STRENGTHENING THE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERNATIONAL YOUTH

STORY 2014

RESEARCH REPORT

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Strengthening the Training Opportunities for InteRnational Youth

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Strengthening the Training Opportunities for International Youth: Research Report
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CONTENTS

FOREWORD 4
KEY RESULTS 5
RECOMMENDATIONS 17
BACKGROUND 19
METHODOLOGY 21
MOBILITY FOR STUDIES 23
- Introduction 23
- Student Perspective 23
- Higher Education Institution Perspective 41
- Comparative Perspective with previous PRIME Studies 59

MOBILITY FOR TRAINEESHIPS 61
- Introduction 61
- Student Perspective 61
- Higher Education Perspective 83
- Receiving Organisation Perspective 97

NON-MOBILE AND FUTURE MOBILE STUDENTS 117
NATIONAL AGENCIES 123
CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER STEPS 129
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 130
REFERENCES 132
FIGURES AND TABLES 133
APPENDIX 138

FOREWORD

In 2014, the Erasmus Student Network celebrates its 25th anniversary. Over the past 25 years we have aided and advocated for international students all around Europe. Our volunteers work together with Higher Education Institutions in over 450 local associations in 37 European countries to make the experience for international students as enjoyable and enriching as possible.

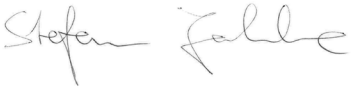
With the new Erasmus+ programme, the European Commission plans to send more than two million Higher Education students abroad between 2014 and 2020. A range of additional programmes are being established all around Europe to increase the number of mobile students even further.

We believe that a period abroad is an important added value in a student's academic life. Going abroad is challenging on the personal level and helps students improve their transversal skills. Going abroad also helps individuals adapt to new environments and prepare for today's fast changing labour market. Students can choose from a diverse range of offers to go abroad during their studies: an exchange, a traineeship abroad or even a full degree in a different country. All such offers come with different advantages and challenges.

To identify the aforementioned advantages and challenges, we believe that exploring the current situation for mobile students is crucial. Building upon our findings will allow us to improve our work, which is an essential jigsaw for high quality mobility and thus supports the continuous success of Europe as a knowledge and education based economy.

I wish you an enjoyable and informative read.

Warm wishes,



Stefan Jahnke
President ESN AISBL 2013-2015

KEY RESULTS

Mobility for Studies

Student Perspective

Information provision for mobility for studies

- 97% of students receive information about the Learning Agreement and 95% receive it prior to the exchange period.

- 95% of students receive information about the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) or other credit systems and 82% receive it prior to the exchange period while 14% receive it during their exchange.

- 69% of students receive information about grade transfer procedures. Only 53% receive the information before the exchange period, 26% obtain this information during their exchange and 20% after their exchange.

- 80% of students receive information about the Erasmus Student Charter: 80% receive the Charter before the exchange period and almost all of the remaining ones during their exchange (18%).

- Students use different sources such as websites (98%), newsletters (90%) or individual consultation from their Higher Education Institutions (HEI, 88%). Those sources are also considered to be the most useful tools.

Learning Agreement

- Almost all students (98%) sign a Learning Agreement when they go on exchange and in 76% of cases they do so before their departure.

- 56% of students are able to freely choose their courses while in 38% of cases the sending and/or the receiving institutions play an active role in the course selection.

- 71% of students make changes to their Learning Agreements: the most frequent reason is that selected courses are not available upon arrival at the receiving institution (57%).

- The majority of Learning Agreements (88%) have course credits expressed in ECTS.

Financial issues

- 91% of students receive a grant to fund their exchange periods: 38% of them receive it mostly during the period abroad, 33% mostly before the period abroad and 6% of students receive it mostly after their exchange period. A further 9% of students receive them in a non-

periodic fashion.

- Students receive additional funding mainly from the sending HEI (32%), national authorities (28%), regional authorities (23%) or private foundations (8%).

Recognition and grade transfer

- The percentage of students receiving full-recognition differs according to the sample and definition of full recognition. In tendency, figures move in the right direction comparing it to the previous PRIME studies. Full recognition for students who receive ECTS credits and who later on give more detailed information on the exact amount of credits is as high as 84% when asking a direct yes or no question. Taking into account the whole sample, the number is considerably lower and only 76% say they have received full recognition. Dividing the concept of recognition into conditional and unconditional recognition shows that 78% receive conditional recognition and only 62% say they have received unconditional recognition for the credits obtained in the final version of their Learning Agreement.

- Main reasons for non-recognition are that the course content is not accepted by the sending institution (29% of cases), problems with credit calculation (17%) and bureaucratic issues in the sending institution (10%).

- 9% of students claim that they have had to prolong their studies at the sending institution due to recognition issues, while 21% don't know if they might need to do so in the future.

- 22% of students feel that their grades are downgraded during the recognition process and 15% of students feel that their ECTS were also downgraded.

General feedback on mobility for studies

- 49% would not have opted for a mobility for studies period, if they had known that they will face recognition or grade-transfer problems. A lower grant would have prevented 37% from going abroad and not receiving a grant at all would have discouraged 57% from going abroad.

- Almost 90% of students are very or rather satisfied with the overall experience of their academic exchange. However, only around 50% of students are very or rather satisfied with the actual recognition process, the actual grade transfer and the information provided on both issues.

Higher Education Institution Perspective

Information provision for mobility for studies

- Actors providing students with information about Erasmus mobility for studies are the international relations office (80%), the institutional Erasmus coordinator (73%) and faculty Erasmus coordinators. 59% of HEIs say the information comes from former exchange students and 45% report that students associations are additional information providers. The most

common channels to provide this information to students are, respectively, information on the university home page (95%) and meetings, seminars and sessions (93%).

- Almost all HEIs (97%) provide their students with a signed copy of their Learning Agreement and a majority (86%) hands out a copy of the Erasmus Student Charter. About a third (32%) offers a conversion table for credits, a grade distribution (28%) and an Erasmus University Charter (28%).

Learning Agreement

- The majority of HEIs (94%) use the official and centrally provided Learning Agreement. In most cases either the Erasmus coordinators at the faculty (30%) or the study programme director or advisor (22%) makes the final decision on courses in the Learning Agreement of an outgoing Erasmus student.

- The responsibility for the decision on the amount of credits a student has to obtain varies between HEIs. The faculty Erasmus coordinator (18%), the dean or head of department (17%), the institutional Erasmus coordinator (16%) or the study programme director or advisor (15%) are most often responsible for this decision.

- The majority of the HEIs (72%) experience modifications in the Learning Agreement from more than 50% of their students. The most common reason for these changes is that the initially chosen courses are not available. In addition, reasons such as the receiving institution requesting changes and an extension of the mobility period are considered important.

Recognition and ECTS

- The majority (77%) of surveyed institutions use the ECTS as the one and only system, while 20% use it together with a national credit system.

- In 25% of the HEIs the faculty Erasmus coordinators are in charge of the credit recognition procedure. The study programme director or advisor (20%), the dean or head of the department (17%) and a special recognition committee (11%) are also responsible for the process.

- In approximately half of the responding HEIs (49%) all outgoing Erasmus students receive full recognition for their studies abroad, while 37% grant more than 80% of their students full recognition.

- The most common reason (43%) why outgoing Erasmus students do not receive full recognition of their studies abroad is that the content or a part of the courses were not accepted by the sending institution. Students who do not provide the needed documents (34%), courses that are not included in the final version of the Learning Agreement (33%) or a lack of approval from the professor (31%) are also common reasons why students do not get recognition for their studies abroad. Some of the HEIs claim that problems with credit calculation (24%) occur through e.g. different credit systems at the sending and receiving institution.

Grade Transfer

- The Faculty Erasmus coordinators (36%) and the international relations office (24%) are the ones who most often have the responsibility to provide students with information about the grade transfer. Study programme directors or advisors (12%) and institutional Erasmus coordinators (12%) are also important actors in some HEIs.

- The majority of HEIs (77%) provides students with information about grade transfer before the exchange. About 12% inform about the grade transfer after the exchange while 5% disseminate the information while the students are abroad.

- Grades are most often converted according to a grade distribution table created by the institution (34%). In some HEIs (17%) only credits are recorded, while grades are not. It is also common in several HEIs to convert grades individually, either by the faculty Erasmus coordinator (12%) or the institutional Erasmus coordinator (3%).

- In about a fourth of HEIs (24%) the faculty Erasmus coordinators are the ones in charge of the final grade transfer for outgoing students, followed by the study programme director or advisor (16%). The dean or head of department (12%), a special recognition committee (11%), the international relations office (8%) and institutional Erasmus coordinators (7%) are also responsible for the finalising of the grade transfer for outgoing exchange students.

Payment and portability of Erasmus grants

- In most HEIs (72%) all outgoing Erasmus students receive an Erasmus grant while in some cases (22%) between 80 and 99% of the students receive the grant. 40% of HEIs provide additional financial help apart from the Erasmus grants, while most (59%) do not.

- Students are typically provided Erasmus grants either partially before and after the exchange (42%), or only before the exchange (28%). Some students receive the grant partially during the exchange and the rest later (19%), while a minor part obtains the whole amount during the exchange (9%).

- If some Erasmus funding is left at the end of the year, most HEIs send what is left back to the National Agency (46%) or redistribute the funds to the students who are already entitled to receive the Erasmus grant (41%). It is less common to use the remaining funding on staff training (8%), promotion for the upcoming year (8%) and providing support to organisations and projects (5%).

- The majority (80%) of students do not lose the right to national grants and other financial support when studying abroad. In some cases (6%) the students lose parts of their financial support while a few HEIs (13%) are not sure.

- In most cases students receive additional Erasmus grants if they decide to prolong their mobility period in case enough funding is available (67%). Some HEIs (22%) always offer more grants, while a minority (6%) never offer financial support if students extend their studies abroad.

- The majority of HEIs (63%) claim that between 1% and 19% of their students have to pay

back some of their grants. In 32% of the HEIs no one is required to pay back the grant. The main reason why students have to return all or a part of their grant is related to too little time spent abroad, early return or not going at all (85%). Insufficient ECTS (31%) and failed exams (18%) are less common reasons.

- Most of the representatives at HEIs claim that the main reason (29%) that discourages students from going on exchange is not receiving sufficient funding. Other HEIs say that obstacles such as fear of not passing the exams abroad (17%), fear of not receiving full recognition (16%) and lack of language skills (15%) make students less encouraged to go on exchange.

Mobility for Traineeships

Student Perspective

Information provision on mobility for traineeships

- The website of the HEI (66%), seminars or presentations (49%), meetings upon request (41%) brochures, booklets, flyers or posters (32%) are successful ways to reach students.

- Most trainees find a receiving organisation themselves (46%) or with the help of their HEI (37%). Family and friends help 7% of responding students to find a receiving organisation. When HEIs provide support, individual professors (55%) and the IRO (55%) are most often helping students to find traineeships abroad.

- A majority of 60% apply directly to the organisation of interest. Consulting specialised traineeship websites (36%) and directly checking relevant organisations' webpages (29%) are also common ways to look for a traineeship. Students also use personal contacts (19%) and word-of-mouth (12%) to look for traineeships.

- Private sector companies (36%), HEIs (22%) and research centres (12%) are the type of organisations that welcome mobile trainees most frequently. A huge majority of 84% states that their traineeship is in a field that matches with their studies.

- Most receiving organisations are small with less than 50 employees (64%). 21% of responding trainees state that their receiving organisation has between 50 and 1,000 employees. Only 7% of the private hosting companies have more than 1,000 employees.

- Traineeships mainly last between 3 and 6 months (83% of the entire sample).

Learning Agreement

- The majority of trainees sign a Learning Agreement for their traineeship (82%) and most of them sign it before the traineeship (87%).

- More than half of the sample evaluates the handling of the Learning Agreement as "very easy" or "easy". However, 9% find it somewhat difficult to handle the Learning Agreement.

- Only 5% of students in the sample have to change their Learning Agreement. In 44% of those cases the receiving organisation requests changes to the Learning Agreement. Extending (25%) or shortening (8%) the traineeship are additional reasons for changes. Also, changing the tutor or contact person (4%) and the student not being satisfied with the traineeship conditions (4%) lead to changes in the Learning Agreement.

Financial Issues

- The majority of students (81%) receives a grant. Grants are mainly provided by HEIs (61%). National, regional and local grants follow with 24% and only in 4% of the sample the receiving organisation provides a grant.

- Most students receive the payment before (43%) or during (31%) their traineeship abroad. While some receive the payment only after (8%), others receive it monthly (8%) or in different instalments (6%).

- 71% of responding students cannot cover their living expenses during their traineeship with their grant. Only 26% receive additional financial compensation from the receiving organisation clearly showing that some students have to rely on other sources such as savings or family support to realise a traineeship abroad.

- Additional financial support from the receiving organisation is mainly provided through a salary (53%). Some organisations provide support through covering accommodation expenses (19%), local transportation (8%) and reimbursements of different costs (7%).

Recognition of traineeships

- 64% of all responding students have already received recognition for their traineeship and for 29% the process is still ongoing. The remaining 7% have not received full recognition resulting in 11% without full recognition taking the ones with ongoing processes aside.

- As a reason for non-recognition, 76% say they do not require it as part of their degree. Problems with credit calculation (3%), part of the traineeship not being included in the Learning Agreement (2%), no approval from the professor (2%) and necessary documents not being provided (2%) are some of the more genuine causes of non-recognition. Putting these cases in relation to the number of students that claim they have received full recognition results in a number of non-recognition of around 2-3%. This result shows that non-recognition is not an extensively big problem for mobility for traineeships.

- Most students (58%) say that ECTS are used in the recognition process. The total amount of hours (39%) and the total amount of months (14%) are most often used as criteria to calculate ECTS.

- The study programme director or advisor (24%), the faculty or institutional Erasmus coordinator (20% and 19%, respectively), professors (19%), International Relations Offices (14%) and the dean or head of department (11%) are the actors in charge of the recognition procedure.

General student feedback on mobility for traineeships

- Students consider personal experience and professional experience the most important reasons to participate in trainee mobility. Culture, language learning, visiting the country and job opportunities are also evaluated as important reasons.

- 88% are either very satisfied or satisfied with their overall experience abroad and 75% are either very satisfied or satisfied with their traineeship experience. Similar to the results for mobility for studies evaluation, this result demonstrates that next to the educational and professional value, the stay abroad provides an added value to students.

- 31% say they encountered obstacles or difficulties during their traineeship. Two major challenges are the grant not being sufficient (45%) and the working language (38%). Integrating into the culture of the organisation (17%), the administrative burden from the sending HEI (15%) and insufficient skills (13%) are also important obstacles and difficulties.

- 57% of students have a supervisor from their HEI. 87% receiving organisations provide a tutor to the trainee. 77% consider such a tutor "very useful" or "useful".

- 60% of students that already have finished their degree programme consider their traineeship an advantage on the labour market. 24% consider the time abroad an important reason for getting hired. The time abroad was instrumental to finding the respective job say 20% and 19% believe that their international experience shortened their job search. Another 18% say that the respective job specifically required experience abroad. 79% of all responding students consider their traineeship possibly very advantageous or advantageous when applying for a job.

Higher Education Institution Perspective

Information provision on mobility for traineeships

- In around half of responding HEIs a traineeship is compulsory for some programmes, but not necessarily abroad. For 22% a traineeship is compulsory for all study programmes and another 22% say that a traineeship is not compulsory at all. Only around 7% say that a traineeship abroad is compulsory for some of their study programmes.

- Almost all of those institutions (83%) promote Erasmus traineeships. Private agreements (30%) and Leonardo Da Vinci traineeships (19%) are less often promoted.

- Individual consulting (69%), institutional or International Office webpages (68%) and seminars or open days (62%) are most often used to provide information about training opportunities. HEIs consider individual consulting also the most effective tool.

- Around three fourth of HEIs support students to find traineeship opportunities.

Learning Agreement

- Faculty Erasmus coordinators (29%), study programme directors or advisors (22%) and institutional Erasmus coordinators (17%) are the ones that mainly take final decisions on the Learning Agreement and the Quality Commitment. Professors (8%), special recognition committees (6%), the International Relations Office (6%), the dean or head of department (4%), career centre office coordinators (3%) decide on the final documents in responding HEIs as well.

- Generally very few students make changes to the Learning Agreement. Most HEIs report no changes at all (38%) or less than 20% of all students make changes to the Learning Agreement (57%).

- The most frequent reason to change the Learning Agreement is an extension of the traineeship period (48%). Changes in the job profile (22%), the receiving organisation requesting changes (22%), shortening the traineeship period abroad (20%), the student not being satisfied (15%) and changing the tutor or contact person (11%) are additional reasons for changes.

Recognition of traineeships

- Around 93% of all institutions claim that they usually grant full recognition of their students' traineeships abroad and a substantial part of responding HEIs say they believe recognition is working well.

- Most of the HEIs provide a supervisor for guidance through the learning process of their traineeship (65%).

- The majority of responding HEIs use ECTS as the only credit system for traineeship recognition (57%). 24% use both their national credit system and ECTS and 19% don't use ECTS at all in the process.

Financial issues

- In 55% of all responding HEIs all students receive the Erasmus grant. Only few HEIs use the Leonardo grant to send students abroad and 73% don't use the Leonardo grant at all.

- Most HEIs split up the payment of the grant and pay a part before (46%) or during the exchange (15%). While 27% pay the whole grant before the exchange, 6% pay the grant during the exchange and only 1% after the exchange.

- If students prolong their traineeship, in 14% of responding HEIs students can rely on additional funding and in 65% they may receive an additional grant if there is enough funding. Only 13% of HEIs report that there is no additional funding for students that decide to prolong their traineeship.

- Only very few students have to return their grant or part of it and the reason why students have to return it is too little time spent abroad or not going abroad at all (85%). Insufficient ECTS (15%) and insufficient learning outcomes (4%) are less frequently mentioned reasons for returning money.

- In many HEIs students do not have the possibility to top up their traineeship grant (35%). In other HEIs income from the receiving organisation (28%), national grants (23%) and additional grants (17%) help students finance their traineeship abroad.

Obstacles for mobility for traineeships

- According to HEIs, the fear of wasting an academic year (27%) and not receiving a grant (26%) are the most important obstacles discouraging students from going abroad for a traineeship. The fear of not getting full recognition is only considered an obstacle by 4% of responding HEIs.

- HEIs consider insufficient financial support (66%) the main problem that trainees may face during their actual traineeship abroad. The working language (39%), integration into the organisational culture (24%), lack of professional skills (24%) and the administrative burden (18%) are also potential issues during the period abroad.

Receiving Organisation Perspective

Promotion of mobility for traineeships opportunities

- Organisations usually find their trainees when students apply on their own initiative (61%), with the help of schools or HEIs (57%), within their network contacts (53%) or through advertising a vacancy (45%).

- The most common reason not to have international students or trainees is the lack of contact with potential trainees abroad (37%) and the lack of financial capacity to pay trainees (31%).

- The average duration of a traineeship is 4.8 months. When asked about the ideal duration for the traineeships, the average answer was 6.4 months.

- Generally, organisations promote traineeships (60%) and the most common form of promotion is the organisation's website (77%) and through Higher Education Institutions (62%).

Financial issues

- A third of organisations always offers some kind of financial benefits, a third of organisations never offer it and 21% sometimes offer compensation.

- The majority of organisations (63%) say that they sometimes offer a job opportunity in the same organisation for their trainee and 5% always offer a job afterwards. 28 % sometimes offer their trainees a job opportunity in another, related organisation, while around half of the organisations say they never offer such an opportunity.

Learning Agreement and additional documentation

- 74% of the organisations say they usually sign a Learning Agreement and they do it before the traineeship starts (94%).

- The majority of organisations (88%) claim that the Learning Agreement does not undergo modifications after its signature.

- Almost half of the organisations say that the tutor assigned in the Learning Agreement is monitoring the student's work during the traineeship. Organisations say it is useful to provide students with a tutor.

- At the end of the traineeship, 49% of the organisations always offer a Letter of Recommendation and 42% offer it sometimes.

- 42% of surveyed organisations always offer a Training Certificate, 30% offer it sometimes, while 16% never offer it.

Value of mobile trainees and organisational challenges

- Organisations that receive mobile trainees rate their experience with their trainees with an average of 4.4 on a scale from 1 (not valuable) to 5 (extremely valuable).

- Organisations say that having international trainees is valuable, mostly because trainees bring diversity and having people from different cultures and backgrounds creates a more dynamic professional environment (77%).

- For the integration of the international trainee, organisations assign a mentor to provide the trainee with enterprise-related background information (79%).

- The main problems that organisations encounter in the traineeship process are administrative burdens (47%), the insufficient finances of the organisation to cover trainees' expenses (37%) and the mismatch between the trainee's profile and the organisational requirements (35%). Suggestions for improving the overall traineeship process are: reducing the administrative burden (44%), creating clear monitoring procedures (33%) and making the recruitment process more thorough (30%).

Non-Mobile and Future Mobile Students

- The issue of financial subsistence is a major reason (31%) why respondents who are planning to be mobile in the future haven't realised a mobility period yet. Lack of recognition (11%), administrative burden of the application (8%), the language barrier (6%) are additional obstacles for this group of students.

- Financial subsistence (44%) is by far the most important obstacle for respondents not interested in a mobility experience. The fear of lack of recognition (12%), the language barrier (10%), the administrative burden of the application (7%) and problems with the integration into a new culture (5%) are also significant obstacles.

National Agencies

- According to National Agencies, the major issues with recognition occur mainly because the exact course catalogue and timetable of the receiving institution are not available when preparing the Learning Agreement prior to an exchange.

- National Agencies also report that modifications of the initially approved Learning Agreement between the student and the HEI are the main risk factor why courses are not approved by the home institution upon return.

- National Agencies say that they have tools and procedures in place to handle problems with recognition at HEIs. They, however, say such cases are generally rare.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognition of studies and traineeships abroad

- The European grade transfer systems should be the only credit system. The calculation of ECTS should be unified and reviewed to avoid that students feel that their ECTS credits and their grades have been downgraded. HEIs should apply for the ECTS label.

- Students should know the exact grade transfer procedures before going on exchange. The process and the rules should be clear and transparent. Using the ECTS grading scale is recommended.

- Mobility windows, joint degrees and binding inter-institutional agreements are recommended to make curricula more flexible and avoid any problems with credit recognition.

- Timely information provision of the course schedule and descriptions is one of the keys to prevent later changes in a student's Learning Agreement and should be ensured. Further efforts should be made to ensure that students receive all necessary information regarding the Learning Agreement, the Erasmus Student Charter, the ECTS and grade transfer before the exchange and not during or after it.

- All students should sign a Learning Agreement prior to their departure. The Learning Agreement is a crucial document for both mobility for traineeships and mobility for studies.

- HEIs should recognise all courses approved in students' Learning Agreements with no further examinations or additional tests. Repeated violations of the Erasmus Higher Education Charter should lead to a withdrawal of the Charter to finally enforce full recognition of all credits approved in the final version of the Learning Agreement.

Funding of mobility

- All students should receive their grants in a regular fashion and at least partly in advance. Paying out funds timely enables students to use the funds effectively and avoids additional obstacles for financially constrained students.

- Additional funding is needed to enable students from disadvantaged background to take part in a mobility experience. National and regional authorities should provide funding in addition to Erasmus grants in particular for less privileged groups. Private funding of mobility should be encouraged (e.g. through giving tax benefits to foundations and private sector organisations to provide grants for students).

- Organisations should offer a fair compensation for mobile trainees and not only rely on public money and students' own sources to fund living expenses abroad.

Improving mobility for traineeships

- Generally, better dissemination and promotion of mobility for traineeships opportunities is needed. All actors in the process are encouraged to do more. HEIs, policy makers, national agencies and student associations need to develop effective tools to reach all students.

- HEIs should be more involved in the process of a traineeship. They should promote traineeships and funding opportunities and have more established agreements with receiving organisations.

- Further efforts should be made to have an easier process of application and clearer monitoring procedures. Organisations should have a tutor assigned in the Learning Agreement that will monitor the student's work during the traineeship.

- Organisations should always offer a Letter of Recommendation and a Training Certificate after the traineeship period.

- A still significant obstacle is insufficient language preparation. Greater efforts need to be made on all levels to improve foreign language learning across Europe.

- A major obstacle for increasing participation in mobility for traineeships is the difficulty to match potentially mobile trainees with interested receiving organisations. A comprehensive and well-known solution such as a matching platform is needed to facilitate the matching process.

BACKGROUND

Traineeships have received increasing attention from many different national and European actors. Transition from education to work is an increasingly crucial challenge of today's economies, which has led to traineeships becoming an important tool to aid this transition. The recent economic crisis and the resultant high unemployment rates in many European countries have left young people particularly vulnerable. Together with the partial lack of regulation in some countries and sectors, employers could all too easily exploit young people's need for quality transition to stable employment.

Survey research shows that only around half of all traineeships are paid and only 25% receive sufficient compensation to cover their living expenses (European Youth Forum, 2011). Other findings, such as the lack of educational value of traineeships and precarious working conditions, have contributed to the development of a European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships to remedy these shortcomings. In the Council Recommendations on a Quality Framework for Traineeships (Council of the European Union, 2014), many of these prevailing issues are acknowledged. The Council gives clear recommendations for a quality framework by requiring a written agreement that outlines educational objectives, ensuring reasonable duration and good working conditions and requiring the clarification of any remuneration, among others.

Cross-border traineeships face the very same challenges as regular traineeships do. Besides the aforementioned common challenges, cross-border traineeships pose a set of additional challenges for those involved. However, the additional benefits for the individual, the receiving organisation, the economy and society at large, justify special emphasis on cross-border traineeships. The Erasmus Student Network continuously provides evidence of these benefits in various editions of its annual ESNSurvey. Mobile students evaluate skills such as English, other foreign languages, general communication and working in intercultural teams at a higher level than their non-mobile peers. Individuals with prior mobility experience are also more likely to be mobile labour market participants in the future (Alfranseder et al., 2012). The Council Conclusions acknowledge existing challenges and point out that cross-border traineeships are a means to "help foster a genuine European labour market" (Council of the European Union, 2014).

The Erasmus+ programme, administered by the European Commission, facilitates cross-border traineeships by including funding for higher education students and recent graduates. While Erasmus student mobility has received increasing attention, we still have limited knowledge about cross-border training mobility. The INENTER (Improving the Placements and Internships from Academia to Enterprises) project produced a "Guide of Good Practices and Quality for Placements" building upon a survey conducted with International Relations Offices of Higher Education Institutions (Makridis, 2012). A comprehensive attempt to take into account a student, institutional and corporate perspective is so far missing. The project "Strengthening the Training Opportunities for International Youth (STORY)" conducted by the Erasmus Student Network aims to fill this void and gives a comprehensive picture on the current state of play of training mobility under the Erasmus+ programme (and formerly Lifelong Learning Programme) of the European Commission. In addition, the study is a comprehensive follow-up of the previous

PRIME studies (cf. Dicle et al., 2010 and Apsalone et al., 2009) that assess the state of play of the recognition of credits taken abroad.

METHODOLOGY

The STORY project aims to improve the accessibility and quality of international traineeships and to increase the awareness regarding the existence of such opportunities for young graduates. Therefore, the STORY survey's main focus is related to the quality of study and training mobility.

The STORY research analyses the impact and quality of study and training mobility programmes and surveys obstacles and expectations as perceived by the main actors of student and training mobility: students, Higher Education Institutions, National Agencies and receiving organisations.

The STORY Research Team drafted separate questionnaires for each target group. The questionnaires were reviewed and implemented after taking into consideration the feedback of different experts from the Erasmus Student Network and also from Associate Partners such as UNICA, CHE-Consult and Campus Europae. Guidance and advice from the European Commission, namely from the DG of Education and Culture of the European Commission, Unit Higher Education: Modernisation agenda; Erasmus+ were also taken into consideration.

All questionnaires were accessible online at www.storyproject.eu for a period of 3 months from the middle of March 2014 until middle of June 2014. The dissemination of individual questionnaire was streamlined according to the respective target group. The student questionnaire was disseminated mainly through websites and social networks of local and national ESN sections/associations. The questionnaires for Higher Education Institutions were disseminated directly and mainly addressed to International Relations Offices through emails. With the help of The European Association of Erasmus Coordinators (EAEC), the HEI questionnaires were promoted to Erasmus coordinators. National Agencies were not only approached by ESN, but the European Commission encouraged its completion. Receiving organisations were approached directly through email, in particular to the HR department. In general, ESN used all its dissemination channels, ranging from internal mailing lists, newsletters, websites, social networks and partner organisations. The number of valid responses varies and is indicated for each figure and table throughout the following document.

MOBILITY FOR STUDIES

Introduction

This chapter investigates on the functioning of mobility for studies in Europe. The Erasmus Student Network has previously studied the issue of recognition extensively in its PRIME (Problems of Recognition with Making Erasmus) studies (cf. Dicle et al., 2010 and Apsalone et al., 2009). The chapter will take different perspectives into account: student, National Agency and Higher Education Institution (HEI). The final part of this chapter concludes the analysis and compares the results to the PRIME 2009 and 2010 studies.

Student Perspective

By Jesús Escrivá Muñoz

Demography

In total 9,106 respondents completed the survey for mobility for studies. More than 80% are between 18 and 24 years old, only approximately one third of which are male. 6% of respondents have also participated in a mobility for traineeships experience. Table 1 shows the countries where respondents study their majors.

Sending Higher Education Institution country of respondents	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Italy	1,881	21%
Spain	1,185	13%
Poland	673	7%
Belgium	587	6%
Germany	487	5%
France	445	5%
Austria	383	4%
Portugal	356	4%
The Netherlands	340	4%
Turkey	272	3%

Table 1: Countries of sending Higher Education Institutions of responding mobile students, n=9,106.

Almost 18% of all respondents study their main degree in countries different than their country of origin and have thus additional mobility experience (e.g. through degree mobility). The most popular programme students use to go abroad is Erasmus (94%). However, there are numerous other programmes as Table 2 shows.

Mobility programme of respondents	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Erasmus programme	8,574	94.2%
Bilateral agreement between Universities	157	1.7%
Governmental programme	124	1.4%
Private foundation (e.g. Fulbright)	45	0.5%
Free-mover	14	0.2%
Erasmus Mundus	12	0.1%
CEEPUS	12	0.1%
Double Degree Programme	12	0.1%
Own initiative	12	0.1%
Campus Europae	10	0.1%
ISEP	10	0.1%
Other programmes	122	1.3%

Table 2: Mobility for studies programmes of responding mobile students, n=9,106.

Main exchange destinations of our respondents are Spain (16%), Italy (9%), Poland (8%), France (7%) and Germany (7%) as Table 3 shows. Compared to statistics provided by the European Commission, France and Germany are a bit underrepresented but the general profile is the same, which validates our data.

Host country of respondents	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents	Position according to the EC
Spain	1,474	16%	1st
Italy	818	9%	4th
Poland	705	8%	5th
France	666	7%	3rd
Germany	652	7%	2nd

Table 3: Host countries of responding mobile students, n=9,106.

75% of students who have finished their exchange stay for only one semester with an average duration of 4.3 months while students who enrol for more than one semester abroad stay for an average of 9.6 months. Overall, students stay for an average of 5.6 months.

More than 50% of students started their exchange during 2013 and 39% of the respondents were still abroad when they answered the questionnaire. If respondents who still have not finished their exchange are taken out, 23% of exchange students do not currently reside in their birth country.

Finally, 88% of the respondents study the same field during their exchange as they do in their home institution. Most popular majors are related to business and management sciences (20%), languages (13%) and engineering and technology (13%) as Figure 1 makes clear.

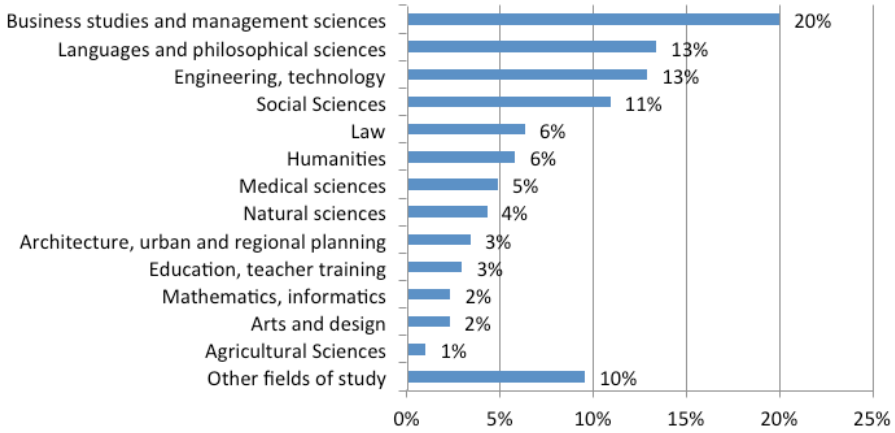


Figure 1: Fields of study at the home institution of mobile students, n=9,106.

Information provision for mobility for studies

Most students claim to have received information regarding the Learning Agreement (97%) and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) or other credit systems used at both the sending and receiving institution (91%). However, information provision on grade transfer systems and the Erasmus Student Charter is less frequent as Figure 2 shows.

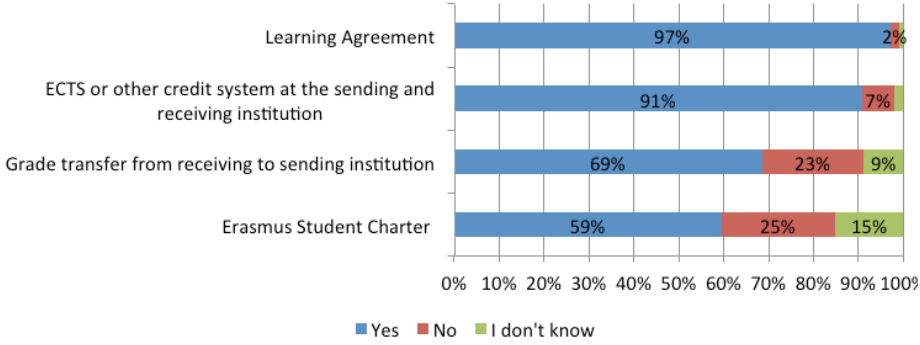


Figure 2: Information provision to mobile students about different documents, n=9,106.

Most students (80-95%) are informed about the Learning Agreement, the ECTS or other credit systems and the Erasmus Student Charter before their exchange. However, only 53% of the students are informed about the grade transfer systems while 26% learn about it during their exchange and 20% afterwards as Figure 3 shows.

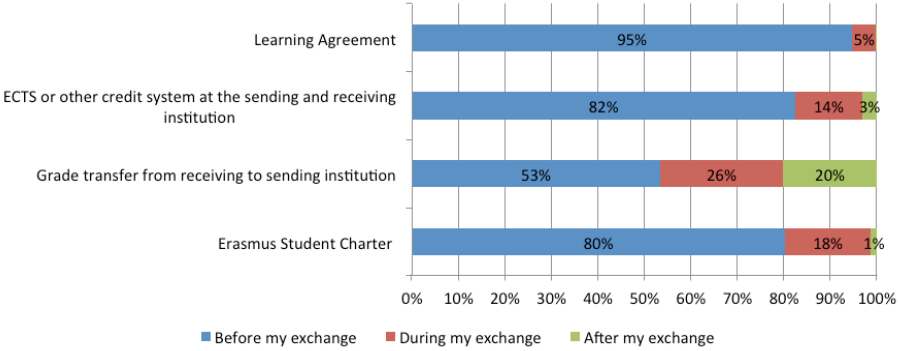


Figure 3: When mobile students receive information about different documents, n=5,413-8,840.

If we study the Learning Agreement specifically, 32% of students find the information on the Learning Agreement by themselves. In the rest of cases, when providing information on the Learning Agreement, the staff from the sending institution is more active than that from the receiving institution. At the sending institution, the institutional Erasmus coordinator, the Faculty Erasmus coordinator and the International Relations Office are the ones who inform students most often. Former exchange students are also a source of information for almost one fifth of students. The most active roles do not change in the receiving institutions, as it can be seen in Figure 4.

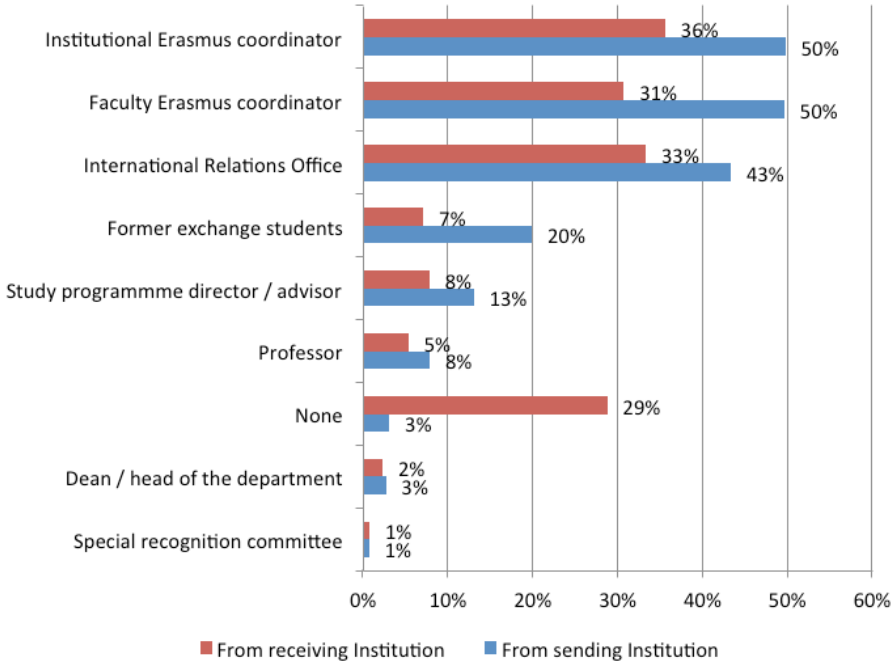


Figure 4: Sources where mobile students receive information about the Learning Agreement, n=6,026.

