

Fundación **BBVA**

Department of Social Studies  
and Public Opinion



# BBVA Foundation International Study on University Students in Six European Countries

December 2010

The **BBVA Foundation International University Students Study** examines the views and perceptions of the university students segment across a wide group of countries and with a large sample size (3,000 cases per country) supporting disaggregation by branch of knowledge.

In a context characterised by the challenges of the knowledge society and present-day factors like the economic crisis and European convergence process, the study examines the views and experiences of what will shortly become the majority professional segment, analysing differences and similarities in six European countries.

The study extends across two main areas:

**Personal life: values, religiosity and ethics**

**Views and experience of the university**

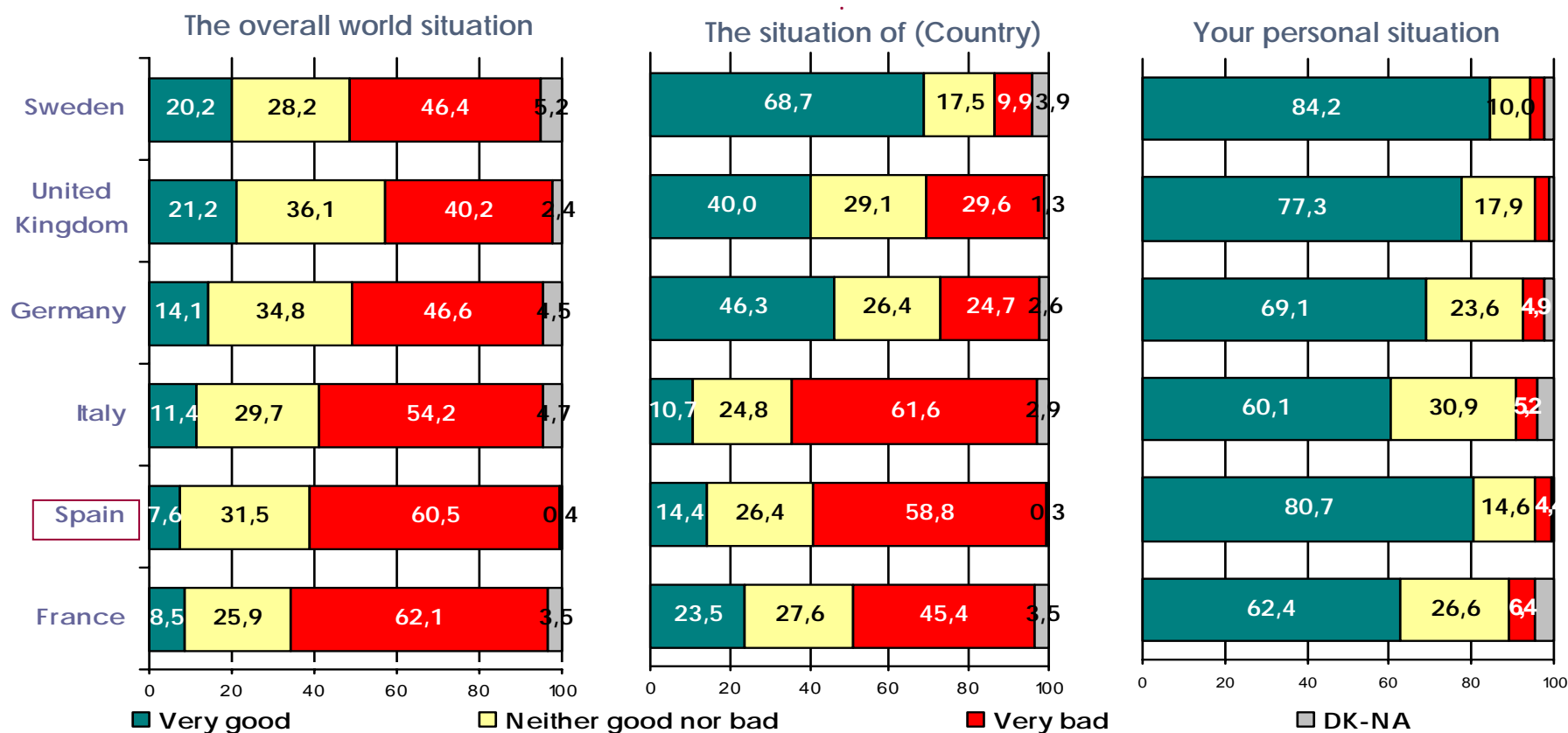
- ➡ **Geographical scope of the study:** Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom
- ➡ **Sample size:** 3,000 face-to-face interviews in each country with students who have completed at least two years of higher education studies belonging to Category 5A of UNESCO's International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), segmented by branch of study (arts and humanities, social and legal sciences, experimental sciences, health sciences, engineering, manufacturing and construction) and type of institution (public, private, mixed)
- ➡ **Fieldwork:** conducted by IPSOS from March to June, 2010

## Personal life: values, religiosity and ethics

- World, country and personal situation
- Ideological self-identification
- Religiosity
- Ethical principles
- Acceptance of emerging social conducts

- In these times of economic crisis, students draw a clear distinction between their views of the world situation (strongly negative), the situation of their country (negative in three of the countries analysed) and their personal situation (strongly positive in all cases).
- The evaluative breach regarding these three situations is especially pronounced in Spain.

In general terms, how would you rate the overall situation in...? Base: total interviews.



- University students tend to place themselves centre-left on an ideological self-definition scale.
- In all countries, students in arts and humanities and other social sciences tend to lean more to the left, while the centre is most popular with social science branches (\*) like economics or legal sciences.

When talking about politics, we tend to use the expressions left and right. Imagine a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 corresponds to the extreme left and 10 to the extreme right.

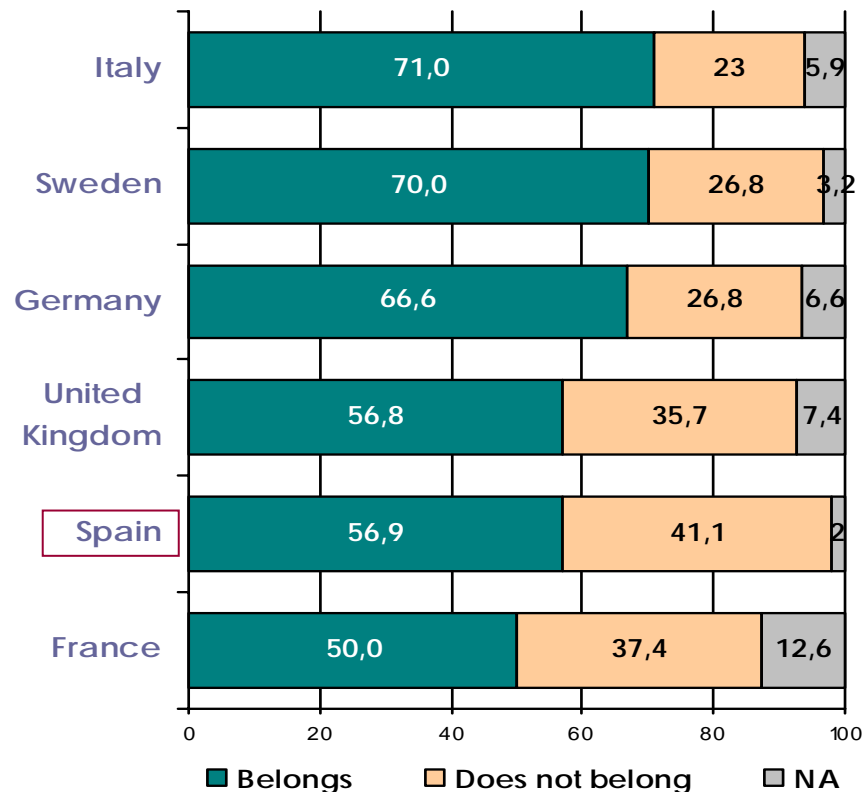
Where would you locate yourself? Base: total interviews



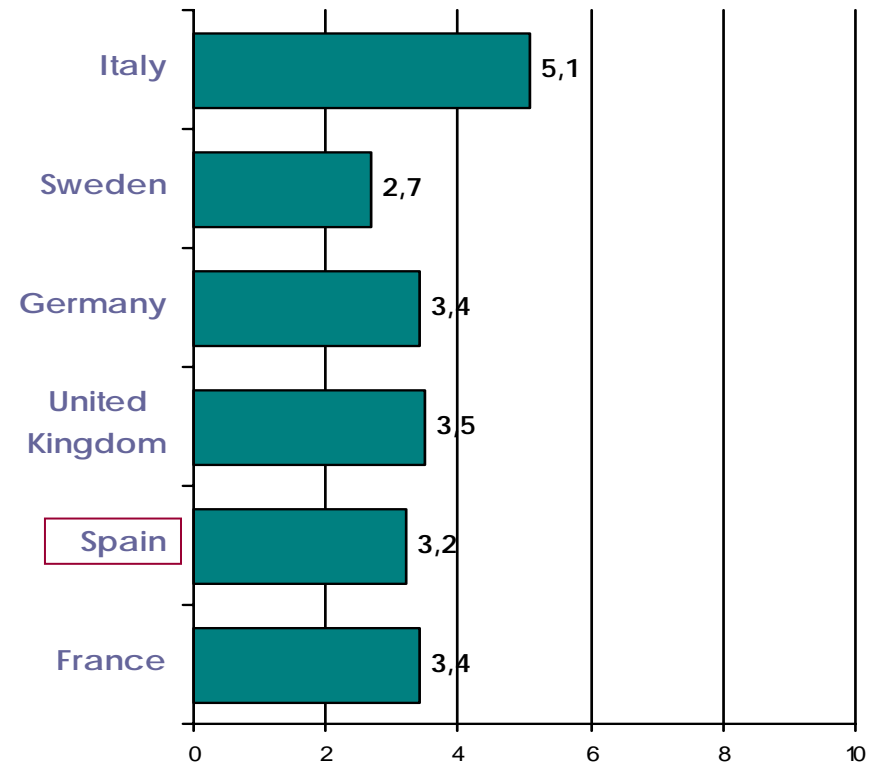
(\*) To facilitate a more detailed analysis, and in view of the size and heterogeneous nature of the social sciences category, respondents were broken down into those studying legal sciences, economic sciences and other social sciences.

- A majority of university students belong to some religion: over two thirds of Italians, Swedish and Germans and half or more of French, Spanish and British.
- However, religiosity is at the low end of the range in all countries except Italy where it stands around the middle.

Percentage that belongs to a religion  
Base: total interviews



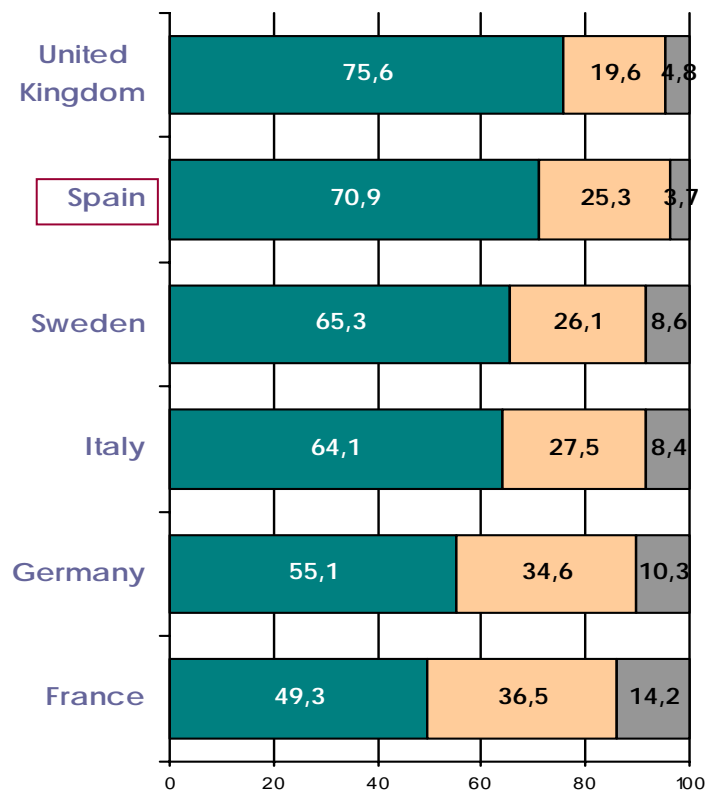
Whether or not you consider yourself part of a church or a religious faith, how would you describe yourself? Base: total interviews. Scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means that you are "not religious at all" and 10 means that you are "very religious".



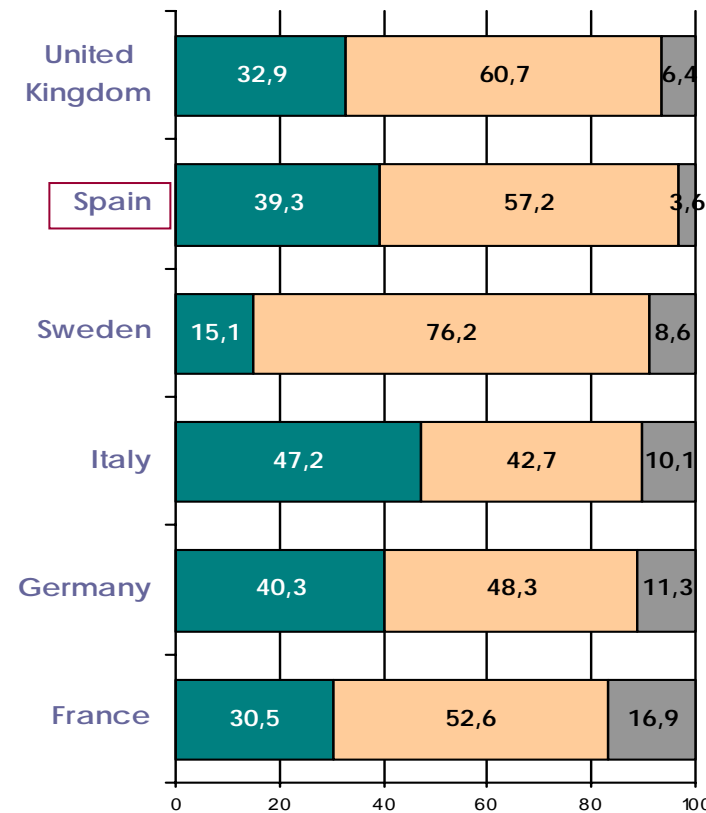
NO TO ETHICAL RELATIVISM BUT YES TO FLEXIBILITY

- A majority of students believe that there are clear ethical principles about what is right and what is wrong. But they also think these principles should be flexibly applied "in accordance with the circumstances at the time". Swedish students are most in favour of this pragmatic approach, with Italians expressing the most reservations.

Which of the following two opinions do you tend to agree with more? Base: total interviews.



■ There are clear ethical principles about what is right and what is wrong  
 ■ There are no clear ethical principles about what is right and what is wrong  
 ■ DK-NA

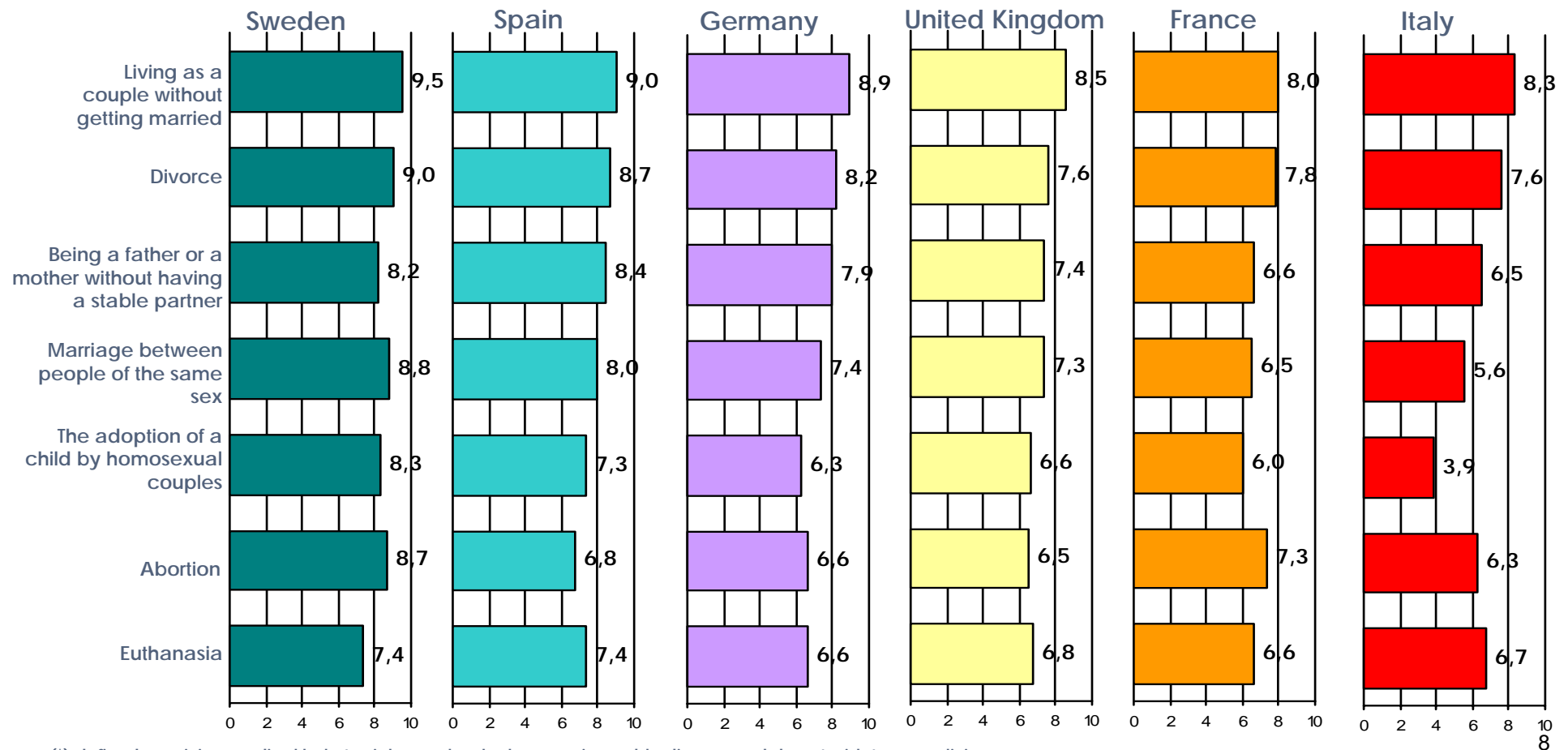


■ Ethical principles should always be applied, regardless of the circumstances at the time  
 ■ Ethical principles should be applied in accordance with the circumstances at the time  
 ■ DK-NA

**EMERGING SOCIAL CONDUCTS CAUSING CONTROVERSY**

- Ample acceptance of social conducts causing degrees of moral controversy such as co-habitation without being married, single parenthood, same-sex marriage and, rather more weakly, adoption of a child by homosexual couples, with the exception of Italy in this last case. Acceptance also of "euthanasia in extreme cases" and, rather less so, "abortion". Swedes and Spaniards are the most liberal in their attitudes out of the six countries surveyed.

