

# International Students in Australian Universities 2021

## International Student Numbers 2021

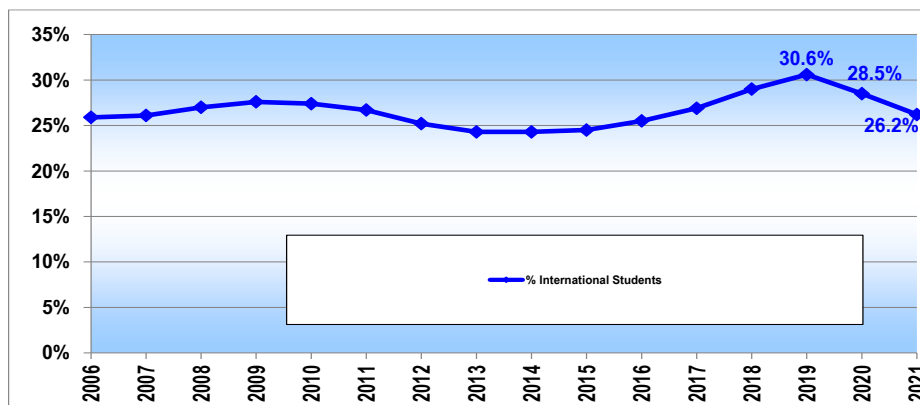
The Australian Department of Education in February 2023 released data<sup>1</sup> on international student numbers in Australian higher education institutions in 2021, the second year of the coronavirus pandemic. This analysis edits that data to include only the 41 Australian universities, including University of Divinity, Bond University, The University of Notre Dame Australia and Torrens University Australia Limited.

### Onshore and Offshore

In the 41 Australian universities, there were 388,444 international students, onshore and offshore, in 2021, down 8.8% from 425,695 a year earlier in 2020, and down 14.4% from 453,833 in 2019. These 388,444 international students made up 26.2% of the 1,483,779 students in Australian universities in 2021, from 28.5% a year earlier and from 30.6% in 2019.

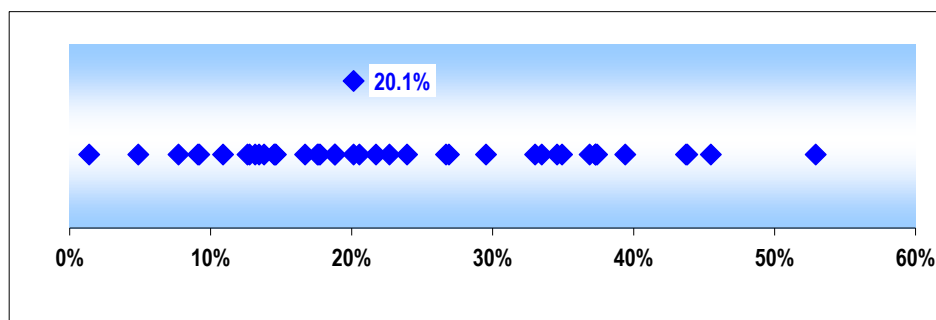
In the previous perfect storm, a decade ago, the proportion of international students in Australian universities dropped from 27.7% in 2009 to 24.3% in 2013, then grew to 29.0% in 2018 and 30.6% in 2019, ahead of the drop to 28.5% in 2020, then 26.2% in 2021, as in Chart 1.

**Chart 1**  
**International Students in Australian Universities: Onshore and Offshore**



Across the 41 universities in 2021, the proportion of international students ranged from 1.4% to 52.9%, with the mean 23.5% and the median figure 20.1%, as in Chart 2.

