

Student-Professor Joint Committee Annual Report 2023

(Academic Year: 2021/2022)

This document contains the Annual Report of the Students-Professors Joint Committee, in accordance with the SISSA Guidelines for Quality Policies. The Committee, regulated by Article 13 of the School Statute, is composed of Prof. Giovanni Bussi, of the Physics Area (Coordinator); Prof. Michele Giugliano, of the Neurosciences Area; Prof. Antonio Lerario of the Mathematics Area; Dr. Jacopo Mazza, Physics Area students' representative; Dr. Jacopo Zanchettin, Mathematics Area students' representative, and Dr. Francesco Diversi, Neuroscience Area students' representative.

NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

The Committee's principal task is to draw up an annual report that examines the educational offer as a whole, with particular reference to the results of the survey of student opinion, indicating any problems specific to particular PhD programmes. The analysis of the anonymised questionnaire responses indicates a School in **overall good health** with a generally high level of student satisfaction. This is in line with the findings of previous years. The Committee has decided to focus the report on identifying **specific points of concern**, rather than highlighting and discussing the many positive findings, which provide little useful information in terms of improving the School's educational offer. These concerns are discussed in the first part of the report. In some cases the Committee has suggested strategies to address these issues. **The suggestions are highlighted in italics.** Many of these points were highlighted in last year's report. The steps taken to address them on the various PhD programmes are briefly mentioned in the second part of the report, which examines the individual courses. A qualitative analysis of the responses showed that many issues are **common to all the PhD programmes** whereas other problems are more evident for particular courses. To identify those questions for which it was appropriate to discuss the statistics in disaggregated form for each PhD programme, we have calculated the normalised mutual information (NMI) of the answers and the PhD programmes they came from (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mutual_information). The NMI has a value of 1 if the answers are totally different for the various PhD programmes, and 0 if answers

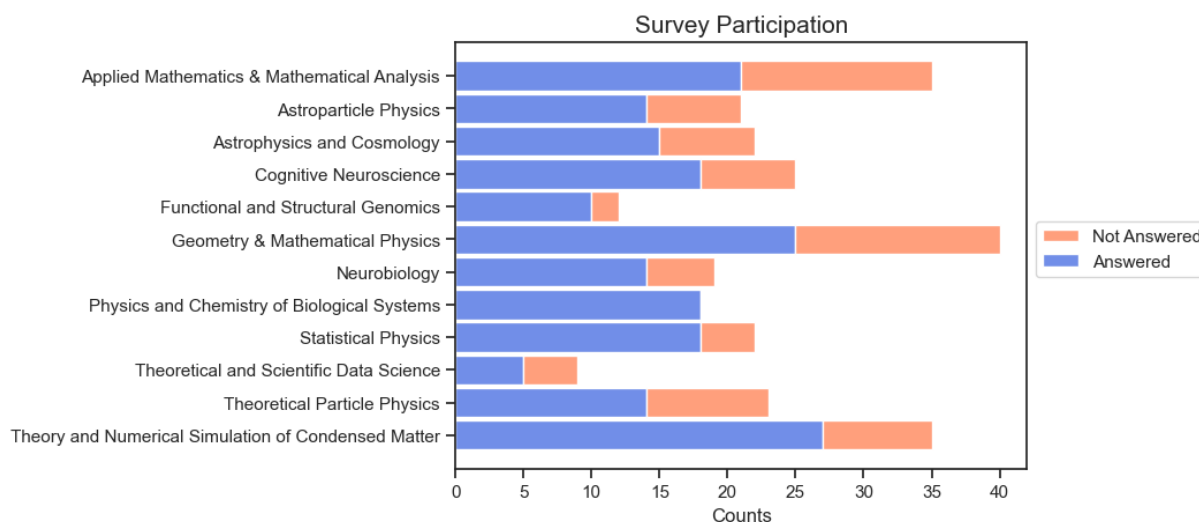
show the same pattern on every course. The low number of students on each PhD programme may cause high NMI values to arise by chance. We therefore calculated the **statistical significance** of the observed NMIs expressed as the Z-score, i.e. the difference between the observed and most probable NMI expressed as a standard deviation. The Committee considered it useful to present the data in **disaggregated form for each PhD programme** where the Z-score is higher than 1.5. Very often, the variations in the data disaggregated per PhD programme are not significant, although there are some exceptions and these are discussed below.

ANALYSIS OF ISSUES WITHIN THE EDUCATIONAL OFFER

Low response to the questionnaire

The first important critical issue relates to the **questionnaire response rate**, which was **69%**. Although this figure is in line with the previous year, it is too low for a questionnaire widely considered essential for assessing our School's 'state of health'.

Analysis of the figures shows the response rate to be high for some PhD programmes, in one case even 100%. Compared to the previous year, it can be noted that the response is more evenly distributed across all the programmes and there are no PhD courses with a response of less than 50%. However, one PhD programme (Theoretical and Scientific Data Science) was below 60%. This is a PhD that was started two years ago and only has a few students, but the response rate will be monitored in the future.



As with the previous report, it should be noted that the low response rate was due to a fear that anonymity was at risk, given the small numbers. For that reason, the Committee only had access to data aggregated per programme, and per enrolment year. It is also possible that the students did not realise that the data were further anonymised.

We suggest that the students should again be told that the questionnaires are anonymised and that the Committee has no access to individual responses. This should be done shortly before they compile the questionnaire, if possible. We also suggest that the PhD programme coordinators should be sent a reminder about the compilation of this questionnaire. The Committee also suggests monitoring the dates on which the replies were given, anonymously, so that the impact of these measures can be verified.

