



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

This snapshot looks at the available data on international higher education students from Australia and the UK. The data used in the snapshot represent each countries' latest academic year (2017 for Australia¹ and 2016-17 for the UK²). According to UNESCO, the UK is the second most popular study destination for international students after the USA, while Australia is the third most popular. Thus, a comparison between the international student populations of the two countries provides some insight into Australia's relative success in the global education market. This analysis compares Australian higher education enrolments (only) with UK higher education student data¹. The top 10 source countries for the UK (Figure 1) made up 50 per cent of all international higher education students in 2016-17, while the top 10 source countries for Australia's higher education sector (Figure 2) were 81 per cent of all enrolments in 2017.

Approximately 30 per cent of the UK's international student population comes from other European Union (EU) countries. Nonetheless, China is the UK's largest student source country, representing 31 per cent of international students coming from outside the EU and 21 per cent of total international students. Between, 2015-16 and 2016-17, the UK's total international student numbers grew by 1 per cent, though mostly due to 6 per cent growth in EU students. Non-EU students declined by 1 per cent, with China one of few major non-EU countries to show growth (4%) in this period.

Conversely, Australia saw strong overall growth in international higher education between 2016 and 2017 (15%), which incorporated consistent growth from its major source countries, particularly China and India. For other common student source countries such as Malaysia, Hong Kong and Singapore, although the UK continued to host larger number of students from these countries, it saw moderate declines from these countries, while Australia saw moderate growth. The UK had a substantial decline in student numbers from Nigeria (21%) in 2016-17 and, although Nigeria is a small student source country for Australia, numbers grew by 18 per cent in 2017. Australia remains a popular destination for higher education students from India, with 22 per cent growth in 2017, while numbers of Indian higher education students studying in the UK have declined substantially in the last five years, including a further 1 per cent decline in 2016-17.

Figure 1: International higher education students in the UK

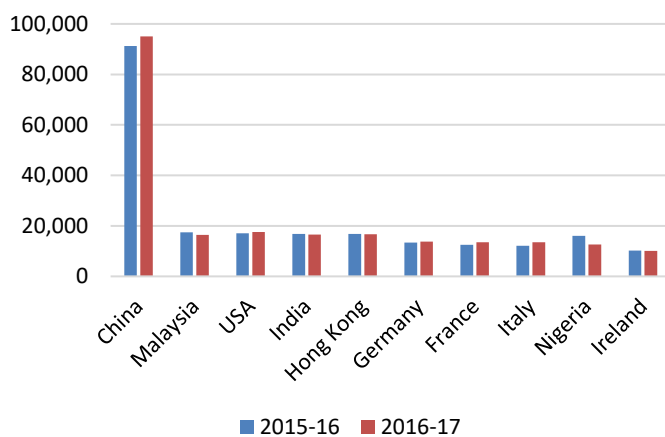
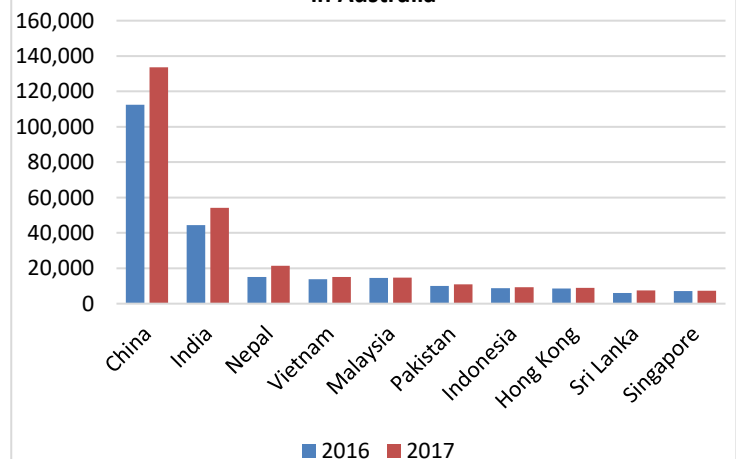


Figure 2: International higher education students in Australia



UK commentators have ascribed the UK's decline in non-EU student numbers in recent years to migration reforms, including student visa restrictions and changes in post-study work opportunities¹. It may be that Australia's introduction of post-study work visas for international higher education graduates in 2013 has positioned Australia to be perceived as not only a quality study destination, with opportunities for working both during and after study, but also as a more welcoming destination for international students.

¹The UK Council for International Student Affairs report is available from: <https://www.ukcisa.org.uk/Research--Policy/Statistics/International-student-statistics-UK-higher-education>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2016/jul/14/international-student-numbers-have-been-plummeting-for-years-now-what>

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