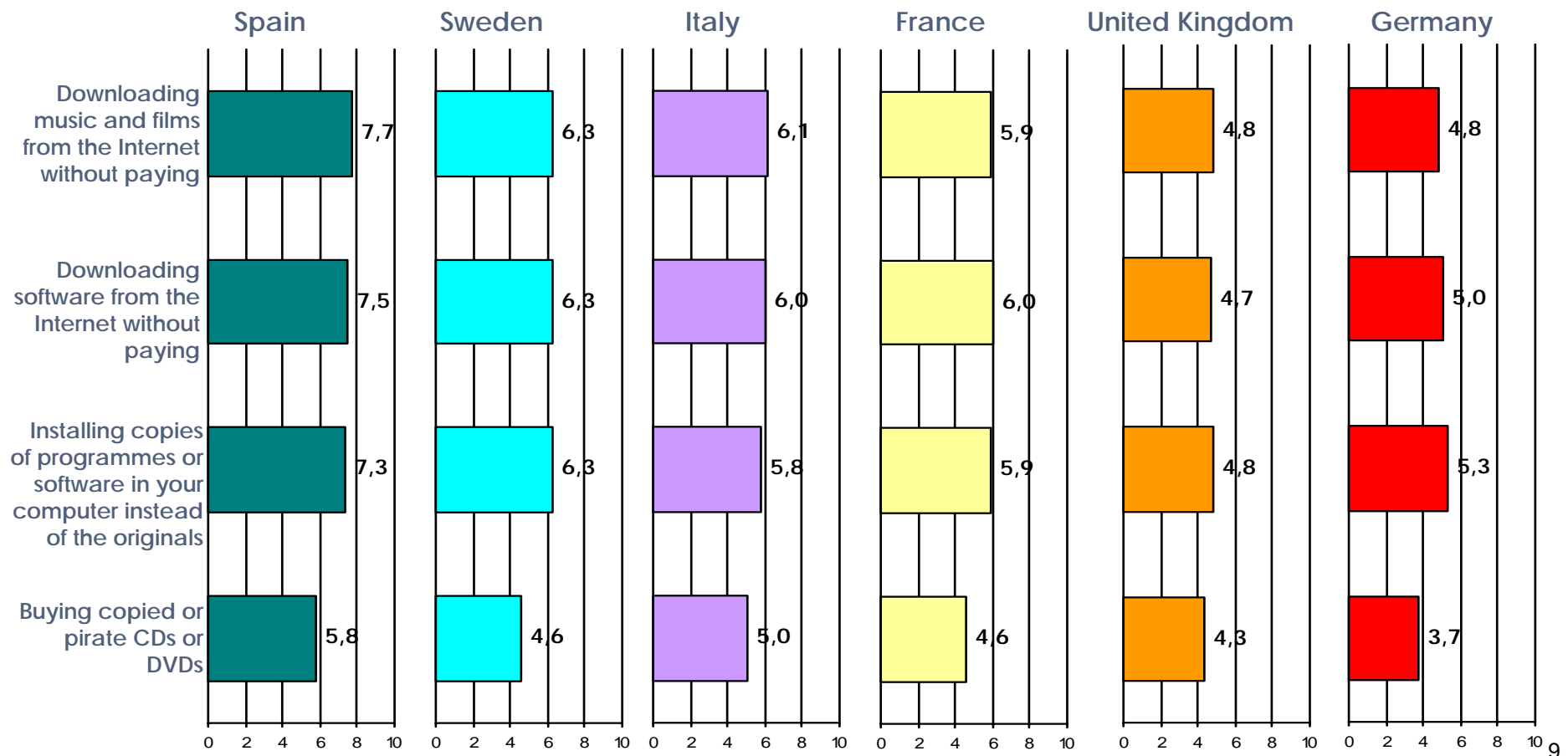
Regardless of what you yourself do or might do, can you please tell me if you think each of the situations and behaviours I am going to read out is acceptable or not? Base: total interviews. Scale form 0 to 10, where 0 means you think the situation or behaviour is totally unacceptable and 10 means you think it is totally acceptable.



**PRACTICES CONTRAVENING INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS**

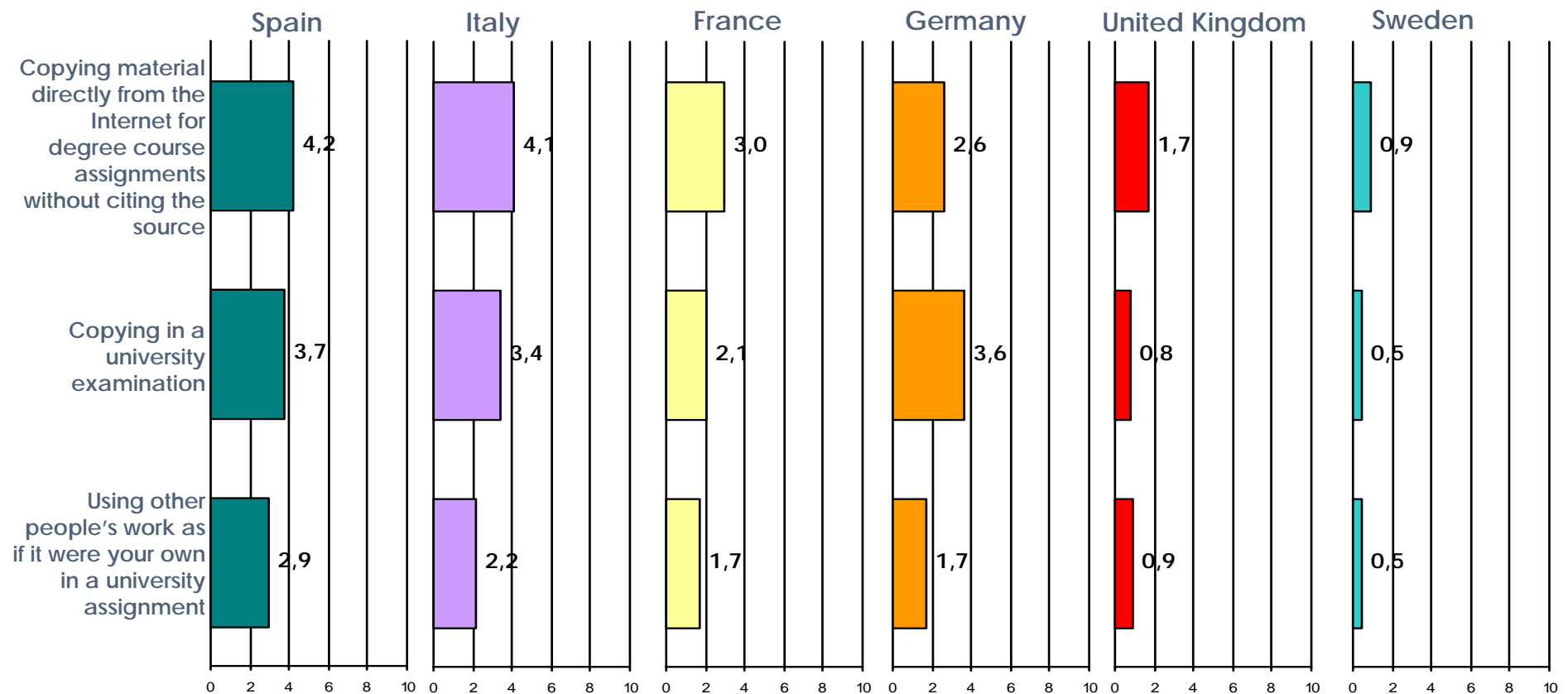
- Major disparities in acceptance of practices contravening intellectual property rights: “downloading software from the Internet without paying” and installing “copies of programmes” is viewed with lenience in Spain and, to a lesser extent, in Sweden, Italy and France. In the United Kingdom and Germany the predominant view is of ambivalence or rejection.

Regardless of what you yourself do or might do, can you please tell me if you think each of the situations and behaviours I am going to read out is acceptable or not? Base: total interviews. Scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you think the situation or behaviour is totally unacceptable and 10 means you think it is totally acceptable.



- "Copying material from the Internet without citing the source", "copying in an exam" or "presenting other people's work as if it were your own" are reproved by students in all countries.
- The British and Swedish are the most vehemently opposed to this kind of conduct.

Regardless of what you yourself do or might do, can you please me if you think each of the situations and behaviours I am going to read out is acceptable or not? Base: total interviews. Scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you think the situation or behaviour is totally unacceptable and 10 means you think it is totally acceptable



# Views and experience of the university

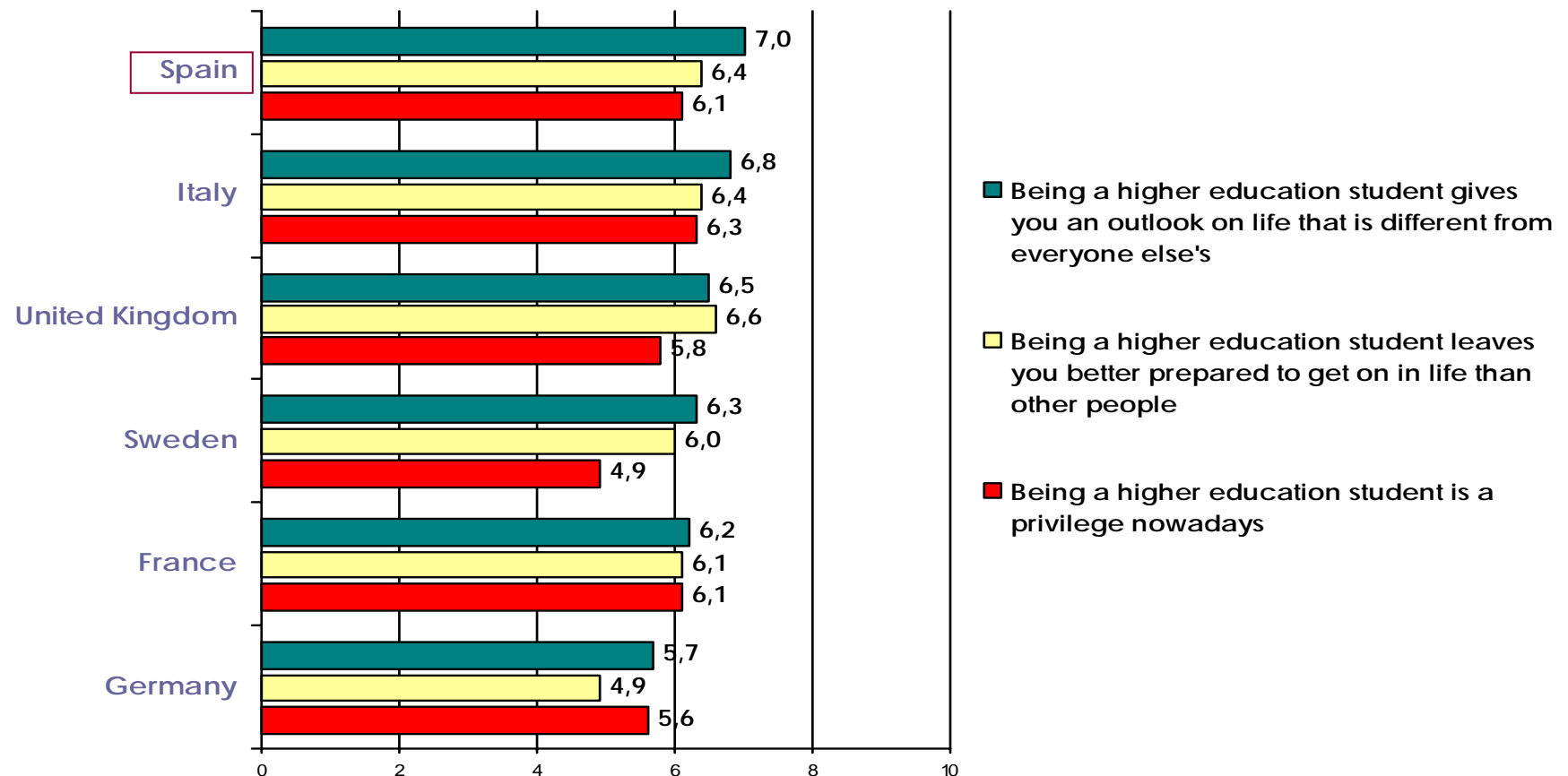
- Views on “being a university student”
- Personal independence and work
- Sources of student finance

## VIEWS ON "BEING A UNIVERSITY STUDENT"

- Consistent with their positive feelings about their personal situation (contrasting with their views on the world and their countries), students affirm that "being a higher education student is a privilege nowadays", "gives you an outlook on life different from everyone else's" and "leaves you better prepared to get on in life".

Now I am going to read out some sentences about being a higher education student and I would like you to tell me how far you agree or disagree with each. Base: total interviews. .

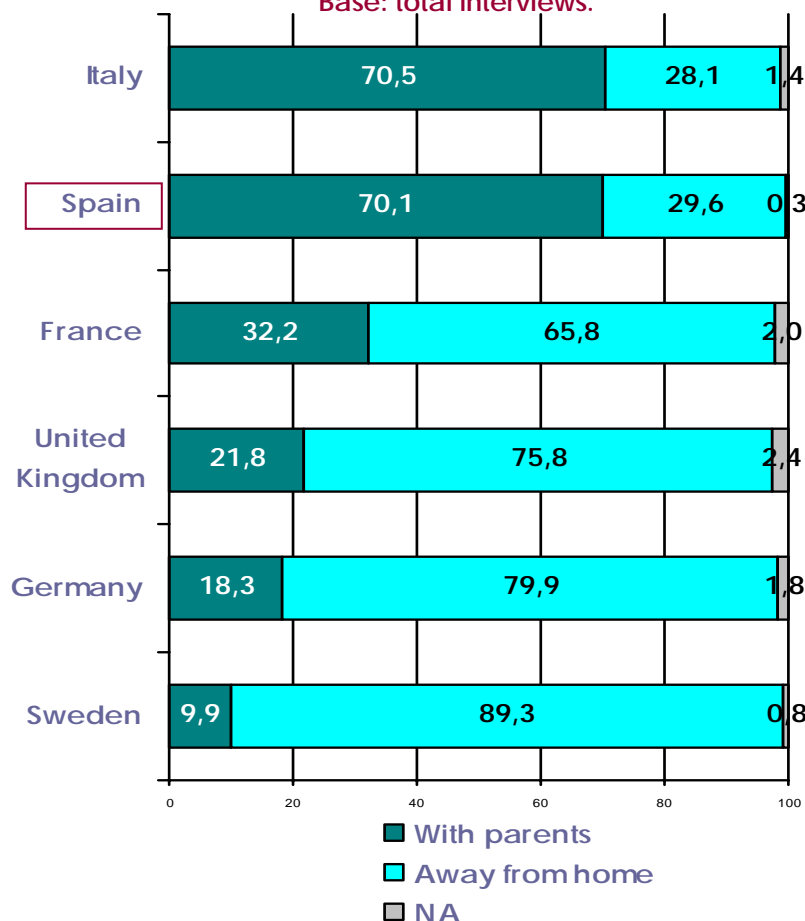
Average on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you totally disagree and 10 that you totally agree



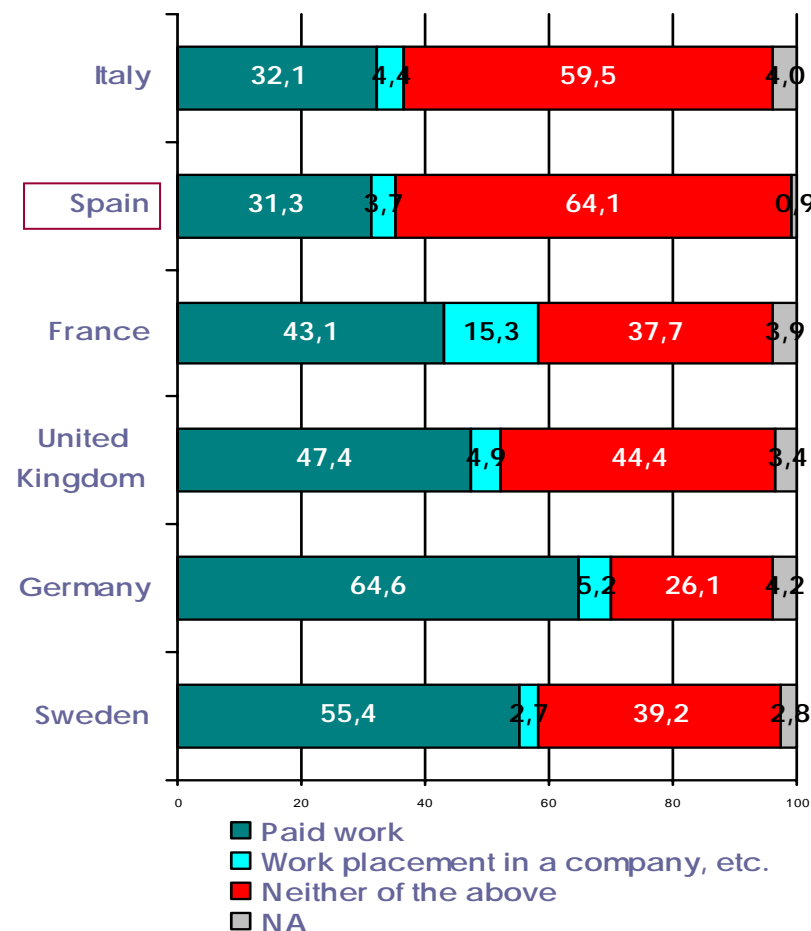
- Marked divergences in students' degree of independence from their families:
  - A majority of students in Italy and Spain have neither moved away from home nor are engaged in paid work.
  - Students in Sweden, followed by the Germans and British and, some way behind, the French, tend to live independently of their families. Most Germans and over half of Swedes also combine their studies with some kind of paid employment.

