



**Student Mobility
and Motivation:**

Latin America

Student perceptions

Powered by the QS International Student
Survey and Global Student Flows

2026

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Foreword



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Latin America (LATAM) is both a major source market and a destination market for international students. Students from across the region are highly mobile internationally, but a significant share of that movement also takes place within LATAM itself. This means countries across the region are simultaneously sending students abroad and competing to attract students from neighbouring markets, supported by shared language, cultural ties and demand for more accessible, career-relevant higher education pathways.

The QS International Student Survey shows that students interested in studying in LATAM – who mostly already live in the region – are not simply comparing institutions on reputation or rankings alone. They are weighing how welcoming a country seems, ROI, visa accessibility, employability, networking opportunities, language development and the quality of the whole decision-making experience. Their expectations of communication are also changing, with faster, more personal responses becoming an increasingly important part of conversion.

This report brings together QS Global Student Flows and International Student Survey data to examine the LATAM mobility market – where students from the region are choosing to study, and how LATAM itself is attracting internationally mobile students from within the region. It explores what is driving this movement, what students are planning to study, which information sources shape their choices, and where institutions may need to adapt.

The findings point to a market with clear areas of sustained demand, but also one where assumptions need to be tested carefully. In a more competitive and compressed decision environment, institutions will need to make the case for study clearly, practically and credibly, whether they are recruiting LATAM students internationally or competing for them within the region.



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Executive Summary

LATAM inbound mobility is expected to keep growing, but student decision-making is becoming more complex. By 2030, the number of international students in Latin America is projected to exceed 500,000, with Argentina, Mexico and Brazil hosting more than 60% of all inbound students in the region. Though the US is forecast to remain the top source country for LATAM, student volumes are mostly underpinned by strong intraregional flows. However, the motivations shaping student choice are increasingly varied.

Subject demand remains concentrated, with Business and Management the leading area of interest at 19% in 2026, followed by Engineering and Technology at 12%. However, the picture is shifting in the second half of the 2020s. Engineering has softened since 2022, while Law and Computing have gained relative ground. Institutions will need to protect demand in established subject areas while also recognising emerging opportunities beyond the traditional business and engineering core.

Country choice is now shaped by a tighter cluster of factors. A welcoming environment remains important, but its influence has declined from 58% in 2022 to 48% in 2026, bringing it closer to teaching quality, visa access, post-study work rights, reputation, employment outcomes, language development and network-building. Students are still looking for destinations that feel supportive, but they are also asking more specific questions about access, value and future opportunity.

The information journey is also shifting. Official university websites remain the top source of information, but their use has fallen from 76% in 2022 to 64% in 2026, while rankings have declined sharply from 42% to 28%. Social media, university fairs, education agents, phone calls and printed prospectuses all point to a more blended journey, where students look for reassurance across multiple touchpoints rather than relying solely on institutional websites or rankings.

Conversion expectations are tightening too. In 2026, 35% of LATAM inbound students expect a complete and personal response to an enquiry within 24 hours, and 63% expect one within three days. For application outcomes, the share expecting a decision within 24 hours has risen from 19% in 2022 to 29% in 2026, while the proportion prepared to wait one month or longer has fallen from 37% to 25%. Speed alone will not secure conversion, but slow or unclear communication now carries a greater risk.

For institutions, the overall message is practical. LATAM inbound students need clear proof of academic quality, stronger links between study and future opportunity, more tailored digital and human touchpoints, and faster, more transparent communication. The opportunity is not only to attract more students, but to reduce uncertainty at each stage of the decision journey.

Latin America: Market Trends

Latin America's international student market is forecast to expand substantially by 2030, with the number of internationally mobile students from the region expected to rise from approximately 366,000 to more than 500,000. Much of this mobility will remain regional. Argentina, Mexico and Brazil are projected to host more than 60% of all inbound students in Latin America, underlining the importance of geographic proximity, language, culture and affordability in shaping student flows.

