

COMING CLEAN – ADDRESSING THE ISSUES WHERE A STUDENT SELF DECLARES CONTRACT CHEATING

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Abstract

Contract cheating has become a massive threat to the integrity of the academic qualifications (Clarke & Lancaster, 2006). The problem is global in its scale and it is unlikely that there any universities or academic institutions that have not had students who have contract cheated, whether or not these students have been detected.

As contract cheating continues to be marketed widely to students, the higher education sector is having to address new challenges, many of which have been little discussed in the academic literature or in practice. This includes the challenge of “*coming clean*”, where a student wishes to declare that they have contract cheated to their institution, the focus of this session. A student may be forced to come clean when they have changed their mind about cheating (Draper et al, 2021), they are at risk of blackmail (Yorke et al, 2020) or have inadvertently succumbed to the unethical marketing practices followed by contract cheating providers (Amigud, 2020; Crockett and Maxwell, 2021; Lancaster, 2019). Research has indicated that higher education institutions often lack clear information and process to deal

with emerging situations like that of students coming clean (Waltzer et al, 2021).

The focus of this session (and the associated paper) is to share the findings of practitioners working in the academic integrity field, in essence, a form of experiential research. The session builds upon existing literature and sector guidance which the practitioners have contributed to (QAA, 2020b; Draper et al, 2021). The session will also be placed within the context of the QAA’s Academic Integrity Charter which the contributors have also helped to develop, and which has now been adopted by over 190 Institutions within the UK (QAA, 2020a). The presenters have experience dealing with contract cheating cases behind closed doors and discussing them in private with colleagues from across the sector.

The issues to be covered include:

- The reasons why a student may decide to come clean and admit to contract cheating. This will include student responses to the threat of external blackmail and extortion from the contract cheating industry.
- How to embed opportunities for students to come clean into teaching

sessions and to raise the issue with students in a non-confrontational manner.

- What to do if a student has initially engaged with a contract cheating provider or essay mill, but ultimately changes their mind and does not go through with a transaction or does not submit work that they have purchased.
- The idea of the “student as a victim” and why academic institutions may need to provide support to students when they decide to come clean.
- The need to update university policies, practices and procedures to allow for students to come clean and to address the situation when it occurs.
- Ways to involve students and Student Unions in the decision-making process in this situation.
- The issues of penalties in this situation, how institutions should consider

inappropriate conduct that may have taken place in a previous year of study, how this cannot be ignored but finding ways to partially mitigate against this.

The session will include real-world style examples based on the experiences that the presenters have had around the sector. Where necessary, these will be anonymised to allow them to be shared but also to allow attendees to benefit from them. Input from the audience will also be welcome.

The intention of the session is to not to provide a full set of answers as to what universities should do in any particular situation. Every university operates with different processes and there is not a single appropriate response that matches everyone. What the session will provide is further information that delegates can use about an emerging topic within contract cheating, as well as thinking points for them to take back to their own institution.

References

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