

PhD Funding Survey at the University of Iceland 2019



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Introduction and purpose

PhD students are an integral part of academia, both as teachers and by producing a considerable proportion of publishable research at universities across the globe. A good PhD program is thus an important factor in managing a university's influence and status within the scientific community. Nevertheless, PhD students are in a precarious situation due to multiple factors, such as their dependence on external funding through competitive funds. Additionally, some PhD students may struggle with a number of mental health concerns. For instance, when compared to the general population, PhD students are three to six times more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety.¹

In recent years, voices of dissatisfaction among PhD students at the University of Iceland (UoI) have become louder. Many PhD students report being underfunded and overworked, explain that the amounts provided by grants are not sufficient to support living in Iceland and that typical grant periods are too short. While the number of enrolled PhD students at UoI has increased by 111% over the last decade (see Appendix 3),² the number of allocated PhD grants has not followed suit. In 2009, 41 grants were allocated to PhD students from the UoI/Eimskip funds; in 2019, only 30 grants were allocated from the same funds.³ In this nine-year period the number of grants allocated has fluctuated, with a low of 20 grants in 2010, and an average of 29.5 grants allocated annually. It is difficult to estimate trends in grant allocated through the Icelandic Research Fund (IRF) housed at Rannís, The Icelandic Center for Research, as Rannís does not publish how many grants are allocated to PhD students through project and excellence grants. However, the overall allocation rate from the IRF has been decreased from 29.6% in 2015 to 17% in 2019.⁵ Numbers are available for the individual doctoral grants from the IRF. They show a small increase, from 12 grants in 2016 to 15 grants in 2019, but at the same time the allocation rate has decreased from 27% to 24% of applicants receiving grants.

The number of years it takes PhD students at UoI to finish their doctorate has increased in the past decade. In 2009, approximately 59% of PhD students graduated within five years whereas in 2014 the ratio dropped to 33%. The ratio of those finishing in six years or more tripled in the same period: from 13% to 39%. Even though PhD studies at UoI are expected to complete their doctorate within a three year period (3.5 or 4 years for some faculties), the average number of years to complete a PhD degree was 5.1 years in 2017 and 2018.⁶ An external institution-wide review of UoI conducted under the authority of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture was published in 2015. The review identified this increase as being a direct result of the lack of funding for PhD students.⁷

To address these concerns, Fedon, the University of Iceland's Association of Doctoral Students and Early Career Researchers, conducted a survey (see Appendix 1) from 1 to 28 March, 2019. All registered PhD students were invited to partake in the study via an e-mail sent through the University's intraweb Uglá and through social media communication channels such as Facebook groups for PhD students.

Summary of findings

A total of 262 PhD students responded to the survey. These students enrolled in their PhD program between 2008 and 2019. In total, 730 PhD students were officially registered in 2018, giving a response rate of 36%.

Results indicate that around 25% of PhD students have **never received funding** during their studies. While the ratio of those who have not received any grants is highest for students enrolled in the years 2018 and 2019, they only comprise about a fourth of the sample. There are still many students who have been studying for several years who have never received any funding. The average **grant duration** in the sample was 32.6 months (SD = 14.5) which is under the 36 months (up to 48 months in some faculties) expected to finish a PhD. Additionally, over 20% of respondents have received grants that only cover two years or less. This funding environment affects PhD projects and the time PhD students are able to allocate to them. Students estimate finishing their PhD studies in a much longer time than the expected three (or four) years. The average **duration of study estimated by PhD students** was 4.7 years which is close to the 5.1 years reported by the Graduate School.²

Over 40% of PhD students **work** in jobs outside the University to support themselves. The workload associated with external employment is high with nearly half working more than 30 hours per week. As a PhD program is considered a full-time job, these results indicate that many students are working up to double the full-time equivalent to cover their cost of living. Grant application writing also adds to the time burden on PhD students with the average student sending in more than one grant application. Some grants are not long enough to cover the whole duration of the PhD program and students therefore have to apply for several smaller grants. Application writing takes time which would be better spent working on the actual project itself.

Sessional and assistant teaching are an important part of academia. Around half of all PhD students have sessional teaching experience and over a third have served as assistant teachers. Some students rely on teaching to support themselves. Sessional teaching and teaching assistant wages are very low, and students must therefore take on a prohibitively large teaching load if their main source of income is sessional teaching.

Many students are dissatisfied with PhD funding at UoI. While those who have not received a grant tend to be less satisfied than those with a grant, the dissatisfaction is also high amongst those who have received funding. Alarming, PhD students are **under considerable mental strain** due to their funding situation. They report anxiety, depression, insecurities and stress. **For more information, see Results Chapter below and Appendix 5, where results are given by school.**

Conclusions & suggested reforms

The PhD funding environment at UoI needs reform. As noted in the external institution-wide review of UoI,⁷ the growth of the PhD programme has been a factor in the significant increase in the University's ISI ratings. However, adequate funding has not accompanied this growth. This has affected PhD students, their ability to support themselves, dedicate themselves to their studies, the length of studies and mental health. Although there are no statistics available on attrition among PhD students, the funding environment is likely to negatively affect student retention.

We identified several reforms which PhD students feel are necessary to undertake for the betterment of the PhD program of UoI:

First, PhD students must be able to cover the basic cost of living in Iceland and dedicate themselves fully to their studies. In order to do so it is necessary to **1)** increase the number of grants allocated so that every PhD student at the University who so wishes is funded, **2)** ensure that all funded students are funded for the entirety of their studies, and **3)** raise the total value of the grants.

Secondly, all PhD students need to be given the status of academic University employees, allowing them to possess the accompanying work benefits.

Thirdly, more opportunities need to be provided to PhD students to gain teaching experience without it negatively affecting their studies. The wages of sessional teachers should be raised so those who support themselves by teaching can take on a workload that also allows them to allocate time to their studies.

Fourth, there is a need for increased transparency in administrative procedures including overhead rules, reimbursement of equipment and conference costs.

Fifth, all PhD students need to have access to adequate working environment with a desk and a computer as well as any other equipment necessary for them to undertake their research.

Sixth, the number of potential travel grants and the monetary value of these grants needs to be raised. The travel grant allocation rules should be changed so students can apply for travel grants on a conference-by-conference basis rather than on a yearly basis. Additionally, students should not only be eligible for travel grants during the first three years of their studies as many do not obtain a grant at the beginning of their studies and therefore cannot fully dedicate themselves to their research in this period.

Seventh, there is a need for further rental subsidies for PhD students, including increases in the availability of student housing.

Finally, UoI needs to improve monitoring and evaluation of the funding status, teaching loads, external employment and well-being of PhD students. One possible solution would be to administer exit-surveys before students graduate and an annual survey. A better understanding of the PhD experience, its strengths and weaknesses can be used to respond to student and faculty requirements, reinforcing the program offered by the University and thus strengthening its status internationally.

While several improvements in the PhD study environment have recently been implemented, there are still many requirements that are yet to be fulfilled. On average, 29.5 UoI/Eimskip PhD grants have been allocated annually in the last decade. According to the Strategy of UoI 2016 to 2021, the University aims to increase the number of grants allocated annually by at least 10 grants or up to at least 39 grants.⁴ While this represents an improvement, it will not bridge the gap created by the increased number of PhD students in recent years.

The value of Icelandic Research Fund grants has been increasing in the last few years and recently an important milestone was achieved when the grant amount from UoI/Eimskip fund was increased to reduce the discrepancy with IRF grants. The University has begun taking measures to allocate the grants as salaries as opposed to contractor contracts.

Despite these positive developments, the value of grants are still low and do not sufficiently cover a full salary, which amounts to 319,013 IKR per month, according to the wage tables of Félag háskólakennara.⁸ Moreover, PhD grant salaries at UoI are determined using the wage table of administrative staff, as opposed to academic staff. The minimum salary of academic staff is considerably higher, or 431,551 IKR per month. In comparison, PhD students in the other Nordic countries are considered academic staff members and receive their funding as a salary, thus receiving all benefits as full staff members. In Norway, the minimum salary for a PhD student is 442,400 NOK annually, which calculates to around 508,000 IKR per month.⁹

The current funding environment at UoI is not sustainable and there is a pressing need for reform. It is the opinion of Fedon that the funds needed to implement these reforms should not primarily be drawn from the current budget of UoI. The government must allocate additional funds to both UoI and the Icelandic Research Fund intended specifically for PhD students. It is important to note that the lack of funding not only affects PhD students personally, but places UoI, and Iceland itself, at a serious competitive disadvantage compared with neighboring countries. Strengthening the PhD program at UoI is imperative if the University is to consolidate its success in recent years and maintain its status among the leading universities of the world.

Results

This chapter contains more in-depth information on the survey's results. For more details on distributions within schools, see Appendix 5: Supplementary figures.

Participation

A total of 262 PhD students responded to the survey. These students enrolled in their PhD program between 2008 and 2019. In total, 730 PhD students were officially registered in 2018, giving a response rate of 36%. Participation rates varied between schools and enrollment year (see Figure 1). For a more detailed overview on participation, see Appendix 2.

