



The recruitment edge: Europe

Discover what more than 42,000 students say they want and expect from universities across Europe.





Executive summary

With 50 countries and a huge variety of study abroad experiences to choose from, Europe is a popular destination for students from across the globe. Teaching quality is an important factor for those choosing institutions in Europe, and the education systems on the continent offer an attractive study experience and a focus on research and innovation. 35 European institutions make the top 100 in the QS World University Rankings 2024. Beyond excellence in teaching, studying in Europe provides an attractive opportunity for students to immerse themselves in a multicultural environment, perfect for fostering personal growth and broadening perspectives. As the global competition for recruiting international students intensifies, it's a critical moment for countries in Europe. Universities across Europe have a strong diversity of experiences to offer but it's essential that they clearly articulate those strengths to future students and make sure their offer stands out.

Key findings

from 42,613 students interested in studying in Europe:

The five most popular study destinations in Europe are the UK (22% most likely to study in this country), Sweden (8%), Italy (6%), the Netherlands (5%) and Germany (5%).

When choosing a university in Europe, the most important factors overall for prospective students are high-quality teaching, that it's welcoming to international students and that it has a good reputation for their chosen subject area.

70% For over 70% of students interested in Europe, their biggest worry about studying in a different country is the cost of living.

63% About 63% of prospective students feel that Europe is becoming more welcoming to international students. That percentage is higher for those interested in countries including Czechia, Hungary and Latvia (90%).

44% of students would feel less worried about studying abroad if they could speak to existing international students at the institution and ask them questions.

54% About 54% of prospective students expect to receive a complete and personalised response to their enquiry within three days.

Recommendations

- Emphasise the credentials which showcase high-quality teaching, ensuring this is a prominent message across all your marketing channels.
- Review your scholarship offer and the way your information about funding, part-time work and affordability is presented to provide much-needed reassurance to concerned students.
- Consider how machine learning and other technological solutions might enable you to scale your enquiry, admissions and offer management to deliver the response times applicants expect.
- Review the way you offer authentic student-led content and communications, to reassure prospective students looking to learn from current international student experiences.
- For universities outside of the top five study destinations (UK, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden), be sure to emphasise your strengths and unique proposition to stand out from the competition.

Real voices, smart choices

With granular insights from more than 115,000 prospective students the QS International Student Survey – the largest global survey of its kind – has been guiding recruitment strategies for over a decade.

Stay one step ahead

You can use the 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 your brand positioning and showcase your differentiators.

Would you like help with applying our insights and recommendations to your marketing and recruitment plans? Or would you like help with refining your strategy? [Contact us today](#) and our student recruitment experts will be happy to guide you.

116,412
prospective
student
responses

194
countries and
territories

42,613
interested in
at least one
European country





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What do prospective students want and expect from European universities?

Did you know
that if you partner with us for the QS International Student Survey you receive a bespoke report for your institution?

It's free to participate and we 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 2024 today.



High-quality teaching

65% of students say that a high quality of teaching is the most important factor when choosing a course. It was the most influential factor in their choice of country and university too.

Official recognition or rating for teaching quality is the leading influencer for prospective students when assessing an institution's teaching. **63%** feel it's important for a university to receive recognition of its teaching quality, and **62%** say it's also important to be ranked well overall in independent rankings.

