



Impact of Policies for Plagiarism in Higher Education Across Europe

Plagiarism Policies in Luxembourg

Full Report

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1. Information sources

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

- One on-line survey responses from a student;
- Structured interviews with a senior academic, a university senior manager and one individual concerned with academic integrity and research at a national organisation;
- First-hand experience from 3 recent visits to Luxembourg by the author;
- Documentation and on-line evidence.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face and via Skype. The national level questions focused on national and institutional policies and procedures relating to plagiarism prevention and detection in all four countries making up the UK. The limited information collected was crucial to set the context of both historical and recent development in Higher Education in Luxembourg and how this has impacted on student plagiarism.

Luxembourg has only one university that is relatively new, having been founded in 2003. Unlike most other EU countries where anonymity was assured for both individuals and institutions participating in this survey, it is impossible to provide anonymity for the single university in Luxembourg. This may be part of the reason behind lack of engagement with the on-line survey.

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 Groups	Organisations and Institutions		
Luxembourg	1	0	3	0	2		
Breakdown of student responses by domicile and award	Home students	Other EU students	Non-EU students	Not known	Bachelor, diploma	Master, doctor	Blank, other
Luxembourg	1	0	1	0	0	1	0

Several requests were made to contacts at the University of Luxembourg for the on-line questionnaires to be completed by students, academic teaching staff and senior managers. However only one student response was received and there were no responses to the teachers' or senior management questionnaires. The single student participant was a master's student studying master's degree in Luxembourg who had previously studied in the UK. Clearly the low response was very disappointing.

The evidence presented in this report relies mainly on the interviews conducted with senior academics, one national representative and narrative responses from the one student respondent. However the author visited Luxembourg during the project, twice in connection with other project work and on a third occasion, in October 2012, at the invitation of the University of Luxembourg to provide a keynote presentation about the IPPHEAE project research at a day conference on Ethics for Research. This event and meetings with University staff and other contributors provided interesting supplementary background information and insights into the development and maturity of systems for academic integrity at the University and also within associated research institutes (public research centres) in Luxembourg.

Interviewees were involved in reviewing this report and they have been made aware of the findings of the research. Where possible the *colour coded* voices of the participants, have been used to inform and enrich the narrative.

2. Higher Education in Luxembourg

There is currently only one university in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg that describes itself as “Multilingual, international and research-oriented” (University web site). In October 2012 the University student population was about 6200 (3400 Bachelor, 1100 Master, 430 PhD, 1250 others) of which about 53% were international students from about 100 countries (University web site).

The University and the country as a whole comprise a truly multilingual society, with three official languages spoken and used: Luxembourgish, French and German, plus the widespread use of English. However other minority languages are spoken by well-established resident groups that immigrated at different times, particularly from Italy and Portugal. Many factors, including lack of tuition fees, the small area and geographical location, effective transport links and strong economy, encourage many students and staff to commute daily from adjacent countries (Germany, Belgium and France) to work and study at the University of Luxembourg. The delivery methods and languages adopted for some university programmes and courses reflects the open welcome, diversity and multilingual ethos of the country as a whole.

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

According to national interviews there is no quality monitoring organisation in Luxembourg for higher education and no national system for audits of quality process and systems.

“It is most important to set up QA criteria and standards, but that has not been done so far. We asked a Dutch agency to help us, they were invited for 2 days to advise on how to set up a quality system, we needed to get the Senate to fund this. Faculty was interested and attended, but it was never repeated afterwards” (national interview).

Academic regulations were not published until 2005, two years after the establishment of the University. It was reported by interviewees that procedures and rules are still being developed and gradually refined as the institution matures. Some areas of the University are reportedly *“lacking transparency and information sharing”* (national interview), which makes it difficult to provide evidence about quality even for people working in the institution.

The nature of assessment can have a bearing on the amount of plagiarism, for example an assessment regime with 100% examinations would not provide equivalent opportunities for students to plagiarise as a programme with 100% assessment by coursework. According to one participant:

“I remember when I first started [working here], no rules, no clues about how assessment could be done. I tried to make it flexible, using a range of methods, I was really aware that with an open framework we would also have a variety and more diversity of assessment models. This was never done at the University, bachelor and master programmes which were assessed only through exams” (national interview).

It was confirmed by this person and other participants that at higher education level in Luxembourg the most common form of assessment is by formal examination, but clearly there are some exceptions. An interesting observation from the student participant was that *“at my current institution there is limited access to academic articles”*. Since this response was from a master’s level

student this raises questions about availability of resources for academic study, but it was just one person's view and must not be considered typical.

