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International students in Australia and the ELICOS sector, 2002 to 2004

Introduction

In Australia, English language courses (also referred to as ELICOS – English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students) are offered by providers in the higher education, vocational education and training (VET) and school sectors. Specialised English language colleges also provide ELICOS services.

ELICOS is a key area in Australian education, as international students often undertake English language courses as a precursor to studies in the other sectors. Whilst individuals may undertake short ELICOS courses as part of a visit to Australia, for example as part of a holiday or business trip on a short-stay visa, the focus of this analysis is on courses undertaken by overseas students on a student visa.

This paper follows an earlier and more general AEI examination of the pathways international students take within the framework of Australian education*. The earlier analysis highlighted broad trends in international student study pathways through the educational sectors in Australia. These are defined as the Higher Education, VET, Schools, ELICOS and Other† sectors.

This paper provides an analysis of international student study pathways specifically through the ELICOS sector in Australia. It shows the uptake of various study options via the ELICOS sector and highlights the extent to which international students in Australia pursue educational pathways through this sector.

Methodology

The dataset used in this analysis was derived from PRISMS‡ data and is, therefore, limited to pathways of international students studying in Australia on a student visa.

The dataset contains the full population of international students studying in Australia for the period 1 January 2002 to 31 December 2004. The reader should note that for this dataset, no distinction was made between commencing students and those continuing their studies in Australia and therefore includes international students already in the education system before the start of the year 2002. The benefit of this is the dataset contains many more student records, and therefore student pathways, to analyse.

Additionally, readers should also be aware that the dataset included records of students who had not yet completed their studies in Australia and were still in the system beyond the end date of the reference period. The full study pathways for these students will not be fully realised until we have a longer reference period to capture their entire pathways history.

It should also be noted that instances of simultaneous multiple sector enrolments were not differentiated from sequential sector enrolments due to the complexities with separately extracting

* The paper *Study Pathways of International Students in Australia* can be found at <http://aei.dest.gov.au/AEI/MIP/ItemsOfInterest>.

† Comprises Non-award courses such as 'Study Abroad', Foundation studies and Enabling courses.

‡ Provider Registration and International Student Management System database.

the information from PRISMS. However, as these instances contribute to the mix of study pathways for international students, they were retained on the dataset for this analysis.

Educational sectors

Of the 429,022 international students recorded in the Australian education system in the period 2002 to 2004, more than three-quarters (76.3%) were single sector students. Half (50.6%) of these single sector international students were enrolled in Higher Education. The next highest single-sector enrolments were in the ELICOS (17.7%) and Other (14.0%) sectors.

About two in three (68.1%) of multiple sector international students were enrolled in the ELICOS sector at some time in the three year reference period.

In total, just under one in three (29.6%) of all international students in studying in Australia in the period 2002 to 2004 were at some time enrolled in the ELICOS sector (*refer Table 1 below*).

Table 1. Whether single or multiple sector students

| <i>Sector</i> | <i>Number of students</i> | <i>% of all students</i> |
|---|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Single sector students</i> | 327,478 | 76.3 |
| Higher Education | 165,791 | 38.6 |
| ELICOS | 57,825 | 13.5 |
| Other | 45,869 | 10.7 |
| VET | 36,364 | 8.5 |
| Schools | 21,629 | 5.0 |
| <i>Multiple sector students</i> | 101,544 | 23.7 |
| Enrolled in ELICOS | 69,147 | 16.1 |
| Not enrolled in ELICOS | 32,397 | 7.6 |
| Total all international students | 429,022 | 100.0 |

The ELICOS sector

There were a total of 126,972 international students enrolled in the ELICOS sector in the period 2002 to 2004. Most of these students were multiple sector enrolments, however, 45.5% studied within the ELICOS sector only. Almost all international students (97.8%) enrolled in the ELICOS sector recorded ELICOS as their first sector of study in Australia. This indicates that most students undertook an English language course as a precursor to further studies in another sector.

One in five (20.7%) international students moved from the ELICOS sector to undertake studies in the Higher Education sector. The next most common pathways were ELICOS to VET (12.8%) and ELICOS to Schools (7.8%).

A small proportion of students enrolled in the ELICOS sector recorded a pathway through three educational sectors. These were ELICOS-VET-Higher Education and ELICOS-Other-Higher Education (2.5% and 1.6% respectively) (*refer Table 2 below*).

