

DIGITAL INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY 2019



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The market for international students continues to grow year on year as does the competition between destination countries and individual universities. IDP Connect's annual Digital International Student Survey

aims to help institutions understand what the key factors are that motivate and challenge prospective students and what research methods they use to access international higher education. This knowledge will help student recruiters and marketers to better target their efforts and resources into strategies and activities that help and support students as they navigate the complexities of different admissions policies and processes as well as different financial support and scholarship programs.

Our survey suggests that students will start their research at least one year prior to commencing their studies overseas and that this journey will begin online, using search engines, institution websites and sites such as Hotcourses International sites. Interestingly they will often only look to contact an institution directly if they cannot find the information they need online - this highlights the importance of having the right content online and making it easy to find and consume. It is through this initial online research that students will build the initial shortlist of universities that they are interested in studying at.

However, prospective students also value and need face-to-face contact with institutions, offline. The survey highlights the importance of education agents and of fairs where they can meet representatives of institutions. Deciding where to study, especially overseas, still very much requires the reassurance that can often only come from off-line interactions.

KEY FINDINGS

- The predominate motivations for international students are economic and employment related.
- Perceived challenges are related to the financing of study and the navigation of admissions procedures.
- Students want to find the information they need online and will only contact an institution if they cannot find the information they need.
- Over half of respondents intend to use an education agent.

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

The survey results were compiled from over 1900 users of IDP Connect's international sites, representing 12 international source markets.

The survey was translated into 10 languages spoken within the 12 international source markets.

Source Markets Represented:

Abroad (Hotcourses International users researching in English).

Middle East

Indonesia

India

Thailand

Vietnam

Brazil

Latin America

Russia

Turkey

Korea

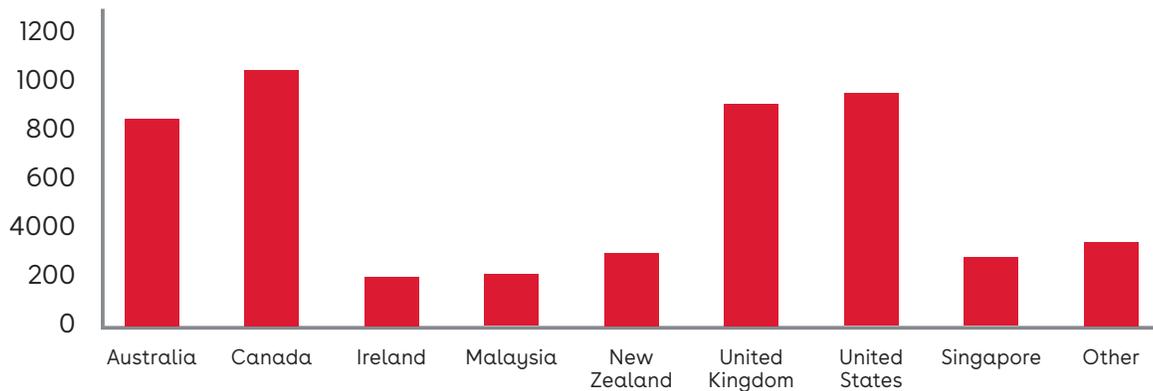
China

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

1. Preferred Destinations

Respondents to the survey confirm the recent trends in terms of where students wish to study. Canada is the most popular study destination, followed closely by the United States and the United Kingdom and then Australia. However, it is interesting to see other, traditionally smaller markets, getting significant interest.

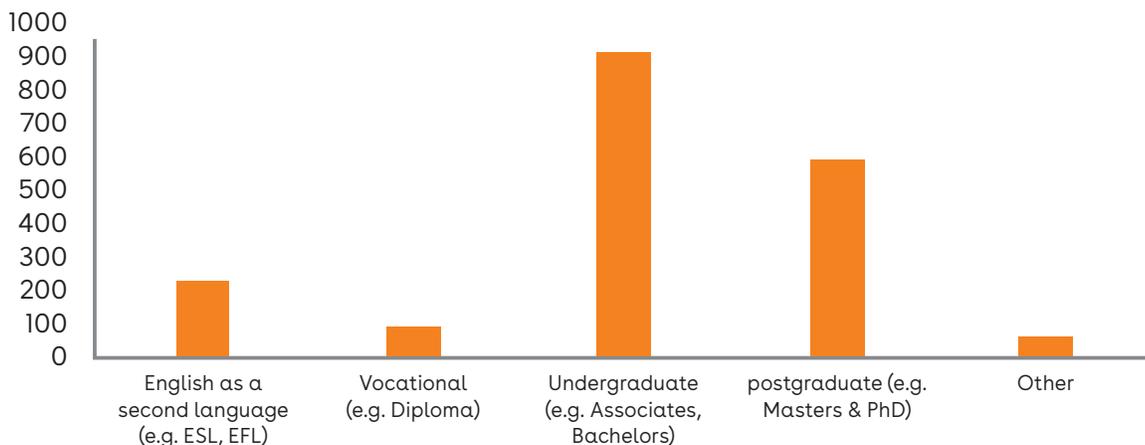
FIGURE 1 - WHAT STUDY DESTINATIONS ARE YOU CONSIDERING?



2. Level of Study

The vast majority of respondents to our survey are interested in academic study at either undergraduate or postgraduate level. English (as a second language) and vocational study are of significantly less interest.

FIGURE 2 - WHAT STUDY LEVEL ARE YOU SEEKING?



