

# Russian students in Norway

Why they come and how they cope

Jannecke Wiers-Jenssen

Report 11/2015

**NIFU**



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# Preface

The number of Russian students enrolled in Norwegian higher education institutions has grown in recent years. Russians now constitute a substantial part of the international student population in Norway. In the spring of 2014 a survey was conducted among international students in Norway. This report presents the main results for the Russian students responding to this survey. Among the questions asked are: Why do Russians choose to study in Norway? How do they assess the quality of education? To what extent are they integrated into the academic environment and in social life? Do they plan to stay in Norway upon graduation? To what extent do they diverge from other international students?

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Oslo, April 2015

Sveinung Skule  
Director

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# Contents

<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>9</b>
1.1 Background and research questions .....	9
1.2 Outline of the report.....	10
1.3 Drivers of student mobility .....	10
1.4 Students' motives for mobility.....	11
1.5 Policy for internationalisation of higher education in Norway .....	12
1.6 Cooperation with different regions .....	12
1.6.1 Cooperation and mobility between Russia and Norway .....	13
1.7 Statistics on student mobility between Russia and Norway.....	14
<b>2 Data.....</b>	<b>17</b>
2.1 Data collection, sampling and response .....	17
2.2 Presentation of data .....	17
2.3 Data source used for comparison: The study barometer.....	18
<b>3 Background of students in the survey.....</b>	<b>19</b>
3.1 Type and duration of sojourn .....	19
3.1.1 Not everyone initially came to study .....	20
3.2 Subject field, level and institution.....	20
3.3 Gender and age .....	21
3.4 Social origin and mobility capital.....	21
<b>4 Reasons for studying in Norway .....</b>	<b>23</b>
4.1 Opportunity structures.....	23
4.2 Students' reasons for studying in Norway.....	24
4.3 Russian students compared to other international students .....	26
4.4 Open question on motives for studying in Norway .....	27
4.5 Reasons for choosing higher education institution.....	29
4.6 Summary: Why Russian students go to Norway .....	30
<b>5 Assessment of teaching and learning environment.....</b>	<b>31</b>
5.1 Teaching and counselling.....	31
5.2 Study environment .....	33
5.3 Work load and formal requirements.....	35
5.4 Why are Russian students more satisfied than others? .....	36
<b>6 Challenges and integration .....</b>	<b>37</b>
6.1 Challenges .....	37
6.2 Academic and social networks .....	38
6.2.1 Interaction with students of different nationalities in university/college .....	38
6.2.2 Interaction with students of different nationalities in leisure time.....	40
6.3 Impressions of Norway .....	41
6.4 Potential for more interaction.....	42
<b>7 Will they stay or will they go? .....</b>	<b>43</b>
7.1 How many would like to stay in Norway? .....	43
7.2 Why students want to stay in Norway .....	44
7.3 Implications.....	45
<b>8 Concluding remarks.....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Appendix .....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>List of tables .....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>List of figures.....</b>	<b>56</b>





# Summary

This report addresses different aspects of being a Russian student in Norway; motivation for studying abroad, assessment of educational quality, challenges related to studying in Norway, and future career plans. It is based on a survey among international students studying in Norway conducted in the spring of 2014. Russian students are compared to other groups of international students.

## **Increased number of Russian students in Norwegian higher education**

The number of Russian students in Norway has grown substantially during the last decade, although a decline in numbers was observed in 2014. Approximately 1500 Russian citizens are currently registered as students in Norwegian higher education institutions, making Russian students the third largest group of international students after students from Sweden and Germany. A few hundred of the Russian students are online students, but the vast majority are attending classes on Norwegian campuses.

The influx of international students to Norway may be regarded as a response to policies for internationalisation, educational reforms and cooperation at international, national and institutional levels. There are a number of factors which contribute to facilitating student mobility in general. English-taught study programmes, absence of tuition fees and exchange agreements are the most important. In the case of Russian students, regional cooperation and study programmes targeting this group has also been essential for recruiting students. Commencing in the 1990s, there has been a huge political commitment to cooperation with Russia in general, and Northwest Russia more specifically, with research and higher education as a vital part of this.

## **Motives for studying in Norway**

Asking the students themselves why they have chosen to study in Norway, the factors they rate as the most influential are the low direct costs (no tuition fees), improving career possibilities in Norway, a peaceful and safe society, technologically advanced society, and English-taught programmes. More than two in three students considered these factors important.

Other reasons frequently mentioned is improvement of career possibilities in Russia and countries other than Norway and Russia, reputation of research and teaching, and unspoilt countryside. Hence, academic as well as non-academic and pragmatic reasons are found. An open-ended question shows that perceived quality of Norwegian higher education institutions in general, and certain study programmes specifically, are seen as important reasons for choosing to study in Norway. Russian students diverge from other international students in that more are motivated by the opportunity for improving career possibilities in Norway.

## **Students' background**

The Russian student population in Norway is characterized by a high proportion of females, and a high proportion of students with parents holding higher education. Students enrolled in prestigious institutions more often have higher educated parents compared to students in other types of institutions. They are also more likely to have previous experience with living abroad and/or have parents who have lived abroad. The majority of Russian students on Norwegian campuses undertake a full degree.

## **Choice of higher education institution**

The study programmes offered is reported to be the most important reason for the choice of higher education institution. Exchange students strongly emphasise the importance of institutional exchange agreements, which illustrates that decisions on where to study depends upon the opportunity structure. Reputation of teaching, research and students social life are more important to exchange students than to full degree students.

## **Assessments of teaching and learning**

Russian students have a positive assessment of the teaching, feedback and learning environment. They are more satisfied with these issues than other international students. Comparing Russian students to Norwegian students, we find that Russians are far more satisfied than Norwegians regarding all aspects of the teaching and learning environment with the exception of the social environment.

## **Challenges and integration**

Getting to know Norwegians and dealing with the high cost of living is more difficult than the Russian students expected. Many students have a low level of interaction with Norwegians, in the university/college as well as in their leisure time. However, this is also a challenge for students of other nationalities although Russian students report more contact with Norwegians compared to students from developing countries.

## **Temporary or permanent migration?**

Eighty per cent of Russian students who undertake a full degree in Norway and 60 per cent of the exchange students consider remaining in Norway after completion of their education. Regarding exchange students, the proportion who would like to stay is far higher than for other categories of international students. If the students keep to their plans, this implies that student mobility is a stepping stone to more permanent migration for many Russian students.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background and research questions

Russia and Norway have a common border of almost 200 kilometres, and there has traditionally been considerable contact between the two countries. Relations were subdued during the cold war, but have revived as from the 1990s. Regional cooperation with Russia is an important part of several policy areas in Norway. The High North Strategy covers a range of topics (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2007), and there are also several activities addressing collaboration in research and higher education. The Norwegian Research Council is funding research projects in the Barents region, including a programme focusing on social science, NORRUSS (Forskningsrådet 2012). There are several exchange programmes targeting Russian students and faculty and there is substantial cooperation between higher education institutions in the Northern Norway and Northwest Russia.

The number of Russian students enrolled in Norwegian higher education institutions has increased substantially in recent years, and has become one of the largest groups of international students in Norway. Close to 1500 Russians were registered as bachelor and master students in Norwegian higher education institutions in 2014. However, limited systematic information exists regarding this group. In spring 2014, a survey was conducted among Russian and other international students in Norway. This report presents the results from this survey. The report also presents statistics on the numbers of Russian students in Norway, as well as policy developments that contributes to explaining why Norway has become a popular destination for Russian students.

The main questions addressed are:

- How has the number of Russian students in Norway developed?
- Why are Russian students choosing Norway as a study destination?
- How do they assess the quality of teaching and learning environment?
- What kind of transitional challenges do they encounter?
- To what extent do they interact with Norwegian students and Norwegians in general?
- Is studying abroad a temporary sojourn, or a stepping stone for more permanent migration?
- To what extent do Russian students diverge from other groups of international students in Norway?

We look into differences according to duration of study sojourn, type/location of the institution, and gender.

## 1.2 Outline of the report

Before presenting results from the survey, we briefly provide some information on policy developments on internationalisation. In the remaining part of this chapter, we address the drivers and rationale of student mobility, the policy for internationalisation of higher education in Norway, educational cooperation between Russia and Norway, and previous studies on the individual motives for studying abroad. We also present statistics on student mobility between Russia and Norway.

In Chapter 2, the data set is described. In Chapter 3, we look at the background of Russian students studying in Norway, and in Chapter 4 we analyse students' motives for studying in Norway. Chapter 5 addresses students' assessments of the education, while Chapter 6 looks at challenges and integration. In Chapter 7 we look at the students' interest in staying in Norway after completing their studies. Concluding remarks are found in Chapter 8.

## 1.3 Drivers of student mobility

The number of internationally mobile students in tertiary education has doubled between 2000 and 2012, and was estimated to be 4.5 million in 2012 (OECD 2014). The biggest 'exporters' of students are Asian countries (China, India and Korea); the largest importers are Western English-speaking countries (USA and UK, Australia, Canada), France, Germany and the Russian Federation (OECD 2014).

There are several reasons for the increase in student mobility. Firstly, the number of students in tertiary education in general has risen. Second, aspects of globalisation and internationalisation have facilitated mobility. Globalisation and internationalisation are concepts that are interrelated but which are applied and defined in different ways. Both phenomena describe increased communication and interconnectedness across borders and the exchange of services, knowledge and ideas. But while globalisation is usually seen as economically driven, and facilitated by communication and communication technology, internationalisation is more politically driven.

It has been argued that internationalisation in higher education is a *response* to globalisation (van der Wende 1997), but internationalisation can also be seen as a strategy or process in its own. Knight (2003: 2) defines internationalisation in higher education as 'the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education'.

Internationalisation of higher education is high on the political agenda in many countries, and student mobility is a very visible form of internationalisation which has been facilitated and encouraged. This development is particularly manifest in Europe. The establishment of the ERASMUS programme, the Lisbon Convention and the Bologna process, including harmonization of degree structures, establishment of exchange programmes, a common credit point system (ECTS), and the aim to establish a common higher education area (EHEA) are among the most important achievements. But strategies of internationalisation are found in countries around the world. Many seek to attract students beyond national borders and let their own students gain international experience.

The political rationales for internationalisation is often grouped into four categories; academic, economic, political, and cultural/social (see for example, Blumenthal, Goodwin, Smith & Teichler 1996, van der Wende 1997, de Wit 2002, Knight 2004, Wiers-Jenssen 2008). As we return to, these types of rationales are all found in Norwegian policy for internationalisation of higher education, and similar motivations are found in the strategies of higher education institutions. Student are seen as a revenue source, particularly in fee-charging institutions. Recruiting from a larger pool of students increases the likelihood of attracting the most talented students. Students from other parts of the world may contribute to quality enhancement and bring in different perspectives. The latter aspect is related to the concept of *internationalisation at home* (Knight 2013). This term is used to describe the goal whereby students who are not internationally mobile should be exposed to international impulses. Internationalisation at home can be international curricula, but also provides a learning environment

consisting of faculty members and/or students from other countries. The concept of internationalisation at home has also been incorporated into Norwegian policy for internationalisation of higher education (White Paper 14, 2008–2009).

## 1.4 Students' motives for mobility

As seen above, there are many structural facilitators for student mobility such as international agreements, common degree structures and institutional strategies. But what are the students' perspectives on this? Why do they go abroad to undertake higher education? Individual motives for studying abroad are often divided into two main categories related to 'push' and 'pull' (Altbach 1998, Mazzarol 2001). Push-factors refer to (unfavourable) conditions in the home country, while pull-factors refer to opportunities in the host country.

Students from developing countries often go abroad due to lack of domestic opportunities; in other words 'push'-factors. The supply of higher education is often lower than the demand in their home countries; hence some of those who aim undertake higher education look for opportunities elsewhere. Others leave their home country because they do not see good career opportunities there while others may want to get away from a certain political system, or due to personal reasons.

Research on exchange students from European countries shows that they are motivated by pull-factors rather than push-factors. They go abroad in search of an 'added value', not due to lack of opportunities. Studying abroad seems attractive for many reasons, and improving language ability, improving career prospects and acquiring foreign cross-cultural experience are among the motives reported (Murphy-Lejeune 2002, Maiworm & Teichler 2002, Krzaklewska & Krupnik 2005).

Western students who undertake a full degree abroad may have a broader range of motives. Research on British students overseas show that some are motivated by quality and reputation of universities abroad, and that others choose to study abroad as a more or less strategic move to distinguish themselves (Brooks & Waters 2011). According to Brooks and Waters some also go abroad to postpone starting a career at home.

A report on students from Nordic countries who have undertaken a full degree abroad shows that pull-related reasons were most strongly emphasized, but that push-related rationale was also present (Saarikallio-Torp & Wiers-Jenssen 2010). Students from sparsely populated countries/regions (Iceland and the Faroe Islands) often reported having chosen to study abroad due to a lack of domestic opportunities. This illustrates that 'push' related motivation is not only found among students from developing countries.

The question remains "What about the Russian students: are they pushed or pulled? The survey upon which this report is based does not ask about 'push' motives. Hence, the report does not provide information on why Russian students leave; only on why they choose to study in Norway. However, the role of 'push' vs. 'pull' motivation among Russian students will be addressed in other parts of the NORRUSS project 'Higher Education in the High North'. Qualitative interviews with students and teachers is likely to provide more insight regarding this.

A Swedish research project has addressed student mobility from Eastern Europe/Russia to Northern Sweden. Interviewing students from Eastern Europe/Russia, motives were revealed that can be characterized as 'push'-motives such as perceived corruption in Russian higher education institutions (Chefer 2013, Sundqvist 2013). However, an important finding is that students tend to focus on 'better opportunities abroad' than 'poor opportunities in Russia'.

## 1.5 Policy for internationalisation of higher education in Norway

Norwegian policy for internationalisation of higher education contains elements from all four categories of rationale mentioned in Section 1.3 (academic, economic, political and cultural/social). In addition, lack of capacity has been an issue. In the period after the Second World War; internationalisation was first of all related to lack of domestic capacity. The supply of higher education was far lower than the demand, and a funding scheme was established to encourage students to search for alternatives abroad. Internationalisation in the form of student mobility arose more out of necessity than anything else.

In the 1970s and 1980s, other rationales emerged. Language skills and knowledge of other cultures became values of their own, and outgoing as well as incoming mobility was encouraged. 'International solidarity' became an important part of internationalisation policy (NOU 1989: 13). Foreign aid and internationalisation was closely related.

In the 1990s, there was a strong emphasis on quantity; increasing the number of mobile students – outgoing as well as incoming. Student mobility was to become available to the masses. Participation in exchange programmes like ERASMUS was encouraged.

It remains an aim to increase outgoing mobility, but in recent years there has been a stronger focus on incoming mobility. *Quality* and *relevance* is high on the agenda – internationalisation is not just an end in itself but a means to enhance quality and relevance in higher education (White Paper no. 14 (2008–2009)). This is linked to academic as well as economic rationales. Internationalisation policy is linked to knowledge policy, and internationalization and student mobility is intended to enhance the quality of Norwegian higher education institutions. The concept of *internationalisation at home* has also become included in policy documents (White paper no. 14 (2008–2009)).

A report investigating strategic plans for internationalisation in Norwegian higher education institutions shows academic rationales (quality, knowledge policy) are high on the agenda in most institutions, but that rationales related to economy/resources and 'social mission' are frequently mentioned. Cultural aspects and international solidarity is less mentioned than previously (SIU 2013a). Another report looking at internationalisation strategies at selected Norwegian universities and colleges concludes that internationalisation has become a more integrated part of institutional strategy (Frølich, Waagene & Stensaker 2014). Hence, national policy is also reflected in these institutional strategies.

