



# HOW **COVID-19** IS IMPACTING PROSPECTIVE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ACROSS THE GLOBE



Discover how prospective international students in China, India, the European Union, and North America are responding to the coronavirus crisis

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# Introduction

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The coronavirus, or COVID-19, has radically transformed sectors across the globe, and higher education is no exception.

From closing campuses to investing in online learning and supporting isolating students and staff, universities have quickly responded and adapted to this new normal.

Looking towards the next academic year, many institutions are concerned about their international student recruitment in this restricted global climate.

When recently speaking to global higher education professionals, many highlighted some key challenges they're facing, including:

*“Keeping our current students, faculty, and staff safe and healthy while also trying to keep normal operations running. We are also very concerned about enrollment for summer and fall.”*

*“The impact on student numbers has been significant, which means that there's pressure to reallocate funding to address shortages that have arisen. There are also communication and distance study options issues that are creating ongoing problems as we iron out the details of who needs what information or which resources.”*

*“Our biggest challenges are keeping students and staff safe and well; avoiding panic; maintaining educational progress with innovative educational solutions, like going online; the financial hit of fewer students and expenditures on coronavirus-related necessities; and keeping our international students coming.”*

Concerns around financial sustainability and recruiting international students were prominent, with universities stressing the uncertainty that restricts any planning they might undertake.

To address this uncertainty, QS established an ongoing survey of prospective international students to understand their response to the global health emergency and how it's impacted their decision making.

Since February, the survey has attracted more than 19,000 respondents and QS will continue to take the pulse of this community to inform institutions and their international student recruitment strategies.

Read on to discover how prospective international students are responding to the coronavirus, and how this differs between students from China, the European Union, India, and North America.





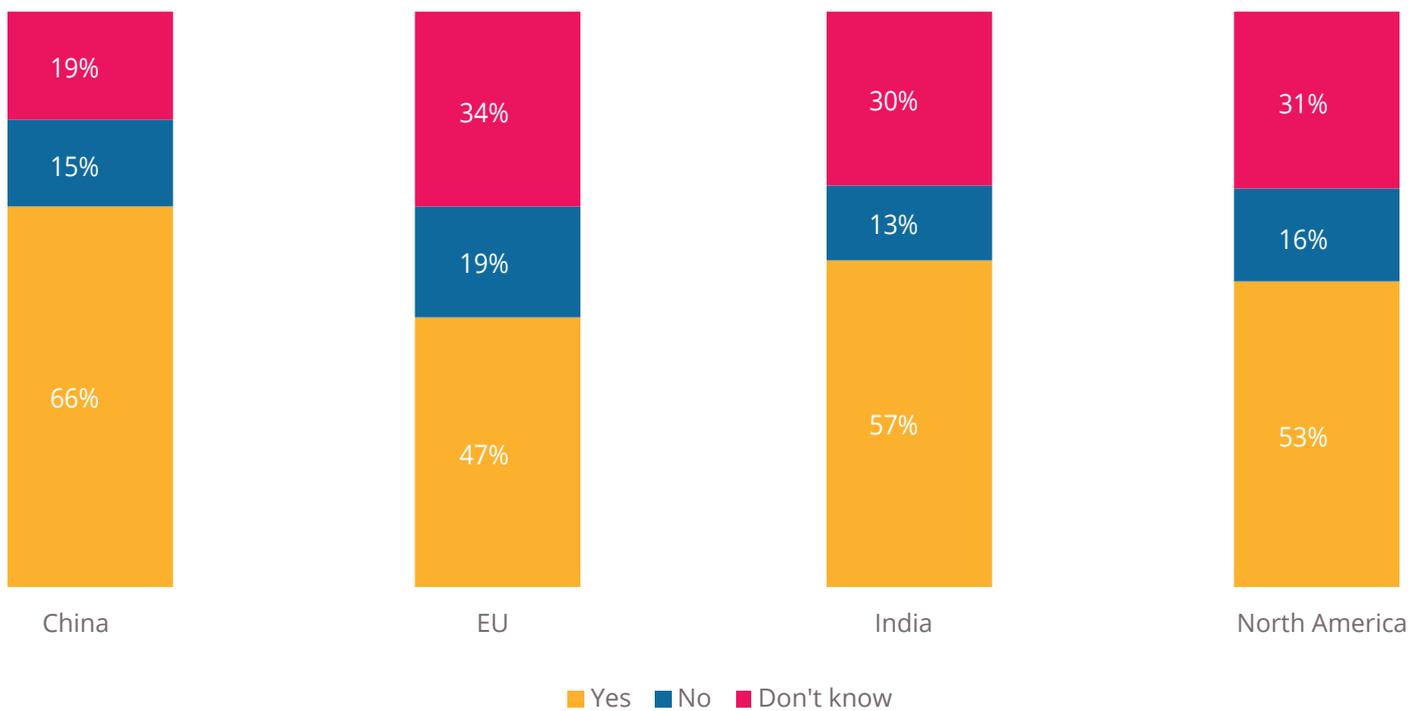
# A comparative overview

In this section, we'll highlight a few key findings and how they differ across the selected locations of China, India, the European Union (EU), and North America.

We'll then delve into these specific areas in more detail in their individual sections.

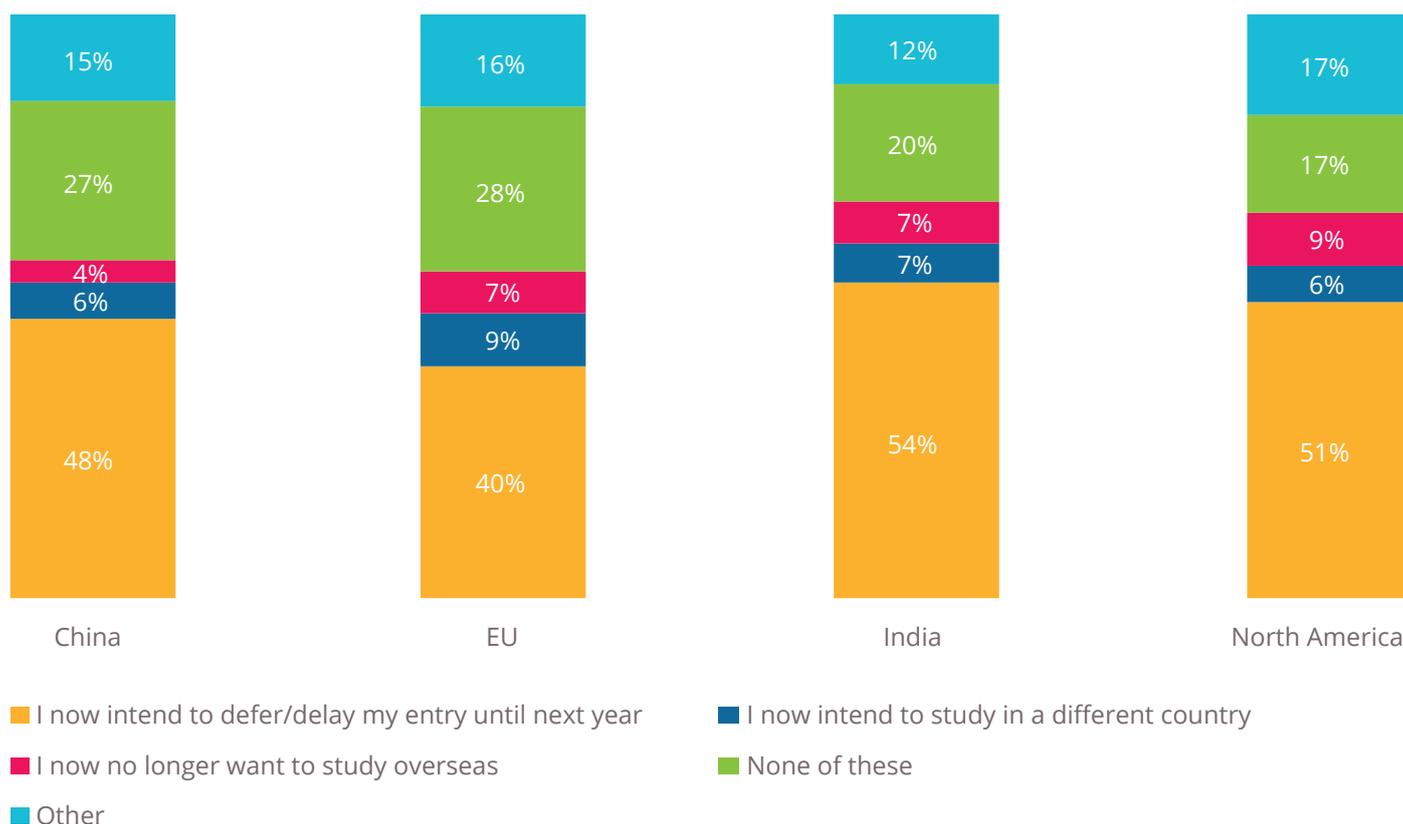
## Has the coronavirus affected your plans to study abroad?

