



# Contract Cheating

## A Circle of Paid and Unpaid Friends

# Acknowledgements



contract cheating and  
assessment design

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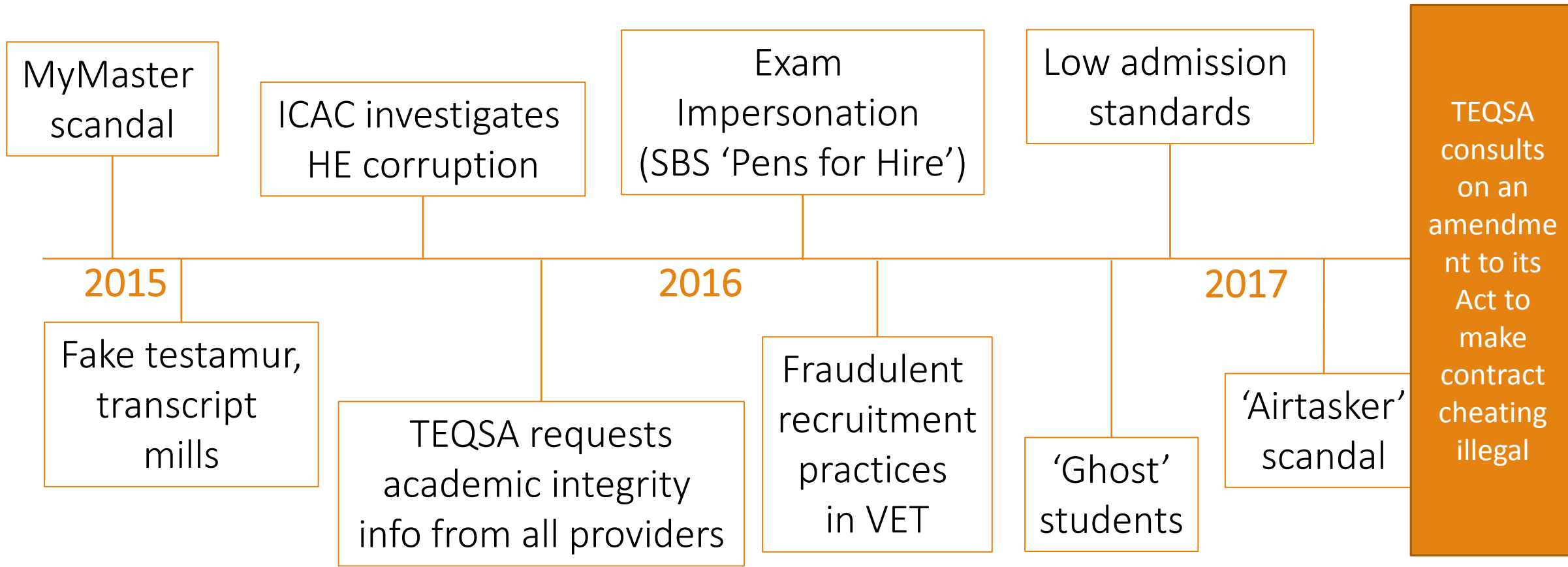
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# 2014 -2019 context





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# Contract cheating

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“Contract cheating occurs when a student submits work that has been completed for them by a third party, irrespective of the third party’s relationship with the student, and whether they are paid or unpaid.”

(Harper & Bretag et al, 2018 forthcoming)

Third party:

- friend or family
- fellow student or staff member
- commercial service



# Seven 'outsourcing' behaviours

Buying, selling or trading notes	Providing a completed assignment (for any reason)	Obtaining a completed assignment (to submit as one's own)	Providing exam assistance	Receiving exam assistance	Taking an exam for another	Arranging for another to take one's exam
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Sharing behaviours



Cheating behaviours



# Research questions

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1. How prevalent is contract cheating in Australian higher education?
2. What are student and staff attitudes towards and experiences with contract cheating?
3. What are the individual, contextual and institutional factors that are correlated with contract cheating?
4. What kinds of assessments are associated with contract cheating?
5. Can 'authentic' assessment solve the problem of contract cheating?



# Research design

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1. Parallel staff and student surveys at 8 universities
  - Student respondents = **14,086** (incl. sample of 925 qualitative responses)
  - Staff respondents = **1,147** (incl. 315 qualitative responses)
2. Large dataset of procurement requests posted to multiple cheat sites
  - Shows the types of assessment commonly contracted out to third parties
3. Data from one university's longitudinal academic integrity databases
  - Shows the assessment items in which purchased assignments have been detected





contract cheating and  
assessment design

# Eight key findings

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# 1. Contract cheating is a symptom, not the problem

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One-third of staff described contract cheating as a *systemic* problem, created or made worse by government and institutional policy and practice.

