European Universities Initiative

Survey on the impact of COVID-19 on European Universities

- Main conclusions -

The rapid spread of the COVID-19 virus throughout Europe is having a substantial impact on higher education, with almost all institutions having closed their doors for face to face activities and replacing them with online courses.

The COVID-19 shows that there is an urgent need for much deeper cooperation between higher education institutions on education, research and innovation. There is also a huge need to pool together and share on-line courses, data, digital and research infrastructure. The COVID-19 has accelerated this need for a digital transformation of higher education institutions.

In order to better understand the way European Universities jointly address these common challenges brought by the crisis but also to grasp the extent to which being part of a European University has contributed to alleviate such impact, DG EAC has conducted a survey in May 2020 with the 114 higher education institutions taking part in the first 17 European Universities. The response rate was very high with 93 respondents covering all 17 alliances.

The survey highlights the importance of being part of a European University to better cope with the challenges of the crisis as well as the accelerator effect the European Universities Initiative has in terms of achieving deeper institutional cooperation, virtual campuses and blended mobility for all students and staff:

- **More than 60% of higher education institutions consider that being part of a European University has been helpful** in addressing the current COVID-19 crisis difficulties, in particular those that are the most advanced in their implementation activities. Examples of what they have already done together to face the pandemic include brainstorming on common challenges, sharing good practices and solutions, pooling together IT tools for distance learning and sharing online resources, maximising the on-line courses on offer to all their students and keeping the international links, creating a joint environment for sharing online teaching and good practices related to online teaching and virtual mobility, engaging students from the different universities in finding solutions to pandemic related challenges, organising virtual/blended mobility for the next academic semester.

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- **Almost 80% shared within their alliance good practices** and measures alleviating the impact of COVID-19 by putting together e-learning tools and platforms, ad-hoc working groups on e-exams and e-testing, teacher training, joint guidance for students/online learners, support through facilities (e.g. libraries, labs), social activities/support. As an example, UNA-Europea organised a cross-European student hackathon "UNA Transform Emergency Now", educational webinars were organised for the staff of YUFE partners, and online courses to enable virtual/blended mobility in the academic year 2020-2021 were created in another alliance.

- **96%** of the institutions think **they would have been better prepared to face this pandemic if their European University had already been fully operational** (they only started 6 or 9 months ago). Examples of the most useful features mentioned by them are:

    - A **fully-functional digital EU inter-university campus**, with member universities pooling together their on-line courses to offer continuous delivery of high quality education through larger volumes of on-line courses for all their students, sharing operational joint digital learning and teaching environment with common digital governance tools.

    - Fully working infrastructure and tested methodology for **joint blended courses** across the universities, with a strategy for managing **blended mobility** (virtual and physical) and recognition mechanisms for students and staff.

    - Developing **in cooperation with companies, regions** and **cities** short learning courses leading to **micro-credentials**, to equip the European workforce with **"just-in-time" skills** that are essential in the context of the recovery, allowing anyone to up-skill and re-skill at any stage of their career.

    - Applying a **challenged-based approach** where student work with academics, researchers, companies, cities and regions from different countries and disciplines to address big societal challenges, for example linked to the European Green Deal or addressing the COVID-19 (many of them participated to the #EUvsVirus matchathon).

  - 59% have started pooling together on-line courses or MOOCs that the students from all their member universities can/will be able to get access to as from the next academic semester Examples: creation of the first YUFE programmes for the 2020/2021 academic year with common on-line courses; blended and active learning (which can possibly take the form of MOOCs) proposed through the development of Connected Learning Communities; UNITE! And CIVICA prepare a repository of online courses.

  - 85% plan to move quicker towards a European virtual inter-university campus

  - 90% would find useful that Erasmus+ supports blended mobility formats (ie short physical mobility, blended with virtual mobility) as from this autumn already.

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Annex: Detailed Results of the survey on the impact of COVID-19

Respondents

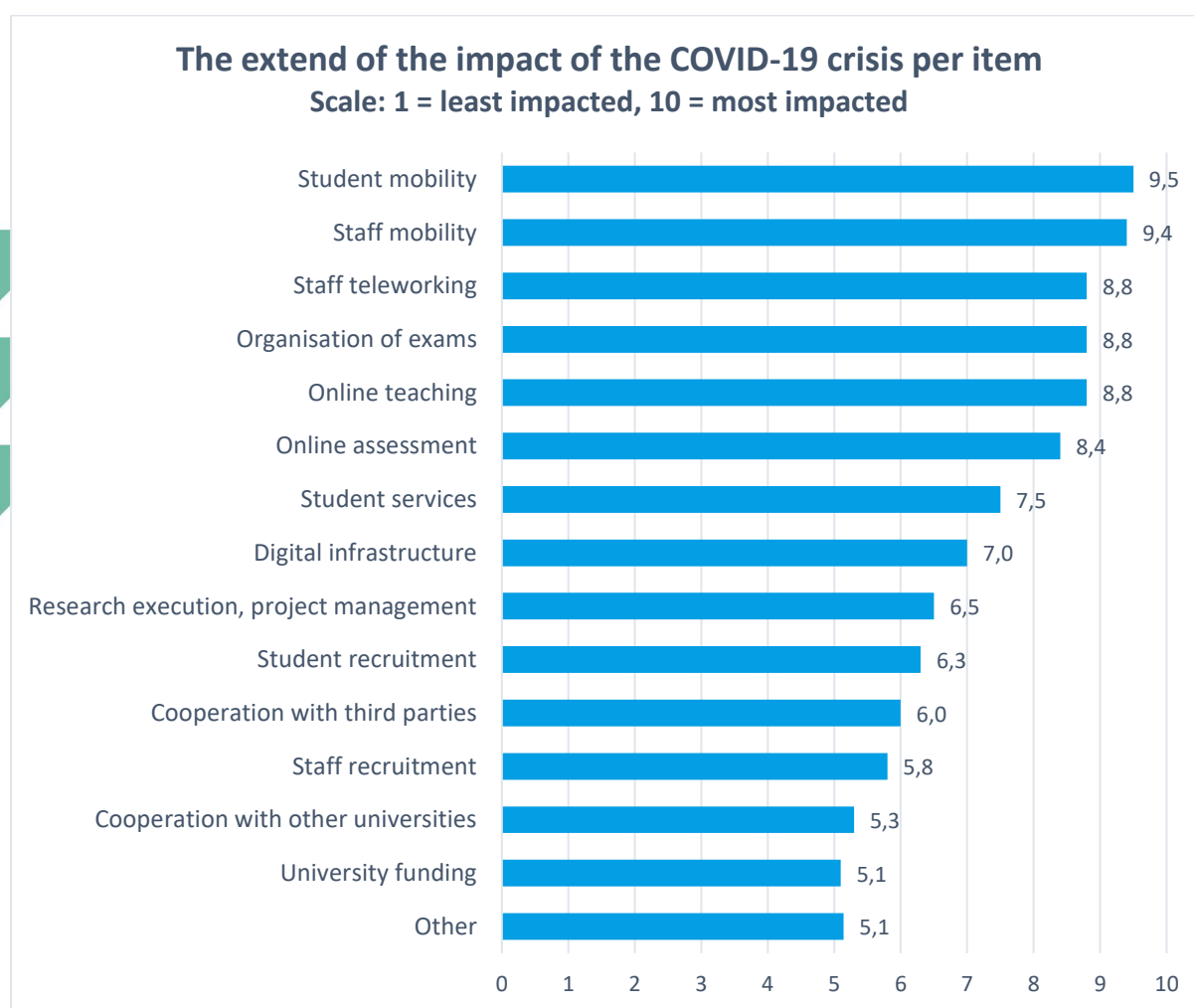Survey carried out between 24 April and 12 May 2020.

