

Covid-19 Best Practices and Challenges

Questionnaire for the GA meeting 2020

Total Answers (25.06.2020): **50**

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1. Main Findings

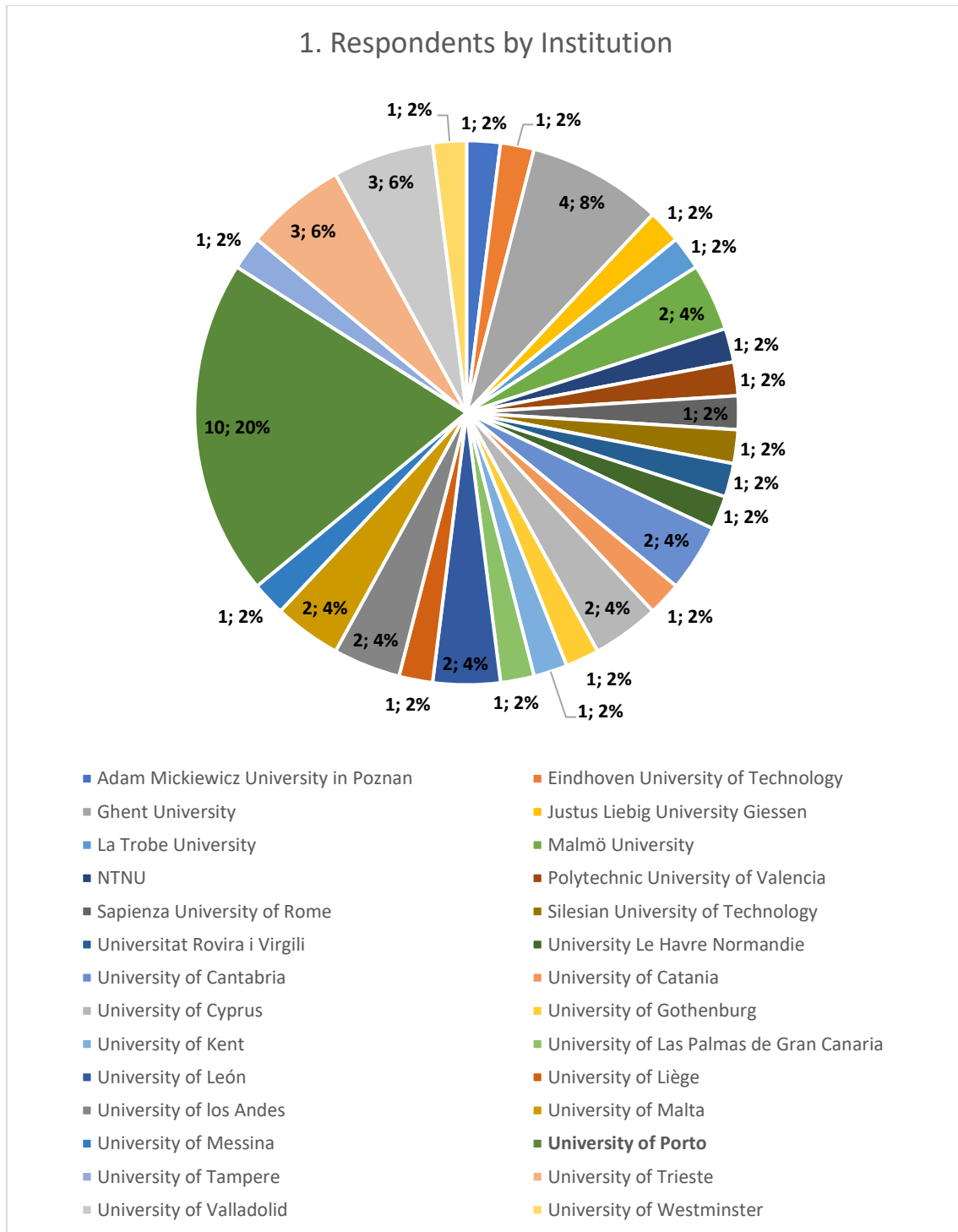
- 28 universities represented among the respondents;
- 66% of the respondents were IRO officers, 16% academic staff;
- 90% believe the exchange student applications will decrease;
- 60% think virtual mobility may be a valid part of a mobility, but not more;
- 48% pointed out the email as the most relevant channel for contacting international students during Covid-19, immediately followed by online meetings (20%);
- Almost 30% of the respondents think their institutions are not considering new recruitment strategies for the upcoming academic year. Those who believe new strategies will be implemented listed digital marketing, webinars, social media and online conferences as the main tools to implement them;
- 56% believe it is unclear whether Covid-19 will lead to financial problems in their universities;
- 86% mentioned that their institutions banned international travel for staff, and 81% of those think they will be restricted or banned for the foreseeable future;
- The transition from face-to-face teaching to online teaching was perceived as relatively easy for 56% of the respondents, while 70% agreed that the main problems for this transition were a combination of problems at the technical, organisational levels and issues with the skills of the teaching staff;