*economic strains on universities created by the **defunding of higher education** provide strong disincentives to fail or punish any students (Staff 133).*

*The upsurge in third-party cheating is due to students' perception of university degrees as a commercial transaction due to university management's focus on **the business of education**, such that marketing of university 'products' becomes more important than the education process itself (Staff 167).*





# 1. Contract cheating is a symptom, not the problem

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One-third of staff described contract cheating as a *systemic* problem, created or made worse by government and institutional policy and practice.

*While it is theoretically possible to design assessment that minimises the opportunity for cheating, there is **not enough time allocated to assessment**, and **not enough time allocated to student-teacher contact** in order to implement this effectively (Staff 12).*

*As a casual you are not paid extra for all the work disciplinary action involves and if pass marks fall in your tutes questions are asked - so **there is no incentive to stop this**, in fact there are incentives not to report (Staff 72).*





# 1. Contract cheating is a symptom, not the problem

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One-third of staff described contract cheating as a *systemic* problem, created or made worse by government and institutional policy and practice.

*The use of a range of assessments is helpful, however we are under increasing pressure to **reduce the number of assessments** to manage the marking resources available to us. Large class sizes and increasing use of sessional markers with little or no knowledge of individual students and their capabilities is likely to impact on this issue as well (Staff 298).*







# 1. Contract cheating is a symptom, not the problem

---

Students also discussed *systemic* problems in higher education, and used this to rationalise the existence of various forms of cheating.

*with **education now a 'business' and degrees sold as a 'product'** - there is less connection and understanding that University is about acquiring knowledge. It is seen as a user-pays system to get the degree. The degree will get the job, or the extended visa for the Masters, the job, etc. [...] **It's about getting passes, getting through the process** - hence, little attachment to the ethics of cheating. Means to an end [...] There's a disconnect - user pays - user seeks to achieve goal as quickly as possible (Student 753, non-cheating).*





# 1. Contract cheating is a symptom, not the problem

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Students also discussed *systemic* problems in higher education, and used this to rationalise the existence of various forms of cheating.

*cheating would be less of an issue if there wasn't so much money at stake. Because each subject costs a significant amount of money, there is an added **pressure of passing subjects to avoid the financial cost of repeating the subject**, which for international students can amount to **much more than paying someone to do the assignment for you** as these fees are astronomical (Student 167, non-cheating)*





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Students also discussed *systemic* problems in higher education, and used this to rationalise the existence of various forms of cheating.

*The **less personal higher education becomes**, the higher the rates of cheating ... To improve the levels of cheating we must ask why these students are feeling the need to cheat- is there **too much pressure and not enough engagement??** I saw inordinate amounts of cheating in the courses which were delivered online- students don't feel valued, and the **lecturers don't care about the students so why would they value their learning/work?** (Student 145, non-cheating).*





# 1. Contract cheating is a symptom, not the problem

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Students also discussed *systemic* problems in higher education, and used this to rationalise the existence of various forms of cheating.

*Many courses nowadays try to save money on tutors by putting students into groups of say six students to complete projects that can be worth more than 50% of the course marks. Usually there is only one student who does most/all of the work, and yet all students receive the same group mark. In my opinion **this is the same as cheating, but is condoned by the institution** (Student 292, non-cheating).*







# 1. Contract cheating is a symptom, not the problem

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## Sector

- Ongoing uncertainty about higher education funding
- Commercialisation, marketisation and competition
- Internationalisation, massification and diversification





# 1. Contract cheating is a symptom, not the problem

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## Institution

'Efficiencies' in teaching and learning

- Larger class sizes
- Less staff/student contact time
- Fewer assessment points
- Less marking time
- Shrinking teaching workloads





# 1. Contract cheating is a symptom, not the problem

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## Educator

'We make do'

- Expedient assessment design
- Don't/can't get to know students
- Difficult to identify contract cheating
- No time/workload/incentive to respond to cheating





## 2. Students share their work a lot...

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6% have engaged in one or more of the  
'cheating' behaviours

15% have bought, traded or sold notes

27% have provided someone with a  
completed assignment





# ... and this may lead to contract cheating

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Cheating students were **2x** more likely than Non-cheating students to engage in sharing...

