

Admissions to English-Taught Programs (ETPs) at Master's level in Europe

Report 2: Procedures, regulations, success rates and challenges for diverse applicants

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1. Introduction

In the post-Bologna era of European higher education, the introduction of the two-tier structure of study programs and degrees opened a new era for international higher education on the ‘old continent’. At a time when internationalisation was moving from the periphery of institutional activity to the heartland of institutional action and strategy, and when the international mobility of students was becoming a real mantra, the newly-introduced (with a few exceptions) Master’s level became a new gateway – a point of entry – into the higher education systems of all European countries that did not have earlier the two-tier system.

Unsurprisingly, the creation of the Master’s level in many European countries was rapidly followed by the establishment of graduate programs in English, particularly in countries with not so widely spoken languages, English becoming rapidly the lingua franca of international higher education. In the past 15 years, the European higher education system saw an unprecedented development of study programs initially partly and now mostly fully-taught in the English language, from roughly 700 programs in the early 2000s to an estimate of roughly 8 000 in 2014, according to three surveys of English-Taught Programs (ETPs) conducted by the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA), between 2001 and 2014¹.

This significant wave of English-taught Master’s programs in Europe enabled European universities to start searching for talented students globally. In fact, many of these programs were created with a view to ‘attracting’ the best, in many cases fee-paying, students from abroad.

Yet, while most if not all of the English-taught Master’s programs in Europe target the ‘internationals’, many of these programs, as we will see throughout this report, were not necessarily designed with the ‘international’ in mind. In many universities the Master’s programs were created as a natural disciplinary continuation of the predecessor Bachelor’s, and therefore the student profile for the Master’s was very much that of the Bachelor’s graduate from the same institution. This very strong link between the Bachelor’s and the subsequent Master’s is further evident as in many institutions the Bachelor’s and the continuing Master’s often have the exact same title. But, as the pool of applicants to English-taught Master’s programs becomes more and more diverse, these inner-links and dependency were bound to raise some challenges.

In this context, the *Mastermind Europe – Master’s admission for a diverse international classroom* project was launched in 2014. Mastermind Europe is three-year ambitious initiative coordinated by the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VUA), and involving the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) and nine other European partners namely the German Rectors’ Conference (HRK), the Catalan Association of Public Universities (ACUP), the University of Helsinki, Vilnius University, the University of Ljubljana, the Polytechnic University of Milan, the University of Graz, StudyPortals and Ziggurat. The project is co-sponsored by the Erasmus+ program of the European Union, via the Strategic Partnerships action line in the Netherlands.

The project is built on the assumption that current admissions at Master’s level are not appropriate for recruiting students for a diverse international classroom, and specifically that these processes are currently restrictive for ‘outsider’ applicants, i.e. applicants with a Bachelor’s or equivalent degree from another institution than the one offering the Master’s. The project aims to generate a paradigm shift in admissions at Master’s level in Europe, from a system currently based on the “recognition of

¹ See the ACA website, the Publications page for access to the three surveys:
<http://www.aca-secretariat.be/index.php?id=25>

diplomas” to one where admissions are based on the “assessment of competencies”. The project is to generate a comprehensive set of guidelines and tools designed to facilitate this comprehensive change, tools that will be put at the disposal of admission officers across Europe.

The role of the present report, however, is to test the basic hypothesis of the project, i.e. to see if there is empirical evidence that external applicants are at a disadvantage in the admission process compared to internal applicants, and if so, to explore the underlying causes. The core hypothesis was tested via two online surveys. The first survey targeted a cross-section of English-taught Master’s programs in Europe and more specifically the program coordinators. The second survey targeted recent Master’s applicants, in order to provide a reality check, a counterbalance to the first survey. The results on the two surveys are presented in this report as follows.

The report team was composed of ACA (Irina Ferencz and Bernd Wächter) together with StudyPortals (Benedikt Wimer) and VUA (Kees Kouwenaar). The team also benefited from the great support of Ariane de Gayardon (CIHE, Boston College) in the qualitative analysis of responses to the survey’s open-ended questions and of Victoria Marambio (ACA) in drafting the applicants’ questionnaire. The team is also grateful to several members of the project’s External Quality Council (EQC), namely Jeroen Huisman (Ghent University), Michael Gaebel (EUA) and Gildas Fresneau (ETS Global), who provided useful feedback on the questionnaires’ development, as well as on this report.

Section 2, which immediately follows this introductory section, provides key methodological information on the design and implementation of the surveys, the representativeness of the response groups, response rates and data presentational aspects.

Section 3 presents key data on a number of core characteristics of the two groups of respondents, on aspects such as the regional distribution, the distribution across subject areas, duration of programs, language of instruction, etc.

Section 4, gives a detailed account of the survey results related to the admission process, covering aspects such as the types of admissions, the target group of programs, admission criteria and processes, typical challenges, notification periods and conditional admissions.

Section 5 looks into the regulatory dimension at the national and institutional level and presents the assessments made by the program coordinators of this regulatory framework that shapes the admission processes to their program.

Section 6 is an exploration of the chances of being admitted to the program of three types of applicants, covering elements such as stay rates for the Master’s of own Bachelor’s graduates, success rates of different groups of applicants and reasons for rejection in the application process.

Section 7 presents the opinions of both groups of respondents on the admission processes to their own program in the case of Master’s coordinators and to the program of their choice in the case of Master’s applicants.

Section 8, the last section of the report, presents the main conclusions and implications of the results for the wider project.

2. Background and methodology

In this section we provide further details on the methodology and definitions used in the process of producing this report and interpreting the results.

2.1 Purpose of the report

As specified in the introductory section, the main purpose of this report in the framework of the Mastermind Europe project was to empirically-test the project's main hypothesis, i.e. that current admission procedures at Master's level in Europe are generally more restrictive for external applicants than they are for internal students, making it thus more difficult for externals to be admitted to a program.

Concretely, evidence was sought for the confirmation or nullification of three related sub-hypotheses, namely:

1. that the processing of files from external applicants poses, because of current admission processes and practices in Europe, more challenges for admission officers than the files of internal candidates, making the fair evaluation of externals more cumbersome.
2. that these challenges in 'making sense' of the applications of externals translate into a lower success rate in the Master's application process for external applicants than for internal candidates, and
3. that because the application process may be more cumbersome for external students, this experience would also impact the way in which externals perceive the process of admissions at Master's level, determining them to, on average, more negatively assess the admission processes than internal candidates.

This testing and exploration of the hypotheses was done, as further described below, via 2 online surveys carried out in the year 2015. The 3 assumptions or sub-hypotheses listed above were the guiding principles used in the design of the 2 questionnaires used for the online surveys, as was the core distinction made between internal applicants on the one hand, and external ones on the other.

For the purposes of the surveys and the report, the category of external applicants was further broken down in two sub-categories, based on the country of prior education of the applicants. Therefore, the surveys were carried out making an essential distinction between three types of applicants, defined as follows:

- *Internal applicants* – the Master's candidates holding or about to obtain a Bachelor's degree awarded by the same institution offering the Master's program to which the internal candidates applied.
- *Domestic applicants* – the Master's candidates holding or about to obtain a Bachelor's degree from another higher education institution from the same country as the institution offering the Master's program of choice for the applicants.
- *Foreign applicants* – the Master's candidates holding or about to obtain a Bachelor's degree from abroad, i.e. granted by a higher education institution from another country than the one offering the master's.

According to the initial project design, the 2 surveys were to result in 4 separate reports:

- Report 1, on the degree of restrictiveness of Master's level admissions to 'outsiders'.
- Report 2, on categories of admission criteria and tests used for different types of applicants.
- Report 3, on legal and regulatory obstacles impacting the process of selective admissions at Master's level.
- Report 4, on the perceptions of students on Master's admission processes.

In the process of carrying out the online survey, it became evident to the team that given the interconnectivity of the four aspects of admissions that were to be explored via the four reports, it would be more advisable to present the survey results in one consolidated report, following throughout the entire admission process at Master's level, and putting the responses of the two groups of respondents – the coordinators and the applicants – face-to-face for a proper reality check and validation.

2.2 Methods – the two online surveys

The two online surveys were carried out subsequently in the course of 2015. Both surveys primarily addressed or enquired about English-taught Master's programs in the 33 countries participating directly in the Erasmus+ program (i.e. in program's terminology, the "Erasmus+ programme countries"). While several Master's programs that are partly-taught in English or not taught in English at all were covered, the main of reference of the survey were programs fully-taught in English because of the likelihood that these programs would be most often open to the three types of applicants.

The first questionnaire, addressing the Master's coordinators was originally designed by ACA in collaboration with VUA, and was improved based on the useful comments received from the project's External Quality Council. The questionnaire contained a mix of closed and open-ended questions. The survey was designed so as to capture as many differences as possible in the 'treatment' of the three types of applicants in the admission process at Master's level, covering details related to the admission criteria, the admission process, challenges faced by coordinators in the admission of different types of applicants, and admission success rates of different types. The survey also dwelled into the regulatory framework shaping the admissions, to see to what extent potential challenges might be inflicted by regulations (national and institutional).

The survey was run by ACA from March through May 2015 using an online survey software. The addressees of the survey were Master's coordinators or directors. As the main purpose of the survey was to test the project's main hypothesis and sub-hypotheses, but not to do a fully-fledged analysis of Master's programs in Europe, a cross-section of the English-taught Master's programs was targeted, paying great attention that the group of addressees is diverse enough to enable drawing the necessary conclusions in the testing process.

Most addressees (over 1000) were Master's coordinators previously surveyed in an ACA study mapping the development of English-Taught Programs (ETPs) in Europe. As this predecessor study only addressed countries where English was not the official language of instruction, contacts from the officially English-speaking or teaching countries were added from the StudyPortals database.

The second questionnaire, targeting Master's applicants, was designed by ACA in close collaboration with the StudyPortals team, and enriched based on the suggestions of VUA and the External Quality Council. The questionnaire, containing as well a mix of closed and open-ended questions, deliberately targeted "applicants", i.e. people that have submitted an application but which were not necessarily successful, and not "students", i.e. candidates that were already successful in the admission process, in order to avoid response bias. This was possible thanks to the StudyPortals database, which enabled to identified people that have submitted a Master's application in the past year – a condition imposed by the team to make sure that the application experience is recent enough to enable students to answer detailed questions with a higher accuracy guarantee (candidates that did not submit a Master's application or that did so more than a year before the survey were sifted out). The database gave access to a varied pool of addressees, of the three applicant types sought for the survey and with various statuses with regards to the Master's application (accepted applicants, rejected ones, applicants waiting for the admission results and candidates already offered conditional admission). As most survey addressees were expected to have submitted more than one application for the Master's, the respondents were asked to reflect only on one of their application experiences throughout the survey. The survey was carried out online, by StudyPortals, in November 2015.

2.3 Responses

Regarding the size of the surveys' addressees and the response rates, for the coordinators' survey 1180 coordinators were in total addressed, and 363 full responses were received, having thus a response rate of 31%. If we are to relate this to the total estimated number of ETPs in Europe at Master's level, about 20% of all such programs were addressed, the respondents accounting for about 6% of ETPs at Master's level in Europe. Although no responses from Cyprus, Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia were received (Table 2.3.1), the pool of respondents and respective programs is wide and diverse enough to allow us to test the hypotheses, as further described in section 3 of the report.

Table 2.3.1: Respondents to the Master's coordinators survey by country of origin (of the Master's program)

Country	Number of program responses	Share (%) of responses of total survey responses
AT	19	5.2%
BE	9	2.5%
BG	3	0.8%
CH	6	1.7%
CZ	21	5.8%
DE	52	14.3%
DK	7	1.9%
EE	7	1.9%
ES	21	5.8%
FI	15	4.1%
FR	40	11.0%
HR	3	0.8%
HU	11	3.0%

IE	6	1.7%
IS	4	1.1%
IT	25	6.9%
LT	13	3.6%
LU	2	0.6%
LV	10	2.8%
MT	1	0.3%
NL	7	1.9%
NO	16	4.4%
PL	16	4.4%
PT	9	2.5%
RO	2	0.6%
SE	21	5.8%
SI	2	0.6%
SK	2	0.6%
TR	3	0.8%
UK	10	2.8%
Total	363	100.0%

Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

For the Master's applicants survey 7130 addressees were reached, of which 2242² completed the questionnaire (partial responses were not analysed in neither of the surveys). The response rate for the 2nd survey is thus 31.0% as well. The distribution of respondents across the different application statuses and types of applicants is presented in Tables 2.3.2 and 2.3.3 below. Further analysis is done in section 3 of the report, and therefore here we would only like to highlight that the majority of applicants that chose the "other status" option were waiting for the results of the selection process at the time of the survey.

Table 2.3.2: Status of the applicants

Status of the applicants	Number of Master's applicants	Share (%) of all Master's applicants
I was rejected for this program and I did not enrol anywhere else	440	19.7%
I was rejected for this program, but I enrolled in another Master's	77	3.4%
I was accepted for this program, but I never enrolled (in this or any other Master's)	318	14.2%
I was accepted for this program, but I enrolled in another Master's	49	2.2%
I was accepted and I am now enrolled in this Master's program	540	24.1%
I was accepted on the condition that I first complete a preparatory program (which I am now doing)	108	4.8%
Other status	706	31.5%
Total	2238	100.0%

Source: Survey of Master's Applicants

Question: What is the current status of your application for this Master's programme?

² The difference of 4 students compared to the total in the table is due to the 4 respondents not having answered the question related to their application status.

Table 2.3.3: Master's applicants by type and application status

Status of the applicant	I was rejected for this program and I did not enrol anywhere else	I was rejected for this program, but I enrolled in another Master's	I was accepted for this program, but I never enrolled (in this or any other Master's)	I was accepted for this program, but I enrolled in another Master's	I was accepted and I am now enrolled in this Master's program	I was accepted on the condition that I first complete a preparatory program (which I am now doing)	Other status	Total
Internal applicants	25.1%	2.1%	11.8%	1.5%	25.6%	7.7%	26.2%	100.0%
Domestic applicants	13.9%	6.9%	5.6%	2.8%	43.1%	2.8%	25.0%	100.0%
Foreign applicants	19.3%	3.5%	14.7%	2.2%	23.3%	4.6%	32.3%	100.0%
Total	19.7%	3.5%	14.2%	2.2%	24.2%	4.8%	31.5%	100.0%

Source: Survey of Master's applicants

Question: What is the current status of your application for this Master's programme?

2.4 Data processing and presentation

To make the data reading more accessible, we are using throughout the report the following grouping of countries, based on the country where the Master's program is offered (Table 2.4.1).

Table 2.4.1: Country grouping used in the report

Baltic	Central East	Central West
- EE Estonia - LT Lithuania - LV Latvia	- CZ Czech Republic - HU Hungary - PL Poland - SI Slovenia - SK Slovak Republic	- AT Austria - BE Belgium - CH Switzerland - DE Germany - IE Ireland - LI Liechtenstein - LU Luxembourg - NL The Netherlands - UK United Kingdom
Nordic	South East	South West
- DK Denmark - FI Finland - IS Iceland - NO Norway - SE Sweden	- BG Bulgaria - CY Cyprus - GR Greece - CR Croatia - MK Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia - MT Malta - RO Romania - TR Turkey	- ES Spain - FR France - IT Italy - PT Portugal

In the calculation of shares and percentages in the report we will be using the ‘valid percent’, i.e. the share calculated against the total number of responses to the respective question and not against the total number of survey respondents, unless otherwise specified.

3. Profile of the surveys' respondents

As already mentioned in the previous section of the report, the number of survey respondents stands at 363 for the Master's coordinators survey and at 2 242 for the survey addressing the Master's applicants. In this section we present further information on a number of general characteristics of both sets of respondents, in order to better understand the representativeness of the two groups for the subsequent data analysis.

Concretely, for the survey of Master's coordinators we will present the programs covered by the survey by region, by the type of institutions offering the respective programs, by subject area and by the duration of the programs (expressed in years and in the ECTS equivalent).

In turn, as via the Master's applicants' survey we collected two types of information – on the applicants themselves and on the Master's programs these candidates applied for – we will consequently present more varied data than for the first survey, shedding light on the respondents' continent of origin, their country of destination (i.e. the country where the Master's program for which they applied was offered), their destination region, the type of applicant, the subject area of the Master's, the duration of the program (expressed in years and in the ECTS equivalent), the age group of the respondents, the final grade of the applicants for their Bachelor's, the language of instruction of the Master's and the incentives (if any) given by the institution offering the Master's.

3.1 Surveyed coordinators of Master's programs

As Graph 3.1.1 shows, the Master's programs included in this report cover all six regions of the study, although some regions are slightly better represented than others, reflecting amongst others different response behaviours to online surveys by region. At the same time, it is noteworthy to mention that the offer of English-Taught Programs (ETPs) across Europe is unequally distributed across the six regions as well (Graph 3.1.2³).

Almost one third of programs covered in this analysis are offered in the Central West part of Europe (30.6%), which is also the region with the highest number of ETPs on offer (34.3%) according to available estimates⁴. As for the other regions, one in 4 Master's programs (26.2%) is offered in the South West area, which is slightly better represented in this study than in the general offer of programs across Europe (16.8%). Slightly better represented within the group of respondents are also the Baltic and the Central West regions (8.3% vs. 4.3% and 14.3% vs. 11.9% respectively), while the Nordic and South East regions are marginally underrepresented. As these differences are not very big however, the responses were ultimately not weighted for the regional distribution of the respondents.

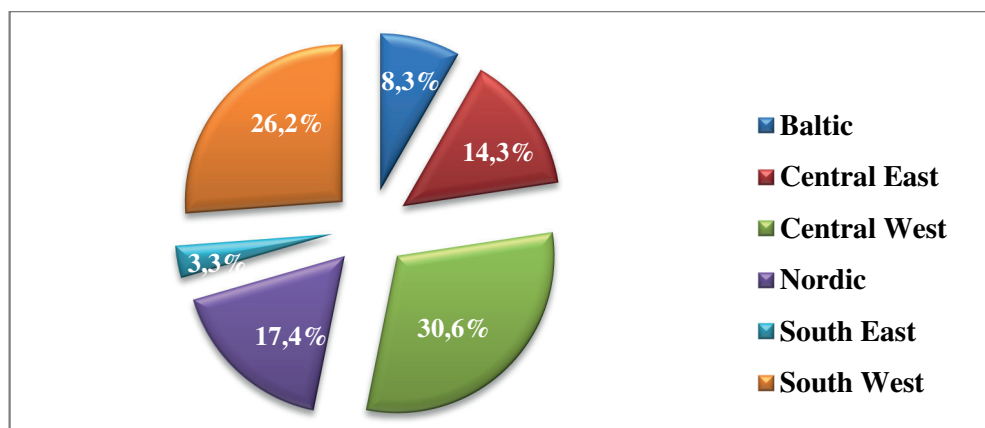
Nevertheless, as the results for one region – the South East one – account for a relatively small share of all programs (3.3%), which translates into a rather small number of programs covered (12), it was agreed to visually represent this region in the tables and graphs in sections 5 – 7 of this report, but to abstain from making any interpretations of the results for the South East region, given its under-representativeness therein.

³ Data from the ACA study “*English-Taught Programmes in European Higher Education. The State of Play in 2014*”. Retrievable from:

http://www.aca-secretariat.be/fileadmin/aca_docs/images/members/ACA-2015_English_Taught.pdf

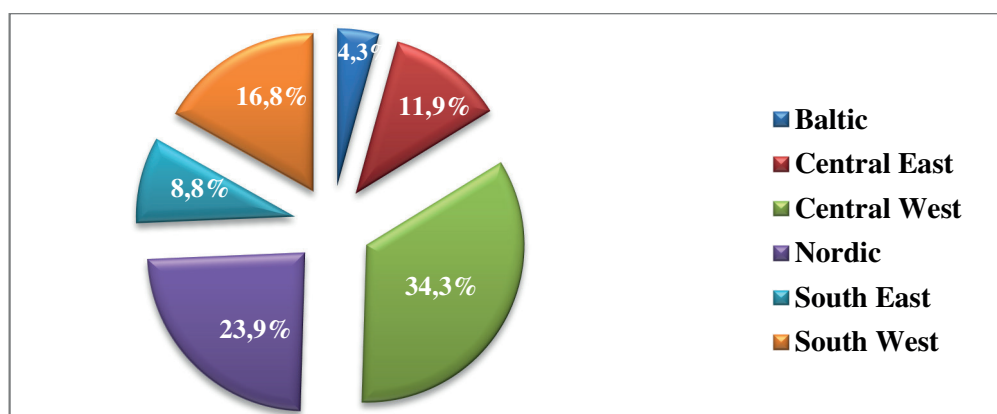
⁴ Idem

Graph 3.1.1: Distribution of Master's coordinators survey respondents in Europe by region



Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators (N=363)

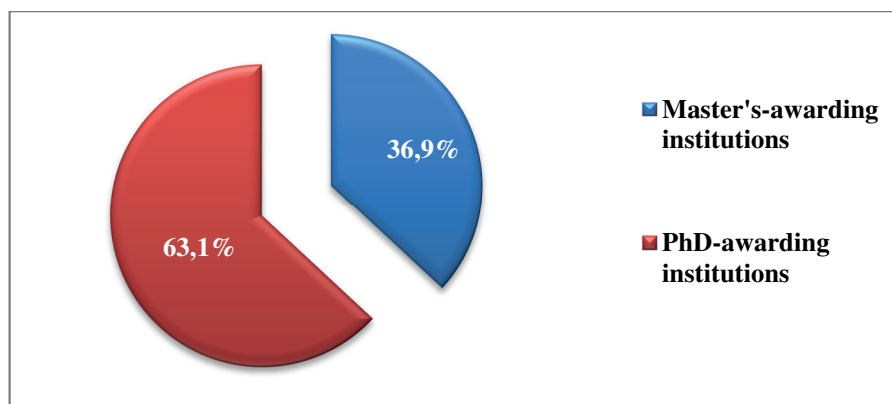
Graph 3.1.2: Distribution of English-Taught Programs (ETPs) in Europe by region



Source: ACA study "English-Taught Programmes in European Higher Education. The State of Play in 2014" (N=8089)

In the absence of an international, generally-accepted, classification of types of higher education institutions, the program coordinators were asked to indicate the highest degree awarded by their institution, with a choice between the Master's degree and the PhD. In this context, the award of a doctoral degree was taken as a proxy for large, comprehensive universities, while the award of the Master's as the top qualification was taken as a proxy for more practically-oriented institutions and for universities of applied sciences or equivalent. The underlying assumption was that while the first type would provide, in general, more academically-oriented Master's programs, the second would provide more professionally-oriented programs, again, generally-speaking. As data in Graph 3.1.3 show, both types of institutions and programs are represented amongst the survey respondents, with almost two-thirds of programs offered in PhD-awarding institutions and with slightly more than one third in institutions that award up to the Master's degree.

