

Non-Anglo countries 'increasingly favoured' for study abroad

Visa cost and 'complexity' among the factors pushing students away from traditional education destinations, survey finds

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Non-Anglo education destinations are increasingly figuring in international students' plans, with around half now considering countries where English is not the predominant language, new research suggests.

A survey of some 5,800 current and prospective students, conducted in March and April, has found that 49 per cent had weighed up alternative study locations in Europe and Asia.

The paper, by Australian-founded educational services giant IDP, found that 21 per cent of the mainly Asian respondents had considered pursuing degrees in Germany – putting it on par with New Zealand, and five percentage points ahead of Ireland, as a study option.

China and France had each been considered by 12 per cent of respondents, with the Netherlands and Singapore each attracting interest from 11 per cent. Six per cent had contemplated the United Arab Emirates, with a similar proportion considering Malaysia.

The findings align with perceptions that the so-called big four education destinations – Australia, Canada, the UK and the US – are losing their market dominance (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/big-four-becomes-big-14-dominating-international->

[tion](#)).



Source: iStock/Sandi Smolker



A separate survey (https://studyportals.com/news-and-insights/global-enrolment-benchmark-survey-jan-mar-2026-intake?utm_source=jour&utm_medium=website-3rdparty&utm_campaign=20260511-RPT-The-Global-Enrolment-Benchmark-Report-January/March-2026-intake&utm_content=46239), also published on 12 May, by Nafsa, the Oxford Test of English, and Studyportals found that half of universities reported lower international enrolments in the first quarter of this year, compared to the same period in 2025.

The US reported the biggest drop in enrolments, with postgraduate enrolments down 24 per cent on average.

Simon Emmett, IDP's chief partner officer, said Anglo countries still held a "clear advantage" on perceived quality and employability outcomes – the "decisive" factors for most students.

But continuing policy volatility, affordability pressures and uncertainty around post-study outcomes could change the equation, Emmett warned. "Students may increasingly weigh certainty and value more heavily against prestige. Over time, that creates genuine space for alternative destinations to capture greater market share."

The survey, the ninth in IDP's "Emerging Futures" (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/international-students-hedge-bets-unstable-policy-landscape>) series, established Australia as a clear frontrunner in the "consideration set" of 59 per cent of respondents, and the first-choice destination for 31 per cent – putting it ahead of the UK on 19 per cent and the US and Canada on 14 per cent each. Only 11 per cent named other countries as their top options.

Survey responses suggested that students judged value "primarily through career outcomes, skills and academic quality", with cost a second-order consideration, the survey report says. "Employability consistently outranks affordability as the core measure of value."

But this assessment is coming under threat as policy uncertainty – particularly the difficulty and expense of obtaining visas – forces a reappraisal. Seventy per cent of prospective students in the survey said they would consider switching study destinations to secure better visa conditions.

"Students are not just worried about getting the visa any more, but about what happens after," an education counsellor in Nigeria told the researchers. "Even if visas are being granted, they are asking about the situation in the country. What if they go, spend one year, and then get asked to leave?"

Of the 200-odd survey respondents who had abandoned international education plans, 26 per cent had done so because of the difficulty of obtaining visas – up from 20 per cent when the same question was posed nine months earlier.

Affordability concerns related to visa expenses – alongside tuition fees and cost of living – are major deterrents to study abroad, the survey found. Students are also more inclined than ever to consider multiple destinations, but quicker to rule certain countries out.

“Visa settings are becoming a front-end filter,” Emmett said. “Students are assessing cost, requirements and approval risk much earlier in their decision-making, and these factors are increasingly influencing whether they pursue international study at all.”

He said that while Australia’s “strength” in international education provided a “buffer”, it was jeopardised by costs and perceived complexity. “Maintaining competitiveness will depend on ensuring that access pathways remain transparent, stable and aligned with the value proposition.”

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