One of the great advantages of formal examinations is that they normally provide cost effective evidence of degree of achievement of learning outcomes for each student for different sized classes through unseen, time-constrained assessment, also *"it is easier to handle, less work for teachers – research assistants do the grading"* (national interview). However effective examination of students relies on the quality of systems surrounding the design and security of examination questions and invigilation and grading or marking processes. Some evidence emerged that there are plans to strengthen procedures for conduct of examinations: *"The president received allegations of cheating ... The vice president wants to tighten security during exams. He proposed to introduce anonymised exams, with stick-down corner [for the examination script]"* [national interview].

Most assessment is conducted for individual students, but some group-working was evident from one participant who described a form of student plagiarism as *"group work and some guy not doing anything - sitting on a ship and not rowing"* (national interview).

4. Academic Integrity and Plagiarism in Luxembourg

4.1 Research and development in academic integrity and plagiarism

In October 2012 the University of Luxembourg ran a one day Research Ethics event, with international invited speakers, presenting about various aspects of academic integrity related to research. About 40 people attended the event in total and the author was one of the keynote speakers. The attendees appeared to be researchers, doctoral students and senior managers rather than academics concerned with undergraduate and master's teaching. Questions and discussion between speakers and the audience were encouraged. The foci of the event were to

- begin a process of awareness-raising in academic integrity in research in Luxembourg;
- present some new guidelines on research ethics that had been developed as a starting point for use within the University and in research institutes in Luxembourg;
- hear from and consult with people first hand with experience and expertise in various aspects of academic integrity.

The keynote presentations covered a wide range of relevant areas including establishing ethical approval processes for research, fraud in research publications, fabrication of research results and policies for student plagiarism across Europe (IPPHEAE), some early results.

This event represented an excellent starting point for establishing systems and processes for ethics and academic integrity in Luxembourg. However the exclusive focus on research was a missed opportunity and more developments are needed as soon as possible, that especially should be inclusive of teaching staff and students.

It is possible that part of the motivation for the development of ethical procedures and staging the October 2012 event was recent publicity about unfortunate incidents of plagiarism in the University, at professorial level and in a PhD thesis that was found to contain falsified data, which *"like Germany's DFG representative it helped to trigger a response"* (national interview). Whatever the reason, this development is very welcome and clearly needed.

4.3 Strategies, policies and procedures for academic integrity in Luxembourg

There were cases reported of bachelor and masters students being penalised for plagiarism in their “final paper”, typically by being required to write a new paper on a different topic (national interview). However it is unusual for sanctions to be applied for plagiarism found in earlier work. Evidence emerged of inconsistencies of response: *“Interpretation varies depending on evidence – some people have much tougher penalties than others, eg exclusion, expulsion”* (national interview).

4.4 IPPHEAE survey findings on policies and procedures

All three national respondents said they believed that plagiarism or cheating cases were rising, *“but can’t say it is student plagiarism only – do not have stats, or the guys do not share the stats when they have them”* and *“on the web page for annual report 2011 – higher level scheme reports 6 cases in 2011, compared to zero previously, we are observing an increase, it is the first time, not sure whether it is a permanent increase we are looking at. I think 10 years ago there were some issues but no software to find them. Now there is a global reach”* (national interviews).

The number of international students studying in Luxembourg presents a different profile and associate challenges compared to many EU countries. The reason behind plagiarism in some cases was described by one respondents as *“cultural plagiarism – applying for example in African and Arabic countries is seen as ‘intertextuality of ancestors’, they did not get the point”*. Then there were cases arising of *“students who think that certain sources are not traceable – particularly undergraduate level”* (national interviews).

There were different responses to the question of whether policies for plagiarism and academic dishonesty should be separate: *“They should be treated the same, intention and degree of professionalism should be the measure”* and *“My personal view is that it is not the same thing as plagiarism, copy/pasting, stealing, ethics. Examination cheating is misconduct... Some of them found translation was better on the web so they used it, but forgot to give reference. Depends whether it was a senior researcher compared to junior fellow, they have to know the rules”* (national interviews).

There are plans to develop and implement a national code of conduct for academic integrity and ethical practice in Luxembourg (national interview). At present after the teacher decides there may be a case to answer the decisions about whether and how to deal with cases on academic misconduct and plagiarism are normally dealt with by the director for the academic programme: *“the detecting teacher writes report with evidence to director of the programme. When the director does not feel they are competent to deal with the case then the vice-dean is asked to help, they then take the decision”* (national interview).

