

Exchange student survey

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Exchange student survey was undertaken as one of the two actions within Victorious to describe the experiences regarding ICT-based services as seen through the eyes of a visiting student. The survey was preceded by student interviews (both the ones being back from the visit and the one just visiting) in nine Victorious partner universities in Fall 2005. The interviews were conducted with an aim to test and clarify the issues we had in mind. The interviews gave us also more in-depth understanding and an opportunity to explain and interpret data we got from the student survey. Besides giving oral answers to the questions, the limited number of students participating in interviews also fulfilled the pilot version of the questionnaire and gave feedback to the clarity and comprehensiveness of the questions.

I Method and procedure

The main survey was conducted in Spring 2006. The survey was completed online after an email alert routed to students via their universities Erasmus Coordinators; national, local and European student associations. The letter of invitation to participate in the survey and the questionnaire were sent to Coimbra Group universities and to other university networks such as European Universities Association (EUA), Academic Cooperation Association (ACA), Santander Group, Compostela Group, UNICA and European Association of International Education (EAIE). We also asked several student networks - the European Student Association (ESIB), Erasmus Student Network (ESN) and AEGEE as well as National Socrates Agencies. The project partners also disseminated the questionnaire individually at a national level via Erasmus coordinators.

The questionnaire was made up of twenty-six questions grouped into three broad areas. Students were asked what digital services at their host university they could access before they arrived, what they had available to them during their visit, and what digital services were still accessible after their stay abroad. We asked about the quality of these services and the support for their use. They were also questioned about the continuity of access during transitional periods (when moving from home to host and from host to home). We gathered information about them (age, gender), their home and host universities plus subjects of study. The questionnaire was anonymous but to enter the prize draw we required an email address. The students were asked to fill in a questionnaire online, and offered the option to participate in a prize draw. It would take them approximately 20 minutes to fill in the questionnaire. A static PDF of the survey can be viewed at http://www.coimbra-group.be/victorious/05_publication.htm.

II Participants

2378 students from 32 countries provided valid responses. Regarding the home country, there was a lower response rate from countries where the project partners were not represented (e.g. France) and a higher rate from Victorious partner countries e.g. UK, Finland and others. Regarding the host country, the sample represented quite well the general major destinations of students in the current Erasmus population. Spain was the most popular destination for students both in Erasmus statistics as well as in Victorious survey, France in the second place, followed by Germany and the United Kingdom. Although the exchange could take place within other programmes besides Erasmus, we used Erasmus data for comparison as it was systematically available for all countries. See Figures 1-2 and Tables 1-2.