A detailed analysis of the responses per programme and per enrolment year highlighted another problem with this questionnaire. For some of the programmes with a particularly high response rate, it was noted that the number of respondents per PhD and per enrolment year was higher than the number of students actually enrolled. In particular, and on the only PhD with a 100% response rate, at least 4 out of 18 students – equating to 22% of the respondents – compiled this field wrongly. If, as can be reasonably expected, this kind of error rate must be considered for the entire questionnaire, it is hard to analyse to what extent the answers depend on the respondents' year of enrolment. It was also noted that the students may also complete the PhD programme field wrongly.

To avoid this kind of problem, the Committee suggests that in future years, the questionnaires should be sent out with the known fields (PhD and year of enrolment) already compiled. Alternatively, a personalised questionnaire can be sent out to each student cohort to avoid compilation errors.

Low level of student wellbeing

A second point of concern is **wellbeing**, which was judged to be **low** by **24%** of students, and **very low** by **6%**. These results are in line with the previous year and the differences are not statistically relevant. This means that **one out of every three** students does not feel “happy, healthy and motivated”. There were no statistically significant differences in the answers to this question, between

students on the different PhD programmes (Z-score = 1.1), nor in the answers to the question on the number of hours of study per day (Z-score = 1.5). While for the previous year, this kind of unhappiness might seem to be justified by the Covid-19 emergency, it is a reason that no longer seems to be relevant for this year. In view of the Committee's difficulties in interpreting this response, we suggest entering a new blank field, where students can enter their reasons in more specific detail.

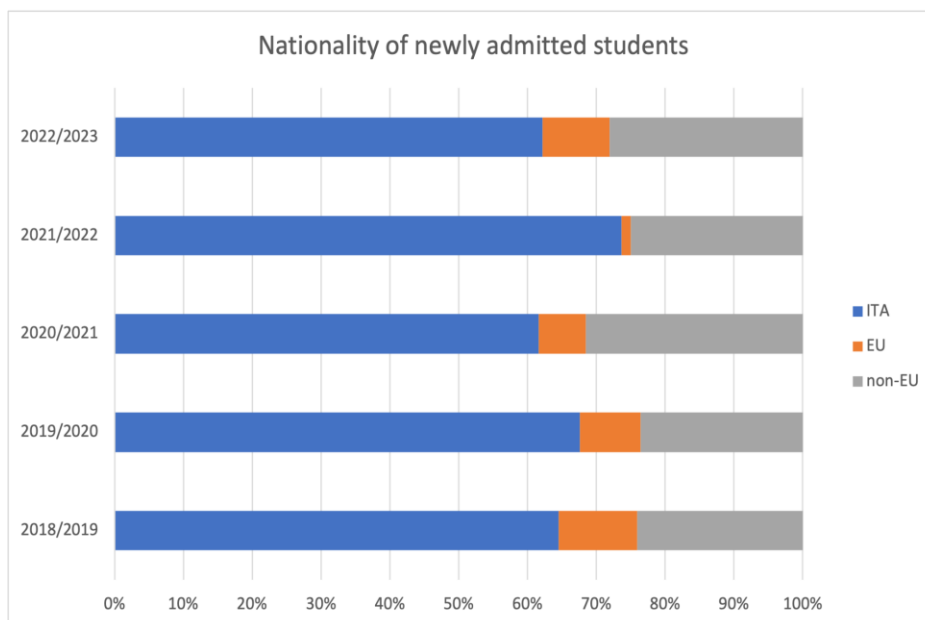
Mental health support

The availability of mental health support is highly appreciated by students. However, the Committee notes there were many complaints about problems in accessing the service, with long waiting times. 27% of students who rated the service considered it to be at least partially unsatisfactory. Two psychologists seem insufficient for a community the size of SISSA. Last year it was thought that the intensity of demand might be due to the Covid-19 emergency. It is hard to compare the students' replies to the question about the mental health service on a quantitative level, because this year's questionnaire included the option of 'no rating' of the service, for the students who did not use it. On a qualitative level, the number of students who were at least partially dissatisfied has fallen from 50 to 16. The lower number of requests might also be correlated to the larger number of agreements with external providers. In any case, it is clear that this service needs to be maintained and the response to this question must be monitored in future questionnaires.

The Committee hopes to consult directly with the psychologists running the service for their opinion as to whether more resources need to be added.

Moderate internationalisation and respect for diversity

The number of international students remains moderate. Overall, 62% of scholarship students in the five-year period 2018-2022 were Italian nationals, **10% were EU (non-Italian) nationals, and 28% were non-EU.** There has been a slight uptick in the number of international students compared to last year, in line with the previous years.



Foreign students highlighted specific issues in last year’s questionnaire. As the Committee does not have access to the nationality of each respondent, it is not possible to make quantitative analyses of this type.

Discrimination

With regard to possible cases of discrimination, the number of reported cases has fallen compared to last year. The few reported cases have no significant correlation to specific PhD programmes ($Z = 0.7$). However, the presence of even a small number of such cases is concerning. Particularly serious is the report of a case of gender discrimination during class time. The Students-Professors Joint Committee (CPAD) acting in concert with the Evaluation Committee (NdV), the Guarantee Committee for equal opportunities, enhancement of workers’ wellbeing and against discrimination (CUG) and the Quality Assurance Unit (PdQ) has considered possible actions to resolve this issue. As the questionnaire is compiled anonymously, direct intervention to address this issue was considered inappropriate.

The Committee suggests that next year’s questionnaire should include a communication aimed at all students who have indicated that they are the target of discrimination, explaining exactly who they can contact if they want the matter to be dealt with. This seems important, partly because of the lack of knowledge of these contacts among the students, as mentioned below.