A total of **93 responses** were submitted, from **25 different countries**, with at least one response received from each of the 17 European University alliances (which involve 114 higher education institutions in total). The number of responses per alliance is as follows:

Acronym	Alliance Name	# responses
1EUROPE	UNA Europa	7
4EU+	The 4EU+ Alliance	1
ARQUS	ARQUS European University Alliance	8
CHARMEU	CHARM European University (Challenge-driven, Accessible, Research-based, Mobile)	5
CIVICA	CIVICA - The European University in social sciences	8
CIVIS	CIVIS - a European civic university alliance	7
CONEXUS	European University for Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability	9
ECIUn	ECIU University	3
EDUC	European Digital UniverCity	5
EPICUR	European Partnership for an Innovative Campus Unifying Regions	7
EU4ART	Alliance for common fine arts curriculum	2
EUGLOH	European University Alliance for Global Health	1
EUTOPIA	European Universities Transforming to an Open, Inclusive Academy for 2050	6
FORTHEM	Fostering Outreach within European Regions, Transnational Higher Education and Mobility	6
SEA-EU	The European University of the Seas	6
UNITE!	University Network for Innovation, Technology and Engineering	5
YUFE	Young Universities for the Future of Europe	7
	Total number of responses	**93**

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Responses by question
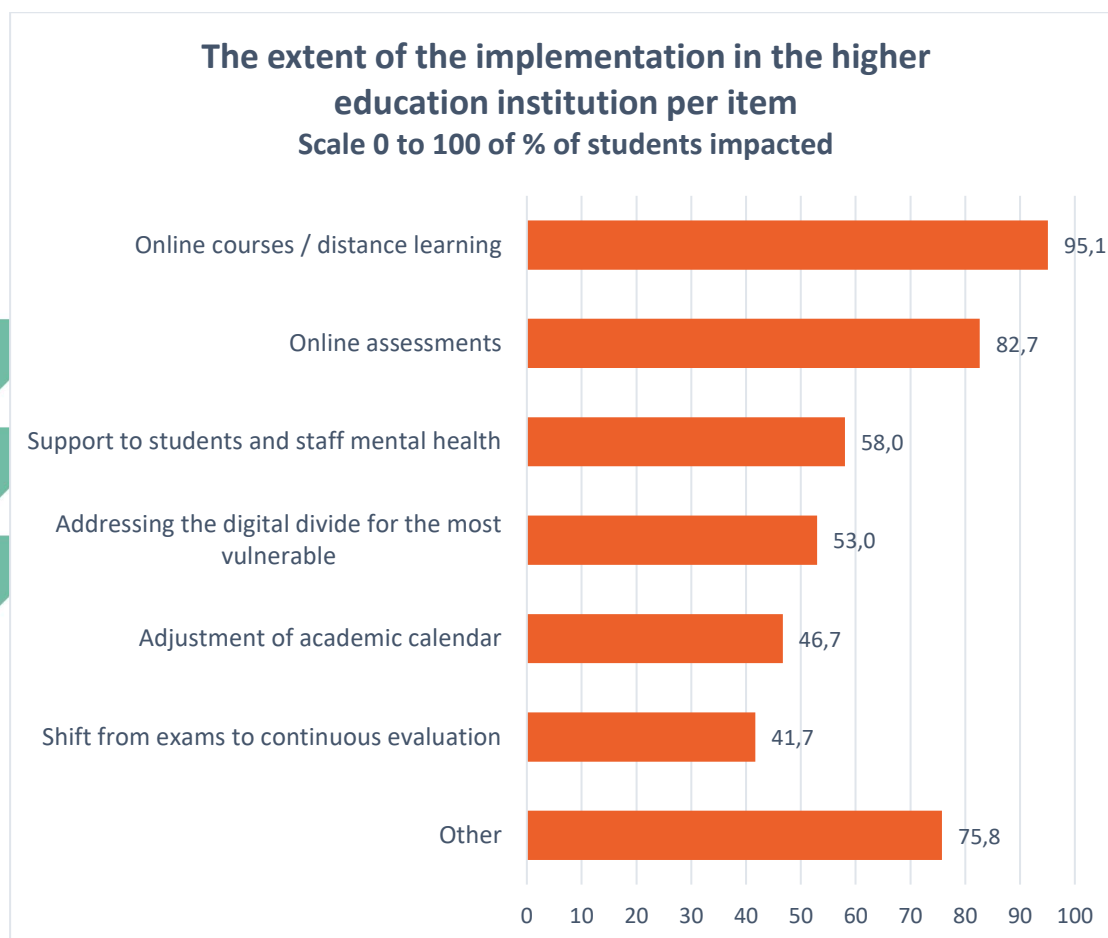
1. **Please indicate for each of the items below the extent to which they have been impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.**

The extend of the impact of the COVID-19 crisis per item
Scale: 1 = least impacted, 10 = most impacted

Item	Value
Student mobility	9,5
Staff mobility	9,4
Staff teleworking	8,8
Organisation of exams	8,8
Online teaching	8,8
Online assessment	8,4
Student services	7,5
Digital infrastructure	7,0
Research execution, project management	6,5
Student recruitment	6,3
Cooperation with third parties	6,0
Staff recruitment	5,8
Cooperation with other universities	5,3
University funding	5,1
Other	5,1

Other impacts mentioned: Collaboration with industry (9), mental health of staff due to increased workload due to the shift to digital teaching (7), and work life balance (6).

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2. **In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent has your higher education institution implemented the following?**

The extent of the implementation in the higher education institution per item
Scale 0 to 100 of % of students impacted

Item	Value
Online courses / distance learning	95,1
Online assessments	82,7
Support to students and staff mental health	58,0
Addressing the digital divide for the most vulnerable	53,0
Adjustment of academic calendar	46,7
Shift from exams to continuous evaluation	41,7
Other	75,8

Moreover, 88 HEIs have provided distance learning opportunities to 60% or more of their students and 58 higher education institutions stated to have implemented online courses for all of their students. In terms of online assessments, 78 have implemented it for 60% or more and one third have provided this option to all of their students. More than a half of HEIs are providing mental health support to more than 60% of their students and staff and almost a quarter of the HEIs have implemented these support structures to all students and staff.

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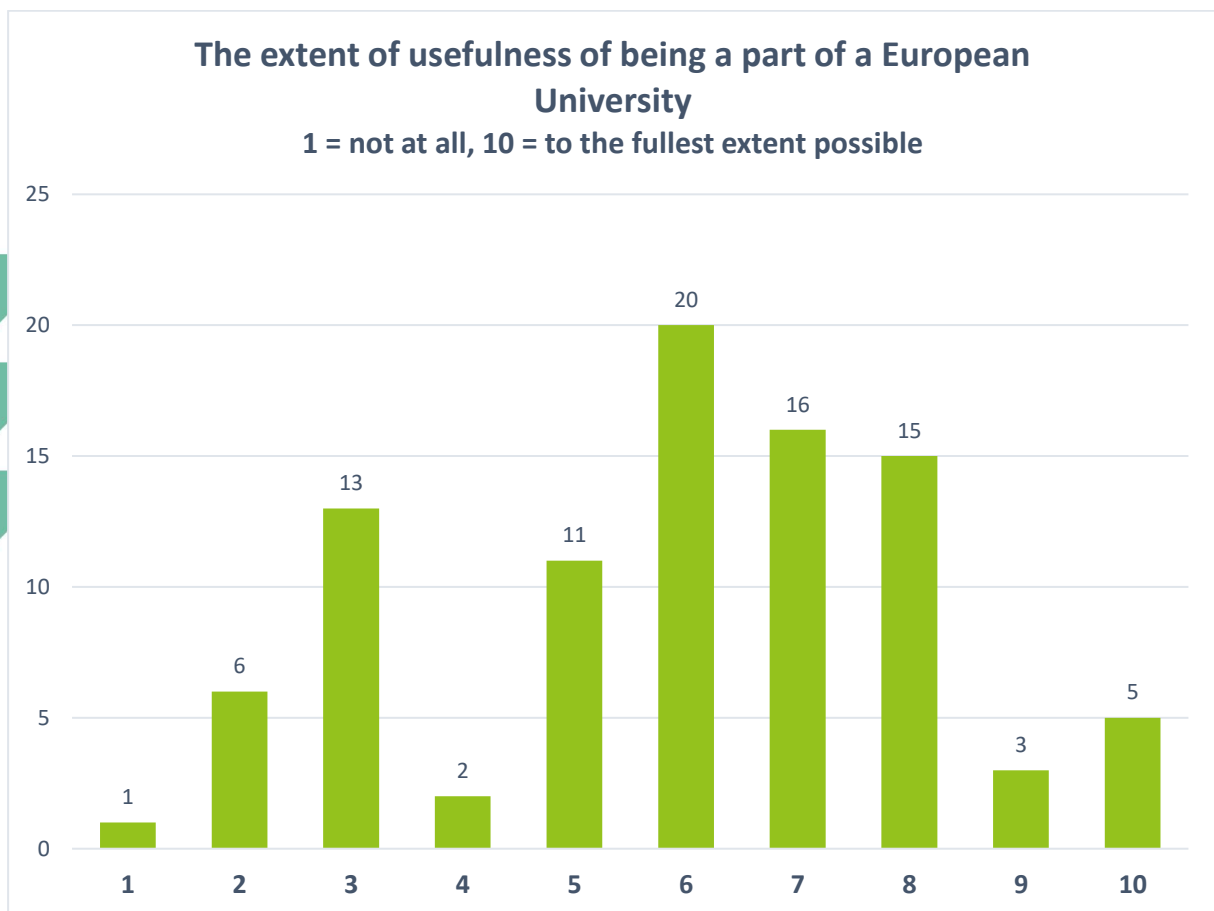
Other items mentioned:

