



Student Perspectives on Online Assessment, Academic Integrity & Ethical Practice: Outcomes of Research at UCD

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Context

Part of UCD's wider initiatives on academic integrity and assessment, launched in 2022 with support of two working groups:

- **Working Group on Online Assessment**
- **Working Group on Academic Integrity and Ethical Practice**

Awarded QQI anniversary funding for research on assessment and qualification confidence: "Assessment Identity, Academic Integrity and Ethical Practice"

- **Research led by Dr Deirdre Stritch (postdoctoral fellow) under Prof. Marie Clarke, UCD Dean of Undergraduate Studies**

Project findings have informed UCD's new, holistic **Academic Integrity Policy**

Research Objectives



Enhance understanding of students' experiences of online assessment, and perspectives on ethical practice, academic integrity and academic misconduct

Seek students' feedback on information and guidance provided by UCD on academic integrity and the university's expectations surrounding assessment behaviour

Investigate how these experiences and perceptions influence students' choices in the context of online assessment.

A further objective of the study was to explore faculty understandings of assessment identity, in the context of online assessment. The outcomes of a consultation with faculty were published in September 2023: [Online Assessment in UCD: Outcomes of Consultation with Schools](#)

Survey Methodology

- UCD Human Research Ethics Committee granted approval for a **short, anonymous, online survey** to be conducted:

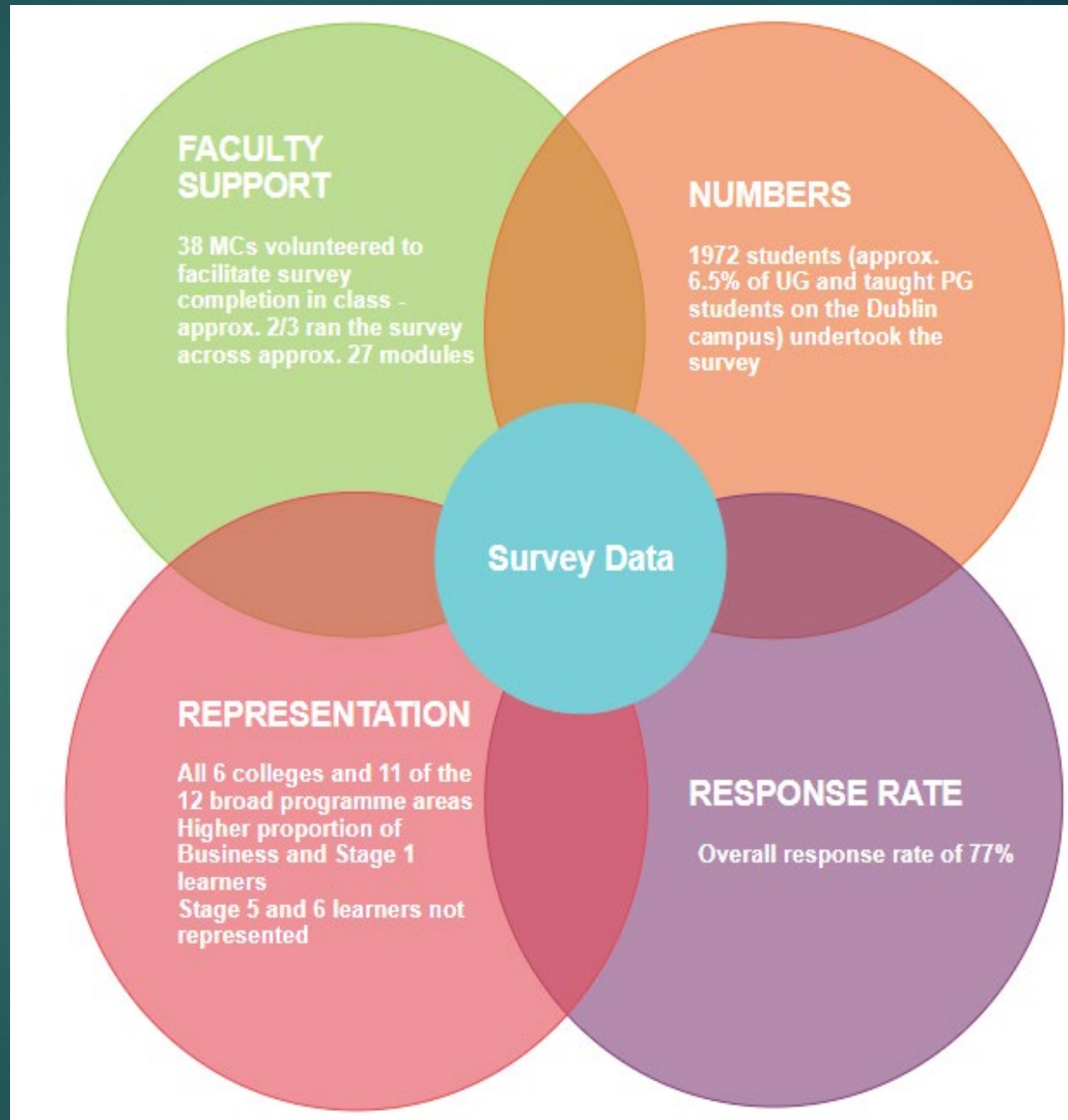
with undergraduate and taught postgraduate students

