



# U21

**UNIVERSITAS 21**

## STUDENT MOBILITY WITHIN THE U21 NETWORK 2018 REPORT

Research commissioned by Universitas 21  
Data collection managed by Explore and Study  
Publication date: 27 August 2019

## Introduction

Student mobility is widely recognised as one of the most important aspects of a globalised higher education system. It is also a key benefit of U21 membership, which offers increased access to mobility programmes, and better connections between organisations exchanging students.

Since 2005 U21 has conducted an annual census of undergraduate and postgraduate student mobility occurring within the U21 network to assess the extent to which U21 partners are exchanging students on short- and long-term mobility programmes.

The U21 network is the largest, truly global network of prestigious research-intensive universities, with a membership spanning six continents. This annual census not only tracks the significance of mobility within the network, but also offers an invaluable insight into the trends in higher education student mobility across student cohorts and geographical regions.

## What we measure

- The census covered mobilities across all levels of study that began within the 2018 calendar year, credit-bearing or otherwise. Mobilities were categorised as follows:
  - Short term <3 weeks
  - Short term 3 weeks – 2.9 months
  - 1 semester 3–6 months
  - Full year 6–12 months
- Each institution provided an incoming and outgoing student count for each other U21 institution, broken down by duration. Cross-referencing incoming and outgoing allowed for data accuracy checks, and any significant discrepancies were returned to institutions for clarification. In most instances revised figures were provided.
- Additional information relating to mobile student profile was requested through optional survey questions on gender, field and level of study. 22 out of 26 members participating provided some additional detail.
- Mobilities could be recorded by an institution against every other U21 partner including domestic. Members with multiple campuses were treated as one institution and so mobility to/from branch campuses was combined with the main campus data. This may appear in the data as domestic mobility in some cases. Inter-campus mobility within one institution could not be captured as a university could not record exchanges against itself.
- As in previous years, all reporting has been based on outgoing numbers only and where data could not be verified, lower estimates have been used in all cases. The only exception to this is in the mapping of institutional exchange partners (page 9) where institutional and network-reporting has been amalgamated to capture all partnerships reported by at least one of the participants.

## Caveats and considerations

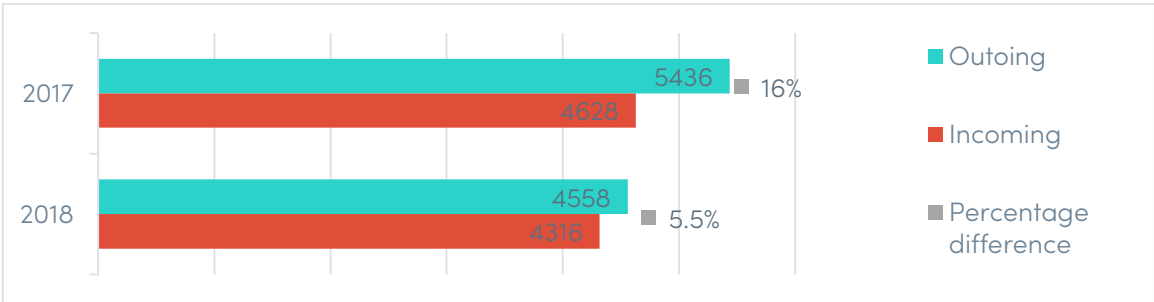
- A major change to the methodology in 2017 allowed for the collection of incoming and outgoing data for the first time. While only outgoing data has been used for reporting, to provide comparison with previous years, the ability to cross-reference allowed the researcher to identify inaccuracies and approach institutions for revised figures. Greater clarity was also available in 2018 regarding inclusion periods for counting mobility, by measuring all mobilities starting in a single calendar year. A further change was from FTE<sup>1</sup> to headcount-based reporting. Therefore, shifts over the last two years may be a result of normalisation of the data. Ongoing review is needed to demonstrate lasting trends.
- A known limitation of this survey is that it depends on central mobility offices being aware of all student mobility happening at faculty level, which in practice is often not the case. Cross-referencing of incoming and outgoing data has helped to identify some unreported mobilities, but not all. Most commonly we receive reports that short-term mobility embedded at faculty level is hard to report, with central offices either unable to access the data or indeed unaware of the activity.
- Another key challenge is timing of the data collection, which occurred in February 2019. Some institutions reported that particularly short-term mobility data would not be available for 2018 until later in the year, in line with wider institutional reporting processes.
- This survey has prompted review of mobility data collection within institutions, and for the first time for the 2018 collection, members of U21 DS<sup>3</sup> (Data Sharing Supporting Strategy) were included in the design and data collection. This has improved the clarity and accuracy of the data return for 2018, and it is hoped that the members of the DS<sup>3</sup> group and the Mobility Group will continue to share and develop robust data collection processes that can support not only this census, but also other national and institutional reporting needs.
- It is important to note that however robust data collection processes are, a small discrepancy is always to be expected due to students withdrawing from programmes, or applying independently to short-term mobilities without the knowledge of their home university.
- Institutions with multiple campuses (including overseas branch campuses) were treated as one institution, which created limitations as outlined above. With the growth of activity at overseas campuses, U21 will consider separating out branch campuses for future submissions, to better understand the geographical mobility of students.

