

The Wide Role of Informatics at Universities

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Why find out what's going on?

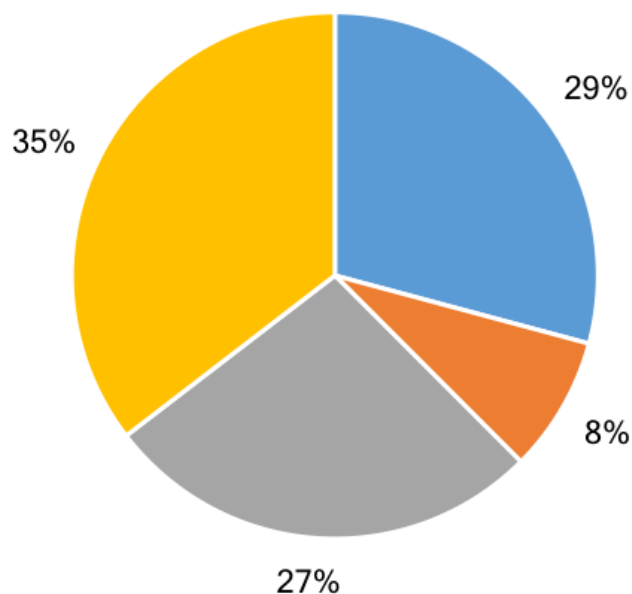
Digital is pervasive

We wished to investigate to ensure that what universities are doing to ensure that non-informatics teaching and research is informed by best practice in Informatics.

- Designed a wide ranging survey
- Invited IE members to fill it in (and non IE members)
- 48 Universities in 19 countries filled it out
- Questions had free format as well as multiple choice questions

Although how Informatics should position itself in a university is a political decision, in many universities what happens has arisen organically rather than strategically.