Prospective international students were asked whether their plans to study abroad were impacted by the coronavirus outbreak. Overwhelmingly, many of the respondents had been impacted by the crisis and had changed their plans as a result.



## Which of these best describes how the coronavirus has changed your plans to study abroad?

In this question, prospective international students were asked how the coronavirus had changed their plans to study abroad, whether it had motivated them to defer or delay their entry until next year, changed their choice of host country, or even their plans to study abroad at all.



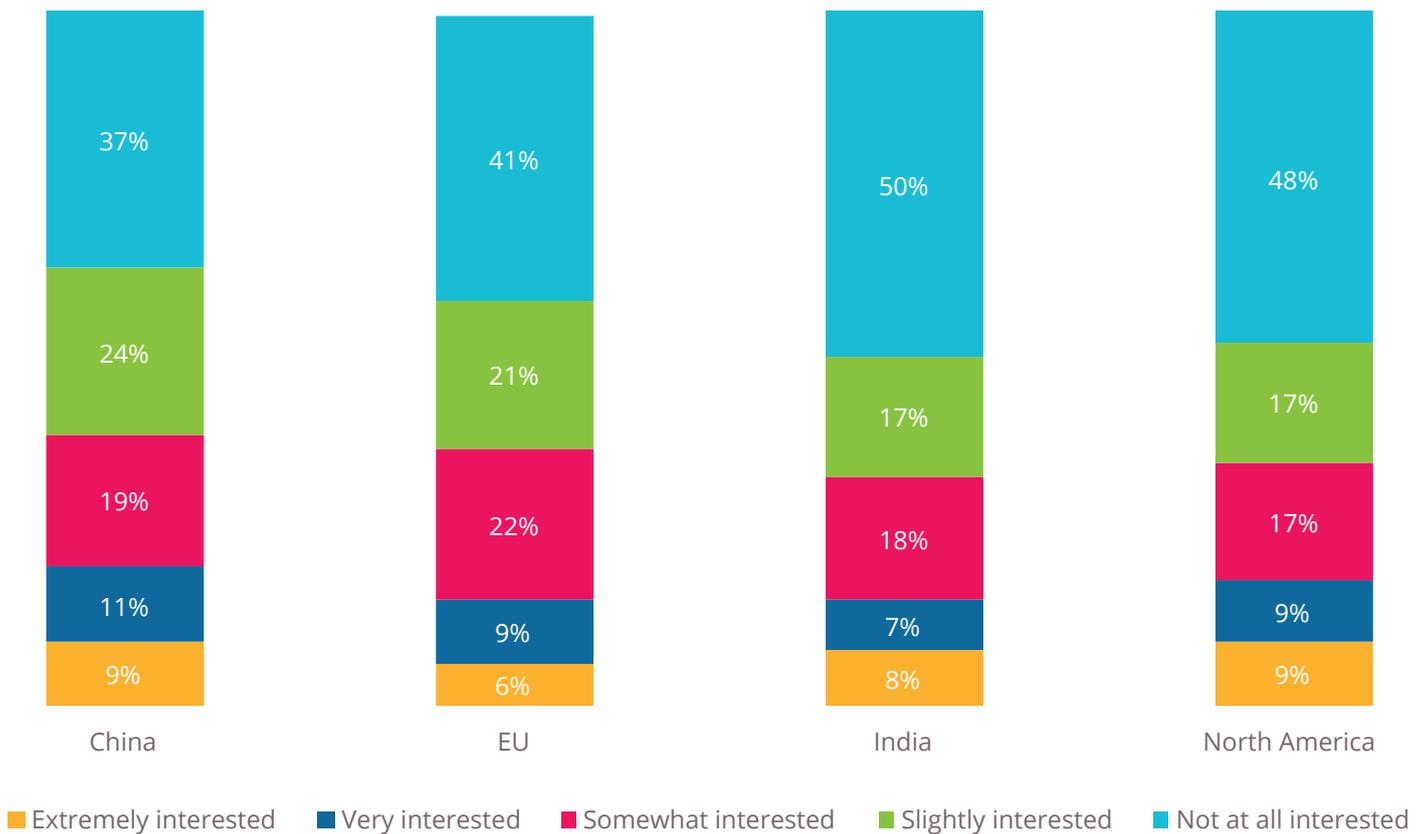
This clearly demonstrates that prospective international students across the globe are primarily choosing to either defer or delay their entry until the following year. Many respondents also stated that none of the listed options applied, which shows that many are finding alternative solutions to their study abroad plans.

In these uncertain times, it's crucial that institutions reach out to prospective international students to understand how they're making these decisions and what their needs are.



## How interested would you be in studying your degree online because of the coronavirus?

QS also asked prospective international students how interested they'd be in studying their degree online rather than in a traditional on-campus environment, due to the spread of the coronavirus.



These results demonstrate that while around half of respondents expressed some level of interest in studying their degree online, another large segment of respondents stated that they had no interest at all.

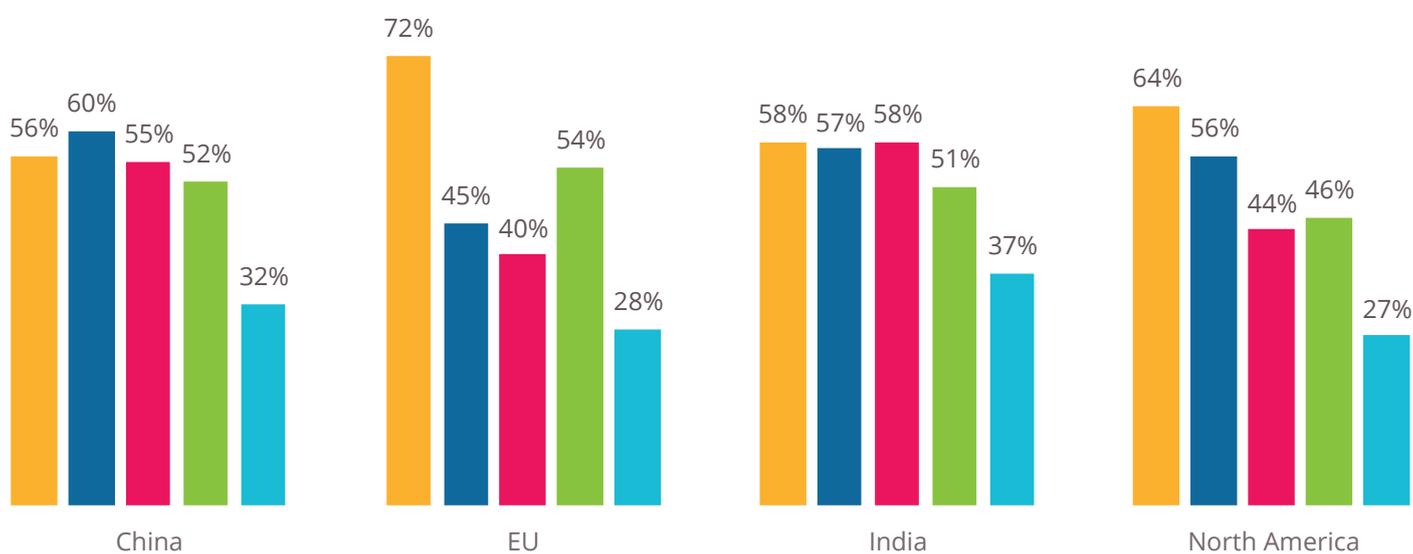
This highlights that institutions need to better communicate the benefits of online learning, and how their degrees are being effectively translated to the online environment.

## Which of the following do you think universities should be doing to limit the impact of the coronavirus?

To get an idea of what prospective international students expect from institutions, we asked them what initiatives they think institutions should implement to limit the impact of the coronavirus.

Respondents were allowed to select multiple options, from moving more of their lectures online to ensuring access to dedicated health professionals (e.g. nurses) for students, establishing a 24-hour helpline for students, ensuring that hand gel is widely available on campus, and holding lectures and seminars in larger rooms to minimize contact.

While some of these options may no longer apply to those institutions who have closed campus facilities, it's interesting to see what prospective international students expect from universities.