- 53% assumes that online teaching will increase in the future, but not become crucial, while 37% believe it will be integrated in all future teaching;
- 35% pointed out the adaptation to online teaching and learning as the biggest challenge in responding to the crisis, followed by the anxiety / fear of the uncertain next steps (19%);
- 60% of the respondents were aware that their university has implemented an emergency plan before the crisis (22% believed their university had not done one, while 18% were not sure). From those, 74% believe the plan will be adapted to anticipate situations like Covid-19.
- The adaptation and flexibility to work online, the support provided to students and a quick response to the crisis were some of the most mentioned best practices implemented by universities.
- 31% of the respondents pointed out blended learning as the preferred new strategy to be adopted by their institutions to implement mobility projects, while 17% mentioned virtual mobility.
- Respondents repeatedly mentioned “Sharing of best practices and ideas” as the best way for SGroup to contribute to support institutions in dealing with Covid-19. Other suggestions included webinars, promotion of virtual exchanges, new external and internal projects, and financial support to students.
- 82% agree that the present crisis brings a host of opportunities to reset humanity’s future path in a new, more caring, compassionate and ecologically sustainable direction (54% agree and 28% fully agree).

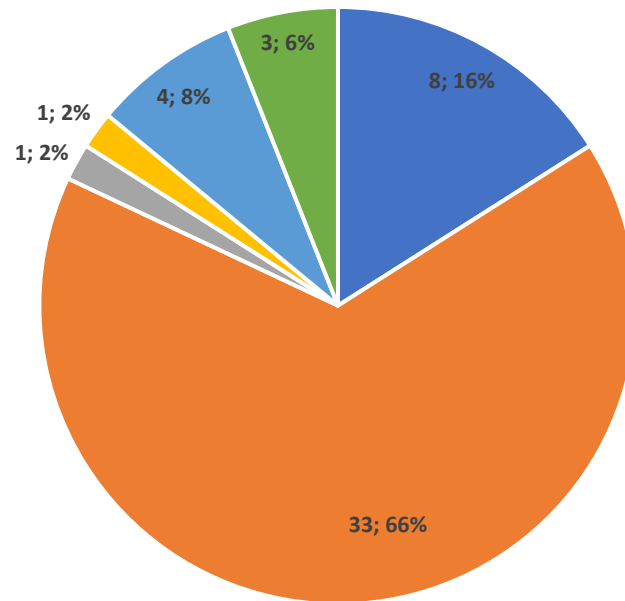
2. Results

1. Respondents' profile





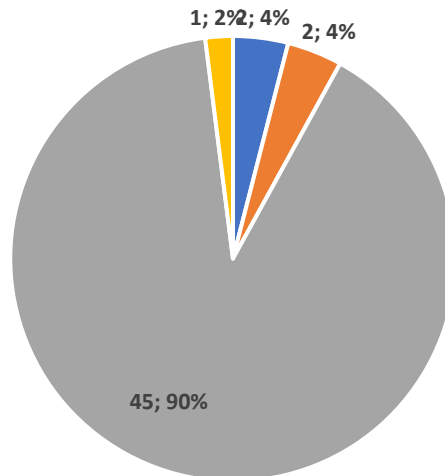
2. Respondents by Position



- Academic staff
- PhD student
- (Vice)-Rector or equivalent
- IRO officer
- Technic assistant
- Other