Lack of knowledge of services

The issue of lack of knowledge of services, already mentioned last year, seems to be a persistent one. In particular, more than 50% of students are not aware of the following services: housing office (61%), the University sports centre (68%), the crèche (62%), dentist (80%), the CUG (57%), the ombudsperson (55%) and technology transfer (67%). As regards the services set up to address these issues and if necessary deal with them non-anonymously (CUG and ombudsperson), these percentages have fallen compared to last year.

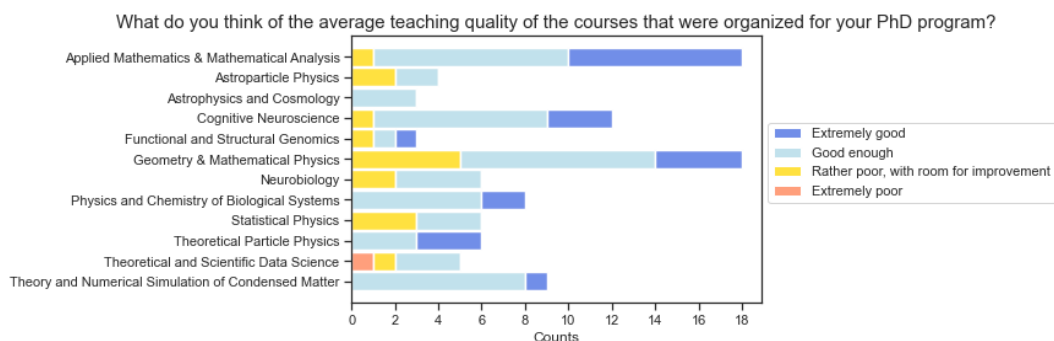
Partly because of the cases of discrimination that have emerged from this questionnaire, the Committee considers that a further communication campaign is necessary in order to bring the percentage down even further. A separate webpage should also be set up, listing all of these services.

Ineffective networking

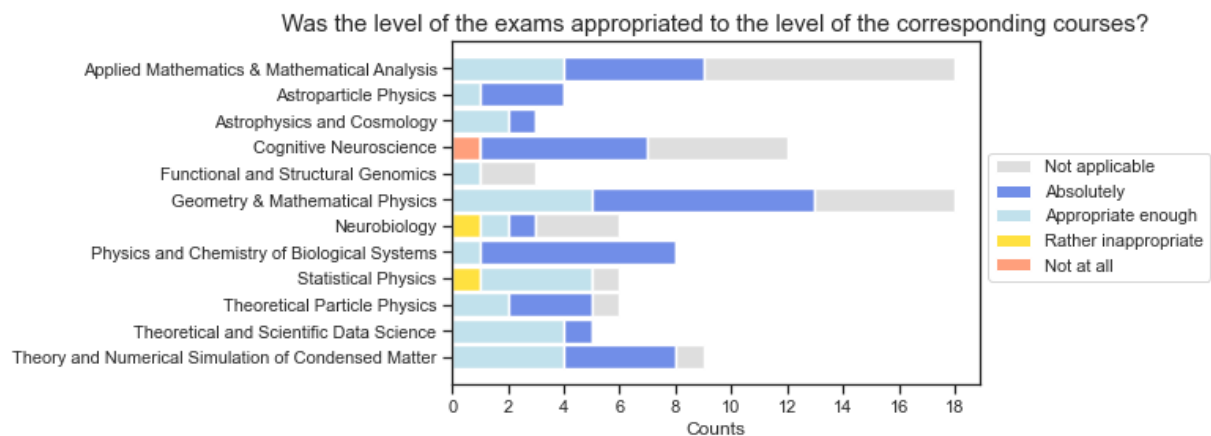
The percentage of students who indicated that their PhD was not helpful in terms of developing a contacts network has dropped significantly compared to last year (36% compared to 60%). This result has reversed the negative trend seen in previous years. It is quite possible that this improvement depends on the increased attendance at conferences, although it is hard to analyse this on a quantitative level because of the extremely low number of students replying negatively to the question about attendance at conferences (see below). 55% of students are completely unaware of the group activities of other Areas, and this is a negative trend compared to previous years.

The Committee repeats the recommendations of previous members, particularly the recommendation to encourage co-supervised projects between different groups and Areas.

Educational offer

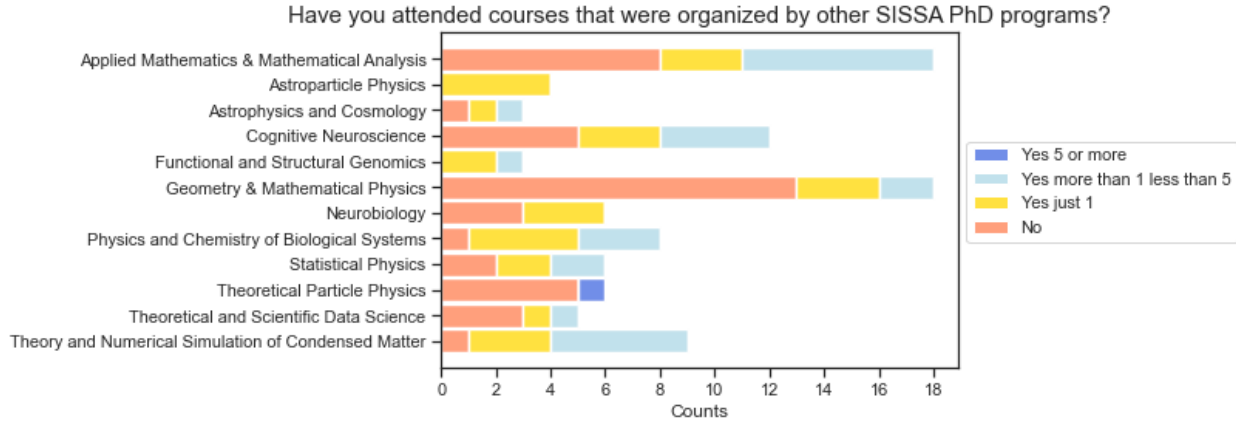


The quality of the educational offer is considered high or very high by a large percentage of students, and this is in line with the previous year (82%). There remains a certain inconsistency among the various programmes but this is less evident than in the previous year ($Z=1.8$). Specific comments on the various PhD programmes are given below. The perception of completeness of the study programmes is in line with the previous year, but this time it is fairly consistent among the courses ($Z = 1.5$). However, there are significant differences in how the students perceive the level of examinations ($Z = 3$). The percentage of students indicating an inappropriate level is low, but this should be monitored. We also note that there is a lower percentage of third- and fourth-year students who find the scientific background courses helpful (69% of students replied Good or Excellent). It is not clear whether they are referring to the same courses, or to courses they attended in the first year. However, the response to this question should be monitored.



