Impact of Policies for Plagiarism in Higher Education Across Europe

Plagiarism Policies in the Czech Republic

Full Report

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Report about Plagiarism Policies in the Czech Republic

1. *Information sources*

Information about the Czech Republic was collected through:

- The three levels of online surveys;
- Documentation and on-line evidence;
- Structured interviews with academics.

Interviews were conducted personally about the national situation in the Czech Republic. The interviewees were academics with special responsibility for aspects of quality assurance. The National Higher Education Institutions Panel helped to promote the research and distribute surveys. Where possible in the following report the voices of the national expert interviewees have been used to inform and enrich the narrative. The responses to the national survey have helped to furnish the background to the educational situation in the Czech Republic.

In the online survey, 351 students, 195 teachers and 12 senior managers participated from 26 institutions and organisations. The discussions were raised at several conferences in Czech Republic dealing with teaching at HEIs.

2. *Higher Education in the Czech Republic*

According to the Annual report on the state of the higher education in the Czech Republic (annual report 2011), there are currently 74 HEIs providing education for about 410 000 students. There are 28 public and 46 private HEIs. Since 2000, the number of students has risen significantly (from 200,000) according to the strategic plans of the ministry of education. The ministry states that now quality will be preferred against quantity and the number of students will not rise further.

About 59% of students study in bachelor degree programs, 23% in follow-up master's degree, 11% in "long" master's degree and 7% in doctoral degree programs. The most popular field of study is economics (25% of students), followed by technical sciences (21%), social sciences (14%) and pedagogy, teaching and social care (13%). Most of the students study for free; there are some fees for longer studies, for additional studies, or for studies in different languages (e.g. English). These fees vary between HEIs.

The division to universities and polytechnics, known from other countries, doesn't apply for the Czech Republic. All HEIs offering all three levels (bachelor, master, Ph.D.) are called "universities" independently on their focus or amount of research (however, without sufficient research results

the Ph.D. programmes are not accredited). At this time, there is ongoing debate about the division to research and teaching universities, but this has not yet been finalised.

In 2011, almost 12 thousand students realized their international mobility, whereas almost 9 thousand international students arrived for their mobility to the Czech Republic. More than 3000 teachers departed to their international mobility and almost 2000 teachers arrived. The most popular countries for the Czech students are Germany, France and Spain. Arriving students come mostly from Slovakia, Spain and USA.

When asked about HE student assessment methods in the Czech Republic, the most common answer would be written exam. It used to be oral exams, but as the number of students has been rising, teachers were not able to cope with the masses and switched to written exams, mostly in test form with closed questions.

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

The official body responsible for the quality assurance at Czech HEIs is the national Accreditation Committee. According to the Higher Education Act, there are two pillars of quality assurance in Czech HEIs – internal, provided by the institution itself, and external, provided by the Accreditation committee. All HEIs are obliged to assess their quality regularly according to their own criteria and then publish their results. Establishment of unique system of internal quality assessment is one of the goals of the ministry of education. The "model of complex quality assessment of HEIs" coming from EFQM excellence model is now being piloted at selected universities.

Detection and prevention of plagiarism is a part of internal quality assessment and it is being explicitly mentioned in the materials and reports of the Czech Ministry of Education. The most helpful tool in this area is Theses.cz (see below) provided by Masaryk University in Brno.

Publicly known cases of plagiarism come mainly from the Law faculty of University of West Bohemia in Pilsen. In 2009 a vice-dean was accused of plagiarism in his Ph.D. theses, supervised by another vice-dean of the same faculty. The dean (of the same faculty) was the opponent and even his review was plagiarised! All of them resigned under the pressure of media. The new dean passed all recent doctoral theses to the system Theses.cz, in which found 1 completely plagiarised thesis, 5 theses with more than 50% of copied text and 9 theses with 20-30% of plagiarised text.

It was also uncovered that many people (especially politicians and criminals) on Czech Republic had gained their educational qualification in suspiciously short periods (mostly in months instead of years), some of the diploma theses were "lost", there were fake minutes from the examination committees and some of the documentation did not exist.