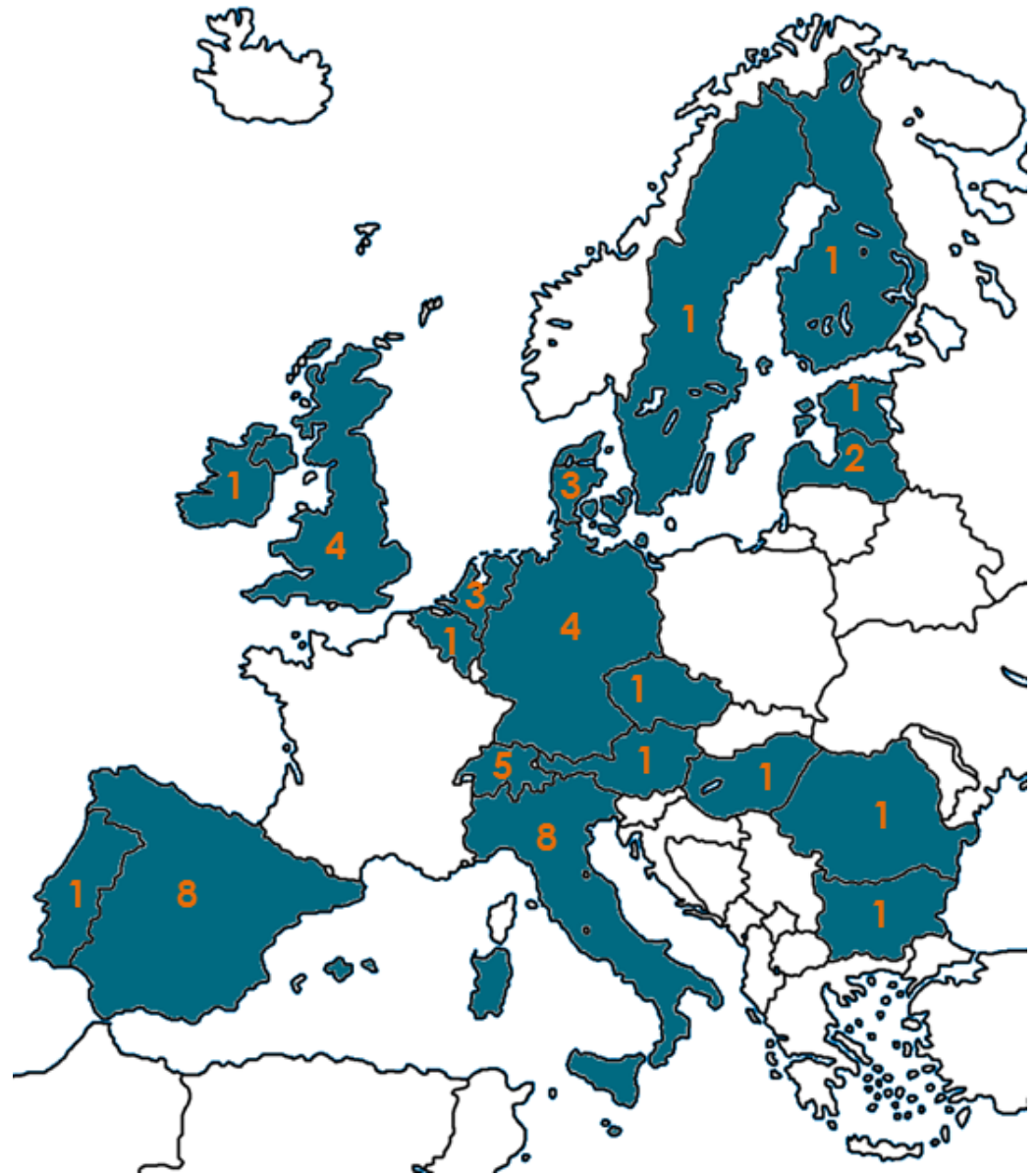
Where the surveys came from



- Western Europe (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland)
- Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania)
- Northern Europe (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Sweden, UK)
- Southern Europe (Italy, Portugal, Spain)

n=48

Where the
surveys
came from

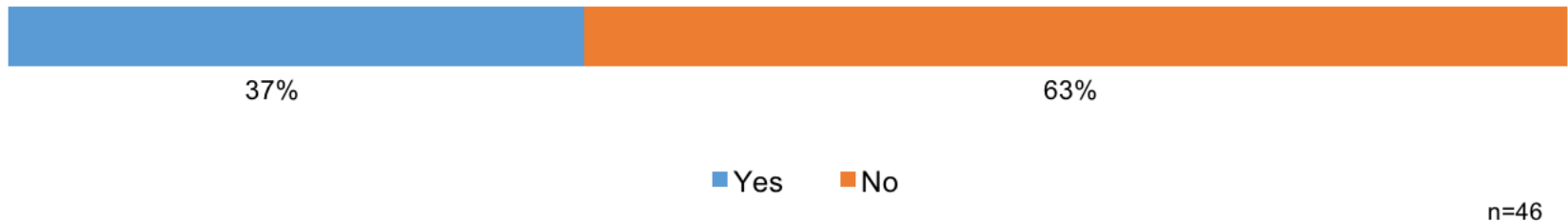


Questions probing the following areas

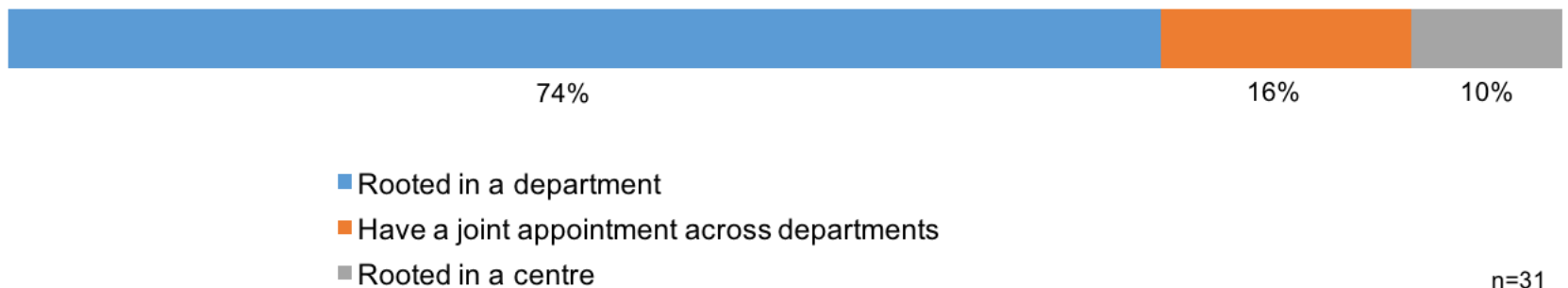
- Research
- Teaching
- People
- Data Science
- Structure

People

- Does your university explicitly advertise/hire academics who focus on interdisciplinary research?



- Are they rooted in a department, have a joint appointment across departments, or rooted in a centre?