Table 2. Top 10 ELICOS sector study pathways

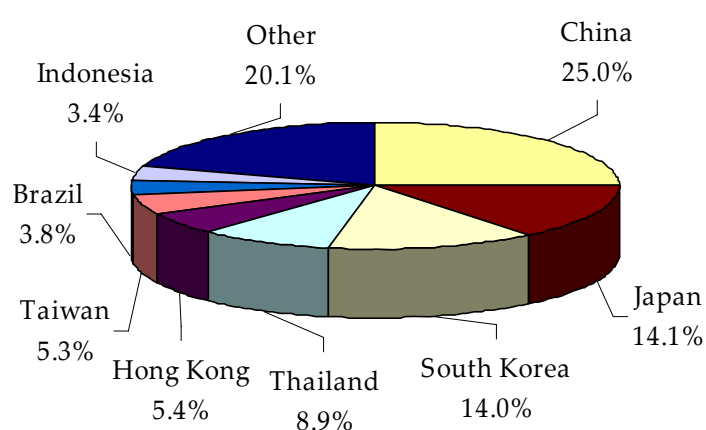
| <i>Sector</i> | <i>Number of students</i> | <i>% of all students</i> |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Single sector students</i> | | |
| ELICOS | 57,825 | 45.5 |
| <i>Multiple sector students</i> | | |
| ELICOS-Higher Education | 26,280 | 20.7 |
| ELICOS-VET | 16,259 | 12.8 |
| ELICOS-Schools | 9,964 | 7.8 |
| ELICOS-VET-Higher Education | 3,116 | 2.5 |
| ELICOS-Other-Higher Education | 2,094 | 1.6 |
| ELICOS-Other | 1,948 | 1.5 |
| ELICOS-Schools-Higher Education | 1,307 | 1.0 |
| ELICOS-Schools-VET | 775 | 0.6 |
| ELICOS-Higher Education-VET | 540 | 0.4 |
| Total | 126,972 | 100.0 |

Nationality and the ELICOS sector

One in four (25.0%) of all students enrolled in the ELICOS sector in the years 2002 to 2004 were from China, the most common nationality of students in the sector. Japanese and South Korean students were the next most common nationalities, accounting for a further 14.1% and 14.0% respectively. Thailand contributed some 8.9%, whilst Hong Kong and Taiwan an additional 5.4% and 5.3% respectively.

Four out of five (79.9%) international students enrolled in the sector were from the top eight nationalities of ELICOS sector students. There were 141 other nationalities contributing international students to the sector.

Nationalities of ELICOS sector students



Of the top eight nationalities, students from Brazil were the most likely to be enrolled in the ELICOS sector. Two-thirds (66.8%) of Brazilian students were in the ELICOS sector. Students from Japan were the next highest proportion to be enrolled in the ELICOS sector with 61.9%, followed by students from South Korea (58.5%) and Thailand (57.5%). Under half (48.3%) of students from China

were enrolled in the ELICOS sector. In contrast, just over one in four (27.6%) students from Hong Kong and 17.2% of students from Indonesia were enrolled in the sector (*refer Table 3 below*).

Table 3. Top eight nationalities of ELICOS sector students

| Nationality | Number of students | | | % of all students | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|----------------|--------------------|--|
| | Not enrolled in ELICOS | Enrolled in ELICOS | Total | Enrolled in ELICOS | From each nationality enrolled in ELICOS |
| China | 34,039 | 31,772 | 65,811 | 25.0 | 48.3 |
| Japan | 10,993 | 17,841 | 28,834 | 14.1 | 61.9 |
| South Korea | 12,606 | 17,785 | 30,391 | 14.0 | 58.5 |
| Thailand | 8,385 | 11,324 | 19,709 | 8.9 | 57.5 |
| Hong Kong | 18,005 | 6,871 | 24,876 | 5.4 | 27.6 |
| Taiwan | 5,752 | 6,713 | 12,465 | 5.3 | 53.9 |
| Brazil | 2,367 | 4,767 | 7,134 | 3.8 | 66.8 |
| Indonesia | 20,671 | 4,285 | 24,956 | 3.4 | 17.2 |
| All nationalities | 302,050 | 126,972 | 429,022 | 100.0 | 29.6 |

Top eight nationalities and the most common study pathways through ELICOS

Among the top eight nationalities, the most common pathways through the ELICOS sector varied depending on nationality. Additionally, significant proportions of students from some of the top eight nationalities are ELICOS sector only students.

The most common nationality of students through the ELICOS sector was Chinese. More than one-third (36.5%) of these students took the ELICOS-Higher Education study pathway. One in five Chinese students recorded either an ELICOS only (19.8%) or ELICOS-Schools pathways (19.7%).

