



29 November 2018

Southgate House
Southgate Street
Gloucester
GL1 1UB

Eileen Naughton
Managing Director and VP
UK-Ireland Sales & Operations
Belgrave House
76 Buckingham Palace Road
London
SW1W 9TQ

01452 557000
Direct line: 01452 557004
d.blackstock@qaa.ac.uk

Dear Ms Naughton

The [Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education](#) (QAA) is the UK's independent quality body for higher education. We work with universities and colleges, parliamentarians and anti-plagiarism experts to campaign against cheating and fraud in UK higher education.

We need your help to stop the essay writing companies that encourage students to cheat advertising their services.

[Google's Enabling dishonest behaviour advertising policy](#) includes paper-writing or exam-taking services as examples of dishonest behaviour. However, essay company advertising is rife on Google and other search engines, and it's time to put this policy into practice by refusing to do business with these companies.

Our UK universities are internationally recognised for their high academic standards. Students from across the globe seek out a UK education for the potential it offers to improve their lives and career prospects.

However, our academic integrity is being threatened by the growing number of companies that prey on vulnerable students by selling customised essays, which can then be submitted as the student's own work. As the essays are written to order, they can often evade plagiarism software.

Essay mills are a scourge on the reputation of the higher education sector. They impact on the academic experience of students, and the trust that employers place in UK graduates.

Google and other employers risk taking on graduates who lack the skills, knowledge and competencies which they rightly believe higher education qualifications ought to provide. Students committing fraud by passing off purchased essays as their own work are liable to significant penalties if caught, including being disqualified from professional practice.

Hundreds of essay mills across the world use platforms like Google to promote their services to students, paying for Google ads to stand out in an increasingly competitive market.

While it is impossible to accurately assess the exact extent of cheating, recent research by Professor Phil Newton at Swansea University estimates that, from 2014 to the present, the percentage of students admitting to paying someone else to undertake their work was 15.7 per cent, or 31 million students around the globe.

In 2016, the Department for Education asked QAA to investigate ways of tackling essay mill abuses. Universities Minister Sam Gyimah MP describes this form of cheating as 'shocking and pernicious', and 'corrosive to education'.

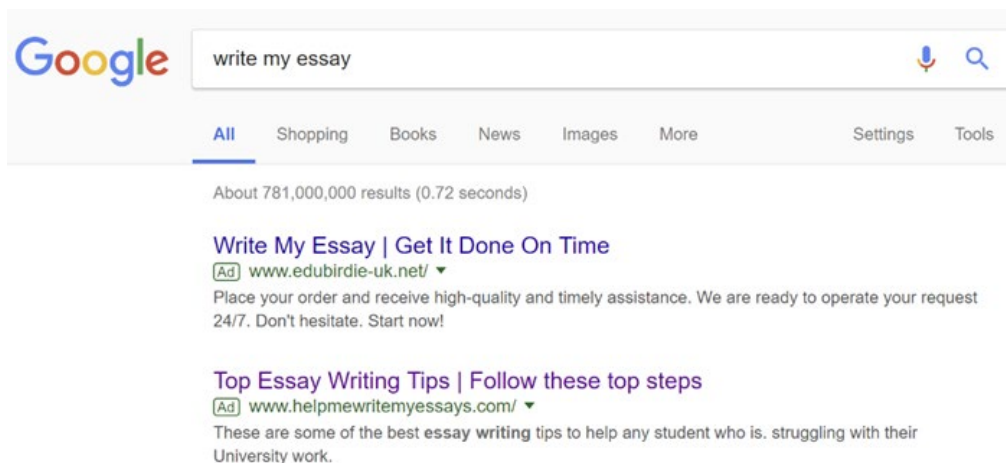
He said: 'I have been working with organisations across the higher education sector to bear down on this problem and this has already resulted in the likes of YouTube removing adverts for these essay mills.'

The minister was referring to the response from your sister company YouTube, following a BBC investigation in May this year into Ukrainian-based EduBirdie that revealed its services were being promoted by YouTube stars on over 250 channels.

At the time, YouTube said: ["We do not allow ads for essay writing and so paid promotions of these services will be removed when we discover them", said a spokesperson.](#)

However, we have ongoing concerns that video promotions for companies like EduBirdie and Edusson, among many others, are rife again on YouTube. We are writing separately to YouTube to raise our concerns.

A search using the term 'Write my essay' regularly reveals multiple paid for Google ads for essay companies, as shown below (top two ads from page one results, 27 November 2018).



Will you join our campaign to end the opportunities available to these companies to promote their services? By refusing to accept essay company advertising, you will make it more difficult for them to find an audience for the unscrupulous services that damage reputations and lives.

Thank you.



Douglas Blackstock
Chief Executive
The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education