At the policy level as well as at the institutional level, the goals of internationalization have become more clearly defined. Incoming mobility is intended to contribute to quality enhancement and internationalisation at home. However, it is less evident *how* student mobility is supposed to enhance quality, and *what kind of quality* it is supposed to enhance. Quality in higher education can be defined in many ways, for example as exception, perfection, fitness for purpose, value for money and as transformative (Harvey & Green 1993). An increase in the number of English-taught programmes and international students is observed, but such quantitative measures cannot indicate the extent to which student mobility contributes to enhanced quality and increased relevance. Incoming mobility of any substantial scope is a quite recent phenomenon, and there is a need to study the effects and consequences.

## 1.6 Cooperation with different regions

Internationalising higher education is a general aim in Norwegian higher education policy, and several regions have been given special attention. Cooperation between the neighbouring Nordic countries has long traditions and is extensive. In higher education, an agreement that gives Nordic citizens access to higher education in all other Nordic countries and the exchange programme NORDPLUS are important tools facilitating student mobility.

Cooperation with the EU has been high given priority, and EU policy on higher education has exerted crucial influence on Norwegian higher education policy. Norway joined the ERASMUS programme just a few years after it was launched, and was an early signatory to the Bologna declaration (1999). Most the aims of the Bologna process have been implemented.

In recent years, there has been a revival of the cooperation with North America. USA used to be a very popular destination for Norwegian students, but student mobility declined for a while, and strategies and partnership programmes have been launched in order to increase collaboration and mobility between the countries. US sponsorship of the sojourns of Norwegian students and researchers in the USA continues to be an important tool to strengthen the relationship between the USA and Norway.

Traditionally, Norway has had substantial cooperation with developing countries. Foreign aid and internationalisation policies are intertwined. An important tool in this process is The Quota Scheme, which provides students from developing countries and countries in the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe and in Central Asia with financial support to study for a degree in Norway. But there are also other important programmes like the NOMA (Norad's Programme for Master Studies) and NUFU programmes (Norwegian Programme for Development, Research and Education). In recent years, there has been a focus on cooperation the so-called BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa).

### **1.6.1 Cooperation and mobility between Russia and Norway**

Norway borders with Northwest Russia, and there are strong geopolitical rationales behind seeking good relations with Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Cooperation with Russia is vital through the High North Strategy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2007). This cooperation addresses far more aspects of society than education (climate, energy, fisheries, etc.), and is seen as a long-term strategy (White paper no. 7 (2011–2012)). On behalf of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign affairs, The Norwegian Barents Secretariat annually funds many bilateral cooperation projects involving Russia and Norway, including higher education (Kortneniemi 2011).

Several incentives for cooperation in higher education and research have been developed. Examples of these are The High North Programme (institutional cooperation), The Cooperation Programme with Russia (institutional cooperation) and the Barents Plus scholarship programme (for student and teacher exchange, language courses), the North2North scholarship programme, multilateral institutional cooperation, such as University of the Arctic, and research programmes like NORRUSS. Mobility programmes such as The Quota Scheme and the Yggdrasil programme (PhD students and young researchers) are also important, although these cater for several nationalities in addition to Russians. The Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education (SIU), has an important role in coordinating several of these programmes.

There are many bilateral and multilateral agreements between Russian and Norwegian higher education institutions involving research and student exchange, and some examples are briefly mentioned below. There is a particular focus on cooperation between regions that are geographically close – Northern Norway and Northwest Russia. The two largest institutions Northern Norway, The Arctic University in Norway (UiT) and University of Nordland (UiN) have extensive cooperation with Russia involving research and higher education, and many Russian students are enrolled in these institutions. UiN commenced cooperation with Russia in the early 1990s. The institution developed courses in business and administration in St. Petersburg, and developed ties to Northwest Russia (SIU 2013b). Cooperation with Russia became a part of the institutions' strategic plans at an early stage, and the business school of UiN was particularly active regarding cooperation and student mobility. UiN later developed strong ties to Northern (Arctic) Federal University (NarFu) in Arkhangelsk, and has developed a Bachelor programme in circumpolar studies (BCS).

The Arctic University of Norway (a merged institution comprising the former University of Tromsø and Finnmark University college) have also cooperated with Russian institutions for a number of years, and has a number of agreements with different institutions. E.g. they have developed a master programme in Public health in English that attracts Russian students. The Finnmark campus at this university has developed a similar programme to the BCS programme, called Bachelor in Northern Studies (BNS). This that recruits a lot of online as well as some on-campus students. Many students from the Murmansk region participate in this programme. Narvik University college has established English taught study programmes in engineering and technology, recruiting a substantial amount of Russian students.

### 1.7 Statistics on student mobility between Russia and Norway

Since the turn of the millennium, there has been a substantial growth in the number of international students in Norway. The number of Russian citizens in Norwegian higher education institutions has also grown, particularly since 2009 (Figure 1.1). In 2011 and 2012 Russian students accounted for about 8 per cent of the total number of international students in Norway. Recent developments indicate that this growth has ceased, and it will be interesting to see if the trend has turned permanently. Nevertheless, there are close to 1500 Russian students in Norwegian universities and colleges, and are exceeded only by Swedish and German students.



**Figure 1.1 Russian students in Norwegian higher education institutions 2002–2014**

Source: Database for statistics on Higher Education (DBH)

PhD students are not included in Figure 1.1. Statistics on the number of PhD students are not available, only the number of students completing doctoral education each year. On average, 22 Russian citizens per year completed a PhD in Norwegian higher education institutions in the period 2011–2014 (NIFU Doctoral degree register).



The number of Russian students in Norwegian higher education institutions has grown faster than the general Russian student export. According to UNESCO statistics, the total number of Russian students abroad increased by approximately 50 per cent between 2002 and 2012. (UNESCO 2014). Traditionally, Russia has had far more incoming than outgoing students.

Russian students are overrepresented in higher institutions in the northern part of Norway. While less than 10 per cent of the total student population of Norway are studying in the three northernmost counties (Nordland, Troms and Finnmark), more than 40 per cent of the Russian students are found in this region. UiT -The Arctic University of Norway and University of Nordland have the highest numbers of Russian students (Table 1.1). They are, however, enrolled in institutions all over the country.

**Table 1.1 Russian students registered in Norwegian higher education institutions autumn 2014**

Higher Education Institution	Number of students
UiT - The Arctic University of Norway	301
University of Nordland	233
University of Oslo	189
University of Stavanger	81
Norwegian University of Science and Technology	65
Oslo and Akershus University College	60
Norwegian Business School	50
Narvik University College	49
Harstad University College	39
University of Bergen	38
Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU)	36
Buskerud and Vestfold University College	31
University of Agder	31
Norwegian School of Economics (NHH)	30
Telemark University College	24
Molde University College	20
Nord-Trøndelag University College	19
Østfold University College	19
Sør-Trøndelag University College	16
Gjøvik University College	12
Hedmark University College	12
Haugesund University College	12
Bergen University College	10
Other	78
Sum	1455

Source: Database for statistics on Higher Education (DBH)

University of Nordland and the Finnmark Campus of UiT (previously Finnmark University College before this institution merged with UiT) have established distance learning programmes in circumpolar studies/northern studies, mainly targeting Russian students. The vast majority of Russian students in these two institutions are not physically present on Norwegian campuses. In national statistics, they are still regarded as foreign students *in* Norway. The larger part of the increase in Russian students since 2009 can be explained by the establishment of the distance learning programmes. Online students constitute between one fourth and one third of all Russian students registered in Norwegian universities and colleges. But even if online students were not included, Russian students would be one of the three or four largest national groups. They have been a special target group for higher education institutions in Northern Norway since the 1990s.

## **Unbalanced mobility**

Student mobility between Russia and Norway is not balanced. Even though Russian universities have long traditions for admitting students from outside Russia (in Soviet time they recruited students from many parts of the USSR), and have become a big importer of international students, very few Norwegians are enrolled in Russian higher education institutions. According to statistics from the State Educational Loan Fund (Lånekassen), the number has fluctuated between 60 and 145 students per year since year 2000. Currently, around 70 Norwegians are studying in Russia. The majority of Norwegian students in Russia have been exchange students, and many of these study the Russian language. Only 7 to 8 students per year are registered as full degree students.

Even when taking into consideration that Norway is a much smaller nation than Russia, and has a smaller (internationally mobile) student population, the imbalance is striking. The most popular host countries for Russian students are Germany, USA, France and the UK; Norway is eleventh on this list (UNESCO 2015). Nevertheless, Russian students studying in Norway constitute around 2 per cent of Russian internationally mobile students. In comparison, less than three out of a thousand Norwegian mobile students choose to study in Russia.

There are several reasons why few Norwegians study in Russia. Language is definitely an issue, and the number of English taught programmes in Russia is few. Funding has also been a barrier. Norway has a quite generous public student support system for students abroad, but until 2012 it was not possible to get support for the first year of a lower degree in higher education in Russia. In general, Norwegian students who undertake a full degree abroad are found in countries where English or Nordic languages are spoken (UK, USA, Australia, Denmark), and where English taught programmes are common (e.g. medical education in Poland and Hungary). Those who go on shorter sojourns are spread throughout a wider range of countries, but still mainly relying on courses in English.

## 2 Data

### 2.1 Data collection, sampling and response

The main data source in this report is a survey among international students in Norway conducted in March 2014 by The Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education (SIU). The target group was foreign citizens commencing higher education in Norway in 2013 or at the beginning of 2014, and who were still registered as students in Norway in February 2014. The students were contacted by email, and three reminders were sent. This data set had a response rate of 40 per cent (SIU 2014). This is very satisfactory for a survey based entirely on the internet. An additional sample of Russian citizens was drawn. The target group of this sample was all Russian students not included in the main sample (who have started their education at an earlier stage), except students in distance learning programmes. The data programme Questback was used for collecting the data.

In this report, we analyse the responses from Russian students in the main sample, plus the responses from the additional sample of Russian students. It turned out that not all students who were listed as citizens of the Russian Federation in the university registers reported Russia as their home country. Excluding these students from our net sample leaves us with 314 students. It has not been possible to calculate the exact response rate for Russian students. A rough estimate indicates that between 30 and 35 per cent of our target group had responded. This is quite modest, and means that the results should be interpreted with considerable caution. We do not claim that our respondents are representative for the total Russian student population in Norway. The study may nevertheless be seen as explorative, and provides new insights even with a moderate response rate.

We also use data from the main sample of international students for comparison. The students in this sample have on average shorter study sojourn in Norway than Russian students. This data set described and analysed in a report in Norwegian (Wiers-Jenssen 2014), where more detailed comparisons are given.

### 2.2 Presentation of data

Data are mainly presented in simple univariate or bivariate tables and figures. Below, we define some categories frequently used in this report; more are described as they appear.

#### **Geographic origin of international students**

In some of the analyses, Russian students are compared to other students. These are divided into two groups:

- Students from Western countries (Europe, North-America, Australia and New Zealand)

- Students from Eastern and Southern countries (Asia, Africa and Latin-America)

These categories are general, but previous analyses have shown that a division is found between students from European and Western countries on the one hand, and students from developing countries and emerging economies in the Eastern and Southern part of the world on the other regarding several types of assessments and outcomes (Wiers-Jenssen 2014).

### **Higher education institution**

Regarding higher education institutions, we have divided students into three groups:

- HEIs in Northern Norway (University of Nordland, UIT – University of the Arctic, Harstad University College and Narvik University College)
- Higher education of high prestige ('Old' universities and specialized universities)
- Other institutions ('New' universities, university colleges and private higher education institutions)

The rationale for this division is first of all that we wanted to distinguish between those studying in the northern part of Norway and the others. The northern region has a geographical proximity to Russia, and the major HEIs there have extensive cooperation with Russian universities. Further, we also wanted to make a distinction between the most selective and prestigious institutions and other institutions.

## **2.3 Data source used for comparison: The study barometer**

To put students' assessment of teaching and the study environment into perspective, we used the results from a survey conducted among Norwegian students conducted by NOKUT (The Norwegian accreditation agency for higher education) and entitled The Study Barometer (Studiebarometeret). The data used were collected in the autumn semester, 2013. The target group was bachelor and master students in their second year of study, and the response rate was 32 per cent. These students have, on average, followed their study programme in Norway for a longer period than the Russian and other international students, which may influence the students' responses. More information about The Study Barometer is found in Lid (2013).

# 3 Background of students in the survey

In this chapter, basic background information about the students in the survey is presented. Central questions are: Where and what are the students studying? Are they undertaking a full degree in Norway, or are they on shorter sojourns? What is the gender and age composition?

## 3.1 Type and duration of sojourn

International student mobility is often grouped into two main categories:

- Degree mobility: Students who undertake a full degree abroad.
- Credit mobility: Students who undertake part of a degree abroad (acquiring credit points) but obtain their diploma in their home institution.

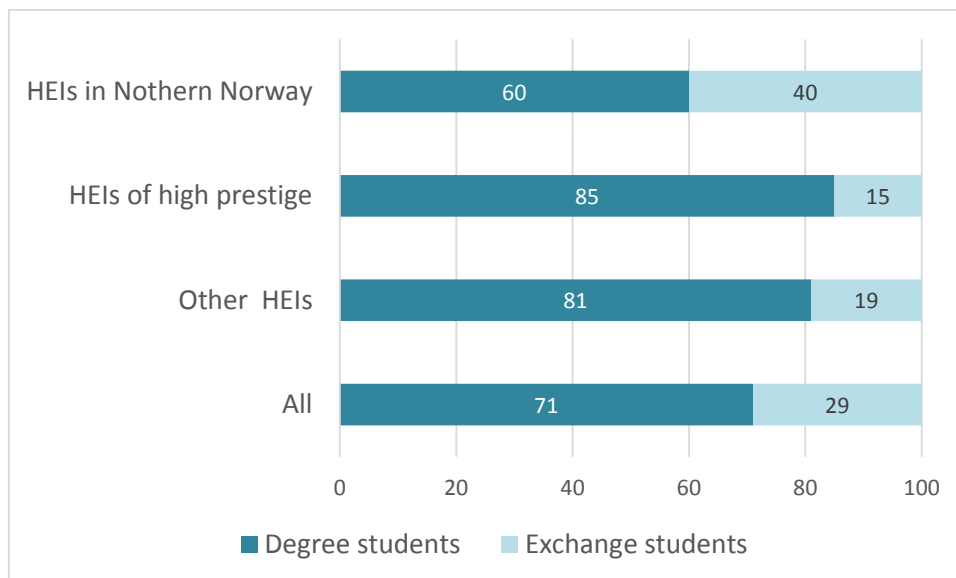
In this report students in the latter group are labelled 'exchange students', since this is a term commonly applied in international research in the field. However, this term can be misleading since this does not imply that institutions necessarily exchange students on a one-for-one basis.

The majority of students on shorter sojourns abroad participate in organised exchange programmes, or bi-/multilateral agreements between institutions. In the case of Russian students, agreements between higher education institutions in Northern Norway and Northwest Russia are of particular importance as well as programmes such as Barents Plus, North2North and The Quota scheme.

Students who undertake a full degree abroad have often organised the study period abroad by themselves, but there are also students participating in organised programmes. The most important programme for incoming students to Norway is the Quota Scheme, sponsoring a full degree in Norway for approximately 1100 students from developing countries, Eastern Europe, Western Balkans and Central Asia (SIU 2005).

It is assumed that degree students and exchange students are different in more ways than the time they spend abroad, and in this report we will investigate to which extent they are different according to background, motives, assessments, future plans and more.

Among our respondents, we find that 71 per cent of the students undertake a full degree in a Norwegian higher education institution, while the rest are on shorter sojourns. There are more exchange students among the respondents studying in Northern Norway than among other students (Figure 3.1). As mentioned in Chapter 1, institutions in the North have developed study programmes targeting Russian students, and this explains why we find particularly many exchange students there.