---

<sup>1</sup> Full-time equivalent

# Discrepancies between outgoing and incoming reported data

FIG. 1: OUTGOING VS INCOMING REPORTED TOTALS SINCE 2017



Each institution provided an incoming and outgoing number for each other U21 institution, broken down by duration. If all mobilities were reported accurately by all parties, then:

- An institution’s reported outgoing students should equal the rest of the network’s reporting incoming students; and
- An institution’s reported incoming students should equal the rest of the network’s reporting outgoing students.

This is shown not to be the case; however the difference between outgoing and incoming has significantly reduced since the first year of cross-referencing, potentially due to the more robust data collection process. However, a discrepancy of 5.5% is still apparent, with outgoing numbers still larger than incoming numbers. Given that the discrepancies are likely to be caused by underreporting (i.e. non-centrally-recorded mobilities), it would follow that there are more incoming students going unrecorded than outgoing.

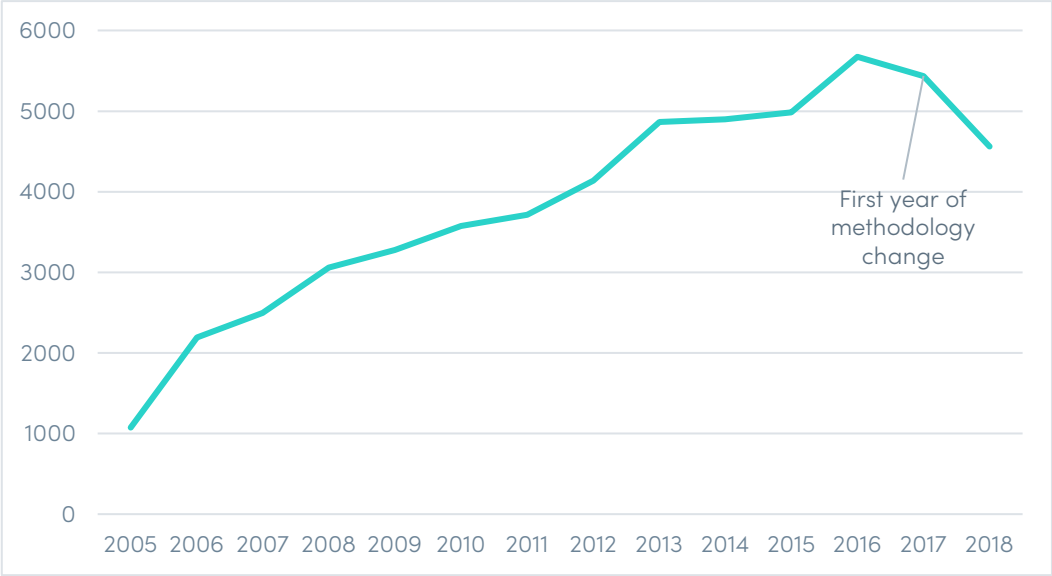
Anecdotal evidence from mobility offices indicates that unreported incoming students will in most cases be on short-term programmes (e.g. summer schools or field trips). Often these students are not registered to the host university in any formal capacity. In a number of institutions these programmes are managed entirely at faculty level and this information is not readily available to central offices.

As in previous years, analysis in this report has been undertaken using outgoing data only, unless specifically stated.