**Chart 2**  
**Proportions of International Students in Australian Universities: Onshore and Offshore**



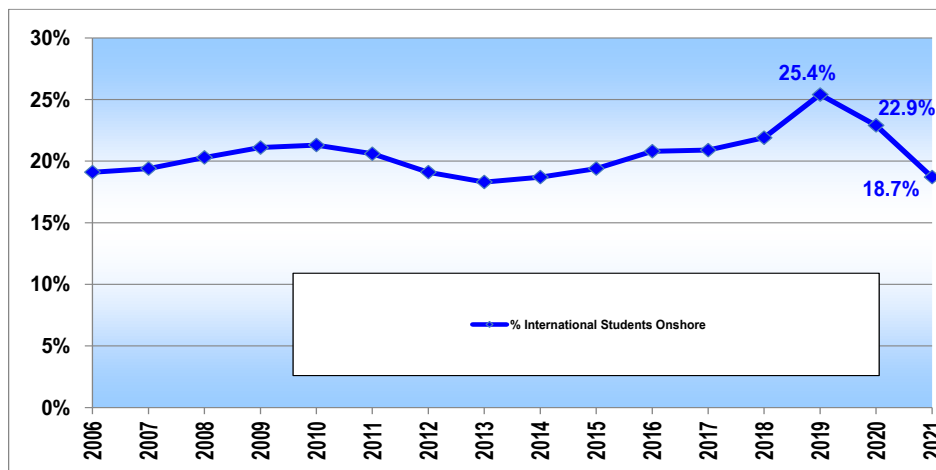
<sup>1</sup> <https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/student-data/selected-higher-education-statistics-2021-student-data>

## Onshore

In the 41 Australian universities, there were 277,994 international students, onshore in Australia, in 2021, down 18.8% from 342,378 a year earlier in 2020, and down 26.1% from 376,427 in 2019. These 277,994 international students made up 18.7% of the 1,483,779 students in Australian universities in 2021, from 22.9% a year earlier in 2020 and from 25.4% a year earlier.

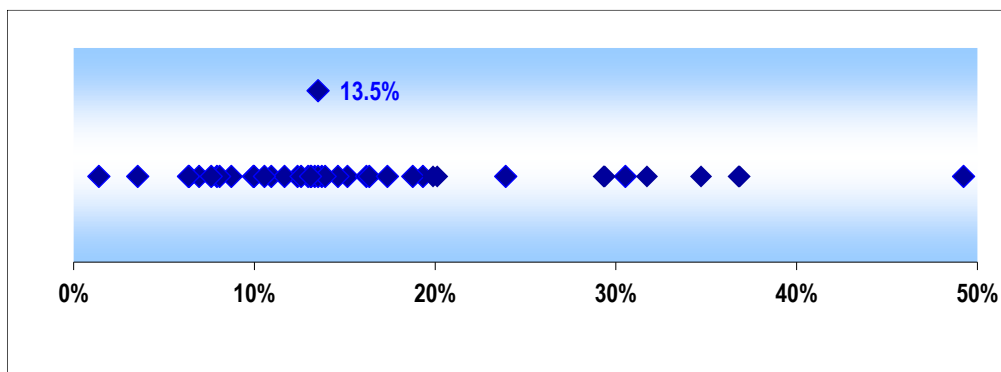
In the previous perfect storm, a decade ago, the proportion of international students in Australian universities, onshore in Australia, dropped from 21.3% in 2010 to 18.3% in 2013, then grew to 21.9% in 2018 and 25.4% in 2019, ahead of the drop to 22.9% in 2020, then 18.7% in 2021, as in Chart 3.

**Chart 3**  
**International Students in Australian Universities: Onshore Only**



Across the 41 universities in 2021, the proportion onshore ranged from 1.4% to 49.2%, with the mean 16.8% and the median figure 13.5%, as in Chart 4.

**Chart 4**  
**Proportions of International Students in Australian Universities: Onshore Only**



## International Student Revenue 2021

The Australian Department of Education in March 2023 released its annual Finance Tables for 2021, providing data from the 2021 financial statements for higher education providers<sup>2</sup>.

