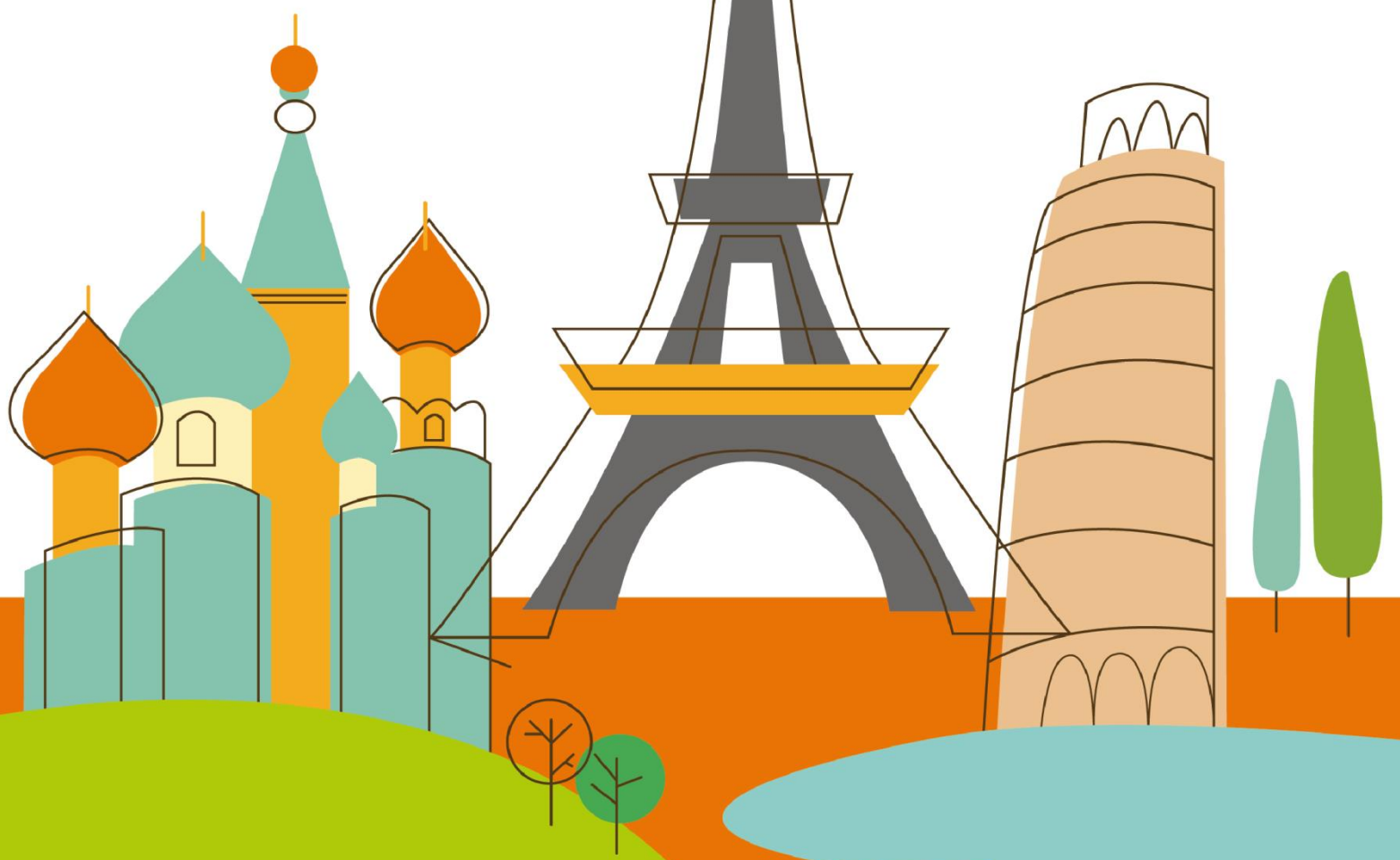
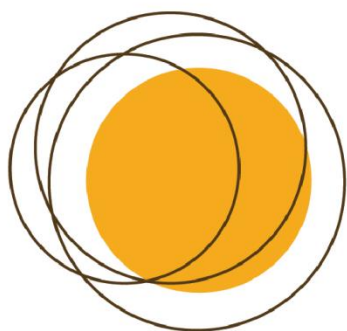
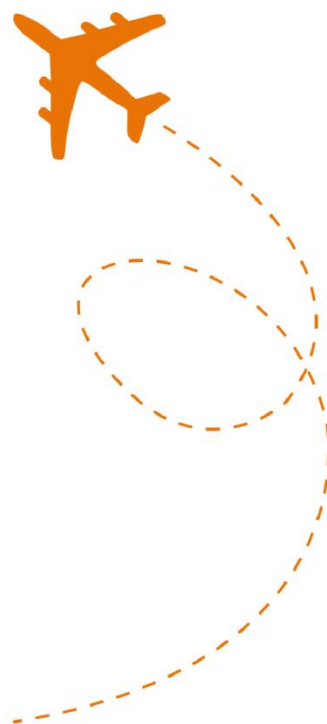


Key influencers of international student satisfaction in Europe 2013



KEY INFLUENCERS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SATISFACTION IN EUROPE

2013



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This publication is also available on the StudyPortals website at

www.studyportals.eu/student-satisfaction

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PREFACE

Dear reader,

Please take 1 minute to answer the following questions:

On a scale of 0 to 10, would you recommend your study experience to your friends?

Why? What are the main reasons why you would (not) recommend?

Please keep your answers in mind. Now imagine that we had asked you to fill out a traditional 30 question survey about the same topic. Would you have taken the time to fill it in? Would you have kept your concentration until the end? Most probably our questions would have been divided into sections like: Application Process, Campus, Facilities, Teaching, Curriculum, Support Staff, Career Perspective, Accommodation, and Finance. Which of these aspects actually came to mind when we asked the 'Why' question above? And, looking at your answers to the questions, would an analyst be able to determine what really drove your (dis)satisfaction?

The first question we posed above is actually the core of a relatively new but highly popular methodology called the Net Promoter Score (NPS), which has five big advantages:

- 1) it measures satisfaction in a very straightforward way and the outcome can be compared with other services, products or even life experiences
- 2) it has a very high response rate since it is so short and easy to understand, boosting reliability and representativeness of results
- 3) you are not biased by any categories we made up and you only mention the aspects you really care about
- 4) it has been proven that this score is the most reliable indicator of social promotion and a predictor of future success
- 5) it truly helps to understand your target group and to motivate people at any level of an organisation to focus their activities on improving the quality of your services.

The NPS is already widely used by many renowned organisations and industries, including Proctor & Gamble, Apple, and Allianz, as well as many public institutes and governments around the world. And now, for the first time, it is applied to Higher Education in Europe on this scale. We proudly present this report on international student satisfaction in Europe and the key drivers that determine (dis)satisfaction).

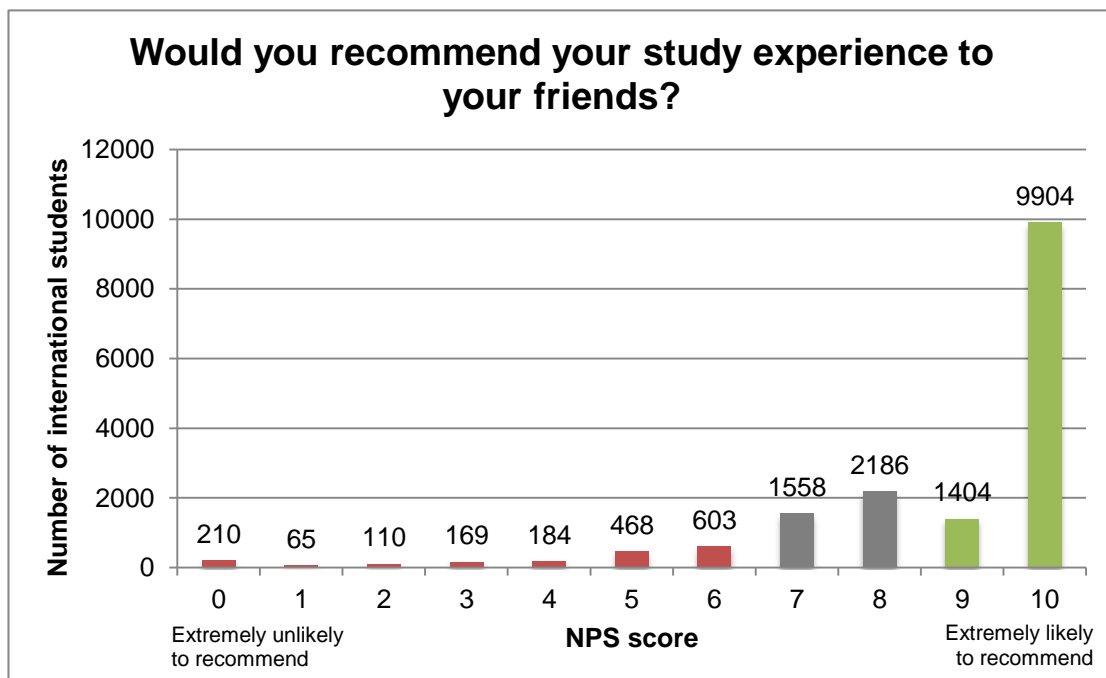
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

International students are overall very satisfied with their study abroad experience. This conclusion comes from the latest study that incorporates 46,537 comments made by 16,861 students on the student experience exchange platform www.STeXX.eu. Two thirds of international students surveyed would rate their experience with a 9 or 10 out of 10 when asked if they would recommend it to their friends. Only 11% gave a score below 6. This **highly positive response** shows that studying abroad is overall considered to be a very positive experience, though there are still areas for improvement.

The three factors with most influence on the student satisfaction are:

1. City atmosphere, looks & size;
2. Quality and attitude of the host university's teachers; and
3. Approachability and friendliness of the locals.

Figure 1: Number of respondents by satisfaction rating.



The methodology that was used to measure students' satisfaction is called Net Promoter Score (NPS); it uses a scale from -100 to +100, where 0 is average. It is popular due to its reliability and freedom from bias when compared to traditional methods of measuring satisfaction. The results, gathered over several years, prove that overall student satisfaction is at +56, showing international education in a very positive light. In addition to NPS scores, there is also information on the average scores out of 10. The European average is 8.8 / 10, again displaying that international

students are highly satisfied with their experience. This is truly a world-class result. A study mobility period abroad in Europe leads to exceptional satisfaction levels with regards to the study experience.

Table 1: Overall result - number of international respondents and NPS

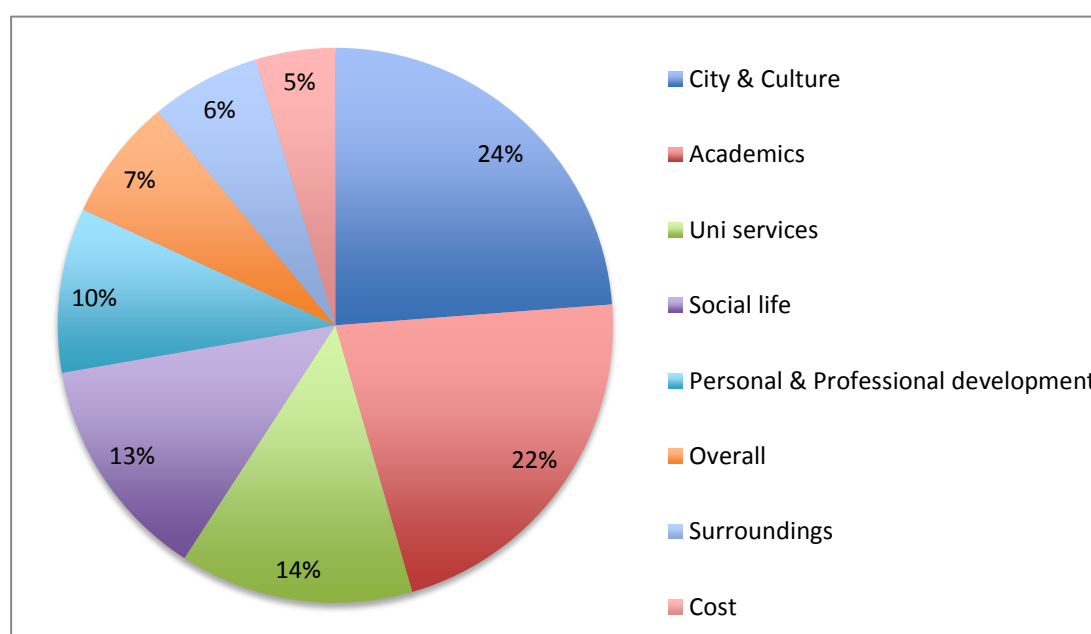
International respondents	N	%
Detractors (0-6)	1809	11%
Passives (7-8)	3744	22%
Promoters (9-10)	11308	67%
Total	16861	100%
NPS (% promoters - % detractors)		+56

Knowing what really determines international student satisfaction is useful for anyone involved in the international tertiary education sector, from international offices at universities to policy makers encouraging international student mobility. It can be used not only to celebrate the successes of international programmes, but also to improve future students' international study experience.

