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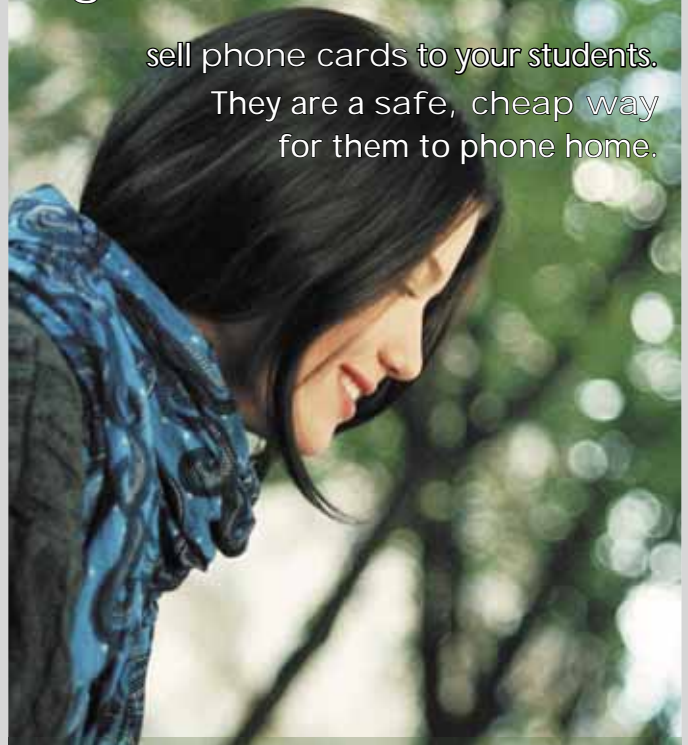
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Australia builds momentum

A favourable migration policy for skilled workers and continued efforts on the part of institutions to reach new student markets are having a positive effect on international enrolments at Australia's universities and technical institutes, says **BETHAN NORRIS**.

Universities and technical institutes in Australia have seen a boom in international enrolments in recent years and many put this down in part to the country's immigration policy. Recent government-led initiatives, which make it easier for skilled migrants in certain employment sectors to settle in Australia, have resulted in an increase in international student enrolments in relevant subjects, according to international student advisors.

"We have experienced strong and steady growth in certain trade courses that currently gain students high points for skilled migration, [such as] interpreting, dental technology, cookery, patisserie and community welfare work," says Vivian Ip at the Southbank Institute of Technology in Brisbane, QLD, who adds that international enrolments grew by an average of three to 19 per cent among their six top markets last year.

At the Australian Catholic University in Sydney, NSW, Australia's migration policy is also having an effect on the take-up of courses by international students. "[We are] still reliant on study areas connected to migration, such as nursing and accounting," says Heleena Lung at the university, who observes, "Nursing forms our most significant enrolment area [for international students]."

Another visa initiative introduced by the government recently will see international students able to qualify for an 18-month work visa on completion of a tertiary degree (see *Language Travel Magazine*, July 2006, page 7). Combined with the skilled migration policy, these developments mean Australian institutions with a close eye on the local and national work forces are in demand overseas.

Nicole Talmacs from the University of Technology (UTS) in Sydney, NSW, says that Chinese enrolments at the university have grown recently and she states, "We believe this has to do with the orientation of the courses which UTS offers and the connections that the university has with industry." She adds, "UTS's close academic ties with Chinese institutions and its off-shore courses throughout China, Hong Kong and parts of southeast Asia have also assisted in raising the profile of UTS as a tertiary institution of high academic standard."

When it comes to the most important student markets for Australian universities and technological institutes, little has changed in that Asian nationalities remain in pole position. "Chinese, Indians and Koreans [are the most important nationalities for us]," confirms Lung, adding, "They've always featured in the top three."

Nick Shaw from the University of Tasmania in Launceston, TAS, says that they have seen overall international enrolments grow by 16 per cent annually for the last five years, with "China and India recording the highest growth". He reports that despite the impressive growth experienced by a number of Asian student markets – China increased its market share by 33 per cent and India by 25 per cent on the previous year according to Australian Education International statistics for 2005 – some nationalities are still experiencing problems when it comes to applying for visas.

"Visa issues remain a significant influence on student enrolments, not just the regulations, but also comparative responsiveness to visa applications between countries impacts on Australian enrolments," he relates. "Bangladesh, India and to a lesser extent China [response times] are still very slow and students are unable to arrive in time for English language programmes leading into award courses," he says. "In many circumstances, potential students switch to other countries."

Shaw also notes certain student trends that are taking place among their international student body, resulting in a change in demand

for different levels of higher education courses. "We now market in countries that have a higher demand for postgraduate programmes – India and other subcontinent countries, the Middle East and China," he says. "[These] are replacing the traditional undergraduate markets of Malaysia and Singapore as chief sources of international enrolments."

In Queensland, Ip says that their most important student markets are Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Thailand, Taiwan and China, although she also reports increased interest from new markets. "We also have



PHOTOGRAPH: TOURISM QUEENSLAND

significant growth in some growing markets such as India, Latin America and Sri Lanka," she says. For most tertiary institutions, however, the emphasis is firmly on Asia and the marketing of individual institutions often reflects this.

At UTS Sydney, Talmacs relates that they attended education fairs in China, South Korea, Germany and India in the last 12 months in order to recruit new international students, but also describes a new venture introduced in 2006: live agent briefings broadcast via the Internet aimed at both agents and students worldwide. "They featured faculty presentations and opportunities for those registered into the broadcast to engage in Q&A sessions with faculty and recruitment staff," says Talmacs. "We were overwhelmed with the questions that flooded in from

all corners of the world – despite the time differences – during our various Q&A sessions and we hope to further develop this mode in the future."