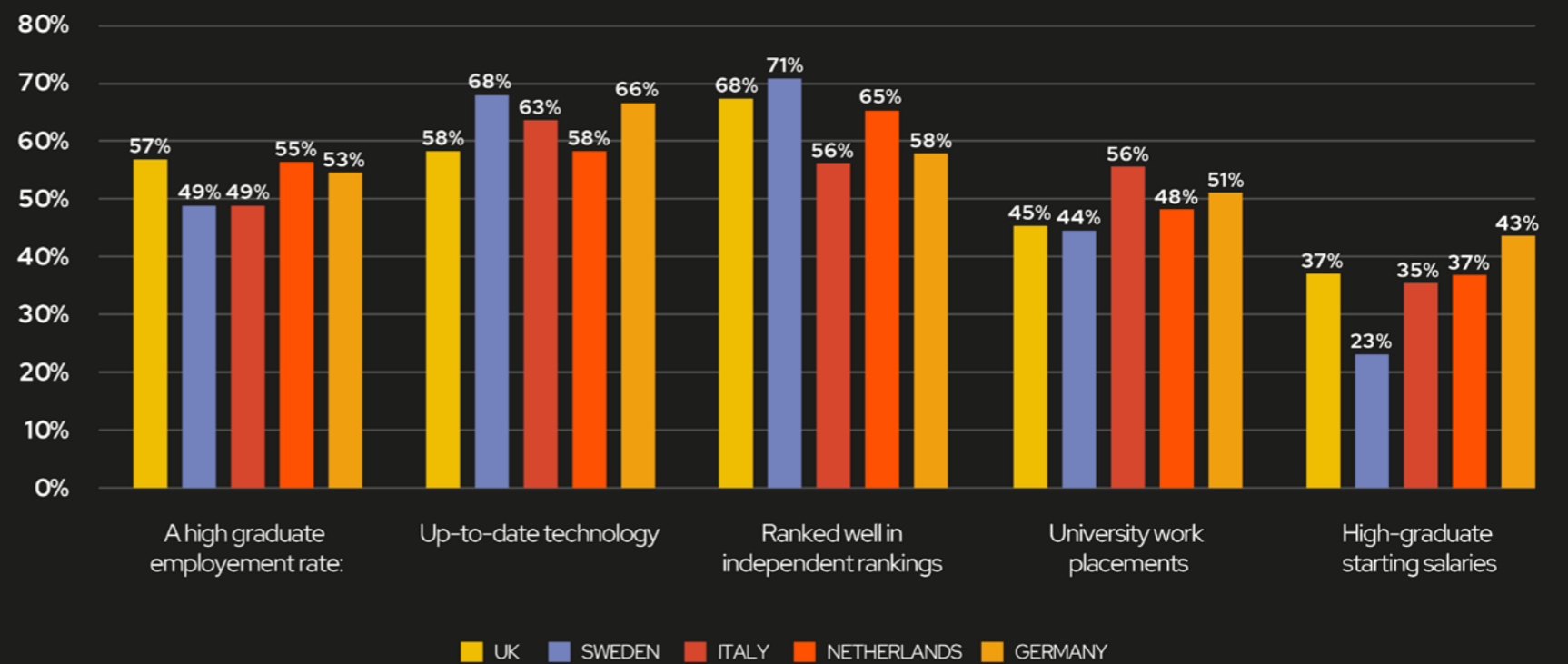
When assessing teaching quality, students also say that the university's teaching staff, up-to-date technology and a high employment rate as important metrics for choosing the right university. When comparing the top five European destinations, the most important factors when assessing teaching quality remain largely consistent.

For students interested in the UK, recognition of teaching quality takes the lead with **68%**. In the Netherlands and Sweden, rankings take the top spot at **65%** and **71%** respectively. Though for Germany and Italy, it's up-to-date technology that prospective students are looking for the most, at **66%** and **63%** respectively.

One student said

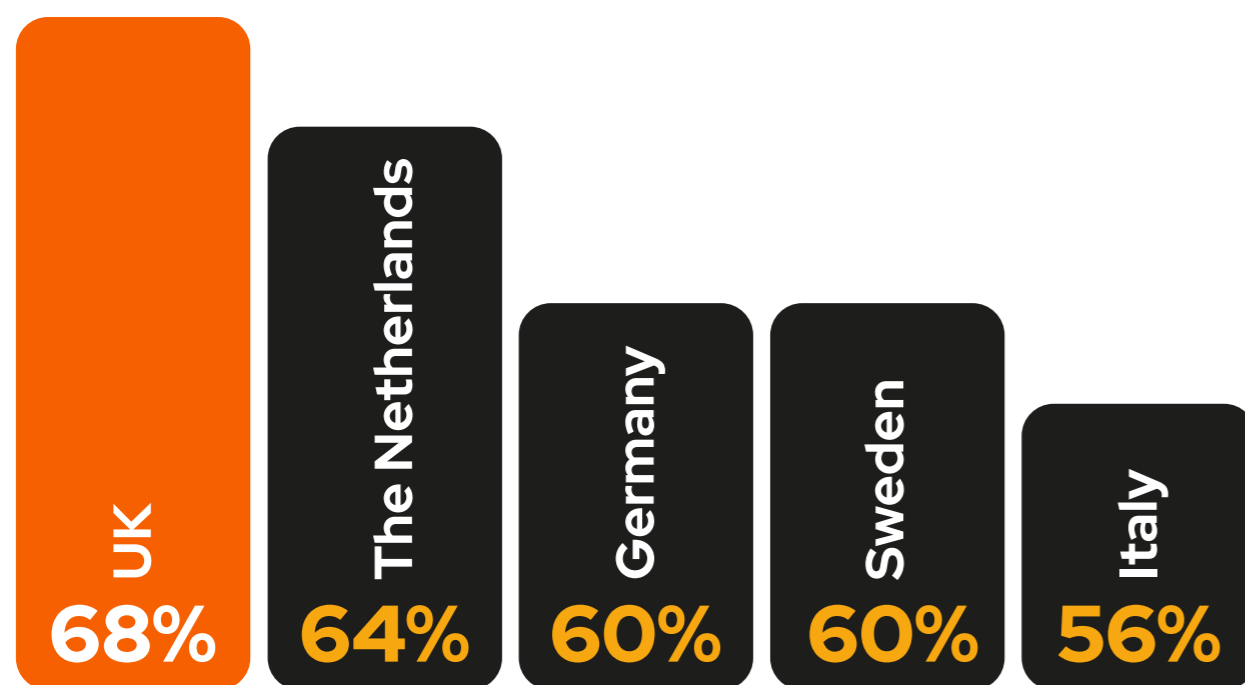
"I'm interested in studying [in Europe] because of its strong education system, which is known for its high-quality universities and innovative teaching methods. Finland is known for its natural beauty and unique culture, which makes it an attractive destination for me. Tuition fees are also comparatively lower than in other countries."