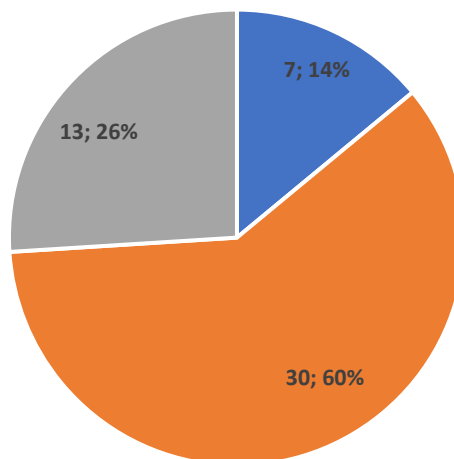
2. Student Mobility

3. How do you expect the coronavirus to affect the number of exchange student applications at your institution?



■ They will increase ■ They will stay the same ■ They will decrease ■ Don't know

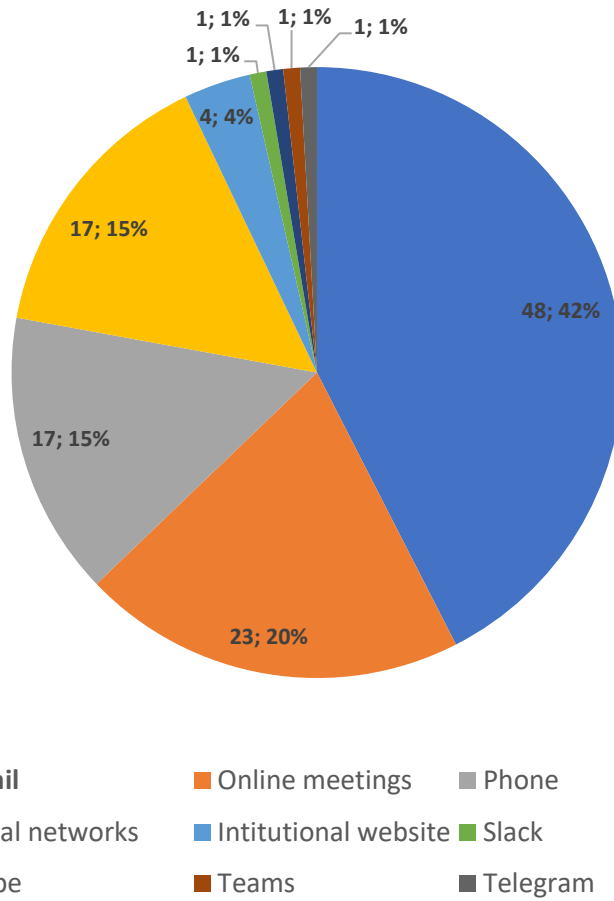
4. Do you think virtual mobility is a valid alternative for physical mobility in internationalisation?



■ It is a valid alternative ■ It may be a valid part but not more ■ It cannot replace it

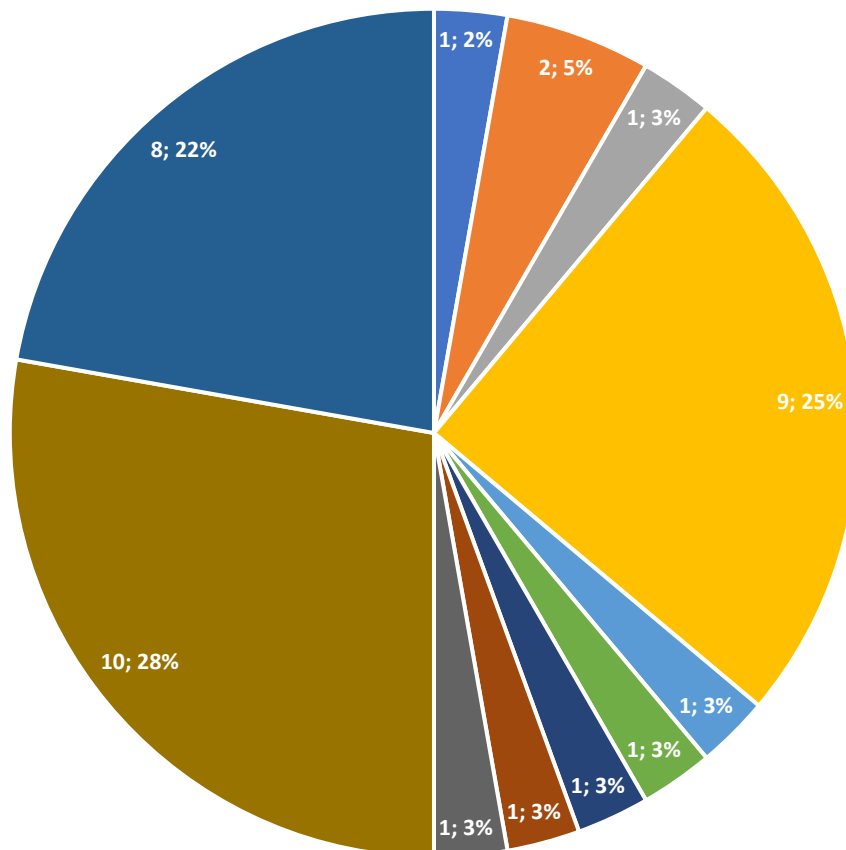


5. Which of these channels have become most relevant for contacting international students at your institution since the beginning of the Covid-19?