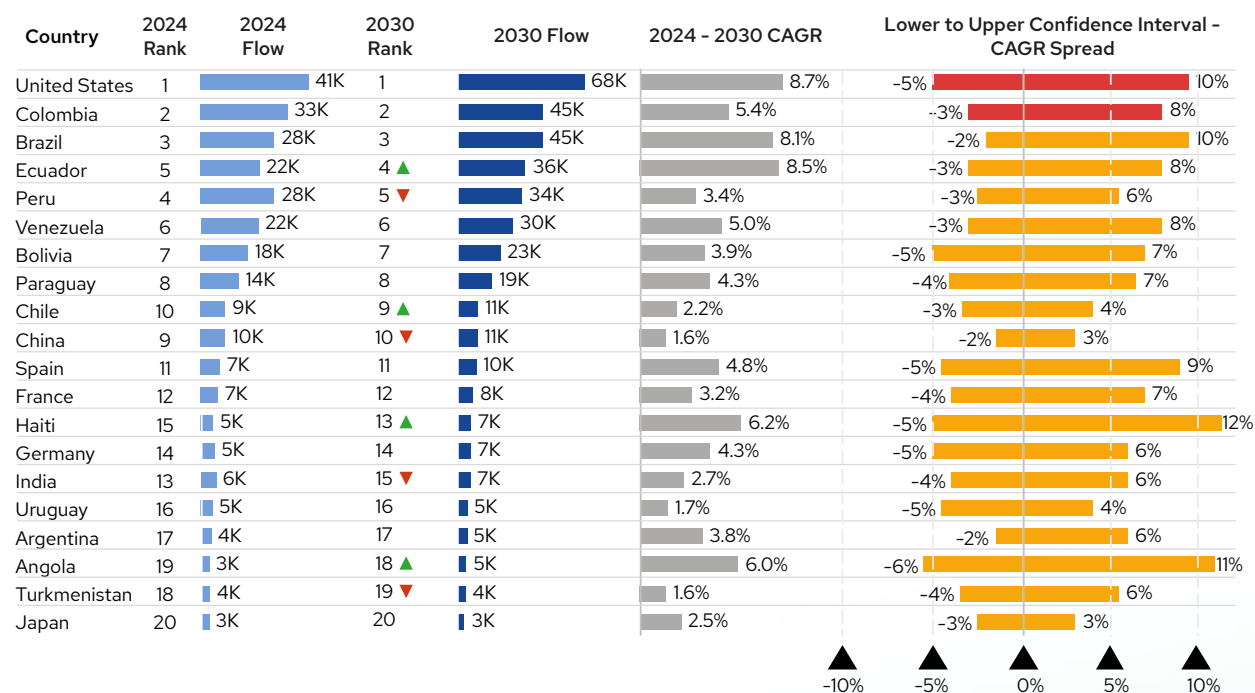
Demand from outside the region is the biggest opportunity for LATAM. The US is set to remain the top source market for LATAM destinations and is forecast to record the strongest growth rate. To realise this, they need to optimise English-language taught provision, student support, and consider the pre-candidate experience.

With a CAGR of 8.7%. Ecuador and Brazil are also forecast to increase their outbound mobility by 2030. Brazil is expected to increase inbound demand from Portuguese-speaking Africa as its digital education infrastructure develops. Mexico's inbound profile also points to selective diversification: 40% of its international students come from the US, but students from Europe make up nearly a quarter of its international cohort.

The overall picture is therefore one of growth with concentration. Intraregional mobility will continue to define the LATAM market, but there are emerging routes for destinations that can connect affordability and cultural fit with clearer evidence of quality, outcomes and access. For institutions, this means regional relevance should remain the foundation of recruitment strategy, while selective diversification opportunities are tested market by market.



Figure 1. Top 20 Source Countries to LATAM, 2024-2030F



Source: QS Global Student Flows

**Read more in Global Student
Flows: Latin America**



Inbound Trends



At a Glance

More than

500,000+

Projected international students in Latin America by 2030

Top destinations



What Do They Want to Study?

