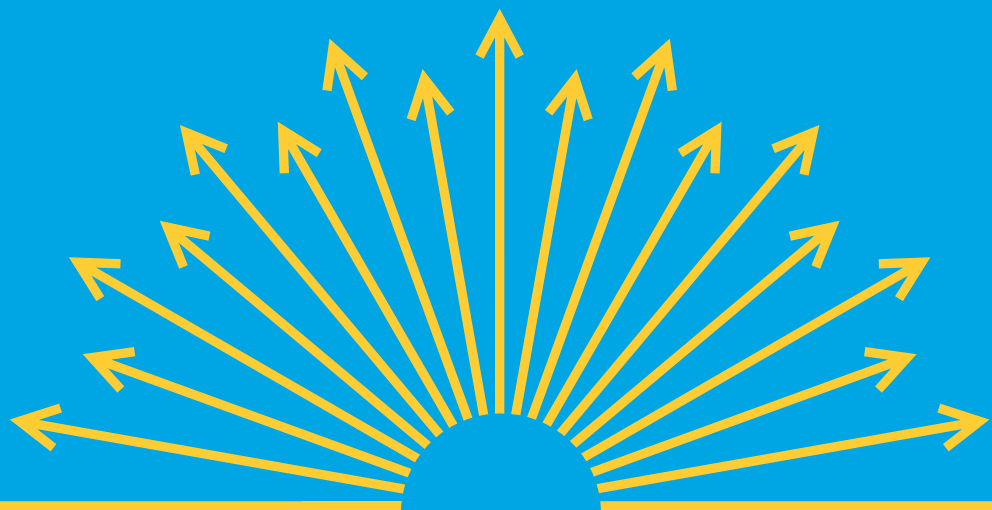


MARCH 2013

Broadening Horizons

Breaking through the barriers to
overseas study



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Broadening Horizons

Overcoming barriers to overseas study

Executive Summary

The holistic internationalisation of the UK higher education sector includes not only successfully attracting international students to UK institutions but also encouraging UK students to pursue study overseas. International students bring to UK campuses a wealth of knowledge, a global perspective and an international dimension. These elements allow UK students to develop many of the skills necessary for them to compete in the growing international employment market, while studying at home. However, research has consistently shown that students who undertake a period of overseas study are more likely to achieve higher grades, gain relevant and timely employment and earn higher salaries. It has never been so important for graduates to excel beyond the academic sphere, developing a broad range of skills that illustrates their value as future employees.

This study stems from the recommendations of the Joint Steering Group on UK Outward Mobility, which has stated that there is a need for more information at a national level to create a more effective strategy and set of mechanisms to support increasing numbers of UK students in studying overseas. The aim of this research was not to develop or agree upon a definition of mobility, or to find a consensus on which data needs to be collected. What we aimed for instead was to develop a better understanding of the barriers to overseas study, as perceived by UK students. This allows us to then investigate how these barriers can be overcome.

With the bilateral nature of this study and the involvement of the US as the second country of focus for our data collection and analysis, we fulfil a number of goals. We aimed to understand more fully the special relationship that is anecdotally reported to exist between students from the US and the UK considering an overseas study experience. The launch of the 100,000 Strong Initiative in November 2009 by President Obama highlighted the importance being placed by the US government on the overseas study experience of its home students. The administrators of this initiative in the US State Department also acknowledged the lack of data and information about current patterns of US student mobility and the driving factors behind student decision-making. The top ten globally ranked universities can be found in the UK and the US¹. These institutions share the highest and second-highest numbers of international students on their home campuses. Hosting a combined total of over one million, UK and US institutions are the home of more than one quarter of all globally mobile students. However, they also share the desire to promote overseas study to domestic students.

In partnership with the National Union of Students in the UK and Zinch in the US, over 10,800 responses were collected from UK and US students via an online self-completion survey, which was promoted in November and December 2012. To complement the quantitative data collection, a series of qualitative interviews were held with both UK and US students.

¹ <http://www.shanghairanking.com/ARWU2012.html> (2012)

Key Findings

- 01** 20% of UK respondents and 56% of US respondents are considering studying overseas.
- 02** When asked to describe themselves, 44% of UK respondents considering overseas study said they wanted to work for an international company and live overseas. When asked the same question, 66% of US respondents described themselves as wanting to have fun travelling and exploring other cultures.
- 03** 29% of UK students considering overseas study selected the US as their first-choice destination, while the UK was the first choice for 22% of US students considering overseas study. This makes the US and the UK the most desirable study destinations for students from the UK and the US, respectively. The main reasons for this included both host destinations having world-class institutions and students wanting to travel to that country and experience living in that culture.
- 04** For the most part, UK students believe they will need more than their degree qualification to get their ideal job in the future. 82% of UK respondents considering overseas study believed they would need more than their current qualification to stand out from the crowd and secure the job they wanted. 90% of these respondents believe an overseas study experience could give them the necessary edge when applying for jobs in the future.
- 05** When asked about information resources, only 24% of UK students felt they had sufficient information to make an informed decision about studying overseas, 30% said they felt they had to work hard to find the information they needed and 24% said they did not have enough information to make an informed decision. Similarly, just 22% of US students felt they had sufficient information to make a decision about studying overseas, while 26% felt they did not have enough information.
- 06** 54% of UK respondents and 49% of US respondents identified the Internet as their primary information resource for overseas study, above school teachers, university professors and study abroad offices.
- 07** 48% of UK respondents wanted to study overseas at undergraduate level and a further 48% at postgraduate level, while 82% of US respondents wanted to study overseas at undergraduate level.
- 08** When asked about the impact of the UK university tuition fee increase only 27% of UK respondents said that the fee hike had inspired their decision to study overseas. US respondents were asked how easy or complicated they felt obtaining financial aid for overseas study was. 37% said they found it very or quite complicated, while 39% said they did not know.
- 09** 82% of UK respondents and 79% of US respondents considering overseas study said they felt confident in using a foreign language.
- 10** UK respondents felt that the greatest barriers to undertaking overseas study were cost (53%), obtaining a visa (35%) and difficulty leaving parents and friends (35%). US respondents also felt that cost was the most important factor (72%), together with language ability (42%) and difficulty leaving parents and friends (38%).
- 11** Of the top ten overseas study destinations chosen by both UK and US students, seven out of ten were non-English speaking countries.
- 12** China was the ninth of the top ten study abroad destinations chosen by UK and US students considering overseas study. It was given priority as it is perceived to be a cheaper country to study in, there are existing institutional partnerships to facilitate mobility and students can receive scholarships. To understand this trend more fully, this study includes case studies from UK and US students who chose to study in China.

These findings clearly show that there is significant demand from both UK and US students for overseas study. Students recognise that they will require more than academic qualifications to be competitive in the global employment market and are seeing overseas study as a way to develop necessary skills. There is the need to equip students with adequate information for them to be able to make informed decisions about overseas study. It is important that students are able to understand and articulate the skills that can be gained from study abroad experiences and appreciate how such an experience could benefit them in the long term.

Introduction

Traditional international student mobility involves students travelling from east to west, from developing to developed countries, in pursuit of the perceived high-quality education offered by universities in the UK and the US – the primary student hosting destinations. The desire to obtain the best quality education from a world-class institution with a global reputation recognised post-study by employers is often cited by students as the primary motivation for pursuing overseas study. For a number of years now, universities in both the UK and the US have been engaged in global marketing campaigns at national and institutional level to attract large numbers of students to their institutions, and their efforts have proven to be very successful.

The strength of the UK in this area is evidenced by the growth in international student numbers over time. In 2011–12 the UK attracted 489,000 international students to its higher education institutions. It is estimated that 1.7 % of the 2.5 million higher education students in the UK are ‘diploma mobile’², ‘degree mobile’, choosing to study for their full degree outside the UK, or ‘credit mobile’, undertaking shorter-term placements. The US attracts the largest number of international students globally, with 764,495 in 2011–12. It is estimated that of the 21 million higher education students in the US, 1.3% pursue a period of study abroad. Although in real terms this represents a far higher figure than in the UK, at 273,996 in 2011–12, US figures remain proportionally lower.

The increasingly recognised shortcomings in the competitiveness of UK and US university graduates and the well-documented benefits of overseas study are leading a shift in mobility patterns. Students, parents, higher education institutions and governments in both the UK and the US are adjusting to the idea that overseas study can be about more than gaining formal knowledge through university education – something that can arguably be gained at home. Instead, the cultural and experiential benefits of overseas study, which can equip students with skills that make them more employable and socially impactful, are being acknowledged.

Recent UK and US government initiatives to understand and encourage the development of non-traditional student flows, such as the creation of the Joint Steering Group on UK Outward Mobility and the 100,000 Strong Initiative in the US, are clear indications of the growing global importance of this topic.

Through this study we aim to understand why students from the UK and the US tend not to opt for overseas study, what influences their decision-making process and what steps can be taken to encourage this study option. We examine the influencing factors on three levels: macro influences, institutional influences and individual influences that reflect personal characteristics.

We aim to understand whether higher education has gained new significance among a generation living with the effects of the largest economic downturn in decades and whether these students believe that overseas study has the potential to make them stand out in an increasingly crowded and competitive job market. We seek to ascertain whether current government initiatives are working – and if students are aware of them – or whether more needs to be done at a national level to inform students effectively about their education options.

² *Motivations and Experiences of UK Students Studying Abroad*, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills’, January 2010

Living in a country that has a reputation for and infrastructure to deliver educational excellence may lead some students to question the benefits of pursuing study overseas. For these students, the domestic provision is high quality and can be accessed without the perceived barriers of foreign language acquisition and credit transfers. We aim to understand whether these students, who have grown up without societal norms or a family history of overseas study, lack awareness of the international study opportunities available to them and the aspiration to pursue such options.

This study aims to assess how shared language, the media and the ease of transitioning from one's home country to a host study destination impact student mobility. With the perceived similarities between the US and the UK as study destinations, we can assess the impact of experiential values for students with a relative degree of shared culture.

At the institutional level, we aim to assess the impact of the recent increase in UK university tuition fees and how access to funding, scholarships, grants and loans impacts student decision-making. We also aim to gauge the impact that institutions can have on student choice; for example, by making partnership opportunities available and utilizing the knowledge of previous study abroad students and experienced, inspirational teachers.

At the individual level, we seek to understand how UK and US students categorise themselves and describe their international aspirations; for example, as CV developers, who prioritise employability prospects and access to the global labour market, Adventure seekers, who aspire to a cosmopolitan identity, inclusive world views and the opportunity to travel, and social aspirants, who see overseas study as the first step towards an internationally mobile lifestyle.

We also aim to understand the views of individuals who do not want to travel or study overseas and to identify the barriers these students feel stand between them and international study.

Methodology

For the most accurate sample of UK and US students we partnered with the National Union of Students (NUS)³ in the UK and Zinch⁴ in the US. In total, we received over 10,800 responses to our online self-completion survey, which ran between November and December 2012.

To complement the quantitative data collection a number of in-depth focus group discussions were carried out in the US and the UK in late 2012 and early 2013. For this, we worked in collaboration with the NUS, City University London and The Student Room in the UK, Zinch, the American University, Washington DC, the University of Southern California and the British Council in the US and the British Council in China.

³ <http://www.nus.org.uk/>

⁴ <http://www.zinch.com/>

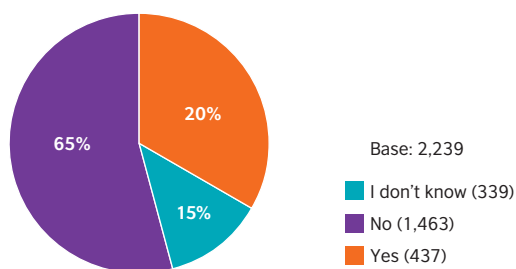
UK Data Analysis

1. UK Student Profile

The total number of UK respondents to our online self-completion survey was 2,239. The survey was carried out in November 2012, at which point there were 2,061,410 UK-domiciled students studying in the UK – 1,702,610 undergraduates and 358,800 postgraduates.

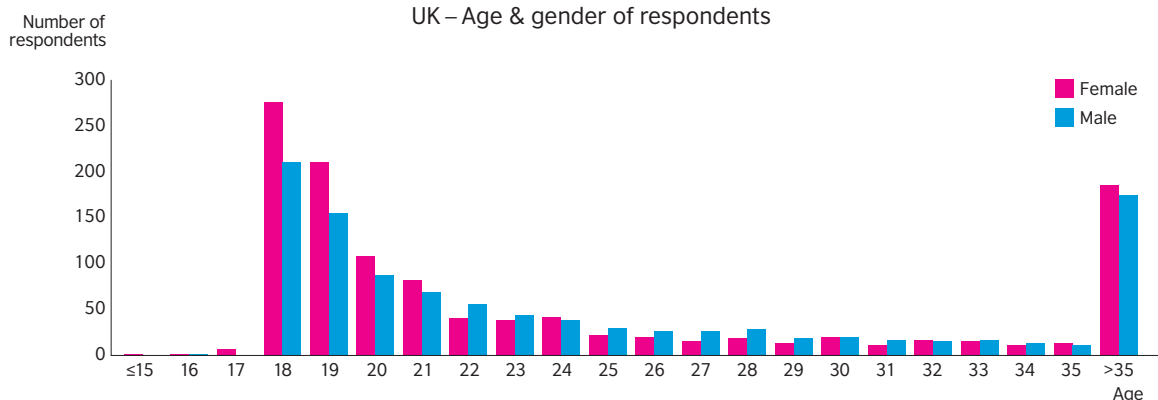
Of the UK respondents, 20% indicated that they were considering studying overseas, while 65% were not considering overseas study and 15% had not made a decision on the topic. It is estimated that UK students abroad make up around 1.7% of the total higher education student population in the UK, which translates as an estimated 33,000 students⁵. This means that the proportion of study respondents that indicated that they were considering overseas study (20%) is far higher than the actual proportion of students who study overseas.

UK – Are you thinking of studying in a foreign country?



The majority of respondents were aged between 18 and 21. Female respondents made up a slightly younger demographic, aged between eighteen and 21, with males being slightly older on average, between 22 and 28. The gender balance for mature students over 35 was fairly evenly split.

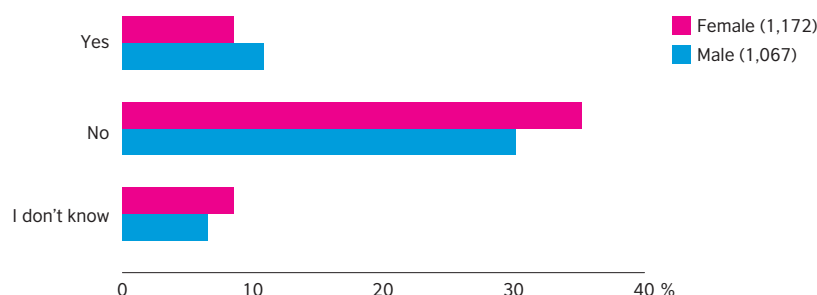
UK – Age & gender of respondents



The respondents in this study are comprised of 52% females and 48% males. Of the respondents considering studying in a foreign country, the majority were male, with this group making up 11% of the total number of respondents. Female survey participants who responded positively to studying abroad represented 9% of the total sample. A greater number of female students were not considering studying overseas (35% of the total sample) than male students (30%), while of the 16% of respondents that had not made a decision about overseas study, 9% were female and 7% male.

⁵ *International Focus*, 55, 20 January, 2010, p.1

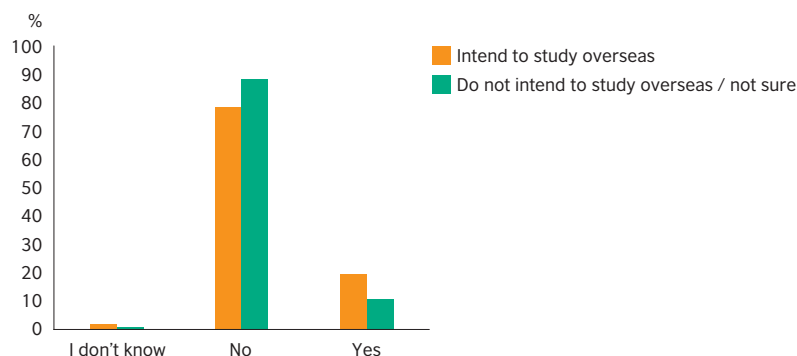
UK – Are you thinking of studying in a foreign country? (By gender)



Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data from 2010–11 shows that 58% of UK-domiciled students in this year were female and 42% were male. Erasmus statistics from 2011–12 show that of the outbound UK students in that year 9,079 (66%) were female, while 4,586 (34%) were male.

While the majority of respondents in our study were female, consistent with the make-up of UK-domiciled students, that the largest proportion of those in our sample considering overseas study is male is a deviation from the actual trend.

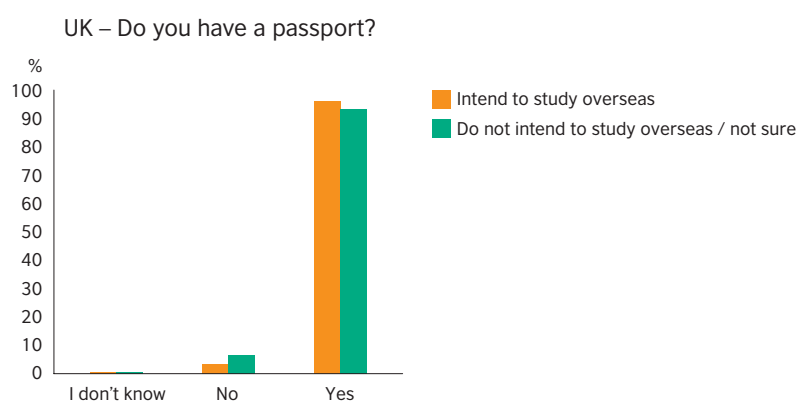
UK – Did either of your parents study overseas?



When asked whether their parents had studied overseas, 19% of the respondents considering studying overseas answered positively. Of those not considering studying overseas or unsure, a higher proportion (88%) indicated that their parents had not studied overseas.

As part of the 2011 Census the Office for National Statistics collected information on passport holders for the first time. The census revealed that 83% of UK residents (46.6 million people) held at least one passport⁶. All respondents to our survey were asked whether they held a passport. Of those considering overseas study, 96% indicated that they held a passport, while 93% of those not considering overseas study or unsure held a passport. Both groups report findings that are at least 10% higher than the national average. This question acts as a proxy for previous travel experience, as being issued with a passport usually indicates the need at some point in the past to have travelled outside the UK.

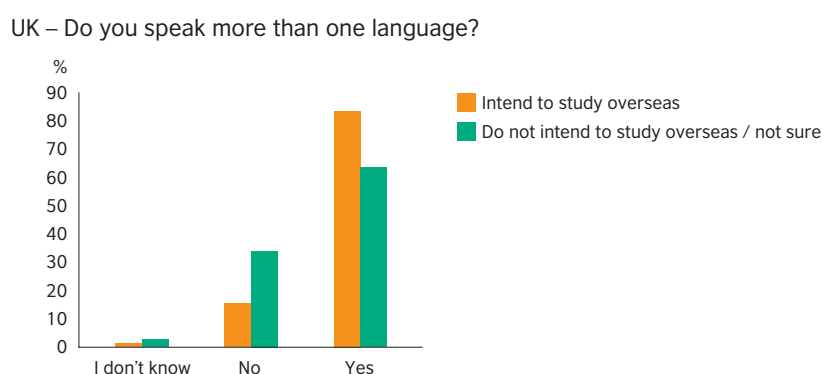
⁶ http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_290685.pdf



A November 2011 report commissioned by the Education and Employers Taskforce presented the findings of a survey on satisfaction among employers. For both graduates and school-leavers, employers ranked satisfaction with employees' foreign language skills last out of twelve skill areas – the greatest area of satisfaction being with IT skills⁷. The report also showed that although language proficiency is in demand across all areas of the economy, it has specific relevance to the UK's trade performance.

Language ability is often cited as a key barrier to UK students studying overseas. Previous studies have shown that there has been a change in the geography of UK student mobility in favour of Anglophone countries. However, with the increasing provision of programmes taught in English in non-English speaking countries, such as Germany, Sweden and the Czech Republic, definitions are becoming blurred.

