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Revision Notes – Exam Hack Special

Xanthe Mitten

Hello and welcome back to another episode of Revision Notes hosted by VICTVS. I'm Xanthe and this is my co-host Kat and today we'll be chatting about exam news and the very interesting topic of ethical exam hacking. Hello Kat, how are you doing?

Katherine Barnett

Hi Xanthe I'm good thank you, how are you?

Xanthe Mitten

Yes, very well - excited to dig into some more assessment news.

Katherine Barnett

Are you ready for your first piece of news?

Xanthe Mitten

I absolutely am

Katherine Barnett

We've seen this rise of contract cheating companies. There's a really fantastic new-ish newsletter that's started called 'This Isn't Fine', and they basically cover contract cheating companies. They send out newsletters every week covering the latest ones. So yeah, they've been documenting the increase in these kinds of companies such as Hail Mary Papers – that's the name of one of them. It uses fantastic branding of the Virgin Mary -

Xanthe Mitten

Which is crazy.

Katherine Barnett

Which is crazy! It's very weird, it's very AI-generated. They've been advertising on platforms like YouTube, and obviously more and more students are seeing these advertisements and maybe being tempted to cheat when before they just wouldn't have even thought about it. I wrote a piece about that recently which is up on the blog. What do you think about that?

Xanthe Mitten

Yeah, I think it's really hard for students to escape because nowadays they spend so much time doom-scrolling on TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and this is where these companies are putting these ads and saying basically for a relative fee you can pay us and we will write your exam paper or your assessment or your dissertation for you. And it won't be able to be traced by AI services and stuff like that – we guarantee it. I think it is, like you say, really really easy to fall for that temptation and I think these companies know what they're doing.

Katherine Barnett

Yeah the temptation is definitely getting higher. And I think, as 'This Isn't Fine' point out, there is a problem with these contract cheating companies and essay mill companies being able to advertise their services because it does actually break advertising law. They're just getting around it somehow. I think what some people can do is if they see these

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ads, you can actually report them for academic fraud, which I did the other day. But it needs to be, that space for sure needs to be regulated more so that students see less of these ads and hopefully get less tempted in the first place.

Xanthe Mitten

Yeah absolutely.

Katherine Barnett

And then on that point also, the Times Higher Education reported back in November that cases of cheating with AI at some UK universities is actually up 15% [15x], which is massive. And whilst the number is large, as pointed out in the cheat sheet, there will have been many successful instances of AI cheating which, because they have been successful, have not been recorded. So the number is probably a lot higher than a 15% increase, or 15x increase sorry.

I think it's really interesting that this AI-related misconduct is, that the study was done at Russell Group Universities – which shows that it is everyone using AI in very high-level research and assignments and assessments. It's not just saved for people who want to cheat or want to get a really easy mark in their school assessment on an English book. It is high-level academics using it.

Katherine Barnett

As you said, obviously, this study was done at Russell Group Universities, so people we know are intelligent, who have gotten into these universities, are still using the tools – maybe as a time-save technique or because they're doing a side hustle to help pay for surviving at university. They're working jobs, they don't have the time to study or the time to write these essays, so they're seeking a bit of extra help.

Xanthe Mitten

Absolutely. The point that you make about saving time, or having side hustles and just time in general – I think that is something that our generation and everyone around us is really struggling with at the moment and it's something that was mentioned in the Search Engine podcast episode that we both listened to. The episode was 'Playboi Farti and his AI Homework Machine', which I know we both enjoy the title very much. It's a guest teenager who is Playboi Farti, and he chats about using AI for assignments and the show also discusses the TikTok influencers that teach people how to use AI to cheat, which is absolutely bonkers. That's a whole little subsection on TikTok, on people learning skills and tricks and tips on how to cheat in exams and how to use AI.

