The commercialisation of universities, driven by constant uncertainty about higher education funding, has created 'a perfect storm' for the proliferation of contract cheating. The findings from this project, based on the largest dataset on contract cheating to date, provide clear evidence that contract cheating is a systemic problem, the causes of which are multiple and complex

Both the quantitative and qualitative data from staff and students connects the issue of contract cheating to the wider context of higher education: to the attitudes and approaches of educators, to the policies and practices of universities, and to the positioning of higher education by government.

Responsibility for addressing contract cheating does not rest solely with students or educators, and simplistic, singular solutions (e.g. assessment design) are on their own ineffective. A systems approach is needed that recognises student and staff decisions are both enabled and constrained by institutional and sector conditions.

Sector and institution

Intensive competition, a dependence on international student revenue, teaching staff casualisation, and a focus on retention and graduate employability contribute to a compromised teaching and learning environment in which educators are struggling to uphold academic integrity.

A diverse and growing student body, increasingly repositioned as fee-paying 'customers' and facing precarious job markets after graduation, are reportedly adopting more 'transactional' approaches to learning, while some are outsourcing their work altogether.

*The upsurge in third-party cheating is due to **students' perception of university degrees as a commercial transaction** due to university management's focus on the business of education, such that **marketing of university 'products' becomes more important than the education process itself*** (Staff 167).

Educator

The prevailing logic in the sector has been that characteristics of assessment can be used to 'mitigate the risk of academic dishonesty and assure academic integrity' (OLT, Strategic Priority Commissioned Grant instructions 2016). In particular, 'authentic assessment' (ie. assessment engaging students in real-world scenarios or problems) has been recommended as a way of minimising cheating. It is disingenuous, however, to suggest that contract cheating can be solved by relying solely on educators to redesign their assessment processes.

*While it is theoretically possible to design assessment that minimises the opportunity for cheating, **there is not enough time allocated to assessment, and not enough time allocated to student-teacher contact** in order to implement this effectively* (Staff 12).

The use of a range of assessments is helpful, however **we are under in increasing pressure to reduce the number of assessments to manage the marking resources available** (Staff 298).

We are given **inadequate time to mark assignments** *(10 mins for 1000 words) … The allocated paid time for marking is unreasonable and every other tutor I've spoken to agree they* **end up overtime and marking for free** (Staff 44).

Findings indicate that the practical conditions of teaching, 'specifically workload for teaching, staff-student contact time, and class sizes' may limit educators' abilities to address contract cheating (Harper & Bretag et al., 2018). A multivariate analysis showed that staff who reported *positively* on teaching conditions at their institution were more likely to use assessment types that students reported were less likely to be outsourced, particularly vivas and in-class assessment (Bretag & Harper et al., in progress). Contract cheating was also most commonly detected when staff had knowledge of their students' academic and linguistic abilities (Harper & Bretag et al., 2018). Moreover,

Student

This study found that three factors influence contract cheating behaviour: 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).

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 esteam.** *I hate the assignments* (Student 2, Non-cheating group).

The **less personal higher education becomes**, *the higher the rates of cheating. From my experience, the courses with the best lecturers who engage their students and have mostly face-to-face communications will have the least rates of cheating* (Student 145, Non-cheating group).

What can be done?

Government and institutions must provide adequate resourcing, policies, systems, and professional development to:
1. Design and implement relevant and meaningful curriculum and assessment processes.
2. Enable teaching, grading and feedback cycles that build relationships with students.
3. Establish communication skill standards for each year in a program, and teach and assess those standards.
4. Build students' comprehension (reading/listening) and also production (speaking/writing) in academic English.
5. Systematically monitor, detect and manage breaches of academic integrity.

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.* doi:10.1080/03075079.2018.1462788

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Further resources available at www.cheatingandassessment.edu.au

contract cheating and assessment design

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 esteam.** *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

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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.

Findings from a survey of 14,086 Australian university students found that students frequently share their academic work with others (Bretag & Harper et al. 2018). Fifteen percent of students reported buying, selling or trading notes, while 27% had provided someone else with a completed assignment (for any reason). In general, students are sharing work with people they know – friends, other students, partners and family. The data indicated that students saw the benefits of collaborating and of obtaining assignment exemplars to assist with the completion of assessment tasks.

