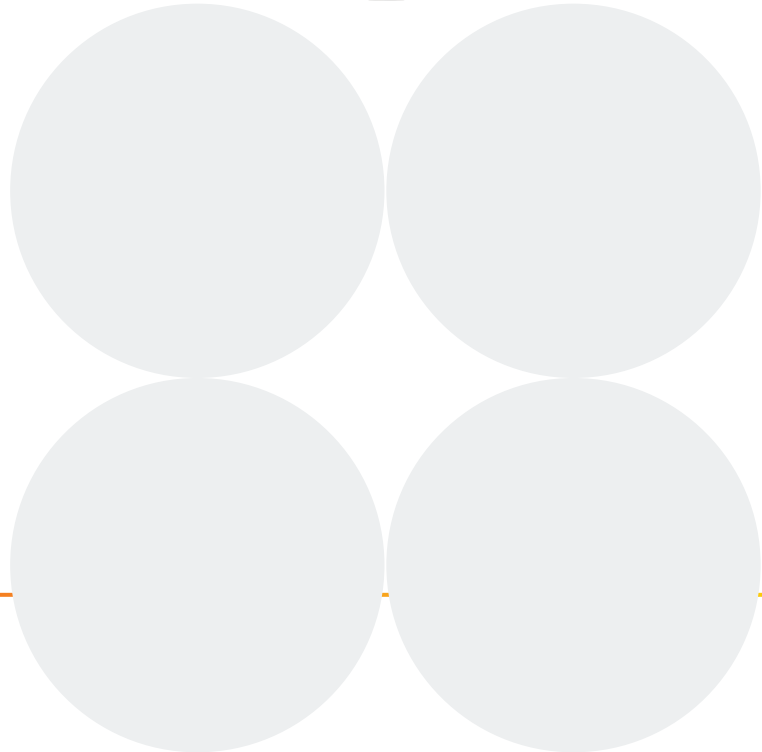


From China to the World



Discover the preferences and motivations of 14,138 students from China looking to study at universities overseas

A report on the QS International Student Survey 2024



Key findings

from the 14,138 Chinese students interested in studying abroad

The UK, Hong Kong SAR and Australia are the top destinations

The US is 14% less popular among Chinese students than the global average.

Graduate outcomes are a top priority

Over two thirds of Chinese students said that a consideration when choosing a course was that it improves their employment prospects.

Safety is the biggest worry for Chinese students

62% of respondents said that safety was their biggest worry when considering studying in a different country, followed by the cost of living.

Local social media is crucial

WeChat and Weibo are important channels to Chinese students, and far more popular than WhatsApp.

Sustainability is important to the majority of Chinese students

55% of students said environmental sustainability was very or extremely important to them, but the global average was 72%.

AI is affecting Chinese student decision-making

43% said AI is affecting their career choices.

Recommendations

1

Promote graduate employability in your marketing materials. Chinese students place more emphasis on graduate outcomes than students from other countries – leverage this to your advantage by evidencing strong performance compared to your peers.

2

Universities have a distinct opportunity to use **Chinese-centric social media** to deliver tailored marketing messages. Weibo and WeChat are opportunities for universities to deliver marketing messages that are tailored to the Chinese market.

3

Show your institution's positive environmental sustainability impact by **promoting the results and outcomes of your sustainability research.**

4

Highlight safety on-campus and in your country as a key message. Chinese students consider rankings and ratings important. Consider how you can use ratings or credentials to evidence safety.



Angela Lehmann
Principal Consultant

"Chinese students account for a vast number of international students. Their perspectives and motivations are unique among other major source markets, as this report explores. Understanding their needs and requirements is crucial if you are to continue recruiting from China. Use Weibo and WeChat to promote the key messages your potential students want to hear about – graduate employability and safety on-campus."

Make smart choices, with real student insights

The QS International Student Survey is the largest global survey of its kind, and it has been guiding international recruitment strategies for over a decade.

146,619
prospective student responses

196
countries and territories

14,138
from China

Use QS International Student Survey data and insights to:

- Understand and fulfil evolving student priorities in the areas that matter most to them, like employability and sustainability.
- Identify growth opportunities.
- Refine brand positioning, adapt strategies, and showcase your difference.

Would you like help from QS experts? We will work with you to apply our insights and recommendations into your marketing and recruitment plans.

Contact us today and we will be happy to guide you towards recruitment excellence.



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What are the preferences and motivations of prospective students from China?

If you partner with us for the QS International Student Survey, you receive a bespoke report for your institution.

