

The postgraduate students

The International Postgraduate Students Mirror contains a number of questions about the students' backgrounds, how they spend their time and support themselves and the motives that prompted their studies. This section contains an account of the responses to these questions. In this context it should be noted that the data from the four countries vary to some extent. The Swedish study does not include first-year postgraduate students, while these are included in the other three countries.

Gender

In Catalonia, Finland and Ireland the ratio of male and female postgraduate students was more or less equal. In Sweden in the spring of 2003 (which is when the Swedish study was undertaken) there were somewhat more male postgraduate students (54 %).⁸ However the proportions of women and men vary in the different subject fields.

Subject field and gender

In terms of the total distribution of postgraduate students over the different subject fields there are also certain differences between the countries (figure 1). The clearest differences are that in Ireland there is a relatively large proportion of postgraduate students taking Science, Mathematics and Computing, and also that in Sweden it is relatively common to take postgraduate programmes in Health and Welfare.⁹

8. In each country there was a slightly higher response rate for women than for men, which resulted in a somewhat larger proportion of women in the data – Catalonia 54 %, Finland 56 %, Ireland 52 % and Sweden 51 %.

9. The data from each country have been weighted on the basis of the actual distribution of postgraduate students in each subject field (register information). See technical report at www.hsv.se/international_mirror.

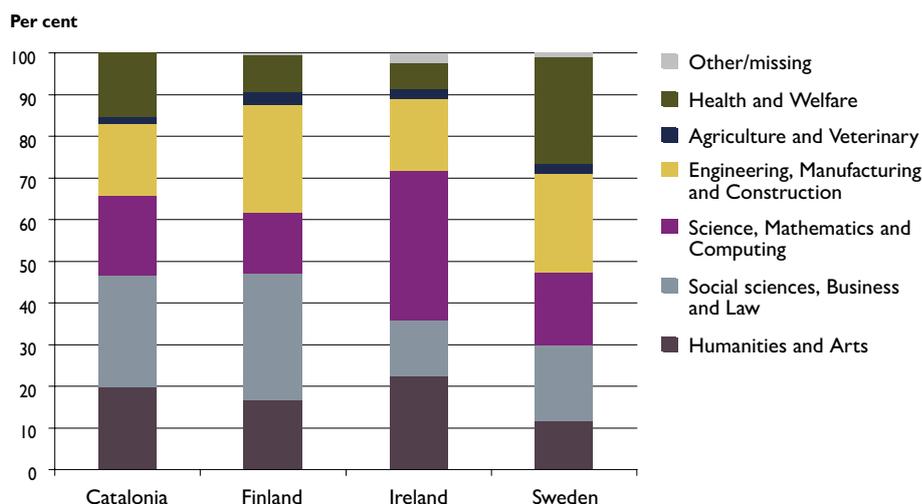


Figure 1. Percentage respondents within different subject fields by country.

Among the postgraduate students responding to the questionnaire the distribution of women and men in the various subject fields reveals a certain pattern (figure 2).

In all four countries it is clearly more frequent for men to study at postgraduate level in Engineering, Manufacturing and Computing, whereas women are more likely to take programmes in Health and Welfare. This means that men are evidently in the majority in Engineering, Manufacturing and Computing, whereas a clear majority of women are studying Health and Welfare.

There are also certain differences between the countries. Two examples are that in Sweden there is a more even balance between women and men in the Humanities and Arts than in the other three countries. In Finland women seem to form the majority in Social sciences, Business and Law.