Spectrum of student 'outsourcing' behaviours (see Bretag & Harper et al. 2018)

Buying, selling or trading notes	Providing a completed assignment (for any reason)	Obtaining a completed assignment (to submit as one's own)	Providing exam assistance	Receiving exam assistance	Taking an exam for another	Arranging for another to take one's exam

Sharing behaviours   **Cheating behaviours**
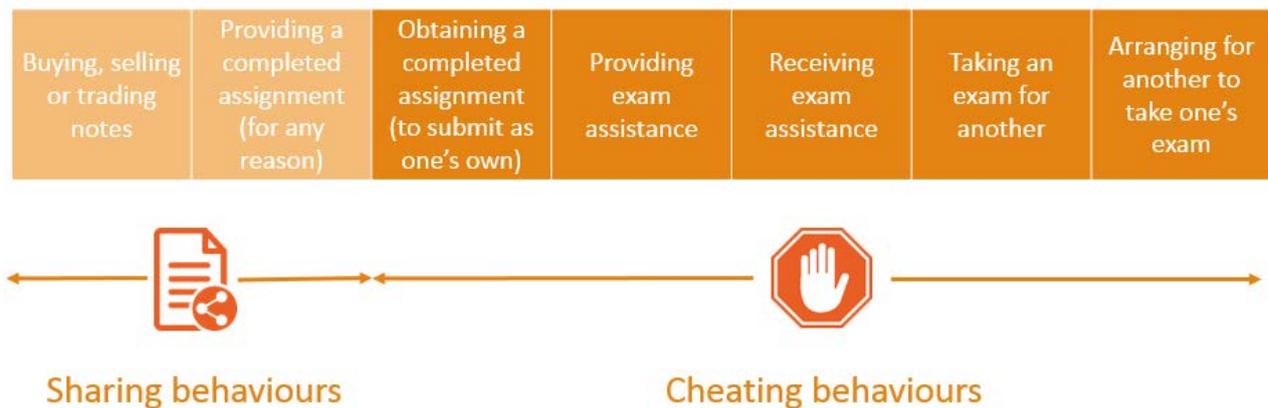
We share past and current notes and assignments to **work out issues with the current module that's being taught**; *there're always discrepancies, especially when it's a different lecturer. We* **learn from the mistakes** *made in the past,* **details to look for** *and* **gauge the standards required** *(Student 119, Non-cheating Group).*

A 'slippery slope'?

The risk inherent to sharing (even when done with altruistic and good intentions) is that some students may copy or adapt the work of others, and then submit it as their own work. Students who reported engaging in cheating were more than *twice as likely* to also report engaging in some form of sharing. In addition, they were more likely to have paid money, used a professional service, or used a file-sharing website for this purpose.

What can be done?

1. Provide teaching staff with adequate time, workload and professional development to ensure that:
   a. Assessment instructions are clearly articulated and annotated exemplar assignments made available
   b. There is sufficient time in class to discuss the potential pitfalls of 'sharing'
2. Engage support units (eg academic development, library) to assist teachers to develop curriculum and pedagogy which reflects 'real world' sharing based on ethical collaboration.
3. Develop disciplinary guidelines and examples about appropriate sharing in assessment.
4. Use marketing campaigns to caution students against online websites offering sharing *and* cheating services.

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

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Managing risk for different assessment types

Students were asked to rate the likelihood that a student would consider getting someone else to complete a range of assessment types for them. Staff were provided the same range of assessment types and asked how often each assessment type is used in their courses. Based on responses from 14,086 students and 1,147 staff, it was found that none of the assessment types investigated were immune from a likelihood of contract cheating. However, some assessment types were far more likely to be outsourced than others. Unfortunately, the assessments that students reported were least likely to be outsourced are used infrequently by staff. While no assessment types are *inherently* good or bad, all carry academic integrity challenges and advantages that need to be considered in design and implementation. The advice below outlines the challenges and advantages of a range of assessment tasks (including some that were highlighted by data elsewhere in the study), and how they can be managed to foster academic integrity.