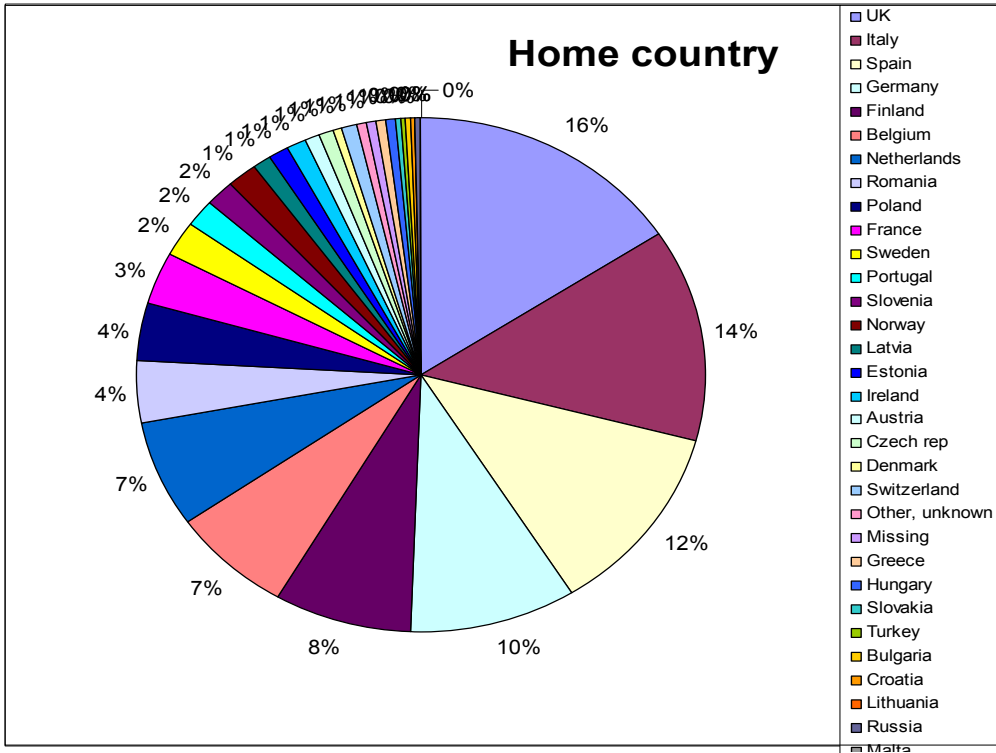


Figure 1. Home country of respondents

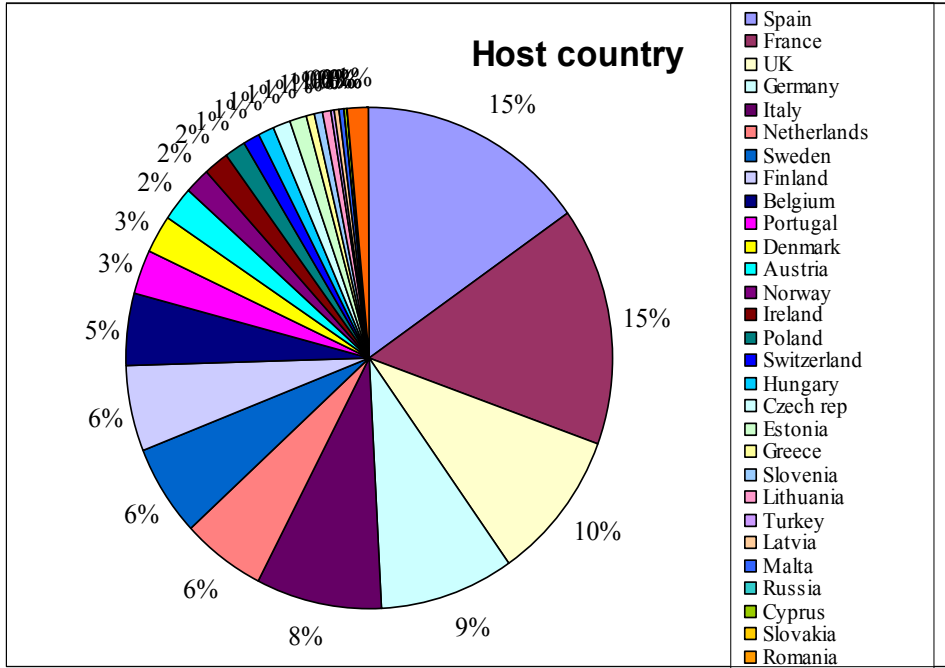


Figure 2. Host country of respondents

Table 1. Home country of visiting students: Statistics from Erasmus student exchange and Victorious survey.

Only countries with bigger % of respondents in Victorious survey are shown

	ERASMUS 2004-2005	Victorious survey
Altogether	144 037	2378
Germany	15,6 %	10%
France	15,0 %	3%
Spain	14,5%	12%
UK	5,0%	16%
Italy	11,4%	14%
Belgium	3,4%	7%
Netherlands	3,3%	6%
Finland	2,7%	7%

Table 2. Host country of visiting students: Erasmus student exchange and Victorious survey.

Only countries with bigger % of respondents in Victorious survey are shown

	ERASMUS 2004-2005	Victorious survey
Germany	12,0%	9%
France	14,2 %	15%
Spain	17,7%	15%
UK	11,3%	10%
Italy	9,3%	8%
Belgium	3,3%	5%
Netherlands	4,8%	5%
Finland	2,7%	6%

The majority (82%) of respondents were 21 to 25 years-old, 7% were 16-20 and 9% 26-20. Only few were over 30 years-old. The male and female ratio was reasonably in agreement with the general student population (64% female against 36% male).

Sixty percent of the respondents were studying for a Bachelor (first) degree, 33% for a Master and 5% for other qualification. Thirty six percent of respondents were studying social sciences at their home university, with approximately 21% studying arts and 24% science and engineering. Only 4% pursued

clinical studies. See Figure 3. The majority took only courses during their visit (75%). 12% did research (some of them together with taking courses) and 6% did internship (some of them also did this besides taking courses). See Figure 4. Fifty percent of the respondents stayed in the host university 3-6 months, 26% 6-9 months and 22% more than 9 months.