This scandal was so severe, that annual reports of Secret Information Service (Czech secret service) have been mentioning it in annual reports since 2009. The annual report from 2010 says: *"A textbook case of clientelism and corruption was interconnection of a part of the teaching staff of the Faculty of Law of the West Bohemian University in Pilsen with some representatives of the police, attorneys, state administration, and local governments. During the course of 2010 the Service monitored the way in which those who have shielded both clientelism and failure to maintain standards of instruction are called to account. The fact that actually no one was called to account and that the efforts of 'reformers' focused more on sanctions against students (including doctoral students) has several explanations. E.g. investigations underway were influenced improperly even after departure of the old leadership of the Faculty, and data in electronic databases of the Faculty were changed or lost. The former leadership maintained its contacts both within the Faculty of Law itself and with the highest authorities of public administration, including the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports. Dysfunction of the 'Pilsen type' was found repeatedly also in other institutions of higher education in the Czech Republic, especially in those focusing on the study of law and public administration. Negative phenomena such as protectionism for prominent students, the existence of 'fast students', and circumvention of accreditation by cooperation 'on paper' with schools abroad pose serious risks in creation new clientelistic networks in the areas of the courts, public administration, and local government."* (SIS annual report)

Many teachers left the faculty, which led to loss of the accreditation because of insufficient staffing. In 2012, the minister of education illegally prolonged the accreditation until 2016 regardless of the conclusion of the accreditation committee. The next minister then changed this decision and faculty was granted accreditation till 2013 to allow current students finish their studies. However, hundreds of students asked to transfer to other universities because the diplomas from the Law faculty in Pilsen were discredited. Fortunately, although this case was extreme, no other similar cases in the Czech Republic are known.

Czech universities are now being compared by private companies, typically by newspapers comparing various criteria (ratio of applicants and accepted students, percentage of unemployed alumni, average income of alumni, percentage of students realizing mobility, etc.). As the number of applicants is generally falling in the Czech Republic due to demographical reasons, universities are forced to improve at least these criteria.

In the Czech HEIs, there is no concept of double or second marking, internal moderation or external scrutiny of assessed work. University teachers are sensed as powerful people deciding about marks of the students with very small possibility of amendment or revision.

4. *Academic Integrity and Plagiarism in the Czech Republic*

There are several problems with perceptions of academic integrity among the Czech students. Even though some behaviour is considered as immoral, it is generally accepted as normal behaviour unless the person gets caught. Especially getting away with cheating in tests is often seen as challenge for students. Those who refuse to let their classmate copy from their tests are considered as bad or unhelpful people. So it is not copying that is considered as immoral, what students hate is preventing copying.

It became clear in the research that there are "no statistics whatsoever" for cases of student plagiarism in the Czech HEIs. Czech HEIs mostly do not consider plagiarism as a problem that they need to deal with. However there is evidence of raised concerns in some areas and an amount of progress towards aiding the detection of plagiarism.

The most widely used plagiarism detection system is Theses.cz provided by Masaryk University in Brno. The system was supported by a centralized development project of Czech Ministry of Education and 35 HEIs are participating in this project. It means Theses.cz serves as a repository of all theses of these HEIs and provides plagiarism detection against its own database and selected internet sources. There are more similar services – Odevzdej.cz for assignments and public use and Repozitar.cz for scientific papers. All services use the same algorithm developed by Masaryk University in Brno. As flows from the answers to the question *"What digital tools or other techniques are available at your institution for helping to detect plagiarism?"* Theses.cz is much more widely known among teachers than students. Teachers usually know its name, whereas students' typical answer was *"They have some software in the university IS, but I don't know any details about it"*.

There appear to be few guidelines available for institutions or for individuals about how to avoid or prevent student plagiarism, other than some general statements about research conduct and ethics. Also, guidelines or instructions for using the detection software tools are very rare. Everybody knows that humans are making the decisions, not the software. But some teachers just click on "False positive" button or similar one and do not examine what parts of student work was copied. This behaviour convinces the students that even though they plagiarize, no one takes care. It definitely makes teachers' lives easier, but it decreases overall level of academic integrity in Czech HEIs.

On the subject of institutional policies for dealing with cases of plagiarism and academic dishonesty, very few institutions have a top-down strategy or policy for preventing and detecting plagiarism. There is no national policy either. It coincides with the Czech mentality – laziness to any changes, no admittance of problem itself, isolationism and conviction that "we are the best and no one should tell us how to do things". However, things are changing slowly, some institutions have already recognized that the problem exists and are trying to address it. Even in these cases, there are usually no retrospective actions taken. The "thick borderline after the past" is often the essential condition

for adoption of any policy. It is clearly illustrated by comment on question *"What would happen if a student at your institution was found guilty of plagiarism in their assignment or final project/dissertation?"* one text response was: *"Although my work was copied by another student and one of the opponents knew it and stated it in his review, nothing happened and the thesis was approved. Next year the more strict system was established including harder penalties, so I hope it should not repeat. But it did not have any consequences retrospectively"* (student survey).

