

Research Paper

Number 2006/2

Study pathways of international students in Australia through the ELICOS sector, 2002 to 2005

Introduction

This examination of international student pathways is based on data from the Provider Registration and International Student Management System (PRISMS), the source of Australian Education International's (AEI) International Student enrolments and commencements database and therefore is limited to international students studying in Australia on a student visa only. Nevertheless, the analysis gives a useful picture of student movements and linkages within the Australian education system.

AEI released an earlier and related research paper in November 2006¹ that examined the pathways international students take within the framework of Australian education. The general analysis highlighted broad trends in international student study pathways through the educational sectors in Australia. These are defined as the Higher Education, Vocational and Technical Education (VTE), Schools, English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) and Other² sectors.

This paper provides an analysis of international student study pathways specifically through the ELICOS sector in Australia. It shows the uptake of various study options via the ELICOS sector and highlights the extent to which international students in Australia pursue educational pathways through this sector. It should be noted that as the data used in this examination of international student study pathways in Australia are derived from PRISMS, non-student visa ELICOS study and ELICOS study undertaken offshore are not within the scope of the analysis.

ELICOS is a major sector in an Australian education for international students. ELICOS courses are offered by providers in the higher education, VTE, and school sectors and by specialised English language colleges. International students often undertake these courses as a precursor to studies in the other sectors, as a stand-alone course on a student visa or they may undertake short ELICOS courses as part of a visit to Australia, for example as part of a holiday or business trip on a short-stay visa. Readers should note an English Australia survey³ found that only 49% of all ELICOS students travel to Australia on a student visa.

This paper is an update to a similar AEI report on the ELICOS sector published in September 2005 (available at http://aei.dest.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/Research/Papers/Default.htm) which highlighted broad trends in study pathways for international students studying in Australia in the period 1 January 2002 to 31 December 2004. This paper extends the period by an additional year, that is, from 1 January 2002 to 31 December 2005.

¹ Research Paper 2006/1 Study Pathways of International Students in Australia, 2002 to 2005 can be found at http://aei.dest.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/ResearchPapers/Default.htm

The 'Other' sector comprises Non-award courses such as 'Study Abroad', Foundation studies and Enabling courses.

³ Survey of Major ELICOS Regional Markets in 2005 (English Australia 2006).

Methodology

The PRISMS-derived dataset used in this analysis contains the full population of international students studying in Australia for the period 1 January 2002 to 31 December 2005. The reader should note that for this dataset, no distinction was made between commencing students and those continuing their studies in Australia and therefore includes international students already in the education system before the start of the year 2002. The benefit of this is that the dataset contains many more student records, and therefore student pathways, to analyse.

Readers should also be aware that the dataset included records of students who had not completed their studies in Australia and were still in the system at the end of the reference period. It should also be noted that instances of simultaneous multiple sector enrolments were not differentiated from sequential sector enrolments due to the complexities with separately extracting the information from PRISMS. However, as these instances contribute to the mix of study pathways for international students, they were retained in the dataset for this analysis. In addition, readers should note that for the purposes of this research paper, a period of study in a particular sector signifies a student has undertaken some study in the sector and does not necessarily indicate they have successfully completed or been awarded a qualification for that study.

Educational sectors

In the period 2002 to 2005, there were 594,113 international students recorded in the Australian education system. About three in four (71.5%) were single sector students. Of these, two in five (44.2%) were enrolled in the Higher Education sector. The next highest single-sector students were in the ELICOS⁴ (19.9%) and Other (16.8%) sectors.

About two thirds (68.3%) of multiple sector international students were enrolled in the ELICOS sector at some time in the reference period. In total, one third (33.7%) of all international students studying in Australia in the period 2002 to 2005 were at some time enrolled in the ELICOS sector (Table 1).

Table 1. Whether single or multiple sector students

Sector	Number of students	% of all students
Single sector students	424,811	71.5
Higher Education	187,926	31.6
ELICOS	84,641	14.2
Other	71,407	12.0
VTE	55,827	9.4
Schools	25,010	4.2
Multiple sector students	169,302	28.5
Enrolled in ELICOS	115,574	19.5
Not enrolled in ELICOS	53,728	9.0
Total all international students	594,113	100.0

Study pathways of international students through the ELICOS sector, 2002 to 2005

⁴ Students studying in Australia on a student visa only.