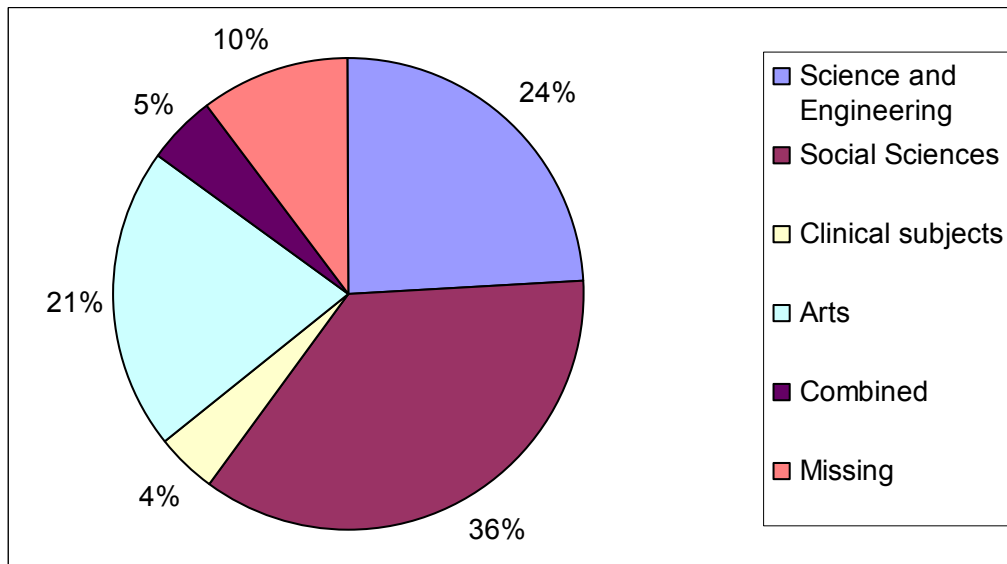


Figure 3. Respondents' main subject at home

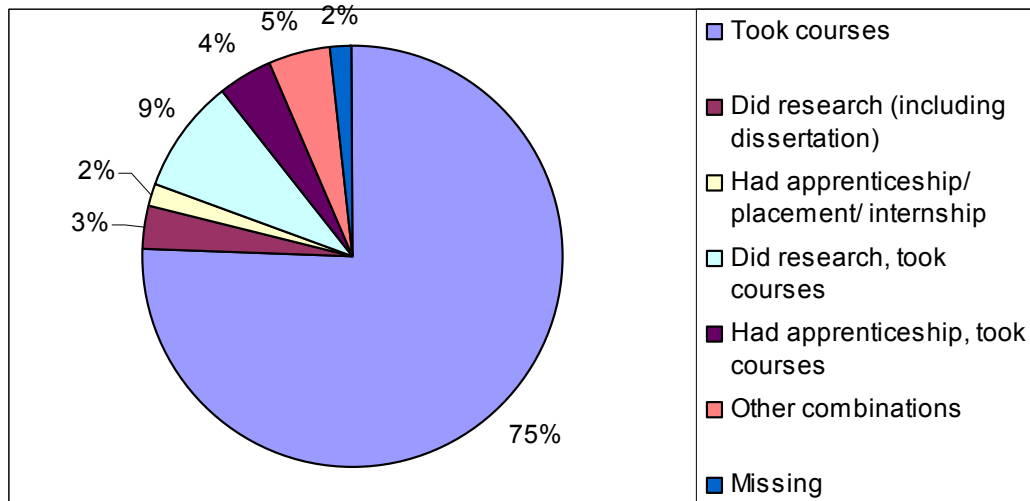


Figure 4. Respondents' main activity during the visit

III Results

3.1. Services available online before the visit

Almost all students had sought information about their host university on the Internet before they left their home university. This means that Internet is an important source of information (besides personal contacts, booklets and International Student Office) for this group and universities should take care of the information and services their visitors can get from there. However, not all students could get all kind of information from Internet. The most basic information – course details – could only be checked by less than 2/3 of the students while only ca 15% could register to the courses. All in all, 'checking things on-line' was accessible to ca 50% of students and 'doing things on-line' (login, register etc) for

ca 20%. Which means that there is quite a big gap between the passive opportunity to see information and interactive opportunity to get some things done via Internet. See Figure 5, the percentage show positive answer to the question “What services and resources were you able to access online before you arrived at your host university?”.

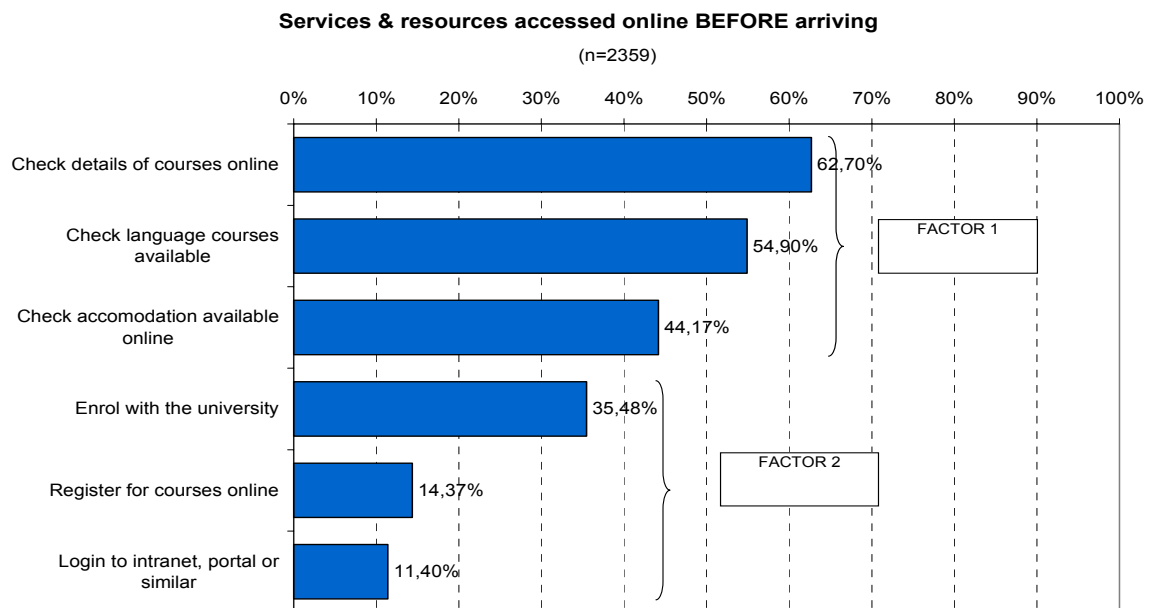


Figure 5. Services and resources accessible online before visit.

