



29 November 2018

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Dear Mr McLean

The [Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education](#) (QAA) is the UK's independent quality body for higher education. We work with universities and colleges, parliamentarians and anti-plagiarism experts to campaign against cheating and fraud in UK higher education.

We need your help to close down the payment facilities for the essay writing companies that encourage students to cheat.

Our UK universities are internationally recognised for their high academic standards. Students from across the globe seek out a UK education for the potential it offers to improve their lives and career prospects.

However, our academic integrity is being threatened by the growing number of companies that prey on vulnerable students by selling customised essays, which can then be submitted as the student's own work. As the essays are written to order, they can often evade plagiarism software.

Essay mills are a scourge on the reputation of the higher education sector. They impact on the academic experience of students, and the trust that employers place in UK graduates.

PayPal and other employers risk taking on graduates who lack the skills, knowledge and competencies which they rightly believe higher education qualifications ought to provide. Students committing fraud by passing off purchased essays as their own work are liable to significant penalties if caught, including being disqualified from professional practice.

Earlier this month, we carried out a spot check on Google, using the search term 'Write my essay'. Seven out of the nine essay companies appearing on the first page of results had accounts with PayPal (Shark Papers, Essay Pro, Hire a Nerd, Edufaq, Academic Prospects, Go to Essay Help, Authentic Essays and EduBirdie).

This is just a snapshot of the hundreds of essay mills operating in the UK and internationally, most of which offer PayPal or similar payment options.

While it is impossible to accurately assess the exact extent of cheating, recent research by Professor Phil Newton at Swansea University estimates that, from 2014 to the present, the percentage of students admitting to paying someone else to undertake their work was 15.7 per cent, or 31 million students around the globe.



In 2016, the Department for Education asked QAA to investigate ways of tackling essay mill abuses. Universities Minister Sam Gyimah MP describes this form of cheating as 'shocking and pernicious', and 'corrosive to education'.

By refusing to allow essay companies to open or continue to operate a PayPal account, you can make it more difficult for them to operate the unscrupulous services that damage reputations and lives.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Douglas Blackstock'.

Douglas Blackstock  
Chief Executive  
The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education