



FraudSCAN

False Records, Altered University Diploma
Samples Collection and Alert for NARICs

Knowledge and awareness of fraud in education: a student perspective



**Evidence-based analysis
in the context of the FraudS+ project**

This document was developed in the framework of the “FraudS+ project - False Records, Altered Diploma and Diploma Mills Qualifications Collection”, co-financed in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union. The project aims to encourage the automatic recognition of higher education and of upper secondary education qualifications by promoting a culture of ethics and transparency and developing further existing databases also involving students and student unions in the process of building useful tools to tackle the phenomenon of fraud in education.

Project partners

CIMEA, Italy - Project Coordinator

France Éducation International, France

Ständige Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Germany

Quality and Qualifications Ireland, Ireland

Nuffic, Netherlands

Swedish Council for Higher Education, Sweden

In collaboration with

European Students' Union

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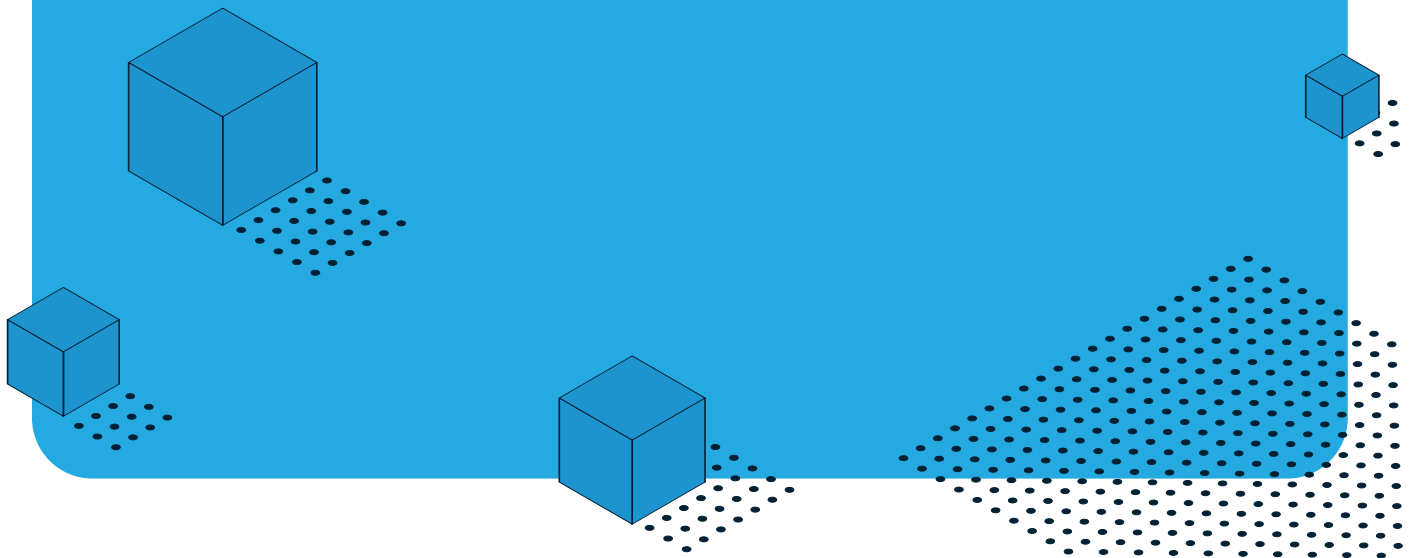


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PART 1

The context of the study: the FraudS+ Project



This exploratory analysis was carried out in the framework of the EU co-funded project FraudS+ "False Records, Altered Diploma and Diploma Mills Qualifications Collection" and **aims to gain a better understanding of students' perception of the phenomenon of fraud in education**. This would constitute the empirical foundation **for the creation of instruments directed towards the promotion of a culture of ethics and transparency in the greater academic community**. Furthermore, by sharing information on the topic, the analysis has **the objective of raising awareness on the phenomenon**.

The FraudS+ project involves the ENIC-NARIC centres of six European countries, namely, Italy (coordinator), France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden, as well as the European Students' Union (ESU). ENIC-NARIC centres have been working on the issue of fraud in education for many years, collecting data and exchanging information, and they have been involved in several projects co-funded by the European Union aimed at developing strategies and tools for higher education institutions and credential evaluators, as well as detecting fraudulent qualifications or qualifications issued by diploma mills¹. With the project FraudS+, the ENIC-NARIC partners together with the European Students' Union (ESU) are engaged in including students in the process. As a matter of fact, students are the first target of fraud in education, often *misled to invest their time and money in fraudulent and useless qualifications*².

In this light, the project proposed a questionnaire to students in their last year of upper secondary education, national and international university students, as well as student unions belonging to ESU in partner countries, in order to gauge their overall awareness on the matter, potentially enhance knowledge and provide more insight into the phenomenon of fraud in education. Therefore, taking into account the primary aspirations and objectives of the project, this exploratory analysis of the responses obtained from the survey would serve as an evidence-based starting point in laying the foundations for the creation of instruments aimed towards the promotion of the values which lie at the core of the FraudS+ project.

Tackling the issue of fraud in education not only means finding tools to detect and further prevent the spreading of fraudulent qualifications in higher education, but also promoting a culture of ethics and integrity. In this sense, together with higher education institutions, national authorities, relevant stakeholders in the field of higher education and students, ENIC-NARICs are also a part of the broader **community of higher education**, committed to sharing their experience in promoting international academic mobility in all its aspects and therefore supporting policies in cooperation with all the actors involved.

¹ Among others, the EU co-funded projects FRAUDOC - Guidelines on Diploma Mills and Document Fraud for Credential Evaluators (2016-2018) and FraudSCAN - False Records, Altered University Diploma Samples Collection and Alert for NARICs (2018-2020). More information on [CIMEA](#) website.

² FRAUDOC, *Handbook on document fraud for credential evaluators*, 2018. (This publication is the result of the FRAUDOC - Guidelines on Diploma Mills and Document Fraud for Credential Evaluators Project, co-financed in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union.)

PART 2

Data collection and objective of the analysis



The FraudS+ project partners and ESU developed an online survey in the following languages: English, French and Italian comprised of 17 questions. The survey was open to respondents from June to September 2021 and received a total of 2147 answers.

The survey is divided into four sections and attempts to explore the phenomenon of fraud in education mainly through a series of closed-ended questions, which measure and raise awareness on the topic. Against this background, each section of the survey is developed in such a way as to analyse and highlight one dimension of the phenomenon, or respondent perception and experience with it, in order to have a more in-depth analysis.

In this light, the first section focuses on measuring knowledge of the phenomenon and the various types of fraud which exist in the academic context.

The second section analyses respondents' direct experience with the phenomenon of fraud through questions which attempt to obtain data relative to the following issues: types of fraud experienced by students; the sources from which they have acquired information regarding fraudulent activities; to the best of their knowledge, how frequently episodes of fraud occur within their institution; to the best of their knowledge, which are the bodies designated to contrast fraud within their academic community and the consequent sanctions applicable in case of such an occurrence.

The third section explores student awareness relative to existing initiatives, within their academic community, aimed at information provision on the phenomenon of fraud. The primary focus points of the questions contained within this section are as follows: types of initiatives, target audience of these initiatives, and student participation in the aforementioned.