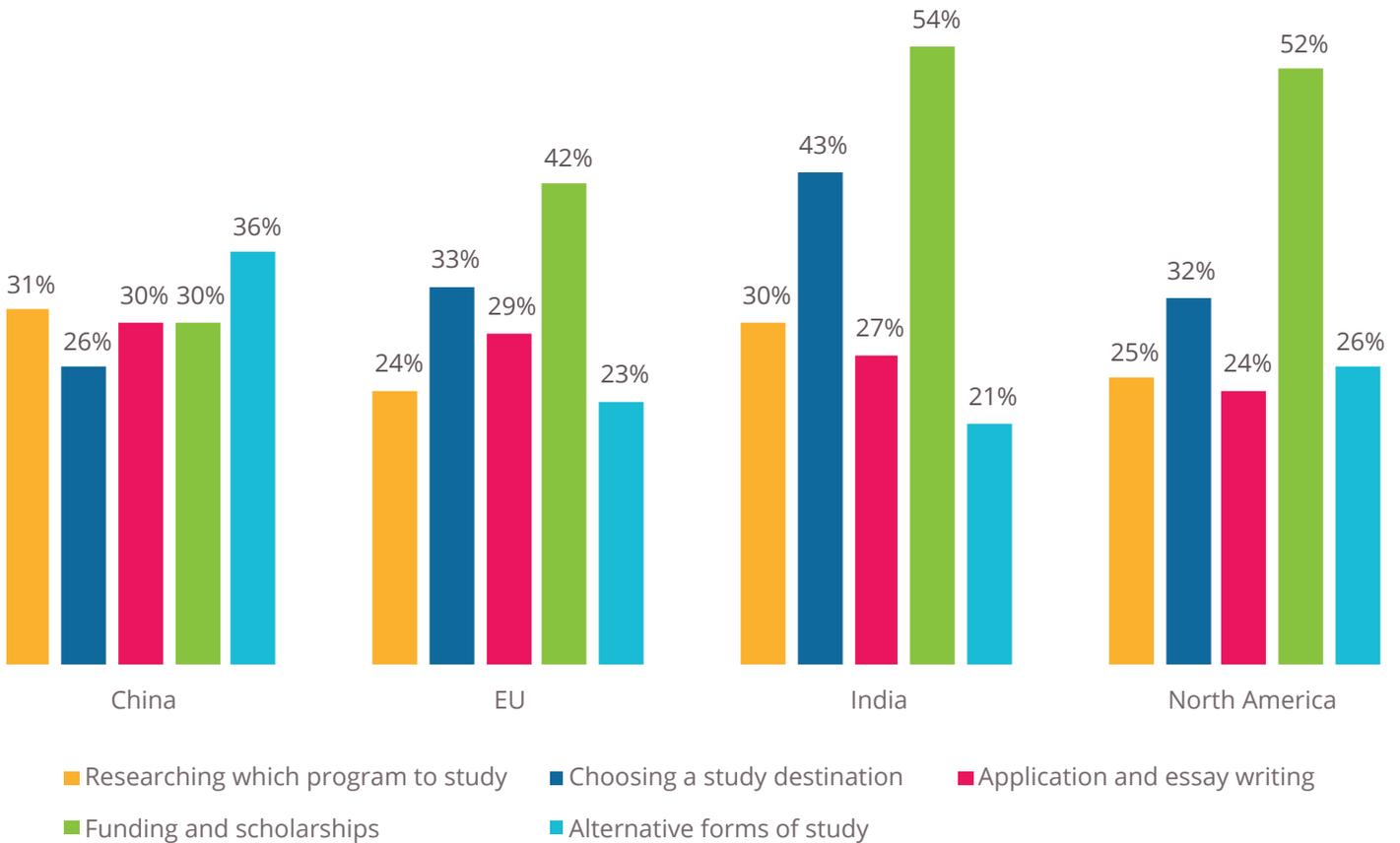
- Moving more of their lectures online
- Ensuring access to dedicated health professionals (e.g. nurses) for students
- Establishing a 24-hour helpline for students
- Ensuring that hand gel is widely available on campus
- Holding lectures and seminars in larger rooms to minimize contact



## Which of the following do you need more information on as a result of the coronavirus?

Prospective international students are looking for specific information and resources during this coronavirus crisis, and institutions need to be prepared to answer any questions or queries they may have.

In our survey, QS asked respondents to select the range of informative materials they need from institutions.



This demonstrates that prospective international students require a range of supporting materials throughout their decision-making process.

Institutions should invest in these informative materials and clearly communicate the availability of these resources to prospective international students.

# The impact on prospective international students from China

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China is the largest source country for international students, with the nation sending more students overseas for higher education than any other country in the world.

According to UNESCO, more than 928,000 Chinese students studied abroad in 2019.

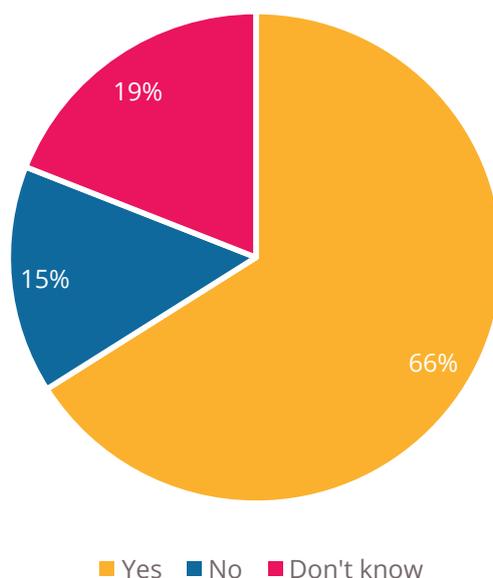
In the US, China is the biggest source of international students with more than 321,000 Chinese students choosing to study there.

It's a similar story in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the UK with each country receiving most of its international students from China.

So, how will the coronavirus impact the mobility of this important cohort of international students?

## Has the coronavirus affected your plans to study abroad?

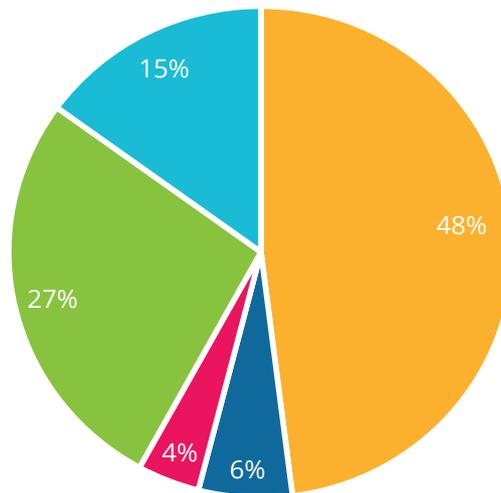
When looking specifically at prospective international students from China, it's clear that the coronavirus has significantly impacted their plans to study abroad.





## Which of these best describes how the coronavirus has changed your plans to study abroad?

For those students whose study plans had been impacted, the majority intended to defer or delay their entry until the next academic year.



- I now intend to defer/delay my entry until next year
- None of these
- I now intend to study in a different country
- Other
- I now no longer want to study overseas

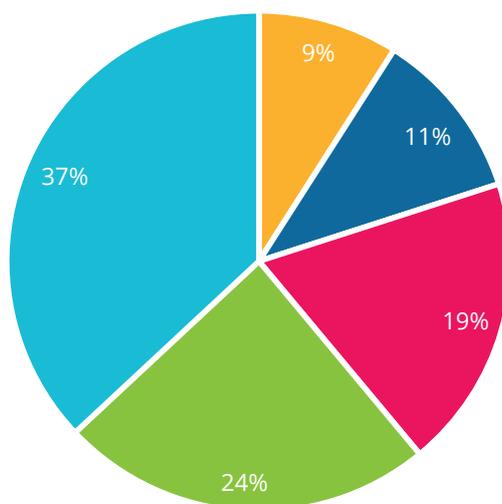
This is positive news for those higher education institutions which rely on Chinese international students, as some may see an uptick in recruitment in the next academic year.

## How interested would you be in studying your degree online because of the coronavirus?

With most institutions moving their operations online, the focus on online learning has never been greater.

While new tools and technologies are being explored to facilitate this move, some students have raised concerns about the return on their investment when a traditional on-campus course is delivered online.

Prospective students from China expressed varying opinions about studying their degree online, as can be seen below.

