

How PhD students choose top universities

7 March 2014

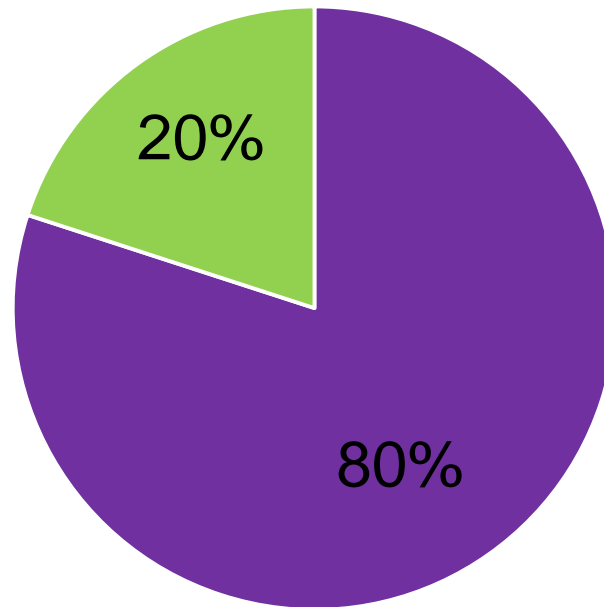
**Louise Simpson, Director World
100 Reputation Network**

International PhD study – Quantitative

Survey sent to

- **staff in W200 universities**, re strategy, PhD student numbers, targets, branding.
- **students considering PhDs** and current PhD students via staff in W200 universities, re reputation, choice, brand, decision making.
- **Asian universities** by the British Council.
- **384 student responses** so far
- American, Danish and Australian interviews to be done.

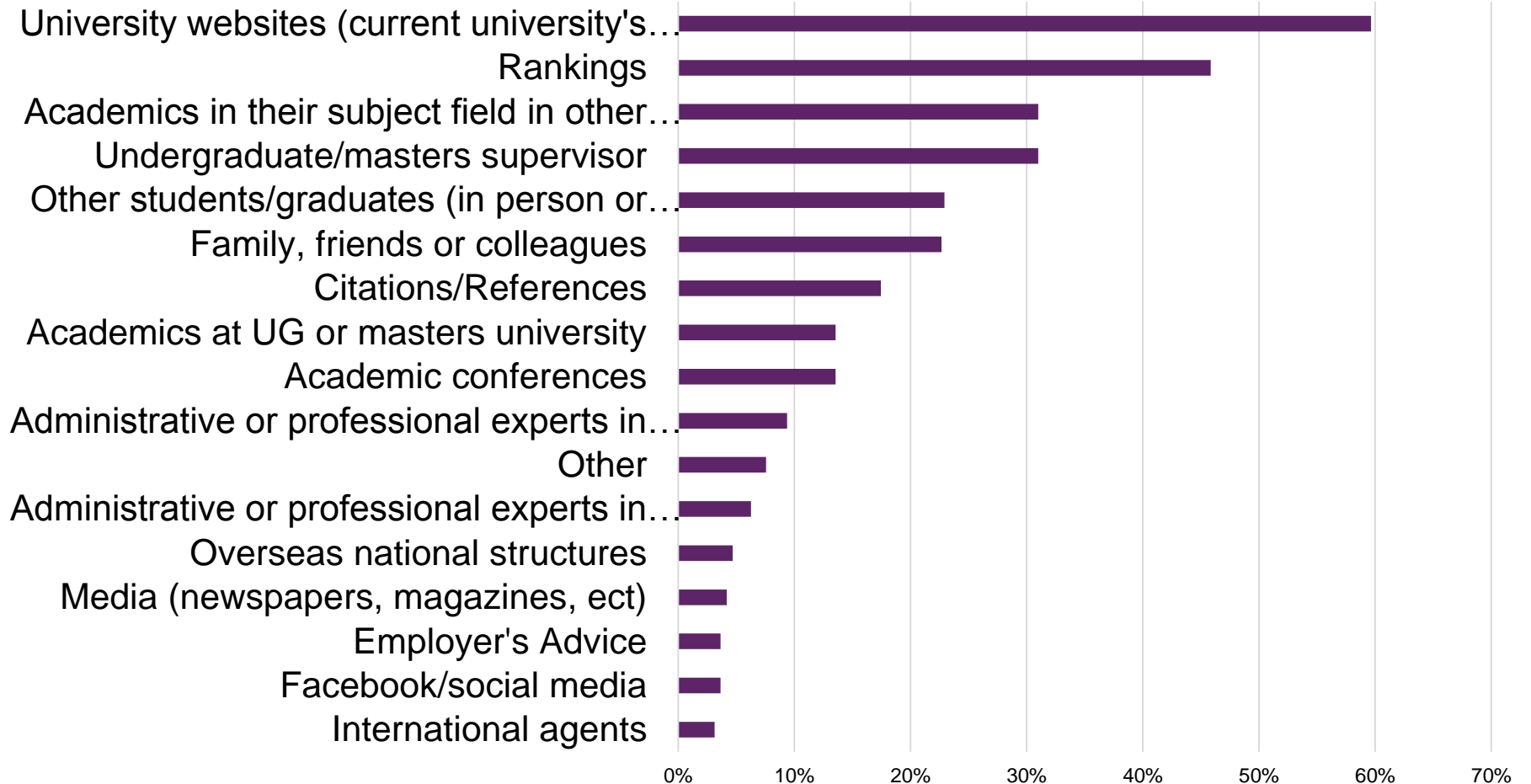
Do you receive a Scholarship for your PhD?