With regard to language skills, survey respondents were asked not to categorise their ability or list their qualifications, but to describe their confidence in functioning in a non-English speaking environment. Students were asked whether they could speak more than one language sufficiently well to buy a train ticket or order some food.



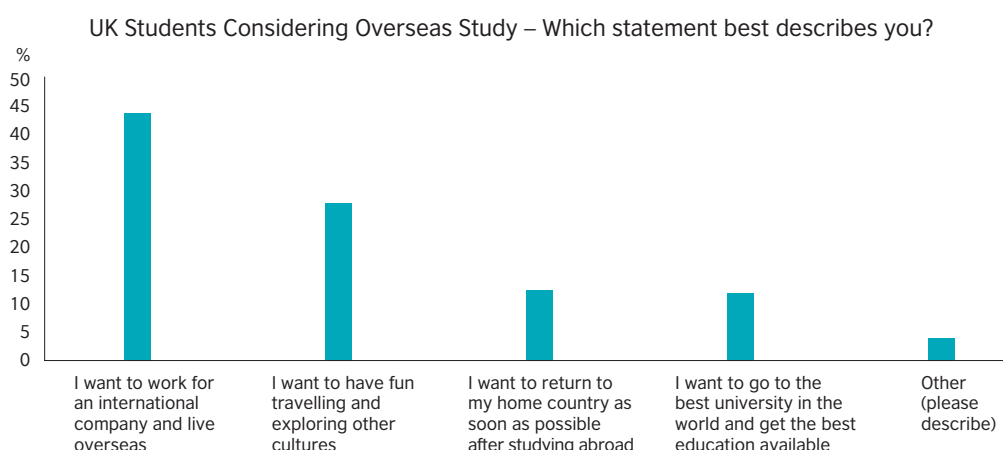
Of the respondents considering overseas study, 83% answered this question positively, while just 63% of respondents not considering overseas study or unsure reported this level of confidence in a foreign language.

The two indicators analysed above – holding a passport and having a degree of foreign language confidence – suggest that a large proportion of the respondents in our study are likely to have travelled outside the UK, and certainly a far larger proportion than are considering studying overseas (20%).

The questionnaire design allowed two independent routes of questioning: one for respondents who said that they were considering overseas study and one for those who said that they were not considering it or were unsure. Students who indicated that they were considering studying overseas were asked to select a statement that best described their aspirations.

To understand how students perceived themselves in the context of their international study aspirations, we asked them to choose one of four statements that best described them, with the additional option of giving an alternative statement.

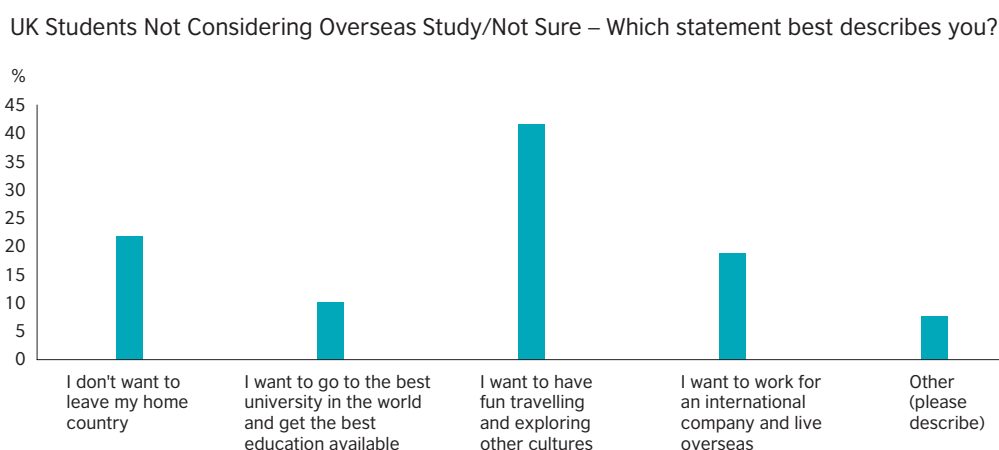
⁷ http://www.educationandemployers.org/media/14563/II_report_1__for_website.pdf



Of those considering overseas study, 44% described themselves as wanting to work for an international company and live overseas, while 28% wanted to have fun travelling and exploring other cultures. A smaller proportion (12%) said that they wanted to go to the best university in the world and get the best education available, while an equal number (12%) stated that they wanted to return home as soon as possible after studying abroad.

The remaining 4% of respondents gave a self-style description, responses to which included wanting to experience foreign languages, establish their own business, build up overseas networks and business associates and gain a greater international perspective.

Respondents who were not considering studying overseas or who were unsure were also asked to choose one of four statements that best described them.



Of these respondents, 41% described themselves as wanting to have fun travelling and exploring other cultures, while 19% indicated that they wanted to work for an international company and live overseas and 10% wanted to go to the best universities in the world and get the best education possible. A further 22% described themselves as not wanting to leave their home country.

Of the respondents not wanting to study overseas or unsure, a greater proportion (8%) chose to give a self-styled description than for those considering overseas study (4%). The largest group of self-styled descriptions mentioned pre-existing commitments as the primary reason for being unable to study overseas. Such commitments included both extended and immediate family, employment and financial considerations. In addition, many self-styled descriptions referenced age as a prohibitive factor.

All respondents were asked to identify the UK county that they considered themselves to be from. The top ten UK counties given by respondents considering overseas study were: Greater London, the West Midlands, Devon, West Yorkshire, Surrey, Lancashire, Hertfordshire, Oxfordshire, Hampshire and Nottinghamshire. There is not a significant geographic spread within these responses, with respondents being grouped in the Midlands and the South and the two exceptions being West Yorkshire and Lancashire.

UK Students Considering Overseas Study – Top ten UK counties



Respondents not considering overseas study or unsure identified with the following top ten UK counties: Greater London, the West Midlands, Surrey, Devon, Kent, Essex, Hampshire, West Yorkshire, Lancashire and Greater Manchester. The additional counties of note for UK respondents not considering overseas study or unsure were Kent, Essex and Greater Manchester.

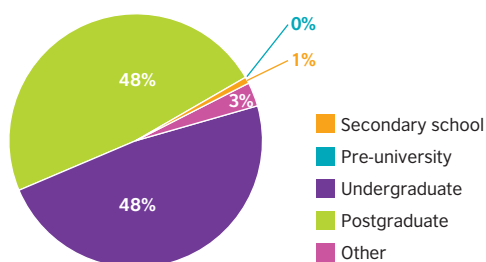
UK Students Not Considering Overseas Study/Not Sure – Top ten UK counties



2. Studying Overseas – Courses and destinations

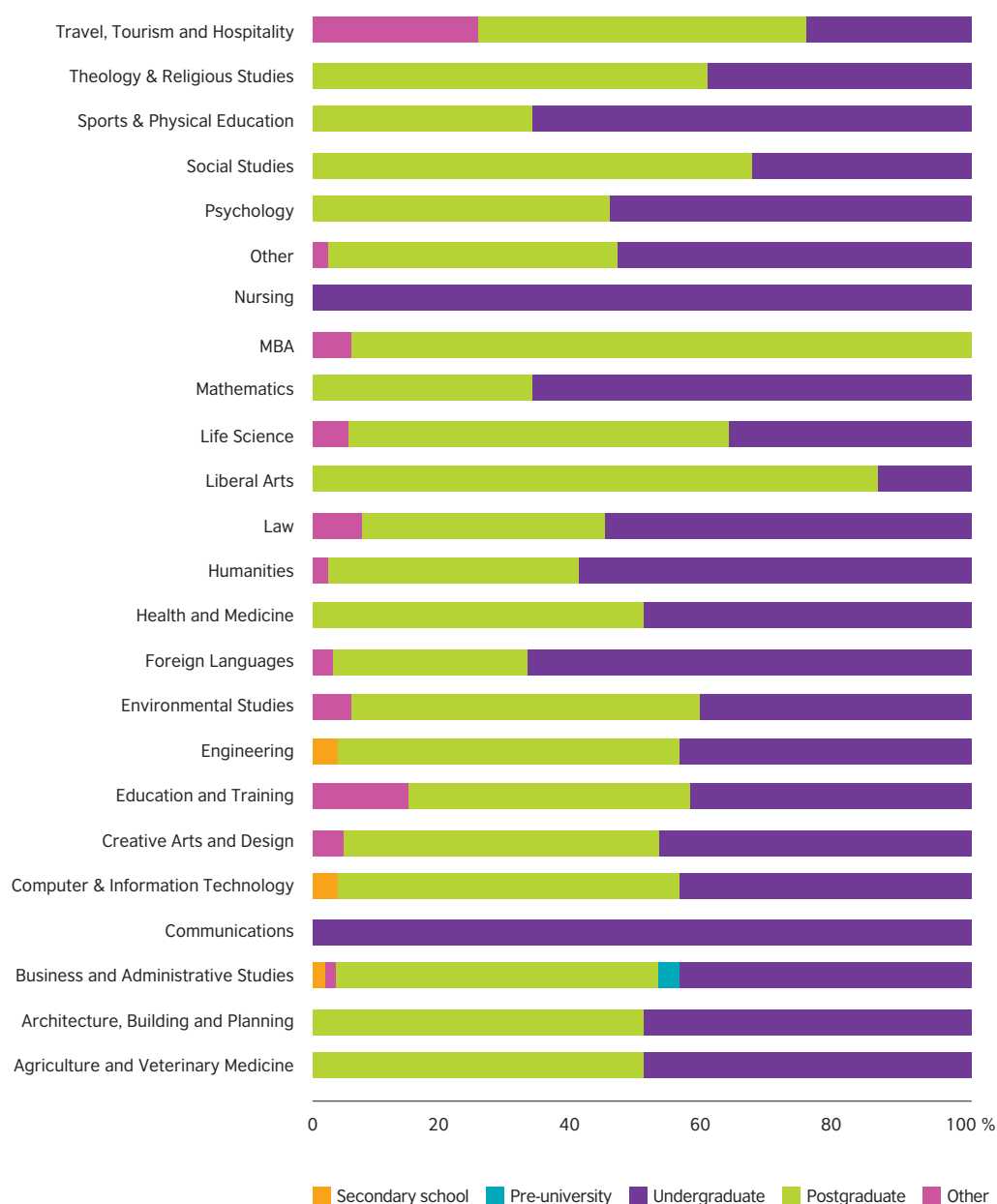
When asked at what level respondents considering studying overseas wanted to study, 48% indicated undergraduate level and the same proportion again indicated postgraduate level. A very small number (1%) chose secondary school and a further small proportion (3%) indicated pre-university. Of the 3% that selected *Other*, the majority said they were intending to study at PhD or post-doctoral level.

UK Students Considering Overseas Study – At what level are you considering studying overseas?



To identify trends in subjects chosen when studying overseas respondents considering overseas study were asked to name their preferred subject areas. This information was then cross-referenced with the previous question on study level in order to identify trends.

UK Students Considering Overseas Study – Level of study and subject choice

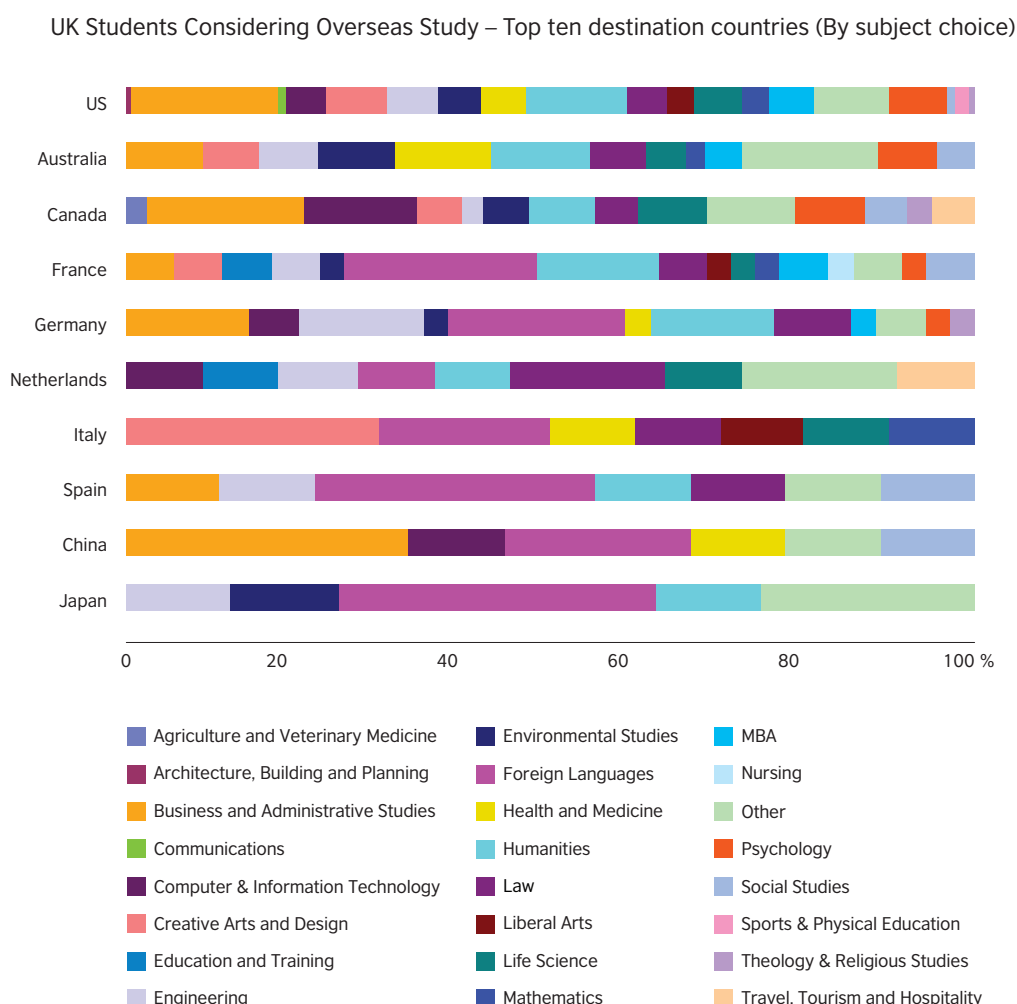


We were able to identify that the most popular subject areas at undergraduate level are: Communications, Foreign Languages, Humanities, Mathematics, Nursing, and Sports and Physical Education.

At postgraduate level, popular subjects include Liberal Arts, Life Science, Social Studies, and Theology and Religious Studies. The MBA is most popular with those interested in postgraduate studies abroad – 94% of those indicating an interest in the MBA were considering postgraduate-level studies, while the remaining 6% were considering study overseas at PhD level.

Business and Administrative Studies is a subject area that is popular at all levels, including secondary school and pre-university, while Computer and Information Technology and Engineering are favoured by those interested in overseas study at secondary-school level.

UK respondents considering overseas study were then asked which country was their ideal study destination. The following countries were identified as the top ten and are given in rank order as follows: the US (29%), Australia (10%), Canada (10%), France (8%), Germany (8%), the Netherlands (3%), Italy (2%), Spain (2%), China (2%) and Japan (2%). In total, 45 destinations were selected from a drop-down list of options.



Of the top ten study destinations, only three are English speaking, although the Netherlands and Germany offer a range of programmes in English. By cross-referencing these top destinations with the subject area findings it is possible to subject-profile certain study destinations. For example:

- France, Germany, Italy, Spain, China, Japan and, to a smaller degree, the Netherlands, are all popular destinations for studying foreign languages.
- Humanities is popular in the US, Australia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Japan and, to a lesser degree, Canada.
- Creative Arts and Design is hugely popular in Italy and also to a lesser extent in the US, Australia, Canada and France.
- Engineering is popular with students interested in Germany, Japan, Spain and the Netherlands.
- Business and Administrative Studies is popular among students considering China, Canada, the US, Germany, Spain and Australia.
- Health and Medicine is popular with students interested in China, Italy, Australia, the US and, to a lesser degree, Germany.

Destinations like the US, Australia and Canada are considered by UK students with a wide range of subject interests; for example, students considering the US express an interest in nineteen different subject areas. This compares to countries like Japan and China, where the subjects identified by interested students number just five and six, respectively.

Previous research has shown that host destinations are favoured for different reasons. We asked respondents to consider why they selected their destination of choice and to choose the best answer from a drop-down list. Analysis of these responses allows us to understand more about the perceived strengths of a country as a destination for international students, as well as the factors that UK students consider to be the most important when choosing a destination country. The first graph shows the feedback from students considering overseas study.

UK Students Considering Overseas Study – Top ten destination countries (By importance factor)

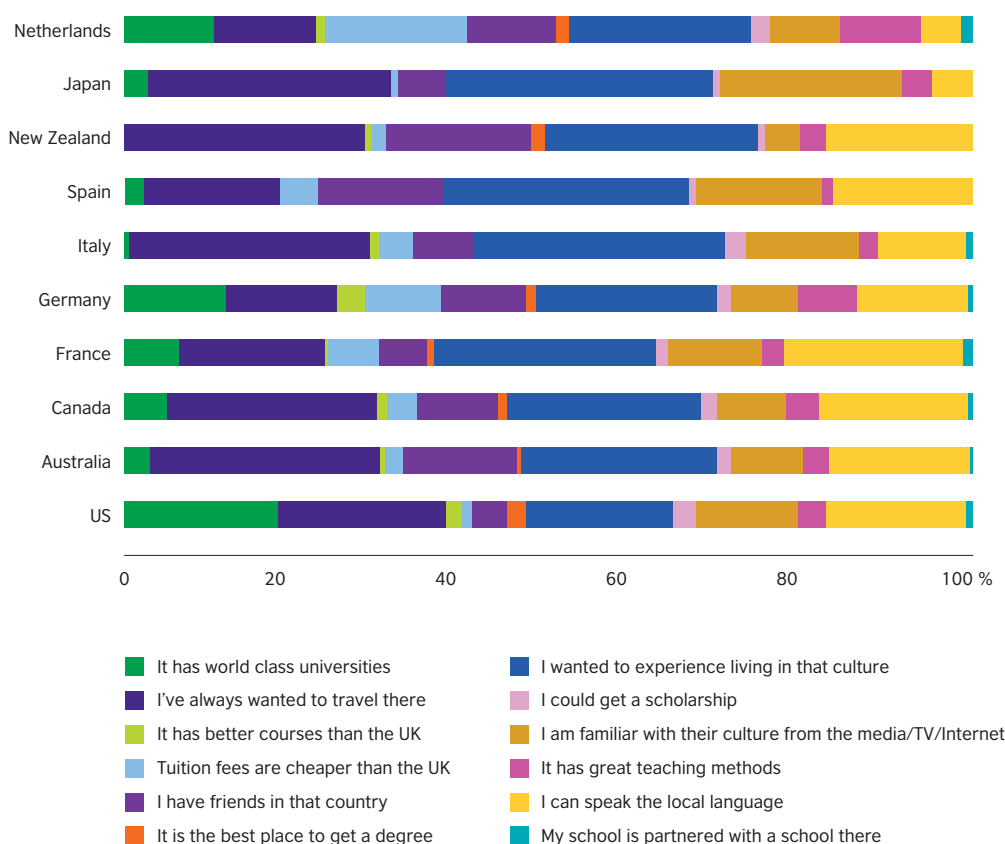


In analysing this data we found that important factors for choosing a study destination abroad are: always having wanted to travel to that destination, wanting to experience living in that culture and familiarity with the local language. These three factors are present, to greater or lesser degrees, for all of the top ten study destinations identified.

Although less statistically significant, the presence of world class universities is a relevant factor for the US, the Netherlands, Italy, Germany and Canada, highlighting students' perceptions of the education on offer in these countries. The perception that tuition fees are cheaper there than in the UK is a factor behind studying in Spain, the Netherlands, Germany, China and Canada. A destination being considered the best place to get a degree is a primary factor for students considering the US, and also to a lesser extent for those choosing the Netherlands, Germany and France. Receiving a scholarship is a notable factor for those considering China and Italy.

While all destinations are popular to some extent due to institutional partnerships, China has the largest proportion of respondents identifying this factor as a reason for choosing a host country.

