



## ***Impact of Policies for Plagiarism in Higher Education Across Europe***

### **Plagiarism Policies in Finland**

*Executive Summary*

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#### **Executive Summary**

#### **ES 1 Background**

- ES 1.1 The survey of Higher Education in Finland was conducted using on-line questionnaires (students, teachers and senior managers), student focus groups and interviews with national representatives. The purpose of the survey was to explore the efficacy of policies and systems for academic integrity in Finland at bachelor and master's levels.
- ES 1.2 Finland has two distinct types of university, there are 16 traditional research-intensive universities and 25 Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS, also known as polytechnics), but some mergers of universities are in progress at the time of writing this report.
- ES 1.3 The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) is responsible for monitoring and assuring quality in higher education, covering both universities and UAS. Their audit manual sets out the objectives and process for audit panels and visits to institutions. The audit report sets out key findings by the audit panel and, if required, sets further targets. However *“The audit manual does not mention plagiarism”* or academic integrity; *“The HE evaluation committee ... have no interest in plagiarism”* (national interviews).
- ES 1.3 Comments on the typical assessment students were required to complete indicated that in Finland the amount of group working and team assessment varied between 10% and 90%. The question about breakdown of assessment types showed that courses had a mixture of different types of assessment, ranging from 75% to 10% by formal examination and 10% to 80% by project work.

#### **ES 2 Findings**

- ES 2.1 According to national interviews there are no *“figures collected for cheating or plagiarism”* in universities. Universities have rules about plagiarism but do not maintain statistics.
- ES 2.2 The National Advisory Board for Research Ethics (TENK) focused on academic dishonesty for research and doctoral students rather than plagiarism in bachelor or master's level work. However there are new guidelines available from 2012 for master's level research integrity (TENK 2012). The new system is being implemented across universities and UAS as this report is being prepared.
- ES 2.3 Evidence about a specific case in 2002 was provided of a master's thesis at a Finnish research university that contained 50% plagiarised material. The award was not rescinded because the plagiarism was found after the award had been made, based on *“inadequate*

*academic standards*” and *“in Finnish law there are no valid arguments for reversing the previous decision”*. However in a more recent case in 2011 a doctoral dissertation was rescinded after two of the five academic papers that formed basis of the thesis were withdrawn by the journal publisher due to academic misconduct (national interview).

- ES 2.4 Evidence emerged from the interviews that many cases of plagiarism are not being recognised and dealt with at university level at least. According to one source *“there are .. written guidelines in each institution. But at the practical level they cannot agree what is plagiarism”*. There is frustration that clear cases of plagiarism are not being dealt with appropriately: *“Yes there are policies, but the policies don’t work”* (national interview).
- ES 2.5 It is clear from the responses that software tools for aiding detection of plagiarism are being adopted and applied by at least some universities in Finland. The feedback from teachers and students also confirms that some students were already making use of software to pre-check their work before submitting. However the emphasis appears to be only on checking the final thesis rather than for all written work.
- ES2.6 The recent move by Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) in Finland to purchase licenses for the software tool Urkund, implement the tool sector-wide for submission of theses is an encouraging sign there is some appreciation that action needs to be taken to address any incidence of student plagiarism in Finnish Higher Education. However systematic use of the tools is not yet in evidence.
- ES 2.7 Survey respondents report that the strengths, limitations and applications of Urkund and other software tools are not well understood by educationalists in Finland. There was particular concern by some people that text in Finnish can easily be manipulated by students to avoid detection by some digital tools.
- ES 2.8 Although not confined to Finland, *“there are teachers who don’t bother reading the student thesis and give an average or guessed mark”* (national interview). Unless students’ assessments or dissertations are thoroughly read there is no way of fairly assigning a grade or ascertaining whether the work is plagiarised. Quality Assurance procedures in higher education should be designed to be robust enough to detect cases like this of poor academic practice, for example through blind double marking and independent moderation. Feedback suggests that this type of practice is not always followed in Finnish HEIs.
- ES 2.9 Given that education of students about good academic practice is a key element of a preventative strategy, it is of concern that *“it is not common to have courses for all students [in academic integrity] – it is not a must; academic writing yes, research ethics no”* (national interview).
- ES 2.10 There were suggestions that some of the most serious form of plagiarism may not be recognised by some academics: *“Regarding ghost-writing, paper mills etc., ... there is no knowledge, public awareness about this. There are suspicions when a student is not progressing on research and then produces really good paper”* (national interview).
- ES 2.11 22% of students and 66% of teachers disagreed with the statement *I believe that all teachers follow the same procedures for similar cases of plagiarism*, with 31% of students and just 8% of teachers agreeing with the statement.