Katherine Barnett

I thought that was fascinating because obviously what comes up on your algorithm is specific to you, so I hadn't seen any of this content, I didn't know about it until they mentioned it. Obviously, it's a huge space with people who have thousands, I think maybe even hundreds of thousands of followers, educating people on how to cheat, which is crazy to me and shows just how popular it is and how wise kids and teenagers are coming to these methods, which is concerning.

Teachers definitely need to stay abreast of that because if they're like us both and didn't know about it, then they'll just have no idea that the students are actively being taught how to do this stuff on TikTok.

Xanthe Mitten

The show also speaks about the importance of creating assignments which cultivate joy and purpose, so that students actually want to do it and are not tempted to just be like, "Oh well this is another boring assignment, I'm just going to put it into ChatGPT and go about my day and do something I actually want to do."

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Katherine Barnett

I can understand why people would maybe take the easy way out with just simply being asked to answer an essay question for homework. I think there are definitely better ways of getting students to engage

Xanthe Mitten

A bit more freedom as well. I think I remember struggling with being given set exam or essay questions at university, but then as soon as my dissertation came along, I absolutely loved the freedom of being able to choose my own topic and do my own research and thinking back now, I would have really struggled to use AI to do my dissertation, but not with my other assignments.

This idea of freedom – to have the creativity and want to be invested in your own work – I think is something that teachers have been trying to focus on, rather than just doing the set curriculum questions.

Katherine Barnett

Yeah definitely. There needs to be more of an effort now to make things more engaging for students, more interesting.

Xanthe Mitten

I found it really useful too – which is also mentioned in the podcast – but the practice of struggling and being bad at writing and just going offline, sitting down, journaling, or making a plan for a blog that you want to write you know. And just struggling with the words and the ideas and actually sitting and thinking, 'cause it's so easy now to have tech check your work or write your work or proof your work.

And the podcast reminded me that sometimes it's nice just to go offline, sit down, try and write, and struggle with the words and the writing and the concepts.

Katherine Barnett

Yeah, they have a guest on the podcast who talks about the artistic struggle of writing and how important it is. I don't think people who wrote some of the greatest books that we have out – I know you love Dracula, so I'll just throw that in there – I don't think...was it Bram Stoker who wrote Dracula?

Xanthe Mitten

Yeah

Katherine Barnett

I don't think he was sat at home like...the struggle was an important part of writing that book. I'm sure that can be said for every fantastic author. Bram Stoker – would he have been using AI? Probably not. We wouldn't have got these great pieces without the struggle that came with them.

I think also, alongside that, you can think about how people often get lulled into the trap of thinking ChatGPT is perfect and will always produce something that is better than what you would naturally write.

Xanthe Mitten

Yeah

Katherine Barnett

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That isn't the case at all and I can give an example of that, because I often use it to just proofread and check for spelling and grammar mistakes because I'm paranoid so I just throw it in there.

Xanthe Mitten

It's great for me with dyslexia. But then sometimes, I'll send stuff to you and you'll be like, "Why have you gone American?"

Katherine Barnett

Yes, exactly.

Xanthe Mitten

That wasn't me!

Katherine Barnett

Yes, exactly. And ChatGPT told me off for using American spellings recently and I reread through my work and there wasn't any. I corrected it and it said, "Oh sorry, I made a mistake."

So that's a prime example.

Xanthe Mitten

If the robot's making a mistake, then I'm making a mistake, and then everyone's going to... yeah. So, let's just time out.

Katherine Barnett

Yeah, so that actually leads us nicely onto our final piece of news from Gulf News, and it's the news that some UAE schools have actually blocked AI-powered chatbots, including ChatGPT. Several public and private schools across the UAE have implemented measures to block access to ChatGPT. This action, aimed at preserving academic integrity, seeks to encourage students to engage in independent thinking, foster healthy competition, and prevent the misuse of AI tools in homework and assessments. Which kind of goes into what we were just talking about really – like, it's important to not use these tools and to try and answer questions and do things on your own. Although, I will say as a point on this, I don't really know how they're going to manage to enforce this because if people have VPNs or go outside of school, they can obviously still access these tools.