KEY INFLUENCERS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SATISFACTION IN EUROPE

Reasons (not) to recommend a study abroad experience, categorised by topic. Percentage of comments in each category, including both positive and negative comments:

Figure 2: Influencers of international student satisfaction



Reasons to recommend a university

City & culture (25% of all positive reasons)

- City atmosphere, looks & size are most commented on overall.
- Local people also greatly influence students' time abroad, with 5% of all comments about the local population, including whether they are friendly, open to strangers, helpful or fun.

Academics (21% of all positive reasons)

- Teachers are very important to a student's international experience: students comment on teachers' attitudes to international students, including how willing they are to assist foreign students and if students have a lot of face-to-face time with lecturers.
- Reputation is another important factor in student satisfaction – students comment frequently on whether or not a university has a good name.
- Together, comments on teachers and reputation account for 1 in 10 positive comments.

Social life (14% of all positive reasons)

- Activities and clubs at the university prompt positive feedback from international students – they appreciate having the extra options for ways to spend their free time.
- Making new friends is a fundamental part of an international experience, and students frequently mention international exchanges being a good way to make lifelong friends.
- Students often comment that an international atmosphere is one of the best aspects of studying abroad.

University services (11% of all positive reasons)

- Students appreciate all the support possible from their host university – whether it is assistance with completing the necessary paperwork or a welcome session organised for international students to help them settle into their new town.
- A well-organised academic course and administrative support is highly valued by international students.

Personal & professional development (11% of all positive reasons)

- International students relish the chance to discover new cultures – having access to new environments is an exciting and educational experience.
- Students are also eager to learn new languages during their study.
- International experience is frequently cited as being beneficial for personal growth.

Reasons not to recommend a university

University services (29% of negative reasons)

- Students dislike excessively bureaucratic procedures and would rather have straightforward administration processes.
- Not receiving help with finding accommodation, or having a very poor quality of university accommodation are negative influencers.

Academics (24% of all negative reasons)

- International students highly value a quality education; the biggest negative academic influencers are a low academic level and poor quality of teaching. Teachers' level of English also gets a specific mention.

Cost (16% of negative reasons)

- Living costs account for 15% of all negative comments, though only 4% of reasons overall. Students often find moving to a new country with a different economic situation is expensive.

City & culture (15% of all negative reasons)

- City atmosphere, looks & size is not only a reason to recommend an exchange; it is also one of the biggest causes of complaints. Eight per cent of all negative comments are regarding this category.

Comparison of segments

International vs. Domestic students

- Academic aspects are far more important for domestic students than international students. International students comment more than domestic students on personal & professional development, particularly learning a new language, although domestic students mention career prospects more frequently.
- This is based on results from 3,528 domestic students who also responded to the questionnaire, in addition to the 16,861 international students, allowing a comparison between international and domestic students.

Short term vs. Full degree mobility

- Students who study abroad for their whole degree comment more frequently on academic aspects than exchange students. Students studying abroad for a short time comment more on city & culture.

European vs. Non-European students

- European students mention city & culture more frequently than non-European students, whereas non-European students are more focussed on academics, particularly the subjects available and reputation of the university.

Destination country: where are students most satisfied?

- The best-rated countries are Slovenia at NPS +74, Norway at +73 and Austria with +70.
- With a NPS of +75, students originating from Croatia were the happiest with their experience overall. Romanian students had a NPS of +71, and Greek students +69. The most critical students were those originating from Sweden with +37 and the Netherlands with +38.

Where can improvements be made?

- International students want to study while they are abroad – so university courses should be aimed at a high level.
- Where courses are taught in English, the teachers should have a high level of language in order to facilitate communication and learning.
- Universities should ensure that they have an efficient, helpful international office to aid new students settling in to their host country. It should also smooth the pathway for communications between the home and host universities.

At the end of the report, there are detailed recommendations of what international student organisations, higher education institutions and policy makers can do to improve on international students' experience of studying abroad. This report can be used to understand what exactly international students want from studying abroad and consolidate the increasing internationalisation of European higher education.

INTRODUCTION

This study identifies the key influencers of international student satisfaction in Europe. It takes direct feedback from international students on their studies and life in Europe, using a popular methodology called Net Promoter Score (NPS). The NPS is a two-question survey that reveals what aspects really influence satisfaction, in this case about the international study experience in Europe. This encompasses the full range of their perception about their experience, including both educational and social aspects of their international mobility period.

Many renowned organisations in the services and consumer products industries use NPS methodology to focus their activities, improve their services and guide strategic decision-making. This study is the first to apply this method to higher education. Stakeholders in European higher education will get a unique insight into what students truly find important, and what they do not. Because of this, this report is particularly interesting for European universities, national institutes, policy makers and international student organisations.

The survey was conducted at www.stexx.eu: the Student Experience Exchange platform. This is a platform created by StudyPortals for students to exchange and review their experiences of studying abroad. It serves as a tool for prospective students to read reviews of different universities and cities in Europe before they make a decision on where to study. It can also be used by anyone working in international education to find areas for improvement. Almost 25,000 students have already used it to evaluate their study abroad programme since it was created in 2011.

Through reading this report you will find what really drives international student satisfaction. You will discover differences in students' needs, based on their level of education, study destination and duration of international mobility. Differences between domestic and international students are presented as well, as are several conclusions and recommendations for the future.

We are confident that this report will help improve understanding of international students' needs and desires, and that it will contribute to an increasing quality of higher education and satisfaction level for international students in Europe.

METHODOLOGY

NET PROMOTER SCORE

In order to analyse student satisfaction in Europe, the Net Promoter Score (NPS) methodology was used (Reichfeld, 2003). This is a relatively new but already widespread survey tool that measures peoples' satisfaction towards a product or service, as well as the likeliness that they will promote it in their social network. The NPS is used by renowned organisations across the world and is highly popular as a management tool and a predictor of future growth. It gives a much better insight into real drivers of satisfaction than traditional surveys: the survey is very short (it has only 2 questions, driving high response rates and more reliable results), respondents describe the most important aspects that influenced their satisfaction in their own words (without asking any leading questions), and it has a strong communicative value with practical recommendations as outcome.

The first question of the survey is: *Would you recommend your experience to your friends?* Respondents answer on a 0 (no, not at all likely) to 10 (yes, extremely likely) rating scale. The second question is an open one, with a free text field: *"Why?"* By applying this methodology to higher education in Europe, it reveals the most important aspects that influence the satisfaction of international students. It identifies the top-of-mind reasons why they would or would not recommend their friends study in a specific country, city and university, without a leading question. Students only mention what they see as important.

Figure 3: Screenshot of the Student Experience Exchange platform www.stexx.eu

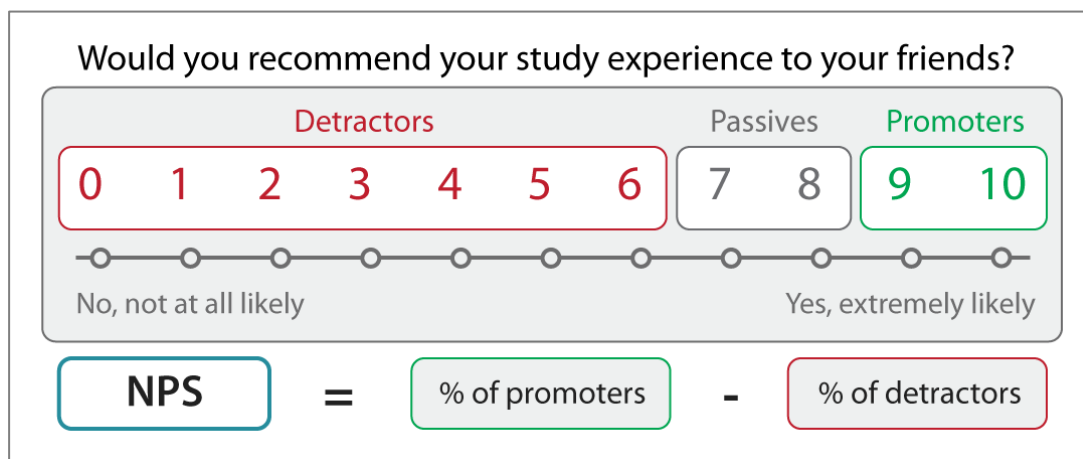
The screenshot displays the SteXX.eu Student Experience Exchange platform. The top navigation bar includes links for 'Like', '+1', 'About', 'Contact', 'Advertising', and 'University Administration'. Below this, there are buttons for 'Find Bachelors', 'Find Masters', 'Find PhDs', 'Find Scholarships', and 'Find Short courses'. The main content area is titled 'Write Review' and prompts users to 'Write a short review of your study experience!'. It lists reasons for writing a review: 'help students like you to choose a study in Europe', 'learn from others by reading about their experiences', and 'share those tips that only you know'. The form includes fields for 'Where did you study?' (a dropdown menu), 'Level of Education' (a dropdown menu), and a rating scale for 'Would you recommend your experience to your friends?' ranging from 0 to 10. Below the rating scale is a text area for 'Why? Any advice?'. The 'Latest Reviews' section on the right shows two reviews: one for 'Studied Industrial Engineering and Management at University of Groningen' with a 7 out of 10 rating, and another for 'Studied at Bogazici University, Turkey' with an 8 out of 10 rating.

The satisfaction rating explained

The outcome of the two-question survey is one overall satisfaction score (the NPS) based on the ratings. Combined with thousands of answers to the open question, prime incentives and disincentives towards studying in Europe become clear. The respondents are divided into three groups, based on the rating in answer to the question “would you recommend your experience to your friends”.

- Promoters (9 – 10)
very enthusiastic and extremely likely to tell their friends to go and study abroad
- Passives (7 – 8)
generally satisfied, but not so overwhelmingly positive that they actively promote it
- Detractors (0 – 6)
unsatisfied, likely to discourage their friends to follow their example

Figure 4: Explanation of the Net Promoter Score



The NPS is then calculated by deducting the number of detractors from the number of promoters, and dividing it by the total number of respondents. The NPS can therefore be as low as -100 (everybody is a detractor) or as high as +100 (everybody is a promoter). The higher this number is, the more satisfied international students are and the more likely they are to promote studying abroad in Europe to their friends.

By gathering information about the respondents on their education level, country of destination and duration of the mobility period, it is possible to compare the satisfaction of international students across these determinants.

COLLECTING REVIEWS ON STEXX

This report is based on reviews gathered online at the Student Experience Exchange platform www.stexx.eu. The grand total of reviews used in this analysis falls at 25,232, incorporating those from 16,861 (former) international students and 3,528 domestic students. There are actually more individual reviews on STEXX. However, this study incorporates only those reviews which include a score out of 10 for the experience, meaning that not all reviews can be used here. In addition to those lacking a score, there were also a number of duplicates and unusable reviews (due to spam content, offensive remarks or incomprehensibility, amongst others). Finally, some respondents did not specify their nationality and thus made it impossible to determine if they were international or domestic students. Unless otherwise mentioned, all the data in this report refers to that for international students only.

In addition to the relevance for the survey, these study experiences are published on www.stexx.eu. This gives prospective students access to previous students' reviews. Through reading these, they are not only able to make a more informed decision on where to study; they also have a much better idea of what to expect from their time abroad, as well as valuable local insights. In doing this, it helps them prepare for an international mobility period and better matches their expectations to reality.

Categorisation and Classification

Firstly, it is necessary to clarify some terms which will be used throughout this report.

Review – refers to the entirety of a student's answer to the question '*Why would you recommend it to your friends?*' There are 16,861 reviews by international students and 3,528 reviews by domestic students incorporated into this study. Here is an example of a review:

“

I recommend going to this university, because you can learn foreign languages, meet new and interesting people, discover a new culture...

”

Student about studying in France

Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 10 out of 10

Comment – each individual part of a student's *review* is treated as a separate reason to recommend, that is to say that if they mention the quality of their teacher, the great city atmosphere and the friendliness of the locals, that will count as three separate comments. Up to four reasons per review are counted in this study, with the result that there are 46,537 reasons for recommending studying abroad given by international students. In the example above, the three

separate comments are highlighted in different colours – *because you can learn foreign languages* [sic.] is the first comment, and is categorised as Personal & professional development, Language. The second, *meet new and interesting people*, is classified as Social life, Making new friends. Finally, the third comment, *discover a new culture...*, is treated as City & culture, Culture.

The thousands of reviews gathered varied in length between a few words and several paragraphs of text. In order to analyse the content of the reviews, each individual 'reason' within the text was assigned a category, with each review being assigned up to four categories. The categories were defined by creating affinity diagrams (Beyer, 1998) of the different comments. The categories ranged, among other things, from academic reputation, educational system and cost of living to personal growth and future job opportunities. Within each category, the comments were then grouped into various subcategories. Any duplicate categories in the same review (for instance more than one comment about the subcategory Teachers) were then disregarded. As reviews could be split into up to four categories each, this accounts for the fact that there are over 46,000 comments made by just under 17,000 students.

