



Impact of Policies for Plagiarism in Higher Education Across Europe

Plagiarism Policies in Bulgaria

Executive Summary

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ES 1 Background

- ES 1.1 On-line questionnaires and interviews were conducted to explore how academic integrity and plagiarism are perceived and handled at bachelor and master's level in Bulgarian Higher Education institutions.
- ES 1.2 A total of 101 participants (**students, teachers, senior managers** and **national representatives**) contributed to the survey, providing information about policies and systems in five different Bulgarian Higher Education institutions.
- ES 1.3 Participants reported that Bulgarian institutions are keen to attract students from overseas to bring in more funding: *"there are many ... problems, the population is under pressure due to decreases, financial, social, other problems, we are trying to attract more students"* (national interview).
- ES 1.4 According to national and senior management interviews there is no quality monitoring organisation in Bulgaria for higher education. *"Standards, quality I don't think so, it is bureaucratic, not about plagiarism"* (national interview). However there are accreditation visits, typically every 6 years, which involve visit to HE institutions *"when they inspect educational programmes and plans, but nothing in the direction of plagiarism policies etc, no such criteria"* (national interview).
- ES 1.5 Although teacher participants were few, the responses showed that the nature of assessment varies considerably even within one institution. Three out of six teachers responding confirmed that some students were set assessed group work, estimated between 0% and 40% of the overall assessment workload.

ES 2 Findings

- ES 2.1 Although some interest in academic integrity and plagiarism was apparent in Bulgaria, the low teacher and management response rates demonstrate a reluctance to discuss this topic. No evidence was found of specific research within the country about academic integrity or of people actively trying to bring about changes to improve practices nationally or locally.
- ES 2.2 No statistics or guidelines were found either held nationally or institutionally about plagiarism and academic dishonesty: *"We do not have statistics, but we have indirect evidence that plagiarism is widespread"* (senior management, translated).
- ES 2.3 One of the institutions surveyed was using software in at least one faculty for submissions and screening of student work, apparently both for local and distance learning students. This evidence was supported by other input to the survey with all six of the teachers and 20 of the 93 student respondents mentioning the use of anti-plagiarism software. However a national interviewee reported that they had *"heard of such a tool Turnitin; not sure where it is being used, but it is not popular here"* (national interview).
- ES 2.4 It was reported that in Bulgaria assessment practices in higher education may have an impact on the ability and willingness of teachers to pursue cases of suspected

- plagiarism, for example “*where there are poor student results for a teacher it means they are seen as a poor teacher*”; further “*teachers are not paid [to support students] for the second or third sitting [resits, retakes], so they think - why should I bother? [They say:] I care about students but I also care also about my free time*” (national interview).
- ES 2.5 Some academics in Bulgaria have studied or worked in other countries and are aware of what more could and should be done to help students to avoid inadvertent plagiarism, for example:
- “*When I was at [a UK university] I was given guidelines about how to prevent [plagiarism]. I talked to my colleagues [in Bulgaria] asking for their point of view, but my colleagues are not aware of how to control, make policy, encourage good practice*”; “*Here there is not a single case of a student being dismissed for plagiarism. Here there are no measures*” (national interview).
- ES 2.6 Responses indicated that a range of sanctions are available in some Bulgarian HEIs for applying to cases of plagiarism that have been identified. The most common penalties appear to be verbal warning, zero mark and rewriting, but it was of concern to note that 54% of students and 50% of teachers believed it was possible that no action would be taken for plagiarism in an assignment and 33% of teachers said this could also be the case for a dissertation. The most common responses about sanctions for the dissertation were zero mark and verbal warning.
- ES 2.7 On questions about consistency of application of policies and procedures none or few of the teachers agreed that *teachers follow the same procedures* (0%), *follow the required procedures* (0%) and *are consistent between students* (17%), but more of the students agreed in response to the same statements (25%, 47% and 33% agreeing respectively) (Annex BG-1 Qu S5l, T5q, S5n, T5s, S5m, T5r).
- ES 2.8 In response to questions about whether policies for plagiarism and academic dishonesty should be separate, several anecdotes revealed incidences of cheating in examinations:
- “*It is not uncommon for students trying to cheat in state exams. People have to have the exam to progress. They were given questions to write, a written exam, their answers were the same as the person who supervised the exam*”
- “*... taking notes into an exam on paper, ... small writing, from web site, also different versions, hide in wrist or fingers, folded up like accordion or rolled up*”(national interview).
- ES 2.9 There were reports that bribery and unfair influence is common in Bulgaria, “*money for the teacher in student book*” and that corruption is the main problem rather than plagiarism (national interview). The general consensus of respondents was that policies for plagiarism and academic honesty should be combined rather than dealt with separately.
- ES 2.10 According to one participant, the advantages of digital tools are not confined to use for matching with publications, papers and standard texts, “*there are "companies" that offer students to write for them their written work, when it comes to a topic and 300 students who write on it, "the companies" when offering written work on it cannot develop unique versions so enter into the mechanism of plagiarism that Turnitin successfully captures*” (senior management, translated). The ability to detect ghost-written clones of essays and other work, or indeed instances of students copying work from each other (collusion), is often not appreciated by institutions that have not piloted the use of software tools.
- ES 2.11 Some student responses suggested various ways to respond to plagiarism, including stronger penalties, banning use of the Internet and setting easier work. All participants,