As there is no national policy and most universities don't have institutional policies either, it is often up to the teacher to decide what will happen when plagiarism is uncovered. Teachers often solve these cases themselves even when the institutional policy (considering plagiarism as any other case of cheating) orders them to give the case to the disciplinary committee. The most common penalty is then request to rewrite, zero mark and verbal warning in case of assignment and zero mark, request to rewrite or suspension from the institution for the dissertation, which is confirmed by following results:

		Students		Teachers	
		Assignment	Dissertation	Assignment	Dissertation
a.	No action would be taken	50 (14%)	11 (3%)	25 (13%)	6 (3%)
b.	Verbal warning	**166 (47%)**	46 (13%)	**97 (50%)**	24 (12%)
c.	Formal warning letter	65 (19%)	61 (17%)	13 (7%)	21 (11%)
d.	Request to rewrite it properly	**221 (63%)**	**149 (42%)**	**113 (58%)**	**105 (54%)**
e.	Zero mark for the work	**196 (56%)**	**167 (48%)**	**91 (47%)**	**86 (44%)**
f.	Repeat the module or subject	125 (36%)	73 (21%)	53 (27%)	40 (21%)
g.	Fail the module or subject	65 (19%)	73 (21%)	25 (13%)	17 (9%)
h.	Repeat the whole year of study	13 (4%)	47 (13%)	8 (4%)	16 (8%)
i.	Fail the whole programme or degree	35 (10%)	74 (21%)	17 (9%)	18 (9%)
j.	Expose the student to school community	32 (9%)	82 (23%)	7 (4%)	17 (9%)
k.	Suspended from the institution	34 (10%)	**162 (46%)**	8 (4%)	**43 (22%)**
l.	Expelled from the institution	29 (8%)	144 (41%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
m.	Suspend payment of student grant	27 (8%)	85 (24%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
n.	Other	19 (5%)	14 (4%)	13 (7%)	17 (9%)

The student respondents often added comments that the specific penalty depends on the scale of plagiarised text. Teachers often added that the penalty often depends on the decision of specific teacher. In both students' and teachers' survey many respondents commented that they don't know what happens as they don't have information about it and their institution does not address the problem. As we can see from table, students' and teachers' responses more or less agree.

5. Why do Czech students plagiarise?

According to teachers, two the most important reasons are laziness and ignorance. They are lazy to produce their own work, they do not have a motivation to write good work and gain new information. They do not know the citation rules, the supervisor does not care. One of the senior management survey respondents provided interesting opinion: *"Copying is rooted in students from primary school and its basic principle is that the one from which the pupils copy agree with it. Pupils from childhood then get the feeling that cheating is normal and that the author, whether that person is known or unknown, has no objections. At the university I see a problem in ignorance to ownership of publicly available source (especially via the Internet) and ignorance of proper citation rules."*

Students confirm their own laziness and add teachers' laziness as another reason: "*Academic environment forces us to write absolutely useless assignments which nobody is going to read*" (student survey). They also do not see any purpose of academic writing, do not know citation rules or consider them as too complicated.

As we can see from the following table, when asked for reasons of plagiarism, both teachers and students agree on easiness to cut and paste from the internet, on missing fear to be caught and on ignorance to express student's ideas in his/her own words. Then we can see that students much more often answered that they run out of time and don't know how to cite or reference, whereas teachers much more often answered that students don't see plagiarism as wrong and that students don't want to learn anything, just pass the assignment. So the difference can be observed, students seem to be worse in teachers' eyes than in students' eyes.

	Reason	Students		Teachers	
1	They think the lecturer will not care:	171	49 %	**127**	**65 %**
2	They think they will not get caught:	**196**	**56 %**	132	68 %
3	They run out of time:	**207**	**59 %**	73	37 %
4	They don't want to learn anything, just pass the assignment:	246	70 %	**153**	**78 %**
5	They don't see the difference between group work and collusion:	41	12 %	57	29 %
6	They can't express another person's ideas in their own words:	**198**	**56 %**	132	68 %
7	They don't understand how to cite and reference:	**204**	**58 %**	95	49 %
8	They are not aware of penalties:	104	30 %	57	29 %
9	They are unable to cope with the workload:	104	30 %	33	17 %
10	They think their written work is not good enough:	57	16 %	16	8 %

11	They feel the task is completely beyond their ability:	94	27 %	22	11 %
12	It is easy to cut and paste from the Internet:	**270**	**77 %**	**179**	**92 %**
13	They feel external pressure to succeed:	69	20 %	0	0 %
14	Plagiarism is not seen as wrong:	144	41 %	**118**	**61 %**
15	They have always written like that:	130	37 %	79	41 %
16	Unclear criteria and expectations for assignments:	69	20 %	27	14 %
17	Their reading comprehension skills are weak:	102	29 %	90	46 %
18	Assignments tasks are too difficult or not understood:	63	18 %	11	6 %
19	There is no teachers control on plagiarism:	40	11 %	41	21 %
20	There is no faculty control on plagiarism:	30	9 %	29	15 %
21	The consequences of plagiarism are not understood:	125	36 %	86	44 %

Another reason, mentioned frequently by students, is diversity of assignments. Teachers usually give the same assignment to hundreds of students, and moreover this assignment is the same as it used to be in previous years. Very often the assignment does not support enough variety, so students know that their texts will be similar to each other anyway. In this situation it is practically impossible to avoid plagiarism and students naturally tend to copy their work.