Graph 3.1.3: Distribution of program responses by type of institution



Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 1.2: Please indicate which is the highest degree awarded at your institution (N=309)

The programs covered in the survey are also largely distributed across all subject areas (Table 3.1.1), although they are more numerous in the fields of study that also show the biggest offer of ETPs in general. The biggest share of Master's programs is offered in social sciences, business and law (10.4% and 18.8%, i.e. 29.2% in total), this being also the top subject area of ETPs offered in Europe (35.0%), followed by natural sciences, mathematics and ICTs (17.4% compared to 23.0% for ETPs in general) and third by engineering, manufacturing and construction (15.6% compared to 18.0%).

Table 3.1.1: Distribution of program responses by subject area and comparison with the general distribution of ETPs across subject areas

Subject area	Number of program responses	Share (%) of total responses	General distribution of ETPs by subject area ⁵
Generic programmes and qualifications	2	0.1%	n.a.
Education (teacher training and education science, etc.)	8	2.6%	2.0%
Arts and humanities	21	6.8%	7.0%
Social sciences, journalism and information	32	10.4%	35.0%
Business administration and law	58	18.8%	
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	38	12.3%	
Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs)	22	7.1%	23.0%
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	48	15.6%	18.0%

⁵ Data from the ACA study "English-Taught Programmes in European Higher Education. The State of Play in 2014". Retrieval from: http://www.aca-secretariat.be/fileadmin/aca_docs/images/members/ACA-2015_English_Taught.pdf

Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	9	2.9%	2.0%
Health and welfare (medicine, public health, care of the disabled, etc.)	16	5.2%	5.0%
Services (personal services, transport services, hygiene and occupational health services, security services, etc.)	3	0.1%	2.0%
Other subject area, please specify	51	16.6%	5.0%
Total	308	100.0%	100.0%

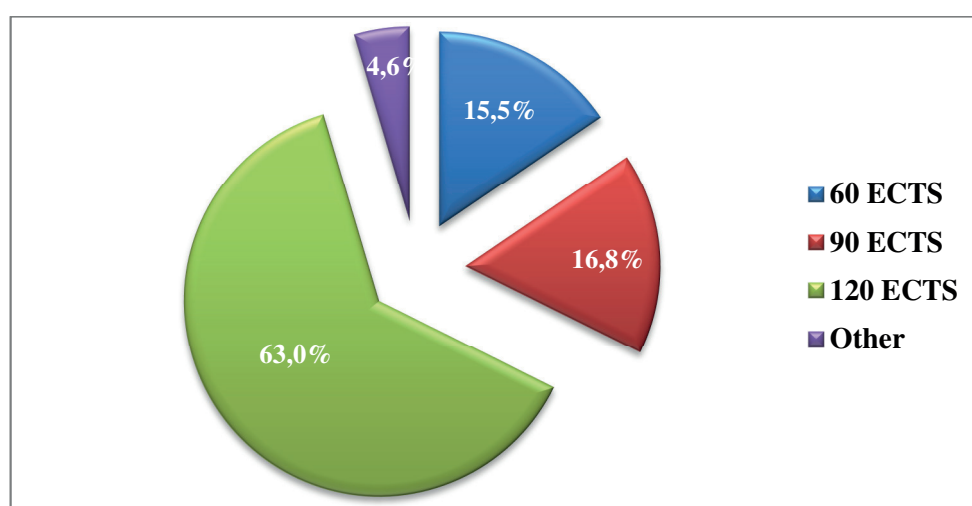
Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 1.4: In which subject area does your Master's programme fit (according to the ISCED 2011 classification of broad groups and fields of education)?

The Master's programs covered in the survey account for all three standard durations of such programs – 1 year, 1.5 years and 2 years (Graph 3.1.4). Master's lasting for 2 years (equivalent to 120 ECTS) seem to be most numerous, with 63.0% of the programs reporting this duration. Master's of 1 year (60 ECTS) and of 1.5 years (90 ECTS) are less common amongst the respondents, with only 15.5% and 16.8% of programs respectively. Less than 5% of programs have a non-standard duration.

This general picture is by and large confirmed at the regional level, 2 years being thus the most common duration of English-taught Master's programs in all six regions. There are a few notable differences, however – about a quarter of programs in South West Europe have a duration of 1 year, while a quarter of programs in Central West and about a third in the Baltic countries last for 1.5 years (Table 3.1.2).

Graph 3.1.4: Distribution of Master's program respondents by ECTS equivalent



Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 1.5: What is the equivalent of your Master's programme in ECTS? (N=306)

Table 3.1.2: Distribution of Master's program respondents by ECTS equivalent and region

Equivalent of Master's program in ECTS	Baltic	Central East	Central West	Nordic	South East	South West	Share (%) of total responses
60 ECTS	3.6%	6.1%	12.5%	13.8%	40.0%	25.6%	15.5%
90 ECTS	32.1%	9.1%	25.0%	12.1%	30.0%	6.4%	16.8%
120 ECTS	60.7%	78.8%	58.3%	74.1%	30.0%	59.0%	63.0%
Other	3.6%	6.1%	4.2%	0.0%	0.0%	9.0%	4.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 1.5: What is the equivalent of your Master's programme in ECTS?

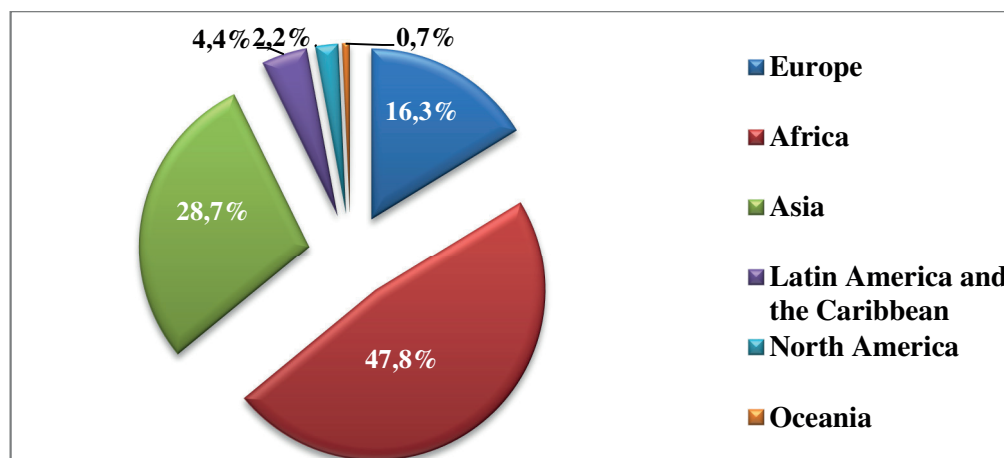
This short overview of general data about the programs covered via the Master's coordinators' survey shows that there is enough coverage, diversity and variation within this to allow for more detailed statistical analysis in the subsequent parts of this report.

3.2 Surveyed Master's applicants

With regards to the second survey carried out in the framework of the project – the survey of Master's applicants in the 33 countries addressed by the study – two types of information was collected, as earlier mentioned. First, the applicants were asked to provide information on a number of personal characteristics, such as age, country of origin and grades, which would enable us to better contour the general profile of survey respondents. Second, they were asked to provide detailed information on the Master's program to which they applied and their overall experience with the application process, to be able to understand their opinions and potential differences of opinion about these processes.

With regards to the personal characteristics of the Master's applicants that answered the related survey, the stark majority of candidates – over 80% – are from outside of Europe (Graph 3.2.1). Specifically, African (47.8%) and Asian (28.7%) students account for more than three quarters of respondents. Lacking comparable data on the regional origin of students enrolled in Master's level ETPs in Europe, we could not apply any weights to correct any potential over or underrepresentation. Nevertheless, as we do expect that the processing of applications by Asian and African candidates are likely to pose more difficulties to Master's coordinators, we will take this into account in the interpretation of results.

Graph 3.2.1: Master's applicants by continent of origin



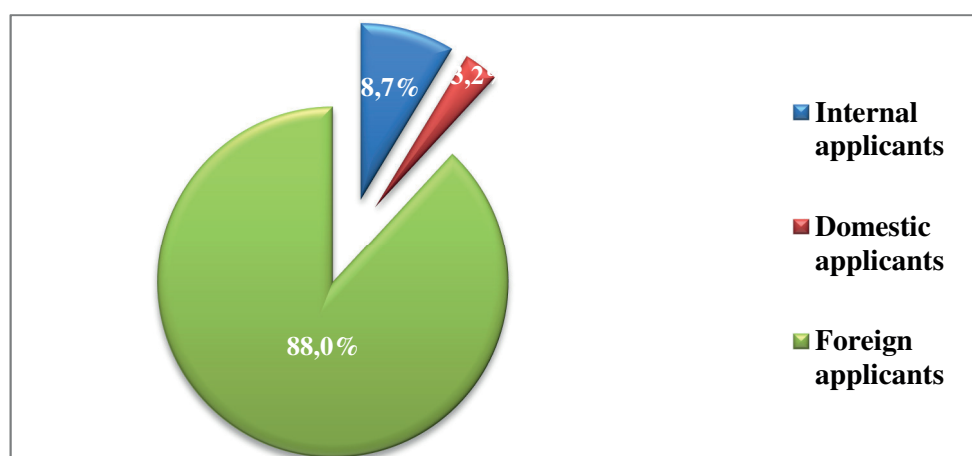
Source: Survey of Master's Applicants

Question: Where are you from? (N=2242)

Considering the high incidence of non-European students amongst the survey respondents, it is also clear that, when it comes to the type of applicants, the majority of respondents are foreign applicants (88%), with only 8.7% of respondents being domestic applicants and as few as 3.2% internal applicants (Graph 3.2.2).

As there is no comparison dataset on the average enrolment of the three different categories of applicants in ETPs at Master's level, we cannot comment on how representative or not this distribution of respondents is (nor could we soundly apply any weights to the responses). What we do know however is that most such programs seem to primarily target foreign students (section 4.2 of this report), and that in many countries such programs are paralleled by programs offered in the national language (which makes the enrolment of internal and domestic students less likely in the English version of the program, for linguistic but also for financial reasons, as the programs in English tend to charge higher tuition fees, on average). Therefore, while the category of foreign students might be overrepresented, we do nevertheless expect that in most programs foreign students would represent the majority group.

Graph 3.2.2: Master's applicants by type of applicant



Source: Survey of Master's Applicants

Question: A combination of survey questions to compute the type of applicant (N=2232)

Another element that Master's applicants were asked about was their age (Table 3.2.1). The vast majority of Master's candidates were in their 20s, with less than 30% of respondents of 31 years of age or above.

Table 3.2.1: Master's applicants by age group

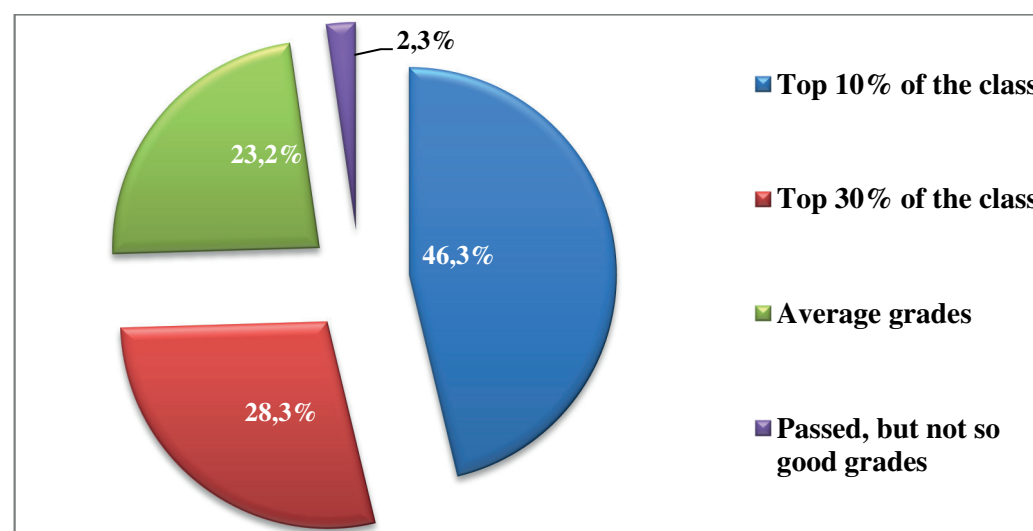
Age group of the Master's applicants	Number of Master's applicants	Share (%) of all Master's applicants
20-25 years	913	40.8%
26-30 years	670	29.9%
31-35 years	344	15.4%
36+ years	311	13.9%
Total	2238	100.0%

Source: Survey of Master's Applicants

Question: What is your age?

Furthermore, given the importance that grades are given in the selection of applicants in many European countries and that grades are often used as a (or as the) proxy for the quality of applicants, the Master's candidates were also asked to indicate where their final grade for the Bachelor's situated them in comparison to their peers (Graph 3.2.3). Almost three quarters of the respondents declared that their final grade placed them at least in the top 30% of their class, with over a quarter being in top 10%. We cannot guarantee however that these responses mirror the reality, as we have no further information.

Graph 3.2.3: Master's applicants by the final grade for their Bachelor's



Source: Survey of Master's applicants

Question: What was your final grade for your Bachelor's? (N=2236)

With regards to the characteristics of the Master's programs to which they applied, the applicants were first asked to indicate in which of the 33 countries covered by the survey their program was offered. The responses to this question, presented in Table 3.2.2, show no big surprises – the highest numbers of students applied to programs in the UK (33.7%), Germany (14.4%) and the Netherlands (12.8%), i.e. countries that are top European destinations for international students, and which have, comparatively speaking, a relatively abundant offer of ETPs.

Table 3.2.2: Master's applicants by country where the Master's program is offered

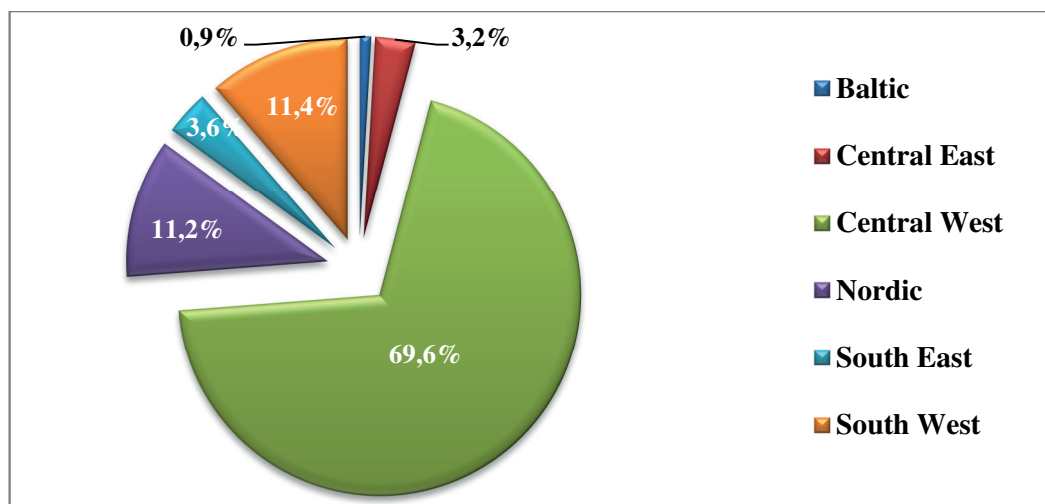
Country of the Master's program	Number of Master's applicants	Share (%) of all Master's applicants
AT	54	2.5%
BE	98	4.4%
BG	5	0.2%
CY	29	1.3%
CZ	24	1.1%
DE	317	14.4%
DK	41	1.9%
EE	11	0.5%
EL	13	0.6%
ES	45	2.0%
FI	46	2.1%
FR	110	5.0%
HR	5	0.2%
HU	26	1.2%
IE	30	1.4%
IT	96	4.4%
LI	2	0.1%
LT	7	0.3%
LU	9	0.4%
LV	2	0.1%
MK	1	0.0%
MT	2	0.1%
NL	282	12.8%
NO	65	3.0%
PL	14	0.6%
RO	3	0.1%
SE	95	4.3%
SI	5	0.2%
SK	2	0.1%
TR	22	1.0%
UK	742	33.7%
Total	2203	100.0%

Source: Survey of Master's Applicants

Question: Which university did you apply o (country)?

When grouping the same information by region, we note that almost 70.0% of the Master's applicants targeted a Master's program in the Central West part of Europe (Graph 3.2.4). Significantly fewer applicants targeted the regions ranked second, South West (11.4%), and third, the Nordic region (11.2%).

Graph 3.2.4: Master's applicants by region where the Master's program is offered

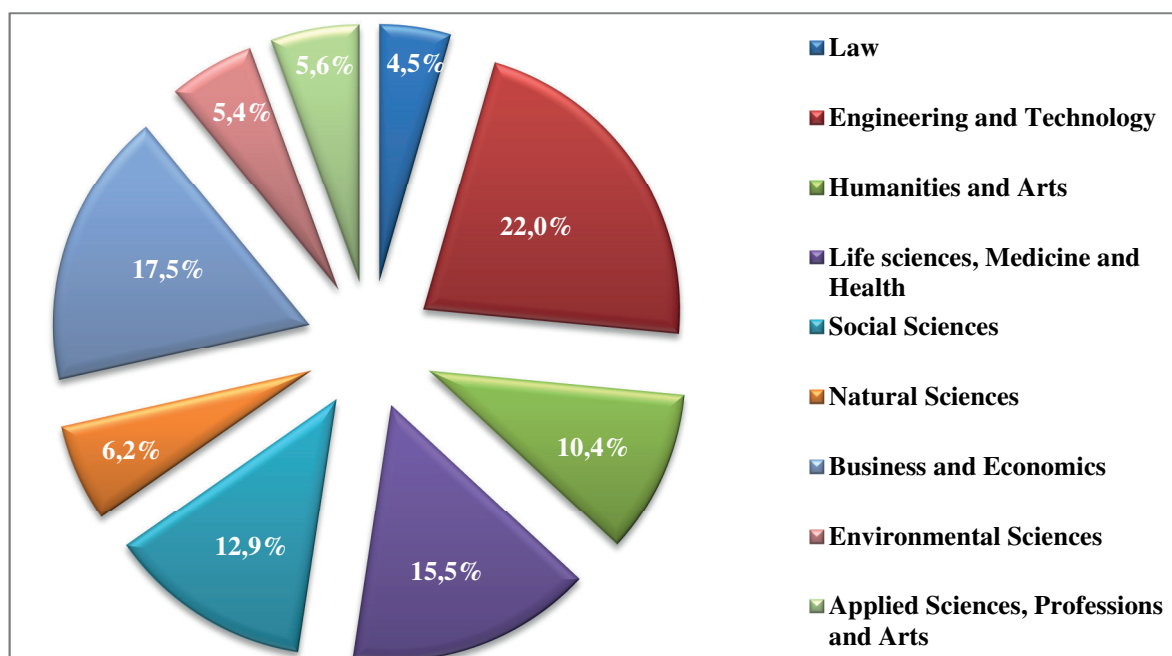


Source: Survey of Master's Applicants

Question: Which university did you apply o (country)? (N=2203)

The Master's targeted by the Master's applicants are also quite wide-spread across the subject areas (Graph 3.2.5), although if taken together social sciences, business and law remain the field of study with the highest concentration of programs (37.5% in total).

