

Summary of the Survey for Doctoral Students and Technical and Scientific Staff

An anonymous online survey on the experiences of Doctoral Students and Staff was completed by 93 people. The largest group of respondents were PhD Students and Assistants 42/93 (45%). Such a high response rate in this group may be related to a generational change, a perceived sense of empowerment through responding to surveys related to, among other things, the evaluation of teaching, which is reflected in the selection of lecturers and subjects.

More than a third of the respondents were Employees and Doctoral Students working at the Institute for a maximum of two years (33/93, 35%). The second largest category was Employees and Doctoral Students associated with the Institute for more than 10 years (30/93, 32%), and the third one was Employees and Doctoral Students associated with the Institute for between 3 and 5 years (23/93, 25%) (Fig.1). More than half of the respondents had more than 10 years of professional experience, the second largest group were Employees and Doctoral Students active in science for a maximum of 2 years (23/93, 25%) (Fig.2).

Single choice, answers 93x, unanswered 0x

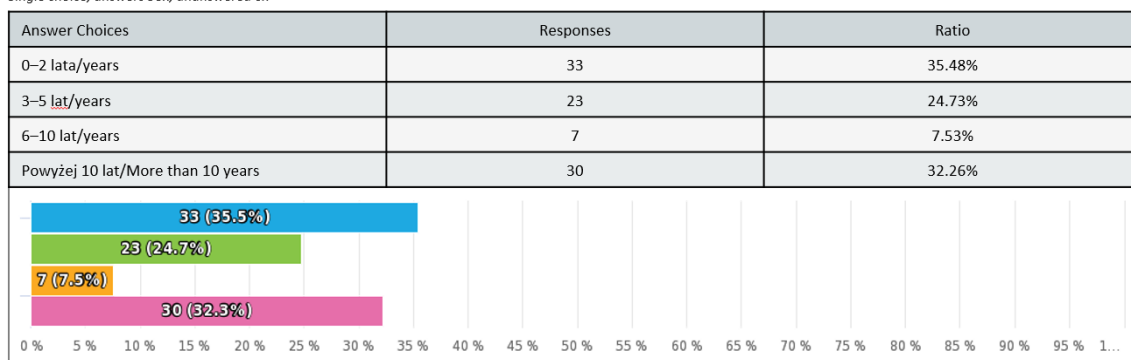


Fig.1 Summary of the declared length of service at the Institute

Single choice, answers 93x, unanswered 0x

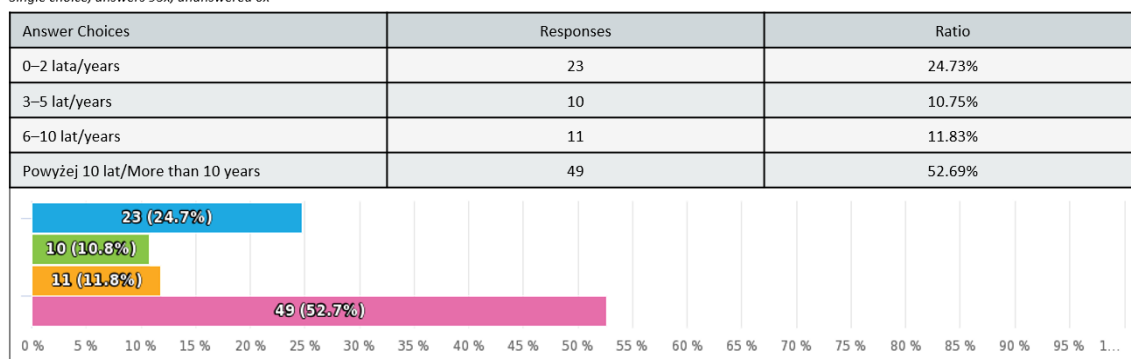


Fig.2 Summary of the declared length of scientific activity (after earning an MSc degree)

Respondents are 24% non-native speakers of Polish (23/93), 4% (4/93) did not state a language group affiliation, and 71% (66/93) declared Polish as their mother tongue.

The percentage of respondents' gender is in line with the results of the Gender Equity Plan analyses showing a numerical advantage for those declaring female gender 67% (62/93) over those declaring male gender 26% (23/93), with eight people choosing not to declare.