Top Subjects in 2026

#1

Business & Management 19%

#2 Engineering & Technology 12%

#3 Law 7%

#4 Architecture, Building & Planning 5%

#5 Sciences; Computing; Creative Arts
& Design; Psychology

Biggest Changes Since 2022



Law +2%



Computing +2%



Architecture, Building & Planning +1%



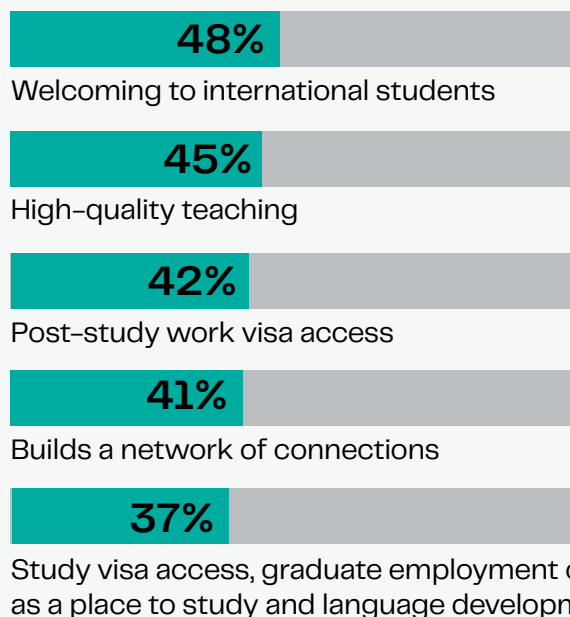
Engineering & Technology -3%



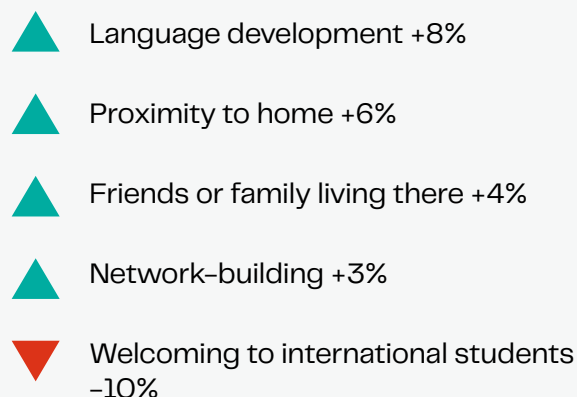
Medicine & Dentistry -3%

What Do LATAM Students Seeking International Study Want?

Top Decision Drivers in 2026 when choosing a country



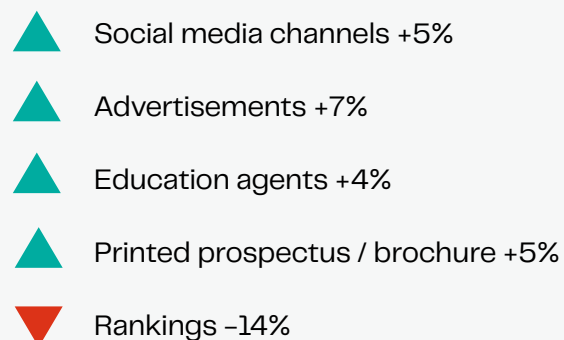
Fastest-Rising Factors Since 2022



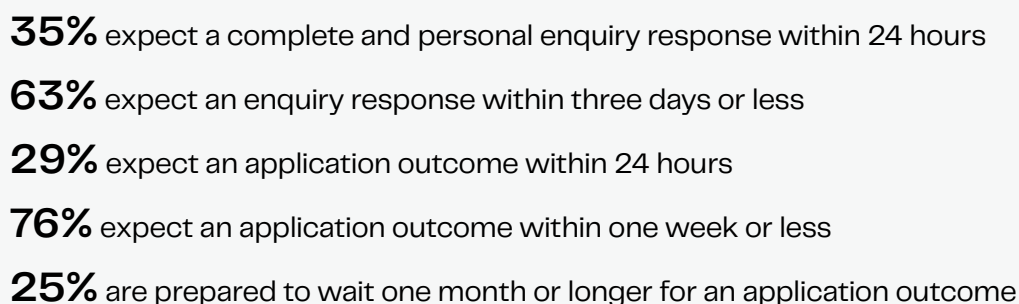
Most Influential Information Sources



Biggest Shifts Since 2022



How Quick Do Students Expect Responses?