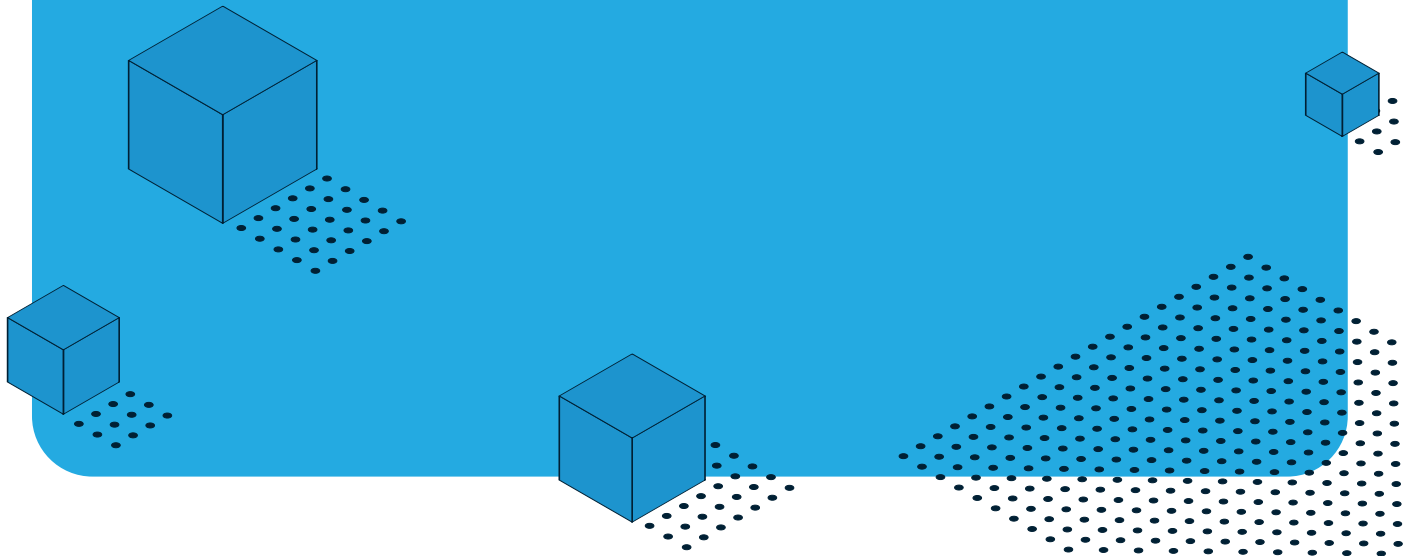
The fourth and last section of the survey highlights potential actions which can be taken with the intent to tackle fraud in education. Furthermore, this section contains questions which ask students to identify actors who, according to them, can play a prominent role in the fight against this phenomenon.

This exploratory analysis has been enriched with the input provided by relevant stakeholders operating in the field of education. This input was collected during the project meetings with the ENIC-NARIC partners of the project and one targeted focus group, where participants representing key stakeholder institutions in the field offered their readings of the key findings arising from the survey³.

³ The focus group was conducted on 22 March 2022. Participant institutions: the Council of Europe (CoE), the European Commission (EC), the ENIC Bureau, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), the European Students' Union (ESU), the European University Association (EUA) and the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee Bureau.

PART 3

Outcomes of the survey



This chapter aims to present the main findings arising from the survey. Each section of the survey is elaborated providing an interpretation of the figures obtained. The main outcomes are illustrated through graphs in order to facilitate reading and visualisation of the data.

3.1 - Knowledge and awareness of the phenomenon

The first section of the questionnaire is comprised of 4 questions. The first two questions measure student knowledge of fraud in education and its types, followed by a list of definitions explaining the terms used to describe them. Subsequently, student familiarity with the phenomenon and its manifestations after reading the definitions is verified. This serves two main purposes: on the one hand, to better understand the extent to which students perceive the phenomenon even without knowing its definitions and classifications; on the other hand, the questions themselves aim at raising awareness on fraud in education among students by providing them with information about it.

3.1.1 Familiarity with fraud in education

Students who think they do not know what fraud in education is and those who have little knowledge of it account for 52% of respondents⁴.

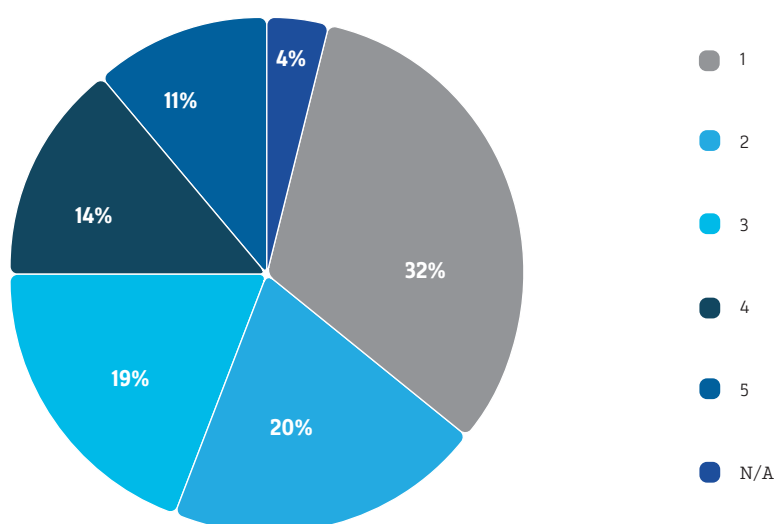
This percentage increases up to 71% if we add 19% who report being a little or somewhat aware of the phenomenon. Only 11% of respondents declared being familiar with the phenomenon and 14% of them reported being quite familiar with it. Almost 3 times more students think they do not know what fraud in education is (1) compared to those who think they do know what fraud in education is (5).

FIGURE 1: KNOWLEDGE OF FRAUD IN EDUCATION

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

1=No knowledge at all

5=Familiar with it

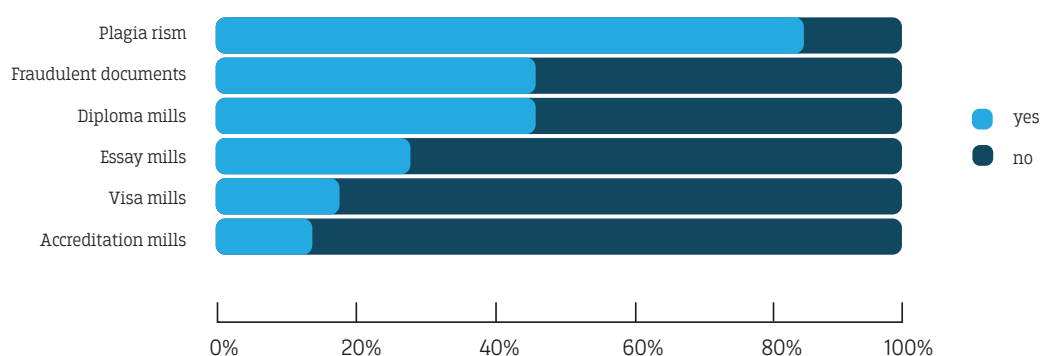


⁴ For this study, the answers from 1 to 5 have been intended as follows: 1 – no knowledge at all; 2 – little knowledge; 3 – a little or somewhat aware of it; 4 – quite aware of it; 5 – familiar with it.

3.1.2 Familiarity with types of fraud

Respondents are most familiar with plagiarism (85%), followed by fraudulent documents (47%) and diploma mills (46,8%). Accreditation mills (12,8%) is the phenomenon students think they are less familiar with, followed by visa mills (17,7%) and essay mills (26,9%).

FIGURE 2: TYPES OF FRAUD STUDENTS ARE MOST FAMILIAR WITH



3.1.3 Knowledge of definitions of different types of fraud

Results gathered after providing students with the definitions of the different types of fraud mentioned in the survey allow us to make further observations.

When asked if they knew the definitions prior to participating in the survey, the percentage of students who have little knowledge of them (1 and 2) account for 55% of the total; whereas when those who declared to be somewhat aware of it (3) are included, they account for 79%. Only 18% of the respondents did know or were quite aware of the different types of fraud before participating in this survey (4 and 5). 3% of the respondents did not answer this question.

These results are in line with the ones of the first questions exploring student familiarity with the phenomenon of fraud.

Also, in this case, more than 3 times the students think they did not know or have little knowledge of the types of fraud before participating in this survey (1 and 2) than students who did know or are quite aware of them (4 and 5).

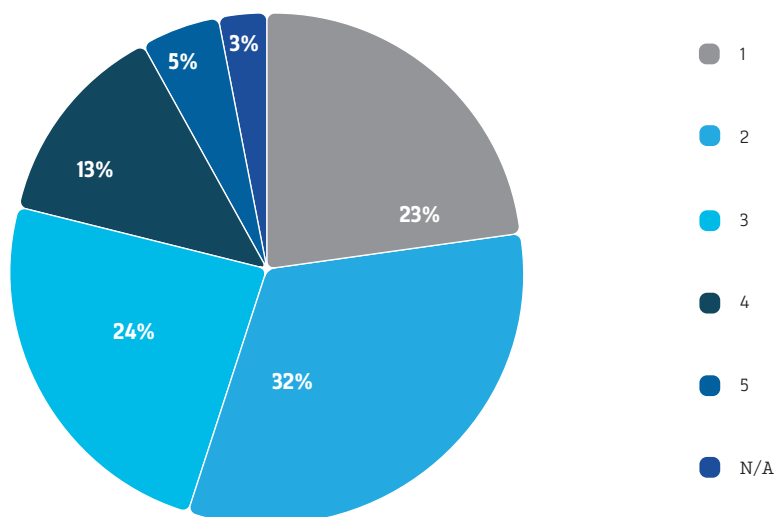
The consistency between the data obtained in these two questions shows that the student perception of their awareness of every single phenomenon matches the level of awareness regarding fraud in education in general, which is absent or very low.