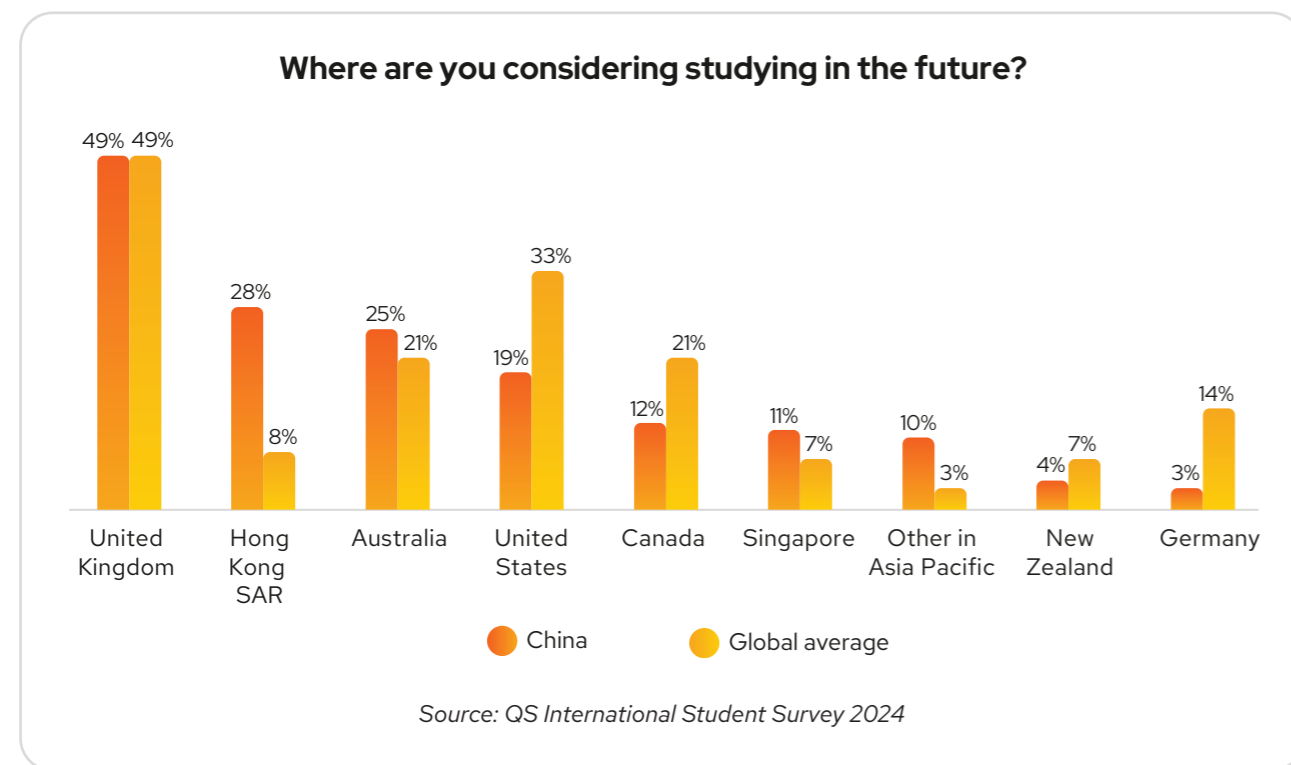
It's free to participate – we just ask that you invite your prospective students to complete the QS International Student Survey.

Register your interest in partnering with us for the QS International Student Survey 2025 today.



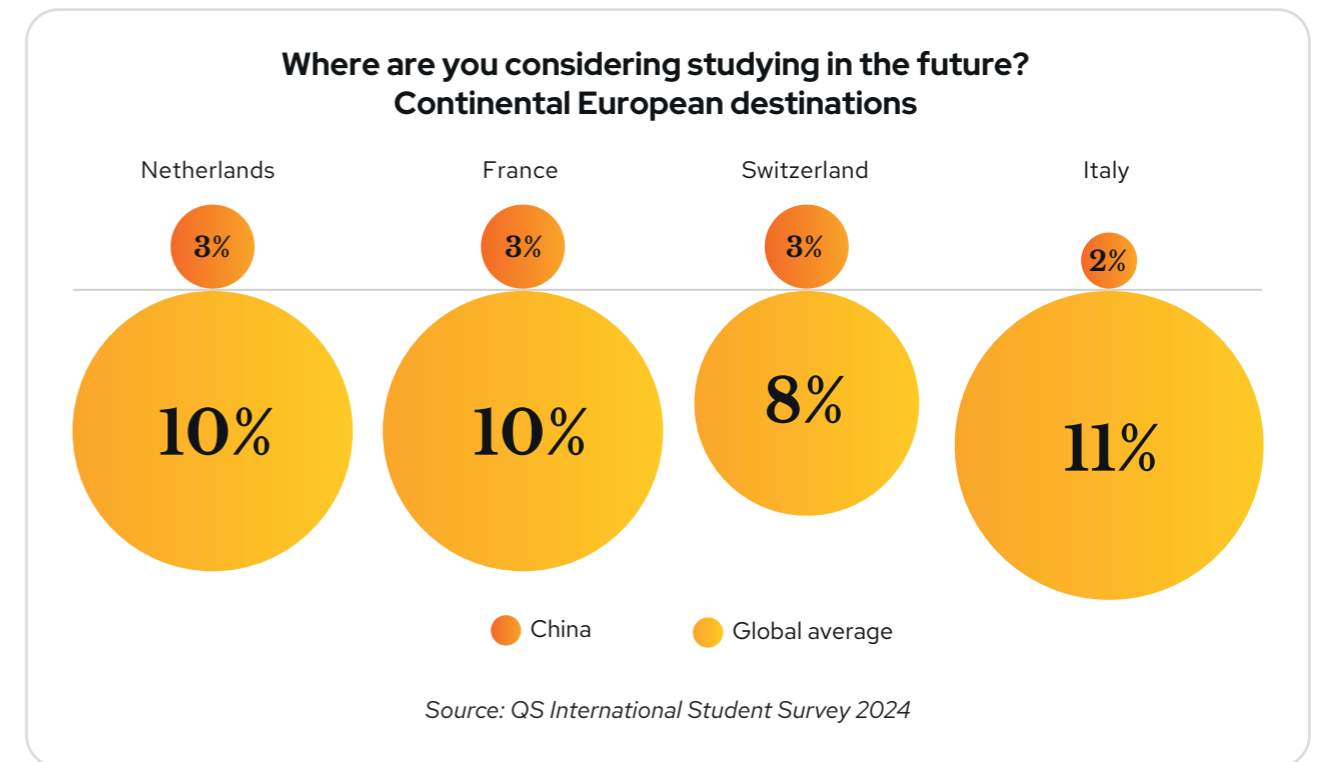
Where do Chinese students want to study?

