

Student visa program

The Student visa program enables international students to come to Australia for the purpose of full-time study. The program is aimed at providing an efficient service that facilitates access to visas for genuine students while ensuring the integrity of Australia's immigration policies and procedures.

The broad objectives of the program are to support the growth of Australia's education services internationally, to develop trade and commercial links and to promote goodwill and understanding of Australia.

The structure of the Student visa program broadly reflects Australia's different education sectors. Student visas issued across the seven categories and the comparison of 2005-06 with 2006-07 are:

- Independent ELICOS increased from 26 683 to 30 115 grants, up 12.8 per cent
- Schools increased from 12 659 to 16 244 grants, up 28.3 per cent
- Vocational Education Training increased from 29 942 to 43 404 grants, up 44.9 per cent
- Higher Education increased from 93 732 to 110 821 grants, up 18.3 per cent
- Postgraduate Research increased from 5510 to 5810 grants, up 5.4 per cent
- Non-Award increased from 17 573 to 17 616 grants, up 0.3 per cent
- AusAID/Defence increased 4573 to 4602 grants, up 0.6 per cent

Numbers of applicants from across all visa subclass categories increased in the 2006-07 program year, pointing to the ongoing success of the program. In the 2005-06 program year total student visa grants were 190 674. In the 2006-07 program year this has risen to 228 592 which represents a 19.9 per cent increase overall.

In addition, Student Guardian visas have increased by 46.4 per cent between the 2005-06 and 2006-07 program years (from 1135 to 1662).

Growth in the overseas student visa program

As at 30 June 2007 there were 250 589 students in Australia, which is a 19.6 per cent increase compared with the previous year.

Offshore

The program has experienced considerable growth in visa applications lodged offshore since the mid-nineties. The program has seen growth from 63 073 visa grants in 1995-96 to 167 129 in 2006-07 (see Fig. 3-17). Offshore