Regarding ECTS, 42.7% of students obtain information on ECTS or other credit systems by themselves. In the rest of cases, sources do not differ much from the provision of information on the Learning Agreement, as Figure 5 depicts. In the sending HEI, faculty Erasmus coordinators (44%), institutional Erasmus coordinators (42%) and the International Relations Office (35%) are the ones mainly providing this information to students. In the receiving HEI, the same actors provide information on ECTS, however generally less frequently.

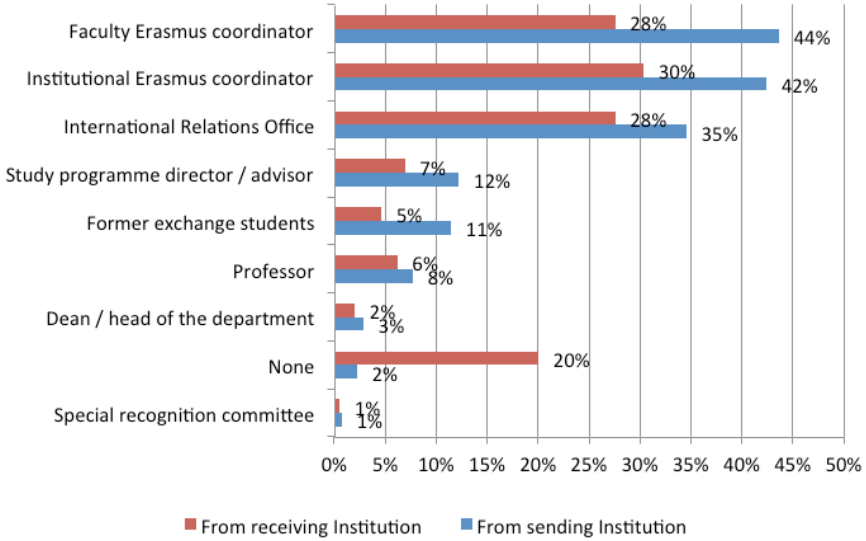


Figure 5: Sources where mobile students receive information about the ECTS or other credit systems, n=4,734.

Concerning the grade transfer from the receiving to the sending HEI, 33% obtain information by themselves. For the remaining cases, faculty Erasmus coordinators (40%), institutional Erasmus coordinators (37%) and the International Relations Office (31%) at the sending HEI most often provide such information. Figure 6 gives a comprehensive overview of the different sources of information on the transfer of grades.

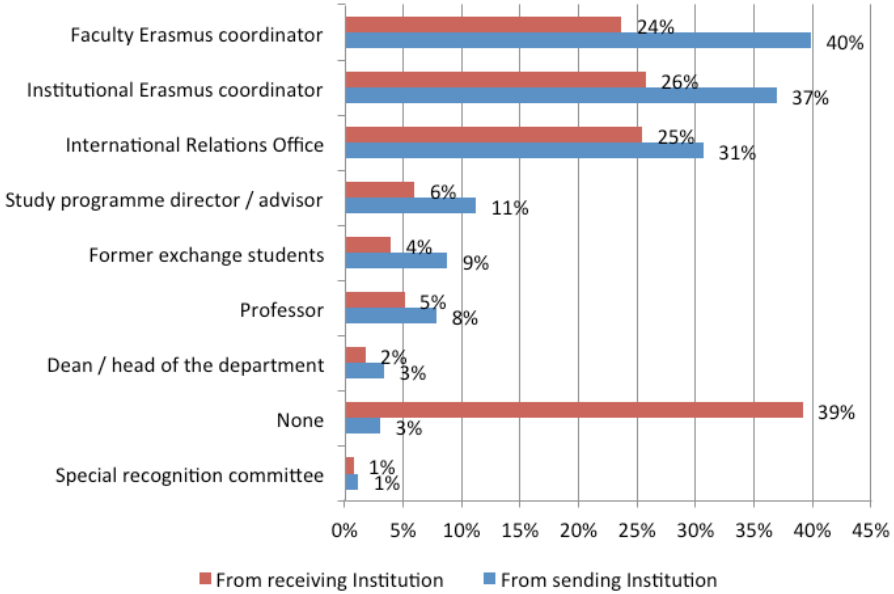


Figure 6: Sources where mobile students receive information about the grade transfer, n=4,193.

The Erasmus Student Charter is the tool least used by students. Only 27% of students find information about it by themselves. Figure 7 gives an overview of the different providers of the Erasmus Student Charter. At the sending institution, faculty Erasmus coordinators (42%), institutional Erasmus coordinators (41%) and the International Relations Office (29%) are the actors that most often provide this information to mobile students.

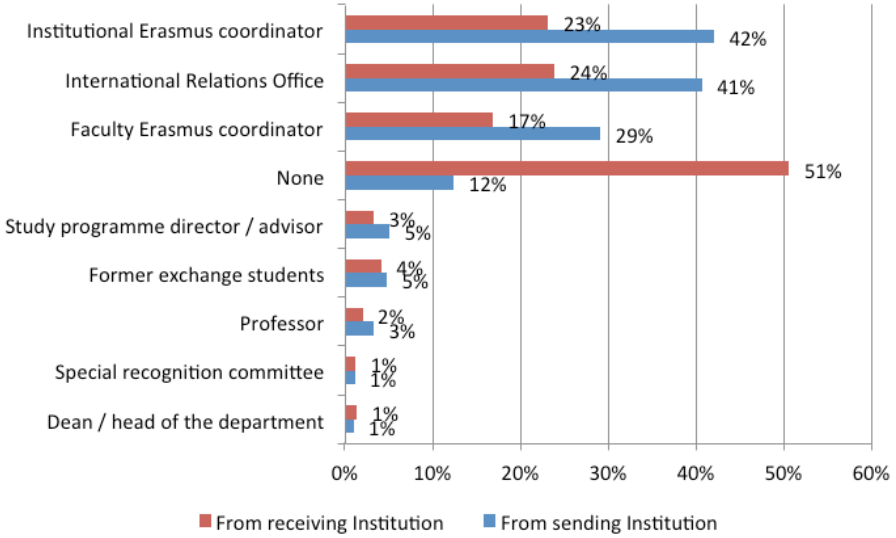


Figure 7: Sources where mobile students receive information about the Erasmus Students Charter, n=3,929.

Students also use a great diversity of sources to obtain information about their exchange. Figure 8 shows the usage of these other sources: websites are by far the most used tool (98% of students use it) but all other sources are quite popular: newsletters and individual emails (90%), individual consulting in HEIs (88%), meeting and seminars (84%), social networking (82%), flyers and brochures (78%) and student association's activities (70%).

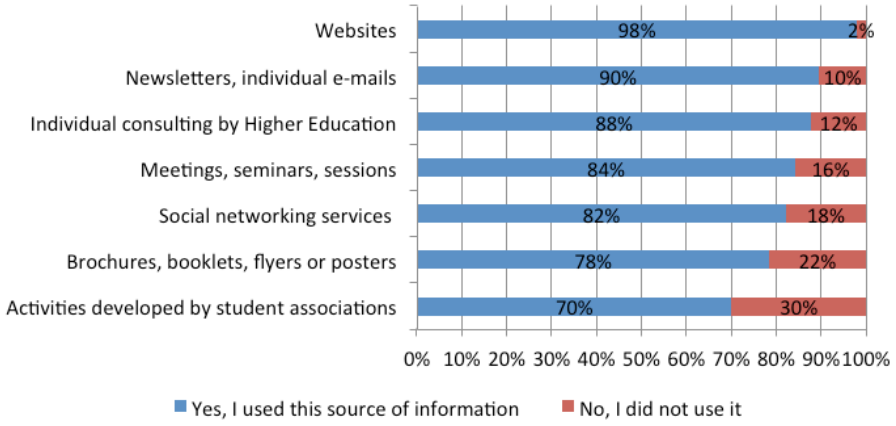


Figure 8: Usage of other sources of information on mobility for studies, n=9,106.

Moreover, students are quite satisfied with how useful these resources are. Brochures, booklets, flyers or posters are the least useful materials (3.1 out of 5 points). Websites (4.2 out of 5 points), individual consulting from HEIs (3.9 out of 5 points) and newsletters or individual emails (3.9 out of 5 points) are considered to be the most useful resources. These findings are illustrated in Figure 9.

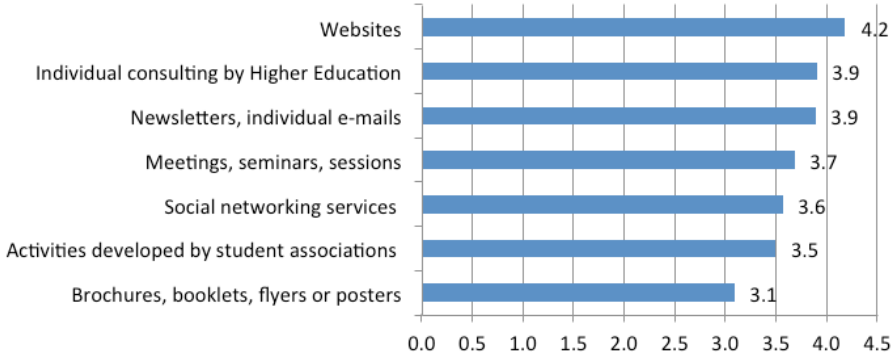


Figure 9: How useful mobile students consider other information sources on mobility for studies (n=9,106).

Learning Agreement for mobility for studies

98% of students signed a Learning Agreement when they go on exchange. Figure 10 shows that more than three fourths of them do it before the exchange period starts. However, 23% of students do it during their exchange and almost 1% do it after their exchange period.

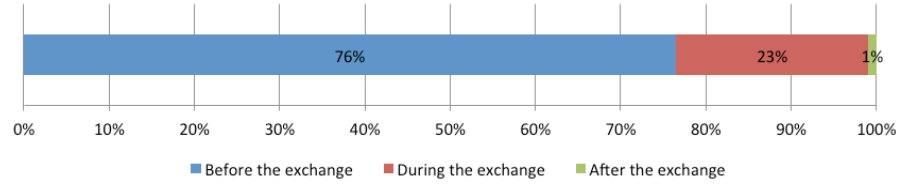


Figure 10: When mobile students sign their Learning Agreement, n=8,737.

Figure 11 illustrates that 56% of responding mobile students are able to freely choose their courses while in 38% of cases the sending and/or receiving institutions play an active role in the course selection.

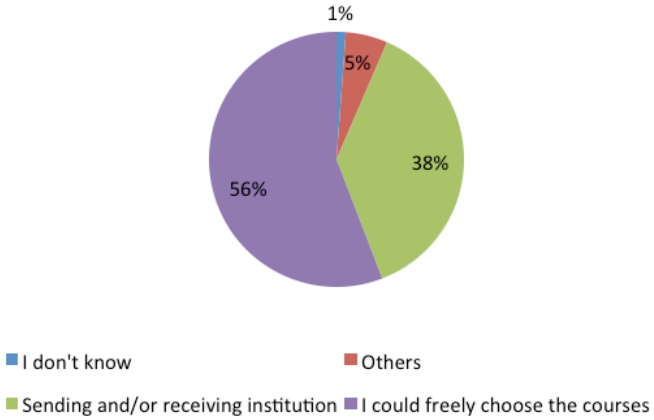


Figure 11: Actor deciding on the selection of courses in the Learning Agreement, n=9,106.

As demonstrated in Figure 12, it is the faculty Erasmus coordinator who plays the most active role in choosing courses for mobile students in both the sending HEI (47%) and the receiving HEI (29%). At the sending HEI, institutional Erasmus coordinators (31%), study programme directors/advisors and professors (20%) are additionally involved in the process. Notably, in many receiving HEIs nobody is in charge of choosing subjects with mobile students (35%).

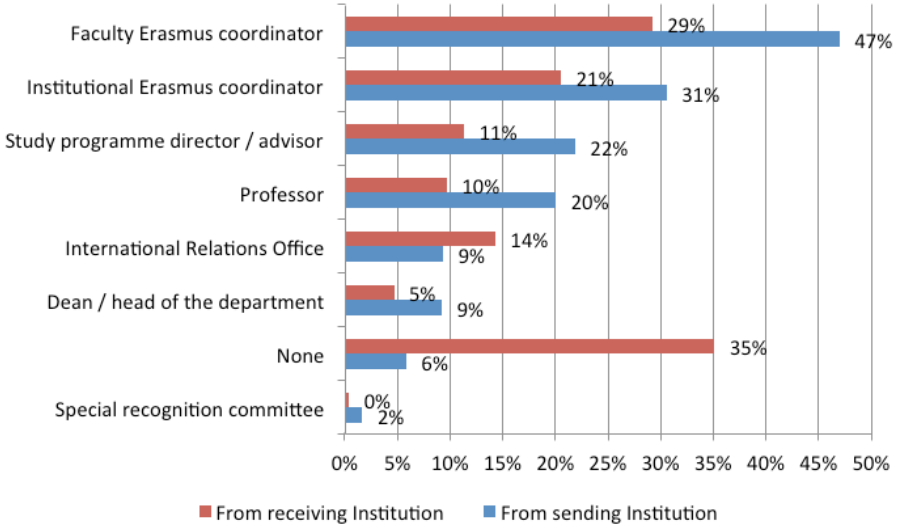


Figure 12: Actor in charge of choosing subjects with mobile students from receiving and sending institutions, n=3,429.

Finally, 71% of students make changes to their Learning Agreement due to a variety of reasons. Figure 13 shows that the most frequent cause is that the courses students selected were not available upon arrival to the receiving institution (57%). Changes requested by the sending institution (10%) and an extension of the stay abroad (8%) are also somewhat frequent. Others refer to students changing their minds upon arrival to the receiving institution because their expectations are not fulfilled or because they have other interests.

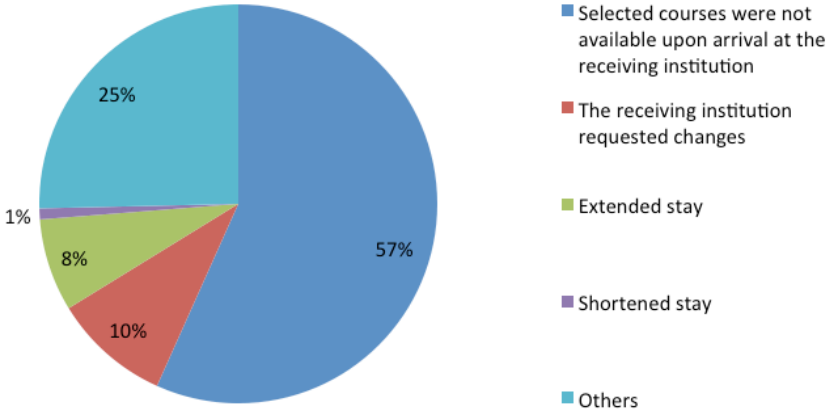


Figure 13: Reasons why mobile students make changes to their Learning Agreement, n=6,439.

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)

The majority of Learning Agreements (88%) have the credits expressed in ECTS. Students who stay one semester have an average of 28.5 credits in the final version of their Learning Agreement, complete 32.9 credits and have 30.1 credits recognised. Students who stay more than 1 semester usually have an average of 51.3 credits in their Learning Agreement, complete 47.9 and have 43.7 credits recognised. In almost all cases, credits replace mandatory courses (91%) or optional courses of students' degrees (57%). Figure 14 shows more details.

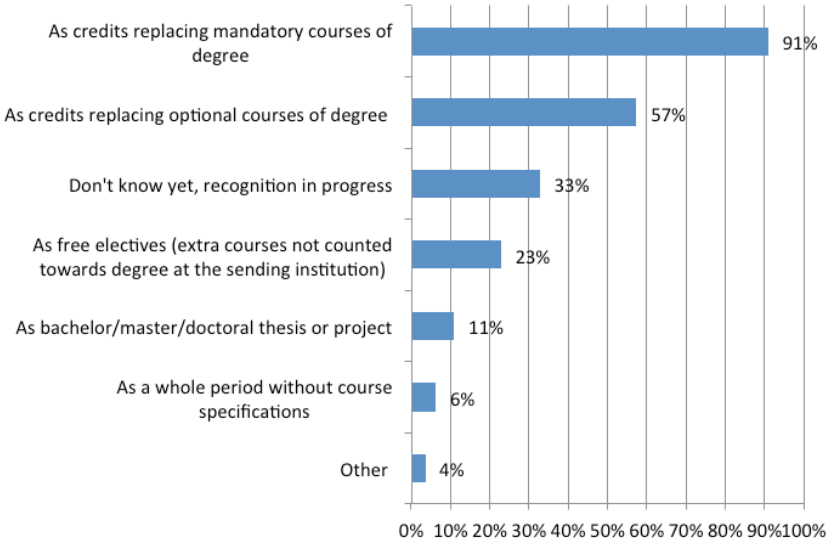


Figure 14: How mobile students get their credits recognised, n=4,994.

Grants and other financial support

91% of students receive a grant to fund their exchange periods. However, the way students receive this funding differs from one case to another. The majority of funded students receive it mostly during the period abroad (38%) or mostly before the period abroad (33%). Only 6% of students receive it mostly after their exchange period. Figure 15 gives an overview of those findings.

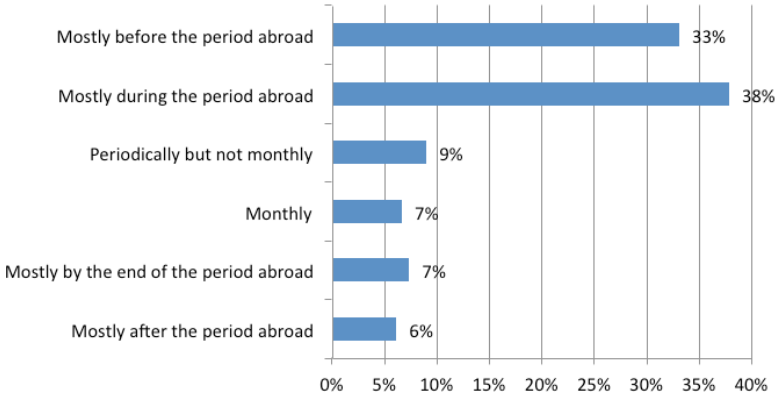


Figure 15: When mobile students receive their grants (n=8,283).

In 81% of cases, grants are not sufficient to cover expenses during the period abroad and 22% of students receive additional funding by different institutions. Figure 16 explains that additional funding comes mainly from the sending institution (32%), national authorities (28%), regional authorities (23%) or private foundations (8%). 4% of students also receive additional funding from sending institutions, receiving institutions or other sources.

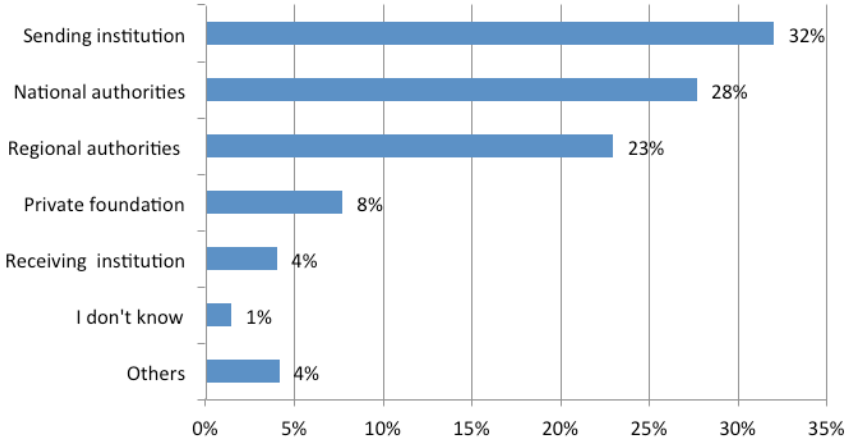


Figure 16: Origin of additional funding for mobile students, n=1,789.

Recognition of mobility for studies

As shown in Figure 17, the faculty Erasmus coordinator is the person in charge of the recognition process upon return in 24% of the cases but other actors also play an important role: the institutional Erasmus coordinator (13%), the International Relations Office (9%) and the study programme director/advisor (8%). However, for 18% of students the recognition process is ongoing and 12% do not know who was in charge of such process.

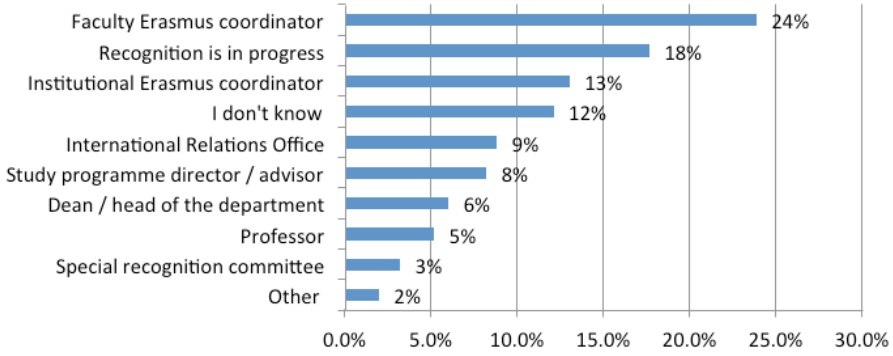


Figure 17: Actor in charge of the recognition process for mobility for studies, n=9,106.

To get a reliable picture on the crucial recognition of credits taken abroad, we chose two methods. First, we directly asked students whether they received full recognition for their studies abroad (they could answer either yes or no). This approach eliminates intentional non-recognition and aims more at students' feeling towards recognition. Some students might in fact answer yes although they haven't received actual full recognition. The opposite seems rather unlikely. Second, we asked students to provide exact information on the total amount of credits taken abroad, the amount of credits recognised unconditionally and the amount of credits recognised conditional on additional work. As the latter question is somewhat challenging to answer for students, we only take into account responses that can be assumed to be reliable which reduces the sample.

Figure 18 shows the recognition figures for students using ECTS and who later on give more detailed information on the exact amount of credits is higher and 84% say they receive full recognition. Taking into account the whole sample, the number is considerably lower and only 76% say they have received full recognition.

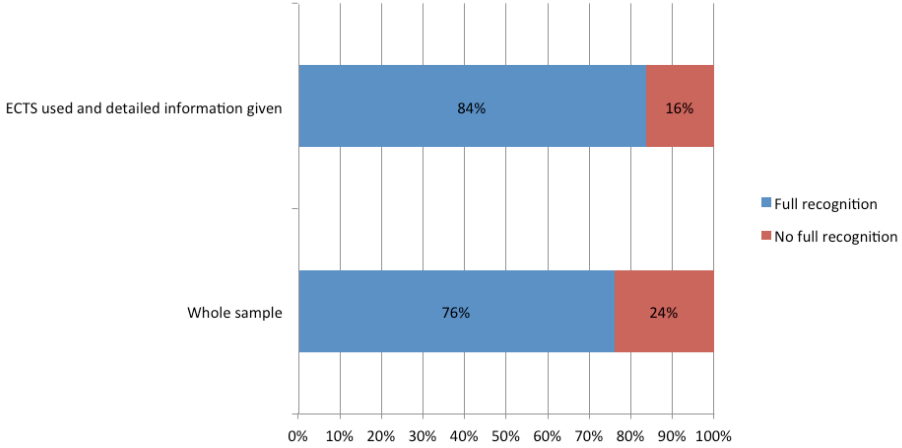


Figure 18: Mobile students receiving full recognition for completed courses and exams abroad, n=9,106; n=4,680.

Figure 19 shows the percentage of students who receive full recognition when considering the actual credits they obtain. Only students using ECTS and giving detailed information on their credits are taken into account. Unconditional recognition compares the number of ECTS credits on the final version of the Learning Agreement to the number of credits recognised without any further exams or courses. Conditional recognition compares the number of ECTS credits on the final version of the Learning Agreement to the number of credits the HEI recognised in the end. Note that this calculation might not take into account if a student has not completed some credits from the final version of the Learning Agreement. Conditional recognition which is comparable to the number in Figure 18 (84%) is lower and stands at 78%. Only 62% say they have received unconditional recognition for the credits obtained in the final version of their Learning Agreement.

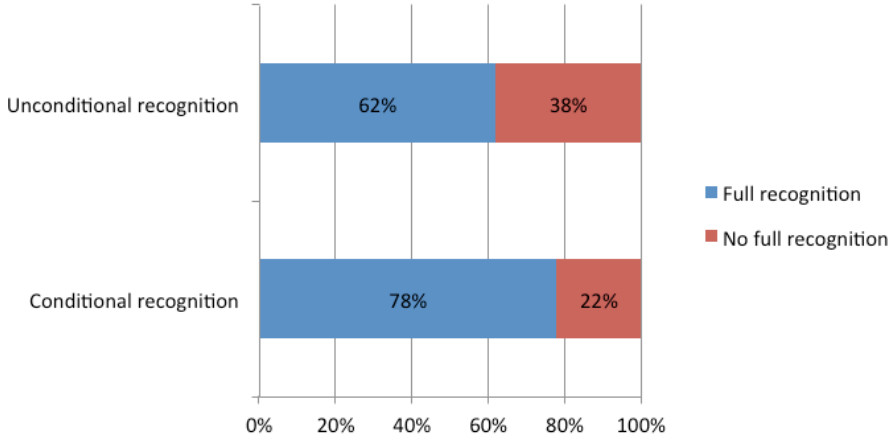


Figure 19: Mobile students receiving full recognition (according to credits indicated), n=4,680.

According to Figure 20 students do not obtain full recognition because their HEIs do not accept the course content or part of it (29%). Problems with credit calculation (17%) bureaucratic issues in the sending institution (10%) and professors' requests to undergo additional examinations (9%) are also quite frequent. Besides, 10% of students do not know why they encounter recognition problems. We have also learnt that 97% of the students who do not receive full recognition had previously signed their Learning Agreement, which excludes the Learning Agreement from being a cause for non-full recognition.

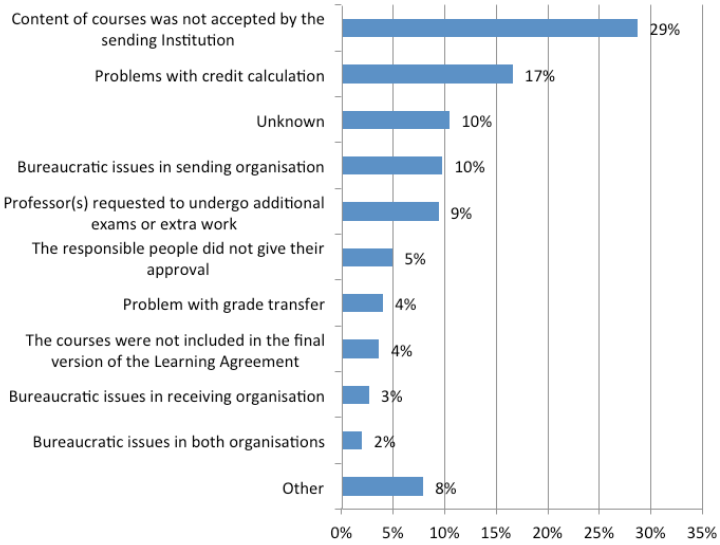


Figure 20: Reasons why mobile students do not obtain full recognition, n=1,925.

In total, 20 students (out of 9,106) decided not to have some courses recognised as a result of the grade transfer.

Figure 21 shows that 9% claim they need to prolong their studies at the sending institution due to recognition issues. According to previous research (cf. Escrivá et al., 2014), the fear of needing to prolong the studies is one of the main obstacles for mobility.

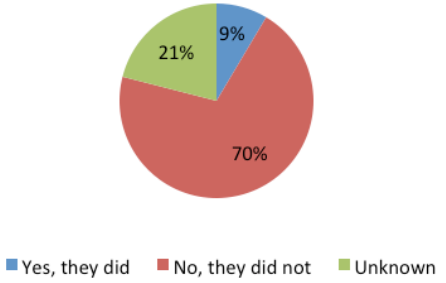


Figure 21: Mobile students that need to prolong their studies at the sending institution due to recognition issues, n=9,106.

Grade transfer

Regarding grade transfer after mobility for studies, students claim to have received grades (35%) or gathered ECTS (28%) as Figure 22 shows. Gathered ECTS are credits for which students obtain recognition as a general block with no final grade. However, many respondents to our survey do not know what they will receive after their recognition process.

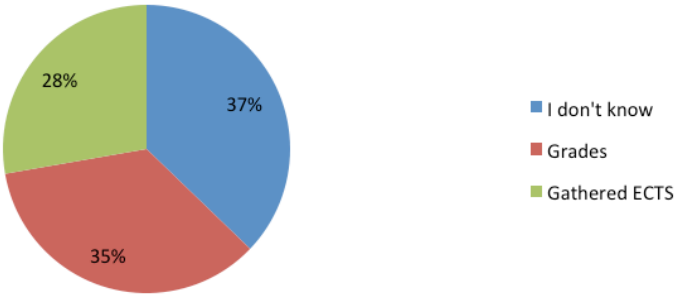


Figure 22: How grades are transferred, n=9,106.

When the grades were converted, almost half of the students feel that, on average, their grades stayed the same. On the contrary, some feel that their grades were downgraded (22%) or upgraded (17%). Figure 23 illustrates these results.

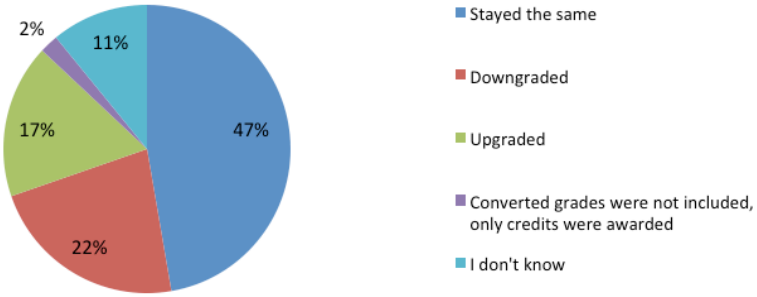


Figure 23: Mobile students' feelings about grade conversion, n=9,106.

Concerning the European Credit Transfer System, 62% of students feel their credits stayed the same when these were recognised. Compared with the grades, fewer students feel that their credits are downgraded (15%) or upgraded (9%). Figure 23 shows students' feelings about their converted grades and Figure 24 explains students' feelings about their converted ECTS credits.

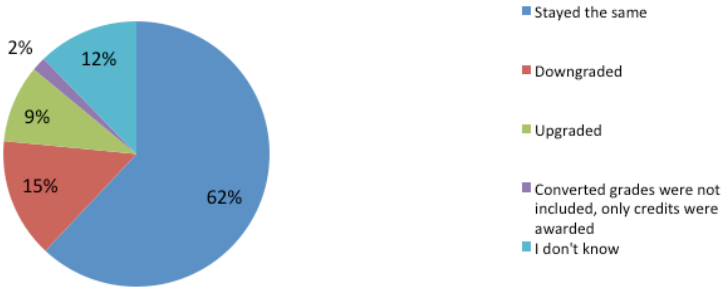


Figure 24: Mobile students' feelings about ECTS credit conversion, n=9,106.

General evaluation of mobility for studies

Mobile students were also questioned whether they would have been on exchange if various circumstances had been changed. Figure 25 shows that if students had known that they will face recognition or grade-transfer problems, 49% would not have opted for a mobility for studies period. A lower grant would have prevented 37% from going abroad and not receiving a grant at all would have discouraged 57% from going abroad.

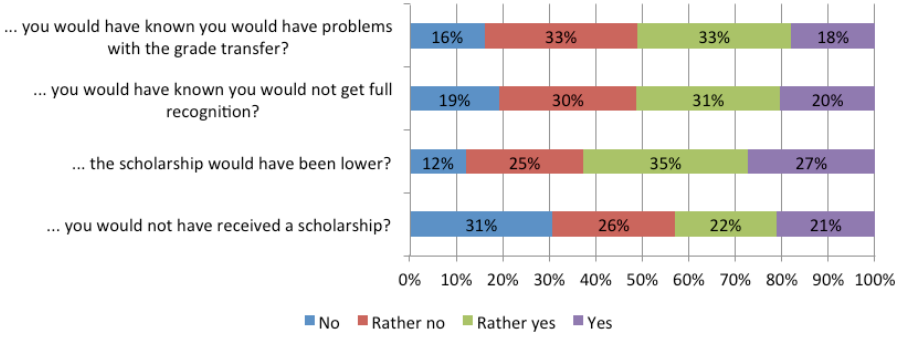


Figure 25: Would students still have studied abroad, if... (n=9,106).

Finally, respondents were also asked to measure their satisfaction with different aspects of the recognition procedures as depicted in Figure 26. Information provided about grade transfer and recognition receives an average satisfaction score of 3.4 on a 5-point scale, where 1 is not satisfied at all and 5 is very satisfied. On the same scale, the actual recognition procedure and the actual grade transfer receive a slightly better mark of 3.5. Nevertheless, the overall satisfaction with the exchange is 4.4 and almost 90% of respondents claim to be very or rather satisfied. The figure below also shows the percentage of students' satisfaction for each item.

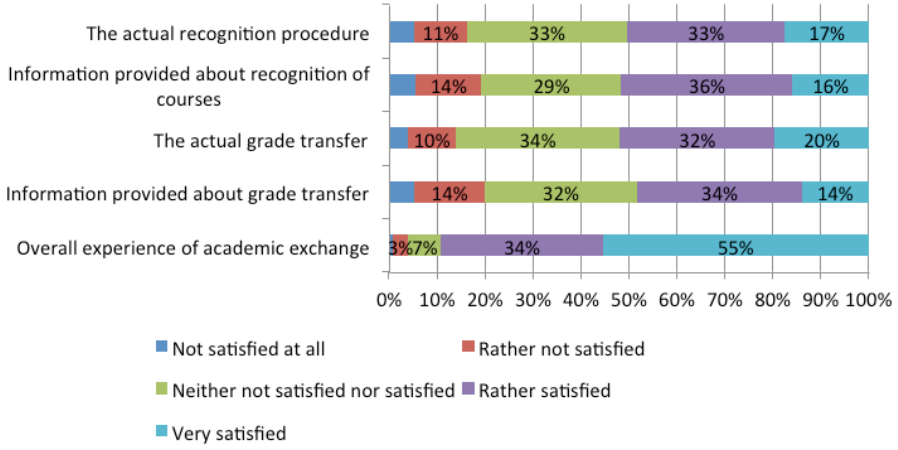


Figure 26: Satisfaction level with different aspects of the mobility experience, n=9,106.

Higher Education Institution Perspective

By Caroline Elisabeth Lund

Demography

In total 179 Higher Education Institutions representing 29 European countries completed the questionnaire about mobility for studies. As shown in Table 4, the three countries with the highest number of responses are respectively Italy, Poland and France.

Country	Number of responses	Country	Number of responses	Country	Number of responses
Italy	20	Belgium	8	Ireland	4
Poland	17	Bulgaria	7	Lithuania	3
France	17	Portugal	6	Czech Republic	3
Finland	13	Switzerland	6	United Kingdom	2
Spain	12	Sweden	5	Turkey	2
Slovakia	11	The Netherlands	5	Denmark	2
Austria	11	Croatia	4	Latvia	2
Estonia	9	Greece	4	Others	6

Table 4: Country overview of Higher Education Institutions, n=179.

On average, responding institutions sent 220 students abroad during the academic year 2012/2013. As shown in Figure 27, 12% of HEIs are a part of a placement consortium, while 72% are not and 16% do not know if they are.

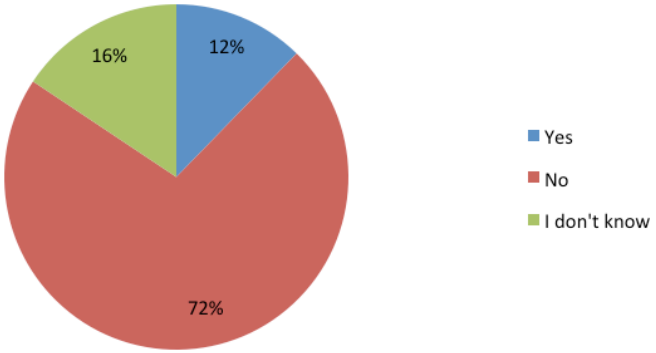


Figure 27: Higher Education Institutions part of placement consortia, n=179.

Information provision for mobility for studies

Figure 28 shows that the majority of sources providing students information about Erasmus mobility come from the institution itself, such as the international relations office (80%), the institutional Erasmus coordinator (73%) and faculty Erasmus coordinators. 59% of HEIs also state that information about mobility comes from exchange students, while 45% of the HEIs state that student associations, such as the Erasmus Student Network, provide information about exchange opportunities. Other sources mentioned by HEIs include: students currently studying abroad, incoming students and international visiting staff.