Legend: Likely to outsource (Non-cheating Group) | Likely to outsource (Cheating Group) | Regularly implemented by staff
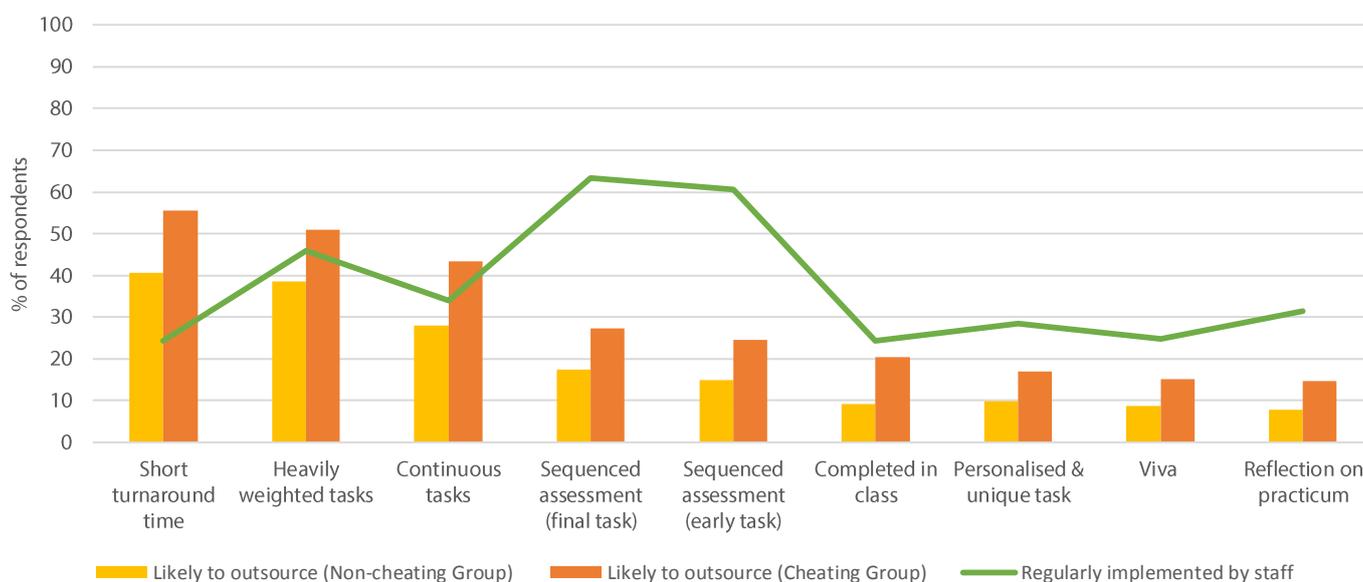
1. Short turnaround time

Risk The assessment most likely to prompt considerations of outsourcing. Other research shows these tasks are also commonly outsourced to paid services. Unreasonable pressure to expect all students to understand assessment requirements in a short timeframe.

Value May be more authentic than an invigilated exam. May replicate certain workplace conditions that are relevant for future practice.

Strategy Provide early, low-stakes practice and feedback on similar/practice tasks. Allow peer collaboration if appropriate. Follow up the submission with a viva, to check that outsourcing has not occurred.

2. Heavily weighted assessment

Risk The second most likely assessment type to prompt considerations of outsourcing. Amplifies the pressure to pass. Often comes in the form of invigilated exams, which are the site of a considerable amount of undetected cheating.

Value Concentrates effort (for students and staff) on a single meaningful task. High-stakes tasks may be authentic in some contexts.

Strategy Provide ample prior practice and feedback opportunities. Break the task up into sequential components, submitted over time for feedback and monitoring of progress. Minimise the impact of failure on progression (e.g. supplementary assessment).

3. Continuous assessment

Risk Engaging in weekly learning for marks can be seen as trivial. Integrity issues also depend on format (e.g. online quizzes have different issues from in-class tasks, *see below).

Value Promote regular engagement, and provide regular feedback for students and staff. Good for getting to know each student.

Strategy Ensure weighting and task conditions support a primarily formative purpose: practice, sharing and feedback.

4. In-class assessment

Risk Inflexible (requires attendance). Inauthentic. Logistically difficult to invigilate. Can create exam-type pressure (depending on weighting).

Value Get to know students' capabilities. Good for formative peer and tutor feedback. Less likely to be outsourced.

Strategy Have a primary purpose: formative or summative? Practice, sharing and feedback? Or verification of learning? Set weighting and conditions accordingly.

5. Personalised and unique

Risk May discourage positive forms of peer learning. Not always scalable for large cohorts (e.g. can be time-consuming).

Value Reduces the degree of collusion possible. Students perceive that cheating is more easily detected. Students can feel more engaged.

Strategy Clarify why tasks are individualised. Clarify what students can collaborate on, and what they cannot.

6. Vivas

Risk Logistically difficult. . Not always scalable for large cohorts (e.g. can be time-consuming). Can create exam-type pressure.

Value Assess verbal skills more authentically than a presentation. Add to variety of assessment. Less likely to be outsourced.

Strategy Have a primary purpose: Practice, sharing, feedback? Or verification of learning? Set weighting and conditions accordingly.

7. Reflection on a practicum

Risk Students see value only in the experience, not in the reflection. Reflective writing is typically not taught, and difficult to mark.

Value Can assess what was *learned* (not just what was done), and evaluative judgement. Less likely to be outsourced.