UK Students Not Considering Overseas Study/Not Sure – Top ten destination countries (By importance factor)

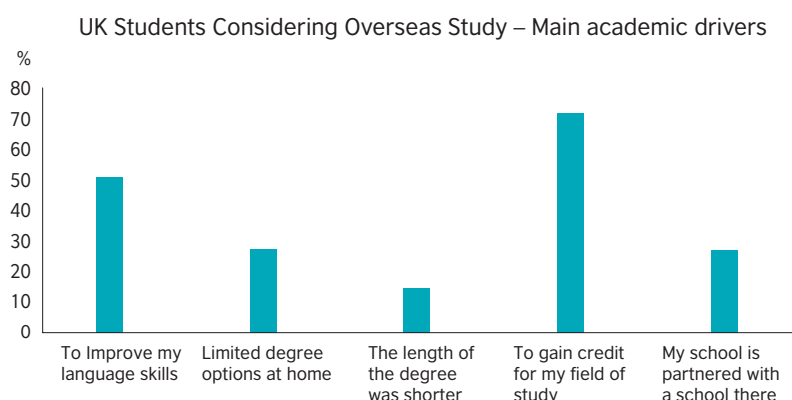


The second graph on this topic shows responses from UK students not considering overseas study or undecided. Similar trends to those seen above emerge from analysis of this data, although there is arguably greater variation in opinion in some cases.

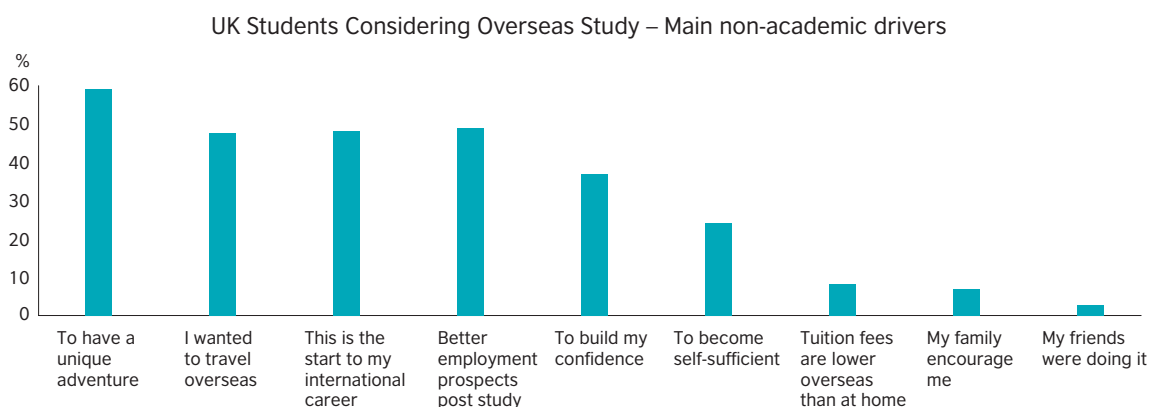
The top three factors remain the same: having always wanted to travel to that country, wanting to experience living in that culture and ability to speak the local language. However, students that are indecisive or have no intention of studying overseas identified having a friend in their chosen destination or having a degree of familiarity with the culture from the media, TV or Internet as more important factors than students considering overseas study. The perception of cheaper tuition fees, better degree programmes than the UK and the availability of scholarships were also identified as being marginally more important factors for these respondents.

3. Drivers

The academic and non-academic drivers for UK students pursuing overseas study are illustrative of not only students' motivations for going abroad but also the opportunities available to them and the skills they lack or are trying to improve.



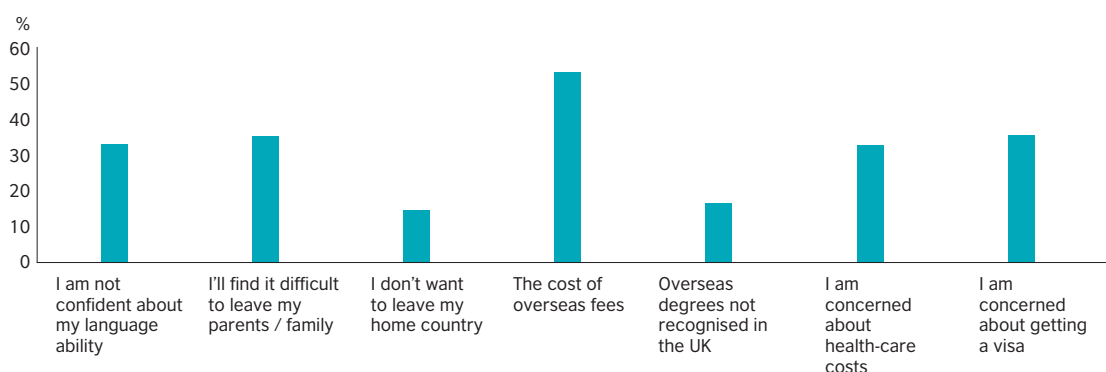
The main academic drivers for UK students considering overseas study are gaining credit for their field of study (71%), improving language skills (50%), limited degree options at home (28%) and their school being partnered with an institution in that country (28%). These findings indicate that UK respondents considering overseas study do so largely as part of an academic programme and as a way of gaining credit. This suggests an interest in shorter periods of academic study abroad, potentially as part of a larger study programme.



The main non-academic drivers for UK students considering overseas study include having a unique adventure, which 58% of students surveyed identified with, better employment prospects (48%), the start of an international career (47%) and wanting to travel overseas (46%). Building confidence and becoming self-sufficient were regarded as less significant non-academic drivers for UK students, and lower perceived tuition fees and the encouragement of friends and family were drivers for only a small proportion of students considering overseas study.

In addition to motivating factors, students considering overseas study were asked to identify their greatest concerns about living and studying in another culture.

UK Students Considering Overseas Study – What is your main concern?

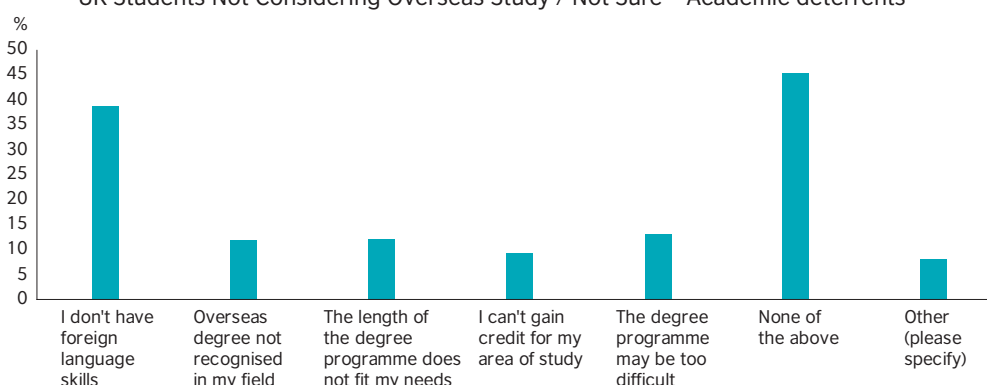


The largest concern overall was the cost of overseas study, which was selected by 53% of respondents. An additional 36% expressed concern about obtaining a visa and 35% mentioned finding it difficult to leave their friends and family. 33% expressed concerns about health-care costs and the same proportion expressed a lack of confidence in their language ability.

During the in-depth focus group discussions UK students frequently expressed concern about not only finding it difficult to leave their friends and family but also the idea of missing out on developments within their peer groups. Many students explained that taking a year away from their established course companions, circles of friends and sports teams would, in their opinion, have an adverse effect on their future progress and success, both academically and socially. Establishing and maintaining such networks was often seen as more important than pursuing an overseas study experience.

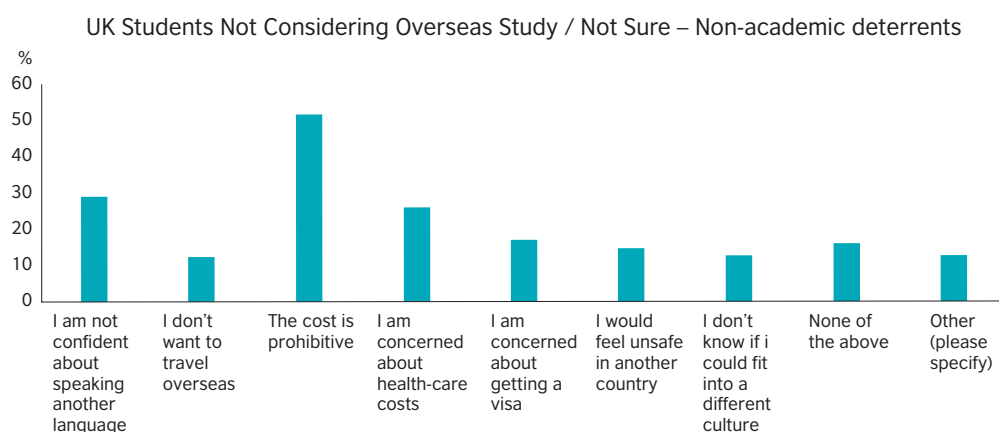
Students not considering overseas study or undecided were asked what, if anything, they perceived to be the academic deterrents to overseas study.

UK Students Not Considering Overseas Study / Not Sure – Academic deterrents



For the most part, these students indicated that there were no academic deterrents to overseas study, with 45% of respondents not identifying any of the deterrents listed. A further large proportion (39%) indicated that they felt they lacked the necessary foreign language skills. The remaining possible deterrents were identified by only small numbers of respondents, with the greatest proportion of these (13%) indicating that they felt the degree programme might be too difficult. For the 8% of respondents that listed another deterrent, typical answers included existing financial, family and employment commitments and a lack of overseas opportunities in their specific area of study.

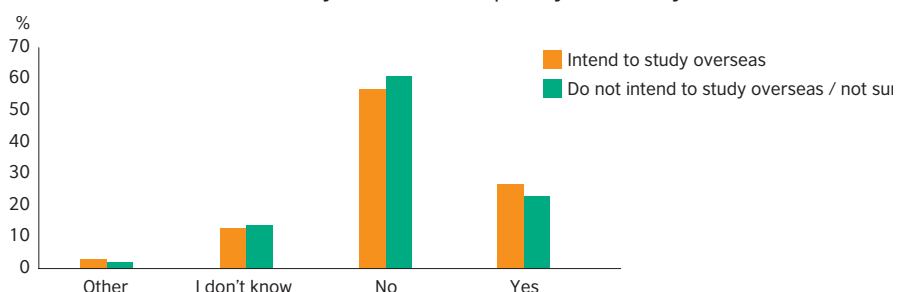
When asked to select the greatest non-academic deterrents, cost was the most significant, being selected by 52% of respondents. Language ability was again identified as a major deterrent, this time by 29% of respondents. A further 13% of students not considering overseas study or undecided offered a reason other than those listed, with typical answers including family commitments, being a long distance from home and not having enough information for the decision-making process.



The 2012–13 increase in tuition fees in the UK saw the cost of undergraduate tuition triple from an average of £3,000 per year to £9,000 per year – a fee that the majority of UK institutions will be charging. A decrease in applications to UK institutions was anticipated by UCAS in November 2012, when early indications showed that undergraduate applications from UK students had already begun to fall. The hike in university tuition fees has made the UK one of the most expensive countries in which to pursue higher education. As a direct result of this, it was further anticipated that many UK students would consider studying abroad.

When questioned on this topic, 27% of respondents considering overseas study and 23% of those not considering overseas study or unsure indicated that the rise in UK university tuition fees had influenced their decision about overseas study. The proportion of those not considering overseas study or unsure who said that fee the hike had not affected their decision (61%) was higher than for those who were considering overseas study (57%).

UK – Has the recent increase in UK university tuition fees inspired you to study overseas?

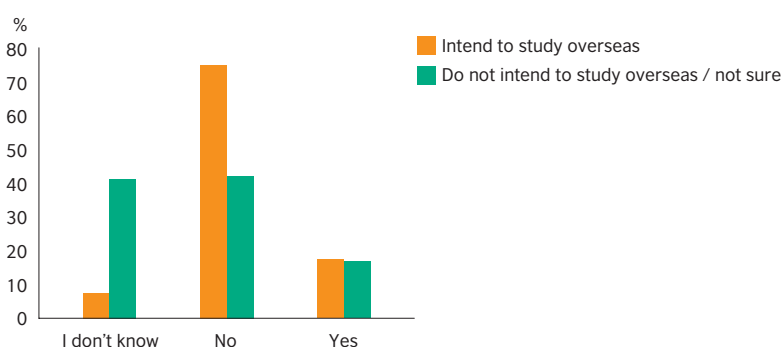


In focus group discussions with UK students the majority of participants were unaware that they could pursue a full-time undergraduate degree in a number of countries and pay reduced tuition fees. The majority indicated that the US was their first choice but that they considered it to be much more expensive than the UK. Many of the students we spoke to expressed concern that while overseas programmes might be less expensive they did not have the internationally recognised quality and reputation of UK programmes.

4. Information Resources

When discussing study abroad opportunities in focus groups with UK students, the biggest barrier – in contrast to the survey findings, which point towards cost or lack of foreign language proficiency – was the absence of transparent information on the possible sources of funding, government scholarship programmes, the level of foreign language ability needed to study in some destinations and how to begin the process of applying to study overseas.

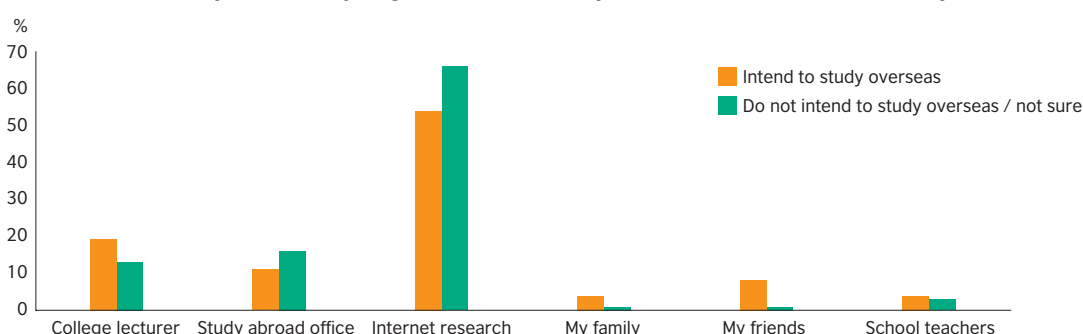
UK – Is your course part of, or are you aware of, a UK government-sponsored programme to promote overseas study?



In response to the survey, the vast majority (75%) of respondents not considering overseas study or unsure said that they were not aware of any government-run initiative open to them. Just 18% of those not considering overseas study or unsure and 17% of those considering study abroad were aware of any government-run initiative that they could benefit from. In addition, a large number (41%) of those considering overseas study responded that they did not know.

Information on study abroad opportunities is crucial when students are making their initial decisions on this topic. The majority of students we spoke to said that they began their search for information using the Internet. This allowed them to refine their ideas before they sought someone from whom they could find out more information.

UK – Where did you / would you get the information you needed about overseas study?

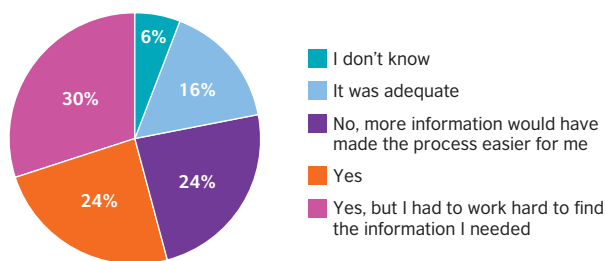


The Internet was cited as the primary information source for 66% of those not considering overseas study or unsure and 54% of those considering studying abroad. Those considering a period overseas also sought advice from college lectures (19%), the study abroad office (11%) and friends (8%). Those not considering international study or unsure indicated they would use the study abroad office (16%) and college lecturers (13%).

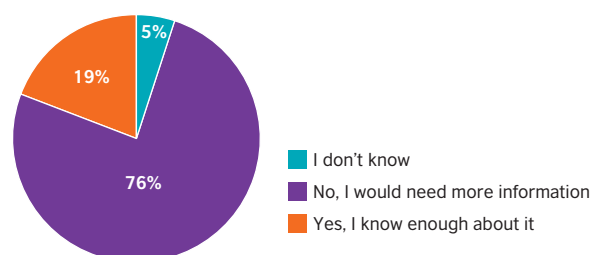
When speaking with students, satisfaction with the availability of information appeared to be low. Of the students surveyed, just 24% said that they felt they had enough information to reach a decision. Of the remaining students, 30% said that they had enough information but that they had had to work hard to find what they needed, while 16% said that it was adequate. Nearly a quarter of students (24%) reported that they felt they did not have enough information to make an informed decision.

Most significantly, over three quarters (76%) of those not considering overseas study reported that they felt they did not have enough information to make an informed decision. Within this group of students, 20% had not yet made a decision about studying overseas and 80% had made the decision not to. From this we can infer that a large proportion of respondents came to a decision about overseas study despite having indicated that they did not have adequate information to make an informed choice.

UK Students Considering Overseas Study –
Do you feel you had enough information to make an informed decision about overseas study?

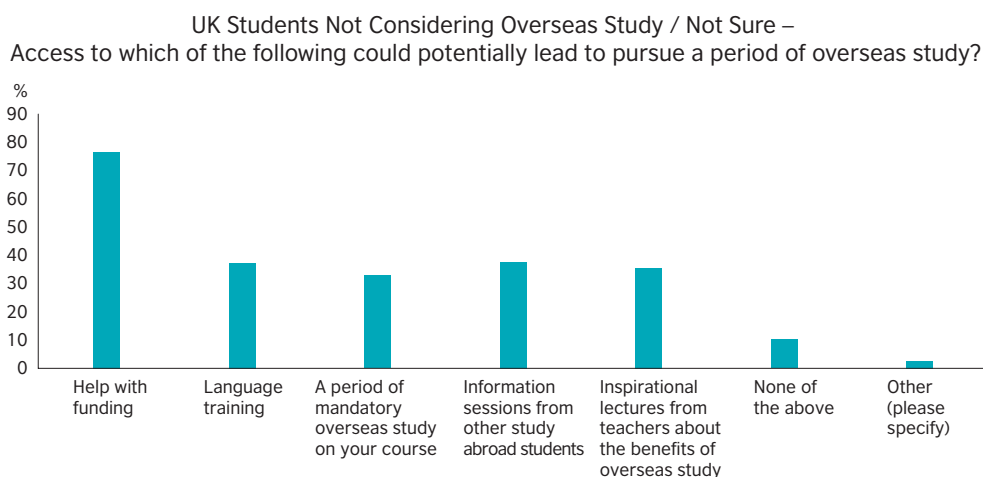


UK Students Not Considering Overseas Study / Not Sure –
Do you feel you know enough to make an informed decision about overseas study?



Information is clearly lacking for students who have chosen not to pursue overseas study or who have yet to reach a decision. We asked these participants which resources could potentially lead them to pursue a period of study abroad.

Of those asked, 78% said that help with funding would be the most beneficial resource to have access to. In addition, 38% of all students identified the possible benefits of information sessions with other study abroad students, 37%, language training, and 36%, inspirational lectures from teachers about the benefits of overseas study. A further 33% of respondents said that a period of mandatory overseas study on their course would encourage them. Students in the focus group discussions echoed these sentiments. Many students recounted the first time they had heard a peer describe their overseas experience and how this had inspired them and made the opportunity feel more realistic and tangible.

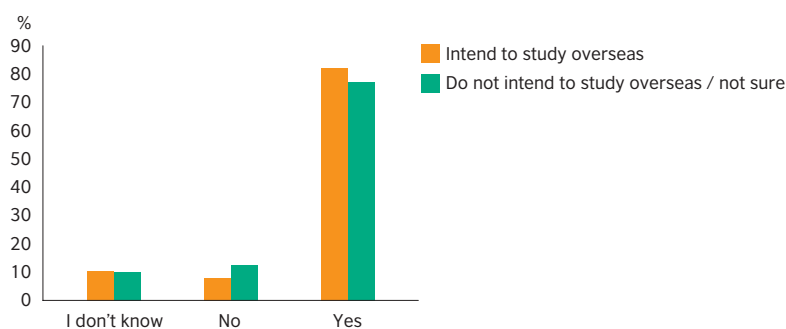


5. Aspiring Individuals

For the first time in generations, graduates are facing a fiercely competitive job market and high unemployment rates. The graduate unemployment rate in the UK in 2012, as reported by the Office of National Statistics, had risen to 18.9%. In addition, nearly 36% of graduates were employed in positions below their skill level. Securing a job after graduation has never been more challenging and graduates are required to possess a range of skills beyond those gained while studying for academic qualifications. Soft skills and characteristics such as teamwork, leadership, problem solving, creativity, initiative, relationship building and emotional intelligence are becoming increasingly important to employers.