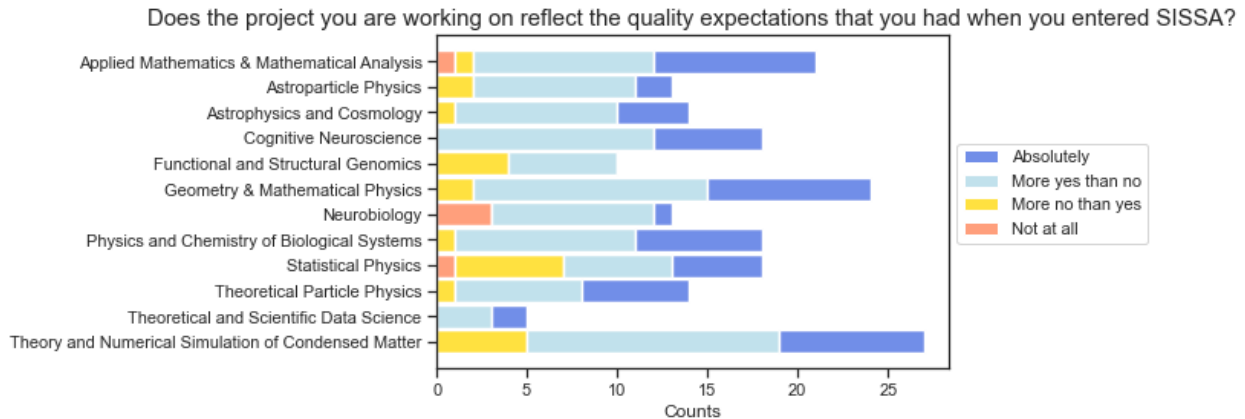
Student attendance on courses organised by other PhD programmes has increased, compared to the previous year (57% compared to 49%), although there are significant differences among the PhD programmes.

The Committee suggests that this kind of take-up could be encouraged, for example by encouraging students from the second year onwards to attend courses on other PhD programmes, without necessarily taking the graded exams at the end of the course. This might also have positive repercussions on networking within the School.

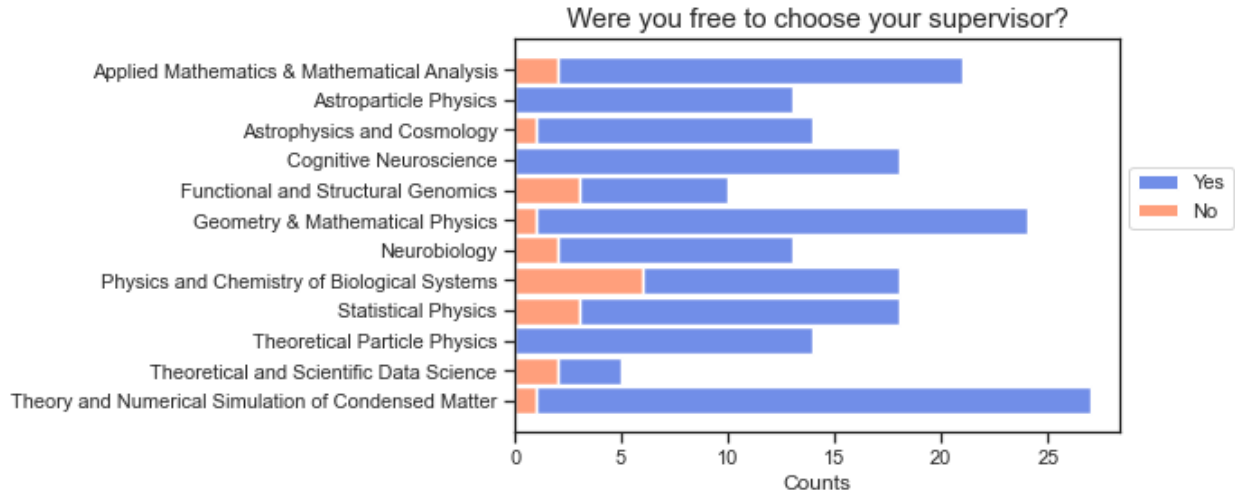


Quality of supervision and job prospects

The percentage of students who are satisfied with the correspondence between the quality of the research project and their expectations on arrival at SISSA has risen from 75% to 85%. Certain differences remain between the PhD programmes ($Z = 2.5$) as can be seen from the figure below.

