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International Students in Norway Contributors to Quality in Higher Education

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Preface

This report covers the sixth in a series of surveys by Diku, conducted among international students in Norway. The five previous surveys were conducted by Diku's predecessor, SIU.

The survey gathers information about the students' motivations for, experiences with and assessments of their studies in Norway. It gives a unique international perspective on Norwegian higher education and is therefore a vital source of knowledge for its further development.

The 2019 report has a special focus on the international students' contribution to the quality in Norwegian higher education. The report is based on analyses of a survey distributed to all international students at 24 Norwegian higher education institutions. More than 6000 students responded. The data collection was carried out by ideas2evidence, and the project as such was built upon a cooperation with the higher education institutions, with the government agencies Unit and NOKUT, the National Centre for Research Data, and with the student organisations International Students' Union of Norway and Erasmus Student Network. Diku would like to thank all the contributors for their effort.

Diku – the Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education – aims to strengthen the quality of Norwegian education. We promote development and innovation in education, encourage international cooperation and digital learning methods.

Through Diku's report series we contribute to strengthen the knowledge base for quality development in education. We aim to provide policy makers and practitioners in the education sector with relevant knowledge for developing policies, strategies and measures for quality enhancement.

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Executive summary

International students can play an important role in enhancing the quality of higher education in Norway. This report examines how international students assess the quality of Norwegian education, how they experience life as a student in Norway, and in what areas international students could play an even more significant role in quality enhancement. The findings presented in the report are based on a survey among 5 094 international students in Norway in April 2019.

International students come to Norway because of the quality of the education offered and because of the country itself. Three in four rate Norway as their number one preferred study destination. The international students are generally well satisfied with the teaching at the Norwegian institutions, and exchange students deem the quality of their Norwegian host institution to be higher than the quality of their home institution. Nonetheless, half the American students rate the quality to be lower than at their home institution.

The students are particularly satisfied with the teachers' ability to teach in English and the institutions' facilities. Despite an overall positive assessment, the international students' satisfaction with guidance and feedback is comparatively lower than for other aspects of the education. International students assess the academic qualities slightly differently than the Norwegian students. They are more satisfied with the teachers' ability to make the teaching engaging than Norwegian students. They are also more content with the relationship between student and staff and find it to be relaxing and informal.

Most international students are ambitious and work hard to achieve good grades. A majority of the respondents indicate that the workload at Norwegian universities and university colleges is acceptable. Overall, the survey results indicate that the international students may have the capacity to submit more assignments and participate in more teaching activities. This particularly concerns students from strong academic regions and educational environments. However, the report also shows that certain sub-sets of the population struggle to meet academic demands.

Among the international students who would like to stay on after completing their studies, the majority would like to work in Norway. A large part of the international students at Norwegian higher education institutions do have some form of contact with working life during their studies in Norway, although the number of internships and traineeships is limited. Nevertheless, most of the students who get such opportunities find the work experience to have a positive impact on the quality of their studies.

The report finds that many international students experience social challenges related to loneliness and homesickness while in Norway. European students, who are closest to home both geographically and culturally, experience the least social challenges. With notable exceptions, some of the social groups striving to meet academic demands also report the most social challenges. International students find it particularly hard to get to know Norwegian students. Many have little or no contact with Norwegian students on campus or in their leisure time.

Furthermore, the study finds that most international students have more contact with other international students than with domestic students. The students do get an international experience in Norway by interacting with other international students, but that not all of them

get a particularly Norwegian experience. This is a loss to the large share of international students who list Norway as their most important motivation factor to study here in the first place. It is also a considerable loss to the Norwegian students, and especially to those who do not themselves go abroad during their studies.

The findings suggest that large-scale intercultural interaction is unlikely to occur spontaneously, and that interventions are needed to achieve more and better intercultural exchange. The report concludes that Norwegian institutions could do more to endorse exchanges between international and domestic students and to advance intercultural learning for their student population as a whole.

A plurality of respondents feel that Norwegian students and staff show interest in their country and culture. Most of the respondents also find Norway to be a welcoming and tolerant society and would like to get more chances to experience Norwegian culture and family life. For Norwegian institutions, this is a window of opportunity.

Personal meetings are by far the most important experience for the international students in Norway. The study shows that courses/classes, introduction weeks and student residences are arenas that play important roles in bringing Norwegian and international students together. However, the findings indicate that these arenas are sometimes organised in ways that separate rather than bring the Norwegian and international students together.

Fellow students are important information sources when the students consider where to go for their studies abroad. Thus, the efforts by national authorities and higher education institutions to facilitate the international students and give them a good study experience in Norway has implications beyond the individual student. International students are potential future ambassadors for Norwegian institutions. It is therefore good news for Norwegian higher education that 85 percent of the international students are likely to recommend Norway as a study destination to others.

1 Introduction

International students play two important roles in the enhancement of educational quality in Norwegian higher education: Firstly, international cooperation provides a basis to compare the educational qualities of Norwegian institutions to high quality universities and colleges internationally. This comparison helps identifying areas where the institutions are not performing as well as they could and prompt a search for ways to improve the performance. International students are an essential part of this basis for comparison. Their experiences and perceptions of the qualities of their Norwegian host institution are valuable, and perhaps underused sources of input to the quality assurance and systematic improvement efforts of the institutions.

Secondly, international students play an important part in achieving what is known as “Internationalisation at Home”. The basic idea behind this concept is that all students in Norwegian higher education should become “active, attractive and responsible participants in the international society”.¹ Norwegian institutions are obliged to offer all their students, international or domestic, learning environments that promote the acquisition of international perspectives and intercultural competence. To achieve this, there is a need to mix international with domestic students and to make the two groups interact.²

This report will address both perspectives. The students’ motivations for coming to Norway, their view on the preconditions for coming here, their satisfaction with and evaluation of the quality of different aspects of the study experience and, finally, their overall impressions – all of this contributes to our understanding of how Norwegian higher education is performing in comparison with other countries. Similarly, the study environment and contact between international students and domestic students will help us understand to what degree international students can contribute to the internationalisation at home in Norwegian higher education at present. In this report we have put a special emphasis on questions about the level of contact.

This chapter will start with a presentation of key developments in Norwegian policies on higher education and internationalisation and proceed with a discussion of fundamental differences between two different groups of international students: degree students and exchange students.

1.1 Background

It is fair to say that the internationalisation of Norwegian higher education entered a new phase after the turn of the millennium. The 2003 Quality reform marked the change.

¹ Meld.St. 16 (2016-2017), *Kultur for kvalitet i høyere utdanning*, <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/meld.-st.-16-20162017/id2536007/>

² In addition, Norwegian authorities and institutions have long traditions of educational cooperation with developing countries in their efforts to build and strengthen their educational capacity. The focus of the current study is however the benefits international students are thought to have on higher education in Norway.

Norwegian authorities wanted higher education to be in front internationally with cross-border cooperation in research and teaching.³ A 2007 evaluation on this reform pointed out that “after 2003 the question was no more whether Norwegian higher education should be internationalised, but to what extent and how.”⁴

Norway’s policies on internationalisation of higher education in this period have been part of a larger international trend. Over the last decades we have seen a sharp increase in the international mobility of students, as well as political initiatives to support this development. Globally, the number of international students has risen from 2 million in 1998 to 5,3 million in 2017.⁵

Policy measures were put in place to support the drive for internationalisation. The focus on internationalisation was reflected in the new financial model for higher education institutions. In addition to framework financing, the HEIs were now allocated funding based on scores across several indicators – one of them being the number of outgoing and incoming international exchange students with stays of at least three months. Thus, establishing exchange agreements and stimulating outgoing and incoming student exchange became a way for the institutions to secure their government funding.

The drive for internationalisation has also been reflected in the Regulations on the supervision and control of the quality of Norwegian higher education. They have been revised on several occasions since the millennium, and with each revision, the demands for internationalisation have been strengthened. The latest revision, from 2017, states that full degree study programmes must have arrangements for international student exchange.⁶

This policy, reflected in both incentives and regulations, set the framework for the increased internationalisation of Norwegian higher education over the last two decades. Student mobility has been at the core of this development.

The 2009 Government white paper on internationalisation went further in explaining why it is so important for Norwegian higher education. Internationalisation is seen as a way to compare the quality of Norwegian education to education internationally. It is seen as a response to the challenges raised by globalisation and is expected to make Norway a more attractive cooperation partner for other countries. More international cooperation in higher education will not only make us better equipped to operate internationally but will also help us deal better with challenges related to the fact that Norway’s own population is growing increasingly multifaceted. Additionally, Norway has a long tradition for assisting developing countries in their efforts to raise the quality of their education.

The white paper underlined the principle that internationalisation should affect *all* students, both those who travel abroad and those who remain at their Norwegian institution for their entire degree. Priority was given to institutional cooperation. This was seen as a way to improve the connection between the education the students receive in Norway and during their stays abroad. In general, the white paper called for an increase in student mobility.

³ St.meld. nr. 27 (2000-2001), *Gjør din plikt – Krev din rett – Kvalitetsreform av høyere utdanning*, <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/stmeld-nr-27-2000-2001-/id194247/sec1>

⁴ Norges forskningsråd, 2007, *Evaluering av Kvalitetsreformen – Sluttrapport*, <https://www.forskerforbundet.no/PageFiles/5632/EvalueringavKvalitetsreformen-Sluttrapport.pdf>

⁵ OECD, 2019a, “Education at a Glance 2019”, <https://doi.org/10.1787/f8d7880d-en>

⁶ Forskrift om tilsyn med utdanningskvaliteten i høyere utdanning (studietilsynsforskriften), <https://lovdata.no/dokument/SF/forskrift/2017-02-07-137>

When it comes to international students coming to Norway, the white paper points out some challenges:

- English-language study programmes: Will Norwegian academic staff be able to deliver English-language courses at a sufficiently high level?
- Housing: Will the students get housing and be integrated with Norwegian students?
- Obtaining a study visa: Some students experience challenges and the process takes too much time.
- Banking rights: For some students, it is a challenge to get the personal ID-number which is necessary to open a bank account.
- International campus: It is a challenge to facilitate meetings between national and international students at campus.⁷

While the HEIs need to pay heed to national policies, they enjoy institutional autonomy. In a recently published study, Diku investigated general tendencies in Norwegian higher education institutions' (HEIs) strategies on internationalisation. Compared to the situation six years earlier, there are now fewer and larger institutions, and there is a tendency towards a larger degree of commonalities among the different strategies. Mobility is high on the institutions' agendas, especially as expressed in interviews with representatives of the institutions. The institutions have a particular focus on contributing to the long-term national goal of having 50 percent of the students complete mobility stays as a part of their higher education at a Norwegian institution.

Recruitment of international students to Norwegian institutions is a key part of the institutions attempt to internationalise their campuses. A number of institutions also mention other measures, such as active attempts towards the integration of international students at campus, inclusion of international perspectives in teaching practices and curricula, English-language instruction or particular international courses for students that do not go on exchange.⁸

1.2 Which international students?

International student mobility is based on two fundamentally different principles: student exchange and degree mobility. Exchange students are students who come to Norway as a part of a study programme they follow in another country. Their primary affiliation is with that foreign institution, and they are enrolled at the Norwegian institution for a limited time, normally one semester or one academic year. Their home institution will most often have an exchange agreement with the Norwegian institution, something which reduces the administrative work related to the exchange. Degree students come to the Norwegian institution to take a complete degree, and do not have an affiliation in their home country. Both groups bring international perspectives to the Norwegian institution, but the circumstances are fundamentally different.

As we will see in the next chapter, most exchange students at Norwegian higher education institutions come from Europe. Norway participates in the Erasmus+ programme which

⁷ St.meld.nr.14, (2008-2009), *Internasjonalisering av utdanning*, <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/a0f91ffae0d74d76bdf3a9567b61ad3f/no/pdfs/stm200820090014000dddpdfs.pdf>.

⁸ Diku, 2019, *Strategier for internasjonalisering av norske universiteter og høyskoler*, Diku rapport 2/2019, <https://diku.no/rapporter/dikus-notatserie-2-2019-strategier-for-internasjonalisering-ved-norske-universiteter-og-hoyskoler>

celebrated its 30 years anniversary in 2017. It is the world's largest educational programme and has provided scholarships to more than 9 million Europeans since its start in 1987. In addition, the Bologna process contributed towards a harmonisation of the architecture of European Higher Education. Norway has been a part of the Bologna process since the very beginning and reformed its higher education system accordingly with the Quality reform in 2003. Together, the Erasmus programme and the Bologna process have impacted significantly on the increased mobility of students to Norway, especially exchange students.

While exchange mobility is arguably at the core of Norwegian policies on student mobility, there is also interest in degree mobility. For a long time, the Norwegian government funded students from developing countries to complete degrees at Norwegian institutions. The aim was that they would return to their home countries and contribute to their development. This Quota scheme was discontinued in 2015 and replaced by measures that focused more on institutional cooperation and student exchange.⁹

The development in international student mobility to Norway is followed with interest by the Norwegian parliament. In 2016, the parliament requested input on measures that could make the recruitment of international degree seeking students to Norway more strategic. The situation when it comes to such recruitment and possible measures, were presented in the 2018 SIU report "More or better? On the recruitment of degree students to Norway". The report showed that the Norwegian government lacks a clear strategy for the recruitment of international degree students, that recruiting such students is increasingly demanding for the Norwegian higher education institutions, and that Europe is a priority region to recruit degree students from. Furthermore, some Norwegian institutions actively recruit international degree students to fill places at their English language master programmes. While the lack of tuition fees means that Norwegian institutions are not incentivised to attract international students in the same way as institutions in some of the neighbouring countries, the financial model of Norwegian higher education means that it is important to fill all places at the degree programmes offered.¹⁰

Meanwhile, Norway's policies towards international degree students stand out in the European perspective. Norway is one among only a few countries in Western Europe not to charge tuition fees from degree seeking students from outside the EU/EEA.¹¹ This, alongside the comparatively liberal opportunities to hold a part-time job while being an international student in Norway, is a part of the reason why Norway came out as one of the most attractive countries for international students in a recent international ranking carried out by the OECD.¹²

While Norway lacks a clear strategy on the recruitment of international degree students, the development in the EU is characterised by an increased interest in recruiting and retaining international degree students for the purpose of strengthening national economies. In a

⁹ Diku, 2018, *Evaluering av utviklingen av Kvoteordningen*, Diku rapport 2/2018, <https://diku.no/rapporter/diku-rapportserie-02-2018-evaluering-av-utviklingen-av-kvoteordningen>

¹⁰ SIU, 2018, *Fleire eller bedre? Rekruttering av gradstuderantar til Noreg*, SIU rapport 3/2018, <https://old.siu.no/publikasjoner/Alle-publikasjoner/siu-rapport-03-2018-fleire-eller-betre-rekruttering-av-gradstuderantar-til-noreg>

¹¹ Eurydice, 2019, *National student fee and support systems in European Higher Education 2018-19*, <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/1367d516-f1fa-11e8-9982-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-82053839>

¹² OECD, 2019b, "How do OECD countries compare in their attractiveness for talented migrants?", *The Migration Policy Brief*, <http://www.oecd.org/migration/migration-policy-affects-attractiveness-of-oecd-countries-to-international-talent.htm>

report from September 2019, the European Migration Network points out that almost half of the 25 EU member states that contributed to the report, consider attracting and retaining international students a policy priority. Important reasons for this policy was the wish to internationalise higher education institutions, a need to increase the institutions' financial revenue, the intention to contribute to the economic growth by increasing the national pool of qualified labour and addressing shortages in specific sectors and to tackle demographic change.¹³

1.3 The structure of the report

Receiving international students to Norway is a part of the internationalisation of Norwegian higher education. It is an aim in itself, but also a means to achieve better quality in Norwegian higher education.

This report is designed to help us understand how international students experience their studies in Norway. Such understanding may benefit Norwegian authorities and higher education institutions in their efforts to recruit and accommodate the students. Moreover, the findings may give us some indications of the current quality of Norwegian higher education.

Chapter 2 discusses definitions of international students, as well as the total number of such students in Norway. It goes on to address key methodological issues related to the survey that was conducted as a basis for this report.

In chapter 3, we see that information about why international students chose to come to Norway and how they experience the process of coming to a Norwegian institution is important as a basis for the work to promote Norwegian higher education internationally, and to adjust the assistance given to the students in this process. Indirectly, it may also give us an understanding of the quality of Norwegian higher education as compared to other countries.

Chapter 4 shows that international students have different educational experiences than Norwegian students. Understanding the level of satisfaction among international students with their study experience in Norway may serve as a corrective to the impression of the qualities of Norwegian higher education as based on feedback from Norwegian students. Relevance of the education for life after university is an important aspect of how we understand quality in higher education. Currently, priority is given to include work life experiences in Norwegian higher education. Assessing the participation in and satisfaction of such activities by international students contributes to an understanding of how successful such attempts are, and how they can be improved.

Studying abroad can be both a rewarding and challenging endeavour, as we discuss in chapter 5. Upon arriving in Norway, the international students need to deal with new academic and social realities. Assessing how the students cope with these realities will give us a better understanding of their potential contribution to the quality enhancement in Norwegian higher education.

¹³ EMN, 2019, «Attracting and retaining international students in the EU», *EMN Synthesis Report for the EMN Study 2018*, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/00_eu_international_students_2018_synthesis_report.pdf

Chapter 6 is a focus chapter in this report where we pay particular attention to the students' feedback on questions related to academic and social inclusion. The 2016 survey of international students in Norway revealed that many of them rarely or never socialise with Norwegian students. What is the point of having international students at Norwegian campuses if they have so little interaction with the Norwegian students? In this survey we attempt to gain a better understanding of the frequency and character of contact between international and Norwegian students.

Finally, it is important for us to get an idea of the international students' overall impression of studying in Norway. Chapter 7 gives us a more direct access to the students' own voices, through a text analysis of answers to open-ended questions.

2 The international students in Norway

The overall aim of this study is to understand how international students can contribute to quality enhancement in Norwegian higher education. For this purpose, we need an understanding of what an international student is, and who the international students in Norway are. This chapter shows that Norway lacks a clear-cut operational definition of international students and a register with precise data on the number of international students in the country. This has consequences for the ability to establish a systematic understanding of their experiences with and possible contributions to Norwegian higher education.

In this chapter we discuss how the term international student is defined in Norway and try to establish an estimate of the total number of international students in Norway. We explain what we have done to gather information from as many international students in Norway as possible. Finally, we analyse the background data we have about the respondents in our survey. Ultimately, this chapter will contribute to the general understanding of who the international students in Norway are and serve as a necessary background for understanding the analyses in the following chapter.

2.1 Definitions and figures

There is broad consensus that the term “international student” includes all students with foreign citizenship that have come to Norway for the main purpose of studying. However, the number of international students is not readily available in statistical overviews. There are two authoritative sources of information of the international students in Norway and they count the number of international students differently.

Through the Common Student System (FS), all public and many private Norwegian HEIs report individual level data on their students to the Database for Statistics on Higher Education (DBH). The Norwegian HEIs register international students as “foreign students”, which includes all students of non-Norwegian citizenship. DBH thus provides statistics on the number of foreign citizens registered as students in Norwegian higher education.¹⁴ Since there is a significant number of foreign citizens living in Norway, this statistic includes a substantial number of foreign nationals who already lived in Norway prior to entering higher education, and who do not meet the criteria to be regarded as international students. In 2018, the number of foreign students registered at Norwegian HEIs was 24 155.¹⁵

Among these 24 155 individuals, there is an unknown number of international students who have come to Norway with the purpose of studying. Notably, the uncertainty adheres only to foreign students who pursue a full degree in Norway. Norwegian institutions do register with

¹⁴ DBH, 2019, «Utenlandske studenter», *Database for statistikk om høgre utdanning*, https://dbh.nsd.uib.no/statistikk/rapport.action?visningId=123&visKode=false&admdebug=false&columns=arstall&index=1&formel=49&hier=insttype!9!instkode!9!fakkode!9!ufakkode!9!progkode&sti=¶m=arstall%3D2019!8!2018!8!2017!8!2016!8!2015!9!semester%3D3!9!dep_id%3D1!9!nivakode%3DB3!8!B4!8!HK!8!YU!8!AR!8!LN!8!M2!8!ME!8!MX!8!HN!8!M5!8!PR

¹⁵ DBH, 2019.

accuracy the number of exchange students they host every semester. According to DBH, the summarised number of exchange students in 2018 was 9 568 students.

Statistics Norway (SSB) applies another operational definition of international students than DBH and the HEIs. The agency provides numbers of foreign degree-seeking students in Norwegian higher education who have moved to Norway within the five last years and who have completed their secondary education in another country. However, in most instances SSB does not have information about the country in which the person completed secondary education, and in these cases uses citizenship/country of origin. The definition employed by SSB may thus include individuals who have come to Norway within the last five years for other purposes than studying, but who have embarked on higher education later.

The best possible estimate of the total number of international students in Norway may be derived by combining the SSB statistics on degree-seeking students with DBH statistics on the number of incoming exchange students. In the spring semester 2018 the number of exchange students was 4 205, while the number of international degree students was 9 568. This leaves us with an estimated total number of international students in Norway of 13 773 in the spring 2018.

2.2 The survey: Data collection and population

The current study keeps with the widely acknowledged definition of international students as individuals with a non-Norwegian citizenship who have moved to Norway with the intention to study at a Norwegian higher education institution. Due to the lack of an accurate register of international students in Norway, the process of identifying the entire population of international students have been conducted in two separate parts. Firstly, we solicited the e-mail addresses of all active students in the spring semester 2019 with a foreign citizenship. These addresses were mediated by the 24 institutions who had been invited and accepted to take part in the study. For a full list of these institutions, see the appendix.

The total number of individual e-mail addresses we received were 15 209. This is nearly 1 500 more students than the best estimate for the spring semester 2018, one year earlier. The survey was sent to all these individuals on e-mail. In order to single out the international students among the recipients, the questionnaire included a screening question in which the respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they came to Norway with the intention to study. Based on the answers to this question, 78 percent of the gross respondents were classified as international students. The 22 percent who reported to have lived in Norway when applying for higher education, were routed out of the questionnaire.

This years' survey expands the number of respondents substantially compared to earlier surveys of international students in Norway. Previously, only students who had been enrolled over the last three semesters were included. This year, all international students currently enrolled at the participating institutions are included. There are several reasons for this. First, there is a risk that restraining the population to relatively newly arrived students may leave us with a skewed sample with a higher proportion of short stay (exchange) students than in the international student population in general. Second, we consider the feedback from students who have stayed in Norway for several years to be of equal value to that of the more recently arrived students.

The data was collected between 19 March and 25 April 2019 and rendered a total of 6 508 responses. Of these, 531 questionnaires were incomplete. The survey thus left us with a

sample of 5 977 completed questionnaires. This gives a complete response rate of 39 percent, and incomplete response rate of 43 percent. Even though the population has been severely extended in this year's survey, the response rate is in line with previous response rates in the survey, cf. table 2.1.

Table 2.1. Response rate development in the survey International students in Norway

Year	Population	Responses	Response rate
2014	8022	3216	40 %
2016	7465	2623	35 %
2019	15209	5977	39 %

A total of 1 413 respondents conveyed that they were already living in Norway when they applied for higher education. The current study is thus based on the responses of 5 094 international students in Norway.¹⁶

Instead of a complete statistical overview of the universe of international students in Norway, the current study gives a good understanding of the span of international students on Norwegian campuses. As the consecutive sections of this chapter will show, the international student body of Norwegian higher education institutions is highly diverse. This diversity can be characterised according to the respondents' academic status, social and geographic background.

2.2.1 Academic status

The perhaps most significant difference among the survey respondents runs between exchange and degree students. A simple majority of the respondents (57 percent) in this study are degree students, whereas the remaining 43 percent are registered as exchange students. As described in chapter 1, students on exchange study in Norway temporarily, normally one semester or one academic year, while degree students pursue a full academic degree in Norway, usually three years of full-time study for a bachelor's degree and two years for a master's degree.

The register data for the survey population confirms that there is a temporal schism between exchange and degree students. 61 percent of the exchange students were given admission to study at a Norwegian institution of higher education (HEI) in 2019, and another 33 percent in 2018. By comparison, hardly any of the degree students in the survey were admitted in 2019. This is not surprising given the fact that regular admission to Norwegian HEIs takes place once a year, with enrolment offers being published every 20 July.¹⁷

At the time of data collection in March and April 2019, the annual admission to higher education had not yet taken place. Almost half (48 percent) of all the surveyed degree students were admitted in 2018, 37 percent in 2017, and 11 percent in 2016. The typical

¹⁶ 18 of these have completed their secondary education in Norway. Furthermore, 149 respondents have been living in Norway for more than five years but have come to Norway for the purpose of studying and were active students at the time of data collection. Both groups would have been excluded from SSB's count, but have been included in our study.

¹⁷ Samordna opptak, 2019, «The Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service», <https://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/english/>.

degree student respondent has therefore had more time to experience Norwegian education and society than the typical exchange student when participating in the survey. This may influence their responses.

Furthermore, more than half (55 percent) of the participants are registered as master students. There are striking differences between exchange and degree students in terms of academic level. As Figure 2.1 illustrates, most of the *exchange* students are at bachelor level (76 percent), whereas an overwhelming share of the *degree* students (83 percent) pursue a Norwegian master's degree.

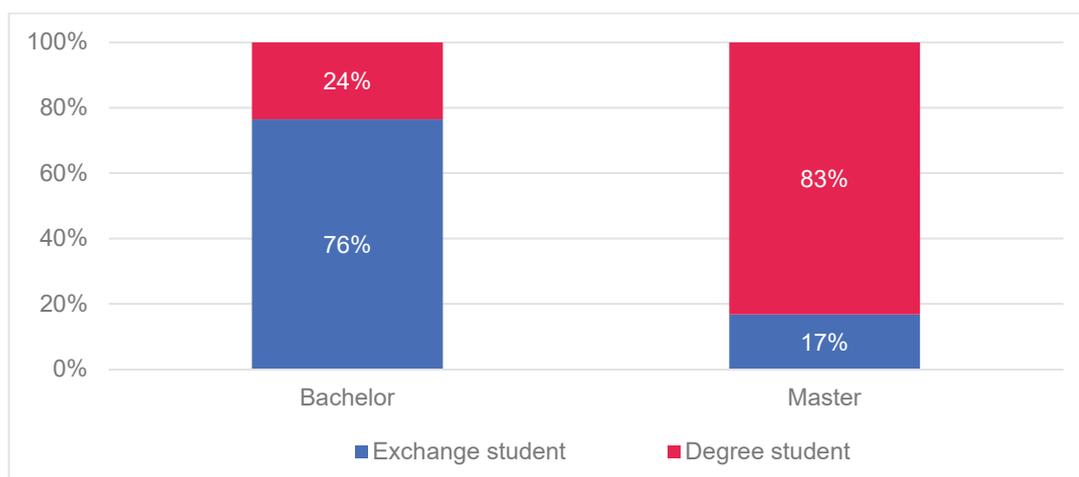


Figure 2.1 Academic level among exchange and degree students (N=4 808)

Half the survey participants study at one of the four oldest universities in Norway, located in Oslo (UiO), Bergen (UiB), Trondheim (NTNU), and Tromsø (UiT).¹⁸ NTNU is the largest with a share of 20 percent of the survey population, while UiO is runner-up with 15 percent. 27 percent of the respondents are registered at one of the seven HEIs in the sample accredited as universities since the turn of the millennium turn. The remaining 16 and seven percent of the survey population were registered at respectively specialized university colleges or universities colleges.¹⁹ 57 percent of the exchange students attend one of the four older universities, against 45 percent of the degree students.