We sought to identify the perceived value of gaining a degree and ascertain whether students believed they would need more than their academic qualification to stand out from the crowd and secure the job they wanted.

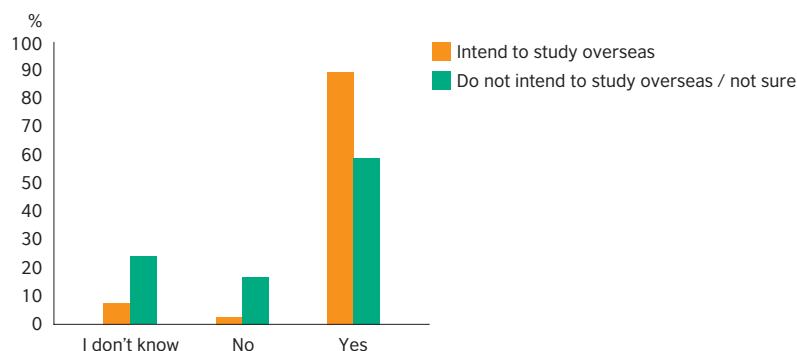
UK – When you graduate, do you think that you will need more than your degree to secure the job you want and stand out from the crowd?



In total, 82% of those considering overseas study and 77% of those not or unsure agreed that they would need more than their degree to secure the job they wanted and stand out from the crowd. A slightly higher proportion of those not considering overseas study (12%) than those considering studying abroad (8%) thought the opposite.

An overseas study experience is believed to develop soft and interpersonal skills, which students can then use in employment and other areas of their lives. However, we wanted to identify whether study participants believed overseas study would enable them to develop the skills they needed for the competitive job market.

UK – Do you think that an overseas study experience could give you the edge you need to stand out when applying for jobs in the future?

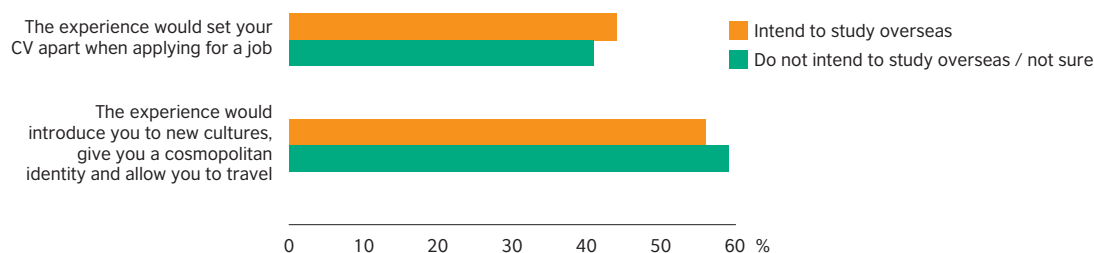


Of those considering going abroad, 90% believed that an overseas study experience would help them stand out from the crowd when applying for jobs in the future. However, only 59% of those not considering overseas study or undecided believed this was the case, while 17% said they disagreed with this view and 24% said they did not know.

In focus group discussions students were asked to identify the skills that a study abroad experience would help them to develop. The majority of students, however, struggled to articulate what these skills would be and how they would be beneficial in the future, especially in terms of employment. In this way, students found it difficult to make the connection between overseas study, the skills they would develop and the ways in which these skills could benefit them in the long term.

At the end of the online questionnaire we asked students to select from two statements the one that best described their point of view. Our aim in doing this was to gain an overview of the perceived value of studying overseas, in the context of all of the questions that each student had answered about destinations, motivations, drivers and deterrents.

UK – Of these two statements, which is the most important to you?



At this final stage, 44% of those considering overseas study and 41% of those not considering it or undecided said that the experience would set their CV apart when applying for a job, while 56% of those considering overseas study and 59% of those not or undecided said that above all the experience would introduce them to new cultures, give them a cosmopolitan identity and allow them to travel.

UK Students Studying Overseas – China case studies

In 2010–11 the Chinese Ministry of Education reported that there were 3,539 students from the UK studying in China. This vast country has become an increasingly important study destination; as our earlier analysis shows, many UK students pursue a period of overseas study in China to develop their Chinese language skills and study Business and Administration. Below are two case studies of UK students studying in China.

What is the name and location of your UK/US institution?

University of Sheffield.

What is the name and location of your Chinese institution?

Nanjing University, Nanjing.

Please describe your programme.

Year abroad.

What level are you studying at?

Second year of Chinese degree.

What subject are you studying?

Chinese Language.

Does your programme have a work/internship element?

No.

What inspired you to study in China?

I was interested in having a year abroad as part of my degree before I started university. I wanted to study a language and at the time Chinese seemed to be the right choice. Having been to China for a school visit at the age of sixteen, I was very keen to return and spend an extended period of time here. A year abroad just seemed like the right route.

What were your main concerns about studying in China?

It took a while to get used to being so far from home for an extended period of time. Because of this, little things such as getting sick or having an accident concerned me sometimes, but these minor concerns subsided the longer I spent time here.

Did the cost of studying overseas factor into your decision at all?

I was able to apply for a Chinese government scholarship, so the cost of studying in China was made considerably cheaper for me. Even without the scholarship, the cost of living here as a student can work out to be slightly cheaper than back in the UK. I was not affected by the tuition fee increase as I studied before this was introduced.

Where did you get the information you needed about going overseas?

I received information from previous students and my university. It was enough as things here change all the time and information quickly becomes outdated.

Do you think your overseas study experience will be enough to secure the job you want when you graduate and allow you to stand out from the crowd?

To a certain extent, yes. I think experience abroad is useful for those wanting to work abroad after graduation.

What did you find hardest about studying in China?

Academic – Earlier classes, different expectations from teaching staff.
Non-academic – Miss home comforts every now and then.

What did you enjoy most about studying in China?

I enjoyed travelling around the country during holidays. Making friends from around the world and learning Chinese.

How would you improve the experience for yourself and others in the future?

More information on available programmes and sources of funding. Also, information on some practical issues, such as organising a residency permit, as these things can be quite confusing when you first arrive.

Student profile:

Male, 23 yrs
Parents did not study overseas.

Describe yourself.

I want to have fun travelling and exploring other cultures.

What is the name and location of your UK/US institution?

University of Westminster, London.

What is the name and location of your Chinese institution?

University of Nanjing, Nanjing.

Please describe your programme.

Year abroad (two semesters).

What level are you studying at?

Intermediate/advanced Chinese Language.

Does your programme have a work/internship element?

No.

What inspired you to study in China?

I chose to study in China because my degree was Chinese. I also had the option to study in Taiwan, but I felt Mainland China would be better as that is where I was most likely going to end up working and living.

What were your main concerns about studying in China?

My main concerns were finding housing once I arrived in China, sorting out residence permits and getting used to a new culture.

Did the cost of studying overseas factor into your decision at all?

Not at all. I hadn't considered the cost of studying overseas. I had also been given a scholarship from the Chinese government and living in China was much cheaper than living in London. The UK tuition fee increase hadn't started by the time I finished my degree. Also, I didn't have to pay tuition fees for the year I studied abroad.

Where did you get the information you needed about going overseas? Was it enough?

I got information from lecturers, students who had just been on their years abroad and the year abroad coordinator. It was mostly enough, but there was still confusion as to what was needed for the medical tests – I had to get a few tests redone in China as they were out of date by the time I arrived.

Do you think your overseas study experience will be enough to secure the job you want when you graduate and allow you to stand out from the crowd?

Absolutely. Intensive language study is hugely beneficial, as is being able to use my Chinese language on a daily basis. It is also much easier to study abroad at a prestigious university in China, and this is appreciated by Chinese employees.

What did you find hardest about studying in China?

I found contact hours of 26 hours a week to be very long and a lot of content was repeated. There was usually quite a lot of work and preparation due for the next day, but I managed to build this into my schedule.

What did you enjoy most about studying in China?

I enjoyed studying with people from all around the world and living in the same building as my classroom. The long holidays also gave me lots of opportunities to travel around China and see the rest of the country.

How would you improve the experience for yourself and others in the future?

I would like to have seen a more dedicated service for carrying out the medical tests necessary for the Chinese visa prior to going to China. I would also have liked to contact current students studying abroad at the same university to ask their advice.

Student profile:

Male, 24 yrs
Parents did not study overseas.

Describe yourself.

I want to work for an
international company and
live overseas.

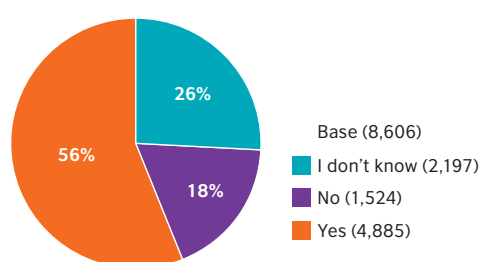
US Data Analysis

6. US Student Profile

The total number of US respondents to our online self-completion survey was 8,606. The US Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics reported that there were 21 million US students enrolled in degree-granting institutions in 2010⁸. Between 2000 and 2010 enrolment increased by 37% from 15.3 million to 21 million. Much of the growth between 2000 and 2010 was in full-time enrolment. During this time the number of full-time students rose by 45%, while the number of part-time students rose 26%.

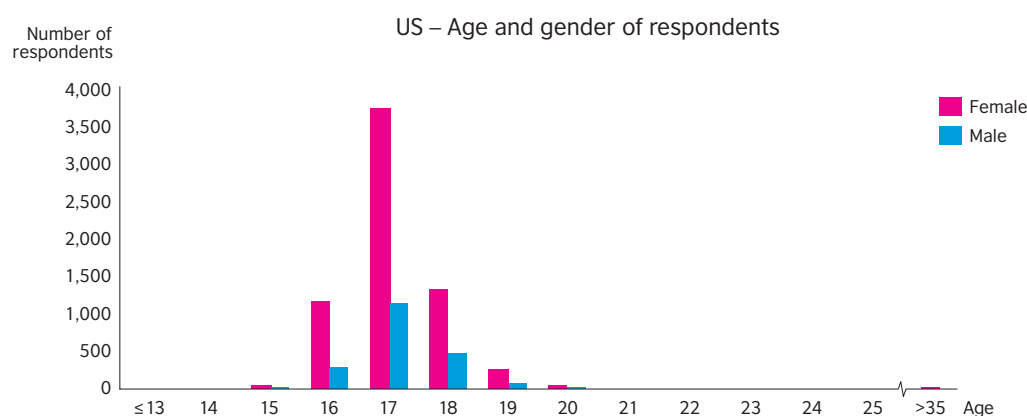
Of the US respondents, 56% indicated they were considering overseas study, while 26% were undecided and 18% were not considering studying overseas. Currently, 1.3% of US higher education students undertake a period of study overseas. The positive response rate of 56% of students in our survey considering studying overseas is therefore far higher than the actual proportion of students heading overseas.

US – Are you thinking of studying in a foreign country?



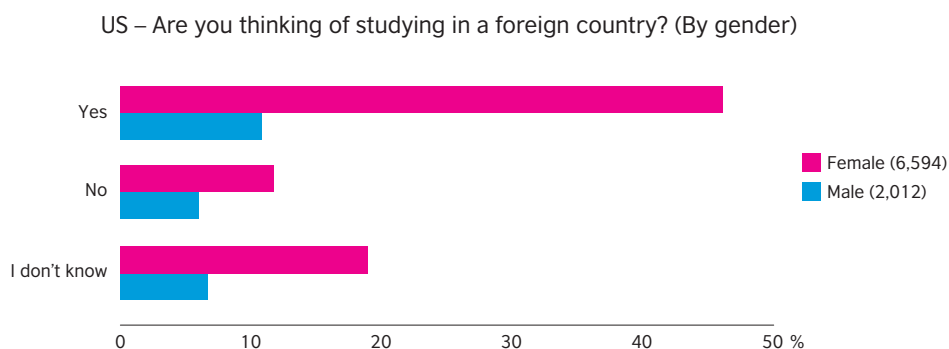
Of the US respondents to the survey, 6,594 (77%) were female and 2,012 (23%) were male. The majority of respondents who said they were considering overseas study were female and this subgroup makes up 46% of the total number of survey participants. Of the complete sample of respondents, 11% were male students considering overseas study. The National Center for Education Statistics reported an increase of 39% in the number of females studying at degree-granting institutions in the US between 2000 and 2010. In the same period, the number of male students rose by 35%.

The majority of respondents to our survey were aged between sixteen and nineteen. 43% of the total sample of US respondents were females aged seventeen and 13% males aged seventeen. Less than 1% of the participants in the survey were aged over 35.

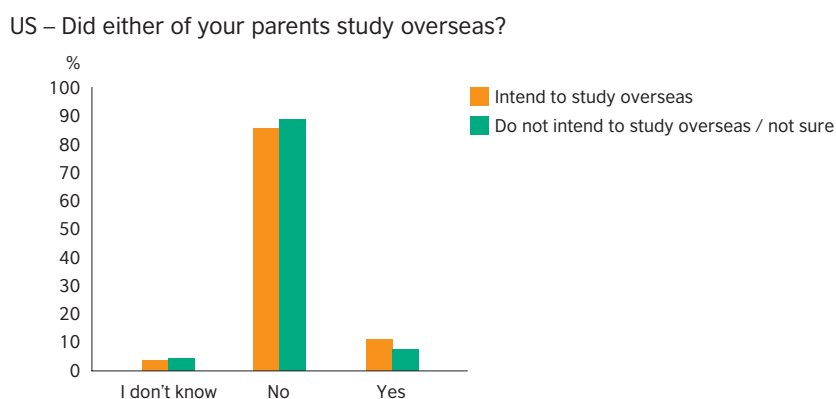


⁸ <http://nces.ed.gov/>

Open Doors statistics from the Institute of International Education reveal that female students have dominated overseas study in the US since 2001. Female students consistently represented around 65% of US students heading overseas between 2001 and 2011. The latest available data (2010–11) reported that 64.4% of US study abroad students were female and 35.6% were male.



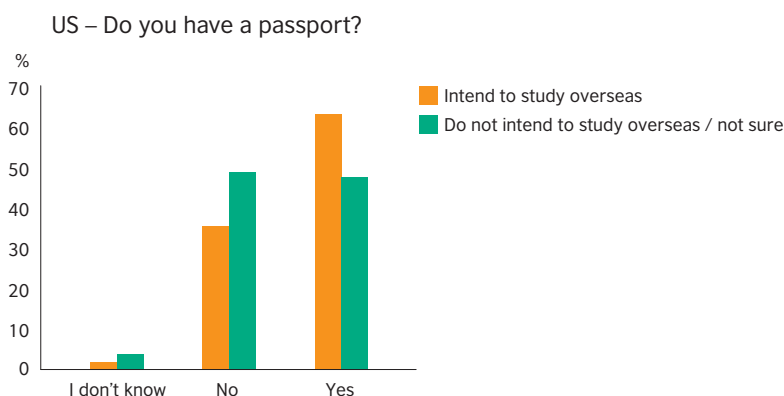
For international students following traditional east–west mobility patterns, parental influence is a very important factor in the decision-making process, often having a direct influence on prospective students' destination choices. We sought to gauge the potential influence that US parents have on student's aspirations to study overseas. To do this we asked whether students' parents had studied overseas.



In total, 85% of those considering studying overseas and 89% of those not considering studying overseas or undecided reported that their parents had not studied overseas. This significant majority indicates that US students lack the parental legacy that often influences traditionally mobile international students, who are often second or third-generation international students and are inspired and moulded greatly by their parents' experiences.

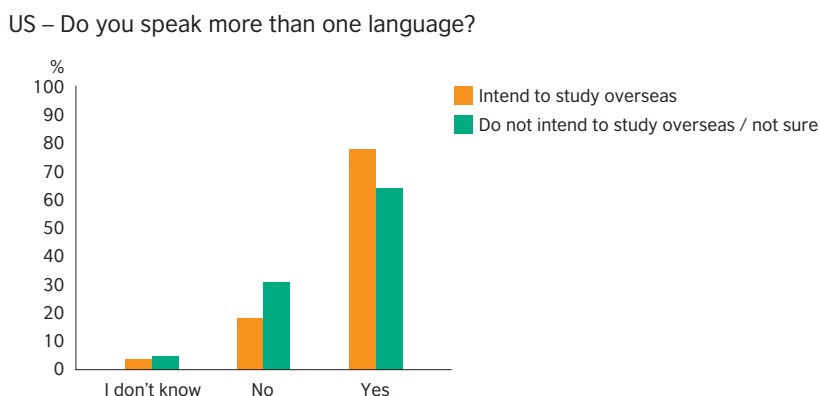
In 2012, statistics from the US Bureau of Consular Affairs at the US State Department revealed that more than a third of the US population – or nearly 110 million of the 313 million US citizens – now held passports. This number is more than double the number of US passports in circulation in 2000, when there were 48 million, and around fifteen times the seven million passports held in 1979.

We used passport ownership as a proxy for readiness and willingness to undertake overseas travel and, by extension, to potentially have an overseas study experience. We therefore asked all study participants if they held a valid passport.



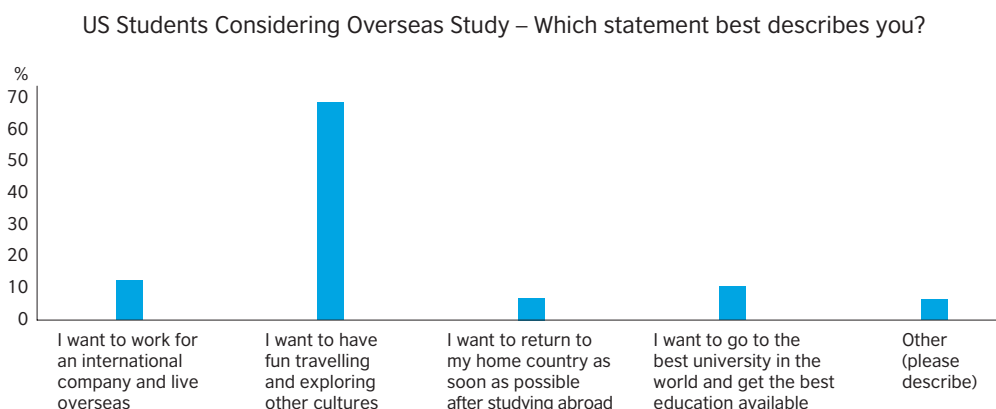
A large proportion of those wanting to undertake overseas study (63%) said that they held a valid passport, while just 47% of students not considering overseas study or undecided held a valid passport. This means that of the students not considering overseas study or undecided, more did not hold a valid passport (49%) than held a passport. Overall, 56% of US survey participants indicated that they held a valid passport.

Language ability is often cited as one of the greatest barriers to overseas study. As described above, survey respondents were asked not to categorise their language ability or list their qualifications, but to describe their confidence in functioning in a non-English speaking environment. Students were asked whether they could speak more than one language sufficiently well to buy a train ticket or order some food.



