Responding to breaches of academic integrity

The need to be consistent, transparent and compassionate

Plagiarism across Europe and Beyond

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What is academic integrity?

Academic integrity means acting with the values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility and courage in learning, teaching and research.

It is important for students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff to act in an honest way, be responsible for their actions, and show fairness in every part of their work.

All students and staff should be an example to others of how to act with integrity in their study and work. Academic integrity is important for an individual's and a school's reputation.

(adapted from Exemplary Academic Integrity Project, n.d. and ICAI 2013)

What is a breach of academic integrity?

A breach of academic integrity can be defined as any behaviour which undermines the values, norms and practices of academic integrity.

Some examples include:
- plagiarism
- cheating in exams or assignments
- impersonation in exams
- collusion
- theft of another student's work
- sabotage of another student's learning/assessment
- paying a third party for assignments ('contract cheating')
- downloading whole, or part of assignments from the Internet
- falsification of data
- misrepresentation of records
- fraudulent research and publishing practices.

A holistic approach to promoting academic integrity

Integrity needs to be promoted in *every* aspect of the academic enterprise (Bretag 2013):
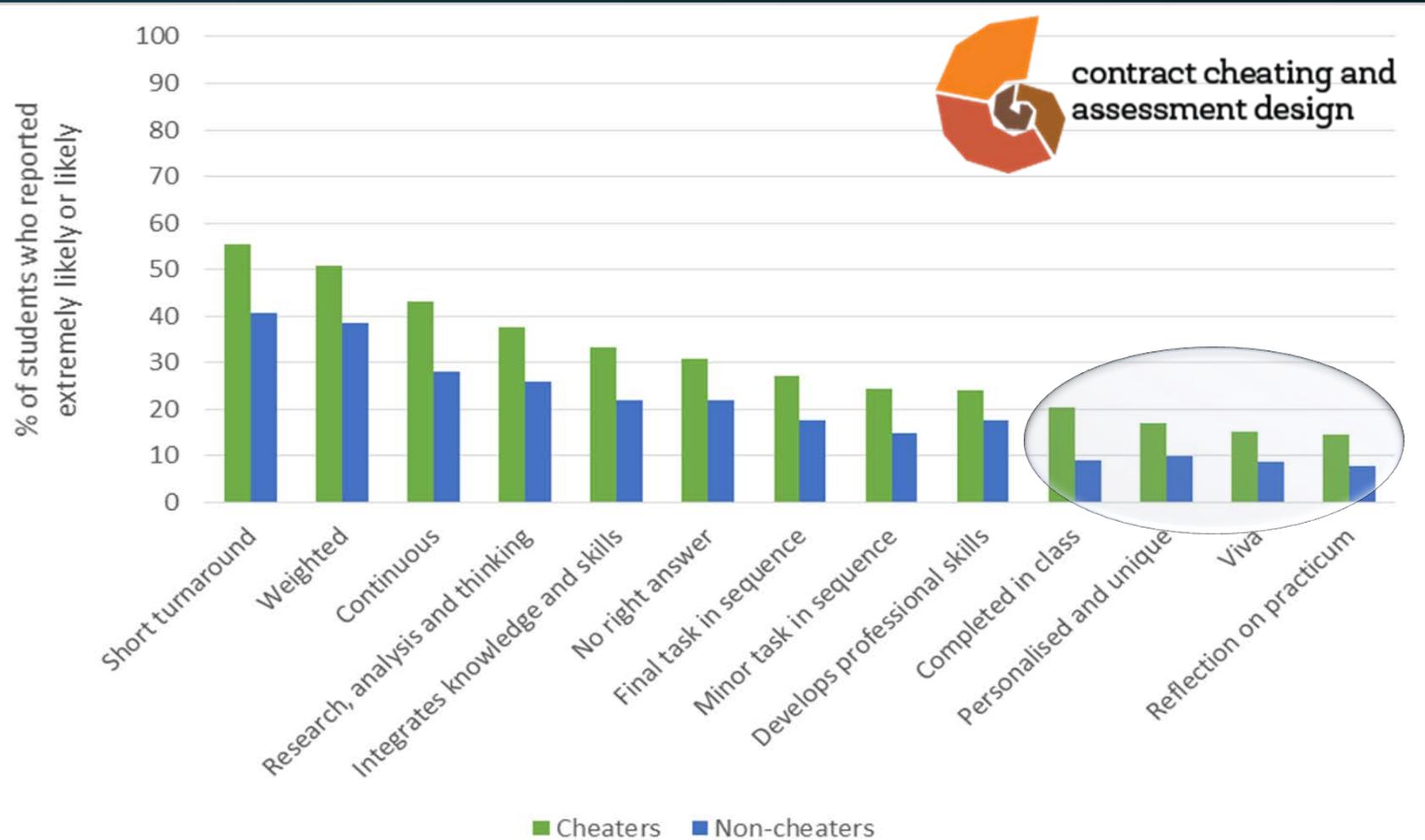
- University mission statements, marketing & admissions processes
- Nuanced and carefully articulated policy & procedures
- Assessment practices and curriculum design
- Information provided during orientation, and frequent and visual reminders on campus
- Embedded and targeted support in courses and at every level for students
- New technologies for both education and detection
- Partnering with students to promote integrity
- Professional development for staff
- Research training
- Standing committee/office with a remit for academic integrity
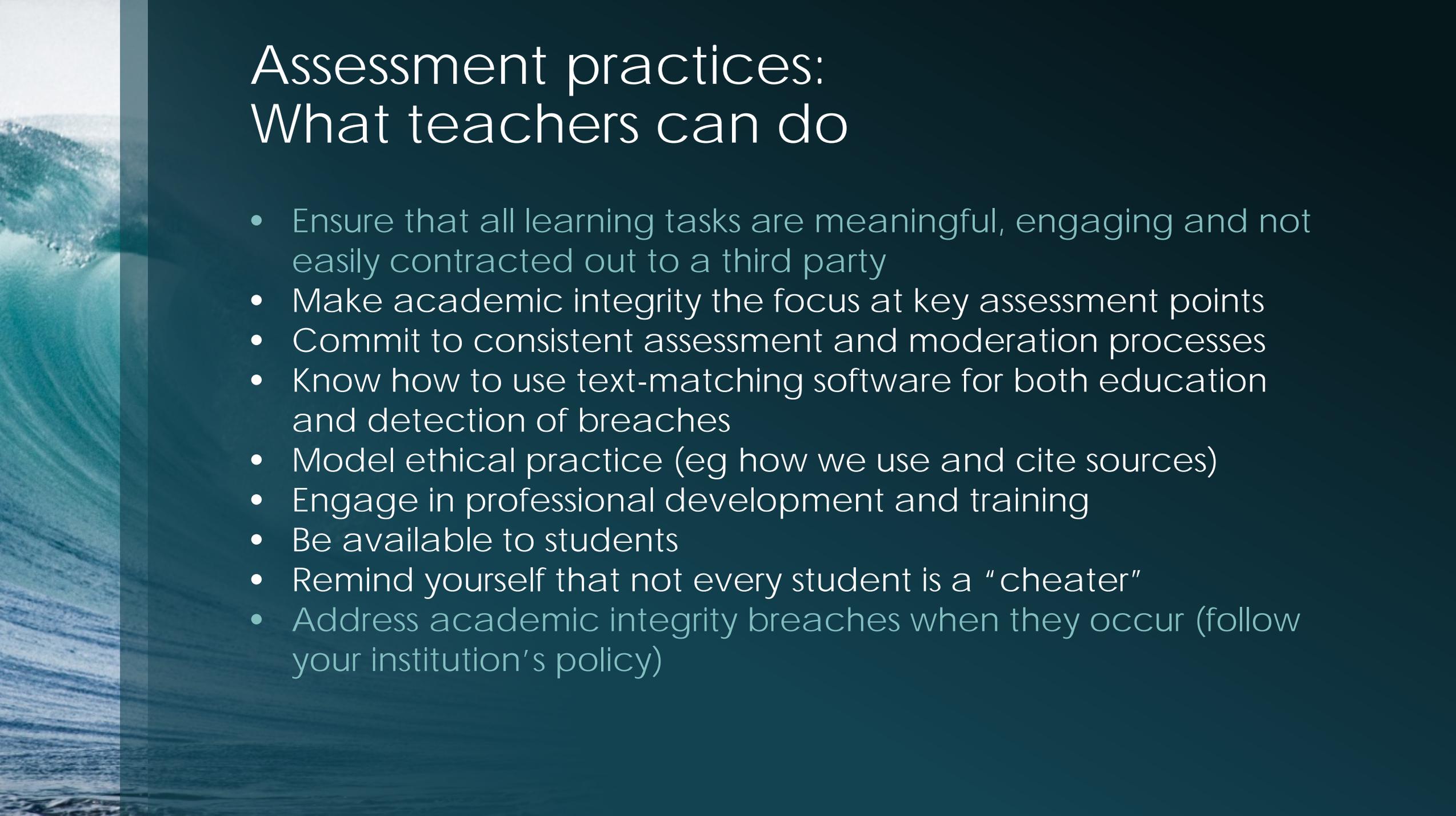
Assessment practices:
What teachers can do