but particularly the student respondents, suggested a mature appreciation about academic integrity and what can be done to improve academic standards in Bulgaria.

- ES 2.12 Interestingly 83% of the teachers agreed that *one or more of my colleagues may have used plagiarised or unattributed materials in class notes* but none of the teachers agreed that they *may have plagiarised (accidentally or deliberately)* themselves (Annex BG-1 Qu T5n, T5o).
- ES 2.13 Just 38% of students admitted they may themselves have plagiarised and about the same percentage agreed with the statement that *I have come across a case of plagiarism committed by a student at this institution* (Annex BG-1 S5k, S5j). The apparent reluctance of both students and teachers to admit to possibly having plagiarised may be interpreted as a true belief, which may or not be accurate. However two other possibilities are: (a) the concept of plagiarism may not be fully understood; (b) there is some reluctance to admit even inadvertently plagiarising, perhaps cultural or motivated by some fear of exposure.
- ES 2.14 Although most teachers and students were able to identify a clear description of plagiarism, only 30% of student respondents and 50% of the teachers agreed that punishment may be appropriate for this conduct. The much lower number of students and teachers positively identifying a case of plagiarism where some words were changed in the copied text suggests that students' confidence in understanding academic writing conventions may be misplaced and that some teachers may themselves be inadvertently plagiarising. The low number of respondents opting for "punishment" may be indicative of a culture where academic misconduct and plagiarism are seen as normal conduct.
- ES 2.15 A national respondent talked about having views that were out of line with those of colleagues and was nervous about being identified. This suggests a reason why plagiarism is not being addressed may be an unfounded fear of reputational damage by admitting that some students are plagiarising.
- ES 2.16 It is very clear from this small sample of data that policies and practices vary greatly between institutions in Bulgaria, but much more should be done across the HE sector to begin to address these problems.

ES 3 Recommendations

ES 3.1 Nationally

- ES 3.1.1 High level guidelines should be drawn up, with timetable for implementation, to advise higher education institutions on required policy reforms, to move towards a national minimum standard on policies and procedures for assuring quality and academic integrity in student assessment, in line with the Bologna agreement. Such guidelines could be based on similar provision elsewhere, for example the Quality Assurance Agency, UK's Quality Code
- ES 3.1.2 The national government should release small amounts of funding to facilitate awareness-raising and open discussion about the need for academic integrity across all levels of higher education in Bulgaria (incorporating honesty, trust, fidelity, ethical conduct, scholarly practices, academic writing standards). This could be achieved by financing and promoting a series of guest seminars and running interactive workshops for academic staff, administrator and students, making use of both local knowledge and external expertise.
- ES 3.1.3 The current system of national accreditation inspections for higher education universities and colleges could be extended to incorporate monitoring of the effectiveness of policies

and procedures for assuring academic quality and standards, particularly relating to institutional oversight of assessment practices, misconduct and plagiarism.

