

International education in Australia

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Australia is an island continent in the southern hemisphere of 7.7 million square kilometres, with a desert interior and population of 22.3 million persons (2010), mainly in coastal cities in the east and south. In building a settler state in a remote and difficult environment, Australians acquired the virtues of improvisation and adaptation: the capacities to create working systems, take measured risks and solve common problems. Their global location provides Australians with the peace and complacency of isolation but impels them to global connectivity. They are natural travellers and communicators.

Australia has a stable polity and modernized society and economy that produced 1.46 per cent of world GDP in 2009, \$924.8 billion USD, one third that of France. Gross National Income per capita was \$38,380 in purchasing power parity terms, 12th in the world, between Austria and Denmark. Australian cities score well on comparative measures of living standards and quality of life. The nation houses a range of minerals and is a principal commodity producer, though there are serious problems of land and water degradation in this ecologically fragile setting. Exports are led by iron ore to China and coal to China and Japan. There are large uranium reserves, and technology-intensive agribusiness is a mainstay of the economy. Australia also exports

services, including international education, transport and tourism. Elaborately transformed manufacturing is weaker than in most OECD and East Asian nations, but Australia has a robust finance sector and low public debt. It rode the Global Financial Crisis without negative growth or increased unemployment, benefitting from one sharp round of stimulus spending.

Australia originated in six separated British colonies established after 1788, on the basis of the dispossession, partial genocide and cultural destruction of the indigenous inhabitants. The federated colonies gained single 'dominion' status from Great Britain in 1901, the key moment in national identity, and the colonies became states. They were joined by two territories, islands in the Pacific, Indian and Southern Oceans and a claim to one quarter of Antarctica. The Commonwealth (Australian or national) government manages foreign policy and defence, taxation, macro-economic policy and welfare incomes. Public education and health services are largely provided by the states and territories but national government leads higher education policy and regulation.

Though the British monarch is still head of state and Australia inherited British common law, most constitutional ties with the United Kingdom have gone. In military matters and business and cultural

Introduction

CampusFrance's REPERES series allows international experts to express their views on mobility issues and their impact on French higher education. This 12th issue is published especially for the "Australia Day", a seminar organised by CampusFrance in Paris. In this paper, Simon Marginson highlights Australia's history and its current policies to attract international students, especially those coming from Asia.

life, the country is closer to the United States than UK, while its economics and demographics are shaped by its geography at the edge of Asia. It enjoys closer relations with China and Vietnam than do the other English-speaking nations. Nevertheless Australia remains a Westminster-style democratic polity and its institutions, including government and education, still show their British origins. Policy changes in higher education continue to closely parallel British developments.



Australia was formed by migration and sustains higher rates of migration and population growth than most OECD nations, despite recurring tensions about migration policy. Debates about refugees and media on international students are often symptoms of uncertainty about identity and diversity. The majority of Australians derive from Britain and Ireland, some via New Zealand or South Africa. But since world war two waves of people have arrived from Europe, the Middle East, Asia, the Pacific islands and the Horn of Africa. Large sub-populations are descended from Greek, Italian, Vietnamese and Chinese settlers. More than 15 per cent of people in Sydney and Melbourne are Asian born. In the first six months of 2011 migrants from China outweighed the UK and Ireland for the first time. In the last decade policy has favoured professional and business migrants, many former Asian students in Australian universities. These diverse ethno-cultural strands are combined within homogenising economic, educational, legal and political institutions. A stable monoculture triumphs over complexity. Anglo-Celts lead business and dominate politics and the professions. The sole public language is English. Children are still more likely to learn French, the foreign language of the UK, than Chinese. Yet many non Anglo-Celtic settlers use their opportunities well. Education is a crucial medium of change: Chinese families participate in university at twice the rate

of the native born. The ratio for Vietnamese families is 1.5. The education of indigenous people has been much less successful. But while inter-cultural tensions still surface, especially in rural areas, open racism is no longer acceptable in the major cities and inter-cultural marriage is common. Future generations of leaders will be more plural.

Higher education in Australia

Australia shares with the UK, Canada and New Zealand the British tradition of state-founded self-governing degree-level universities organized in a national system. Doctoral qualifications are the academic norm. There are 37 self-accrediting public universities and the Australian Catholic University on the public schedule. Another 87 private institutions and public Vocational Education and Training (VET) institutions provide some higher education places. A small number of private institutions are self-accrediting. Government accredits the others. Students study Bachelor, Masters and Doctoral degrees plus shorter diplomas and certificates. The undergraduate education of domestic students is paid for jointly by federal government grants and student charges, financed by low pressure loans. Subsidies and student charges vary by discipline. Loan repayment is income contingent not time based. Graduates pay extra tax when income reaches a threshold just below average earnings. From 2012 the number of subsidized first-degree places has been deregulated, with student numbers decided by institutions, though the government may move later to 'cap' total enrolments. Postgraduate education combines subsidized places, scholarship-based research, and full cost tuition in vocational areas subject to income contingent loans. International students in all programs pay full cost tuition fees, aside from the few in receipt of scholarships.