3. Study Preferences

Taking into account that the survey was carried out across websites catered for those seeking overseas study, it is no surprise to see that 92% of respondents are very likely or somewhat likely to study abroad (FIGURE 3). What is perhaps more surprising is that less than half of respondents wished to spend all of their study time overseas, with over a quarter indicating that they wished to have a mixture of overseas study and study in their home country. Nearly a third of respondents wished to stay in their home country (FIGURE 4).

Add to these findings the fact that face-to-face study is predominately the most appealing way in which students wish to study (FIGURE 5) and you have a complex set of results that indicate, on the surface, a compelling case for some of the many different forms of transnational education.

FIGURE 3 - HOW LIKELY ARE YOU TO STUDY AT AN INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY?

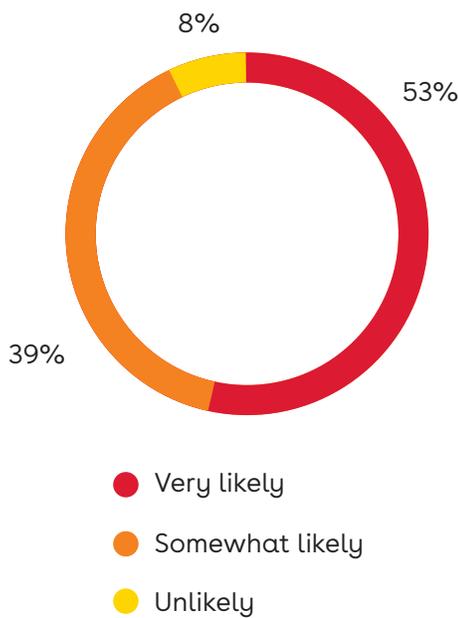


FIGURE 4 - WHICH STUDY MODE WOULD YOU LIKE TO EXPERIENCE WHILE EARNING AN INTERNATIONAL QUALIFICATION?

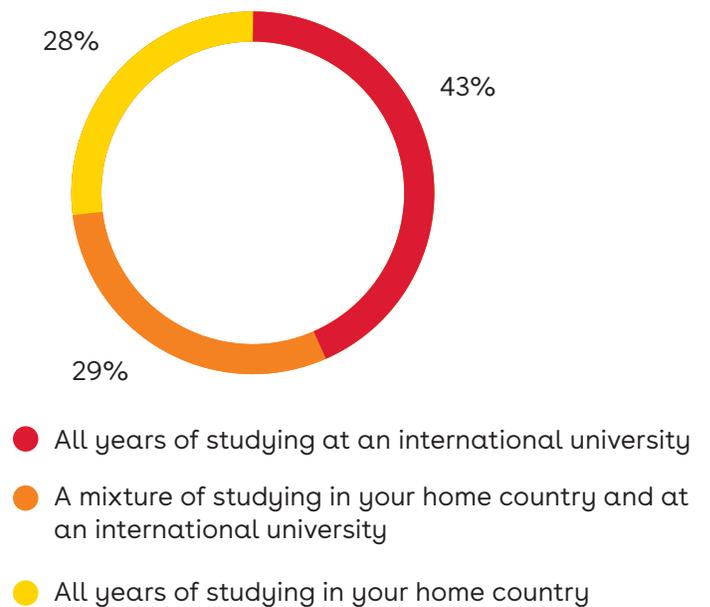
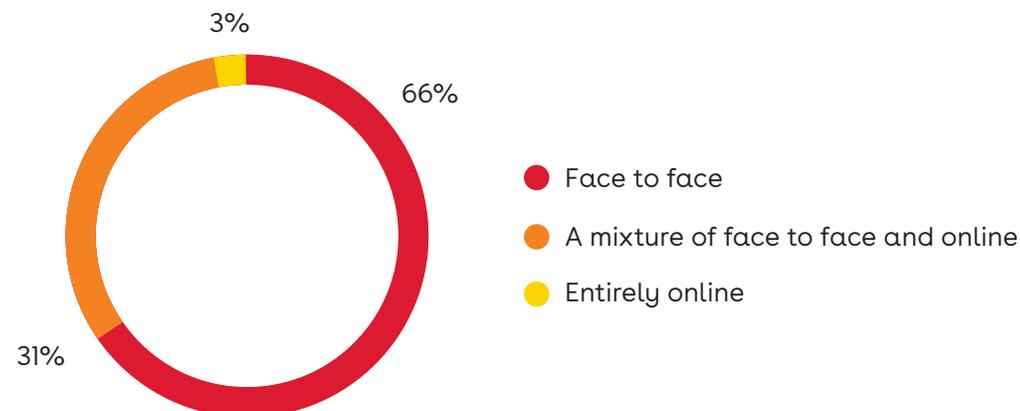


FIGURE 5 - WHAT TYPE OF COURSE DELIVERY IS MOST APPEALING?