Graph 3.2.5: Master's applicants by subject area of the Master's program



Source: Survey of Master's Applicants

Question: Which of the following categories describes this programme best? (N=2233)

Over half of the Master's applicants applied for a program of a 2-year duration, which is also the most common duration amongst the programs covered via the coordinators' survey (Table 3.2.3). In turn, a third of applicants targeted 1-year programs (33.5%).

Table 3.2.3: Master's applicants by the duration of the Master's program

Duration of the Master's programs	Number of Master's applicants	Share (%) of all Master's applicants
60 ECTS (1 year)	747	33.5%
90 ECTS (1,5 years)	244	10.9%
120 ECTS (2 years)	1242	55.6%
Total	2233	100.0%

Source: Survey of Master's Applicants

Question: What is the length of this Master's program?

With a view to gaining insights into how funding might be linked to the applicants choosing a particular program, the survey addressees were also asked whether the respective program offered them any additional incentives (financial or other) (Table 3.2.4). Only slightly more than a quarter of respondents declared being offered such incentives (27.0%), meaning that the rest were either self-funded applicants or applicants that received incentives from other sources than the program or institution to which they applied. We do not know however to what extent the availability of incentives influenced the program choice of the applicants.

Table 3.2.4: Incentives

Incentives (financial or other)	Number of Master's applicants	Share (%) of all Master's applicants
Yes	602	27.0%
No	1630	73.0%
Total	2232	100.0%

Source: Survey of Master's Applicants

Question: Did the university give you any "added incentive" (financial or other) to do this specific Master's programme?

We conclude from this overview that like the responses to the coordinators' survey, the responses to the applicants' survey provide a sound-enough base for further statistical analysis.

4. Admissions at Master's level in Europe

In this section we present the results of the two surveys on various aspects related to admissions at Master's level. We will be touching on the type of admissions at master's level (open vs. selective), the target group of the Master's programs in question – internal, domestic and/or foreign applicants, the most typical and less common criteria used in the admission process (i.e. the admission requirements), the admission process itself, challenges related to admission, a specific type of admission – conditional admissions (or alternative admission paths), the usual notification periods and the comparative information that Master's coordinators might or might not hold on similar programs to their own.

The purpose of this analysis and this section implicitly is to test one of the core hypotheses of the study, namely that generally it is more difficult for domestic applicants and even more so for foreign applicants to go through the admission process at Master's level than it is for internal students.

4.1 Type of admissions: open vs. selective

The Master's coordinators reached via the first survey were asked to state which type of admission process they had in their respective program – open (in the sense that all applicants that held the prior qualification – the Bachelor degree or equivalent – were eligible to apply and were automatically admitted to the program) or selective (in the sense that the admission committee went through an evaluation procedure of the applicants based on additional criteria like language test results, grades, results to admission standardized tests, etc. and accepted only a portion of initial applicants). As Table 4.1.1 shows, the majority of programs (almost 70%) have selective admissions, while less than a third of programs organize open admissions. The only region where this general picture is not confirmed are the Baltic countries, where slightly more than half of the programs (52.2%) declared to have open admission (this is a narrow majority, however).

The question on open vs. selective admissions was posed because of the assumption that in the case of selective admissions the difficulty of fairly assessing domestic and foreign applicants compared to internal students is even higher than in the case of open admissions. This is because while in the case of open admissions the admission officers or coordinators have to make sense typically of only one criterion – the prior degree of applicants –, in the case of selective admission procedures, coordinators have to assess the candidates on multiple other criteria than the Bachelor's and rate the candidates against each other accordingly. Thus this seems like a logical conclusion, which will be nevertheless tested in the next sections of the report.

Table 4.1.1: Open vs. selective admissions (Master's coordinators survey)

Answers		Baltic	Central East	Central West	Nordic	South East	South West	Total
Yes	Number	12	13	28	13	2	14	82
	Share of all responses	52.2%	43.3%	31.1%	26.5%	22.2%	20.0%	30.3%

No	<i>Number</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>62</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>189</i>
	Share of all responses	47.8%	56.7%	68.9%	73.5%	77.8%	80.0%	69.7%
Total	<i>Number</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>90</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>271</i>
	Share	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

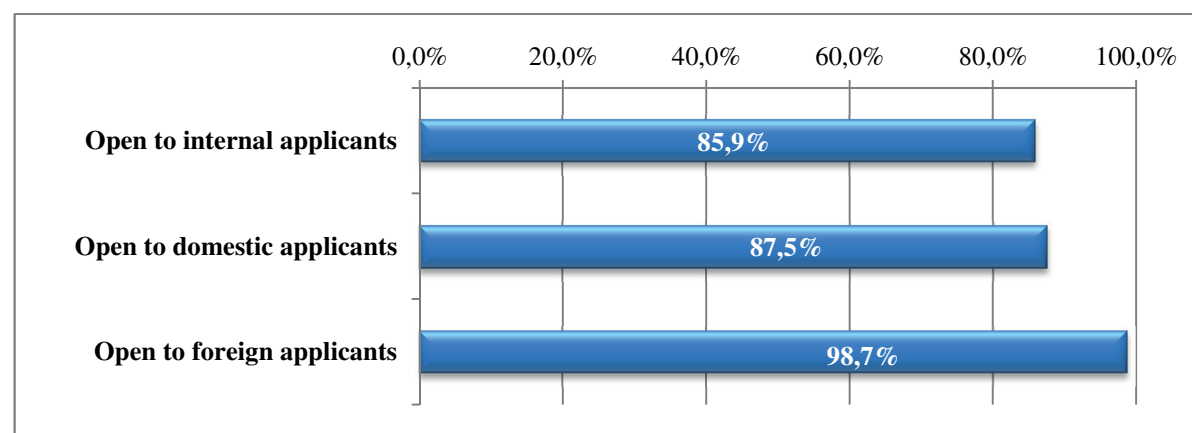
Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 3.1: Is admission to your Master's programme open (i.e. you accept all applicants that are formally eligible, without any selection)?

4.2 Openness of the Master's programs to different types of applicants

The Master's coordinators were also asked which of the three types of applicants considered in our analysis – internal, domestic and foreign applicants – could in principle apply to their program. It is clear from Graph 4.2.1 below that the prime target group of Master's programs taught in English are the foreign applicants, with almost all programs (98.7%) open to this type of candidates. We infer from the same graph and based on our prior knowledge that some programs might be open exclusively to foreign applicants, given that 14.1% of coordinators declared that their program is not open to internal students, and that 12.5% of programs are not open to domestic students. This refers nevertheless to the eligibility to apply, but not to the actual enrolment of different types of applicants.

Graph 4.2.1: Share of programs open to different types of applicants



Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 2.1: To which of the following types of applicants is your programme open to? (N by type of applicant=261, 266, 300)

Looking at the openness of programs to the three types of candidates by region (Table 4.2.1 and Graph 4.2.2) we notice that indeed all programs (100.0%) in the Central East, the Central West and the Nordic countries are open to foreign candidates. The Nordic countries are also the region where the smallest differences are observed between the shares of programs open to each type of applicant, leading to the conclusion that in this region the respective programs target all types of students, almost equally.

In turn, in the Baltic countries (20.7%) and in the South West region (18.2%), about one program in 5 is not open to internal applicants at all. In Central East (14.3%) and Central West (14.4%) Europe, at least one in 10 programs is not open to internals.

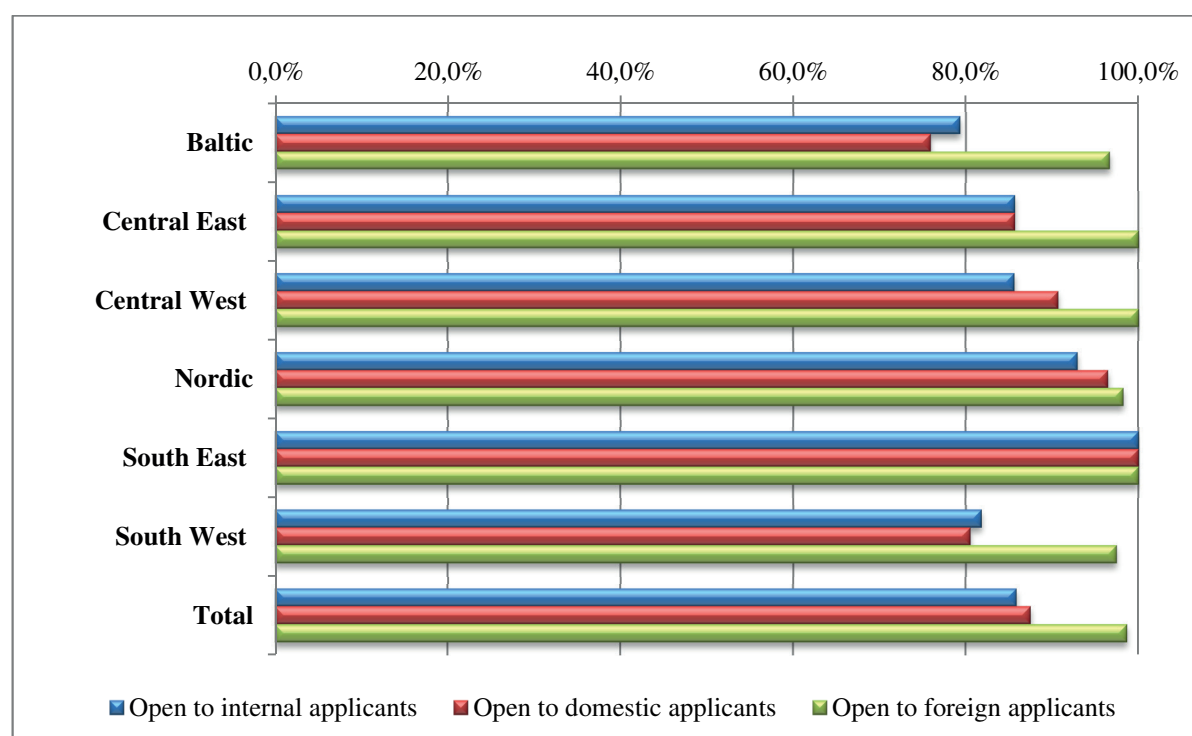
Table 4.2.1: Degree of openness of programs to different types of applicants, by region

Type of applicant		Open to internal applicants	Open to domestic applicants	Open to foreign applicants	Total respondents
Baltic	<i>Number</i>	23	22	28	29
	Share within the region	79.3%	75.9%	96.6%	
Central East	<i>Number</i>	30	30	35	35
	Share within the region	85.7%	85.7%	100.0%	
Central West	<i>Number</i>	83	88	97	97
	Share within the region	85.6%	90.7%	100.0%	
Nordic	<i>Number</i>	52	54	55	56
	Share within the region	92.9%	96.4%	98.2%	
South East	<i>Number</i>	10	10	10	10
	Share within the region	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
South West	<i>Number</i>	63	62	75	77
	Share within the region	81.8%	80.5%	97.4%	
Total	<i>Number</i>	261	266	300	304

Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 2.1: To which of the following types of applicants is your programme open to?

Graph 4.2.2: Degree of openness of programs to different types of applicants, by region



Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 2.1: To which of the following types of applicants is your programme open to? (N by region=29, 35, 97, 56, 10, 77, 304)

4.3 Admission criteria and compliance

Both the master's coordinators and the Master's applicants were asked questions related to the admission requirements or criteria. The Master's coordinators were asked about the admission requirements to their program, and were invited to differentiate between and to mark four types of requirements (Table 4.3.1)

- those that are an absolute 'must' for candidates to be eligible to apply (the 'sine qua non' criteria),
- those for which applicants must reach a 'minimum threshold' or mark to be eligible (e.g. a minimum GPA or a language test score),
- those for which some flexibility is possible and conditional admission can be granted even when not all requirements are met, and
- those requirements where the 'higher the value' the better applicants will do in the selection process.

In the parallel survey, the applicants were asked about which requirements they had to comply with in order to apply for their respective Master's program (Table 4.3.2). The results are presented below.

The top 3 'musts' in the application process to the programs covered by the study (via the coordinators' survey) are the prior degree (94.7%), the application form filled in (74.8%), and the transcript of records (68.4%), in this very order. They are followed by additional criteria like the CV, the language test/certificate and the motivation letter, which are demanded by more than half of the programs covered in the study. Admission tests on the other hand are rarely an eliminating requirement (only 5.3% of programs mentioned this).

While the language test/certificate is requested only in slightly more than half of the programs (53.8%), this is the most often mentioned requirement where a minimum threshold must be met for candidates to be eligible – almost two thirds of respondents (65.4%) require a minimum score for the linguistic assessment, which is not surprising given that the top target group of most programs are foreigners, and that most of these programs are taught in English. Almost a third of the programs have a cut-off point also for the GPA (30.2%) and slightly more than a quarter for the prior degree (27.2%).

Table 4.3.1: Admission criteria used by the Master's coordinators

Admission criteria	Sine qua non criteria (documents that must be present or criteria that must be met in order to be considered eligible to apply)		Criteria for which a minimum threshold must be met (e.g. a minimum score)		Criteria for which conditional admission is still possible (if the threshold is not met)		Criteria for which higher values are an advantage in the selection process	
	Number	Share of cases	Number	Share of cases	Number	Share of cases	Number	Share of cases
Prior degree (Bachelor or other)	252	94.7%	44	27.2%	21	25.0%	64	35.8%
Admission test scores (GMAT or GRE)	14	5.3%	21	13.0%	15	17.9%	42	23.5%
GPA/certain honours classification	35	13.2%	49	30.2%	19	22.6%	76	42.5%
Language test/certificate (required IELTS, TOEFL or other scores)	143	53.8%	106	65.4%	25	29.8%	50	27.9%
Work experience	19	7.1%	12	7.4%	17	20.2%	82	45.8%
Literacy	33	12.4%	17	10.5%	6	7.1%	45	25.1%
Quantitative skills	24	9.0%	25	15.4%	12	14.3%	45	25.1%
Personal skills	19	7.1%	16	9.9%	15	17.9%	57	31.8%
Interview	60	22.6%	14	8.6%	13	15.5%	38	21.2%
Transcript	182	68.4%	27	16.7%	5	6.0%	60	33.5%
Motivation letter	137	51.5%	16	9.9%	11	13.1%	42	23.5%
CV	154	57.9%	12	7.4%	6	7.1%	36	20.1%
Application form	199	74.8%	9	5.6%	5	6.0%	16	8.9%
Essay	17	6.4%	3	1.9%	12	14.3%	25	14.0%
Entrance test (organised by your own programme or institution)	34	12.8%	14	8.6%	9	10.7%	21	11.7%
Photograph	79	29.7%	3	1.9%	6	7.1%	9	5.0%
Other	40	15.0%	4	2.5%	2	2.4%	12	6.7%
Total	1441	541.7%	392	240.5%	199	234.1%	720	400.0%

Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 3.2: Please mark in the table below the status (value) the different documents or criteria (in the first column to the left) have during the admission process to your programme. More than one box can be ticked for each document/criteria:

e.g. a Language test/certificate can be both a “Sine qua non item” and an “Item for which a minimum threshold must be met” (Multiple response question)

Where Master’s coordinators seem to be more often able to bend the rules and provide conditional admission in certain cases where the basic requirements are not fully met is when it comes to the language test/certificate – 29.8% of programs mentioned conditional admission is possible when the language requirements are not fully met – the prior degree (25.0%), the GPA (22.6%) and the work experience (20.2%).

The criteria that seem to make most of a difference in the selection process, i.e. the requirements for which higher values or scores provide a competitive advantage, are the work experience (in almost half of programs – 45.8%), and unsurprisingly a set of criteria that touch upon the past educational performance and educational background – the GPA (in 42.5% of programs), the prior degree (35.8%) and the transcript of records (33.5%). On the other hand, the ‘softer’ criteria, like the quantitative or personal skills or the CV seem to have an impact in the selection process as well, although they are less often mentioned by the coordinators (between a quarter and a third of programs) compared to the above-mentioned ‘hard’ requirements.

Notably, the interview seems to be one of the decisive factors in admission for only about one in 5 programs. We are not sure though if this is due to the fact that not all programs organize interviews or to other reasons. Surprisingly, 5.0% of the coordinators also marked the photo of applicants as a criterion where higher values matter, but we are not so sure how to interpret these responses either. Possibly, the respondents misinterpreted this response option.

The stated practice of the Master’s coordinators seems to be largely confirmed by the student experience with the admission process (Table 4.3.2). According to the responses of the Master’s applicants survey, at least half the students were asked for having the prior degree in a specific field (77.8%), for a language certificate/test (63.4%), a CV (61.3%), for the grades to be above a certain level (59.3%), for a motivation letter/essay (59.1%) and a recommendation letter(s) (58.3%). All the other requirements were mentioned by maximum a third of applicants.

Table 4.3.2: Admission criteria reported by the Master's applicants

Admission criteria	Number of Master's applicants	Share (%) of all Master's applicants
Prior degree (Bachelor's or other) in a specific field	1253	77.8%
Language certificate/test (required IELTS, TOEFL, or other scores)	1021	63.4%
CV	988	61.3%
Grades from previous degree above a certain level	956	59.3%
Motivation letter/essay	952	59.1%
Recommendation letter	939	58.3%
Work experience	600	37.2%

A certain number/share of courses taken in a specific field	299	18.6%
Interview	264	16.4%
Subject-specific entrance test	228	14.2%
Bachelor's thesis	211	13.1%
Admission test scores (GMAT, GRE or other standardised selection tests)	183	11.4%
Other	127	7.9%
Generic entrance test	96	6.0%
Total	8117	503.8%

Source: Survey of Master's Applicants

Question: Which of the following items were asked from you when applying for this Master's programme? (Multiple response question)

When analysing the same data by type of applicant, we notice though quite some variation by type according to the coordinators' answers (Table 4.3.4 and Graph 4.3.1). Concretely, the Master's coordinators declared that they ask foreign applicants more often than internal applicants to submit or comply with certain requirements (which are also the core assessment criteria for most programs):

- coordinators said they have asked on average 4 in 5 foreign students to have a prior degree in a specific field (78.6%), whereas only 69.0% of internal students were asked for the same;
- almost two thirds of foreign candidates (65.8%) have been asked according to the coordinators for a language test/certificate, whereas less than half of internal applicants (48.4%) had to make proof of that;
- 60.5% of foreign applicants have been required by the same coordinators answering this question to have the grades from their prior degree above a certain threshold, while only 47.6% of internal applicants were faced with this requirement;
- and the same coordinators required foreign applicants almost twice as often to hand in a motivation letter/essay than internal students (61.7% vs. 36.5%).

On the other hand, there seem to be also requirements that are more often demanded from internal students than from foreign applicants, mostly in the area of testing – subject-specific entrance tests (16.7% vs. 13.6%), generic entrance tests (9.5% vs. 5.7%), admission test scores (15.9% vs. 11.0%) and the Bachelor's thesis (19.8% vs. 12.6%).

Coordinators seemed to ask from domestic applicants, for most of the core criteria, the same requirements slightly more often (i.e. by more programs) than internal applicants, but slightly less frequently than foreign candidates, the domestics being thus somewhere in-between these two other types of candidates, with a few exceptions. For instance, a higher share of domestic applicants have been invited for an interview by the responding coordinators compared to both internal and foreign applicants (1 in 5 domestic applicants), while smaller shares of domestic candidates have been asked to pass a generic entrance test (3.9%) compared to the others.