on selected modules offered by local 'academic integrity champions'

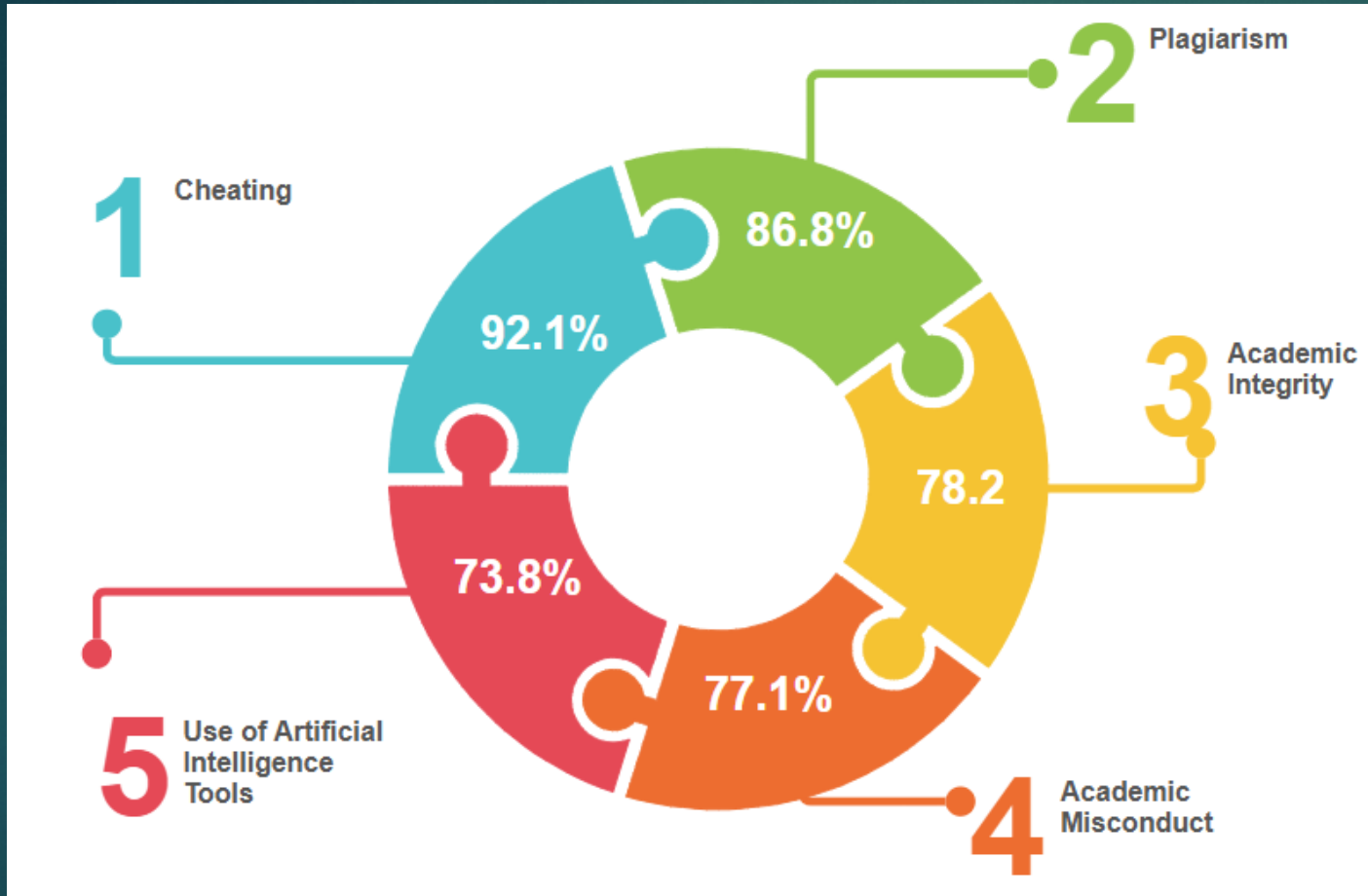
in each of the six colleges.