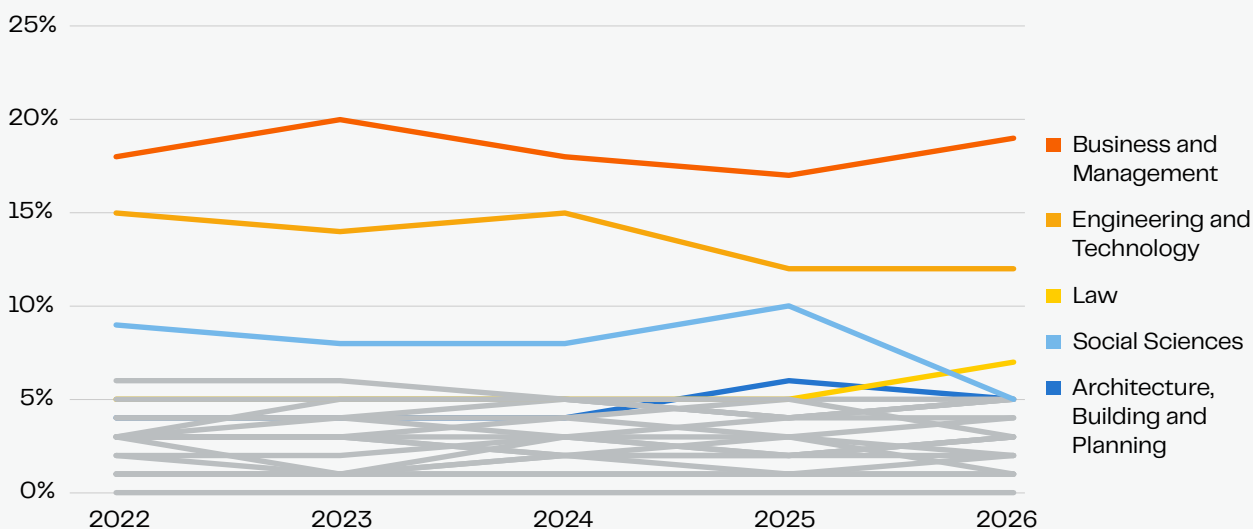


Subject-level Interest

Business and Management remains the clearest anchor of LATAM inbound study interest. After peaking at 20% in 2023, it returned to 19% in 2026, broadly in line with its 2022 position and still well ahead of any other subject area. This suggests a relatively stable demand base for commercially oriented programmes, but also a highly competitive market in which institutions need to differentiate through employability, international networks, entrepreneurship, industry links and flexible career pathways.

Engineering and Technology remains the second-largest subject area, but its share has softened from 15% in 2022 to 12% in 2026. Engineering recruitment may require sharper programme positioning, clearer career outcomes and stronger links to priority sectors if institutions are to sustain interest from LATAM students.

Figure 2. What are LATAM-bound Students Planning to Study?



Source: QS International Student Survey

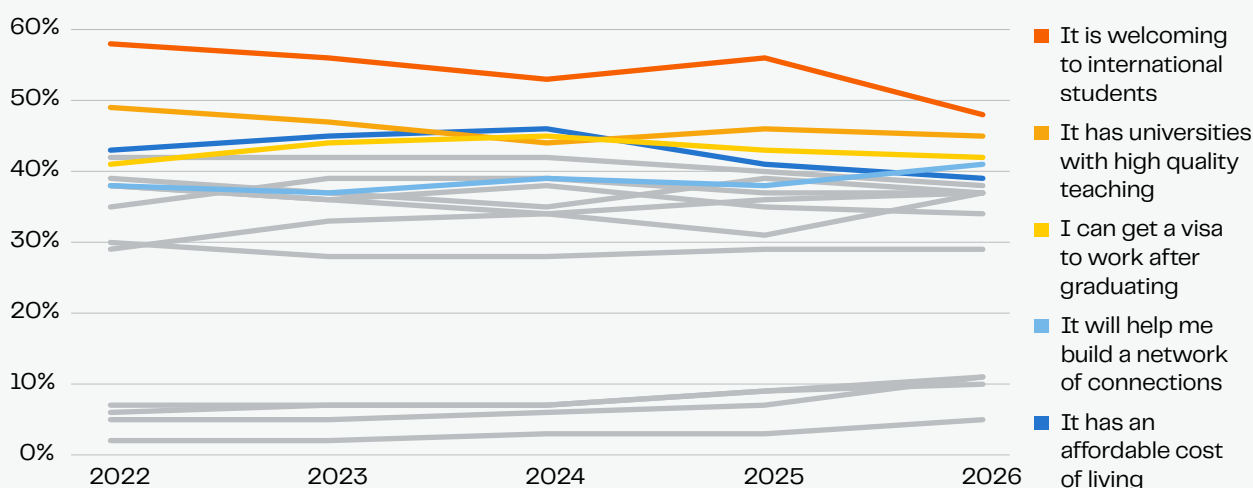
The most notable upward movement is in Law, which rose from 5% to 7% between 2022 and 2026, making it one of the strongest growers in the dataset. Computing has also strengthened compared with 2022, moving from 3% to 5%, despite some fluctuation since its 2023–2024 high. Medicine and Dentistry has fallen from 6% in 2022 and 2023 to 3% in 2026, while Social Sciences dropped sharply from 10% in 2025 to 5% in 2026, returning below its earlier 2022–2024 range. These shifts suggest that institutions should avoid assuming that long-standing areas of international demand will automatically sustain momentum without clear value propositions around outcomes, accreditation, cost, clinical or practical experience, and progression routes.