... and more likely to pay money or use a file sharing website or professional service for this purpose



### 3. It's who you know

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Despite the spread of file-sharing websites and online cheating services,

students still primarily engage in  
outsourcing with people they know

current students, former students, friends, and family



## 4. Three factors contribute to contract cheating

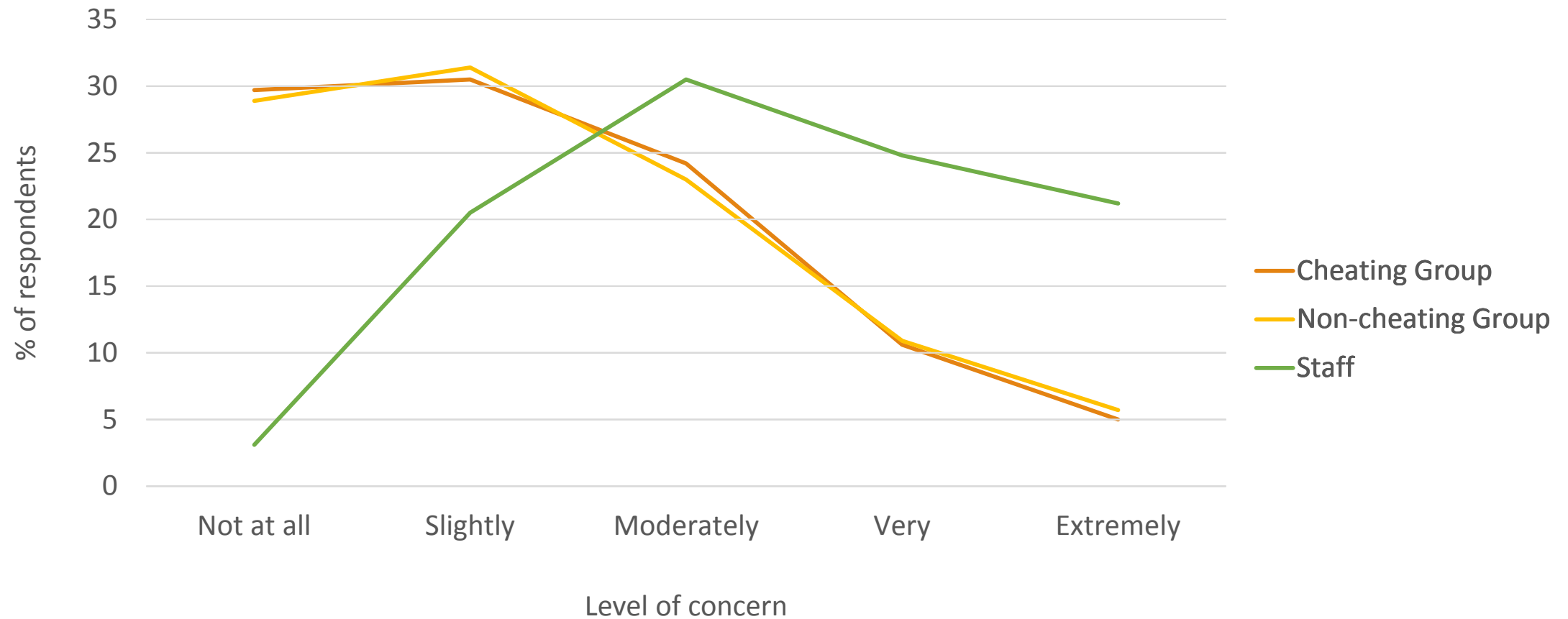
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Gender?  
Discipline?  
Language?  
Study mode?  
Domicile?

1. Speaking a language other than English at home
2. Perceptions that there are 'lots of opportunities to cheat'
3. Dissatisfaction with the teaching and learning environment