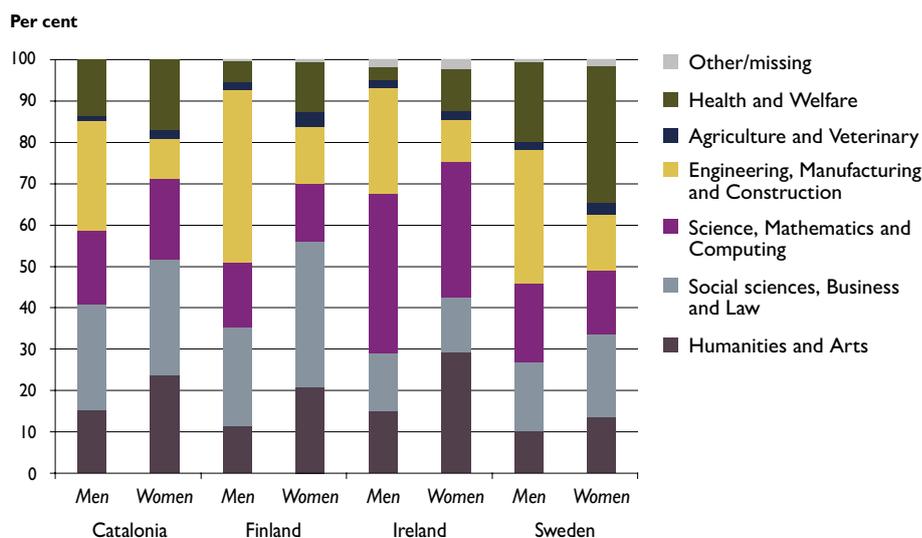


Figure 2. Percentage respondents within different subject fields by country and gender.

Age

The age distribution of those responding to the questionnaires suggests that postgraduate students are somewhat younger in Catalonia and Ireland compared to Finland and Sweden (figure 3). In Ireland 72 % of the postgraduate students are not yet 30 – in Sweden this proportion is 23 %. In both Finland and Sweden PhD students in the age group 20-24 are uncommon.

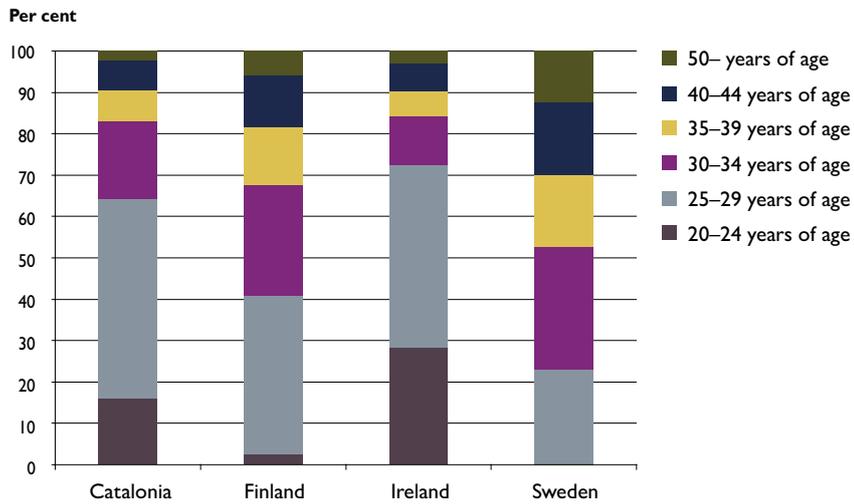


Figure 3. Percentage respondents within different age groups by country.

Activity – hours devoted to postgraduate studies

The number of hours devoted to their postgraduate studies reported by the students varies from country to country (figure 4). In Ireland 70 % of the students devote at least 30 hours a week to their studies, whereas 44 % do so in Catalonia, 48 % in Finland and 63 % in Sweden.

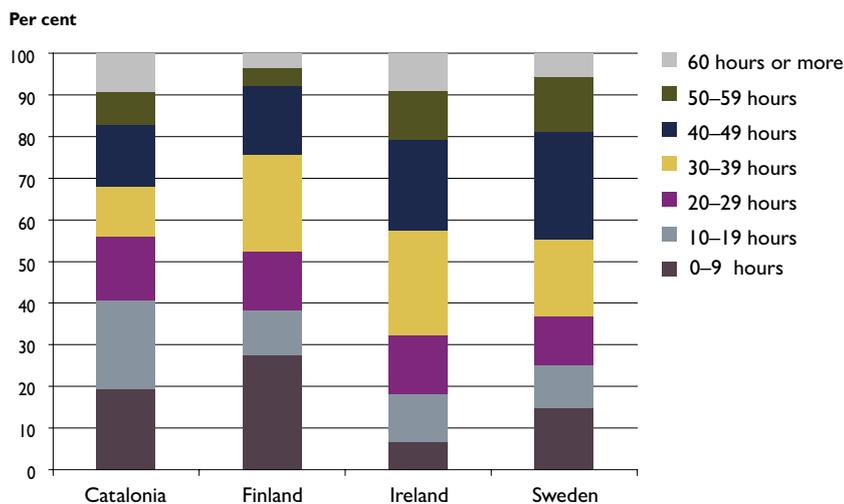


Figure 4. Distribution of hours devoted to postgraduate studies by country.