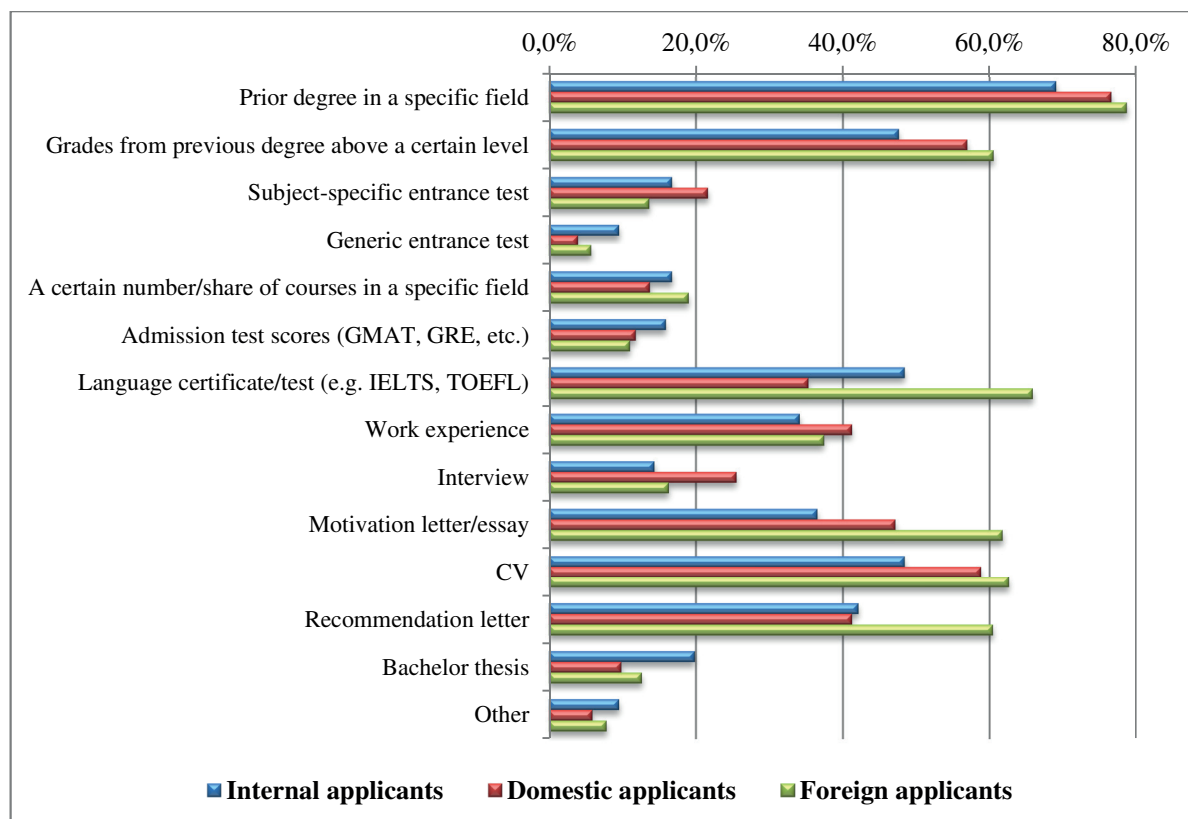
Table 4.3.4: Admission criteria reported by type of Master's applicant

Admission criteria	Internal applicants		Domestic applicants		Foreign applicants	
	<i>Number of Master's applicants</i>	<i>Share (%) of all Master's applicants</i>	<i>Number of Master's applicants</i>	<i>Share (%) of all Master's applicants</i>	<i>Number of Master's applicants</i>	<i>Share (%) of all Master's applicants</i>
Prior degree (Bachelor's or other) in a specific field	87	69.0%	39	76.5%	1122	78.6%
Grades from previous degree above a certain level	60	47.6%	29	56.9%	863	60.5%
Subject-specific entrance test	21	16.7%	11	21.6%	194	13.6%
Generic entrance test	12	9.5%	2	3.9%	82	5.7%
A certain number/share of courses taken in a specific field	21	16.7%	7	13.7%	271	19.0%
Admission test scores (GMAT, GRE or other standardised selection tests)	20	15.9%	6	11.8%	157	11.0%
Language certificate/test (required IELTS, TOEFL, or other scores)	61	48.4%	18	35.3%	939	65.8%
Work experience	43	34.1%	21	41.2%	533	37.4%
Interview	18	14.3%	13	25.5%	233	16.3%
Motivation letter/essay	46	36.5%	24	47.1%	880	61.7%
CV	61	48.4%	30	58.8%	894	62.6%
Recommendation letter	53	42.1%	21	41.2%	862	60.4%
Bachelor thesis	25	19.8%	5	9.8%	180	12.6%
Other	12	9.5%	3	5.9%	111	7.8%
Total	540	428.5%	229	449.2%	7321	513.0%

Source: Survey of Master's Applicants

Question: Which of the following items were asked from you when applying for this Master's programme?(Multiple response question)

Graph 4.3.1: Admission criteria reported by type of Master's applicant



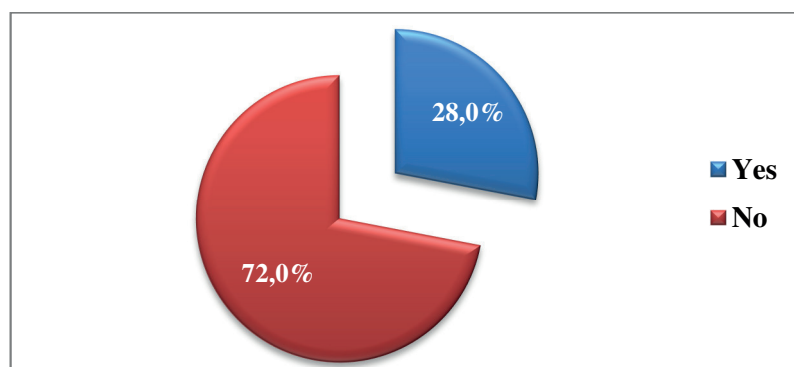
Source: Survey of Master's Applicants

Question: Which of the following items were asked from you when applying for this Master's programme? (Multiple response question)

4.4 Admission processes

The Master's coordinators were also asked whether they organised a different application process for the different types of applicants to their program, or whether the application was the same for all applicants (Graph 4.4.1). The majority of programs – 72.0% - have the same admission process for all types of applicants to the program.

Graph 4.4.1: Different application process for different types of applicants

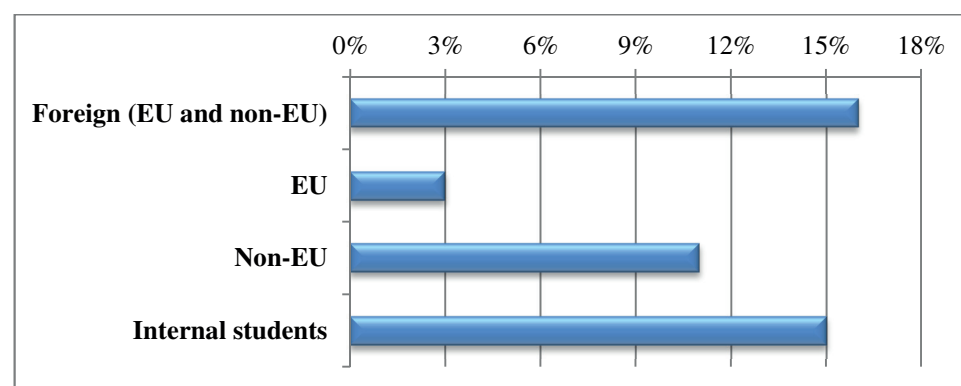


Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 2.5: Is there a different application process to your programme for the different types of applicants? (N=150)

Amongst the programs for which the application process depends on the type of applicant, based on the answers provided to the open-ended questions by Master's coordinators, foreign applicants are the most likely to have to undergo specific process: 16.0% of Master's degrees have a process in place for all foreigners, 11.0% a process specifically for non-European students and 3.0% a process for European students only (Graph 4.4.2). Internal students are often the beneficiaries of specific admission processes (15.0%), which generally consist of streamlined and simplified procedures.

Graph 4.4.2: Different application processes for different types of applicants



Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 2.6: Please describe in what way(s) the application process is different for the different types of applicants to your programme (N= 41)

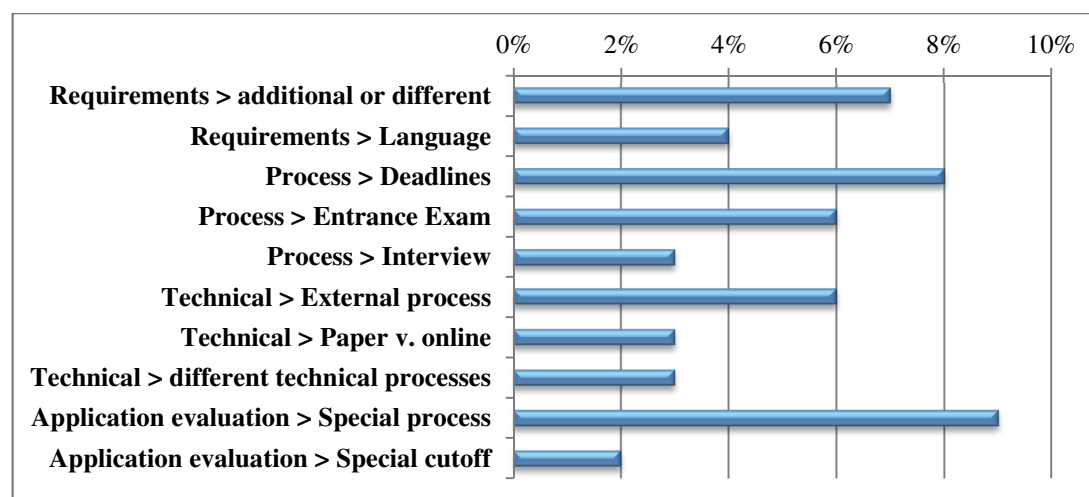
In Graph 4.4.3 we have tried to capture differences reported by the coordinators according to different categories of differences, in the: requirements (additional or different requirements, differences in language requirements), in the process (different application deadlines, or presence of an entrance exam for some categories or an interview), technical (paper submission vs. online submission, e.g.) or in the evaluation of the application (different process or different 'cut-off' points – different minimum thresholds for different categories). As shown in Graph 4.4.3, the differences are multiple, but the most common seems to be the presence of different evaluation processes (9.0%), as stated in this example:

"Applicants who graduated in Italy go through an automated test that verifies their knowledge of the basic principles. Applications from abroad are treated individually by an admission commission."

Other differences that stand out include

- distinctions in the admission procedures with different deadlines (8.0%);
- the presence of an entrance exam for some applicants and not others (6.0%);
- different or additional requirements (7.0%); and
- technical differences with the use of an external process such as a national screening, a private company, or the institutional international office (6.0%).

Graph 4.4.3: Types of differences in the application process for different types of applicants



Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 2.6: Please describe in what way(s) the application process is different for the different types of applicants to your programme (N= 41)

4.5 Challenges related to the admission of different types of candidates

One of the basic assumptions to be tested via the two surveys was that it is more challenging in general for Master's coordinators and admission officers to process applications from foreign and domestic applicants compared to applications by internal students. The answers provided to the open-ended questions come to substantiate this claim. Different types of challenges were captured – in the general 'understanding' of applications, in seeing differences between the applications and the reality, in the general requirements, in treating the actual application and the application process.

According to these responses, the challenges faced by the admission team do vary widely with the type of applicant. Internal candidates, who gained their previous degree in the same university, pose the least issues – 71.0% of respondents said they encountered no problems with these candidates at all. The majority of respondents (55.0%) also stated that domestic students were not a source of problems in the process of admission. When issues related to domestic applicants do arise, they seem to be mostly linked to missing requirements – the most prevalent issue – and more specifically missing courses or content in the former syllabus (10.0%) and an incompatible ('irrelevant') field of the Bachelor's (6.0%, Graph 4.5.1).

Significantly more challenges seem to arise when talking about foreign candidates, with only 14.0% of respondents who acknowledge no particular difficulty with this kind of applicants. This means that almost 1 in 10 coordinators encounter some type of difficulties, bigger or smaller, when dealing with foreign applicants, whom nevertheless and as we have seen in previous sections of this report are the prime target group of English-taught Master's programs.

Based on the survey responses, two issues are clearly prevalent when dealing with files from foreign candidates and they are both related to understanding and making sense of the prior qualification and educational performance of the candidate. First, it seems very hard for admission committees to fairly judge the grades awarded by institutions from so different higher education systems across the globe, institutions that are often unknown to the committees, with 1 in 5 coordinators mentioning this

problem (20.0%). The challenge related to grades and what they might mean is summarised in this quote:

“What are the grades truly worth? We had everything thus far: grades that have been below our normal threshold, where the candidates were perfectly educated and performed immediately well, or candidates from other countries with perfect grades, but no education in self-organized learning processes, no former experience in presenting a talk, etc.”

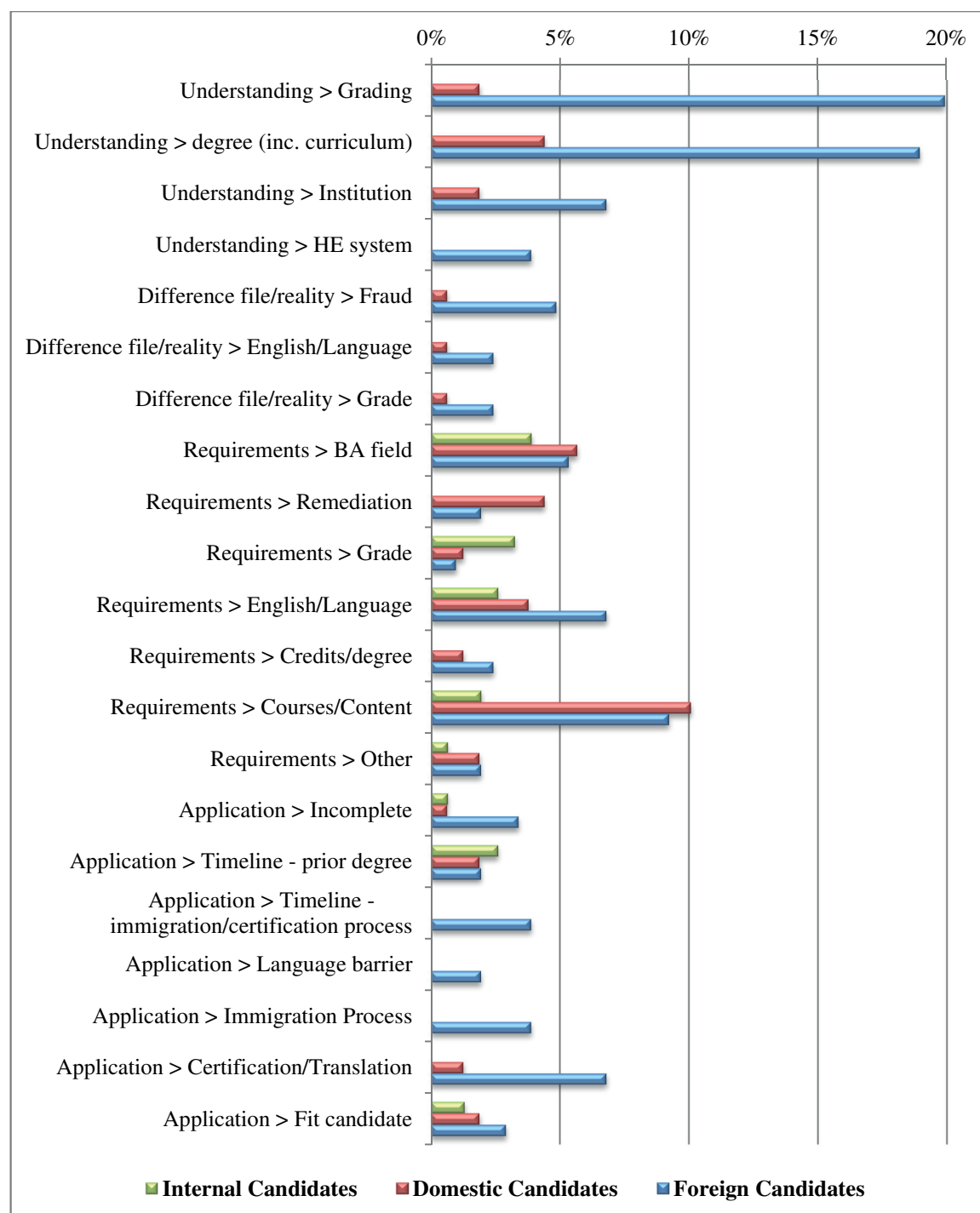
Second, there is the difficulty to truly understand what the prior degree stands for in terms of content and acquired knowledge – what this degree includes and what students have concretely learned during their studies (what are the learning outcomes of the Bachelor’s?), as the following quote makes clear:

“It is not possible to treat equally qualifications given by different universities and countries.”

This challenge is underlined by 19.0% of coordinators.

It is clear from this analysis that the admission criteria most often used at the Master’s level – the prior degree and the grades (the transcript of records) – are also the requirements that pose most problems during the selection process when treating the files of foreign applicants, and to a lesser extent of domestic applicants.

Graph 4.5.1: Challenges posed by different types of applicants



Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 3.3: Are there any typical challenges/difficulties that you encounter when processing the applications of candidates with a prior qualification (Bachelor or equivalent) from your own institution? Please comment. (N= 154)

Question 3.4: Are there any typical challenges/difficulties that you encounter when processing the applications of candidates with a prior qualification (Bachelor or equivalent) from another institution in your country? Please comment. (N= 159)

Question 3.5: Are there any typical challenges/difficulties that you encounter when processing the applications of candidates with a prior qualification (Bachelor or equivalent) from an institution abroad (in a foreign country)? Please comment. (N= 206)

As table 4.5.1 portrays, the magnitude of the different challenges varies also by the region where the program is located – the challenges are not experienced in the same way and to the same extent across all regions. Making sense of the prior degree of the candidates and ‘translating’ what the grading actually means are top difficulties in the Nordic, Central West, and South West regions – thus reflecting the general trend.

The Baltic region, on the other hand, seems to have more issues with foreign candidates meeting the requirements, especially when it comes to their Bachelor’s field (17.0%) and the English language mastery level (17.0%). Additionally, these countries emphasise how time-consuming issues with certification and immigration processes can be and how they can interfere with the overall admission timeline (17.0%).

Similarly, problems with translation and certification are highly felt in the countries in the Central East (30.0%), not so much in terms of the overall timeline, but because they impose additional work on both the candidates and the admission committees. In this region, the second highest difficulty encountered is to find candidates who meet the requirements in terms of courses and content in their prior degree (22.0%).

Table 4.5.1: Challenges posed by foreign applicants by region of the Master’s program

Challenges	Baltic	Nordic	Central East	South East	Central West	South West
No problem	22.0%	08.0%	22.0%	33.0%	13.0%	11.0%
Understanding						
Grading	11.0%	26.0%	09.0%	00.0%	25.0%	19.0%
Degree (including curriculum)	11.0%	28.0%	09.0%	33.0%	17.0%	20.0%
Institution	00.0%	08.0%	00.0%	00.0%	07.0%	11.0%
HE system	06.0%	13.0%	00.0%	00.0%	03.0%	00.0%
Difference file/reality						
Fraud	00.0%	10.0%	04.0%	00.0%	00.0%	09.0%
English/Language	00.0%	03.0%	00.0%	00.0%	04.0%	02.0%
Grade	06.0%	05.0%	00.0%	00.0%	01.0%	02.0%
Requirements						
BA field	17.0%	05.0%	00.0%	00.0%	06.0%	04.0%
Remediation	00.0%	00.0%	04.0%	00.0%	04.0%	00.0%
Grade	00.0%	00.0%	00.0%	00.0%	01.0%	02.0%
English/Language	17.0%	03.0%	09.0%	00.0%	09.0%	04.0%
Credits/degree	00.0%	00.0%	00.0%	00.0%	04.0%	04.0%
Courses/Content	00.0%	03.0%	22.0%	33.0%	13.0%	06.0%
Other	00.0%	00.0%	00.0%	00.0%	04.0%	02.0%
Application						
Incomplete	00.0%	05.0%	00.0%	00.0%	06.0%	02.0%
Timeline - prior degree	00.0%	00.0%	00.0%	00.0%	01.0%	06.0%
Timeline - immigration/certification process	17.0%	00.0%	09.0%	00.0%	03.0%	02.0%

Language barrier	00.0%	03.0%	04.0%	00.0%	01.0%	02.0%
Immigration Process	00.0%	00.0%	13.0%	00.0%	06.0%	02.0%
Certification/Translation	00.0%	15.0%	30.0%	00.0%	04.0%	00.0%
Fit candidate	00.0%	03.0%	00.0%	00.0%	06.0%	11.0%
Total answers to this question	18	39	23	3	69	54

Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 3.5: Are there any typical challenges/difficulties that you encounter when processing the applications of candidates with a prior qualification (Bachelor or equivalent) from an institution abroad (in a foreign country)? Please comment. (N=206)

As further shown in Table 4.5.2, an analysis of word occurrences in the three open-ended questions of the survey that were related to challenges and difficulties encountered in the admission of the three types of candidates reveals the frequent incidence of various words linked to the concept of judgement and assessment. In the words of the respondents, difficulties include having to “evaluate”, “judge”, “assess” a candidate on a sometimes incomplete or difficult to fully-understand file.

This vocabulary hints at the fact that admission committees often have to exercise judgement calls, thus implying that the admission of certain candidates (especially foreign, and to a lesser extent domestic) is more than a ‘yes-no’ decision based on quantitative evidence, and could have an element of subjectivity in it.

