

# To PG or not to PG?

A data-driven soliloquy on postgraduate audiences  
for 2025

**...in four acts**

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# Dramatis personae

## Pulse

*Being such a survey as nowhere else is seen,  
for 'tis perpetual in its tracking of those that  
pondereth PG.*

*It hath greater than three summers now of  
questions, yes and other seasons too; and  
500 score monthly answers from which to tell  
its truths.*

*And with such knowledge well can we say, if  
our timely insight matches yesterday.*

## Share of Search

*Unshaken by vicissitudes of traffic, or of  
listings, this metric doth reveal what  
millions a month are seeking.*

*It takes account of actions as they take  
place on site, to account for real intentions  
and account for these a'right.*

*In seeking to explain, 'tis best likened to a  
pie: of which the slices change in relation to  
their size.*



*FindAUniversity's Monthly Pulse reports track how  
postgraduate audiences are feeling, what they're  
thinking about and what they're planning to do next.  
<https://info.findauniversity.com/insights>*

# Our programme...

- **Act 1** – In which we recount the plot of recent PG recruitment...
- **Act 2** – In which we ponder the slings and arrows of outrageous policy decisions...
- **Act 3** – In which we ask what it is that drives and opposes postgraduate study in the minds of prospective students...
- **Act 4** – In which we humbly offer some hopefully actionable insight and an invitation to discuss more...



# Act 1

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**In fair HESA where we set our  
scene...**

***In which we recount the plot of  
recent PG recruitment...***



“What’s past is prologue.”

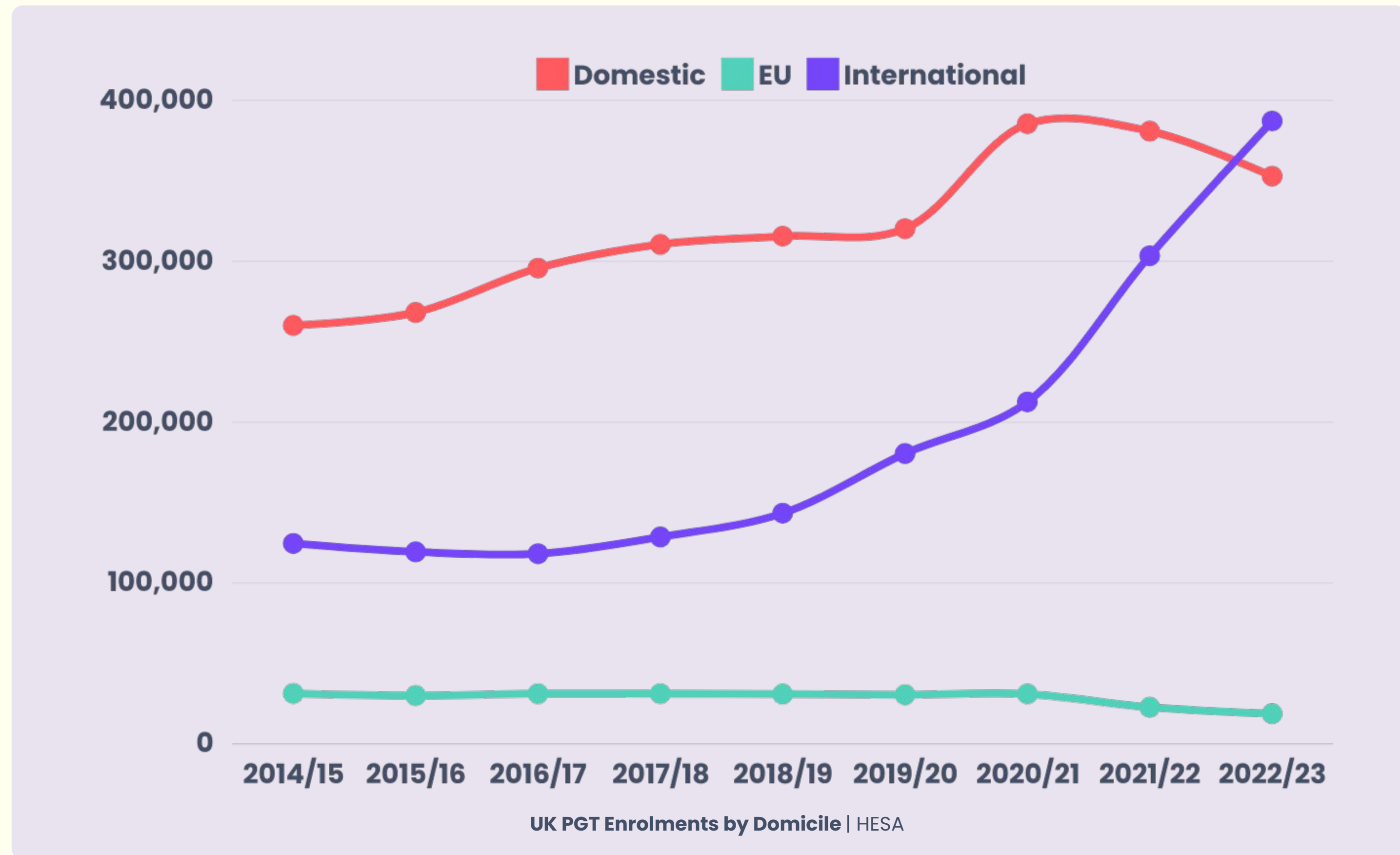
- *The Tempest*

The **pandemic** boosted **Domestic** and **International** enrolments in **20/21**.

The opening of the **Graduate Route** further spurred **International** from **21/22**.

**Brexit** eventually impacted **EU** recruitment in **21/22**.

## How have PGT enrolments grown in recent years?

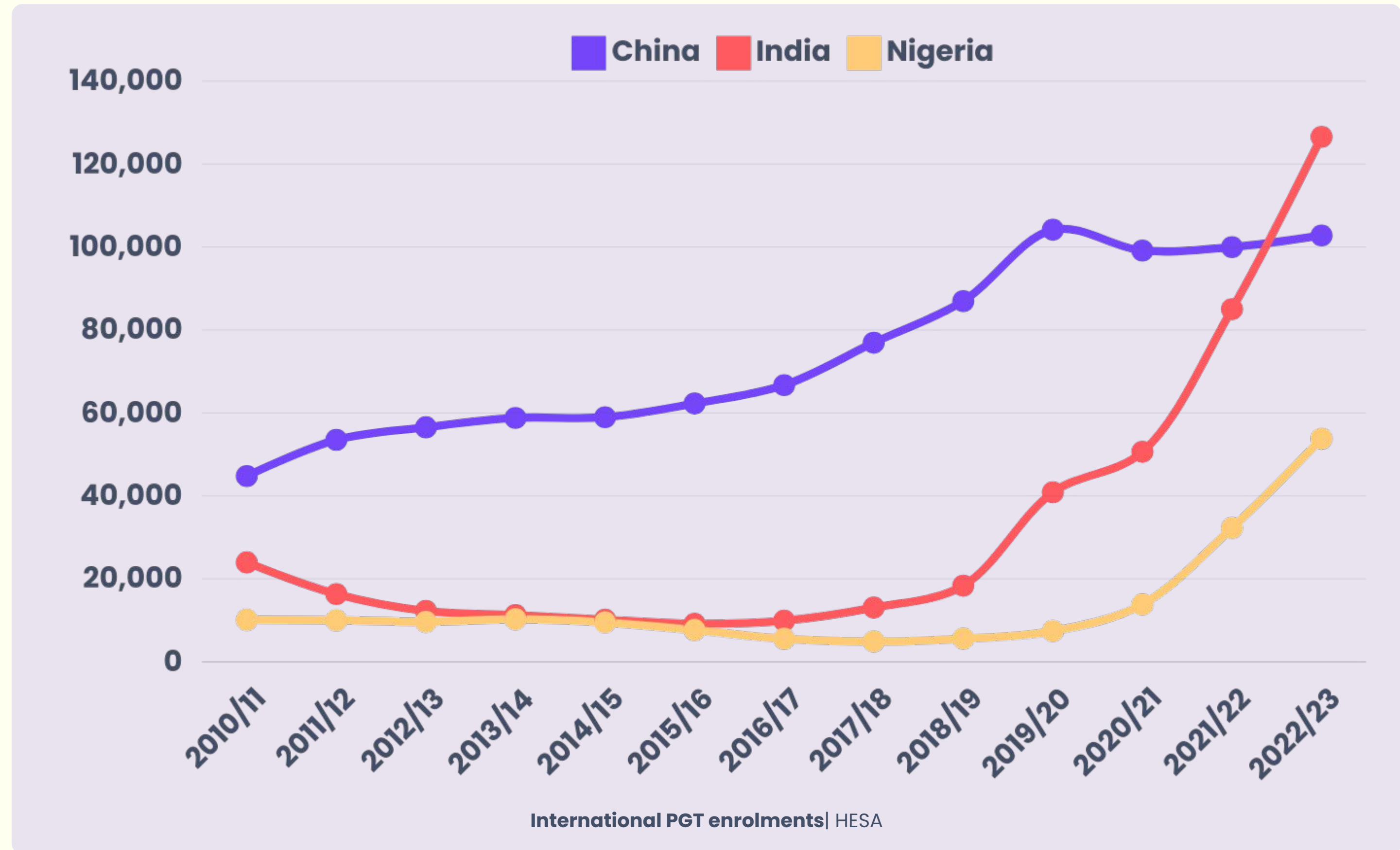


The Graduate Route announcement increased **Chinese** enrolments by 21%.