**Figure 3.1 Percentage of degree students and exchange students in different types of Norwegian higher education institutions**

### 3.1.1 Not everyone initially came to study

Official statistics on student mobility usually count students with foreign citizenship, rather than incoming students. Hence, immigrants are also included in the statistics. This means that international figures on student mobility are inaccurate (Bürger, Ferencz & Wächter 2011). Norwegian statistics are no exception. Citizenship is the criterion for being labelled ‘international student’, something which is also reflected in the sample for this study. Among our respondents, we found that the vast majority of Russian students came to Norway with the purpose of taking higher education, but 17 per cent initially came for other reasons and applied for higher education later. Hence, not all Russian students can be characterised as *incoming students*.

Not surprisingly, coming for ‘other reasons’ is more common among degree students than exchange students (22 vs. 7 per cent). The group which came for other reasons is characterised by being older (46 per cent are 30 years or older), and consists mainly of females (85 per cent). We have no information on how long they had been living in Norway.

## 3.2 Subject field, level and institution

Regarding field of study, study programmes in science and technology and business and administration programmes are the most popular fields among our respondents.

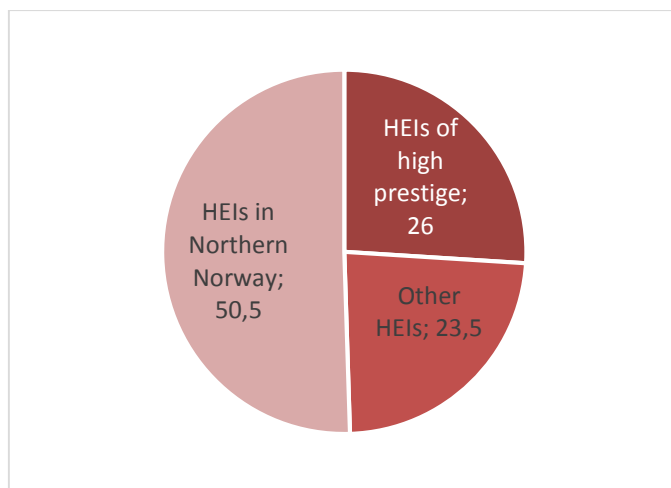
**Table 3.1 Students’ distribution on type of study programme. Per cent.**

	All <i>N=314</i>	Degree students <i>N=214</i>	Exchange students <i>N=88</i>
Science and technology	31	34	21
Humanities and arts	14	10	24
Social science and law	18	18	19
Education	5	6	3
Health and care	5	6	3
Business and administration	25	23	30
Other	3	3	1
Total	100	100	100

The distribution of Russian students according to subject field is similar to that of other international students (Wiers-Jenssen 2014).

Fifty-seven per cent of students are taking a bachelor degree; 43 per cent are enrolled in a master programme. More than half of the students have studied in Norway for more than one year at the time of data collection (Figure A.1 in Appendix).

The respondents are studying in more than 40 institutions. They are overrepresented in universities and colleges in Northern Norway, which is corresponding to statistics of the total Russian student population (cf. Section 1.3 in this report).



**Figure 3.2 Distribution of students according to type of higher education institution. Per cent.**

### 3.3 Gender and age

The majority (72 per cent) of students responding to the survey are female. This corresponds to the proportion of females in the total student population of Russian students in Norway (Wiers-Jenssen 2013). The proportion of females among Russian students is higher than the average for students from other parts of the world. Among students from Western countries the proportion of women is 59 per cent, and 42 per cent among students from Eastern and Southern countries (Asia, Africa and Latin-America).

Slightly more than half of the students are between 18-23 years; 33 per cent are between 24 and 30 years, and 15 per cent are more than 30 years old.

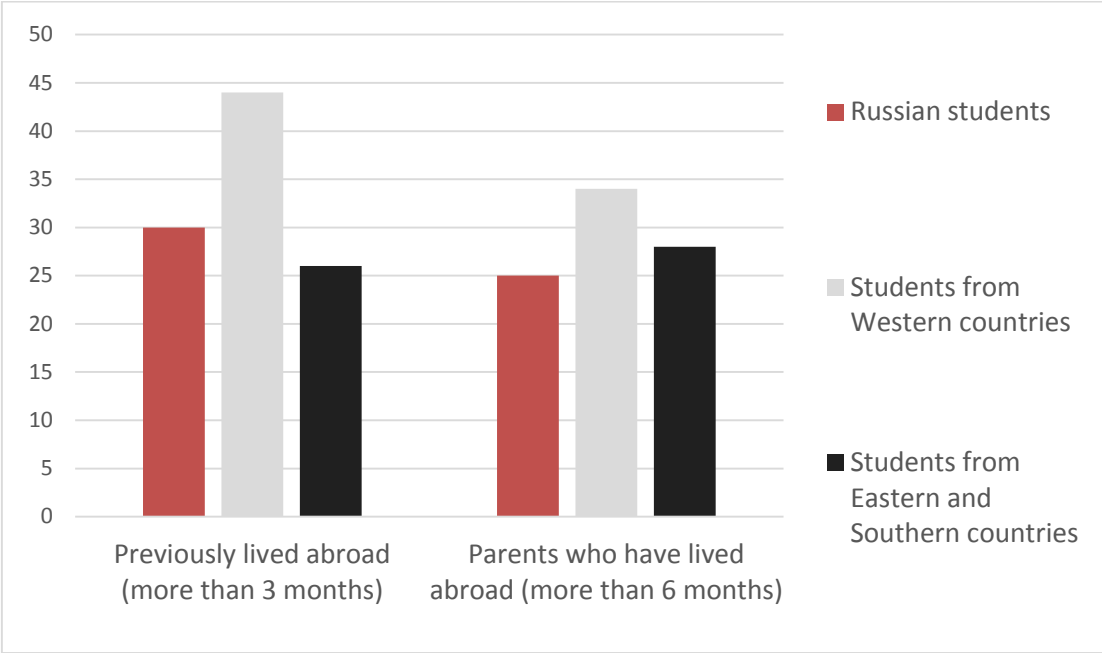
### 3.4 Social origin and mobility capital

The Russian students have parents with a high level of education. Among the students' mothers, 77 per cent hold higher education. Among the fathers, the proportion is 69 while 85 per cent of students have one or both parents with higher education. This proportion is higher than students from most other countries. The average proportion with one or both parents with higher education is 69 per cent for students from Western countries and 63 per for students from Eastern and Southern countries.

We also asked students whether they, or either of their parents have had a longer sojourn abroad. The reasons why we asked this was to map *mobility capital* among international students in Norway. The concept of mobility capital originates from a study of student mobility in Europe by Murphy-Lejeune (2002). Interviewing European mobile students, she found that mobile students often have previous experience of living abroad, or that they have family members who have done so.

These experiences can be described as a form of human capital, but also as social capital. A study among graduates from the Nordic countries provided quantitative empirical evidence that mobile students have more mobility capital than domestic students (Wiers-Jenssen 2013). Studies from Britain have also shown that mobile students frequently have had previous sojourns abroad (Brooks & Waters 2011).

We find that substantial proportions of the Russian students in Norway have previous experience with living abroad, or that they have parents who have been living abroad. However, such experiences are less common among Russians than among students from Western countries (figure 3.3).



**Figure 3.3 Per cent of students and students’ parents who have lived abroad.**

Regarding social origin and mobility capital, we also examined differences between students studying in different institutions. Results show that students in the most prestigious institutions more frequently had parents with higher education. We also found that the proportion of students in these institutions whose parents had have lived abroad was double that of other students (Table 3.2).

**Table 3.2 Social origin and mobility capital among Russian students in different types of Higher Education Institutions in Norway. Per cent.**

	HEIs in Northern Norway	HEIs of high prestige	Other HEIs	Total
One or both parent with higher education	82	94	84	85
Previously lived abroad	21	42	37	30
Parents previously lived abroad	17	42	19	24

In summary, the Russian student population in Norway is characterized by a high proportion of females, and a high proportion of parents with a higher education. This is corresponds with findings from a Swedish qualitative study (Chefer 2013). Students in prestigious institutions are more socially selected than others, and they more likely to have lived abroad and/or have parents who have lived abroad.



# 4 Reasons for studying in Norway

## 4.1 Opportunity structures

As mentioned in Chapter 1, there are a number of reasons people choose to study abroad. In most cases, moving to another country to undertake higher education is influenced by the opportunities for studying abroad such as acquiring an education of (perceived) high quality, improving language skills, cultural skills and so forth. But it may also be related to (unfavourable) conditions in the home country. Some individuals study abroad due to the absence of domestic opportunities such as lack of capacity or lack of funding, while others leave their home country on account of personal matters or even political reasons.

Opportunity structures in the country mobile students go to – in this case Norway – may partly explain why one country is chosen on preference to others. In addition to types of study programmes offered, and the perceived quality of these, aspects such as marketing, total costs of sojourn, facilities for international students (English taught programmes, housing etc.) contribute to attracting international students.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Norwegian policy on student mobility and internationalization of higher education has changed over time. In recent years it has been an aim to increase incoming mobility, and higher education institutions have established a number of courses and programmes in English. The number of English taught programmes has almost doubled between 2007 and 2013 (Ministry of Education and Research 2014). Bi- and multilateral exchange programmes have become increasingly popular, and some of these have a particular focus on relations between Russian and Norwegian institutions.

Policy developments in internationalization of higher education may be seen as a reflection of, or response to, international trends, but is also related to a reform in Norwegian higher education, *The Quality Reform*, introduced in 2003. The degree structure was transformed into a 3 + 2 + 3 model, in accordance with the principles of the Bologna Process. Combined with a common European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), this made mobility between institutions across countries easier.

The Quality Reform also contains elements of performance-based funding, implying increased competition between Norwegian higher education institutions. Fees are not charged in public higher education institutions, but parts of their funding are dependent upon the number of credit points students produce. This has resulted in more active institutional strategies to attract students nationally as well as internationally. Institutions now include internationalization and student mobility as part of their strategic plans.

The fact that courses in public higher education institutions in Norway, and even some private establishments, have remained free of charge, has made Norway relatively more attractive as a study destination. With few exceptions (the main one is BI – The Norwegian School of Economics) higher education establishments do not charge tuition fees. On the contrary, fees have been introduced in an increasing number of countries (at least for students from outside EU), including the neighbouring countries of Denmark and Sweden. The absence of tuition fees implies that even if the cost of living in Norway is high, total study costs may be lower than in other countries.

There are also other financial incentives for studying in Norway. Several exchange programmes include funding. The Quota Scheme (see Section 1.5.1) is particularly important in this respect. This programme is a part of internationalization policy, but also a factor in aid and development policy, as capacity building in the students' home countries is a central aim. This allows citizens from selected countries to study in Norway free of charge (grants for covering costs of living are provided), subject to certain conditions.<sup>1</sup> However, the number of students able to study in Norway on the basis of the Quota Scheme has been quite stable, and cannot alone explain the increase in the number of incoming students.

In summary, a policy on internationalization and student mobility has been increasingly implemented in Norwegian higher education institutions. The establishment of more English taught programmes, exchange agreements and other efforts to attract international students have been quite successful.

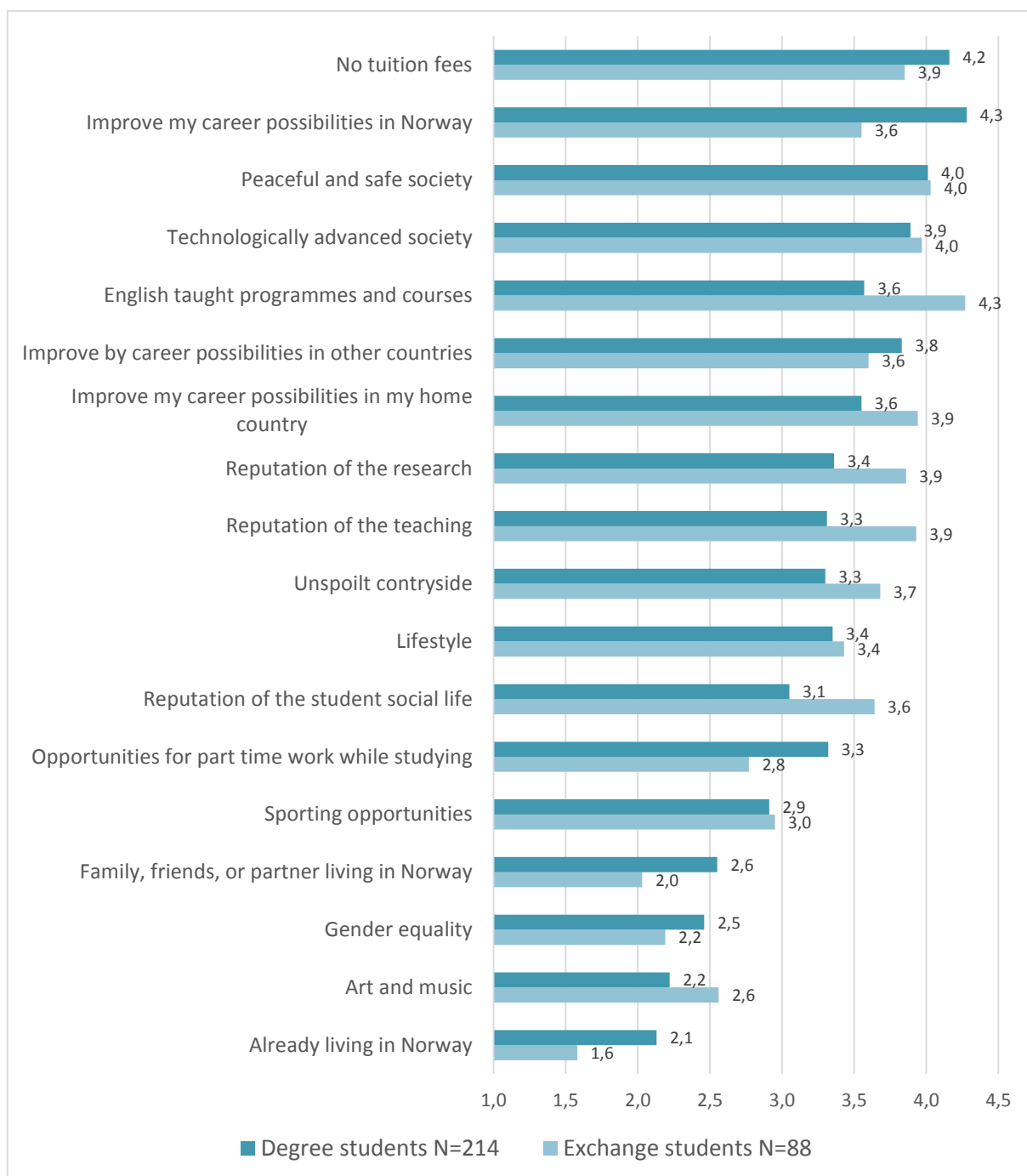
## 4.2 Students' reasons for studying in Norway

Students were presented with a list of 18 potential reasons for studying in Norway, and asked to indicate the degree to which their decision to study in Norway was influenced by these factors. The scale ranged from form 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). The factors rated as most influential for studying in Norway include: no tuition fees, improved career possibilities in Norway, peaceful and safe society, technologically advanced society, and English taught programmes. More than two in three students considered these factors important (rated as scores 4 and 5). Other reasons emphasised by many students are improvement of career possibilities in Russia and countries other than Norway and Russia, reputation of research and teaching, and unspoilt countryside.

The mean scores on all listed alternatives for full degree and exchange students are shown in Figure 4.1. We observe that these two groups place a different emphasis on some factors. Absence of tuition fees, improved career opportunities in Norway and possibilities for part time work while studying are more important to degree students than to exchange students. Exchange students place greater emphasis on English taught programmes and courses, improved career opportunities in their home country, reputation of teaching, research and student social life, and unspoiled countryside compared to degree students.

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<sup>1</sup> A central condition is that the students return to their home country upon graduation. If not, their grants are converted to loans.



