

Universities let vast majority of AI cheats escape punishment

Fintan Hogan

Leading universities are catching a “strikingly low” number of students who use artificial intelligence to plagiarise others’ work.

Fewer than one in 400 undergraduates at Russell Group universities were punished for AI misuse last year, according to responses to requests made by The Times under the freedom of information law. However, more than 90 per cent of their students use AI large language models and nearly a fifth admit copying directly from chatbots, a

survey by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HePI) found this year.

“This data suggests a strikingly low proportion of students are being penalised for AI misuse,” said Josh Freeman, policy manager at HePI.

Nine of the 24 universities said they did not record AI-related sanctions, despite a commitment two years ago to “academic rigour and integrity” from all Russell Group vice-chancellors. Of those that did record AI disciplinary data, an average of 74 undergraduates were investigated and 51 punished out of a population of more than 20,000. Most

universities said further cases may have been pursued at departmental level.

Many universities allow limited use of chatbots, for example in the creation of lecture notes, but experts believe cheating is far higher. Last year 47 per cent of university students said generative AI made it “easier to cheat”, according to the publisher Wiley, while in February HePI found 8 per cent of students admitted to using chatbots for assessments without even editing the output. Freeman said: “There is no scientific way of working out if someone has used AI, but lots of ways of obfuscating AI use, such

as using multiple chatbots or prompting AI to write in a student’s own style.”

One Russell Group university course leader, speaking anonymously, estimated at least a third of its students broke rules on academic integrity using models such as ChatGPT and DeepSeek. One in ten were “using it to generate a complete piece of coursework with no input from the student”, they added.

A recent graduate of one London university told The Times they “used ChatGPT loads and sometimes just copy-pasted” directly into their assessments. “I could copy almost word for

word and be pretty confident that it wouldn’t be detectable,” they said.

Four universities — Durham, King’s College London, Leeds and Queen Mary University, London — confirmed that they had expelled undergraduates because of their AI misuse.

The Russell Group said: “The rise of generative AI tools presents a shared challenge for the sector as it makes a profound impact on the way we teach and learn. Our universities are proactively working together with external experts to develop policies that help staff and students become AI literate.”

Dynamo no more, but card king still has magic touch

Theatre Dominic Maxwell

Up Close and Magical

Underbelly Boulevard Soho, London (65 mins)

★★★★☆

“This is just the beginning,” says Steven Frayne, the magician formerly known as Dynamo, at the end of his first show under his own name. Having just seen this slight Yorkshireman wow and bamboozle for an hour in his own humbly self-possessed way, I don’t doubt it.

Once he played big theatres and even arenas. Now he’s here at the deluxe 200-seat Underbelly Boulevard Soho in London, and he wants to use that intimacy to his benefit. He wanted to phase out the name Dynamo after a mix of his longstanding Crohn’s disease and food poisoning led to such a severe case of autoimmune arthritis that he was no longer able to hold a pack of cards.

His onstage patter factors in his health issues — he has gone from taking 29 pills a day to two — and inspirational thoughts about forcing himself to “push past my limits”. These vary from the touching to the cloyingly Hallmark-ish. His suggestion that he is out to fill us with wonder rather than fool us feels too fine a distinction for the non-magician to grasp. Heavens, though,

the tricks speak for themselves. His showy way of manipulating the cards is a thrill in itself. The trick where he gets eight audience members on stage to tell each in turn what card they have picked is cool enough, but he then caps it with an even better trick.

Likewise when he goes from first calculating how many cards have been dropped on to his palm just by their weight — successfully, repeatedly — then segues into a

memory trick. Superb. There is smoke, there are spotlights, there are bursts of loud music. Yet this show, *Up Close and Magical*, has a sense of showmanship that feels shared rather than forced.

He involves the crowd a lot, best of all with a routine in which he gets a couple to pick the same cards from different decks. And then does things you can’t second guess involving windows, calculators and plenty more

decks of cards. Plenty of wow moments. As he uses the last phone message from his late grandad to introduce one trick, the tender and the manipulative come together.

