




Contract cheating and academic integrity in higher education:

What can universities, governments and quality assurance agencies do to understand, prevent and respond to the challenge?

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS



CONTRACT CHEATING & ACADEMIC INTEGRITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Meet... Abdullah



Photo credit: Lotus on Pinterest

International Centre for Academic Integrity



International Center
for Academic Integrity

- 68% of undergraduate students admit to *any kind* of cheating on tests or on coursework
- 43% of graduates admit to cheating on tests or on coursework
- Is the Internet to blame? Cheating is often blamed on the Internet (89% of students in a Cornell study blamed the increase in cheating generally on the rise of the Internet)
- Don McCabe: there is a growing apathy toward school and cheating amongst today's students
- Attitude + opportunity

How big is the problem?

- **15.7% of the student population globally admits to contract cheating***
- **31 million students globally**
- **1 in 7 graduates may have paid someone to do an assignment for them during their degrees**
- It might be even worse?

- Source: Professor Philip Newton, Director of Learning and Teaching, Swansea Medical School, Swansea University,
 - “How Common is Commercial Contract Cheating in Higher Education and is it Increasing? A Systematic Review” (2018) *Frontiers in Education*

* In Newton's study this figure is based on research from 2014

What is “contract cheating”?

- **“The submission of work by students for academic credit which the students have paid contractors to write for them”**
 - (Clarke and Lancaster, 2006)
- Some definitions include work done by family and friends
- **“Contract cheating ... is a basic relationship between three actors: a student, their university and a third party, who completes assessments for the former [i.e. the student] to be submitted to the latter [i.e. the university] but whose input is not permitted**
 - (Draper and Newton, 2017)

Where a student “submits work that has been completed for them by a third party, irrespective of the third-party’s relationship with the student, and whether they are paid or unpaid”

Source: Bretag and Harper et al (2018)

Rentacoder...now Freelancer

The screenshot shows a Google search interface. The address bar displays the URL: `https://www.google.com/search?q=rentacoder&oq=rentacoder&aqs=chrome..69i57j0l5.3539j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8`. The search bar contains the text "rentacoder". Below the search bar, the "All" tab is selected. The search results show "About 215,000 results (0.33 seconds)". The first result is an advertisement titled "RentACoder Is Now Freelancer® | Affordable & Reliable Experts" with a link to www.freelancer.com/. The ad text describes the platform as a place where programmers, designers, and writers can find jobs, highlighting features like 14M+ jobs, 100% payment guarantee, 24/7 support, and a 95% rehiring rate. Below the ad, there are two promotional boxes: "How Freelancer Works" and "Outsource Anything". At the bottom, a "People also search for" section lists related search terms.

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Languages

VIRTUAL ASSISTANT NEEDED TO HANDLE EMAILS. 6 days left

\$41 / hr Avg Bid

1 bids

Hi, I am in need of a virtual assistant for email work: - sorting through emails and assigning the right email to the right team member - replying to emails based on specific guidelines - additional administrative tasks I am looking for a virtual assistant I am able to hire and delegate a few specific tasks to. I'm...

[Customer Support](#) [Data Entry](#) [Email Handling](#) [Internet Research](#) [Virtual Assistant](#)

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\$37 Avg Bid

1 bids



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☒ All open jobs

☐ All open and closed jobs


I need an expert essay writer 5 days left  VERIFIED

\$56 Avg Bid

34 bids

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Need Help with Writing 4 days left  VERIFIED

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61 bids

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Write an essay 4 days left  VERIFIED

\$55 Avg Bid

66 bids

Write an 1200 words **essay**, more details in chat

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Essay : The image of Ivan the Terrible in Russian history and culture. 4 days left  VERIFIED

\$57 Avg Bid

49 bids

Topic: The image of Ivan the Terrible in Russian history and culture. The **essay** should not be plagiarized It should be 3000 words

[Article Writing](#) [Copywriting](#)

- ☐ HTML
- ☐ Javascript
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Or enter skills



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Or enter languages



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the aspects of tort **law**. the legal principle. the provision of consumer protection legislation.