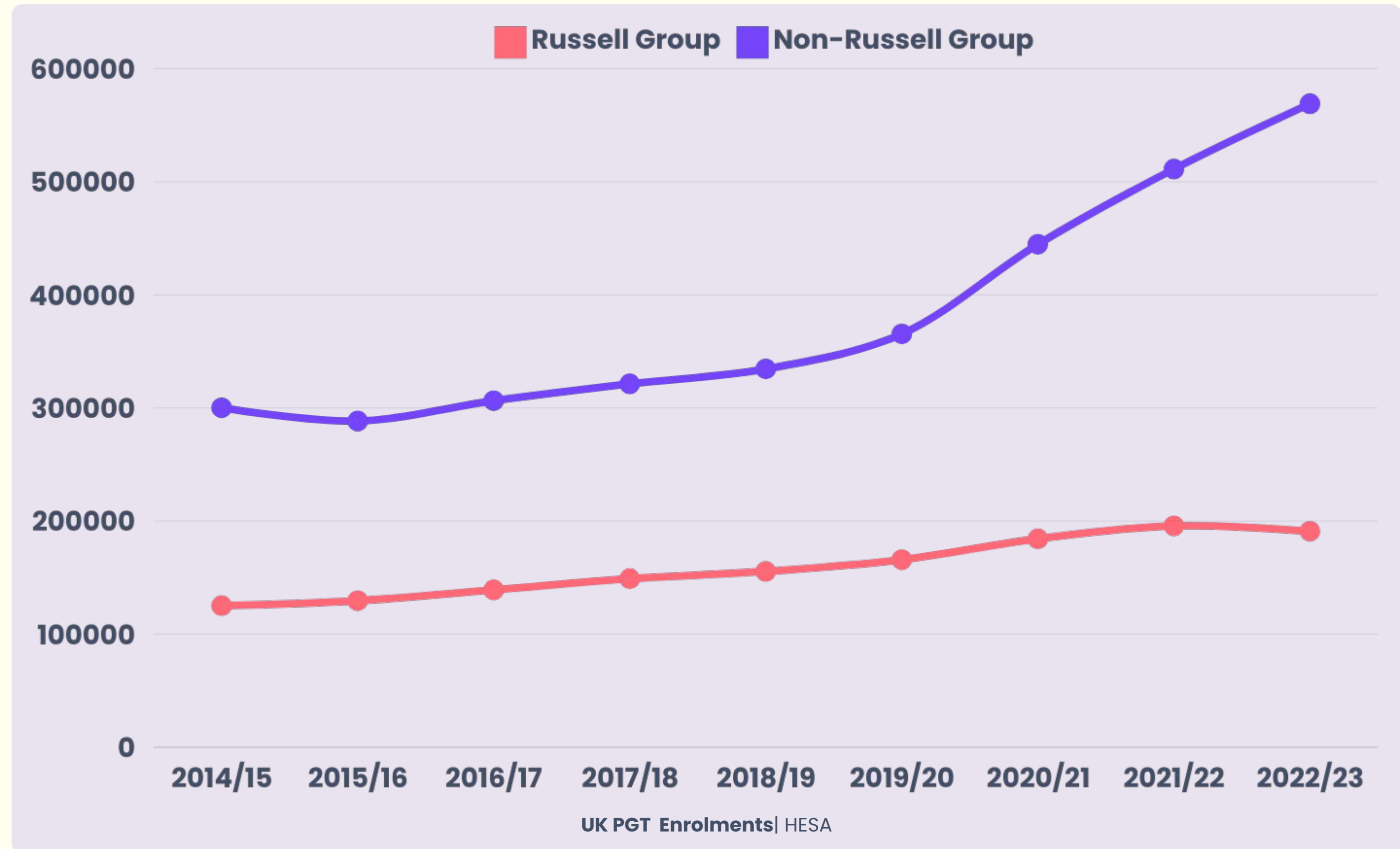
**Indian** enrolments doubled at launch.

...and **Nigerian** enrolments (almost) doubled every year.

## What's been behind the shift in international audiences?



## ...and what had that meant for the sector?

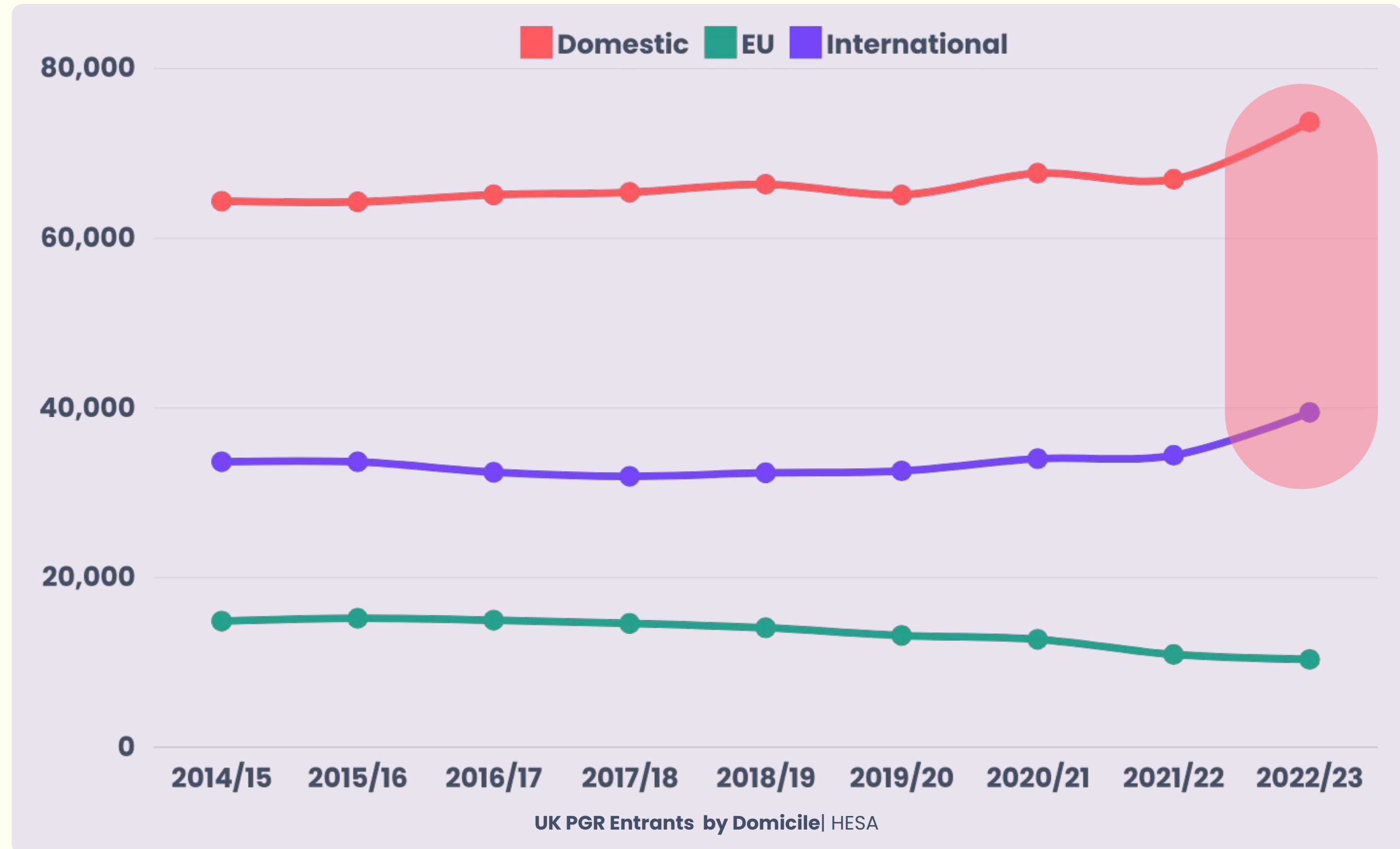


Enrolments grew across UK universities.

But institutions **outside the Russell Group** (finally) saw significant benefits from international PGT.



## And what of PGR?



Things have been fairly flat for **PGR**.

Domestic enrolments **fell** the year after the **PhD loan** was introduced - and changing **UKRI** eligibility didn't do much for **International** either.

The increases for **2022/23** are



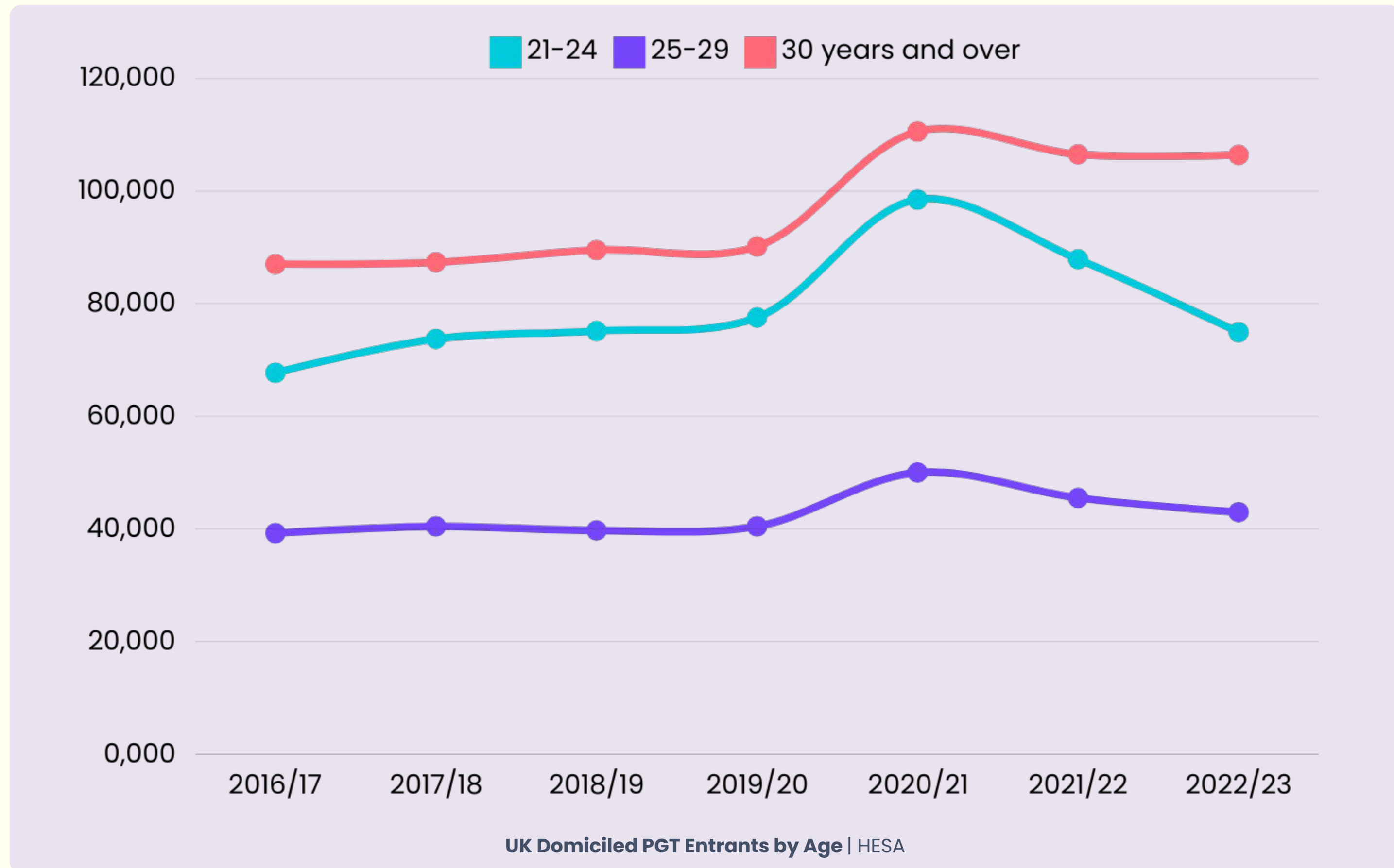
“This blessed plot, this earth,  
this realm, this England...”

