

The European Students' Union



# QUEST FOR QUALITY FOR STUDENTS

SURVEY ON  
STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES

VOLUME II PART 1



Lifelong  
Learning  
Programme

**QUEST**

QUEST FOR QUALITY FOR STUDENTS

## IMPRINT

### QUEST FOR QUALITY FOR STUDENTS

Survey on students' perspectives

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# 1 FOREWORD

It is very interesting how education and especially higher education is portrayed in political debates during difficult periods of time, like the current economic crisis. These debates are often led by the governments and strongly linked to economic indicators such as the employability of graduates, drawing a picture of the so-called >efficiency< of the higher education system. That understanding of the concept of quality of higher education from the policy-making arena has always been challenged by students' unions, higher education institutions or teachers' trade unions, that do often have another point of view on how quality should be understood.



It has been a challenging task to define a shared concept for the quality of higher education because stakeholders have had different views on it. The approach that has been taken towards quality assurance within the European Higher Education Area is a clear example of it, where the discussion about the understanding of quality was left out; notwithstanding it was possible to develop a common framework for quality assurance (the European Standards and Guidelines) with a great success.

The project called **QUEST** for Quality for Students is a contribution to the policy developments for the quality of higher education, shedding some light on the concept of

quality from the perspective of European students. This publication contributes to achieving that goal in a significant way by explaining the outcomes of a survey conducted by **ESU** on students' perspectives on quality assurance in higher education.

This publication is the first part of Volume II of the **QUEST** research. It follows-up on the work that has already been done and published in Volume I, containing a desk research focusing on existing trends in student engagement in quality assurance, a survey

to National Students' Unions complemented with a focus group of student representatives, and the reports of two case studies and three site visits of different higher education systems in Europe. The forthcoming second part of Volume II will include the outcomes of several site visits to higher education institutions where focus groups with students and interviews with the institutional leadership and managers of the internal quality assurance systems took place. All those publications will together be

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**“ONE OF OUR GOALS THROUGHOUT THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN TO RAISE AWARENESS ABOUT THE UNDERSTANDING OF QUALITY FROM STUDENTS' POINT OF VIEW.”**

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the foundation of Volume III, which will present how quality through students' eyes can be defined, reached and assured; as well as what information students think is important that higher education institutions provide to them.

One of our goals throughout this project has been to raise awareness about the understanding of quality from students' point of view. Thus, it can be considered and influence discussions on higher education, having a positive effect on it and improve its quality.

Last but not least, we would like to express our greatest gratitude to the authors of this report, Jens Jungblut and Martina Vukasovic, whose work has been essential for achieving the aims of this project. We would also like to thank the higher education institutions that kindly agreed to distribute the questionnaire among their students and to all the students that participated in the survey, which is a key element in the project and we have managed to complete successfully.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Fernando Miguel Galán Palomares  
Vice-Chairperson of the European Students' Union 2013–14





## 2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of the QUEST project is to map students' views on quality at different levels and in different disciplinary contexts. The survey that is the focus of this report, an integral part of the project, addressed the following research questions:

- ◊ What is the students' view on quality of higher education?
- ◊ Do quality assurance mechanisms at the European, national and institutional level actually enhance quality in the understanding of students?
- ◊ What sort of information do students need to be provided to them in relation to what they perceive as quality education?

Each of these areas was refined through more detailed items in the survey, which consisted of six sections focusing on (1) students' motivations for and expectations of higher education, (2) their perspectives on quality, (3) awareness of quality assurance mechanisms, (4) needs and use of information, (5) perceptions about academic freedom and (6) demographic information. The full survey is provided in the appendix.

The survey was distributed electronically in eight European countries, selected because of different factors including region, difference in size and type of higher education and quality system present in the country. Germany, France, UK, Spain, Poland, Norway, Latvia and Slovenia were selected. In each of the countries specific higher education institutions and programmes were targeted. In total there were more than 8000 individual responses.

The different perspectives on quality in higher education were categorised following two classifications. The first one is based on Harvey and Green's (1993) work on dimensions of quality: quality as excellence, quality as exceptional, quality as value for money, quality as fitness for purpose and quality as transformation. The second one was developed to reflect two distinct features of higher education, (1) added-value and inclusiveness as opposed to (2) selectivity and elitism.

The study points towards the fact that students have a multi-dimensional concept of quality in higher education, with the dimensions of quality as fitness for purpose, quality as transformation and quality as added-value being the ones with the highest level of agreement. At the same time, the dimensions of quality as selectivity and quality as value for money have the lowest agreement and the highest amount of disagreement, pointing to the fact that they are less important for students. However, it is not

possible to define a typical comprehensive profile of a person that shares a particular view of quality in Harvey and Green's terms.

Based on students' responses concerning their expectations of higher education, two distinct views were constructed. The first Humboldtian one stresses traditional academic values (freedom of learning and teaching etc.), while the second consumerist one focuses on employability and implies a view of students as customers. In general, the more the respondent has expectations that are in line with the Humboldtian and the consumerist views, the more likely the respondent is also to agree with the differ-

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**“THE COUNTRY COMPARISONS USED IN THIS STUDY ALSO SUGGEST THAT THE COMPARATIVE APPROACH IS A ROAD WORTH TAKING, AND THAT NATIONAL SITUATIONS MIGHT HAVE AN IMPACT ON THE STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION.”**

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ent views on quality, although the strength of correlations differs across the dimensions of quality. Both the similarities and the differences between a Humboldtian and a consumerist view on the different dimensions of quality in higher education offer multiple avenues for further research with a more refined dataset.

The general level of knowledge of quality assurance mechanisms is rather low, and the closer the mechanisms are situated to the participants' day-to-day reality the more knowledge they seem to have on them. The highest level of knowledge is reported on the ways to get involved in quality assurance processes

on the institutional level, while the three big European quality assurance initiatives, the ESGs, EQAR and ENQA are more or less unknown to the participants. Around 85 percentage of the participants report to regularly have the chance to take part in student evaluations and half of the respondents also see the results of these processes. Of those who see the results of these evaluations a large majority also reports to have witnessed follow-up activities on the results. More than half of the respondents think that evaluations have an effect on quality in higher education.

The relation between the knowledge of quality mechanisms and the support of certain concepts of quality is rather weak. The more the participants know about quality mechanisms on national or European levels, the more pronounced their support for different dimensions of quality is. On the one hand, there is no link or only a very weak one between expectations towards higher education, as conceptualised through the Humboldtian-versus-consumerist dichotomy, and the awareness of quality mechanisms. On the other hand, there seems to be a stronger relationship between motivational factors and the awareness of quality mechanisms. The strongest links can be found between motivations stemming from the social dimension and additional opportunities, and between a knowledge of quality mechanisms on the European level and the activities of student unions.

The respondents get most of their information from websites of higher education institutions and the respective programmes as well as other students. Least used to gather information are student unions and websites of public authorities. The same pattern was observed for the importance of the information for the students' choice as well as the respondents' assessment of the quality of the information provided. University rankings also seem to be used a lot by students to access information.

The findings of the study paint a multi-faceted picture of students' view on quality in higher education. Even though this project has characteristics of a pilot study it does point towards interesting relations. The results offer several points of departure for future research projects to get an even clearer picture on the preferences, knowledge and need of students in Europe when it comes to quality in higher education. The country comparisons used in this study also suggest that the comparative approach is a road worth taking, and that national situations might have an impact on the students' perception of quality in higher education.



### 3 INTRODUCTION

The European Students' Union (ESU), in partnership with the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), the National Unions of Students Scotland—student participation in quality Scotland (NUS, Sparqs) and freier zusschluss von studentInnenschaften (fzs), and with support of the European Commission (DG EAC), launched the “Quest for Quality for Students” (QUEST) project.

The motivation for this project lies in the core of the issue of quality in both the major European initiatives related to higher education (the Bologna Process being the main

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“THE MOTIVATION FOR THIS PROJECT LIES IN THE CORE OF THE ISSUE OF QUALITY IN BOTH THE MAJOR EUROPEAN INITIATIVES RELATED TO HIGHER EDUCATION AS WELL AS THE DIFFERENT NATIONAL POLICIES AND REFORMS TAKING PLACE IN THE LAST TEN YEARS.”

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example) as well as the different national policies and reforms taking place in the last ten years. The project is also motivated by the centrality of students and their experiences, as evident in the shift towards student-centred learning and continuous emphasis on the importance of student participation in governance of higher education by major European stakeholders and ESU and its members.

Therefore, the project seeks to connect these two central features of the recent higher education dynamics in Europe and uncover students' perspectives on quality and quality assurance in higher education. Apart from the survey on student perspectives on quality, which is the focus of this report, the project also included a desk research fo-

cusing on existing trends in student engagement in quality assurance and study visits to a number of countries and higher education institutions (Finland, Spain—both national and institutional—, the Netherlands, Romania, Germany, Slovakia and Latvia), complemented with two case studies (Germany and Scotland).

### 3.1 AIM OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS ADDRESSED THROUGH THE SURVEY

The aim of the QUEST project is to map students' views on quality at different levels and in different disciplinary contexts. The survey that is the focus of this report, an integral part of the project, addressed the following research questions:

- 1 What is the students' view on quality of higher education?
  - a What are the similarities and differences in students' view on quality of higher education when the higher education system, year of study, job while studying and student status (part-time or full-time) are taken into account?
  - b What patterns can be identified in students' view on quality of higher education depending on students' background, including elements of the socio-economic background?
  - c What patterns can be identified in students' view on quality of higher education depending on students' motivations and expectations from higher education?
  - d What is the relationship between students' view on the role and purpose of higher education and their view on quality of higher education?
- 2 In the understanding of students, do quality assurance mechanisms on the European, national and institutional level actually enhance quality?
  - a What is the students' knowledge of quality assurance mechanisms at the European, national and institutional level aiming at enhancing quality?
  - b How do students see the capacity of these mechanisms to enhance quality?
- 3 What sort of information do students need to be provided to them in relation to what they perceive as quality education?

## 3.2 STRUCTURE AND FOCUS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

In consultation with the experts involved in the project<sup>1</sup>, as well as the European Students' Union, the questionnaire was developed to cover the concepts relevant for answering the research questions. The questionnaire was tested on a group of Bachelor level students at the Faculty of Education, University of Oslo. The full questionnaire is included in the Appendix of this report.

The questionnaire consists of six different parts:

- a Motivations and expectations from higher education
- b Perspectives on quality
- c Awareness of quality mechanisms at different levels
- d Information needs of students with respect to higher education
- e Academic Freedom
- f General higher education and demographic information about the respondents

### MOTIVATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS FROM HIGHER EDUCATION

Part A includes questions concerning the choice whether to go into higher education, as well as the choice of a particular higher education institution and a particular study programme, and what the major influence on these choices were (parents, peers, teachers, friends, etc.).<sup>2</sup> In general, agreement or disagreement with the statements, or level of importance or strength of influence was always measured using a Likert-type scale, and respondents had the possibility to also choose a "do not know/do not want to answer" option, which was in the analysis coded as a missing value.

In relation to choosing to go into higher education, a number of aspects of higher education were included in the questionnaire. The respondents were asked to identify the importance of different aspects of higher education for their choice, covering a total of 18 aspects, including content, organisation, entry requirements, language of instruction, favourable study and financial conditions etc. (see Appendix for the full

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**1** Members of the project Advisory Board: Sonia Cardoso (CIPES, Portugal), Mihai Paunescu (ARACIS, Romania) and Bjørn Stensaker (University of Oslo, Norway).

**2** For a model of student's choice behavior see Chapman (1981).

list, Part A, question 4). The options were organised in a five point Likert-type scale. Some of these were later in the analysis (see sections 4 and 5 of the report) combined into broad aspects of higher education<sup>3</sup>:

- ◉ statements concerning the content and focus/specialisation of the programme, its reputation and flexibility were combined into a study programme composite;
- ◉ statements concerning scholarship opportunities, quality of student support services and favourable conditions for studying and living were combined into a social dimension of higher education composite;
- ◉ statements concerning the reputation of the programme and the higher education institution were combined into a reputation composite;
- ◉ statements concerning mobility, internship and scholarship opportunities were combined into an additional opportunities composite;
- ◉ statements concerning career prospects upon graduate and internship opportunities were combined into an employability composite, and
- ◉ statements concerning learning infrastructure, research infrastructure and quality of student support services were combined into an infrastructure composite.

When it comes to expectations from higher education, a total of 14 expectations were formulated (Appendix, Part A, question 5) and the respondents were expected to indicate their agreement with these expectations, using a five point Likert-type scale.

On the basis of the desk research conducted as part of the overall QUEST projects, some of the statements in the survey concerning expectations from higher education were formulated in order to construct the predominantly Humboldtian view of higher education that stresses freedom to learn, teach and research as well as the intrinsic value of knowledge, i.e. expectations that: higher education will provide the student with knowledge and personal growth; the programme will have an interesting topic; higher education will provide an experience of being part of an academic community and will contribute to the development of critical thinking; higher education will prepare one to be an active citizen; and that students are an integral part of an academic community (namely statements 1, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9, Part A, question 5).

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<sup>3</sup> The aspects are not seen as mutually exclusive, which is why some elements appear in more than one broad aspect of higher education.

There were also statements linked closely to a more consumerist view that stresses efficiency and the link to the labour market, i.e. expectations that higher education ensures a higher salary and better employment opportunities; provides training relevant for the labour market; ensures successful and timely completion; prioritises skills relevant for future employment over theoretical knowledge; and is organised by higher education institutions that maintain close links with business and industry (namely statements 2, 3, 10, 12, 13 and 14, Part A, question 5).

These two groups of statements were combined into two composite scores—one indicating the level of agreement of the respondent with a predominantly Humboldtian view and the other indicating the level of agreement of the respondent with a predominantly consumerist/efficiency view of higher education.

## PERSPECTIVES ON QUALITY

Part B of the questionnaire was constructed to uncover the respondents' perspectives on quality in higher education. The students were asked to indicate to what extent they agree with each statement using a Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (-2) to "strongly agree" (2).

The statements were as follows:

- a There are different views on what is perceived as quality in higher education by professors and students.
- b In discussions about the quality of our study programmes professors seldom have a unified position.
- c The quality of a study programme only depends on its academic excellence.
- d Programmes need to be taught by teachers who are exceptional experts in their fields.
- e It is clear to me what the purpose of my study programme is.
- f The courses are well structured so they ensure that the aim of the programme is achieved.
- g A good programme offers something that others don't.
- h Good programmes offer novel approaches to core topics in a field.

- i The higher the costs for a study programme the more I expect of it.
- j I am willing to pay more for my education if the quality of the study programme is very high.
- k A good study programme has to broaden the horizon of the students.
- l A good study programme provides the students with additional competencies.
- m The quality of the study programme is measured by its selectivity.
- n A programme has a high quality when the participating professors are chosen based on their reputation.
- o A programme has a high quality when after finishing it the students are amongst the best in their field.
- p A programme is of high quality if it significantly increases the students' knowledge.
- q Students should play a significant role in shaping their curriculum.
- r Professors should design the curriculum according to their expertise in the subject.

Some of these statements were combined into composite perspectives on quality. Firstly, following Harvey and Green (1993), five dimensions on quality were constructed, by calculating the mean of the scores for each groups of statements:

- ◉ Quality as excellence—statements *c* and *d* above,
- ◉ Quality as fitness for purpose—statements *e* and *f* above,
- ◉ Quality as exceptional—statements *g* and *h* above,
- ◉ Quality as value for money—statements *i* and *j* above, and
- ◉ Quality as transformation—statements *k* and *l* above.

The dimensions should not be seen as mutually exclusive, which is also the reason why the study will not employ a factor analysis approach but rather compare levels of agreement with the relevant statements and employ simple correlational analysis.

Furthermore, statements *m* and *n* were combined to reflect quality as a perspective of selectivity, while statements *o* and *p* were combined to reflect quality as a perspective of an added-value<sup>4</sup>. Statements *q* and *r* correspond to a student-centred perspective on higher education (see Appendix, Part B).

## AWARENESS ABOUT QUALITY MECHANISMS AT DIFFERENT LEVELS

Part C of the questionnaire was designed to investigate the existence and the knowledge of quality mechanisms. In four sections the respondents were asked to answer a set of questions covering different levels of knowledge concerning quality mechanisms.

The first question covers the existence of quality measures in the respective higher education institutions and uses a simple yes/no/do not know scale. The focus is on students' participation in evaluations, publication of the results of evaluations and follow-up to such evaluations, as well as the existence of persons or structures explicitly responsible for quality assurance, effect and consequences of these evaluations.

The respondents were also asked to rate their knowledge of quality measures at different levels of higher education: institutional (higher education institution), national (higher education system) and European, using a five point Likert-scale.

The institutional level includes a focus on ways in which quality of a study programme is ensured, how the entire institution works on quality assurance and whether students participate in these processes. The national level focuses on ways in which quality of a higher education institution is ensured, what are the system level mechanisms for ensuring the quality of higher education as a whole, whether students are involved in these processes, as well as the work of the national union of students in general, and on quality assurance in particular. The European level includes focus on European initiatives in higher education in general, but also on the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) and the work of ENQA and EQAR, plus the work of ESU both in general and on quality assurance in particular. In the analysis (see sections 5.3 and 5.4 of the report) the awareness of quality assurance mechanisms is constructed as four distinct composites (as usual, calculating the mean for the corresponding statements for each respondent):

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<sup>4</sup> Concerning the latter, there may be problems with construct validity, which are discussed in more detail in sections 4.4, 5.2 and 5.4)

- ◉ Institutional level—focusing on institutional processes as explained above;
- ◉ National level—focusing on national processes as explained above, excluding awareness of the work of the national union of students;
- ◉ European level—focusing on European level processes as explained above, excluding awareness of the work of ESU, and
- ◉ Student unions—focusing on awareness about the work of the national union of student and ESU.

For specific statements related to these levels, please consult the Appendix, Part C, question 2.

## STUDENT INFORMATION NEEDS

Concerning the students' need for information, the respondents were asked to indicate the type of information sources they used and how important these sources were for their choice of higher education, as well as how they evaluated the quality of information provided (Part D of the questionnaire, see Appendix).

With regards to the type of information sources, these included: website of the programme; printed brochure of the programme; website of the institution; printed brochure of the institution; media reports (e.g. newspaper articles); university rankings; website of public authorities (e.g. ministry of education); websites of quality assurance agencies or similar structures; recommendation from someone who studies/studied there; employment statistics and labour market opportunities; information/Open Days organised by the institution and student union. The respondents were first asked to indicate whether they used these sources of information (use was coded as 1, did not use as 0, while if the source was not available this was coded as missing value).

Afterwards they had to assess separately how important for their choice these sources of information were, by selecting an option from a five point Likert scale.

Finally, the respondents were asked to assess the quality of information provided by each of these sources. The assessment was done using a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 which corresponded to “very low quality, almost useless”, to 5 “excellent quality”.

## ACADEMIC FREEDOM

In this section of the survey the participants were asked to comment on statements that relate to the level of academic freedom at their institutions, as well as the link between these freedoms and quality. The statements related to freedom to express ones views on matters related to academic studies as well as on matters not closely related to studies, perception of possible adverse consequences for students who freely express their views, physical safety and well-being, and the relationship between freedom of expression and quality of the educational experience. Actual statements are given in the questionnaire in the Appendix. Each of the five statements could be judged using a five point Likert scale.

## DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Part F of the survey was designed to collect the usual demographic information about the students and to enable the analysis of the different aspects covered in previous parts of the survey in relation to their age, gender, duration of higher education experience so far, status (part-time or full-time student), education of parents, job while studying, as well as activity in the student union (see Appendix for more details).

