QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

Evaluation of PhD Day 2023 and Experience with Doctoral Studies at the Faculty of Science MU

HR Award Office   **November 2023**

Contents

Executive Summary

In connection with PhD Day, which took place on 6 October 2023 at University Campus Bohunice, we approached PhD students of the Faculty of Science with a request to fill in an [online questionnaire](#), to get feedback on PhD Day 2023, but also to learn more about students' experiences with doctoral studies at the Faculty of Science.

A total of 82 respondents (16 of them participated in PhD Day 2023, 66 did not participate) responded, **the return rate was 12%** (converted to the number of all PhD students at the Faculty of Science as of 11/2023).

1. **The evaluation of the students who participated in PhD Day 2023** was very positive. The majority of students who attended the event considered the organisation of the event to be excellent. Students rated the following components of the programme as **the most beneficial**: *Mobility Programmes and Grants*, *PhD questions and answers (from students to students).*

2. **Another part of the questionnaire was the evaluation of PhD studies at the Faculty of Science:**

- 82% of respondents know that the Faculty of Science is a holder of the HR Excellence in Research Award and has been developing and implementing a new HR strategy since 2018.

- **Faculty social climate in terms of equality of culture, friendly or discriminatory environment** - 79% rate as satisfactory or rather satisfactory, 17% rate as rather unsatisfactory or unsatisfactory, 4% unable to assess.

- **Encountering unethical behaviour** - 29% have encountered behaviour that could be considered unethical during their studies at the faculty, 65% of respondents answered this question negatively, 6% could not answer.

  When asked about specific unethical behaviour, 31% of respondents answered it was "*unfair competitive practices among students/colleagues/teachers*", 24% reported *"discrimination and unequal treatment (based on gender, age, ethnicity, etc.)"*, 21% chose *"sexual harassment"*. 10% of respondents chose *"abusing the position of supervisor for own profit".*

- **Encountering different treatment because of one´s of gender** - 62% of respondents answered that they had not encountered such treatment during their studies at the Faculty, 24% did, while 13% could not answer.

- **Quality of individual areas of support for doctoral students at the Faculty -** respondents **evaluate positively** the support from the Faculty in the following areas: *availability of information on the organization of doctoral studies* (78%), *cooperation with a supervisor* (80%), *opportunities for further education and mentoring* (77%) and *international mobility options* (71%).

Negative responses are more evident in the area of *financial conditions for PhD students* (51%) and also in the area of *setting formal rules for resolving conflict situations (the role of ombudsman for PhD students)* (24%).

The area of *setting formal rules for resolving conflict situations* also shows the highest frequency of **neutral responses** (45%), with almost half of the students surveyed unable to assess this area, which may indicate their uncertainty about where to turn in case of difficulties during their PhD studies.

- **Areas of PhD study on which the Faculty should focus** - *Financial conditions of PhD students*; *cooperation between students and supervisors*; *availability of information about PhD study and opportunities after its completion*; *mobility programs*; *care for foreign students*; *unification of conditions of PhD study at all faculty units*; *care for students' mental health*.

- **Newsletter for Early Stage Researchers** - 76% of respondents who receive the Newsletter find it **useful** ("Very useful" and "Useful"), with the remainder unable to judge.

- **Desired topics of further raining** - *Academic skills - presenting, writing publications, project management*; *soft skills training - work-life balance, mental hygiene, time management*; *career paths after PhD*; *hard skills training* (specialised, language); *Training on information about PhD*; *Leadership skills training.*

1. Introduction and Methodology

On the occasion of interfaculty PhD Day 2023, we contacted PhD students after the event with a request to fill in an online questionnaire to get feedback on PhD Day 2023 and also to know more about students' experiences with doctoral studies at the Faculty of Science MU.
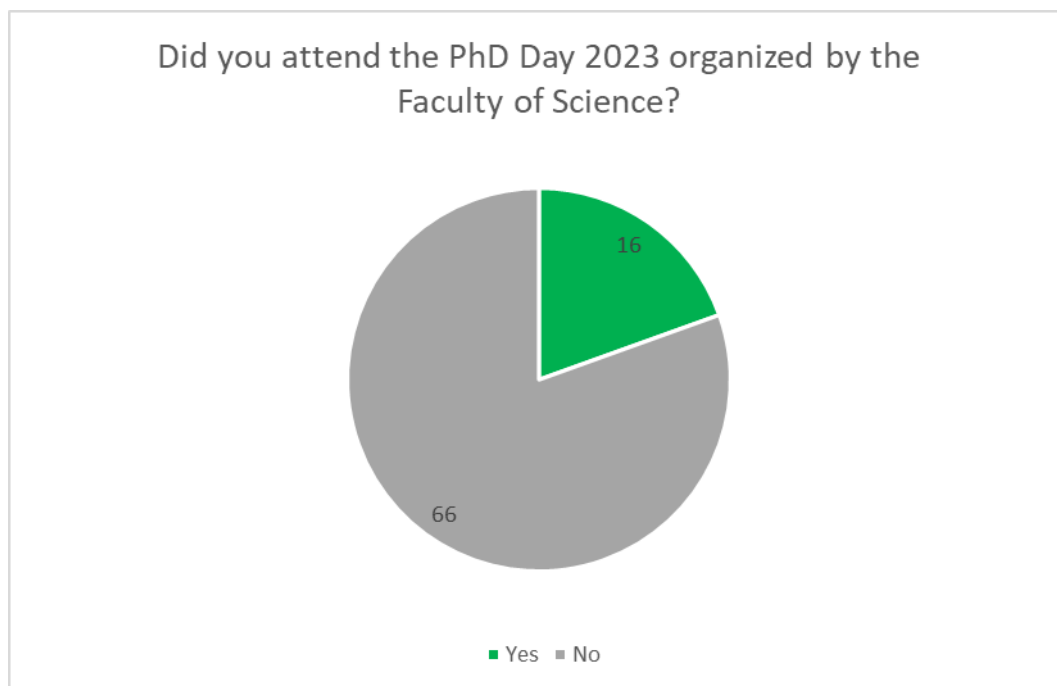
The questionnaire was sent out in October 2023 to all doctoral students. The data were collected via an online Microsoft Forms questionnaire: https://forms.office.com/e/8AGMX0WTZG.
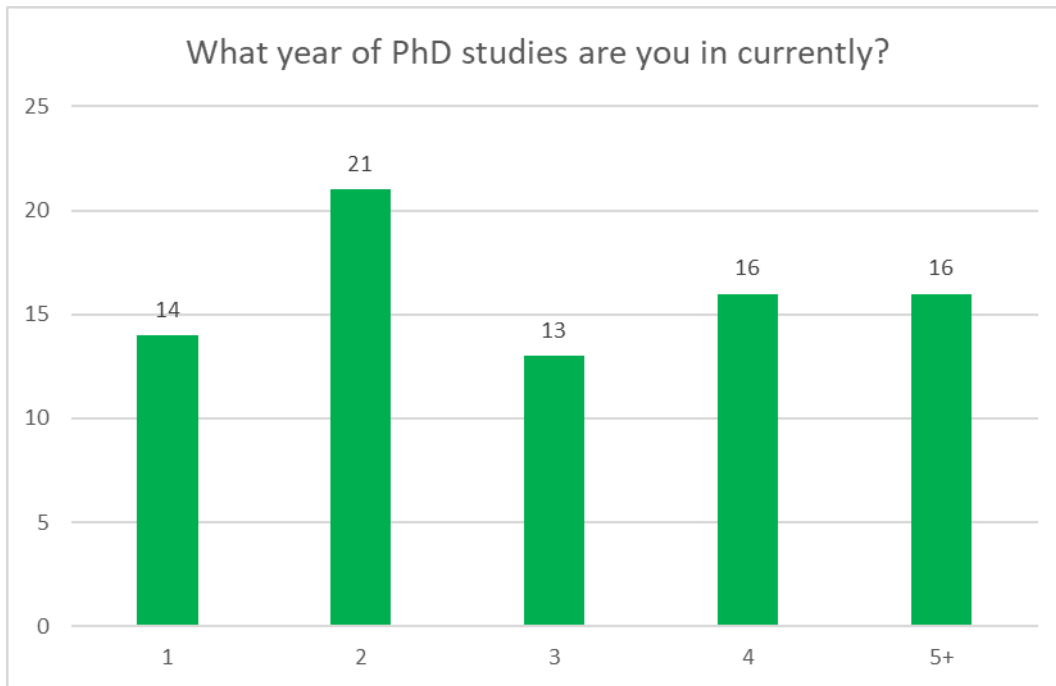
In the first part of the questionnaire, respondents who participated in the interfaculty PhD Day 2023 evaluated the organisation and benefits of the components of the programme.

