



# The future of international education

Research conducted by The Future Laboratory,  
commissioned by Western Union Business Solutions.  
Executive summary – February 2020.

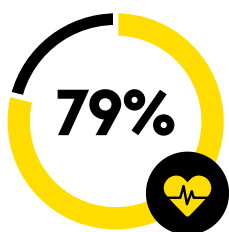
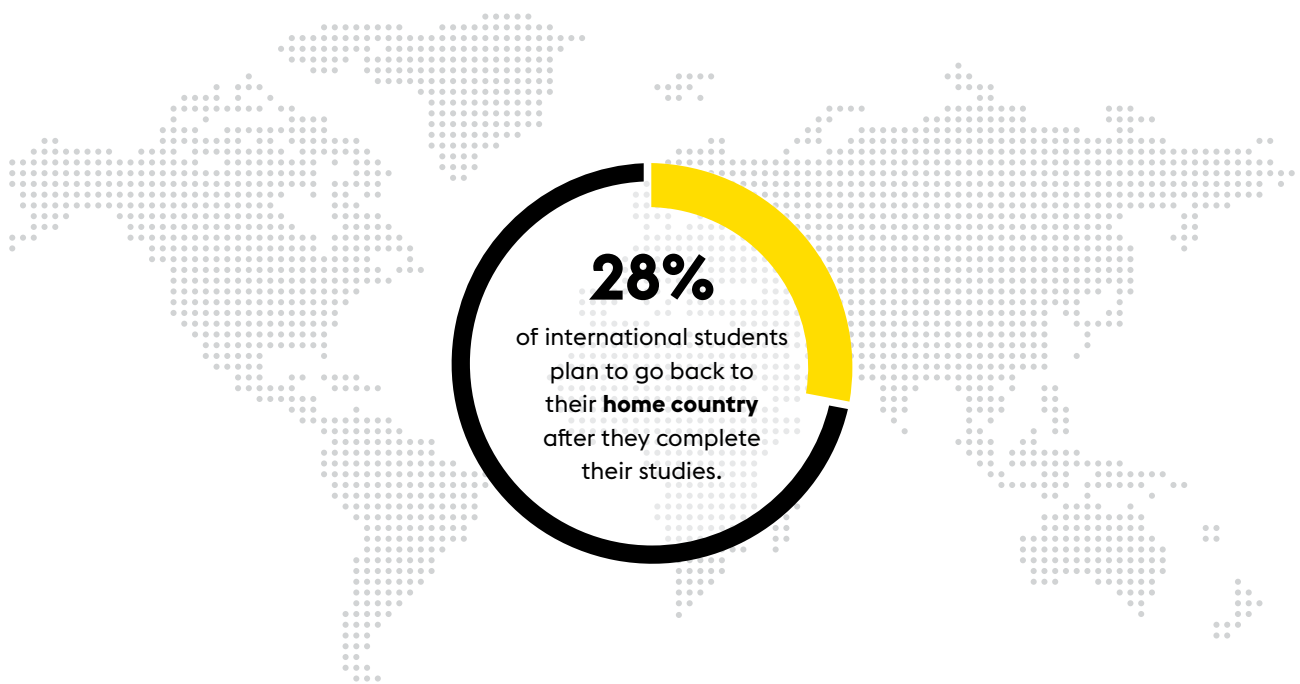
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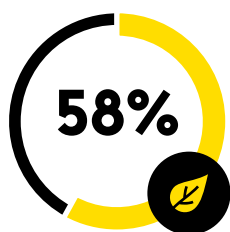
# The future of international education – executive summary

This report provides insight into the future of international education, highlighting the key technological, social and environmental shifts driving change. It explores future student typologies and how universities and colleges must engage with these new archetypes in order to attract prospective international students, maintain their international revenues, and continue to attract academics and research funding. Ultimately it aims to help universities protect and increase their position on the global university rankings.

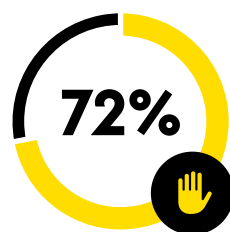
## Key findings



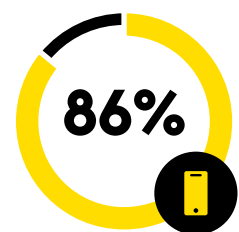
of international students said that how an institution looks after their students' **health and wellness** would influence their decision to study there.



of international students stated that they would boycott an educational institute with bad **sustainability credentials**.



of international students felt more engaged with universities that take a stand on **social issues** from politics to feminism and racial issues.