Of particular interest is also the high occurrence of the word family of “compare”, which demonstrates that Master's degrees are still very much designed after the predecessor Bachelor's degree in the same institution. This shows that at least in some cases if not in general the admission committees are using the institution's own Bachelor's degree, curriculum, and student profile as baselines for assessing the fitness of external degrees and applicants:

“The curricula of foreign students hardly ever match our own (which is not surprising) and depending on how much required knowledge they lack, they get admission or not.” (Question 2.3.2)

Table 4.5.2 – Words used when talking about difficulties for different types of students

Word Family	Word count
Compare	25
Assess	19
Evaluate	17
Value	6

Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 3.3: Are there any typical challenges/difficulties that you encounter when processing the applications of candidates with a prior qualification (Bachelor or equivalent) from your own institution? Please comment. (N=154)

Question 3.4: Are there any typical challenges/difficulties that you encounter when processing the applications of candidates with a prior qualification (Bachelor or equivalent) from another institution in your country? Please comment. (N=159)

Question 3.5: Are there any typical challenges/difficulties that you encounter when processing the applications of candidates with a prior qualification (Bachelor or equivalent) from an institution abroad (in a foreign country)? Please comment. (N=206)

It is because of these challenges that almost two thirds of coordinators (63.8%) stated that it is “more difficult for applicants with a prior qualification (Bachelor or equivalent) from an institution abroad to be accepted to my program than it is for applicants with a prior qualification awarded by my institution” (Table 4.5.3). In almost a third of programs this difficulty is encountered also with regards to domestic applicants (30.0%). At the same time, in almost half of the programs the internal applicants – those with a Bachelor’s degree from the same institution – are automatically admitted to the Master’s (46.2%).

Table 4.5.3: Ease of access for different types of applicants

Statements	Number of programs	Share (%) of all question respondents
<i>Internal applicants are automatically admitted to my program</i>	60	46.2%
<i>It is more difficult for domestic applicants to be accepted to my program than it is for internal applicants</i>	39	30.0%
<i>It is more difficult for foreign applicants to be accepted to my program than it is for internal applicants</i>	83	63.8%

Source: Survey of Master’s Coordinators

Question 2.3: Please select from the statements below those that are applicable to your study programme

These statistics are further corroborated by the written explanations of the respondents (Graph 4.5.2). The answers highlight the importance to meet the entry requirements, with external domestic and foreign students not having the correct or appropriate background (23.0% and 36.0%) and course and/or credits (19.0% and 21.0%). The content of prior courses taken by students is also often seen as inadequate or incompatible (12.0% and 15.0%), as well as their level in English (8.0% and 12.0%).

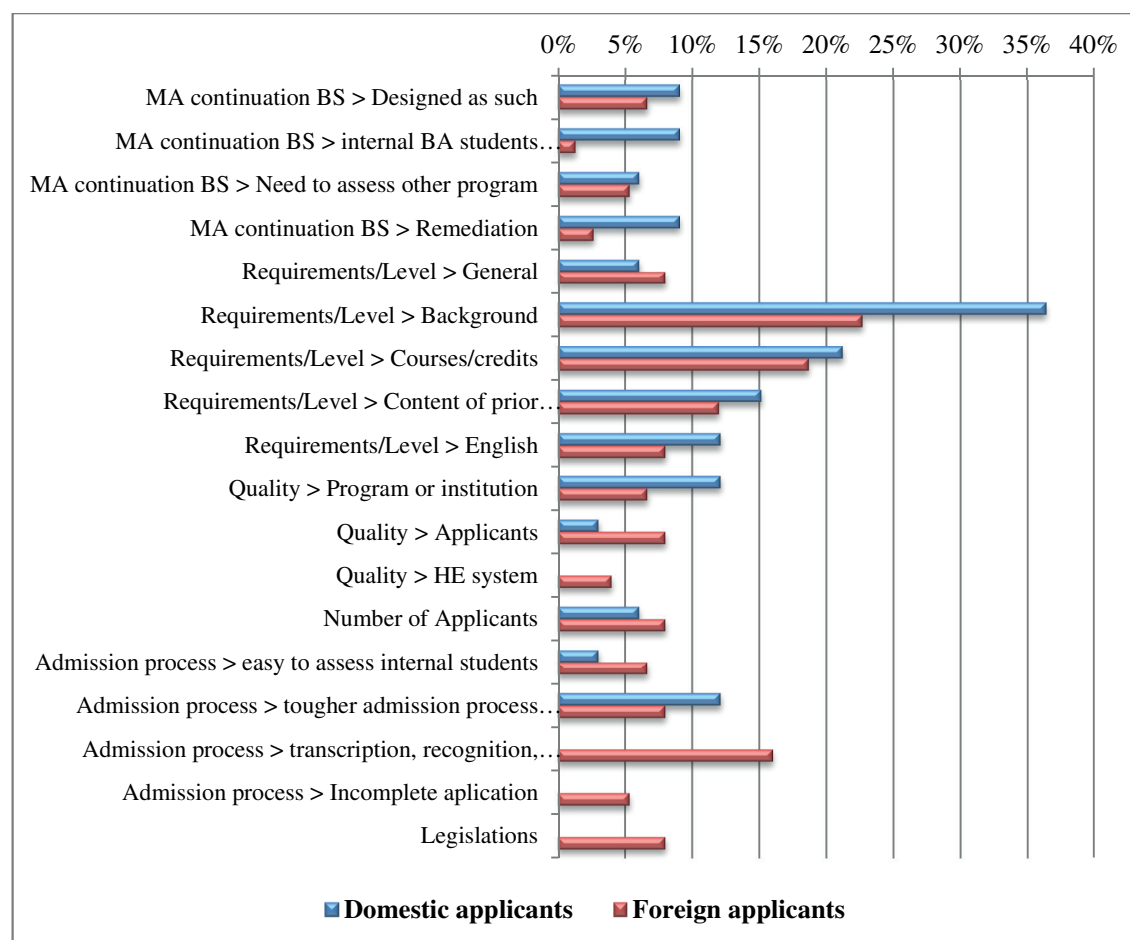
For foreign applicants, issues with transcriptions, certifications, and other admission requirements rank third (16.0%) in the difficulties that prevent them from being admitted as easily as internal applicants to the program.

The coordinators’ concerns mostly revolve around the quality of candidates and the difficulty to assess them well, especially when they come from different institutions or different countries. Respondents make it clear that they have to evaluate applications differently based on where the candidate comes from:

“A bachelor from one institution in one country is not necessarily the same level as a bachelor from a different institution in the same country.”

“The level of education in, e.g., Germany, is not the same as the level of education in, e.g., Cameroon. If we would compare 2 students, one coming from Germany and one coming from Cameroon, having the same nature of Bachelor diploma, having the same GPA, there is still a big difference in education level (meaning Cameroon has a much lower level than Germany). Sometimes, this is only to be learned through a long experience in the field”.

Graph 4.5.2 – Reasons behind difficulty to be admitted for different types of applicants



Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 2.3.1: You have answered to the previous question that „It is more difficult for applicants with a prior qualification (Bachelor or equivalent) from another institution in my country to be accepted to my programme than it is for applicants with a prior qualification awarded by my own institution“. Please explain why. (N=33)

Question 2.3.2: You have answered to the previous question that „It is more difficult for applicants with a prior qualification (Bachelor or equivalent) from an institution abroad to be accepted to my programme than it is for applicants with a prior qualification awarded by my institution“. Please explain why. (N=75)

The lack of or incomplete knowledge about other higher education systems remains a significant challenge for admission committees. Despite the fact that internationalisation has reached the core of institutional activities in most of Europe and that many of these Master's programs have been designed as an instrument for attracting talented foreign students (primarily or even exclusively), admission requirements and processes remain modelled on internal applicants, thus raising multiple issues when applied to external applicants. It is interesting to note the lack of reference, in the coordinators' responses to tools developed in the European context that were meant to ease recognition of prior learning, such as the Diploma Supplement. As we have not asked specific questions on the Diploma Supplement we cannot comment of how the coordinators see its usefulness, broadly speaking.

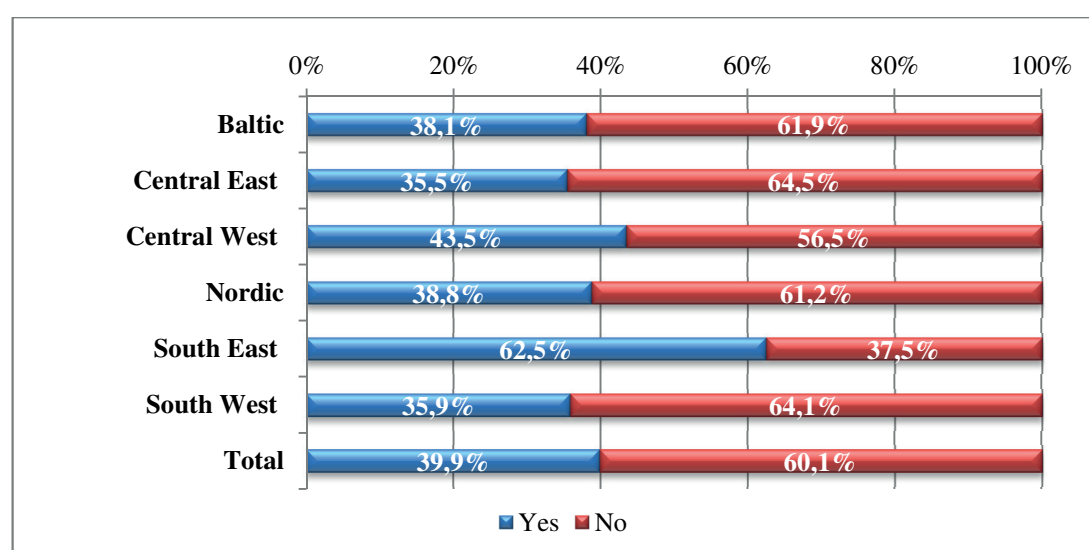
Furthermore, some coordinators reported that even when the requirements are formally met, the candidates accepted are not always in line with the expectations in practice, raising thus the question if the current admission requirements and processes are actually helping coordinators recruit the desired type of students after all:

“In several cases we have accepted students whose qualifications on paper match the prerequisite requirements for the programme only to find in practice that the students' knowledge is woefully inadequate”.

4.6 Conditional admissions

The Master's coordinators were also asked, in the event that the formal requirements are not fully met, if they can still admit certain applicants to the program, conditionally (Graph 4.6.1). About 40.0% of the programs offered conditional admissions. On the one hand, this finding can be seen in a positive light – in the event that not all requirements are met, a good share of the programs show flexibility and are willing to admit the candidates in question provided that they take some extra steps. On the other hand though, as we have seen in the previous section that the admission requirements are not always bullet-proof, we cannot help but wonder if the use of other (alternative) admission criteria would not have led to a different admission result, i.e. to the respective candidates being fully admitted to the program (thus making conditional admission redundant).

Graph 4.6.1: Conditional admission by Master's coordinators

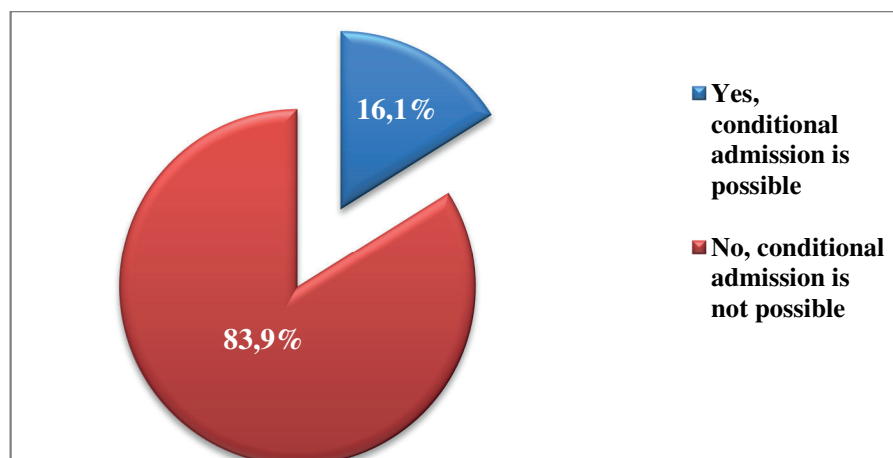


Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 3.12: Do you offer alternative admission paths to your programme in case certain applicants don't fulfil all the conditions? (N by region= 21, 31, 85, 49, 8, 64, 258)

The Master's candidates were also asked whether, to their knowledge, the program they applied for offered conditional admission (Graph 4.6.2). In comparison to the coordinators' response, only 16.1% of Master's applicants said their respective program offered this possibility. This might however be due to a lack of information on the applicants' side on this topic, as it is primarily the applicants that were offered conditional admission that are likely to know about this possibility. The other applicants are likely not to know.

Graph 4.6.2: Share of programs offering conditional admissions (student survey)



Source: Survey of Master's Applicants

Question: As far as you know, are there alternative admission paths for applicants who do not meet all entry requirements or who do not fit the "traditional" student profile? (N=2236)

Within the applicants' respondent group, 5.2% of respondents were offered conditional admission and were at the time of the survey taking a preparatory year in order to be able to then study in the Master's they had initially applied for. The countries where these students had applied and were granted conditional admission are presented in Table 4.6.1. Given the small number of respondents per country, it is impossible to draw any wider conclusions from this country distribution. We would like to note nevertheless, that in the countries with most students that were granted conditional admission within our sample – Germany, the Netherlands and the UK – 4 in 5 candidates admitted conditionally were foreigners. And overall (for the entire group of countries), only 1 in 10 students was an internal applicant.

Table 4.6.1: Students enrolled conditionally (i.e. on a preparatory program) by country of the Master's program

Country of the Master's program offering conditional admission	Number of Master's applicants offered conditional admission	Share (%) of all Master's applicants offered conditional admission	Number of Master's applicants	Share (%) of all Master's applicants
AT	5	4.6%	54	9.3%
BE	6	5.6%	98	6.1%
CY	1	0.9%	29	3.4%
CZ	1	0.9%	24	4.2%
DE	11	10.2%	317	3.5%
DK	1	0.9%	41	2.4%
ES	2	1.9%	45	4.4%
FI	1	0.9%	46	2.2%
FR	6	5.6%	110	5.5%
IT	6	5.6%	96	6.3%

Country of the Master's program offering conditional admission	Number of Master's applicants offered conditional admission	Share (%) of all Master's applicants offered conditional admission	Number of Master's applicants	Share (%) of all Master's applicants
NL	14	13.0%	282	5.0%
NO	2	1.9%	65	3.1%
PL	1	0.9%	14	7.1%
SE	1	0.9%	95	1.1%
TR	1	0.9%	22	4.5%
UK	49	45.4%	742	6.6%
Total	108	100.0%	2080	5.2%

Source: Survey of Master's Applicants

A related question was whether conditional admission was also a matter of the subject field itself, i.e. that conditional admission might be more easily possible in some fields and not in others (that are more regulated). The low number of responses does not allow us to fully explore this hypothesis. We present nevertheless the programs that answered the question on alternative admission paths by subject field of the Master's (Table 4.6.2). The only fields of study where more programs than on average offer conditional admissions are agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary and health and welfare. But given the low number of cases, we cannot conclude how typical this is for the fields in question.

Table 4.6.2: Programs offering conditional admissions by subject area

Subject area		Yes, conditional admission possible	No, no conditional admissions	Total
Education (teacher training and education science, etc.)	<i>Number</i>	1	4	5
	Share within field	20.0%	80.0%	100.0%
Arts and humanities	<i>Number</i>	7	11	18
	Share within field	38.9%	61.1%	100.0%
Social sciences, journalism and information	<i>Number</i>	10	13	23
	Share within field	43.5%	56.5%	100.0%
Business administration and law	<i>Number</i>	17	30	47
	Share within field	36.2%	63.8%	100.0%
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	<i>Number</i>	10	21	31
	Share within field	32.3%	67.7%	100.0%
Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs)	<i>Number</i>	9	11	20
	Share within field	45.0%	55.0%	100.0%
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	<i>Number</i>	17	24	41
	Share within field	41.5%	58.5%	100.0%
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	<i>Number</i>	5	2	7
	Share within field	71.4%	28.6%	100.0%
Health and welfare (medicine, public	<i>Number</i>	8	6	14

Subject area		Yes, conditional admission possible	No, no conditional admissions	Total
health, care of the disabled, etc.)	Share within field	57.1%	42.9%	100.0%
Services (personal services, transport services, hygiene and occupational health services, security services, etc.)	Number	1	2	3
	Share within field	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
Other subject area, please specify	Number	17	27	44
	Share within field	38.6%	61.4%	100.0%
Total	Number	102	151	253
	Share within field	40.3%	59.7%	100.0%

Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 3.12: Do you offer alternative admission paths to your programme in case certain applicants don't fulfil all the conditions?

Question 1.4: In which subject area does your Master's programme fit (according to the ISCED 2011 classification of broad groups and fields of education)?

We also present the students that were offered conditional admission by their field of study in Table 4.6.3. Unsurprisingly, the majority of students admitted conditionally were studying a program in social sciences, business and law (the three sub-fields accounting together for 35.9% of applicants) – this being also the field in which most Master's respondents studied and in which most ETPs in Europe are offered.

Table 4.6.3: Students enrolled conditionally (i.e. on a preparatory program) by subject area

Subject area	Number of Master's applicants offered conditional admission	Share of Master's applicants offered conditional admission	Number of Master's applicants	Share (%) of all Master's applicants
Law	4	3.8%	101	4.0%
Engineering and Technology	25	23.6%	491	5.1%
Humanities and Arts	10	9.4%	232	4.3%
Life sciences, Medicine and Health	17	16.0%	345	4.9%
Social Sciences	11	10.4%	288	3.8%
Natural Sciences	9	8.5%	139	6.5%
Business and Economics	23	21.7%	391	5.9%
Environmental Sciences	5	4.7%	121	4.1%
Applied Sciences, Professions and Arts	2	1.9%	125	1.6%
Total	106	100.0%	2233	4.7%

Source: Survey of Master's Applicants

4.7 Notification of results

Because of the complexity of the admission process at Master's level, the coordinators were also asked about how long it takes for them to be able to notify the applicants about the admission results, and that by type of applicant. Given the challenges related to processing the files of foreign applicants described in detail in previous sections, it is perhaps no wonder that on average, foreign applicants are notified 7 days later than internal applicants (36 days compared to 29 days, on average) and 4 days later than domestic applicants (32 days) about the admission results (Table 4.7.1). Differences are also observed in the longest notification period amongst the respondents by type of applicant, the period spanning from a maximum of 120 days for internal applicants to as many as 180 days for foreign candidates. 180 days were the maximum given to respondents as a response option, so it could be that the maximum is even higher for foreign students. The median values confirm the same trend.

Table 4.7.1: Average length of the notification period (of admission results) by type of applicant

Types of applicants	Number of program responses	Longest notification period in days	Average notification period in days	Median (in days)
Notification of internal applicants	203	120	29	20
Notification of domestic applicants	207	150	32	25
Notification of foreign applicants	238	180	36	30

Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 3.10: How long is the notification period for applicants to your programme (the time that elapses in days from the moment an application is admitted until the applicant is informed about the result)?

We further notice (Table 4.7.2) that while almost two thirds of the programs (68.5%) can inform internal applicants of admission results in maximum one month from the moment when the processing of the applications starts, the share of programs that can do the same for foreign applicants is less than 10 percentage points smaller (at 56.9%).

Table 4.7.2: Length of the notification period (of admission results) by type of applicant

Notification period	Internal applicants		Domestic applicants		Foreign applicants	
	Number of program responses	Share	Number of program responses	Share	Number of program responses	Share
Up to 2 weeks	72	35.5%	64	30.9%	64	26.9%
2 weeks - 1 month	67	33.0%	68	32.9%	72	30.3%
More than 1 month	64	31.5%	75	36.2%	102	42.9%

Total	203	100.0%	207	100.0%	238	100.0%
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Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 3.10: How long is the notification period for applicants to your programme (the time that elapses in days from the moment an application is admitted until the applicant is informed about the result)?

At the same time, given the big challenges in processing the files of foreign applicants, we were expecting that the notification differences between the internal applicants and the foreign ones would be higher. The fact that they are not might be due to the way in which the question was phrased, the respondents being asked about the length of the “notification period” and not of the “processing period” of files. So while the processing period of files might be longer for foreign applicants in many institutions, the notification period of applicants might be more or less the same for all applicants irrespective of type.

5. Admission regulations at national and institutional level

As the existence of national and institutional regulations on admissions at Master's level are expected to shape the admission process at program level at least to some extent, the Master's coordinators were also asked about the existence of such rules in their countries and institutions and were also invited to comment on the usefulness of these regulatory frameworks.

5.1 National regulations

When asked about the existence of such regulations at national level, about three quarters of the respondents (74.2%) declared that such rules existed in their country (Table 5.1.1). It must be mentioned however that respondents from the same country sometimes disagreed over the existence of such rules nationally, which might be due to a lack of knowledge of some respondents on this topic, or to the belonging of the respondents to different types of institutions (some of which are regulated at national level while the others are not). So, irrespective of the potential explanations, these numbers should be taken with some caution.

