



## Comparison between the UK's and Australia's international education sectors

This snapshot looks at recent data on international higher education students from Australia and the UK. According to UNESCO, the UK is the second most popular study destination for international tertiary students after the USA, while Australia is the third most popular. The data used in the snapshot has been created by each country in relation to its latest full academic year (2018-19 for the UK<sup>1</sup> and 2019 for Australia<sup>2</sup>). This analysis compares Australian higher education enrolments (only) with UK higher education student data<sup>1</sup>.

In 2018-19, 29 per cent of the UK's international student population came from the European Union (EU). Nonetheless, China was the UK's largest single student source country, representing 35 per cent of international students coming from outside the EU and 25 per cent of all international students in the UK. Between, 2017-18 and 2018-19, the UK's total international student numbers grew by six per cent, comprising three per cent growth in EU and seven per cent growth in non-EU students. There was particularly strong growth in students from India and China (13% and 35% respectively).

**Table 1: Comparison of UK and Australia incoming international students numbers**

UK				Australia			
	2017-18	2018-19	% growth		2018	2019	% growth
China	106,530	120,385	13%	China	152,488	164,716	8%
India	19,750	26,685	35%	India	71,649	90,792	27%
United States	18,885	20,120	7%	Nepal	28,120	34,592	23%
Hong Kong	16,350	16,135	-1%	Vietnam	15,691	16,388	4%
Italy	13,985	13,965	-0.1%	Malaysia	13,981	13,088	-6%
Malaysia	14,970	13,835	-8%	Pakistan	11,363	11,759	3%
France	13,660	13,675	0.1%	Sri Lanka	9,193	11,077	20%
Germany	13,545	13,475	-1%	Indonesia	9,880	10,622	8%
Nigeria	10,540	10,645	1%	Hong Kong	8,930	8,900	-0.3%
Spain	9,630	10,330	7%	Singapore	7,323	7,106	-3%
Other	220,645	226,395	3%	Other	69,335	73,092	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>458,490</b>	<b>485,645</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>397,953</b>	<b>442,132</b>	<b>11%</b>

Australia had solid overall growth in international higher education enrolments between 2018 and 2019 (11%), which incorporated 8% growth from China and 27% growth from India. For other common student source countries like Malaysia and Hong Kong, the UK and Australia both saw moderate declines. The pending nature of Brexit had no apparent impact on incoming EU students to the UK, where EU students grew by three per cent in 2018-19 following a similar degree of growth (4%) in 2017-18.

The UK's 2018-19 international student data confirms a return to growth following a long hiatus following the introduction of migration reforms in 2012, including changes to post-study work opportunities. Commentators are attributing the UK's return to growth to its recent announcement that post-study work visas are being reintroduced and will be available to international students graduating in the 2020-21 academic year and thereafter.<sup>3</sup> Given this return to growth is likely to be sustained, prior predictions by commentators that Australia would overtake the UK to become the world's second most popular study destination now seem unlikely to eventuate.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The HESA data available at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/16-01-2020/sb255-higher-education-student-statistics/location>

<sup>2</sup> Australian Government enrolments data for the year-to-date November available at: <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/international-student-data/pages/default.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> Two-year work rights for international students in UK reinstated for 2020/21: [https://thepecenews.com/news/two-year-work-rights-for-international-students-in-uk-reinstated-for-202021/?mc\\_cid=05307d4a58&mc\\_eid=60be93b279](https://thepecenews.com/news/two-year-work-rights-for-international-students-in-uk-reinstated-for-202021/?mc_cid=05307d4a58&mc_eid=60be93b279)

<sup>4</sup> The UK in the global student market: second place for how much longer? <https://www.researchcoghe.org/publications/research-findings/the-uk-in-the-global-student-market-second-place-for-how-much-longer/>

For further information about this Research Snapshot or the Research Snapshot Series contact the International Research and Analysis Unit by email [IEResearch@education.gov.au](mailto:IEResearch@education.gov.au). The Research Snapshot series can be accessed from <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/research-snapshots/pages/default.aspx>