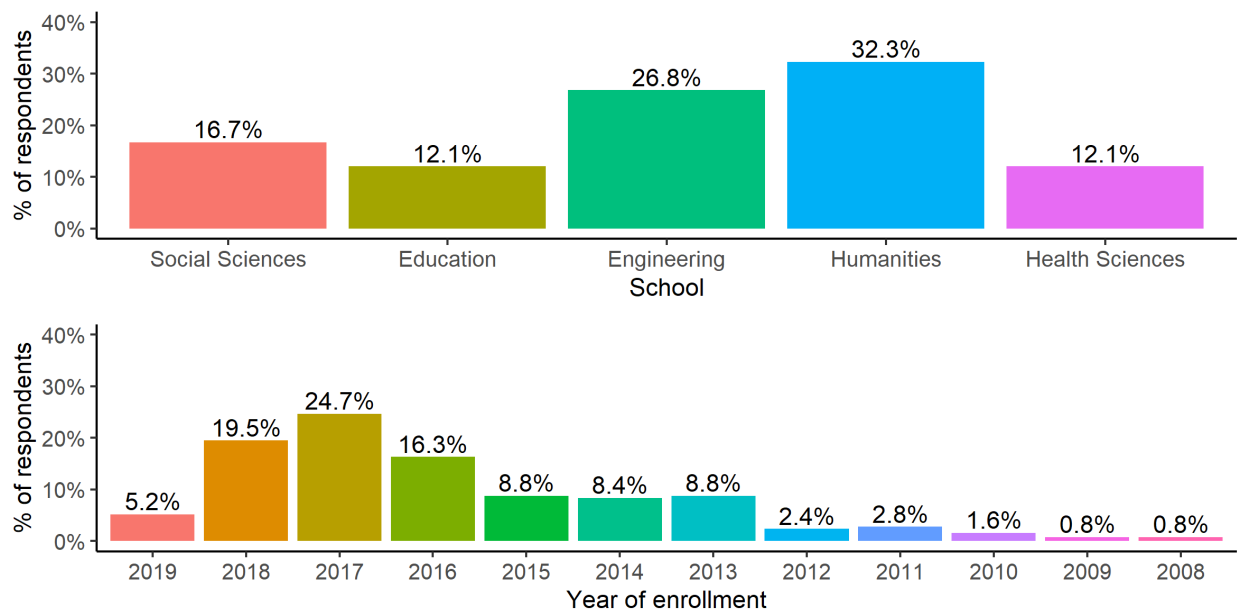


Figure 1. Participation by school and year of enrollment.

Funding status

Roughly 25% of PhD students at the University have never received a grant in any form during their studies. Figure 2 shows that those who feel like they do not need or want a grant are an absolute minority.

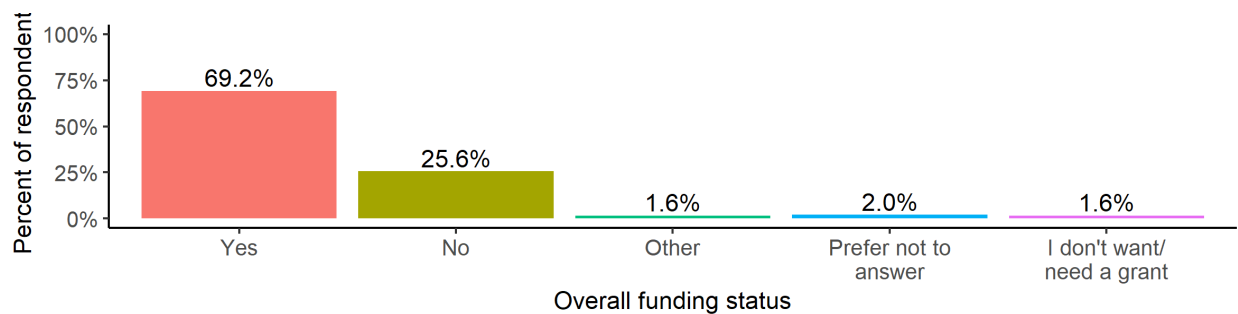


Figure 2. Overall funding status.

When examining funding status by year of enrollment it becomes clear that the high ratio of students who have never received a grant is not fully explained by recent enrollments (see Figure 3). While the ratio of those without a grant is higher for those enrolled in 2019, there are still many students who have been studying for several years who have never received a grant.

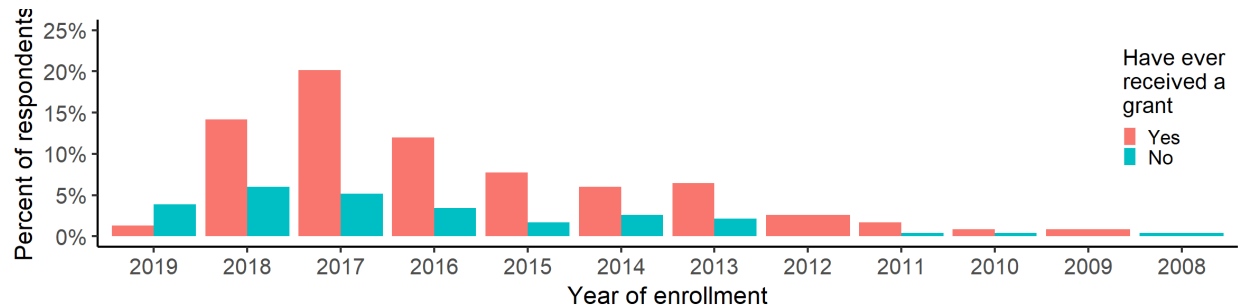


Figure 3. Funding status by year of enrollment.

While participation rates differ depending on school (see, Figure 4), funding status also varied between schools in the sample. It is unclear whether the variation reflects a true difference with some schools having a greater chance of securing grants for their students than others, or if the results are due to sample bias. Nevertheless, students in the schools of Engineering and Natural Sciences as well as Health Sciences have the highest ratio of funded students in this sample. In the external review of the University, a similar trend was reported.⁷

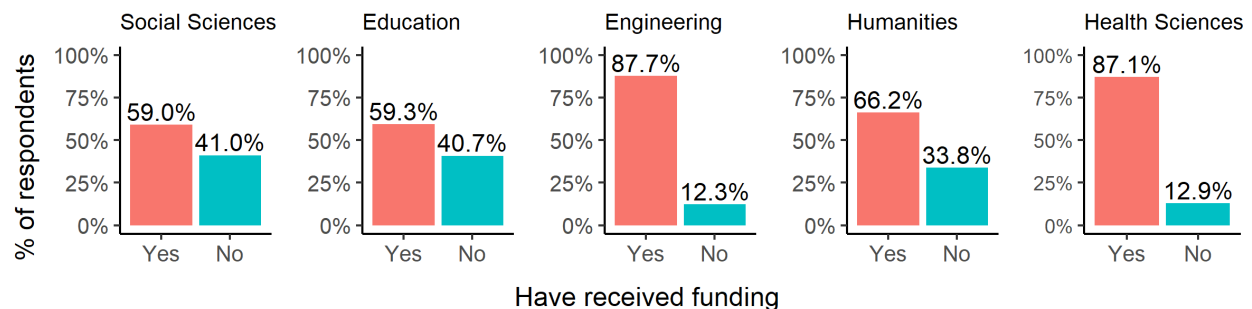


Figure 4. Funding status by School.

Grant and study duration

Although almost 70% of the PhD students in the sample have received some form of grant, the grant duration does not always cover the three to four years the program is expected span. Some students were able to apply for a few smaller grants to cover their studies. Around a third (34%) of the students with grants received two or more grants to cover their studies. Out of those with more than one grant, 38% received three grants. With all grants taken into account, grant duration spanned 0–72 months, and covered 32.6 months (SD = 14.5), on average. This is less than the 36 (or 48) months PhD studies at UoI are expected to take. Notably, more than 20% of students with grants received funding for two years or less. The individual number of grant applications submitted by those who have never received a grant ranged from 0–8, with the average of 1.4 applications per person (SD = 1.5).

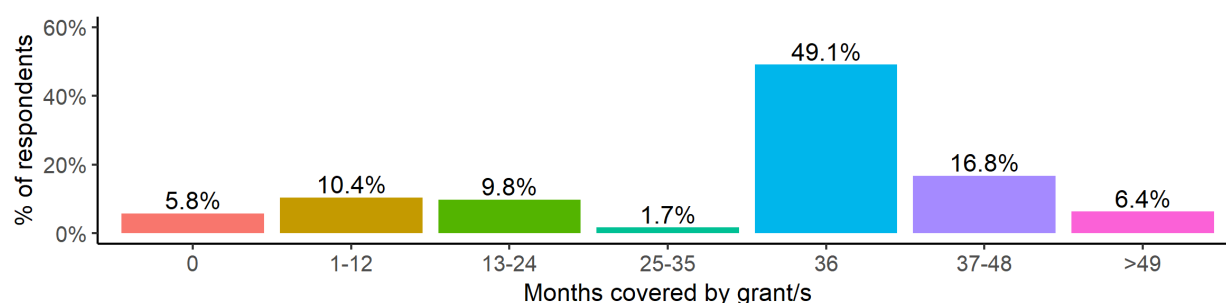


Figure 5. Total grant duration. Those who reported 0-months received one time grants instead of salaries.

The average grant duration in the School of Health Sciences and the School of Engineering and Natural Sciences covers 36 months, while the grant duration of the Schools of Social Sciences, Education, and Humanities does not cover that period on average.

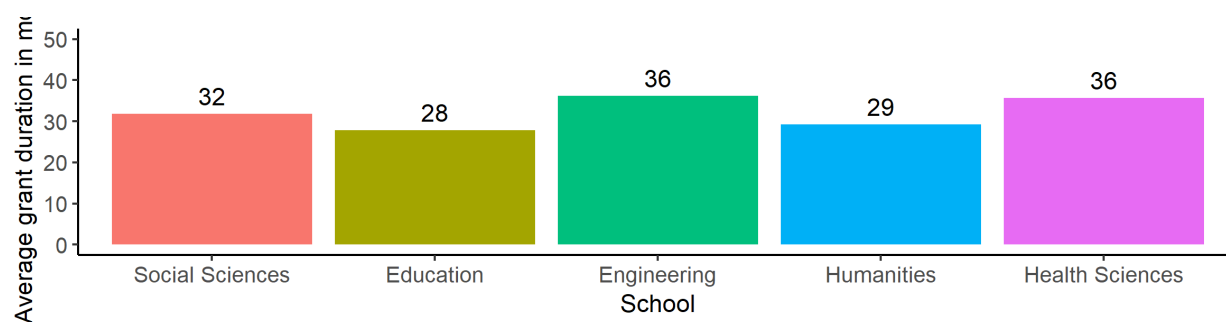


Figure 6. Average number of funded months covered by schools.

