Plagiarism Policies in Denmark

Full report

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Impact of Policies for Plagiarism in Higher Education Across Europe

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1. *Information sources*

While implementing the project there were many difficulties in obtaining survey responses from students, teachers and managers. Despite numerous requests to cooperate with Danish HEIs the project team was not given permission to conduct research on the target groups. As a result only on the basis of personal contacts of project team members was it possible to obtain answers from 15 respondents- 13 students and 2 teachers and one interview at institutional level.

Unfortunately it is not possible to know how representative this small sample is and impossible to generalise on the basis of these answers. However this report provides relevant analyses based on the available evidence referring to the issues of plagiarism, the reasons for it, ways of preventing and punishments for using somebody's property rights.

The report includes a short overview of the higher education sector and the system of quality assurance in Denmark. This will allow comparison of the Danish educational system with others.

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

Table 1: Breakdown of Survey responses							
Country		Student responses	Teacher responses	Senior Management and National		Student Focus Groups	Organisations and Institutions
Denmark		13	2	1		0	5
Breakdown of student responses	Home students	Other EU students	Non-EU students	Not known	Bachelor, diploma	Master, doctor	Blank, other
Denmark	13	13	0	0	0	11	1	1

This summary also draws on publications about research into quality assurance in Denmark and some on-line material available on web sites and blogs.

2. *Higher Education in Denmark*

Higher education in Denmark are regulated and governed by the state. Danish higher educational institutions have a certain level of autonomy but are required to adhere to all the national regulations. This must be done both for teacher qualifications, degree structures and examination processes. This provides all students in Denmark with an education of high international quality and relevance. Furthermore, many institutions have obtained international accreditation for their programmes.

All HEIs in Denmark apply the *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System* (ECTS), which facilitates international credit transfer. Students will obtain certificates or other types of official documentation once the courses are completed. Upon graduation from a first cycle or second cycles study a Diploma Supplement is issued. All educational institutions in Denmark have adopted a

common set of ethical guidelines (Code of Conduct). These rules refer to the recruitment, admission and education of international students. The Code of Conduct applies both to exchange students and full degree students.

Four types of higher education institutions offer education in Denmark:

1. Academies of Professional Higher Education (Erhvervsakademie) offering professionally oriented first cycle degree programmes;
2. University Colleges offering professionally oriented first cycle degree programmes;
3. Research Universities offering first, second and third cycle programmes in all academic disciplines;
4. University level institutions offering first, second, third cycle degree programmes in subject areas such as: architecture, design, music and fine arts, performing arts.

"The teaching in Denmark has the following features:

- Student-centred learning and open debate during class;
- Close collaboration between students and teachers;
- Traditional lectures combined with project work with the teacher as a consultant;
- Active participation and problem solving rather than passive listening;
- Focus on turning new knowledge and learning into innovative solutions"(Education Guide, Copenhagen Post 2013)

It is possible to formulate a hypothesis that this kind of teaching will be less favourable to plagiarism. It may be considered questionable practice to rely too heavily on information coming from one anonymous source. Therefore the institutional respondent was asked *how typical is your institution compared to the rest of Denmark*? The reply provided some confidence that most of the factual responses could be considered generally applicable: "*This University is not that different, it is a small country, there is a lot of cooperation going on as a general rule the universities are ruled in similar ways*".

According to the institutional source "*The student work is about 50% in English and 50% Danish, perhaps slightly more English if anything as we have a large number of international students*". At this institution approximately 20% of the student population have permanent residence outside Denmark. Students come from parts of Asia and Canada, "*from Europe the highest number is from Norway, perhaps then Sweden*". This factor is important because evidence from interviews for the report about Sweden (Glendinning 2013) suggests that examiners are less likely to identify plagiarism when they are not native speakers in the language of the writing.

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

In Denmark, the quality and relevance of a study programme are assessed on the basis of five predefined criteria:

1. Demand for the study programme in the labour market;
2. The study programme must be based on research and combined with an active research environment of high quality;
3. Academic profile of the study programme and learning outcome;
4. Structure and organisation of the study programme must be of a very high quality;
5. Continuous internal quality assurance of the study programme, which helps to ensure a very high quality.