Strategy Teach reflection as a genre. Make marking criteria clear, and aligned to course objectives. Consider oral rather than written.

*Online quizzes

Risk Collusion is commonplace, and nearly impossible to avoid. Students see them as trivial and rationalise cheating to complete them.

Value They can encourage engagement, incremental learning, and offer regular feedback. Can be cheap and efficient.

Strategy Make them formative and voluntary – for learning, not assessment. Give them a clear purpose (e.g. apply learning soon after the quiz).

* Student reports of cheating in quizzes *more than doubled* staff reports of detection. In addition, students' qualitative responses discussed cheating in online quizzes more than any other topic. Despite this, many staff reported *increased* use of online quizzes (partly because they are cheap and expedient). But, well aware of the prevalence of cheating, staff also expressed concerns about the impact of online quizzes on academic integrity.

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.* doi:10.1080/03075079.2018.1462788

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While assessment design cannot prevent cheating, it is a vital tool for fostering integrity. Assessment drives learning, so where assessment is poorly conceived, students will be more likely to rationalise or resort to cheating. Our data suggests that integrity is more likely to be compromised when educators or their institutions:

1. use or encourage assessment types primarily because they are *efficient* or *expedient*, or
2. use or encourage certain assessment types due to misperceptions they *alone* will ensure integrity.

Our findings indicate that three assessment types are particularly prone to this, so care must be taken to ensure they are implemented for learning, rather than efficiency.

Use with caution: invigilated exams

Many staff reported using more invigilated exams, due to a belief that they are the best way to safeguard integrity. This is false. Among students who have engaged in cheating, exam cheating was more common than outsourcing assignments, and was detected *far less often* by staff. Moreover, students reported that cheating was more likely on a heavily-weighted, high stakes task than almost any other kind of task. In addition, students rationalised student cheating in assignments they perceived to be irrelevant to future learning.
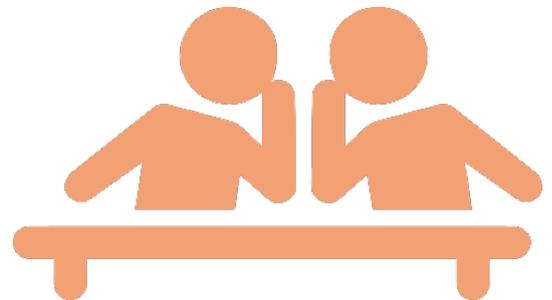
> *Exams and hard deadline assignments really **don't reflect anything to do with learning how to function in the real world**. They simply don't teach anything, they just show off a student's ability to rote learn and recall (Student 871, non-cheating).*

Unfortunately, many staff also reported they were *reluctantly* reverting to exams, for a range of reasons.

> *Sadly, at least two academic units at my university have **mandated that every subject will include a final exam** as the major assessment item because of the belief that this prevents at least one form of third-party cheating. This is another example of a **complex problem being treated by a single simple solution** (Staff 155).*

Use with caution: online quizzes

Student reports of cheating in quizzes *more than doubled* staff reports of detection. In addition, students' qualitative responses discussed cheating in online quizzes more than any other topic, highlighting a range of perspectives:

> *It happens ALL the time for online quizzes … **Everyone just does them together, even if they get different questions** … It disenfranchises students who want to, and regularly do the right thing, and **incentivises you to buy into a cheating framework** (Student 286, cheating).*

Despite this, many staff reported *increased* use of online quizzes. But, well aware of the prevalence of cheating, they also expressed concerns about the impact of online quizzes on academic integrity:

*My university **requires me to provide several assessment tasks online (e.g. online quizzes).** These are really difficult to develop in a way that prevents cheating (Staff 223).*

While online quizzes can be used to great effect for encouraging weekly learning – either individually or collaboratively – and for providing automated, formative feedback, there are clearly risks in using them for summative purposes.

Use with caution: group work

Student reports of cheating in group work significantly exceeded staff reports of detection. Both students and staff also commented on the misuse of group assessment, suggesting it is employed by many as a means for saving time and money rather than teaching and assessing collaboration.
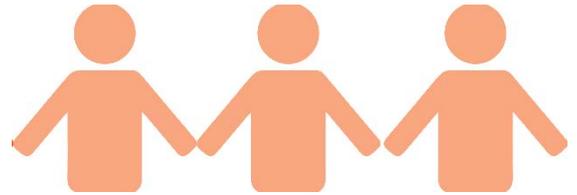
*Many courses nowadays **try to save money on tutors by putting students into groups of say six students to complete projects** that can be worth more than 50% of the course marks. Usually there is only one student who does most/all of the work, and yet all students receive the same group mark. In my opinion **this is the same as cheating, but is condoned by the institution**. (Student 292, non-cheating).*

What can be done?