In the next part, the respondents evaluated their experience with doctoral studies at the Faculty of Science MU.

A total of **82 respondents** submitted their answers: 16 respondents participated in PhD Day 2023, 66 did not participate. Return rate (calculated based on the number of all doctoral students as of 11/2023) was 12%.
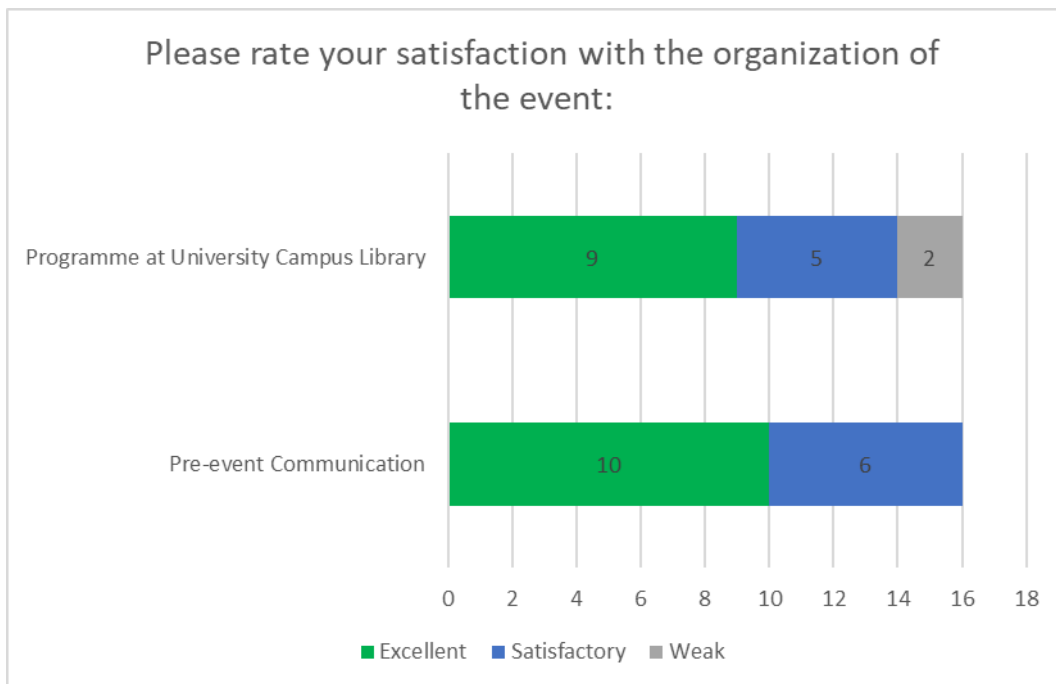
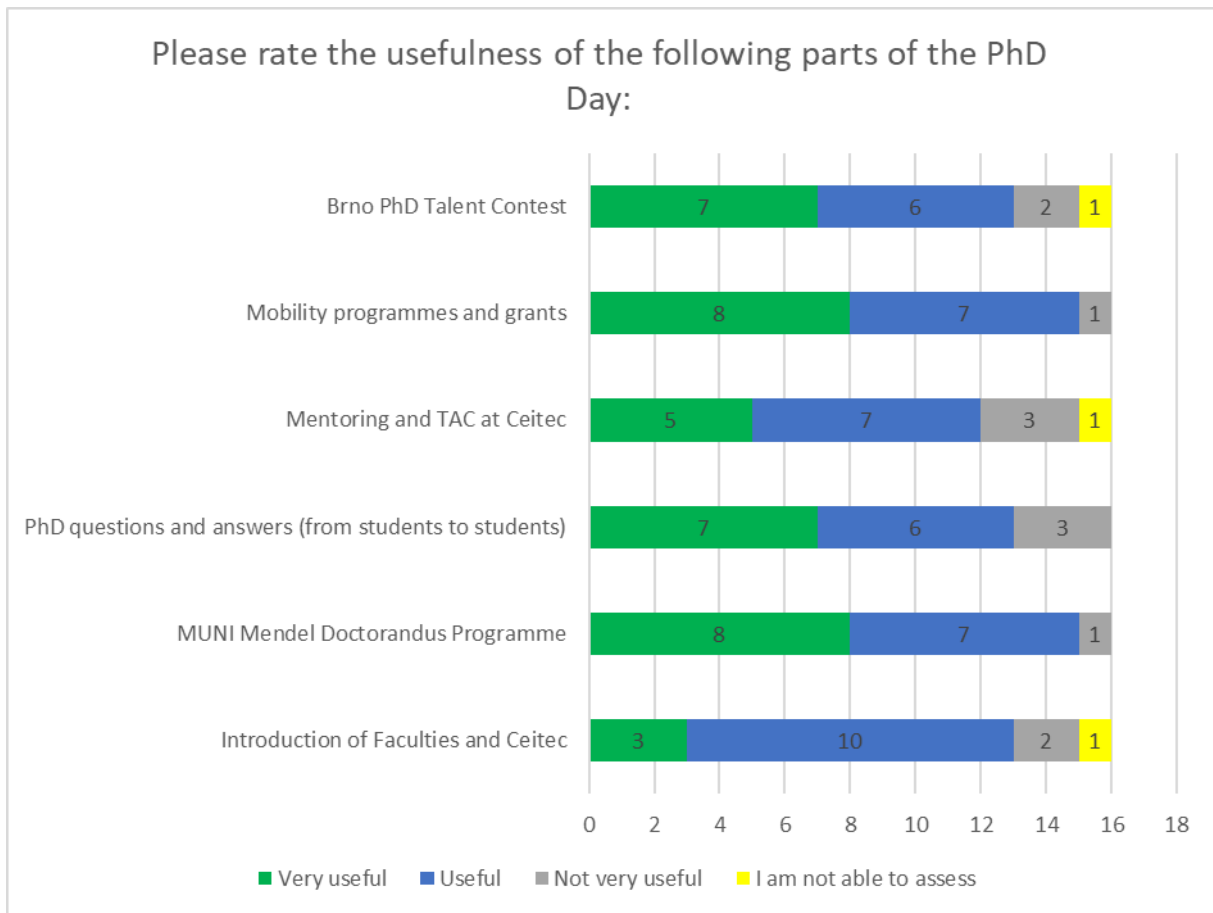# 2. Characteristics of Respondents