**Figure 4.1 Factors influencing the decision to study in Norway for degree and exchange students. Mean score on a scale from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important).**

We have also examined whether differences exist based on the type of/location of higher education institution (HEI). Students in HEIs in Northern Norway place more emphasis on improvement of career possibilities in Russia, reputation of research, teaching and student social life, and are less likely to have family in Norway or have lived there previously. Otherwise, differences between students in different higher education institutions are relatively small (Figure A2 in Appendix).

We also looked for differences according to gender, and found that these were small regarding the most important reasons for studying in Norway. We nevertheless found that female students attach more importance to gender equality and that they had family, friends or partner living in Norway. (For both reasons the mean score was 2.6 for women and 1.9 for men).

### 4.3 Russian students compared to other international students

We have also considered whether Russian students' motives for studying in Norway are different to that of students of other nationalities. The analysis is restricted to a comparison of full degree students. Figure 4.2 shows that there is one particular motivation where Russian degree students clearly stand out from other students – 'improving career possibilities in Norway'. Eighty-three per cent of Russians rated this as important (scores 4 and 5), while the proportion was 70 per cent among students from Western countries and 65 per cent among students from Eastern and Southern countries.

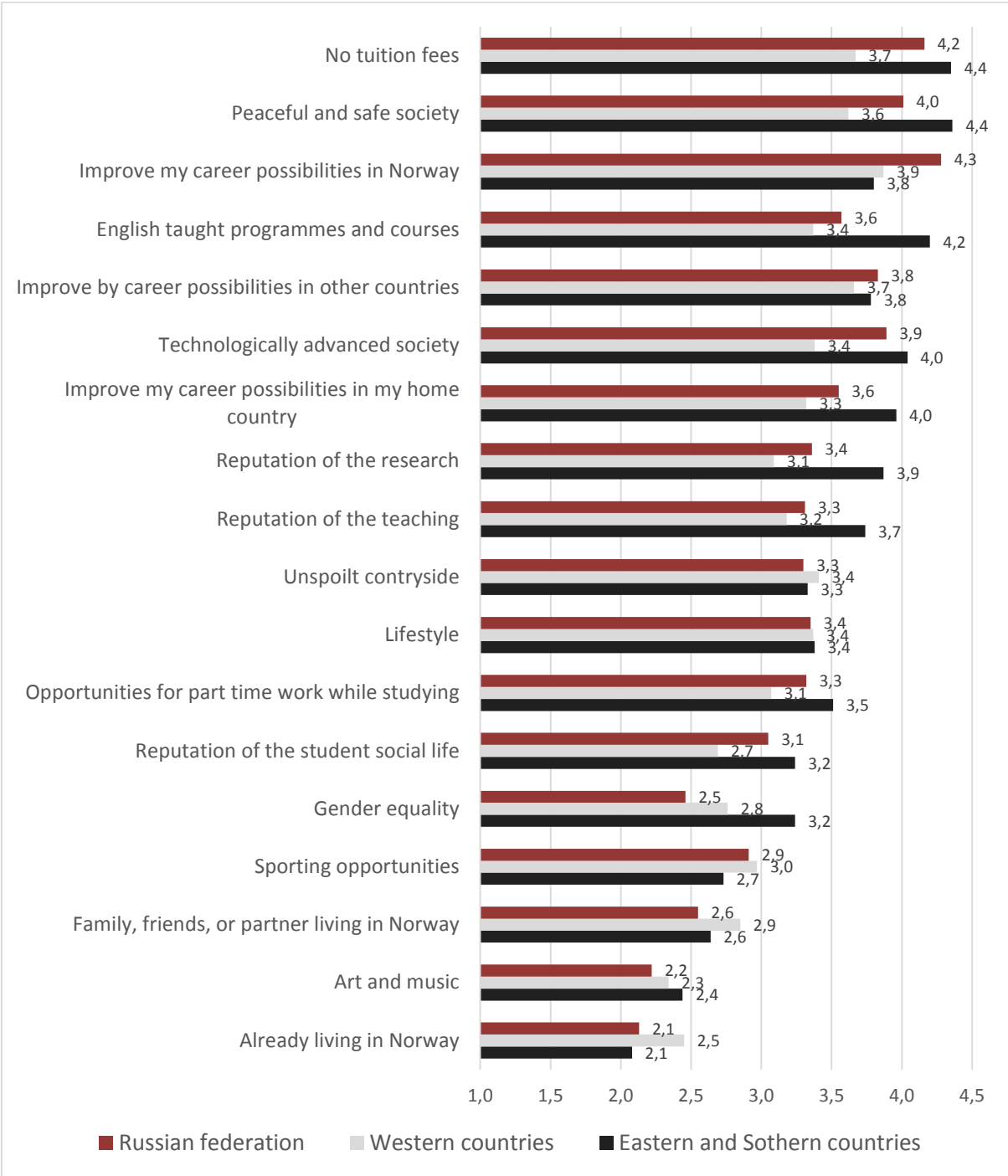


Figure 4.2 Factors influencing the decision to study in Norway for degree students from different countries. Mean score on a scale from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important).

Regarding the other most important motivations, the mean score for Russian students is often between those of students from Western countries and students from Eastern and Southern countries. We observe that gender equality has been less of a motivation for Russian students than others.

#### 4.4 Open question on motives for studying in Norway

The decision to study abroad is often a complex one, not fully captured by quantitative measures. As a supplement to the pre-defined alternatives, the questionnaire also contained an open space where students could elaborate on the reasons why they chose to study in Norway. This question was placed *before* the question with list of predefined alternatives (those shown in Figure 4.2), so that the students could write whatever came to their mind, without being influenced by the predefined alternatives.

The responses show that students report a wide range of rationales. Most of them are also covered by the pre-defined alternatives. Perceived quality, practical facilitation, economic considerations, cultural interest and personal relations are among the motives frequently mentioned. Nevertheless, the responses to open-ended questions provide more information on what comes to students' minds first, and how different rationales interplay, though the responses in a questionnaire cannot provide the same in-depth information as face-to-face interviews. We will now look at some examples of what the students express when they can think more freely.

Quality issues and interest in particular fields are frequently mentioned. Some students express a belief in the quality of Norwegian higher education in general; others underscore the reputation or uniqueness of the institution or subject field they have chosen. Some have studied Norwegian language or other topics related to Norway in Russia, and going to Norway for practicing the language is seen as a 'natural next step'. Some examples of how this is phrased are given below:

*Norway offers the same, high level of education as Germany and France.*

*Best expertise in offshore petroleum technology.*

*UiO is one of the best universities in Europe.*

*Norway is one of the best countries for studying marine biology. Much money available for research, great facilities (modern equipment).*

*Because I wanted to study Ibsen.*

*Because my first education was linguistics with a focus on Norwegian.*

Many students underscore the importance of exchange programmes. Students in Northern Norway in particular, but also students in other universities and colleges, say that exchange agreements have decisive for their choice:

*Because my home institution has an agreement with University in Tromsø, it is easier to get a place and scholarship.*

*My university conducts a good campaign on the BNS programme.*

*My home university and UiB are in collaboration. I also talked to a few students who already took a master degree at UiB and they gave me a positive response about being a student in Norway.*

*I chose Norway because I get this opportunity from the University of Nordland. I have been studying there more than one year in a distance programme and then I had a chance to finish one semester in Norway. I used this opportunity to see how people study in Norway, to get*

*experience of living in another country and communicate with people from different cultures. And I have never been in Norway before. I wanted to see it.*

The fact that education is free of charge is also brought up. The fact that there are no direct costs for education is definitely important, and often mentioned in combination with other motives:

*Because it is free, and I was provided with Quota scheme support for study.*

*Free education for non-EU citizens. Good career opportunities.*

*Free education, good living conditions, people, most Norwegians speak English.*

Another type of motive related to economy is future career prospects. This is often related to the opportunity to remain in Norway upon graduation:

*I decided to study in Norway, because it gives me a lot of job opportunities in the future.*

*Stable economy, good place to live. I want to get citizenship in order to enter the Norwegian army and move my family here.*

*Norway, an economically stable, developing country. After graduation, you can find a well-paid job. I think that I can live my life here, start a family.*

In addition to being an economically attractive study destination, there are also other features of Norway that attract. Some underscore the high standard of living, and aspects of the welfare state model. Safety issues are also mentioned. Others are fascinated by culture, including what they regard as friendly people. Others again underscore and beautiful scenery as a reason for coming to Norway.

*Have heard a lot about how beautiful the country is. My mom suggested choosing Norway. It is one of Scandinavian countries with strong traditions and an interesting culture that is important for me.*

*Norway was the first foreign country I attended and I wanted to come back. Also, I'm interested in the Arctic region in both political and economic spheres and being here, in the North of Norway. This will deepen my knowledge for my research paper.*

*Because it is very interesting to know new interesting facts about Norwegian culture, their position about rights of indigenous peoples of the North.*

*Beautiful nature, safe and peaceful environment.*

*No. 1 in standard of living index, human development index, top in list of most happiest countries. Also asked those who already study here. Replies were great.*

A few students say that Norway is attractive because they find it exotic, but it is more common to emphasize the close ties and the cultural and geographical proximity between Russia and Norway:

*Norway has similar historical and partly cultural features with my country.*

*It is like Russia, in many aspects, the weather for example. We are neighbours and I have friends in Norway.*

*Close to home, Murmansk, Russia.*

Personal relations have been of vital importance to some students. They have friends or relatives living in Norway or a Norwegian partner, and some of them were already living in Norway when they commenced higher education. For some of these students, higher education was really the only alternative.

*Most of my friends are studying in Norway.*

*My sister is living here and I've visited her many times.*

*I'm married to a Norwegian citizen and live in Norway.*

*My family lives in Norway and education is free here. So, it was the only choice for me.*

Often, students report that the decision to study in Norway was influenced by a number of factors in combination:

*Cooperation programme between home University and UiT, scholarship, good studying conditions, good welfare system for students (accommodation, facilities), closeness to home city in Russia.*

*It is a good opportunity to get a degree that is internationally recognizable, improve English skills, learn a new language, meet new people from different countries around the world and study using different teaching methods.*

*Friendly educational atmosphere, free education, quota scholarship, possibility to find a job related to educational level. Friendly kind Norwegians. Nice professors, open-minded and communicative. Beautiful nature. Wonderful country.*

We observe that there are many different reasons that are mentioned. A methodological challenge, for the open as well as the closed question, is that we ask about a decision that was made some time back, and that they may not remember exactly what they were thinking at the time when the decision was made.

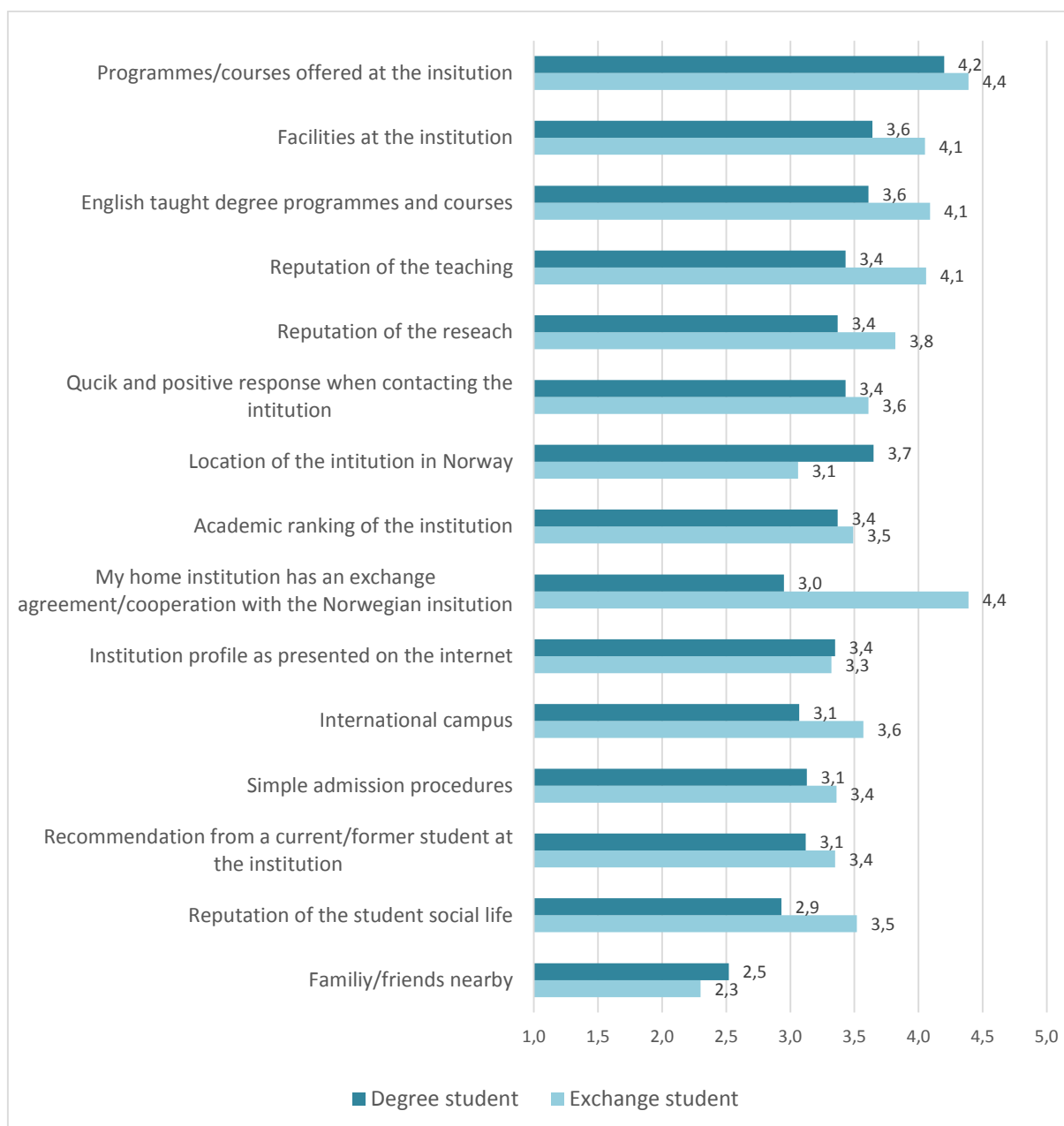
## **4.5 Reasons for choosing higher education institution**

The decision to study abroad and the choice of higher education institution are often closely related. Many students go abroad mainly because they find an institution that has something particular to offer. Others initially decide to go abroad, and then decide about the country and an institution.

What reasons do students have for choosing particular Norwegian institutions? Figure 4.3 shows how full degree vs. exchange students respond to this question. Not surprisingly, the programmes/courses are of great importance for both groups.

We observe that exchange students clearly place more emphasis on institutional exchange agreements, and they also assess the reputation of teaching, research and students' social life as more important than is the case with degree students. Exchange students attach less importance to the geographical location of the institution. As we observed in Chapter 3, (Figure 3.1), many exchange students are found in the northern part of Norway.

Looking at differences according to type of/location of institution, we find that students in institutions in Northern Norway, more often than others, consider exchange agreements important. This applies to degree students as well as exchange students. Students in the north also emphasise simple admission procedures and recommendation from a current/former student at the institution to a greater extent than others (Figure A3 in the Appendix). It is possible that these results are related to cooperation between institutions on both sides of the Russian-Norwegian border. We also examined differences between female and male students, but found that these were small.



**Figure 4.3 Factors influencing the choice of higher education institution. Mean score on a scale from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important).**

## 4.6 Summary: Why Russian students go to Norway

The reasons why Russians study in Norway are complex. Exchange agreement courses in English facilitates mobility, and free education makes it economically accessible. Quality is perceived as good, and some go to obtain education that is unique or has a good reputation. Non-academic motives are also present. Students are attracted by features of Norwegian society, such as high level of development, safety and the welfare state. Scenery and nature is also mentioned by some. Future career prospects are also important, and Russian students are more likely to be tempted by a career in Norway than students of most other nationalities.