- ES 2.12 In responses from 171 Finnish students for the IPPHEAE research, 25% of Finnish students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement *I believe I may have plagiarised (accidentally or deliberately)*, 25% said they were not sure, 47% disagreed or strongly disagreed and 2% declined to answer. In response to the same question 18% of the teachers agreed and 75% disagreed that they may have plagiarised (Annex FI-1, Qu S5k, T5o).
- ES 2.13 In the on-line questionnaire students and teachers were asked to identify cases of student plagiarism from scenarios. It was of concern to see the high number of respondents, students and teachers, who were unsure whether some of these examples would be acceptable practice for assessed work. 57% of the student respondents said they were confident about referencing and citation, but responses to this question cast some doubts on their understanding.
- ES 2.14 Students (75%) and teachers (100%) agreed that students received training in “scholarly academic writing and anti-plagiarism issues” and 56% of students said they would like more training compared to only 25% of the teachers. Most teachers’ responses contrast with views from the national interviewees, three believed strongly that there should be “*more training and guidance*” for both teaching staff and students. Another view was that “*a lot of training is taking place at the moment*”.
- ES 2.15 There is evidence from the research of marginalisation and intimidation of people in Finland who are trying to improve academic integrity and quality by highlighting cases of plagiarism and dishonesty. The discouragement of whistle-blowers will not help to raise standards or reduce cases of plagiarism.

### ES 3 Recommendations

#### ES 3.1 Nationally and internationally

- ES 3.1.1 It is welcomed that the national body TENK has produced clear procedures for handling allegations of misconduct, including plagiarism, at master’s level and above. However there are some caveats, based on experiences elsewhere:

There need to be policies procedures covering academic misconduct in all assessed work in higher education, not just master’s level and focusing on the thesis;

Making the responsibility for academic conduct decisions rest with the rector potentially makes the process overly formal and potentially slow to resolve;

Many UK institutions have now moved away from this kind of formal judicial practice and devolved responsibility to specially trained Academic Conduct Officers (ACO), normally departmentally-based;

There needs to be a focus on understanding underlying reasons for plagiarism and academic misconduct and adopting a preventative approach by educating teaching staff and students;

Software tools to aid education of students as well as to support detection of plagiarism can be a powerful resource if applied appropriately and understood well, but this depends on the quality and properties of the tools and the skills of those

using them. Some questions have been raised by Finnish participants about both factors in relation to the software tools being used in Finland.

ES 3.1.2 The apparent culture of fear associated with finding plagiarism and the unfair treatment of whistle-blowers in some institutions is the most distressing finding in all the research across Europe for this project. Unfortunately some examples of this practice were reported in other countries and not confined to Finland. There is no place for this type of cover-up anywhere in Europe, but particularly in such a liberally-minded country as Finland. Researchers into plagiarism should be encouraged and their findings used to inform educational policy.

ES 3.2.2 Ideally similar policies, procedures and equivalent tariffs should be common to all universities, not just in Finland but across Europe.

### ES3.2 Institutionally

ES 3.2.1 The recommendations set out below taken from research carried out into plagiarism in Finland, presented in a master's thesis, provide a good starting point for the IPPHEAE recommendations for Finland.

*“..the following should be considered to be included in a University-wide plagiarism policy:*

- *Aims and objectives for the plagiarism policy*
- *Responsibilities for administration, teachers, library/informatics and students*
- *Plagiarism statement*
- *Definitions of student plagiarism and student cheating*
- *Means to be applied in deterring plagiarism*
- *Process definition and clearly written instructions for processing plagiarism cases*
- *Plagiarism tariff*
- *Creating statistics on student plagiarism and cheating*
- *Defining how students should learn to avoid plagiarism. Providing guidance to students on academic writing*
- *Educating staff and students on plagiarism and the plagiarism policy*
- *Monitoring the implementation of the plagiarism policy” (Silpiö 2012)*

### ES 3.3 Individual academics

ES 3.3.1 A culture of openness and dialogue about assuring academic integrity and conduct needs to be cultivated between academics across institutions and encouraged by senior academic leaders in Finland. There is clear need for a serious programme of academic and student staff development about how to raise academic standards by ensuring that cases of academic dishonesty are consistently recognised and appropriate measures taken to discourage or penalise.