% of students impacted by the measure	Digital support
100%	• Support for both teaching staff and students regarding online teaching and online learning (video tutorials, moodle platform for exchange on home learning, weekly newsletters); • Development of video-conference tools such as "unimeet"; collection of media didactic models
	Student support
100%	• Support to locked down students, in cooperation with the Erasmus Student Network. • Addressing the digital divide for the most vulnerable students • Student support, such as Academic Writing Service and special pedagogical support for student with documented disabilities now provided digitally through on-line consultations
30%	• Social interactions with primo-entering students, through personal phone calls and social support for students
	Support to local and national governance:
100%	• University hospitals: creation of laboratories, fablab solutions (masks, respirators,…), various solidarity initiatives on research, culture and volunteering
75%	• Helping the City Council to build an emergency hospital in the University premises, • Helping the most vulnerable people with take away meals, helping developing tools for SARS testing • Students initiated humanitarian action of making face shields for hospital workers.
	Financial support:
100%	• Financial help to repatriate [students]
50%	• Additional funds to assist the students with their tuition fees

3. **To what extent has being part of a European University been helpful in addressing the difficulties?**

92 responses

The extent of usefulness of being a part of a European University
1 = not at all, 10 = to the fullest extent possible

Value	Count
1	1
2	6
3	13
4	2
5	11
6	20
7	16
8	15
9	3
10	5

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Concrete examples illustrating how being part of a European University helps Higher Education Institutions in addressing the current challenges:

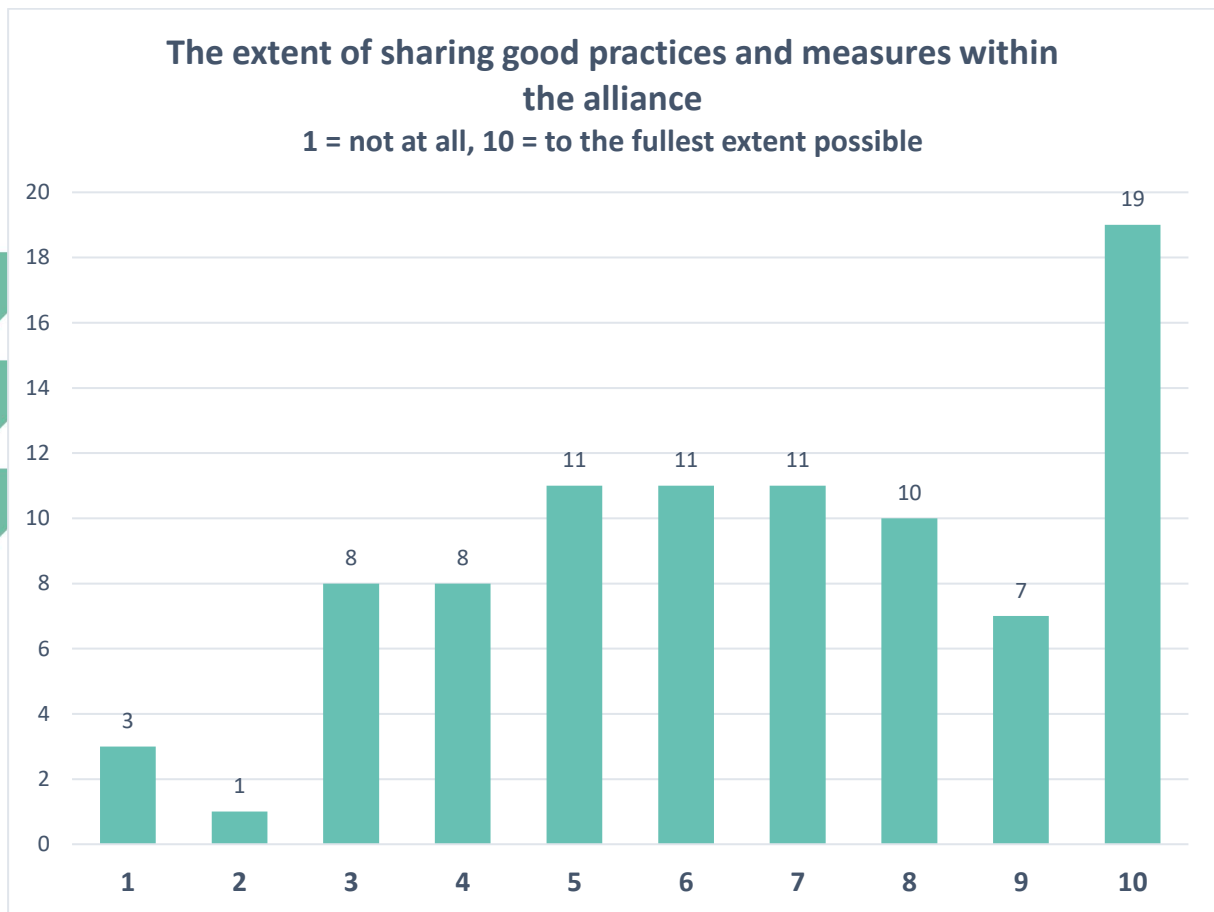| |
|---|
| **In terms of collaboration:** |
| Brainstorming on common problems, developing of various strategies for the future, continuous communication - all together gives understanding that you are part of the large solid structure. The crisis has triggered a sense of belonging among the staff. Our common values brought us together to create and project solutions for society for post-pandemic times. |
| Discussing plans for post-cOVID-19 operations, including a common draft of procedures for blended mobility in emergency situations. |
| **In terms of digital development:** |
| Identification of common solutions to online courses, leading to a faster distance and blended learning implementation |
| Developing joint online training and webinars |
| Sharing of video conferencing tools as well developing a joint environment for sharing online teaching and good practices related to virtual mobility. |
| **In terms of sharing experiences:** |
| Sharing experiences, good practices, solutions and responses in a trusted environment. |
| During our virtual meetings we exchanged practices and ideas on all important aspects and got familiar with all the current practices in the countries of our partners. |
| **In terms of mobility:** |
| Jointly addressing the issue of virtual mobility on an institutional and European level |
| Sharing offers for distance learning (boost to virtual mobility) |
| Common guidelines related to (student) mobility. |

4. **To what extent have you shared within your alliance good practices and measures alleviating the impact of COVID-19?**