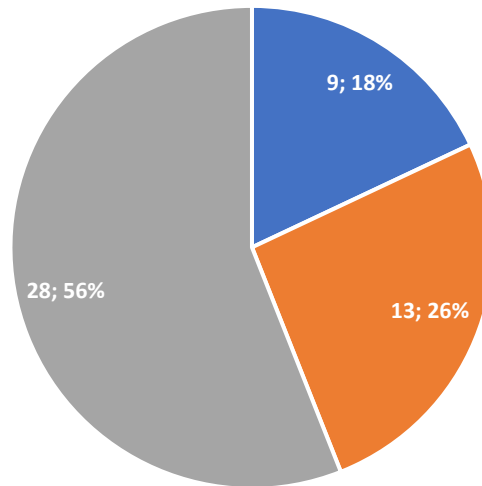
3. International Degree Students

6. Is your University considering new strategies in order to recruit international degree students for the upcoming academic year? If so, which ones?



- Adjustement of start dates
- Attending online conferences
- Definitely yes, but still thinking about the best way to do it
- Digital marketing and recruitment, webinars and social media
- Direct mailing to partner institutions
- Mixed mobilities
- New grants
- New recruitment strategies and virtualization of the academic CV
- Organizing Virtual Open Days
- No / Not yet
- Don't know / Not involved

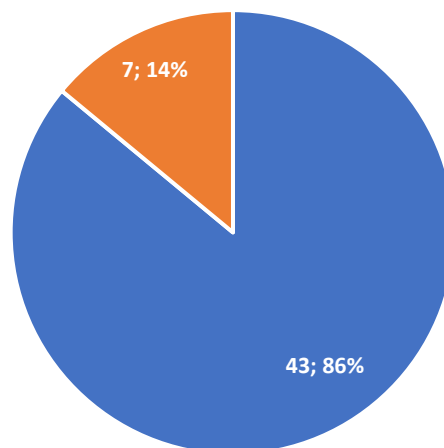
7. To what extent do you think the COVID-19 crisis will lead to financial problems for your university?



■ It cannot be avoided ■ It is likely ■ It is unclear yet

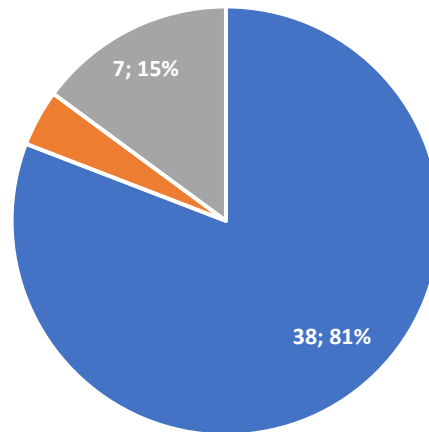
4. University staff and teaching methods

8a. Has your institution banned or restricted international travel for staff?



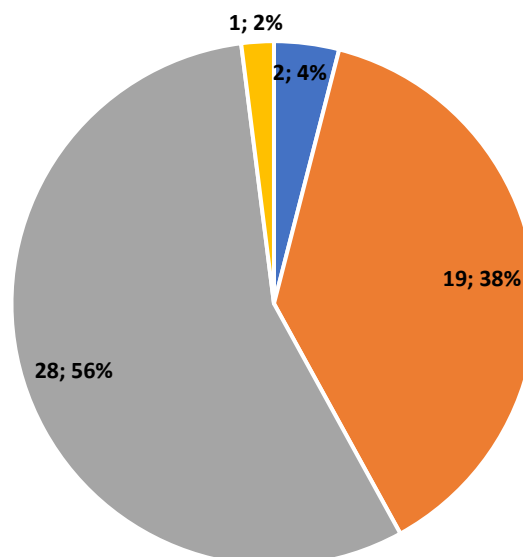
■ Yes ■ No

8b. In case there were restrictions



- International travels are restricted/banned for the foreseeable future
- The restrictions have already been lifted
- None of the above

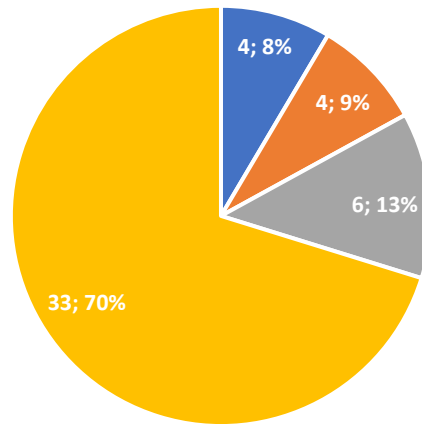
9. How difficult was/is it for your institution to switch from face-to-face teaching to on-line teaching?