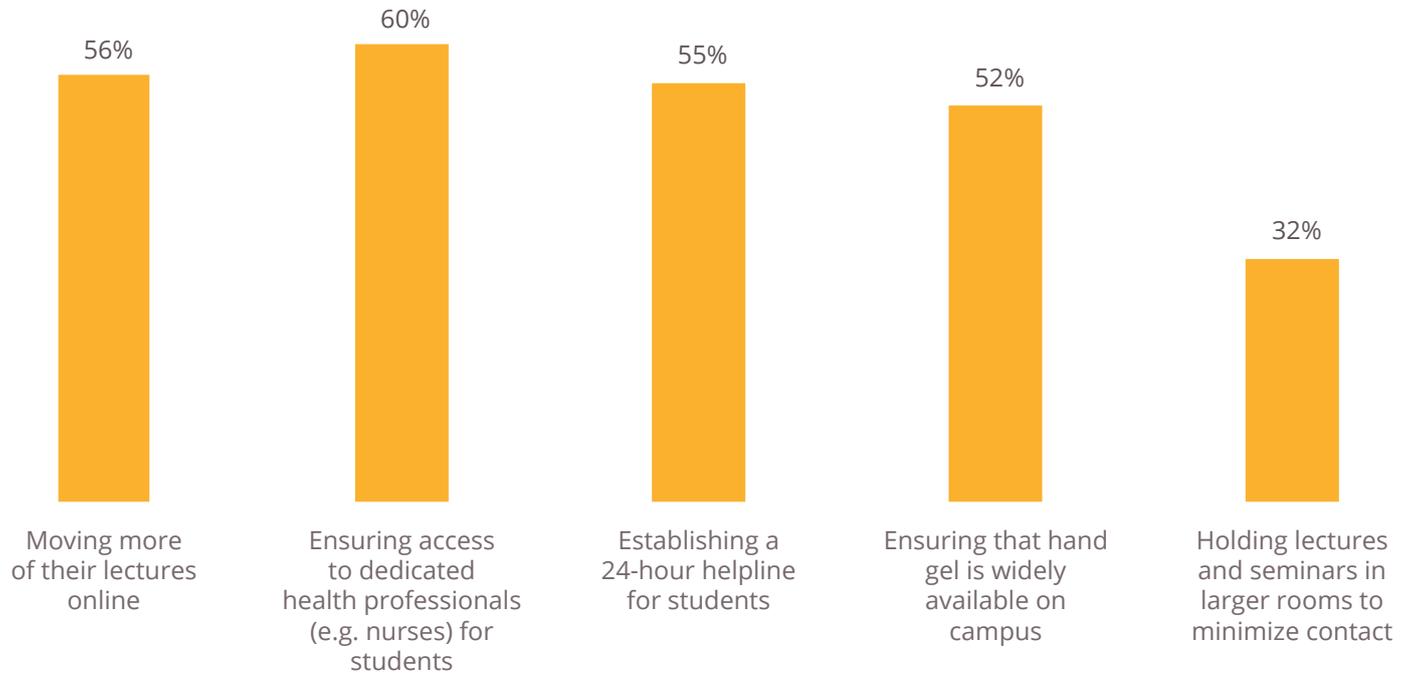


■ Extremely interested   
 ■ Very interested   
 ■ Somewhat interested  
■ Slightly interested   
 ■ Not at all interested



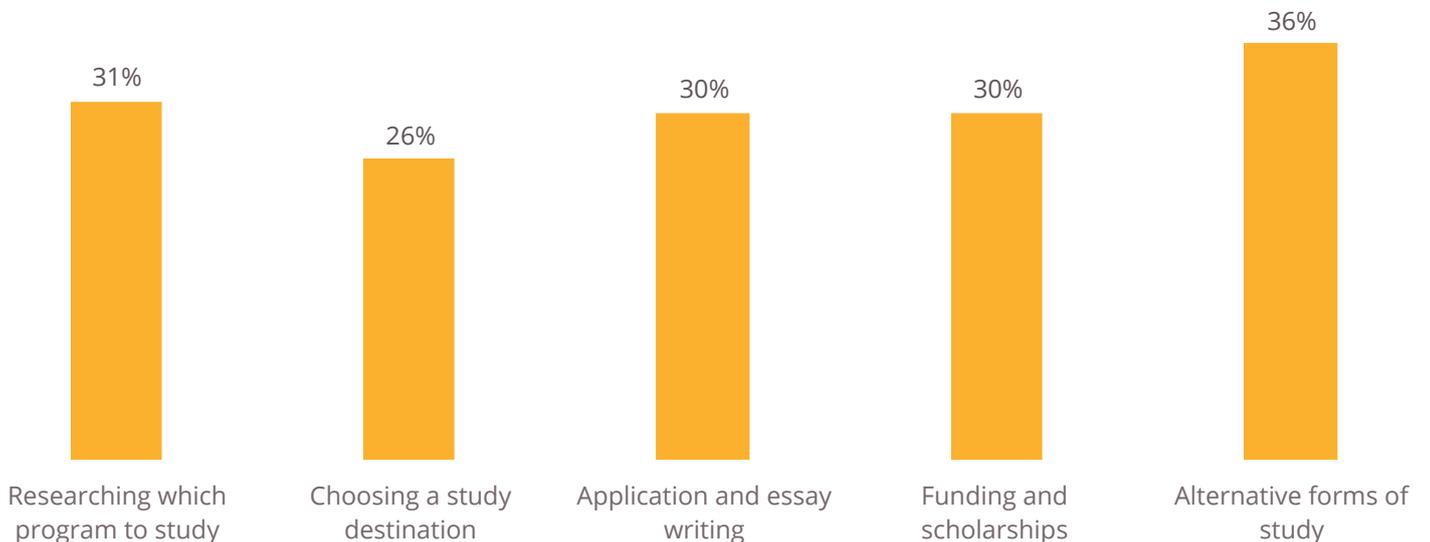
## Which of the following do you think universities should be doing to limit the impact of the coronavirus?

Prospective students from China expect institutions to implement a range of measures to address the spread of the coronavirus.



## Which of the following do you need more information on as a result of the coronavirus?

Chinese students also expect universities to provide a variety of informative materials to assist them during the admissions process.



# The impact on prospective international students from the European Union

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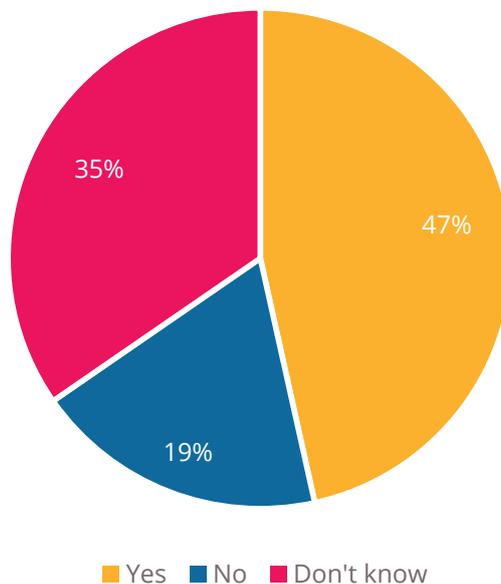
Students across the European Union (EU) have been dramatically impacted by the spread of the coronavirus across the continent.

Examining responses from prospective international students across the EU, QS analysts were able to identify the perspectives and opinions of this group.

Explore the results below to understand how EU students are faring.

## Has the coronavirus affected your plans to study abroad?

Compared to students from China, EU students expressed more uncertainty when it came to whether the coronavirus had impacted their plans to study abroad.

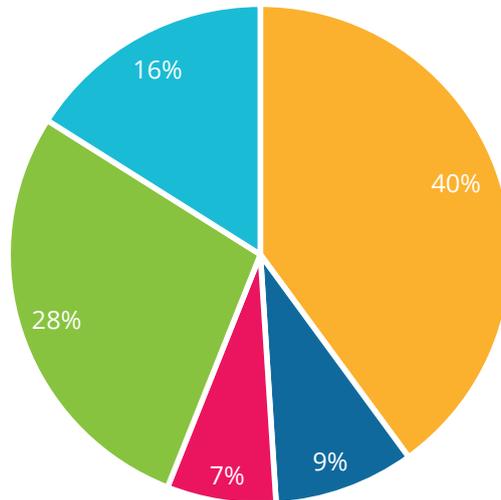


This may suggest that prospective international students from the EU may need further consultation from institutions to aid their decision-making process.



## Which of these best describes how the coronavirus has changed your plans to study abroad?

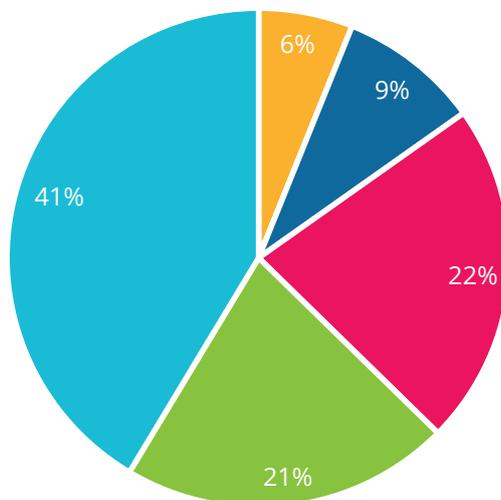
When responding to this question, the results were quite similar to those seen from Chinese respondents, though more Chinese students had decided to defer or delay their entry (48%).



