

# **Analytical paper: Plagiarism among Belarusian students. Contributory factors, consequences, and solutions**

The Ostrogorski Centre presents a new analytical paper “Plagiarism among Belarusian students: Contributory factors, consequences, and solutions”, written by Vadim Mojeiko and Piotr Rudkouski.

The paper primarily based on suggestions made during [a conference](#) on reform of Belarusian higher education held on 27 December 2018 in Minsk, organised by the Ostrogorski Centre.

Dedicated to the issues of higher education and its reforms in Belarus, the conference allowed academics, practitioners and administrators to discuss the existing problems and possible solutions. The main topics concerned new forms of practice-oriented business education at the masters level, modernization of higher education at entrepreneurial university framework, reforms of Belarusian scientific research, and the issue of plagiarism at Belarusian universities.

The analytical paper suggests that written assignments remain particularly vulnerable to various dishonest practices – plagiarism being the most conspicuous. At least 50% of Belarusian students plagiarise. They commit all varieties of plagiarism, although “compiled” and “copy-paste” plagiarisms occur most frequently. It is very likely that a significant percentage of Belarusian students studying at Western-type universities also resort to plagiarism.

There is remarkable tolerance of plagiarism within the

Belarusian education system. Lecturers are generally lenient when it comes to punishments for plagiarism. There are no critical thinking and/or academic writing courses, which would introduce students to good practices in respect of finding and processing data.

The current system requires that students produce a large number of written essays, but it does not give them tools for doing so appropriately. This is a chief contributory factor in plagiarism.

Other contributory factors of plagiarism include the absence of licensed anti-plagiarism software at lecturers' disposal, the excessive workload of students and lecturers, lecturers' low salaries, and the weak academic ethos in Belarus. To start seriously dealing with the problem, universities should first of all train students in critical thinking and academic writing. It is imperative to give students instruments with which they can complete written assignments. No other measures will work if this element is neglected.

## **Recommendations**

The research paper proposes several initiatives on how to decrease the plagiarism level among Belarusian students, however, the authors acknowledge that the use of anti-plagiarism software remains far from being a panacea.

### **· Train students in critical thinking and academic writing**

It is crucial to give students instruments with which they can undertake written assignments. No other measures will work if this element is neglected. The Belarusian students who plagiarise are not only "culprits", but also "victims": if

they are not trained in academic writing or if it is at a low level, how can they succeed in doing written assignments on their own? As one of the interviewees aptly said, “It is necessary to distinguish between cynicism and the lack of knowledge. We must introduce the courses for lecturers on how to analyse a [student’s] text and detect plagiarism, and for students on how to write academic essays.”



Piotr Rudkouski and Vadim Mojeiko at the Ostrogorski Centre’s conference on the reform of higher education.

## **.Provide financial incentives for combatting plagiarism.**

The incentives can be both positive and negative. To quote one of the interviewees, “A system of selective post-checking [is needed]: premiums for lecturers should depend on whether they accepted plagiarised essays or not.”

## **.Use automatic anti-plagiarism checkers, preferably licensed versions.**

However, one should remember that these checkers cannot substitute for the personal commitment of a lecturer. Software is not a panacea. To quote one of the interviewees, “Yes, we need anti-plagiarism checkers; up to half of all plagiarism can be detected in this way. But it can only serve as an element supplementary to human engagement.”

## **Revise the workload of both lecturers and students.**

For lecturers to be able to combat plagiarism, it is necessary to ensure enough time and appropriate conditions for doing so. When it comes to students, it is advisable to reduce the volume of classroom tutorials to allow more time for students to work on their own. To quote one of the interviewees, "Students are overloaded with classroom hours, they have no time to prepare written assignments."

## **. Combat plagiarism at the earlier stages of the educational process.**

If young people get accustomed to plagiarising in secondary schools, it is extremely hard to eradicate this habit later. "Plagiarism originates in [secondary] school. We should check essays and presentations [in schools] more strictly."

## **. Change the system of recruitment to universities.**

"The most important thing is that it is motivated students, and not just school leavers, who should be accepted in universities," as one of the interviewees noticed.

## **. Avoid rash acting.**

It is important to combat plagiarism, but it should be done gradually and prudently. To quote another of the interviewees, "It is necessary to think about the consequences of any harsh measures." The antidote should not be more poisonous than the poison.

- Read the full paper in English [here.](#)
- Read the full paper in Belarusian [here.](#)