

This study was prompted by a series of media scandals in 2015, which revealed that some Australian higher education students had been outsourcing their assessment to commercial 'contract cheating' services. The project used 5 questions to investigate the scale and nature of the problem, and the potential relationship between a range of assessment approaches and the promotion and assurance of academic integrity.

1. How prevalent is contract cheating in Australian higher education?
2. What are student and staff experiences with and attitudes towards contract cheating?
3. What are the individual, contextual and institutional factors that are correlated with contract cheating?
4. What kinds of assessments are associated with contract cheating?
5. Can 'authentic' assessment solve the problem of contract cheating?

Phase 1: Data Collection and Analysis

Parallel surveys at 12 higher education institutions

— Responses from 15047 students and 1238 staff

Assessment orders

— A sample of 250 orders made by students to cheat sites

Contract cheating breach reports

— 235 substantiated contract cheating cases

Nine key findings

1. Contract cheating is a symptom of sector-level issues.
2. Students 'share' work a lot, which *may* lead to cheating.
3. Despite the availability of commercial cheating services, students mainly engage in *unpaid* assessment outsourcing with people they know (e.g. family, friends, students).
4. Around 6% of students reported having engaged in contract cheating. This was due to three factors: speaking a language other than English at home, a perception there are 'lots of opportunities' to cheat, and dissatisfaction with teaching and learning.
5. Students aren't 'concerned' that contract cheating occurs, and institutions aren't talking to them about it.
6. Suspected cheating often goes unreported by staff, and penalties are lenient.
7. Authentic assessment is good for learning ... but it doesn't prevent contract cheating.
8. Most contract cheating occurs in exams and tests, but it is poorly detected by institutions.
9. Assessments 'less likely' to be outsourced are rarely used.

Phase 2: Framework and Resource Development

Framework

As a systems problem, contract cheating needs evidence-based action at four levels: sector, institution, educator and student (see image). The framework:

- 1) explains how stakeholders at each level may be contributing to conditions that foster contract cheating and
- 2) outlines how they can begin to address it.

Resources

The framework is supported by resources at all levels, which include detailed information from the data, scenarios and questions for reflection, and advice based on the findings.

Workshops

The framework and resources were piloted at workshops in five states. Key staff were invited from every university, and from the higher education sector more widely. Feedback was sought on the practicality of the advice and usability of the resources, which were then adapted in response.



www.cheatingandassessment.edu.au

Phase 3: Dissemination and Implementation

Website

Stakeholders could subscribe to the website throughout the project to be notified as outputs were added. It has been accessed by over 10,000 visitors from 98 countries.

Conferences and invited presentations

The project team took every opportunity to present on the project, giving over 50 presentations in five countries to over 4200 higher education stakeholders.

Publications

Three publications have been released so far, the links to which are on the project website. A further five are under review and in development.

Impact

TEQSA developed a Guidance Note entitled *Addressing Contract Cheating to Safeguard Academic Integrity*, which drew heavily on the project findings. TEQSA is exploring legislation to render cheating services illegal in Australia, an early aim and recommendation of this project. While further impact will take time to become visible, the survey revealed a readiness among staff:

Look forward to engaging with the results of the research. (Staff 271)

I would like to see more action on changing the culture by starting at the top ... totally over the 'talk fest' and lack of commitment. (Staff 273)