FIGURE 3: KNOWLEDGE OF THE DEFINITIONS OF FRAUD

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

1=No knowledge at all

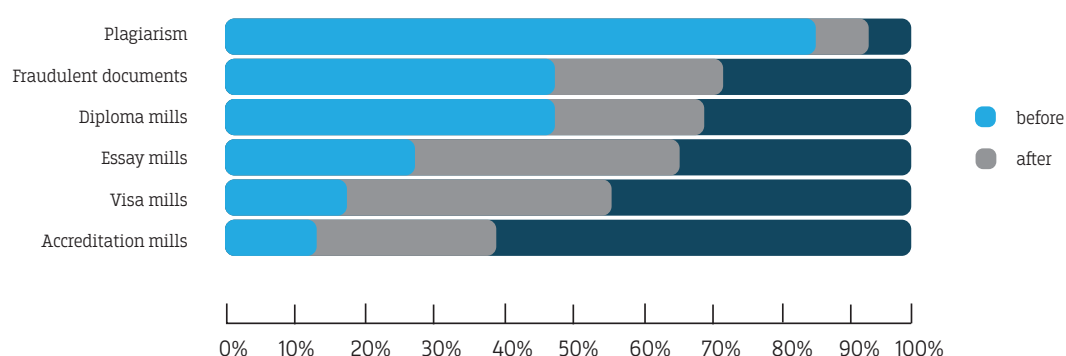
5=Familiar with it



3.1.4 Knowledge of definitions of different types of fraud after reading the definitions

The last question measures the diffusion of awareness regarding the different types of fraud among respondents after having been provided with definitions in the survey.

FIGURE 4: COMPARING THE KNOWLEDGE OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF FRAUD BEFORE AND AFTER READING THE DEFINITIONS



There is a noticeable increase in terms of respondents who have now become aware of such phenomena falling under the category of fraud, while the order of familiarity per phenomenon is the same as in questions. Plagiarism remains the best-known phenomenon (92%) followed by fraudulent documents (71%), diploma mills (69%), essay mills (65%) and visa mills (55%). Accreditation mills (39%) still remain quite unfamiliar to the respondents.

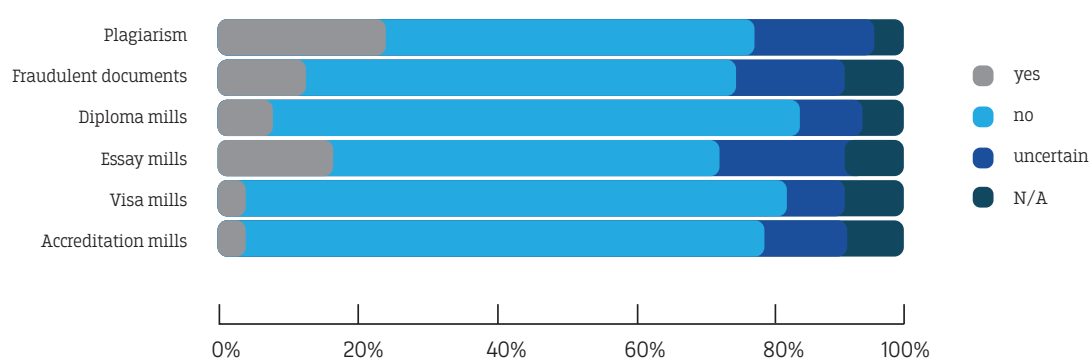
3.2 - Experience with fraud in education

The second section of the survey shifts the focus from knowledge concerning fraud to the experience respondents have had with it in the field of education. On one hand, it aims to shed light on the types of fraud students have encountered previously in their academic community; on the other hand, it aspires to check the level of awareness regarding the competent structures and the procedures enacted to contain the diffusion of fraud.

3.2.1 Firsthand experience with fraud

The first question of this section focuses on firsthand experience with one or more types of fraud in education. The term “firsthand” in this case refers either to encounters experienced by respondents directly or by acquaintances. The findings show that a relatively low number of respondents report having had such encounters with the phenomenon in their academic community.

FIGURE 5: TYPE OF FRAUD ENCOUNTERED BY STUDENTS

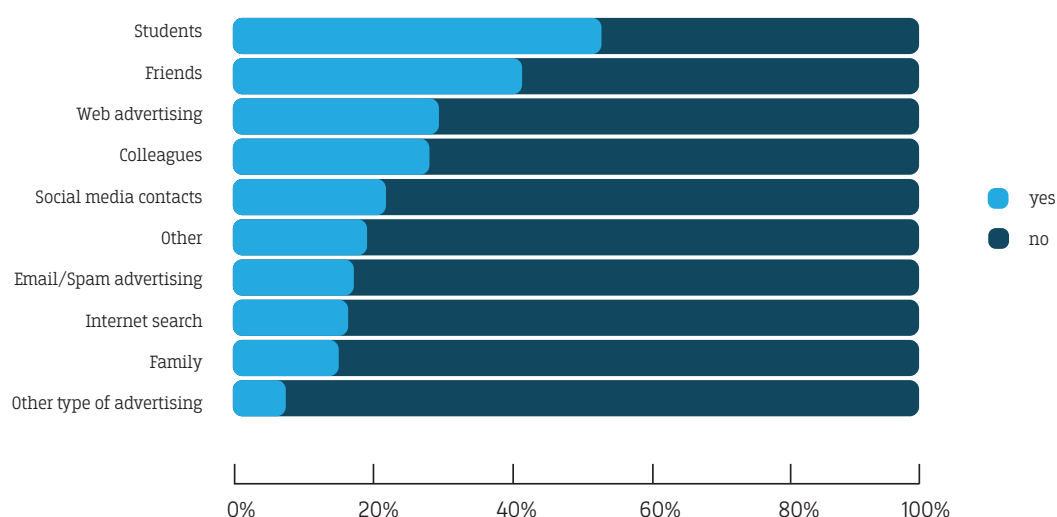


According to the data illustrated, the most frequently encountered type of fraud is plagiarism, which amounts to approximately 22%. This type is followed by essay mills which is the second most common type of fraud at 13% and fraudulent documents at 8%. On the other hand, the least common types of fraud students have come across are visa mills and accreditation mills, both of which amount to approximately 3%, followed by diploma mills which amount to 6%. It is interesting to note that there is a relevant degree of uncertainty among respondents, seeing as a range of 12% to 17% did not know how to answer this question.

3.2.2 Sources of information regarding fraudulent activities

The second question of this section aims to reveal the main sources from which students, who reported having had previous encounters with fraud, had obtained information regarding the phenomenon. As such, this question was directed only towards those who had responded “yes” to the previous question.

FIGURE 6: SOURCES OF INFORMATION REGARDING FRAUDULENT ACTIVITIES

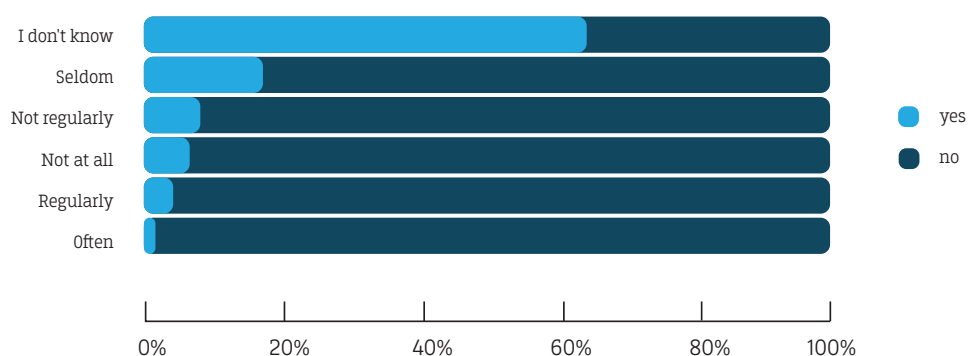


The findings that arise from the data analysis indicate that the main source from which respondents had obtained information regarding fraudulent activities was other students, standing at approximately 53%, followed by friends which amounts to 41%. Following these two sources, there are two main clusters revolving around a similar percentage range which make up the greatest chunk of respondents who answered “yes”; one comprises web advertising 28%, colleagues 26% and social media contacts 23%. The other cluster comprises the option “other” and email/spam advertising both standing at approximately 19%, internet research at 17% and family at 16%. Lastly, the data demonstrates that the least common source is other types of advertising which amounts to just 8%.