Overall, students estimated that they would need 4.7 years (SD = 1.8) to finish their degree, which is much longer than the average grant duration. Figure 7 shows the average expected duration of PhD studies by school. Markedly, in the School of Health Sciences and the School of Engineering and Natural Sciences

where students were more likely to receive a grant and the grant period is on average the longest, students report the lowest estimated duration to finish their degree.

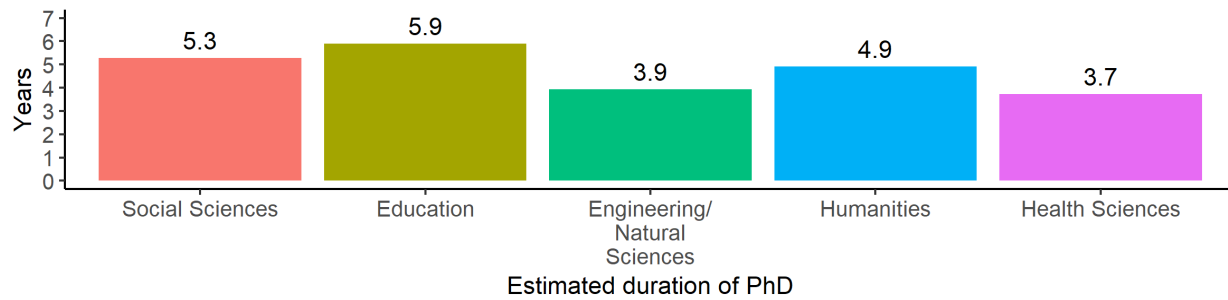


Figure 7. Average expected duration of PhD studies by school.

Teaching duties & working alongside studies

Teaching is an important part of the PhD experience. However, only around half of the respondents have been sessional teachers and only a third have been assistant teachers. In contrast, a large portion of students are employed and work alongside their studies, not including their PhD work and teaching duties. Of those employed, almost half work 30 hours or more per week (SD = 18), which can be considered close to full time employment. While teaching duties are most commonly assigned to a couple of subjects, over 17% of student teachers have taught eight subjects or more (see Figure 8 Figure 9).

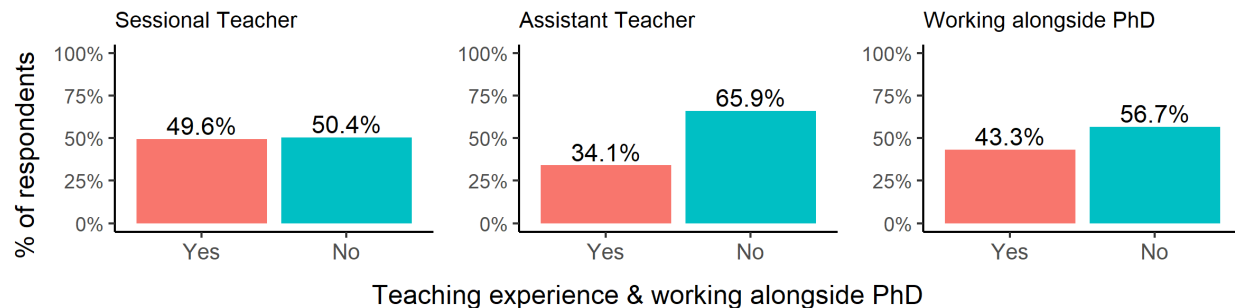


Figure 8. Teaching experience and employment outside of UoI. The figures do not include missing values (NA) or ratio of those who preferred not to answer (PNA). The number of yes to no responses were as follows; Sessional teaching 115/117 (NA = 28, PNA = 2), Assistant teaching 77/149 (NA = 34, PNA = 2), Work alongside PhD 100/131 (NA = 28, PNA = 3).

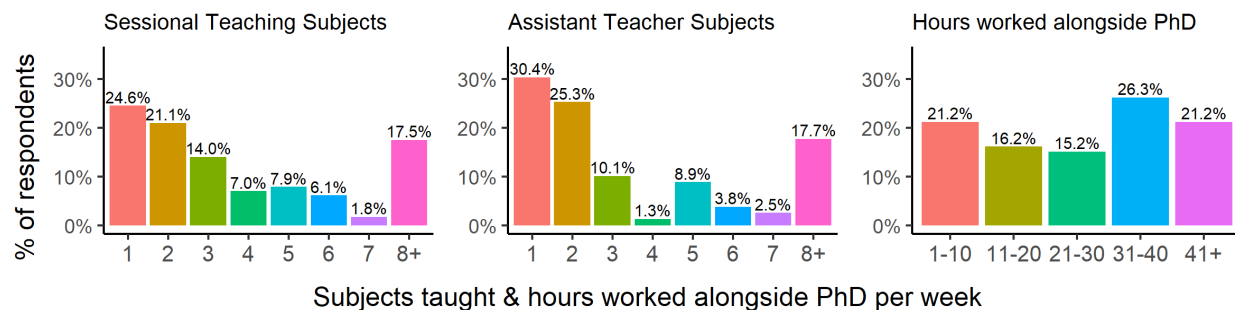


Figure 9. Number of subjects taught as sessional and assistant teachers as well as the hours worked per week outside the University. For sessional teaching and assistant teaching, the number of respondents who provided information on the number of subjects taught were 114 and 79, correspondingly. As for external teaching, 99 reported the number of hours worked per week.

The number of subjects taught was defined as the sum of the number of years teaching the same subject, or the number of subjects taught during each semester. That way a single subject taught 5 years in a row counted as 5 subjects, and if a student taught 5 subjects during a semester they would also count as 5 subjects. While the number of subjects taught as a sessional or assistant teacher provide an overview of the PhD students' teaching experience, the survey did not ask students how many subjects they had taught simultaneously during a single semester, how often they had taught the same subject, how many students they were responsible for, if they taught a whole subject by themselves or took on a smaller portion of the teaching load, or, finally, how many student-reports or exams they had to grade. These factors are all play a role in the time and effort involved in teaching duties and as such, the results are not indicative of the definite teaching workload or responsibilities. Further research is needed to better map the sessional and assistant teaching of PhD students.

Satisfaction with PhD funding environment

The majority of PhD students are not satisfied with the grant environment at UoI (see Figure 10). Those who have received a grant tended to be more satisfied than those who have not received any funding. Nevertheless, the overall satisfaction with funding leaves much room for improvement.

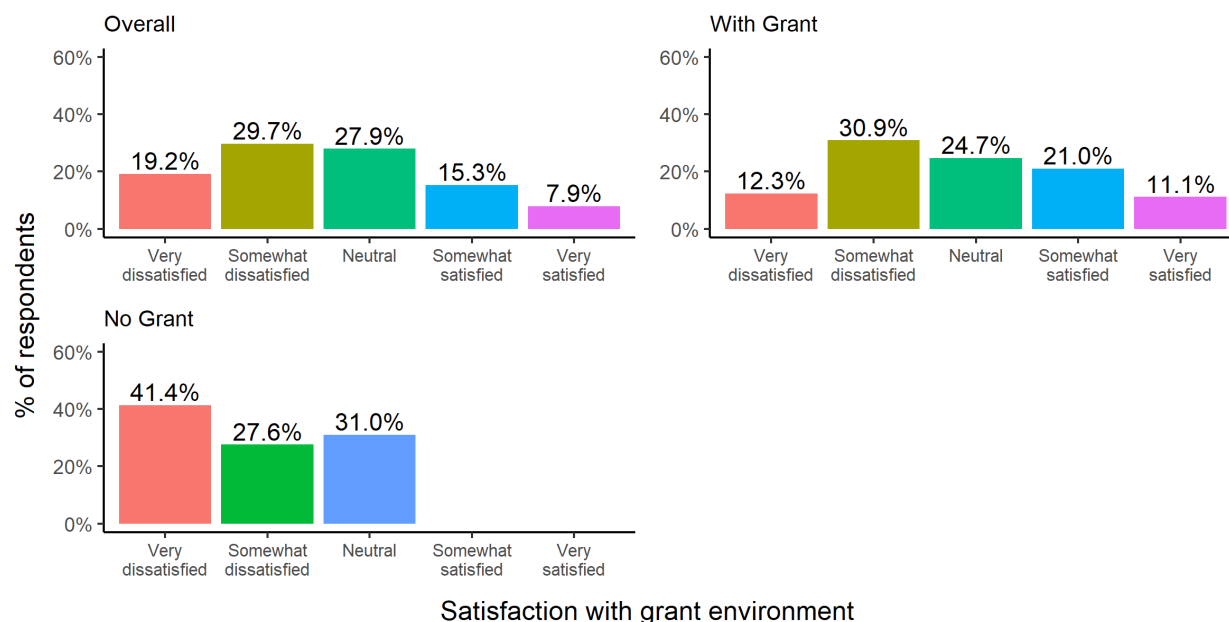


Figure 10. Overall satisfaction with the grant environment, overall, for those who have received a grant, and for those who have not received any funding. Out of the 262 respondents, 33 did not provide information on their satisfaction level.

Open ended feedback

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked to provide information on how the funding environment influenced their PhD experience and provide recommendations on how the funding environment could be improved.

Perceptions on the influence of the funding environment on the PhD experience

In total, 116 respondents provided additional comments about PhD funding and how it has affected their PhD experience. This section provides a summary of some of the key issues raised. As respondents were not specifically asked about these issues, the overall rate of respondents that agree with statements is likely to be much higher.

The most common feedback from people receiving the Rannsóknasjóður Vísinda- og tækniráðs/IRF, Eimskip/UoI PhD and Assistant Teacher grants is that **the value of the grant is too low** (mentioned by 42 respondents, 36%). Several respondents noted that the value of the grants was below the minimum wage in Iceland and that any increases in the value of grants has lagged far behind inflation and the rising cost of living in Iceland. Several respondents mentioned that the amount often did not cover a full-time salary, with a reported salary ranging from 70–90% of the salary according to the wage table. The fact that the grant does not cover a full-time salary has caused some respondents problems with their union and meant that they are not eligible to apply to union funds. Others mentioned that the value of the main grants were substantially lower than grants for PhD programs in Scandinavia.