While the UK is the most popular option, other European destinations aren't as favoured



The UK is the most common study destination reported by Chinese students – exactly aligned to the global average. However, destinations closer to China, such as Hong Kong SAR, Singapore and other Asia Pacific destinations are of much more interest.

Continental European destinations, such as the Netherlands, France, Switzerland and Italy are all selected at much lower rates than the global average.



However, when students were asked to select the country they were most likely to study in, there is much less variety in students' opinions.

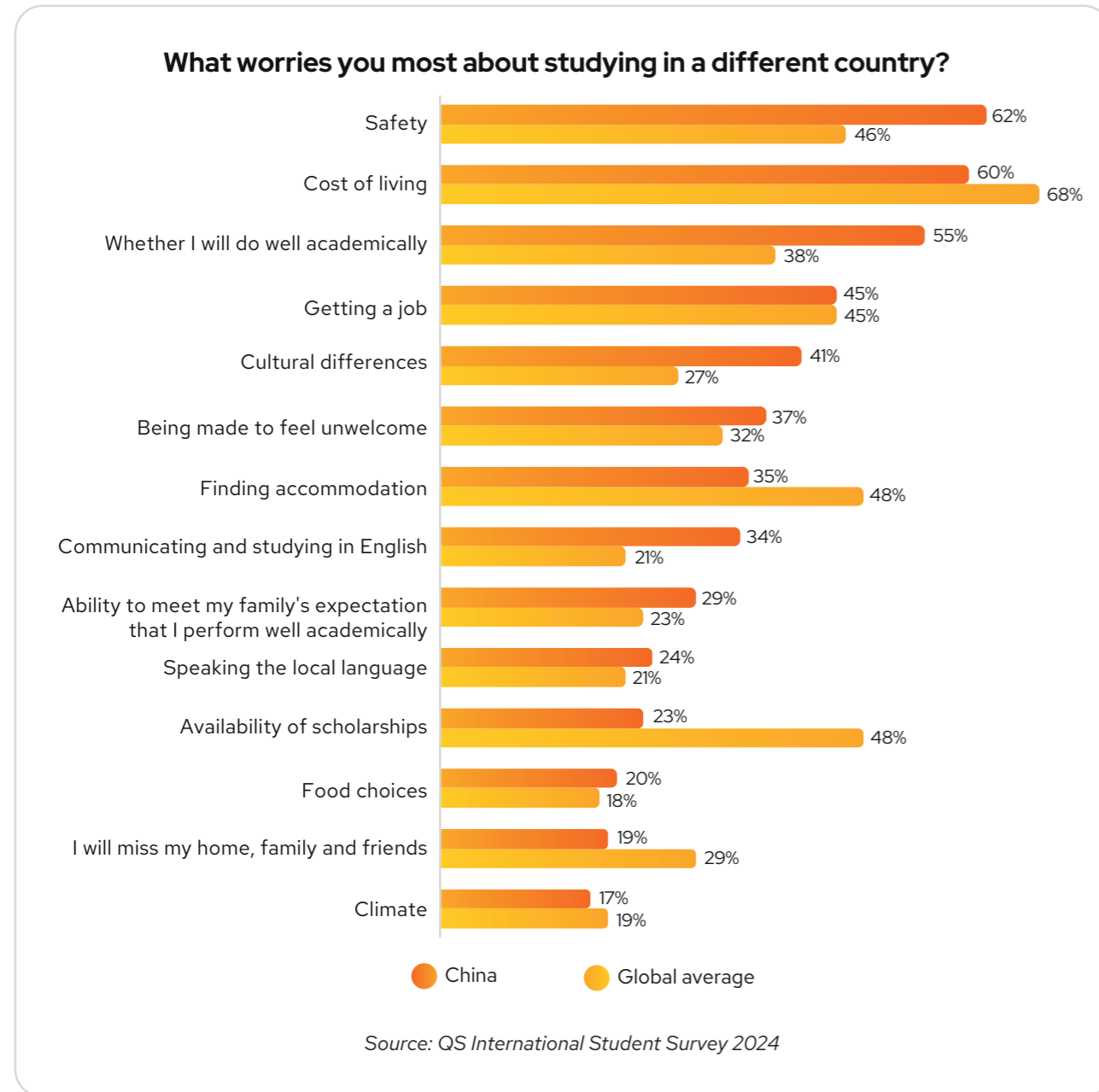


While students are open to lots of options in principle, Chinese students would prefer one of the major study destinations. The outlier in this is Hong Kong SAR, which is geographically close and has a recognisable culture.

What are the most important things when choosing a country to study in?



What are their concerns about studying abroad?



Safety is the biggest worry for Chinese students

62% of respondents said that safety was their biggest worry when considering studying in a different country – 16% higher than the global average. Cost of living closely follows in second, with academic concerns in third.

While cost of living is a major concern, availability of scholarships and concerns around finding accommodation are both reported at lower rates than the global average. With 45% of Chinese students reporting a household income between \$10,001 – \$100,000, Chinese respondents are wealthier than the global average (32% reported the same income level).

Cultural differences are also a significant concern to Chinese students (41%). Universities should highlight their welcoming environment, as well as any specific activities that will ease students into life in another country, such as student societies.

There being no language barriers was identified as the factor that would make Chinese students feel less worried about studying abroad. Having friends or family being close by, and friends and family identifying good support for international students are the next most popular factors (47%). As we will explore later in the report, this re-emphasises the importance families have in Chinese student-decision making.

Which of the following factors would make you feel less worried about studying abroad?