1. Avoid mandating invigilated exams as a way to ensure academic integrity.
2. Use online quizzes for formative purposes only.
3. Use group work to *teach* about the challenges and benefits of collaboration.
4. Give students strategies for responding to academic integrity issues in group work.

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

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Supported by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training.

contract cheating and assessment design

Quantitative and qualitative findings from both the student and staff surveys indicate that knowing our students is critical for fostering academic integrity in teaching, learning and assessment. Students who have engaged in cheating reported a more negative experience on three teaching and learning items, which together were labelled the **Personalised Teaching and Learning relationship**:

- I have opportunities to approach my lecturers and tutors for assistance
- 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.

Design assessment to get to know students

Students' qualitative responses also showed clearly that cheating can be rationalised when there is a perceived absence of care or interest from educators or the institution:

> *The less personal higher education becomes, the higher the rates of cheating [...] To improve the levels of cheating we must ask why these students are feeling the need to cheat- is there too much pressure and not enough engagement?? [...]* **students don't feel valued, and the lecturers don't care about the students** *so why would they value their learning/work? (Student 145, non-cheating).*

Building relationships with students not only helps to improve engagement and minimise cheating, it also helps to detect cheating when it occurs. Among staff who have suspected cases of contract cheating, the most common signal (in over 70% of cases) was their knowledge of the student. The most common strategies to prevent cheating were getting to know students, and using formative in-class assessment:

> *If you connect with the students and allow them to feel* **comfortable with making mistakes/asking questions in non-assessable forums**, *then you gain trust. The students feel like they can "risk" being themselves, rather than purchasing/borrowing the previously successful work of others. University is a fragile time for most students ... I also make sure that assessments are set which* **require handwritten responses/details (i.e. names).** *I keep their weekly handwritten quizzes and* **can easily compare these to the final exam papers** *(Staff 293).*

Use authentic, relevant assessment

'Authenticity' on its own is unlikely to minimise contract cheating. An analysis of online requests posted to multiple cheat sites, along with breach reports from two universities, showed that even highly authentic tasks are routinely outsourced. There is some evidence to indicate that while authentic assessment cannot prevent cheating, it may make detection of cheating more likely.

Staff signalled that tasks should not only be authentic to students' future lives, but also to where they are in their learning journey. Some students suggested that discipline areas would benefit from engaging students as partners in designing assessment. This would give students more ownership in the teaching, learning and assessment process.

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

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Students and educators agree that collaboration is great for learning, but the 'rules' seem to change when it comes to assessment. Findings from a survey of 14,086 university students showed that students are often unclear about when and how they can collaborate, and under what circumstances collaboration might be seen as cheating.

> *The only form of cheating I have engaged in … is the cheating where you have an out-of-class study group but *gradually*, discussion of the content shades from abstract discussion of issues into swapping specific tips to get a specific question done, or specific solutions to tricky problems (Student 869, non-cheating group).*

The point at which collaboration crosses a line is not a clear one – for students or educators. Courses are usually designed so that assignments are closely related to weekly content – so when does a conversation about content turn into a conversation about assessment, and at what point does a conversation about assessment become inappropriate? Students are often told they can collaborate when *preparing for* an assignment, but must *write* their assignment on their own. So if an assignment is in a student's *own words*, does that mean no cheating has occurred?

> *Cheating is very ambiguous. For instance, if friends asked for my assignments from the past so as **to use it as a guide for their assignment**, I would not consider that cheating. Nor would I consider it cheating if a group of people **worked together on individual assignments**, so as to help each other. I study engineering, and **we are taught to work together** (Student 342, non-cheating group).*

> *The most prominent form of cheating … is collaboration on individual assignments. Almost EVERYONE will collaborate with peers. In many ways it is good to work together, when studying and revising it is very helpful. When completing assignments **it can be unfair** (Student 32, non-cheating group).*

While educators recognise the importance of collaboration, employers and the public expect that universities award grades that accurately reflect the abilities of *individuals*. Educators need to have confidence that the marks they give a student fairly reflect that student's knowledge and skills. If they don't, the public is at risk from engineers, scientists, accountants, nurses, designers, etc. who are not competent to practice. The challenge for students is that the desire to help friends can sometimes conflict with responsible approaches to learning.

