

Australian numbers rise

More international students are choosing to study in Australia than ever before, according to statistics released by Australia Education International (AEI) in March. Student numbers reached 303,324 in 2003, an increase of 11 per cent on the previous year.

All education sectors in Australia recorded an increase in international student numbers last year, with higher education institutions on top with 17 per cent growth, high schools recording 15 per cent growth and vocational colleges and English language schools each chalking up increases of four per cent.

Many institutions reported that students who have found it increasingly difficult to get a visa to study in the USA are now more likely to choose Australia as their education destination. Victor Johnson from Nafsa: Association of International Educators in the USA, told the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, "There's no question that other countries are making proactive efforts to recruit foreign students. The United States, on the other hand, is doing the opposite. Not only do we not have an active policy of recruiting foreign students, we are putting visa obstacles in the way."

The Australian Department of Education, Science and Training has recently been looking at ways to quantify quality assurance among Australian higher education institutions in a bid to enhance the country's reputation as a provider of quality education to international students. Strategies currently being examined include an international quality badge and a code of practice. The move comes after research conducted by IDP Education Australia recently showed that the quality of education is a key driver of international higher education growth (see *Education Travel Magazine*, March 2004, page 49).

UK beats student growth target

The Prime Minister's Initiative, designed to increase the number of international students studying in higher education in the UK by 50,000 within five years, has been reached a year early, according to statistics released by the Higher Education Statistics Agency in the UK. Student numbers look set to rise even further by the 2004 deadline set in 1999.

According to the figures, the number of non-EU students studying in higher education in the UK during the 2002/2003 academic year increased by 23 per cent on the previous year to a total of 174,575. International student numbers have increased by 59 per cent since 1996.

The British Council attributed the increase to a number of factors, including practical changes implemented by the Department for Education and Skills; amendments to the UK visa process; the Council's own global marketing campaign; the individual efforts of the universities themselves; and the opening up of new student markets such as China and India.

Alan Johnson, Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education, said, "These figures show that more and more international students recognise the benefits of experiencing a first class UK education and demonstrate the success of our efforts to promote the UK as an accessible and welcoming study destination."

A joint study produced by the British Council and IDP Education Australia forecasts that international student demand for places at UK higher education institutions could be as high as 677,000 by 2015 and rise to 1,330,000 by 2025.

Dr Neil Kemp, Director of the British Council's Education UK Marketing Division, however, warned the industry against complacency. "The Mori research [involving interviews with international students in 30 countries and 110 UK institutions] highlights the fact that two-thirds of UK institutions only have capacity to cope with a slight increase in international student numbers," he said. "It is therefore vital that we start

planning for the future now, so that we are in a position to take advantage of predicted demand."

Many institutions in the UK are bracing themselves for a flood of applications from students in the EU accession countries this year, who will be eligible to pay the same fees as EU students from 1 May. Typical undergraduate degree fees for non-EU students ranged from UK£4,000 (US\$7,400) to UK£17,000 (US\$31,440) for the 2003/2004 year, while fees for EU students were UK£1,125 (US\$2,100). Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, Cyprus and Malta will all join the European Union in May this year.

Graduate applications down in USA

A survey of 530 US institutions conducted jointly by a number of education associations in February shows that nearly half of the institutions providing data regarding graduate applications from international students had experienced a downturn in this sector, compared with 2003 figures.

Nineteen of the respondents are ranked among the 25 US research institutions that enrol the most international students on their programmes, and all of these reported a decline in international applications for graduate studies this year. Nine of these institutions indicated a decrease of 30 per cent or more, while a further six reported a decrease in enrolments of between 11 and 30 per cent.

The survey, which was conducted by the American Council of Education, the Association of American Universities, the Council of Graduate Schools, Nafsa: Association of International Educators and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, also shows a reduction in the number of international applications for undergraduate studies, with 36 per cent of institutions reporting a decline this year.

The findings form a stark contrast with recent statistics regarding international enrolments at institutions in Australia and the UK (see above) and are largely being blamed on over-zealous visa tactics on the part of the USA.

Terry Hartle from the American Council on Education said of the survey findings, "This is an unfortunate by-product of the necessary effort to enhance national security. National security is clearly the pre-eminent priority, but it's not the only priority."

A statement by Nafsa claimed that international students pursuing graduate studies, particularly in subjects relating to the sciences, were being particularly hard hit by delays in visa issuance. "Visa applications from students in these categories are now frequently forwarded to Washington, DC, for review and delays can stretch from a few weeks to several months," said the association in a statement.

The organisations involved in the survey called on the Department of Homeland Security to "establish a balanced visa processing system that serves the long-term US interest in not only preventing entry to those who would do harm but also welcoming legitimate visitors who contribute to our national security, economy and global leadership".