In order to use these reviews for the analysis of what is important in international student satisfaction, each comment was then classified as positive or negative. It is important to remember that not all students who give a low rating will be entirely negative about their experience, and not all those who give a high rating will be entirely positive. A student who rates their study experience as 9 out of 10 may have absolutely no negative comments about their time abroad, but it is also possible that they will see areas for improvement. Of the four possible areas that they comment on, one or more may be rated negatively. This gives a highly accurate view of student satisfaction.

Of course, this report does not present every single piece of information mentioned in the thousands of reviews analysed. It was decided that only four comments per review could be counted for the analysis, although there were sometimes many more comments that could have been used. This maximum of four comments per review ensures that all reviews have a somewhat equal impact on the final result, making sure that it is not possible for a single respondent to have a disproportionate impact by providing a very high number of comments in one review. The general upper limit of number of comments per review is around 7, although occasionally there were up to twelve different comments in one review. Having said this, the vast majority of reviews fit within four categories.

Table 2: Overview of review categories

Category	Academics	City & culture	Cost	Personal & professional development	Social life	Surroundings	University services	Overall impression
Sub categories	Level (high)	City atmosphere, looks & size	Financial aid	Career prospects	Activities	Location	Accommodation	Overall impression
	Level (low)	Culture	Living costs	Discovering new cultures	International atmosphere	Nature	Bureaucracy	
	Recognition	Infrastructure	Tuition fees	Language	Making new friends	Travel	Campus atmosphere	
	Reputation	People		Personal growth	Nightlife	Weather	Equipment	
	Research	Security			Social life overall		Facilities	
	Subject	City overall					International services	
	Teacher language						Uni language	
	Teachers							
	Teaching							
	Academics overall							

2011 REPORT

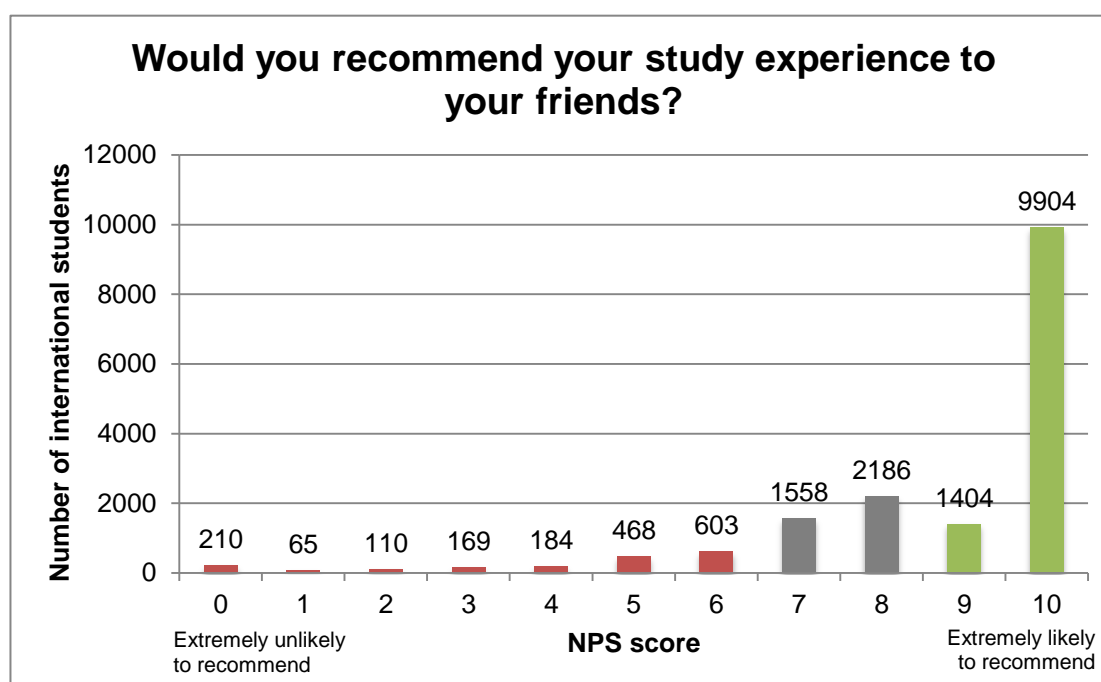
In 2011, StudyPortals published the first report 'Key influencers of international student satisfaction'. This report (published in 2013) takes into account the first report, and expands on it. There are several key differences between the 2011 report and the 2013 report:

- In 2011, we had 2,982 reasons for studying abroad, given by 1,482 international students. This allowed us to draw some initial conclusions about the study abroad experience.
- In 2013, we now have access to over 40,000 reasons for studying abroad, given by almost 17,000 international students, meaning that we can produce a much more accurate analysis of all that is positive about studying abroad, what can be improved, and the impact it has on students' lives. This allows us to present a much more in-depth report detailing how using international students' experiences can help internationalise further education in the future.
- In 2013 there is a new category: Surroundings, (which was classified as part of City & culture in 2011, but has now been divided up into subcategories). In addition, there are more sub-categories, including Level (high) and Level (low), Teacher language, University language and Bureaucracy, amongst others. This allows for a more in-depth analysis of exactly what students comment upon.
- There is no comparison between the figures used in 2011 and 2013, as the results for 2011 are incorporated into the 2013 report.

RESULTS

In order to present the results of the STeXX survey, a total of 25,232 reviews by 16,861 international students and 3,528 domestic students were analysed, thus giving a unique insight into the satisfaction of international students in Europe. The main conclusion is that international students in Europe are very satisfied with their study experience.

Figure 5: Number of respondents by satisfaction rating



The reviews are mainly written by students from Europe, but there are also 1,630 reviews written by students from outside of Europe. Equally, there are views represented from every level of university study, and from students who have gone abroad for their whole degree as well as those who have only done a short term stint abroad. This allows a wide spectrum of comparisons to be made, according to different study conditions. It reveals insights from what aspects are more important for long-term students, to which ones students in Italy do not take into consideration.

Differences occur in the results when they are broken down into results per country, or per level. For example, students from Germany are much more concerned about academic aspects when studying abroad than their peers from the UK, whereas French students are less concerned about the services provided by their university.

The comparison of results by country is done purely within the biggest European countries, according to the number of international students they host per year. Due to the large number of

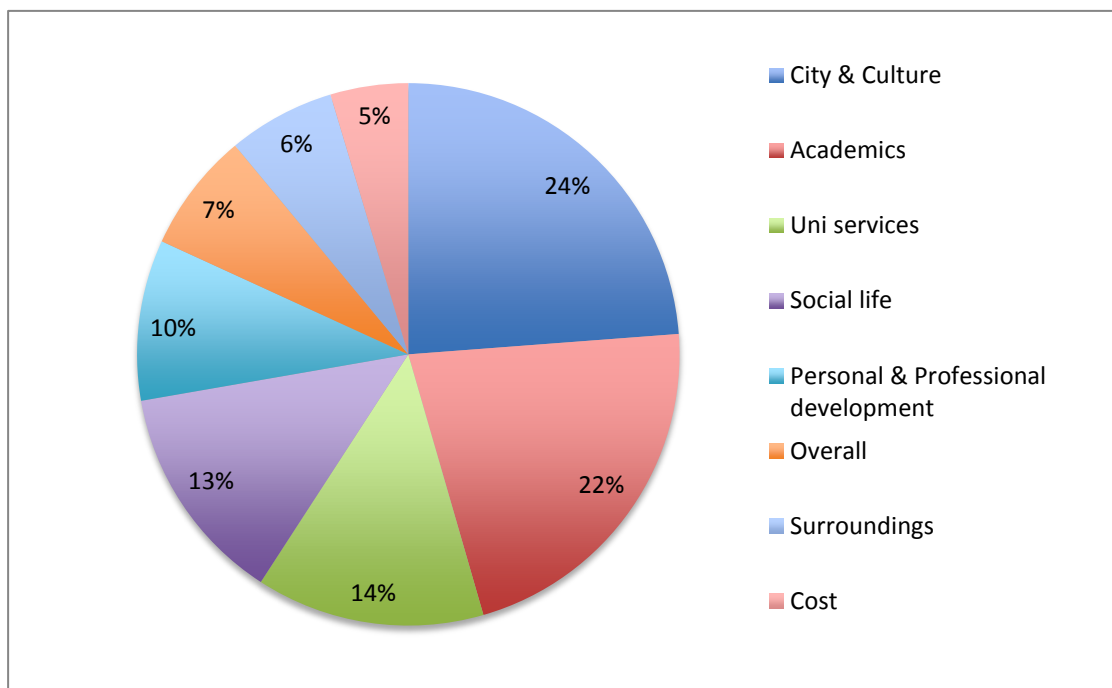
different countries, and relative lack of information about them, we are not able to discuss other countries in this study.

International students' high level of satisfaction regarding their study experience is largely due to the impact of City & Culture and Academics – which together make up almost half of all comments. This shows that they are both aspects that are vitally important to students studying abroad. And together with University services and Social life, these four categories account for almost three quarters of all comments.

The more specific aspects of international student satisfaction can be seen when we look in more detail at the breakdown of comments. Within the main categories, the biggest individual influencers are the city atmosphere, high quality of teachers and friendly locals, as well as a university with a good reputation. The biggest single cause for complaint is a high cost of living, followed by a lack of support in finding accommodation and excessive university bureaucracy.

Together, these reasons have the most influence on why students would or wouldn't recommend studying abroad. This report gives a unique insight into exactly what students want from their study abroad experience, and can be used to encourage students to consider studying abroad.

Figure 6: Overall result - number of international respondents and NPS



INFLUENCERS OF STUDENT SATISFACTION

The key influencers of international student satisfaction in Europe surface when we take a closer look at the results in Table 3. It shows the number of reasons mentioned by the respondents, divided by topic (category) and classification (negative or positive). In the analysis of these results, and in calculating the percentages of reasons per category, all international student reviews have been taken into account. After all, the question is about what aspects influence the likeliness of recommending the study experience most. Therefore, whether someone is a promoter, a passive, or a detractor, and whether a review is positive or negative, the reason mentioned is still the most important influencer of their experience, even though the respondents with more extreme opinions (promoters and detractors) are more likely to actually spread their opinion.

The next chapters will focus on these categories one by one, discussing the influencers individually.

Table 3: Influencers of international student satisfaction in Europe

Category	Classification			
	Negative	Positive	Total	%
Academics	1499	8616	10116	22%
Level (high)	164	1619	1784	4%
Level (low)	470	88	558	1%
Recognition	67	197	264	1%
Reputation	64	1935	1999	4%
Research	5	98	103	0%
Subject	156	1324	1480	3%
Teacher language	86	45	131	0%
Teachers	192	2094	2286	5%
Teaching	285	1155	1440	3%
Academics overall	10	61	71	0%
City & Culture	976	10083	11059	24%
City atmosphere, looks & size	497	5710	6207	13%
Culture	123	1155	1278	3%
Infrastructure	88	354	442	1%
People	159	2181	2340	5%
Security	74	110	184	0%
City overall	35	573	608	1%
Cost	1034	1121	2155	5%
Financial aid	32	96	128	0%
Living costs	976	978	1954	4%
Tuition fees	26	47	73	0%
Personal & Professional development	134	4312	4446	10%
Career prospects	55	636	691	1%
Discovering new cultures	4	1111	1115	2%
Language	74	1213	1287	3%
Personal growth	1	1352	1353	3%
Social life	408	5717	6125	13%
Activities	182	1707	1889	4%
International atmosphere	52	1529	1581	3%
Making new friends	46	1286	1332	3%
Nightlife	90	790	880	2%
Social life overall	38	405	443	1%
Surroundings	362	2616	2978	6%
Location	38	792	830	2%
Nature	6	893	899	2%
Travel	7	573	580	1%
Weather	311	358	669	1%
University services	1818	4538	6356	14%
Accommodation	551	718	1269	3%
Bureaucracy	525	774	1299	3%
Campus atmosphere	51	826	877	2%
Equipment & Facilities	134	1149	1283	3%
International services	332	753	1085	2%
University language	225	318	543	1%
Overall	95	3207	3302	7%
Total	6326	40210	46537	100%
%	14%	86%	100%	

Academics (22%)

Students commented on all aspects of their education: whether or not the level was right, how good the reputation of the university is, if there was a wide range of subjects and research areas, the level of recognition they received from their home university for the work they did at their host university (in case of exchange students), the quality of the teachers and if they spoke another language (usually English), as well as the quality of teaching.

Level (high) and Level (low) (4% and 1% of all reasons respectively)



The university has a high academic level, they provide high quality lectures and it is one of the oldest universities of Madrid. It is well known by companies and different organizations, so students have the opportunity to take advantage of these contacts in Spain and abroad.