53%

If I was confident that there would be no language barriers

47%

If I had heard from family or friends that there is good support for international students

47%

If I had family or friends in the country of the institution that I am applying to

46%

If I knew a lot about the culture of the country that I would be moving to

Source: QS International Student Survey 2024

Applying to university

Students expect a quick and personal response to enquiries

90% of Chinese students expect a complete and personal response to their enquiry within one week. 64% expect a response within three days. Alongside a quick response, they also expect ongoing contact. After making an application, 53% of students expect weekly contact from a university. 23% expect monthly contact, and 11% expect daily contact.

Chinese students applying to multiple universities

20% of Chinese students are considering applying to, or have already applied to between 5-10 universities. 8% said they had applied to more than 10 universities.

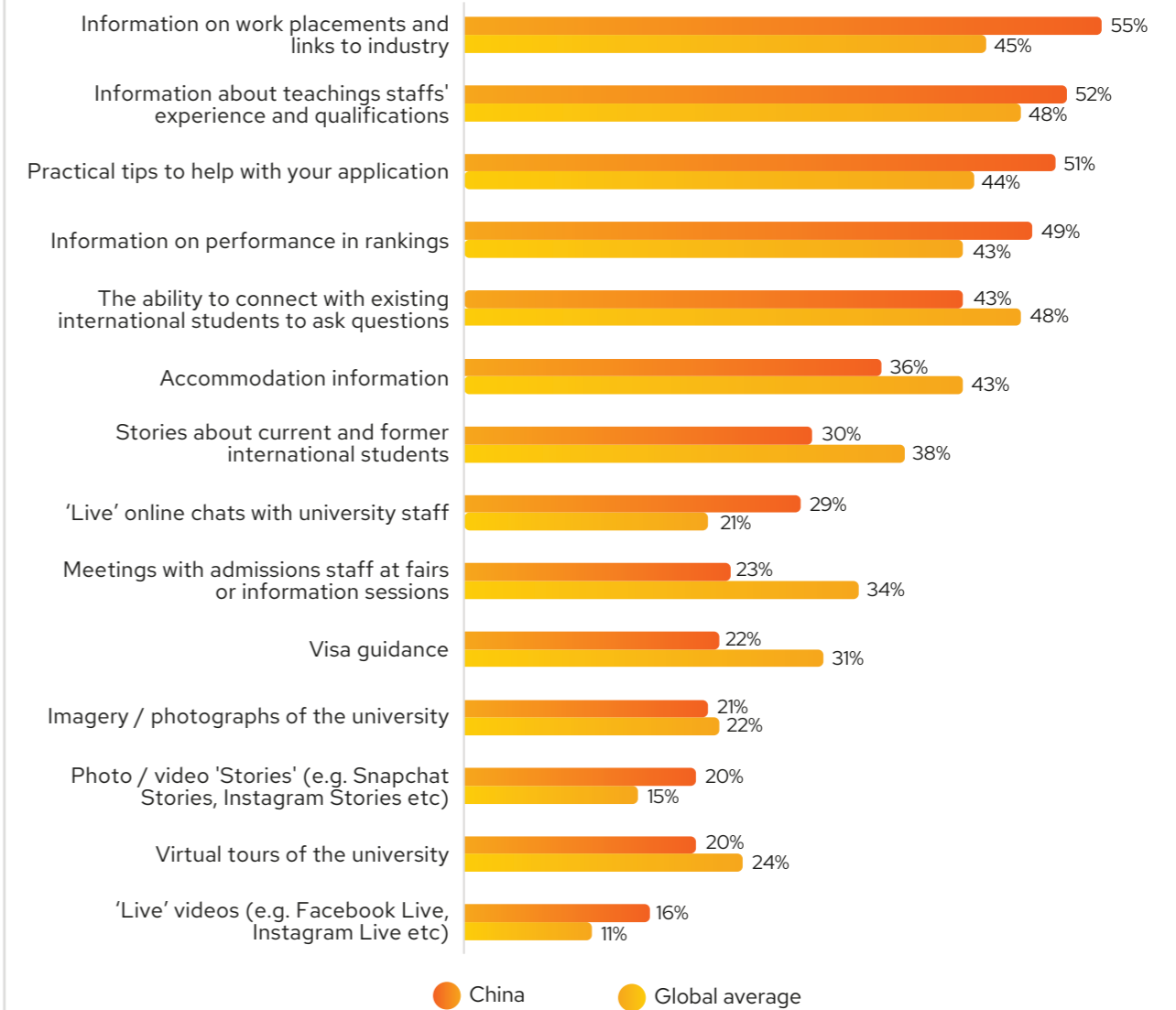
The most common number of universities to be considering is five (18%).



Information sources

Chinese students find insights into work placements and links to industry to be the most useful sources of information when making study decisions.

Which of the following are most useful to you when making study decisions?



Source: QS International Student Survey 2024

The pieces of information Chinese students find useful do not entirely align to the global average, with information about work placements, teaching staff's experience, application tips and rankings all being cited as more important by Chinese students.

Study decisions often discussed with parents

What have you discussed with your parents?

	Chinese students	Global average
1 Choice of course	62%	53%
2 Choice of country	74%	64%
3 Choice of university	71%	54%
4 None of these	2%	3%

Over 60% of students have discussed key study decisions with their parents - a higher percentage than the global average. Interestingly, this doesn't seem to impact the amount of influence parents have on Chinese student decision-making. Chinese students report a similar level of parental influence to the global average.

How much influence do your parents have in your decisions about where and what to study?

	Chinese students	Global average
1 A lot of influence	22%	20%
2 A fair amount of influence	35%	37%
3 Not very much influence	36%	31%
4 No influence at all	6%	12%

A huge 81% of Chinese students said parents/family will be their main source of funding, far higher than the global average (43%). Parents are clearly a key stakeholder - universities looking to recruit more Chinese students should consider how they can target their parents with useful messages.

Advisors at their current education institution are the next most popular set of people to discuss their options with - 34% explored their choice of course with them.