The three most common study pathways of the other seven of the top eight nationalities were the same. These pathways were ELICOS-only, ELICOS-Higher education and ELICOS-VET.

Just over two in every three (67.4%) students from South Korea were enrolled only in the ELICOS sector, with relatively smaller proportions reporting an ELICOS-VET (9.7%) and ELICOS-Higher education (8.9%) study pathway.

Similar pathway types were reported by Japanese and Brazilian students where the majority were ELICOS-only students (69.6% and 69.7% respectively), followed by smaller proportions in the ELICOS-VET (14.7% and 24.6%) and ELICOS-Higher Education (5.8% and 2.7%) pathways.

The study pathway choices of Thai, Hong Kong and Indonesian students were more evenly distributed than those of the other top eight nationalities. More than one-third (38.3%) of Thai students were single sector ELICOS students, 28.6% reported an ELICOS-Higher education pathway, and a further 20.7% an ELICOS-VET pathway.

Almost one-quarter (23.5%) of students from Hong Kong were in ELICOS only, followed by ELICOS-VET (18.3%) and ELICOS-Higher education (13.0%). Just over one-third (36.9%) of Indonesian students reported an ELICOS-Higher education pathway, 22.3% were ELICOS-only and a further 16.1% an ELICOS-VET pathway (*refer Table 4 below*).

Table 4. Top 8 nationalities and the most common sector pathways for each nationality

| <i>Nationality and Sector pathway</i> | <i>Number of students</i> | <i>% from each nationality</i> |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>China</i> | | |
| ELICOS-Higher Education | 11,600 | 36.5 |
| ELICOS | 6,293 | 19.8 |
| ELICOS-Schools | 6,247 | 19.7 |
| <i>South Korea</i> | | |
| ELICOS | 11,985 | 67.4 |
| ELICOS-VET | 1,728 | 9.7 |
| ELICOS-Higher Education | 1,580 | 8.9 |
| <i>Japan</i> | | |
| ELICOS | 12,411 | 69.6 |
| ELICOS-VET | 2,615 | 14.7 |
| ELICOS-Higher Education | 1,033 | 5.8 |
| <i>Thailand</i> | | |
| ELICOS | 4,341 | 38.3 |
| ELICOS-Higher Education | 3,240 | 28.6 |
| ELICOS-VET | 2,339 | 20.7 |
| <i>Hong Kong</i> | | |
| ELICOS | 1,614 | 23.5 |
| ELICOS-VET | 1,258 | 18.3 |
| ELICOS-Higher Education | 892 | 13.0 |
| <i>Taiwan</i> | | |
| ELICOS | 3,621 | 53.9 |
| ELICOS-Higher Education | 1,459 | 21.7 |
| ELICOS-VET | 491 | 7.3 |
| <i>Brazil</i> | | |
| ELICOS | 3,321 | 69.7 |
| ELICOS-VET | 1,173 | 24.6 |
| ELICOS-Higher Education | 130 | 2.7 |
| <i>Indonesia</i> | | |
| ELICOS-Higher Education | 1,580 | 36.9 |
| ELICOS | 954 | 22.3 |
| ELICOS-VET | 688 | 16.1 |

Sector pathways and time spent in the ELICOS sector

Almost two in three (64.0%) of the 126,972 international students enrolled in the ELICOS sector over the reference period had an ELICOS course length of between 5 and 26 weeks, the equivalent of up to one semester. A further one-third (34.5%) had a course length of 27 or more weeks.

As discussed earlier, the largest proportion of students enrolled in the ELICOS sector over the reference period were single-sector ELICOS students (45.5%). The sector pathways with the next largest proportions were ELICOS-Higher education and ELICOS-VET (20.7% and 12.8% respectively).

Over half (57.6%) of the ELICOS sector only students reported a course length of 5 to 26 weeks and another 42.1% had a course length of 27 or more weeks. Of those students who reported an ELICOS-Higher education study pathway, three-quarters (75.2%) reported an ELICOS course length of 5 to 26 weeks. Just under two in three (64.4%) students on the ELICOS-VET pathway and almost three in four (70.8%) ELICOS-Schools students had an ELICOS course length of 5 to 26 weeks (*refer Table 5 below*).