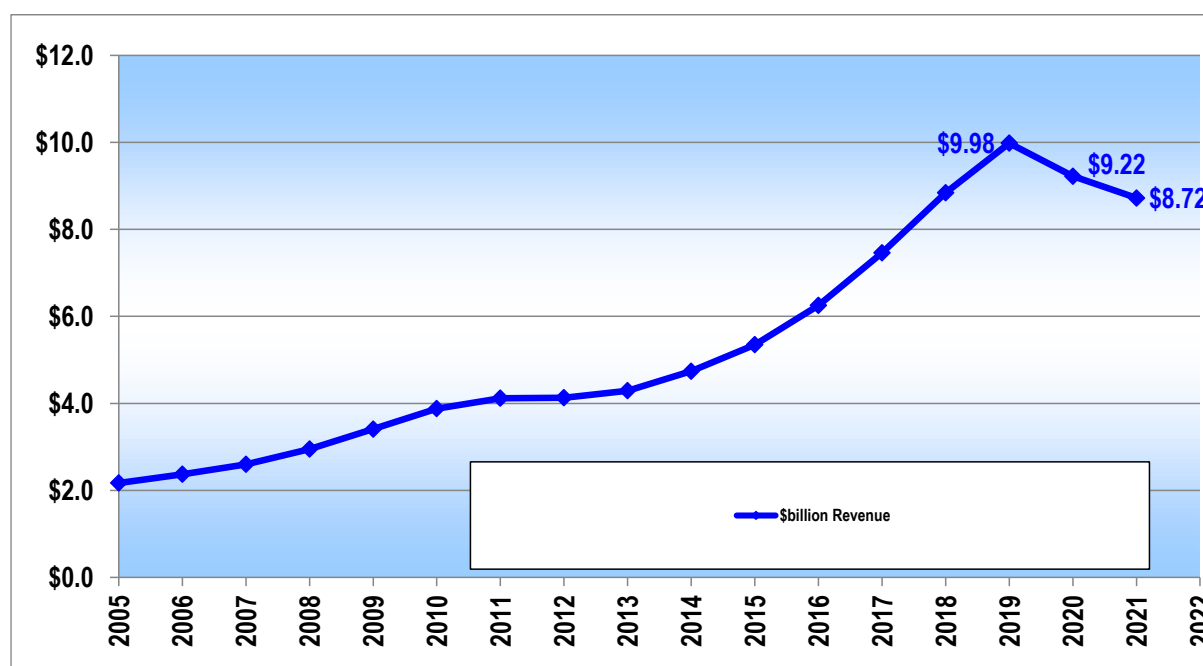
The finance data covered 41 universities, up from 38 universities in 2020. The 2021 data included University of Divinity, Bond University and Torrens University Australia Limited. The inclusion of these three additional universities does not have a significant impact. In 2021, these three universities accounted for 1.3% of total revenue and 2.6% of revenue from fee paying overseas students.

The 41 Australian universities in 2021 had total revenue of \$38.86 billion, an increase 12.2% from \$34.62 billion across 38 universities in 2020.

The 41 Australian universities in 2021 earned \$8.72 billion from international student fees, a drop of 9.5% from \$9.22 billion across 38 universities in 2020.

In the previous perfect storm, revenue from international student fees was flat at \$3.88 billion in 2010, \$4.12 billion in 2011, \$4.13 billion in 2012 and \$4.29 billion in 2013, then grew to \$7.46 billion in 2017, \$8.84 billion in 2018 and \$9.98 billion in 2019, before a drop to \$9.22 billion in 2020, and \$8.72 billion in 2021, as in the chart.

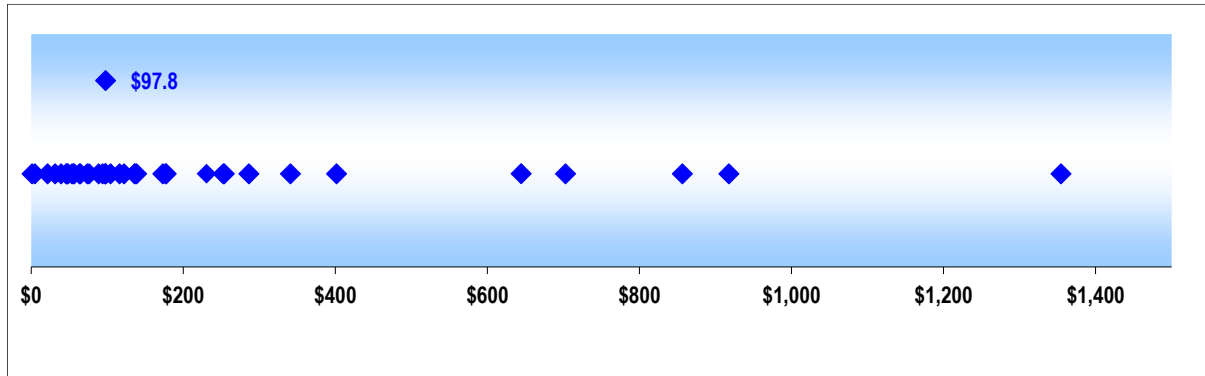
**Chart 5**  
**Revenue from International Students \$ billions**



