

# University of Technology Sydney

Submission on Tackling Contract  
Cheating

March 2019

## PART 1: UTS response to HESP recommendations

This submission is made in response to the advice of the Higher Education Standards Panel on commercial (or 'contract') cheating in higher education and the Government's response to that advice.

UTS welcomes the timely advice of the Higher Education Standards Panel and the emphasis on a nationally consistent approach to communicating the Australian higher education sector's firm commitment to academic integrity. We support the view of the panel that failure to address commercial (or 'contract') cheating has the potential to cause significant damage to the domestic and international reputation of Australian higher education. We welcome the recommendation to develop legislative mechanisms to combat individuals and companies who promote cheating on an organised or commercial basis.

UTS offers the following responses to the recommendations set forth in the advice of the Higher Education Standards Panel on commercial (or 'contract') cheating in higher education.

### *Recommendation 1. Adopting a standardised student statement*

The recommendation that all enrolling students sign a statement of personal commitment to academic integrity which also serves to instil awareness of the seriousness of the consequences for breaches offers little that is new. While a clear and consistent national statement may assist in underscoring a new unified approach to academic integrity, most institutions already have codes of conduct or similar to which students must adhere. Many institutions also require students to sign similar statements with explicit reference to academic integrity for each individual assessment task. These measures, while entirely appropriate, have to date demonstrated little deterrence effect and so the proposed new statement is likely to have limited impact.

### *Recommendation 2. Legislative support*

UTS supports the view of the panel that organised or commercial cheating presents a significant reputational risk to the Australian higher education sector. We recognise that existing legislation does not provide adequate means to address the complexities of the contract cheating industry. The recommendation that legislation be enacted to combat individuals and companies who seek to provide or advertise commercial cheating services is therefore a welcome one.

While section 292E of New Zealand's *Education Act 1989* provides a workable model for such legislation, we note that it may not capture the following which have emerged as related areas of concern:

- a) the use of Australian university names and logos by such entities to create the impression of legitimacy by association
- b) the creation and maintenance of platforms for the exchange, sale and re-use of universities' own teaching materials
- c) the use of the labels 'coaching' and 'tutoring' to frame activities or services that constitute forms of cheating or that are broadly designed to give a student an unfair advantage over other students.

- d) the direct email targeting of students in specific courses/classes with electronic advertising for cheating or 'tutoring' services.
- e) the use of blackmail against students who have paid for the services of commercial cheating entities and the significant implications this holds for student safety and welfare.

While individual universities are developing strategies to address the above points, it may be helpful to investigate whether the specific legislation the Government proposes can encompass any of these related areas of concern or whether other nationally consistent measures might be adopted.

Finally, while the proposed legislation will make it illegal to advertise commercial cheating services, it may be important to extend this to consider:

- f) making it illegal to facilitate the advertising of such services, thereby requiring the platforms that regularly carry such advertisements to work with us to shut down their operations.

*Recommendation 3. TEQSA to have oversight for the new cheating provisions*

UTS acknowledges that TEQSA is already playing a significant leadership role in the area of academic integrity. The recent provision of the [TEQSA Guidance Note of Academic Integrity](#) and the [Good Practice Note: Addressing Contract Cheating to Safeguard Academic Integrity](#) has established a clear and consistent framework for the Australian higher education sector to manage academic integrity. Researching, understanding, and addressing threats to academic integrity is exceptionally time-intensive and resource-intensive. Given higher education providers face the same challenges in this area, TEQSA should be directly supported to facilitate stronger cooperation and sharing amongst Australian institutions. This could include the development of a national academic integrity network working toward better information sharing across the sector and more explicit alignment of policies and practices, including those associated with the investigation and reporting of breaches of academic integrity. It could also assist in the sharing of models of successful educational interventions.

In the context of the above recommendations, UTS strongly endorses the view advanced by HESP that the actions of students not be criminalised as part of the new legislative measures. We support the view that an educative approach be retained as the appropriate response in the first instance, with any subsequent breaches addressed in accordance with the relevant policies of each institution. As noted, TEQSA and/or a future national integrity network should assist in ensuring that approaches and penalties across the sector remain broadly aligned.

## PART 2: UTS strengthens its culture of academic integrity

UTS is currently undertaking significant work in the area of academic integrity and for this reason is especially interested in the HESP recommendations and the government's response.

In 2018, the University's Teaching and Learning Committee established a Working Party to identify areas for improvement and recommendations for change. It is tasked with developing a new University-wide Academic Integrity Framework that consolidates, updates and streamlines existing policies and procedures. The Working Party is due to report in June 2019.

In particular, UTS is seeking to move from a disciplinary culture focused narrowly on breaches of plagiarism and cheating to an inclusive, values-based culture that places integrity generally – and academic integrity in particular – at the centre of our activities. Among the proposed initiatives to achieve this which the working party has set forth are:

- the consistent use of the language of 'academic integrity' across the university and the focusing on a culture of integrity as core to UTS values.
- the building of a shared understanding of academic integrity through the development of an integrated communication strategy across all stakeholder groups in the University.
- the explicit linking of academic integrity to integrity more broadly and to ethics and professionalism as they apply both within students' courses of study and beyond the university setting to their futures professional lives.
- the adoption of a university-wide initial information and training module to build newly enrolled students' understanding of academic integrity.
- the revision of UTS course accreditation and re-accreditation documentation to require faculties to include an academic integrity strategy for each course demonstrating how students' understandings of academic integrity will be scaffolded across the course and integrated with their developing understanding of ethics and professionalism for graduates of that program of study.
- the development of enhanced resources for academic staff to support their work in educating students around issues of academic integrity and in developing assessment tasks and that are less amenable to cheating practices.
- the building of enhanced awareness among academic staff of the nature of contract cheating and support for them in sharing that awareness with students who may believe staff are unaware of this industry and how it operates.
- supporting peer educators to play a role in promoting academic integrity.

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