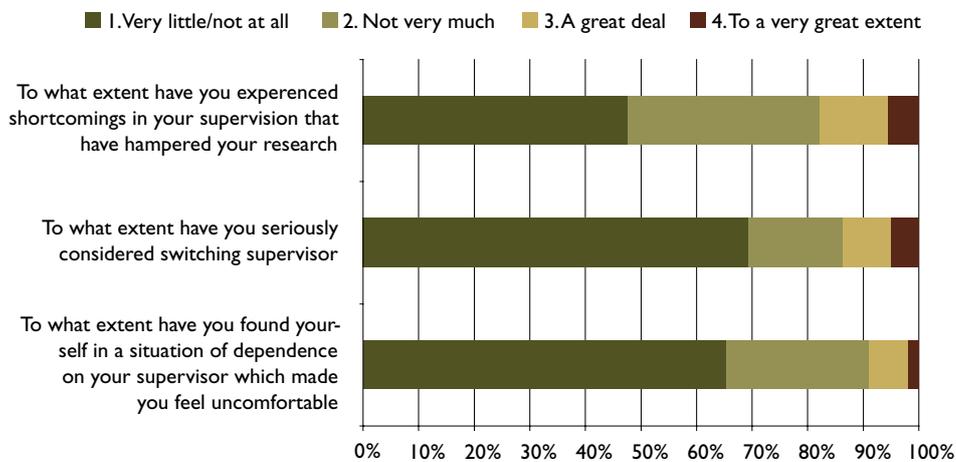


Supervision in action

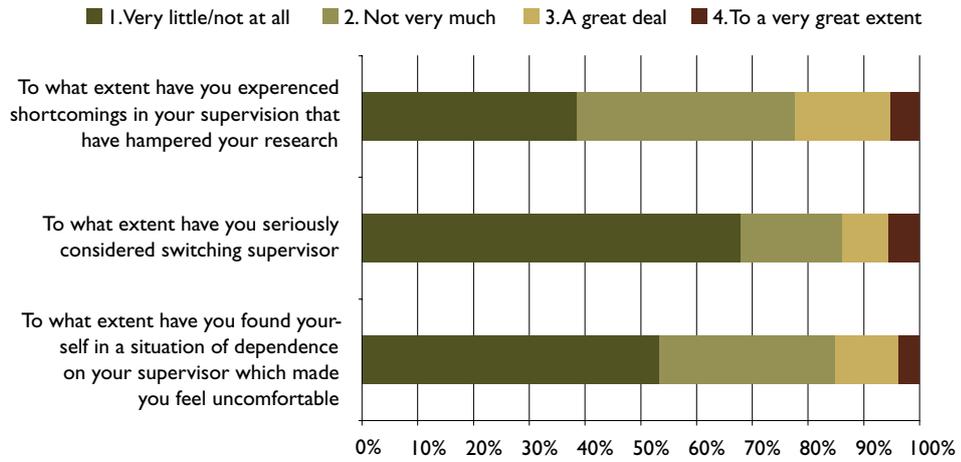
Shortcomings in their supervision may be the straw that breaks the backs for some postgraduate students. To be effective, for instance, an adequate amount of supervision must be provided. Opinions about where the limit should be drawn can, of course, differ between postgraduate students and their supervisors. Often contacts are at their most intensive early in the programme when the thesis subject has to be chosen, studies planned and the student initiated into research procedures. But towards the end of the programme as well, when the thesis has to be completed, contacts intensify again. There are no rules that lay down how much supervision a postgraduate student is entitled to.

The questions included in this index deal with the extent to which postgraduate students during the autumn semester 2004 (2002 in the Swedish data) experienced shortcomings in their supervision that hampered their research work, considered switching supervisor, were given as much supervision as they desired or found themselves in a distressful situation of dependence (figure 21).