<sup>2</sup> <https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-publications/resources/2021-higher-education-providers-finance-tables>

In 2021, the range among the 41 universities was from \$1.1 million to \$1,354.4 million. The mean across the 41 universities in 2021 was \$212.8 million, the median figure was \$97.8 million, as in the chart.

**Chart 6**  
**University Revenue from International Students \$ millions**



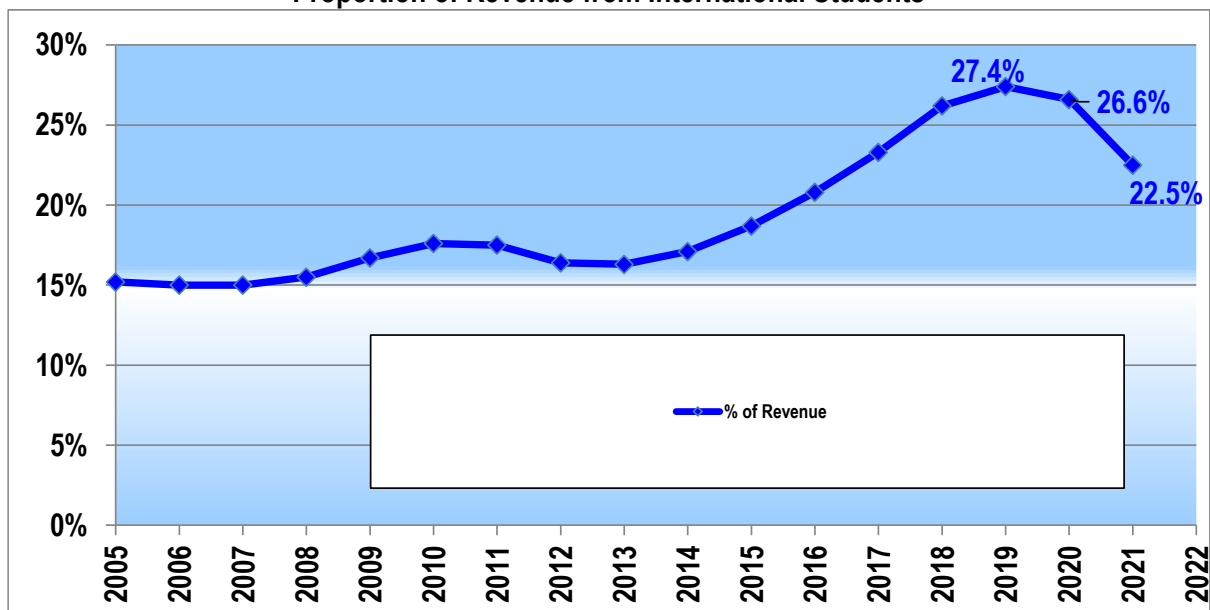
The University of Sydney is the university with international student fee revenue above \$1 billion. The University of Sydney had total revenue from all sources aggregating to \$3.531 billion in 2021, up 29% from \$2.644 billion in 2020. Income from international student fees in 2021 was \$1.354 billion, 38.4% of total revenue, up 22.5% from \$1.105 billion or 41.8% of total revenue in 2020.

### Proportion of Revenue from International Students

In the 41 universities, revenue from international student fees in 2021 made up 22.5% of total university revenue, a drop from 26.6% across 38 universities in 2020.