Note: Factor 1 - “checking things online”, Factor 2 - “doing things online”

Universities in five of the countries that were most represented in the survey (each of which had been visited by 190-350 respondents) were compared for their provision of information about student access to services. The following statistically significant differences appeared in one-way ANOVA. In general, the UK universities appeared to be the best providers of information online (passive information) and French universities seemed to make the weakest provision. Only language course information was better available in Italy and Germany. See Figure 6. Regarding the active services – ‘doing things online’, only login to Intranet was somewhat better available in UK than in other countries.

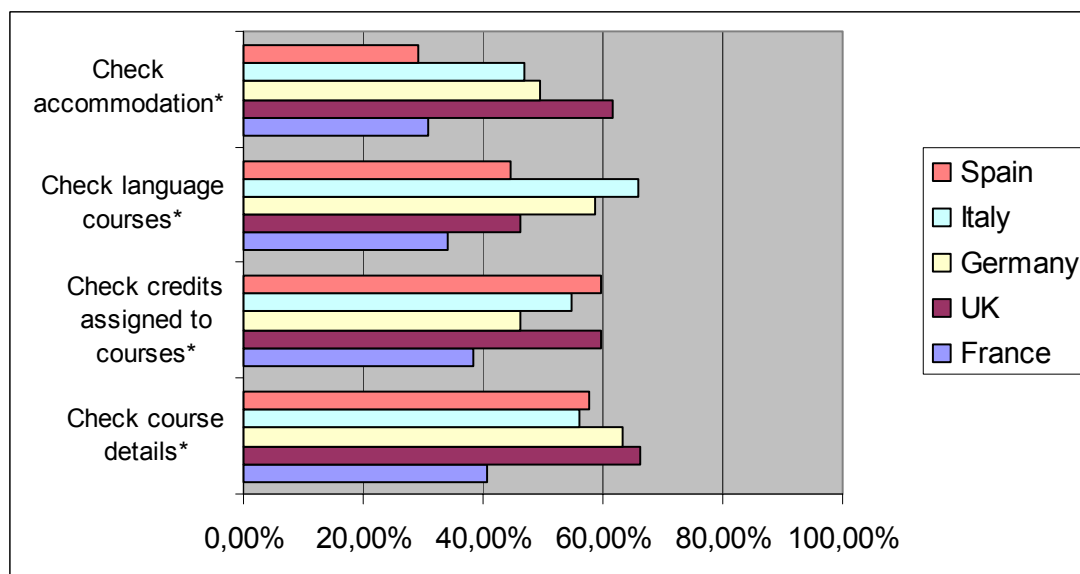


Figure 6. Percentage of students who could access information online before visit, comparison across five bigger host countries.

Note: Statistically significant differences are marked with *

However, these are generalisations and experiences varied greatly between universities, and between departments in the same university.

The questionnaire results showed that language was an issue. Most of the institutions provided language courses – 86% of respondents said language courses were available - but when the institution provided courses taught in English, students may have expected that other services would be provided in English too.

The short written answers in the survey from students were generally quite positive. The students valued good information about social events upon arrival: *“Also information on social events and student organisations in host university”* and the ability to contact teachers before they arrived: *“Informations about laboratories and researches; works and contacts of professors”*. Negative comments concerned the information being out of date: *“The information online to which I have had access were all relative to the previous academic year, the most part of it were mistakes”* or not in electronic format: *“None at all: completely out of touch with modern technology! Everything was paper forms.”*

3.2. Services available during the visit

Most students (70%) took a personal PC or laptop on their study visit or bought it when in host university. However, over 20% said that they were not able to connect them to the internet. This may partly explain why 75% of students reported that they used university computers. See Figure 7 for overview of the usage of university computer services by exchange students.

Approximately half the students considered access to PCs and the Internet to be a problem to some extent, and ca 20% reported that the number of PCs or opening hours of PC rooms was as a major problem. See Figure 8. Students were required to pay for only a few services, which were mainly printing services or WIFI access in dormitory. This did not seem to bother them unduly, probably because this is also the case in their home university.’ When facing a problem, 57% of the students said that they could get assistance, half of them face to face, 17% via e-mail and 14% from web-page.