Are you currently living with your parents/father/mother or away from home?

Base: total interviews.

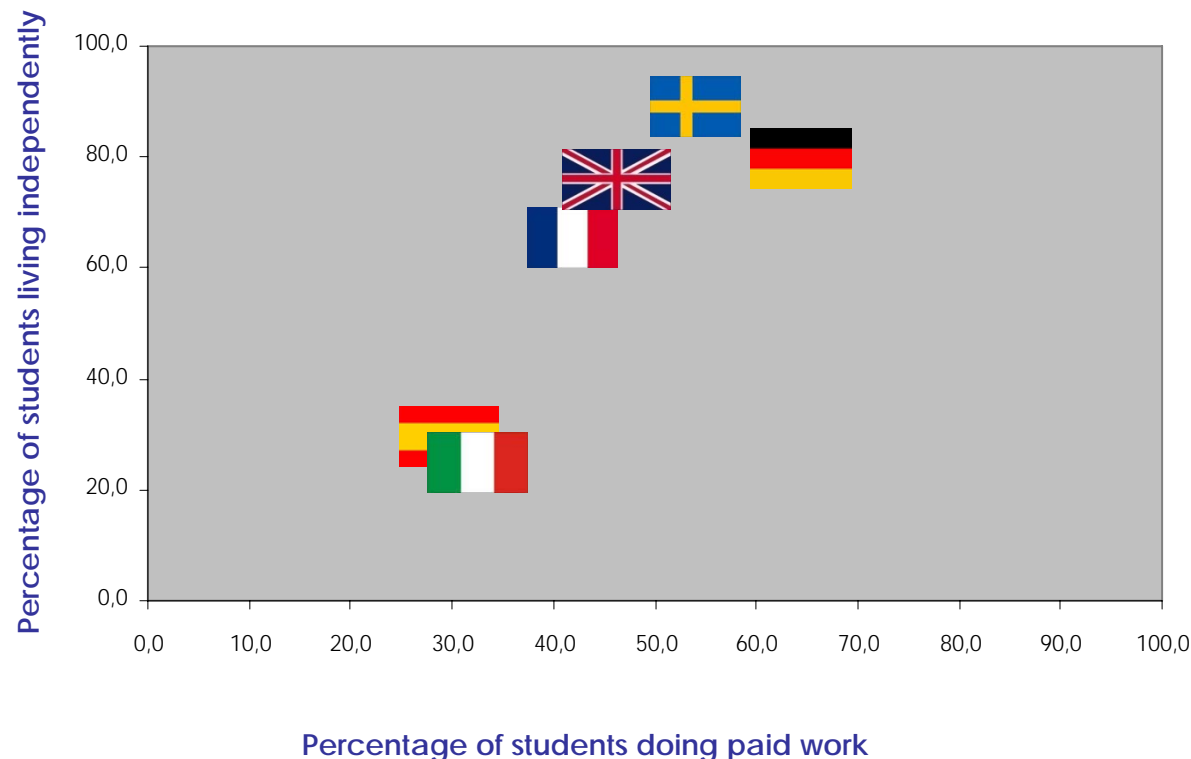


Apart from studying, do you do any of the following things?: Base: total interviews.



- Combining the percentage who work and the percentage who live independently of the family, we arrive at a highly differentiated map of the ways of life of Europe's students:
  - The Spanish and Italians live least independently and are the least likely to do paid work,
  - The Swedes and Germans are likeliest of all to live away from home and have a paid occupation,
  - In the middle, though closer to the second, stand the French and the British.

Map of countries by independence from family. Base: total interviews

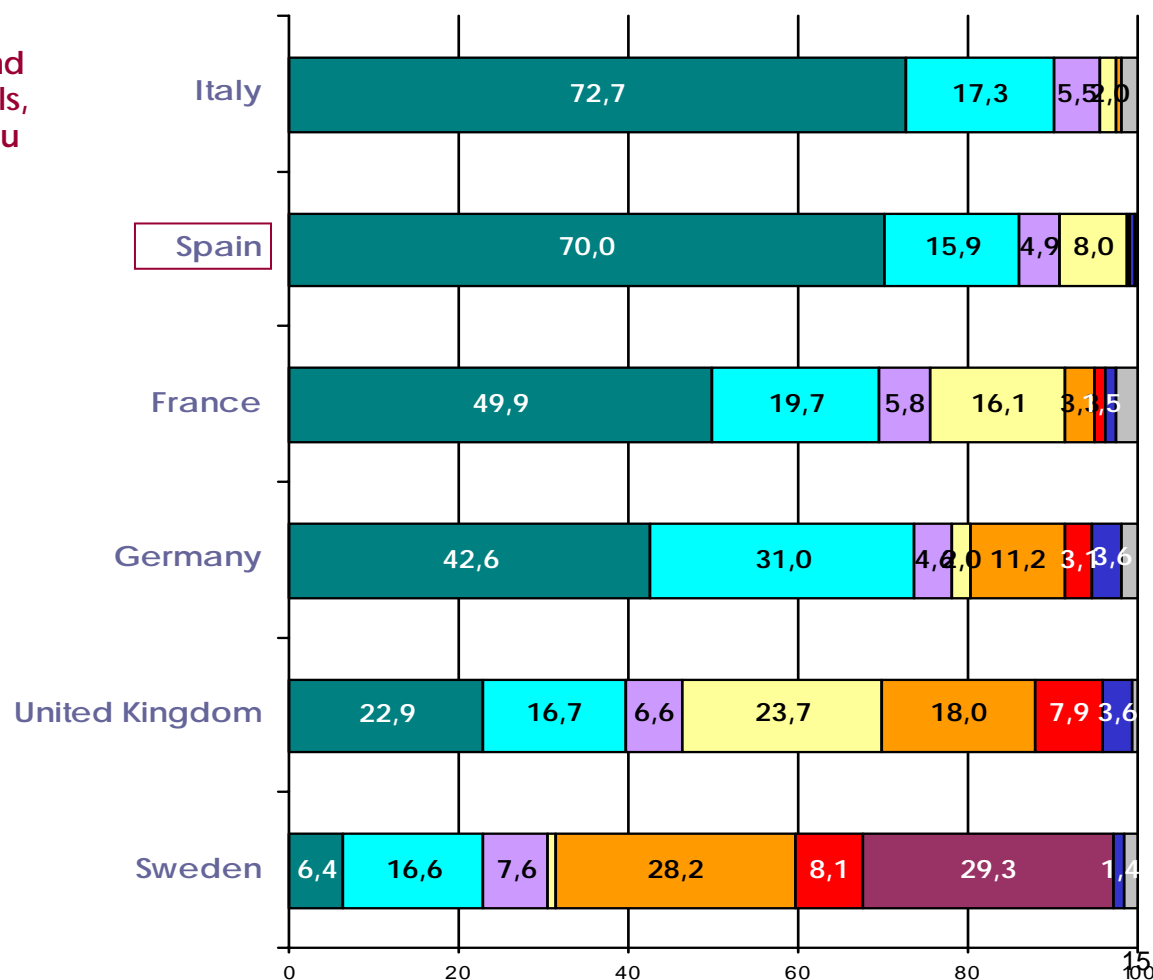
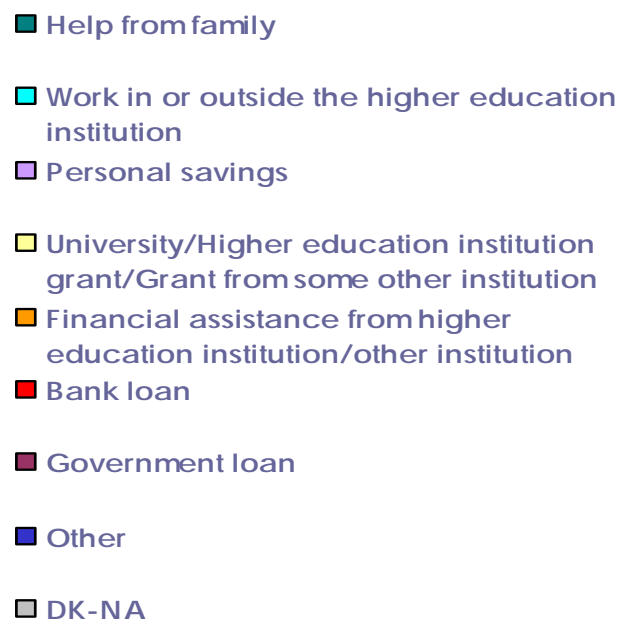


SOURCES OF STUDENT FINANCE

- A majority of students in Italy and Spain and a plurality in France and Germany cite help from the family as their main source of income.
- A significant portion of Germans finance their studies through paid work.
- UK students draw their income from more diversified sources, particularly grants and financial assistance. Swedes rely more heavily on financial assistance and government loans.

Thinking about your outlays including accommodation, food, transport, going out, and study expenses like matriculation fees, materials, etc., from which of the following sources do you draw the money to pay for them?

Base: total interviews



# Views and experience of the university

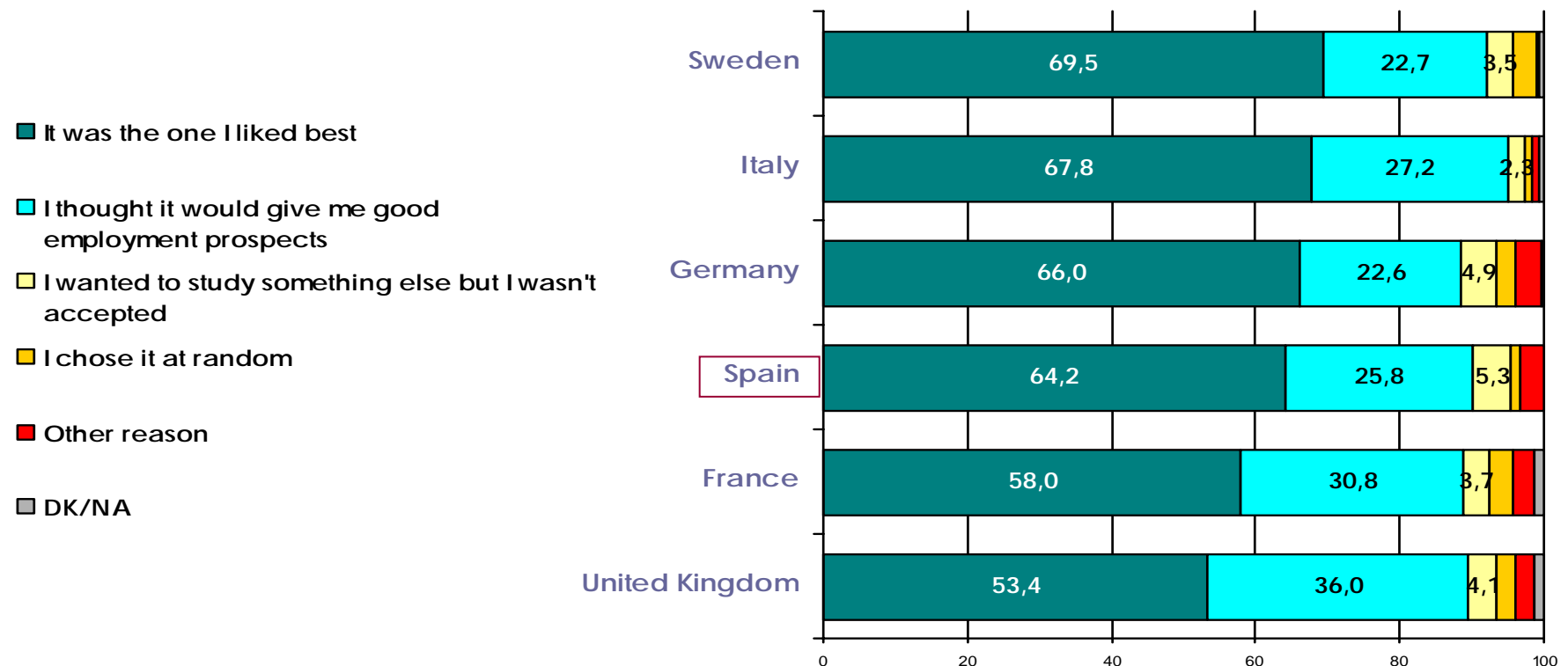
- Reasons for choice of degree and university
- Satisfaction with degree course and university
- Study habits
- The European Higher Education Area
- Research in the university
- Future plans and job expectations

## VOCATIONAL AND INSTRUMENTAL FACTORS IN CHOICE OF DEGREE COURSE

- Choice of degree course was mainly based on vocational considerations ("it was the one I liked best").
- Instrumental considerations like good employment prospects were the next to be mentioned, especially in the United Kingdom and, second, France.

What is the main reason you enrolled in the course you are currently studying?

Base: total interviews

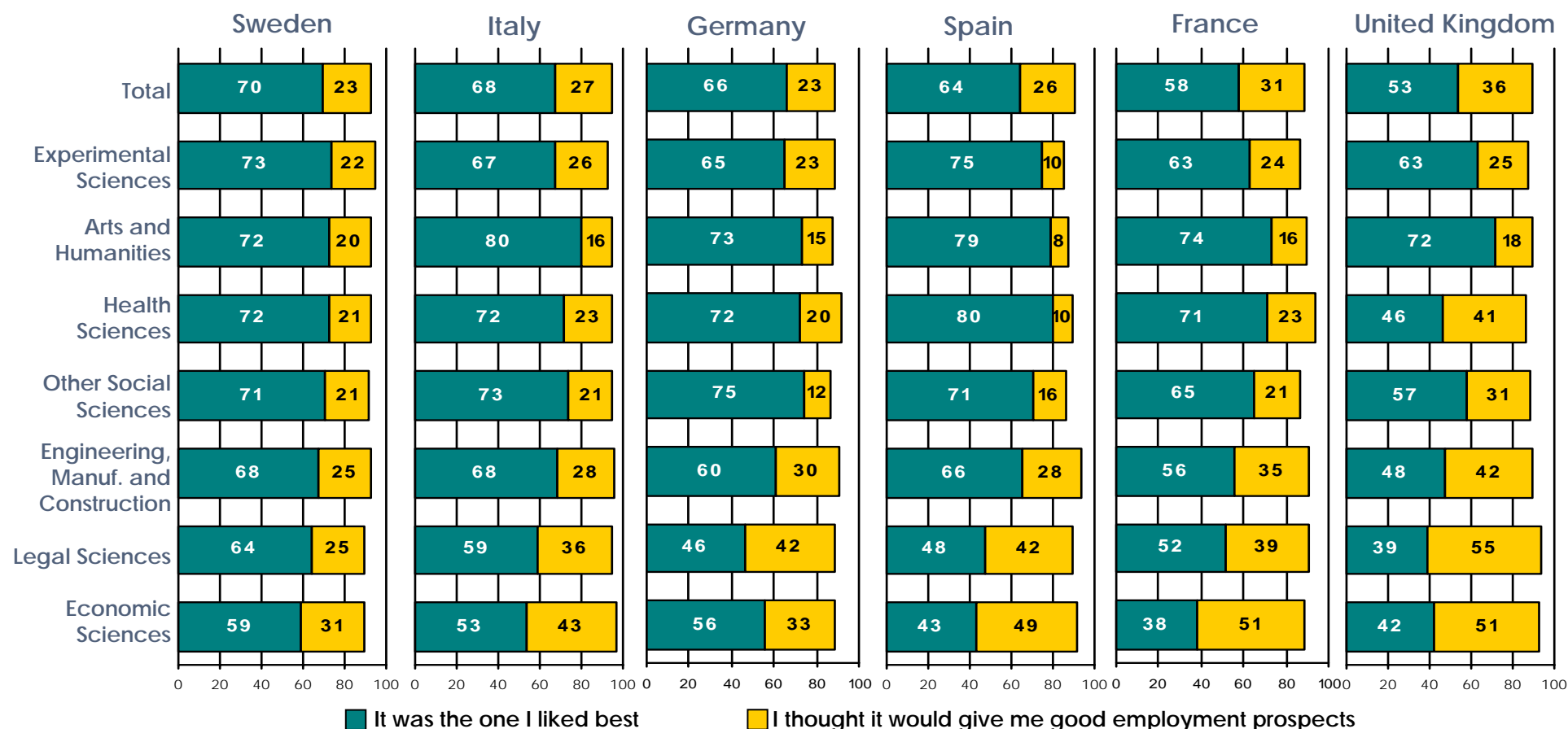


## CHOICE OF DEGREE COURSE BY BRANCH OF STUDY

- In all countries, vocational factors were the major influence in students' degree choice. These factors predominated among students of arts and humanities, and among those of health sciences, other social sciences and experimental sciences, depending on the country.
- Students of economic and legal sciences are the likeliest to mention employment prospects as a reason of weight.