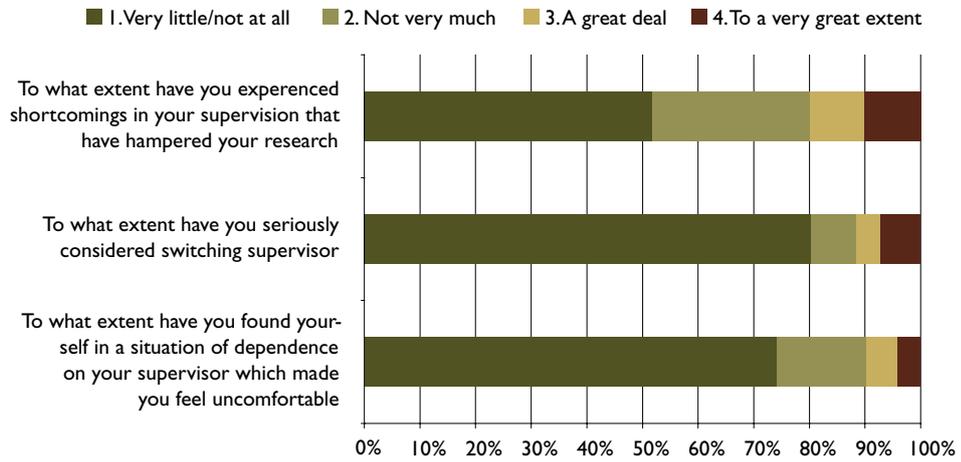
Catalonia



Finland



Ireland



Sweden

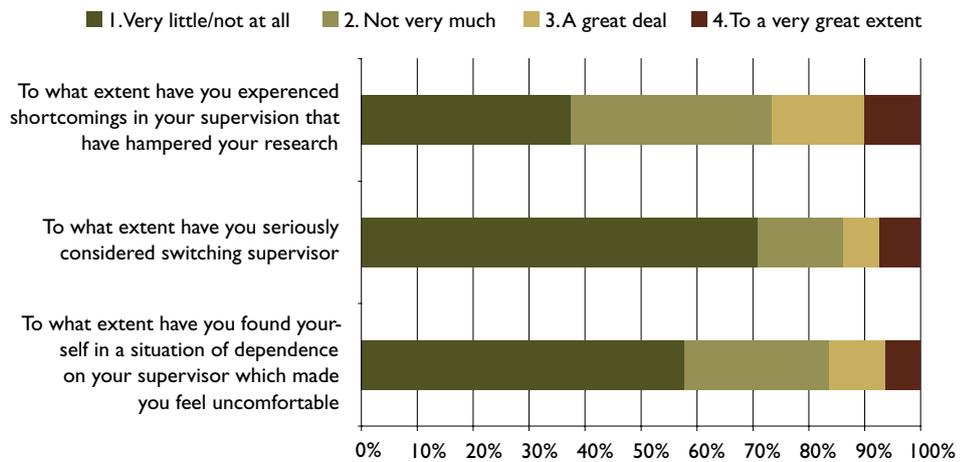


Figure 21. Supervision in action. Index items and distribution of responses by country.

The majority of postgraduate students in all the countries considered that Supervision in action functioned satisfactorily (figure 22). The most satisfied students were those in Ireland. However, between one-fifth and one-quarter in the different countries experienced shortcomings in their supervision that had obstructed their research work.

In their response to the question on whether they had received as much supervision as they desired¹³, 60 % of the postgraduate students in Sweden said they were satisfied, 55 % in Ireland and only 49 % of the postgraduate students in Finland.

Postgraduate students always find themselves in a situation of dependence on their supervisor in one way or another. The students in Sweden and Finland felt less comfortable about this dependence than their counterparts in Catalonia.

In all the subject fields there is a slight tendency for the men to respond more positively than the women.

