

Practical approaches to protecting academy integrity and combating academic misconduct

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How much of a problem are essay mills?



Can we really know how many students pay for essays?

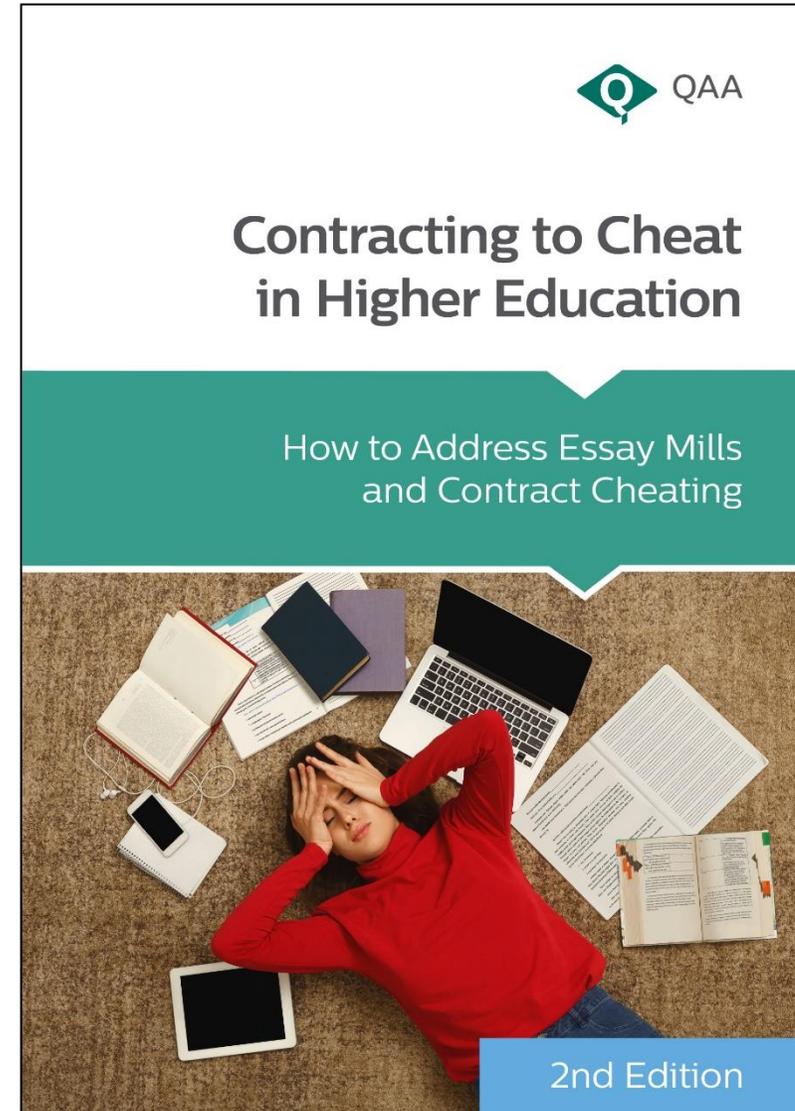


We can see demand from comparison sites – 946 listed

QAA guidance 2nd edition

June 2020

- ❑ Based on a survey of UK higher education institutions
- ❑ Input from sector experts and students
- ❑ Written for the UK higher education sector but applicable globally
- ❑ Areas covered:
 - Education and training for staff
 - Education for students
 - Reducing opportunities to cheat
 - Detection
 - Regulations and policies



Ministerial endorsements

“I hope this guidance, along with innovations in technology, will help protect the integrity of our world-leading higher education and prevent students turning to contract cheating.”

Universities Minister Michelle Donelan

“I welcome the new guidance published by QAA which will help our institutions combat the use of essay mills, particularly in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.”

Richard Lochhead, Scotland’s Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science

“I welcome the publication of this new guidance from QAA to help our higher education sector combat the pernicious effects of contract cheating and essay mills.”