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



Students interested in Europe's five most popular study destinations say that recognition of teaching quality is most important.

The university has received recognition of its teaching quality via a country-wide measurement scheme



Spotlight on teaching

About **39%** of candidates looking to study in Europe have no interest whatsoever in studying online, compared to 32% in 2022 and 28% in 2021.

Access to university facilities, the opportunity to meet other students and concerns that they'd feel isolated studying online are the main reasons why candidates aren't interested in studying a degree online.

For those who are interested in online study, the main draw is flexibility, rather than cost. In fact, the top three reasons to choose online programmes are: the convenience of studying from anywhere, flexibility and the opportunity to study while working.

Employability and career aspirations

Career outcomes remains a key driver in student decision-making with 56% feeling that a high graduate employability rate is the most important measure when thinking about graduate outcomes. Many European universities have strong credentials when it comes to graduate outcomes and 22 European institutions feature in the top 100 for the 'employment outcomes' indicator in the QS World University Rankings 2024. About 50% of students interested in studying in Europe say that the most important factor when choosing a course is that it leads to their chosen career. Though quality teaching and a personal interest in the subject rank higher.

56%

of students interested in studying in Europe say that a high graduate employability rate is the most important consideration when thinking of graduate outcomes.

76%

of students still feel that it's important to have a careers advice service as part of the university experience, showing that support in becoming 'work ready' is crucial.

One student said

"I think Germany is the perfect country for studying as it provides extra care and support for students and helps students to focus on their chosen career. I think there are more opportunities to start a job as an international student in Europe."

Top three career considerations when choosing a university:



63%

It will help me learn new skills



56%

I will gain international experience



52%

It will help me to build a professional network

Spotlight on post-study work and employability

11%

of those planning to study in the Europe intend to return home immediately after completing their studies.

33%

hope to stay in the Europe temporarily (between one and six years) with 16% hoping to stay permanently. 26% don't know yet.

56%

say it's very important to have ease of access to work in their home country post-degree.

50%

are looking for a clear path to permanent residency post-degree.

Comparing the top five popular European destinations, what's the most important measure when thinking about graduate outcomes?

UK	SWEDEN	ITALY	NETHERLANDS	GERMANY
High graduate employability rate	High graduate employability rate	High graduate employability rate	High graduate employability rate	High graduate employability rate
58%	57%	51%	53%	58%

Environmental sustainability

40%

Over 40% of prospective students are actively researching universities' environmental sustainability strategy and efforts.

65% of those who researched the level of environmental action being taken by universities in the UK say they are somewhat or extremely satisfied with the efforts being made, compared to 58% for the US, 62% for Australia and matching the perceptions of institutions in Canada with 65%. UK institutions could look to Canadian institutions for new methods to communicate their sustainability efforts and strategies for even greater impact.

Perceptions of Europe

53%

of students interested in Europe say the most important thing when choosing a country to study in is that the culture and lifestyle appeals to them.

That percentage has increased over the previous three years, from 46% in 2021. This year's figure is higher in some countries including France, Spain and the UK (59%), the Republic of Ireland (61%), Sweden (67%) and Latvia (74%). Overall, 61% of prospective students interested in Europe say that good lifestyle and leisure opportunities are the most important factors when choosing a city or town to study in, with 75% feeling that a welcoming place for international students is most important.

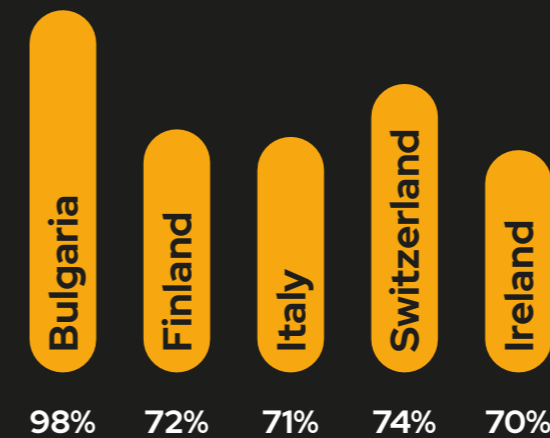
Safety is relatively low on the concerns of students looking to study on the continent (at 38% overall), though for some countries that figure is much higher – 67% for Bulgaria, 65% for Latvia, 64% for Russia and 59% for Luxembourg.

About 63% of prospective students feel that Europe is becoming more welcoming generally. Respondents interested in four of the top five most popular European destinations feel that 'being welcoming to international students' is one of the three most important factors when choosing a country to study in.