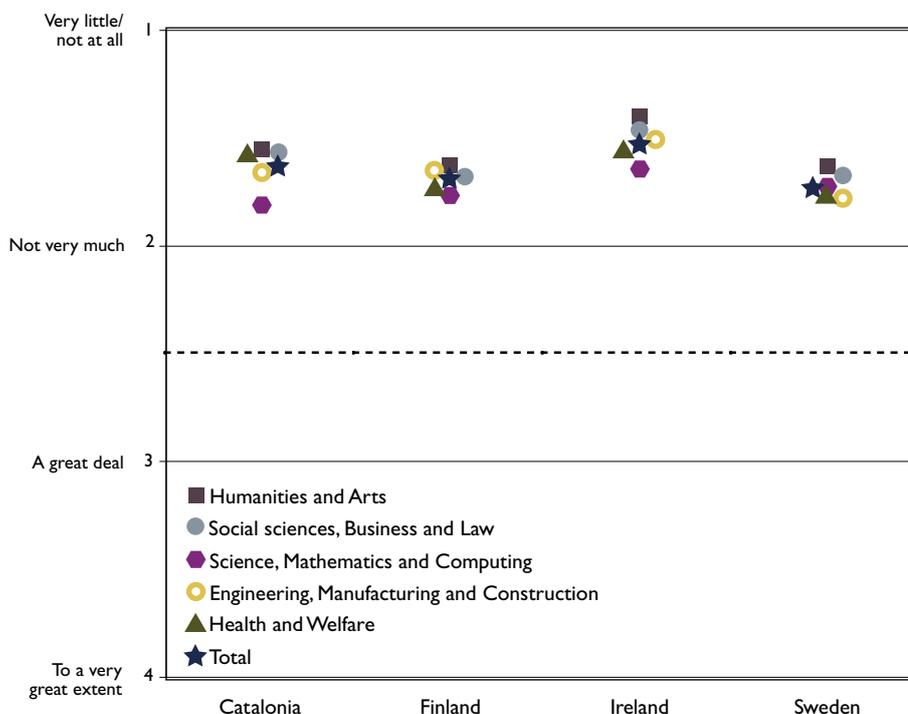


Figure 22. Supervision in action by country and subject field.

Ancillary questions

A lot or little supervision?

In one question the postgraduate students were asked to assess the average amount of time allocated to supervision during a semester. The smallest

13. This question has been removed from this index because the implication of the wording differed in Catalonia.

amount of supervision was reported by the students in Finland and the largest by those in Ireland (table 15). More than half of the postgraduate students in Ireland state that they received 11 hours of supervision or more each semester. The corresponding proportions for Sweden and Catalonia are 45 %, and for Finland 30 %.

There is a great deal of variation between the different subject areas with regard to the extent of supervision (table 15 and figures 23–27). Postgraduate students in Humanities and Arts in Catalonia, Finland and Sweden are those who report the fewest hours of supervision, on average 1–5 hours per semester. Students in Science, Mathematics and Computing as well as Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction report considerably more supervision hours compared to doctoral students in other areas, except in Finland.

In Sweden, Finland and Ireland the students were asked if they had been offered supervision to the desired extent. Not surprisingly there is a clear link, the more supervision, the more content the students.

Subject field	Catalonia	Finland	Ireland	Sweden
Humanities and Art	1–5 hours	1–5 hours	6–10 hours	1–5 hours
Social sciences, Business and Law	6–10 hours	1–5 hours	6–10 hours	6–10 hours
Science, Mathematics and Computing	11–15 hours	6–10 hours	16–20 hours	11–15 hours
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	11–15 hours	6–10 hours	16–20 hours	11–15 hours
Health and Welfare	6–10 hours	6–10 hours	6–10 hours	11–15 hours
Total (all subject fields)	6–10 hours	6–10 hours	11–15 hours	6–10 hours

Table 15. Average amount of time allocated to supervision by country and subject field.