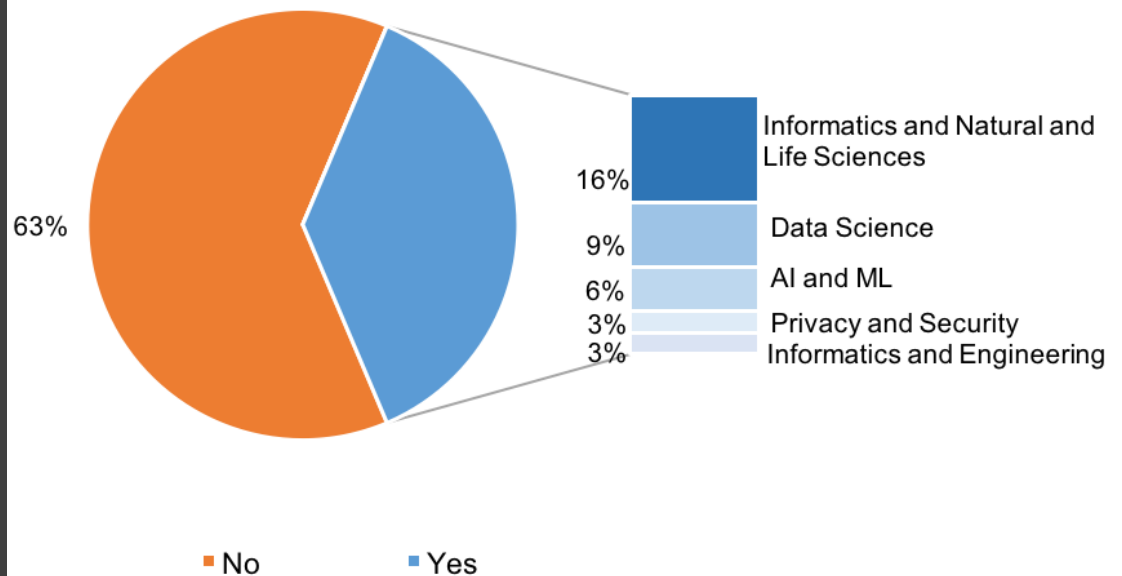
People

How is their quality judged for both appointment and for promotion? For example are they judged according to the criteria of one of the departments or both? Are the people who judge from a single department or both?



People

Are there any initiatives planned to hire in interdisciplinary areas?



n=43

People

General comments - situation is still quite immature

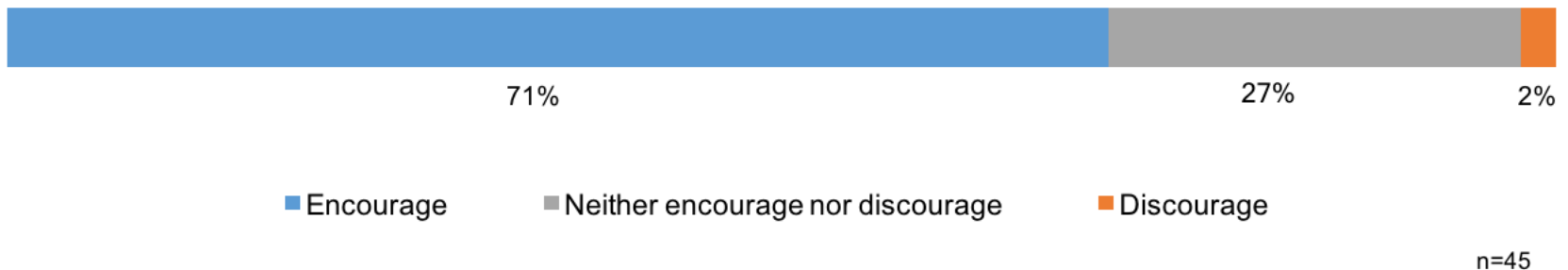
- In the cases where universities are largely autonomous from national agencies, hiring interdisciplinary researchers is encouraged when there is some funding, often by third parties, dedicated to this.
- Respondents highlight the difficulty of comparing researchers with different background and skills and the current lack of complete understanding of how to judge interdisciplinary research, given the limited number of multidisciplinary researchers that are currently in the system.
- Respondents from countries where the hiring system is strongly regulated by some national agency, highlight the difficulty to introduce some flexibility and to define long-term plans which include multidisciplinary as an important aspect.

Final thoughts

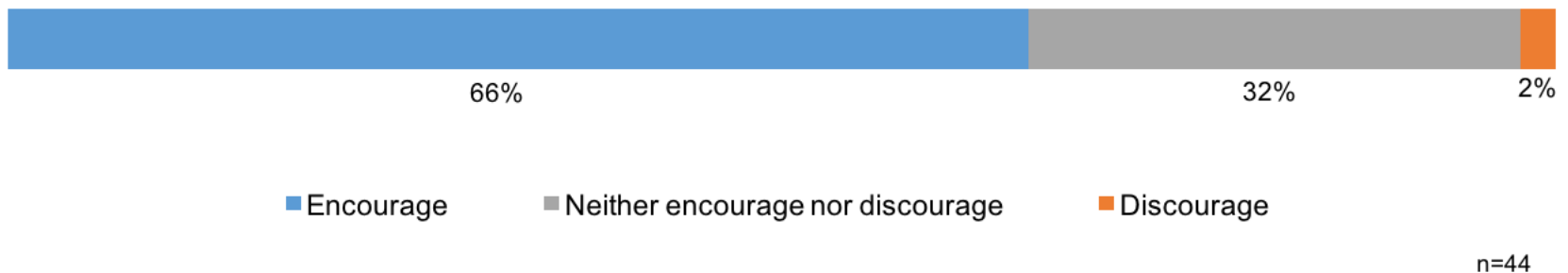
- For most questions approximately a third of respondents are at universities where there is little activity.
- From comments it is clear that most activity is initiated from below. Whether there is catchup from university hierarchies is patchy and lags behind the activities.
- Thanks
 - To the people who filled out the questionnaire.
 - Help with designing the questions: Stuart Anderson, Luis Caires, Brian Keegan, Ulf Lesser, Chris Sadler, and Hannes Werthner.
 - Svetlana Tikhonenko of the Informatics Europe office.
- The document is available at:
<https://www.informatics-europe.org/publications.html>