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16 bids

European Law Research Needed

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BUDGET \$30-250 CAD

Freelancer > Jobs > Legal > European Law Research Needed

Looking for someone with an ****LLB from the UK**** who has experience researching and writing. The topic would be regarding EU Law situation.

Must state where you completed your LL.B and if possible an academic writing sample.

Must be available second week of May 2019.

Skills: [Legal](#), [Legal Research](#), [Legal Writing](#), [Research](#), [Research Writing](#)

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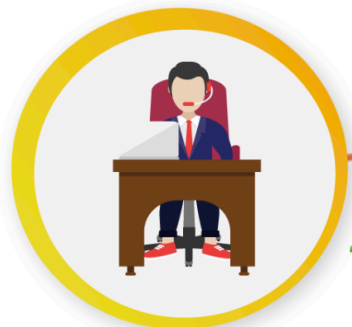
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My chat with “lawessays.co.uk” on 27 April 2019

My messages in grey

The image displays three sequential screenshots of a web chat interface with a customer service representative named Mathew sheldon. The chat window has a dark red header with the representative's name and a close button. The user's messages are in grey bubbles, and the representative's responses are in dark red bubbles. A date separator '17 May' is visible in the middle screenshot.

Screenshot 1 (Left):

- Header: Online, Mathew sheldon
- User message: Hello
- Representative message: Get the Discount Code before placing your order!
- User message: Can you writ a full 2500 word essay or only proofread and edit it

Screenshot 2 (Middle):

- Header: Mathew sheldon, Customer Service
- User message: Hello
- User message: When do you need it back by?
- Date separator: 17 May
- Representative message: This will cost you £95.90.
- User message: ??

Screenshot 3 (Right):

- Header: Mathew sheldon, Customer Service
- User message: That is for edit and proof read.
- User message: so i have to write it
- Representative message: We can also write it.
- User message: whats the price if you write it
- User message: What standard of paper are you looking for? First Class, 2:1 or 2:2?



Mathew sheldon
Customer Service



looking for 1st class, 2:1 or 2:2.

2:1 or 2:2



The fee for 2:1 will be £145.90.



And for 2:2 it would be £135.90.



May I have your name, email address
and phone number to enroll you?

We're ⚡ by talk to



Mathew sheldon
Customer Service



May I have your name, email address
and phone number to enroll you?

i dont know if im going to go ahead
yet, getting a quote from a couple of
sites



Well if quality matters for you then
you should go for it now.



Mathew sheldon
Customer Service



do you run essay through plagiaism checker after its finished? Or how do you know it will be plagiarism free essay?



Yes, There are companies that are going to offer you this in cheap prices but they cannot deliver the quality that we promise.



Yes we will provide you the plagiarism report as well.

We're ⚡ by tawk to

what if it doesnt get the grade agreed on

or what if it fails completey

refund?





Mathew sheldon
Customer Service



or what if it fails completey

refund?

the refund is for an F but only if theres more than %30 plagairism. but i might get an F for other reasons. eg. lecturer might not think i wrote it. so no refund in that sitaution.

im not sure about it. need to think about it more.



<https://www.lawessayshelp.co.uk/refund-policy.php>



You can see that.



im not sure about it. need to think about it more.



See we are actually dealing with thousands of students we never face such issues



But i'm not to force you for this



You can think about it.

Is this a problem?

1. Contract cheating is hard to detect
2. It is completely intentional – there's nothing accidental about this conduct
3. It's easy
4. It's a growing problem - globally
5. Contract cheating undermines the individual student's degree
6. Undermines the institutions' degrees, harms its reputation
7. Contract cheating could undermine the higher education sector in a country if contract cheating becomes widespread
8. Contract cheating results in graduates who do not have the skills and knowledge they are supposed to have: do you want a doctor or a nurse or a pilot or a lawyer who cannot perform skills to a required standard?
9. It doesn't stop at graduation: Numerous studies show that students who cheat at school or university are much more likely to engage in or permit corrupt practices in the workplace

Is contract cheating different?

