



Impact of Policies for Plagiarism in Higher Education Across Europe

Plagiarism Policies in Sweden

Full Report

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1. Information sources

Information about policies and procedures for plagiarism in Sweden was collected through

- One on-line questionnaire responses from students;
- Structured interviews with two senior academics and an expert consultant in academic integrity with experience of research in Sweden;
- A student focus group conducted by video-conferencing;
- Documentation, research papers and on-line evidence.

Interviews were conducted via Skype. The national level questions focused on national and institutional policies and procedures relating to plagiarism prevention and detection in Sweden. The information collected provided useful background both historical and recent developments in Higher Education in Sweden and how this has impacted on student plagiarism.

Table 1 summarises the responses received to different elements of the survey.

| Country | Student Questionnaire responses | Teacher Questionnaire responses | Senior Management and National | Student Focus and Groups | Organisations and Institutions | | |
|--|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|--------------|
| Sweden | 7 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3 | | |
| Breakdown of student responses by domicile and award | Home students | Other EU students | Non-EU students | Not known | Bachelor, diploma | Master, doctor | Blank, other |
| Sweden | 7 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 7 | 0 |

Many requests were made to contacts at universities in Sweden for the on-line questionnaires to be completed by students, academic teaching staff and senior managers. However, disappointingly very few responses were received. The evidence presented in this report draws to some extent on all these responses, but relies heavily on interviews conducted with three senior academics with excellent knowledge and experience of the Swedish higher educational sector. This report was reviewed by the interviewees.

Where possible the *colour coded* voices of the participants, have been used to inform and enrich the narrative.

2. Higher Education in Sweden

Sweden was said to be a country with over *“9 million people and a fairly homogeneous approach”* (national interview). Sweden has 34 public Higher Education Institutions (HEI), comprising 14 universities, 20 university colleges, and several independent HEIs. In 2010 there were 468,458 registered students in total in Sweden of which 320,925 were full-time. Seven Swedish HEIs each had more than 15,000 full-time equivalent students (Högskoleverket 2010 p 21, 22). The institutions together offer a mixture of academic subjects and higher vocational training. In 2012 257,000 “first-time” students were admitted to HE. About 60% of HE students in Sweden are female (Facts about Sweden).

The Swedish national government provides the majority of funding for higher education mainly from tax revenue, with no tuition fees charged for Swedish, Swiss and EU/EEA students, with grants and loans available for Swedish students. *“Until 2 years ago it was illegal to charge anyone for education. International students discovered this”*, which led to a large influx of non-EU international HE students.

Subsequently, *“the law was changed and now they pay fees”* (national interview). Fees for non-EU students were introduced from 2011, but a scholarship and grants programme ensures that highly qualified students from “development countries” can still access the higher education provided in Sweden (Facts about Sweden).

Although “universities and colleges ... make their own decisions about the content of courses, admissions and grades”, there is some central control in Sweden for Higher Education. Until recently the Högskoleverket was responsible for quality assurance in Swedish HEIs. From 1st January 2013 the Higher Education Authority (Universitetskanslersämbetet) and the Swedish Council for Higher Education (Universitets och högskolerådet) were established to oversee quality and standards in HEIs (Facts about Sweden).

“The Swedish Council for Higher Education is responsible for admission issues, information concerning university-level studies, assessments of foreign qualifications, and international co-operation, among other things. The Swedish Higher Education Authority mainly has a scrutinising function, and is responsible both for reviewing the quality of higher education and granting degree-awarding powers. It is also responsible for the supervision of universities and university colleges, and for maintaining official statistics” (Facts about Sweden).

Swedish HEIs encourage learner-centred studies and critical thinking, with less class contact time and role learning and more group-work than in many EU countries. Many programmes are taught in English, which, together with the generous funding support, helps to attract international students.

3. Quality Assurance in Swedish Higher Education - teaching, learning and assessment

As stated above the Swedish Higher Education Authority is now responsible for oversight of process and quality assurance in HEIs, which takes the form of a subject level review every four years.

The Authority has *“permanent employees with 2 committees per subject, typically 3 academics, 2 Swedish and one other”*; *“... they are concerned with subject currency and delivery, learning objectives. They look at assessment, undergraduate dissertations (almost exclusively)”*; *“They don’t look at the library facilities or interview students”*; *“If the institution does not pass then they cannot operate the course”*; *“As a result of this [audit visit] universities’ examining rights are either confirmed or taken away, but [the latter] rarely happens”* (national interviews).

