

## Language, opportunity and dissatisfaction

Findings from the largest dataset gathered to date on contract cheating indicate that there are three influencing factors: speaking a language other than English (LOTE) at home, the perception that there are 'lots of opportunities to cheat', and dissatisfaction with the teaching and learning environment (Bretag & Harper et al., 2018).

### Language other than English (LOTE)

A student's LOTE status had the *strongest effect* on cheating behaviours of the three factors (Bretag & Harper et al., 2018). Moreover, when asked to rate the likelihood that 'a student' would consider outsourcing a range of assessment types, LOTE status increased likelihood ratings significantly for all assessment types, particularly those requiring research, analysis and thinking, those comprising a significant portion of the final grade, and those with a short time between receipt and submission (Bretag & Harper, in progress).



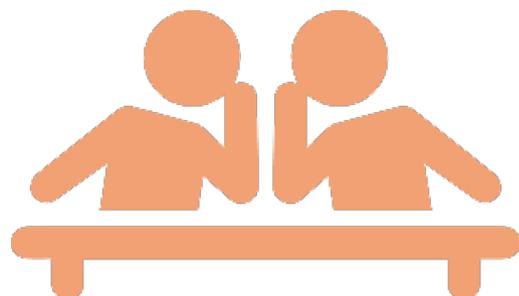
A distinction should be made between LOTE students and International students. Although there is an overlap between these two groups (approximately 80% of International students are also likely to be LOTE), a considerable proportion of Domestic students are also LOTE, and International status had *no influence* on cheating behaviour. While not disputing the challenges faced by International students studying in Australia, language clearly presents the most profound challenge for a LOTE students' learning and success, and the most significant risk to integrity.

*As an international student I need help to a lot of help to complete my assignments, but here everyone is only worried about themselves. Native speakers hardly ever want to help international students by checking grammar or structure. All the assignments that I have submitted I have done on my own, no has as helped me, that's why they are filled with tears, anger, desperation, frustration and my decreasing self esteem. I hate the assignments* (Student 2, Non-cheating Group).

Studies have consistently argued for the need to integrate the teaching of language and communication into curricula. This is not only beneficial for LOTE students, but also for native English speakers who learn together with LOTE students how language is used in a discipline's academic and professional contexts. Arkoudis et al. (2014) suggest that the challenge begins by establishing English language standards – getting agreement on a set of language and communication skills fundamental to each discipline, that are then taught and assessed.

### There are 'lots of opportunities' to cheat

Contract cheating behaviours are influenced by the perception that there are 'lots of opportunities' to cheat (Bretag & Harper et al., 2018). When asked to rate the likelihood that 'a student' would consider outsourcing a range of assessment types, the perception of cheating opportunities increased likelihood ratings for all assessment types, particularly those comprising a significant portion of the final grade, those bringing together a range of knowledge and skills, and those comprising a series of small graded tasks (Bretag & Harper, in progress).



Students reported seeing opportunities where assessments were recycled from semester to semester, during online quizzes, and where there was lack of monitoring (eg. invigilated exams, take-home exams). Students also spoke about the temptations offered by growing numbers of commercial providers that market their 'services' to students.

*The teachers know it's happening, but **don't seem to care or do much about it**. Most cheating I've seen has occurred during exams at uni where there are **not enough invigilators** (Student 828, Non-cheating Group).*

*I always find it frustratingly amusing when universities offer such assessments or online quizzes that are taken by groups of students in musical chair fashion in the library ... **If I see them, so do staff, and the practice is almost expected** (Student 697, Non-cheating Group).*

*Having been on the website "air tasker" to look for cleaners, I was **shocked to see how many people were there asking for assignments to be written or offering their services** ... even when you have no intentions of ever cheating, it is easy to come across sights offering it (Student 195, Non-cheating Group).*

## Dissatisfaction with teaching and learning

Contract cheating behaviours are influenced by dissatisfaction with the teaching and learning environment, though this effect is weaker than LOTE status and the perception of opportunities to cheat (Bretag & Harper et al., 2018). Cheating students reported markedly lower levels of satisfaction on three items:



- My lecturers and tutors ensure that I understand what is required in assignments
- I receive sufficient feedback to ensure that I learn from the work I do
- I have opportunities to approach my lecturers and tutors for assistance when needed

Educators are finding it increasingly difficult to provide high-quality teaching and learning experiences for their students, however. The practical conditions of teaching, such as workload, staff-student contact time, class sizes and marking time, are being affected by dwindling resources and a push for 'efficiency' (Harper & Bretag et al., 2018).

*It would be a dream to be able to individualise assessment tasks or have an innovative approach where students can be assessed in class doing individual oral presentations. **We make do...** (Staff 273).*

## What can be done?

1. Reinstate English language and communication standards in the *Higher Education Threshold Standards* and audit to ensure these standards are taught and assessed.
2. Review institutional strategies for supporting LOTE students who fail assessments or courses.
3. Assist institutions to take an evidence-based approach to designing assessments with integrity by using the findings from this research in institutional reviews.
4. Audit institutional strategies for ensuring academic integrity and disseminate good practice examples.
5. Encourage the publication of academic integrity breach outcomes (de-identified) across the sector.
6. Ensure Enterprise agreements allow adequate time for detecting breaches as part of the marking, feedback and moderation process for all assessments.

## References

- Arkoudis, S., Harris, A., Kelly, P., Hunter, K., & Lynch, A (2014). Graduate Communication Skills: Distributed Expertise Model. Funded by the Office for Learning and Teaching. Retrieved from: [http://melbourne-cshe.unimelb.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/2318523/OLT-Grad-Comms-Skills-web.pdf](http://melbourne-cshe.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/2318523/OLT-Grad-Comms-Skills-web.pdf)
- 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
- 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.

Further resources available at [www.cheatingandassessment.edu.au/](http://www.cheatingandassessment.edu.au/)

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