89 responses

The extent of sharing good practices and measures within the alliance

1 = not at all, 10 = to the fullest extent possible

Rating	Responses
1	3
2	1
3	8
4	8
5	11
6	11
7	11
8	10
9	7
10	19

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Examples of good practices and measures put in place:

| Measures for online teaching and virtual mobility: |
| --- |
| Sharing examples and processes for online teaching and examination, and comparing IT tools Moving to an e-platform for teaching and learning as a whole alliance Development of joint virtual mobility, and options for future mobilities Development of ad-hoc working groups (e.g.: on digital education, virtual mobility, and impacts of COVID-19) Teachers training, guidance for students/online learners, support through facilities (e.g. libraries, labs), social activities/support, diversity and inclusion |
| **Exchange of good practices:** |
| Collecting and sharing ideas for virtual activities, exchange and trainings, on digital teaching, it-tools and platforms, etc. Updating and discussing situations of, and measures taken by, individual universities regularly through virtual mediums across all levels of alliance governance Sharing experiences on specific COVID-related issues (e.g.: nurses volunteering to help, prevention, COVID test validation) |
| **Concrete examples:** |
| Several additional activities will be carried out before the summer including mapping of on-line pedagogical practices and technologies, joint working group, ad-hoc Steering Committee to define a common EPICUR position. Dedicated newsfeed regarding the measures and calendars. Regular Newsletter addressing the issues. A cross-European student hackathon UNA Transform Emergency Now; ONE Health as an additional strategic area on health and covid-19 related issues; "UNA StrongerTogether" Twitter campaign |

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5. **Have you started pooling together on-line courses or MOOCs that the students from all your member universities could get access to?**

93 responses

Are on-line courses or MOOCs being pooled together and made accessible to students from all member universities?
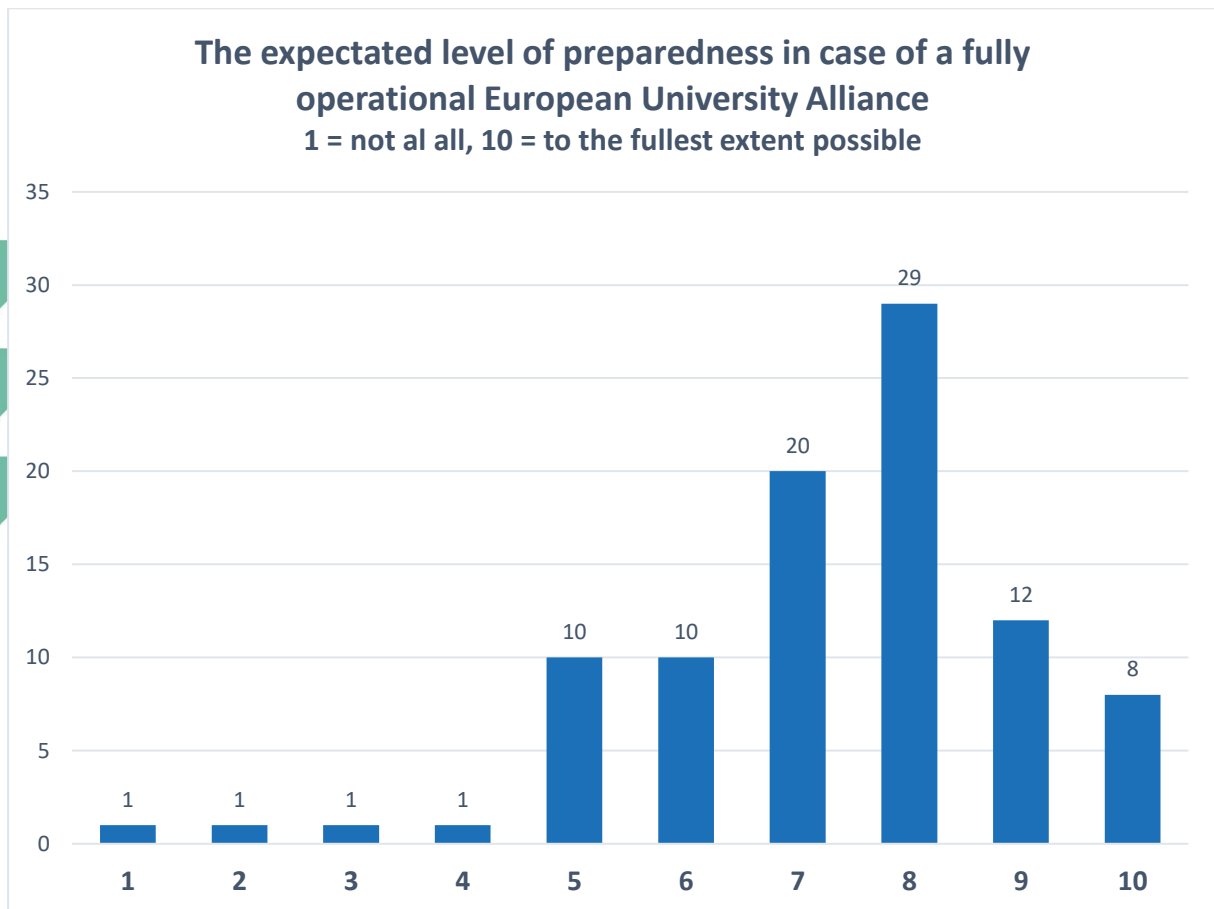

- 41% No
- 59% Yes
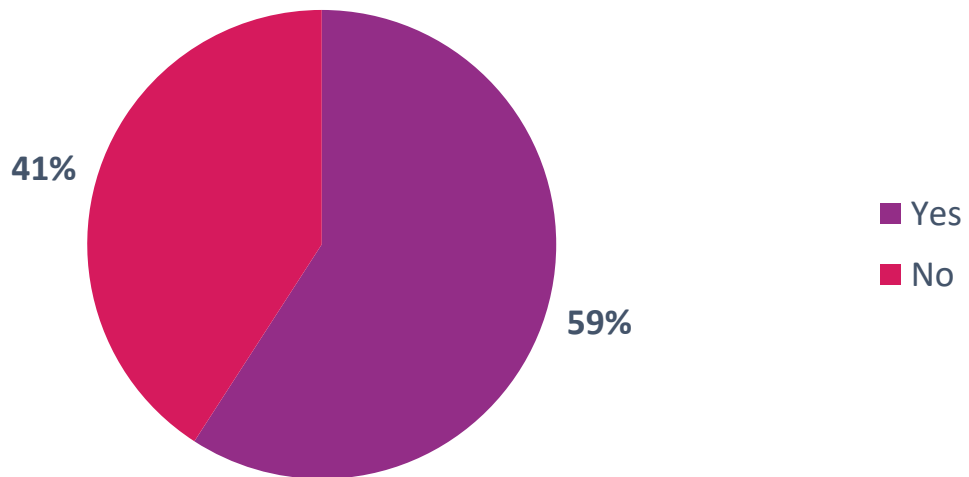
If yes, to which extent?	Number of Institutions involved
Start of the process (discussions)	8
Mapping/pooling courses	14
Courses are being prepared	13
Online courses are being promoted and carried out already	5
Planned start for next semester academic year 20/21	9
Planned start after academic year 20/21	2

6. **Do you think you would have been better prepared to face this pandemic if your European University had already been fully operational?**

93 responses

The expected level of preparedness in case of a fully operational European University Alliance
1 = not al all, 10 = to the fullest extent possible

Value	Count
1	1
2	1
3	1
4	1
5	10
6	10
7	20
8	29
9	12
10	8

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Examples given:

Joint online courses/digital tools:
• The volumes of on-line courses would have been larger and the quality of studies would be higher.   • A joint portfolio of on-line courses and procedures in place for pooling new ones; clear and automatic procedures for credit recognition; fully developed models for blended mobility   • The implementation of digital governance tools, distance and blended learning, sharing research infrastructures would have facilitated our reaction to the crisis.   • More common online courses or MOOCs for students and their recognition or certification

