Australian Catholic University AI misconduct referrals

IMPLEMENTED 2023–2025 · EDUCATION · AUSTRALIA · BAND F · PARTLY PROVED
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The ABC reported in October 2025 that ACU registered nearly 6,000 academic misconduct cases in 2024, about 90 per cent linked to AI use, and that students were wrongly accused. ACU says the figures are substantially overstated, that about a quarter of referrals were dismissed, and that it stopped using Turnitin's AI detector in March 2025.

ABOUT THIS SYNOPSIS

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The impact band, proof marker and SEAM view are MarLuc's opinion. The organisation is not a MarLuc client and has not reviewed or endorsed this synopsis. Names and trademarks belong to their owners.

NOTICE WORDING LAST UPDATED 16 NOVEMBER 2026

AT A GLANCE

What went wrong: Weak oversight or controls; AI output or malfunction.

AI used: AI writing detection feature inside Turnitin's plagiarism checking product.

Implemented: 2023–2025. Grade: band F, Failure, Partly proved.

Headline result, as reported: ACU dropped Turnitin's AI detector in March 2025 after reported wrongful accusations; the ABC reported nearly 6,000 misconduct cases in 2024

1 · The case

The facts, as reported by the 3 sources listed at the end. Where a source is silent, the field says "Not reported".

Organisation

Australian Catholic University. Large Australian university with nine campuses. The reporting concerns academic integrity processes in 2024 and 2025. Canvas block: 8. Governance and risk. Also 4. Operations and process, 5. People and skills.

Business challenge

The challenge. Universities had long used software to detect plagiarism. In 2023 Turnitin added an AI detector. ACU registered nearly 6,000 alleged misconduct cases in 2024 across nine campuses, about 90 per cent relating to AI use, per internal documents seen by the ABC.

How it was addressed. ACU referred students to its academic misconduct process, in many cases with a Turnitin AI report as evidence, per the ABC. It stopped using the Turnitin AI tool in March 2025, per the ABC, and says it introduced new modules on ethical use of AI for staff and students and made significant improvements to investigation timeliness. [1] [2] [3]

Who implemented it

Turnitin (Software vendor): Supplied the plagiarism checking software and its AI writing detector..

Technology (SEAM pillar E)

SEAM types: T2 Embedded AI in existing software. Deployment: Vendor SaaS. Vendors and products: Turnitin, Turnitin AI writing detection.

Where it was built in: A feature of the Turnitin software ACU used for assignments; it produced a report highlighting text judged to be AI-written.

What changed

Before: AI detector reports fed misconduct referrals. After: ACU stopped using the tool, says sole-evidence detector cases are dismissed, and says investigations are quicker. [1] [2] [3]

Cost of failure

Not reported. No damages, fines or refunds are reported. The ABC reports one student's transcript was marked "results withheld" for six months, and the student believes this affected a graduate job offer.

What it saved

Not reported. [1] [2] [3]

Governance and control

ACU says any case where Turnitin's AI detection was the sole evidence was dismissed immediately. The ABC reports email chains and documents indicating ACU regularly relied on the report alone, and that students had to provide notes and search histories, which ACU says is no longer practice. No regulator or court finding is reported.

S2 · Accountable owner · Not reported
Not reported. The deputy vice-chancellor responded publicly for the university; no named owner of the detector is reported. [1]

A1 · Safe use · Claimed
ACU says this year it introduced new modules on ethical use of AI for all staff and students. [1]

A2 · Human in the loop · Claimed
ACU says any case where the detector was the sole evidence was dismissed immediately; the ABC reports emails and documents indicating ACU regularly relied on the report alone. [1]

A3 · Monitoring and assurance · Evidenced
The ABC reports internal documents showing ACU knew of issues with the detector for more than a year before it stopped using the tool in March 2025 after finding it ineffective. [1]

A4 · Vendor AI · Claimed
Turnitin's guidance says the report should not be used as the sole basis for adverse action; ACU says it dismissed sole-evidence cases, and the ABC reports documents indicating regular reliance on the report alone. [1] [3]

A5 · Agent controls · Not reported
No agents described.