• *Richard II*

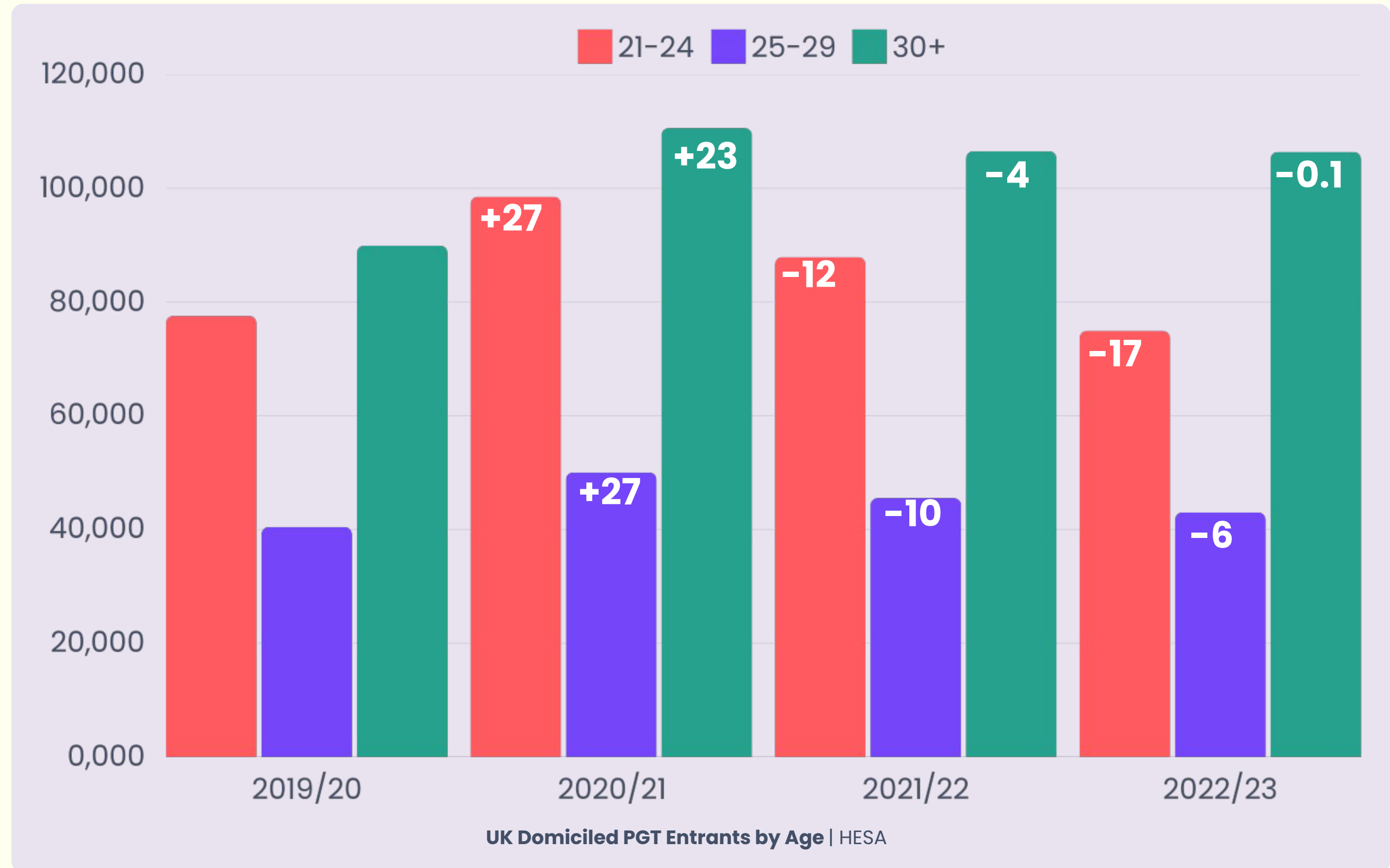
The pandemic saw a substantial – and sustained – **increase** in **domestic** PGT.

And the **shape** of this cohort changed along with its **size**...

## What about home students?



## What's beneath this trend?



**'Continuer'**  
enrolments  
(**21-24**) rise  
sharply but drop  
off fast.

**Early career**  
(**25-29**)  
enrolments also  
rise sharply, but  
drop off slightly.

**Older (30+)**  
enrolments rise  
fastest and barely  
fall.



## Act 2

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### To PG or not to PG?

*In which we ponder the slings and arrows of outrageous policy decisions...*



“Blow, winds, and crack your  
cheeks! Rage, blow!  
You cataracts and  
hurricanes”  
• *King Lear*

# What was 2024 like for international students?

Jan 24

Feb 24

Mar 24

Apr 24

May 24

Jun 24

Jul 24

Aug 24

Sep 24

Oct 24

Jan 25



Dependent  
ban

Visa fee  
increase

Work visa  
changes

Graduate  
visa review

Election

Proof of funds  
increase

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Can I afford  
it?



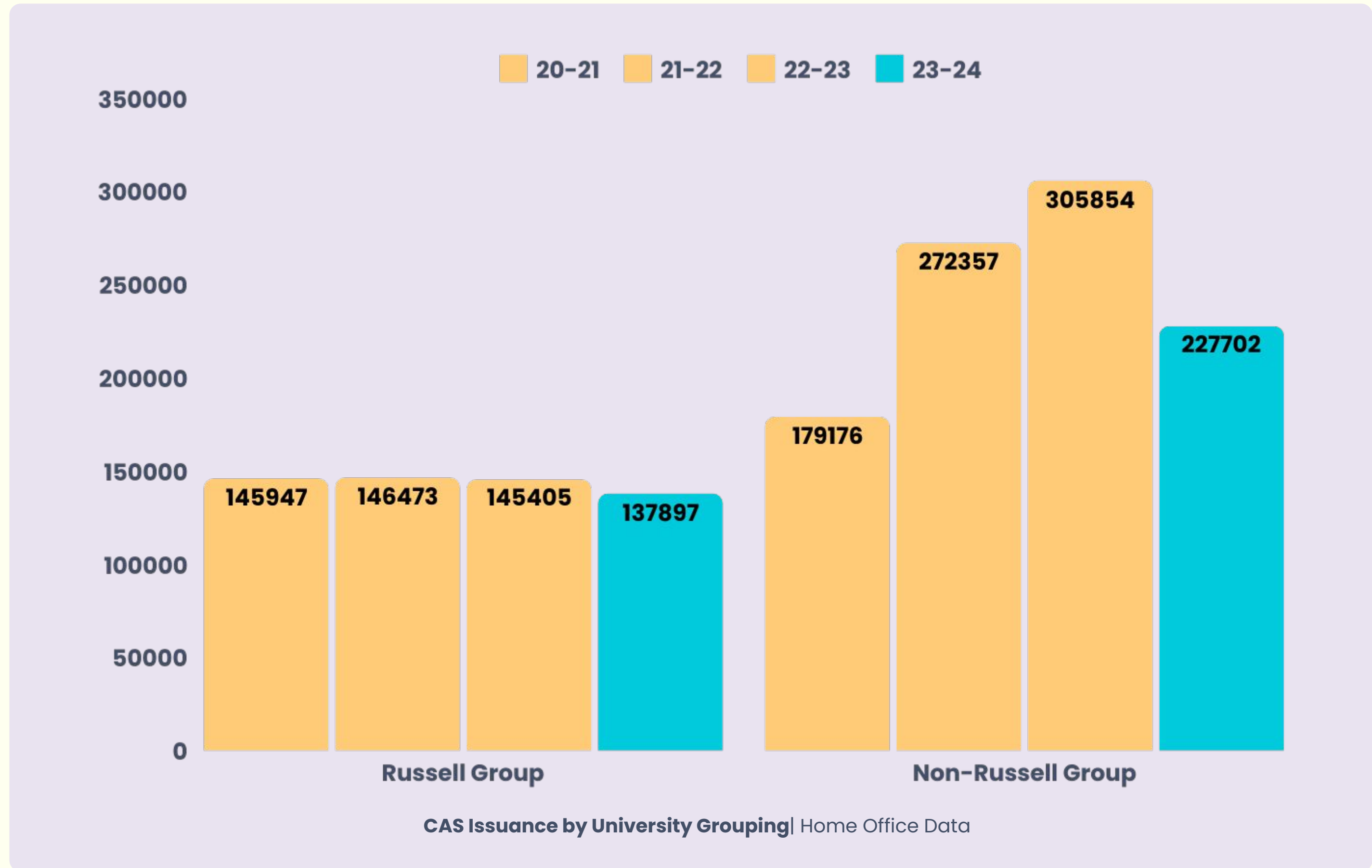
Is it worth  
it?



Is all of this going  
to change again?



## And what was that like for universities?



The pain of international recruitment was as unevenly distributed as the gains.

**Russell Group** members issued **5%** fewer CAS.

**Non-Russell Group** universities issued **26%** fewer.



“What light from yonder  
window breaks?”

- *Romeo and Juliet*

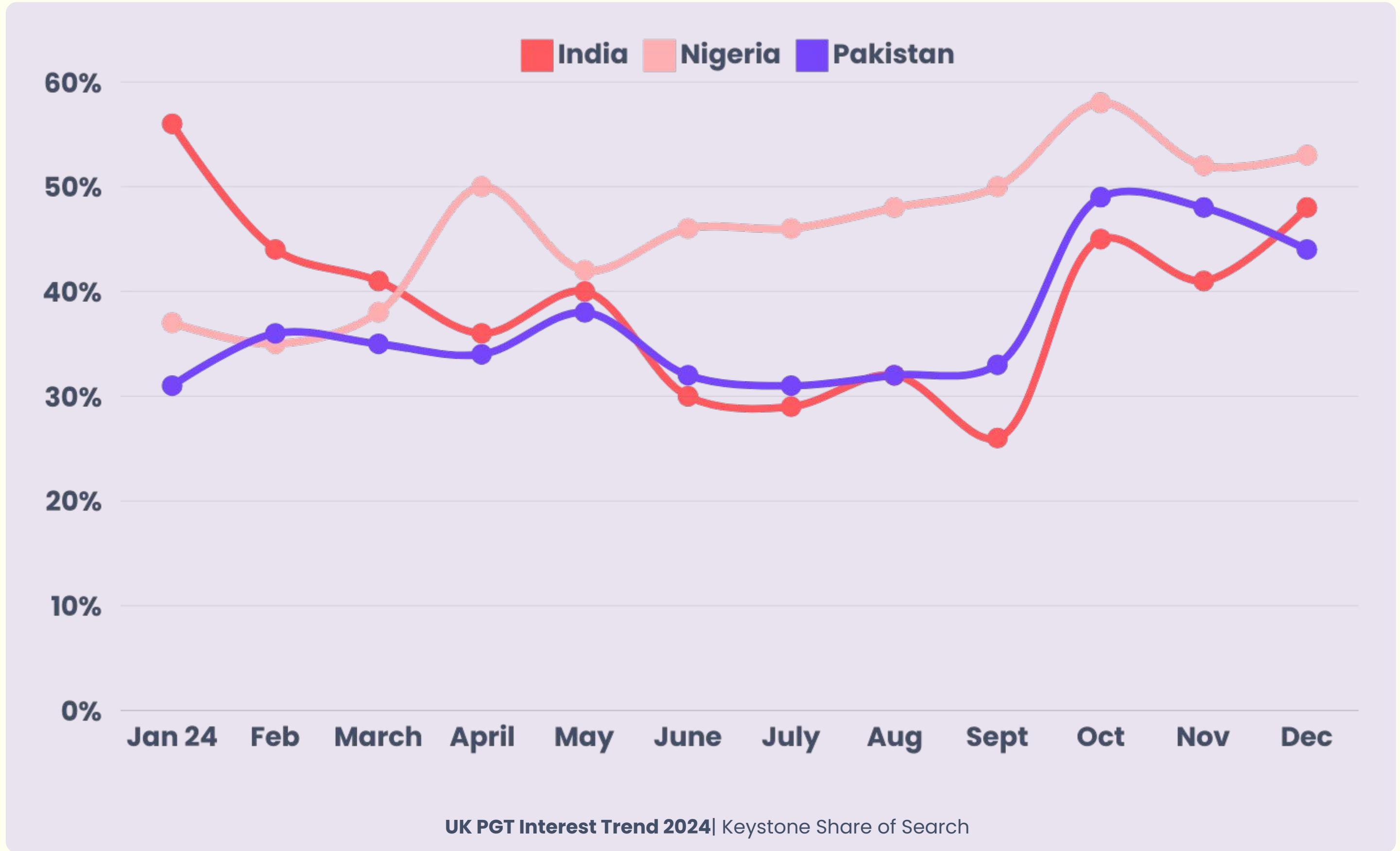
# International

interest in the UK fell during the first half of 2024.