Not all cheating is deliberate. Lack of awareness or care can lead to breaches of academic integrity, so it is useful for students to know the criteria that educators use to judge assignments. Educators will be concerned about the integrity of an assignment if:

- it misrepresents a student's abilities
- they cannot assess a student's abilities based on the work submitted
- a student has somehow gained an unfair advantage over others in the course

On the following page are 10 scenarios. They have been placed on a continuum with appropriate collaboration at one end, and cheating or 'collusion' at the other. Consider where the behaviours cross a line into cheating, and how each scenario might be viewed differently, using the alternative circumstances shown on the right. This activity is intended to generate discussion rather than provide a hard and fast 'correct' answer.

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

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Supported by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training.

1. A student is struggling with an assignment and visits his university's Learning Advisors for help. They explain how to improve his draft to better meet the assignment requirements.

What if the student asked a parent instead? Or perhaps another student in the course?

2. Three students collaborate on research for an assignment. They share the readings they find, but analyse and write their assignments individually.

What if 40% of the assignment marks were for research, e.g. finding and retrieving a range of relevant readings?

3. Four students in a study group have done individual research for their assignments. At their weekly meeting they discuss their research, key ideas, and arguments. They then write their papers individually.

What if two of the students hand up similar assignments?

4. Five students are working on their group assignment. They divide the assignment into five equal parts and each complete one. One student collates the work and submits it on behalf of the group.

Is this collaboration? What if the task instructions required all students to contribute to each part?

5. Three students are working on their group assignment and decide to divide it into three equal parts. Two students struggle, so one student does most of the work.

Is equal contribution important in group work? Is this cheating, or just unfair?

6. Three students email their assignment drafts to one another. They all then revise their own drafts to include ideas they hadn't previously considered, taking care not to copy each other's ideas word for word.

Would it be different if some ideas *had* been copied word for word?

7. A student shares their assignment from a previous semester with a friend now enrolled in the same course. The student is sure that her friend will not plagiarise it, but only use it as a guide.

What if her friend does plagiarise it, or submits it as her own? What if the student uploaded it to a file-sharing site so lots of students could use it?

8. Eight students gather in the Library to complete an online quiz together which is worth 10% of their grade. They share all their answers and only get one wrong.

Would it be different if the quiz was worth more? Do you think educators expect students to do these tasks together?

9. A student is searching a file-sharing site for assignment examples. The topic has not changed since last year, and he finds 6 assignments from previous students. He takes ideas from each, using a thesaurus tool to change the words.

Is it partly the educator's fault for not changing the topic?

10. A student is working on a large assignment and pays a professional assignment writer to complete parts of it for him. He knows that businesses regularly outsource work, so as long as he pays a fair price, he believes the work belongs to him and he can submit it as his own.

Does the work belong to him? Would it be worse if he had outsourced the whole assignment? What if he hadn't paid money for it?

contract cheating and assessment design

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

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contract cheating and assessment design

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.

Level of concern

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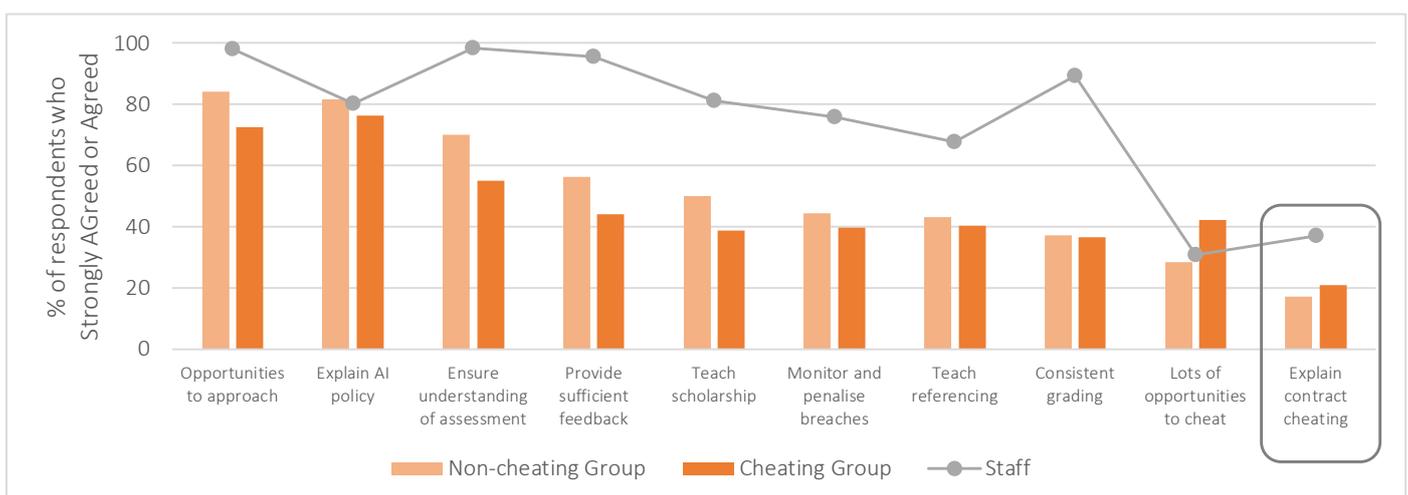
Qualitative responses from educators (Harper & Bretag et al., 2018) indicated that while some staff are worried about contract cheating in their courses, they are unaware of what they can do to respond to the problem.

