

THE VALUE AND IMPACT OF SHORT-TERM MOBILITY

A DMU report on participation, impact
and good practice of inclusive
international opportunities



CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Key findings and summary	2
Methodology	3
Survey findings	4
Focus groups	8
Appendices	12



INTRODUCTION

This research project looking into the impact of short-term mobility was conducted by Universities UK International and funded by the British Council and the Northern Consortium. De Montfort University was a project supporter, and Leo Smith (Head of Global Mobility) was a member of the Project Steering Group, responsible for supporting with the design and delivery of this piece of research.

The project responded to the growth in the number of reported instances of short-term mobility in UK Higher Education, and the need to better understand the impact, value and barriers associated with such activity.

Since the launch of DMU Global in 2014, over 15,000 students have participated in short-term mobilities, making the programme one of the largest of its kind in the sector, and thus the data presented in this report showcases and celebrates the impact of our work to date. It is also worth noting, that as part of the wider, summative UUKi report, DMU had the largest number of respondents to the student survey, hence why we have been able to produce a 'DMU-specific' research summary.

Acknowledgment and thanks

This research and report wouldn't have been possible without the hard work from the following people:

Universities UK International: Katherine Allison and Dörte Stevenson for leading the project and writing the final report.

De Montfort University: Leo Smith and Kishan Naker for preparing and designing the DMU report.

All project steering group members, project institutions and students who contributed in their various ways.



KEY FINDINGS AND SUMMARY

The report set out to understand what attracts students to short-term mobility, barriers that may exist and the benefits of these experiences. The key findings from the DMU respondents are as follows:

Motivations

The majority of respondents (99%) went abroad to experience something new, with 95% wanting to improve their intercultural awareness. A further 88% agreed or strongly agreed that they wanted to enrich their studies or build up professional and personal networks.

Respondents felt that university-organised and supported short-term mobility was very attractive as this would make the visit more impactful and immersive, and that they would learn more. They also felt that travelling as a group provided greater security.

Duration

The short duration of the programmes was viewed by respondents as very positive as it allowed them to immerse themselves and to experience plenty in a

short period of time.

Students also fed back that the short duration allowed them to schedule the programme around their academic curriculum and commitments at home, including caring responsibilities and part-time jobs.

Support

Funding provided for the short-term visits was important to all students and there was consensus that the funding provided by DMU Global made the programme more accessible, with many saying they would not have been able to afford to go abroad without the funding.

Support ahead of the mobility was highlighted as important by many students in the focus groups to ensure they felt prepared and overcame any nervousness about the experience. It was reported that the pre-departure sessions took away students' concerns around risk.

Academic impact

Respondents reported that their DMU Global experience had a positive impact on their academic experience, particu-

larly in providing an international dimension to their subject (81%), increasing their confidence in their academic ability (74%) and broadening their understanding of their degree (75%). Notably, a further 48% suggested that their international experience inspired topics for their dissertation, essays or presentations.

Employment

All students who participated in a focus group felt that the mobility would positively impact their employment prospects due to the skills and experience they had gained. Of the respondents who had graduated, 44% felt that the experience has been beneficial to their career.

Soft skills

The majority of respondents (91%) indicated that they had improved their adaptability, with a further 89% reporting an improvement in their communication skills. Additionally, 87% of respondents felt they had developed their intercultural and interpersonal skills.

Personal development

There was general consensus among all students that their mobility helped them grow on a personal level. The majority of respondents (93%) agreed they were more eager to learn about cultures that were different from their own, and 92% reported increasing their understanding of different cultures. 87% of respondents agreed that they are more self-confident, and 88% felt more confident to travel overseas independently. A further 81% rated that the experience had increased their interest in global affairs.

Future plans

Overwhelmingly, respondents were inspired to travel more (96%), with over 70% of students saying they were now more likely to engage with international students and international opportunities on campus. Furthermore, 73% of students were also more likely to consider working abroad after graduation due to the mobility experience.



METHODOLOGY

This research and data forms part of a wider UUKi report about the impact of short-term mobility on undergraduates, of which DMU was a steering group member. This report includes data that was collected via a student survey and focus groups with DMU students. This project data sourced through surveys and focus groups relied on participants' self-identification.

The survey questions were developed by UUKi staff with expertise provided by the project Steering Group. The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete. The responses were confidential with reasonable efforts made to protect respondents' anonymity and confidentiality.

The two student focus groups that were conducted with DMU students took place in January 2021, with 14 participants in total. The focus groups were hosted virtually due to localised lockdown rules relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. The sessions were interactive and designed to encourage students to engage with the topic. Methodologies used included group discussions, private reflections and polling exercises.

Data was collected via digital recording, harvesting of responses shared through mentimeter.com and note taking.

Respondent profile

The respondents that completed the survey were all former DMU Global participants, and had been on an overseas experience between 2014 and 2020. Students were contacted directly by DMU Global, with alumni being contacted via the Development and Alumni Engagement team.

The respondents who participated in the survey studied across a wide variety of subject disciplines, with the highest number coming from Creative Arts & Design subjects. It is worth noting for the purpose of this study, the term 'Social studies' includes programmes such as Politics, Economics, Sociology and Psychology.