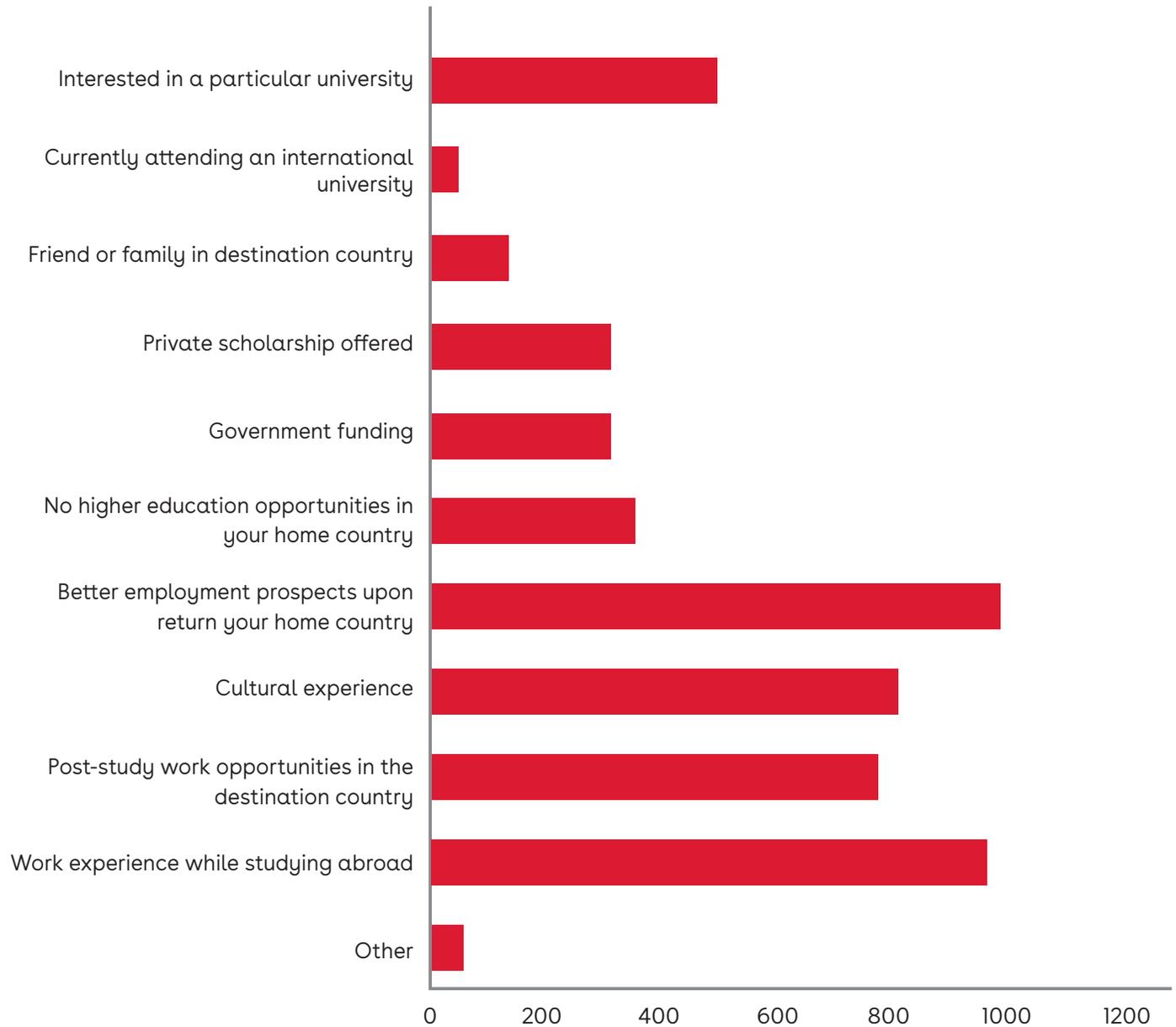


4. Study Abroad Motivations

Overwhelmingly students are motivated to study abroad for reasons related to employment and employability. Over 50% of students want to study overseas because of aspects related to employability.

Other significant motivating factors include the cultural experience and an interest in studying at a particular university. The latter factor shows how important it is for universities to build and promote their brand overseas.

FIGURE 6 - WHY DO YOU WANT TO STUDY AT AN INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY?



5. Concerns and Challenges Related to Studying Abroad

The biggest concerns of potential international students relate to the financing of their studies as well as understanding and navigating fees and funding schemes as well as entry requirements.

Entry requirements are identified as the greatest perceived challenge to finding and researching a suitable university suggesting that institutions should work hard to communicate their requirements and how they relate to international students in terms of international equivalences.

In addition, the findings show the importance of having clear advice and guidance on how international students can access financial support and what support is in place.

FIGURE 7 - WHAT DO YOU FIND MOST CHALLENGING ABOUT LOOKING FOR A UNIVERSITY COURSE ABROAD?