The Survey covered the following three thematic areas: recruitment procedures, conditions for development and institutional support, ethical issues and resolution of difficult situations. In most of the questions, irrespective of the area surveyed, there was a consistent percentage ranging between 2 and 6 respondents who answered "strongly disagree" and a total predominance of positive evaluations (after adding up the less numerous "strongly agree" with the more numerous "agree") over the sum of negative evaluations (the less numerous "strongly disagree" with the more numerous "disagree"). In the remainder of the report, "agree" and "strongly agree" ratings are treated as positive ratings, while "disagree" and "strongly disagree" ratings are treated as negative ratings. In many categories surveyed, the sum of positive responses exceeded half of all responses, while the sum of negative responses was less than 20%.

Recruitment procedures

Nuanced responses were obtained in the block of questions concerning the respondents' experience as recruiters. Most respondents consider the recruitment process transparent and open, but there were isolated opinions about irregularities in the recruitment process. In addition, most respondents are not thoroughly familiar with the European Charter for Researchers (ECF), indicating the need for dedicated training in this area. Only 19% of respondents stated that they were well aware of the tenets of the EKN and the OTM-R policy. 43% have heard these concepts but do not know the details, and 37% never faced them.

Half of the respondents assessed the competitions as transparent and well organised (the sum of the yes and definitely yes answers was 49%, 46/93). In comparison, 17% (16/93) expressed the opposite opinion, and 33% (31/93) were neutral (Fig. 3). The group of people negatively assessing recruitment decreased for the question on impartiality and fairness and the question on equal opportunities regardless of gender, age of origin to 10 out of 93 people.

Recruitment processes at the Institute are open, transparent, and well-organized.

Single choice, answers 93x, unanswered 0x

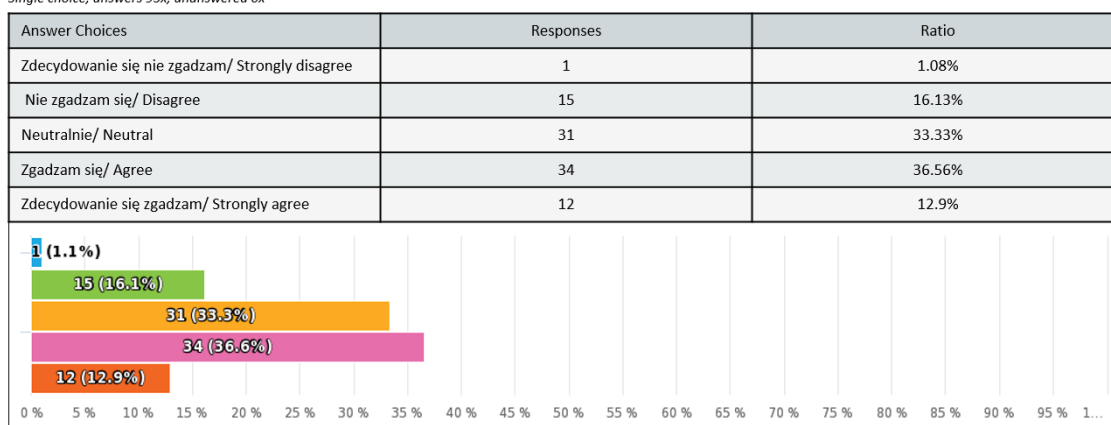


Fig.3 Assessment of the transparency and organisation of recruitment competitions

Regarding equal opportunities, the group of strongly positive respondents about the recruitment process increased to 27% (25/93) and positively to 34% (32/93), respectively. Critical of whether clear feedback is given were 10 respondents, including two who were very negative about this aspect of recruitment. None of the questions about the recruitment procedure did the group of people negatively assess the process exceeded 16 people. In the open question, there were comments on two main categories of recruitment:

for academic posts and for the Doctoral School. The comments on competitions for staff positions were different so that they will be discussed first. The most serious objection in this survey section was three responses suggesting that competitions are not open. In addition, there were suggestions to improve the administrative service, the way in which advertisements are prepared and the policy of communicating recruitment results.

Several statements directly referred to the recruitment of doctoral students, which has detailed rules and timetables at IBB PAN. There were no comments on the impartiality of the procedure or its openness. Comments related to the way in which the competence and selection of candidates are verified, the streamlining of extensive advertising over and above that required by law and grantors (which is done). Many of these comments are part of a transnational trend related to the exodus of competent candidates, especially domestic ones who go abroad, a general decline in interest in doctoral studies, and the resulting difficulty of recruiting competent candidates.

Institutional support

The majority of respondents were positive about their working conditions and the support available for their professional development. More than 77% (72/93 respondents) felt that they were provided with adequate working conditions (office, equipment, access to facilities), with as many as 23% (21/93) responding 'strongly agree'. Only 11% (10/93) expressed dissatisfaction with the working conditions, and 12% (11/93) remained neutral.