Danish accreditation involves both existing study programmes and new study programmes which must be accredited before they may be started. According to an institutional response "*plagiarism policy is part of the* [accreditation] *package but not seen as a big thing*".

In Denmark, the operational responsibility for the accreditation processes is divided between two operators: Danmarks Akkrediteringsinstitution (ACE Denmark) and the Danish Evaluation Institute ([EVA](#)).

EVA is the accreditation operator of the professional bachelor, academy profession and diploma programmes as well as the specialization courses (adult education and continuing training). It also evaluates studies of early childhood education, primary and lower secondary education, upper secondary education, higher education and adult education.

The institutional interviewee raised an important factor regarding the background of many lecturers and external examiners in Denmark. The "*biggest challenge is to communicate the information* [about policies] *to external lecturers and external examiners. External lecturers are drawn from business and do not necessarily have academic skills and background, they can contribute real-life business experience, but their focus on academic aspects is less. External examiners are also likely to be people brought in from outside academia. Their role is to check the thesis, bachelor, masters, PhD*". It was further clarified that in some institutions this external scrutiny may only apply to the final theses and not to earlier work such as "*coursework and student essays*".

The background of some examiners could have implications on their expectations for student work, ability to identify plagiarism and may cause inconsistencies in academic standards.

Clearly, it is crucial to ensure that all people involved in assessment across the range of student work are familiar with the policies and systems for maintaining academic integrity and have skills to identify and act on possible cases of academic malpractice. In particular, the identification and correction of poor academic practice at the earliest stage in education should be an essential part of formative learning.

4. *Academic Integrity and Plagiarism in Denmark*

Danish Committees on Scientific Dishonesty (DCSD) – In Denmark all the cases regarding scientific misconduct are reviewed the Danish Committees on Scientific Dishonesty (DCSD). There are three separate committees which cover the following areas:
- health sciences,
- natural, technological and production sciences, and
- cultural and social sciences.

A case is raised on the basis of either a complaint or a request for having a case tried in order to clear someone of circulating rumours. Each year the Committees publish an account of their decisions. However the work of these committees only applies to academic research. There is no equivalent system, nationally or institutionally, for student work at bachelor and master's levels.

It became clear in the research that there are no available statistics for cases of student plagiarism in Denmark. "*There is no requirement to submit information about the amount of plagiarism to any national agency so it is not easy to find anything*" (institutional interview). However the interest and

awareness in plagiarism and academic dishonesty has greatly increased in Denmark recently due to several high profile cases of research fraud, including one case of data fabrication involving a Danish researcher Diederik Stapel (Borsboom and Wagenmakers 2013).

According to an institutional respondent:

> "*Our institutional guidelines do not take up much space, really part of general regulations on how to treat sources etc. I was surprised to find there is no national prevention or detection policy, because it is the sort of thing to be expected in Denmark. I called someone at another university and she confirmed there is nothing. There are only 2 things nationally*
>
> 1) *the national association of research libraries has a web site Stop Plagiarism*
>
> http://en.stopplagiat.nu/ *that has advice for international students and a self-testing tool.*
>
> 2) *The Ministry of Culture has some guidelines dating to 2006 (when Education came under MofC) about how to reference correctly".*

The high proportion of international students was explored with respect to plagiarism. The interviewee expressed caution when asked whether Asian students were more likely to plagiarise than European students, "*we have to be careful not to be prejudicial, to some extent it can be is the mastery of the language that is the problem rather than cheating*". The respondent then provided further information about perceived language difficulties "*I'm not sure how some students can pass a language exam if they don't know how to ask for a book. It is so unfair to accept a student with lack of language skill then pursue them for plagiarism. We need to check admission criteria to make sure students have good language skills, but also have support systems for English proficiency*". The same sentiments were expressed by many survey participants in several other countries, particularly UK and Sweden.

A further point was added about motives of international students: "*Some students don't attend classes, they just come here to work*". Such students are unlikely to take advantage of guidance, support and advice provided about good academic practice and therefore more likely to plagiarise.

The results from the IPPHEAE survey showed that only one student admitted they *may have "accidentally or deliberately" plagiarised at some time previously* (Annex DK-1, Qu S5k). However 6 out of the 13 student respondents agreed they had *come across a case of student plagiarism* in the institution (Annex DK-1, Qu S5j).