Subject	Faculty	%	No
Creative arts & design	ADH	27%	46
Business & administrative studies	BAL	23%	39
Social studies	CROSS	12%	20
Architecture, building & planning	ADH	8%	14
Subjects allied to medicine	HLS	8%	13
Education	HLS	6%	10
Law	BAL	4%	7
Biological sciences	HLS	3%	6
Computer science	CEM	3%	6
Historical & philosophical studies	ADH	2%	3
Mass communications & documentation	CEM	2%	3
Physical sciences	HLS	2%	3
Engineering & technology	CEM	1%	1
Languages	ADH	1%	1

Total respondents 172

SURVEY FINDINGS

The goal of the survey was to understand barriers and enablers of mobility, and the particular impact of short-term mobility programmes on undergraduate students.

Short-term mobility experience

Whilst the majority of respondents (88%) had been abroad prior to studying at DMU, mostly for the purpose of holidays or to visit friends and family, 47% had not previously travelled abroad as part of an educational programme.

Out of the 172 respondents, 136 had participated in a short-term mobility experience of 4 weeks or less whilst at DMU. 75% of the mobile students had been overseas between September 2018 and August 2020, with the remaining 25% travelling between September 2014 and August 2018.

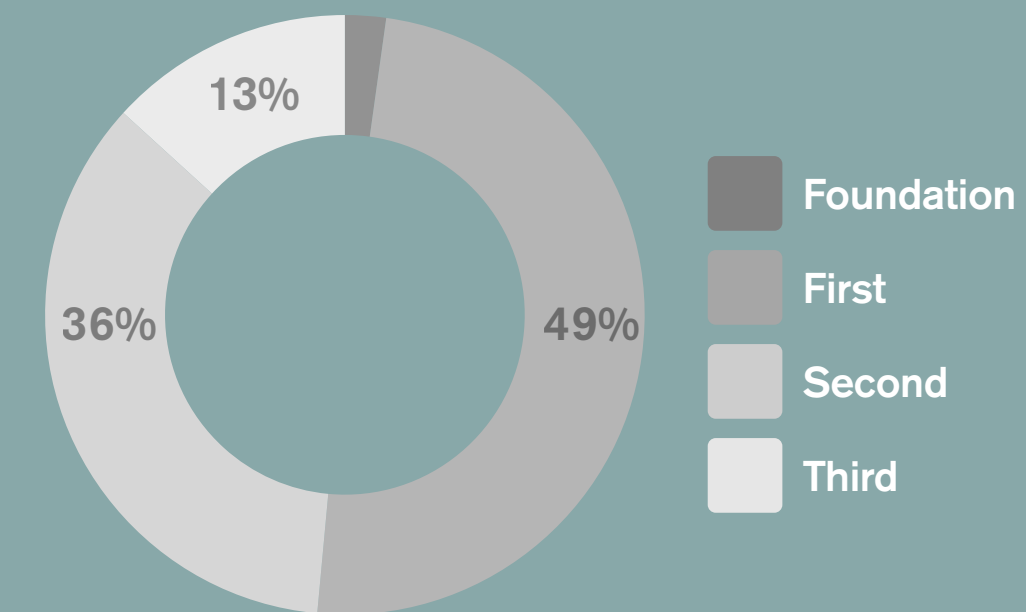
78%

Participated in experiences that lasted **between 4 and 7 days**

22%

Participated in experiences that lasted **between 8 and 15 days**

Participant's year of study



Type of mobilities

The majority of short-term mobilities were study-related, followed by cultural/language programmes, then work and volunteer experiences. 75% of such mobilities were course-related group visits, whilst 15% were extra-curricular group visits. The remaining responses related to activities such as summer schools and international conferences.

Overwhelmingly the short-term mobilities were not credit bearing (85%), with only 7% of students stating that they received credit, and 8% didn't know.

Student funding

For the majority, the funding (scholarships and bursaries) received tended to cover the majority of costs associated with travel. When thinking about travelling without any financial support, only 33% of respondents indicated that they would have gone abroad without the funding.