Xanthe Mitten

Yeah, I'd be interested to see - cause they say that they have implemented measures to block, so I'd be interested to see how they're actually doing that, and if some of the students will actually be able to get around it. And whether it will give them an advantage or whether it will be a disadvantage.

Katherine Barnett

I agree. It'll be interesting to see what they're actually doing, but also whether other schools start doing the same measures really

Xanthe Mitten

So, it'd be interesting to see if other countries – so, the UK - schools in the UK will be following suit, or whether they'll continue to not really have a strong definitive answer on how AI can be used in schools and universities. I think we're

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still kind of here in the UK sitting on the idea that each institution has their own rules and regulations and detection software's and that's where we're at at the moment. But a potential whole ban on AI and ChatGPT – I mean, it would be wild, but it's not out of the picture.

Katherine Barnett

Yeah definitely not. I think maybe you'd think the Russell Group universities would take the lead with that but I guess we'll just have to wait and see.

Xanthe Mitten

Okay, so we've spoken quite a lot about recent cheating news. So now I'd like to quickly mention our creative cheating challenge this year which is the Exam Hack 2025.

Katherine Barnett

Yeah, please tell me more about this. What exactly is the Exam Hack Xanthe?

Xanthe Mitten

So, it's not your typical hackathon, it's basically a high-stakes challenge where we are inviting individuals from all across the world to take part in an online exam - general knowledge - and see if they can cheat their way through our online invigilation system. So we're looking for creative hacks or cheats to get past our invigilators and get full marks on the test, and if they do this, they can potentially win \$1,000.

And we had a successful hack last year - Sebastian managed to get past the systems, cheat his way through the invigilators, and he got full marks and won that \$1,000 prize. So yet again, we are opening up our system to make sure that we always are testing our products to make sure that we are the best and that we have the best online invigilation system.

Katherine Barnett

Yeah, I think it's worth going into how this benefits us, because it allows us to see new, innovative ways of cheating and make sure our invigilation team is aware of all these new forms of cheating, and that our systems - like our multi-mode monitoring systems - can stay up to date and keep abreast of all these different ways of cheating.

Xanthe Mitten

We're not blind to the idea that people do cheat in exams, and we know that there's this idea that it's easier to cheat in an exam at home, and we want to challenge that. And make sure that when we go to our clients we can be confident and say that we have the best product, and we're so confident that we've opened it up to the industry and to anyone to try and test it. And you know, if we learn something from this online event, if we learn something valuable in how to improve our product, that is what this kind of pentesting is all about. And it's really exciting.

Katherine Barnett

Yeah, it's interesting that you bring up pentesting there as well. I have a tech background, I'm very nerdy about this stuff. I used to want to be a pentester - then I realized that's really, really hard to get into actually!

Xanthe

Mitten

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Just talk about it!

Katherine Barnett

Yeah, I'll just talk about it! Obviously, it's called the Exam Hack. We don't want people to think that means it's okay to try and DDoS our servers, launch a distributed denial-of-service attack, do anything crazy like that—like try and take down our Wi-Fi or something. I mean, I'd be really impressed if someone managed to do that as a student, because we do advertise this mainly for students and young people. But please don't do that, you'll get disqualified. There's no point.

But the word “hack” does encompass quite a large array of things, including stuff which doesn't involve technology at all, which is the stuff we're really excited to see. Obviously,

Xanthe Mitten

I mean, if I was doing this - this is a little insider advice - but I would say I'd probably team up with you or a friend and have it somehow that someone's Googling the answers, can hear what's going on in the exam or see it.