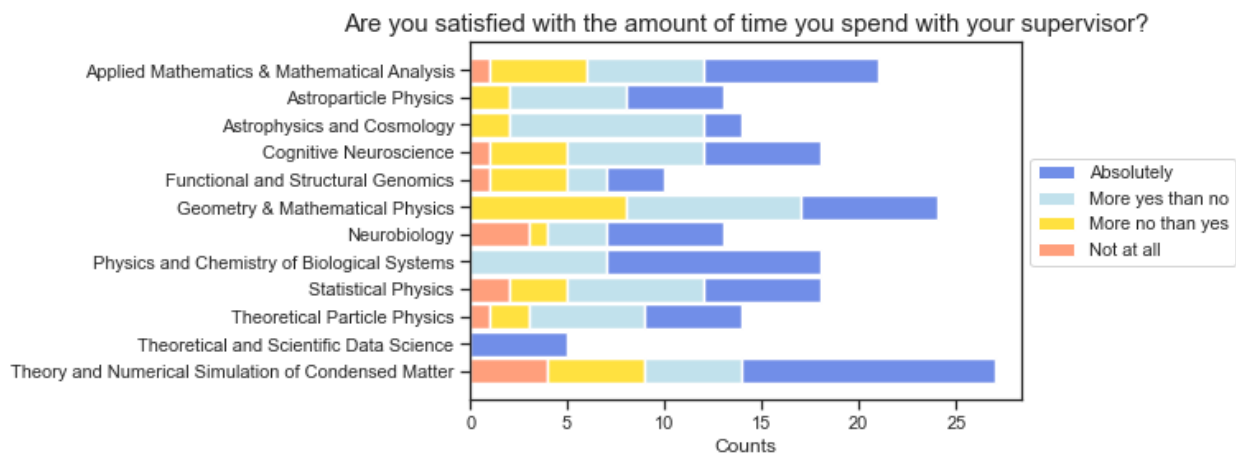
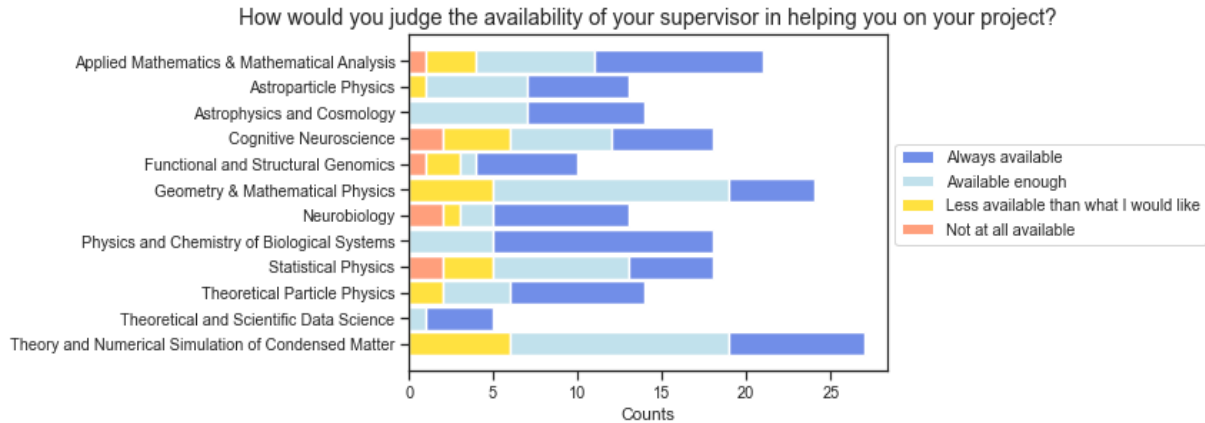


The vast majority of students were able to choose their own supervisor. The reply to this question depends on the PhD programme ($Z = 2.4$). In particular, the PhD in Physics and Chemistry of Biological Systems recorded the highest number of “No’s” (6), due to a policy of selecting supervisors, which will be described in the section on this programme, see below. The Committee also observes that a growing number of students is paid with project bursaries, and in this case there is no free choice of supervisor. We suggest that this question should be re-worded so that it is only addressed to students who benefit from a bursary paid by the School.



Overall, the number of students complaining of having spent too short a time with their supervisors has risen, compared to previous years (25% compared to 20%). There has also been a slight increase in the number of students complaining of poor feedback (17% compared to 15%). The same applies to the overall rating of supervision (20% of students said that supervision was unsatisfactory, compared to 17% in the previous year). The negative trend in these responses, already seen in the previous report, has thus continued. The answers to these questions have a low Z, apart from the questions relating to approachability and time spent with the supervisor. Some students say that the supervisor is never available to help with their research project. The students' comments reveal that some supervisors meet students less than once a week, and only on express request. In some cases, students complain that they have effectively been left to fend for themselves. Although these are a minority of cases, they are unacceptable at an outstanding school and they should be identified and resolved through appropriate channels, such as the ombudsperson.

The Committee recommends that each supervisor should organise regular individual meetings with each student they are responsible for.



A point of concern highlighted last year was that **47%** of the final-year students have already decided to **abandon their academic career**, with little variation between PhD programmes (Z -score = 0.5). The results from the last survey are very encouraging, as this percentage has fallen to 25%, again without any significant differences among the various PhD programmes.

Attendance at conferences

The attendance at conferences differed significantly among the various PhD programmes ($Z = 8$). In particular, most PhD's have seen a significant increase in student attendance at conferences held outside Trieste; this is probably due to the sharp decline in the pandemic restrictions. However, this increase has not been seen on some of the PhD programmes, as mentioned below.