46%

received funding that covered between **25% and 49% of the total cost**

29%

of respondents **would not** have gone abroad without funding

31%

received funding that covered between **51% and 100% of the total cost**

32%

of respondents **were unsure** if they would go abroad without funding

SURVEY FINDINGS

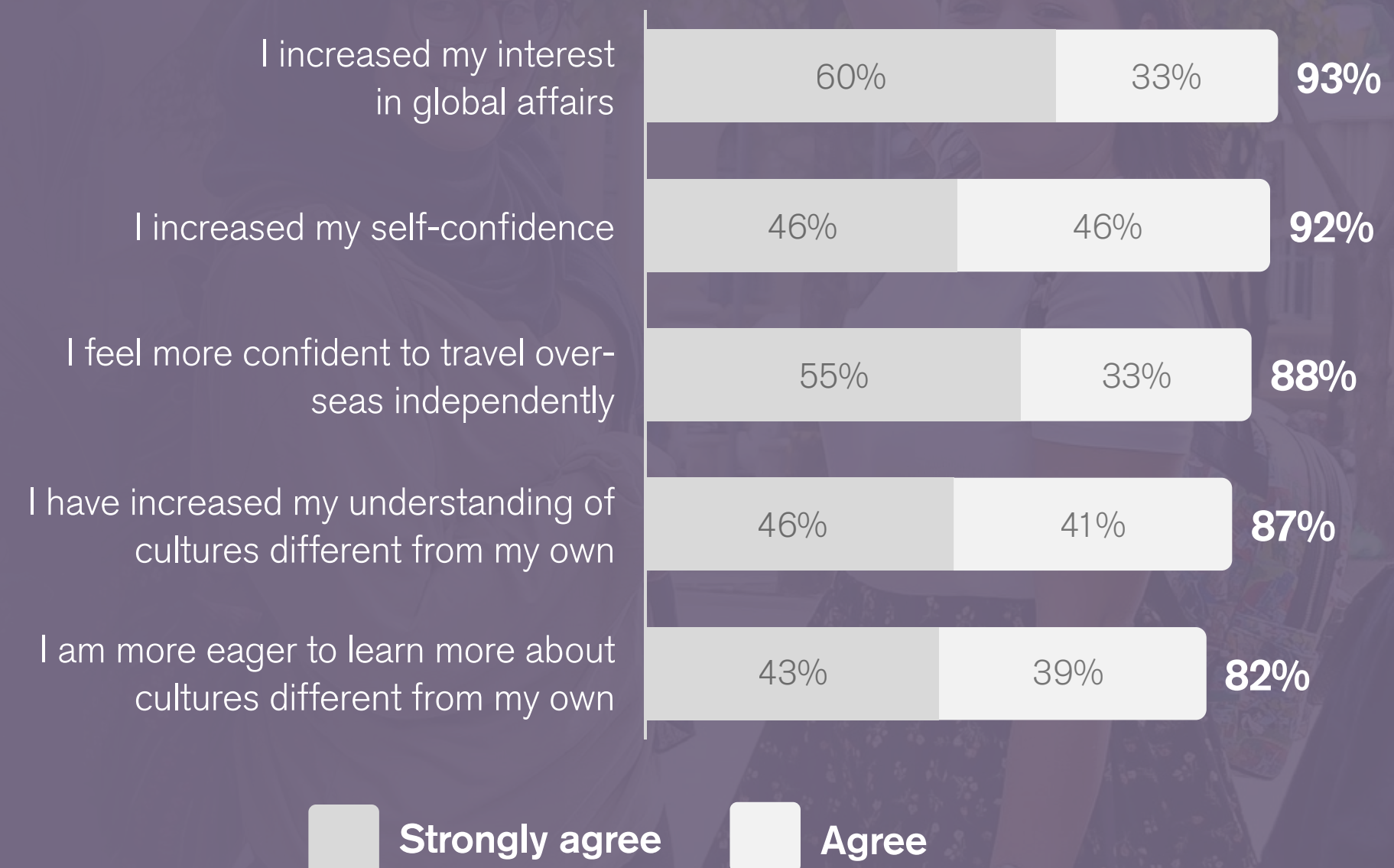
Motivations and barriers

Respondents were asked to reflect on the motivators and barriers to participation in short-term mobility programmes, and the following reasons were ranked highest (choosing strongly agree or agree), in the order below. It is worth noting that some DMU students felt that programmes can be too short, and it is therefore imperative that DMU also offers medium and long-term mobility options, to complement its short-term mobility offer.

	Motivators	Barriers
1	To experience something new overseas	Duration of mobility programme is too short
2	To improve my intercultural awareness	Fear of the unknown
3	To enhance academic skills, to enrich studies	The total cost of a mobility period is too high
4	To improve my confidence	Fear of being lonely or isolated while I am abroad
5	To meet people and build up a personal and professional network	Loss of income/loss of student job while abroad

