a one-line rationale.

Additional measures include:

- university policy literacy (both cohorts)
- code of ethics literacy and endorsement/internalisation (police cohort only)
- a brief social-desirability screener
- minimal demographics (cohort, year of study, age band).

Procedure

The survey (approximately 15 minutes long) is hosted on Jisc Online Surveys in anonymous mode. No names, emails, force identifiers or IP addresses are collected. Participants are reminded not to include identifying details in free text.

Ethics and data management

Participation is voluntary, items can be skipped, and withdrawal is possible before submission. Data are exported to approved university storage, reported only in aggregate, and no institution or force is identified.