3.2.3 Incidence of fraud within the academic community

The graph illustrates the perceived incidence of fraud occurrences within the academic community of respondents.

FIGURE 7: INCIDENCE OF FRAUD WITHIN THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

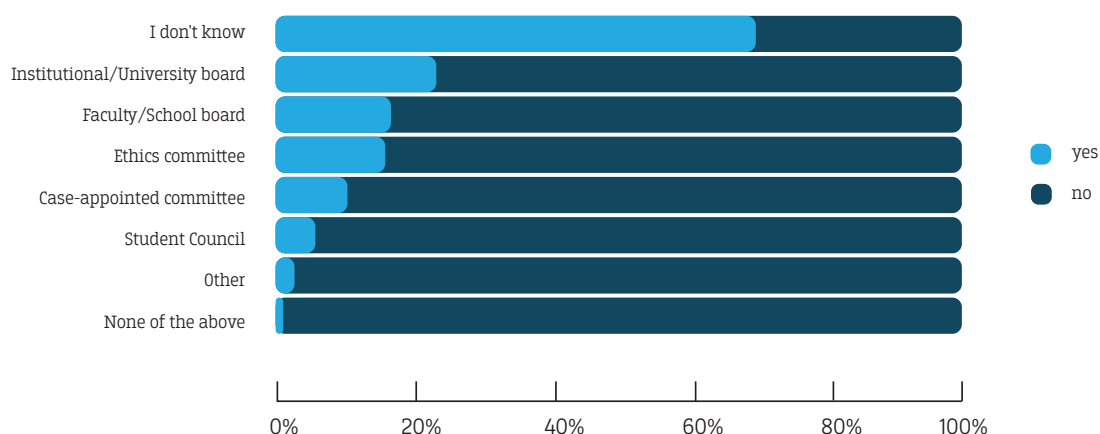


According to the results obtained, it is clear that a noteworthy portion of respondents have no knowledge of the frequency of incidences of fraud within their academic community. Among those who have perceived the phenomenon to a certain degree, only a very small percentage have reported a frequent or regular incidence; 2% and 4% respectively. Others instead have either perceived these occurrences as rare (17%) or occasional (9%). Lastly, the perception of fraud being inexistent within the respective academic communities stands at approximately 7%.

3.2.4 Institutional bodies tackling the phenomenon of fraud

This question aims to gain further insight into whether students are aware of which bodies within their institutions tackle the issue of fraud. The results show that a highly significant percentage of respondents (68%) do not know which bodies within their academic community deal with the phenomenon of fraud. In cases where an organ was selected, it seems that the most commonly referred-to option is an institutional or university board which stands at 22% followed closely by the faculty or school board and ethics committee, which amount to 16% and 15% respectively. By contrast, student council and other unidentified bodies represent a relatively small percentage by comparison, with an even lower proportion being represented by the option “none of the above”, which is, as a matter of fact, last in the ranking.

FIGURE 8: INSTITUTIONAL BODIES TACKLING THE PHENOMENON OF FRAUD

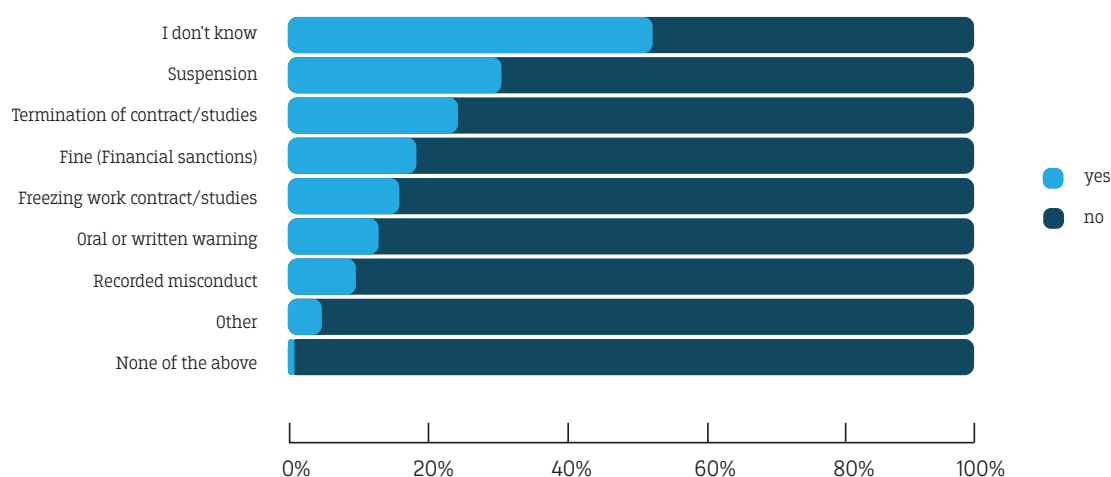


3.2.5 Most common sanctions for fraudulent activities

This question focuses on the knowledge students have regarding the most common sanctions applied by their respective academic institutions when occurrences of fraud are verified.

The findings reveal that a significant number of respondents (51%) do not know what these sanctions are. This is in line with what arose from the previous question where the majority of respondents did not know which institutional bodies deal with the phenomenon of fraud. Nevertheless, in comparison to the number of respondents who had no knowledge of the competent bodies, the percentage of respondents who are not familiar with the sanctions applied is slightly lower.

FIGURE 9: MOST COMMON SANCTIONS FOR FRAUDULENT ACTIVITIES

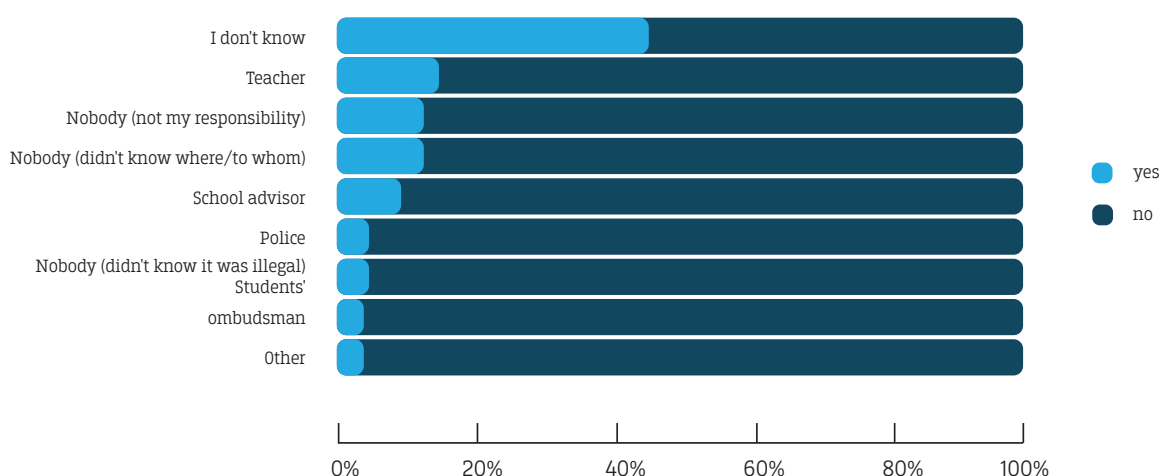


Out of the potential sanctions, suspension prevails as the most commonly applied penalty at approximately 31%, followed by termination of contract or studies and fines or financial sanctions, which stand at 25% and 19% respectively. The least applicable sanctions according to the results obtained appear to be recorded misconduct at approximately 9% and other unidentified sanctions.