# Findings

## Scale

FIG. 2: OUTGOING MOBILITIES SINCE 2005



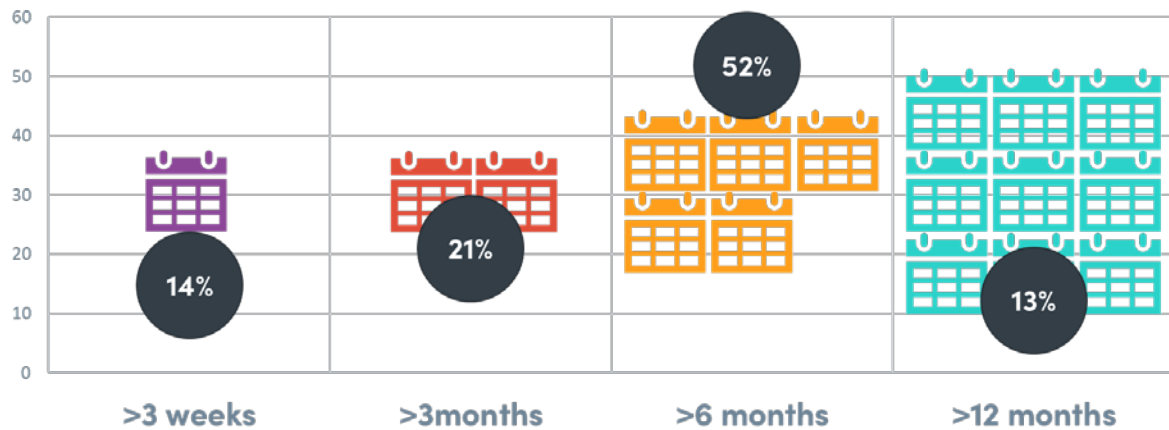
The last two years have shown a reduction in overall mobility, with numbers at their lowest since 2012. This is a significant change in direction, particularly considering the rising targets for student mobility set in many U21 member institutions. This may be an indicator that the growth in mobility for some members is happening in areas not captured by this survey, or is occurring with non-U21 partners.

It is important to note that this change in direction occurred at the same time as the new methodology was introduced. The sample has also changed over this period, with several institutions leaving and joining the network<sup>2</sup>. It would be wise to undertake an ongoing review and allow the new methodology to settle before any conclusions are made.

<sup>2</sup> Four new members joined the network in 2017 and 2018. One member leaving in 2019 did not participate in the data return, and so instances of outgoing mobility to this institution reported by other members have been excluded from the dataset.

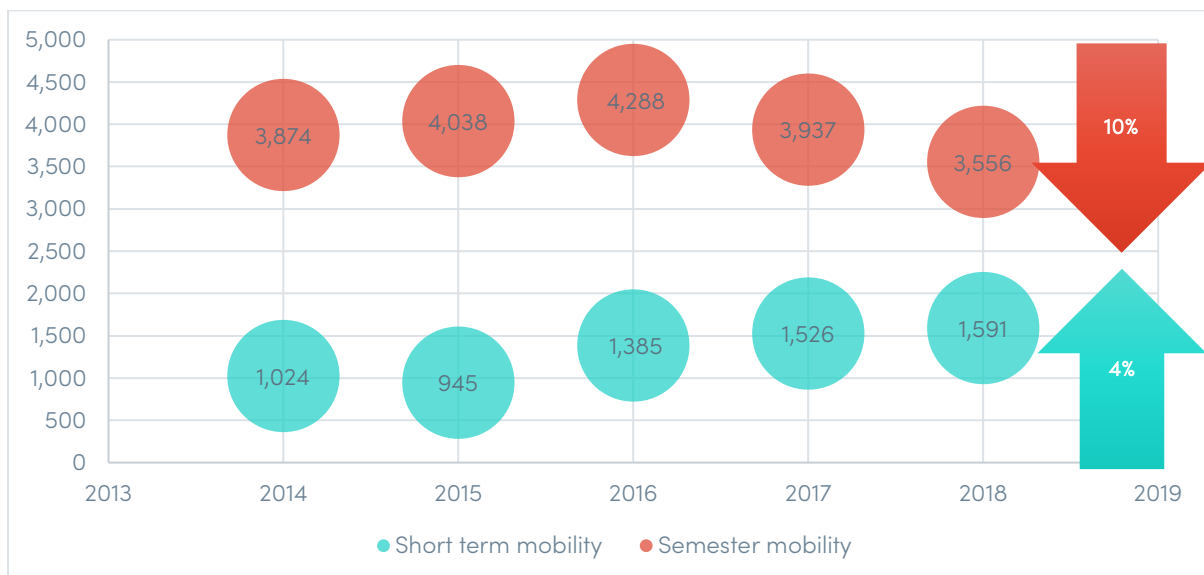
## Duration

FIG. 3: OUTGOING MOBILITIES BY DURATION



87.1% of mobilities that began in 2018 were of less than 6 months' duration. This is a slight decrease from 88.6% in 2017, but more striking is the profile change within that grouping. Looking at a five-year trend, we see semester-based mobility numbers continue to drop, whereas short-term mobility is increasing.

