



European Network  
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Integrity

# Contract Cheating

Training module for HEI instructors  
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# Basic information for trainers

- Target group of instructors: advisors in academic integrity; policy-makers
- Summary of content:
  - Definition, facts and materials about contract cheating
  - Update on recent intelligence and research on contract cheating
  - Raise awareness of evolving threats
  - Collect thoughts, experiences and ideas from participants

# Basic information for trainers

- Learning outcomes, on completion of this module participants should:
  - Appreciate what is meant by contract cheating
  - Understand why it is a problem
  - Be able to develop policies and actions to counter the threats

# Basic information



- Educational format(s): workshop, presentation, discussion, feedback
- Duration: 50 minutes
- Recommended number of participants: any number

# Definition of contract cheating

- Students asking a third-party to complete assessed work on their behalf and submitting it for credit as their own work
- Definition includes essay mills, but also other forms of ghost-writing
  - Students / graduates offering services to other students
  - Friends and family helping or paying for commissioned work
  - Academic staff completing students' work for them
  - Impersonation to complete examinations or laboratory work
  - File-sharing sites (e.g. uploading then downloading for free)
- Applies to any level of education
- Price paid often determined by required quality and timescale

# Other aspects of contract cheating

- University employees working for essay mills
- Essay mills blackmailing students
- Misrepresentation as an approved tutoring or proof-reading service
- Social media used to make contact
- On campus, leafletting, advertising, business cards, discounts
- Classroom “moles” and infiltration of systems
- Pervasive / predatory nature of contact methods



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## CONTRACT CHEATING

Have you heard that some students are getting other people to do their university assessments for them?  
This is called contract cheating. [#defeatthecheat](https://twitter.com/defeatthecheat)

If you are tempted to use such services (perhaps through the internet or supported by personal friends or other contacts), you need to be clear about all the serious impacts this will have on your education and future career.

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# Threats from contract cheating



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- Quality and standards
- Fairness and equity
- Institutional reputation
- Huge drain on institutional resources
- Massive industry and marketplace
- Difficult to detect and generate evidence to prove
- Easier to ignore it than challenge students?
- Inconsistencies > legal challenges from students
- Global and growing problem
- Student safety – blackmail threats



# Challenging contract cheating

- Assessment design
- Vigilance, buy-in of academic staff
- Working with students as partners
- Education, awareness-raising
- International days of action
- Understanding motivations for contract cheating
- New tools from Turnitin – Authorship Investigate (+ others)
- Whistle-blower protection policy
- National / International initiatives (e.g. legislation)

# Findings from research

- Commissioned work not always of an appropriate standard (may stand out because too good or very poor depending on who did it)
  - Essay mills:
    - Not always delivered on time
    - Price paid does not align with standard of work delivered
    - Terms and conditions – often no protection of personal data

(Sutherland-Smith and Dullaghan 2019)
  - The majority of contact cheating is in the form of sharing, downloading or support from family and friends
  - Students are far less concerned than academics about the ethics of contract cheating
- (Bretag, Harper et al 2017, 2018)

# Your input

- Working in groups (if audience > 8 people)
- What experiences do you have of
  - Developing policies to address contract cheating
  - Finding cases of contract cheating
  - Generating the evidence to prove it has happened
  - Holding hearings to present the evidence
  - Applying sanctions to students found guilty
  - Dealing with essay mills on campus or on social media

# Summary

- The global higher education sector cannot afford to do nothing
- Minimum requirement is strong, clear, transparent and consistently applied policies, procedures and sanctions
- Provide education and training for everyone regularly
- How can you know whether your students, staff and alumni are working as ghost writers?
- This is an evolving threat, requiring regular reviews and updates
- HE providers should share intelligence and learn from each other



# Acknowledgement & references

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- Sutherland-Smith, W., Dullaghan, K. (2019). You don't always get what you pay for: User Experiences of engaging with contract cheating sites. Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, Taylor and Francis. DOI: 10.1080/02602938.2019.1576028

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