Here and there he gives us something we’ve seen before; once or twice a trick needs more explanation. Mostly, miraculously, Frayne finds entertaining new ways to make us question what’s possible. To May 11, underbellyboulevard.com



Steven Frayne wanted to phase out the name Dynamo after suffering health issues, which feature in his onstage patter

Wellbeing ‘key to exam achievement’

Nicola Woolcock

The trade-off between exams and wellbeing is a false choice, the former education secretary Lord Blunkett said, because pupils do better academically if they have good mental health.

He wrote the foreword to a briefing from the Social Market Foundation think tank. It says that Bridget Phillipson, the education secretary, should reduce the number of GCSEs and collect better data on pupil wellbeing.

A review of curriculum and assessment in England is due to conclude in the autumn. Its interim report said the government should cut the number of GCSE exams, but not subjects.

The foundation said the UK recorded the largest fall in a sense of belonging for pupils between 2003 and 2022 of any developed country.

It said that education reforms by the previous Conservative government, which increased the amount of exams sat by pupils, had resulted in raised stress and mental health problems.

Blunkett, who was education secretary from 1997 to 2001, wrote: “When students feel a sense of belonging, when they are happy and supported in school, they are more likely to engage, attend regularly and perform well academically. The level of absenteeism in our schools, the number of 16 to 24-year-olds not in employment, education or training and the incidence of ill health should tell us something profound about the need for change. Countries that have prioritised wellbeing alongside rigorous learning have achieved both high levels of attainment and positive student experiences.”

Free tutors help state pupils to excel

Nicola Woolcock Education Editor

State school pupils have achieved top A-level grades and places at leading universities after free tutoring from Cambridge academics.

A programme to help sixth-formers taking maths and science after the pandemic has helped thousands of teenagers do better than expected.

The first analysis of the Stem Smart programme by the university admissions service Ucas shows that all pupils benefited. Those who were the most engaged achieved far more A* grades than their peers and were almost twice as successful at getting into Oxford or Cambridge.

Stem Smart is an acronym of science, technology, engineering and mathematics subject mastery and attainment

raising tuition. In the first wave, about 850 sixth-formers, many from deprived backgrounds or areas that do not send many school leavers to university, were given free weekly tutoring by Cambridge experts in maths, further maths, physics, chemistry and biology. They were also invited for a residential stay.

A further 1,000 joined in the second wave and academics have worked with more than 800 schools through the 16-month programme.

From the first two waves, Ucas compared 1,120 participating pupils with 9,000 from similar backgrounds who had not participated. Of the participating pupils, 720 were accepted for courses at selective universities, including 80 at Oxbridge. On average, their A-level results were about half a grade higher than those of their peers. The 360 who

were most engaged with the programme were twice as successful at achieving A* in maths and four times as successful at getting A* in physics as those who did not participate. Analysis found that pupils who participated were more aspirational and those from the most deprived backgrounds saw the biggest average grade boost.

The programme was launched in 2021 to help to bridge attainment gaps in maths and science. A-level subjects and mitigate educational disruption caused by the pandemic. A total of 6,500 sixth-formers have participated.

Jasmine Covell, 18, a first-year natural sciences undergraduate student at King’s College, Cambridge, studied A-levels in biology, chemistry and maths at a college near Middlesbrough. She said: “Oxbridge is not

really on people’s radars where I live. I joined the Stem Smart course just thinking it would support me getting good grades, then I started to realise I enjoyed doing the work.

“We were able to submit questions to Cambridge academics before the tutor sessions, and then they would go through it. It definitely helped with catching up on stuff we’d missed during the pandemic. Visiting Cambridge was the best ever — it was seeing the chemistry labs that made me want to apply.”

The university says it launched the scheme in response to teacher shortages and many schools using non-specialists. England has an estimated shortage of at least 3,500 physics teachers and 70 per cent of pupils taking A-level physics come from only 30 per cent of schools, it says. Participants in

the scheme are from state schools and either from areas that do not send many pupils to university, are deprived, have been on free school meals, in care, are from low-performing schools, or are an asylum seeker or refugee.

Samuel Iranloye, 19, a second-year engineering undergraduate student at Churchill College, Cambridge, joined the programme while studying for A-levels in maths, further maths, physics and chemistry in southeast London. He said: “I wasn’t certain I would apply until I visited the university; I felt more comfortable.”

Much of the programme is delivered through the Isaac Physics online platform founded by Professor Mark Warner and Professor Lisa Jardine-Wright. She said: “This is about levelling the playing field.”