In 2010 higher education institutions enrolled 1,192,657 students, 56 per cent women, and produced 2 per cent of

world scientific publications. VET enrolled 1.8 million sub-degree students. All programs are subject to the Australian Qualifications Framework, which specifies standards and equivalence. The rate of enrolment of 15 to 19 year olds was slightly below the OECD country average but the participation of older age groups is high. Among persons aged 25 to 34 years the rate of graduation from tertiary education was 45 per cent (2009) compared to the OECD average of 37 per cent. However, average duration of tertiary studies in Australia of 3.48 years is well below the OECD average of 4.33 years. Graduate employment rates are at average levels. Between 1993 and 2010 the average student-staff ratio rose from 13 to 21. There was a marked growth of casual staff employed on an hourly basis, who now provide half of all teaching.

Research output is stronger in quantity than quality. In 2007 Australia produced 17,831 papers, 13th in the world. However, in the Thomson-Reuters data on citation impact for 2001-2011 place Australia at 17th with 12.10 cites per paper, one position below France (12.57). Australia has a broad-based research capacity, 19 universities in the top 500 in the 2011 Shanghai Academic Ranking of World Universities, but none in the top 50. The highest ranked was the University of Melbourne at 60. Nevertheless, the nation has clear global strength in areas like agriculture, plant and animal sciences, ecology, geosciences and clinical medicine. Australians have won eleven Nobel Prizes, the most recent in medicine (2005), medicine (2009) and physics (2011).

Internationalization

Australian higher education stands out most for internationalization. In 1951 it initiated the multilateral Colombo Plan, providing scholarship-based degrees and technical training for emerging nations in Southeast and South Asia. The objective was to shape neo-colonial

alternatives to communism. The Plan had unforeseen consequences. It fostered appreciation of Australia among future Southeast Asian leaders and normalised an Asian presence in Australia. The number of private international students also grew.

By the early 1980s there were tensions about international student quotas. In 1984 the government decided to follow UK policy and create a commercial market in full-fee international student places. The next year it introduced tuition charges for domestic students. Together these decisions instigated a new era of entrepreneurship and mixed funding. Whereas government provided 90 per cent of higher education income in 1984, its share was 68 per cent in 1990, with 12 per cent from domestic students and 3 per cent from internationals. Twenty years later the government share was 42 per cent, domestic students 16 per cent and international students had reached 18 per cent.

From the beginning capitalism was installed as the mode of internationalization. Institutions were forbidden to subsidize international students from government income. The number of scholarships was kept low. Once recruiting was underway, assisted by Australian embassies in Asia, prices were deregulated, and institutions allowed to enrol as many international students as they wanted. The new places were additional to the domestic enrolment, not a substitute for it. Meanwhile public funding per domestic student was cut in both 1989 and 1996, generating powerful incentives to grow private revenues. By 2008 public spending on tertiary education was at 0.7 per cent of GDP, well below the OECD average of 1.0 per cent. This reduction in government funding, plus the growth of middle class families in Asia, families that saw benefits in English language skills in a globalizing environment, were the keys to growth. Australia also benefited from proximity to Asia, a reputation for safety, and average tuition and living expenses at

two thirds the level of American state universities and the UK. This cost advantage has recently been eroded by a stronger Australian dollar.

By the mid 1990s surplus from international education was the main source of discretionary and developmental funding for research, teaching, facilities, buildings and service divisions. The market also spread from higher education to VET. At this time, like other Anglo-American systems, neo-liberal economic policies and business models of education were shaping Australian tertiary education. Universities became more competitive and status-differentiated, executive leadership more strategic, operations more professionalized, and the private sector grew. No doubt the business model placed undue pressure on scholarly cultures. Nor did it facilitate recruitment of high quality international doctoral students, where competition is driven by scholarships not full fee places. But it certainly favoured the quantitative growth of internationalization.

In 1990 there were 20,000 full fee students in higher education. By 2010 the number was 335,273. Growth averaged 14 per cent per annum for 20 years. Nearly a quarter of all onshore students were international, highest ratio in the OECD, with more in branch campuses and franchises offshore. In all sectors, including VET, schools and English language colleges, there were 619,119 enrolments in 2010. In 2009 Monash University had 13,052 onshore international students and 21,114 in total. Nine other universities had 8000 onshore students. The American doctoral university with the most foreign students, the University of Southern California, had less than 8000 in 2010.