In Finland relatively many students have a low intensity of postgraduate study (expressed as a percentage of a full-time occupation), which is reflected in the proportion of students who devote less than 10 hours a week to their studies.

There are clear differences between different subject fields (table 8). The greatest number of hours per week can be found in Science, Mathematics and Computing – in Ireland 84 % of the students in these areas devote at least 30 hours per week to their studies. Many of the postgraduate students in Ireland are taking programmes in these areas, which to some extent explains the relatively high overall figures reported from Ireland in this respect.

The corresponding figure for Catalonia is 52 %, Finland 69 % and 78 % for Sweden, so there are obvious differences between the countries in this area.

It is not as common for students in the Humanities and Art to devote at least 30 hours a week to their postgraduate studies – 37 % do so in Catalonia, 48 % in Finland and Ireland and 57 % in Sweden.

In the Social sciences, Business and Law the number of hours spent studying each week is relatively low. In Catalonia 42 % of the students devote at least 30 hours a week to study, in Finland 40 %, 46 % in Ireland and 59 % in Sweden.

Subject field	Catalonia	Finland	Ireland	Sweden
Humanities and Art	37	48	48	57
Social sciences, Business and Law	42	40	46	59
Science, Mathematics and Computing	52	69	84	78
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	55	42	76	64
Health and Welfare	31	51	65	57
Total (all subject fields)	44	48	68	63

Table 8. Percentage respondents who devote 30 hours or more per week to postgraduate studies by country and subject field.

There is a link between the number of hours spent on study and the age of the postgraduate students. The older they are, the fewer hours they devote to their studies, which means that postgraduate students with “low” activity are older than those whose activity is “high”(table 9). This is particularly apparent in Finland, Ireland and Sweden, where the proportion of postgraduate students who are at least 40 is considerably higher among those who pursue their studies less actively.

Hours per week devoted to PhD studies	Catalonia			Finland		
	–39 years	40 years–	Total	–39 years	40 years–	Total
Less than 30 hours	89	11	100	72	28	100
30 hours or more	93	7	100	92	8	100
Hours per week devoted to PhD studies	Ireland			Sweden		
	–39 years	40 years–	Total	–39 years	40 years–	Total
Less than 30 hours	83	17	100	53	47	100
30 hours or more	93	7	100	80	20	100

Table 9. Respondents by age and number of hours devoted to postgraduate studies per week.

Reasons for postgraduate studies

In Finland, Ireland and Sweden the majority of the respondents state that their own interest in their subject has been the main reason for beginning postgraduate studies (figure 5). In Catalonia, on the other hand, most students say that the main reason was “to prepare for a career in teaching/research in higher education”.

In Catalonia considerably more students envisaged a continued career in higher education than in the other countries (see “Postgraduate students in Catalonia want to stay put”, p. 85).

The reason why somewhat more students in Finland have opted for “other” as their response is probably that the Finnish question was followed by a number of alternative responses that were not provided in the other countries and which have been grouped under this heading.

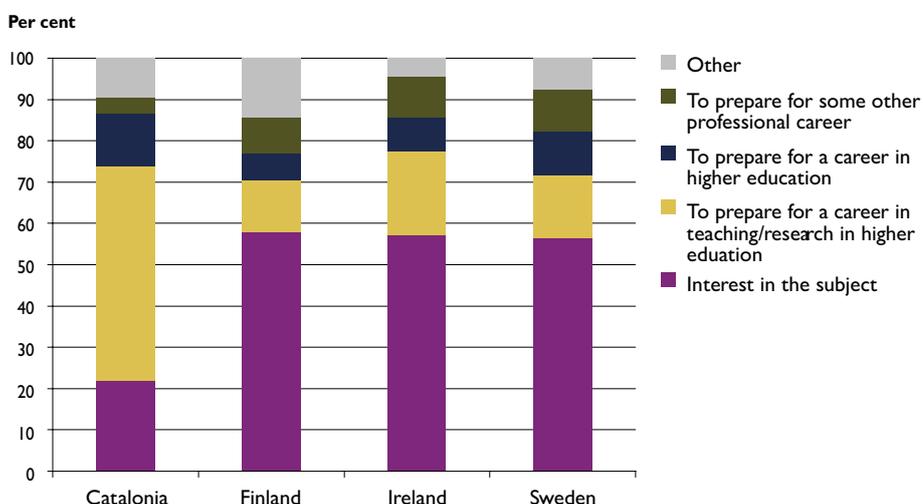


Figure 5. Distribution of reasons for postgraduate studies by country.