FIG. 4: SEMESTER VS SHORT-TERM MOBILITY 2014-2018



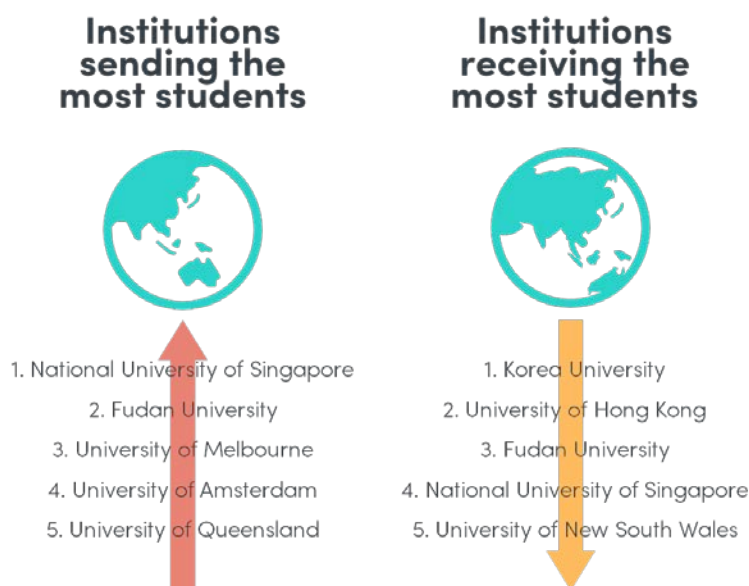
As previously noted, significant methodology changes from 2017 onwards may be a factor in these trends. With the collection of incoming as well as outgoing figures, short-term figures may be benefitting from more accurate reporting. Similarly, greater clarity on inclusion periods and counting of semester mobility may have had an impact on the declining semester mobility with reduced double-counting occurring over two years; it is not clear how far semester mobility is actually in decline, and how far the numbers are normalising to the new methodology.

However, anecdotal evidence from mobility offices supports the notion of semester mobility decreasing in favour of short-term options, which offer greater flexibility to institutions and students.

## Intensity of U21 mobility activity

### Concentration of mobilities

FIG. 5: MOST ACTIVE U21 PARTNERS BY NUMBER OF MOBILITIES



In terms of volume of students, the most active regions of the U21 network are in Australia and Asia for both sending and receiving students.<sup>3</sup> The top 5 institutions in each case account for nearly 50% of all mobile students within U21 (sending 49% of all students; receiving 46% of all students). After the Asia-Pacific region, Europe is the next most active region for volume of students sent and received.

### Regional Mobility

- As most students are sent and received by institutions within the Asia-Pacific region, it is unsurprising that the strong regional flows between these institutions apparent in 2017 have continued into 2018.
- Strong regional mobility is also apparent between U21 partners in Europe, most likely influenced by the Erasmus+ student mobility programmes.
- No international mobility was reported between U21 members in Canada, Mexico, and the USA. This represents a change from 2017 when mobility flows occurred between Mexico and the USA.

<sup>3</sup> Calculated using outgoing data only: institution-reported outgoing for sending students; network-reported outgoing for receiving students.

## Breadth of mobility flows

FIG. 6: INSTANCES OF NO MOBILITY BETWEEN U21 PARTNERS  
(COUNTRY LEVEL)

Country	No student mobility to or from (also reported in 2017)
<b>Australia</b>	Canada, South Africa
<b>Canada</b>	Australia, Chile, India, Ireland, Mexico, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, USA
<b>Chile</b>	Canada, India, New Zealand, Singapore, South Africa,
<b>China with Hong Kong (SAR)</b>	India
<b>India</b>	Canada, Chile, China with Hong Kong (SAR), Ireland, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, USA
<b>Ireland</b>	Canada, India
<b>Japan</b>	India, South Africa
<b>Mexico</b>	Canada, India, South Africa, USA
<b>New Zealand</b>	Chile, India, South Africa
<b>Singapore</b>	Chile, South Africa
<b>South Africa</b>	Australia, Canada, Chile, India, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea
<b>South Korea</b>	Canada, India, South Africa
<b>Sweden</b>	Canada, India
<b>Switzerland</b>	Canada, India & USA
<b>UK</b>	Canada
<b>USA</b>	Canada, India, Mexico, Switzerland

From the of countries represented in U21, only the Netherlands had an inbound and/or outbound flow with all other U21 countries in 2018. Behind this, the UK and China with Hong Kong (SAR) had inbound or outbound flows with 16 out of a possible 17 countries.