Social media usage

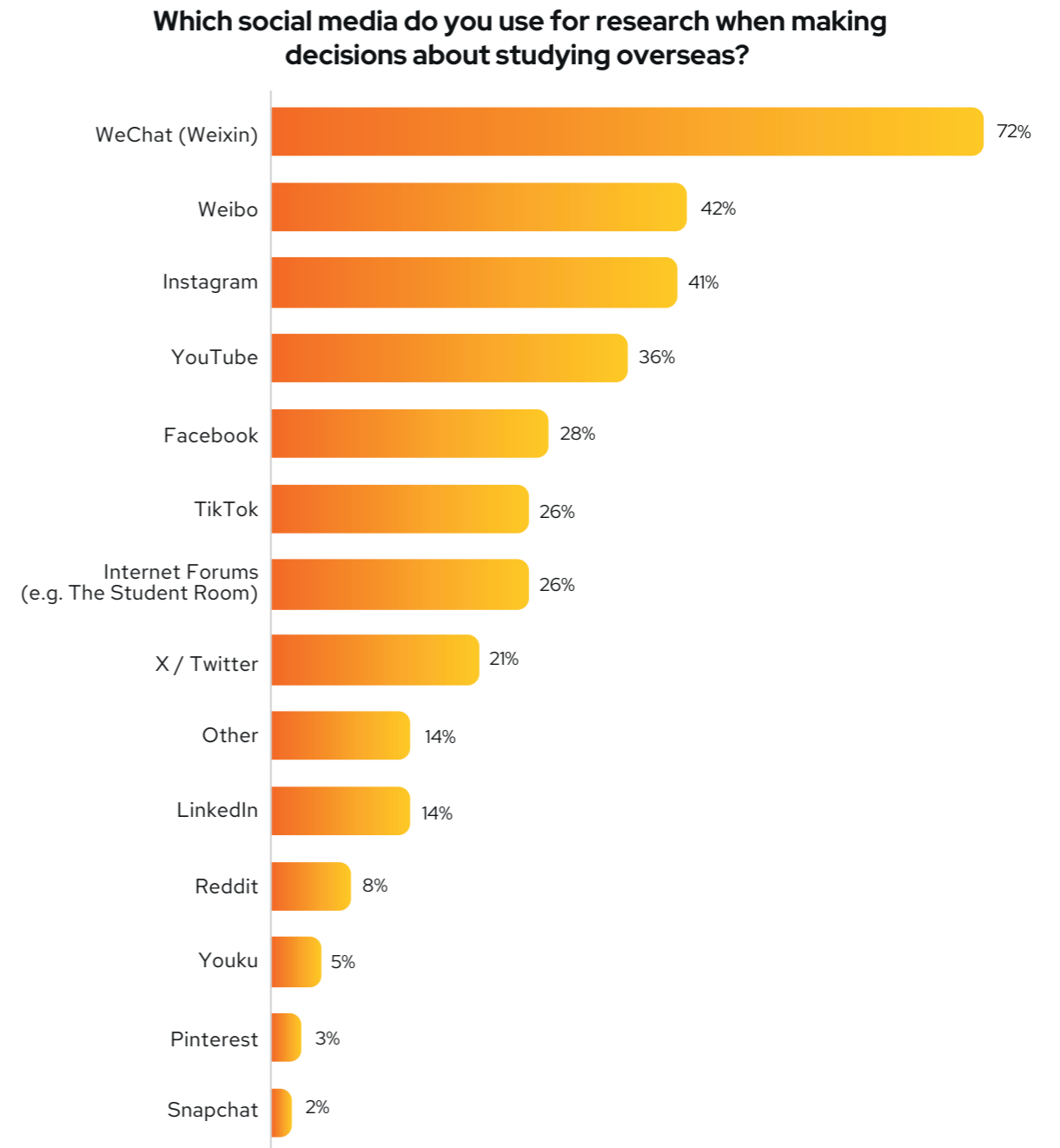
WeChat is the most popular social media for researching study decisions

72%

of Chinese students said they use WeChat for research when making study decisions.