According to one respondent at programme level within institutions the *“standards assurance mechanism is a type of external examining”* in that it provides some external scrutiny for academic programmes, but there were *“no external examiners at bachelor level”*. External scrutiny does apply at PhD level and, although not required, sometimes can be included for master’s level theses. This policy implies that oversight of standards for the undergraduate and master’s programmes is not considered important.

Respondents expressed confidence that this ensured there were equivalent *“standards across institutions”* (national interviews), because of strong communications in the academic community in Sweden. Perhaps this confidence is misplaced or overstated.

Increasingly Swedish universities are working with international partners, within Europe and beyond. The survey explored plagiarism in the international context:

“We had an Erasmus agreement with a Spanish University. I found cases of plagiarism and raised this with the partner. This was highly prestigious business school with part-time teachers. This was not part of their culture. The agreement was stopped. They were not aware of plagiarists; it was a shock to them. We have to respond and set a good example, not to be silent, we need to speak out but in a polite way” (national interview).

This quotation highlights the need for vigilance in quality assurance matters when working with partners and also the urgent need for developing shared educational standards at least across EU member states.

4. Academic Integrity and Plagiarism in Sweden

4.1 Strategies, policies and procedures for academic integrity in Sweden

The national Higher Education Authority and previously the Högskoleverket, requires HEIs to maintain statistics on various metrics, including academic misconduct cases and outcomes. The statistics are submitted annually to the Authority and a report is produced that summarises the national situation. The report from 2010, shows that 750 cases of academic misconduct were recorded nationally during the previous academic year, resulting in 591 suspensions and 159 warnings (Högskoleverket 2010 p 21, 22). A more recent report relating to the 2012 academic year shows a rise to 801 nationally recorded cases that resulted in 621 suspensions and 180 warnings (Universitetskanslersämbetet 2012 p 8).

It is clear from the 2012 data, as shown on an interesting graph (press release Universitet-Kanslersämbetet 18/10/2013, 2013 report p10), that a small number of institutions detected many more cases than others as a percentage of student population. This discrepancy may be because some institutions have more robust systems than others for detecting and recording cases. Despite the apparent rising trend the overall number of reported cases is relatively low considering the amount of assessed work that students undertake (examinations, essays, theses etc). This relatively low number of cases nationally may in part be due to the requirement in Sweden for an accuser to demonstrate that the person intended to plagiarise. The onus is on teachers to provide evidence where plagiarism has occurred in student work.

Of all the types of disciplinary offences, plagiarism remains the most common reason in Sweden, with 460 allegations upheld in 2012, which was down 11% from the cases recorded in 2011 (press release, Universitet-Kanslersämbetet).

Despite being one of the few countries where data on academic dishonesty is collected locally and centrally, the feedback from the national interviewees suggests lack of confidence in the national data, based on responses to a question about whether they were *aware of any increase in the incidence of student plagiarism in recent years in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) [in Sweden]? (specifically at master's and bachelor levels)*:

"The trend in the reporting is upwards";

"I'm not aware and I don't think anyone is. I'm aware of reported cases but we don't know; we can only rely on estimates. In comparison crime detection statistics have sophisticated mechanisms. My instinct is to be highly sceptical about claims – my gut feeling is that we have been made much more aware of the issue through publicity, reporting has not always been proportional";

"Yes I do believe this is true, but not sure whether there is any strong evidence. As diversity of students goes up there is an obvious increase in cut and paste. Straight undergrad students are now much more aware, but not necessarily any better at knowing what this means";

"I'm aware of plagiarists, not to say increase even if just 10 in board for one year then this is too many – pick up figure quite quickly, less than 50 in 7000 students. Majority cheat in written exams";

"I don't know if everyone follows the policy of using Urkund. For thesis work 95% goes via Urkund. [Even if feedback looks OK] it is not absolutely guaranteed that it is not plagiarism" (national Interviews).

Reasons behind the lack of confidence in the national data include lack of uniformity in institutional processes and policies. *“There are crude attempts to amalgamate, but the [institutional] data is unsuitable”* for comparison. *“National data in Sweden? This is very distorted, it is a huge unaddressed issue. There can be one third of [nationally reported] cases in one institution”*, implying that a few universities may have more effective institutional policies than others.