## 5 Assessment of teaching and learning environment

Previous studies on international students in Norway shows that they are generally satisfied with the sojourn (SIU 2011, 2013c). However, there is limited knowledge about what aspects of the sojourn they are satisfied with. Is it the teaching and learning environment? Or is it the sojourn in general? In this chapter we will look at the students' assessment of teaching and counselling, and the study environment.

### 5.1 Teaching and counselling

The vast majority of students are satisfied with the aspects of teaching and counselling listed (Figure 5.1). Very few claim to be dissatisfied. Students are particularly satisfied with the teachers' ability to teach in English. They are slightly less satisfied with individual student counselling than with other aspects, although Russian students have more positive assessments of this than others (as we will return to later).

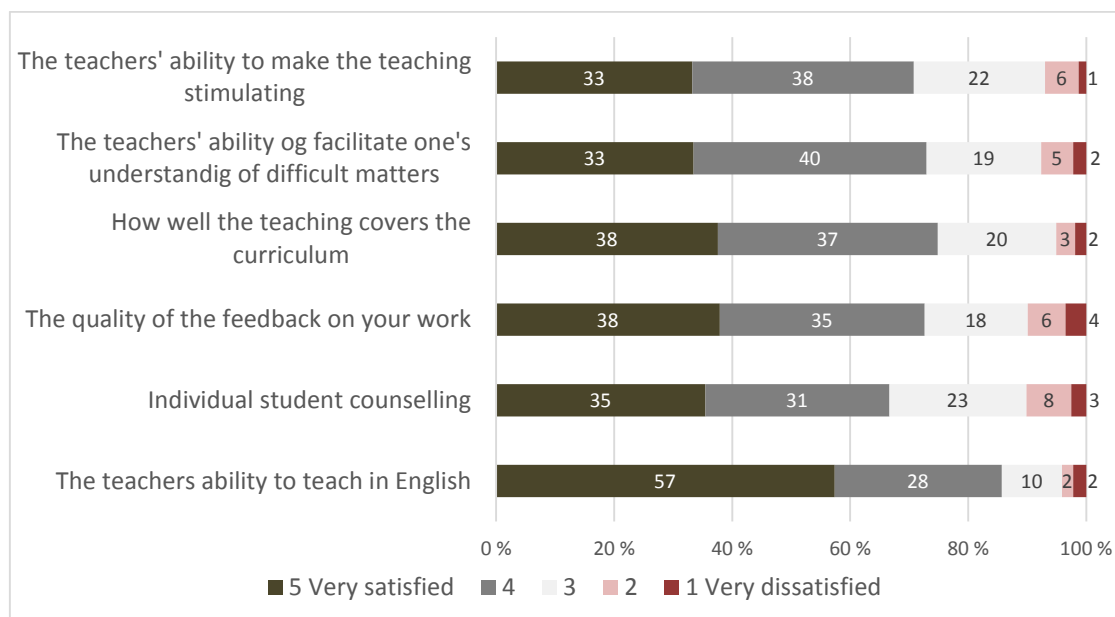
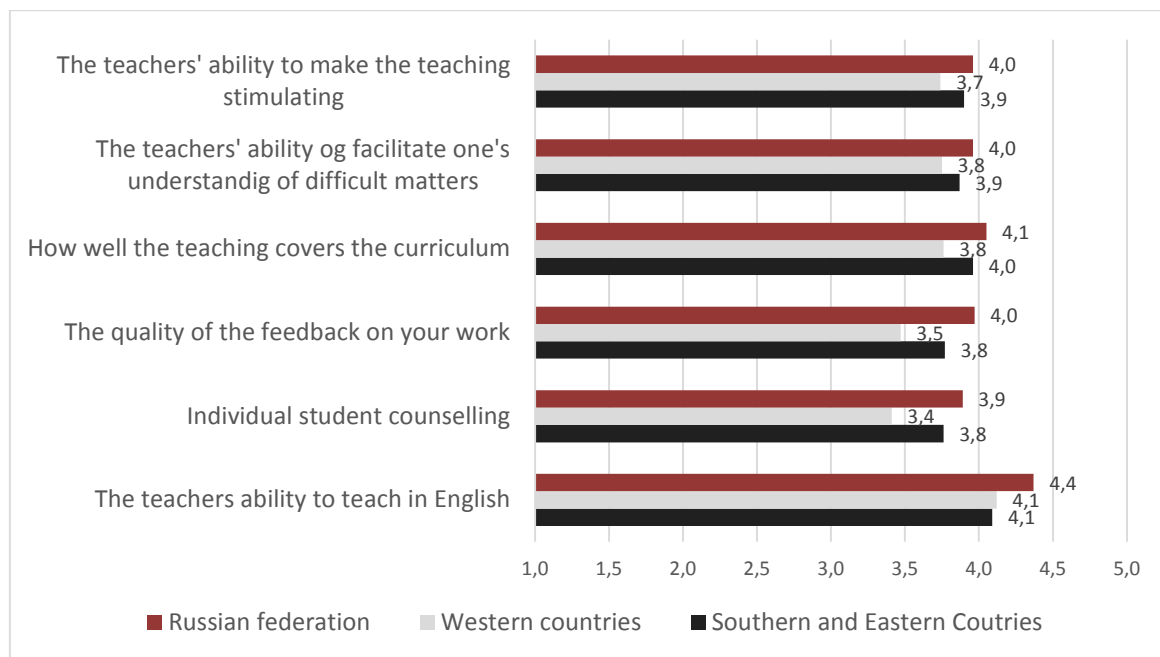


Figure 5.1 Students' assessment of teaching and counselling. Per cent

There are small differences according to the type of institution where the students are enrolled, but regarding individual student counselling, we found that students in institutions of high prestige were less satisfied (43%) than others (57%). That intuitions of high prestige is regarded less positive by students, may be seen as a paradox.

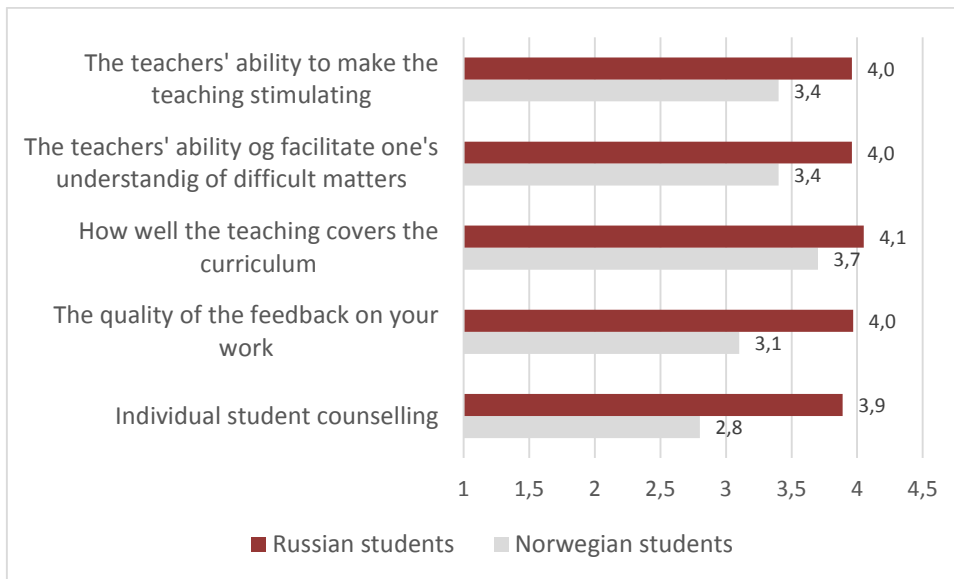
We also checked for differences according to gender and type of student (full degree/exchange). Differences were small, but the exchange students were generally slightly more satisfied.

Comparing Russian students to other groups of international students, we find that Russian students are more satisfied than others. Figure 5.2 shows that mean scores regarding all six questions regarding teaching and counselling are higher for Russian students than students from Western countries and Southern and Eastern countries.



**Figure 5.2 Students' assessment of teaching and counselling, students from different countries. Mean score on scale 1 (dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).**

We have also compared the assessments of international students with those of a survey among Norwegian students containing some of the same questions. The sample in our survey and that of the Norwegian students was made on a different basis, and hence not identical. Comparisons should thus be made with care. The pattern we find is interesting: international students in general, and Russian students in particular, are more satisfied than Norwegian students (Figure 5.3). Differences are particularly striking regarding feedback and counselling. While two of three Russian students reported being satisfied (score 4 or 5), this is only true for less than 40 per cent of the Norwegian students.

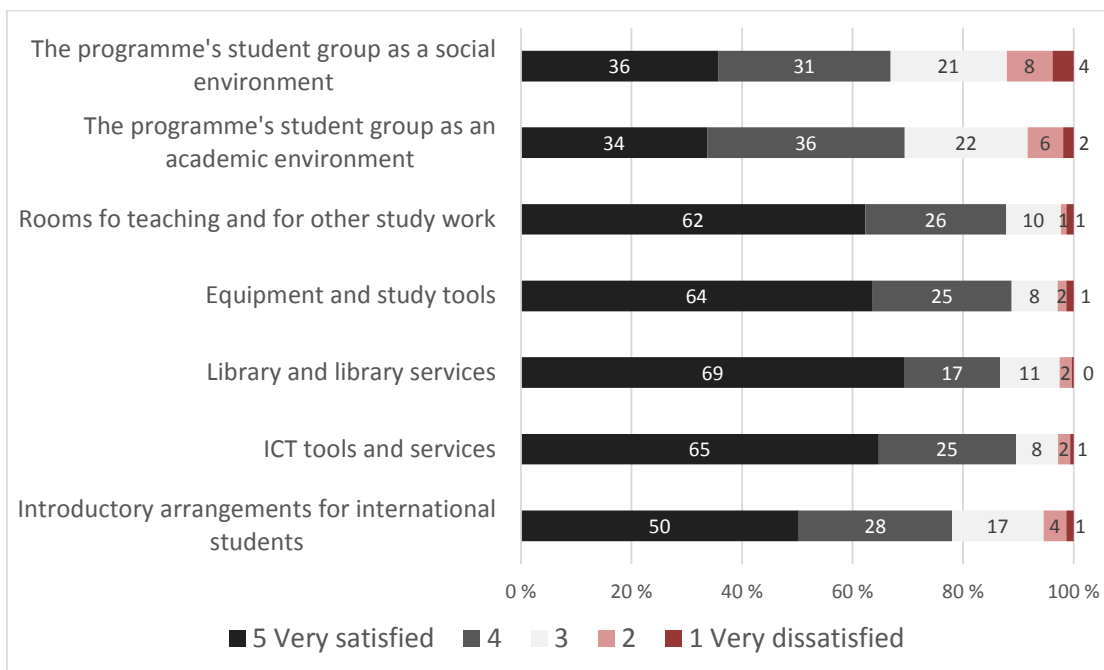


**Figure 5.3 Russian and Norwegian students' assessment of teaching and counsellings. Mean score on scale 1 (dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).**

Possible reasons for the differences in assessment between Russian and Norwegian student are discussed later in this chapter.

## 5.2 Study environment

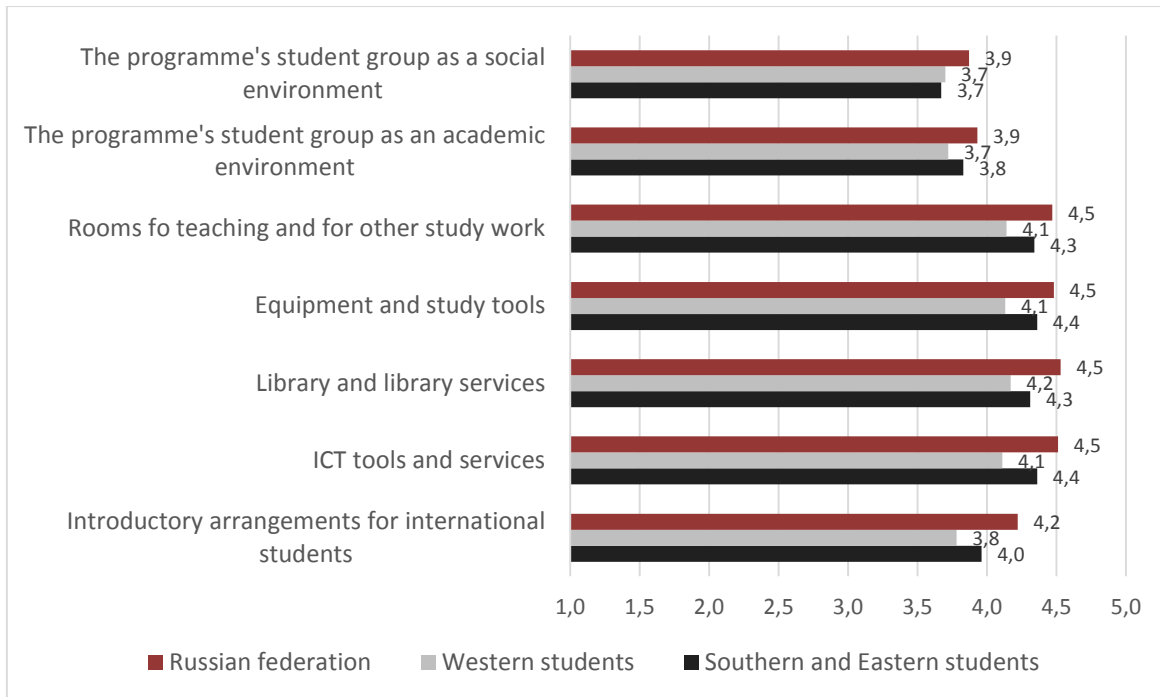
Students were also asked to assess the study environment, rooms and equipment (Figure 5.4). We find a high level of satisfaction regarding these aspects. The proportion of students reporting to be 'very satisfied', is particularly high (more than 60 per cent) regarding rooms, equipment and study equipment, library and ICT. We note that more students are far more satisfied with these issues compared to teaching and counselling.



**Figure 5.4 Students' assessment of study environment. Per cent.**

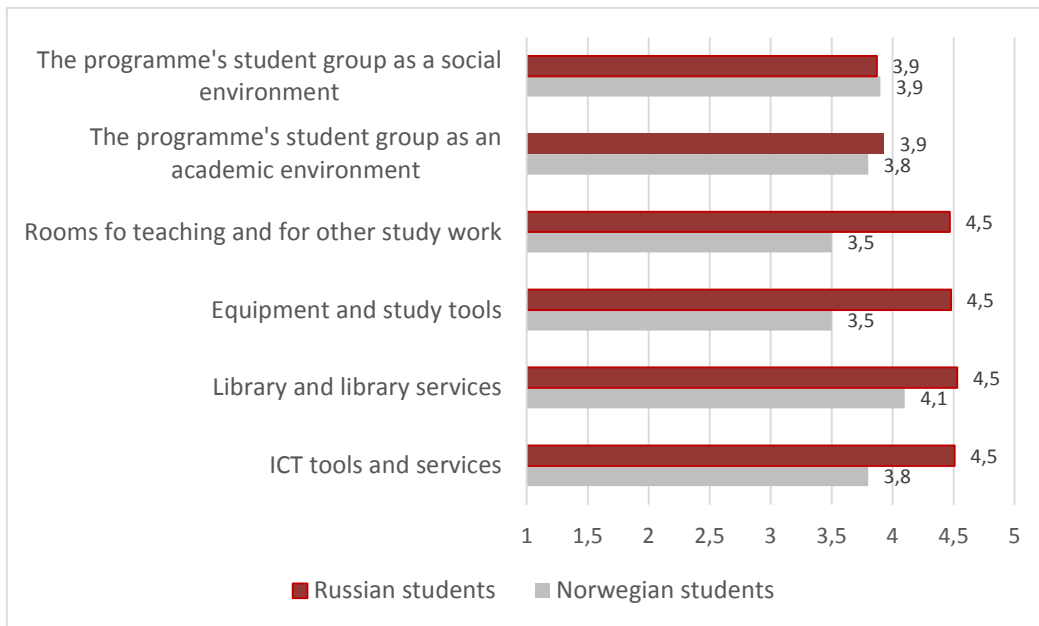
We looked at differences between types of institutions, and found that these were small (see Figure A4 in the Appendix). There were no substantial differences between male and female students, but we found that exchange students in general were slightly more satisfied than full degree students.