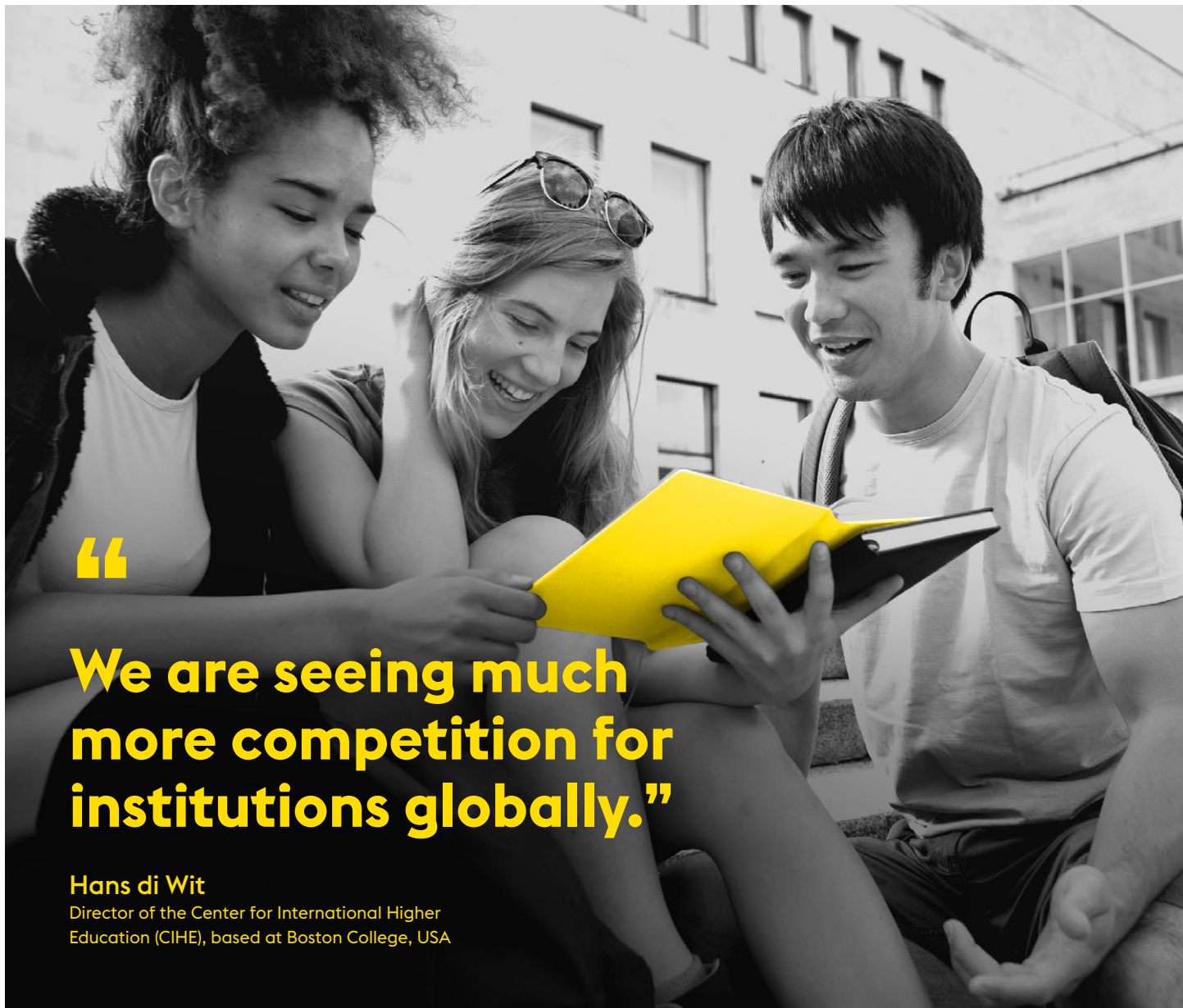


of international students check their **digital devices** at least once an hour.

# International study: drivers of change

Individual market share and ranking of the world's major study destinations have been in flux over the past decade. The climate is one of increasing competition, with further movement expected in the rankings of top destinations due to dramatic differences in year-on-year growth rates from country to country.