42%

use Weibo, and 41% use Instagram



Source: QS International Student Survey 2024

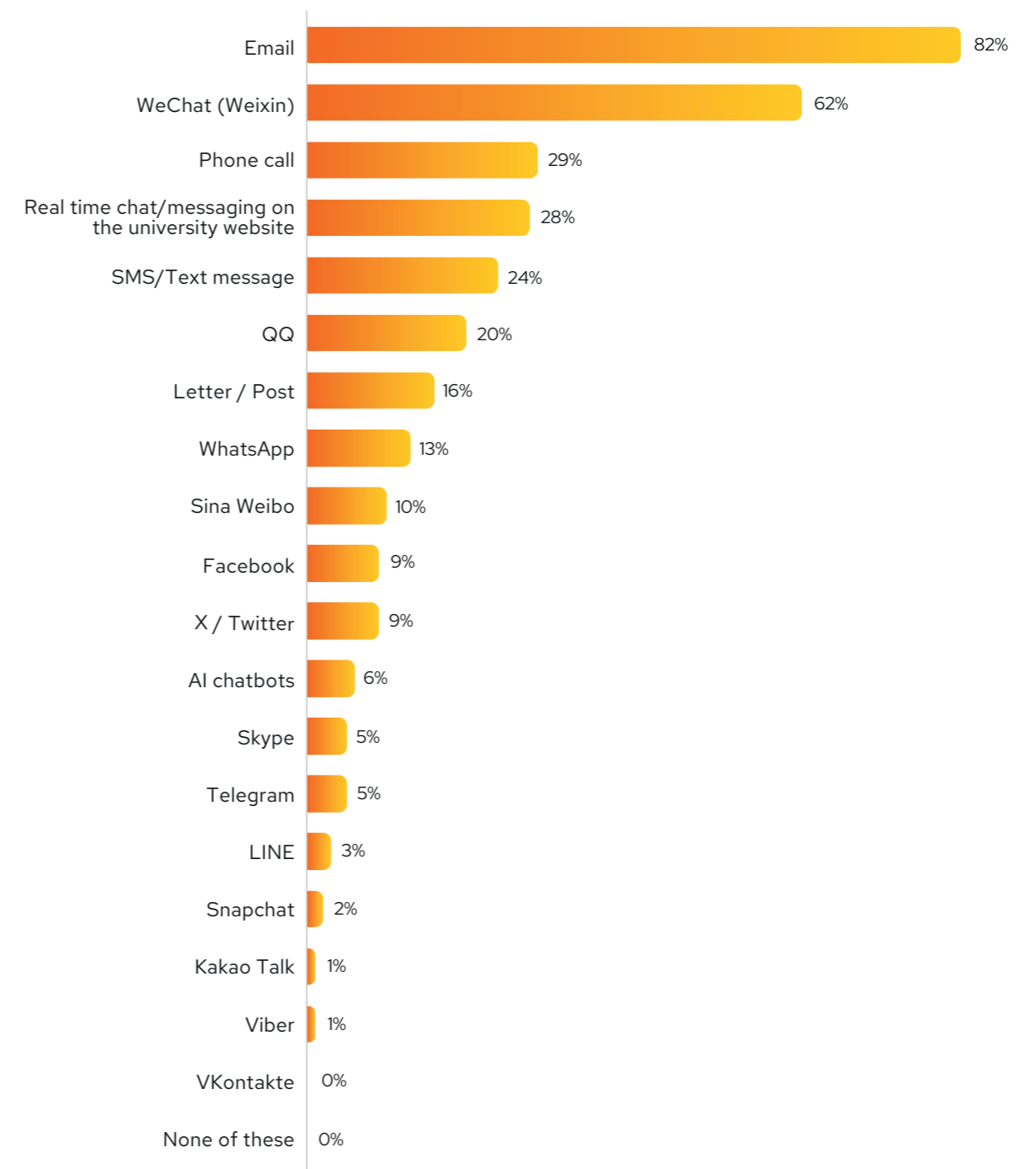
Ensuring you have a presence on these key channels enables you to deliver tailored messages to the Chinese market – globally, only 15% of respondents use WeChat, and 9% use Weibo.

Communication channels

Email and WeChat are the preferred communication channels

As well as having distinct social media habits, Chinese students also display different communication preferences to the global average. While email is the most preferred communication channel, as it is globally, WeChat is far more popular among Chinese students than the global average, and WhatsApp is far less popular.

Which of these would you like to use to communicate with a university you're considering studying at?



Source: QS International Student Survey 2024



Student recruitment events

Over
50%
of Chinese students
have been to a student
recruitment event

54% of Chinese students have attended a student recruitment event or fair. 60% attended an in-person event – while this is a majority, it does highlight an opportunity for universities to use virtual events to supplement their in-person fairs.

Why did you choose to attend a student recruitment event?

Top **3**
reasons

61%

To see the range of universities and courses that were on offer

42%

To speak with universities I have already researched

31%

To speak with universities that are new to me

Talking to universities directly influenced decision-making

Nearly three quarters of Chinese students said talking directly to universities influenced their decision making. This presents a significant opportunity for universities to use student recruitment events to drive conversion and enrolments.



Employability

Graduate outcomes more important to Chinese students than the global average

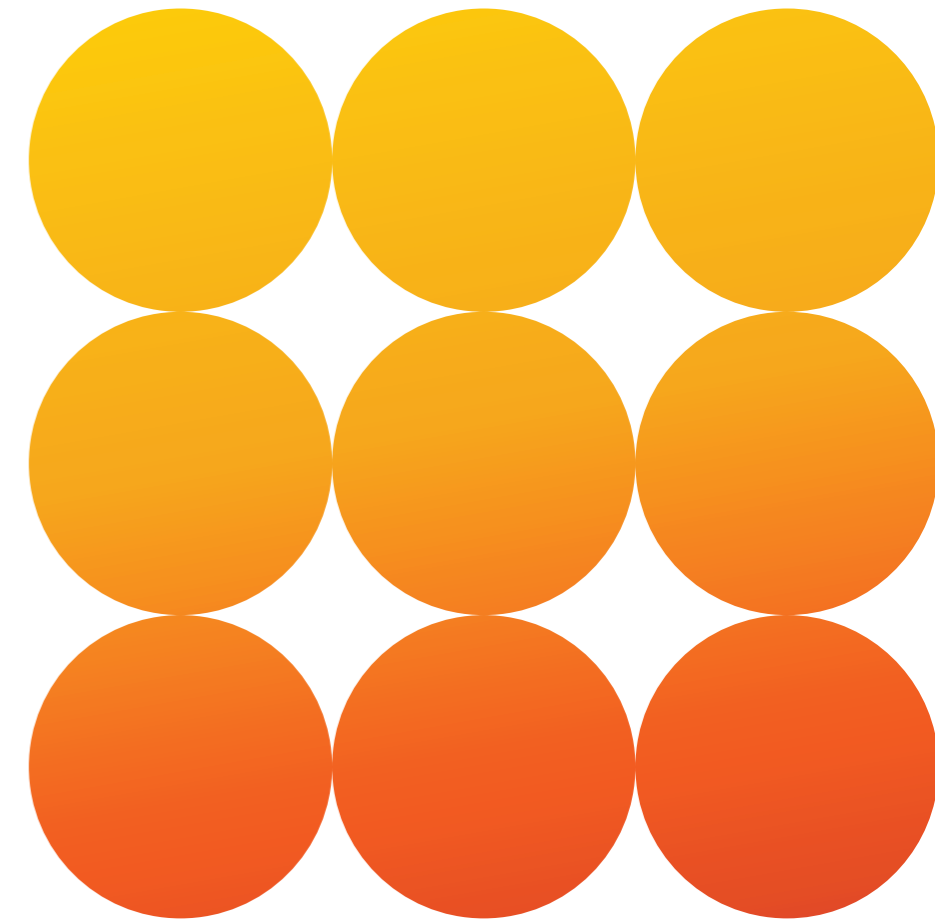
65% of the Chinese students we surveyed said that one of the most important things for them is to study at a university with proven graduate outcomes and a good record for getting students into the careers they want. Only 52% said the same, globally.