Belgian student about studying in Spain

Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 10 out of 10

The level of education features highly in comments by students – they wish to feel that they are receiving a high quality education. It is certainly a reason to recommend a university to a friend. Exchange students often compare the level at their host university with their home university, and complain when the level is lower at their host university. Some students complain that though the course may be difficult due to being taught in another language (which here is counted as a separate category), the level of content was much lower than they expected. Having some knowledge of the subject area, students did not want to ‘be spoken down to’ due to linguistic problems. Although they may have slight problems studying in another language at first (if that is the case), they quickly adapt and are able to appreciate the level. Indeed, a too-low level is a reason not to recommend a university, as students feel that they do not learn enough. The number of students who complain that the level of study was too high is very low, as is the number of students who liked having a low level.

Recognition (1%)

“

It was only one of two Erasmus partner universities in my chosen country of destination + it was the more easily accessible from my country of origin

”

British student about studying in Italy

Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 8 out of 10

Some of the credit mobile students (exchange students) in this study mentioned the cooperation between their host and home universities – whether or not their work in the destination is given recognition by their home university, or if they will have to re-do the semester once they return home. A lack of appropriate cooperation between universities is frustrating for students, and causes problems unnecessarily.

Reputation (4%)

“

ETH has an excellent reputation.

”

Dutch student about studying in Switzerland

Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 9 out of 10

A university with a good name is often cited as a positive reason to – although this often reflects the reason that a student chose the university in the first place, rather than why they would recommend it once they had already been. Students who already study somewhere are more likely to recommend a university on their personal experiences such as the quality of the teachers and the academics programme, rather than the overall reputation of the university.

The number of reviews on this topic stresses the importance that students can place on a university's reputation while making a decision on where to study. Universities that receive positive comments on their reputation are not only typical top 100 universities – they can be renowned in a specific study discipline or highly ranked within a certain region or country.

Subject & Research area (3%)

“

Fantastic design programme at TU Delft, with great lecturers and interesting learning environment..

”

British student about studying in the Netherlands
Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 10 out of 10

Students frequently comment on the subject or research area at their host university – particularly if it is well known for a certain subject or area of research. Students are most likely to recommend their own study programme, rather than their academic field in general. In other words, when it comes to the subject area, students show loyalty towards their own university. This is especially the case if the quality of the study programme is high or the faculty being well known in the field. As such, highly specialised study programmes are more often recommended because of their academic field than others.

Teachers & Teacher language (together 5%)

“

Friendly teachers which also have good english language skills, high quality of lectures, rich and diverse culture in Copenhagen

”

German student about studying in Denmark
Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 10 out of 10

How approachable and helpful teachers are has a big influence on students' satisfaction. The more willing they are to assist international students, the more likely it is that the student will later recommend their experience to their peers. Teachers who are very well qualified or viewed as specialists in their field are also seen positively by students.

Where courses are offered in another language, students often comment on the level of language spoken by the host university's teachers – whether they are happy and comprehensible when they speak another language (usually English) or if this is something that the university can improve.

Frequently mentioned in this category is the English proficiency of teachers, which really is a decisive factor in whether a student will recommend a particular university. On a positive note, several universities (and countries in general) are recommended because of the high level of English proficiency.

When professors are internationally renowned or highly skilled within their area, it is also a reason to recommend a study experience. Finally, a passionate style of teaching and approachability of

the professors is of influence. A close and relatively personal interaction with professors is much appreciated by students, as well as professors being available and supportive.

Teaching (3%)

“

Professional faculty where case study methods are used a lot in a very successful way, lectures are interactive, and the subjects are diverse (from marketing and HR to Project and Operations).

”

Student about studying in Serbia

Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 9 out of 10

Although the quality of the teachers is mentioned as a large part of students' satisfaction with their academic experience, their methods of teaching are also a key influencer, accounting for 5% of all negative comments. Students may encounter new methods of teaching when they study abroad, and find it difficult to adjust to the unknown techniques. They appreciate practical work as well as theory – some find that courses are too theoretical to be useful in today's job market. They expect their learning to be directly useful in a professional context, and readily complain when they feel that the teaching is not setting them up well for the future. They also consider a well thought-out and planned study course to be highly important, and particularly express their appreciation for interactive study methods. Interesting presentations, working in small groups and the possibility of asking questions are all positive influencers. Moreover, students appreciate if company visits and other ways of gaining practical experience are included in the curriculum.

Academics overall (<1%)

“

Because academics, [...] are great!

”

Spanish student about studying in Italy

Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 10 out of 10

This category accounts for those comments which do not fit into any of the above categories, but still refer to academic aspects of their study abroad. There are very few responses in this category.

City & culture (24%)

Typical topics include the atmosphere and appearance of the city, its size, annual events and whether it is a student city. Finally, this category includes comments on the local culture, attitude of the people and their English proficiency.

City atmosphere, looks & size (13% of all reasons)

“

Krakow is one of the oldest medieval cities in Poland. Full of beautiful buildings. It also is a great student city - many students live and party there.

”

Italian student about studying in Turkey
Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 10 out of 10

This is the largest overall sub-category that students comment upon. Having a city with a lively atmosphere is highly valued by students. Another contributor to city atmosphere, and thereby student satisfaction, is the percentage of students in the city. Several respondents indicate they would recommend their study experience based on the fact that they were living in a nice student city, describing a young, lively and vibrant environment that is much sought after.

International student satisfaction highly depends on the city where the university is located. Typical contributors of a good city atmosphere are a variety of events, cafés, bars and restaurants. The city size is often specifically mentioned as a way to indicate the atmosphere. There is no consensus on the ideal city size though, this mostly depends on the past experiences and background of a student: those coming from a large city typically look for discovering a smaller and cosier city, and vice versa.

Typically valued are historic buildings, canals and sightseeing opportunities. It is interesting to note that beautiful, historic cities are frequently mentioned as being beautiful, whereas students are less likely to mention that a city is particularly ugly (i.e. they are disproportionately positive).

Culture (3%)

“

Because of the particular culture and architecture. Some ancient structures are so far from the usual buildings in Europe. It's an important trip for an architect who wants a complete culture in his field.

”

Swedish student about studying in Poland

Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 8 out of 10

Culture includes many aspects of the host city – the way of life, food, local customs and sights, as well as the local language. This category is different from *Discovering new cultures* and *Language* within *Personal & professional growth* in that this is purely observation of the culture in the destination, and whether or not a student would recommend visiting a place based on if they had enjoyed it. Students express their (often positive) views on local norms, ways of thinking and general welfare of the society.

Infrastructure & Security (1%)

“

The city is very well-organized. Is easy to move around the city, transports are punctual and working,

”

Italian student about studying in Lithuania

Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 10 out of 10

How well the city is equipped with public transport, hospitals and other useful civic provisions does not have a huge influence on students' experience, but can make a difference nonetheless. If students feel particularly safe or unsafe in their city, it can have a great effect on their experience of studying there.

People (5%)



Swedish are really nice people, they are very open minded, really good in lot of languages and it was my best experience ever.



French student about studying in Sweden

Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 10 out of 10

The local population's friendliness and willingness to help is one of the more common reasons to recommend a certain city – students settle in more easily when the locals are welcoming. The English proficiency of local people is of high influence here.

City overall (1%)



That's probably one of the best cities to study in whole Europe



Spanish student about studying in Belgium

Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 10 out of 10

This category provides the option for any remaining comments or general comments that cannot be classified.

Cost & funding (5%)

Cost includes comments on tuition fees, cooperation schemes, accommodation costs and various aspects of living costs and typical expenditures, including examples. The funding side typically includes scholarship opportunities, funding schemes and alternative ways of earning an income, such as part time job opportunities. Altogether, this covers the budget for studying and living abroad.

Financial aid (<1% of all reasons)

“

The amount of scholarship together with the cost of living is beneficial.

Azerbaijani student about studying in Greece
Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 9 out of 10

”

The availability or lack of funding for studying abroad is mentioned relatively infrequently, though when it is it is an important factor. Some exchange students mention that they have access to an Erasmus grant, but in some countries this does not stretch far enough for them.

Living costs (4%)

“

I studied in Budapest where the food is really cheap and good (there are many good restaurants in which a lunch menu will cost nearly 3.5 euro) and the nightlife too (the beer in an international bar like Szimpla is about 2 euro for a 50cl beer, in a typical Hungarian bar it would cost 1 euro, the entrance fees for discos and parties are cheap too). In Budapest there are many big markets where the prices are good and the quality too.

French student about studying in Hungary
Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 10 out of 10

”

The cost of living is one of the biggest causes of complaint when studying abroad – even within Europe there are vast differences in the cost of rent and important everyday items such as groceries, and common expenses such as alcohol and student activities. High living costs are the single biggest cause of complaint, accounting for 15% of all negative comments, even though they only make up 4% of comments overall. Unsurprisingly, there are more negative comments about cost in countries with a traditionally higher cost of living, whereas those countries with a lower cost of living have fewer negative comments.

Tuition fees (<1%)

“

*With the Institute for Study Abroad I paid the same tuition as at home,
this made it possible to go.*

”

American student about studying in Denmark

Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 6 out of 10

International exchange students within Europe do not have to pay for tuition as part of the Erasmus agreement. Additionally, some countries, such as Denmark, do not charge for tertiary education. However, students who study abroad for the duration of their degree may be liable to pay tuition fees. This accounts for the very low number of comments on tuition fees. There may also be an aspect that students are put off studying in a certain location due to the cost of tuition, and so only those who know they can afford to go do so.

Personal & professional development (10%)

Personal growth and soft skills are typically covered in this category. This includes cultural awareness and understanding, independence and broadening one's horizon. Moreover, it includes professional development related topics, on for instance career perspective, future job opportunities, CV building and learning or improving language skills.

Career prospects (1% of all reasons)

“ *My exchange improved my English skills, experience and made my CV more attractive on [the] labour market.* ”

Polish student about studying in Sweden
Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 10 out of 10

Students mention the benefits that an international experience can bring to their CV – from improved language skills being good for working in multinational companies to the improved social and personal skills they develop while studying abroad. Although few students undertake a study period abroad purely for their professional development, many comment that it is a very pleasant bonus in addition to the other reasons that they study abroad.

Discovering new cultures (2%)

“ *I recommend to live this experience because it's a great opportunity to know other country, other culture and other people.* ”

Polish student about studying in Finland
Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 10 out of 10

Going abroad to explore a new world is one of the greatest opportunities afforded to international students. They comment on the excitement of discovering a new culture, with all its quirky traditions, exotic food and excitingly different way of doing things. Understanding a new culture is often commented to be a great way of growing as a person; from realising that 'doing things differently' is not necessarily the same as 'doing things wrong' to becoming more tolerant of other ways of life, and using different languages. Discovering new cultures is not exclusive to the culture of the host country – many students comment that they learn as much from their fellow international students as from the host university's students. An understanding of discovering new cultures, and the open-minded attitude that often comes alongside it is frequently cited as a great way to improve their chances in the international jobs market.

Language (3%)



Everybody knows people in Scandinavian countries speak English very good, this improved my English. Also, you discover other ways of living and reflect on your own.



Polish student about studying in Finland

Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 10 out of 10

Developing language skills is a commonly mentioned reason to go abroad, not least because immersion in a country is usually seen as the best method to improve linguistic ability. Students mention that they want to learn a language to improve their job prospects, or because it is part of their course. It is often seen as an integral part of discovering the culture of their host country. Although learning the language of their host country is the most-mentioned aspect in this section, it also covers those students who make the most of the opportunity to improve their English skills whilst conversing with their international colleagues. This includes both improvement of existing language skills and learning a completely new language.

Personal growth (3%)



Because I came back changed, more independent, more self-aware, more tolerant, with friends all over the continent and a better understanding of how we are all surprisingly similar and deliciously different.



Romanian student about studying in Belgium

Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 9 out of 10

Students see their own development whilst studying abroad as one of the greatest benefits of the experience. They refer to the increased confidence gained through dealing with the challenges and new experiences of moving to a new country, as well as the independence this offers students who may not have lived away from home before. As well as this increased confidence in themselves and independence, students also appreciate the chance to improve other soft skills, such as communication. Unsurprisingly, comments about personal growth are overwhelmingly positive, with just one negative comment in this category.

Social life (13%)

This includes any social aspects of an international experience – if there are extra-curricular activities, the international atmosphere, making new friends, parties and opportunities for going out in the evenings. An experience studying abroad is often somewhat unfairly seen as an ‘academic holiday’; a time of constant parties and socialising, but the number of comments in this category counters that idea. Although social life does account for 13% of all comments overall, it is the fourth biggest category, with aspects such as Academics, City & Culture and University services outweighing it by far. Students obviously do enjoy the great social life of an international study experience, but it is by no means the most important aspect of their time abroad.

Activities (4% of all reasons)



There are heaps of student associations and activities, which is in my opinion essential to make your university experience unforgettable.



