



Higher education students studying abroad in 2019

An annual survey conducted by the Australian Universities International Director's Forum's (AUIDF) found that students from 34 universities had undertaken 58,058 international study experiences at all levels in 2019¹. This was larger than the 52,171 experiences reported by 34 universities in 2018 (Table 1). Over half (54%) of experiences were undertaken by domestic undergraduates, 16 per cent by international undergraduates and remainder by postgraduates. The 31,376 international experiences undertaken by domestic undergraduates represented 23 per cent of the 2019 graduating cohort, slightly down from 24 per cent in 2018. The equivalent figure for US² undergraduates in 2019/20 was 16 per cent and for UK undergraduates it was 7 per cent in 2018/19³.

Faculty-led study (26%) and internship or other practical placements (20%) were the most popular types of study experiences among undergraduates in 2019. Postgraduate research students most often travelled for research-related experiences (51%) followed by conferences (42%) in 2019.

Nearly two-thirds (69%) of study abroad experiences undertaken by both undergraduates and postgraduate coursework students were for non-compulsory academic credit. Almost four out of every five (79%) experiences were less than a semester, the remainder being exchange and other semester or longer programs. Most experiences for postgraduate coursework (89%) and research (83%) students were for less than a semester.

In 2019, Asia remained the top primary destination region for learning abroad experiences with almost half (48%) of learning abroad experiences undertaken in Asia followed by Europe (28%). Two out of every five experiences (40%) in 2019 were in the top five destination countries (China, USA, UK, Italy and Japan), the same top five as in 2018 (Table 2). The proportion of experiences in China grew in 2019 (15% of all experiences) from 14 per cent in 2018. Nearly half of undergraduate domestic students (15,440) had experiences in Indo-Pacific countries, up from 14,481 in 2018. In 2019, 11,660 university students received scholarships and grants to study overseas under the New Colombo Plan⁴. A 22 per cent decline from 2018. The top destination was India followed by Indonesia.

Australia's Higher Education Statistics Collection shows there were 5,069 Australian students enrolled in offshore Australian higher education campuses in 2019, slightly less than in 2018 (5,244)⁵. It is likely that these students are also counted within the survey of Australian university students described above. The latest UNESCO data shows 13,319 Australian students enrolled in tertiary courses in other countries in 2018, a decrease of 1 per cent from 2017⁶. This statistic only counts Australian students enrolled in an award course in another country. Hence these students represent an additional cohort of Australians studying towards full qualifications in foreign institutions who are not counted in the survey described above.

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

Type of experience	2016	2017	2018	2019
Exchange	9,046	9,205	8,172	8,596
Other semester or year-long programs	1,594	1,042	807	1,472
Short-term Programs	19,669	22,992	26,360	30,267
Internship or other practical placement	8,334	10,094	10,753	11,866
Research-related	3,960	4,461	4,304	3,909
Volunteering/community engagement	1,234	1,030	1,064	844
Other	208	439	711	1,104
Total	44,045	49,263	52,171	58,058
<i>Number of universities reporting</i>	35	37	34	34

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

Top 5 destination countries (2019)	2018		2019	
	Number of experiences	% of all experiences	Number of experiences	% of all experience
China	7,376	14.1%	8,567	14.8%
USA	5,268	10.1%	5,212	9.0%
UK	3,959	7.6%	4,622	8.0%
Italy	2,261	4.3%	2,343	4.0%
Japan	2,190	4.2%	2,289	3.9%
Other	31,117	59.6%	35,025	60.3%
Grand Total	52,171	100.0%	58,058	100.0%

¹ AUIDF's infographics [Australian Universities Learning Abroad 2019](#)

² Institute of International Education's [Fast Facts](#); [Open Doors 2020](#) report; ² Universities UK: [International facts and figures 2020](#)

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

⁴ Unpublished Higher Education Statistics data [Department of Education, Skills and Employment](#)

⁵ UNESCO data used in this research snapshot is from <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>