3.2.6 Bodies to which students reported occurrences of fraud

This portion of the section aims to identify the bodies to which students, who declared having had previous encounters with fraud, reported occurrences of the phenomenon. It is noteworthy that the responses taken into account for the purposes of this question are the ones deriving from those students who have answered "yes" to previous encounters with fraud.

FIGURE 10: BODIES TO WHICH STUDENTS REPORTED THE OCCURRENCE OF FRAUD

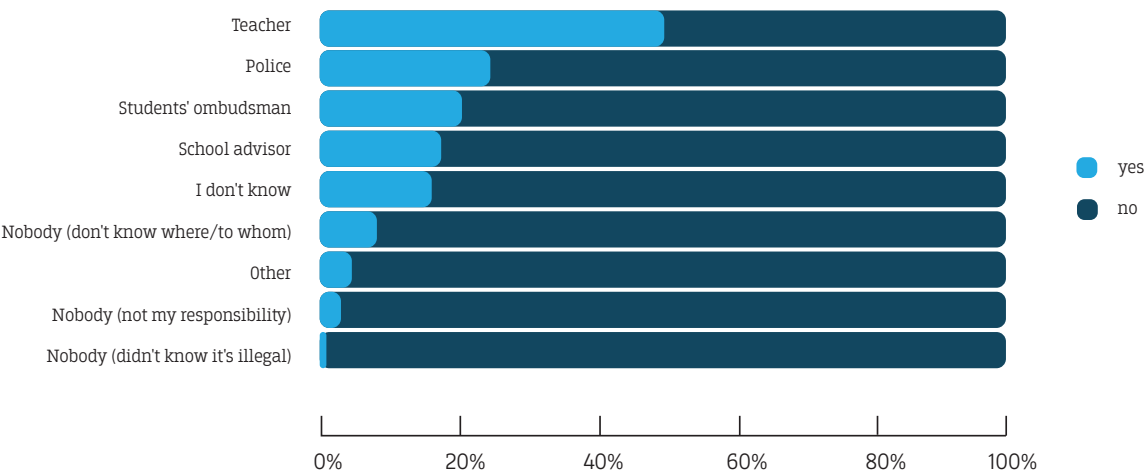


Out of those who have reported the incident, the most common points of reference are the teacher at 16% and the school advisor at 7%. According to the data, students seem to turn to the police, students' ombudsmen, and other potential authorities less commonly by comparison.

3.2.7 Bodies to which students would report occurrences of fraud

This question instead is directed towards those students who have not had previous encounters with fraud. The results reveal that in case of potential encounters, the most common point of reference would be the teacher, amounting to approximately 48%, followed by the police (25%), students' ombudsman (21%), and school advisor (18%). It is very noteworthy that compared to the previous question, significantly fewer respondents (18%) do not how to answer this question or would not report the occurrence to anybody.

FIGURE 11: BODIES TO WHICH STUDENTS WOULD REPORT THE OCCURRENCE OF FRAUD



3.3 - Initiatives to advise students on fraud in education

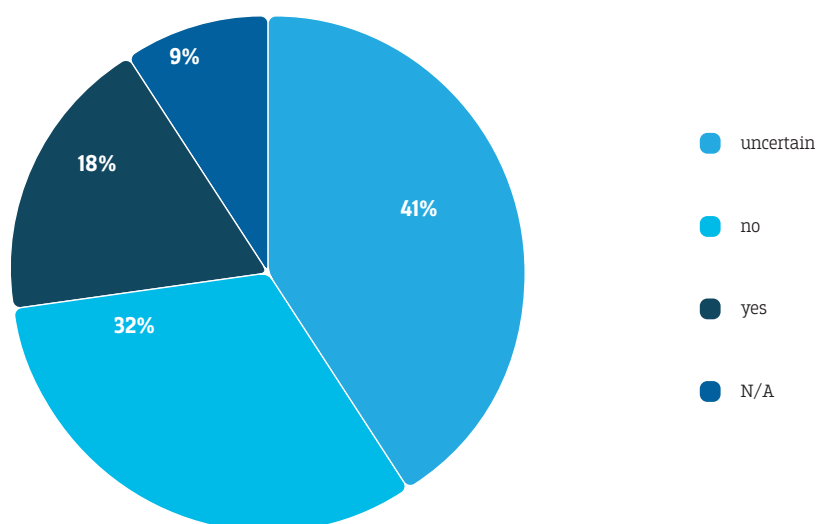
The third section of the questionnaire is focused on student awareness of initiatives in their academic community to advise them on fraud in education.

Attention is also paid to the target group these initiatives are addressed to and the degree of student participation in them.

3.3.1 Initiatives organised by their educational institutions (schools) or student unions

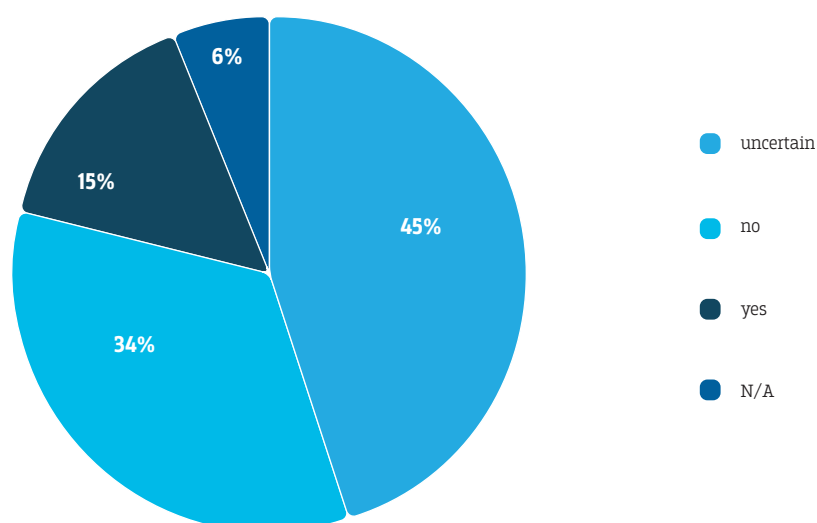
41% of students admit not having information on whether their institution organises initiatives to advise students on fraud in education, 32% report that nothing is organised on the topic and 18% of them are aware of their institution carrying out such kind of activities. 9% of students did not answer this question.

FIGURE 12: STUDENT KNOWLEDGE ABOUT AWARENESS-RAISING INITIATIVES ORGANISED BY THEIR INSTITUTION/SCHOOL



As for the student unions, once again, almost half of the respondents (45%) are uncertain about the answer. 34% of students reported not being aware of activities organised to advise them on fraud in education, whereas only 6% are aware of these kinds of activities carried out by their student union. 15% of respondents did not answer this question.

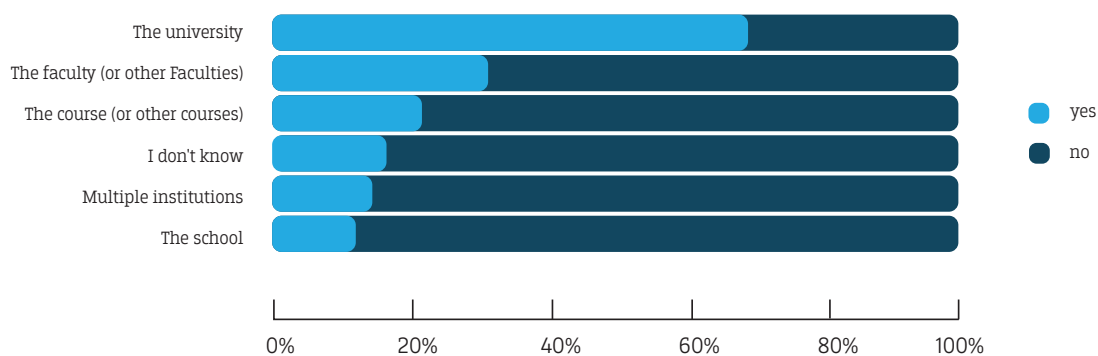
FIGURE 13: STUDENT KNOWLEDGE ABOUT AWARENESS-RAISING INITIATIVES ORGANISED BY STUDENT UNIONS



3.3.2 Target of the initiatives organised by institutions (schools)

This is a follow-up question addressed to the subset of the total sample represented by those who declared being aware of initiatives organised by their institution to advise them on fraud. In most cases, the initiatives to advise students on fraud in education organised by the institution are addressed to the university (69%), followed by the faculty (31%), the course (21%), multiple institutions (15%) and the school (13%). 17% of the respondents do not know the answer.