The proportion stating that their own interest in their subject has been the main reason for beginning postgraduate studies is considerably smaller in Catalonia in all subject fields (table 10). In all four countries it is students in the Humanities and Art that respond that their own interest in their subject was the main reason – about two out every three in Finland, Ireland and Sweden and one in three in Catalonia.

Subject field	Catalonia	Finland	Ireland	Sweden
Humanities and Art	31	63	64	69
Social sciences, Business and Law	18	56	53	56
Science, Mathematics and Computing	23	60	59	62
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	23	57	52	51
Health and Welfare	16	57	44	52
Total (all subject fields)	22	58	57	56

Table 10. Percentage respondents who state that their own interest in their subject has been the main reason for beginning postgraduate studies by country and subject field.

Type of thesis

In the two Nordic countries the most frequent thesis type consists of a collection of articles, whereas in Ireland and Catalonia it is more usual to write a monograph (figure 6).

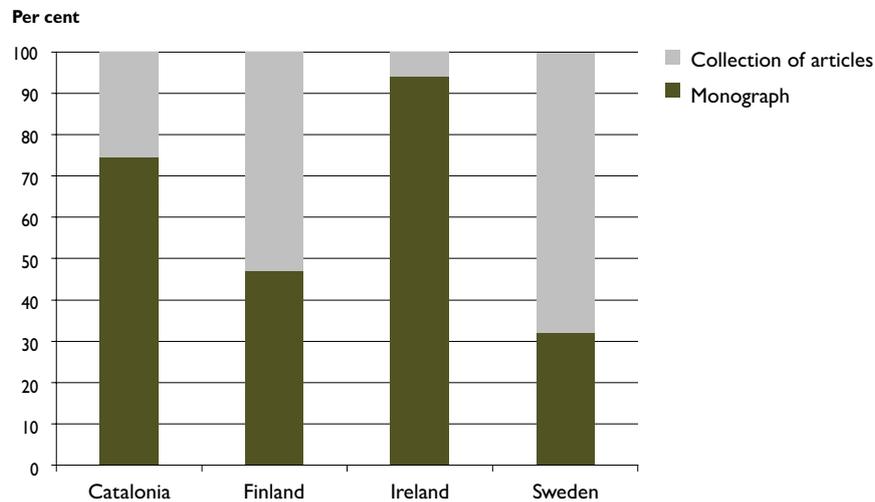


Figure 6. Distribution of types of thesis by country.

This pattern applies irrespective of the subject field studied (table II). A very clear difference can be seen in Science, Mathematics and Computing, and Health and Welfare, where almost all students in Ireland write monographs while this is uncommon in Finland and Sweden.

Subject field	Catalonia	Finland	Ireland	Sweden
Humanities and Art	97	86	98	90
Social sciences, Business and Law	85	64	93	62
Science, Mathematics and Computing	60	12	92	8
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	72	39	94	27
Health and Welfare	54	11	99	5
Total (all subject fields)	74	47	94	32

Table II. Percentage respondents who write monographs by country and subject field.

Selection of topic

About half of the respondents in Catalonia, Finland and Sweden state that they have themselves on the whole chosen the topic of their thesis, while somewhat fewer, 43 %, have done so in Ireland (figure 7). The lower share in Ireland is partly a result of the high numbers of students within Science, Mathematics and Computing, who, in all countries, to a lesser degree state that they have themselves chosen the topic of their thesis.

It is more frequent for students to choose their topic themselves in all four countries in Humanities and Arts and in Social Sciences, Business and Law,

72–82 %, whereas this is less common in the other subject fields, especially in Science, Mathematics and Computing, where most state instead that the topic has mainly been proposed by a supervisor or department (76–86 %).

