

# More support for academic integrity in higher education

*Australian Government response to recommendations of the Higher Education Standards Panel.*

The Australian Government is moving to deter and respond to incidences of contract cheating in higher education and to support higher education providers to enhance student academic integrity across all institutions.

Following detailed consideration, in response to a request by the then Minister for Education, the Hon Christopher Pyne MP, the Higher Education Standards Panel recommended that the Government consider strengthening legislation to support academic integrity in higher education.

Maintaining the strong reputation of Australia's higher education system as an internationally recognised source of high quality and academically robust education is critical to the sector's future success. Increasing threats to the integrity of the sector have been experienced in recent years, especially with the growth internationally of commercial essay writing services and attempts by organised criminal actors to encourage or induce students into deceptive or fraudulent practices

The measures the Government is taking will both underline the importance of developing a strong culture of academic integrity among higher education students and help higher education providers manage emerging threats to the integrity of their operations.

## **Cracking down on commercial cheating services**

In the 2018-19 Budget, the Australian Government provided the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) with additional funding of \$1.1 million in 2018-19 and around \$660,000 in ongoing annual resources to undertake a national regulator role in support of new legislation to deter and respond to cheating activity carried out for profit.

The new laws will make it an offence to provide or advertise commercial cheating services to Australian higher education students, whether those services are delivered from within Australia or overseas. Significant penalties will apply where an offence is proven.

The Government is working with the states and territories to design the legislation, based on an approach adopted in New Zealand. This will likely involve the Australian Government enacting a national law relying on its powers with respect to communications, corporations, trade and commerce, territories, and 'aliens'. Such a law would cover the majority of likely commercial cheating situations, but will see some regulatory gaps; for example where the cheating activity does not involve communications by mail or electronic means, occurs in a single state and involves a domestic student. Such gaps could be reduced in future through states and territories taking supplementary action in support of the national law.

It is anticipated that new law will be introduced to the Australian Parliament in 2019, with other jurisdictions encouraged to enact supporting measures as a follow-up.

## **Support for higher education providers to enhance academic integrity**

TEQSA already works closely with higher education providers to ensure they have robust systems in place to detect and address instances of cheating and academic fraud. In October 2017, TEQSA issued a [guidance note on academic integrity](#), which outlines the issue and the role of the Higher Education Standards Framework. TEQSA also issued a [Good Practice Note: Addressing contract cheating to safeguard academic integrity](#), which gives detailed information on practices that providers can adopt to reduce the risk of academic integrity breaches.

The new funding will enable TEQSA to develop additional supports and work more with individual providers seeking support to improve their approaches. It will enable TEQSA to undertake intelligence gathering to monitor commercial cheating services' use of social media and other communication channels aimed at enticing students to do the wrong thing.

TEQSA will also be able to work intensively with providers who experience significant incidences or attempts at academic fraud or commercial cheating; to assist the providers' own efforts to detect, manage and respond to these threats. This could include working with law enforcement and public prosecution authorities to mount legal action where necessary.

## **Improving understanding of integrity obligations**

The Australian Government is keen to do all it can to support higher education providers to instil and maintain a strong culture of academic integrity among students and staff. In line with the Panel's recommendation, the Government will work with higher education providers to develop a template statement of commitment to academic integrity that students could be asked to sign on enrolment; to make clear the commitments they are making to act with honesty and integrity in their academic pursuits. It would make clear the expectation to not misrepresent the work of others as their own and the range of penalties that could apply if such dishonesty is identified.

The intent is that such a clear statement at the start of a person's study journey will help set the benchmark for future actions and make clearer the gap in achievement if a problem is identified at a later date. Providers would be encouraged, on a voluntary basis, to adopt the statement for all students at enrolment as part of induction processes aimed at ensuring all students have a clear understanding of expectations and their responsibilities.

Such a measure, however, is only one element of a comprehensive institutional strategy to underpin a culture of academic integrity. As part of its ongoing educative role in this area, providers will be able to draw on TEQSA's advice and support to ensure they are adopting best practice approaches to academic integrity.