

BOLOGNA WITH STUDENT EYES 2009

The European Students' Union



IMPRINT

BOLOGNA WITH STUDENT EYES 2009

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FOREWORD

Dear reader,

The extraordinary higher education transformation known as the Bologna Process is now reaching its 10 year crossroad. For the past year, governments, policy makers and academic communities have been debating the future of the Process and its new vision, while trying to make an analysis of what has been achieved so far.

Any new transformation needs a solid dose of hope, vision and idealism, attributes that are widely acknowledged to be characteristic to students and their representatives. Students all across Europe still believe in the process and their cry for more involvement is fully justified by the significant contribution they had in the paradigm shift.

The 2009 Bologna With Student Eyes survey (BWSE) is more than a mirror of the Process. The publication aims to capture the real effects felt by students all across the 46 Bologna countries and their trust in the reform taking place around them. It is a detailed and critical view on what happened beyond legislative measures, conference results and structural transformation. And this should be the starting point for a new agenda.

We should remember the big picture—establishing the European Higher Education Area—and measure the distance towards this ultimate goal. The Bologna Process is all about a vision, a vision of breaking down educational borders and creating a European Higher Education Area where learning is encouraged, facilitated and enabled in a simplified, integrated way across the continent. The Process should be about delivering this vision, translating the concept into a reality on the ground.

The Bologna Process goes beyond immediate economic priorities or obvious attempts to focus exclusively on fortunate small societal groups that contribute to the prestige of a country's educational system. It is an integrating transformation that smoothes political and economical edges, while having social emancipation through education at its core.

The relative slow progress since the last edition, when BWSE 2007 already observed a cooling down of the implementation engine, continues to be alarming. The core issues are still there: high quality in equitable education systems, mobility as both a tool for building the EHEA and a goal for societal progress,



lifelong learning as a key element to widening participation and socio-economic development. Looking at most “traffic light” style maps, it is clear that we have an orange predominance. We need to move with full speed ahead to reach the finish line. In this regard, the responsibility should not only lie on the shoulders of higher education national authorities, but should encompass governments as a whole, higher education institutions and stakeholders. Higher education is, and must remain, a public responsibility and a community.

The recommendations included in each chapter of the survey are a way of ensuring our continuous constructive contribution to the development of Bologna Process. BWSE 2009 is the only document providing a critical overview coming from the academic community before the Leuven / Louvain la Neuve Ministerial Conference, and it sheds light on the dark side of the Moon, sometimes pointing out the somewhat optimistic and sometimes self-flattering tone of national reports. And we do hope that it puts the latest developments in a different perspective, especially in the context of recent student protests against some national reforms unrightfully labelled as part of the Bologna Process.

For their work and dedication, I would like to thank Alessia, Alma, Bergthora, Inge, Liam, Mark, Olav and Vio. A special thank you note goes to Bruno, as the coordinator of the publication and to Frances and Linus for their work in bringing the study into printed form. The research accuracy was constructively criticised by Pavel Zgaga, Dionyssis Kladis and Per Nyborg. We also thank our member unions for all the work with filling in the questionnaires, providing the information for seeing the real big picture. The dedication of all will remain forever engraved in the record of the student movement’s contribution to the most important reform process of European higher education ever undertaken.

Ligia Deca

Chairperson of the European Students’ Union (ESU)

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Repetition is deeply dissatisfying. It suggests a stagnation—a situation of marching determinedly and yet somehow never leaving the spot. It demotivates, creating a feeling of helplessness and wasted efforts. And it creates distrust and disillusionment in processes that have previously engendered a strong sense of commitment and enthusiasm.

In producing this, our fourth analysis of Bologna Process implementation through the eyes of Europe's 11 million students, the last thing that ESU wanted was to be doing a “copy-paste” exercise of the Executive Summary from our last report in 2007. Sadly, in many ways, that is exactly what we are doing. The language will be slightly different, the formulation of sentences mildly varied, the data from the survey will be new. But the core messages are all-too-familiar for everyone's liking, a distinctly “déjà vu” feeling that strongly reflects a lack of progress with many aspects of the Process.

In BWSE 2007, ESU summarised the situation with Bologna Process implementation as one of an “à la carte” menu that member countries were using to hand-pick the reforms and action lines they wanted to work on, and turning a blind eye to the rest. The situation in 2009 remains much the same, with the most commonly overlooked action line relating to the social dimension, the one element preventing the whole Process from being revealed as little more than a hollow skeleton of structural reforms.

Yet amongst the feelings of gloom, there are some encouraging chinks of light that hold out the promise of better things to come. Progress is discernable in terms of student participation, quality assurance and the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). In truth, the picture is not one of total stagnation, but of patchy progress in some areas and not in others, and of a pace of change that is much slower than the stated political commitments intended.

In particular, this edition of BWSE once more highlights the importance of the student perspective of Bologna Process implementation, due to the level of ‘divergence’ in the perceptions of national ministries, higher education institutions and students themselves. While it is easy to claim that certain reforms are technically in place and to provide supporting evidence for this, listening to the student voice can reveal that these reforms are only in place at a rather superficial level, and that the situation on the ground is far less glossy than the paper on which such statements are made.

Student participation is one such area. Despite a number of countries having enacted legislation or put in place non-legislative measures to increase participation in institutional governance, this is very often insufficient to change the student reality. In a majority of EHEA countries (64%), the student participation situation is not considered to have changed, leaving only one in three where some positive progress has been made. Furthermore, many of the changes appear to be at the surface level only, with participation often meeting the definition of 'tokenistic' more than 'meaningful'. Students complain widely of not being considered as equal stakeholders in terms of governance; involvement resulting more from a sense of duty rather than an appreciation of students' value and their ability to contribute to the management of higher education institutions.

Mobility is another aspect of Bologna with something of a gulf between perception and reality, and where the pace of real change is considerably less than ministers, politicians and HEI leaders would have us believe. Despite the regular appearance of commitments to the contrary, the goal of making mobility the rule rather than the exception seems almost as elusive as ever.

A key reason for the lack of progress in mobility appears to be the absence of an overall target and underpinning mobility strategy for the whole EHEA which leads to different approaches being taken by member countries. Until stronger guidance is issued, perhaps in the form of a European strategy for mobility, a European Higher Education Area mobility charter or a multi-level financing strategy for mobility, the coordinated effort required by the full 46 to remove barriers and actively facilitate mobility will continue to be found wanting. It is also clear that without firm commitments at ministerial level, the current neglect of the need to diversify the mobile student population, particularly in terms of including those with special needs and students with families, will continue for the years ahead.

The social dimension of the Bologna Process is crucial if the vision of the EHEA is ever to be realised. Despite this, and the firm commitments in the London Communiqué to increasing the diversity of the student body to reflect that of the national population and to producing national action plans, only one-third of national unions of students feel that it is a political priority for their government. Students continue to report widespread discrimination in terms of those from a low socio-economic background, as well as those with children, students with disabilities and those with a job. Student debt, meanwhile, continues to increase as fees and study and living costs more generally continue to rise, and at a pace that far outstrips what the provision of loans and grants is available to cover, forcing many into part-time employment.

National action plans are designed to be the tool to effectively address the social dimension across the EHEA, and yet only a few countries have developed such a plan. In the case of those that have, it has very often been without the involvement of the students themselves that it is designed to assist.

It is also impossible to improve the socio-economic conditions of students without a clear view of the baseline from which you are starting. While this has been acknowledged for several years, action to fill the data collection gap has still not followed this awareness.

On a slightly more positive note, one area where some progress is discernable is that of quality assurance. Implementation of the European Standards and Guidelines has commenced, and student awareness of, and support for, these is relatively high. Nevertheless, issues remain. The majority of NUSes are keen to see a less subjective interpretation of the ESG and an equal focus on all standards, including student participation.

An encouraging trend is also visible in terms of student participation in quality assurance processes, with the situation having generally improved relative to 2007. Serious issues remain, however, with students continuing to face a widespread reluctance in terms of their involvement in actual decision making. The student experience also seems to depend heavily on whether it is internal or external evaluations that are involved, with the most vocal criticisms being made in terms of the former. Above all, there appears to be a clear correlation between the degree to which the ESG are implemented, and the level of student involvement in quality assurance, strongly indicating that the former is crucial in terms of delivery of the latter.

Progress is more negligible where qualifications frameworks are concerned. Although processes appear to be moving in the right direction, they are doing so at something of the pace of a snail. Importantly, student support for the principals and ideas of qualifications frameworks remains strong, but many NQFs remain far from the completion stage, and worryingly, the level of student involvement in their development is reported to be less than two years ago.

The most notable loss of momentum in Bologna implementation can be seen in terms of the three-cycle system, where little visible change can be discerned since 2007. Only 61% of unions report their country to have the three-cycle system fully in place, an increase of just 5% compared to two years ago. In addition to there being few visible new reforms, the implementation of the basic system has scarcely advanced in recent times, with most unions revealing that the most significant reforms of their degree structures took place between the Bergen and London ministerial conferences (2005-2007). Since then,

little more has been done, creating an impression of ‘job done’ once the main structural reforms were, to some extent, visible, and reflecting something of a ‘tick-box’ mentality—an attitude of something being completed if it is technically ‘in place’, regardless of quality or the extent to which it is operational and delivering on its original purpose.

Furthermore, poor implementation of the cycles and inadequate understanding of the purpose of these reforms has negatively affected students, pressuring them to follow longer periods of study in order to reach a position of sustainable employment. There are few cases in which students get a job after the first cycle—which was the purpose of the reform—whilst there has also been insufficient promotion of the first cycle on a continent generally accustomed to longer degrees.

In the field of research and doctoral education, the confusion related to the status of doctoral students gives rise to a lack of their participation in decision-making processes and to a severe inequality in their rights and situation, depending on whether they are employed or not within the institution. In addition, in some European Higher Education Area countries, we can see an increase in the level of tuition fees for the third cycle students, which seriously endangers the implementation of the third cycle as an inclusive way of binding education and research.

Even if some progress has been achieved since 2007, lifelong learning is still primarily seen as continuing education and although public authorities are using it as a rhetorical priority, many countries—more than half of the European Higher Education Area states—still do not have any strategy or policy at the national level. The development of the sector relies mostly on the initiative of higher education institutions, considering that even in the case where public authorities take a bigger role in organising lifelong learning, it is most commonly a shared responsibility.

ESU members are calling for a greater involvement from the side of public authorities in order to make sure that lifelong learners are not regarded as a special category with fewer rights and support measures than students enrolled in ordinary higher education programmes. Proper strategies in the field of lifelong learning must be further developed, while keeping in mind the good practice examples and guidance documents that already exist at the European level, such as the European Universities’ Charter for Lifelong Learning or the ESU Statement on Lifelong Learning. Widening participation should be at the core of the lifelong learning implementation strategies, together with public responsibility and quality assurance.

There is reason for both cheer and concern where the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is concerned. The fact that ECTS is now established as *the* credit system of the EHEA is a real achievement. However, there remain six out of the 46 member countries that use a different system and there has been little progress in ensuring that the ECTS is able to fully reflect student workload—a core principle of the new system.

Crucially, while the ECTS should be a key mechanism for a shift towards student-centred learning, poor implementation is resulting in quite the opposite effect. The concept of learning outcomes remains poorly understood in most countries, and the flexibility in learning paths that the ECTS should facilitate continues to be much more of an aspiration than a reality.

Student enthusiasm reaches a peak when it comes to the Diploma Supplement which brings with it a clear added benefit for a relatively small amount of effort. Despite the passing of six years since the Berlin communiqué called for every student to receive the Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge, issuing practices vary considerably across EHEA countries, and worryingly, awareness of them among employers and the general public remains persistently low.

In terms of efforts to increase the attractiveness of the EHEA, a tendency can be observed to promote national systems ahead of the EHEA as a whole, in the competitive drive for scholars, students and resources. This has significant consequences in terms of the balance and sustainability of the EHEA and can trigger active brain drain policies. Full implementation of the “EHEA in a global setting” strategy can only work if done at national level by all stakeholders and if its five core policy areas are put in place in an equally relevant way.

1.1 RECOMMENDATIONS TO 2010 AND BEYOND

Commitments need to be matched by actions—Ministers need to go over all the commitments made in ministerial communiqués to date, as well as all the agreed action lines, and comprehensively appraise which have actually been fully achieved and which ones still need further action. And crucially, HEIs and students need to be brought into this appraisal so that it has complete ownership by those who are essential to its implementation. This should all take place within a framework of national action plans with measurable targets to guide the implementation of Bologna.

From a la carte to a set menu—Ministers need to make an express commitment to implement all Bologna action lines equally. Education ministries in each signatory country need to work with HEIs and students in their country to create a genuine partnership that translates words into concrete realities and which puts an end to the selective approach that has hitherto been much in evidence.

Moving up a gear with mobility—a target and clear action plan for delivering greater balanced mobility across the EHEA needs to be developed and put in place as part of the Bologna Process, in order to coordinate efforts and create the momentum needed for real progress towards the stated objective to be made.

A commitment to education for all that is free of fees and charges and therefore genuinely accessible to all socio-economic groups.

National Action Plans for the social dimension—a concerted effort must be made to ensure that national action plans are developed for all Bologna signatory countries, and moreover that their development and implementation is carried out with full student participation.

Stronger student participation—where it does not already exist, legislation is needed to ensure a minimum level of student involvement in institutional governance, and where such legislation or other measures exist, they need to be fully implemented so that students are fully involved in the decision-making process related to their education. Students must be both considered and treated as equal partners in institutional governance.

Action on NQFs—much greater efforts need to be channelled into developing a National Qualifications Framework for each Bologna signatory country, with the full involvement of students and other stakeholders. This should be done as quickly as possible, although quality and inclusiveness are far more important than delivery by the initial deadline.

Evaluating and expanding the ESG—a process of evaluation of the European Standards and Guidelines should be initiated in a consultative way to review current progress with their implementation, as well as the level of understanding of, and commitment to, them from all stakeholders.

Increasing the student contribution to quality assurance—further work is urgently needed to ensure that students are regarded and treated as equal partners in both internal and external quality assurance, and that the good practice examples in evidence are universally followed by all signatory countries.

Student-centring the learning process—improve student participation in building student-centred learning systems that are underpinned by a coherent simultaneous implementation of all Bologna Process structural tools.

Fulfilling the potential of the ECTS—critically assessing ECTS implementation in terms of both learning outcomes and student workload, for all the Bologna cycles, moving beyond the simultaneous co-existence of the old and new degree cycles and fully secure the correct Bologna three cycles, and remove access obstacles to progression between cycles, with a special attention to mitigating the causes for low vertical mobility between the first and second cycle.

Enhancing employability—implementation of the full three cycle system needs to be prioritised and delivered in a way that fulfils its original purpose—to create flexibility in learning paths and greater options for employability, essential given the current economic crisis that Europe and the wider global community are facing. The full implementation process should be accompanied by consultation of, and communication with, both employers and society as a whole in relation to degrees to ensure a common level of understanding about their purpose and value in light of the three cycle system changes.

Mainstreaming Lifelong Learning as an integral part of the education system—lifelong learning should be envisaged as part of the framework for the widening participation challenge; an essential part of efforts to create more open and responsive institutions that welcome new audiences. Quality assurance and public responsibility should be at the core of national strategies for lifelong learning, with stakeholder participation ensuring the ownership of the academic community over this essential priority for the decade to come.

Developing doctoral education by ensuring equal support to all doctoral students—doctoral students need to be equally supported, regardless of their status—as employees, students, young researchers etc. In addition, doctoral students' participation in the development of the link between education and research is essential and national student unions should be involved in decision-making processes related to the third cycle and research in general.

Developing a relationship with the rest of the world based on cooperation and sustainable development—the reinforcing of relationships must be done with mutual respect and acknowledgement of different contexts and of the need to learn from counterparts, whilst ensuring that it is done with full stakeholder involvement. International mobility also needs to be enhanced with a commitment to protect the

rights of international students, to ensure access to relevant and accurate information, to provide a high quality of education and ensure a refusal to adopt policies conducive to brain drain.

ESU strongly believes that the implementation of these recommendations would enable the realisation of the EHEA as originally envisioned, and bring the Bologna Process to a successful conclusion over the next decade.

2 INTRODUCTION

The *Bologna With Student Eyes* (BWSE) report has become a tradition of the Bologna Process itself. The reality check that the fourth edition tries to bring to the debate is again based on the students' perspective of the national implementation of the reforms, analysed in a synthetic way from a Europe-wide perspective. The unique experience that only students can have as specific members of the academic community and the learning process makes their views essential and unique—even if the views and practices of governments and other stakeholders can result in setting aside student participation as a second-class action line.

2009 has been the year of debate—do we continue the work towards building a true European Higher Education Area or do we strive to find new and catchier action lines that governments can easily captivate audiences with in their speeches? Countries seem keen to reassert their commitment in key areas such as the social dimension, mobility, lifelong learning, etc. But at the same time, the need for clear X-rays of implementation at European, national and institutional has increased. The purpose of this report is to shed light onto the progress made since the London ministerial conference and, at the same time, to bring attention to students' views on how to move forward with greater speed and support from the academic community—the core element in the success of any higher education reform.

The report is divided into 12 chapters in which relevant parts of Bologna Process reforms are discussed. The primary source of data is a detailed questionnaire, which included a range of qualitative and quantitative items. This questionnaire was drawn up by the elected representatives of ESU, based on a review of past surveys and including new concerns arising from signals on problematic areas, given by the ESU members in the past two years. The questionnaire received the critical contribution of CEPS—Centre for Educational Policy Studies, whom we wish to thank. Most suggestions were integrated either in the structure of the questionnaire or in the way the answers were interpreted. There are, however, lessons learned about that should be fed into any upcoming exercises.

The BWSE 2009 report maintains the basic structure from the previous edition with some small additions. For the accuracy of the overview, it tried to take into account the priorities recognised by ministers in the London Communiqué and to assess the progress made in those specific areas. Structurally, recognition of prior learning was included in a larger chapter devoted to lifelong learning, the Diploma Supplement was addressed in a separate chapter from cycles and credits and employability was added to the other chapters. A description of the respondents, national unions of student members of the European

Students' Union, was also inserted, to allow the reader to further explore the character and structure of the organisations that allow for building up the *Bologna With Student Eyes*. The concept of the report included a research validity check done by CEPS. After the drafting process had started, the research centre made an analysis and gave powerful recommendations for a sample of the chapters that served as inspiration for others. This element is a specific feature of the 2009 edition in comparison to the 2007 one. The main rationale behind this way forward was given by the intention to continuously improve the quality of the survey, with the aid of experienced experts in higher education policy.

The initial draft survey was created in October of 2008 and tested with three unions from separate regional contexts in Europe: SYL from Finland, SUS from Serbia and VSS-UNES-USU from Switzerland. Their comments allowed for a significant restructuring of the questionnaire and enabled us to detect some of its shortcomings early on. We wish to express our gratitude for the contribution that these specific unions brought to the final version of the questionnaire. The actual data collection process took place from November 2008 onwards. Respondents were 36 national unions of students from 33 countries. The answers provided were also compared to other findings in the national reports presented by national authorities for the stocktaking exercise when available and appropriate. In addition, several other research papers, reports and policy documents were referenced in the various chapters. The report was written in March/April 2009 and reflects the information available at that specific point in time.

BWSE 2009 focuses mostly on the perceptions of the national student unions. These perceptions, belonging to one of the key stakeholders in the reform that the Bologna Process encompasses, are a sound testimony of the level of satisfaction and involvement of the unions.

We hope that this report lifts the veil on the real grassroots implementation of the agreed reforms, as students are experiencing it every day. A further wish is that the results of the BWSE 2009 will help in implementing the Bologna Process reforms in a coherent and qualitative way so that all present and future students will fully benefit from the paradigm shift that the pan-European reform process is supposed to bring—high quality higher education based on student-centred learning and accessible for all.

Enjoy the reading and welcome to reality!

ESU team 2008-2009

3 SOCIAL DIMENSION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

At the start of the Bologna Process in 1999, the social dimension was not mentioned in the ministers' declaration. It was only in Prague in 2001, when the students got involved, that the social dimension became part of the Process. The ministers stated that they reaffirmed the need, as called for by the students, to take account of the social dimension in the Bologna Process. However, it was only in Bergen in 2005 that the Ministers stated that the social dimension would become an integral part of the Bologna Process. In 2007 in London, the Ministers defined the following goal:

“The student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations.”

Ministers stated that higher education should play a strong role in fostering social cohesion, reducing inequalities and raising the level of knowledge, skills and competences in society. The importance of students being able to complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background was reaffirmed. They promised to continue their efforts to provide adequate student services, create more flexible learning pathways into and within higher education, and to widen participation at all levels on the basis of equal opportunities.

They would also report on these efforts, which would be integrated into the stocktaking

“Similarly, we will report on our national strategies and policies for the social dimension, including action plans and measures to evaluate their effectiveness. We will invite all stakeholders to participate in, and support this work, at the national level.”

They also concluded that data had to be gathered, in conjunction with the BFUG, to be presented at the next Ministerial Summit:

“We recognise the need to improve the availability of data on both mobility and the social dimension across all the countries participating in the Bologna Process. We therefore ask the European Commission (Eurostat), in conjunction with Eurostudent, to develop comparable and reliable indi-

cators and data to measure progress towards the overall objective for the social dimension and student and staff mobility in all Bologna countries.”

The report of Eurostat and Eurostudent is written. ESU welcomes the data gathered and hopes it will serve for policy development in the coming months. The data gap however is still deep and more efforts will be needed to get a clear picture of the social dimension of the EHEA.

The lack of data also has a big impact on the content of this chapter. Most student unions do not have data at their disposal to answer the questions we asked based on adequate research. The chapter aims at giving an overview of the situation regarding the social dimension, according to the perception of the student unions. It points to problems student unions face in their every day work. Some answers however point to a lack of awareness and a request of unions for more sound data.

3.2 CONCLUSIONS

Even though the social dimension is an action line of the Bologna Process, many unions report that it is not a political priority for the government. The unions believe that several groups are under-represented in higher education or face discrimination when in higher education. Most problems are reported in relation to students from a lower socio-economic background, as well as students with disabilities, students with jobs and students with children.

Many student unions complain about the economic conditions of their students. In many countries, students have to pay tuition fees and often additional fees are charged. In most countries, study costs are not measured, but many unions believe they have increased in the past few years. The loans and grant system is often insufficient to cover all these costs. Student debt is increasing and many students have to work in order to get by.

Only a few countries have worked out a real social dimension strategy and most unions were not included in the drafting of the national action plan for the social dimension. However, some governments have taken active measures to improve the social dimension in their respective countries.

In spite of some data collection efforts, there is still a huge data gap waiting to be filled.

The social dimension should be a priority within the Bologna Process and must be made more concrete in the coming years. ESU believes that the following recommendations are necessary conditions and steps towards a social European higher education area.

Bologna events should be a platform to debate initiatives to remove barriers to higher education and Ministers must commit to giving the social dimension the same amount of attention as is given to the other action lines.

- Ministries must deliver on their National Action Plans and all Bologna signatory countries should develop a strategy to improve the social dimension of their higher education. Stakeholders, including national student unions, should be involved in both the development and implementation of the strategy.
- A target to increase participation across the EHEA by 2020 should be established in the Bologna Process, but must be implemented in a balanced way that ensures participative equity and fully accessible higher education, so that the expansion of higher education is accompanied by a real democratisation of HE participation.
- Anti-discrimination legislation covering higher education must be set up so that all kinds of discrimination can be fought.
- The aspiration of widening access must be recognised as a benefit to society and not just to the individual, and therefore must be publicly financed.
- Tuition fees are a financial barrier to higher education and they therefore must be abolished. Where tuition fees exist, they should be evaluated critically and where there are currently no tuition fees, they should not be introduced. This critical evaluation should also include other fees associated with studying. We already know that tuition fees affect some student groups harder than others. Studies on the impact of the introduction of tuition fees should be undertaken. Following on from this, measures should be taken to compensate the burden of tuition fees particularly on those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, through grants, sliding scales of repayment, bursaries etc.

- ▶ The United Nations Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which states that “Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, [...], in particular by the progressive introduction of free education”, should be respected by all Bologna countries.
- ▶ Comparable data on support provisions such as living conditions, guidance, counselling, financial support and the socio-economic background of students must be independently collected from all Bologna signatories and used to map the progress of this action line and to spread best practice.
- ▶ Study costs should be monitored regularly and student financing should be based on covering all costs of living and learning. Student financing must be adapted to the outcomes of this.
- ▶ Ministers must work towards a generous, parent-independent system of grants that supports the student as a learner, meaning that money to cover the costs associated with living and learning as a student is guaranteed.
- ▶ Student services should be subsidised sufficiently to provide student housing, transportation discounts, healthy food provisions, sport facilities, medical care, discounts for cultural activities, etc. Student services must be accessible to all students, including international students. These services must pay special attention to making studying and student life accessible to disabled students.

3.4 ANALYSIS OF THE ANSWERS

SOCIAL DIMENSION AS A POLICY PRIORITY

Student Unions from only 14 countries (Finland (SAMOK), Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Luxemburg, Macedonia, Malta, the Netherlands (ISO), Norway, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, UK) consider the social dimension to be a real priority for their current government. Unions from 14 countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Germany, Georgia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands (LSVB), Poland, Serbia, Sweden, Ukraine, and Portugal) claim that the social dimension is not a priority for the government. The unions from Belgium—Flemish Community, Czech Republic, Denmark, France and Finland (SYL) state that their government sees the social dimension as important but that they don't always see it in reality. The un-

ions also link this to budgetary decisions. Most unions believe the government is not investing enough in higher education. Some unions are fearing budget cuts as a result of the crisis or a government change.

“The current economic climate has resulted in budget cuts and a delay in the National Action Plan 2008 – 2013”.
USI, Ireland

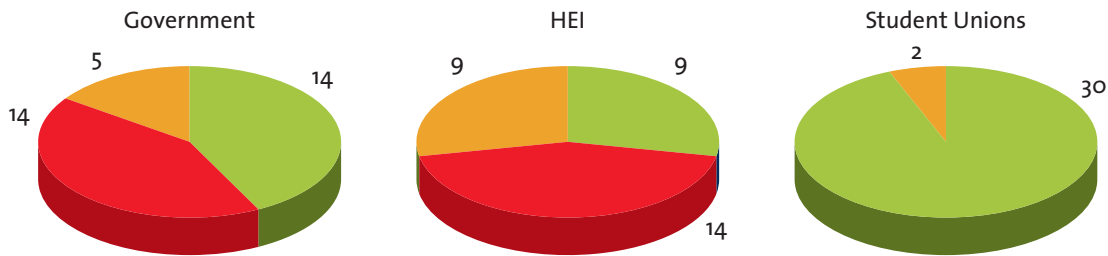
“The Minister increased public funding for Universities and promised to do so in future. Over the course of a few years, this could improve the social dimension and the quality of higher education in Spain. We hope the promised increase will still happen after the elections.”
CREUP, Spain

Even less student unions believe that the social dimension is a priority for all the higher education institutions in their country. 9 unions claim the social dimension is a priority in HEI’s, 14 state the opposite. 9 unions say the situation depends on the HEI: to some it is very important, to others it is not.

The vast majority of unions (30) state the social dimension is a priority for their student union. They develop policy on the issue, they lobby for better conditions for students, they participate in projects, etc.

fig. 1—Is the social dimension a priority, according to the student unions, for the government, the higher education institutions and the student union?

- Yes
- No
- Some degree



3.5 OBSTACLES TO ACCESS, PARTICIPATION AND COMPLETION

Most unions report that there is a clear lack of data on the social dimension. Therefore it is difficult to identify under-represented groups and problems of discrimination. However, based on scattered data and the everyday experience of unions, they identified the problems below. We asked the unions if they are aware of problems of certain groups of students. Many of the characteristic below are interrelated and so the problems reported for one group, are often also a problem for other groups mentioned.

STUDENTS FROM A LOWER SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

Student unions from 28 countries identify the participation of this group as very problematic. Many unions complain about financial barriers that keep potential students away from higher education. The reasons given are high fees, costs for accommodation and transport, etc. Another problem reported is that student financing is insufficient to cover all costs. In some countries students cannot get a loan if the bank believes the student is not eligible. But student unions also mention debt aversion among students as a factor. Another problem mentioned is that sometimes these students are not encouraged in the same way to go to higher education. It is also reported that not all students can prepare equally for entrance exams because some have to work and have less time to prepare for them. Other students can afford private lessons to be better prepared.

SOME UNIONS WERE ABLE TO PROVIDE SOME DATA ON THIS:

VVS (Belgium-Flemish Community)

A key factor is the occupational status of the parents: Only 22% of children whose father is an unskilled labourer go to higher education, compared to 80% of students with a father in a management role (average is 54%). The degree of schooling of the parents is also important: Only 25% of children whose mother does not have a primary degree gets access to HE compared to 83% of those whose mother has an HE degree. (HIVA, 2001)

Financial resources are equally a crucial factor: the participation of the richest 20% in society is twice as great as the participation of the poorest 20% in society. (Bea Cantillon 2005)

EÜL (Estonia)

Students whose parents have third level qualifications are twice as numerous in higher education compared with students of low educational background. (Source: EUROSTUDENT III)

USI (Ireland)

Participation rates for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds differ depending on the specific grouping (skilled manual, non-manual etc.). However, in no case do they exceed 50% and some are as low as 27% in terms of the children of non-manual workers (National Access Plan 2008 – 2013). It is believed that the costs of entering and participating in higher education and the limited opportunities to combine work and study are amongst the obstacles (National Access Plan 2008 – 2013). The Higher Education Authority (HEA) Survey of New Entrants to Higher Education 2004 showed that one of the key determining factors in whether someone participates in higher education is the socio-economic background of the parents, in particular the father.

NUS UK (UK)

In 2004, just 10 percent of people from the poorest fifth of families acquired a degree by the age of 23, compared with 44 percent of those from the richest fifth. The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) regularly collects data for each HEI on the make-up of the student body and benchmarks this data. These Performance Indicators can be found at: <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php/content/view/1166/141/>

“To study in higher education means financial problems for the families.”

Hungary, HÖÖK

ETHNIC-CULTURAL MINORITIES

15 NUSes report that this group faces obstacles regarding access to HE. Problems reported are language, cultural expectation, social norms, low self-esteem, lack of support, prior education that does not give access to higher education, etc.

MIGRANT CHILDREN

12 unions state that migrant children face obstacles when accessing higher education. An even bigger group (14 unions) reports to have no knowledge about this. Reported problems are a lack of information, language, lack of social support, etc.

STUDENTS FROM LESS ECONOMICALLY DEVELOPED REGIONS

Unions from 16 countries report problems for this group. The obstacles reported are differences in the quality of teaching in secondary education, an absence of higher education institutions in the region, high costs when moving to the city, poor transport links, shortage of student housing in the city, etc.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Even though many unions say that efforts have been made to increase the participation of these students, nevertheless, unions from 23 countries state that this group faces access problems. The obstacles reported are physical inaccessibility, lack of awareness from other students and teaching staff, lack of necessary provisions, etc.

“As of 2005/2006 only 3.2% of the total undergraduate student population was drawn from students with disabilities (National Access Plan 2008 – 2013). The main obstacles for this have historically been low levels of support and resources for these students, along with low educational expectations.”
USI Ireland

GENDER

There are 9 unions that report obstacles for male and/or female students. Under-representation in higher education is linked to higher dropouts in secondary education and gender stereotypes in study choice.

“There is a lot of gender segregation. There is a general idea in society about what a woman should do or not do and what a woman is good at and not good at, Computer science, for example, is the kind of subject that is usually stereotyped as a subject that men are good at. Female students might face obstacles in these kinds of fields.

Male students applying for some programmes, especially those that are ‘typically feminine programmes’ might face some obstacles. Men can have limited ideas about what kinds of job are appropriate for them and therefore dismiss some options even before they consider seriously applying.”

SAMOK, Finland

LGBT STUDENTS¹

Only 2 unions report obstacles, but 15 NUSes claim to have no knowledge about this. This points to a possible lack of awareness. There is almost no research available on the issue.

Discrimination that LGBT students face is most often in terms of social norms and constructions. They can't talk about their social life as openly as other students and can therefore be left out from social events. The education itself (materials, lectures etc.) can include heteronormative assumptions that LGBT students may find offensive.

SAMOK, Finland

STUDENTS WITH JOBS

25 unions believe that students with jobs face problems accessing higher education. The reasons given are many: inflexible curricula, lack of evening lectures, absence of part-time programmes, higher fees for part-time students, losing the grant when earning too much, lack of time and energy to study, etc.

STUDENTS WITH CHILDREN

NUSes from 21 countries report obstacles for students with children, such as lack of affordable childcare provisions, lack of flexibility, etc. They sometimes get more student financing, but it is still often not enough to cover the extra cost for day-care.

“NUS UK will be publishing a major new report in February 2009 on Student Parents. In Scotland, a campaign has been launched to ask for better developed childcare support so that student parents could access education without the childcare obstacle (www.theparenttrap.org.uk)”

NUS UK-UK

STUDENTS +35

According to 16 NUSes, these students can encounter problems. Many of them report that certain benefits students receive are only awarded up to a certain age. This can be loans and grants, higher fees, no more student discounts, etc. The age difference with classmates is also mentioned.

¹ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual

“These are students that are likely to have more financial responsibilities but the students loans system only lends out an amount that seems more like pocket money.”

SHI, Iceland

“They pay a much higher tuition fee (students aged 30+ pay about 10.000 while the rest pay about 1.500 euro a year.”

ISO, the Netherlands

RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

Only 4 unions report problems for this group. They state that it is often linked to ethnic minorities. A problem can be that their beliefs and practices are not taken into consideration, for example in terms of special dietary requirements or different religious holidays. A lot of unions state to have no knowledge on the issue, which points to a lack of awareness.

REFUGEES/ASYLUM SEEKERS/STUDENTS WITHOUT RESIDENCE PERMIT

According to 18 unions, this category of student comes across many barriers. They often can't get any student financing and do not have permission to work. They have problems getting earlier qualifications recognised. These students often have to pay higher tuition fees, and although they can apply for a visa, they then have to prove their financial independence which is difficult without grant, loan or work permit. The situation is better for recognised asylum seekers than for people who do not have the necessary documents.

“Students without papers often see their right to education denied.”

VVS, Belgium

DROP OUT

Student unions see many factors leading to drop out: failing study orientation policies, low self-esteem, lack of integration in the academic community, lack of proper student counseling, etc. A lot of unions believe that financial problems lead to high drop-out rates. Students that have to work too much to afford their studies often can't cope and drop out. In some countries, students have to pay extra when studying over a long period, or find they are prevented from continuing when not progressing fast enough. These problems do not only lead to drop out, but they can also cause prolonging of graduation.

3.6 ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF STUDENT LIFE

FEES

From the answers of our unions, we must conclude that students pay a lot. The majority of unions say they have to pay tuition fees (18 countries). Unions from 24 countries claim that students pay additional fees as well. These fees are charged to cover various costs: fees for materials, copy costs, health insurance, mandatory study trips, registration fees, administrative fees, student services fees, exam fees, entry fees, diploma expenditure, regional fees, union membership fees, etc. The amount students have to pay varies a lot. Within one country it can also depend on the institution or the program. But in many countries, students pay several hundred to several thousand of euro on fees.

Students from 19 countries claim tuition fees have increased in the past few years. In some countries the increase has been in-line with inflation. In other countries, tuition fees have increased more than inflation. In the Netherlands the government will have the students pay a lot more in the coming years: fees will increase by 22 euro for the next ten years. In Slovenia, the fees have increased with the justification that HEI's need more funding, while in Italy they increased because of public budget cuts. In the UK (expect Scotland) fees have increased with the justification that HEI's need more funding and that the benefits of higher education are such that individuals should contribute more to the cost of its provision.

“The increase of the tuition fees in the Netherlands doesn't even benefit the Higher Education, as it is used to cover budget deficits in other areas.”

ISO, the Netherlands

However, it is not just bad news. In some countries, students had some recent victories in their battle against tuition fees. In Denmark, students succeeded in having fees for Erasmus Mundus Masters courses abolished after successfully arguing that they were illegal. In Hungary and Ireland, fees were abolished in 1998 and 1996 respectively. In Scotland, full-time home and EU undergraduate fees have recently been abolished. In Austria, the principle of tuition fees still exists, but the number of exemptions has been increased. Because of this, the majority of Austrian students are relieved from paying fees.

STUDY COSTS

Unions from 11 countries claim that study costs are monitored regularly, but another 18 claim that this does not happen at all. Unions from 28 countries believe that study costs have increased in recent years,

while those from 20 countries claim that grants and loans are not calculated through a monitoring of study costs.

STUDENT FINANCING

Most NUSes answered that there are grants available in their country. However, the number of students that receive a grant differs significantly. Some countries have a universal grant system where the majority of students receive a grant. Other countries have very selective grants that are only awarded to a rather small number of students, usually based on merit or income. Some countries have a combination of systems. Grants are mostly awarded by the government, but can also be awarded by private foundations for example. These are then usually very selective.

In some countries the grants are awarded to students, whereas in more family-dependent systems, the grant is based on family income. In some countries the student's family is still entitled to some family benefits like child allowance. A lot of unions are not satisfied with the grant system. They complain that not enough students receive a grant, the grant amount does not cover the costs and sometimes the grants do not reach the students that need it most.

“The small amount of grants and state support that exists in Estonia is not targeted at under-represented groups, such as students from a low educational background.”

EUL, Estonia

In most of countries there are also loans available, mostly awarded by the government or banks, or by a combination of the two. The number of students taking out a loan differs among countries. The average debt at graduation also differs quite a lot. In Denmark the average debt is about 14.975 EUR. In Estonia, the maximum amount that a student can borrow until graduation is about 9 600 EUR which most students take out according to EUL. In Iceland the average debt is about 18.639 EUR, however because of currency problems this may be an underestimation. In Norway students lend on average €30.000 and about 86% of students take out a loan. In Sweden the average debt is about 10.000 EUR. In the UK there is no data but it is estimated by the PUSH Guide and Barclays Bank that student debt will increase by 2010/11 to about 25,000 euro. About 80% of the students eligible for a loan take one out. In some countries (Portugal, Georgia) the loan system has only been recently introduced and so it is too soon to count an average.

Several student unions complain that grants and loans are not sufficient to cover all the costs of studying and living. As we mentioned before, student financing in most countries is not based on a calculation of

costs which can explain why they are insufficient. The portability of loans and grants still seems to be a problem in many countries. An analysis of portability problems can be found in the mobility chapter.

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Student unions were asked to rate the student services provided in their country on a scale of 1 to 4 (1= inexistent, 2= exists but with very little quality/access, 3= exists, with reasonable quality and access, 4= exists, in good quality and sufficient access). On average, student unions are not very satisfied with the provisions (general average is 2,58). They are the least satisfied with childcare provisions (2,09). The best scores are given to medical care and public transport (2,85 for both). The lowest country scores are for Iceland and Georgia (1,50 both) and Ukraine (1,60). The highest average is given by KSU, the student union of Malta (3,80).

There are some structural problems according to unions. Not all services are provided in all regions or institutions and so not all students can benefit from the same (quality of) provisions. For example, in Belgium Flanders, there is very little subsidised accommodation for students of university colleges (hogescholen) while there is a much bigger offer for university students. In Denmark it is much more difficult to get affordable housing in Copenhagen or Aarhus. In Norway, the provisions are different depending on the institution you study at.

Insert graphs or maps here, with a text like: “The following graphs present the student union perception on student services. The first one present the perception by country, the second one the perception by service”.

STUDENT EMPLOYMENT

According to our member unions, many students have to work to help pay for their studies. Either the loans and grants provided are not sufficient, or students prefer to get a job instead of ending with a huge debt at graduation (debt aversion). Also the number of elder students with a job, re-entering higher education is growing. The average ranges from 5 hours to over 31 hours per week. Some averages that student unions provided us with are 11.5 hours in Austria, 20 hours per week in Estonia, 22 hours in Finland, 31.8 hours per week in Iceland, 15 hours per week in Ireland, 9 hours in Norway, 17 hours in Slovenia, about 5 hours in Italy and 22 hours per week in the Czech Republic.

The current financial crisis is also hitting students hard. In some countries it means fewer students can find a job to help them finance their studies. This can lead to increase in the average debt of students. As can be seen in the second part of this chapter, student unions believe it is difficult to combine working and studying. Students are unable to attend classes (which are sometimes obligatory), there are not enough special programmes and the general ones are often not flexible enough, they can't prepare properly for (entrance) exams, and they also report that public authorities and institutions do not take a lot of measures to facilitate combining work and study.

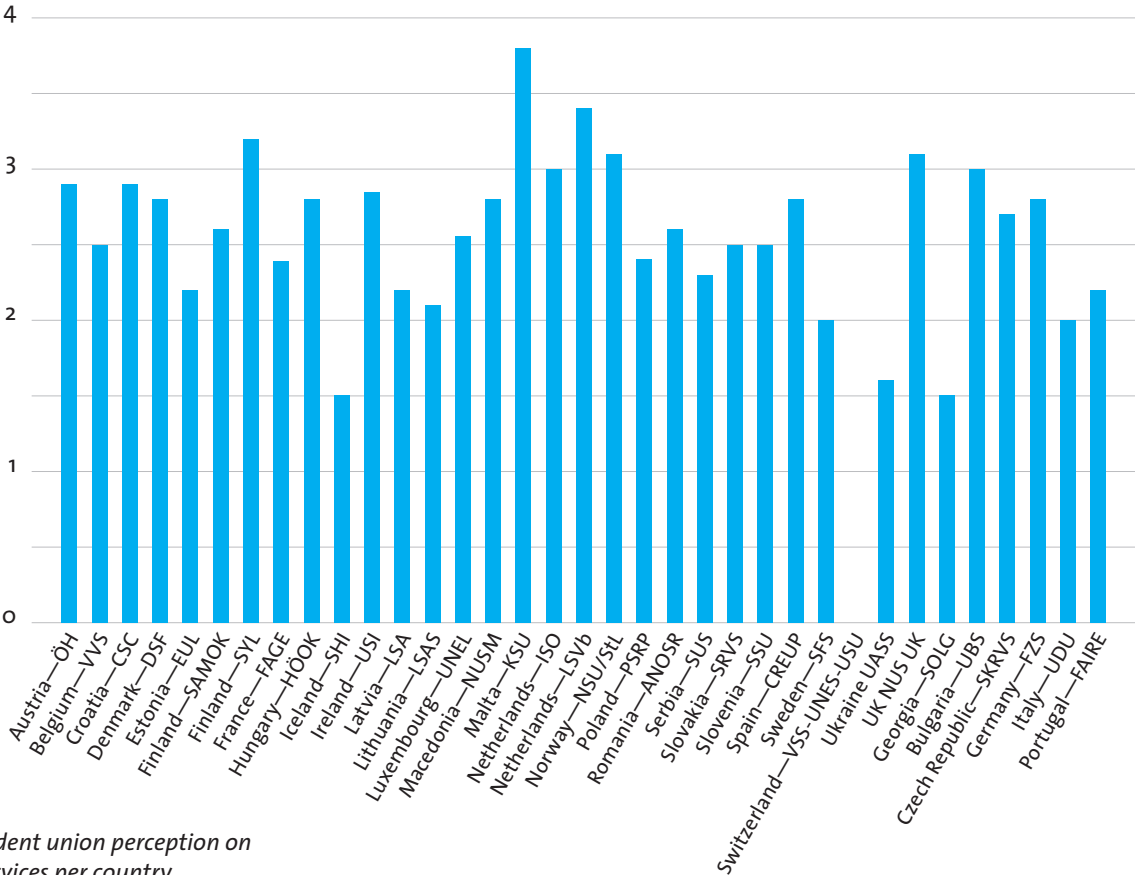


fig. 2—Student union perception on student services per country

Student employment could be a way to gain experience that is beneficial for the student when entering the labour market after graduating. However, the majority of student unions(from 18 countries) reported that the paid work most students do is not related to their studies.