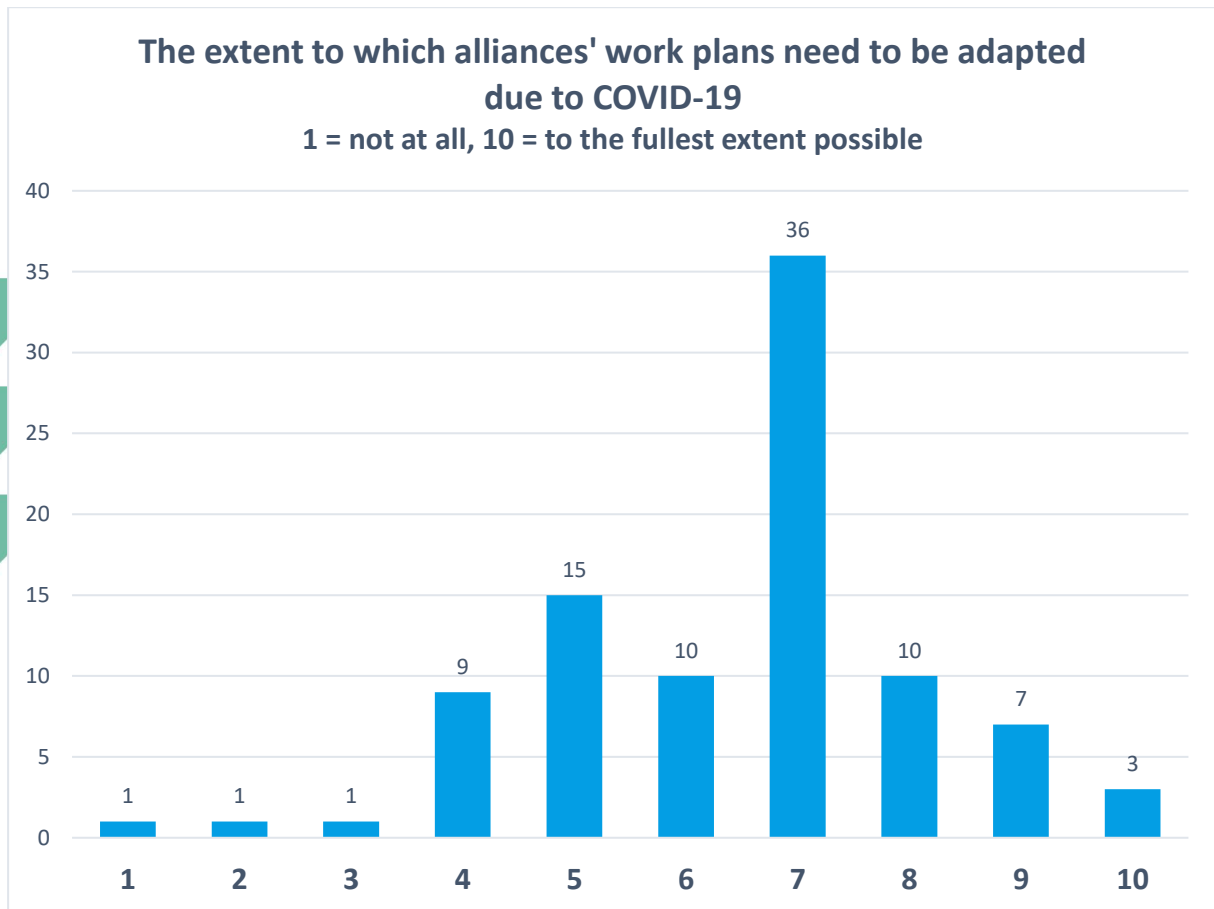| **Virtual mobility:** |
|---|
| • If already implemented, virtual mobility would have been a huge support (students would have been more familiar with virtual tools). It would also have made less fragile the European cohesion
 • The virtual online courses and their indexation would have been helpful, had it been in place already. It will provide an opportunity to keep international exchange up even in crises and hence make our universities more resilient. |

Response/cooperation:
• We could [have] respond[ed] quicker to building equipment much needed to fight the pandemic.   • If we had already established virtual conferences and exchanges, we wouldn't have to spend so much time moving to this mode of delivery while also dealing with national issues.   • EDUC learning activities would have been very helpful for staff to quickly adapt and extent the offer of education to many students. It would have improved the working conditions and simplified administrative and technical changes.

7. **To what extent does the work plan of your alliance need to be adapted due to the COVID-19 crisis?**

93 responses

The extent to which alliances' work plans need to be adapted due to COVID-19

1 = not at all, 10 = to the fullest extent possible

8. **Do you plan to move more quickly towards a European virtual inter-university campus?**

93 responses
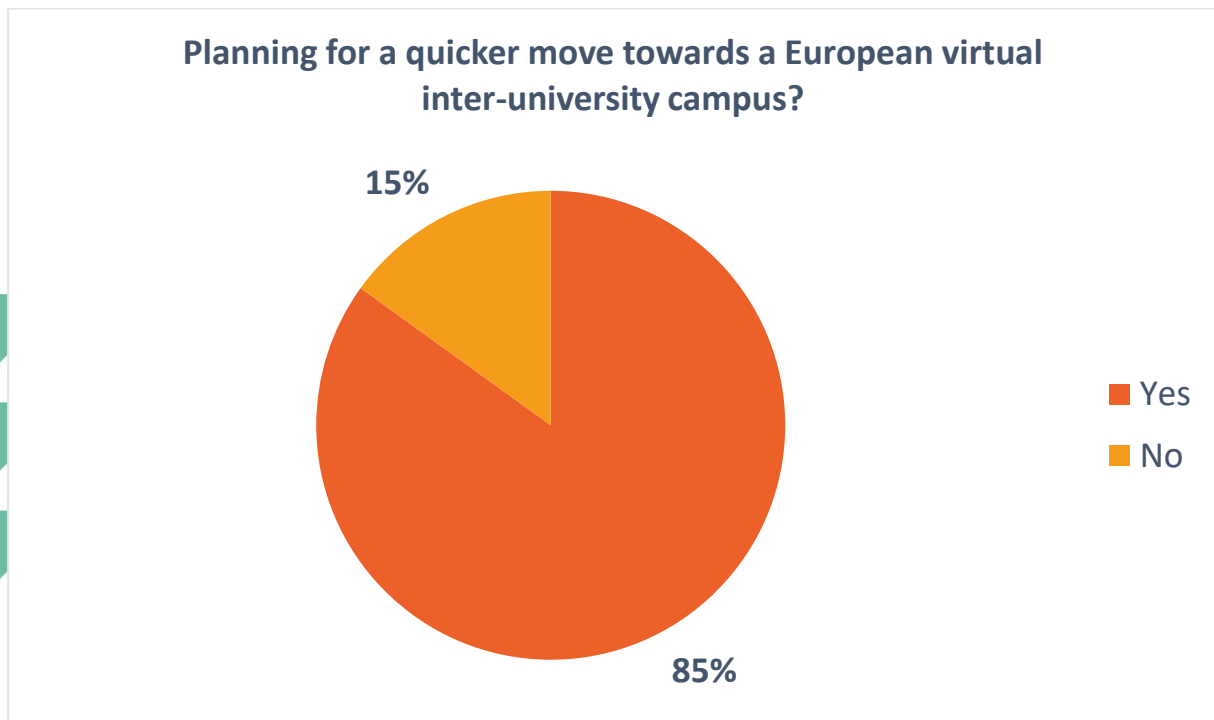
Planning for a quicker move towards a European virtual inter-university campus?

15%

85%

- Yes
- No

9. **What is the expected approximate delay for your European University alliance's work plan due to the crisis?**