Several respondents who received a grant, mentioned that despite the funding they were experiencing severe financial difficulties (“I’m broke”, “it’s hard to live on the grant alone”, “the grant is so low, it’s hard to make ends meet”, “scraping by every month”, “it is extremely hard to get by financially on such a low income”, “does not cover the cost of living”, “too low to survive on”, “has put me under financial strain”, “impossible to live off”, “wages that barely meet basic needs of everyday life”).

The low level of grants was linked to stress and students feeling that their work is not valued (“it can be very disheartening to only get low salary for such a long time”, “low wages can cause high levels of stress at times”, “it feels like your work is undervalued”, “I am a bit baffled to realize how little value is given to my work from this society”, “the grant is too low [...] which adds extra stress”). The low value of grants, and the difficulties faced living off these funds, was considered by some to have ethical implications. One respondent mentioned “I find the grant application system in Iceland deeply disturbing, somewhat elitist, and highly outdated”.

The grant amount was viewed as a significant barrier for some demographics from participating in a PhD program, such as those supporting families (especially single parents) and those who come from a financially weaker background (“In effect, PhD studies are only for those who are well off in society and have financial support from their family which is not acceptable for a society that wants to promote equality, justice and democracy”, “it is impossible to live on the grants alone as a single parent”, “PhD studies are obviously not meant for single parents”). A few respondents mention the fact the financial support from family members was crucial to them (“I have a very supportive extended family”, “I rely on my spouse and extended family to make end meets”).

Another key criticism levelled against the current grants available is that they are **too short in duration** (specifically mentioned by 17 respondents, 15%). PhD programs in some faculties are longer than the 3-year maximum grant period, as a result these grants do not cover the whole program period. Many respondents mentioned that 3 years of funding is inadequate to complete their PhD and that only having funding for 3 years would cause them trouble (“I foresee challenges in continuing my studies due to lack of funding”, “You get 3 years of funding and people act as if you will finish within these 3 years. Then you realize that this is not possible and that your supervisor doesn’t have money to pay you longer”, “It’s ridiculous that the UoI grant is for 3 years when literally no one can finish in 3 years”). Several respondents mentioned that not being able to extend a grant was detrimental and that there was a lack of funds for shorter periods of time (“there is no sort of safety net to extend for a year or so as is present in some other universities”, “there are few options for when additional funding is needed for shorter period of time after a longer term grant ends”, “there should be an option to extend to 4 years”).

As with the low value of grants, the short duration was also perceived as an additional source of stress and anxiety by some respondents (“the constant overhanging threat of being out of salary before you finish is no good for the morale”, “the grant does not cover the entire period of study which adds extra stress”, “PhD students already start getting worried about funding in their second year”).

Having to **work alongside PhD studies** was mentioned by 47 respondents (41%) including both students with grants and without grants. Many of those who have received grants have needed to work as the grant period is too short (“I needed to start working in another job when my funding finished”, “I have needed to work part-time within the university and outside of it to support my studies”). Several respondents worked even when they had funding in order to support themselves (“I must work in the

evenings and weekends to manage”, “I cannot pay rent without work”, “it was necessary to work substantially beside the PhD project”).

Those without grants supported themselves by working and report having little time to work on their PhD (“I had to take a leave from the PhD studies to work full time because of lack of funding”, “I have to work full time at another job and my PhD is for afternoons, evenings and weekends”). Many of the respondents specifically mentioned that working delayed progress on their PhD (“my progress has been slower than desired”, “að vinna með náminu stæstan hluta tafði mig talsvert”, “affects the amount of time dedicated to the project, creating a no exit loop”, “has also slowed my progress considerably”, “no funding makes continuing and finishing studying very difficult”, “working has extended my PhD by 3 years. I should be done by now!”).

Other common feedback (mentioned by 14 respondents, 12%) is that the grant writing process is very time consuming and hinders PhD students from focusing on their projects (“you need to spend the first year or more applying for funding”, “it leaves me with the feeling that I am always discussing the research I plan to do instead of actually doing the research, which is frustrating”, “I basically spent the first 2–3 years of PhD just applying for funding”). A few respondents also highlighted the mental toll of the grant writing process (“it is a bit exhausting”, “depressing”, “it discourages people from completing PhD studies”, “like a limbo”).

Finally, the whole grant situations is understood to have detrimental effects on the mental and physical health of PhD students including stress, depression, anxiety, insecurity and forcing students to deny themselves seeking medical attention (“Stress, insecurity, problems with staying focused on PhD”, “it affects students finances and ultimately their mental and physical health”, “It has caused me a lot of stress, wondering whether I will be able to cover my bills, if I can go to the dentist/doctor etc.”). One respondent had to seek professional help (“This greatly affected my mental health and I was forced to seek professional help as I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown”).

Respondent’s suggestions on how to improve the funding situation

In total, 146 respondents provided recommendations about how the funding process can be improved. This section provides a summary of some of the key issues raised. As respondents were not specifically asked about these issues, the overall rate of respondents that agree with particular statements is likely to be much higher.

Advocate for more funding options

- Make **more grants available** (24 respondents)
- Students and University to **advocate for further funding from sources** such as the government (9 respondents), banks (2 respondents), university (2 respondents), department-sponsored programs (1 respondent), industry (2 respondents, for example reaching out to Iceland Air to sponsor language PhD positions). Some respondents mentioned that this requires a sustained effort to convince the government that research and education is a good long-term investment.
- Strikes and protests against University and Government (1 respondent)

Changes to PhD enrolment

- **Restrict the number of students accepted into PhD programs** (18 respondents, 10 of whom are from School of Humanities), some respondents specifically mentioned that acceptance should be contingent upon funding (6 respondents). Many referenced the Scandinavian system.

Provide clearer information and support for students about funding (20 respondents) including:

- Immediately after submission/entry into the program
- Individualized support for grant applications
- Specific office for grant support
- Information about application process (especially for international students)
- Information about tax status (contractor vs. salary) for grant recipients
- Clear timely information about funding opportunities

Grant allocation procedures:

- **Dedicate funding for underfunded subjects** (7 respondents) including education/social sciences/humanities (4 respondents, “the funding mechanism appears to be highly skewed in favor of certain schools”, “there is also a great imbalance between qualitative and quantitative research which needs to be addressed at this level”)
- Dedicate funding for young academics and innovative research projects (1 respondent)
- Streamlined process to **allow students to apply for funding when applying to the PhD program** (3 respondents, “When applicants have to wait 1-2 years for applying, getting feedback and so on we are left with approx. 1.5-2 years to complete 3.5 years of work”)
- Do not make the allocation of grants contingent on its perceived economic value (1 respondent, “this threatens the independence of the university and further marginalizes subjects such as humanities that are less likely to have economic value”)
- Do not reduce total duration for UoI grants based on registration year (2 respondents, “the University punishes people for the lack of grants by only allocating 1 or 2 years instead of the full 3 years if they have already been registered 2 or 3 years. Even if they have been working full time, including on sessional teaching they do not care, do not take it into consideration”)
- Supervisors to have greater responsibility for helping students find funding (7 respondents, “Very often the supervisors take little to no responsibility for information getting to the 10 students, what they should do regarding funding and general structure of the research, so every student needs to reinvent the wheel”, “put the responsibility on supervisors to acquire funding”)
- Standardize application formats for main grants: Rannsóknasjóður Vísinda- og tækniráðs/IRF, Eimskip/UoI PhD grants (1 respondent).
- Emphasize research of student rather than merit of the supervisor (1 respondent)

Amount and duration of grant disbursements:

- **Raise grants with some specifying that the grants should be raised to cover at least minimum salary based on 100% workload in-line with union pay schedule** (48 respondents, “Improve from 75% to 100% position”, “funding should be 100%, so that people funded through Eimskip or Rannís don’t have to compromise with their time by taking different jobs”, “at least make all PhD

grants with 100% salary. Even if it means fewer students, anything else is indecent”) some also mentioned that their grants should increase overtime to keep track with inflation

- **Increase duration of grants or allow for the extension of grants for up to one year** (12 respondents), most mentioned that the duration should be extended up to 4 years
- Permit grant recipients to work more than 20% (1 respondent)
- Standardize of grant disbursements (2 respondents, “I am receiving lower pay per month than any other PhD student in my department that I know of and it makes me feel discriminated against”)
- Reduce tax rates on grants (1 respondent)

Status of PhD students within the school

- **PhD students to be given University employee status** including the rights extended to employees (10 respondents, “all doctoral students should be considered as members of the faculty, as is the case in most Nordic countries”, “the money should be paid out as a salary”, “PhD students should have a contract as employed”, “Even if you do stundakennsla outside of your PhD field and are thus paid for it (which means that on total you actually go above 100%), you still are not entitled to food tickets”)
- Do not limit opportunities for students based on funding status (1 respondent, “The school needs to fix the unequal access to various events are rights that funded and unfunded PhDs have. It’s bad enough to be unfunded but to feel you are not even a part of the academic community but just really affects you)

Terms and conditions of grants:

- Keep administrative procedures to a minimum including with regard to overhead rules (1 respondent)
- Greater transparency on grants including on remaining amount and use of overheads (“it seems preposterous to me that it should be subject to the same rules as the money of the university itself, since it is technically ours and not the University’s. And the administration should be more transparent, providing reports on how much we have left, instead of keeping quiet in the hope that we forget about it so that they can keep it”)
- Institutes/schools should guarantee grant allocations in case of unexpected difficulties with supervisor (1 respondent, “The institute should be obligated to pay salary at the union’s rates in the event that the supervisor suddenly/unexpectedly cannot”)
- More efficient reimbursement for equipment and conference costs (1 respondent)

Sessional teaching and teaching assistant (9 respondents):

- **Increase pay for teaching assistants and sessional teachers** (5 respondents, “Pay fairly and equally and do not add more unpaid or underpaid work for a PhD student who already has double the workload”, “No doctoral student should be hired as a stundakennari, which in fact, should not be offered to anyone given the unacceptable conditions that it offers for the level of work expected of the employee”)
- More opportunities for PhD students to teach (4 respondents, “get rid of the unspoken rule of letting doctoral students teach only one seminar during their studies”)

Travel grants:

- **Increase potential number of travel grants and their value** (2 respondent)
- **Change allocation rules of travel grants** (1 respondent, “you should be able to apply for on a per conference basis, rather than like a conventional fund which is open once a year. Often a conference’s themes or focus will not have been advertised at the time of application so you will have no idea what you are applying for, which is, of course, absurd”)

Other:

- **Revise grant system drawing on lessons-learnt from Nordic universities** (5 respondents, “look to other Nordic universities that offer a much more balanced PhD experience”)
- Ensure all PhD students have access to a desk and computer (1 respondent, “Having access to a desk and a computer is vital, in most Nordic countries PhD students have their own office/shared office with 2 other students”)
- Provide further rental subsidies for PhD students (2 respondents)

Study limitations

Several variables of interest, such as gender, family situation, number of children born to students during the study period and age of respondents were not included in the survey, as they could compromise anonymity and possibly reduce responses to the survey’s more sensitive questions. No information about official registration status of participants was included in the survey. The study did not take interdisciplinary studies (5% of PhD students) into account. Response rates varied between survey questions, making some of them less descriptive of the population than others. Open-ended qualitative questions are hard to confidently generalize without further exploration.

