Impact of Policies for Plagiarism in Higher Education Across Europe

Plagiarism Policies in Belgium

Executive Summary

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ES 1   Background

ES 1.1   The survey of Higher Education in Belgium was conducted using on-line questionnaires (students, teachers and senior managers), and interviews with national representatives. The purpose of the survey was to explore the efficacy of policies and systems for academic integrity in Belgium at bachelor and master's levels.

ES 1.2   The number of responses from Belgium was very low, which makes it impossible to generalise the findings. However some interesting and potentially useful input was made by those who participated.

ES 1.3   Although Belgium is a small country, the federal divisions of education in Belgium based on different languages and cross-border provision, add a level of complexity that makes it difficult to appreciate the whole landscape of higher education without a comprehensive regional and institutional survey.

ES 2   Findings

ES 2.1   There appears to be no external oversight in Belgium for institutional policies and systems covering academic standards, quality, academic integrity and ethics.

ES 2.3   Policies and sanctions for academic misconduct or "study fraud" are defined at institutional level in Belgium.

ES 2.4   No statistics were available at either institutional or national levels for case of academic dishonesty or plagiarism in student work.

ES 2.5   It is impossible to show whether there is a significant issue with plagiarism in Belgium and if so whether this has been recognised by those empowered to respond.

ES 2.6   A student respondent when studying in Belgium witnessed "*rational behaviour with deliberate attempts to copy*" by students for assessed work.   The student described the very modular system for learning, assessment and feedback, which made it difficult for academic teachers to have a holistic view of student conduct, achievement and performance.

ES 2.7   Only one of the three teacher respondents thought that *plagiarism policies, procedures and penalties are available to students*, and none of the teachers agreed that *Plagiarism*

policies, procedures and penalties are available to staff which suggests more could be done to make this information available.

ES 2.8   None of the teacher respondents agreed with either of the statements *I believe that all teachers follow the same procedures for similar cases of plagiarism* and *I know what penalties are applied to students for different forms of plagiarism and academic dishonesty.* This suggests lack of transparency and inconsistencies in systems, policies and sanctions in at least the institutions of the respondents.

ES 2.9   Evidence emerged about "plagiarism in examinations", which was explained as students copying each other's answers because of crowded exam halls and poor invigilation.

ES 2.10   A respondent suggested that plagiarism is often found in academic papers for conferences and journals and sometimes papers are published regardless of this problem.

ES 2.11   It was asserted that all HEIs in Belgium have "*some mechanisms and systems (most generally digitally based) to track plagiarism*" (national interview).

ES 3   Recommendations

ES 3.1   Nationally and internationally

ES 3.1.1   The limited responses received from Belgium lead to the suggestion that the national government should consider funding research into all aspects of academic integrity in Belgian HEIs to help raise the profile and priority;

ES 3.1.2   It would make sense to initiate cross-border cooperation for the development of international digital repositories containing academic sources and student work in the different languages (French, Flemish, Dutch and German) spoken by Belgian nationals.

ES 3.1.3   A national programme of seminars and workshops on good practice in academic integrity aimed at all academic staff in Belgium would help to highlight the need for the development of effective practices and policies for Belgian HEIs;

ES 3.1.4   The national ministry of education should consider monitoring policies for handling and deterring academic dishonesty in Belgian institutions; also require institutions to centrally record any allegations and the outcomes.

ES 3.2 Institutionally

ES 3.2.1   Institutional managers should study good practice elsewhere, as documented in the IPPHEAE reports and begin to develop their policies and systems to ensure fair, consistent and transparent outcomes for allegations of academic dishonesty by students at all levels of higher education;

ES 3.2.2   Institutions should examine their administrative process for assessing students to ensure any student misconduct or dishonesty in examinations, written assessment, research and theses is detected and suitable penalties applied;

ES 3.2.3   Academic staff should be required or at least encouraged to participate in collegial workshops and discussions, within and between institutions, about how to improve academic integrity in student work;

ES 3.2.4   It is recommended that institutions develop guidelines and regulatory frameworks for systematising the use of digital tools for formative learning, deterring and aiding the detection of plagiarism.