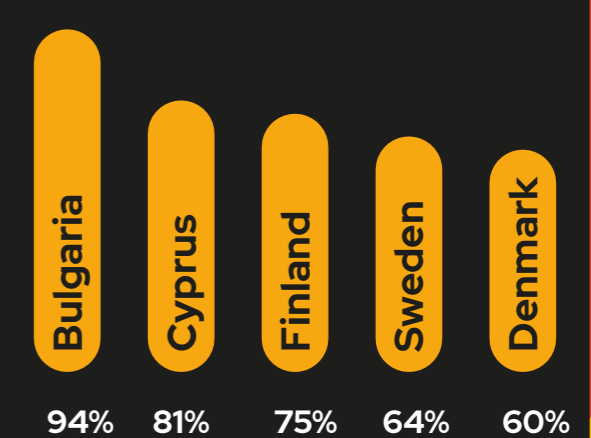
What words would you use to describe countries in Europe?

Artistic 26% **Safe 39%** Exciting 46%
Welcoming 41% Vibrant 31%
 Clean 30% **Beautiful 54%**
 Affordable 22% **Modern 47%**

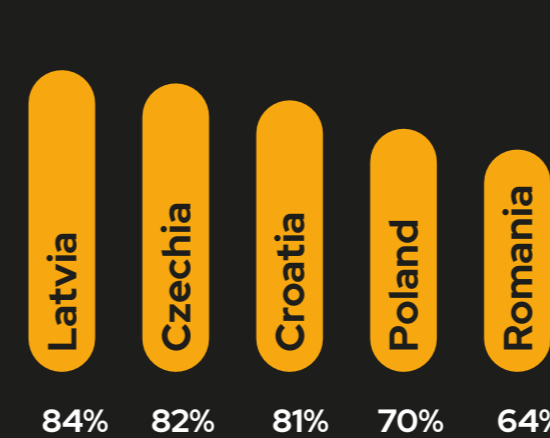
The top five European countries described as beautiful



The top five European countries described as safe



The top five European countries described as affordable



Student views on studying in Europe

“Italy is a popular international study location not only due to its multicultural cities, but the country also has several top public and private universities. Italy is one of the most affordable countries to study abroad in Europe, for both tuition fees and living costs.”

“Spain is a very interesting and beautiful country. I have always wondered about visiting – especially Barcelona – because of its enormous architecture and urban planning.”

“Germany seems to be a pretty good option because it’s very known for having international students in its cities, offers a post-graduation work visa and good salaries. Also, it’s one of the most important economies in the world which can give me international opportunities for work.”

“I am mainly looking forward to the cultural interaction since there will be many people from different parts of the world studying in Switzerland.”

“I am interested in studying in Belgium because of its vibrant educational environment, excellent academic reputation and diverse culture. Belgium offers a great variety of educational programmes and offers high-quality educational institutions with innovative teaching methods.”

“Czechia offers affordable tuition unlike the UK, USA and other countries. The application procedure and visa requirements are considerably more flexible too.”



Funding and affordability

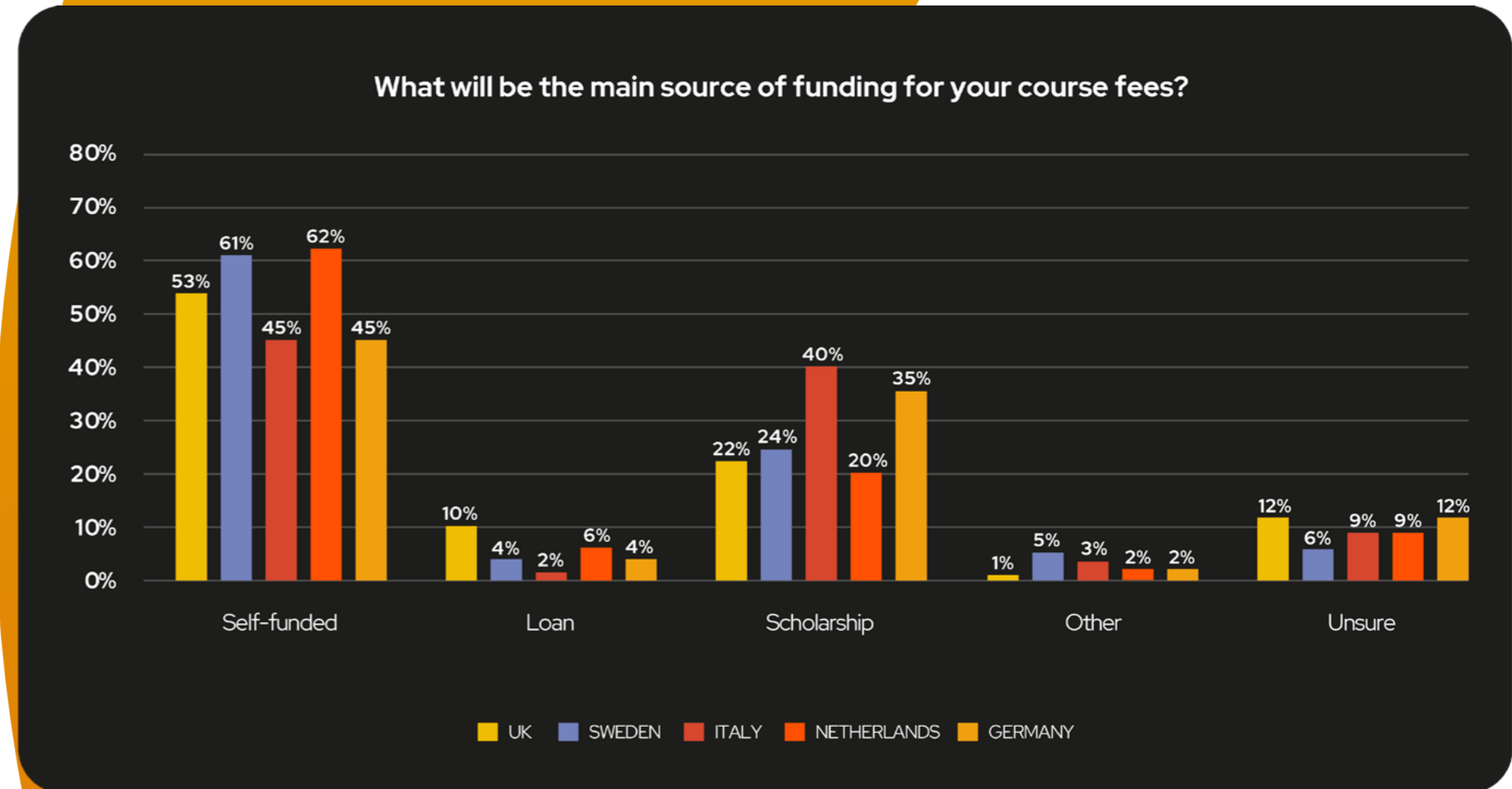
For 73% of prospective students interested in Europe, their biggest worry about moving to a different country is the cost of living. 41% say that one of their top priorities is to study at an affordable university which offers scholarships and is located in a city with a lower cost of living. 49% of prospective students think the most important thing about choosing a city to study in is the availability of affordable accommodation.