The ELICOS sector

There were a total of 200,215 international students enrolled in the ELICOS sector in the period 2002 to 2005. The majority of these students were multiple sector enrolments, however, 42.3% studied within the ELICOS sector only. Of all international students enrolled in the ELICOS sector at some time in the period, almost all (98.2%) recorded ELICOS as their first sector of study in Australia. This indicates that a large proportion of students undertook an English language course as a precursor to further studies in another sector.

About one in five (18.5%) international students enrolled at some time in the ELICOS sector moved from the ELICOS sector to undertake studies in the Higher Education sector. The next most common pathways were ELICOS to VTE (15.3%) and ELICOS to Schools (5.8%).

A small proportion of students enrolled in the ELICOS sector recorded a pathway through three or more educational sectors. These included ELICOS-VTE-Higher Education and ELICOS-Schools-Higher Education (5.1% and 1.7% respectively) (Table 2).

Table 2. Top 20 study pathways through ELICOS

Sector pathway	Number of students	% of all students
Single sector students		
ELICOS	84,641	42.3
Multiple sector students		
ELICOS-Higher Education	37,024	18.5
ELICOS-VTE	30,622	15.3
ELICOS-Schools	11,691	5.8
ELICOS-VTE-Higher Education	10,241	5.1
ELICOS-Schools-Higher Education	3,321	1.7
ELICOS-Other-Higher Education	3,198	1.6
ELICOS-Schools-VTE	2,649	1.3
ELICOS-Other	2,554	1.3
ELICOS-Higher Education-VTE	1,138	0.6
ELICOS-Schools-VTE-Higher Education	1,092	0.5
ELICOS-VTE-ELICOS	830	0.4
ELICOS-Higher Education-ELICOS	650	0.3
ELICOS-Other-VTE	617	0.3
VTE-ELICOS	520	0.3
ELICOS-VTE-ELICOS-Higher Education	509	0.3
ELICOS-Schools-ELICOS	507	0.3
ELICOS-Other-VTE-Higher Education	448	0.2
ELICOS-VTE-ELICOS-VTE	434	0.2
VTE-ELICOS-Higher Education	426	0.2
Total	200,215	100.0

Nationality and the ELICOS sector

One in four (24.6%) of all students enrolled in the ELICOS sector in the years 2002 to 2005 were from China—the most common nationality of students in the sector. Students from the Republic of Korea and Japan were the next most common nationalities, accounting for a further 15.2% and 12.9% respectively. Thailand contributed a further 8.8%, while Taiwan and Hong Kong an additional 5.0% each.

Four out of five (82.9%) international students enrolled in the sector were from the top ten nationalities of ELICOS sector students. Students from a total of 162 nationalities undertook study in ELICOS.

Switzerland 1.8% Other Czech Republic China 17.1% 1.8% 24.6% Indonesia 3.5% Brazil Republic of Korea 15.2% Hong Kong 5.0% Japan Thailand Taiwan 12.9%

Nationality of ELICOS students

Of the larger ELICOS source nationalities, students from Brazil were the most likely to enrol in the ELICOS sector—three in four (73.2%) Brazilian students were in the sector. Students from the Republic of Korea were the next highest proportion to be enrolled in the ELICOS sector (67.9%), followed by students from Thailand (65.4%) and Japan (64.7%). In contrast, one in three (32.8%) students from Hong Kong and 21.1% of students from Indonesia were enrolled in the sector. Of the nationalities contributing smaller proportions of ELICOS students, about three in four students each from Switzerland and the Czech Republic were in the sector (Table 3).

Table 3. Top ten nationalities of ELICOS sector students

	Nun	iber of students	5	% of all s	tudents
	Not			- "	From nationality
Nationality	enrolled in ELICOS	Enrolled in ELICOS	Total	Enrolled in ELICOS	enrolled in ELICOS
China	37,202	49,224	86,426	24.6	57.0
Republic of Korea	14,361	30,377	44,738	15.2	67.9
Japan	14,086	25,792	39,878	12.9	64.7
Thailand	9,282	17,532	26,814	8.8	65.4
Taiwan	6,584	10,000	16,584	5.0	60.3
Hong Kong	20,317	9,927	30,244	5.0	32.8
Brazil	3,226	8,832	12,058	4.4	73.2
Indonesia	26,281	7,011	33,292	3.5	21.1
Czech Republic	1,309	3,672	4,981	1.8	73.7
Switzerland	1,039	3,522	4,561	1.8	77.2
All nationalities	393,898	200,215	594,113	100.0	33.7

Top ten nationalities and the most common study pathways through ELICOS

The most common pathways through the ELICOS sector varied depending on nationality, and significant proportions of students from some of the top ten nationalities were ELICOS sector only students.