It was suggested that in Sweden for academic misconduct cases *“the average [waiting] time per case is 11.5 months. Even then who knows, stack of papers 4-5 inches high, facing a retired judge, vice chancellor, students union, poor little students”*. However a different view was that *“typically meetings are scheduled within about 4 weeks of the matter being raised”*, which suggests that there may have been recent improvements, or that some institutions are more efficient than others at scheduling disciplinary panels.

The penalties available to the disciplinary panel are limited to two options *“they write a letter that says don’t do it again or you can ask the student to step down from the university for in theory up to 6 months, in reality even in the most dire cases never get more than 2 weeks, denied assessment, library access, that’s all the punishment you can get”* (national interview).

The experiences of international students were mentioned several times in the interviews. If they are accused of misconduct students may be forced to wait for a decision on their future after making a genuine mistake, *“often these students are newly arrived masters students from say China or India”*, but also the sanctions applied may not be proportionate, perhaps *“... they do something really vile and all they get is a brief suspension, which people think is not really sufficient to match the severity of cases”* (national interviews).

When asked about the tendency for examiners to ignore plagiarism one respondent said *“I’d be very surprised if there were not an awful lot of that. It is a sacking offence. Most teachers do it”*. Another view was that *“nobody trusts the systems and so cases don’t get recorded. It is a really difficult situation”*. Conversely *“there are some extreme cases of teachers who genuinely believed there was no intention to cheat, but were reported by students for dereliction of duty”* (national interviews).

Regarding measures for deterring plagiarism: *“there is a requirement to inform and document every system provided to counter plagiarism, including that students answer a quiz. Students asked to agree to a statement that they have ‘read university policy on plagiarism and understand it’ – a meaningless statement”*. It was asserted that *“regarding prevention, most institutions have discovered individually”* through experience how to discourage plagiarism and develop a culture of honesty (national interviews).

Although the national recording process in Sweden is well intentioned, the examples here provide evidence that the current system is not working well in its current form.

4.2 Research and development in academic integrity and plagiarism

A consultant to this project and former UK academic Jude Carroll spent one academic year in 2008-9 working in Sweden advising on aspects of academic integrity, within HEIs and with the national quality agency for HE (Högskoleverket). During this time she held a series of seminars in Stockholm with about 50-60 people attending and building up a community, leading to some really useful and detailed discussions *“then it just died, I went away and people went and did other things”* (from conversation with Jude Carroll). A publication arising from this secondment was a guide for teachers on avoiding plagiarism (Carroll and Zetterling 2009) written in both Swedish and English. This guide describes a measured approach to identifying the difference in student work between poor academic practice and a deliberate attempt to deceive. The publication also advises on a range of responses to cases of minor to major plagiarism to ensure that the lengthy legalistic disciplinary process in Sweden is only invoked in the most serious cases.

Diane Pecorari is Professor of English Linguistics at Linnaeus University in Sweden and a prolific author. She has researched aspects of plagiarism and intertextuality from a linguistic perspective and also in non-native language writing. She is the author of three recent books on academic writing of which two directly concern plagiarism (Pecorari 2008, 2013). Several journal papers, both individually and co-authored, are also of direct relevance to the study of policies for academic integrity in Sweden (Pecorari 2012, Pecorari et al 2012, Sutherland-Smith and Pecorari 2010, Pecorari and Shaw 2010 and several other publications).

The following quotation raises two issues pertinent to the IPPHEAE research:

“About a year ago, I was asked to speak about plagiarism to a group of public health students. They were engaged, bright people and keen to learn the standards they were expected to meet in their writing. However, when I showed them examples of writing that have been condemned as plagiarism, they became worried. Many expressed the view that if re-using even anodyne, formulaic sentences is illegitimate, then not only is the bar set too high, but they might unknowingly stumble over it. Answering their fears and concerns was made more difficult by the awareness that the various teachers responsible for their education would provide different and inconsistent answers to questions about what is allowed”.
(Pecorari 2012)

As this extract states, many students may reuse phrases and sentences their writing either legitimately in the form of “stock phrases”, patch-writing or inadvertently plagiarising because they don’t understand how to mark up their work to appropriately acknowledge sources. However, where institutional disciplinary procedures and guidelines are absent, vague or, conversely, very bureaucratic or draconian, it is likely that different academics would view the same situation in different ways, potentially leading to widely varying outcomes for students depending on their tutor. The ensuing inconsistencies are fundamentally unfair to students. However this encapsulates the current situation in higher education not just in Sweden but also in many other parts of Europe.