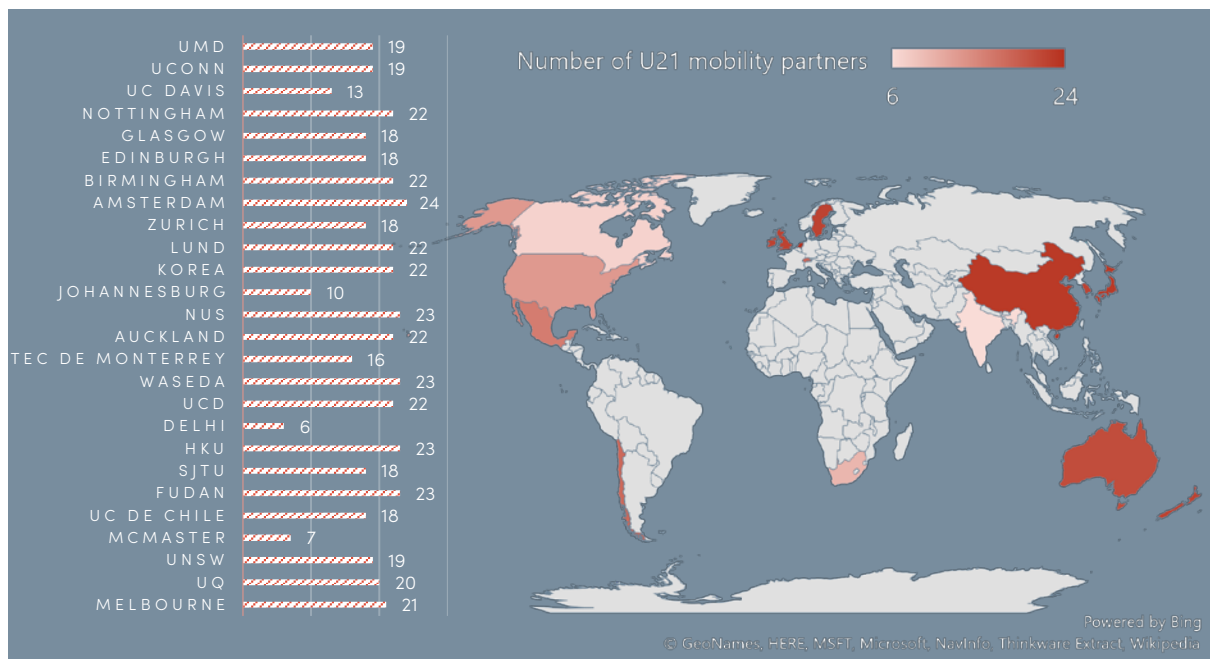
A relative lack of mobility between India and other U21 countries continued from 2017 into 2018. Given that India is a source of increasing numbers of international students worldwide, this suggests that student mobility to and from India is currently being driven by non-U21 institutions, and that there is a potential for growth within the U21 network.

Further investigation into this and other examples in Fig. 6 may be warranted to unpack whether the lack of mobility flows between U21 partners are indicative of overall in/out flows between the countries in question, or if institutions have other preferred partners in the region.