### 3.3 CASE SELECTION AND SAMPLING

The process of sampling and case selection for this study is multi-levelled. On the first level the target countries were chosen. Since the aim of the research project is to shed more light on the perception of quality of students in Europe, the survey was launched in eight countries: Germany, France, UK, Spain, Poland, Norway, Latvia, and Slovenia. These countries were selected based on different factors including region (Northern countries, Mediterranean countries, Central-Eastern Europe etc.), difference in size and type of higher education and quality system present in the country. To ensure a higher and more even participation it was decided to translate the questionnaire in each of the local languages using professional translators.

On the second level higher education institutions within the countries were identified. Since this research had the characteristics of a pilot project, it was decided to focus on the Bachelor level<sup>5</sup> in the largest public universities, since these were the study programmes that affected the biggest share of the student population and thus could be seen as being the most representative for the general student experience. Due to the limitations of the study, it was decided to choose as many public universities as

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<sup>5</sup> In cases where study programs were not yet transferred to the 3-cycle structure or where integrated 5 year programs were in use these were included as well.

needed to cover at least 25 percent of the student population of a country. For this the researchers obtained data from public sources, such as bureaus of statistics, listing the universities of each country by number of students as well as the overall number of students. Depending on the size of the universities and the number of students in the country, as many institutions were included as needed to fulfil the 25 percent condition. All these universities were then contacted by the European Students' Union with information about the research project and asked whether they would like to participate. If a university refused to participate or did not respond after several reminders the next biggest but not yet included universities were approached to fulfil the 25 percent condition. This led to a sample of approximately 60 institutions.

In a third and last level of sampling the researchers identified in each of the selected institutions four Bachelor programmes. These programmes were selected covering hard and soft as well as pure and applied subjects, following the classification of Becher (1994). By ensuring the participation of students from these different fields the researchers wanted to control subject-related quality perceptions and approaches.

Partially due to very slow responses by several higher education institutions and the timeframe of the project, the survey had to be launched in some countries without having the support of enough universities to fulfil the 25 percent condition. The researchers tried to approach more institutions also after the survey was launched in the respective country. However, it was not possible in all cases to secure the support of enough institutions to fulfil the 25 percent condition (see the next section). Though, if a university launched the survey it was made sure that all four Bachelor programmes were included.

### 3.4 DISSEMINATION OF THE SURVEY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ANALYSIS

Due to the multi-country nature of this research project, the questionnaire was disseminated as an online-survey. As mentioned above, the text of the survey was translated into the local languages of all participating countries. The contact with the universities within the sample, as well as the promotion of the survey, follow-up activities and all practicalities connected with it, were handled by the secretariat of ESU. The survey as well as the research project was promoted by ESU to their national member unions and through them to the local unions at the universities. In some cases ESU also directly approached the universities.

As mentioned above it was not possible to secure the support of enough higher education institutions to fulfil the 25 percent condition set by the researchers. Furthermore, the response rate in the survey was limited to 10 percent in some countries and practically zero in others. The sample thus shows a difference in response levels between the countries. To address these problems the researchers decided to keep the survey open for a longer time and ESU tried to motivate their local member unions and the universities to increase the promotion of the survey. All these activities showed only limited success in some countries. Since the timeframe of the research project demanded the survey to be closed at a certain point to have enough time for analysis, the researchers decided to include all responses gathered so far in their analysis of the general European picture on the students' perception of quality, but only perform country specific analysis in countries, where the response level was comparable and at least covering 10 percent of the students in the programmes that were part of the survey; this led to France, Spain and the UK being eliminated for the country specific analysis. The other countries showed a better response rate and thus allowed for country comparisons. The universities and programmes that agreed to participate in these countries are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Overview of the participating universities and programmes (per country)

Country	University	Hard-pure	Hard-applied	Soft-pure	Soft-applied
Germany	Distance University Hagen	BSc Mathematik	BSc Informatik	BA Kulturwissenschaften	Bachelor of Law
	University Göttingen	BSc Biologie	BSc Angewandte Informatik	BA Philosophie	BSc Betriebswirtschaftslehre
	Techn. University Dresden	BSc Chemie	Diplom Maschinenbau	BA Philosophie	BSc Wirtschaftswissenschaften
	Ruhr-University Bochum	BSc Physik	BSc Angewandte Informatik	BA Philosophie	BA Wirtschaftswissenschaften
	LMU München	BSc Physik	BSc Informatik	BA Philosophie	BSc Betriebswirtschaftslehre
	University Duisburg-Essen	BSc Physik	BSc Mechanical Engineering	BA Angewandte Philosophie	BSc Betriebswirtschaftslehre
	RWTH Aachen	BSc Chemie	BSc Elektrotechnik	BA Philosophie	BSc Wirtschaftswissenschaften
	Humboldt University Berlin	BSc Biologie	BSc Informatik	BA Philosophie	BSc Betriebswirtschaftslehre
	University Heidelberg	BSc Physik	Staatsexamen Medizin	BA Philosophie	Staatsexamen Jura
	Norway	University of Oslo	BA Kjemi	Profesjonsstudium Medisin	BA Filosofi og idéhistorie
Norwegian University of Science and Technology		BA Biologi	MA (5 years) Bygg- og miljøteknikk	BA Filosofi	MA (5 years) Samfunnsfag

Country	University	Hard-pure	Hard-applied	Soft-pure	Soft-applied
Slovenia	University of Ljubljana	Fizika I. stopnja	Enovitega magistrskega študijskega programa Medicina (integrated master) AND Univerzitetni študijski program prve stopnje STROJNISTVO	Študijski program Filozofija, enopredmetna smer	prvostopenjski univerzitetni študijski program Pravo
Poland	University of Warsaw	Studia licencjackie Chemii	Informatyka, stacjonarne pierwszego stopnia	Studia I stopnia Filozofii	Studia stacjonarne Prawa i Administracji
	Jagiellonian University Krakow	studia stacjonarne I stopnia Chemii	kierunek lekarski, studija stacjonarne	licencjackie Filozofii st.	Administracja st. jednolite
	Adam Mickiewicz University Poznan	studia stacjonarne I stopnia Biologii	Ochrona środowiska specjalność hydrobiologia i ochrona wód	Filozofia, Studia prowadzą do uzyskania tytułu zawodowego licencjata	Prawo, Studia prowadzą do uzyskania tytułu zawodowego magistra
Latvia	University of Latvia	BSc Biology	Medicine	BA Sociology	BA Law
	Riga Technical University	BSc Chemistry	BSc Mechatronics	BA Technical Translation	BA Business and Management

Looking at the participating institutions it becomes clear, that Germany is slightly overrepresented. This is due to the fact that the national union of students in Germany was one of the main project partners in the QUEST project and thus easier to activate for promotional activities.

In total there were 8173 respondents. The distribution in terms of the countries they were studying in at the time of the survey is presented in Table 2.

*Table 2 Distribution of respondents in terms of countries they were studying in at the time of the survey*

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Germany	3480	52.4%
	Latvia	283	4.3%
	Norway	329	5.0%
	Poland	1897	28.6%
	Slovenia	654	9.8%
	Total	6643	100.0%
Missing	System	1530	
Total		8173	

The sample used in this study has some clear weaknesses and is, partly due to the lack of cooperation at many universities, for sure not as good as it could be. However since this project has the characteristics of a pilot-study the researchers feel confident that the quality of the data gathered is high enough to point towards interesting trends and structures in the data. The responses show that the questionnaire used is a valid instrument for studying the perception of quality of students, nevertheless, the data can also only offer a very rough glance at this perception and follow-up studies that focus on increased response rates should be considered.

## 3.5 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

Section 4 focuses on a univariate analysis, i.e. descriptive statistics in terms of basic characteristics of the respondents in terms of their socio-economic background and student status (subsection 4.1); their motivations and expectations from higher education (subsection 4.2.); their information needs and perception of quality of the information provided on higher education (subsection 4.3); their prevailing perceptions about quality of higher education (subsection 4.4); their awareness of quality mechanisms at different levels (subsection 4.5); and their views on academic freedom. At the end of each subsection a short summary of key findings is provided.

Section 5 focuses on bivariate analysis, i.e. interpretations of correlations and comparison of means of different measured constructs. In light of the research questions (see above), the correlations between different perspectives on quality (following Harvey and Green classification) and respondents demographic characteristics, motivations and expectations from HE are analysed (subsection 5.1). This is followed by the focus on the selectivity and added-value perspectives on quality in relation to these last variables (subsection 5.2). The relationship between respondents' awareness of quality mechanisms and their demographic characteristics is explored in subsection 5.3. Subsection 5.4 focuses on the relationship between the awareness of quality mechanisms and different perspectives on quality (the Harvey and Green classification as well as the selectivity/added-value distinction). Finally, subsection 5.5 explores the relationship between the awareness of quality mechanisms in relation to motivations for and expectations from higher education. Similar to section 4, at the end of each subsection a short summary of key findings is provided.

The conclusions are summarised in section 6. At the end, the actual questionnaire used is provided in the Appendix of this report.



## 4 UNIVARIATE ANALYSIS—DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

### 4.1 BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS

This section provides an overview of the respondents in terms of their demographic characteristics and various elements of their higher education experience.

Most of the respondents were female (58.2 percentage), with more than half of them (54.4 percentage) of typical higher education age (18–25). This reflects the composition of the student population as analysed in the EUROSTUDENT IV report<sup>6</sup>, though the number of students of non-traditional age in this study is somewhat lower.<sup>7</sup>

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#### “IN TERMS OF PARENTAL EDUCATION, MAJORITY OF THE STUDENTS HAVE PARENTS WITH SOME FORM OF HIGHER EDUCATION ...”

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tion of the student population as analysed in the EUROSTUDENT IV report<sup>6</sup>, though the number of students of non-traditional age in this study is somewhat lower.<sup>7</sup>

In terms of parental education, majority of the students have parents with some form of higher education (almost 70 percentage of fathers and almost 60

percentage of mothers, see Table 3), which is in line with the findings from EUROSTUDENT IV. The country differences are notable: (1) from 85.3 percentage of mothers of Latvian respondents with high education attainment, to 44 percentage of mothers of German respondents; (2) from 80.9 percentage of fathers of Norwegian respondents with high education attainment to 62.3 percentage in Germany.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.eurostudent.eu/download\\_files/documents/EIV\\_Synopsis\\_of\\_Indicators.pdf](http://www.eurostudent.eu/download_files/documents/EIV_Synopsis_of_Indicators.pdf) (accessed 3 May 2013)

<sup>7</sup> The difference is due to a certain overrepresentation of non-traditional students in the sample, due to the inclusion of a distance-learning higher education institution from Germany catering to lifelong learners.

Table 3 Distribution of respondents in terms of education of parents, in percentages

	Education of mother	Education of father
None or incomplete primary education	1.1%	1.4%
Only primary education	23.0%	16.0%
Secondary education	16.9%	13.0%
Higher vocational education	11.9%	20.1%
Higher university education (first degree)	11.8%	11.2%
Higher education (second degree)	29.7%	27.9%
Higher education (PhD)	5.4%	10.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

When it comes to the degree the students are studying towards (Table 4), in this sample 2 out of 5 students are enrolled in Bachelor programmes, while the EUROSTUDENT IV study shows a proportion of 2 in 3 students in a Bachelor programme. This divergence is deliberate, given that the aim of this study is to adequately capture the perspectives on quality by Master students as well.

It is interesting to note (a) a low proportion of 4-year bachelor and 1-year master students and (b) a large proportion of students (almost 30 percent) that are enrolled into integrated master programmes. Both can be linked to the sampling procedure (see sections 3.3 and 3.4). However, it should be stressed that the 3+2 combination of the two Bologna cycles is in general more common in Europe than the 4+1 combination and integrated 5-year master programmes are also relatively common (especially in areas where previous degrees lasted 5 years), though in the latter case the particular pattern observed here can also indicate differences in the understanding of the terms “integrated master”. Concerning this, Slovenian responses are particularly interesting given that all Slovenian respondents reported being part of integrated master programmes.

The large majority of respondents (over 80 percent) are full-time students, which is in line with the EUROSTUDENT IV data. The vast majority of part-time students in the sample of this study comes from Germany (almost 90 percent of the number of part-time respondents). The latter is clearly linked to the sampling procedure and the fact that the German sample also included a large distance-learning institution.

Table 4 Distribution of respondents in terms of the final degree they are studying towards

	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Bachelor, 3 years	33.2%	33.2%
Bachelor, 4 years	7.6%	40.8%
Master, 1 year	1.1%	41.9%
Master, 2 years	14.1%	55.9%
Integrated master, 5 years	29.1%	85.1%
non-Bologna degree	14.9%	100.0%
Total	100.0%	

Slightly more than half of the respondents claim not to pay tuition or registration fees, while in the EUROSTUDENT IV data around 40 percent claim not to have such costs. This difference can be explained by the fact that the EUROSTUDENT data includes both the UK and Ireland. Country specific analysis reveals that the average students pay for one year is lowest in Slovenia and Norway, which is in line with the fact that in these two countries there is no tuition, only relatively low semester registration fees. The average amount paid is highest in Latvia (a bit less than 500 EUR on average). Minority of students receive loans (11.5 percent) or grants and scholarships (22.1 percent), with the sources of such support primarily being public (around 90 percent). Slovenian students do not receive a loan but the proportion of them receiving grants and scholarships is quite high (around  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the total number of Slovenian respondents). Not surprisingly, Norwegian students are better supported than their colleagues in the other four countries with more than 80 percent of them claiming to receive a grant or scholarship and more than 90 percent receiving a loan.

In general, a bit less than half of the respondents (46.5 percent) are working while studying, with 52.3 percent having a job that is not related to their study and 56 percent spending more than 15 hours per week on that job. A country specific analysis shows that while more than half of the respondents from Germany and Norway are working while studying, it is only one in four respondents in Poland and only one in three in Latvia who do the same. In Slovenia a bit more than 40 percent of respondents work while studying. However, while respondents who work in Norway spend relatively little time working (only 20 percent works more than 15 hours per week), around 65 percent of respondents working in Poland and Latvia spend more than 15 hours per week on their job, compared to 60 percent in Germany and 34 percent in Slovenia. Comparing these results to the data from EUROSTUDENT IV discrepancies only exist in relation to Germany and Latvia; in both countries there is a higher proportion of students working more than 15 hours per week in this study than in EUROSTUDENT IV. In terms of other activities, around 42 percent of the respondents were involved in

extra-curricular activities (not including work), with the highest proportions in Slovenia (66.5 percent) and Norway (62.1 percent).

Similar to EUROSTUDENT IV, most of the respondents were, at the time of the survey, studying in their country of origin (almost 94 percent). Almost 80 percent of those who were not from the country they were studying in indicated that they do plan to complete their entire degree outside of their country of origin. The highest proportion of foreign students amongst the respondents was identified in Germany (8.5 percent) and Norway (6.5 percent), and this is where almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of students also expected to complete their entire degree outside of their country of origin. Contrary to this, all respondents who were at the time of the survey studying in Latvia were Latvians, and less than 1 percent of respondents from Poland were not Polish. In general, one quarter of the students planned to study elsewhere after they complete their current degree, with the highest proportion of those in Slovenia (64 percent) and Latvia (49 percent).

In terms of student activism, 10.5 percent of respondents were active in the student unions, primarily on the department or faculty level (5.3 percent). Less than 1 percent of respondents were active on the national or European level. The proportion of respondents who were at some point active in the student union was highest in Norway (26.1 percent) and Latvia (22.7 percent) and lowest in Germany (8.7 percent) and Poland (8.6 percent). However, these differences should be primarily seen in light of how the survey was distributed (through the student unions or through the universities) and how student unions in these countries are organised, and less so in terms of differences in the overall level of activism amongst the students.

*Table 5 Distribution of respondents in terms of their perception of own academic performance*

	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Among the bottom 25% of your class/ course	5.2%	5.2%
Average of your class/course	61.8%	66.9%
Among the top 25% of your class/ course	33.1%	100.0%
Total	100.0%	

Majority of the students (around 60 percent, see Table 5) perceive themselves as average in terms of academic performance. Latvian students seem most confident, given that around  $\frac{2}{3}$  perceive themselves to be among the top 25 of their class/course, while in the other countries proportion of such confident students is between 31 percent and 34 percent.

## 4.2 MOTIVATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS FROM HIGHER EDUCATION

One section of the survey focused on the influences on respondents' choice to pursue higher education in general, as well as on the influences on their choice of a particular higher education institution and study programme.

### CHOOSING HIGHER EDUCATION AS SUCH

Respondents were first asked to indicate level of agreement with a number of statements concerning their choice to pursue higher education, by using Likert-type scale, from 1 corresponding to “strongly disagree” to 5 corresponding to “strongly agree”. As indicated in Table 6, respondents disagree with the view that their choice of higher education was connected to their family expectations, though they agree with the link between their own choice and choice of their peers. Job prospects are important for choosing to pursue higher education, though it is more about better employment or employment that is desirable to the respondents and much less related to the poor employment opportunities with only a high school degree. Finally, an interest in the topic of the study seems to be the most important amongst this group of reasons.

*Table 6 Reasons for choosing to pursue higher education: Percentage of total respondents per level of agreement, mean and standard deviation*

	It was expected from my family	Most of my friends from high school went to HE	I am expecting a higher salary or better employment	I was very much interested in this topic	I need a HE degree in order to get the job I want	I did not find suitable employment after high school
Strongly disagree (1), %	32.5	11.9	5.0	1.2	6.9	58.6
Disagree (2), %	21.6	16.0	3.7	2.4	5.8	18.8
Neither disagree nor agree (3), %	15.2	16.0	8.1	9.0	13.5	11.5
Agree (4), %	19.6	30.6	31.1	31.4	21.4	6.4
Strongly agree (5), %	11.1	25.5	52.1	55.9	52.4	4.8
Mean	2.54	3.42	4.21	4.39	4.09	1.79
Standard deviation	1.390	1.332	1.080	0.835	1.218	1.153

Country differences in this respect are analysed by comparing means (and their standard deviations) on different statements between the five countries. The analysis reveals that, comparatively speaking, family expectations are least important in Poland, with an average score of 2.03 (small standard deviation 1.176), corresponding closely to “disagree”. Average score for Germany is 2.58 (standard deviation 1.397), with 51.9 percent of respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing and 31.2 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing. On the other end is Latvia with the average score of 3.62, 58.9 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing and only 19.6 percent disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement about family expectations.

Concerning the statement “most of my friends from high school went to higher education”, while in all five countries the average score is above 3 (from 3.3 in Germany to 3.75 in Slovenia, suggesting a higher proportion of agree and strongly disagree) the dispersion is also relatively high (and highest in Poland, with the 1.425 standard deviation). Expectations of higher salary and better employment opportunities as well as the requirements for jobs that are of interest to the respondents seem highest in Norway, with 4.58 and 4.54 scores respectively, opposed to Germany (4.14 and 4.01). Respondents from Germany seem however less concerned with regards to job prospects with only a high school degree (average score 1.62) compared to Norway or Poland (averages scores of 2 and 2.1 respectively).

In general, when it comes to students’ choice to pursue higher education, an interest in the topic studied is the most important, followed by expectations of higher salary/better employment and necessity to have a higher education degree in order to qualify for the job of interest. Expectations from family and lack of suitable jobs after high school are least important.

## CHOOSING A PARTICULAR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION AND PARTICULAR FIELD/DISCIPLINE OF STUDY

Once the student chooses to go into higher education, the choice becomes which higher education institution s/he will attend. The respondents were asked to assess the strength of influence of each choice, using a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1—no influence at all to 5—very strong influence. The respondents seemed in general rather independent in their choices given that the different influences presented in Table 7 had all been estimated to be none or very weak for at least 50 percent of the respondents. What stands out is the influence of parents and close friends: with respondents reporting strong or very strong influence in 23.3 percent and 20.2 percent of cases respectively (average scores 2.47 and 2.28). Alumni of the higher education institution and other relatives seemed to have the least influence (1.59 and 1.62 average scores). Teachers are also not very prominent in terms of influence on student choice of a par-

ticular institution, and neither are peers, siblings or other students of a prospective institution.