According to the student participant *“at the current institution I study at plagiarism seems not to be taken very seriously and frequently simply lowering the mark for inappropriate referencing would be the maximum penalty”* (student questionnaire response).

4.5 Use of digital tools

There was some evidence from all three national participants that some digital tools are being applied to help with the detection of plagiarism cases in Luxembourg. Ephorus was specifically mentioned by one national participant and a second said that *“use of software tools is seen as a threat”* by students and the third respondent said that *“plagiarism tracking software raises some awareness in students”*. However digital text matching tools are not yet part of the systematic toolset available in Luxembourg and the student participant said *“I am not aware of any tools for*

detecting plagiarism at my current institution. During my BA at a different institution we were required to submit all work through Turnitin” (student questionnaire response).

The use of translation software by students when writing essays was mentioned several times by the national participants. The multilingual environment and diversity of students presents a particularly difficult challenge to teachers when trying to detect cases of plagiarised text without the use of tools to either match to existing papers in the same language or translated.

4.6 Making systems and procedures more effective

Luxembourg has made a start in developing some policies and procedures for research and doctoral level work, but clearly more needs to be done to encourage good practice and consistency of approach at bachelor and masters levels. According to a national interview participant the University *“wants to do workshop for PhD and master’s levels, but they don’t know what to do at bachelor level”*.

On the question of whether *current policies and procedures are effective for detection and prevention of plagiarism*, one participant referred to lack of statistics about the situation, although *“some evidence comes from reports about quality element and student evaluation”* and another response was *“not really – even if you tell them about plagiarism they will still do it”* (national interviews).

Suggestions from national interviews about what more could be done to reduce student plagiarism are listed below:

Hard assignments for combatting different types of plagiarism;

Initial Teacher Training course – covering research, knowledge construction at student level;

Respect for work of others – integrate this in all courses taught at university, not just courses on scientific aspects, should be valued, but some people do not want this.

Fixed rules needed.

Training opportunities, particularly about how to paraphrase,

Use of Google and Google translate to detect plagiarism.

The following really constructive response was provided by the single student participant:

“In the previous institution I was at there were several session on references and teachers in the first year courses frequently explained issues of plagiarism and referencing in class, therefore students were aware of the seriousness of the situation. At my current institution in our MA course there is a short class explaining referencing, but plagiarism was not mentioned at any point, possibly assuming that students at MA level would be aware of the issue. This however is not the case, therefore if the course about references did talk about plagiarism and explain what consequences it could lead to, it might have helped to reduce the high levels of plagiarism”.

5. Perceptions and Understanding of Plagiarism

5.1 Support and guidance

The October 2012 Ethics for Research Conference and the development of the Policy on Ethics in Research (Blessing 2012) was an excellent first step on the protracted journey that Luxembourg needs to complete towards a comprehensive system for assuring academic integrity.

Some signs emerged that operating training or professional development activities for academic teaching staff may be seen as unnecessary and unwarranted by many people in the Luxembourg academic teaching context (national interviews). Changes to practices, for example strengthening assessment and ensuring consistency of approach when handling cases of suspected academic misconduct, are unlikely to be effectively developed and implemented without some inclusive forum for dissemination and discussion involving teaching staff and management.

Several references have been included in this report already about support and guidance provided to students. It is clear that some provision exists for advising and instructing some students at master's level at least on academic writing practices. However, in the opinion of the student respondent, his/her experience proved inadequate to meet the needs of the diverse types of student colleagues studying in Luxembourg. Similar requirements have been identified in other institutions around the world where students' earlier experiences of education can vary greatly. This can result in very different levels of skills for conducting research and for writing and misaligned expectations between students and teachers.

There were welcome signs that more student training events, perhaps in the form of workshops, were being developed for master's level and above. However studies elsewhere (Carroll and Appleton 2001, Carroll 2005, Morris 2012, Neville 2010, Park 2003) show that it is critical that all students receive appropriate initial guidance combined with on-going support, which is linked to their study programme and assessment requirements, preferably in a holistic and cohesive manner. According to one respondent, there "*never can be enough information about different types of plagiarism*" (national interview).

5.2 Factors affecting the incidence of plagiarism

The multilingual nature of Luxembourg society combined with the diversity of the student population in the University generates specific difficulties that can affect the propensity for plagiarism: "*English has added to plagiarism. If students feel uncomfortable about writing in any language then they are more likely to plagiarise*". There is a sense in which some students believe that "*English does not belong to anyone*" (national interview).