- Very difficult
- Relatively difficult
- Relatively easy
- Easy

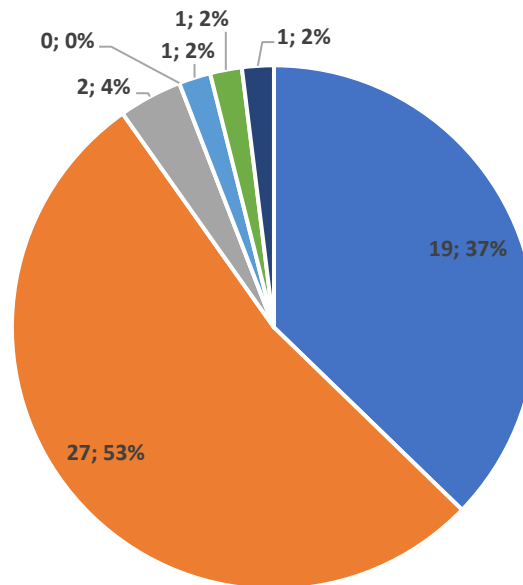


10. If you experienced problems were they



- Mainly technological
- Mainly organisational
- Mainly in terms of the skills of the teaching staff
- **A combination of the above**

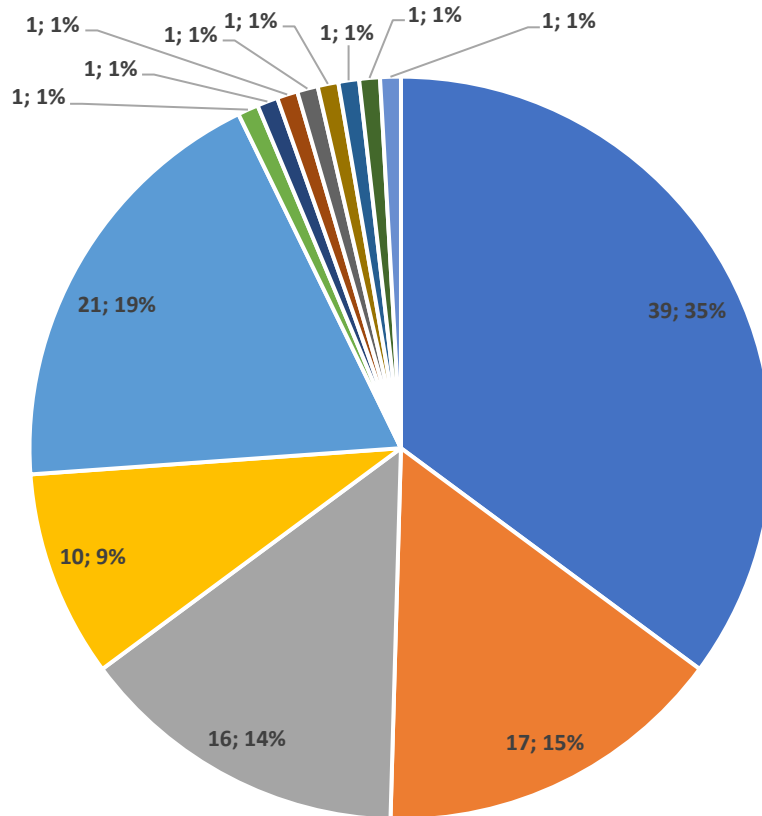
11. Do you think online teaching will become more important in the future as a result of Covid-19?



- It will be integrated in all future teaching
- **It will increase but not become crucial**
- It will be integrated in the majority of the programmes but not all programmes
- Everything will go back to normal once the crisis is over
- It will be integrated into many programmes or courses - and will continue past this specific crisis - but not all programmes
- It will increase and will offer a new dimension to the University's provision.
- We will try optimize the use of online learning as part of our overall educational policy

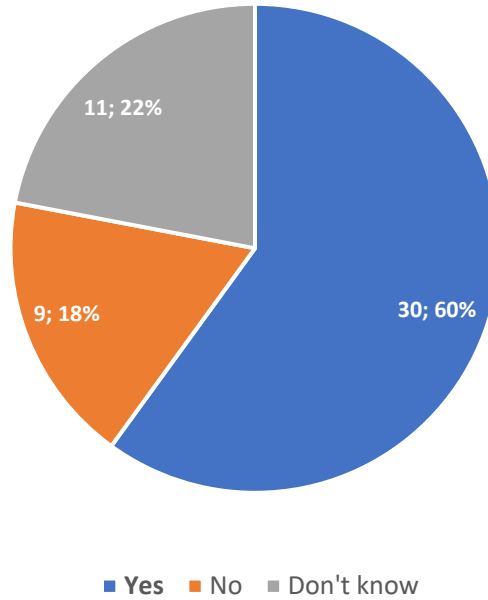
5. Implementation of new strategies and best-practices