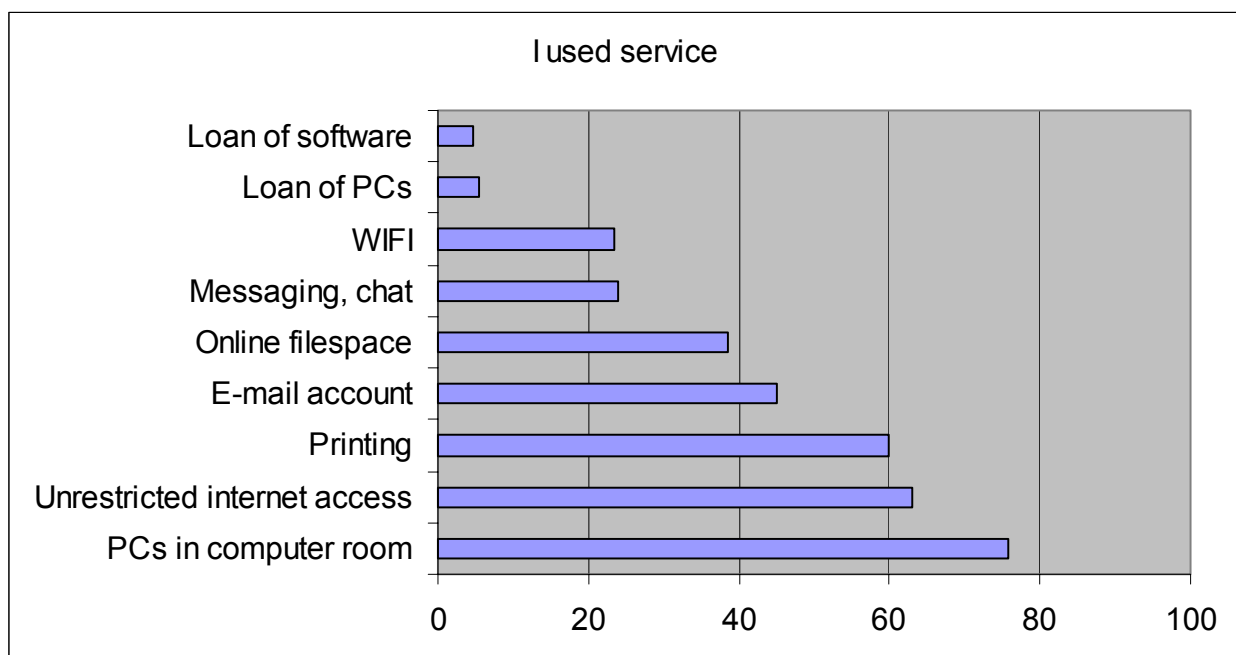


Figure 7. Percentage of students using computer services at host university.

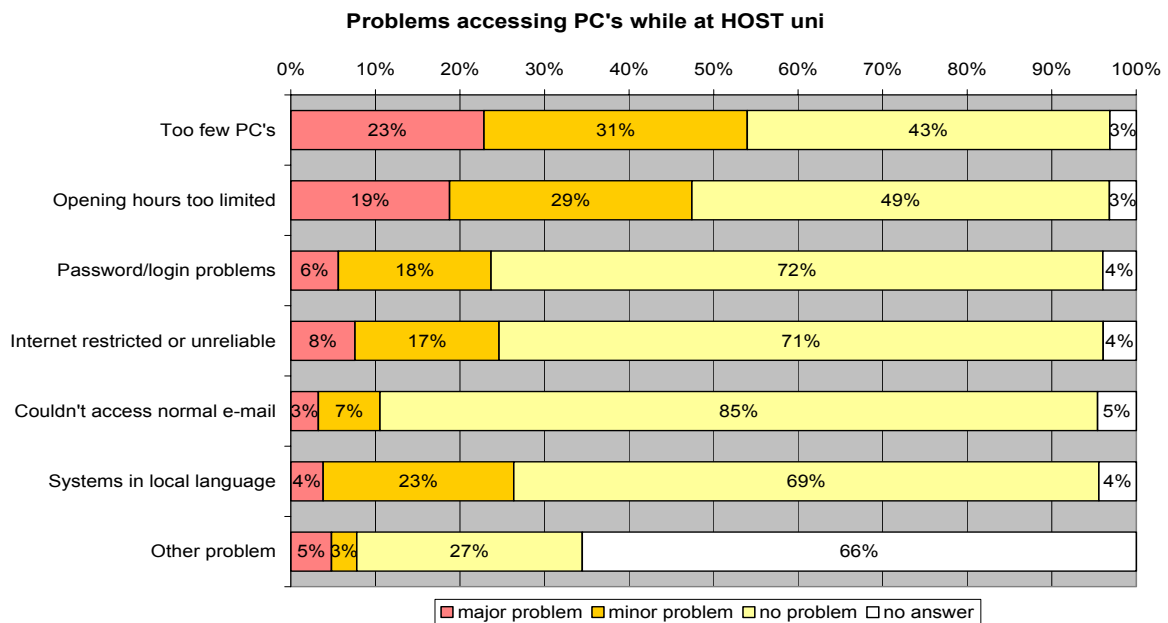


Figure 8. Problems accessing PCs and Internet while at host university

Students were asked if online learning materials or information about any course that they took were made available to them during their stay at their host university. Ca 2/3 (68%) said that such materials or information were available, 26% said the information was not available, 6% said “do not know”. It is not much more than the percentage of students (63%) who were able to check course information before arrival. This might indicate to the fact that ca 1/4 to 1/3 of universities have real problems making their course information (and materials) available online.

