



HECA

Higher Education
Colleges Association



NATIONAL FORUM
FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING
AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

#NF Seminar

Smoke Without Fire: A case study of alleged misconduct





HECA

Higher Education
Colleges Association



NATIONAL FORUM
FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING
AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

#NFSeminar

Context

This presentation outlines an experience in March 2021 that has changed how we handle alleged academic misconduct.

The people and events referred to are real, and details are shared with the consent of the learner involved.

Personal details have been anonymised.



HECA

Higher Education
Colleges Association



NATIONAL FORUM
FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING
AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

#NFSeminar

Allegation of academic misconduct

Hi This is Rakesh from worldwide assignments . [REDACTED student details] studying in Griffith college Dublin has been doing all his assignments and dissertation with me for the past 12 months . Since he did not pay for his assignments as agreed upon this resulted me a heavy loss and i have been cheated. I have got enough Proofs and screenshots . Please make sure this doesn't happen to any other student . I hope i will get an immediate response from you thanks.

“I have been cheated...”

Allegation of academic misconduct

Our initial impressions:

- The learner is studying a business discipline, in which academic misconduct is unfortunately relatively common
- When substantiated, the allegation specifically referred to his masters thesis, which is also a relatively common area for misconduct
- As part of our zero tolerance approach to academic misconduct, urgent action is required

Allegation of academic misconduct

Our assumptions:

- There is no good reason why such a service would have someone's name and student number
- There is clearly a case to answer, urgently
- **An apparent cut-and-dry case of academic misconduct**



HECA

Higher Education
Colleges Association



NATIONAL FORUM
FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING
AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

#NFSeminar

The learner's response

“Do they have any proof?”



HECA

Higher Education
Colleges Association



NATIONAL FORUM
FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING
AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

#NFSeminar

The investigation

The learner showed us:

- Evidence that he had collected the research data himself
- The metadata on the Microsoft Word supporting his claims to authorship
- A clear and coherent rationale for the use of certain methodologies, phrasings and ideas
- An understanding of the subject consistent with authorship



HECA

Higher Education
Colleges Association



NATIONAL FORUM
FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING
AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

#NFSeminar

The investigation

So...

How did they get
his name,
Student number,
and phone
number?





HECA

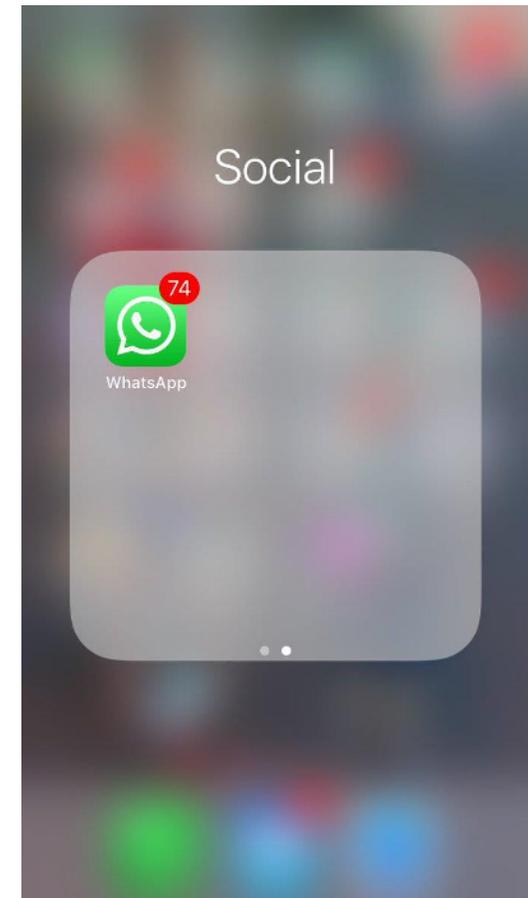
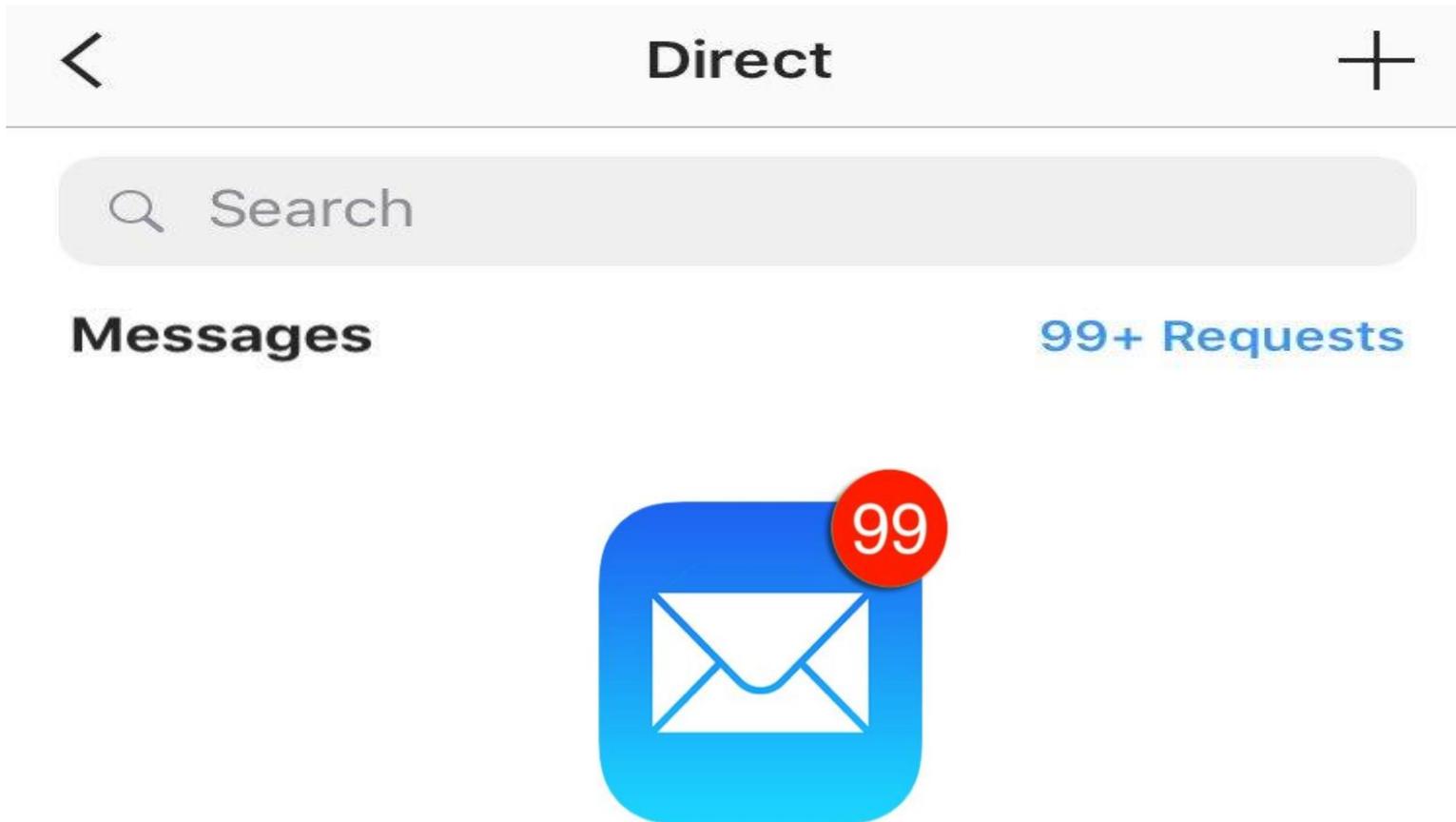
Higher Education
Colleges Association