85 responses

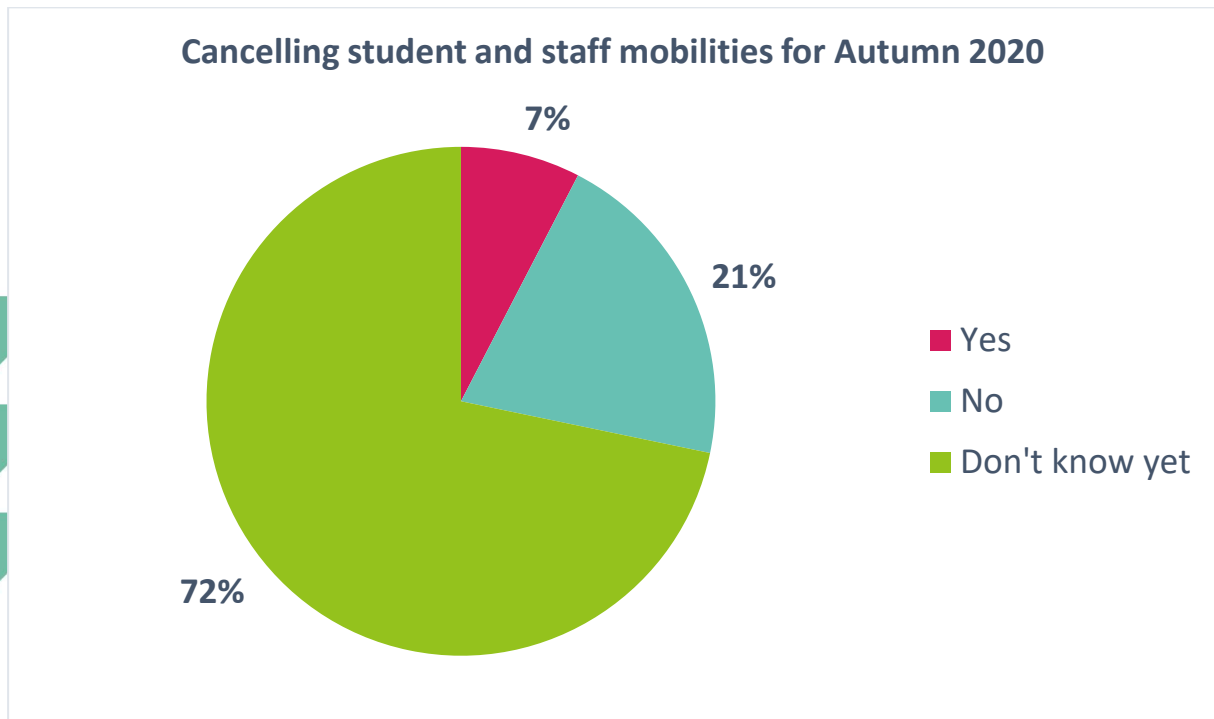Expected delay to alliance's work plan (in months) due to the COVID-19 crisis
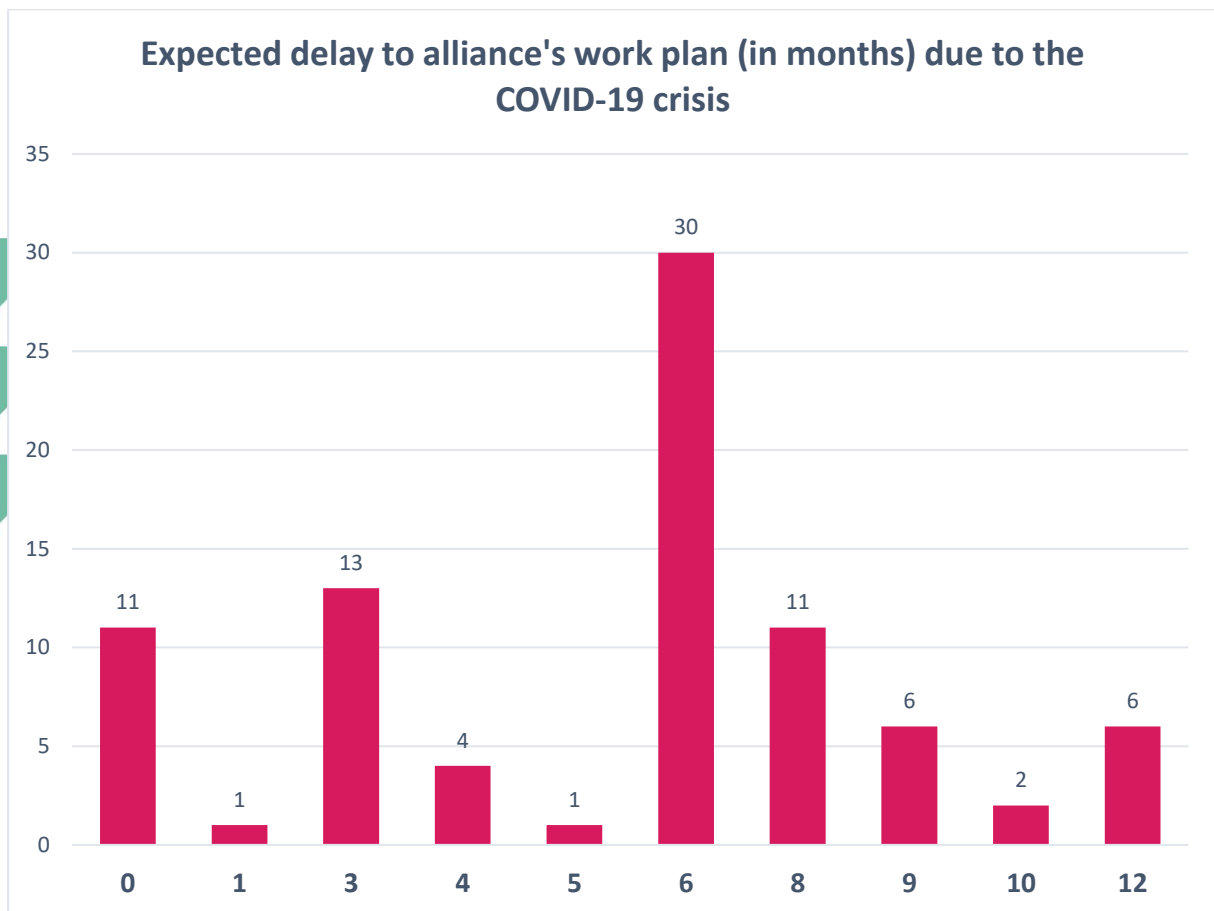
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10. Do you plan to cancel student and staff mobilities for the Autumn 2020 semester?
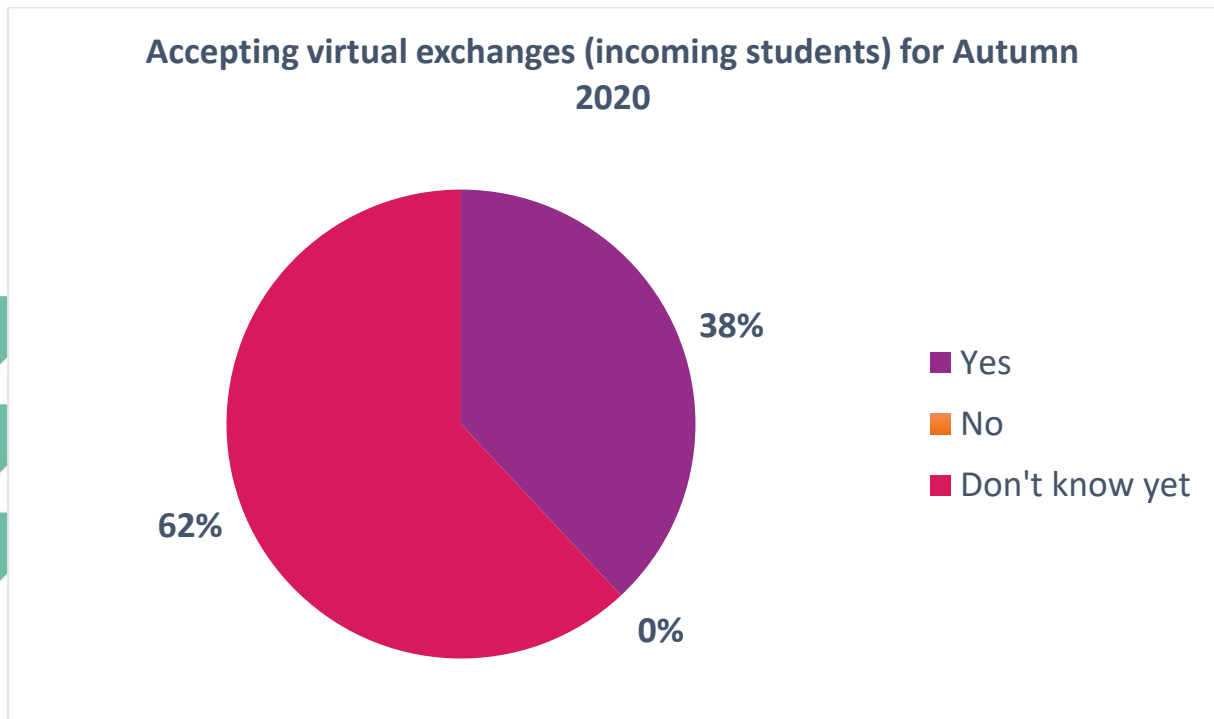
92 responses

Cancelling student and staff mobilities for Autumn 2020

7%

21%

72%

- Yes
- No
- Don't know yet

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11. Will you accept virtual exchanges for Autumn 2020 for incoming students?