Over two thirds of Chinese students said that a consideration when choosing a course was that it improves their employment prospects – 19% higher than the global average. When choosing a course, university or country to study in, Chinese students reported good graduate employment rates as a factor more often than the global average.

This highlights an increased focus on graduate outcomes and employability among Chinese students.

Graduate employment rate is the most important measure of student outcomes

When thinking about graduate outcomes, Chinese students identified a high graduate employment rate as the most important measure (60%), followed by how soon students find employment post-graduation (53%). Highlighting these key statistics, and doing so on the marketing channels Chinese students are present on, is key to enrolling more Chinese students.



Top three career considerations for Chinese students when choosing a course at university

67%

It improves my employment prospects

Global average: 48%

59%

It will help to boost my salary

Global average: 46%

54%

It allows me to learn new skills

Global average: 58%

High-quality teaching

The most important fact when choosing a course and university

70% of respondents from China said that high-quality teaching was among the top five most important factors when choosing a course – the most popular option. High-quality teaching was also the most important factor when choosing a university to study at.



Ranking and rating indicate teaching quality to Chinese students

Which five factors are most important to you when assessing a university's teaching quality?



Source: QS International Student Survey 2024

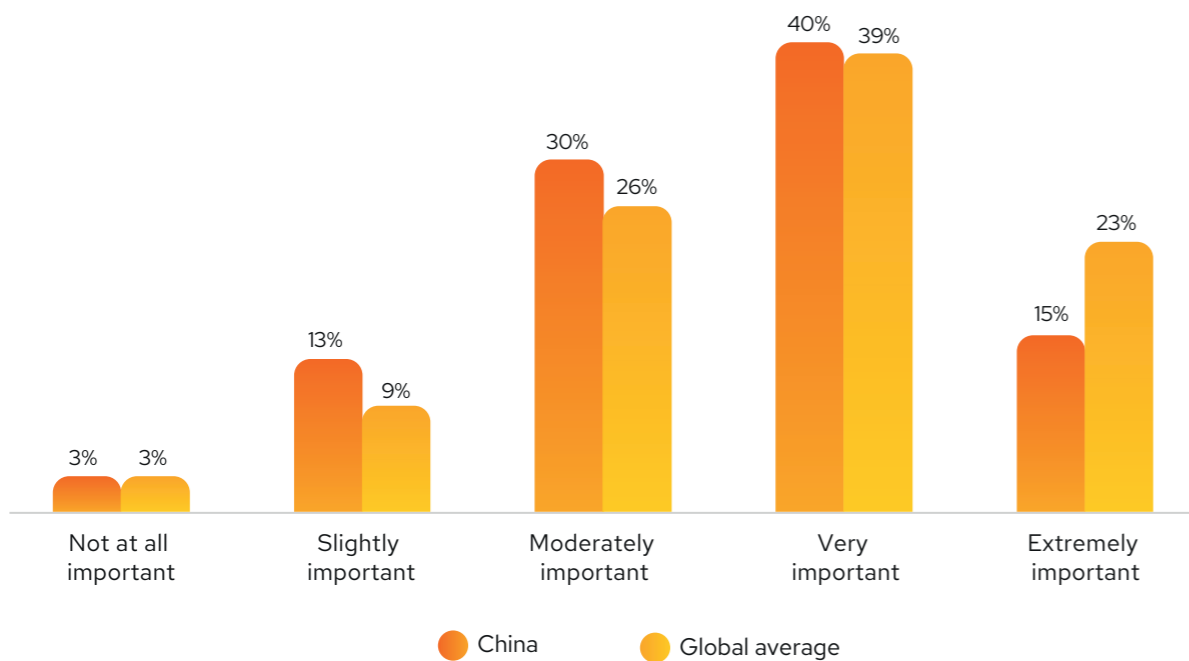
Chinese students think ranking in independent ratings is more important than the global average. In contrast, quick responses to enquiries is less important.

Again we see an emphasis on graduate employability. A high graduate employment rate and work placements are both reported as important by over 58% of Chinese students.



Sustainability

How important is environmental sustainability to you?



Source: QS International Student Survey 2024

Sustainability is important to the majority of Chinese students, but less so than the global average

55%

of Chinese students said environmental sustainability was very or extremely important to them, while 72% said so on average.

When asked what was important to them when judging whether a university is environmentally sustainable, 70% identified a university's sustainable research output. Only 56% said the same globally. It's a marked difference to students from other countries, where on-campus initiatives are often perceived as most important.

What's most important to you when judging whether a university is environmentally sustainable?