Table 5. Top 10 ELICOS sector pathways by Length of study in ELICOS sector

| Sector pathway | Length of study | | | Total |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------|------------------|----------------|
| | 1 to 4 weeks | 5 to 26 weeks | 27 or more weeks | |
| | <i>Number of students</i> | | | |
| ELICOS | 209 | 33,289 | 24,327 | 57,825 |
| ELICOS-Higher Education | 337 | 19,758 | 6,185 | 26,280 |
| ELICOS-VET | 725 | 10,466 | 5,068 | 16,259 |
| ELICOS-Schools | 108 | 7,056 | 2,800 | 9,964 |
| ELICOS-VET-Higher Education | 53 | 2,094 | 969 | 3,116 |
| ELICOS-Other-Higher Education | 56 | 1,560 | 478 | 2,094 |
| ELICOS-Other | 92 | 1,344 | 512 | 1,948 |
| ELICOS-Schools-Higher Education | 9 | 1,092 | 206 | 1,307 |
| ELICOS-Schools-VET | 6 | 563 | 206 | 775 |
| ELICOS-Higher Education-VET | 5 | 361 | 174 | 540 |
| Total | 1,901 | 81,322 | 43,749 | 126,972 |
| <i>Proportion (%)</i> | <i>1.5</i> | <i>64.0</i> | <i>34.5</i> | <i>100.0</i> |

Nationality and time spent in the ELICOS sector

The period of study in the ELICOS sector varied depending on the nationality of the student. Table 6 below shows the most common sector pathways and the time spent in the ELICOS sector for each of the top eight nationalities.

In general, more students from China (79.3%), Thailand (62.0%), Hong Kong (70.4%), Brazil (81.0%) and Indonesia (83.0%) tended to spend the equivalent of over one month and up to one semester enrolled in the ELICOS sector. Most students from South Korea tended to spend the equivalent of more than one semester in ELICOS.

Of the students from Japan and Taiwan, similar levels of students of each nationality (between 44% and under 50%) were enrolled in ELICOS for one month and up to one semester as those enrolled in the sector for more than one semester.

Of students who were single sector ELICOS students, those from China, Thailand, Brazil and Indonesia spent one month and up to one semester in ELICOS compared to students from South Korea and Japan who tended to spend more than one semester in the sector (*refer Table 6 below*).

Table 6. Top 8 nationalities and Length of study in the ELICOS sector

| <i>Nationality</i> | <i>Length of study</i> | | | <i>Total</i> |
|--------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| | <i>1 to 4 weeks</i> | <i>5 to 26 weeks</i> | <i>27 or more weeks</i> | |
| | <i>Number of students</i> | | | |
| China | 370 | 25,196 | 6,206 | 31,772 |
| South Korea | 86 | 6,529 | 11,170 | 17,785 |
| Japan | 217 | 8,151 | 9,473 | 17,841 |
| Thailand | 85 | 7,017 | 4,222 | 11,324 |
| Hong Kong | 91 | 4,834 | 1,946 | 6,871 |
| Taiwan | 56 | 2,976 | 3,681 | 6,713 |
| Brazil | 81 | 3,859 | 827 | 4,767 |
| Indonesia | 111 | 3,556 | 618 | 4,285 |
| | <i>Proportion (%)</i> | | | |
| China | 1.2 | 79.3 | 19.5 | 100.0 |
| South Korea | 0.5 | 36.7 | 62.8 | 100.0 |
| Japan | 1.2 | 45.7 | 53.1 | 100.0 |
| Thailand | 0.8 | 62.0 | 37.3 | 100.0 |
| Hong Kong | 1.3 | 70.4 | 28.3 | 100.0 |
| Taiwan | 0.8 | 44.3 | 54.8 | 100.0 |
| Brazil | 1.7 | 81.0 | 17.3 | 100.0 |
| Indonesia | 2.6 | 83.0 | 14.4 | 100.0 |

Similarly, students from China, Thailand, Hong Kong, Brazil and Indonesia whose study pathway was ELICOS-Higher education were more likely to have spent up to one semester in ELICOS compared to students from South Korea who tended to spend more than one semester in the sector.

Of the students who reported an ELICOS-VET study pathway, students from South Korea tended to have a longer period of study in ELICOS than those from the other most common countries. A larger proportion of them spent more than one semester in ELICOS, compared to the equivalent of up to one semester for students of other nationalities.

The most common Level of Study pathways through ELICOS

As discussed earlier, a high proportion of students recorded a single sector ELICOS pathway (45.5% of all students enrolled in the ELICOS sector in the period 2002 to 2004). It is then not surprising that a significantly large proportion of ELICOS sector students recorded a 'Non-award' level of study pathway (43.3%).

The next most common level of study pathways through the ELICOS sector was Non-Award-Masters Coursework (9.8%), Non-Award-Diploma (6.9%), and Non-Award-Senior Secondary Studies (5.8%).