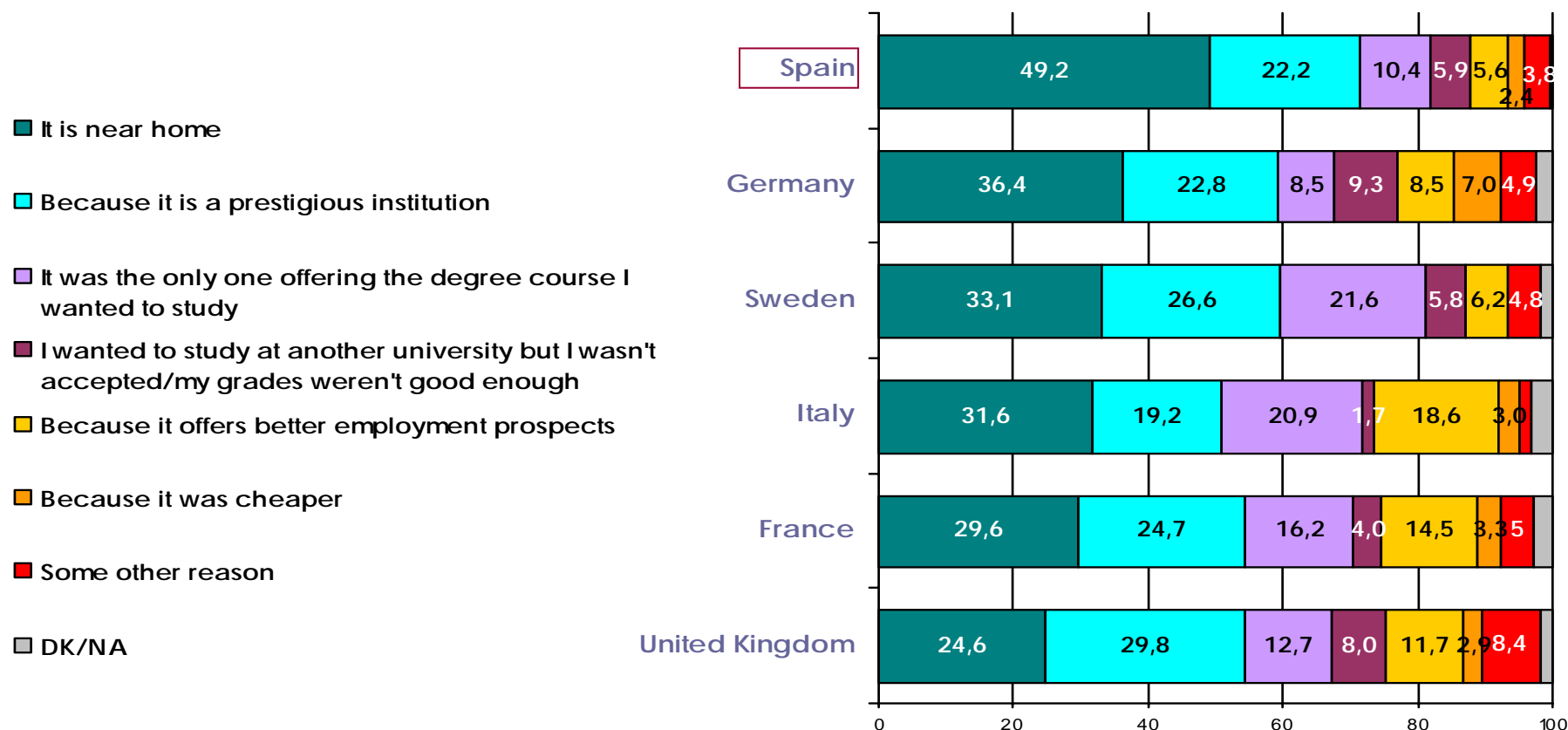
What is the main reason you enrolled in the course you are currently studying?

Base: total interviews



- Choice of university rests heavily on pragmatic considerations like nearness to home (the reason predominant in Spain) or the fact it was the only one that offered the desired degree course (most often mentioned in Sweden and Italy).
- The centre's prestige is the next most important deciding factor in the interval of 20%-30% in almost all countries, with the United Kingdom to the fore.

Of the following statements, which one best reflects your main reason for choosing this higher education institution ? Base: total interviews

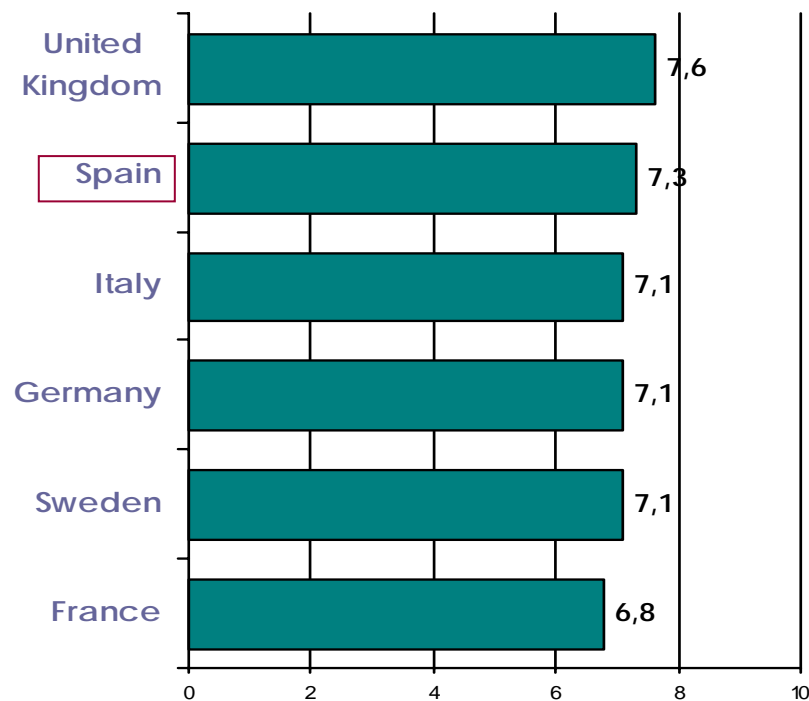


## SATISFACTION WITH DEGREE COURSE

- Students in all countries declare themselves satisfied with their chosen degree course.
- This perception leads most to affirm that they would re-enrol for the same degree if they could go back in time.

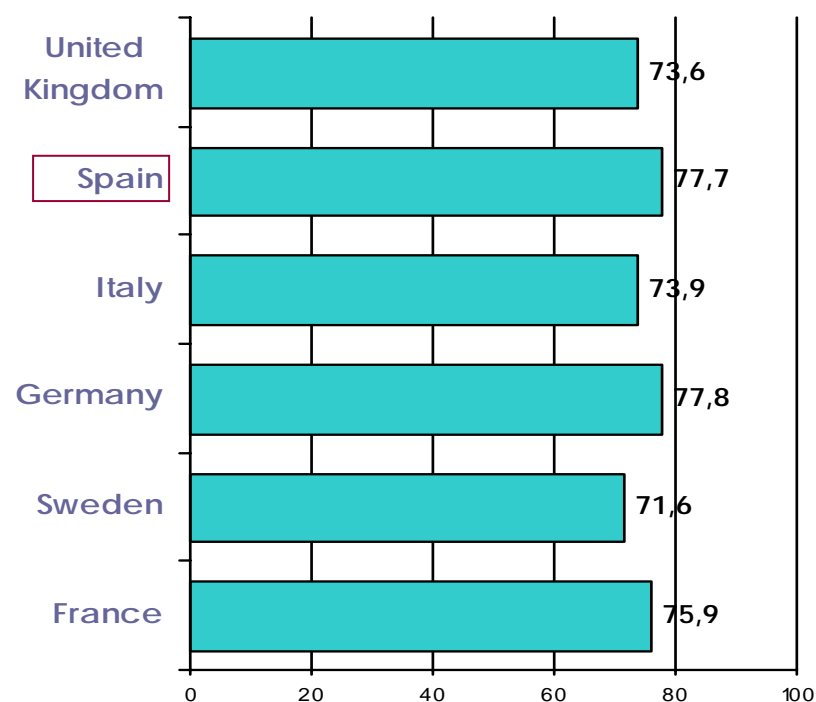
Thinking about the degree course you are doing at the moment, in general, how satisfied would you say you were with the course you are studying?

Average on a scale from 0 to 10, in which 0 means "not at all satisfied" and 10 means "completely satisfied".



If you could back go in time, would you enrol for the same degree or for a different degree?

Percentage that responds affirmatively



## SATISFACTION WITH KEY ASPECTS OF DEGREE COURSE

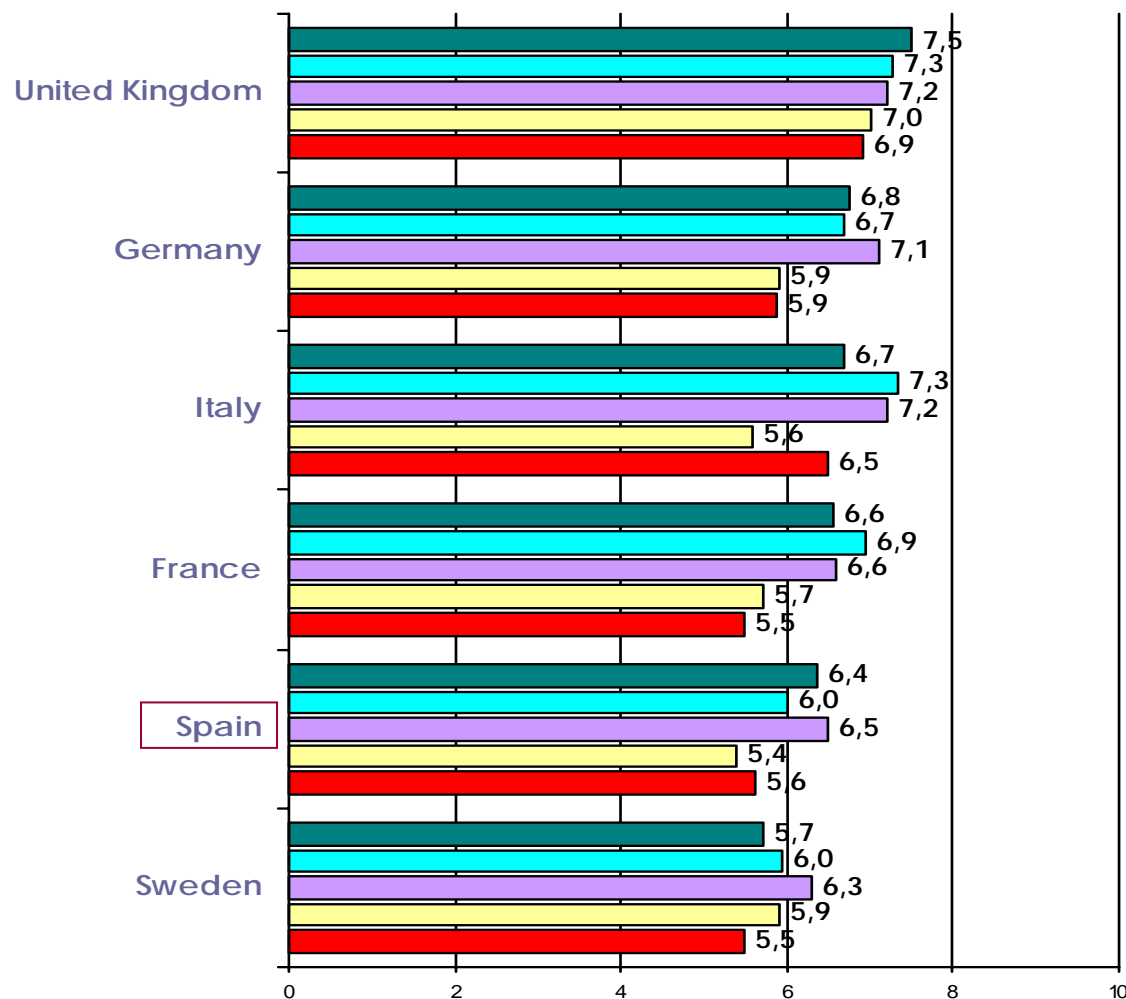
- Students' overall satisfaction with their degree is reflected in their favourable assessment of diverse aspects of university education, with British students the most positive of all.
- The worst rated aspect in all countries is the matriculation fee.
- In almost all countries, the theoretical teaching receives far better marks than the practical teaching.

Now I would like you to give me your views on different aspects of your degree course. Specifically, to what extent do you think the following aspects are satisfactory or unsatisfactory.

Please use a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means it is very unsatisfactory and 10 that is very satisfactory.

Base: total interviews

- The general standards required
- The general knowledge acquired
- The theoretical teaching
- The practical teaching
- The matriculation fee

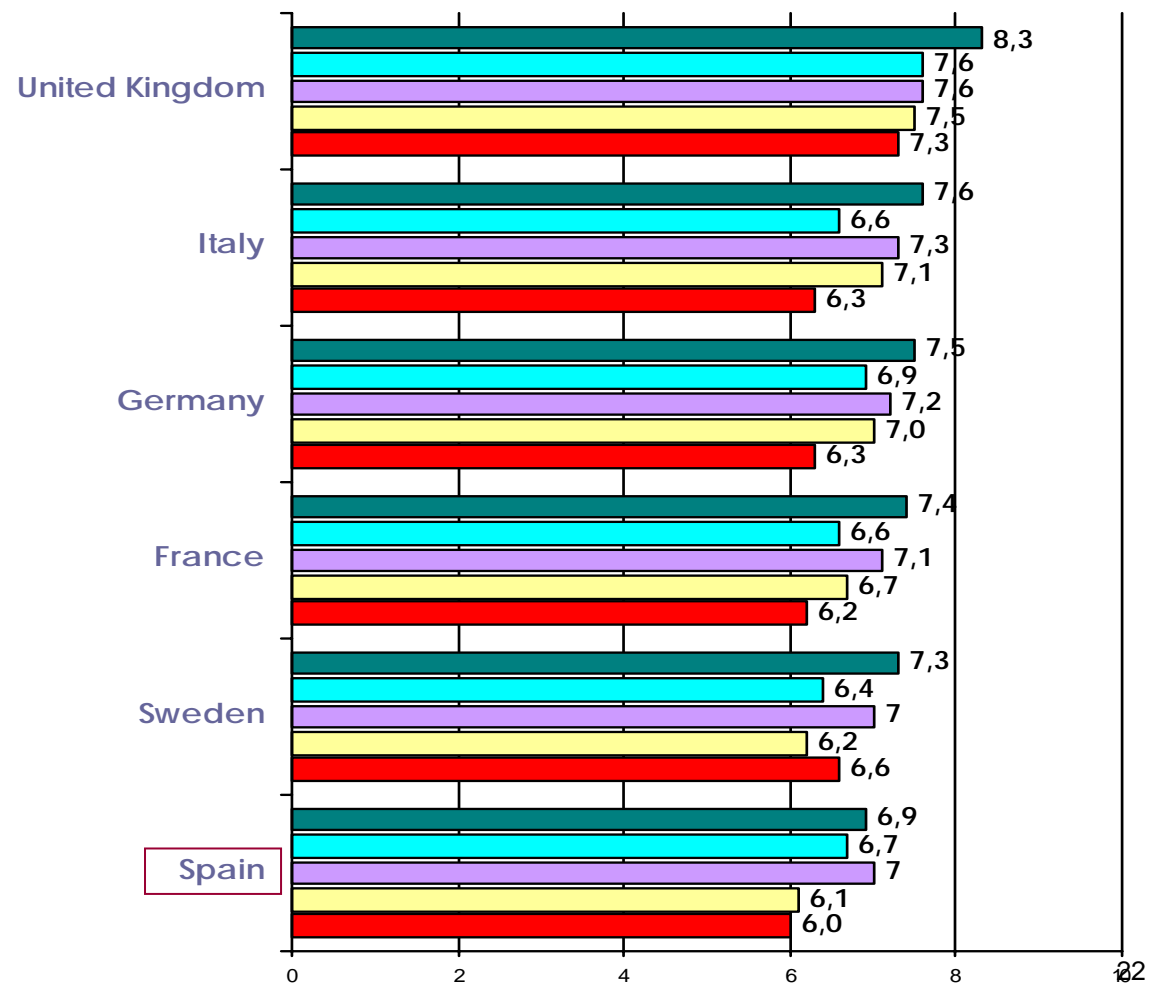


(\*) Swedish students were not asked about matriculation fees since this charge does not exist