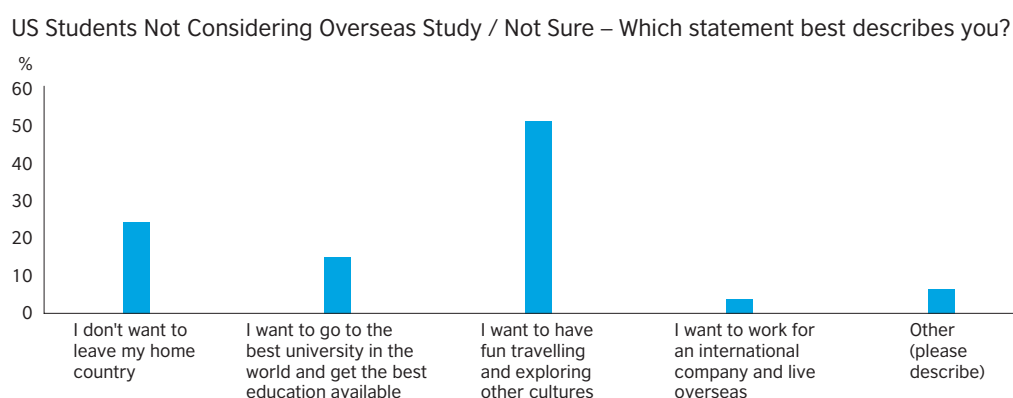
Of the respondents considering overseas study, 78% felt that they were able to speak more than one language to the level described above, while 64% of those not considering overseas study or undecided indicated that they could speak more than one language. The high proportion of respondents in each subgroup suggests that language may not be a significant barrier to US students pursuing overseas study.

To understand how US students perceived themselves in the context of their international study aspirations, we asked them to choose one of four statements that best described them, with the additional option of giving an self-styled description.



Of the US respondents considering studying overseas, 65% described themselves as wanting to have fun travelling and exploring other cultures. Much smaller proportions said that they wanted to work for an international company and live overseas (12%), to go to the best university in the world and get the best education available (10%) and to return to their home country as soon as possible after studying abroad (7%). A further proportion of respondents (6%) chose to give a self-styled description. Typical responses included reasons specific to a student's field of study or future area of work, as well as to gain an understanding of other cultures while living and working overseas for a short period of time before returning home, to develop a professional network overseas before returning home to pursue an international career in the US and to start a company overseas with the advantage of knowing the US market.

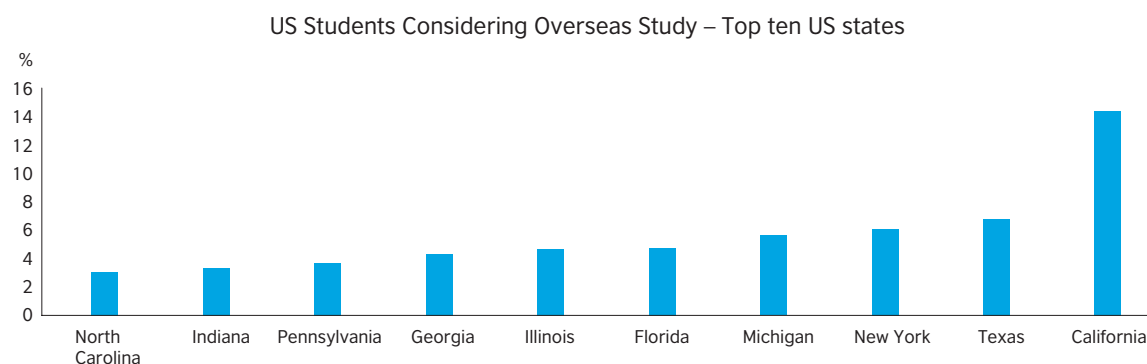
We asked students who were not considering a period of overseas study or who were undecided to complete the same exercise.



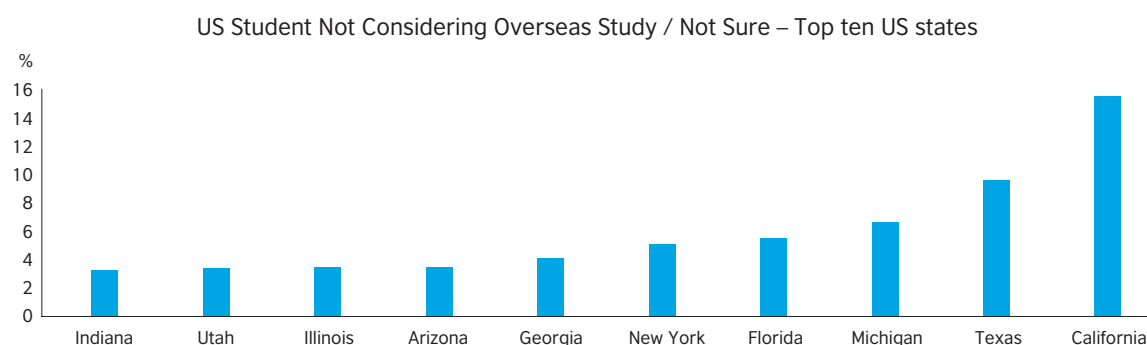
Of these students, more than half (51%) said that they wanted to have fun travelling and exploring other cultures, while 24% indicated that they did not want to leave their home country. Smaller proportions said that they wanted to go to the best university in the world and get the best education available (15%) or to work for an international company and live overseas (4%), or gave a self-style description (6%). Typical responses in this last category included acquiring skills in international business, starting an international business, becoming fluent in a foreign language, experiencing different education methods from other cultures and studying subject areas specific to their own interests and field of study.

Excluding the 24% of students not considering overseas study or undecided that did not wish to leave home, the responses of all students, whether considering studying overseas or not, were fairly similar.

The top ten states with which respondents considering overseas study identified were: California (14%), Texas (7%), New York (6%), Michigan (6%), Florida (5%), Illinois (5%), Georgia (4%), Pennsylvania (4%), Indiana (3%) and North Carolina (3%).



The top ten states that students not considering overseas study or undecided identified with were: California (15%), Texas (9%), Michigan (6%), Florida (5%), New York (5%), Georgia (4%), Arizona (3%), Illinois (3%), Utah (3%) and Indiana (3%).

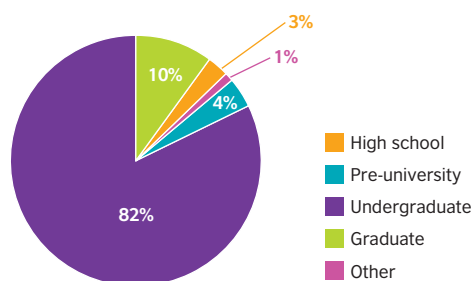


7. Studying Overseas – Courses and destinations

Open Doors statistics from The Institute of International Education give a very detailed breakdown of the levels at which US students study abroad. Of the US students studying overseas in 2010–11, the following proportions were studying at each academic level: junior (35.8%), senior (23.4%), sophomore (12.6%), bachelors – unspecified (10.3%), masters (8.5%), freshman (3.3%), graduate – unspecified (2.1%), graduate – professional (2.3%), doctoral (0.6%), associate (0.2%) and other (0.9%).

Broadly speaking, of those students studying abroad in 2010–11, 85.4% studied at undergraduate level. Of the US survey respondents considering overseas study, 82% indicated that they wanted to study overseas at undergraduate level. This is therefore in line with the actual trend in study abroad options pursued by US students.

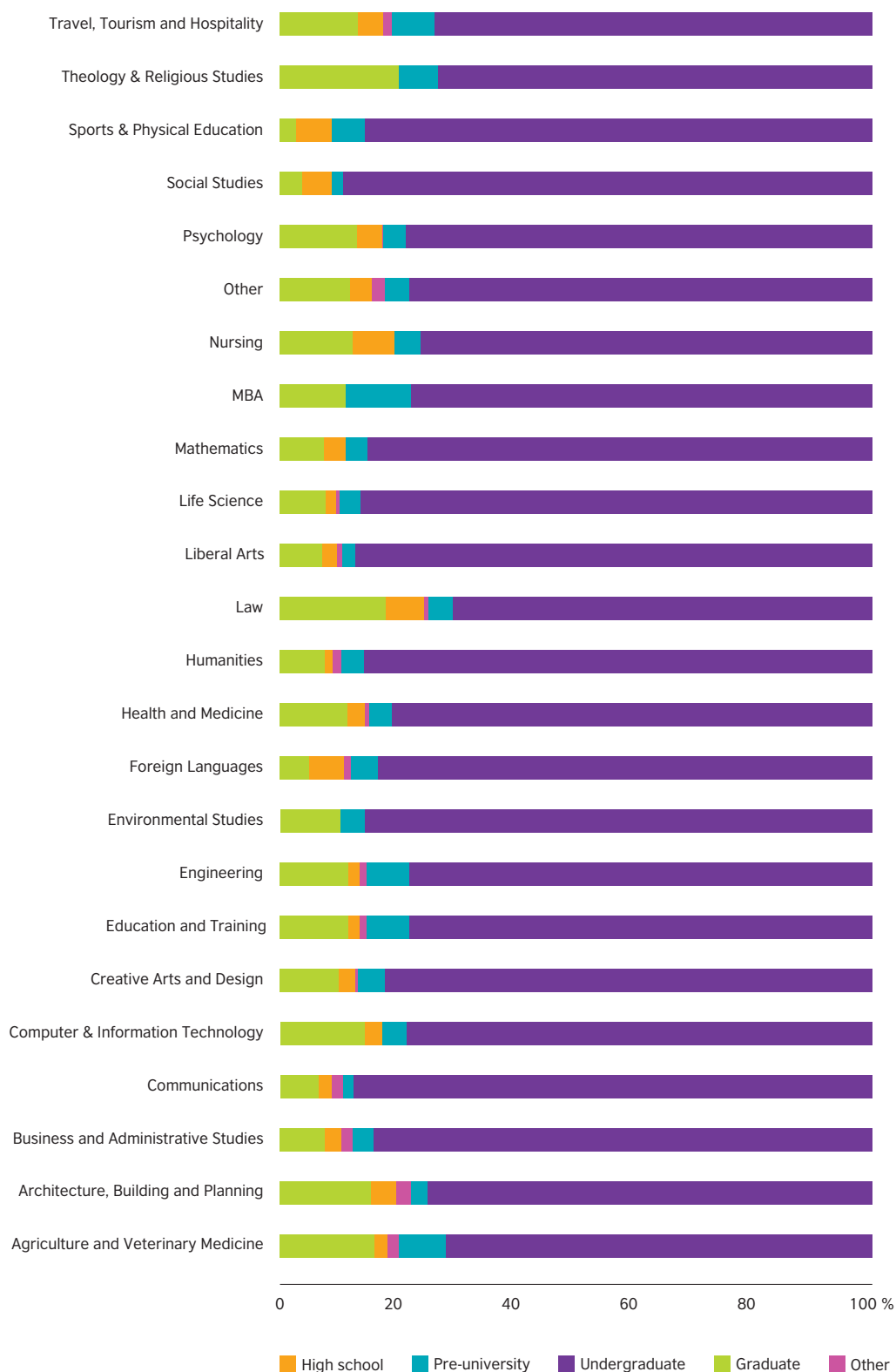
US Students Considering Overseas Study – At what level are you considering studying overseas?



In addition to the significant interest in undergraduate programmes overseas, 10% of respondents wanted to study at graduate level, 4% at pre-university level and 3% at high-school level. For the 1% that fell outside these categories, typical alternatives included subject-specific options ranging from pre-university and undergraduate to graduate levels.

As with UK students, we aimed to identify trends in subjects choices by asking US respondents considering overseas study to name their preferred subject areas. This information was then cross-referenced with the previous responses on study level in order to identify trends.

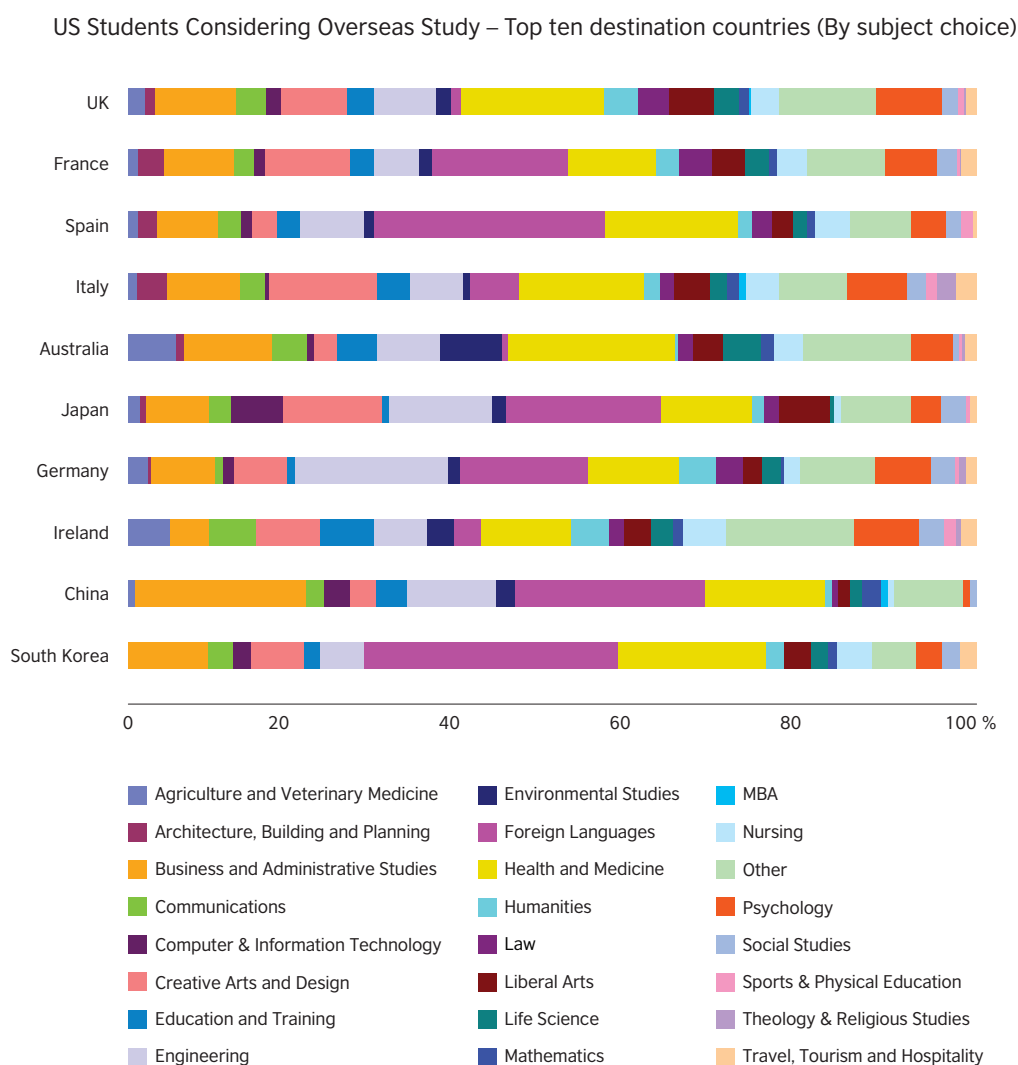
US Students Considering Overseas Study – Level of study and subject choice



The overseas study market in the US is largely characterized by undergraduate-level programmes, meaning that all of the subject areas shown in the graph are dominated by demand at the undergraduate level.

However, it is still possible to identify trends for high-school, pre-university and graduate-level study programmes. Popular subject areas for US students looking to study overseas at high-school level were Travel, Tourism and Hospitality, Sports and Physical Education, Nursing, Law and Foreign Languages. At pre-university level students showed particular interest in studying an MBA or Engineering, Education and Training, and Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine. At graduate level students showed interest in overseas programmes in Theology and Religious Studies, Law, Computer and Information Technology, Architecture, Building and Planning, and Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine.

US respondents considering overseas study were then asked to select their first-choice study destination. The following top ten countries were identified: the UK (22%), France (11%), Spain (11%), Italy (8%), Australia (6%), Japan (5%), Germany (5%), Ireland (3%), China (3%) and South Korea (2%). In total, US respondents chose 133 different destinations from a drop-down list of countries.



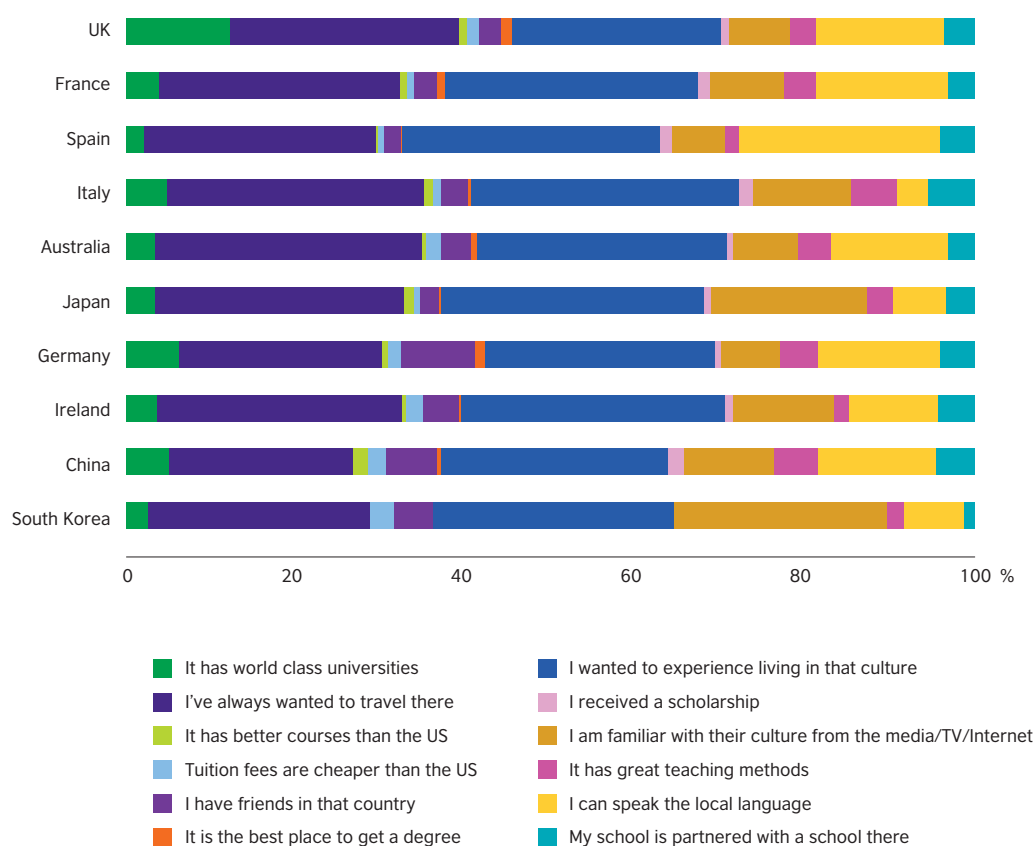
Of the top ten study destinations chosen, only three are English speaking. By cross-referencing these top destinations with subject area choices we can identify subject-profiling trends for certain study destinations. For example:

- Foreign languages are a popular option for overseas students heading to France, Spain, Japan, Germany, China, South Korea and, to a lesser degree, Italy, owing to the possibility of developing foreign language skills while studying.
- The UK, Australia and South Korea, in particular, are popular destinations for students of Health and Medicine.
- Engineering is particularly popular in Japan, Germany and China.
- China is the most popular destination for Business and Administrative Studies.
- Environmental Studies is a particularly popular option in Australia.
- Creative Arts and Design programmes enjoy the most popularity in France, Italy and Japan.

Across all of the top ten destinations, however, a wide range of subjects are chosen by US students.

US respondents considering overseas study were asked to indicate why they opted for a particular country as their first-choice destination by selecting one option from a drop-down list. Following this, four key reasons emerged across all of the top ten study destinations. We can generalize that countries are popular study destinations for US students if a student has always wanted to travel there or has always wanted to experience living in that culture, if a student is familiar with the culture from the media, TV or Internet, or if a student can speak the local language.

