

Contract Cheating Risk and Avoidance: A Student Guide



Introduction

All students are expected to undertake their studies with integrity and honesty and in adherence to the University's policy on [Academic Integrity](#). The behaviour of the vast majority of the University's students is exemplary. However, as part of a wider move to offer more transparency and education about Academic Integrity, and because the consequences of contract cheating can be particularly severe, it is therefore important that all students understand what contract cheating is, how to ensure they avoid it, the penalties that the University can impose, and the possible longer-term risks associated with contract cheating. To deal with academic misconduct, including activities associated with contract cheating, the University has [Student Discipline Policy and Procedures](#) that apply to all students of the University irrespective of their mode or place of study.

The University understands that assessment can be stressful for students, for a wide range of reasons. Therefore, if you are feeling anxious about your assessment(s), please contact the [Student Advice Hub](#), the [Student Well-Being Services](#), your Personal Tutor or your course leader for guidance and/or advice. If there are circumstances preventing you from effectively engaging with and completing assessed work, you should seek advice and consider applying for [Mitigating Circumstances](#).

What is Contract Cheating?

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) defines Contract Cheating¹ as: *“Contract cheating happens when a third party completes work for a student who then submits it to an education provider as their own, where such input is not permitted. Over the last decade, an industry has developed where companies, based in the UK or overseas, are paid to undertake this work. These companies have become known as ‘essay mills’, although many supply a range of services in addition to essay writing. Typically, the essay mill will outsource the commissioned work to individual writers engaged on an ad hoc basis. The term ‘contract cheating’ does not apply exclusively to essay mills. It can, for example, also refer to situations such as friends or family members completing assignments for students in whole or in part, and does not always involve a financial relationship”.*

The fundamental distinguishing feature of contract cheating is that a student has in a premeditated manner, sought to submit work that was prepared by a third party. Third parties include anyone other than yourself, for example, ghost writers, freelance academic writers, online ‘essay mills’, family members, friends, academic tutors, and any service offering tutorial or homework support.

¹ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/guidance/contracting-to-cheat-in-higher-education-2nd-edition.pdf>

Risk and Consequence: reasons why you should not Contract Cheat

1. **Disciplinary Consequences:** The University **will not accept** any form of Contract Cheating, and the University Discipline Committee (UDC) has the authority to impose a number of sanctions, including in the most severe cases, expulsion from the University. All students are forewarned that the academic sanctions imposed may prevent a student from receiving their degree award or lead to the immediate **expulsion** of the student from the University.

The University Discipline Committee (UDC) also has the authority to remove all the offender's course credits, which can impact progression and graduation. In such cases, the student will not be able to carry credits over to another institution.

2. **Risk of Blackmail.** You should also be aware that academic sanction is not the only consequence of contract cheating. There is a growing trend in which third parties extort further financial payment from students who engaged in contract cheating, i.e., blackmailing the student into handing over more money. The blackmailer will indicate that if further payment is not received, they will inform the University (regardless of whether you are an existing student or graduate) or, in future, an employer, of prior dealings with them (irrespective of whether the material provided was actually used by you). Such "legacy for life" blackmail may continue indefinitely.

What to do if you are Blackmailed: The University does not wish to see any student victimised in this way, regardless of the fact they have cheated. The University will therefore support any student who is a victim of blackmail, regardless of the reasons. Students in such situations are strongly advised to contact either the University Student Conduct Office (conduct@hw.ac.uk), or the Student Advice Hub advice.hub@hw.ac.uk as soon as possible. Whilst informing the University that you have committed an academic offence will result in a disciplinary investigation, this is ultimately preferable to being blackmailed.

3. **Detection.** You should not be deceived by claims made by third parties that their work will not be detected. The 'original' piece of assessed work created by a third party can be recognised using various detection methods. HWU uses sophisticated detection processes, including, but not limited to, Turnitin detection software, website searches and agreements with online services to provide us with upload and download data should our assessment questions or similar appear on their websites. You should be aware that academics can reliably detect the tell-tale signs of contract cheating, for example by a change in writing style, the use of inappropriate academic literature, inclusion of unexpected content, etc., all clues that the work is not the student's and not that of a HW student. If staff suspect that a submission is not that of the student, then they are duty bound to investigate and refer the case to the University Disciplinary Committee.
4. **Peer Reporting.** The vast majority of HW students uphold our values of integrity and professionalism and wish to protect the value of the HW degree. As such, many cases of contract cheating are reported to the University by students. If you are aware that other students have submitted work that is not their own, you should feel confident in reporting this to the University via the University Student Conduct Office (conduct@hw.ac.uk) or directly to your Programme or Course Leader. Reports of any academic misconduct are always treated in the strictest confidence.

Likewise, if you are approached by a third party offering contract cheating services, you should immediately inform the University via the University Student Conduct Office (conduct@hw.ac.uk), the Student Advice Hub (advice.hub@hw.ac.uk), your Head of School, Programme or Course Leader, or your Personal Tutor.

5. **The Psychological Cost:** Those who cheat ultimately live with the psychological cost associated with feelings of guilt and damage to self-respect. The feeling of guilt and the impact this has can be far reaching. It can also be stressful waiting for the outcome of a disciplinary investigation which can take several weeks and may delay your ability to progress as planned in your programme of study. Delays may have financial consequences in terms of reassessment fees, extension of rental agreements, study visas, etc. Any student suffering from stress or feelings of guilt, whatever the reason, should seek advice from [Student Well-Being Services](#).

How to Avoid Contract Cheating

1. **Do not seek assistance from anyone else** to complete any part of your assessed work. It is better to submit an incomplete answer (for which you might get some partial credit) than to submit something produced by someone else. Whether you pay someone or not, whether there is a contract or not, if you submit the work of someone else as your own then this is contract cheating.
2. **Do not be tempted to 'google' or search for any assignment or Timed Online Coursework (TOC) questions online.** If you access an online service (e.g., an 'essay mill' or 'homework service') to upload a question OR to look at an answer, you run the risk of being detected and therefore suspected of contract cheating, even if you do not copy the answer into your coursework submission. Uploading any teaching or assessment materials created by HWU staff, including exam and coursework questions, is a breach of UK copyright law.
3. **Do not share, upload, or post any of your assessed work** (pre or post submission) via any platform e.g., a third-party website, social media platform, email, etc. If another student uses your work in part or in full then they will be investigated for either collusion or contract cheating and you will be suspected of collusion, even if you have not copied or used anyone else's work.
4. **Do improve your study skills.** To avoid engaging in any form of academic misconduct, including contract cheating, the University offers a wide range of [skills development](#) opportunities on campus, and [online](#). There is a lot of support available to you to help you develop the academic skills needed to succeed. These opportunities can help you develop your study skills – so that there is no reason for you to contract cheat.
5. **Apply for Mitigating Circumstances when, through no fault of your own, you are unable to engage in your assessment.** If you are unable to engage effectively with any assessed work due to events that are no fault of your own, then you should apply for Mitigating Circumstances (MCs). Never allow external pressure to tempt you to resort to cheating of any kind. You can find full details of the circumstances that HWU rejects/accepts for mitigation in this [student guide on mitigating circumstances](#). Instructions on how to apply for MCs are available on the [mitigating circumstances](#) webpage.