Research

- When compared with single disciplinary research, does your university encourage or discourage interdisciplinary research?

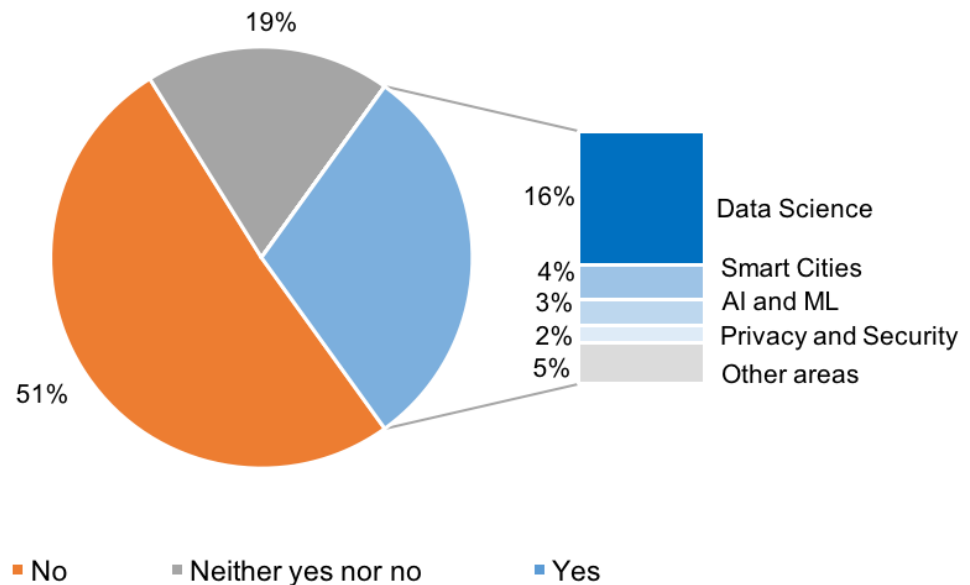


- Does your Department encourage or discourage interdisciplinary research?



Research

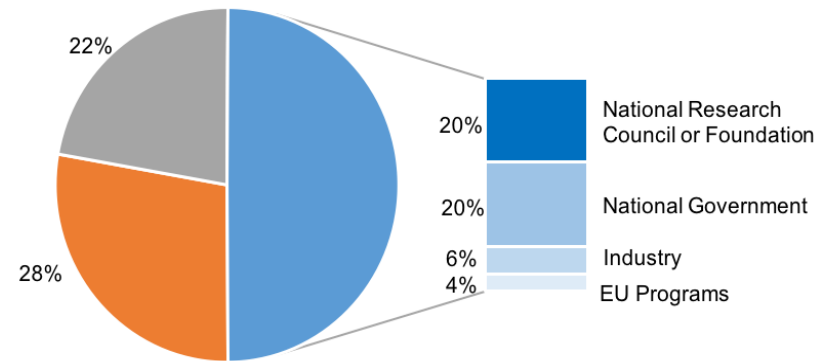
Are there interdisciplinary areas of research where your university could (should) enter but aren't due to lack of university support? If so what are they?



n=37

Research

Are there other players who have helped increase the interdisciplinary research in your university?



- No
- Yes, we have other players and initiatives within a university
- Yes, there are external organizations helping to increase interdisciplinary research

n=36

Research

General comments

- Not all respondents were especially supportive of interdisciplinary research.
- Some funding streams demand interdisciplinarity, it is possible that 'artificial collaborations' were formed that attracted the funds but did not make good use of the capabilities of the researchers.
- Frequently interdisciplinary projects are focussed on how information technology can serve the other discipline so the progress made and any breakthroughs that occur advance the other discipline but have no impact on the development of Informatics.
- The excitement and interest in supporting interdisciplinary projects could make it likely that lower quality proposal were accepted (compared with single discipline ones).
- There is concern about its development owing to limited funding, low esteem compared with discipline-specific research or lack of strategic direction.