The sector chart below (figure 2.2) shows the distribution of respondents among six study categories. Natural sciences and technology are by far the most popular fields of study among international students, followed by studies of arts and humanities, economics and business. Professional training programmes, such as teacher training, nursing, and various forms of medicine are among the academic fields with fewest respondents in this survey.

Professional practice within the latter fields require specific recognition before graduates can start working in a country and are regulated differently across countries. For professional practice in countries within the EU/EEA, applications for authorisation/recognition will be processed in accordance with the EU Professional Qualifications Directive. For countries

¹⁸ NTNU and UiT have campuses also outside Trondheim and Tromsø.

¹⁹ The institutions in the survey are presented in the appendix. The groups are based on NOKUT's categories. For the purpose of simplicity, we use the term "university colleges" to refer to the group known as "university colleges/universities of applied sciences".

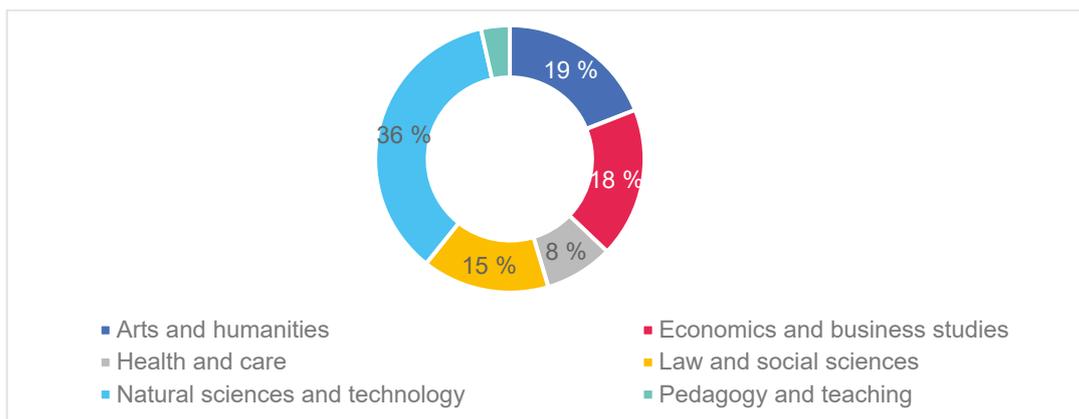


Figure 2.2 Distribution of respondents across fields of study (N=5 071)

outside the EU/EEA, similar harmonisation is not in place and there is no guarantee that Norwegian education will be found adequate and approved for professional practice.

These requirements are especially challenging for those degree students who are going to work outside Norway and Europe after completing their studies. Surprisingly, there are no more exchange students than degree students studying health sciences and pedagogy/teaching in the survey population. The low numbers of international students within these fields of study can therefore not only be ascribed to professional regulations.

2.2.2 Social background

Female respondents outweigh the share of male students in the survey by 12 percent. The gender imbalance is particularly conspicuous among the exchange students, of which 61 percent are women. Conversely, there is virtually perfect gender balance among the degree-seeking international students.

There are a number of differences among the men and women represented in the survey. 59 percent of the male respondents pursue a full academic degree in Norway, as opposed to 49 percent of the female respondents. Furthermore, most of the males in the survey study at the master level (62 percent), while their female counterparts are equally spread across bachelor and master studies. Almost half the male respondents (47 percent) study natural sciences and technology, against 27 percent of the females. The female students are more evenly distributed across the various disciplines.

The students in the survey are 26.5 years old on average. This is a high number compared to the mean student age across Europe, but slightly younger than the average student age in Norway.²⁰ The international students participating in this study constitute a more compact age-group than Norwegian students do. While 45 percent of the students in Norway are younger than 24 years old, only 31 percent of the international students in the survey fall into this age category. Only two percent of the international students are older than 40. In Norway, 13 percent of the entire student population is 40 years or older.²¹

²⁰ Eurostudent, 2019, «Eurostudent VI Database», <http://database.eurostudent.eu>

²¹ SSB, 2019, «08725:Students in higher education in Norway and abroad, by age, contents and year», <https://www.ssb.no/en/statbank/table/08725/tableViewLayout1/>

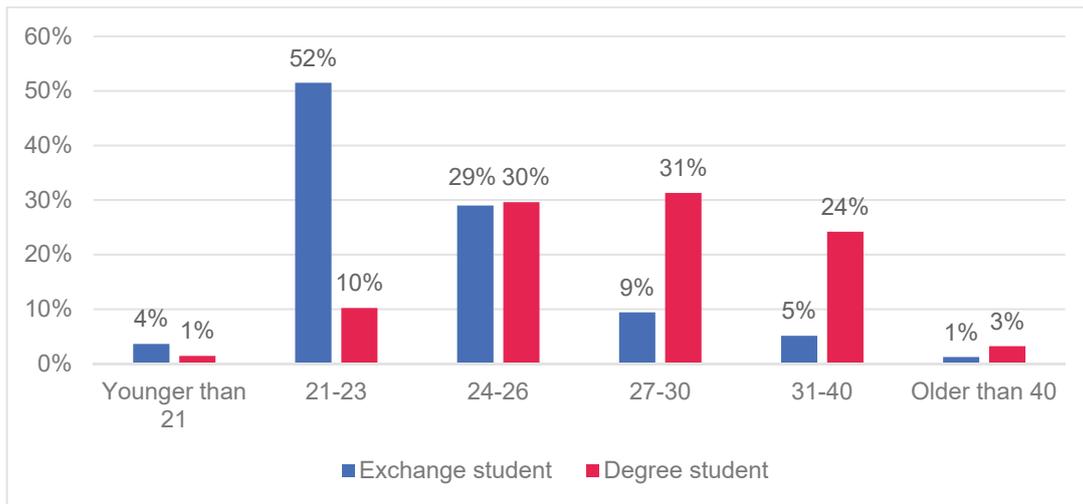


Figure 2.3 Age distribution between exchange and degree students (N=5 094)

Again, there are substantial differences between exchange and degree students. The degree-seeking students are on average four and a half years older than the participating exchange students. Figure 2.3 portrays the age distribution between the two student types. While the exchange students predominate among the youngest age cohorts, the degree students are in majority among the students aged 27 years or more. The fact that most degree students pursue education at master level contributes to the difference between student types. A master's degree takes two years of full-time study after the completion of a bachelor's degree.

However, the age difference between degree and exchange students exceeds the two years it takes to complete a master's degree. This indicates that there are other factors at play. The master students in the survey are also four years older than the bachelor students. Some of this difference can be ascribed to differences between male and female respondents. The average male respondent is one year older than the average female respondent. We have already seen that the male participants predominantly study at master level, while female respondents are evenly distributed across bachelor and master studies.

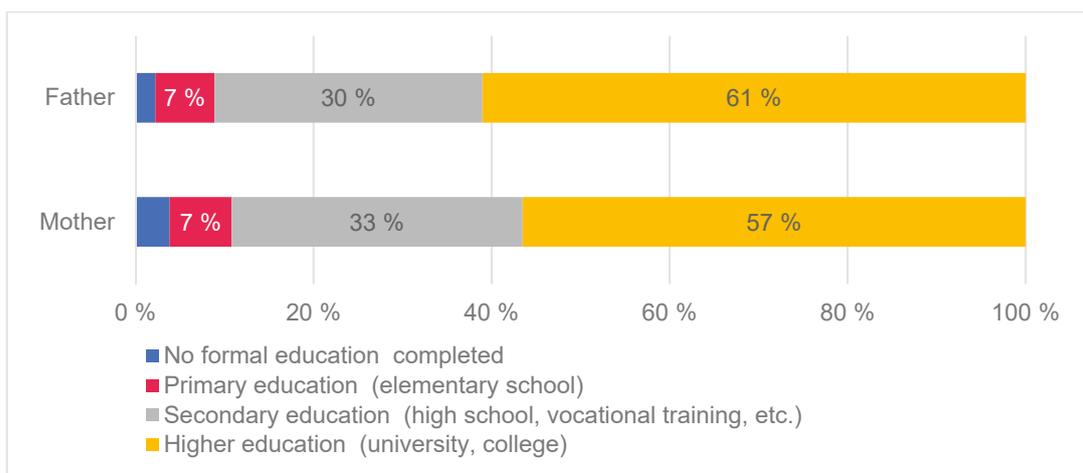


Figure 2.4 Parents' highest level of completed education (N=4 921-4 971)

Numerous studies have shown that there is a strong intergenerational transmission of the level of education from parents to children, statistically expressed as significant causality

between parents' and children's highest level of education. It is therefore no surprise that the respondents report a high level of completed education among their parents; 61 percent of fathers and 57 percent of the mothers are reported to have higher education (cf. figure 2.4). In comparison, the transmission of higher education from parents to children in the EU is 63 percent. Only about ten percent of the respondents have parents with low or no completed formal education. Especially the female students report high educational levels among their parents; 60 percent of their mothers and 63 percent of their fathers have completed higher education, as opposed to 52 and 59 percent of the male respondents' mothers and fathers.

2.2.3 Geographical background

What countries and continents do the survey participants come from? Figure 2.5 portrays the continental distribution in the data set. It shows that the lion's share come from Europe (53 percent), while another 28 percent are Asian citizens. The Americas are represented with 10 percent of the survey population and the African continent with eight percent. A single percent descends from Oceania.

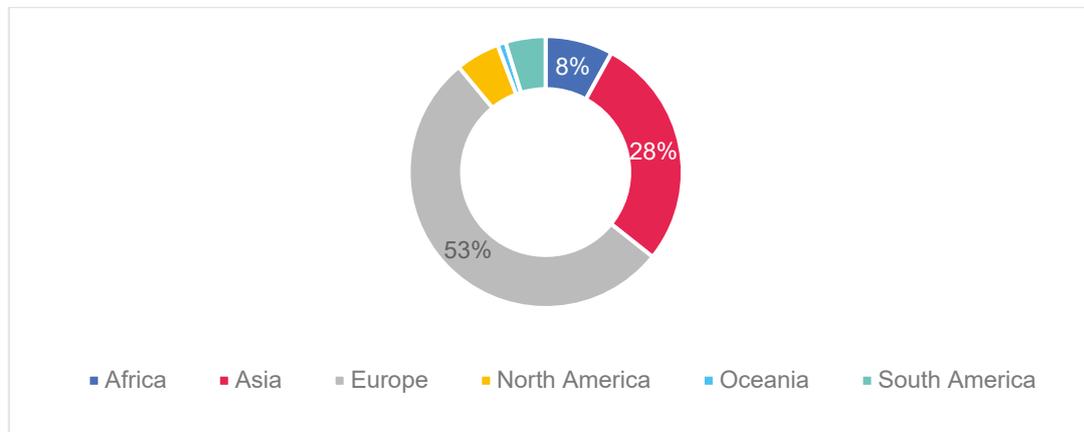


Figure 2.5 Geographical background by continent (N=5 082)

One of the most significant distinctions between the international students in Norway hangs on whether they originate from within or outside the EU/EEA area. The biggest difference in this regard is related to the students' legal status. Internationals from outside the EU/EEA are required to apply for a student visa before coming to Norway. This implies a quite long process, which comes in addition to the application to the university/college and entails additional costs.

There are also differences when it comes to the process of applying for academic admission. An intention of the Bologna process has been to ease the movement between HEIs in the EU/EEA area, and as a result, credits and credentials from different institutions are more easily recognized and accepted across Europe. In addition, there is a cultural and linguistic aspect. Countries in the EU/EEA area are, with some exceptions, geographically and culturally closer to Norway than countries outside this region. This should be expected to have implications on the challenges that students face when studying in Norway.

These differences are visible when it comes to exchange and degree students. While 76 percent of all exchange students come from Europe, 60 percent of the degree students come from either Asia, Africa, or Latin America. This means that the two main student types represented in the survey by and large descend from widely different backgrounds, not only geographically, but economically, socially, politically, judicially, culturally, and academically.

Whether a respondent for instance originates from an established democracy, a strong and modern economy, or an academic system adjusted to the Lisbon Recognition Convention, may impact the way a respondent experience Norwegian higher education and respond to the survey.

The respondents' geographic background is also associated with a range of other variables. Figure 2.6 displays the mean age of respondents dispersed among different continents. It shows that survey participants from Africa, Asia and South America are older than the respondents from Oceania, North America and Europe. While 81 percent of the African students are 27 years or older, only 21 percent of the European students fall into this category. 39 percent of the total survey population is 27 years or older.

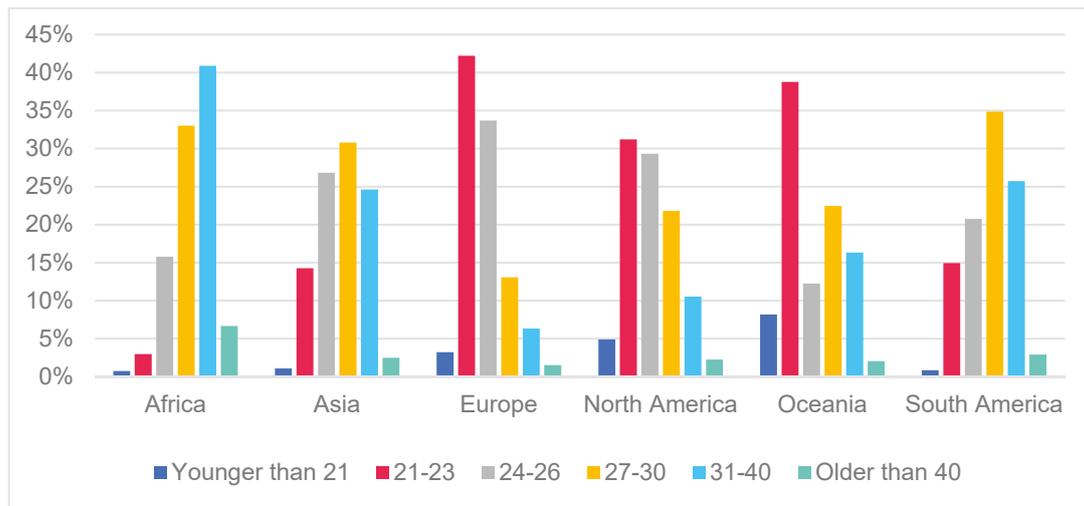


Figure 2.6 Age distribution across continents (N=5 082)

Geographical differences are also present in gender distribution. While 67 percent of North American respondents and 62 percent of European respondents are women, only 36 percent of the African respondents are female.

Furthermore, geographical differences are visible in the level of education among the respondents' parents. The North and South American parents have the highest level of education, followed by Oceanian and European parents. African and Asian parents have the lowest average level of education. Africa and Asia are also the continents where there are highest discrepancies in the levels of education between mothers and fathers.

Respondents originating from countries in South America (78 percent), Africa and Asia (76 percent each) predominantly pursue education at the master level, whereas the bulk of respondents from Europe (59 percent) and Oceania (57 percent) study in Norway for their bachelor's degrees.

The country background of the respondents is illustrated by the word cloud in figure 2.7. European countries, most notably Germany, France, Spain, and Italy, dominate the figure, but also Nepal, Pakistan, Iran, China, Russia, and USA are well represented in the survey population. Norwegian priority countries for academic cooperation are the EU/EEA, North America, BRICS (Brazil, China, India, Russia and South Africa) and Japan. These countries are well represented in the survey. 48 percent of respondents descend from the EU/EEA, a total of twelve percent originate from the BRICS states and Japan, and five percent come from USA and Canada.

3 Why international students come to Norway

The question of why international students come to Norway is a key issue for Norwegian authorities and institutions in their work with recruiting international students. In this chapter, the *why*-question will be broken down into several parts.

This is partly a question of what preconditions need to be in place for the students to have the opportunity to come to Norway. Such preconditions may be related to the availability of funding or programmes taught in a language the students know. The *why* is also a question of motivation - aspects that make the students more or less eager to come to Norway. These motivations may relate to qualities of the higher education in Norway or to circumstantial qualities of life in Norway, its nature, society or culture.

Moreover, it is important to take into consideration that the strongest driver behind the students' choice of study destination may not necessarily be a desire to go to Norway, but an interest in the larger geographic region of which Norway is a part, in the specific institution they apply to or simply a desire to go abroad, to experience something new.

The presentation of our findings in this chapter comes with some significant caveats. Firstly, we have surveyed only the students who ended up in Norway. This means that the survey does not tell us anything about what the preconditions or motivations mean to those who did not end up as students in Norway, either because they preferred another study destination or did not get the chance to come to Norway. This is unfortunate, since information about this group would have been valuable for Norwegian authorities and institutions in their work with recruiting the students.

Secondly, the students are asked about their motivations sometime after arriving in Norway. This means that their answers might be tainted by their perceptions of Norway developed after arrival. This is particularly problematic from a methodological point of view as there is a risk that their replies will be influenced by these more recent experiences. Notwithstanding, the answers presented in this chapter give us a basic understanding of why the students come to Norway and which challenges they have had in the process of coming here.

3.1 Motivation

Figure 3.1. displays the distribution of responses among exchange and degree students when asked about their primary motivation for choosing study destination. Among both types of students, the wish to study in Norway and the wish to study abroad are the strongest motivational factors. Each of these motivations is singled out by roughly a third of the students. The exchange students are more likely to choose Northern Europe, while more degree students report that their current institution is their main motivation. This may be seen in light of the different consequences of this choice – the exchange students choose destination for a semester or two, while the degree students choose the institution where their degree will be issued.

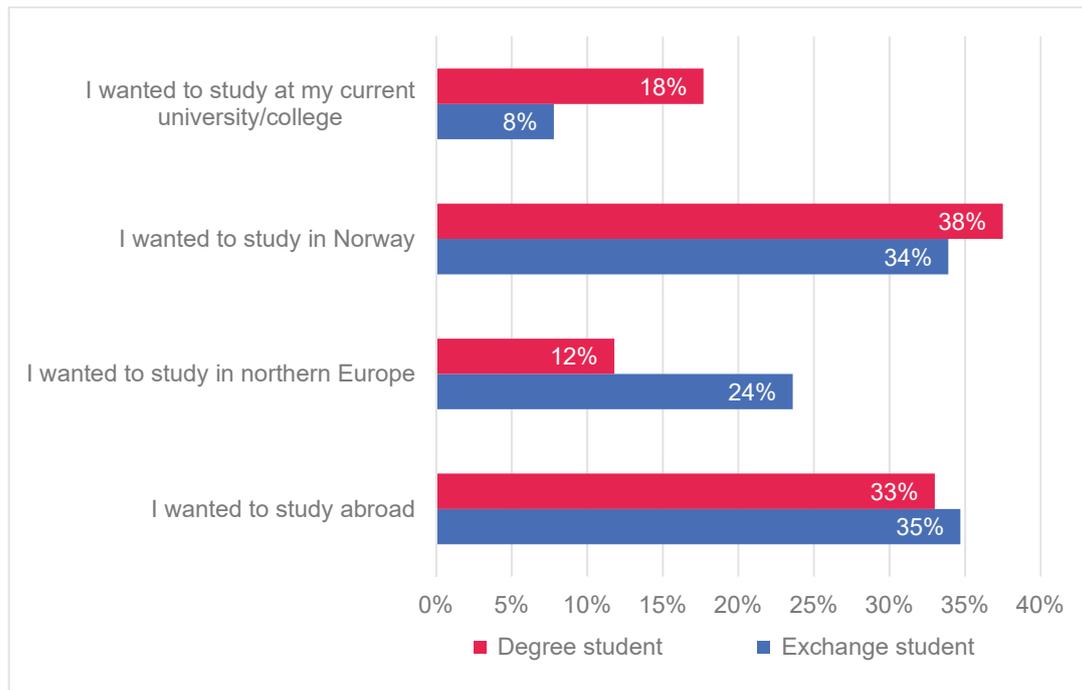


Figure 3.1. Primary motivation for choosing study destination among degree and exchange students (N=4 948)

Students at the specialised university colleges name the institution as their main motivation much more frequently (21 percent) than the average (13 percent). This may indicate that these institutions have a stronger visibility among potential students internationally than other Norwegian HEIs.

The country Norway is cited as the main motivation more frequently among students from North America (46 percent), than the average (36 percent). This tendency is reaffirmed in the answers given for the following question in the questionnaire, “Was Norway your first country to study abroad?”. Again, North American students score highest, with 81 percent as compared to the 72 percent average. This average is comparable to those of the 2016 and 2014 surveys.

In figure 3.2 we look at the motivations for choice of Norway as study destination. Three reasons stand out: The quality of the education, Norwegian nature, and the perception of Norway as a peaceful and safe society. While the quality of education scores equally high among both degree and exchange students, Norwegian nature stands out as the most important reason among exchange students. For the degree students, both high standards of living and work opportunities after studies are equally important to Norwegian nature. The perception of Norway as a peaceful and safe society is particularly important to students from Asia, almost two-thirds of these students identify this as one of their main reasons to come to Norway. These findings suggest that Norwegian authorities and institutions should be advised to approach the exchange and degree students differently in the recruitment process.

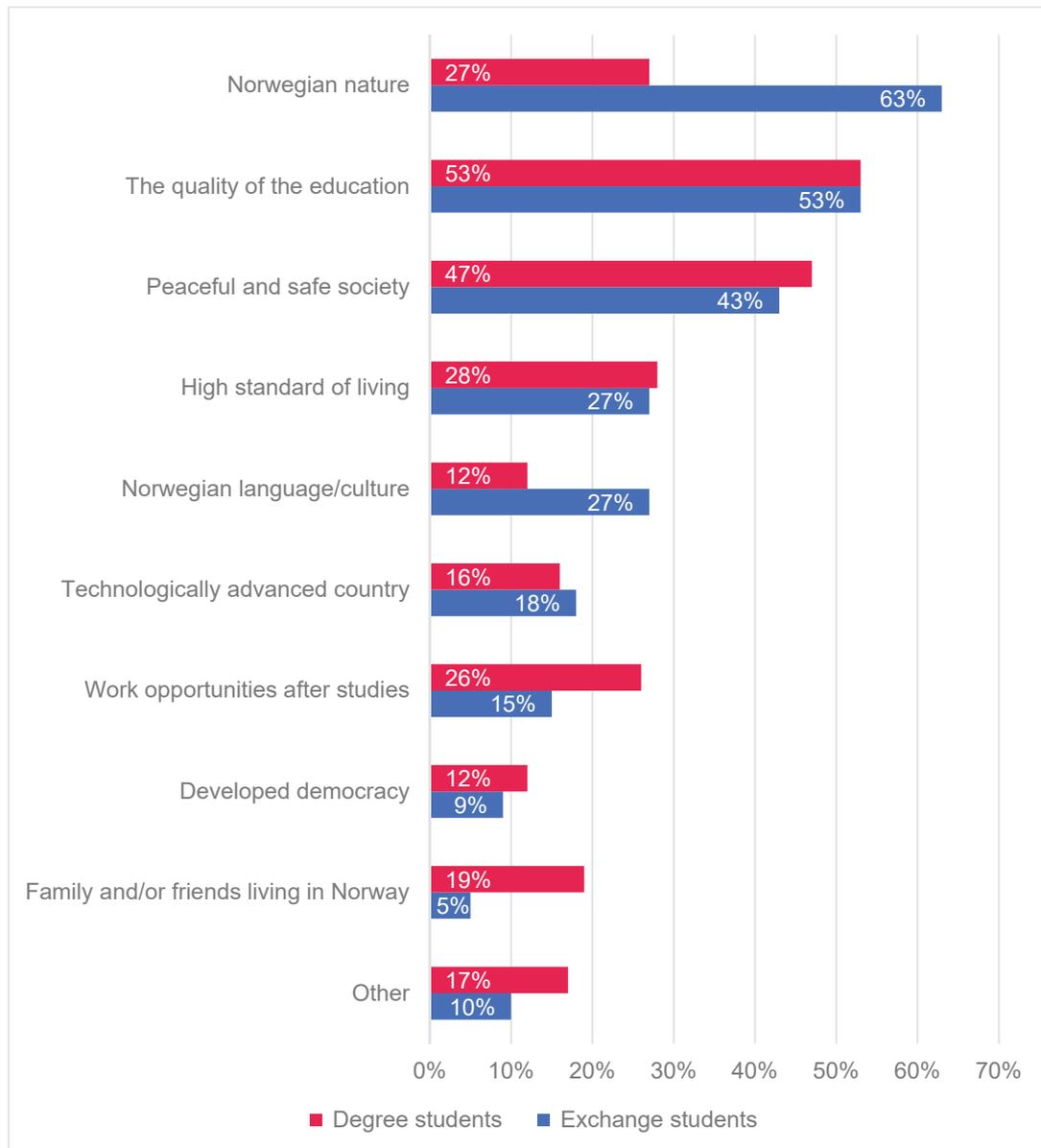


Figure 3.2 Most important reasons to study in Norway among degree and exchange students (N=4 963)

3.2 Preconditions

While these factors motivate students to come to Norway to study, it is also important to understand the importance of certain preconditions which determine whether the students are able to go to Norway in the first place. Among such factors, the availability of courses in English is decisive, cf. figure 3.3. In fact, this was deemed important or very important to almost nine in ten international students. The lack of tuition fees in (public) Norwegian higher education is also a significant precondition. Especially so for the degree students, 85 percent of them consider this to be important for their decision. The lack of tuition fees is particularly important to students from Asia and Africa. These two groups also pay considerably more attention to the possibilities of working during their studies than students

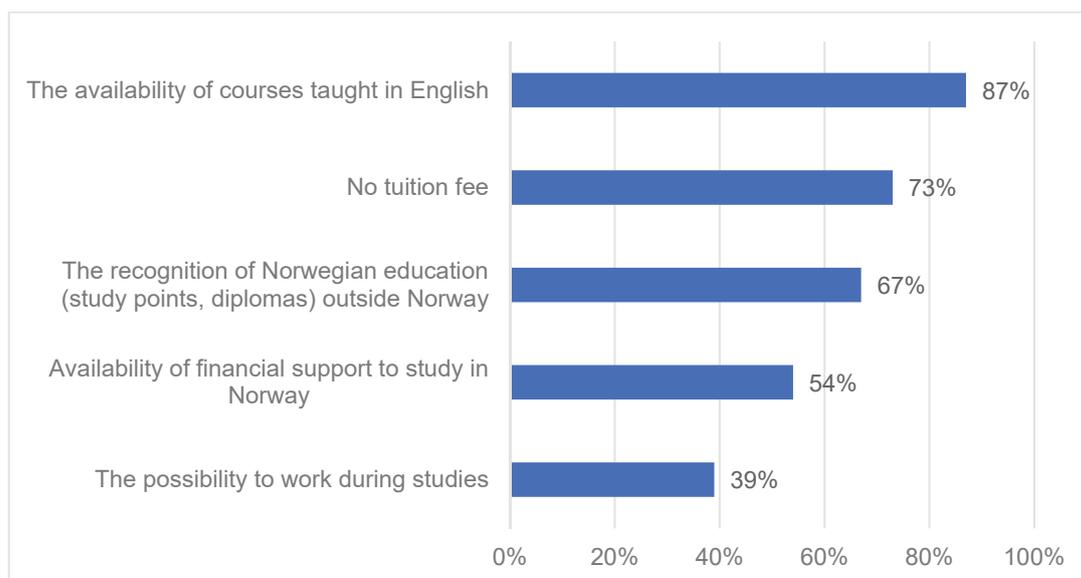


Figure 3.3 Share of respondents who rated different preconditions important or very important (N=4 872-4 918)

from other continents. Six in ten students from these two regions consider this possibility to be important or very important in their decision to come to Norway.