Of the 52% of prospective students who will self-fund their degree programmes, 37% will rely on parents or family for funding. University scholarships make up the next highest percentage at 21% and those relying on loans to fund their studies make up only 6% of the pool.

While much of Europe is renowned for being a less affordable region to study in, 15 European cities feature within the top 50 QS Best Student Cities in the affordability indicator. Three Romanian cities take the top three places, with three Polish cities taking fourth, fifth and sixth place, in Europe.

There's an opportunity for institutions across Europe to reassure students with messages around affordability, scholarship information and other financial aid opportunities.

Comparing funding choices for the top five popular study destinations in Europe



Environmental sustainability

Student views on environmental sustainability

Two thirds of prospective students who have researched a university's environmental sustainability strategy feel somewhat or extremely satisfied with the institution's efforts.

Compared to prospective students looking to study in the 'big four', the percentage of those researching sustainability efforts in Europe is lower.

EUROPE	AUSTRALIA	UK	CANADA	US
37%	43%	43%	42%	40%

Though, when breaking Europe down into individual countries, it's Greece (49%), Finland (46%) and Sweden (45%) where prospective students are more likely to research an institution's sustainability efforts.

38 European universities feature in the top 100 in the QS World University Ranking: Sustainability 2023. Three Swedish universities feature in the top 30. European institutions looking for new, more impactful ways to communicate their sustainability efforts and strategies could look to Sweden for inspiration.

"I was surprised with the commitment to sustainable development in Switzerland, and the investment into renewable energy. My chosen university has created one of the most eco-friendly campuses in the world, and the complete reliance on solar and renewable energy stood out."

"[Portugal is] certainly doing more than other countries and it's nice to see an institution I'm invested in take care of the planet I'll be living in for the next 80 years or so."

"[Universities in Germany] use a high percentage of green energy. The accommodation is made from recyclable materials, and they keep developing new eco-friendly materials for the campus."

"What stood out for me is the ability for the institution [in Italy] to train students to understand and manage environmental the problems, risks and hazards associated with environmental and nature protection."

Spotlight on environmental sustainability

36–39%

Postgraduate research and postgraduate taught students are the most likely to research the level of action a university is taking on environmental sustainability (39% and 37%), followed by undergraduate (36%).

60%

Those planning to study geographical and environmental studies in Europe are the most likely (60%) to research a university's environmental sustainability strategy and efforts, followed by medicine and dentistry (46%).

18

European universities are ranked in the global top 50 in the QS World University Rankings: Sustainability 2023. The University of Edinburgh takes the highest spot in fourth place globally.