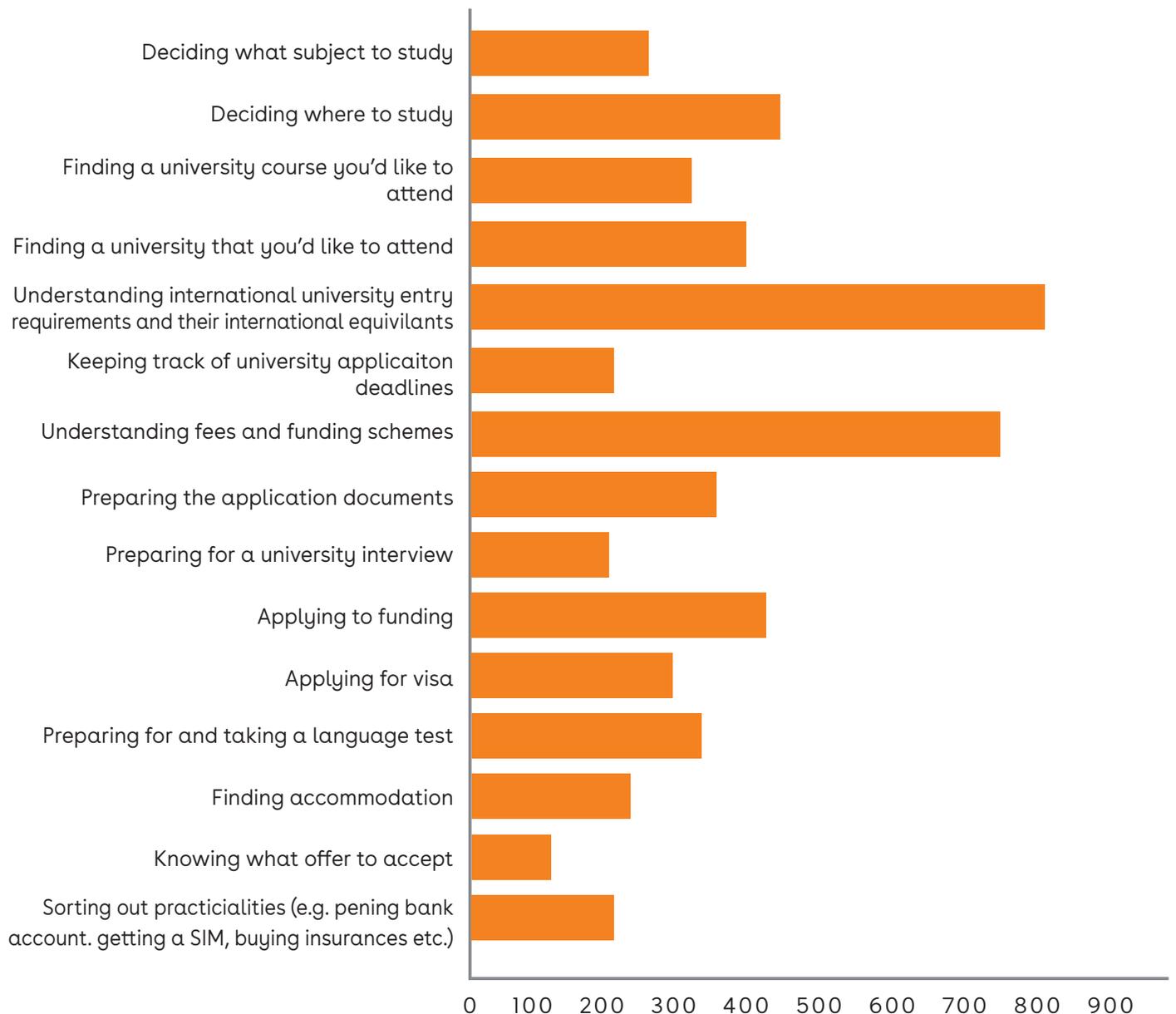
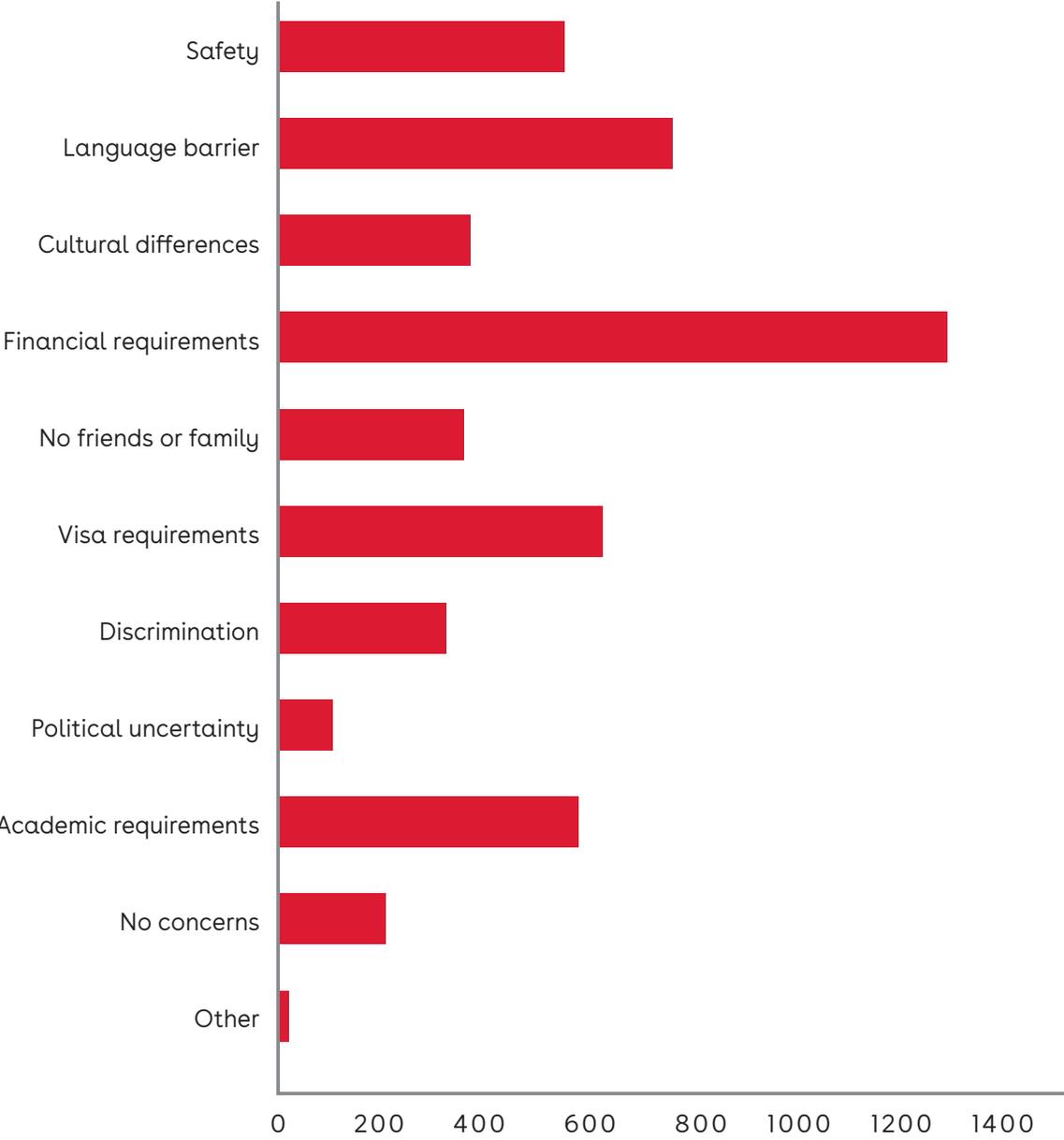