The reflective reports by the Högskoleverket provide information on trends, how practices are developing and indications on where policies need to be revised (Högskoleverket 2010). However the lack of comparability of the institutional data limits the usefulness of the advice and the statistical tables.

4.3 IPPHEAE survey findings on policies and procedures

Although student responses to the on-line questionnaire are limited in number, they reveal some interesting perceptions.

Question 7 of the Student and teacher questionnaire asked: *What would happen if a student at your institution was found guilty of plagiarism in their assignment or final project/dissertation?* The responses are summarised in Table 3. There was only one teacher response.

The responses in Table 3 clearly indicated that *no action* was not a valid option for Sweden. For plagiarism in an assignment every option proposed was selected by at least one respondent. The most selected responses were the award of zero mark and rewriting the assignment, both selected by the teacher and 71% of the students. Also 43% of students and the teacher also selected *fail the module or subject*.

The responses were different for a major piece of work such as a project, but with some of the lighter options such as a verbal warning were still selected by some respondents. Interestingly, although 43% of the students believed they could be expelled from the institution for plagiarism in their project, the teacher did not select this option.

Table 3: Sanctions for plagiarism %

| Assignment | | Project or Dissertation | | |
|------------|---------|-------------------------|---------|--|
| Student | Teacher | Student | Teacher | |
| 0% | | 0% | | No action would be taken |
| 57% | | 9% | | Verbal warning |
| 29% | | 14% | | Formal warning letter |
| 71% | X | 14% | | Request to re write it properly |
| 71% | X | 14% | | Zero mark for the work |
| 14% | X | 0% | | Repeat the module or subject |
| 43% | X | 0% | | Fail the module or subject |
| 14% | | 14% | | Repeat the whole year of study |
| 29% | | 29% | X | Fail the whole programme or degree |
| 29% | | 29% | | Expose the student to school community |
| 14% | | 29% | X | Suspended from the institution |
| 29% | | 43% | | Expelled from the institution |
| 14% | | 29% | | Suspend payment of student grant |
| 14% | | 14% | | Other |

Further feedback from the other levels of the survey, particularly the interviews reported earlier in paragraph 4.2, suggested that a period of suspension is the normal outcome if a student is found guilty by a formal disciplinary panel.

“Where there is well founded suspicion of intent to deceive or mislead, the incident must be reported to the Vice Chancellor. Not covered is where there is no intent to deceive, for example patch-writing”; “Penalties are warning or suspension, for plagiarism student can be suspended for up to 6 weeks, which normally means a whole terms’ work is lost, depending on timing”; “6 months exclusion, 3 months, re-mark the work, in most cases students are excluded for 1 month with no access to the university” (national interviews).

It was also suggested by interviewees that no lasting penalty, such as a capped mark, was applied after a suspended student was reinstated and allowed to progress.

Although 100% of the student respondents agreed that *the institution where I now study has policies and procedures for dealing with plagiarism*, only 71% agreed *that the plagiarism policies, procedures and penalties are available to students*, with 29% not sure. On consistency of approach 57% of students agreed that teachers follow the same procedures for similar cases of plagiarism, with 43% not sure. However only 29% agreed with the statement *I believe that the way teachers treat plagiarism does not vary from student to student*, with 43% not sure and 14% disagreeing. 58% agreed that their previous institution was less strict about plagiarism than their current institution, with 29% disagreeing and 14% selecting *not sure*.

The above findings suggest more could be done to advise students about the policies. There is also an implication that some students may be aware of inconsistencies in the way staff deal with plagiarism cases.

57% of student respondents agreed that *one or more of my teachers may have used plagiarised or unattributed materials in class notes*, with 29% disagreeing and 14% not sure. However 86% of students disagreed that they *have come across a case of plagiarism committed by a student at this institution*, with 14% agreeing. The same percentages were recorded for the statement *I believe I may have plagiarised (accidentally or deliberately)*.

There were opposing views expressed in response to the question *are policies and procedures in Swedish HEI effective for detecting and preventing plagiarism?*

“Never know, the instinct is to be sceptical because we only deal with what to do when detected, we don’t address how to detect”;

“Yes policy, we have that rule, all faculty have a high degree of integrity. I don’t think it would just get through – I have no reason to think so”;

“In Sweden the system is so flawed, can’t rely on it” (national interviews).

“Every 4th year programmes checked by the accreditation authority: Looking, reading a sample of theses, meet students and faculty, check web site, courses - assessment report provided for each programme. It is a small country, we know people all over the country. Regulated, consistent, honesty. Of course we have cause [not to be complacent]” (national interview).