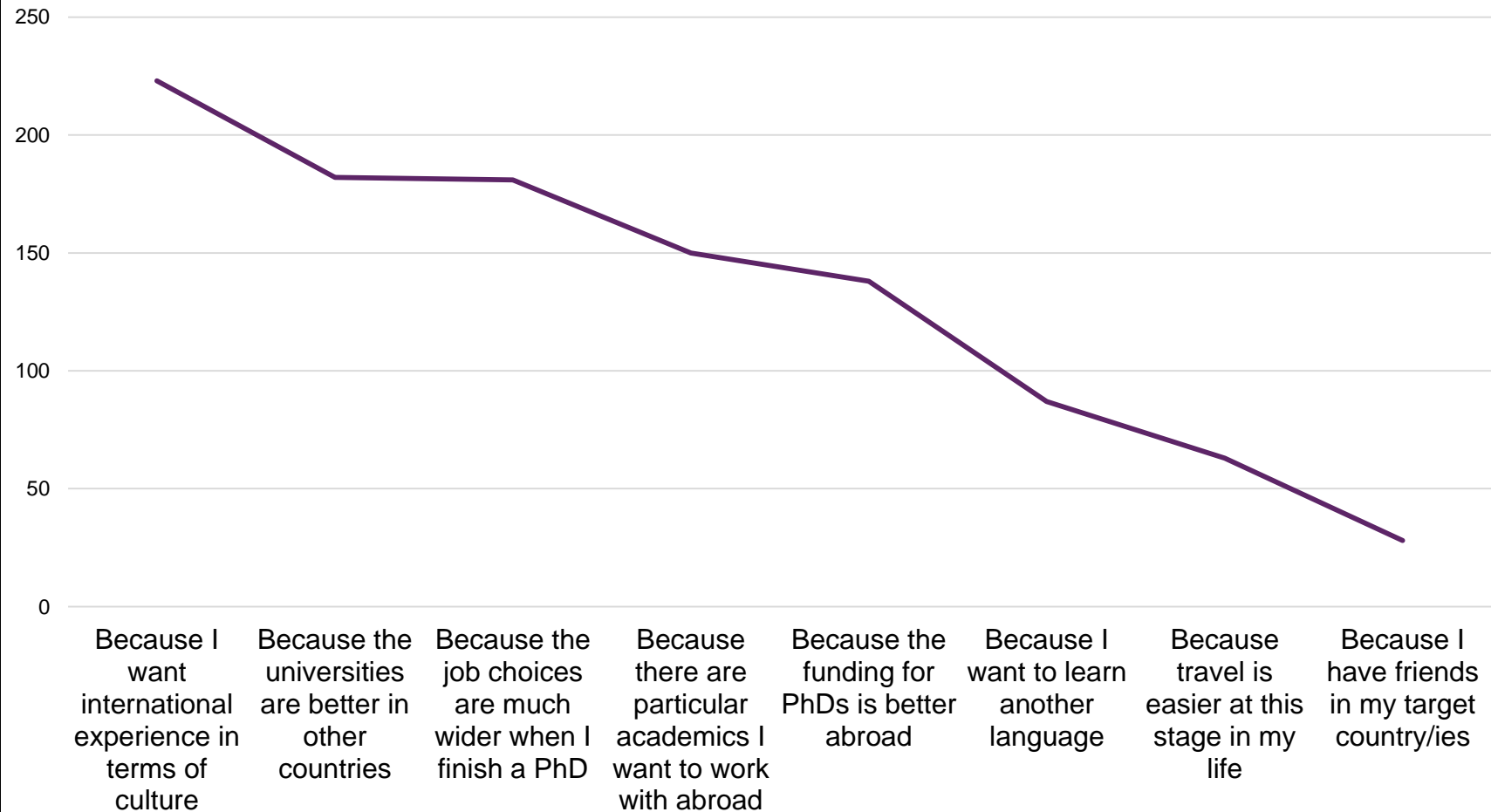
■ Yes ■ No

Source of Funding	Number of Students
Government	123
University	110
Research Council	36
Other	18
Employer	16
Charity	4

Information Sources



Why study a PhD Internationally?



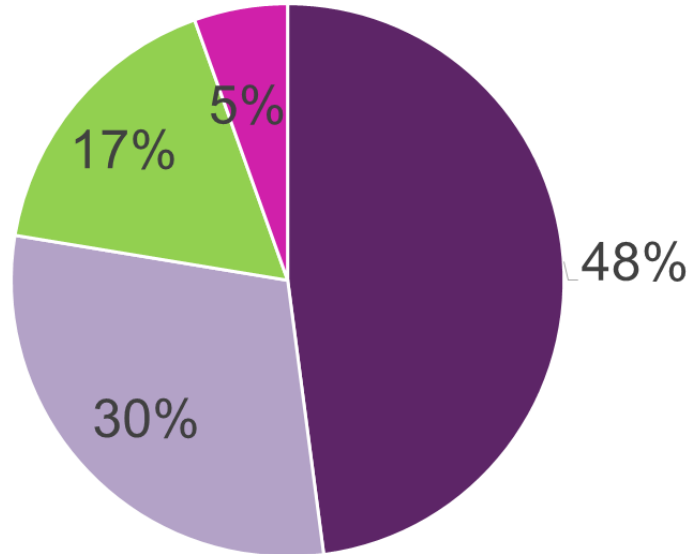
Which three countries do you perceive to be particularly supportive for international PhDs?

Country	Number of Students
USA	226
UK	221
Germany	118
Canada	65
Australia	63
Sweden	57
Denmark	56
Norway	49
Netherlands	46
Switzerland	36