Did you attend the PhD Day 2023 organized by the Faculty of Science?

16

66

■ Yes ■ No

What year of PhD studies are you in currently?

Bar chart showing:
- 1: 14
- 2: 21
- 3: 13
- 4: 16
- 5+: 16

3. Evaluation of the Interfaculty PhD Day 2023

Question: Please rate your satisfaction with the organisation of the event.

Please rate your satisfaction with the organization of the event:

Horizontal stacked bar chart:
- Programme at University Campus Library: Excellent 9, Satisfactory 5, Weak 2
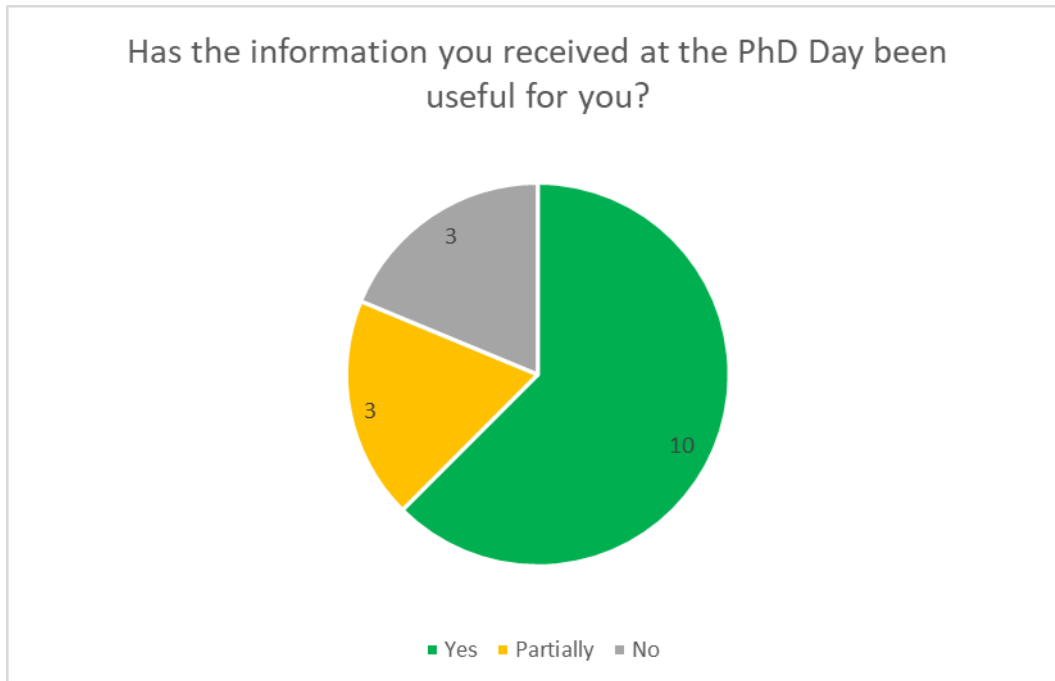- Pre-event Communication: Excellent 10, Satisfactory 6

Legend: ■ Excellent ■ Satisfactory ■ Weak

Question: Please rate the usefulness of the following parts of the PhD Day.

Please rate the usefulness of the following parts of the PhD Day:

Part	Very useful	Useful	Not very useful	I am not able to assess
Brno PhD Talent Contest	7	6	2	1
Mobility programmes and grants	8	7	1	
Mentoring and TAC at Ceitec	5	7	3	1
PhD questions and answers (from students to students)	7	6	3	
MUNI Mendel Doctorandus Programme	8	7	1	
Introduction of Faculties and Ceitec	3	10	2	1

Question: What has been the most valuable part of the programme to you?