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Appendix 1: The survey

PhD Funding Survey

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Survey about PhD funding

Hello fellow PhD students,

The PhD student association Fedon is conducting a survey of student experiences with PhD funding at the University of Iceland. Our aim is to gather more information about your experiences so we can advocate with the University and the Government for improvements to the system in-line with our experiences.

The survey is anonymous, and all data will be treated with high confidentiality.

We intend to present a summary of the results will be presented to the rector, pro-rector of science, the Board of the Graduate School, heads of the schools and members of the Government.

The Survey is in English, and it takes about 5 minutes to answer all the questions.

Please take the time to fill in this short survey about your experience.

For any technical issues contact ano11@hi.is.

Thanks!

Fedon, PhD student association

Page Break

Q2 Are you currently a PhD student at the University of Iceland?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)
- ☐ Other (please specify) (3) _____

Skip To: End of Survey If Are you currently a PhD student at the University of Iceland? = No

Page Break

Q3 What School are you in?

▼ School of Social Sciences (1) ... I prefer not to answer (7)

Skip To: Q4 If What School are you in? = School of Social Sciences

Skip To: Q5 If What School are you in? = School of Education

Skip To: Q6 If What School are you in? = School of Engineering and Natural Sciences

Skip To: Q7 If What School are you in? = School of Humanities

Skip To: Q8 If What School are you in? = School of Health Sciences

Skip To: Q10 If What School are you in? = I don't know

Skip To: Q10 If What School are you in? = I prefer not to answer

Page Break

Q4 Social Sciences faculty:

- ☐ Faculty of Business Administration (1)
- ☐ Faculty of Economics (2)
- ☐ Faculty of Law (3)
- ☐ Faculty of Political Science (4)
- ☐ Sociology, Anthropology and Folkloristics (5)
- ☐ Faculty of Social Work (6)
- ☐ I prefer not to answer (7)

Skip To: Q10 If Social Sciences faculty: = Faculty of Business Administration

Skip To: Q10 If Social Sciences faculty: != Faculty of Business Administration

Page Break

Q5 Education faculty:

- ☐ Faculty of Education and Diversity (1)
- ☐ Faculty of Education and Pedagogy (2)
- ☐ Health Promotion, Sport and Leisure Studies (3)
- ☐ Subject Teacher Education (4)
- ☐ I prefer not to answer (7)

Skip To: Q10 If Education faculty: = Faculty of Education and Diversity

Skip To: Q10 If Education faculty: != Faculty of Education and Diversity

Page Break

Q6 Engineering and natural sciences faculty:

- ☐ Industrial Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Computer Science (1)
- ☐ Electrical and Computer Engineering (2)
- ☐ Civil and Environmental Engineering (3)
- ☐ Physical Sciences (4)
- ☐ Earth Sciences (8)
- ☐ Life and Environmental Sciences (9)
- ☐ I prefer not to answer (7)

Skip To: Q10 If Engineering and natural sciences faculty: = Industrial Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Computer Science

Skip To: Q10 If Engineering and natural sciences faculty: != Industrial Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Computer Science

Page Break

Q7 Humanities faculty:

- ☐ Faculty of History and Philosophy (1)
- ☐ Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies (2)
- ☐ Faculty of Languages and Cultures (3)
- ☐ Theology and Religious Studies (4)
- ☐ I prefer not to answer (7)

Skip To: Q10 If Humanities faculty: = Faculty of History and Philosophy

Skip To: Q10 If Humanities faculty: != Faculty of History and Philosophy

Page Break

Q8 Health sciences faculty:

- ☐ Faculty of Food Science and Nutrition (1)
- ☐ Faculty of Medicine (2)
- ☐ Faculty of Nursing (3)
- ☐ Faculty of Odontology (4)
- ☐ Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences (10)
- ☐ Faculty of Psychology (11)
- ☐ I prefer not to answer (7)

Page Break

Q10 In what year did you start your PhD?

▼ In 2019 (1) ... I prefer not to answer (23)

Page Break

Q65 In what year do you expect to finish your PhD?

▼ In 2019 (1) ... I prefer not to answer (10)

Page Break

G0 Do you currently receive or have you previously received a grant for your PhD studies? (answer yes for salaried PhD positions)

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)
- ☐ Other (please specify) (3) _____
- ☐ I don't want/need a grant. (6)
- ☐ I prefer not to answer (5)

*Skip To: Q23 If Do you currently receive or have you previously received a grant for your PhD studies? (answer ye...
= No*

*Skip To: Q23 If Do you currently receive or have you previously received a grant for your PhD studies? (answer ye...
= I don't want/need a grant.*

*Skip To: Q23 If Do you currently receive or have you previously received a grant for your PhD studies? (answer ye...
= I prefer not to answer*

*Skip To: G1.1 If Do you currently receive or have you previously received a grant for your PhD studies? (answer ye...
= Yes*

*Skip To: G1.1 If Do you currently receive or have you previously received a grant for your PhD studies? (answer ye...
= Other (please specify)*

Page Break

G1.1 What type of grant do you currently receive or have you received in the past as part of your current PhD project? (this does not include travel grants)

You will be asked for up to three grants starting with the first. If multiple grants received start with highest value grant, you will subsequently be asked about up to two more.

- ☐ I am/was employed by a company to work on the project (1)
- ☐ Eimskip/University of Iceland PhD Fund (2)
- ☐ Rannsóknasjóður Rannís/IRF (individual) (3)
- ☐ Rannsóknasjóður Rannís/IRF (through supervisor) (9)
- ☐ Assistant teacher grant (this refers to a specific grant not to regular salaried teaching assistant work) (4)
- ☐ Marie Curie (5)
- ☐ Other EU grant (individual) (6)
- ☐ Other EU grant (through supervisor) (7)
- ☐ Other (please specify, write X if you do not want to identify) (8)

- ☐ I don't know (10)
- ☐ I prefer not to answer (11)

Page Break



G1.2 How many months does this grant/contract cover? (give as number of MONTHS, if one-off grant write 0)

Page Break

G1.3 Are you able to extend this grant beyond the originally understood period? If yes, for how long?

- ☐ It was a one-time grant (1)
- ☐ Yes, for another 12 months (2)
- ☐ Yes, for a period 13-24 month (3)
- ☐ Yes, for a period longer than 24 months (4)
- ☐ No, it is not possible to extend the grant (5)
- ☐ I don't know (6)
- ☐ I prefer not to answer (7)

Page Break

G2 Do you currently or have you previously received another grant for your PhD studies?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)
- ☐ Other (please specify) (3) _____
- ☐ I prefer not to answer (8)
- ☐ I do not want/need another grant (9)

Skip To: Q23 If Do you currently or have you previously received another grant for your PhD studies? = No

Skip To: Q23 If Do you currently or have you previously received another grant for your PhD studies? = I prefer not to answer

Skip To: Q23 If Do you currently or have you previously received another grant for your PhD studies? = I do not want/need another grant

Page Break

G2.1 For 2nd grant- What type of grant(s) do you currently receive or have you received in the past as part of your current PhD project (Please choose all grants that you have received)?

- ☐ I am/was employed by a company to work on the project (1)
- ☐ Eimskip/University of Iceland PhD Fund (2)
- ☐ Rannsóknasjóður Rannís/IRF (individual) (3)
- ☐ Rannsóknasjóður Rannís/IRF (through supervisor) (9)
- ☐ Assistant teacher grant (this refers to a specific grant not to regular salaried teaching assistant work) (4)
- ☐ Marie Curie (5)
- ☐ Other EU grant (individual) (6)
- ☐ Other EU grant (through supervisor) (7)
- ☐ Other (please specify, write X if you do not want to identify) (8)

- ☐ I don't know (10)
- ☐ I prefer not to answer (11)

Page Break



G2.2 For 2nd grant: How many months does this grant/contract cover? (give as number of MONTHS, if one-off grant write 0)

Page Break

G2.3 For 2nd grant: Are you able to extend this grant beyond the originally understood period? If yes, for now long?

- ☐ It was a one-time grant (1)
- ☐ Yes, for another 12 months (2)
- ☐ Yes, for a period 13-24 month (3)
- ☐ Yes, for a period longer than 24 months (4)
- ☐ No, it is not possible to extend the grant (5)
- ☐ I don't know (6)
- ☐ I prefer not to answer (7)

Page Break

G3 Do you currently or have you previously received another grant for your PhD studies?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)
- ☐ Other (please specify) (3) _____
- ☐ I don't want/need another grant (6)
- ☐ I prefer not to answer (5)

Skip To: Q23 If Do you currently or have you previously received another grant for your PhD studies? = No

Skip To: Q23 If Do you currently or have you previously received another grant for your PhD studies? = I don't want/need another grant

Skip To: Q23 If Do you currently or have you previously received another grant for your PhD studies? = I prefer not to answer

Page Break

G3.1 For 3rd grant: What type of grant(s) do you currently receive or have you received in the past as part of your current PhD project (Please choose all grants that you have received)?