Key audiences have recovered since the election (although things are still slightly volatile).

There is a wider context for this...

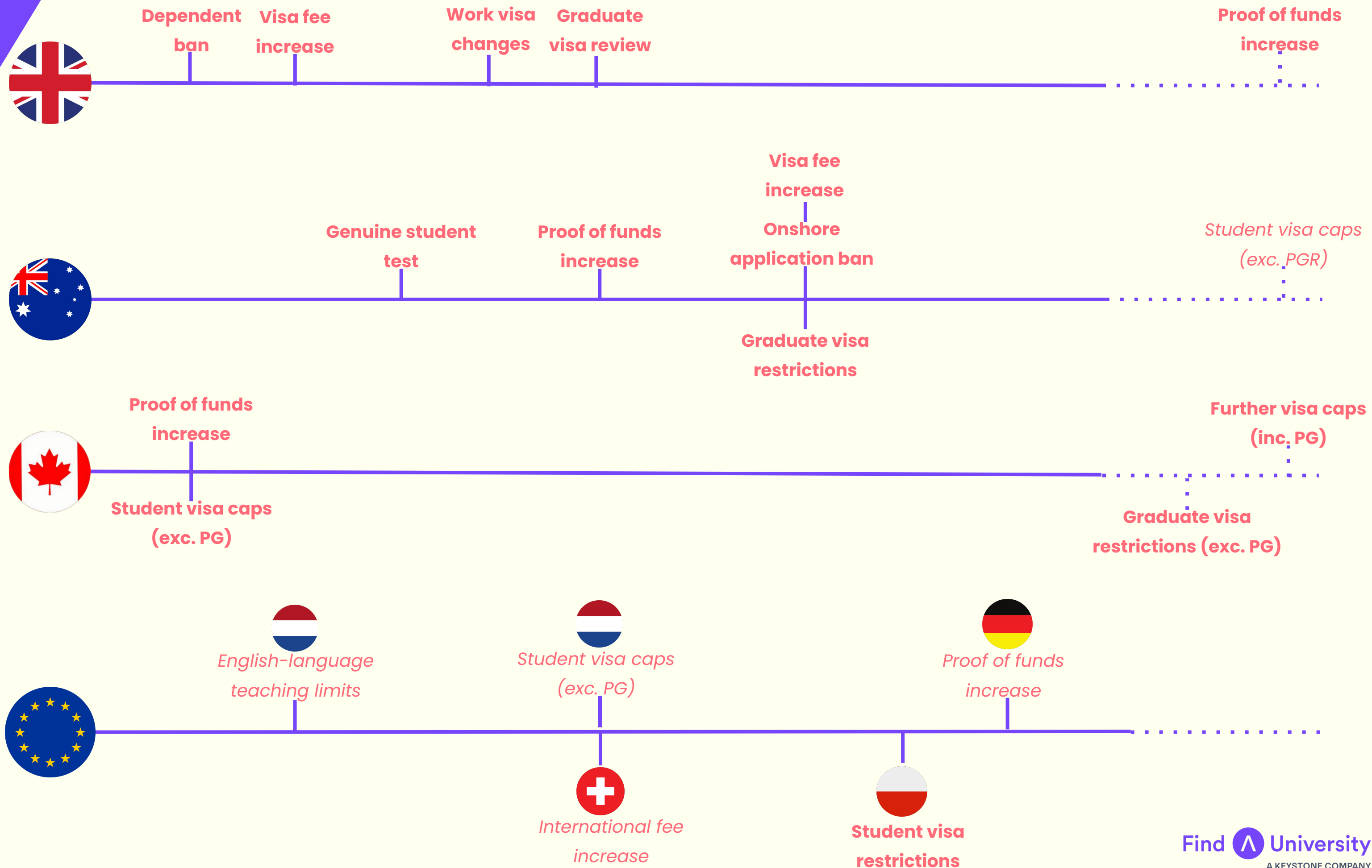
## Are audiences turning back towards the UK?



UK PGT Interest Trend 2024 | Keystone Share of Search

And the UK isn't the only country making big policy changes...

Jan 24 Feb 24 Mar 24 Apr 24 May 24 Jun 24 Jul 24 Aug 24 Sep 24 Oct 24 Jan 25

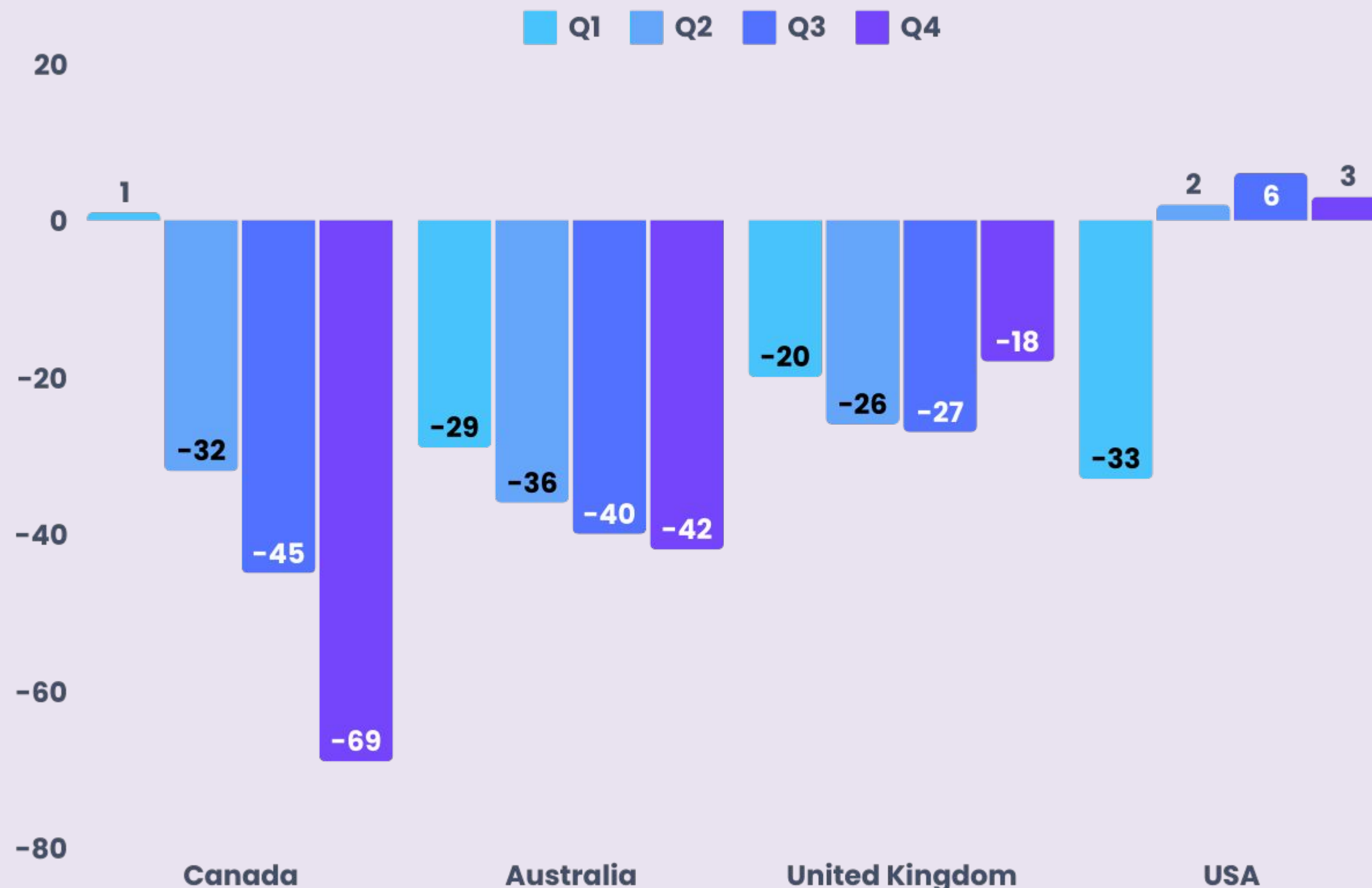


Search interest in **Canada** and **Australia** has dropped further and more consistently.

The **UK** is actually beginning to recover.

The **USA** is somewhat volatile.

## How does the UK compare to the rest of the 'big four'?



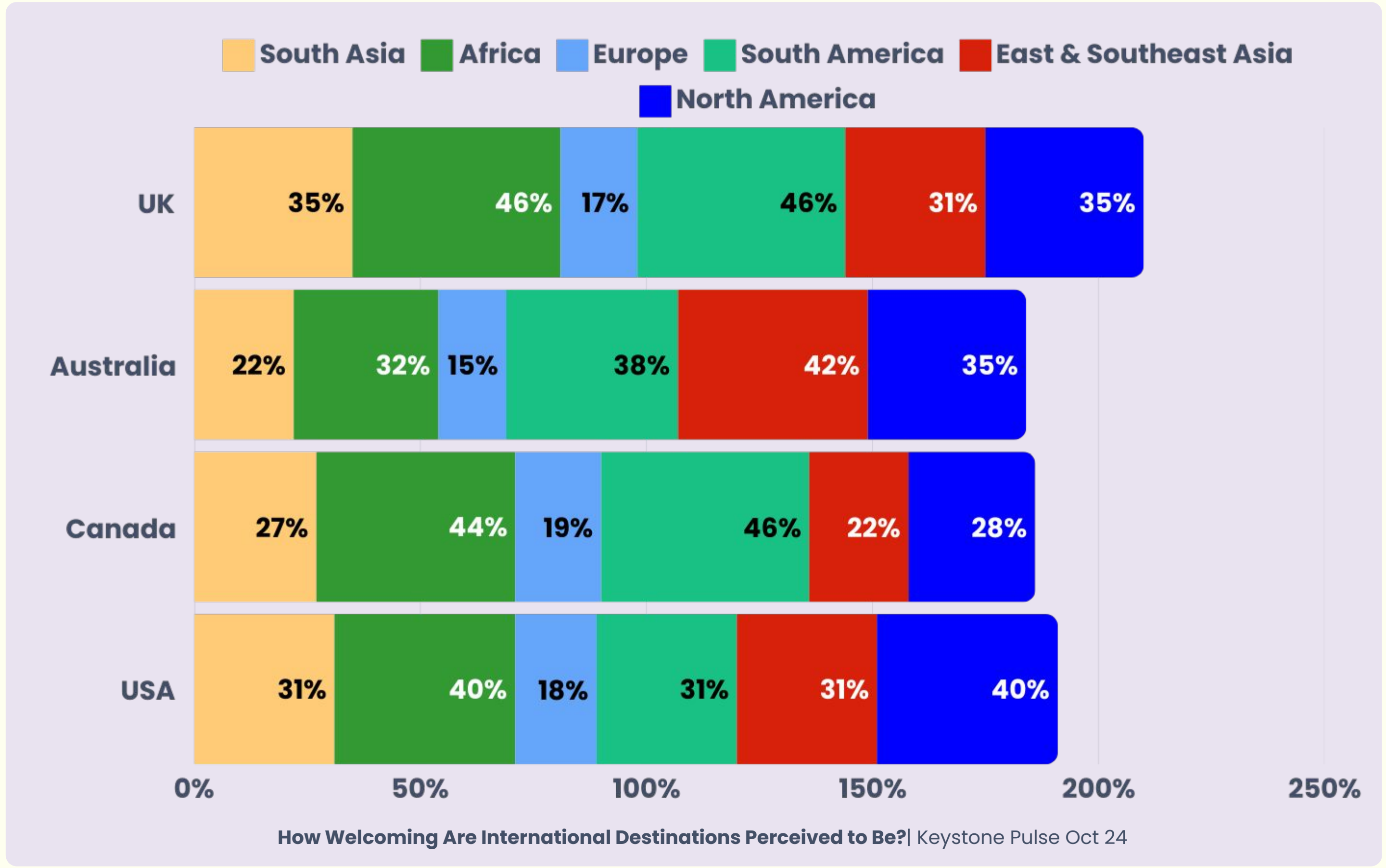
PGT international interest (non-Europe) Q3 2024 | Keystone Share of Search