- Ensure that all learning tasks are meaningful, engaging and not easily contracted out to a third party
- Make academic integrity the focus at key assessment points
- Commit to consistent assessment and moderation processes
- Know how to use text-matching software for both education and detection of breaches
- Model ethical practice (eg how we use and cite sources)
- Engage in professional development and training
- Be available to students
- Remind yourself that not every student is a "cheater"
- Address academic integrity breaches when they occur (follow your institution's policy)

Assessments 'less likely to be outsourced'

Assessment practices and the student/teacher relationship

Reflections on practicum

Oral presentations (vivas)

Individualised

Completed in class
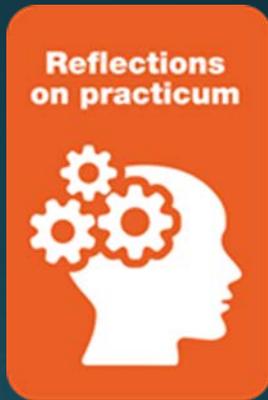
- My lecturers and tutors ensure that I understand what is required in assignments
- I receive sufficient feedback to ensure that I learn from the work I do
- I have opportunities to approach my lecturers and tutors for assistance when needed

3 factors influence contract cheating

弱势
tekanan
mahina
غير حصين
vulnerable
nhấn mạnh
dễ bị tổn thương 応力
चपेट में
vulnerabile
弱势 脆弱
ευάλωτα 脆弱
στρες
ضغط عصبی
ευάλωτα
stress

Language other than English (when the language of instruction is English)

The perception that there are **'lots of opportunities to cheat'**

Dissatisfaction with the teaching and learning environment

What to do when breaches occur

Follow your institution's academic integrity policy consistently, transparently and with compassion

New technologies for both education and detection
- Use text matching software to assist students' understanding – encourage multiple submissions of drafts.
- Learn how to read and understand text matching reports
- Use text matching software to assist with marking. Why mark an assignment with >50% text match of uncited sources?
- Explore other technologies, eg. 'Author Verification'

Consult with a trusted colleague if you are unsure
- Seek out opportunities for professional development and training
  - Best practices in teaching and learning
  - International research on academic integrity (like today!).
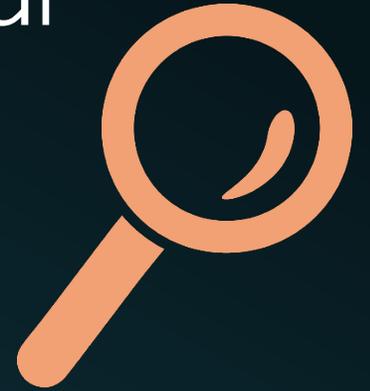
Never ignore a potential breach

Repercussions of not addressing academic integrity breaches:

- Students may think academic integrity 'doesn't matter'.
- Students may think we 'don't care'.
- Students may inadvertently keep making mistakes.
- Students may choose to deliberately breach academic integrity guidelines
- We are not being role models of integrity to our students.

https://www.google.com/search?site=&tbm=isch&source=hp&biw=1920&bih=974&q=Ostrich+with+head+in+sand&oq=Ostrich+with+head+in+sand&gs_l=img.