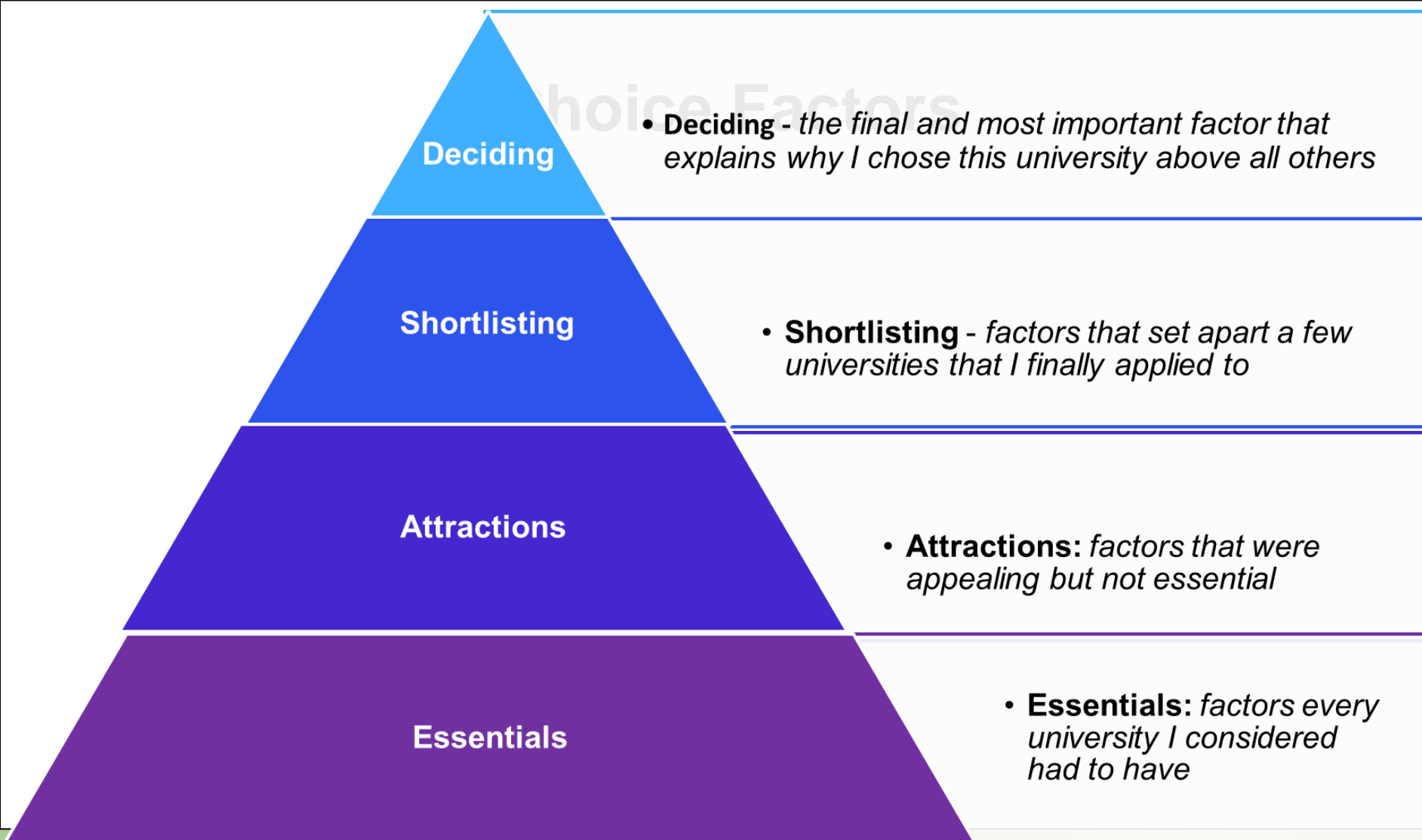
Any countries you would not consider studying?



Country or University?



- It was a mixture of both at the same time
- I considered the countries then looked for the universities in them
- I chose the universities irrespective of countries
- Other



Essential – *factors that every university had to have*

Essential

1. Quality supervisor
2. Quality university
3. Taught in English
4. Good academic facilities
5. Available funding/scholarships

All Students

Essential

1. Quality supervisor
2. A safe environment
3. Available funding/scholarships
4. Taught in English
5. Good academic facilities

**Students studying in
Japan**

Attraction – factors that were appealing but not essential

Attraction	Attraction
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Attractive location/city2. Attractive country3. Impressive student experience4. Ability to work in that country before or after PhD5. Low cost of living	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Impressive student experience2. Low cost of living3. Good graduate training opportunities4. Ability to work in that country during or after PhD5. Attractive location/city
All Students	Students Studying in Japan

Shortlisting – *factors that set apart a few universities that I finally applied to*