*Table 7 Strength of influence on the choice of a particular higher education institution: Percentage of total respondents per level of agreement, mean and standard deviation*

	Parents	Siblings	Other relatives	Peers	Close friends	Teachers	Alumni	Other students
No influence at all (1), %	31.7	58.1	64.0	58.5	38.8	57.7	68.0	58.7
Very little influence (2), %	19.8	18.1	17.1	18.5	19.5	16.7	13.9	16.8
Medium influence (3), %	25.2	14.2	12.6	15.4	21.6	15.4	11.4	14.3
Strong influence (4), %	16.3	6.9	4.9	5.7	15.0	7.7	5.2	7.2
Very strong influence (5), %	7.0	2.7	1.4	1.9	5.2	2.5	1.5	3.0
Mean	2.47	1.79	1.62	1.73	2.28	1.81	1.59	1.79
Standard deviation	1.263	1.090	0.968	1.027	1.258	1.099	0.978	1.108

With regards to comparison between countries, parents seem to have the strongest influence in Norway (mean 3.17) and the weakest in Germany (2.22). Influence of close friends is stronger in Norway (2.99) than in other countries, with weakest influence in Poland and Germany (2.20 and 2.22, respectively). Siblings and alumni of prospective higher education institutions have the highest influence in Latvia, while other relatives, peers, teachers and other students have the highest influence in Norway, compared to other countries. Combining the scores for different sources of influence, Norwegian respondents, on average, reported the strongest influence (with a 2.56 mean score and 0.72 standard deviation) while German respondents reported the weakest influence (with a 1.69 mean and 0.63 standard deviation).

**Table 8** *Strength of influence on the choice of a particular field or discipline: percentages of total respondents per level of agreement, mean and standard deviation*

	Parents	Siblings	Other relatives	Peers	Close friends	Teachers	Alumni	Other students
No influence at all (1)	36.1	62.9	66.1	63.9	47.1	53.9	74.1	67.7
Very little influence (2)	19.1	17.8	16.2	18.0	20.5	17.6	11.4	14.5
Medium influence (3)	24.1	12.3	12.0	12.9	18.9	16.0	9.8	11.7
Strong influence (4)	14.3	5.2	4.3	4.0	10.6	9.0	3.5	4.9
Very strong influence (5)	6.4	1.7	1.3	1.2	2.9	3.5	1.2	1.1
Mean	2.36	1.65	1.59	1.60	2.02	1.90	1.46	1.57
Standard deviation	1.274	0.997	0.951	0.937	1.159	1.167	0.893	0.952

With regards to the choice of a particular field or discipline, the respondents were asked to assess the influence of the different sources in the same way as for choosing a particular higher education institution. As presented in Table 8, the parents and close friends still have more influence than others overall, though in this case the influence of teachers is somewhat stronger than in the case of choosing a particular higher education institution.

With regards to comparison between countries, and similar to the situation with the choice of a particular higher education institution, parents seem to have the strongest influence in Norway (mean 3.1, standard deviation 1.255), and weakest influence in Germany (mean 2.16, standard deviation 1.233). The situation is similar with regards to influence of close friends: Norwegian respondents' mean is 2.66 (standard deviation 1.257) while in Germany and Poland the influence of close friends is much lower (1.96 and 1.97 respectively). The pattern repeats for influences that are in general less important, with Norwegians scoring these influences highest and Germans lowest (except in the case of peers, where Polish scored the lowest). Combining the scores for different sources of influence, Norwegian respondents reported on average the strongest influence (with a 2.39 mean and 0.72 standard deviation) while German respondents

reported the weakest influence (with a 1.64 mean and 0.6 standard deviation), followed by Poland (1.67 mean, 0.572 standard deviation).

In general, when it comes to choosing a particular HEI and a particular programme/discipline, the influence of parents and close friends seems more relevant than others, while the influence of alumni, other students and other relatives seems least relevant. Furthermore, it seems that the respondents rely on others' opinions slightly more when it comes to choosing a particular HEI (mean 1.82, standard deviation 0.660) than when it comes to choosing a programme/discipline (mean 1.71, standard deviation 0.628).

### IMPORTANCE OF DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR STUDENT CHOICE

The overview of importance of different aspects of higher education for student choice is provided in Table 9 (means, number of observations and standard deviations). Overall, the most important aspects for respondents' choice are: career prospects upon graduation (mean 3.78, standard deviation 1.260), reputation of higher education institutions as a whole (mean 3.68, standard deviation 1.172), content of the programme (mean 3.63, standard deviation 1.179) and focus/specialisation of the programme (mean 3.52, standard deviation 1.145). Given that all means are higher than 3.5, the majority of the respondents assessed these as being of strong or very strong importance. Least important aspects are scholarship opportunities (mean 1.96, standard deviation 1.232), suggesting that a large majority was assessing scholarship opportunities as either of no importance at all or of very little importance. Favourable financial conditions for living, as well as mobility and internship opportunities also do not seem to be of significant importance for the respondents.

When it comes to country differences, Norway and Latvia lead in terms of importance of each individual aspect. In Norway the content of the programme (mean 4.42, standard deviation 0.859), location in a particular city ( $M=3.64$ ,  $SD=1.160$ ), reputation of the programme ( $M=4.01$ ,  $SD=0.972$ ), favourable financial conditions for studying ( $M=3.11$ ,  $SD=1.428$ ) and language of instruction ( $M=2.93$ ,  $SD=1.226$ ) are more important than in other countries. For Latvian respondents the focus and specialisation of the programme ( $M=4.06$ ,  $SD=1.074$ ), career prospects upon graduation ( $M=4.34$ ,  $SD=1.012$ ), reputation of institution as a whole ( $M=4.25$ ,  $SD=0.934$ ), opportunities from scholarships ( $M=3.06$ ,  $SD=1.402$ ), mobility opportunities ( $M=3.21$ ,  $SD=1.312$ ), internship opportunities ( $M=3.74$ ,  $SD=1.172$ ), learning ( $M=3.29$ ,  $SD=1.219$ ) and research infrastructure ( $M=2.93$ ,  $SD=1.281$ ), quality of student support services ( $M=3.05$ ,  $SD=1.280$ ) and entrance requirements ( $M=3.44$ ,  $SD=1.275$ ) are more important than for other respondents, although financial conditions for studying also ranked quite high ( $M=3.09$ ,  $SD=1.608$ ). The only two aspects that are not considered to be among

the most important in Norway or Latvia are: distance from home (most important in Poland,  $M=2.94$ ,  $SD=1.383$ ) and flexibility of study programmes where Germany leads the way ( $M=3.05$ ,  $SD=1.559$ ).

*Table 9 Importance of different aspects of higher education for student choice*

	Total		
	Mean	N	SD
Content of the programme (1)	3.63	7940	1.179
Focus/specialisation of the programme (2)	3.52	7838	1.145
Location in particular city (3)	2.85	7892	1.436
Distance from home (4)	2.74	7891	1.419
Career prospects upon graduation (5)	3.78	7921	1.260
Reputation of the programme (6)	3.41	7897	1.246
Reputation of the institution as a whole (7)	3.68	7897	1.172
Scholarship opportunities (8)	1.96	7781	1.232
Mobility opportunities (9)	2.44	7879	1.352
Internship opportunities (10)	2.44	7805	1.356
Learning infrastructure (11)	2.70	7876	1.300
Research infrastructure (12)	2.29	7793	1.282
Quality of student support services (13)	2.36	7856	1.243
Entrance requirements (14)	2.83	7853	1.416
Language of instruction (15)	2.65	7840	1.401
Flexibility of the study programme (16)	2.86	7821	1.449
Favourable financial conditions for studying (17)	2.94	7852	1.508
Favourable financial conditions for living (18)	2.37	7775	1.337

The individual aspects were combined to reflect more general characteristics of higher education (see section 3.2). The results (means, number of observations, standard deviations) are provided in Table 10.

Table 10 Importance of combined aspects for student choice

	Mean	N	SD
Importance of programme characteristics for student choice	3.3559	8044	0.71969
Importance of reputation for student choice	3.5445	8003	1.04918
Importance of additional opportunities for student choice	2.2924	7992	1.00922
Importance of employability for student choice	3.1165	8015	1.07099
Importance of infrastructure for student choice	2.4641	7992	0.95941

It can be observed that, when related aspects are combined into more general characteristics of higher education, it is the reputation that seems to be the most important aspect for students' choice, closely followed by programme characteristics. Additional opportunities (mobility, scholarship, internship) seem to be least important.

## EXPECTATIONS FROM HIGHER EDUCATION

The survey also asked the students to indicate their level of agreement with the statements corresponding to various expectations from higher education. The average scores for level of agreement are summarised in Table 11.

*Table 11 Level of agreement with different expectations from higher education*

I am expecting...	Mean	N	SD
HE to provide me with knowledge and personal growth (1)	1.65	7951	0.612
that a HE degree will ensure higher salary (2)	1.12	7918	1.035
to have better employment opportunities (3)	1.30	7915	0.970
the HE programme I am pursuing to have an interesting topic (4)	1.55	7939	0.680
HE to provide me with experience of being part of academic community (5)	0.67	7869	1.130
HE to contribute to the development of my abilities of critical thinking (6)	1.25	7914	0.909
HE to prepare me to be an active citizen (7)	0.35	7843	1.230
my professors to be specialists in their field (8)	1.48	7890	0.778
as a student to be an integral part of the scholarly community (9)	0.55	7817	1.061
to benefit from training that is relevant to the labour market (10)	0.66	7871	1.223
that pursuing a higher education degree would enable me to work in a university (11)	-0.09	7831	1.260
my study programme to ensure successful and timely completion (12)	1.12	7848	1.022
my study programme to prioritise skills relevant for future employment over theoretical knowledge (13)	0.59	7885	1.258
my HEI to maintain close links with business and industry (14)	0.26	7841	1.296

As can be seen, the three statements with the highest average level of agreement overall are:

- ◊ “I am expecting HE to provide me with knowledge and personal growth”,
- ◊ “I am expecting HE programme I am pursuing to have an interesting topic”, and
- ◊ “I am expecting my professors to be specialist in their field”.

The three least supported statements on average are:

- ◊ “I am expecting that pursuing a HE degree would enable me to work in a university”,
- ◊ “I am expecting my higher education institution to maintain close links with business and industry”, and
- ◊ “I am expecting HE to prepare me to be an active citizen”.

In general, these results reflect to a great extent the respondents’ motivations and background for pursuing higher education (see above).

With regards to country differences, Norwegian respondents, compared to other countries, have a generally higher level of agreement with the majority of the statements and in most cases are more similar to each other than respondents from other countries. German respondents, on the other hand, show generally lower levels of agreement.

Some of the statements concerning expectations from higher education were formulated in order to construct the predominantly Humboldtian view of higher education that stresses a freedom to learn, teach and research as well as the intrinsic value of knowledge (namely statements 1, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9). There were also statements linked closely to a more consumerist view that stresses efficiency and the link to the labour market (statements 2, 3, 10, 12, 13 and 14, see section 3.2).

In general, the Humboldtian view seems somewhat more dominant ( $M=1.0042$ ,  $SD=0.58301$ ) than the consumerist view ( $M=0.8561$ ,  $SD=0.75839$ ). The lower SD for the Humboldtian view also suggests that the respondents are less different from each other in terms of this view than in with regards to consumerist positions, i.e. the sample is more homogeneous with regards to the Humboldtian view of higher education than with the consumerist view. With regards to country differences, while in Norway,

Poland and Slovenia the differences between the two different views are not very high (means differ by less than 0.1), in Latvia and Germany they are (means differ by 0.3 or more). In Germany it is the Humboldtian view that dominates, in Latvia it is the other way around—the consumerist view dominates.

In sum, with regards to expectations from higher education, the respondents expect most of all personal growth and interesting studies taught by specialist in the field. The respondents overall slightly favour the Humboldtian view of higher education.

The main findings in relation to students' choice, motivations and expectations from higher education:

- ▶ When it comes to choice to pursue higher education, an interest in the topic studied is the most important, followed by expectations of higher salary/better employment and necessity to have a higher education degree in order to qualify for the job of interest.
- ▶ In terms of choosing a particular higher education institution and a particular programme/discipline, the influence of parents and close friends seems more relevant than others, while the influence of alumni, other students and other relatives seems least relevant.
- ▶ The most important aspects of higher education for the respondents' choice are: career prospects upon graduation, reputation of higher education institutions as a whole, the content of the programme and focus/specialisation of the programme. The least important aspects are scholarship opportunities.
- ▶ With regards to expectations from higher education, the respondents expect most from a personal growth and interesting studies to be taught by specialist in the field.
- ▶ The respondents are overall slightly in favour of the Humboldtian view of higher education.

## 4.3 STUDENT INFORMATION NEEDS

### USE OF INFORMATION

As can be seen from Table 12, respondents rely primarily on online sources of information (such as a website of the programme or the higher education institution) and less so on printed information. Open/information days organised by the institution are used by approximately  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the respondents. In terms of country differences, it is interesting to observe a very high proportion of respondents from Slovenia who rely on information/open days organised by their institutions (87 percent). Information/open days are least used in Norway.

*Table 12 Use of information sources provided by higher education institutions (percentages calculated within categories of responses)*

	Not available	1.2%
Website of the programme	Did not use	9.6%
	Used	89.2%
	Not available	8.2%
Printed brochure of the programme	Did not use	43.0%
	Used	48.9%
	Not available	0.6%
Website of the institution	Did not use	6.6%
	Used	92.8%
	Not available	6.9%
Printed brochure of the institution	Did not use	46.8%
	Used	46.3%
	Not available	2.8%
Information/Open Days organised by institution	Did not use	63.0%
	Used	34.2%

When it comes to other sources of information, the picture is quite diverse (Table 13). Overall, the least used are student unions and websites of public authorities (such as ministries responsible for higher education): they were only used by 9.5 percent and 12.3 percent of the respondents respectively. The reason for this could be that the information that is relevant for the choice of higher education is not provided by student unions or on websites of public authorities. Alternatively, the needs of students for information could well be satisfied by other sources, indicating that the student unions

and public authorities do not provide an added-value information-wise. An exception to this is Slovenia where the use of student union information and information from websites of public authorities is quite high (22.8 percent and 28.2 percent respectively). In this case, the student unions and public authorities may well be compensating for the identified lack of information available at higher education institutions.

Apart from the websites of programmes and institutions themselves the most used information sources are other students who are currently studying or used to study in the higher education institution of choice (used by 59.6 percent of respondents), followed by university rankings (used by 52.4 percent of respondents). Social media, media reports and employment statistics are on average used by  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the respondents (31.6 percent, 31.3 percent and 30.2 percent respectively).

In terms of country differences, other students are the information source mostly used in Slovenia (84.1 percent) and least in Germany (48.5 percent). Social media seems to be least used in Norway (18.1 percent) and most used in Latvia (44.9 percent) and Slovenia (45.9 percent). Latvian respondents also seem to use more media reports than respondents from other countries (58.2 percent). University rankings are very much used in Poland (72 percent) and least so in Norway (26 percent). While this could be linked to the mushrooming of private higher education institutions in the past in Poland, it is interesting to observe a rather high use of rankings in Germany (50.3 percent) and Latvia (43.9 percent) as well. Employment statistics and labour market opportunities are least used in Germany (18.7 percent) and most in Slovenia (61.5 percent).

*Table 13 Use of other information sources (percentages calculated within categories of responses)*

Social media	Not available	5.0%
	Did not use	63.4%
	Used	31.6%
Media reports	Not available	6.7%
	Did not use	62.0%
	Used	31.3%
University rankings	Not available	2.7%
	Did not use	44.9%
	Used	52.4%
Website of public authorities	Not available	3.5%
	Did not use	84.2%
	Used	12.3%
Recommendation from someone who studies/studied there	Not available	6.5%
	Did not use	33.8%
	Used	59.6%
Employment statistics and labour market opportunities	Not available	4.2%
	Did not use	65.5%
	Used	30.2%
Student Union	Not available	2.5%
	Did not use	88.0%
	Used	9.5%

Overall, the respondents seem to get most of their information from websites of programme/higher education institutions, from other students and a lot of them also seem to use university rankings. Least used are student unions and websites of public authorities.

## IMPORTANCE OF DIFFERENT SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The respondents were asked to assess separately how important for their choice were these sources of information, by selecting an option from a Likert-type scale in which “completely unimportant” was ranked as -2 while “very important” was ranked as +2. The overview of the means for each source of information (with corresponding standard deviations and numbers of relevant observations) is provided in Table 14. The closer the mean is to 2, the more it corresponds to “very important”, and the closer the mean is to -2, the closer it corresponds to “completely unimportant. Mean around 0 corresponds to “neither important nor unimportant”.

*Table 14 Importance of different information sources (M—mean, N— number of valid responses, SD—standard deviation)<sup>8</sup>*

Importance of	M	N	SD
Website of the programme	0.95	6898	1.149
Printed brochure of the programme	-0.15	6897	1.334
Website of the HEI	0.92	6895	1.139
Social media	-0.65	6895	1.245
Printed brochure of the HEI	-0.30	6894	1.303
Media reports	-0.52	6894	1.207
University rankings	0.13	6896	1.391
Website of public authorities	-1.05	6893	1.088
Website of QAA <sup>8</sup>	-1.05	6895	1.117
Recommendation from someone who studies/studied there	0.37	6894	1.376
Employment statistics	-0.31	6897	1.360
Open Days organised by the HEI	-0.31	6892	1.397
Student Union	-0.96	6894	1.133

As can be seen, not only are the websites of programmes and higher education institutions the most used but also considered to be the most important sources of information. All other sources of information are far behind in importance: the third most important source of information is “recommendation from other students” with the

<sup>8</sup> Due to problems in exporting data, there was a high number of missing responses for the use of website of QAA, but sufficient responses with regards to importance and quality of such information. Therefore, the data about QAA website was not reported in Table 13, but is reported in Tables 14 and 15.

mean of 0.37. The only other source of information with a positive mean is university rankings. The least important sources of information are websites of public authorities and quality assurance agencies. While in general the diversity amongst respondents does not seem very high, the respondents are most diverse with regards to importance assigned to open/information days organised by higher education institutions and university rankings (compare standard deviations).

In terms of country differences, the programme and higher education institutions websites are more important in Germany and Latvia (means higher than 1) than in Slovenia (means a bit below zero). Recommendations from other students are most important in Slovenia ( $M=0.98$ ) and least in Germany ( $M=0.16$ ). University rankings are most important in Poland ( $M=0.69$ ) and least in Norway ( $M=-0.68$ ).

In sum, patterns with regards to importance assigned to sources of information follow the patterns identified with regards to use of information, both in general and in terms of country differences.

## QUALITY OF INFORMATION

Finally, the respondents were asked to assess the quality of information provided by each of these sources. The assessment was done using a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 which corresponds to “very low quality, almost useless”, to 5 “excellent quality”.

As can be seen from Table 15, information provided by (a) programme and institution websites and (b) recommendations provided by those who used to or are currently attending said institution, is considered to be of higher quality than other sources, though it should be noted that for the latter the respondents were more diverse in their responses than for the former (compare standard deviations). The quality of information provided by public authorities and quality assurance agencies, as well as student unions and social media is, on the other hand, considered of least quality (in relative terms).

Table 15 Quality of different information sources (M—mean, N— number of valid responses, SD—standard deviation)<sup>9</sup>

Quality of	M	N	SD
Website of the programme	3.60	6427	0.878
Printed brochure of the programme	3.36	4767	0.917
Website of the HEI	3.62	6523	0.873
Social media	2.79	4399	1.046
Printed brochure of the HEI	3.27	4547	0.951
Media reports	2.89	4478	0.979
University rankings	3.18	5571	1.092
Website of public authorities	2.55	3458	1.050
Website of QAA <sup>9</sup>	2.53	3371	1.055
Recommendation from someone who studies/studied there	3.66	5484	1.076
Employment statistics	2.95	4379	1.113
Open Days organised by the HEI	3.26	4475	1.156
Student Union	2.78	3508	1.127

In terms of country differences, the patterns observed with regards to the use and importance of information sources are reflected in how the quality of these resources has been assessed. Overall, in the entire sample the quality of information provided has been assessed as relatively high ( $M=3.3077$ ,  $SD=0.61685$ ).

