



Impact of Policies for Plagiarism in Higher Education Across Europe

Plagiarism Policies in Ireland

Executive Summary

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Lifelong Learning Programme



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ES 1 Background

- ES 1.1 Surveys for the project *Impact of Policies for Plagiarism in Higher Education across Europe* (IPPHEAE) were conducted in the Republic of Ireland during 2012 to investigate the support systems, policies and practices in place for managing aspects of academic integrity in higher education institutions. The survey focused on the experiences of bachelor and master's degree students studying at four different Higher Education Institutions in Ireland.
- ES 1.2 Institutional level survey responses were captured through three on-line questionnaires, targeted at **students**, **teachers** and **senior managers**. Interviews were conducted with selected people who provided a view **nationally or institutionally**. Three **student focus groups** conducted by a PhD student and research assistant provided rich information to supplement the largely quantitative data from the student questionnaire.
- ES 1.3 Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) was founded in November 2012 as a "new integrated agency" (QQI.ie web site), taking over responsibility from the Irish University Quality Board (IUQB) and amalgamating the functions of three other agencies to oversee quality and standards in the whole HE sector. Previously oversight of plagiarism policies was not directly part of the institutional audit process, but could have arisen if a panel member raised a question or decided to explore some evidence in more depth.
- ES 1.4 In the Republic of Ireland external oversight of quality and standards at discipline and programme level provided through a system of external examiners, but also through professional accreditation panels.
- ES 1.5 It appears that most learning and assessment is individual rather than involving groups or teams. The amount of group working and team assessment reported was low, with 50% of responses saying there is 10% or less group work. The question about breakdown of assessment types showed that courses had a mixture of different types of assessment, ranging from 70% to 0% by formal examination and 10% to 50% by project work.

ES 2 Findings

- ES 2.1 Despite the system of scrutiny by quality agencies, confidential feedback from participants acting in external roles in Irish HEIs suggests that poor quality systems or inconsistent application of quality processes in some institutions may have led to cases of student plagiarism that have been either ignored or not recognised.
- ES 2.2 In common with most parts of Europe, no statistics are available for the Republic of Ireland on academic misconduct or plagiarism cases. *"There is not a picture [about the amount of plagiarism] nationally. It is up to individual institutions. In this institution there are no central figures; our policy says it should be done but at the moment it is not done"* (national interview).



- ES 2.3 The Royal Irish Academy is developing a policy for research integrity. According to a discussion document *“The incidence of research misconduct is difficult to determine, partly because of the relative absence of agreed national structures responsible for monitoring research integrity and collecting and collating relevant data...”* there is evidence that suggests it is underreported at the individual and institutional level” (RIA 2010 pp5). According to the national interviews, there is similar situation with statistics for academic misconduct at bachelor and master’s level.
- ES 2.4 There are concerns from some survey participants that institutional policies are not consistently being applied, for example *“I think it varies across the institution, with some schools or disciplines being more proactive than others”* (senior management survey).
- ES 2.5 Other HEIs have well designed systems, based on research elsewhere *“We have plagiarism advisors in each school and our institutional plagiarism policy is well circulated”* (senior management survey). There is also evidence of maturity of processes and systems in at least one HEI, where when problems were detected, after consultation, the policies were refined and training was provided.
- ES 2.6 As is to be expected the penalties appear to be less severe for assignments than plagiarism in major project or thesis components. The most common sanctions for an assignment appear to be formal warning, zero mark and rewriting, according to the responses from both teachers and students. The most common sanctions for the project appeared to be zero mark and either rewrite or repeat the work. A range of other sanctions appear to be available in more serious cases of dishonesty.
- ES 2.7 A view expressed in the teachers’ questionnaire is that some institutions may be too lenient with students: *“students should fail in many cases, but the University is very lax to enforce plagiarism penalties and takes a very soft approach on students”*. Another specific example of leniency was provided during an interview: *“There was a case of a student on a sports scholarship, a member of staff reported him for plagiarising, but it was not supported [by the authorities] and the plagiarism was ignored”* (national interview).
- ES 2.8 Software tools for aiding detection of plagiarism are being adopted and applied by at least some universities in Ireland. There is also evidence that tools are being used systematically for checking all assignments in some cases. The feedback from teachers and students also confirms that some students are allowed to make use of software tools to pre-check their work before submitting.
- ES 2.9 Students were generally confident that they understood plagiarism, but there was slightly less certainty about the technicalities of academic writing.
- ES 2.10 The main channel for education of students about plagiarism and academic dishonesty appears to be through tutors, in classes and through course handbooks and course handbooks and study guides. The responses confirm that some institutions also have specific and dedicated services and information for supporting students in academic integrity, perhaps through the university library or an academic support unit.
- ES 2.11 The number of useful and relevant suggestions demonstrates how knowledgeable the student participants were about this subject and high levels of interest in the IPPHEAE research. Adding to this evidence about prevention measures, 86% of teachers and 65% of