Top ten universities in Europe for sustainability

38 European universities featured among the world's top 100 in the QS World University Rankings: Sustainability 2023.

UNIVERSITY	GLOBAL RANK
The University of Edinburgh, UK	4
Uppsala University, Sweden	11
Lund University, Sweden	12
University of Glasgow, UK	13
Aarhus University, Denmark	15
University of Oxford, UK	16
Newcastle University, UK	18
University of Cambridge, UK	19
Universitat de Barcelona, Spain	21
Delft University of Technology, Netherlands	23

Source: QS World University Rankings: Sustainability

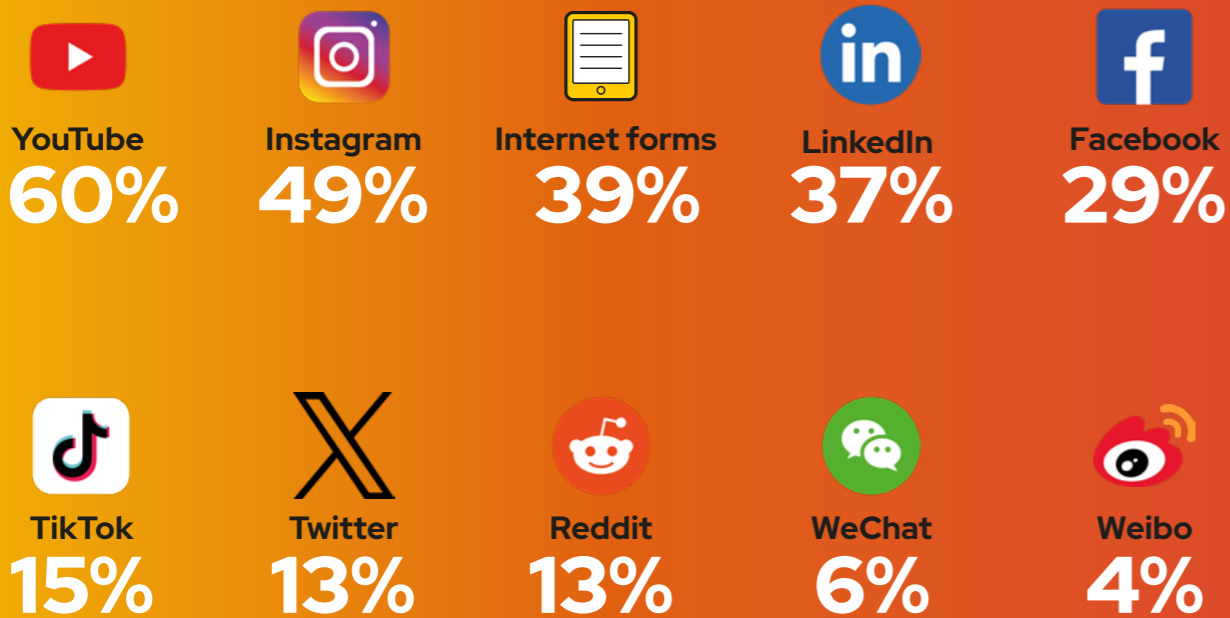
Preferred communications and channels

Over **50%** of prospective international students interested in studying in the UK want a personal and complete response to an enquiry within three days.

University enquiry teams are not currently meeting students' expectations when it comes to response times or application communications. European institutions looking to increase student numbers must be prepared to manage higher enquiry and application numbers – without compromising on quality and personalisation.

37% of those interested in studying in Europe said they find social media most useful when researching universities.

Top ten social channels for researching universities



42%

of respondents in Africa and the Middle East are using Facebook to research universities in Europe, the highest percentage of any region.

87%

Prospective students in Latin America and North America are the highest proportion using Instagram (at 58% and 57% respectively.)

of prospective students interested in studying in Europe still want to be communicated with via email. About 54% want to be communicated with via WhatsApp and 34% say phone call.

Over half of prospective international students interested in studying in Europe want a personal and complete response to an enquiry within three days.

Latin America is relying more on LinkedIn than other regions (at 46%) and respondents in the Asia Pacific region use WeChat and Weibo more than the rest of the world (at 25% and 18% respectively.) When it comes to TikTok, it's North America taking the lead at 25%.

63%

of prospective European students expect to be communicated with weekly once they've applied, and 73% expect weekly communication once they've received an offer.