Personal development

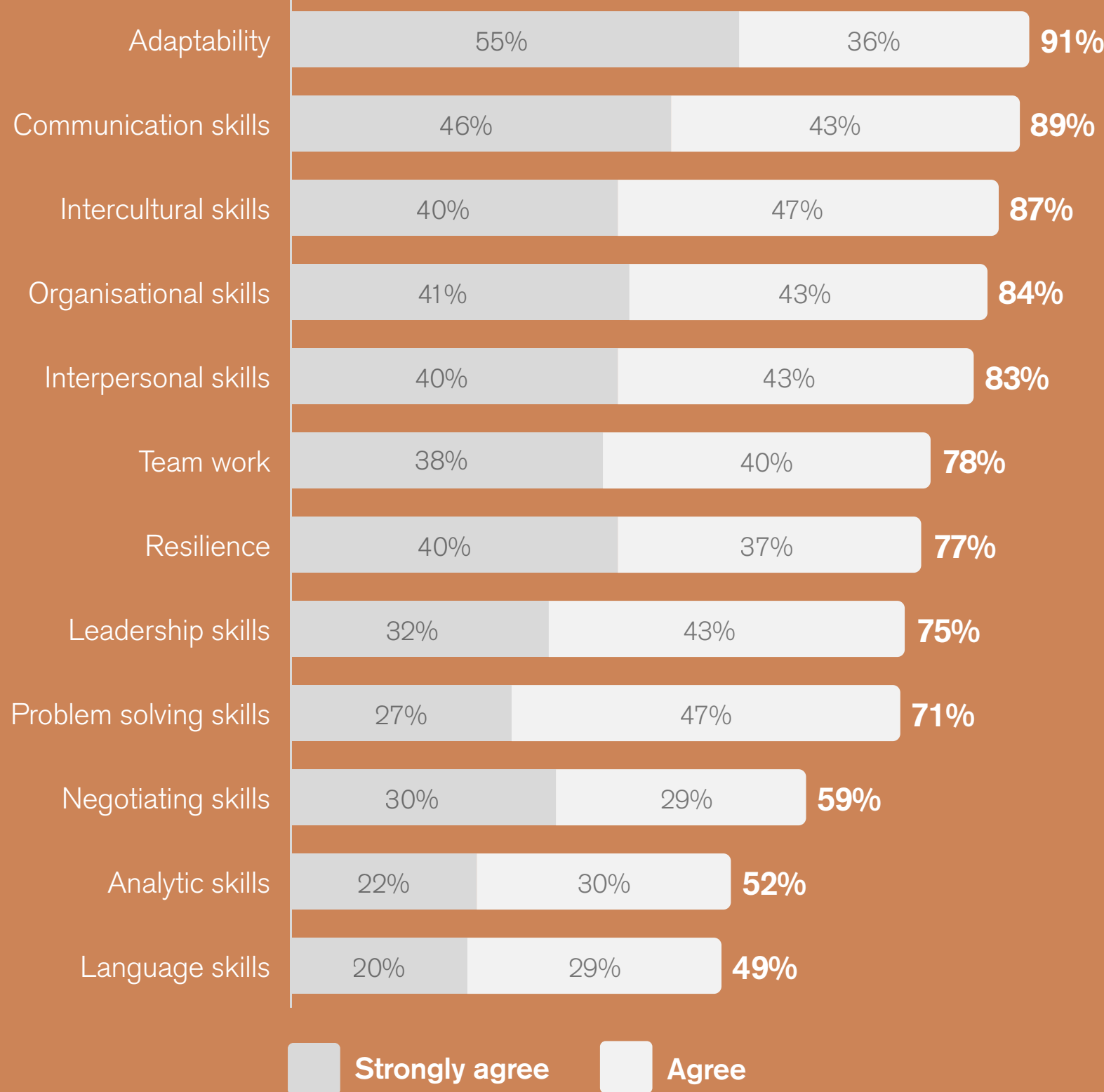
Evaluating the impact of their time abroad on their personal development, respondents felt strongly that the short-term mobility had impacted them in a number of ways.