Dutch student about studying in Spain

Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 10 out of 10

Students place great value on the availability of extra-curricular activities, especially those organised by international student societies. This category also includes other student activities such as sports clubs and societies, as well as the trips organised for international students by the university. Anything which helps them to settle in to their new home and make new friends attracts positive reviews. However, a lack of activities organised for international students can be a great cause for complaint.

Activities such as an introductory, or ‘welcome’ week for international students are highly appreciated, as are buddy programmes.

International atmosphere (3%)

“

It is the best place on earth for meeting people of different cultures and friends for life.

”

Student about studying in Serbia

Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 10 out of 10

One of the aspects that international students like most about studying abroad is the chance to meet people from all over the world – from countries near and far. Though closely related to two other categories – *Discovering new cultures* and *Making new friends*, this category takes into consideration comments about the international sphere – one in four comments in this category is negative, the remainder positive. This shows that international students really appreciate being able to meet people from other countries.

Making new friends (3%)

“

Within the short time I was there, I made friends for life with fellow exchange students and my Swedish corridor mates, and developed good relationships with my lecturers, exchange coordinator, even the local grocer, cafes and kebab joint!

”

Australian student about studying in Sweden

Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 10 out of 10

Time spent studying abroad is a great opportunity to make new friends. In addition to making lifelong friends, it also helps students settle in and enjoy their international experience. Many respondents report on their appreciation of meeting new people from various cultural backgrounds, making friends for life and finding life partners. This social aspect can turn an international study period into an unforgettable experience.

Nightlife (2%)

“

The night life is awesome. The parties last until 6 in the morning and you can have a lot of fun there. Although the city doesn't offer too many cultural attractions, besides some museums, the castle and the bull fight arena and the centre is fairly small but still it was a fantastic experience and you will meet so many great and interesting people there.

”

German student about studying in Spain

Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 9 out of 10

Although most students love parties, nightlife is by no means the biggest subcategory within social life. More important are activities, making new friends and international atmosphere. It is fair to say that students wish for a good selection of bars and clubs to spend their evenings in, and for some not having that is a reason for complaint, but overall it is not a great influencer of international student satisfaction.

Social life overall (1%)

“

I would recommend it for its social/students life.

”

Swiss student about studying in the UK

Explained why s/he rated the study experience with 8 out of 10

This category contains any comments which do not fit into any of the above categories - mainly comments that the social life is great!

Surroundings (6%)

The area around a students' host city, including whether or not there is nearby nature such as mountains, forests or beaches, or international infrastructure such as an airport, as well as the weather, can have an effect on international student satisfaction.

Location (2% of all reasons)

“

I do enjoy travelling around. Turkey is just perfect place for it. I chose Isparta because it's near the sea and also close to other interesting places.

”

Czech student about studying in Turkey

Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 8 out of 10

Students may comment on the proximity of their host university to another city, or country, or that it is generally well placed. It may also be that students are content that their host university is close to their home city, or indeed, far away from it!

Nature (2%)

“

Amazing landscapes, quite special to live close to the polar circle : long days the summer and long nights in winter this includes polar lights, non-ending sunsets

”

French student about studying in Sweden

Explained why s/he rated the study experience with 10 out of 10

Having access to nearby nature, such as beaches, or being in a less densely populated area with forests and mountains, can be a plus point for international students. In this category, by far most comments are positive, as students appreciate the lifestyle that accompanies the surrounding area. This tends to be something that students comment positively on if it is there, but do not comment negatively if it is not. Countries with a large area of undeveloped forests and nature, such as those in Scandinavia, have more students commenting on this category.

Travel (1%)

“

If you're in Europe, use this opportunity to get to know other countries as well. It's really easy, cheap and totally worth it.

Brazilian student about studying in Germany
Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 9 out of 10

”

Being near to a major international airport is seen as an advantage to international students – not only is it easier for them to go home, it is also a great way for them to see more of the area of Europe they are in for their international study. This is particularly relevant for students who have travelled a long way and wish to make the most of being in a certain area of Europe. Of course, travelling does not solely mean air travel to another country; it also counts for student travels exploring their host country by rail, road or boat.

Weather (1%)

“

If you don't like usually sunny and hot weather, as well as relaxed people that knows how to enjoy life!

Turkish student about studying in France
Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 9 out of 10

”

Though only accounting for 1 per cent of all comments, weather makes up 5% of negative comments overall! Most of the old clichés about weather prove true according to our results; students studying in northwest Europe (especially Benelux, the UK and Ireland) tend to complain about the weather much more than those who go to southern Europe. The exception to this is students going to Scandinavia who greatly enjoy the snow. As is to be expected, students' attitudes to the weather in their host country very much depend on what the weather is like in their home country.

University services & facilities (14%)

The university's pastoral care is assessed in this section: how well it deals with caring for international students, if there is good university accommodation (or if the university offers assistance with finding it), the atmosphere on campus, quality of facilities and equipment, whether students can study in various different languages. It is the biggest area for complaint for international students, accounting for almost a third of all negative comments.

Accommodation (3%)



University accommodation is easy to arrange upfront and standard is very high.



Turkish student about studying in France

Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 9 out of 10

Despite making up only 3 per cent of comments overall, accommodation accounts for almost one in ten negative comments. Students complain that the university accommodation is badly located – too far away from university and city amenities, or that it is not in a good condition, with occasional reports of vermin, mouldy walls or simply being in disrepair. Of course, it is not always feasible for universities to completely rebuild their accommodation provisions, but it can be expected that they provide a safe, clean environment for international students to live in. Within the private sector, aside from the same issues as with university accommodation, students complain of unhelpful landlords, and cite problems finding accommodation in the first place. Many who complained mention that they did not receive assistance from their university when looking for accommodation. It is important to remember that finding a place to live is one of the biggest, and first, challenges that students face when moving to a new city, and can be incredibly stressful. The high number of negative comments reflects that this is an area where great improvement can be made.

Bureaucracy (3%)



I would recommend this university because it is very organized, and it gives you everything you need to enjoy your stay and learn as much as you can!



Italian student about studying in the UK

Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 10 out of 10

University administration accounts for a small number of comments overall, but a large proportion of negative comments due to badly organised or excessive administration. At 8% of negative

comments, this is a big reason for dissatisfaction amongst international students. Students feel that they have to complete more paperwork than necessary, or that the university offices are overly bureaucratic when dealing with problems. Some countries, such as France, Italy and Spain have more negative comments in this category than others, though the overall rating is still very high. Streamlined university administration, particularly in the first few weeks of a stint abroad, can play a large part in making students feel welcome, and put them at ease in their new environment, whereas an unpleasant experience with an administrator can do the exact opposite.

Campus atmosphere (2%)

“ *The University of Minho is one of the best universities that offer a lot of opportunities for its students. The campus is huge, there are a lot of internationals and the learning experience is great.* ”

Romanian student about studying in Portugal
Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 10 out of 10

Students comment on the general atmosphere of the university, whether other (domestic) students are friendly and if they like the university as a whole. When universities do not have a campus, this category refers to the atmosphere within the university buildings.

Equipment & facilities (3%)

“ *This city has all kinds of services, the university even more. I never had to buy a book, everything is always available at the library of the university (and of course, for free).* ”

Italian student about studying in Finland
Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 9 out of 10

This is a small, but nonetheless important category. Students are on the whole pleased with the equipment and facilities at their host universities, though there is still room for improvement. This category accounts for everything from scientific laboratories, to the library, to the university's sports provisions. Different aspects of these are important to different subjects – for example, a humanities student will not necessarily be concerned with having good science laboratories, but well-developed university facilities are still important in some way to all students.

International services (2%)

“

Everything is well organized and all necessary information and support is given to make the exchange run smoothly. Upon my arrival at the campus, there was a buddy waiting for me with keys to my apartment. I was given a start package with maps of the campus and surrounding areas and practical information. There is also a welcome event for exchange students so I quickly made friends and integrated into the social life on campus.

”

Finnish student about studying in Sweden

Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 9 out of 10

This focuses especially on the international office of the university – how helpful, approachable and efficient it is, as well as whether or not it organises special events or a buddy system to welcome international students. There are rather a high proportion of negative comments in this category, indicating that international offices could still do more to improve international students' experience.

University language (1%)

“

I can really recommend to study at the University of Southern Denmark because as a foreigner it is easy to integrate. Everything takes place in English and so it is easy to follow the courses.

”

German student about studying in Denmark

Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 10 out of 10

Students highly appreciate courses being offered in languages they understand, usually meaning that they would like to see courses offered in English. Students also comment on being able to find university-run language courses to improve their language skills during their stay. Despite only 1% of comments being about this, it makes up 4% of all negative comments, indicating that students are unhappy with the level of foreign language provision at their university.

Overall impression (7%)

This covers any other aspects, or the overall impression – some students are content to just write that they had a great time and would recommend it to anyone.

“

I just enjoyed it. And that was one of the best decisions in my life!

Lithuanian student about studying in Portugal
Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 8 out of 10

”

“

It was spontaneous. There is no specific reason, just go.

Student about studying in France
Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 7 out of 10

”

“

Simply awesome.

French student about studying in Italy
Explained why s/he rated the study experience with a 10 out of 10

”

COMPARISONS BY SEGMENTS

International vs. Domestic students

As well as the 16,861 international students who completed the survey, there are also responses from 3,528 domestic students. This allows a comparison between international and domestic students. There are significant differences in their satisfaction levels: international students would give their experience 8.8 on average, while domestic students 'just' score 8.0.

Table 4: Student satisfaction in Europe by mobility

Mobility	N	Average	NPS
International students	16,861	8.8	+56
Domestic students	3,528	8.0	+28

This result is in itself not surprising. Studying in a foreign country is likely to bring more moving experiences and lasting memories than studying in one's country of origin. We also have to take into account that a majority of the international students in the sample group are short-term credit mobility students (mostly exchange students), whereas the domestic student sample is more comprised of full degree students.

Academic aspects are far more important for domestic students than international students; there are 13 percentage points more comments in this category for domestic students, at 35%, to international students' 22%. The most important aspects for domestic students are Reputation, Teachers and Teaching, with almost a quarter of all their comments falling into these categories. Academics is not only the largest category commented on overall, it is also the category with the most negative comments – accounting for 37% of all negative comments. However, there is also positive news within Academics; one in 10 positive comments are about the university's reputation. Domestic students mention career prospects more frequently than international students.

International students emphasize the benefits of their personal & professional development, particularly learning a new language, and their excitement at meeting new people. They also comment more negatively on living costs – different countries have vastly differing living costs, while one is usually used to the living costs at home. However, though domestic students complain less about the cost of living, it still makes up almost 10% of their negative comments.

Both international and domestic students find many problems with the university services provided – showing that this is not just a matter affecting international students.

Table 5: Influencers of international student satisfaction in Europe by mobility

Category	Domestic students				International students			
	Negative	Positive	Total	%	Negative	Positive	Total	%
Academics	445	2327	2772	35%	1499	8617	10116	22%
Level (high)	41	390	431	5%	164	1619	1783	4%
Level (low)	50	9	59	1%	470	88	558	1%
Recognition	7	13	20	0%	67	197	264	1%
Reputation	36	645	681	9%	64	1935	1999	4%
Research	4	37	41	1%	5	98	103	0%
Subject	41	363	404	5%	156	1324	1480	3%
Teacher language	7	6	13	0%	86	45	131	0%
Teachers	105	561	666	8%	192	2094	2286	5%
Teaching	152	291	443	6%	285	1155	1440	3%
Academics overall	2	12	14	0%	10	61	71	0%
City & Culture	134	1608	1742	22%	976	10083	11059	24%
City atmosphere, looks & size	82	1086	1168	15%	497	5710	6207	13%
Culture	4	138	142	2%	123	1155	1278	3%
Infrastructure	19	58	77	1%	88	354	442	1%
People	17	204	221	3%	159	2181	2340	5%
Security	6	6	12	0%	74	110	184	0%
City overall	6	116	122	2%	35	573	608	1%
Cost	111	184	295	4%	1034	1121	2155	5%
Financial aid	6	9	15	0%	32	96	128	0%
Living costs	90	145	235	3%	976	978	1954	4%
Tuition fees	15	30	45	1%	26	47	73	0%
Personal & Professional development	57	477	534	7%	134	4312	4446	10%
Career prospects	55	243	298	4%	55	636	691	1%
Discovering new cultures	1	54	55	1%	4	1111	1115	2%
Language		52	52	1%	74	1213	1287	3%
Personal growth	1	128	129	2%	1	1352	1353	3%
Social life	64	774	838	11%	408	5717	6125	13%
Activities	23	269	292	4%	182	1707	1889	4%
International atmosphere	4	115	119	1%	52	1529	1581	3%
Making new friends	5	145	150	2%	46	1286	1332	3%
Nightlife	18	135	153	2%	90	790	880	2%
Social life overall	14	110	124	2%	38	405	443	1%
Surroundings	37	300	337	4%	362	2616	2978	6%
Location	13	165	178	2%	38	792	830	2%
Nature	3	73	76	1%	6	893	899	2%
Travel		25	25	0%	7	573	580	1%
Weather	21	37	58	1%	311	358	669	1%
University services	307	763	1070	13%	1818	4538	6356	14%
Accommodation	38	106	144	2%	551	718	1269	3%
Bureaucracy	104	108	212	3%	525	774	1299	3%
Campus atmosphere	20	210	230	3%	51	826	877	2%
Equipment	5	19	24	0%	9	95	104	0%
Facilities	84	224	308	4%	125	1054	1179	3%
International services	20	56	76	1%	332	753	1085	2%
Uni language	36	40	76	1%	225	318	543	1%
Overall	39	342	381	5%	95	3207	3302	7%
Total	1194	6775	7969	100%	6326	40211	46537	100%
%	15%	85%	100%		14%	86%	100%	

Short-term vs. Full degree mobility

The majority of the respondents studied abroad for a period of 10 months or less. In total, 14,299 of the respondents are so-called credit mobility students, opposed to 1,167 international students who studied for at least one or more academic years abroad in Europe (degree mobility students).