NATIONAL FORUM
FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING
AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

#NFSeminar

The investigation





HECA

Higher Education
Colleges Association



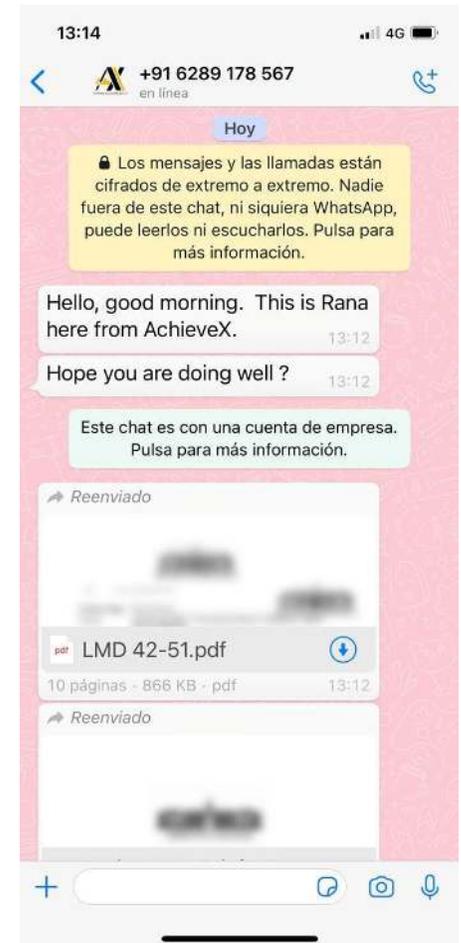
NATIONAL FORUM
FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING
AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

#NFSeminar

The investigation

The learner showed us 100s of unsolicited messages from contract cheating services, including dozens who had access to his mobile phone number.

Some had access to current assignment briefs, class lists, and email addresses.





HECA

Higher Education
Colleges Association



NATIONAL FORUM
FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING
AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

#NFSeminar

The investigation



The revelation

Not only are these services paying students to pass on information about their classmates, but they were specifically targeting students based on their nationality.

Unwillingness to cooperate provoked a malevolent false report, knowing that sensitivity to contract cheating is high and that a disciplinary process would be initiated.



In his own words

“I know they want to pick on Indian students. In India if you get the opportunity to go abroad to study, you are very lucky. No one wants to fail, so sometimes under pressure students take these bad options.

But it is also not accepted to be dishonest, and students are in danger of being blackmailed by these companies. I have friends who have paid these companies not to report them to their college, even when they have done nothing wrong”

What does that mean for us?

Zero tolerance

=/=

Quick, decisive, summary decisions on academic misconduct

What does that mean for us?

Our learnings:

- Need to reframe perspectives on academic integrity. Act with caution, investigate fully, have some trust
- Don't trust bad actors
- Specific cohorts of learner are especially vulnerable
- Sometimes there is smoke without fire. Some people make money from the smoke