- Conducted in-class at the start of November 2023.
- Took **10 minutes** to complete.
- Students absent from class could conduct the survey from a link in the VLE.

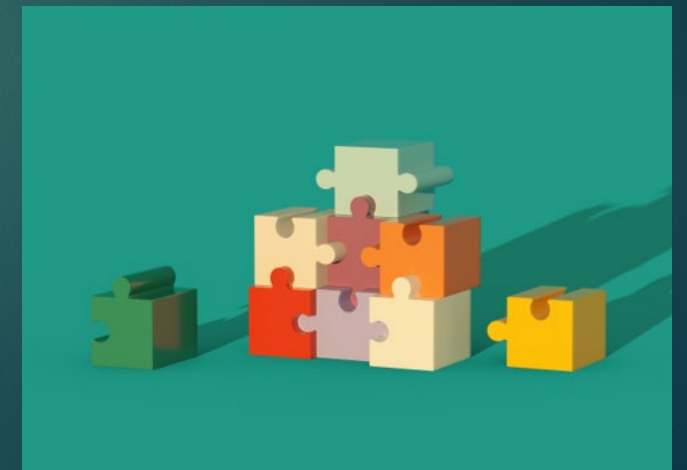
Survey Data Overview



Student Understanding of Academic Integrity Related Terms (Extremely + Very Well)