92 responses

Accepting virtual exchanges (incoming students) for Autumn 2020

38%

62%

0%

- Yes
- No
- Don't know yet

12. Will you accept virtual exchanges for Autumn 2020 for outgoing students?

93 responses
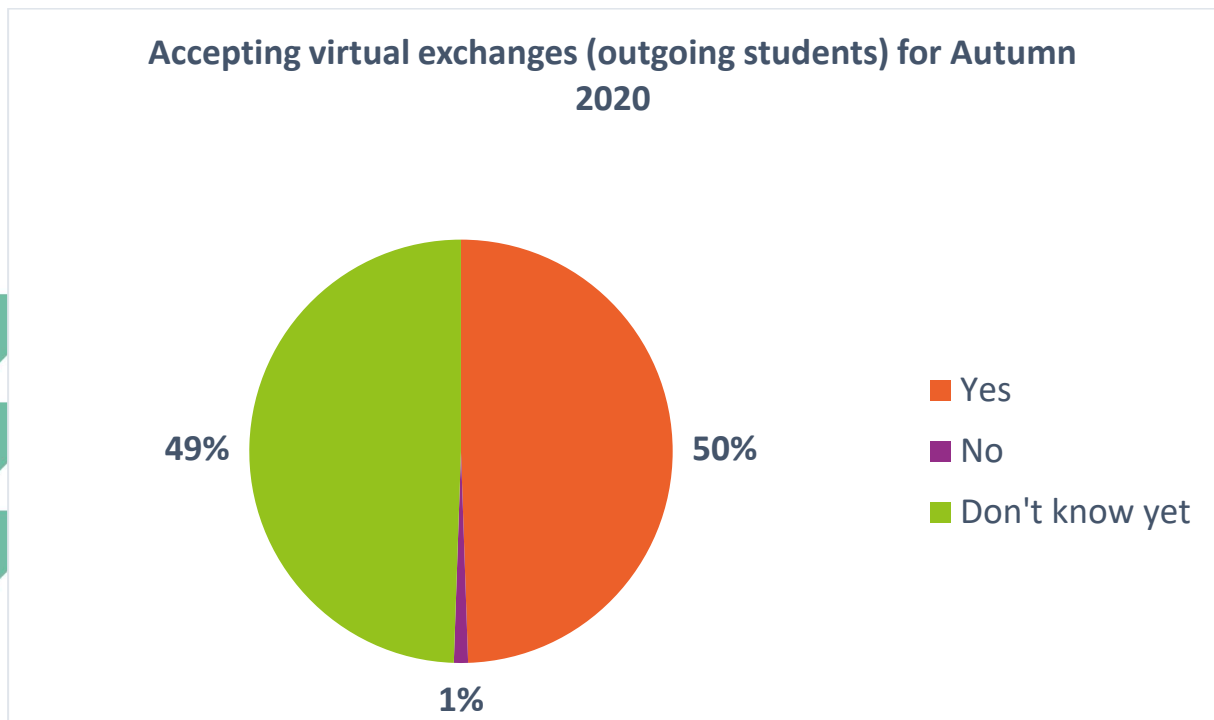
Accepting virtual exchanges (outgoing students) for Autumn 2020

49%

50%

1%

■ Yes
■ No
■ Don't know yet

13. To which extent would you find useful blended mobility formats (ie short physical mobility, blended with virtual mobility)?

93 responses
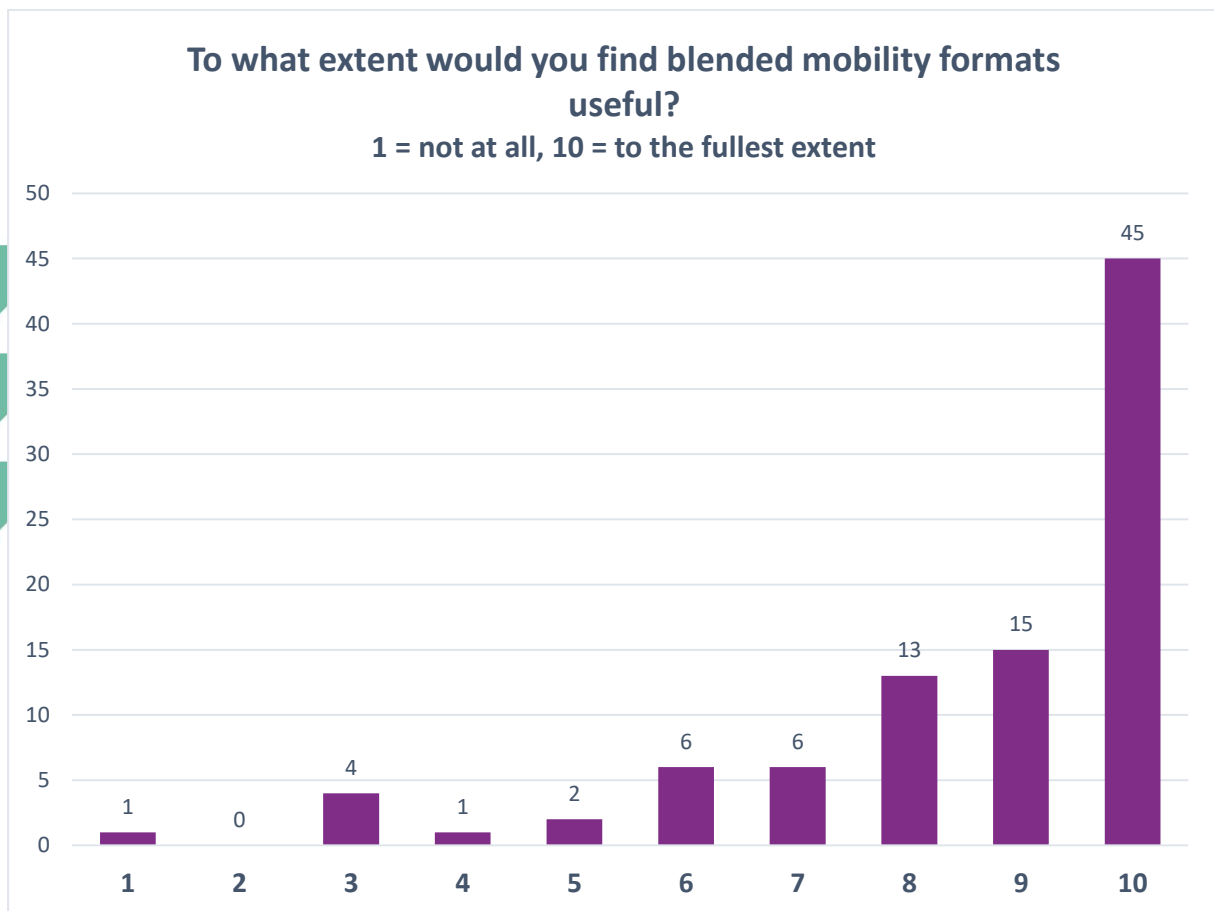
To what extent would you find blended mobility formats useful?