Fig. 3-17: Student visas granted offshore from 1996-97 to 2006-07

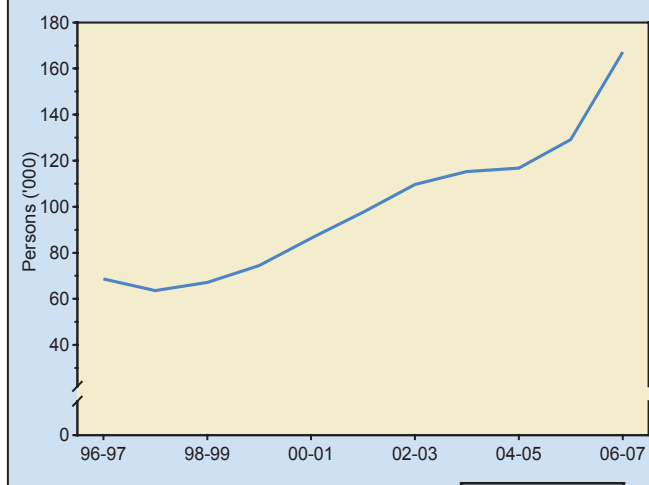


Fig. 3-18: Student visas granted offshore by country of citizenship 2006-07

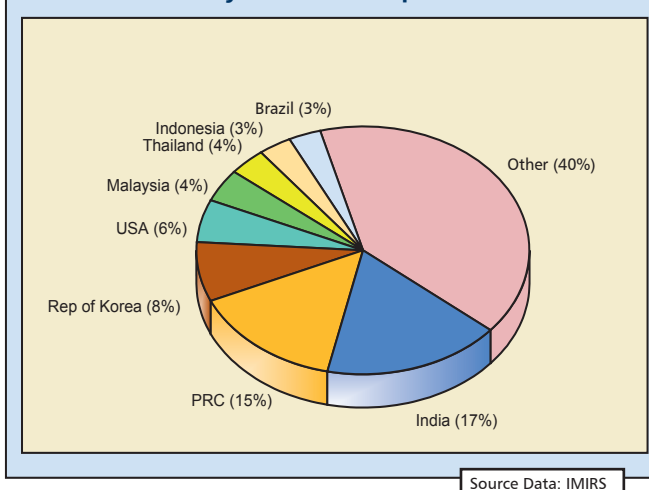
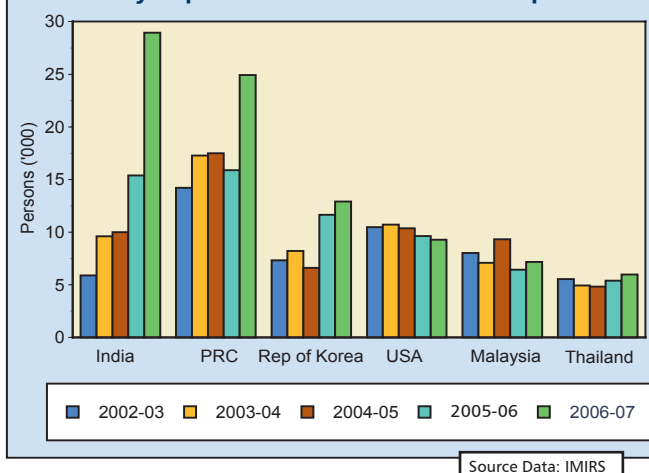
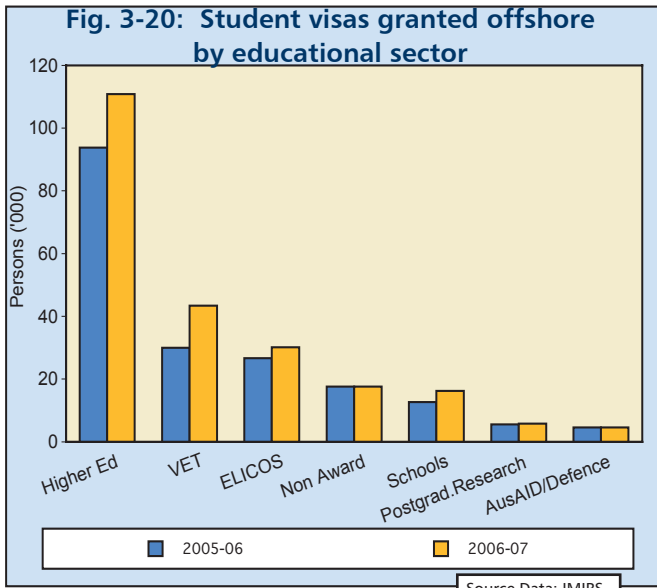


Fig. 3-19: Student visas granted offshore by top six countries of citizenship

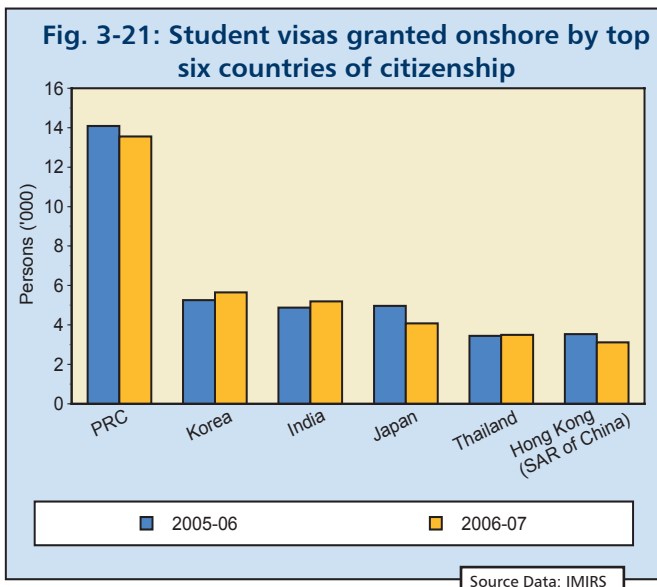




experienced strong growth with a 33.8 per cent increase from 2005-06 to 2006-07 program years (2240 to 2997). Korean nationals lodging onshore also experienced strong growth up 7.4 per cent from the last program year (5260 to 5647). Other top source countries included China with 13 551 total grants and India with 5197 total grants (see Fig. 3-21).

eVisa take-up rates

Australia's eVisa system allows applicants to lodge their applications on-line. All eVisa applications, lodged onshore and offshore, are processed in Australia. While this option is available to any student visa holder wanting to extend their visa in Australia, this method of lodgement is restricted to selected nationals if applying from offshore. Currently, visa applicants who fall within Assessment Level (AL) 1 requirements can lodge applications online from overseas. In addition, under a trial being conducted at present for AL 2-4 countries, approved education agents from China, India, Thailand and Indonesia, can lodge eVisa applications for local applicants.