What has been the most valuable part of the programme to you?

Part	Count
Brno PhD Talent Contest	2
Mobility programmes and grants	5
PhD questions and answers (from students to students)	4
MUNI Mendel Doctorandus Programme	2
Mentoring & TAC at Ceitec	2
Introduction of Faculties and Ceitec	1
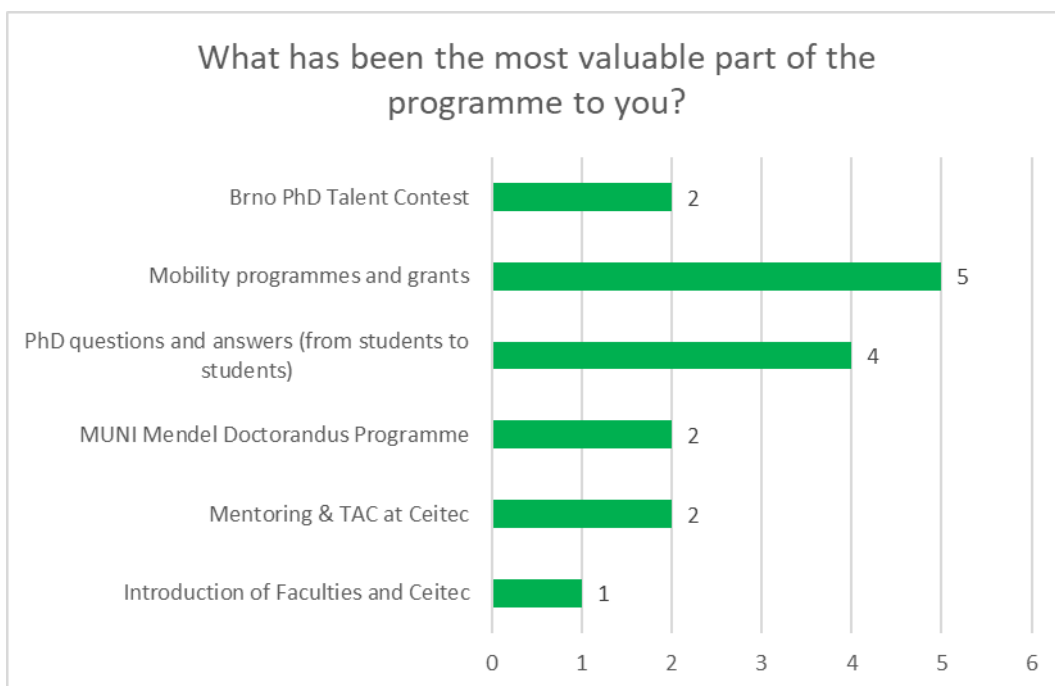
Question: Has the information you received at the PhD Day been useful for you?

Question: What topic/programme would you suggest adding to the next PhD Day? (open-ended question)

Recurring suggestions (grouped into main thematic areas, including the specific respondent statements):

- <u>Real Q&A sesssion, from the people in attendance to a panel</u> – *(„Having an open Q&A session, take questions from the audience directed to a panel (head of department + current students)"*
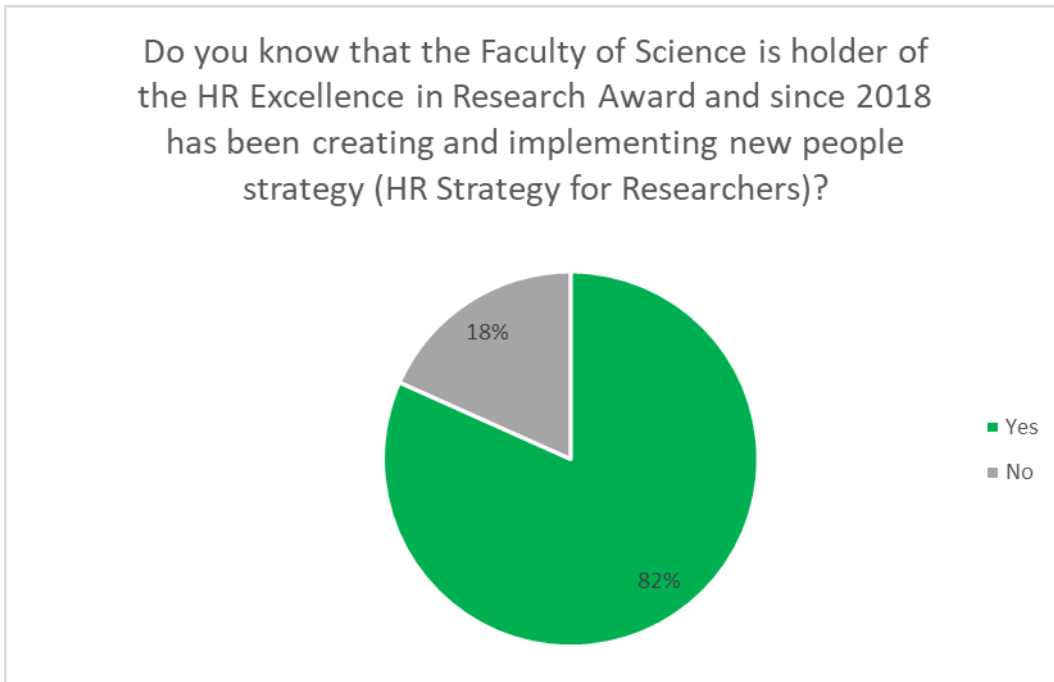
Individual suggestions (specific respondent statements):

