



Visa grants for international students studying ELICOS

Student visa data provides a useful indicator of likely future international student enrolment trends in different education sectors. Prior to 2018, the only visa data available on the ELICOS sector was for the Independent ELICOS visa class, which only represented students studying an ELICOS course with no intention of doing further study in Australia. The larger number of students doing an ELICOS course as part of a pre-defined study pathway were generally studying on a different visa sub-class corresponding to the end-point of their study pathway. For example, a student intending to undertake an ELICOS course prior to commencing higher education is generally granted a higher education visa.

In 2018, it became possible to identify any student visa grantee intending to study ELICOS either independently or as part of a study pathway from the PRISMS data system. The Department of Home Affairs agreed that the Department of Education should release this data publicly on a biannual basis covering the period January to June and subsequently July to December. This Research Snapshot summarises findings for January to June 2019. A detailed table of this data by source country and period is available [here](#).

Table 1: Summary of January-June 2019 student visa grants to international students intending to do an ELICOS course

Period	Total ELICOS	% change from previous year	Independent ELICOS	% change from previous year	Pathway ELICOS	% change from previous year
January-June 2018	40,952	0.1%	17,883	-9.8%	23,069	9.4%
January-June 2019	39,552	-3.4%	18,990	6.2%	20,562	-10.9%

This analysis relies on a number of assumptions to generate the data and should be considered as indicative only. Although total visa grants associated with an ELICOS course in the first semester of 2019 declined by 3.4%, compared to the same period in 2018, the independent ELICOS visa grants grew by 6.2%. The net result of these changes corresponds to the small increase in total ELICOS enrolments (1%) seen in the Department of Education’s January to June 2019 data on international student enrolments in Australia¹.

For Australia’s top student source countries, China, India and Nepal, over 94% of student visa grantees intending to study ELICOS were doing so as part of a study pathway. However, Chinese students have a higher propensity to study ELICOS (13% of all enrolments) than Indian or Nepalese students (4-5%). Hence, the 10.9% decline in pathway visa grants can be largely attributed to declining demand from China since 2018.

Nonetheless, enrolments in ELICOS from all other countries except China have increased by 5 per cent since 2018, which is similar to the growth trend seen in Independent ELICOS. Thus, the current decline in pathway ELICOS can be seen as a market readjustment as a long period of consistent growth in demand for ELICOS from China has now tapered off. China still remains Australia’s largest source country for ELICOS enrolments and for the period January to June 2019, it contributed more than double the number of ELICOS enrolments than the next largest source country, Colombia. The slow-down from China in the face of sustained growth from other countries will contribute to a more diversified ELICOS sector in the future.

¹ <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/international-student-data/pages/default.aspx>

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