In sum, the respondents seem to get most of their information from the websites of a programme/institution and from other students. A lot of them also seem to use university rankings. Least used are student unions and websites of public authorities. The same pattern exists with regards to importance of information for students' choice as well as respondents' assessment of the quality of the provided information.

<sup>9</sup> Due to problems in exporting data, there was a high number of missing responses for the use of website of QAA, but sufficient responses with regards to importance and quality of such information. Therefore, the data about QAA website was not reported in Table 13, but is reported in Tables 14 and 15.

## 4.4 PERSPECTIVES ON QUALITY

This section focuses on the respondents' perspectives on quality in higher education, namely the different dimensions of quality as conceptualised by Harvey and Green (1993) and the distinction between quality as selectivity/elitism and quality as added-value/inclusion (see section 3.2 and Appendix).

### STAKEHOLDERS' VIEWS ON QUALITY

The first statement addressed differences in views concerning quality between professors and students: "There are different views on what is perceived as quality in higher education by professors and students."

Overall 5944 students responded to this statement. The mean value of the answers is 0.53 and the median and mode are 1. The Standard Deviation is 1.03. These numbers point to the fact that the respondents rather agree with the statement. The detailed reaction is presented in Table 16.

Table 16 Differences between students and professors in the perception of quality

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly disagree	181	3.0%	3.0%
Disagree	888	14.8%	17.8%
Neither disagree nor agree	1476	24.6%	42.5%
Agree	2453	40.9%	83.4%
Strongly agree	996	16.6%	100.0%
Total	5994	100.0%	

More than half of the respondents (57.5 percent) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement and that only 17.8 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with it. When looking into the responses per country Germany, Norway, Poland and Slovenia mirror the general results. The responses from Latvia however show stronger amount of disagreement with the statement. Only around one fifth of the respondents from Latvia either agreed or strongly agreed to the statement.

The second statement addressed the difference in the views on quality within the group of professors: "In discussions about the quality of our study programmes professors seldom have a unified position."

To this statement 5061 participants responded. The mean value is 0.23, the median 0 and the mode 1. The Standard Deviation is 1.02. These figures indicate that the respondents were rather neutral in their judgement with a slight tendency towards agreeing with the statement. In detail the respondents reacted as presented in Table 17.

*Table 17 Differences in the perceptions of quality within the group of professors*

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly disagree	232	4.6%	4.6%
Disagree	1024	20.2%	24.8%
Neither disagree nor agree	1641	32.4%	57.2%
Agree	1700	33.6%	90.8%
Strongly agree	464	9.2%	100.0%
Total	5061	100.0%	

Around one quarter of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, while 32.4 percent had a neutral position. 42.8 percent of the students agreed or strongly agreed. The tendency of the answers is less clear in the second statement compared to the first but the tendency of the responses is towards an agreement with the statement and thus the opinion that the group of professors has a varying view in quality discussions of specific study programmes.

The country specific analysis shows similar results as the one connected to statement 1. Germany, Poland, Norway and Slovenia mirror more or less the general results, while Latvia shows differing outcomes. Here more than half of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree with the statement, thus pointing towards a more unified position of the group of professors.

## DIMENSIONS OF QUALITY BASED ON HARVEY AND GREEN

The following ten statements (3-12) address the different dimensions of quality proposed by Harvey and Green. Each dimension will be addressed by two statements. The first two statements cover the idea of quality as excellence and read as follows:

- ◊ “The quality of a study programme only depends on its academic excellence.”
- ◊ “Programmes need to be taught by teachers who are exceptional experts in their fields.”

The first of the two statements was answered by 5852 students and has a mean value of 0.5 with a mode and median of 1 and a Standard Deviation of 1.01. The second one was answered by 6342 respondents and has a mean value of 0.91 with a median of 1 and a mode of 2. Here the Standard Deviation is 1.08. These results show that generally there is a tendency to agree to both statements with the second one being supported by more students. The detailed results of the responses are provided in Table 18.

*Table 18 Quality as excellence*

	Statement 1		Statement 2	
Strongly disagree (1)	246	(4.2%)	157	(2.5%)
Disagree (2)	596	(10.2%)	679	(10.7%)
Neither disagree nor agree (3)	1935	(33.1%)	1054	(16.6%)
Agree (4)	2139	(36.5%)	2147	(33.9%)
Strongly agree (5)	936	(16.0%)	2305	(36.3%)
Total	5852	(100%)	6342	(100%)

The detailed responses to both statements show rather similar results concerning the amount of people (strongly) disagreeing with them. In both cases roughly 14 percent showed some form of disagreement. Also the amount of students agreeing with the statements is with about 36 percent rather similar. The major difference between both statements is that while the first one was strongly agreed by 16 percent, the second was strongly agreed by 36 percent. In both cases the strengthness of the agreement leads to the conclusion that more than half of the respondents, in one way or another, support the idea that quality in higher education is linked to excellence.

In the country specific analysis the first statement shows a rather common picture in the case of Germany, Latvia, Poland and Slovenia, while the Norwegian data shows an especially strong support for the statement. For the second statement the picture is different. While Germany and Norway show results rather similar to the general findings, Latvia, Poland and Slovenia show an especially large number of responses strongly agreeing with the statement.

The next two statements address the dimension of quality as fitness for purpose:

- “It is clear to me what the purpose of my study programme is.”
- “The courses are well structured so they ensure that the aim of the programme is achieved.”

The first one of these two statements was answered by 6337 students. The mean value is 1.17, the median is 1 and the mode is 2. The Standard Deviation is 0.99. The second of the statements was answered by 6270 respondents. The mean value is 1.27, the median is 1 the mode is 2. The Standard Deviation is 0.92. These values show that a large part of the respondents agrees with the statements and that the second statement is supported even stronger than the first one (see Table 19).

Table 19 *Quality as fitness for purpose*

	Statement 1		Statement 2	
Strongly disagree (1)	197	(3.1%)	106	(1.7%)
Disagree (2)	255	(4.0%)	269	(4.3%)
Neither disagree nor agree (3)	709	(11.2%)	574	(9.2%)
Agree (4)	2272	(35.9%)	2210	(35.2%)
Strongly agree (5)	2904	(45.8%)	3111	(49.6%)
Total	6337	(100%)	6270	(100%)

Both statements show also in the detailed results many similarities. In both cases more than 40 percent strongly agreed with the statements and around 35 percent agreed with each of them. Only a small percentage of 7.1 percent and 6 percent respectively disagrees with the statements in any form. This shows the strength of the support for the idea of quality as fitness for purpose.

In the country specific analysis the results of all countries are rather similar and mirror the general findings. The only outcome worth pointing to is that compared to the other countries the amount of disagreement to the two statements is much higher in Poland. Here, around 15 percent of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed to the two statements.

The next dimension of quality covered is the concept of quality as exceptional, represented through these two statements:

- ▶ “A good programme offers something that others don’t.”
- ▶ “Good programmes offer novel approaches to core topics in a field.”

The first statement was answered by 6262 students. Its mean value is 0.58, the median and the mode have a value of 1. The Standard Deviation is 1.08. The second statement has 6243 respondents. The mean value is 0.92 and the mode and median are 1. Its Standard Deviation is 0.91. These results already show that the agreement with this concept is similar to the concept of quality as excellence and a bit weaker than with the idea of quality as fitness for purpose (Table 20).

Table 20 *Quality as exceptional*

	Statement 1		Statement 2	
Strongly disagree (1)	253	(4.0%)	88	(1.4%)
Disagree (2)	717	(11.5%)	305	(4.9%)
Neither disagree nor agree (3)	1819	(29.0%)	1397	(22.4%)
Agree (4)	2073	(33.1%)	2683	(43.0%)
Strongly agree (5)	1400	(22.4%)	1770	(28.3%)
Total	6262	(100%)	6243	(100%)

The responses show a stronger support to the second statement than to the first one. While 55.6 percent (strongly) agree with the first one, 71.3 percent (strongly) agree with the second one. The level of disagreement is also lower in the second statement with only 6.3 percent (strongly) disagreeing as compared to 15.5 percent. Overall, the results mirror rather well the ones from the set of statements that addressed the idea of quality as excellence.

The responses analysed by country show rather similar results. Only two findings stand out: for the first statement the responses from Latvia show an exceptionally strong agreement with the statement and for the second statement the replies from Slovenia are very strongly agreeing with the proposed statement. All other countries mirror the general results.

The next two statements address the dimension understanding quality as value for money:

- ◊ “The higher the costs for a study programme the more I expect of it.”
- ◊ “I am willing to pay more for my education if the quality of the study programme is very high.”

The first of the two statements was answered by 5983 respondents. Its mean value is 0.24, the median is 0 and the mode 2. The Standard Deviation is 1.46. The second statement was commented by 6049 students with a mean value of 0.1. The median is 0 and the mode is 1. The Standard Deviation is 1.33. These values indicate that the amount of agreement with these two statements is much lower than with all prior ones. However, the large Standard Deviation gives reason to believe that the differences within the dataset are rather large. This could point towards the fact that the statements polarise more than others (Table 21).

Table 21 *Quality as value for money*

	Statement 1		Statement 2	
Strongly disagree (1)	1046	(17.5%)	996	(16.5%)
Disagree (2)	962	(16.1%)	1032	(17.1%)
Neither disagree nor agree (3)	1171	(19.6%)	1452	(24.0%)
Agree (4)	1118	(18.7%)	1521	(25.1%)
Strongly agree (5)	1686	(28.1%)	1048	(17.3%)
Total	5983	(100%)	6049	(100%)

The table shows that the percentage of those respondents that do not agree with both statements lies around 33 percent and is much higher than it was the case for prior statements. However, there are also around 40 percent of the respondents that agree with the statements. This shows that the students are much more divided in the judgement of this dimension of quality as they were concerning the previous dimensions.

The country specific analysis shows that the division in the answers can be partially traced back to the country in which the students study. In the case of the first statement respondents from Latvia, Poland and Slovenia rather agree with it, while respondents from Germany tend to have a more balanced view and respondents from Norway rather disagree with it. The second statement is overall judged more or less neutral by respondents from Germany and Norway while students from Latvia, Poland and Slovenia are rather agreeing with it. This hints towards a regional impact on the question in how far a value for money dimension of quality is supported by respondents.

The last two statements referring to dimensions of quality based on Harvey and Green capture the concept of quality as transformation:

- ◊ “A good study programme has to broaden the horizon of the students.”
- ◊ “A good study programme provides the students with additional competencies.”

The first statement was answered by 6325 students and has a mean value of 1.59. The median and mode are 2 and the Standard Deviation is 0.69. The second statement has 6265 responses with a mean value of 1.46 and also a median and mode of 2. The Standard Deviation here is 0.75. Based on these numbers one can conclude that this one of Harvey and Green’s dimensions of quality finds the strongest agreement within the group of respondents. Furthermore, the lower Standard Deviation points towards a more unified view of the respondents on this issue (Table 22).

Table 22 *Quality as transformation*

	Statement 1		Statement 2	
Strongly disagree (1)	62	(1.0%)	58	(0.9%)
Disagree (2)	29	(0.5%)	96	(1.5%)
Neither disagree nor agree (3)	298	(4.7%)	361	(5.8%)
Agree (4)	1690	(26.7%)	2110	(33.7%)
Strongly agree (5)	4246	(67.1%)	3640	(58.1%)
Total	6325	(100%)	6265	(100%)

Both statements are agreed by more than 90 percent of the respondents and in both cases more than half of the students strongly agreed with the statements. This underlines what was already concluded above, that this dimension of quality is strongly supported by the respondents of this study. Also the picture in the country specific analysis is very homogeneous. All countries show a coherent and strong agreement with the statements.

The following table shows the level of agreement (percentage of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing) and disagreement (percentage of respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing) for each of the five dimensions conceptualised by Harvey and Green: excellence, fitness for purpose, the exceptional, value for money & transformation. The levels are constructed by creating the average percentage of both statements for each of the dimensions (Table 23).

Table 23 *Overview over the dimension of quality based on Harvey and Green*

Dimension	Level of Agreement	Level of Disagreement
Quality as excellence	61.35%	13.8%
Quality as fitness for purpose	83.3%	6.55%
Quality as exceptional	63.4%	10.9%
Quality as value for money	44.7%	33.55%
Quality as transformation	92.8%	1.95%

This table sums up what was debated already before: the respondents agree most with the statements connected to the ideas of quality as transformation and quality as fitness for purpose while the disagreement is strongest with the statements connected to quality as value for money. However, the levels of agreements in all dimensions also point to another conclusion: quality in the eyes of the respondents seems to be a multi-dimensional concept and the respondents seem to be rather homogeneous in

their agreements with the dimensions of quality as transformation and quality as fitness for purpose.

## STUDENTS' ROLE IN THE CURRICULUM PROCESS

The final dimension of quality that is covered by the study investigates the view of the students towards student centred learning and the roles of professors and students in the curriculum process. The two statements connected with it read as follows:

- ◉ “Students should play a significant role in shaping their curriculum.”
- ◉ “Professors should design the curriculum according to their expertise in the subject.”

The first sentence was commented on by 6252 respondents. The mean value is 0.65 and the median and mode have a value of 1. The Standard Deviation is 1.08. The second statement has 6147 responses with a mean value of 0.46 and a median and mode of 1. The Standard Deviation is 1.07. Both statements seem to be rather agreed on by the students, however the first one seems to be supported by more respondents (Table 24).

*Table 24 Students' role in the curriculum process*

	Statement 1		Statement 2	
Strongly disagree (1)	227	(3.6%)	276	(4.5%)
Disagree (2)	707	(11.3%)	915	(14.9%)
Neither disagree nor agree (3)	1641	(26.2%)	1676	(27.3%)
Agree (4)	2140	(34.2%)	2276	(37.0%)
Strongly agree (5)	1537	(24.6%)	1004	(16.3%)
Total	6252	(100%)	6147	(100%)

Each of the statements has more than 50 percent of responses agreeing or strongly agreeing with it and less than 20 percent disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with it. At the same time, both statements have slightly contradicting directions, with the first putting the emphasis on the students' participation and the second emphasising

the professors' role in the curriculum process. The stronger agreement and the lower disagreement with the first statement indicate that the students' role is seen as a bit more important in the curriculum process. However, since both statements are not completely contradictory and one could agree to both of them, the participants clearly favour a curriculum process including both students and professors.

The country specific analysis shows different patterns for both statements. The first one, which emphasises the students' role in the curriculum process, was agreed upon more by respondents from Poland and Norway, while the other countries reflected the general findings. The second statement, pointing towards the professors' role, was agreed more by students from Latvia, less by students from Slovenia and the rest answered in line with the finding above.

To sum up, from the description of the survey in this section one can expand the already presented table on the level of (dis-)agreement to the dimensions of quality by Harvey and Green with the results from the dimensions covering selectivity and added-value (Table 25).

*Table 25 Overview of all measured dimensions of quality*

Dimension	Level of Agreement (in %)	Level of Disagreement (in %)
Quality as excellence	61.35	13.80
Quality as fitness for purpose	83.30	6.55
Quality as exceptional	63.40	10.90
Quality as value for money	44.70	33.55
Quality as transformation	92.80	1.95
Quality as selectivity	29.65	33.05
Quality as added-value	82.00	6.40

This table shows once more that the concept of quality in the eyes of the respondents seems to be a multi-dimensional one and that the dimensions with the highest level of agreement and thus the strongest homogeneity in support are quality as transformation, quality as fitness for purpose and quality as added-value. At the same time the

concepts of quality as selectivity and quality as value for money have both the lowest level of agreement and the highest level of disagreement.

The main findings with regards to perspectives on quality are:

- The participants' concept of quality in higher education is multi-dimensional.
- The dimensions of quality as fitness for purpose, quality as transformation and quality as added-value have the strongest agreement.
- The dimensions of quality as value for money and quality as selectivity have the lowest amount of agreement and the highest level of disagreement.
- The respondents agree that there are different views on quality by students and professors and also within the group of professors.
- The participants agree also to a curriculum process that gives both students and professors an important role.

## QUALITY AS SELECTIVITY AND QUALITY AS ADDED-VALUE

To get an even more detailed picture of the students' view on quality the survey also covered the divide between selectivity and added-value of higher education. Also those two dimensions were analysed using two statements each. For the selectivity part these statements are:

- "The quality of the study programme is measured by its selectivity."
- "A programme has a high quality when the participating professors are chosen based on their reputation."

The first statement was commented on by 5643 students with a mean value of -0.23 and a median and mode of 0. The Standard Deviation is 1.09. The second sentence was answered by 6105 respondents. Here the mean value is 0.09 with a median and mode of 0. The Standard Deviation is 1.14. These numbers indicate that the agreement with those statements is very low and also that there seems to be a bigger spread in the answers. The detailed responses thus look as presented in Table 26.

Table 26 *Quality as selectivity*

	Statement 1	Statement 2
Strongly disagree (1)	884 (15.7%)	584 (9.6%)
Disagree (2)	1185 (21.0%)	1209 (19.8%)
Neither disagree nor agree (3)	2217 (39.3%)	2156 (35.3%)
Agree (4)	1045 (18.5%)	1388 (22.7%)
Strongly agree (5)	312 (5.5%)	768 (12.6%)
Total	5643 (100%)	6105 (100%)

The agreement with the first statement is with 2.4 percent lower than with the second statement, which is agreed by 35.3 percent. At the same time the disagreement with the first statement is higher with 36.7 percent versus 29.4 percent in the case of the second statement. Overall these statements find even less support than the dimension of quality as value for money and the smaller Standard Deviation indicates that the respondents are more united in their rather disagreeing view.

In the country specific analysis, different patterns for each statement emerge. The answers from Norway, Poland and Slovenia to the first statement reflect the general picture, while the ones from Latvia show more agreement with the statement and the ones from Germany more disagreement with the statement. For the second statement the groups shift a bit. Here the answers from Latvia and Norway show stronger agreement, while the ones from Slovenia show less agreement and the ones from Germany and Poland reflect the general picture.

Now, to investigate the dimension of added-value of higher education the following two statements are used:

- ◊ “A programme has a high quality when after finishing it the students are amongst the best in their field.”
- ◊ “A programme is of high quality if it significantly increases the students’ knowledge.”

The first sentence was commented on by 6281 students. The answers have a mean value of 0.95, a median of 1 and a mode of 2. The Standard Deviation is 1.08. The second statement was answered by 6342 participants with a mean value of 1.48 and a median and mode of 2. The Standard Deviation is 0.73. This indicates that the concept of added-value of higher education finds more agreement with the respondents than the one of selectivity. The detailed responses are given in Table 27.

Table 27 *Quality as added-value*

	Statement 1		Statement 2	
Strongly disagree (1)	230	(3.7%)	47	(0.7%)
Disagree (2)	429	(6.8%)	99	(1.6%)
Neither disagree nor agree (3)	1131	(18.0%)	331	(5.2%)
Agree (4)	2115	(33.7%)	2135	(33.7%)
Strongly agree (5)	2376	(37.8%)	3730	(58.8%)
Total	6281	(100%)	6342	(100%)

Both statements show very high levels of agreement with the second one having especially high support with more than 58 percent agreeing strongly with it. At the same time the percentage of students disagreeing with the statement is also very low. The first statement only has 10.5 percent and the second statement 2.3 percent of respondents who disagree with it.

As indicated earlier the differences in answers between both statements might hint towards a problem with constructing validity. There is a chance that both statements don't actually measure the same attitude towards quality as was intended by the researchers. This will be taken into consideration in further analysis.

The country specific results show rather small variations. Concerning the first statement the responses from Germany and Slovenia reflect the general results while the ones from Poland, Norway and Latvia are more positive towards the statement. The answers from Poland and Slovenia show comparatively less support for the second statement than the ones from Latvia, Germany and Norway.