Inflexible curricula make it difficult to organise studies in an appropriate way. In the first quantitative survey on study conditions since Bologna, conducted through national student unions and the rector’s conference, it became clear that there is a significant higher amount of students from a more difficult socio-economic background in study fields like social and human sciences (where

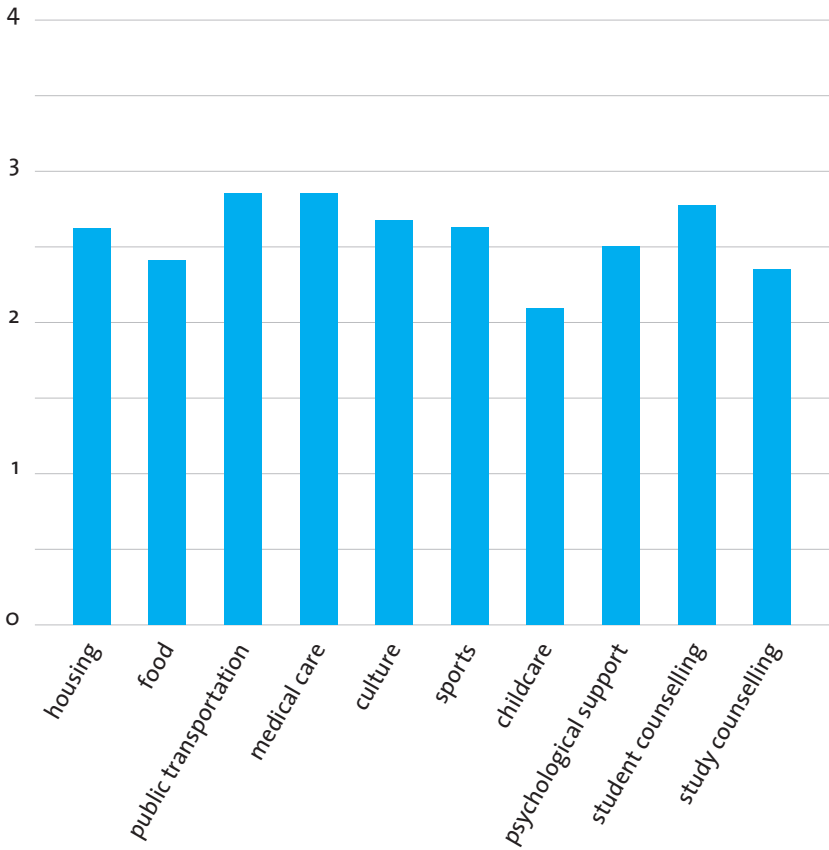


fig. 3—Student union perception on student service per type of service

flexible curricula make study more convenient than in most other fields). The study results are not yet fully interpreted, but it is very probable that those from a lower socio-economic background experience limitations in their choice of study field.

VVS-UNES-USU, Switzerland

“Implementation of the new Bologna Process system sometimes does not allow students to study while working.”

CREUP, Spain

3.7 GOVERNMENT POLICIES

NATIONAL ACTION PLANS

At their ministerial summit in London 2007, the ministers committed to set up national strategies for the social dimension. These would include action plans and measures to evaluate their effectiveness. They promised to invite stakeholders to participate in this work.

Only 9 unions know about a national action plan on the social dimension from their government, 12 unions believe there is no action plan and 11 unions report having no knowledge on the issue. Some unions report that there is a plan as part of the stocktaking exercise but that not much effort has been put into it (Finland) or that it is more a description of measures that were already taken (Belgium Flanders) and not really a national strategy to enhance the social dimension.

The analyses report on the national strategies in the social dimension, prepared by the Centre of Social Policy Studies of the University of Antwerp in cooperation with the BFUG coordination group on social dimension, suggests that more countries delivered a national report than the 9 reported by our unions. The analyses report however also states that there is a great variety in the detail, quality and focus of these reports. Several countries filled in the template provided by the Bologna secretariat, but are lacking a coherent strategy. Clearly, the stakeholder involvement in the drafting of the strategies was not sufficient, as many unions are not even aware of the strategy existing.

GOOD PRACTICE

In Ireland, the government drafted a National Access Plan 2008-2013 and USI was involved in the drafting process. USI declares itself to be satisfied with the report and its concrete, target-driven approach and believes it creates a framework within which social dimension policies can exist. However, USI is concerned that the current economic downturn will allow the Government to not provide the funding necessary to follow through on the National Access Plan 2008 – 2013.

In Finland the ESOK project was launched in autumn 2005 and was influenced by the Ministry of Education publication *Esteetön opiskelu yliopistoissa* (2005), (transl. *Accessible studying in universities*). According to its guidelines, the project promotes the removal of obstacles and barriers that hinder/prevent study in HEIs. Particular attention is paid to students with disabilities, learning difficulties, mature students/third age students, and those students who belong to a cultural or linguistic minority. The project is supported by the Ministry of Education for the years 2007-2009. The project supports the accessibility work of all HEIs by promoting collaboration between HEIs and non-governmental organisations, organising training, endorsing good practice and developing guidelines and recommendations. There are ten pilot HE institutions and twenty non-governmental organisations in the project.

In Belgium Flanders, a new decree on the financing of higher education institutions was voted. This introduced some financial incentives for widening access for disadvantaged groups. HEIs get more funding (the funding is student-based and students with disabilities, grant students and working students count for an extra 50%). VVS, the student union, supports the incentive funding but believes the groups are defined too narrowly (for example, only severe disabilities are counted) and some under-represented groups are not taken into account, such as students from ethnic minorities, migrant backgrounds, students with poorly-schooled parents). The new decree also introduced a fund for equality and diversity which will fund projects on the social dimension. The student union is in favour of the fund but regrets that it is small (not more than 1% of the HE budget).

In France, the number of students receiving a grant increased with 50 000 students benefiting, but according to FAGE, students from single parent families have lost out from this reform. In Malta, initiatives to increase participation in higher education include the free provision of full-time post secondary and tertiary education, Student Maintenance Grants awarded to over 15,834 students and the Malta Government Scholarship Schemes for Undergraduate and Postgraduate studies. And some policies have been implemented to help students with children. More student housing has been built with government support.

DATA COLLECTION

One of the key elements when it comes to recognition of the problems and also when measuring the impact of reforms is data collection on the situation of students. As mentioned before, in 2007 in London, Ministers confirmed the need for more data. The report of Eurostat and Eurostudent is a step ahead in closing the data gap. But still, the lack of data remains a problem in many countries. Only 11 unions believe that there is adequate data available, when 18 unions claim that there is not. Some unions specifically refer to the Eurostudent data, which is very much appreciated, but despite covering more countries in each round, it still does not cover all the Bologna signatory countries. 17 unions believe that there are efforts from public authorities to collect data on social conditions, so this may indicate that the situation will improve in the near future. These figures show an improvement, compared to the previous BWSE survey.

There is some good practice to report that hopefully will inspire other countries. In Croatia, students have to fill out a questionnaire when enrolling about their social status. In France since 2000, the Observatory of Student Life has been publishing a report every third year on student living conditions. In addition, the Ministry for Higher Education now also collects data and made it available in 2007. Ireland took part in the latest Eurostudent survey and the Higher Education Authority now requires all institutions to collect data on the social conditions of students at registration at the beginning of the academic year in order to assess the delivery of the National Access Plan 2008 – 2013.

The 'Deutsches Studentenwerk' collects data on the social conditions of students' lives in Germany regularly every 3 years. In Austria, data is being collected by the 'Studierenden Sozialerhebung', which is based on surveys with nearly 9,000 students, but the data remains silent on many important issues and therefore needs further improvement. In Belgium Flanders, a registration system was developed where HEI's gather information about students that enrol. However, it works at the moment on a voluntary basis. There were privacy issues but these should now be solved. The Federation of Estonian Student Unions has organised the Estonian Students' Socio-economic Situation Survey three times already (2003, 2005/2006 and 2008). Data for Eurostudent has been collected concurrently with a survey which is not funded directly by the state. In Portugal, there is a research unit linked to the ministry that is gathering data.

NON-DISCRIMINATION

Most countries have some legislation that forbids discrimination. Many unions however complain that there are no clear procedures on how to fight discrimination in higher education institutions. In many

countries, the legislation is very specific and it does not require HEI's to set up a clear procedure for complaints. In Croatia, anti-discrimination policies, gender equality and minority rights issues are being included in the university statutes and followed strictly according to student union CSC. In Norway, a new law on discrimination and availability was adopted, giving disabled people much stronger rights in society.

4 STUDENT PARTICIPATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The importance of student participation has been continuously underlined by Ministers in the Bologna Process since the Prague Ministerial summit: *“Ministers stressed that the involvement of universities and other higher education institutions and of students as competent, active and constructive partners in the establishment and shaping of a European Higher Education Area is needed and welcomed”* and, significantly, by the defining statement *“Students are full members of the higher education community”*—*Prague communiqué, 2001*.

Two years later, in the Berlin communiqué, the role of students in higher education governance at all levels was specifically recognized: *“Students are full partners in higher education governance”*.

The Prague and Berlin communiqués set the stage for students as equal partners in the reform processes, at all levels. The two above mentioned quotations reveal the participatory role of students (both as a right and as a responsibility) in the academic community and its governance, and thus in building the EHEA.

In the London Communiqué, Ministers reaffirmed the importance of stakeholder engagement for the success of the Process as a whole, and restated the preparation of students as active citizens in democratic societies as a core mission of higher education institutions,

While student participation became a concrete priority within the Bologna Process, ESU’s role increased and hence the students’ opinion has been voiced within most Bologna Follow-Up Group working groups or Bologna seminars.

Since 2001, student participation from institutional to European levels features as a prominent element in the build-up of the European Higher Education Area. This chapter aims to assess the current status of student involvement in the reform processes, the needs of national unions to fulfil their mission and how students perceive their involvement and recognition as a full partner in their higher education systems.

4.2 CONCLUSIONS

Progress in increasing student participation in higher education continues to be slow, with only around one third of respondents recording a rise compared to 2007. In particular, there appear to be delays with the implementation of legislation on student participation, where this exists. Only a very small proportion of national unions of students are satisfied with the current situation, highlighting a need for much greater action to be taken over the next two years.

Despite the Bologna Process being promoted as a driving force behind increasing student participation, overall, a significant number of unions feel that the Bologna Process has, in reality, had little effect. There is a number of others which feel that it has had a positive effect, but in general the common feeling is that what is proclaimed on paper in official Bologna documents is quite different from the situation on the ground.

A key, recurrent problem is the understanding that students are not regarded as equal partners by higher education institutions and other stakeholders. This has been recognised as a major obstacle to greater, and meaningful, student participation.

An interesting finding is that in non-university high education sectors, student representation becomes problematic and sometimes even discouraged. The reasons reported that explain this worrying situation are the existence of restrictive legislation and the different traditions in student participation between university and other institutions.

While student unions are reported to operate in an independent way, one factor that can compromise this is funding, considering that the participation of some unions in higher education governance depends on the financial support from government and higher education institutions themselves. This also relates to the wider problem of the quality of student participation: some unions reported that their participation is being limited to bodies without real decision-making power: student involvement is granted but in a rather tokenistic manner.

4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Greater and better involvement of students in the governance of higher education is needed: the majority of student unions feel students need to be considered as equal partners in the governance of higher

education. Students need to be involved in decision-making at all levels, including the most senior, and for their voice to be recognised as of equal value in governance structures.

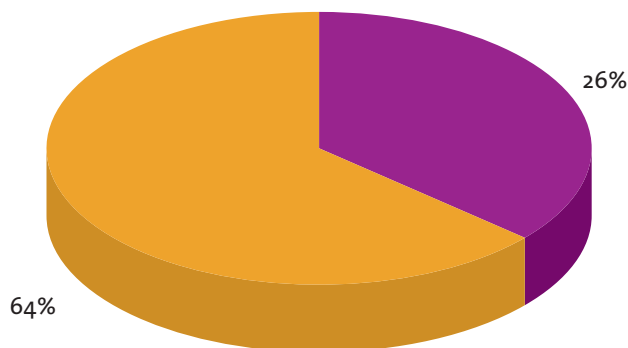
- ▶ Legislation guaranteeing minimum level of student participation is needed where it doesn't yet exist, and a much greater emphasis is needed on delivery, so that the commitments on paper become a reality on the ground.
- ▶ Union funding needs to be examined so that students can participate in a way that does not compromise their independence.

4.4 PROGRESS AND CHANGE IN STUDENT PARTICIPATION

According to the answers received, in the great majority countries (64%) the situation has not changed since 2007: only 12 countries out of 34 reported that some changes had taken place. Of those, two registered a decrease in student participation: Portugal, where a new law on higher education governance stated that students can only be present in higher governance bodies at a level of 14% (thus experienced a decrease from 40%), and France, where a new law was enacted on university autonomy, also leading to a lower level of student participation. Ten other countries experienced an increase in student involvement. In some cases like Romania, the UK, Switzerland and Ireland, the changes are related to the involvement of quality assurance, while in others, the main changes are due to NUS lobbying (Denmark), or to better internal working and greater communication with the Ministry (Latvia). In Austria, the increase in participation can be attributed to membership of the national union being extended to students of applied science, and in Ireland a new law on institutes of technologies institution increased the participation of student in this area.

fig. 4—Have there been changes in the legislation regarding Student Participation?

- Yes
- No



Although a number of countries (25 according to BWSE 2007) saw a change in student participation in the period 2005-2007, when we look at the level of satisfaction among student unions regarding student participation, the situation has not improved. Only 4 out of 34 respondents are satisfied with the current situation. In the remaining countries, unions are experiencing a number of different problems. These include students not being seen as an equal partner by other stakeholders or by the institutions themselves, or in some other cases like Germany, the union is satisfied with the legislation in place, but feels there is a strong need to put it into practice. The national union in Croatia considers the fact that students have to work voluntarily to be a major contributing factor, while in Iceland, as in some other countries, students claim not to have any real decision-making power. There are two other situations that are highlighted through an analysis of responses: firstly, that of unions that are only partly satisfied with the student representation system, such as Austria, or that want to increase representation at some level (e.g. at the national level in France, or within the applied sciences sector in Finland), and secondly, that of countries with a low level of student activism.

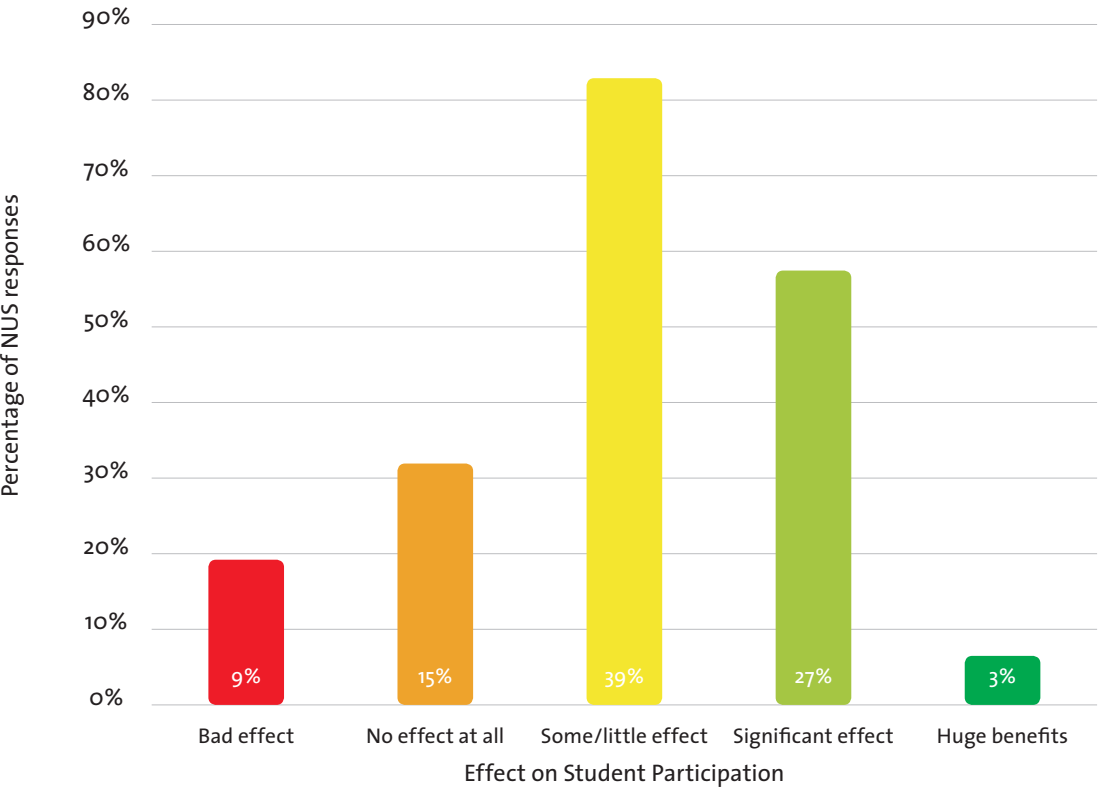
4.5 THE INFLUENCE OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS REGARDING STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

The Bologna Process has been continuously identified as a driving force for the increase of student participation throughout the continent. The recognition of students within the Process and their inclusion in the reforms at European level didn't have necessarily a correspondence with the developments at the national and institutional levels. Although current student representatives can hardly make an analysis of the progress across the whole period of the Bologna Process, their perceptions are valid when it comes to comparing what is stated in official Bologna documents and what they can observe and perceive as the reality surrounding them.

The students in the majority of the countries surveyed feel that the Bologna Process has had little effect on the level of student participation (13 out of 34) while 10 other unions show more enthusiasm, 9 reporting that it has had a significant effect and only one stating that it had a huge effect (Croatia). Six other unions, on the contrary, said it had no effect at all and in three other countries, the Bologna Process has been blamed for worsening the level of student representation. These answers have to be analysed within the context in which they have been produced. In some cases, changes to student participation were made within a package of reforms aiming at modernising higher education in which the implementation of the Bologna Process featured prominently. Therefore, Bologna was presented as the justification for changing the rules in terms of student participation, as is the case for Slovenia and Austria. The case

of the UK is quite different, as the union perceived the changes to be totally separate from the Process as a whole², and regarded them as having no effect at all in the country.

fig. 5—The Effect of the Bologna Process on Student Participation



² We also have to consider that Austria stated a worse situation in the BWSE 2007 report, so it is possible that the evaluation about the Process was given from this point of view. (ESU, BWSE 2007)

4.6 INDEPENDENCE OF THE STUDENT UNIONS

NATIONAL LEVEL

The large majority of the student unions surveyed confirmed that they operate in a totally independent manner at national level. The majority of the concerns regarding the way they can be conditioned relate to student union funding. On the one hand, some unions claim difficulty in finding resources or support, as in the case of Ukraine, for example; on the other hand, “pressure is always present because student participation is not guaranteed and sometimes depends on funding by the institutions”, reported Switzerland.

When comparing the results with the BWSE 2007, it is clear that the majority of the respondents that answered very positively confirmed the absence of restriction or constraints to their activity. A more positive situation has been reported by the national unions of students in Belgium-Flemish community, Croatia, Iceland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain. However, the fact that the existence of factors that inhibit student unions to operate fully independently at the national level is being reported again in some countries is rather worrying and calls for immediate action. This has been the case for Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Poland, Switzerland and Ukraine, that already in the last edition made note of these difficulties.

INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL/COURSE DEPARTMENT LEVEL

Again, at the institutional level, we can observe some continuity with the results of BWSE 2007, since more problems and cases are reported than at national level. It is interesting to see that funding also remains a fundamental problem at this level, where there is sometimes too much proximity. Some unions indicate cases in which students are influenced or pressured by other partners while others reported that the bodies in which students are allowed to participate lack real decision-making power (especially at the course/department level). In Ukraine, for example, it has been claimed that student representatives at this level are directly appointed by rectors. Several answers stressed the existence of significant differences in the level of student engagement between institutions due to the legal status and autonomy of the institutions. In Finland, for example, students of applied science have a weaker level of representation at the institutional level than university students, due also to the fact that more groups have to be represented by law within the governance bodies.

The majority of unions feel the institutional and department level to be the weakest when it comes to student participation (16 out of 34). Recent changes in legislation in some countries (such as Portugal) have

fig. 6—Independence of student representatives at national level

- Fully independent
- Some pressure exists
- Partially independent
- Not at all independent

led to a greater concern about the true capacity to influence institutional decisions. In Macedonia, students have the right to comprise up to 20% of governance bodies, and the national union states the need to increase the number of student representatives to at least this level (because some universities have only 10%), while in Iceland, students are calling for an involvement in decision-making bodies and not only in advisory bodies.

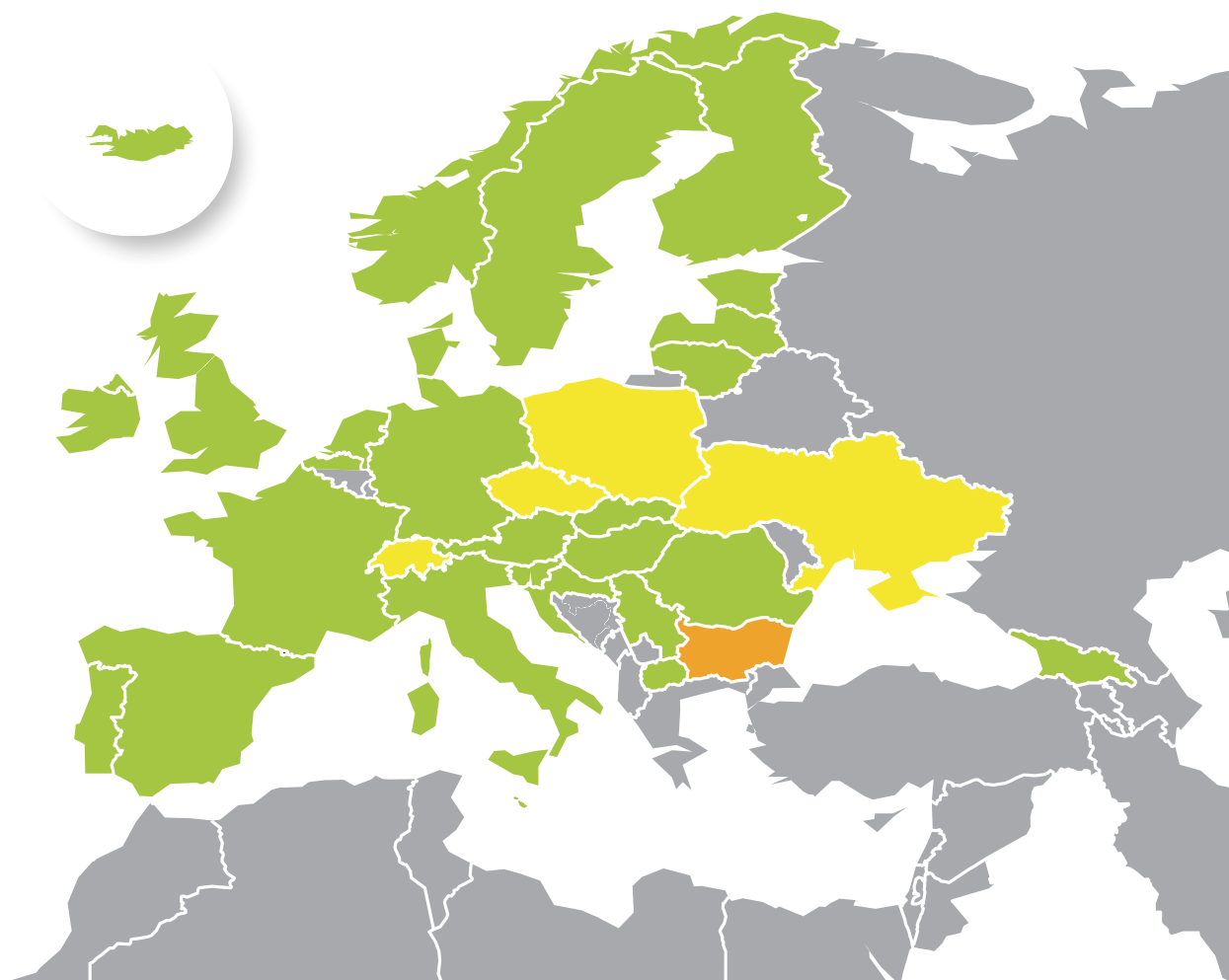


fig. 7—Independence of student representatives at institutional level

- Fully independent
- Some pressure exists
- Partially independent
- Not at all independent

Other unions identify other levels as the most problematic areas still needing development. The different weight of student participation depending on the legal status of the institutions, especially in the case of the universities of applied sciences³ was identified as a problem by at least five unions. Poland and Croatia are the cases in which unions reported that the real challenge is participation at ministry level, where recognition and involve-

3 As well in Finland, already mentioned above.

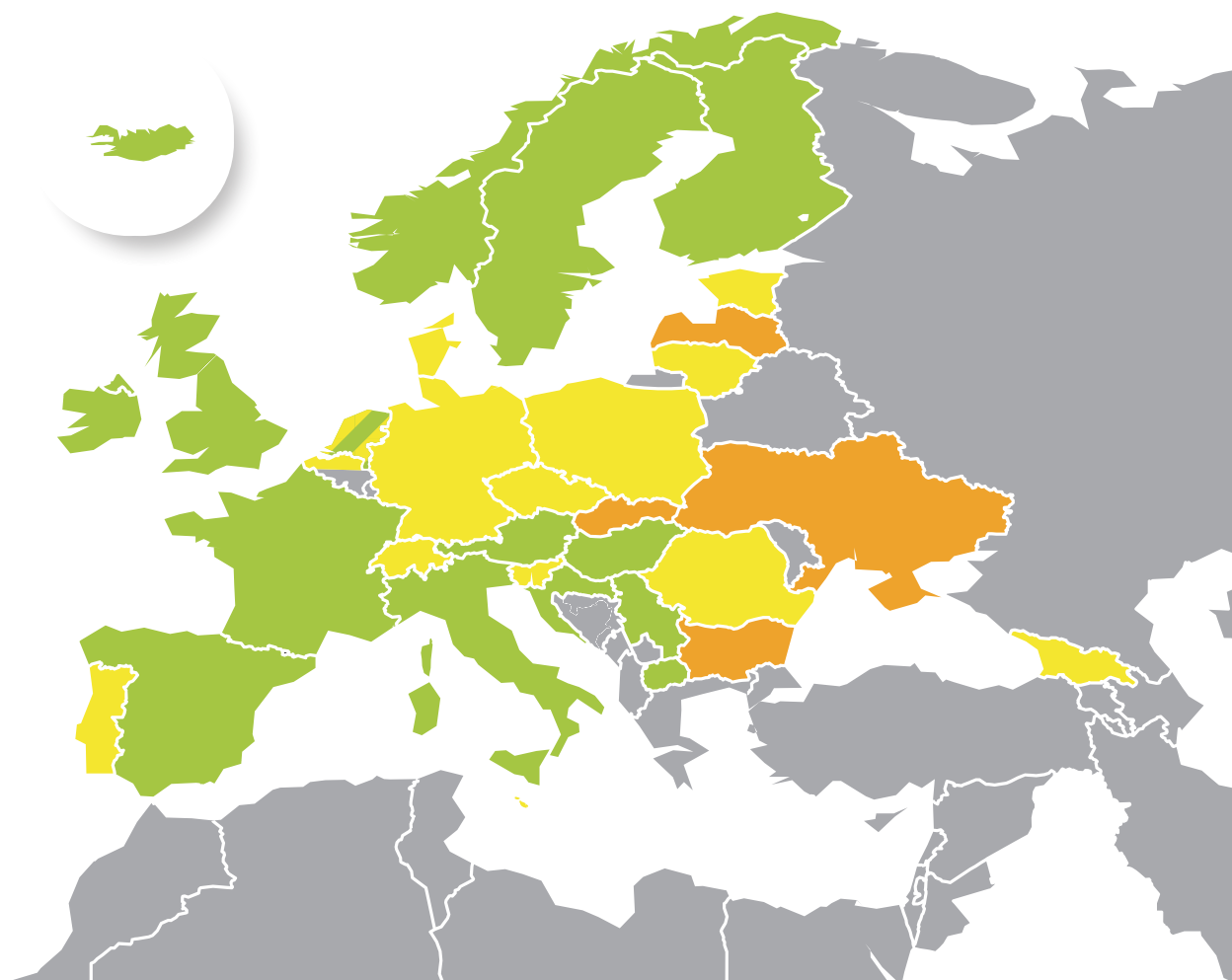
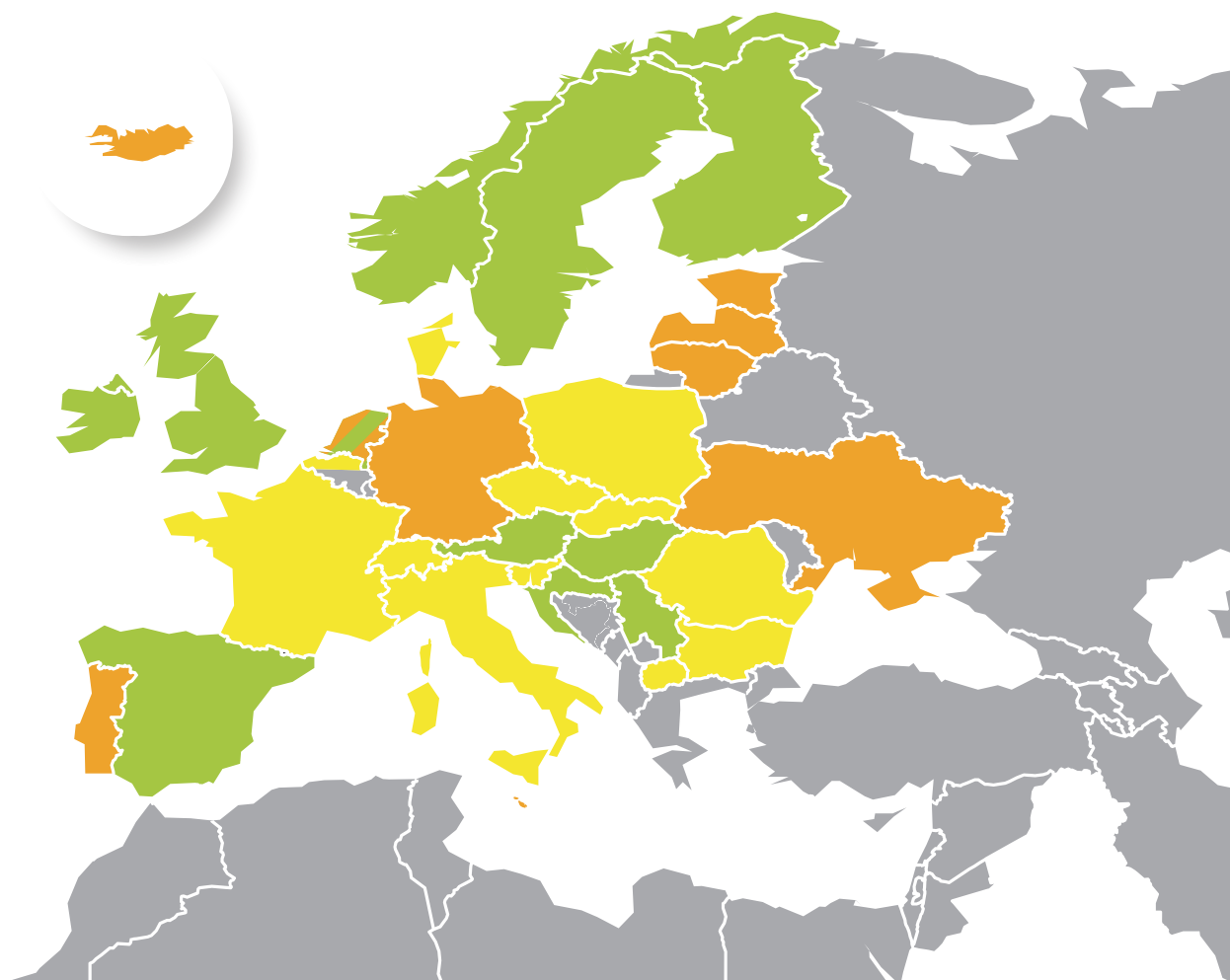


fig. 8—Independence of student representatives at department/course level

- Fully independent
- Some pressure exists
- Partially independent
- Not at all independent

ment still requires real improvement (in the case of Poland, for example, students are calling for more involvement in the working groups created by the ministry).

The answers provided by the respondents illustrate a clear trend of having a fixed percentage or a range of student representatives in the different governance bodies. Norway is a case in which the same percentage exists at



all the levels, but the majority of respondents mention figures only for the institutional level. The most common range reported is around 15-20%, but there are exceptions. In Spain, figures of student participation reaches between 15% and 25%; in Romania it is 25%; in Serbia the students report it to be at least 20% and in Denmark student representatives account for 50% of members of bodies at department level. Although legislation enforces the involvement of the student union in the governance of the institutions in the Flemish community of Belgium, it is left to the higher education institution to determine whether such involvement is of a consultative or decision-making nature. The lack of more clear and binding legislation on this issue raises serious concerns for the national student union in question, which is also asking for a more specific legal framework on student union funding in order to secure greater independence.

In general, unions are not asking for significant changes to existing legislation. But in Denmark, students state that the legislation needs serious improvement while in Germany there are complaints that the absence of a common framework at national level creates a too diverse situation in the Lander state, some of which have undermined the principles that make it possible to have truly independent student unions. In both Switzerland and Italy, the student unions have also criticised the lack of appropriate legislation that can allow for proper student participation.

The most common remark, however, is that students are not yet regarded as equal partners by other stakeholders. According to the respondents, this has a direct impact on their level of participation and the student weight in governance bodies, as these views are also reflected in official regulations at different levels. Interestingly, some unions also reported an increase in individualism and a lack of interest of among the average student as one of the obstacles and challenges to be addressed in the future, since it prevents greater adherence and activism in the student movement, and ultimately has served for other stakeholders to justify a weakening of student participation.⁴

4.7 BINARY SYSTEM AND STUDENT PARTICIPATION

14 unions out of 34 stated that there is a binary system in their country. In some unions such as those in Norway and Romania, there are no differences between the level of participation of students in both

⁴ This is a problem that arises from the answers of some student union such as Croatia, Estonia, and the Czech Republic. In the case of this last country, the student union expanded their answer with an explanation of the historical context: during the communist regime, student unions were under government control, and are now felt to be anachronistic.

universities and other higher education institutions. However, in the majority of the countries we have found significant differences. In Georgia, for example, student participation is authorised only where the institutions have the legal status of a university. Although, in the majority of the cases, these differences are allowed or promoted by law, in many others, there are different factors contributing to this diverse situation. In Belgium there are no differences stated in the legislation, which applies to both universities and *hogescholen*⁵. However, while autonomous institutions (set up at the initiative of the government) are obliged to include the students in decision-making bodies, the “free institutions” (private initiative, but also subsidised by the government) are not. The Latvian respondent claimed that the student movement is weaker in higher education institutions of applied sciences while in the Finnish non-university sector, student representation at the institutional level is seen as an obstruction to academic success and not so much praised.

What we can conclude is that in the institutions of applied science, student representation is less than that of university students for two key reasons: because this is stated by law, and because there are different traditions in student participation between university and other institutions. It seems clear that there is a need to reaffirm the existence of equal rights and level of involvement of student representatives within this sector of higher education.

4.8 NATIONAL BOLOGNA FOLLOW-UP GROUPS AND STUDENT PARTICIPATION

In the great majority of countries (22 out of 33 countries) students report that there is a national Bologna Follow Up Group, and that there is student representation in it. Georgian students claim that there is no such group, although the country report states the opposite. The fact that the same report admits that no student is included in this group might help to explain that students are not aware of its existence. In Italy, Latvia, Portugal and Serbia the student unions are also not aware of the existence of a national Bologna Follow-Up Group, although in some cases they report the existence of other structures that also include student representatives.

⁵ We can't consider Belgium as a real binary system, because some differences exist between universities and Hogescholen.

4.9 NATIONAL REPORT FOR STOCKTAKING, STUDENT INVOLVEMENT AND THE IMPACT ON PUBLIC OPINION

However, it is interesting to note that in a minority of cases, the unions that state not to be included in the national BFUG are nevertheless in some way involved in writing or consulted in the national report for stocktaking. In the case of other unions that have been involved and belong to the national BFUGs, the common claim is that such involvement is not very extensive or is of limited effect in the report (such as Denmark or Estonia). But the most extraordinary case is reported by the Croatian unions: although being a member of the national BFUG, they have not been consulted or included in the drafting exercise of the national report. It seems therefore that belonging to the follow-up structure does not necessarily mean the possibility of being more than formally present.

Unions are also pessimistic about the real impact that the stocktaking exercise of the Bologna Process truly has on public opinion. Only two unions recognised any effect and many claim that public opinion is still not aware of the Bologna Process at all. In Ireland, the union reported that the public is aware of many reforms taking place because of the Bologna Process, but have only limited understanding in terms of the content of those reforms and the context in which these took place. The pessimism continues, with very rare cases in which it was reported that the stakeholders used the results in their national level debate. It seems that either the reports are not known about and disseminated or the results are not considered to be reliable both by stakeholders and in public or media debate. As this is the tool the Bologna Process has used to monitor progress and compare the performance of national systems in relation to Process implementation, the results clearly show the need to enhance the accountability and overall level of awareness about a process that requires the engagement of all the stakeholders.

5 QUALITY ASSURANCE

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Quality assurance has been at the forefront of the Bologna Process since the Berlin Ministerial Conference and its subsequent communiqué, when the issue was included first on the list of intermediate priorities of 2005.

It continued gaining momentum in Bergen, with the adoption of the European Standards and Guidelines in Quality Assurance (ESG). Since then, many countries have followed this up and have introduced significant reforms in their national quality assurance systems, although the core principles of the ESG have not always been implemented. In 2007, Ministers gathered in London acknowledged the progress achieved and supported the creation of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) while calling for an increased level of student participation.

The ESG have significantly contributed also by bringing to the forefront issues of great importance to students, such as student participation in quality assurance (QA), learning resources and student support—key safeguards for student centered learning. The ESG are also a driver for enhancing the quality of higher education in a consistent manner throughout the European Higher Education Area and one which has had a significant impact. Therefore, the implementation of the ESG remains a priority for the European Students' Union and for its member unions.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of the ESG has started on a widespread basis, but ...

There is room for improvement in terms of knowledge of the ESG and national stakeholders' commitment to its principles. National student unions state that they are clearly committed to the implementation of the ESG and their level of knowledge on them guarantees their capacity to take decisions and participate in technical QA processes.

NUSes awareness on the content of the ESG has increased considerably, leading to an increase in NUSes describing their support as “full”. However, more than half of respondents qualified their support for the ESG as “general”, due to it having some key weaknesses. We can see the need for an assessment of the ESG as the next step forward following an exercise to identify the reasons of concern for the student body.

Based on the perceptions of the NUSes, a substantial 25% minority of national authorities are not knowledgeable of, and/or reluctant to apply, the ESG. As regards higher education institutions, the same minority reaches 47%. We can conclude that there is a need to further build knowledge of the ESG amongst institutions and national authorities and to raise their awareness on the impact of the proper implementation of the ESG.

Overall student participation in QA has progressed since 2007. However, the analysis of the answers shows the serious gaps in terms of formal participation in decision-making processes and a rather unequal rate of participation in the different processes associated with QA across different countries. We can conclude that, in spite of students being accepted as a part of the follow up rather than technical processes, they are still face reluctance towards their involvement in the decision-making process. This statement is valid on a case-by-case basis, and it is not currently possible to establish a general trend on the location or scale of the phenomenon. An increased effort needs to be made by all actors in higher education in order to extend good practice in student inclusion to a larger number of countries and at all levels, namely: internal quality assurance, external evaluations and agency governance.

However, student unions tend to be less vocal in their critique against external evaluation processes when compared to internal quality assurance. A higher level of participation increases the feeling of ownership over the process amongst student unions. Greater focus needs to be put on raising the trust of student unions in internal quality assurance through participative methods.

There appears to be a correlation between how seriously the ESG are taken and the level of student participation, thus we can conclude that proper ESG implementation acts as a safeguard towards student participation.

Quality assurance is perceived in a significant number of cases as too strongly interlinked with employability. Employability is one of the concerns of quality assurance that is highly important for the students, but the current tendency can lead to limiting the range of beneficiaries from all stakeholders and society as a whole to a more employer-focused perspective.

While some of the countries that are evaluating their quality assurance systems are discussing changes in the focus, most of the student unions surveyed remained consistent in their support for a system of quality assurance comprising both the study programme and the institutional evaluation, integrating both the role of the institution as the body primarily responsible for education and the role of the study programme as the main driver for empowering the learner to be an active vector of quality enhancement and the interface between the student and the institution, in educational matters

The register is perceived by student representatives as a political success and their support for its activities is high and increasing. Significantly, those student unions that expressed their political opposition in 2007 have changed their positions to full support. Yet, there remains a substantial (24%) share of student unions that have formed no opinion on the matter.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is necessary to initiate a process of evaluation of the implementation of the ESG, conducted in a consultative manner, where students are involved at the very core of the discussions. Students' concerns in relation to the ESG need to be a key input for this process. This is needed in order to further explore the role of external evaluation in not only controlling, but also contributing to making the internal quality assurance systems effective and compliant with the ESG.

Four years after the Bergen Declaration, genuine commitment is needed by governments for the implementation of equal partnerships with the students in quality assurance. Examples of good practice are available and they should be further promoted.

We also see a need to increase the effectiveness of both internal quality assurance systems and student involvement in quality assurance at the level of institutions. Commitment in terms of the proper implementation of the first part of the ESG is needed on behalf of the institutions. Good practice has to be spread wider and the contribution of international experts to this goal needs to be further explored.

Finally, additional efforts need to be made in order to properly inform students of the European Quality Assurance Register and on its impact on QA in the EHEA.

5.4 THE EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

The London communiqué acknowledged that *“The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA adopted in Bergen (ESG) have been a powerful driver of change in relation to quality assurance.”* This document should be the basis for the developments in quality assurance and national unions seem to be increasingly aware of it. 62% of the respondents state that they are aware “in detail” about the European Standards and Guidelines, while only one respondent reports having no awareness of them at all, 35% state that they have little awareness of them.

Compared to 2007, a clear trend of increasing awareness of the ESG amongst student representatives can be observed. The number of respondents stating that their awareness reaches “details” has increased considerably to 63% of respondents (up from 33%)⁶. We consider that the debates on quality assurance within the European student movement contributed to this improvement. In spite of the positive trend, we consider that the percentage of NUS’s being aware of the content of the ESG is still low, indicating either not enough involvement of the students (through their representatives) as legitimate stakeholders, or not enough commitment in making the quality assurance discourse understandable for the whole society and particularly for students. Further efforts need to be directed at increasing the number of NUS’s that are aware “in details” of the ESG.

From the moment when the ESG was still an idea, student unions have approached them supportively and constructively. ESU is acknowledged as a stakeholder and was equally involved in the conception of the ESG⁷. Under these circumstances, it is normal to expect a large ESG ownership amongst the NUS’s. While all unions expressed support for the ESG: 49% express full support, 51% of them also expressed reservations due to several points that do not convince them. There are no unions expressing a neutral opinion, nor opposition, whilst back in 2007, amongst the same unions, there was still a substantial group who expressed themselves as either “neutral” (41%) or opposed to the ESG (6%)⁸.

