Comparison between Canada’s and Australia’s international education sectors

This snapshot looks at the available data on international students from Australia and Canada. According to UNESCO, Canada is the fourth most popular English-speaking study destination for international tertiary students, while Australia is the third most popular\(^1\). The data used in the snapshot represent each countries’ latest reported full year (2018).

Canada’s primary source of student data comes from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada\(^2\) unlike countries such as the USA, UK and Australia whose primary data sources are education providers. Canada’s counting of study permit holders incorporates the levels ‘secondary or less’ (13% of total), ‘post-secondary’ (76%) and ‘other studies’ (10%). Thus, the scope of Canada’s data appears similar to Australia’s multi-sector data, albeit with a larger proportion of school students (13% compared to Australia’s 3%). As Canada’s annual data count is of unique individuals, the most comparable Australian measure is our unique international student count.

On this basis, Canada hosted 572,415 international students in 2018\(^4\), following 16 per cent growth on 2017, while Australia hosted 693,750 international students in 2018, following 11 per cent growth in 2017. Each countries’ top 10 student source countries in 2018 are shown below in Figures 1 and 2.

The top 10 source countries contributed 77 per cent of Canada’s total and 70 per cent of Australia’s total student numbers in 2018. In 2018, India overtook China to become Canada’s top student source country following 40 per cent growth in Indian and two per cent growth in Chinese students. China continued to be the top source country for international students in Australia, comprising 30 per cent of all international students, followed by India comprising 13 percent. For Canada, Indian students comprised 30 percent and Chinese students comprised 24 per cent of all international students. Nepal, Australia’ third largest student source country and fastest growing in 2018 (51%), sent only a few hundred students to Canada (780) in 2018.

Canada also saw large growth in students from Iran (48%), Vietnam (46%) and Brazil (17%) in 2018. Universities in Canada showed an 11 per cent increase in the overall number of international students between 2017 and 2018\(^3\), while Australia’s higher education sector saw enrolments growth of 14 per cent in that same period.

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1. According to UNESCO 2016 data, Australia is the 3rd most popular destination after the US and the UK, while Canada comes 8th following Angola, France, Germany and Russia.
2. Sourced from: Study permit holders on December 31st by country of citizenship.
3. Sourced from: https://www.immigration.ca/well-over-half-a-million-study-permit-holders-now-in-canada and Study permit holders on December 31st by province/territory of intended destination and study level. Canada’s colleges have some similarities to Australia’s VET institutions in offering courses with primarily vocational goals.
4. Canada’s academic year commences in September and ends in June, but its count of student permit holders is reported by calendar year.
5. As reported here; https://thepienews.com/news/canada-increasingly-attractive-to-mobile-students-idp/

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