DETECTORS COULD SPOT PLAGIARISM IN RESEARCH PROPOSALS

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SIR — Your News story 'Entirepaper plagiarism caught by software' *(Nature* **455,**715; 2008) follows other reports of systems to detect plagiarism (see M. Erramiand H. Garner *Nature* **451,**397-399; 2008, and S.L Titus *et al. Nature* **453,**980-982;2008). Having all been involved in proposal evaluation, we believe the studies indicate that a text matching analysis of research proposals could reduce plagiarism in subsequent publications. For instance, when European Commission evaluators have met in the past to evaluate research proposals, they received printed copies which had to be returned before the panel members left, and had no computer access during deliberations. A plagiarism detector using text-mining methods could be used instead of the current security measures. Such a system could, in principle, detect similarities to previous submissions and uncited sources using advanced document segmentation. Only official agencies have access to confidential proposals and the funds to experiment with automated plagiarism-detectors. It is important that they should investigate these approaches to reducing the possibility of scientific misconduct.