Yet, half of respondents also mention their reservations regarding the ESG in this survey. Further action is required in order to identify these concerns and to develop the necessary corrective action. Some of the frequently expressed issues of concern for student representatives deal with the lack of objectivity in external evaluations; with treating different standards unequally (in some of the cases, student participation is accorded too little significance); and with the lack of clarity due to insufficient operationalisa-

⁶ ESIB, BWSE 2007, page 17

⁷ Berlin communiqué, page 3

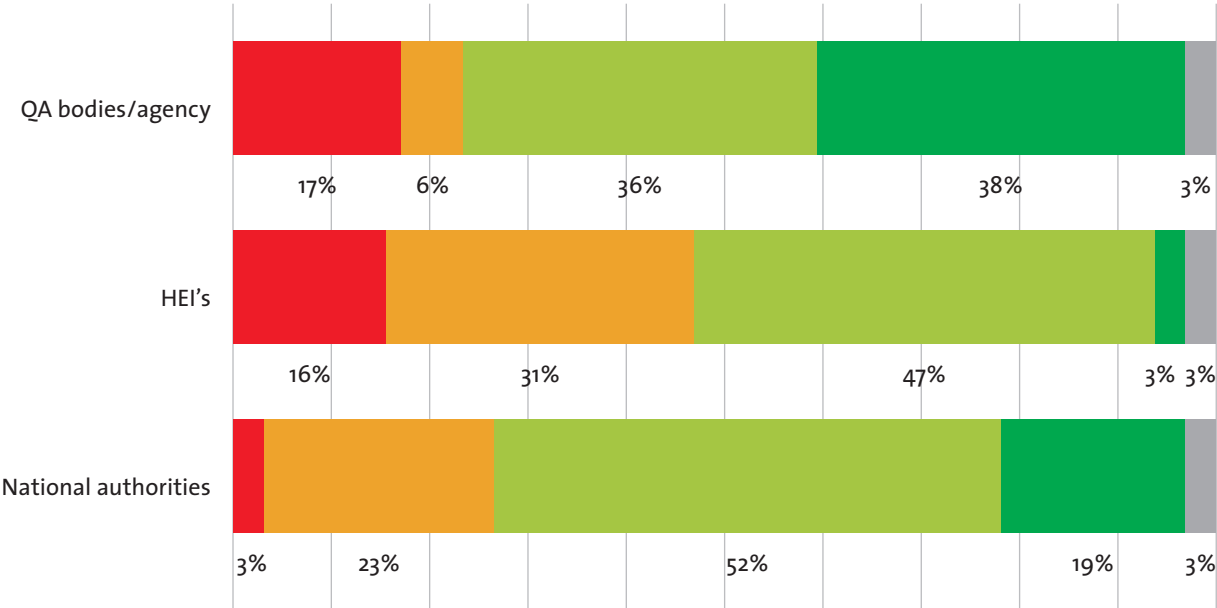
⁸ ESIB, BWSE 2007, page 17

tion (in some cases the ESG are perceived as a model of good practice to be used for the enhancement of quality in other cases, as a mandatory compliance test).

The Trends V report brings another argument to explain student unions' reserved attitude towards the implementation of the ESG at the level of institutions: student services such as libraries, academic orientation, counseling and advising, are regularly being made part of the internal quality assurance system in only a handful of countries. *"Most of these services must either be so new that they have not yet been evaluated, or alternatively there are no plans for reviewing them on a regular basis."* The only country where HEI's reported that all or nearly all institutions do evaluate student services is the UK, whilst the majority of institutions do have in place such practices in Georgia, Ireland and the Netherlands⁹.

fig. 9—ESG impact on the work of national authorities, HEI's and quality assurance agencies/bodies

- they are known, but there is reluctance to apply
- they are not known, so cannot be taken into account
- they are taken into account and they are known
- yes they are known, and taken very seriously
- no answer



9 Crosier et al, Trends V, page 55.

We can conclude that the next step in ensuring support for the ESG within the student body is to identify the causes of respondents' reservations towards it and to initiate a wide process of consultation on the assessment of the ESG, involving student unions in the core of the debate.

National student unions were asked about how seriously implementation of the ESG is taken by other key stakeholders in quality assurance, namely by national authorities, higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies/bodies.

The results reveal that, at country level, students perceive quality assurance agencies/bodies to be the ones taking the ESG most seriously. To a certain extent, such a result would be expected when taking into account that the core activity of quality assurance agencies/bodies is centred on the ESG. However, as higher education institutions remain the primary bodies responsible for quality assurance, it is quite surprising that in 47% of countries, the respondents answered that the higher education institutions were either not knowledgeable of, or reluctant in, applying the ESG. In fact, only one respondent considered that institutions have a high level of knowledge on the ESG and take them very seriously—which is a matter of real concern.

Based on these figures we could only conclude that from student unions' perspective, higher education institutions' level of commitment in terms of the implementation of the ESG is too low, as the prime prerequisite of commitment to the ESG is ensuring a minimal level of knowledge on its content.

Looking at the respective national reports¹⁰ we observe that they paint a considerably more positive image of the developments in terms of internal quality assurance. Governments are reporting that in 78% of the countries either all or at least most of institutions do have a published strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality. Furthermore, when surveyed as to whether institutions do have arrangements for internal quality assurance, governments expressed the opinion that in 41% of countries such arrangements do exist, while another 44% claim that the same arrangements exist in most of the institutions.¹¹

It can be considered that having arrangements for internal quality assurance as well as a published strategy for the enhancement of quality represents decisive indicators for a strong commitment on behalf of the institutions in terms of implementing the ESG.

¹⁰ Only the national reports that corresponded to an existing NUS questionnaire properly filled were analysed. Bulgaria's national report was not available;

¹¹ National reports, the countries corresponding to the responding unions;

The difference between the students unions' and governments' perspective on the commitment of the institutions can be explained by the fact that having published strategies or internal quality assurance arrangements may not be enough to express true commitment to quality assurance and the ESG. It can also be interpreted to mean a lack of knowledge of the situation in reality on the institutional level; these results should be confronted with the effectiveness of internal quality assurance, directly correlated with good quality of the study programmes that can only lead to genuine student satisfaction. The stock-taking questionnaires have not reached such a level of detail, as rather they are focused on the technical, procedural aspects of quality assurance within institutions.

In 26% of countries, the respondents perceived national authorities as either not knowing the ESG or being reluctant to apply them. This is rather puzzling given that Ministers have adopted the ESG and have committed themselves to the introduction of national quality assurance systems based on the principles of the ESG.¹² It seems that in a significant number of countries the ESG have been formally adopted, but the unions nevertheless consider that they are not being taken seriously in the policy making process or in developing a vision on quality assurance.

Student unions were also asked to provide us with their view on the involvement of different stakeholders in relevant QA levels in their respective countries. Academic staff has the highest percentage of participation at all levels: internal quality assurance, external quality assurance and agency governance, which is to be expected as quality assurance systems are based on the peer review model.

The involvement of international experts has been signaled as one of the best methods to spread good practices and increase the credibility of quality assurance, besides contributing to ensuring consistency in implementing the ESG around Europe. Unions reported back that the participation of international experts in internal quality assurance exists in 13% of the countries. However, in the case of external quality assurance, their level of involvement rises up to 61%. The national reports submitted for stocktaking in the Bologna Process have quite similar results (63%).

An ENQA survey on quality procedures paints an image in-line with that of student unions' and governments' opinions: 73.9% of the quality assurance agencies involve international experts in external evaluations; the analysis is carried out per agency, and not per country. Taking into account that while in most of countries there is only one agency, there are also cases of countries having more than one, these figures can be considered as expressing the same perception of the situation. Regarding the governance

12 ENQA, Quality Procedures in the European Higher Education Area and Beyond—Second ENQA Survey, Page 37

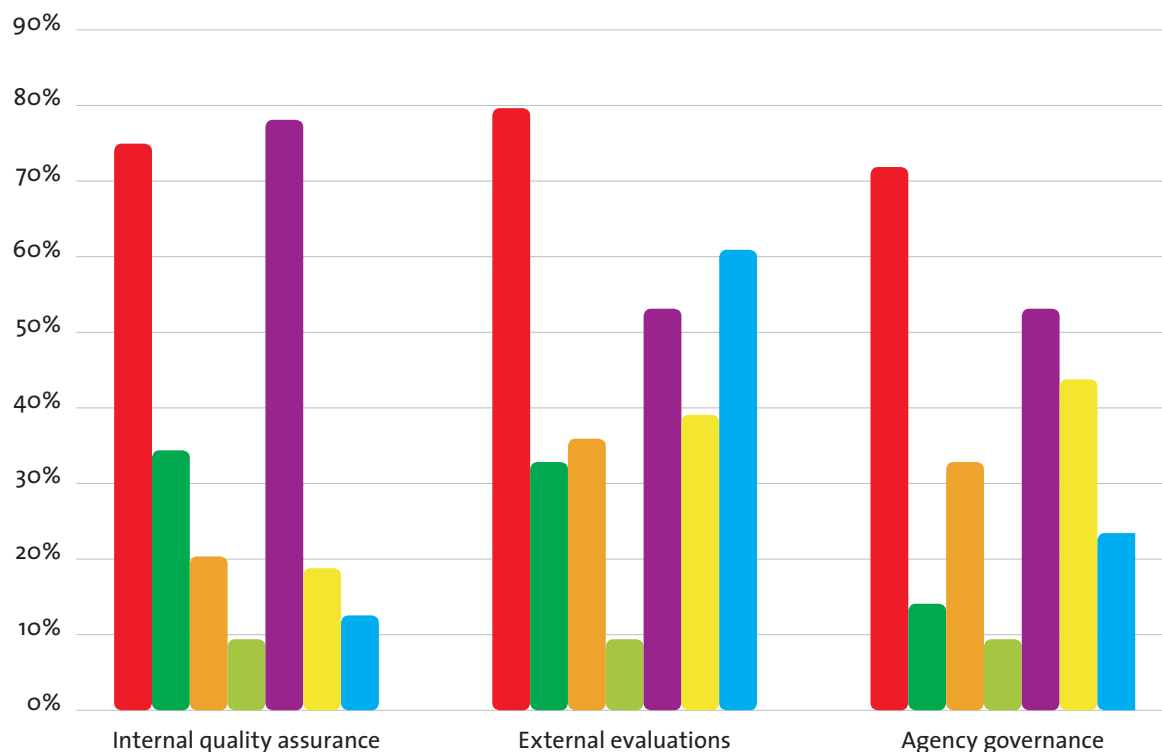


fig. 10—Stakeholder involvement in quality assurance

- Academic staff
- Non-academic staff
- Employers
- Trade Unions
- HEI's
- Public authorities
- International experts

of quality assurance agencies, 23 % of union answers' stated that international experts are included. Government officials were more generous in their answers (53%). ENQA survey validates the student union answers by stating that 31% of the responding quality assurance agencies have experts from the international quality assurance community involved in their governance. The 8% variation is acceptable due to the difference in methodologies.

Employers, meanwhile, have been included in quality assurance at different levels, which is important for increasing the dialogue between the institutions, students and the labour market. Employers are involved in internal quality assurance in 20% of countries, but this figure rises to 36% in the case of external audits (45.7% ENQA's survey perspective) and to 33% in the agencies' governance bodies. The agencies claim that in 49% of cases representatives

of industry and of the labour market participate in agencies' governance¹³. The data difference between the student union and agency perspective is higher than in the case of international experts, yet can be considered to be a good correlation nonetheless when the abovementioned differences in methodology are taken into account. It is also noteworthy that trade unions are reported to be involved in less than 10% of all the countries surveyed, in a far lower percentage than employers.

The difference between employers and trade unions' involvement can indicate that quality assurance is perceived to focus more on providing guarantees for the employers rather than on the benefits for all stakeholders (including trade unions) and society as a whole.

In most countries (56%) student unions reported that a specific body designed to oversee the operation of the ESG exists. In most cases, this responsible body is the ministry for education or the quality assurance agency.

The national unions of students' perspective on the level of compliance of the ESG with the national quality assurance system encompass all three levels: internal quality assurance, external evaluations and the quality assurance agencies.

The countries that are considered by the respondents as fully matching the ESG model are the Netherlands and Norway.

Student unions expressed their concerns regarding the internal quality assurance system in Croatia, France, Germany, Latvia and Portugal.

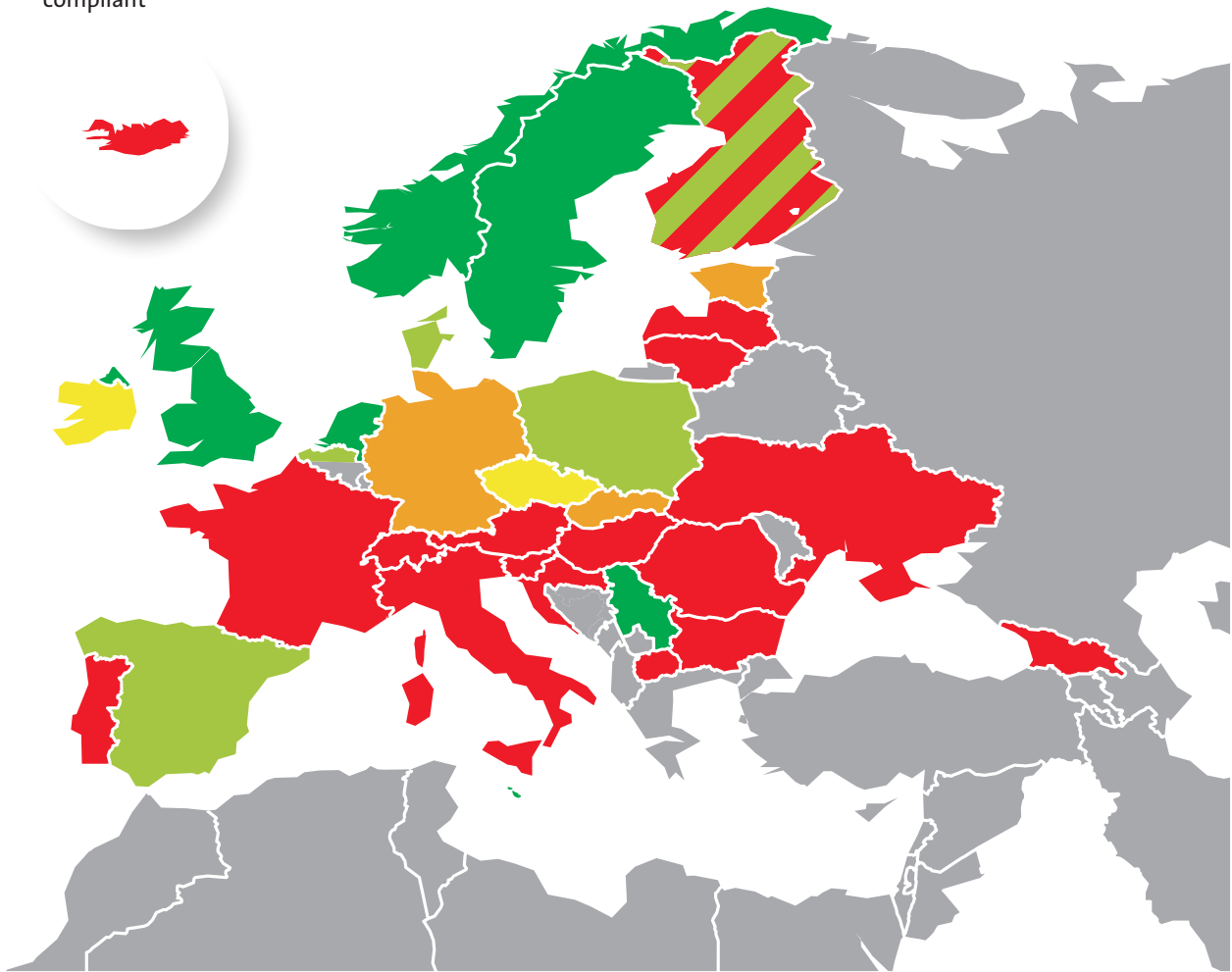
Respondents rated agencies' compliance differently in countries where such a body does not exist. Student unions from Iceland and Macedonia considered this level not compliant, whilst the national student union of Malta considered the agency (in the process of being establishment) as significantly compliant with the ESG.

The countries with a higher level of compliance for internal quality assurance than for the rest of the system are Ireland and Slovakia. The UK is rated as fully compliant for internal quality assurance and significantly compliant for the rest of the surveyed processes. For these countries we can conclude that student representatives are considering institutions to be the most progressive in terms of ESG implementation.

13 ENQA, Quality Procedures in the European Higher Education Area and Beyond—Second ENQA Survey, Page 37

fig. 11—Quality assurance systems' compliance with the ESG

- Internal QA, External QA, QA agency at least significantly compliant
- External QA and QA agency significantly compliant
- IQA significantly and either external QA or QA agency significantly compliant
- Either internal QA, external QA or QA agency significantly compliant
- Neither internal QA, external QA, nor QA agency significantly compliant



But for 27% of countries, student unions considered the external quality assurance to show a greater level of compliance than internal quality assurance.

It was also surveyed whether there was any change of initiative or change of focus from study programme to institutional quality assurance. The countries that reported such changes are Belgium (the Flemish community), Germany, the Netherlands and Slovenia. Back in 2007, the respective NUSes opinion was unanimously critical, mainly pointing out that *“the quality of single study programmes is much more crucial than the quality of the institution as a whole”*¹⁴. Most of the unions remained consistent with their position that both a study programme and institutional external QA are needed and in a complementary manner, while the unions of the Netherlands were split between supporting and being moderately positive towards the changes. In other countries, namely Denmark (the national student union supporting the institutional approach) and France (the national student union supporting the study programme approach) the drift goes the opposite way, from institutional to study programme quality assurance. Correlating these reports with the data on the impact of the ESG at institutional level, it is clear that in the Netherlands and Denmark, institutions are considered to know the ESG and to take it into account, which can be seen as an explanation for the change in the respective student unions' position since 2007.

Both institutional and study programme evaluations are equally important for the quality of education and we consider them valuable in a complementary manner. However, in the case of changing preferences for any of the two type of evaluation, consensus should be reached amongst the stakeholders, after wide consultations involving students at the core of the debate. A sudden shift of exclusive focus on one form of evaluation or another, done without the proper involvement and sense of ownership on the part of the students, has the potential of undermining the development of a sound quality culture at institutional level.

5.5 STUDENT PARTICIPATION

The role of students in quality assurance is increasing and student participation has been established as a core principle of quality assurance in the ESG. *“... society and the labour market are rapidly changing in a global environment. Students are more than ever aware of the pressure on them, develop their own ideas about their future and are more articulate in voicing what they need. (...) As the quality of their education not only affects their academic careers, but to a high degree determines their future lives, it is only fair that*

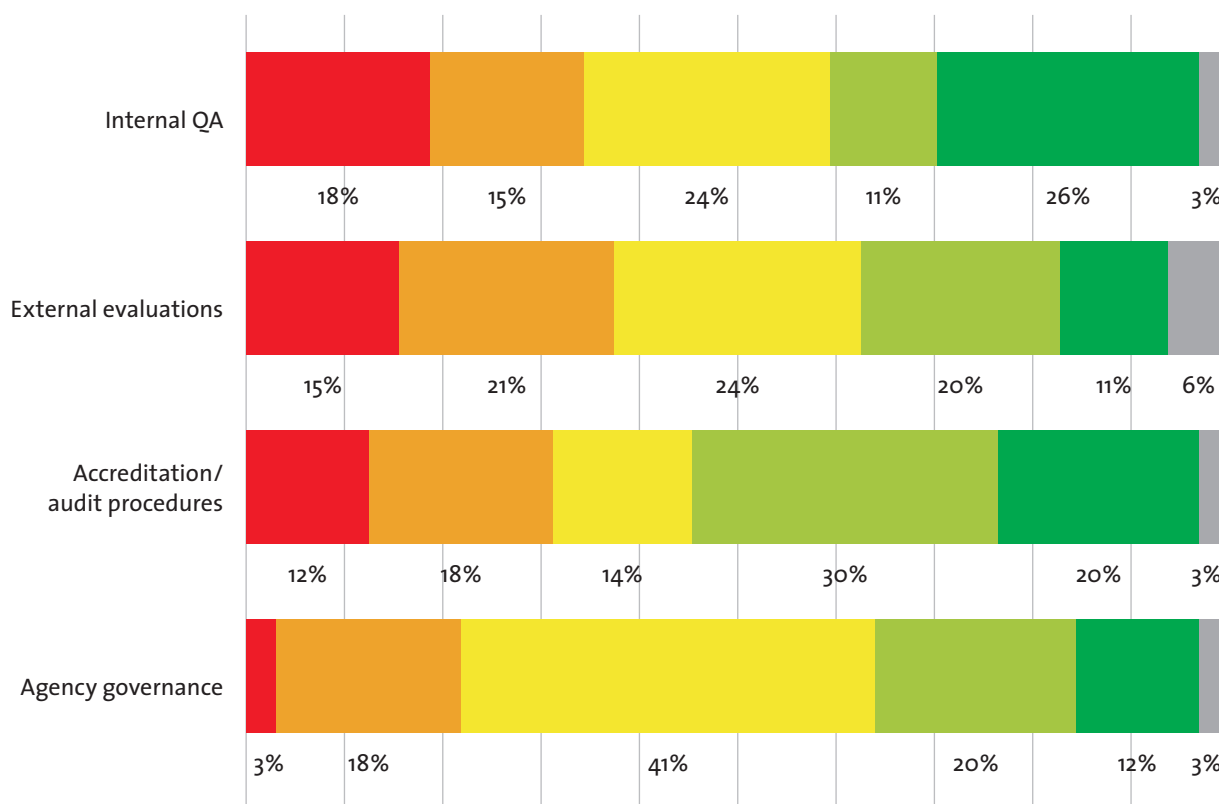
¹⁴ ESIB, BWSE 2007, page 16

fig. 12—Student participation in quality assurance processes

- no participation
- very little participation
- some participation, but far from being enough
- participation high, but still lacking in some places
- equal partners
- No answers

they have a strong say in accreditation and quality improvement.”¹⁵ Furthermore, students can bring their own unique perspective to education that can only complete the visions of the rest of the stakeholders.

Trends V also acknowledges that increased student involvement is in fact a driver of QA within the institution concerned. High levels of student involvement are regarded as highly beneficial by both students and institutional leaders alike¹⁶ and can be considered an indicator for institutions with more experience in internal QA and for more mature external QA systems.



¹⁵ ARACIS audit report, page 28

¹⁶ Crosier et al, Trends V, page 57

The questionnaire surveyed how the national student unions consider their participation in internal quality assurance, in external evaluations of study programmes and institutions, in accreditation and audit processes and in the governance of agencies. The figures are presented in the following chart:

In half of the countries, students do participate highly or as equal partners in external evaluation, which is a rather technical process that precedes decisions on accreditation. It is the highest percent of proper student involvement and we interpret it as confirmation of the capacity of the students to follow rather technical processes.

On the negative side, we can observe that the percentage of countries that are not involving students at all, grows from external evaluations to agency governance. We interpret this as reminiscent of reluctance shown in giving students full decision making powers. This reluctance is increasing with the potential impact of the decisions.

38% of the respondents considered that their national quality assurance agencies have in-depth knowledge of the ESG and take them very seriously in their work. 37% of the countries are in the “green zone” when it comes to student participation in the governance of the agencies. We can therefore conclude that there is a strong correlation between awareness on the ESG and student participation.

We would expect to be able extrapolate the same correlation to internal quality assurance, but we cannot observe such similarities. Trends V¹⁷ also places new concepts in quality assurance contained in the ESG amongst the incentives for students increasing presence in quality assurance processes within institutions. We consider that this situation is the result of the fact that student participation is one of the disadvantaged issues in quality assurance, hence the reservations of the student unions generated by the implementation of the ESG.

At institutional level, it is noteworthy that NUSes stated that students do participate in 96% of countries, as anticipated also by Trends V back in 2007 by mentioning institutions’ tendency to include students in such activities¹⁸. In 12% of the countries, respondents affirm that students are equal partners in internal quality assurance and in 20% of the cases they consider that student participation reaches high levels, but remains lacking in some places. Asked what the mechanisms of participation are, the majority of respondents stated that they are heterogeneous and depend from university to university, with the most

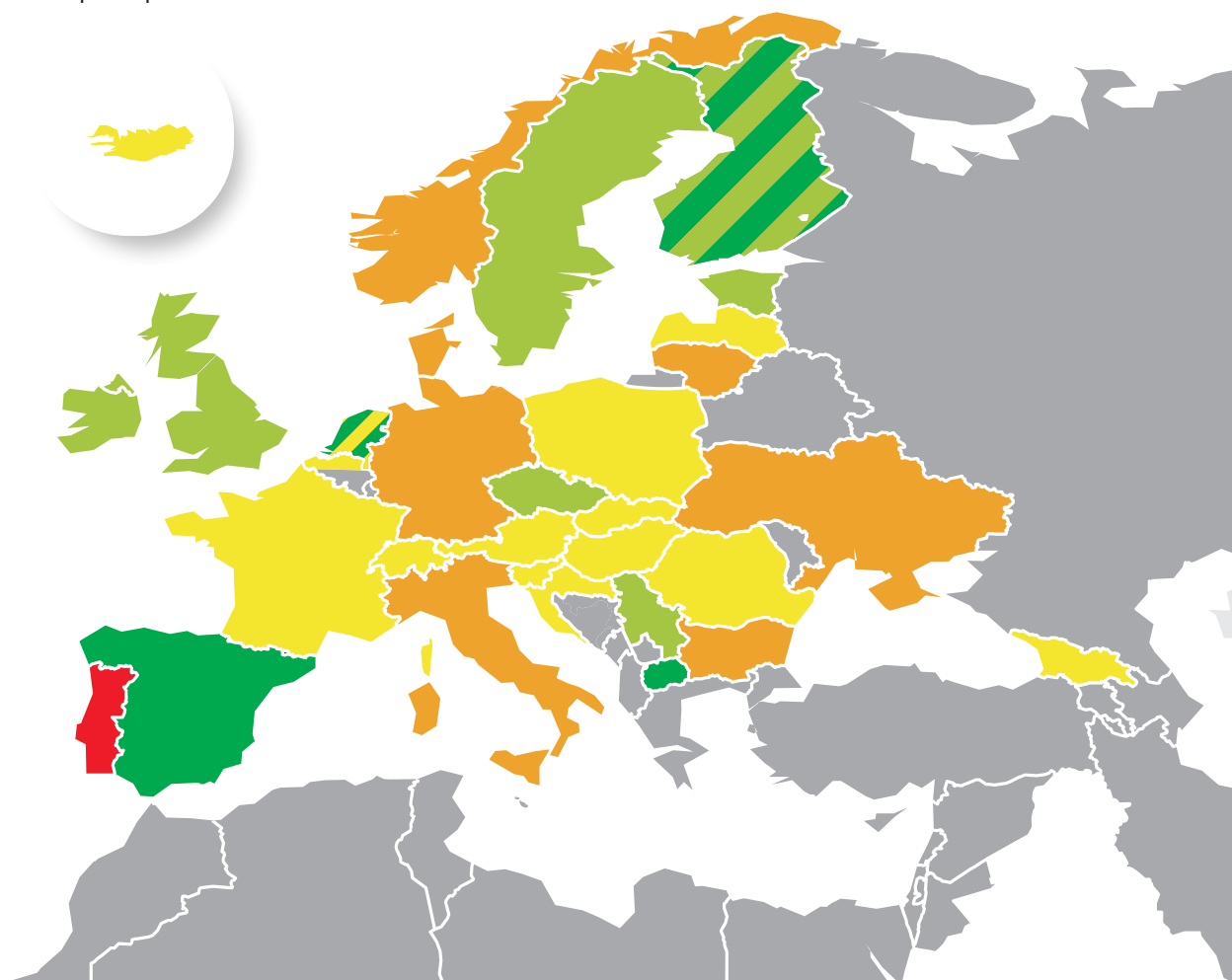
¹⁷ idem, ibidem, page 57

¹⁸ idem, ibidem, page 8

fig. 13—Student participation in internal quality assurance

- equal partners
- participation high but still lacking in some places
- some participation but far from being enough
- very little participation
- no participation

common being representatives in bodies dealing with QA and in governance structures. Yet, 62% of the countries are outside the “green zone”, dark or light ... In most of the countries (41%) student unions consider that there is some participation at institutional level, but this remains far from sufficient. 18% of countries are rated with low participation, while in only one country we find that the student union considered that students do not have the opportunity to participate in internal quality assurance.



Student participation in external evaluations is also becoming a widespread practice. However, in only 20% of countries did respondents consider that students are equal partners in such processes, whilst in another 30%, student unions considered that the level of participation is high but still lacking in some places. In 16% of countries, it is considered that some participation exists, but far from enough, whilst 19% of countries are rated as having very little student involvement.

The respondents stated that students do not participate at all in external quality assurance in 13% of countries. There are examples of countries where student experts' pools for external evaluations do exist and are coordinated by student organisations: Belgium, Germany, Romania, Scotland and Switzerland. In other cases, the quality assurance agencies are the ones organising the student evaluators: UK and Spain.

We can conclude that, when it comes to the processes being coordinated by quality assurance agencies, student participation is regarded as being generally better, with the exception of: Estonia, Ireland, Czech Republic and FYROM.

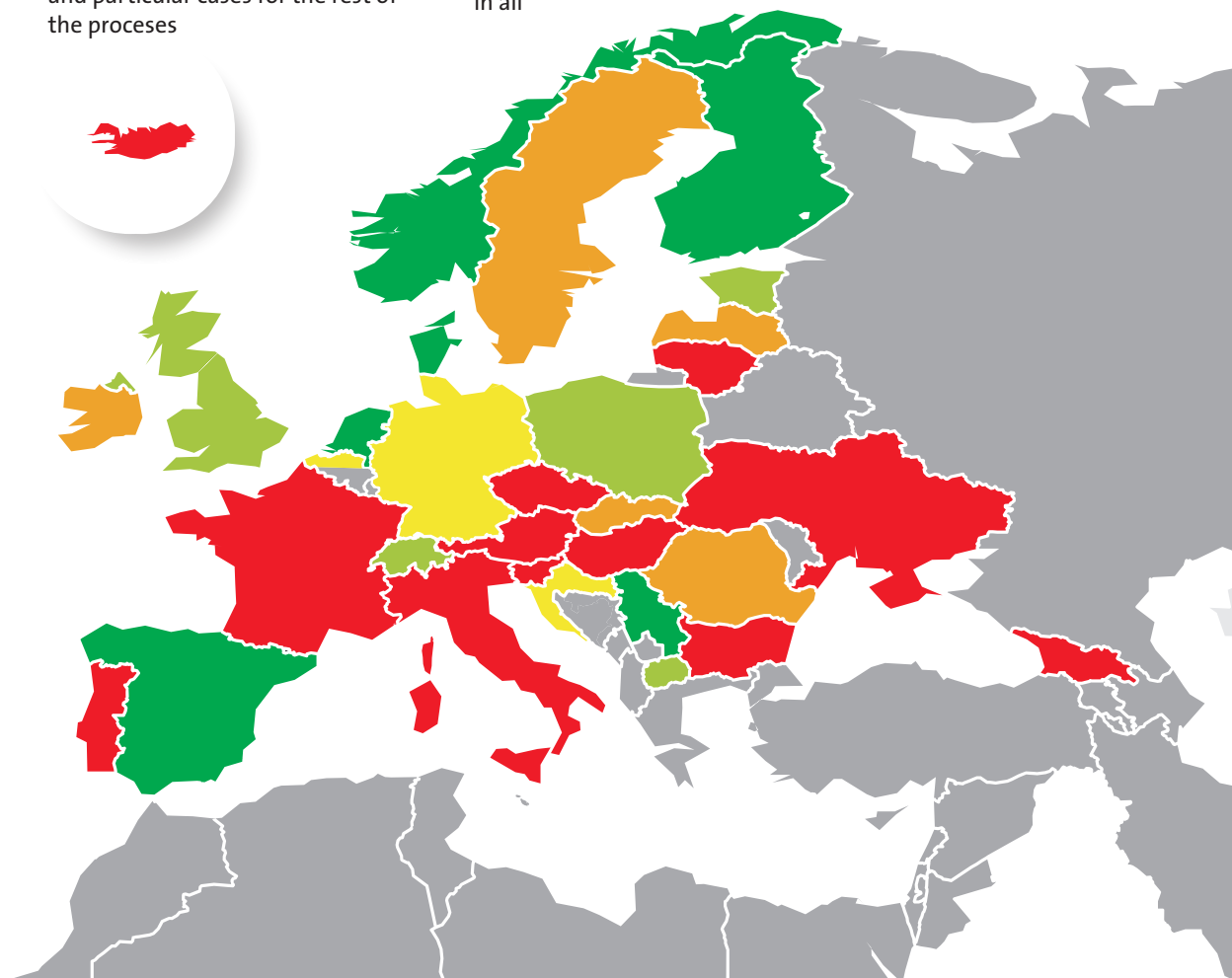
In Estonia and Switzerland, the NUSes are equal partners in the governance of the agencies, but students do not participate in any other process coordinated by the agencies. In FYROM the NUS is highly participating in agency governance and students' participation is also high in external evaluations, but still lacking in some places. In the United Kingdom the NUS is equal partner agency governance and students' participation is high in external evaluations, but still lacking in some places. In Poland, the NUS is highly participating in the governance of the agency and in the accreditation processes. We notice that in the cases of Poland and the United Kingdom, student participation is following the trends set by the focus of the national quality assurance system: accreditation for Poland and enhancement—external evaluations for the United Kingdom.

Governments, on the other hand, responded three fold to the question of whether students do participate in external evaluation activities and in agencies' governance. We can consider that governments answering "yes, students do participate" should correspond to the "equal partners", "high level of participation" and "some participation but far from being enough" categories from the student questionnaire, while "in some cases" should correspond to "very little participation".

For external evaluation activities, in 37% of the countries student unions' opinions do not correspond to those of governments. What is interesting is that in 45% of these cases, the unions have a more positive

fig. 14—Student participation in external evaluation, audit/accreditation processes, agency governance

- high participation or equal partners in external evaluations, audit/accreditation and quality assurance governance
- high participation or equal partners in agency governance and particular cases for the rest of the processes
- high participation or equal partners in external evaluations and audit/accreditation processes
- high participation or equal partners in external evaluation
- unsatisfactory level of participation in all



perception on their involvement, while in the rest of the cases, governments are the ones claiming that students participate more than unions' appreciate.

In the case of participation in quality assurance agency's governance, in 43% of the countries, student unions opinions do not match governments'. The unions have been more positive in 46% of the cases, almost equal as in the case of external evaluations.

We can conclude that there are a fair amount of countries, 37 to 43%, where student unions' views on their participation in external evaluations and agency governance are in conflict with governments' views. Assuming that all the respondents, both student unions and governments, responded with objectivity, the explanation is that student participation is perceived differently by the two sides. Further dialogue is needed in order to bridge this gap and ensure similar perceptions on student participation in quality assurance processes.

Unions were also questioned on the impact student participation makes and a clear tendency could not be identified. Some unions considered that their participation is taken seriously and they are regarded as equals by their partners, while other NUSes stated that student participation is moving from formal to real, with a considerable investment of time and energy. Some were rather pessimistic, claiming that at the end of the day, in spite of their efforts, students are being outvoted in important decisions. 10% of NUSes (stated that their participation is just a formality.

5.6 EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE REGISTER

The EQAR was founded in 2008, governed by the E4 group partners: ENQA, ESU, EUA, and EURASHE. Its expected impact is mainly to enhance trust in higher education in the EHEA, facilitate recognition and enhance mobility. The main issues in shifting the QA paradigm are placing the stakeholders and the general public as the primary beneficiaries of QA, by opening access to objective information and increasing the ownership of QA amongst stakeholders¹⁹. The Register includes representatives of HEI's, students and QA agencies, but also social partners and government representatives. This stakeholder approach is the Register's hallmark.²⁰

¹⁹ London communiqué, page 4

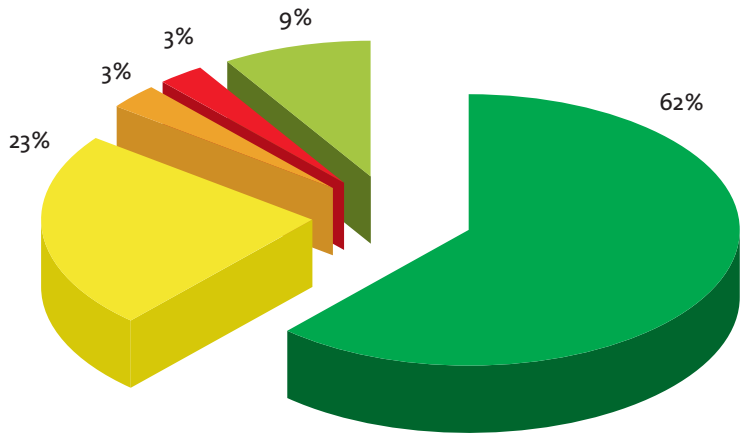
²⁰ ESIB, Berlin declaration, page 3

The findings of the survey clearly show that the broad majority of national student unions support the newly created EQAR. The number of NUSes that fully support the register has increased by 24%²¹ since 2007. The percentage of NUSes supporting it with some concerns has decreased from 25% in 2007 to 9% in 2009, indicating that the register managed to convince a substantial number of unions on its role and utility. The most frequent expressed concerns in 2007 were dealing with the negative aspects of creating a quality assurance market: conflicts of interests, the opportunity to choose a more permissive agency, the difficulties emerging national quality assurance systems will face in direct competition.

On the negative side, the percentage of respondents who hadn't formed an opinion on the register remained high, in fact, if we just compare the responses of the unions that responded both in 2007 and 2009, it increased by 6% since 2007. These figures clearly reflect the fact that the register was not sufficiently promoted amongst student representatives and further efforts must be made in terms of both information and promotion.

fig. 15—Student unions' support for register

- Full support
- Partial support, with some concerns
- No opinion
- Not sure
- I don't know this register



It is remarkable that all NUSes which expressed opposition to the EQAR back in 2007 have now declared that they fully support the register.

We can conclude that EQAR and the principles behind it have managed to convince the critical voices in the student movement and that it is gaining increased support.

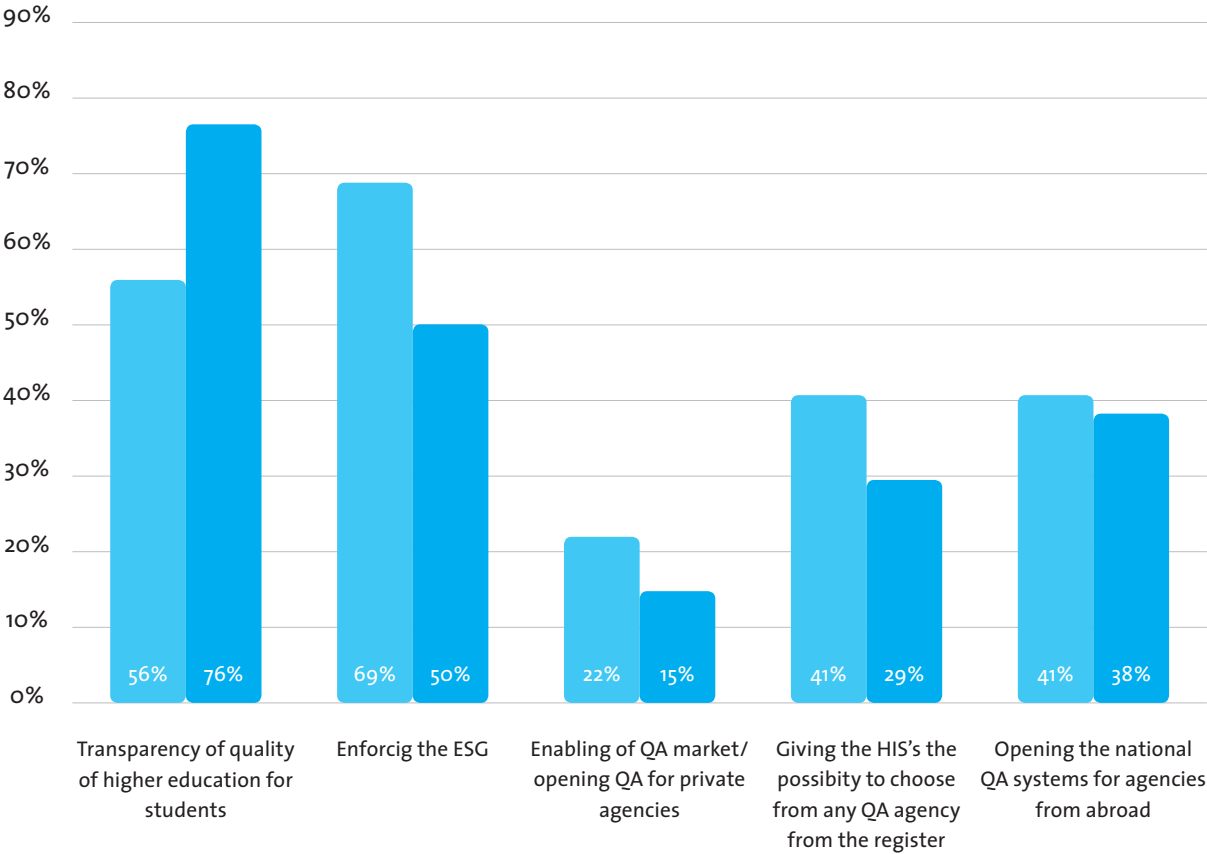
²¹ For accuracy in interpretation of the trends, this part of the analysis refers only to the unions that responded to the BWSE questionnaire both in 2007 and in 2009

Whilst reading the national reports indicates us that governments expect the inclusion in EQAR to be regarded as the main indicator for the credibility of the country's QA system, NUS expectations are more process-oriented. The most widely expected impact of EQAR is enforcement of the ESG, while transparency in terms of the quality of higher education remains at the top NUSes expectations. Giving HEI's the possibility to choose from any quality assurance agency on the register and opening national quality assurance systems to agencies from abroad are developments expected by a substantial number of NUSes, indicating that the register is seen as connected to the internationalisation of the quality assurance agency.

fig. 16—Expected impact of the register

- 2009
- 2007

The chart shows results for the unions that responded both in 2007 and 2009, in order to better illustrate the changes that have taken place since



London. Enforcement of the ESG shows a 19% increase in terms of the expected impact of the EQAR, showing that unions do place trust in the registers' model. 20% of unions no longer expect that EQAR will reach a higher level of transparency in quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

We can only conclude that EQAR needs to promote its work further, with an emphasis on the outcomes of its activities that are connected to transparency, such as the register of member quality assurance agencies.

It is important to note ESU's aims in relation to EQAR: increased and reliable information, aiming to increase the transparency and trust in European QA, and therefore, in mobility enhancement.

6 STUDENT MOBILITY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Mobility is fundamental to the Bologna Process and has become a barometer of the success of the entire reform agenda. It is widely regarded as both a tool and an end in itself, due to its well-known role in fostering tolerance and diversity at the societal level, while contributing to personal development, social networking and employability. At the last Conference in London, this point was widely acknowledged by Ministers: *“Mobility of staff, students and graduates is one of the core elements of the Bologna Process, creating opportunities for personal growth, developing international cooperation between individuals and institutions, enhancing the quality of higher education and research, and giving substance to the European dimension.”*

Mobility can also be a tool for the proper implementation of the Bologna Process, because it engages with every policy area of it: qualifications frameworks, understanding of ECTS and learning outcomes, progress on recognition practices, trust in quality assurance mechanisms, attention to internationalisation, concern with the European dimension, development of flexible and student-centred provision and significant social support for the student body to achieve its full potential. Although the Ministers committed to a number of actions for removing obstacles to mobility, and while calling for more institutional commitment and striving for balanced mobility flows, it appears that no substantial progress has been made as mobility opportunities are still out-of-reach for many students across the European Higher Education Area.