## U21 members as mobility partners

FIG. 7: NUMBER OF MOBILITY PARTNERSHIPS WITHIN U21<sup>4</sup>



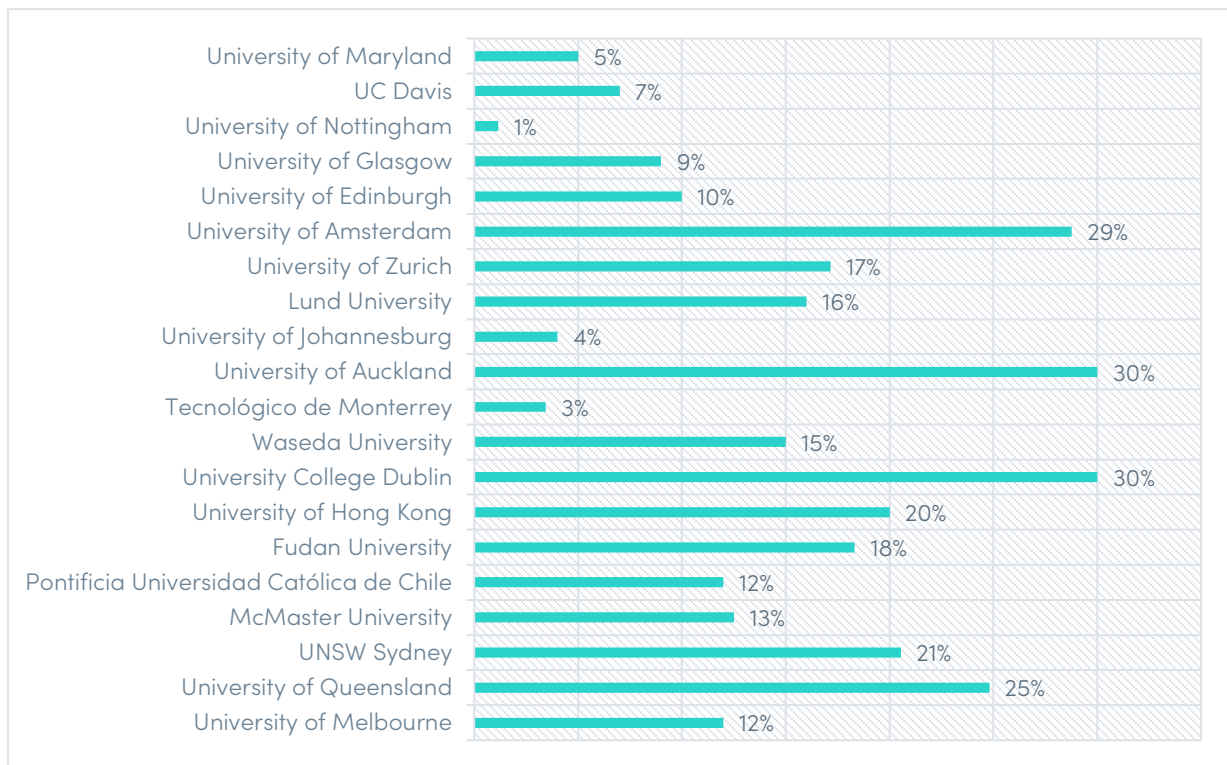
The map shows the number of mobility partnerships originating in each country within the U21 network, with the accompanying table showing the breakdown by institution. Mobility partnerships may not represent a formalised exchange agreement, but have been counted where at least one instance of an inbound or outbound mobility was reported. Equally, formalised exchange agreements may be in place that are not shown in Fig. 7 because no mobility between the institutions was reported for 2018.

As shown in Fig. 7, the most mobility partnerships originated within Europe, China with Hong Kong (SAR), and Australia. The University of Amsterdam had the most mobility partnerships, with 24 out of a possible 25 partners.

Regions with the most mobility partnerships are also the most active regions in terms of volume of students: Asia-Pacific and Europe. The institutions in these regions are major contributors to student mobility within U21; not only are they exchanging significant numbers of students within their own regions, but they are also demonstrating wide-ranging mobility partnerships across the U21 network.

<sup>4</sup> Including incoming and outgoing figures to recognise breadth of activity, i.e. where either an incoming or outgoing student had been reported by either party, a mobility partnership was counted.