Table 5.1.1: Existence of a national regulation that must be followed in the admission process at Master's level

Answers	Number of program responses	Share of cases
Yes	193	74.2%
No	67	25.8%
Total	260	100.0%

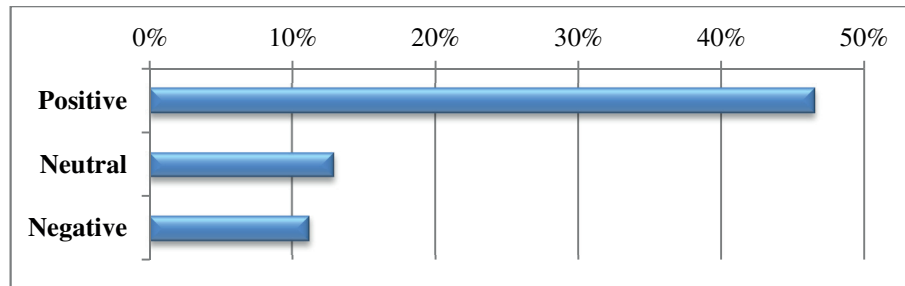
Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 4.1: Is there a national regulation/set of regulations (laws) in your country that you must follow in the admission process at Master's level?

As Graph 5.1.1 further shows, a little less than half of the respondents expressed only positive views on the national regulations in their country. Only 13.0% responded more neutrally by using descriptors like "fine," "normal" or "OK". And 11.0% gave a solely negative opinion of the regulations. The remaining responses were mostly mixing positive and negative reviews of the regulations.

Although the answers were highly positive in general, we recognise that the phrasing of the question might have unwillingly influenced the respondents in that direction, i.e. the question might have been biased. Given this situation, the presence of more than 20.0% of neutral and negative opinions, accompanied by an important number of responses that show mixed feelings need to be acknowledged, and in many cases national regulations seem to pose at least some challenges for admission committees.

Graph 5.1.1: Opinion on national admission regulations



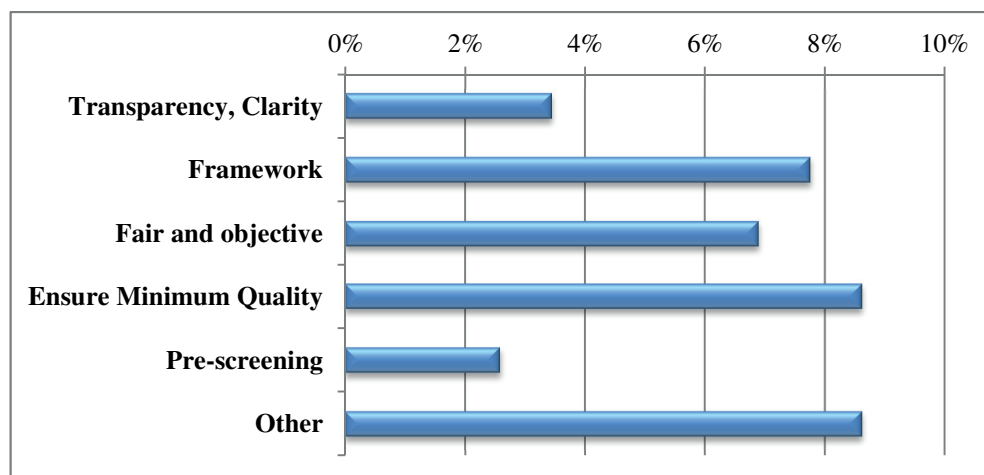
Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 4.3: What is your opinion on the related (to Master's admissions) national legislative framework (e.g. is it helpful, necessary and why)? (n=116)

Positives opinions were supported by various justifications (Graph 5.1.2), including the fact

- that national regulations help ensure a minimum quality of the applicants (quoted by 9.0% of respondents),
- that they provides a framework to work with in the admission process (8.0%), and
- that they supports a fair and objective process (7.0%).

Graph 5.1.2 – Rationales behind positive opinions



Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 4.3: What is your opinion on the related (to Master's admissions) national legislative framework (e.g. is it helpful, necessary and why)? (n=116)

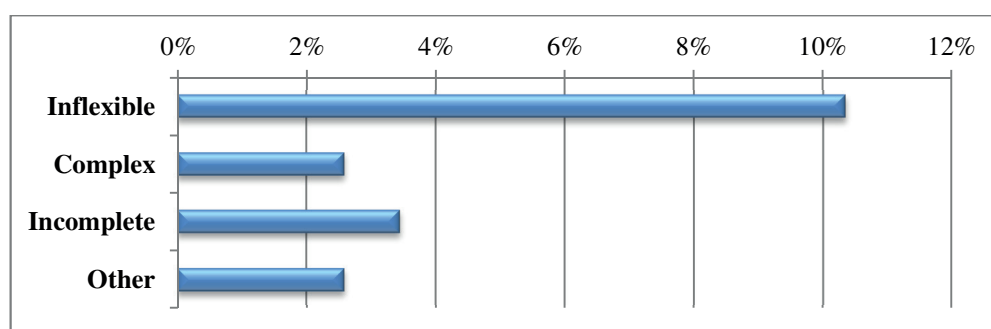
Negative opinions on the other hand (Graph 5.1.3), were mostly based on the lack of flexibility of such regulations (10.0%). This highlights the diverging sentiments of the coordinators, national regulations being valued for being strict and straightforward by some and blamed for not being flexible enough by others.

And it seems that the importance of the lack of flexibility of these regulations does tie up with the need to individually assess some applicants whose file is different and cannot be fairly valued on usual criteria. The coordinators did emphasize that flexibility is essential in the admission process, in order to be able to qualitatively assess a candidate and sometimes regulations prevent this, as exemplified by these quotes:

“Our experience - students with excellent diploma have problems with autonomy and responsible studies at the EQF 7 level (Latvian and foreign students), and those with not good official documents are very motivated, creative, have the willingness to create new pedagogical knowledge, to be competent !!!”

“the rule with the minimum grade is not always good. It doesn't mean that the ones with better grades perform better in the end in their professional lives and careers, but we aren't allowed to take those who gained their knowledge with (working) experience instead of (excellent) educational results.”

Graph 5.1.3 – Rationales behind negative opinions



Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 4.3: What is your opinion on the related (to Master's admissions) national legislative framework (e.g. is it helpful, necessary and why)? (n=116)

5.2 Institutional regulations

In parallel, slightly more than half of the respondents (52.1%) stated that they had to abide by an institutional (internal) regulation over admissions at Master's level as well (Table 5.2.1). No big differences are observed though in the occurrence of institutional regulations by region, the only region where more programs than on average are guided by institutional regulations being Central East (61.3%).

Table 5.2.1: Existence of internal (institutional) regulations that must be followed in the admission process at Master's level, by region

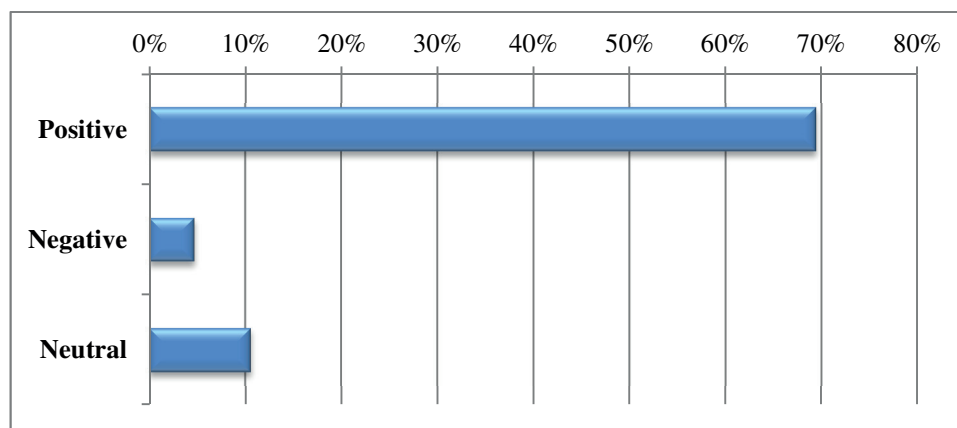
Answers		Baltic	Central East	Central West	Nordic	South East	South West	Total
Yes	Number	11	19	38	24	4	30	126
	Share of all responses	52.4%	61.3%	50.0%	53.3%	57.1%	48.4%	52.1%
No	Number	10	12	38	21	3	32	116
	Share of all responses	47.6%	38.7%	50.0%	46.7%	42.9%	51.6%	47.9%
Total	Number	21	31	76	45	7	62	242
	Share	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 4.4: Is there an additional (to the national level) internal document that regulates admissions at Master's level in your institution?

As shown in Graph 5.2.1, opinions on institutional regulations are mostly positive as well, with nearly 70.0% of respondents who gave fully positive responses. Neutral and negative opinions on such regulations have less weight than for the national ones. Institutional regulations seem to be more widely accepted than national ones, and seem to pose fewer challenges to admission committees. Of particular significance is the fact that no respondents deemed the institutional regulations as inflexible, thus hinting at the fact that these regulations might allow for more cases to be taken into account and award more freedom to admission committees than their national counterparts.

Graph 5.2.1: Opinion on institutional regulations



Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

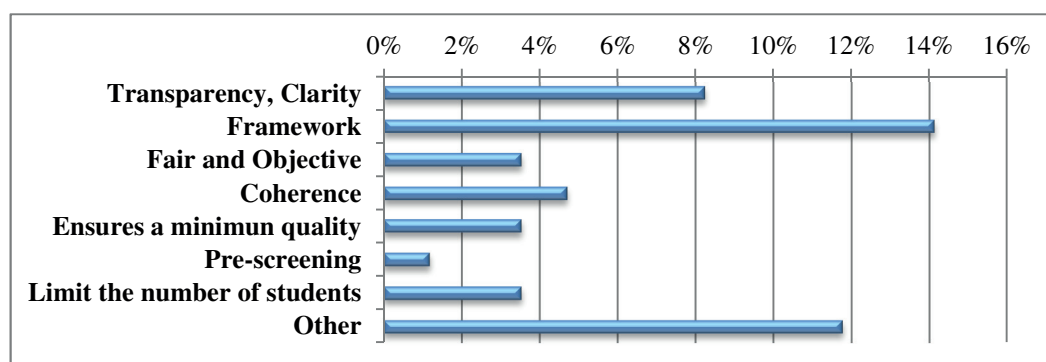
Question 4.6: What is your opinion on this internal regulation (e.g. is it helpful, necessary and why)? (n=85)

Graph 5.2.2 shows the main rationales behind these positive ratings. Of particular value for the coordinators seems to be the guidance and framework these regulations gives to admission committees when it comes to the process of assessment and decision-making (14.0%). A respondent stated that:

“Internal regulation is very helpful as it provides a framework for quality, consistency and standards across the university.”

The transparency and clarity that institutional regulations generate in the process are also positively regarded by respondents (8.0%), as well as the fact that they help creates coherence at the institutional level on how applications are handled (5.0%) according to the respondents.

Graph 5.2.2: Rationales behind positive opinions



Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 4.6: What is your opinion on this internal regulation (e.g. is it helpful, necessary and why)? (n=85)

6. Chances of being admitted at Master's level for different applicants

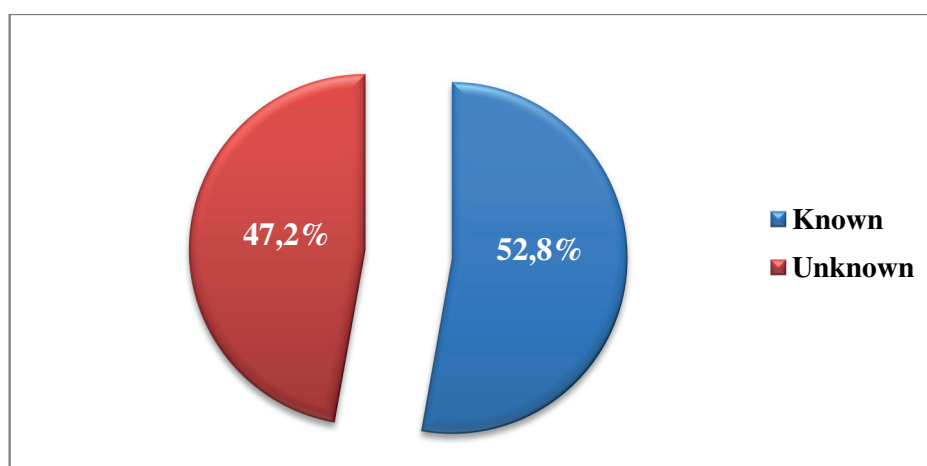
In the previous sections it was confirmed that, in general, it is more difficult for foreign applicants to be admitted to a given Master's program than it is for domestic and certainly internal applicants. Through the analysis, we also took note of the many difficulties that coordinators encounter when processing the files of foreign applicants in the attempt to make a fair assessment process. But the ultimate question we still have to answer is whether these difficulties actually translate into a lower success rate at Master's level of foreign applicants compared to the other two standard categories of candidates. This is the main purpose of this section of the report.

Before looking into the success rates question, however, we try to see what the general tendency is for internal students to try to continue with a Master's in the same institution, given that almost half of the programs (46.2%) stated that internal students are automatically admitted to their program. We ultimately want to see what room is left, in programs open to all types of applicants, for foreign and domestic candidates once the internals have been automatically accepted, i.e. to set the context for understanding the actual success rates of externals.

6.1 Stay rates of Bachelor's graduates for the Master's

When asked whether they knew what the share of Bachelor's graduates that stay for a Master's in their institution was, only slightly more than half of the coordinators (52.8%) were able to provide an estimate (Graph 6.1.1).

Graph 6.1.1: Stay rate of Bachelor's graduates in the same institution for the Master's level



Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 2.4: Do you know what is the share of the Bachelor graduates that remain to continue their studies in your institution (at Master's level or in other types of programmes)? (N=284)

In about half of the 146 institutions for which this question was answered, more than half of the Bachelor's graduates continued with a Master's in the same institution (Table 6.1.1). In about a third of the programs (36.3%), the stay rate for the Master's was between 75.0% and 100.0%. These figures are further proof that in many institutions the Master's is the natural continuation of the predecessor Bachelor's.

Table 6.1.1: Stay rate of Bachelor's graduates in the same institution for the Master's level

Stay rate for the Master's	Number of program responses	Share of total responses
0-25%	42	28.8%
26-50%	32	21.9%
51-75%	19	13.0%
76-100%	53	36.3%
Total	146	100.0%

Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 2.4: Do you know what is the share of the Bachelor graduates that remain to continue their studies in your institution (at Master's level or in other types of programmes)?

And we observe further differences by the region of the Master's (and implicitly of the institution). In more than half of the programs in the Central East region (52.2%) and in over 40.0% of the programs in the Nordic countries (41.7%) over three quarters of the Bachelor's graduates continue with a Master's at the same institution (Table 6.1.2).

Obviously, the internal students might or would primarily target Master's programs taught in the domestic language, i.e. not the kind of programs that we analyse in this report. But with more and more institutions in Europe moving towards teaching exclusively in English at the postgraduate level, less 'room' might be left for external applicants in programs with limited places (unless the demographic decline in these countries will lower 'competition' by internals).

At the same time, the Nordic region seems quite divided, having just as many institutions where staying for the Master's is not the norm – 41.7% of institutions where less than a quarter of the Bachelor's graduates stay for the Master's within.

Table 6.1.2: Stay rate of Bachelor's graduates in the same institution for the Master's level, by region

Stay rate for the Master's		Baltic	Central East	Central West	Nordic	South East	South West	Total
0-25%	Number	3	1	16	10	0	12	42
	Share of all responses	20.0%	4.3%	39.0%	41.7%	0.0%	30.0%	28.8%
26-50%	Number	7	6	5	3	2	9	32
	Share of all responses	46.7%	26.1%	12.2%	12.5%	66.7%	22.5%	21.9%
51-75%	Number	2	4	5	1	1	6	19
	Share of all responses	13.3%	17.4%	12.2%	4.2%	33.3%	15.0%	13.0%
76-100%	Number	3	12	15	10	0	13	53
	Share of all responses	20.0%	52.2%	36.6%	41.7%	0.0%	32.5%	36.3%
Total	Number	15	23	41	24	3	40	146
	Share of all responses	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 2.4: Do you know what is the share of the Bachelor graduates that remain to continue their studies in your institution (at Master's level or in other types of programmes)?

6.2 Application success rates of different types of applicants

As specified in the methodological section of the report, the objectives of the Master's applicants' survey were to reach out to Master's candidates of three types – internal, domestic and foreign – and with varying statuses with regards to their application (accepted, rejected or accepted conditionally), to ensure there is enough heterogeneity within the group of respondents to prevent response bias (e.g. an overtly positive or negative assessment). The distribution of Master's applicants by type and application status is presented in Graph 6.2.1 below. This data does *not* reflect however the actual success rate of different types of applicants in the application process, the only reason why we are presenting it here being to showcase that the respondents to the applicants' survey represent a diverse enough group to be able to rely on responses to the other questions.

In the group of internal applicants:

- a quarter of applicants were rejected in the application process and did not enrol in another program (25.1%),
- another quarter had already enrolled in the respective program (25.6%),
- 7.7% of internal applicants had been accepted conditionally to the program and were enrolled in a preparatory year, and
- a third quarter of applicants (26.2%) had another application status (mostly pending application – i.e. students that had recently applied and were still waiting for the results of admission).

As for the application statuses of domestic applicants, the distribution is rather different than for the group of internal students, as follows:

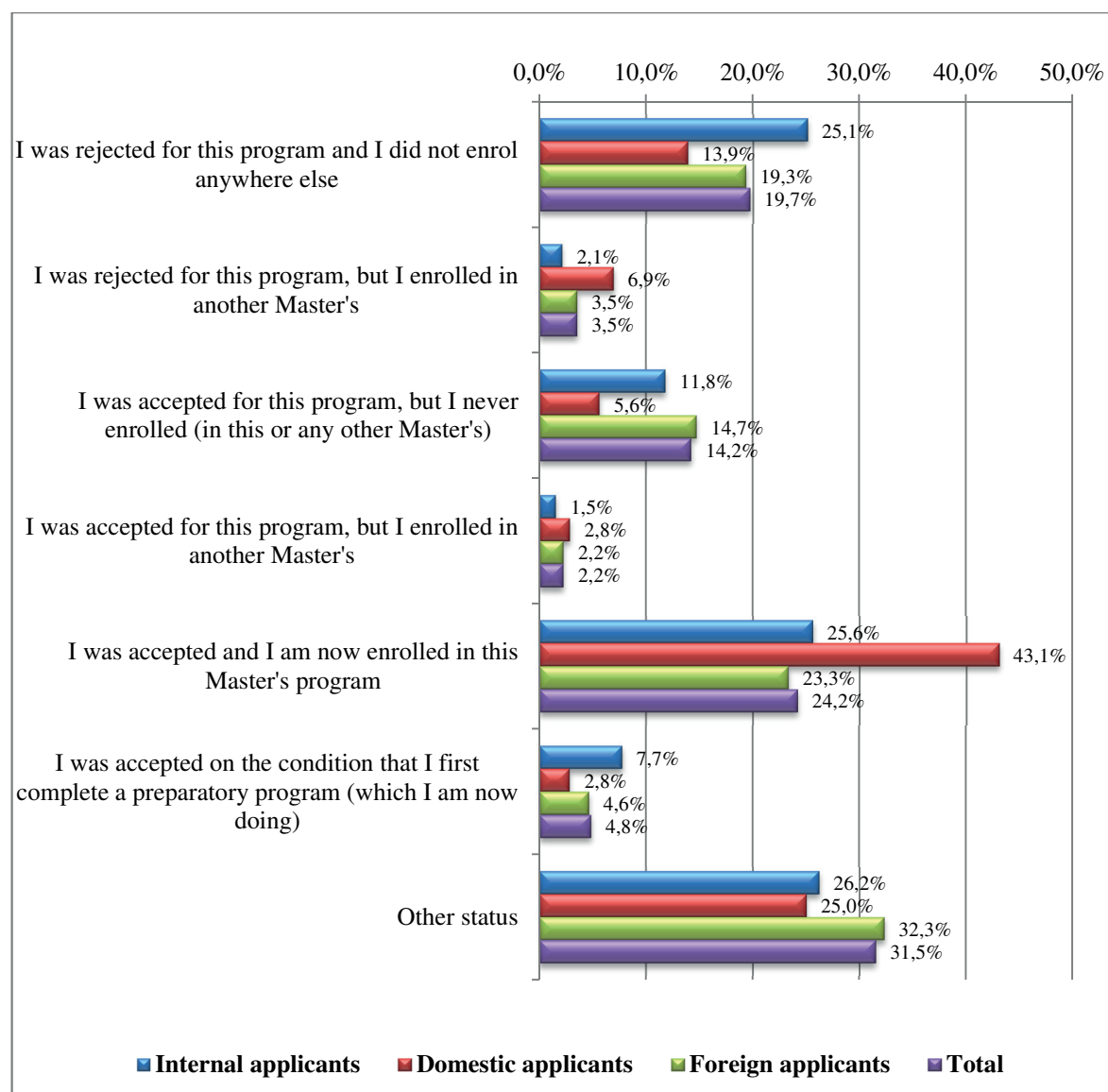
- less than a fifth (13.9%) of domestics were rejected and not studying anywhere else,
- the stark majority (43.1%) of domestic applicants were currently enrolled in the program,
- another small group – 2.8% – were accepted conditionally to the program, and
- a quarter (25.0%) were in another situation with regards to their admission than the response options given (mostly waiting for the results).

