



Contract Cheating:

Preparing assignment briefs to enhance academic integrity An exemplar for managing assessment briefs

- Issue** Contract cheating is a major academic offence and a growing issue across UK universities, expected to continue after the pandemic (Lancaster and Cotarlan 2021). Students upload assignment briefs to essay mills, that sell their tailored service in exchange for a fee (Rogerson and Basanta 2016).
- Focus** In a large cohort, this type of offence can be difficult to detect and nearly impossible to prove.
- Query** Can a simple “barium meal test” or “canary trap” allegedly used by the intelligence service (Wright 1989; Miller 2021) for many years be a solution?

Consider the following two passages of text

Contract cheating happens when a third party completes work for a student. Over the last decade, an industry has developed where companies are paid to undertake this work. These companies are known as ‘essay mills’.



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Spot the difference? Maybe not. Yet these two paragraphs are different. In efforts to detect potential academic integrity activities, we present a simple yet practical solution.

The process

1) Place assignment brief in Word [manual preparation required]

2) Choose a paragraph of text [manually]

3) Break down into sentences [automatically]

4) Make a few versions of each sentence [manually]

5) Create all permutations of the sentences [automagically]

6) Insert into Word and convert to PDF [automatically]

7) Upload a different version to each student on Brightspace

Result: If the brief appears on an assignment commissioning site, it is possible to link it to source for referral.