FIG. 8: INTRA-NETWORK MOBILITY AS A PERCENTAGE OF OVERALL OUTGOING MOBILITY

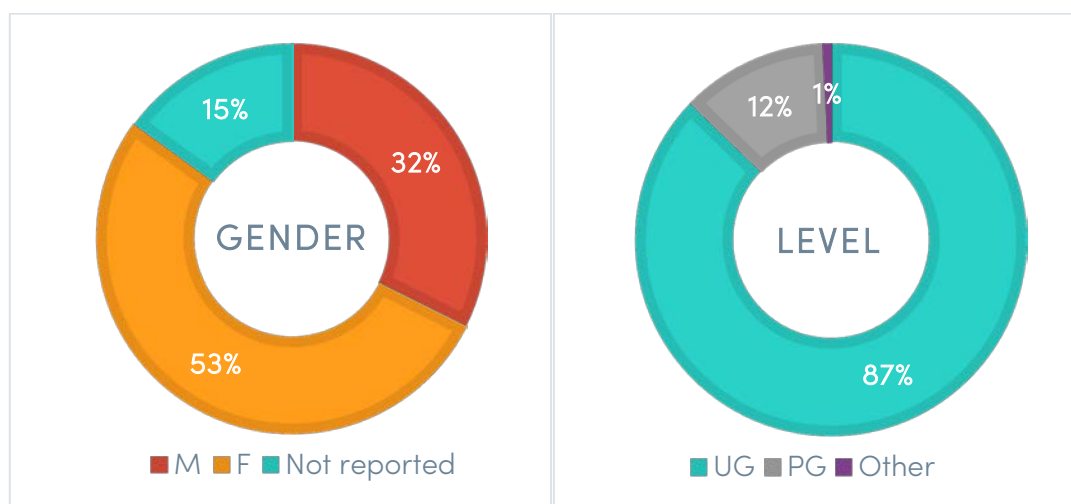


There is significant variation in the percentage of institutions' mobility activity which took place within the network. Other networks, strategic partnerships and international mobility schemes (such as Erasmus+) are likely to have an impact on the exchange agreements established; however, where more than 25% of an institution's mobility is within U21 it would suggest that U21 membership has some impact.

Anecdotal evidence from within mobility offices indicates that a number of schemes for treating U21 members as 'preferred partners' exist within the network, such as network-only mobility funding, and enhanced exchange agreements. There would be scope to investigate these schemes further and explore whether they correlate with the proportion of mobility activity which members undertake with their U21 partners.

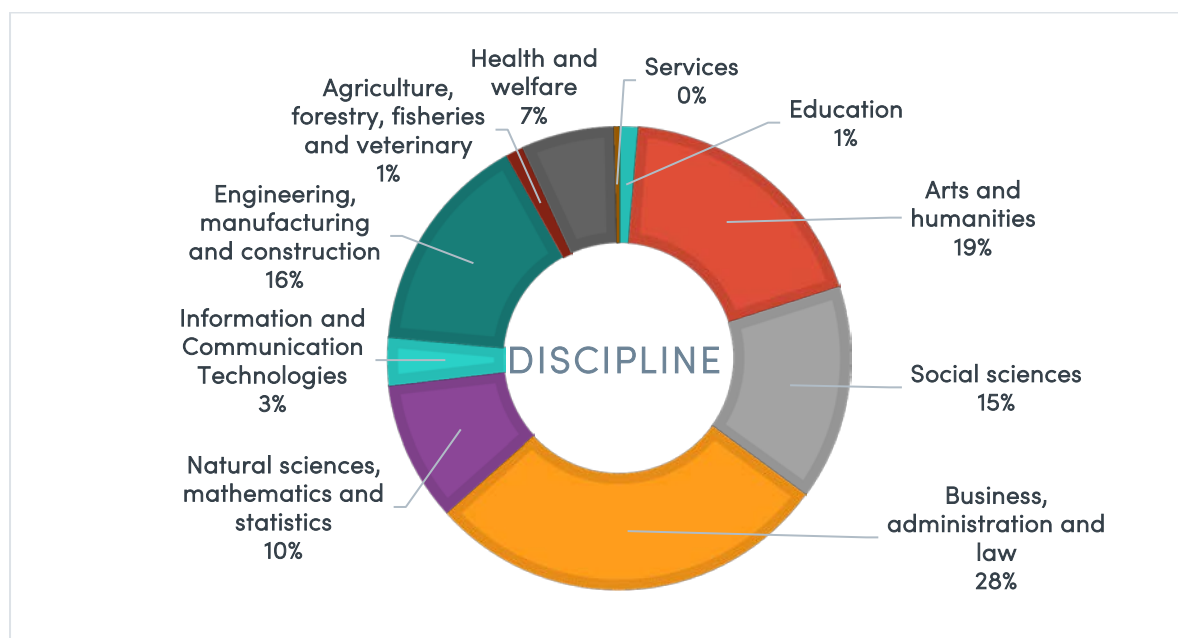
## Student profile

FIG. 9: MOBILE STUDENTS BY GENDER AND LEVEL OF STUDY<sup>5</sup>



As in 2017, the majority of students undertaking mobility were female and almost entirely undergraduates; however, it should be noted that postgraduate mobilities may be more likely to be at faculty level and therefore potentially underreported.