SURVEY FINDINGS

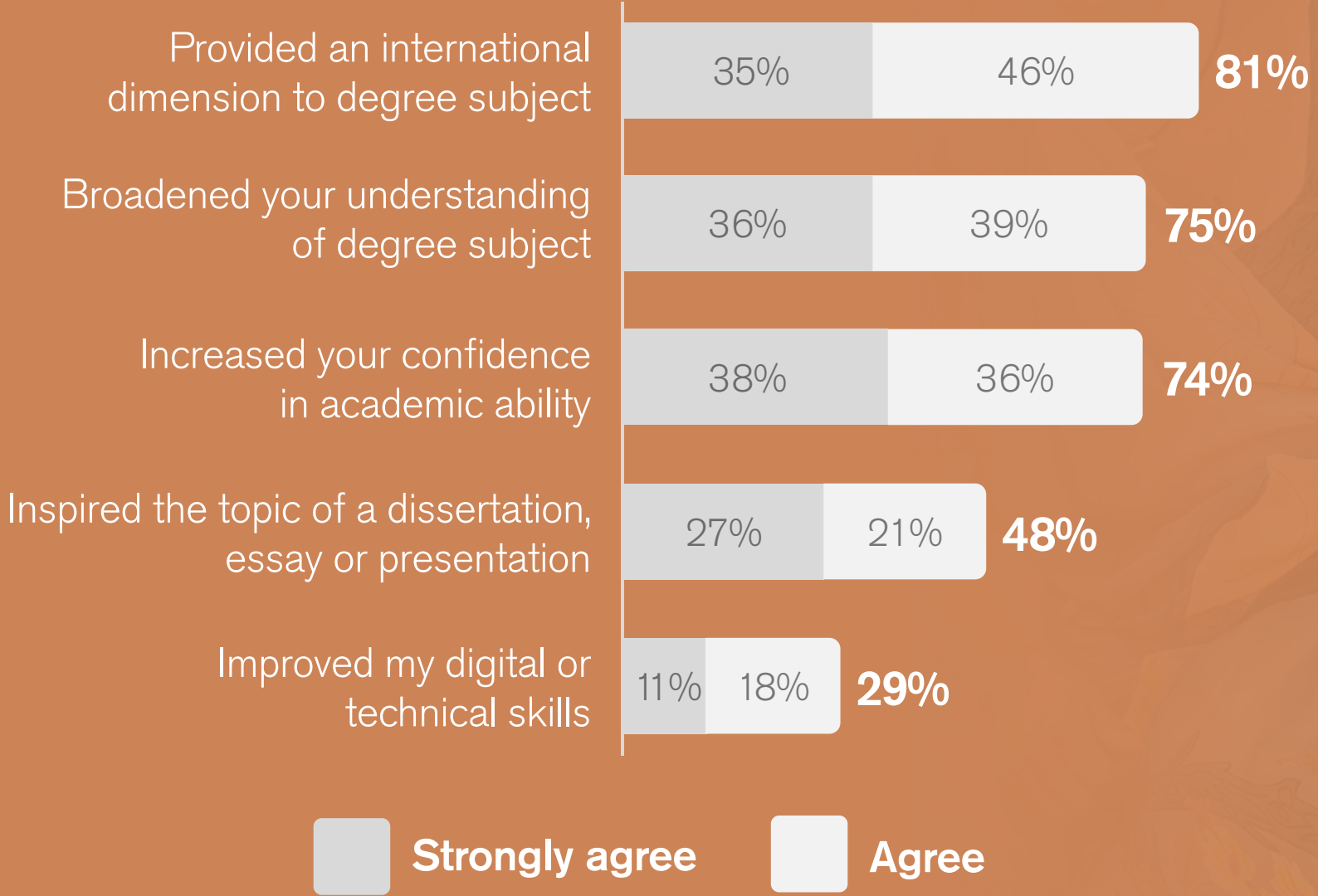
Skill development

Respondents were asked to review 12 different key skills and to reflect on whether they felt these skills had improved following their short-term mobility experience. Across the skillset there was general agreement that the programme had helped respondents develop these skills.



Academic development

Overall, respondents reported that their short-term mobility had a positive impact on their academic experience.



46%
felt that their **academic performance improved** following their short-term mobility experience

SURVEY FINDINGS

Post mobility experience

Respondents were asked about the ways in which their short-term mobility with DMU Global had impacted their future life choices.

Overwhelmingly, respondents were inspired to travel more (96%), with over 70% of students saying they were now more likely to engage with international students and international opportunities on campus. Furthermore, 72% of students stated that they had participated in other international activities or were planning to do so in the future following their short-term mobility experience at DMU.

73%

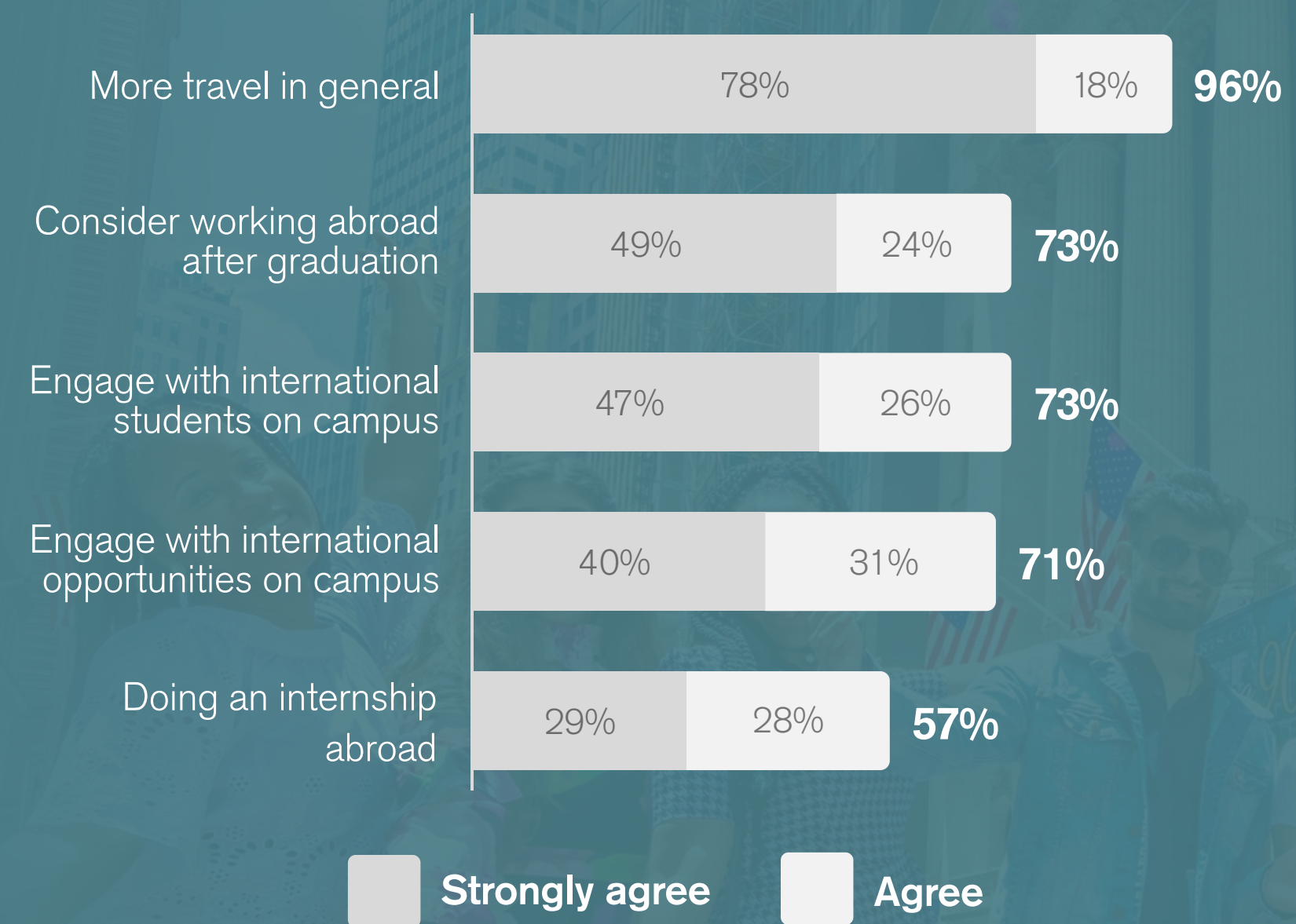
of students said they **more likely to consider working abroad** after graduation due to their mobility experience

Graduate outcomes

Out of the 136 mobile respondents, 40% (54) had graduated from DMU at the time of answering the survey. 24% of whom had worked, studied or volunteered abroad after completion of their degree.

