



Contract Cheating Guidance for Students

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Guidance for students on 'Contract Cheating'

Our Brunel community believes that the diligence and effort shown by virtually all students must not be undermined by a dishonest minority trying to gain an unfair advantage with their work.

The University takes a hard-line where allegations of 'Contract Cheating' are found to be proved, as it represents a threat to academic standards and academic integrity and in turn to UK Higher Education as a whole.

A student's application to be admitted into a regulated profession, such as teaching, nursing, social work or physiotherapy may also be put at risk if they have committed 'Contract Cheating'.

This guidance is supplementary to the procedure for investigating and dealing with allegations of 'Contract Cheating' set out in:

- [Senate Regulation 6: Student Conduct \(Academic and Non-Academic\) \(revised version\) \(SR6.21e\)](#); and
- Paragraph 37 e of the [Academic Misconduct Procedure](#).

Advice and guidance about the academic misconduct procedure can be obtained by contacting conduct@brunel.ac.uk.

1. What is 'Contract Cheating'?

The University considers 'Contract Cheating' to have taken place where a student:

- **obtains or purchases work** from another person/organisation; and
- **submits it** for assessment as their own; and
- such third-party input/assistance is **not permitted**.

'Contract Cheating' includes:

- the use of 'essay mills' and/or ghost-writing,
- buying work online (including code and/or games),
- getting someone to conduct your research;
- impersonating you in an exam;
- using artificial intelligence or chatbots in an assessment when not allowed (see [more here](#))

[An 'essay mill' is an organisation or individual, usually with a web presence, that contracts with students to complete a piece of work for a student for a fee.](#)

In 2022, laws were passed in England that prohibited the operation of commercial essay mills, including the advertising of their services. **Although the new law does not criminalise students, the provision of these services for money is now illegal.**

There are **huge risks** for students who choose to use essay mills. For example:

- Student personal data may be stored online with minimal if any security, exposing students to identity theft and bank fraud.
- Essay mills may contact students after purchases are made and threaten to identify them to their universities unless further money is given to them.
- Essay mills may contact universities directly if students fail to pay the agreed price.

Essay mills make extensive use of social media to find and engage with potential customers. Students should therefore be advised not to post details about their assessments on social media, or have conversations with contract cheating services who contact them.

2. How does 'Contract Cheating differ to Proof-reading?

- ✓ Quality checking, sense checking and revising work are of course seen as important elements in the preparation of your assignment and you are **encouraged to proof-read your own work** before submitting it for assessment.
- ✓ The [University's Academic Skills team \(ASK\)](#) does not offer a proof-reading service or correct every mistake, but is happy to discuss your work and provide support on topics including:
 - writing style and structure;
 - presentations,
 - time management; and
 - grammar.

You can send ASK a [500-word sample](#) of your work to ask@brunel.ac.uk and obtain feedback. The aim of this is for you to develop good proof-reading skills for yourself.

- ✓ If you have a **disability** and have registered with [Student Wellbeing](#), the [Assistive Technology Centre \(ATC\)](#) can provide you with a wide range of **assistive technology**, including spellchecking and proofreading software. [Study skills support](#), including proof-reading, is also commonly facilitated by Student Wellbeing if you have a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia.
- ✗ If, however, you are found to have used and/or **paid for the services of a third-party proof reader or copy editor**, this **may constitute cheating depending on the scale of the changes to your work**. For example, if the final work you submit is substantially different to that which you originally wrote and the changes were made following proof-reading or copy editing by a third party for a fee, the University may take steps to assess whether contract cheating has occurred.

3. How does the University determine whether 'Contract cheating' has happened?

- It is possible that a student's contract cheating is **flagged to the university by the essay writing service** itself. Indeed, students are at risk of blackmail from essay mill services or online organisations from which they may obtain or purchase work to submit for assessment. The University has seen instances where such services have demanded more money and threatened students that they will report them to their university if they do not make payment.
- All the summative assessments which you submit whilst at University will be scanned through **Turnitin**. The databases used by this software not only consist of material from books, academic journals, websites and magazines, but also contain assignments previously submitted to universities around the world and the work of other students at the University. **If you have engaged in contract cheating buy obtaining or purchasing work from another person or organisation, it is possible that it will be flagged as similar to another piece of work when it is scanned through Turnitin. This is because the person or organisation who you have bought the work from may have generated the same piece of work for multiple students.**
- Your **work will be reviewed** to ascertain whether you have:
 - followed the University's guidance on citations and referencing;
 - properly referenced taught materials, recommended reading and any other sources;
 - made other submissions which vary in style.
- You may also have to submit outlines or drafts of your work. The draft documents which you submit may be retained by your Taught Programmes Office (TPO) for comparison with the final submission of your work.
- **Viva assessment** may also be used as a means of checking your work where suspicions are raised prior to a formal investigation, and/or during the investigation of an allegation of 'contract cheating' (as described at section 4 below). A viva is a **face-to-face meeting in which you would be asked to respond orally to questions about your work**. If a viva is held, the following procedure will be followed:
 - You will be given at least 5 working days' notice of the viva and be informed of the purpose of the meeting.
 - The viva will not determine whether an allegation of 'contract cheating' is substantiated but be used to gather evidence. A detailed written note of the viva will be taken.
 - You will be asked to attend (along with your permitted representative) as well as an academic subject expert (normally the person making the allegation).
 - The viva will be chaired by someone independent of the concern or allegation.
 - You will be allowed to present evidence at the viva, such as date-stamped draft copies of your work.