Despite the last comment, the overall impression from the research there is a hint of some misplaced confidence and complacency in Sweden that is likely to be masking inconsistencies and pockets of poor practice.

4.4 Use of text-matching software for detecting and deterring plagiarism

Innovative research on the application of software tools to aid detection of plagiarism was reported by colleagues from University of Stockholm In addition to papers (Pecorari and Shaw and Razera et al) mentioned earlier, Appelgren and colleagues compared efficiency and efficacy of three different digital tools and recommended complementary activities to software for detecting plagiarism (Appelgren et al 2012). Larsson and Hansson’s paper (2012) reported on the development of a local system for both prevention and detection of plagiarism in student theses, to be used in conjunction with text matching software, utilising a system of peer review.

The software tool Urkund is widely used in Sweden for submission of student theses in Swedish and Turnitin is also used by some institutions, mainly for work in English. One national interviewee said they *“have a good system with Turnitin and Urkund, but [I have seen] cases not detected”*. As this point implies, it is crucial that academic staff understand the limitations in the detection and reporting capabilities of the software tools, to ensure they are not over-reliant on what is presented and appreciate the need for interpretation and academic judgment.

“The higher education authorities have no top-down regulation of detection policies, but Urkund is widely used, a coalition of Swedish Universities has negotiated a group license, provides joint IT resources”; *“... I don’t know if everyone follows the policy of using Urkund. Thesis work - 95% goes via Urkund. [Even if feedback looks OK] it is not absolutely guaranteed that it is not plagiarism”* (National Interview).

Regular, systematic use of such tools for all written student work over time will help to increase their value and effectiveness by expanding the number of sources in the repository. Systematic use will also provide a means of ensuring consistency of approach within and between institutions. Although the digital aids are useful, it is crucial that academics understand the limitations of software to detect and recognise plagiarism and are encouraged to use the information they provide intelligently.

4.5 English language programmes and international students

The growing amount of English language teaching in Sweden brings some complications for the detection of plagiarism: *“teaching in English is problematic – If it is not [a teacher’s] first language then it is much harder for them to detect plagiarism”;* *“teachers, even strong English speaking colleagues, can’t spot plagiarism in the same way a native speaker can see it”* (national interview).

A combination of factors, including language skills of the examiner, weaknesses in some of the software tools for detecting plagiarism together with absence of double marking or moderation in most assessment increases the potential for student plagiarism to be overlooked.

There was acknowledgement by one respondent that cultural and educational differences can be a source of confusion for international students *“take cases discussed with students all over the world,*

China, Bangladesh, it may be that professors are happy if students use their text. There is a need to change the mind-set of lecturers [and students] that this is wrong” (national interview).

One respondent explained some challenges to academia arising from the increasing diversity of the student population in Sweden: *“10% of the Swedish population are immigrants who don’t have Swedish as first language, they have shaky grasp in academic discourse and it is problematic if they come to university without skills, particularly language capability. They are less likely to do writing that meets our required standards, for example [students from] Thailand. English language programmes now allow admission. Underfunded universities admit students with inadequate qualifications resulting in negative outcomes and student visa problems. It is a relatively small problem still, but not restricted to just one or two universities. Sweden is new to the business of recruiting international students, therefore administratively, no alarm bells ring”.*

It is clear from studying research from other countries (for example Robinson-Pant 2009), Pecorari and Shaw 2012) that international students need very specific support that is different the provision for local students, particularly when they first enrol in the institution. To be fair to teachers and students, institutional admissions policies should be designed to safeguard against allowing entry to students with weak language skills, but, unfortunately financial aspects may sometimes take priority.

4.6 Making systems and procedures more effective

In some ways Sweden is ahead of other countries in having a nationally applied system for recording and responding to cases of academic dishonesty. However the judicial formalities, high level of panellists officiating, timescale and institutional level of disciplinary hearings can make this process unsuitable for all except cases of serious academic misconduct or research fraud. Crucially, unless the national and institutional systems are fair, proportional and efficient, academic staff will be discouraged from reporting cases of plagiarism and academic dishonesty.

The sanctions or penalties available to disciplinary panels are restricted to warnings and suspensions, starting at one week and up to a maximum of six months (Higher Education Ordinance, Chapter 10). However, ideally *“what you need is a range of penalties to match the range of cases”* to suit the scale of severity of the offences committed. *“Because Sweden does not have that, nobody trusts the systems and so cases don’t get recorded”* (national interview)

National interviewees were asked about any plans to review or change the current systems: this is *“not under debate right now, the system is quite good how to follow up on cases”*; *“There is no substantive discussion that altering or revising the current process is on anyone’s agenda. Not everyone is happy. From my perspective it works reasonably well and provides consistent responses for cases that come to the board”* (national interview).