The question of preconditions also relates to the students' most important sources of funding. Two thirds of the students mention personal or family resources as one important source of funding while they are in Norway. For exchange students, Erasmus or other EU grants are equally important, while part time work during studies is an important source of funding for half of the degree students. As we saw in chapter 1, the possibility of working part time while studying, along with the absence of tuition fees, both constitute important reasons why Norway is seen as an attractive study destination.²²

Figure 3.4 demonstrates that personal or family resources are the most important source of funding for students from all continents. Still, there are considerable geographical differences. The African students stand out against students from the other continents. They rely on Norwegian grants to a much larger degree than other students. They are far less likely to rely on family or personal resources, and they rely on part time work to a larger degree than other students.

Information is also a crucial precondition. When considering where to study abroad the students look to the web. Web searches is a method used by three quarters of the students. Moreover, as many as 40 percent have sought information among other students. Other students are a particularly important source of information among exchange students. Many of the exchange students come from the same institution, which means that exchange students have a bigger chance than degree students to meet students at their home institution who have relevant experiences. On the web, the website of the students' institution in Norway is the most used source of information. It is used by three in four students, and it is equally frequent among degree and exchange students. Being the most

²² OECD, 2019b.

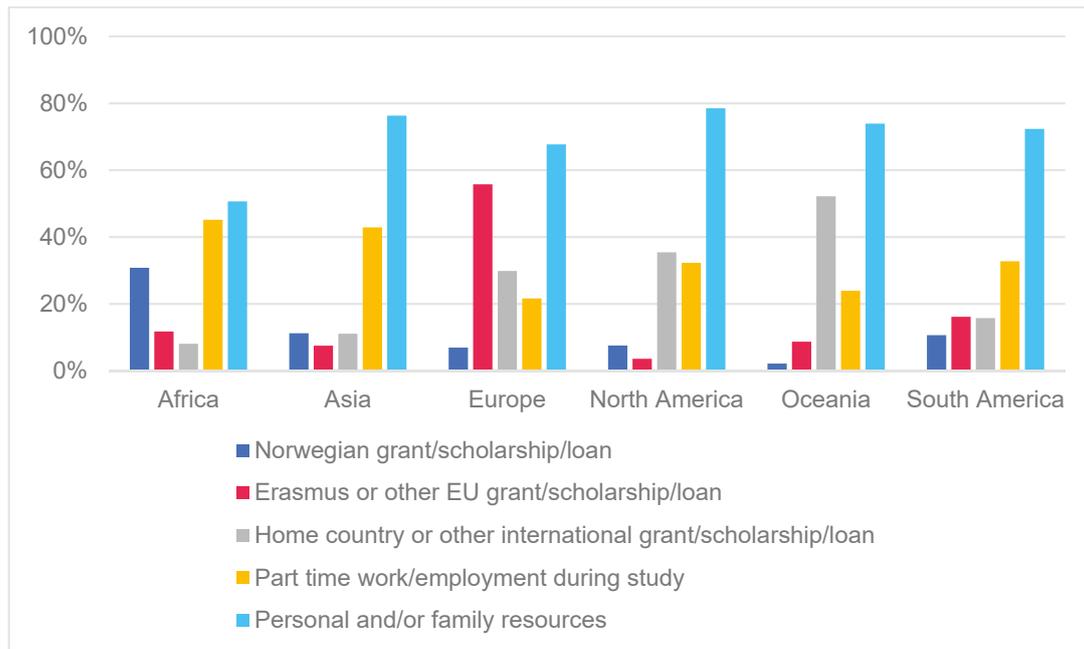


Figure 3.4 Sources of funding per continent (N=4 809)

frequently used information source, it is encouraging that 86 percent of the students find this source to have been useful.

3.3 Barriers

There may be some additional obstacles to coming to Norway to study, even when the mentioned preconditions are met, and the students are motivated to come to Norway. These obstacles are related to administrative procedures and the legal framework for arriving in Norway from another country to study. These are obstacles that many students will be expecting when going abroad, so the most interesting approach is to identify whether these obstacles were bigger or smaller than expected.

As a consequence of the legal framework, there are fundamental differences between the situations for students from the EU/EEA area and those from other countries. While students from the EU/EEA area can freely travel to Norway, and only need to register in Norway as students within three months, students from the rest of the world need to obtain a student visa. The students need to pay a visa application fee, which rose from 3 200 NOK to 5 300 NOK from 1 January 2018. In addition, the students need to prove that they have sufficient funding to support their stay in Norway. The required amount is linked to the grant scheme of the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund and has risen with the increase in grants and loans available to Norwegian students over the last years.²³ Thus, some of these questions are only relevant to students from outside EU/EEA area.

In general, the answers presented in figure 3.5 lean to the positive side of the scale. Across all variables, there are more students who met fewer problems than expected than there are students who met more problems than expected. In addition, a dominating share of the

²³ SIU, 2018.

students assess the problems they met to be as expected. The overall conclusion is therefore that for most students, the different aspects of the preparation phase did not give unexpected problems.

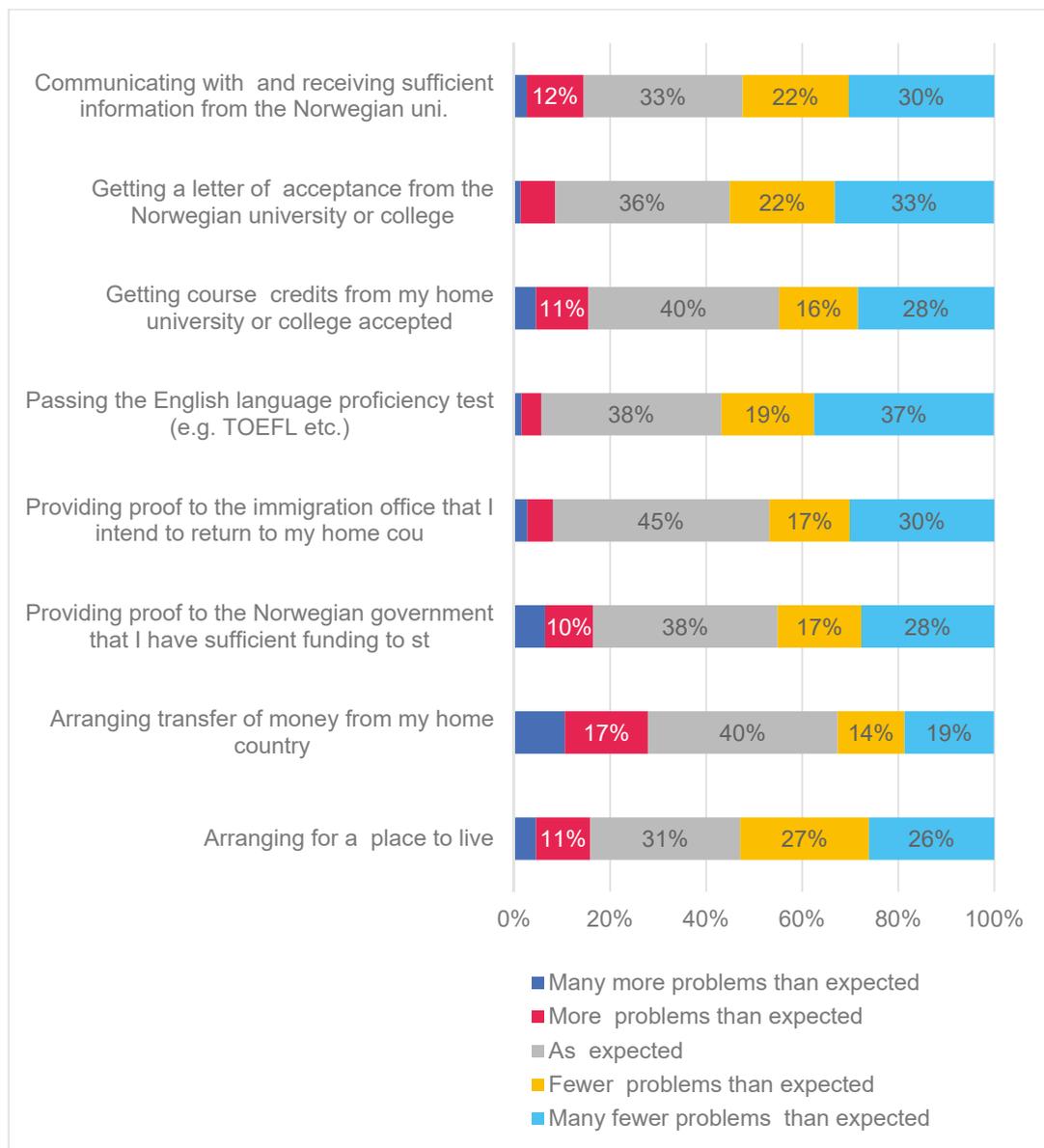


Figure 3.5 Problems in preparation for studies in Norway (N=2 834-4 607)

There are small differences between degree and exchange students when it comes to reported problems in the preparation phase. Still, a larger share of exchange students (17 percent) than degree students (8 percent) report to have experienced more problems with having course credit transferred from their home institution than expected. On the other hand, a larger share of degree students experienced more problems than expected with providing proof of sufficient funding (18 percent, against 7 percent for exchange students), and with arranging money transfer to Norway (28 percent, against 17 percent for exchange students).

It may be encouraging for the institutions to see that half of the students experience less and only 14 percent experience more problems than expected in their communication with

the Norwegian institution. Among the institutions, the group of “new universities” score slightly better than the others in this aspect. In addition, it is a positive sign that half of the students report less problems with finding a place to stay than expected. Here, the specialised university colleges perform worse than the other institutions, as one in five students at these institutions experienced more problems than expected.

North American students stand out regarding problems during the preparations for studies in Norway. 41 percent of these students experienced more problems than expected in obtaining a study permit, much higher than the 14 percent average score. This score is also much higher than the score for other students from outside the EU/EEA. Similar tendencies are seen when it comes to providing proof of sufficient funding to support their stay in Norway. Additionally, twice as many of the North American students reported problems in communicating with and receiving sufficient information from their Norwegian institutions.

For Norwegian HEIs, the process of assessing applications from international students is labour-intensive. In addition, there is a perception that many of the students apply to several institutions at once, with the result that the same students are assessed by several Norwegian institutions. There is an ongoing debate about establishing a national application system for international students that apply to the master level, in order to make the assessment process more efficient.²⁴ In this context, it is interesting to gain an idea of how many students apply to more than one Norwegian institution. This is particularly relevant for the degree students. In our survey, almost half the degree students applied to more than one Norwegian institution, one in four students applied to at least three different institutions.

83 percent of the students ended up in their preferred institution. This result represents a drop from the 2016 and 2014 surveys, when it was at 91 percent and 90 respectively. The score is highest for the students at the older universities, at 86 percent.

3.4 Motivation for choice of institution

In figure 3.6. we present the most important reasons for studying at the specific institution. The students show particular interest in academic specificities of the institution: the opportunity to study a particular subject and the quality of the education at the institution. This tendency is particularly strong among the degree students, also the subsequent three most frequent replies among these students are related to academic matters: good facilities, quality of research at the institution and the prestige of the institution’s diploma. As is natural, the institutional agreement is an important reason for as many as three out of four exchange students. As in Figure 3.2, we see that the exchange students pay more attention to Norwegian nature than the degree students, but when it comes to the choice of institution, it is only the fourth most important reason. We may thus say that qualities of Norwegian nature were important when it came to the question of drawing these students’ attention to Norway as a study destination, but other reasons were more important for their choice of institution.

²⁴ SIU, 2018.

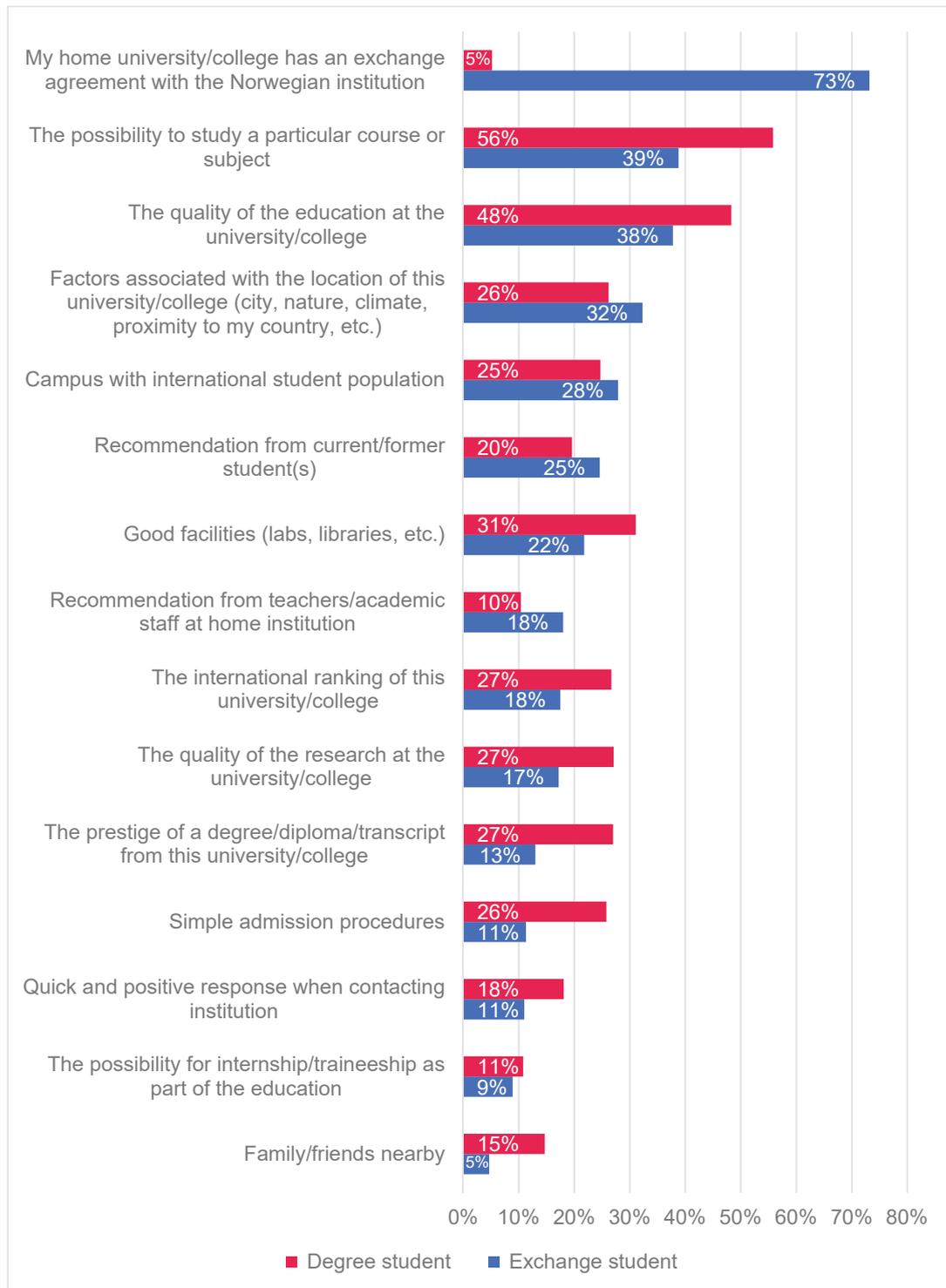


Figure 3.6 Motivations for choice of institution (N=4 809)

The institutional affiliation has implications on the answers to these questions. The older universities score relatively high on the quality of research. The specialised university colleges score high on quality of education, prestige of the diploma and international ranking. The latter question demonstrates huge differences between the institutions – while 39 percent of the students at specialised university colleges pick international ranking as one of their five reasons for the choice of their institution, only 4 percent of the students at

university colleges do the same. University colleges score high on the existence of an institutional agreement and recommendations from former students.

3.5 Future prospects

The students' motivations for the future is assessed in a question about whether they would like to stay and why. A comparison with data from earlier surveys shows that there has been a rise in the share of students who consider staying on in Norway after having completed their current studies. The share of students who would like to stay on in Norway saw a significant decrease from 55 percent in 2014 to 46 percent in 2016 but has since then increased to 58 percent in 2019. This increase is seen both for exchange and degree students, among degree students as many as 70 percent consider staying on in Norway, up from 62 percent in 2016. The fact that the increase is seen among both degree and exchange students shows that it cannot simply be explained by the inclusion in the 2019 survey of students that have stayed in Norway longer than three semesters.

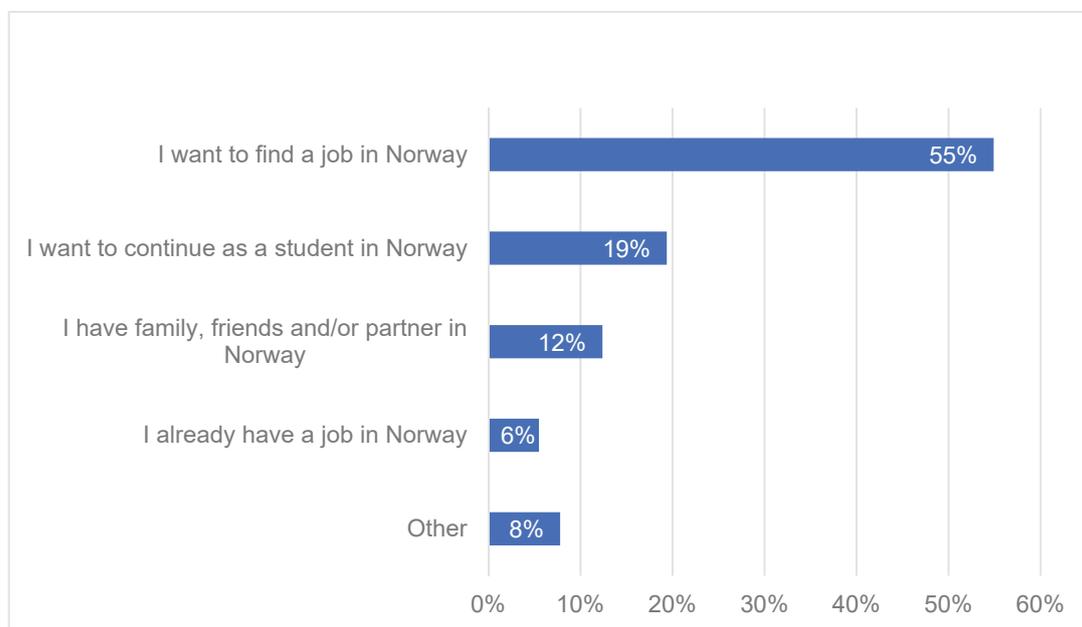


Figure 3.7 Reasons to stay on in Norway (N=2 627)

There is a geographical difference among the students. While exactly half the students from the EU/EEA area consider staying on, the number is 52 percent for students from North America. As many as 65 percent of the students from the so-called Panorama countries and 66 percent of the students from the rest of the world consider staying on. Equally important is the differences among students based on the different fields of study. Among students in natural sciences and technology, 62 percent consider staying on (up from 54 percent in 2016). The students least inclined to stay on are in economics and business, at 51 percent they are also up from 44 percent in 2016.

Prospects of a future job is the predominant reason among the students that consider staying on in Norway after having completed their current studies. Together with the students that already have a job in Norway it makes up more than 60 percent. 19 percent consider staying on to continue as a student in Norway. Taken together these three variables are a strong indication of the attractiveness of Norway as a destination for studies and work. At 63 and 59 percent respectively, the prospects of a future job is particularly

important for students in economics and business, and natural sciences and technology. At the same time, almost one in four students in arts and humanities consider staying on because they would like to continue their studies in Norway.

3.6 Summary

In general, the country itself is the most frequently cited motivating factor for international students coming to Norway, and three in four students had Norway as their first priority study destination. When asked why they chose Norway, quality of the education was singled out as the most important reason. If we use these simple facts as tokens of how Norwegian higher education performs in the international perspective, they give a positive impression. In the forthcoming chapters more nuance will be added to this general finding.

When compared to the results for the institutions, we see that, in general, Norway has a stronger brand among international students. Meanwhile, some institutions have a stronger standing than the rest. International students at specialised university colleges give much more importance to the prestige of the diploma and the international ranking of their Norwegian institutions than students at other institutions.

The Norwegian HEIs should take encouragement from the fact that the vast majority of the students found the information on their websites to be useful. At the same time, it is worth paying attention to the importance of fellow students as information source when the students consider where to go for their studies abroad.

English as a language of instruction in the classroom is a precondition for almost all students coming to Norway. This is not surprising, but it opens an important perspective on the internationalisation of Norwegian higher education. In the 2001 white paper *Gjør din plikt – krev din rett*, the Norwegian government identified increasing the number of English-language programmes at Norwegian HEIs as a key measure in the effort to internationalise Norwegian higher education.²⁵ Two decades later we see the results of this process: the number of English-language programmes has multiplied, as has the number of international students in Norway.

The fact that North American students report more problems than expected to a larger degree than other international students when it comes to the preparations for their studies in Norway may be related to different levels of expectations. It appears that students from North America expect these processes to run more smoothly than students from other continents outside Europe. Moreover, the dissatisfaction with information from the host institution should be seen in light of the problems they experienced in the process with obtaining visa, i.e. their *need* for information was higher than they had expected.

All of this should be taken into consideration by Norwegian authorities and institutions when dealing with these students. There appears to be a need to manage their expectations ahead of the visa process, particularly because other students are such an important source of information for the international students when considering going abroad. If these expectations are not managed, it may reflect negatively on the attractiveness of Norway as a study destination.

²⁵ St.meld. nr. 27 (2000-2001).

Norway is an attractive country to study and work in for the international students, and there has been an increase in this attractiveness in 2019 compared to earlier. For a majority of the students who would like to stay on, the perspectives of a job in Norway is a main motivation.

4 Assessment of quality in Norwegian higher education

This chapter presents an analysis of the answers given by the students to questions that relate to their experiences with the quality of teaching and academic life at their Norwegian institution. We also analyse working life experiences integrated in the study programmes.

Education quality is a priority area for Norwegian authorities. Generally, the students' assessment of the education is a frequently used information source for understanding this quality in the Norwegian higher education sector, a point that is most apparent in the use of NOKUT's annual student survey, *Studiebarometeret*.²⁶

Relevance to working life after the studies is an important part of how quality is understood in Norwegian higher education. This relevance may be accomplished in various ways, be that project work in cooperation with relevant businesses, work placements, internships or in other ways. As we have seen, work opportunities in Norway after the studies is reported as a motivating factor in the consideration of Norway as a study destination for one in four international degree students in our survey.

For many of the questions, the students have been asked to give assessments along a balanced five point-scale from very satisfied via neither satisfied nor dissatisfied to very dissatisfied. This scale allows us to get a clear picture of the level of satisfaction.

Some of the questions treated here are parallel to questions in *Studiebarometeret*. For the purposes of comparison, we have asked NOKUT to provide us with the data for the Norwegian nationals in the survey from 2018. Some of these data are provided here.²⁷

4.1 Satisfaction with academic quality

In general, the international students are satisfied with the teaching at the Norwegian institutions. For all the variables presented in figure 4.1, at least 65 percent of the students are satisfied.

The students are particularly satisfied with the teachers' ability to teach in English, this point of view is supported by more than eight in ten students. The overall tendencies related to this variable is constant from the 2016 survey. However, there is reason to point out that there is a drop by ten percentage points in the number of students who are very satisfied. A high score on this question is vital, since the students report that the availability of English-language courses is so important for their choice to come to Norway. The level of satisfaction is also high among students from regions where English is an official language. 82 percent of students from North America are satisfied with the teachers' ability to teach in English.

²⁶ NOKUT, 2019, *Studiebarometeret*, <http://www.studiebarometeret.no/en/>.

²⁷ It should be noted that while both use a five point-scale, the scales are slightly different. On the scale used for *Studiebarometeret* only the extreme values are provided with a description, e.g.: 1 (Do not agree) and 5 (Completely agree).