- *„Realization of mentoring at other Faculties, namely Faculty of Sciences, as the presented system of mentoring at CEITEC seems to be really useful but I am not aware of any mentoring system at my faculty, I would also recommend to spend more time with Mobilities and MMD programme to give more information about these"*
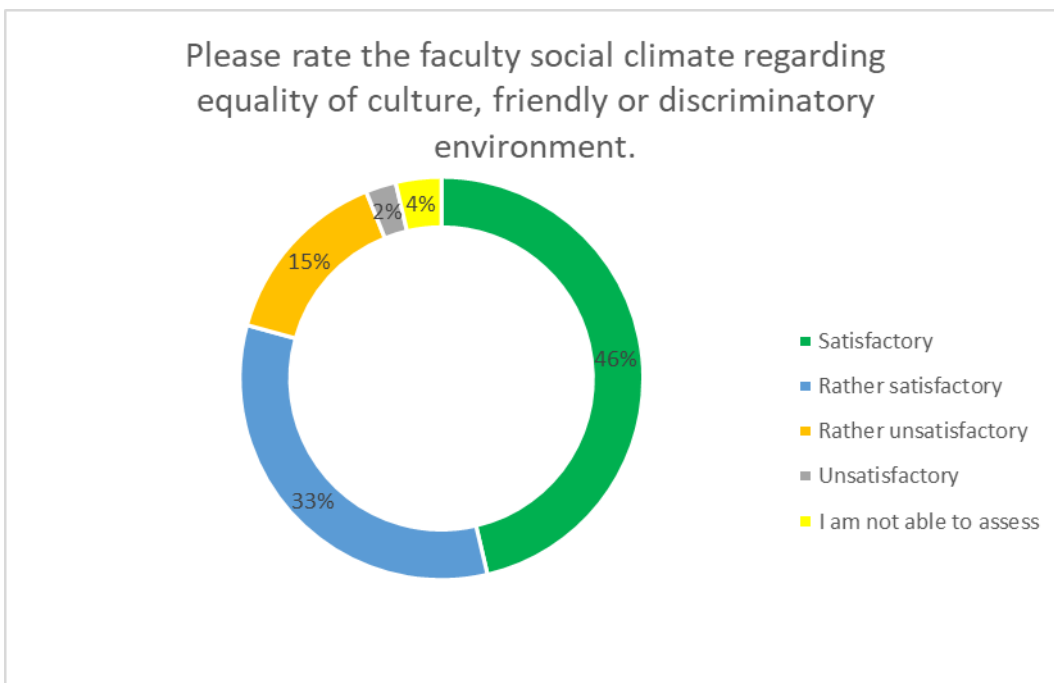- *„More information about interships and travel grants"*

These results need to be interpreted in light of the fact that only 16 of the 82 students who completed the questionnaire participated in the PhD day (and, therefore, were able to evaluate its course). Nevertheless, the feedback received from these respondents was **positive**. Students rated **the following parts of the programme as the most useful and beneficial:** *Mobility Programmes and Grants, PhD questions and answers (from students to students).*

4. Evaluation of Experience with Doctoral Studies

Question: Do you know that the Faculty of Science is holder of the HR Excellence in Research Award and since 2018 has been creating and implementing new people strategy?
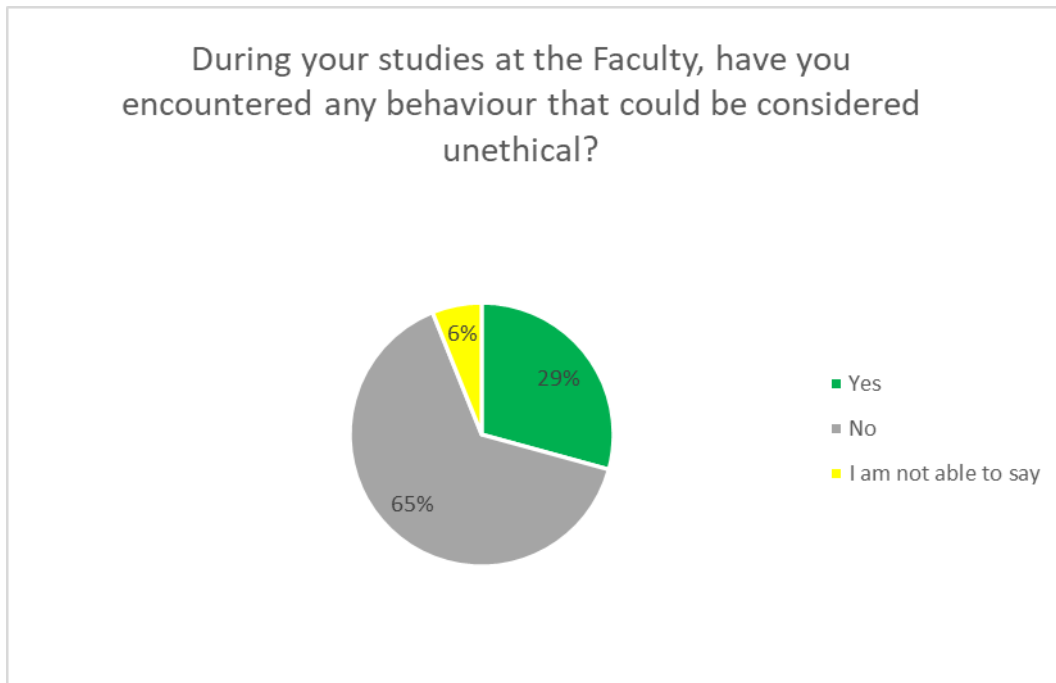
Do you know that the Faculty of Science is holder of the HR Excellence in Research Award and since 2018 has been creating and implementing new people strategy (HR Strategy for Researchers)?
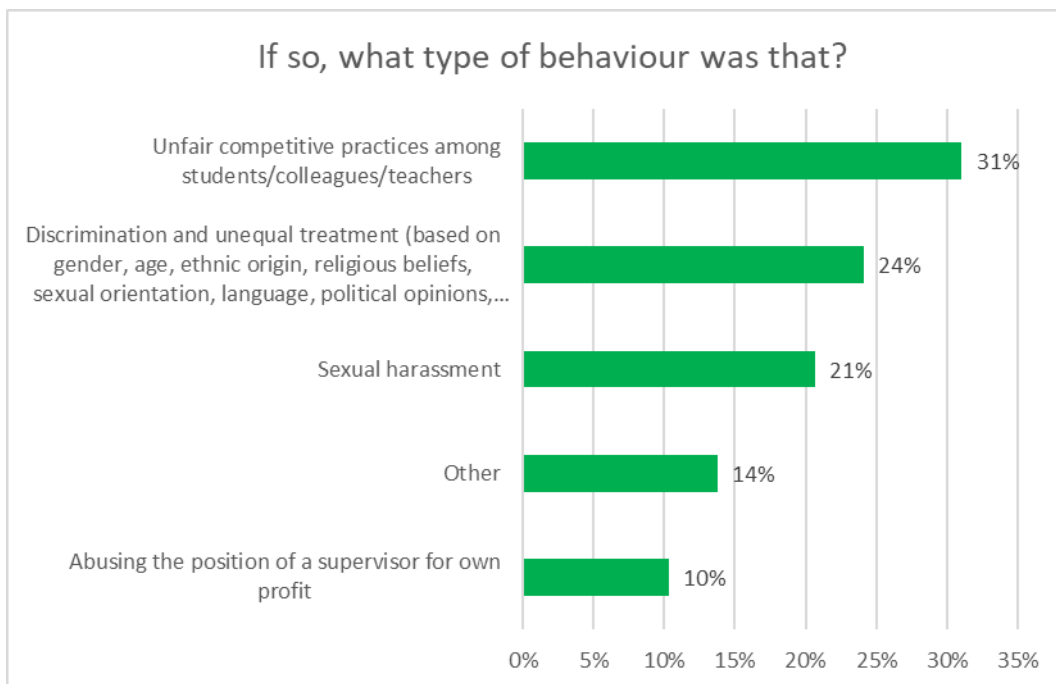
- Yes
- No