Actual attitudes to study destinations broadly correlate with policy and rhetoric.

35% of South Asian PGT audiences and 46% of African feel the UK is 'very welcoming' to international students.

This compares to

### The UK is regarded as the most welcoming of the "big four"





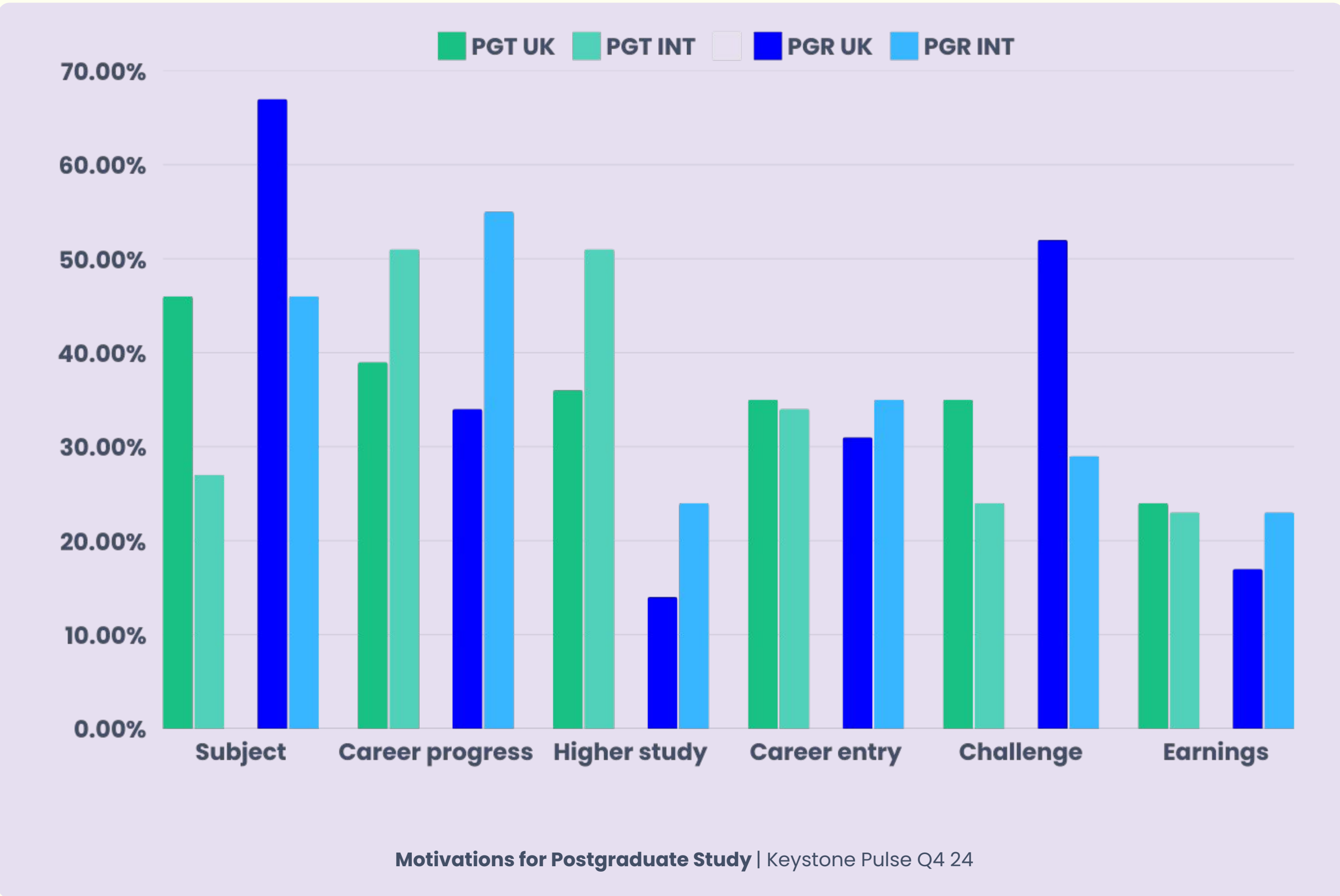
## Act 3

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# Wherefore art thou postgraduate?

*In which we ask what it is that  
drives and opposes postgraduate  
study in the minds of prospective  
students...*

# What drives people to consider PG?



Motivations for Postgraduate Study | Keystone Pulse Q4 24

UK audiences are significantly motivated by **Subject** and by **Challenge**.

International audiences are motivated by academic and professional **Progress**.