- YES!
- Contract cheating is different from plagiarism (citing other people's work without acknowledging the source) or whispering an answer on a test
- Plagiarism is sometimes accidental, exam cheating is sometimes done on the “spur of the moment”
- Contract cheating is pre-meditated, intentional and it usually involves a whole assessment item
- It damages the academic integrity of an institution on a far greater level – reputational damage can be severe (e.g.. the *Pens for Hire* scandal in Australia in 2015)



WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Understand, prevent and respond

Three-pronged response – no single solution

1. Universities

2. Governments

3. Quality assurance agencies

◦ My framework: understand, prevent, respond



UNIVERSITIES

1. Universities: what can they do

- **Universities should try to understand why students cheat:**
- Remember Abdullah?
 - Language other than English Status (LOTE)
 - Dissatisfaction with the learning environment
 - Opportunities to cheat
 - Other factors....being male, being an undergraduate, etc. can't be changed but its good to be aware of them



Universities can prevent cheating

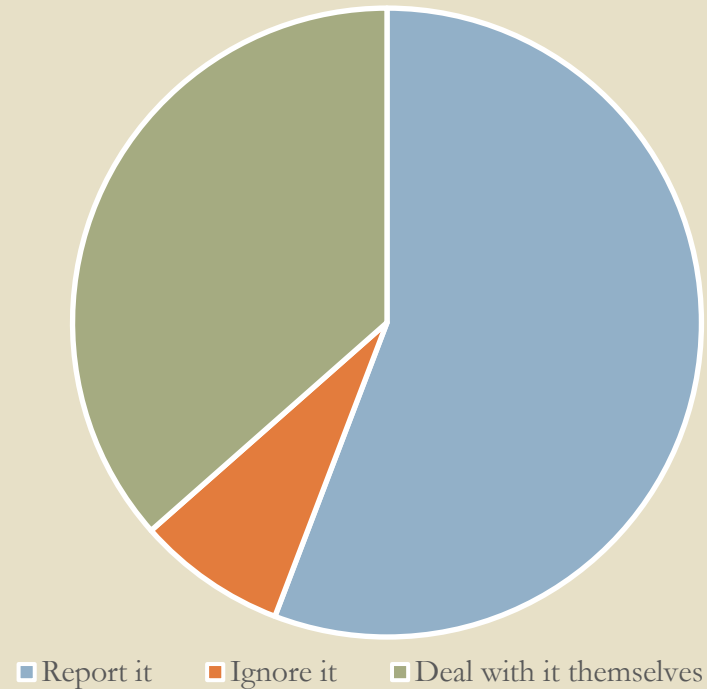
- **Changes to the teaching and learning environment**
 - Teach modules in research ethics and academic integrity
 - Teach how to footnote, how to create a bibliography/list of references
 - Introduce an “Honor code”
 - Explain the Academic Integrity policy
- **Assessment Design:** meaningful, reasonable, timely & closely linked to learning outcomes
 - Oral presentations for written assignments
 - Unique assessments – don’t roll out the same assignments/questions each semester
 - Tailor the assessment closely to the course
 - Not too many individual pieces of assessment – they mount up over 4-5 courses – no conflicts
- **Teaching and learning practices:** get to know your students! This is the most important factor in detecting contract cheating (Bretag and Harper, 2018)
- Academic integrity: discuss it, have a policy, teach it (see recommendations

Universities must respond to cheating

- A comprehensive **reporting system** and database
- To deal with **ALL complaints of cheating**, including contract cheating
- Australian research showed that when a lecturer suspects contract cheating:
 - More than 1/3 of lecturers (36.5%) deal with suspected contract cheating themselves with a range of penalties
 - About 55.8% referred it to an academic integrity decision-maker
 - And 7.7% ignored it
- Out of the 36.5% who “dealt with it themselves”:
 - Warning/counselling – 41.9%
 - Zero for the assignment 37.1%
 - Reduced mark - 28.3%
 - Is this a problem?