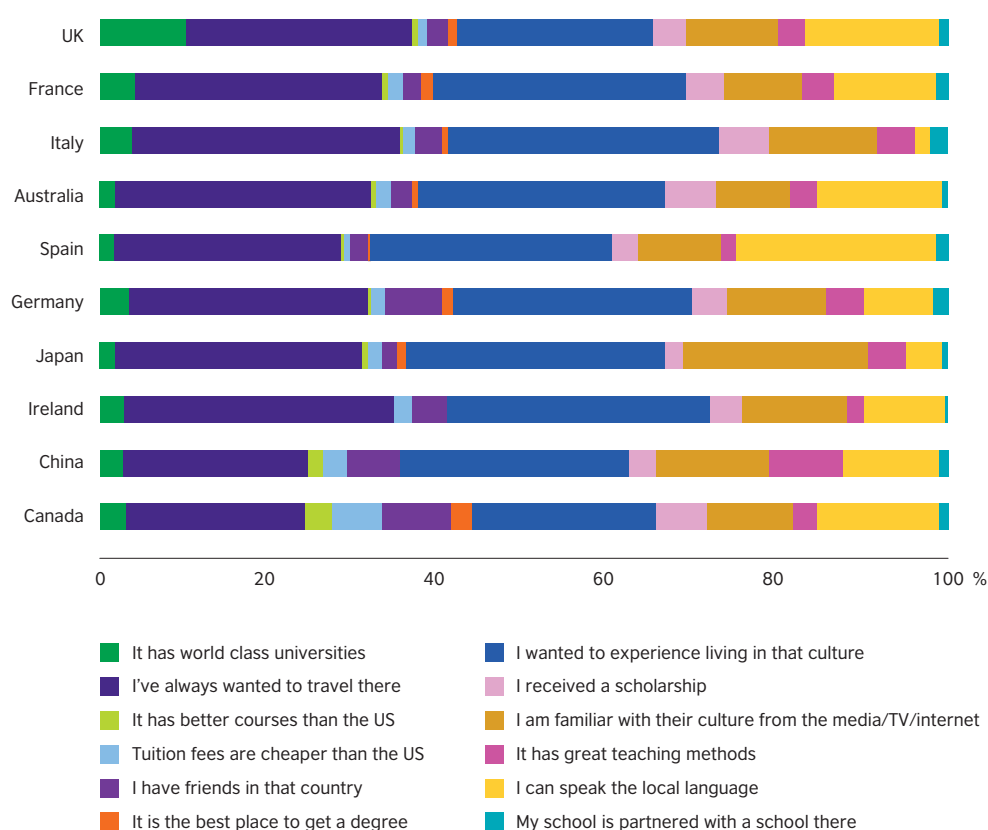
US Students Considering Overseas Study – Top ten destination countries (By importance factor)



Minor deviations from these four main factors included a destination having existing partnerships with domestic schools; this was true to a small degree for each of the top ten destinations. In addition, and again to a much lesser extent, the UK is seen as having world-class institutions, the UK and Germany are considered the best places to obtain a degree qualification, Italy, Germany and China are recognised for their teaching methods, and China, Italy, Spain and France for their potential to offer scholarships. Furthermore, US students indicated to some extent that they valued Germany and China as study destinations as friends were known to be studying there.

US participants not considering studying overseas or undecided selected the following top ten overseas study destinations: the UK (23%), France (11%), Italy (10%), Australia (8%), Spain (7%), Germany (5%), Japan (4%), Ireland (3%), China (2%) and Canada (2%). The only difference between the destinations chosen by the different subgroups of US respondents was the tenth-place spot, held by South Korea for those considering overseas study and Canada for those who weren't or were undecided.

US Students Not Considering Overseas Study / Not Sure –
Top ten destination countries (By importance factor)

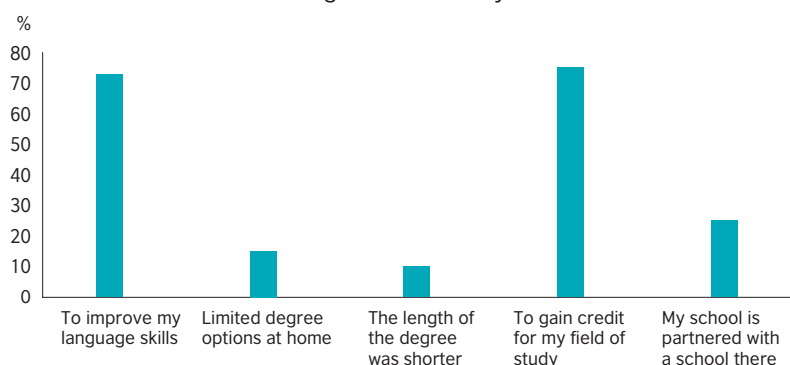


Similarities between the subgroups exist again with the top ten destinations and the reasons for their popularity. Four key reasons remain prominent: having always wanted to travel to that country, wanting to experience living in that culture, familiarity with the culture from the media, TV or Internet and being able to speak the local language. Students who were not considering overseas study or were undecided placed greater emphasis on China and Canada in particular as cheaper places to study, and they also highlighted the possibility of gaining a scholarship for each of the top ten destinations. To a lesser extent than for students considering overseas study, reasons also included the importance of inter-school partnerships. The ability to speak the local language was of greater importance to students not considering overseas study or undecided who would otherwise opt for the UK, France, Australia, Spain, China or Canada.

8. Drivers

As with UK students, the academic and non-academic drivers for pursuing overseas study are illustrative of not only students' motivations for going abroad but also the opportunities available to them and the skills they lack or are trying to improve.

US Students Considering Overseas Study – Main academic drivers



The majority of US respondents considering overseas study (75%) indicated that one of their main academic drivers was to gain credit for their field of study and a second majority (73%) indicated the academic goal of improving their language skills. Although the proportions are much smaller, a quarter of students (25%) were motivated by their school being partnered with a foreign institution, 15% were driven by the limited degree options at home and 10% by shorter degree durations overseas.

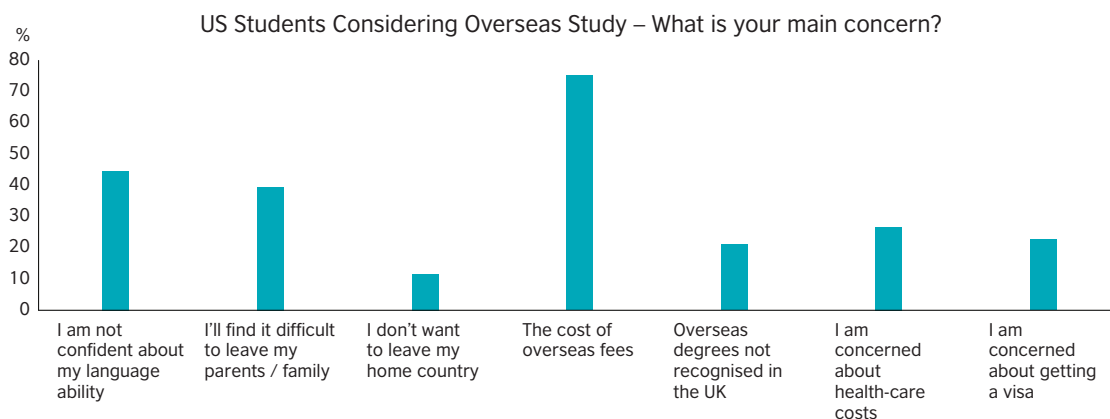
As highlighted by the earlier profiling questions, US respondents are known to view study abroad as an opportunity to travel and experience other cultures. The data collected in this study therefore suggests that US respondents tend not to place as much emphasis on gaining academic experience from a period of study abroad.

US Students Considering Overseas Study – Main non-academic drivers



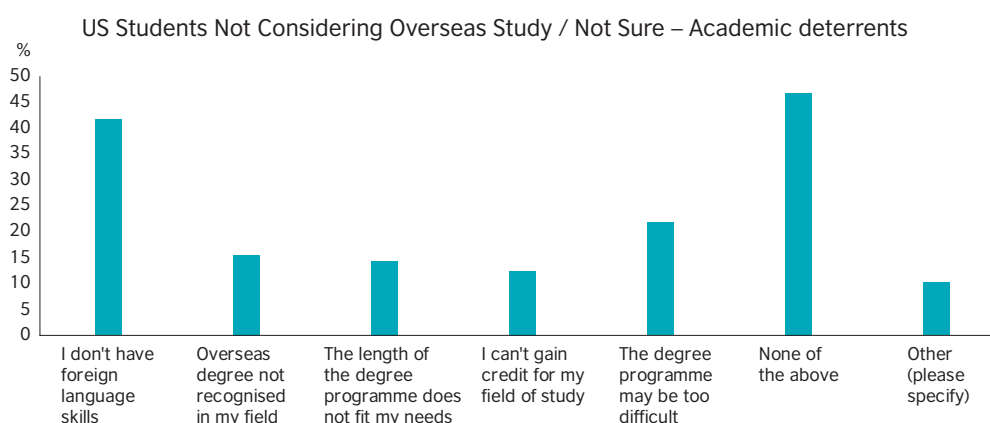
When asked to indicate their main non-academic drivers, the majority of US respondents considering overseas study (84%) confirmed that the main purpose of the overseas experience is to have a unique adventure. In addition, 66% indicated that they wanted to travel overseas, 36% identified the opportunity to become self-sufficient and 30% to build their confidence. A further 30% of respondents highlighted overseas study as an opportunity to start an international career and 19% saw this time as a chance to improve employment prospects. Smaller proportions of respondents were encouraged by family (9%), thought that the tuition fees might be lower (4%) and were inspired by their friends studying abroad (2%).

Despite being motivated by strong academic and non-academic reasons to pursue overseas study, students still regularly express concern about living and studying in a new country and culture. Those considering studying overseas were asked to identify their main concerns from seven options.



By far the greatest concern of US students considering heading overseas was the cost of international study, as indicated by 75% of students. This core concern was followed by a lack of confidence in language ability (44%) and finding it difficult to leave parents and friends (39%). This last sentiment was echoed in all of the focus group discussions that took place. Students showed significant concern about taking time away from their peers and friends and the developments that would be missed in the academic calendar, sports teams and social circles. Over a quarter of students (26%) highlighted concerns about health-care costs while studying overseas and 23% about being able to secure a visa. Lastly, 11% of students considering a period of overseas study indicated that they did not want to leave their home country.

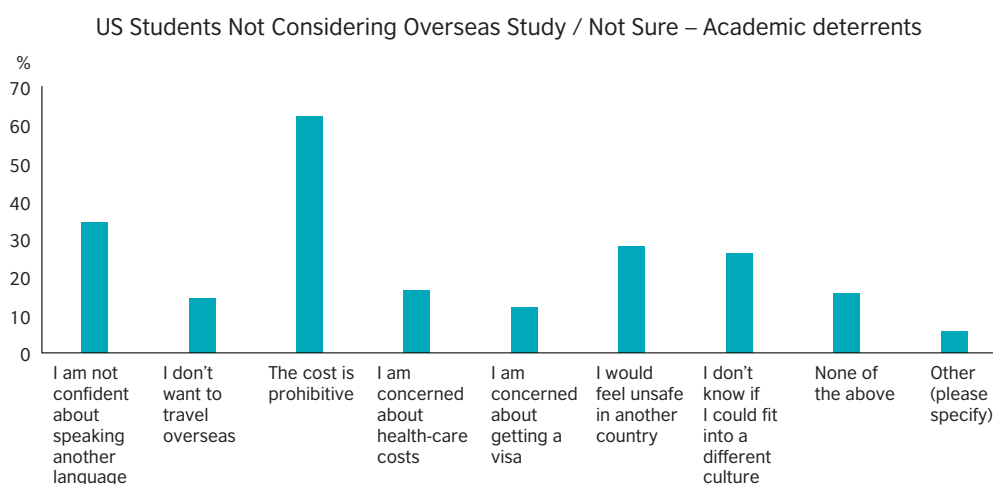
US respondents that reported that they were not considering overseas study or had not decided were also asked to select the academic deterrents to their pursuing overseas study.



Although 42% of students claimed that their lack of foreign language skills was a deterrent to overseas study, the largest group of students indicated that none of the academic deterrents mentioned applied to them. A further 22% of students feared that the degree programme might be too difficult, 16% felt that the degree might not be recognised in their field, 14% that the length of the degree might not fit their needs and 12% that they couldn't gain credit for their field of study.

A proportion of students (10%) chose to specify their own reason, with typical responses including: personal and family circumstances, including distance from the home and family members, time and financial commitments, academic and social commitments, a lack of information about particular subject areas and credit transfer agreements, and the belief that overseas study was beyond reach academically because of their grades.

US respondents not considering overseas study or undecided were then asked to highlight the main non-academic deterrents to their studying overseas. When we look at the data, we see a similar pattern to the reasons given by students considering overseas study.

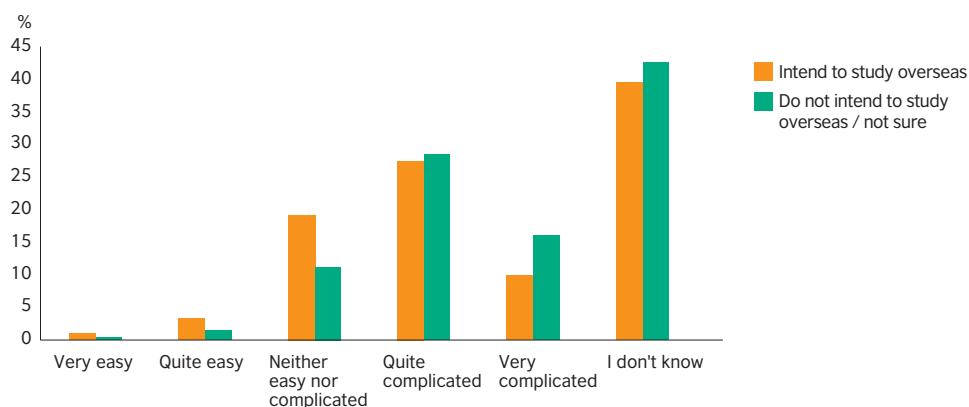


Again, the largest proportion (62%) indicated that cost was a prohibitive factor, while 34% expressed their lack of confidence in speaking another language, 28% indicated that they would feel unsafe in a different culture, 26% didn't know whether they would fit into a different culture, 17% said that they were concerned about health-care costs, 14% said that they did not want to travel overseas and 11% said they were concerned about getting a visa. In addition, 16% indicated that none of the reasons listed applied to them and 6% opted to give their own reason, which typically stated financial and family commitments. A number of students also indicated that they did not know what study abroad actually meant, where they would go to find out about it and what skills the experience would give them.

As with our analysis of UK students, students in the US who are hesitant when it comes to studying abroad tend to be concerned about the perceived cost element. Lack of clear information is also usually a significant factor contributing to this concern. Most US students indicate that they lack information about the possibility of transferring their existing on-campus financial aid package to their study abroad trip, as well as about any scholarships available to them. Financial aid for undergraduate study abroad consists mainly of federal grants and federal and private loans, although scholarship money may also be available from organizations and sponsoring companies.

In our in-depth focus group discussions with US students a topic raised often was the confusion around the possibilities for US students to gain financial assistance for studying overseas. To gauge just how challenging students found this process we asked all survey respondents how easy they found it to obtain financial aid to study abroad.

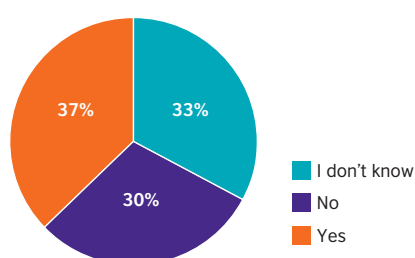
US – How easy or complicated did you find it to obtain financial support to study abroad?



In response, 43% of students not considering overseas study or undecided and 39% of those considering studying overseas said that they didn't know. Choosing this option largely indicates that a student has no knowledge of or experience with the process of obtaining financial aid. 16% of students not considering overseas study or undecided and 10% of those considering studying overseas indicated that they found the process very complicated, while 28% and 27%, respectively, indicated that they found it quite complicated. Overall, only a very small proportion of respondents found the process of obtaining financial aid neither easy nor complicated, quite easy or very easy.

To ascertain the impact of these findings, we asked US survey participants that had indicated that they were not considering overseas study or were undecided whether access to financial aid had directly affected their decision-making.

US Students Not Considering Overseas Study / Not Sure –
Has access to financial aid directly affected your decision regarding study overseas?

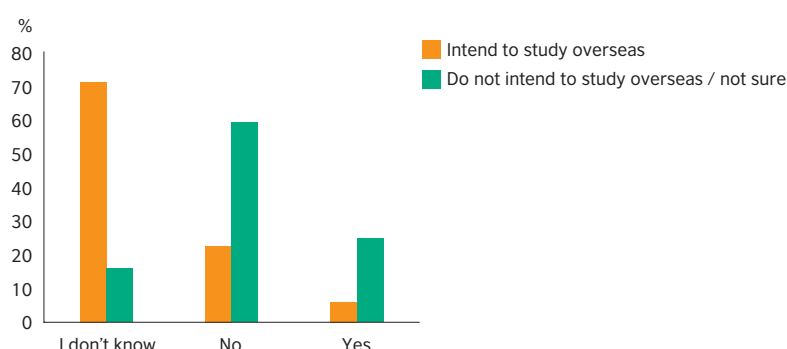


In response, 37% of US students said that access to financial aid had directly affected their decision, while 30% said that it had not and 33% said that they did not know. By applying the interpretation given above of students who select the *I don't know* option, we can infer that at least two thirds of US students consider access to financial aid to be a potential barrier to overseas study. Students therefore need appropriate information resources to help them overcome this barrier. This should ensure that access to funding does not become the sole reason for a student not pursuing an overseas experience.

9. Information Resources

As discussed, funding and financial constraints have been highlighted as the primary barriers to students pursuing overseas study experiences; finding sources of funding is seen as complicated and little is known about the opportunities open to students. US government sponsorship programmes, such as the Fulbright Fellowships and Gilman Scholarships, help large numbers of students each year to study overseas. We sought to gauge the level of awareness among US students of the US government funding opportunities available to them.

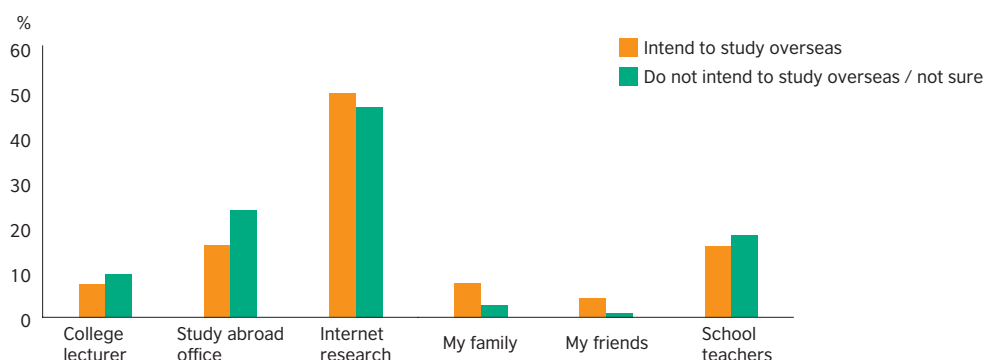
US – Is your course part of, or are you aware of, a US government-sponsored programme to promote overseas study?



Of the US students considering studying overseas, 6% indicated that their chosen study abroad opportunity was part of a government-sponsored scheme or that they were aware of such schemes, while a quarter (25%) of those not considering overseas study or undecided reported that they were aware of opportunities of this kind. Nearly a quarter of students considering study abroad (23%) and 59% of those who were not or were undecided indicated that they were not aware of any government funding opportunities or that their selected programme was not part of such a scheme. However, by far the largest proportion of students considering spending time overseas (71%) indicated that they did not know if their programme was part of a US government study abroad scheme or whether government funding was available.

We then asked all US survey respondents to identify their primary source of information about overseas study opportunities.

US – Where did you / would you get the information you needed about overseas study?

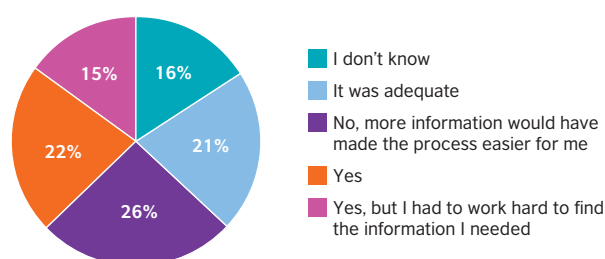


The Internet is the most prominent source of information for all US students, with 49% of students considering overseas study and 46% of students not considering studying overseas or undecided naming it as their main source of information. Students not considering studying overseas or undecided relied more heavily on study abroad offices (23%) or school teachers (18%) for information than students considering overseas study, while these students tended to rely more on family (8%) and friends (4%).

Students have access to a number of different information resources and prioritise them according to personal preferences and the value they place on the quality of content; this is evident in all student decision-making cultures. Students also attribute higher values to different resources depending on the point that they are at in the decision-making process. For example, Internet resources are seen as a valuable when conducting background research, while more specialised individuals and personalised resources are turned to when students are finalising their decisions.

