

Mr John Gilchrist
Freedom of Information Officer

25 April 2019

Ref: FOI/April 2019/ Iftikhaar Aziz

By email to icca.1@hotmail.co.uk

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Dear Ms Aziz

Your request for information received on 2 April 2019 has been dealt with under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

You asked:

I am writing to you under the freedom of information act 2000 to request the following.

- How many reports have there been in the last five academic years (2013-14, 2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-17, 2018-19) of "contract cheating"?
Please break this down by academic year and include all reports of cases, including those that were investigated and those that were dropped. Please say what the result of the investigation was (eg a student was dismissed)
- Of the reports above, how many included "essay mill" websites?
Please break this down by year and provide any additional information, such as the website used.
- Please provide any guidance you have on essay mills. Please say when this guidance was updated.
- Does your university use any technology to check work for contract cheating - e.g. a programme that examines an essay? Please say what programme you use, when it was introduced and how much you spend on this per year.

University Response

2016/17 – 13 which equates to around 3% of academic misconduct cases and 0.06% of our whole student population

2017/18 – 20 which equates to around 5% of academic misconduct cases and 0.1% of our whole student population

Our data does not enable us to provide a breakdown of type of academic misconduct to this level of specificity before 2016/17.

The specific details of completed investigations and their outcomes are withheld under section 40(2) of the Freedom of Information Act which covers the personal data of third parties where complying with the request would breach any of the principles in the Data Protection Act. We owe a duty of confidence to all parties involved in investigations of this nature; therefore the University considers the information to be exempt from disclosure. So in accordance with Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, (the Act), this letter acts as a Refusal Notice.

We cannot provide a more detailed response beyond the general category of 'contract cheating'.

This notice is on the front page of our Student Unihub website and was updated in May 2018. It is complemented by further information about Academic Integrity regulations on the Student portal with policies & procedures and FAQs

***Important information: Be aware of companies targeting you for programme documents
Please report third-party companies that ask you to upload files, assignments or coursework.***

It has become apparent that students around the country (including Middlesex) are being targeted by companies to upload documents, including past exam papers and coursework, in return for a payment. Many of you have already reported seeing adverts on your Facebook feeds. In addition, these companies also encourage students to purchase what they term as model answers. Please be reminded that both of these activities, selling or purchasing materials from companies like these breaches student regulations and can lead to disciplinary action being taken. We therefore strongly advise all Middlesex students to avoid any engagement with such activity.

To help to you to better understand issues around academic integrity and plagiarism the university has defined a short online course found on My Learning titled '[Academic Integrity Awareness](#)'. This course will help you to understand aspects which place you in breach of university academic misconduct regulations and signpost to further support. Students who have been contacted by the company (or seen online advertisements from them) should report such communications to the University by emailing: communications@mdx.ac.uk

We do not have any technological solution in place to check work for contract cheating.

I trust this satisfies your request sufficiently. Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, you have the right to complain about the University's response to your request for information. If you have such a complaint, you may contact Mr David Maplas, Director of Student Affairs, Middlesex University, Hendon campus, London NW4 4BT, tel: 020 8411 5830, d.malpas@mdx.ac.uk within 40 days of the date of this letter for a review of the University's decision. If you remain unsatisfied with the outcome of that complaint, you may seek further recourse by lodging an appeal with the Information Commissioner.

Yours sincerely

John Gilchrist
Freedom of Information Officer