The questionnaire for students asked what sanctions or penalties would be applied for plagiarism. All student respondents believed there would be consequences for plagiarising in their dissertation.

Student Question 7 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 a clear different in responses from students between perceived sanctions for "assignments" and what would happen if a student plagiarised in their final thesis. However the lack of responses for triangulation from teachers and managers limits the value of these student responses. It is impossible to know how knowledgeable the students were about the consequences or whether their answers were pure speculation.

Table 3: Sanctions for plagiarism		
Assignment	Project or Dissertation	Possible Sanction
Student#	Student#	
0	0	*No action would be taken*
7	3	*Verbal warning*
3	3	*Formal warning letter*
8	3	*Request to re write it properly*
6	3	*Zero mark for the work*
5	4	*Repeat the module or subject*
5	4	*Fail the module or subject*
1	2	*Repeat the whole year of study*
1	5	*Fail the whole programme or degree*
1	3	*Expose the student to school community*
2	3	*Suspended from the institution*
2	5	*Expelled from the institution*
1	2	*Suspend payment of student grant*
0	1	Other: *Ich weiß es nicht, tippe aber auf Neuschreiben (I do not know, but guess rewriting)*

Responses to part of question 5, summarised in Annex DK-1, reveal that all student respondents agreed their institution has policies and procedures for dealing with plagiarism. Regarding information being available to students, 8 of 13 students responded positively. This suggests that, where there are policies in place, much more could be done to inform students.

There was a suggestion that more could be done to support academic staff: "*Some lecturers diligently pursue cases, but some feel they are not reimbursed for their effort*" of investigating plagiarism cases (institutional interview). This observation was interesting when noting that only one student respondent believed that *all teachers follow the same procedures for similar cases of plagiarism* with 9 students saying they were not sure and three disagreeing (Annex DK-1, Qu S5l).

The above responses imply that policies in place in Denmark may not be applied in a consistent manner. This may be because lecturers find them burdensome. The lecturers would need to be convinced that there was a good reason and clear benefits for introducing a more draconian or invasive system.

The student survey contained two questions about "digital tools", responses are summarised in Tables 4 and 5. Student Question 8: *What digital tools or other techniques are available at your institution for helping to detect plagiarism*?

Table 4: Software Tools	Student #
Software for text matching	4
VLE, Platform	1
Internet, Google	1
Nothing	2
Don't know	5

Student Question 9: *How are the tools you named above used*?

Table 5: Use of software tools	Student#
It is up to the lecturers to decide whether to use the tools	4
For some courses students must submit their written work using the tools	1
Students must submit all written work using the tools	3
Students may use the tools to check their work before submitting	0

The responses in Tables 4 and 5 suggest that software tools are used in some Danish HEIs as part of a strategy for managing plagiarism. However no cases emerged from the survey of institutions providing access for students to such tools. The institutional respondent confirmed that "*from April* [2013] *eight major universities are all using anti-plagiarism software tools*".

The institutional respondent had responsibility for preventative strategies and advising students, including supporting the use of available software, a Swedish product "*that does not work at all*". The interviewee described an interesting outcome from an awareness-raising activity: "*We had a campaign last year targeting our students, we let the students and the lecturers know the student work would be checked. The Head of Legal Services said the rise in cases* [of plagiarism*] after that publicity was enormous. I don't understand it because the anti-plagiarism tools don't work. It was not the tools, it was the people*".

Some institutions have a formal statement included on documentation that students are required to sign, either on enrolment to their course or with submission of assessments. The responses summarised in Table 6 suggest that there are some instances of this type of formality, but that it is not consistently applied in the majority of institutions.

Question 4 of the student questionnaire asked when *students are required to sign a declaration about originality and academic honesty…*

Table 6: Students signing a declaration	
Student #	When
2	On starting their degree
1	For every assessment
1	For some assessments
1	Never
8	Not sure

Students were generally confident that they understood the technicalities of academic writing, but there was less certainty about plagiarism:

Student Question 2: I became aware of plagiarism…

4 students said that they still were still not sure about this and 7 said they learned about plagiarism before they started bachelor degree education.