- student participants agreed that *it is possible to design coursework to reduce student plagiarism* (Annex IE-1 Qu S5o, T5t).
- ES 2.12 Many student participants received guidance, *in techniques for scholarly academic writing and anti-plagiarism issues* according to 50% of students and 71% of teacher respondents (Annex IE-1 Qu S5a, T5a), but 79% of students and 43% of the teachers said *they would like to have more training* (Annex IE-1 Qu S5b, T5p).
- ES 2.13 In response to two questions concerning academic writing skills 77% of students selected both *inability to cite and reference* and *difficulties in paraphrasing* as reasons for student plagiarism, compared to 64% and 86% respectively of the teachers.
- ES 2.14 Some of the student respondents and a few teachers appear to be unsure about what constitutes plagiarism (deliberate or accidental) by suggesting that blatant copying may not be plagiarism if some words are changed or if references are added. Lower percentages of respondents believed “punishment” was not appropriate even when some said they believed this was a case of plagiarism.
- ES 2.15 Only 7% of the teachers and 22% of student respondents believed that *all teachers follow the same procedures for similar cases of plagiarism*, with 71% and 31% respectively disagreeing with the statement (Annex IE-1 Qu S5l, T5q). There was a great difference between teacher and student responses to one of the questions. None of the teachers agreed with the statement *I believe the way teachers treat plagiarism does not vary from student to student*, with 71% disagreeing and 29% not sure. However 53% of the students did agree with the same statement, with 9% disagreeing and 36% not sure (Annex IE-1 Qu S5m, T5r).
- ES 2.16 Some Irish HEIs have made special provision the area of academic integrity by creating a workable and transparent system for discouraging plagiarism, supporting staff and student development in this area and managing accusations of plagiarism and academic dishonesty that may arise proportionately, consistently and fairly. As far as can be deduced from this limited sample of responses, this appears to be the general direction for other HEIs in the Republic of Ireland, although some have travelled farther than others on this journey.

ES 3 Recommendations

ES 3.1 Nationally

- ES 3.1.1 The national government should aim to provide funding for research and development in the Republic of Ireland in the area of increasing awareness of existing good practice in academic integrity;
- ES 3.1.2 The national agencies and professional bodies are encouraged to recognise and celebrate good practice in the sector regarding policies and procedures for addressing plagiarism;
- ES 3.1.3 The QQI should explore the introduction of a system for monitoring plagiarism and academic dishonesty cases, at institutional level at least, within the HE sector;
- ES 3.1.4 The Education Ministry should consider introducing educational information pre-university to support students in the transition to Higher Education.



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ES3.2 Institutionally

- ES 3.2.1 Institutional quality systems should be audited to ensure that all potential cases of academic misconduct within the institution are identified and dealt with equably, consistently, proportionally and fairly;
- ES 3.2.2 Systematic and compulsory training/development about academic writing skills should be provided for students at all levels when they first enrol; this should be reinforced and regularly revisited through embedding within curricula;
- ES 3.2.3 Information for students should be made readily available through a variety of media (web, course guides, posters, leaflets, classes) about the penalties and procedures for academic dishonesty;
- ES 3.2.5 Effective formative and systematic use should be made of software tools for text matching (eg Turnitin) to educate and prepare students for academic writing and research as well as for deterring plagiarism;
- ES 3.2.6 Regular, collegiate staff development should be available for all academic staff to foster good practice in academic integrity, identifying cases of plagiarism and design of assessment to discourage plagiarism;
- ES 3.2.7 Institutions should draw on the expertise and knowledge within the academic community in the Republic of Ireland and further afield to move towards a solid institutional strategy for assuring academic quality and integrity.

