

Brussels, 22 April 2009

## Survey asks students for their views on higher education in Europe

*A new Europe-wide survey among students shows that they want wider access to higher education and that universities should open up cooperation with the world of work and to lifelong learning. A large majority agree that it is important for higher education institutions to foster innovation and an entrepreneurial mindset among students and staff, and that there should be a possibility to undertake work placements in private enterprises as part of a study programme. More students want to study abroad and a majority want more information about the quality of higher education institutions in order to inform their study choices.*

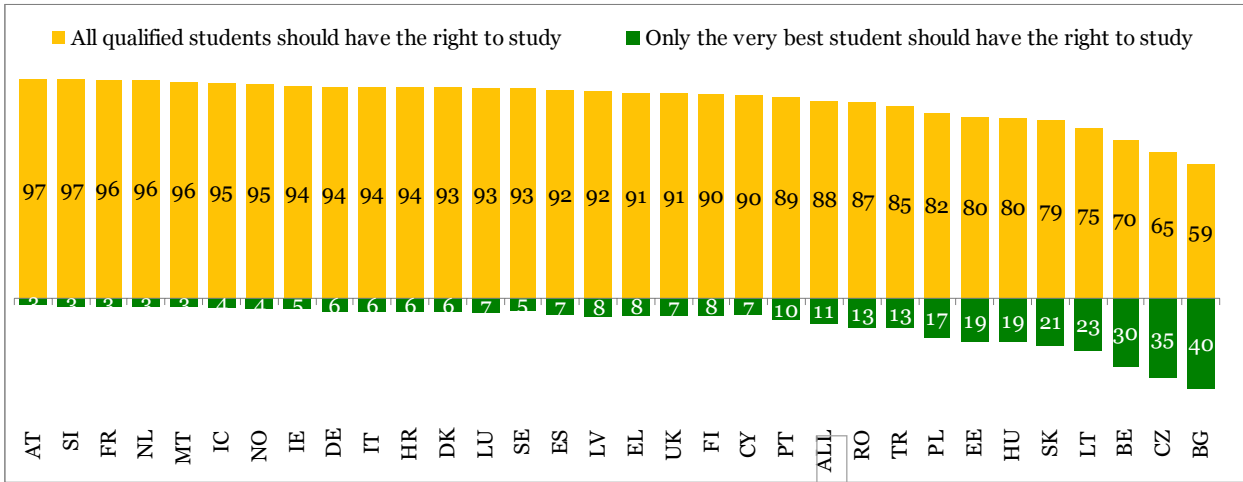
For this Eurobarometer survey, which took place in February 2009, students from 31 European countries – all EU Member States plus Croatia, Iceland, Norway and Turkey, were asked for their opinions.

The findings echo the opinions of academic staff which were surveyed two years ago on improved possibilities for learning mobility, and on opening up universities to business cooperation and lifelong learning.

### Access to higher education

Students were asked whether the right to study in higher education institutions should be granted to all, or only to the very best students. More than four out of five agreed that all qualified students should have the right to study in the higher education system (88%), while one out of ten felt that higher education should only be for the very best students (11%).

A similar trend can be seen in all countries: the majority of respondents favoured a system where all qualified students could gain entry to higher education (between 59% and 97% depending upon the country); a minority were in favour of a more selective higher education system (between 3% and 40%). On average, half of the interviewed students were convinced that universities should have the right to select students which matched their profile (50%); in contrast, 48% supported the idea that higher education institutions should admit all students.



**Costs of higher education**

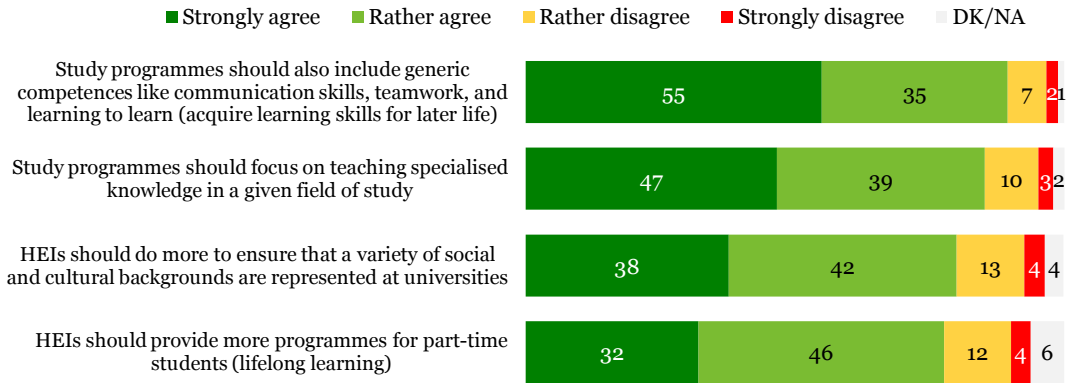
As to the costs of higher education, according to almost two-thirds of students currently in the higher education system (65%), higher education should be free of charge; on the other hand, one-third of respondents believed that student fees were acceptable when grants and loans were available (33%).

**Higher education institutions and their study programmes**

The students were asked how much they would agree with four statements about higher education institutions and the programmes they offered: relating to part-time courses, courses to meet varied social/cultural backgrounds, specialised courses and those teaching skills for “later life”.

Students cited skills for “later life” as the most important focus for study: on average, nine in ten students agreed that **study programmes should include generic competencies like communication skills, teamwork, and “learning to learn”** (90%). Approximately half of interviewed students *strongly agreed* with this statement (55%), roughly a third *rather agreed* (35%) and 9% disagreed.