FIGURE 8 - WHAT CONCERNS, IF ANY, DO YOU HAVE ABOUT STUDYING AT AN INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY?

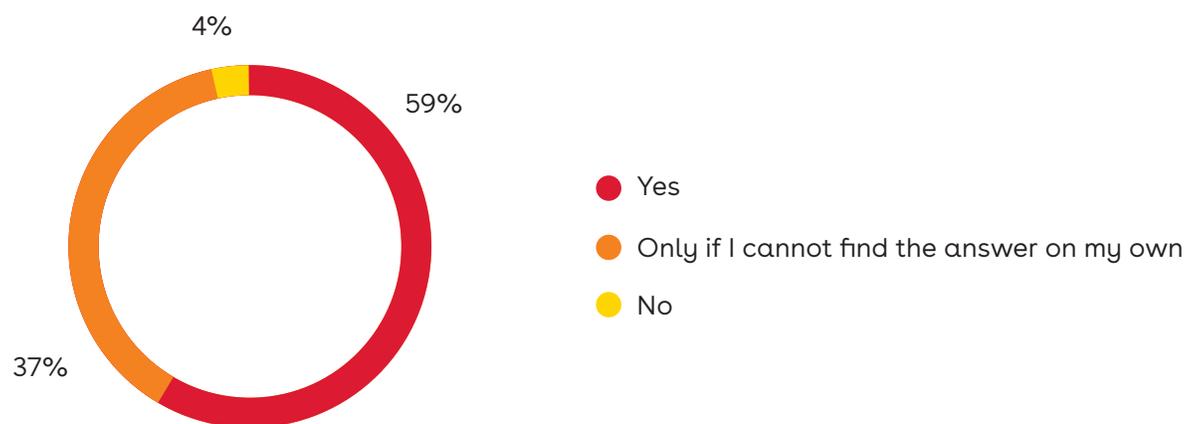


6. Researching and Communicating with Universities

As we may expect, the majority of students will contact a university directly if they are interested in studying there (FIGURE 9). This highlights the importance of having systems and processes in place to quickly and effectively respond to contact and inquiries from prospective international students. However, more interestingly, over a third of respondents state that they would only contact the institution if they could not find the information that they wanted.

Universities therefore need to have comprehensive and easy to find information on their sites or risk losing prospective students going to universities where they can find the information that they need.

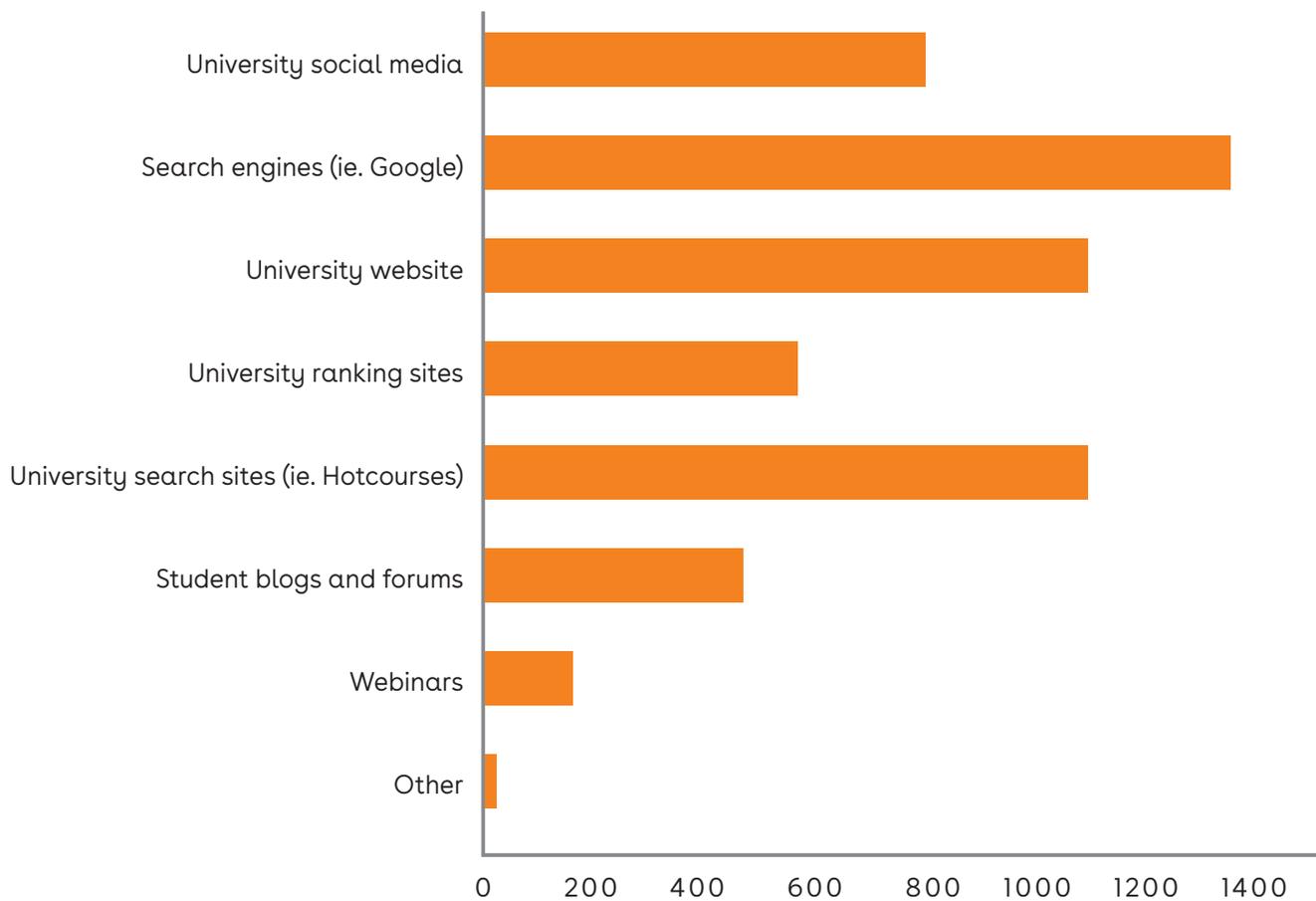
FIGURE 9 - WHEN YOU ARE INTERESTED IN A UNIVERSITY, WILL YOU CONTACT THEM DIRECTLY?