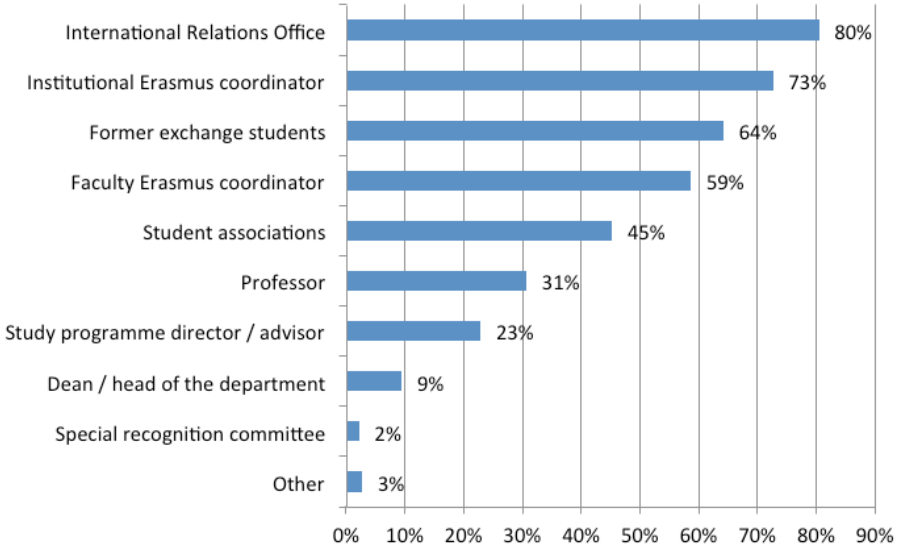


Figure 28: Actors that provide information about Erasmus mobility, n=179.

The most common channels to provide information about mobility for studies opportunities to students are: information on HEI home pages (95%) and meetings, seminars and sessions (93%) which can be seen in Figure 29.

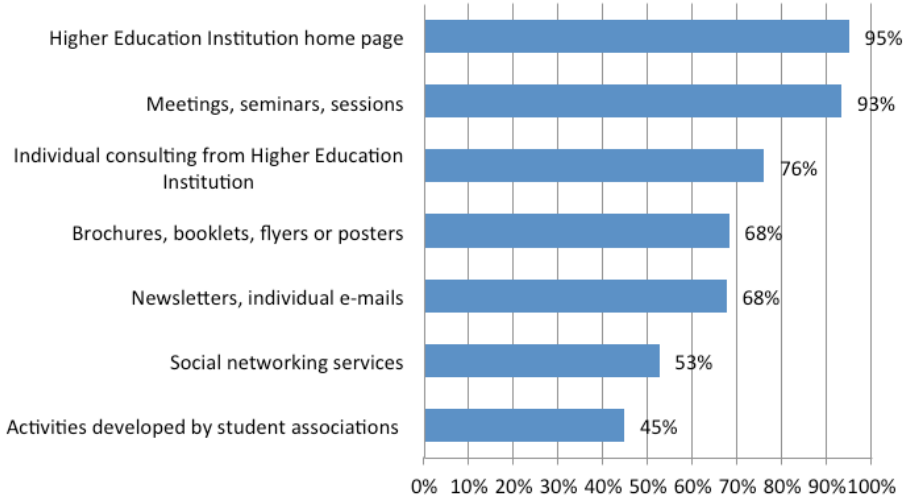


Figure 29: Channels used for information about mobility for studies opportunities, n=179.

When asked to rate the effectiveness of different forms of providing information from 1 (ineffective) to 5 (very effective), meetings, seminars and sessions (4.22) rank highest followed by individual consulting from the HEI (4.12), information on the university website (3.82) and newsletter and e-mails (3.72). Brochures, booklets, flyers and posters (3.06) tend to be considered less effective channels to promote information about student mobility than through students associations (3.32) and social networking (3.39). Figure 30 gives an overview the effectiveness of the communication channels to promote student mobility.

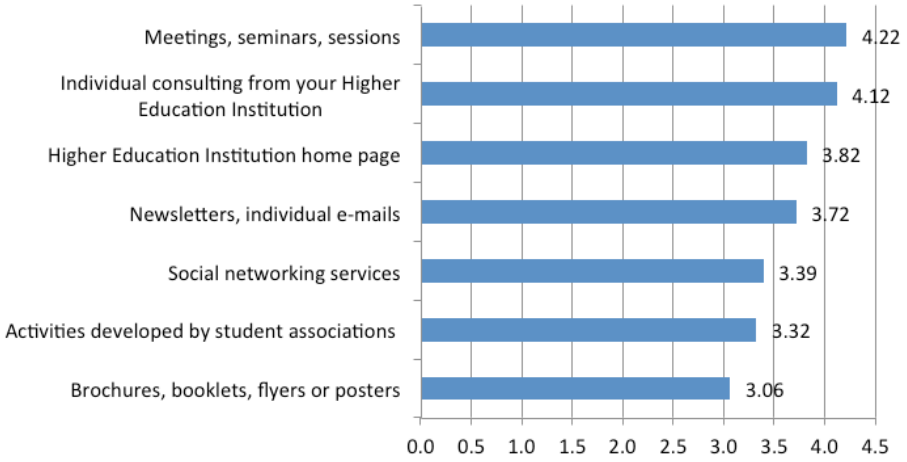


Figure 30: Effectiveness of communication channels to promote mobility for studies opportunities, n=179.

Figure 31 shows that almost all of the HEIs (97%) provide their students with a signed copy of their Learning Agreement, while a majority (86%) hands out a copy of the Erasmus Student Charter. Furthermore, about a third (32%) of HEIs offers a conversion table for credits, a grade distribution (28%) and an Erasmus University Charter (28%).

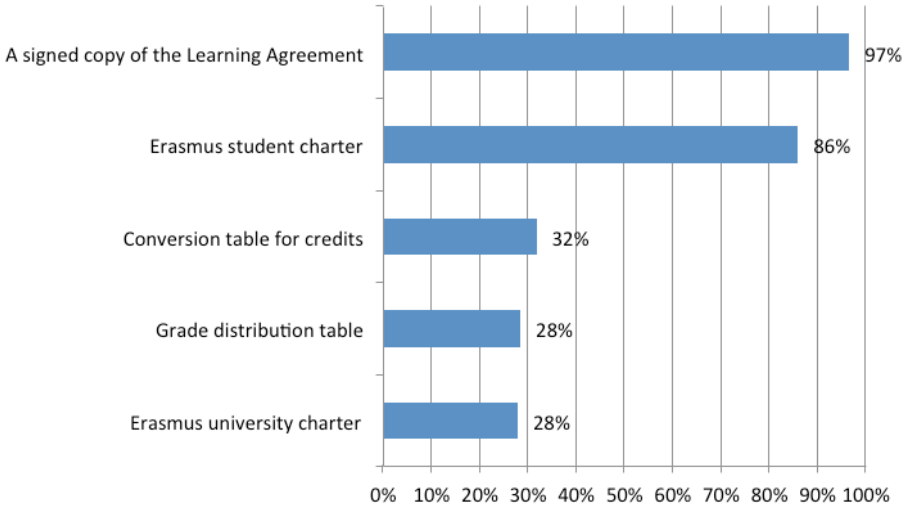


Figure 31: Documents provided to outgoing mobile students, n=179.

Learning Agreement for mobility for studies

The majority of HEIs (94%) use the official and centrally provided Learning Agreement. In most cases, as shown in Figure 32, either the Erasmus coordinators at the faculty (30%) or the study programme director or advisor (22%) makes the final decision on courses in the Learning Agreement of an outgoing Erasmus student, followed by the dean or head of department (15%). It is less common that the students (4%), the international relations office (3%) or professors (3%) take this decision.

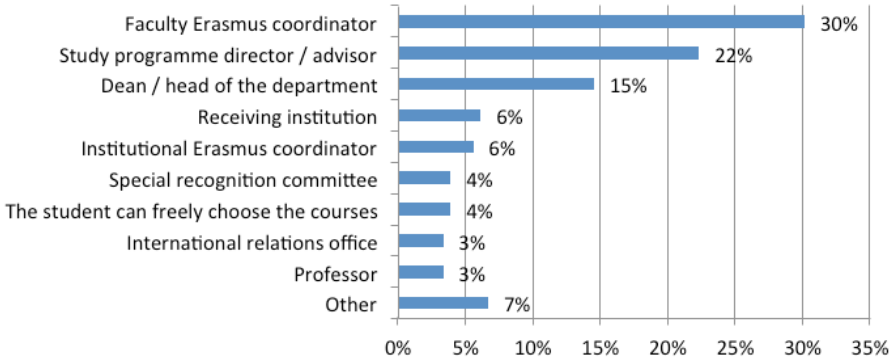


Figure 32: Who makes the final decision on courses in the Learning Agreement, n=179.

The decision on the amount of credits a student has to obtain during the mobility programme varies as seen in Figure 33. In some HEIs it is up to the faculty Erasmus coordinators (18%), the dean or head of department (17%), the institutional Erasmus coordinator (16%) or the study programme director or advisor (15%) to decide. In very few cases the professor (2%) or the student themselves (1%) are eligible to choose the minimum number of credits to obtain.

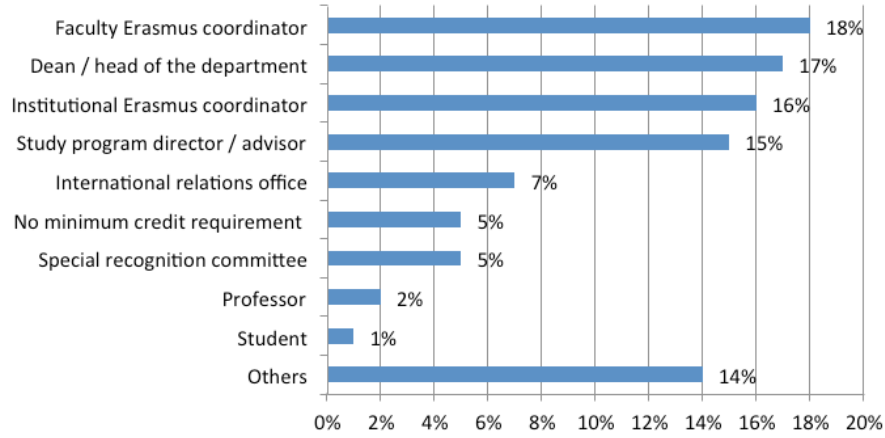


Figure 33: Who makes the decision on minimum credits required, n=179.

Figure 34 shows that the majority of students make changes to their Learning Agreement after it has been signed. Some of the institutions have a lower rate of changed agreements than others, but the majority of the HEIs experience modifications to the Learning Agreement for more than 50% of their students. More than 80% of the students in 32% of the HEIs make changes after it has been officially signed, while 3% of the institutions claim that all of their outgoing Erasmus students change their original Learning Agreement.

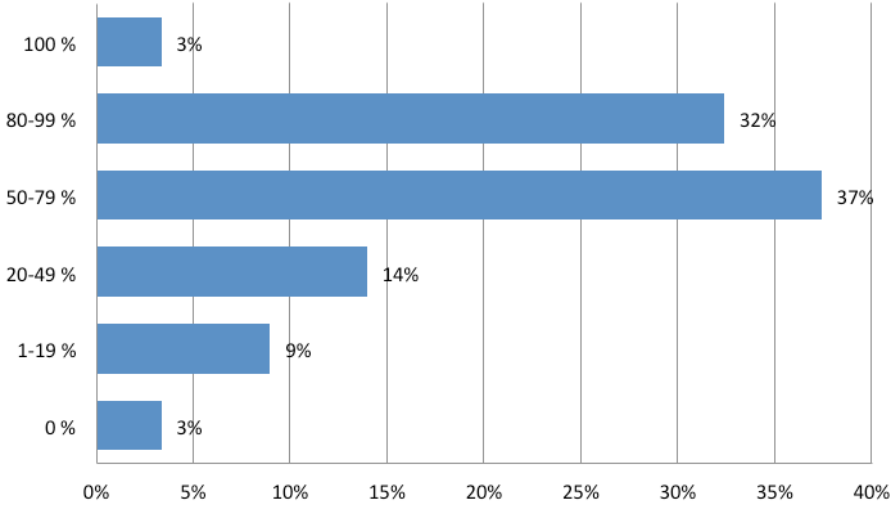


Figure 34: Percentage of mobile students making changes to the Learning Agreement, n=179.

When asked to rate the frequency of reasons for changes in the Learning Agreement from 1 (least frequent reason) to 5 (most frequent reason), Figure 35 shows that the most common reason is when the chosen courses were not available (average 4.21). Furthermore, receiving institutions occasionally request changes (average 3.34), while the least frequent reasons are either an extension (average 2.59) or shortening (average 1.52) of the studies abroad.

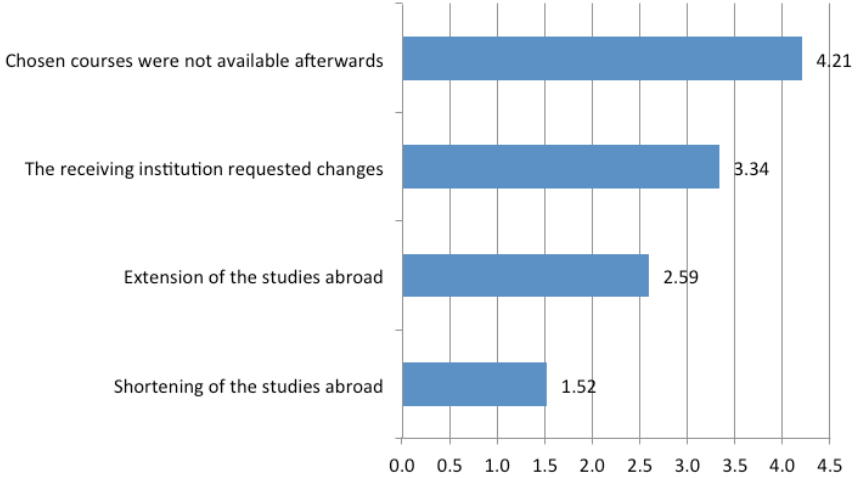


Figure 35: Reasons for changes to the Learning Agreement, averages (1-ineffective to 5-very effective), n=179.

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)

Figure 36 shows that the majority (77%) of the institutions use the ECTS as the one and only system, while 20% use it together with a national credit system. 2% of the HEIs do not use ECTS at all. 1% of the HEIs are not sure if they use it or not.

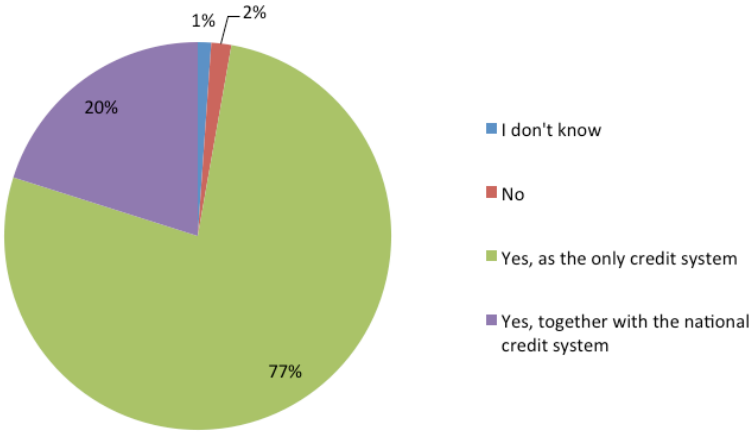


Figure 36: Higher Education Institutions using the ECTS, n=179.

Figure 37 shows that among the Higher Education Institutions who use the ECTS, the majority calculate the credits according to workload (45%) or a combination of both workload and type of course (42%). In some cases the credits are calculated based on hours spent in the classroom (4%) or type of course (4%).

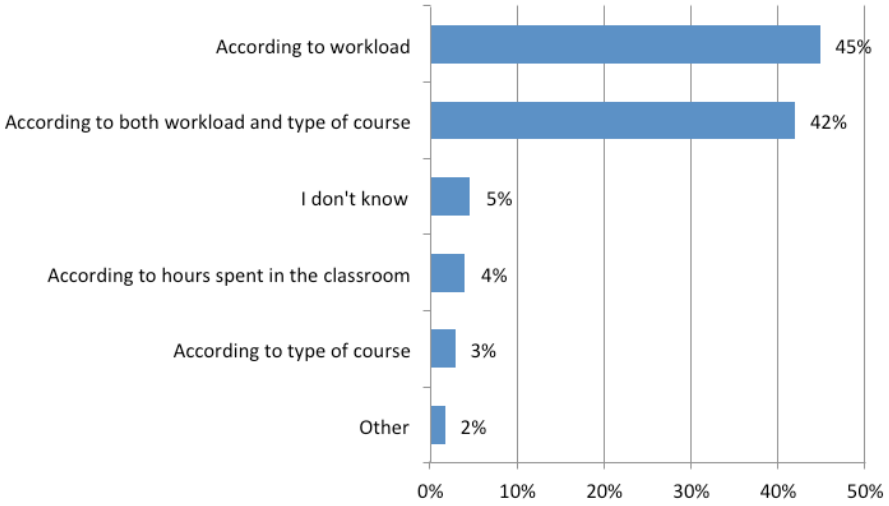


Figure 37: How Higher Education Institutions calculate ECTS credits, n=174.

Figure 38 shows that around one fifth (22%) of the HEIs are holders of the ECTS label, while the majority (61%) are not. The rest (17%) do not know if they hold the ECTS label.

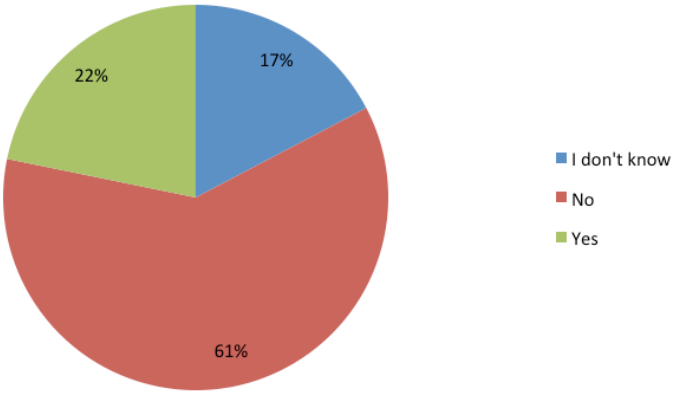


Figure 38: Higher Education Institutions that hold the ECTS label, n=179.

Recognition for mobility for studies

In about a fourth of the HEIs the faculty Erasmus coordinators (25%) are in charge of the credit recognition procedure. Figure 39 shows that the study programme director or advisor (20%), the dean or head of the department (17%) and a special recognition committee (11%) are also responsible for the process. It is less common to put the International Relations Office (7%), the institutional Erasmus coordinator (6%) or professors (2%) in charge for the credit recognition process. 2% of the HEIs are not sure, while 11% have other actors responsible for the process, such as a separate ECTS coordinator or a combination of several actors at the university.

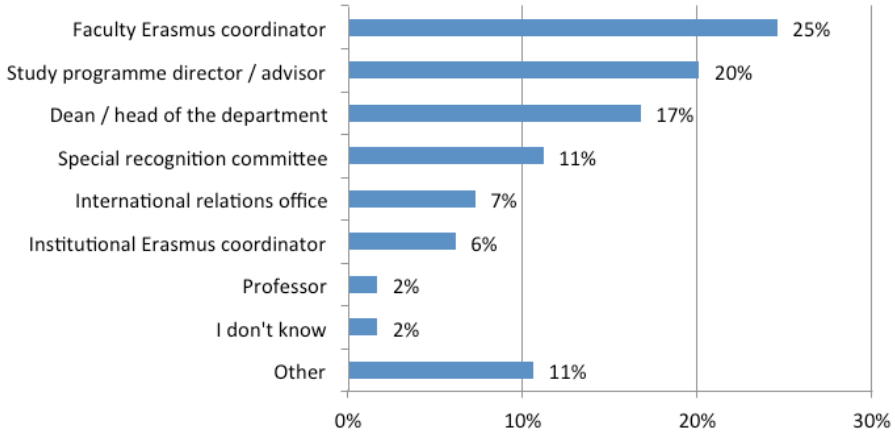


Figure 39: Actors responsible for the credit recognition procedure for mobility for studies, n=179.

In half of the responding HEIs (49%) all outgoing Erasmus students receive full recognition for their studies abroad, while most other cases (37%) give more than 80% of their students full recognition. In some HEIs (8%) between 50% and 79% of the students get all credits recognised, while in some small cases (5%) the HEIs claim that less than 50% of the outgoing students get full recognition. This can be seen in Figure 40.

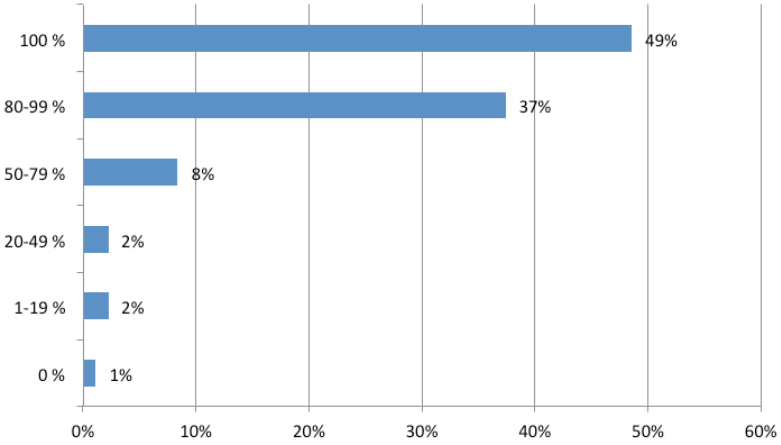


Figure 40: Percentage of mobile students receiving full recognition, n=179.

Figure 41 shows that the most common reason (43%) why outgoing Erasmus students do not receive full recognition of their studies abroad is that the content or a part of the courses were not accepted by the sending institution. Students who do not provide the needed documents (34%), courses that are not included in the final version of the Learning Agreement (33%) or a lack of approval from the professor (31%) are also common reasons why the students get no recognition for their studies abroad. Some of the HEIs claim that problems with credit calculation (24%) occur through e.g. different credit systems at the sending and receiving institution.

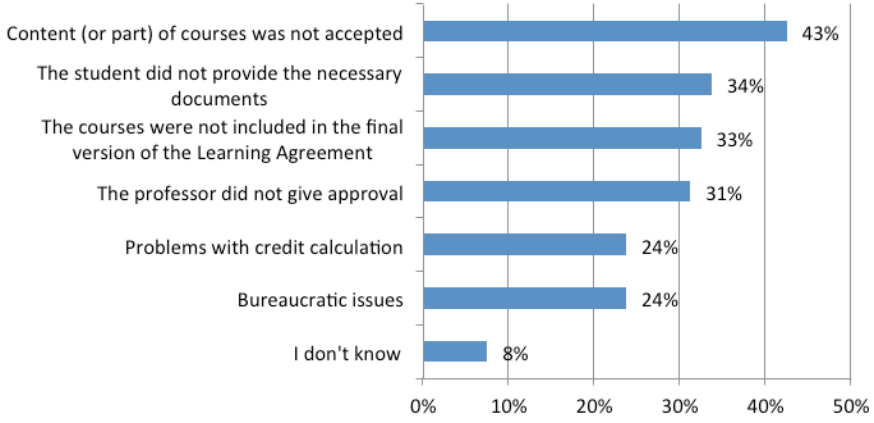


Figure 41: Reasons why Higher Education Institutions do not grant full recognition, n=156.

Grade Transfer

Figure 42 shows the faculty Erasmus coordinators (36%) and the international relations office (24%) are the ones who most often have the responsibility to provide students with information about the grade transfer. Study programme directors/advisors (12%) and institutional Erasmus coordinators (12%) follow, while actors such as dean and head of department (3%), a special recognition committee (2%) and students organisations (1%) are less common to provide information. Others (8%) specify ECTS coordinators and international study coordinators.

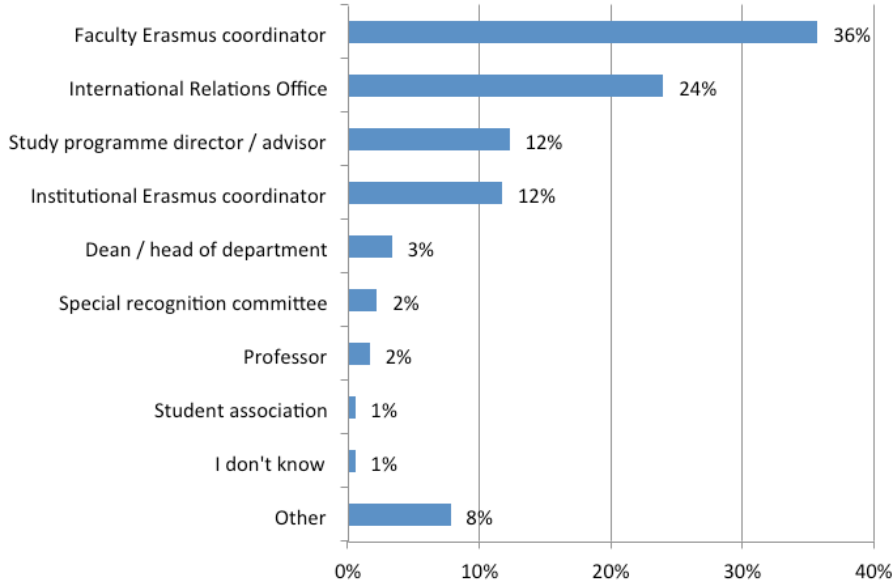


Figure 42: Actors providing information about the grade transfer, n=179.

As demonstrated in Figure 43, the majority of HEIs (77%) provides students with information about grade transfer before the exchange. About 12% inform about the grade transfer after the exchange while 5% give out the information while the students are abroad and 6% are not sure.

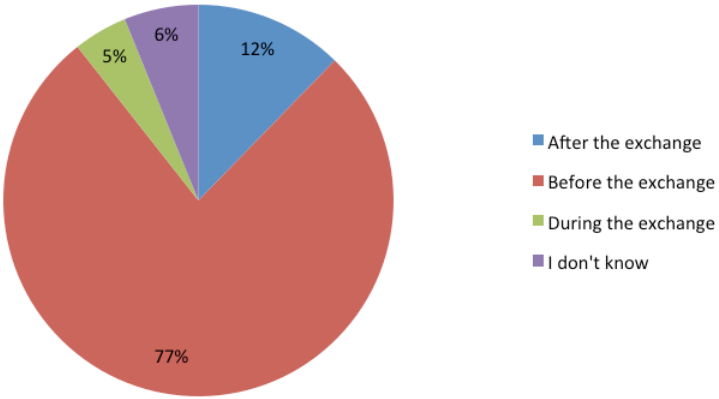


Figure 43: When mobile students receive information about the grade transfer, n=179.

As illustrated in Figure 44, grades are generally converted according to a grade distribution table created by the institution (34%). In some HEIs (17%) only credits are recorded, while grades are not. It is also common in several HEIs to convert grades individually, either by the faculty Erasmus coordinator (12%) or the institutional Erasmus coordinator (3%). Others (9%) mention ECTS coordinators, the vice-dean, professors and a combination of different actors at the institution.

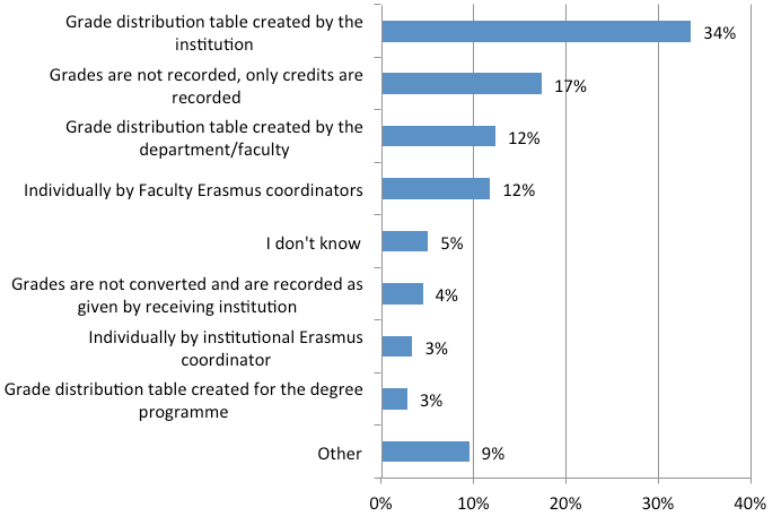


Figure 44: How Higher Education Institutions convert grades, n=179.

In about a fourth of HEIs (24%) the faculty Erasmus coordinators are the ones in charge of the final grade transfer for outgoing students, followed by the study programme director or advisor (16%). The dean or head of department (12%), a special recognition committee (11%), the international relations office (8%) and institutional Erasmus coordinators (7%) are also responsible for the finalising of the grade transfer for outgoing exchange students. Others (18%) specify ECTS faculty coordinators, deans and the faculty or a combination of different actors at the institution. This can be seen in Figure 45.

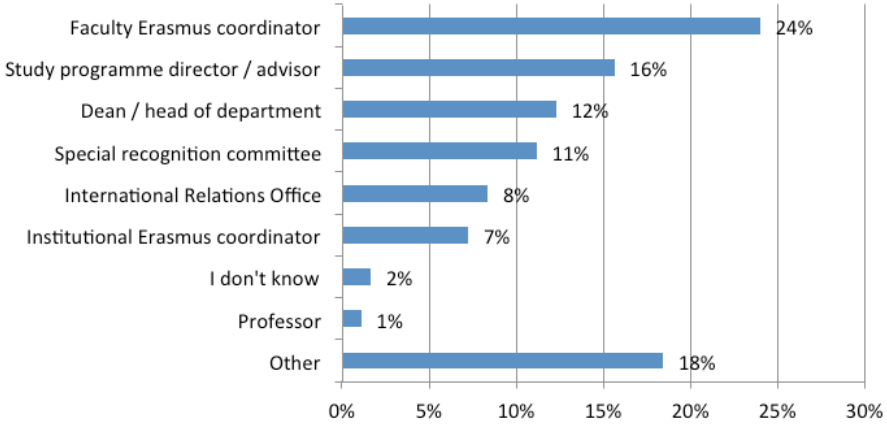


Figure 45: Actors responsible for grade transfer, n=179.

Payment and portability of Erasmus grants

Figure 46 illustrates that in most HEIs (72%) all outgoing Erasmus students receive an Erasmus grant while in some cases (22%) between 80 and 99% of the students receive the grant. In fewer cases (5%), less than 50% of students receive the grant, while only a minor part of HEIs (1%) offer no Erasmus grants at all to the outgoing exchange students.

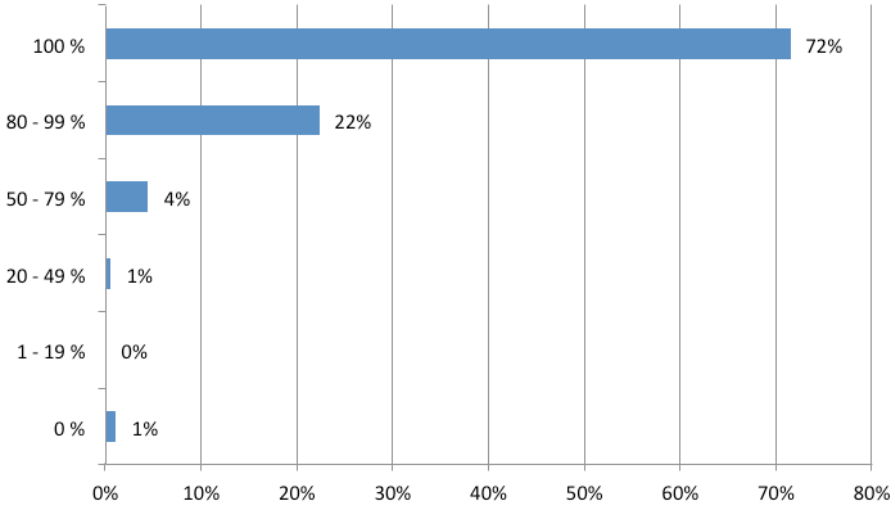


Figure 46: Percentage of Higher Education Institutions offering Erasmus grants, n=179.

Students are generally provided Erasmus grants partially before and after the exchange (42%) or only before the exchange (28%). Some students (19%) receive the grant partially during the exchange and the rest later, while a minor part (9%) obtain the whole amount during the exchange. 1% of students receive all the support after the exchange. This is clearly demonstrated in Figure 47.

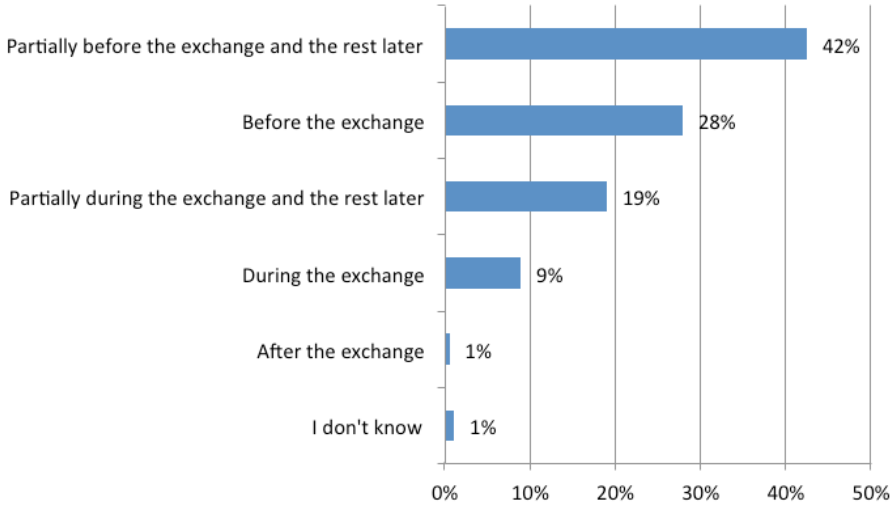


Figure 47: When mobile students receive the Erasmus grant for mobility for studies, n=179.

Figure 48 shows that 40% of HEIs provide additional financial help apart from the Erasmus grants, while most (59%) do not.

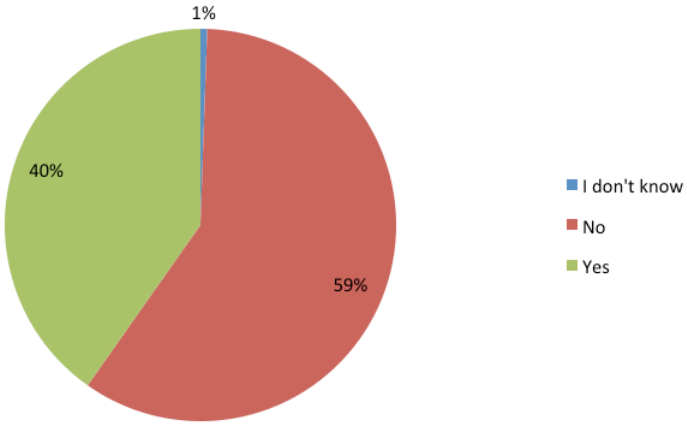


Figure 48: Higher Education Institutions providing additional financial support, n=179.

Among the HEIs providing additional financial support, a generic additional grant (43%) is the most common followed by national grants (32%). In some cases HEIs help students by covering travel costs (13%) or students receive regional support (7%). Others (29%) specify grants from national or regional councils, grants based on performance or discount on semester fees. This is shown in Figure 49.

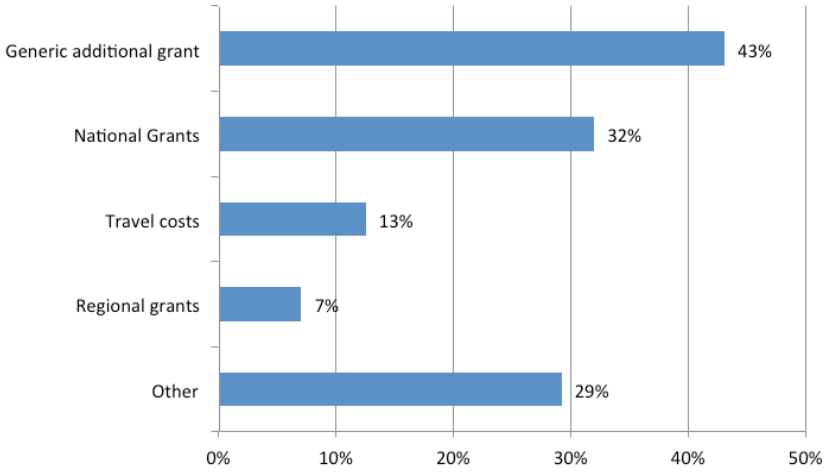


Figure 49: Types of additional financial support, n=179.

In cases where there is some Erasmus funding left at the end of the year, most HEIs send what is left back to the National Agency (46%) or redistribute the funds to the students who are already entitled to receive the Erasmus grant (41%). It is less common to use the remaining funding on staff training (8%), promotion for the upcoming year (8%) and providing support to organisations and projects (5%). This is illustrated in Figure 50.

