

## — Report Overview —

This report gives an overview of the threat to UK higher education from custom essay-writing services. Such websites are often described as ‘essay-writing mills’ and their use has increased rapidly over the last ten years.

### **Section one**

Most custom essay-writing services assure students that the essays are ‘plagiarism free’, but submitting them as your own is a serious form of cheating. The reason for this is that once the essay is submitted for assessment and represented as the student’s own, it is itself plagiarised. We look more closely at specific cases where this has happened in Section one of this report. The report also details some of the other claims made by these service providers. For example, it highlights claims made about turnaround times and the qualifications of those commissioned to write essays.

### **Section two**

Section two looks more closely at how often students are using custom essay-writing services. Although we cannot quantify exactly how many times students have been caught submitting custom-written essays, it is clear that recorded academic offences have been much more frequent over the last decade.

To illustrate the point, recent data compiled from UK universities shows that in the last three years alone, there has been an average of around 17,000 academic offences, almost 40% higher than ten years ago. The consensus is that this rise is largely due to the submission of custom-written essays, the main reasons probably being increasing internet use and the rising number of websites offering such services. This is backed up by our investigations which show that custom-written essays are now advertising on university noticeboards, through posters on campus as well as through mass emails. Our investigations and research are explained more fully in Section two.

### **Section three**

In Section three, the report goes through some of the existing ways of dealing with the issue of essay plagiarism and at potentially new ways of targeting this type of cheating. QMHE has no regulatory or legal power to act against essay-writing services at this time. Therefore, our current role is to advise higher education institutes on ways to enhance existing assessment procedures so that they are thorough and designed to flag potential cases of plagiarism. We are also able to take action against higher education institutes who fail in this duty. This section will also go into detail about our guidelines, workshops and consultancy services.