This chapter will focus on students’ perception regarding the progress made in removing the main mobility obstacles: financial restraints, administrative red-tape, recognition barriers and language provision. It will also look into the general perception in terms of the involvement of the national and institutional levels in fostering mobility.

6.2 CONCLUSIONS

When looking at general student perceptions, it seems like progress on making mobility the rule, rather than an exception, is considerably slower than the rhythm of commitments expressed by the ministers,

higher education institutions leaders and European institutions representatives in various European mobility seminars.

Financial problems related to the lack of accessible and portable grants and loans, in addition to clear limitations in covering the actual costs of studying and living have a significant impact on the motivation of students to be mobile. Fears of recognition difficulties, generated particularly by institutional protectionism and the lack of proper implementation of recognition tools are also a severe deterrent to the increase in mobility numbers.

When looking at whether mobility flows have become more balanced, it becomes obvious that the lack of an overall European target and underpinning strategy for mobility fosters very different approaches across the EHEA states. Fears of a brain drain puts a strain on the political commitment to invest in mobility and students have to face supplementary restrictions in order to access mobility support schemes, in addition to complicated administrative procedures, especially if we look at the non-EU to EU flows. From the answers provided by our members, it seems that little concern is given to the issue of diversifying the mobile student population, with a special focus on students with special needs and students with families.

Data collection continues to be a problem, although surveys such as Eurostudent made mobility more measurable across the European continent. In order to balance the mobility flows, the need for objective information gathering and analysis is self-evident. Hence, we recommend all countries to commit to comprehensive data collection and provide the necessary support for progress in this area.

For mobility to be more than an auxiliary action line in the next decade, a clear coordinated effort should be made. Both governments and stakeholders should combine their efforts in order to follow a common strategy to make balanced EHEA mobility a viable reality.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the conclusions listed above, the following actions are essential in fostering mobility across the European Higher Education Area:

- ▶ Financing mobility—more coordination and investment needed:
 - ▶ multilevel coordination of funding sources at European, regional, national and institutional level,
 - ▶ introducing full support for mobility, not just partial assistance as in the case of Erasmus, in addition to making grants and loans fully portable,
 - ▶ the setting up of a European mobility fund that could function in a similar manner to the CEEPUS system.
- ▶ Addressing the need for institutional commitment in the field of recognition, through the implementation of grassroots Bologna Process recognition tools and the development of a European Charter for mobility, for guaranteeing the rights of mobile students across the EHEA.
- ▶ Making a true governmental commitment to remove “red-tape” administrative obstacles: visas and work permits.
- ▶ Taking a straightforward and easy-to-monitor European political commitment—20% mobile students by 2020. Every fifth student should be mobile in an academically meaningful way during the study period.
- ▶ Committing to national action plans for mobility, underpinning an overarching European strategy for mobility.
- ▶ Improve data collection and analysis, in order to make the progress in the field of mobility evident across the EHEA.

6.4 FINANCIAL OBSTACLES

Ministers have consistently reaffirmed their commitment—in the Berlin, Bergen and London communiqués—to removing the remaining barriers to the portability of loans and grants and recognising this issue as a major obstacle to student mobility. Despite some improvement, this survey has returned results which show that there still are many impediments to full portability.

Perhaps the most considerable area of concern, reported by the majority of unions, is the particular difficulties with portability when it comes to full cycle mobility to non-EU EHEA and non-EHEA countries.

Most countries still report lingering problems with the full portability of loans and grants for all forms of mobility. This is particularly evident in Romania, the Czech Republic and Lithuania, where unions state that portability is still not possible in any case.

In other countries portability is often not possible or is hindered by major obstacles for certain types of mobility. One case in point is Ukraine, where students report major obstacles for every type of mobility, while in the UK, full portability is only available for short-term Erasmus type mobility, with major barriers still remaining for all other periods spent abroad.

It was only the respondents from Malta, Finland, Croatia and Italy that reported that students faced no major obstacles in terms of the portability of their grants and loans. Noteworthy is the example of Croatia, which has registered significant progress since 2007, with students now reporting fully portable loans and grants when compared to none being available by the publishing date of the 2007 edition of this survey.

Many unions report that portability for all forms of student mobility is often limited or prevented by a number of minor obstacles. This is clearly shown to be the case in Bulgaria, Slovakia, Sweden, Netherlands, Norway, Iceland, Austria, Denmark Belgium, Luxembourg and Macedonia—with students in Slovakia identifying administrative difficulties as being one remaining barrier in question.

As it seems relative progress is being made across the European Higher Education Area on ensuring various forms of portable financial aid for students²², this year's edition of the BWSE also tries to answer the question of whether this support is sufficient to cover the studying and living costs incurred by mobile students. More than 80% of the respondents indicated that many or some national students spending a period abroad do not find their grant or loan sufficient to meet their living expenses.

Respondents in Denmark and Belgium (the Flemish community) indicate clear problems related to students going to countries outside the Erasmus area or the EHEA, with tuition fees in particular being mentioned as a definite deterrent to going abroad.

22 According to the Bologna Process Stocktaking Leuven/ Louvain-la-Neuve 2009, p.95

fig. 17—Portability of grants and loans

- grants and loans are fully portable
- portability of grants and loans is possible with minor obstacles
- portability of grants and loans is possible with major obstacles
- portability of grants and loans is not possible

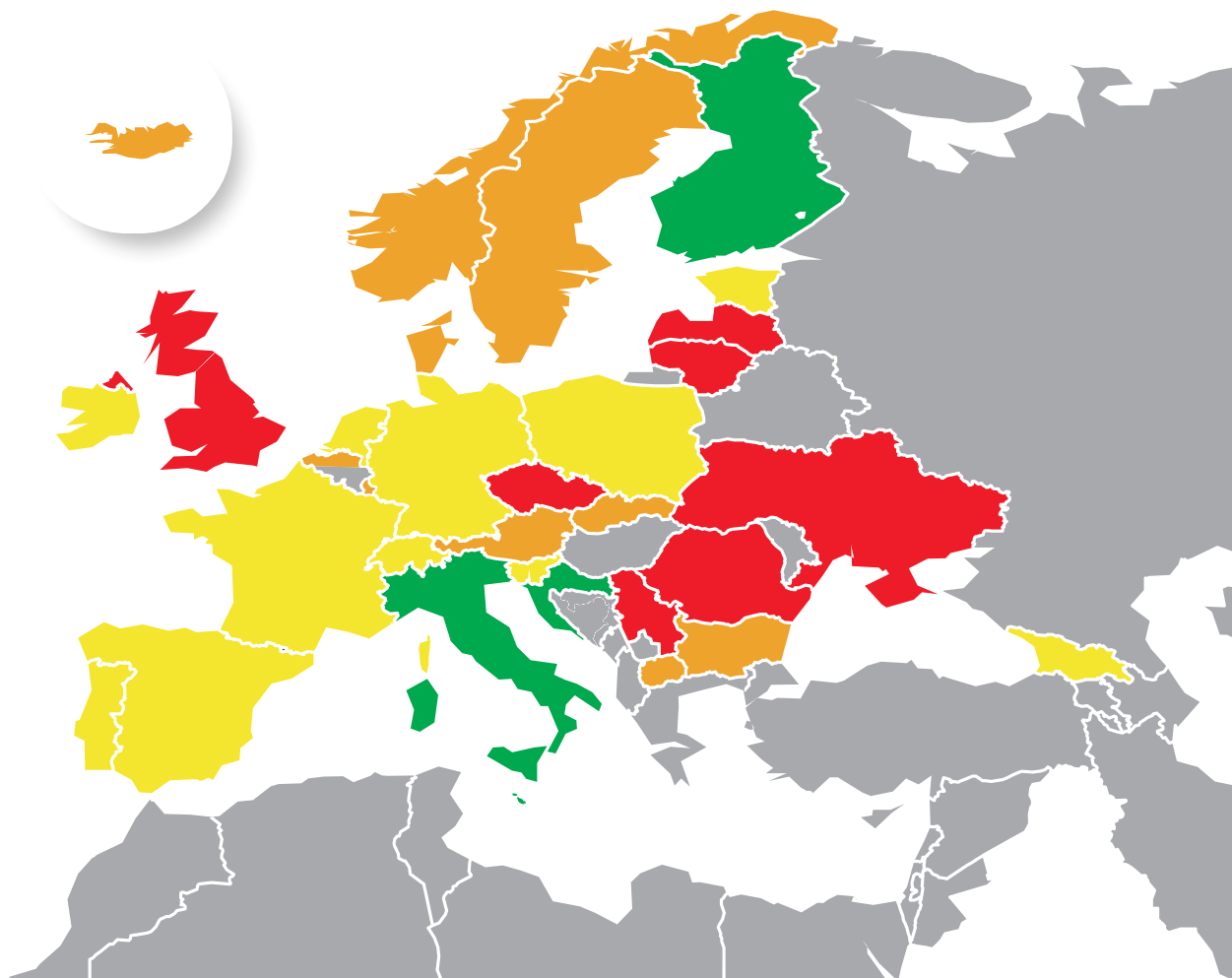
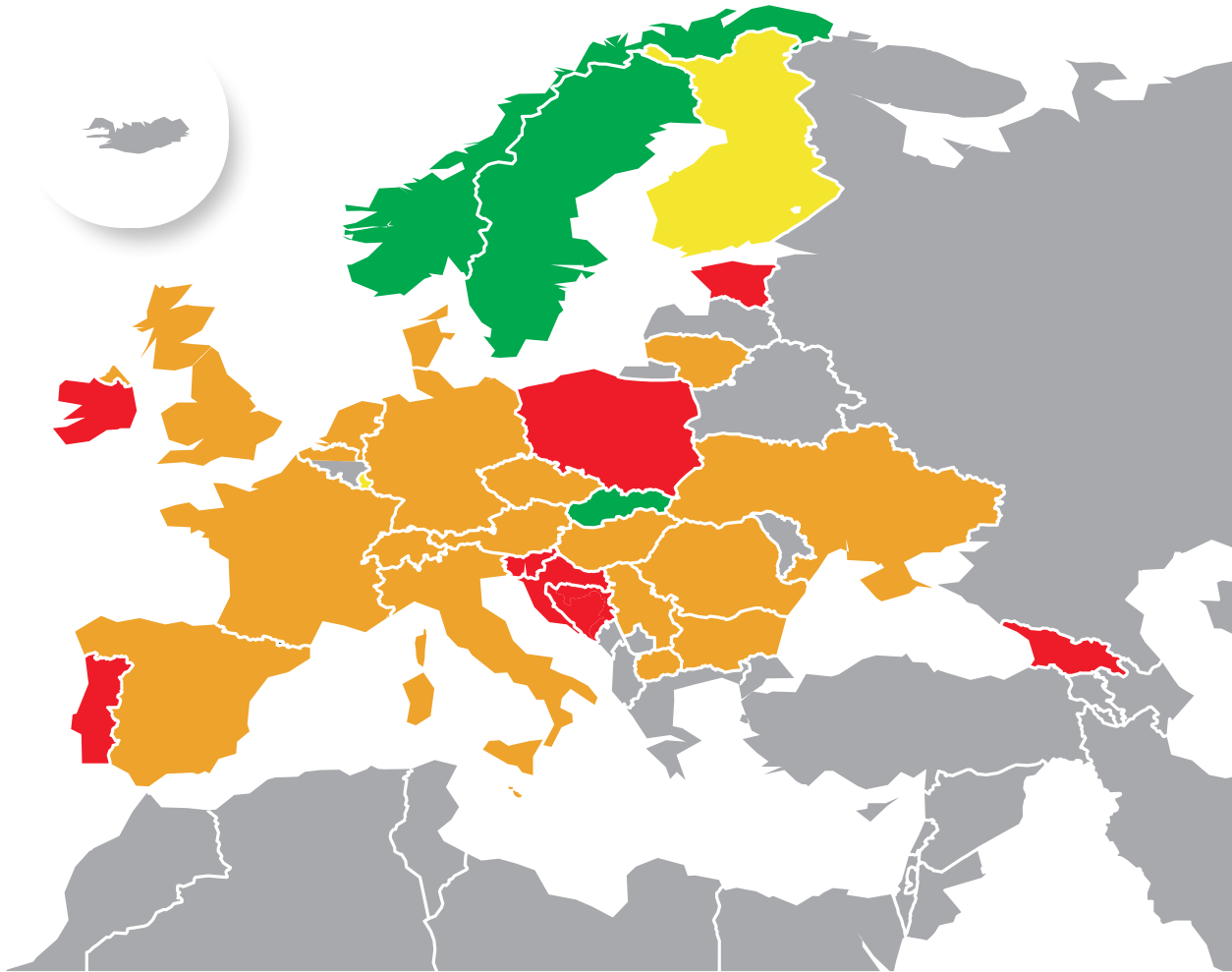


fig. 18—Situation of national students spending a period abroad that encounter problems meeting their living expenses from their grant or loan

- None or almost none have problems
- Few have problems
- Some students have problems
- Many students have problems



Students in Croatia, Estonia, Ireland, Slovenia, Portugal and Poland report serious problems with being able to meet living expenses abroad with their grant or loan. On the other hand, students in Sweden and Finland seem not to have to face such problems.

It is clear is that if countries are to reach the target of 20% of students being mobile by 2020; urgent increased focus needs to be given to removing these remaining obstacles and increasing the financial incentives available to students.

The picture seems slightly better, but not significantly improved, when analysing whether foreign students spending a study period in their respective higher education system have problems meeting their living and studying expenses from their grants and loans. 70% of respondents pointed out that most or some foreign students have problems in meeting their expenses. Ireland, Denmark, France, Germany, Finland and Norway are revealed to be the countries where the highest amount of foreign students incur severe financial problems in trying to offset their expenses with the available grants and loans.

The Mobility Barometer (Connor Cradden, 2008) points out that 58% of respondents were dissatisfied or entirely dissatisfied with the funding available for mobility. The difference in figures might originate from different types of additional support for mobility. In this regard, it is clear that there is a need for coordinating the various types of funds available for mobility, at European, regional, national and institutional level; so that larger shares of the costs incurred are offset and any available funds are used in an effective manner.

A relevant aspect in discussing mobility is the extent to which opportunities for a meaningful mobility period abroad are granted to different groups of students, for example students with disabilities or female students. 60 % of the respondents said that mobility opportunities are distributed reasonably fairly but extreme cases were signaled, such as Ukraine and Slovenia, where it seems like mobility opportunities are completely beyond the reach of certain student groups. Among the reasons mentioned for some groups not having equal access to being mobile, the following were mentioned: lack of counseling, lack of additional support and non-existent special facilities for students with disabilities. It is clear that more effort in the direction of ensuring equal mobility opportunities is required and a possible solution could include concrete support measures in future national and institutional action plans for mobility.

In addition to this, significant administrative deterrents are making mobility complicated, especially between EU and non-EU countries. Several countries have started to improve the situation, but more

involvement from the government side is necessary for lifting visa and working permit-related obstacles for mobility.

6.5 INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT FOR MOBILITY

While the European ministers committed to making mobility a reality within their authority, higher education institutions have had the freedom to decide their own policies regarding mobility. But are the institutions convinced of the benefits of mobility? And if so, what is their contribution in fostering mobility in a balanced manner, while fulfilling the recent internationalisation recent goal?

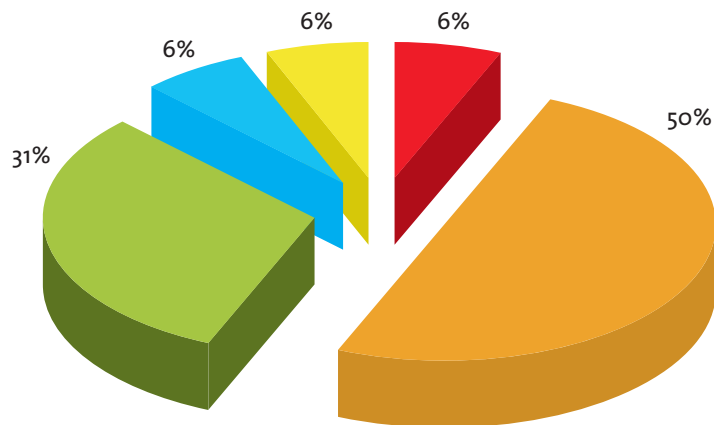
Three main areas were surveyed within the European Students' Union membership: support of the institution for incoming or outgoing mobile students, recognition of credits or existing qualifications and language provision.

When asked whether students wishing to spend a period abroad have problems getting the support or permission of their institution, 55% of the respondents answered that most or some have such problems. The Finnish and Romanian student unions pointed out that the support of the institution depends highly on the destination of the mobility programme. The areas in which students feel that they are not supported by the institution are primarily recognition (France, Bulgaria, Germany, Luxembourg, Malta), followed by information (most respondents) and obstacles posed by academic staff and inflexibility / overburdening the curricula (Norway). Also, a clear deterrent for accessing mobility support schemes is the academic performance filters mentioned by the Slovenian and Slovakian student unions. Moreover, it seems that these obstacles appear with more frequency in some fields of study and have a strong link with the duration of the mobility period spent abroad, especially in Croatia, France and Georgia.

When discussing the possible problems with the recognition of credits gained abroad during the mobility period, 85% of the respondents said that many or some students have problems in this department. This outcome seems to be consistent with both the Data collection and Stocktaking 2009 reports, especially since the link between ECTS and learning outcomes is usually problematic. An interesting example of institutional obstacles linked with credit recognition comes from Switzerland. Here, credits are recognised but not validated. In some higher education institutions credits are recognised without validation, which means that these “extra credits” are not accumulated but only “added as a surplus in the diploma supplement”.

fig. 19—Percentage of student unions stating that students have problems related to the institution's permission or support

- None or almost none have problems
- Depends on their destination
- Some have problems
- Many have problems
- Not sure/difficult to say



One of the reasons that students lack the confidence to go abroad is the lack of linguistic proficiency. Since language provision is of an institutional remit, we surveyed the extent to which the appropriate language courses are available before departing to participate in a mobility programme abroad.

22% of respondents confirmed that many students have problems accessing these courses, while 60% indicated that some students have such problems, especially when languages are not a mandatory part of the curricula. The problems originate also from language courses only being provided in English and French (in Belgium, Italy and Denmark), when a much larger variety would have been required to satisfy the needs of outgoing students. The fact the quite often the language courses are not free of charge has a

fig. 20—Status of free language provision around Europe

- Free language provision in all programmes and HEI
- Free in some programmes and HEI
- Additional fees are always or almost always charged
- Not sure/difficult to say

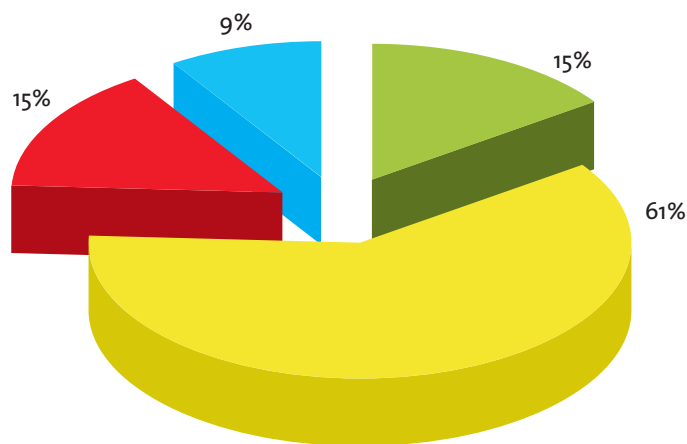
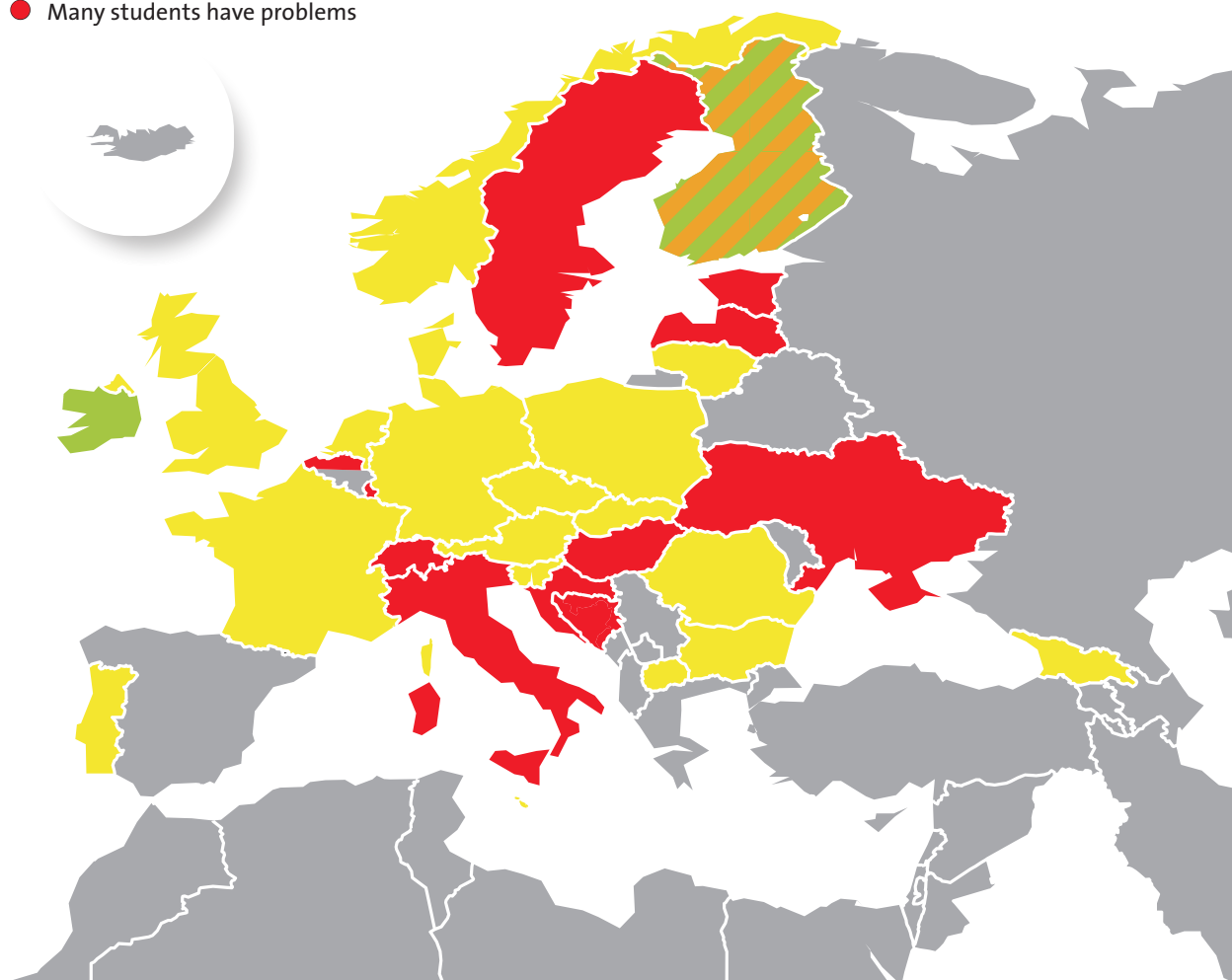


fig. 21—Situation of national students returning from a period of study abroad encountering problems with the recognition of their credits

- None or almost none have problems
- Some students have problems
- Depends on where they were studying
- Many students have problems



significant impact on students' ability to achieve the confidence and motivation to apply for a mobility period. 63% of the respondents confirmed that language courses are free only in some institutions and programmes, usually conditioned by their inclusion in the curricula. 16% of the respondents confirmed that additional fees are always or almost always charged. The countries with such a system are Germany, Croatia, Austria, Belgium and Malta. What is interesting is that these countries seem to have a rather high degree of outgoing mobility, which means that probably language provision is considered as an additional source of funding for higher education institutions. One might wonder if the language courses were to be more accessible, whether the mobility figures would not noticeably increase.

If we look at the type of obstacles still present at the institutional level, we can easily see that instruments such as a Bologna Charter for Mobile Students would help in guaranteeing the rights of mobile students and raise the stakes for higher education institutions in their mission to support and foster mobility in their internationalisation process.

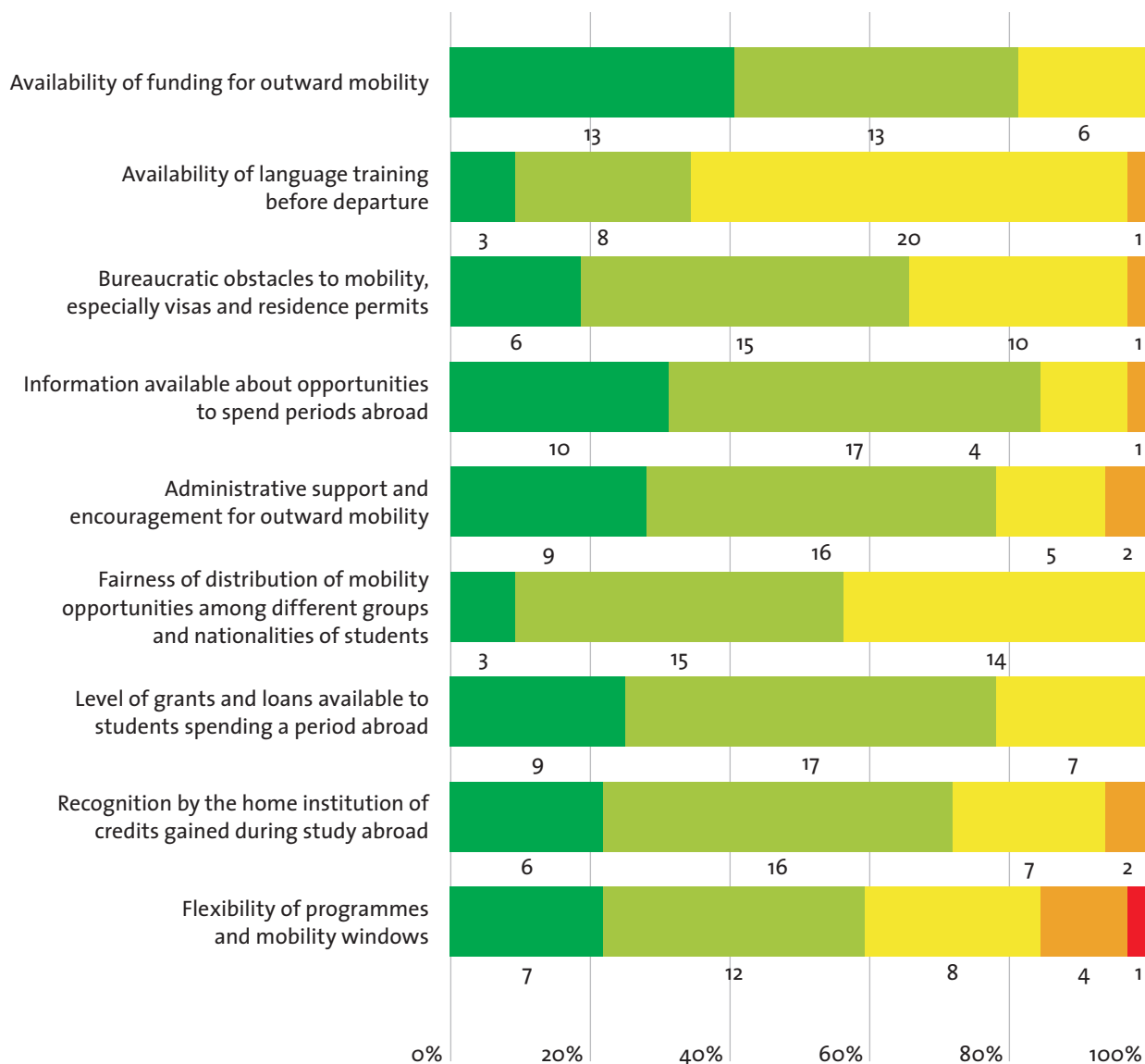
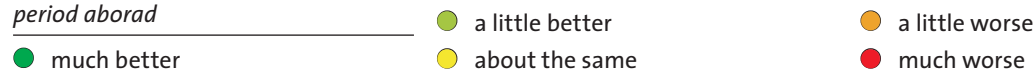
6.6 GENERAL PROGRESS IN REMOVING MOBILITY OBSTACLES

As a new agenda is emerging and mobility competes for a front row position in the next list of Bologna working priorities, we have asked our members how they saw progress in removing various mobility obstacles.

From the graphs below we can see that in terms of almost all the possible obstacles listed, the situation seems to have remained the same or presents slight improvements, notably with reference to information, administrative support and the level of grants and loans for national students who have spent or wish to spend a period abroad. Similarly, for foreign students who have spent or who wish to spend a period in the respective country, information and administrative procedures seem to be the issues that generate most progress. Worrying developments can be seen in the field of language provision and in the fairness of the distribution of mobility opportunities.

The situation at the European level continues to be remarkably diverse when speaking about the level of commitment for mobility. Hence a coherent and overarching European strategy for mobility, underpinned by concrete national action plans to remove mobility obstacles, would ensure an increased and more balanced inward and outward flow of mobile students.

fig. 22—Situation for national students who have spent or who wish to spend a period abroad



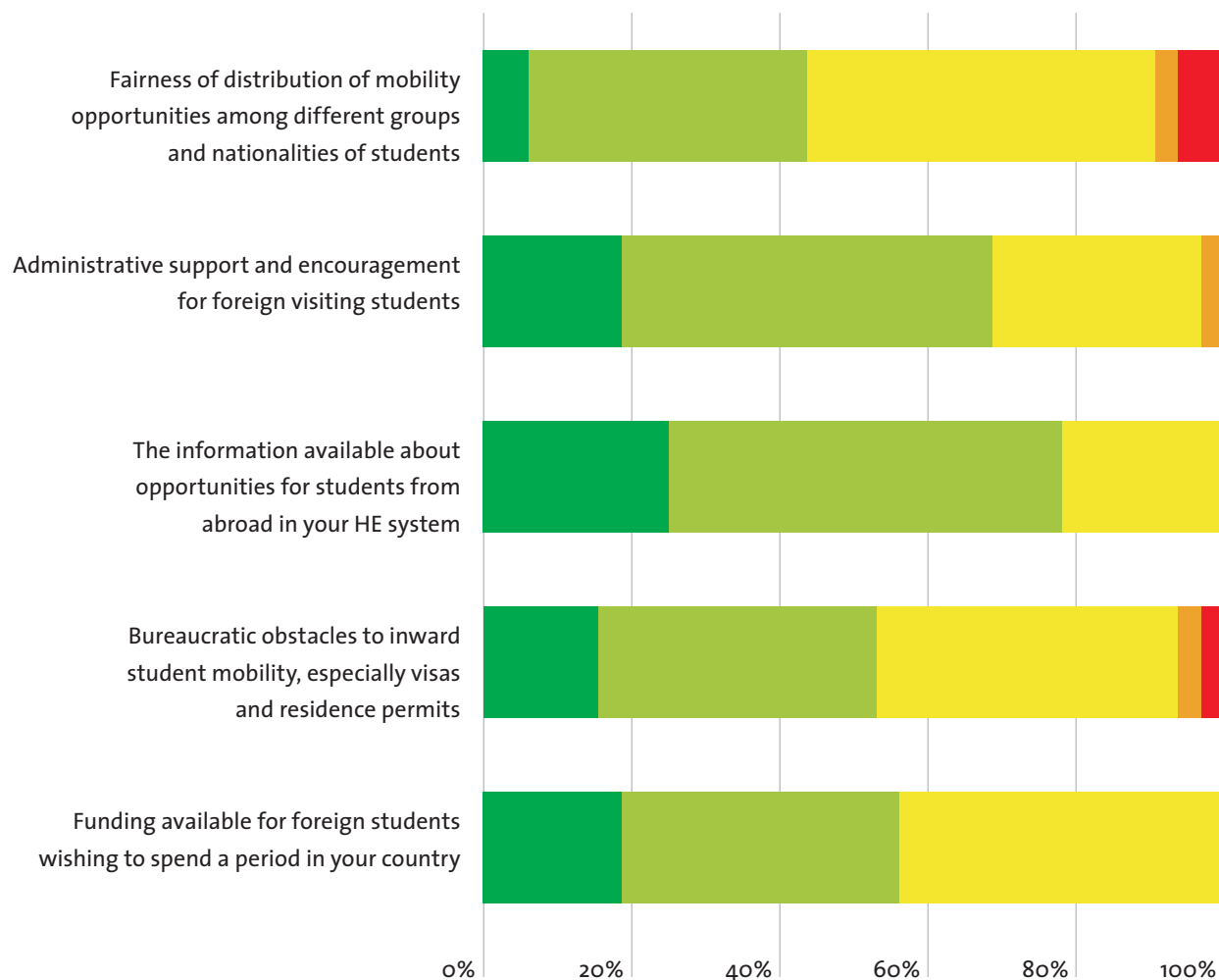


fig. 23—Situation for foreign students who have spent or who wish to spend a period in the respective country

- much better
- a little better
- about the same
- a little worse
- much worse

7 CYCLES AND CREDITS

The reform of the degree structures and the introduction of the three cycle system are recognised by Europeans and non-Europeans as the most visible outcome of the work towards the European Higher Education Area. Introduced since the Bologna Declaration, this goal aimed at allowing flexibility of education paths, enhancing mobility and fostering a higher standard of employability. Notably, this remains a challenge for higher education institutions. Students today still face a rather superficial adaptation of degrees, curricula, teaching and assessment methods.

Reforming cycles is not only about changing legislation. The London Communiqué underlined *‘the importance of curricula reform leading to qualifications better suited both to the needs of the labour market and to further study. Efforts should concentrate in future on removing barriers to access and progression between cycles and on proper implementation of ECTS based on learning outcomes and student workload’*. This statement indicates the need for a more substantial and less formal implementation of the degree cycles.

7.1 CONCLUSIONS

There has been negligible improvement when it comes to the implementation of the three-cycle system. Student unions clearly state that restructuring cycles are no longer an important element of the overall reform and indicate that little has been done in most countries in this regard. There is little evidence of the introduction of real curricula adaptation and teaching and assessment methods. The poor implementation of the new Bologna cycles causes several negative side effects that contradict the purpose of the reforms. In some countries, there is a coexistence of the old and new systems; employment opportunities continue to exist mostly at the end of second cycle and the focus and purpose of second cycle itself will require a clearer definition.

Progression between cycles remains hindered, especially in cases when a student wishes to change its learning paths. Institutions remain protecting the transition of students between cycles within the institution and more obstacles are created, by tightening the selection procedures and introducing tuition fees in the different levels and cycles. However, student unions remain supportive of the degree structures proposed within the Bologna Process. The students seem to believe in the potential of the reforms and concentrate in criticising the poor or ill implementation observed in their national systems.

ECTS is now *the* credit system across the EHEA: over 70% of the respondents are positive about this and some more unions indicate that its introduction is approaching. Despite this formal adoption, student unions continue to point out that student workload for the allocation of ECTS credits is still not being measured correctly. Basing ECTS on learning outcomes is a lengthy process which is often engaged in superficially. This incorrect implementation of ECTS is impinging upon the flexibility a learner-centred system should have.

7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

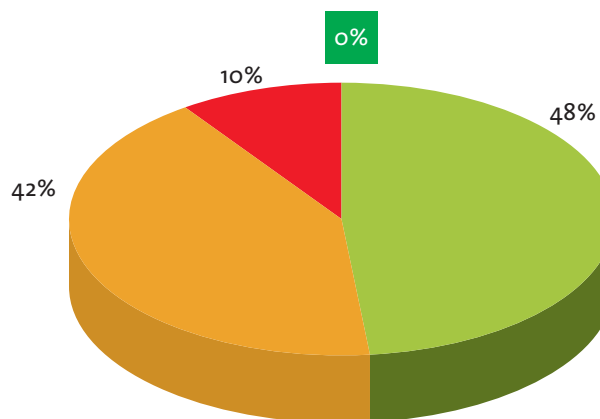
- Critically revise the ECTS implementation, based on both learning outcomes and student workload, for all the Bologna cycles.
- Improve student participation in building student centred learning systems, that are underpinned by a coherent simultaneous implementation of all Bologna Process structural tools.
- Moving beyond the simultaneous co-existence of the old and new degree cycles and fully secure the correct implementation of the Bologna three cycles.
- Remove access obstacles to progression between cycles, with a special attention to mitigating the causes for low vertical mobility between the first and second cycle.

7.3 IMPLEMENTATION OF DEGREE CYCLES

The reforms pertaining to the three cycle system have not maintained impetus since 2007. Few new reforms have taken place in the past two years and there has only been a negligible improvement as regards the overall system. In many cases, unions reported that institutions or public authorities initiated partial changes in their degree system several years ago, but most unions also clarify that the significant reforms of their degree structures happened between the academic years of 2004-2005 and 2006-2007, that is to say between the Bergen and the London ministerial conferences. The stocktaking reports presented in these conferences can clearly indicate a good level of progress in terms of the formal adaptation of national degrees to the Bologna cycles.

fig. 24—Importance of degree structures reform within the national system

- The most important topic
- Important alongside other reforms
- Part of the debate but not too important
- Not an issue at all



It is clear that respondents consider the reform of the cycles now has a less important place in the context of the national reforms taking place. In fact, only just under half of unions perceive cycles to be an important topic of discussion nationally alongside with other national reforms. None of the unions feel that public authorities elect this topic as the most important and 42% of respondents mention that this is still present in the debate but not really important. This might indicate that public authorities and stakeholders have moved their focus of attention to other areas of reform of the higher education system, although significant misconceptions or bad implementation have remained.

7.4 CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING A NEW DEGREE STRUCTURE

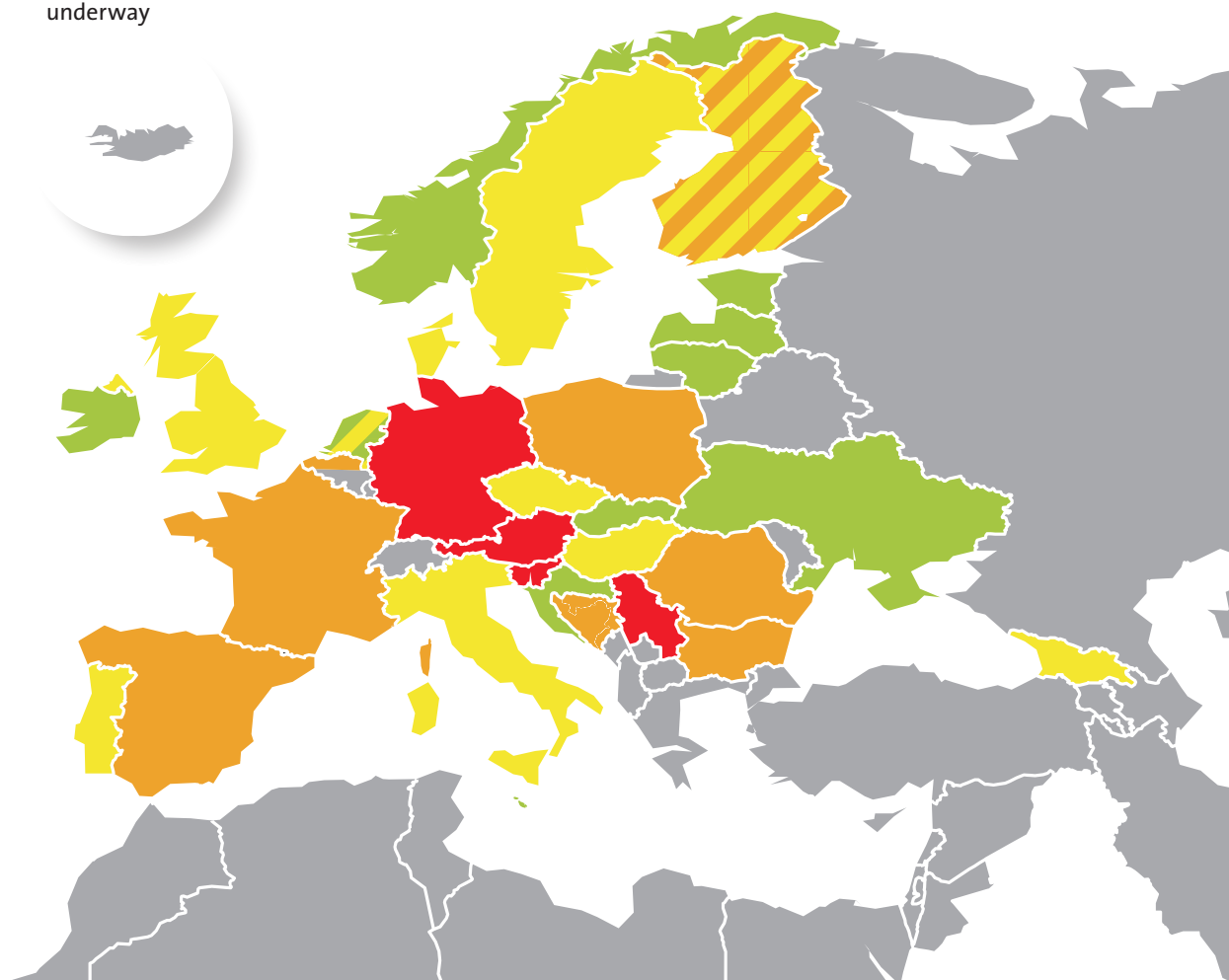
Although progress can be shown, the methods used by different countries for the introduction of the three cycles have a significant variation. Several unions mention the coexistence of two systems in place and a progressive reform process, or indeed the need for the reform process to be restarted at one point. In the case of Spain, the reforms were initiated in 2005 and only addressed post-graduate studies, with all cycles only being brought in since 2008. In Slovenia, a law was introduced in 2004, but students have still been allowed to enrol in the old programmes until now. A fade out system is being put in place: all new entrants in the first cycle will now encounter reformed degree structures; by 2014, all programmes will have been reformed and all students enrolled will have experienced the new system only. In 2007, Trends V showed similar findings regarding other countries and it seems that this might be considered the safest way of providing a transition that is well accepted by students and academics. However, at such a late stage of the Bologna Process, this strategy bears the risk of increasing misunderstanding of the

fig. 25—Reform of degree structures in Europe

- 3 cycles in place and fully operational
- 3 cycles in place with outstanding issues
- 1st and 2nd cycles in place and 3rd cycle yet to be reformed
- 1st and 2nd cycle reform still underway

value of old and new degrees, leading to clashes between the different national stakeholders, and affecting recognition practices between countries.

According to 61% of unions, the three cycles are fully in place when it comes to the legal framework and its formal implementation; however, more than half reported that the system in place has significant problems. These re-



sults are comparable to the ones presented by BWSE 2007, where 56% claimed to have the system in place and again over half of the unions mentioned that problems were still occurring. These results contradict substantially the positive feedback from public authorities contained in the national reports. However, the fact that this view is the continually reported consolidated position of student unions indicates that outstanding challenges remain to be overcome at national level.

The issues most commonly referred to are an increase in the rigidity of curricula and learning paths, areas in which the Bologna Process was expected to bring greater flexibility and openness. Several unions indicate that higher education institutions have tended to try to include the content of an old, longer degree in a 3 year first cycle programme. Unions also reported that students felt compelled to continue their studies into the second cycle, not identifying graduation as a true exit point to the labour market. In Norway, however, students reveal a different attitude and understanding of the value of their first degree, depending on the type of institution they are enrolled in. Graduates from university colleges enter the labour market immediately after the completion of their first degree, while 80% of their colleagues from the university sector plan to continue to a Masters programme.

