

The Right Honourable Damian Hinds MP  
Secretary of State for Education

27 September 2018

## Essay Mills and Contract Cheating

Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing to urge you to take action against the increasing problem of so-called essay mills, companies that facilitate contract cheating by producing assignments-to-order for students. Essay mills undermine the integrity of UK Higher Education and are unfair to the vast majority of honest, hard-working students. We are confident that you abhor such cheating as much as we do and encourage you to take the necessary steps to curb these practices, steps which must include a legislative ban on operating or advertising an essay mill.

In March 2017, Lord Young of Cookham, representing the Government, told Parliament that, '*we remain open to legislation in the future should the steps we are taking prove insufficient.*'<sup>1</sup> Despite concerted action by the QAA, universities and student unions, new research published last month indicates that contract cheating is becoming more common around the world. This form of cheating is particularly hard to detect and, whilst universities must continue to do their part, it is clear to us the time has come for the Government to give legislative backing to the efforts to shut down these operations.

Legislation will not be a magic bullet; it is, however, a vital part of the broader package of measures. Legislation would, amongst other advantages, shut-down UK-based essay mills; prevent the advertising of their services near campuses and in public places such as the London Underground; enable the removal of essay mills from search engine findings and prevent UK-based companies from hosting online advertisements for essay mills. Most importantly, it will send a clear statement to the global Higher Education sector that the integrity of a UK degree is valued by the government. Any legislation would need to be carefully crafted, in particular to ensure that the law targeted the essay mills themselves, and did not criminalise students or legitimate educational services. There are, however, existing models, including the Bill recently introduced by the Irish government and the draft bill published by Newton and Draper in 2017<sup>2</sup>, either of which provide a starting point for developing legislation for the UK.

We therefore call upon you to:

- Commit to introducing legislation to ban the provision and advertising of essay mills before the end of this Parliament.
- Commission the QAA to develop and publish a draft Bill by or before the beginning of the next Parliamentary Session, building on their existing work with academic and legal experts.
- Give your Department's full support to efforts by the QAA and OfS to tackle this issue, including supporting the QAA's proposed initiative to establish a UK Centre for Academic Integrity, with a formal remit to research, analyse and combat academic misconduct.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2017-03-13/debates/3918310D-2240-4FF6-B1F7-ECFADA8B2163/HigherEducationAndResearchBill?highlight=essay%20mills#contribution-5B0DE22F-6151-4980-823C-E1396932AA38>

<sup>2</sup> <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40979-017-0022-5>

Essay mills have no place in UK Higher Education. With New Zealand, Ireland, Australia and 17 US states all having introduced or introducing a ban, it is time for the UK to also take the necessary action to demonstrate that the UK is not a safe haven for Essay Mills to do business, and so to safeguard the reputation of the UK Higher Education sector.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Michael Arthur	President and Provost, University College London
Professor Dame Janet Beer	Vice-Chancellor, University of Liverpool
Professor Amanda Blackmore	President and Chief Executive, GSM London
Professor Paul Boyle CBE	Vice-Chancellor, University of Leicester
Dr Tim Bradshaw	Chief Executive, Russell Group
Professor Hugh Brady	Vice-Chancellor and President, University of Bristol
Cath Brown	President, Open University Students Association
Professor Julia Buckingham CBE	Vice-Chancellor and President, Brunel University London
Professor Edward Byrne AC	President and Principal, King's College London
Professor Anne Carlisle	Vice-Chancellor, Falmouth University
Professor Joy Carter CBE	Vice-Chancellor, University of Winchester and Chair of GuildHE
Professor Stuart Corbridge	Vice-Chancellor and Warden, Durham University
Professor Stuart Croft	Vice-Chancellor, University of Warwick
Mary Curnock Cook OBE	Former Chief Executive, UCAS
Professor Scott Davidson	Vice-Chancellor, Newman University
Professor Chris Day	Vice-Chancellor and President, Newcastle University
Professor Linda Drew	Vice-Chancellor, Ravensbourne University London
Professor Sir David Eastwood	Vice-Chancellor, University of Birmingham
Sir Mark Featherstone-Witty OBE	Founding Principal/CEO, Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts
Professor Ian Greer	President and Vice-Chancellor, Queen's University Belfast
Professor Gavin Henderson CBE	Principal, The Royal Centre School of Speech and Drama
Professor Margaret House OBE	Vice-Chancellor, Leeds Trinity University
Professor Sir Chris Husbands	Vice-Chancellor, Sheffield Hallam University
Alistair Jarvis	Chief Executive, Universities UK
Alison Johns	Chief Executive, AdvanceHE
Professor Mary Kellett	Acting Vice-Chancellor, The Open University
Professor Koen Lamberts	Vice-Chancellor, University of York

Professor John Last OBE	Vice-Chancellor, Norwich University of the Arts
Dr David Llewellyn	Vice-Chancellor, Harper Adams University
Professor Jane Longmore	Vice-Chancellor, University of Chichester
Professor Sally Mapstone	Principal and Vice-Chancellor, University of St Andrews
Russell Marchant	Vice-Chancellor, Hartpury University
Gordon McKenzie	Chief Executive, GuildHE
Clarie Middleton	Principal and Chief Executive, Rose Bruford College
Professor Kathryn Mitchell	Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, University of Derby
Professor Sir Anton Muscatelli	Vice-Chancellor, University of Glasgow and Chair of the Russell Group
Professor Malcolm Press	Vice-Chancellor, Manchester Metropolitan University
Professor Colin Riordan	Vice-Chancellor, Cardiff University
Sir Anthony Seldon	Vice-Chancellor, University of Buckingham
Bilal Sheikh	Principal, Mont Rose College
Professor Sir Steve Smith	Vice-Chancellor, University of Exeter
Professor Karen Stanton	Vice-Chancellor, York St John University
Professor Rob Warner	Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, Plymouth Marjon University
Dr Greg Walker	CEO, MillionPlus
Professor Andrew Wathey CBE	Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, Northumbria University
Professor Shearer West	Vice-Chancellor, University of Nottingham