- Views on teaching staff also reflect students' general contentment with the university experience. Special plaudits were reserved for teachers' "up-to-date" knowledge of their subject, approachability, and reputation within their specialty.
- Again students in the United Kingdom assigned the highest scores.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the teaching staff at your higher education institution? Scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means you totally disagree and 10 that you totally agree.  
Base: total interviews

- Are knowledgeable about the latest developments in their subject
- Can be easily approached for help or advice
- Are reputed in their specialty
- Explain things clearly
- Encourage students to participate and be creative



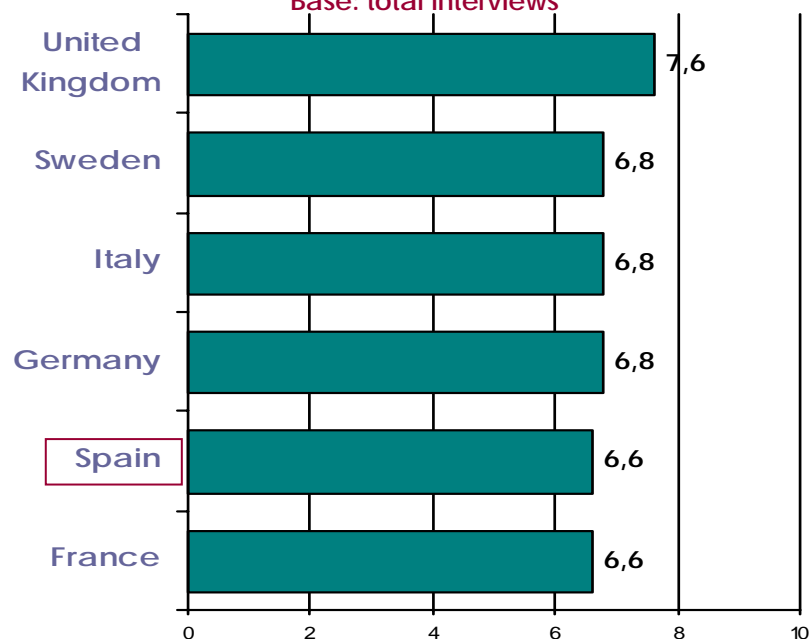
**SATISFIED WITH THEIR UNIVERSITY BUT IDENTIFICATION IS WEAK**

- Students are also favourably impressed by their university, especially the British.
- However only British and, to a lesser extent, Spanish students declare a sense of institutional identification. In these two countries a majority feel identified with their university.

How satisfied would you say you were overall with your higher education institution?

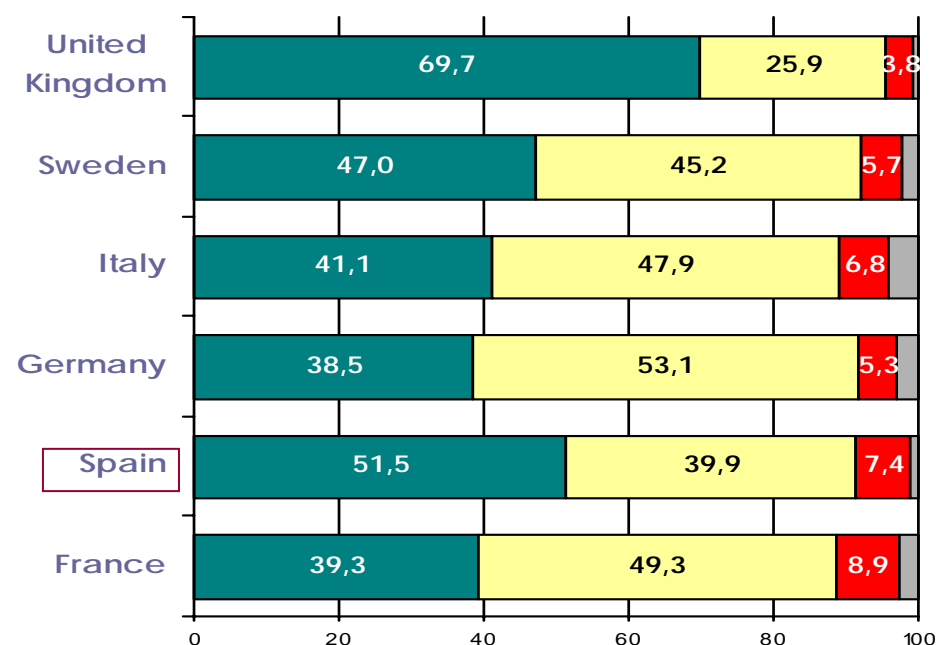
Scale from 0 to 10, in which 0 means "not at all satisfied" and 10 means "very satisfied".

Base: total interviews



Which of the following statements best defines your feelings about your higher education institution ?

Base: total interviews



- I am proud to be a student at this higher education institution: I feel very identified with it
- I am neither proud nor disappointed with regard to my higher education institution: I have no special feelings towards it
- I am disappointed with my higher education institution: I do not feel at all identified with it
- DK/NA

ASSESSMENT OF UNIVERSITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

- University facilities and services merit an overall pass, though with major differences between countries. The highest marks of all come from students in the United Kingdom. In general, IT and library resources are the highest rated.
- Career guidance/employment services tend to be the least highly valued, scraping a bare pass mark in France, Spain, Germany and Sweden. The choice of extracurricular activities scores particularly low in Italy, as do information services in France.

**What is your opinion about the following services or facilities at your higher education institution?**

Scale from 0 to 10, in which 0 means "very poor" and 10 means "very good". Base: total interviews

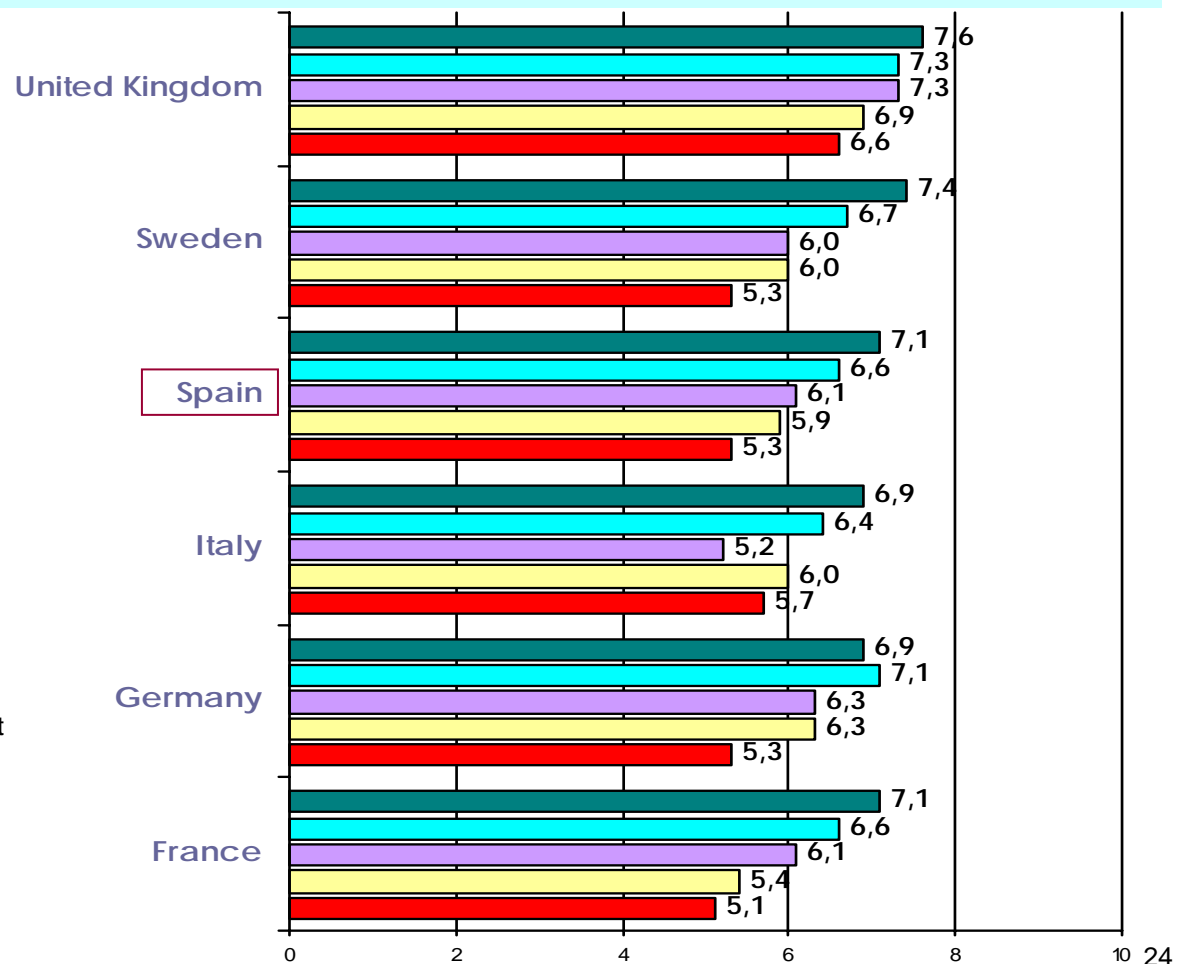
■ The library resources

■ The IT services

■ The choice of extracurricular activities  
(cultural activities, voluntary work, etc.)

■ The information services

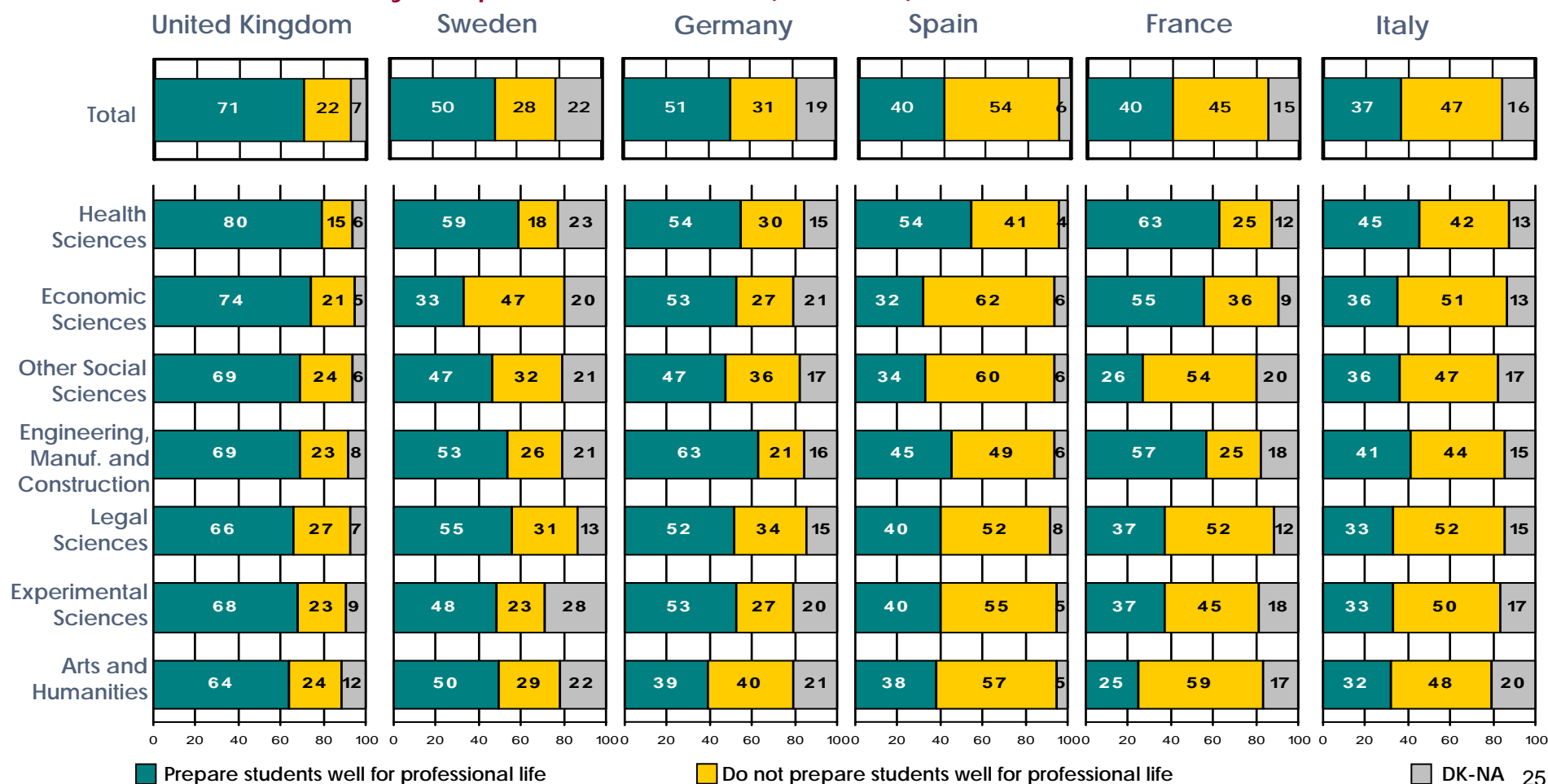
■ The careers guidance service/employment service



## PREPARATION FOR PROFESSIONAL LIFE BY BRANCH OF STUDY

- The extent to which universities prepare students for professional life is seen very differently: positively by a large majority of Britons and around half of Swedes and Germans, with the Spanish, Italian and French inclined to be sceptical.
- In almost all countries, students of health sciences and engineering, manufacturing and construction viewed this aspect in a more positive light. In Spain, students of economic sciences and other social sciences are those who see such preparation as most clearly lacking

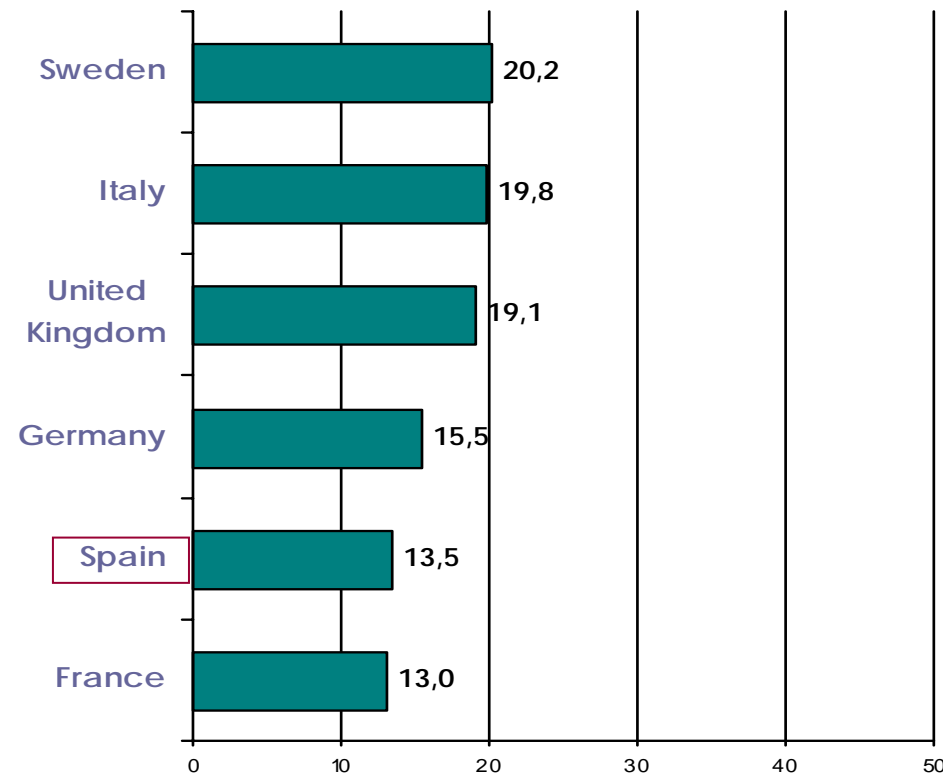
In your opinion, universities in (COUNTRY)...Base: total interviews



- The average time spent studying in a standard week varies markedly across the European countries surveyed, regardless of the duration of the academic year.
- The Swedes and Italians devote most hours to personal study (around 20 hours a week), followed by the British (19 hours), with students in France and Spain (13 and 13.5 hours respectively) a long way behind. German students come somewhere in the middle with an average of 16 hours studying per standard week.

On average, how many hours a week do you spend studying your degree course subjects excluding classroom hours? Base: total interviews

Hours per week



**HOURS OF STUDY BY BRANCH**

- Branch of study is a differential factor for personal academic effort. In France and Spain, the gaps between study branches tend to be larger.
- In most countries, students of legal and health sciences stand out for the longer hours put in.
- In Spain, students taking technical and health science degrees devote most hours to personal study, with economics and other social sciences students putting in the least.