Shortlisting	Shortlisting
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Low cost of living2. Attractive country3. Attractive location/city4. Impressive student experience5. Evidence of integrative and collaborative research	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Reputation of university2. Good graduate training opportunities3. Evidence of integrative and collaborative research4. Available funding/scholarships5. Quality supervisor
All Students	Students Studying in Japan

Deciding – the final and most important factor that explains why I chose this

Deciding

1. Quality supervisor
2. Available funding/scholarship
3. Quality department
4. Quality university
5. Reputation of university

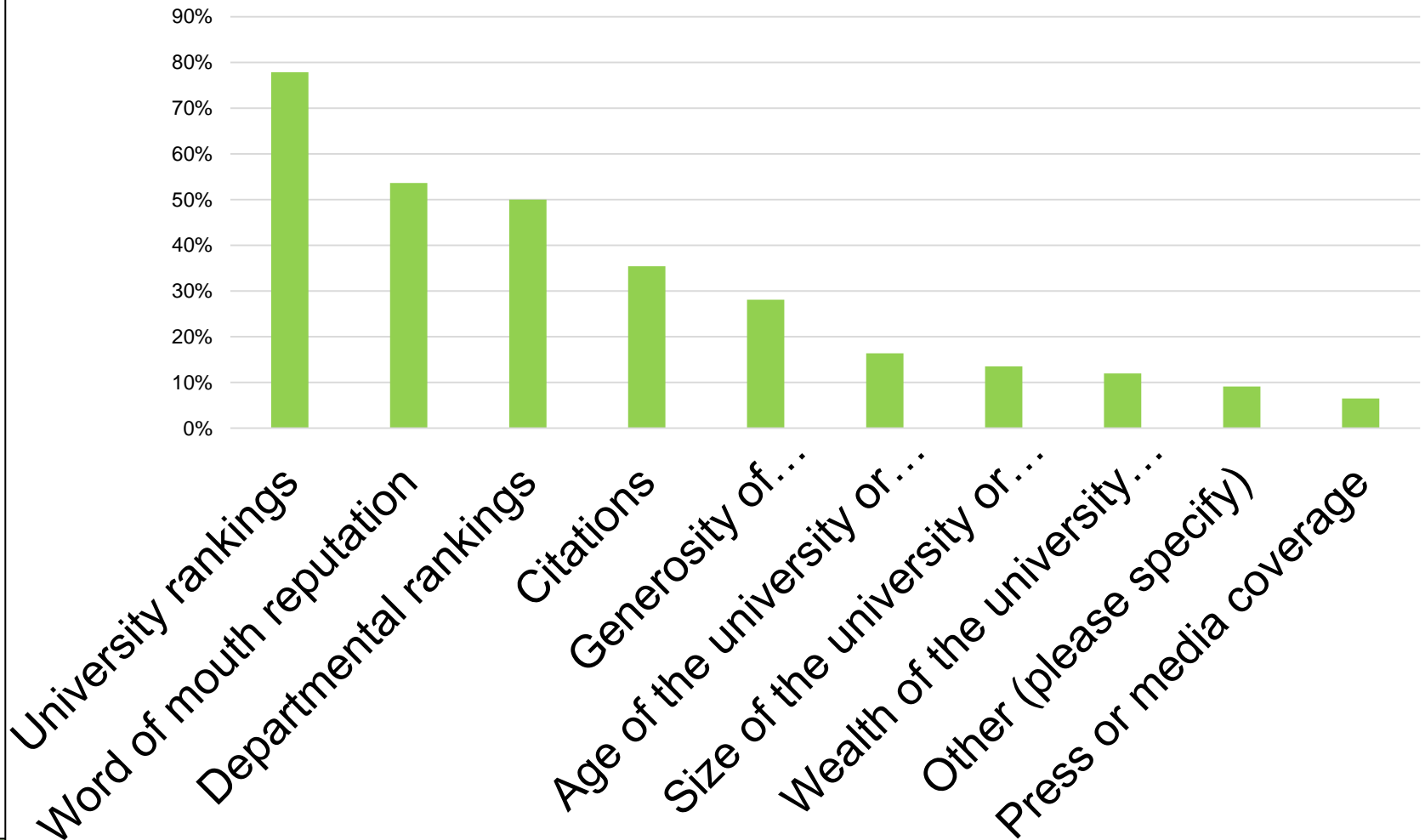
All Students

Deciding

1. Length of PhD
2. Low cost of living
3. Low cost of PhD
4. Good academic facilities
5. A safe environment

**Students Studying in
Japan**

Determining the Quality of a university



Aspects beyond the Academic Offer	Number of Students
Graduate training	129
Graduate school	104
Language training	104
Support with finding housing	95
International alumni network	93
Graduate internships	89
Study abroad at a twinned PhD university	83
Orientation programme	58
Other (please specify)	26
Offices in their home country	19

Students concerned with graduate training opportunities – especially those who aren't staying in academia.

University	Perceived Relative Rank (W100 Student Survey)	Average Ranking (TKP Ranking of Rankings)
MIT	2	1
Oxford	1	2
ETH Zurich	3	3
Tokyo	5	4
Toronto	4	5
Hong Kong	10	6
Melbourne	6	7
Ecole Polytechnique	9	8
Technische Universitat Munchen	7	9
Leiden	11	10
Copenhagen	8	11
Pohang University of Science and Technology	12	12

Perceived Relative Rank was calculated using a mean of all ranks assigned to that university.