## 4.5 AWARENESS OF QUALITY MECHANISMS ON DIFFERENT LEVELS

Concerning awareness of quality mechanisms on different levels, as indicated in section 3.2, the survey first focuses on eight questions related to the existence and functioning of different quality measures. The first of these questions investigates whether students have the possibility to participate in student evaluations on a regular basis. Here 84.5 percent of the 5549 respondents answer positively while the rest answers negatively. On the question whether the students have ever seen the results of such evaluations, only 56,8 percent of 5863 respondents replies with yes while the rest have never seen those results. When asking whether there was a follow-up to such evaluations of the 3560 respondents roughly  $\frac{2}{3}$  (65.8 percent) say yes.

This part of the survey also investigated more structured student involvement in quality mechanisms. Out of 5330 respondents only 18.2 percent participate in structures that have a particular mandate for quality assurance. 52.1 percent of 3225 students responding don't know whether there is anyone explicitly responsible for quality assurance.

When asked whether evaluations have an effect on quality in higher education 4131 students responded. Of these 57.1 percent are of the opinion that evaluations have an effect. As a follow-up the question was asked whether the respondents are aware of incidents when staff suffered consequences from negative evaluation or where positive evaluations led to incentives. Almost  $\frac{3}{5}$  (59.8 percent) of 2320 respondents say that they are not aware of negative consequences at their institutions, while 78 percent of 2987 students answer that they know of cases where positive incentives were implemented.

The respondents were also asked to indicate how well they judged their knowledge on quality mechanisms in their institution. On the question how well they know how the quality of their study programme is ensured 6259 participants responded. The mean value is 2.34, with a median and mode of 2 and a Standard Deviation of 1.00. This indicates a rather limited knowledge (Table 28).

*Table 28 Knowledge on quality processes on the program level*

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No knowledge at all	1415	22.6%	22.6%
Very limited knowledge	2202	35.2%	57.8%
Some knowledge, but not in depth	1835	29.3%	87.1%
Rather good knowledge	698	11.2%	98.3%
In-depth knowledge	109	1.7%	100.0%
Total	6259	100.0%	

It seems that students themselves judge their knowledge on quality assurance processes connected to their study programme as being rather limited. 57.8 percent have either no knowledge or very limited knowledge and only 12.9 percent claim to have good or in-depth knowledge. Analysing the data per country uncovers that students from Norway and Latvia seem to feel that they have more knowledge than the respondents from the other countries.

When asked to judge their knowledge in the way that their higher education institution works on quality assurance 6259 students replied. The mean value of the responses is 2,28 with a median and mode of 2 and a Standard Deviation of 1,01. These results are only slightly different from the previous ones indicating a similar level of knowledge on the programme and institutional level (Table 29).

*Table 29 Knowledge on quality processes on the institutional level*

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No knowledge at all	1614	25.8%	25.8%
Very limited knowledge	2148	34.3%	60.1%
Some knowledge, but not in depth	1722	27.5%	87.6%
Rather good knowledge	681	10.9%	98.5%
In-depth knowledge	94	1.5%	100.0%
Total	6259	100.0%	

The answers to this question are rather similar to the prior ones with only a small number of students claiming to know even less about the quality assurance work of their institution. The results per country are rather similar to the general findings with only Polish students reporting a bit better knowledge on the issue than the others.

The final question concerning the institutional level investigates in how far students know about ways in which they can get involved in quality assurance process in their institution. 6259 students answered this question. The mean value is 2.55 with a median and mode of 3 and a Standard Deviation of 1.12. This leads to the impression that the knowledge of the respondents on possible ways to get involved in quality debates at their institutions is better than the knowledge on their programmes' or institutions' quality processes. It points towards the conclusion that the participants might be aware of ways how to initialize comments on questions concerning quality, but are less knowledgeable about the actual processes that follow. This is underlined in Table 30.

*Table 30 Knowledge on how to get involved in quality assurance processes on the institutional level*

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No knowledge at all	1345	21.5%	21.5%
Very limited knowledge	1731	27.7%	49.1%
Some knowledge, but not in depth	1825	29.2%	78.3%
Rather good knowledge	1133	18.1%	96.4%
In-depth knowledge	225	3.6%	100.0%
Total	6259	100.0%	

The percentage of respondents claiming to have good or in-depth knowledge is nearly twice as high as with the first two questions. This leads to the conclusion that even though many participants don't know a lot about the quality assurance processes at their institution, the knowledge on possibilities to get involved is more present. However, nearly half of the respondents also claim to have very limited or no knowledge on ways to get involved in their institution. Looking into the country specific results only Norway shows numbers that stand out where the knowledge on ways to get involved seems to be better than in the other countries included in the study.

Taking into consideration that the institutional and especially the programme level are closest to the students' every-day reality and should be best known, the results seem to be on a rather low level. Turning now to national quality assurance processes, the first question addresses the knowledge students think they have on the way the quality of their institution is assured. Here 6247 students answered. The mean value is 2.18, the median and mode is 2 and the Standard Deviation is 0.98. These values suggest a level of knowledge which is only a little below what was indicated on the institutional level (Table 31).

*Table 31 Knowledge on quality processes on the national level concerning the respondents' universities*

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No knowledge at all	1743	27.9%	27.9%
Very limited knowledge	2316	37.1%	65.0%
Some knowledge, but not in depth	1600	25.6%	90.6%
Rather good knowledge	496	7.9%	98.5%
In-depth knowledge	92	1.5%	100.0%
Total	6247	100.0%	

Nearly two-thirds of the respondents has only very limited or no knowledge on the way their institution's quality is assured on the national level and less than 10 percent claim to have good or in-depth knowledge. In the country specific analysis the respondents from Poland and Latvia seem to have a level of knowledge on these issues, which is a bit better than the ones of the other countries.

Asked about their knowledge on the question, in which way quality in higher education in their country is ensured, 6247 participants answered. The mean value is 2.21, the median and mode is 2 and the Standard Deviation is 0.96. These results are very similar to the ones of the first question on the national level quality mechanisms (Table 32).

*Table 32 Knowledge on quality processes on the national level in general*

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No knowledge at all	1647	26.4%	26.4%
Very limited knowledge	2284	36.6%	62.9%
Some knowledge, but not in depth	1756	28.1%	91.0%
Rather good knowledge	474	7.6%	98.6%
In depth knowledge	86	1.4%	100.0%
Total	6247	100.0%	

These results also show the similarity between the answers to the previous question. More than 60 percent of the students have very limited or no knowledge at all of national quality assurance processes that address the institutions' quality. Also in the

country specific analysis the picture is very similar with Poland and Latvia showing a better level of knowledge than the average.

The third question asked was about knowledge on ways on how students can get involved in quality assurance on a national level. This question was answered by 6247 respondents. The mean value is 2.15, the median and mode is 2 and the Standard Deviation is 0.98. These answers show less knowledge on the ways on how students can get involved on the national level compared to the institutional, but a similar level of knowledge than in the other questions connected to the national level (Table 33).

*Table 33 Knowledge on how to get involved in quality assurance processes on the national level*

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No knowledge at all	1880	30.1%	30.1%
Very limited knowledge	2174	34.8%	64.9%
Some knowledge, but not in depth	1627	26.0%	90.9%
Rather good knowledge	491	7.9%	98.8%
In-depth knowledge	75	1.2%	100.0%
Total	6247	100.0%	

Also the detailed results reflect the previous ones connected to the national level. Furthermore, the difference in knowledge on students' involvement between the institutional and national level becomes clearer. While on the national level about 30 percent have no knowledge at all, 35 percent have only very limited knowledge and only 9.1 percent have good or in-depth knowledge, at the institutional level these numbers are 22 percent, 28 percent and 21.7 percent respectively. In the country specific analysis it also becomes clear that the results from Germany are below the average while results from Poland and Latvia show above average knowledge.

The final questions concerning the national level asked for the knowledge of the students on the work of the national union of students in general and more specifically on quality assurance. These two questions were answered by 6247 respondents. Concerning the general activities of the national union of students the mean answer was 1.89 with a median of 2, a mode 1 and a Standard Deviation of 1.02. The mean value concerning the quality related work of the national union of students is 1.82, the median is 2, the mode 1 and the Standard Deviation is 0.96. These numbers indicate that the knowledge of the activities of the national student union is rather low and even lower on specific quality assurance activities (Table 34).

Table 34 Knowledge on the activities of the national unions of students

	General activities		Quality assurance activities	
No knowledge at all (1)	2939	(47.0%)	3056	(48.9%)
Very limited knowledge (2)	1662	(26.6%)	1722	(27.6%)
Some knowledge, but not in depth (3)	1089	(17.4%)	1060	(17.0%)
Rather good knowledge (4)	507	(8.0%)	364	(5.8%)
In-depth knowledge (5)	50	(0.8%)	45	(0.7%)
Total	6247	(100%)	6247	(100%)

In both cases nearly half of the respondents have no knowledge at all on the activities of their national union of students, be it in general or specifically on quality assurance. Rather good or in-depth knowledge is claimed in both cases by less than 10 percent of the participants. This might indicate that national unions of students have problems reaching out to the grass-roots level. The country specific analysis uncovers interesting groupings. The answers from German respondents to both questions indicate a level of knowledge below average, while the Norwegian results reflect more or less the general picture. Slovenia, Poland and Latvia show a higher level of knowledge both on general and quality related activities of the respective student union.

In the last section the students were asked about their knowledge on European processes in quality assurance. The first question referred to European initiatives connected to quality in higher education in general. It was answered by 6245 respondents. The mean value is 1.8, the median is 2, the mode 1 and the Standard Deviation is 0.95 (Table 35).

Table 35 Knowledge on European initiatives in quality assurance

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No knowledge at all	3090	49.5%	49.5%
Very limited knowledge	1747	28.0%	77.5%
Some knowledge, but not in depth	995	15.9%	93.4%
Rather good knowledge	377	6.0%	99.4%
In-depth knowledge	36	0.6%	100.0%
Total	6245	100.0%	

The answers to this question portray a level of knowledge comparable to the one concerning the activities of national unions of students and below the level of knowledge on other national quality assurance processes. Generally, the knowledge of European activities can be seen as rather low, with around 50 percent of the students having no knowledge at all and below 7 percent claiming to have rather good or in-depth knowledge. The country specific analysis shows that students in Poland and Latvia claim to have a better knowledge of European initiatives than the remaining countries.

The second, third and fourth question asked for the students' knowledge of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG), the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) and the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) respectively. The question concerning the ESG was answered by 6243 students, with a mean value of 1.63, a median and mode of 1 and a Standard Deviation of 0.90. The question concerning EQAR had 6245 respondents. The mean value was 1.46, the median and mode were 1 and the Standard Deviation was 0.80. The question addressing ENQA was also answered by 6245 respondents. Its mean value was 1.45. The median and mode were 1 and the Standard Deviation is 0.79. All these concrete initiatives were less known than the general term of European initiatives (Table 36).

*Table 36 Knowledge on the ESGs, EQAR and ENQA*

	ESG		EQAR		ENQA	
No knowledge at all (1)	3724	(59.7%)	4328	(69.3%)	4365	(69.9%)
Very limited knowledge (2)	1490	(23.9%)	1190	(19.1%)	1167	(18.7%)
Some knowledge, but not in depth (3)	713	(11.4%)	544	(8.7%)	542	(8.7%)
Rather good knowledge (4)	277	(4.4%)	146	(2.3%)	132	(2.1%)
In-depth knowledge (5)	39	(0.6%)	37	(0.6%)	39	(0.6%)
Total	6243	(100%)	6245	(100%)	6245	(100%)

All three initiatives have more than 80 percent of respondents claiming they have very limited or no knowledge at all and between 5 percent and 3 percent stating to have rather good or in-depth knowledge. Since those three initiatives are the most prominent European quality assurance activities this calls the results on the first question concerning European initiatives in general a bit into question and leads to the possible conclusion that the knowledge in the first question concerning the European level could have been overstated by some participants. Looking into the analysis per country concerning the knowledge about the ESG, Latvian, Slovenian and Polish respond-

ents claim to have more knowledge, while German and Norwegian ones seem to have less knowledge. Concerning EQAR, German participants have again less knowledge, while Slovenia ones claim to have more knowledge and the rest showing an average result. On the question related to ENQA, Latvian respondents claim to have more knowledge, Germans have again less knowledge and the rest shows an average result.

The final two questions in this section address the knowledge of the work of the European Students Union (ESU) in general and on quality assurance in specific. Both questions were answered by 6245 respondents. The mean value connected to ESU's general activities is 1.53, the median and mode is 1 and the Standard Deviation is 0.82. Concerning ESU's activities related to quality assurance the mean value is 1.49. The median and mode have a value of 1 and the Standard Deviation is 0.81 (Table 37).

*Table 37 Knowledge on the activities of the European Students Union*

	General activities		Quality assurance activities	
No knowledge at all (1)	3980	(63.7%)	4177	(66.9%)
Very limited knowledge (2)	1471	(23.6%)	1330	(21.4%)
Some knowledge, but not in depth (3)	586	(9.4%)	527	(8.4%)
Rather good knowledge (4)	171	(2.7%)	171	(2.7%)
In-depth knowledge (5)	37	(0.6%)	40	(0.6%)
Total	6245	(100%)	6245	(100%)

Comparing the knowledge of ESU and of the national unions of students it shows that the respondents know less about ESU than about their national representation. While nearly 90 percent claim to have very limited or no knowledge at all on ESU's activities, be it in general or related to quality assurance, on the national level this is "only" around 75 percent. The country specific analysis shows similar patterns as in the case of the questions connected to the national unions of students. German participants report especially low levels of knowledge on ESU's general activities, while Latvians claim to have more knowledge and the other countries show average results. Concerning ESU's activities in quality assurance Latvians again report a higher level of knowledge and Germans and Norwegians claim to know less. The other countries show again average results.

Overall, this section showed that the further away from the students' day-to-day reality a quality assurance actor or mechanism is the less the students know about it. This also applies to the activities of student unions at the different levels. In general, the overall level of information seems to be rather low, taking into consideration that even

on the level of the study programme more than half of the students claimed to have very limited or no knowledge at all about quality assurance mechanisms.

The main findings with regards to students' awareness of quality mechanisms:

- Around 85 percent of the participants had regularly the chance to participate in student evaluations and half of the respondents saw the results of these processes. Of those who saw the results of the evaluations a large majority also reported to have witnessed follow-up activities on these results.
- More than half of the respondents thought that evaluations had an effect on the quality of higher education.
- The level of knowledge on quality mechanisms was generally rather low. The closer the mechanisms were situated to the participants' day-to-day reality, the more knowledge they seemed to have about them.
- The participants reported the highest amount of knowledge on the question about ways to get involved in quality assurance processes in their institution if needed.
- The three big European initiatives and organisations connected to quality assurance, the ESG, EQAR and ENQA were more or less unknown to the participants.

## 4.6 ACADEMIC FREEDOM

In this section of the survey the participants were asked to comment on statements that were related to the level of academic and intellectual freedom at their institutions. Again each of the five statements could be judged using a Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (-2) to “strongly agree” (2).

The first statement was: “Students at my institution are free to express their views on matters related to their academic studies in class and in written academic papers without fear of censorship, penalty or intimidation.”

In total 5740 respondents commented on this statement. The mean value of the answers is 0.87, the median and mode is 1 and the Standard Deviation is 1.066. This means that in general students agreed with the statement and that there seems to be a level of academic and intellectual freedom linked to study related topics in the class rooms of European universities (Table 38).

*Table 38 Freedom to express views on academic issues*

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly disagree	176	3.1%	3.1%
Disagree	535	9.3%	12.4%
Neither disagree nor agree	1011	17.6%	30.0%
Agree	2140	37.3%	67.3%
Strongly agree	1878	32.7%	100.0%
Total	5740	100.0%	

The table shows that more than  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed statement and only 12.4 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with it. This supports the conclusion that there is a certain level of academic freedom concerning study related topics in European universities. However, there also seems to be a certain number of students that face problems related to academic and intellectual freedom.

Looking into the data per country three clusters seem to appear. The first cluster consists of Germany and Latvia, where the results mirror more or less the overall picture. The second cluster consists of Poland and Slovenia. Here we can find more students answering negatively to the statement and thus the situation seems to be worse. The third cluster encompasses Norway, where we can find more positive answers thus the situation seems to be better.

The second statement to be commented on by the respondents was: “Students at my institution are free to express their views on matters outside of their academic studies, without fear of censorship, penalty or intimidation, including through participation in student activities, political and social organizations, unions and other groups (including in-person and online social media groups).”

It was answered by 5673 participants. The mean value is 0.9 and the mode and median is 1. The answers to this statement have a Standard Deviation of 0.995. Overall, the picture resembles the answers to the first statement and thus allows for the same conclusion. When looking more in detail on the answers given, it becomes clear that the judgment of this statement is even more positive (Table 39).

*Table 39 Freedom to express views on non-academic issues*

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly disagree	151	2.7%	2.7%
Disagree	385	6.8%	9.4%
Neither disagree nor agree	1051	18.5%	28.0%
Agree	2362	41.6%	69.6%
Strongly agree	1724	30.4%	100.0%
Total	5673	100.0%	

Only 9.4 percent of the respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement and more than 70 percent agreed or strongly agreed with it. So the level of academic and intellectual freedom at European universities seems to be sufficient both concerning study related and other activities on campus.

Looking into the data per country the three clusters appear again. While Germany and Latvia have again results that mirror the overall picture, Poland and Slovenia show results pointing towards a conclusion that the situation seems to be worse and Norway shows more positive answers thus the situation seems to be better.

The third statement in this section addressed the general fear of repressions: “Students at my institution regularly worry that if they freely express their views they may be prohibited from continuing their studies, such as by termination of scholarships or stipends; by denial of registration, permissions or permits; or by arrest, prosecution or detention.”

This statement was answered by 5532 respondents. The mean value is -1.22, the median and mode is -2 and the Standard Deviation is 1.03. Generally it seems that most participants disagree with this statement. Due to the negative formulation this is in line with the previous findings. Also, the detailed answers support this view (Table 40).

*Table 40 Fear of expulsion due to expressing one's opinion*

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly disagree	2904	52.5%	52.5%
Disagree	1530	27.7%	80.2%
Neither disagree nor agree	654	11.8%	92.0%
Agree	294	5.3%	97.3%
Strongly agree	150	2.7%	100.0%
Total	5532	100.0%	

More than half of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement and only 8 percent strongly agreed or agreed with it. This also supports the previous findings. Although the number of students agreeing to this statement is below 10 percent, these answers indicate that even though the overall level of academic freedom seems to be good there are also some students facing problems with academic freedom.

Connected to the third statement, the data per country also shows three clusters. Germany and Latvia have once more results that mirror the overall picture, Poland and Slovenia show results pointing to a situation that seems to be worse and Norway shows again more positive answers.

The fourth statement addressed more serious fears of physical well-being: "Physical safety and well-being are a significant worry for students at my institution, whether because of crime, violence, or intimidation on the way to/from the institution; state security, military or police presence on or surveillance at the institution; or intimidation or threats from non-state religious, cultural, political or other groups within the institution."

It was answered by 5777 respondents and has a mean value of -1.48, a median and mode of -2 and the Standard Deviation is 0.945. The results are rather similar to the ones of the prior statement with an even lower mean value indicating a stronger disagreement to this statement than to the one before (Table 41).

Table 41 Fear of physical harm due to the expressing one's opinion

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly disagree	3983	68.9%	68.9%
Disagree	1048	18.1%	87.1%
Neither disagree nor agree	391	6.8%	93.9%
Agree	220	3.8%	97.7%
Strongly agree	135	2.3%	100.0%
Total	5777	100.0%	

The detailed answers to this statement indicate a strong disagreement with it. More than 2/3 of the students strongly disagree and only 6.1 percent agree or strongly agree with it. This underlines the general picture that the overall situation concerning academic freedom is quite good, however there also seems to be a small but consistent number of students facing serious problems.