There were small proportions of students who recorded a level of study pathway through three levels. Some 1.1% of students followed the Non-Award-Foundation Studies-Bachelor Degree level of study pathway and 0.7% recorded a Non-Award-Senior Secondary Studies-Bachelor Degree pathway (*refer Table 14 below*).

Table 7. Top 20 Level of study pathways through ELICOS

| <i>Level of study pathway</i> | <i>Number of students</i> | <i>% of all ELICOS students</i> |
|---|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Non-Award | 54,973 | 43.3 |
| Non-Award-Masters Coursework | 12,404 | 9.8 |
| Non-Award-Diploma | 8,733 | 6.9 |
| Non-Award-Senior Secondary Studies | 7,335 | 5.8 |
| Non-Award-Bachelor Degree | 5,022 | 4.0 |
| Non-Award-Diploma-Bachelor Degree | 2,560 | 2.0 |
| Non-Award-Advanced Diploma | 2,386 | 1.9 |
| Non-Award-Certificate III | 2,058 | 1.6 |
| Non-Award-Certificate IV | 1,567 | 1.2 |
| Non-Award-Foundation Studies-Bachelor Degree | 1,398 | 1.1 |
| Non-Award-Junior Secondary Studies | 1,350 | 1.1 |
| Non-Award-Foundation Studies | 1,301 | 1.0 |
| Enabling Course | 1,124 | 0.9 |
| Non-Award-Senior Secondary Studies-Bachelor Degree | 894 | 0.7 |
| Non-Award-Graduate Diploma | 757 | 0.6 |
| Non-Award-Certificate II | 739 | 0.6 |
| Non-Award-Senior Secondary Studies-Diploma | 653 | 0.5 |
| Non-Award-Graduate Diploma-Masters Coursework | 590 | 0.5 |
| Non-Award-Certificate III-Diploma | 527 | 0.4 |
| Non-Award-Junior Secondary Studies-Senior Secondary Studies | 494 | 0.4 |
| Total | 126,972 | 100.0 |

Nationality and the most common level of study pathways

The most common level of study pathway for students in the ELICOS sector was a non-award course. This was regardless of the nationality of the student and due to the large proportion of international students who were single sector students enrolled in the ELICOS sector only.

A high proportion of students from some of the top eight nationalities reported they were enrolled in a single level of study pathway. About two in three students from South Korea, Japan and Brazil were in a Non-award course only. Most South Korean and Japanese students recorded a course length of more than one and up to two semesters (60.5% and 53.5% respectively), and four in five (81.6%) Brazilian students studied for more than a month to one semester in their Non-award study.

Similar levels (about 17% each) of students from China recorded a Non-award–Masters coursework and Non-Award–Senior secondary studies level of study pathway (*refer Table 15 below*).

Table 8. Nationality by most common Level of study pathway

| <i>Nationality and Level of study pathway</i> | <i>Number of students</i> | <i>% from each nationality</i> |
|---|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>China</i> | | |
| Non-Award | 5,988 | 18.8 |
| Non-Award-Masters Coursework | 5,412 | 17.0 |
| Non-Award-Senior Secondary Studies | 5,304 | 16.7 |
| <i>South Korea</i> | | |
| Non-Award | 11,283 | 63.4 |
| Non-Award-Diploma | 1,021 | 5.7 |
| Non-Award-Bachelor Degree | 596 | 3.4 |
| <i>Japan</i> | | |
| Non-Award | 11,920 | 66.8 |
| Non-Award-Diploma | 1,056 | 5.9 |
| Non-Award-Certificate III | 539 | 3.0 |
| <i>Thailand</i> | | |
| Non-Award | 4,054 | 35.8 |
| Non-Award-Masters Coursework | 2,284 | 20.2 |
| Non-Award-Diploma | 1,055 | 9.3 |
| <i>Hong Kong</i> | | |
| Non-Award | 1,486 | 21.6 |
| Non-Award-Diploma | 716 | 10.4 |
| Non-Award-Senior Secondary Studies | 500 | 7.3 |
| <i>Taiwan</i> | | |
| Non-Award | 3,432 | 51.1 |
| Non-Award-Masters Coursework | 714 | 10.6 |
| Non-Award-Diploma | 305 | 4.5 |
| <i>Brazil</i> | | |
| Non-Award | 3,186 | 66.8 |
| Non-Award-Diploma | 361 | 7.6 |
| Non-Award-Certificate III | 208 | 4.4 |
| <i>Indonesia</i> | | |
| Non-Award | 896 | 20.9 |
| Non-Award-Masters Coursework | 750 | 17.5 |
| Non-Award-Diploma | 612 | 14.3 |