

International students



Australia as a destination for international students

Australia plays a significant role in international education and is the third most popular country in which to study, behind the United States of America and the United Kingdom. Students choose Australia not only for its quality of education but also for its diversity of educational and cultural experiences, the integrity of its qualifications, and its reputation for a safe and friendly environment.

International education is Australia’s third largest export industry. Total export income generated by all international education activity in 2018-19 was \$37.6 billion. School students are a small proportion of the total number of international students in Australia, accounting for just over 3.9 per cent (\$1.45 billion) of the total export income from international education and 3.1 per cent of the total number of international students studying in Australia.

In 2019 total international student enrolments reached their highest point ever with 956,773 enrolments, growing by 9.7 per cent over 2018. School sector enrolments decreased by 4.3 per cent over the same period to 25,564 enrolments and the non-government sector enrolments decreased over this period by 4.7 per cent.

International students in Independent schools

Non-government school enrol just under 36% of international students in the school sector. Just over 7,620 overseas students, approximately 30 per cent of international school students in Australia, were enrolled in Independent schools in 2019. The majority of international students in Independent schools – 83 per cent – are in the secondary years, with senior

secondary accounting for the majority of enrolments. The remaining 17 per cent are in primary schools.

The major source country for the non-government school sector is China, accounting for nearly 60 per cent of total enrolments in the sector in 2019. Together Hong-Kong, Vietnam, South Korea and Japan account for a further 23 per cent of the total.

International student enrolments in the non-government school sector – Top 10 source countries, 2019.

Nationality	Number of enrolments	% of total enrolments
China	5,301	57.5%
Hong Kong	779	8.5%
Vietnam	673	7.3%
South Korea	396	4.3%
Japan	266	2.9%
Papua New Guinea	253	2.7%
Thailand	163	1.8%
India	150	1.6%
Malaysia	148	1.6%
Taiwan	140	1.5%

Source: Austrade PRISM data 2019

Note: This data covers student visa holders only.

Enrolment trends

International student enrolments in schools had been growing fairly steadily until 2009. This marked the beginning of a downturn across all sectors of education. The decline was due to a range of factors including the strength of the Australian dollar, changing visa arrangements, quality issues associated with some providers in some education sectors and changes in the relative attractiveness of competitor countries. The decline in international student enrolments in the schools sector was most significant in the non-government schools sector.

However Australia’s education system is well regarded, and the assurance of its quality, underpinned by the Australian Qualifications Framework, ensures that Australia remains an attractive study destination and 2019 data shows that enrolments and commencements across all sectors of education are continued to grow in 2019.

The 2019 data from the Commonwealth Department of Education and Training shows a decline in commencements of 4.3 per cent in the schools sector, including a 4.7 per cent reduction in commencements in the non-government school sector.