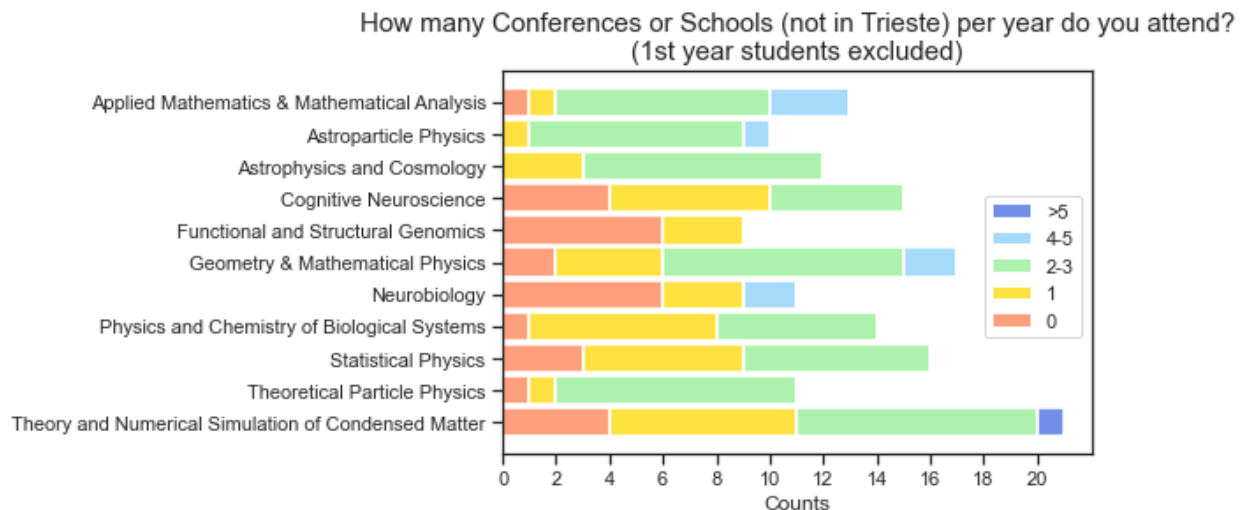
From a discussion with the of PhD programmes whose students are completing a below-average number of missions, it can be seen that the overwhelming majority of requests is approved. It seems that the low attendance is more a consequence

of lack of encouragement and lack of clarity as to the amount of funds available, rather than the requests not being approved in practice.

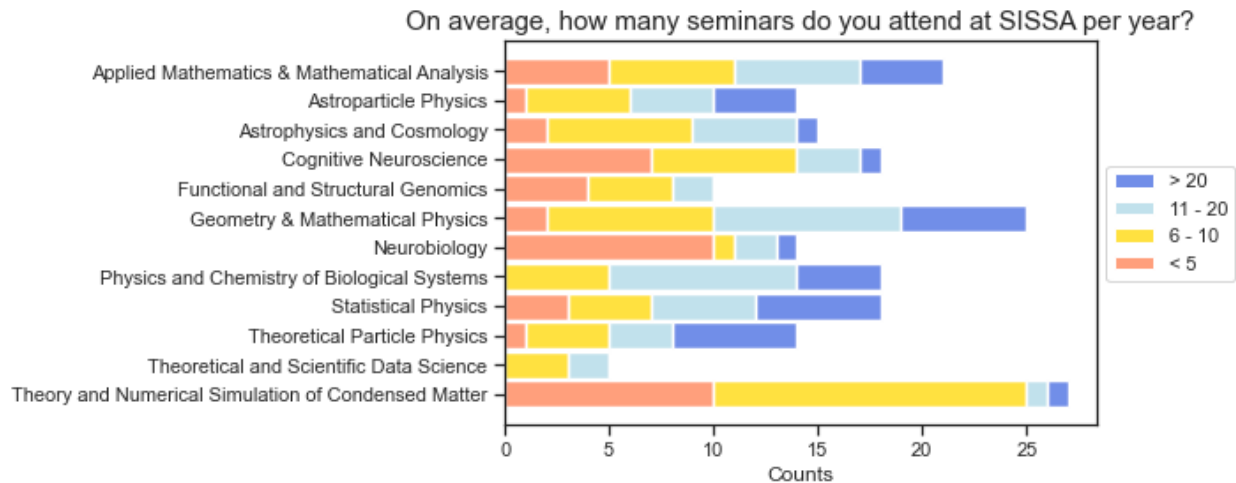
In some of the experimental subject areas, the supervisors often discourage students from attending conferences with premature results, due to the material risk of ‘scooping’ by third parties, which would compromise the originality and impact. The attendance at conferences without any presentations (posters/talks) is of course seen as an experience with less impact on learning, due to the absence of feedback or discussion with other researchers. Despite these considerations, the Committee has noted a potential problem, as the questionnaire refers to both to Conferences and to “Schools”. The potential strategic restrictions on attendance do not apply to Schools. The Committee suggests that the supervisor should guide and actively monitor their students’ application to at least one School during their PhD programme, or alternatively, their enrolment at a conference where preliminary results can be presented, in sectors where this is appropriate.

Regardless of the PhD of origin, the Committee suggests that there should be greater transparency in how funds are used for student admissions. The students’ comments indicate that many are unaware that each PhD programme has specific funding for student mobility.

The Committee notes that the question is phrased in such a way that it is unclear whether the reference is made to the year in question, or to the average of the previous years. Finally, we note that a possible solution to obtain this information and avoid any errors in compilation could be to reconstruct the information based on the data available on the mission management system.



Attendance at seminars



There has been a slight drop in the number of students attending fewer than 5 seminars during the course of a year (16% compared to 22%). On the other hand, these students are not distributed evenly among the various PhD programmes ($Z = 5$). As can be seen below, a particularly high percentage of students on the Neurobiology PhD reported that they have attended fewer than 5 seminars in a year. Checks done by the student representatives show that just 6 seminars were organised on that programme during 2022.

The Committee considers that each PhD should organise a minimum of one seminar per month. Attendance at other seminars held at SISSA by scientifically compatible PhD programmes should also be suggested. Seminars can also be an opportunity to promote networking, for example by encouraging informal meetings between guests and students, even without SISSA lecturers being present. Unfortunately, the strict rules on extracurricular costs mean that it is not easy to organise social activities (such as class dinners with the guest speakers) during visits to the School.

In general, seminars should be announced with more advance notice and should be easily visible on the website or on social media.