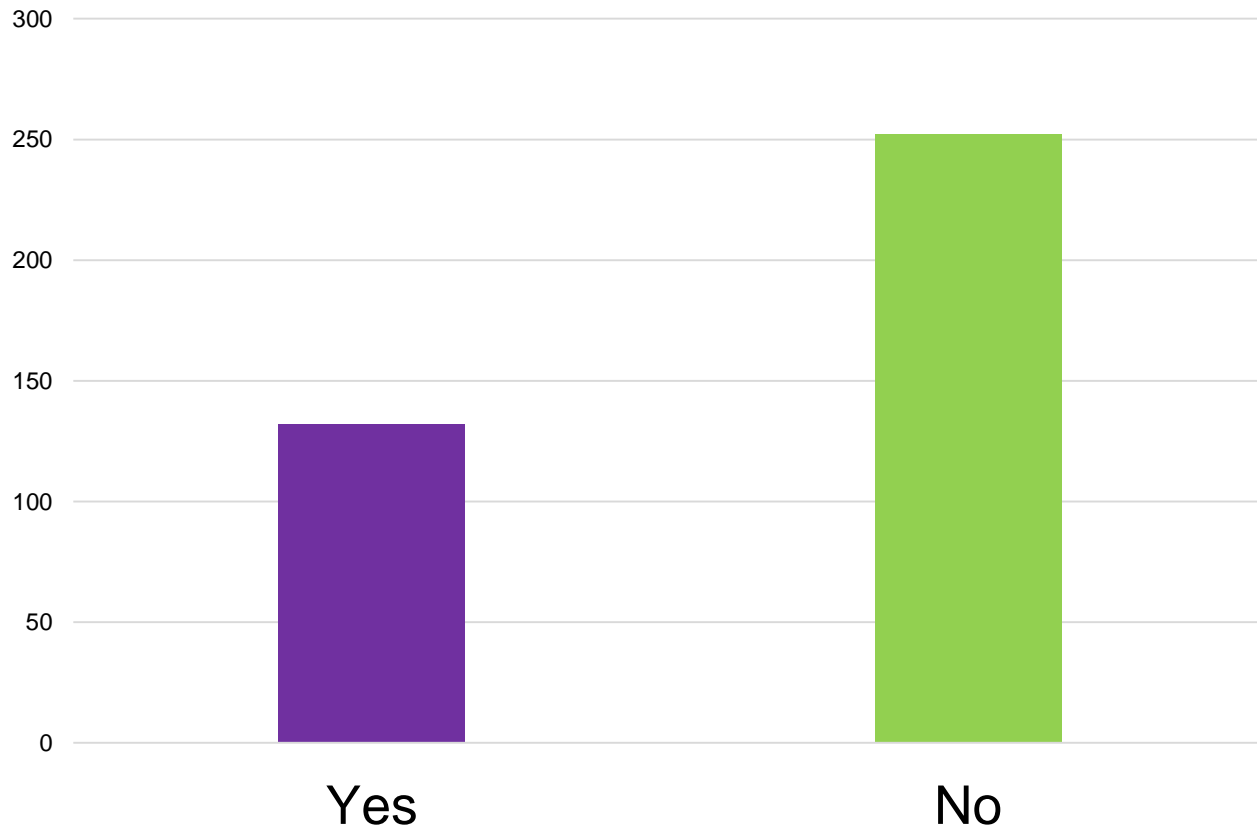
All Students

University	Perceived Relative Rank (All Students)	Perceived Relative Rank (Students studyin in Japan)
Oxford	1	2
MIT	2	1
ETH Zurich	3	6
Toronto	4	5
Tokyo	5	3
Melbourne	6	4
Technische Universitat Munchen	7	11
Copenhagen	8	10
Ecole Polytechnique	9	12
Hong Kong	10	8
Leiden	11	7
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All three Asian universities were ranked more favourably by students studying in Japan – Increased awareness of brand and reputation?

All Students vs Students studying in Japan

Does your current university
have a brand?



If yes, how would you describe the brand?



How does your current university project its brand?



Words used to describe
current university (Top 10) -
All Students

Academic
International
Quality
Friendly
Research-led
Collaborative
World-class
PhD
Excellent
Safe

Words used to describe
current university (Top 10) -
Students studying in Japan

Academic
Quality
Research-led
Creative
PhD
Challenging
Competitive
Dedicated
Friendly
Global

The Qualitative Interviews



PhdhighlightsTokyo.wlmp

- Anonymous depth interviews, one hour
- 4 key exercises on choice factors, information sources, countries, rankings
- Only international PhD students
- Gender and country mix

General Qualitative Feedback

- Importance of scholarships
- Rankings valuable = proxy for reputation
- Supervisor, university, language, department = important
- Language preferences: English
- Passionate scholar or ambitious careerist
- Sense of place and student experience has some value

Positive Feedback: Japan

- Speedy responses to enquiries
- Awareness of excellence, and quality education
- Experience of living in Japan, adventure
- Availability government scholarships – freedom to choose (6 months) with confidence of funding
- Safety/ability to travel around