Australia educates 7 per cent of the world's foreign tertiary students, fifth behind USA, UK, France and Germany. Education is Australia's third or fourth largest export—it fluctuates with the price of gold—and generated earnings of \$18.5 billion AUD in tuition and spending

by students and their families in 2009-10 (the AUD currently has parity with the USD). That year education constituted 35.1 per cent of all services exports.

The main growth has been in disciplines with portable and saleable credentials. In 2009 52.1 per cent of international students were in business studies with the next largest cohorts in information technology and engineering. Only 3.7 per cent were doctoral students. In terms of origin, the largest groups in higher education were from mainland China (78,181 in 2009), Singapore (33,485), Malaysia (33,218), India (27,837), Hong Kong SAR (21,147), Vietnam (13,117) and Australia's nearest northern neighbour Indonesia (12,040). The largest non-Asian cohort was from the United States (8305). Australia enrolls more Southeast Asian students than do American universities but is the lesser provider to China, Korea, Japan and Taiwan, and the Indian sub-continent.

As intended, international education has helped to integrate Australia into Asia, at a time when East Asia and Singapore are becoming the third great zone of the knowledge economy, after Europe and North America, with profound significance for Australia's identity and trajectory. It has been less well understood that large numbers of students from non English language backgrounds must challenge pedagogy and curricula. Despite much good work, Australian universities have yet to satisfactorily build the English language competence of international students during their course of study or draw full educational value from the now cosmopolitan student population. Domestic and international students do not mix enough, the curriculum has little changed, and few domestic students go offshore for study. Deeper internationalization is resource heavy. Continued scarcity of public funding locks universities into maximizing unit revenues rather than ploughing money back into more transformative learning experiences for all.



The other form of internationalization is research collaboration. More than a third of scientific papers published by Australians entail cross-border partnerships, which is at the world average. Most research partnerships are in North America, the UK and Western Europe. There is a high rate of collaboration in Singapore and Australia-China collaboration is at 1.4 times the level predicted by the overall collaboration patterns of the two nations. Lack of competence in Asian languages remains a handicap.

Recent policy changes

Prior to the 2010 federal election public support for migration fell and both major political parties adopted a policy of reduction. International students as temporary migrants were the largest component of migration. At the same time, highly publicized assaults on Indian students generated negative publicity about student safety. It also became apparent that some private VET colleges, working with agents in India, were running a migration not education business. At the same time, some international graduates were entering the Australian labour market with insufficient English.

These concerns generated a new set of policies less welcoming of international students, paralleling similar initiatives in the UK. Prospective students were required to demonstrate \$18,000 in support funds for each year of their course, and student visa processing was slowed. Delays of three months became common for persons from China, India and Vietnam. It also became more difficult for graduates to secure permanent residence, the first step to migration. Greater English language competence was required, and work experience in the area of study. Migration scams were shut down. There was a dramatic drop in numbers from South Asia. The obstacles to student visas affected the supply of places in all regions, including China and Vietnam. It was widely predicted numbers would fall by a third

or more. In December 2010 the government asked a former state politician, Michael Knight, to review the student visa program.

The Knight review reported in June 2011. Its proposals, all accepted by the federal government, signified return to a more student-friendly policy. It applied only to universities but it was expected it would be later extended to selected VET providers. All provisions on demonstrated financial support were dropped, and visa processing was speeded up, while universities were given enhanced responsibility to ensure students were bona fide. Students gained more flexible work rights, and graduates were provided with a new post-study work visa allowing them to work for two to four years after graduation, depending on level of course. It was expected that growth would return.



◆ Biographical Sketch

Simon Marginson



Simon Marginson is a Professor of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne, where he graduated with a PhD in 1996. He works in the Centre for the Study of Higher Education on policy, globalization, comparative and international education, and the conditions underpinning creative work. Simon is a frequent media commentator and has prepared policy advice for the OECD and the governments of Ireland, the Netherlands, Japan, Hong Kong SAR, Malaysia, Vietnam and Australia. He also advises the Shanghai Jiao Tong Academic Ranking of World Universities and the Times Higher Education.

Much of Simon's recent work has focused on emerging East and Southeast Asia, including papers on what he calls the 'Post-Confucian model of higher education', and the co-edited *Higher Education in the Asia-Pacific: Strategic responses to globalization* (2011). Other books include *International Student Security* (2010), *Imagination: Three models of the imagination in the age of the knowledge economy* (2010), *Ideas for Intercultural Education* (2011), and the co-edited *Handbook of Higher Education and Globalization* (2011). He is an editor of the world journal *Higher Education*.

Simon Marginson has been a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Social Sciences since 2000 and Honorary Life Member of the UK Society for Research into Higher Education since 2005. He won awards for scholarly publication in the United States in 2001, 2002 and 2011. His articles have been translated into French and Spanish; he is a member of *El Seminario de Educacion Superior de la Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico*, and of the Advisory Committee for the Center for International Higher Education at Peking University. Four of his books have been published in Chinese.

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