

Almost half of the 1,147 educators surveyed reported that they do not typically refer suspected contract cheating cases to an academic integrity decision maker (Harper & Bretag et al. 2018). The most common reasons were that contract cheating cases are 'impossible to prove', too time consuming, and there is a lack of support from senior managers to pursue such matters. Staff also reported that the current reward environment (including performance review and student evaluations of teaching) are disincentives to actively address and report contract cheating.

*It is **exceptionally hard to make a rock solid case** against a student who has used an essay mill. You can build a very strong circumstantial case but unless the student admits to it in an interview (which they rarely do as they are dishonest) the University I work for is very **reluctant to punish** them preferring to settle for lesser charges. I do not think my University takes this issue anywhere near seriously enough (Staff 177).*



Lenient penalties

Staff also reported that the penalties applied for substantiated cases of contract cheating were lenient compared to those recommended in the literature. Only 3% of students who had outsourced an assignment task were suspended, and only 16% of students who had arranged for an exam impersonator were suspended.



Outsourced assignment

30% Warning/counselling
27% Zero for assignment
21% Reduced mark for assignment
3% Suspension
2% Exclusion/expulsion

Exam impersonation

23% Zero for the exam
23% Warning/counselling
16% Zero for the subject
16% Suspension
12% Exclusion/expulsion

The AI process [...] is problematic. Repeat offenders are continually allowed to resubmit for the full range of grades, even after submitting assignments with someone else's name on the front page (Staff 150).

What can be done?

1. Review existing policies and procedures for identifying, reporting and managing suspected breaches, using an evidence-based approach which recognises the seriousness of contract cheating.
2. Ensure that academic staff at all levels (from Heads of Schools through to sessional markers) are trained and appropriately resourced, so they can effectively identify and respond to suspected contract cheating.
3. Include academic integrity breach reporting as a positive part of performance development and review.
4. Ensure consistency in the application of appropriate penalties for substantiated cases of contract cheating, including the recording and communication of case outcomes to staff and students.

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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