I don't know, you can get these glasses now, can't you, which have a camera? And then if you have an AirPods - so I would use technology in that sense, but it would be old-fashioned methods 'cause I'd have somebody else in a different room Googling the answers, telling me via the AirPods. And then I guess it would be up to the invigilators to try and spot that these glasses had a camera in them and that I had an AirPods in, or that I was being suspicious with my answering.

Katherine Barnett

Xanthe, it's a shame that we can't just team up and do the exam.

Xanthe Mitten

I might go incognito.

Katherine Barnett

We could do with that one thousand dollars!

But yeah, I think it's interesting that hacking does include all of that stuff that you just mentioned. It does include pure people manipulation. A lot of pentesters—pentesters are people that legally hack, by the way, if you don't know what a pen tester is—they are paid to go to businesses and try and break into their systems. Like banks pay pentesters to try and steal a gold bar from a vault. Sounds like James Bond stuff, but this is a job, and I think it's really cool.

Xanthe Mitten

It's the coolest job ever.

Katherine Barnett

Yeah it's the coolest job ever. But yeah, a lot of that just involves convincing people you're supposed to be there, convincing people that you are an electrician who's come to do something in the building. That is just people manipulation. Hacking is people manipulation.

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And so with that in mind, you could have someone who's manipulating the invigilators - they know the invigilators, they're bribing the invigilators to let them cheat.

Xanthe Mitten

Bribing an invigilator - I mean, we've never seen that before, but it's another idea and it's very real. All industries have always suffered from issues with bribes and corruption, so why not the exam industry?

Katherine Barnett

It would be considered a hack.

I mean, yeah, hacking is a very broad term and I think more people need to be aware of that. And it also makes it so exciting to think about the kinds of things that we could see in this year's Exam Hack. So yeah, if you are listening and you're interested, get thinking - there's a whole bunch of stuff you could be doing.

Xanthe Mitten

Absolutely. And visit examhack.io and sign up. It'll be happening on the 1st of July this year, 2025, and we are wanting to set a record by having the most people take part. So yeah, anywhere, all over the world, as long as you've got a laptop, internet access, and a smartphone, you'll be able to take part.

And yeah, really looking forward to seeing it. And we'll definitely have a dedicated episode to the results of this year's Exam Hack if people are interested.

Katherine Barnett

Yeah, hopefully. Well, I'm just sad we can't take part. I'm gutted. I might have to dye my hair back brown and you can wear a wig or something and we can be a duo. Because you can take part in pairs, which is awesome.

Xanthe Mitten

Yes, we've seen people in exams before dress up as other people and sit their exams. So there's nothing stopping me from dressing up and going undercover.

Katherine Barnett

Can't wait for that special Revision Notes episode

Xanthe Mitten

Yes, 'the ultimate hack: my story.'

But yeah, if you're interested in the Exam Hack, we will be discussing it more and you can check out the website for more details.

Katherine Barnett

Exciting stuff. I'm excited to see what happens.

Xanthe Mitten

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Yeah, absolutely. So I think we can finish the episode on that note. We've covered recent news, we've covered the Exam Hack. As usual, please check out our blogs and our other podcast episodes on YouTube, Spotify, and we're also on Instagram and Facebook and LinkedIn as well, so please do send any questions or ideas that you have for the podcast there. We're always excited to hear feedback and we really enjoy discussing with you guys in comments and online in chats.

So yeah, we'll be coming back online soon to record another podcast, and then yeah, please do check out the Exam Hack. I've been your host Xanthe and this has been Kat, and yeah, have a wonderful rest of your day.

Sources:

Chosun Biz - [Audit agency penalizes 249 teachers for private education bribes in Korea](#)

Search Engine Podcast - [Playboi Farti and his AI Homework Machine](#)

['This Isn't Fine'](#) Substack

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The Cheat Sheet - [Cases of Cheating With AI at Some UK Universities is Up 15x](#)

Gulf News - [Some UAE schools block AI-powered chatbots including ChatGPT](#)

VICTVS Exam Hack 2025 - [ExamHack.io](#)