JPPHEAE

Impact of Policies for Plagiarism in Higher Education Across Europe

Plagiarism Policies in France

Executive Summary

Irene Glendinning

With contributions from Anna Michalska and Stella-Maris Orim

October 2013

IPPHEAE

Impact of Policies for Plagiarism in Higher Education Across Europe

Plagiarism Policies in France

Executive Summary

ES 1   Background

ES 1.1   A small but useful sample of survey data was collected by on-line questionnaires, structured interviews and focus groups from higher education students, teachers, senior management and national representatives in France. The research also drew on documentary evidence available in the form of reports, blogs and web sites.

ES 1.2   From the different perspectives the survey explored the effectiveness of policies and procedures implemented nationally and in higher education institutions in France that concern aspects of academic integrity and specifically plagiarism and academic conduct. The research was focused on the provision at bachelor and master's level rather than doctoral studies and research.

ES 2   Findings

ES 2.1   The lack of statistics at national level and few institutional statistics about quality and academic integrity in higher education in France (Eumida p 148) made it impossible to be precise about the scale of student misconduct and plagiarism.

ES 2.2   According to national interviews there is no quality monitoring organisation in France for higher education and no national system for audits of quality process and systems. However, "*une démarche qualité est en place dans la plupart des organismes de recherche*", (*there are changes taking place regarding quality in most research organisations*) (national interview), which is welcome news. However according to one interviewee "*it is all PR* [public relations], *they talk about it but nothing ever changes*" (national interview).

ES 2.3   A report *La fraude aux examens dans l'enseignement supérieur* published in April 2012 set out evidence from research about the current deficit in policies for responding to breaches to academic integrity in higher education at all levels and made recommendations for the French Ministry of Education on how the country and HE institutions should respond (Mazodier et al 2012).

ES 2.4   Several academics are running active blogs in order to highlight the lack of action in France to tackle the incidence of plagiarism and misconduct pervading both education and public life. However the culture of "shoot the whistle-blower" discourages such healthy debate.

ES 2.5   It is common for student assessment in France to rely heavily on rote learning, even at master's level, discouraging original ideas, innovation and creativity. This ethos not only encourages a culture of plagiarism but is also incompatible with the higher level learning outcomes required at higher education level.

ES 2.6   A teacher respondent provided an example of how poorly students understand plagiarism, saying that he/she "*had to move to in-class exams in order to avoid the problem. If I allow time at home, the students will almost always copy at least some of the research word for word*" (Teacher questionnaire).

ES 2.7   The research revealed that it is uncommon for students studying in France to be given penalties for plagiarism, despite 46% of the student respondents and 50% of teachers responding saying they believed they may have plagiarised *accidentally or deliberately*.

ES 2.8   Although some institutions provide access to digital tools to aid detection of plagiarism by text matching, many institutions do not yet have licences for such software. Understanding the limitations and potential of these tools appears to be problematic and some evidence of overstatement and overreliance on their capabilities by academic staff and managers emerged from the research.

ES 2.9   On questions about consistency of application of policies and procedures most of the teachers disagreed that *teachers follow the same procedures* (75%) and *are consistent between students* (63%), but responses from students to the same questions were more balanced (Annex FR-1 Qu S5l, T5q, S5m, T5r). Encouragingly 75% of teachers and 63% of students responded positively to the statement: *it is possible to design coursework to reduce student plagiarism* (Annex FR-1 Qu S5o, T5t).

ES 2.10 Distinct differences emerged in the responses from students and teachers about reasons for plagiarism. Four suggested reasons for student plagiarism: *Unclear criteria and expectations for assignments, not being aware of penalties, there is no teacher control on plagiarism* and *they think the lecturer will not care* were selected by many more teachers than students. Conversely more students than teachers selected *they think they will not get caught, they run out of time* and *they can't express another person's ideas in their own words.* There was more of a consensus on most other points, including the ease of cutting and pasting from the Internet.

ES 2.11 It is clear that some participants studying in France received guidance in techniques for scholarly academic writing and anti-plagiarism issues according to 52% of student and 38% of teacher respondents (Annex FR-1 Qu S5a, T5a). Despite this 65% of students and only 38% of the teachers agreed that they would like to have more training, with 15% and 50% respectively disagreeing (Annex UK-1 Qu S5b, T5p).