- Good language provision/support

Less positive feedback in Japan —

- Lack of student support (tax, insurance, living)
- High cost of living and distance from university
- Lack of student social life (for some)
- Competitive/shy Japanese (work culture!)
- Difficulty with learning language
- No dedicated student dormitories
- No Graduate Centre/School
- Food is not to everyone's taste

University of Tokyo

- Highly ranked - students guessed 20 in world, 2 in civil engineering
- Beautiful campus - impressive
- Very prestigious as a brand
- Nuclear, engineering, chemistry – strong
- Tokyo as a city – hard work for some
- Plus campus signage erratic
- Diverse students; staff less international

Emerging general conclusions

- Quality and rankings critical
- But country and sense of place important
- Student integration and student life – needs more university effort
- Training important for some
- Brand stories need work

Recommendations for Japan

- All-campus signage
- Create English-speaking hubs (cafes/Graduate Centres)
- Work the sense of country
- Create a stronger institutional brand (ie more than just well ranked)
- Orientation and dormitories - important

- Manga, contemporary, comics
- Legend and mystique
- Efficient and safe
- European and Japanese (?Modern Asian)
- Innovation and technology
- Literature and art
- Beauty and elegance
- Connected and well organized




Survey at www.theworld100.com



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2014 Japan and Korea

Global Education Dialogue (co-hosted by the British Council and the World 100) Tokyo Higher Education Reputation Conference, 6-7 March 2014, including the launch of THE World Reputation Rankings. Spring study tour: 8-11 March 2014, to visit South Korea's leading universities:...

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