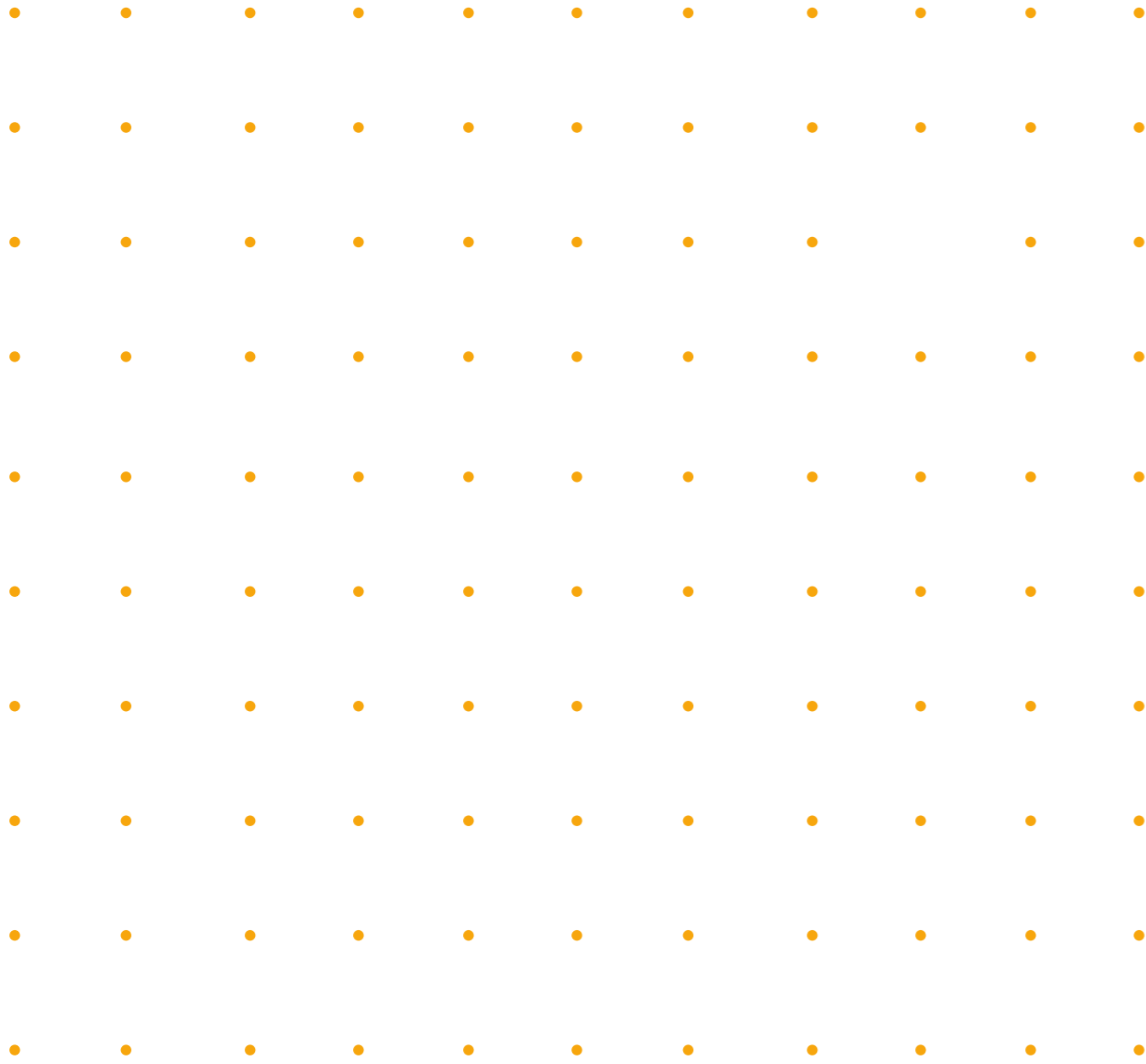
50%

of prospective European students expect to receive notification of the outcome of their application within a week.



Want to stay one step ahead?

Would you like help with applying our insights and recommendations to your marketing and recruitment plans? Or would you like help with refining your strategy? **Contact us** today and our student recruitment experts will be happy to help.



Appendix

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The current higher education landscape

While the higher education landscape in Europe varies from country to country, overall the continent offers many opportunities to gain a high-quality education from some of the world's best universities in a variety of study abroad destinations. 35 European universities feature in the top 100 in the QS World University Rankings 2024 with institutions in the UK, Switzerland, France, Germany and the Netherlands all featuring in the top 50.

European universities are actively involved in world-leading research and innovation and Horizon Europe provides substantial funding for university research projects across the region. Mobility is another area of strength for Europe with programmes like Erasmus+ and Erasmus Mundus promote student and staff mobility across European institutions, facilitating academic exchanges and collaboration, plus a broader study abroad experience.

Comparison among the world's 'big four' international student destinations

UK High-quality teaching is the top priority for those interested in the UK, with a good reputation for the chosen subject and feeling welcomed as an international student also featuring in the top three most important factors when researching where to study.

UK Respondents in the UK feel that high-quality teaching, reputation and interest in the subject are most important when choosing a course and university, with appealing lifestyle/culture and a welcoming environment for international students in the top three factors when choosing a country.

UK Jessica Turner, QS Chief Executive, commented: "UK universities have demonstrated their powerful global appeal, excelled as international education front-runners, and produced some of the world's most employable graduates. Their commitment to robust international collaboration has transformed them into a global magnet, attracting bright minds from around the world. Despite this noteworthy success, it is important to recognise the increasingly competitive international education landscape."

SWEDEN
SWEDEN
SWEDEN
SWEDEN
SWEDEN
SWEDEN
SWEDEN

With eight universities featuring in the QS World University Rankings 2024 and three of the country's universities in the top 50 in the QS Sustainability Rankings 2023, Sweden is a desirable student destination. In fact, the percentage of respondents interested in Sweden has increased from 16% in 2021 to 21% in 2023.

Swedish universities are known for their progressive teaching methods, which often include a student-centered and collaborative approach, encouraging critical thinking and independent learning. For students interested in this Northern European country, it's high-quality teaching that's most important when choosing a course and a university. Alongside an appealing culture and lifestyle, and a welcoming environment for students, high-quality teaching also features in the top three when choosing a country. Of those interested in Sweden, 77% say they're somewhat or extremely satisfied with the environmental sustainability efforts of the institutions they've researched.