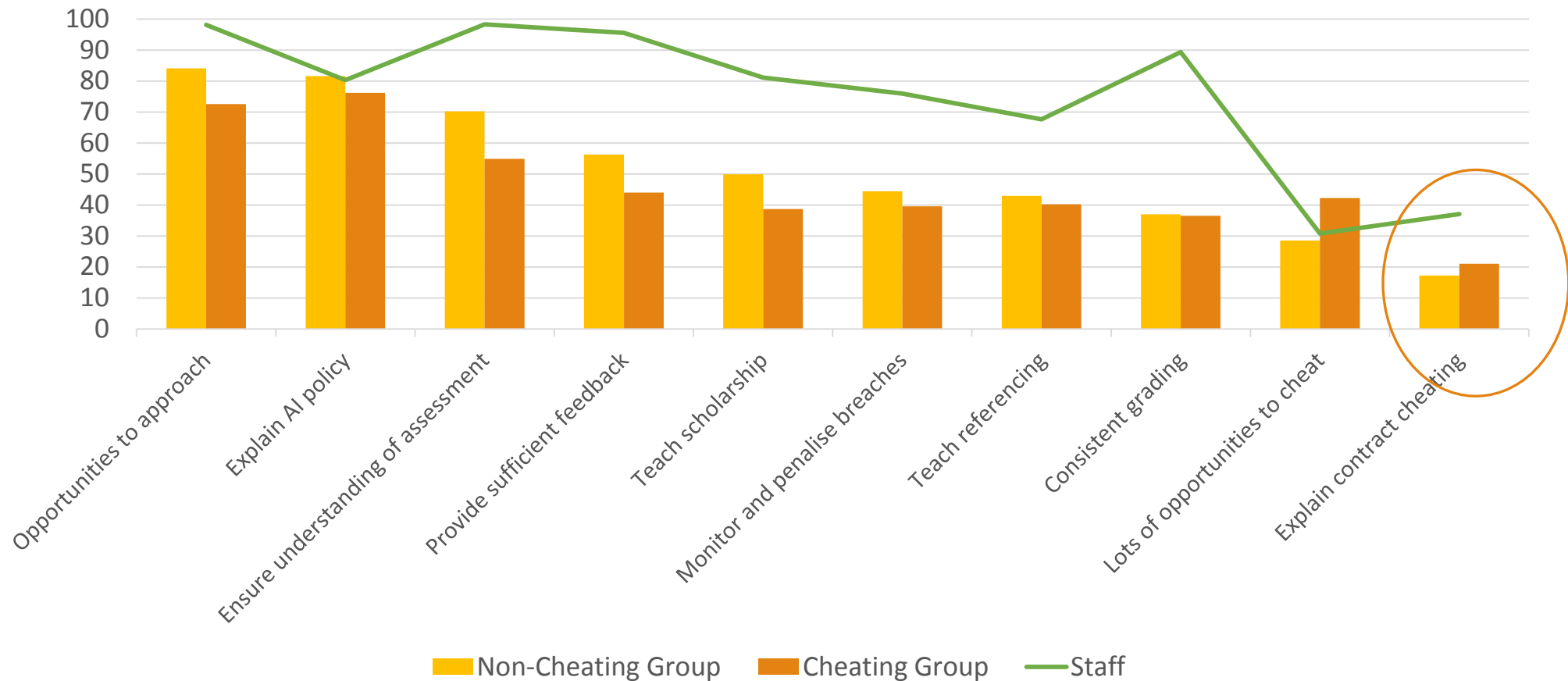
## 5. Students aren't concerned ...







# ... and we're not talking to them about it



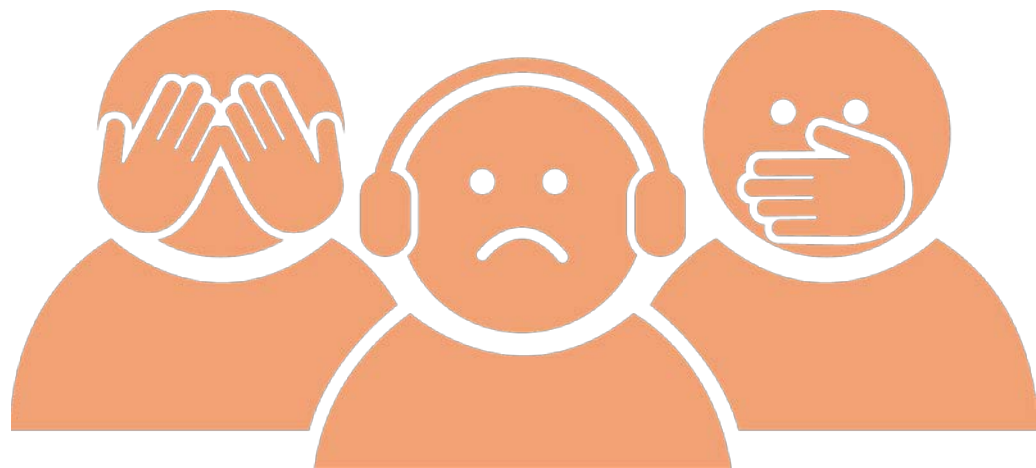


## 6. Suspected cheating often goes unreported...

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Three reasons:

1. Perceptions it's 'impossible to prove'
2. Too time consuming
3. Staff don't feel encouraged to report





# Turnitin Authorship Investigation Tool

The Authorship Investigation Tool report uses the following measures to create an authorship profile for a student:

## *Readability*

Readability uses the [Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Formula](#). Assuming the text is grammatically correct, this scale estimates the years of education needed to understand the document and gives you an indication of what grade level each file falls into.