Student Question 3: I learned to cite and reference…

5 said they learnt this before they started bachelor degree and 6 said during bachelor degree, only one respondent said they were still not sure.

Student Question 6, addressed the question about awareness-raising: students become aware of plagiarism and of other forms of academic dishonesty (e.g. cheating) as an important issue through:

Table 7: Ways that students become aware about plagiarism and academic dishonesty		
Plagiarism	Academic Dishonesty	
Student#	Student#	
6	4	Web site
6	3	Course booklet, student guide, handbook
5	0	Leaflet or guidance notes
8	4	Workshop / class / lecture

3	1	I am not aware of any information about this

Student Question 12 asked: *Which of the following services are provided at your institution to advise students about plagiarism prevention*? The responses are summarised in Table 8.

Table 8: Services and student support for discouraging plagiarism	
Student #	Service or provision
2	Academic support unit
8	Advice in class during course/module
3	Additional lectures, workshops:
10	Advice from tutors or lecturers
5	Guidance from the library
0	University publisher
3	Academic writing unit/Study skills unit

These responses suggest the most common approach to educating students about good academic practice this by tutors through standard classes. However there is evidence here that some specialist support services are available in some institutions.

The institutional respondent talked about encouraging the "*use of Refworks*" or similar free-standing and plug-in tools for formatting references. This was viewed as "*important to ensure students get the format of references right, students can be sloppy and some lecturers can be hardliners, but I'm keen for responses to be consistent*". This is a good example of how simple tools can help students to comply with requirements.

A dual strategy was described that had been applied in one institution: firstly the library had the role of ensuring students knew how to cite and reference properly; secondly "*there is the official strategy to catch a few people each year, not many but these will provide examples*" that would deter other students from cheating. It was not known how effective this was or how fair such a strategy was perceived to be by different stakeholders.

Although 7 out of the 13 student respondents agreed *that students receive training in techniques for scholarly academic writing and anti-plagiarism issues*, the same number of respondents agreed they would like to have more training (Annex DK-1 Qu S5a, S5b). However when the institutional respondent was asked about *persuading lecturers to change their approach to coursework setting* the response was quite negative: "*I don't know, I don't think it would work here, it is a tricky business interfering with judgement of individual lecturers, I have been here 6 years, not really something I've seen happen*". This aligns with similar responses about strong cultures of individual academic autonomy in different institutions across most parts of Europe (particularly Germany, some parts of UK, Spain, France, Italy, Greece).

5. *Perceptions and understanding of Plagiarism*

It was important to gain some insight through the survey of what participants understood by plagiarism in order to be able to validate and interpret responses to certain questions. A question was included in all four levels of survey to determine whether any differences existed for reasons for plagiarism in different part of Europe. The responses are summarised in Tables 9 and 10. The responses from students suggest that implementation of sanctions, applied consistently, combined with more guidance and support for academic writing skills may have a deterrent effect on student plagiarism.

Student Question 14: *What leads students to decide to plagiarise*?

Table 9: Reasons student plagiarise – student questionnaire	
Student#	Possible reason for plagiarism
3	They think the lecturer will not care
11	They think they will not get caught
6	They run out of time
6	They don't want to learn anything, just pass the assignment:
4	They don't see the difference between group work and collusion
8	They can't express another person's ideas in their own words
8	They don't understand how to cite and reference
4	They are not aware of penalties
4	They are unable to cope with the workload
5	They think their written work is not good enough:
4	They feel the task is completely beyond their ability
11	It is easy to cut and paste from the Internet
5	They feel external pressure to succeed
3	Plagiarism is not seen as wrong
5	They have always written like that
1	Unclear criteria and expectations for assignments
3	Their reading comprehension skills are weak
4	Assignments tasks are too difficult or not understood
1	There is no teacher control on plagiarism

The most common reasons selected by students (Table 9) were *They think they will not get caught* and the *ease of copy and paste via the internet*. The next most popular responses were relating to students' skills in paraphrasing and acknowledging sources.

Several questions were included in the questionnaires for students and teachers as a means of determining how consistently respondents understood concepts relating to plagiarism. Responses in Tables 10 and 11 provide some encouragement that student respondents had been advised about acknowledging sources in academic writing, but there is a clear message that respondents saw the connection with plagiarism.