Motivations for study are rarely purely

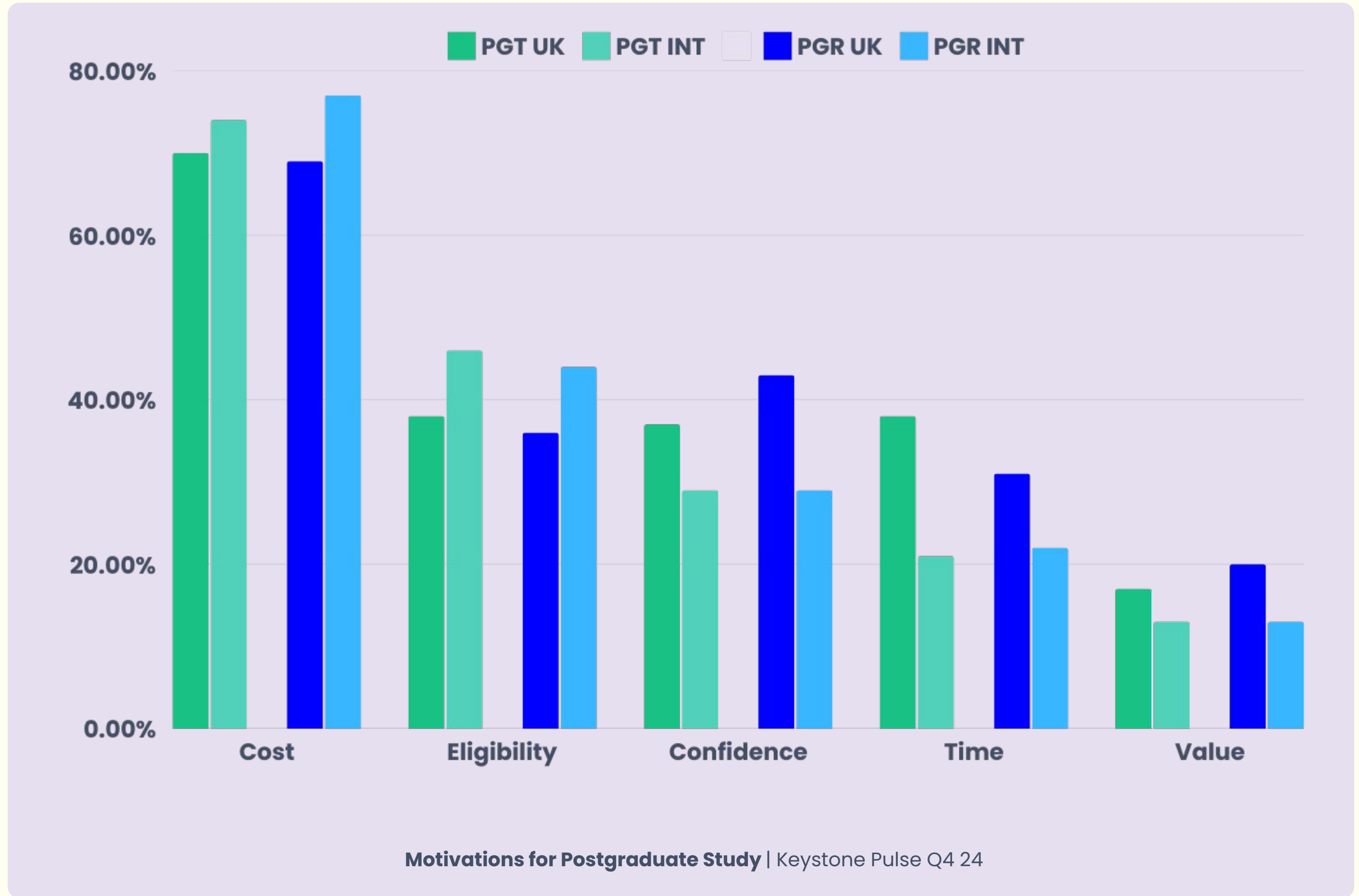


**Cost** is (always) the biggest concern.

**International** are more concerned about “possibility” (**Eligibility, Cost**).

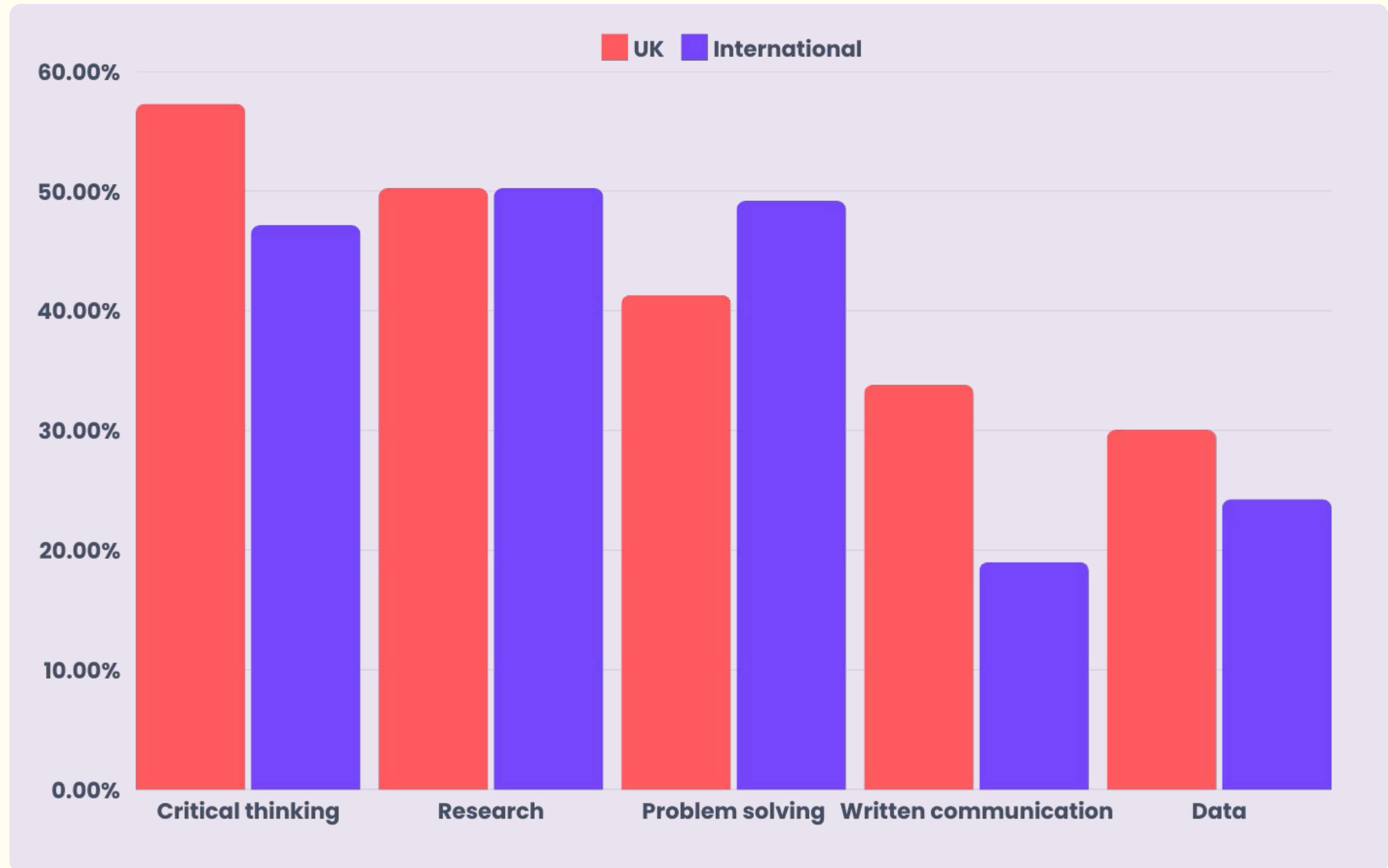
**Domestic** are more concerned about “practicality” (**Confidence, Time**).

## And what deters them?



Motivations for Postgraduate Study | Keystone Pulse Q4 24

## What do people actually want *out of* PG?



“Soft skills” like Critical thinking, and Problem solving are amongst the most popular for both PGT audiences.

Of course, this varies hugely by subject...

# What outcomes should we be articulating for different audiences?

Critical thinking

Problem solving

Teamwork

Research

Project Management

Time Management

Management

Written Communication

Visual Communication

Oral Presentation

Sales & Marketing

Data

Coding

Web Design

AI Prompt Engineering

80.00%

60.00%

40.00%

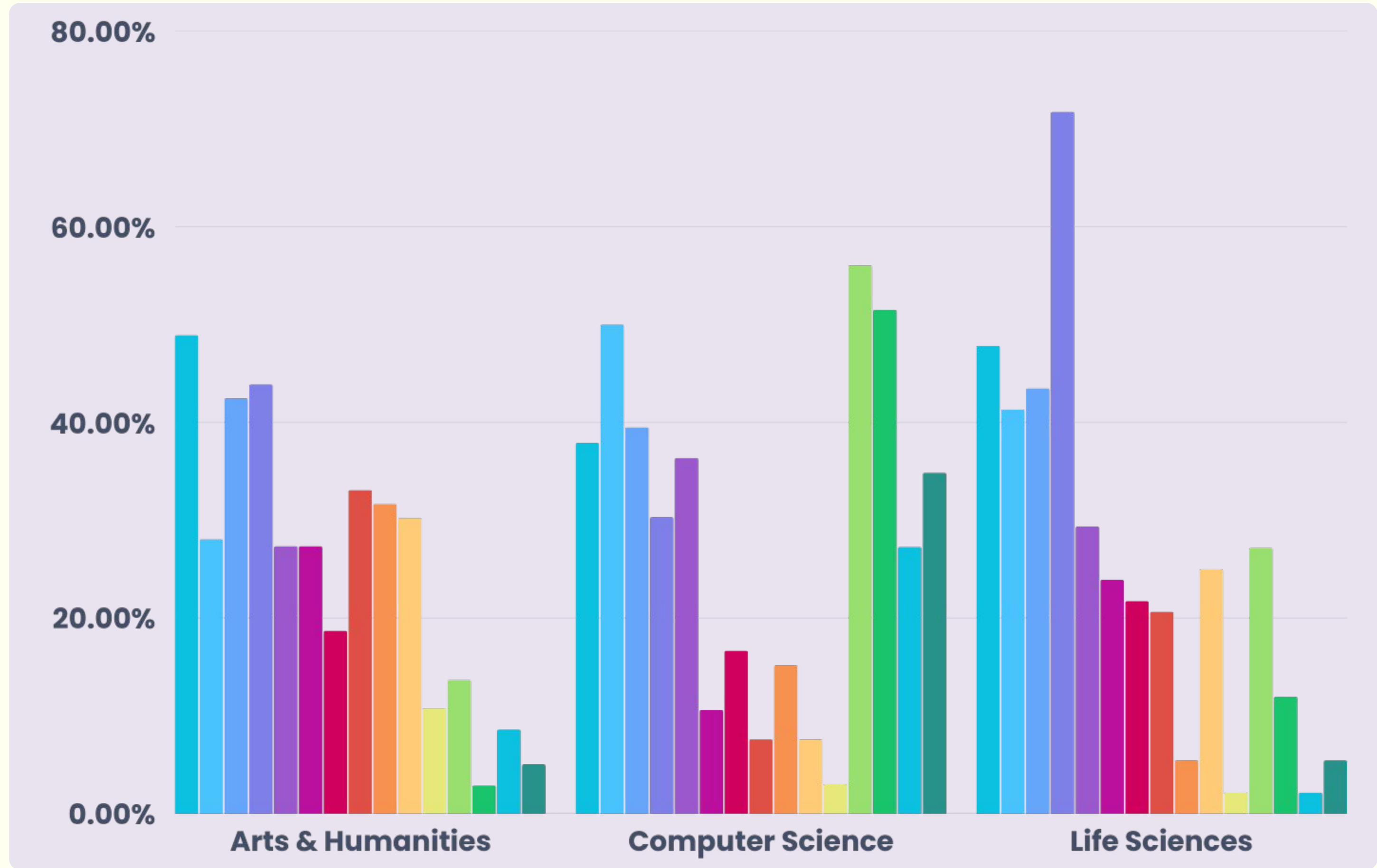
20.00%

0.00%

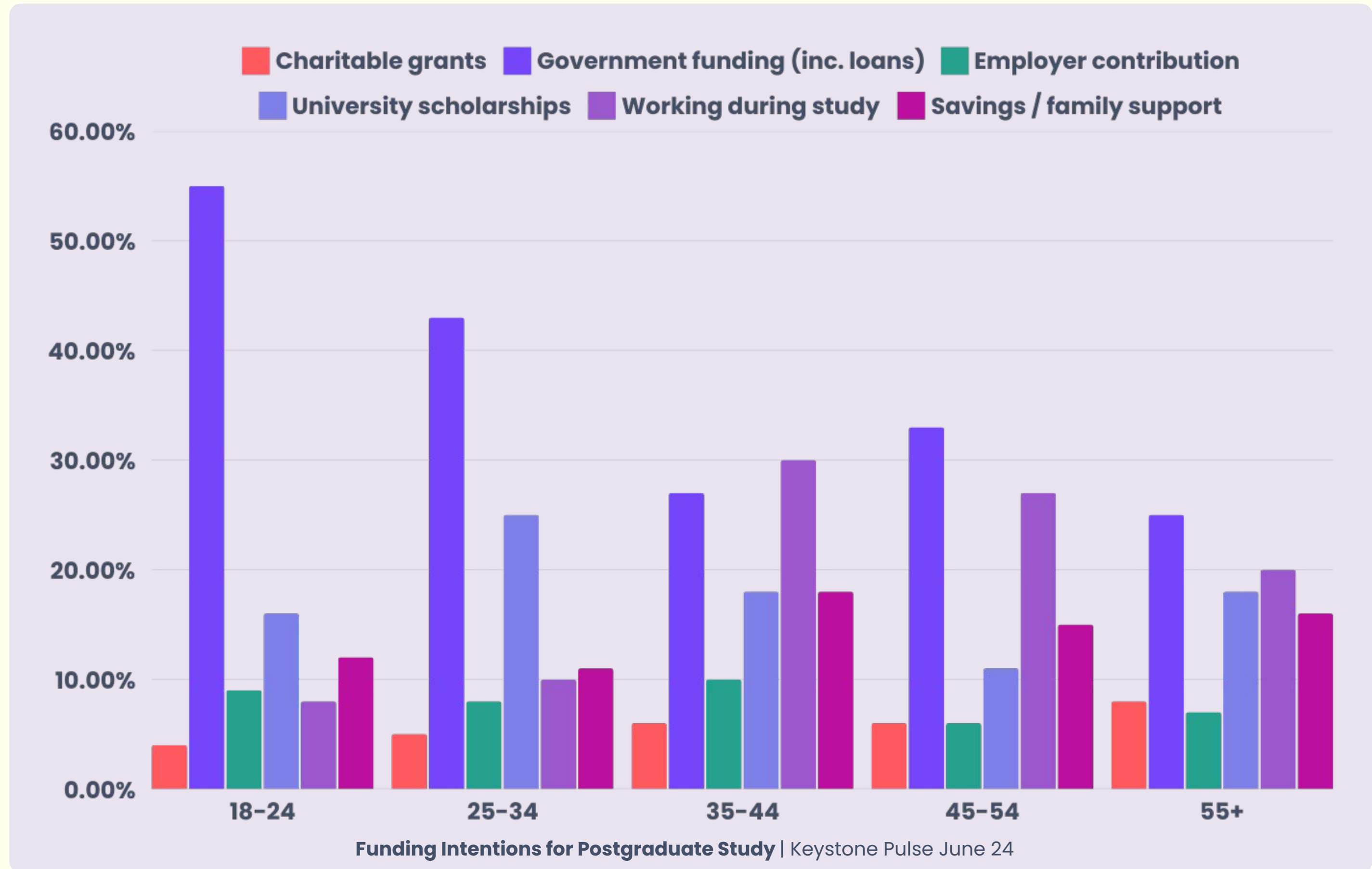
Arts & Humanities

Computer Science

Life Sciences



# How do different audiences actually intend to fund?



Yes. Loans are important.