Key Questions to Consider:

- How differentiated is your Business and Management offer?
- Are STEM programmes clearly linked to career outcomes?
- Where should health-related programmes be given more prominence?
- Which emerging subjects justify targeted recruitment?

What Drives Inbound Mobility?

Figure 3. LATAM Inbound Mobility: Important Factors When Choosing a Country



Source: QS International Student Survey

For LATAM inbound students, country choice is increasingly shaped by a tight cluster of practical and experiential factors rather than one dominant driver. Being welcoming to international students remains important, but its influence has weakened over time, falling from 58% in 2022 to 48% in 2026. That decline brings it closer to other leading factors, narrowing the gap with the importance of teaching quality, visa access, post-study work rights, reputation, employment outcomes, language development and network-building.

Employability has emerged as a significant consideration, with three of the top five factors focused on employability. High-quality teaching has remained relatively stable, moving from 49% in 2022 to 45% in 2026, while well-ranked universities has held at 29–30% for most of the period. Reputation as a place to study has also stayed within a narrow range, ending at 37% in 2026. This points to a mature consideration set in which academic credibility matters, but is weighed alongside practical access, outcomes and personal value.

The notable growth areas are more personal and practical. Language development has risen from 29% in 2022 to 37% in 2026, networks have increased from 38% to 41%, and proximity to home has more than doubled from 5% to 11%. Friends or family in the destination and student recommendations have also strengthened. At the same time, culture and lifestyle appeal has slipped from 38% to 34%. This suggests that students are becoming more specific about what a destination can offer them: not just appeal or prestige, but access, support, connections and future mobility.

Key Questions to Consider:

- What now defines a welcoming destination? Are you able to differentiate from other LATAM destinations?
- Which factors will tip a close decision?
- Is your guidance on visa accessibility, employability outcomes and networking opportunities clear?
- How does your country stand out when priorities converge?





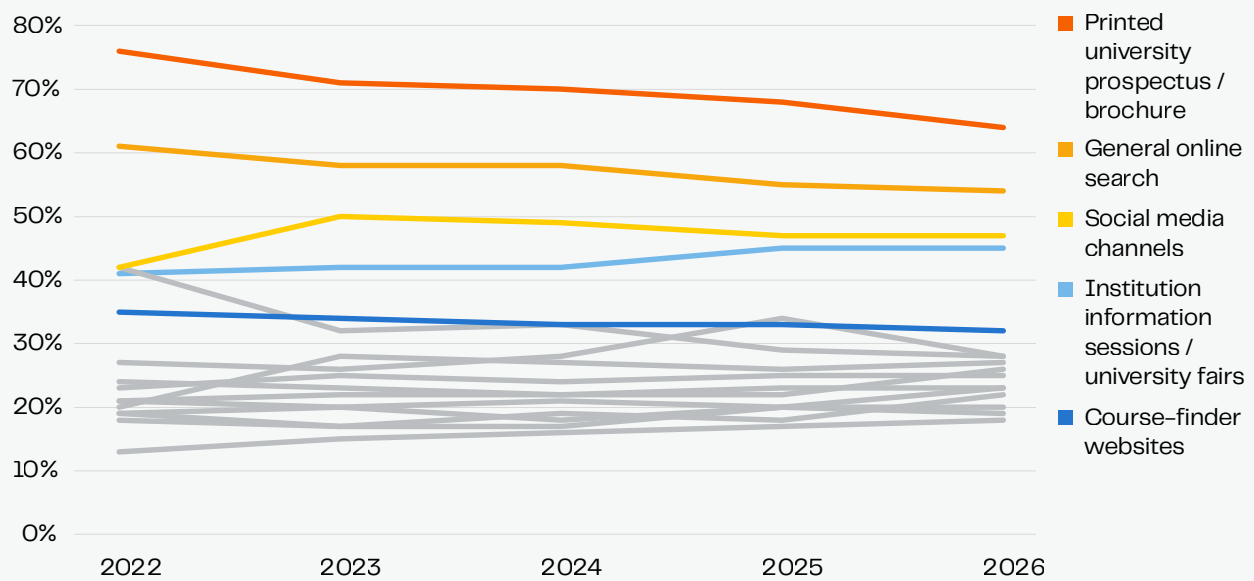
The Sources of Information Students Use to Make Decisions