- ES 3.1.4 The national government could encourage higher education Institutions to make use of technological aids for supporting the detection and prevention of student plagiarism by offering a financial subsidy to purchase software licenses. National support for guidance and training in the implementation and application of digital tools would also help to ensure the use of the software is based on experience and best practice elsewhere in the world.
- ES 3.1.5 It would help with detection of plagiarism if a national Bulgarian digital archive of academic papers, theses and student work was created and made accessible to digital searching and matching tools.
- ES 3.1.6 Whistle blowers should be supported, to encourage people to expose genuine cases of academic fraud or dishonesty, rather than silenced or intimidated.

ES3.2 Institutionally

- ES 3.2.1 Higher Education Institutions need to provide strong leadership to promote high standards in academic quality and academic integrity, in line with the requirements of the Bologna agreement. Internal systems for monitoring and advising will help to create a supportive culture, while sending a strong message that maintaining status quo is not an option. It is possible that new strategy, policies and procedures will need to be devised to bring about such changes.
- ES 3.2.2 Institutions should listen to the views of academic teachers and managers when devising policies and procedures about academic integrity to ensure that what is mandated is practical and feasible. If teaching staff are genuinely consulted there is more likely the change management will be effective.
- ES 3.2.3 It is important that senior managers listen to the student voice prior to setting institutional policy. Engagement of student leaders in this process can encourage buy-in and compliance, particularly where major changes are likely.
- ES 3.2.4 Institutions may find it valuable to make use of ideas from external academics and researchers in this area in order to establish what policy options are available and have worked elsewhere before deciding which would best suit the particular needs of the institution.
- ES 3.2.5 Institutions should try to acquire an institutional licence for text matching software. Before implementing the tools institutions should define regulations, policies and procedures clarifying use of the tools and provide training for all staff.
- ES 3.2.6 Training, education and support for students should be provided on academic integrity, plagiarism, techniques for writing and appropriate use of good quality sources and guidance should be provided for student use of software for text matching.
- ES 3.2.7 An on-going development programme should be provided for academic staff involved in teaching and assessment that encourages dialogue about academic standards and integrity.
- ES 3.2.8 In line with requests from students, academic teaching staff should be encouraged to set more challenging student assessments that help to discourage plagiarism and academic dishonesty with rewards for critical thinking and creativity.
- ES 3.2.9 Every HE institution should encourage dialogue across the academic community about all matters relating to quality and standards.

ES 3.3 Individual academics:

- ES 3.3.1 Academic teaching staff should be mindful of the recommendations at national and institutional level and how they would be affected. They should encourage colleagues and managers to bring about similar complementary changes “bottom up”, at faculty and departmental levels.
- ES 3.3.2 Where possible academic staff interested in raising standards in assessment and academic integrity should attend and contribute to professional development activities.
- ES 3.3.3 Academic teaching staff should communicate with colleagues and students to establish what resources are needed to support student awareness about academic integrity issues and further learning and development. Many suitable resources already exist and are available for free, but may need to be translated or adapted for use in Bulgaria.
- ES 3.3.4 Any suspected cases of plagiarism or academic dishonesty uncovered need to be investigated and suitable action taken according to an agreed and consistent set of regulations and procedures. If not already available, the underlying policies will need to be established either at departmental, faculty or institutional level.
- ES 3.3.5 Software tools have proved very useful in various places and in part of Bulgaria for aiding the detection of plagiarism. They also have wider applications for detecting students copying each other (collusion) and when used formatively for helping students to learn to write in a more academic style (for example Davis 2009, Ireland and English 2011). Academic staff are encouraged to request that their institution purchases licenses for suitable digital text matching tools (also see 8.1.4, 8.2.5).
- ES 3.3.6 Any academic interested in this topic wishing to become part of a research community in Bulgaria, linked to counterparts in Europe and across the world, is encouraged to make contact with the IPPHEAE team.