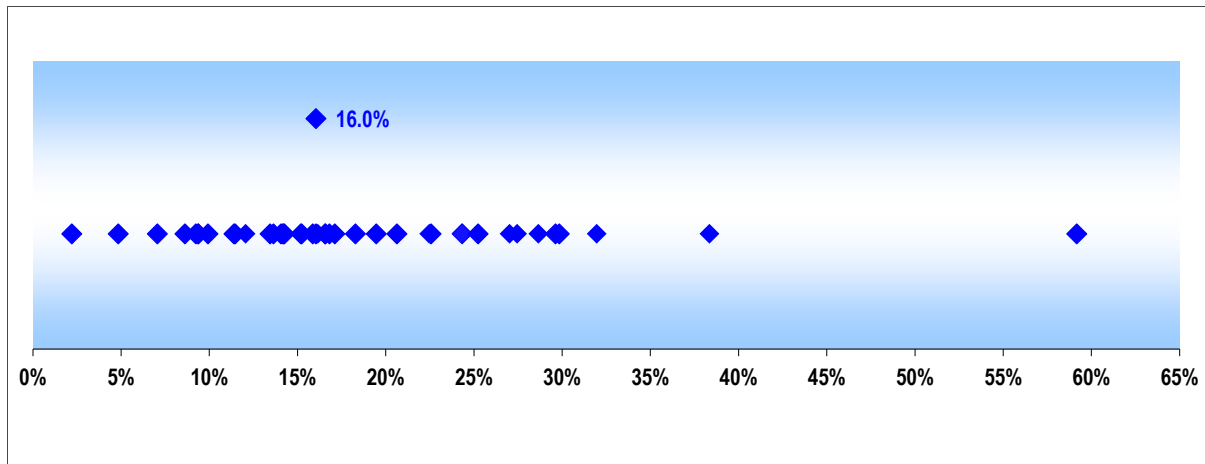
In the previous perfect storm, the proportion was flat at 17.6% in 2010 and 17.5% in 2011, then dropped to 16.4% in 2012 and 16.3% in 2013, then grew to 23.3% in 2017, 26.2% in 2018 and 27.4% in 2019, before the drop to 26.6% in 2020 and 22.5% in 2021, as in the chart.

**Chart 7**  
**Proportion of Revenue from International Students**



In 2021, the range among the 41 universities was from 2.2% to 59.2%. The mean across the 41 universities in 2021 was 18.3%, the median figure was 16.0%, as in the chart.

**Chart 8**  
**University Proportion of Revenue from International Students**



In the above chart, the university with the highest proportion of revenue from international student fees is Torrens University, where \$177.6 million in fees from international students made up 59.2% of total revenue \$300.1 million.

Next is The University of Sydney, where \$1.354 billion in fees from international students made up 38.4% of total revenue of \$3.531 billion.

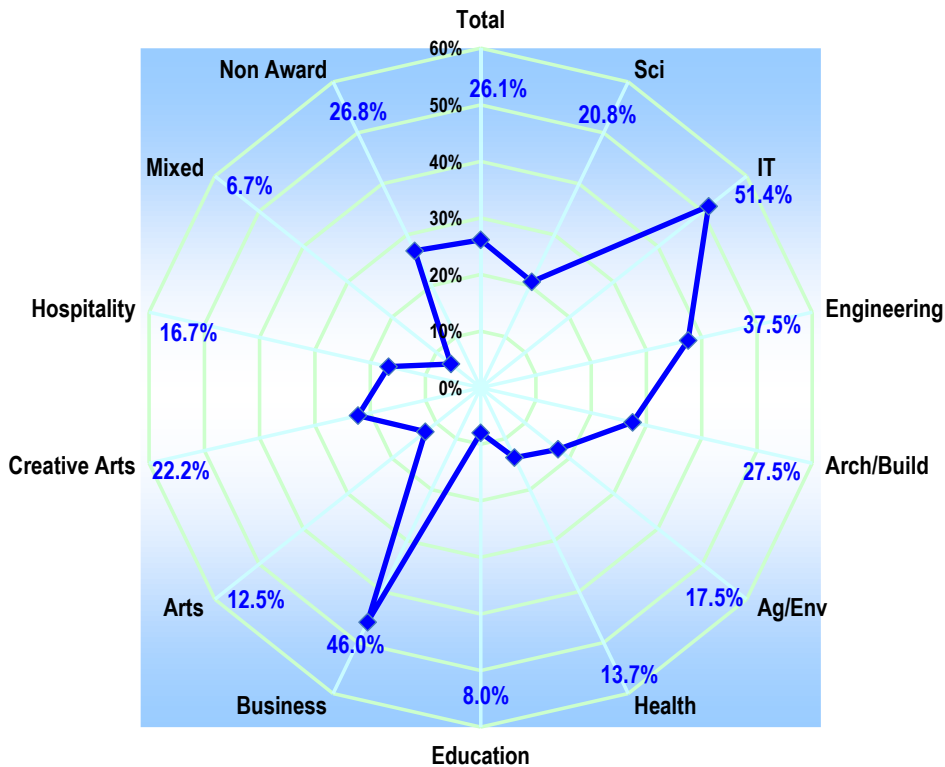
## International Students: Fields and Levels of Education