In the case of support in professional development (training, conferences, mentoring), a positive response ('agree' and 'strongly agree') was indicated by 58% of respondents. At the same time, 17% (16/93) gave a negative assessment and 25% (23/93) a neutral assessment - indicating potential for improvement in this area (Fig.4).

I receive support in professional development (training, conferences, mentoring).

Single choice, answers 93x, unanswered 0x

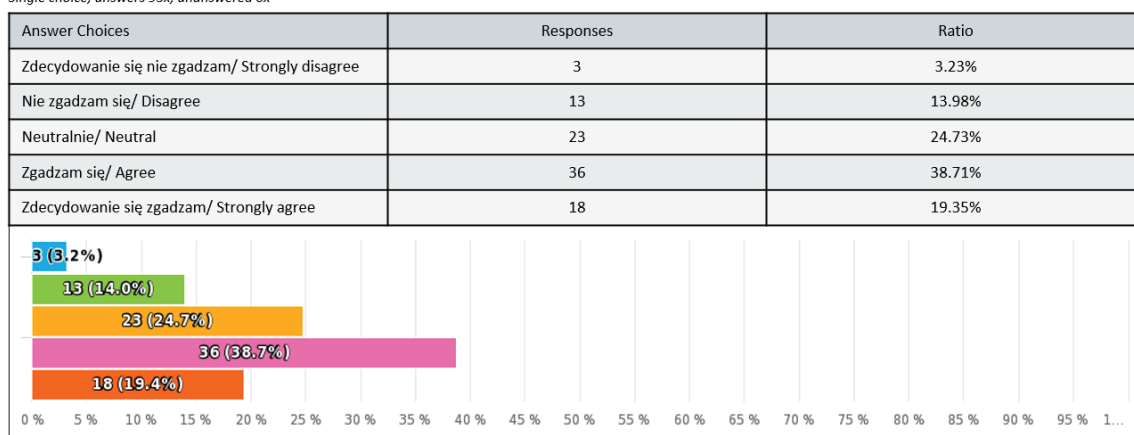


Fig.4 Evaluation of professional development support

Administrative support was rated highly. As many as 68% (63/93) of respondents expressed a positive opinion, only 14% considered this area neutral and 18% negatively rated support in handling grant and staffing issues. The polarisation of responses to this question is more significant than that of the other questions in this section, and it may be due to the interpersonal nature of the question. Issues of working conditions or access to professional development are not as clearly linked to contact with a specific department or employee as administrative support.

The process of evaluating employee performance is evaluated differently: less than half of the respondents evaluated it positively (47%, 44/93), 39% (36/93) neutrally, and 14% (13/93) of the respondents spoke negatively. The evaluation's neutrality may indicate that most respondents understand that the employer has a statutory obligation to conduct cyclical evaluations of employees, and the doctoral school also has to implement cyclical evaluations. The small group of negative evaluations of this procedure suggests that there are not many inadequacies in the process, while the lack of transparency and clarity about the rules of staff evaluation and promotion pathways seems to be a significant issue (this was raised repeatedly in the comments).

An overwhelming majority of respondents (68%) are positive or very positive about the Institute's attitude towards openness and the dissemination of research results, with only 6% being critical. None of the respondents expressed intense criticism here.

Open-ended comments were dominated by the need for mentoring, systematic training (including for managers), and soft skills development (team management, interpersonal communication, conflict resolution and project management). The demand for improved communication and training appeared repeatedly in the responses. The need to emphasise the importance of participation in this type of training by team leaders, who tend to be under-represented among participants, was also indicated.

Some statements also included recommendations for developing promoter competencies and supervision of promoter care. Such mechanisms have already been implemented as part of the activities of the doctoral school through, inter alia, annual surveys examining the relationship of each promoter-doctoral student pair, annual meetings with promoters and intervention meetings in case of a need expressed by one of the parties.

There were proposals to organise the work of the teams in a different way, to follow a career path, to ensure the stability of employment and to support the continuity of research groups and the mode of research funding, as well as to extend the administrative staff, technical staff, implement solutions to commercialise research or renovate buildings. These opinions were scattered and individual, not arranged in a homogenous vision of solutions. The divergence of opinions expressed in this section is likely due to the diversity of experiences, research specificities, the research group/team needs, the research focus/cost, and available funding. The catalogue of respondents' needs is extensive and should be subjected to targeted analysis to identify priority areas for future action/investment/reform.