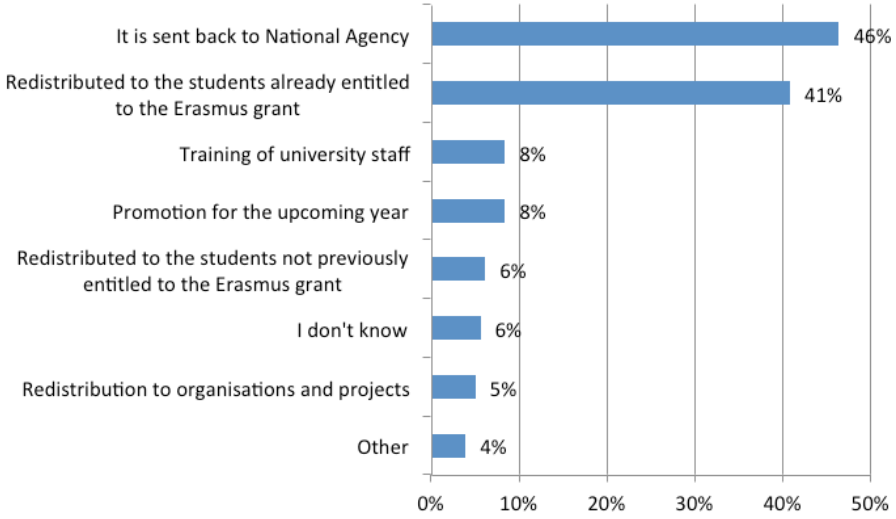


Figure 50: What Higher Education Institutions do with extra funding, n=179.

Figure 51 shows that the majority (80%) of students do not lose the right to national grants and other financial support when studying abroad. In some cases (6%) the students lose parts of their financial support while some (13%) are not sure.

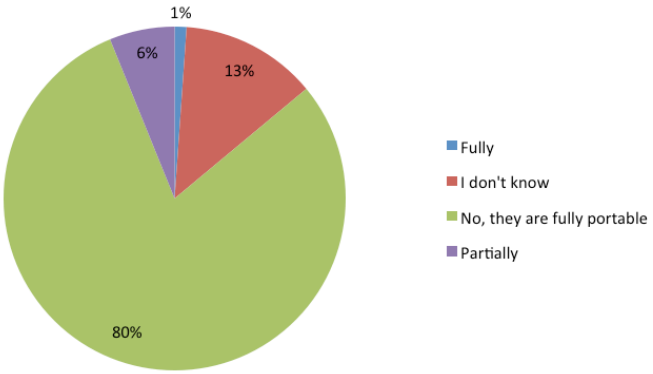


Figure 51: Portability of regular financial support during a mobility for studies period, n=179.

As Figure 52 illustrates, in most cases students are provided with additional Erasmus grants if they decide to prolong their mobility period in case enough funding is available (67%). Some HEIs (22%) always offer more grants, while a minority (6%) do not offer financial support if the students extend their studies abroad.

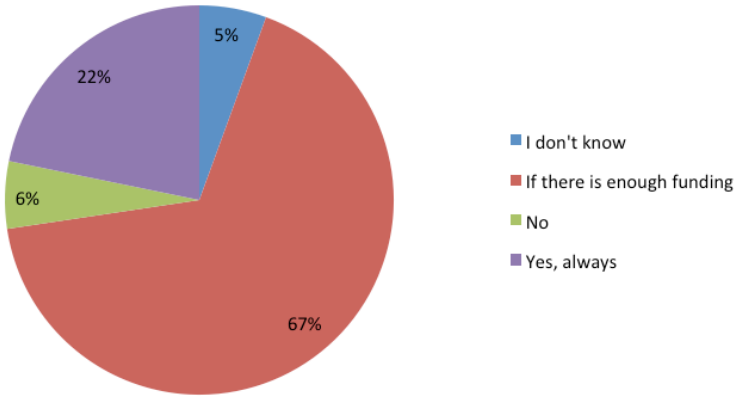


Figure 52: Higher Education Institutions providing extra funding when mobile students extend the mobility period, n=179.

The majority of HEIs claim that between 1% and 19% of their students have to pay back part of their Erasmus grant (63%). In 32% of HEIs no one is required to pay back the grant. In some cases (4%) between 20% and 50% of the students have to pay back all or parts of their Erasmus grant. This is shown in Figure 53.

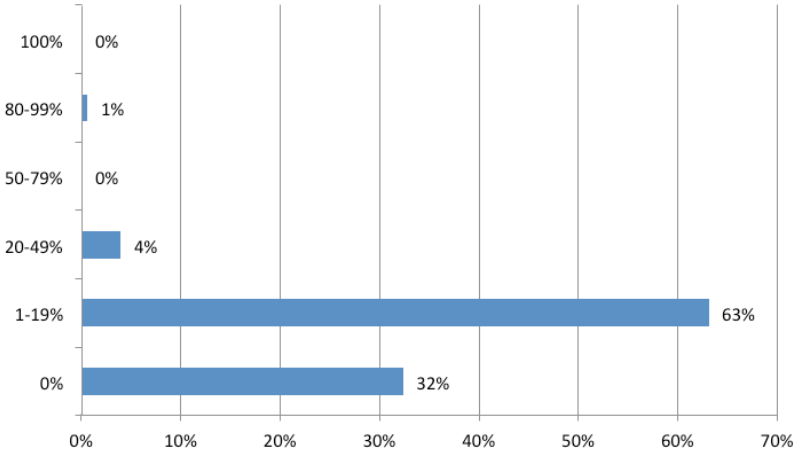


Figure 53: Percentage of mobile students that need to pay back their grant, n=179.

As Figure 54 illustrates, the main reason why students have to return all or parts of their grant is related to too little time spent abroad, early return or not going at all (85%). Insufficient ECTS (31%) and failed exams (18%) are less common reasons. In some cases (4%) a lack of documentation is the reason why students have to return grant money.

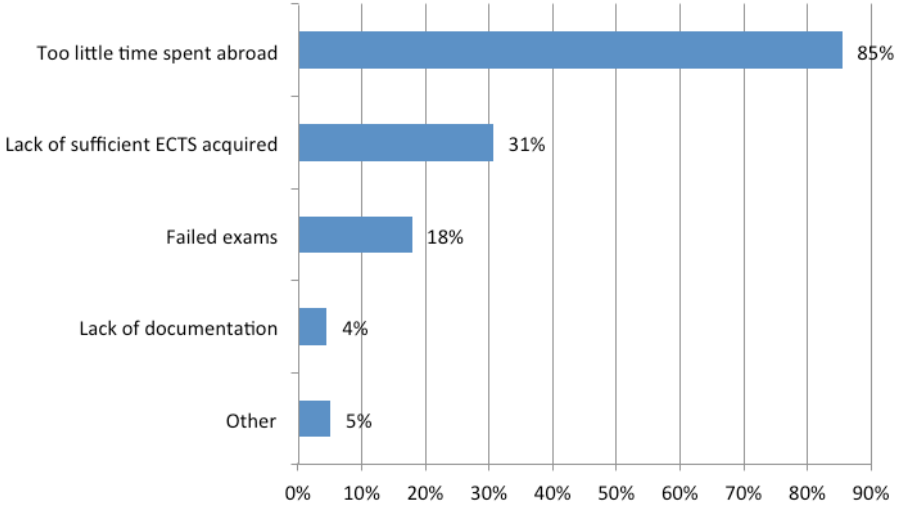


Figure 54: Reasons why mobile students need to pay back their grant, n=179.

Most of the representatives at HEIs claim that the main reason (29%) which discourages students from going on exchange is not receiving sufficient funding. In other cases obstacles such as fear of not passing the exams abroad (17%), fear of not receiving full recognition (16%) and lack of language skills (15%) make students less encouraged to go on exchange. Some (13%) are also afraid that they would have to prolong their studies when they return from exchange because of their stay abroad. Others (8%) claim that there are too little courses offered at the receiving institution, too many students and a combination of all or some of the aforementioned factors. These results are on display in Figure 55.

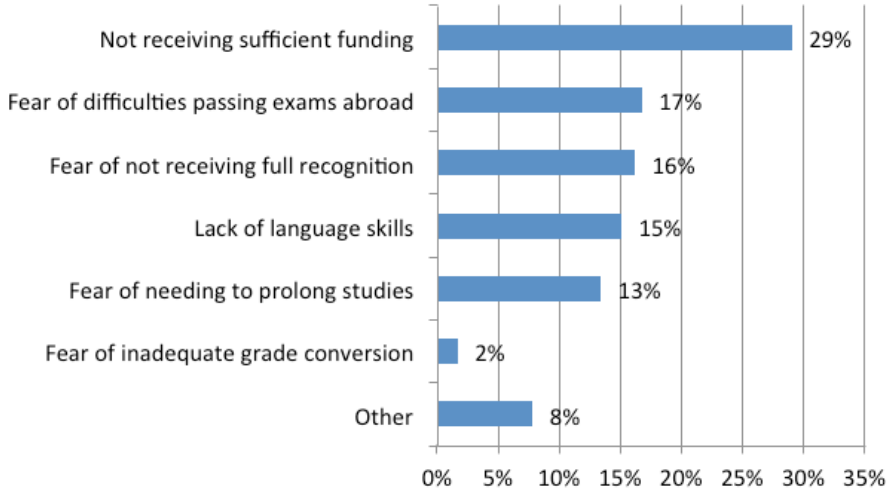


Figure 55: Factors discouraging students from using mobility for studies opportunities, n=179.

Comparative Perspective with previous PRIME Studies

By Emanuel Alfranseder

It is not possible to directly compare the outcomes of the PRIME 2009 (cf. Dicle et al., 2009) and PRIME 2010 (cf. Apsalone et al., 2010) with the outcome of this study. The methodologies used differ slightly between the studies. Nevertheless, in quantitative terms a clear and positive trend becomes evident. PRIME 2009 shows that 66% receive full recognition and PRIME 2010 finds an improvement to 73% of full recognition.

The current study takes a more multifaceted approach and doesn't report one single figure to evaluate the success of the recognition process. Full recognition for students who receive ECTS credits and who later on give more detailed information on the exact amount of credits is as high as 84% when asking a direct yes or no question. Taking into account the whole sample, the number is considerably lower and only 76% say they have received full recognition. Dividing the concept of recognition into conditional and unconditional recognition shows that 78% receive conditional recognition and only 62% say they have received unconditional recognition for the credits obtained in the final version of their Learning Agreement.

While the trend is clearly positive, it is far from an ideal world. Around a fifth of all mobile students do not receive full recognition and many still have to take extra efforts to get their credits recognised. The results clearly show that the recognition of credits taken abroad remains a major challenge in the implementation of the programme. Likewise, the fear of non-recognition remains a major obstacle for mobility.

MOBILITY FOR TRAINEESHIPS

Introduction

The following chapter is the main contribution of this report. So far there is little knowledge on the functioning of, and eventual issues concerning mobility for traineeships: general and Erasmus placements in particular. Subsequently, we analyse this issue from three perspectives (student, HEI and receiving organisation) to draw a comprehensive picture on the state of play of training mobility.

Student Perspective

By Emanuel Alfranseder and Salvatore Nolli

Demography

Most respondents (67%) are between 18-24 years old and almost all others are between 25-34 years old (32%) as Figure 56 illustrates. Female respondents are in the majority with 69%.

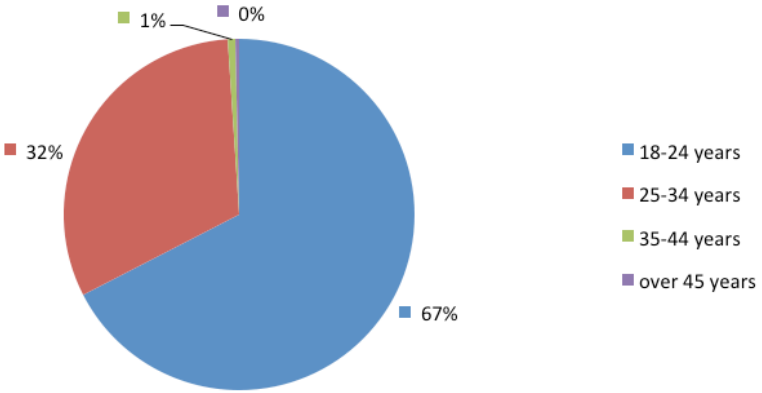


Figure 56: Age of responding mobile trainees, n=1,245.

In total 1,245 students from all participating countries completed the survey. Table 5 gives an overview of the countries of origin of participating students.

Country	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
Italy	239	19%
Belgium	168	13%
Spain	118	9%
Poland	105	8%
The Netherlands	79	6%
France	70	6%
Portugal	45	4%
Germany	38	3%
Bulgaria	38	3%
Greece	38	3%
Estonia	29	2%
Romania	24	2%
Croatia	21	2%
Lithuania	20	2%
Other	213	17%

Table 5: Countries of origin of responding mobile trainees, n=1,245.

Countries of the sending organisations of students as depicted in Table 6 mainly coincide with the countries of origin of responding students. Italy (20%), Belgium (13%) and Spain (10%) are the most represented countries in our sample.

Country	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
Italy	243	20%
Belgium	167	13%
Spain	128	10%
The Netherlands	107	9%
Poland	105	8%
France	78	6%
Portugal	51	4%
Greece	39	3%
Bulgaria	33	3%
Finland	32	3%
Estonia	31	2%
Germany	27	2%
Romania	22	2%
Croatia	22	2%
Other	160	13%

Table 6: Countries of sending organisations of mobile trainees, n=1,245.

Figure 57 shows that business management (18%), engineering (13%) and medical sciences (13%) are the main fields of study of mobile trainees.

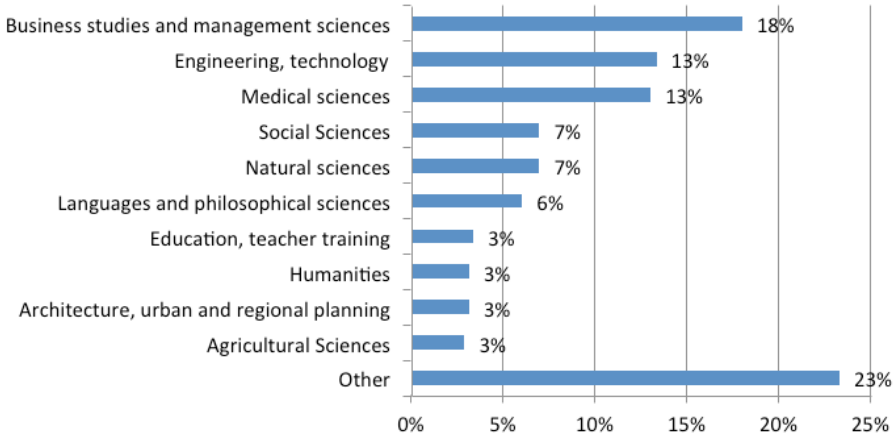


Figure 57: Fields of study at the sending institution of mobile trainees, n=1,245.

Spain (15%), Germany (11%) and the United Kingdom (8%) are the main destinations of responding trainees as shown in Table 7. Belgium, Italy and France follow with 7% each.

Country	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
Spain	191	15%
Germany	132	11%
United Kingdom	112	8%
Belgium	92	7 %
Italy	91	7%
France	90	7%
The Netherlands	52	4%
Finland	51	4%
Portugal	48	4%
Sweden	33	3%
Malta	26	2%
Poland	26	2%
Ireland	26	2%
Czech Republic	23	2%
Norway	22	2%
Austria	21	2%
Other	209	14%

Table 7: Host countries of responding mobile trainees, n=1,245.

46% of the responding students not only participate in mobility for traineeships, but also in mobility for studies. Figure 58 shows that 76% of responding trainees are funded via an Erasmus Placement and an additional 4% participate in the Leonardo Da Vinci Programme. National, regional and local authorities also provide various programmes funding traineeship mobility.

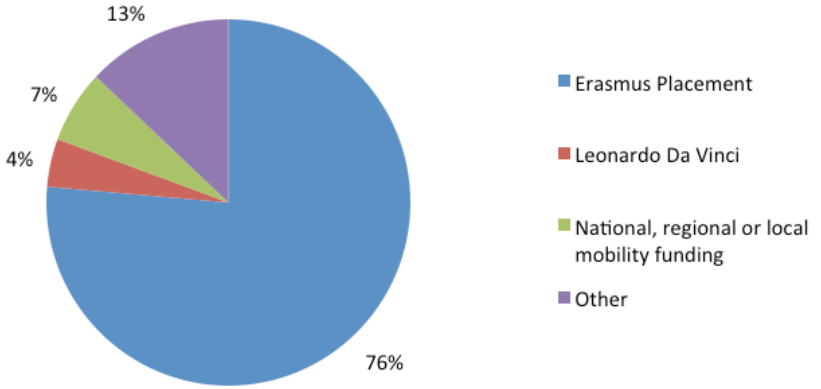


Figure 58: Types of funding of mobile trainees, n=1,245.

Information provision for traineeship opportunities abroad

Figure 59 gives an overview of how students receive information on traineeship opportunities abroad. The home page of the HEI (66%), seminars or presentations (49%), meetings upon request (41%), brochures, booklets, flyer or posters (32%) are successful ways to reach students. Less frequently mentioned are the newsletter of the HEI (20%), student associations (17%) and social networking services (13%).

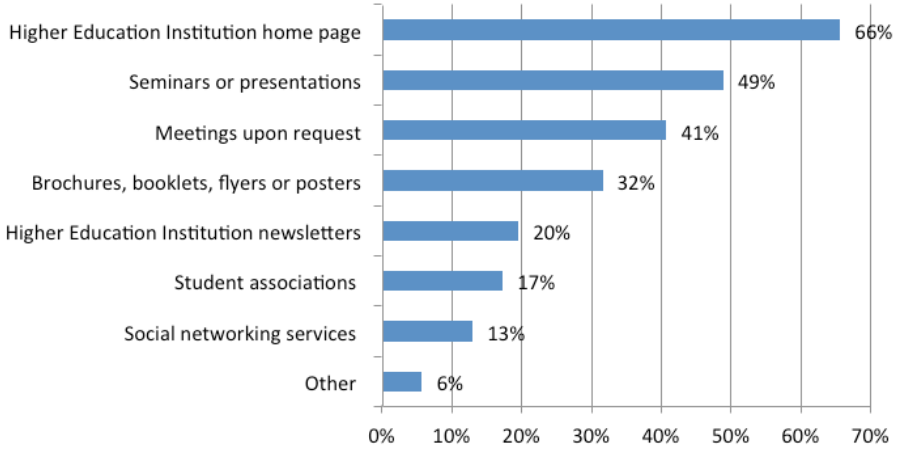


Figure 59: How students receive information on mobility for traineeships opportunities, n=928.

Most trainees either find a receiving organisation themselves (46%) or with the help of their HEI (37%). Family and friends help 7% of responding students to find a receiving organisation. Figure 60 illustrates that the impact of student associations (such as ESN) in this field seems to be very low (2%).

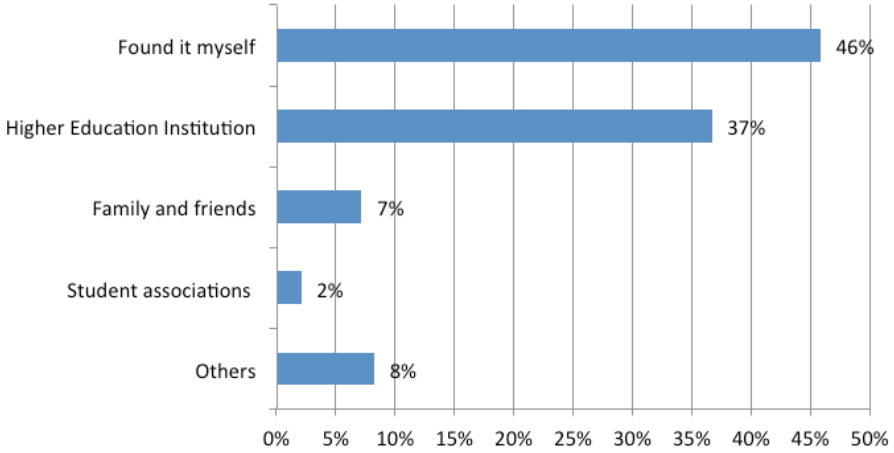


Figure 60: How students find a receiving organisation, n=457.

Figure 61 further breaks down the answers of Figure 60 for those who answer that their HEI has helped them to find a receiving organisation. Professors (55%) and the IRO (55%) are most often mentioned, while career centres only provide such support to 5% of responding students.

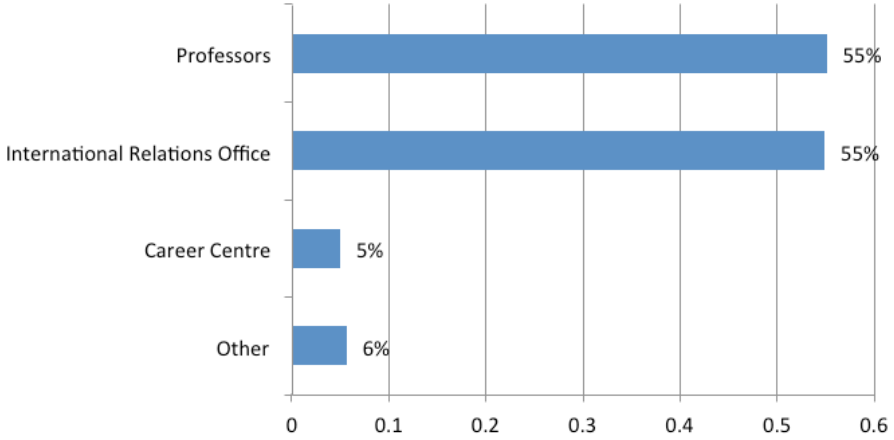


Figure 61: Actors in Higher Education Institutions helping students to find a receiving organisation for their traineeship, n=457.

Figure 62 shows how students look for a receiving organisation abroad. A majority of 60% apply directly to the respective organisation. Consulting specialised traineeship websites (36%) and directly checking relevant organisation's webpages (29%) are common ways to look for a traineeship. Students also use personal contacts (19%) and word-of-mouth (12%) to look for traineeships. Social networking (8%), traineeship fairs (4%) and newsletters (3%) play a less important role in the search process.

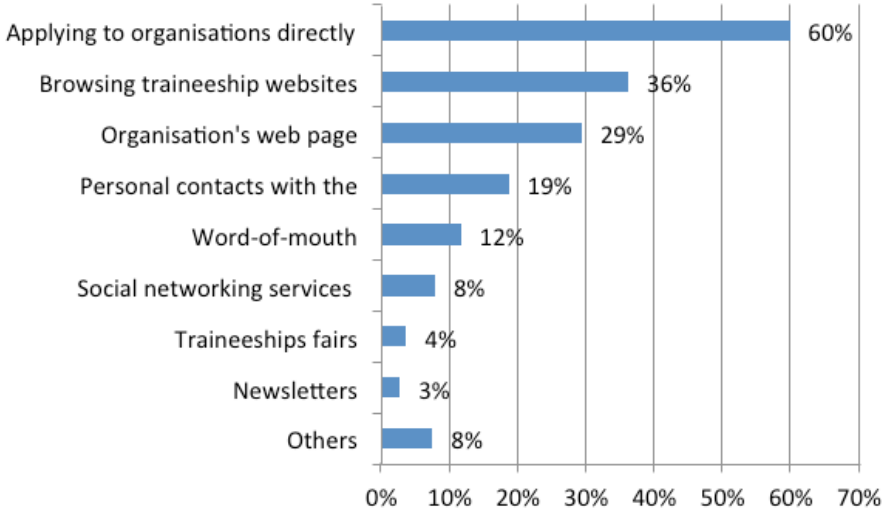


Figure 62: How students look for a receiving organisation abroad, n=571.

Figure 63 shows that the main sectors of traineeships are Research and Development (17%), Health (11%) and Higher Education (6%). A huge majority (84% of respondents) state that their traineeship is in a field that matches with their studies.

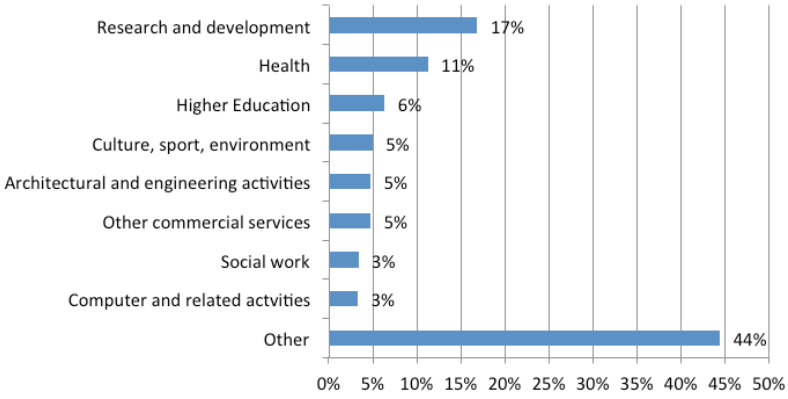


Figure 63: Sectors mobile trainees work in, n=1,245.

Private sector companies (36%), HEIs (22%) and research centres (12%) are the type of organisations that welcome trainees most frequently. Non-profit organisations (9%), public administrations (7%) and training centres (2%) also host mobile trainees. Many falling in the "Other" category mention that they did their traineeship in a hospital (2%). Figure 64 depicts these results.

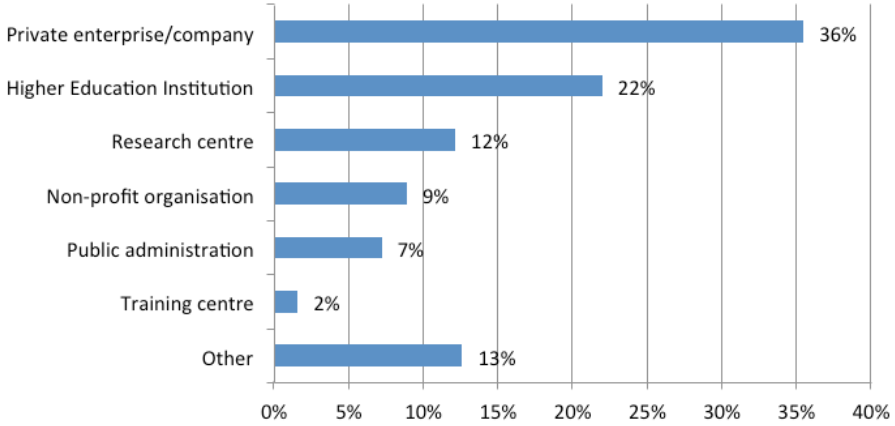


Figure 64: Type of receiving organisations, n=1,245.

Further inquiry on the size of private sector hosting companies, as depicted in Figure 65, shows that most of those organisations are small with less than 50 employees (64%). 21% of responding trainees state that their receiving organisation has between 50 and 1,000 employees. Only 7% of the private hosting companies have more than 1,000 employees.

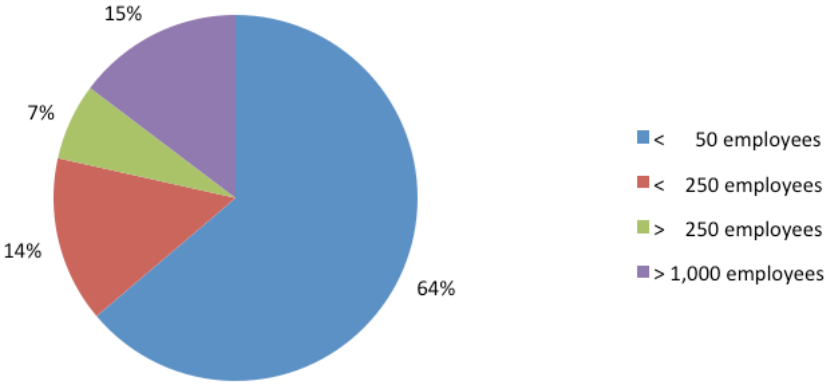


Figure 65: Size of private sector receiving organisations, n=422.

Figure 66 shows that traineeships mainly last between 3 and 6 months (83% of the entire sample). Merely 9% are shorter (1 or 2 months) and only a few traineeships (8%) are longer (from 7 to 12 months).

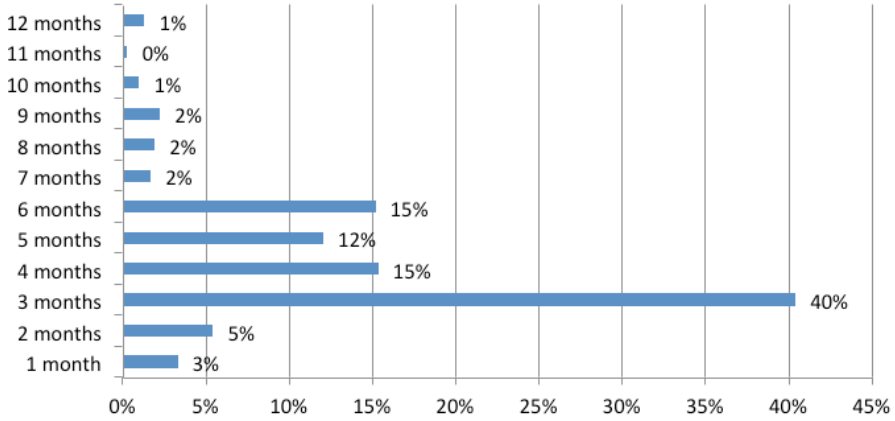


Figure 66: Duration of the traineeship, n=1,245.

As shown in Figure 67, the majority of traineeships take place during the spring semester (57%) and mainly during university studies (only 6% of traineeships take place after graduation).

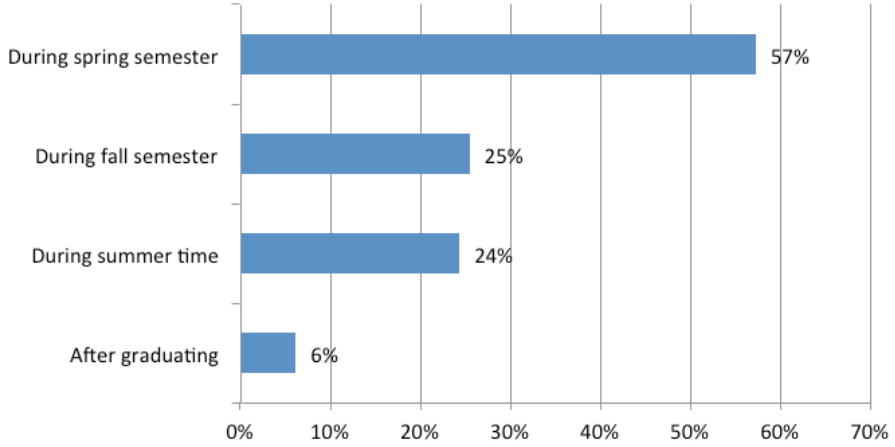


Figure 67: When traineeships take place during the year, n=1,245.

Figure 68 shows when during a student's education a traineeship takes place. The majority of students do traineeships abroad during their Bachelor studies (52%) or Master studies (37%), and only 11% after graduation (Bachelor or Master). This result shows that most of the traineeships are potentially part of students' higher education and not beyond it.

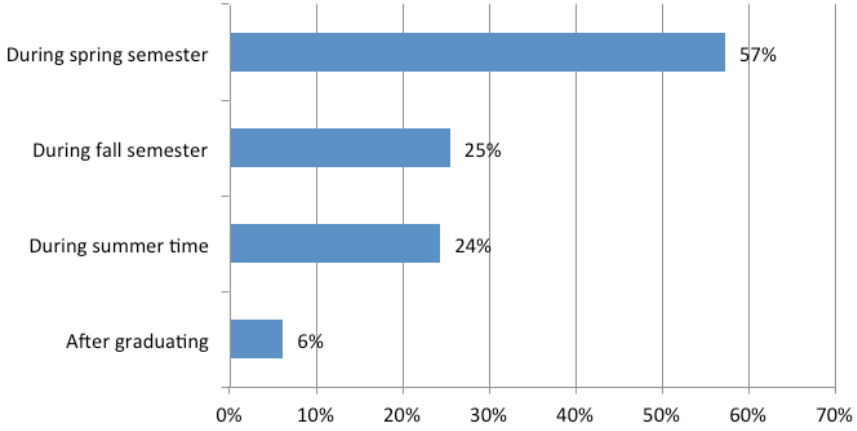


Figure 68: When traineeships take place during students' education, n=1,245.

Learning Agreement and other documents for mobility for traineeships

The majority of trainees sign a Learning Agreement for their traineeship (82%). Figure 69 shows that most of them sign it before the traineeship (87%), some only during their traineeship (9%) and only 1% signs it afterwards.

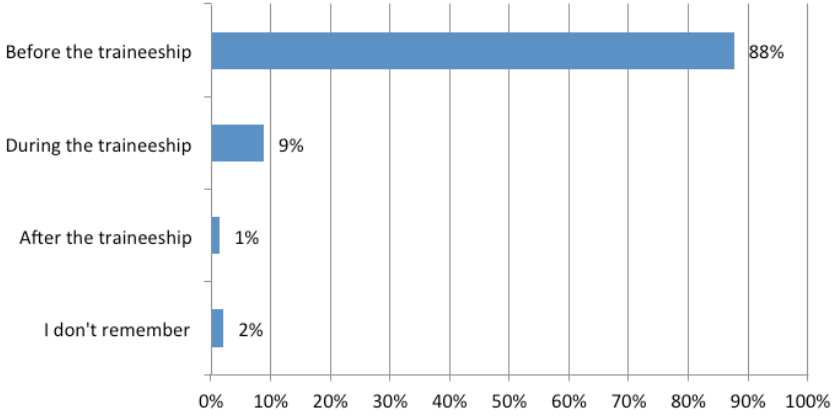


Figure 69: When mobile trainees sign the Learning Agreement, n=1,025.

More than half of the sample evaluates the handling of Learning Agreement as "very easy" or "easy". The weighted average of the evaluation on a five level Likert-type scale evaluation from 1=not easy at all to 5=very easy is 3.7. Figure 70 shows that 9% find it somewhat difficult to handle the Learning Agreement.

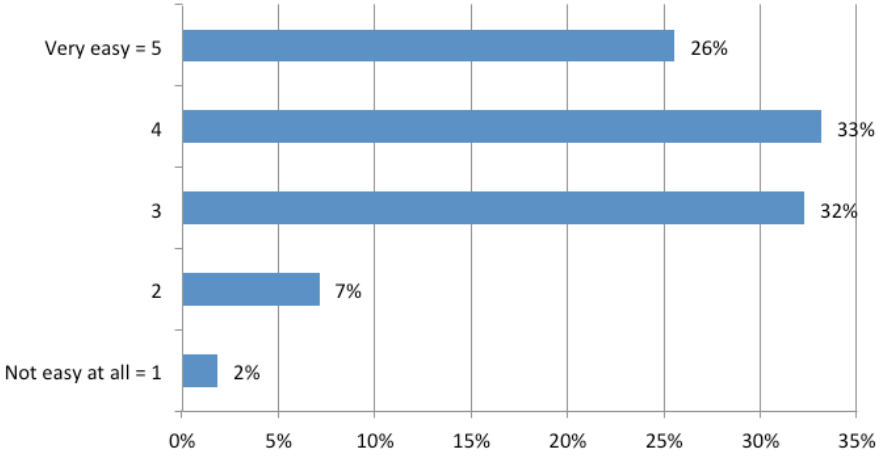


Figure 70: How mobile trainees evaluate the Learning Agreement (1-not easy at all to 5-very easy), n=1,025.

Figure 71 shows that only 5% of students in the sample have to change their Learning Agreement. This compares to a significantly higher number of changes for students that are in a mobility for studies programme where 71% of students need to change their Learning Agreement.

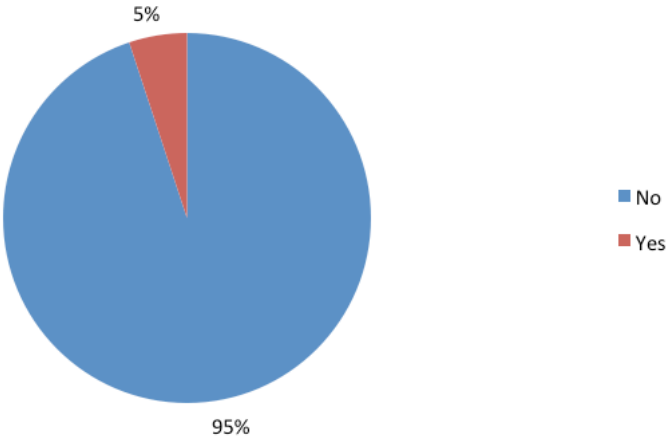


Figure 71: Mobile trainees that need to change their Learning Agreement, n=1,025.

Figure 72 details who requests changes to the Learning Agreement. Receiving organisations (39%) and students (38%) most often request such changes. The sending HEIs (21%) and where applicable the receiving HEIs (2%) request the remaining changes.

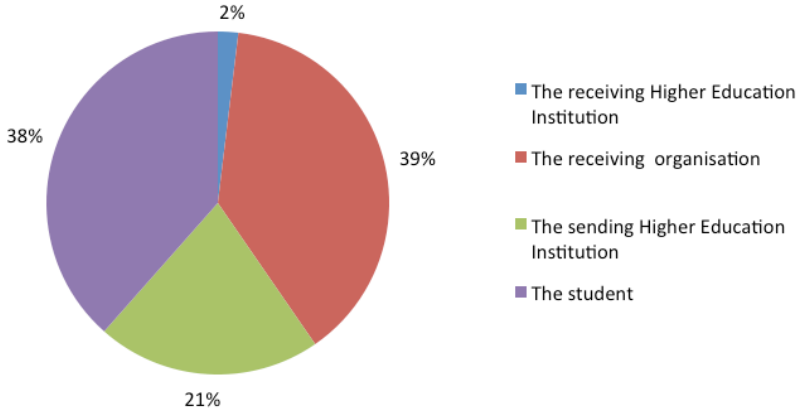


Figure 72: Actors requesting changes in the Learning Agreement for mobility for traineeships, n=52.