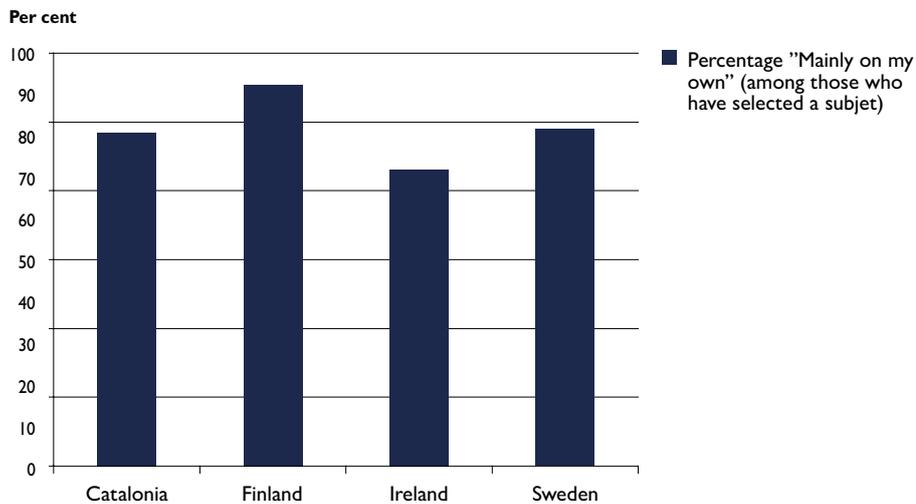


Figure 7. Percentage respondents who have themselves on the whole chosen the topic of their thesis by country.

Working methods

The majority of students who have chosen the subject of their thesis mainly work individually (figure 8). In Finland¹⁰, Sweden and Ireland about eight students out of ten claim that they mainly work on their own, while in Catalonia this applies to somewhat fewer, 56 %.

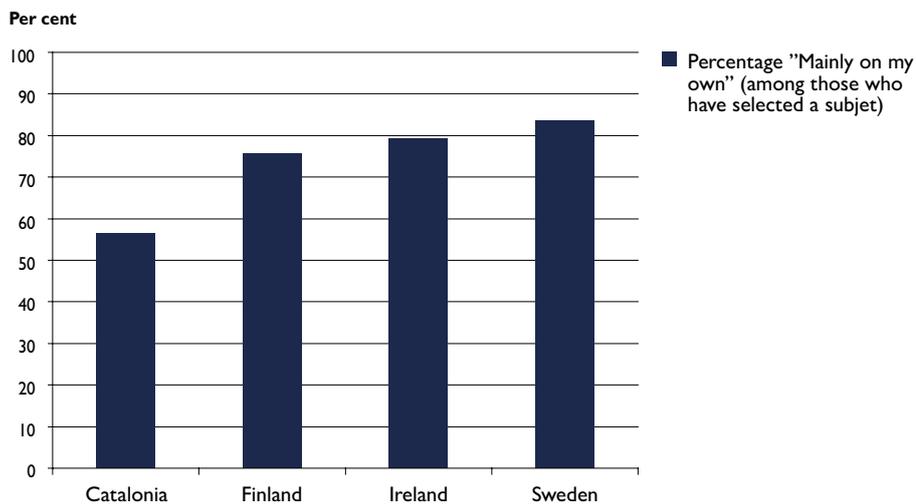


Figure 8. Percentage respondents who mainly work on their own by country.

10. The questionnaires in Finland offered the response alternative “as much on my own as in a research team” which was chosen by 20 %. In the other countries the responses consisted only of “mainly on my own”, “mainly in a research team” and “not chosen subject”.

The proportion working individually varies between the different subject fields, but even so it is smaller in Catalonia (table 12). Individual work is most frequent in the Humanities and Arts, where this applies to virtually all the students in Finland, Sweden and Ireland, while the proportion is somewhat lower in Catalonia, 80 %. Science, Mathematics and Computing is the field where individual work on the thesis is less common. This is how three students of every four work in Finland and Sweden, 58 % in Ireland and 33 % in Catalonia.

Subject field	Catalonia	Finland	Ireland	Sweden
Humanities and Art	80	93	99	99
Social sciences, Business and Law	79	84	94	93
Science, Mathematics and Computing	33	58	76	74
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	49	73	69	86
Health and Welfare	30	54	79	73
Total (all subject fields)	56	79	79	84

Table 12. Percentage respondents who mainly work on their own by county and subject field.

In Finland, Ireland and Sweden a relationship can be seen between how far students have progressed in their studies and how they are working with their theses – the further they have progressed the more they work on their own (figure 9).