What is driving this competition? Our research found that the wants and needs of students around the world is changing, and that students can be collated into distinct groups based on their demands. Institutions must reexamine the way they operate if they want to remain competitive in an international landscape.



“

**We are seeing much  
more competition for  
institutions globally.”**

**Hans di Wit**

Director of the Center for International Higher  
Education (CIHE), based at Boston College, USA

# International students of the future

Our research identified five global international student typologies of today and how they will force change in the learning landscape of tomorrow.



**Key driver:**  
environmental sustainability

## Greener Graduates

Sustainability will become a key factor in international students' choice of university as an already passionate and growing cohort of greener graduates go mainstream across the globe.

Environmentally sustainable office policies and practices are high on the agenda for young international students when considering their future work environment.

**58%**

would boycott an educational institute with bad sustainability credentials.

**59%**

use public transport specifically to act more sustainably.

**56%**

recycle products and 47% cut back on their waste.



**Key driver:**  
purpose

## Social Engineers

Students of the 2020s and 2030s will be impassioned and empathetic. Every decision they make, from the products they buy to the universities they study at, will be driven by their deepest values.

**72%**

of international students felt more engaged with universities that take a stand on social issues from politics to feminism or racial issues.

Importance of individual issues fluctuates among a number of topics:

**28%** environmental issues

**19%** political state

**19%** health and social care

**16%** gun violence

**14%** gender equality



**Key driver:**  
wellbeing

## Mindful Scholars

This group is mindful of the effect that their decisions and behaviors will have on their wellbeing, now and into the future.

**84%**

of international students practice mindfulness.

**66%**

have undertaken a digital detox, lasting 1-2 days.

**92%**

consider the importance of switching off from social media, whilst admitting that they check their accounts every hour.



**Key driver:**  
technology

## Digital Learners

Future international students will see technology as an extension of themselves, seamlessly integrating it into their relationships.

**78%**

said a campus that embraces technology to learn and adapt to people and places would be more appealing than a less technologically advanced institution.

**86%**

said it is important to socialize with friends in real life as well as online.



**Key driver:**  
hybridity

## Hybrid Thinkers

By 2030, international students will be a 'hybrid generation' that have no distinctions between work, rest and play.

They are known as the slash generation, unwilling to commit to a single career path, as job roles today will cease to exist in the future.

**49%**

rated environmentally sustainable office policies and practices as one of their top three most important features in their working environment.

**45%**

rated experiences outside of work such as exercise classes and mindfulness workshops as one of their three most important features in their working environment.

# Tomorrow's education

1

## The rise in trans-national learning

For tomorrow's international students, the decision to study abroad will weigh up quality of education versus carbon footprint. This rise in sustainably-minded international students will drive educational institutions to think more flexibly in the future. As international students consider their carbon footprint when choosing to travel abroad, opportunities abound for heritage institutions to build campuses in growing Asian markets, allowing students quality of education without cost to the environment.

## The conscious campus

For tomorrow's students, the siren song of sustainability will call more powerfully than ever. As educated eco-fluencers strive for the best sustainability solutions in their everyday lives, the significance of the eco-conscious campus emerges. Impact-aware institutions will grow in importance as sustainability moves from nice-to-have to imperative for both international student recruitment and profitability.

2

## Social-emotional education

In the future universities and colleges will increasingly focus on a more holistic approach in order to optimize international students' emotional wellbeing. International students of tomorrow will become more engaged with mindful, mentally-aware, emotionally-driven institutions.

3

## The smart campus

Universities and colleges must invest in digital transformation in order to attract the digital native international students of the future. Students will demand seamless, personalized experiences like the ones they've become accustomed to in their interactions with consumer brands such as Amazon and WeChat.

4

## Hybridity

In the coming decade, universities and colleges will reflect the workplace as flexible, collaborative hubs that adapt to future international students' needs as they prepare for a life of professional nomadism.

5



# Summary & conclusions

This research explores the key shifts driving change in international education. As market share rankings of study destinations have been in flux, institutions must re-examine how they remain competitive. Our research identified five global international student types and how they will drive change: greener graduates, social engineers, mindful scholars, digital learners and hybrid thinkers who are driven by sustainability, purpose, wellbeing, technology and hybridity respectively. Institutions should look to increase trans-national learning, create eco-conscious campuses, provide a more holistic approach to optimize wellbeing, invest in digital transformation and create flexible collaborative hubs to adapt to students' future needs.





**Get full report**



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