> *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

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Findings from a survey of 1,147 teaching staff at eight Australian universities indicated that many staff do not feel confident in identifying and substantiating suspected contract cheating (Harper & Bretag et al., 2018). One of the key reasons for not following up on suspected contract cheating was that such cases are 'impossible to prove'.

The challenge with contract cheating […] is that it is undetectable. The work is original. **Even if you have a suspicion…. you have no proof.** *It is challenging (impossible?) to investigate a suspicion and time/tools/resources are not available. (Staff 255).*

Sites demand log in details including credit card details which I am disinclined to give, therefore making it **impossible to prove without a doubt** *(Staff 135).*

Substantiating contract cheating: Key principles

1. **Educate:** Ensure all staff are aware of the signals that can indicate contract cheating (see reverse).
2. **Investigate:** One or two signals do not provide enough evidence to substantiate cheating, but can provide cause for further investigation.
3. **Use policy:** Refer suspected cases of contract cheating to an appropriate investigator and decision-maker, as per your institution's relevant policies.
4. **Not 'proof', but 'balance of probability':** Investigate suspected breaches as a lay proceeding, using the standard from civil law, where the 'balance of probability' is the relevant test to which allegations must be subjected. The balance of probability is based on 'clear and convincing evidence' that it is *more likely than not* that the allegation is true. This is less demanding than the criminal law test of 'beyond reasonable doubt'.
5. **Examine:** Look carefully at each aspect of the document and other relevant sources of evidence (see reverse). Identify every aspect that is cause for concern. Conduct an interview with the student to ascertain his/her familiarity with the contents of the assignment.
6. **Collect evidence:** Accumulate a range of evidence that clearly and convincingly establishes the firm belief that the breach in question is not only probable, but *highly* probable. Two forms of evidence are critical:
   a. Textual evidence
   b. Knowledge of the student's academic and linguistic abilities
7. **Use experience:** Decide how much weight to give to each piece of evidence, based on common sense, everyday experience, and experience of previous academic integrity breach cases.
8. **Ensure natural justice:** Allow the student to have an opportunity to explain and demonstrate, either in person (face to face/ teleconference) or in writing, how they developed their assignment. Ensure the student is supported appropriately in this process. Record the meeting carefully for future reference.
9. **Evaluate:** Weigh all of the evidence to form an overall picture that provides clear and convincing evidence on the 'balance of probability' that contract cheating has or has not occurred.

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

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Further resources available at www.cheatingandassessment.edu.au/
Supported by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training.

Textual signals or evidence	Why is this a potential problem?	No Concern	Some Concern	High Concern
Very low text match (0 – 5%)	Scholarly work cites sources, so it is unlikely to have a text-match of 5% or less; the work may have been manipulated to lower the similarity score to avoid checks.			
High text match (>30%)	Commercial 'bespoke' assignments can be cut and pasted from sources, despite claims they are 'plagiarism free'.			
High text match (other student's work)	Assignments obtained from file-sharing sites or other students are likely to be identified by text-matching software.			
Document properties: • Author • Creation date • Editing time • Version number	The metadata of a Word document may indicate an author name not matching the student, an odd creation date, or very short editing time. If the student suggests it was written on a friend's computer, or that it is a final 'fresh' version, they should be able to provide drafts and other evidence.			
Not appropriate to discipline area	The writing and content are at odds with language typical in the assignment/discipline.			
Quality different to or above expectations	A mismatch between the assignment quality (language use, content knowledge, formatting and style) and the student's previous work (eg assignments, exams, online and in-class work).			
Language use and ability	A mismatch between the language use in the assignment and the student's language use (eg in class, in interpersonal interactions, online, in previous assignments, exams).			
Unreadable language, including jargon-filled sentences and misuse of words	Online 'article spinners', translation and/or paraphrasing tools can automatically transform any text into 'original' writing that bypasses text-matching software. This writing sounds excessively verbose/complicated, makes little sense, and misuses terms and everyday words.			
Reference list, but: • No in-text citations • Mismatch with in-text citations • Sources inappropriate/irrelevant • Access dates for internet sources predate enrolment • References are falsified	Commercial 'bespoke' assignments are often produced quickly by (re)using old information or writing from previous jobs. This maximises profit, but leads to low quality work. Moreover, students taking a transactional approach to learning may only send minimal task information to the cheating service, overlooking important details in the assignment brief. That's why assignments that are only vaguely relevant to the topic, or using references to odd sources are classic signs of contract cheating.			
Does not meet criteria/requirements: • Min/max required references • Required references/authors • Date range of references • Referencing style • Excludes key content; includes irrelevant content	Writers may append reference lists without any in-text citations, or in-text citations may not match the reference list. Access dates for internet sources may predate the student's enrolment in the course. Some of the references may be false (non-existent), or falsified (don't contain the referenced material).			
References in languages that the student does not speak	It's highly unlikely that a student would try to use foreign language references that don't match their own language/s.			
Anything else that seems unusual or concerning?	Trust your instincts as an experienced educator. If something seems unusual or 'off', consult a trusted colleague or academic integrity decision-maker.			