Table 6: International student satisfaction in Europe by duration

Study duration	N	Average	NPS
Credit mobility (<1 year)	14,299	8.8	+58
Degree mobility (>1 year)	1,167	8.7	+53
Unknown	1,395	8.2	+40
Total	16,861	8	+56

Full degree students are in general a bit less satisfied about their study experience than credit mobility students, albeit with an NPS of +53, their satisfaction level is still very high. The discussed topics and reasons for (not) recommending their study experience are for both credit and degree mobility students quite similar – there is very little variation in where students are positive and negative. The most noticeable difference is in Academics: a quarter of all reviews by degree mobility students are on academic topics, which is 4 per cent points higher than credit mobility students. This difference is mostly related to the reputation of the university; students who spend more than one year at a university focus more on the reputation or ranking than short-term (exchange) students. Credit mobility students on the other hand, comment slightly more on City & Culture, particularly the people and the city atmosphere.

Table 7: Influencers of international student satisfaction in Europe by duration

Category	Credit mobility (<1 year)				Degree mobility (>1 year)			
	Negative	Positive	Total	%	Negative	Positive	Total	%
Academics	1249	7213	8462	21%	114	668	782	25%
Level (high)	141	1347	1487	4%	9	125	134	4%
Level (low)	406	75	481	1%	27	6	33	1%
Recognition	61	180	241	1%	2	14	16	1%
Reputation	49	1606	1655	4%	8	146	154	5%
Research	3	69	72	0%	1	19	20	1%
subject	136	1122	1258	3%	12	99	111	4%
Teacher lang	71	40	111	0%	9	3	12	0%
Teachers	144	1755	1899	5%	22	167	189	6%
teaching	230	965	1195	3%	24	87	111	4%
Academics overall	8	54	62	0%	0	2	2	0%
City & Culture	835	8766	9601	24%	66	616	682	22%
Culture	100	1020	1120	3%	9	69	78	2%
Infrastructure	78	313	391	1%	5	24	29	1%
People	139	1904	2043	5%	9	132	141	4%
Security	65	94	159	0%	5	9	14	0%
City atmosphere, looks & size	426	4932	5358	13%	36	354	390	12%
City overall	27	503	530	1%	2	28	30	1%
Cost	849	937	1786	4%	72	94	166	5%
Financial aid	21	75	96	0%	5	13	18	1%
living costs	814	837	1651	4%	64	69	133	4%
Tuition fees	14	25	39	0%	3	12	15	0%
Personal & Professional development	106	3811	3917	10%	16	272	288	9%
Career prospects	37	498	535	1%	9	67	76	2%
Discovering new cultures	4	1016	1020	3%		51	51	2%
Language	64	1096	1160	3%	7	68	75	2%
Personal growth	1	1201	1202	3%		86	86	3%
Social life	346	4957	5303	13%	32	383	415	13%
Activities	154	1479	1633	4%	13	117	130	4%
International atmosphere	46	1310	1356	3%	2	109	111	4%
Making new friends	40	1135	1175	3%	3	74	77	2%
Nightlife	72	698	770	2%	13	45	58	2%
Social life overall	34	335	369	1%	1	38	39	1%
Surroundings	311	2320	2631	7%	24	158	182	6%
Location	31	705	736	2%	3	43	46	1%
Nature	6	779	785	2%		62	62	2%
Travel	7	523	530	1%		29	29	1%
Weather	267	313	580	1%	21	24	45	1%
Uni services	1545	3923	5468	14%	114	312	426	13%
Accommodation	467	645	1112	3%	33	39	72	2%
Bureaucracy	443	669	1112	3%	31	46	77	2%
Campus atmosphere	41	706	747	2%	3	52	55	2%
Equipment	9	81	90	0%		8	8	0%
Facilities	106	874	980	2%	11	91	102	3%
International services	288	663	951	2%	20	50	70	2%
Uni language	191	285	476	1%	16	26	42	1%
Overall	69	2764	2833	7%	10	210	220	7%
Total	5310	34691	40001	100%	448	2713	3161	100%
%	13%	87%	100%		14%	86%	100%	

European vs. Non-European students

The majority of the respondents in this study come from a European country (17,906 respondents). With 1,630 students from other continents however, it is possible to draw some conclusions on whether European students are more or less satisfied with their international study experience than non-European students. The results are presented in Table 8. Since only European students can take part in the Erasmus programme and it is likely that this has a significant influence on the duration of the mobility period, the duration is presented in this table as well.

Table 8: International student satisfaction by origin

Origin	Credit mobility	Degree mobility	Unknown duration	Total	Average	NPS
Europe	12,774	889	744	14,407	8.8	+58
Outside Europe	912	215	98	1,225	8.8	+56
Unknown	613	63	553	1,229	8.3	+42
Total	14,299	1,167	1,395	16,861	8.8	+56

The results show that non-European students almost as satisfied with their international study experience in Europe as European students. There are few differences in the areas that students comment upon – non-European students are more concerned about Academics, particularly Reputation than European students, whereas for European students, City & Culture is more important. Personal & Professional development is also more important for non-European students, accounting for 4 per cent points more than their European counterparts.

However, despite these small differences, the requirements and influencers for European and non-European students are remarkably similar. It may be useful to do a more in-depth study of what drives these students' to study in Europe in order to gain a better understanding of how their experience can be improved.

To investigate the drivers of student satisfaction by continent (or even country) of origin, more respondents will be needed.

Table 9: Influencers of international student satisfaction by origin

Category	European Students				Non-European students			
	Negative	Positive	Total	%	Negative	Positive	Total	%
Academics	1331	7335	8666	21%	77	730	807	24%
Level (high)	146	1402	1548	4%	7	112	119	4%
Level (low)	432	81	513	1%	19	5	24	1%
Recognition	63	163	226	1%	2	27	29	1%
Reputation	57	1573	1630	4%	3	198	201	6%
Research	4	63	67	0%		27	27	1%
Subject	140	1113	1253	3%	6	116	122	4%
Teacher language	78	42	120	0%	8	3	11	0%
Teachers	164	1859	2023	5%	13	139	152	5%
Teaching	238	987	1225	3%	19	99	118	4%
Academics overall	9	52	61	0%		4	4	0%
City & Culture	866	8863	9729	24%	53	610	663	20%
City atmosphere, looks & size	442	5005	5447	13%	20	336	356	11%
Culture	106	1028	1134	3%	13	73	86	3%
Infrastructure	77	307	384	1%	7	29	36	1%
People	141	1944	2085	5%	11	117	128	4%
Security	70	85	155	0%	2	21	23	1%
City overall	30	494	524	1%		34	34	1%
Cost	899	969	1868	5%	70	100	170	5%
Financial aid	24	73	97	0%	4	19	23	1%
Living costs	858	862	1720	4%	63	69	132	4%
Tuition fees	17	34	51	0%	3	12	15	0%
Personal & Professional development	106	3719	3825	9%	21	411	432	13%
Career prospects	41	492	533	1,3%	10	90	100	3%
Discovering new cultures	4	947	951	2%		123	123	4%
Language	60	1104	1164	3%	11	69	80	2%
Personal growth	1	1176	1177	3%		129	129	4%
Social life	356	5067	5423	13%	30	357	387	12%
Activities	160	1524	1684	4%	12	93	105	3%
International atmosphere	44	1344	1388	3%	5	107	112	3%
Making new friends	40	1145	1185	3%	4	92	96	3%
Nightlife	81	703	784	2%	5	39	44	1%
Social life overall	31	351	382	1%	4	26	30	1%
Surroundings	309	2322	2631	6%	35	161	196	6%
Location	27	696	723	2%	5	49	54	2%
Nature	5	800	805	2%	1	44	45	1%
Travel	6	503	509	1%	1	54	55	2%
Weather	271	323	594	1%	28	14	42	1%
University services	1591	4006	5597	14%	118	283	401	12%
Accommodation	481	647	1128	3%	45	42	87	3%
Bureaucracy	443	700	1143	3%	37	27	64	2%
Campus atmosphere	48	711	759	2%	2	62	64	2%
Equipment	7	82	89	0%		9	9	0%
Facilities	100	895	995	2%	11	82	93	3%
International services	304	686	990	2%	17	41	58	2%
University language	208	285	493	1%	6	20	26	1%
Overall	70	2761	2831	7%	12	240	252	8%
Total	5528	35042	40570	100%	416	2892	3308	100%
%	14%	86%	100%		13%	87%	100%	

Level – Bachelor, Master and PhD

Most of the respondents reviewed a study experience at Bachelor's or Master's level. The number of PhD candidates that took part in the survey is significantly lower than the numbers of other students, but nonetheless gives some interesting results.

Table 10: International student satisfaction in Europe by level of education

Education level	N	Score	NPS
Bachelor's students	8,243	8.7	+56
Master's students	5,599	8.8	+57
PhD candidates	395	8.9	+61
Unknown/ Other	2,624	8.7	+55
Total	16,861	8.8	+57

The level of education (degree level) does not seem to have a huge effect on the satisfaction with an international study experience in Europe. It is interesting to note that both Master's students and PhD candidates are happier than Bachelor's students when looking at NPS scores, with PhD candidates 5 percentage points ahead in satisfaction when compared with their undergraduate colleagues.

Surprisingly, there is little variation in what different levels of students find important. Academic aspects are slightly more important for Master's students and PhD candidates, but only by an average of 2%. Bachelor's students comment a little more often on Social life and Surroundings than postgraduates, but there is no category which is outstandingly more popular than another. There are some slightly more revealing results when we consider the differences in positive and negative comments between the different levels of study. Interestingly, although the levels of positive comments on academics are similar between the different levels, PhD candidates make fewer negative comments about Academics than either of the other levels. This can be explained by the fact that PhD candidates do more research into their destination university and arranging their supervisor before departure from their home country, thus making it more likely that they study in a more satisfactory academic environment. PhD candidates make more negative comments with regards to cost – they complain about a lack of financial aid. In addition, PhD candidates find that they do not receive enough support from their international offices when trying to find accommodation, or that there is not sufficient post-graduate accommodation available.