Figure 73 shows the main reasons for changes in the Learning Agreement. In 44% of all cases the receiving organisation requests the changes. Extending (25%) or shortening (8%) the traineeship are additional reasons for changes. Also, changing the tutor or contact person (4%) and the student not being satisfied with the traineeship conditions (4%) lead to changes in the Learning Agreement.

What is more, 75% of students have to sign further documents for their traineeship abroad.

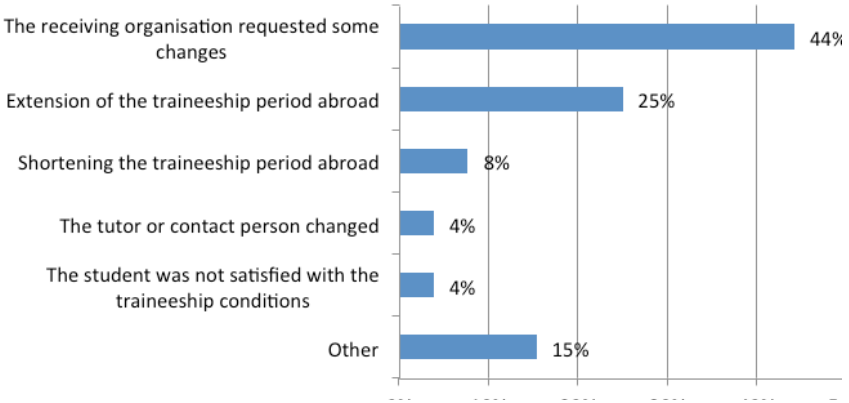


Figure 73: Reasons for changing the Learning Agreement for mobility for traineeships, n=52.

Grants and other financial support

The majority of students (81%) receives a grant. Grants are mainly provided by HEIs (61%). National, regional and local grants follow with 24%, and only in 4% of the sample the receiving organisation provides a grant. Figure 74 depicts these results.

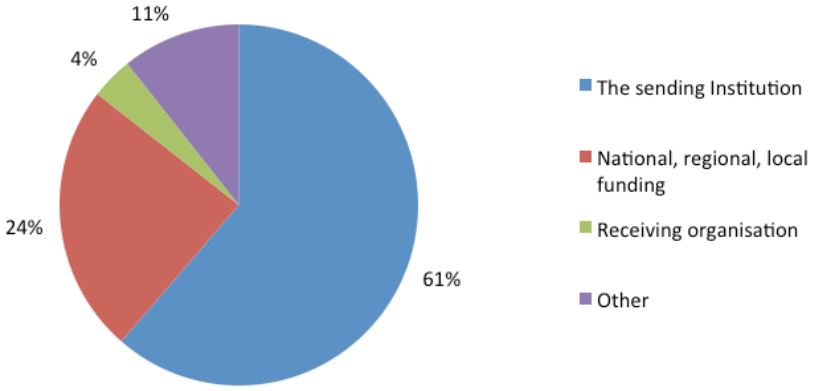


Figure 74: Who provides grants to mobile trainees, n=1,004.

Figure 75 shows the time periods when mobile trainees receive the payment of their grant. Most students receive the payment before (43%) or during (31%) their traineeship abroad. While some receive the payment only after (8%), others receive it monthly (8%) or in different instalments (6%).

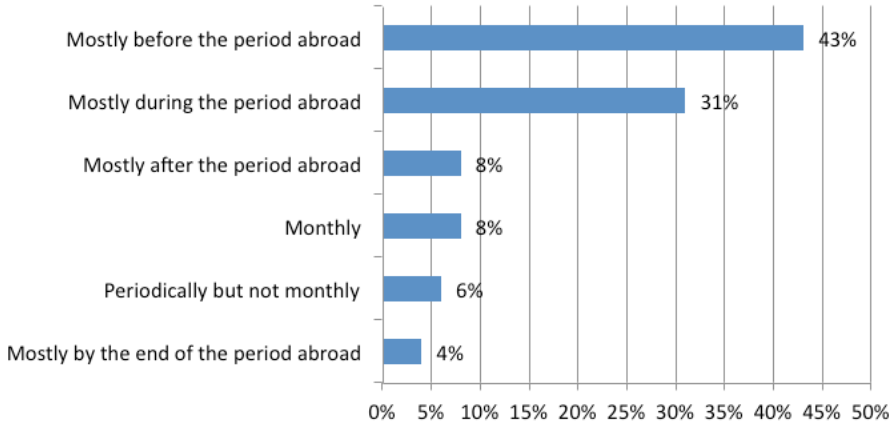


Figure 75: When mobile trainees receive their grant, n=1,004.

Figure 76 illustrates that 71% of responding students cannot cover their living expenses during their traineeship with their grant. Only 26% receive additional financial compensation from the organisation. These figures clearly show that some students have to rely on other sources of funding such as savings or family support to realise a traineeship abroad.

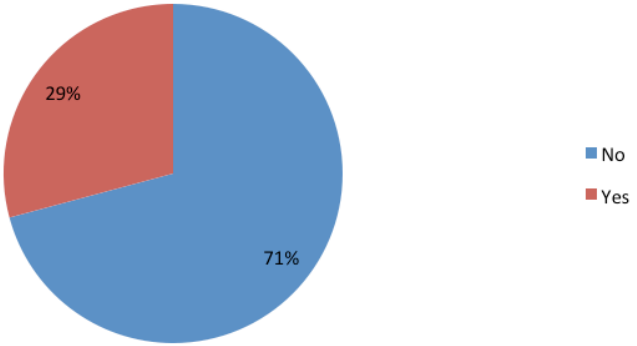


Figure 76: Grant covering living expenses during the traineeship, n=1,004.

Figure 77 shows that such additional financial support from the receiving organisation is mainly provided through a salary (53%). Some organisations provide support via accommodation expenses (19%), local transportation (8%) and reimbursements of different costs (7%).

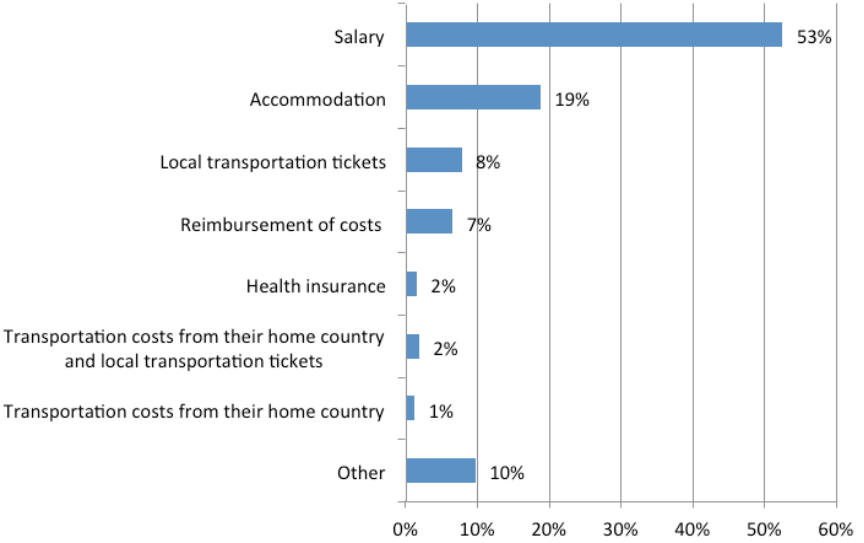


Figure 77: Type of additional financial compensation receiving organisations offer, n=320.

Recognition of mobility for traineeships

Figure 78 shows that 64% of all responding students have already received recognition for their traineeship and for 29% the process is still ongoing. The remaining 7% percent have not received full recognition resulting in 11% without full recognition not including the ones with ongoing processes.

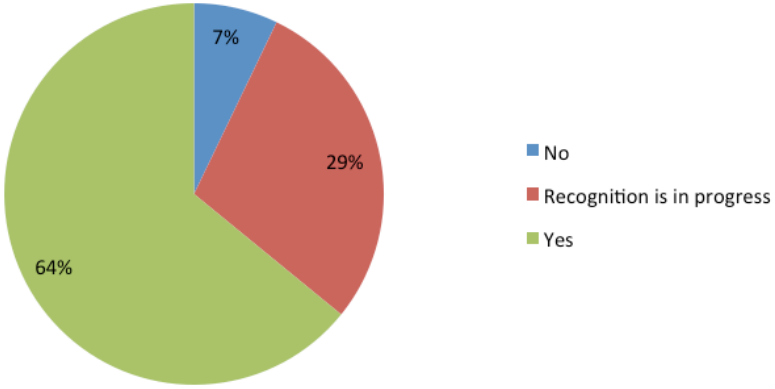


Figure 78: Traineeships recognised by sending institutions, n=1,245.

Figure 79 lists the reasons for non-recognition. Not surprisingly, 76% say they do not require it as part of their degree which is not negative for students as they most likely have known this before. Problems with credit calculation (3%), part of the traineeship not included in the Learning Agreement (2%), no approval by the professor (2%) and the lack of necessary documents (2%) are some of the more genuine causes of non-recognition. Putting these cases in relation to the number of students that claim they have received full recognition results in a number of non-recognition of around 2-3%. These results show that non-recognition is not an extensively big problem for mobility for trainees.

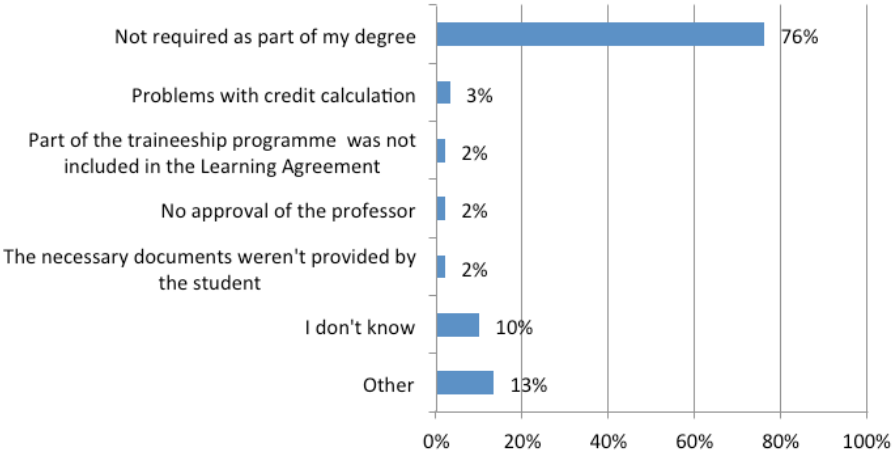


Figure 79: Reasons for non-recognition of traineeships, n=89.

Figure 80 shows that in 58% of students' cases, ECTS credits are used in the recognition process. For 24% the ECTS is not used and the remaining 18% do not know.

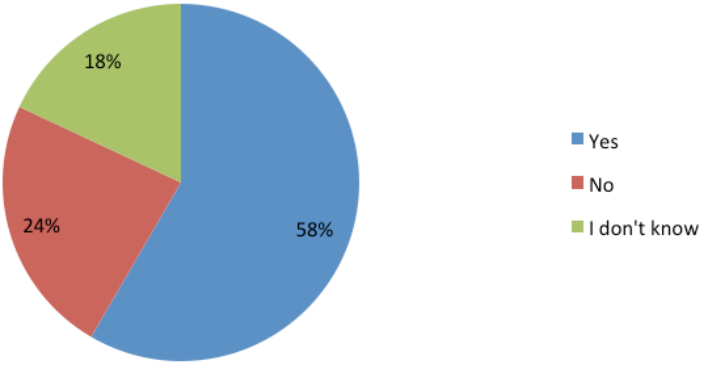


Figure 80: ECTS use in the recognition process for mobility for traineeships, n=798.

Figure 81 shows how mobile trainees say their ECTS credits are calculated. The total amount of hours (39%) and the total amount of months (14%) are most often the criteria. In other cases, the type of traineeship (8%) and the workload of the traineeship (5%) determine the ECTS credits obtained for the traineeship.

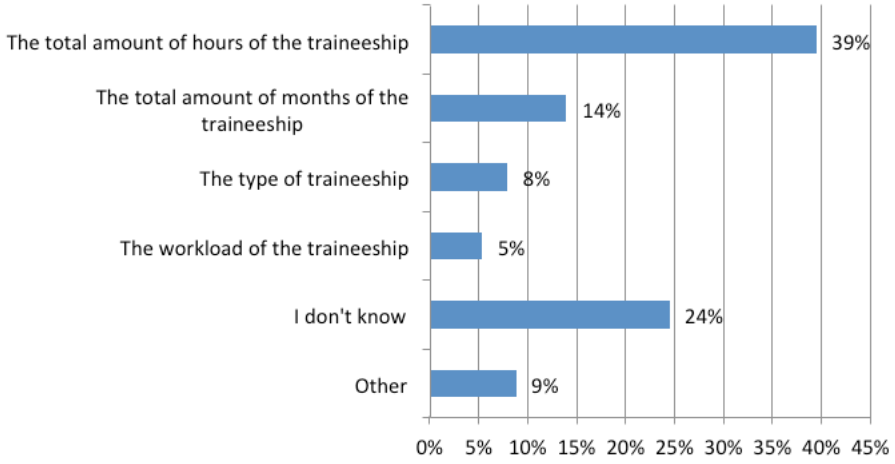


Figure 81: How Higher Education Institutions calculate ECTS credits according to mobile trainees, n=466.

Figure 82 gives an overview of the actors in charge of the recognition process, which varies quite a lot among different institutions. The study programme director or advisor (24%), the faculty or institutional Erasmus coordinator (20% and 19%, respectively), professors (19%), International Relations Office (14%) and the dean or head of department (11%) are involved in the recognition procedure.

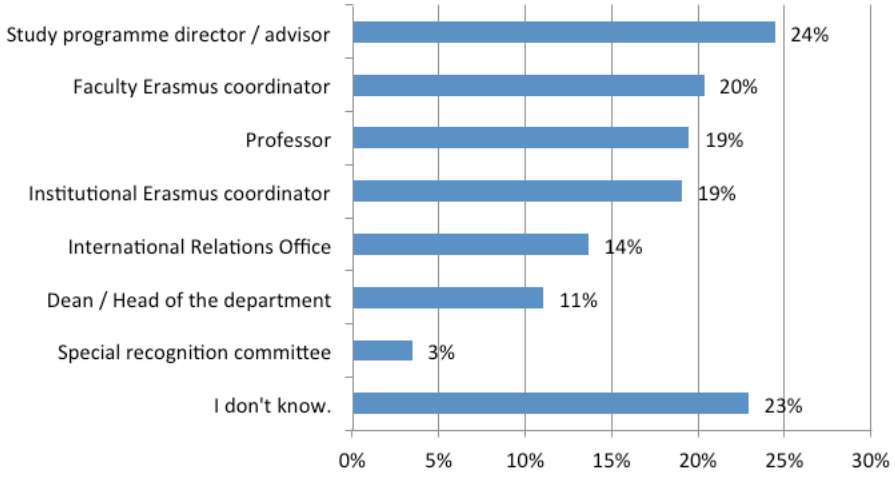


Figure 82: Actor in charge of the recognition process for mobility for traineeships, n=462.

General evaluation of mobility for traineeships

Figure 83 shows the weighted averages in terms of importance (1=not important at all to 5=very important) of different reasons to participate in trainee mobility. Personal experience (4.7) and professional experience (4.6) are considered as very important by most students. Culture (4.2), language learning (4.1), visiting the country (4.0) and job opportunities (4.0) are also evaluated as important reasons. Not surprising considering the financial situation of most mobile trainees, income is evaluated least important (2.6).

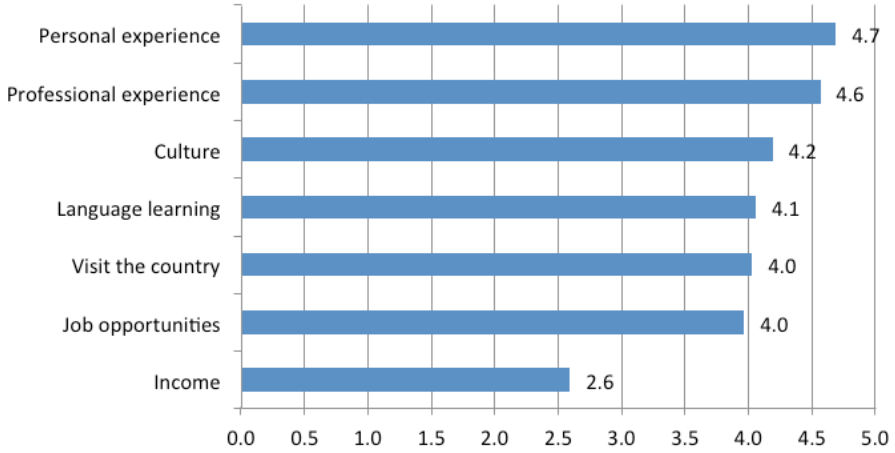


Figure 83: Evaluation of reasons for doing a traineeship abroad, averages, (1-not important at all to 5-very important), n=981-1,089.

Figure 84 gives an overview of satisfaction levels of students with both their overall experience abroad and the traineeship experience in particular. 88% are either very satisfied or satisfied with their overall experience abroad and the weighted average is 4.4. Also, 75% are either very satisfied or satisfied with their traineeship experience (weighted average 4.1). This result is similar to the experience of mobility for studies and shows that next to the educational and professional value, the stay abroad provides an added value to students.

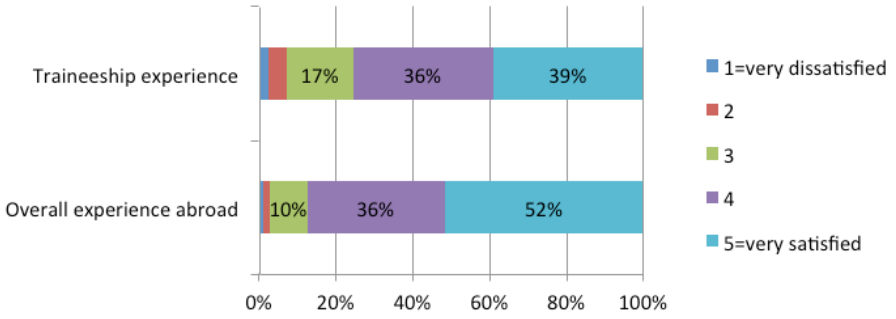


Figure 84: Satisfaction levels with the traineeship experience abroad (1-very dissatisfied at all and 5-very satisfied, n=1,245.

Asking trainees whether they encountered any obstacles or difficulties during their traineeship, 31% say they did. Figure 85 lists these obstacles and difficulties. Two major challenges are the grant not being sufficient (45%) and the working language (38%). Integrating into the organisation's culture (17%), the administrative burden from the sending HEI (15%) and insufficient skills (13%) are also important obstacles and difficulties. The application to the receiving organisation (12%) and the application process timeline (9%) are also difficult for some students.

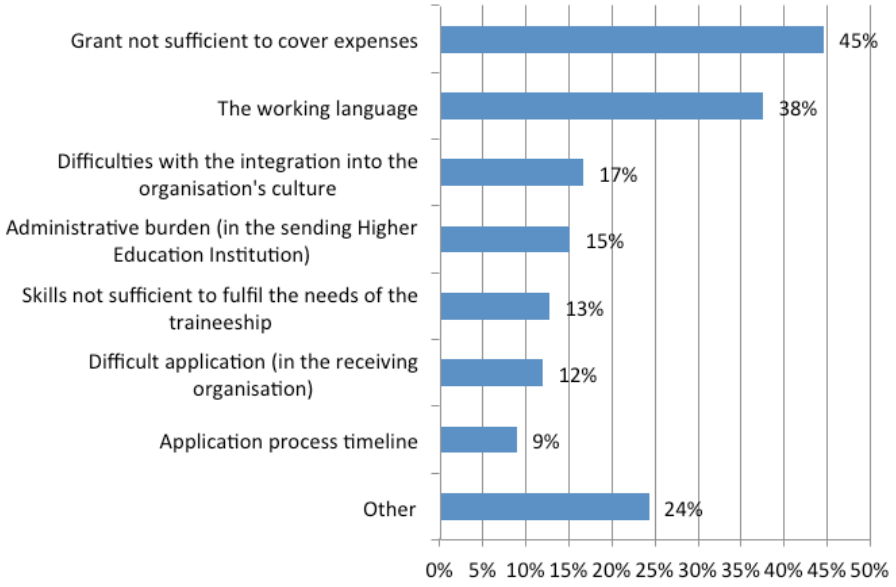


Figure 85: Perceived obstacles and difficulties during the traineeship abroad, n=383.

Figure 86 shows that 57% of students have a supervisor from the HEI, while 34% say they don't have a supervisor and 9% do not know if they have one.

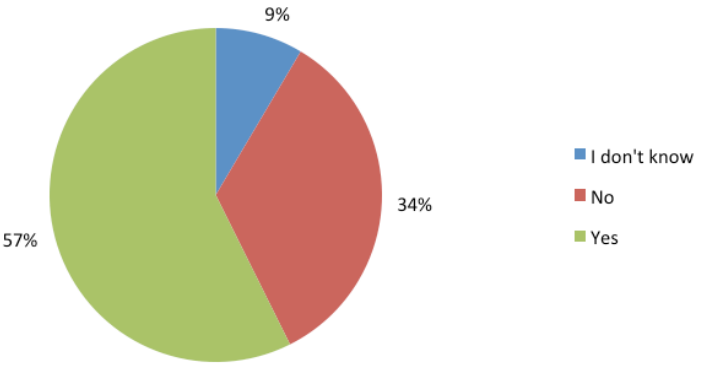


Figure 86: Mobile trainees getting a supervisor from their Higher Education Institution, n=1,245.

Ideally, HEIs should provide students with all relevant information concerning their traineeship prior to departure. Figure 87 illustrates to which extent students receive certain kinds of information. The learning outcomes of the traineeship (57%), the tasks and responsibilities of the organisation (50%), social and labour rights as a trainee (42%) and information on health and safety risks (39%) are most often provided. Provision of information on the relevant social security (28%), general information about the host city (20%) and information on worke representatives (17%) are often left to others.

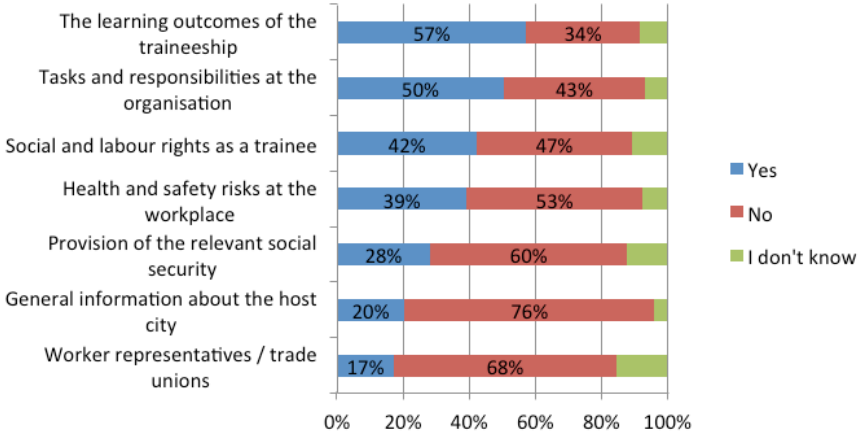


Figure 87: Provision of information by the sending Higher Education Institution prior to departure, n=1,245.

87% of receiving organisations provide a tutor to the trainee. Figure 88 shows that 77% consider such a tutor "very useful" or "useful". The weighted average in the sample is 4.1.

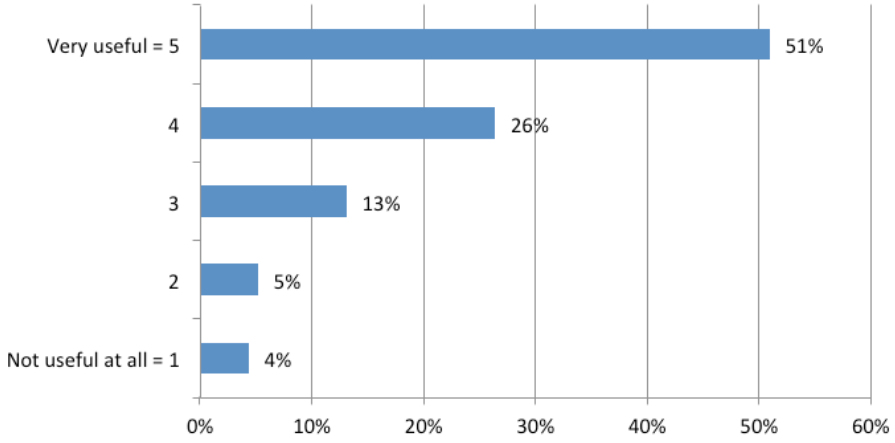


Figure 88: Evaluation of the tutor from the receiving organisation (1-not useful at all to 5-very useful), n=1,083.

31% of students already have finished a degree programme. We ask them whether they consider their traineeship abroad an advantage on the labour market. Figure 89 shows that 60% consider their traineeship an advantage on the labour market.

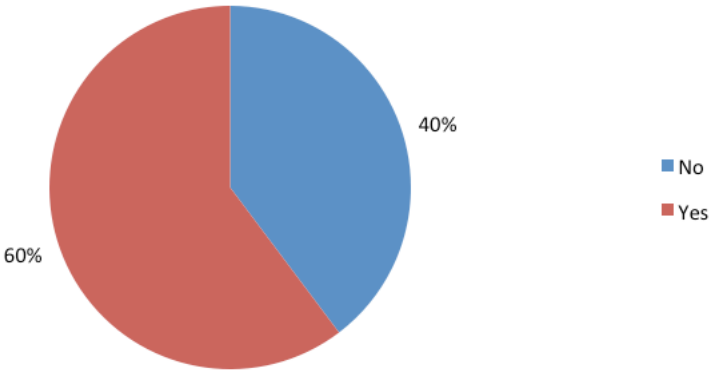


Figure 89: If a mobility for traineeships experience is an advantage on the labour market, n=380.

We ask students that already work and consider their traineeship abroad an advantage on the job market what kind of advantage they experienced. Almost one fourth consider the time abroad an important reason for getting hired as Figure 90 illustrates. The time abroad was instrumental to finding the respective job say 20%, and 19% believe that their international experience sped up the job search. Another 18% say that the respective job specifically required experience abroad.

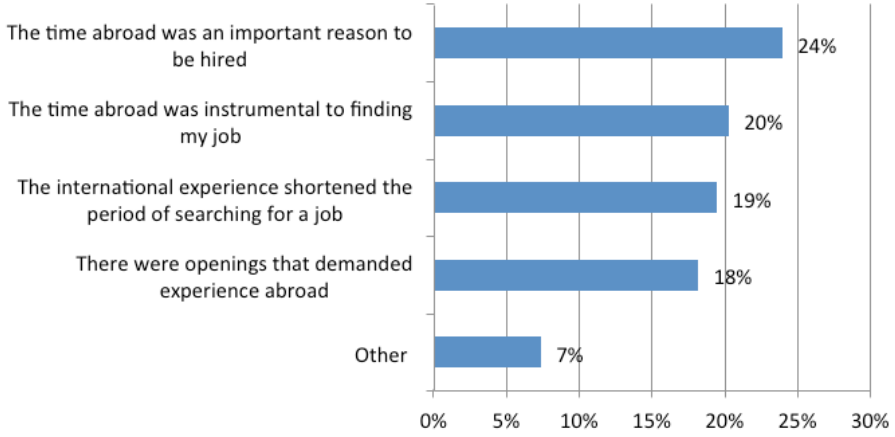


Figure 90: Advantages of a traineeship abroad when applying for a job, n=229.

Figure 91 shows that 79% of all responding students consider their traineeship very advantageous or advantageous when applying for a job (possibly only in the future). Calculating the weighted average results in a value of 4.2 also indicates that students consider their traineeship abroad as an advantage. Only 3% of the sample give a slightly negative evaluation (1=not advantageous at all, and 2=not very advantageous) of the impact of their experience on the labour market.

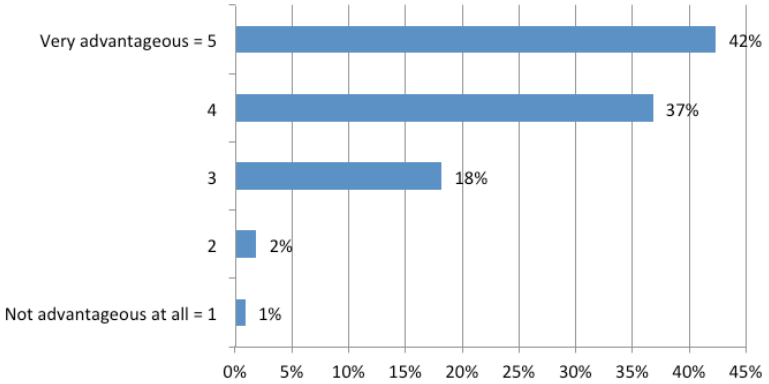


Figure 91: How advantageous mobile trainees consider their traineeship abroad when applying for a job (1-not advantageous at all to 5-very advantageous), n=1,245.

Higher Education Perspective

By Emanuel Alfranseder

Demography

In total 157 HEIs from 29 participating countries completed the survey. Table 8 shows that HEIs from France, Italy, Spain and Poland contributed most to the results of the survey.

Country	Number of HEI responses	Country	Number of HEI responses	Country	Number of HEI responses
France	21	Austria	7	Bulgaria	3
Spain	15	Portugal	6	Czech Republic	3
Italy	15	The Netherlands	5	Switzerland	3
Poland	11	Greece	4	Lithuania	3
Estonia	10	Croatia	4	Hungary	2
Finland	10	Ireland	4	United Kingdom	2
Slovakia	9	Sweden	4	Other	8
Belgium	8				

Table 8: Country overview of Higher Education Institu tions, n=157.

Most HEIs are not members of placement consortia (74%) or are not aware of it (12%) as Figure 92 shows. Around 14% of responding institutions are part of such a consortium. Such consortia are built by two or more participating organisations teaming up to prepare, implement and follow up a project or an activity within a project.

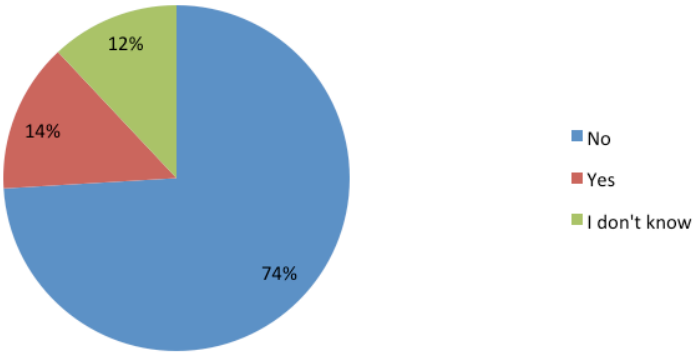


Figure 92: Higher Education Institutions part of placement consortia, n=157.

Most of the figures in this analysis refer to an entire institution (93%) and the rest refers to single faculties and departments. The positions held by the individual responding to the questionnaire range from Erasmus coordinators, international coordinators and exchange coordinators to directors and heads of the international relations office. All of the individuals included in the final sample work with mobility for traineeships and 85% work also with mobility for studies. On average, the responding institutions sent 69 students abroad for a traineeship in the academic year 2012/2013. While some universities sent as much as 900 students during the academic year, 12 HEIs included in the sample did not send anyone abroad for a traineeship.

Figure 93 illustrates that in around half of responding HEIs a traineeship is compulsory for some programmes, but not necessarily abroad. For 22% a traineeship is compulsory for all study programmes and another 22% report that a traineeship is not compulsory at all. Only around 7% say that a traineeship abroad is compulsory for some of their study programmes.

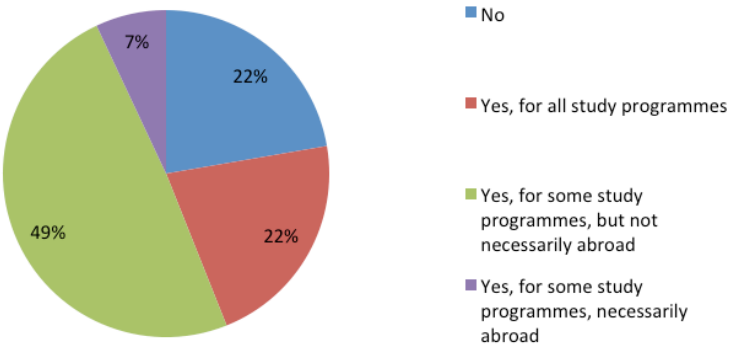


Figure 93: Higher Education Institutions with compulsory traineeships, n=157.

Information and actors for mobility for traineeships

A majority of institutions (85%) claim that they provide specific information about training opportunities abroad. Figure 94 shows that while almost all of those institutions (83%) promote Erasmus traineeships, private agreements (30%) and Leonardo Da Vinci traineeships (19%) are much less frequently promoted. Some universities mention that they have their own travel grants and they provide information on traineeships abroad offered by associations such as the International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience (IAESTE) and their own university career services.

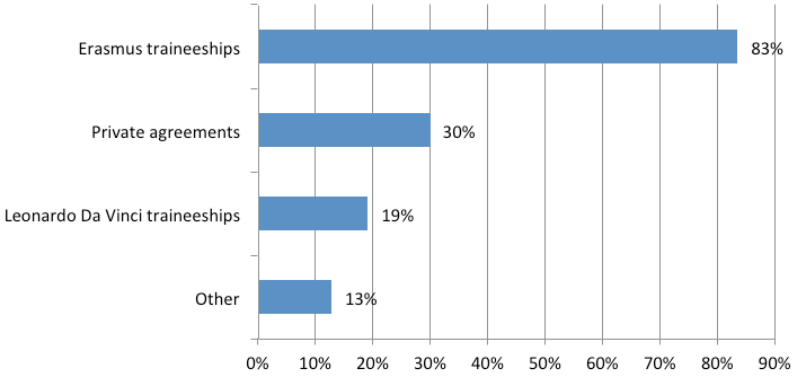


Figure 94: Type of traineeships Higher Education Institutions provide information for, n=157.

International relations offices (54%), institutional Erasmus coordinators (51%) and faculty Erasmus coordinators (41%) most frequently provide information about training opportunities abroad to students as shown in Figure 95. Former exchange students (31%), student associations (22%) and career centres (22%) also provide information to students according to responding HEIs.

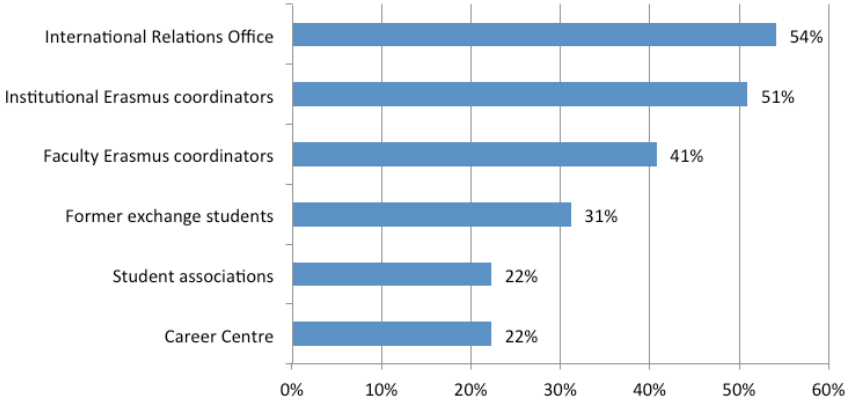


Figure 95: Actors providing students with information about mobility for traineeships opportunities, n=157.

Individual consulting (69%), Institutional or International Office webpages (68%) and seminars or open days (62%) are most often used to provide information about training opportunities. Figure 96 also illustrates that newsletters and individual emails (48%), brochures, booklets, flyers or posters (44%), social networking services (34%) and students associations such as ESN (26%) are additional tools to provide information to students.

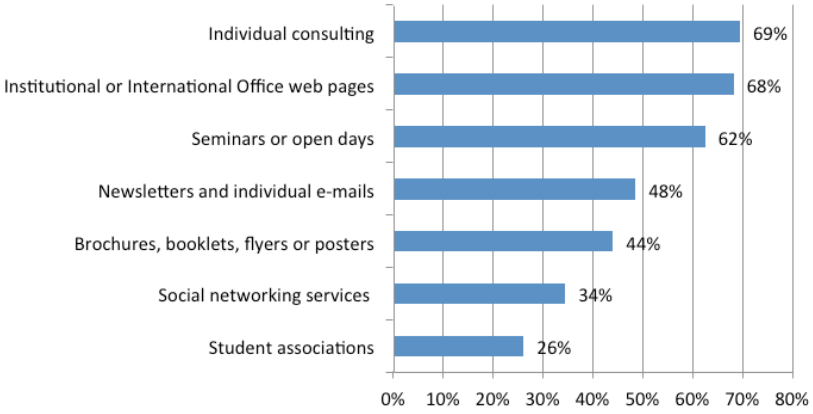


Figure 96: How information about mobility for traineeships opportunities is provided, n=157.

When asked to rate the effectiveness of the different tools from 1 (ineffective) to 5 (very effective), it appears that HEIs have aligned their priorities according to the effectiveness of the tools. Not surprisingly, individual consulting is considered most effective (average 4.45). Brochures, booklets, flyers or posters (average 2.90) and student associations such as ESN (average 2.99) are not viewed as very effective as Figure 97 makes clear.