- I now intend to defer/delay my entry until next year
- None of these
- I now intend to study in a different country
- I now no longer want to study overseas
- Other

## How interested would you be in studying your degree online because of the coronavirus?

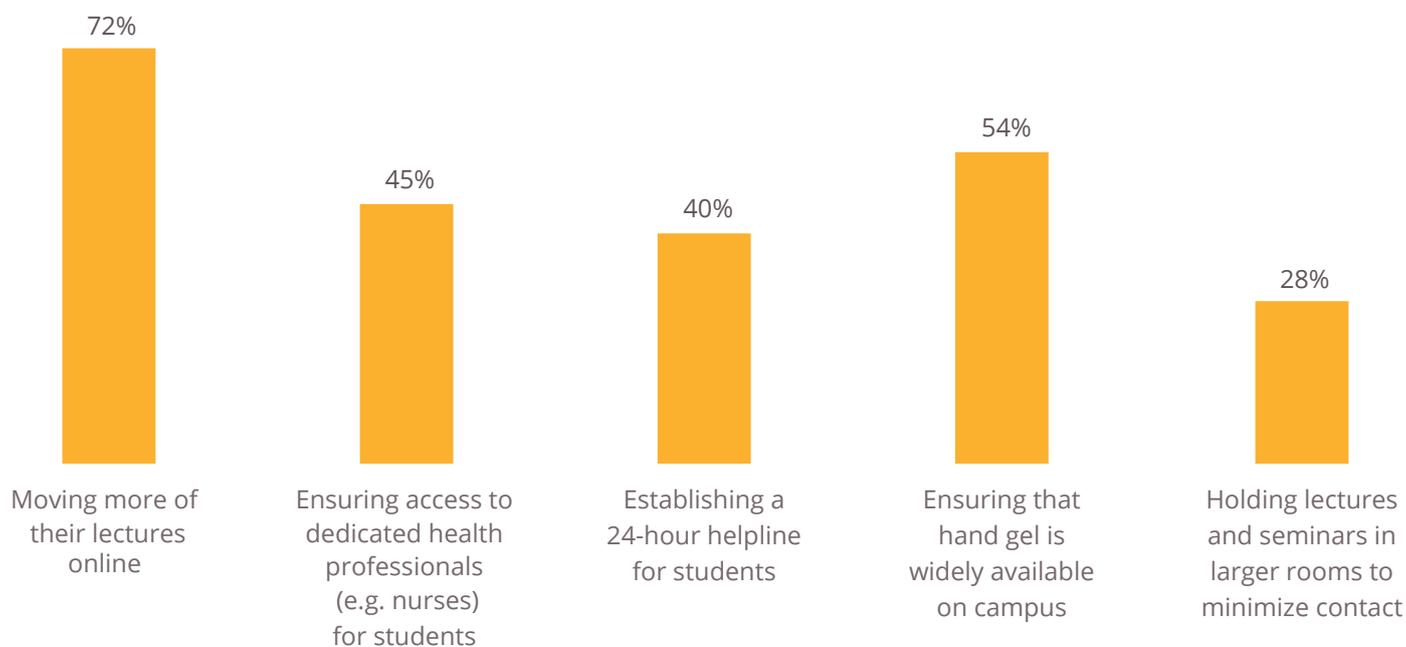
Again, the level of interest in online learning was varied, with a staggering 41% of EU prospective international students stating that they had no interest in studying online.



- Extremely interested
- Very interested
- Somewhat interested
- Slightly interested
- Not at all interested

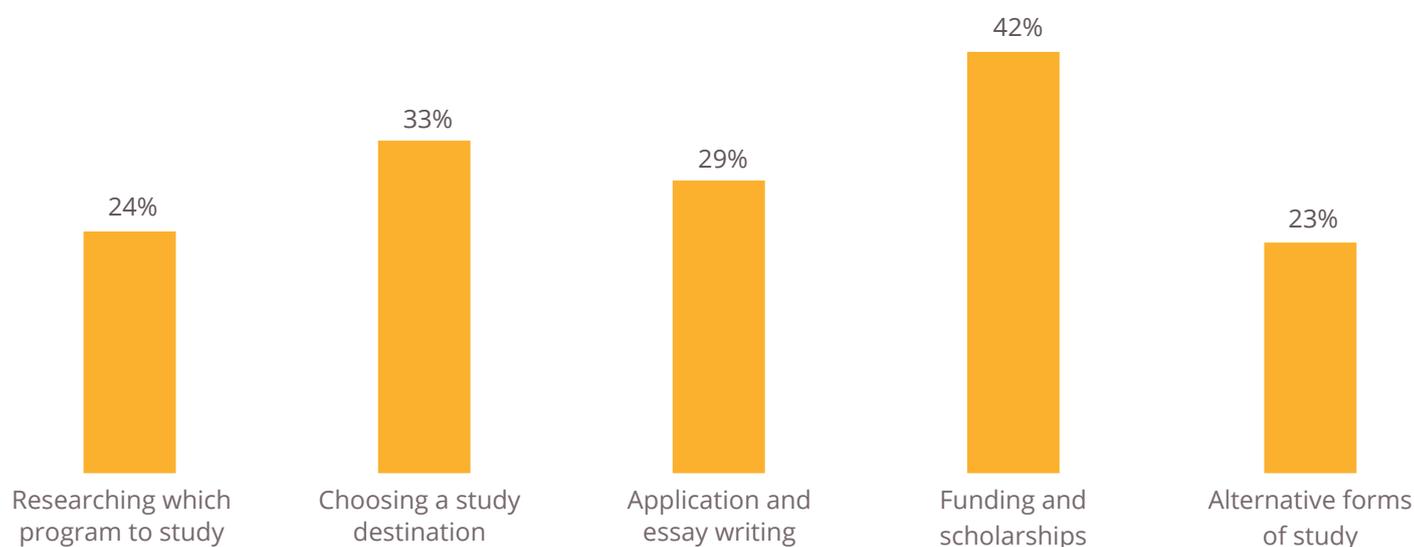
## Which of the following do you think universities should be doing to limit the impact of the coronavirus?

In comparison, EU students were overwhelmingly in support of universities moving their lectures online (72%), compared to 56% of Chinese students, 58% of Indian students, and 64% of North American students.



## Which of the following do you need more information on as a result of the coronavirus?

EU students are looking for a wide range of support materials from universities during these uncertain times, with a significant portion looking for information on funding and scholarships (42%).





# The impact on prospective international students from India

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Like China, India also represents an extremely important source market for the global higher education sector.

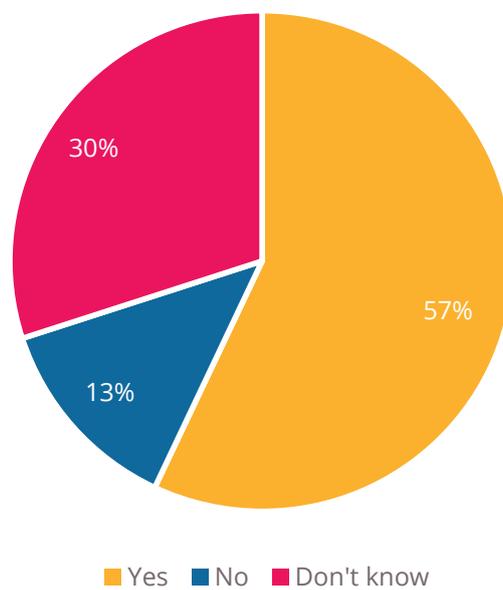
According to UNESCO, more than 142,000 Indian students are studying in the US, almost 52,000 are studying in Australia, more than 32,000 are studying in Canada, and over 16,000 are studying in the UK.

With these figures, it's clear that India is a crucial source market for many of the world's leading institutions.

To explore how prospective international students from India are dealing with this crisis, see the results below.

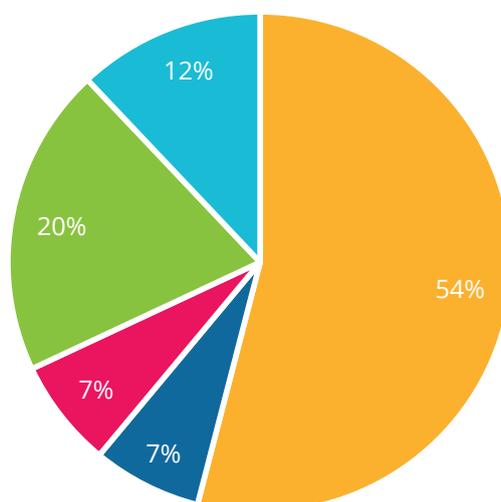
## Has the coronavirus affected your plans to study abroad?

Compared to 66% of Chinese respondents, Indian students are the second most impacted group with 57% of Indian students stating that their study abroad plans had been affected.



## Which of these best describes how the coronavirus has changed your plans to study abroad?

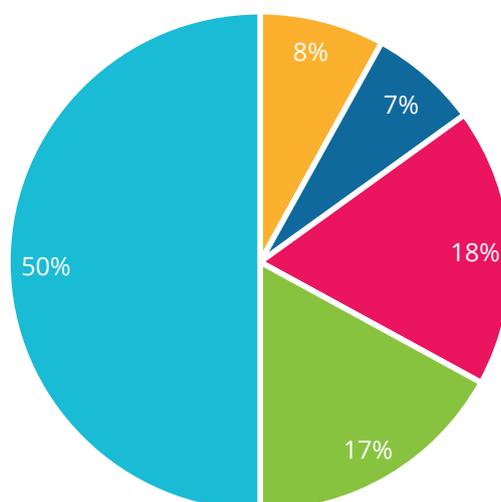
According to QS analysts, 54% of prospective Indian students surveyed have decided to defer or delay their entry until next year, compared to 48% of Chinese students, 40% of EU students, and 51% of North American students.