ES 2.12 The low number of students and teachers positively identifying possible plagiarism examples suggests that students' confidence in understanding academic writing conventions may be misplaced and that teachers may themselves be inadvertently plagiarising. The low number of respondents opting for "punishment" reflects the emerging picture of the culture in France where it appears to be common to condone student plagiarism.

ES 3   Recommendations

ES 3.1   Nationally and internationally

ES 3.1.1 With reference to *Recommendation 1* (Mazodier et al 2012 p71, and Annex FR-2):

1 integrate the issue of plagiarism in the work carried out by the Group of Bologna on quality assurance programs and degrees.

The recommendation is that the range of teaching and learning at bachelor and master's degree levels in French Higher Education is reviewed, with the dual aims of increasing accountability and transparency, improving academic standards and discouraging plagiarism and academic dishonesty.

ES 3.1.2 With reference to *Recommendation 2* (Mazodier et al 2012 p71, and Annex FR-2):

2 promote at EU level the creation of a High Level Group on ethics academic assessments. The creation of a High Level Group recommended is to be welcomed. This group is advised to look at examples of good practice in academic integrity elsewhere in the world before

developing policy, particularly recent developments in Australia as well as research and effective policies and strategies developed over the last 12 years in parts of the UK.

ES 3.1.3   Although it contained some reference to plagiarism "prevention" activities, the recommendations from the French report described above focus predominantly on legislation, sanctions and punishment. A complementary approach that has proved useful elsewhere is to focus on educating teachers and students about good academic practice, improving design of assessment coupled with a transparent quality assurance regime to discourage or remove opportunities for cheating and to foster consistency and fairness in academic decisions (consistent with 3.1.1).

ES 3.1.4   With reference to *Recommendations 4 and 5* (Mazodier et al 2012 p71, and Annex FR-2):

4 ask the CPU to promote the AMUE collection of best practices, development of training, developing guides.

5 engage with AMUE to work on antiplagiat software (comparing the costs and effectiveness of different products; acquisitions of licenses, etc.)

There are lessons to learn from similar activities in the UK and Australia that might be useful to the French policy makers.

a) There are many very useful tried and tested resources and research papers already available in English that could be translated for use in France (JISC, IPPHEAE UK report)

b) The policy decision in the UK from 2002 to fund research into plagiarism and make Turnitin available to HEIs transformed the way plagiarism is viewed in the UK today. Building on these lessons could provide a short-cut method from France to make rapid and effective progress (Rowell 2009, p2)

ES 3.1.5   The IPPHEAE survey results indicate that the adoption of digital tools can be useful providing they are utilised in an appropriate setting and all parties understand the limitations and values that they bring to strategies for academic integrity. In particular there need to be

a) Clear policy statements about when and how tools should be used and accessed by teachers, students and administrators;

b) Guidance for teachers about how to interpret and make use of the outputs for helping to detect cases of plagiarism and information about the limitations for what the tools can achieve;

c) Guidance for teachers on how to use the tools formatively to support student learning;

d) Clear guidance for students on how software tools can help them and particularly what they do not show;

ES 3.1.6   It is important that any reforms introduced are applied across all levels in higher education, not just for doctoral level programmes and research.

ES 3.1.7   It is essential in a healthy democratic society to allow and encourage people to freely raise matters of concern, particularly where there are implications for national and educational quality and standards. Further a forum should be provided to ensure that any whistle-blower cases raised are fully investigated without prejudice and a public response provided.

ES 3.1.8   Should the French ministry or individual institutions wish to conduct a more comprehensive survey about academic integrity and plagiarism in France, the tried and tested on-line IPPHEAE surveys are available to use for this purpose.

ES3.2 Institutionally

ES 3.2.1   Although the national coordination of recommendations described above makes good sense when considering the scale of reform needed in France, encouraging more local responses to changing culture and attitudes may help to bring about more rapid and sustained reform.   The institutional recommendations need to echo each of those outlined above at national level.