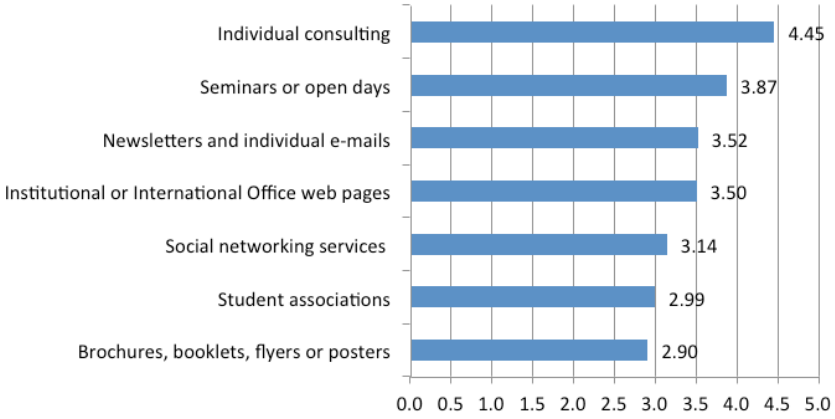


Figure 97: Effectiveness of different forms of information provision, averages, (1-ineffective to 5-very effective), n=135.

Figure 98 shows that around three fourth of HEIs help students to find traineeship opportunities. While 3% is not sure, 25% do not provide any help to students to find traineeships abroad.

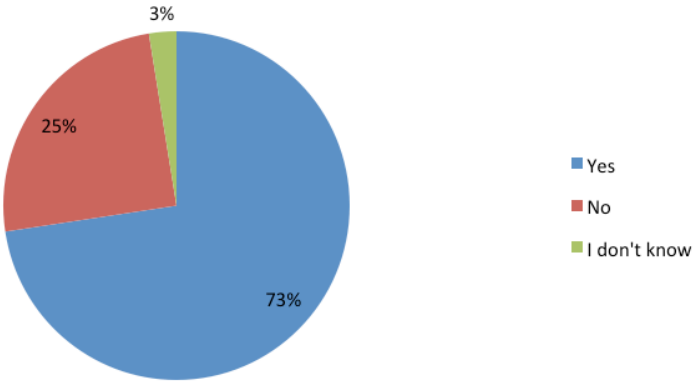


Figure 98: Higher Education Institutions helping students finding traineeship opportunities, n=157.

Most often HEIs contact organisations directly (63%) and rely on bilateral agreements (54%). Career fairs (25%) and sectorial fairs (16%) are also means of helping students to find traineeships as illustrated in Figure 99. Some HEIs provide a database or list with potentially interested receiving organisations. Others mention that they have tools to provide specific offers to students (often through their university homepage) and have university career centres to provide information to students.

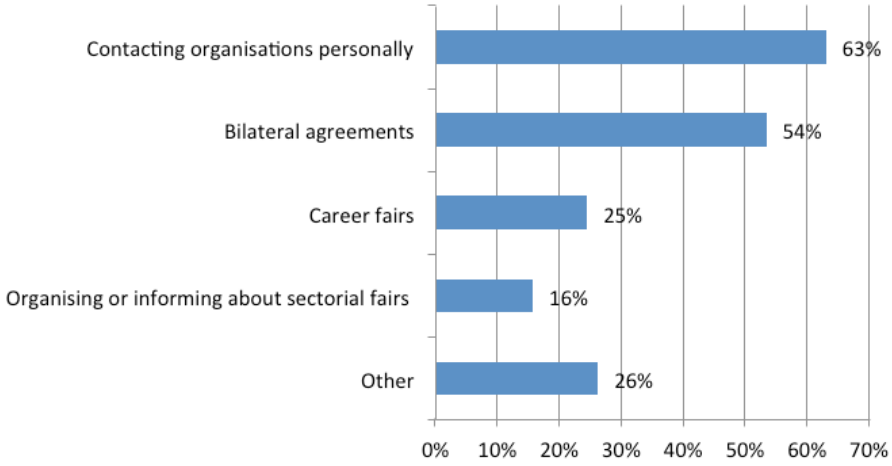


Figure 99: How Higher Education Institutions help students find traineeship opportunities, n=114.

Recognition of mobility for traineeships

Besides the Learning Agreement and the Quality Commitment, 57% of responding HEIs require additional documents. Figure 100 illustrates that another 9% of HEIs do not know and 34% of responding HEIs do not require any additional documentation. A majority of HEIs mentions that they additionally require a grant or financial agreement. Some HEIs also require the agreement or contract with the receiving organisation, a CV, a general application form and information about insurance.

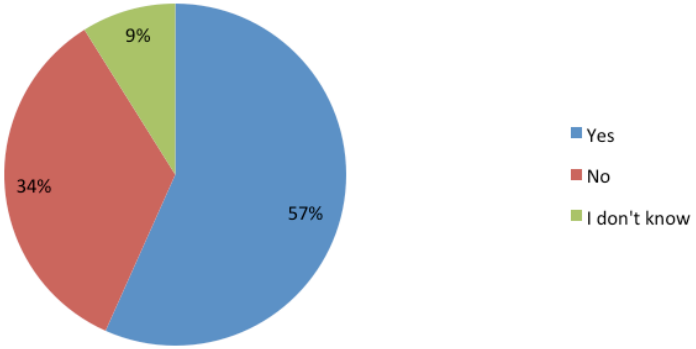


Figure 100: Higher Education Institutions that require mobile trainees to sign additional documents together with the Learning Agreement and the Quality Commitment, n=157.

Faculty Erasmus coordinators (29%), study programme directors or advisors (22%) and institutional Erasmus coordinators (17%) are the ones that mainly take final decisions on the Learning Agreement and the Quality Commitment as Figure 101 shows. Also professors (8%), special recognition committees (6%), the International Relations Office (6%), the dean or head of department (4%), career centre office coordinators (3%) decide on the final documents in responding HEIs. In 2% of all cases, students can choose the content of the training agreement themselves.

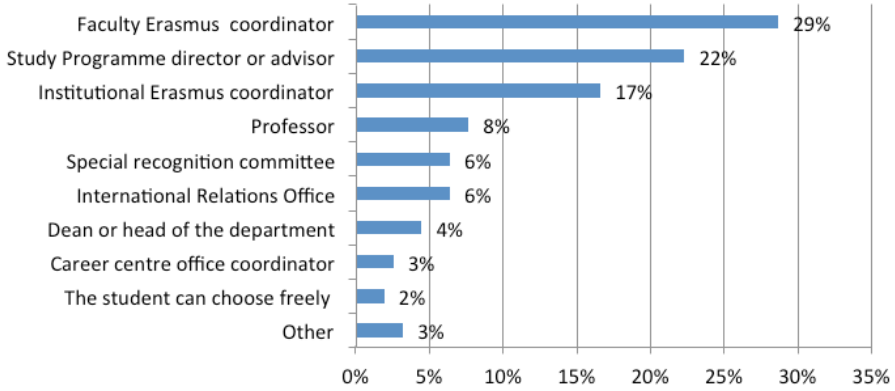


Figure 101: Actor making the final decision on the Learning Agreement and the Quality Commitment of the traineeship, n=157.

Generally very few students make changes to the Learning Agreement as shown in Figure 102. Most HEIs report no changes at all (38%) or less than 20% of all students make changes to the Learning Agreement (57%).

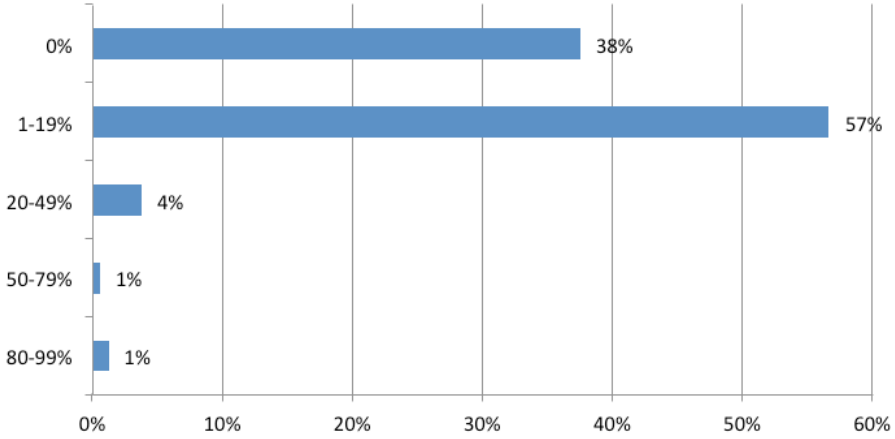


Figure 102: Percentage of mobile trainees making changes to their Learning Agreement, n=157.

The most frequent reason to change the Learning Agreement is an extension of the traineeship period (48%). Figure 103 shows that changes in the job profile (22%), the receiving organisation requesting changes (22%), shortening the traineeship period abroad (20%), the student not being satisfied (15%) and the tutor or contact person (11%) are additional reasons for changes. Many in category "Other" don't have experience with changes yet.

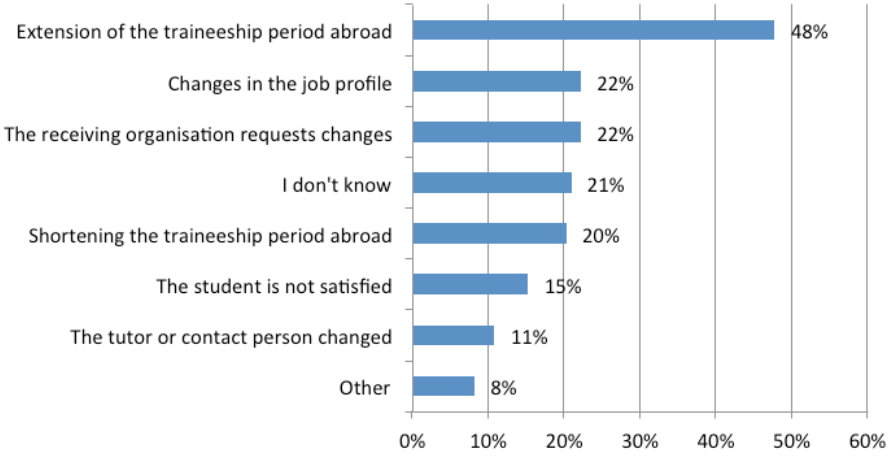


Figure 103: Main reasons why mobile trainees change the Learning Agreement, n=157.

Around 93% of all institutions claim that they usually grant full recognition of their students' traineeships abroad. When directly asked what could improve the recognition of traineeships abroad, a substantial part of responding HEIs say they believe recognition is working well and they have no additional suggestions. Some suggested improvements are a simpler, less bureaucratic process, harmonisation of the European Credit Transfer system and including traineeships as an obligatory element in the curriculum. A specific problem mentioned is the calculation of the workload and the conversation into ECTS as the expectations are not always clear in the beginning and this situation could be improved by better and more thorough communication prior to departure. In addition, the recognition for students that don't have a traineeship as an integral part of their curriculum and cannot get any ECTS should be improved.

Most of the HEIs provide a supervisor for guidance through the learning process of their traineeship (65%). Only 22% do not provide such a person and another 13% do not know whether this is the case as Figure 104 shows. Out of those who provide a supervisor, most of them consider such a supervisor very useful. On a scale from 1 (not useful at all) and 5 (very useful), respondents consider a supervisor on average rather useful (4.4).

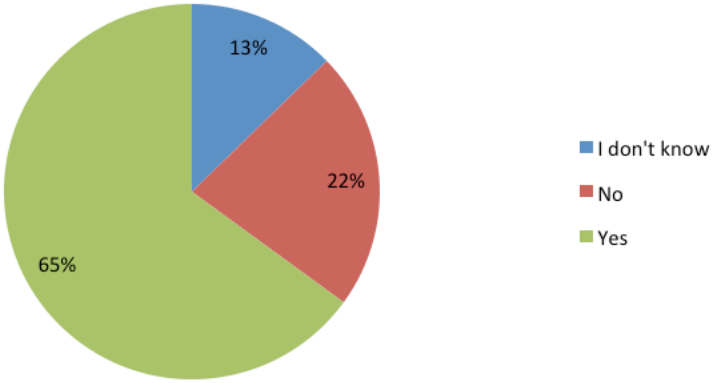


Figure 104: Higher Education Institutions that provide a supervisor to every student for guidance through the learning process of their traineeship, n=157.

The majority of responding HEIs use ECTS as the only credit system for traineeship recognition (57%) as Figure 105 makes clear. While 24% use both their national credit system and ECTS, 19% don't use ECTS at all in the process.

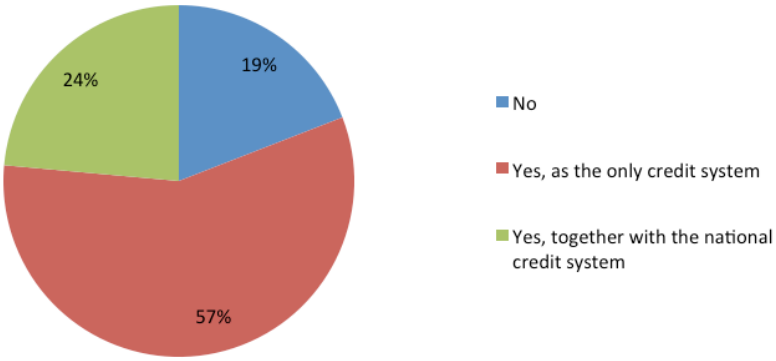


Figure 105: Higher Education Institutions using ECTS credits for traineeship recognition, n=157.

HEIs differ in their approach to calculate the number of ECTS of a traineeship as Figure 106 illustrates. The workload (29%), the total amount of hours (19%), the total amount of months (17%) and the type of the traineeship (11%) determine the amount of ECTS a student receives for the traineeship.

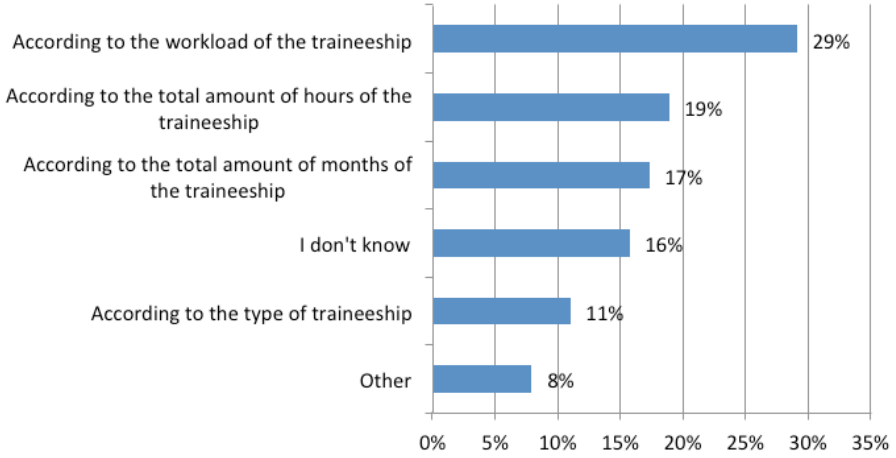


Figure 106: How ECTS credits are calculated (only if used), n=157.

Grants and other financial support

Figure 107 shows that a majority of students receives an Erasmus grant and in 55% of all responding HEIs report that all students receive an Erasmus grant.

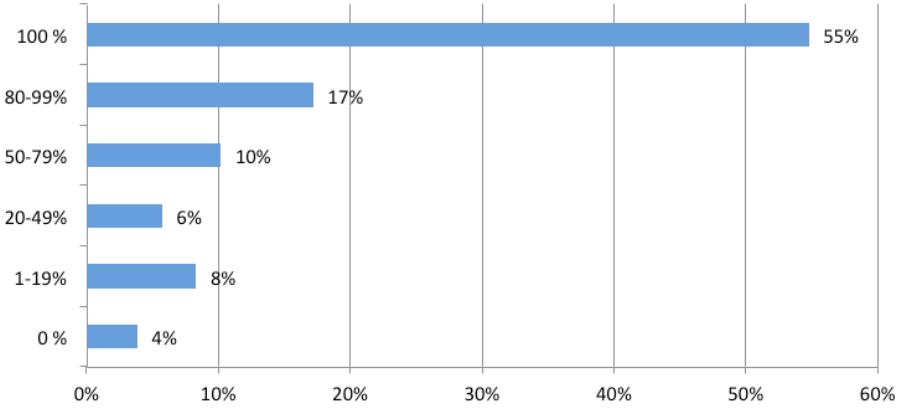


Figure 107: Percentage of mobile trainees receiving the Erasmus grant, n=157.

Figure 108 illustrates that only few HEIs use the Leonardo grant to send students abroad and 73% don't use the Leonardo grant at all.

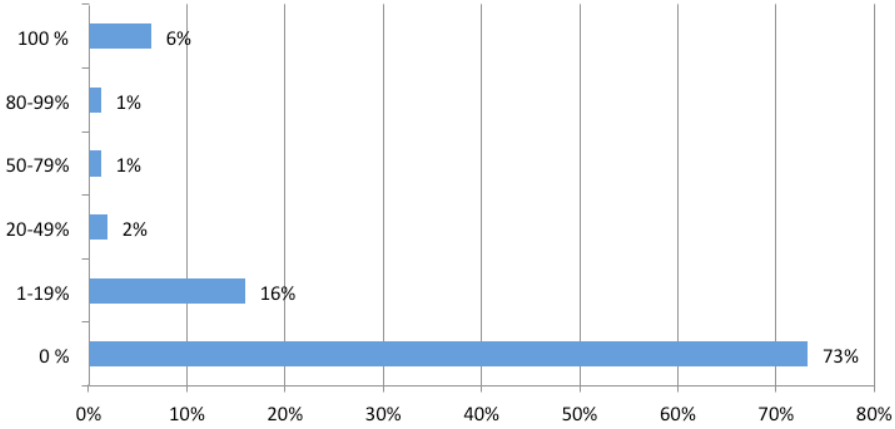


Figure 108: Percentage of mobile trainees receiving the Leonardo grant, n=157.

Most HEIs split up the payment of the grant and pay a part before (46%) or during the exchange (15%) as shown in Figure 109. While 27% pay the whole grant before the exchange, 6% pay the grant during the exchange and only 1% after the exchange.

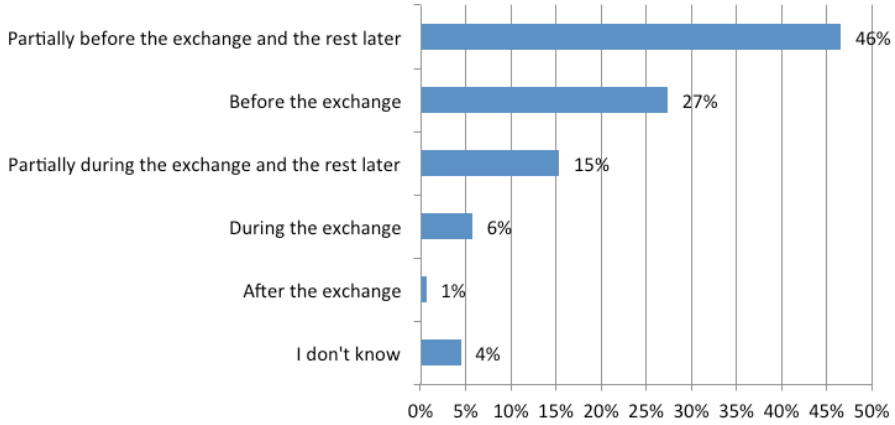


Figure 109: When mobile trainees receive their grant, n=157.

If students prolong their traineeship, in 14% of responding HEIs students can rely on additional funding and in 65% they may receive an additional grant if there is enough funding. Only 13% of HEIs report that there is no additional funding for students that decide to prolong their traineeship. Figure 110 depicts these results.

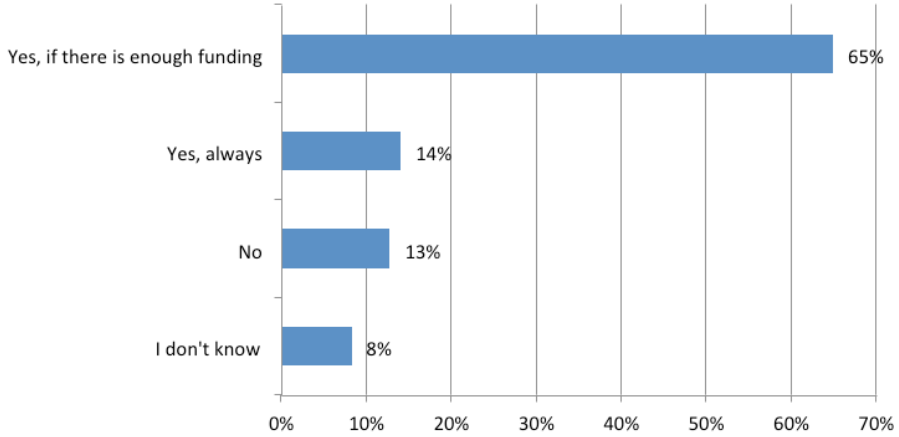


Figure 110: Higher Education Institutions providing additional grants for mobile trainees that prolong the traineeship, n=157.

Only very few students have to return their grant or part of it. Figure 111 shows that 48% of HEIs do not have cases in which students have to return money and 50% have less than 20% of such cases.

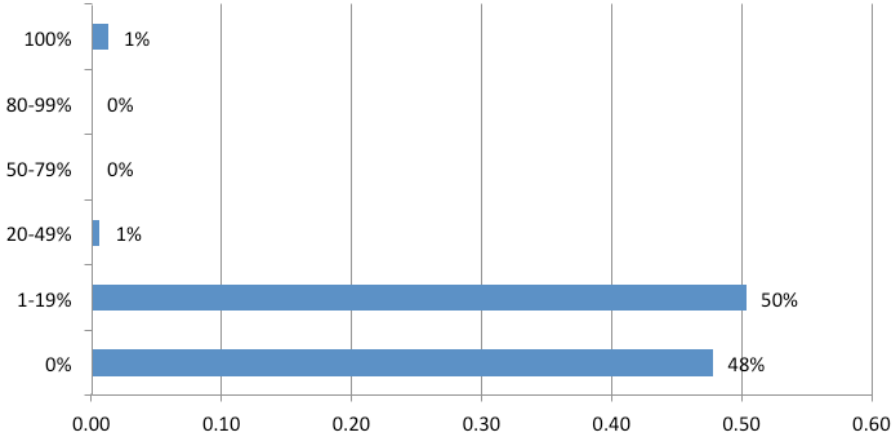


Figure 111: Percentage of the mobile trainees required to return the grant or part of it, n=157.

The main reason why students have to return their grant or parts of it, is too little time spent abroad or not going abroad at all (85%) as Figure 112 illustrates. Insufficient ECTS (15%) and insufficient learning outcomes (4%) are less frequently mentioned reasons for returning money.

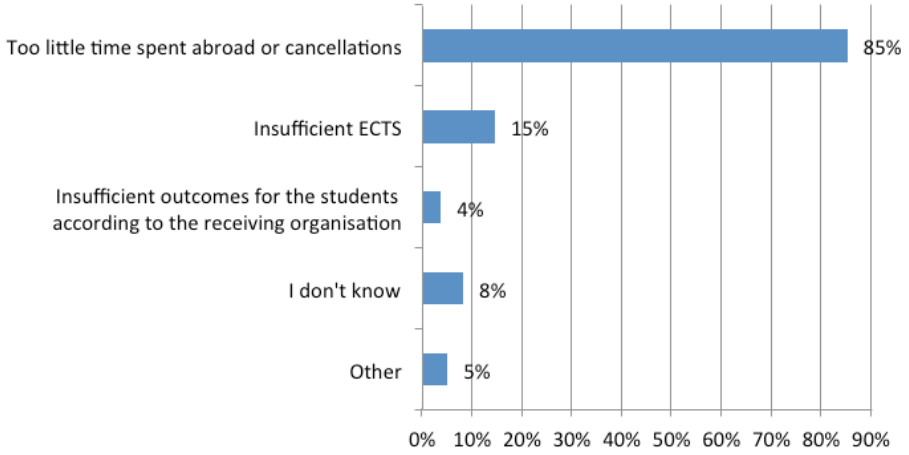


Figure 112: Reasons why mobile trainees are required to pay back the Erasmus grant, n=157.

Figure 113 shows that in many HEIs students do not have the possibility to top up their traineeship grant (35%). Income from the receiving organisation (28%), national grants (23%) and additional grants (17%) help students to finance their traineeship abroad. Regional grants and need-based support are most often mentioned in the category "Other".

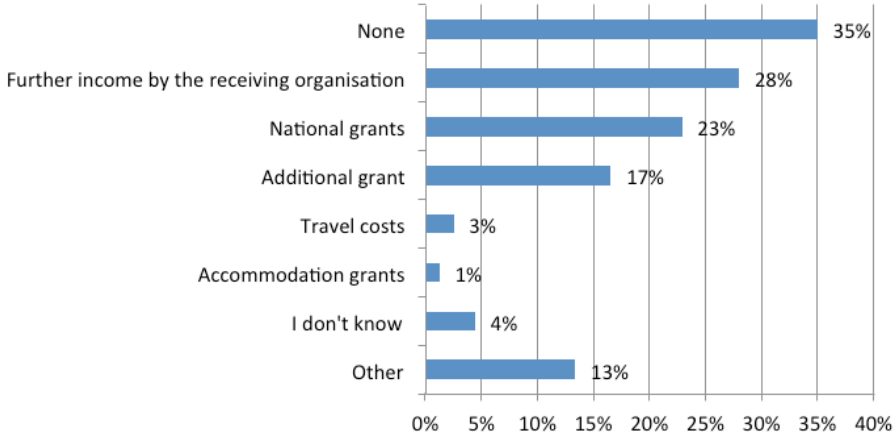


Figure 113: Additional financial help (apart from the traineeship grant) provided to mobile trainees, n=157.

Obstacles for mobility for traineeships

According to HEIs, the fear of wasting an academic year (27%) and not receiving a grant (26%) are the most important obstacles discouraging students from going abroad for a traineeship. The fear of not getting full recognition is only considered an obstacle by 4% of responding HEIs. As Figure 114 shows, 31% have "other" suggestions on the most important issues discouraging students. HEIs frequently mention the difficulties to find a receiving organisation abroad. Insufficient funding, lack of language skills and fear of losing ties at home are also singled out as potentially discouraging factors.

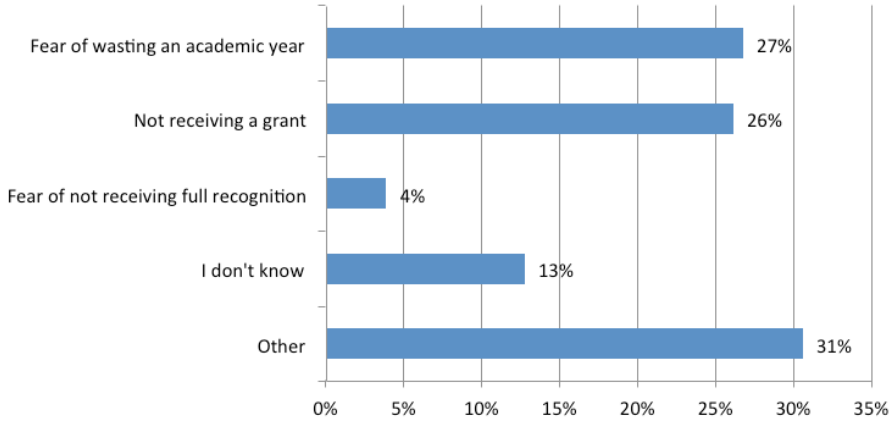


Figure 114: Most important problems that discourage students from going abroad on a traineeship according to Higher Education Institutions, n=157.

When asked about potential problems that trainees may face during their actual traineeship abroad (depicted in Figure 115), most HEIs consider insufficient financial support the main problem (66%). The working language (39%), integration into the organisational culture (24%), lack of professional skills (24%), administrative burdens (18%) and issues with the application (process timeline - 15%; difficulty – 8%) are also potential issues during the period abroad.

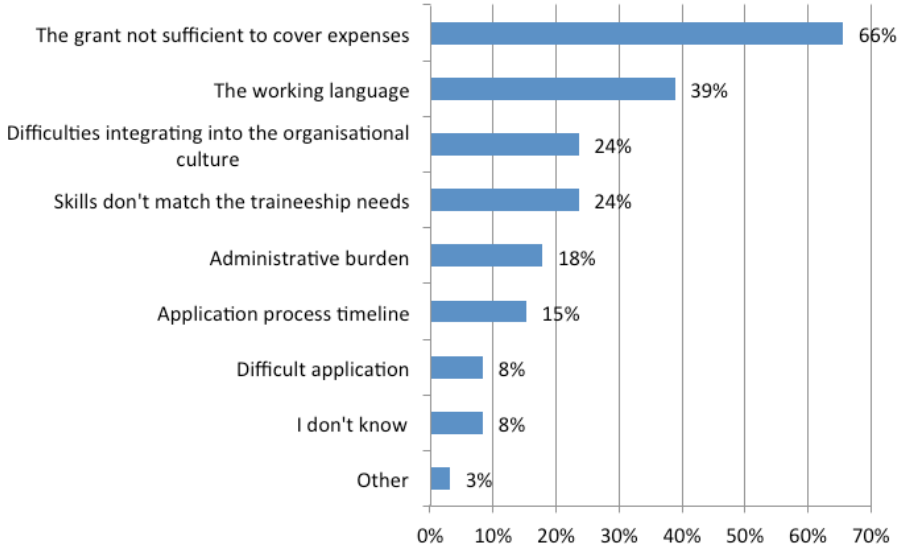


Figure 115: Obstacles mobile trainees may face during the traineeship according to Higher Education Institutions, n=157.

Receiving Organisation Perspective

By Mihaela Pinciuc

Demography

A total of 59 receiving organisations answered the online questionnaire. Table 9 shows that receiving organisations from 23 countries participated and most responses are from France, Italy and Germany.

Country	Number of responses	Country	Number of responses	Country	Number of responses
France	5	Belgium	3	Ireland	2
Italy	5	Denmark	3	Sweden	1
Germany	5	United Kingdom	3	Croatia	1
Slovenia	4	Hungary	3	Bulgaria	1

Turkey	4	Czech Republic	2	Macedonia	1
Portugal	3	The Netherlands	2	Romania	1
Poland	3	Austria	2	Iran	1
Spain	3	Estonia	1		

Table 9: Country overview of receiving organisations, n=59.

Regarding the sector of the receiving organisation, organisations active in higher education represent 20% of the responses, followed by culture, sport and environment (8%) along with research and development (8%). Further details are displayed in Figure 116.

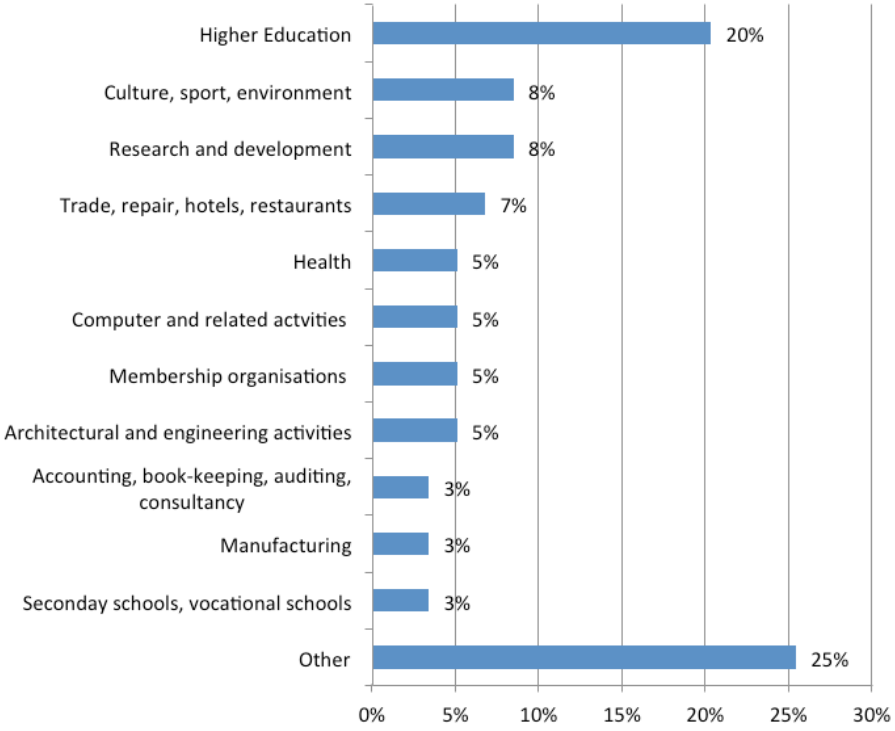


Figure 116: Sector of receiving organisations, n=59.

Figure 117 illustrates that almost half of the responding organisations are from the private sector (49%), while only 15% are from the public sector. Universities cover 15% of responses, non-profit organisations cover 19% and one response comes from a research centre.

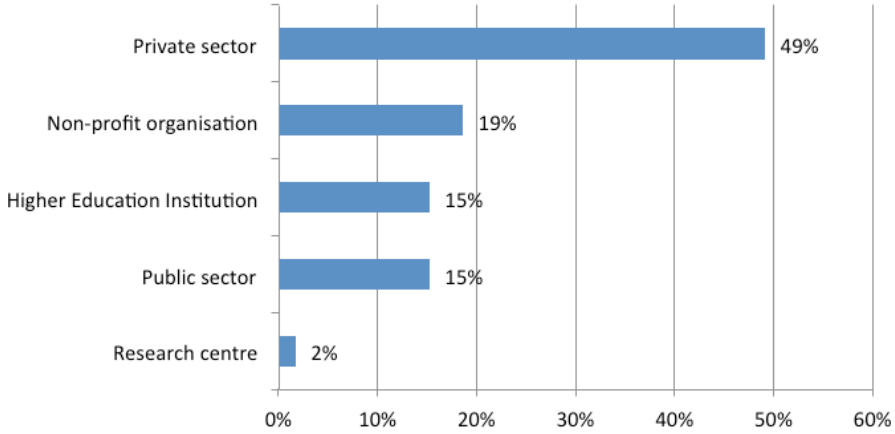


Figure 117: Type of receiving organisations, n=59.

The majority of organisations that filled our questionnaire are micro-organisations with less than 10 employees (37%) and small organisations with less than 50 people employed (27%). 14% of all responses are from medium-sized organisations with less than 250 employees, 15% from big organisations with more than 1,000 employees and 7% from organisations with more than 250 workers. Figure 118 gives an overview of these results.

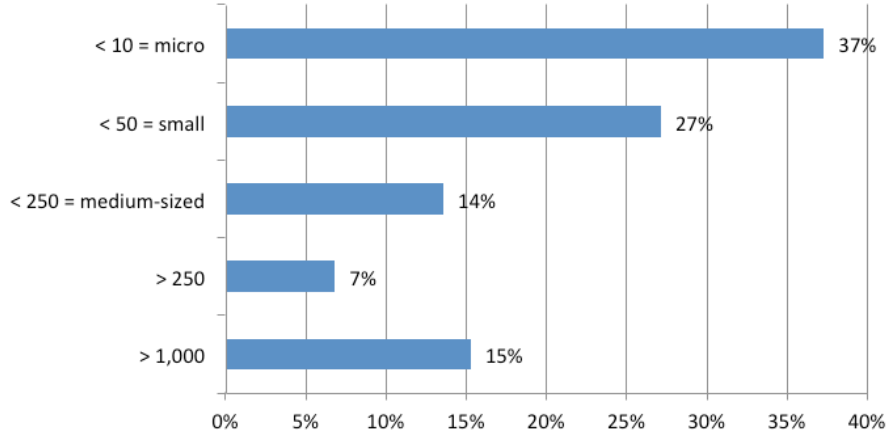


Figure 118: Size of receiving organisations according to their number of employees, n=59.

Needs of receiving organisation and finding mobile trainees

Figure 119 demonstrates that a big majority of organisations regularly receive trainees (86%). Figure 120 shows that students applying on their own initiative (61%), with the help of schools or HEIs (57%), within their network contacts (53%) or advertising a vacancy (45%) are ways how organisations usually find their trainees. National Agencies (14%) and EU offices coordinating mobility programmes at national level (16%) are also ways for the organisations to find their future trainees.

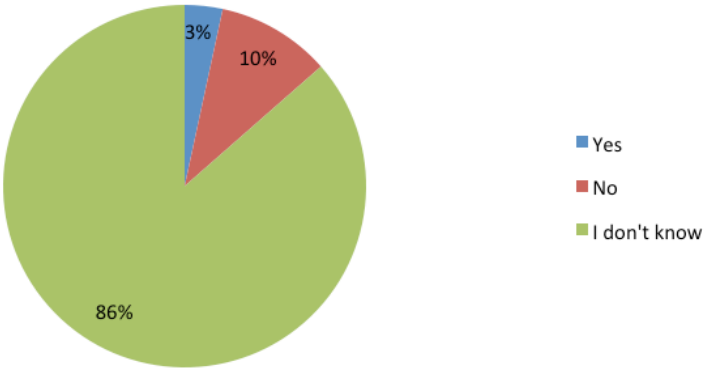


Figure 119: Organisations receiving trainees, n=59.