Colloquia

Unfortunately the approval of colloquia remains very low: just 52% of students who have an opinion on this issue find them useful. It is not possible to make a direct comparison with previous years because this year's questionnaire included the option to not give an opinion. Unfortunately it does not appear that the solutions

suggested in previous years have been useful. The Committee notes that the absence of a Lecture Hall in which to hold the colloquia may be a factor in their low popularity.

Below is an analysis of the three Areas of the School and of each PhD programme in those Areas. The same methodological approach was used, with the sole aim of identifying points of concern.

Physics Area

ASTROPARTICLE PHYSICS

Specific points of concern: Two of the respondents consider that the educational offer is not sufficiently complete. The comments indicate that the students' workload in the first year is often seen as high. Ratings of the quality of courses vary: the programmes are seen as excellent in some cases and with plenty of room for improvement in others. The student representative has pointed out that many courses are common with TPP and APC and therefore with very different content (theoretical or astrophysics): this might influence the students' ratings of the courses.

In comparison with the previous year, there has been a sharp increase in the response rate to the questionnaire, which is now 67% compared to 44% for the previous year, in line with the rest of the School. The situation regarding student welfare, mentioned in last year's report, appears to reflect that of the whole School, without any signs of improvement compared to last year.

Corrective measures: faculty members report that they have identified a strategy, together with the student representative, to address the emerging issues. The actions taken include the introduction of a journal club, which is run entirely by the students, and also various adjustments to the educational offer.

The Committee takes a positive view of the increase in the questionnaire response rate, and encourages faculty members to continue in this direction.

ASTROPHYSICS AND COSMOLOGY

Specific points of concern: Four of the seven students who replied to this question consider the courses not very useful or not useful at all, in terms of strengthening their scientific background; this is worse than last year

Corrective measures:

Faculty members report that the duration of some of the courses has been changed, and the decision has been taken to organise meetings with the 3rd and 4th year students. This decision, as well as the intensification of non-SISSA networking activities, are measures appreciated by the Committee in terms of offering greater support to students in choosing their post-PhD career as this had been identified as a point of concern in last year's report. Finally, of the five students who replied to this question, three of them thought that the supervisor was useful in helping them choose a post-PhD career.

The Committee takes a positive view of the greater attention and increased action taken to support students in deciding their professional or academic careers after their PhD's. We suggest that the programme coordinator should talk to the students about the recent changes to the educational offer.

PHYSICS AND CHEMISTRY OF BIOLOGICAL SYSTEMS

Specific points of concern: Of the 18 respondents, six said that they had not been free to choose their own supervisor. Many of the comments linked this to the policy of faculty members, who prefer each lecturer to supervise only one student at a time. Similarly, seven students (out of 18) complained of a lack of available funds to attend conferences and Schools. Finally, of the five who answered the question, three students appreciated the supervisor's role in assisting them with their search for a post after the PhD. This indicates a clear improvement compared to what was indicated in last year's report. However, we note that some of the students may not need the assistance of a supervisor in their post-doc job search. The question could be amended to take account of this.

Corrective measures: The report indicates that the PhD course does pay attention to group-internal networking and extracurricular education.

The PhD has also introduced a new system for gathering preferences on dissertation topics, in order to make students more aware of the broad range of research topics. The Committee suggests that the effects of this measure should be monitored, particularly with regard to the indicator on the freedom to choose the supervisor.

The Committee intends to monitor the effects of the new system for gathering dissertation topics, with particular attention to the indicator on the freedom to choose the supervisor. The Committee appreciates that this report was discussed in advance with the student representative and hopes that this will be repeated in the future.

STATISTICAL PHYSICS

Specific points of concern: Of the 18 respondents to the questionnaire, one student considered that the thesis project did not meet their expectations; the responses of another six students revealed a certain degree of dissatisfaction with the thesis project. Half of the respondents (3 out of 6) said that the courses were not very helpful or not helpful at all. Six students out of 18 reported a lack of funds available to attend conferences and Schools. Another point to note is that 2 students out of 18 were dissatisfied with the amount of time the supervisor spent with them, while another 3 were not sufficiently satisfied.

Corrective measures: The report does not highlight any further adjustments to the educational offer, as the changes made in previous years are considered adequate. Faculty members report that students have been encouraged to contact all the members of the teaching body, before definitively choosing a supervisor. Despite the adjustments to the educational offer made in recent years, the situation does not seem to have improved substantially. The same applies with regard to the invitation for students to talk to all the PI, before choosing a supervisor.

The Committee notes that the corrective measures, particularly with reference to the educational offer, have not yet resolved all the issues and therefore faculty members are encouraged to keep monitoring the situation. The Committee also suggests that the PhD programme should explain to students in advance about the availability of funding for scientific missions. The Committee also notes that the comment fields indicate that the study load for students on this

PhD programme may be too high, or in any case not evenly distributed throughout the year. The PhD programme coordinator is asked to talk to students to address this issue.

THEORETICAL PARTICLE PHYSICS

Specific points of concern: One first-year student left the course before the end of the year, having not reached the required grades.

Corrective measures: Nothing to report

The Committee also suggests that the PhD programme should explain to students in advance about the availability of funding for scientific missions.

THEORY AND NUMERICAL SIMULATION OF CONDENSED MATTER

Specific points of concern:

Of the 27 students who replied, five of them said they were partially dissatisfied with the quality of the research project they were working on. In addition, one-third of the respondents was partially or completely dissatisfied with the time spent with their supervisor. Finally, 11 students out of 27 complained that there were not enough funds for them to attend conferences and Schools. A discussion with the programme coordinator revealed that all the requests appear to have been approved—this indicates that the problem lies with the lack of information about the availability of funds.

Corrective measures: The report mentions an improvement in the educational offer, and highlights a positive response from the students. No further measures are indicated.