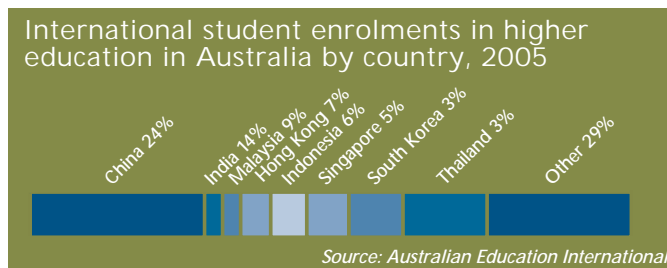
Southbank Institute of Technology is another institution that is keen to develop its Internet presence in the future in order to market in new countries.

"Compared with the past, we have now put more focus on Internet

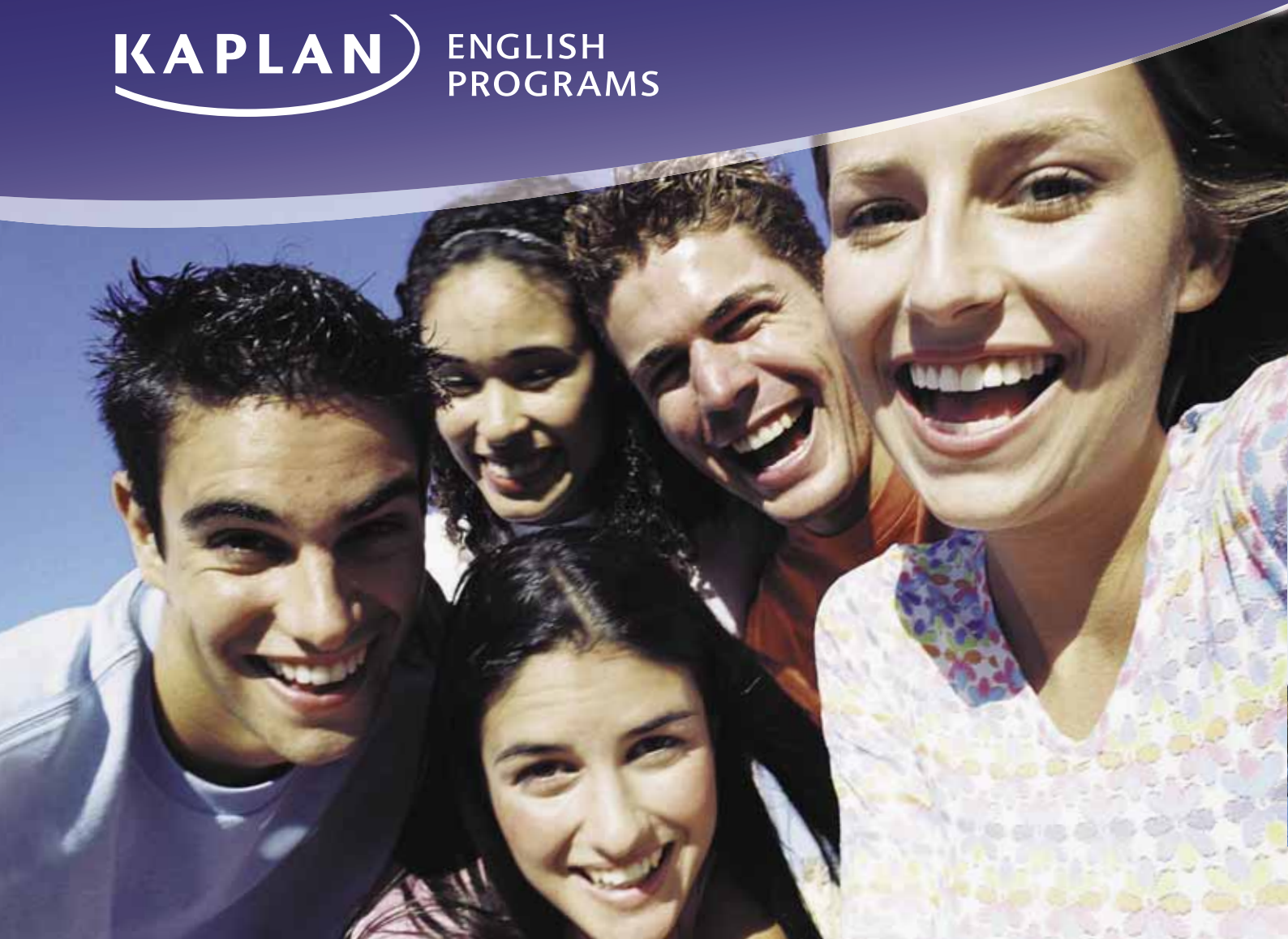
marketing to encourage direct applications and to raise our profile in certain new markets," says Ip, adding, "We expect a steady growth in most of our major markets and some new emerging markets [such as] Vietnam, India and Latin America [in the future]."

It is likely that Australia's higher education market will continue to grow over the next few years, as the country's need for skilled migrants continues. However, the industry would be wise not to rest on its laurels, especially in the face of increased competition from other study destinations. Talmacs notes that enrolments from some student markets are already down due to "aggressive marketing from competitor states" and warns, "UTS has noticed that the international student market has become increasingly fierce over the last 12 months."

International student enrolments in higher education in Australia by country, 2005



Source: Australian Education International



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