

In the course of our research into “contract cheating” we have examined over 4,000 suspicious items and traced over 1,000 assignment back to their source.

In doing so we observed some interesting behaviour which is summarised by the diagram on the previous page.

Scenario 1

The lecturer creates an assignment and makes it available to students.

The student completes the assignment themselves and returns the work to the lecturer for marking.

This is what we would normally expect to happen.

Scenario 2

The lecturer creates an assignment

The student posts the assignment details on an auction site.

The student pays a contractor to do the work

The student hands in the work produced by the contractor as his own.

This is “contract cheating”.

The work handed in is original (so it will not be spotted by software that checks for “non-originality”). It’s just not the original work of the student.

Scenario 3

The student requests help from a tutor. This could be through an online tutorial site, like kasamba.com, or a discussion forum.

The tutor posts the assignment onto an auction site.

The tutor is acting as a “third party sub-contractor” and may submit assignments from many different colleges.

This makes it harder to identify the true miscreant, but does mean that we can target known contractors.

Scenario 4

The student posts the assignment onto an auction site and accepts a bid from a contractor.

The contractor almost immediately re-posts it, sometimes onto the same site.

Could this be called “pyramid cheating”?

Scenario 5

The student posts the same assignment onto two or more auction sites at the same time. Presumably to maximise the chances of getting a good response.

Scenario 6

The student requests that the contractor produce two different solutions, either at the same time or immediately after the solution has been handed over.

A usual comment is “please produce one for my friend; but it must be different else the lecturer will suspect”

Scenario 7

Several students post the same assignment, almost at the same time, and sometimes on the same auction site.

This could be characterised as a “swarm”.

Students try to remove tell-tale markers from their postings. When multiple postings are made we have found that the markers left become significant in attributing the source, and we can net them all in one go.

Scenario 8

Here one lecturer copies another’s assignment specification, without consent or acknowledgement.

Has led to misattribution on a few occasions.

Scenario 9

Lecturers may re-use the same assignment over several years.

Not only does this increase the chances of collusion, but contractors are likely to be able to re-sell solutions.

If the assignment stays around long enough it may end up being sold through an Essay Bank site.

Scenario 10

Instead of creating their own “fresh” assignments, lecturers use stock exercises from text books.

The same exercise may be used by many other lecturers.

This is another opportunity for contractors to resell solutions

It also makes it much harder to attribute the source.

Scenario 11

Solutions to the exercises in the text book may end up:-

* On an Essay Bank – for a fee

* On a web site as a Worked Solution – for free.