The Committee takes a positive view of the efforts made in past years and encourages faculty members to address the new problems. We also suggest explaining to students in advance, about the availability of funding for scientific missions.

THEORETICAL AND SCIENTIFIC DATA SCIENCE

The PhD accreditation dates back to June 2021, which means that the 2021-22 academic year is the first reporting year.

Specific points of concern: The response rate to this questionnaire was particularly low, at around 56%. Of the five students who did reply, two of them said that the quality of the courses was fairly low or extremely low.

Two out of the five first-year students (the 2021/22 cohort) were not admitted to the second year because they were deemed not to have met the grade. The situation of one of the two students came to the attention of the student representatives, who began a series of discussions about the procedure for admission to the next year. These discussions also involved members of the data science teaching body, the Director and the student who was not admitted, opening up a wider conversation about the management of students at risk of not passing the year. The specific issue of these two students is now considered closed, by all the parties involved. However, the student council considers that the process of assessment regarding admission is not entirely transparent. The rules have now been published and are clear. The student representatives hope that in future, similar situations will be dealt with by bringing in a third party in the discussion with the at-risk student, where possible and appropriate; the PhD programme coordinator agrees with this suggestion. Overall, the student's non-admission to the next year created a climate of tension in the Data Science student body. The Committee is confident that the conversation which has now begun between lecturers and students will avoid any future tensions. The PhD programme coordinator reports that after positive exchanges of views between the Data Science lecturers and students, this climate of tension now appears to have dissipated.

Corrective measures: A Code of Conduct has been adopted, and “personal tutors” have been introduced.

The Committee encourages faculty members to take actions to encourage responses to the questionnaire, given the low statistical materiality of the results.

Mathematics Area

APPLIED MATHEMATICS & MATHEMATICAL ANALYSIS

Specific points of concern: In previous years, it has been reported that supervisors have not been very helpful in finding a position after the PhD programme. This problem now appears to have been fully dealt with. The same can be said for the issues arising with the educational offer.

GEOMETRY AND MATHEMATICAL PHYSICS

Specific points of concern: The problems emerging last year in relation to the quality of the courses seems now to be heading towards resolution. The number of students who attended courses and gave a negative opinion has fallen from approximately 38% to 28%. Overall, these numbers are relatively consistent across the School ($Z = 1.8$). From a discussion with the student representative, it emerges that this PhD programme still has issues with lecture room logistics.

The free comments reveal that some of the students find the courses too easy and others too hard. This may be inevitable, considering the mixed ability of the students admitted to the course. However the programme coordinator is asked to monitor the situation. The PhD programme coordinator is also asked to consider streaming the courses depending on the students' background.

Neuroscience Area

One point of concern emerging from last year's questionnaire and common to all three PhD's was the dissatisfaction with the educational offer. In the last questionnaire, the situation seems to have improved significantly. The percentage of students indicating Good or Extremely Good has risen from 62% on the previous questionnaire to 81% on this year's. This is in line with the overall average for the school. From a discussion with the student representatives, it emerged that many of the issues have been resolved and that student satisfaction with the courses held in the academic year 2022/2023 is still rising. The Committee is pleased with the work done so far and hopes that the dialogue between lecturers and students will continue.

To facilitate in-person interaction (planned or informal), and Teams exchanges with technical staff, we suggest providing advance access for individual in-person availability or smart working (e.g. by using a reserved area on the Neuroscience website).

COGNITIVE NEUROSCIENCES

Specific points of concern: As seen above, the issues with the educational offer mentioned in the previous report have either been resolved or are moving towards resolution. The cases of discrimination reported by students are still present, although in decline. In view of the low number of cases reported, they are not statistically significant ($Z=0.7$). The report shows that the faculty members are aware of the situation and are actively working to resolve the problems. A discussion with the student representatives revealed that in some groups, there is an unhealthy rivalry between students. It appears that this situation has persisted for a few years.

We suggest that faculty members continue to monitor and take stricter measures to resolve the situation.

FUNCTIONAL AND STRUCTURAL GENOMICS;

Specific points of concern:

The previous report highlighted the students' low response rate, but this year it was in line with the other PhD programmes. The rating of the educational offer - compatibly with the small number of students on this PhD programme - was also in line with the rest of the School. However, one important issue that did arise this year was the students' lack of attendance at conferences ($Z=8$). Specifically, all the students who compiled the questionnaire said that they had not attended more than one conference outside Trieste. Looking at the free comments it can be seen that students think they do not have enough budget to attend conferences. This comes as a surprise to the Committee, as a portion of the budget is earmarked for student missions. Another reason that emerged was the low level of encouragement from lecturers, in some cases justified by the need to carry out lab work. As can be seen from the free comments, the students on this PhD programme have issues with networking. The Committee thinks that the lack of attendance at conferences might be a big factor in this regard.

The Committee hopes that faculty members will encourage the students on this PhD to attend more conferences, so that they can build up a network of scientific contacts. Students should be informed of the budget allocated to mobility.

NEUROBIOLOGY

Specific points of concern: As seen above, the issues with the educational offer mentioned in the previous report have either been resolved or are moving towards resolution. As mentioned above for the PhD in FUNCTIONAL AND STRUCTURAL GENOMICS, the students' attendance at conferences outside Trieste is concerning also for this programme (Z=8), although slightly higher. Looking at the free comments it can be seen that students think they do not have enough budget to attend conferences. This comes as a surprise to the Committee, as a portion of the budget is earmarked for student missions. Another reason that emerged was the low level of encouragement from lecturers, in some cases justified by the need to carry out lab work. As can be seen from the free comments, the students on this PhD programme have issues with networking. The Committee thinks that the lack of attendance at conferences might be a big factor in this regard.

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