Social requests in this section concern the demand for increased stipends, salaries, and support in the search for housing (made by foreigners). Doctoral students also make such requests directly to the doctoral school staff.

Infrastructure was also frequently raised, including the need for renovations and a publicly accessible social space, a rest and relaxation area.

Ethics in research

The majority of respondents unequivocally declare knowledge of the ethical principles in force (only 6 out of 93 people disagree with this statement) and confirm that the Institute ensures the protection of personal data (3 people disagree with this statement) and that the Institute ensures the protection of IP and supports collaboration (3 people disagree with this statement). The Institute's policy on research data management is assessed slightly less positively, with the dominant positive responses (61%) and only 14 negative ones.

Violations and procedures

Among the respondents, as many as 21 out of 93 (22%) do not know to whom they may report an event of ethical violations, and 25 (23%) expressed a neutral position, which can hardly be interpreted as good situational awareness. 47 out of 93 respondents (51%) know the procedure. Regarding similar questions about whether one knows to whom to report a problem in the workplace (e.g. bullying, discrimination or conflict), 22 people answered negatively, and 13 (14%) had no opinion. Furthermore, as many as 16 people (17%) declare that they do not know about procedures for reporting difficult situations, while only 46 people (49%) confirm that they know about them. Inconsistently, 47 people declared they knew to whom they should report problems.

An overwhelming majority of respondents feel safe at their workplace (64/93, 69%), while a relatively high percentage of neutral or negative answers is noted (31% in total, of which 17% are neutral and 14% negative) (Fig.5). Equal treatment of employees is confirmed by slightly fewer people (55/93, 59%), 14% rate this issue negatively and 26% remain neutral (Fig.6).

I feel safe and treated with respect in my workplace.

Single choice, answers 93x, unanswered 0x

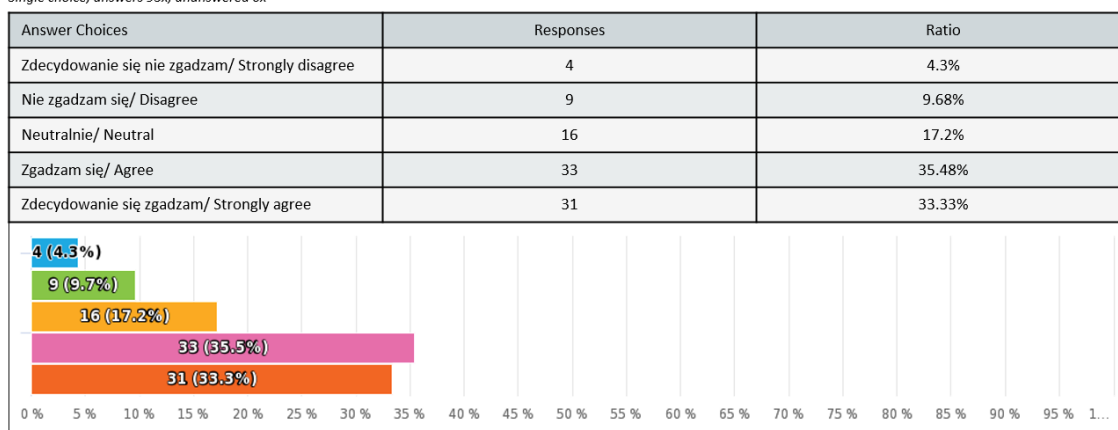


Fig.5 Perceived level of safety and respect in the workplace

All employees are treated equally – regardless of gender, age, origin, religion, sexual orientation, or nationality.

