Wherever there is testing, there is cheating. But by any standards 2011 will be remembered as a significant year in cheating history. In June the Chinese media was reporting “high-tech cheating devices” and the equally innovative use of mobile signal jamming and tracking units. These were stationed outside halls where candidates were sitting the highly competitive national college entrance test, the “gaokao”, to catch any reprobates.

Similar tales emerged from Vietnam to Venezuela. But this wasn’t the only reason for the notoriety of 2011. It was also the industrial-scale cheating by test administrators and teachers, and the professional institutionalisation of cheating practices.

The longest running saga has been the story of Curtin University English language centre in Australia where it was alleged that staff accepted bribes to alter certificates in the Ielts test of English. Criminal investigations led to the closure of the centre. A Curtin employee and eight others have since been convicted.

Another rapidly expanding form of cheating is known as “ghost writing”, where a student pays a professional test taker to sit the test for them. In June Mandarin language reports on the Australian SBS international news site revealed that ghost writers were operating in Ielts centres in Hong Kong. The response of Ielts representatives was to claim the “integrity” of the test. The response of competitors was to claim the “integrity” of the test. The response of competitors was to claim the “integrity” of the test. The response of competitors was to claim the “integrity” of the test. The response of competitors was to claim the “integrity” of the test.

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High stakes ... parents wait for their children to complete China's competitive college entrance exam-Reuters