18%
82%

Question: Please rate the faculty social climate regarding equality of culture, friendly or discriminatory environment.

Please rate the faculty social climate regarding equality of culture, friendly or discriminatory environment.

- Satisfactory
- Rather satisfactory
- Rather unsatisfactory
- Unsatisfactory
- I am not able to assess

2% 4%
15%
46%
33%

Question: During your studies at the Faculty, have you encountered any behaviour that could be considered unethical?

During your studies at the Faculty, have you encountered any behaviour that could be considered unethical?

- Yes — 29%
- No — 65%
- I am not able to say — 6%

Question: If so, what type of behaviour was that?

If so, what type of behaviour was that?

| Type of behaviour	Percentage
Unfair competitive practices among students/colleagues/teachers	31%
Discrimination and unequal treatment (based on gender, age, ethnic origin, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, language, political opinions,…)	24%
Sexual harassment	21%
Other	14%
Abusing the position of a supervisor for own profit	10%

14% of respondents selected the "Other" field, and some of them used it to provide specific information about unethical behaviour.

Individual suggestions provided in the "Other" field (specific statements made by respondents):

- „Arrogant treatment of students from the teachers in some cases"

- *„Systematic abuse of students to perform work that does not belong to them, for which they are not competent and which prevents them from working on their dissertation. The writing, coordination and solution of projects is mostly dependent on PhD students, which leads to a complete disillusionment about the science, which is done poorly and without a well thought out hypothesis…"*
- *„US Sanctions should be toward the government of the countries not toward the normal phd student. It is effecting my work and study here."*

Question: During your studies at the Faculty, have you ever experienced different treatment than others because you were a woman or a man?
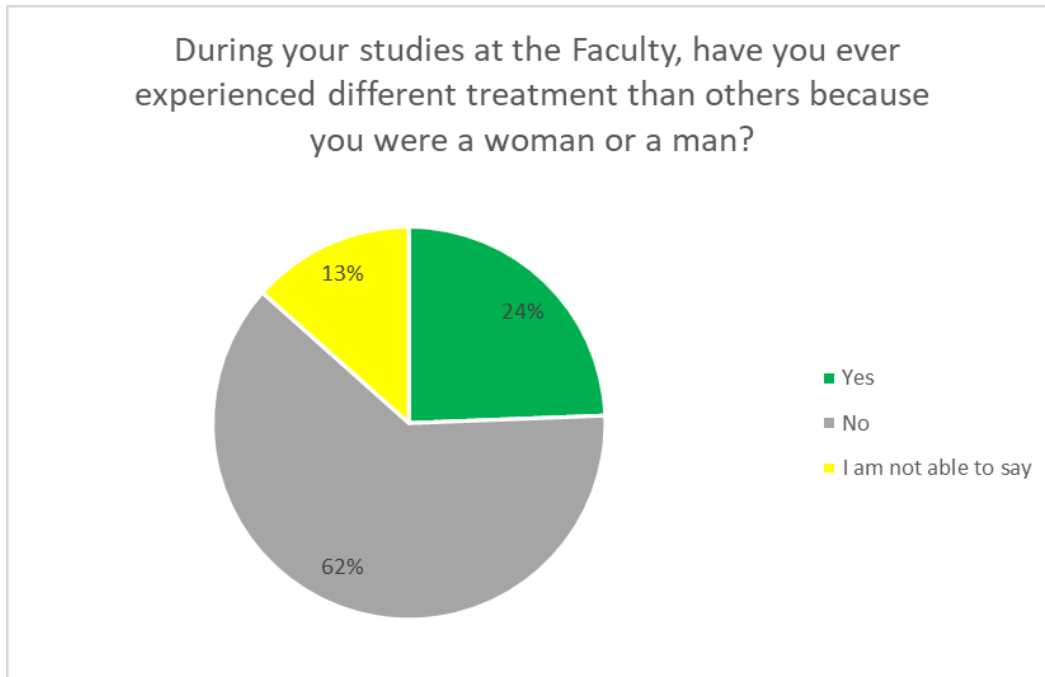
Question: Could you please rate the quality of different areas of support for PhD students at the Faculty of Science?
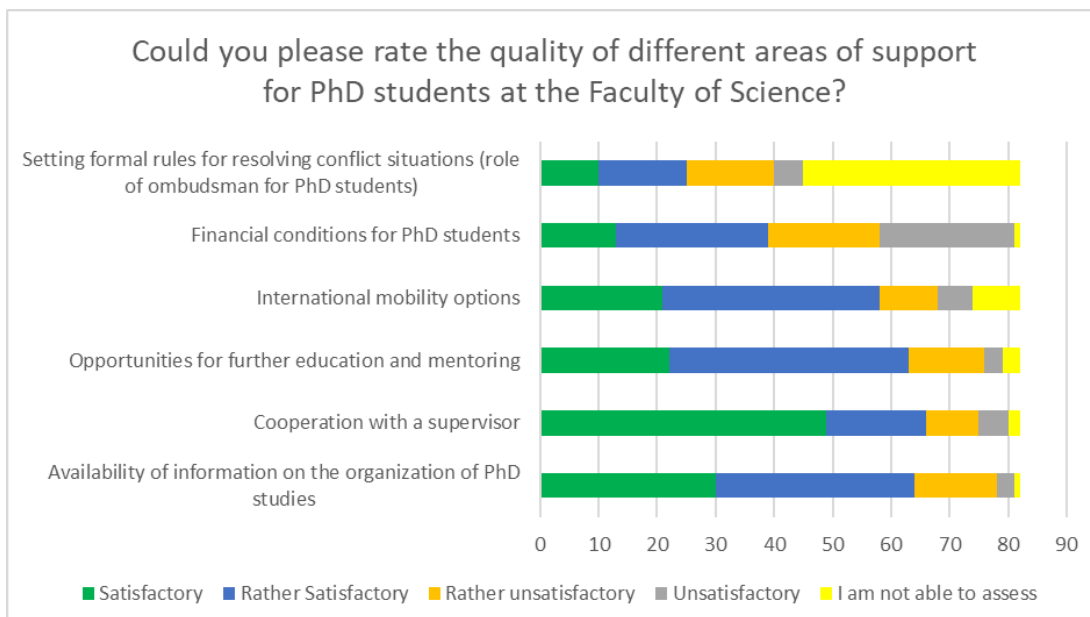
The answers to this question show that respondents **evaluate positively** („Satisfactory"
a „Rather satisfactory") the support from the Faculty in the following areas: *availability of information on the organization of doctoral studies* (78%), *cooperation with a supervisor* (80%), *opportunities for further education and mentoring* (77%) and *international mobility options* (71%).