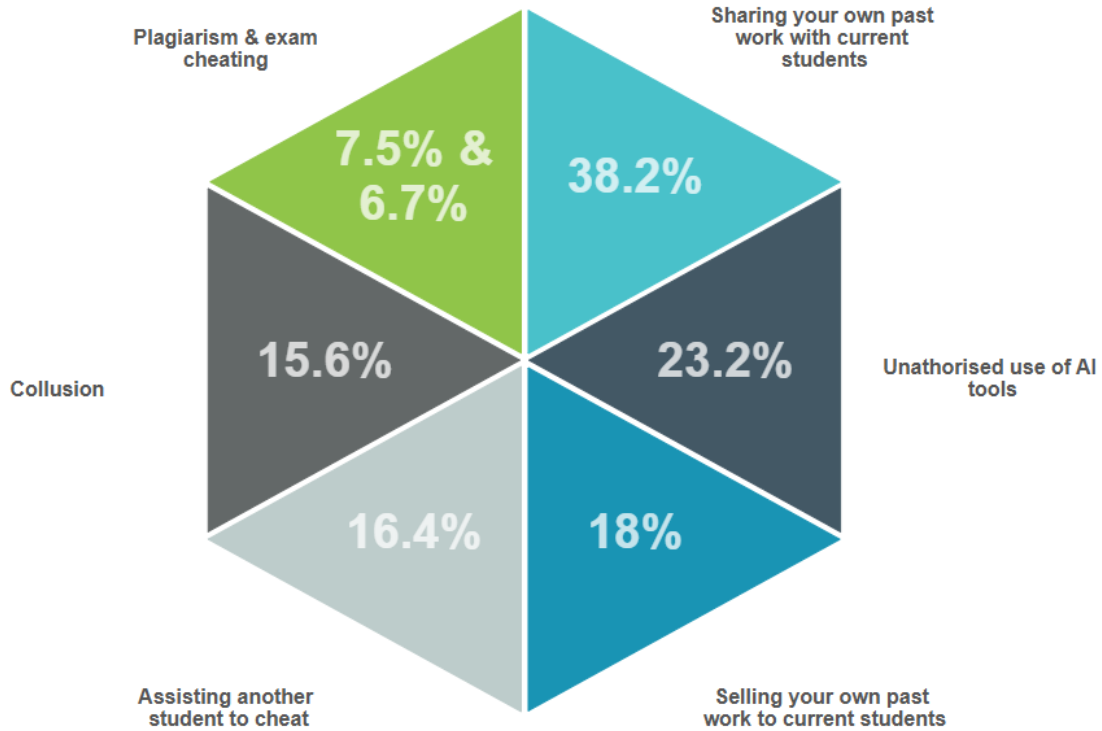


- 52.3% understand contract cheating extremely or very well
- 49.1% understand collusion extremely or very well