We also investigated whether Russian students diverge from other groups of international students. The results are shown as mean scores in Figure 5.5. We observe that Russian students in general are more satisfied than other international students, Western students in particular.



**Figure 5.5 Students' assessment study environment, according to country of origin. Mean score on scale 1 (dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).**

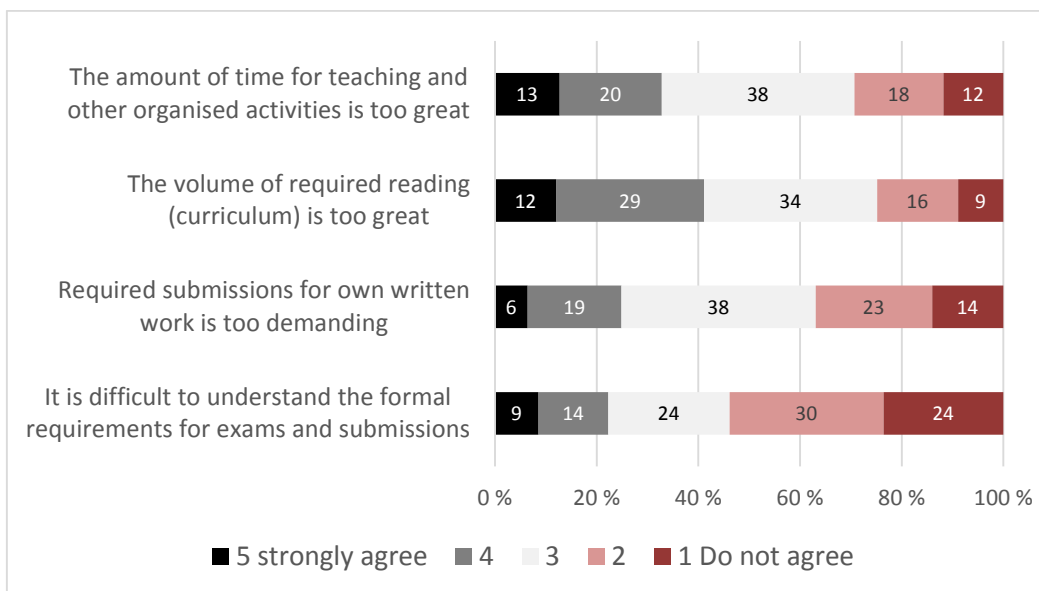
Finally, we compared Russian students to Norwegian students, using the same data set as described above. Results are displayed in Figure 5.6. Russian and Norwegian students have similar perceptions of the programme's student group as part of the social and academic environment. But regarding rooms, equipment, library and ICT, we find that Russian students are far more satisfied with this compared to Norwegian students.



**Figure 5.6 Students' assessment of study environment, Russian and Norwegian students compared. Mean score on scale 1 (dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).**

### 5.3 Work load and formal requirements

The questionnaire also contained some questions on how students perceive workload and formal requirements. These are typically matters that may be quite different from the students' situation in their home country. Students were presented four statements, and asked to indicate whether they agreed with these or not. Results are displayed in Figure 5.7.



**Figure 5.7 Students' assessments of workload and formal requirements scale 1 (not agree) – 5 (strongly agree)**

Regarding the amount of teaching, we see that the proportion that agrees is the same as the proportion that disagrees. As for the volume of required reading, more students agree than disagree that it is too extensive. One in four students agrees that the required submissions for own written work is too demanding, but more students disagree. Almost one in four agree that it is difficult to understand

the formal requirements for exams and submissions, while twice as many disagree, and the rest are neutral. Hence, we see that Russian students have quite different opinions regarding work load and formal requirements. However, this does not vary very much by gender or whether they are exchange students or full degree students. There are slightly more female (44%) than male students (33%) who report that the workload is too heavy. We also find that a higher proportion of exchange students find the workload too heavy (40%) compared to full degree students (31%). Neither do we find much variation between different kind of HEIs, except that fewer students (23%) in prestigious establishments agree that the amount of teaching and other activities are excessive (36%).

Russian students do not differ substantially from other international students regarding viewpoints on workload and formal requirements. This is an area where opinions were split in both groups.

## **5.4 Why are Russian students more satisfied than others?**

In this chapter we have seen that Russian students are generally quite satisfied with different aspects of teaching, learning and the study environment. They tend to be more satisfied than other international students, and definitely more satisfied than Norwegian students. How can we interpret these findings? Our quantitative data cannot explain these differences. However, we have some suggestions which provide a possible explanation.

We assume that the level of satisfaction will vary according to expectations and the kind of educational system students come from. When we find that Russian students are satisfied with rooms, tools and equipment, it may be because the standard is actually better. When they are more satisfied with feedback than most others, it may be because they experience that teachers are more accessible and willing to give feedback than that to which they are accustomed in Russia.

Another interpretation is that the level of satisfaction can be related to motivation. Other studies have shown that highly motivated and ambitious students tend to be more satisfied (Astin, 1993; Diseth *et al.* 2010). Students who go abroad are likely to be more motivated – in general – than students entering a local college, and this may explain why Russian students are more satisfied than Norwegian students.

Qualitative interviews conducted by other researchers in the NORRUSS team can shed light on why Russian students are particularly satisfied. This may be addressed in forthcoming publications.

## 6 Challenges and integration

Studying in a country other than that where one is born and raised, involves many challenges. Teaching methods and examination forms may be quite different, and there are also many challenges regarding practicalities such as language, cultural codes, social networks and housing. Many studies from around the world have shown that international students struggle with psychological and sociocultural adjustment as well as cross-cultural learning (see, for example Jochems *et al.* 1996, Murphy-Lejeune 2002, Lee & Rice 2007, Wiers-Jenssen 2008). In this chapter, we look at how Russian students cope with some of these challenges compared to other international students.

### 6.1 Challenges

Students were presented with a list of six potential challenges associated with studying in Norway. They were asked to indicate whether it had been easier or more difficult than expected to handle these tasks. Figure 6.1 shows that the getting to know Norwegians and dealing with the cost of living are the two tasks that cause most concern. Close to half of the students find these aspects more challenging than expected.

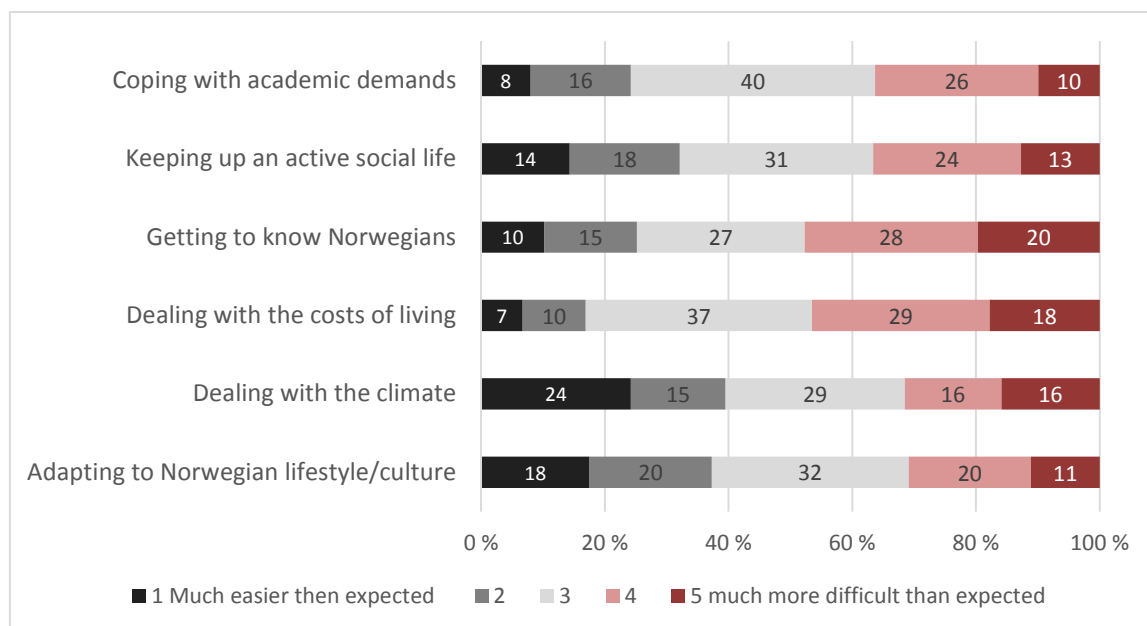
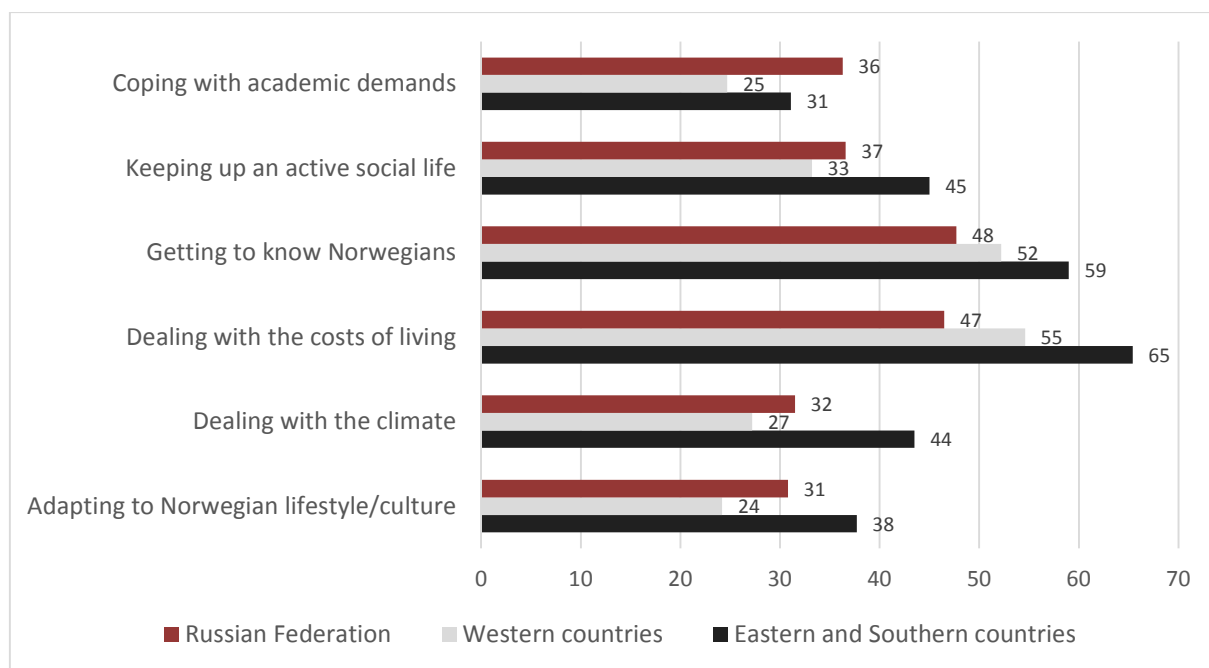


Figure 6.1 Challenges associated with studying in Norway. Per cent.

Regarding these questions, we found relatively small differences according to type of institution, gender and between full degree and exchange students.

In Figure 6.2, Russian students are compared to other international students regarding these questions. The figure shows the proportions of students finding the listed challenges more difficult than expected (Score 4 and 5 on a scale from 1 - 5).

We see that more Russians than other international students find ‘coping with academic demands’ more challenging than expected. On the positive side, Russians report to struggle less with getting to know Norwegians and dealing with the costs of living.



**Figure 6.2 Challenges associated with studying in Norway. Percentage of students from different countries finding different matters more challenging than expected.**

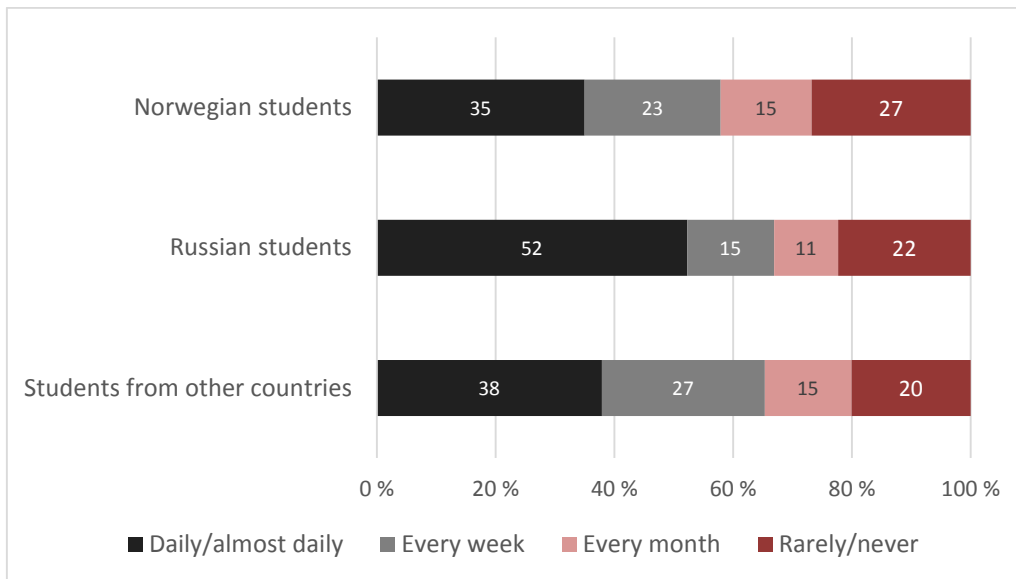
## 6.2 Academic and social networks

In the previous section, we saw that a substantial proportion of students find it more challenging than expected to get to know Norwegians. In this section we look at the kind of network students have. To what extent do they socialize with Russian students, other international students and Norwegians?

### 6.2.1 Interaction with students of different nationalities in university/college

Figure 6.3 shows to how frequently students interact with other groups of students in the university/college. We see that the student group with whom Russian students socialize most is other Russian students. Half of them do this on a daily basis, while one third of the students interact with Norwegians on a daily basis. In total, Norwegian students is the group with which they have least contact.



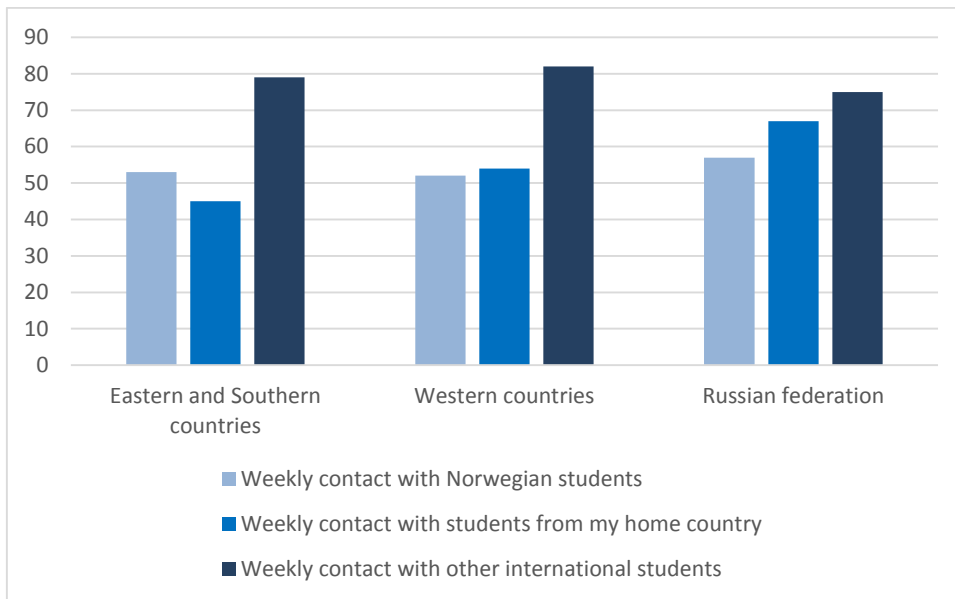


**Figure 6.3 Russian students' interaction with students of other nationalities in university/college. Per cent.**

Exchange students have more contact with Russian and international students compared to degree students. Seven of ten exchange students socialize with other Russian students on a daily basis. Students in institutions in Northern Norway have less contact with Norwegians compared to students in institutions in other parts of the country. This may be due to that there are more Russians 'available' to interact with in institutions in Northern Norway.