The largest number of students through the ELICOS sector was from China. More than one-third (34.4%) of these students took the ELICOS-Higher Education study pathway. Chinese students also recorded an ELICOS-only pathway (15.3%) and ELICOS-Schools pathways (12.7%).

About two in every three (63.6%) students from the Republic of Korea were enrolled only in the ELICOS sector, with smaller proportions reporting an ELICOS-VTE (13.4%) and ELICOS-Schools (7.1%) study pathway.

Similar pathway types were reported by Japanese and Brazilian students where the majority were ELICOS-only students (65.6% and 68.0% respectively), with smaller proportions in the ELICOS-VTE (16.6% and 25.9%) and ELICOS-Higher Education (5.5% and 2.4%) pathways.

The study pathway choices of Thai, Hong Kong and Indonesian students were more evenly distributed than those of the other top ten nationalities. More than one-third (35.6%) of Thai students were single sector ELICOS students, 27.4% reported an ELICOS-Higher Education pathway, and a further 22.6% an ELICOS-VTE pathway.

One in five (19.9%) students from Hong Kong recorded an ELICOS-VTE pathway, followed by ELICOS-only (18.7%) and ELICOS-VTE-Higher Education (16.6%). Over one-quarter (28.1%) of Indonesian students reported an ELICOS-Higher Education pathway, 19.5% an ELICOS-VTE pathway and a further 18.8% were ELICOS-only (Table 4).

Table 4. Top 10 nationalities and the most common sector pathways for each nationality

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	Number	% from each
Nationality and Sector pathway	of students	nationality
China		
ELICOS-Higher Education	16,953	34.4
ELICOS	7,532	15.3
ELICOS-Schools	6,242	12.7
Republic of Korea		
ELICOS	19,329	63.6
ELICOS-VTE	4,062	13.4
ELICOS-Schools	2,154	7.1
Japan		
ELICOS	16,921	65.6
ELICOS-VTE	4,277	16.6
ELICOS-Higher Education	1,412	5.5
Thailand		
ELICOS	6,233	35.6
ELICOS-Higher Education	4,806	27.4
ELICOS-VTE	3,960	22.6
Taiwan		
ELICOS	4,943	49.4
ELICOS-Higher Education	1,966	19.7
ELICOS-VTE	895	9.0
Hong Kong		
ELICOS-VTE	1,973	19.9
ELICOS	1,861	18.7
ELICOS-VTE-Higher Education	1,651	16.6
Brazil		
ELICOS	6,009	68.0
ELICOS-VTE	2,287	25.9
ELICOS-Higher Education	216	2.4
Indonesia		
ELICOS-Higher Education	1,968	28.1
ELICOS-VTE	1,367	19.5
ELICOS	1,318	18.8
Czech Republic		
ELICOS	1,963	53.5
ELICOS-VTE	1,538	41.9
ELICOS-VTE-Higher Education	43	1.2
Switzerland		
ELICOS	3,321	94.3
ELICOS-VTE	100	2.8
ELICOS-Other	39	1.1

Sector pathways and time spent in the ELICOS sector

Almost two in three (65.2%) of the 200,215 international students enrolled in the ELICOS sector over the reference period had an ELICOS course length of between 5 and 26 weeks, the equivalent of up to one semester. A further one-third (33.4%) had a course length of 27 or more weeks.

As discussed earlier, the largest proportion of students enrolled in the ELICOS sector over the reference period were single-sector ELICOS students (42.3%). The sector pathways with the next largest proportions were ELICOS-Higher Education and ELICOS-VTE (18.5% and 15.3% respectively).

Over half (58.8%) of the ELICOS sector only students reported a course length of 5 to 26 weeks and another 40.8% had a course length of 27 or more weeks. Of those students who reported an ELICOS-Higher Education study pathway, three-quarters (75.7%) reported an ELICOS course length of 5 to 26 weeks. Two in three (66.8%) students on the ELICOS-VTE pathway and a similar proportion (68.9%) of ELICOS-Schools students had an ELICOS course length of 5 to 26 weeks (Table 5).