Official university websites remain the dominant information source for LATAM inbound students, but their influence has declined steadily from 76% in 2022 to 64% in 2026. General online search has followed a similar downward path, falling from 61% to 54%. This does not reduce the importance of owned digital channels, but it does suggest that students are no longer relying as heavily on a single institutional source when researching study options.

Social media has become a more established part of the decision journey, rising from 42% in 2022 to 47% in 2026 after peaking at 50% in 2023. University fairs and information sessions have also strengthened, reaching 45% in 2025 and 2026. Students are using formal institutional channels alongside social proof, live engagement and peer-facing content.

The clearest decline is in rankings, which fell from 42% in 2022 to 28% in 2026. Course-finder websites have also softened slightly, from 35% to 32%. By contrast, education agents have grown from 19% to 23%, printed prospectuses from 21% to 26%, and phone calls with institutions from 13% to 18%. This suggests that while digital research remains central, students are starting to place more value on guided, practical and reassurance-led sources as they move closer to decision-making.

Figure 4. LATAM Inbound Mobility: Information Sources



Source: QS International Student Survey

Key Questions to Consider:

- Is your website tailored to international students?
- How visible are you beyond owned channels?
- Are agents and internal admissions teams aligned?
- Does your social media content provide real reassurance, and reflect the decision-making factors that matter to inbound students?

Student Conversion and Communication

LATAM inbound students increasingly expect faster communication from universities, particularly at the application–outcome stage. For enquiry responses, expectations have remained relatively stable but are weighted towards speed: in 2026, 35% expect a complete and personal response within 24 hours, while a further 28% expect one within three days. Together, nearly two-thirds expect a meaningful enquiry response within three days or less, leaving limited tolerance for slow or generic follow-up.

Expectations around application outcomes have shifted more clearly towards speed. The share expecting a decision within 24 hours has risen from 19% in 2022 to 29% in 2026, while those expecting an outcome within three days increased from 19% to 23%. The one-week expectation has remained broadly stable, at around a quarter of students.

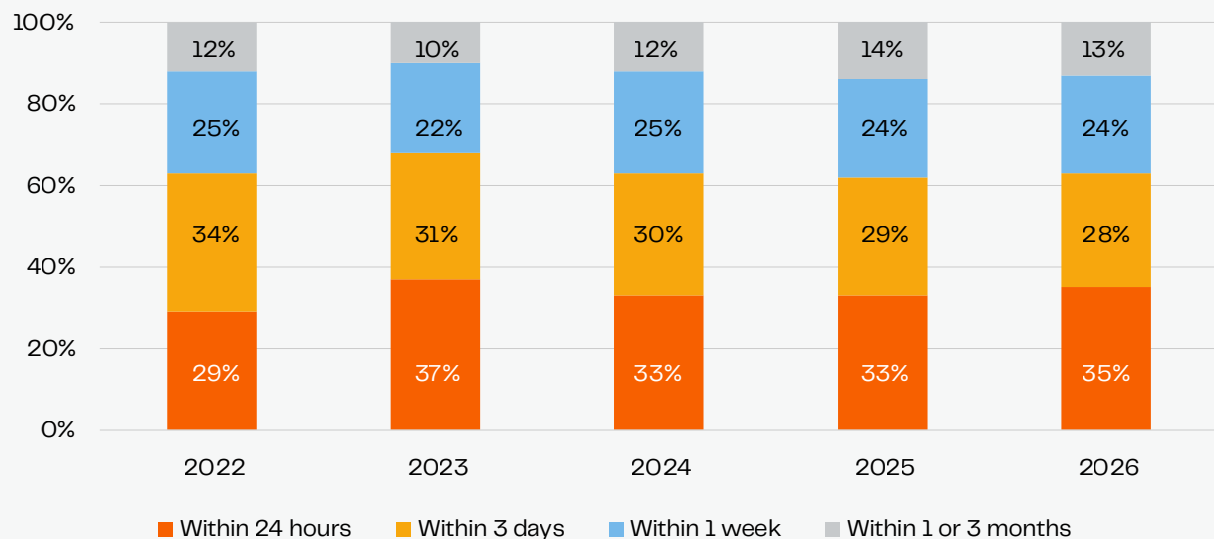
The clearest evidence of a tightening expectation is in the decline of longer acceptable waits. For application outcomes, the share prepared to wait within one month or within three months fell from 37% in 2022 to 25% in 2026. For enquiry responses, longer waits have remained lower and more stable, with 14% prepared to wait up to three months in 2026.