There was contradiction in feedback from two respondents, one complaining about time-scales typically waiting over one year for the disciplinary panel to meet to discuss a case and a second interviewee saying the panel must meet within four weeks of the case being identified. It is not clear whether the discrepancy could be accounted for by recent changes to the process to address the delays or by institutional policy differences.

There is an interesting distinction in the Swedish regulations compared to other countries that affects the academic’s initial front-line role in deciding whether there is a disciplinary case to answer: *“What does not work well is that there is the obligation is to consider intention, the offence is then the intent to deceive, not plagiarism itself. It works well in the sense that it puts pressure on teachers to consider that question”*. *“Where there is well founded suspicion of intent to deceive or mislead, the incident must be reported to the Vice Chancellor. Not covered is where there is no intent to deceive, for example patch writing”* (national interviews).

In many cases of plagiarism it can be very difficult and time-consuming to establish proof of intention. This complication in the system raises questions about how academics address students who are

suspected of plagiarism, what range of responses there are for advising students about poor academic practice and how grading in perceived unintentionally plagiarised work is handled. There is inherent danger here for inconsistencies of response, intimidation of students and possible negligence in guiding advising students when a case was viewed as not proven. No evidence was found that any of the institutions involved in the research had policies for addressing these and related key issues.

There was recognition that institutions should continue to offer training in dealing with plagiarism and in ensuring students have the necessary skills. One approach was to ask experts to “*come and speak about plagiarism, writing using sources, who and what can and can’t do, go about resolving grey areas, basic topics like reasons for referencing, argumentative writing, bringing other voices into your text, writing well, preventative measures for plagiarism. Writing is a skill that needs to be taught as a process*” (national interview).

5. Perceptions and Understanding of Plagiarism

5.1 Support and guidance

86% of student respondents agreed and 14% strongly agreed that *I have received training in techniques for scholarly academic writing and anti-plagiarism issues*. 57% of student respondents disagreed with the statement *I would like to have more training on avoidance of plagiarism and academic dishonesty*, 29% agreed and 14% did not respond. Responses to the statement *I understand the links between copyright, Intellectual property rights and plagiarism* were mixed, with 43% either disagreeing or not sure and 57% agreeing. All student respondents from Sweden became aware of plagiarism and learned how to cite and reference sources either before they started (57%) or during (43%) their undergraduate studies.

According to student participants the most common means of communicating with students about plagiarism and academic dishonesty was through workshops or lectures (86%) and within course booklets.

All student respondents confirmed there is a preferred referencing style in use at their institution. Most students (71%) said they were confident about referencing and citation. 57% of the student respondents said they found paraphrasing difficult and 29% said they had problems locating good quality sources and the same percentage found referencing difficult.

5.2 Understanding plagiarism

Most student respondents showed a good grasp of what constitutes plagiarism. When provided with scenarios about potential student plagiarism 89% of the student respondents correctly identified the most obvious example of plagiarism, with 71% saying it was serious plagiarism (*40% identical to other sources with no quotation marks or acknowledgements*), but only 71% said they believed that sanctions should be applied in this case. Responses to the same scenario, but where some words had been changed showed slightly less certainty, reducing to 14% believing this was serious plagiarism and 71% saying it was plagiarism, but with only 57% believing sanctions should be applied.

5.3 Factors affecting the incidence and detection of plagiarism

Ghost-writing is recognised as a growing problem in UK universities. However when asked about whether this phenomenon had been identified in Sweden one interviewee appeared to have little knowledge: “*There have been no cases of students buying essays – could be a risk that they could get through, hard to discover. Some students are presenting ready text, I’m very suspicious when seeing that. I like to see how the text is developed. It is the only way to be sure they have [done the work themselves]*” (national interview).

Regarding the origin of student essays and written assignments, there is no evidence of how widespread the practice may be, but *“it is low risk to get someone to do the work for them. Taking a programme of between 3 and 5 years, if they do it once they will keep on doing it”* (national interview).

It was suggested that high staff workloads can have a direct effect on whether a case of plagiarism is pursued or not by a teacher: *“10 theses to supervise then it is OK, 25 is a problem. How serious are you, other duties, again the system must be to recognise academic quality and integrity. Huge number, more students in HE across the world affects academic quality”* (national interview).