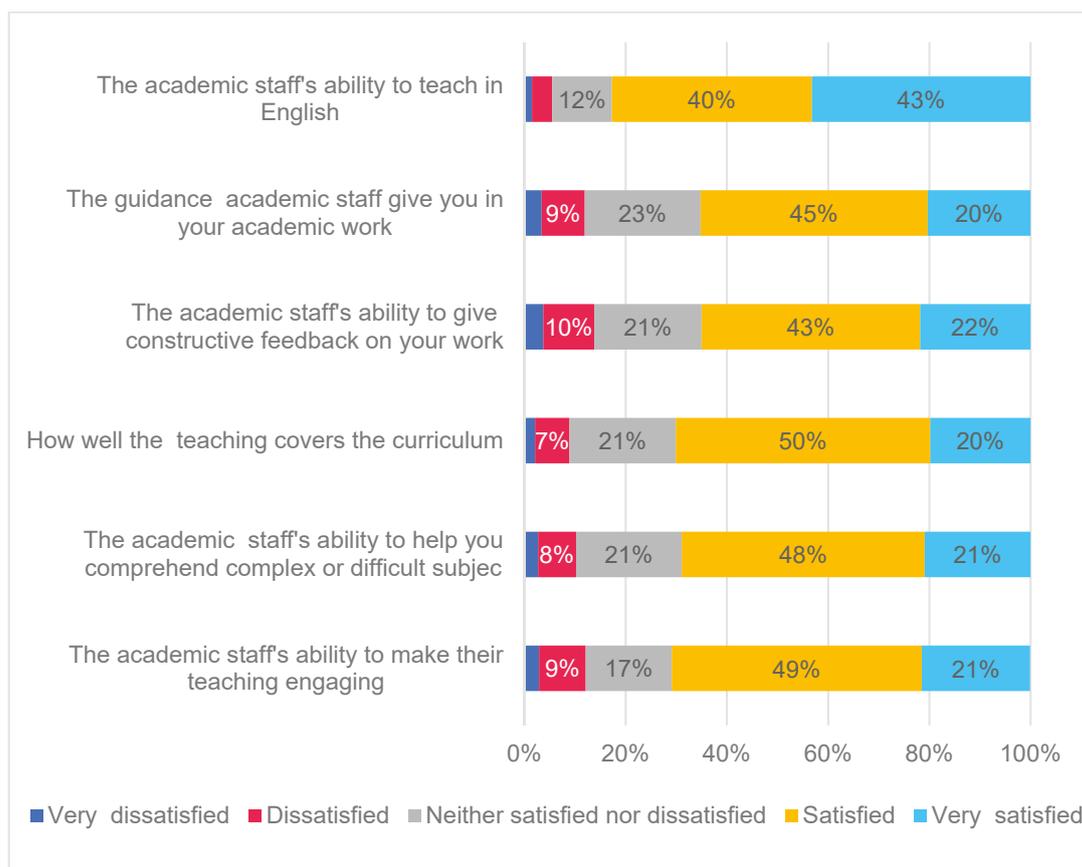


Figure 4.1 Satisfaction with teaching (N=4 7324-4 734)

The students are least satisfied with the feedback they get from the academic staff, but even here the level of dissatisfaction is low – 14 percent report that they are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. The students' institutional affiliation has some implications on the answers, students at university colleges tend to be more satisfied than their peers. The international students at these institutions are happier with the guidance they get in their academic work and the feedback they get from their teachers. There are also considerable geographical differences. Students from North America tend to be much less satisfied than students from other continents. As many as 30 percent of these students are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the feedback they get on their work. By contrast, the corresponding score for African students is five percent.

The latter three variables from figure 4.1 are found in *Studiebarometeret*. A comparison shows that international students tend to be more positive in their evaluation than their Norwegian peers, and that they are more positive in their evaluation of how well the academic staff succeeds in making their teaching engaging. While 70 percent of the international students are satisfied in this regard, only 57 percent of the Norwegian students are.

Also, when it comes to the international students' satisfaction with their learning outcomes, the scores are positive, cf. figure 4.2. A majority of the students are satisfied with their learning outcomes. As many as eight out of ten students are satisfied or very satisfied with how they have learnt to work independently, and the scores are also high for critical thinking. At the other end, twelve percent are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the experience they have gained from research and development work.

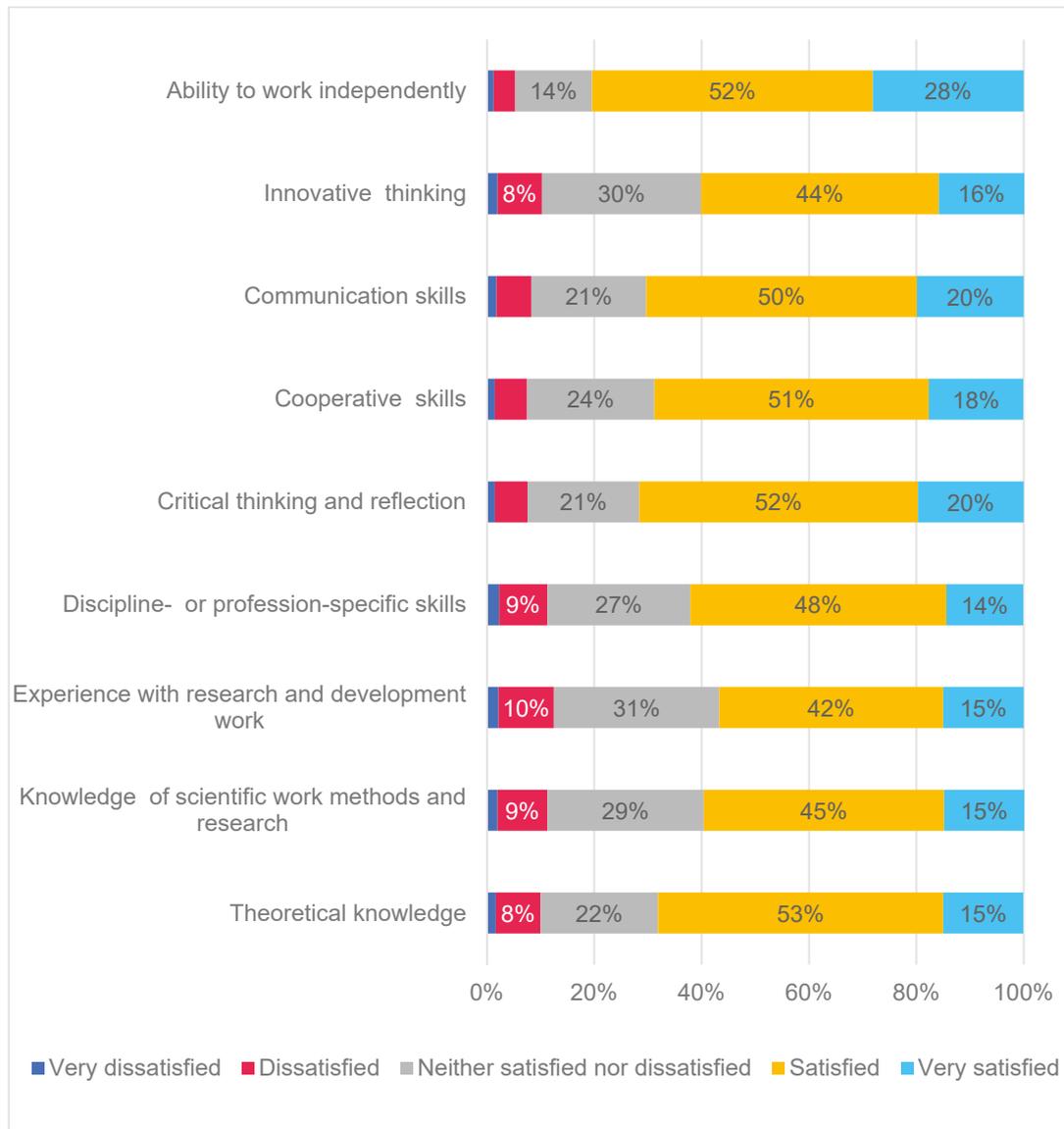


Figure 4.2 Satisfaction with learning outcomes (N=4 608-4 625)

In general, students at university colleges and specialised university colleges tend to be slightly more satisfied with the learning outcomes than students at the universities. Geographic background affects the students' satisfaction strongly. Students from Africa tend to be most satisfied with the learning outcomes, and students from North and South America least satisfied. For instance, 18 percent of the North American students are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the experiences with research and development work, while the average for this question is 12 percent.

Compared to the international students, the Norwegian students in *Studiebarometeret* vary more in their evaluations. The findings for the two groups are juxtapositioned in figure 4.3. While they are slightly more positive when it comes to learning outcomes relating to theoretical knowledge, critical thinking and cooperative skills, they are much less satisfied with the experiences they have gained in research and development work, the knowledge they have gained of scientific work methods and research, as well as the discipline- and profession specific skills they have acquired.

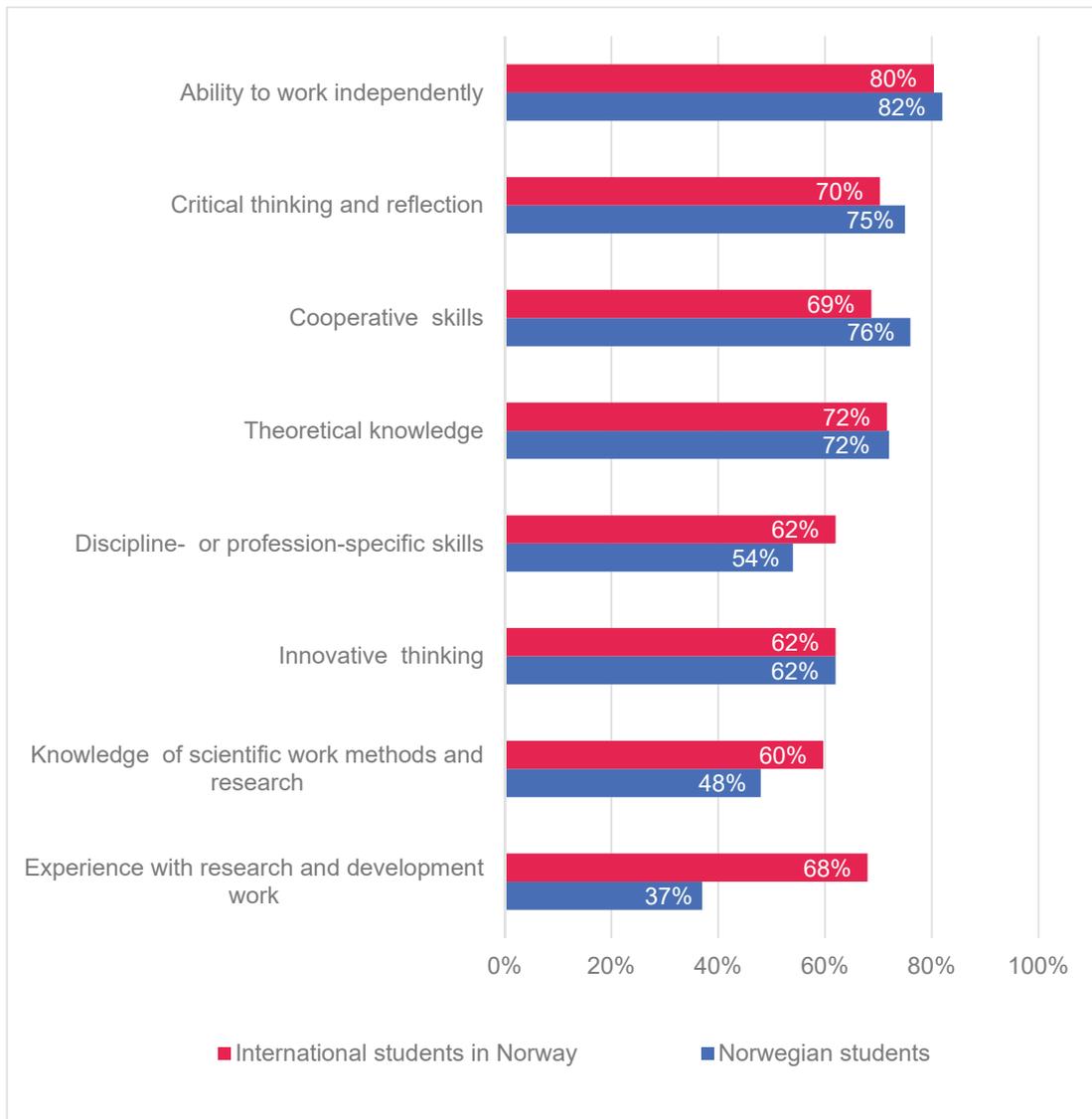


Figure 4.3 Share of international and domestic students who are satisfied or very satisfied with their learning outcomes²⁸

While there is a general satisfaction with the social and academic environment among the international students, the students are most satisfied with the relationship between students and academic staff, cf figure 4.4. Three quarters of the students are satisfied or very satisfied with this aspect of their student experience in Norway. The students at university colleges and specialised universities are more satisfied than other students when it comes to all these questions, as many as 85 percent are satisfied or very satisfied with the relationship between students and academic staff. Students at bachelor level are more satisfied than students at master level, and particularly with the social environment among students. There is a general tendency in the data that the students are more satisfied with the academic environment among the students than with the social environment, but this tendency is considerably stronger among the African students, 79 percent are satisfied and

²⁸ Data about international students are from the survey conducted for this report (N=4 608-4 625), whereas data for Norwegian students are provided by NOKUT (N=18 233-21067)

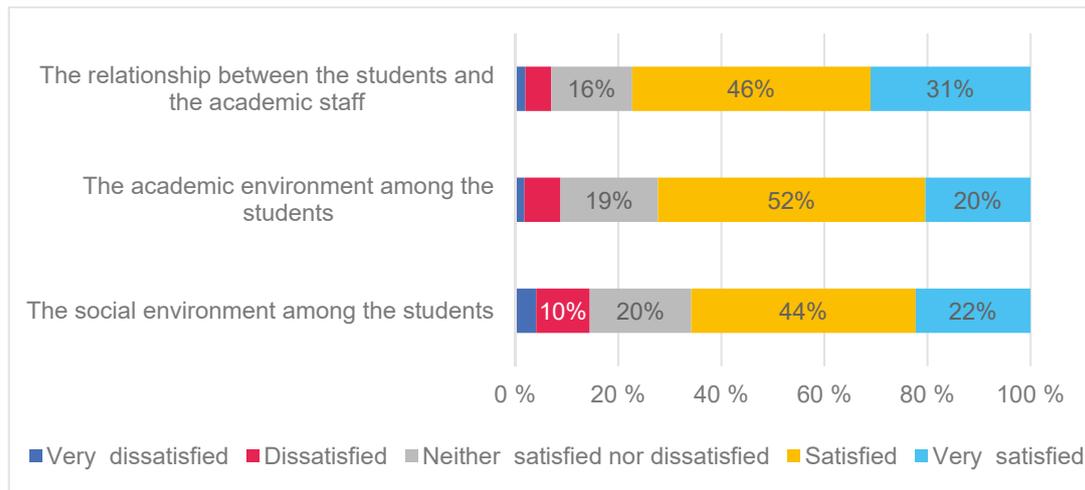


Figure 4.4 Satisfaction with study environment among international students (N=4 628-4 631)

very satisfied with the academic environment against 59 percent related to social environment.

International and Norwegian students rate the study environment differently. 77 percent of the international students are satisfied with this aspect as compared to 60 percent for Norwegian students. On the other hand, the Norwegian students rate the social environment among the students slightly higher than the international students, 71 percent satisfied as compared to 66 percent.

The exchange students were asked to compare the academic level of their Norwegian institution to that of their home institution, a third of the students consider the level to be about the same, slightly more students (36 percent) consider the level to be higher or much higher, while one in four students consider the Norwegian institution to be at a lower level. Among the Norwegian institutions, the new universities have the highest score – 42 percent of the surveyed exchange students at these institutions consider them to be at a higher level than their home institutions.

There are big differences in how exchange students from different continents rate their Norwegian institution as compared to the home institution. The results are presented in figure 4.5. European students make up three fourths of this group and lean slightly to the positive side. American students are much more sceptical, almost half of them rate the Norwegian institution lower. On the other hand, students from Africa and Asia rate the Norwegian institution highly, 86 percent of the African students rate the Norwegian institution higher than their home institution.

The students were also asked about their satisfaction with their current studies in Norway. 83 percent agree or agree strongly. Bachelor students (85 percent) agree slightly more than master students (81 percent), and exchange students (86 percent) more than degree students (80 percent). Again, there are considerable geographical differences ranging from 91 percent of the African students to 74 who agree among the North American students.

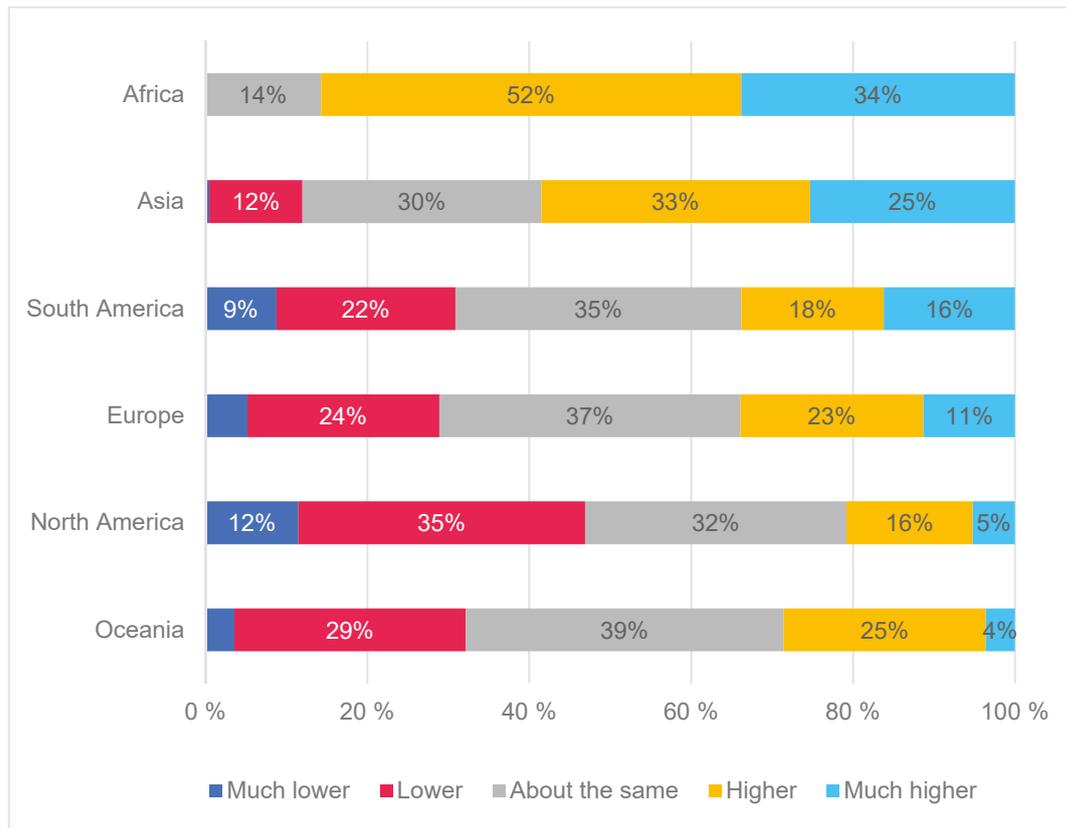


Figure 4.5 Norwegian institution compared to home institution among exchange students per continent (N=2 067)

When asked directly if they would recommend Norway as a study destination to other students, 60 percent confirmed in the definite, while 85 percent said they would probably recommend Norway. These are strong indications of the students' satisfaction with the quality of Norwegian higher education. As we see in figure 4.6, the exchange students are more positive. There is some variation among the institutions, the students at university colleges are most positive, nine in ten would probably recommend Norway. The African students stand out on the positive side, 71 percent of them would definitely recommend Norway in contrast to the score of 53 percent for the North America students, who are the most sceptical. Still, even among the North American students, 77 would probably recommend Norway.

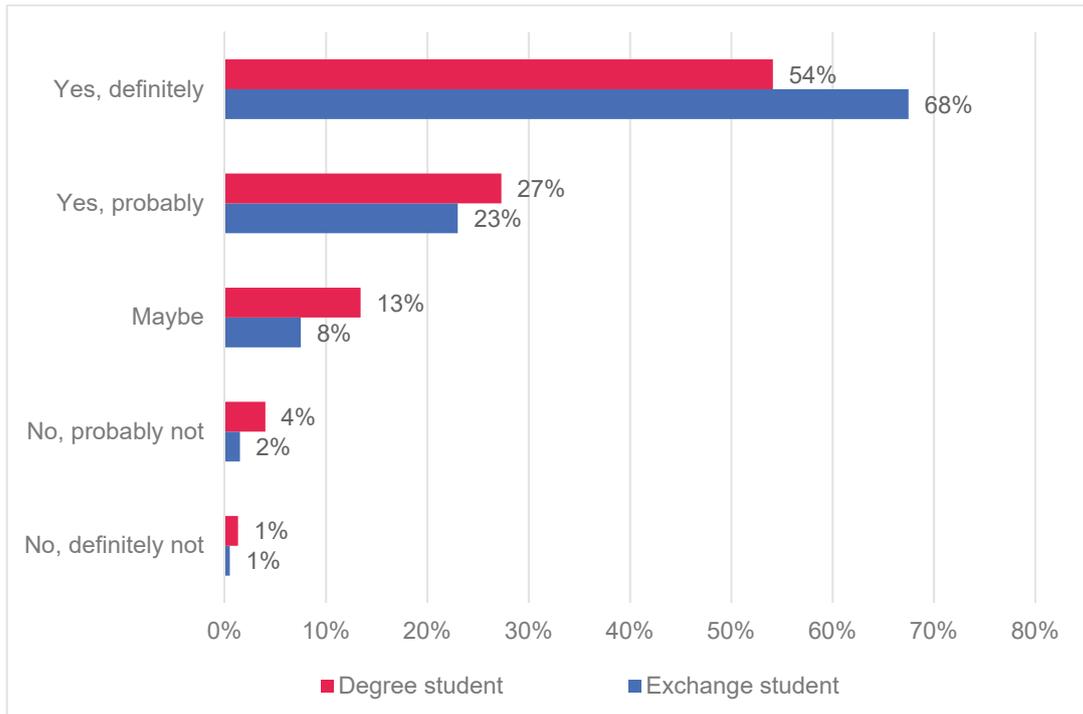


Figure 4.6 Recommending Norway to other students – exchange and degree students (N=4 553)

We now turn from the general impression international students have of Norwegian higher education and higher education institutions, to a look at some more specific characteristics of Norwegian higher education, in figure 4.7. In general, the students agree with some commonly held assumptions about Norwegian higher education. The students are most impressed by the campus facilities, nine in ten agree that they are modern. Four in five students agree that the relations between students and academic staff are informal and relaxed.

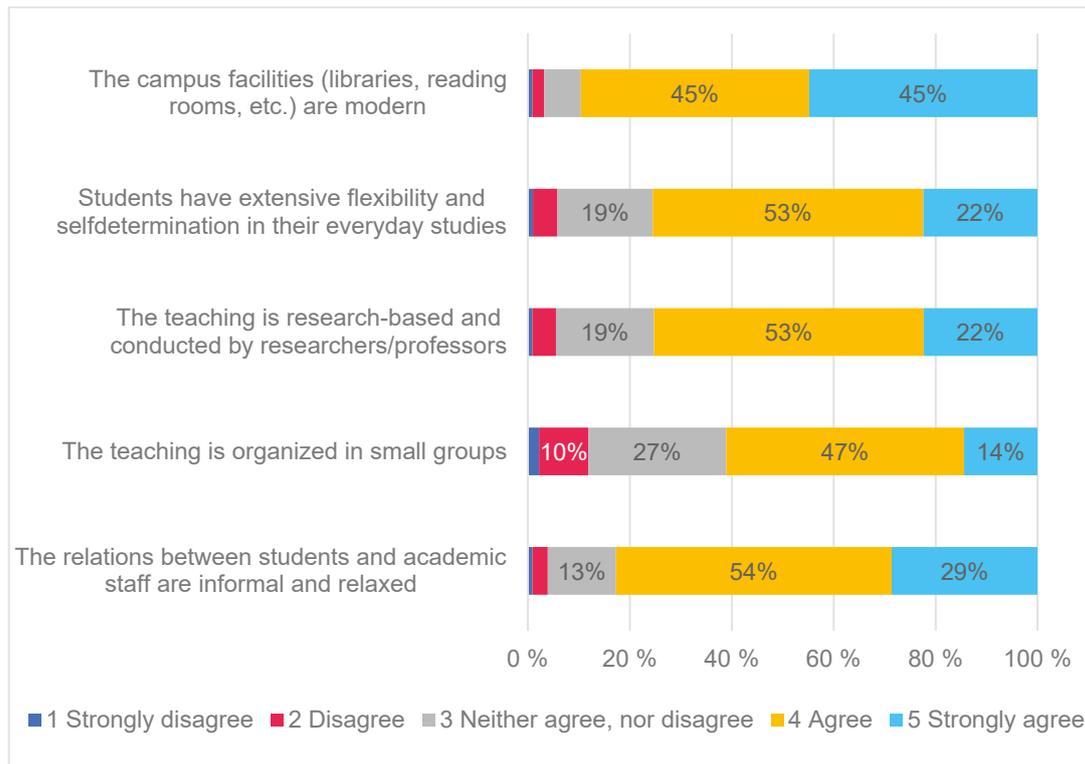


Figure 4.7 Statements about Norwegian education (N=4 538-4 548)

4.2 Working life experiences

More than half the international students at Norwegian HEIs report to have contact with working life as a part of their studies. The most frequent kind of contact is project work: more than a third of the students are in contact with working life through thesis work, research project or similar activities. Figure 4.8 shows that there are considerable differences between the different categories of institutions. Two thirds of the international students at university colleges are in contact with working life as a part of their studies in Norway, as compared to half of the students at the old universities. Such activities are more frequent among students of health and care studies (64 percent) and less so among students in law studies and social sciences (46 percent).

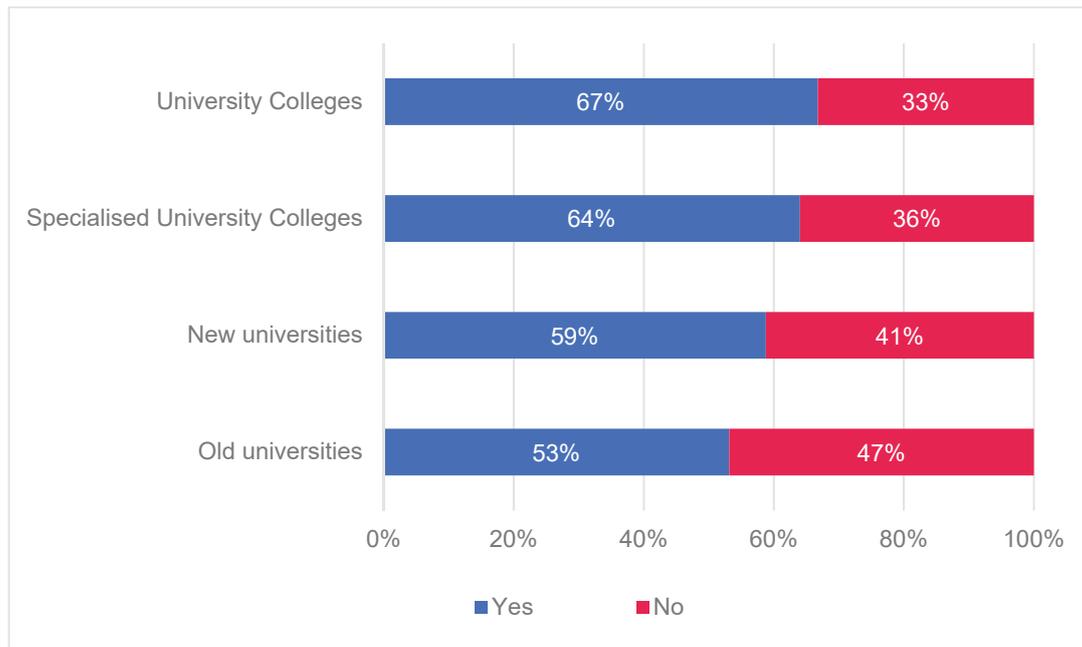


Figure 4.8 Contact with working life the in studies among different institution types (N=4 653)

The numbers are more restricted when we circle in on internship and traineeship. In a separate question, the students were asked whether they have had or will have internship or traineeship as a part of their studies in Norway.²⁹ One in four students confirm this. The share is higher among degree students, almost one in three degree students say that they have had or will have internship as a part of their studies in Norway.