- ☐ I am/was employed by a company to work on the project (1)
- ☐ Eimskip/University of Iceland PhD Fund (2)
- ☐ Rannsóknasjóður Rannís/IRF (individual) (3)
- ☐ Rannsóknasjóður Rannís/IRF (through supervisor) (9)
- ☐ Assistant teacher grant (this refers to a specific grant not to regular salaried teaching assistant work) (4)
- ☐ Marie Curie (5)
- ☐ Other EU grant (individual) (6)
- ☐ Other EU grant (through supervisor) (7)
- ☐ Other (please specify, write X if you do not want to identify) (8)
- _____
- ☐ I don't know (10)
- ☐ I prefer not to answer (11)

Page Break



G3.2 For 3rd grant: How many months does this grant/contract cover? (give as number of MONTHS, if one-off grant write 0)

Page Break

G3.3 For 3rd grant: Are you able to extend this grant beyond the originally understood period? If yes, for now long?

- ☐ It was a one-off grant (1)
- ☐ Yes, for another 12 months (2)
- ☐ Yes, for a period 13-24 month (3)
- ☐ Yes, for a period longer than 24 months (4)
- ☐ No, it is not possible to extend the grant (5)
- ☐ I don't know (6)
- ☐ I prefer not to answer (7)

Page Break



Q23 Which of the following PhD grants have you ***applied*** for in the past? Please select all that apply (turn red) AND include number of times you have applied for that specific grants.

☐ Eimskip/Hi PhD grant. (1) _____

☐ Rannsóknasjóður Rannís/IRF (individual) (2)

☐ Rannsóknasjóður Rannís/IRF (through supervisor) (10)

☐ Assistant teacher grant (does not include regular teaching assistant work) (3)

☐ Marie Curie (4) _____

☐ Other EU grant (individual). (5) _____

☐ Other EU grant (group grant through supervisor) (6)

☐ Other, please specify: (7) _____

☐ I have not applied for any grants (11)

☐ I don't know (8)

☐ I prefer not to answer (9)

Page Break

Q61 Have you worked as a sessional teacher (stundakennari) at the University of Iceland since starting your PhD?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)
- ☐ Prefer not to answer (3)

Skip To: Q63 If Have you worked as a sessional teacher (stundakennari) at the University of Iceland since startin... = No

Skip To: Q63 If Have you worked as a sessional teacher (stundakennari) at the University of Iceland since startin... = Prefer not to answer

Q62 For how many subjects? (note: if you have taught the same subject five years in a row count as five, if you taught five subjects in the same semester count as five)

- ☐ 1 (1)
- ☐ 2 (2)
- ☐ 3 (3)
- ☐ 4 (4)
- ☐ 5 (5)
- ☐ 6 (6)
- ☐ 7 (7)
- ☐ More than 7 (8)

Q63 Have you worked as a teaching assistant (aðstoðarkennari) at the University of Iceland since starting your PhD?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)
- ☐ Prefer not to answer (3)

Skip To: Q32 If Have you worked as a teaching assistant (aðstoðarkennari) at the University of Iceland since sta... = No

Skip To: Q32 If Have you worked as a teaching assistant (aðstoðarkennari) at the University of Iceland since sta... = No

Q64 For how many subjects? (note: if you have assisted the same subject five years in a row count as five, if you assisted five subjects in the same semester count as five)

- ☐ 1 (1)
- ☐ 2 (2)
- ☐ 3 (3)
- ☐ 4 (4)
- ☐ 5 (5)
- ☐ 6 (6)
- ☐ 7 (7)
- ☐ More than 7 (8)

Q32 Are you currently in other paid employment (not including your PhD, teaching assistant or sessional teacher as these are covered above)?

- ☐ Yes (4)
- ☐ No (5)
- ☐ I don't know (6)
- ☐ I prefer not to answer (7)

*Skip To: Q34 If Are you currently in other paid employment (not including your PhD, teaching assistant or session...
= No*

*Skip To: Q34 If Are you currently in other paid employment (not including your PhD, teaching assistant or session...
= I don't know*

*Skip To: Q34 If Are you currently in other paid employment (not including your PhD, teaching assistant or session...
= I prefer not to answer*

Page Break



Q33 On average, how many hours per week do you work?

Page Break

Q34 How do you rate your experience with PhD funding at HÍ?

	Very dissatisfied (1)	Somewhat dissatisfied (2)	Neutral (3)	Somewhat satisfied (4)	Very satisfied (5)
Please choose one (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Page Break

Q35 Please provide additional information about PhD funding, how it has affected your PhD experience?

Page Break

Q46 Do you have any suggestion how the funding situation can be improved?

End of Block: Default Question Block

Appendix 2: Participation by school and faculty

Table 1. Survey respondents by school and faculty. Number of respondents (n) percentage of respondents (%) are presented along with the number of enrolled PhD students according to the Graduate School 2018 (Miðstöð Framhaldsnáms).		Participation in survey	Registered 2018
School	Faculty	Number of students	
Education	Total	31	61
Engineering & Natural Sciences	Life and Environmental Sciences	23	56
	Earth Sciences	17	39
	Physical Sciences	16	59
	Civil and Environmental Engineering	4	18
	Industrial-, Mechanical Engineering and Computer Science	4	19
	Electrical and Computer Science	3	3
	I prefer not to answer	2	-
	Total	69	194
Health Sciences	Food Science and Nutrition	10	23
	Psychology	7	22
	Medicine	7	98
	Nursing	3	15
	Pharmaceutical Sciences	3	19
	I prefer not to answer	1	-
	Total	31	179
Humanities	Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies	40	69
	History and Philosophy	32	58
	Languages and Cultures	11	18
	Theology	-	6
	I prefer not to answer	0	-
	Total	83	151
Social Sciences	Sociology, Anthropology and Folkloristics	22	58
	Business Administration	11	21
	Economics	3	8
	Social Work	2	5
	Political Science	1	8
	Law	-	6
	I prefer not to answer	4	-
	Total	43	106

Appendix 3: Increase in registered PhD students the last decade

<i>Table 2. Increase in registered PhD students at the University of Iceland from 2009-2018</i>			
School	Registered in 2009	Registered in 2018	Increase
Education	26	61	135%
Engineering and Natural Sciences	115	194	69%
Health Sciences	76	179	136%
Humanities	51	151	196%
Social Sciences	71	106	49%
Interdisciplinary studies	7	39	457%
Total	346	730	111%

Appendix 4: PhD Duration

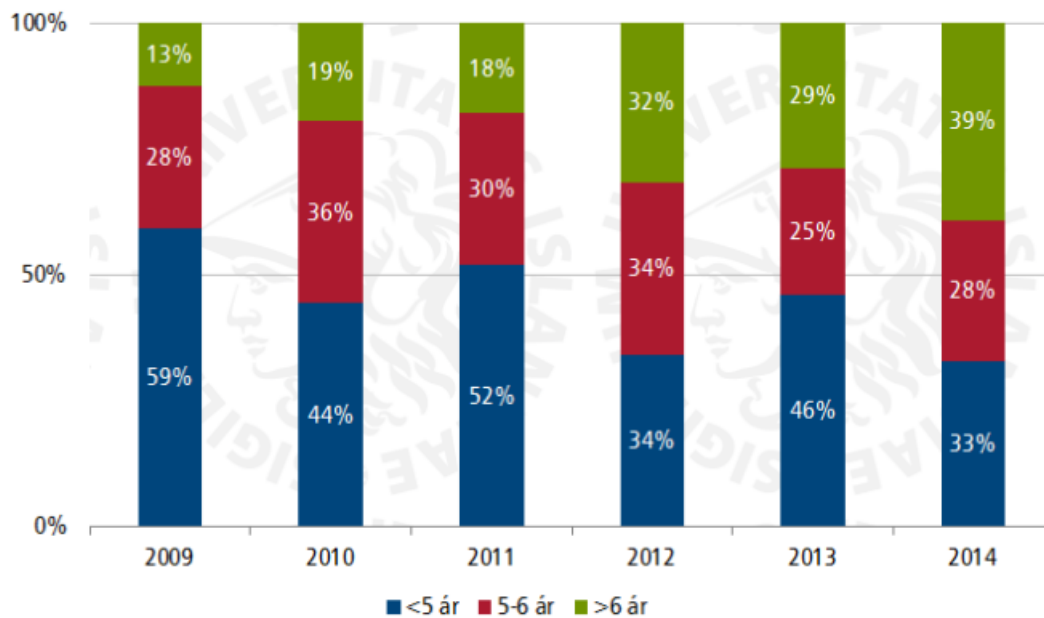


Figure 11. Average number of years needed to complete a PhD degree at the University of Iceland in the years 2009-2014.
Source: the Graduate School's website.¹⁰

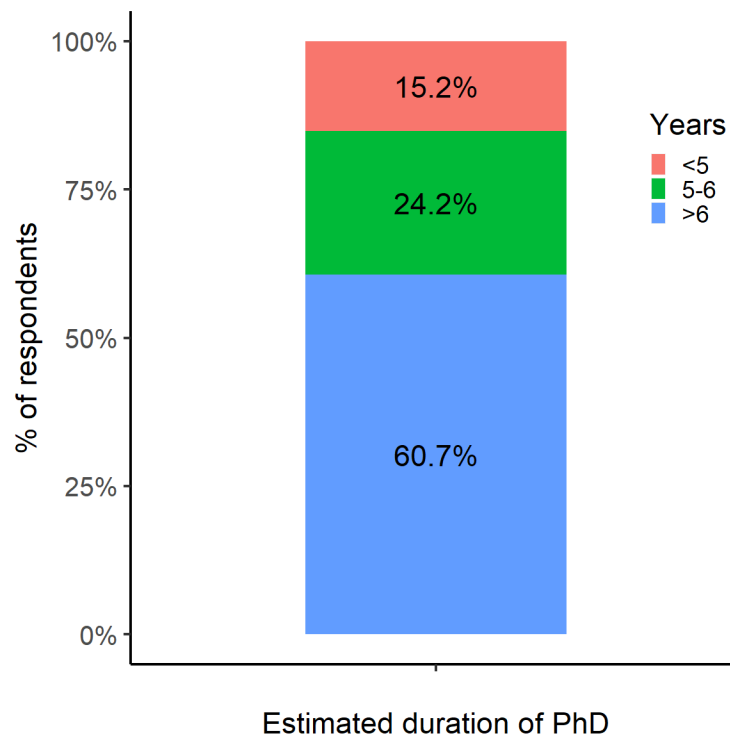


Figure 12. Average number of years students in the sample expect to need to complete their PhD degree (2019).