Consistent and transparent

Follow your institution's academic integrity policy consistently and transparently.

- Never assume a breach has occurred – always meet the student with an open mind.
- Encourage student to bring support person
- Include administrative colleague; record the conversation
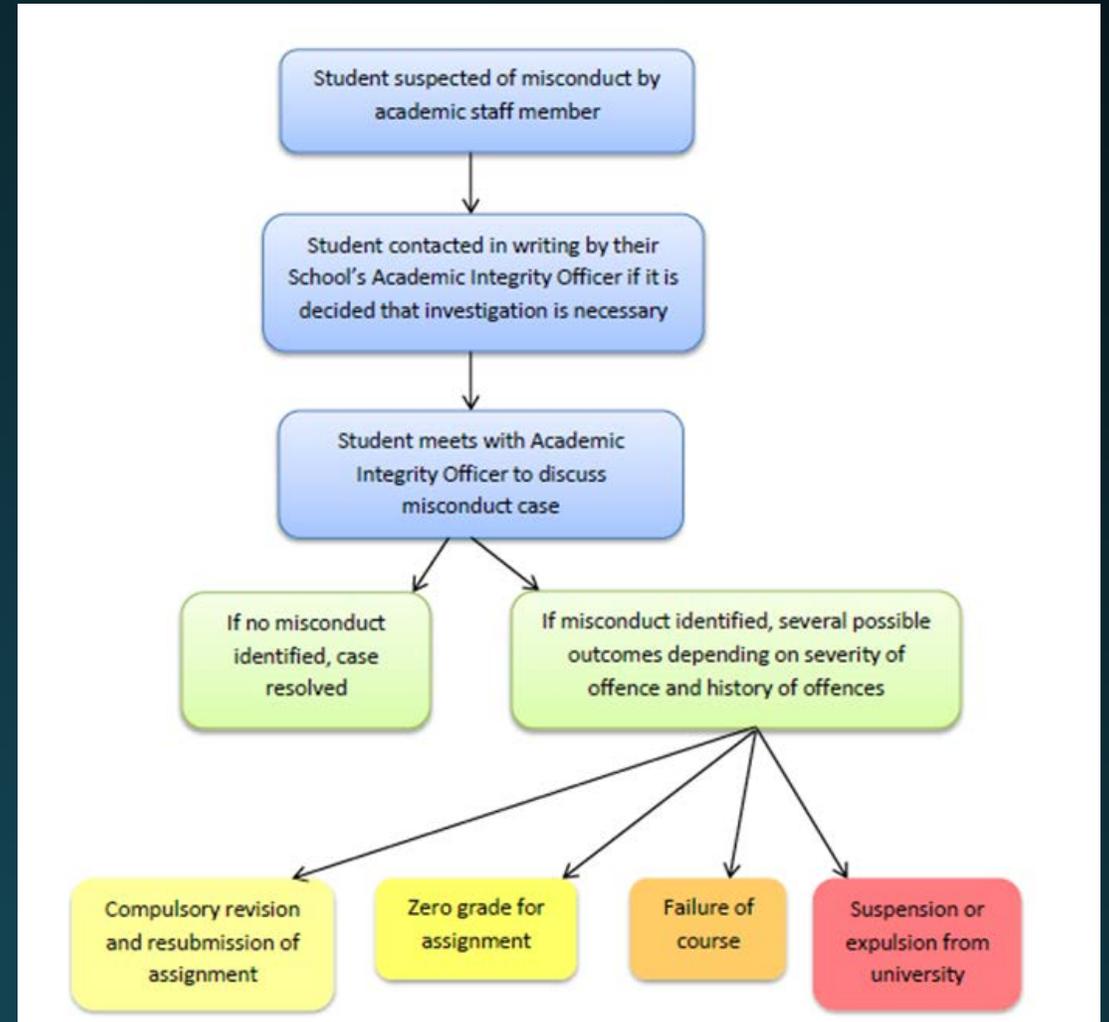
Ensuring academic integrity is ensuring learning