We sought to understand whether students felt that the information they had access to was adequate for them to make an informed decision about studying overseas.

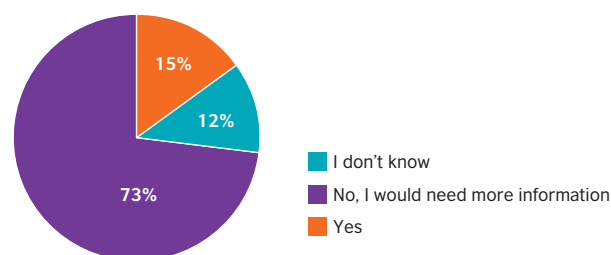
US Students Considering Overseas Study –
Do you feel you had enough information to make an informed decision about overseas study?



Of those US students considering overseas study, 22% said that they had sufficient information and 15% said that they had enough information but that they had had to work hard to find what they needed. A further 16% said that they did not know, 21% said that the information available was adequate and 26% said that they did not feel that they had adequate information and that more information would have made the process easier for them.

US students not considering studying overseas were also asked whether they felt they had enough information to make an informed decision about studying overseas.

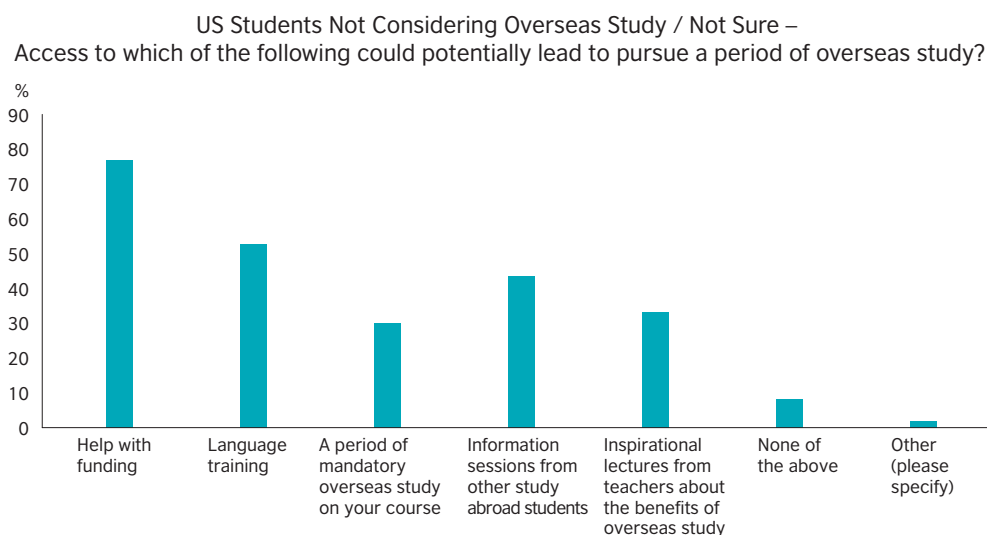
US Students Not Considering Overseas Study / Not Sure –
Do you feel you know enough to make an informed decision about overseas study?



The vast majority of respondents that were not considering an overseas study experience or were undecided (73%) said that they felt they did not have enough information to make an informed decision.

At the beginning of the survey we ascertained that 56% of US students were considering overseas study, while 26% of those remaining said they were undecided and 18% reported that they were not considering studying abroad. This means that of the 44% of respondents in this second negative–undecided group, 73% subsequently reported that they felt they did not have enough information to make a decision regarding overseas study. This pool of students presents a considerable opportunity for increasing the number of US students studying abroad.

In order to understand the nature of this opportunity we asked students who were not considering studying overseas or were undecided whether access to a number of resources could potentially lead them to pursue overseas study.



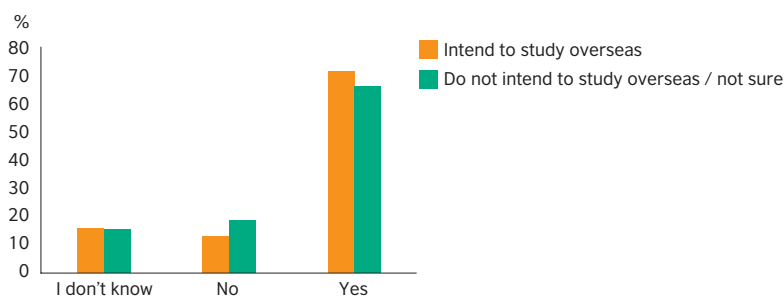
Of these students, 77% indicated that help with funding could potentially lead them to pursue overseas study, highlighting once again how significant a barrier finance is to US students heading overseas. A further 53% of students indicated language training as a tool for encouraging overseas study, while 43% indicated information sessions with other study abroad students, 33% suggested inspirational lectures from teachers about the benefits of overseas study and 30% suggested possible benefits of a period of mandatory overseas study. A small proportion of students (8%) indicated that access these resources would not alter their decision-making and 2% specified their own answer, typical examples of which included family support, credit transfer and access to students who had successfully completed a period of study abroad.

10. Aspiring Individuals

It is estimated that in 2012 over half of US college graduates were unemployed or employed in positions that did not fully utilise their skills and knowledge. This figure is based on an analysis of 2011 Current Population Survey data by Northeastern University researchers and the Economic Policy Institute, a Washington-based think tank. The analysis relied on US Labor Department assessments of the level of education required for more than 900 occupations in the US, which were used to calculate the number of young adults with bachelors degrees that were underemployed. In 2012, around 1.5 million (53.6%) of bachelors degree holders under the age of 25 were jobless or underemployed – the highest proportion seen in over eleven years. In 2000, the figure stood at a low of 41%, before the bursting of the dot-com bubble erased college graduate job gains in the telecommunications and IT fields.

We sought to understand whether US survey respondents felt that they would need more than their academic degree to secure the job they wanted and stand out from the crowd.

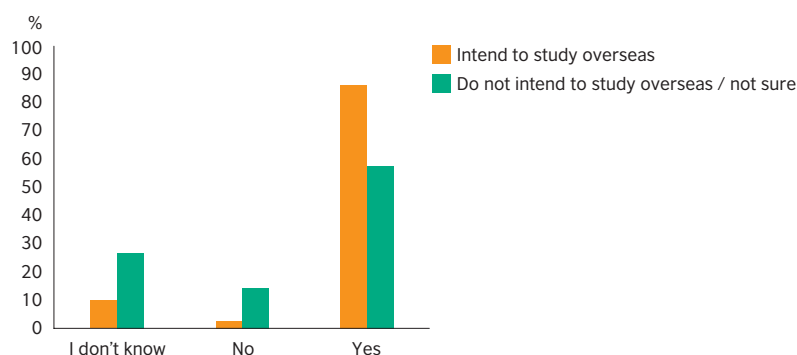
US – When you graduate, do you think that you will need more than your degree to stand out from the crowd and secure the job you want?



Of the US respondents considering studying overseas, 72% said that they thought they would need more than their academic qualification to stand out from the crowd when applying for a job – a sentiment shared by 66% of those not considering or undecided about overseas study.

As for UK students, we wanted to identify whether US study participants believed overseas study would enable them to develop the skills they needed to stand out in the competitive job market.

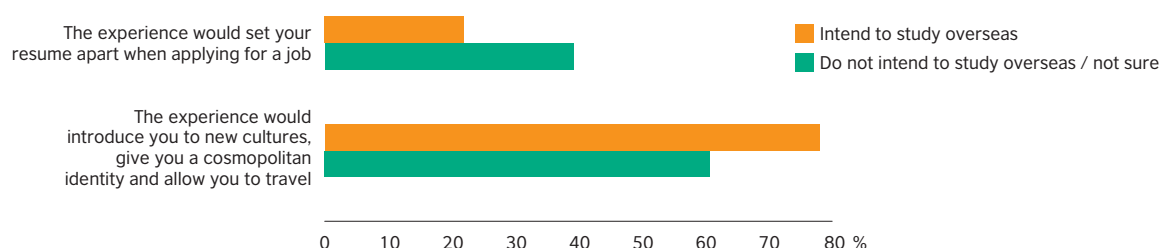
US – Do you think that an overseas study experience could give you the edge you need to stand out when applying for jobs in the future?



We found that there was a considerable difference in opinion between those considering overseas study and those who were not or were undecided. Of those considering overseas study, 88% said they believed it would give them the edge they needed when applying for a job, however only 59% of those not considering or undecided about overseas study thought that this was the case. Most notably, 27% of those not considering or undecided about overseas study said that they did not know whether studying abroad would give them the additional skills they felt they required. This indicates that there is a lack of knowledge about and understanding of the wider benefits of international study among US students.

At the end of the online questionnaire we asked US students to select from two statements the one that best described their point of view. As with UK students, our aim in doing this was to gain an overview of the perceived value of studying overseas, in the context of all of the questions that each student had answered about destinations, motivations, drivers and deterrents.

US – Of these two statements, which is the most important to you?



The vast majority of students considering studying overseas (78%) said that they believed the experience would introduce them to new cultures and give them a cosmopolitan identity – a view shared by 61% of respondents not considering or undecided about overseas study. A greater proportion of students not considering or undecided about overseas study thought that it would set them apart from the crowd when applying for a job (39%) than those considering undertaking overseas study (22%).

US Students Studying Overseas – China case studies

A recent publication by the Institute of International Education titled *Meeting the Goals of the 100,000 Strong Initiative* reported that, in 2011, there were at least 26,686 US students participating in educational activities in China. The country has become an increasingly important study destination; as our earlier analysis shows, many US students pursue a period of overseas study in China to develop their Chinese language skills and study Business and Administration. Below are two case studies of US students studying in China.

Name and location of your UK/US institution?

Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vermont, US.

What is the name and location of your Chinese institution?

Beijing Capital Normal University, Haidian District, Beijing.

Why did you choose to study in China?

In 2010 I studied abroad in Beijing during the spring semester of my third year of college, as part of Middlebury College and CET's study abroad programme, the CV Starr–Middlebury College School in China. The programme included a language pledge and a one-on-one Chinese lesson on a student-chosen topic in addition to classes in business Chinese, Beijing culture and advanced speaking and grammar. Previously I took five semesters of Chinese before studying abroad in Beijing.

What subject are you studying?

I had a major in Art History–Architectural Studies with a minor in Chinese. My programme has a work placement element, although not required.

What inspired you to study in China?

I was studying Chinese at Middlebury at the time and it is highly encouraged for students studying a language to study abroad at one of Middlebury's related study abroad programmes during their third year. I wanted to improve my Chinese level as well as experience living abroad.

What concerned you most?

Having never lived abroad for more than a few weeks, I was probably most concerned about the culture shock that I might experience and adjusting to living in China.

Where did you get the information you needed about going overseas? Was it enough?

University Language teachers and the residence abroad co-ordinator gave a lot of valuable information, and I did lots of Internet research.

Do you think your overseas study experience will be enough to secure the job you want when you graduate and allow you to stand out from the crowd?

No. I think it's a combination of many things, but this is one significant element.

What did you find hardest about studying in China?

Education differences – 8.00 a.m. starts and different teaching styles and methods (rote learning) and vast amounts of homework every night.

What did you enjoy most about studying in China?

Studying with people from all over the world and having the opportunity to travel around China and the region during the holidays.

How would you improve the experience for yourself and others in the future?

I had a great experience studying abroad. I don't know how it could be improved while there, but preparation and information is so important to ensure everything goes to plan.

Student profile:

Male, 23 yrs

Parents did not study overseas.

Describe yourself.

Other – I live overseas, working for foreign start-up company.

What is the name and location of your UK/US institution?

West Virginia University, US.

What is the name and location of your Chinese institution?

Ming Chaun University, Taipei, Taiwan. I studied a year abroad, studying Intermediate Mandarin.

What subject are you studying?

Chinese Language with a work placement element.

What inspired you to choose to study in China?

I studied abroad four times in college: Taiwan, Chile, Jordan and Semester at Sea. After graduation I moved to Beijing, China for an internship opportunity in marketing. Chinese was my minor in college and it was difficult to find an entry-level job after graduating college. Therefore I took a chance and moved to Beijing with no defined plan.

What were your main concerns about studying in China?

Initially, finding a place to live and a group of friends, as I did not know a single person before moving there. As time went on, continually adapting to Chinese culture, the smog in Beijing, financial means and fighting homesickness. Ultimately, the smog was my main decision for leaving Beijing.

Where did you get the information you needed about going overseas?

I researched it online. There could have been more helpful places regarding looking for jobs and visa help. Every site wants you to pay them; none will explain how to do the process yourself.

Do you think your overseas study experience will be enough to secure the job you want when you graduate and allow you to stand out from the crowd?

As a graduate, it has not helped me find the ideal job of my choice, but it definitely helps for a more competitive resume/CV.

What did you find hardest about studying in China?

In Beijing, the smog; it was so bad that I could taste it some days when I was outside. I developed a wheeze and shortness of breath that lasted until I left.

What did you enjoy most about studying in China?

The challenge and how every day was an adventure of sorts; so much unknown to discover and explore.

How would you improve the experience for yourself and others in the future?

As I was trying to learn the language, in Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong a person can get by fine on English alone. I had friends who did not know more than three words of Chinese and lived fine for several months. I wish it been a more pressing challenge for me to practise every day. Also I would advise on taking breaks from the city, taking short vacations or holidays to the countryside or neighbouring countries; this provides needed breaks as a foreigner in China.

Student profile:

Male, 24 yrs

Parents did not study overseas.

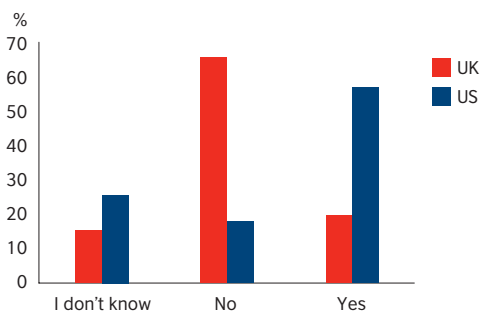
Describe yourself.

I want to have fun travelling and exploring other cultures.

UK–US Comparative Analysis

11. UK–US Student Profile

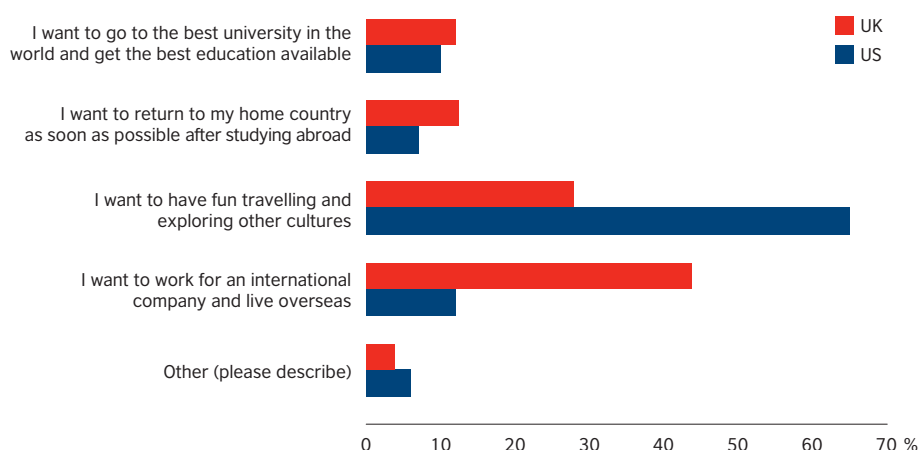
UK/US Students – Are you thinking about studying in a foreign country?



Of the students that participated in our study, a greater proportion of US students (56%) than UK students (20%) were considering studying overseas. Of the US respondents, 77% were female, while 52% of the UK respondents were female. The majority of US respondents (56%) were aged seventeen and less than 1% were over 35, while the age profile of UK respondents was far broader, ranging from eighteen to over 35. Over 90% of UK respondents held a passport, while just 55% of US students indicated that they had a passport.

UK and US students had similar levels of confidence in speaking a second language, with around three quarters of all students indicating that they felt comfortable speaking a second language at a basic level.

UK/US Students Considering Overseas Study – Which statement best describes you?

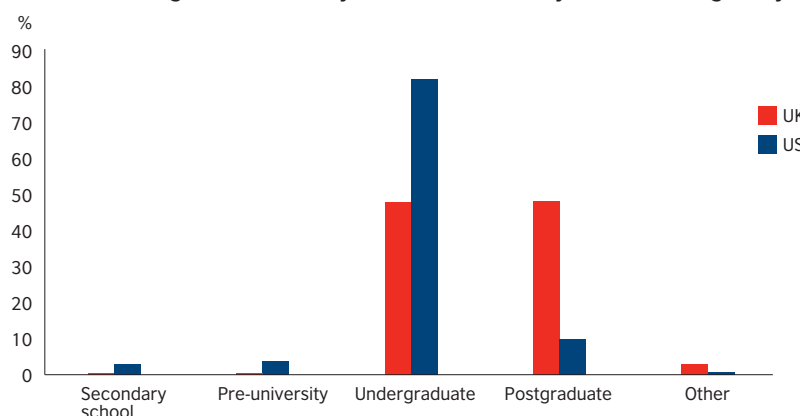


Of the UK students considering overseas study, 44% reported that they wanted to work for an international company and live overseas when asked to describe themselves in the context of their international study aspirations. When asked to choose, 65% of US students indicated that their primary motivation for overseas study was to have fun travelling and exploring other cultures.

12. Studying Overseas – Courses and destinations

Of the UK students considering overseas study, 48% hoped to do so at undergraduate level and 48% at postgraduate level, while 82% of US students considering overseas study wanted to study at undergraduate level.

UK/US Students Considering Overseas Study – At what level are you considering studying overseas?



Key subjects of interest to UK students wanting to study abroad at postgraduate level were an MBA and Liberal Arts, Life Science and Social Studies. Key subjects of interest to US students wanting to study abroad at postgraduate level were Law, Computer and Information Technology and Architecture, Building and Planning.

Trends in destination choices for UK and US students were consistent. While 29% of UK respondents identified the US as their first-choice study destination, 22% of US respondents listed the UK as their first choice. The top ten destination countries for both UK and US students were the same but for two minor variations: the US top ten included South Korea and Ireland, while the UK top ten included Canada and the Netherlands. China was the ninth most popular international study destination for both UK and US students. The combination of foreign language learning opportunities, Business and Administrative Studies programmes and readily available Chinese government scholarships appears to be increasing the attractiveness of China as an international study destination for both UK and US students.

UK students - Top 10 destination countries

- 1 US
- 2 Australia
- 3 Canada
- 4 France
- 5 Germany
- 6 Netherlands
- 7 Italy
- 8 Spain
- 9 China
- 10 Japan

US students - Top 10 destination countries

- 1 UK
- 2 France
- 3 Spain
- 4 Italy
- 5 Australia
- 6 Japan
- 7 Germany
- 8 Ireland
- 9 China
- 10 South Korea

The analysis of study destinations chosen by UK respondents cross-referenced with their subject area choices highlighted patterns and priorities in overseas study activity. Students most commonly chose destinations based on the possibility to study Foreign Languages, Engineering, Humanities, Life Science or an MBA.

UK STUDENTS

Subject Profile	Study Destination
Foreign Languages profile countries	France, Germany, Italy, Spain, China and Japan
MBA profile countries	US, Canada, Germany and China
Engineering profile countries	Germany, Spain, Japan
Humanities profile countries	Japan, Spain, Germany France, Australia, US
Life science profile countries	Italy, Netherlands, Canada, US

The analysis of study destinations chosen by US respondents cross-referenced with their subject area choices revealed similar patterns and priorities to the UK scenario. US students also tend to focus on Foreign Languages, Health and Medicine, Sports and Physical Education and Engineering.

US STUDENTS

Subject Profile	Study Destination
Foreign Languages profile countries	South Korea, China, Germany, Japan, Spain, France
Health and medicine profile countries	UK, Spain, Italy, Australia, South Korea
Sports and physical education profile countries	Japan, Italy, France
Engineering profile countries	China, Germany, Japan

When asked why they wanted to study in a particular destination US and UK respondents identified three overriding factors that were the most impactful for students considering overseas study, as well as for those who were not or who were undecided: always having wanted to travel to the destination, wanting to experience living in a destination culture and being able to speak the local language. This trend is consistent across all of the top ten destinations. However, analysis of subtle nuances in the data reveals that there are some small but significant differences between UK and US student responses.