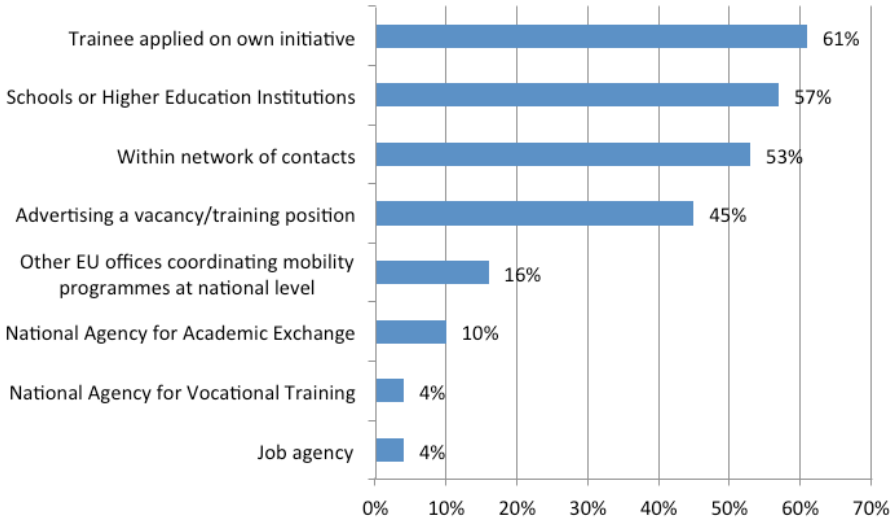


Figure 120: How organisations find their trainees, n=51.

73% of organisations receive international students or trainees, while 27% do not. As depicted in Figure 121, the most common reason not to have international students or trainees is the lack of contact with potential trainees abroad (37%) and the lack of financial capacity to pay trainees (31%). Other reasons are the language barrier (19%), difficulty to integrate international trainees in the organisation's culture (19%) and too much bureaucratic obligations (12%).

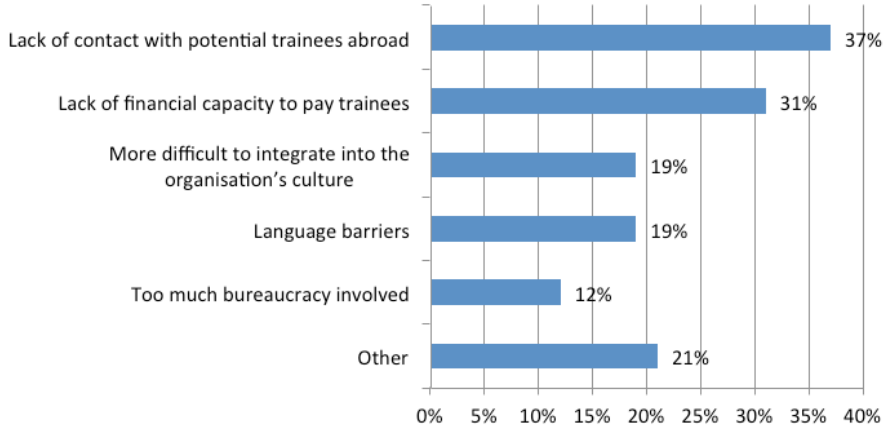


Figure 121: Reasons for not having mobile trainees, n=19.

Almost all surveyed organisations that have trainees also have international trainees (84%). Erasmus Placement (60%) is the most common training mobility programme that the organisations use. Just 7% of organisations use Leonardo da Vinci as a mobility programme, while 19% of organisations don't exactly know the programme that they use. 5% of organisations say they use both Erasmus Placement and Leonardo da Vinci, and only 2% use the Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs. Further details are displayed in Figure 122.

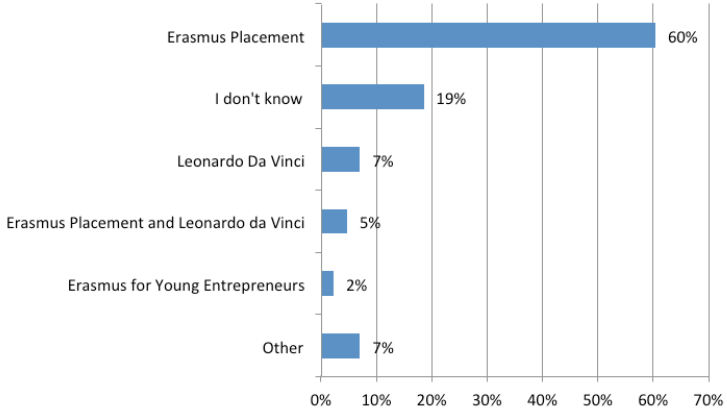


Figure 122: Training mobility programmes organisations use, n=43

As shown in Figure 123, organisations that receive international students or trainees rate their experience with the traineeships relatively high. On a scale from 1 (not satisfied at all) to 5 (extremely satisfied) the average is 4.13.

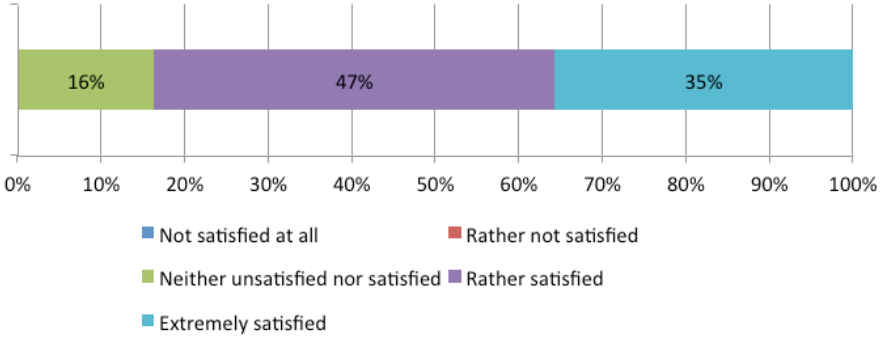


Figure 123: Satisfaction with mobile trainees (1-not satisfied at all to 5-extremely satisfied), n=43.

The average number of trainees that the surveyed organisations hosted in 2013 is 8. There is an obvious correlation between the number of employees and the number of trainees, which means that macro organisations have more trainees than micro ones.

Figure 124 illustrates that organisations consider trainees to be a frequent need more than a one-off need. In other words, there are frequent positions open for trainees every year.

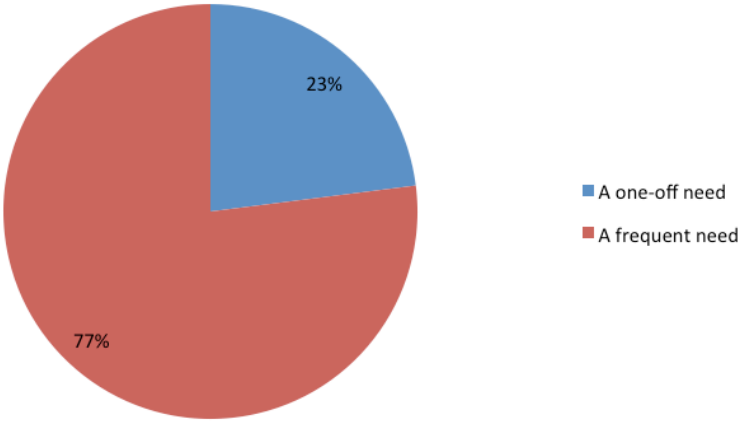


Figure 124: Need for trainees of receiving organisations, n=43.

Taking into consideration the education level of their trainees, 98% of organisations say they accept trainees who are enrolled in a Higher Education Institution. Graduates are a preferred option as well (65%) and the percentages drop lower as the education level is lower as well: 12% after finishing a secondary school or vocational education and training and 14% who are enrolled in secondary school or vocational education and training. This is illustrated in Figure 125.

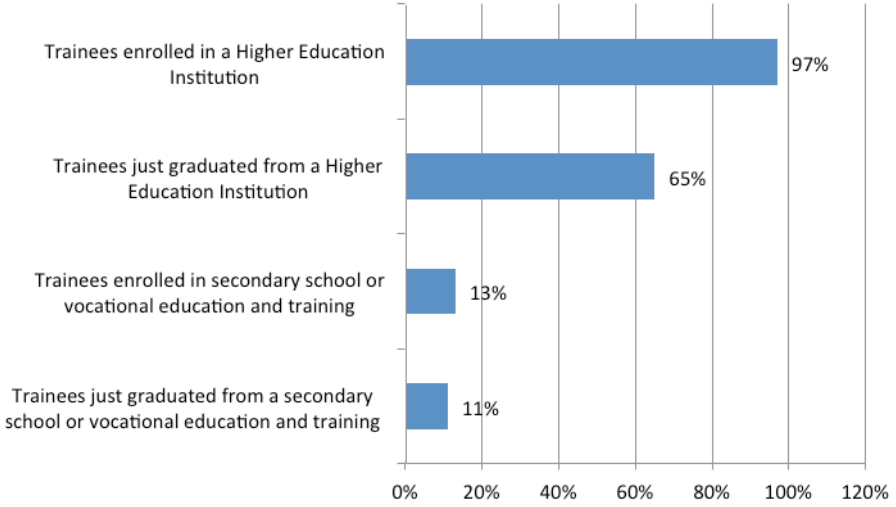


Figure 125: Accepted education level of trainees, n=43.

The average duration of a traineeship is 4.8 months. When asked about the ideal duration for the traineeships, the average answer was 6.4 months. All receiving organisations think the same or a higher number of months than they offer is needed.

As demonstrated in Figure 126, when choosing the best period for the traineeship, the most popular answer is throughout the whole year, depending on the need (72%). Spring time (23%) is also in the top, while winter time is the least preferred with only 4%.

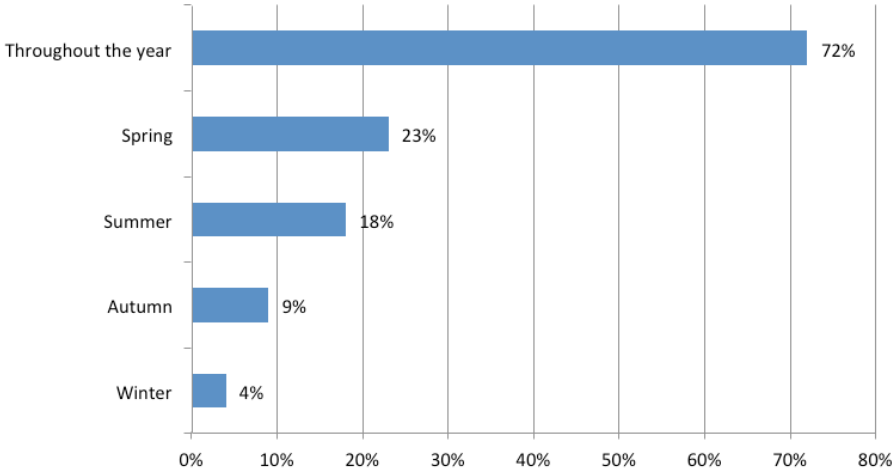


Figure 126: Preferred period for the traineeship, n=43.

Half of all responding organisations (49%) have a different working language than the local language showing openness towards international trainees. Also 49% of respondents have a different working language for trainees than for the entire organisation. The working language of the last trainee that an organisation has hosted is English for more than half of the respondents, followed by German (14%).

As to the number of nationalities working in the respective organisations, one nationality (16%), between one and five nationalities (39%), between five and twenty (39%) and more than twenty nationalities (4%) are working in the participating organisations. This is shown in Figure 127.

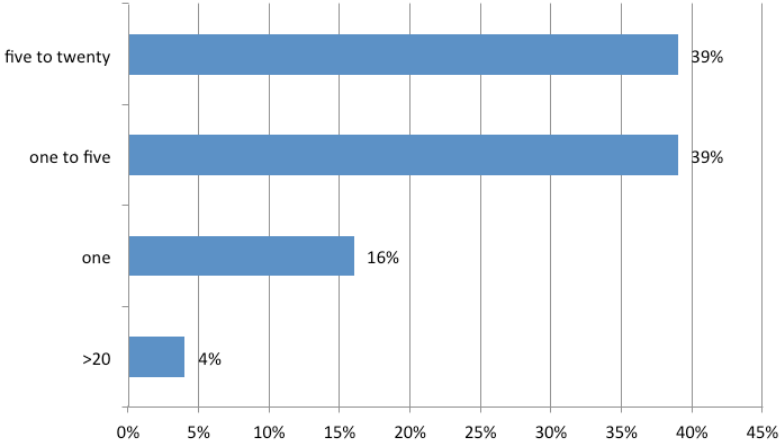


Figure 127: Number of nationalities in the receiving organisation, n=43.

Generally, organisations promote traineeships (60%). However, 26% do not promote traineeship at all and 14% do not know if they promote these opportunities.

As demonstrated in Figure 128, among organisations who promote their traineeships, a big majority (77%) uses the organisation's website for promotion. The organisation's social media (50%) is an important factor and the organisation's newsletter (19%) is used as much as job agencies (19%). Promotion through Higher Education Institutions (62%) and other EU offices coordinating mobility programmes at the national level (27%) are also preferred options. Other forms used are portals for advertising traineeship opportunities or press articles in magazines for teacher training.

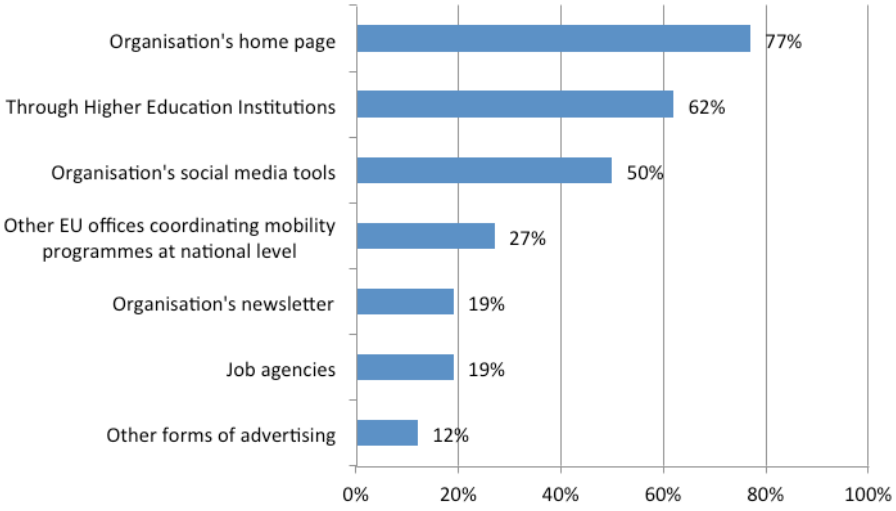


Figure 128: Forms of advertising traineeships, n=26.

The contact points for organisations who advertise traineeship offers through HEIs are IROs (56%), the career offices (56%), the departments/faculties or lecturers (38%) and offices of consortia of traineeship mobility (13%). This is shown in Figure 129.

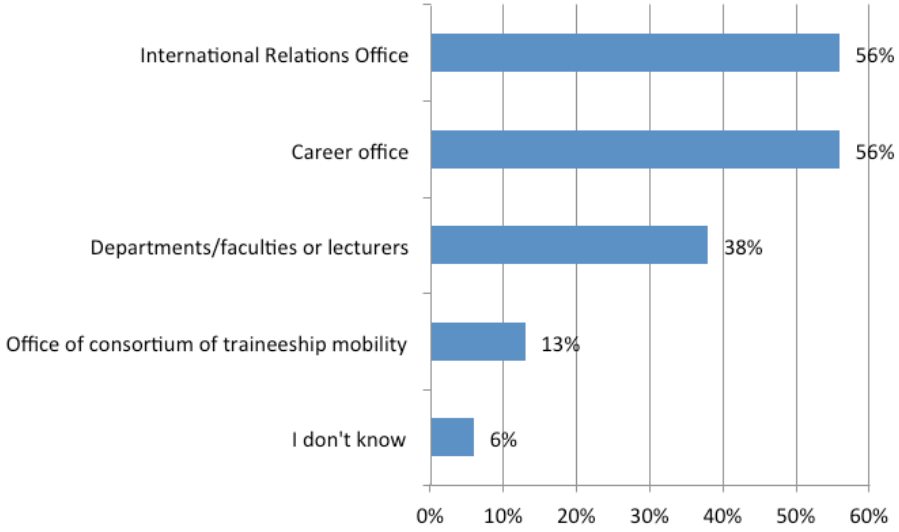


Figure 129: The point of contact for organisations using Higher Education Institutions to advertise traineeships, n=16.

More than half of the organisations (53%) say they have graduates from different HEIs. Figure 131 demonstrates that the majority says these HEIs offer trainees with the exact profile they need (64%) and that they have an established agreement with these HEIs (14%).

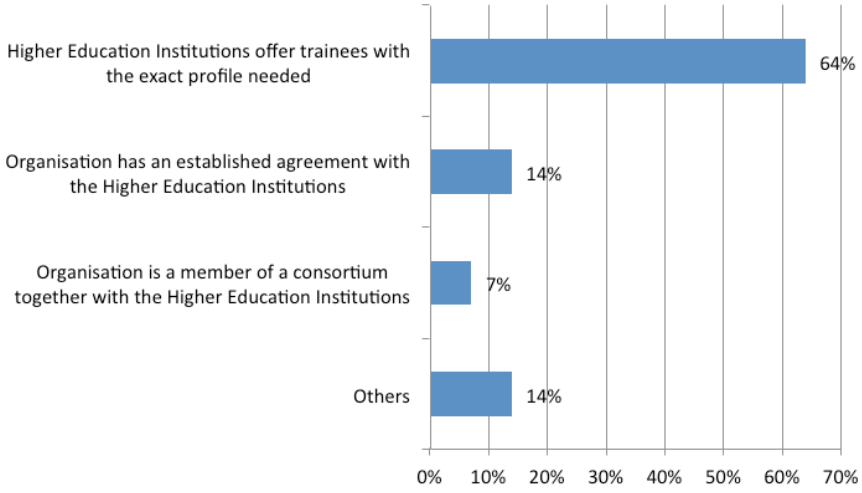


Figure 130: Reasons to cooperate with different Higher Education Institutions, n=14.

Grants and other financial compensation

Figure 131 illustrates that a similar share of organisations always offers financial benefits (37%) compared to organisations that never offer financial benefits (35%). In addition, 21% of responding organisations sometimes offer such benefits.

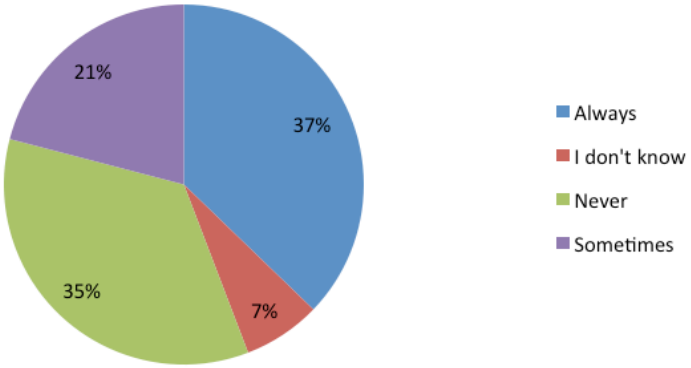


Figure 131: Financial compensation for mobile trainees, n=14.

Half of the organisations that offer financial compensation to trainees use a salary (49%) as a means to support trainees. Health insurance (14%), access to the organisation's cafeteria at discounted prices (14%) and accommodation (11%) are more common ways than covering tickets for local transportation (6%) or reimbursement of costs incurred to obtain a Visa (6%). This is presented in Figure 132.

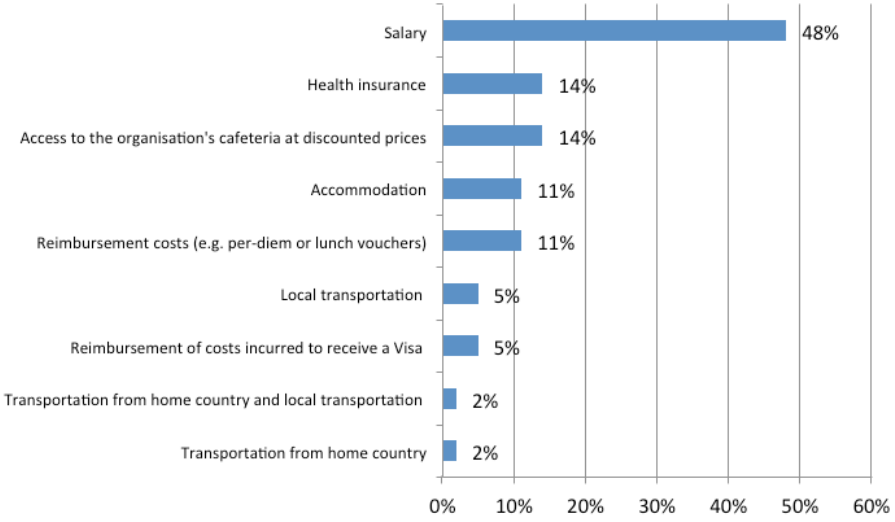


Figure 132: Types of financial compensation organisations offer to mobile trainees, n=35.

Learning Agreement, additional documents and routines

According to Figure 133, 74% of organisations say they usually sign a Learning Agreement that outlines which activities a student needs to complete during the traineeship. However, 12% do not use a Learning Agreement and another 14% that do not know if this is common practice in their organisation.

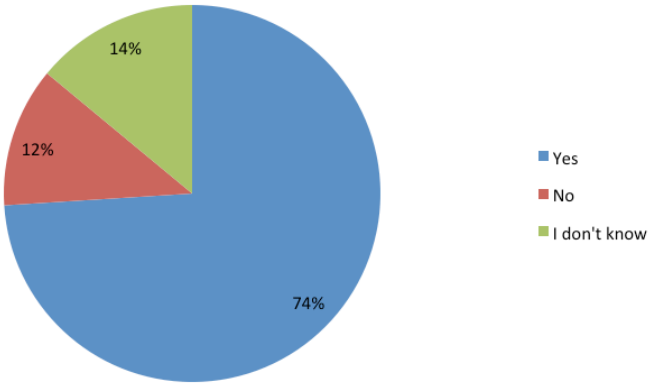


Figure 133: Receiving organisations using a Learning Agreement, n=43.

Figure 134 shows whether organisations use a Learning Agreement. The Learning Agreement is usually signed before the traineeship (94%). Only 6% say they sign it during the traineeship and none sign it after the traineeship.

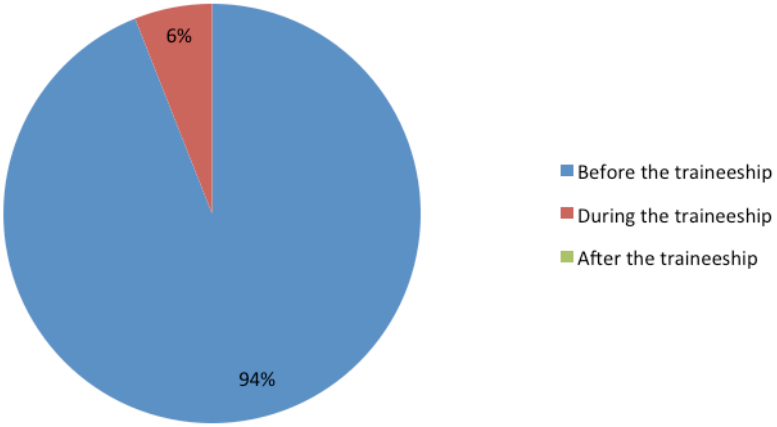


Figure 134: When the Learning Agreement is signed, n=32.

The majority of organisations (87%) claim that the Learning Agreement does not undergo modifications after its signature. Only 9% of the organisations add changes to the initial Learning Agreement and it can be subject to modifications from the receiving organisation, the trainee or both sides. The main reasons to change the Learning Agreement are an extension of the traineeship period (67%), changes in the job profile (67%) and changes requested by the receiving organisation (33%).

Almost half of the organisations say that the mentor assigned in the Learning Agreement is monitoring the student's work during the traineeship. The supervisor (33%) is also often responsible for monitoring the trainee, but also several colleagues (12%) take over this task. This is illustrated in Figure 135.

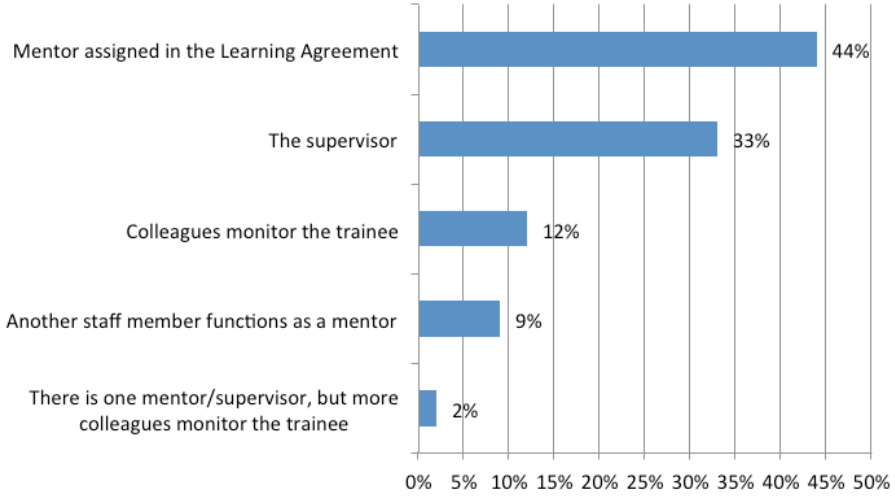


Figure 135: Actor monitoring the trainee's work, n=43.

When asked how important it is to provide students with a mentor, using a scale from 1 (not useful at all) to 5 (very useful), organisations said it is useful (average 4.24).

Figure 136 shows that at the end of the traineeship, 49% of the organisations always offer a Letter of Recommendation, 42% offer it sometimes, while just one organisation never offers it.

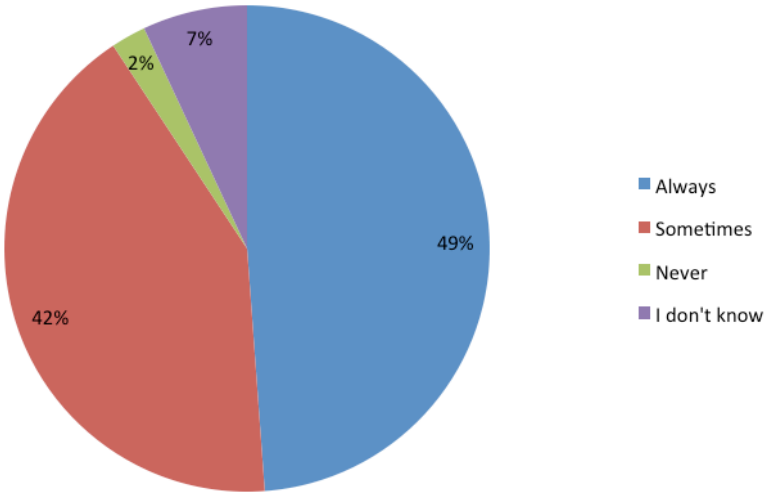


Figure 136: Receiving organisations using a letter of recommendation, n=43.

Figure 137 depicts that 42% organisations always offer a Training Certificate, 30% offer it sometimes, while 16% never offer it.

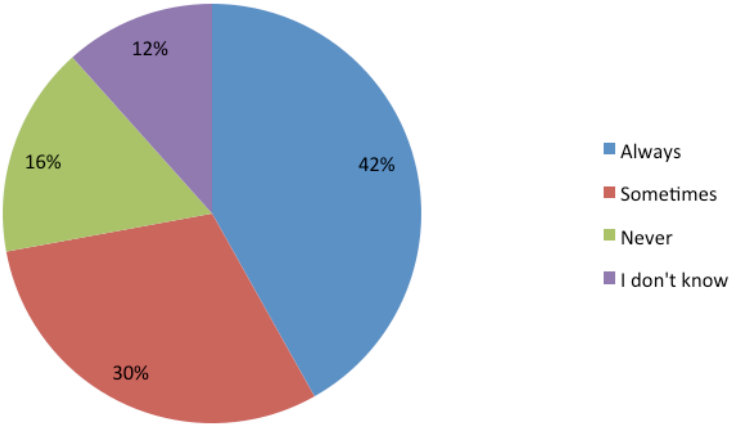


Figure 137: Receiving organisations using a Training Certificate, n=43.

The majority of organisations do not offer any awards for the trainees (72%). One organisation has a "best trainee award", while 9% sometimes offer rewards of different kinds.

Organisations offer a job opportunity to their trainees later on to varying degrees. Most organisations say they sometimes offer a job afterwards (63%), while 5% always offer it. Details are illustrated in Figure 138.

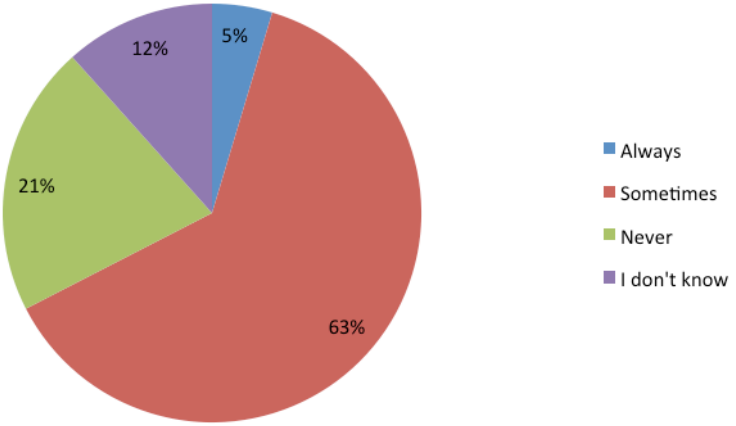


Figure 138: Receiving organisations offering further job opportunities in the same organisation, n=43.

Considering that 27 organisations always or sometimes hire their trainee, the majority (52%) hired up to 30% of the trainees they hosted in the last 3-5 years. Another 26% of organisations hired up to 60% of their trainees hosted in the last 3-5 years, while 19% of organisations did not hire any trainees.

While some organisations might not directly have employment in continuation of the traineeship, they may offer employment in a related organisation. Figure 139 demonstrates that the majority of organisations (51%) say they never offer a further job opportunity in another organisation, while 28% offer it sometimes. A mere 2% say they always offer such an employment opportunity.

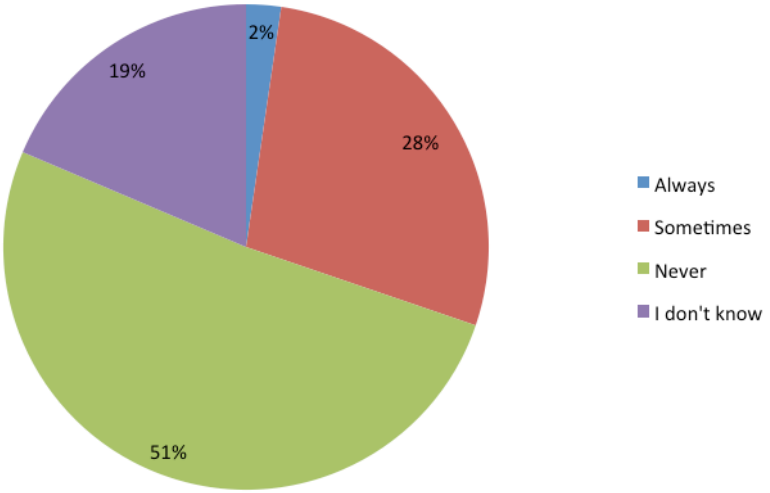


Figure 139: Receiving organisations offering further job opportunities in a different organisation, n=43.

General evaluation of mobility for traineeships

On a scale from 1 (not valuable) to 5 (extremely valuable), organisations rated the value of having international trainees as quite valuable (average of 4.4). Details are shown in Figure 140.

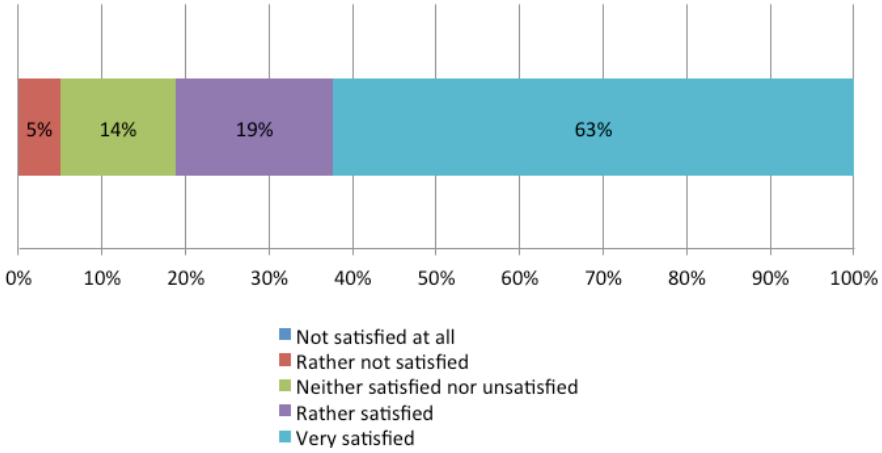


Figure 140: Satisfaction with mobile trainees (1-not satisfied at all to 5-very satisfied), n=43.

The majority of responding organisations believe it is valuable to have international trainees because trainees bring diversity and having people from different cultures and backgrounds creates a more dynamic professional environment (76%). Figure 141 depicts that trainees bring not only fresh ideas to the organisation but also a new perspective on organisational issues (65%), often have foreign language skills (58%), can cover a specific need of skills in a given timeline (44%) and are valuable for recruiting and training future employees (44%).

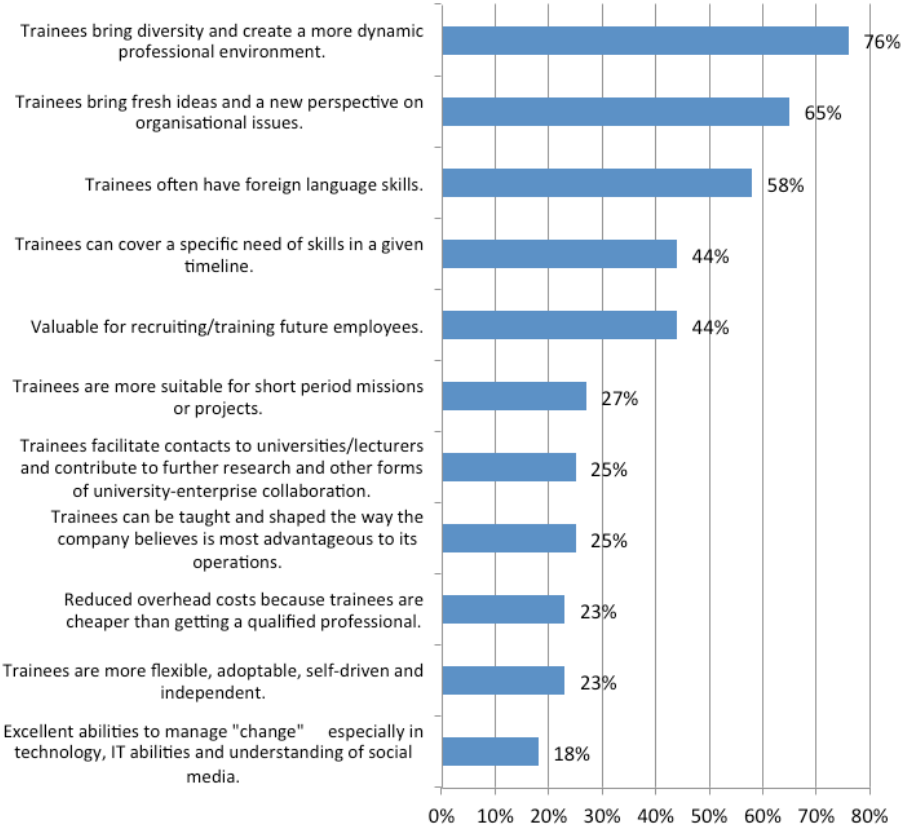


Figure 141: Why receiving organisations consider it valuable to have mobile trainees, n=43.

Regarding the integration of the international trainee, Figure 142 illustrates that organisations assign a mentor to provide the trainee with organisational background information (79%). Organisations also provide the trainees with a welcome session, so they understand the workplace policies and procedures (70%) and provide one-to-one meetings with the mentor or supervisor on a regular basis to support the integration process (63%). Some organisations mention that they have their own learning programme (training given internally), lunches and meetings together with other trainees and employees, offer personal development courses and

help them with finding housing, register at the city hall, get local language classes, do the tax declarations, etc.

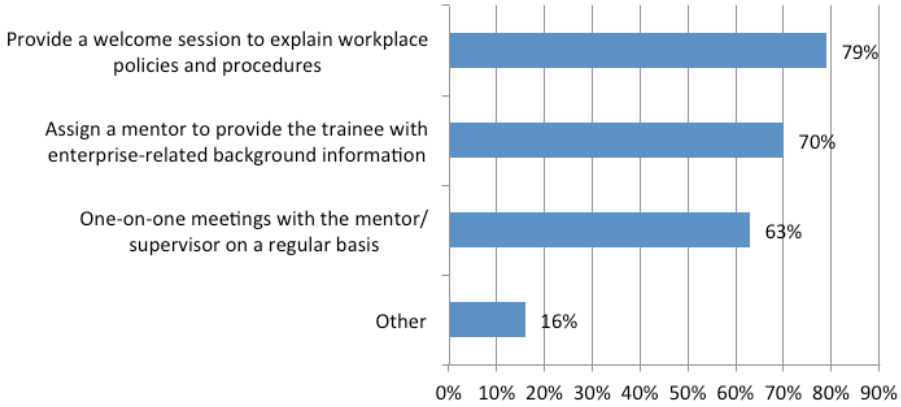


Figure 142: Integration of mobile trainees, n=43.