But so are universities' own scholarships.

Particularly for the 'young returner' 25-34 bracket.



## Act 4

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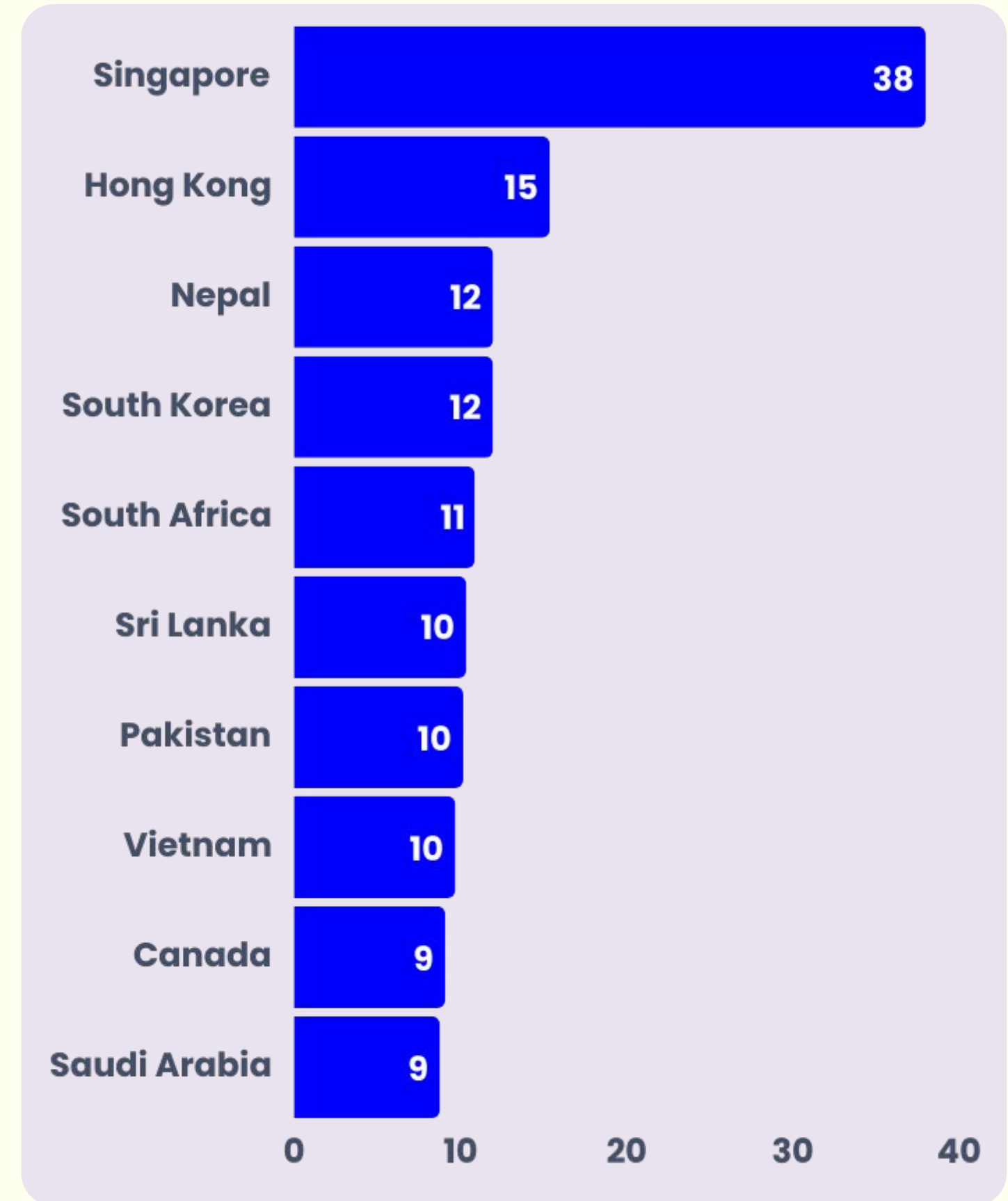
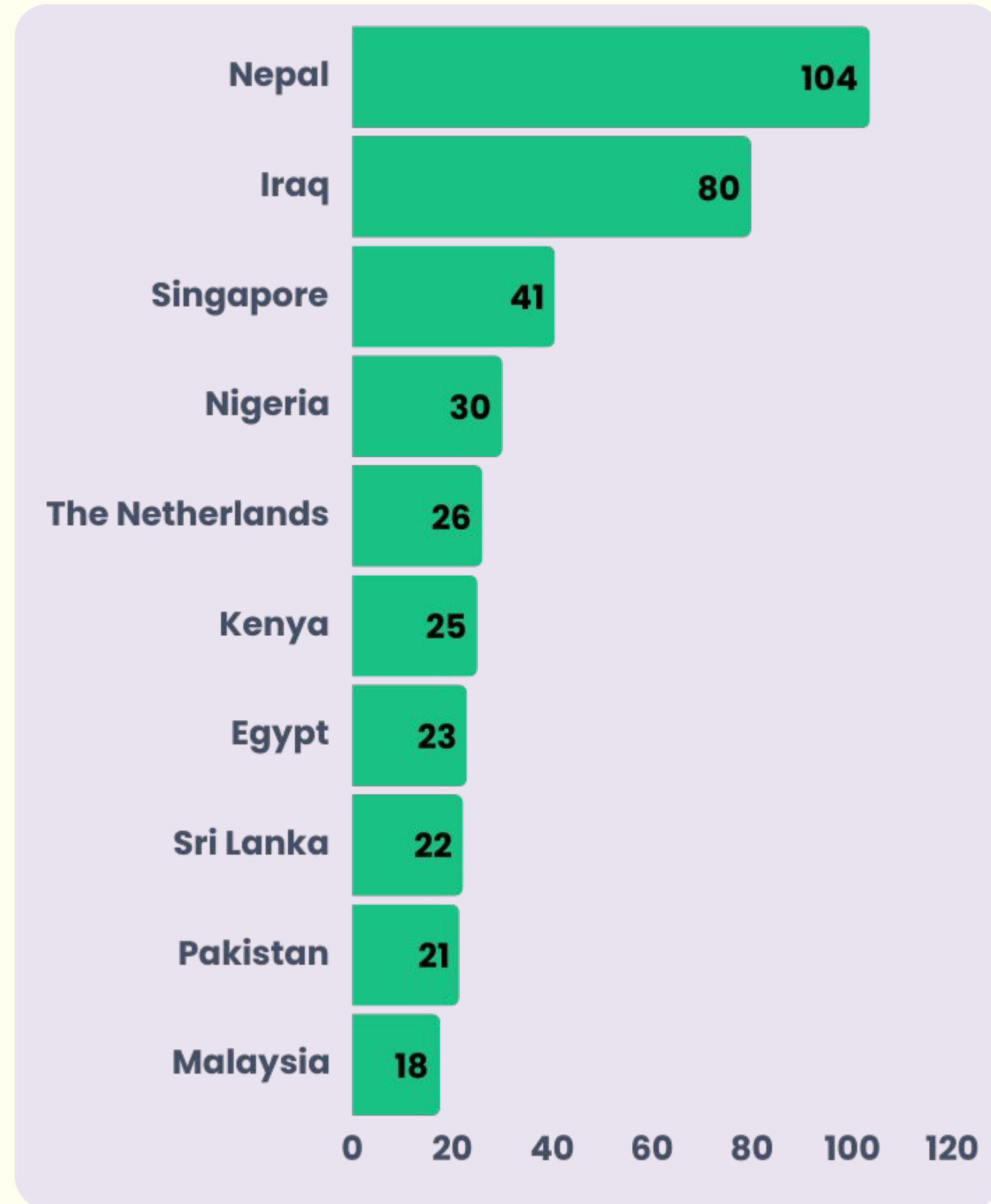
**Exit, pursued to a beer**

*In which we humbly offer some  
hopefully actionable insight and  
an invitation to discuss more...*

## Who are the fastest growing audiences for UK PG?

We're now seeing strong **PGT** growth from other countries in **South Asia** and **Africa**.