ES 3.3   Individual academics

ES 3.3.1   Individual academics in Belgium should acquaint themselves with good academic practice elsewhere in policies for academic integrity;

ES 3.3.2   Academics are advised to work with colleagues to encourage more consistency and fairness in the manner allegations of dishonesty and plagiarism are handled;

ES 3.3.3   The onus is on academic teachers to ensure all students at all levels are made aware of

Good scholarship, appropriate use and acknowledgement of academic sources;
What constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it;
The consequences of academic dishonesty and plagiarism.

ES4 Conclusions

It proved particularly difficult to persuade the many people contacted in Belgium to contribute to the survey, but the author is particularly grateful to those people who agreed to participate. There appears to be a low level of awareness in Belgium about potential issues for academic quality and institutional reputation from not adequately addressing the security of assessment of student learning in higher education.

It is hoped that the recommendations in this report are taken seriously by those who can make a difference to academic standards and quality in Belgium.

References

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Annex BE-1: Responses to question 5: (1=strongly disagree – 5=strongly agree)

Qu	Negative (1,2)		Don't know		Positive (4,5)		Statement
	student	teacher	student	teacher	student	teacher	
s5a t5a	0	0	0	67	0	33	*Students receive training in techniques for scholarly academic writing and anti-plagiarism issues*
s5b t5p	0	33	0	33	0	33	*I would like to have more training on avoidance of plagiarism and academic dishonesty*
s5c t5b	0	33	0	0	0	67	*This institution has policies and procedures for dealing with plagiarism*
t5c		0		33		67	*I believe this institution takes a serious approach to plagiarism prevention*
t5d		33		0		67	*I believe this institution takes a serious approach to plagiarism detection*
s5d t5e	0	67	0	0	0	33	*Plagiarism policies, procedures and penalties are available to students*
t5f		67		33		0	*Plagiarism policies, procedures and penalties are available to staff*
s5e t5g	0	67	0	0	0	33	*Penalties for plagiarism are administered according to a standard formula*
s5f t5h	0	67	0	33	0	0	*I know what penalties are applied to students for different forms of plagiarism and academic dishonesty*
s5g t5i	0	0	0	33	0	67	*Student circumstances are taken into account when deciding penalties for plagiarism*
s5h t5m	0	0	0	0	0	100	*The institution has policies and procedures for dealing with academic dishonesty*
t5j		0		33		67	*The penalties for academic dishonesty are separate from those for plagiarism*
t5k		33		67		0	*There are national regulations or guidance concerning plagiarism prevention within HEIs in this country*
t5l		33		67		25	*Our national quality and standards agencies monitor plagiarism and academic dishonesty in HEIs*
s5i t5n	0	0	0	67	0	33	*I believe one or more of my teachers/colleagues may have used plagiarised or unattributed materials in class notes*
s5j	0		0		0		*I have come across a case of plagiarism committed by a student at this institution*
s5k t5o	0	33	0	33	0	33	*I believe I may have plagiarised (accidentally or deliberately)*
s5l t5q	0	67	0	33	0	0	*I believe that all teachers follow the same procedures for similar cases of plagiarism*
s5n t5r	0	33	0	33	0	33	*I believe that the way teachers treat plagiarism does not vary from student to student*
s5n t5s	0	33	0	0	0	67	*I believe that when dealing with plagiarism teachers follow the existing/required procedures*
s5o t5t	0	33	0	0	0	67	*It is possible to design coursework to reduce student plagiarism*
s5p t5u	0	0	0	33	0	67	*I think that translation across languages is used by some students to avoid detection of plagiarism*
s5q	0		0		0		*The previous institution I studied was less strict about plagiarism than this institution*
s5r	0		0		0		*I understand the links between copyright, Intellectual property rights and plagiarism*