It should be noted that the second cycle is undergoing significant reforms and it is now unclear what its status is in each country. Respondents addressed it, sometimes indistinctively, as a degree on its own; as a mere follow up to the first cycle, professional training beyond the academic education of the first cycle or as an integral part of the third cycle. The third cycle itself seems to be the new focus of attention in some of the systems that were the first to establish their degree structure reforms. In the cases of Ireland, Finland and Norway, respondents referred mostly to doctoral studies when asked to comment on the priorities for degree structures reforms, claiming that the goals were now either to make them “more Bologna-like” or to increase the flexibility of admission procedures to these programmes.

A lack of understanding of the concepts of competences, learning outcomes and appropriate measurement also seems to be a relevant issue when reforming curricula and discussing the concepts behind the new degree system. These issues were continuously mentioned by several respondents in different steps of the survey and will be addressed further below.

7.5 PROGRESSION BETWEEN CYCLES

An analysis of the transition of students between cycles sheds significant light on the side effects of the current reforms in most countries of the EHEA. The majority of the unions confirmed that progression

between the first and the second cycles is possible within the same field of study. It seems that institutions are keeping a protectionist attitude and inhibiting vertical mobility from occurring within the same country. In the cases of systems with high levels of competition for admission into the second cycle, and when a linkage between the curricula of the two cycles is very evident, this attitude is sometimes appreciated by respondents who understand that it secures the conditions for students to finish their education.

Changing an education path remains a risky undertaking for any student. Most of the answers provided clearly mention severe difficulties, with institutions refusing to apply the Lisbon Recognition Convention principles and imposing bridging programmes. However, in the case of the Flemish community of Belgium, in cases where a student wishes to progress from one cycle of a particular field of study into a subsequent cycle of another field of study, but does so within the same institution, this reluctance is significantly diminished. Such a high level of protectionism impedes the free choice of students and is a serious impediment to the student mobility desired.

In other cases, the same blockage occurs motivated by the existence of binary systems and the different legal status of higher education institutions. In the case of Estonia and Finland, for example, students from the non-university sector are impeded from progressing into masters and doctoral programmes respectively. In both cases, the unions explain that this is not a consequence of the legislation in place, but rather the result of institutional practice.

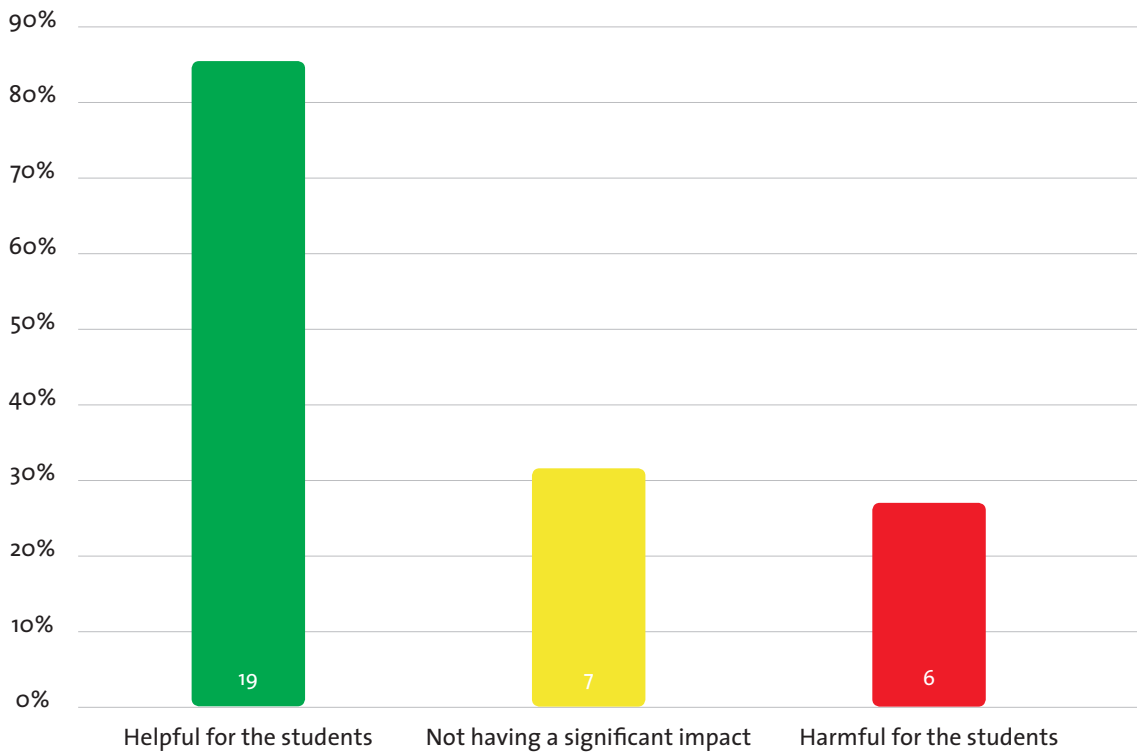
The case of France is very particular, reflecting the remains of a previous system: there is a selection procedure within the second cycle for students progressing from the first to the second year. However, the respondent also stated that a reform programme is being prepared and this situation is expected to improve.

Finally, regarding the reasons for enhancing and hindering progression between cycles, the answers reflect the organisation of different systems of higher education, their funding mechanisms and their overall accessibility, with some respondents highlighting admission and selection procedures based on merit and others prioritising the obstacles to progression. Amongst the different reasons for hindering progression between cycles, respondents mentioned most frequently the *numerus clausus* that still exists and the introduction or maintenance of tuition fees for the second cycle. In the context of an overall expansion of the second cycle, when students feel pressure to continue their studies due to a lack of recognition of the value of the first cycle degree, tuition fees constitute a significant hindering of the accessibility to this level.

7.6 DEGREE STRUCTURES AND NATIONAL UNIONS OF STUDENTS

Despite all of the problems identified, a significant majority of unions stand behind the idea of reforming their degrees according to the Bologna three-cycle system, considering it to be beneficial for the students they represent. Out of 32 answers, only six stated clearly that this reform was harming students, with their critique pointing directly at the way it has been implemented in their own national context. Nineteen respondents were fairly positive about the reform and the way this could help students, and the remaining seven stated that it was not having a significant impact. Interestingly, all of the latter were unions that reported a significant delay in the reform of the cycles in their country, indicating that they are still expecting the outcomes of the reform in order to be able to provide a full assessment of the situation.

fig. 26—Perception of the national unions about the degree structures reform



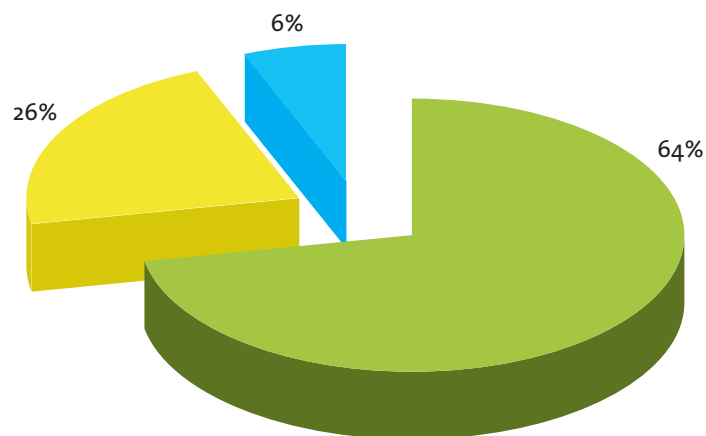
It seems that even in cases where unions support the idea of reforming the degree structures, they remain critical about many of the elements of it, as well as the way the reform has been undertaken at the national level. The answers provided below on the way credits are understood and used, and their negative effects, help to explain this position and constitute a reason for great concern and attention.

7.7 CREDIT SYSTEMS

ECTS has become the credit system of the European Higher Education Area, adopted nationally by most countries. There are however still 6 countries that use other credits systems because these were implemented before the Bologna Process itself (e.g., the Baltic states and the UK), while others were in the process of reforming them during the time of this survey (Spain). Two other unions were unclear regarding this, as their system was undergoing reform at that particular time.

fig. 27—ECTS adopted by national law as the credit system for the higher education institutions

- ECTS in the law
- Other credit systems
- Unclear



Public authorities took leadership of the process of instituting ECTS as the credit system and defined its features within a regulatory framework. These legal provisions are mainly either a definition of ECTS credits and/or the value for an ECTS credit in terms of workload, fixing the workload per ECTS credit usually within a range of 24 to 30 hours. Countries themselves use different ranges according to the ECTS User Guide, allowing some flexibility for institutions to elaborate on their study programmes and allocate workload between the different modules or courses. Officially, the majority of countries use ECTS as a credit transfer and accumulation system, although significant gaps can be observed between theory and practice according to national unions of students.

7.8 STUDENT WORKLOAD

When it comes to the analysis of progress regarding measuring student workload, it seems again that there has been little evolution. The BWSE 2007 report stated that *a correct measuring of student workload, being a core principle of ECTS, has proven to be the most significant problem in the implementation of ECTS*²³ and the answers provided for this edition's analysis reiterate the same concern.

Although 92% of the respondents that had ECTS in place declared that, in their country, this was formally based on workload, most of the unions commented that this was more in theory than in practice. According to the ECTS Users' Guide, *the estimation of workload should be regularly refined through monitoring and student feedback*²⁴. However only 12% (4 countries) of unions reported that the workload was being estimated and re-adapted according to student surveys, which is practically the same situation identified in the BWSE 2007. The unions from Denmark, Finland, Flemish community of Belgium and the Netherlands report that the calculation of workload has been generalised. In these countries, the workload of courses and modules has been estimated and is regularly readapted according to surveys completed by students. Nevertheless, the respondents reflect that some improvements are both possible and needed, such as the way students are asked to estimate their workload. There are other cases in which calculation occurs on the basis of the policy of individual higher education institutions: some collect data systematically and others continue to base ECTS on teachers' estimation of the workload.

Unions from different countries (e.g., France, Poland and Serbia) confirm that ECTS credits are often assigned to modules on the basis of their prestige or importance, disregarding any estimation or calculation of the workload. In Georgia, Poland and Romania, contact hours are still the main method for establishing credits and in cases like the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden there were attempts to translate old credit systems based on contact hours into ECTS through the use of a formula, without proper measurement of the real student workload. This apparently remains one of the misconceptions of the idea of ECTS credits that they should be clearly associated with workload. Only through that can ECTS be used as a means for planning the curricula in a way that is feasible for students to achieve the desired learning outcome in the correct timeframe, and therefore be a tool for the promotion of student attainment and the completion of studies.

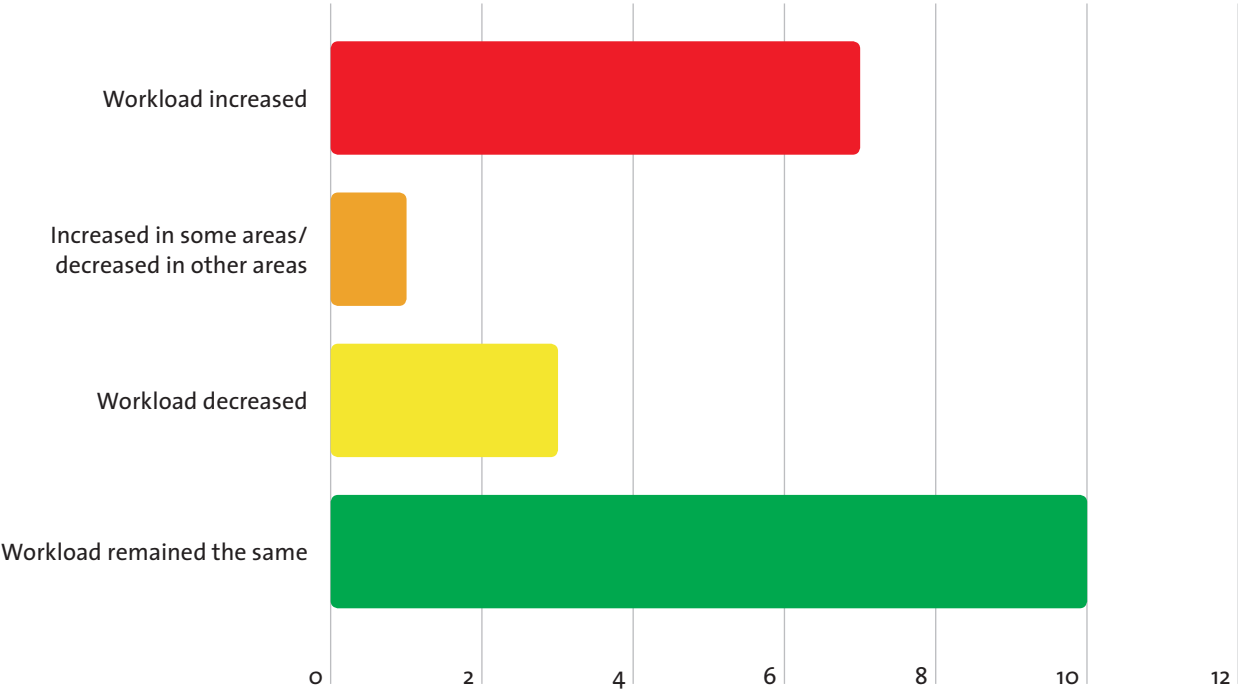
²³ ESIB, *BWSE 2007*, p. 38.

²⁴ EU Commission, *ECTS User Guide 2009*, p.10.

Following the introduction of ECTS, most unions observed that the workload has more or less remained the same, whilst a few have commented that it has increased. Only in three countries (Belgium—French community, Italy and Serbia) has there been a perceived decrease in workload. In the case of Italy, it was noted that the workload has decreased per module, but the overall number of assessments increased dramatically in many cases. It seems that the poor concept of learning outcomes has given ground to the multiplication of assessment procedures, namely exams. This is the case of a perverse effect resulting from incorrect implementation which has led to an increase in workload. However, it should be noted

fig. 28—Changes to student workload after the implementation of ECTS

that several other unions chose not to answer this question. It is a fact that, when the reform is yet to occur or did occur some years ago, they had no experience of this, sufficient reporting or means of assessing the effect of ECTS in terms of overall student workload.



Some other unions also state that curricular reform, frequently disconnected from the introduction of ECTS, had the effect of increasing student workload. Estonia is a clear example of this, but Romania also claims that ECTS had quite different effects in terms of student workload, depending on the scientific area and institution. Nevertheless, some other examples pointed out don't really refer to ECTS credits but to other factors such as the introduction of semesters and of new learning methods.

7.9 LEARNING OUTCOMES IN THE EHEA—TOWARDS STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING?

The definition of learning outcomes is still a rather big challenge for the higher education institutions in most countries in Europe. Although several unions state that this is a mandatory element of the reform, that higher education institutions should define learning outcomes and that debates have started, the large majority also concur that the concept is not used or is poorly understood.

Nine respondents said that no outcome approach was instituted in their country and an additional 4 claimed that it depended significantly on the higher education institutions. Although a majority of 15 respondents claim that descriptors have been created, their main reference is “learning outcomes” for the degree or cycle level. The Dublin Descriptors are mentioned several times and quite often cycle descriptors, “learning outcomes” and course or teacher objectives/expectations are referred to without distinction. It seems that the true sense of learning outcomes is yet to be established in debates held at the national and institutional levels. Amongst these positive respondents, at least 3 highlighted the fact that ECTS had not implemented; and 4 other respondents were very concerned with stating that they only meant cycle descriptors instituted in legislation without significant impact in terms of institutional behaviour or concepts.

In fact, defining the learning outcomes of a course or module is still not widespread in Europe. In only around 33% of countries, there are institutions that define their courses and modules in terms of learning outcomes (mainly in Northern Europe), whilst around 50% defined degrees in terms of learning outcomes. This clearly indicates that the implementation of ECTS has been done in a very formal manner without reference to concrete curricular reform and reconsideration of the role of students and of the institution in the learning process.

On the contrary, teacher-centred provision is the dominant feature of the curricula and some confusion between accountability (stating clearly what the learning objectives are, and providing prescriptive checklists of competences) and a real student-centred approach (designing a module with a view to spe-

cific learning outcomes and assessing their real achievement) is sometimes also present in the answers presented by respondents.

A very interesting element is the fact that one of the respondents stated that the introduction of the Diploma Supplement itself promoted the discussion of the concept of learning outcomes, although again these were defined in terms of cycles. Two other respondents also mentioned that the introduction of qualifications frameworks in the future would allow for further clarification of the meaning of degrees and elaboration of the respective learning outcomes at module level.

7.10 IMPACTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF A POOR IMPLEMENTATION OF ECTS

The feedback from the national unions is quite clear: while ECTS should allow flexibility in the way the education paths are built, the type of implementation observed sometimes undermines that possibility, especially at the institutional level.

Mention has to be made of the number of ECTS that a student can take every year. The agreed reference point for an academic year of a full-time student is 60 ECTS in Europe. This enables students and academics to plan their year and protect the former from being overburdened in terms of workload. However, this reference point is sometimes taken both as the limit a student can enrol for, and the minimum a student must attend, which has consequences for the way students might plan their degree. In Denmark, students were unhappy about being prevented from progressing between cycles that are interlinked in case a single credit point is still missing. But a worse situation happens in the cases of a very rigid implementation of the same cycle, where students cannot progress from one year to the next without having all their credit points taken. France and Norway are good examples of countries where failing some modules is compatible with progressing to the next year and exams from those modules can be redone in the following year.

These regulations are particularly important not only when it comes to the most effective use of the student's time but also regarding the concept of student-centred learning. Unless there is a clear chain between the different modules that prevents them from being taken as the student sees fit, a maximum amount of flexibility should be allowed regarding the time in which the module is taken. Such flexibility has also implications in terms of the policies regarding the social dimension, since governments and institutions are more commonly linking the achievement of credit points with the allocation of funding and support for students.

In addition, in terms of the validation of prior learning there are signs of significant conservatism from the institutions. Although one can witness that the recognition of prior learning, regardless of its nature (most commonly formal and non-formal) is becoming more commonly used, leading to mechanisms for access into, and credit within, study programmes and exempting students from taking several modules and their credits points, it is also becoming clear that there is a move to limit these mechanisms to a maximum of ECTS. This is further explored in the chapter dedicated to lifelong learning.

7.11 ECTS FOR ACCUMULATION PURPOSES?

Achieving the learning outcomes expected should lead to the award of a degree built upon those same outcomes. However, as identified continuously by ESU and other reports, this remains to be established. In fact, many respondents were explicit about the fact that a majority of institutions continue to rely on traditional end-of-year examinations to assess student knowledge. As the assessment of learning outcomes is required for credits to be awarded, this raises questions about how profoundly programmes have been restructured when introducing ECTS. Trends V already raised this question and mentioned the existence of a group of institutions *which have so far engaged in more cosmetic and superficial implementation—often to meet the basic requirements of compliance with new legislation*²⁵. It seems that, contradicting the best expectations regarding the Bologna Process, a process of transformation of higher education purely driven by legislative reform is not sufficient to ensure the creation of a student-centred learning concept of education.

7.12 ECTS AS A TRANSFER TOOL

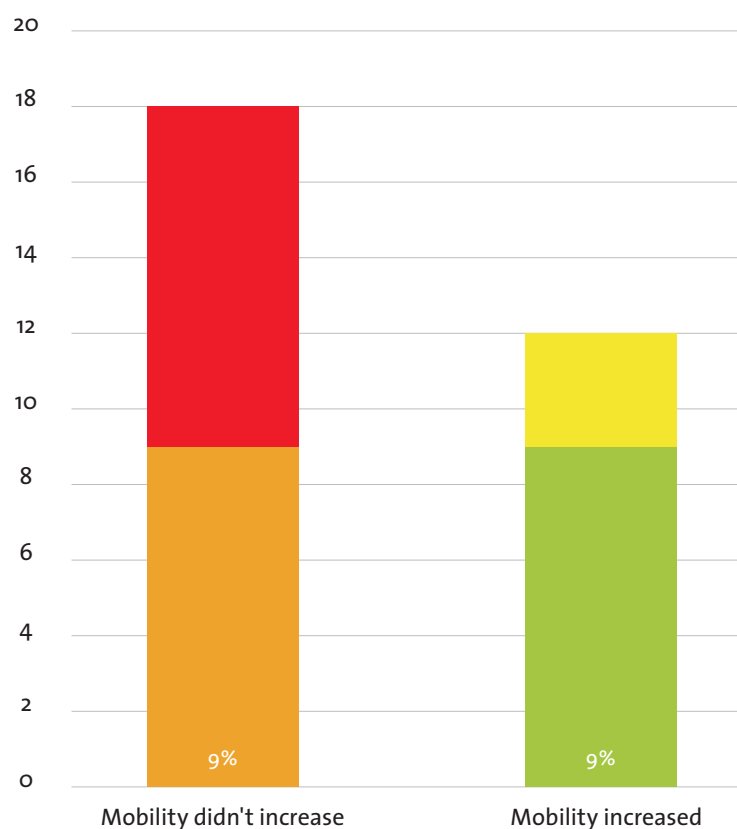
The results are usually more positive when it comes to the use of ECTS as a transfer tool, since this was its primary purpose on creation and institutions have grown accustomed to dealing with it. In fact, the majority of respondents (18) claim that no outstanding issues happen in cases of Erasmus mobility, when a learning agreement provides the framework for this period of studies abroad. The fact that ECTS is in place doesn't necessarily imply an increase in the overall level of outward mobility, as half of these respondents (9) also signal that there was no significant increase in mobility, despite the fact that the credits used would have been recognised. In those cases, the socio-economic conditions of students and an academic culture that depreciates horizontal mobility are some of the explanations provided. On the

²⁵ EUA, *Trends V*, p. 21.

other hand, 40% of respondents claim that students still face several problems when trying to recognise their studies abroad, and although 10% mention that mobility has increased in spite of these problems, the remainder are clear about the lack of an increase in the levels of outward mobility. A correlation between the two indicators becomes clearer in this case.

fig. 29—Use of ECTS for transfer and recognition of studies abroad and its effect on mobility

- No major problems identified in the use of ECTS and mobility increased
- Major problems identified in the use of ECTS but mobility increased
- No major problems identified in the use of ECTS but mobility didn't increase
- Major problems identified in the use of ECTS and mobility didn't increase



It should be noted that, both in terms of the group of respondents identifying many challenges in ensuring the recognition of ECTS and in the ones claiming that students don't usually face big problems, several real cases of difficulties were mentioned as examples. Despite the anecdotal nature of these statements, they are relevant as they allow an understanding of the fact that it is sometimes not a systemic issue, but rather a problem of the attitude of some institutions regarding the learning achieved elsewhere. In many other cases, the curricula is analysed instead of the learning outcomes of the modules and courses, and at least two unions claim that requests for recognition have to go through a round of appeals until they

are accepted. And if it becomes clear that institutions are mostly suspicious of the quality of the education taken abroad, and there is already a tendency for building networks that somewhat limit the range of students' opportunities to become mobile, there are also cases in which mobility within the same country faces exactly the same obstacles.

8 QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In 2007, ministers committed themselves to “fully implementing (...) national qualifications frameworks, certified against the overarching Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA, by 2010”. They also acknowledged that it would be “a challenging task²⁶”, and by almost all accounts it seems that national qualification frameworks in most countries will be far from fully implemented by 2010.

Ministers also emphasised that “qualification frameworks should be designed so as to encourage greater mobility of students and teachers and improve employability” (London Communiqué). Since 2007, progress has been slow, and the reason might be that governments are waiting to see how the development of the European Union European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning progresses.

The national qualifications frameworks (NQF) are of the utmost importance since they constitute a framework within which countries and higher education institutions can work with learning outcomes, competences and credits, as well as access to higher education. ESU believes that correctly implemented NQFs can help improve the recognition of prior formal, informal- and non-formal learning, improve the transparency of study paths as well as enforce student-centered learning in combination with workload and learning outcomes. NQFs are in many ways a crucial part of the systemic changes proposed by the Bologna Process.

8.2 CONCLUSIONS

There seems to have been little progress in the implementation of the national qualifications frameworks (QF) over the last two years. The processes are going in the right direction, however, albeit slowly. Support from students for the principles and ideas behind the QF is strong, but it is worth noting that there seems to be less consultation with national student unions than in 2007 in terms of the development of NQFs.

²⁶ London Communiqué, page 3. http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/about/how_it_works.htm

8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Involve students and other stakeholders in all stages of the development of the NQF. If students have not been consulted before, it is even more important to get them involved in the further development of the NQF.
- Do not rush the implementation just to have it finished by 2010. It is more important to ensure a broad and inclusive process than to finish the QF by the initial deadline.
- Interlink the reform of qualifications frameworks with the introduction of national-based procedures and guidelines for the recognition of prior learning.
- Establish national working groups with the inclusion of relevant stakeholders, providing for expertise and training about issues related to the design and concept of qualifications frameworks.

8.4 THE FORMAL STATUS OF QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

11 of the responding national student unions say that a QF is either in place for all levels of education or only for higher education. By looking at the countries' own national reports on the progress of the Bologna Process²⁷, one can conclude that six countries have completed the self-certification process of their national qualifications framework. Nearly half of the national unions of students (14 out of 32) state that the QF is under discussion but not yet implemented at any level.

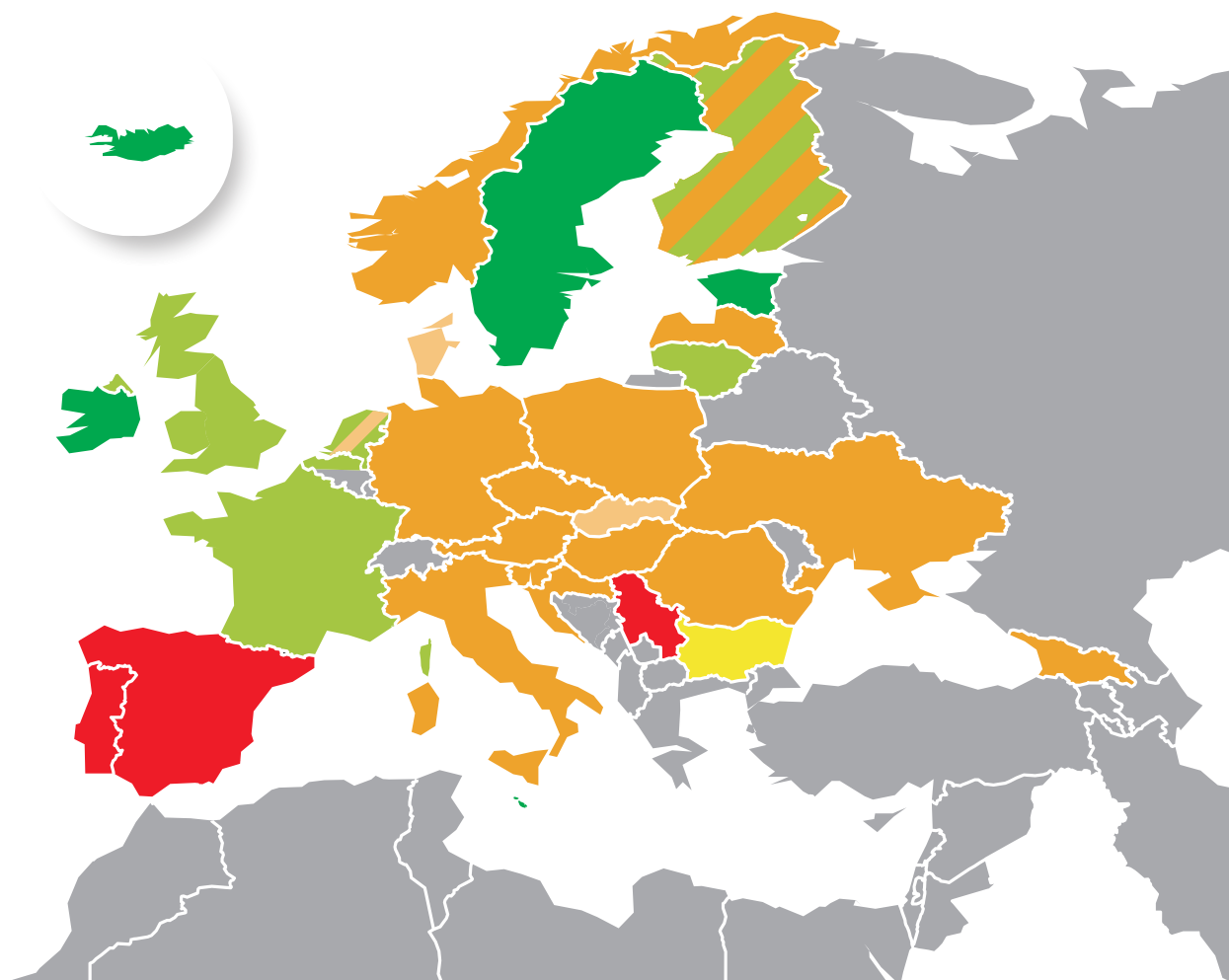
One of the reasons that the NQF is not yet implemented may be that there has been too narrow a focus on individual components such as ECTS or cycles, and that these have not been integrated with each other in the overall work towards an NQF.

Is the deadline of 2010 seen as feasible for the completion of national qualifications frameworks? 65% of the respondents answered negatively, while 77% wish to extend the deadline beyond 2010. While the fact that this goal seems not to be reachable by 2010 is not a positive outcome, having a thorough implemen-

27 <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/>

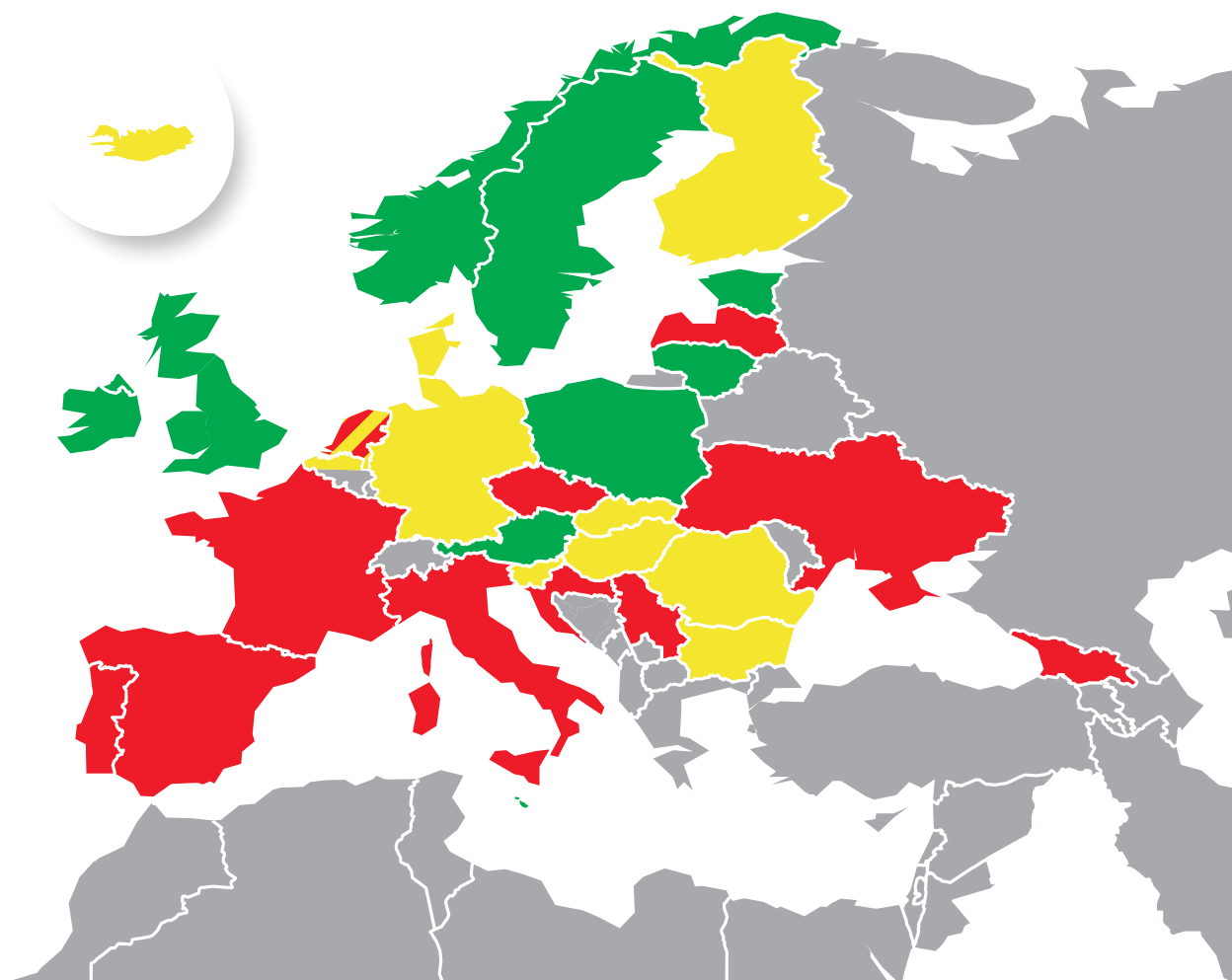
fig. 30—The status of the development of a national qualifications framework

- Fully in place for all levels of education
- Fully in place for HE but not others
- In place for some levels of education but not higher education
- In place for some levels of education but not in all
- Under discussion but not implemented at any level
- Not under discussion yet



*fig. 31—Involvement of student unions
in the work with a national QF for HE*

- Students fully consulted
- Only some consultation of students
- Students not consulted at all/not applicable



tation process is seen as more important than rushing to the finish line to have the formalities of the NQF in order.

8.5 STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

When asked about the involvement of their national union of students in a national QF for higher education, 9 unions state that they have been “fully consulted”. A further 12 say there has been “some consultation”, while 11 state that they have not been consulted at all.

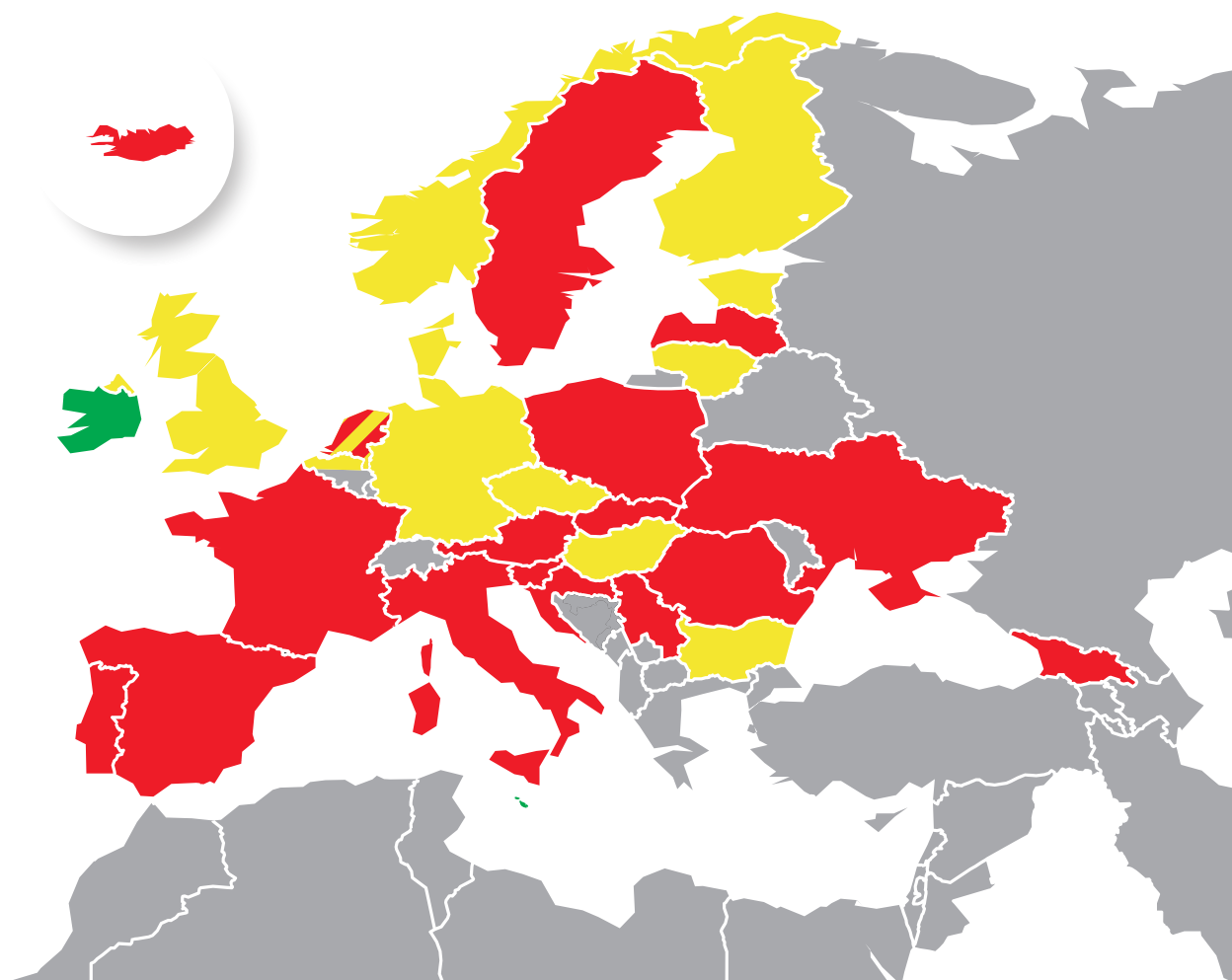
The unions who state that they have not been consulted in the work towards an NQF are Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Italy, Latvia, Serbia, Spain and Ukraine. Judging from the results of the national reports, it is especially serious that the unions from Croatia, Czech Republic, France, and Latvia report not to have been consulted since all these countries themselves claim to have held national discussions about the NQF.

The only way for an NQF to become fully functional is if all stakeholders are aware of it and feel ownership of it. Furthermore, countries have agreed to have a consultation process with relevant stakeholders, and ESU assumes that national unions of students are seen as such relevant stakeholders. In addition to this, not much has changed regarding this matter since the 2007 edition of the “Bologna With Student Eyes”.

Indeed, it is a negative trend that while 80% of the national unions of students replied that they had been consulted in the 2007 edition of Bologna With Student Eyes, this time only 66% report they have been consulted in the development of the NQF. This reason might be that governments believe that once the formal procedures and legal prerequisites concerning the frameworks have been set up, there is no longer a need to consult with students in the further development of the NQF. Another element for explaining this is the fact that some countries have decided to develop their national qualifications frameworks in alignment with both the EHEA-QF and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). In the last edition of the BWSE, the students reported less consultation on the issue of the EQF, especially because of the focus on other levels of education besides higher education.

Not surprisingly, also in this edition the consultation of student unions is even lower in relation to the introduction of a general NQF that covers all levels of education. Only two unions say they have been fully consulted, while 13 say there has been some consultation. There has been no change compared to

- Students fully consulted
- Only some consultation of students
- Students not consulted/not applicable



the situation in 2007. In the next chapter, we will see that students are far from satisfied with the state of the frameworks that have been set up so far.

8.6 ARE STUDENTS HAPPY ABOUT THE NQF?

The opinion expressed by national unions of students regarding their satisfaction with national qualifications frameworks is a strong indicator of the progress made in the development of NQFs. Unions expressing that NQFs are useful and help in reaching the goals set up through the Bologna Process indicate that the NQF is implemented in a functional manner and that it has gained understanding among many stakeholder groups.

Only one union reports to be very happy with its country's NQF (Ireland). Around one third of unions say they are neither happy nor unhappy with their NQF, and think that the NQF will not change a lot of things. This might be because the NQF does not function, or because the NQF is not yet fully implemented. It might also be because information about the NQF is not widely spread. An example of good practice in this regard is Ireland, which has taken concrete measures to spread information about the descriptors for qualifications in higher education in upper secondary school, so that future students are prepared before they enter higher education. While it might seem obvious to point to the Irish example, it is a fact that only the Irish national union of students expressed satisfaction with their NQF and it is unfortunate that this remains as an almost unique example of successful work in this topic.

The case of the Irish national qualification framework did take a lot of time to develop—this must be acknowledged. The lesson to be drawn is that it is important that the process undertaken at the national level manages to include all stakeholders and gives them a sense of ownership, while ensuring the recognition amongst the stakeholders that the promotion and ownership of the NQF is a “responsibility for all”²⁸.

8.7 OBSTACLES AND CONCERNS

Many unions report slow progress in the development of qualifications frameworks. Lack of knowledge among employers is also mentioned several times as an obstacle to the proper use of NQFs. Some unions

²⁸ Final report, The European Qualifications Framework from a Stakeholders Perspective, 2008, p. 47

also state that the debate about qualifications frameworks is limited, and that discussions mostly take place within groups of higher education experts (Finland) and not among the academic community or the broader public. Other problems include the incorrect use of learning outcomes (Belgium, Flemish Community); not all stakeholders, employers and the academic community, understand the purpose of the NQF (Czech Republic); discussions have been held regarding whether the NQF is a threat to diversity (Norway; see also figure below); and finally the mentality of teachers plays a role (Romania).

The National Union of Students in the UK raises the concern that there might be two Qualification Frameworks: one based on learning outcomes and one that is not. They say that the EQF LLL must not be seen as a way of avoiding moving towards a learning outcome based approach. ESU is also concerned by the indications from the national level that the work on learning outcomes is not integrated into the development of qualification frameworks, or the other way around. The national reports present very few examples of countries that make an explicit link between flexible learning paths and qualification frameworks (page 15).

In Denmark, students are concerned about the watering down of definitions regarding when a student is supposed to be able to individually carry out research. Whereas students today are mainly trained in research skills from the first semester onwards, there is a fear that this will not be the case in the future. The Danish National Union of Students claims that in their national QF research skills are something students are supposed to acquire or practice only by the third cycle.

In Portugal, the national student's union states that both the public authorities and the general public do not understand the concept of the NQF at all, while some even claim that the QF is in place already. The union believes that the NQF is seen just as a bureaucratic exercise and not a true change of the system. No discussion has so far been promoted by government or higher education institutions.

8.8 ALIGNMENT EHEA AND EQF

Almost all unions, except four, state that the national goal is to have the NQF aligned with both the EU qualifications framework on Lifelong learning and the QF developed within the Bologna Process. It is crucial that students are involved in the work with both frameworks, so that mismatches can be discovered before the frameworks are fully implemented in a legal framework and so that the students can gain ownership over both frameworks. See also the chapter on student involvement above.