## ES4 Conclusions

The provision for managing student plagiarism in Finland has improved greatly since the investigation began two years ago and recent developments are welcome. However Finland is taking the first small steps on a long journey and academic misconduct is evolving in parallel.

With the relatively new phenomenon in mind of language translation plagiarism, some software tools are being gradually enhanced to detect cases of cross-language plagiarism. By combining automatic language translation software with access to different language repositories within the scope of the search tools, the digital tools will increasingly become more proficient in finding matches.

The reported problems with the ease of “fooling” Urkund particularly relating to the Finnish language characteristics need to be investigated. There are many ways students can find to by-pass digital matching tools, it does not take them long to find these techniques if they are determined to cheat.

Although not widely accepted by respondents in Finland the phenomenon of ghost-writing and use of “paper mills” is still rising elsewhere and is more difficult to detect and prove than plagiarism; often the software tools do not help to detect such cases.

It is to be hoped that those who have been actively researching in Finland are given space and funding to allow them to build on their findings and to ensure the whole academic community inside and external to Finland, can benefit from their expertise.

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

Table 16: Student and teacher responses to questionnaire Question 5 (percentages)							Statement
Qu	Negative (1,2)		Don't know		Positive (4,5)		
	student	teacher	student	teacher	student	teacher	
s5a t5a	12	0	12	0	75	100	<i>Students receive training in techniques for scholarly academic writing and anti-plagiarism issues</i>
s5b t5p	25	75	17	0	56	25	<i>I would like to have more training on avoidance of plagiarism and academic dishonesty</i>
s5c t5b	2	25	19	0	78	75	<i>This institution has policies and procedures for dealing with plagiarism</i>
t5c		35		0		68	<i>I believe this institution takes a serious approach to plagiarism prevention</i>
t5d		33		8		58	<i>I believe this institution takes a serious approach to plagiarism detection</i>
s5d t5e	6	25	43	8	49	66	<i>Plagiarism policies, procedures and penalties are available to students</i>
t5f		25		8		66	<i>Plagiarism policies, procedures and penalties are available to staff</i>
s5e t5g	4	33	62	0	33	67	<i>Penalties for plagiarism are administered according to a standard formula</i>
s5f t5h	37	25	26	8	33	58	<i>I know what penalties are applied to students for different forms of plagiarism and academic dishonesty</i>
s5g t5i	15	8	63	50	20	42	<i>Student circumstances are taken into account when deciding penalties for plagiarism</i>
s5h t5m	2	25	32	9	63	67	<i>The institution has policies and procedures for dealing with academic dishonesty</i>
t5j		50		8		42	<i>The penalties for academic dishonesty are separate from those for plagiarism</i>
t5k		33		25		42	<i>There are national regulations or guidance concerning plagiarism prevention within HEIs in this country</i>
t5l		42		33		25	<i>Our national quality and standards agencies monitor plagiarism and academic dishonesty in HEIs</i>
s5i t5n	40	17	32	42	26	42	<i>I believe one or more of my teachers/colleagues may have used plagiarised or unattributed materials in class notes</i>
s5j	58		19	0	20		<i>I have come across a case of plagiarism committed by a student at this institution</i>
s5k t5o	47	75	25	0	25	25	<i>I believe I may have plagiarised (accidentally or deliberately)</i>
s5l t5q	22	66	45	25	31	8	<i>I believe that all teachers follow the same procedures for similar cases of plagiarism</i>
s5n t5r	11	33	46	25	39	42	<i>I believe that the way teachers treat plagiarism does not vary from student to student</i>
s5n t5s	6	41	36	25	56	33	<i>I believe that when dealing with plagiarism teachers follow the existing/required procedures</i>
s5o t5t	7	0	28	8	61	92	<i>It is possible to design coursework to reduce student plagiarism</i>
s5p t5u	12	0	30	25	55	75	<i>I think that translation across languages is used by some students to avoid detection of plagiarism</i>
s5q	41		22		27		<i>The previous institution I studied was less strict about plagiarism than this institution</i>
s5r	13		14		72		<i>I understand the links between copyright, intellectual property rights and plagiarism</i>