For this statement the data per country shows slight differences. While Germany's results still mirror the overall picture, Poland, Slovenia and Latvia show results pointing towards a more negative situation. Norway once more has mainly positive answers and thus the situation seems to be better.

The final statement linked the issue of academic freedom to the perception of quality: "If students at my institution felt freer to express their academic and non-academic views without fear of censorship, penalty or intimidation, it would improve the quality of the learning experience at the institution."

4884 participants answered it and the mean value of these answers is -0.55. The median is -1 and the mode -2. The Standard Deviation is 1.33. This shows several things. First, students rather seem to disagree with the link between academic freedom and the quality of the learning experience. However, the results also show that the answers to this statement are more spread then to the prior ones in this section, indicating that the views of the respondents differ more strongly (Table 42).

Table 42 *The link between academic freedom and quality*

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly disagree	1726	35.3%	35.3%
Disagree	749	15.3%	50.7%
Neither disagree nor agree	1369	28.0%	78.7%
Agree	567	11.6%	90.3%
Strongly agree	473	9.7%	100.0%
Total	4884	100.0%	

Half of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement and thus also agreed with the connection between academic freedom and quality of the educational experience. Only 21.3 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

The disagreement with this statement might, however, be linked to the rather positive views on the level of academic freedom given by the students earlier in this section. Perhaps the positive experience of the respondents makes them take a certain level of academic and intellectual freedom for granted, thus not linking it to the level of quality of their educational experience? Looking into the data per country one can find a certain support for this hypothesis. While respondents from Germany and Norway, both countries with rather positive answers concerning the level of academic freedom, mainly disagreed with the statement that connects academic freedom to educational quality, students from Poland, Latvia and Slovenia, countries with more negative answers to earlier statements, agreed with the connection. This is also supported by the fact that statements 1-4 all correlate significantly on a 0.01 level with statement 5 with the following coefficients (Table 43).

Table 43 *Correlations between statements on academic freedom*

Statements	Kendall's tau Correlation coefficient
Statement 1 & 5	-0.189
Statement 2 & 5	-0.188
Statement 3 & 5	0.267
Statement 4 & 5	0.264

The coefficients are at a medium level but the consistency and the high level of significance support the thesis offered earlier that there is a connection between the experience concerning academic freedom and the connection between academic freedom and quality of the educational experience.

The main findings with regards to views on academic freedom can be summarised as follows:

- The overall level of academic and intellectual freedom seems to be good.
- However, there is a persistent percentage of respondents reporting problems connected to their academic freedom.
- There seems to be a regional or country-specific impact on the judgment of the level of academic freedom.
- Half of the participants disagree with the idea that academic freedom is linked to the quality of education.
- There seems to be a connection between how problematic one's own situation concerning academic freedom is and whether one sees academic freedom as enhancing educational quality.



## 5 BIVARIATE ANALYSIS—CORRELATIONS AND COMPARISON OF MEANS

This section focuses on a bivariate analysis of the data set, i.e. calculations and interpretations of correlations between responses to different parts of the survey. The section is organised as follows:

- ◊ The first subsection focuses on the relationship between perspectives on quality as defined by Harvey and Green and demographic characteristics of respondents, as well as their motivations and expectations from higher education;
- ◊ The second subsection focuses on the selectivity vs. added-value vision of quality and how it relates to demographics, motivation and expectations;
- ◊ The third subsection explores the relationship between the awareness of quality mechanisms and demographic characteristics of the respondents;
- ◊ The fourth subsection focuses on the relationship between the awareness of quality mechanisms and perspectives on quality (both the Harvey and Green classification and the selectivity/added-value distinction); and
- ◊ The fifth subsection focuses on how the awareness of quality mechanism relates to students motivations for and expectations from higher education.

### 5.1 HARVEY AND GREEN PERSPECTIVES ON QUALITY IN RELATION TO DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS, MOTIVATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

As previously indicated, a number of responses in the “Perspectives on quality” section of the survey were formulated to follow the five dimensions of Harvey and Green:

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**“THIS SECTION FOCUSES ON A BIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF THE DATA SET ...”**

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quality as excellence, quality as fitness for purpose, quality as exceptional, quality as value for money and quality as transformation. Each dimension corresponded to two statements (see subsection 3.2) and the combined score is the average of the

two responses of each respondent. The higher the combined score the more the respondent shares that view of quality.

## PERSPECTIVES ON QUALITY IN RELATION TO DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

The different perspectives on quality were first correlated with a number of demographic characteristics: age, type of studies (full-time or part-time), semester attended, mother's educational attainment, father's educational attainment, paid job, and activity in the student union.

The results of correlation calculations (using Kendall's tau-b coefficient<sup>10</sup>) between perceptions of quality in terms of Harvey and Green's dimensions and the demographic characteristics are summarised in Table 4.4. A number of correlations are significant on a 0.01 level, though all of them have a rather small value.

*Table 4.4 Correlation: Harvey and Green perspectives on quality vs. demographic characteristics*

	Quality as excellence	Quality as fitness for purpose	Quality as exceptional	Quality as value for money	Quality as transformation
Age	-0.065**	0.045**	-0.021*	-0.013	-0.027**
Full-time/part-time	-0.039**	0.020	-0.014	0.021	-0.025*
Semester	-0.067**	0.012	-0.054**	-0.041**	-0.032**
Mother's education	0.0043**	-0.028**	0.003	0.037**	0.017
Father's education	0.017	0.017	-0.010	0.021*	0.021
Paid job	-0.037**	0.055**	-0.002	-0.018	-0.029*
Student union	-0.059**	-0.101**	-0.054**	-0.041**	-0.095**

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed test)

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed test)

In general, perceptions of quality in terms of Harvey and Green's dimensions are most strongly correlated with student union activity, suggesting that students who are/were at some governance level active in student unions agree to a lesser extent with statements corresponding to each of the dimensions.

<sup>10</sup> Following Agresti and Finlay (1997), Kendall's tau-b coefficient is recommended for calculating correlations between ordinal variables where the number of levels is very similar.

Quality as excellence and quality as value for money correlate positively with mother's education attainment, suggesting that respondents whose mothers are better educated are slightly more inclined to agree with the statements stressing the excellence and value for money aspects of quality. The opposite is the case for quality as fitness for purpose: respondents with better educated mothers are slightly less inclined to agree with the statements stressing this aspect of quality.

Respondents who have a paid job are somewhat more inclined towards the view of quality as fitness for purpose and somewhat less inclined towards the view of quality as excellence, compared to respondents who do not have a paid job.

Given that the responses for full-time were coded as 1 and for part-time as 2, the results indicate that, though small, this status seems to have an influence on the view of quality as excellence and quality as transformation: full-time students are slightly more inclined towards both of these views than part-time students.

The semester students are currently enrolled in seems to have a rather small, yet significant negative influence on perspectives of quality: the higher the number of semesters (i.e. the longer time the student has spent in higher education), the less inclined the student is to agree with the perspective of quality as excellence, as the exceptional, as value for money and as transformation. The situation is similar when it comes to the age of respondents, though in this case a small positive influence is visible for quality as fitness for purpose (older students tend to agree somewhat more with this) and no statistically significant influence exists for quality as value for money.

## PERSPECTIVES ON QUALITY IN RELATION TO MOTIVATIONS FOR AND EXPECTATIONS FROM HE

As was previously indicated (see section 3.2), the responses, which relate to how important the different aspects of higher education were for the respondents' choice to pursue higher education studies, are combined to reflect six broad aspects of higher education: programme characteristics, social dimension, reputation (of the institution and the programme), availability of additional opportunities for students (e.g. scholarships, mobility and internships), expected employability and infrastructure. The correlations of these characteristics with different dimensions of quality (as defined by Harvey and Green) are provided in Table 45 (all coefficients are Kendall's tau-b). As was the case with regards to demographic characteristics, there are statistically significant correlations, despite being generally rather weak.

Table 45 Correlation: Harvey and Green perspectives on quality vs. broad aspects of higher education

	Quality as excellence	Quality as fitness for purpose	Quality as exceptional	Quality as value for money	Quality as transformation
Programme characteristics	0.111**	0.153**	0.100**	0.024**	0.074**
Social dimension	0.047**	-0.056**	0.047**	-0.017	-0.019*
Reputation	0.150**	0.114**	0.081**	0.024*	0.063**
Additional opportunities	0.085**	-0.058**	0.068**	0.049**	-0.005
Employability	0.122**	0.035**	0.094**	0.083**	0.050**
Infrastructure	0.046**	0.008	0.081**	0.015	0

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed test)

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed test)

As can be expected, with regards to quality as excellence the strongest correlation is with the reputational characteristics, followed by employability and programme characteristics. This suggests that respondents for whom the reputation, employability and programme characteristics were more important were more inclined to agree with the view of quality as excellence. The same patterns exist for the view of quality as exceptional, though in this case the programme characteristics and employability have a slightly stronger influence than reputation (and infrastructure).

A similar pattern exists for the view of quality as fitness for purpose: those valuing programme characteristics and reputation are slightly more inclined to share this view, while it seems that valuing the social dimension and additional opportunities for students has a very small, though statistically significant, negative influence on the view of quality as fitness for purpose. With regards to quality as transformation, again, those valuing programme characteristics, reputation and employability are more inclined to share this view. The view of quality as value for money seems to be somewhat more present amongst respondents who also see additional opportunities for students and employability as more important.

The different expectations respondents had from higher education, asked in terms of level of agreement, were, as indicated in subsection 3.2, combined to reflect two different views on higher education: a predominantly Humboldtian view that stresses

freedom to learn, teach and research as well as the intrinsic value of knowledge and a predominantly consumerist view that stresses efficiency and the link to the labour market. Correlations between these different views and the Harvey and Green dimensions of quality are provided in Table 46 (all coefficients are Kendall's tau-b).

*Table 46 Correlation: Harvey and Green perspectives on quality vs. Humboldt/consumerist view on HE*

	Quality as excellence	Quality as fitness for purpose	Quality as exceptional	Quality as value for money	Quality as transformation
Humboldt view	0.186**	0.144**	0.160**	0.046**	0.256**
Consumerist view	0.175**	0.099**	0.160**	0.122**	0.142**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed test)

While there are statistically significant correlations, not all of them are equally strong. In general, the more the respondent has expectations that are in line with the Humboldt and the consumerist view, the more likely the respondent is also to agree with the different views on quality.

However, while respondents who agree with the views of quality as exceptional and quality as excellence are, more or less, equally likely to exhibit both Humboldtian and consumerist expectations from higher education, the situation is different with regards to quality as fitness for purpose, quality as value for money and most of all quality as transformation. Respondents who have more Humboldtian expectations from higher education agree more strongly with the quality as fitness for purpose and quality as transformation perspectives than those who share a more consumerist view. The situation is the opposite with regards to quality as value for money—those more oriented towards the consumerist view more strongly agree with this perspective, than those of a more Humboldtian persuasion. Both the similarities and the differences between a Humboldtian and a consumerist view on the different dimensions of quality in higher education offer multiple avenues for further research with a more refined set of data.

The main findings with regards to the relationship between perspectives on quality as defined by Harvey and Green and demographic characteristics of respondents, as well as their motivations for and expectations from higher education can be summarised as follows:

- ◉ While most of the demographic characteristics, motivations for and expectations from higher education correlate in a statistically significant way with Harvey and Green's dimensions of quality, the correlations are relatively weak.
- ◉ Given this, it is not possible to define a typical comprehensive profile of a person that shares a particular view of quality Harvey and Green's terms.
- ◉ Reputation, programme characteristics and employability correlate positively with all dimensions of quality, although there are differences in terms of strength of correlation. Reputation and employability correlate most strongly with the perspective of quality as excellence, while programme characteristics correlate most strongly with quality as fitness for purpose.
- ◉ In terms of Humboldtian vs. consumerist expectations from higher education, there is no significant difference with regards to strength of correlations with the perspectives of quality as excellence and quality as exceptional in higher education.
- ◉ A strong agreement with the Humboldtian view of higher education correlates more strongly with the quality as fitness for purpose and quality as transformation, while a strong agreement with the consumerist view correlates more strongly with quality as value for money.

## 5.2 SELECTIVITY VS. ADDED-VALUE VIEW OF QUALITY IN RELATION TO DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS, MOTIVATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

As previously indicated, two pairs of responses in the “Perspectives on quality” section of the survey were formulated in order to attempt to contrast the view of quality that stresses selectivity (and elitism) with the view of quality that stressed the added-value of higher education. Each view corresponded to two statements (see section 3.2) and the combined score is the average of the two responses of each respondent. The higher the combined score the more the respondent shares that view of quality. It should be borne in mind that, as presented in section 3.2, the way the “added-value

view” in particular was operationalised in this study may not be particularly strong in terms of construct validity, implying that the results reported below should be taken with reservation.

These two views were, similar to the five perspectives of Harvey and Green, correlated with demographic characteristics (Table 47), importance of different aspects of higher education for students’ choice (i.e. their motivation to pursue higher education, Table 48) and their expectations from higher education (i.e. their position with regards to Humboldtian vs. consumerist view of higher education, Table 49). All correlations were calculated as Kendall’s tau-b coefficients.

*Table 47 Correlation: Quality as selectivity/added-value vs. demographic characteristics of respondents*

	Quality as selectivity	Quality as added-value
Age	-0.047**	-0.122**
Full-time/part-time	0.015	-0.128**
Semester	-0.080**	-0.111**
Mother’s education	0.019	0.079**
Father’s education	-0.037**	0.063**
Paid job	-0.024*	-0.118**
Student union	-0.020	-0.083**

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed test)

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed test)

With regards to the relationship between the views of quality as selectivity and quality as added-value, the most striking result is the existence of statistically significant, though not necessarily very strong correlations between the view of quality as added-value and demographic characteristics, and the lack of as much and as strong correlations between the view of quality as selectivity and demographic characteristics. In general, respondents are more likely to agree with the view of quality as added-value, or, given the aforementioned concerns about construct validity, with the two statements used to construct this measure: the younger they are, if they are fulltime students, earlier in their education, and if they do not have a paid job. In addition, though the relationship is weaker, the same pattern exists the more their father and mother are educated, and if they were not active in the student union. With regards to the quality as selectivity view, the only statistically significant though very weak correlations exist with age, semester and father’s education.

*Table 48 Correlation: Quality as selectivity/added-value vs. broad characteristics of higher education*

	Quality as selectivity	Quality as added-value
Programme characteristics	0.079**	0.044**
Social dimension	0.127**	-0.005
Reputation	0.117**	0.174**
Additional opportunities	0.154**	0.044**
Employability	0.176**	0.122**
Infrastructure	0.109**	0.032**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed test)

With regards to the relationship between the importance of different aspects of higher education and the selectivity/added-value perspective on quality, most of the correlations are statistically significant, though not equally strong. The quality as selectivity correlates most strongly with employability expectations, availability of additional opportunities and the social dimension of higher education, suggesting that those who assign more importance to these characteristics of higher education when making their choice are also more likely to have a quality as selectivity view. The quality as added-value (see above for concerns over construct validity) correlates most strongly with reputation and employability, while the correlation is the weakest with programme characteristics and availability with additional opportunities, with no significant correlation with the social dimension.

*Table 49 Correlation: Quality as selectivity/added-value vs. Humboldt/consumerist view on higher education*

	Quality as selectivity	Quality as added-value
Humboldt view	0.083**	0.184**
Consumerist view	0.180**	0.198**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed test)

All correlations between the Humboldtian/consumerist view of higher education and selectivity/added-value view of quality are statistically significant, and, compared to other correlations (see above), relatively stronger. All of the results point to the following: the more the respondents agree with the Humboldtian or consumerist point of view, the more they agree with seeing quality in terms of selectivity and added-value. However, it seems that quality as added-value correlates more strongly with both views than quality as selectivity. Those agreeing more with the consumerist view

are more likely inclined to have views of quality as selectivity and as added-value, than those agreeing more with the Humboldtian view. These results in particular point towards construct validity of the “quality as added-value” measure.

The main findings regarding the relationship between perspectives on quality as selectivity or as added-value and demographic characteristics of respondents, as well as their motivations for and expectations from higher education can be summarised as follows:

- The operationalisation of “quality as added-value” suffers from problems with construct validity, so the results reported below should be seen in terms of agreement with the two statements used to calculate the scores for “quality as added-value” view.
- While most of the demographic characteristics, motivations for and expectations from higher education correlate in a statistically significant way with both the quality as selectivity and the quality as added-value views, the correlations are relatively weak.
- However, it can be concluded that older, full-time students, who have a paid job and have spent a longer time in higher education are less likely to view quality as added-value.
- All aspects of higher education correlate positively with both dimensions of quality, though there are differences in terms of strength of correlation. Availability of additional opportunities and employability correlate most strongly with the quality as selectivity perspective, while reputation and employability correlate most strongly with quality as added-value.
- Both those who agree more with Humboldtian and those who agree more with consumerist expectations from higher education are more inclined to agree with the quality as added-value perspective, although the correlation is stronger in the case of consumerist expectations towards higher education.
- Those agreeing more with the consumerist view are more likely inclined to have a quality as selectivity and quality as added-value view, than those agreeing more with the Humboldtian view.

## 5.3 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS AND THE AWARENESS OF QUALITY MECHANISMS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The following section analyses the correlations between the demographic variables of the survey with the combined scores covering the awareness of quality mechanisms on different levels and the awareness for the work of student unions. The idea behind this analysis is to see whether there is a common pattern between awareness for quality mechanisms and certain demographical features, for example if respondents with a higher number of semesters behind them have a better level of knowledge of quality mechanisms.

The combined scores for the awareness of quality mechanisms are constructed by creating the mean of responses to statements in connection with the respective level of higher education, i.e. institutional, national, and European (see section 3.2). For the institutional level, all three statements of the respective section of the questionnaire have been included. The national level composite includes the first three questions from the section on awareness of national quality mechanisms, excluding the two statements on national unions of students. The combined score for the European quality mechanisms consists of the first four questions in this section, excluding the two last ones that cover the activities of ESU. The questions addressing the work of student unions on both the national and European level correlate strongly and thus can be compiled to a fourth score, addressing student union activities in general.

In terms of demographics, the most interesting variables are whether the participants are part-time or full-time students, the number of semesters already studied as well as whether the respondents were already active in any form in a student union. All these characteristics seem to have the potential of being connected to the level of awareness of quality mechanisms. For example, a student who is enrolled full-time and thus spends more time at her university should have a better knowledge about how quality assurance works.

### AWARENESS OF QUALITY MECHANISMS AND PART-TIME/FULL-TIME STUDENTS

In this first set of correlations, the variable for part-time/full-time student and the composite measurements for the awareness of the quality mechanisms on different levels are used. The variable for part-time/full-time students is measured nominally with 1 being the value assigned to full-time students and 2 to part-time students. The value for the composite can lie between 1 (no knowledge at all) and 5 (in-depth knowledge). The Kendall's tau correlation coefficients for the four correlations are summarized in Table 50.

Table 50 Correlation: Awareness of quality mechanisms and full-time/part-time student

Awareness of ...	Full-time/part-time student
Institutional quality mechanisms	-0.129**
National quality mechanisms	-0.072**
European quality mechanisms	-0.055**
Student unions	-0.084**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed test)

All correlation coefficients are negative and on a small or very small level, and show a rather high level of significance. This suggests that being a part-time student has a very weak negative effect on the awareness of quality mechanisms. The strongest effect exists at the institutional level, and the further away from the participants' day-to-day reality the quality mechanisms are situated, the weaker the effect of being a part-time student is. This is in line with the findings in the descriptive part that uncovered a generally declining level of awareness of quality mechanisms the further away they are from the everyday reality of the respondents. Since the participants already have a very low level of awareness of national and European quality mechanisms to start with, the influence of being a part-time student is only very limited. A similar argument can be made concerning the awareness of student unions. Since the overall awareness was described as being rather low already in the descriptive analysis, the effect of being a part-time student is only very weak.