Single choice, answers 93x, unanswered 0x

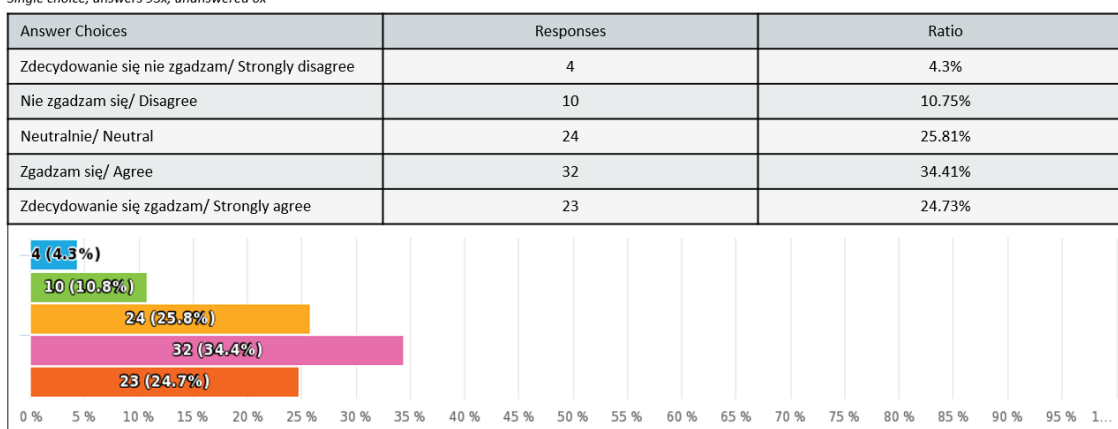


Fig.6 Perception of Equal Treatment at the Institute

From this part of the Survey, a picture of a relatively friendly workplace emerges, with communication being the weakest link. In an open question concerning the self-experience or witnessing a situation of harassment, discrimination or unequal treatment, there were indications of, among other things, abusive

positions of superiors, an insufficient sense of management support in conflict situations, a language barrier and exclusion of non-native speakers, and a lack of clarity or trust in anti-bullying procedures. The Institute has recently implemented new collegiate bodies responsible for handling reports of difficult or unethical situations. Once the committees and ombudsmen have been constituted, there is a need to explain to the Institute's community the changes, structures and arrangements to deal with reporting abuse and conflict resolution.

Although the majority of respondents declare that they feel safe at the Institute, the scale of the neutral and critical responses, as well as the numerous comments regarding distressing experiences and lack of trust in internal response mechanisms, point to the need to actively reinforce a culture of safety, equality and mutual respect in the workplace. Respondents referred to recent training on anti-bullying and discrimination issues, confirming the validity and effectiveness of this form of education. Further efforts to develop an anti-bullying policy are recommended.

Internal communication and information flow

The area of internal communication emerges as one of the most frequently raised problems in the open comments. Only 50% of the respondents stated that they receive comprehensible information on current procedures, responsibilities and available forms of support, while as many as 32% chose a neutral answer and a further 18% gave negative answers (Fig.7). This means that almost half of the respondents do not feel that the flow of information at the Institute is positive.

I receive clear information about my responsibilities, work regulations, and available forms of support and development at the Institute.

Single choice, answers 93x, unanswered 0x

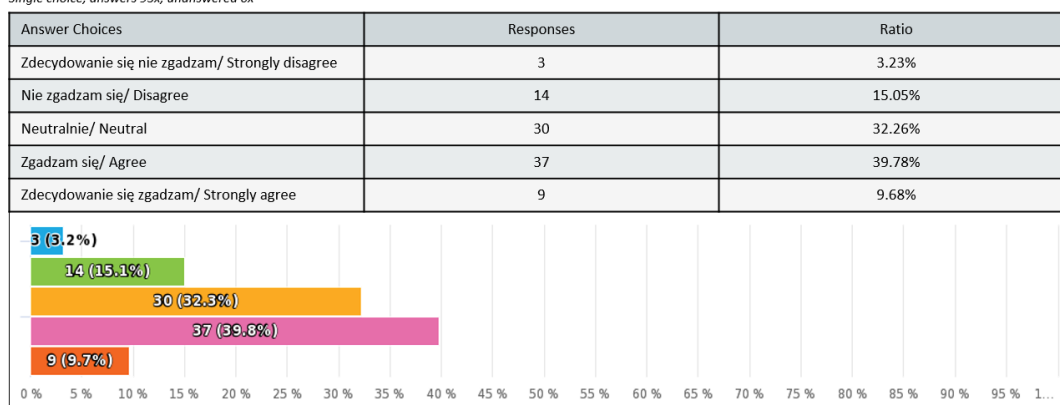


Fig.7 Assessment of the transparency and effectiveness of internal communication

Comments point, inter alia, to problems of lack of clarity regarding the rules for incentive allowances and conditions of employment, promotions and rules for evaluating scientific activities, career paths, available opportunities, and rules for creating and closing research groups.

Many of the problems reported relate to new procedures that should be implemented more efficiently and better communicated. At the same time, employee appraisal and motivation allowance are implemented according to regulations, which are available on the intranet and based on open scoring. The solutions implemented have increased the transparency of staff appraisal through, among other things, information on the quantiles in which a person has been appraised among all persons of a given grade.

A widely raised problem in the Survey is the general communication chaos and lack of uniform, easily accessible sources of information as well as a structured communication process.