- I now intend to defer/delay my entry until next year
- None of these
- I now intend to study in a different country
- Other
- I now no longer want to study overseas

## How interested would you be in studying your degree online because of the coronavirus?

Of the four groups, Indian students were the most opposed to studying their degree online, with 50% of Indian students not at all interested in the prospect.

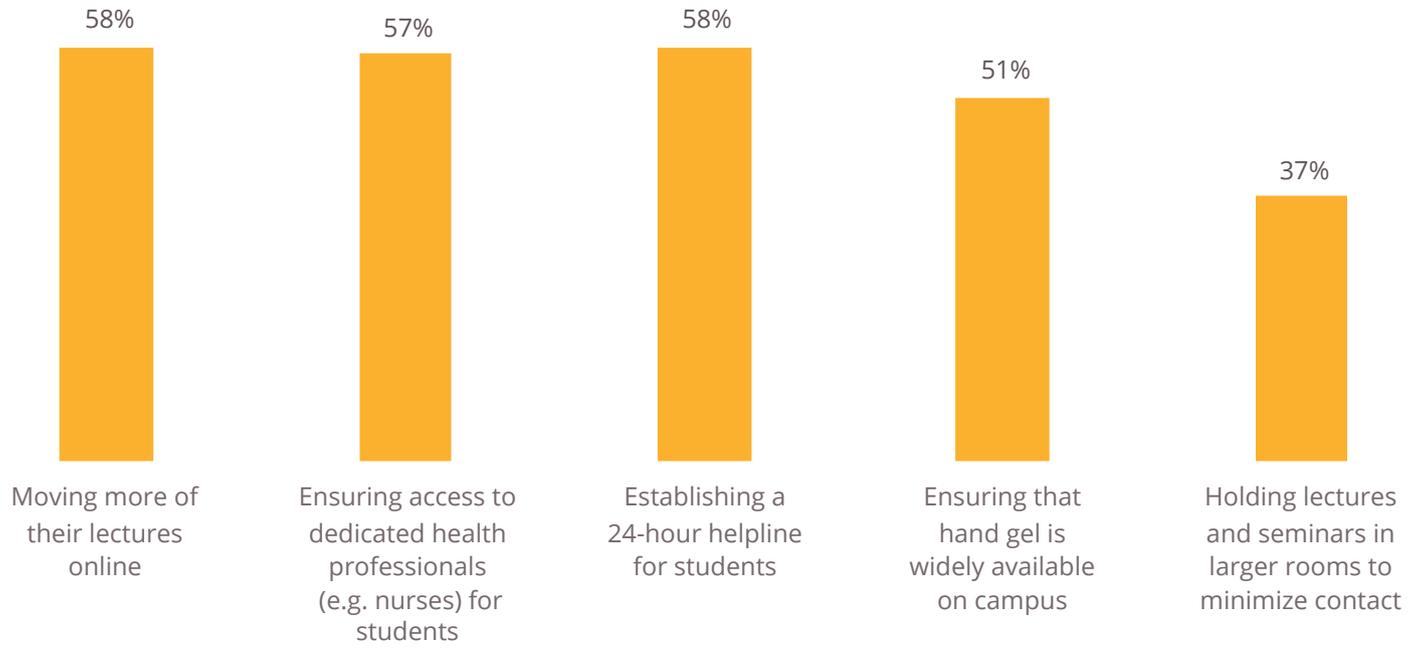


- Extremely interested
- Very interested
- Somewhat interested
- Slightly interested
- Not at all interested



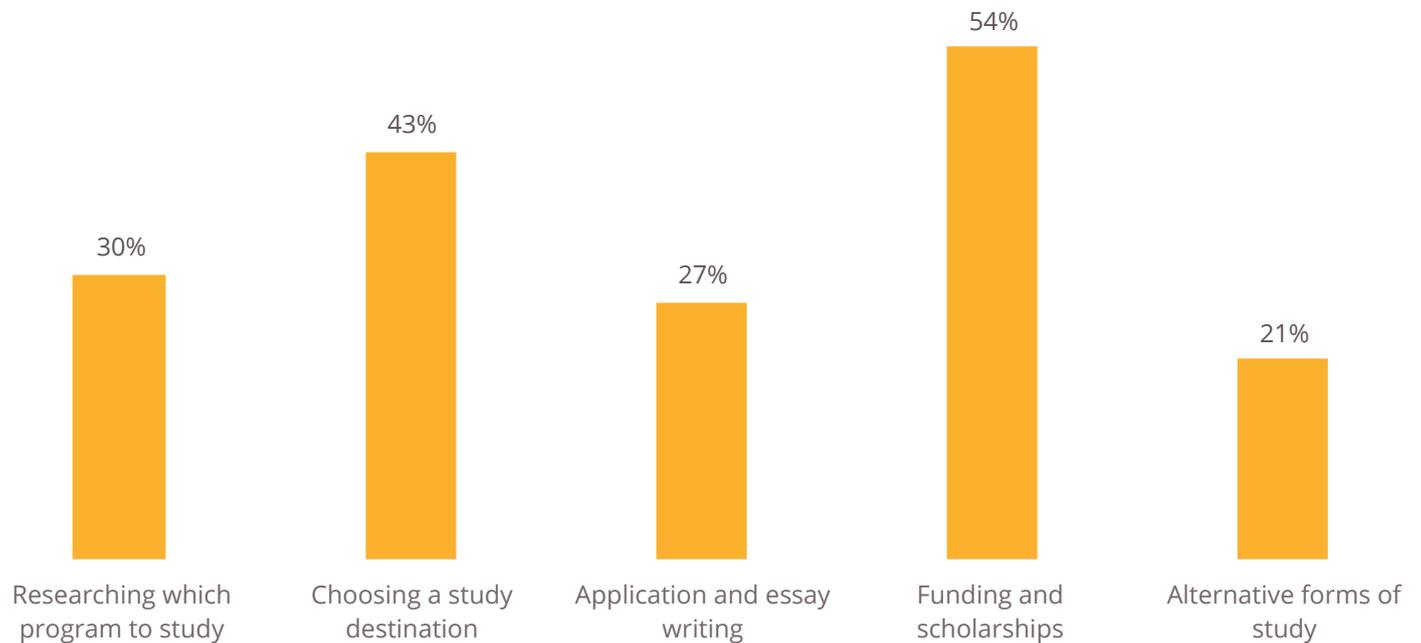
## Which of the following do you think universities should be doing to limit the impact of the coronavirus?

Indian students chose a wide range of measures in response to this question, suggesting that they believe institutions need to be implementing a number of initiatives to limit the impact of the coronavirus.



## Which of the following do you need more information on as a result of the coronavirus?

Like EU and North American students, funding and scholarships was a popular choice for this question, highlighting the financial pressures and concerns that students may be facing in these uncertain times.



# The impact on prospective international students from North America

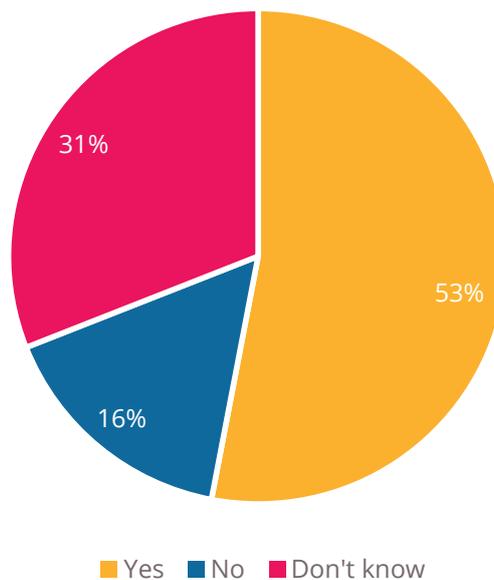
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While prospective international students from North America make up a smaller portion of the international student cohort than those from China or India, it's clearly a significant source market, and one that's been just as affected by the coronavirus crisis.

See below for the perspectives and responses of prospective international students from North America.