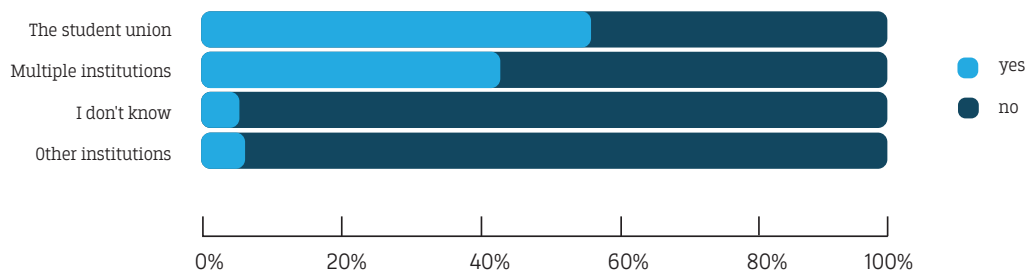
FIGURE 14: STAKEHOLDERS WHICH INSTITUTIONS ADDRESS THEIR INITIATIVES TO



3.3.3 Target of the initiatives organised by student unions

Respondents who answered that their student union carries out initiatives to advise students on fraud in education were asked this follow-up question.

FIGURE 15: STAKEHOLDERS WHICH STUDENT UNIONS ADDRESS THEIR INITIATIVES TO



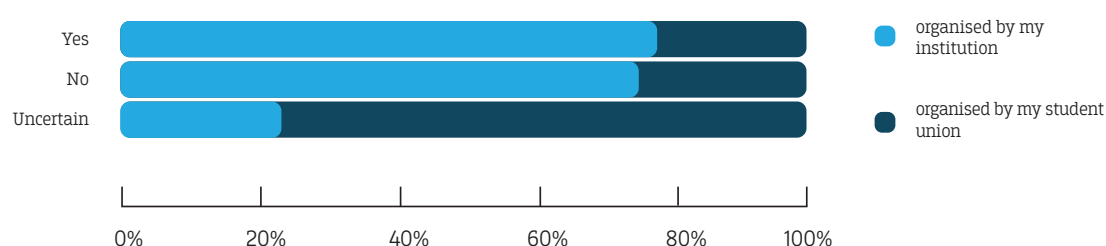
In most cases, the initiatives to advise students on fraud in education as organised by student unions are addressed to the student union (57%), followed by multiple institutions (43%) and other institutions (7%). 7% of the respondents do not know the answer.

3.3.4 Student participation in the awareness activities to advise them on fraud

The fourth question of this section is aimed at measuring the number of students participating in the activities regarding fraud organised by their institution or student union. Also in this case, the subset of the sample is represented by students who declared being aware of the initiatives carried out by their institution or student union, with the aim of measuring their participation in such activities.

The percentage of respondents participating in the activities is not high, it varies between 8% for the institutions and 18% for the student unions.

FIGURE 16: STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN AWARENESS-RAISING INITIATIVES



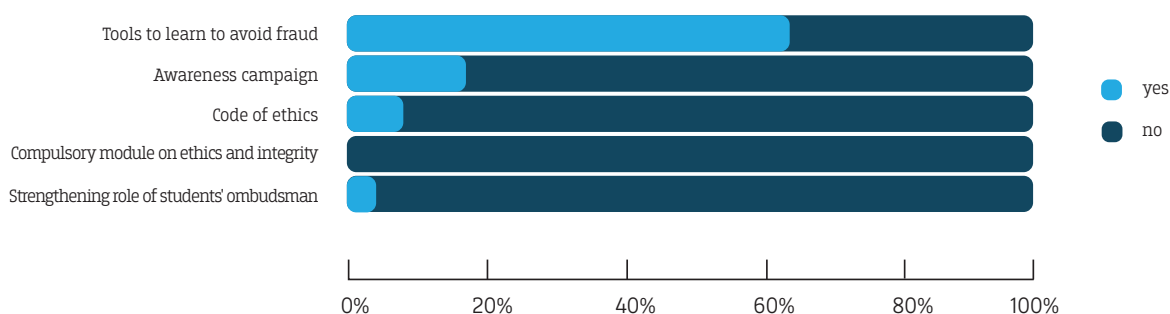
3.4 – Activities to contrast fraud in education

This last section of the survey focuses mainly on initiatives that can be undertaken with the aim of tackling the phenomenon of fraud in education. The first two questions aspire, on one hand, to pinpoint potential initiatives which could be implemented in order to contrast this phenomenon; on the other hand, they aim to identify the main actors that could play a prominent role in the enactment of these initiatives.

3.4.1 Proposals to tackle fraud in education

This question focuses on identifying potential initiatives that according to students could be implemented in order to tackle the phenomenon of fraud in education.

FIGURE 17: PROPOSAL TO TACKLE FRAUD IN EDUCATION



According to the results obtained, most students see the introduction of tools aimed towards teaching them how to identify and avoid resorting to fraudulent activities as being the most effective initiative. As a matter of fact, it amounts to approximately 62%. A close second in the results, standing at about 59%, is the adoption of awareness campaigns aimed at raising awareness regarding the phenomenon. This shows a very positive, proactive approach in the effort to tackle this phenomenon within the academic community. Vice versa the option with the lowest percentage is the proposal to strengthen the role of the students' ombudsman.

This was the only question including space for open-ended answers, to which only 99 students replied. It is interesting that most answers concern two main themes: the prevention of fraud through information provision directed at students and the reforming of the education system of such activities through the punishment of fraud in education. Almost one third of all answers (31,8%) concern informing students about fraud in education. These 27 answers include proposed methods of informing students, including webinars, optional courses, documentaries, films, posters and emails. One answer proposes compulsory courses, while 3 answers argue that compulsory and extra-curricular courses will discourage students from actively participating. Moreover, the answers include specific themes to inform students about: how to reference correctly, research ethics, the importance of learning, methods of reporting fraud in education, and consequences of committing fraud in education. Many of these answers also propose providing "tools" to detect, prevent and report fraud in education. As for reforming the education system, there were 12 answers which included a series of arguments. Firstly, it is argued that the education system needs to be reformed from primary school on, mainly because that is where the encouragement of using plagiarism starts. Secondly, it is argued that the evaluation system in higher education needs to be reformed, since it currently seems to encourage quantity over quality.

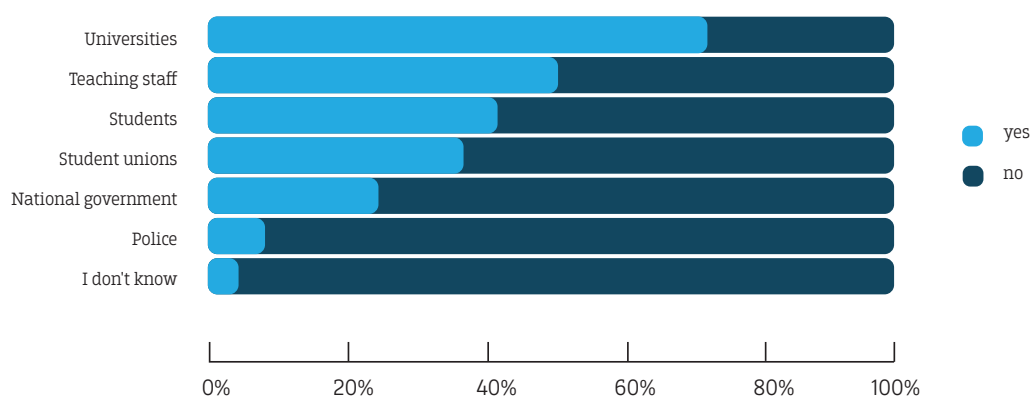
This proposition aims to lead to an improvement of both transparency in education and the self-confidence of students. Thirdly, it is argued that it is necessary to cultivate an open and honest student-teacher environment. This can contribute not only to promoting transparency in education as previously mentioned, but also to the possibility for students to freely report fraud to their institution. Along the same lines, 4 additional answers suggest preventing fraud in education by improving the living conditions and environment of students, so they do not feel the need to commit fraud in education. The answers argue that in this way, the reason for committing fraud in education can be eliminated in advance.