In the latest year for which official statistics are available, international student numbers in higher education in the USA increased by just 0.6 per cent in the 2002/2003 academic year, with many student markets experiencing a sharp decline in numbers (see *Education Travel Magazine*, March 2004, page 51).

UK uni in China

Nottingham University in the UK has started discussions with the Wanli Education Group (WEG) in China regarding the creation of a new campus in Ningbo, Zhejiang Province, which will be the first UK university campus in China.

Professor Ian Gow, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Asia at the university, said, "WEG, Ningbo City education authorities and the Zhejiang Province education authorities are considering developing China's first foreign campus, made possible by new Sino-Foreign Education joint legislation. Nottingham has responded positively in principle and we are looking forward to continuing discussions on what could be a landmark development."

The University of Nottingham has established a number of links with China in recent years, culminating in the opening of the China Policy Institute at the University Park Campus in Nottingham in October last year. The Institute, which was opened by Chen Zilli, Councillor of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, aims to become one of the leading Chinese think-tanks in the Western world.

The Institute will "provide a leading-edge, easily accessible evidence base for [putting] policy into practice in relation to Sino/UK activities in key areas and examine the future structure of higher education in China and the West", commented Gow.

Online visa renewal in NZ

International university students in New Zealand can now renew their student permits using an online visa processing system designed to cut waiting times and streamline the procedure.

The new system, called Students Online, was introduced in February this year by the New Zealand Immigration Service (NZIS) and can be used by international students studying at Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT), Unitec, Auckland University of Technology, Lincoln University, Waikato University and Victoria University. Approved students receive their permits within 48 hours of their application.

Arron Baker, eServices Manager at NZIS, said, "Following a successful pilot with Lincoln University and MIT in June 2003, NZIS has continued to work closely with both education and technology providers to implement secure encrypted technology that can process overseas students' renewal visa and permit applications quickly and efficiently."

Students using the online system will also be able to apply for a "length of course" permit that is valid for their entire course rather than just six months. More institutions in other education sectors are expected to join the scheme in the future.

Students complain of racism in Russia

The fatal stabbing of a foreign student in Voronezh in southwest Russia has led to hundreds of international students demonstrating in protest at the failure of the authorities to protect them from racist incidences.

Amaru Lima, a second-year medical student from Guinea-Bissau, was stabbed four times in the chest in February this year. His fellow students pledged to boycott classes until concrete measures were taken to protect them.

Racist behaviour towards dark-skinned foreigners has become more common in recent years and students at the 33 institutions of higher education in the city claim to typically experience racist behaviour at least once before graduating.

Registration for students in Norway

Non-western students studying at universities in Oslo and Bergen in Norway are being required to register with the security police (PST), according to a report in *The Norway Post*.

The PST has claimed that there are several hundred foreign students at Norwegian universities who are able to obtain knowledge about how to develop weapons of mass destruction and they are being regis-

- tered in order to determine
- whether or not they pose a
- threat to Norway and the
- rest of the world.

The Norwegian Lawyer's Association has questioned the validity of such action, claiming that the PST cannot ask for such information unless there are concrete suspicions.

Online qualifications not valid in Malaysia

The Malaysian Minister of Education, Tan Sri Musa Mohamad, has announced that part-time distance learning and online qualifications awarded at all levels by overseas universities will not be recognised by the Public Service department for employment purposes.

The decision was made after the Ministry received numerous reports questioning the quality of education offered via e-learning and online courses by foreign institutions.

Institutions that conduct distance and online courses on a part-time basis could be recognised on condition that they have been accredited by the National Accreditation Board.

Bogus uni exposed

- The founder of an
- unaccredited university
- based in Saipan in the North
- Mariana Islands was arrested
- at the end of last year,
- accused of defrauding more

- than 80 Chinese students
- out of half a million dollars.

Soon Kyung Park charged each student US\$6,600 to US\$7,000 to arrange admission to the university, a student visa, a plane ticket and part-time work, promising them a state-of-the-art campus and facilities. According to local press, the university occupied one floor of an office building and had one working computer and no textbooks.

The FBI in the USA has charged Park with fraud.

Bonuses questioned

The education spokesperson for New Zealand First has questioned the ethics of secondary school principals in New Zealand being paid bonuses based on the number of fee-paying foreign students attending their schools.

"It is wrong that principals should receive bonuses for the number of foreign fee-paying students they recruit," said Brian Donnelly. They are employed to look after the interests of New Zealand students – not to go on trips around the world on recruitment drives."

School boards wishing to pay their principals extra money for additional responsibilities have to apply to the Ministry of Education and the number of requests to do so have increased from 10 in 2001 to 51 in 2003.