Further investigation shows that these work-related activities are often of some duration: 85 percent of the students who have had internships have been involved in such activities for more than a month, and more than half of them for more than two months. Thus, for the students who are offered such learning activities, they constitute a considerable part of their study experience in Norway. There are noticeable differences between the different categories of institutions. While more than 60 percent of the students at old universities have had traineeships for more than two months, this is true for only 44 percent of the students at new universities and specialised university colleges.

Certain sectors dominate as hosts for the internships. Particularly, the area of education and research, which makes up 30 percent of the total number of internships and health care and social services, which amounts to 17 percent. The unspecified "other" group was chosen by as many as 24 percent of the students, indicating that it is not always easy for the students to identify their specific case with the general categories used for this question. The cross tabulation identifies a very strong correlation between sector and field of study when it comes to the health care and social services, 86 percent of the students who have had internship in this sector study health and care.

When it comes to education and research, the picture is more complex. Only 29 percent of the students who have had an internship in this sector study pedagogy and teaching. This

²⁹ For the remainder of the chapter we will restrict ourselves to the term internship to cover both phenomena.

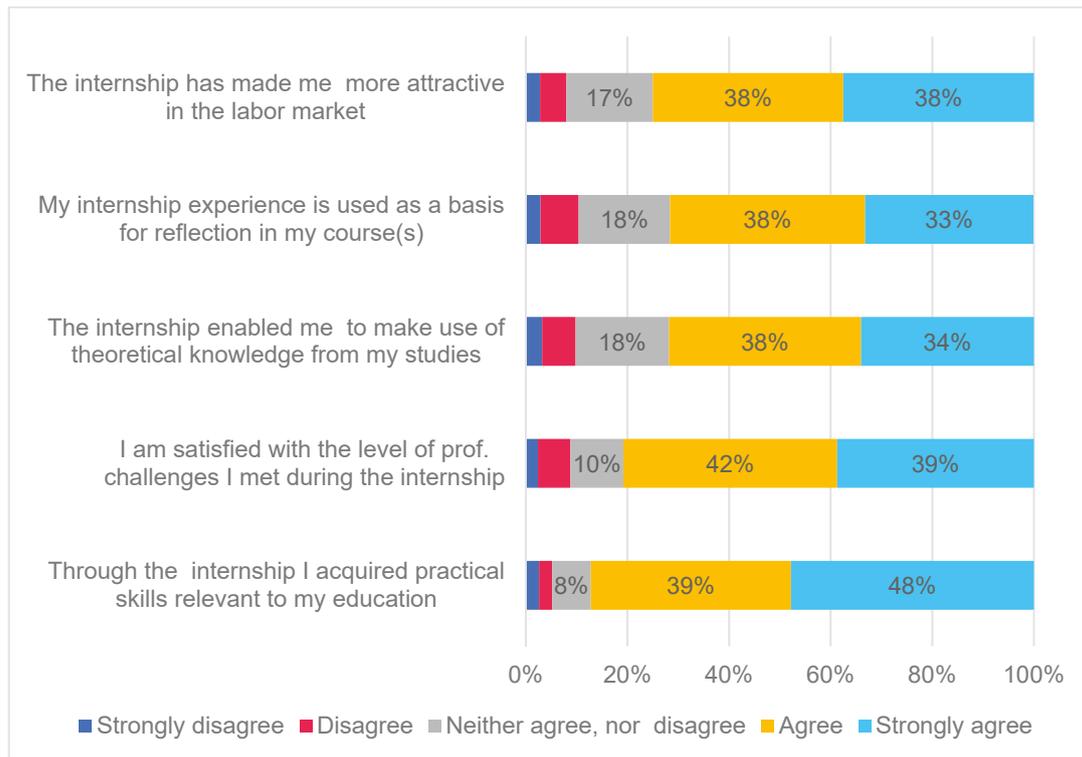


Figure 4.9 Relevance of working life experience (N=464-502)

may be explained in at least two ways. First of all, the category of education and research is broader, and may include internships by student in a research setting at a higher education institution, secondly, there may also be teachers students affiliated with other faculties than pedagogy and teaching.

A large majority of the students deem the internships to have a positive impact on the quality and relevance of their study experience in Norway, as shown in figure 4.9. 87 percent agree that they have acquired practical skills relevant to their education, and three in four students believe that the internship has made them more attractive to the labour market.

In general, students at the specialised university colleges rate the importance of the working life experience considerably lower than their colleagues at other institutions. One in four students at the specialised university colleges disagree that the internship enabled them to make use of theoretical knowledge from their studies. The differences are even more striking when we analyse the answers according to the students' field of study. While 96 percent of the pedagogy and teaching students find that they have acquired practical skills relevant to their education, the same is true for 72 percent of the economics and business students. Equally, while 86 percent of the pedagogy and teaching students are satisfied with the professional challenges they have met during the internship, the share of economics and business students with the same opinion is 59 percent. These differences indicate that the quality of internship arrangements varies greatly across the various fields of study.

4.3 Summary

In total, the analyses in this chapter serve as a contribution to our understanding of how Norwegian higher education performs in comparison with higher education in other

countries. In this context, it is significant that in general the international students are well satisfied with the teaching at the Norwegian institutions. We should also note that when the exchange students are asked to compare, Norwegian institutions score better than the students' home institutions. 83 percent of the students are satisfied with their studies in Norway and 85 percent report that they would probably recommend Norway as a study destination.

International students assess the academic qualities slightly differently than the Norwegian students. They are more satisfied with the teachers' ability to make the teaching engaging than Norwegian students. They are more satisfied with the relationship between student and staff and find it to be relaxing and informal.

Some features of Norwegian higher education stand out, the students are particularly satisfied with the teachers' ability to teach in English and the facilities at Norwegian institutions are rated highly. Even if the general impression also in these matters is still positive, the international students' satisfaction with the guidance and feedback is lower, and fewer students agree that the teaching is organised in small groups.

While it is true that the exchange students score their Norwegian institution higher than their home institution, there is great geographical variation. It should be noted that half the American students rate the quality to be lower than at their home institution.

A large part of the international students at Norwegian higher education institutions have some contact with working life, in one way or the other, during their studies in Norway. The numbers are more restricted when we circle in on more substantial activities such as internships, however, for the students who get such opportunities, they constitute a considerable part of their study experience in Norway. A large majority of these students find the working life experience to have a positive impact on the quality of their studies. Given that the experience for the international students is so positive, the institutions should consider what could be done to give this experience to more international students.

5 Coping with academic and social life

High quality education is more than delivering prominent teaching, good feed-back, and relevant courses. It is about inspiring students to work long hours towards established learning outcomes and to help them reach their full potential. Studies have shown that students who perceive to have academic control tend to work harder, are less concerned and more motivated, and generally perform better academically.³⁰

International students are likely to meet an academic tradition that differs from home, with other pedagogical approaches and a different mix of activities, demands, responsibilities and liberties. To accommodate these differences, the students may need to adjust their learning habits, studying techniques, or ambitions to the new situation. However, being an international student is more than just *studying* abroad. Adapting to a new culture and making new acquaintances, while leaving old friends and family behind, may cause certain social adaption challenges, such as home sickness and loneliness.

This chapter addresses how international students in Norway cope with their academic and social lives. How much time do they invest in their studies? How ambitious are they in terms of learning results? How do they perceive the workload and academic requirements? The chapter also looks at how the students handle various social challenges and how much time they devote to paid work, as opposed to their studies.

5.1 Time spent on academic activities

In total, the respondents spend 35 hours per week on academic activities. These hours are split between organised learning activities and independent study such as reading, assignments or self-initiated group work. On average, the respondents spend 15 hours per week on organised academic activities and 20 hours per week on independent study.

The international students devote one hour more to their studies per week than the Norwegian students surveyed in *Studiebarometeret*. The Norwegian students spend 16 hours per week on organised learning activities, which is one hour more than the international students. Furthermore, they spend 18 hours per week on independent study, i.e. two hours less than the international students.

There are however notable differences between the various groups of international students as regards the amount of time they invest in their studies. Master students spend on average ten hours more on their studies per week than bachelor students (40 vs. 30 hours/week). It makes sense that students at a higher academic level need to put more effort into their studies.

The respondents furthermore spend more time studying the older they are, cf. figure 5.1. While the youngest age cohort spends 27 hours per week on their studies, the students between 30 and 40 years spend 42 hours per week. The exception is students above 40

³⁰ Kember, 2004: "Interpreting student workload and the factors which shape students' perceptions of their workload." *Studies in Higher Education*, 29 (2), pp. 165–184.

years, among which there is a decline in time spent on academic activities. As established in chapter 2, the master students in the survey are on average four years older than bachelor students. The fact that age and academic level both correlate with the number of hours the respondents invest in their studies is therefore as expected.

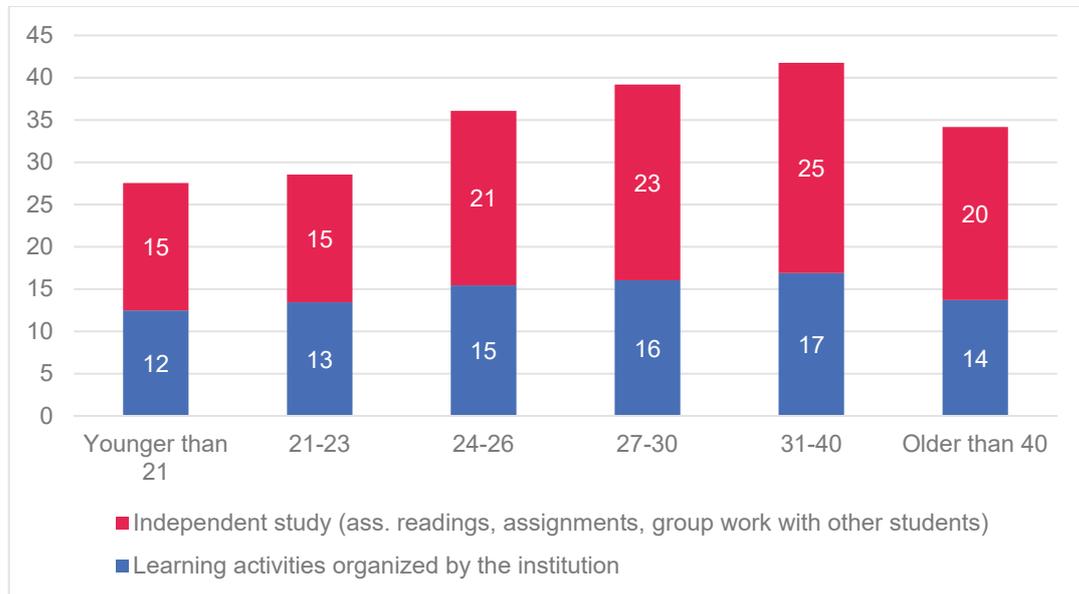


Figure 5.1. Hours per week spent on academic activities for different age groups (N=4 429)

There are also substantial differences in the amount of time invested in the studies between exchange and degree students. While the exchange students on average spend 29 hours per week on academic activities, the degree students spend 39 hours per week. The fact that most degree students pursue education at the master level and are older than the exchange students go together with the findings mentioned above. Students from Africa are the most hard-working, spending 45 hours a week on academic activities, while students from Oceania, Europe, and the Americas spend between 31 and 33 hours.

5.2 Time spent on paid work

As discussed in chapter 3, one in three students in the survey indicate that part-time work is an important source of funding. This is particularly the case for the degree students. Half of them have a part time job, in contrast to only one in ten exchange students. Short stays may hinder exchange students in finding a job in Norway. In addition, the majority of exchange students come from Europe, from countries with relative strong economies, and many receive financial support through Erasmus+.

In total, 31 percent of the respondents are employed. There is great variation in part-time employment figures among the different age groups (figure 5.2). The share of employed students rises from under 10 percent for the youngest students to more than 50 percent for the students in the thirties.

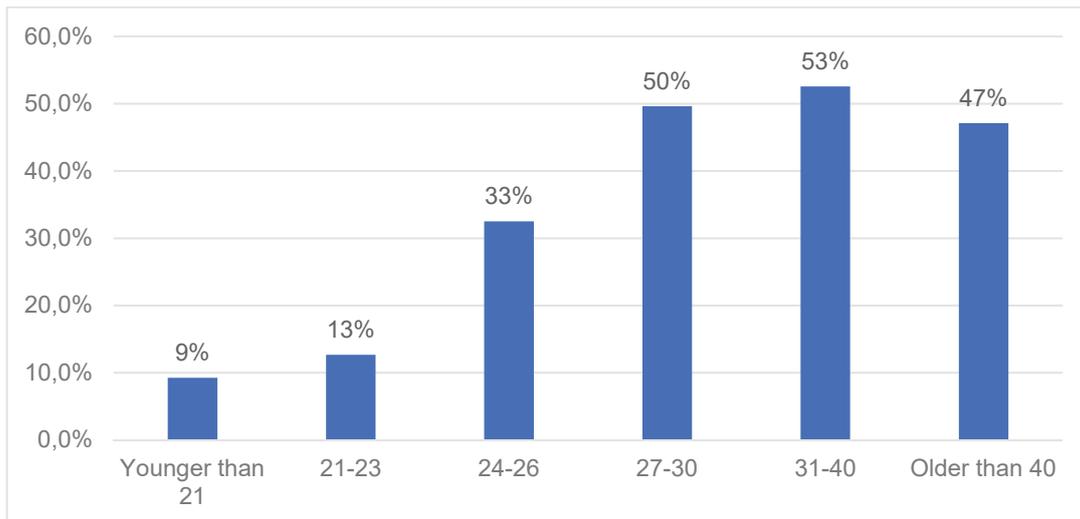


Figure 5.2 Percentage of students with a paid job in different age groups (N=4 805)

Those respondents who are employed, spend on average 15 hours per week on paid work. This is one hour more weekly than the Norwegian students in *Studiebarometeret*, who report to work 14 hours per week. Interestingly, there is not much difference between the different sub-sets of employed respondents in terms of how many hours they work. The 263 exchange students who have a paid job work as much as the 1 321 employed degree students in the survey population.

Yet, there are age differences with respect to the amount of time spent on paid work; the international students spend increasingly more time on part time work the older they get. Students older than 40 years old work ten hours more per week than students younger than 21 years old. The previous section witnessed a similar pattern regarding time investments in learning activities; the higher age, the more time spent on the studies. This does not mean that it is the same students that spend much time on their studies and on paid work; we find no statistical relationship between time spent on academic activities and time spent on part-time work.³¹ Thus, we do not have evidence to conclude that hours spent on paid work compromise the time that would otherwise have been spent on studies.

5.3 Academic workload

Results from the survey displayed in figure 5.3 indicate that the international students not only invest much time in their studies, but that they also work hard, and that the workload is within the capacity for most of them.

Most of the students (60 percent) report that they need to work hard to achieve the grades they aim at. Only 15 percent disagree or strongly disagree with this statement. 72 percent of the degree students agree that they work hard, against 47 percent of the exchange students. As one may expect, more of the master students than students at the lowest academic level feel the need to work hard to achieve the grades they are aiming at (20

³¹ Pearson's $r = .067$, $p < 0.01$, two-tailed test.

percentage points difference). African and Asian students seem to work harder for their grades than the average respondent, whilst the European students work the least.

Overall, those aged 21-23 are less prone to agree with this statement than the older students. In fact, the inclination to agree that they must work hard to achieve the grades they aim at increases for every age category until 40 years. For the older students, more seems to be at stake. Importantly however, the distribution of responses along this item does not say anything about what grades the students aim at, i.e. how ambitious they are.

77 percent of the international students report to have high ambitions regarding their grades, aspiring towards marks above average or well above average. The degree students are more ambitious than the exchange students; 81 percent of the former group aim at grades above average, against 72 percent in the latter group. The African respondents, who are mainly degree students, are the most ambitious with 85 percent of the African sub-set aspiring for academic results above average. In contrast, 74 percent of the European students have corresponding ambitions. There is however no statistical correlation between grade ambitions and assessment of academic workload and formal requirements³².

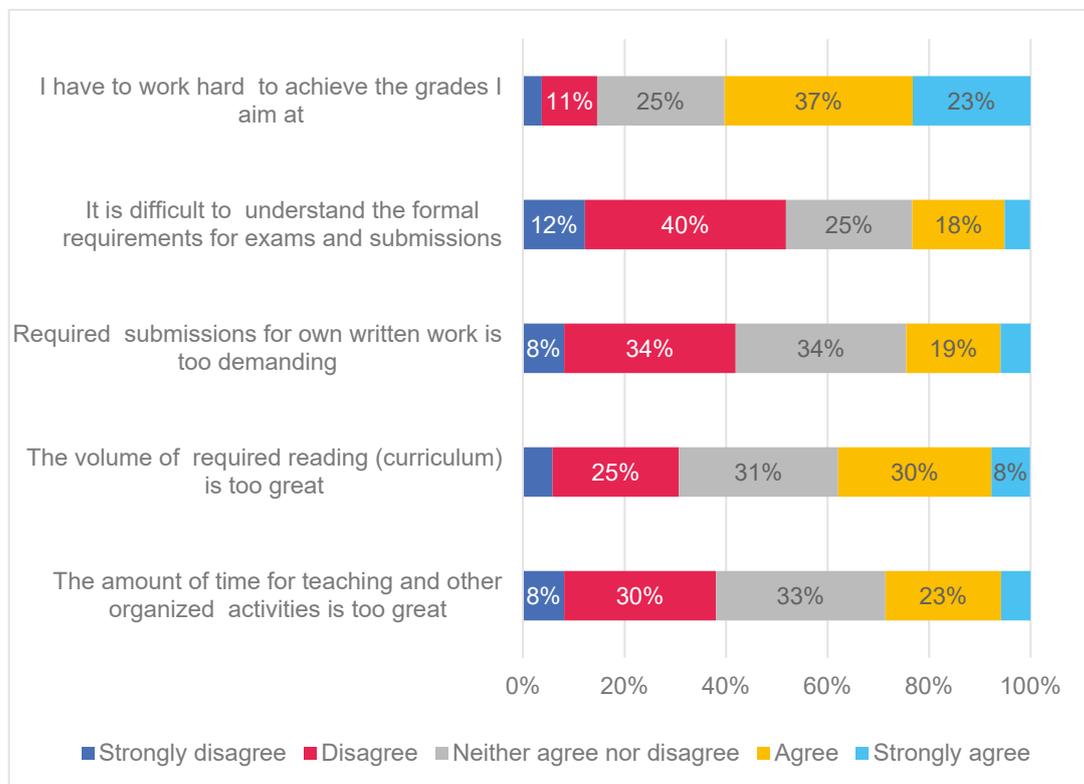


Figure 5.3 Assessment of academic workload and formal requirements (N=4 659-4 671)

29 percent of the survey population consider the amount of time for teaching and other organised activities as being too great. The biggest differences in assessments here are between students from Africa (55 percent agree/strongly agree) on the one hand, and North America (10 percent agree/strongly agree) and Oceania (nine percent agree/strongly agree) on the other.

³² Spearman's rho varies between -.019 and -.063, p < 0.01, two-tailed tests.

A total of 38 percent agree that the volume of required reading is too great. Once again, the student's assessments differ according to age and continent. 60 percent of the African students agree to this, compared to 20 percent of the students from Oceania and 21 percent from North America. There is also a higher percentage of students over thirty years of age that support the statement.

Furthermore, one in four students agree or strongly agree that the required submissions for written work is too demanding. Students of natural sciences and technology have the highest average score on this question and students of pedagogy and teaching have the lowest. Moreover, the older the respondents are, the more they tend to agree with the statement. To write assignments in English is expectedly more demanding for the non-native English-speakers than for students from countries such as USA, Canada, Australia, or the UK. While 39 percent of the students from Asia and Africa agree that required submissions are too demanding, only 6 percent of the students from North America and 11 percent of the students from Oceania consent to this.

The responses furthermore indicate that most of the surveyed students find it relatively straightforward to understand the formal requirements for exams and submissions. However, 23 percent indicate that they find it difficult. Students aged over 40 find this harder than the younger students and that students from Africa have least problems, while students from North America seems to struggle the most with these challenges. This may indicate that the institutions need to inform these sub-groups of international students better on these requirements.

Further analysis show that the different statements in figure 5.3 are quite strongly correlated,³³ implying that respondents who consent to one statement also are inclined to consent to another. This may explain why the same sub-sets of respondents have consistently high or low scores across the different items in the figure.

5.4 Social challenges

Being away from home in another country may cause social challenges such as loneliness, homesickness, and for some, even racism or other kinds of discrimination. Half the students in this survey report feeling homesick from time to time, and 61 percent indicate that they sometimes feel lonely. Nine percent report that they have experienced some kind of harassment during their studies in Norway. The results are displayed in figure 5.4.

³³ Teaching and curriculum: Spearman's rho = .489, curriculum and submissions: rho = .454 between, submissions and teaching: rho = .429, all tests are two-tailed and significant at the 1 percent level.

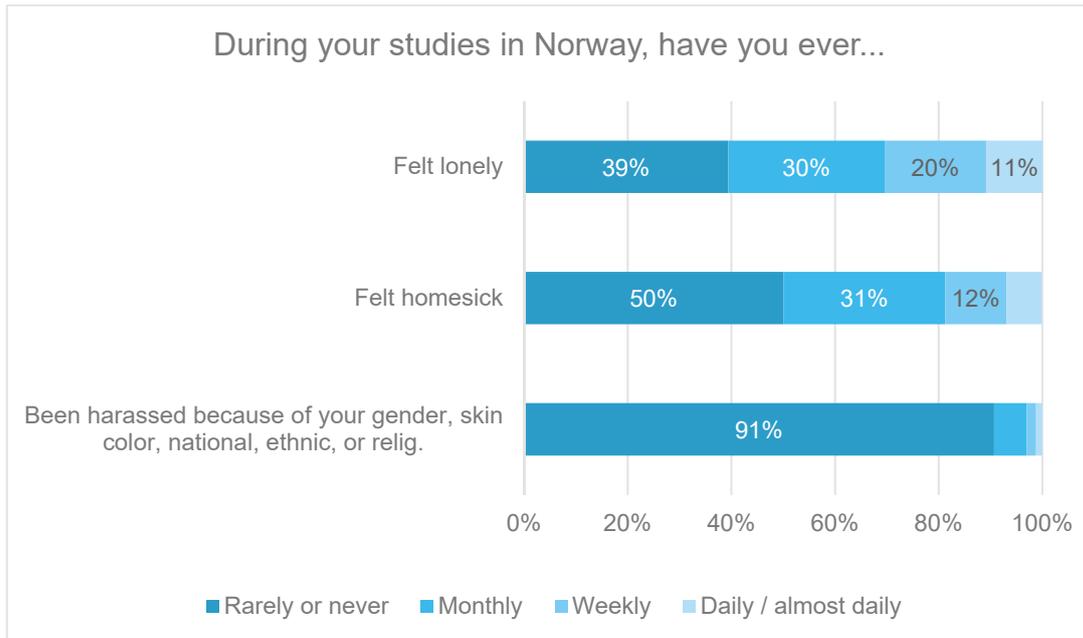


Figure 5.4. Distribution of social challenges

The survey indicates that degree students struggle more with loneliness than exchange students. 15 percent of the degree students report to be lonely daily or almost daily while only six percent of the exchange students report the same. The exact same numbers are replicated among bachelor and master students. While only six percent of the bachelor students felt lonely daily/almost daily, 15 percent of the master students report this.

Figure 5.5 shows that the region origin is an important factor. Only five percent of the students from Oceania and six percent of the European students report to struggle daily/almost daily with loneliness, while 21 percent of the African students and 16 percent of the Asian students report this. North American students is the group with the highest percentage of students reporting to feel lonely monthly or more frequent, 75 percent.

The same tendencies manifest in the question about homesickness (figure 5.6). Ten percent of the degree students report feeling homesick daily or almost daily, while only four percent of the exchange student do. Four percent of the bachelor students and nine percent of the master students report to feel homesick daily or almost daily. African students report having most problems with homesickness, 21 percent daily/almost daily. Only three percent of the European students report to feel homesick daily/almost daily. Most of the European students (58 percent) rarely or never feel homesick, compared to only 38 percent of the African students.