Whilst the sample size is relatively small, 31% of respondents stated that they felt that the mobility experience helped them get their current job. A further 44% of respondents who had graduated felt that the experience has been beneficial to their career.

Future plans



FOCUS GROUPS

In January 2021, UUKi held focus groups with 14 DMU students from across a range of academic disciplines who had participated in a DMU Global short-term mobility experience. The workshops covered motivators, barriers, and the impact of these international experiences.

Motivations

“I think I needed that experience; I think it changed me as a person and I went there hoping that would be the case.”

All the students were excited by the opportunity to travel, to meet new people, see new places and learn new things. They were particularly keen to experience a new “totally different” perspective from that of the UK. Cross-cultural learning and engagement with locals were motivating factors.

“The work and professional learning experience is something you can’t get if you travel by yourself.”

In addition, students were excited to experience things they “wouldn’t experience if they went alone”. The students agreed that travelling with the university is a different experience to travelling as an individual. The trip

being delivered by the university meant that students were able to experience the local culture and meet partner university students, visit companies and work with local organisations, which made the trip more impactful.

“We’re at uni and we’re getting a degree to move on to getting a full-time job and trips can enhance that.”

For some students the motivations related to their course and what they thought would be “helpful” for their degree, for example one student was keen to experience “how different countries media styles are run”. Other students were keen to participate as the programme was embedded in their degree programme, and it helped to justify the trip. Students were also “thinking more about (their) career in the future” and how a mobility period might support those future ambitions.

Students reported that the locations felt more accessible as they were going through a university programme, particularly locations that were far away from the UK or had a strikingly different culture to western Europe.



FOCUS GROUPS

Mobility experience

DMU students attending the focus groups mainly participated in study, work or volunteer experiences. These were attractive to students as they felt they received both the formal learning of the programmes, and the informal learning of cultural and language immersion.

“It’s a good opportunity to meet new people and try new things without feeling too scared.”

Students enjoyed going abroad as part of a group with accompanying staff, as this allowed a mix of travelling with friends on the course and meeting new people on similar courses who they did not know prior to the programme. This provided not only a sense of shared experience, but also some security when compared to travelling abroad alone, with one student noting: “it’s good because you are technically going with strangers, but you feel more safe and secure because your lecturers are there”.

The students liked the short trips as

they could visit and experience more cultures which would be more limiting with one long-term programme. They were able to participate in more than one trip and to access more locations. Students enjoyed crossing nations off their “bucket list” and experiencing “different snippets of the world”.

The students felt the programmes were still immersive and enriching, with one student noting that: “it’s only 5 days but you get a lot out of it”.

“Fitting it around my life as I work as well as being at uni... it made it more accessible.”

Students were excited about “still getting the experience but not having to take a complete year (out)” and ending up “behind everybody else”. Students were concerned about longer trips requiring them to extend their study period and about “leaving it later and later to get into a career and start a job”. The timing of the programme was also positive as “it was during enhancement week so it didn’t interrupt any lectures”.

Students’ personal circumstances also meant that the shorter duration programmes were attractive. One student was married and was unable to leave her husband for a whole year. Another commented that “the idea of being away from my family and my partner for a year was too much”. One student noted that their mental health means that they “don’t like being in areas unknown to them” so a shorter duration is more manageable.

Students noted that the short duration also made the programme feel like less of a risk and encouraged them to participate as they didn’t have to make a long-term commitment to an unknown programme.



FOCUS GROUPS

Student support

The students were very happy with the support measures provided by DMU Global including the funding, the pre-departure sessions, as well as the staff support at home and abroad.

“The only reasons I was able to go was because of the bursary.”

The funding provided for these trips was important to the students as “it’s hard to be able to fund these sort of things”. There was a consensus among the group that the funding provided made the programme more accessible to them, with many saying they would not have been able to afford to go abroad without the funding.

“The pre-departure session I attended was really good it covered a lot of things.”

The students all found the pre-departure sessions “very helpful” and “the ease of the whole process”, which took away students concerns around risk. Students appreciated these sessions as an opportunity to get to know the other students who would be travelling abroad as well as the staff who would be attending the programme. They especially

liked the group chats which helped connect the cohort. Students who suffered with anxiety found the support especially helpful. The support provided by the team for visa applications was really appreciated by students, especially for the US trips as the process is complicated and confusing.

“They made it really easy and accessible to everyone.”

Several students were granted an extension on essays by their academic departments which again was appreciated by students as it meant they could fully engage with the programme rather than take time out to work on assignments.

A student who has autism and mental health issues reported that the support provided by DMU was a factor in their choice to go abroad, and that the university ensured they had a mentor, access to a fridge and a single room.



FOCUS GROUPS

Impact

Students reported that their mobility positively impact their academic attainment. One student noted that “experiencing how people learn in a different culture has enhanced (their) academic study”.

“I do think it enhanced it [academic learning] as I had a richer experience to draw on when I was writing my assignments”.

