



Country Brief – Japan

Overview

Japan's government is increasingly viewing education as a vehicle to drive economic growth. Its policies highlight internationalisation and reform of higher education, to better meet Japan's needs for a globally skilled workforce. Targeted investments in university research and broader science and technology activity seek to reinforce Japan's position as a leading knowledge producing nation, while other funding aims to make Japan a competitive international education destination. Japan is looking to develop strong international partnerships through student exchange and research collaboration and actively promoting two-way student exchange in Asia, the US and EU. Australia has recently gained prominence in Japan's university sector, following the Asian Century White Paper and government to government efforts, offering opportunities for institutions to benefit from greater Japanese interest and collaboration.

Trends in Internationalisation

Japanese International Enrolments

The number of Japanese students studying overseas has declined over the last six consecutive years, driven by changing demographics, a flat economy, increasing domestic job search pressures, graduate unemployment and until recently a strong yen. Against that background Australia showed a 4.1% increase in Japanese student commencements in 2012, driven by growth in Australia's vocational and English language education sectors. Higher education continued to decline. The growth in working holiday maker visa numbers (related to English language study) also show a strong increase on previous levels, helping to reverse the overall decline in enrolments from Japan.

Growth Potential

With Japan's new government promoting study abroad to help develop a workforce with global skills and English language abilities, opportunities exist to build student enrolments. Australia has attracted recent media interest for the strength of our international education policies and university courses. Research shows student growth from Japan is strengthened where institutions establish and maintain active partnerships with Japanese universities. Australia's Asian Century White Paper and AsiaBound program have generated Japanese interest in Australia, as have recent government to government discussions. This could be harnessed by those who have or seek links to Japanese institutions.

Internationalisation Initiatives

Current government policies aim to expand the Global 30 initiative to 42 universities, significantly funding Japan's ongoing international education efforts. Japan aims to become a high quality international education destination in Asia by expanding the number of courses offered in English. As well as attracting international students, Japan is funding 10,000 Japanese university students to undertake short-term study abroad, reflecting a focus on developing global human resources. Global skills sought for students are language and communication skills, cultural awareness, critical thinking and problem solving skills.

University Reform

The new Japanese government is pursuing reform of its higher education sector to streamline administration and drive efficiencies. With 75% of Japan's private universities failing to meet enrolment targets and growing debate on the quality of university education in Japan, policy focus is now on sustainability (of which internationalisation is one strategy). The government is looking to revise regulations and may limit the establishment of new universities. Further planned changes will see a merging of functions and faculties across public institutions, in what could lead to a smaller number of universities overall for Japan.

Looking ahead

Competition in International Education

Japan has made little progress towards its target of enrolling 300,000 international students by 2020, but with concerted efforts, has the potential to significantly increase its numbers in the longer term. Japan continues to attract most of its students from Asia, with China making up 63% of Japan's 137,000 international students. With most international students studying in Japanese, the government hopes the growing numbers of English courses will boost enrolments. Japan's funding model sees international students pay the same tuition as Japanese students, making tuition costs at a top public university compare favourably with other international destinations. This is often complemented by low cost student housing, scholarship programs and part-time employment opportunities.

Asia and US Focus

Japanese universities are increasingly active in student exchange, recruitment and collaboration overseas, and government policies target collaboration with ASEAN nations, China, the Republic of Korea and the US. Japan's development of credit transfer agreements with ASEAN nations reflects its interest in attracting students from the region. Government policies actively encourage double degrees with Asian and US universities and promoting university networks, particularly in science and technology. Potential benefits could flow to any Australian universities represented in these groupings.

Science and Research

As a leading science and technology (S&T) nation in science output and research intensity, Japanese institutions and research agencies have strong potential as science collaborators, including in research student exchange. Japanese research has the third highest total investment in the world, producing approximately one quarter of the world's patents. Priority research areas are energy and green innovation, health and medical research and sustainable environments. Japan is pursuing policies to further collaboration with the US and major EU knowledge producers, and to deepen intra-regional science collaboration. Japan's universities are therefore, networked with leading S&T institutions globally, offering Australian institutions good opportunities for research collaboration with key S&T partners beyond Japan.

Counsellor contact details

Contact details: Karen Sandercock Counsellor (Education & Research) Japan Australian Embassy 2-1-14 Mita Minato-ku Tokyo 108-8361 JAPAN	Phone: +81 3 5232 4055 Fax: +81 90 5232 4119 Email: karen.sandercock@dfat.gov.au
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