As regards the other main theme which can be identified from the open-ended questions, one third of the answers (24,7%) concern punishing fraud in education, most likely as a deterrent for future occurrences. 21 answers propose stricter sanctions, particularly when it comes to fake education visa and mills. Apart from the suggestion which regards banning those who have committed fraud from entering higher education again, the answers do not specify any other types of sanctions. The answers argue that stricter sanctions will set an example to discourage fraud.

3.4.2 Prominent actors in the battle against fraud in education

This question aims to identify the actors which students deem as most prominent in the battle against this phenomenon.

FIGURE 18: PROMINENT ACTORS TO TACKLE FRAUD IN EDUCATION



The results show that according to the students, the most prominent role is played by the university itself (71%) and bodies belonging to the institution, namely teaching staff (50%), students (41%) and student unions (36%).

Instead, the role played by national authorities, such as national government and police, seems to be less prominent according to the answers provided by the respondents. As a matter of fact, national government amounts to 25%, whereas the option “police” amounts to 17%.

PART 4

Reading the data from different perspectives



The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the perspective and interpretation of relevant stakeholders operating in the field of education regarding the results and key findings obtained from the survey and reported in this exploratory analysis. In this light, two main groups of stakeholders have been involved: the ENIC-NARIC partners and representatives of institutions operating in the field, namely, the Council of Europe (CoE), the European Commission (EC), the ENIC Bureau, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), ESU, the European University Association (EUA) and the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee Bureau.

The first stage of the input gathering entailed a brainstorming session involving the ENIC-NARIC partners, while the input of the other group of stakeholders was gathered during a targeted focus group. Data collected provides insightful suggestions to outline the first steps towards the promotion of a culture of ethics and transparency in the academic community starting from participants' views on the main results of the survey.

4.1 ENIC-NARIC partners

The analysis of the data resulting from the survey offers ENIC-NARICs space for further engagement on the topic, taking into consideration a comprehensive approach to the phenomena of fraud in education towards the process of recognition of qualifications.

Concerning the **knowledge of and awareness about the phenomenon**, the information vacuum among students suggests that fraud in education is still an unknown phenomenon. With regards to this, ENIC-NARIC centres, in cooperation with universities and higher education institution, could provide students information about referencing and tools to self-prevent plagiarism, as the most common phenomenon of fraud in education students are aware of. In addition to this, also general information provision about fraudulent documents, diploma mills, essay mills, visa mills and accreditation mills would prove to be useful, starting from a basic level of information. Alongside this, more and detailed information on the consequences of committing fraud in education, which institutional body is responsible for tackling fraud in education, and where they can report fraud in education. An increased awareness on the phenomenon would make students directly responsible against fraud in education and ambassadors themselves of a culture of ethics and transparency.

In relation to the **initiatives to advise students in the academic community**, both higher education institutions and student unions have a key role in promoting activities aimed at raising awareness on the different phenomena of fraud in education, in light of their work and the direct link they have to students. A joint effort in promoting such initiatives may result in an effective strategy towards the creation of a shared accountability among students, teaching and administrative staff, as well as other members at higher education institutions. In this framework, considering the privileged viewpoint of higher education and the networking activities entertained within their national territories, ENIC-NARIC centres may support higher education institutions in providing consistent data linked to the phenomenon at the national level, so as to facilitate the definition of specific, tailor-made strategies for the context in which they operate. Moreover, ENIC-NARICs may act in this framework to support higher education institutions for initiatives linked to training and the exchange of good practices.

Regarding possible strategies for **tackling the phenomenon**, in general, students think that universities have the main responsibility of tackling fraud in education, recalling the urgency for them to be active in organising awareness campaigns, training and specific courses on ethics and integrity. The latter point is particularly relevant, especially taking into consideration the effects it could have in the long term, in developing a different narrative around the issue, focused on the importance of having quality education and integrity among the referral values when building learners' educational paths.

4.2 Stakeholders in the field of education

As a preliminary observation about the survey results, two elements concerning the sample of respondents were highlighted. The first is that most responses come from students who seem to have already made the "choice of quality" over shortcuts, showing a sense of community and an interest in taking a proactive approach in facing this issue. The second element is that extending the geographical area to which the survey was administered might bring forward additional interesting results.

Having this in mind, there was overall agreement that the results arising from the survey were not surprising. Participants identified a common key element of proximity when it came to awareness regarding types of fraud among respondents. This means that students were generally more familiar with types of fraud which may entail their direct involvement (such as plagiarism) rather than types which do not directly depend on them. Overall, they are more concerned about types of fraud in which they can intentionally or unintentionally actively participate in.

Concerning the lack of knowledge and awareness about the phenomenon, its incidence within the academic community, the procedures to be followed and subjects to be contacted in case of potential encounters with fraud, the importance of thinking about students as a part of an academic community and the need for guidance which can work as a compass to help them navigate was highlighted.

This is even more urgent when thinking about social and socio-economic implications of the right of recognition. Students may still be victims of fraudulent activities, even without actively taking part in them, because they enter a social context such as the labour market, where they encounter other individuals who may have obtained fraudulent qualifications. The effects of this unfair competitive advantage are not only limited to the individual level, but spill over into several sectors of society. In this light, the role of institutions to promote the empowerment of individuals becomes more and more clear.

Schools and higher education institutions are the first democratic institutions that individuals encounter, and thus they need to play a role in promoting a culture of ethics and integrity. National institutions and public authorities should not only provide information but put into place actions aimed towards protecting students' rights and their right to equal treatment through:

- Understanding and support.
- Prevention.
- Protection.

- Prosecution.
- Establishment of international mechanisms for information sharing and cooperation.

This will be effective only if aimed at encouraging critical knowledge and understanding, creating learning opportunities for students to be empowered starting from the first year of studies or even before. This process encompasses three main dimensions:

- Awareness (on the part of students to know what the phenomenon is).
- Critical Knowledge (be able to recognise it).
- Action (how to deal with it).

Consistent procedures need to be accompanied by substantial understanding and substantial practice, otherwise procedures themselves may be meaningless. It is against this background that a link can be identified between awareness, critical knowledge, and action. Targeted and effective action cannot be taken without being based on a sound foundation comprising awareness, understanding and critical knowledge.

Additionally, it is important to underline that students' participation in the safekeeping of academic integrity values could have a big impact on the positive promotion of values among students. In this context, two points were clearly stated as elements that need to be taken into consideration to promote a culture of ethics and integrity:

- The necessity to refer to the broader institutional community.
- The role of technology both in teaching and learning and in digital credentials.

As for the first point, it is necessary to identify roles for the different stakeholders in order to better define how each of the stakeholders can respond to demands related to the phenomenon. Creating a culture of quality in education goes beyond the strict academic community located within higher academic institutions and it passes through the involvement of relevant stakeholders operating in the field of education such as the culture industry, public opinion and media. This also implies supporting institutions on a broader scale, so they are able to respond to students' needs. Furthermore, the involvement of different stakeholders in the process may result in better support procedures and policies available to foster a culture of quality education.

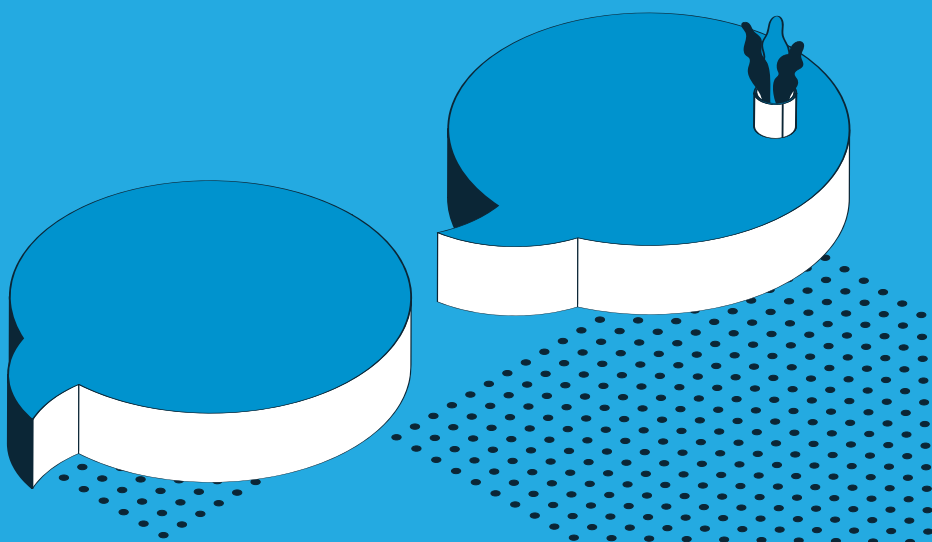
Concerning the second point, there was overall agreement that technological advancement can play a fundamental role throughout the student's lifecycle; from orientation, enrolment, awarding of degree, publication of degree. In addition to this, the role of digital credentials was also pointed out. In this regard, it is important to take into account that technology can be as much part of the problem as it is of the solution. As a matter of fact, technology may be used to falsify qualifications and distribute them online in the global market but, on the other hand, the use of digital credentials enables simple and secure verification of authenticity. The latest initiatives in the field of digitalisation of qualifications such as the use of blockchain in recognition represent a tool to register and share qualifications in a secure way, guaranteeing their transferability and authenticity.