12. What do you think are the biggest challenges your institution is facing in responding to the coronavirus?

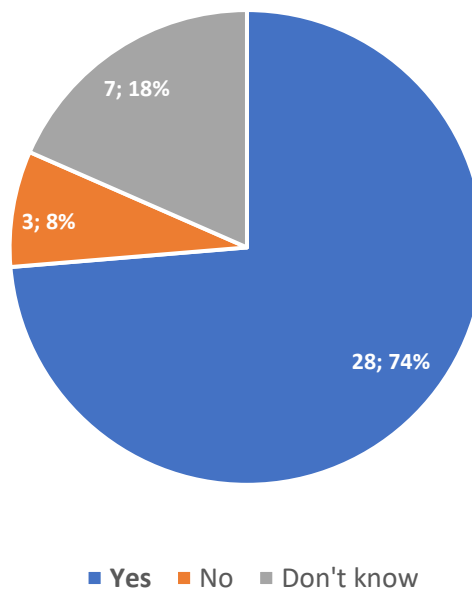


- Adapting to online teaching and learning
- Adapting to online administrative services
- Constraints of working from home
- Financial constraints
- Anxiety / fear of the uncertain next steps
- Adapting to online exams
- Issues with space on physical teaching
- Challenges on lab-based research
- Keep the same level of quality pre-Covid
- Ensuring everybody is connected
- Practical issues like desinfecton, security measures, etc.
- Making decisions in line with being a public entity (public regulations)
- Seeking colaboration with international partners

13a. Has your University implemented an emergency plan before this crisis?



13b. If it did, do you believe it will be rethought and adapted to anticipate situations like the current crisis?



14. What do you consider to be the best practices your institution has adopted to face the coronavirus pandemic?

- To be able to create a new model of study and management;
- The capacity of solidarity response of the university community to give support to the territory in the terms the health crisis;
- academic society (students and scientific/academic staff) involvement in finding / proposing new projects and measures to be implemented due to the situation, including those helping the world outside of university (mainly hospitals/health services);
- All the teaching has been done online, as well as exams;
- An emergency team was immediately set-up and all relevant parties were involved so the best decisions are taken for the benefit of the university and its students/staff;
- Calling home students and staff and refunding part of the extra costs;
- Delivering all its programs remotely;
- Fast-track decision making processes; widespread upskilling of staff in online teaching practices; development of online assessment protocols;
- Flexibility towards teleworking;
- From an International officer's point of view: organisation of remote work, organisation of live activities for isolated students, improved collaboration with executives, improvements in sharing information, more focus and efficiency, more fluid cooperation with international partners via remote meetings;
- Full implementation of distance learning, graduation and exams included. Support to international students, administrative services fully implemented during the lockdown, 100% staff (teaching and admin) switched to smart-working without major problems and keeping high standards of services and teaching facilities, the University has been at local level a driver for active policies to fight against covid 19 crisis;
- Good communication channels with all stakeholders: staff, students, partners etc.;
- Home office is very well organized and it shows that in most cases we can do without university buildings;
- Immediate response;
- Improved e-learning capacities;
- Created an Emergency Fund to national and international students in need;
- Established projects that try to find solutions for problems generated by the pandemics in the country;
- Individually, there are many good examples, but as a university chaos is reigning;
- One important aspect was the *flexibilization* of evaluation during this semester. Since many students have difficulties (of different sorts) during this period of online learning, the university decided to temporary switch to a system of qualitative evaluation (approved / not approved), with the goal of reducing



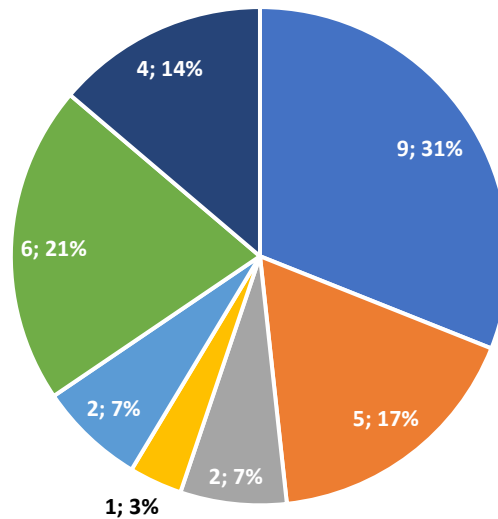
students' anxiety and also challenging professors to rethink the way they teach and evaluate. This represented many challenges but I think it was an important practice. Another good practices are: working individually with professors to support them in the transition to online services; offering permanent workshops regarding the many different online tools to the whole community; supplying internet access and computers to the less favoured students so they could continue studying; implementing a system of differentiated financial discounts or loans for next semester;