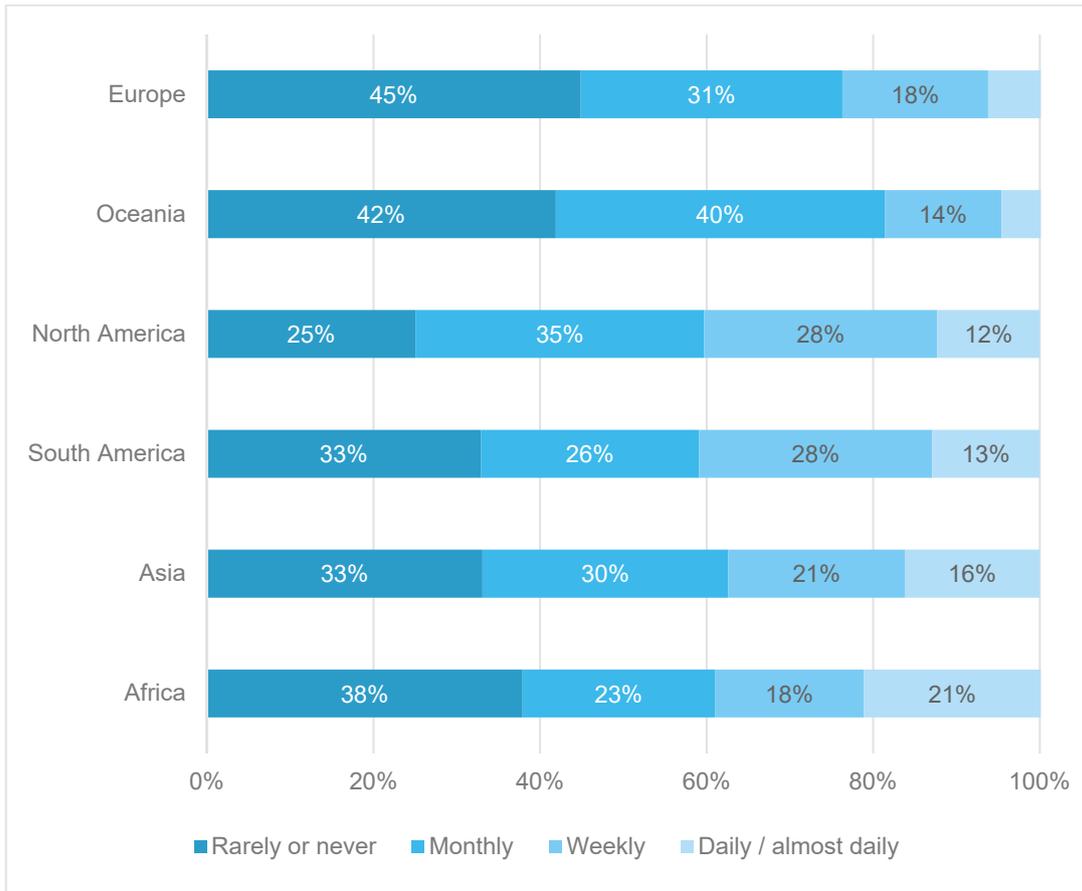


Figure 5.5. Loneliness per home continent (N=4 558)

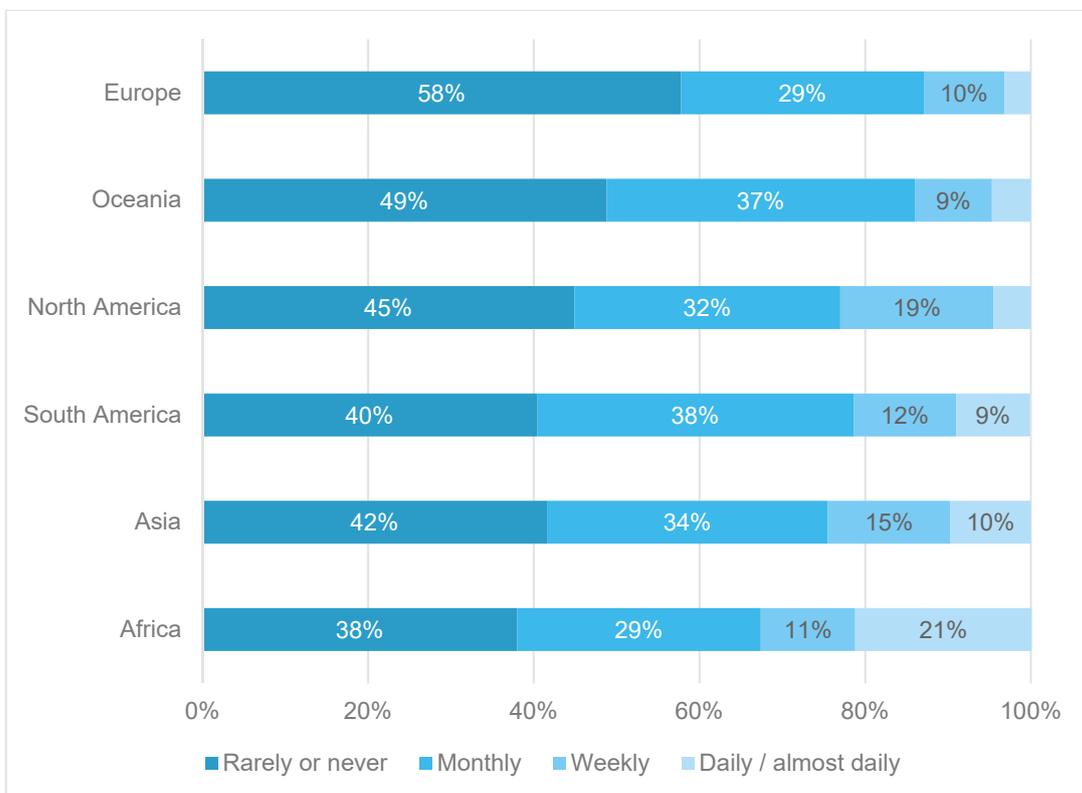


Figure 5.6 Homesickness per home continent (N=4 555)

The total number of students reporting harassment is low. 91 percent of the students have rarely or never been subject to harassment because of gender, skin colour, national, ethnic or religious background. However, nine percent of the international students have experienced harassment while studying in Norway.

Degree students report more harassment than exchange students; three versus nine percent have experienced harassment monthly. The academic level is also an important factor. While seven percent of the students at bachelor level are being harassed, twelve percent of the master students report to be harassed monthly or more frequently.

European students are the ones who report the lowest exposure to harassment, five percent monthly or more frequent. Conversely, 16 percent of the Asian and 14 percent of the African students report to be harassed monthly or more frequently.

5.5 Summary

Most international students are ambitious and work hard to achieve good grades. However, the majority of respondents indicate that the workload at Norwegian universities and colleges is acceptable. This is particularly the case for requirements regarding submitting written work. Three of four respondents assess these requirements to be within their capacity or indicate that they have capacity to do more. The amount of time for teaching and other organised activities is assessed to be within reach for 71 percent of the survey population. In comparison, the volume of required reading is found most challenging. The results seem to express some typical features of Norwegian education; a relatively large curriculum in combination with few written submissions, teaching, supervision and other organised learning activities, as compared to many other countries.

Overall, the survey results indicate that international students may have the capacity to submit more assignments and participate in more teaching activities. This particularly concerns the students from North America and Oceania. Many of these students come from strong academic regions and educational environments we like to compare Norwegian education to. However, the survey also shows that certain sub-sets of the population already struggle to meet academic demands. Students from Africa assess their effort to be the hardest, but also belong to the most academically ambitious group.

In addition to meeting a different level of academic workload and new formal requirements, many international students experience social challenges related to loneliness and homesickness while in Norway. European students, who are closest to home both geographically and culturally, experience the least social challenges. With notable exceptions, some of the social groups striving to meet academic demands also report the most social challenges. The next chapter will look closer at the relational challenges of international students, both in their academic and social life.

6 Academic and social inclusion of international students

Most international students arrive in Norway not only with the expectation of earning a high-quality academic credential within a specific discipline, but also to have meaningful interactions with Norwegian students and staff and getting to know Norwegian society. However, previous surveys have shown low levels of interaction between international students and their Norwegian peers. This chapter examines the current status of academic and social exchanges between international and domestic students in Norway and seeks to display some qualities associated with high and low levels of intercultural exchange.

For the Norwegian government, «it is an aim that students in higher education are part of a learning environment that also includes foreign students».³⁴ To achieve interaction between Norwegian and international students is therefore not only essential for the academic and social inclusion of the international students. It is considered particularly important for those domestic students who, for a number of reasons, are unable to study abroad. For the latter group, encounters with students from other parts of the world can provide valuable encounters and help them experience “internationalisation at home”.³⁵

6.1 Exchanges between international students and Norwegians on campus

6.1.1 Share of Norwegian students in class

In order to facilitate academic exchanges between international and Norwegian students, the two groups need regular meeting places. For the purpose of creating a mixed international learning environment, they must as a minimum follow the same courses. Yet, the survey results show extensive variation in the share of Norwegians attending courses and classes with international students.

The average respondent estimates a 47 percent share of Norwegian students in their current courses and classes. However, the estimates vary considerably among the respondents.³⁶ Eight percent report to have strictly international students in class and another 29 percent attend classes where less than a third are Norwegians. By contrast, 12 percent of the students attend classes in which most students, 90 percent or more, are Norwegian. A total of 32 percent of the respondents attend courses and classes where more than two-thirds of the students are Norwegian.

³⁴ Meld.St. 16 (2016-2017), p. 65

³⁵ Internationalisation at home has been defined as “...the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments”, cf. Beelen & Jones. “Redefining Internationalization at Home”, in Curaj et al. (2015) *The European Higher Education Area. Between Critical Reflections and Future Policies*, (pp.59-72). Springer.

³⁶ Standard deviation = 31.

This finding points to widespread differences in the organization of courses and study programmes; some classes are specifically targeting international students and are either not open to Norwegian students or do not cater to them,³⁷ while other classes are taught in Norwegian and primarily target students who can understand the native language, such as Norwegians, Swedes, Danes, and Icelanders. The Swedish, Danish and Icelandic respondents all report a share of Norwegians in class well above average, respectively 67 percent, 60 percent, and 63 percent.³⁸

The old universities and the specialized universities are reported to have a somewhat higher average of Norwegian students present (48 and 49 percent) than the university colleges (41 percent). Differences between the various fields of study however seem to explain more of the variation in course composition than institution type. While students of natural sciences and technology report a mean share of 51 percent Norwegian students in class, students of pedagogy and teaching report an average share of 22 percent. Health and care also score slightly lower than average, with 41 percent Norwegian students in the typical class.

Whereas 26 percent of the pedagogy students attend classes with strictly international students, 4 percent of the economy students, 7 percent of the law and social science students and yet another 7 percent of the science and technology students report total absence of Norwegian students in class. Populous educations such as teacher training (“pedagogy and teaching”) and nursing (“health and care”) now primarily takes place at the two latter institution types and are, judged by the scores for various fields of study, likely to subtract the institutional average.

6.1.2 Academic exchanges between international students and Norwegians

International classrooms can bring about improved learning outcomes and intercultural skills for both international and domestic students. Additionally, they foster international networks between students and hence build social capital, which can be beneficial for the students’ future lives and careers. However, these benefits require more to materialize than mixed classes. We will now look at how often the international and domestic students and staff interact in and outside the classroom.

Figure 6.1 shows the self-reported frequency of interaction international students have with Norwegian students and academic staff. The majority (63 percent) report to interact with Norwegian students in the classroom weekly or more often. However, one in four international students rarely or never have any contact with their Norwegian peers in the formal learning arenas. An even larger share of the international students (73 percent) interact regularly with academic staff in the classroom. 12 percent rarely or never interact with their teachers during the formal hours of instruction.

³⁷ In 2017, *Studiebarometeret* found that Norwegian students prefer Norwegian over English both as the language of instruction as well as for the syllabus.

³⁸ For the Swedish respondents n=90, Danish respondents n=68, and Icelandic respondents n=23.

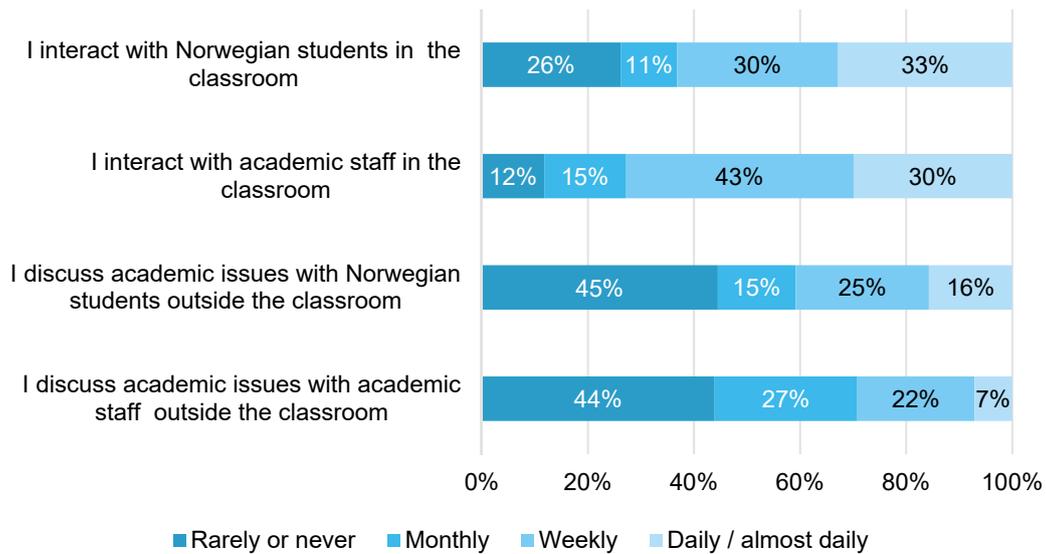


Figure 6.1 Academic interaction with Norwegian students and staff (N=2 473-2 476)

The international students' frequency of interaction with Norwegian students and academic staff drops severely when moving from the formal arenas of instruction to the informal learning arenas. Half as many international students report to have daily academic interaction with Norwegian students outside the classroom as in the classroom. 45 percent rarely or never participate in colloquia, group work, academic discussions, and other self-initiated forms of academic exchange with Norwegian students. Moreover, 44 percent rarely or never confer with lecturers, tutors, or seminar leaders in the informal arenas of instruction to elaborate or clarify issues addressed in the classroom.

We do not have comparative data about the Norwegian students to assess whether the international students' levels of contact with other students and staff are particularly high or unusual. However, the distinct drop in exchanges from the formal to the informal learning arenas does indicate that voluntary and self-governing academic activities may be insufficient to promote or maintain an adequate level of interaction between international and Norwegian students in order to realize the potential benefits of such interaction.

The previous section portrayed great variation with respect to the portion of Norwegian students attending classes with their international peers. To what extent does the frequency of contact with Norwegian students covary with the share of Norwegian students in class? Figure 6.2 shows the mean share of Norwegian students in class for all respondents, contingent upon their frequency of contact with Norwegian students in and outside the classroom. The columns express the percentage of Norwegian students in class. This share declines proportionately as the frequency of contact with Norwegian students decreases. The fewer Norwegians attending the respondents' courses and classes, the less academic contact with Norwegian students the international students seem to have.³⁹

³⁹ This co-variance is confirmed by bivariate correlation tests: The frequency of interaction with Norwegian students in classroom is moderately correlated with the share of Norwegian students in class ($\rho = -.301$, $p < 0.01$, two-tailed test). The negative correlation indicates that when the share of Norwegian students increases, so do the international students' interactions with them. The share of Norwegian students in class is also negatively correlated with the frequency of academic discussions *outside* the classroom, although this correlation is relatively weak ($r_s = -.201$, $p < 0.01$, two-tailed test).

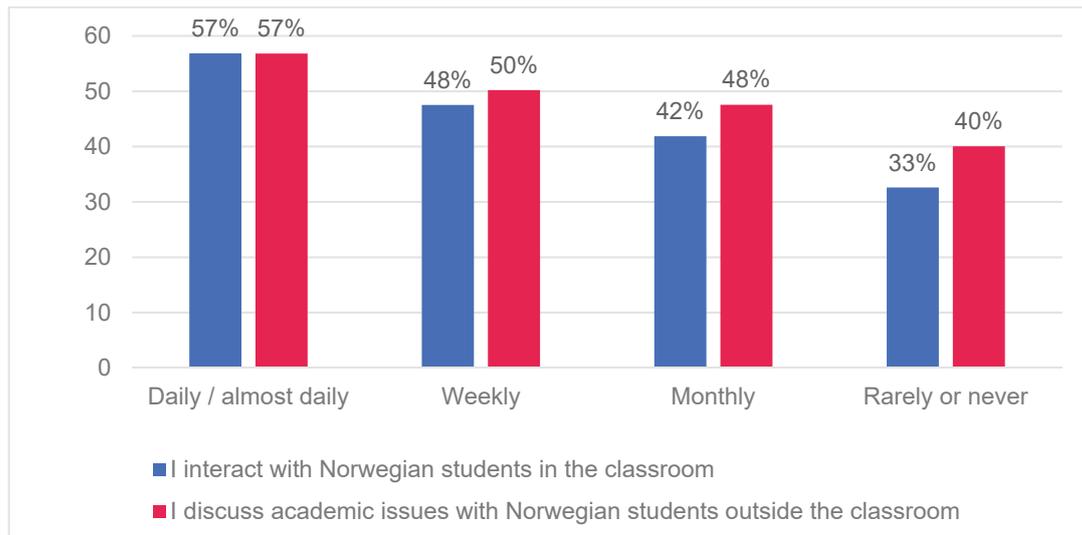


Figure 6.2 Average percent Norwegian students in class for each frequency category of interaction with Norwegian students in and outside the classroom (N=2 058, 2 056)

We will now look at whether specific subsets of the survey have less contact with Norwegian students and staff than others. Insofar as intercultural learning is the intentional outcome of this contact, it matters which international student clusters the domestic students and scholars interact with. Is it those most similar or dissimilar to themselves culturally and geographically? Should institutions aim to establish customized measures targeting special groups of international students?

International students who pursue a full degree in Norway tend to interact more frequently with Norwegian students and staff than students on exchange, cf. figure 6.3. As mentioned in chapter 4, degree students are integrated to a study programme and have more opportunities to get to know their fellow students and lecturers and become accustomed to the education system. In short, they are more likely to feel confident of the context they find themselves in and this may influence their probability to take the floor in a lecture theatre, as well as approaching local students and scholars beyond the organised academic settings.

The survey furthermore indicates that master students engage in academic discussions with Norwegian students and staff slightly more often than bachelor students. While 67 percent of the master students interact with Norwegian students weekly or daily, 58 percent of the bachelor students do the same. The fact that post-graduate students are usually more familiar with the academic debate, tradition, and discipline-specific vocabulary may motivate these students to have more frequent exchanges with the local students and staff than their peers at the lower academic levels.

The communication with Norwegian students is most frequent within the arts and humanities, and most rare in pedagogy and teaching. 69 percent of the arts and humanities students interact with their Norwegian peers in the classroom weekly or daily, as opposed to 40 percent of the international students in pedagogy and teaching. Furthermore, 38 percent of the arts and humanities students interact regularly (weekly or daily) with their Norwegian peers outside the classroom, as opposed to 27 percent of the international students in pedagogy and teaching.

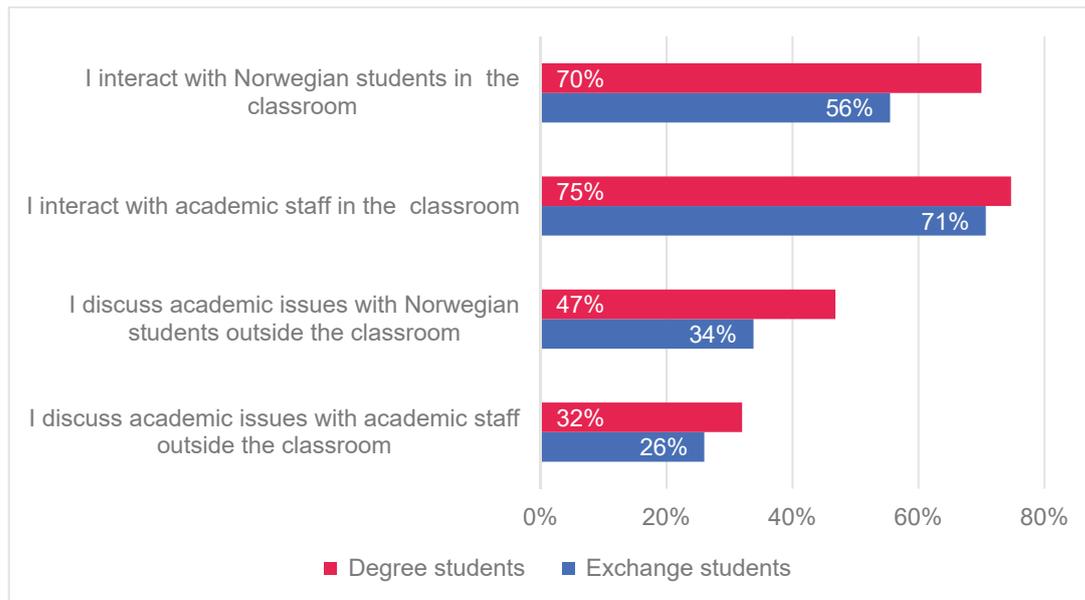


Figure 6.3 Weekly or more frequent contact with Norwegian students and academic staff (N=2 076, 2 074)

The level of contact with *academic staff*, on the other hand, is highest in the natural sciences and technology. 36 percent of the international science students interact weekly or daily with academic staff outside the classroom, whereas the similar figure for the pedagogy and teacher students is 21 percent. The only field of study with a lower frequency of contact with academic staff is social science and law, in which 20 percent of the students have regular contact with staff outside the classroom.

The North American and Oceanian students stand out as having the most frequent academic exchanges with Norwegian students. 71 percent of the North Americans and 77 percent of the Oceanians interact with Norwegian students on a weekly or daily basis. These are primarily native English-speaking students who may encounter lower barriers against speaking up in a lecture or seminar room, or to engage in academic discussions in and outside the formal learning arenas. Asian students interact least frequently with Norwegian students and staff in the classroom, as well as with Norwegian students outside the classroom.

African students also have few academic exchanges with Norwegian students *outside* the classroom but not *inside* the classroom. In fact, the Africans respondents are those that most frequently engage in discussions with academic staff, both in and outside the classroom. For instance, 47 percent of the African students report to interact daily with academic staff in the classroom, as opposed to 27 percent of the Asian students.

6.1.3 Cooperation on written assignments

The exchanges we have looked at thus far concern discussions between international and Norwegian students in and outside the classroom. We will now address to what extent the international students also write assignments with Norwegian students.

The survey results indicate that international students mostly work on assignments with other international students. Four in five respondents have written assignments with other international students during their current studies in Norway, while two in five students have

done assignments with co-nationals. Three in five survey participants have conducted written work with Norwegian students sometime during their current studies.

25 percent of the international students have in fact written assignments with the entire spectre of groups in figure 6.4. Another 13 percent have written assignments with both students from their home country and other international students, but not with Norwegian students. Only four percent of the international students have written assignments solely with Norwegian students, and 11 percent of the students in the survey have not written assignments with anyone.

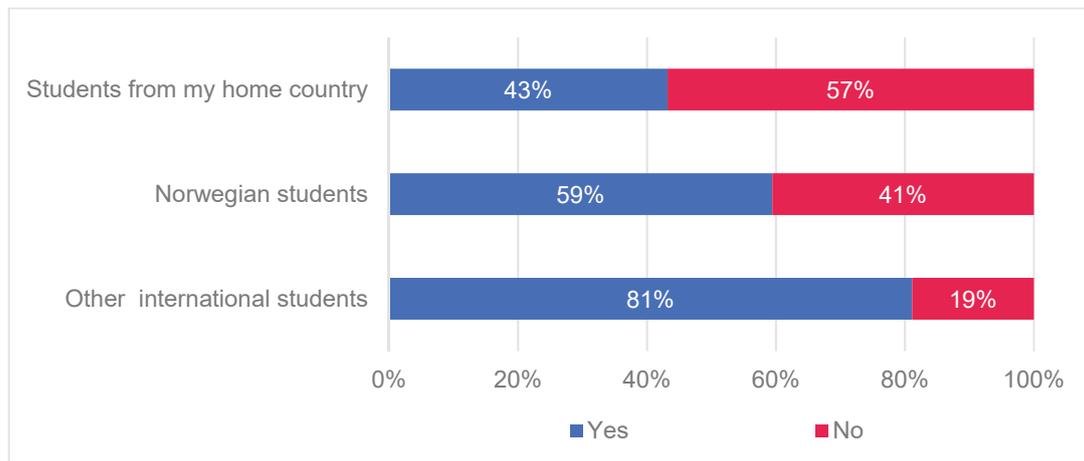


Figure 6.4 Written academic work with different student groups (N=2 393-2 420)

59 percent of the respondents have worked on assignments with Norwegian peers. This is quite a high number. However, an even higher number of students have collaborated with other international students on written work. Provided that international students constitute a modest five percent of the total student population in Norway, this is surprising. As with the other forms of academic interaction examined so far, the writing of assignments with Norwegian students also correlates with the share of Norwegian students in class. Those students who have written assignments with Norwegians have 54 percent Norwegians in class on average, whilst those who have not, are in classes with 36 percent Norwegians on average.

A key question is; are there specific sub-groups of international students where the experience of writing assignments with Norwegian students is particularly low? If so, do those students collaborate with other international students on written work, or do they primarily work with their co-nationals? The answer matters for the international students' opportunities to gain intercultural competence.

Overall, the exchange students have collaborated with fewer groups on assigned written work than degree students. While 70 percent of the degree students have written assignments with Norwegian students, 47 percent of the exchange student have done so. Similarly, 67 percent of the master students have written assignments with Norwegian co-students, as opposed to 51 percent of the bachelor students. Instead, a larger share of the bachelor students (47 percent) have written student projects with co-nationals than the master students (39 percent). In chapter 2, we learned that there is a high degree of covariance between the groups that are now reported to write assignments with Norwegian students most frequently.

66 percent of students in science and technology and 65 percent of students in economy and business students have written assignments with Norwegians. This contrasts with pedagogy and teaching, in which 44 percent of the students have written assignments with Norwegians. In general, science/technology and economics/business are the fields in which the greatest portion of students have written assignments with different groups. This may indicate more extensive use of co-written assignments in these fields than others. However, this pattern is not as clear across all fields of study. Disciplines in which international students seldom co-write assignments with Norwegians, do not necessarily show low levels of such collaboration with *other* groups. Some fields of study thus seem to have the potential for facilitating more collaboration between Norwegian and international students.

6.2 An international study environment?

Norwegian students can be difficult to get to know, according to this survey. As portrayed in figure 6.5, nearly half the population (47 percent) disagree with the statement “It is easy to make friends with Norwegian students”. In contrast, a total of 82 percent agree that it is easy to get to know other international students. South American and African students are those who find it hardest to get to know Norwegian students. Yet, these two groups find it easier than respondents from other continents to make friends with *other international* students. Students from Oceania, on the other hand, find it the easiest to make friends with Norwegian students.

Successful exchanges between international students and domestic students and staff depends on a certain degree of cultural responsiveness among the actors involved, i.e. the ability to learn from and relate to people of other cultures. Being culturally responsive requires openness and curiosity to the viewpoints, thoughts, and experiences of others. It is not about changing others to be more like oneself, but rather about exploring and honouring the differences.

Respectively 45 and 43 percent of the respondents find that Norwegian students and staff show interest in their country and culture. Interestingly, there is a strong positive correlation between the level of interest respondents believe Norwegian students show in their country and culture, and their assessment of how easy it is to make friends with Norwegian students.⁴⁰

Students from Oceania constitute the group that mostly consent to the statements that Norwegian students and academic staff show interest in their country and culture. Conversely, African and South American respondents find Norwegian students to show the least interest in their geographic and cultural background.

Furthermore, economy and business students stand out in their assessments. They find it harder than their peers from other disciplines to make friends with Norwegian students, and they also feel that Norwegian students and staff show less interest in their country and culture. Yet, they find it easier to make friends with other international students than the typical survey participant.