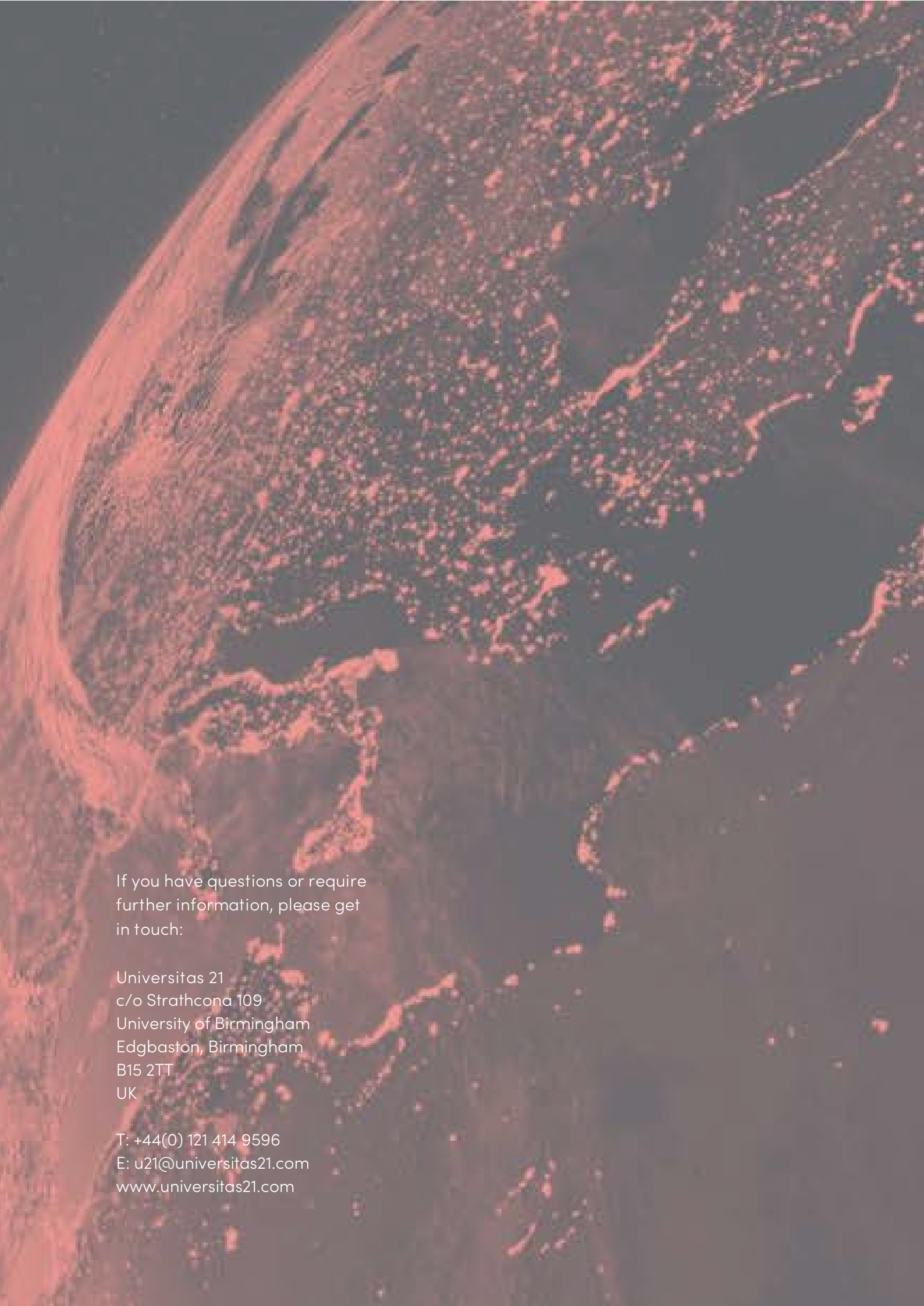
FIG. 10: MOBILE STUDENTS BY DISCIPLINE/MAJOR<sup>6</sup>



The three most common disciplines (business, administration and law; arts and humanities; and engineering, manufacturing and construction) account for over half of all students. This mirrors the 2017 findings.

<sup>5</sup> Not all institutions could provide this level of information for all recorded mobilities. Gender data provided by 20 institutions; Level of study data provided by 21 institutions

<sup>6</sup> Discipline data provided by 19 institutions



If you have questions or require further information, please get in touch:

Universitas 21  
c/o Strathcona 109  
University of Birmingham  
Edgbaston, Birmingham  
B15 2TT  
UK

T: +44(0) 121 414 9596  
E: [u21@universitas21.com](mailto:u21@universitas21.com)  
[www.universitas21.com](http://www.universitas21.com)