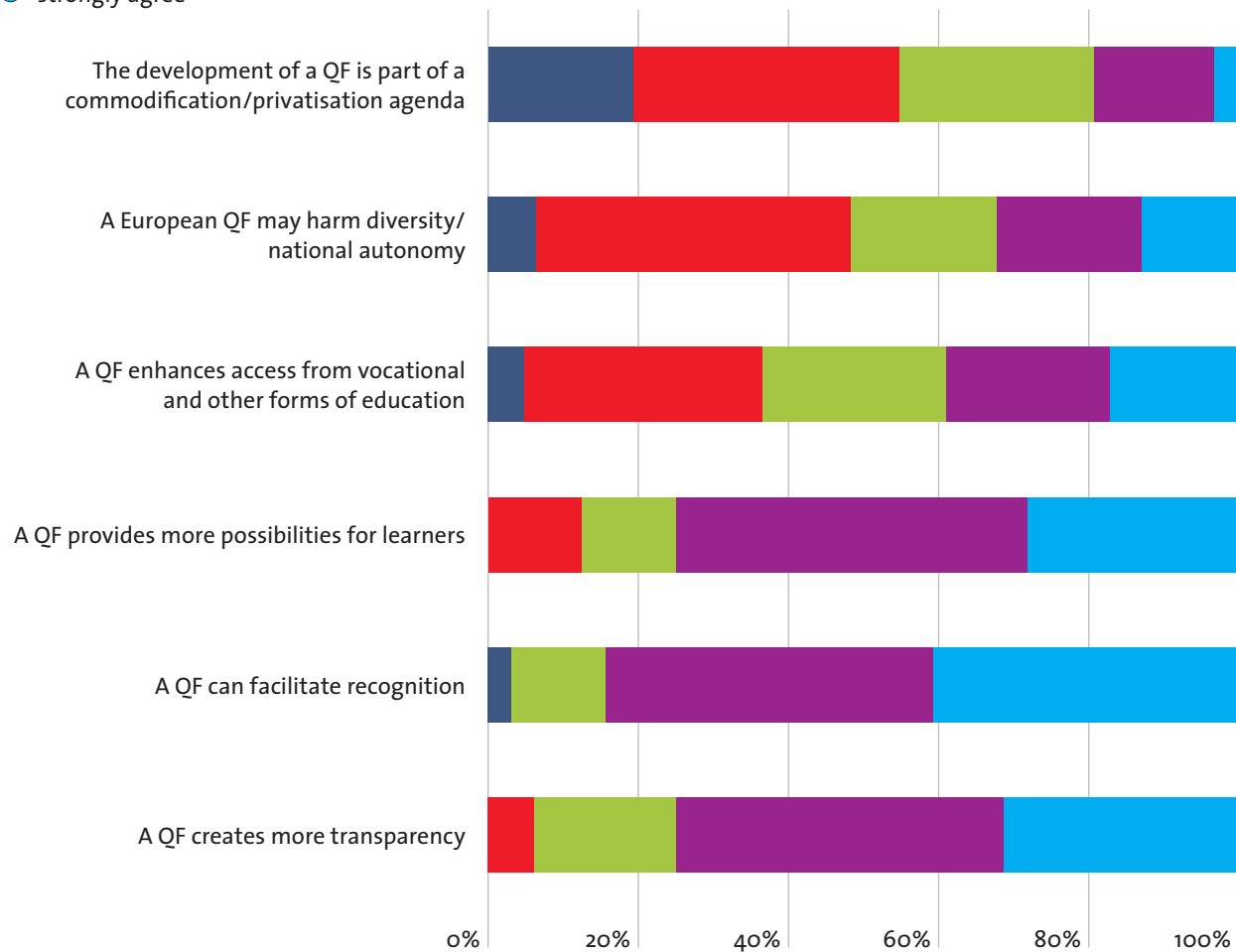
8.9 STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

Student support for the concept of a QF remains strong. Almost half of the unions (43 %) believe a QF creates more transparency in higher education. Half of the unions believe a QF can facilitate recognition, and only one union completely disagrees with this view. The student support for the concept and development of QF is positive, but it also further underlines that students must be involved in the development of the QF if this positive attitude is to have spillover effects to the implementation of the QF.

Compared to two years ago, a higher proportion of respondent unions (around 20 %) state that they to some extent perceive the QF to be part of a commodification or privatisation agenda (compared to around 10 % in 2007). This could indicate that the work on NQFs is not being properly discussed with stakeholders and the aim of the NQF not clearly conveyed. It can also depend, however, on other changes at national level leading to an overall understanding of instruments related to the Bologna Process as simply a conduit to commodification/privatisation, increased pressure on students to finalise their studies quicker and generally greater competitive pressure in higher education.

fig. 33—Level of knowledge about the marketing strategies by the stakeholders

- completely disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neutral
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree



9 THE DIPLOMA SUPPLEMENT

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The Diploma Supplement has been a consistent feature of the Bologna Process since its inception through the Joint Bologna Declaration, agreed in June 1999, where Ministers agreed to the *“adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement, in order to promote European citizens employability and the international competitiveness of the European higher education system”*.

Through the Berlin Communiqué in 2003, Ministers reaffirmed this commitment by setting the objective *“that every student graduating as from 2005 should receive the Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge”* and *“should be issued in a widely spoken European language”*. The Ministers asked that *“institutions and employers to make full use of the Diploma Supplement, so as to take advantage of the improved transparency and flexibility of the higher education degree systems, for fostering employability and facilitating academic recognition for further studies.”*

The London Communiqué, agreed by Ministers in 2007, made little reference to the Diploma Supplement other than to recognize that although progress had been made, there remained a *“range of national and institutional approaches to recognition needs to be more coherent.”*

9.2 CONCLUSIONS

Although Diploma Supplements are being issued by all Bologna signatory members, there remains a large degree of variation in issuing practices. Perceived awareness of Diploma Supplements remains stubbornly low for both employers and the general public. However students remain enthusiastic as to the benefits of the Diploma Supplement.

9.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Diploma Supplements remain an important tool in enhancing employability, recognition of academic standards and mobility in the European labor market. As such, important work remains to be done:

- Ministers should commit to continuing work towards meeting the Berlin objective of issuing the Diploma Supplement to graduating students automatically and free of charge. A work plan to achieve this should be agreed by the Bologna Follow Up Group.
- Ministers from countries who currently charge students for the Diploma Supplement should agree not to.
- Much work remains to be done in educating students, employers and the general public as to the existence and purpose of the Diploma Supplement. Ministers should agree to ask the Bologna Follow Up Group to support countries in creating a communication strategy to this end.

9.4 LEGISLATION CONCERNING THE DIPLOMA SUPPLEMENT

“FAGE really push for it [The Diploma Supplement], but it is very scarcely implemented, mainly because a big part of the HE community considers it useless.”

Fédération des Associations Générales D’Etudiants (FAGE)

The majority of NUSes (63%) report that legislation for Diploma Supplements to be issued to students has been created, with only eight countries stating that this is not the case.

It is interesting to note that there are indications of a connection between the presence of legislation and the success of implementation. Out of the eight NUSes that reported no existing legislation (Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Switzerland and the UK) only Malta automatically issues Diploma Supplements to all graduating students free of charge. Whereas out of the twenty-one countries who have legislation in place, nine have yet to meet the Berlin objectives.

9.5 ISSUING OF DIPLOMA SUPPLEMENTS

“Georgian HEIs need the help of the experts and experienced colleagues to develop the culture and knowledge in issuing high quality Diploma Supplements which will be usefull and helpful for students and for HEIs in the EHEA in the future to facilitate recognition and better understanding of the degrees and courses taken by the student ...”

Students Organizations League of Georgia (SOLG)

It is heartening to see that all NUSes reported that Diploma Supplements are being issued to students or are planned to be in the near future, however there remains variation as to which students and under what circumstances issuing takes place. Just under half of respondents (46%) stated that not all institutions will issue the Diploma Supplement automatically or that students have to request the Diploma Supplement from their institution.

The vast majority of Diploma Supplements will be issued in English or another official European Union language, as well as the native language for the individual student.

It is welcomed that the majority of countries issue the Diploma Supplement free of charge and that and that there has been less occurrences of charging students compared to that reported in *Bologna with Student Eyes* 2007. However it is worrying that in Bulgaria, Germany and Spain, students may have to pay.

Four years since the agreed deadline, we have not yet achieved the Berlin objectives of issuing Diploma Supplements to all graduating students automatically and free of charge.

9.6 AWARENESS OF DIPLOMA SUPPLEMENTS

Students perceive the level of awareness concerning Diploma Supplements by fellow students, employers and the general public in a very similar way to what was found in *Bologna through Student Eyes* 2007. There seems to have been little progress on this front.

The group most aware of the Diploma Supplement remains the students themselves, with 67% of NUSes reporting students to have some awareness or more. This is in stark contrast to the level of awareness of employers (45%) and the general public (13%).

fig. 34—Awareness about the Diploma Supplement as anticipated by NUSes

- No awareness
- Little awareness
- Some awareness
- Some awareness and increasing
- Fully aware

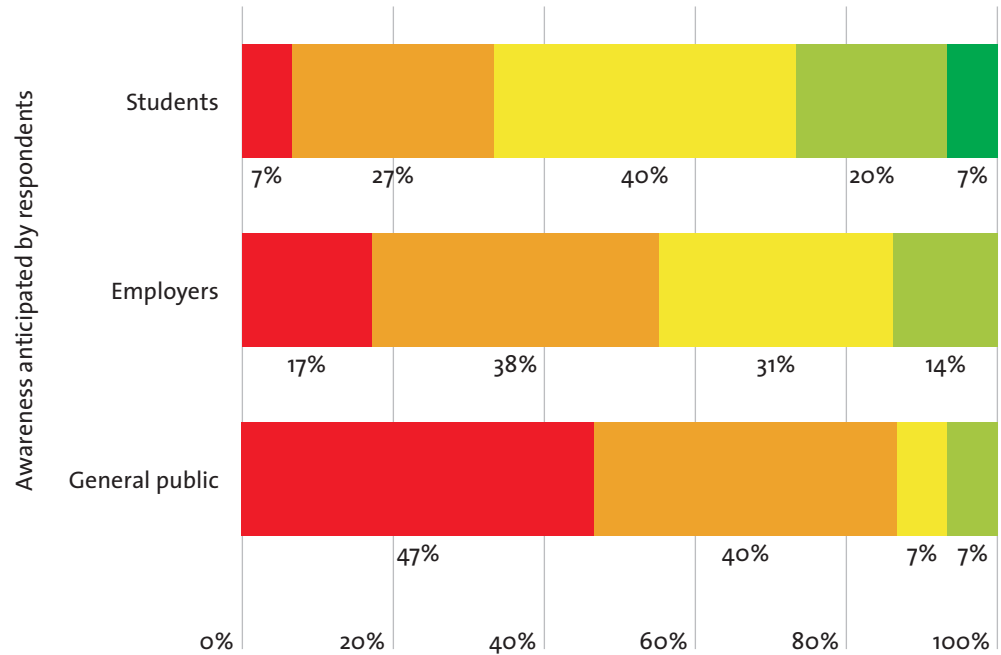
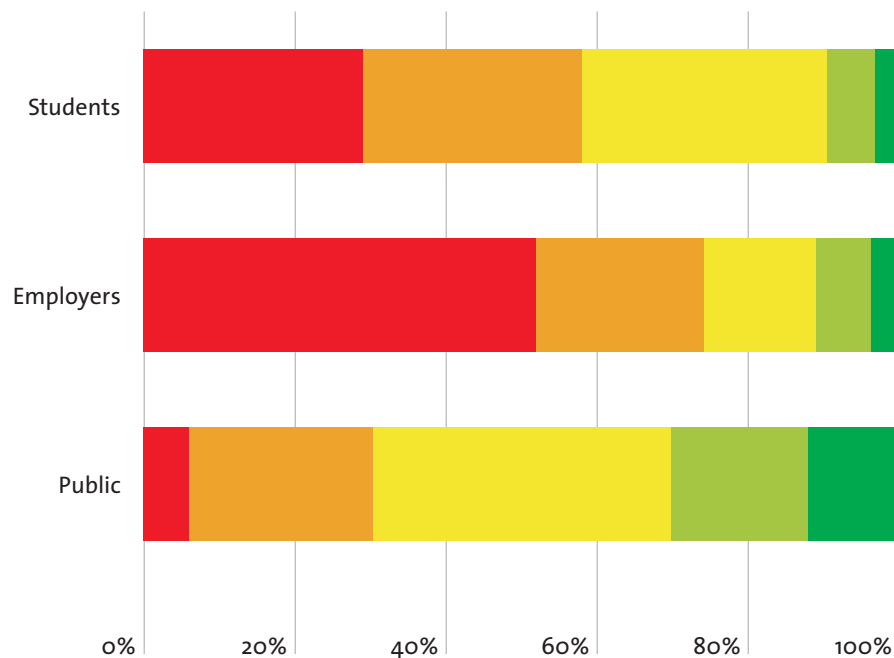


fig. 35—Perceived Awareness of the
Diploma Supplement (BWSE 2007)

- Very little
- Little
- Some
- Fair
- Lot



10 RESEARCH AND DOCTORAL EDUCATION

Higher education and research are closely intertwined and together make up the cornerstones of the academic mission. One without the other becomes meaningless, no matter what angle the observer looks from.

Doctoral education was introduced in the Bologna Process as the third cycle only after the Berlin ministerial meeting in 2003 where ministers stated that it is “*necessary to go beyond the present focus on two main cycles of higher education to include the doctoral level as the third cycle in the Bologna Process.*”

Through this, ministers have come to recognise the important link between education and research in the context of the Bologna Process, with work on the European Higher Education Area and the EU’s European Research Area increasing ever since.

For students, high quality research is crucial, as is the link between research and education. High quality research, in combination with committed and skilled teachers, is needed to ensure high quality education. Students must be introduced to new research and get the chance to increase their understanding in terms of the search for new knowledge. Students also need to have the prospect of a possible academic career, achieved through the presence of a close link with research throughout their education. Furthermore, doctoral students and the development of doctoral education are part of the range of responsibilities of many national unions of students.

This chapter will address the topic of research particularly in relation to the development of doctoral education. Despite the numerous names attributed to the individuals enrolled in doctoral programmes (PhD students, doctoral candidates, early stage researchers, etc.), this chapter uses the term ‘doctoral students’ to cover the full range of statuses addressed.

10.1 CONCLUSION

- The status of doctoral students is very diverse around Europe and they are regarded as somewhere between students and employees. In some cases this double status is officially acknowledged whereas in other countries it is not, even if it is the case in practice.

- ▶ Doctoral students often pay higher tuition fees than first and second cycle students.
- ▶ The great majority of respondents indicated that doctoral students have some kind of paid work in the institutions where they study, in some cases related to their research and student status, in others, not.
- ▶ In many countries, doctoral students have problems being properly represented in the governance of higher education institutions. This is partly due to the fact that doctoral students find themselves somewhere between the status of student and employee.
- ▶ Student unions are in general not very aware of the Salzburg Principles, the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for their recruitment.
- ▶ The third cycle is being developed around Europe, but often without the real involvement of national unions of students.

10.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Student unions must fully commit to addressing the issues of doctoral students, as these are enrolled in the third cycle and require special attention due to their particular situation. While ensuring that this particular student body is fully catered for and represented in student organisations, it is fundamental to ensure that a sufficient level of dialogue and cooperation exists with other bodies and organisations that have been representing them for some time.

Governments and higher education institutions must recognise and empower student unions as key stakeholders regarding the debate on doctoral education and research as a whole. That not only allows for a better representation of the doctoral student voice, but also corresponds to a concept of high quality higher education in which research and education are strongly linked.

Doctoral students should be granted the double status of students and employees, as a means of recognising their vulnerable and less defined situation and allowing for a maximisation of their career development opportunities. Special attention must be paid regarding access to pension rights and social security, besides the appropriate student support systems.

Funding opportunities must be increased and greater investment is needed to enlarge access to, and conditions for, the progression of doctoral students. This can be achieved both through an increase in the number and level of grants and scholarships, but also through employing these students and recognising them as researchers.

The European Charter for Researchers, the Code of Conduct for the recruitment of researchers and the Salzburg Principles need to be further disseminated and used at the national level as guiding tools for the development of doctoral education.

10.3 REPRESENTATION OF DOCTORAL STUDENTS

The representation of doctoral students and their active participation in higher education institutional governance is of the utmost importance. These early stage researchers are at the start of their career. Not only does this give them a fresh perspective in terms of the internal life of the institution, but it also places them in one of the most vulnerable positions in the whole academic system. They often find themselves in situations where they are extremely dependent on their supervisor, have low job security and sometimes a difficult economic situation. The voice of doctoral students is, for all of these reasons, very important.

As has been shown by earlier editions of the Bologna With Student Eyes survey, the representation of doctoral students is carried out in a variety of ways. In 2009, a large part of ESU's members claim to represent doctoral students, with 24 out of 34 unions reporting that this is the case. However, the special status and situation of doctoral students becomes apparent when looking at their representation. In Denmark, doctoral students are represented through the trade union for academic staff, which is also the case in some other countries. In addition to this, doctoral students are in some countries represented both by trade unions and student unions. The Finnish national union of students for the university sector (SYL) reports that they represent around 23 % of doctoral students.

Some unions (Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Switzerland) report that the issue of who represents doctoral students is still rather unclear. Doctoral students can join local unions and via them are also members of a national union, but their membership is not compulsory and some doctoral students belong to labour unions. Furthermore, ESU members in Italy, Hungary and Poland report that doctoral students are represented by a special organisation working solely with doctoral students. As pointed out above, in some countries doctoral students are represented by several organisa-

tions at the same time; in France, both student unions and special doctoral student organisations represent them and in Portugal, they are represented by a special scholarship-holder organisations (similar to a trade union).

From this it could look as if doctoral students are over-represented. This is, however, not the case; more often, the different organisations working with doctoral students fail to coordinate their work and thus leave third cycle students in a more disadvantaged situation.

10.4 THE STATUS OF DOCTORAL STUDENTS

As has been discussed above, the status of students in the third cycle is rather mixed. The three most common models are that doctoral candidates are either students, employed or have a special status as neither students nor staff. Five national unions of students state that doctoral students have a special status; 5 national unions of students report that doctoral students are always considered employees; 10 unions state that doctoral students always have student status and in the case of 14 unions, doctoral students are seen as employees if they carry out work at the institution.

This question is important since it has an impact on the financial support, social and job security available for early stage researchers, as well as for matters such as tuition fees. Fourteen unions underline that doctoral students pay higher tuition fees than first and second cycle students. The situation in Sweden also clearly illustrates how important the status of doctoral students is for matters such as social security. In Sweden, doctoral students usually either get a stipend or a scholarship, and the country also has a special state grant for doctoral students who are employees in an institution. The first type of financial support does not provide the doctoral student with any social security rights, the second does to a certain extent but many doctoral students find themselves very dependent on their institution for matters such as parental leave, and the third situation gives full social security cover. Furthermore some unions, such as the Czech national union of students, express that doctoral students are sometimes exploited as very cheap teaching labour—they are given responsibilities but without being properly paid for it.

In spite of the political promises and acknowledgements made in the context of the need for a highly educated workforce as well as for an increase in the number of citizens with research education, there is little evidence of a real commitment towards providing the necessary financial support for this to become true.

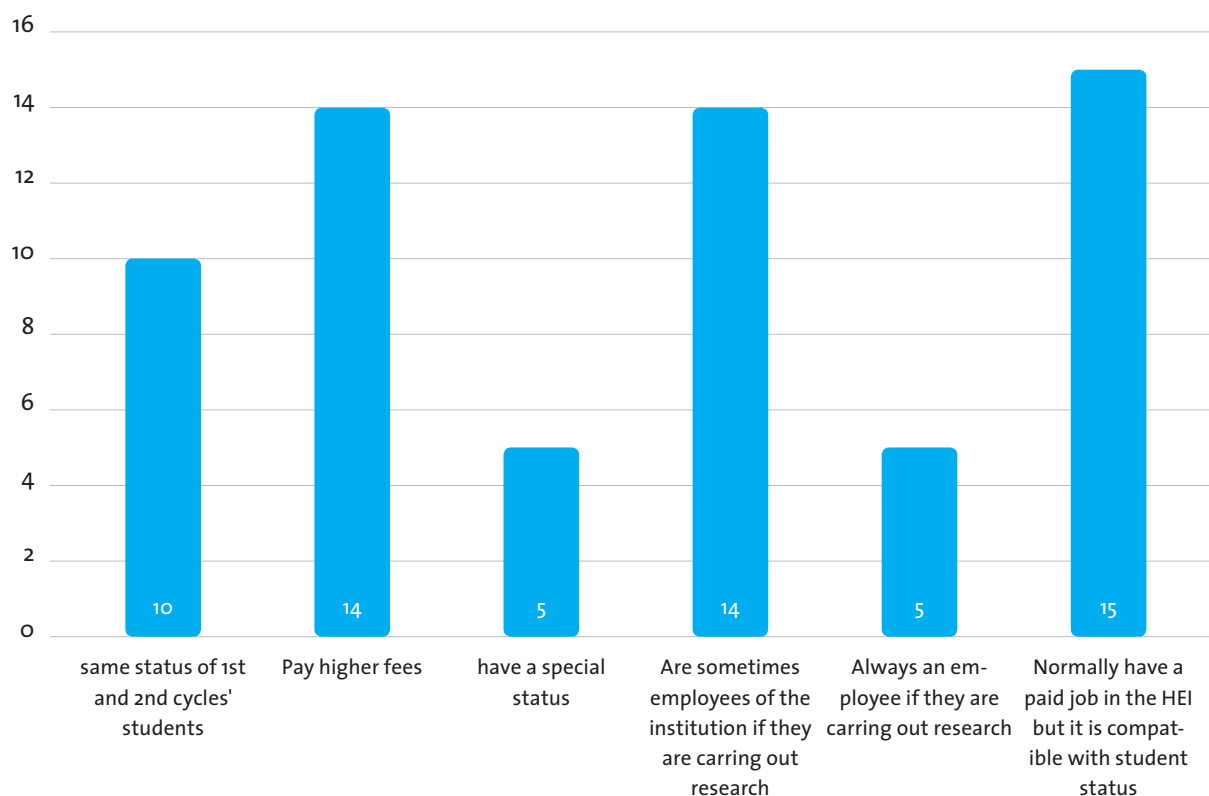


fig. 36—Status and financial situation of doctoral students

It is interesting to compare the answers given by the national unions of students with the national reports written by ministries responsible for higher education. In Denmark, for example, the ministry considers doctoral students as both students and early stage researchers, but as stated by the national union of students, they are represented only by the labour union. In general, the national report and student union answer do not display very divergent answers on this issue. However, in a number of national reports the status of doctoral students is not clearly specified²⁹, and in more than one, their status is linked with the terms of the contract the individual student has.

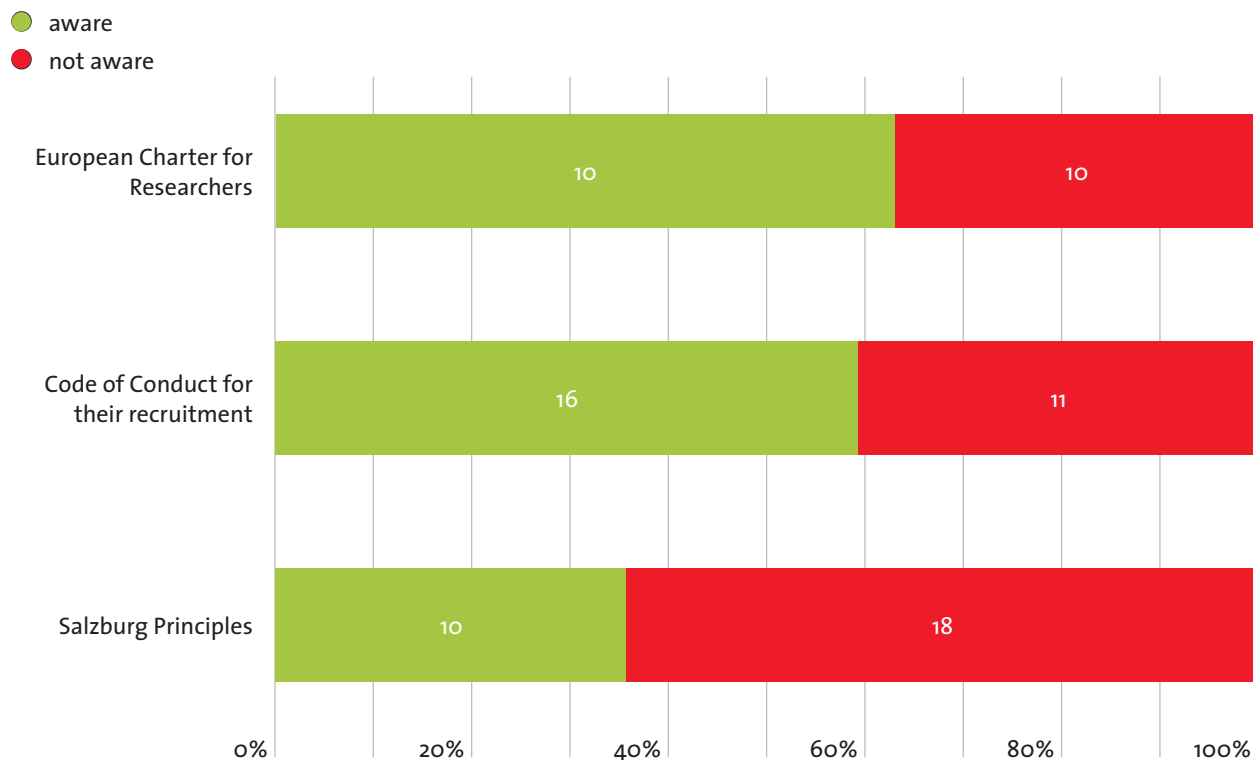
²⁹ Also if it is clearly asked in the national report form.

10.5 THE SALZBURG PRINCIPLES, THE EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR RESEARCHERS AND THE CODE OF CONDUCT FOR THEIR RECRUITMENT.

The Salzburg Principles, the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for their recruitment are important documents laying down the principles for doctoral education in the European Higher Education Area and the European Union respectively. Although these documents are also seen as important within the Bologna Process and are often mentioned in national reports by ministries, knowledge of these documents amongst national unions of students is not yet widespread.

Ten out of 28 unions are not aware of the content of the European Charter for Researchers, 11 out of 28 do not know the Code of Conduct and 18 out of 28 unions have a limited understanding of the Salzburg principles. Furthermore, 6 out of 34 unions did not even answer the questions related to these documents.

fig. 37—Level of awareness of the student unions regarding important documents for doctoral studies



These results depend on a range of factors, but it is clear that the documents have not been disseminated and discussed at national level. This most likely also means that they have not been discussed at the institutional level either, or that student representatives have not been included in these debates around research and doctoral education. It is difficult to draw conclusions regarding whether that also means that the principles laid down in these three documents are not followed, or if what is stated there is already standard practice in most Bologna Process countries.

It is clear, however, that further engagement with these topics is required from both national unions of students and the European Students' Union. Ministries of education have a particular responsibility regarding the dissemination and implementation of these principles and supporting documents, and need to take it as a matter for real action. And higher education institutions must involve student representatives in the work and debates regarding the organisation of the third cycle.

10.6 CHANGES SINCE 2007

From the answers provided by the national unions of students, it is clear that some change is taking place regarding the third cycle. The picture regarding how much national unions of students (who represent doctoral students) are really involved in these changes is mixed. The main trends reported by the respondents can be described as the following:

A number of countries are still working on implementation of the third cycle; this is reported from Austria, Georgia and Slovenia.

In some countries, rather radical changes regarding the funding of doctoral programmes seem to have taken place. This is the case, for example, in the Netherlands where the funds for research are no longer given directly to universities by a funding council that then awards grants to what is, in their eyes, the most promising project. In Portugal, there has been an increase in the funding for post-doctoral programmes and positions and a correspondent increase in the number of hired researchers within higher education institutions. Six out of 33 unions also report developments regarding more organised doctoral schools in their country.

A positive development is that Italy and France refer to an increase in doctoral student scholarships in those cases where a new contract has been written for a doctoral student. However, only 3 out of 33 unions report a similarly positive development for first and second cycle students.

Regarding the involvement of national unions of students in the work on doctoral education, only a small group of respondents state that they are being involved. This lack of involvement of national unions of students might reflect a lack of recognition among ministries of education regarding the fact that many student unions do in fact represent doctoral students. This lack of involvement is reported from the Czech Republic and the Netherlands, among others.

It can thus be concluded that there is a real need to further involve those organisations representing doctoral students in issues regarding their education and research environment.

11 LIFELONG LEARNING

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Lifelong Learning was first mentioned in the Bologna Declaration, but only in the Prague Communiqué signed by ministers in 2001 did they “recognized the need for a lifelong learning perspective on education” in order “to face the challenges of competitiveness and the use of new technologies and to improve social cohesion, equal opportunities and the quality of life.” In the Berlin Communiqué, its importance was underlined but no action was taken, and in Bergen in 2005 the creation of the European Qualifications Framework by the European Commission was considered “as an opportunity to further embed lifelong learning in higher education.”

By the Bergen ministerial conference, lifelong learning and recognition of prior learning were interlinked with a bigger focus on widening participation. However, promoted through the European Commission’s initiatives in the context of the Lisbon Strategy, and primarily regarded as a tool for the economic development, the topic became increasingly prominent throughout the entire continent, far beyond the borders of the European Union.

The London Communiqué in 2007 integrated both concepts of lifelong learning: it called for “a more systematic development of flexible learning paths” and asked “to improve employability in relation to each of these cycles as well as in the context of lifelong learning.”

Lifelong learning is being singled out as one of the most important elements of higher education reform. In fact, lifelong learning is seen by a number of the actors in the European arena as a framework that structures all other elements of the reorganisation of higher education. It gained momentum and is now pointed out as one of the priorities for the decade to come. The understanding of the concept is still reliant on national policies and contexts, but a clear step in the direction of a common European understanding of the term was provided by the European Universities Charter for Lifelong Learning. This is expected to be a basis for further debates that do not exclude stakeholders and the main group directly affected by this priority—learners themselves.

Things seem to be looking up for now, as complex definitions are being circulated at European level, but once we take a deeper look into national, and especially institutional, understanding of the term, we see

that a lot more needs to be done. Perhaps the main burning issue is regarding lifelong learning as a natural part of education, subject to the same principles of public responsibility and public financing, with a clear focus on stakeholder participation and quality enhancement. This chapter will delve into the current understanding of the national unions of students regarding progress on making lifelong learning more than a “pocket swiss knife” concept that can be used to rename or justify any initiative outside the formal setting of higher education.

11.2 CONCLUSIONS

The concept of lifelong learning is seen as multidimensional by all stakeholders and national student unions make no exception. However, a clear misconception of lifelong learning being a mere tool for professional reconversion and market development is still present at the national and sometimes institutional level.

It seems therefore that although the unions recognise that lifelong learning is primarily seen as continuing education and that public authorities are using it as a rhetorical priority, many countries still do not have any strategy or policy at the national level. The development of the sector is relying mostly on the initiative of higher education institutions, considering that even in the case where public authorities take a bigger role in organising lifelong learning this is many times a shared responsibility.

In spite of the need for building coherent national and institutional strategies for lifelong learning that ensure the fulfilment of all missions related to this composite concept, it seems that only half of the European Higher Education Area countries have managed to do develop them. Due to this situation, sometimes lifelong learners are caught in the middle, between being an ordinary student with the same rights and duties and a learner with a special status.

Recognition of prior learning is being increasingly regarded as a tool for creating greater flexibility in learning paths and, unfortunately, slow progress in building national frameworks in this regard has been registered. Institutions seem to be more dynamic in this field, by setting up recognition of prior learning systems as part of their institutional autonomy. The problem that seems to arise in some cases is that there is a lack of consistency between various institutional practices, which makes it harder for the learner to benefit from a truly open and effective way of recognising prior learning experiences.

11.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Looking at the concerns expressed by ESU members, there is a clear need for a greater involvement from the side of public authorities in order to make sure that lifelong learners are not regarded as a special category with fewer rights and benefiting from fewer support measures than students enrolled in ordinary higher education programmes. Proper strategies in the field of lifelong learning and a fully systemic approach must be further developed, while keeping in mind the good practice examples and guiding documents that already exist at European level.

In addition, lifelong learning needs to be mainstreamed in the mission of higher education institutions, while the full participation of relevant stakeholders, in particular learners, must be encouraged and guaranteed. Lifelong learners should not be segregated from normal students, in order for learning paths to become fully flexible and various access routes to be equally well regarded by the academic and professional world.

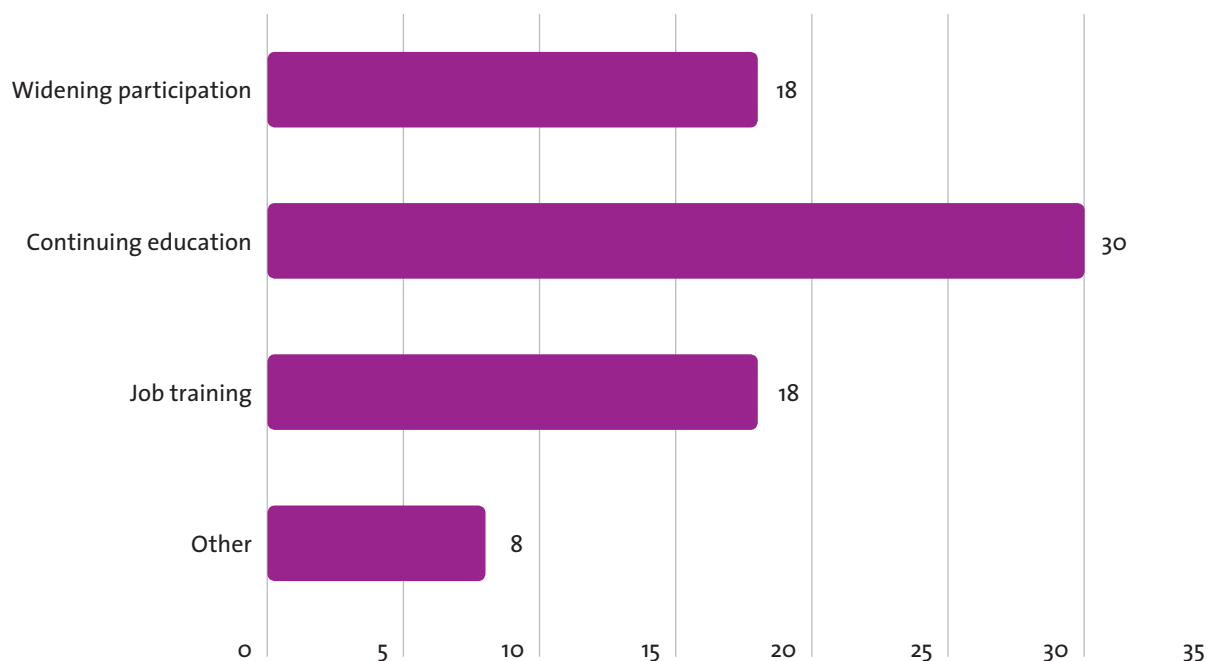
As a prerequisite for successful lifelong learning strategies, the recognition of prior learning must be fully available, without financial burdens for learners. In order to build sound recognition practices, a comprehensive implementation of all Bologna action lines must be pursued, with a special focus on qualification frameworks, learning outcomes and ECTS, Diploma Supplement and last, but certainly not least, sound quality assurance procedures.

11.4 LIFELONG LEARNING AS A CONCEPT

Lifelong learning remains diverse and sometimes unclear to all those referring to it in the debates held at European level. The concept is used indistinctively as a synonym of adult education in initial levels of training; as part of the widening participation agenda; as permanent access to education for all; as upskilling for those with solid professional experience and few formal qualifications; as continuing education for former graduates or their mere professional update, etc. In other cases, the diversity of meanings means it is also considered as a matter of the type, place and level of provision of education: the short cycle linked to the 1st cycle of the Bologna Process; short, specific professional courses that do not result in a degree award; general courses that are open to anyone for the purpose of intellectual fulfilment and personal development; on-the-job training, etc.

We asked the national unions of students what they understood to be the meaning of lifelong learning. The large majority answered continuing education (30), while more than half (18) also regarded widening participation and job training as appropriate definitions. It should be noted that most unions selected two or three definitions and thus accept the multidimensional character of the concept. But several respondents highlighted that it is wrongly seen as a mere tool for developing the labour market: it should be used for recognising that learning is not only what one can achieve in the context of the classroom, but throughout the lifetime, and that more opportunities for accessing and developing knowledge beyond mere professional training are required.

fig. 38—Definition of lifelong learning



11.5 STRATEGY TOWARDS LIFELONG LEARNING

Considering all the perspectives of what lifelong learning is and what it should encompass, one can expect that the different elements of this concept are prioritised in a diverse manner at national level. The student unions were questioned about the existence of a policy for promoting access to continuing education at the national level and the respondents were equally divided between positive and negative an-

swers. 14 unions reported that there is no such policy or that they have no knowledge of it, while another half confirmed the existence of this policy. Many of the positive answers focused primarily on the existence of legal texts that have allowed and promoted the development of the sector. Some of the examples came from Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Norway, Spain and the United Kingdom, for example. The national union from Slovenia reported extensively on a debate between the ministry and stakeholders regarding a strategy for the sector. French students confirmed the existence of such a policy but regretted that the information about the different opportunities it creates is scattered and not organised enough.

Considering how important this topic has been recognised to be, it is quite surprising that half of respondents could not report any national strategy for the sector. The cases presented were mostly from eastern European countries and included Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Georgia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Slovakia, amongst others. Comments added to the answers indicate that despite this fact, some higher education institutions are taking the initiative and the responsibility for developing tools and programmes on their own.

When questioned about widening access in higher education, half of respondents (14) confirmed that the country had a national policy especially designed for enhancing access for early school leavers and non-graduates. But again, the exact same number of national unions reported such a policy not to exist. Interestingly, some of the unions that answered positively to the first question above supplied a negative answer to this one, and vice versa, suggesting a definite lack of coherency in the national approach to lifelong learning.

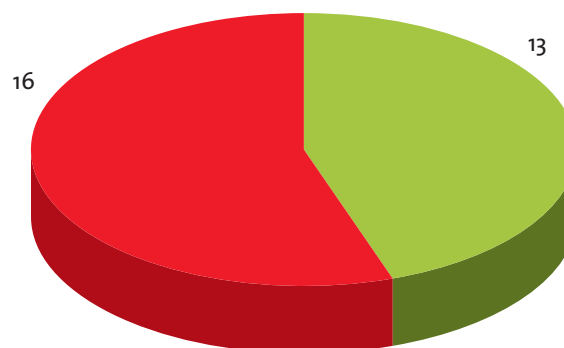
The description of the policy on widening participation given by the respondents related mostly to admission procedures, with the introduction of special entrance exams, the validation of the prior experiential learning or the creation of specific classes or paths within higher education institutions. Only the Irish respondent made the link between the development of a policy for allowing access from larger cohorts of learners and the national qualifications frameworks—the “national access plan 2008-2013”—which is an important indicator of the depth of integration of the different topics of reform.

Admission procedures are an important tool for widening access to adult learners and students with different profiles and backgrounds, but they may not be sufficient to allow an expansion of the students enrolling through these mechanisms. It is fundamental that they have enough financial support and incentives for pursuing higher levels of education successfully. 13 unions reported that these incentives exist, but the majority of them (16) state that such mechanisms are still lacking. The countries that con-

firmed these mechanisms were generally the Nordic countries plus Austria, Belgium, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania and Spain. However, it should be noted that in some of these countries, the financial incentives mentioned are in place for all students and not only for lifelong learners.

fig. 39—Existence of financial incentives for continuing education or second chance learners

- Yes
- No

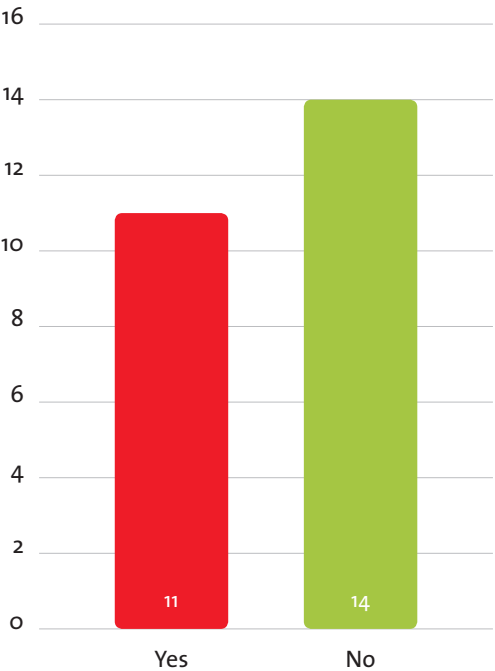


It seems that one of the reasons for the growing interest of higher education institutions in some countries in lifelong learning activities is the capacity for using this to raise income levels. Several unions reported that tuition fees have been charged to these students, even in countries where they do not exist for regular students. In Denmark, for example, tuition fees are requested from these students, but only in the case of enrolment on a part-time basis. There is an enormous variety of situations between countries and within countries themselves. In Poland, fees for regular students and for lifelong learners differ and in Estonia, in most cases the situation is the same for different categories of learner, but it may happen that lifelong learners pay higher fees. The respondent from Portugal stated that the fees are the same for degree students, regardless of their access route, but there are specific fees charged in the case of continuing education.

Having tuition fees for these students doesn't mean that in all cases the burden lies on their shoulders alone. Again, we find a very diverse situation and some unions mentioned that there are different sources for covering these expenses; public authorities (through either the higher education sector or social security and employment agencies), employers themselves, students or a mix of different sources. In countries where lifelong learners and ordinary students have the same status, there are similar systems of funding for institutions and support for students. Funds from public sources are sometimes allocated to students, but in the majority of the cases they are directly provided to the higher education institutions themselves. The respondent from Italy reported that the higher education institutions themselves are the ones practicing a reduction of the level of tuition fees for these cases.

There are also fees associated with the process of admission or credit through the recognition of prior learning. Although these are presented mostly as administrative fees, it remains a fact that they can reach significant amounts. In the case of the Belgian-Flemish community, the prices vary from over 200 to 600 euros, depending on the number of units within a degree and the cycle this degree belongs to. In Slovenia the amounts have been negotiated with the student representatives and in Norway there are also regulations that stipulate the fees that can be charged. However, in the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Portugal and Spain it varies greatly and depends mostly on the higher education institution's policy.

fig. 40—Are there fees associated with RPL?



All in all, it seems that lifelong learners are caught in the middle, between being an ordinary student with the same rights and duties, and a learner with a special status. Instead of this meaning that they have a secure situation, it means that they are regarded as fee-paying students, in a situation where common rules don't apply. It is rather worrying to see signs that the responsibility for the sector is so much fragmented or undefined. The only way to enhance the progress of the sector in a sustainable manner is to ensure that these students are granted access to an education free from burden and to the support

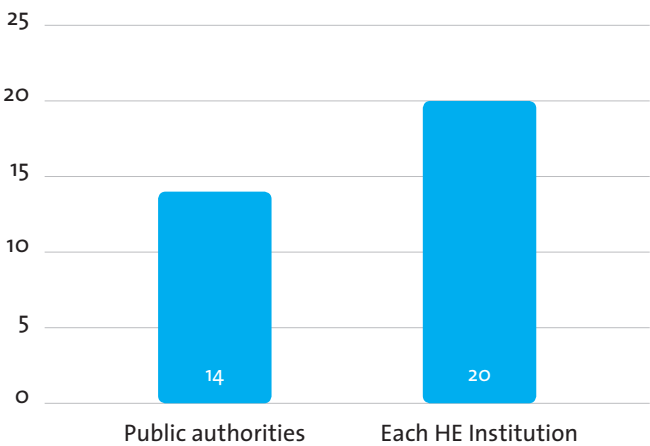
mechanisms to allow for their full development. Public responsibility must be recognised and public authorities must seek to take a greater role in the creation of the necessary conditions for this.

11.6 THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR LIFELONG LEARNING AND RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

Lifelong learning seems to be increasingly prioritised by public authorities and higher education institutions, according to our respondents. But another element for assessing its real impact is to check how and by whom the sector is organised.

Many student unions report that initiatives have been recently taken by governments in this area, either by creating a legal framework, establishing targets and assuming the coordination of the sector or introducing a debate about the topic. Nearly half of the respondents (14) attributed the main role for the organisation of further education to public authorities, but half of them (7) also indicated the existence of a shared responsibility between public authorities and higher education institutions. Despite all the initiatives and shared work, the majority of respondents clearly stated that it is up to higher education institutions to organise the sector. In Estonia, for example, the national student union reported that the topic has been prioritised within the ministry and the legislation defines in broad terms the aims and general principles for the validation of the prior learning achieved. However, each higher education institution sets its own targets and policies regarding lifelong learning and the organisation of study programmes. Similar feedback was also provided by Portugal.

fig. 41—Organisation of further education at national level



It seems that higher education institutions are frequently operating without the support of any framework developed for the sector. This brings inevitably problems of consistency in terms of initiatives and procedures and raises concerns as to whether there is enough sustainability and quality in relation to these activities. By analysing some of the answers, it is apparent that lifelong learning is often a separate sector within higher education institutions and despite the commitment some of them show, it is not sure to which extent these sectors are subject to the same rules.