Appendix 5: Supplementary figures

Grant duration

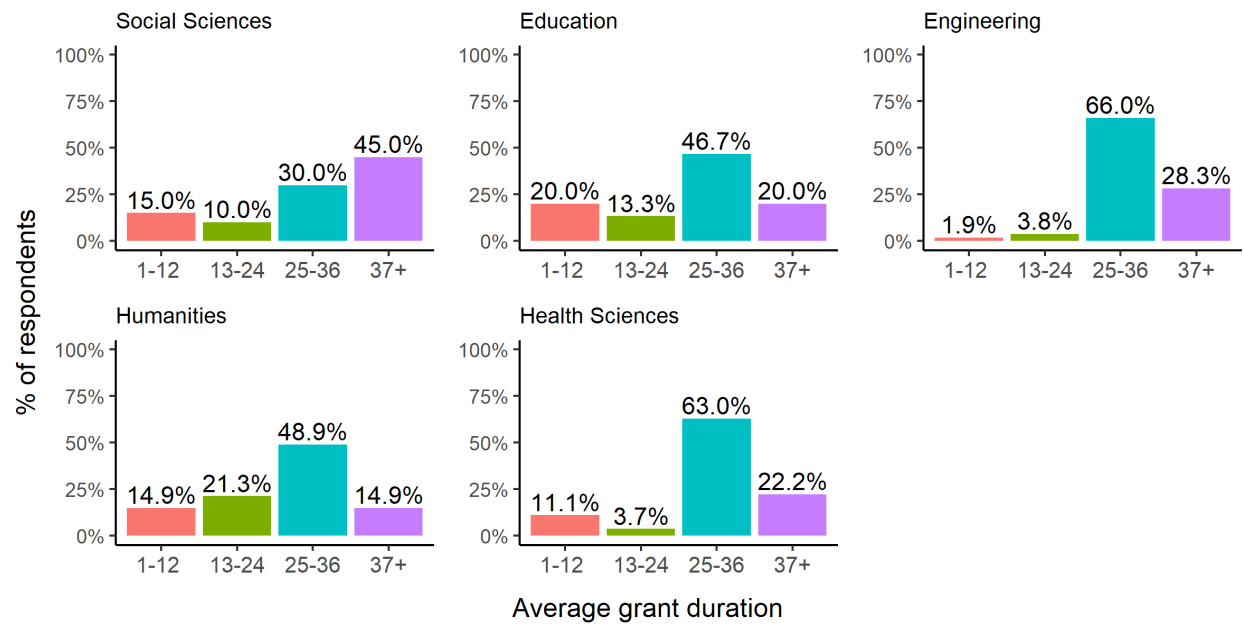
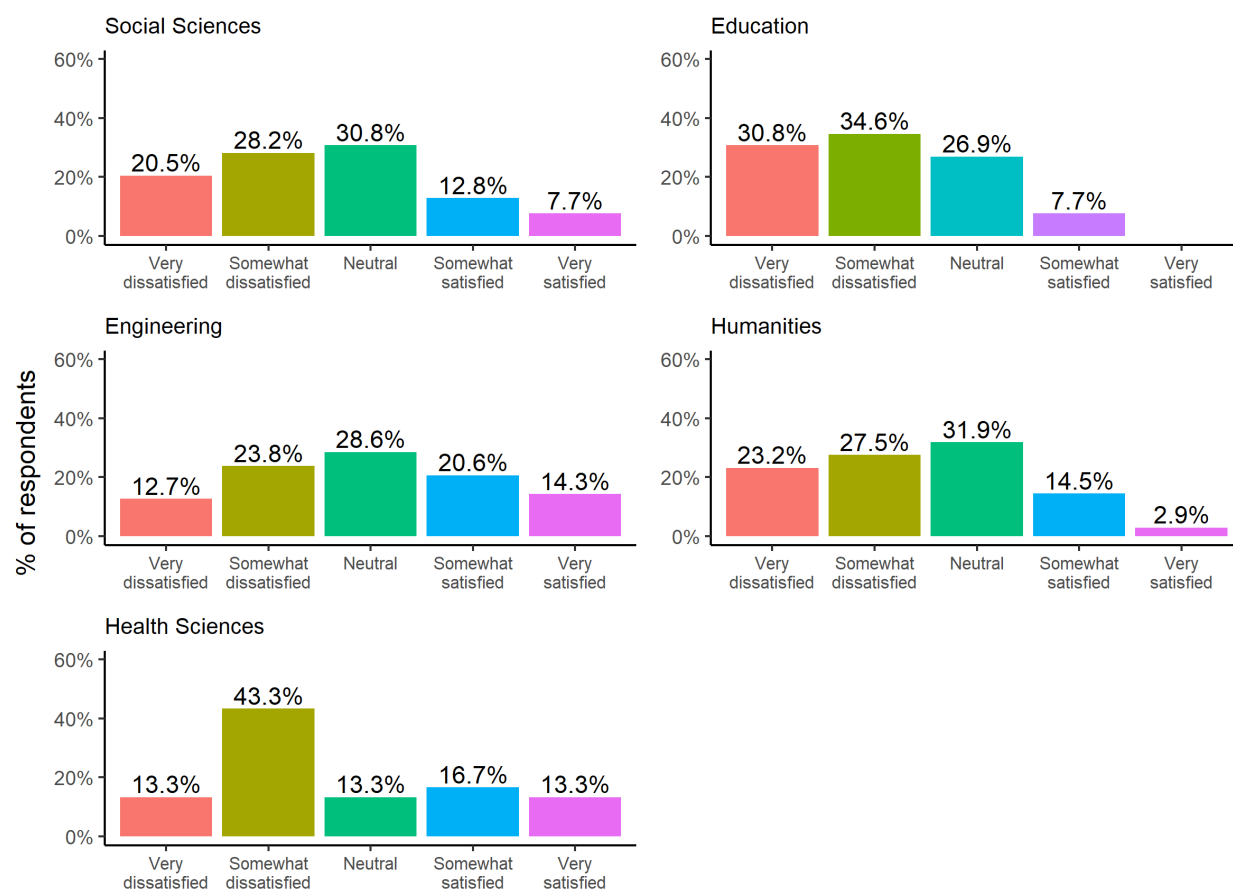


Figure 13. Overall grant duration by school.

Satisfaction with funding environment



Satisfaction with grant Environment

Figure 14. Satisfaction with grant environment depending on school.

Sessional Teaching

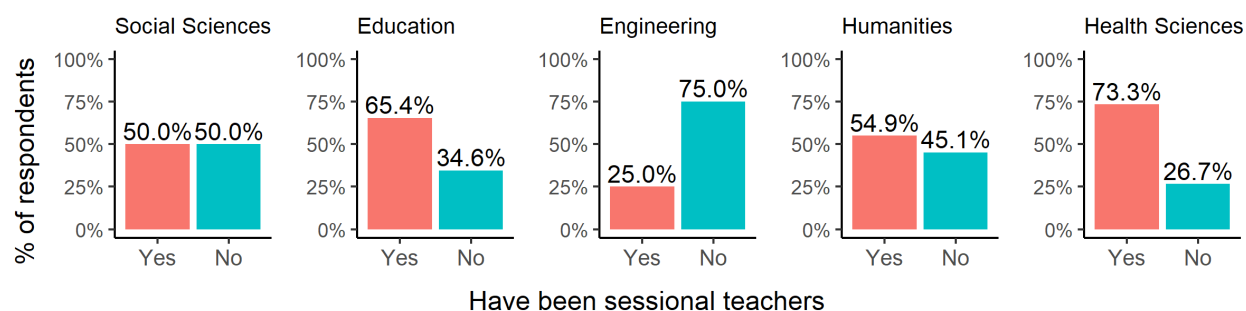


Figure 15. Sessional teaching experience by school.