**Higher education institutions and their study programmes**



Q2. How much would you agree or disagree with the following statements? %; Base: all respondents

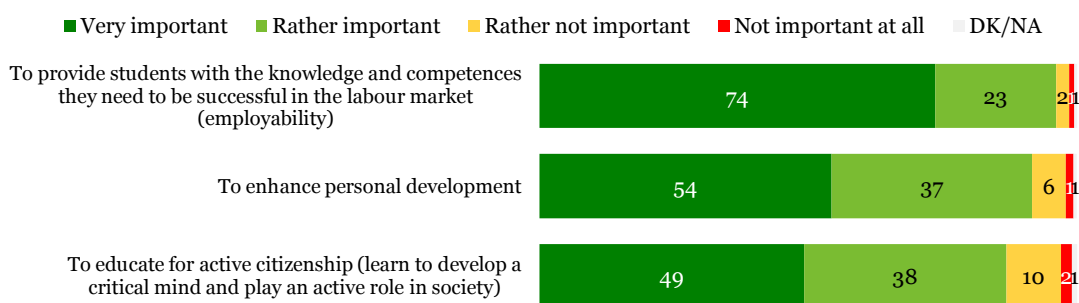
## Purposes of higher education

Students were asked about the significance of the role of higher education in: ensuring employability; enhancing personal development; and educating people to play an active role in society.

Overall, all three of these objectives were considered to be important by a large majority of respondents: 97% of students believed it was *very important* or *rather important* to provide students with the knowledge and skills they needed to be successful in the labour market, 91% agreed that the enhancement of personal development was *very important* or *rather important*, and 87% of respondents considered that the education of people to play an active role in society was an important aim of higher education.

While almost three-quarters of students considered that future employability was a *very important* objective of higher education (74%), roughly a half believed the same about the enhancement of personal development (54%) and the need to educate people so they could play an active role in society (49%).

### Purposes of higher education



Q2.1. According to you how important is each of the following purposes of higher education?  
%, Base: all respondents

## Quality and transparency of higher education institutions

The survey also examined the views of students on the quality and transparency of higher education institutions. Most frequently, students *strongly agreed* or *rather agreed* that **independent reports on the quality of universities and programmes would help students to decide where to study** (83%); a similar proportion agreed that **students choose where to study on the basis of the quality/reputation of the institution and its study programmes** (83%).

Overall, 81% of respondents in higher education believed that **students should be involved in quality reports and rankings**.

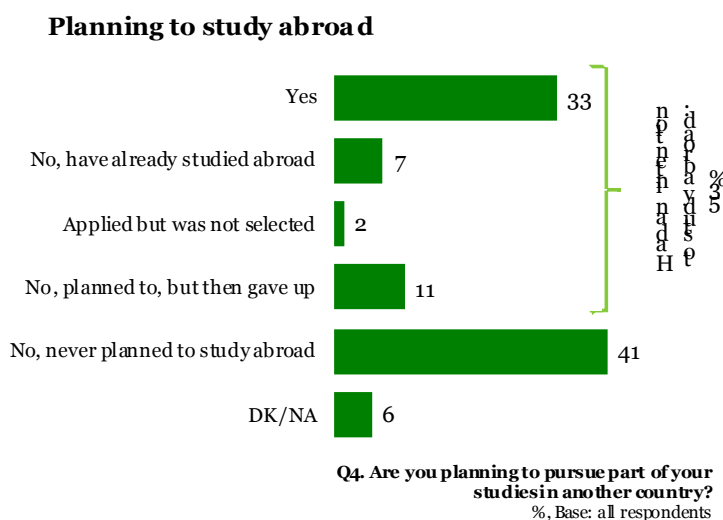
## Studying abroad

### Planning to study abroad

Asked if they plan to pursue part of their studies in another country, two-fifths of the surveyed students in higher education said that they had never planned to study abroad (41%), and 11% stated that they had planned, but gave up the idea.

One-third of students stated an intention to study in another country (33%). Less than one in ten interviewees said they had either already studied abroad (7%) or had applied but had not been selected (2%). A small proportion (6%) of respondents were undecided about whether to pursue part of their studies in another country.

Looking at individual country results, there were large variations in the proportion of those who declared their intention of doing part of their studies in another country.



### Inclusion of a short study period in another country as an integrated part of studies

A majority of the students supported (*strongly agreed* or *rather agreed*) that all study programmes should include a possibility for study period abroad. Approximately three in ten respondents disagreed (32%).

## Cooperation between universities and businesses; and entrepreneurship in higher education

A large majority (87%) of students *strongly agreed* or *rather agreed* that it was important for higher education institutions to foster innovation and an entrepreneurial mindset among students and staff, and that there should be a possibility to undertake work placements in private enterprises as part of a study programme.

Three-quarters of interviewees strongly, or rather, agreed that higher education institutions should provide tailor-made study programmes for enterprises to help upgrade their workforce (76%), and one-fifth of respondents disagreed (20%).

### Plans after graduation

Three-quarters of students working towards a first cycle (Bachelor) degree said they wanted to continue their studies - either to a second cycle (Masters programme) or to find work and resume their studies later on a part-time basis.

On average, twice as many respondents wanted to continue directly to a second cycle degree – e.g. a Masters programme (50%), rather than find work after graduation and resume their studies later on a part-time basis (25%).

### To know more:

European Commission: [Bologna](#) (includes full Eurobarometer report and summary)