ES4 Conclusions

For Bulgaria, one of the advantages in coming late to the developments in this area is that there is no need to waste time by learning from your own experience, so much more is known and documented than say ten years ago about what strategies, policies and systems can be effective and what approaches work less well (for example Carroll 2005, Carroll and Appleton 2001, Davis 2009, Ireland and English 2011, Neville 2010, Park 2003, Park 2004, Morris 2011, Rowell 2009, Tennant and Rowell 2009, Tennant and Duggan 2010).

The major hurdles to progress are lack of will to make changes, nationally, institutionally and between individual academics on the front line of the educational process. Some strong leadership is needed to kick-start this process, followed up by on-going monitoring and support. Some investment will be needed, but small amount of funding well applied could begin a rapid cascade of reforms.

The apparent negativity among some respondents about the current situation, coupled with a tendency for some people to view Bulgaria as “a lost cause” and den of corruption, needs to be turned around. The misplaced energy could be used to bring about required reforms and slowly but surely prove the critics wrong.

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

Table 16: Student and teacher responses to questionnaire Question 5 (percentages) (S n=129; T n=8)							
Qu	Disagree (1,2)		Don't know		Agree (4,5)		Question
	student	teacher	student	teacher	student	teacher	
S5a T5a	45%	17%	25%	50%	26%	33%	Students receive training in techniques for scholarly academic writing and anti-plagiarism issues
S5b T5p	26%	50%	16%	0%	53%	50%	I would like to have more training on avoidance of plagiarism and academic dishonesty
S5c T5b	15%	34%	33%	0%	49%	67%	This institution has policies and procedures for dealing with plagiarism
T5c		34%		50%		17%	I believe this institution takes a serious approach to plagiarism prevention
T5d		17%		33%		50%	I believe this institution takes a serious approach to plagiarism detection
S5d T5e	19%	34%	32%	17%	47%	50%	Plagiarism policies, procedures and penalties are available to students
T5f		34%		50%		17%	Plagiarism policies, procedures and penalties are available to staff
S5e T5g	21%	33%	38%	67%	36%	0%	Penalties for plagiarism are administered according to a standard formula
S5f T5h	24%	17%	40%	67%	29%	0%	I know what penalties are applied to students for different forms of plagiarism and academic dishonesty
S5g T5i	28%	17%	43%	67%	26%	0%	Student circumstances are taken into account when deciding penalties for plagiarism
S5h T5m	15%	50%	40%	17%	39%	33%	The institution has policies and procedures for dealing with academic dishonesty
T5j		0%		17%		50%	The penalties for academic dishonesty are separate from those for plagiarism
T5k		34%		50%		17%	There are national regulations or guidance concerning plagiarism prevention within HEIs in this country
T5l		83%		17%		0%	Our national quality and standards agencies monitor plagiarism and academic dishonesty in HEIs
S5i T5n	37%	0%	31%	17%	31%	83%	I believe one or more of my teachers/colleagues may have used plagiarised or unattributed materials in class notes
S5j	38%		23%		39%		I have come across a case of plagiarism committed by a student at this institution
S5k T5o	40%	50%	22%	50%	38%	0%	I believe I may have plagiarised (accidentally or deliberately)
S5l T5q	30%	50%	41%	50%	25%	0%	I believe that all teachers follow the same procedures for similar cases of plagiarism
S5m T5r	25%	50%	38%	33%	37%	17%	I believe that the way teachers treat plagiarism does not vary from student to student
S5n T5s	21%	33%	32%	67%	47%	0%	I believe that when dealing with plagiarism teachers follow the existing/required procedures
S5o T5t	16%	0%	33%	17%	46%	83%	It is possible to design coursework to reduce student plagiarism
S5p T5u	21%	0%	34%	17%	42%	83%	I think that translation across languages is used by some students to avoid detection of plagiarism
S5q	40%		24%		24%		The previous institution I studied was less strict about plagiarism than this institution
S5r	12%		27%		54%		I understand the links between copyright, Intellectual property rights and plagiarism