

Articles: complete the text below with a, an, the, some or —

## ESSAY MILLS: A Multi-Million-Pound Online Industry

Despite THE fact that — tuition fees have tripled in THE last few years, more and more young people are choosing to attend British universities. However, once they get to THE institution of their choice, SOME 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 THE 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 THE requirements of their course. So, is this practice illegal in THE UK and, if not, should it be banned?

THE first part of the question is easy to answer. — 'Academic malpractice', which can take A number of forms, including plagiarism, submitting work written by someone else, collusion and cheating in examinations, has not been treated as A crime until very recently. 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. SOME 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 A tutor's suspicions and, unless THE student is actually caught in THE act, such cases are extremely difficult to prove now that each essay is submitted anonymously and THE person marking it has no idea who wrote it, let alone whether his/her style has changed to a suspicious degree since THE 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 THE essay they provide within 12-48 hours for £400, is only A guide, A model answer which THE 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 THE British government choose to criminalize them, they will simply move abroad to A foreign country and continue their activities, as before. Not only would THE problem continue unabated but THE UK economy would lose a considerable amount of income tax from what is, by now, A multi-million-pound industry.

On THE other hand, supporters of THE practice would claim that, firstly, there is no significant difference between asking A friend to write an essay for you and simply buying one from A company. It might be unethical but it should not be treated as A criminal matter.

Secondly, ~~THE~~ Times Academic Misconduct Survey found that ~~—~~ foreign students from ~~—~~ Asia and ~~THE~~ USA are most likely to contact ~~AN~~ essay mill for help, and that this is understandable given their unfamiliarity with ~~THE~~ British system. In these cases, it may be that ~~THE~~ 'academic research company' in question really is providing ~~AN~~ anxious student with ~~A~~ 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 ~~THE~~ prospect of a £50,000 student loan to pay off at ~~THE~~ 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 ~~AN~~ upper-second class or first-class degree. In this case, ~~THE~~ logic of ~~THE~~ market prevails and ~~—~~ universities have no-one to blame but themselves if ~~—~~ students now view ~~A~~ B.A. as ~~A~~ 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 ~~THE~~ required result, as long as they obtain it.

In 2022, however, ~~THE~~ British government passed '~~THE~~ Skills and Post-16 Education Bill' to legislate for landmark reforms that will criminalize ~~—~~ essay mills which facilitate ~~—~~ contract cheating. 'Contract cheating' happens when ~~A~~ third party completes ~~SOME~~ work for ~~A~~ student which is passed off by ~~THE~~ student as their own. Many essay mill companies use marketing techniques which indicate they are offering 'legitimate' academic writing support for students and ~~—~~ reports also indicate that ~~SOME~~ essay mills seek to blackmail ~~—~~ students who use these services.

So, by UK law, it is now ~~A~~ criminal offence to provide or arrange for another person to provide contract cheating services for financial gain to students taking ~~A~~ qualification at ~~A~~ post-16 institution or sixth form in England, enrolled at ~~A~~ higher education provider in England and any other person over compulsory school age who has been entered for ~~A~~ regulated qualification.

Similarly, it is now ~~AN~~ offence for ~~A~~ person to make arrangements for ~~AN~~ advertisement in which that person offers, or is described as being available or competent, to provide or arrange for another person to provide ~~A~~ cheating service. Importantly, ~~THE~~ offence centres around ~~THE~~ act of advertising to ~~—~~ students, and for ~~AN~~ offence to be committed, it does not need to be seen by its target demographic.

Even so, it may be that ~~THE~~ Internet has effectively removed Essay Mills from British jurisdiction, so any law attempting to curb their activities, no matter how just, will be ineffective in ~~THE~~ long term.