- The academic subject expert will normally ask you questions about your work to ascertain whether you understand what you have submitted.

Please note: The test for considering allegations or suspicions of contract cheating is the balance of probabilities. This means the evidence will need to demonstrate that it is more likely than not that you have committed this offence. It is not necessary to prove beyond reasonable doubt that you have done it.

4. What will happen where there is a suspicion that you may have engaged in 'Contract cheating'?

The [University's Academic Misconduct Procedure](#) sets out the formal process for considering allegations of 'Contract cheating'.

A concern that you have committed 'Contract cheating' should be reported to the Deputy Dean (Academic Affairs) of the student's College. The Deputy Dean (Academic Affairs) will then determine whether a formal investigation of the concern is required and if so, will appoint an Investigating Officer to investigate the concern under the process in paragraphs 27-32 of the Academic Misconduct Procedure.

Once the formal investigation has been concluded the Investigating Officer will provide a report to the Deputy Dean (Academic Affairs) who will decide the next course of action. This may include referring the case to the Secretary to the Fitness to Practice & Misconduct Board for consideration by the Vice Chancellor's Representative (VCR) or, more usually, an Academic Misconduct Panel. Alternatively, the Deputy Dean (Academic Affairs) may decide that the student's conduct relates to poor academic practice, in which case the concern will be dismissed and you will be warned about future practice and directed to sources of guidance and information. (Academic Misconduct Procedure, paragraph 33).

The VCR or Academic Misconduct Panel will weigh up the evidence in the case and make a decision on the balance of probabilities as to whether it is more likely than not that you have committed the offence of 'Contract cheating'.

5. What if you are found to have committed the offence of 'Contract cheating' on the balance of probabilities?

If it is determined that it is more likely than not that you have committed 'Contract Cheating' on the balance of probabilities the **indicative penalty is expulsion**. However, each case is considered on its own merits and there are a range of possible penalties set out in the Academic Misconduct Procedure.

Your application to be admitted into a regulated profession may also be put at risk if you are found to have engaged in 'contract cheating'. This is because you may be seen to have failed to maintain the appropriate standards required by the relevant professional body and this could compromise your professional suitability. The [Fitness to Practise Procedure](#) sets out the process to be followed when professional suitability concerns are raised.

6. What does the University do to prevent 'Contract cheating'?

Along with raising awareness of the definitions of academic misconduct, the University takes other preventative action which may, where possible, include:

- removing posters appearing on campus which advertise essay mill websites;
- working with 3rd party vendors to block essay mill websites from contacting students via email and social media; and
- sending 'cease and desist' correspondence to essay mill companies.

Should you become aware of essay mill websites advertising their services, or are contacted by an essay mill company, you may report this by emailing conduct@brunel.ac.uk.

7. Additional support

Further support is available at the University to enable you to develop skills in studying, academic writing, the use of academic sources, paraphrasing and research. For example:

- The University's [Academic Skills Team \(ASK\)](#) does not offer a proof-reading service or correct every mistake but can provide students with effective techniques for proofreading. ASK is happy to discuss a student's work and provide support on topics including writing style and structure, presentations, time management and grammar. Brunel students can send ASK a 500 word [sample](#) of their work to academicskills@brunel.ac.uk and obtain feedback. The aim of this is for students to develop good proof-reading skills for themselves. ASK also offers a comprehensive [writing and study skills service](#) including [writing and learning workshops](#) and individual appointments.
- The [Brunel Language Centre](#) provides free English Language support to all current Brunel University students who have English as a second language, including for academic writing.
- The [Graduate School](#) provides workshops and seminars for Postgraduate Research (PGR) students on Academic Writing, Technical Writing, Thesis Writing and Writing for Academic Publications.
- All Academic Departments at Brunel have a named [Academic Liaison Librarian \(ALL\)](#). This service is provided via the Library Academic Services Team, which offers tailored support, including citing, referencing and tips for avoiding plagiarism. There is a library guide to referencing: [Referencing overview - Referencing - LibGuides at Brunel University Library](#). Advice is also provided about understanding what plagiarism is, and how to avoid it on the [Plagiarism](#) Library webpages and in the [Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism](#) module (which is available on Brightspace too).
- Your Personal Tutor can provide academic support and guidance.
- The [Student Support and Welfare Team](#) is available to offer support and guidance on a range of personal and welfare issues helping you to overcome particular challenges that you may face so that you can achieve your university goals.