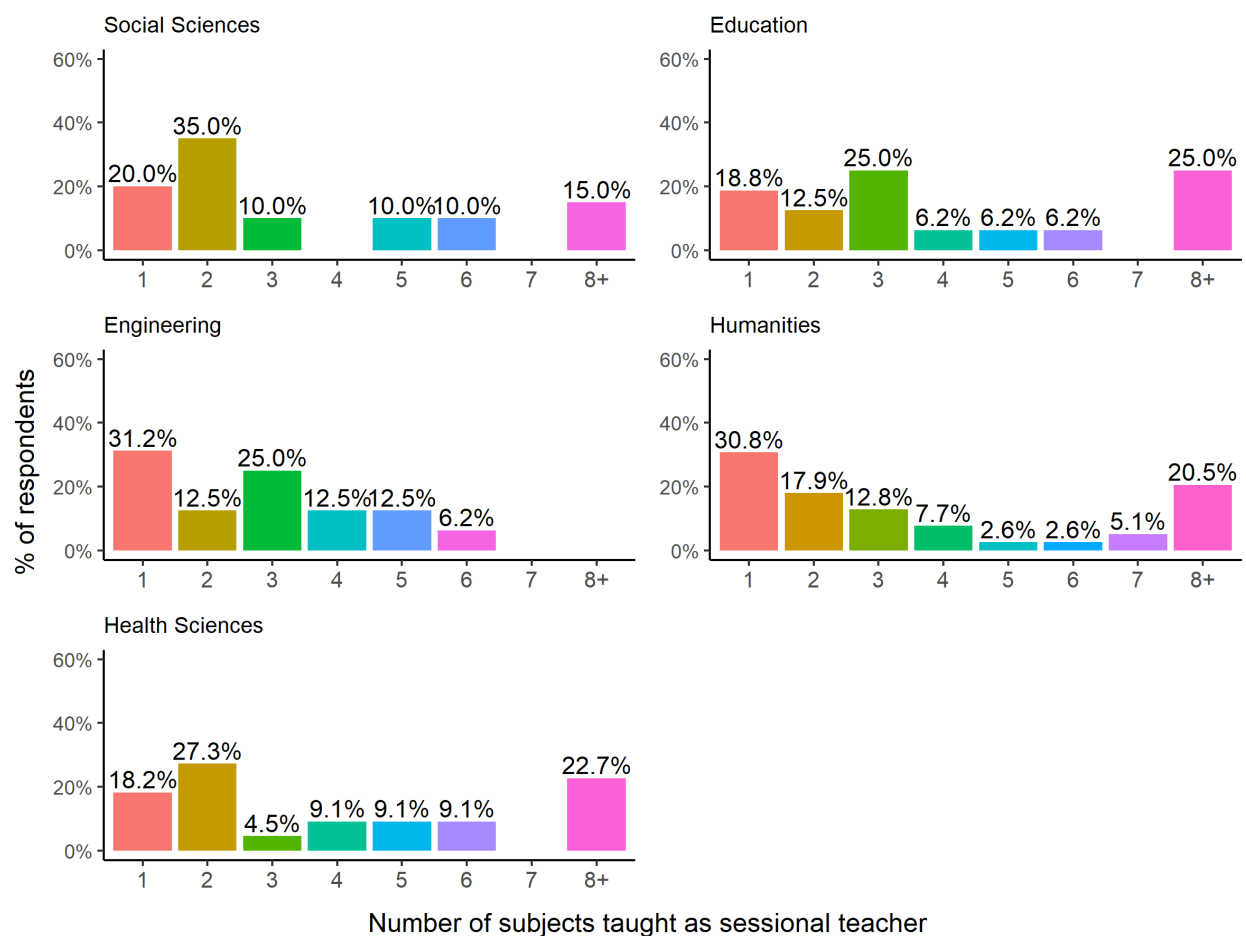


Figure 16. Number of subjects taught as sessional teacher by school.

Working alongside PhD studies

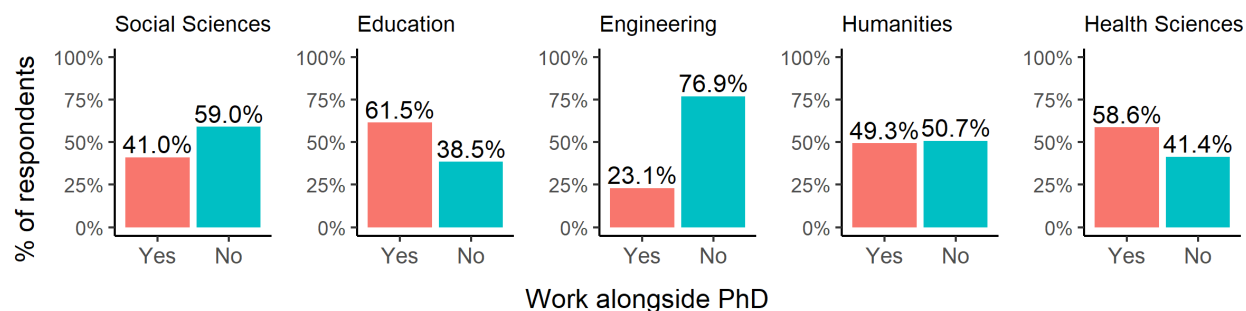


Figure 17. Employment status depending on school.

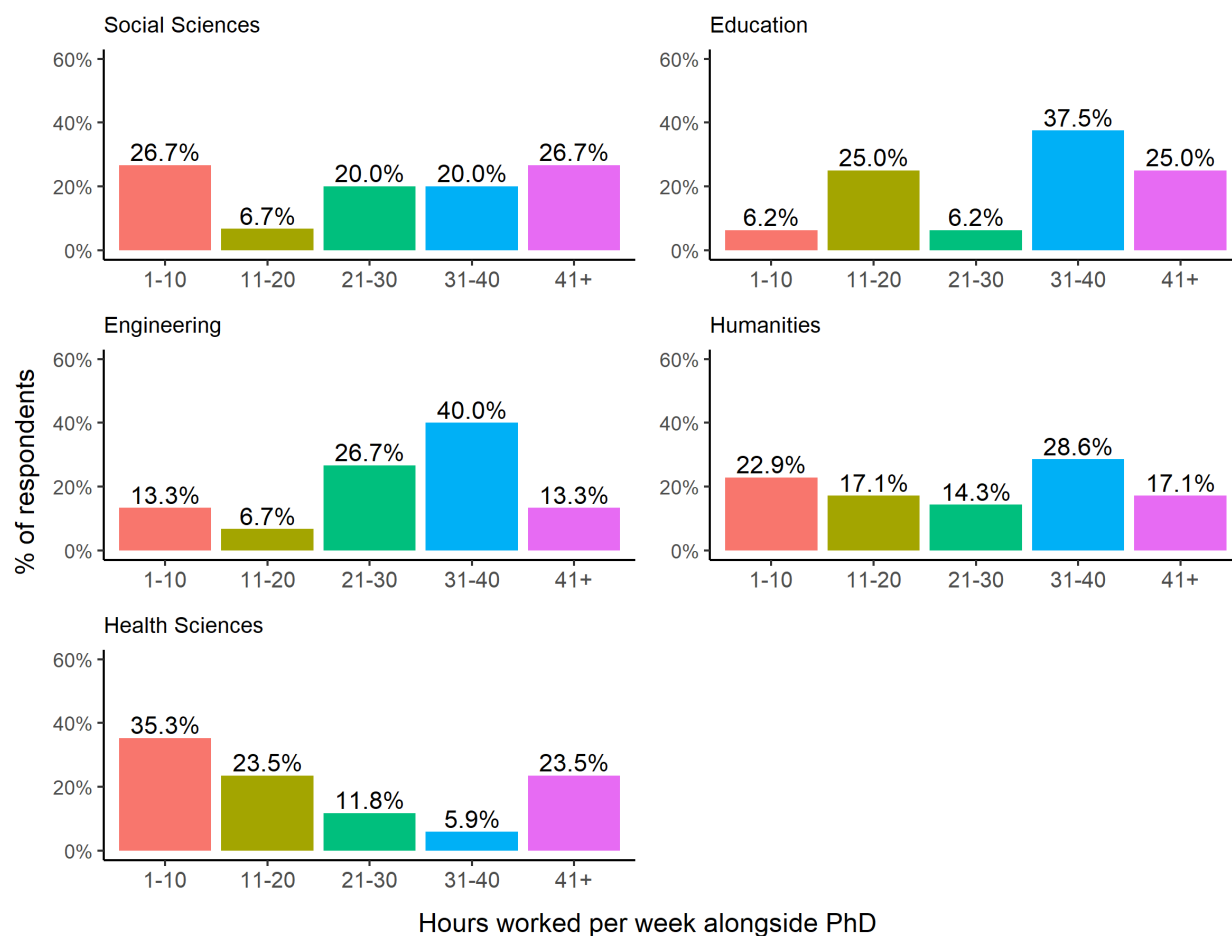


Figure 18. Hours worked per week outside of the university by school.

Funds

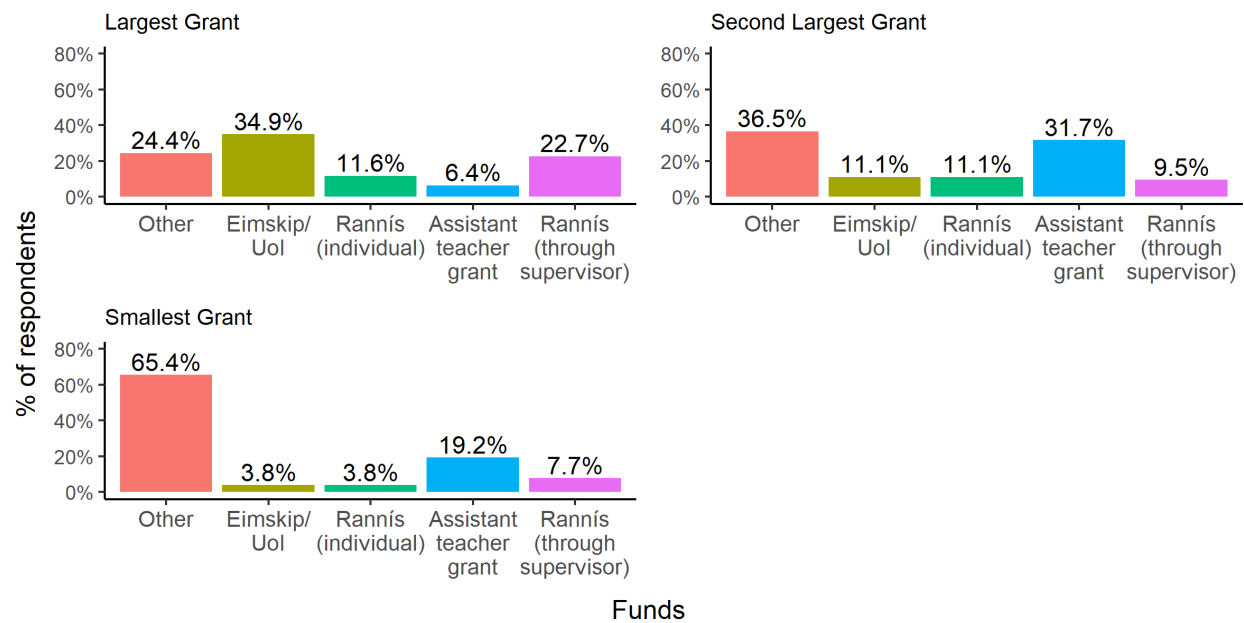


Figure 19. Funds students receive their grants from.