It is clear from this evidence that Sweden has a number of challenges yet to address. Other than (where possible) maintaining close contact on student progress during the supervision of the student thesis, no evidence emerged of systems for verifying authorship and originality in other work.

6. Examples of good practice

The national recording and annual reporting of institutional statistics is to be commended. However as it was not apparent whether all institutional systems had the same degree of rigour in detecting and recording cases, the implications of these statistics were not clear.

One institution at least identified the need to provide support for teaching staff. Some teachers were found to be *“not 100% confident with language: international students are writing in English, Swedish students in Swedish”* (national interview), which made it more difficult for them to detect student plagiarism than would be the case for a native speaker. To guide the teachers *“extra classes were provided, the first course 3 weeks, 10 weeks in total. The course covered how to read a text, write a text, put through Urkund Urkund will find [copied text] immediately – if plagiarism comes up then it must go to disciplinary board and follow the process. All faculty for Higher Education went through this training”* (national interview).

According to one participant *“in my previous university I built up a subject programme with aspects of progression, showing what needs to be provided across the undergrad degree programme to deliver skills for writing etc, I was proud of it. The emphasis was on teaching how to write and use sources – constructive alignment, learning activities were aligned with assessment”* (national interview), but it had not been possible so far to replicate this in their new university.

One interviewee spoke of the fundamental ethos of honesty in Sweden and about the *“closeness between faculty and students, they follow process with clear guidance and do not accept [bad practice]. Plagiarism or mistakes must be reported. People follow the rules, leading to good integrity and high standards”* (national interview).

7. Discussion

From the very small amount of questionnaire data collected for Sweden it is not possible to know how representative the evidence is for the HE sector as a whole. As with other countries, the national participants were a self-selected minority of well-informed professionals who generally had a positive message to convey about national and institutional policies. However it was possible to ascertain, from their wider knowledge and the full range of responses to the survey, that although there were good practice examples, there were many areas where the Swedish systems could be improved.

Although Sweden has national regulation, the universities remain distinct and autonomous. The collection of statistics at national level and periodic reporting of trends across the HE sector was commendable practice that was believed to be unique to Sweden. One well-regarded participant reported great inconsistencies between and within institutions in terms of internal practices. However it was not possible to verify this from the data collected. However it is clear that to make the

information more meaningful, institutions must work together towards establishing parity in what data is collected and ensure that their internal policies and systems are sufficiently aligned and effective, thereby making the data comparable.

The ready availability of software tools for aiding the detection of plagiarism provides an advantage for Swedish HEIs compared to institutions in many EU countries. However there did appear to be some over-confidence in what these tools can bring to the process and less awareness than had been seen in other areas of Europe about how to respond to more difficult problems including ghost-written work.

It is clear that the national agencies in Sweden are determined to implement innovative ways to maintain and improve standards in higher education. However some weaknesses of the national system that were identified by participants were:

- Difficulty of proving “intent” to deceive;
- Limited number and type of sanctions available (warning letter or temporary exclusion) to match possible range of misconduct cases that could arise;
- Bureaucracy that discourages reporting cases of dishonesty.

The danger arising from this situation is that by ignoring cases of plagiarism, students may not receive the required guidance and advice to allow their writing and research skills to develop.

8. *Recommendations for Sweden*

8.1 *Nationally*

- 8.1.1 Findings from this research suggest that the current institutional disciplinary panel system in Sweden discourages the reporting cases of plagiarism. It also suggests that teachers stated lack of confidence in the reliability and accuracy of figures is justified. The difficult requirement for proving “intent” in cases of dishonesty and plagiarism appears to compound the problem of under-reporting. To increase the likelihood that possible disciplinary cases are raised, recorded and dealt with consistently and fairly, it is recommended that institutions should be encouraged to review their policies for academic integrity. Reviews should focus on making them less bureaucratic and less onerous for academic teachers. Revisions should place plagiarism management within student development and should stress support and education.
- 8.1.2 The guidance to academic teachers and sanctions for academic dishonesty available to HEIs should be reviewed in order to provide a range of different penalties. Mechanisms need to be devised to ensure penalties are applied to the different categories of misconduct that can arise and to encourage consistent application across all institutions and within institutions themselves.
- 8.1.3 Without impacting on institutional autonomy, institutions should be encouraged to strengthen their internal processes to work towards consistency of approach (internally and externally) in discouraging, identifying and recording academic dishonesty and plagiarism.
- 8.1.4 Institutions should be encouraged and perhaps rewarded for sharing good practice in academic integrity across the HE sector. Swedish HEIs may wish to consult with institutions in other countries to promote new ideas and to learn from others.
- 8.1.5 Policies and systems for quality assurance and academic integrity should apply at all levels of higher education, starting with bachelor level.
- 8.1.6 Interviewees referred to high standards of integrity and uniformity of thinking across Swedish academia. However from an external viewpoint, it is worth reflecting that there