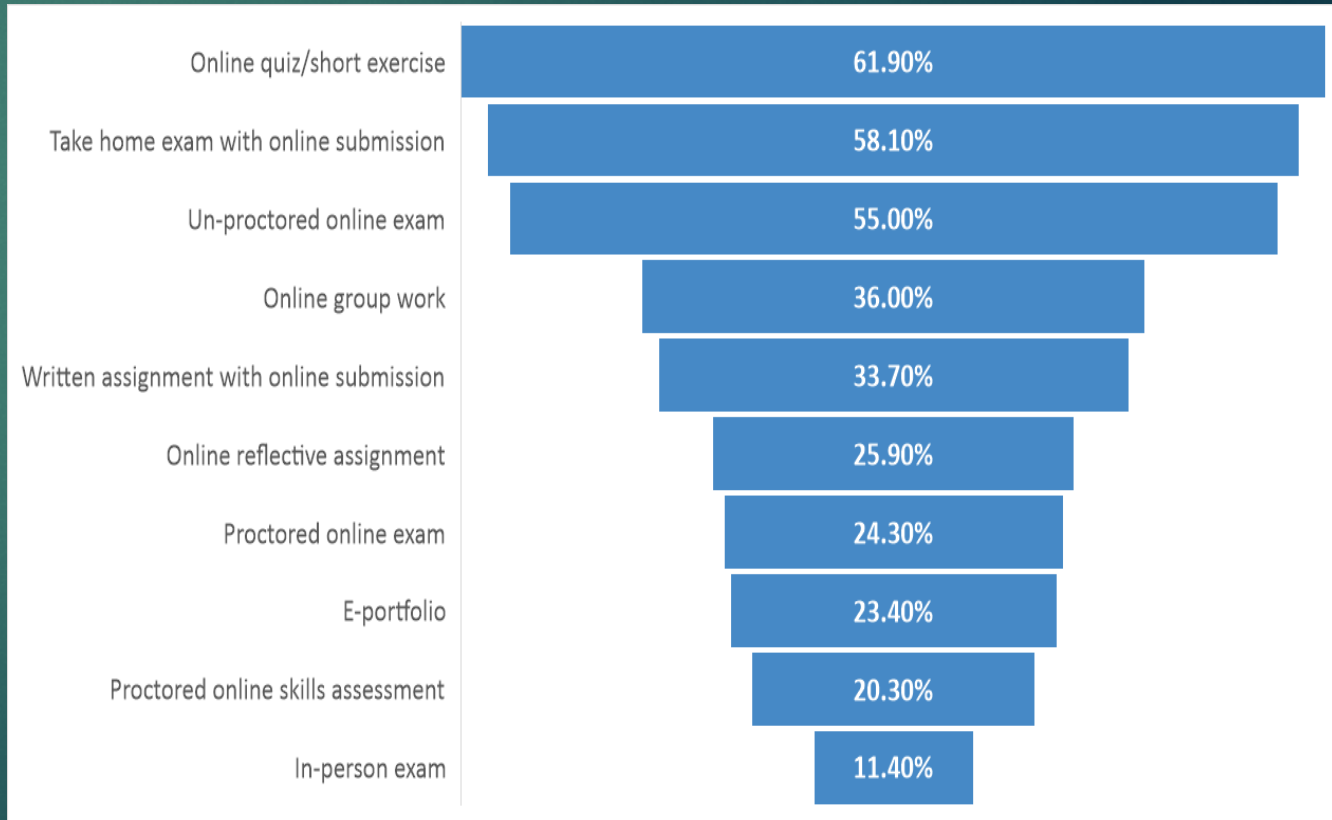


Perspectives on Ethical Practice

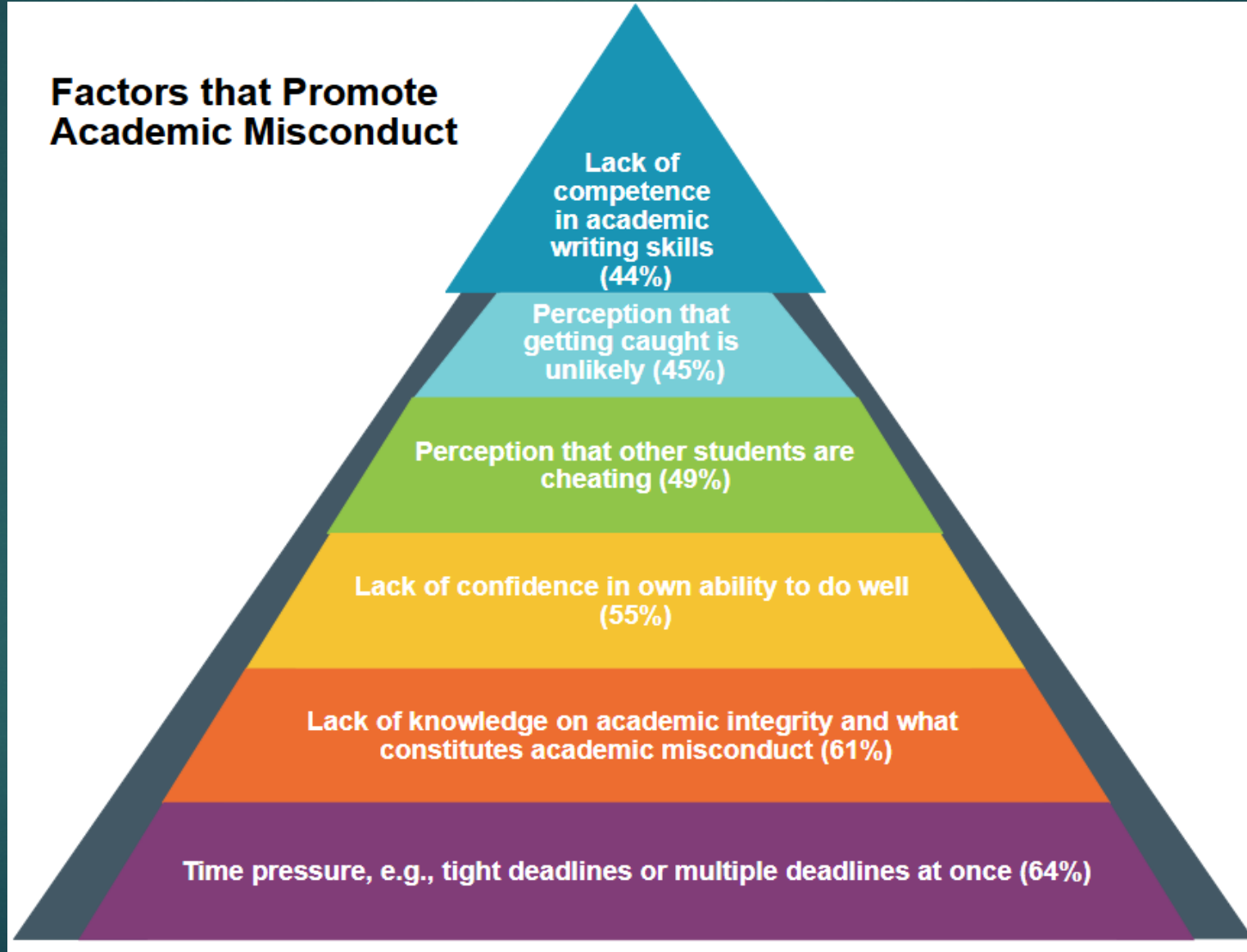
Behaviour Considered 'Ethical' or 'Somewhat Unethical'