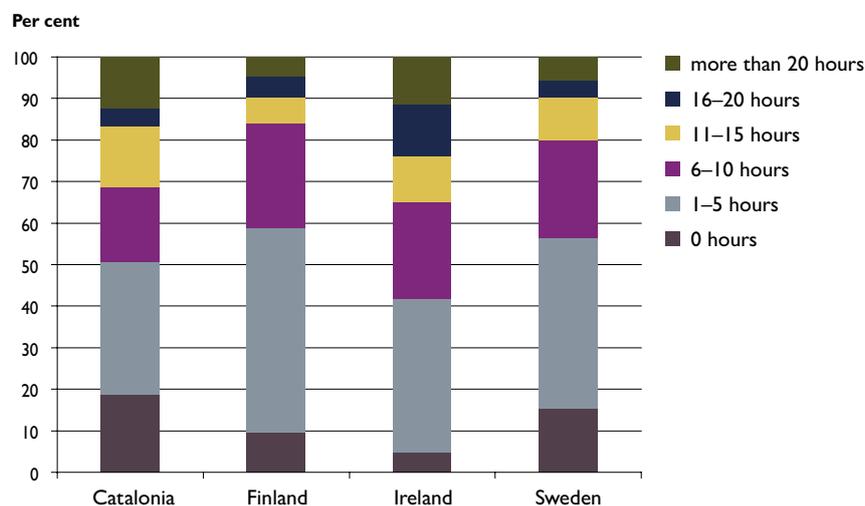


Figure 23. Humanities and Arts Amount of time allocated to supervision by country.

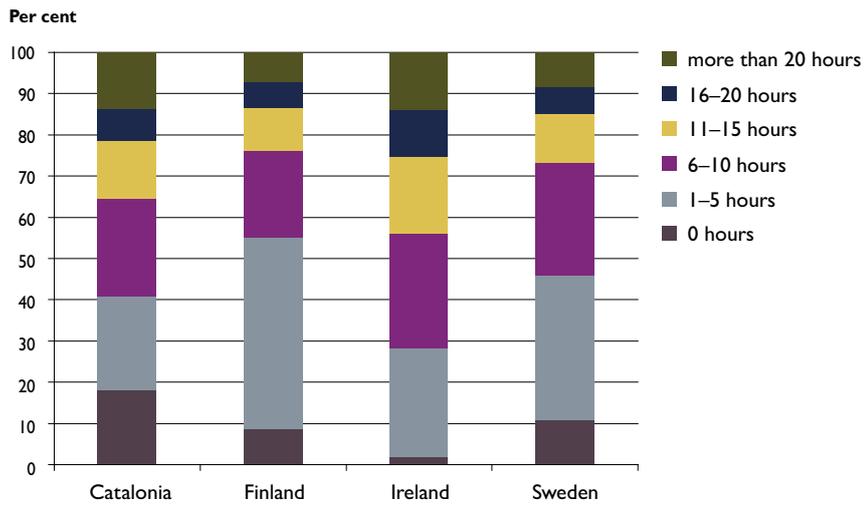


Figure 24. Social sciences, Business and Law Amount of time allocated to supervision by country.

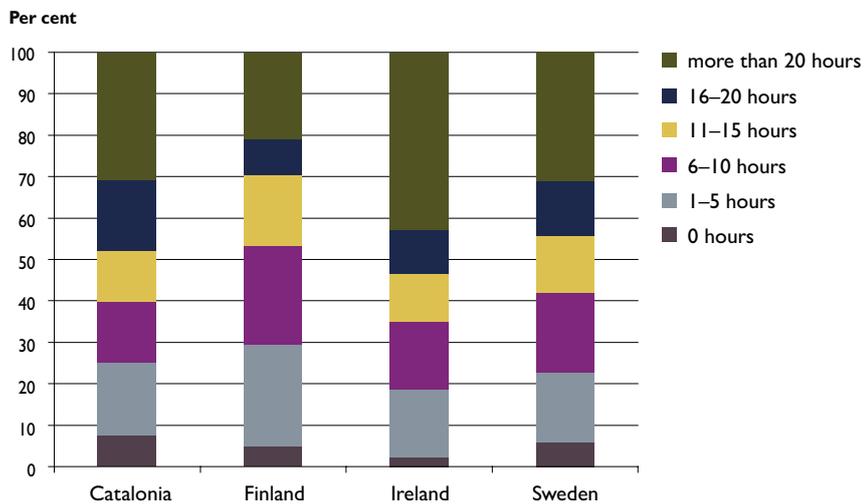


Figure 25. Science, Mathematics and Computing Amount of time allocated to supervision by country.