Student Question 10: *What are the reasons for using correct referencing and citation in scholarly academic writing?*

Table 10: Reasons for referencing and citation	
12	To avoid being accused of plagiarism
7	To show you have read some relevant research papers
8	To give credit to the author of the sourced material
11	To strengthen and give authority to your writing
2	Because you are given credit/marks for doing so
2	I don't know

Student Question 11:

Table 11: Referencing styles			
yes	No	Not sure	Question
Student#	Student#	Student#	
7	5	1	Is there any referencing style students are required or encouraged to use in written work?
6	3	4	Are you confident about referencing and citation?

Student Question 13: *What do you find difficult about academic writing?*

Table 12: Difficulties with academic writing	
4	Finding good quality sources
4	Referencing and citation
5	Paraphrasing
7	Understanding different referencing formats and styles

The responses summarised in Tables 11 and 12 reconfirm the earlier finding that students may benefit from more guidance on use of sources and conventions for academic writing.

Student Question 15: *Examples of possible plagiarism, with 40% matching text*

Qu	Is it plagiarism?			Punishment?	Assuming that 40% of a student's submission is from other sources and is copied into the student's work as described in (a-f) below, indicate your judgement on plagiarism
	Yes	No	Don't know		
a	13	0	0	12	word for word with no quotations
b	9	3	1	7	word for word with no quotations, has a correct references but no in text citations
c	4	6	2	3	word for word with no quotations, but has correct references and in text citations
d	6	5	2	5	with some words changed with no quotations, references or in text citations
e	5	6	2	5	with some words changed with no quotations, has correct references but no in text citations
f	2	6	5	3	with some words changed with no quotations, but has correct references and in text citations

Table 13: Student responses to possible cases of plagiarism

Question 15 of the student survey explored understanding of plagiarism in students work using six scenarios. All six cases (a-f) in the question may be categorised as plagiarism, but some could be construed as poor academic practice or perhaps patch-writing due to poor language skills could account for some matching. Given that the scenario says 40% of the paper is identical to other work, it is difficult to justify why a student should be given academic credits without at least some investigation. Although all student respondents correctly identified case (a) as plagiarism, case (d), which was at least as serious, was identified as plagiarism by less than half the respondents. It is of concern to see the complacency in a high number of respondents who implied through their responses that most of these examples would be acceptable practice for assessed work. It is notable to recall that in Student Question 11 (Table 11) 6 of the same student respondents said they were confident about referencing and citation. Their responses to this question cast some doubts on their understanding.

With regard to responses to a question about plagiarism by academics and researchers it was confirmed that there was "*no policy in place for checking on faculty cheating. There have been some celebrity cases, but there is denial. I have come across cases, widely published in newspapers, a highly esteemed researcher was found guilty of ghost-writing (keeping co-author hidden) and some cases of cheating with research data*"(institutional interview).

There were problems reported with student plagiarism in Danish upper secondary schools, identified through discussions in newspaper for teachers. Plagiarism was seen as "*a major training issue for*

the ministry responsible for schools education”; the teachers “*don't know how to deal with it*”
(institutional interview).

6. *Examples of good practice*

The national policy on research integrity provides a good starting point for Denmark. However this needs to be translated into a consistent set of institutional policies.

Some examples of good practice emerged locally in the form of on-line student guidance, support services and adoption of software tools, often coordinated through institutional academic libraries.

The accreditation and external examining systems adopted in Denmark suggest some evidence of transparency of assessment processes that was not found in most institutions surveyed in some other countries, for example, Germany, France and Spain.

7. *Recommendations*

Based on the limited data collected it appears that a great deal more effort is needed in Danish HEIs to improve policies and systems for assuring academic integrity.

7.1 Nationally

7.1.1 Quality and accreditation agencies are advised to include in their auditing activities the requirement for institutions to demonstrate that policies at all levels of higher education for discouraging and handling case of academic misconduct and plagiarism are appropriate, applied consistently and operationally effective.

7.1.2 The national agencies should provide funding and support for the development of a Danish language repository for academic sources and student work for use in aiding detection of plagiarism,

7.1.3 The national government should consider providing incentives to encourage institutions to acquire digital tools that are effective for screening work in both Danish and English, to be deployed both as deterrent against student plagiarism and to aid detection of cases.

