



International mobility of Australian university students

An annual survey of Australian universities¹ found that students from 37 universities undertook 49,263 international study experiences in 2017 (Table 1). This was an 11.8% increase on the experiences reported by 35 universities in 2016. Around 60% of experiences were undertaken by domestic undergraduates, 11% by international undergraduates and remainder by postgraduates. The 29,428 international experiences undertaken by domestic undergraduates represented 22.4% of the 2017 graduating cohort. The equivalent figure for US undergraduates in 2016-17 was 16%².

Faculty-led study (26%) and student exchange programs (25%) were the most popular types of study experiences among undergraduates in 2017. Postgraduate research students most often travelled for research-related experiences (60%) followed by conferences or international competitions (37%) in 2017. Over half (58%) of study abroad experiences among all study levels were for non-compulsory academic credit. Almost three quarters (74.6%) of experiences were less than a semester, the remainder being exchange and other semester or longer programs. The majority of experiences for postgraduate coursework (87.4%) and research (92.1%) students were for less than a semester (Figure 1).

In 2017, over one third of all experiences (39.1%) were in the top five destination countries (China, USA, UK, Italy and Japan) (Table 2). Students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields were more likely to study abroad (21% of all experiences) than students in other fields. Twenty-three universities reported 12 per cent of international experiences were undertaken by students from regional or remote areas. In 2017, 7,441 university students were funded to travel overseas under the New Colombo Plan³, an increase of 36 per cent on 2016. The top destination was China. Nearly half of undergraduate domestic students (13,499) had experiences in Indo-Pacific countries. The top 5 Indo-Pacific destinations were China (17.4% of total), Japan (10.6%), India (9.5%), Indonesia (8.7%) and Cambodia (6.3%).

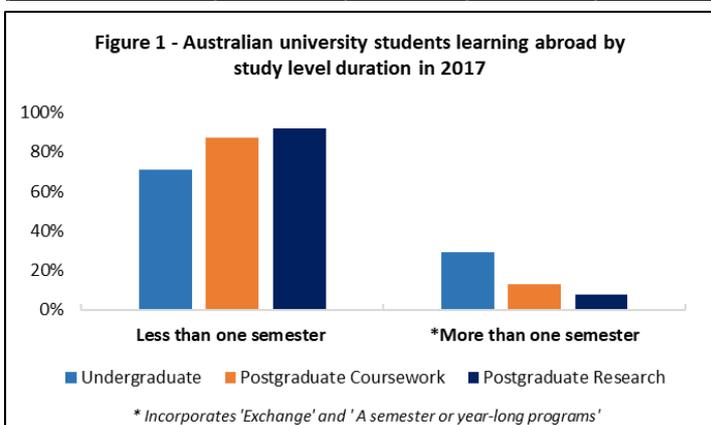
Australia's Higher Education Statistics Collection shows there were 5,622 Australian students enrolled in offshore Australian higher education campuses in 2017, slightly less than in 2016 (5,685)⁵. It is likely that these students are also counted within the survey of Australian university students described above. The latest UNESCO data show 12,713 Australian students enrolled in tertiary courses in other countries in 2017⁴. This is a slight (0.5%) decline since 2016. This statistic only count Australian students enrolled in a course of more than 2 years' duration in another country. It is assumed that these students represent an additional cohort of Australians studying towards full qualifications in foreign institutions and who are hence not counted in the survey described above.

Table 1. Australian university students mobility - by type (All levels)

Type of experience	2014	2015	2016	2017
Exchange	8,750	8,539	9,046	9,205
Other semester or year-long programs	340	1,517	1,594	1,042
Short-term Programs	13,870	15,748	19,669	22,992
Internship or other practical placement	5,259	7,934	8,334	10,094
Research-related	2,135	3,257	3,960	4,461
Volunteering/community engagement	858	807	1,234	1,030
Other	700	342	208	439
Total	31,912	38,144	44,045	49,263
Number of universities reporting	34	36	35	37

Table 2. Australian university students abroad by country (all levels)

Top 5 destination countries (2017)	2016		2017	
	Number of experiences	% of all experiences	Number of experiences	% of all experiences
China	4,542	10.3%	5,526	11.2%
USA	5,061	11.5%	5,472	11.1%
UK	3,486	7.9%	4,065	8.3%
Italy	1,874	4.3%	2,142	4.3%
Japan	1,748	4.0%	2,066	4.2%
Other	27,334	62.1%	29,992	60.9%
Grand Total	44,045	100.0%	49,263	100.0%



¹ The 'Learning Abroad 2017' (2019) Australian Universities International Directors' Forum (AUIDF) report by (unpublished). Data for earlier years were drawn from previous iterations of the AUIDF Research Agenda reports.

² Fast Facts - Open Doors 2018 available at: <http://www.iie.org/en/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors>.

³ Information on New Colombo Plan Indo-Pacific host locations is available at: <https://dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/new-colombo-plan/about/Pages/about.aspx>

⁴ UNESCO data used in this research snapshot is from <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>. ⁵ Unpublished data of Higher Education Statistics available on <https://www.education.gov.au/>.

For further information about this research, Snapshot Series contact the International Research and Analysis Unit by email: IEResearch@education.gov.au.

The Research Snapshot series can be accessed from <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/research-snapshots/pages/default.aspx>