Those who said that at least one course provided some online information or material, answered following questions about the availability of different kind of information and whether they used it. Again passive information – course information (64%), learning materials (54%) and grades online (34%) were most often available and among those who had this opportunity ca 2/3 also used it. Interactive services (online tests/exams, collaboration) were available for ca 20-23% of students. See also Figure 9.

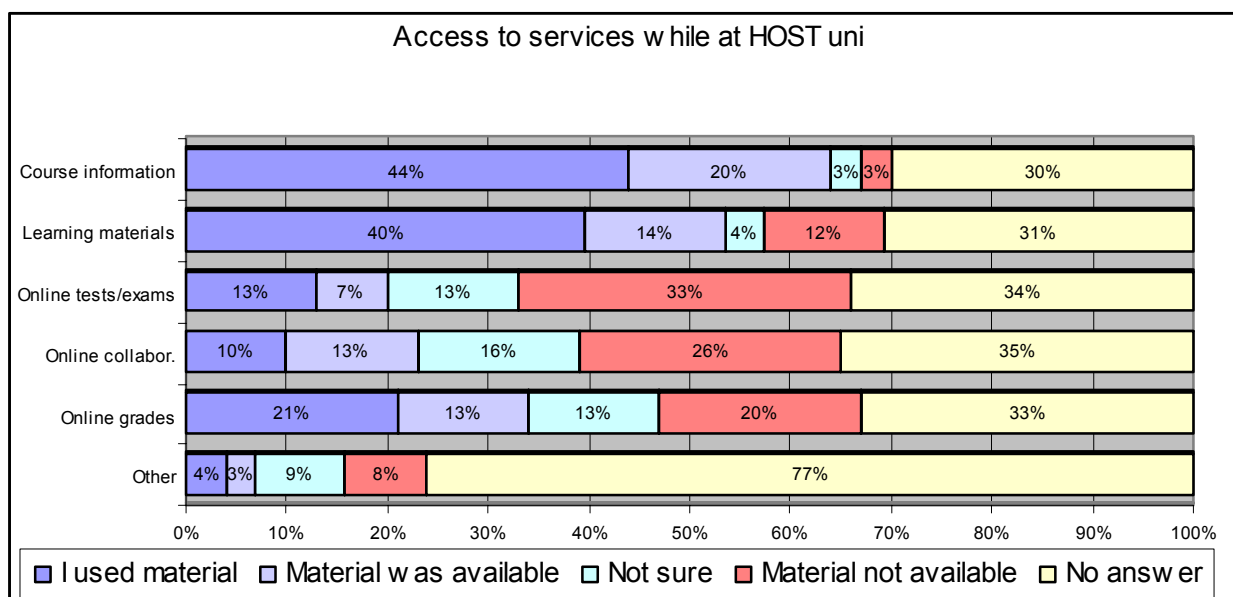


Figure 9. Availability of different online materials in some or all courses during the stay at the host institution.

Note: No answer means that none of the courses had any online information or materials. Only those (68%) evaluated different services who answered positively to the previous question about the availability of online information or materials in any of courses they took.

The main reason (13%) for not using online materials if these were available was their non-relevance for one's studies. Technical problems (couldn't login to the system, system not working, no access to PC or Internet) were met by ca 3% of students and commented as follows: *"I did use them but only the last month when I finally got my account 😊". "I couldn't use it because erasmus aren't linked to the teachers' directory, so we couldn't see what they put online."* As said already above, some students felt the difference between exchange and local students in getting online information: *"Local students could see their test results online etc. Erasmus student didn't have this possibility."* An additional problem that came out only in open answers (as it was not directly asked in the questionnaire) as the main concern regarding access to online resources was language: *"platform was in local language", "they were meant for home students (...) and were not translated into English", "material was in Spanish, and my language skills weren't good enough."*

Regarding library services, only 25-50% of respondents used the electronic services, mostly the electronic catalogue. Electronic journals, borrowing materials online and access to databases were used by a quarter of respondents and another 20% reported that these were available. A surprising 41% of students did not know whether electronic journals, subject-related bibliographic databases or an online borrowing record existed in their host university library. Fewer students, around 20%, did not know whether the library catalogue was online. Most of the students did not know if other services existed and whether they could use them. Importantly, some 30% of students continued to use the host university online library after returning to their home university. See also Figure 10.