Differences according to gender are small. Those who lived in Norway prior to entering higher education have less contact with other students in general, and Russian and international students in particular. More than half of this group rarely/never have contact with Russian or other international students. This may partly be explained by that the students who already lived in Norway are older (and possibly less interested in interacting with younger students), and have had more time to form a network outside the university compared to those who came to Norway to study.

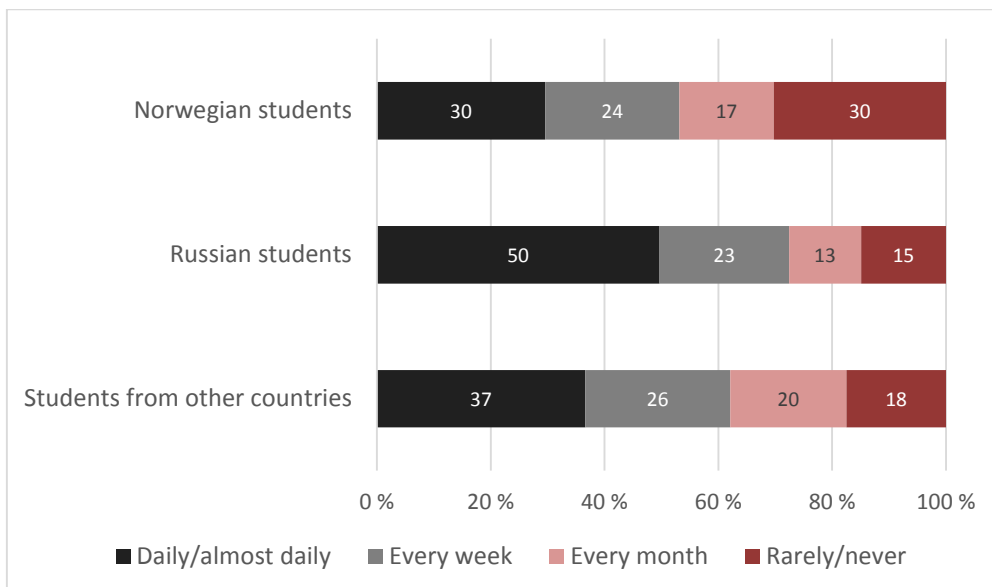
A pattern of less contact with Norwegian students than students from other international students is not specific to Russians. Students from other countries also tend to have limited contact with Norwegian students. Figure 6.4 shows the proportions of students who have contact with other groups of students on a weekly basis.



**Figure 6.4 Proportion of students who have contact with students of other nationalities on a weekly basis.**

### 6.2.2 Interaction with students of different nationalities in leisure time

Students were also asked to indicate how often they socialize with students of different nationalities in their leisure time. Results are shown in Figure 6.5.



**Figure 6.5 Russian students' interaction with students of other nationalities in leisure time. Per cent**

We observe that the interaction pattern is very much the same in leisure time as in the university/college (Figure 6.3), but that the level of interaction is even lower. Thirty per cent of students never interact with Norwegians in their leisure time. Again, limited contact with Norwegians is not unique to Russian students. Students from Eastern and Southern countries have even less contact with Norwegians in their leisure time where 43 per cent report never having contact with Norwegians. In contrast, students from Nordic countries and North America report far more contact with Norwegian students.

The questionnaire also contained an open question on what the higher education institution could do to improve the study course. We observe that the majority of comments is in some way related to the need for interaction between international and Norwegian students. A few examples from Russian students are listed below:

*More joint events for Norwegians and international students.*

*To enter more Norwegian courses, such as language, culture and living in Norway, to be available to be a part of Norwegian society during the education.*

*Mix the students in student houses to avoid the appearing of diasporas.*

Similar opinions are also shared by other groups of international students, and it seems clear that this is an area where improvements could be made.

### **6.3 Impressions of Norway**

The survey contained a question on whether impressions of Norway have changed during the sojourn, as well as an open question where students could elaborate on how their impressions have changed.

The majority of students (64%) responded that the impressions had changed positively; a small minority (8%) reported that their impressions changed in a negative direction. The remaining students (26%) responded that their impression had not changed, or had changed very little.

Among the students who have developed a more positive impression, this is mainly related to lifestyle and social networks. Many students mention that Norwegians are more open than they expected, but that they struggled in the initial phase of their sojourn. Some examples of why impressions have changed positively is found below:

*The lifestyle in Norway differs a lot from that of in my home country. I feel safer here and calmer, almost not stressed and confident about the next day (so to say).*

*End of culture shock and adaptation to Norwegian culture.*

*Good organization of welfare and very liberal attitude towards differentness.*

*The life style in Norway differs from my home country. People are very kind, responsive.*

*Initially I thought that social life in Norway is not that interesting. However since I got to know more people I changed my opinion.*

*I had a good impression about Norway before I arrived here, but after I arrived I met a lot of Norwegian people, who are very open and kind and leave very good impression, and I like the equality between genders.*

*I got to know Norwegians with time, adapted to culture and weather, got used to food and small supermarkets with limited food variety, became more social at uni, travelled around Norway and saw how stunningly beautiful it is, got a job with a local salary...and simply fell in love with Norway!*

Among the minority who have developed a more negative attitude, this is mainly related to social contact – of lack of the same:

*Norwegians - asocial nation. This is very uninteresting and boring to study in Norway, and to live too.*

*Hard to socialize with people in class. Even though I know Norwegian very well, it's not my language and it is hard to communicate with them at level they communicate with each other. Slang, dialects and such things making it even harder. Me, my friends from Poland and Russia have become outcasts. Nobody talks to us and we don't talk to anybody. My enthusiasm has decreased very much and I don't go to school if I don't have to, because I don't want to be around all the people there.*

*After the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, Norwegian students' attitude towards Russians has changed.*

*People are very reserved, are not willing to communicate. They might help just if it's their job, but not on their own initiative. They might even see you are struggling, but will rarely offer help, physical or any other type. Throughout the years of studying at UIS I was never invited to Norwegian parties.*

## **6.4 Potential for more interaction**

Limited contact between international and national students is not unique to Norway. Studies from several countries have shown that this is a challenge (Williams and Johnson 2010, Arkoudis et al 2013 Garret 2014). Social network is important for satisfaction and adaptation (Wiers-Jenssen 2008, Perucci and Hu 1995) and has impacts beyond the well-being of the individual student. If interaction between international students and those from the host country is not taking place, the possibilities for 'doing internationalization' are limited. Central goals of the Norwegian policy of internationalization are quality enhancement and 'internationalization at home'. To obtain such goals, a high level of interaction between international and national students is needed. The number of international students in Norway has increased rapidly in recent years, and possibly too fast for some institutions to provide satisfactory facilities for all of them.

It may be argued that some aspects of national political goals for internationalization can be perceived as 'buzzwords' rather than achievable goals, and that higher education institutions may give priority to other rationales for student mobility than quality enhancement and internationalisation at home. Capacity building in other countries, international solidarity, or regional cooperation are among the issues that may be seen as important, independent of 'immediate' internationalization effects at the micro level. Further, some institutions are probably more focused on *attracting* students than catering for them on campus. For higher education institutions having a limited pool of local students to recruit from, attracting international students may be essential for the sustainability of the study programmes and academic environment. As parts of the funding of Norwegian higher institutions are related to the number of credit points students achieve, economic rationales for recruiting international students can also be present. In addition, entrepreneurial activities such as developing new study programmes targeting new groups of students is likely to be perceived as particularly interesting for some faculty members. As mentioned, such programmes have been very important regarding recruiting Russian students to Norwegian universities and colleges.

There is definitely a potential for improvement regarding interaction between Russian and Norwegian students. We nevertheless observe that Russian students do slightly better than students of other nationalities regarding contact with Norwegians. This may partly be related to that the Russian students on average have been in Norway longer than the other international students with whom comparisons are made, but it can also be that the cultural distance is less between Russians and Norwegians than between Norwegians and students from some other countries.

# 7 Will they stay or will they go?

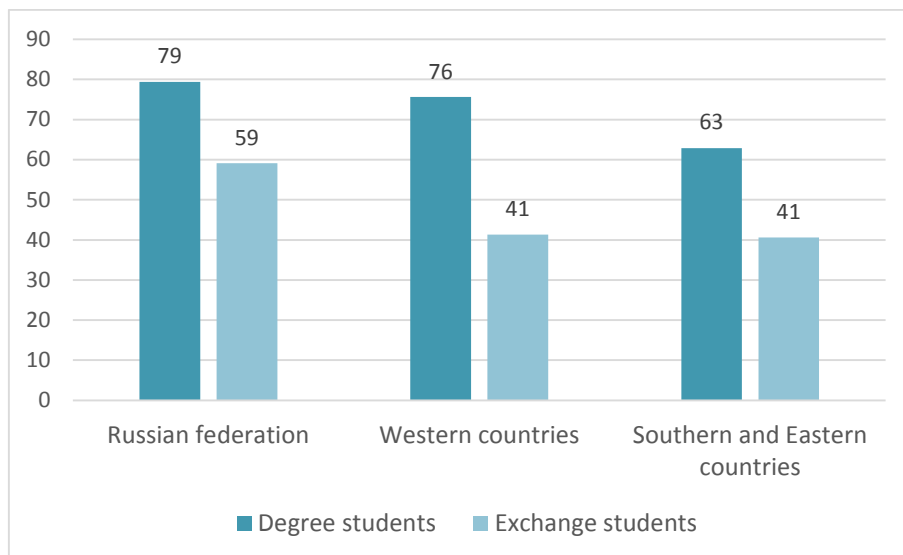
Studying abroad is a form of temporary migration, but some students end up staying behind in the country where they were studying. For some students, the idea of permanent migration had been present from the start; for others, this is something that develops during the sojourn abroad.

In Chapter 4, we saw that more than two-thirds of the Russian students mentioned career opportunities in Norway as an important reason for their decision to study in Norway. This proportion is higher than for students of most other nationalities. In this chapter we look at those who consider staying upon completion of their studies and the reasons for this.

## 7.1 How many would like to stay in Norway?

Eight in ten full degree students and six in ten exchange students state that they have considered staying in Norway after finishing their degree. Not surprisingly, the proportion is even higher among those who were already living in Norway where as much as 90 per cent of degree students had considered staying on. There are no statistically significant difference between males and females in the proportions considering to stay, men are as interested as women.

There are more students who would like to stay in Norway among Russians than other international students. The difference is striking regarding exchange students. Figure 7.1 shows that the proportion of exchange students who would like to stay is approximately 50 per cent higher among Russian students than among other international students. From more detailed analyses, we know that the proportion that would like to stay is even higher among students from the Nordic countries – 86 per cent among degree students (Wiers-Jenssen 2014). However, among the Nordic students the exchange students are not particularly interested in staying. In total, Russians is that nationality most interested in staying.



**Figure 7.1 Proportion of students from different countries considering to stay in Norway after graduation**

## 7.2 Why students want to stay in Norway

Students who considered staying in Norway upon graduation were asked why they wanted to do so. Table 7.1 shows that the majority would like to stay because they want to find a job, but there are also some students who would like to continue studying.

**Table 7.1 Reasons why Russian students consider to stay in Norway upon graduation. Per cent.**

	Degree students N=170	Exchange students N=51
I want to continue as a student	14	30
I want to find a job in Norway	62	59
I already have a job in Norway	12	6
Other	12	6
Sum	100	100

Those who want to find a job in Norway, or who already have a job, were asked *why* they want to work in Norway. The majority related this to good career opportunities or high wage level, but some report family, friends or partner as the main reason to stay. Few report that difficulties finding a job in Russia as the main reason.

**Table 7.2 Reasons why students want to work in Norway upon graduation. Per cent.**

	Russian students who want to work in Norway N= 158
Good career opportunities in Norway	48
High wage level	22
Difficult to find job in home country	6
Family, friends or partner in Norway	20
Other	4
Sum	100

Some students may have several reasons why they want to stay and work in Norway. However, it was not possible to tick several boxes on any of the questions shown in Tables 7.1 and 7.2. It nevertheless seems clear that students see themselves as pulled towards Norway rather than pushed out of Russia.

### **7.3 Implications**

The fact that students consider staying in Norway does not necessarily mean that they will end up residing in the country. They may find more attractive alternatives, they could change their minds or they could face legal restrictions as non-EU citizens. Still, it is interesting to observe that Russians are more interested in staying in Norway compared to students of most other nationalities.

From other studies, we know that around half of international master students remain in Norway upon graduation (DAMVAD 2013). This can be seen as an advantage from a Norwegian point of view. The demand for skilled labour is still quite high, in recent years there has been a shortage of graduates in science and technology. Certain stakeholders, like the Norwegian Employers Association have argued that more international students should remain in Norway upon graduation since their higher education has been sponsored by the Norwegian government (NHO 2015). But so far this is not a part of official Norwegian policy.

Seen from a Russian point of view, student mobility to Norway implies a high risk of a brain drain. The loss of Russian students is not compensated with a similar flow of Russians to Norway. However, it may also be seen as positive that some students stay behind. They may be seen as good ambassadors for Russia, and contribute to improving Russian-Norwegian relations in the economic as well as the cultural sphere. Taking into consideration the size of the Russian population, a few hundred students migrating to Norway may not be seen as a problem.

## 8 Concluding remarks

This report has presented the main results from a survey among Russian students in Norway. This is a group where we have had limited systematic knowledge. Hence, this report provides new information. The response rate of the students is moderate which means that results should be interpreted with caution. Still, we have no reason to believe that those who have responded to the survey are very different from those who have not. For example, the proportion of females and the distribution of students on different institutions are more or less the same.

One of the advantages of using these survey data is that it has allowed us to compare Russian students with other groups of international students. Among the things we have learned is that Russian students are generally satisfied with their study sojourn in Norway. Their assessments of teaching, counselling and learning environment are more positive than some other groups of international students, and definitely more positive than Norwegian students. We have also learnt that Russian students are more interested in pursuing a career in Norway compared to the average international student. We have also seen that Russian students, more often than others, come from homes where their parents have higher education. As a group, Russian students seem quite successful, and capable of adapting to living in Norway. It would be interesting to look into other data sources to acquire more information on the profile of the Russian students such as intake scores, dropout and completion rates.

However, quantitative data definitely has limitations regarding telling us *why* Russian students choose to study in Norway and reason like they do. We note that the responses to the few open questions that were included in the survey provide interesting supplementary information about issues like reasons for studying in Norway, barriers to integration and other issues. Qualitative approaches are needed to obtain a better understanding of topics like decision-processes, integration and more. Qualitative interviews are conducted as a part of the NORRUSS-project 'Higher education in the High North', and will contribute to a better understanding of student migration from Russia.