The eVisa take-up rate was highest among Singapore nationals; 97.6 per cent of student visa applications from Singapore were lodged online. In the same period 96.98 per cent of new student visa applications from Malaysia, 96.4 per cent from the USA and 91.7 per cent from Norway were lodged online. (see Fig. 3-22).

The eVisa take-up rate for India, China, Thailand and Indonesia is collectively greater than 50.0 per cent.

Student visa compliance activity

One of the main goals of the Student visa program is to support the growth of Australia's international education sector, while minimising the number of students not complying with their visa conditions. These levels of non-compliance are measured by:

- Protection visa (PV) applications by student visa holders
- number of student visa holders who become unlawful and
- visa cancellation rates.

In the 2006-07 program year, rates of unlawful students have increased (1.3 per cent in 2006-07 up from 0.5 per cent in 2005-06), as have rates of PV applicants (0.1 per cent in 2006-07 up from 0.05 per cent in 2005-06). The rate of cancellations of student visas has decreased from 3.6 to 2.8 between 2005-06 and 2006-07. Another encouraging note for the program is that during the same period, overall student visa approval rates have increased from 93.0 per cent to 93.9 per cent.

grants in 2006-07 increased by 29.4 per cent in comparison with 2005-06, from 129 175 to 167 129.

The major source countries for offshore grants were India with 28 949 (up 88.1 per cent), the PRC with 24 915 Student visas granted (up 56.9 per cent), Republic of Korea with 12 910 (up 10.7 per cent), the USA with 9289 (down 3.6 per cent), Malaysia with 7175 (up 11.3 per cent) and Thailand with 5986 (up 11.1 per cent) (see Fig. 3-19). Other important markets include Indonesia with 5403 (up 18.5 per cent) and Brazil with 5223 (up 15.5 per cent).

Onshore

Onshore student visa grants remained steady between the 2005-06 and 2006-07 program years with a slight (0.06 per cent) decrease in grants overall. The case load from Brazilian nationals lodging visa applications onshore

Assessment level review

Set assessment levels apply to all student visa applications. These levels determine the range of evidentiary requirements which must be met for a student visa to be granted. These requirements apply to areas such as proof of financial requirements and academic qualifications. High risk applications attract higher assessment levels and therefore greater evidentiary requirements.

The increasing compliance of some international students has resulted in an easing of student visa assessment levels for 16 countries, regions and education sectors which was announced in May 2007. Students from countries or regions that have demonstrated a high level of compliance with their student visa conditions while in Australia are being rewarded in this way.

Students from Brazil, Taiwan, Hong Kong (SAR of China), Viet Nam, Czech Republic, Mauritius, Mexico, South Africa, South Korea, Macau (SAR of China), Venezuela, Argentina, Botswana, Cyprus, Slovakia and Hungary will all benefit from the changes, which allow some applicants to lodge applications online, depending on their education sector.

Overseas education is one of Australia's largest export industries and these changes will continue to strengthen Australia's market share.

While these changes will potentially open up new markets for the Australian overseas education industry, the department remains committed to ensuring the integrity of the student visa program through increasing compliance with visa conditions.

Applications for permanent residence by overseas students

A range of onshore General Skilled Migration (GSM) visa categories are available which enable international students to apply for and be granted permanent residence following the completion of their studies without the need to leave Australia.

In the 2006-07 program year, of the 22 858 visa grants to former overseas students (including dependants) across three GSM visa categories, 20 288 were in the Skilled Independent Overseas Student category and 1540 were in the Skilled Australian Sponsored Overseas Student visa category. The remaining 1030 grants were in the Skilled Designated Area Sponsored Overseas Student visa category.