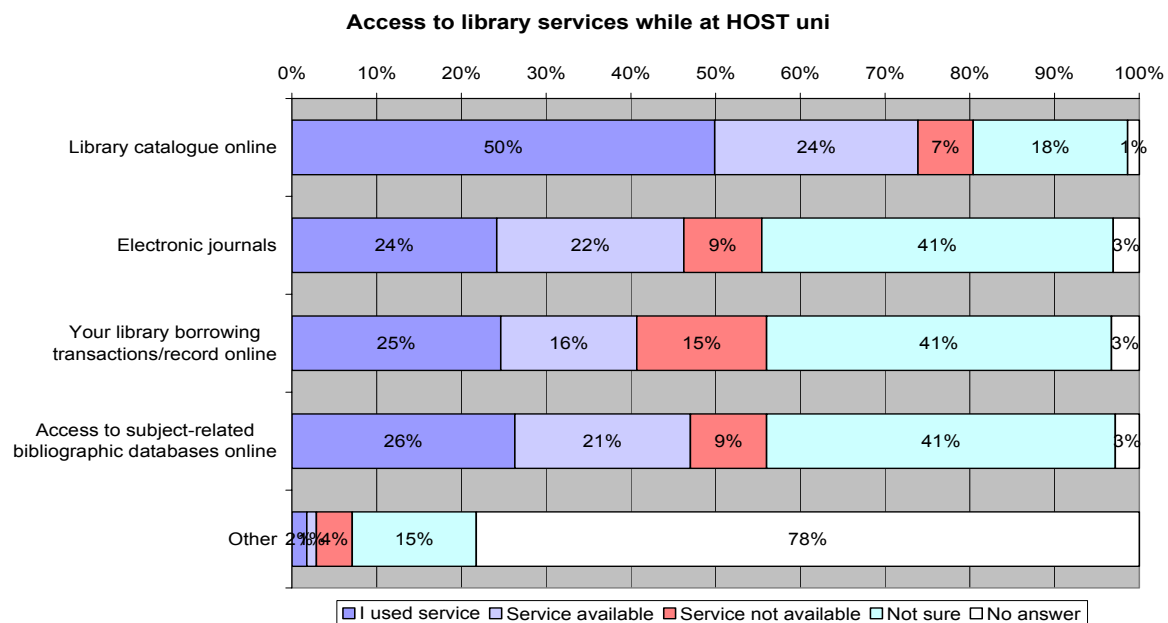


Figure 10. Access to library services during the stay at the host institution.

3.3. Continuing access to services

Access to the home university from the host university was not a major problem. Around two third of students could still access their home university email and digital library, and half could access their online student record. Access to online filespace was more of a problem, with only a quarter of respondents able to access these. However, this access to home services has to be considered in the light of what the home university offers, as some students did report rather low levels of home university services (see Figure 11).

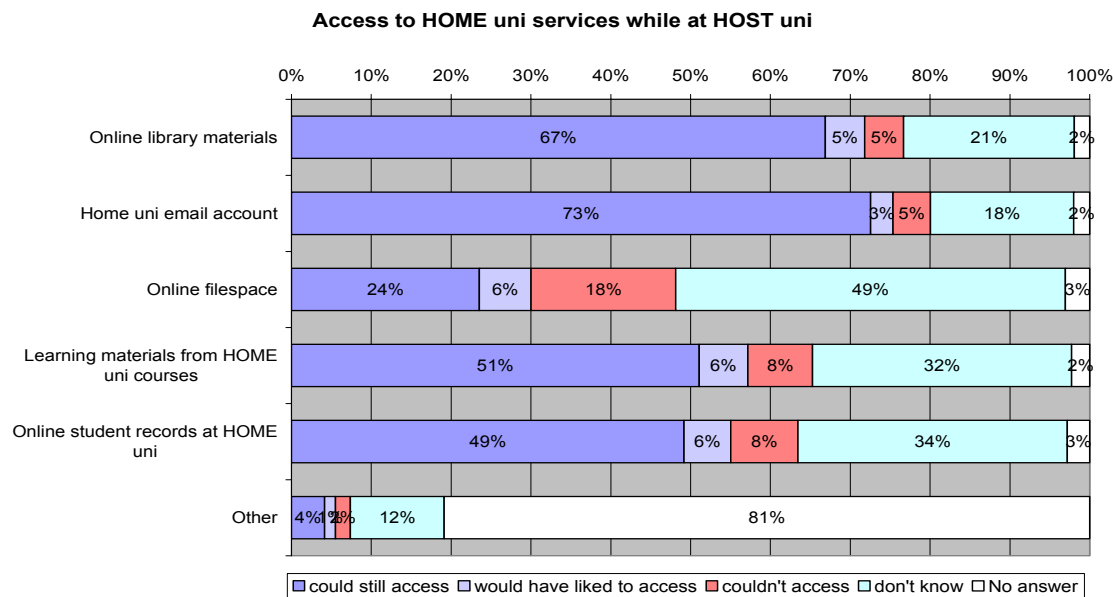


Figure 11. Continuing access to home university services while at host university

Many students had little knowledge of what digital services of their host university were, or would be, available to them after their return to their home university. Forty to fifty percent did not know this for the digital library, email, saved files and their student record online. Ability to access these services varied between 13% and 30% depending on the service, an average of 20% said the services were not available (Figure 12).