may be some complacency in areas where institutional policy and systems could be strengthened. These small steps should promote higher academic standards, greater accuracy and comparability in the institutional data collected in Sweden.

8.2 *Institutionally*

8.2.1 At the earliest opportunity, all HEIs should explore the efficacy of their internal policies for upholding academic integrity and determine whether they are fit for purpose.

8.2.2 Institutions should communicate and consult about improving aspects of academic integrity with academic staff and researchers across the institution, across the Swedish HE sector and internationally with partners and researchers.

8.2.3 Institutions should consider implementing revised systems for discouraging, detecting and recording cases of academic misconduct;

8.2.4 If not already in place, institutions should be sure to instigate training for all academic teaching staff about methods for discouraging academic dishonesty and plagiarism

8.2.5 If not already in place, ensure that students and teacher at all levels have adequate knowledge of

- Techniques and conventions for academic writing;
- How to identify scholarly sources and apply the information in their writing;
- What is meant by academic integrity;
- The policies, systems and consequences for academic dishonesty.

8.2.6 Institutions should ensure that assurance for academic integrity is included in their quality assurance policies and systems.

8.2.7 Admissions policies for international students should ensure students are not admitted to degree programmes without evidence of suitable language skills.

8.3 Individual academics

8.3.1 Academic teachers should familiarise themselves with institutional policies of academic integrity and encourage revising systems where weaknesses become apparent.

8.3.2 Academic teachers are advised to communicate with colleagues to support less experienced teachers in order to reach a consensus on what constitutes inappropriate conduct and how to respond in a consistent manner in application of the policy.

8.3.3 Teachers should not assume that all students already have adequate knowledge in academic writing conventions and understanding aspects of academic integrity, particularly international students.

8.3.4 Teachers should ensure all students understand about ethical values and consequences of academic dishonesty.

8.3.5 Teachers are advised to remain alert to the possibilities of ghost-written and purchased work by students and ensure that such cases are fully explored and dealt with appropriately.

8.3.6 Careful design of assessments can help to discourage student plagiarism. For example, teachers should set different tasks, exercises, research projects for each new cohort of students, where possible individualising the work for each student and ensure no stock solutions are available that students can download.

9. Conclusions

At the time of the survey only two countries in Europe were found to be taking the initiative to centrally record academic misconduct cases in higher education, Sweden and Austria. Austria does not make the findings publicly available. Sweden is the only country to publish the statistics in annual reports. The availability of statistics is commendable and provides an excellent starting point for a system of monitoring responses to academic integrity. The established policies for institutional disciplinary panels, sanctions and the need to show intent for plagiarism cases bring some clarity to the decision making processes for the academic community.

However there were clear indications from this research that the higher education policies and systems in Sweden were seen as overly bureaucratic and inflexible, leading to avoidance by some people in the academic community. There were also indications of complacency within institutions, particularly leading to disparities in the way institutional policies were implemented. Further, differences in how institutions collected and recorded the data rendered the institutional statistics incomparable.

The needs and different viewpoints of the student population should be factored in to any policies, nationally or institutionally. The nuances of policies, systems and standard sanctions need to ensure any cases are quickly resolved, reflect the gravity of different offences and underlying reasons or motives behind perceived misconduct cases. Ultimately students should be allowed space to learn from small mistakes while ensuring that academic standards are not undermined.

The aim of finding ways of reducing plagiarism is paramount. The strong culture of collegiality within and across institutional communities in Sweden is a great asset for spreading good practice. There is existing expertise in academic integrity research and practices in Sweden that should be utilised to ensure that the entire academic community is working towards the same goal; particularly educating the student community and applying learning and assessment techniques help to discourage student plagiarism and academic dishonesty.

By addressing the recommendations arising from this research at the different levels, the systems for assuring academic integrity in Sweden would be considerably strengthened and could become the best overall in the European Union.

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