Table 5. Top 10 ELICOS sector pathways by length of study in ELICOS sector

_	Length of study			
	1 to 4	5 to 26	27 or more	
Sector pathway	weeks	weeks	weeks	Total
_		Number	of students	
ELICOS	360	49,788	34,493	84,641
ELICOS-Higher Education	361	28,028	8,635	37,024
ELICOS-VTE	1,140	20,468	9,014	30,622
ELICOS-Schools	132	8,050	3,509	11,691
ELICOS-VTE-Higher Education	235	7,114	2,892	10,241
ELICOS-Schools-Higher Education	18	2,840	463	3,321
ELICOS-Other-Higher Education	99	2,350	749	3,198
ELICOS-Schools-VTE	9	1,977	663	2,649
ELICOS-Other	109	1,807	638	2,554
ELICOS-Higher Education-VTE	9	778	351	1,138
Total	2,822	130,514	66,879	200,215
Proportion (%)	1.4	65.2	33.4	100.0

Nationality and time spent in the ELICOS sector

The period of study in the ELICOS sector varied depending on the nationality of the student. Table 6 below shows the most common sector pathways and the time spent in the ELICOS sector for each of the top ten nationalities.

The majority of students from China (79.7%), Thailand (63.0%), Hong Kong (70.6%), Brazil (81.1%) and Indonesia (82.3%) spent 5 to 26 weeks enrolled in the ELICOS sector. The majority of students from the Republic of Korea spent 27 or more weeks in ELICOS.

In the case of students from Japan and Taiwan, similar proportions of students of each nationality were enrolled in ELICOS for 5 to 26 weeks as those enrolled in the sector for 27 or more weeks (Table 6).

Table 6. Top 10 nationalities and length of study in the ELICOS sector

	Length of study			
	1 to 4	5 to 26	27 or more	
Nationality	weeks	weeks	weeks	Total
		Number o	f students	
China	477	39,225	9,522	49,224
Republic of Korea	169	12,655	17,553	30,377
Japan	329	12,102	13,361	25,792
Thailand	141	11,041	6,350	17,532
Taiwan	74	4,531	5,395	10,000
Hong Kong	121	7,008	2,798	9,927
Brazil	117	7,163	1,552	8,832
Indonesia	187	5,767	1,057	7,011
Czech Republic	212	2,895	565	3,672
Switzerland	45	3,015	462	3,522
		Proport	ion (%)	
China	1.0	79.7	19.3	100.0
Republic of Korea	0.6	41.7	57.8	100.0
Japan	1.3	46.9	51.8	100.0
Thailand	0.8	63.0	36.2	100.0
Taiwan	0.7	45.3	54.0	100.0
Hong Kong	1.2	70.6	28.2	100.0
Brazil	1.3	81.1	17.6	100.0
Indonesia	2.7	82.3	15.1	100.0
Czech Republic	5.8	78.8	15.4	100.0
Switzerland	1.3	85.6	13.1	100.0

ELICOS sector only students from China, Thailand, Brazil and Switzerland spent 5 to 26 weeks in ELICOS compared to students from the Republic of Korea and Japan who tended to spend 27 or more weeks in the sector.

Students from China, Thailand, Indonesia and India whose study pathway was ELICOS-Higher Education were more likely to have spent up to 26 weeks in ELICOS compared to students from the Republic of Korea and Taiwan who tended to spend 27 or more weeks in the sector.

Similarly, of the students who recorded an ELICOS-VTE study pathway, students from the Republic of Korea and Taiwan tended to have a longer period of study in ELICOS than those from the other top ten nationalities. Almost two in three each of Korean and Taiwanese students spent 27 or more weeks in ELICOS, compared to a period of 26 weeks or less for students of other nationalities.

The most common Level of Study pathways through ELICOS

A high proportion of students recorded a single sector ELICOS pathway (42.3% of all students enrolled in the ELICOS sector in the period 2002 to 2005). As a result, a large proportion of ELICOS sector students recorded a 'Non-award' level of study pathway (41.1%).

The next most common level of study pathways through the ELICOS sector was Non-Award–Masters Coursework (9.9%), Non-Award–Diploma (6.7%), and Non-Award–Bachelor Degree (5.5%).