Suggestions for improvement included a transparent database containing all the Institute's current documents, rules and procedures. Currently, such a function is performed by the Institute's intranet

website; at the same time, the survey results point to a lack of sufficient awareness of the functioning of this solution and its incompleteness or non-functionality. The need was also raised for regular consultations and information meetings, including with the Board of Directors, on changes being made and planned developments, which would result in greater transparency in communication, trust in the management and a sense of inclusion in relevant issues.

In response to a question about staff involvement in decision-making regarding researchers, only a proportion of respondents (36%) confirmed that they felt involved in the process (Fig.8). This suggests the need to develop more participatory communication mechanisms and to take greater account of the voice of researchers in the Institute's strategic and organisational activities.

Researchers are included in the decision-making processes that concern them.

Single choice, answers 93x, unanswered 0x

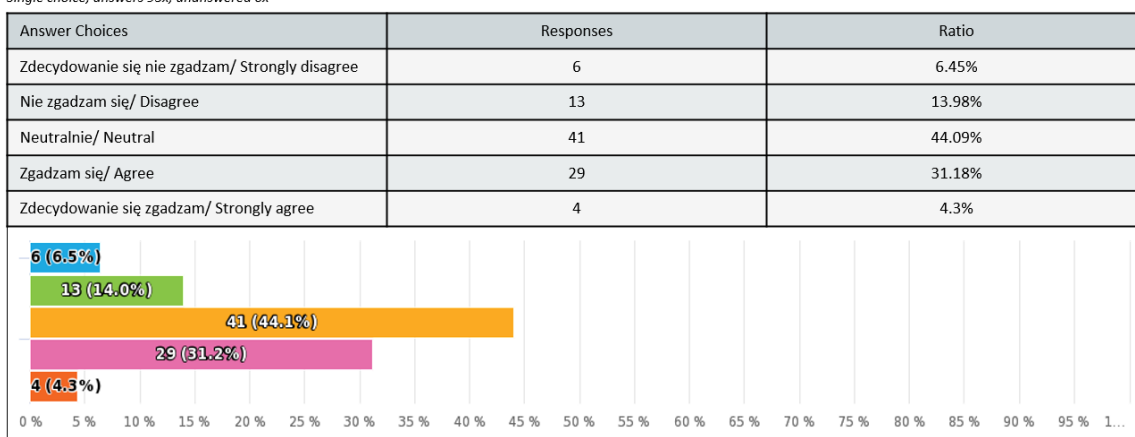


Fig. 8 Perceived degree of participation in decisions concerning scientists

Positive features of the Institute

Of all the categories of open-ended questions, the most responses came in the section 'What do you value about working at IBB', with as many as 36 people expressing their opinion and 32 in areas for improvement. In this section, respondents most often emphasised the positive working atmosphere, the high culture of collaboration and the high degree of research autonomy. The quality of relationships between colleagues and support from the administration was also highlighted.

Flexible working hours, the possibility of combining scientific work with private life (work-life balance), the openness of the Institute to diversity, and the international character of the research teams were also appreciated. The availability of research infrastructure and the high degree of freedom to conduct research in line with scientific interests were pointed out.

Some respondents noted that, despite the organisational difficulties that arise, daily work at the Institute is based on trust, mutual respect and a willingness to solve problems together. These elements were assessed as a great value of the working environment at IBB.

Summary

The survey results indicate that many areas of the Institute's functioning are evaluated positively, as well as those that need to be strengthened or improved. Respondents appreciated the working atmosphere, the culture of cooperation, flexibility, the research infrastructure quality and the research environment's openness. On the other hand, there were clear calls for improving internal communication, developing systemic mentoring, management training, transparent career paths, and more support for team and

individual development. Further efforts are needed to develop an anti-bullying policy and to explain the existing institutional response mechanisms to the Institute's community.

In both the recruitment process and the work/study process, the overwhelming majority of respondents believe that everyone is treated equally regardless of gender, age or background. Furthermore, they feel safe in the working environment. That is a clear value base around which the Institute can build its identity as an open, inclusive and supportive place for freedom in learning.

It is noteworthy that respondents were very active in the optional open questions. They show the Institute's community's high level of involvement in organisational issues and the quality of the working environment. It also indicates the need for more channels for expressing opinions, including regular consultations and space for sharing suggestions. It also shows that staff and PhD students have clarified expectations, are willing to share experiences and are ready to participate in building change at the Institute.

Survey prepared by Aneta Walas and Aleksandra Kania

Report prepared by Aleksandra Kania and Anna Muszewska