The data for 2021 on international student numbers, released in March 2023, enabled analysis of fields of education and levels of education of international students in the 41 Australian universities, including University of Divinity, Bond University, The University of Notre Dame Australia and Torrens University Australia Limited. The data by field and level of education included all students, onshore and offshore.

### Fields of Education

In total, 26.1% of students in all fields of education in 2021 were international. 51.4% of students in IT were international, 46.0% of students in Business were international, 37.5% of students in Engineering were international, with proportions in other fields as in the chart.

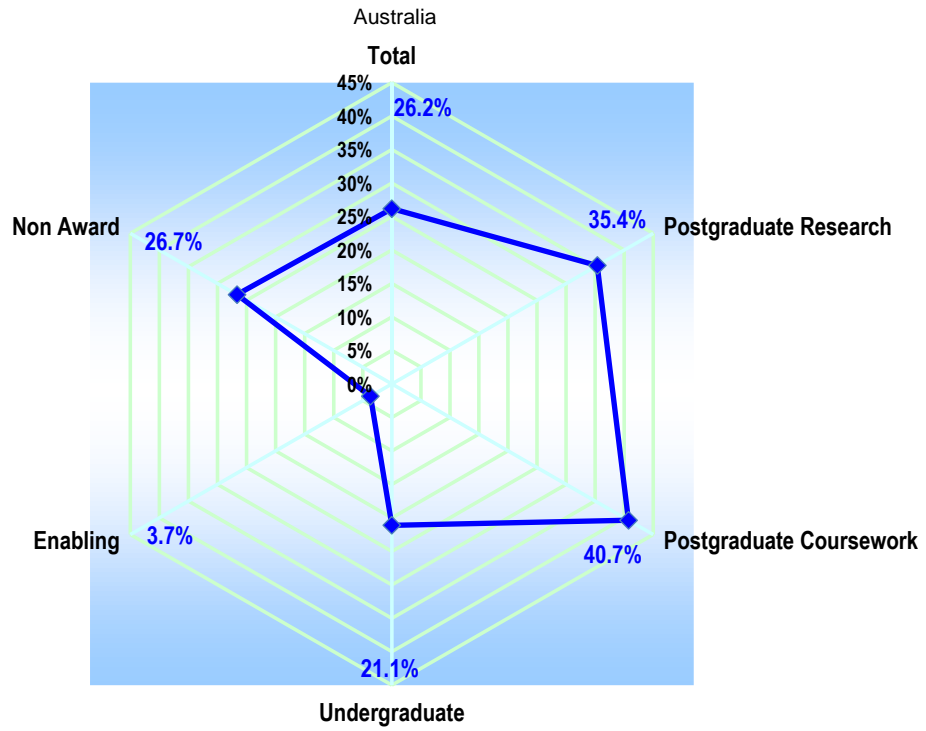
**Chart 9**  
**Fields of Education: Proportion of International Students**



## Levels of Education

In total, 26.2% of students at all levels of education in Australian universities in 2021 were international. 5.4% of postgraduate research students were international, 40.7% of postgraduate coursework students were international and 21.1% of undergraduate students were international, as in the chart

**Chart 10**  
**Levels of Education: Proportion of International Students**



## International Students: Progress

The Australian government publishes annually data on progress rates for commencing bachelor degree students for the 41 universities, including University of Divinity, Bond University, The University of Notre Dame Australia and Torrens University Australia Limited<sup>3</sup>.