On a scale from 1 (not difficult at all) to 5 (very difficult), respondents consider finding international trainees with the appropriate profile that correspond to organisations needs on average not very difficult (2.6). The most common reason for difficulties in finding trainees is that they must speak the working language fluently (33%). A low number of applications (23%) is also a challenge.

Administrative burden (47%), insufficient funds to cover trainees' expenses (37%) and a mismatch of the trainee profiles with the required needs (35%) are the main problems that organisations encounter in the traineeship process. The trainee skills are not levelled with the needs of the traineeship (26%) and application process timeline (19%) are also identified as problems. This is further detailed in Figure 143.

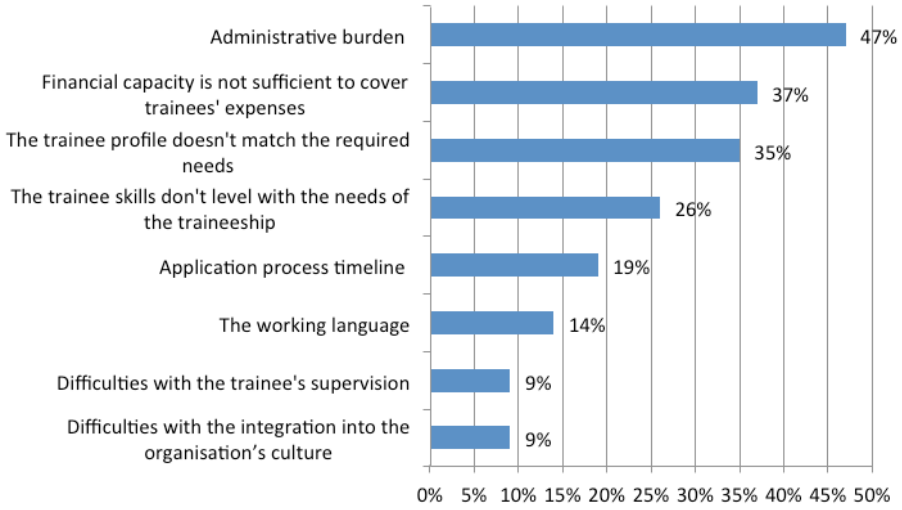


Figure 143: Problems receiving organisations face with mobile trainees, n=43.

Not surprisingly, when it comes to suggestions for improving the overall traineeship process, reducing the administrative burden is the most popular answer (44%). As illustrated in Figure 144 creating clear monitoring procedures so supervision is easier (33%) and making the recruitment process more thorough (30%) are also important suggestions for an improved traineeship process.

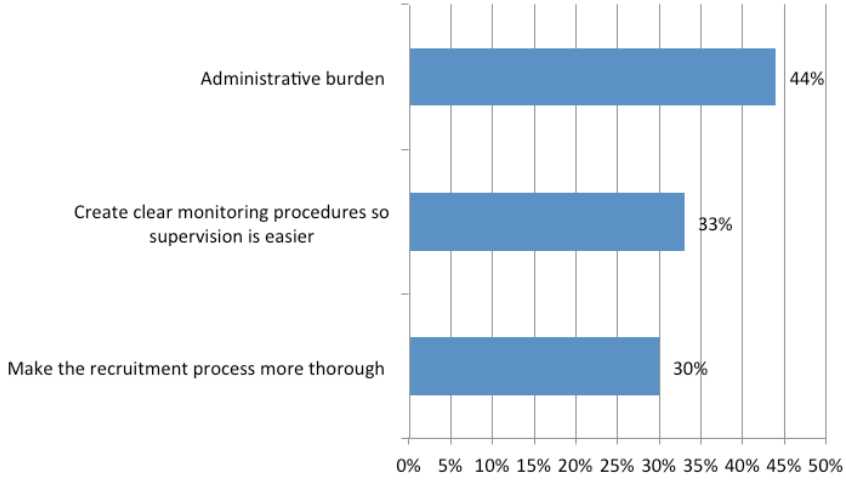


Figure 144: Suggestions to improve the overall traineeship process, n=43.

NON-MOBILE AND FUTURE MOBILE STUDENTS

By Emanuel Alfranseder

Introduction

The survey asks students from the outset whether they have stayed in another European country as part of a mobility programme. While we have extensively analysed the ones that answer yes to this question, the following chapter gives insight into those who have never studied abroad (non-mobile students) and those who have not yet (future mobile students) studied abroad. To analyse non-mobile and future mobile students it is crucial to single out remaining obstacles to mobility.

Future Mobile Students

Table 10 gives an overview of the most represented countries in our sample. Poland, Spain, Italy and Belgium have the largest share of respondents. The fact that 22% do not live in the same country they were born in indicates some prior exposition to mobility, if not trainee or study mobility.

Country	Number of responses	Country	Number of responses	Country	Number of responses
Poland	372	Estonia	28	Sweden	18
Spain	216	France	28	Norway	16
Italy	213	Denmark	27	United Kingdom	14
Belgium	187	Serbia	26	Latvia	11
Croatia	166	Bulgaria	25	Ireland	7
Portugal	84	Greece	23	Switzerland	7
Lithuania	61	Czech Republic	22	Georgia	5
Germany	53	Slovakia	22	Macedonia	4
Finland	51	Hungary	21	Cyprus	3
The Netherlands	38	Romania	21	Ukraine	3
Turkey	29	Austria	20	United States	3

Bosnia and Herzegovina	28	Slovenia	18	Other	39

Table 10: Countries of residence of future mobile students, n=1,909.

Figure 145 illustrates that 88% of respondents are between 18-24 years old and almost the entire remaining sample is between 25-34 years of age (11%). The majority of respondents are female (65%).

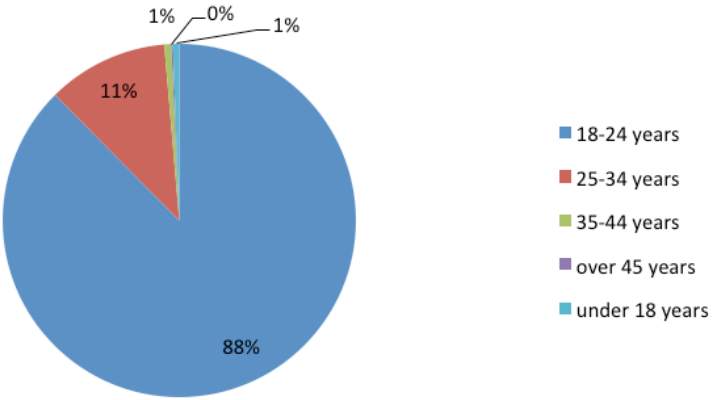


Figure 145: Age of future mobile students, n=1,909.

Figure 146 shows that mobility for studies is the most popular type of mobility (48%). Many respondents are interested in both types of experiences (33%) and some are interested in traineeships only (13%). Few indicate that they are not really interested in either type of mobility experiences (7%).

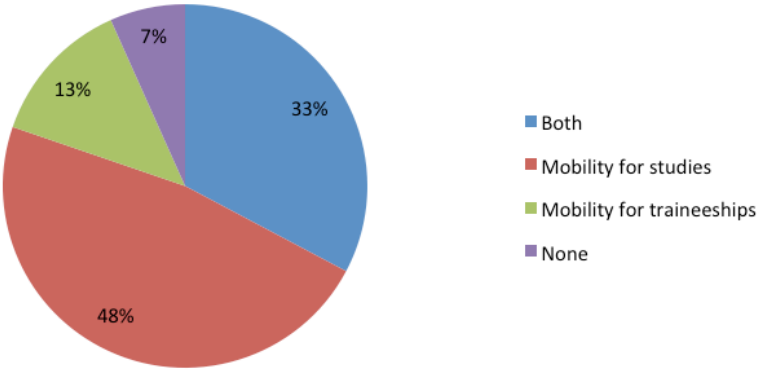


Figure 146: Type of mobility experience future mobile students are interested in, n=1,909.

Figure 147 gives an overview of the main reasons that prevent students from going abroad for a traineeship or for studies. The issue of financial subsistence is a major reason (31%) why respondents haven't been abroad yet. One fourth of respondents say that a mobility experience is only available later on in their education which indicates that they plan to go abroad later on. Lack of recognition (11%), administrative burden of the application (8%), the language barrier (6%) and the application process timeline (5%) are also important obstacles for students. Less frequently mentioned are the integration in a new culture (4%), difficult application (4%) and personal reasons (close to zero).

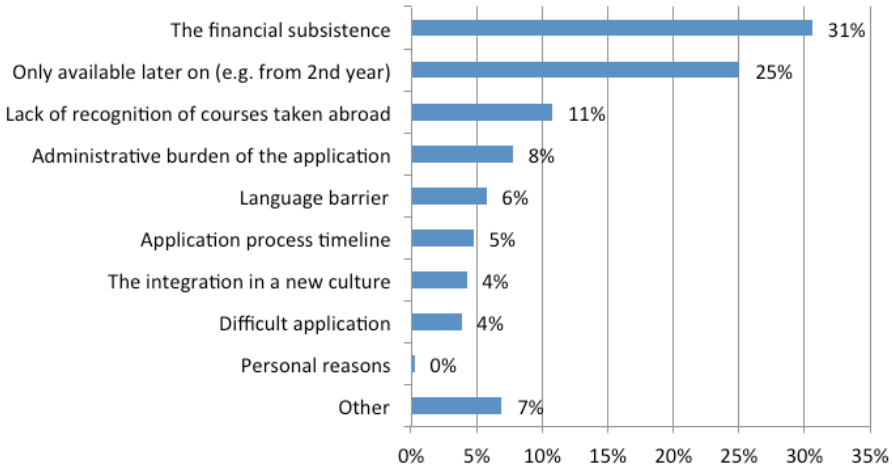


Figure 147: Main reasons that prevented students from going abroad for a study or traineeship period so far, n=1,532.

Non-mobile Students

Table 11 shows that most respondents are residents of Poland, Belgium, Spain and Croatia. 24% of respondents live in a different country from where they were born which shows again that respondents in our sample have some prior mobility experience in life.

Country	Number of responses	Country	Number of responses	Country	Number of responses
Poland	132	Finland	12	Ireland	5
Belgium	115	Lithuania	12	Latvia	5
Spain	70	Sweden	12	United Kingdom	5
Croatia	63	Turkey	10	Hungary	4
Italy	39	Germany	9	Slovakia	4
Portugal	29	Norway	9	Austria	3
Bosnia and Herzegovina	25	Estonia	8	Azerbaijan	3
The Netherlands	21	Bulgaria	7	Canada	3
France	16	Greece	7	Switzerland	3
Romania	13	Denmark	6	Other	25
Serbia	13	Czech Republic	5		

Table 11: Countries of residence of non-mobile students, n=693.

Figure 148 illustrates that 75% of respondents are between 18-24 years old and 21% are between 25-34 years old. Similar to the other samples, a majority of respondents are female (62%).

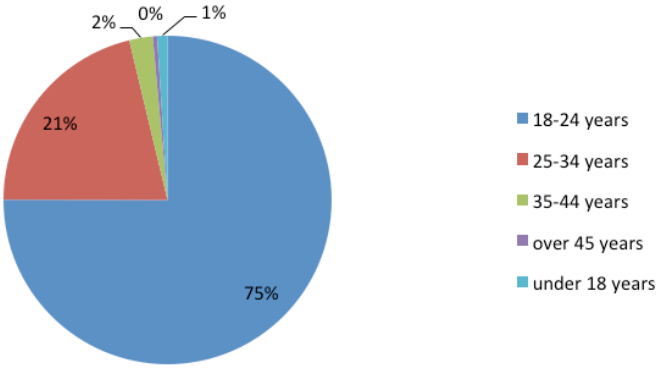


Figure 148: Age of non-mobile students, n=693.

Figure 149 lists the main reasons that prevent students from going abroad for studies or a traineeship. Financial subsistence is by far the most important reason (44%). The fear of lack of recognition (12%), the language barrier (10%), the administrative burden of the application (7%) and problems with the integration into a new culture (5%) are also significant obstacles. Also, respondents consider the difficulty of the applications (4%) and the application process timeline (3%) important reasons not to go abroad for studies or a traineeship.

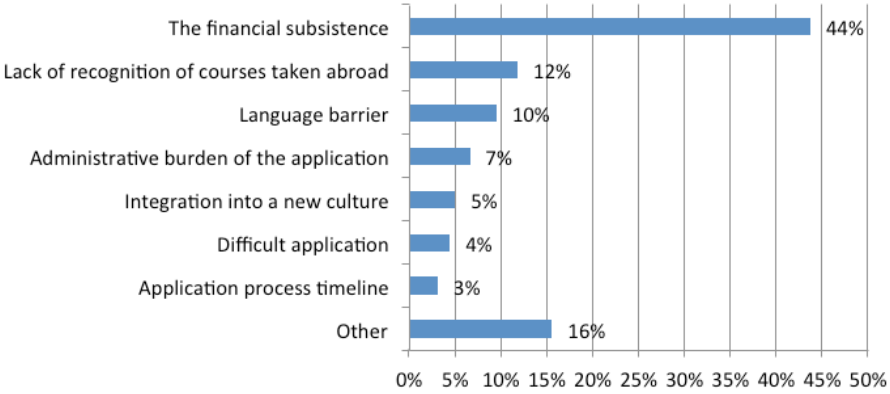


Figure 149: Main reasons that prevent students from going abroad for a study or traineeship period, n=693.

NATIONAL AGENCIES

By **Marko Žmirak**

Introduction

The National Agencies included in the research are responsible for the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme through indirect management, meaning that the European Commission entrusts budget implementation tasks to the National Agencies. As part of their work, National Agencies are responsible for funding and monitoring of the entire mobility process. The rationale behind this approach is to bring Erasmus+ as close as possible to its beneficiaries and to adapt to the diversity of national education, training and youth systems. For this purpose, each country involved in the Erasmus+ programme has one or more National Agencies. These National Agencies promote and implement the programme at a national level and act as a link between the European Commission and participating organisations on a local, regional and national level. In addition, National Agencies play an important role as intermediary structures for the quality development of the Erasmus+ Programme.

Demography

A total number of 19 National Agencies responded to the questionnaire. National Agencies included in the research are from Estonia, Malta, The Netherlands, Finland, Cyprus, Spain, Luxemburg, Slovakia, Ireland, Croatia, Sweden, Romania, Bulgaria, Denmark, Norway, Poland, Lithuania, Italy and Belgium. Table 12 shows that the highest number of HEIs under the responsibility of the respective National Agencies are located in Spain, Poland and Italy.

Country	Number of HEIs	Country	Number of HEIs
Spain	697	Denmark	40
Poland	260	Belgium	39
Italy	203	Croatia	38
Romania	72	Ireland	35
The Netherlands	54	Slovakia	33
Norway	52	Estonia	24
Bulgaria	49	Cyprus	23
Lithuania	42	Luxembourg	4
Finland	40	Malta	3
Sweden	40		

Table 12: Number of Higher Education Institutions under the responsibility of the National Agency, n=19.

The National Agencies taking part in the study report that during the academic year 2012-2013 in total 126,013 students used the Erasmus mobility programme. Table 13 shows that most of them are from countries with the largest number of the HEIs.

Country	Number of outgoing Erasmus students	Country	Number of outgoing Erasmus students
Spain	39,249	Ireland	3,000
Italy	25,224	Denmark	2,565
Poland	16,221	Bulgaria	1,952
The Netherlands	10,061	Norway	1,707
Romania	5,011	Estonia	1,159
Finland	4,258	Croatia	1,124
Sweden	3,728	Luxembourg	400
Lithuania	3,529	Cyprus	350
Belgium	3,259	Malta	208
Slovakia	3,008		

Table 13: Number of outgoing Erasmus students during the academic year 2012-2013, n=19.

Erasmus University Charter

The Erasmus University Charter provides the general framework for the European cooperation activities a higher education institution may carry out within the Erasmus programme. It is prerequisite for HEIs to organise student mobility, teaching and other staff mobility and to carry out Erasmus Intensive Language Courses and Intensive Programmes. All National Agencies state that annual compliance reports ensure that the Erasmus University Charter is respected. Monitoring and evaluation of institutions' work – desk monitoring (interim and final reports) and regular on-the-spot visits are the most commonly used means to ensure that HEIs respect the Erasmus University Charter. The Romanian National Agency states that they are in daily contact with HEIs and carry out evaluations through conversations with students.

National Agencies strongly recommend HEIs to provide each outgoing student with the Erasmus Student Charter. National Agencies provide the Erasmus Student Charter on their webpages so that students can easily find it. A mobility handbook for HEIs is also published every year. National Agencies ensure that the Erasmus Student Charter is provided to students through monitoring visits, desk checks and information campaigns to inform students about their rights and to find out about their expectations to the receiving institution.

Credit recognition process

Information about the recognition of credits is mostly provided through seminars with Erasmus Institutional Coordinators, during information days, monitoring meetings and e-mail

correspondence. The Swedish National Agency publishes a handbook for the administration of the Erasmus programme which can be found on their website, while Slovakia's National Agency uses an e-mail tool called ''ErasmusTalk'' where they discuss all issues related to the mobility and recognition process directly with the HEIs. However, National Agencies point out that the HEIs make the final decision regarding recognition in cooperation with partner institutions, while the National Agencies use information meetings and monitoring visits to emphasise the importance of ensuring full recognition of the mobility period.

All National Agencies monitor the process through monitoring visits, on-the-spot checks, audit visits and final reports. Some of the National Agencies contact students requesting feedback reports after every academic year. National Agencies monitor the recognition process through annual HEI reports and through seminars and meetings with International Relations Offices. National Agencies check the documents and procedures of the HEIs before, during and after mobility. Direct contact with students and dealing with complaints is also part of the common practice to monitor the recognition process.

National Agencies in general support International Relations Offices through annual Erasmus seminars, and encourage all HEIs to use the ECTS users' guide which clarifies issues related to the recognition process. Most National Agencies have specialists and experts who can give advice when specific problems arise. Thematic meetings, seminars and consultations are also used by the National Agencies to support the IROs and HEIs. The Croatian National Agency points out that it does not influence the decision of recognition which is arranged on an institutional level. The Croatian National Agency generally emphasises the necessity of granting recognition for a mobility period which is essential for improving transparency and recognition of studies and qualifications.

Learning Agreement

A Learning Agreement defines the mobility programme and is approved by the student and the sending and the receiving institution. The Learning Agreement puts its emphasis on the thorough preparation of the mobility by including all the educational components and learning outcomes for future recognition as well as the required language skill of the student. All three parties signing the agreement commit to comply with all the agreed courses, thereby insuring that the student should receive the recognition for the mobility period. All National Agencies state that they recommend using the official form of the Learning Agreement.

National Agencies point out that the major problem in using the official Learning Agreement is that an exact course list and timetable of the receiving institution is not available at the time of signing the agreement. Lack of sufficient course information before the signing of the Learning Agreement increases the risk of modifications in the Learning Agreement during the mobility period. Some of the National Agencies state that it is a time consuming process to collect signatures, update and change the original Learning Agreement. A couple of National Agencies mention situations where the Learning Agreement was signed late by the receiving institution, in particular after the mobility period has begun. "Too much of a teacher-centred approach'', is pointed out as being a problem, as teachers in some cases do not recognise courses before the Learning Agreement is signed. The lack of an effective dialogue between the teacher and the student often leads to changes of the initial Learning Agreement upon the students' arrival at the receiving institution. In spite of this, the National Agencies of Luxembourg, Ireland and Croatia did not experience any major problems in using the Learning Agreement.

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) is a standard for comparing the study attainment and performance of students of higher education across the European Higher Education Area. One academic year corresponds to 60 ECTS which are equivalent to 1500-1800 hours of studies. All countries included in the research use ECTS in their Higher Education Institutions and for almost all their mobility programmes.

The recognition process is almost the same in all countries and it is based on regular monitoring, desk checks and obligatory final reports by HEIs. The National Agencies webpages include all relevant information about ECTS and provide the ECTS Users' Guide. Some National Agencies have a national team of Bologna experts who organise seminars about ECTS for student representatives where the ECTS Users' Guide is distributed. Through open discussion they provide information regarding ECTS issues and give advice on how to correctly use the ECTS. The Spanish National Agency mentions that the use of ECTS is made compulsory by Spanish law in all higher education studies. In Denmark an external recognition institution has to accredit all degrees provided by Danish HEIs. Therefore the student can complain to an external public council for recognition if they believe their earned credits are not recognised properly.

Most National Agencies claim that they do not have any problems with the implementation of the ECTS. However, some National Agencies experience problems with the lack of knowledge on how to use ECTS to create flexible study paths among students and teachers, lack of a well-developed advisory role and a complicated process of grade transfer.

Erasmus grants

Correct allocation of Erasmus grants is closely monitored through contractual steps set by the European Commission in the financial agreement. All HEIs send an obligatory final report at the end of the contractual period to the National Agencies. The Italian National Agency has an IT tool called DYNERS (Dynamic Erasmus System) that allows HEIs to give detailed information on student mobility and staff mobility.

In general, National Agencies report that students rarely need to return the Erasmus grant. Students are required to return grants if the mobility period has been interrupted without a formal agreement which happens seldom. In the case that students receive the grant for the whole mobility and return before the agreed time abroad, they have to return the respective part of the grant. Another reason why students have to return the grant is lack of ECTS credits. The Finnish National Agency points out that they emphasise that the rules must be transparent and clear to all students in advance and they advise HEIs to take other factors into consideration, such as sudden changes in the timetables or language difficulties before asking the student to return the entire grant.

Tuition fees

The National Agencies ensure that HEIs do not charge incoming Erasmus students any tuition fees by raising awareness about expectations and rights to the outgoing students prior to the exchange. Through the Erasmus Student Charter, the receiving institutions are aware of their rights and obligations abroad. In addition to this, the receiving HEIs are also bound by inter-

institutional agreements that are signed with the sending Institution under the support of the Erasmus programme. Audits, on-the-spot checks and final reports are regular monitoring tools that the National Agencies use to detect such cases. In Finland and Norway there are no tuition fees for the home or non-European students while in Denmark only students from third-world countries are required to pay tuition fees.

Problems with recognition

The most common problem related to recognition is that the parties involved underestimate the effort of careful preparation of the Learning Agreement. Lack of effective communication between the students and the person in charge of the recognition process often leads to changes to the initial Learning Agreement and is the reason why problems with the transfer of credits occur. The students sometimes do not inform the HEI about changes to the study programme and problems of recognition therefore occur upon arrival at the sending institution. National Agencies mention that students taking part in Erasmus placements sometimes do not get full recognition of ECTS credits because Erasmus placements in some cases cannot be recognised as obligatory in the student's study courses.

15 out of 19 National Agencies included in the research had no reports of recognition problems made by students, 3 National Agencies stated cases when 3 or less students reported problems related to recognition, whereas 1 National Agency had 10 reports on recognition problems by the students. This implies that students do not normally suffer from recognition problems, or they do not report them directly to the National Agencies.

Any incident of non-compliance of HEIs with the principles of the Erasmus University Charter is reported back to the HEI concerned and, if needed, follow-up measures are set up. National Agencies uncover such incidents via their analysis of the different primary and secondary checks that they regularly perform. In case of complaints made by students, the Erasmus department addresses the complaint by searching for more information and checking information received from both the student and the HEI. National Agencies implement system checks and monitoring procedures of HEIs if proved necessary through reports. Although National Agencies have prepared tools and procedures, such cases rarely occur and therefore serve as preventive methods.

Tackling remaining obstacles

According to the Estonian National Agency, the HEIs should generally increase the importance of internationalisation among their staff. Students should be more goal-oriented and informed about changes in their study plans during the exchange period. Good planning together with a new ECTS User's Guide should include an improved system for better recognition of ECTS grades. The Bulgarian National Agency states the necessity of HEIs to revise their curricula and to be more encouraged to develop joint and double degree programmes. Some of the suggestions include implementing monitoring interviews, providing advice to HEIs, analysing relevant data from final reports, organising discussions with students to gather information, and raise awareness about issues that could be seen as obstacles for a successful implementation of the programme.

National Agencies state that the recognition process should be simplified in cooperation with partner HEIs. Recognition is a very important element of mobility and should be fully respected

by the HEIs. Students must know beforehand that they need to obtain all recognition details applied by their sending institution, clearly, in writing. Some National Agencies mention projects already in place or proposed in the new Erasmus+ programme to facilitate the preparation of an effective Learning Agreement for a more efficient mobility process and for coherent recognition of ECTS credits.

CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER STEPS

The report has given a comprehensive overview of both mobility for studies and mobility for traineeships. The results show that while some challenges such as funding, language barriers and administrative burden are similar, other aspects differ. The problem of non-recognition is far less severe for traineeships than for studies. This is not a surprising result as generally the content of a traineeship is much less rigid than the learning outcomes of a university course. The non-recognition issue shows tendencies of improving, but with around 20% of students still not receiving full recognition, it remains a significant concern. The detailed recommendations of this analysis should be taken seriously and a closer integration and harmonisation of the European Higher Education Area should further help remedy these deficiencies.

Funding remains a significant challenge for mobility experiences. This holds true for both mobility for traineeships and mobility for studies. To enable equal access to these opportunities, sufficient funding is needed. In particular less privileged groups need more financial support. Equally, language education is a looming challenge and deserves continued attention and efforts. Making the administrative process as easy and accessible as possible is also an obvious challenge for both mobility for traineeships and mobility for studies.

While one of the major challenges for mobility for studies is credit recognition, the major challenge for mobility for traineeships is bringing receiving organisations and matching mobile trainees together. Information on universities, programmes, courses abroad and the characteristics of mobile students are certainly to be improved in certain aspects to facilitate optimal choices for both HEIs and mobile students. However, the challenges to find optimal matches between receiving organisations and potentially mobile trainees are much more pressing for the well-functioning of mobility for traineeships. Receiving organisations and students alike confirm the added value of mobility for traineeships experiences. Continuous and concerted efforts are needed to promote these opportunities and to provide means to match receiving organisations and mobile trainees.

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The idea of a study project which investigates obstacles posed to recognition and recommends solutions for the situation is not new to ESN. With the PRIME Project (2008/2009), ESN successfully conducted Europe-wide research on academic recognition after an Erasmus exchange. The results showed that only 72% of the students received full recognition for their studies abroad. Building on the experience and success of the first PRIME project, ESN decided to continue this project (2009/2010) and deepened its knowledge concerning obstacles to student mobility.

Despite this knowledge, we lack research data on the obstacles to training mobility. In addition, EU statistics shows that participation in the different training mobility opportunities is still relatively modest, in particular when compared to student exchange programmes.

The report you are reading now is the result of the continuation of the study of obstacles to study mobility combined with the study of obstacles to training mobility. Is the outcome of almost one year work of motivated volunteers from the Erasmus Student Network. They contributed to the project through all of its stages: from the design of the questionnaires, through the dissemination, up until the analysis of the results and the production of this publication. Without their hard work this study would have never been possible.

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FIGURES AND TABLES

Figures

Figure 1: Fields of study at the home institution of mobile students. 25
Figure 2: Information provision to mobile students about different documents 26
Figure 3: When mobile students receive information about different documents 26
Figure 4: Sources where mobile students receive information about the Learning Agreement. . 27
Figure 5: Sources where mobile students receive information about the ECTS or other credit systems 28
Figure 6: Sources where mobile students receive information about the grade transfer. 29
Figure 7: Sources where mobile students receive information about the Erasmus Students Charter. 30
Figure 8: Usage of other sources of information on mobility for studies. 30
Figure 9: How useful mobile students consider other information sources on mobility for studies. 31
Figure 10: When mobile students sign their Learning Agreement. 31
Figure 11: Actor deciding on the selection of courses in the Learning Agreement. 32
Figure 12: Actor in charge of choosing subjects with mobile students from receiving and sending institutions. 32
Figure 13: Reasons why mobile students make changes to their Learning Agreement. 33
Figure 14: How mobile students get their credits recognised. 33
Figure 15: When mobile students receive their grants. 34
Figure 16: Origin of additional funding for mobile students. 35
Figure 17: Actor in charge of the recognition process for mobility for studies. 35
Figure 18: Mobile students receiving full recognition for completed courses and exams abroad. 36
Figure 19: Mobile students receiving full recognition. 37
Figure 20: Reasons why mobile students do not obtain full recognition, n=1,925. 37
Figure 21: Mobile students that need to prolong their studies at the sending institution due to recognition issues. 38
Figure 22: How grades are transferred. 38
Figure 23: Mobile students' feelings about grade conversion. 39
Figure 24: Mobile students' feelings about ECTS credit conversion. 39
Figure 25: Would students still have studied abroad, if.... 40
Figure 26: Satisfaction level with different aspects of the mobility experience. 40
Figure 27: Higher Education Institutions part of placement consortia. 41
Figure 29: Channels used for information about mobility for studies opportunities. 43
Figure 30: Effectiveness of communication channels to promote mobility for studies opportunities. 44

Figure 31: Documents provided to outgoing mobile students.. 44
Figure 32: Who makes the final decision on courses in the Learning Agreement 45
Figure 33: Who makes the decision on minimum credits required.. 45
Figure 34: Percentage of mobile students making changes to the Learning Agreement. 46
Figure 35: Reasons for changes to the Learning Agreement, averages 47
Figure 36: Higher Education Institutions using the ECTS. 47
Figure 37: How Higher Education Institutions calculate ECTS credits. 48
Figure 38: Higher Education Institutions that hold the ECTS label. 48
Figure 39: Actors responsible for the credit recognition procedure for mobility for studies. . . . 49
Figure 40: Percentage of mobile students receiving full recognition. 50
Figure 41: Reasons why Higher Education Institutions do not grant full recognition.. 50
Figure 42: Actors providing information about the grade transfer. 51
Figure 43: When mobile students receive information about the grade transfer. 52
Figure 44: How Higher Education Institutions convert grades. 52
Figure 45: Actors responsible for grade transfer. 53
Figure 46: Percentage of Higher Education Institutions offering Erasmus grants. 54
Figure 47: When mobile students receive the Erasmus grant for mobility for studies. 54
Figure 48: Higher Education Institutions providing additional financial support. 55
Figure 49: Types of additional financial support. 55
Figure 50: What Higher Education Institutions do with extra funding.. 56
Figure 51: Portability of regular financial support during a mobility for studies period. 56
Figure 52: Higher Education Institutions providing extra funding when mobile students extend the mobility period. 57
Figure 53: Percentage of mobile students that need to pay back their grant. 57
Figure 54: Reasons why mobile students need to pay back their grant.. 58
Figure 56: Age of responding mobile trainees 61
Figure 57: Fields of study at the sending institution of mobile trainees. 63
Figure 59: How students receive information on mobility for traineeships opportunities.. 65
Figure 60: Actors helping students to find a receiving organisation for their traineeship. 66
Figure 61: Actors in Higher Education Institutions helping students to find a receiving organisation for their traineeship. 66
Figure 62: How students look for a receiving organisation abroad. 67
Figure 63: Sectors mobile trainees work in. 67
Figure 64: Type of receiving organisations. 68
Figure 65: Size of private sector receiving organisations. 68
Figure 66: Duration of the traineeship.. 69
Figure 67: When traineeships take place during the year. 69
Figure 68: When traineeships take place during students' education.. 70
Figure 69: When mobile trainees sign the Learning Agreement 70
Figure 70: How mobile trainees evaluate the Learning Agreement 71
Figure 71: Mobile trainees that need to change their Learning Agreement.. 71
Figure 72: Actors requesting changes in the Learning Agreement for mobility for traineeships. 72

Figure 73: Reasons for changing the Learning Agreement for mobility for traineeships. 72
Figure 74: Who provides grants to mobile trainees. 73
Figure 76: Grant covering living expenses during the traineeship. 74
Figure 78: Traineeships recognised by sending institutions. 75
Figure 79: Reasons for non-recognition of traineeships. 76
Figure 80: ECTS use in the recognition process for mobility for traineeships. 76
Figure 81: How Higher Education Institutions calculate ECTS credits according to mobile trainees. 77
Figure 82: Actor in charge of the recognition process for mobility for traineeships. 77
Figure 83: Evaluation of reasons for doing a traineeship abroad, averages. 78
Figure 84: Satisfaction levels with the traineeship experience abroad. 79
Figure 86: Mobile trainees getting a supervisor from their Higher Education Institution. . . . 80
Figure 87: Provision of information by the sending Higher Education Institution prior to departure 80
Figure 88: Evaluation of the tutor from the receiving organisation. 81
Figure 89: If a mobility for traineeships experience is an advantage on the labour market. . . 81
Figure 91: How advantageous mobile trainees consider their traineeship abroad when applying for a job 82
Figure 92: Higher Education Institutions part of placement consortia. 84
Figure 94: Type of traineeships Higher Education Institutions provide information for. 85
Figure 95: Actors providing students with information about mobility for traineeships opportunities. 85
Figure 96: How information about mobility for traineeships opportunities is provided. 86
Figure 97: Effectiveness of different forms of information provision. 86
Figure 98: Higher Education Institutions helping students finding traineeship opportunities. . . 87
Figure 99: How Higher Education Institutions help students find traineeship opportunities. . . . 87
Figure 100: Higher Education Institutions that require mobile trainees to sign additional documents together with the Learning Agreement and the Quality Commitment. 88
Figure 101: Actor making the final decision on the Learning Agreement and the Quality Commitment of the traineeship. 89
Figure 102: Percentage of mobile trainees making changes to their Learning Agreement. . . . 89
Figure 103: Main reasons why mobile trainees change the Learning Agreement. 90
Figure 104: Higher Education Institutions that provide a supervisor to every student for guidance through the learning process of their traineeship. 91
Figure 105: Higher Education Institutions using ECTS credits for traineeship recognition. 91
Figure 106: How ECTS credits are calculated (only if used). 92
Figure 107: Percentage of mobile trainees receiving the Erasmus grant. 92
Figure 108: Percentage of mobile trainees receiving the Leonardo grant. 93
Figure 109: When mobile trainees receive their grant,. 93
Figure 110: Higher Education Institutions providing additional grants for mobile trainees that prolong the traineeship. 94
Figure 111: Percentage of the mobile trainees required to return the grant or part of it. 94
Figure 112: Reasons why mobile trainees are required to pay back the Erasmus grant. 95

Figure 113: Additional financial help (apart from the traineeship grant) provided to mobile trainees. 95
Figure 114: Most important problems that discourage students from going abroad on a traineeship according to Higher Education Institutions. 96
Figure 115: Obstacles mobile trainees may face during the traineeship according to Higher Education Institutions. 97
Figure 116: Sector of receiving organisations. 98
Figure 117: Type of receiving organisations. 99
Figure 118: Size of receiving organisations according to their number of employees. 99
Figure 119: Organisations receiving trainees 100
Figure 120: How organisations find their trainees. 100
Figure 121: Reasons for not having mobile trainees. 101
Figure 122: Training mobility programmes organisations use 101
Figure 123: Satisfaction with mobile trainees 102
Figure 124: Need for trainees of receiving organisations. 102
Figure 125: Accepted education level of trainees. 103
Figure 126: Preferred period for the traineeship. 104
Figure 128: Forms of advertising traineeships. 105
Figure 129: The point of contact for organisations using Higher Education Institutions to advertise traineeships 106
Figure 130: Reasons to cooperate with different Higher Education Institutions. 106
Figure 131: Financial compensation for mobile trainees 107
Figure 132: Types of financial compensation organisations offer to mobile trainees. 108
Figure 133: Receiving organisations using a Learning Agreement 108
Figure 134: When the Learning Agreement is signed. 109
Figure 135: Actor monitoring the trainee's work. 110
Figure 136: Receiving organisations using a letter of recommendation. 110
Figure 137: Receiving organisations using a Training Certificate. 111
Figure 138: Receiving organisations offering further job opportunities in the same organisation. 112
Figure 139: Receiving organisations offering further job opportunities in a different organisation. 113
Figure 140: Satisfaction with mobile trainees. 113
Figure 141: Why receiving organisations consider it valuable to have mobile trainees. 114
Figure 142: Integration of mobile trainees. 115
Figure 143: Problems receiving organisations face with mobile trainees. 116
Figure 144: Suggestions to improve the overall traineeship process. 116
Figure 145: Age of future mobile students. 118
Figure 146: Type of mobility experience future mobile students are interested in 119
Figure 147: Main reasons that prevented students from going abroad for a study or traineeship period so far. 119
Figure 148: Age of non-mobile students. 121

Figure 149: Main reasons that prevent students from going abroad for a study or traineeship period 121

Tables

Table 1: Countries of sending Higher Education Institutions of responding mobile students. 23
Table 2: Mobility for studies programmes of responding mobile students. 24
Table 3: Host countries of responding mobile students. 24
Table 4: Country overview of Higher Education Institutions. 41
Table 5: Countries of origin of responding mobile trainees. 62
Table 6: Countries of sending organisations of mobile trainees. 63
Table 7: Host countries of responding mobile trainees. 64
Table 8: Country overview of Higher Education Institutions. 83
Table 9: Country overview of receiving organisations.. 98
Table 10: Countries of residence of future mobile students 118
Table 11: Countries of residence of non-mobile students.. 120
Table 12: Number of Higher Education Institutions under the responsibility of the National Agency. 123
Table 13: Number of outgoing Erasmus students during the academic year 2012-2013. 124

APPENDIX

To consult the questionnaires of this research such as other useful information regarding this study please visit storyproject.eu/results.

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