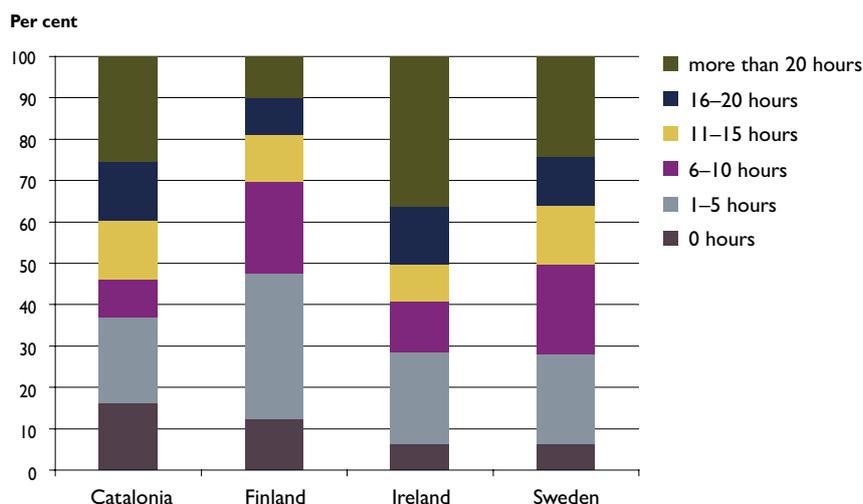


Figure 26. Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction Amount of time allocated to supervision by country.

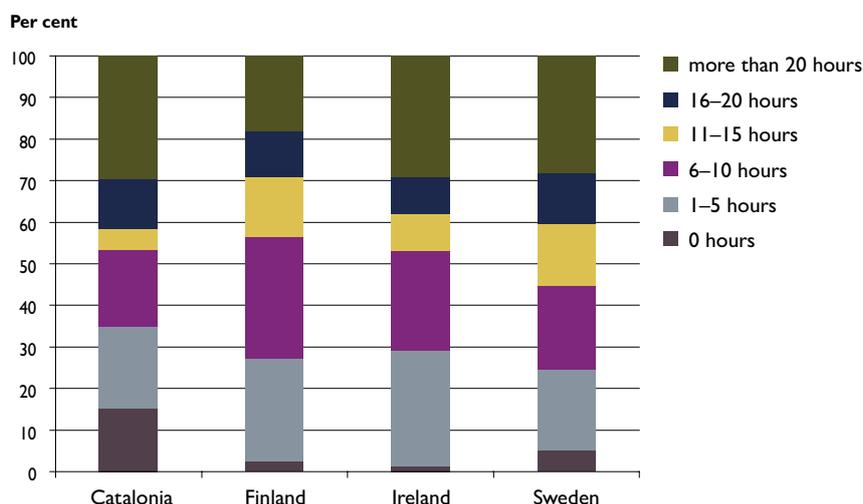


Figure 27. Health and Welfare Amount of time allocated to supervision by country.

Comments

The pattern revealed by the responses to the *Supervision in action* index is the most positive of the seven different indices.

Even though they constitute a minority, it is worth bearing in mind that every fourth or fifth postgraduate student has experienced shortcomings in their supervision that have affected their research results. This is probably not merely a question of the volume of supervision. However, the volume of supervision is an interesting area in itself. Are the major differences between subject areas justifiable? What is the optimal amount of supervision? What are the consequences of more or less supervision? It is interesting to note that the amount of supervision provided in a subject area can vary between the different countries.