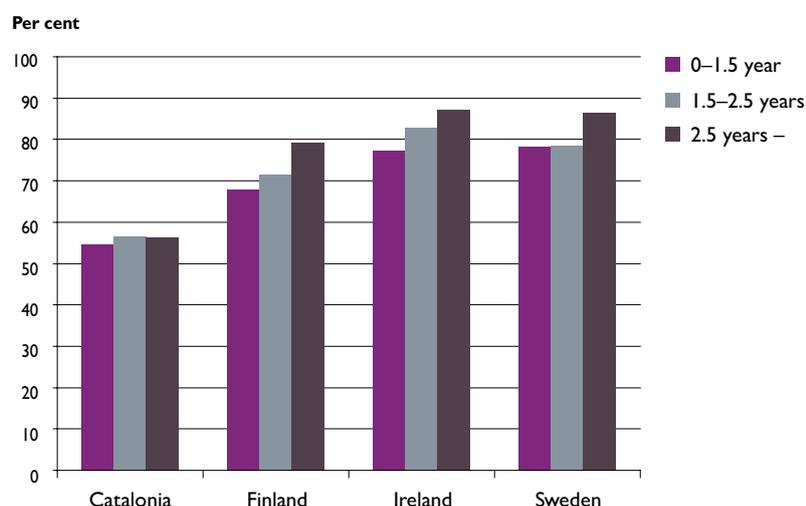


Figure 9. Percentage respondents who mainly work on their own by country and time in postgraduate education.

Language

Writing a thesis in English is obviously most common in Ireland, but in Finland and Sweden as well, a clear majority write their theses in English (figure

10). In Catalonia, students most frequently use their native Spanish (which is a world language) or Catalanian instead.

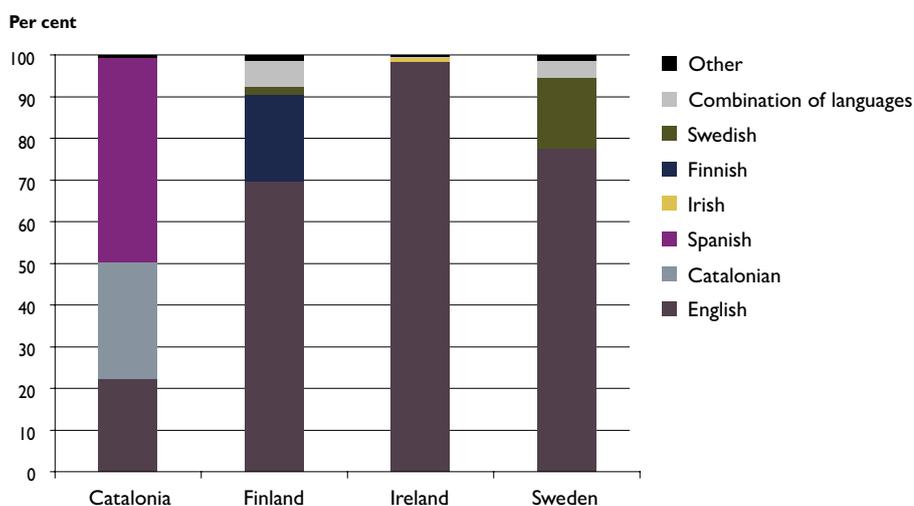


Figure 10. Distribution of thesis languages by country.

In Catalonia, Finland and Sweden the proportion of theses written in English varies from subject field to subject field (table 13). In Catalonia, English is most frequently used in Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction and Science, Mathematics and Computing. In Finland and Sweden, English is frequently used in these subject fields as well, but in contrast to Catalonia, English does dominate in all subject fields, except from Humanities and Art and in Social Sciences, Business and Law.

Subject field	Catalonia	Finland	Ireland	Sweden
Humanities and Art	12	42	95	32
Social sciences, Business and Law	10	48	100	47
Science, Mathematics and Computing	35	95	99	98
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	52	91	100	91
Health and Welfare	8	84	99	95
Total (all subject fields)	22	70	98	78

Table 13. Percentage respondents writing a thesis in English by country and subject field.

Forms of funding

The support provided for postgraduate students varies from country to country and therefore different questions were posed to their students. For this reason no comparisons are made between the countries but the forms of funding in each country are described and the extent to which students are satisfied with the way in which they function (for the most frequent funding forms).¹¹

11. See also the descriptions of postgraduate education in the respective countries.

Catalonia

Nearly a quarter of the respondents in Catalonia are studying on grants from the Catalan/Spanish government (figure 11).