A6 · Standards and regulation · Not reported
Not reported.

What worked, what did not, what is unproven

WORKED

– ACU stopped using the detector and, per its statement, dismissed cases resting on it alone.

– ACU says it introduced training modules on ethical AI use for staff and students.

DID NOT

– The ABC reported several students said the onus was on them to prove their innocence and that they waited months for the university to clear them.

– One student, unnamed, was cleared after six months and says a withheld-results transcript harmed her job prospects, per the ABC.

– ACU acknowledged investigations were not always as timely as they should have been and said it regretted the impact on some students.

UNPROVEN

– How many students were wrongly accused: ACU would not say, and the figure is Not reported.

– The ABC's 6,000 figure: ACU says it was substantially overstated and has not published a replacement.

– Whether students suffered lasting harm beyond the cases the ABC describes: Not reported.

Timeline

2023 Turnitin adds an AI detector to its toolkit [1]

2024 ACU registers nearly 6,000 cases of alleged academic misconduct across nine campuses, per internal documents seen by the ABC [1]

Mar 2025 ACU stops using Turnitin's AI detection tool after finding it ineffective, per the ABC [1]

Oct 2025 The ABC reports students wrongly accused of AI cheating; ACU responds [1]

Sept 2026 An academic article in The Conversation cites the ACU case and reports that Australian universities are moving away from detection software [2]

2 · Grade and SEAM assessment

MarLuc's opinion, made on the evidence above. How cases are graded: marluc.co.uk/case-studies/how-we-rate

Level of change and impact

Claimed: Not applicable. Grade: F, Failure. Proof: Partly proved. Level of change: Not graded.

No level assessed: band F. The ABC reports harm to students, and ACU stopped using the tool.

The ABC reported students cleared after months, with results withheld on one transcript, and ACU acknowledged delays and regret. ACU stopped using the detector. The scale of wrongful accusation is not reported, so the marker is partly proved.

The SEAM view and lessons learnt

The reported failure sat between a vendor flag and a disciplinary process. Turnitin's own guidance warns against using the report as the sole basis for action. The ABC reports ACU used it that way, which ACU disputes in part. The case shows a screening signal becoming an accusation, with the burden placed on the person accused. For any larger organisation, the transferable point is to decide, before launch, what a flag may and may not trigger, and to size the review capacity for the volume it creates.

1. Never let an AI flag be the sole evidence for an adverse decision.
2. Size investigation capacity for the volume a detector creates.
3. Tell people promptly when they are accused, and set a time limit for clearing them.

Evidence

Score 2 of 4. Independent journalism based on internal documents and student accounts, with the university's partial responses. No regulator or court finding.

Evaluation method. Investigative news report with internal documents, student testimony and on-the-record university responses; later academic commentary.

Sources disagree. The ABC reports nearly 6,000 cases in 2024, about 90 per cent related to AI. ACU's deputy vice-chancellor said the figures were "substantially overstated" and gave no alternative number. The ABC reports documents indicating ACU regularly relied on the Turnitin report alone; ACU says such cases were dismissed immediately.

Status. ACU stopped using the tool in March 2025. ABC report published 9 October 2025. Subsequent ACU process changes beyond its stated training and timeliness improvements: Not reported.

3 · Original sources

Read these in full. To challenge a fact or a grade, use the contact form at marluc.co.uk or the link on https://marluc.co.uk/case-studies/australian-catholic-university-ai-misconduct-referrals

[1] ABC News: University wrongly accuses students of using artificial intelligence to cheat
https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-10-09/artificial-intelligence-cheating-australian-catholic-university/105863524

[2] The Conversation: Unis and schools are moving away from AI-detection software. They should stop using it altogether
https://theconversation.com/unis-and-schools-are-moving-away-from-ai-detection-software-they-should-stop-using-it-altogether-292593

[3] Turnitin: Understanding the false positive rate for sentences of our AI writing detection capability
https://www.turnitin.com/blog/understanding-the-false-positive-rate-for-sentences-of-our-ai-writing-detection-capability

Australian Catholic University website: https://www.acu.edu.au

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