

Findings from a survey of 14,086 university students indicated that students were *not particularly concerned* about contract cheating – even if they had never engaged in cheating behaviour themselves (Bretag & Harper et al., 2018). This contrasted starkly with responses from 1,147 educators, who typically reported being ‘moderately’ to ‘very’ concerned about contract cheating (Harper & Bretag et al., 2018).

Many students appear to view it as a ‘victimless crime’, or believe that students who cheat are ‘only cheating themselves’. Students do not appear to be aware of the potential harm involved, such as risk to public safety, which may result from graduates who have incomplete knowledge and skills. Students also appear to be unaware of the damage it does to the reputation of their own qualifications, and the negative effects on student experience and satisfaction in courses where contract cheating is known to occur.



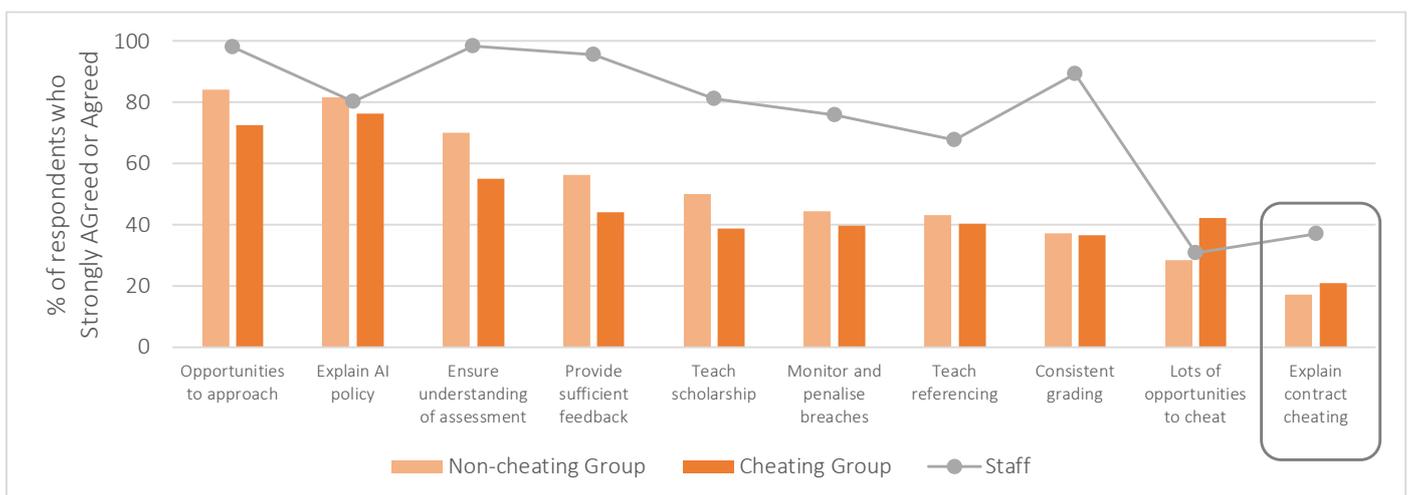
Ultimately [...] the people which do cheat will probably fail later on anyway (Student 118, Non-cheating group).

I do not get personally upset by others cheating as I focus purely on my own studies (Student 102, Non-cheating group).

Educators are not talking to students about it

Compounding students’ lack of concern about contract cheating is the fact that educators are *not talking to students* about it. Students were asked about educators’ use of 10 features of teaching and learning practice at their university. This included features such as having opportunities to approach educators, provision of sufficient feedback, clarity of assessment requirements, and the extent to which staff explain and discuss contract cheating. Staff were provided with the same list of 10 features of teaching and learning, and were asked to report the extent to which they implemented these features in their own teaching practice. As shown below, both students and staff agree that contract cheating is not really being discussed.

Extent to which 10 features of teaching and learning practice are used: Staff vs student level of agreement (%)



Qualitative responses from educators (Harper & Bretag et al., 2018) indicated that while some staff are worried about contract cheating in their courses, they are unaware of what they can do to respond to the problem.

I run an online course and I am very worried about this in the course. I don't really see a way to solve the problems. (Staff 164).

I don't really know how to combat the increasing trend of purchasing essays and the like online where a specific assignment is written to order... It's a serious issue, but no quick fixes unfortunately (Staff 205).

What can be done?

1. Create space during class for open dialogue with students about the various forms of contract cheating and collaboratively explore the potential academic, personal and professional consequences.
2. Include specific advice and instructions related to contract cheating as part of the academic integrity information provided in course/unit outlines and via learning management systems.
3. Seek opportunities for professional development, and work with academic support staff to create strategies to minimise and identify contract cheating.

References

- Bretag, T., Harper, R., Burton, M., Ellis, C., Newton, P., Saddiqui, S., Rozenberg, P & van Haeringen, K. (2018). Contract cheating: A survey of Australian university students, *Studies in Higher Education*, 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2018.1462788>
- Harper, R., Bretag, T., Ellis, C., Newton, P., Rozenberg, P., Saddiqui, S., & van Haeringen, K. (2018). Contract cheating: a survey of Australian university staff. *Studies in Higher Education*, 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2018.1462789>

Further resources available at www.cheatingandassessment.edu.au/

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