Table 11: Influencers of international student satisfaction in Europe by level of education

	Bachelor students				Master's students				PhD Candidates			
Category	Negative	Positive	Total	%	Negative	Positive	Total	%	Negative	Positive	Total	%
Academics	775	4077	4852	21%	499	3074	3573	23%	26	218	244	23%
Level (high)	84	759	842	4%	59	607	666	4%	1	48	49	5%
Level (low)	242	46	288	1%	169	32	201	1%	8	1	9	1%
Recognition	33	74	107	0%	20	56	76	0%	2	2	4	0%
Reputation	34	883	917	4%	21	685	706	5%		56	56	5%
Research		32	32	0%	1	37	38	0%	3	9	12	1%
Subject	80	609	689	3%	53	498	551	4%	4	28	32	3%
Teacher language	46	28	74	0%	33	13	46	0%		2	2	0%
Teachers	108	1062	1170	5%	49	716	765	5%	3	43	46	4%
Teaching	141	556	697	3%	92	408	500	3%	5	27	32	3%
Academics overall	7	28	35	0%	2	22	24	0%		2	2	0%
City & Culture	483	4908	5391	24%	332	3403	3735	24%	21	230	251	24%
Culture	59	571	630	3%	42	375	417	3%	4	28	32	3%
Infrastructure	43	176	219	1%	34	116	150	1%	3	7	10	1%
People	84	1043	1127	5%	52	743	795	5%	5	50	55	5%
Security	33	51	84	0%	26	31	57	0%	2	2	4	0%
City atm., looks & size	245	2767	3012	13%	171	1943	2114	14%	7	134	141	13%
City overall	19	300	319	1%	7	195	202	1%		9	9	1%
Cost	478	581	1059	5%	393	354	747	5%	24	25	49	5%
Financial aid	10	37	47	0%	14	37	51	0%	4	4	8	1%
Living costs	459	518	977	4%	367	302	669	4%	20	19	39	4%
Tuition fees	9	26	35	0%	12	15	27	0%		2	2	0%
Pers. & Prof. dev.	65	2064	2129	9%	47	1242	1289	8%	3	93	96	9%
Career prospects	25	288	313	1%	18	232	250	2%	2	13	15	1%
Disc. new cultures	2	529	531	2%	1	290	291	2%		16	16	2%
Language	37	567	604	3%	28	350	378	2%	1	34	35	3%
Personal growth	1	680	681	3%		370	370	2%		30	30	3%
Social life	206	2832	3038	13%	135	1796	1931	12%	6	124	130	12%
Activities	92	840	932	4%	58	563	621	4%	2	37	39	4%
Int. atmosphere	27	761	788	3%	17	498	515	3%		31	31	3%
Making new friends	27	629	656	3%	15	349	364	2%	1	31	32	3%
Nightlife	46	394	440	2%	26	249	275	2%	3	20	23	2%
Social life overall	14	208	222	1%	19	137	156	1%		5	5	0%
Surroundings	172	1304	1476	7%	127	808	935	6%	2	60	62	6%
Location	15	409	424	2%	16	229	245	2%		19	19	2%
Nature	5	425	430	2%	1	295	296	2%		24	24	2%
Travel	2	285	287	1%	4	182	186	1%		11	11	1%
Weather	150	185	335	1%	106	102	208	1%	2	6	8	1%
Uni. services	928	2199	3127	14%	607	1631	2238	14%	43	104	147	14%
Accommodation	248	352	600	3%	213	254	467	3%	16	19	35	3%
Bureaucracy	276	380	656	3%	161	280	441	3%	10	17	27	3%
Campus atmosphere	27	392	419	2%	15	311	326	2%	1	14	15	1%
Equipment	4	47	51	0%	5	32	37	0%		2	2	0%
Facilities	62	508	570	3%	43	377	420	3%	4	32	36	3%
International services	196	376	572	3%	92	252	344	2%	7	17	24	2%
Uni. language	115	144	259	1%	78	125	203	1%	5	3	8	1%
Overall	45	1564	1609	7%	29	1022	1051	7%	1	84	85	8%
Total	3152	19529	22681	100%	2169	13330	15499	100%	126	938	1064	100%
%	14%	86%	100%		14%	86%	100%		12%	88%	100%	

Destination country

In order to provide a comprehensive analysis of satisfaction in Europe, it is possible to break down the results per country, considering only those countries with more than 100 student reviews.

Table 12: International student satisfaction in Europe by country

Destination country	N	Average	NPS
Norway	381	9.3	+73
Slovenia	235	9.3	+74
Estonia	181	9.1	+69
Austria	667	9.1	+70
Finland	1113	9.0	+65
Sweden	1081	9.0	+65
Czech Republic	339	8.9	+63
Hungary	178	8.9	+64
Denmark	601	8.9	+62
Ireland	297	8.9	+61
Germany	1487	8.9	+62
United Kingdom	1210	8.8	+59
Poland	498	8.8	+60
Switzerland	539	8.8	+58
Netherlands	811	8.8	+58
Spain	2125	8.7	+55
Portugal	602	8.7	+55
Belgium	758	8.7	+53
Lithuania	178	8.6	+46
Other*	568	8.5	+47
Italy	1067	8.4	+46
Greece	263	8.3	+39
Turkey	224	8.2	+39
France	1458	8.1	+34
Total	16861	8.8	+56

*Countries with fewer than 100 student reviews

It is interesting to note that the highest scores go to countries that would not traditionally be seen as ideal international study destinations. Indeed, within the top 10 countries with most international students (and therefore those more traditional destinations), only Austria and Sweden come within the top 10 for international student satisfaction.

This may be in part due to the expectations of students before they go away – they may think that they will have less of an enjoyable experience in a country which does not have a long history of hosting international exchanges, or indeed, that a time spent in a ‘traditional’ destination will be a sensational experience, only to find that not everything is perfect when

they get there. Or, many students might still choose to study in an English speaking country unaware of the vast offer of English taught programmes in other European countries. The European study choice website www.mastersportal.eu for instance, currently lists more than 7,500 English taught Master's in non-English speaking European countries (StudyPortals 2013). This would imply that students might actually make a different decision if they were better informed. It remains a guess what influencers are at play here of course, but it is likely that this at least contributes to this phenomenon to some extent.

Individual country reports

Due to the number of countries involved, this section will focus on the ten biggest countries for international tertiary education according to market share.

Table 13: International student satisfaction in 10 European countries with most international students

Country	% Market share	Average	NPS
Austria	3,99%	9.1	+70
Sweden	2,61%	9.0	+65
Germany	15,36%	8.9	+62
United Kingdom	31,11%	8.8	+59
Switzerland	3,14%	8.8	+58
Netherlands	2,86%	8.8	+58
Spain	5,74%	8.7	+55
Belgium	3,20%	8.7	+53
Italy	4,07%	8.4	+46
France	15,13%	8.1	+34
European Average		8.8	+54

Austria International students in Austria comment 4 four percentage points more than the European average on City atmosphere, looks & size. The aspects influencing student satisfaction are otherwise very similar to average, but students are overall even more satisfied with their experience than in other countries.

Sweden International students in Sweden are much less concerned about City & culture than average. Although there are 5 percentage points more negative comments than average about Cost (bringing these to a total of 20% of negative comments), students are very content with the beautiful Swedish countryside and nature. They are generally happier with University services than average, but as in many other countries, students find that the provisions for accommodation are inadequate.

Germany Students in Germany are slightly more interested in career prospects and language development than their peers in other countries. All in all, 8% of negative comments focus on the cost of living. Although this is still a quite high figure, it is worth remembering that the European average is almost twice this – showing that students find living in Germany to be significantly cheaper than elsewhere in Europe. Between them, bureaucracy, accommodation and international services account for a quarter of all negative comments, indicating that though students in Germany are very content on the whole, there is still plenty of room for improvement.

UK International students in the UK are more concerned with academic and pastoral aspects at the university than the European average. Although the number of positive remarks, at 24% is only slightly higher than the European average, the number of negative comments regarding Academics is just 3%, over 20% points lower than the average, so reflecting the renowned education system in the UK. Students studying in Britain comment 4% points less on city & culture than their peers who have studied elsewhere, showing that their main interest is in academic aspects, rather than discovering the culture of the UK.

Switzerland The overwhelming reason that students would recommend studying in Switzerland is for its academic strength. There are 6% points more comments than average on academics, with far fewer negative comments, and 11% points more positive comments. Reputation is the main reason for this – it accounts for 11% of all comments made about studying in Switzerland. Students in Switzerland are more positive than average about the surroundings of the country, but comment 8% points less about city & culture. The biggest drawback for students in this Alpine country is unsurprisingly the cost – although it accounts for 9% of comments overall (twice the average), it comprises 41% of negative comments about Switzerland. These comments are mostly about the living costs, showing that international students would greatly appreciate more financial aid to cope with the high cost of living. The second biggest cause for complaint is the lack of suitable accommodation – with 18% of all negative comments (double the average), but only 4% of comments overall. Aside from accommodation, students are remarkably content with University Services in Switzerland.

The Netherlands Students studying abroad in the Netherlands, like those in the UK, are concerned firstly with academics, particularly teacher quality and reputation. They find the level of study very high, and although some students complain about this, it is overall seen as a positive aspect of studying in the Netherlands. One of the main downsides of this is that almost 10% of negative comments are about teaching – some students find the teaching methods difficult to get used to. This can be accounted for by the fact that different countries use different methods, and students may take some time to get used to a new method. Students in the Netherlands comment about Personal & professional development less than average, but more overall about Career prospects, indicating that students go to the Netherlands to improve their CVs. They do, however, find the life there expensive; one fifth of all negative comments are about living costs.

Spain Students in Spain greatly enjoy the vibrant culture – they comment 4 percentage points more than average on city & culture, with 7% points more positive comments than for other countries. These comments are mainly about City atmosphere, looks & size, and People. Academics and University services each account for a third of negative comments, indicating that these are big areas for improvement. The biggest causes for complaint in Spain are that the level of study is too low, that students do not receive help finding accommodation, and that the university administration is excessively bureaucratic.

Belgium The comments from students who had studied in Belgium show remarkable similarity to the average. There are some slight differences in that they comment 3 percentage points more on Academics than elsewhere in Europe, and find the cost of living to be less than in other countries.

Italy As could be expected, international students in Italy greatly enjoy the atmosphere of its cities and its Mediterranean culture. However, though they are very pleased with the social and cultural aspects of studying, students find University services in Italy a big cause of complaint – there are 7 percentage points more negative comments about this than average. As in other countries, excessive, or inefficient, Bureaucracy is the biggest single negative influencer in this category.

France Despite its low place within Europe, with average score of 8.1 and an NPS of +34, Students in France can be considered overall fairly happy with their experience. There are many areas for improvement; 27% of all negative comments are about academics, particularly with regards to a low level of education and bad teaching. University services in France are overall lacking: they account for 15% of all comments overall, but 36% of negative comments. Accommodation, bureaucracy and international services all have high numbers of negative comments. Although living costs account for 11% of negative comments, this is still less than the European average, showing that students find living in France more cost-effective than in other countries.

Top 20 universities for international student satisfaction

It is also possible to offer a breakdown of student satisfaction per university. Though universities across Europe have received very good satisfaction scores, there are some which have received outstanding satisfaction scores from their international students. Unfortunately, due to the relatively low numbers of students at each university, we are unable to provide an in-depth analysis of why these institutions are so highly rated. However, there is no doubt that it is at least in part due to impeccable organisation, well-balanced student support and an open and friendly study atmosphere. See below for a list of the top 20 universities for international student satisfaction.

Please note that this is by no means a ranking, and merely serves as an informative list of which universities have received the highest scores. In order to be counted, each university must have over 20 student reviews on STeXX – there are many universities which do not appear on this list due to low numbers of student reviews, but that nonetheless have inspiring scores. All the universities in the table below have an average score of 9.5 or above, and are sorted alphabetically.

Table 14: 20 European universities with outstanding international student satisfaction (with average scores >9.5 out of 10)

University	Country	N
Åbo Akademi University	Finland	37
Cardiff University	UK	26
Dresden University of Technology	Germany	34
Jagiellonian University	Poland	57
Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz	Germany	24
KTH Royal Institute of Technology	Sweden	50
Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg	Germany	23
Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences	Finland	22
Tampere University of Technology	Finland	58
Technical University of Munich	Germany	64
Umea University	Sweden	27
University of Cologne	Germany	32
University of Dublin Trinity College	Ireland	41
University of Helsinki	Finland	108
University of Iceland	Iceland	36
University of Salzburg	Austria	23
University of Tübingen	Germany	37
University of Warwick	UK	25
University of Wroclaw	Poland	42
ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences	Switzerland	31

Origin countries

The destination country is not the only factor affecting student satisfaction; the country of origin also has a profound impact on how highly students will rate their experience. The differences between the home country and destination culture, as well as the standard of living and geographic region all make a difference. It is likely that cultural differences in scoring also contribute to the mix – in some countries 10 out of 10 is, while theoretically available, never attainable in reality, whereas other cultures see 10 as a standard high score. In order to have more of an idea of the difference, a bigger number of students from each country would be necessary. Not all origin countries are known; these 1229 reviews are left out of Table 16.

Table 15: International student satisfaction in Europe by country of origin

Origin country	N	Average	NPS
Croatia	177	9.2	+75
Romania	355	9.2	+71
Greece	316	9.1	+69
Portugal	372	9.0	+66
Italy	1763	9.0	+65
Bulgaria	400	9.0	+66
France	953	9.0	+63
Spain	1674	9.0	+63
Slovenia	400	8.9	+60
Lithuania	336	8.9	+63
Slovakia	585	8.9	+62
Poland	924	8.8	+58
Latvia	189	8.8	+54
Belgium	569	8.7	+56
Switzerland	265	8.7	+54
China	134	8.7	+54
Czech Republic	783	8.7	+55
Austria	274	8.7	+50
Hungary	178	8.6	+53
Estonia	228	8.6	+50
Germany	1229	8.6	+50
Other*	1655	8.5	+54
United Kingdom	398	8.5	+46
United States	111	8.4	+42
Turkey	580	8.3	+42
Finland	452	8.2	+42
Netherlands	165	8.2	+38
Sweden	167	8.2	+37
Total	15632	8.8	+58

*all countries of origin that have fewer than 100 student reviews.

CONCLUSION

This study has given a unique insight into what aspects really drive international student satisfaction in Europe. It provides a categorised overview of these drivers, with practical examples. Overall, the result can be considered a big compliment to all organisations involved in the internationalisation of higher education. International students in Europe are overall very satisfied with their study experience.