## *Document Information*

For any files submitted to the AI Tool that are .docx file types, the report will pull the file's metadata. There are four different types of metadata that can be found; author name, dates, editing time and revisions.

## *Sentences*

Compare how each paper has utilized the different sentence structure types. There are four main sentence structures: simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex.

## *Vocabulary*

Unique word usage (type-token ratio) calculates the total number of unique words as a percentage of the total number of words used in a document. Vocabulary richness (Hapax Legomena ratio) calculates the percentage of words in a document that only occur once.



... and penalties are lenient

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Staff were asked what a *typical* penalty includes.

### Outsourced assignment

- 30% Warning/counselling
- 27% Zero for assignment
- 21% Reduced mark for assignment
- **3% Suspension**
- 2% Exclusion/expulsion

### Exam impersonation

- 23% Zero for the exam
- 23% Warning/counselling
- 16% Zero for the subject
- **16% Suspension**
- 12% Exclusion/expulsion



## 7. Authentic assessment is a good thing to do...

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Many students rationalised cheating in 'trivial' assessments, or justified unauthorised learning practices because they reflect the 'real world'.

*In engineering, the worst possible student would love to try hard and do design work; however, **"useless assignment" like weekly quizzes are very unwelcome** (Student 46, non-cheating).*

*Students are more likely to cheat with take home exams or online exams/quizzes. With the internet readily available at most jobs now, **having to memorize material for exams is becoming more and more irrelevant**. Universities would do well to **remember the resources available to students once they enter their profession** and spend time testing/quizzing/ examining students in a more relevant manner (Student 148, non-cheating).*



## 7. Authentic assessment is a good thing to do...

---

Many students rationalised cheating in 'trivial' assessments, or justified unauthorised learning practices because they reflect the 'real world'.

*I sometimes [work on assignments] with others and justify it as we still engage in the learning process, use critical thought and develop team work skills to solve problems. I'm an engineering student and I figure that's how the real world works so as long as we're learning, its justified (Student 311, non-cheating).*





# Authentic assessment

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- Commonly described as assessment tasks that reflect the ‘real world’
- Five features of authentic assessment identified:
  1. Frequency – task is common or fundamental to discipline or profession
  2. Fidelity – task reflects *how* something is done in discipline or profession
  3. Complexity – task reflects the ‘messiness’ of real-world problems
  4. Impact – task has real impact, shared with or delivered in the real world
  5. Feed forward – task directly, meaningfully informs future practice

(Based on work by Bosco & Ferns, 2014; Iverson, Lewis & Talbot, 2008)



## 7. ...but authentic assessment isn't a solution

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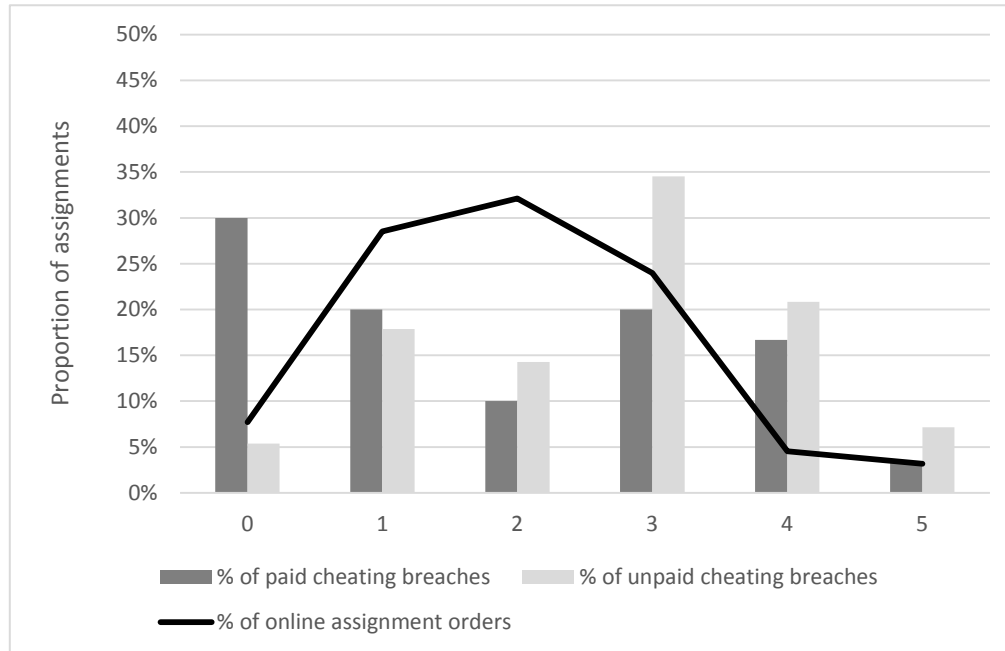
We identified 5 factors of authenticity possible in any assignment