Just over 10 % studies on a grant from the university where the programme is given, a further 12 % have a grant from abroad or another organisation.

Just over 29 % are employed outside the university (and slightly more than half of these students have the possibility of working on their research during their working hours).

On average 49 % of the Catalan postgraduate students say that they are content with their form of funding. The largest proportion of satisfied students can be found among those receiving a grant from abroad or another organisation (64 %) or a grant from the Catalan/Spanish government (61 %).

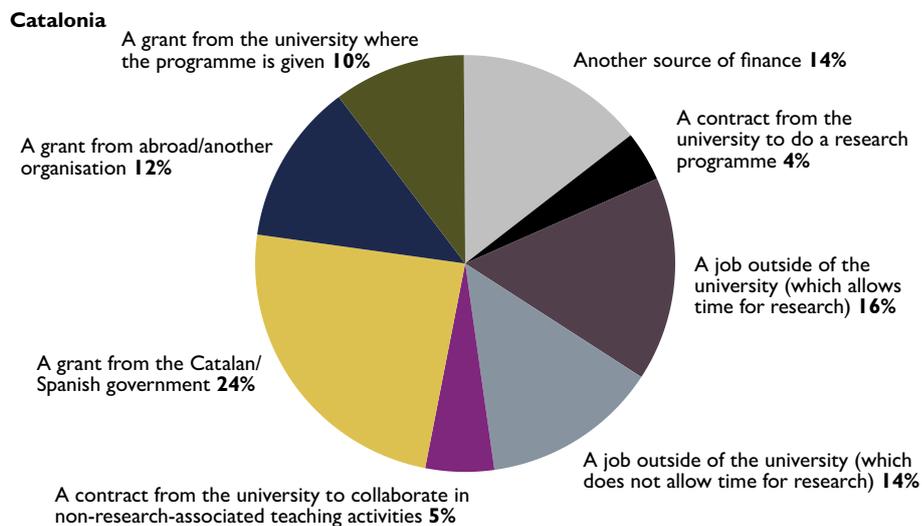


Figure 11. Funding forms in Catalonia.

Finland

In Finland 17 % of the respondents have a doctoral student position funded by the government (figure 12).

A further 17 % have a post at the university and 12 % have a scholarship offered by a foundation.

One in five of the postgraduate students state they finance their studies mainly through “some other paid work of your own”.

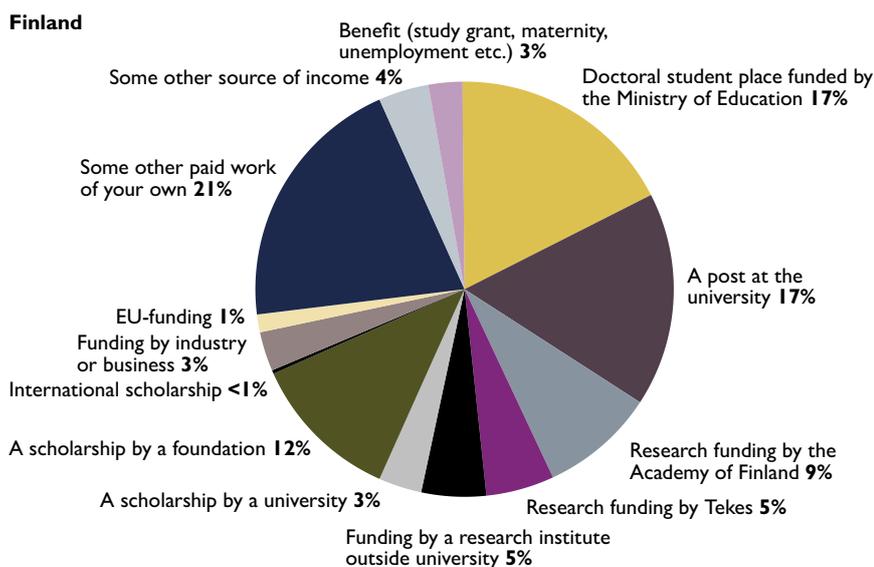


Figure 12. Funding forms in Finland

Overall seven out of every ten respondent in Finland are satisfied with their form of funding. In terms of the most frequent forms, the largest proportion of satisfied students can be found among those with a post at the university (80 %). On the other hand relatively few with a scholarship offered by a foundation are content with the way in which they are financed (58 %).