Last but not least, foreign applicants showed yet another pattern:

- only 1 in 5 foreigners was rejected and not studying anywhere else (19.3%),
- almost a quarter of foreigners were enrolled in the program (23.3%),
- less than 5.0% were accepted conditionally, and
- about a third (32.3%) were mostly waiting for the application results.

It is difficult though to compare the results for the 3 groups, as, beyond the reasons given above, the three types of applicants did not apply to the same programs, and therefore the numbers don't reflect the treatment of the three categories of applicants by the same programs or their success rate in a comparable manner. In turn, the results of the Master's coordinators' survey do make this assessment possible.

Graph 6.2.1: Master's applicants by type and application status



Source: Survey of Master's applicants

Question: What is the current status of your application for this Master's programme?

The respondents to the Master's coordinators survey were asked to estimate the success rate in the application process of the types of applicants to which their program was open. Data presented in Table 6.2.1 and Graph 6.2.2 confirms one of the project's core hypotheses, namely that on average, the application success rate of foreign applicants is the lowest amongst the three types of applicants. Therefore, according to the coordinators, while on average almost 1 in 4 internal students that applied to their Master's program was rejected (28.0%), about 1 in 3 domestic applicants (35.4%) and close to 1 in 2 foreign applicants (46.5%) were turned down.

The difference between the average application success rate of internal students and that of foreign applicants was 18.5 percentage points for the programs represented by the responding coordinators, to the detriment of the latter group.

We did not ask however the coordinators to estimate the success rates of foreign applicants based on the country where they had completed their prior education, but we imagine there could be some (important) differences, for example, between the application success rates of applicants with a European prior degree vs. those with a non-European one. Given the progress made in the recognition of prior learning especially within Europe and the wider use of recognition tools such as the Diploma Supplement, we could imagine that it is easier for the coordinators to assess the applications of candidates having completed their prior education in other European countries than it is to evaluate those of non-Europeans. If this is so, this could (but not necessarily must) result in higher application success rates of those with prior degrees in other European countries compared to those that pursued their prior education outside of Europe. If these assumptions were true, then the gap of 18.5 percentage points (Table 6.2.1) between the internal and foreign applicants would be (much) smaller if the foreigners had completed their prior education in other European countries and potentially (much) bigger for candidates with a non-European prior education. As these questions were not raised in this study however, the related assumptions remain to be tested in subsequent studies.

Table 6.2.1: Average application success rates of different types of applicants by region⁶

Regions	Success rate of internal applicants	Success rate of domestic applicants	Success rate of foreign applicants
Baltic	56.7%	54.8%	43.1%
Central East	70.9%	68.3%	68.7%
Central West	76.3%	69.6%	50.5%
Nordic	62.4%	51.5%	47.2%
South East	82.9%	86.3%	75.1%
South West	77.6%	65.3%	55.8%
Total	72.0%	64.5%	53.5%

Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

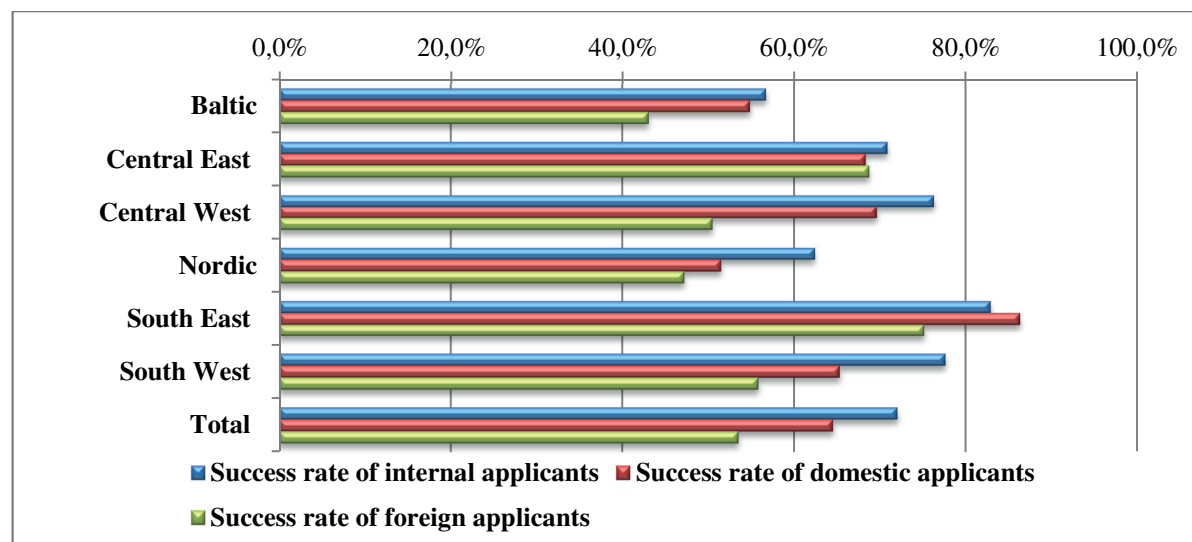
Question 2.2: Please try to estimate (in case you do not have the actual numbers at hand) the success rate (on average) of the following types of applicants to your programme.

The general picture is largely confirmed across the regions, with the biggest difference between the success rates of the two groups in the Central West (25.8 percentage points), which is also the region where most programs and applicants that answered to the surveys are concentrated. The smallest differences between the three groups are observed in the Central East region, where the success rates of domestic and foreign applicants are about the same (68.3% and 68.7%), and come very close to the success rates of internal applicants (56.7%).

It is noteworthy though that not all the internal students are successful in the application process to a Master's in the same institution, i.e. not all internal applicants are automatically admitted to the Master's.

⁶ The information on success rates of the different types of applicants is based on estimates submitted by the Master's coordinators, and therefore not on pure admission statistics provided by the respondents.

Graph 6.2.2: Average application success rates of different types of applicants by region



Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 2.2: Please try to estimate (in case you do not have the actual numbers at hand) the success rate (on average) of the following types of applicants to your programme.

Table 6.2.2 presents the same data on declared success rates by the Master's coordinators by country of the Master's program. We take special note of the particularly higher than the average (18.5 percentage points) differences between the application success rates of internal and domestic students in countries like Belgium (93.0% vs. 59.6%), Switzerland (98.0% vs. 47.5%), Germany (72.2% vs. 44.2%), and Denmark (81.1% vs. 46.1%), but we have no further information as to what could explain these differences.

Table 6.2.2: Application success rates of different types of applicants by country

Country	Success rate of internal applicants	Success rate of domestic applicants	Success rate of foreign applicants
AT	78.6%	74.9%	64.5%
BE	93.0%	90.9%	59.6%
BG	60.0%	89.0%	51.0%
CH	98.0%	72.7%	47.5%
CZ	82.1%	70.3%	75.3%
DE	72.2%	67.7%	44.2%
DK	81.1%	56.7%	46.1%
EE	54.2%	87.7%	50.3%
ES	78.9%	70.0%	59.5%
FI	47.8%	43.1%	43.3%
FR	74.0%	53.7%	53.1%
HR	87.0%	78.0%	76.3%
HU	85.5%	63.0%	70.1%
IE	79.2%	69.2%	68.4%
IS	67.3%	30.3%	59.3%
IT	77.9%	74.0%	53.8%
LT	62.6%	57.0%	40.9%
LU	5.0%	0.0%	50.5%

LV	51.7%	38.6%	37.8%
MT	100.0%	100.0%	80.0%
NL	70.7%	71.0%	50.4%
NO	47.9%	39.3%	31.5%
PL	55.3%	71.4%	47.8%
PT	100.0%	92.5%	64.3%
RO	95.0%	95.0%	95.0%
SE	70.4%	66.0%	58.1%
SI	4.0%	4.0%	89.5%
SK	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
TR	75.0%	75.0%	75.0%
UK	65.0%	43.8%	38.8%
Total	72.0%	64.5%	53.5%

Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 2.2: Please try to estimate (in case you do not have the actual numbers at hand) the success rate (on average) of the following types of applicants to your programme.

Further on, Table 6.2.3 presents the success rates of the three types of applicants grouped by 5 ranges of success and by region of the Master's programs. The purpose of this presentation of the data is to see, for each region, and for each type of applicant, in which of the 5 success ranges the majority of programs are situated (the highest values, which are marked with the grey colour in the table). For the general picture, we note that while 1 in 2 programs (54.9%) have an application success rate of internal applicants of between 80.0 and 100.0%, only 1 in 3 programs have similarly high success rates of domestic applicants (39.1%) and as few as 1 in 5 programs have such rates for foreign students (20.5%). In fact, with regards to the success rate of foreign students, the programs in the study are more or less equally spread across the 5 ranges, highlighting that there is quite some variety in the chances of being admitted at Master's level for foreign applicants, and that chances differ greatly by program.

Table 6.2.3: Distribution of programs by success range for different types of applicants by region

Regions	Types of applicants	Success rate of 0-20 %	Success rate of 21-40 %	Success rate of 41-60 %	Success rate of 61-80 %	Success rate of 81-100 %	Total
Baltic	<i>Internal applicants</i>	25.0%	10.0%	10.0%	25.0%	30.0%	100.0%
	<i>Domestic applicants</i>	17.6%	17.6%	11.8%	29.4%	23.5%	100.0%
	<i>Foreign applicants</i>	36.4%	13.6%	22.7%	9.1%	18.2%	100.0%
Central East	<i>Internal applicants</i>	17.9%	3.6%	14.3%	3.6%	60.7%	100.0%
	<i>Domestic applicants</i>	8.0%	16.0%	16.0%	4.0%	56.0%	100.0%
	<i>Foreign applicants</i>	6.5%	12.9%	19.4%	22.6%	38.7%	100.0%
Central West	<i>Internal applicants</i>	3.9%	9.1%	15.6%	14.3%	57.1%	100.0%
	<i>Domestic applicants</i>	6.0%	13.3%	18.1%	18.1%	44.6%	100.0%

	<i>Foreign applicants</i>	17.2%	25.8%	28.0%	15.1%	14.0%	100.0%
Nordic	<i>Internal applicants</i>	23.3%	9.3%	14.0%	9.3%	44.2%	100.0%
	<i>Domestic applicants</i>	32.6%	8.7%	17.4%	19.6%	21.7%	100.0%
	<i>Foreign applicants</i>	27.1%	14.6%	20.8%	27.1%	10.4%	100.0%
South East	<i>Internal applicants</i>	11.1%	0.0%	0.0%	11.1%	77.8%	100.0%
	<i>Domestic applicants</i>	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	44.4%	55.6%	100.0%
	<i>Foreign applicants</i>	11.1%	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	55.6%	100.0%
South West	<i>Internal applicants</i>	8.3%	6.7%	5.0%	18.3%	61.7%	100.0%
	<i>Domestic applicants</i>	8.6%	20.7%	12.1%	19.0%	39.7%	100.0%
	<i>Foreign applicants</i>	14.3%	27.1%	15.7%	18.6%	24.3%	100.0%
Total	<i>Internal applicants</i>	12.2%	7.6%	11.4%	13.9%	54.9%	100.0%
	<i>Domestic applicants</i>	12.6%	14.3%	15.1%	18.9%	39.1%	100.0%
	<i>Foreign applicants</i>	18.4%	20.9%	21.2%	19.0%	20.5%	100.0%

Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

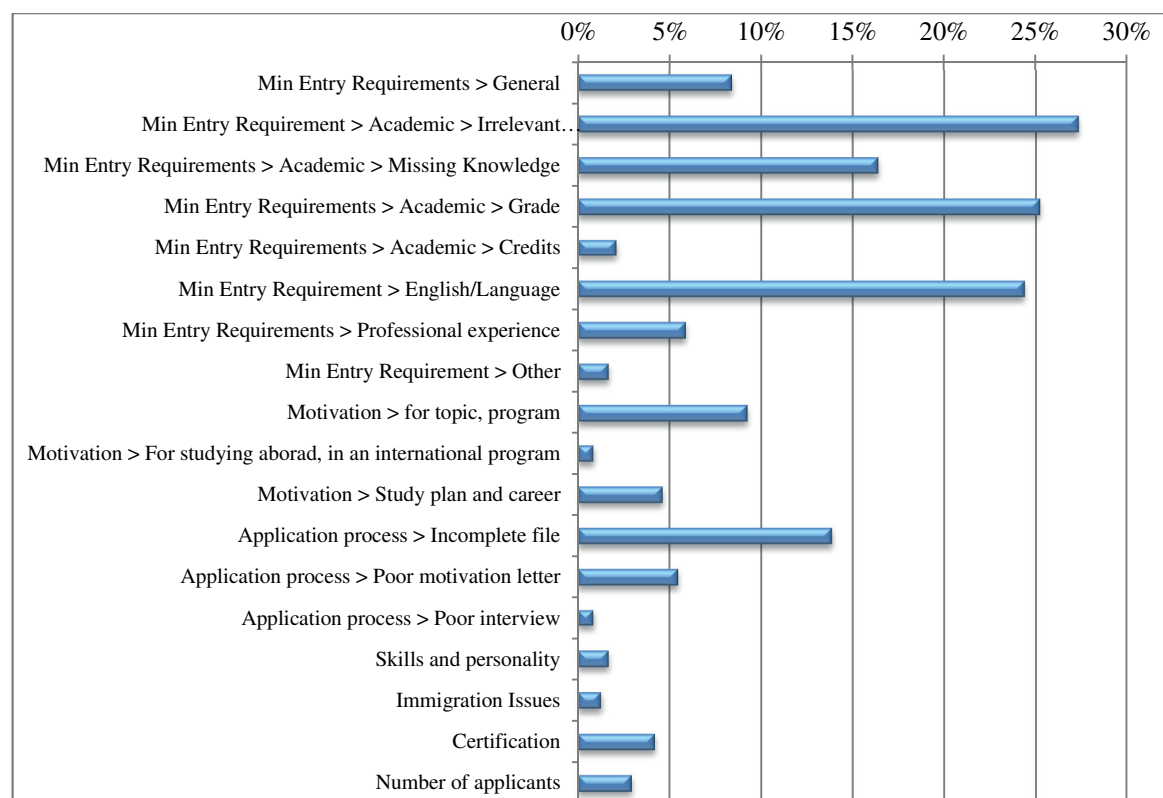
Question 2.2: Please try to estimate (in case you do not have the actual numbers at hand) the success rate (on average) of the following types of applicants to your programme.

6.3 Rejection in the admission process

As between about a quarter of internal students (28.0%) and almost half of foreign applicants (46.5%) are not, on average, admitted to the Master's program of their choice, the Master's coordinators were also probed about the main reasons why applicants fail to be admitted in their program. Falling short of meeting the minimum entry requirements set by the program was the most often cited answer. More specifically, as Graph 6.3.2 portrays, three requirements take prevalence on all others. The number one reason for failure is the applicant not having the relevant or appropriate background for the Master's degree, which was quoted by 26.0% of respondents. Second reason, mentioned by 25.0% of participants, is the final grade from previous study. English and language-related requirements are the third most reported reason unsuccessful admission (24.0%), which is logical in the context of degrees taught in English. Slightly less important, as cited by only 16.0% of respondents is the lack of knowledge of participants, although this reason also ties back to the quest for relevant background and shows the importance of acquired knowledge in current admission processes across Europe. Comparatively, factors such as applicants' motivation, personality, immigration issues, and certification are more rarely responsible for the admission failure of the applicant.

European English-taught Master's degrees do seem to give utmost importance to the previous qualification of applicants and to regard it as a study success predictor, i.e. as a guarantee of the applicants' capacity to successfully complete the program. Less traditional criteria for admission seem less decisive in the admission process, at least for the moment.

Graph 6.3.2: Reasons for failure in the admission process



Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 3.6: What is the most typical reason why applicants fail to be accepted to your programme? Please comment. (n=238)

7. Opinions on the admission process

Both sets of survey respondents – the Master's coordinators and the Master's applicants – were asked to express their opinion on the admission process, of their own program, in the case of coordinators and of the program to which they applied, in the case of candidates.

7.1 Opinions of the Master's coordinators

Overall, self-assessments of the admission procedures in place for one's Master's degree were positive. More than a quarter of respondents answered that they were fully satisfied with their process. When prompted to give examples of both bad and good practice for their admission process, 42.0% gave examples of good practice and 27.0% examples of bad practice – thus emphasising an overt positive assessment of their own admissions.

A word analysis and count for this question showed that the lexicon of “easy” and “simple” is often used, showing thus that directors value the elements that in their view facilitate the admission process. A straightforward process is therefore viewed as essential.

The examples of practice provided were extremely varied and not so easy to categorise, and therefore trends cannot be outlined so easily.

It is interesting to note, though, that both bad practices and good practices include the notion of time: a quick and timely process was seen as positive (4.0%), while longer processes or a long turn-around time were seen as negative (8.0%). A respondent regretted that:

“This year results were published two months and ten days after the application deadline.”

In addition to the time factor, the components and proceedings of the admission process are another source of examples for both good (20.0%) and bad practices (7.0%). Elements that are sources of satisfaction include interviews, a pre-screening process, flexibility, and demanding admission criteria. Interviews particularly stand out in the good practices category and seem to be a valued part of the process, although they are not so widely used:

“Admission is often dependent on the impression of the academic staff during the interviews.”

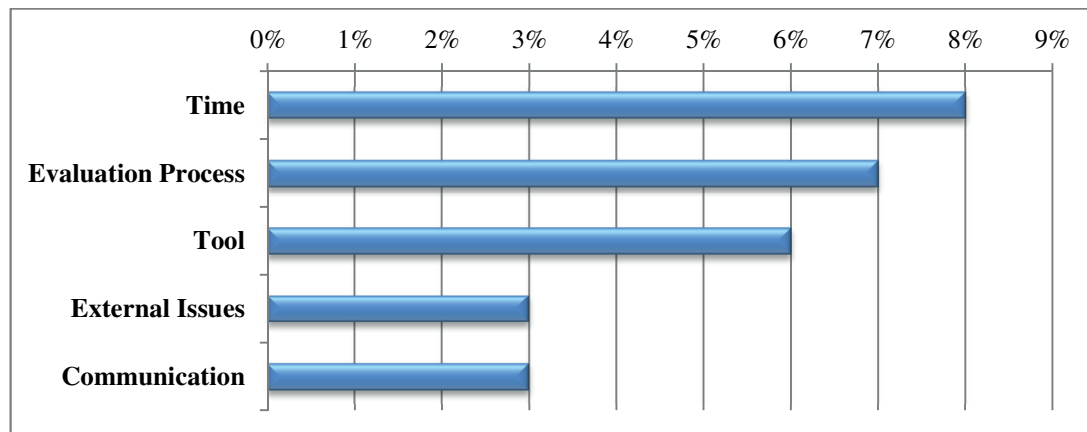
“Ideally we should interview all of the applicants. Information from grades and transcripts are only limited.”

“It [the admission process] is very quick and has a ‘personal touch’ (the interview) which allows to best assess the applicant and also gives the applicant an opportunity to ask questions about the programme to see and hear if it fits her/his expectations. We consider this an example of good practice.”

On the other hand, elements that could be simplified mainly pertain to the assessment of candidates’ qualifications, should it be their diplomas from other institutions, their foreign diplomas, or the applicants’ English credentials.

The actual admission tools (website, paper application etc.) and communication procedures are also mentioned as an area of both possible improvements and good practice, though not as prevalently as the previously mentioned aspects.