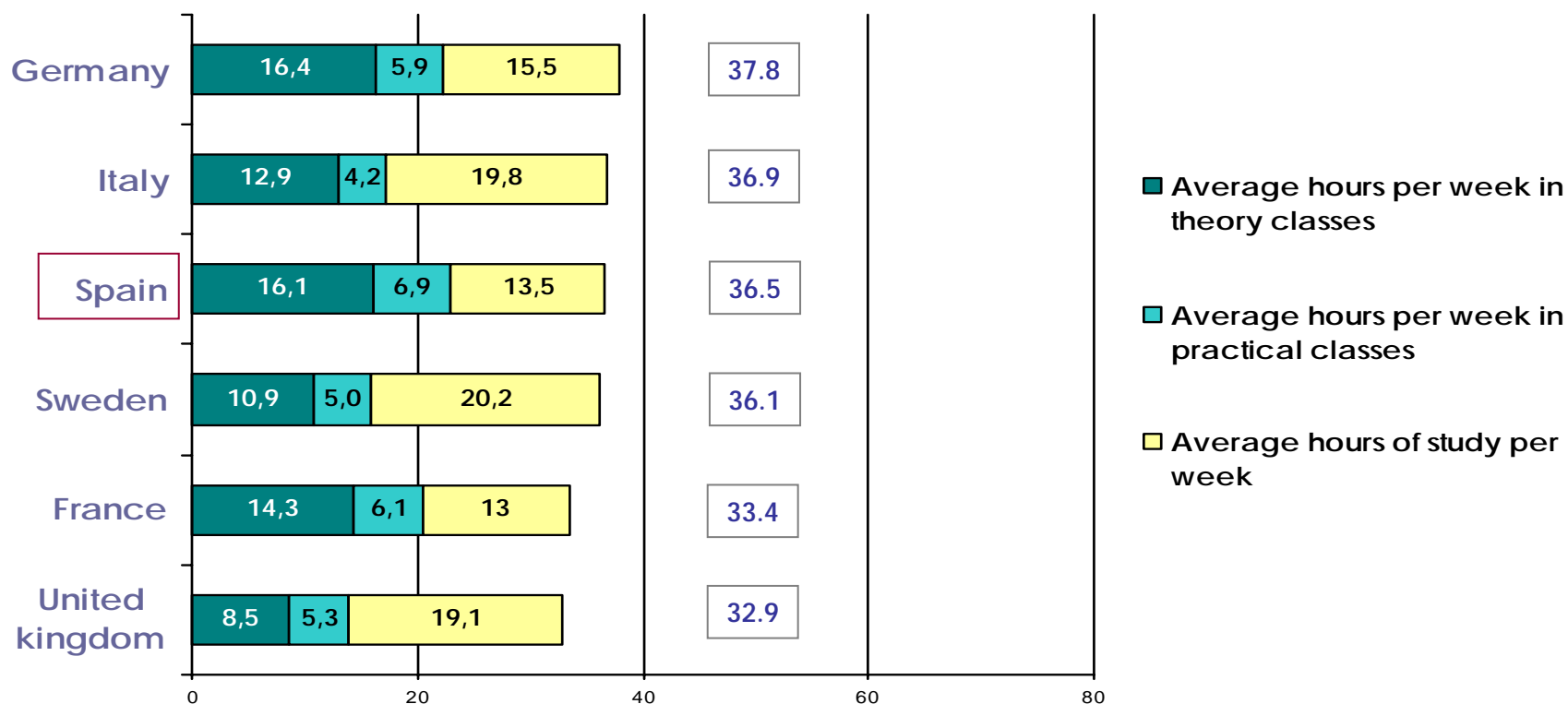
On average, how many hours a week do you spend studying your degree course subjects excluding classroom hours? ? Base: total interviews.  
Average hours per week



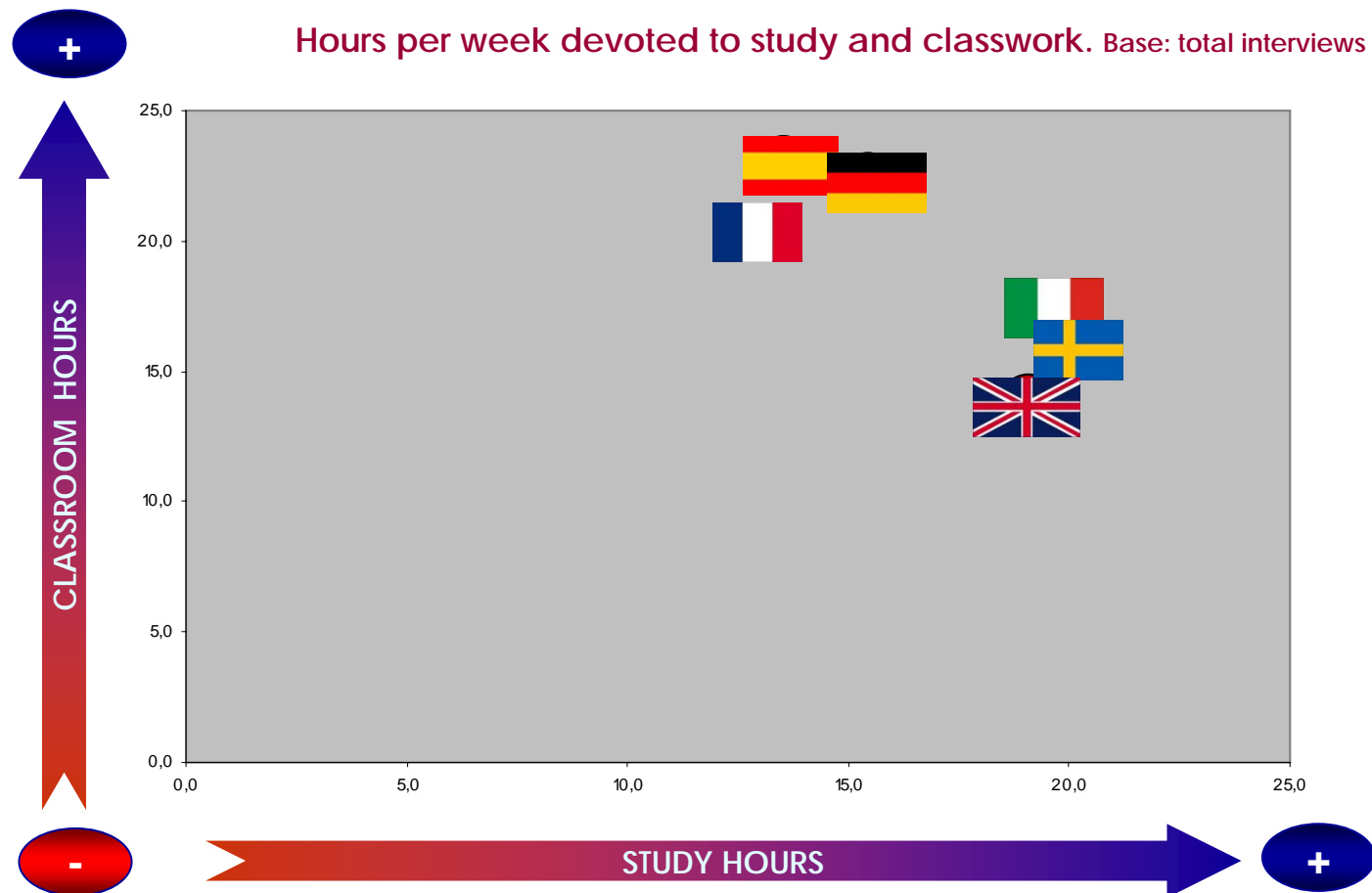
## TIME DEVOTED TO CLASSWORK AND STUDY

- Classwork takes up more hours per week for students in Germany, Spain and, at a distance, France.
- Hours spent in theory classes far outnumber those spent in practical classes in all countries surveyed.
- Personal study and classroom hours tend to balance each other out. Summing the two together, inter-country differences smooth out considerably, with the total time devoted to academic activities ranging from 33 to 38 hours per week.

Hours per week spent studying and attending classes. Base: total interviews



- Looking at the time spent on study and classwork in a standard week, we can distinguish two training styles or approaches: the first based predominantly on individual effort – students devote more time to personal study – and the other prizing attendance at classes. British, Swedish and Italian students spend more hours studying and fewer in class, while those in Spain, France and Germany devote more time to classwork than personal study.

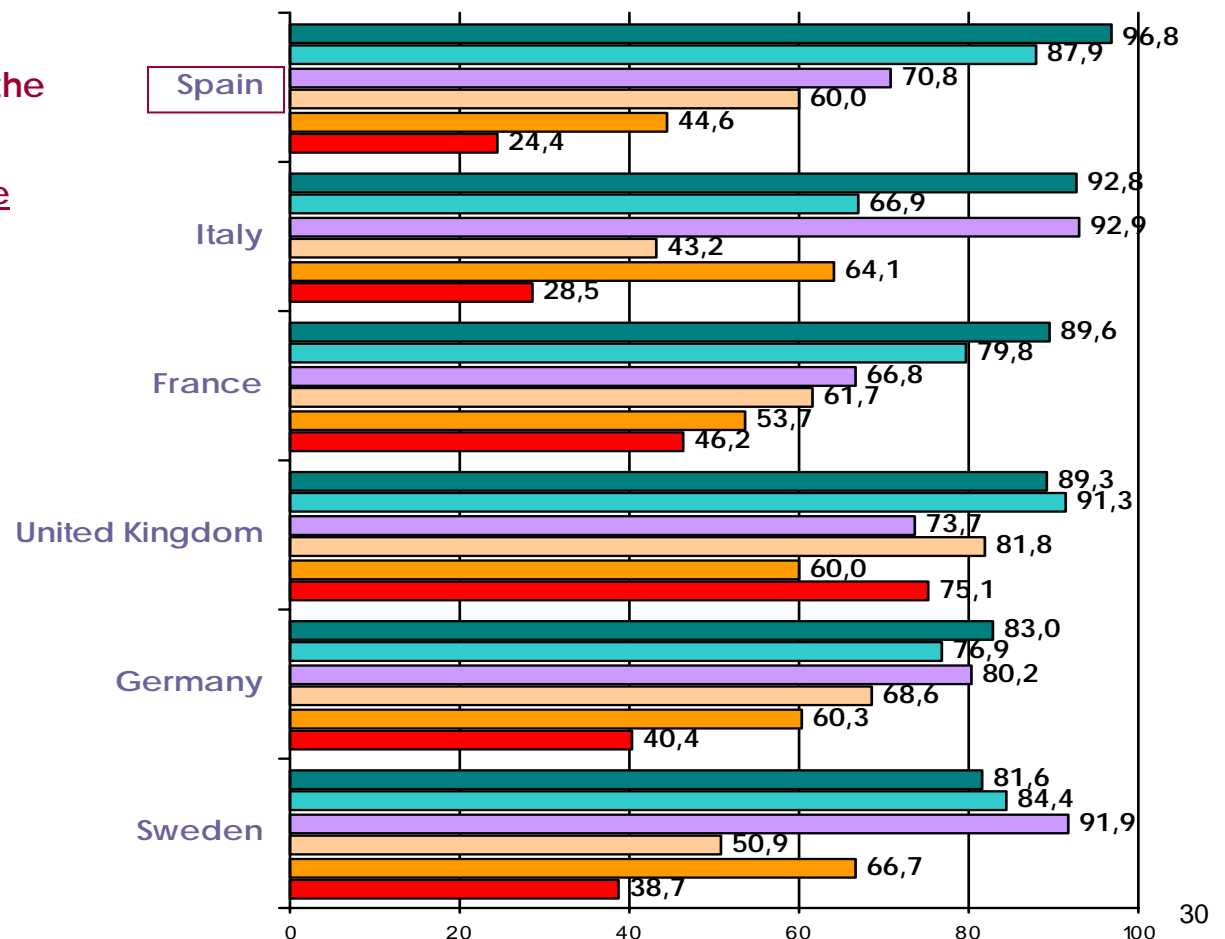
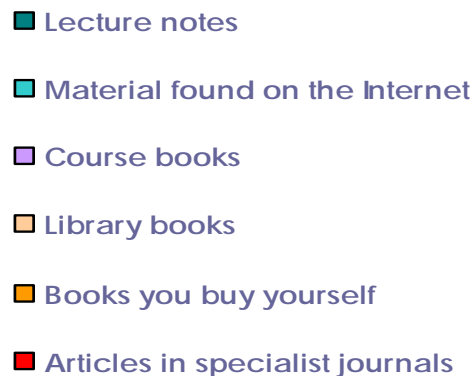


- Students differ in the study materials they utilise: the most popular being lecture notes, Internet materials and course books.
  - Those in Spain and the United Kingdom are the most regular users of Internet materials.
  - Those in Italy and Sweden make more frequent use of course books.
  - British students are the keenest consumers of library books.
- The use made of articles in specialist journals is particularly uneven: a minority habit in Spain and Italy, moderate in Sweden, Germany and France and highly frequent in the United Kingdom.

When you study, how often do you use the following materials?

Base: total interviews

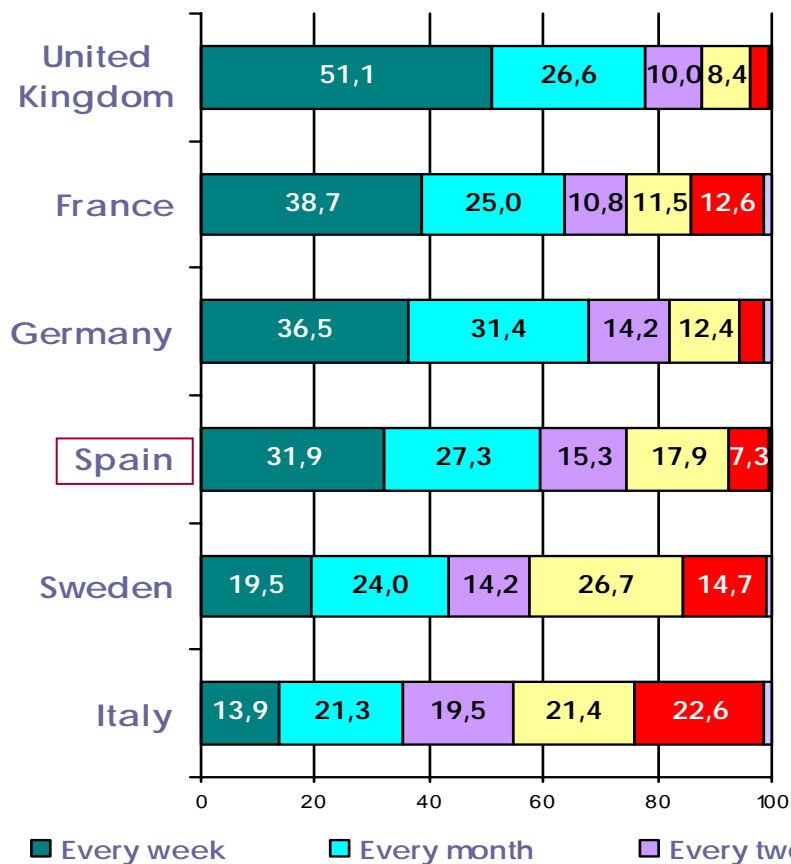
Percentage responding "very often+quite often"



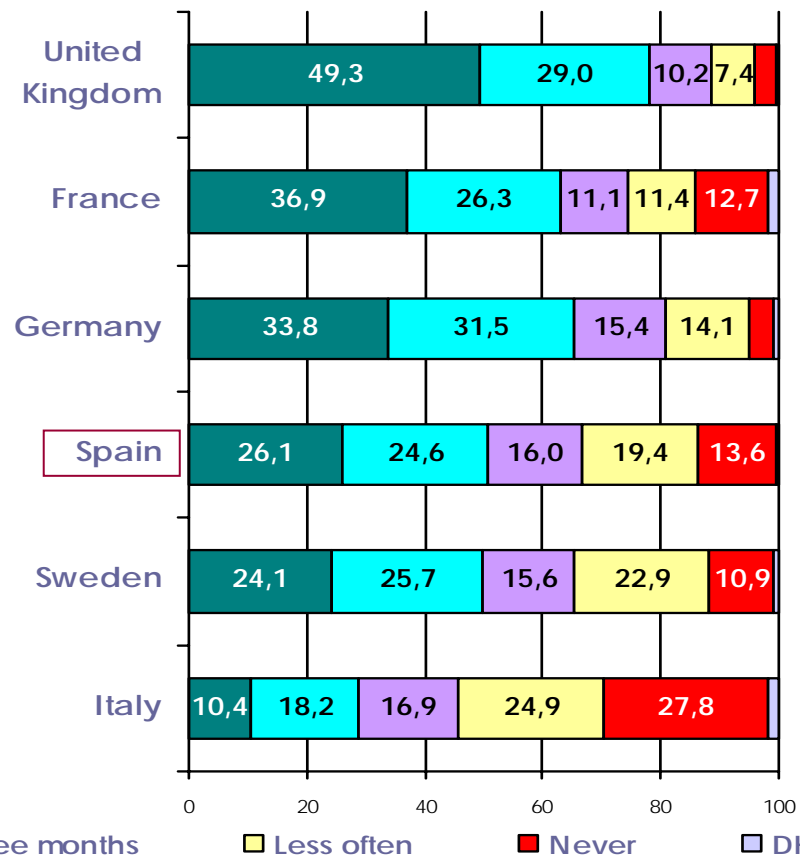
- Students use the library to find specific materials that were recommended in class rather more often than they do to search of their own accord for texts or materials.
- But use of the library for either activity is far from uniform: starting from the frequent use made in the United Kingdom, it drops through France and Germany then Spain around the mid-way mark down to Italy, where students are the least frequent visitors of all.