Italy boasts 42 universities in the QS World University Rankings, a significant number when compared with most EU countries, (and ninth worldwide), surpassed only by Germany, with 49 universities ranked. Despite this, Italy's performance shows significant variations among the different indicators.

Jessica Turner, CEO of QS commented, "Italy shines in the Sustainability Score, outperforming the global average and most EU countries with more than 10 ranked universities. This figure suggests that Italian universities are making significant progress in terms of sustainability. While boasting a sizable number of ranked universities, Italy has room for improvement in several areas, particularly in faculty-student ratio, reputation among employers, internationalisation and employment outcomes. Its strengths, on the other hand, lie in research output and sustainability; areas that are key to addressing the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century."

The percentage of students interested in Italy who have researched the environmental sustainability efforts of the institutions they're interested in is slightly higher than the European average (37%) at 39%. The most important factor when choosing a course is having affordable tuition fees. For choosing a university, it's that the institution is welcoming to international students. And when it comes to choosing a country, it's the culture and lifestyle that takes the top spot.

ITALY
ITALY
ITALY
ITALY
ITALY
ITALY
ITALY
ITALY

15 universities in The Netherlands feature in the **QS World University Rankings 2024**, including Delft University of Technology, which is the country's leading university in joint 47th place, and the University of Amsterdam in 53rd place. The country is known for its international and multicultural environment and its open and welcoming attitude to international students, making it easy to adapt and integrate.

For those looking to study in The Netherlands, the key factors to choosing a university and a course are finding a subject they're interested in, high-quality teaching and a good reputation in their chosen area. Affordable tuition fees are also considered important, along with being welcoming to international students and an appealing culture and lifestyle.

NETHERLANDS
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GERMANY
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Germany is a world leader in research, spearheading global efforts to advance human understanding through intense levels of international cooperation. The **QS World University Rankings 2024** see German institutions make significant progress in the rankings thanks to a highly collaborative research agenda and large international faculty. Germany's premier university, the Technical University of Munich continues to ascend the table, solidifying its place among the world top 50.

For international students looking to study in Germany, affordable tuition fees and scholarships take the top spot when choosing a course and university. High-quality teaching, having a personal interest in a subject offered in Germany, and a welcoming environment for international students are also important factors.

QS Senior Vice President Ben Sowter said: "Renowned among global academics and boasting abundant resources, Germany's collaborative research agenda and international faculty contribute to its significant progress in the 2024 QS World University Rankings. However, it trails its global competitors in generating high-impact research, highlighting a scholarly focus on relevant contemporary challenges as a pathway for improvement."

What matters most when choosing a course?

	UK	SWEDEN	ITALY	SWEDEN	ITALY
1	High-quality teaching	High-quality teaching	Affordable tuition fees	Personal interest in the subject	Affordable tuition fees
2	Personal interest in the subject	Personal interest in the subject	High-quality teaching	High-quality teaching	High-quality teaching
3	Course has a good reputation	Affordable tuition fees	It leads to my chosen career	Affordable tuition fees	Personal interest in the subject

Source: QS International Student Survey 2023

What matters most when choosing a university?

	UK	SWEDEN	ITALY	SWEDEN	ITALY
1	A good reputation in my chosen area	High-quality teaching	Welcoming to international students	High-quality teaching	It offers scholarships
2	High-quality teaching	Offers specific course I am interested in	It offers scholarships	Good reputation for chosen subject	Welcoming to international students
3	Offers specific course I am interested in	Welcoming to international students	High-quality teaching	Welcoming to international students	Offers specific course I am interested in

Source: QS International Student Survey 2023

What matters most when choosing a country?

	UK	SWEDEN	ITALY	SWEDEN	ITALY
1	High-quality teaching	The culture/life-style appeals to me	The culture/life-style appeals to me	High-quality teaching	Affordable cost of living
2	The culture/life-style appeals to me	High-quality teaching	Affordable cost of studying	Welcoming to international students	High-quality teaching
3	Welcoming to international students	Welcoming to international students	Has universities with high quality teaching	The culture/life-style appeals to me	Welcoming to international students

Source: QS International Student Survey 2023

QS International Student Survey 2023



Demographics of those interested in Europe

Gender

54%
female

42%
male

5%
prefer not to say or
to self-describe

Age

34%
17-20

32%
21-24

24%
25-31

10%
32 or older

Funding

52%
Self-funded

6%
Loan

31%
Scholarship

11%
Not sure
or other

Study level

2%
Foundation or
vocational

37%
Undergraduate

39%
Postgraduate taught

20%
Postgraduate
research

Main subjects of interest

22%
Business and
management

13%
Engineering and
technology

8%
Social sciences

8%
Computing

Household income

34%
Less than \$10,000 USD

15%
\$10,000–25,000 USD

9%
Over \$25,000 USD–
\$50,000 USD

4%
Over \$50,000–
USD–\$75,000 USD

7%
Over \$75,000 USD

32%
Don't know or prefer
not to say

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 2024.