ES 3.2.2   The IPPHEAE survey results suggest that it would be useful to stage a serious programme of professional development for academic staff within institutions to update people on how research practices have changed in the last 12-15 years and promote some good practice examples for assuring high standards in academic integrity.

ES 3.2.3   Institutional leadership and support needs to be established to encourage academic teaching staff to highlight cases of student cheating and plagiarism.

ES 3.2.4   If not immediately achieved on a national basis, each institution or region should develop a set of fair, proportional sanctions and related procedures for consistently dealing internally with cases of academic dishonesty in students. There are many examples that can be used for guidance, for example the AMBeR project report and tariff (Tennant and Rowell 2010, Tenant and Duggan 2008).

ES 3.3   Individual academics:

ES 3.3.1   Although the French Higher Education system tends to be controlled centrally and does not encourage independence of actions, each individual academic has a responsibility for upholding standards and quality in all aspects of academic activity, including teaching, setting assessments, grading of work, providing support, guidance and advice to students. This list of activities naturally extends to aspects of academic dishonesty and plagiarism. Given a supportive regime at institutional and national levels, it should be possible for academic staff to

> a) support students to improve independent study, research and writing skills;
>
> b) develop innovative assessments that challenge students and make plagiarism or cheating difficult;
>
> c) respond to suspected cases of student plagiarism and cheating according to policies that are fair, transparent and easy to apply.

ES 4   Conclusions

The national interviewees involved in this research were under no delusions about the difficulties faced by France in the areas of both quality assurance and academic integrity at higher education level. The French reforms will require a steep climb from the current situation to achieve what is expected and desirable under the terms of Bologna. However every IPPHEAE participant was sure that this difficult journey needs to be made, no matter how treacherous and long the ascent may prove to be.

IPPHEAE

France is not the only EU country that must make this journey, but as one of the largest and most prominent member states, its successful transition is of key importance to the reputation of higher education throughout the EU.

References

Bonaccorsi, A., Brandt, T., De Filippo, D. Lepori, B., Molinari, F., Niederl, A. Schmoch, U., Schubert, T., Slipersaeter, S. (2010) *Feasibility Study for Creating a European University Data Collection* (EUMIDA project report and dataset) http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/docs/en/eumida-final-report.pdf [28/05/2013]

Bergardaa, M., blog http://responsable.unige.ch/ [accessed 25/06/13]

Campus France: http://www.campusfrance.org/en/page/universities-and-higher-education-and-research-clusters [accessed 28/05/2013]

Darde, J., blog http://archeologie-copier-coller.com/ [accessed 25/06/13]

JISC (formerly) Joint Information Systems Committee http://www.jisc.ac.uk/ [accessed 23/04/2013]

JISC Electronic Plagiarism Project: http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/plagiarism/archive/detection.aspx [accessed 23/04/2013]

Maurel-Indart, H., blog http://leplagiat.net/ [accessed 25/06/13]

Mazodier, M., Foucault, M., Blemont, P., Kesler, S. (2012) La fraude aux examens dans l'enseignement supérieur - Rapport à Monsieur le ministre de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche (April 2012)

Rowell, G. (2009) *A National Strategy for Ensuring Authenticity in Student Work,* EDULearn13 Conference, Barcelona, Spain 6th-8th July 2009

Tennant, P. and Rowell, G. (2010). Benchmark Plagiarism Tariff for the *Application of Penalties for Student Plagiarism and the Penalties Applied*. UK: Plagiarismadvice.org.

Tennant, P. and Duggan, F. (2008) *Academic Misconduct Benchmarking Research Project: Part 2. The Recorded Incidence of Student Plagiarism and the Penalties Applied*. UK: The Higher Education Academy and JISC.