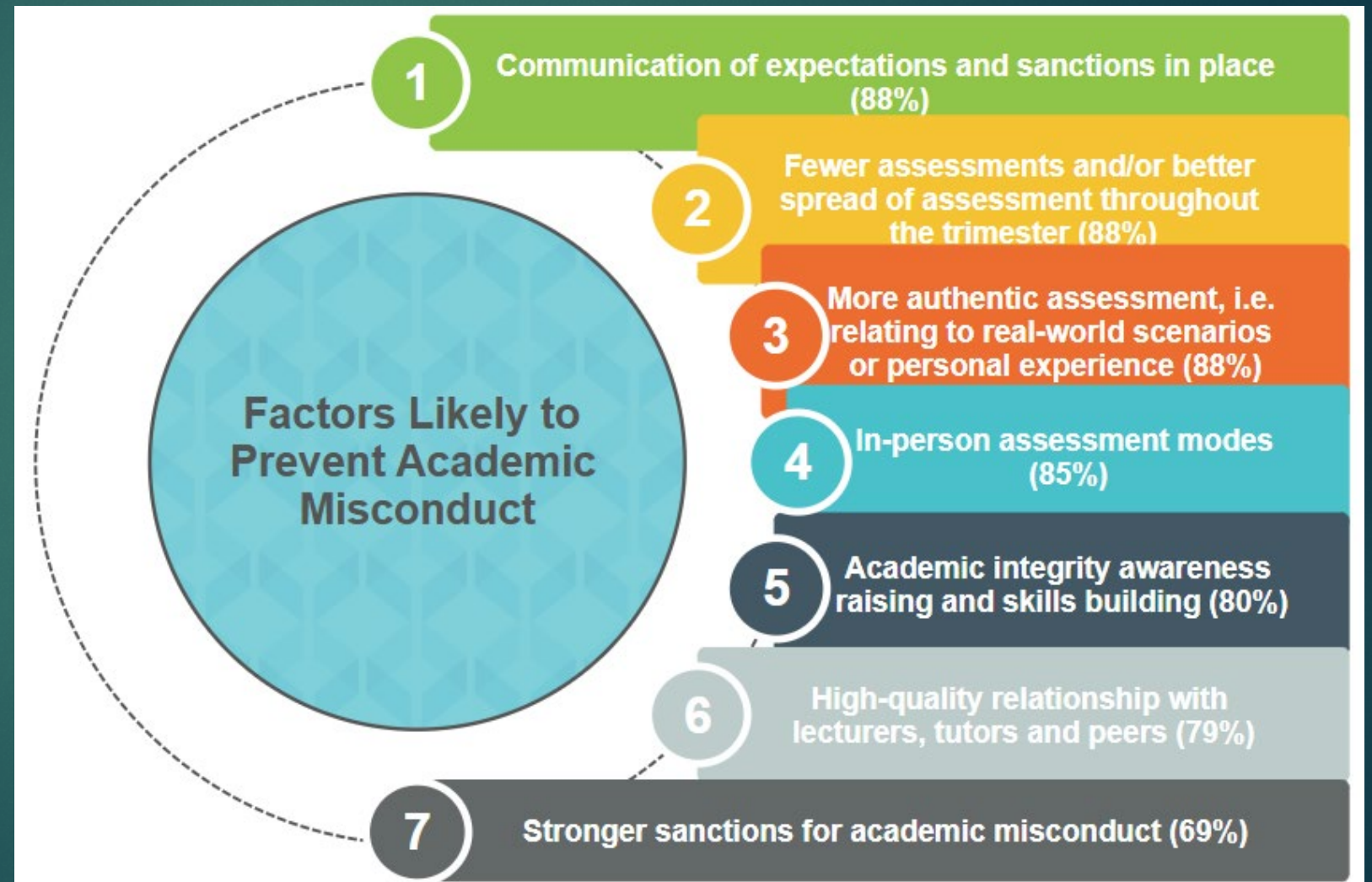
Perceptions of Cheating Levels in Different Assessment Types (Common, Very Common and Extremely Common)