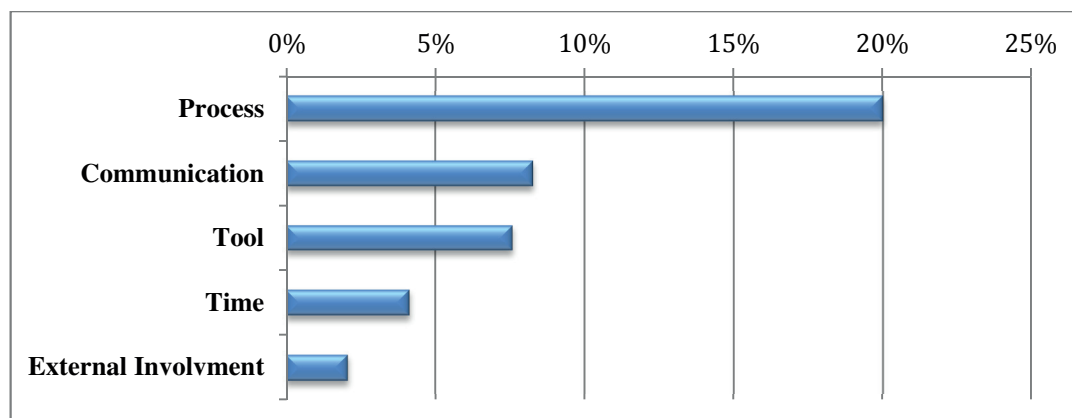
Graph 7.1.1: Areas of possible improvement



Source: Survey of Master’s Coordinators

Question 3.12: What is your opinion of the overall admission process to your programme? Are there any particular elements that could be simplified/ streamlined? Are there any aspects that in your opinion could be an example of good practice? (n= 145)

Graph 7.1.2: Areas of good practice

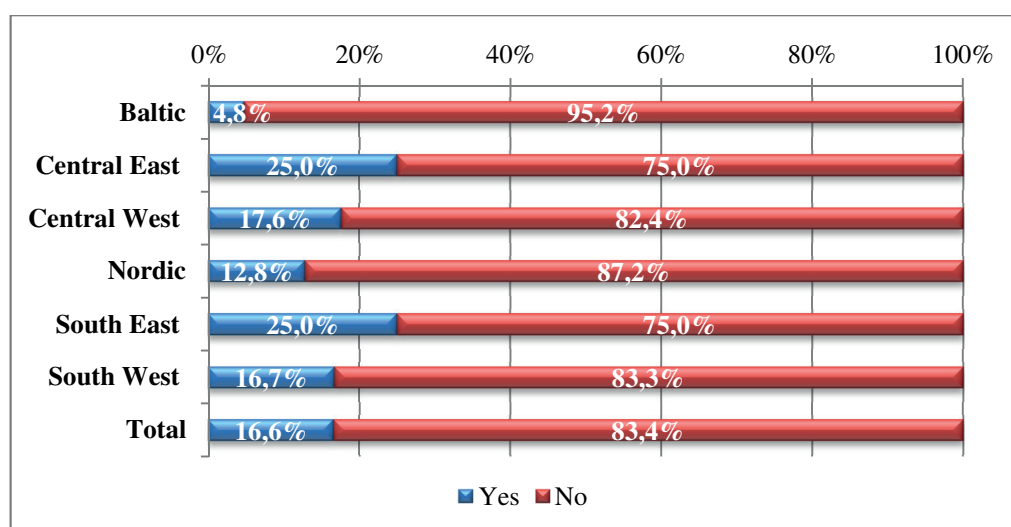


Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 3.12: What is your opinion of the overall admission process to your programme? Are there any particular elements that could be simplified/ streamlined? Are there any aspects that in your opinion could be an example of good practice? (n= 145)

The coordinators' self-assessments are rarely based on any comparative information, however, as only 16.6% of coordinators seem to know how their program is performing in comparison to similar programs in their field in terms of transparency and speed in the admission process (Graph 7.1.3). The majority of coordinators across all regions do not have such information about other programs, showing there is ample room for information exchange on admission processes and peer-learning in the field, especially as in spite of the generally-bright picture portrayed above, the coordinators also listed quite a number of challenges in the admission process.

Graph 7.1.3: Information about transparency of admissions and speed of admission to the program in comparison to similar programs



Source: Survey of Master's Coordinators

Question 3.9: Do you know how transparent and/or fast you are in the admission process in comparison to similar Master's programmes? (N by region= 21, 32, 85, 47, 8, 66, 259)

7.2 Opinions of the Master's applicants

The three types of applicants answering the survey were also asked to assess the admission process of the program to which they applied in terms of the fairness of chances, of the clarity of requirements, and of the ease of interaction with the staff of the Master's program, in case the applicants needed any type of support in submitting their application.

The underlying assumption of these questions was that, if foreign applicants were indeed encountering more difficulties in the application process than other types of applicants – internal or domestic – they were to assess the fairness, clarity and interaction with the program staff much more negatively than the other types of applicants.

This expectation was not confirmed however, as we do not find any striking differences between the ratings of internal, domestic and foreign students:

- about three quarters of applicants of each type rated the admission process as 'absolutely fair' or 'fair' (Table 7.2.1 and Graph 7.2.1),
- about 90.0% or more of applicants across all types judged the clarity of requirements as 'very clear' or 'clear' (Table 7.2.2 and Graph 7.2.2), and
- more than half of each group of applicants assessed that interacting with staff from the program was 'very easy' or 'easy' (Table 7.2.3 and Graph 7.2.3).

Although the hypothesis with regards to the assessment by the applicants is not confirmed, we do not regard these responses as counter-proof of this hypothesis either. Rather, we think that the similar ratings are likely due to the fact that the applicants do not have comparative information on the ease of application of other types of candidates and can therefore only reflect on their own experience when answering. In other words, even if it is more difficult for foreign applicants to be admitted to the program, as a good share of Master's coordinators confirmed, the applicants themselves are likely not to know this. The applicants are mostly (if not fully) unaware of the entire assessment process of their files and therefore of the challenges that admission officers and coordinators encounter when processing their applications.

Table 7.2.1: Ratings of the fairness of the application process by type of applicant

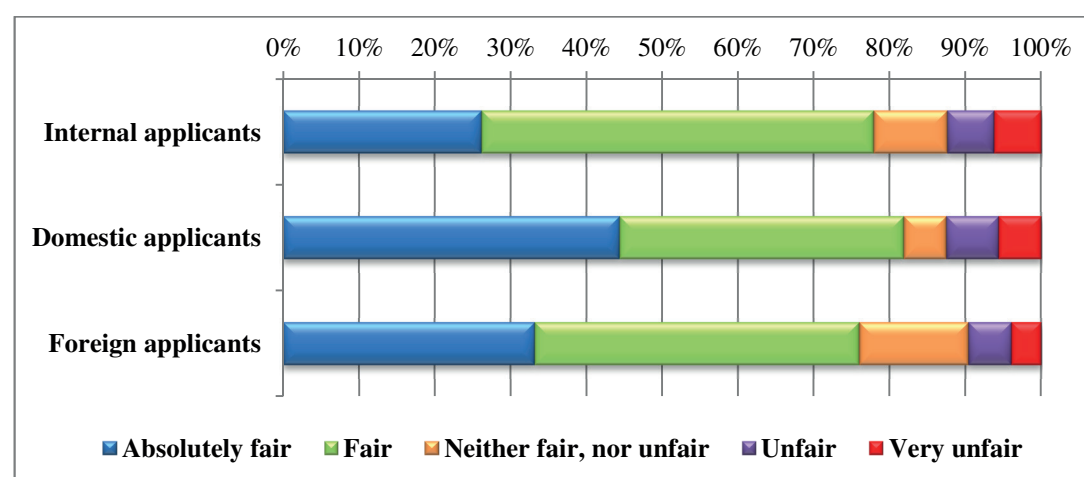
Type of applicants		Absolutely fair	Fair	Neither fair, nor unfair	Unfair	Very unfair	Total
Internal applicants	<i>Number of applicants</i>	51	101	19	12	12	195
	<i>Share (%) of all applicants</i>	26.2%	51.8%	9.7%	6.2%	6.2%	100.0%
Domestic applicants	<i>Number of applicants</i>	32	27	4	5	4	72
	<i>Share (%) of all applicants</i>	44.4%	37.5%	5.6%	6.9%	5.6%	100.0%
Foreign applicants	<i>Number of applicants</i>	650	838	282	111	76	1957

	Share (%) of all applicants	33.2%	42.8%	14.4%	5.7%	3.9%	100.0%
Total	Number of applicants	733	966	305	128	92	2224
	Share (%) of all applicants	33.0%	43.4%	13.7%	5.8%	4.1%	100.0%

Source: Survey of Master's Applicants

Question: In your opinion, how fair was the application process at this Master's programme?

Graph 7.2.1: Ratings of the fairness of the application process by type of applicant



Source: Survey of Master's Applicants

Question: In your opinion, how fair was the application process at this Master's programme?

Table 7.2.2: Ratings of the clarity of the application process by type of applicant

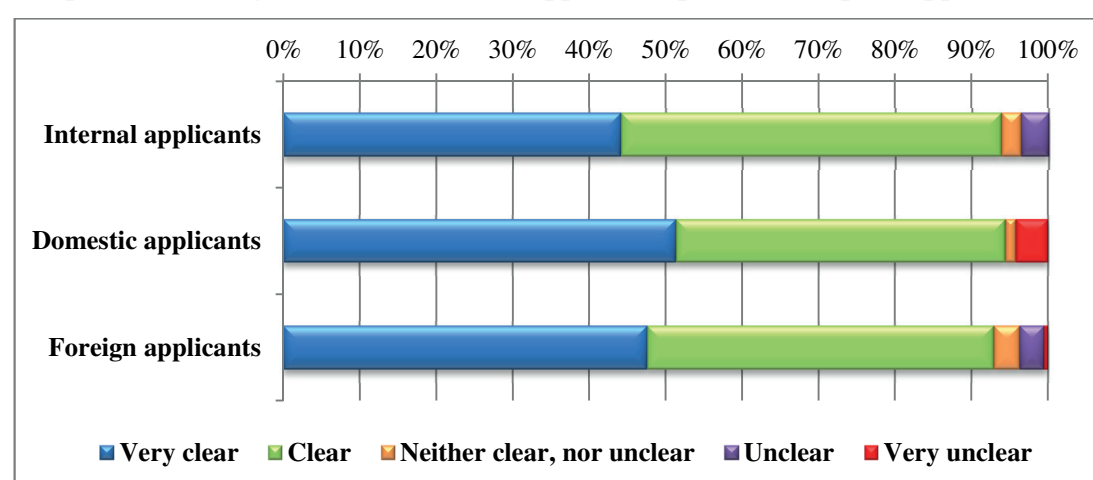
Type of applicants		Very clear	Clear	Neither clear, nor unclear	Unclear	Very unclear	Total
Internal applicants	<i>Number of applicants</i>	86	97	5	7	0	195
	<i>Share (%) of all applicants</i>	44.1%	49.7%	2.6%	3.6%	0.0%	100.0%
Domestic applicants	<i>Number of applicants</i>	37	31	1	0	3	72
	<i>Share (%) of all applicants</i>	51.4%	43.1%	1.4%	0.0%	4.2%	100.0%
Foreign applicants	<i>Number of applicants</i>	933	889	67	63	9	1961

	Share (%) of all applicants	47.6%	45.3%	3.4%	3.2%	0.5%	100.0%
Total	Number of applicants	1056	1017	73	70	12	2228
	Share (%) of all applicants	47.4%	45.6%	3.3%	3.1%	0.5%	100.0%

Source: Survey of Master's applicants

Question: In your opinion, how clear were the requirements in your application process to this Master's programme?

Graph 7.2.2: Ratings of the clarity of the application process by type of applicant



Source: Survey of Master's applicants

Question: In your opinion, how clear were the requirements in your application process to this Master's programme?

Table 7.2.3: Ratings of the ease of getting support from the university staff in the Master's application process

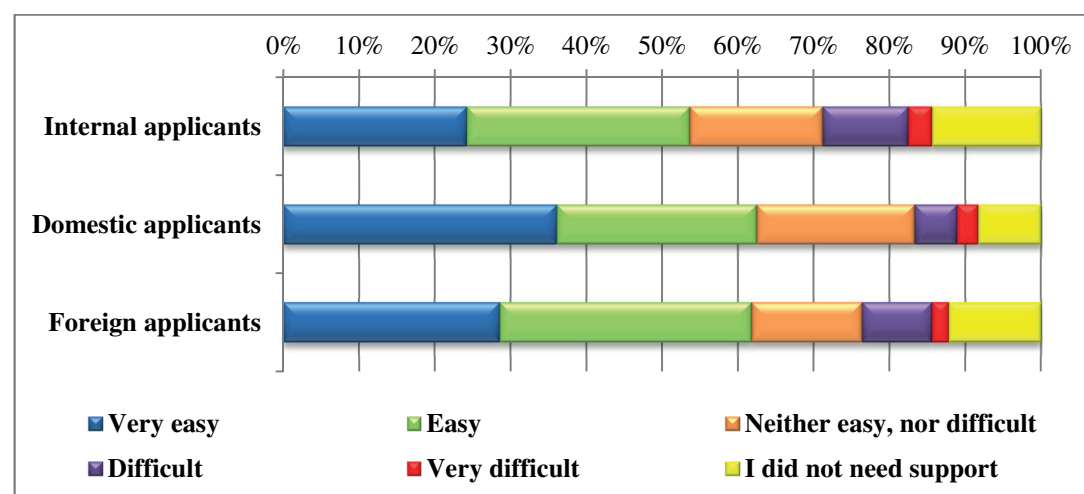
Type of applicants		Very easy	Easy	Neither easy, nor difficult	Difficult	Very difficult	I did not need support	Total
Internal applicants	<i>Number of applicants</i>	47	57	34	22	6	28	194
	<i>Share (%) of all applicants</i>	24.2%	29.4%	17.5%	11.3%	3.1%	14.4%	100.0%
Domestic applicants	<i>Number of applicants</i>	26	19	15	4	2	6	72
	<i>Share (%) of all applicants</i>	36.1%	26.4%	20.8%	5.6%	2.8%	8.3%	100.0%
Foreign applicants	<i>Number of applicants</i>	562	651	287	180	44	239	1963

	Share (%) of all applicants	28.6%	33.2%	14.6%	9.2%	2.2%	12.2%	100.0%
Total	Number of applicants	635	727	336	206	52	273	2229
	Share (%) of all applicants	28.5%	32.6%	15.1%	9.2%	2.3%	12.2%	100.0%

Source: Survey of Master's applicants

Question: During your application process at this Master's program, how easy or difficult was it to get support from staff if you had questions regarding your application?

Graph 7.2.3: Ratings of the ease of getting support from the university staff in the Master's application process



Source: Survey of Master's applicants

Question: During your application process at this Master's program, how easy or difficult was it to get support from staff if you had questions regarding your application?

The analysis of the vocabulary used by applicants to describe the admission process to the program shows that quite a number of students use very positive wording, labelling the process as “streamlined”, “fast”, “effective”, “very professional”, “smooth”, “easy”, “friendly”, “great”, and “transparent”.

Nevertheless, while the overall assessment is rather positive, the respondents do list a number of areas where improvements would be welcome, areas that coincide to some extent with those mentioned by the coordinators themselves.

Quite a few applicants listed the time aspect, underlining that the notification period (and therefore the assessment period) could be shorter, and that programs could communicate more effectively with the applicants during the assessment period, as evident in the following quotes:

“I think the status of the application can be conveyed automatically at certain time intervals.”

“No the application is straight forward they could indicate what date the results will be out. I am still waiting to find out if I got accepted.”

“The delay in procedure should be faster.”

“The waiting period is too long. Rather have the application running time shorter and do a selection right-away (i.e. the following month).”

A number of respondents also highlighted a number of potential improvements of a more technical nature, such as better programming and functioning of the online admission form, running the applications online and not on paper (which seems very costly for some students and can delay the process), updating the website so that outdated information about the program is eliminated and no false promises are made.

A recurrent theme in the applicants' responses are the admission criteria themselves, and especially the use of grades and past educational performance as a proxy for the quality of an applicant. Several of the respondents are sceptical about the appropriateness of these criteria and recommend the use of other tools to assess the general academic competencies of applicants and be able to improve the process, as the following quotes illustrate:

“Your bachelors percentage is the important one to get admission here.”

“The admission for my programme went easily. But I will explain here some of the problems. The problem with German Universities is that they require very good grades in Bachelors for giving admission into Masters. The students with only good grades end up with getting admission and the students with average grades don't get admission. But the problem here is the students with average grade might also have very good knowledge and talent which may not have been reflected in grades.”

“University should check the skills of students and not check grades. Grades can be low due to students illness during exams. But skills can never be hidden.”

“The university gives admission only for those who has high grade, so this is very bad.”

Still with regards to the criteria, several respondents also emphasised the need for more flexibility, i.e. adapting the requirements to the situation of each applicant, such as no longer demanding a language certificate if the respective student has already completed a Bachelor's degree in English in a native speaker country, or valuing more work experience and not only past degrees.

Despite these suggestions, the stark majority of the applicants seems to have full trust in the ability of the admission committees to select the best candidates, which would explain the strikingly-positive assessment of admission processes, as the following quote underlines:

“The process was a bit time consuming, but due to the fact that the quota is limited to 25 students a semester, it showed that the university was eager to select the most fitting students.”

8. Conclusions

As announced in the initial sections, the main purpose of this report and related surveys was to gather empirical evidence for and/or against the hypothesis on which the Mastermind Europe project is built, namely that current admission procedures at Master's level in Europe are generally more restrictive for external applicants than they are for internal students and that because of this restrictiveness it is generally more difficult for foreign and domestic applicants to be admitted to a Master's program.

More specifically, evidence was sought for three related sub-hypotheses, namely:

1. that the processing of application files from foreign and domestic applicants would pose more challenges to admission officers than those of internal candidates, making the fair evaluation of external applicants more cumbersome and subjective.
2. that these challenges in 'making sense' of the applications of externals would lead to a lower success rate in the Master's application process for foreign and domestic applicants than for internal candidates, and
3. that because the application process may be more cumbersome for external students, this experience would also impact the way in which externals perceive the process of admissions at Master's level, determining them to, on average, more negatively assess the admission processes compared to internal candidates.

Through the explorations done in the previous sections of the report, we gathered a number of important findings for the testing of the hypotheses.

The majority of Master's programs (almost 70%) have selective admissions, while less than a third of programs organise open admissions. Therefore more than two thirds of programs are passible to experience the biggest challenges related to the admission of a diverse pool of applicants as from within this diversity the admission officers had to not only accept "all candidates that qualify" (open admissions) but to find the "best candidates amongst all that qualify" (selective admissions).

We also learned that indeed admission processes at Master's level in Europe are still primarily based on "diploma recognition", the prior degree (94.7%) and the transcript of records (68.4%) being in the top 3 admission criteria used in the application process of most programs (along the admission form). These are also the criteria that seem to make most of a difference in the selection process, i.e. the requirements for which higher values or scores provide a competitive advantage, most often mentioned being the GPA (in 42.5% of programs), the prior degree (35.8%) and the transcript of records (33.5%).

At the same time, it is clear from the analysis that the admission criteria most often used at the Master's level – the prior degree and the grades (the transcript of records) – are also the requirements that pose most problems during the selection process when treating the files of foreign applicants, and to a lesser extent of domestic applicants. Coordinators often struggle with making sense of the prior education (the Bachelor's or equivalent degree) and previous educational performance (grades) of external candidates, and particularly of foreign applicants. Only 14.0% of coordinators declared they encountered no challenges at all in processing the application files of foreign students.

The high occurrence of the word family of "compare" when coordinators were asked to talk about their admission process and the challenges they face in this respect demonstrates that Master's degrees are still very much designed after the predecessor Bachelor's degree in the same institution.

This shows that very often the admission committees are using the institution's own Bachelor's degree, curriculum, and student profile as baselines for assessing the fitness of external degrees and applicants.

As a result, almost two thirds of coordinators (63.8%) stated that it is "more difficult for applicants with a prior qualification (Bachelor or equivalent) from an institution abroad to be accepted to my program than it is for applicants with a prior qualification awarded by my institution". In almost a third of programs this difficulty is encountered also with regards to domestic applicants (30.0%). At the same time, in almost half of the programs the internal applicants – those with a Bachelor's degree from the same institution – are automatically admitted to the Master's (46.2%). This is while, on average in about half of the programs more than half of the Bachelor's graduates continued with a Master's in the same institution, making this further proof that in many institutions the Master's is the natural continuation of the predecessor Bachelor's.

Given these challenges it is perhaps not surprising that the more external a candidate is the more his/her success rate seems to decrease, on average, in the application process. The average application success rate of internal applicants is 72.0%, decreasing to 64.5% for domestic applicants and further down to 53.5% foreign applicants, with great variation also by region. We would theoretically imagine there could be further variation of success rates within the group of foreign applicants – with, for example, applicants that have completed their prior education in another European country showing higher success rates than those with prior education outside of Europe – but the data collected via the two surveys does not support further testing of this hypothesis. This could nevertheless make the object of further research.

At the same time, the coordinators are quite positive in the assessment of their application process (although they generally lack comparative information from similar programs), as well as in the assessment of national and institutional regulations on admission, pointing to the fact that regulations might not necessarily hinder admission processes, or not be perceived as hindering them in any case.

Furthermore, we do not find any striking differences between the ratings of internal, domestic and foreign students when it comes to the fairness, clarity of and the ease of interaction with staff from the program during the admission process at Master's level. All three categories of students provide an overtly positive assessment of the admission processes, and we believe this is comprehensible (and therefore that our last sub-hypothesis was unrealistic), as students are able to reflect on the process mostly based on their own experience and would rarely, if at all, have any comparative information on how easy or difficult it is for other types of applicants.

At the same time the applicants do advance quite a number of proposals for improving the admission procedures, and a share of the applicants specifically questions the use of grades as the best criterion to assess the quality of applicants. In general though, applicants show great trust in the capacity of staff at the program level to select the best candidates.

We regard all these findings as largely validating our hypothesis and confirming that because of the "diploma recognition" model followed by most of the English-taught Master's programs, foreign applicants have fewer chances at being admitted at Master's level compared to internal and domestic applicants, although the foreigners represent for most programs the prime (if not the exclusive) target group.

We see thus room for further alignment between the recruitment and educational objectives of the Master's and the Master's admissions. Moving towards the assessment of competencies in the admission process could be the way forward, such a need being clearly felt by some of the

coordinators and Master's applicants, although, based on our data we cannot say that this is yet the majority.