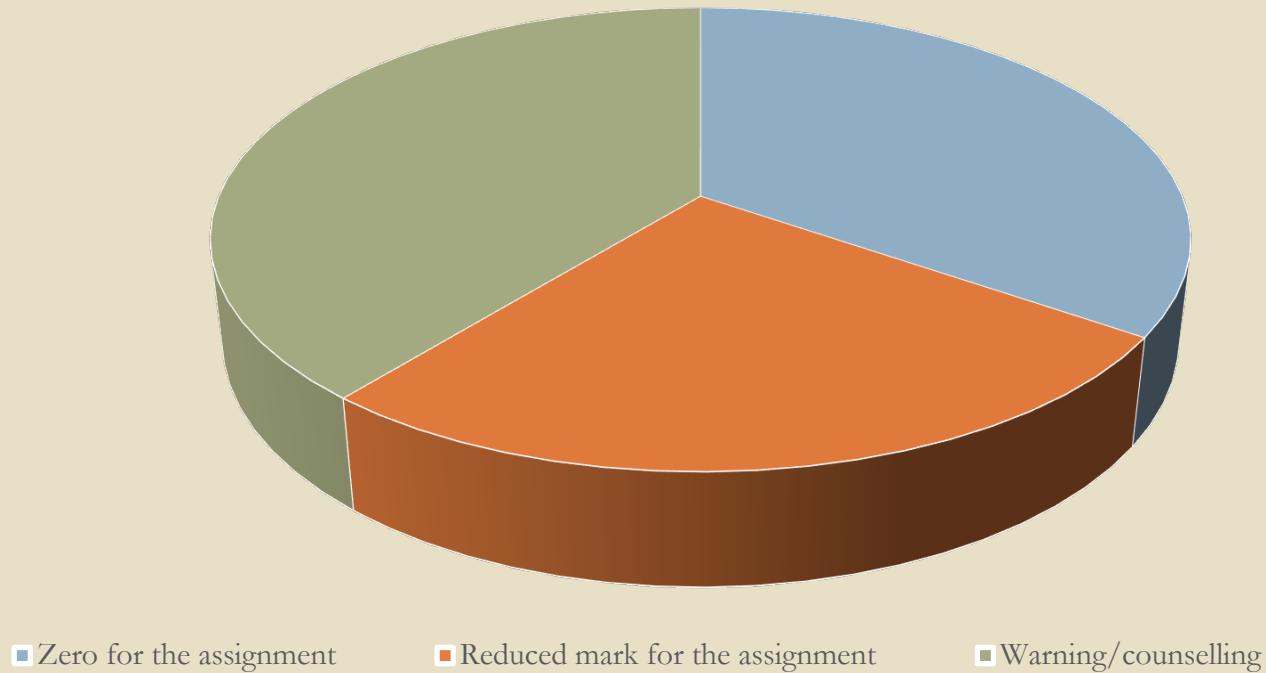
What do lecturers do when they suspect a case of contract cheating?

Bretag & Harper et al (2018)



How do they “deal with it themselves?”

Bretag and Harper et al, 2018



Is this a problem?

- Yes, because:

1. The university does not have a record of which students are engaging in contract cheating
 2. The university does not have a record of which assignments/courses need to be revised
 3. The university can't ensure **consistency of penalties**
- *Think about the police: what would happen if every police officer decided every case on the spot?*



GOVERNMENTS

Governments: what can they do?

- **Pass a law to make contract cheating websites and offices illegal**
- New Zealand has done this already – Australia, the UK and Ireland are in the process of considering their options
- Every country should consider making it illegal to sell work to students when the provider likely knows that the work is for school or university credit
- Get the Ministry of Higher Education to work with the Ministry of Education: cheating starts in school

New Zealand law - contract cheating is a crime

- s292E Offence to provide or advertise cheating services
- **A person commits an offence if the person provides any service specified in subsection (4) with the intention of giving a student an unfair advantage over other students.**
- A person commits an offence if the person **advertises** any service described in subsection (4) knowing that the service has or would have the effect of giving a student an unfair advantage over other students.
- A person commits an offence who, without reasonable cause, **publishes an advertisement for any service**, described in subsection (4).
- The services referred to in subsections (1) to (3) are as follows:
- **Completing an assignment or any other work** that a student is required to complete as part of a programme or training scheme;
- **Providing or arranging the provision of an assignment** that a student is required to complete as part of a programme or training scheme;
- Providing or arranging the provision of **answers for an examination** that a student is required to sit as part of a programme or training scheme;
- **Sitting an examination** that a student is required to sit as part of a programme or training scheme or providing another person to sit the exam in place of the student.



QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

Quality assurance

- “Maintaining and enhancing academic integrity can be viewed as part of the quality assurance cycle within an institution, to ensure that it comes under regular scrutiny”
 - QAA “Contracting to cheat in higher education” (2017), p24
- There should be an explicit process for an faculty member to follow when they suspect a case of contract cheating:
 - Who to report it to
 - How to report it
- Evidence collection
 - Samples of the student’s normal writing style
 - Notes from a viva voce examination
 - Meta-data collected from a word doc - authorship
- Viva voce examination of the student
 - Vivas should be a normal part of the assessment process
 - Chaired by someone independent of the allegation

Quality assurance agencies

- The QAA has written 2 reports and made recommendations to the higher ed sector
- QA agencies can undertake research across the whole sector
- QA agencies can make recommendations to all higher ed institutions:
 - Create an Academic Integrity Office
 - Create an Academic Integrity policy
 - Raise awareness of contract cheating with faculty and students on a regular basis
 - Recommend all universities look at their assessment policies
 - Ensure that there is a comprehensive database to deal with ALL cases of cheating in every university
 - Introduce requirements into national QA frameworks
- QA agencies can ensure that changes are made across the sector in a way that individual institutions cannot – for fear of being singled out or for lack of institutional capability
- Database using an overall system to see trends across all institutions

QAA “Contracting to cheat in higher education” – (2017)

- Sets out **best practice towards achieving academic integrity in higher education**
- **Education for students**
- Training and information for faculty
 - Authentic Assessments:
 - Authentic
 - Face-to-face
 - Peer assessments
 - Don't recycle each semester
- Blocking essay mills and those who advertise them



MY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations: (see pp35 of my paper)

1. **Act now** – don't wait for a scandal
2. Start a conversation on your campus about academic integrity and academic misconduct
3. **Establish an Academic Integrity Office** – staff it with people who have knowledge of pedagogical issues like assessment
4. Policy – get your AIO to create an Academic Integrity Policy with a wide mandate
5. Focus groups – faculty and student, to understand current attitudes and behaviours
6. **Research: do it, read it, understand it, implement it**
7. Definitions and understandings of what academic integrity is
8. Mission statement and values – review?
9. **Educate staff and students**
10. **Create a Database** – comprehensive, secure, for complaints and penalties...

Continued...

11. **Penalties: transparency, consistency**, across the university: graduated in severity. Job references? Admission to professional bodies?
12. Disciplinary Committee – clear and transparent process
13. **Honour Code** – students cheat less when they sign up to an agreement about academic integrity e.g. Stanford, McCabe research
14. **Academic honesty education**
 11. Every under-graduate and post-graduate programme needs to have a module on academic integrity and ethics
 12. Instructors must **explicitly** define why a practice is unacceptable
15. **Teach citation techniques** – no one is born with the ability to cite properly
16. **Teach students computer skills** – how to use Word, create a PowerPoint
17. Enhance detection – Turnitin? Other software solutions?
18. **Social media – monitor it for advertising of cheating services**
19. Tutoring services – it's a fine line between tutoring and cheating
20. **Secondary schools – all your students come from them: 99% of cheating students in Canada cheated at school**
21. **Accreditation and quality assurance**
22. International connections – **join ICAI**
23. 19 October 2019 – mark the International Day Against Contract Cheating (ICAI)
24. Lobby your Minister of Higher Education for a law change and action at all levels of education against cheating
25. **Legislative change** - support universities – penalize students??



CONCLUSION

Takeaways...

- Contract cheating is a problem – for every university – it is happening on your campus!
- It is a growing problem
- A range of solutions are needed to address it: there is no silver bullet
- Set up an Academic Integrity Office/Unit without delay and give them a list of tasks
- There must be cross-sector co-operation to address it – no institution can fix it on their own
- The government should get involved: it's a key stakeholder in higher education
- Every university needs to design an action plan to determine what it will do: short-term and long-term
- **Don't wait for the scandal or the undercover journalist to expose your institution and risk institutional damage**
- **Act now – create a culture of academic integrity on your campus**



THANK YOU

Correspondence to: drmyrawilliamson@gmail.com