Student Perception of Factors that Promote Academic Misconduct



Student Perception of Factors that may Prevent Academic Misconduct



Willingness to Engage in Academic Misconduct



	Don't know	No	Yes
All	25%	69%	7%
Year/Stage 1	26%	69%	5%
Year/Stage 2	25%	69%	6%
Year/Stage 3	19%	71%	10%
Year/Stage 4	25%	59%	16%
Taught postgraduate students	23%	73%	4%

Willingness to Facilitate Academic Misconduct

	Don't know	No	Yes
All	22%	73%	5%
Year/Stage 1	22%	74%	4%
Year/Stage 2	22%	75%	3%
Year/Stage 3	19%	70%	11%
Year/Stage 4	23%	66%	11%
Taught postgraduate students	7%	80%	3%

Reasons Presented for Willingness to Engage in Academic Misconduct

- ▶ Acceptance of unauthorised use of AI as ethical and necessary
- ▶ Lack of relevant knowledge or understanding of what is required for the assessment
 - ▶ lack of support or guidance from faculty
- ▶ Stress / pressure
- ▶ Time pressure
- ▶ Perception that others are cheating
- ▶ Online assessment
- ▶ Fear of failure
- ▶ Unfair assessment and / or assessment conditions

If I were given a confusing/very difficult assignment and did not know where to begin I might collude with another student (Survey Respondent)

Online exams, I would look up answers, in first year, before AI tools were a thing MCQ (Survey Respondent)

If I was overwhelmed with a lot of essays or assignments and I needed to get it down fast (Survey Respondent)

To prevent being at the bottom of a bell curve when other students are cheating if I knew everyone in the module to be doing the same (Survey Respondent)

Reasons Presented for Willingness to Facilitate Academic Misconduct

- ▶ Altruistic reasons
- ▶ Low probability of getting caught
- ▶ Transactional attitude to cheating
- ▶ The assessment and / or assessment context is unfair
- ▶ Assessment difficulty

If a friend desperately needed my help, I would (Survey Respondent)

If I knew it would be impossible for me to get caught and/or I was getting paid enough to take the risk (Survey Respondent)

If I deem the assessment to be unfair or that the conditions/restraints of assessment do not allow for me to properly demonstrate my learning and understanding, and this is a sentiment shared by others in the module with me (Survey Respondent)

In the workforce nobody works alone. You are only as good as your team and so working as a team to help other students is more reflective of how the real world works (Survey Respondent)

What More Can Universities DO?

- ▶ Improve assessment design and delivery
- ▶ Provide better / more / repeated academic integrity guidance and training
- ▶ Provide better guidance on assessment requirements and how to address them
- ▶ Permit and mainstream use of artificial intelligence tools
- ▶ Ensure a better spread of assignments and reduced assessment load
- ▶ Provide greater clarity and consistency around academic integrity rules and regulations
- ▶ Improve faculty performance
- ▶ Improve assessment feedback
- ▶ Improve course design

In my experience, academic misconduct occurs most when students do not believe they can do well in an exam or assessment due to the conditions it must be taken under. Assessments should be an opportunity for students to demonstrate learning and understanding. MCQ formats whether online or in person, while easier, faster, and cheaper to complete and grade, do not allow for a proper assessment of understanding as answers are binary: correct, or incorrect. Assessments which require written or verbal responses allow for students to demonstrate knowledge even if it is incomplete or imperfect. An MCQ usually only allows for one correct answer. Knowledge and real-world experience rarely has only one correct answer. For this reason, I think that for fairer and more accurate assessment, UCD should rely less on MCQ assessments and explore other options which allow for more opportunities to show learning. Not just written assessment, but oral or interview type assessments could be considered (Survey Respondent).



Thank you

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