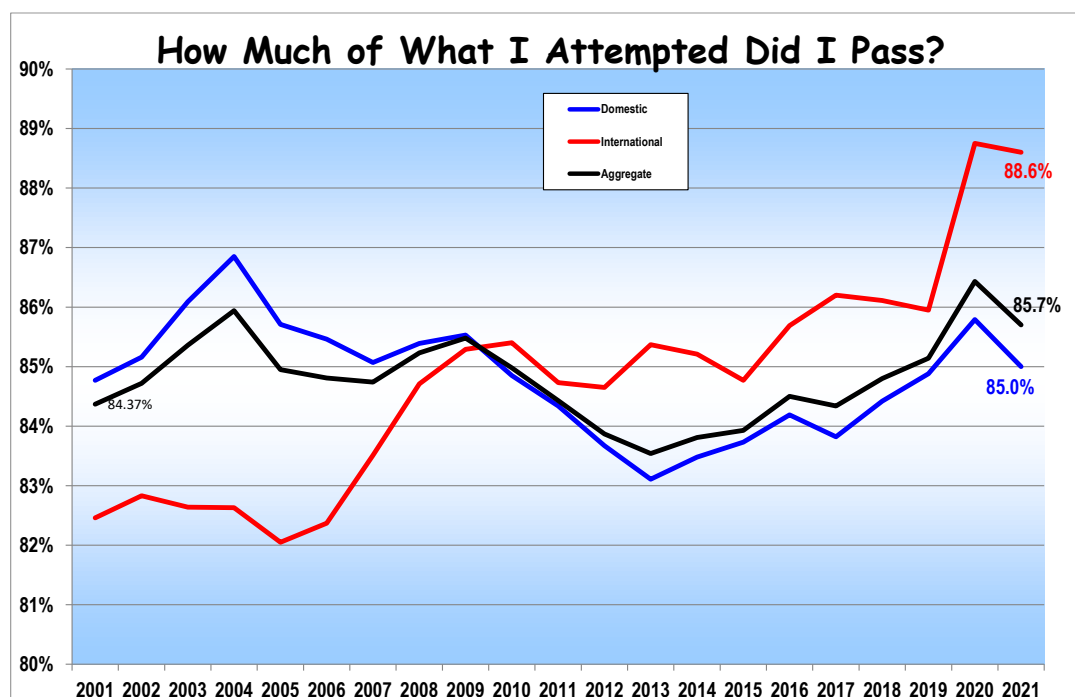
The most recent publication of data on student performance in Australian universities was the publication in February 2023 of data from 2021, the second year of the coronavirus pandemic.

In 2021, 315,152 students commenced bachelor degrees in Australian universities. 79% were domestic students, 21% were international students. In 2021, commencing international bachelor students passed 88.6% of what they attempted in that year, and did better than commencing domestic bachelor students, who passed 85.0%.

But it was not always so. It was not until 2008 that commencing international students did about the same as commencing domestic bachelor students (less than one percentage point difference). It was not until 2013 that commencing international students did better than commencing domestic bachelor students. Generations of academics had the experience that commencing international bachelor students dragged standards down. In 2001, commencing international bachelor students were 2.3 percentage points worse, in 2004 negative 4.2 and in 2005 negative 3.7.

The results since 2013 can be interpreted as showing that increasing numbers of Australian universities set and maintain entry standards, including English language entry standards, for international undergraduates that lead to successful outcomes, prepare international students better in English language proficiency, monitor academic performance and provide effective English language and study skills support. Of course regulation has played a role in the improvement of standards.