Another aspect to be taken into consideration is the inclusion of technological tools to encourage

student, teacher and professor technical understanding when it comes to any type of fraud. As also emerged from the survey, teachers and professors are identified as a first contact point. In this light, they need to be supported and trained also on new technological advancements in order to better provide guidance to their students.

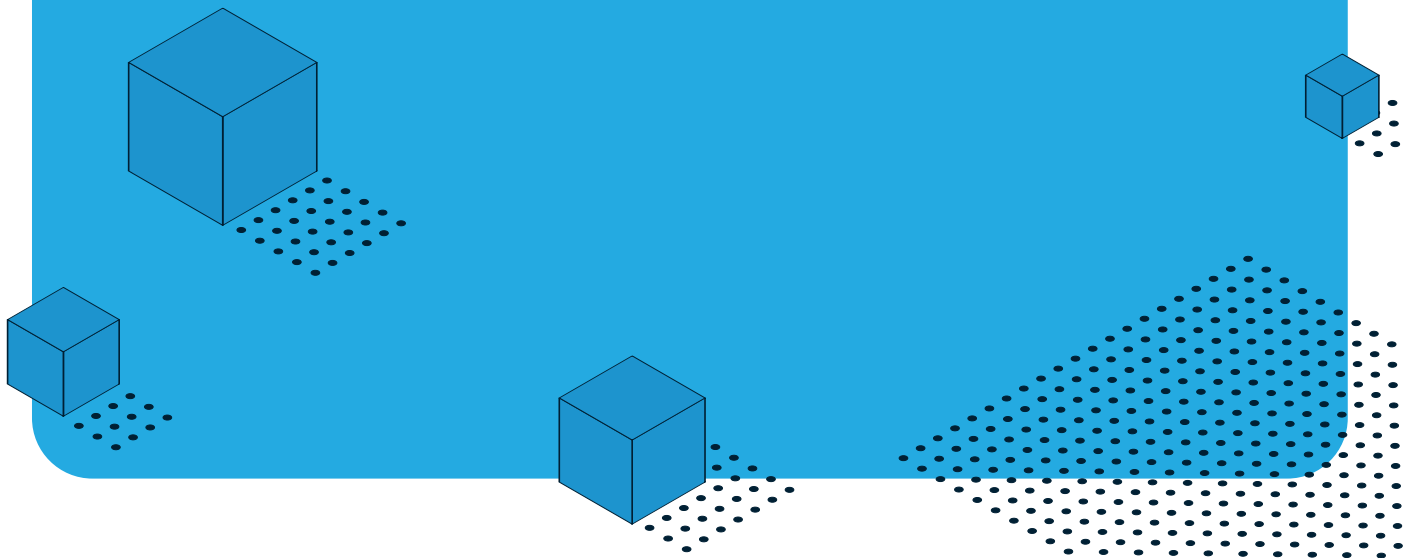
Finally, technology can assist in spreading information and awareness regarding the topic, contributing in such a way to more consistent procedures and more consistent practice.





PART 5

Final considerations



There are three main areas which can be identified and under which some final considerations can be classified regarding the findings arising from the survey.

Firstly, there appears to be limited awareness on the topic of fraud in education among respondents, both in terms of knowledge and direct experience with the phenomenon. On one hand, the interpretation of the stakeholders suggests that this finding could be seen from the perspective that a segment of respondents is not touched nor affected by this phenomenon in the academic context, also taking into consideration that most answers came from students who have already made the “choice of quality” over shortcuts. On the other hand, this lack of awareness is also associated with great uncertainty as far as the actors involved in fraud prevention, identification and contrasting are concerned, in addition to admitted unfamiliarity with the procedures to be enacted when faced with fraudulent activities.

In this regard, the importance of thinking about students as a part of an academic community and providing them with guidance was emphasised. In this light, the ENIC-NARIC partners recognised their role in enhancing engagement on the topic through greater cooperation with higher education institutions.

This cooperation should be targeted towards improved information provision, not only in reference to the general notion of fraud and its constituent elements, but also in reference to proper citation methods and tools to prevent plagiarism, more detailed information on the consequences of committing fraud, and the figures and bodies students may use as a point of reference. In addition to this, national institutions and public authorities play a role not only in terms of information provision, but also as entities which should enact initiatives aimed toward protecting the rights of students and their right to equal treatment. The effectiveness of these actions is inextricably linked to the capacity of encouraging critical knowledge and understanding on the part of students.

The second area to be considered regards the prominent role that the academic community itself plays in preventing and tackling the phenomenon of fraud in education. The data obtained from the survey, clearly indicates that, according to the respondents, the role of the protagonist in the fight against fraud in the academic context belongs to the education institution and its constituent elements, including faculty members and students. As can be seen from the results of the survey, as far as the respondents are concerned, the role of the academic community prevails when compared to the role of “external” actors such as national authorities or law enforcement authorities.

Although this reflection area is highly influenced by the input provided by respondents belonging to an educational institution, and thus, likely unaware of the roles and duties external to the institution itself, it is interesting to note the level of protagonism attributed by respondents to the community to which they belong.

As regards initiatives to advise students in the academic community, ENIC-NARIC centres may play an important role in supporting higher education institutions through activities such as providing consistent data linked to the phenomenon at the national level, so as to facilitate the definition of specific, tailor-made strategies for the context in which they operate. Moreover, ENIC-NARICs may act

in this framework to support higher education institutions for initiatives linked to training and exchange of good practices.

The third main theme which can be pinpointed among the key findings of the survey primarily concerns the actions to be implemented when tackling the issue of fraud. A higher degree of awareness among the student community and more efficient information provision campaigns seem to be the *fil rouge* when it comes to initiatives and instruments to be enacted. The need for a higher level of awareness can be linked not only to a question of ethics and prevention of the phenomenon of fraud but also knowledge of the figures involved, and respective procedures adopted within the academic community. Against this background, there seems to be ample space for intervention, especially by education institutions such as universities and schools, with a particular focus on prevention instruments such as information and awareness campaigns teaching students how to avoid committing plagiarism and proper citation methods.

In addition to the prevention of fraud through information provision, among the actions directly proposed by the students, it is possible to identify two main themes: the need for reforming the education system and punishment of fraud in education. Although a limited number of students reacted to the open question, it is noteworthy that they see an improvement of their living and studying conditions as a potential way forward when tackling fraud in education. As a matter of fact, most students stated that operating in a less competitive environment, which values quality above quantity, as well as having the knowledge that they are part of a community of fellow students and professors who are ready to help, are fundamental in facing their studies as an opportunity for personal growth rather than a path in which you need to cut corners.

Finally, the stakeholders' perspective on the survey findings opens up space for two considerations. The first is that the creation of a culture of quality in education passes through the involvement of relevant stakeholders operating in the field of education such as the culture industry, public opinion and media to better respond to students' needs and support procedures and policies available to foster a culture of quality education. The second reflection concerns the role of technology which is fundamental throughout the student's lifecycle. Technology in this field is gaining momentum with the issuing of digital credentials and represents a tool in providing students and teachers with information and knowledge about fraud in education and sharing information and good practices.

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Coordinator



Partners



In collaboration with