	China	Global average
1 The university's sustainable research output	70%	56%
2 Working with the local community on sustainable and social justice initiatives	64%	63%
3 On-campus initiatives (recycling, locally-sourced produce etc.)	61%	70%



Generative AI

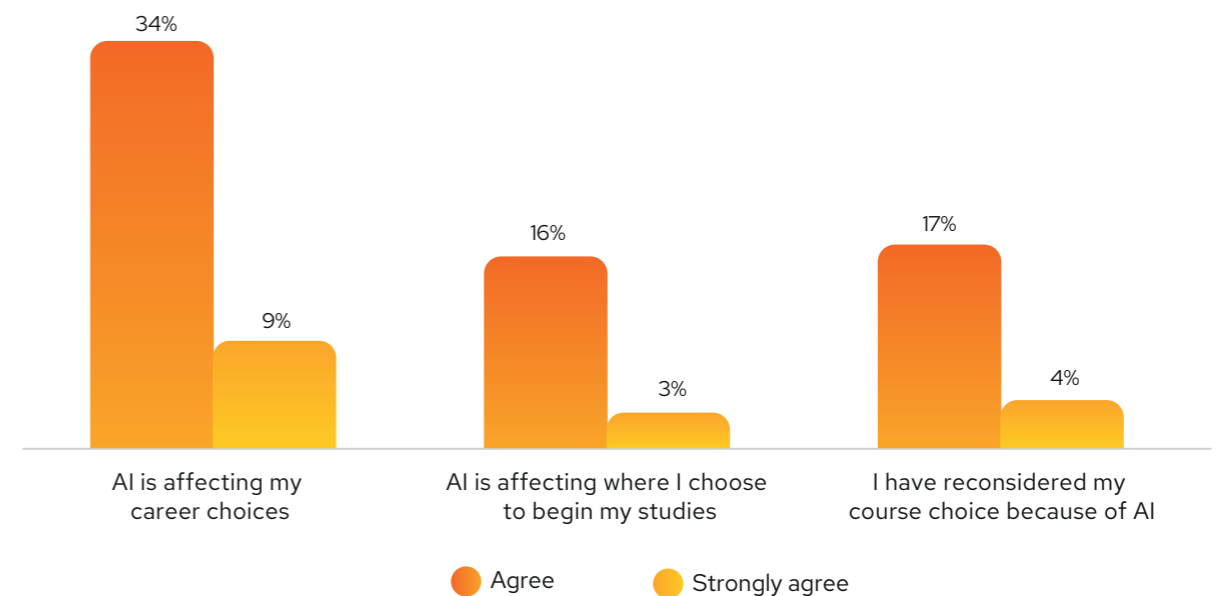
A majority of Chinese students have used Generative AI technologies

The opportunity and disruption caused by Generative AI in higher education is already well documented. Regardless of how universities feel about it, their students are using the technology. 68% of Chinese students said they have personally used Generative AI technology, with 56% saying they've used OpenAI's GPT-3, and 43% saying they've used GPT-4.

AI is affecting the study decisions of Chinese students at a higher rate than the global average

Information about how universities use AI is more highly sought after by Chinese students than the global average. AI is also causing noticeable shifts in student decision making.

Percentage of Chinese students who agree that AI is causing a change in their study decisions



Source: QS International Student Survey 2024

Chinese students are more optimistic about the impact Generative AI will have on teaching quality. Nearly 50% of the Chinese students surveyed agree or strongly agree it will have a positive impact – higher than the global average (45%).

It should also be noted that there is an increasing focus on the environmental impact of Generative AI. The processors required to train the models and support requests take place in a data centre, and require energy to cool and operate them – one assessment from a University of Washington professor estimates the daily energy consumption of Open AI GPT is 1 Gigawatt hour, equivalent to 33,000 US homes. Universities should consider this when promoting use of Generative AI.

QS student recruitment solutions

We support institutions across the globe at all stages of the student recruitment journey – from initial enquiry to enrolment.

Find and recruit the right students

	Your goal	How can we help	The QS solution			
1	Build strategy & benchmark performance	Insights analytics & advice	QS 360 analytics & advisory	Consultancy and advisory services		Student insights tracker
		Marketing & advertising	QS Advanced Profiles	Display advertising	Email marketing	Retargeting
2	Create brand awareness & generate leads	Student recruitment events	QS Discover fairs		QS Connect events	
		Performance assessment to highlight strengths	QS Stars		Brand Audit	
		In-market engagement	In-country representation services		QS student recruitment events Summits and conferences	
3	Convert quality leads & process applicants	Expert conversion & admission support	Enquiry management & lead follow-up	QS Admissions	Admissions management software	
4	Enrol & engage students	High-quality, diverse candidates & enrolment support	Offer conversion services		Counselled (QS Apply) & independent enrolments	

Find out how QS can help



Appendix



Demographic of survey respondents



QS International student survey 2024 Demographic breakdown of Chinese respondents

Gender	
Female	56%
Male	39%
Prefer not to say or to self-describe	4%

Age	
17-20	26%
21-24	50%
25-31	18%
32 or older	7%

Main subjects of interest	
Business and Management	24%
Engineering and Technology	21%
Computing	15%
Subjects allied to medicine	5%

Household income	
Less than \$10,000	6%
\$10,001 - \$25,000	14%
\$25,001 - \$50,000	15%
\$50,001 - \$75,000	10%
Over \$75,000	16%
Don't know / prefer not to say	39%

Funding	
Self-funded	92%
Loan	1%
Scholarship	3%
Not sure / other	3%

Study level	
Foundation or vocational	0%
Undergraduate	22%
Postgraduate taught	39%
Postgraduate research	38%

QS International Survey 2024 | Demographic breakdown of Chinese respondents





Want to delve deeper into what your future students think?

We provide bespoke reports for institutions which partner with us to encourage prospective students to participate in the QS International Student Survey.

Benchmark the needs and wants of your prospective students against other universities in the region and across the globe.

Register your interest in partnering with us for the QS International Student Survey 2025.