⁴⁰ Pearson's $r = .552$, Spearman's $\rho = .544$, both significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

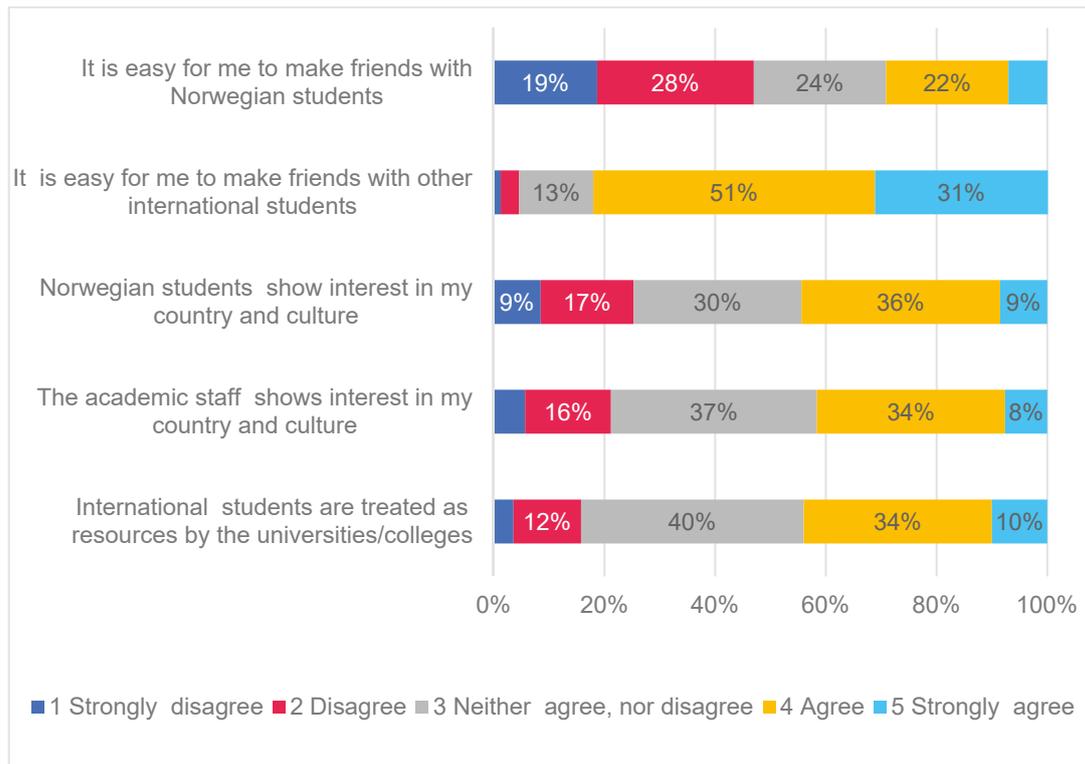


Figure 6.5 Overall impressions about the social dimension of studying in Norway (N=2 457-2 432)

The Norwegian policy is clear that international students are potential learning resources that may benefit both the institutions and society. International students may bring new and sometimes challenging perspectives into an academic discussion, both in and outside the classroom. Using cultural diversity as a learning resource however requires more than mere interest and openness by domestic students and staff towards the international students. It includes finding institutional strategies and instruction practices aiming to elicit the experiences and knowledge of students from diverse backgrounds. How do the international students assess their Norwegian institutions' efforts and achievements in this area?

The respondents were asked to agree or disagree with a statement that international students are treated as resources by the universities/colleges. The assessments are essentially in line with the prior assessment of the openness of students and staff, with 44 percent agreeing that international students are treated as resources by their institutions. Conversely, only 16 percent explicitly oppose the statement. This is a lower level of disapproval than for the 'show interest' statements. A relatively large share of the respondents however, 40 percent, neither agree nor disagree. When a larger share of respondents has chosen the midscale category for this particular item, it may indicate that it is unclear to the respondents what it means to be treated as a resource by a university or college.⁴¹

⁴¹ Research show that survey participants interpret the midpoint of opinion scales in widely different manners, from no opinion, unsure, or neutral, to equal, both or neither. The mid-point may even be chosen to indicate rejection of underlying assumptions or uncertainty about the meaning of the question. (Nadler, Weston, and Voyles, 2015, "Stuck in the middle: The use and interpretation of mid-points in items on questionnaires", *The Journal of General Psychology*, 142 [2], pp. 71-89).

6.2.1 Establishing a social network: Introduction week

Buddy systems and introduction/welcome weeks are possibly the most frequently adopted measures to assist new students adapting to their new environments. They constitute potentially important social arenas where new incoming students can get to know each other and attain useful information about life as a student in Norway, at the university/college, or in a specific faculty or department. Most HEIs in Norway organise an introduction week for new students, both domestic and international, yet not necessarily jointly for the two groups.

Four out of five international students report to have attended an introductory week at their Norwegian university or college. Among those who attended, an overwhelming majority of 91 percent report to have become acquainted with other international students during the event. Just over half of the students were introduced to one or more Norwegian student and yet another half of the population got to know a student from their own home country. 34 percent made acquaintances with students from all the mentioned groups; both Norwegian students, students from their home country and other international students during introduction week. Three percent of those who participated in the welcome week at their institution did not make any new acquaintances at all.

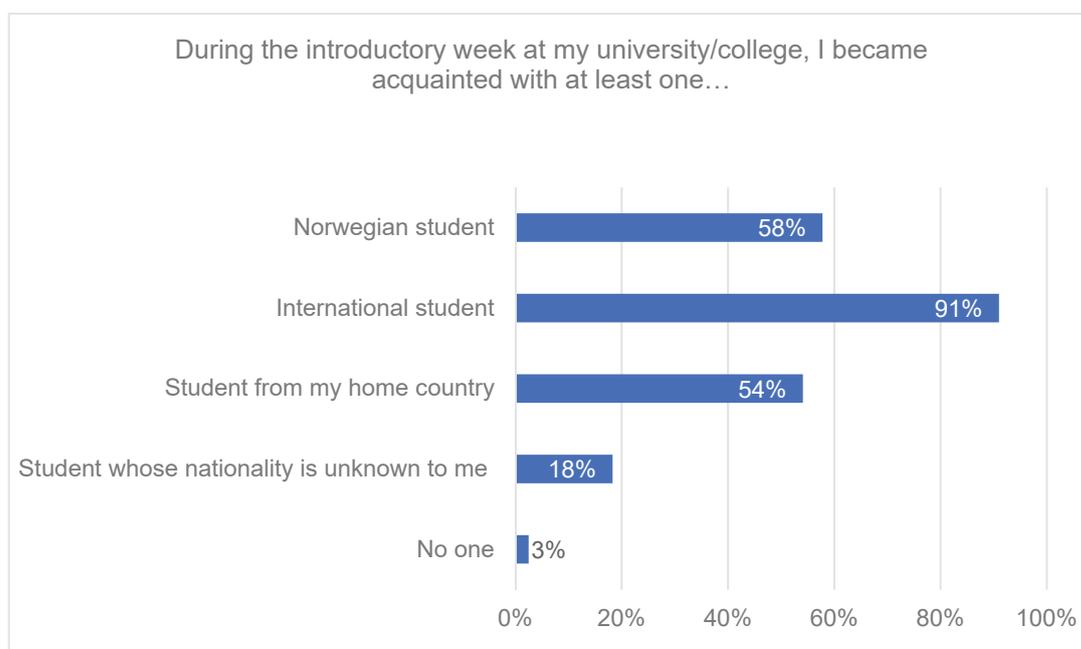


Figure 6.6 Acquaintances during introduction week (N=2 075)

The numbers indicate that introduction week is an arena in which international students first and foremost get to know other international students. The event may thus work as an important area for establishing social networks between people who find themselves in a similar situation. Being new to the country brings up a range of questions and challenges besides those of being new to the institution, the city, or higher education. Many Norwegian HEIs thus knowingly organise separate welcome weeks for international and Norwegian students.

Still, many respondents also report to have become acquainted with Norwegian students. Notably, the survey item does not account for *the number* of students the respondents have made acquaintance with from each group. For those who report to have become acquainted with Norwegians, this could in principle be a single Norwegian student buddy.

A key question we will return to later in this chapter is: Do patterns of interaction established during introduction week fortify themselves in the social lives of international students later?

6.2.2 Norwegian language course participation

Many Norwegian HEIs offer their international students a variety of courses in the Norwegian language. By learning the language, international students are better equipped for mastering both student life and everyday life in Norway. Learning the language makes it easier to understand the local culture as well as information given in Norwegian. It also increases the number of available educational provisions, as many study programmes and courses are taught only in Norwegian. International students may also learn the language to increase their appeal to the domestic labour market.

Norwegian is a small language, with approximately five million speakers. Yet, 53 percent of the survey participants have attended Norwegian language training during their studies in Norway. 15 percent more of the degree students have attended a language training course than the exchange students. Similarly, European (mostly exchange) students score comparatively low on language course attendance (46 percent), while 65 percent of the (degree-seeking) Asian students and 60 percent of the South American students have undertaken local language training. Degree students may have a longer perspective than exchange students, who are usually in the country for a semester or two and have less incentives to learn the language.

The Norwegian language courses are furthermore popular among the master students, of whom 61 percent have attended, while 43 percent of the bachelor students have done so. 42 percent of the university college students have attended such a course, against 56 percent of the students at the new universities.

There is no statistical variation between Norwegian language training and frequency of contact with Norwegian students and staff. There is however co-variation between language course attendance and the wish to stay in Norway after completed studies. 61 percent of those who consider staying on in Norway after their current studies have undertaken Norwegian language training. Even more of those who have attended such courses, 67 percent, consider staying on in Norway. This indicates that language courses are more adequate instruments for the retention of international students than for including them in the Norwegian academic community.

Most of those who did *not* attend a Norwegian language course justify the abstention with personal needs and wants (62 percent): 29 percent point to time constraints, 23 percent do not feel the need for language training, and ten percent simply do not want to participate. The remaining 38 percent point to institutional deficiencies and restraints; 14 percent say language courses are full, 12 percent claim there are no language courses offered at their institution, seven percent have not had any information about such courses, and five percent are ineligible for language courses.

61 percent of the exchange students give personal reasons for not attending a language course, in contrast to 46 percent of the degree students. This makes sense, given that these groups stay in Norway for very different lengths of time. Those respondents who do not want to attend a Norwegian language course are those with the shortest residency in Norway, while those who do not feel the need such courses are those with the longest stay.

There are also notable differences between the various types of institutions. 66 percent of the students at the university colleges and universities of applied sciences give reasons

related to factors the institutions control, most notably course deficiency. The corresponding average among the remaining institution types is 35 percent. This indicates that a specific group of institutions still have more work to do if they want to offer language courses to their international students.

6.3 Leisure time

The previous chapter uncovered that nearly half the survey participants find it hard to make friends with Norwegian students. The difficulties of getting in touch with the host culture also manifests itself in the student’s leisure time, cf. figure 6.7. 45 percent of the international students indicate difficulties with getting to know Norwegians *outside* the university/college. This corresponds to previous findings by Diku. In 2014, 54 percent of the surveyed international students described “getting to know Norwegians” as “difficult”.⁴² The question did not separate students from the general public, and this may explain why the number is lower in the current survey. Nonetheless, the scores from then and now are within the same scope.

There is a strong desire among most of the international students to get exposed to more of the Norwegian culture. 77 percent of the respondents wish for more opportunities to experience Norwegian culture and family life. A clear majority of students (67 percent), however agree that Norway is a tolerant and welcoming society. Only ten percent oppose this statement.

Particularly the African students find Norway to be a welcoming and tolerant society, whilst North and South American students most often disagree with this statement. The latter

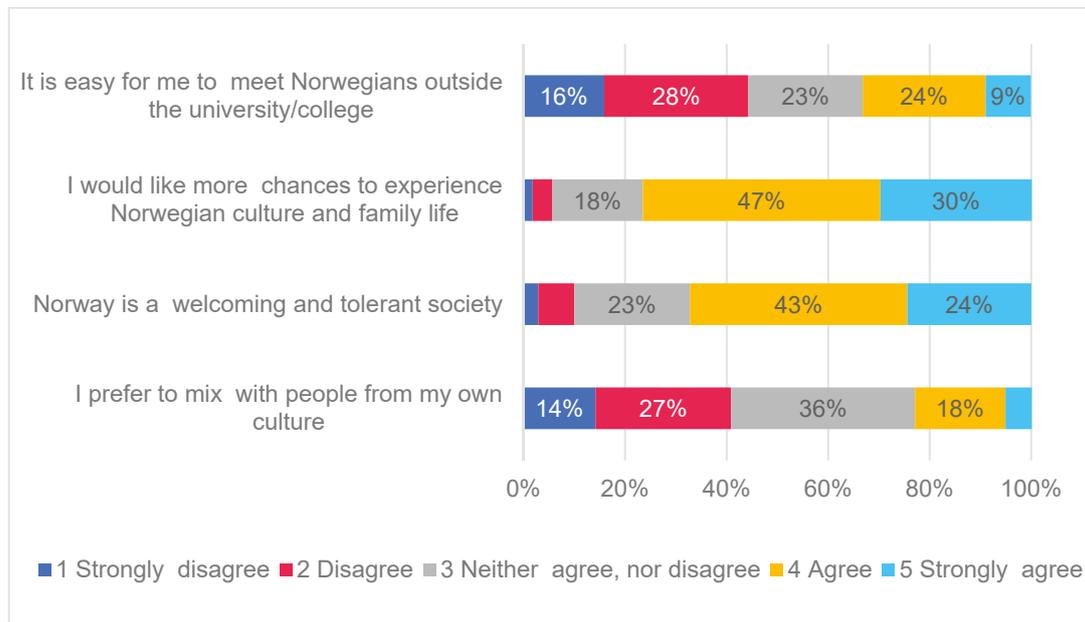


Figure 6.7 Social interaction interest assessments (N=2 450-2 455)

⁴² SIU, 2014, “Norway is the best place in the world.” *Foreign Students’ Perception of Norway as a Study Destination 2014*, SIU rapport 7/2014, <https://old.siu.no/publikasjoner/Alle-publikasjoner/Norway-is-the-best-place-in-the-world-Foreign-student-s-perception-of-Norway-as-a-study-destination-2014>

groups also find it harder than their peers to get to know Norwegians outside the university/college. This is especially worrying among South Americans, who find it harder than most respondents to make friends with Norwegian peers.

Exchanges between international students and Norwegians not only hangs on the locals but depends as much on positive attitudes among the international students. The respondents were asked to assess their own openness towards other cultures, by agreeing or disagreeing to the statement “I prefer to mix with people from my own culture”. The ensuing picture is somewhat complex. A plurality of the respondents, 41 percent, disagree with the statement, indicating that they welcome interaction with cultures other than their own. However, quite a substantial number, 23 percent, admit to the statement.

Particularly Asian students prefer mixing with people from their own culture (35 percent). Yet, 86 percent of the Asian students would like more chances to get to experience Norwegian culture and family life. Also, students from Oceania (91 percent), Africa (84 percent) and South America (83 percent) students frequently consent to the latter statement.

All the respondents, both exchange students and degree students socialize the least with Norwegians and mostly with internationals from other countries than their own. Figure 6.8 shows that while 53 percent of the respondents interact with students from other countries daily or almost daily, 27 percent have similar contact with Norwegian students. Almost half the respondents (45 percent) never or only occasionally have contact with Norwegians (monthly, rarely or never).

The frequency of contact across all these groups is only weakly correlated with how often the respondents have felt lonely. The somewhat surprisingly weak association may partly be attributed to the fact that frequency of contact with different groups is a rather crude measure. It cannot give a full account of the social network of the respondents, neither measured in hours, number of social contacts, nor the quality of that contact.

Students from North America, South America, and Oceania all socialize more often with

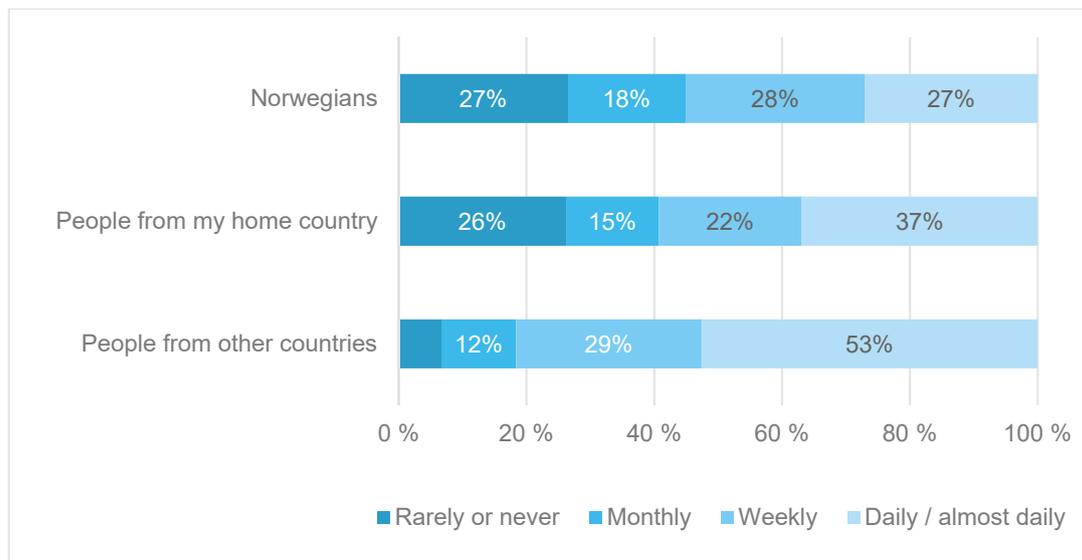


Figure 6.8 Frequency of contact with different groups in the respondents' leisure time (N=2 444-2 454)

Norwegians than with their co-nationals, while the opposite is the case for African and Asian respondents. The latter two regional groups least frequently hang out with Norwegians in their leisure time. European students have almost the same level of social contact with Norwegians as with their compatriots.

Exchange students seem to be more social in the sense that they report to have more frequent contact with members of all the three groups in figure 6.8 than the degree students. Bachelor students are consistently more social with all the three groups than master students are. While bachelor students socialize least with the locals, the Master students are socially connected to the locals as much as their own countrymen. Both groups socialize the most with people from other countries than their own.

Students at the university colleges have the most frequent social contact with each of the groups. Survey participants from the (new) universities accredited since the millennium have the least contact with Norwegians. Students at the four older universities have least contact with their compatriots. In fact, they have as infrequent contact with their countrymen as with Norwegians.

Previous sections have shown that economy and business students find it harder than their peers to make friends with Norwegian students and feel that Norwegian students and staff show less interest in their country and culture. The survey results disclose that these students also find it harder to meet Norwegians outside the university/college than the average respondent. Moreover, they prefer to mix with people from their own culture to a larger extent than other respondents. Interestingly however, they do not consider Norway a less welcoming and tolerant society than the average respondent. Quite the contrary, students of economy and business are more geared towards increasing their chances to experience Norwegian culture and family life than the other respondents.

The fact that features associated with the respondents' academic position - such as student status, type of institution, and disciplinary affiliation – go together with the respondents' recreational contact with different social groups, indicate that patterns of social interaction from the university/college propagates to the students' leisure time. Statistical analyses confirm this. The respondents' frequency of contact with Norwegians in their leisure time is relatively strongly correlated with their frequency of interaction with Norwegian students in the classroom,⁴³ as well as with their frequency of academic discussions with Norwegian students outside the classroom.⁴⁴

Crossing the respondents' frequency of socialisation in their leisure time with their experience of writing assignments with different groups reveals a similar pattern. Those respondents who have written assignments with Norwegian students have more frequent contact with Norwegians in their spare time. Similarly, those who report to have written assignments with students from their own country also have more contact with their fellow citizens outside campus. And again, those who have written assignments with other international students have more contact with people from other countries.

Correspondingly, the respondents' frequency of interaction with different groups go together with acquaintances made during introduction week at their institution. Respondents who became acquainted with respectively Norwegian students, students from their home country

⁴³ Spearman's rho=.434, $p > 0.01$ (two tailed).

⁴⁴ Spearman's rho=.498, $p > 0.01$ (two tailed).

and other international students also report to have more frequently contact with these groups in their spare time. For the purpose of caring for the immediate needs of incoming international students, a separate buddy week may be good practice. For the purpose of facilitating a mixed international student environment, however, the practice of separate welcome events for international and domestic students seem counterproductive and should perhaps be questioned.

The above findings indicate that efforts by the HEIs to increase exchanges between international and domestic students are likely to bear fruits beyond campus life.

6.3.1 Accommodation

University residences and other forms of shared accommodation offer ample opportunities for social interaction and making friends. Many Norwegian universities guarantee student housing for their international students, and this is also apparent in the survey results. By far, most of the international students (69 percent) live in student residences provided by their institution. A quarter of the students (26 percent) rent accommodation in the private market and four percent live in an apartment or house owned by their family.

According to the survey, university students more often live in student residences than their peers in colleges, and fewer of them live alone. Higher real-estate prices in the university cities, improved availability of student housing, and more comprehensive institutional housing guarantees towards international students may be some of the factors driving these differences.

77 percent of the students in economy and business live in student housing, as opposed to 62 percent of the arts and humanities students. Correspondingly, twice as many students from the latter disciplines live in private housing than those in the former. Student houses are usually more affordable than private market alternatives. The fact that they are home to many economy students should come as no surprise.

Personal economy does indeed seem to matter for the respondents' choice of accommodation. Figure 6.9 is based on a crosstabulation of accommodation type and employment status. It shows that a plurality of the students residing in the private market have paid work, while the plurality of residents in university/college housing do not. This might elucidate some of the other findings in the survey. For instance, 19 percentage points more exchange students (73 percent) live in a university/college residence than degree students (54 percent), while eight percentage points more bachelor students than master students reside in student housing. Only 12 percent of the exchange students have paid work, whereas half of the degree students (52 percent) are employed. Similarly, 19 percent of the bachelor students have a paid job, while almost half of the master students (47 percent) do.

In terms of increasing the level of interaction between international and domestic students, does it matter where the international students live? Is it not more important with whom the international students reside? We will return to these questions shortly.

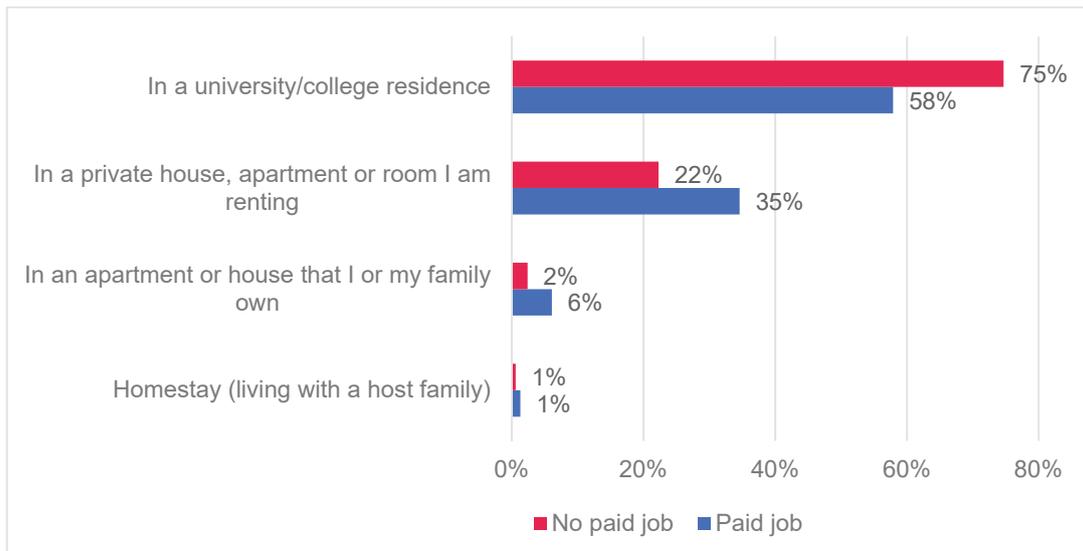


Figure 6.9 Percentage with and without a paid job in different types of housing (N=2 450)

Figure 6.10 portrays which groups the international students share accommodation with. The lion's share of respondents lives with someone from another country than their own (51 percent). An almost equally large segment of respondents resides with someone from Norway (41 percent), whereas 25 percent live with co-nationals, and 19 percent live alone. Exchange students, more often than degree students, live with someone else. 23 percent of degree students live alone as opposed to 14 percent of those on exchange stay.

As with the question regarding acquaintances made during introduction week, these items do not designate the number of individuals from each group. The number of possible housemate constellations is therefore high, and a frequency count of the respondents' household members may well have contradicted the pattern displayed in figure 6.10 extensively.

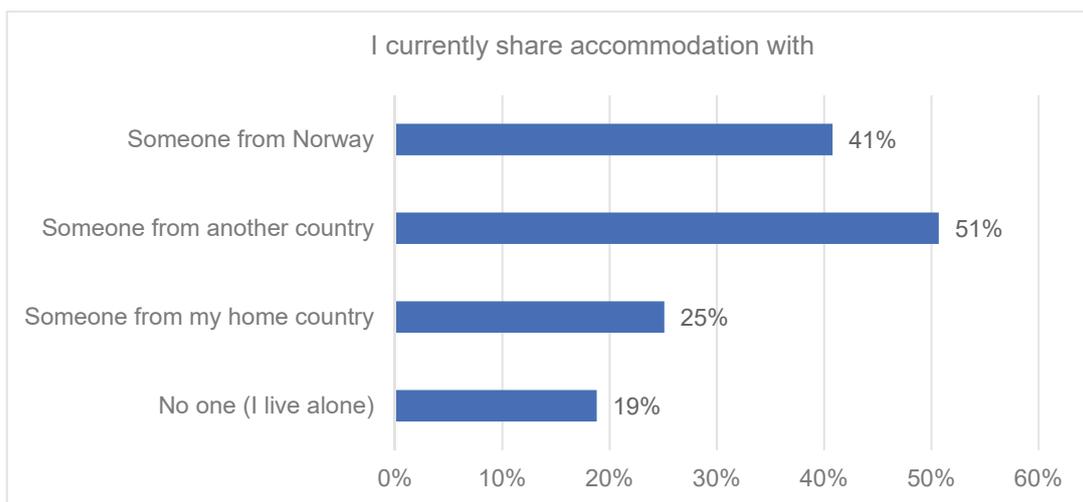


Figure 6.10 Percentage who share accommodation with different groups (N=2 475)

With whom the students live is moderately correlated with whom they socialize with in their leisure time.⁴⁵ 41 percent of those who live with Norwegians have daily contact with Norwegians in the leisure time, as opposed to 17 percent of those who do not live with Norwegians. It does seem undeniably plausible that most people who share accommodation speak regularly. Surprisingly however, 17 percent of those international students who live with Norwegians rarely or never have any contact with the citizens of their host country, including, we must assume, their house mates. In comparison, 33 percent of those who do *not* live with any Norwegians rarely or never have contact with Norwegians.