Negative responses („Rather unsatisfactory" a „Unsatisfactory") are more evident in the area of *financial conditions for PhD students* (51%) and also in the area of *setting formal rules for resolving conflict situations (the role of ombudsman for PhD students)* (24%).

The area of *setting formal rules for resolving conflict situations* also shows the highest frequency of **neutral responses** („I am not able to assess") (45%), with almost half of the students surveyed unable to assess this area, which may indicate their uncertainty about where to turn in case of difficulties during their PhD studies.

Question: What areas within doctoral studies should the Faculty focus on in the upcoming period? (open-ended question)

Recurring suggestions (grouped into main thematic areas, including the specific respondent statements):

- Finantial conditions of PhD students *(„Stable finantial conditions. It is not really possible to live from basic stipend, and the support from projects is not stable"; „Please make sure that phd students at muni are receiving fair wage at their lab/institution, if the lab cannot provide some extra money for their students, they should not take the phd students at all"; „The faculty provides finances for PhD students, and not pass this responsibility to their Departments/Sections. For small sections, this new system could be paralyzing and prevent them from doing high quality research.")*

- Cooperation between students and supervisors (*„Implementing a system for student to give feedback on our supervision/supervisors"; „Mandatory education for supervisors - how to treat other people that work for you with respect"; „Defining what are the students AND supervisor's obligation - often PhD students are expected to work 12 hours a day and more without any financial reward and are not led by supervisors properly (e.g., no expertise therefore no help in troubleshooting)"; „Supervisors should be obligated to attend workshops on leadership and management skills.")*

- Availability of information about PhD study and opportunities after its completion *(„Focus on better Information System - it is very unintuitive - once is something at the beginning, sometimes at the end of semester, sometimes in Student, sometimes somewhere else..."; „Understandably described conditions and requirements of PhD studies, mentoring systém"; „I would prefer to have all the information on the organization of PhD studies accessible through IS in some interactive way. It would be much more comfortable than via the web pages of faculties"; „Awareness on future options, collaborations.")*

- Mobility programs („*The Faculty should focus on areas that are specific to my field of study, for example TAC meetings, more information about different mobility options, I know about Erasmus+ and A6 but I don't know about EMBO scholarship and others, I would appreciate if the Faculty would send more information about it and also not just a few days before the deadline for application*"; „*Financial support for internships abroad.*")
- Care for foreign students („*More Czech language classes for international students, and a few more subjects that are currently offered in Czech could be added in English as well. But this is already happening, I just encourage more lectures to be in English*"; „*Have a clear and honest information regarding family members reunification process*"; „*Internationality, opportunities for international PhD students.*")
- Unification of conditions for PhD studies at all faculty units („*Faculty should focus on equal quality of Ph.D. studies across the faculty and push for equality across the university*"; „*Unifying the conditions and requirements for the PhD students across all the departments of the Faculty of Science as the strictness of the requirements differ among departments.*")
- Student Mental Health Care („*Work-life balance and not overworking PhD students*"; „*Mental health support of students.*")

Individual suggestions (specific respondent statements):

- „*Less self-appreciation and more talking to actual students and catering their needs and their questions*"
- „*Cancelling state exams for doctoral students - it is absolutely unnecessary, and other faculties don´t require state exams*"
- „*Courses, worshops and seminars in hybrid form (available to people who work outside campus)*"
- *Broader range of free language courses*"

Otázka: Do you receive Newsletter for Early Stage Researchers

Do you receive Newsletter for Early Stage Researchers?