About a third of the Russian students registered in Norwegian higher education institutions, of whom most are undergraduate students in Circumpolar Studies/Northern studies, work online, and rarely or never physically attend Norwegian institutions. Most of them take the online education parallel to taking a degree in Russia. This group has not been part of this survey, but would be an interesting group at which to take a look. Among the questions that would be interesting to investigate are: What characterizes students who enrol in these programmes? What is their motivation to sign up for this kind of class? To what extent do these kinds of programme contribute to internationalization of Norwegian higher education institutions? Quantitative as well as qualitative approaches could be used for investigating these questions. Online education of foreign students as a target group is a relatively new phenomenon in Norway. This kind of transnational education can be considered an innovative



measure with a large market potential. But it has also been questioned, to what extent such a development is consistent with the policy objective of the central authorities in which internationalisation will or should contribute to improving the quality of Norwegian institutions and to 'internationalisation at home'.

This report has also mapped the development of the number of Russian students in Norway. The figures have grown for many years, particularly after 2009. Recent developments indicate that this growth has ceased. The actual number declined between 2013 and 2014, although most of this reduction has occurred at one single institution (UiN), it would be misleading to interpret this as a trend. As the number of international students in Norway is generally increasing, the proportion of Russian students of the total international student population in Norway has fallen in recent years. During the last decade, Russian students have constituted one of the largest groups of international students, and cooperation with Russia and the Barents region is an important part of Norwegian policy on internationalization of higher education. Further, relations with Russia is also an important feature of Norwegian foreign policy, and educational cooperation can be seen as a form of soft diplomacy. If the cooperation and student mobility between Russia and Norway in higher education is about to decline, the reasons for this would need to be investigated.

One of the reasons why Russians, and other international students, choose Norway, is the absence of tuition fees. While neighbouring countries like Sweden and Denmark have introduced such fees, study programmes in public higher education institutions are without charge in Norway. Introducing tuition fees for students from outside the EEA has been suggested by several political parties, but hitherto has not gained sufficient support in the parliament. However, this may change in the future. If so, this will most likely affect the student flow from Russia to Norway. Some students may not be able to pay fees, while some of those who could afford it may well prefer other countries in which to study if fees were introduced.

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# Appendix

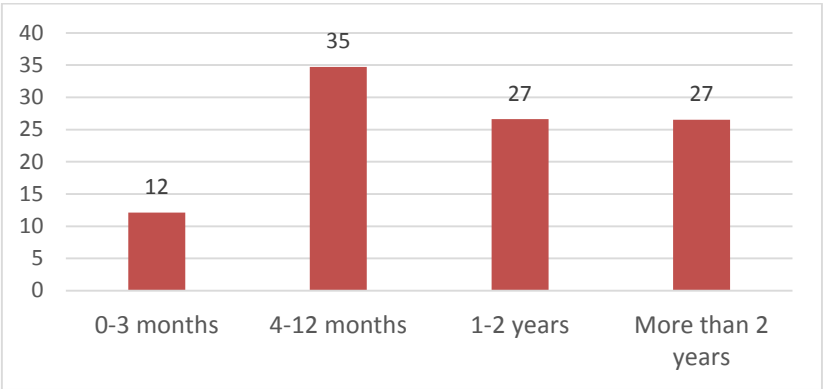
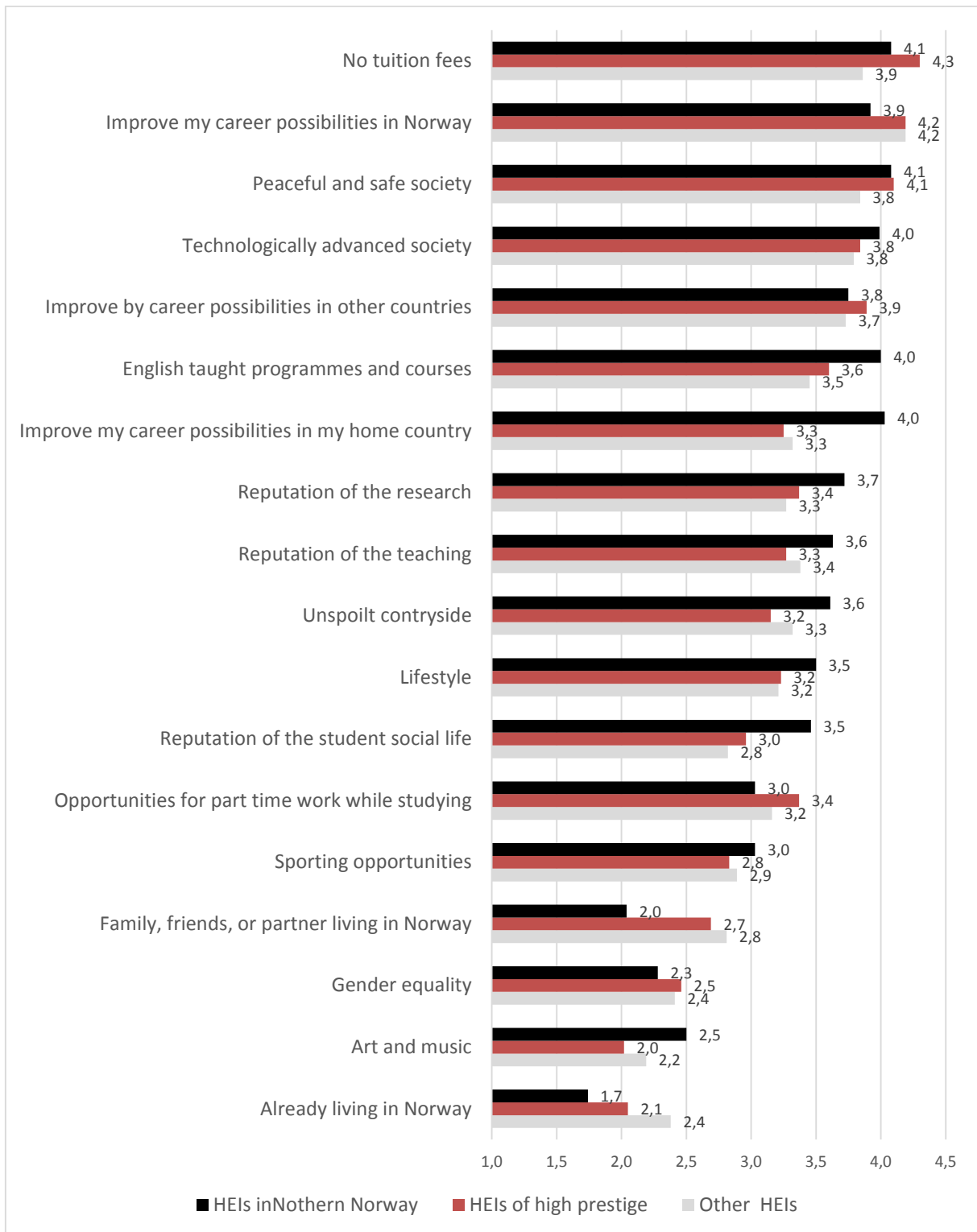
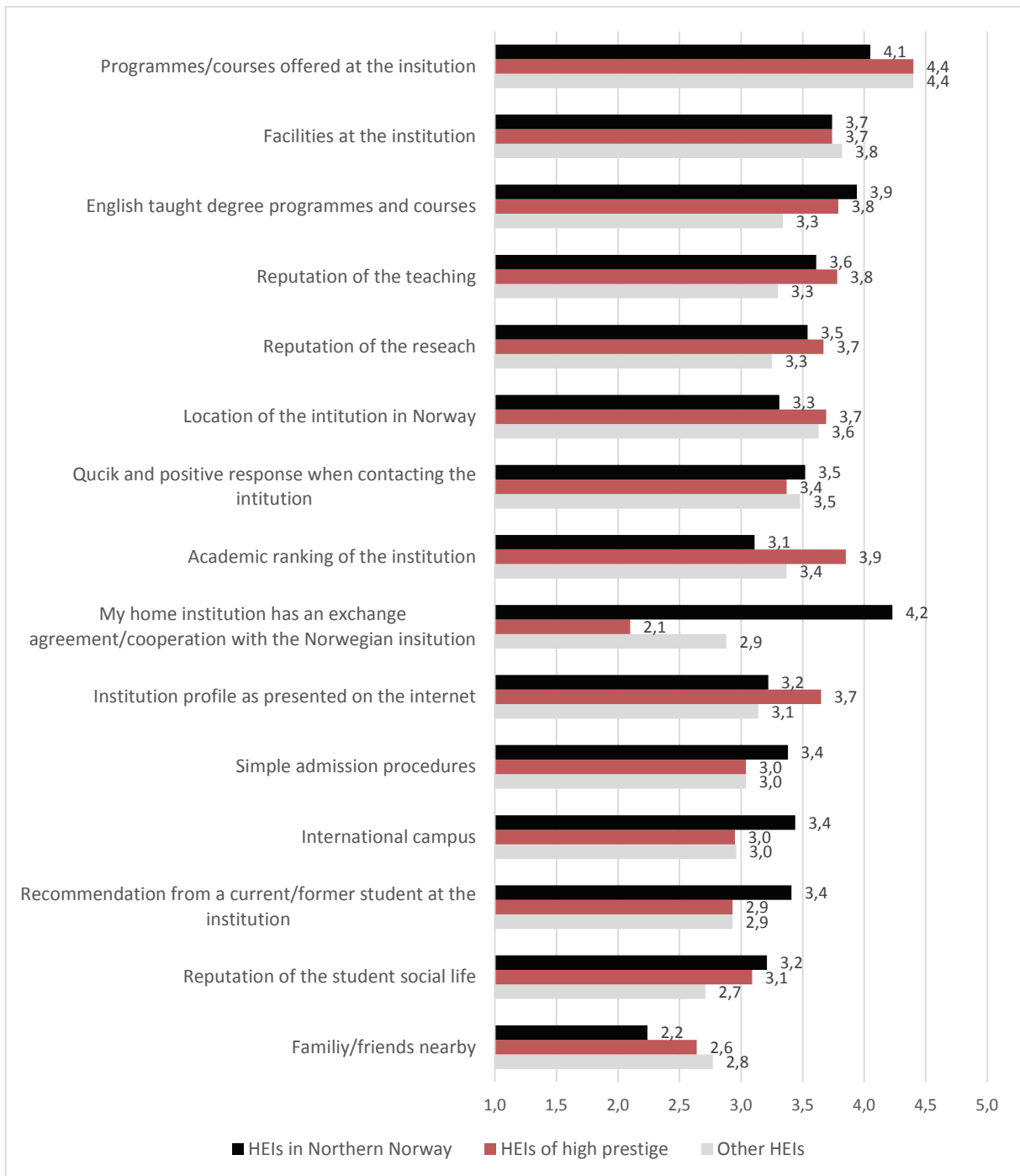


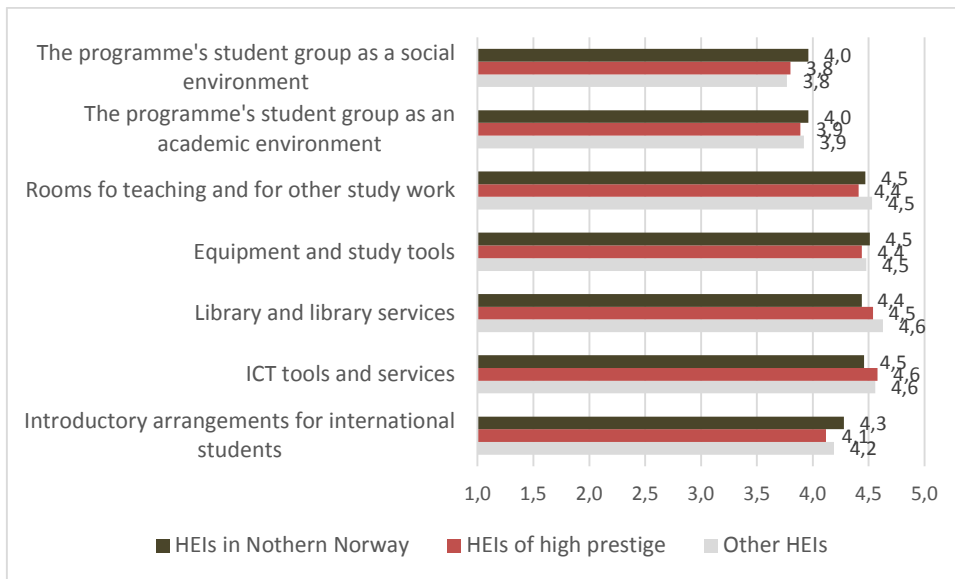
Figure A1 Duration of study sojourn in Norway for Russian students in the survey. Per cent.



**Figure A2 Factors influencing the decision to study in Norway for students in different higher education institutions. Mean score 1 (not important) til 5 (very important).**



**Figure A3 Factors influencing the decision of higher education institution in Norway for students in different types of institution. Per cent.**



**Figure A4 Students' assessment of the learning environment. Mean score 1 (dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).**



## List of tables

Table 1.1 Russian students registered in Norwegian higher education institutions autumn 2014.....	15
Table 3.1 Students' distribution on type of study programme. Per cent. ....	20
Table 3.2 Social origin and mobility capital among Russian students in different types of Higher Education Institutions in Norway. Per cent. ....	22
Table 7.1 Reasons why Russian students consider to stay in Norway upon graduation. Per cent. ....	44
Table 7.2 Reasons why students want to work in Norway upon graduation. Per cent. ....	44

## List of figures

Figure 1.1 Russian students in Norwegian higher education institutions 2002–2014.....	14
Figure 3.1 Percentage of degree students and exchange students in different types of Norwegian higher education institutions .....	20
Figure 3.2 Distribution of students according to type of higher education institution. Per cent. ....	21
Figure 3.3 Per cent of students and students' parents who have lived abroad. ....	22
Figure 4.1 Factors influencing the decision to study in Norway for degree and exchange students. Mean score on a scale from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). ....	25
Figure 4.2 Factors influencing the decision to study in Norway for degree students from different countries. Mean score on a scale from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). ....	26
Figure 4.3 Factors influencing the choice of higher education institution. Mean score on a scale from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important).....	30
Figure 5.1 Students' assessment of teaching and counselling. Per cent.....	31
Figure 5.2 Students' assessment of teaching and counselling, students from different countries. Mean score on scale 1 (dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). ....	32
Figure 5.3 Russian and Norwegian students' assessment of teaching and counsellings. Mean score on scale 1 (dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).....	33
Figure 5.4 Students' assessment of study environment. Per cent. ....	33
Figure 5.5 Students' assessment study environment, according to country of origin. Mean score on scale 1 (dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). ....	34
Figure 5.6 Students' assessment of study environment, Russian and Norwegian students compared. Mean score on scale 1 (dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). ....	35
Figure 5.7 Students' assessments of workload and formal requirements scale 1 (not agree) – 5 (strongly agree) .....	35
Figure 6.1 Challenges associated with studying in Norway. Per cent. ....	37
Figure 6.2 Challenges associated with studying in Norway. Percentage of students from different countries finding different matters more challenging than expected. ....	38
Figure 6.3 Russian students' interaction with students of other nationalities in university/college. Per cent. ....	39
Figure 6.4 Proportion of students who have contact with students of other nationalities on a weekly basis. ....	40
Figure 6.5 Russian students' interaction with students of other nationalities in leisure time. Per cent.....	40
Figure 7.1 Proportion of students from different countries considering to stay in Norway after graduation.....	44
Figure A1 Duration of study sojourn in Norway for Russian students in the survey. Per cent.....	51
Figure A2 Factors influencing the decision to study in Norway for students in different higher education institutions. Mean score 1 (not important) til 5 (very important). ....	52
Figure A3 Factors influencing the decision of higher education institution in Norway for students in different types of institution. Per cent. ....	53
Figure A4 Students' assessment of the learning environment. Mean score 1 (dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). ....	54



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