Some students reported direct impact on their study, where it fed into formal assignments once back in the UK. Students reported that the peer-to-peer learning with other students enhanced their academic attainment. There was consensus across the groups that the experience brings a different perspective to their discipline, adding a different cultural perspective that enriches studies. Furthermore, students reported the development of transferable skills, they learned to rely more on others, enhanced team building and communication skills which contributed to their academic experience.

All the students felt very positive that going abroad for these programmes would positively

impact their employment prospects. Students discussed how they were able to build their list of contacts and further extend their networks. Students noted that the opportunity would look good on their CV, show the skills they developed and provide “something extra to talk about in interviews”. It also enhances their appeal as a good candidate, demonstrating that they make the most of opportunities available.

Students reported a number of key skills they developed, including communication and language skills and independence. One student noted that “you learn many transferable skills such as teamwork, communication and even timekeeping and organisational skills” while abroad. Another student described how they were able to “liaise with brands and businesses” during their programme which was a skill they could bring to their career.

“It has increased my independence and confidence in meeting new people in a new place. I was a bit worried about new situations but being able to do it in a different country has helped!”

Most students reported an increase in confidence following their mobility experience.

One student described how they “feel more confident now than (they were) before, (they) feel more up to it”. Another said that since their return they are “saying yes to new opportunities” more. The students on return from the programme were more engaged with student life on campus and involved with other programmes delivered by the university.

“It has helped me to grow as a person: I learned a lot about [myself] and how I react in situations that are difficult.”

The students found the experiences incredibly impactful in terms of increasing their interest in experiencing other cultures and learning more about the world. One student described how an international experience “challenges some of your ideas [about] being confronted with different cultures and ways of life”. Another student noted that “learning new cultures broadens the mind and allows you to be more open-minded and can truly change aspects of your life”.

One student commented that “it enabled me to do something for myself without my mental health limiting me”. Another student described it as an “amazing opportunity: all students should do it”.



APPENDICES: APPENDIX 1 SURVEY DATA TABLES

Mobility experience

Table 1 Previous travel: Prior to starting your undergraduate degree, had you previously travelled abroad? Please select all that apply

Response	Count	%
Yes, on holiday or for visits with family or friends	151	88%
Yes, to study	17	10%
Yes, to work	7	4%
Yes, to volunteer	13	8%
Yes, other	9	5%
I lived abroad	22	13%
No	14	8%
Total	172	

Table 2 Year of Study: DMU undergraduates participated in the following years of study:

Response	Count	%
Foundation Year (including summer at end of year)	3	2%
First Year (including summer)	67	49%
Second Year (including summer)	48	35%
Third Year (including summer)	18	13%
Total	136	

Table 3 Mobility date: In what academic year did you go abroad for this short-term mobility programme? If you participated in more than one short-term mobility experience, please answer relating to your first programme.

Response	Count	%
Before September 2014	2	1%
September 2014 – August 2015	1	1%
September 2015 – August 2016	6	4%
September 2016 – August 2017	12	9%
September 2017 – August 2018	12	9%
September 2018 – August 2019	59	43%
September 2019 – August 2020	44	32%
Total	136	

Table 4 Type of mobility: What was the format of this short-term mobility experience? Please select all that apply.

Response	Count	%
Study or research experience	86	63%
Work or professional learning experience	31	23%
Volunteer experience	20	15%
Cultural or language experience	51	38%
Sport experience	2	1%
Course elective	22	16%
Total	136	

Table 5 Mobility duration: What was the approximate duration of the short-term mobility programme? Please include travel days in your calculation.

Duration	Students	%
1 day	0	0%
2 days	0	0%
3 days	0	0%
4 days	14	10%
5 days	35	26%
6 days	20	15%
7 days	37	27%
8 days	4	3%
9 days	1	1%
10 days	7	5%
11 days	1	1%
12 days	1	1%
13 days	2	1%
14 days	12	9%
15 days	1	1%
31 days	1	1%
Total	136	

Mobility Funding

Table 6 Mobility funding: How was your short-term mobility programme funded? Please consider “total cost” to include accommodation, travel, administration (including insurance, visa, vaccinations, programme costs etc) food and pocket money.

Response	Count	%
Private or personal funds, no cost was covered by a scholarship or grant funding	11	8%
Less than 25% of the total cost was covered by a scholarship or grant funding	20	15%
Between 25% and 49% of the total cost was covered by a scholarship or grant funding	63	46%
Between 50% and 74% of the total cost was covered by a scholarship or grant funding	30	22%
Between 75% and 99% of the total cost was covered by a scholarship or grant funding	11	8%
100% of the total cost was covered by a scholarship or grant funding	1	1%
Total	136	

Table 7 Participation without funding: If you did receive funding to support your time abroad, would you have undertaken the short-term mobility programme without the grant?

Response	Count	%
Yes	45	33%
Maybe	44	32%
No	39	29%
I did not receive funding	8	6%
Total	136	

APPENDICES: APPENDIX 1 SURVEY DATA TABLES

Motivations and barriers

Table 8 Motivators and barriers:

To what extent do you agree that the following motivations were important when making your decision to go abroad?

To what extent do you agree that you experienced the below barriers?