Adapted from a rubric developed by Felicity Prentice (La Trobe University, Melbourne) and based on: Rogerson, A. (2017). Detecting contract cheating in essay and report submissions: Process, patterns, clues and conversations. *International Journal for Educational Integrity*, *13*(1), 10.

contract cheating and assessment design

Findings from a survey of 14,086 university students showed that students were *not particularly concerned* about contract cheating – even if they had never engaged in cheating behaviour themselves (Bretag & Harper et al. 2018). Staff, on the other hand, reported being 'moderately' to 'very' concerned (Harper & Bretag et al. 2018).

Perhaps you think that cheating is a 'victimless crime', or that students who cheat are 'only cheating themselves'? Perhaps you haven't considered the potential harm involved, such as risk to public safety – imagine an engineer or doctor who paid someone to take their exams for them – now, are you worried? Have you thought how you might feel if you were competing for the same job with someone who cheated their way through their degree? What if they got the job? Worse, what if they got the job, made a mess of it, and the employer decided never to employ anyone from your university again?
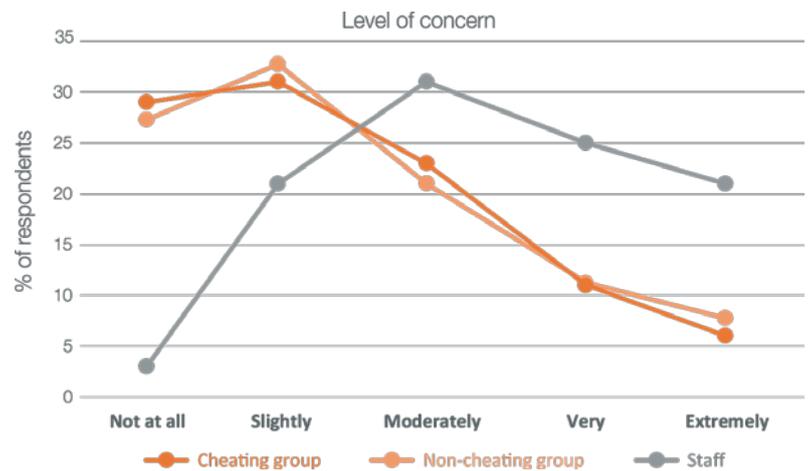
Level of concern

% of respondents

Not at all — Slightly — Moderately — Very — Extremely

— Cheating group — Non-cheating group — Staff

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

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

I find it really disappointing that I have met several people in my industry that are studying their undergraduate degree and have **openly told me that they have purchased papers**. *My grades are not the best, however I know that it is my work and I am learning the material. (Student 235, Non-cheating)*

Why should you care?

It matters! You want your degree to be worth something. You want to feel proud of your university and all of the effort and time that went into earning your degree. You want to be able to trust other students to do their share of the work when you are in a team or group. You want to know that employers trust your university to have trained you properly for your career. Most of all, you want things to be fair.

What can you do?

1. Speak up! When you see students around you obviously cheating, let them know that their cheating impacts on you directly.
2. Be brave! No-one likes a dobber, but no-one wants a worthless degree either. Tell your unit/subject convenor if you have witnessed cheating and trust your university to treat the information confidentially and fairly.
3. Encourage your friends and classmates to see why cheating is harmful to themselves, to the university and to you.

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

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