Using these, we then rated (out of 5) the authenticity of:

1. over 200 assignment orders made to multiple cheat sites
2. assessments identified and penalised by one university as contract cheating



## 7. ...but authentic assessment isn't a solution

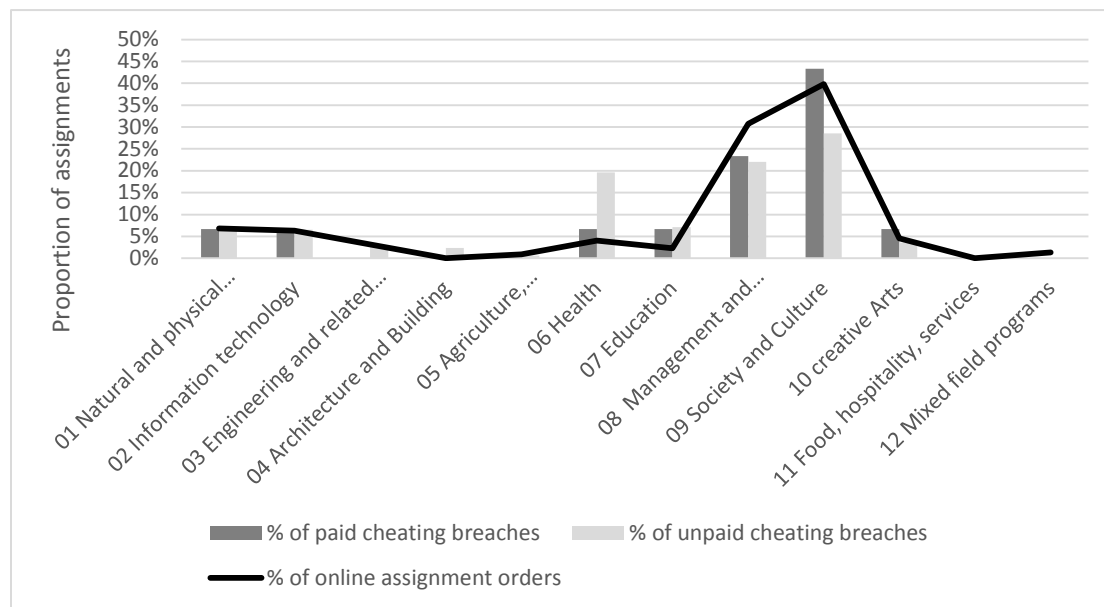


Assessment tasks with no, some, or all authenticity factors are routinely ordered by students.

In one discipline (Education) ALL the orders were for highly authentic assignments (4 or 5)



## 7. ...but authentic assessment isn't a solution



More than 70% of online assignment orders and detected paid breaches were coded in either Management and Commerce (08) or Society and Culture (09). These are both very large FoE codes encompassing numerous disciplines, which may be contributing to their over-representation.

Institutional records may better reflect disciplines where academic staff are highly vigilant in the detection, reporting, investigating and recording of academic integrity breaches than the actual proportion of academic integrity breaches that are occurring

## So what does this all mean?

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- Contract cheating is a systemic problem: the causes are multiple and complex
- Responsibility does not rest solely with students, or educators
- Simplistic solutions (e.g. assessment design) are on their own ineffective
- Staff and student decisions are enabled and constrained by institutional and sector conditions



# So what does this all mean?

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Government and institutions must provide adequate resourcing and support for:

- Relevant and meaningful curriculum and assessment design
- Teaching that builds relationships with students
- Improving the language and learning of LOTE students
- Marking of assessment
- Systematic detection and management of breaches





# References

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Project website: [www.cheatingandassessment.edu.au](http://www.cheatingandassessment.edu.au)



contract cheating and  
assessment design

# Questions?

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