Does it matter who lives where, in terms of increasing the level of interaction between international and domestic students? Figure 6.11 shows which groups the respondents share accommodation with across the different types of housing. The share of Norwegian house mates is rather stable across accommodation types. So is the share of house mates from the respondents' home country, except in student residents, where the portion of compatriots is somewhat lower than in private housing. The most remarkable difference between the different housing alternatives is the share of respondents that report to live with people from other countries: 60 percent of those in university/college residents versus 34 percent in rented private housing. For the remaining accommodation types, the numbers are much lower.

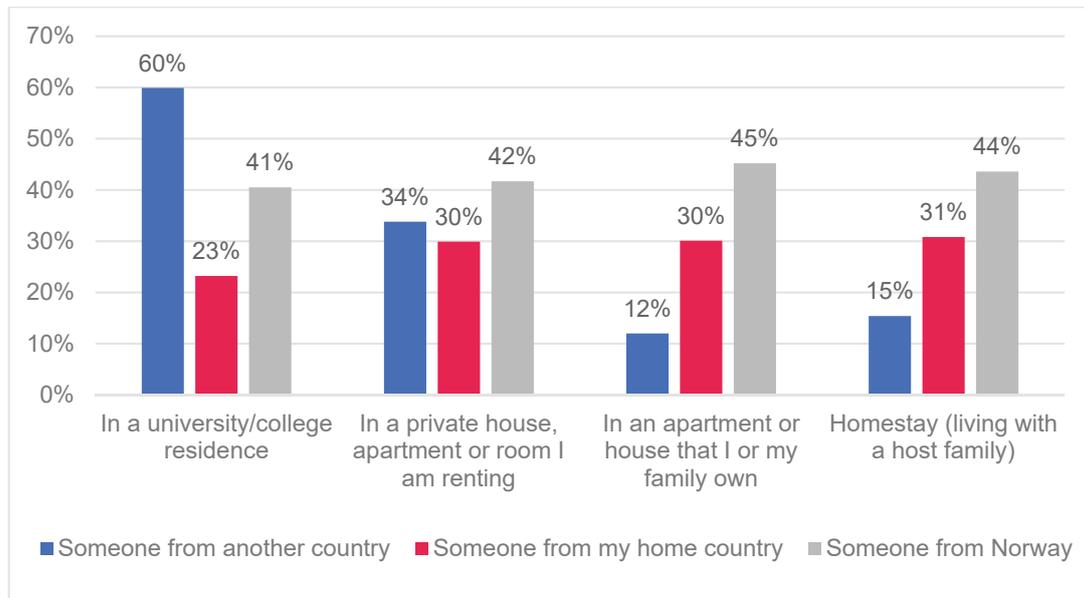


Figure 6.11 House mate groups per accommodation type (N=2 453)

A key difference between these housing alternatives is that students in university/college residences can usually not choose their house mates, unlike those residing in the private market. In fact, when the international students get to choose their flat mates (i.e. reside privately), the relative share of Norwegian cohabitants increases. This is a striking contrast to what happens in academic life when students are let to choose: Students' self-organisation of academic and social collaboration does not endorse intercultural exchange. It is nevertheless a finding worth making note of for the institutions, as board members of the student welfare organisations that own the student residences.

⁴⁵ Spearman's rho = -.268, p > 0.01 (two tailed).

6.3.2 Organised student activity participation

Norway has a long tradition for voluntary work and many Norwegians are active members of a voluntary organisation. The level of participation, as well as the time spent on volunteering, remains high compared to other countries. The organisations serve as social meeting places and “social glue” in many local communities, as well as at the universities and in student life. There is a myriad of student unions, societies for study programmes, social clubs for specific faculties, international student associations, and societies for the pursuit of hobbies and interests.

However, only a very small part of the international students participates in organised student activities in their spare time. The international student groups attract most international students; 25 percent of the survey population participate weekly or more often in such groups. One in five international students engage in study clubs or student union activities weekly or more often, but one in four international students rarely or never participate in any form of organised voluntary student activities. For the survey population as such, 86 percent participate in organised voluntary student activity monthly or more rarely. International students at the university colleges tend to be the most active in voluntary student organisations, but otherwise there is little difference between the different subsets of international students in this regard.

When it comes to mixing Norwegian and international students, the low levels of organisational affiliation among the latter group may not be too worrying; the participation in voluntary organisations is only weakly correlated with the students’ level of social contact with Norwegians.⁴⁶ Some of the organisations international students participate in cater solely to international students. The most apparent example is the label “international student group”. Participation in such organisations can thus not be expected to increase the respondents’ contact with Norwegians. The correlation increases slightly if we keep “international student group” out of the correlation, but the statistical association between participation in voluntary organisations and the level of social contact with Norwegians is still weak.⁴⁷

Contact with people from other countries is also somewhat positively correlated with organisational participation.⁴⁸ However, none of the above correlations are stronger than one may expect, given that participation in an organisation itself necessarily leads to increased interaction with others. The current survey can neither confirm nor refute the role of student organisations in the socialisation patterns of international students; for this purpose, more detailed data on the national versus international profile of the organisations they engage in is needed.

6.4 Summary

Norwegian institutions have come far in welcoming international students to their courses and campuses and accommodating their learning and social life. Nonetheless, findings in this chapter indicates that Norwegian institutions could do more with respect to endorsing exchanges between international and domestic students and to advance intercultural learning for their entire student population. Many of the international students in this study

⁴⁶ Spearman’s rho = .194, $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

⁴⁷ Spearman’s rho = .217, $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

⁴⁸ Spearman’s rho = .246, $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

have little or no contact with Norwegian students in and *outside* the classroom. The levels of contact in academic settings is largely reflected in social domains, and vice versa. 45 percent of the respondents seldom have contact with Norwegians in their leisure time.

The survey suggests that certain meeting places play an important role in bringing Norwegian and international students together, such as courses/classes, introduction weeks, and student residences. However, the findings also indicate that these arenas occasionally are organised in ways that separate rather than bring the groups together.

Low levels of contact with Norwegians is primarily a loss to the Norwegian students, and especially to those who do not take part of their education abroad. The survey shows that the international students do get an international experience in Norway insofar as they interact with other international students, but that not all of them will get a particularly *Norwegian* experience while here.

However, low levels of interaction between domestic and international students is not a distinctly Norwegian phenomenon. A vast body of empirical research has concluded that domestic students anywhere are largely uninterested in initiating contact with their international peers. The current survey does not leave this unchallenged. A plurality of respondents feel that Norwegian students and staff show interest in their country and culture. Moreover, most of the respondents find Norway to be a welcoming and tolerant society and would like to get more chances to experience Norwegian culture and family life.

Norwegian HEIs have the opportunity to meet these positive expectations and wishes. International students are resources readily available on most university or college campuses in Norway. The survey however suggests that large-scale intercultural interaction is unlikely to occur spontaneously, and that interventionist strategies would need to be introduced to promote more and better intercultural activities.

7 Overall impressions of studying in Norway

With the aim of understanding the students' experiences in Norway beyond the figures, two open-ended questions were included. These questions aim to elicit positive and negative experiences of being an exchange student in Norway, asking the students to write about, respectively, the most positive and the most negative part of their study experience in Norway. 3 749 students gave an answer about the most positive part of their study experience in Norway, while 3 665 students reflected on the most negative part of it.

7.1 Analysing replies to open-ended questions

To identify tendencies in the open-ended questions, we need a different approach compared to the preceding chapters in this report. All the answers to each question are treated as one group, regardless of the student's gender, institution, origin, etc. The object is simply to identify what has been identified as positive or negative aspects of the study experience in Norway. Inspired by data and text mining, we are using a corpus linguistic approach. All replies from the two questions are gathered in two separate texts – so-called corpora – the “positive” one consisting of 66 786 words and the “negative” one consisting of 72 765 words.

Two basic approaches were used to analyse the open-ended answers. First, an analysis of the corpora established that text sequences of four words, so-called fourgrams, were the best source for identifying recurrent themes in the open-ended answers.⁴⁹ Secondly, analysis of word frequencies and the appearance of key words in context was used as a supplement to this first approach.⁵⁰

Every four-word sequence – fourgram – that occurs more than five times in one of the corpora is examined. The fourgrams give insight into which themes are important for the students. To ensure that themes are not missed due to the fact that some frequent constructions may contain less than four words, the fourgrams are compared to word frequency lists from the corpora.⁵¹

The word frequency lists are words that semantically say something about the themes in the two texts. The fourgrams and the frequency of each word tells us how often they are used in the answers given to the two questions. Assuming that frequent fourgrams and words reflect what is important to a larger group of students, this approach gives us an indication of which themes the students are most concerned with, when it comes to their positive or negative

⁴⁹ To investigate these two texts, we are using NGram Analyzer to create n-grams that is a contiguous sequence of n words from the text. The NGram Analyzer was tested with n=2, 3, 4 and 5. The results from n=2 and 3 were too general while n=5 produced too few results. This led us to set n=4 for this study, i.e. we are using fourgrams. The fourgrams in the corpus are used to identify themes occurring in the open-ended answers. See <http://guidetodatamining.com/ngramAnalyzer/index.php>

⁵⁰ This was done using TextSTAT, a simple program for text analysis that produces word frequency lists and concordances from simple text files. If the fourgrams does not give enough context to identify the theme, we use TextSTAT to create KWIC concordances (Key Word In Context). TextSTAT is also used to create word frequency list for each text. See <http://neon.niederlandistik.fu-berlin.de/en/textstat/>

⁵¹ The two word frequency lists are examined with the main emphasis on nouns, adjectives and some verbs. High frequent words with low semantic value, like the, and, to, I, of, etc. are removed from the frequency lists. Words used in the two questions are evaluated to check if they are only included in the text as reformulations of the questions, many respondents tend to use the question as a starting point when they formulate their answers. Therefore, one should expect to find many replies opening with phrases such as “The most positive part of my study experience in Norway was ...”. After an examination of the occurrences of Norway and study in the two corpora, we decided to keep them in the word frequency list.

experiences of being an international student in Norway. Thus, fourgrams and words used by many students in their description of their study experience in Norway are more likely to represent what is a common opinion among the students.

7.2 Positive and negative aspects of being an international student in Norway

As one could expect, there is an overlap between the most frequent fourgrams and the most frequent words. It is important to keep in mind that these are word frequencies and not the number of respondents who have used the actual words in question, but refers to how often these words appear in the corpora.

7.2.1 Positive aspects

The answers about the most positive part of student experiences in Norway can be placed in five categories. The themes are sorted according to the number of fourgrams indicating them, hence the first theme is more likely to represent a larger group of students than the last theme.

Table 7.1 Themes and words in positive corpus

Theme	Fourgram frequency	Related words
Meet people	783	People, Student(s), International, Meeting, Friends, Norwegian, Different, Culture
Studies	143	Student(s), study, learning, environment, work, education
Comparison with home	111	Country, university
New country and culture	108	Norway, Norwegian, different, culture, country, environment
Personal development	16	Life, country, culture

The table demonstrates that there are big differences in the material. There are 783 fourgrams categorised in the first group *to meet people*,⁵² roughly five times more than the next theme. While the first four themes have more than a hundred occurrences, there are only 16 fourgrams addressing personal development.

The word frequencies for the twenty most used words in this corpus range from 768 for the most popular word (“people”) to 213 for number twenty on the list (“student”). “Student” appears in various forms, the total frequency for the forms “student” and “students” is 793.

Quotes from the material contribute to our understanding of the students’ experiences. When the students are given the liberty to express their impressions from their study experience in Norway, table 7.1 demonstrates that personal meetings is most frequently mentioned.

⁵² Due to the way we are identifying the fourgrams, there are some overlapping in the counting; hence the same mention of a theme could be counted several times.

‘The most positive part of my study experience in Norway has been the opportunity to meet and work with other international students’.

Canadian exchange student

As the above quote and the related words indicate, these meetings may be with other international students, Norwegian students or both. But when mentioned, it is often about establishing friendships and experiencing a different culture.

Studies is another frequent theme in the students' answers.

‘The availability of needed resources to make studies smooth’.

Ghanaian degree student

The studies may be mentioned in themselves or in comparison to the students' experiences from their home country.

‘Meeting many amazing Norwegians, being able to study in a very new and modern university and attend courses that cannot be found in my home country’.

Latvian exchange student

It should not come as a surprise that the opportunity to get to know a new country is seen as positive together with the possibility to make friends from all over the world.

‘The possibility of knowing a beautiful country and making friends from all over the world’.

Bolivian degree student

‘The most positive part has been learning a completely new culture and being able to study at an academic level in that language. Meeting many international students and listening to new stories. The challenge of studying in a completely different culture and climate than the home country has been positive and life-changing for me in many aspects in a positive way’.

Albanian degree student

These quotes demonstrate the different perspectives inherent in the answers that represent the most recurrent themes in the answers to the question about the students most positive experiences during their studies in Norway. As is obvious, many of the answers include several of the identified themes in one.

7.2.2 Negative aspects

Table 7.2 shows us that answers about the most negative part of the study experience can be placed in seven categories. We note that even though the number of replies that form the basis for this corpus is comparable to the positive corpus and the size is slightly bigger, the frequencies are much lower for the most popular fourgrams. The frequencies ranges from 125 to six occurrences. There is thus a much larger degree of agreement about the positive aspects related to studies in Norway, than about the negative aspects.

The opposite is true when we look at word frequencies. “Norwegian” is the most popular word in this corpus, combined with the plural “norwegians” it occurs 1116 times. Table 7.2 also shows that the word “Norwegian” is often related to the theme “Difficulties getting to know people”, indicating that these difficulties are often related to Norwegians in particular.

We observe that several of the themes from table 7.1 reappear in table 7.2, now with a negative value. Again, personal meetings are at the top of the list and again “comparison with home” is ranked number three. The bulk of the other issues on this list relate to life outside the studies – living costs, work, learning the language, residence permit.

Table 7.2 Themes and words in negative corpus

Theme	Fourgram frequency	Related words
Difficulties getting to know people	125	Norwegian, students, hard, difficult, friends
High costs of living	51	Norway, expensive, living, work, job
Comparison with home	50	University
Difficulties finding a job	44	Time (part time), hard, difficult, job, work
Hard to learn Norwegian	8	Language
Missing home	6	friends
Obtaining study permit	6	Norway, study (study permit)

It is worth noting that issues related to meeting people is at the top of both the positive and negative aspects for international students when they write about their study experiences in Norway. This indicates two things: firstly, such meetings are a key part of the study experience for international students, and, secondly, such meetings are not always easy.

Table 7.2 indicates that the difficulties related to getting to know people is often related to Norwegians.

‘I have found it hard to make friends with Norwegians as many of my classes and my living accommodations is mostly international students. When I am in a class with more Norwegian students, it is hard to meet people as I am not fluent in Norwegian’.

US exchange student

‘The interaction with the locals. Coming from an Asian country I have recognized that Norwegian students might not be concerned by our current presence in their country but overall if somebody suggests that they intend to stay in Norway the attitude has turned negative towards them by the Norwegians’.

Pakistani degree student

Given the fact that Norway is widely considered a high cost country, the number of references to this fact is perhaps even lower than expected. On the other hand, the frequency might reflect that the students already expected Norway to be expensive before they arrived.

‘Probably the cost of living here. It is considerably higher than I had initially thought it to be, and it turns out I’m not very good at budgeting, which doesn’t help much’.

British exchange student

While most themes relate to aspects outside the studies, the comparisons with the situation at home correlate with words that refer to the education.

'Also I understand the flexibility of the teaching style as something Norwegian institutions pride, but it's so different from my university back home that I've felt lost and far behind many of my peers simply because even the education seems foreign to me'.

US exchange student

Part time work is important for many international students, so it is no surprise that challenges related to finding a job appears in this material.

'Can't speak Norwegian, making it really hard to find a job here'.

Chinese degree student

When the students do not understand Norwegian, this may make it hard to find a job, but it may also be a problem for their ability to follow their courses.

'Ok seriously? How much they want us to pay for the Norwegian language course at the university. Most of my friends took the course and they improved so much and I am so jealous, but I can literally not afford to learn the language and I think that's stupid because I could actually get a JOB if I knew Norwegian. I try to teach myself and practice with friends and read books, but it's very hard and I want to attend the real course more than anything. Sometimes my courses give reading in Norwegian and it makes me so sad I can't do my course work just because my personal savings are limited!'

Dutch degree student

Moving to another country may be exotic and exiting, but it can also be a lonely experience, also for international students who have arrived from Norway's neighbouring country.

'I miss all of my friends and family at home. I feel like I left my whole social life behind me'.

Swedish degree student

Obtaining the official documents needed to stay and study in Norway is known to pose challenges for students from outside the EU/EEA area. These quotes show that it afflicts both the study experience itself and the prospects for a future in Norway.

'As a music student with aspirations to work as a freelance artist after graduating, there is essentially no hope for me to get a working visa to stay in Norway. The immigration laws, though surely practical for some fields of employment, are incredibly restricting and limiting for students who work in artistic fields'.

Canadian degree student

'I had to deal with visa problems from the UDI although, in the end, I managed to prove that everything was okay with my documentation, for me that period has been stressful and took a lot of my energy and attention from studies'.

Albanian degree student

Course and *courses* are also frequently used in this corpus without being placed under one of the themes identified by the study of fourgrams. Closer investigation shows that the use of these words is related to complaints on the type of existing courses, the lack of Norwegian courses and the teaching or the professors. Weather is another a highly frequent word in this corpus, indicating – to no great surprise – that the weather in Norway is also reported as one of the most negative part of the study experience in Norway.

7.3 Summary

This analysis of the students' own descriptions of their study related experiences in Norway – positive and negative – adds to our understanding of what is important to them and how they rate Norwegian education.

Personal meetings are by far the most important for the students. Mostly, these meetings are positive, but they simultaneously figure as the most frequently mentioned negative aspect among the students. This paradox indicates that the students give much importance to such meetings, and that it subsequently becomes a negative experience when the meetings do not go as they had hoped. Furthermore, it is important to note that many students experience difficulties with getting to know Norwegians.

While many of the experiences mentioned by the students are related to issues surrounding the studies themselves, two of the most frequently mentioned positive themes are directly related to their studies, both studies as such and studies in Norway as compared to experiences from the home country. This observation of the students' evaluation of Norwegian higher education supports the findings from earlier chapters in this report.

Concluding remarks

This report shows us that international students rate the quality of Norwegian higher education highly. In addition, it tells us something about which aspects of Norwegian higher education they appreciate. The international students in Norway are far from a homogenous group. There is a divide between exchange and degree students, overlapping with a number of other factors. Many of these differences are acknowledged in the Norwegian higher education sector. Yet, there is a need for further understanding of what these differences mean for the students' experiences with Norwegian higher education and their contribution to its quality.

Some of the sub-groups among the international students stand out with experiences that moderate some of the positive findings in this report. Such input should be taken seriously both as ideas on ways to improve the quality of Norwegian higher education and as an inspiration for the work to attract and accommodate future international students.

Some of this input is difficult to address for the Norwegian institutions, since it relates to general conditions of arriving in and living in Norway. In such cases there might still be room for a certain degree of expectation management. Our findings indicate that some of the students could have been better prepared for the challenges posed by the bureaucratic processes related to settling in Norway. This need for expectation management also relates to the academic experience. Some features of Norwegian higher education that are normally considered to be strengths, come as surprises to many of the international students. Thus, more could be done to prepare them for the academic part of their study experience in Norway.

We want international students at Norwegian HEIs because they add valuable perspectives that Norwegian students would otherwise not have been exposed to. Our report shows that a majority of the international students are ambitious and hard-working. Their presence has the potential of contributing to the relevance and quality of Norwegian higher education in a globalised world. For this to happen, there needs to be an academic and social interaction between Norwegian and international students. Such interaction requires a planned approach. Courses/classes, introduction weeks, and student residences play an important role in bringing the students together. Unfortunately, these meeting places are occasionally organised in ways that separate rather than bring the groups together.

Low levels of contact between the two groups is primarily a loss to the Norwegian students, and especially to those who do not go abroad themselves during their studies. This report shows that the international students do get an international experience in Norway through contact with each other, but that not all of them will get a particularly *Norwegian* experience.

Language of instruction has been a key issue in the efforts to make Norwegian higher education more international over the last two decades. Along the way, questions have been raised about the quality of the English-language teaching at Norwegian institutions. Seen in this perspective, English-language instruction is a success story for internationalisation. The findings in this report indicate that when Norwegian institutions deliver such programmes, they are able to do so in a very satisfactory way.

The increase in English-language programmes is, however, not an uncontroversial matter. First, this tendency provokes a tension with the wish to maintain and develop Norwegian as

an academic language. Secondly, there is the fear that international students following English-language programmes become isolated from the rest of the student community at campus. And, thirdly, if at some point Norwegian authorities should want to encourage the students to remain in Norway upon graduation, their chances in the Norwegian labour market may be lower if they have completed their studies in English only.⁵³

Norway is an attractive country to study and work in for international students, and most of the students who would like to stay on are motivated by the perspectives of a job. These are highly skilled workers that could make a significant contribution to Norway's economy. In a European context, there is an increasing interest in international students as future contributors to the national work force. These are developments that form the context for international student mobility, and that Norwegian authorities should follow.

Norway lacks a commonly accepted definition of the concept international student and consequently also lacks exact knowledge of the number of international students in the country. This is particularly evident when it comes to degree students, and it is a clear disadvantage in the efforts to establish, implement and evaluate national policies in the field. Diku sees a need for Norwegian authorities to establish a commonly agreed upon definition of international students and explore the possibility of establishing a registry of such students.

⁵³ EMN, 2019.

Appendix

This appendix describes the procedures of data collection and analysis for the sixth survey among international students in Norway conducted by Diku.

Population and sampling

24 Norwegian institutions of higher education were invited to participate in the survey. This selection included the largest public and private institutions, as well as some of the smaller institutions. All 24 institutions accepted the invitation. The participating institutions are listed in table I in this appendix.

The initial target population for the survey was students registered with a foreign citizenship at the participating institutions. The institutions provided Diku with the contact information for this population, in total 15 209 individuals. PhD students were not included, only students at the bachelor and master level.

The further selection of students for the survey was done by way of the initial question of the questionnaire, where the students were asked whether they came to Norway to study or already lived in the country when they submitted their application for higher education. See chapter 2 for a more comprehensive account of the universe of international students in Norway, as well as the population of this survey, and response rate.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire is made up of 50 items, some of which are complex batteries with multiple sub-questions. The items range from simple yes-no questions to Likert scale evaluations. Some of the questions have been routed to make sure that follow-up questions are relevant for the respondents. The full questionnaire is available at www.diku.no.

The questions are organised in thematical chapters: background, information sources, motivation and preconditions, satisfaction with teaching and academic counselling, contact with working life, workload, study environment, social environment, well-being, overall impressions and future plans. The current questionnaire is based on the questionnaires used in the 2014 and 2016 surveys of international students but has been subject to thorough revision. These revisions are anchored in previous survey findings and needs for new data pertaining to changes in context and political priorities.

The first item in the questionnaire is the only mandatory question in the survey. This is a screening question that helps to single out the primary target group for the survey (international students who came to Norway to study). Based on their responses to this question, respondents who are not regarded as international students in Norway have been acknowledged for their participation and sent out of the questionnaire.

For five questions the answer alternatives have been randomized. These questions are number 12, 17, 24, 39 and 47. All randomizations are independent from another. Questions 19, 20 and 32 make use of validation to ensure that the respondents' answers are submitted as numbers within a pre-defined interval.

Two of the questions are open-ended and another six questions include an open text box for specifications, in case the respondents did not find their preferred answer among the listed alternatives. The remaining questions are closed.

Testing and programming

The data collection was conducted by the Norwegian analysis company ideas2evidence on behalf of Diku. ideas2evidence programmed and administered the survey through the web-based software Confirmit. The survey was adapted for use both on stationary computers and handheld devices such as tablets and mobile phones.

The survey went through small-N pilot testing before the data collection, as well as extensive testing by ideas2evidence and Diku during the development phase. The test pilots were ten international students in Norway recruited in cooperation with International Students' Union of Norway (ISU) and Erasmus Student Network (ESN). The pilot group consisted of 50/50 exchange and degree students, both male and female, from different institutions. The assessments made by the pilots were overall positive and no major technical or substantial revisions were deemed necessary.

Data collection

The survey was launched on 19 March 2019 and was kept open until 25 April, the end of Easter holidays. It was distributed to the respondents by email, as a clickable link to a web-based questionnaire. Each respondent received a unique URL that led to the questionnaire.

For most respondents we had access to both private and institutional email addresses. The address data base was cleaned and verified by ideas2evidence prior to the data collection. The first invitation to participate in the survey was sent to the respondents' institutional email addresses. Three reminders were sent during the subsequent weeks. The first two reminders were sent to the students' private email addresses, and the final one to both the institutional and private email.

To motivate the students to participate, all those who completed the questionnaire were in the draw of ten universal gift cards á 1 000 Norwegian kroner. Diku also collaborated with the participating institutions to keep the target group well informed about the survey and to motivate the invitees to participate.

The survey was conducted in accordance with the Norwegian Personal Data Act and the General Data Protection Regulation. The students were asked to give their consent to the use of their responses before entering the survey, as well as to give permission to use register data from the institutions on age, gender, citizenship, student type, academic level, field of study, institution and year of admission.

Participating institutions

Table I displays the recoding of the 24 participating institutions into broader institution types based on the three categories of institutional accreditation that exists in Norway.⁵⁴ The largest of these, the university category, has been further divided between institutions accredited as universities before ("old universities") and after ("new universities") the year 2000.

⁵⁴ NOKUT, 2019, "Accredited institutions," <https://www.nokut.no/en/surveys-and-databases/accredited-institutions/>

Table I: Participating institutions divided by category

Old Universities	New Universities	Specialised University Colleges	University Colleges ⁵⁵
University of Oslo	Nord University	The Oslo School of Architecture and Design	Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences
University of Bergen	Norwegian University of Life Sciences	BI – Norwegian Business School	Volda University College
The Norwegian University of Science and Technology	OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University	MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society	Østfold University College
UiT – The Arctic University of Norway	University of Agder	Molde University College – Specialized University in Logistics	Western Norway University of Applied Sciences
	University of Stavanger	Oslo National Academy of the Arts	NLA Høgskolen
	University of South-Eastern Norway	NHH Norwegian School of Economics	
		The Norwegian School of Sport Sciences	
		Norwegian Academy of Music	
		VID Specialized University	

⁵⁵ NOKUT uses the term «Universities Colleges/Universities of Applied Sciences», we have shortened it for the sake of simplicity.



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