1 = not at all, 10 = to the fullest extent

Rating	Count
1	1
2	0
3	4
4	1
5	2
6	6
7	6
8	13
9	15
10	45

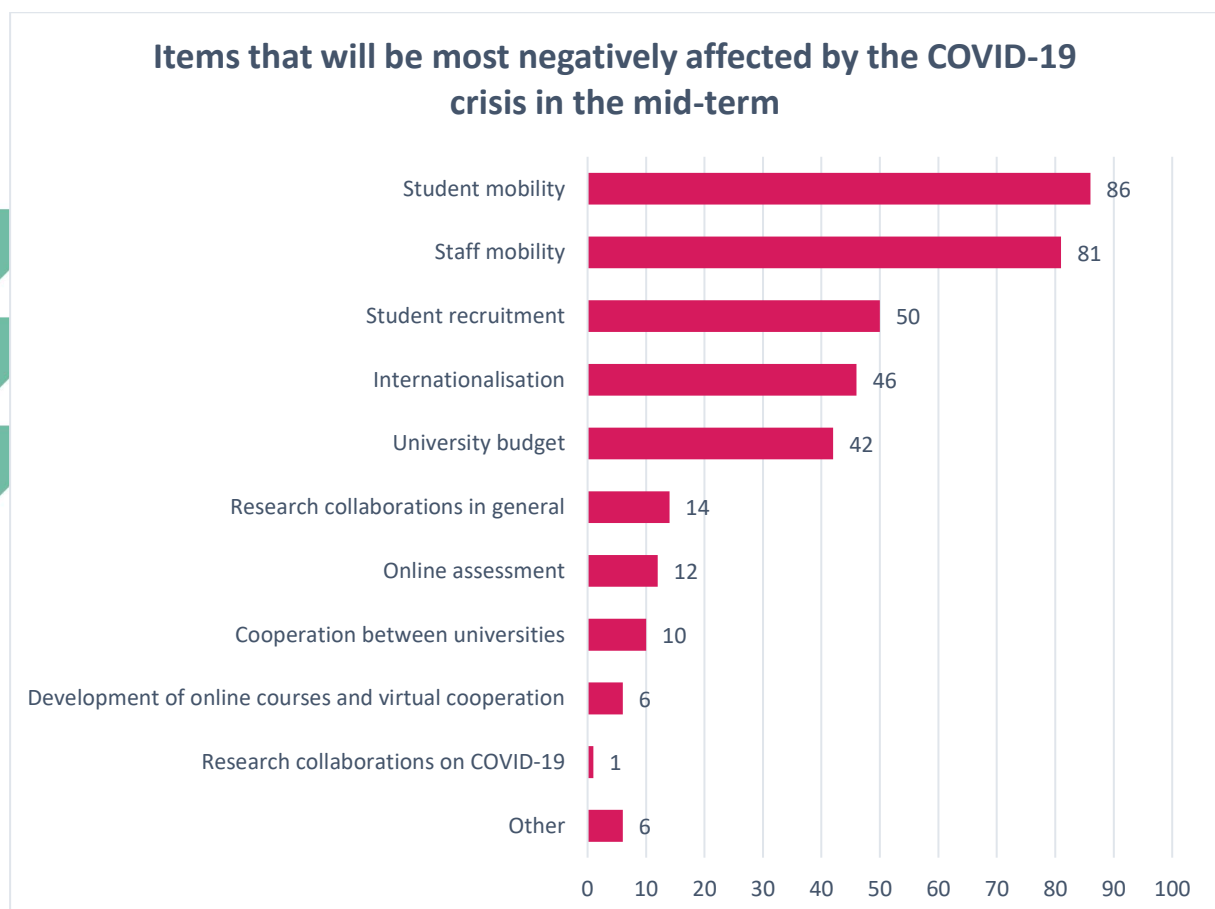**14. Please select the top four items that will be most negatively impacted by the COVID-19 crisis in the mid-term:**

354 items selected from 92 responses

Items that will be most negatively affected by the COVID-19 crisis in the mid-term

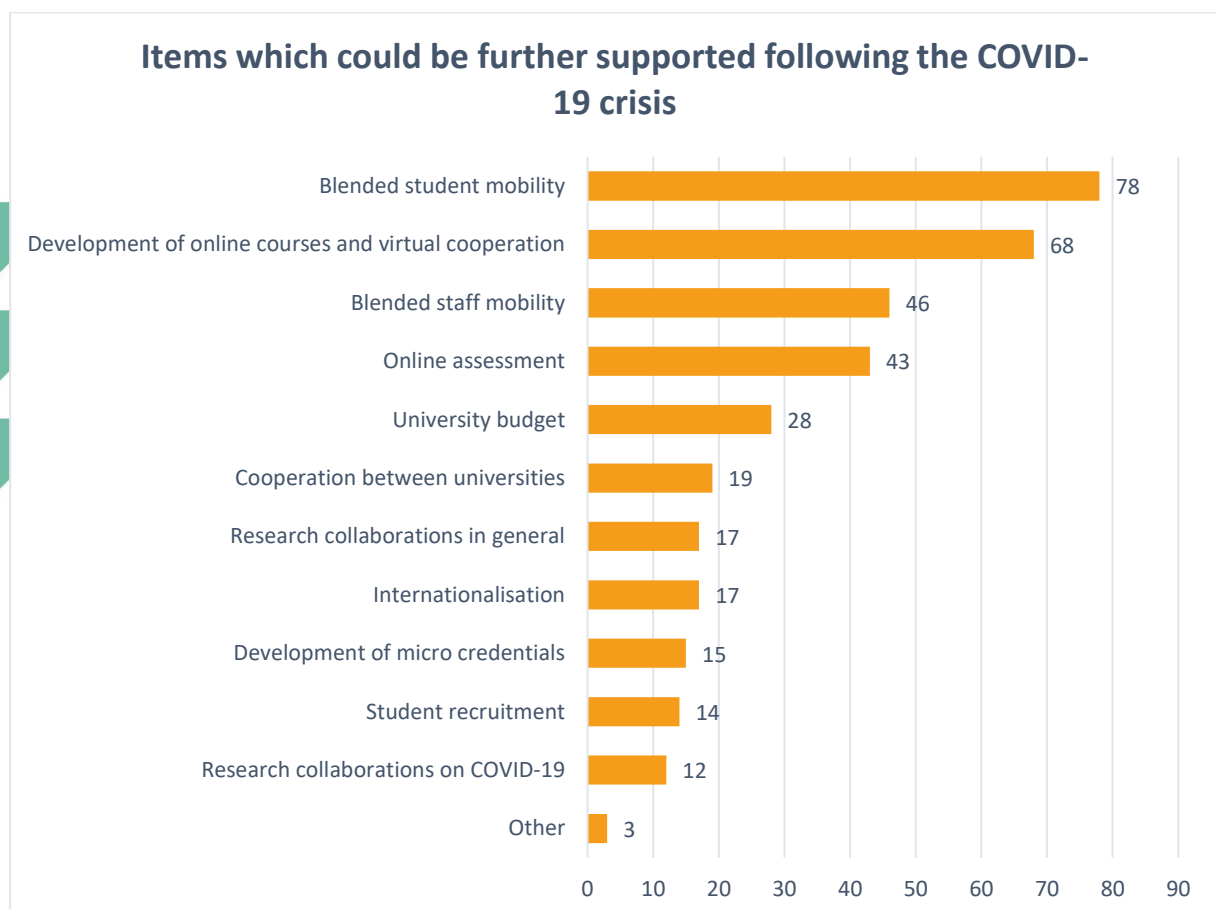| Item	Value
Student mobility	86
Staff mobility	81
Student recruitment	50
Internationalisation	46
University budget	42
Research collaborations in general	14
Online assessment	12
Cooperation between universities	10
Development of online courses and virtual cooperation	6
Research collaborations on COVID-19	1
Other	6

"Other" responses were:
- Physical student/ staff mobility is negatively impacted. However, this allows for greater focus on virtual learning, but additional support is needed.
- Reduced placement opportunities in light of the economic crisis
- Student well being

15. Select the top four items that in your opinion, could be further supported in the mid-term following the COVID-19 crisis:

360 items selected across all 93 responses

Items which could be further supported following the COVID-19 crisis

Item	Value
Blended student mobility	78
Development of online courses and virtual cooperation	68
Blended staff mobility	46
Online assessment	43
University budget	28
Cooperation between universities	19
Research collaborations in general	17
Internationalisation	17
Development of micro credentials	15
Student recruitment	14
Research collaborations on COVID-19	12
Other	3

"Other" responses were:

- Support to short mobilities
- Increase 5% cap on infrastructure limits to equip ourselves with adequate ICT tools at a time when we need to move to virtual mobility
- Internalisation at home

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