ES 3.3 Individual academics:

- ES 3.3.1 Support and guidance should be provided for students and colleagues across the sector in development of skills for academic writing and effective use of academic sources;
- ES 3.3.2 Academic staff should remain personally vigilant to uphold academic standards by identifying and responding appropriately to potential cases of academic dishonesty, particularly plagiarism, collusion and ghost-writing;
- ES 3.3.3 Academic staff are advised to keep up to date with developments in policies and good practice in academic integrity through staff development workshops and research.

ES4 Conclusions

Although the research in the Republic of Ireland involved a relatively small sample of people, some very good practice and awareness about plagiarism was revealed, but also evidence of less mature policies and systems elsewhere in the Irish HE sector. Student respondents were supportive of the research and aware of the need for much more guidance and support to improve their skills and knowledge. It is to be hoped that the recommendations are taken seriously and some improvements ensue.

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

Table 16: Student and teacher responses to questionnaire Question 5 (percentages)

Qu	Negative (1,2)		Don't know		Positive (4,5)		Statement
	student	teacher	student	teacher	student	teacher	
s5a t5a	38	21	10	7	50	71	<i>Students receive training in techniques for scholarly academic writing and anti-plagiarism issues</i>
s5b t5p	13	50	8	0	79	43	<i>I would like to have more training on avoidance of plagiarism and academic dishonesty</i>
s5c t5b	4	7	5	0	90	93	<i>This institution has policies and procedures for dealing with plagiarism</i>
t5c		14		0		86	<i>I believe this institution takes a serious approach to plagiarism prevention</i>
t5d		14		0		86	<i>I believe this institution takes a serious approach to plagiarism detection</i>
s5d t5e	19	14	6	0	73	86	<i>Plagiarism policies, procedures and penalties are available to students</i>
t5f		7		0		93	<i>Plagiarism policies, procedures and penalties are available to staff</i>
s5e t5g	4	7	53	29	42	64	<i>Penalties for plagiarism are administered according to a standard formula</i>
s5f t5h	41	14	40	29	18	57	<i>I know what penalties are applied to students for different forms of plagiarism and academic dishonesty</i>
s5g t5i	19	0	75	36	6	64	<i>Student circumstances are taken into account when deciding penalties for plagiarism</i>
s5h t5m	5	0	14	7	82	93	<i>The institution has policies and procedures for dealing with academic dishonesty</i>
t5j		0		71		29	<i>The penalties for academic dishonesty are separate from those for plagiarism</i>
t5k		7		71		21	<i>There are national regulations or guidance concerning plagiarism prevention within HEIs in this country</i>
t5l		7		71		21	<i>Our national quality and standards agencies monitor plagiarism and academic dishonesty in HEIs</i>
s5i t5n	50	14	27	57	20	21	<i>I believe one or more of my teachers/colleagues may have used plagiarised or unattributed materials in class notes</i>
s5j	50		15		35		<i>I have come across a case of plagiarism committed by a student at this institution</i>
s5k t5o	52	64	21	14	26	21	<i>I believe I may have plagiarised (accidentally or deliberately)</i>
s5l t5q	31	71	46	14	22	7	<i>I believe that all teachers follow the same procedures for similar cases of plagiarism</i>
s5m t5r	9	71	36	29	53	0	<i>I believe that the way teachers treat plagiarism does not vary from student to student</i>
s5n t5s	1	29	30	29	70	43	<i>I believe that when dealing with plagiarism teachers follow the existing/required procedures</i>
s5o t5t	11	0	19	7	65	86	<i>It is possible to design coursework to reduce student plagiarism</i>
s5p t5u	11	0	57	64	29	36	<i>I think that translation across languages is used by some students to avoid detection of plagiarism</i>
s5q	19		6		35		<i>The previous institution I studied was less strict about plagiarism than this institution</i>
s5r	24		14		63		<i>I understand the links between copyright, Intellectual property rights and plagiarism</i>