

ESSAY MILLS: Multi-Million-Pound Online Industry

Despite fact that tuition fees have tripled in last five years, more and more young people are choosing to attend British universities. However, once they get to institution of their choice, students find themselves ill-prepared for higher education or unsuited to their chosen course of study, while others fall behind due to ill-health or adverse personal circumstances. Unable to keep up with volume of course-work required of them, an increasing number of undergraduates contact 'essay mills' (i.e. private companies which provide papers, essays, theses or dissertations on any subject, written by experts in return for money) and simply buy whatever they need to fulfill requirements of their course. So, is this practice illegal in UK and, if not, should it be banned?

..... first part of the question is easy to answer. 'Academic malpractice', which can take number of forms, including plagiarism, submitting work written by someone else, collusion and cheating in examinations, is not actually crime. Each institution of higher education has its own rules governing what constitutes 'academic malpractice' and a range of sanctions and punishments depending on the severity of the offence. universities take it extremely seriously, others are reluctant to accuse students, who may retaliate by legal means and force them to settle the matter in court, which is time-consuming and expensive. In many cases, accusations of misconduct are based on tutor's suspicions and, unless student is actually caught in act, such cases are extremely difficult to prove now that each essay is submitted anonymously and person marking it has no idea who wrote it, let alone whether his/her style has changed to a suspicious degree since beginning of the academic year.

As for 'essay mills', most of them describe themselves as 'academic research companies' and clearly state on their websites that essay they provide within 12-48 hours for £400, is only guide, model answer which student can use to improve his/her own academic work. Online companies, such as OxbridgeEssays, UKessays, EssaysUK, UKbestEssays, Okessays and DissertationHomework, claim that their activities are perfectly legal and that, should British government criminalize them at some point in the future, they will simply move abroad to foreign country and continue their activities, as before. Not only would problem continue unabated but UK economy would lose a considerable amount of income tax from what is, by now, multi-million-pound industry.

On other hand, supporters of practice would claim that, firstly, there is no significant difference between asking friend to write an essay for you and simply buying one from company. It might be unethical but it should not be treated as criminal matter. Secondly, Times Academic Misconduct Survey found that foreign students from Asia and USA are most likely to contact essay mill for help, and that this is understandable given their unfamiliarity with British system. In these cases, it may be that 'academic research company' in question really is providing anxious student with model answer which will improve his/her academic work in future. Thirdly, undergraduates have more to lose than ever before and simply cannot afford to fail a course for want of an essay, with prospect of a £50,000 student loan to pay off at end of three years, and no qualification to show for it. Lastly, many employers simply will not interview third-class graduates and restrict recruitment to those with upper-second class or first-class degree. In this case, logic of market prevails and universities have no-one to blame but themselves if students now view B.A. as commodity which is not only extremely expensive but useless in career terms if it is not up to the required standard. Given that most graduates end up doing a job that is in no way related to their degree course, it is understandable that they are unconcerned about how they obtain required result, as long as they obtain it.

In conclusion, I would say that, although ~~the~~ use of essay mills is, for the moment, legal, it devalues ~~the~~ reputation of British academic qualifications in general and is ultimately self-destructive. As for banning them in ~~the~~ name offairness, I fear that ~~the~~ Internet has effectively removed them from British jurisdiction, so any law attempting to curb their activities, no matter how just, will be ineffective in ~~the~~ long term.