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Staff views on commercial contract cheating in higher education: a survey study in Australia and the UK / Rebecca Awdry ; Philip M. Newton

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Abstract

Contract cheating is, potentially, a serious threat to the quality of higher education around the world. Prior research has focused on student perspectives and the companies themselves, but the staff view is poorly understood, despite staff being a major stakeholder with considerable influence over strategies designed to address contract cheating. We surveyed staff in Australia and the UK about their views on contract cheating. We asked staff to estimate the extent of contract cheating, how much it cost students to buy assignments, and whether proposed strategies to tackle contract cheating would work. We also asked about the factors which may motivate students to engage with contract cheating. Staff in both countries estimated high costs for an assignment from an online essay mill. Staff believed that low numbers (5â€“10%) of students are using these services, although this could represent approximately a quarter of a million students across the two countries. A large proportion of staff had had some experience with student cases of contract cheating at their university and reported that

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outcomes were lenient. The most prominent reasons which staff believed contributed to contract cheating were "Studying in a non-native language"™ and "Fear of Failure"™. Over half of the respondents were aware of companies selling work to students on campus. There was strong support for the view that contract cheating services should be illegal, and that creative assessment strategies could reduce contract cheating. There was also modest, qualified support for the criminalising of student use of these services, and an increased use of examination-based assessments. Suggestions are made for how these data can inform the ongoing debate around contract cheating, including increasing staff awareness of contract cheating and the development of more appropriate assessment strategies. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)