### AWARENESS OF QUALITY MECHANISMS AND THE NUMBER OF SEMESTERS STUDIED

This section analyses the link between the aforementioned composites measuring awareness of quality mechanisms and the variable measuring the number of semesters the respondents have studied (Table 51). This variable has a range from 1 to 36 and consists only of full numbers.

Table 51 Correlation: Awareness of quality mechanisms and semester studied

Awareness of ...	Semester
Institutional quality mechanisms	+0.025*
National quality mechanisms	-0.011
European quality mechanisms	+0.013
Student unions	+0.009

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed test)

The correlation coefficients in this set of correlations vary greatly. Only one of the coefficients, the one connected to institutional level mechanisms, reaches a level of significance making it interesting for further analysis. The others seem to be only valid for the dataset as such and do not have enough significance for the purposes of generalisation. Overall, the coefficients are very weak, indicating a very limited connection between the two variables.

When analysing more in detail, the coefficient that describes the relation between the number of semesters and the awareness of institutional quality mechanisms, it seems logical that there is a positive relation between the two. Since the quality mechanisms on the institutional level are connected more strongly to the day-to-day reality of students, spending more time as a student at an institution might have a positive impact on the level of knowledge of these mechanisms. However, the coefficient is very small so the relation should be treated with caution.

### AWARENESS OF QUALITY MECHANISMS AND BEING ACTIVE IN THE STUDENT UNION

The final set of correlations in this section explores links between the awareness of quality mechanisms and the variable measuring whether the respondent was active in a student union before (Table 52). This variable is dichotomous with 0 representing no active involvement in student unions and 1 measuring involvement.

*Table 52 Correlation: Awareness of quality mechanisms and active involvement in the student union*

Awareness of ...	Active involvement in student union
Institutional quality mechanisms	+0.116**
National quality mechanisms	+0.116**
European quality mechanisms	+0.130**
Student unions	+0.139**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed test)

All coefficients in this set of correlations are significant. Although the coefficients are weak, there seems to be a rather strong tendency for people who were involved in student unions to have more knowledge on quality mechanisms at all levels and on student unions.

The coefficient is strongest in relation to the knowledge on student unions, which seems logical. However, this coefficient is surprisingly weak at +0.139, indicating that the involvement in a student union has only a marginal influence, especially considering the fact that this variable was dichotomous.

To summarise one can see a contradicting pattern in the effect of demographic variables on the knowledge and awareness of quality mechanisms. On the one hand, while the questions whether the respondent is a full-time or part-time student and whether s/he was involved in a student union have a constant and highly significant effect on all composite measures, the effect is very weak. On the other hand, the number of semesters already studied has a significant effect only on the knowledge on quality mechanisms at the institutional level.

The main findings of this section:

- In general, the effect of demographic variables on the knowledge and awareness of quality mechanisms is limited.
- The questions whether one is a part-time/full-time student and whether one was involved in a student union have a constant and highly significant positive effect on the awareness of quality mechanisms at all levels.
- The negative effect of being a part-time student on the knowledge of quality mechanisms is stronger at the institutional level than on the national or the European level.
- The number of semesters already studied has a significant positive effect on the knowledge of quality mechanisms at the institutional level.

## 5.4 THE AWARENESS OF QUALITY MECHANISMS AND PERSPECTIVES ON QUALITY

The following section analyses correlations between composite measures covering the awareness of quality mechanisms at different levels as well as the awareness of the work of student unions with composite measures for the different perspectives on quality. The logic behind this analysis is to see whether there is a link between having a certain perspective on what is quality in higher education and having knowledge on quality mechanisms, and vice versa.

The composite measurements covering the awareness of quality measures are the same as in the previous section. The composite measures covering different perspectives on quality are constructed by creating the mean of the two statements used to explore each of the dimensions in the survey (see also the descriptive part of the analysis).

## AWARENESS OF QUALITY MECHANISMS AND THE DIMENSIONS OF QUALITY BY HARVEY AND GREEN

The first set of correlations will cover the dimensions of quality based on Harvey and Green and the awareness of quality mechanisms (Table 53, all coefficients are Kendall's tau-b). Each of the dimensions of quality is represented through a single composite measure.

*Table 53 Correlation: Awareness of quality mechanisms and dimensions of quality by Harvey and Green*

Awareness of ...	Quality as excellence	Quality as fitness for purpose	Quality as exceptional	Quality as value for money	Quality as transformation
Institutional quality mechanisms	-0.022*	-0.009	-0.025**	-0.031**	-0.06**
National quality mechanisms	+0.01	-0.054**	-0.011	-0.004	-0.055**
European quality mechanisms	-0.025*	-0.133**	0	-0.017	-0.115**
Student unions	+0.013	-0.119**	0.12	-0.001	-0.079**

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed test)

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed test)

Looking at the coefficients in general, one can state several things. Firstly, only around half of the coefficients are significant either at the 0.01 or 0.05 level. Secondly, the coefficients show both positive and negative relations, but all significant coefficients are negative. Finally, all coefficients are either weak or very weak, with only three having a strength of more than 0.1.

When it concerns the dimension of quality as excellence only two coefficients are significant at a 0.05 level. These are related to the awareness of quality mechanisms at the institutional as well as the European level. However, both are very weak and thus offer no solid ground for interpretation.

Correlating quality as fitness for purpose and the awareness of quality mechanisms leads to three coefficients that are significant at the 0.01 level. Only the coefficient connected to the institutional level is not significant. Looking at the strength of the coefficients, one has to point out the fact that all of them are negative and the one linked to the national level quality mechanisms is much weaker than the ones linked to the European level and the student unions. The latter two are also the strongest coefficients in the complete set.

The dimension of quality as exceptional only shows one significant coefficient. It is linked to the awareness of quality mechanisms at the institutional level and is significant at the 0.01 level. However, with its strength of -0.025, it is also very weak and thus not properly interpretable.

When looking at the dimension of quality as value for money, the correlation uncovered also only one significant coefficient. It is again linked to the institutional level and significant at the 0.01 level. However, also here the strength of the coefficient is very weak at -0.031 and gives no basis for further interpretation.

The dimension of quality as transformation shows the highest number of significant coefficients. All four are significant at the 0.01 level. However, those connected to the institutional and the national level as well as the student unions have a much weaker strength with -0.06, -0.055 and -0.079 than the remaining one. The coefficient representing the correlation between the composite for quality as transformation and European level quality mechanisms is the third one in the complete set of this section showing a relation that is a bit stronger with a value of -0.115.

Looking in more detail at the three coefficients that are significant and show a stronger relation, one can see that two of them are connected to the dimension of quality as fitness for purpose. The more participants supported this view the less knowledge they had on European quality mechanisms or student unions and vice versa. The remaining coefficient is linked to the view of quality as transformation. Also here, the more the participants supported this view the less knowledge they had on European quality mechanisms and vice versa.

There is one interesting factor that needs to be addressed. All significant correlation coefficients are negative. This means that there seems to be a weak but existing negative link between supporting the different dimensions of quality and knowledge of quality mechanisms. This is puzzling for two reasons. Firstly, there is no big difference between the different dimensions of quality. Secondly, the relation is negative.

This means that supporters of a specific dimension of quality are not more likely to know more about quality mechanisms at different levels. To the contrary, strongly supporting one of the quality dimensions is actually linked to less knowledge of quality mechanisms. Similarly, the more participants know about quality mechanisms, the less likely they are to strongly support one of the dimensions of quality. Thus, it seems that knowledge of quality mechanisms and having strong support for one of Harvey and Green’s dimensions is either unrelated or, at best, negatively related.

### AWARENESS OF QUALITY MECHANISMS AND QUALITY AS SELECTIVITY AND ADDED-VALUE

After analysing the dimensions of quality based on Harvey and Green, this section addresses the divide between quality as selectivity and quality as added-value (Table 54). The composites for these two dimensions will be correlated with measurements for the awareness of quality mechanisms.

*Table 54 Correlation: Awareness of quality mechanisms and quality as selectivity & added-value*

Awareness of ...	Quality as selectivity	Quality as added-value
Institutional quality mechanisms	-0.005	-0.009
National quality mechanisms	0.069**	-0.026**
European quality mechanisms	0.134**	-0.089**
Student unions	0.154**	-0.064**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed test)

These coefficients offer some interesting results. First, there is no significant or strong coefficient connected to quality mechanisms at the institutional level, meaning that there is no stable link between having a specific view on quality and having a certain level of knowledge about mechanisms at the institutional level. All the other coefficients are significant at the 0.01 level, although differing in strength and direction. The effect between having the view of quality as added-value and knowledge about quality mechanisms at the national and European level as well as knowledge about student unions is very weak and negative. This means that participants who strongly supported this view reported to have less knowledge on quality mechanisms. At the same time the coefficients connected to the concept of quality as selectivity are stronger and positive, leading to the conclusion that those who strongly supported this dimension of quality also reported to have a good knowledge of quality mechanisms and vice versa.

It is necessary to point out that the strength of the coefficients connected to the added-value dimension are very weak while the one connected to the dimension of selectivity is a bit stronger but still weak. It is also interesting to mention that the strength of the coefficient grows in both dimensions when moving from national level mechanisms to those on the European level, a phenomenon that has been observed as well in the section covering the dimensions of Harvey and Green. In addition, the knowledge of students unions seems to be stronger connected to certain dimensions of quality. Based on the correlation coefficients one can conclude that respondents with good knowledge of student unions are more likely to support a view of quality as selectivity and score rather low on quality as fitness for purpose and to a lesser extent on quality as transformation or added-value. Participants with a good knowledge on European quality mechanisms show a similar pattern of links. The only differences are that they are even less supportive of quality as transformation and also show a very weak negative link to the concept of quality as excellence.

It is interesting that knowledge of European quality mechanisms and student unions only has a positive link with the concept of quality as selectivity. However, due to the low response rate of this study and the weakness of some of the coefficients used it seems to be too far a stretch to give an encompassing explanation for this, but it is definitely worth analysing in more detail in later studies.

Since the descriptive analysis pointed towards a possible problem with the construct validity of the combined score for the dimension of quality as added-value, we ran a separate correlation with the scores for the single statements that form the construct (Table 55). This correlation showed significantly different results for both statements, supporting the earlier finding that the construct might not have been measured well. As a reminder, these were the two statements that formed the combined score:

- 1 "A programme has a high quality when after finishing it the students are amongst the best in their field."
- 2 "A programme is of high quality if it significantly increases the students' knowledge."

*Table 55 Correlation: Awareness of quality mechanisms and statements concerning quality as added-value*

Awareness of ...	Statement 1	Statement 2
Institutional quality mechanisms	0.017	-0.041**
National quality mechanisms	-0.002	-0.05**
European quality mechanisms	-0.035**	-0.125**
Student unions	-0.008	-0.113**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed test)

All correlations with the second statement are significant at a 0.01 level. Furthermore, the strength of the correlations is also bigger, thus the weak coefficients of the combined score might be connected with a problem of construct validity. This would be an issue to be addressed by a follow-up study. For this study, it means that the interpretation of the results connected with the dimension of quality as added-value should be treated with caution.

The main findings of this section:

- Overall, the number of significant coefficients was rather limited and most of them had a very weak impact. This leads to the conclusion that the relation between knowledge of quality mechanisms and the support of certain concepts of quality is rather weak.
- Only the coefficients for the concept of quality as selectivity have a positive impact, while all the others are negative. This means that strong supporters of quality of as selectivity have a better knowledge of quality mechanisms while strong supporters of other dimensions either show no special pattern concerning their knowledge or have less knowledge of quality mechanisms.
- The further away from the respondent's day-to-day reality the level of the quality mechanisms is, the stronger the impact of supporting certain quality perceptions is on the knowledge of these mechanisms.
- Respondents that show a high level of knowledge of the activities of the student unions as well as European quality mechanisms are more likely to support a view of quality as selectivity.

## 5.5 THE AWARENESS OF QUALITY MECHANISMS IN RELATION TO MOTIVATIONS FOR AND EXPECTATIONS FROM HIGHER EDUCATION

The aim of this part of the analysis is to investigate whether the expectations of the participants concerning higher education or the motivation for their current study programme and higher education institution are somehow connected to their awareness of quality mechanisms. For the latter part of the analysis, the same composite measures as those used in the previous chapters have been used.

The expectations towards higher education are measured through two contrasting composites. The first encompasses a view of higher education more in line with classical academic values that could be described as a Humboldtian view of higher education. The second one is labelled as a consumerist view of higher education and is linked to expectations concerning future employability, work-related skills, etc. Each composite is constructed by creating the mean of six statements that are linked to the specific point of view.

For the analysis of the link between the awareness of quality mechanisms and motivations for the current study programme or institution, six composites covering different aspects of motivation have been created. Each composite is constructed by creating the mean from varying numbers of statements from the questionnaire. The first composite measures motivational factors stemming from programme characteristics and it consists of four statements. The second composite covers motivation through factors linked to the social dimension and is also composed by four statements. The third composite measure is composed by two statements and addresses motivational factors linked to reputation. The fourth covers motivation through additional opportunities and is constructed using three statements. The fifth composite covers employability and consists of two statements and the sixth addresses infrastructure and is constructed out of three statements (Table 56). The composites addressing the expectations towards higher education were correlated first with the composites covering the awareness for quality mechanisms.

*Table 56 Correlation: Awareness of quality mechanisms and Humboldtian & Consumerist view on HE*

Awareness of...	Humboldtian	Consumerist
Institutional quality mechanisms	0.026**	-0.005
National quality mechanisms	0.025**	0.018
European quality mechanisms	-0.048**	0.009
Student unions	-0.011	0.05**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed test)

Only half of the reported coefficients are significant at the 0.01 level. All have a very weak impact factor. While the Humboldtian view seems to be positively connected to better knowledge of institutional and national quality mechanisms and negatively connected to knowledge of European quality mechanisms, the consumerist view only shows a positive connection with knowledge about student unions. However, since all the coefficients have a strength below 0.1 the relationship is too weak to give a proper explanation of the results, thus these coefficients can only serve as an indication of the need for further study.

Now, we can turn to the analysis of the relation between the awareness of quality mechanisms at different levels and the respondents' motivation for their current study programme or higher education institution (Table 57).

*Table 57 Correlation: Awareness of quality mechanisms and respondents' motivation*

Awareness of ...	Programme characteristics	Social Dimension	Reputation	Additional Opportunities	Employability	Infrastructure
Institutional quality mechanisms	0.016	0.053**	0.069**	0.11**	0.057**	0.121**
National quality mechanisms	0.02*	0.112**	0.04**	0.166**	0.099**	0.136**
European quality mechanisms	-0.018	0.212**	-0.004	0.254**	0.14**	0.199**
Student unions	-0.014	0.210**	0.019*	0.279**	0.176**	0.199**

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed test)

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed test)

When interpreting the coefficients by motivational composites three different groups emerge. Firstly, it seems that there is no strong link between motivation based on programme characteristics and awareness of quality mechanisms. Only the coefficients linking awareness of national quality mechanisms and programme characteristics are significant at the 0.05 level, but their strength indicates a very weak basis for interpretation.

Secondly, the link between motivation based on reputation and awareness of quality mechanisms shows a very weak link. Here three coefficients are significant, two at the 0.01 level and one at the 0.05 level, and only the coefficient linked to the European level does not deliver a significant result. However, all significant coefficients show very weak relations, with the one connected to the institutional level being the strongest at 0.069. All of these coefficients are positive indicating that participants who chose their programme and institution based on its reputation report better knowledge of quality mechanisms at the institutional and national level as well as of student union activities.

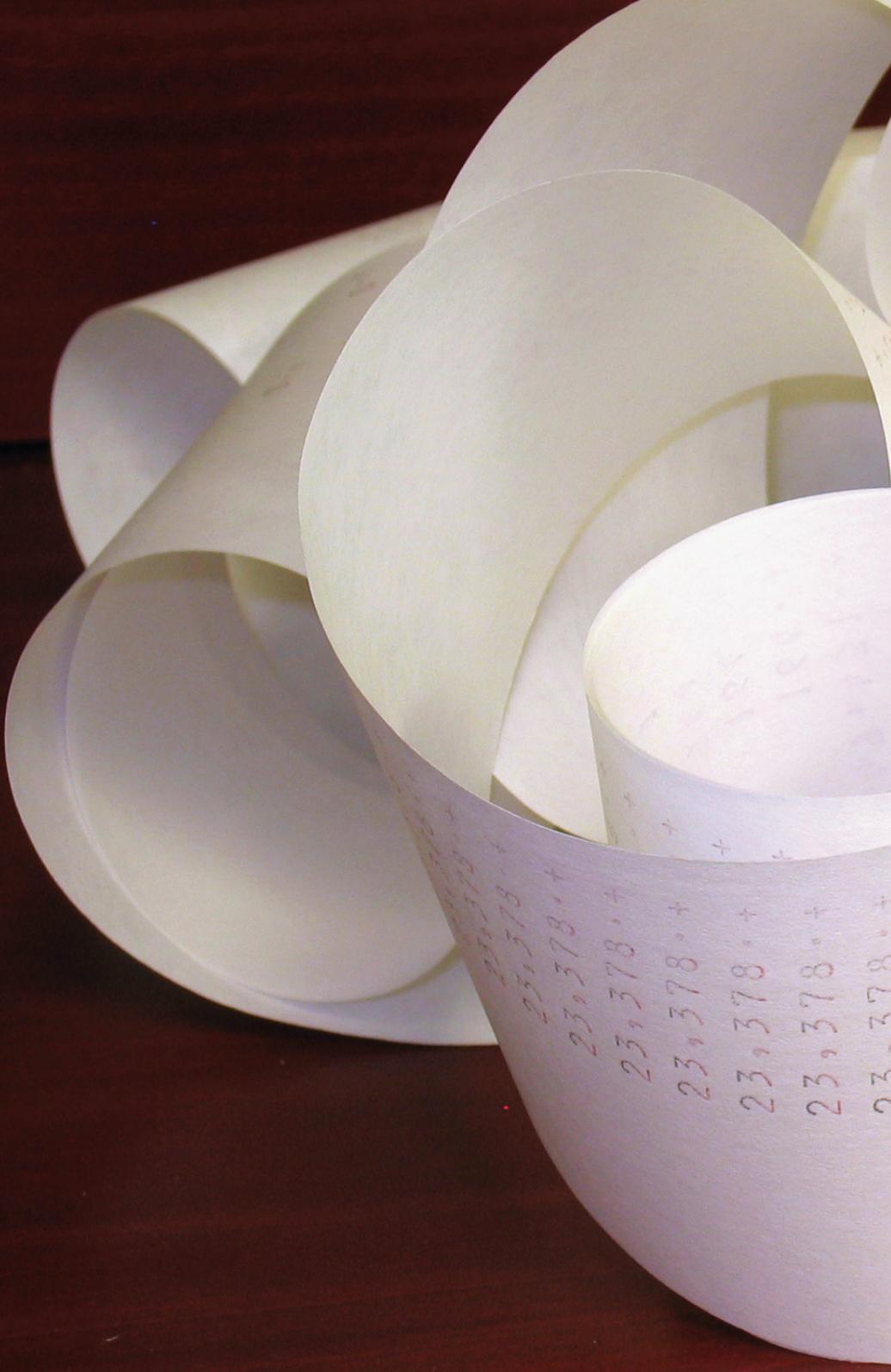
The remaining four motivational composites all show positive and significant coefficients at the 0.01 level for all measures of awareness. The strength of all coefficients increases from the institutional to the national and on to the European level. This shows that respondents who are aware of European level quality mechanisms choose their study programme more often based on employability, infrastructure, social dimension or additional opportunities related motivations or vice versa. In the context of this study especially strong coefficients with a value of more than 0.2 can be found linking awareness of European quality mechanisms and motivation based on additional opportunities and the social dimension.