**PGR** growth is also coming from **East** and **Southeast Asia**.

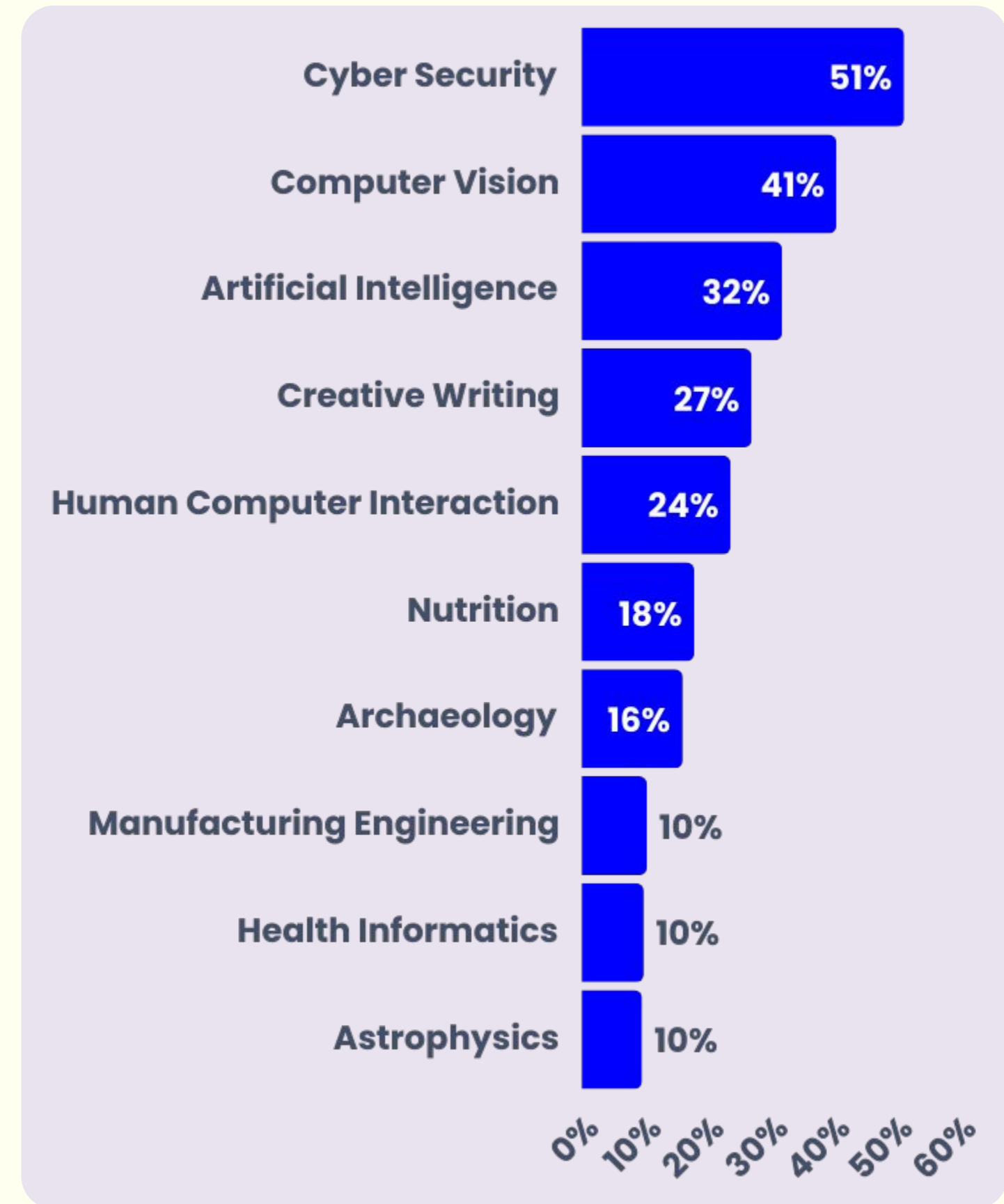
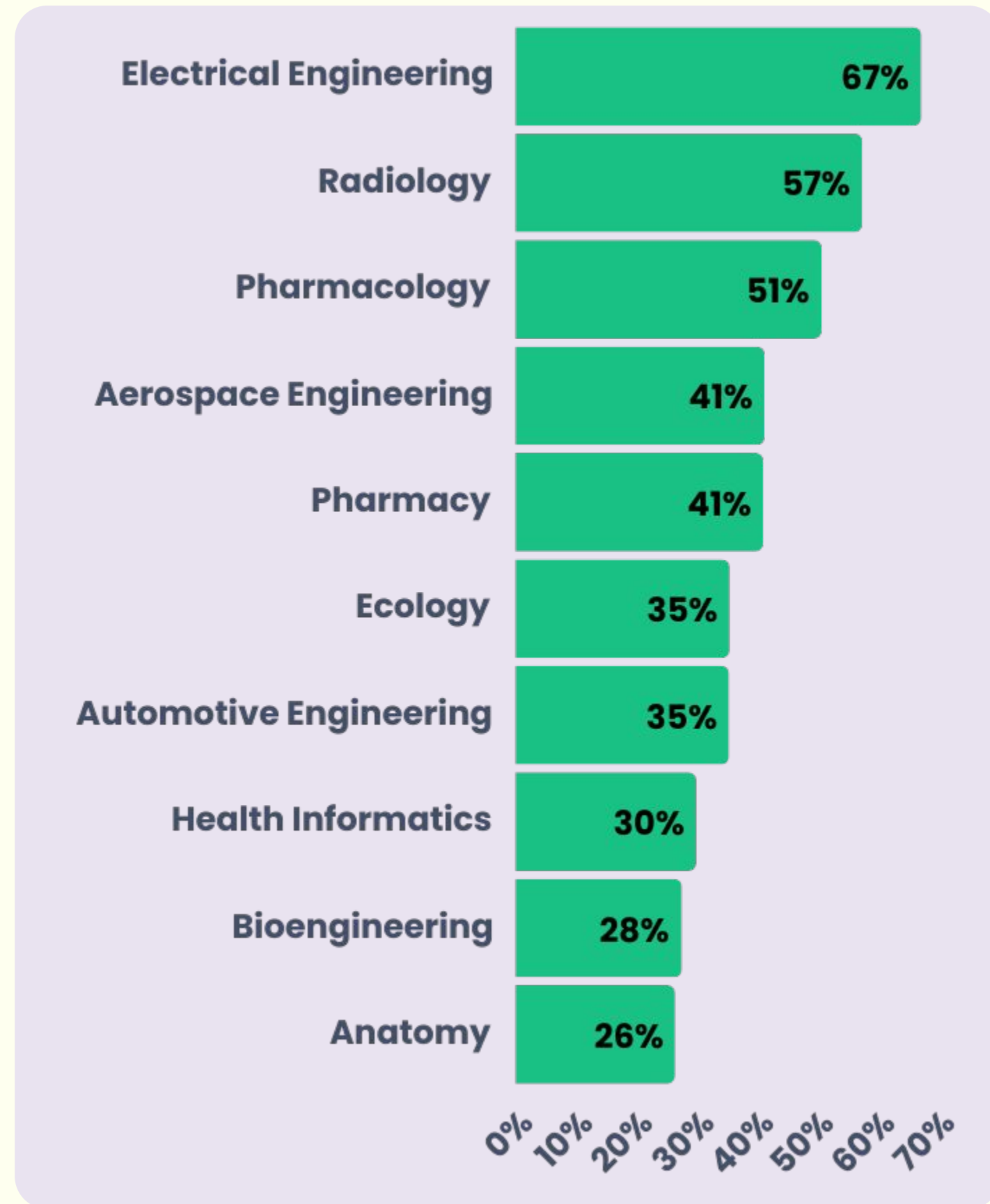


# Engineering and Bioscience

specialisms are growing at **PGT**.

**Computing** and related fields are performing well in **PGR** search – and this is where growth is still strongest for AI.

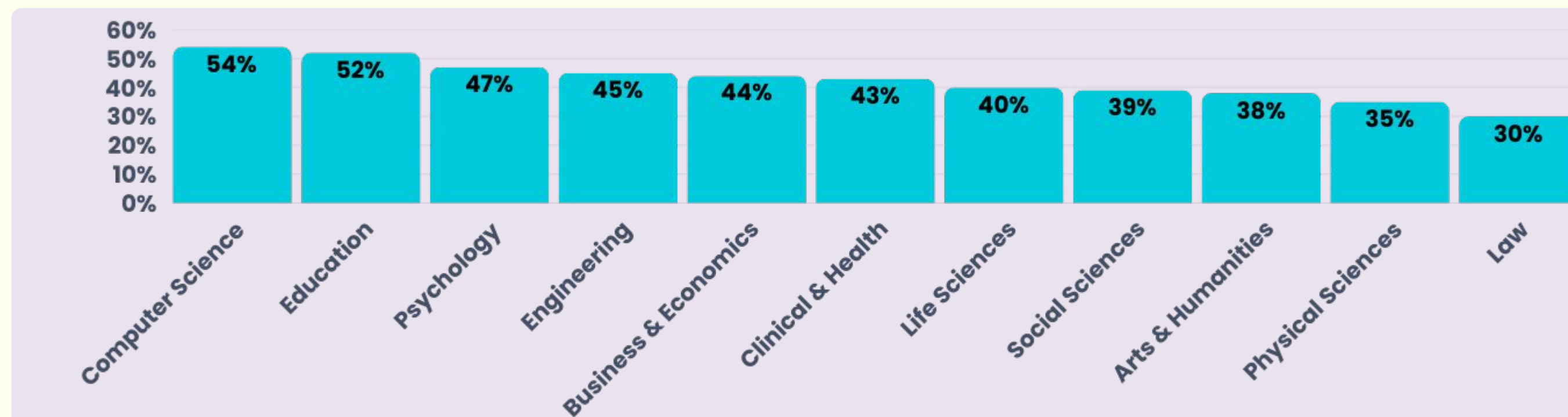
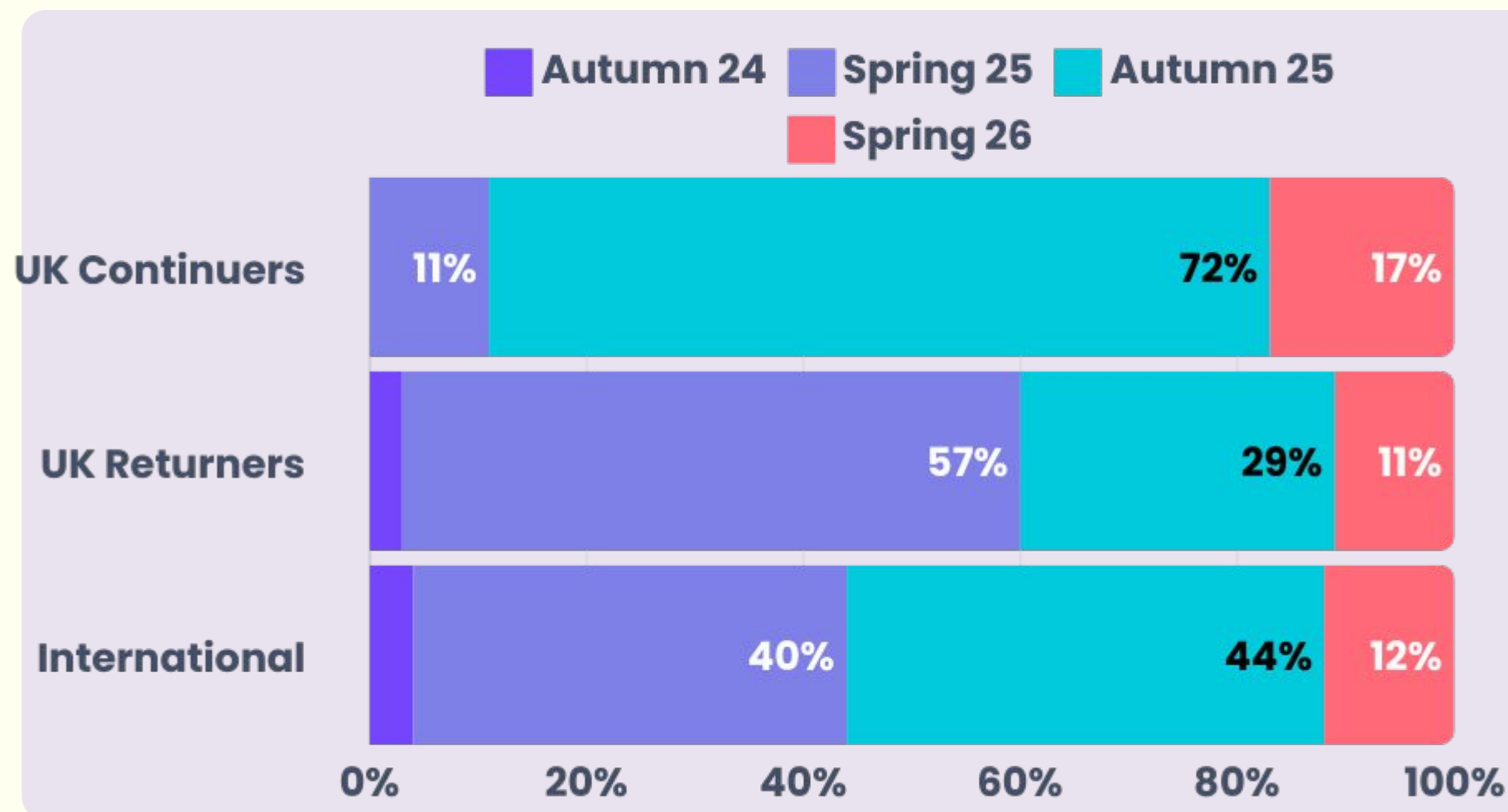
## What are the fastest growing subjects for UK domestic PGT?



## Is there still interest in January?

# 102%

YoY increase in users within the FindAMasters January Starts hub



Interest in **January** entry for **UK PGT** study is *substantially up* on 2024.

Over half of **UK Returners** are considering this option and **International** interest is evenly split vs September.

Interest is present across a **range of**



# Finis...



*Subscribe for monthly updates on:*

- *Target entry points*
- *International audience growth*
- *Subject growth*

*As well as other original research and insight for postgraduate marketing and recruitment*



*Come chat to us in the Business Expo for advice on engaging current audiences, or for further discussion about our data!*