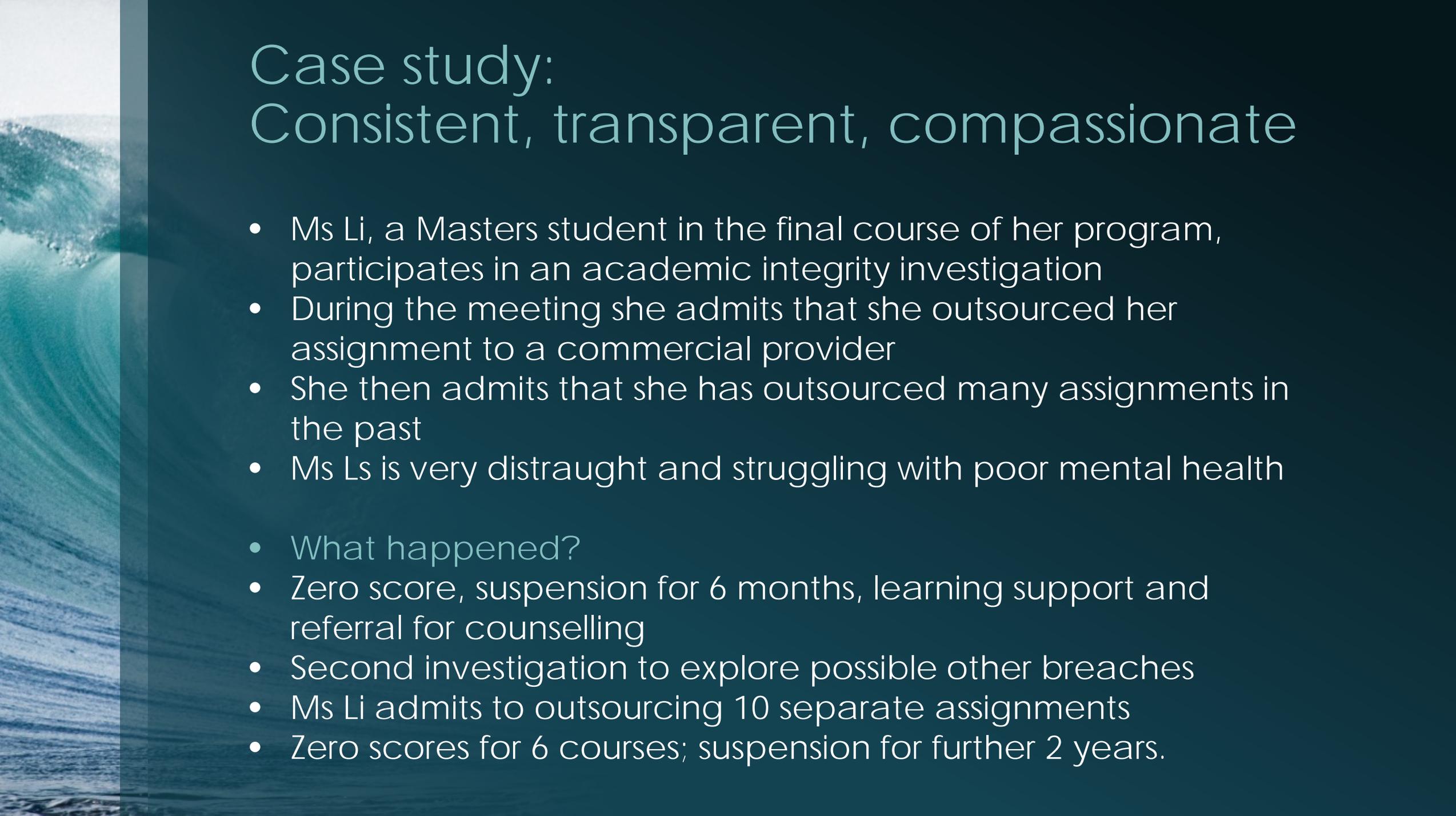Your first priority should be to determine if the student has met the learning objectives.

- A breach of academic integrity undermines learning.
- A supportive conversation may result in:
  - An understanding of the student's situation
  - Referral to appropriate support services
  - A change of student behaviour
  - A change to assessment practices
  - Achievement of learning outcomes
- An academic integrity conversation does not necessarily equate to a misconduct investigation.

