

POLICIES TO ADDRESS CONTRACT CHEATING

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Contract cheating (Clarke and Lancaster 2006; Lancaster and Clarke, 2016) represents a major threat to the academic integrity of higher education. Many solutions to contract cheating have been proposed, including legal, technological and pedagogical interventions. An area that is underexplored in the academic literature is the importance of university policies as part of the contract cheating debate.

The proposed session will be run as a panel, with the panelists discussing the type of policies in place to address contract cheating that they are aware of, as well as the need for continuing development of policies to account for emerging contract cheating developments and threats to academic integrity. The panelists are all members of the ENAI Addressing Contract Cheating working group, bringing with them a wide range of different perspectives, including at institutional and national level. The role of wider quality assurance bodies is also represented.

The ENAI working group so far has identified that policies for addressing contract cheating differ greatly across the sector. Some institutions do not yet appear to have policies about this at all. In some cases, this is covered as part of wider policy relating to academic misconduct. The panelists will help to present a picture of how this issue is approached across Europe and beyond, providing guidance that delegates can take back to their own institutions.

Of particular interest to delegates will be a discussion of emerging developments in this space. Some of these have not yet been widely integrated into university policies, but the panelists will share examples from their own experience and research. These include the issue of how institutions could react if they are notified that students are contract cheating, for example by a disgruntled writer. Another instance asks how we can best deal with the situation where a student says they are at risk of blackmail. Should this be used solely as an opportunity to introduce sanctions or is it better to ensure that the student is protected and supported? At what stage does external proofreading become contract cheating and how should university policies address this? Yet a further source of concern surrounds undercover work by some faculty who approach students on social media, inviting them to buy assignments and then reporting them for misconduct. To what extent should such work be considered as detection and where does this cross a line?

Ideally, institutions should develop a strategic approach for instilling a culture of academic integrity across their whole community (Bretag and Mahmud, 2016). The panel aims to provide guidance and engage delegates in discussing ways to develop associated policies and procedures, to encourage more consistency of approaches across the higher education sector globally.

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