## Has the coronavirus affected your plans to study abroad?

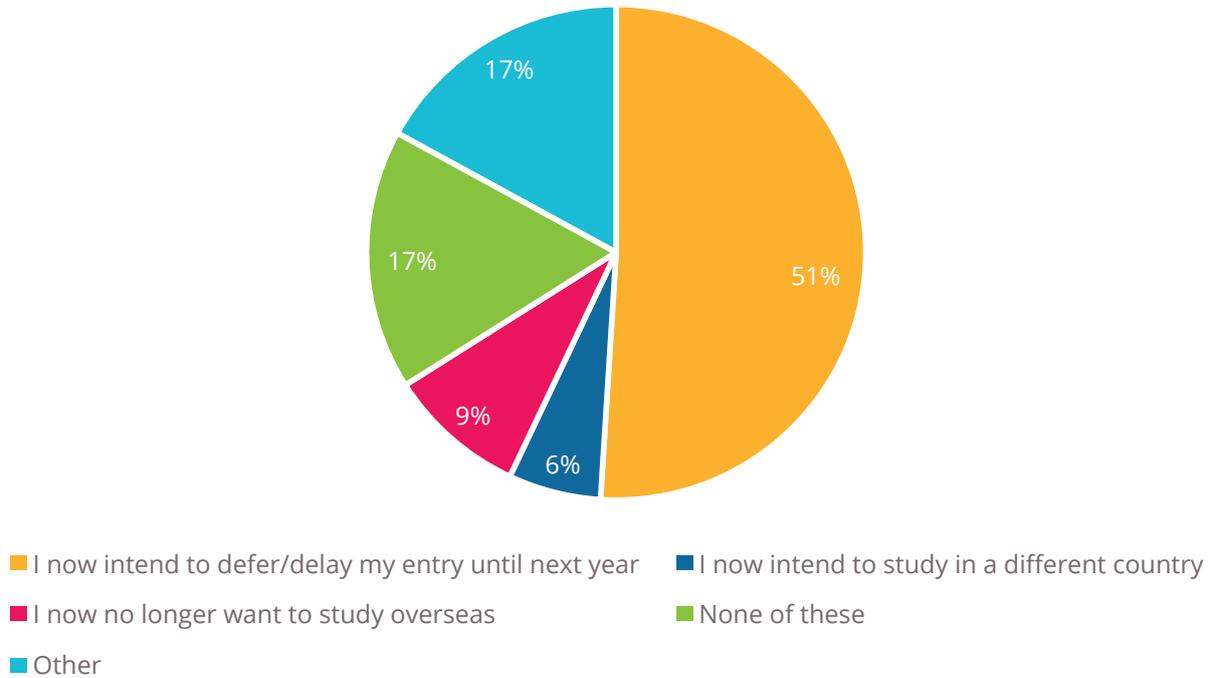
While 53% of North American students stated that their plans to study abroad had been affected by the coronavirus, this pales against the 66% of Chinese students and 57% of Indian students.





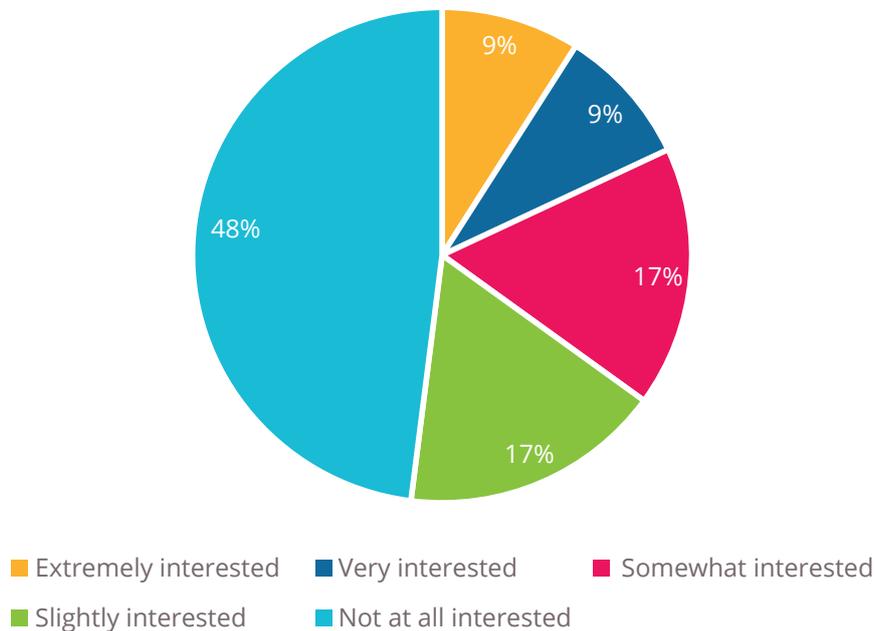
## Which of these best describes how the coronavirus has changed your plans to study abroad?

North American prospective international students were primarily choosing to defer or delay their entry until next year, similar to the responses from the other student groups.



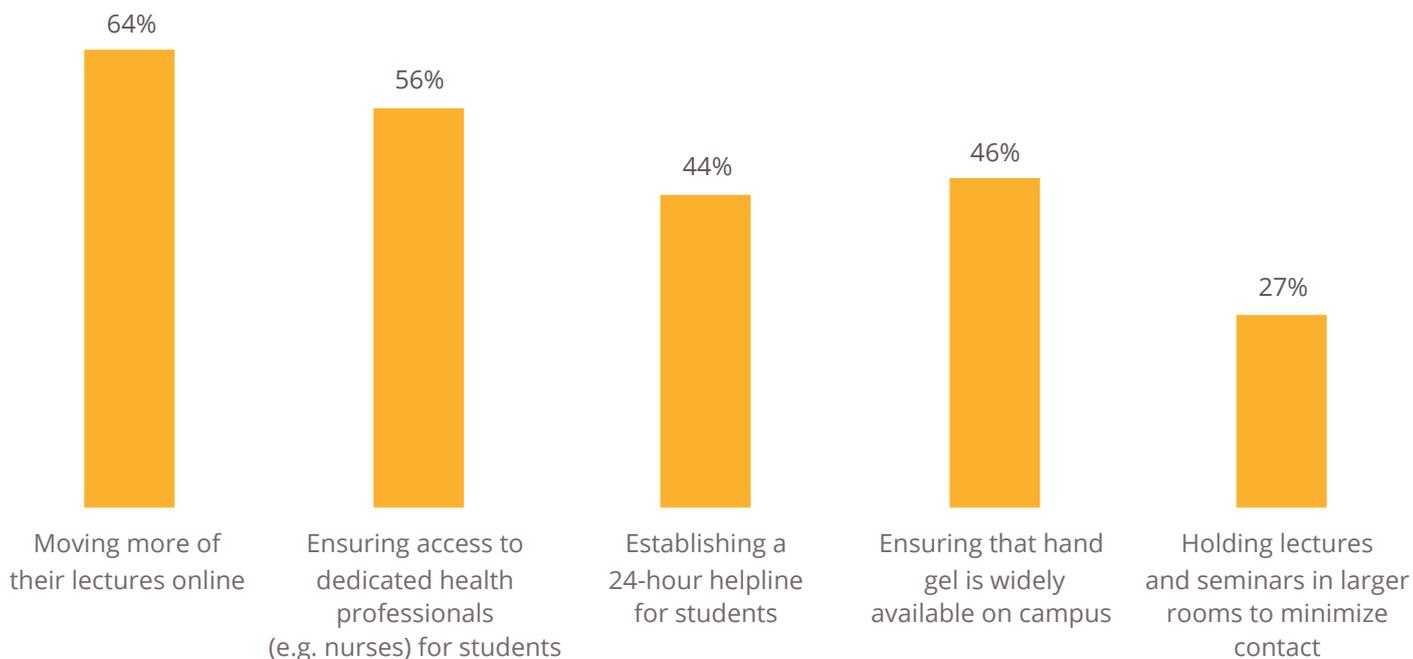
## How interested would you be in studying your degree online because of the coronavirus?

While prospective Indian students were the most opposed to studying their degree online (50%), North American students came a close second with 48% of respondents.