As we would expect to see, search engines are the most popular online channels when searching for universities. This is followed by the individual institution websites and university search sites such as Hotcourses International sites.

It is therefore, important that universities ensure they have content and websites that are tailored to the needs of international students and are optimized for the most popular search engines in key countries.

FIGURE 10 - WHAT ONLINE CHANNELS DO YOU USE TO RESEARCH PROSPECTIVE UNIVERSITIES?



While the vast majority of students will commence their research online there is still an important role for off-line marketing and recruitment. Respondents to the survey show that university brochures are still valued and used. This is very closely followed by education agents who are able to guide and advise students throughout their journey into international education.

Prospective students also look to more face-to-face interaction and see fairs as a key component of their research as well as the advice that current students can give them about what it is like to study at an institution. In fact, over half of respondents intend to use an education agent to assist them (FIGURE 12).

FIGURE 11 - WHAT OFFLINE CHANNELS DO YOU USE TO RESEARCH PROSPECTIVE UNIVERSITIES?

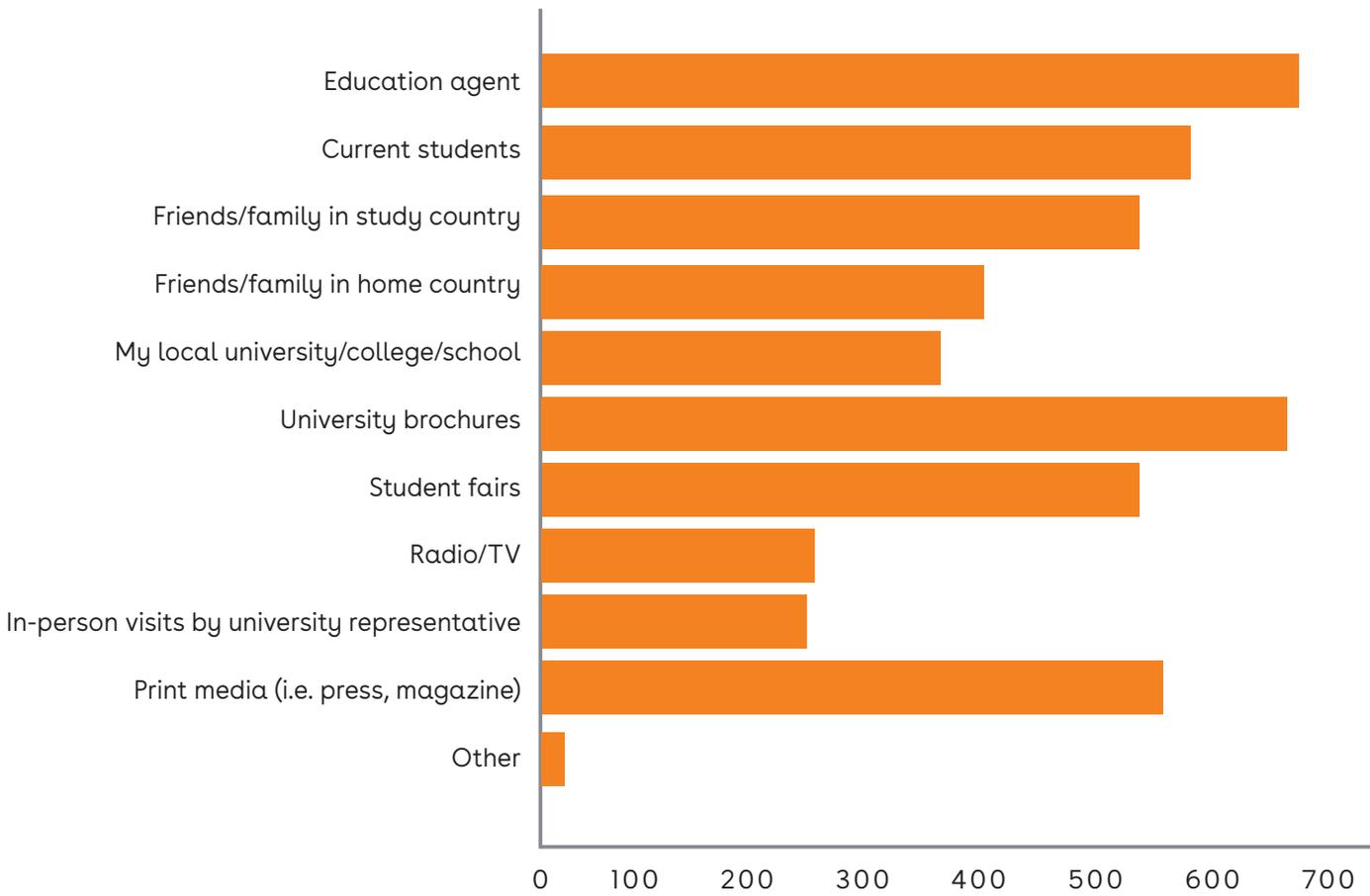
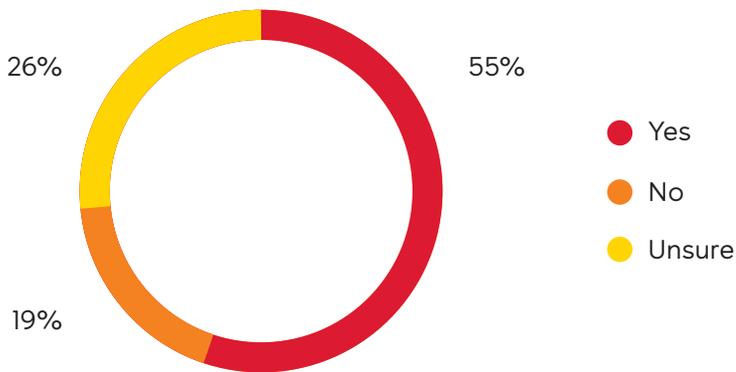
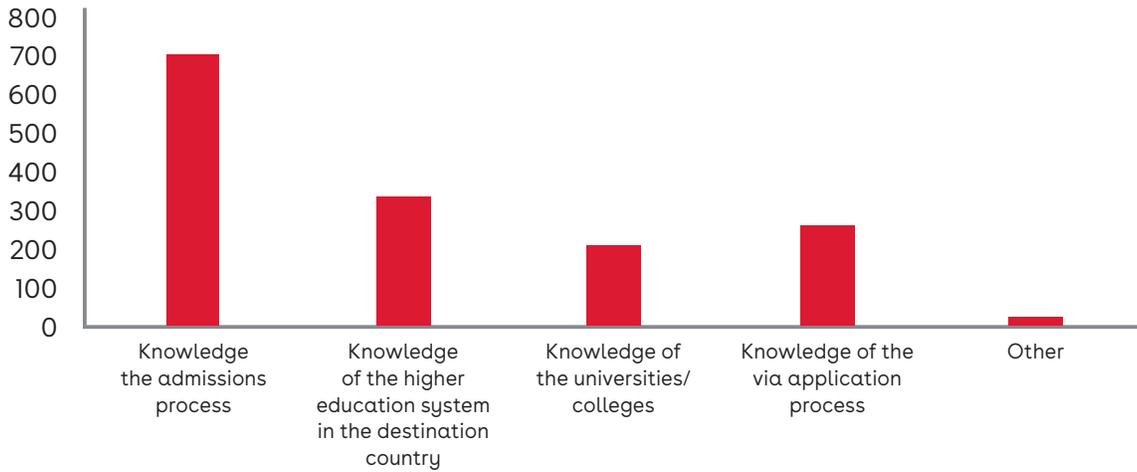


FIGURE 12 - DO YOU PLAN TO USE AN EDUCATION AGENCY TO ASSIST YOU WITH ENROLLING IN AN INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY?



Respondents intend to use an agent to predominately help them navigate the admissions process (FIGURE 13).

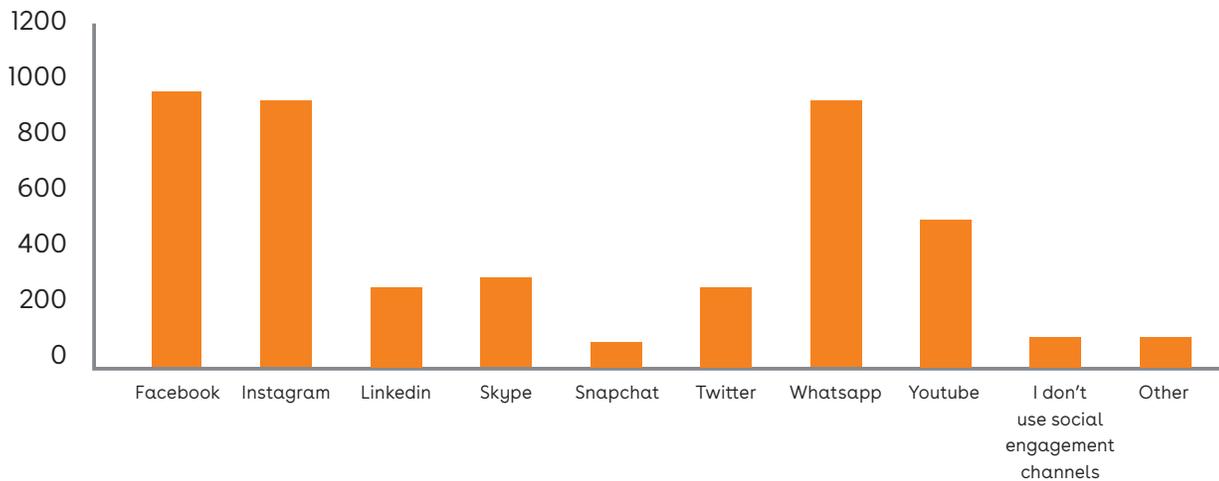
FIGURE 13 - WHICH AREAS OF THE ENROLLMENT PROCESS DO YOU EXPECT AN EDUCATION AGENCY WILL BE BENEFICIAL?