LATAM inbound students may tolerate some processing time for applications, but the acceptable window is narrowing. Institutions that can provide faster, more transparent updates are better placed to maintain applicant confidence through the conversion journey.

Key Questions to Consider:

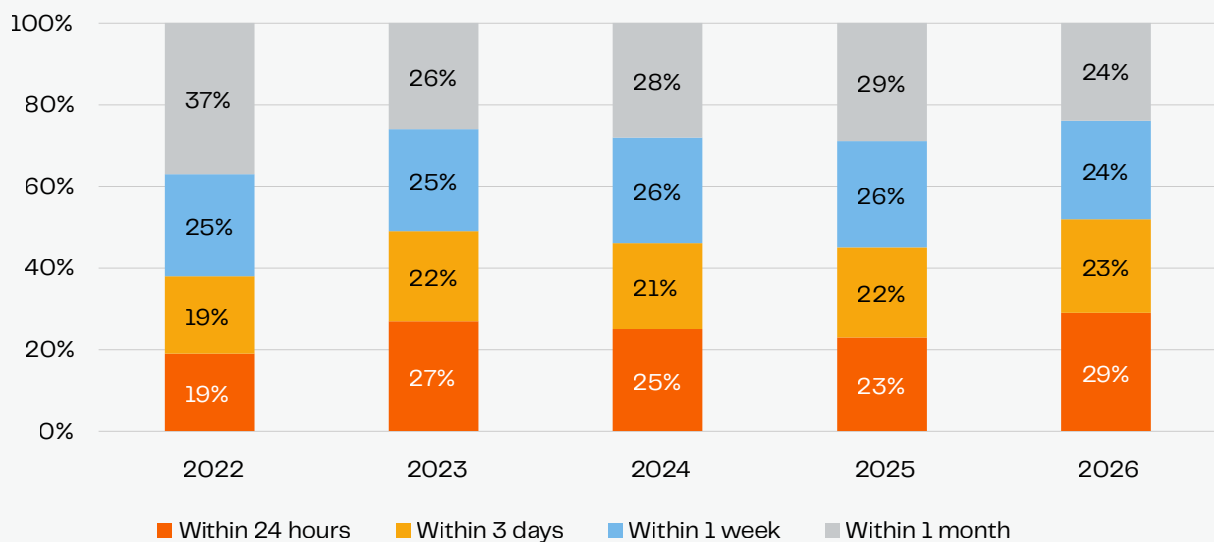
- Can enquiries receive a personal reply within 72 hours?
- Where can application decisions be faster?
- Are waiting students kept clearly informed?
- Is the response experience consistent end-to-end regardless of enquiry touchpoint?

Figure 5. LATAM Inbound Mobility: Expectation of Time to Receive a Complete and Personal Response to Enquiry



Source: QS International Student Survey

Figure 6. LATAM Inbound Mobility: Expectation of Time to Receive the Outcome of Their Application