Weber-Wulff, D., blog
http://copy-shake-paste.blogspot.de/2013/04/french-rabbi-steps-down-in-plagiarism.html [accessed 25/06/13]

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

Qu	Disagree (1,2)		Don't know		Agree (4,5)		Question
	student	teacher	student	teacher	student	teacher	
S5a T5a	32%	50%	13%	13%	52%	38%	Students receive training in techniques for scholarly academic writing and anti-plagiarism issues
S5b T5p	15%	50%	14%	13%	65%	38%	I would like to have more training on avoidance of plagiarism and academic dishonesty
S5c T5b	9%	50%	19%	13%	72%	38%	This institution has policies and procedures for dealing with plagiarism
T5c		75%		25%		0%	I believe this institution takes a serious approach to plagiarism prevention
T5d		50%		13%		38%	I believe this institution takes a serious approach to plagiarism detection
S5d T5e	18%	50%	12%	13%	70%	38%	Plagiarism policies, procedures and penalties are available to students
T5f		50%		13%		25%	Plagiarism policies, procedures and penalties are available to staff
S5e T5g	7%	50%	26%	25%	66%	25%	Penalties for plagiarism are administered according to a standard formula
S5f T5h	19%	13%	20%	25%	59%	63%	I know what penalties are applied to students for different forms of plagiarism and academic dishonesty
S5g T5i	22%	25%	49%	38%	27%	38%	Student circumstances are taken into account when deciding penalties for plagiarism
S5h T5m	8%	38%	42%	25%	50%	25%	The institution has policies and procedures for dealing with academic dishonesty
T5j		13%		68%		26%	The penalties for academic dishonesty are separate from those for plagiarism
T5k		25%		50%		25%	There are national regulations or guidance concerning plagiarism prevention within HEIs in this country
T5l		50%		38%		13%	Our national quality and standards agencies monitor plagiarism and academic dishonesty in HEIs
S5i T5n	22%	0%	47%	13%	27%	75%	I believe one or more of my teachers/colleagues may have used plagiarised or unattributed materials in class notes
S5j	40%		16%		31%		I have come across a case of plagiarism committed by a student at this institution
S5k T5o	29%	26%	23%	25%	46%	50%	I believe I may have plagiarised (accidentally or deliberately)
S5l T5q	23%	75%	47%	13%	27%	13%	I believe that all teachers follow the same procedures for similar cases of plagiarism
S5m T5r	25%	63%	35%	25%	34%	13%	I believe that the way teachers treat plagiarism does not vary from student to student
S5n T5s	10%	63%	43%	25%	44%	13%	I believe that when dealing with plagiarism teachers follow the existing/required procedures
S5o T5t	8%	0%	26%	25%	62%	75%	It is possible to design coursework to reduce student plagiarism
S5p T5u	14%	0%	32%	25%	51%	63%	I think that translation across languages is used by some students to avoid detection of plagiarism
S5q	16%		28%		53%		The previous institution I studied was less strict about plagiarism than this institution
S5r	2%		2%		94%		I understand the links between copyright, Intellectual property rights and plagiarism

Table 16: Student and teacher responses to questionnaire Question 5 (percentages) (S n=129; T n=8)

IPPHEAE

Annex FR-2

A report *La fraude aux examens dans l'enseignement supérieur* published in April 2012 set out evidence from research about the current deficit in policies for responding to breaches to academic integrity in higher education at all levels and made recommendations for the French Ministry of Education on how the country and HE institutions should respond (Mazodier et al 2012).

Recommendations 1-6 from the report summarised and translated.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS 1-6

1 integrate the issue of plagiarism in the work carried out by the Group of Bologna on quality assurance programs and degrees.

2 promote at EU level the creation of a High Level Group on ethics academic assessments. 3 submit to the consultation the principle of creating an ethics committee in higher education and its functioning public institutions.

4 ask the CPU to promote the AMUE collection of best practices, development of training, developing guides.

5 engage with AMUE to work on antiplagiat software (comparing the costs and effectiveness of different products; acquisitions of licenses, etc.)

6 legalize a [fast-track system for resolution for minor academic dishonesty] *by allowing a prior admission of guilt.*

Abbreviations used in the report

Responsibilities for several actions were referred to the following European and national level organisations, initiatives and working groups:

AMUE – Agence de Mutualisation des Universities et Establishments
CPU – Conference des Presidents d'Université
CNESER - Conseil National de l'enseignment supérieur et de la recherche
Groupe de Bologna

(The remaining recommendations 7-12 from the report have not been elaborated here as they concerned reforming national legislation or developing new national systems for handling different forms of academic dishonesty).