### Frequency of going to the library. Base: total interviews

How often do you visit the library to find some specific text or material that was recommended?



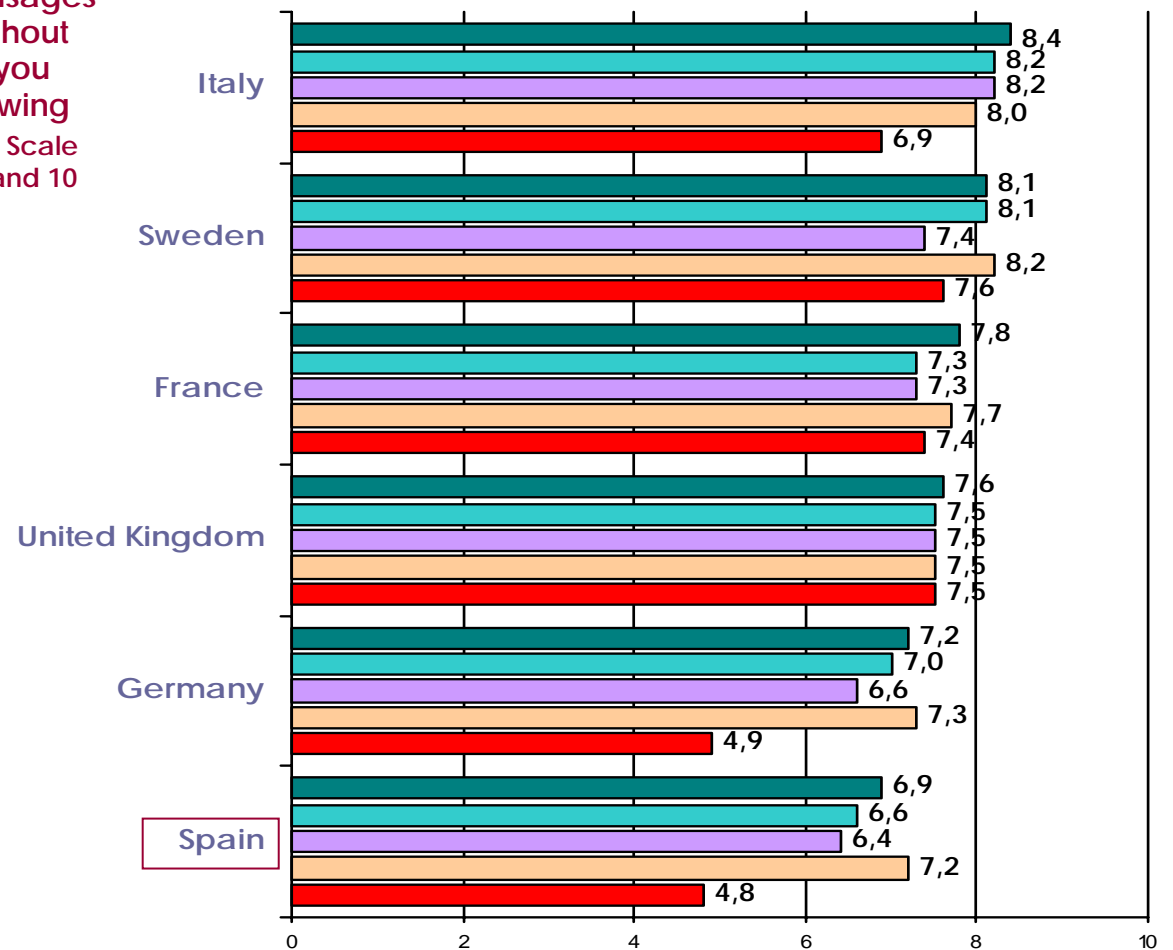
How often do you visit the library to search of your own accord for texts or materials that may be of use?



- Students come out in favour of certain goals of the European Higher Education Area like the alignment of degree systems, the promotion of mobility and cooperation, and adoption of a common credits system.
- Conversely, the adoption of a system based on three cycles fails to convince either German or Spanish students.

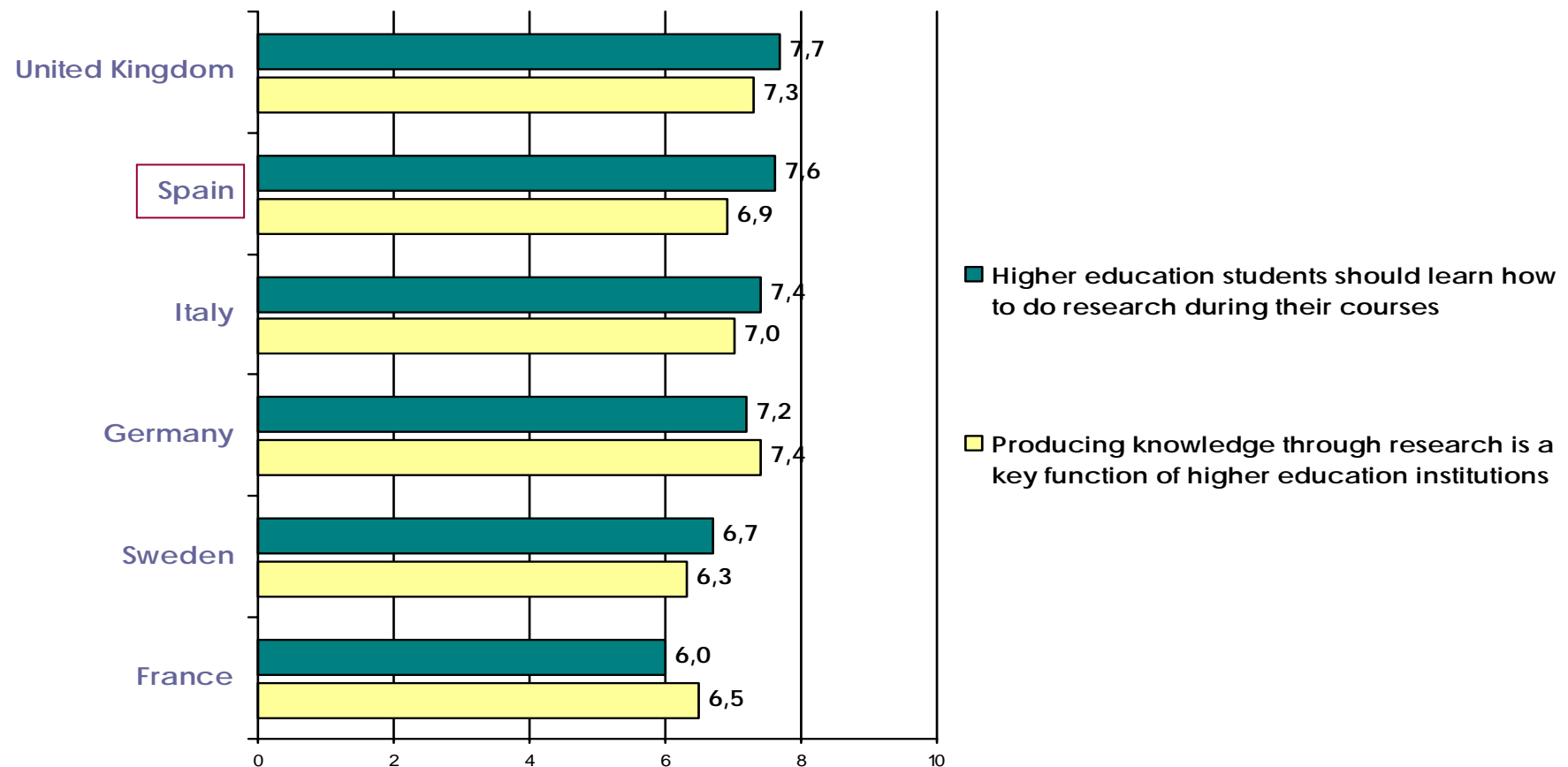
The Bologna Declaration lays the foundations for a "European Higher Education Area", which envisages the convergence of higher education throughout the European Union by the year 2010. Can you please tell me what you think about the following aims of the of this project? Base: total interviews. Scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you are strongly against and 10 that you are strongly in favour

- Adoption of a degree system that is both transparent and comparable between countries
- Promotion of the mobility of students, lecturers and administrative staff across European countries
- Adoption of a common credits system which considers the overall volume of work done by the student and not just the classroom hours
- Promotion of the mobility of students, lecturers and administrative staff across European countries
- Adoption of a system based on three cycles: bachelor's, master's and doctorate



- Students agree that they should learn research skills as part of their degree courses, and also that producing knowledge through research is a key function of higher education institutions.

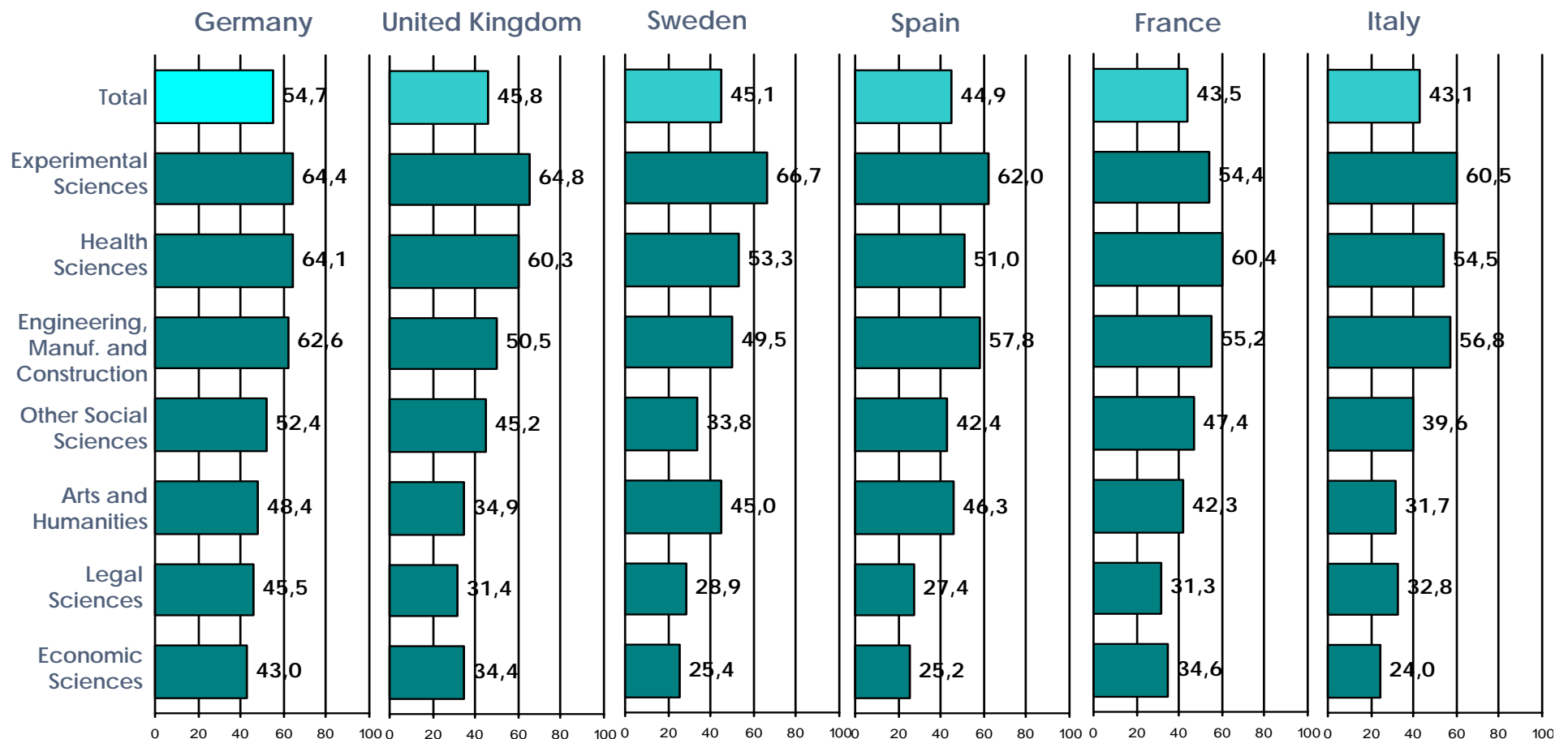
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following sentences? Base: total interviews.  
Average on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you totally disagree and 10 that you totally agree



- Just over 50% in Germany and 40% in remaining countries are familiar with some research project going on in their faculty.
- Branch of study is a discriminating factor for familiarity with research projects: greater among students of experimental sciences, followed by those taking health sciences and engineering and technical degrees, and significantly less among students of economics and legal sciences.

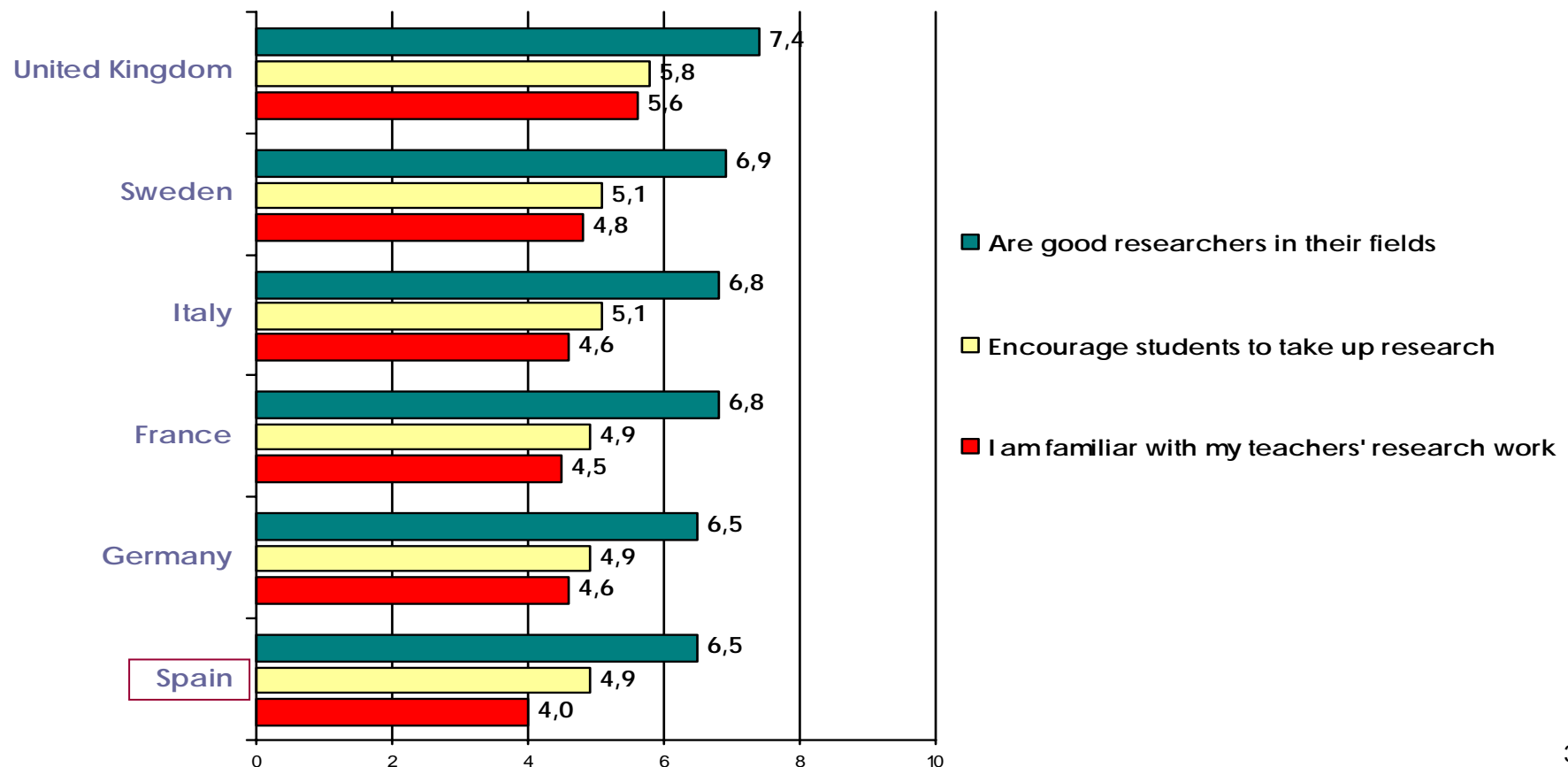
Do you know of any research programme or project currently being undertaken in your faculty?