Source: QS International Student Survey

Methodology

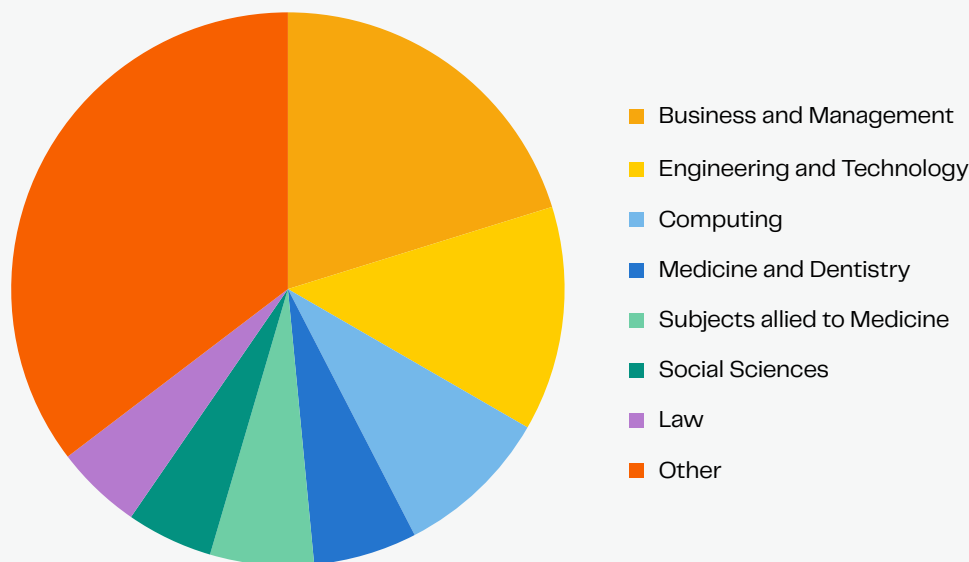
The QS International Student Survey offers an unparalleled view into pre-enrolled international students. The 2026 iteration draws on responses from over 42,115 students in 191 locations, and this report uses over 500,000 responses from the past five years.

The questions in the Survey are designed to enable higher education institutions to make sound decisions on recruitment and communication strategies. Now combined with Global Student Flows data, we offer a well-rounded view of where students are choosing to study, and how they make that decision. To understand what matters to students, we ask a wide range of questions about their pre-enrolment journey. We want to know what students prioritise when choosing a location, university and course, and we want to understand what they perceive as high-quality teaching. We ask students how their family influence decision-making, and we gather data on the social media and digital channels they use to find study information. The International Student Survey also benefits from its longevity – 2026 is our 14th edition. The consistency in our questioning allows us to see how students' answers change over time, and predict future trends and shifts. Its yearly format allows us to add new questions to get a snapshot of student perception.

The International Student Survey's robust methodology ensures we truly represent the perception of pre-enrolled international students. Respondents are collected for the International Student Survey are collected in partnership with global universities. This year, we partnered with 82 universities globally, who were invited to share the Survey with their own prospective international students. Fieldwork for the Survey was conducted between 5 January and 6 April 2026, via Qualtrics, an online survey management platform. The Survey contains 50 unique questions, covering a range of topics relating to prospective student decision-making, from their study background to their priorities, marketing communication preferences, through to their principal information sources, career aspirations, and post-study plans. The 2026 iteration of the Survey also contains questions on candidate perceptions of different locations as study destinations. Each institution who took part received a tailored benchmarking report detailing the results of their own prospective students.

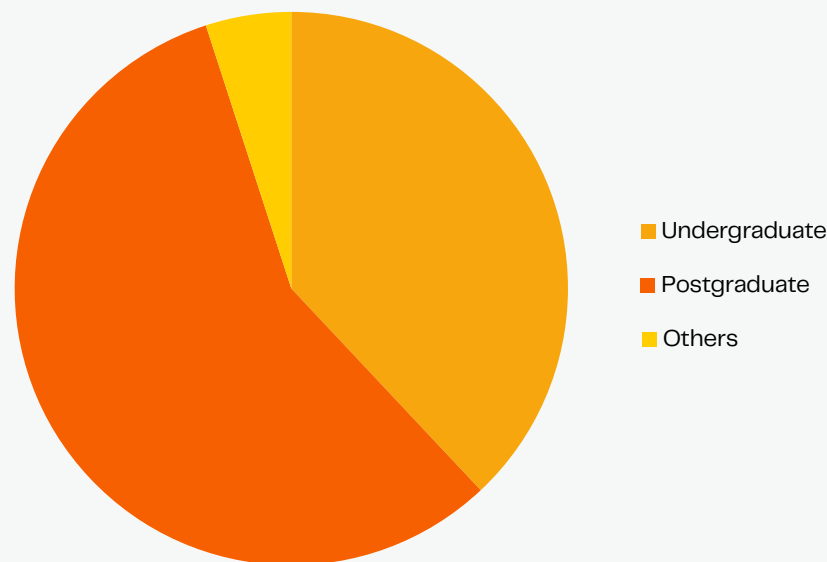
International Student Survey Respondent Demographics

Subject Preference



Source: QS International Student Survey

Study Level



Source: QS International Student Survey

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