6. *Comparison of the Czech Republic with EU average*

Several differences in the Czech survey results against the EU average worth to be pointed out. At first, students receive much less training. Only 26% of them agree that they have received training of scholarly academic writing, whereas the EU average is 65%. This is confirmed by answers to the question about the mean how the student became aware of plagiarism. In EU, the most common way is workshops, guidance notes prevail in the Czech Republic. Students are also less demanding for more training. Only 44% of Czech students would like to have more training on avoidance of plagiarism and academic dishonesty, compared with EU average of 60%. Students also are less likely to suspect their teachers of having used plagiarised or unattributed materials in class notes (24% compared to 31% of EU average). On the contrary, 57% of students have come across a case of

plagiarism committed by a student at their institution, which is much more than the EU average on this question (35%). If we choose only those respondents who have received training of scholarly academic writing, 70% of these students have met a case of plagiarism. That confirms that some institutions address plagiarism more seriously, train their students and uncover cases of plagiarism, but other institutions do not deal with plagiarism at all. When looking at the data from Western European countries, there is no difference (i.e. trained and not trained students meet with plagiarism equally), but in Eastern Europe the difference is much bigger (Foltynek & Rybicka, 2013).

When given a specific case (40% of a student's submission is from other sources and is copied into the student's work), rather more Czech student respondents tended to judge it as plagiarism (or serious plagiarism), when compared to responses from across the EU. For example, the sub-question stating that some words in copied 40% of text were changed with no quotations, references or in text citations, gave us following results:

7. *Examples of good practice*

The most outstanding example of good practice is definitely the project Theses.cz (and its siblings Odevzdej.cz and Repozitar.cz) provided by Masaryk University in Brno. Theses.cz is not only a technical solution for plagiarism detection. It has started a much needed discussion about plagiarism and brought the concept into students' minds. Any case of plagiarism is now much more difficult to hide. However, it is just half of the way: All Czech universities should participate in this project to make a real national repository. Nowadays, if a student copies his/her work from the source which is not in the database, he/she will probably not be caught. The other aspect is that the software tool provides just some facts about the sources. The decision whether given case is plagiarism or not lies with teachers and they may not follow the same procedures.

8. *Recommendations for the Czech Republic*

As clearly flows from the author's research (Foltynek & Rybicka, 2013), Czech universities should introduce more training on scholarly academic writing. Survey results confirm that students want to receive more training and trained students can better judge given case of plagiarism. Students should be convinced about the reasons for correct referencing during this training and taught how to cite and reference correctly.

Moreover, training should be introduced not only for students, but also for teachers. *"Namely training of teaching staff is needed. They are those who give information and examples to students."* (Senior management survey).

Also, policies and procedures dealing with plagiarism should be introduced either nationally or institutionally. And, much more importantly, teachers should be convinced to follow the procedures. There are numerous examples (from abroad) of institutions having their procedures which are just on paper and nobody follows them. This is not only about plagiarism, it is general mentality and approach to academic integrity, which will be very hard to change, but it is needed. Some respondents even consider this aspect as more serious than introducing of policies itself. They judge that plagiarism is sufficiently covered by contemporary legislation (Authorship act, study regulations, ethical codex); the problem is that this legislation is not enforced.

Numerous text responses from both students and teachers suggested two aspects: Prevention (educate teachers and students) and adequate penalties (strict detection, consistency in dealing with cases of plagiarism, publicity and maintaining statistics). It is clear that adequate publicity (probably with sufficient level of anonymity) would convince students that plagiarism is addressed and those who plagiarize are being punished adequately. Maintaining national statistics may also make HEIs to address this phenomenon honestly.

9. *Conclusion*

The research on plagiarism in the Czech Republic showed us some specifics of the Czech approach. However, in many aspects the Czech Republic is comparable to other European countries. Based on suggestions of respondents, comparison with other countries, exploitation of good practices and research results, some recommendations were raised. We will now summarize them clearly:

- Introduce training for students and teachers. They have to know exactly what plagiarism is, how to avoid it, how to cite and reference correctly and why it is important.
- Introduce policies and procedures dealing with plagiarism; Plagiarism should be explicitly mentioned in study regulations.
- Establish national repository of theses which will be obligatory to use for universities.
- Unify procedures and penalties for plagiarism across all HEIs in the Czech Republic. Cases of plagiarism should be published (anonymously) and institutional and national statistics should be maintained.
- Encourage academic teachers to take measures to discourage student plagiarism

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