When it comes to the use of social media in their research, students prefer to engage with institutions through Facebook and Instagram (FIGURE 13), suggesting that universities without good social strategies will be missing out on a key medium for international students.

More interestingly students do want to engage with universities through Whatsapp. This is not something that universities will find easy to facilitate, but it should be encouraged where it can play a role in the communications with prospective students.

FIGURE 14 - WHAT SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT CHANNELS DO YOU PREFER TO USE TO ENGAGE WITH UNIVERSITY REPRESENTATIVES?

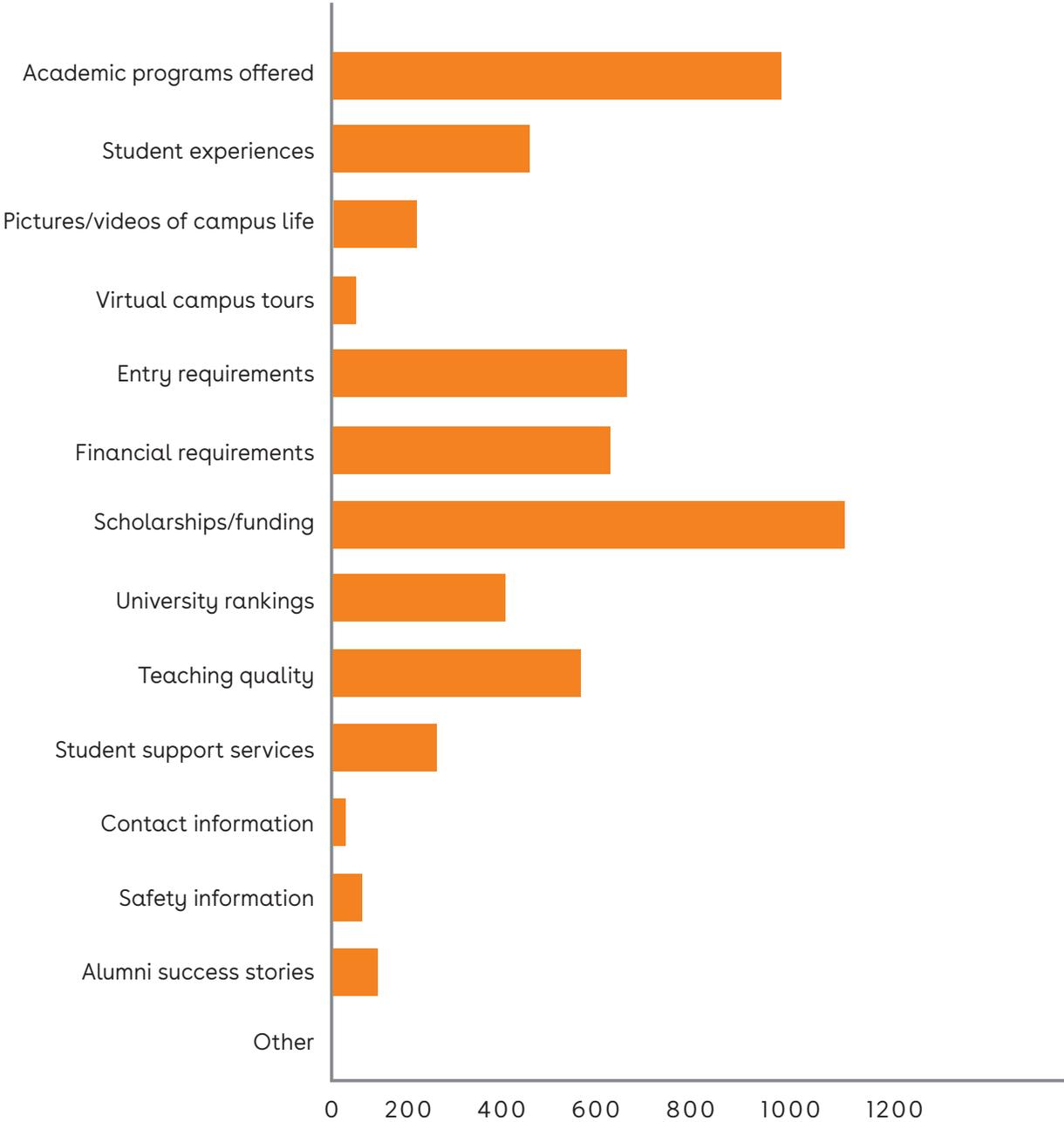


7. Content

The content that international students see and consume both online and offline will be a crucial factor in their decision-making process. As we have seen earlier in the survey, students expect to be able to find the information they want and require independently and also see the greatest challenges as relating to financing their studies and navigating admissions processes.

This is again borne out in the responses to what content is most valuable to them – respondents find information about scholarships and funding most valuable, followed by information about the academic programs they are interested in studying.

FIGURE 15 - WHAT CONTENT IS MOST VALUABLE WHEN RESEARCHING INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITIES?





Connect with us

For more information on the Digital International Student Survey contact inquiries@idp-connect.com