Kirsty Williams, Wales’ Minister for Education

The key findings and recommendations

- ❑ Essay mills operate effective marketing techniques that use the channels preferred by students. We are increasingly hearing of practices such as blackmail and extortion
- ❑ Identifying a strategic lead with responsibility for staff training and institutional coordination can help improve detection of essay mill use
- ❑ Assessment design can help reduce opportunities to cheat, but no assessment should ever be considered cheat proof

The key findings and recommendations

- Technology can help detect the use of essay mills, but is most effective when used by experienced staff with knowledge of the student
- Essay mills have sought to exploit students who are feeling vulnerable or anxious, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Effective institutional and peer support can help
- Staff and students should be aware of, or be able to easily access, information and procedures to follow to report a suspicion of academic misconduct

QAA's Academic Integrity Charter

- ❑ With over 100 universities and colleges as signatories
- ❑ Drafted in collaboration with experts, higher education institutions and students
- ❑ It demonstrates the sector getting on the front foot
- ❑ To be 'launched' in April 2021
- ❑ Contains seven principles demonstrating institutional commitment
- ❑ It's about protecting and promoting academic integrity

Academic Integrity Charter for UK Higher Education





Introduction

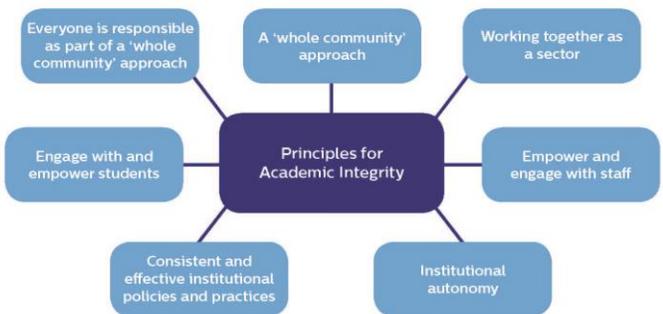
The UK's higher education sector has a world-class reputation, founded on high standards and outstanding quality. Academic integrity is a major contributor to this. However, academic misconduct is a growing problem globally, and presents a threat to the reputation of higher education worldwide. It takes a wide variety of forms including the use of essay and degree mills, plagiarism, collusion between students and forged or altered qualification certificates. This Charter represents the collective commitment of the UK higher education sector to promote academic integrity and take action against academic misconduct.

Students who commit academic misconduct, especially if they deliberately cheat, risk their academic and future careers. The implications, however, go far wider than higher education. It is a societal issue. Graduates could enter the workforce without the necessary skills, knowledge and competency, with potential public health and safety implications.

This Charter is intended to provide a baseline position upon which UK providers, as autonomous institutions, can build their own policies and practices to ensure that every student's qualification is genuine, verifiable and respected. It has been developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) with the support of the [Academic Integrity Advisory Group](#).

The Academic Integrity Advisory Group provides expert advice and opinion, on behalf of the sector, on actions, policy development and activity that will protect academic integrity in the UK. It consists of expert academics and organisations, sector agencies, student representatives and individuals working to protect academic integrity. Representatives of UK governments, regulators and funders sit as observers.

Principles for Academic Integrity



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      graph TD
        A[Everyone is responsible as part of a 'whole community' approach] --- B((Principles for Academic Integrity))
        C[A 'whole community' approach] --- B
        D[Working together as a sector] --- B
        E[Empower and engage with staff] --- B
        F[Institutional autonomy] --- B
        G[Consistent and effective institutional policies and practices] --- B
        H[Engage with and empower students] --- B
      
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Academic misconduct is unacceptable.
These principles are intended to guide the implementation of academic integrity policy development and practice in UK higher education institutions.

Academic Integrity Charter principles

- Everyone is responsible as part of a 'whole community' approach
- Taking a 'whole community' approach
- Working together as a sector
- Engaging with and empowering students
- Engaging and empowering staff
- Consistent and effective institutional policies and practices
- Institutional autonomy

What else is happening?

This is a global issue with no single or simple solution. Ultimately these are commercial entities. If they aren't making money then they have no reason to continue.

- Legislation in the UK?
- Campaigning to raise awareness
- Working with international partners
- Challenging online platforms; Google, Facebook, PayPal, YouTube



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