- Online counselling;
- Online courses on online teaching and assessment, improvement of software and servers, financial/technological help for students, option to cancel enrolment if online teaching is not feasible for a student, fluent communication with students and staff;
- On-line support in a very short time (servers were reinforced, the use of TEAMS for the whole community, etc.), more coordination among governing bodies, administrative and academic units, specially at such a big institution. On-line applications have worked well for signature of documents, for example.
- Online teaching (5x);
- Helping students to have appropriate material for the exams;
- Connections developed in order to work from home;
- Our rector was very down to earth and didn't follow the panic wave in other Portuguese institutions. He also tried to resume as soon as possible (following, of course, governmental regulations and safety). There was also a concern from top management on quality of the teaching procedures. Overall I was very well impressed. Note that I was not a supporter of the current Rector and even had low expectations on the current Rectorship team. So I was really very well impressed. The Porto University approach should be a case study in Portugal and abroad.
- Quick establishment of two key crisis groups: a decision-making group and a working group. Both are cross-unit and continue to meet and work with new developments. Once decided, we moved quickly to online, and overall smoothly. Working with students and staff to hear and meet their needs as best we can.
- Remote teaching and learning
- Set up university-wide support structures
- Social distancing and working from home
- Switching immediately to online teaching and online services
- The on line teaching reaching the 95% coverage
- Total confinement
- Updated information and continuous communication with students
- We formed a Corona group at an early stage, with daily meetings initially, where all questions were raised and processed. Good communication strategy = well-informed decisions.



- We started acting very early. Already in January, the IO was in touch with students and staff who had visited China or were planning to arrive from China to implement quarantine measures, contact tracing etc. The setting up of an Emergency Situation Team in early March when we still had no cases in Malta but the situation in Italy was becoming worrying. Swift and early shift to online teaching - decisions were taken very quickly to allow international students who wished to return home to have the necessary time and possibility to do so before the commercial passenger flights were stopped. Open and frequent communication with students and staff in English (our medium of instruction and communication). All staff pulled the rope in the same direction with a clear commitment to get through this and complete the academic year successfully. Assistance to all our students abroad, booking them for repatriation flights, assisting with their re-integration and taking on the major tasks of preparing and filing hundreds of cases to be considered for Force Majeure by the Erasmus National Agency. Continued assistance and reach out to the international degree and exchange students who remained here. Continuous training on Zoom, Google meet and all other technology required for teaching, meeting, online exams, etc. Early decisions regarding online exams, etc. "
- The University of Cyprus managed to switch to online teaching relatively easy. There was continuous monitoring of all incoming and outgoing exchange students The University of Cyprus has set up a support system for students, as indicated below: students in distress or in need can contact specific telephone numbers, which are in operation 24/7; students with technical issues can contact the IT helpdesk via email or telephone.; students with general queries can contact the Academic Affairs and Student Welfare Service, via both email and telephone. Furthermore, an online forum has also been set up, available to UCY academic staff (<http://e-learning.ucy.ac.cy>). Through this forum, staff can exchange ideas, best practises and experiences regarding e-learning.
- A strong Critical Incident team that had an agile approach to decision making, and then moving into a more structured recovery approach once the initial critical challenges were addressed; constant communication with staff as phases of response evolved; clarity about decision making authority.
- That the crisis team in our university was activated immediately and a special webpage dedicated to all the information related to the COVID-19 situation (relevant for all our students and staff) was established immediately after the outbreak in Belgium.
- Communication and flexibility of the procedure of examination, PhD defence.
- Acting carefully, communicating carefully to all parties involved, listening to students and staff

15. Is your University considering new strategies to implement your current Mobility projects (concerning both student and staff Mobility)? If so, which ones?



- Yes, blended learning
- Yes, virtual mobilities
- Yes, developing internationalization at home
- Yes, extending mobility projects and restructure them
- Yes, but they are not clear yet
- No / Not yet
- Don't know

16. How can SGroup contribute to supporting your institution in dealing with Covid-19?

- **Sharing of best practices and ideas from other institutions (19x);**
- The 2020 meeting will be a helpful forum to exchange problems and propose solutions.
- Initiatives may be put forward to promote virtual exchanges among the SGroup members
- It is good to know that you are not alone
- Promoting discussions on the alternatives to mobility projects to Support internationalization;
- Design projects to develop new e-learning tools and innovative teaching techniques and materials;