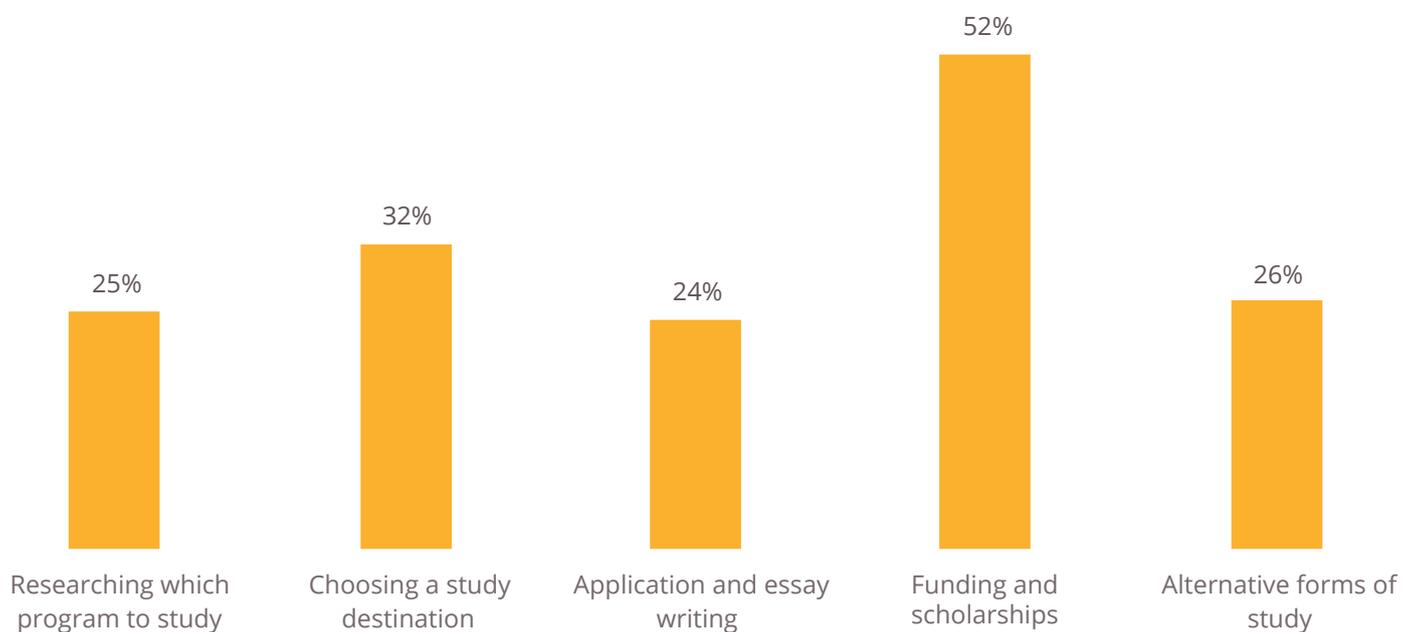
## Which of the following do you think universities should be doing to limit the impact of the coronavirus?

North American students are hoping to see a wide range of measures adopted by universities, including moving lectures online (64%) and ensuring access to dedicated health professionals (56%).



## Which of the following do you need more information on as a result of the coronavirus?

Similar to EU and Indian students, North American students are primarily seeking information on funding and scholarships.





# Conclusion

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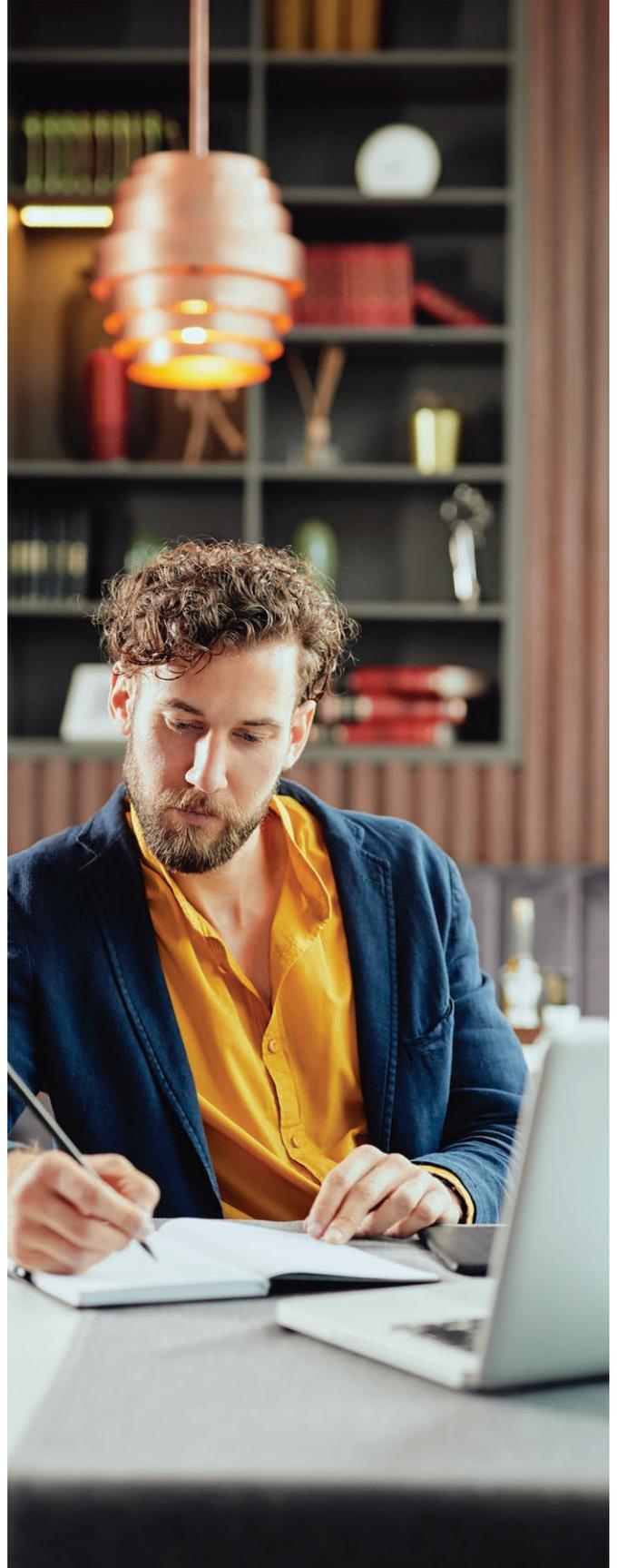
The ongoing QS survey of prospective international students aims to support and inform the global higher education sector during the disruption caused by the coronavirus crisis.

We are continuously reporting on the latest results of the survey and providing analysis to help universities inform their international student recruitment approach and other pertinent strategies.

By listening to students' needs and concerns, we hope to aid institutions in better serving and communicating with students during these uncertain times.

Please reach out to the QS team at <https://www.qs.com/contact> if you have any questions or concerns.

**For any media queries, please contact** [qspressooffice@qs.com](mailto:qspressooffice@qs.com).





# About QS

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QS Quacquarelli Symonds is the world's leading provider of services, analytics, and insights to the global higher education sector. Our mission is to enable motivated people anywhere in the world to fulfil their potential through educational achievement, international mobility, and career development.

Our QS World University Rankings portfolio, inaugurated in 2004, has grown to become the world's most popular source of comparative data about university performance. Our flagship website, [www.TopUniversities.com](http://www.TopUniversities.com) – the home of our rankings – was viewed 149 million times in 2019, and over 94,000 media clippings pertaining to, or mentioning, QS were published by media outlets across the world in 2019.

## QS portfolio

- **QS Digital and Events** provides prospective undergraduate, graduate, and MBA applicants with independent guidance throughout their search and decision making. Our world-class digital platforms include TopUniversities.com, TopMBA.com, and QSLearn.com which support search and inform applications to programs matching their profile and aspirations. In parallel, prospective students can meet, either virtually or face-to-face, with admissions officers of international universities and business schools. For universities and business schools, it offers effective and innovative digital and off-line student recruitment and branding solutions.
- **QS Enrolment Solutions** supports higher education institutions to maximize their student recruitment with a range of specialist services, from data-driven insights and high-quality lead generation to optimized communications and student conversion. With over 20 years of experience QSES has an unequalled understanding of international student decision-making. Our international office locations (UK, Romania, India, Malaysia and Australia) enable us to operate across time zones to deliver high value to our partners and exceptional services for applicants.
- **The QS Intelligence Unit** is a leading originator of institutional performance insight drawing on unique proprietary datasets gathered in pursuit of its published research. Best known for the widely referenced QS World University Rankings, today comprising variants by discipline and geography, the unit also operates a sophisticated, multi-dimensional quality standard; a comprehensive analytics platform facilitating advanced benchmarking; and an in-demand consulting team. Our insights both inform and are informed by frequent presence and digital conferences for educators, university leaders, and policy makers.
- **QS Unisolution** is dedicated to developing SaaS technology solutions to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of international mobility, relations, and recruitment functions within education, positively impacting the educational experience for the students, staff, and partners we serve.



For more information about the QS services, please contact [b2bmarketing@qs.com](mailto:b2bmarketing@qs.com)

To continue empowering motivated individuals and institutions across the world alike during the coronavirus outbreak, QS's response has included:

- Moving its [student recruitment events online](#), ensuring that universities and talented potential applicants across the world are still able to achieve high-quality personalized engagement.
- Expanding its range of digital marketing offerings, empowering student recruitment teams as they seek to maintain outreach and enrolment efforts.
- Launching a webinar series designed to enable university faculty and administrators alike to share best practices as they transition their educational offerings into the virtual classroom.
- Ongoing surveys of prospective students and institutions globally to analyze how the COVID-19 crisis is impacting them.

In 2019, as part of our commitment to sustainability, [QS became a certified CarbonNeutral® Company](#), reflecting our efforts to reduce our impact on the environment through a range of efficiency initiatives and offsetting unavoidable emissions through a verified carbon offset forestry project in Brazil.