Response	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Motivators					
To improve foreign language skills	15%	17%	38%	18%	13%
To improve employment prospects	32%	38%	20%	8%	2%
To enhance academic skills, to enrich studies	48%	40%	10%	1%	1%
To meet people and build up a personal and professional network	46%	32%	16%	5%	1%
To improve my intercultural awareness	58%	37%	5%	0%	0%
To improve my confidence	50%	33%	13%	3%	1%
To experience something new overseas	79%	20%	1%	0%	0%
Encouragement from my tutor/professor	22%	26%	39%	7%	6%
I wanted to support a community or cause via volunteering abroad	19%	15%	37%	15%	14%
My friends/Other students were planning to go abroad	15%	24%	27%	17%	17%
Barriers					
The total cost of a mobility period is too high	3%	17%	28%	41%	8%
Academic entry requirement is too high	1%	4%	16%	49%	16%
Language requirement is too high	1%	2%	16%	46%	16%
Loss of income/loss of student job while abroad	3%	12%	14%	35%	16%
Family or other community ties	2%	10%	21%	34%	25%
Interruption to social ties, friendships or relationships	1%	6%	15%	43%	29%
Absence of family support or permission to go abroad	1%	4%	13%	37%	37%
Duration of the mobility programme is too long	1%	1%	10%	38%	44%
Duration of mobility programme is too short	10%	20%	28%	28%	11%
Fear of being lonely or isolated while I am abroad	2%	18%	14%	35%	26%
Fear of the unknown	1%	25%	16%	28%	24%
There is not enough information about opportunities to go abroad at my institution	3%	10%	13%	34%	38%
There is lack of practical support from my institution to help me to go abroad	3%	3%	13%	38%	38%
Total	136				

Impact of mobility

Table 9 Academic achievement: In terms of your academic achievement, on average, did your academic grade:

Response	Count	%
Increase following mobility period	54	40%
Decrease following mobility period	0	0%
Stay the same following mobility period	63	46%
Don't know	19	14%
Total	136	

Table 10 Academic development: To what extent do you agree that your mobility experience resulted in the following?

Response	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Broadened your understanding of degree subject	36%	39%	20%	4%	1%
Improved my digital or technical skills	11%	18%	38%	21%	6%
Provided an international dimension to degree subject	35%	46%	13%	3%	1%
Increased your confidence in academic ability	38%	36%	21%	4%	1%
Inspired the topic of a dissertation, essay or presentation	27%	21%	24%	16%	5%
Total	136				

Table 11 Personal development: Please rate the following statements with regards to how much you agree or disagree with the statement following your short-term mobility programme.

Response	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I changed my personal values	24%	24%	32%	18%	2%
I re-evaluated my view of the UK	29%	33%	24%	12%	1%
I increased my interest in global affairs	43%	39%	13%	4%	0%
I increased my self-confidence	46%	41%	10%	3%	1%
I developed new social and professional networks	38%	34%	19%	9%	1%
I feel more confident to travel overseas independently	55%	33%	10%	1%	0%
I am more eager to learn more about cultures different from my own	60%	33%	6%	0%	0%
I feel more responsible for the society I live in	34%	33%	24%	6%	1%
I feel more engaged in my university community	32%	40%	22%	2%	3%
I have increased my understanding of cultures different from my own	46%	46%	7%	1%	0%
Total	136				

APPENDICES: APPENDIX 1 SURVEY DATA TABLES

Impact of mobility

Table 12 Skill development: For the below skills, please rate to what extent you agree that your skills improved following your short-term mobility programme.

Response	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Problem solving skills	27%	47%	21%	2%	1%
Communication skills	46%	43%	9%	1%	0%
Leadership skills	32%	43%	21%	4%	0%
Language skills	20%	29%	30%	11%	2%
Team work	38%	40%	17%	4%	0%
Resilience	40%	37%	20%	2%	0%
Adaptability	55%	36%	8%	1%	0%
Interpersonal skills	40%	43%	15%	1%	0%
Negotiating skills	30%	29%	24%	9%	1%
Analytic skills	22%	30%	37%	5%	2%
Organisational skills	41%	43%	13%	1%	0%
Intercultural skills	40%	47%	12%	1%	0%
Total	136				

Post mobility

Table 13 Future plans: Has your mobility experience made you more or less likely to participate in the following opportunities?

Response	Highly likely	Likely	Neutral	Unlikely	Highly unlikely
Studying for a Masters or PhD in my home country	19%	23%	35%	18%	6%
Studying for a Masters or PhD abroad	18%	25%	32%	16%	9%
Doing an internship in my home country	19%	33%	29%	14%	5%
Doing an internship abroad	29%	28%	29%	10%	5%
More travel in general	78%	18%	4%	0%	1%
Engage with international students on campus	47%	26%	24%	2%	1%
Engage with international opportunities on campus	40%	31%	24%	4%	1%
Consider working / applying to work in another country after graduation	49%	24%	18%	7%	2%
Total	136				

Table 14 Employment after graduation: If you are working, do you feel that your mobility experience helped you get your current job?

Response	Count	%
Yes	17	31%
No	19	35%
Graduated but not working	18	33%
Total	54	

Global Mobility Office

De Montfort University
The Gateway
Leicester
LE1 9BH
UK

T: +44 (0) 116 257 7613

E: dmuglobal@dmu.ac.uk

W: dmuglobal.com

Twitter: [@DMUglobal](https://twitter.com/DMUglobal)