Compassionate

Image from:
https://www.google.com/search?site=&tbm=isch&source=hp&biw=1920&bih=974&q=Cup+of+coffee&oq=Cup+of+coffee&gs_l=img.

- Welcome, set at ease
- Your role as educator not police officer
- Establish rapport
- Allow student to lead discussion
- Provide evidence to student as discussion point, not as allegation
- Use academic integrity policy in similar way
- Explore reasons and options in partnership with student
- Encourage student to 'own' behaviour and outcome
- Seek consensus
- Remind student that any 'judgement' is of the behaviour, not the person
- Offer immediate and ongoing support

*Thanks to Dr Anne Rogerson for her insights for this part of the presentation

Case study:
Consistent, transparent, compassionate

- Ms Li, a Masters student in the final course of her program, participates in an academic integrity investigation
- During the meeting she admits that she outsourced her assignment to a commercial provider
- She then admits that she has outsourced many assignments in the past
- Ms Ls is very distraught and struggling with poor mental health

- What happened?
- Zero score, suspension for 6 months, learning support and referral for counselling
- Second investigation to explore possible other breaches
- Ms Li admits to outsourcing 10 separate assignments
- Zero scores for 6 courses; suspension for further 2 years.

How can we demonstrate compassion while also consistently applying policy?

Excerpts from transcript of inquiry meeting:

When introducing the inquiry panel to the student:

> Chair: *"So our job is to be here for you. It can be really stressful. You're thinking, 'wow, all these people'. The reason we have so many people, is so that a lot of different people from all around the university can provide different perspectives…it's not to make you scared, but so that you know that 'hey, a lot of people have looked at this…"*

Demonstrating compassion

Excerpt from transcript of inquiry meeting
Following student's disclosure of cheating:

Chair: *"I'm happy for you. You've told us now. That makes it so much easier and better for us to understand what is happening…It's not the worst thing you've ever done in your life. It's just a mistake. It doesn't make you a bad person. You are a young person. Everyone in this room has made mistakes. Right? We've all made mistakes. We learn from those mistakes.*

The sad thing about when you get someone else to do your assignment is that you didn't get a chance to learn the material. So, for this course, you didn't learn anything because somebody else did it for you. So, we are sad for that because you wasted your money and you wasted your stress and your time."

Demonstrating compassion

Excerpts from outcome (2 year suspension) letter:

"The panel appreciated your honesty in admitting to receiving third party assistance and for expressing remorse for your actions. The panel further noted that you accepted that your choices carried serious consequences for you and that you had not achieved the learning outcomes in these six courses."

"Please be assured of our best intentions in upholding integrity…The panel has confidence that you will learn from this mistake and develop a strong commitment to ethical behaviour, both personally and professionally."

Reflect

1. What are your thoughts regarding the approach shared today?
2. Is it appropriate?
3. What would you do differently?
4. Why is transparency and consistency so important?
5. In your own context, do you think it's possible to have a process which has all three elements: transparency, consistency *and* compassion?

Consider your own context

What is your institution's policy regarding:

1. Defining academic integrity
2. Defining academic integrity breaches
3. How breaches are identified (including use of technology)
4. The responsibilities of teachers/markers
5. The process for referring breaches
6. The decision-maker/s responsible for determining an outcome
7. The student's rights and responsibilities as part of the process
8. The factors to consider when determining an outcome
9. The outcomes that apply to particular breaches
10. How the student is supported going forward

Summary

- Academic integrity matters, because learning matters
- A holistic approach to fostering academic integrity includes using engaging assessments that are 'less likely to be outsourced', plus a focus on supportive student/teacher relationships.
- New research has found 3 factors that influence contract cheating: Language other than English, dissatisfaction with the T&L environment, and the perception that there are lots of opportunities to cheat.
- If we identify academic integrity breaches, we have a responsibility to investigate.
- A consistent and transparent application of our institution's policy can, and should be, compassionate.

Useful sources

Contract cheating and assessment design project:
www.cheatingandassessment.edu.au

Bretag T (2013). Challenges in Addressing Plagiarism in Education. *PLoS Med* 10(12): e1001574.
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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.* https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2018.1462788

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