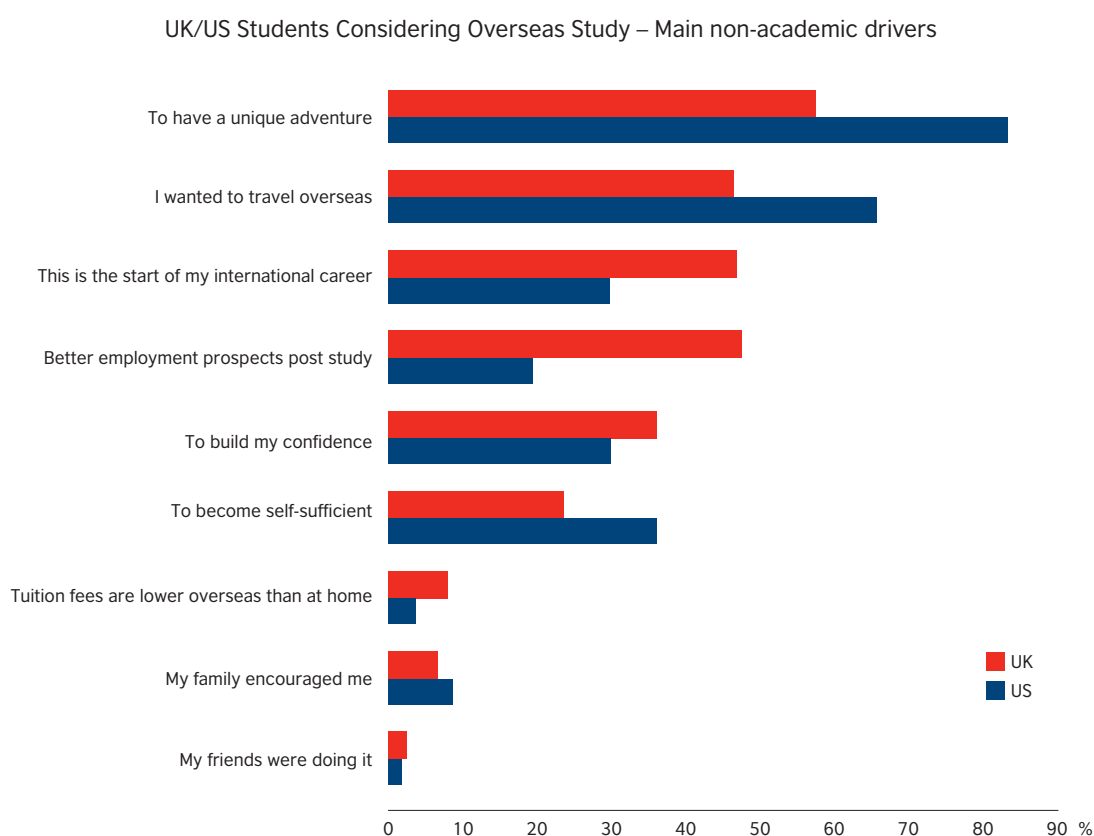
US students indicate that their country choice is based in small part on the availability of scholarships, familiarity with the culture from the media, TV or Internet, although to varying degrees, and that their school is partnered with a school in the country of choice. To a smaller extent, certain countries, including the UK and China, are perceived as having world-class universities and excellent teaching methods.

The destination choices made by UK students build a slightly different picture. Here student priorities appear to be affected less by familiarity with the culture and more by the perception that a destination has world-class universities, that there are better courses on offer than at home in the UK and that the destination is the best place to get a degree. Most notably, however, there is a small but increasing consideration that a destination's tuition fees may be perceived to be cheaper than those in the UK.

13. Drivers

The academic drivers identified by students wanting to study overseas from both the US and the UK highlight the emphasis on gaining credit for a current study programme and improving language skills. The majority of students that we spoke to in focus group discussions indicated that their first point of access for study abroad opportunities was through their existing course programme. To a slightly greater extent than in the US, UK students indicated that they felt there were limited degree options at home and that study abroad was a way of widening their academic opportunities.

The non-academic factors identified by UK and US students also followed a similar pattern, with both wanting above all to have a unique adventure and travel overseas.

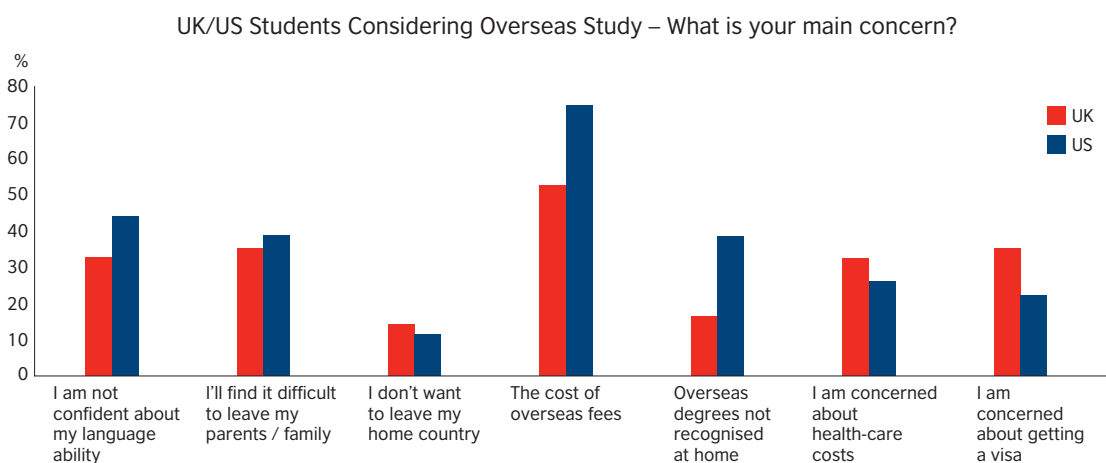


However, UK students tended to place greater emphasis on their potential overseas study experience as the beginning of an international career and as something that would improve their employment prospects. US students, on the other hand, demonstrated that they saw international study as a way of building confidence and become self-sufficient.

In focus group discussions, US students expressed concern about pursuing academic opportunities in other countries owing to the high standard of domestic provision, which they also felt was something recognised by future employers. Instead, they pursued study abroad to develop soft skills and add non-academic weight to their resumes.

The concerns of UK and US students were also very similar, with the primary concern highlighted by both being the cost factor. This was followed by confidence in foreign language skills and difficulty leaving parents and friends. UK students had greater concerns about health-care costs and the ability to obtain a visa. During in-depth discussions both UK and US students placed significant emphasis on their concerns about being absent from their peer groups and sports teams for an extended period of time. They felt that by studying abroad they would be missing out on valuable opportunities to develop socially. Study abroad was therefore seen as a period of time-out from the status quo and something that took considerable time to recover from.

The greatest perceived barriers for students not considering or decided about overseas study were foreign language skills and the cost of studying overseas. This was the same for both UK and US respondents. For UK students, health-care costs and visas were again raised as potential concerns, while US students reported that they were more concerned about feeling unsafe in another country or fitting into a different culture.

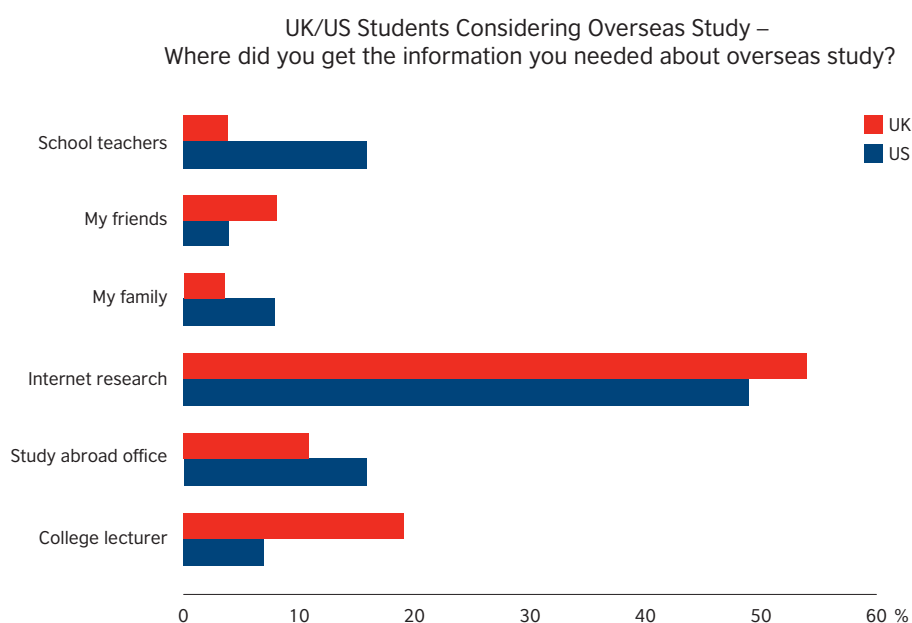


Cost is often cited as a major barrier to pursuing overseas study. UK tuition fee increases appear to have had a limited effect on UK student decision-making, with only 26% of respondents considering overseas study indicating that the recent fee hike had inspired their decision to study overseas. US respondents reported that applying for financial aid was either quite or very complicated (39% and 37%, respectively). This suggests that students were unaware of what the process entailed and potentially indicates that they had not previously attempted to gain funding from this source.

14. Information Resources

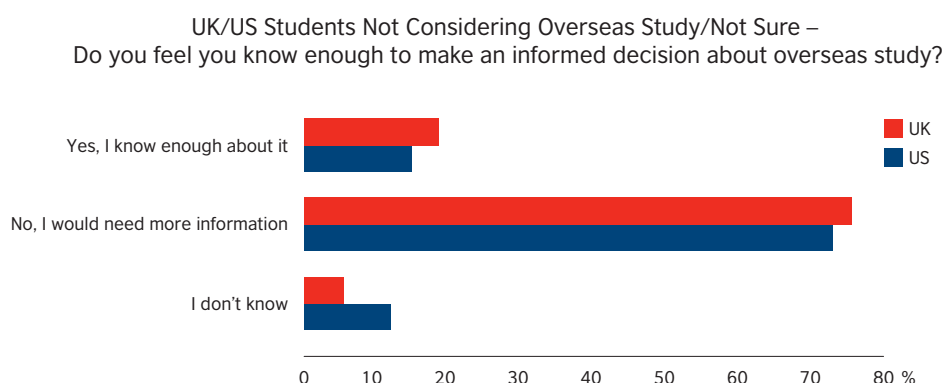
Access to information resources for students seeking an overseas study experience is crucial at every stage of the decision-making process, whether the information is to do with funding, course choice, programme length or destination. When asked if their future study abroad programme was part of a government scheme or if they were aware of any government-funded study abroad options, similar patterns of answers emerged from UK and US students. While small numbers of respondents answered positively (18% in the UK and 15% in the US), much larger proportions responded in the negative. In both cases the highest proportion of negative responses came from those not pursuing or undecided about overseas study. This indicates a lack of awareness of government-sponsored programmes and how they can be accessed. Most interesting, however, are the large proportions of respondents that said they did not know about any government-funded opportunities, despite having made the decision to pursue overseas study (41% of UK respondents and 71% of those in the US).

Similar patterns exist in the UK and the US regarding information resources: Internet research, teachers and lecturers and international or study abroad offices are the resources utilised most often.



Similarities also emerge when we compare the answers to the questions posed of US and UK students to enable us to identify whether students felt they had enough information to make decision. Similar proportions of students considering overseas study (24% in the UK and 22% in the US) reported that they felt they had adequate information about overseas study to make an informed decision.

Respondents not pursuing or undecided about overseas study were asked the same question about information resources. This time 76% of those in the UK and 73% of those in the US reported that they felt they did not have enough information to make an informed decision about studying overseas.



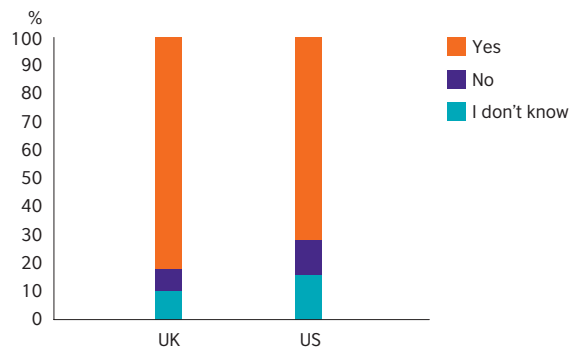
When these same students were asked to indicate whether access to certain resources could potentially lead them to pursue overseas study, similar patterns appeared in the UK and US responses: funding assistance is the primary resource for encouraging participation, followed by language training. Both UK and US respondents indicated that information sessions with experienced study abroad students, followed by inspirational lectures from teachers, could potentially lead them to pursue overseas study.

Of the 80% of UK students that report that they are not considering or are undecided about overseas study, 76% felt that they did not have enough information to make an informed decision. Of the 44% of US students that are not considering or undecided about overseas study, 73% reported the same lack of information. It is these students that present a real growth opportunity for UK and US institutions looking to inspire increasing numbers of students to undertake overseas study.

15. Aspiring Individuals

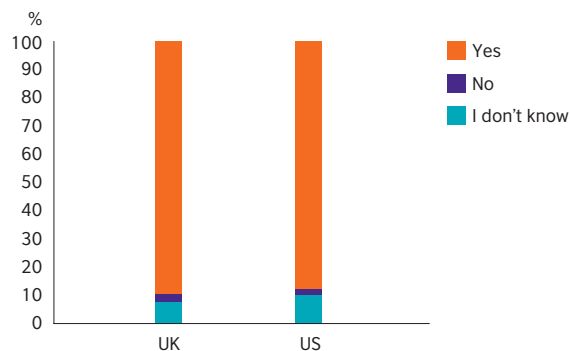
The perceived value of a degree for students competing in a fierce global employment market is an indication of students' awareness of and preparedness for their future careers. Similar proportions of US (72%) and UK (82%) students indicated that they believe that they will need more than their degree to secure the job they want and stand out from the crowd after they graduate.

UK/US Students Considering Overseas Study – When you graduate, do you think that you will need more than your degree to secure the job you want and stand out from the crowd?



When asked whether they believe a study abroad experience could give them the necessary edge when applying for a job in the future, a similar pattern emerged in UK and US responses. Of those respondents considering overseas study, 88% in the US and 90% in the UK indicated that they believed a study abroad experience would give them the edge they needed.

UK/US Students Considering Overseas Study – Do you think that an overseas study experience could give you the edge you need to stand out when applying for jobs in the future?



Broadening Horizons – Conclusion

There is clearly growing drive and ambition among the UK and US students surveyed as part of this study to undertake an overseas study experience. Whether a student's motivations and drivers are to have a unique adventure, to travel and experience other countries or to improve employment prospects post-graduation, it is evident that students from both the UK and the US are looking to explore international opportunities in increasing numbers. Access to and information about the options available are the first barriers that students face – barriers that, although expressed as concerns about funding overseas study or confidence in a foreign language, can be broken down given the adequate and appropriately delivered resources.

Cost and foreign language learning will continue to be issues for students and their home institutions as they try to pursue and promote overseas study, respectively. The cost of studying overseas is often perceived to be higher than it is in practice. Many students from our featured case studies who had studied in China were awarded Chinese Government scholarships and reported that living costs in China were far lower than those of a student at home. Analysis of the data from UK respondents showed that students are beginning to look at overseas study in countries where the tuition is considered to be less expensive than in the UK.

For the most part, UK students indicated that their thoughts on and aspirations to overseas study have not been affected by the rise in tuition fees for UK domestic students. However, there has clearly been a small shift in perception, which may take a number of years to manifest as a significant shift in attitudes or behaviours. When students were asked whether they had considered studying a full degree overseas in a destination where the fees were considerably less than at home, there was a real lack of awareness about the study alternatives available to them and the actual costs involved. As traditional host destinations, the UK and the US have not been the focus of institutional and national education marketing campaigns that could attract students to consider full degree study overseas. It may only be a matter of time before the UK and the US are targeted more strategically by marketers and this trend begins to develop.

US students tend to consider cost as a barrier to overseas study, however they do not make destination choices based on the cost of tuition fees. This may be illustrative of the types of programme – summer schools, short-term visits and exchange programmes – that US students look to undertake. The context from which US students come – the legacy of living in one of the most costly higher education environments in the world – raises the benchmark for the perception of 'expensive' tuition costs.

Despite foreign languages being highlighted as a barrier to overseas study, a large proportion of UK and US respondents reported a degree of confidence in their conversational foreign language ability. Data from both the UK and the US shows that of the top ten destination countries, just three were English speaking, meaning that seven were majority-foreign language teaching environments. Students looking for the opportunity to develop their language skills choose an overseas study destination based on its inherent potential to develop these skills.

Students pursuing overseas study can, at the most basic level, be placed into four categories: those pursuing the opportunity to develop their language skills, those pursuing academic excellence in one subject in a world-class institution, those pursuing international career opportunities and those who seeking a unique travelling experience. Destinations are selected based on students' primary motivations and as our analysis has shown, both UK and US students seek similar destinations to fulfil similar motivations.

Deviating from the transatlantic cultural similarities, our data has shown that UK students are more inclined towards CV development, while US students are motivated to a greater degree by the experience of travelling and living in other cultures. To some extent, in acknowledging that they are seeking better quality courses overseas, UK students are conceding that other countries, and primarily the US, offer better conditions in which to obtain a degree, as well as highlighting that these students aspire to be educated in world-class institutions. In discussions with both UK and US students, both groups expressed reservations when asked if they would consider studying a full degree overseas, owing to the fact that they valued their nationally gained qualifications too highly and believed that employers would hold domestic institutions in the highest possible regard. In these discussions, study abroad experiences were seen as opportunities to develop soft skills: cultural awareness, adaptability, independence, confidence, social cognisance and competitive employment experience.

UK students saw a three-year overseas programme as a long commitment, while one or two semesters or one year was regarded as a manageable time to take from friends, part-time jobs and courses. The idea of short placements like summer schools in the US was seen as a good model to follow.

Although 80% of UK students indicated that they did not want to study overseas, this was in no way due to a lack of international aspiration or desire to travel and have unique adventure; 92% of students not considering overseas study held a passport and only 11% of students not considering overseas study indicated that they did not want to leave their home country. In trying to identify the greatest academic barrier to overseas study, we found instead that there were no academic barriers – that UK students' pursuit of education did not influence their decision not to study abroad. Instead, cost and language ability were again highlighted, despite 62% of students not considering overseas study reporting confidence in speaking a foreign language at a basic level.

The data we collected showed that 76% of UK students that were not considering or undecided about overseas study said they felt they did not have enough information on the topic to make an informed decision. When asked what could change this, 76% indicated that help with funding may lead them to pursue study overseas, while 38% cited information sessions from other study abroad students and 36%, inspirational lectures from teachers about the benefits of overseas study.

This was echoed by all of the students that took part in our in-depth discussion groups, who said they had either been inspired by other students or felt that listening to the experiences of others would break down the perception that studying overseas was an unattainable, exclusive goal – something only for the wealthy or high academic achievers. One student remarked that seeing someone like herself, who she could relate to, would make the concept of studying overseas tangible for her.

US students echoed the need for information, with 73% of students not considering or undecided about overseas study reporting that they felt they lacked the adequate information to make an informed decision. They indicated similarly that help with funding (76%), language training (52%) and information sessions from other study abroad students (43%) could potentially lead them to pursue a study abroad experience.

Inspiring home students to travel overseas when they have the world's best education institutions on their doorstep is no mean feat. However, the UK and US governments have identified that in order for graduates from both countries to remain competitive in the global employment market, students need to undertake overseas study and acquire the skills that this is proven to bring. The aim of this research was not to identify who is responsible for broadening the horizons of UK and US students, but to understand the perceived barriers that students face – and that can be overcome in order to facilitate real change. Demand exists from both UK and US students to pursue these opportunities. Most importantly, this study has shown that relevant, timely, accessible and appropriate information resources are needed to help students make decisions now that will benefit them in their future careers.