Only small proportions of students recorded a level of study pathway through three levels. Some 3.0% of students followed the Non-Award–Diploma–Bachelor Degree level of study pathway and 1.5% recorded a Non-Award–Secondary Studies–Bachelor Degree pathway (Table 7).

Table 7. Top 20 level of study pathways through ELICOS

Level of study pathway	Number of students	% of all ELICOS students
Non-Award	82,388	41.1
Non-Award-Masters Coursework	19,841	9.9
Non-Award-Diploma	13,401	6.7
Non-Award-Bachelor Degree	10,918	5.5
Non-Award-Secondary Studies	10,795	5.4
Non-Award-Diploma-Bachelor Degree	5,907	3.0
Non-Award-Advanced Diploma	4,126	2.1
Non-Award-Certificate III	3,089	1.5
Non-Award-Secondary Studies-Bachelor Degree	2,945	1.5
Non-Award-Certificate IV	2,494	1.2
Enabling Course	1,627	0.8
Non-Award-Secondary Studies-Diploma	1,343	0.7
Non-Award-Graduate Diploma-Masters Coursework	1,162	0.6
Non-Award-Certificate II	1,060	0.5
Non-Award-Graduate Diploma	1,008	0.5
Non-Award-Diploma-Advanced Diploma	860	0.4
Diploma-Masters Coursework	831	0.4
Non-Award-Certificate III-Diploma	757	0.4
Non-Award-Advanced Diploma-Bachelor Degree	751	0.4
Non-Award-Certificate IV-Diploma	727	0.4
Total	200,215	100.0

Nationality and the most common level of study pathways

The most common level of study pathway for students in the ELICOS sector was a Non-Award course, regardless of the nationality of the student. This was due to the large proportion of students who were single sector students enrolled only in the ELICOS sector.

A Non-Award only pathway was the most common pathway recorded for all of the top ten nationalities except China, with about two in three students each from the Republic of Korea, Japan and Brazil in a Non-Award course only. The most common level of study pathways of Chinese students was Non-Award–Masters coursework (17.8% of Chinese students). This pathway was the second most common for students from Thailand (20.1%), Taiwan (12.2%) and Indonesia (17.3%).

A Non-Award–Bachelor Degree pathway was the second most common level of study pathway recorded by students from Hong Kong (13.1% of Hong Kong students) and the third most common pathway for students from the Republic of Korea (3.5% of Korean students).

A Non-Award–Diploma level of study pathway was also relatively common with students from several of the top ten nationalities (Table 8).

Table 8. Top 10 nationalities by most common level of study pathways

	Number of	% from each
Nationality and Level of study pathway	students	nationality
China		
Non-Award-Masters Coursework	8,768	17.8
Non-Award	7,612	15.5
Non-Award-Secondary Studies	6,003	12.2
Republic of Korea		
Non-Award	18,367	60.5
Non-Award-Diploma	2,047	6.7
Non-Award-Bachelor Degree	1,075	3.5
Japan		
Non-Award	16,472	63.9
Non-Award-Diploma	1,616	6.3
Non-Award-Certificate III	852	3.3
Thailand		
Non-Award	5,888	33.6
Non-Award-Masters Coursework	3,524	20.1
Non-Award-Diploma	1,576	9.0
Taiwan		
Non-Award	4,797	48.0
Non-Award-Masters Coursework	1,224	12.2
Non-Award-Diploma	444	4.4
Hong Kong		
Non-Award	2,022	20.4
Non-Award-Bachelor Degree	1,301	13.1
Non-Award-Diploma-Bachelor Degree	913	9.2

Table 8. Top 10 nationalities by most common level of study pathways (continued)

	Number of	% from each
Nationality and Level of study pathway	students	nationality
Brazil		
Non-Award	5,775	65.4
Non-Award-Diploma	781	8.8
Non-Award-Certificate III	366	4.1
Indonesia		
Non-Award	1,352	19.3
Non-Award-Masters Coursework	1,211	17.3
Non-Award-Diploma	799	11.4
Czech Republic		
Non-Award	1,893	51.6
Non-Award-Diploma	331	9.0
Non-Award-Certificate III	277	7.5
Switzerland		
Non-Award	3,194	90.7
Enabling Course	107	3.0
Non-Award-Diploma	28	0.8