



International student course variations in 2020

In early 2020, the COVID-19 outbreak has resulted in a substantial increase in the number of students deferring their studies to a later date, but a relatively minor increase in enrolment cancellations. Student Course Variations (SCVs) are reported by Australian CRICOS providers on a regular basis ensuring international student enrolment data continues to accurately reflect how many international students are enrolled and which courses they are enrolled in. As seen in Table 1 SCVs may routinely increase year-by-year in accordance with growth in overall student numbers. However, in the first quarter of 2020, there was a substantial increase well above that normal trend, largely in deferments where there were around 20,000 more deferments than normal. There were only minor increases in non-payment; non-commencement and notifications of cessation SCVs, being areas that represent students cancelling their enrolment.

Table 1: Student course variations, first quarter, by reason for variation.

Student Course Variations (SCV) January-March 2020	2017	2018	2019	2020	Increase in SCVs (from 2019 to 2020)
Deferment - Compassionate/compelling grounds	7,628	8,064	9,212	30,798	21,586
Non payment of fees	2,212	2,583	3,117	4,755	1,638
Student notified ceasing studies	12,630	12,597	14,125	15,518	1,393
Non-commencement of studies	38,619	38,497	44,307	44,280	-27
Student transferred to another provider	4,461	5,280	5,835	5,686	-149
Other	3788	3810	4490	5245	755
Grand Total	69,338	70,831	81,086	106,282	25,196

Tables 2 and 3 below, show the distribution of Deferment SCVs by sector and nationality, where it is apparent the majority were in the higher education sector and were mostly Chinese students. As reported in an earlier 2020 *Research Snapshot*, at the end of March 2020 nearly 40 per cent of all Chinese student visa holders were outside Australia as a consequence of travel restrictions, a far higher proportion than any other nationality. It is likely that those students, unable to travel to Australia, underlie the substantial increase in deferments seen in the first quarter of 2020. Nonetheless, given there were more than 60,000 Chinese primary student visa holders outside of Australia at the end of March 2020, it is apparent that the majority of those had not deferred up to the end of March.

Table 2: Deferments, first quarter, by education sector.

Deferment - Compassionate/compelling grounds	2017	2018	2019	2020	Increase in SCVs (from 2019 to 2020)
Higher Education	3,012	3,268	3,592	19,310	15,718
VET	3,255	3,383	3,913	5,776	1,863
ELICOS	1,167	1,154	1,444	2,842	1,398
Non-award	55	105	112	1,492	1,380
Schools	139	154	151	1,378	1,227
Grand Total	7,628	8,064	9,212	30,798	21,586

Table 3: Deferments, first quarter, by nationality.

Deferment - Compassionate/compelling grounds	2017	2018	2019	2020	Increase in SCVs (from 2019 to 2020)
China	1,340	1,531	1,743	19,792	18,049
India	1,083	1,295	1,639	2,470	831
Colombia	426	438	475	980	505
Vietnam	406	416	356	710	354
Nepal	167	365	545	683	138
Others	4,206	4,019	4,454	6,163	1,709
Grand Total	7,628	8,064	9,212	30,798	21,586

A recent global survey of international students found that few (5%) were cancelling their study plans due to the outbreak of COVID-19. In fact, most were anticipating commencing or continuing their studies online for the duration of the crisis¹.

1. <https://institutions.educations.com/insights/student-survey-covid-19-and-study-abroad>