The students' comments showcase the many positive outcomes of their international mobility period. In addition to the academic education, the most prominent learning outcomes are soft skills such as improved communication skills and language proficiency, increased intercultural awareness and understanding, as well as more independence. This shows that international cooperation and mobility in higher education ensures “personal, social and professional fulfilment”, one of the primary goals of European cooperation in higher education (ET2020, 2009).

KEY INFLUENCERS

The key influencers of international student satisfaction in Europe are identified in this study, with city atmosphere, local people, and teachers forming the three biggest areas of influence. That *City & culture* and *Academics* come far ahead of *Social life* in students' comments shows that international students do not simply see their time abroad as an ‘academic vacation’, but they consider it to be a great time of improving their academic knowledge and skills, as well as a chance to get to know a new city and its culture.

Within academic aspects, the reputation, teachers and a high level of education at the host university make the biggest impact on international students. They wish to receive a good level of education and quality teaching; when they do not, this is one of their biggest areas of complaint. Students find that inadequate university accommodation and excessive bureaucracy is also one of the biggest reasons not to recommend a university.

The NPS survey methodology is in particular useful to identify the key drivers of satisfaction and social promotion. As such, it is also useful in defining what aspects are *not* as important as one might initially imagine. This study has shown that finances (tuition fee, scholarships, and living costs), career prospects, and university facilities do not have a big impact on students' study experience. Though financial issues are one of the biggest negative influencers, it is important to remember that these only make up a small percentage of comments overall, as they are not mentioned by many students. One has to keep in mind that this study only surveyed those who actually studied abroad, thereby leaving out students who did not go due

to issues with accommodation or funding, amongst other things. Although these aspects might indeed be basic needs, the results do indicate that more luxurious facilities, accommodation or a better financial situation are less likely to contribute to the student experience than for instance the resulting personal growth, the city atmosphere, or the academic subject and teacher quality.

COMPARISON OF SEGMENTS

International students are far more satisfied with their study experience than domestic students, with the key differences being that domestic students place more importance on academics, where international students attribute more importance to their personal development. Together with the three main aspects driving student satisfaction set out above, this seems to underline that viewing a mobility period as a wide concept – combining the academic side, personal growth and cultural experience – make the study time far more interesting.

This is in line with the ESNSurvey2008, “Exchanging Cultures” (ESN, 2008), where students were said to be most satisfied with the atmosphere of the city and country where the university was located, the social life, the university facilities and the contact with the host country’s culture. The present study shows the importance of personal growth and the city atmosphere as well, but also highlights students’ emphasis on academic topics. The ESNSurvey2008 also reported that 76% of the exchange students are satisfied with their studies and 92% of the exchange students satisfied with their stay abroad. The present study measured very high satisfaction levels as well.

This study shows only a slight difference in satisfaction levels between Bachelor’s students, Master’s students and PhD candidates; they are mainly preoccupied with very similar issues, though postgraduate students make more comments about academic aspects. The same is observed with regards to the duration and the international dimension of the mobility period: students who study abroad for more than one year are affected by academic aspects more than exchange students, and domestic students more than international students. It is likely that domestic, full degree and postgraduate students are indeed more concerned about academic aspects. At the same time, international, exchange and undergraduate students might be more affected by the cultural impressions and experience a more intense personal growth.

Specifically discussing exchange students, the Problems of Recognition In Making Erasmus (PRIME) (ESN, 2009) study indicated that only 73% of the exchange students receive full recognition. Academic recognition is therefore a barrier to mobility as it is likely to negatively impact the motivation for students to study abroad. The low number of comments on

recognition issues in the present study does not contradict these findings. This study only enquires into the *most important aspects* that influenced students' study experience, whereas PRIME specifically focuses on *recognition aspects*. In other words: even if recognition issues occur, it might not be the single most important aspect that shaped their experience. Moreover, respondents to this study all studied abroad, meaning they already overcame barriers to mobility such as lack of awareness and difficulties in funding.

STUDENT FEEDBACK HIGHLY VALUABLE

Of course the goal of internationalisation is not only to meet the needs of international students and increase their satisfaction. Some students might for instance complain about the workload although it is in their interest. Nevertheless, it is an important indicator of the current state of play and a study like the present one can provide valuable insights. We are confident that this structured feedback from the student perspective will help to improve quality of higher education in Europe and the experiences of international students across Europe in particular.

In order to do so, several recommendations for important stakeholders in European higher education are presented in the following chapter. Through increasing international student satisfaction, prospective students will be motivated to study abroad in Europe. We are convinced this is one of the most important drivers towards achieving the ambitious internationalisation goals in European higher education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS

Respondents expressed their appreciation for local student organisations. Students attach high importance to a variety of activities, which includes social gatherings, trips and cultural events organised by student organisations, especially internationally focussed ones.

Student associations can be open to students from any discipline, like AEGEE and ESN, or specifically for students from the same academic background, such as the European Students of Industrial Engineering and Management (ESTIEM). These organisations typically organise social and cultural activities both for international and domestic students. Assistance with finding housing and administrative tasks is also much appreciated and sometimes provided by the local student union.

The following recommendations for international student associations are formed on basis of the reviews in this study.

1. Organise a welcome event at the start of every semester. This has a positive impact on the satisfaction of international students, it helps them to feel welcome and make friends through introducing them to their new study environment and culture.
2. Arrange regular social and cultural events, this is highly appreciated by international students and will help them to have a great time.
3. Promote active involvement of both local and international students. This helps international students to connect with locals – otherwise students sometimes feel that they are stuck in an ‘international bubble’. Moreover, participation in international events increases international mobility through encouraging students to discover each other’s cultures.
4. Focus on smooth cooperation with the university, as this will benefit both parties.
5. Act as a matchmaker between universities. Several new partnerships between universities have been created as a result of study mobility initiated by members of student organisations.
6. Share your members’ experiences and advice with (prospective) international students. This will help to encourage studying abroad, to prepare for a mobility period, and to form realistic expectations so international students can make the most of their experience.

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES

Higher education institutes have the biggest overall influence on their students' satisfaction, and therefore have the biggest stake in increasing the student satisfaction level. Not only does the NPS measure student satisfaction, it also measures how likely it is that students will recommend a university to their friends. As such, the NPS has proven to be a predictor of future growth. The identified influencers might help to focus efforts, resources and budgets into improving international students' experience.

Through carefully analysing and acting upon the results of this study, higher education institutes can increase the satisfaction level of their international students and thereby attract more in the future. The following recommendations are based on a detailed analysis of student reviews, and particularly focused on those aspects that can be influenced by the institution:

Teachers and Teaching

1. Provide (obligatory) language training to all student focused staff in the official language of tuition, as well as English, if this is not the main language of instruction. The language proficiency of teaching staff has a high impact on the quality of education, as it affects how comfortable students feel in their learning environment, including how confident they feel in asking their lecturers for help when they have difficulties. Although offering courses in English as well as in the national language(s) can help attract more international students, it can also be a reason for concern if the teachers' level of English is not sufficiently high.
2. Encourage a close working relationship between academic staff and students. Personal guidance and the opportunity to ask questions are highly appreciated and contribute to quality of education.
3. Use student-centred, interactive teaching methods, group work and field visits. To many students this type of education is innovative and in fact a reason to study abroad. The importance of student-centred learning generally considered to be of high priority (Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué, 2009; ESU, 2010; EUA, 2010) and also clearly highlighted by international students in this study, although the Netherlands, which uses this frequently, did have rather more negative comments on teaching methods than the Average. Home universities should prepare students for possible differences in teaching methods before the beginning of the exchange.
4. Pitch classes at the right level - students sometimes find that specific Erasmus classes have a level that is too low for them – they may have some difficulties with the new language, but their capacity for understanding a subject in context is unchanged. Lecturers should bear this in mind when teaching.

Services and facilities

5. Provide a tutor or mentor as contact person for every international student. This is the first point of communication and can help incoming students with taking care of administration and other practical matters. It makes them feel welcome.
6. Implement a buddy system to match new international students with current students, to help them settle in.
7. Ensure that the international office is well organised and welcoming. It should provide assistance with finding accommodation if it is not provided by the university – such as a list of approved landlords in the area. Office opening times for international administration should be clearly stated and consistent, in order to help international students whenever possible.
8. Streamline administration between different universities as much as possible. Excessive bureaucracy makes students' first few days in a new place more difficult and stressful, and ought to be avoided as far as possible.
9. Provide language classes for international students, if they do not already speak the local language. Even if their classes do not take place in this language, it is important to help them settle in to their new environment. Students who do not receive help learning the language often feel that they miss out on learning more about their host country's culture, not to mention that it is more difficult to make local friends.
10. Focus on the library and laboratories. Facilities are generally not a big influencer of student satisfaction; just 3% of all reasons are dedicated to Facilities & equipment. However, these reasons are very specifically about the comprehensiveness of the library and the high quality subject specific facilities such as laboratories.
11. Promote and support student associations. Through their activities, network and services they positively contribute to student satisfaction. The level of support from the institution often determines how active student associations can be.

Personal growth and social life

12. Facilitate personal growth of students in any way possible. Maturing, becoming independent and broadening horizons are often mentioned and highly valuable results of international mobility.
13. Connect international students with each other and with local students, for instance through organising events (if possible, in collaboration with local student associations). Start by organising a welcome event at the start of every semester, if possible together with the local groups of international student organisations. This facilitates social interaction, makes students feel welcome and is an excellent opportunity to get administrative obligations taken care of.

Communication

14. Emphasise the following in external communication, these topics are generally highly appreciated by students:
 - a. Any of the points above.
 - b. Drivers of student satisfaction that are beyond the control of your institute, such as city atmosphere or local culture. Regional and cultural aspects are certainly a decisive factor when choosing where to study (almost one quarter of all influencers focuses on this topic).
 - c. Reputation and ranking, even if your institute is not listed in the top 100 universities. Universities renowned in a specific study discipline or regionally strong universities are also much sought after.
15. Poor university services are the main reason not to recommend a university. This is often related to bureaucracy, which is an important negative influencer of student satisfaction, as well as poor accommodation. Therefore, focus on the quality of the services and information provision for current students, this can prevent student retention and increase satisfaction. The same conclusion is highlighted in the Trends 2010 study (EUA, 2010).
16. Make important study choice information such as enrolment dates and annual tuition fees easily accessible for prospective students. Many students indicate their choice of university depends on information availability, particularly emphasising website quality. Not only is this information critical for them to make the right choice, it is also a way for students to assess the general service level and quality of the institution as a whole.

All these aspects will help to increase quality of study mobility even more. Finally, there is a significant difference in student satisfaction between international and domestic students. Although this report focuses on international student mobility, and the needs and satisfaction

drivers of domestic students are not identical, there is no doubt that domestic student satisfaction too can be lifted to another level through learning from these international student experiences.

POLICY MAKERS

Increasing student mobility is currently an important goal in European policy, especially with regards to the Europe 2020 strategy. As well as being highly beneficial for those students who take part in any international study abroad, it also improves relations across the communities that international students come from and go to by increasing the awareness of different cultures within the Union. Because of this value to Europe as a whole, it is vital for policy makers to streamline and improve the processes for young people studying abroad as far as possible.

How policy is made at an international level (European Commission) has a profound effect on how policy is made at national level – if studying abroad is made easier by European policy makers, it will encourage national governments to promote an international education for their students. Progress is necessary at all levels in order to make international education even more attractive to prospective students, not only within Europe, but also throughout the world.

Although there is room for improvement within international education, it is important to remember that international students in Europe are overall very happy with the education and experiences they gain from studying abroad. It is possible to make studying abroad an even more successful experience with some considered support and improvements to the system.

Based on this study, we have the following recommendations to make students in Europe even happier with their experience:

1. Raise awareness of the international study options available across Europe, as well as the funding available, in order to encourage as many students as possible to engage in studying abroad. Many students are still unaware of the possibilities, or fear that they will not be able to afford studying abroad. If more were made aware of the fact that there are numerous study options and types of funding available, it would encourage them to apply in the first place.
2. Continue to provide funding for international student mobility within Europe – students often find the costs of moving abroad for study to be higher than they would like. As a result, a high cost of living is one of the main reasons for complaint among international students. Students appreciate any financial help that they may receive, especially when moving to a country with a significantly different standard of living.
3. Improve systems of international student mobility to make it easier for students to study at foreign universities without having to work through lots of paperwork and bureaucratic problems. This involves encouraging universities to cooperate with each other with regards to systems of grading and transfer between universities.

4. International mobility is aided by courses being taught in widely spoken languages. Students appreciate being able to study in another country in a language they understand, especially when they do not speak the language of the country itself. Even if students do speak the language, their level may initially not be high enough for academic study. Because of this, universities should be supported in implementing language classes for teachers, to ensure that their level of language is high enough to teach well and help students regardless of their level of language.
5. Support international student organisations, and encourage them to be present throughout all of Europe. Student organisations can give vital support to students moving to a new country, helping them settle in and make new friends. It is therefore important that they are active wherever there is an international student population.

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