Knowledge of student unions is positively correlated with motivation based on employability, infrastructure, social dimension or additional opportunities. Also here, the coefficients linking it with motivation based on the social dimension and additional opportunities has an impact above 0.2. This either shows that people who choose their studies based on these factors are also more knowledgeable about their student unions, or that respondents who are knowledgeable about their student unions are more likely to be driven by motivations stemming from the social dimension or additional opportunities.

Comparing these coefficients to the ones concerning perceptions on quality, it becomes clear that the motivational factors have more impact on the awareness of quality mechanisms than perceptions of quality or expectations towards higher education. Especially links between motivational factors and knowledge about European quality mechanisms and student unions seems to be meaningful and deserves closer analysis.

The four main findings of this section:

- There is only a very weak or no link between expectations from higher education, as conceptualised through the Humboldtian-versus-consumerist debate, and the awareness of quality mechanisms.
- There seems to be a stronger relationship between motivational factors and the awareness of quality mechanisms.
- For motivations based on employability, infrastructure, social dimension or additional opportunities only positive and significant coefficients can be observed. These are especially strong concerning mechanisms at the European level and the activities of student unions.
- The strongest links can be found between motivation stemming from the social dimension and additional opportunities, and from knowledge of quality mechanisms at the European level and of the activities of student unions.



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## 6 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to shed light on the European students' perception of quality, both in terms of their views on the dominant perspectives on quality of higher education, as well as in terms of their awareness of different mechanisms of quality assurance at the European, national and institutional levels. In addition, the study aimed at uncovering students' use of information about higher education and their assessment

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“... THE STUDY AIMED AT UNCOVERING STUDENTS' USE OF INFORMATION ABOUT HIGHER EDUCATION AND THEIR ASSESSMENT OF THE QUALITY OF THAT INFORMATION.”

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of the quality of that information. The survey was designed to address these issues focused on several questions around the choice of higher education, knowledge of quality assurance mechanisms, perceptions of quality in higher education, the needs of students for information as well as their motivations.

Due to challenges connected to the dissemination of the survey, this study has the characteristics of a pilot project mapping interesting patterns that pave the way for further research. Nevertheless, the findings provide new insight into students' views on quality and enlarge the knowledge base on patterns between students' perceptions of quality, their motivation and personal (demographic) characteristics such as the educational background of the parents, year of study, etc.

### 6.1 STUDENTS' CHOICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND RELATED USE OF INFORMATION

In the students' choice to pursue higher education, the main driving force seems to be the interest in the topic/subject of study followed by factors linked to success on the labour market, e.g. higher salary, better employment opportunities and the necessity to have a specific degree in order to qualify for a certain job. The least important factors were the expectations from family and a lack of suitable jobs after secondary school. When it comes to choosing a particular higher education institution or discipline, the influence of parents and close friends seems more relevant than other groups, with alumni, other students and other relatives being the least relevant.

The most important aspects of higher education for the respondents' choice are career prospects upon graduation, the reputation of the higher education institution as a whole, the content of the programme as well as its focus or specialisation. The

least important aspects are scholarship opportunities. When aggregating aspects into more general characteristics of higher education, reputation seems to be the most important aspect for students, closely followed by programme characteristics. At the same time additional opportunities (mobility, scholarships, and internships) seem to be least important.

Concerning students' expectations from higher education, the respondents expect a personal growth and interesting studies to be taught by specialists in the field most of all. Overall, it seems that the students favour a view of higher education that matches the Humboldtian one, and is characterised by the freedom to learn, teach and research as well as the intrinsic value of knowledge.

The respondents get most of their information from the websites of higher education institutions and programmes as well as from other students. Least used to gather information are student unions and websites of public authorities. The same pattern was observed in relation to the importance of the information for the students' choice as well as the respondents' assessment of the quality of the information provided.

University rankings also seem to be used a lot by students to access information. Of those who used rankings, respondents from Poland and Latvia stated that they were more important for their choice than respondents from Norway and Slovenia, while respondents from Germany were neutral. Although the survey did not test what rankings were used, the respondents found, in general, that the quality of rankings was above average, with those from Poland and Latvia judging the quality of rankings the highest.

## 6.2 PERSPECTIVES ON QUALITY

The study points towards students having a multi-dimensional concept of quality in higher education, with the dimensions of quality as fitness for purpose, quality as transformation and quality as added-value being the ones with the highest level of agreement.

At the same time, the dimensions of quality as selectivity and quality as value for money have the lowest agreement and the highest amount of disagreement among respondents, pointing to the fact that they are less important for students. The participants agree that there are differing views on quality between students and professors as well as within the group of professors. They also agree that the processes related to curriculums should include both professors and students as active participants.

The general level of knowledge of quality assurance mechanisms is rather low and the closer the mechanisms are situated to the participants' day-to-day reality the more knowledge they seem to have about them. The highest level of knowledge is reported on the ways how to get involved in quality assurance processes at the institutional level, while the three big European quality assurance initiatives, the ESG's, EQAR and ENQA are more or less unknown to the participants.

While most of the demographic characteristics, motivations for and expectations from higher education correlate in a statistically significant way with the Harvey and Green dimensions, the coefficients are relatively weak. Therefore, it is not possible to define a typical comprehensive profile of a person that shares a particular view of quality in Harvey and Green's terms. Reputation, programme characteristics and employability correlate positively with all dimensions of quality. However, there are differences in terms of strength of the coefficients. Reputation and employability correlate most strongly with the quality as excellence perspective, while programme characteristics correlate most strongly with quality as fitness for purpose. Furthermore, strong agreement with the Humboldtian view of higher education correlates more strongly with the quality as fitness for purpose and quality as transformation perspectives, while strong agreement with the consumerist view correlates most strongly with the notion of quality as value for money.

The relationship between the perspectives of quality as selectivity or quality as added-value and the demographic characteristics of the respondents and their motivations for and expectations from higher education mostly show statistically significant correlations. However, most of these are relatively weak. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that older, full-time students, who have a paid job and have spent a longer time in higher education are less likely to have the quality as added-value perspective. The availability of additional opportunities and employability correlate strongly with the quality as selectivity perspective, while reputation and employability correlate most strongly with the quality as an added-value perspective.

Both those who agree more with the Humboldtian view and those who agree with the consumerist expectations from higher education are more inclined to agree with the quality as an added-value, although the correlation is stronger in the case of the consumerist expectations. Those who are more likely to agree with the consumerist view are more likely inclined to have a quality as selectivity and quality as added-value view than those agreeing more with the Humboldtian expectations. However, all these results need to be seen in the light of the problem related to the construct validity of the operationalisation of examining quality as an added-value.

Those respondents who agree with the views of quality as exceptional and quality as excellence are, more or less, equally likely to exhibit both Humboldtian and consum-

erist expectations from higher education. The situation is different with regards to quality as fitness for purpose, quality as value for money and, most of all, quality as transformation. Respondents who have more Humboldtian expectations from higher education agree more strongly with the quality as fitness for purpose and quality as transformation perspectives than those who share a more consumerist view. It is the opposite with regards to the perspective of quality as value for money—those more oriented towards consumerist views agree more strongly with this perspective, than those of a more Humboldtian persuasion. These similarities as well as the differences between a Humboldtian and a consumerist view on the different dimensions of quality in higher education offer multiple avenues for further research with a more refined dataset. Furthermore, two aspects need to be remembered: 1) Harvey and Green's dimensions on quality and the Humboldtian/consumerist classifications are independent from each other, and 2) they do not have the same degree of exclusivity of categories.

### 6.3 AWARENESS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISMS

When it comes to the awareness of quality assurance mechanisms, around 85 percent of the participants report to regularly have the chance to take part in student evaluations and half of the respondents also see the results of these processes. Of those who see the results of these evaluations, a large majority also reports to have witnessed follow-up activities on the results. More than half of the respondents think that evaluations have an effect on quality in higher education.

The effect of demographic variables on the knowledge and awareness of quality mechanisms is limited. Being a full-time student has a constant and highly significant positive effect on the awareness of quality mechanisms at all levels, as does being involved in a student union. The negative effect of being a part-time student on the knowledge on quality mechanisms is stronger on the institutional than on the national or European level. The number of semesters studied has a significant positive effect on the knowledge on quality mechanisms at the institutional level.

The relation between the knowledge of quality mechanisms and the support of certain concepts of quality is rather weak. Only the coefficients for the concept of quality as selectivity indicate a positive relation, while all others are negative, pointing towards the fact that strong supporters of the quality as selectivity view have a better knowledge of quality mechanisms, while strong supporters of other dimensions of quality either show no special pattern or have less knowledge of quality mechanisms. The further away from the day-to-day reality of the participants the level of the quality mechanisms is, the stronger the impact of supporting certain quality perceptions is on the knowledge of these mechanisms. Or to put it the other way around, the more

the participants know about quality mechanisms on national or European levels, the more pronounced their support for different dimensions of quality is. Respondents reporting a high level of knowledge on the activities of student unions as well as European initiatives are more likely to support a view of quality as selectivity.

On the one hand, there is only a very weak or no link between expectations towards higher education as conceptualised through the Humboldtian-versus-consumerist dichotomy and the awareness of quality mechanisms. There seems to be a stronger relationship between motivational factors and the awareness of quality mechanisms. For motivations based on employability, social dimension or additional opportunities, only positive and significant correlation coefficients can be observed. These are especially strong in relation to quality mechanisms at the European level and the activities of student unions. The strongest link can be found between motivation stemming from the social dimension and additional opportunities on the one side and knowledge on quality mechanisms at the European level and on the activities of student unions on the other.

## 6.4 FINAL REFLECTIONS

Concerning the respondents' perceptions of the level of academic freedom, the study points towards the fact that the overall level of academic freedom seems to be good. However, it can also be observed that a persistent percentage of the respondents reports having problems connected with their level of intellectual freedom. Furthermore, there seems to be a regional or country-specific impact on the judgement of the level of academic freedom. While the Norwegian respondents report more positively about their level of academic freedom, the Polish and Slovenian respondents draw a more negative picture. Additionally, half of the respondents disagree with the idea that academic freedom is linked to the quality of education. However, there seems to be a connection between how problematic one's own situation concerning intellectual freedom is and whether one sees academic freedom as enhancing educational quality.

The findings described above paint a multi-faceted picture of the students' view on quality in higher education and even though this project has characteristics of a pilot study it does point towards interesting relations. The results offer several points of departure for future research projects, so that we can get an even clearer picture on the preferences, knowledge and the needs of students in Europe when it comes to quality in higher education. The country comparisons used in this study also suggest that the comparative approach is a road worth taking, and that different national situations might have an impact on the students' perception of quality in higher education.

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# 8 APPENDIX—QUESTIONNAIRE

## PART A—MOTIVATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS FROM HIGHER EDUCATION

- 1 Statements below are connected to your choice to pursue higher education. Please indicate using the scale on the right how much do you agree with each of the statements.
- 2 It was expected by my family
  - a Most of my friends from high school went to higher education.
  - b I am expecting to have a higher salary or better employment opportunities if I complete higher education.
  - c I was very much interested in this topic.
  - d In order to get the job I want I need a higher education degree.
  - e I did not find suitable employment or traineeship after finishing high school.
  - f Other (specify)
- 3 Which of the following influenced your choice to study in this particular institution: parents, siblings, other relatives, peers, close friends, teachers, alumni, other students, others?
- 4 Which of the following influenced your choice to study in this particular field/discipline: parents, siblings, other relatives, peers, close friends, teachers, alumni, other students, others?
- 5 The following section is about your of higher education, please indicate how important the following factors were for your choice:
  - a Content of the programme (e.g. which courses are part of the programme)
  - b Focus/specialisation of the programme
  - c Location in a particular city

- d Distance from home
  - e Career prospects upon graduation
  - f Reputation of the programme
  - g Reputation of the institution as a whole
  - h Scholarship opportunities (e.g. there was a scholarship you could apply for)
  - i Mobility opportunities (e.g. there are possibilities to spend some time studying in another country)
  - j Internship/traineeship/placement opportunities (possibility for practical work in a company or an organization)
  - k Learning infrastructure (library, access to journals, quiet rooms for reading or rooms for group work)
  - l Research infrastructure (e.g. laboratory equipment)
  - m Quality of student support services (sports/leisure facilities, canteens, dormitories etc.)
  - n Entrance requirements
  - o Language of instruction
  - p Flexibility of the study programme (e.g. opportunity to choose which courses to take when or to have a break during the studies)
  - q Favourable financial conditions for studying (e.g. no or very low tuition fee)
  - r Favourable financial conditions for living (e.g. low living costs)
- 6 The following section is about your expectations from higher education. Please indicate using the scale on the right how much you agree with the following statements:
- a I am expecting higher education to provide me with knowledge and personal growth.

- b** I am expecting that a higher education degree will ensure me a higher salary later on.
- c** I am expecting to have better employment opportunities after completing higher education.
- d** I am expecting the higher education programme I am pursuing to have an interesting topic.
- e** I am expecting higher education to provide me with experience of being part of the academic community.
- f** I am expecting higher education to contribute to the development of my abilities for critical thinking/reasoning.
- g** I am expecting higher education to prepare me to be an active citizen in a democratic society.
- h** I am expecting my professors to be specialists in their fields.
- i** I am expecting as a student to be an integral part of the scholarly community.
- j** I am expecting to benefit from training that is relevant for the labour market.
- k** I am expecting that pursuing a higher education degree would enable me to work in a university.
- l** I am expecting my study programme to be constructed in such a way as to ensure timely and successful completion.
- m** I am expecting my study programme to prioritise skills relevant for future employment over theoretical knowledge.
- n** I am expecting my higher education institution to maintain close links with business and industry.

## PART B—PERSPECTIVES ON QUALITY

- 1** Using the scale on the right please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements

- 2 There are different views on what is perceived as quality in HE by professors and students.
- 3 In discussions about the quality of our study programmes professors seldom have a unified position.
- 4 The quality of a study programme only depends on its academic excellence.
- 5 Programmes need to be taught by teachers who are exceptional experts in their fields.
- 6 It is clear to me what the purpose of my study programme is.
- 7 The courses are well structured so they ensure that the aim of the programme is achieved.
- 8 A good programme offers something that others don't.
- 9 Good programmes offer novel approaches to core topics in a field.
- 10 The higher the costs for a study programme the more I expect of it.
- 11 I am willing to pay more for my education if the quality of the study programme is very high.
- 12 A good study programme has to broaden the horizon of the students.
- 13 A good study programme provides the students with additional competencies.
- 14 The quality of the study programme is measured by its selectivity.
- 15 A programme has a high quality when the participating professors are chosen based on their reputation.
- 16 A programme has a high quality when after finishing it the students are amongst the best in their field.
- 17 A programme is of high quality if it significantly increases the students' knowledge.
- 18 Students should play a significant role in shaping their curriculum.

- 19 Professors should design the curriculum according to their expertise in the subject.

## PART C—AWARENESS OF QUALITY MECHANISMS AT DIFFERENT LEVELS

- 1 Please respond to the questions below with a yes, no or do not know.
- 2 Do you have the possibility to participate in student evaluations on a regular basis?
  - a Have you ever seen the results of such evaluations?
  - b Has there been a follow-up to such an evaluation?
  - c Do you participate in any structures that have a particular mandate for quality assurance?
  - d Do you know whether there is anyone explicitly responsible for quality assurance?
  - e In your opinion, do these evaluations have an effect on quality of higher education?
  - f Have there been cases in which staff has suffered consequences from negative evaluations?
  - g Have there been cases in which staff has received positive incentives due to good evaluations?
- 3 How would you rate your knowledge of the following aspects of quality assurance processes in higher education?
  - a Institutional processes
    - i The ways in which the quality of your study programme is ensured?
    - ii The ways in which your institution works on quality assurance?
    - iii The ways in which students can get involved in quality assurance in your institution?
  - b National processes

- i The ways in which the quality of your institution is ensured?
  - ii The ways in which the quality of higher education in your country is ensured?
  - iii The ways in which students can get involved in quality assurance in your country?
  - iv The work of your national union of students (student parliament, student association) in general.
  - v The work of your national union of students (student parliament, student association) on quality assurance in higher education.
- c** European processes
- i European initiatives in the area of higher education
  - ii European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG)
  - iii European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR)
  - iv European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)
  - v The work of the European Students' Union in general
  - vi The work of the European Students' Union on QA in HE

## PART D—STUDENT INFORMATION NEEDS

- 1 Please indicate by choosing options on the right what sources of information you used when making your decision concerning higher education? Please indicate how important was this information for your choice?
- 2 Website of the programme.
  - a Printed brochure of the programme.
  - b Website of the institution.

- c Printed brochure of the institution.
  - d Media reports (e.g. newspaper articles)
  - e University rankings.
  - f Website of public authorities (e.g. ministry of education)
  - g Websites of quality assurance agencies or similar structures.
  - h Recommendation from someone who studies/studied there.
  - i Employment statistics and labour market opportunities.
  - j Information/Open Days organised by the institution.
  - k Student Union.
  - l Other (specify)
- 3 How do you rate the quality of the information provided? Please use the scale on the right.
- a Website of the programme.
  - b Printed brochure of the programme.
  - c Website of the institution.
  - d Printed brochure of the institution.
  - e Media reports (e.g. newspaper articles)
  - f University rankings.
  - g Website of public authorities (e.g. ministry of education)
  - h Websites of quality assurance agencies or similar structures.
  - i Recommendation from someone who studies/studied there.
  - j Employment statistics and labour market opportunities.

**k** Information/Open Days organised by the institution.

**l** Student Union.

**m** Other (specify)

## PART E—ACADEMIC FREEDOM

The following section addresses the extent to which academic and intellectual freedom are respected in your university. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement using the scale on the right.

Students at my institution are free to express their views on matters related to their academic studies in class and in written academic papers without fear of censorship, penalty or intimidation.

- 1** Students at my institution are free to express their views on matters outside of their academic studies, without fear of censorship, penalty or intimidation, including through participation in student activities, political and social organizations, unions and other groups (including in-person and online social media groups).
- 2** Students at my institution regularly worry that if they freely express their views they may be prohibited from continuing their studies, such as by termination of scholarships or stipends; by denial of registration, permissions or permits; or by arrest, prosecution or detention.
- 3** Physical safety and well-being are a significant worry for students at my institution, whether because of crime, violence, or intimidation on the way to/from the institution; state security, military or police presence on or surveillance at the institution; or intimidation or threats from non-state religious, cultural, political or other groups within the institution.
- 4** If students at my institution felt more free to express their academic and non-academic views without fear of censorship, penalty or intimidation, it would improve the quality of the learning experience at the institution.

## PART F—DEMOGRAPHIC AND HE RELATED INFORMATION

- 1** Indicate which country (if necessary also province/Land/region), institution, programme you are studying in.

- 2 What is the final degree you are studying towards (BA, old degrees etc.)
- 3 Which semester/trimester are you currently in?
- 4 Are you a full-time or part-time student?
- 5 Do you pay a tuition fee, do you receive a loan from a public or private source, do you receive a grant from a public or private source?
- 6 Are you currently studying in your country of origin?
  - a Did you already study for some period of time in your country of origin?
  - b Do you plan to complete your entire degree outside of your country of origin?
  - c What is your country of origin? (open ended question)
  - d Do you plan on studying in another country after you complete this degree?
- 7 What is your gender?
- 8 How old are you?
- 9 What is the education level of your parents?
  - a Separate information for mother and father
- 10 Do you have a paid job besides studying?
  - a Is this job related to your field of study?
  - b Do you spend more than 15 hours per week in that job?
- 11 Have you ever been active in the student union or acted as a student representative in a decision-making structure?
  - a On what level (department/faculty, university, national, European)?
- 12 Are you involved in any other extra-curricular activities at your university?

- 13 Would you consider yourself to be:
- a Among the top 25% of your class.
  - b Average of your class.
  - c Among the bottom 25% of your class.
  - d Do not want to answer.