11.7 AVAILABILITY OF RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

Recognition of prior learning is a fundamental tool for developing a lifelong learning strategy. In the context of the Bologna Process reforms there is a greater recognition that setting, duration and mode of provision are less important than the actual knowledge, competences and skills achieved by the learner. This instrument can enhance access to education and training to a number of individuals that have acquired knowledge through formal, non-formal and informal learning but never had the chance to enrol in higher education. The validation of this knowledge should also be used by students themselves that can request credit within their study programmes and be exempted from taking redundant courses. All of these elements constitute a small revolution for many higher education institutions, as it fundamentally changes the role of the teacher and of the learners.

We queried the national unions of students about the current status of recognition of prior learning and the situation appears to have changed little since 2007, as shown in the map below. The situation is diverse across the continent, with a slight increase in the number of countries reporting the existence of a national-based system for the recognition of prior learning. A positive note should be issued regarding the evolution of Estonia, which moved from debating and reforming to having a national policy.

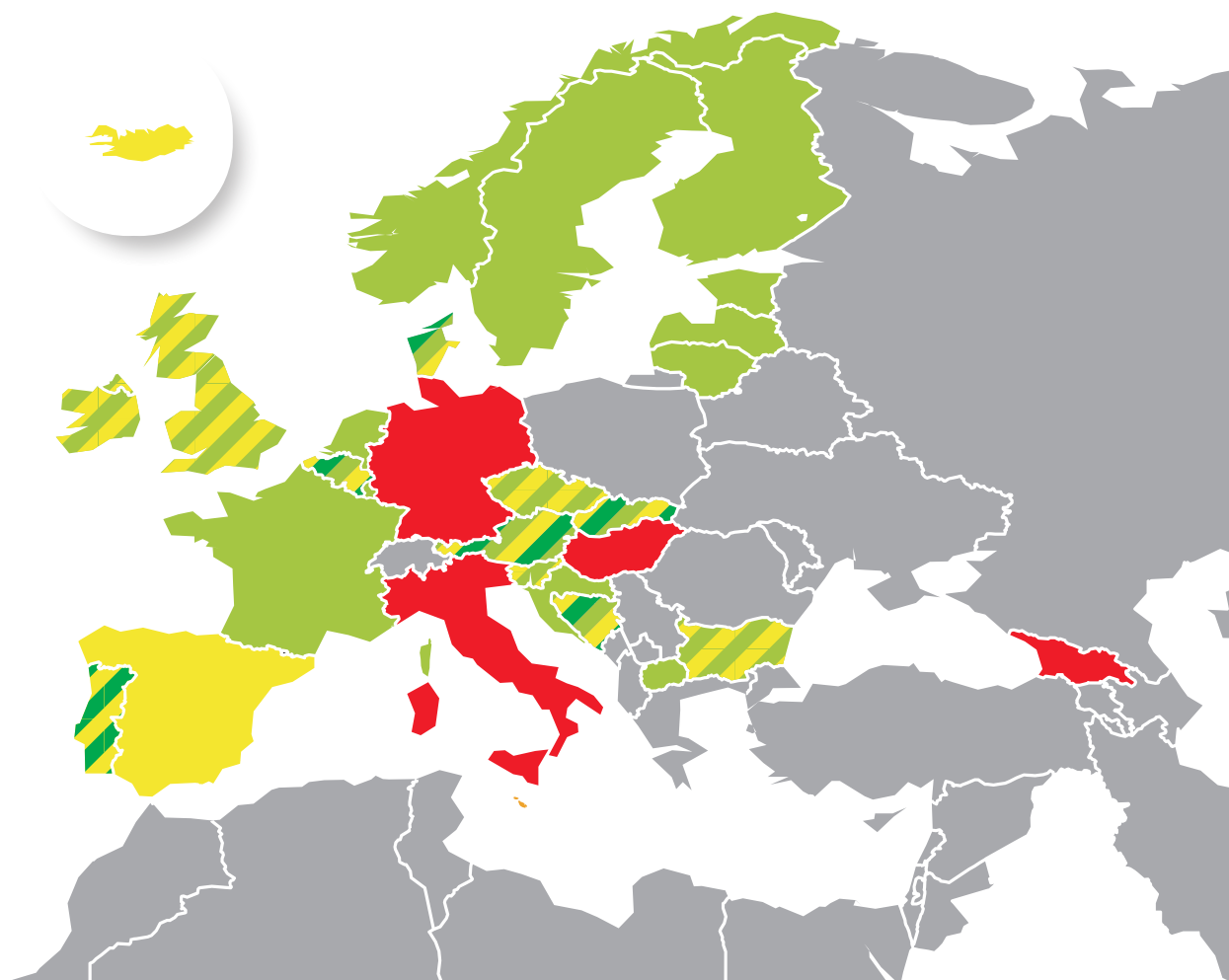
A large number of these unions reported a mixed situation, where national provision is coupled with legislation and rules for a specific sector and/or with local policy of the higher education institutions themselves. In fact, the existence of national legislation doesn't mean that the system is fully covering all higher education institutions, and many of the answers indicate that the recognition of prior learning is only applied in some sectors (14 countries). This is the reason for many unions selecting multiple options. Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Serbia and Ukraine report having no recognition of prior learning at all. That is rather surprising in the cases of Hungary (that reported having a national system in place in 2007) and of Germany (that stated in the last edition of BWSE that this was limited to local institutional policy) and suggests a need for further investigation of these answers.

fig. 42—Availability of recognition of prior learning

- Available by national or regional policy
- Available only in some sectors
- Available only in some institutions
- Other (limited, being discussed)
- Not available at all

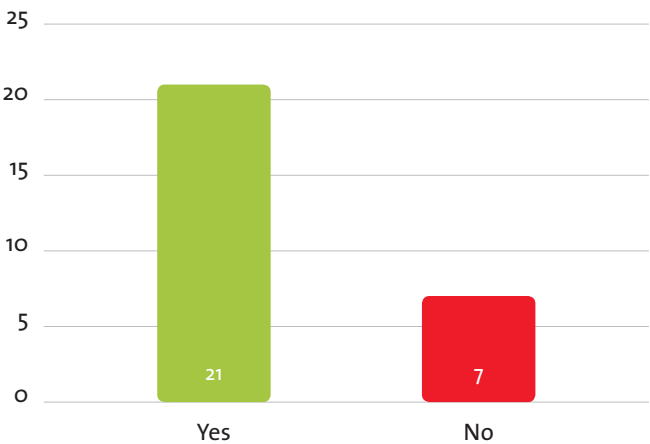
However, more than half of the respondents' answers to this question (16) clearly highlighted the prominent role of higher education institutions themselves in the creation of local policy and thus in enabling these mechanisms to exist.

It seems that by taking the initiative on the ground, higher education institutions have successfully created real possibilities for the validation of



learning achieved before or outside the academic activities developed within campuses. We asked unions about the real existence of opportunities for the recognition of prior learning and the answer was very positive, with three quarters stating that this is the case and only seven unions answering such opportunities do not exist. It should be noted that although Bulgaria, Poland, Spain and Sweden reported that the recognition of prior learning was available either by national or regional policy, or by the initiative of some institutions, they also report that the opportunities in practice are limited, as shown in the map above. This is an indication of a divorce between legal frameworks and the reality on the ground, which is a recurrent theme throughout this report.

fig. 43—Does recognition of prior learning really exist in your country?



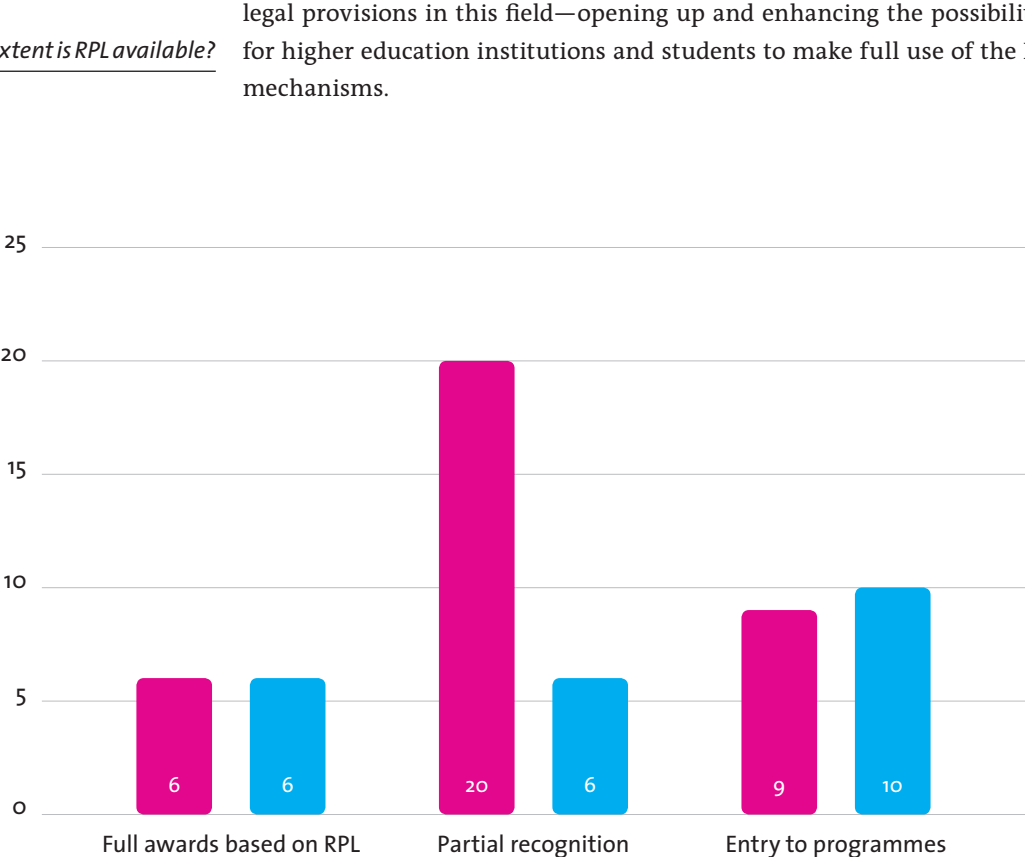
11.8 PURPOSE OF THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

Mechanisms for validating prior learning are in place in most countries, but they are used for a variety of purposes. In most cases, higher education institutions use RPL for enhancing access to higher education and for credit within study programmes. We noticed that credit within is now predominant: 20 unions state that this is a common practice and 6 others claim that legislation allows such practice or that it occurs sometimes. In the 2007 edition, only 12 respondents answered this way. The use of RPL as a mechanism for widening access has increased at a slower pace: 19 respondents confirm that this exists, against the 16 positive answers received in 2007. This can indicate that RPL is being regarded by higher education institutions as a tool for increasing flexibility in the learning paths for student already enrolled, shortening their study periods and releasing them from typical assessment methods.

Awarding degrees based fully on the recognition of prior learning happens only in a minority of cases. However, the situation has changed from the 3 positive answers received in 2007 to the 12 answers now that allow for this possibility. Although a lot of progress seems to have been made, caution needs to be exercised in the analysis of these figures because the criteria on which these statements have been made are varied, and this assessment will require further research in the future. Despite this, it remains an interesting point of interest that public authorities have been concerned with the flexibilisation of their

fig. 44—To what extent is RPL available?

- Yes
- Sometimes



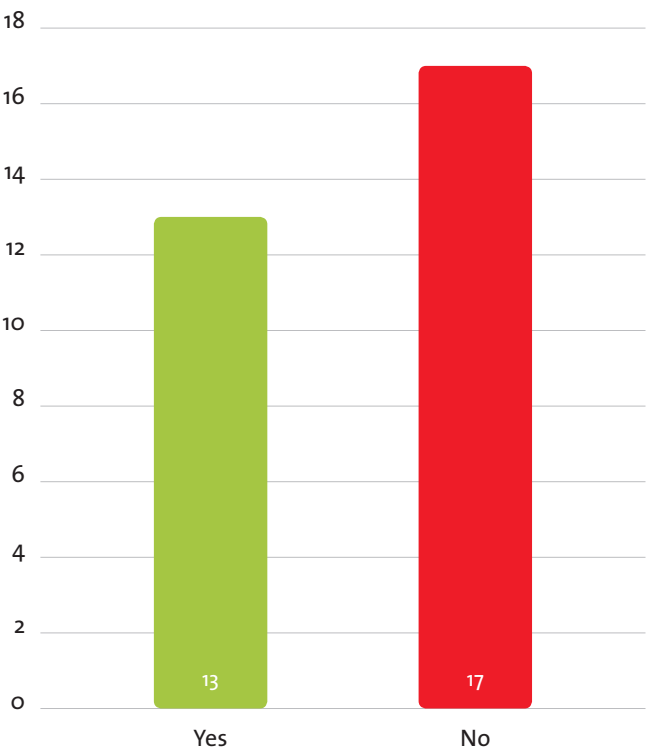
Despite the creation of frameworks and guidance on principles at national level in some countries, as this is an academic related activity, the policy for the recognition of prior learning is regarded as part of institutional autonomy. There are very different understandings of what RPL is and should focus on. Although some unions indicate that there is an increasing level of openness in relation to the use of these

mechanisms, others are clear about the fact that institutions focus primarily on the validation of learning achieved in formal and sometimes non-formal settings.

11.9 DEVELOPMENT AND CONSISTENCY OF PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES FOR RPL

There were also reports about the lack of consistency of practice and procedures between different higher education institutions within the same country. While recognising that diversity is a positive feature in higher education, much concern arises when principles and understanding of the concept of recognition of prior learning are applied differently to the same group of students without a minimum level of alignment. 57% of respondents state that there are no common rules and procedures for applying RPL and the remaining 43% confirm its existence, indicating some level of cooperation or influence of the legal frameworks mentioned earlier.

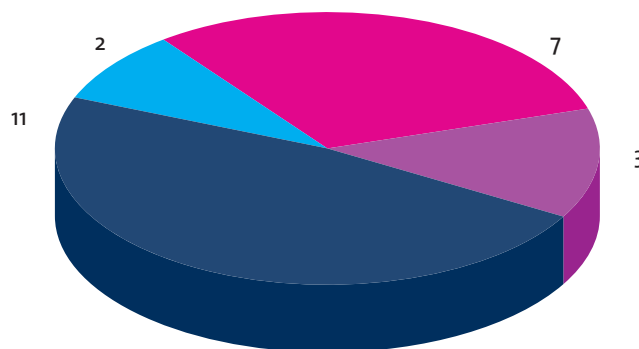
fig. 45—Existence of common rules and procedures for recognition of prior learning



In fact, public authorities have been focusing on the development of these common principles and procedures and have allowed its existence. The majority of student unions reveal a great influence of the legal provisions developed either at national or regional level. Belgium—Flemish community, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Ireland, Lithuania, Macedonia, Spain, Slovenia are examples of countries where a legal framework has been created specifically for this. Self-regulation has been developed recently in Finland, in which both the university and the non-university sector are discussing their own regulations. Norway and Slovakia are other examples where the self-regulation of higher education institutions is taking place. However, as observed in other points of the questionnaire, the respective initiatives of institutions and governments are coexisting. Amongst the 13 respondents that were positive about the existence of common rules and procedures for RPL, Belgium-Flemish community, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Estonia, Ireland and Slovenia were identified as countries where there is a multi-level type of regulation. In some cases, this is also due to the existence of both national and community-level governments, with this resulting in an overall inflation of the figures as presented in the graph below.

fig. 46—How were these common rules developed?

- National legal framework
- Regional legal framework
- National self-regulation
- Regional self-regulation

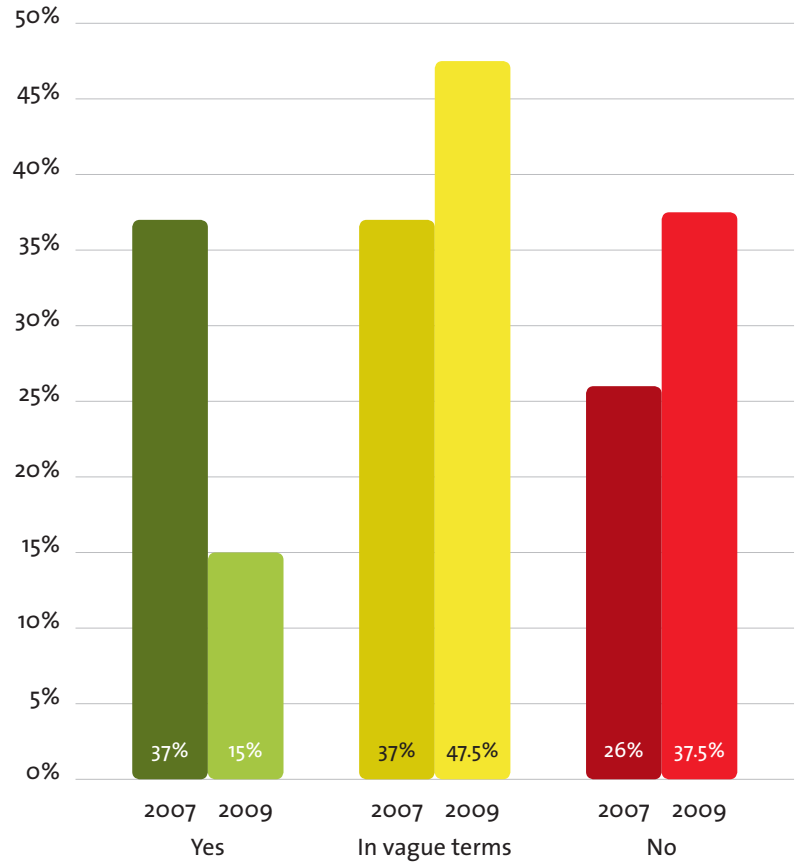


11.10 THE INTERLINK BETWEEN RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING AND OTHER REFORMS

The discussion about national qualifications frameworks is increasingly linked to the concept and use of the recognition of prior learning. Comparing the results revealed in the 2007 edition of Bologna With Student Eyes, it is clear that there has been a 10% reduction in each of the group of respondents that saw no link between the two elements or that saw a small or vague link. The unions that answered positively increased from 15% in 2007 to 37%.

These results indicate at the same time that the reform of qualifications frameworks has started more steadily in a number of countries and that the elements of reform are becoming slightly more integrated. The *à la carte* approach that ESU highlights in relation to national implementation, in which each action line of the Bologna Process is treated separately, remains a problem, however. Despite this progress, two thirds of respondents continue to see no or little link between the two topics, even though the debate on, and implementation of, national qualifications frameworks has not been restricted solely to one third of countries in the EHEA.

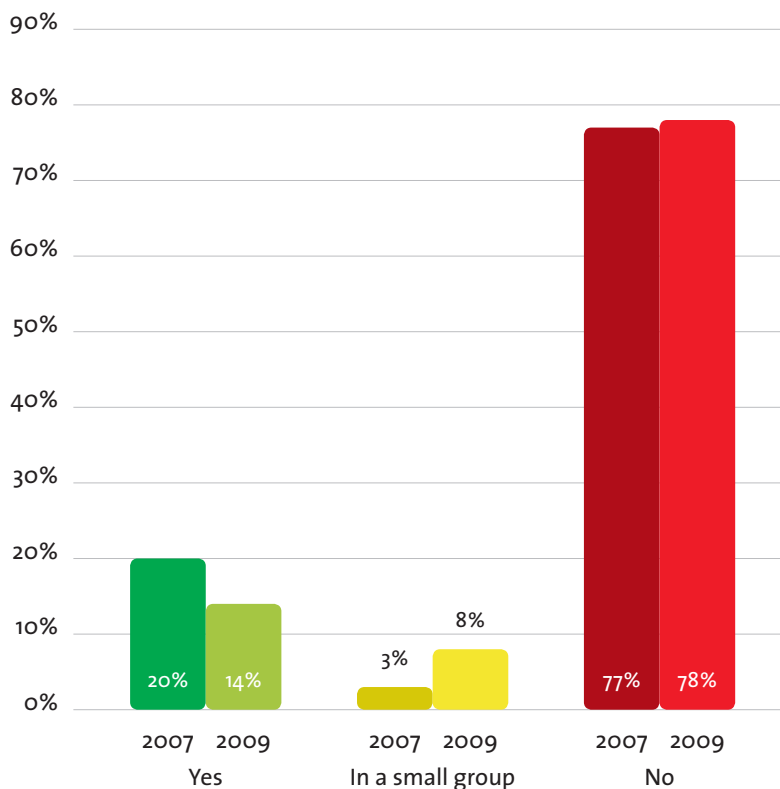
fig. 47—Is the introduction of RPL linked with the reform of qualifications frameworks?



11.11 INVOLVEMENT AND KNOWLEDGE OF STAKEHOLDERS?

A central point in the Bologna Process reforms refers to the involvement of relevant stakeholders and the increase in the level of awareness and ownership these acquire. As the success of these reforms relies heavily on their being understood by the people whose lives they aim to improve, communication of the purpose and the means of these new mechanisms is fundamental. In the case of the recognition of prior learning, over and above the academic community, it is necessary that the wider public acknowledges and uses the opportunities created by these mechanisms. They can have an enormous impact on the upskilling and social development of a community. Despite the efforts put in place and the initiatives taken by higher education institutions and public authorities, this is an issue that remains obscure to the wider public, according to national unions.

fig. 48—Is RPL well-known amongst the wider public

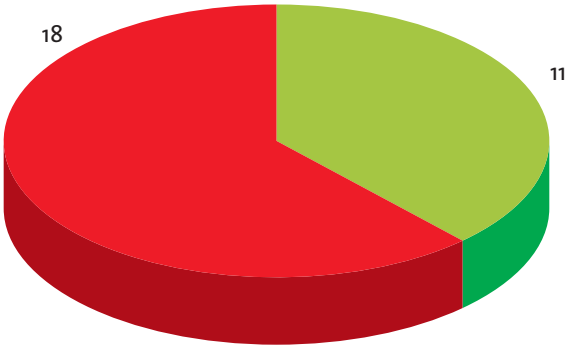


Furthermore, little or no progress in this respect can be seen from the answers of the national unions of students, as the increase in the number of respondents answering positively to the question corresponds to the decrease in the number of answers that reported widespread knowledge of RPL amongst a specific sector in society. Much work must be done to make sure that the reforms that require such a great level of change and enhance so many possibilities are positively affecting the wider public.

Student unions have themselves a great responsibility in terms of mainstreaming knowledge and adherence to the principles and mechanisms for the recognition of prior learning. However, it also seems that amongst student unions there is a need for greater attention to be paid to the topic. Only 11 out of 29 respondents have created a policy regarding this topic and a majority of 18 have not yet done so. It is true to a certain extent that student unions often develop policy on topics that are high on the agenda and need an immediate reaction. They tend to deprioritise topics that are not being developed and therefore not affecting students' lives. In this regard, the results can be understood as an indication that beyond all rhetoric, there has been little impact in terms of the initiatives developed so far. However, student unions also have a responsibility in this respect and the proper implementation of these reforms will require further commitment and attention.

fig. 49—Has your national union of students adopted a policy on RPL?

- Yes
- No



12 EMPLOYABILITY

12.1 INTRODUCTION

Since the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998, enhancing the employability of European citizens has been one of the core objectives of what became the Bologna Process. What is interesting is the journey the sector has taken in trying to deliver that objective. The 1999 Bologna Declaration enshrined the reforms as acting “*to promote European citizens employability*”³⁰ although it only actually made two references to employability and both were simply statements of intent. Yet the 2007 London Ministerial Communiqué made seven references and dedicated a section of the communiqué specifically to employability.

In between these statements from ministers, references to employability have matured from simply expressing intent to enhance employability to commitments on exactly how enhancement will be achieved and acknowledging the barriers that still exist. These included:

- ▶ internationalising the curricula and developing skills for the labour market³¹
- ▶ employer engagement, use of the Diploma Supplement and increasing mobility through joint degrees³²
- ▶ Acknowledging issues with employability after the first cycle, promoting interdisciplinary training and transferable skills, and introducing an employers’ organisation to the Bologna Follow Up Group³³
- ▶ Use of ECTS to remove barriers to access and progression, gathering data concerning employability, qualification frameworks that encourage mobility to improve employability, sharing

³⁰ Bologna Declaration, 1999, http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/MDC/BOLOGNA_DECLARATION1.pdf

³¹ Prague Communiqué, 2001, http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/MDC/PRAGUE_COMMUNIQUE.pdf

³² Berlin Communiqué, 2003, http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/MDC/Berlin_Communique1.pdf

³³ Bergen Communiqué, 2005, http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/MDC/O5O52O_Bergen_Communique1.pdf

of best practice, better communication of the reforms to employers and other stakeholders and inclusion of employability within the stocktaking process³⁴

The European Universities Association noted in 2007 that the number of institutions that considered employability as “*very important*” had increased to 67% from only 11% in 2003. Certainly this would suggest that the employability agenda has gathered momentum although information from EUA also reflects that employer engagement has remained static over this time, which has led to a poor communication of reforms to employers and public authorities. This statement is supported by the fact that only 22% of institutions in 2007 expected their students to enter the labour market after the first cycle.

Bologna With Student Eyes 2007 reported concern about the employability of first cycle (bachelor) degrees, attributed to a lack of dialogue with employers

12.2 CONCLUSIONS

Employability has been a very reflective topic for partners in the Bologna Process. Communiqués have given more specific guidance, commitments and admissions of barriers and areas for improvement as they have progressed. Although employability has moved substantially up in the agenda for many countries, efforts at the institutional level seem to be insufficient and inconsistent.

Employers remain wary of first cycle qualifications, either because of a ‘cut and paste’ mentality to moving from old degree structures to a three cycle structure or because of a lack of employer engagement. The Bologna Process was meant to deliver first cycle degrees relevant to the labour market and, in some cases from the student perspective, this has not happened.

12.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ministers should reflect on ways to ensure that first cycle degrees become or remain relevant to the labour market, namely through more sophisticated curricula development that embeds opportunities for enhancing employability skills.

³⁴ London Communiqué, 2007, http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/MDC/London_Communique18May2007.pdf

- Employer engagement and communication must remain an area of work for ministries and higher education institutions, both for curricula adaptation and development and for enhancing knowledge of the purpose and potential of the cycles' reforms.
- Although committed to in the 2007 London Communiqué, it appears that more work is needed in gathering data concerning graduate employability. There will be a need to interlink employability with a proper implementation of qualifications frameworks, the use of learning outcomes and strategies for lifelong learning.

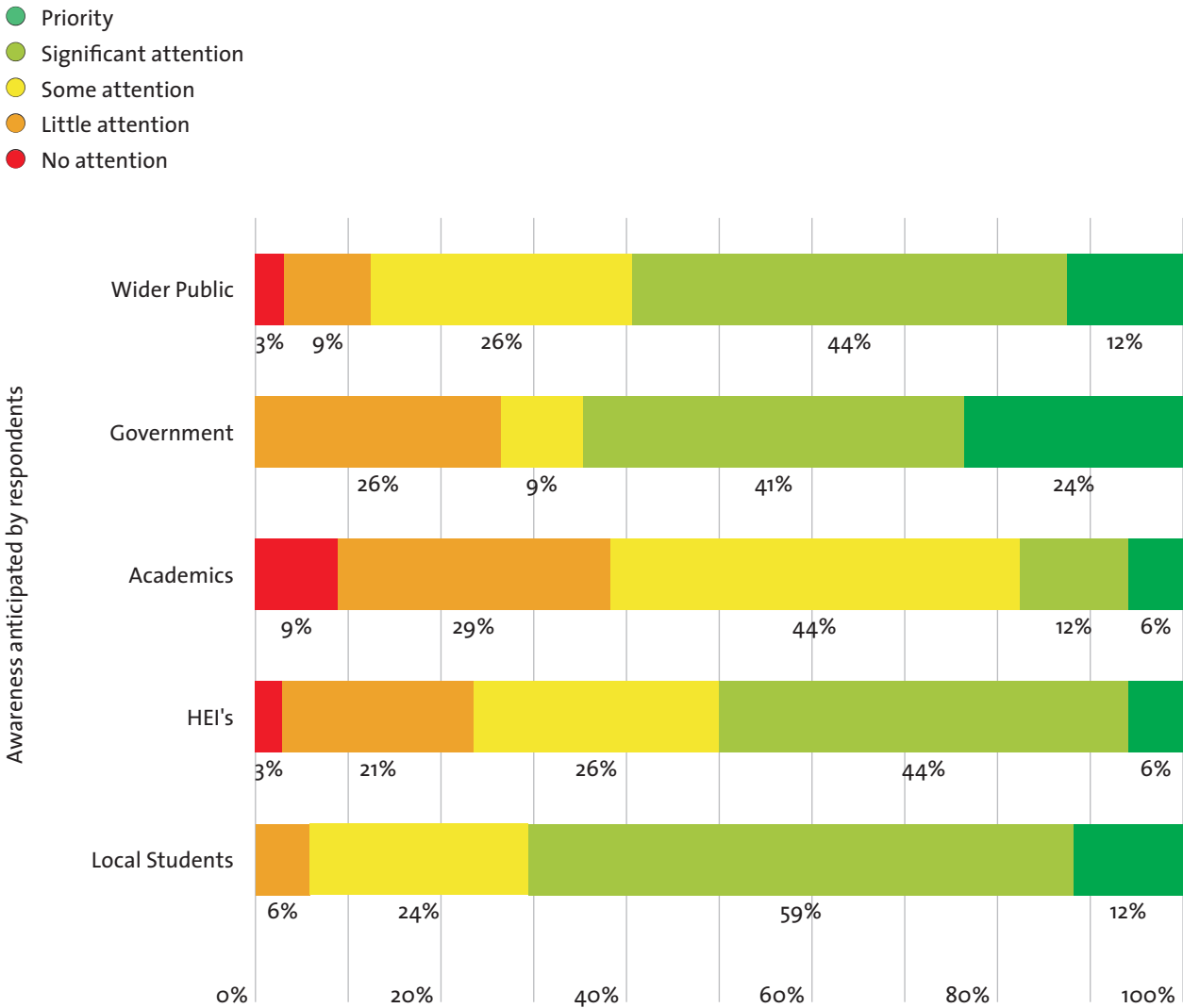
12.4 PERCEIVED LEVEL OF ATTENTION GIVEN TO EMPLOYABILITY

Unions were asked the level of priority/attention paid to employability by different stakeholders. It is positive to note that at least 75% of unions consider that all stakeholders are paying at least some attention to the employability agenda.

No equivalent data is available from Bologna With Student Eyes 2007. However, comparison is possible with the results of the Trends V report, in which 67% of the leadership of higher education institutions attributed high importance to the topic. There is a clear contrast with the student respondents, only 50% of whom claim that higher education institutions take this as a priority or assign a significant level of attention to it. It should be noted that the Trends report itself recognises that these figures were overestimated, as only one third reported to take measures to promote employability, and less than a quarter reported that students moved to the labour market after the first cycle.

94% of the student unions reported that local students pay either some, significant or priority attention to employability. Such a level of attention is reported to be closely followed by governments and the wider public. This is in stark contrast to academics with 38% of respondent NUSes believing they pay little or no attention to the topic. This may have implications for curriculum development at the grass roots level in terms of employability skills and is sustained by evidence in other reports that assess the absence of real curricula and attitude change in the department level. The contrast reported by the student unions also points to a sense of relative closure of the institutions to societal needs and constitutes a point of concern.

fig. 50—Assessment of the level of attention paid to employability of study programmes by the different stakeholders



12.5 EMPLOYERS' LEVEL OF AWARENESS OF THE BOLOGNA REFORMS

“... evaluations show that many bachelor students still experience large problems in getting a relevant job without a Masters degree. The Bachelor degree, which replaced a four yearly education at most university programmes, seems to have trouble getting acknowledged by many employers. The Master degree seems to have been accepted more easily.”

National Union of Students in Norway (NSU) and Norwegian association of students (StL)

Unions were asked to assess the level of employers' awareness, knowledge and trust of degrees designed under the Bologna framework. It should be welcomed that nearly all unions accepted that the awareness of 'Bologna' degrees by employers was increasing. However a common theme was that although awareness and knowledge of new degree structures had increased, trust remains an issue.

Many unions still acknowledge that due either to 'cut and paste' curriculum change to create a three cycle system or a lack of engagement with employers, first cycle qualifications (Bachelors) are often treated with scepticism by employers.

“Research made by the student union of the University of Ljubljana showed that 61.1% of employers have not been properly informed by the Government about Bologna reforms and the new Bologna structure. In addition, 45% of employers assessed their knowledge of Bologna process as vague.”

12.6 TOOLS FOR ENHANCING EMPLOYABILITY

Some institutions include external representatives in evaluating study programmes, some more than others. Many of the programmes of professional studies, like nursing and teaching, have extensive work placement periods. Most students, however, obtain very little relevant work experience before graduating.

National Union of Students in Norway (NSU) and Norwegian association of students (StL)

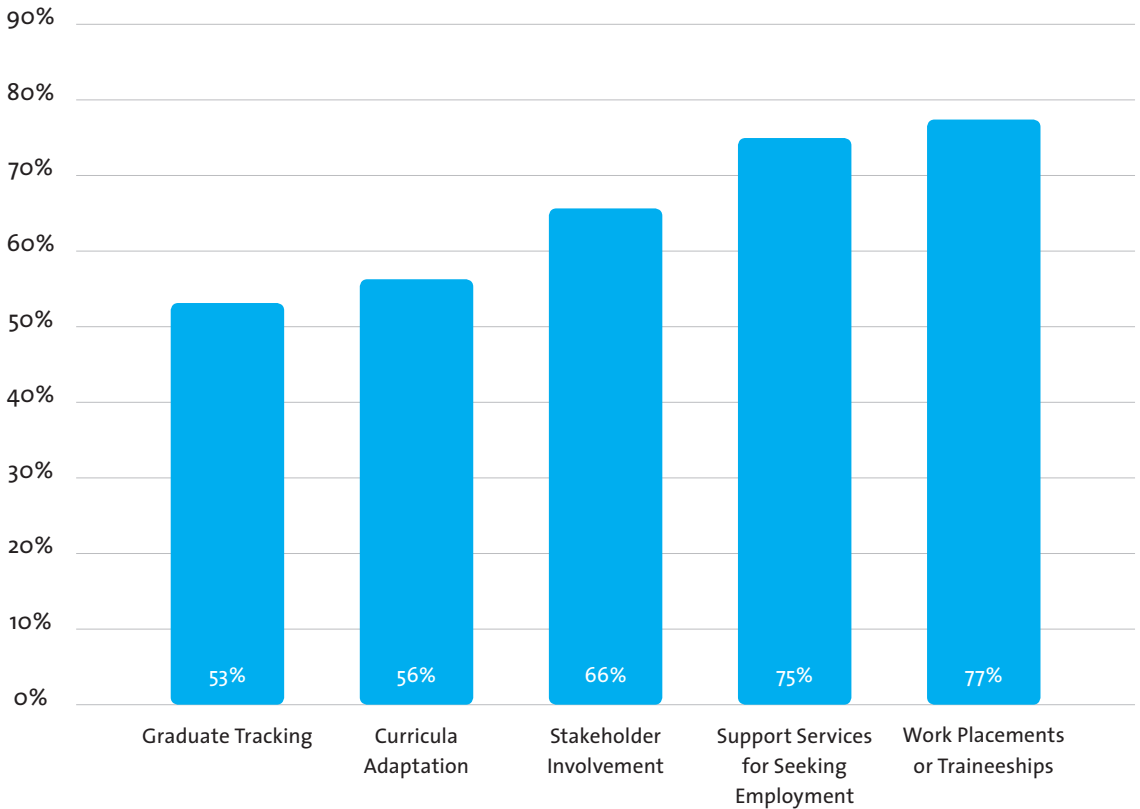
Unions were asked what work was being undertaken at an institutional level to enhance employability, the most common being work placements and traineeships (77%) and support services dedicated to finding employment (75%). It is interesting to note that 66% of unions reported stakeholder involvement, and yet qualitative answers often point to a lack of employer engagement as a serious issue.

Only 56% of unions reported adaptation of curricula to enhance employability skills and opportunities. This may be symptomatic of an overarching concern that curricula development has not been undertaken in a meaningful way where significant structural change in terms of a degree has taken place as a result of the Bologna reforms.

In the 2007 London Communiqué, ministers underlined “the importance of improving graduate employability, whilst noting that data gathering on this issue needs to be developed further.” However it may be worth reflecting on the fact that only 53% of unions reported that graduate tracking was taking place.

fig. 51—Percentage of unions reporting work to enhance employability

With all of the above examples, unions reported that provision was sporadic and very much dependent on the course, level of study and type of HEI.



13 ATTRACTIVENESS OF THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

13.1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of enhancing the attractiveness of higher education systems in Europe is a fundamental cornerstone of the creation of the European Higher Education Area. In a context in which students worldwide are seeking qualifications in higher education institutions outside of Europe, the fact that a significant flow of these students were coming from Europe itself was a worrying development. In the Bologna Declaration (1999) ministers set as a goal “to ensure that the European higher education system acquires a worldwide degree of attraction equal to our exceptional cultural and scientific traditions.” Promoting the attractiveness of the EHEA was an objective reaffirmed several times in the different communiqués throughout the years and it is seen as a natural outcome of the implementation of the reforms as they have evolved.

The Bologna Process relies on the international engagement of different countries and European cooperation is a reality in some areas, namely in quality assurance. However, there has been a temptation to expand the concept and focus of the Bologna Process from Europe to a wider context, creating a tension between the European dimension and the external dimension which remains until today. The Bologna Process caught the attention and admiration of countries and higher education institutions worldwide and enhanced the opportunities for building up partnerships in the sector. These European developments soon became a reference point for other reform processes happening all over the world.

The ministers gathered in London in 2007 adopted the strategy “EHEA in a global setting”, a document striking the balance between core policy principles, an idea of promoting European higher education, but also information, cooperation and partnership. The strategy helps to frame the relationships that Europe should establish with the outside world.

The integration of the EHEA into a global-wide education system implies some challenges in maintaining high standards and informing and protecting students. The different stakeholders have a specific level of responsibility in making this protection possible. In this regard, the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance and the UNESCO-OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Education

are essential tools. Trans-national education is, and should be considered as, part of the education system, subject to the same principles and standards applicable to the domestic sectors of education.

13.2 CONCLUSIONS

The “EHEA in a global setting” strategy is a tool for promoting the openness and international engagement of the entire Bologna area which, when applied by signatory countries, has a spill-over effect in terms of the profile and internationalisation of their national higher education systems. However, there seems to be little knowledge or use of the strategy by both governments and stakeholders at the national level. Governments have rather focused on the mere promotion of their own national higher education systems and institutions and have left little room for enhancing the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area as a whole. The national strategies have been built around the creation of bodies and international agencies that ensure communication abroad and create special arrangements for non-EHEA incoming students, although little is done regarding outgoing students.

There seems to be minimal concern for the integration of these non-EHEA/non-EU students in the academic community, and increasing their numbers and collecting their tuition fees is too much of a primary target. The special arrangements regarding students housing, social interaction and special study programmes creates a great divide between the different student groups and reduces the chances for student unions to acquire greater awareness of the problems of this specific group.

This approach also overlooks the possibilities for “internationalisation at home” and has therefore little impact on the real process of internationalisation at the institutional level. Internationalisation is not sufficiently mainstreamed as a natural part of the institutional life and a regular experience for the domestic students in home campuses.

International students remain relatively non-protected. Three quarters of the BWSE respondents certified that tuition fees are introduced for international students and a significant group referred to debates about increasing them in future. Furthermore, international students seem to receive less protection of their rights, as student unions are not called to contribute to the creation and implementation of internationalisation strategies nor to monitor the quality of the education provided in this specific sector..

This lack of engagement can also be portrayed by the fact that an insufficient number of student unions have reported themselves to be aware and knowledgeable about the UNESCO-OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Education.

13.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to achieve the goals of the “EHEA in a global setting” strategy, a synchronisation process is required. Both the national and the institutional levels seem to have a clear interest in developing internationalisation as a clear dimension of future higher education systems. But their efforts must be coordinated and the adherence to common principles and priorities is essential. In addition, national interest should not be promoted in an exclusive manner, as an overall strategy to enhance the attractiveness of the EHEA has a bigger chance of maintaining the principles that the Bologna Process relies on and improve the image of each educational system as part of a comprehensive and interactive European framework.

The involvement of stakeholders is crucial if internationalisation is not to become a top-down commercialisation process. Most concerns raised by the respondents would be better addressed within a context of real student participation in designing and implementing internationalisation strategies at the national and institutional level. Such involvement is fundamental for enhancing their intrinsic quality and ensuring the protection and representation of the international student body.

International students should be treated in a fair, equal manner and granted access to the same rights as the domestic students. As they are involved in a learning process, there should be no substantial difference between their status and they must not be regarded as a source of revenue, as the greatest benefit they can provide is the quality enhancement that a diverse student body with an international composition can offer. A common effort of governments and the academic community to secure the rights and integration of non-EHEA incoming students is the only way forward in the process of internationalisation.

Assuming public responsibility for educational provision both within the national context and across borders is a necessary step in the direction of ensuring quality in cross-border education and securing the rights of international students. All stakeholders have a responsibility in this process and thus future debate and dissemination of the UNESCO-OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Educa-

tion is essential in informing policy levels at national level and providing true protection and integration of both incoming and outgoing international students.

13.4 THE EHEA IN A GLOBAL SETTING: PROMOTING THE NATIONAL SYSTEMS?

Internationalisation and the mobility of scholars and students has always been a part of higher education, especially linked to research activities. This has been done mostly through contacts between individual academics and it focused mainly on cooperation between departments or research centres. Full degree mobility of students was restricted in number and destination and it found mostly in relation to post-graduate studies. But as international students are increasingly seen by institutions and governments as a potential market and the level of internationalisation is praised as a sign of institutional vitality and quality, the development of promotion activities and strategies is becoming more frequent.

As the Bologna Process gained more recognition in the world arena, it became increasingly attractive for other parts of the world and processes of emulation of its reforms have sprung up in many regions of the world. As the EHEA lacked a framework for developing its relationship with the outside world, the strategy “European Higher Education Area in a Global Setting” was developed and adopted in 2007 by the ministers responsible for higher education. The strategy was meant to inform the concepts and activities of stakeholders and it encompasses five core policy areas: improving information on the EHEA; promoting the attractiveness and competitiveness of the EHEA; strengthening cooperation based on partnership; intensifying policy dialogue; and improving recognition.

However, there seems to be little knowledge about this document: only 12 student unions stated that they had some knowledge about the strategy, 3 of which mentioned that such knowledge was limited. 11 other respondents simply admitted having no knowledge of the document. The two clear exceptions to this state of affairs is Croatia and the Czech Republic, since in the first case the inclusion of the country in the Erasmus Mundus programme forced the union to acquire some knowledge of the document and in the second case it has been mentioned that this has been part of the regular debates of the Bologna experts’ team.

The situation is even worse when asked about the use of this document as a reference regarding any work on enhancing the attractiveness of higher education. The number of respondents drops to 19 answers and 11 of which report that the strategy has never been mentioned as a reference document for the topic. It seems that promoting the EHEA has still not become a relevant item on the agenda.

However, this shouldn't make us mistake the lack of awareness on the document and the absence of initiatives regarding the internationalisation of higher education and enhancing the attractiveness of each of the member states. In fact, experiences in recent years have given us room for an increased focus of attention in the promotion of national higher education systems worldwide.