Ireland

In Ireland 25 % of the respondents have a postgraduate studentship and 16 % a scholarship (figure 13). Many, 32 %, indicate “some other form of funding” as their source of finance, and with some of them probably having posts outside higher education.

Ireland

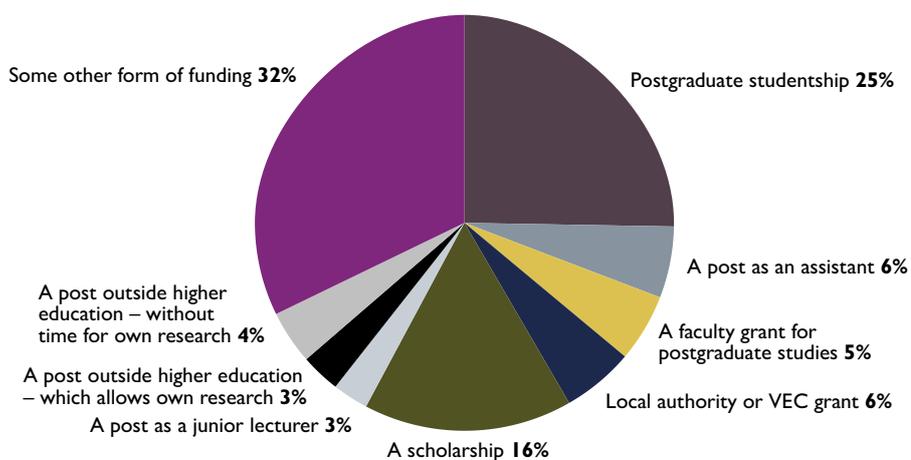


Figure 13. Funding forms in Ireland.

The proportion of Irish postgraduate students as a whole who say that they are content with their form of funding amounts to 55 %. Somewhat fewer of these with postgraduate studentships are satisfied (50 %), while a larger proportion are satisfied of those with scholarships (58 %) or some other form of funding (60 %).

Sweden

In Sweden just over half of the respondents have a postgraduate studentship funded by the university (figure 14).

Nearly 17 % have a post outside the university, of whom more than half can undertake their own research during working hours, and 8 % have a faculty grant for postgraduate studies.

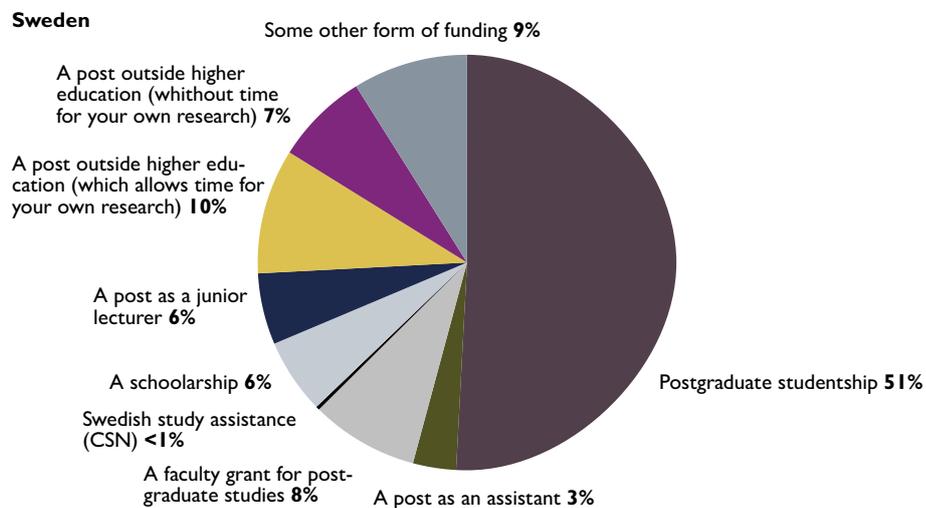


Figure 14. Funding forms in Sweden.

On average, 79 % of the Swedish postgraduate students say that they are satisfied with their form of funding. The largest proportion of satisfied students can be found among those with postgraduate studentships (92 %), but on the other hand the proportion is considerably smaller among those with faculty grants for postgraduate studies (42 %).