



## End of Year Review 2023

### ChatGPT



2023 will be remembered as the year of ChatGPT, with our barristers dealing with dozens of allegations of cheating using artificial intelligence. While some institutions gave warnings to those found 'guilty', others expelled them. The disparity of sanctions for improper use of AI across universities is extreme.

Some students who were accused of using ChatGPT were, in fact, innocent and we were proud to have helped some of these students prove this. What is more, we went public on the real harms of wrongful accusations, publishing articles in the *Times Higher* and elsewhere. We also see first-hand the high levels of stress experienced by those accused of cheating, whether rightly or wrongly. We called for fair procedures and evidence of wrongdoing that was 'robust enough to justify launching proceedings that could change the lives of the accused'. We are concerned, for example, about allegations based solely on the belief that the submitted assignment was 'too good' to be the student's own work.

### Blackmail

We have also dealt with several cases of blackmail by 'essay mill' companies, proofreaders, and even ex-boyfriends or girlfriends. Essay mills appear more willing than before to act on the threats of disclosure to university authorities in the event of non-payment. These cases are little known to the outside world and we consider it our duty to share our experience. We have published a number of

articles and case studies in WONKHE about this phenomenon, arguing that universities should generally refuse 'tip offs' of cheating without proof of identity by the reporter and if there is evidence of unconscionable conduct, such as threats and blackmail, directed at the student.



### Achieving justice for our clients

Our barristers now act for a wide range of clients, including young children entering nursery, secondary school pupils, undergraduate and postgraduate students, doctors sitting professional examinations, academics undergoing disciplinary proceedings and authorship disputes, and universities undergoing litigation. We have instructed experts in fields as diverse as French linguistics and IT.

In particular, our barristers were successful in helping students obtain the compensation they deserved when universities got it badly wrong. The danger for students is accepting the first offer made by the institution, without seeking the

assistance of lawyers knowledgeable in the quantification of damages. This runs a real risk of undercompensation. We have had cases where a university offered £1,000 before eventually agreeing to pay £45,000, and another one offering £3,000 before agreeing to pay £85,000. In both cases, settlement occurred at the pre-litigation stage.



### Glowing reviews ★★★★★

We are delighted to have 66 independent reviews on Google, with every single one 5\*. Reviewers commented on our responsiveness (we are open 7 days a week, from 7am to 7pm), professionalism, and the quality of our advice and written work. The team consists entirely of practising barristers, with the exception of our excellent assistant, Bradley Talbot, who is a First Class law graduate with the Bar course under his belt. Many of our clients have been recommended to us by their friends or by solicitors.

### Publications

Our barristers have been quoted in a range of publications, from scholarly journals such as the *Bulletin of the Royal College of Surgeons* to newspapers like *City A.M.* Our founder, Daniel Sokol, was invited by a former client of Alpha Academic Appeals to appear on the *SORA* podcast to talk about his work at AAA.

### Going forward...

In 2024, we will continue to advocate for better standards of investigation and decision-making by

universities. In our experience, breaches of natural justice remain common with students accused of wrongdoing regularly deprived of key information and then ambushed in formal meetings disguised as innocuous 'chats'. We still see too many disabled students who are disadvantaged because their disability plans are not implemented properly.

We also believe in more robust financial sanctions for those universities falling well short of the expected standards. Is it really fair for universities who take, quite literally, years to deal with a complaint or appeal, thereby profoundly affecting the life of the aggrieved student, to be invited by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator only to pay compensation of between £2,001 and £5,000 for the delay? We think not.

At Alpha Academic Appeals, we look forward to confronting new challenges in 2024 and playing our part in promoting fairness and justice in schools and universities.

Thank you for reading our End of Year Review and please do contact us if you need anything.



And finally, we wish you a happy festive season and a new year full of joy, success and prosperity.