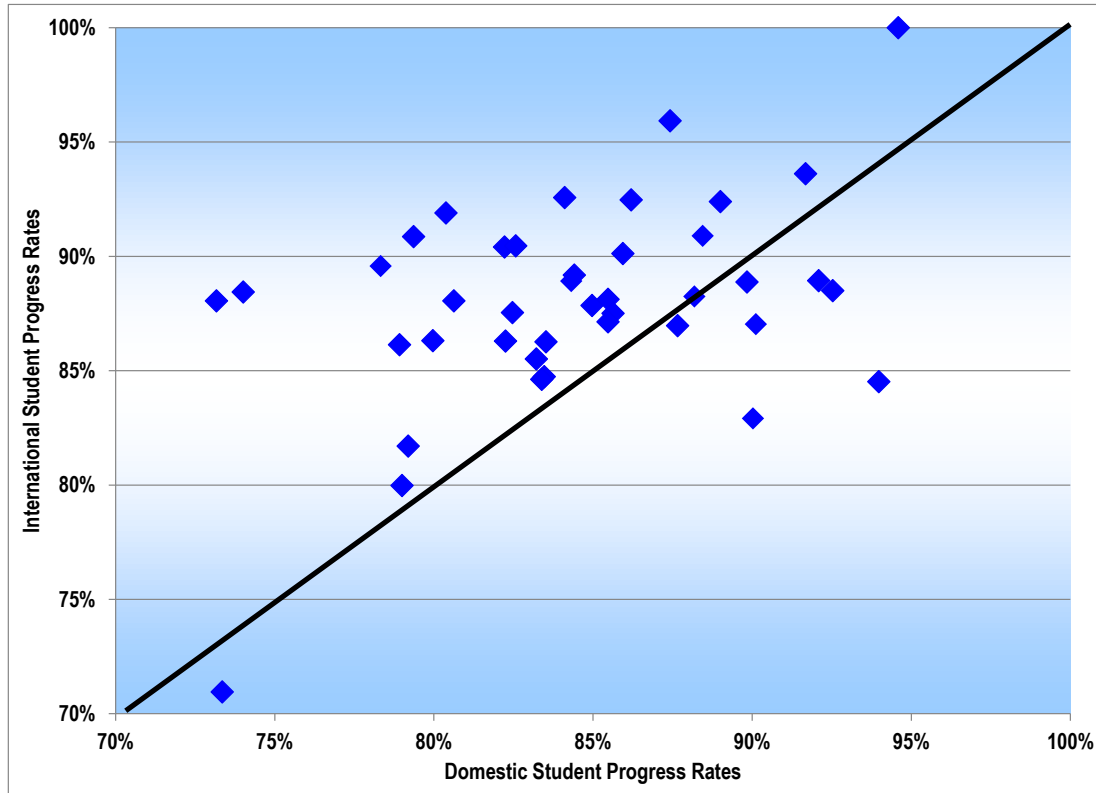
Chart 11  
Student Progress Rates: Commencing Bachelor Students: Time Series



<sup>3</sup> <https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/resources/2021-section-15-attribution-success-and-retention>

In 31 universities in 2021, commencing international undergraduates did better than domestic students. In 6 universities domestic students did better. In 4 universities, there was no difference (less than one percentage point) as in the chart.

**Chart 12**  
**Student Progress Rates: Commencing Bachelor Students: 41 Universities**



Why only commencing bachelor students, why only first years? Because that's what's published.

But former University of Wollongong Vice-Chancellor Paul Wellings, then chair of the expert panel to provide advice on implementing performance-based funding to improve university student outcomes in Australia, provided a useful quote in the Australian Financial Review on 12 August 2019:

“Student success was not based on completion. A better measure was whether a person survived first year and went through to second year. You can put a wrapper around first-year students. See if all first years become second years. Once they're second years they tend to last.”

## Postgraduate Research Completions

At the level of commencing bachelor students, international students outperform.

A long way from commencing bachelor students are students completing postgraduate research degrees (covering both Ph D and Masters by Research).

From analysis of the Award Course Completions Pivot Table <sup>4</sup>, there were 9886 postgraduate research (PhD plus Masters by Research) completions at the 41 universities in 2021.

38% of postgraduate research completions were by international students, including 60% of IT research completions and 58% of Engineering completions, with details in the table.

### Postgraduate Research Completions 2021

Field	Completions	International %
Science	2,380	41%
Society/Culture	1,823	23%
Engineering	1,659	58%
Health	1,589	25%
Management/Commerce	624	50%
Education	451	29%
IT	464	60%
Agriculture/Environment	392	51%
Creative Arts	385	15%
Architecture	149	45%
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,886</b>	<b>38%</b>

Alan Olsen  
Director, SPRE P/L  
31 March 2023

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/resources/award-course-completions-pivot-table-2021>