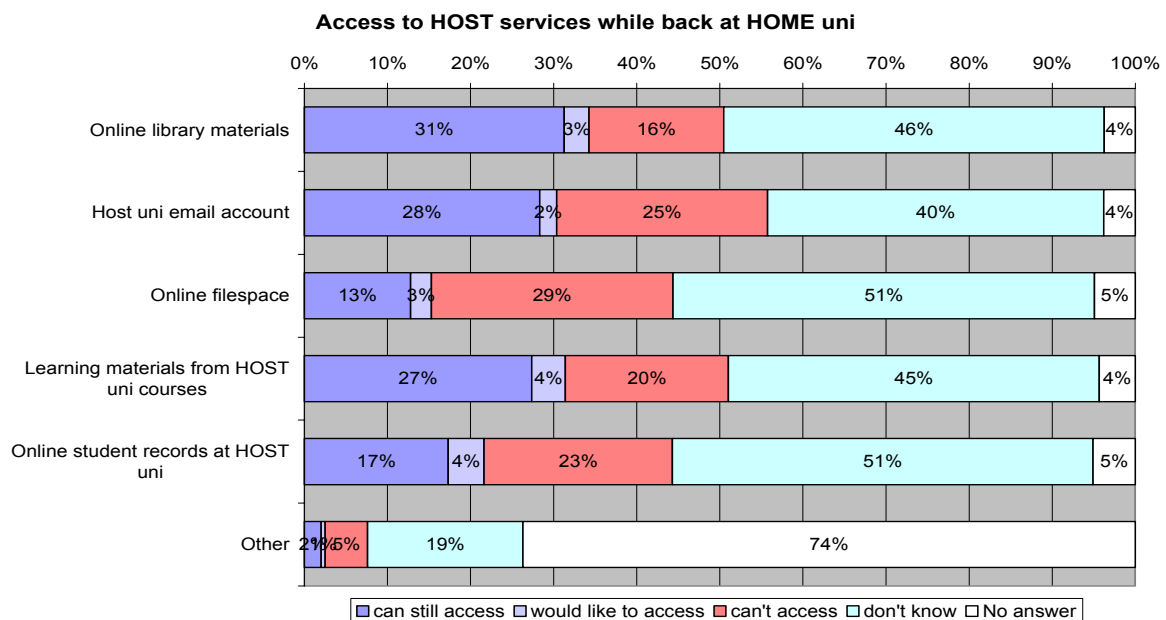


Figure 12. Continuing access to host university services when back at home institution

IV Conclusions

The survey was a valuable source to get students own views about the provision of ICT-based services during their visit to the host institution. Relatively good representativeness of the sample regarding the host country, gender of students and their subject of study, allows us to draw some basic conclusions.

Almost all students accessed host university via Internet for getting information about studies or practical matters regarding their stay. Thus, although internet-based services may not make the most important element in exchange students' experiences, this is still relevant for quality exchange. Several people have said that preparation for the exchange (incl mainly information gathering about the studies at host institution) is of utmost importance for the successful visit. But not as many students as have accessed the host university via Internet before the visit, managed to get even the most basic information about the studies – course information - online. While this was the case of 63% of students before the visit, not much more - 64% got course information online during the stay. Regarding passive information or access to materials, in average ca 50% could get this information (both before and during the stay), while interactive opportunities (e.g. register to courses before the visit or using collaboration tools during the stay) were much more limited – all in all ca 20% could use these.

Regarding student mobility one of the major problems is recognising the studies done in abroad. In principle, the courses that students intend to take should be agreed beforehand and students should sign a learning agreement before the visit. It is quite obvious that this would require accurate course information and preferably an opportunity to register to the courses before the visit. Only then can the students be sure that they can really take the course.

While at the host institution, one of the main problems for 20-50% of students related to access to PCs and the internet. In the case of online services at the host university, problems related to language; sometimes a limited availability of some services to exchange students; and lack of support (with 43% reporting little or no support).

Online library services seemed to be in place but only 25-50% of students used these. Regarding most of services (besides electronic library catalogue) – 40% did not know about them and another 10-15% said these did not exist. Whether the low awareness is a problem of students, library or courses that do not require usage of these sources is impossible to say. Several students said in the interviews that they managed most of their studies locally – on the Faculty or department level and thus did not need central library services.

Regarding continuous access to information and services while at host institution to home and when back to home university to host institution, it is quite clear that students keep better contact with their home institution. Ca 1/5 of students complained about the unavailability of online filespace, lack of other services were missed by ca 5-8% of students. Much more students loose contact to host institution when back at home – at least ca 20-25% cannot see their grades nor access course materials. Quite a number of students could not answer this question while being probably still in the middle of their visit.