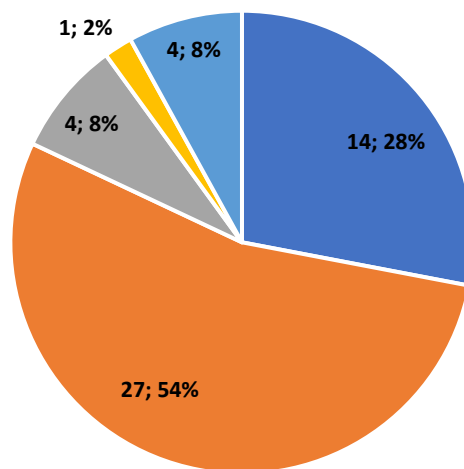


- This questionnaire is helpful. We would like more feedback about how Universities will consider virtual mobility for the next academic year - will they allow students to follow virtual mobility and provide full accreditation?
- 1) How to keep quality and engagement in the on-line courses; 2) How to manage laboratory courses in terms of COVID-19. These are the two most profound issues as staff I'm facing because we teach physics laboratories to hundreds of students and they are fundamental for the training of future engineers.
- Sharing what member institutions are doing in terms of contingency planning and highlighting best practices.
- Financial help for students
- Among the member universities of the SGroup, we should allow a maximum of flexibility for staff and student mobility, accepting changes from the first to the second semester, or allowing more combined (physical + virtual) mobilities to take place.
- Through collaboration
- Exchange of information, good webinars
- SGroup could contribute to develop the weaknesses of international internships linked to the Commerce chambers or regional enterprises
- Can foster a SGroup shared COIL courses
- Promote a virtual summer courses
- It could allow to create mobility modules to shorten mobility as well as make it more effective and at the same time more accessible.
- The main issues go around the online assessment. If you have sound and bulletproof (and cheap) best practices to share, that would be a great contribution.
- International Networks are vital for helping HEIs to face the crises, learn from each other, transfer competences and experiences, catch financing opportunities for international research and education, provide targeted information and training modules for administrative staff and governance of HEIs to get inspired to implement innovative practices and tools for the future and modernization of HE. This is a milestone in our modernization process to be considered an opportunity more than a challenge.
- Providing platforms for Exchange, staying connected, Training for digital Tools (academic and administrative)
- It would be great to propose an Erasmus Capacity building project regarding crisis management or strengthening capacities for this new online environment. Additionally, SGroup could facilitate virtual mobility among member universities.
- Set up a system to share offers re. online learning, COIL-initiatives, support structures,...
- Unsure. Possibly having a collection of resources, innovations, and best practice examples from members (and beyond). Working with EU to be as clear and

flexible as possible with recognition of a wider variety of mobility formats moving forward. Highlighting opportunities to work together.

- Webinars, financial support
- Supporting associated University to start virtual exchange programmes
- Information sharing. Some institutions may feel a bigger need than others for interacting and bench-marking with partners. Sometimes an individual staff member at an institution may need other like-minded staff at another university to ventilate thoughts and ideas with, Even though not every single institution may take advantage of the network's community, it may be very valuable to some.
- It can be an effective partner
- Giving us advice for students mobility in the near future.
- I think if institutions combine strengths, they will be able to quickly define successful and proactive strategies to tackle the obstacles this new reality imposed. SGroup, as an experienced and influent network of institutions, is a valuable asset regarding for example the constitution of a task force to address the issues the COVID-19 brought to the management of HEIs' strategies (in particular the internationalisation strategy and the treatment of mobility flows, both outgoing and incoming).
- Regular updates on changing policy and practice across SGroup.
- Evidence based recommendation.

17. Do you agree that the present crisis brings a host of opportunities to reset humanity's future path in a new, more caring, compassionate and ecologically sustainable direction?



■ Fully agree ■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Fully disagree ■ No opinion

18. Any other comments?

- Lock down at the beginning was very difficult. It meant a lot of extra work and there was no timetable. Anyone could contact you anytime and you were supposed to be ready to answer immediately. Everybody thought working from home or teleworking was great but now it has shown that it is not ""ideal"" because there was no freedom of movement during lockdown.
- We do not work in distant learning universities so we had to adapt in a very short period of time. My university could do it because it is a technological one with very well prepared professionals in computers. Students and teachers would like to continue teaching in person and with normal examinations, but the experience has shown that other ways of working are possible, though not ideal.
- There was a mistrust on staff ""not working"" as they ""should"" but it has been proved that workers are very committed and the ones who work in person also work seriously from home.
- I think communication in general has improved as well as coordination. We have all learnt new technological things.
- Let us go through this safely and being wiser in future. Just about the above response: of course it could be a great opportunity to go in that direction, but unfortunately I tend to think that the immediate action will have to focus on the economic crisis, and by the time it is over, nobody will keep all of these good thoughts
- Great challenges await us, but everyone is just dying to go back to old life.
- I would love giving a talk/presentation on; How far the HEIs preparing students and faculty for digital teaching and learning?
- We have to seize these opportunities, all together.
- It is important to remember that there will need to be good collaboration during the next 2-3 years as the impacts on universities, communities and economies around the world stabilise.
- The webinar series that was initiated by the SGroup is a good initiative.