Percentage responding affirmatively. Base: total interviews



- Students judge their teachers to be good researchers in their fields.
- However, they are less sure that they encourage students to take up a research career, with scores in most countries converging on the middle mark.
- Except in the United Kingdom, a majority have little idea of the research their teachers are engaged in. This feeling is particularly strong in Spain.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the teaching staff at your university ? Base: total interviews. Average on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you totally disagree and 10 that you totally agree

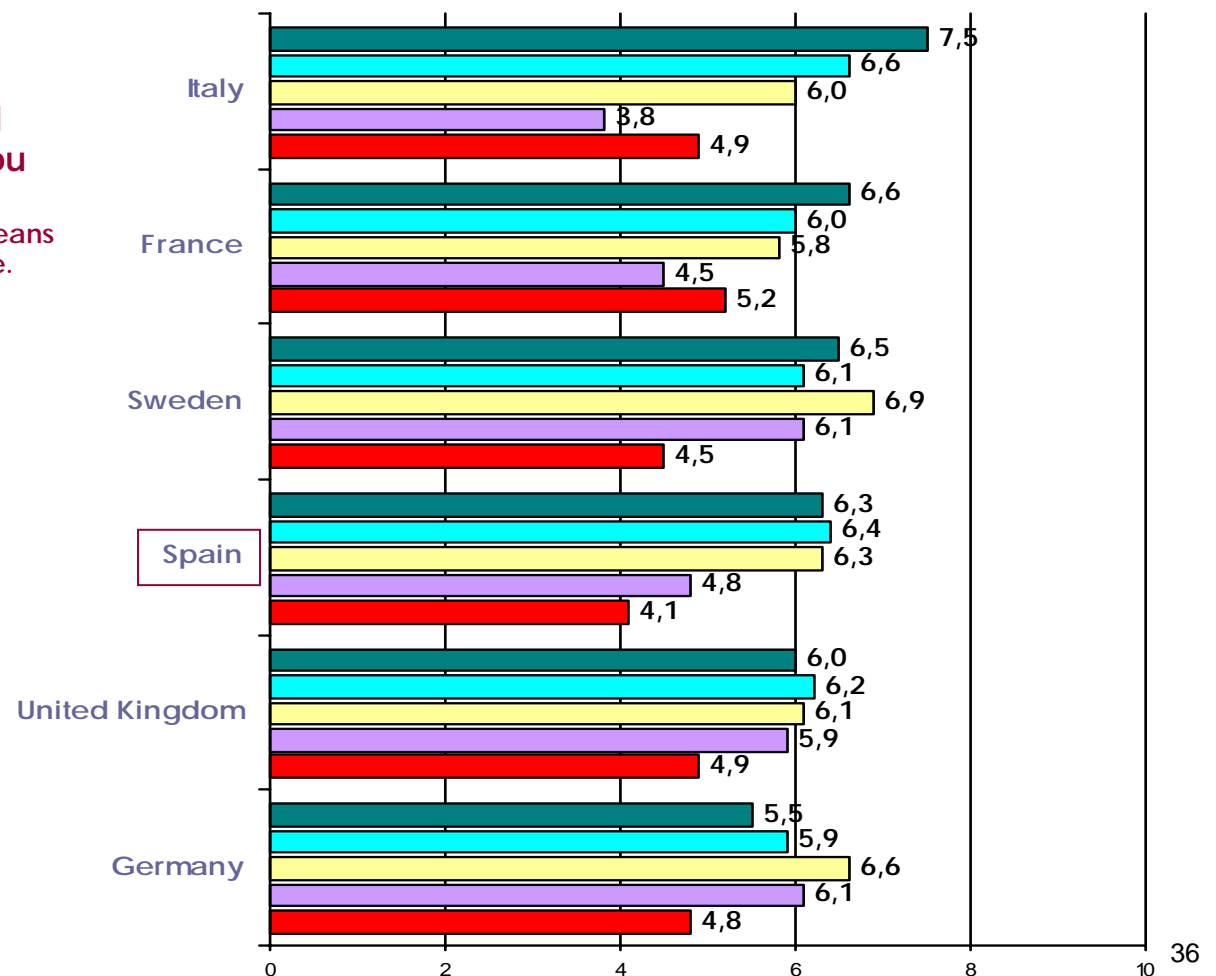


- Although a majority consider that the research career carries a lot of prestige, they also see it as difficult and not that well paid. Students in Italy, France and Spain tend not to believe that the state supports researchers.
- In a context of poor familiarity with teachers' research and the perception that they are not being encouraged into a research career, a majority of students, particularly in Spain, do not feel well informed about how they could become a researcher.

I am now going to read out some sentences about a research career. I would like you to tell me how much you agree or disagree with each.

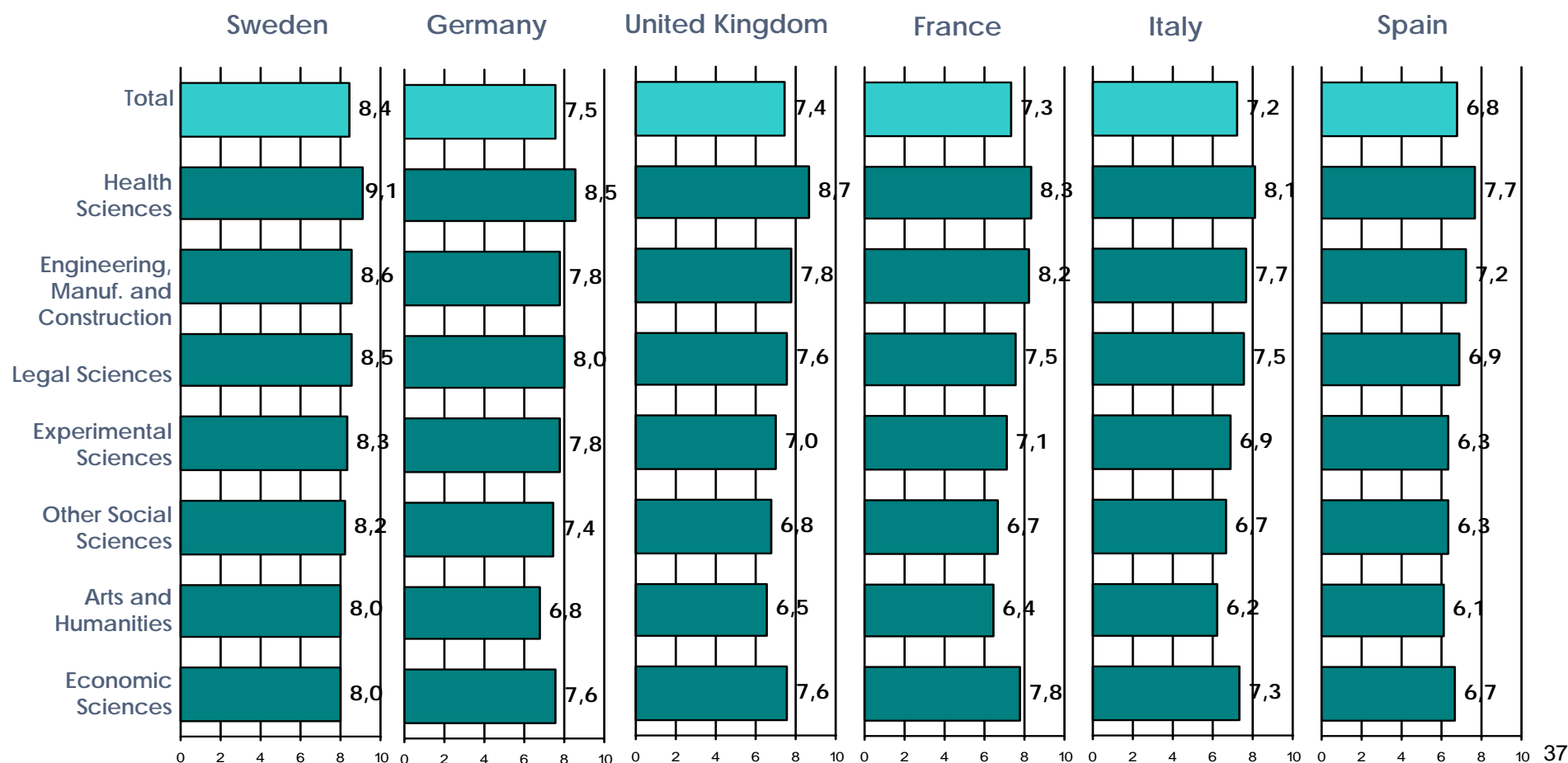
Base: total interviews. Scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you totally disagree and 10 that you totally agree.

- Researcher salaries are not attractive
- Research work requires more effort than most professions
- Research work carries a lot of prestige
- The state supports researchers
- I feel I am well enough informed about how to become a researcher



- Students are upbeat about their chances of finding a job that fits their qualifications on completing their degree. Optimism on this count is strongest in Sweden and fairly moderate in Spain.
- Students in health sciences are more optimistic in every country, followed by engineering, manufacturing and construction, legal sciences and economics. Those doing arts and humanities, finally, are more modest in their expectations.

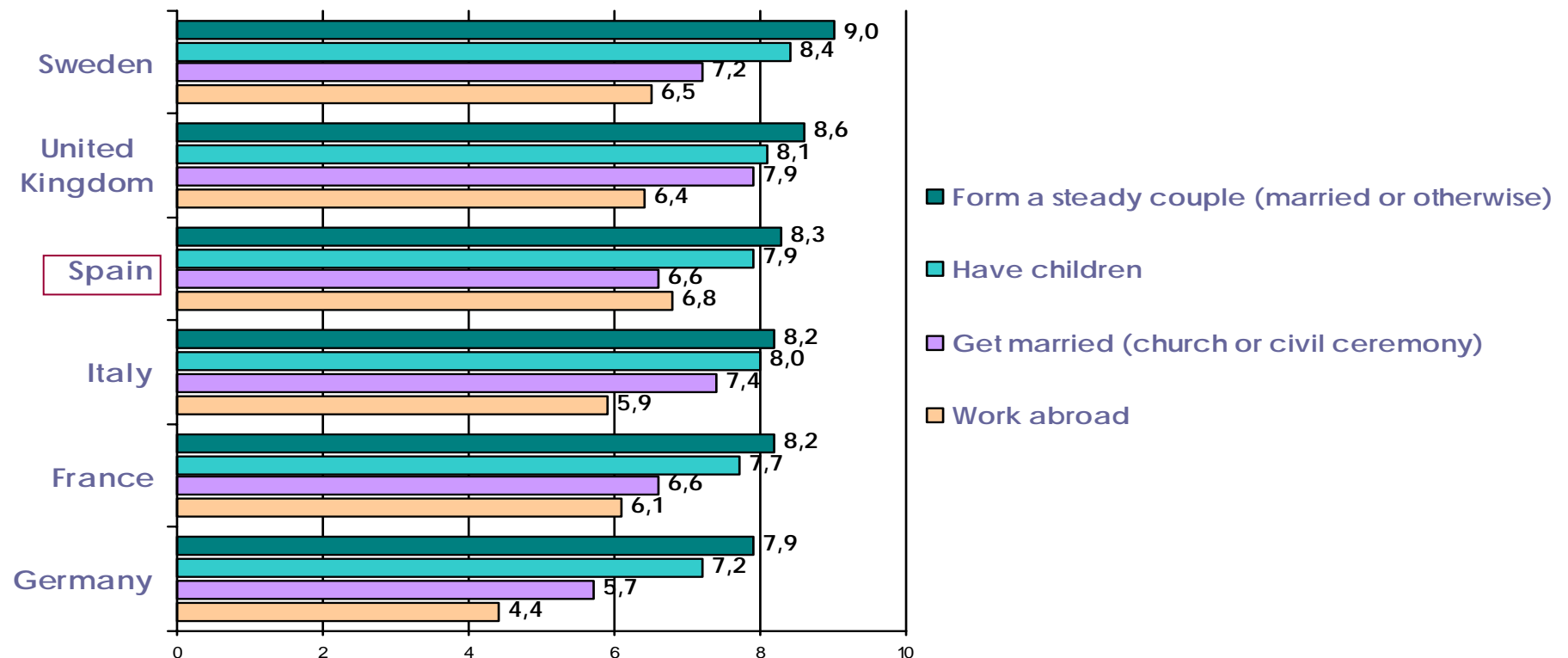
**Do you think you are likely to find a job that is related to your degree course?** Base: total interviews  
Average on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means it is not very likely and 10 that it is very likely.



- An ample majority in all countries aspire to form a steady couple, have children and, in third place, get married. The desire to marry is attenuated somewhat in Germany, France and Spain.
- Students differ more strongly regarding the desire to work abroad at some point in their lives. This aspiration predominates in almost all countries, particularly in Spain. The exception is Germany, where only a minority of respondents would welcome such an opportunity.

Thinking about what you would like to do with your life, to what extent would you like or not like to do the following things at some point in your life?

Base: total interviews. Scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you would not like it at all and 10 means that you would like it a lot.



# Summary

*Students are negative about the world situation and, in some countries, their national situation also. However they see their personal situation in a positive light and are upbeat about their employment prospects*

*They see being at university as a privilege, which puts them at an advantage to other people in their way of seeing and getting on in the world*

*Ideologically, they consider themselves on the centre-left*

*Although a majority belong to a religion, they express a low degree of religiosity*

*Forming a family is a widespread aspiration*

*University students are not ethical relativists, but accept that moral principles can be flexibly applied as the situation demands*

*Social conducts arousing controversy and rejected by some religions meet with wide acceptance among university students (same-sex marriage, adoption by homosexual couples, euthanasia and, rather more weakly, abortion)*

*Greater personal and financial independence among university students in Sweden, Germany, the United Kingdom and France versus the greater dependence of their Spanish and Italian peers, most of whom live with their parents and rely on help from the family to finance their studies*

*University students tend to choose their degree for vocational reasons. Choice of university is based more on practical concerns – closeness to home or the fact it was the only one offering the desired course – than the prestige of the institution*

*Though globally satisfied with their studies, students in Spain, France and Italy perceive a degree of mismatch between university training and the job market*

*The share-out of hours devoted to academic activities (personal study, classwork) differs widely by country: a product of two starkly contrasting educational styles*

*They see research as a key goal of higher education, but perceive little information or encouragement to take up a research career*

**Personal independence**

- **United Kingdom, Sweden, Germany and, to a lesser extent, France:** more independent of their families, likelier to work, financing study outlays from a variety of sources.
- **Spain and Italy:** a majority living with their parents, only a minority in work, and reliant on help from the family to finance their studies, with little access to grants or other forms of financial assistance.

**Academic life**

- **Spain, France and Italy:** students perceive a mismatch between university education and the job market.
- **United Kingdom and, to a lesser extent, Sweden and Germany:** the dominant view among students is that the university is equipping them well for professional life.

**Study patterns**

- **United Kingdom, Sweden and Italy:** more hours devoted to personal study than classwork in a standard academic week.
- **Germany, Spain and France:** classroom hours outnumber personal study hours in a standard academic week.

- Generally speaking, students in the **United Kingdom** differ from those in **Continental Europe** in their greater satisfaction with the university experience, more intense sense of institutional pride (identification with their university) and firmer conviction of their centre's success in equipping them for professional life.
- In keeping with work patterns that emphasise personal study over time spent in class, they are also the most frequent users of university libraries and the likeliest to employ books and specialist journals as study materials.

- Students in **Spain** are among those most reliant on the family.
- They are the likeliest to choose a university for reasons of proximity.
- Against a backdrop of global satisfaction with the university, they are the most sceptical about its success in preparing students for professional life.
- Regarding the European Higher Education Area, they join with the Germans in opposing the adoption of a system based on three cycles (bachelor's, master's and doctorate).
- They are among the least aware of the kind of research being done by their teachers and those feeling least well informed about the possibilities of a research career.

• Students of **health sciences** are among the likeliest to choose their degree for vocational reasons, and tend to stand at the extreme of most satisfaction with their university experience and, particularly, the preparation it gives them for professional life. In a majority of countries, they tend to be the students devoting most time per week to personal study. They are also more confident than their peers about the possibilities of finding work that fits with their qualifications.

• Students of **engineering, manufacturing and construction** resemble their health science fellows on a number of counts, while tending to be less positive in their assessments. Although a majority state vocational factors among those guiding their choice of degree course, a significant percentage was also influenced by what they saw as better employment prospects.

• Students of **economic and legal sciences** give more weight to employment prospects when choosing a degree course. At the same time, they are among those likeliest to perceive a mismatch between university training and the job market.

• Students of **arts and humanities** stand out for the clearly vocational nature of their degree course choice. They are also the most vehement about the shortcomings of practical teaching and about the university's failings in equipping students for professional life. They tend to be less optimistic about their future job prospects. Students of **other social sciences** exhibit a similar profile to this last group.

• Students of **experimental sciences** stand out clearly for their affinity and familiarity with research: they are the most aware of the research projects being conducted at their universities and those who feel best informed about the possibilities of going on to a research career.

## TECHNICAL NOTES

**Universe:** students who have completed at least two years of higher education studies belonging to Category 5A of UNESCO's International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) (\*), segmented by branch of study and type of institution.

**Method:** administered face-to-face survey in study centres.

**Sample size and distribution:** 3,000 valid cases per country stratified according to region, type of centre and branch of study. The final unit was arrived at by random selection in the frame of the above stratification. The sample included from 35 to 50 universities in each country.

**Sampling error:** the estimated sampling error is  $\pm 1.8\%$  for a confidence level of 95.5% and in the worst-case scenario ( $p=q=0.5$ ).

**Fieldwork:** coordinated by IPSOS between the months of March and June, 2010.

In some countries, like Italy and Spain, private university students were oversampled with a view to providing a more robust sample base for this segment. Data were subsequently weighted to re-establish the real weight of each group within the study universe.

(\*) Category 5A corresponds to tertiary programmes that are largely theory-based and are designed to provide sufficient qualifications for accessing advanced research programmes and professions with high skill requirements