- Yes 40%
- No 60%
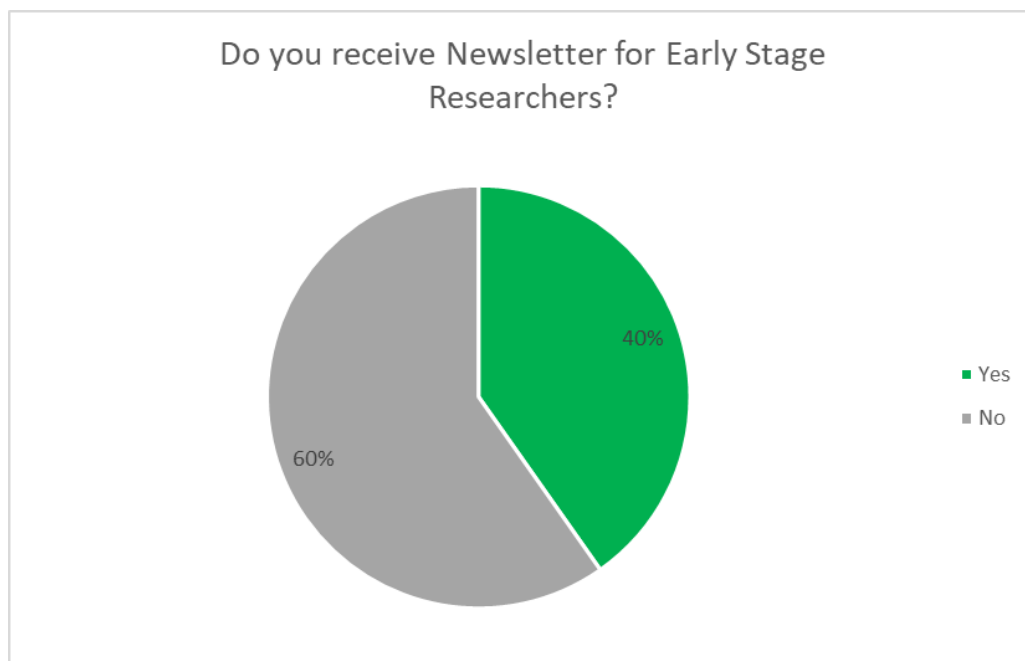
A regular Newsletter for Early Stage Researchers is sent to all current PhD students and Postdocs. The high percentage of respondents indicating that they do not receive the Newsletter is due here to an inaccurately formulated question in the questionnaire. The Newsletter goes to recipients in an email entitled "Newsletter for PhD students and Postdocs". We will therefore modify the wording of the question in the next questionnaire.
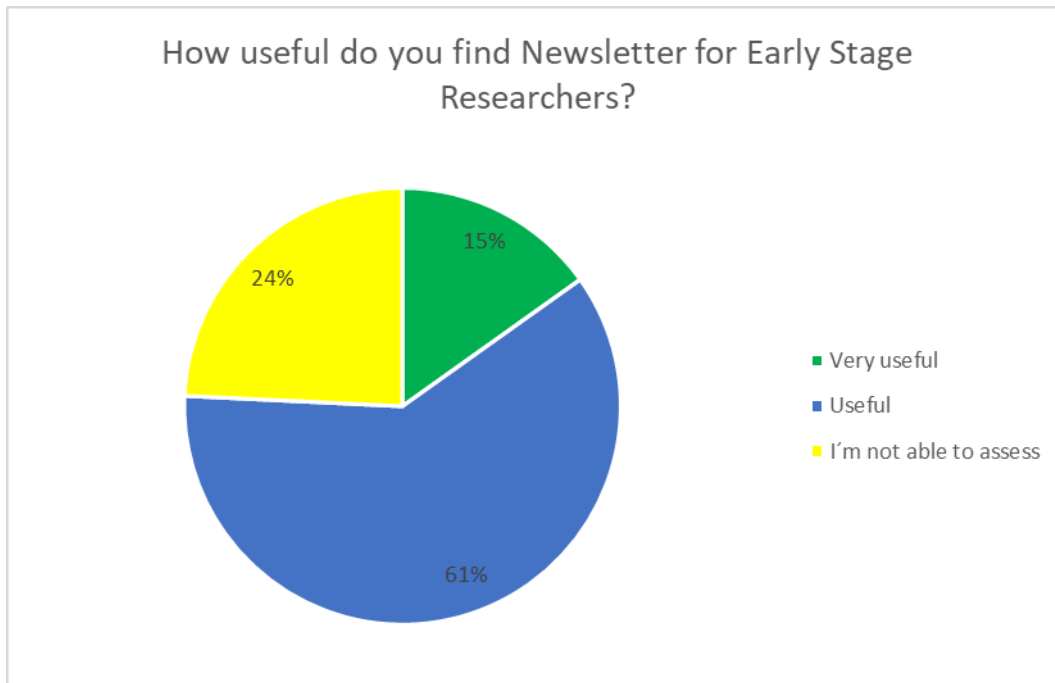
76% of respondents who receive the Newsletter find it **useful** ("Very useful" and "Useful"), with the remainder unable to judge.

Question: In case we organize trainings for PhD students, which topic/s would you prefer?) (open-ended question)

Recurring suggestions (grouped into main thematic areas, including the specific respondent statements):

- Academic skills - presenting, writing publications, project management *(„Improving presentation skills for teaching and conference presentations"; „Peer review of publications, scientific writing")*
- Soft skills training - work-life balance, mental hygiene, time management *(„Psychological hygiene, work/life balance, soft skills for future job positions"; "time management")*
- Career paths after PhD *(„a career in public or private-sphere non-research related; „Career development in academia")*
- Hard skills training (specialized, language) *(„communication skills in English"; „Electron microscopies, CryoEM")*
- Training on information about PhD studies
- Leadership skills training

Individual suggestions (specific respondent statements):

- *„My supervisor wouldn't like me to go...“*
- *„I do not have time to attend any trainings because I am trying to finish my Phd in reasonable time“*

Question: Do you have any other suggestions or comments you would like to mention to us? (open-ended question)

Individual suggestions (specific respondent statements):

- *„I would prefer to have a PhD day specified just on one faculty and providing more info concerning that particular faculty. Troubleshooting of the first steps on PhD“.*
- *„If the majority of students are unable to graduate within 4+1 yrs, the problem can not lie with the students but the system.“*
- *„Please, start to push for improving the tutoring skills of supervisors. It is almost criminal how despotic some supervisors are. Supervisors should be aware of the fact that they need us as well as we need them“.*
- *„I would like to express my dissatisfaction with finances and stays abroad since students are often partially employed but still students and there are subsequent problems with financing the stays (e.g. stipend and employment etc).“*
- *„I feel many PhD students think the administration can't change the situation for them, therefore, they feel quite demotivated even to attend the meetings and participate in such surveys. I feel a closer (really close) talk with them/us is a good idea.“*
- *„There is no need to create motivational programmes for PhD students. Rather, create solutions to the poor situation that students have to face, like no interest of the PI who is interested only in results for publications to hype up his name. Writing grants on anything that might bring the money but at the same time brings a huge amount of work which is put only on the backs of PhD students, and no one cares about that or completely not flexible administration…“*
- *„Thank you that you care.“*