Nineteen respondents provided detailed information about the recent initiatives taken mostly by national authorities. In most cases, legislation is being adapted to allow for teaching in foreign languages (namely English) at the higher education level or to enable the easing of visa regimes for international students. Nine of these mentioned the existence and recent creation of international agencies or bodies at the national level, charged with developing strategies and promoting higher education institutions abroad. Participation in international fairs, creation of "Study in ..." -type websites and increasing information in English are also commonly mentioned.

Ireland has set a target of doubling the number of international students enrolling in the country and Denmark's goal is to become a major study destination. According to the national student union, significant funding has been allocated to support the international engagement of institutions through the creation of joint and double degrees, namely Erasmus Mundus consortia. Joint degrees are also being considered in Sweden and Portugal as a tool for the internationalisation of higher education and Norway points to their master programmes taught in English as their main instrument.

Six respondents from western European countries specifically mentioned that Asia had been targeted as a focus of interest by these strategies, namely China, India and Japan, with who there has been a signing of agreements and the creation of special visa regimes and language training provision. The Finnish respondents mentioned an older initiative promoting the international exchange of students with developing countries that should continue in the context of future strategy. Surprisingly, few mentioned the former colonies or areas of influence as important targets, which may indicate that since exchanges with these countries has been consolidated, it is no longer seen as a priority for the present time.

On a final note, only 4 of the respondents mentioned that these strategies also pay special attention to accommodation and funding mechanisms to support the inward flow of international students.

13.5 THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF HIGHER EDUCATION: A NEW PRIORITY FOR COUNTRIES

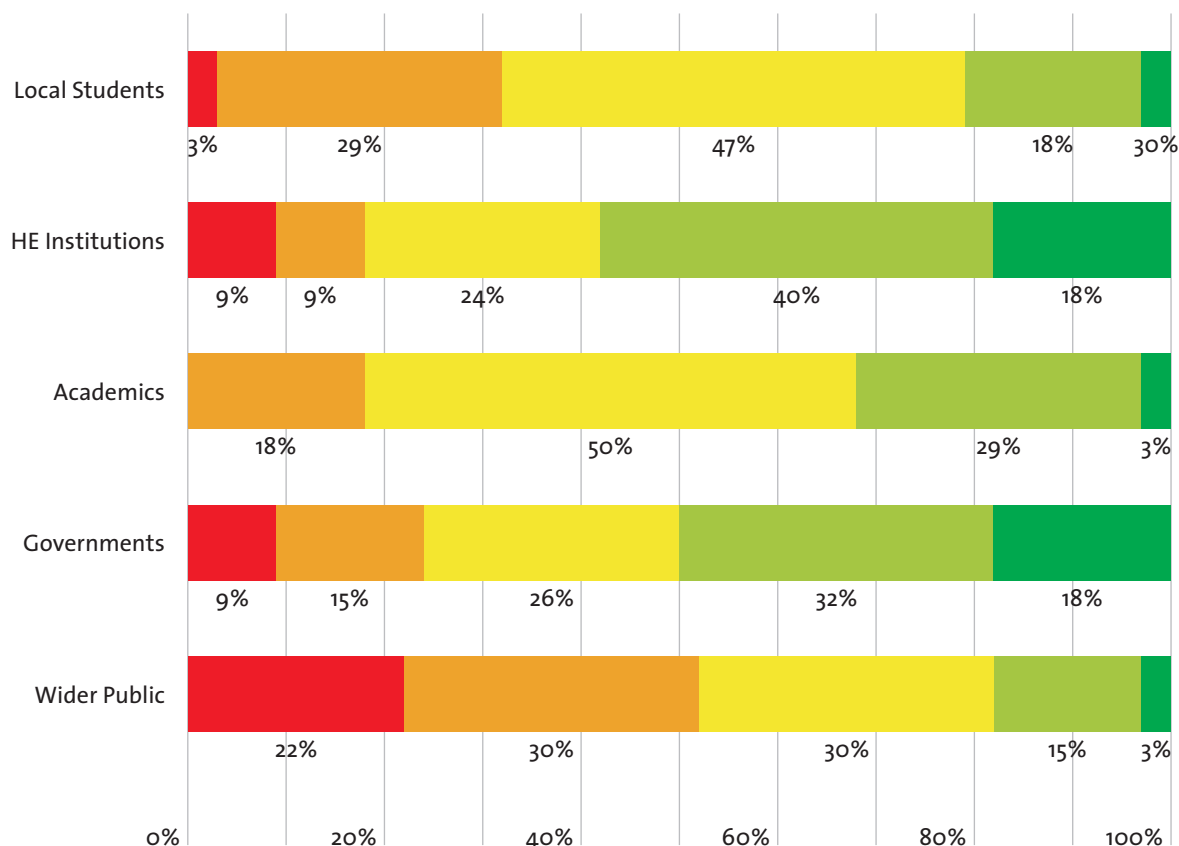


fig. 52—Assessment of the level of attention paid to internationalisation

- full attention
- significant attention
- some attention
- little attention
- no attention

We asked the national unions of students to assess the level of attention paid to internationalisation by different stakeholders. Over half of the respondents claimed that the wider public has little, or no awareness at all, of recent developments. The respondents clearly indicated that this topic has not yet reached the realm of public debate and remains inside the remit of the academic community. However, inside the academic community, students seem to be the least informed about internationalisation and the initiatives taken, with little more than 20% claiming that they are signifi-

cantly or fully aware. One third of the respondents answered that, by contrast, academics are very much involved. The top two positions are taken by governments and higher education institutions, which comes as a natural outcome of the fact that these have been the stakeholders developing strategies on this topic.

In spite of the interest manifested by governments when it comes to internationalisation and enhancing the attractiveness of higher education, national unions of students view higher education institutions as the main developers of these strategies. Nearly 60% of respondents answered that higher education institutions are fully or significantly aware of the developments in the sector. In fact, a number of respondents mentioned the fact that, even in cases where there is no initiative or incentive from public authorities, some higher education institutions feel the urge to take the initiative and seek to attract international students and scholars.

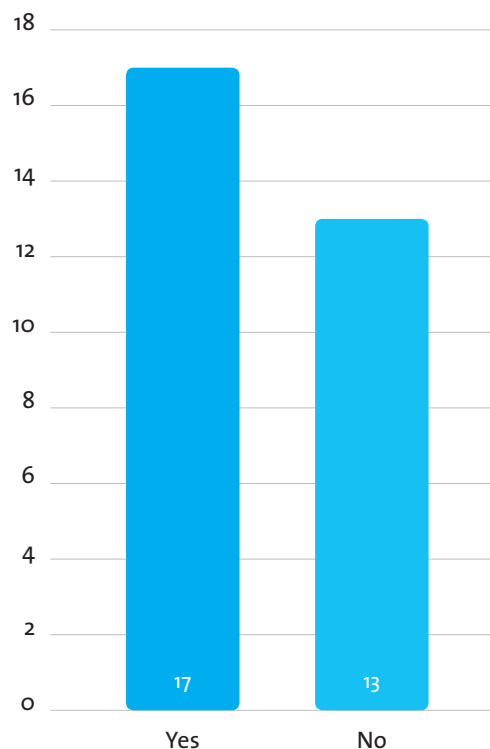
In many of the answers provided, national unions of students indicated intra-European mobility as a major focus of attention of the work on internationalisation by both institutions and public authorities. Erasmus type-mobility seems to be seen by students and other stakeholders as part of the internationalisation strategy of many institutions. It is seen as the first step for accustoming support structures and academics to a different audience.

However, international mobility from outside the EHEA is a new point of interest for both countries and institutions. When queried about the existence of strategies for marketing higher education systems and institutions specifically to students from other continents, more than half of the respondents answered positively. This question was not part of the questionnaire for the previous edition of Bologna With Student Eyes, and therefore we cannot draw a direct assessment of how important this focus has become in the last two years. However, it should be noted that up to 2007, only a very small fraction of respondents included any mention of students from outside the EHEA as part of inward mobility. The results seem to indicate a growing interest directed at these students.

At the same time, a regional divide inside the EHEA can be established, with mostly student unions from the east and south answering that there are no strategies or that they have no knowledge about the existence of them (Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia, Ukraine, Italy and Malta).

These strategies are mostly known inside the academic community, with a low level of impact on the wider public, despite the fact that it is mobilising significant resources and attention from public authorities

fig. 53—Existence of national or institutional strategies for marketing higher education outside Europe



and higher education institutions. Respondents also claim that students themselves are poorly involved, with 18 out of 22 answers indicating that they have no, or a low level of knowledge about these strategies. More than half (12) however attribute the highest level of knowledge in this regard to academic staff.

The great exceptions to this rule are the unions from Denmark, Finland and Norway, all of which indicate that they have been involved or consulted in the preparation of such strategies. In the Norwegian case, unions indicate that they have defended the need to ensure relevant information for allowing informed student choices whilst redirecting the strategy towards high quality education and research rather than pure commercialisation. In Finland, the strategy is under preparation and yet to be launched.

In general, student unions have been poorly involved in the work related to internationalisation, because they haven't yet included it in their activities and also because the developers of these strategies are yet to identify them as a key stakeholder when it comes to this field. This minimal involvement is often achieved through work to integrate foreign students experiencing a period of horizontal mobility

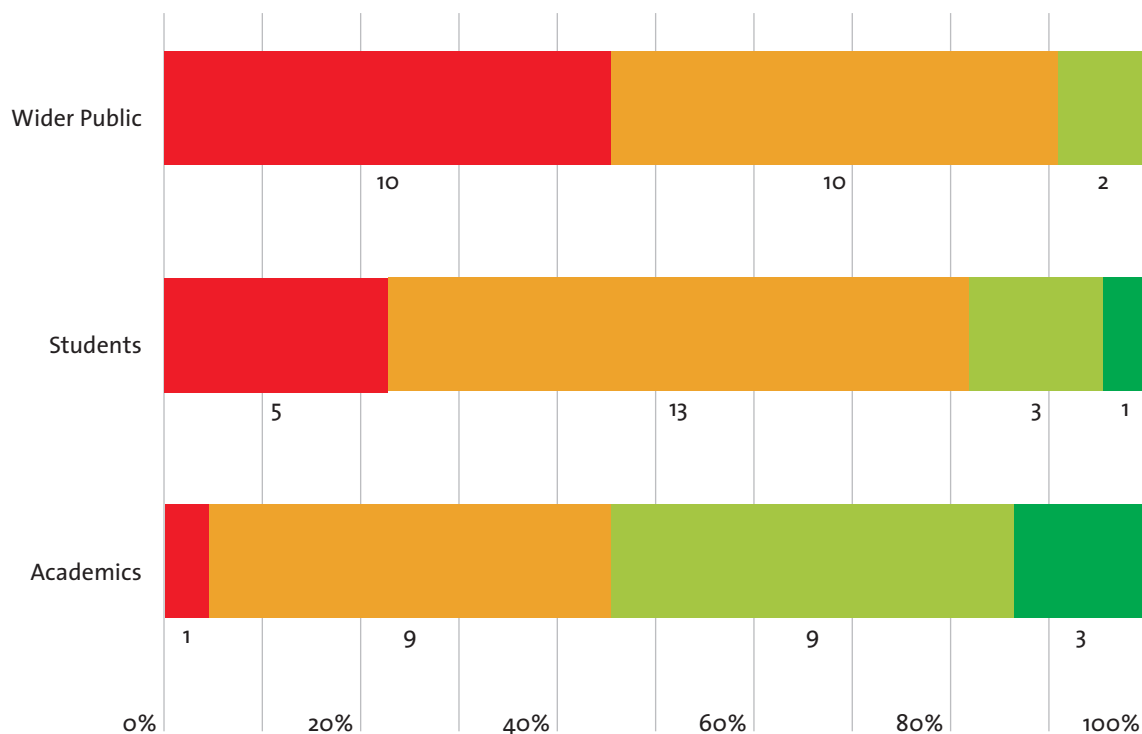


fig. 54—Level of knowledge about the marketing strategies by the stakeholders

- high
- medium
- low
- none

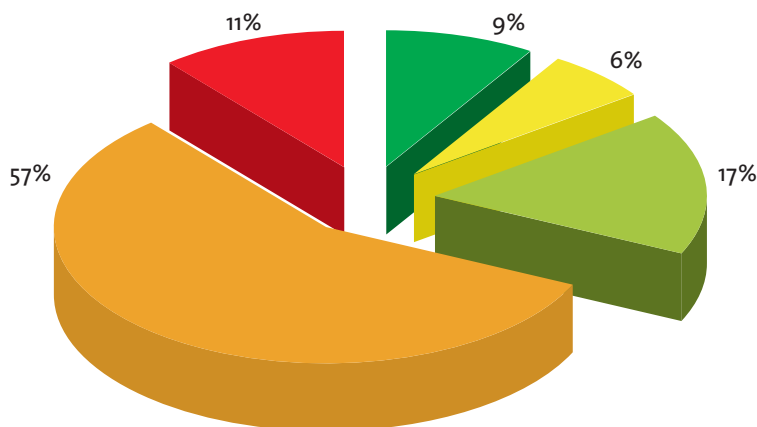
abroad; the other methods are also indirect—when dealing with student services or quality assurance, issues that are relevant for international students may be touched upon.

In 2007, ESU carried out a survey of its members on the level of interaction with the activities surrounding the internationalisation of higher education. One of the questions focused on their involvement in developing, monitoring and maintaining quality in international education. Half of the respondents indicated that they are not involved at all, France had unions with different levels of involvement and the remaining ones reported to be fully involved. By that time, the survey revealed that these answers were optimistic, as respondents were considering themselves to be involved because they had been for general quality assurance procedures at some level. Their direct involvement in maintaining quality in cross-border higher education provision was, in fact, minimal.

13.6 INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

fig. 56—Introduction of tuition fees for non-European/non-EU students

- No fees at the moment
- Discussions about introducing fees
- Fees already exist; reduction proposed
- Fees already exist; no changes proposed
- Fees already exist; increase proposed



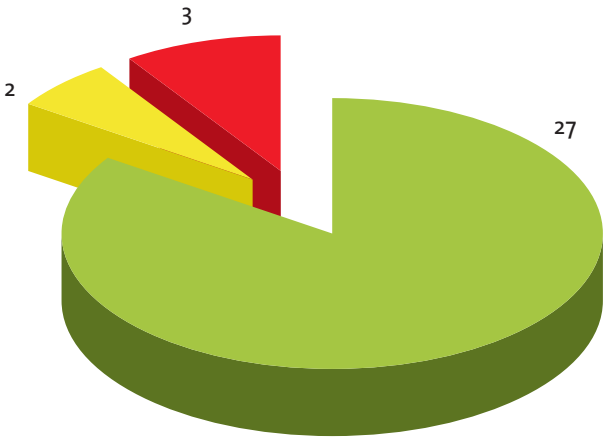
The current mobilisation of efforts and interest is not detached from a financial incentive: foreign students, especially from outside the EU (in the case of EU countries) are not subject to the same regulations and can be asked to pay significant amounts in tuition fees. 77% of respondents answered that tuition fees already exist for these students (although in some of these cases, tuition fees also exist for national students). 9% of respondents indicated that proposals for reducing them have been put forward, but a group of 11% stated the opposite, announcing an increase. Besides the large group of 77%, we can also find that 17% of respondents indicated that discussions on the introduction of tuition fees for these students have been initiated.

Considering that the international mobility of students seeking higher education qualifications is a phenomenon which is expected to increase in the coming decades, we can see the motivation for higher education institutions and governments to take a bigger share of what is regarded by some as a very appealing market. The figures are increasing at the current time and this can potentially benefit both international and domestic students by providing a more enriching study experience. We asked the national unions of students what their perception was regarding the number of international students in home campuses and were clear about the need to separate Erasmus students from this group. The answers were very clear, with nearly 85% of them (27 out of 32) indicating an increase of this student body in recent years. Whether this is a reflection of a true increase or rather a more attentive attitude regarding this

phenomenon, it illustrates a shift in the way home campuses are regarded and sets a different framework for the level of impact that international mobility has over domestic students.

fig. 57—Growth of the number of international students in home campuses

- Increased
- Same
- Decreased



International students are however not always treated in the same way as domestic students. In the case of tuition fees, we have identified the practice of introducing them and even considering increasing them. Twenty student unions reported that in this regard, international students are treated differently from domestic students. In fact, in all the items considered (housing, social benefits, right to work, financial support and tuition fees) the majority of the respondents considered that this group was treated differently.

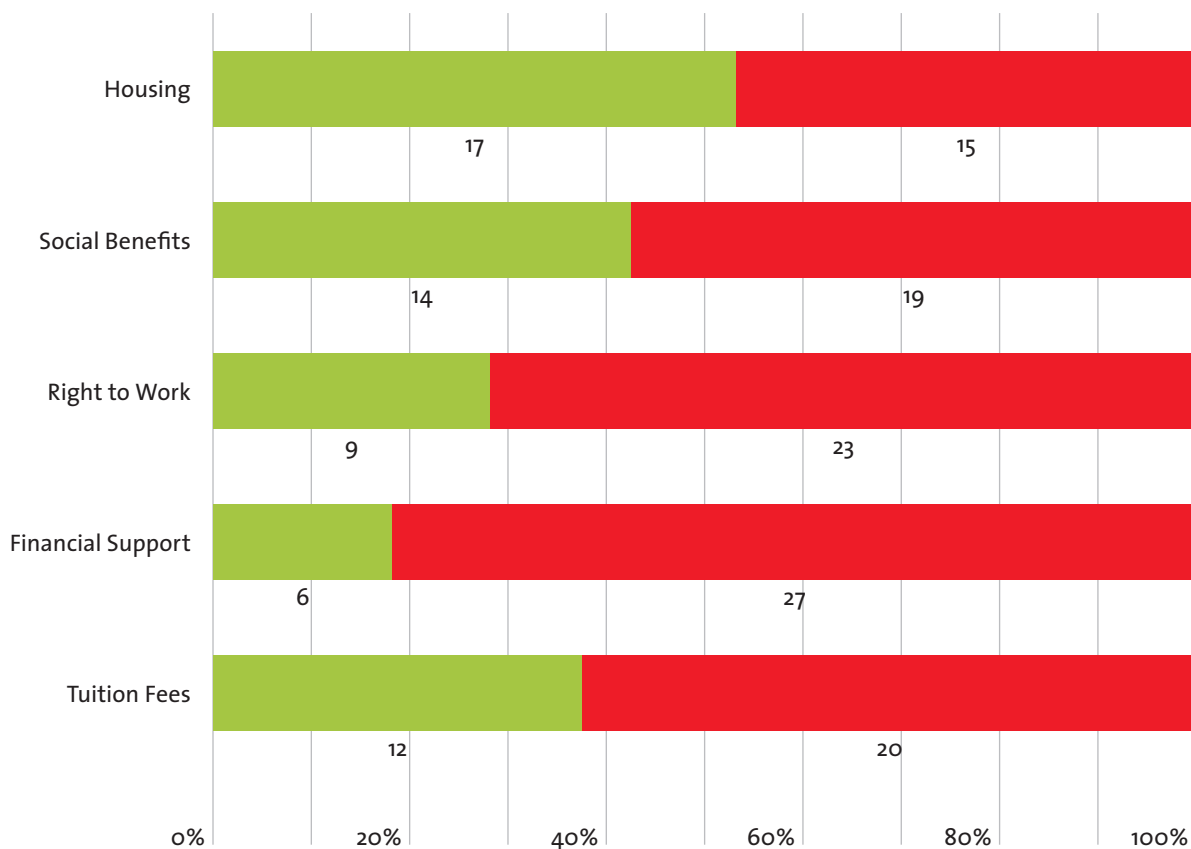


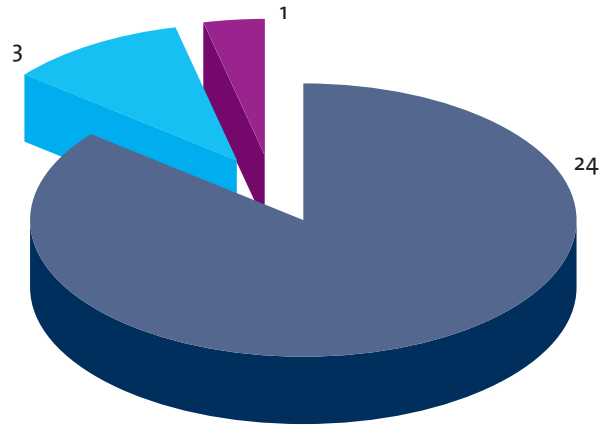
fig. 58—Treatment of non-European/
non-EU students in home higher
education institutions

- same
- different

This difference in treatment is not necessarily a negative aspect. Students pay a substantial amount of money and are sometimes regarded as a special group in need, or entitled to separate facilities and arrangements. The most common can be language and culture courses, but also special accommodation arrangements or services, tutoring systems and study programmes delivered in English. All respondents answered positively in terms of the existence of special arrangements for international students, with the exception of one (Bulgaria).

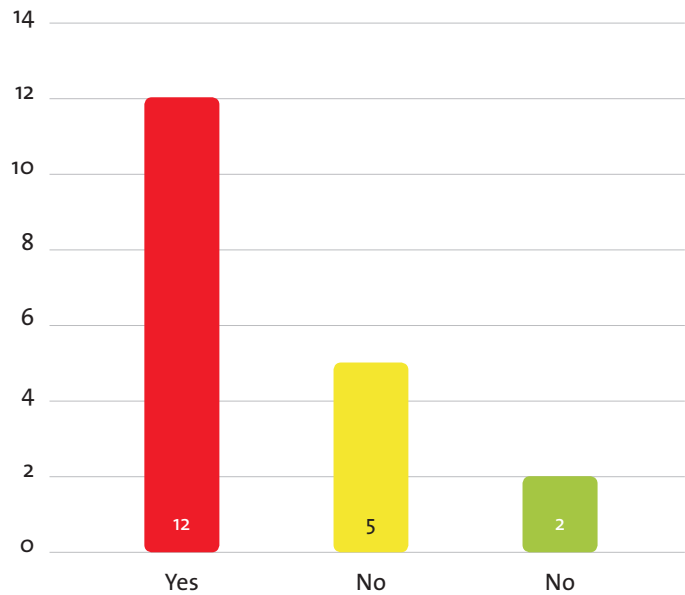
fig. 59—Existence of special arrangements for international students

- Yes
- Depends on the HE Institution
- No



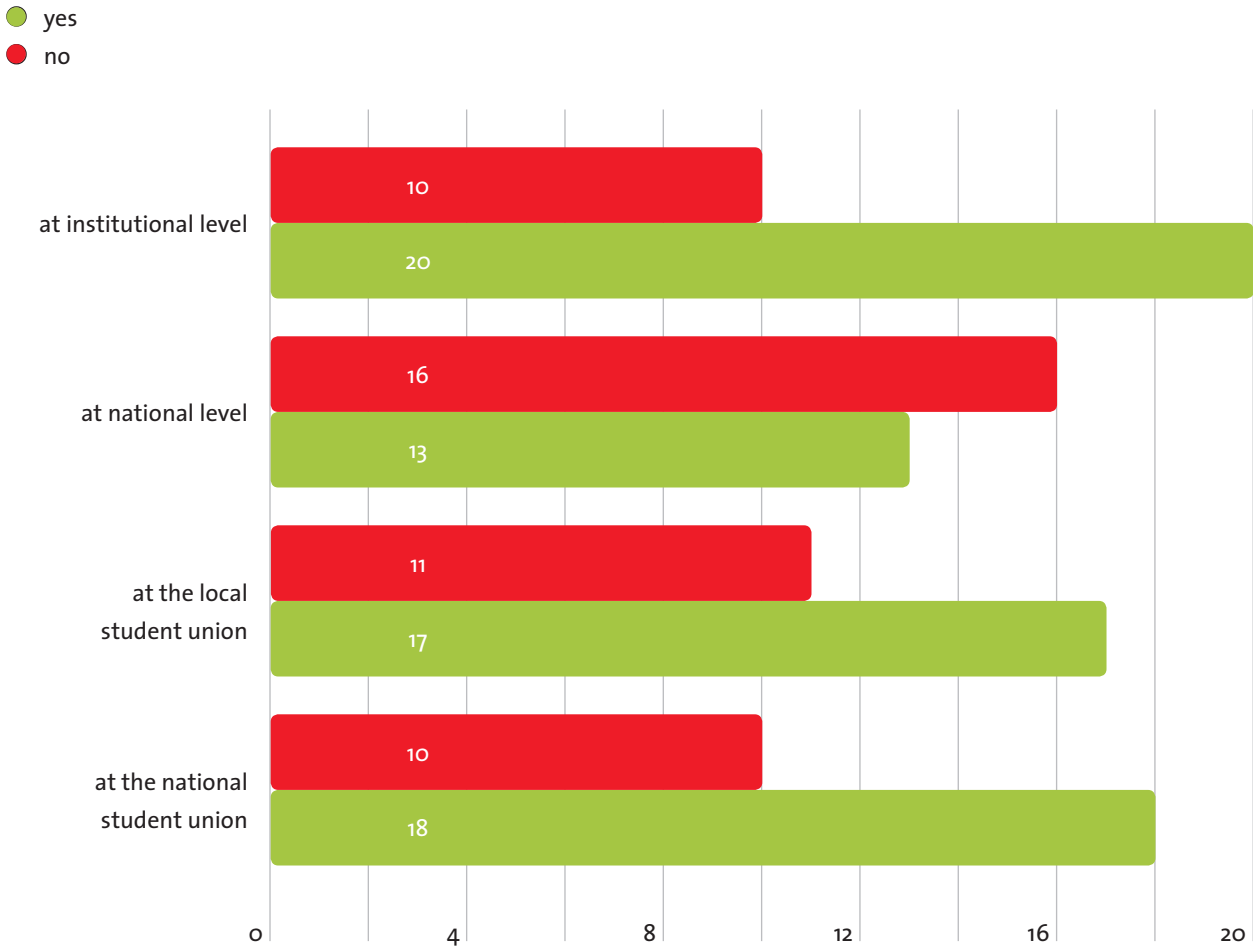
The presence of international students on campus has an enormous potential for developing “internationalisation at home”, a process in which a student can experience cultural diversity and exchange ideas and knowledge with people from other countries while staying on his/her own home campus. Unfortunately, international students are mostly kept apart from the remaining student body. 63% of respondents were clear about this fact, and only two unions (Czech Republic and Sweden) indicated that they are fully integrated into life with other students.

fig. 60—Are the international students separated from the local students in campus?



Considering that these students are in a special situation, we asked the student unions to report back as to the level at which they saw their rights being catered for and two thirds indicated that the institutions appear to be catering for this group, and a majority of respondents considered that international students receive less protection from public authorities. The respondents were also quite self-critical: although a majority considered that they had been addressing the rights of international students in both national and local structures, a significant number of national unions (over one third) admitted that they haven't been paying enough attention to this aspect.

fig. 61—Are the rights of international students being addressed or catered for?



THE UNESCO-OECD GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY PROVISION IN CROSS-BORDER EDUCATION

The London Communiqué inserted the “UNESCO-OECD Guidelines for quality provision in cross-border education” as a relevant document to be taken into account when developing the work on enhancing the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area. Introducing a quality culture within cross-border education is very challenging since quality assurance mechanisms are more difficult to set up, information is less easily accessible and degree comparability becomes more complicated.

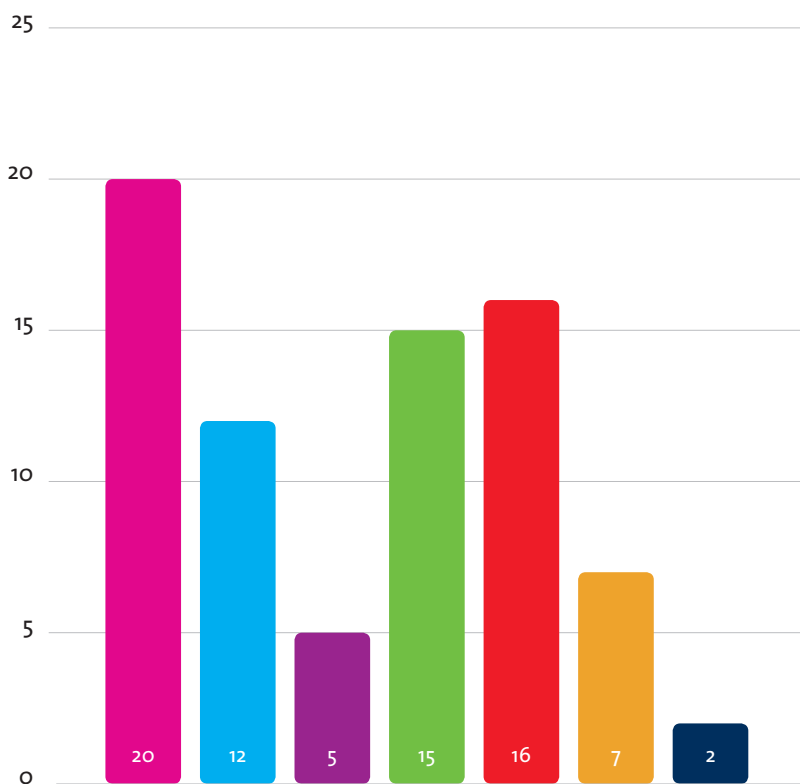
In the survey ESU carried out in 2007 regarding the level of interaction of its members with the internationalisation of higher education, student unions were asked to self-assess their level of awareness regarding this document. The results are frankly low and indicate an immediate need for governments and higher education institutions to further involve them in all activities in the field.

Two groups of unions amongst the respondents lacking in awareness were then identified: unions who are not aware of the guidelines due to being relatively young and therefore still building up a robust structure for student representation (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Georgia and Ukraine) and unions who have other pressing political issues to deal with at the national level or who have yet to discuss the dissemination of the Guidelines internally (Denmark, Iceland, Italy, Sweden, United Kingdom).

Despite this relatively low level of awareness, the relevance of it was recognised by most unions for different purposes, from policy making to advocacy on behalf of the students they represent. The survey itself helps in bringing attention to this document and has had positive effects. When questioned about the possible benefits of the guidelines, the benefit considered to be the most important one for ESU members was the provision of an international framework for quality assurance in cross—border higher education that can inform policy at national and institutional levels (20 responses). This is closely followed by improving the quality of cross—border higher education (16 responses) and raising awareness of the cross—border higher education quality issue (15 responses).

fig. 63—Most important benefits of the guidelines as anticipated by the national unions of students

- Providing an international framework for quality assurance in cross-border higher education that can inform policy at national and institutional levels
- Promoting international collaboration, sharing and mutual trust between providers and receivers of crossborder higher education
- Promoting collaboration between the six stakeholders targeted by the Guidelines both internally and externally
- Raising awareness of the cross-border higher education quality issue
- Improving the quality of cross-border higher education
- identifying gaps and lack of capacities in the management of quality crossborder higher education
- other (please specify)



14 PROFILE OF THE NATIONAL UNIONS OF STUDENTS

This publication is based on the answers to a survey developed by the elected representative of the European Students' Union. However, this could never been done without the contribution of the national unions of students that took the time to answer to the long questionnaire and were also available to further clarifying the results of this survey.

This section is built as a short guide through our different respondents. It will hopefully help you to identify and understand who is behind the knowledge we compiled.

AUSTRIA

ÖH —Österreichische HochschülerInnenschaft/Austrian National Union of Students.

Legal status: OH is a public institution, and since 2008 has also been representing college students. All students are represented by OH as membership is compulsory at both the local and national level. All representatives are students and according to the Student Union Act they have to work voluntary.

BELGIUM—FLEMISH COMMUNITY

VVS—Vlaamse Vereniging van Studenten/National Union of Students in Flanders

Legal status: VVS is a non-governmental organisation representing all students in Flanders. In Belgium there are two more organizations of French-speaking students, FEF and Unécof. The local student unions are the members of VVS. The student status is only a condition for delegates to the general assembly. For the EC up to 1/5 of the members don't have to be students.

BULGARIA

UBS—Union of the Bulgarian students

Legal status: UBS is a NGO; its members are individual students on a voluntary basis. UBS is not the only union in Bulgaria, the other NUS is called Assembly of Students' Councils NASC. The status of being a student is the condition to be elected to UBS' structure. Five people work at national level and they are elected in the Executive Board.

CROATIA

CSC—Hrvatski studentski zbor/Croatian student union,

Legal status: CSC is a public institution, but in Croatia there is also another NUS called CSU. Local student unions are the members of CSC, and the membership of students in these unions is voluntary. All the people working for the NUS are students.

CZECH REPUBLIC

SKRVS Studentská komora Rady vysokých škol/Student Chamber of the Council of Higher Education Institutions

Legal status: The Student Chamber is an autonomous part of the Council of HEIs, which is a representative body established as a result of a common agreement of all higher education institutions in the Czech Republic. SKRVS is the only student organisation represented in HEI bodies. The status of being a student is a compulsory condition for election and also in order to have voting rights in the body to which students are elected.

DENMARK

DSF—Danske Studerendes Fællesråd/National Union of Students in Denmark

DSF is a non-governmental organisation, and it is the only organisation of students in Denmark. Local student councils are the members of DSF. The membership of students is on a voluntary basis. Elected bodies and employees are mostly students. To be elected to the NUS structure, it is compulsory to be a student.

ESTONIA

EUL—Eesti Üliõpilaskondade Liit/Federation of Estonian Student Unions

Legal status: EUL is a non-governmental organisation, but most of its member unions are publicly organised. EUL is the only student organisation in Estonia. Local unions are members of EUL, and membership of EUL is voluntary. To be elected to EUL's structure it is compulsory to be a student. Employees, however, don't need to be a student. The board and the employees work full time.

FINLAND

SAMOK—Suomen ammattikorkeakouluopiskelijakuntien liitto/ Union of Students in Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences

Legal status: SAMOK is non-governmental organisation representing student unions of universities of applied sciences in Finland. The other Finnish student organisation is SYL, representing university students. Local unions are members of SAMOK and membership is on a voluntary basis. The executive board works full time, and the status of being a student is compulsory to be elected.

SYL—Suomen ylioppilaskuntien liitto—the National Students' Union in Finland

Legal status: SYL is an independent non-governmental organisation. The highest decision-making body is the General Assembly. SYL represents university students; there is another student organisation for polytechnic students (SAMOK). The members of SYL are local student unions who affiliate on a voluntary basis; for students it is compulsory to be member of a local union.

FRANCE

FAGE—Fédération des associations générales étudiantes/Federation of General Student Associations

Legal status: FAGE is a non-governmental organisation, one of five national unions in France. Local unions are the members of FAGE and the membership of students is on a voluntary basis. The status of being a student is the only condition for election into FAGE's structures. The elected executive committee consists of 11 members.

GEORGIA

SOLG—Students' Organizations League of Georgia (SOLG)

Legal status: The Union "The Students' Organizations League of Georgia", is a voluntary, non-governmental, non-entrepreneurship, non-political and a socially registered union which brings together student organisations formed at the Higher Education Institutions of Georgia. Local unions are the members of SOLG and membership of these is on a voluntary basis. Having the status of a student is necessary in order to be elected to SOLG's structure.

GERMANY

FZS freier Zusammenschluss von studentInnenschaften (fzs) —The National Union of Students in Germany

Legal status: fzs is a registered non-governmental organisation in Germany, with local unions as its members. Membership of fzs is voluntary. Students are compulsory members of the local student unions except in the federal states of Bavaria, Baden Wurttemberg and Saxony-Anhalt. Student status is compulsory in order to be elected to fzs' structure, but the local unions have the power to set up their own statutes and decide on that.

HUNGARY

HOOK—Hallgatói Önkormányzatok Országos Konferenciája

Legal status: Hook is a public institution and the only student organization in Hungary. Individual students are members of Hook. Membership is compulsory and automatic. The status of being a student is also compulsory in order to be elected to Hook's structure. Secretariat staff are not obliged to be a student.

ICELAND

SHI—Stúdentaráð Háskóla Íslands/The Students Council at the University of Iceland

Legal status: SHI is a voluntary, non-governmental, non-entrepreneurship, non-political and a socially registered union. There is another student organisation in Iceland called BISN. Individual membership is compulsory and automatic. Employees are generally students as well as the chairperson and the secretary general who works full time.

IRELAND

USI—Union of Students in Ireland

Legal status: USI is a non-governmental organisation, and there are no other organisations of third level students in Ireland. USI represents both individual students and local unions, and the membership of students is decided upon by each third level institute. This is normally done through the means of a referendum. Student status and registration to USI is compulsory in order to be elected to USI's structure.

ITALY

Udu—unione degli universitari; University Students' Union

Legal status: Udu is a non-governmental organisation. It isn't the only student organisation in Italy, but few of the other organisations are national unions. Local unions and individual students can both become member of Udu. Membership is on a voluntary basis. To be elected to Udu's structure it is compulsory to have student status.

LATVIA

LSA-Latvijas studentu apvieniba/Student Union of Latvia

Legal status: LSA is a non-governmental organisation and the only student union in Latvia. Local unions are LSA's members and the membership of students is compulsory according to the law. Student status is mandatory in order to be elected to LSA. Some of the elected people, however, are no longer students.

LITHUANIA

LSAS—Lietuvos studentu atstovybiu sajunga/ The National Union of Student Representations of Lithuania

Legal status: LSAS is a non-governmental organisation, one of two in Lithuania, the other being Lithuania's National Union of Students (LSS). Local unions are members of LSAS, and membership is on a voluntary basis. Student status is not a condition of being a member of the office or President of LSAS. Members of the Council must be students.

LUXEMBOURG

UNEL—union national des étudiantes de Luxembourg/National Students' Union of Luxembourg

Legal status: UNEL is a non-governmental organisation. In Luxembourg there are other student organisations, for example LUS, the student union of the University of Luxembourg.

MACEDONIA

NSUM Национална студентска унија на Македонија-National Student Union of Macedonia

Legal status: NSUM is a non-governmental organisation, and it is the only student organisation in Macedonia. Individual students are members of the national union. Membership is compulsory. The only condition to be elected to NSUM's structure is being a student —elected people work part time.

MALTA

KSU—Il-Kunsil ta' I-Studenti Universitarji; University Student Council

Legal status: KSU is a non-governmental organisation and the only NUS in Malta. Individual students are members of KSU and membership is compulsory. KSU is a national union and a local union at the same time.

NETHERLANDS

LSVb—Landelijke studenten vakbond/Dutch National Union of Students.

Legal status: LSVb is a federation, independent from any public institution, but largely funded by the Ministry of Education and our member unions. There is another student organisation in The Netherlands, named ISO. Local unions are members of LSVb, it is possible to have individual membership but it barely happens. Membership of students is on a voluntary basis and to be a student is compulsory in order to be elected to the structure. Indeed, elected people have to take a break from their studies.

ISO—INTERSTEDELIJK STUDENTEN OVERLEG

Legal status: ISO is a non-governmental organisation; in the Netherlands there is another student organization called LSVb. Local student unions are the members of ISO, and individual membership of these is not compulsory. Elected people work part time. Almost all of them are students.

NORWAY

NSU—norsk student union/National Union of Students in Norway

Legal status: NSU is a non-governmental organisation representing university students in Norway. There is another student organisation called StI that represents students at University-Colleges. Local student unions are the members of NSU; membership of students is compulsory, but it is voluntary for local

unions to join the NUS. The status of being a student is compulsory in order to be elected to NSU's structure.

StL—studentenes Landsforbund/Norwegian Association of Students

Legal status: StL is a non-governmental organisation. In Norway there is another student organisation called NSU that represents university students. Local unions are the members of StL; the membership of local unions is voluntary but, in general, membership at the local level is collective. Any student or person who works full time as an elected representative for a student union can be elected to a position in StL.

POLAND

PSRP—Parlament Studentów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (PSRP)/ The Students' Parliament of the Republic of Poland

Legal status: PSRP is a public institution and the national representation of student self-government structures within the provision of the law on universities. Local student parliaments are the members of PSRP; the membership of students in the parliaments is compulsory but individual membership is not formalised. The work of elected people is usually part-time, except for the president who works full time.

PORTUGAL

Faire—Fórum Académico para a Informação e a Representação Externa/ Academic Forum for Information and External Representation

Legal status: FAIRE is a Federation of Student Structures in Portuguese Higher Education. FAIRE is a non-political, non-governmental organisation. Today, FAIRE has a number of associates throughout the multiple sub-systems of Portuguese higher education. Local unions are members of FAIRE, and student status is the basis for election to the structures of FAIRE. In addition to this, students need to be nominated by their own local union in order to be elected. In Portugal, there are other two organisations; one is for students of Polytechnics and is itself a member of FAIRE, and the other one is for students of private sector institutions.

ROMANIA

ANOSR—Alianta Nationala a Organizatiilor Studentesti din Romania/ National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania

Legal status: ANOSR is a non-governmental organisation, one of several national student unions in Romania. Local unions are the legal members of ANOSR, and student membership is on a voluntary basis. The work is not salaried and is de facto full time work.

SERBIA

SUS—Studentska unija Srbije/Student Union of Serbia

Legal status: SUS is a non-governmental organisation; it is de facto recognised as an NUS if no other student or youth organisation is recognized by law as a national union in Serbia. Local unions are the members of SUS, there is no individual membership. Individual membership on the local level is not compulsory in Serbia. To be elected to SUS' national structure, it is compulsory to have the status of a student, and these representatives work part-time.

SLOVENIA

SSU—Študentska organizacija slovenije/Slovenian Student Union

Legal status: SSU's legal status is defined by the Students' Association Act passed by the Slovenian Parliament in 1994, and SSU works in accordance with the Student Constitution passed in November 2002. There is no other student organisation in Slovenia. All individual students are members of SSU. People elected to the structure of SSU have to be students, and they work part time.

SPAIN

CREUP—Coordinadora de Representantes de Estudiantes de las Universidades Publicas

Legal status: CREUP is a non-governmental organisation and is the only student organisation in Spain. Local unions are the members of CREUP and student membership of these unions is not compulsory. There are two conditions to being a member of CREUP: be part of a public university and have a democratic way of electing student representatives within the HEI. To be a student is a condition of being elected to the NUS structure.

SWEDEN

SFS—Sveriges förenade studentkårer/The Swedish National Union of Students

Legal status: SFS is a non-governmental organisation, and the only national student union in Sweden. Local student unions are the members of SFS, student membership is not compulsory anymore. To be elected in the NUS' structures the student status is not compulsory, elected people in SFS work full time and get paid.

SWITZERLAND

VSS-UNES-USU —verband der schweizer studierendenschaften/union des étudiant-e-s de suisse/ unione svizzera degli universitari/The Union of Students in Switzerland

Legal status: vss-unes-usu is registered as a non-governmental organisation representing local student unions whose membership is voluntary. In Switzerland there is other NUS representing 3 universities called vsh-aes. The status of being a student is not compulsory in most parts of the structure of vss-unes-usu except for the co-presidents and president.

UNITED KINGDOM

NUS UK—National Union of Students UK

Legal status: NUS UK is a voluntary membership organisation. NUS UK is a confederation of local student representative organisations in colleges and universities throughout the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland which have chosen to affiliate and which pay a membership fee. Students' associations make the decision to join or not join NUS UK—on the local level membership of the student unions is automatic, unless the students exercises their right not to be a member. Officers have to be students at the time of their election, once elected they are deemed to be members of NUS—there are limits on the number of times you can hold a position. The National Executive consists of 27 members.

UKRAINE

UASS—Ukrainian Association of Student Self-government

Legal status: UASS is a voluntary association of student self-government bodies and local student NGOs, which are representative, democratic and student-controlled. UASS is registered by the Ministry of Justice as a nationwide youth NGO in accordance with the law. UASS is also registered by the State Tax Ad-

ministration as a non-profit organisation. UASS has, according to the law, individual membership and the student status is compulsory for the UASS membership.

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