7.1.4 The Danish quality agency should consider systematic monitoring of cases of plagiarism and academic misconduct occurring in Danish HEIs as a measure of the effectiveness of institutional policies.

7.1.5 In view of the poor response to this survey in Denmark, research funding agencies should consider procuring further research into the effectiveness of policies for plagiarism and academic misconduct applied in Danish HEIs and also at secondary level education.

7.2 Institutionally

7.2.1 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Denmark should ensure that their institutional policies, regulations, penalties and processes for academic misconduct and plagiarism, particularly as applied for bachelor and master's student work, are robust, proportional and fair.

7.2.2 HEIs should monitor the implementation of policies for academic dishonesty and maintain statistics on cases of misconduct.

7.2.3 Most of the students surveyed had received some training about academic writing, plagiarism and academic misconduct, but almost all said they would like to have more guidance. Institutions should ensure that all students receive information and support about all aspects of good academic practice and scholarship throughout their study.

7.2.4 The high percentage of international students studying in Denmark puts extra burdens on institutions to ensure that both subject qualifications and language skills of students are sufficient for them to have a rewarding and productive educational experience. Further, there is an onus on the institution to ensure that international students understand the expectations for academic standards and conduct, particularly relating to academic writing requirements.

7.3 Individual academics

7.3.1 There is a danger that the high reputation of Danish education could suffer unless strong measures are taken to encourage good academic practice across the academic community. Academic teaching staff have an essential role to play in ensuring students at all levels understand about plagiarism and how to avoid it.

7.3.2 Academic staff should signpost any institutional support services, for example academic writing and study skills units provided for students, to ensure they are adequately prepared for their educational experience.

7.3.3 Any academics interested in involvement in further research about academic integrity should contact members of the IPPHEAE team.

8. *Conclusions*

It was disappointing that the HEIs in Denmark were so resistant to engage in the IPPHEAE survey. However the information collected from different sources has provided some insight into the situation in Danish HEIs. Some good practice was identified, but, incommon with many other EU countries, there appears to be a general culture of complacency, which is inevitably already affecting academic standards. It is hoped that some of the recommendations in this report are useful and taken seriously by people who can make a difference to educational policies in Denmark.

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Annex DK-1: Responses to Question 5 (1=strongly disagree – 5=strongly agree)

Qu	Negative (1,2)	Don't know (3)	Positive (4,5)	Question
Table 16: Student responses to questionnaire Question 5 (showing number of responses)				
s5a	3	3	7	Students receive training in techniques for scholarly academic writing and anti-plagiarism issues
s5b	4	2	7	I would like to have more training on avoidance of plagiarism and academic dishonesty
s5c	0	0	13	This institution has policies and procedures for dealing with plagiarism
s5d	1	4	8	Plagiarism policies, procedures and penalties are available to students
s5e	9	1	3	Penalties for plagiarism are administered according to a standard formula
s5f	5	4	4	I know what penalties are applied to students for different forms of plagiarism and academic dishonesty
s5g	3	7	3	Student circumstances are taken into account when deciding penalties for plagiarism
s5h	0	4	9	The institution has policies and procedures for dealing with academic dishonesty
s5i	9	3	1	I believe one or more of my teachers/colleagues may have used plagiarised or unattributed materials in class notes
s5j	5	2	6	I have come across a case of plagiarism committed by a student at this institution
s5k	10	2	1	I believe I may have plagiarised (accidentally or deliberately)
s5l	3	9	1	I believe that all teachers follow the same procedures for similar cases of plagiarism
s5m	2	4	7	I believe that the way teachers treat plagiarism does not vary from student to student
s5n	0	5	8	I believe that when dealing with plagiarism teachers follow the existing/required procedures
s5o	1	5	8	It is possible to design coursework to reduce student plagiarism
s5p	2	3	8	I think that translation across languages is used by some students to avoid detection of plagiarism
s5q	3	3	7	The previous institution I studied was less strict about plagiarism than this institution
s5r	2	6	6	I understand the links between copyright, Intellectual property rights and plagiarism