The main responses from the national participants to the question: *Why do students plagiarise* are listed below

Time pressures (2)

They think the lecturer will not care

They are not aware of penalties

Internet cut and paste

Lack of confidence, not feeling empowered

Students get bored going through mandatory work, take the easy way out

However all the suggested reasons provided with the interview questions were seen by participants to have relevance at some level.

6. *Examples of good practice*

There was clear evidence from participants of good understanding about the challenges that plagiarism presents today and knowledge about ways of countering some of the underlying reasons. One national interviewee described assessment in a master's programme where *"each student has a personalised problem and must analyse concepts. It is difficult to cheat or use plagiarism"*. This is a good example of how plagiarism can be "designed out" or at least made more difficult.

The development of guidelines for Ethics in Research and doctoral level (Blessing 2012) provides a foundation on which to develop a much broader set of policies and procedures for academic integrity across the academic spectrum in Luxembourg. The guidelines were informed by the Singapore Statement on Research Integrity (2010).

Two respondents talked about *"teacher dialogue for bringing issues into the open"* and a *"culture of discussion"*, *"When facing a problem colleagues bring in their own practices and present to a group of people in this programme. It is absolutely transparent, everything is shared"* (national interviews). Clearly this forum provided an effective means to share good practice and new ideas, but it was not clear how widespread this practice was.

Although not yet systematic, the use of software *"screening"* to aid detection of plagiarism is growing and should be encouraged. However it is important that there are policies and guidelines developed about how to interpret results, what they are actually indicating, limitations and how the results are used.

7. *Discussion*

The very limited set of data collected for Luxembourg, coupled with the specificity of the findings to one institution, means that this report can only be considered to provide a micro view of higher education in Luxembourg. However this does not invalidate either the evidence collected nor does it diminish the value of the recommendations.

8. *Recommendations for Luxembourg*

8.1 Nationally and Institutionally

It is recommended that Luxembourg develops a set of policies for upholding all aspects of academic integrity to be applied consistently throughout the university and within research institutes. The Policy on Ethics in Research provides an excellent basis for the much wider ranging policy. The policy needs to incorporate:

- Guidelines for the whole academic community on assuring academic integrity;

- Ethical approval processes (workable and proportional for all levels);

- Procedures and responsibilities for detecting, handling and reporting cases of suspected academic misconduct at all levels;

- Sanctions and penalties to be applied consistently for different cases and levels;

- Policies to encourage good academic practice and specifically for discouraging plagiarism and cheating;

- A programme of student and staff development in the area of academic integrity;
- Resources for students and staff to promote good practice, either developed or through links to existing resources;
- Institutional licenses for digital tools for text match to aid both detection of plagiarism and formative learning of academic writing;
- A system for accountability including recording statistics and auditing process and decisions;
- Regular audits and reviews of the whole system.

The University may wish to study some examples of resources, systems and policies developed elsewhere (Carroll and Appleton 2001, CU Harvard Style Guide, JISC Electronic Plagiarism Project, Morris 2012, Neville 2010, Park 2004, Rowell 2009, Tennant and Rowell 2010, Tennant and Duggan 2008).

8.2 Individual academics

Institutional changes generally take a long time to develop, agree, approve and implement. However in the short term it is possible for individual staff working and department heads within faculties to begin to establish and encourage improvement towards good and consistent practices that will be incorporated in the longer term policies. This lower level activity is important because:

- It will ensure that there is minimal delay to the process of change;
- It is probable that important differences in requirements for different academic subjects will emerge from this pilot exercise that must feed into the final institutional policies that will not be understood otherwise;
- The priority focus needs to be about improvements to the student experience and standards of teaching, learning and assessment;
- Effective management of change should not be based on top-down delivery.

Individual academics have a responsibility for upholding standards and quality in all aspects of academic activity, including teaching, setting assessments, grading of work, providing support, guidance and advice to students. This list of activities naturally extends to aspects of academic dishonesty and plagiarism. Given a supportive regime at institutional and national levels, it should be possible for academic staff to

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

9. Conclusions

The University of Luxembourg is a young institution that is already developing a reputation for research. The identity of the institution is still forming alongside its processes and systems. It is hoped that this report and associated recommendations are received well and found to be instructive for guiding the way forward in the area of institutional and national academic integrity.

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