


# International students are applying for Australian visas in record numbers

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**EXCLUSIVE**

By **TIM DODD**, HIGHER EDUCATION EDITOR

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The number of international students applying for visas hit an all-time record in June, giving heart to universities and other education providers who are looking for a strong bounce back in student numbers.

In an update sent to education providers on Monday, the Home Affairs Department said that about 42,700 student visa applications had been lodged in June, in a post-Covid rush to return to Australia.

“This is the largest number of offshore applications received in a single month in the last 10 years,” the department told education providers. Because the number of international students coming to Australia in the past decade is far higher than in earlier decades, the June figure is an all-time record.

The department said that the high numbers seen in June are continuing, with an average of 10,000 student visa applications a week being received during July from offshore applicants. In comparison, only 34,015 student visa applications were received in June 2019, before the pandemic.

International Education Association of Australia CEO Phil Honeywood said the figures showed that demand was recovering “notwithstanding the reputational damage” which Australia had suffered as an education destination during the pandemic.

“This latest data proves there is still a strong appetite to study in Australia,” Mr Honeywood said.

The record number of applications will put even more pressure on the Department of Home Affairs which has struggled to process the volume of student visa applications since borders opened at the end of last year.

In an effort to speed up processing the department has assigned 140 more people to visa processing in its overseas offices since May.

Last week Immigration Minister Andrew Giles said 62,000 student visas had been finalised since the beginning of June but warned that the situation would not change quickly.

“The processing of visas will continue to be a major priority for this government, but reducing the backlog of applications can’t happen overnight,” Mr Giles said.

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“People reallocated to dealing with the visa applications on hand need to be trained and skilled before they can go about this important work.”

Currently the international education industry is lagging well behind the boom conditions it experienced pre-Covid, when the value of Australia’s education exports reached a record \$40.3 billion in 2019.

The latest student data from the federal Education Department, issued on Monday, said that 171,000 international students had commenced courses in the five months to May this year, 31 per cent less than in the same period of 2019.

Mr Honeywood said it was important to learn from experience as international education recovered from Covid.

“Lessons learnt from the pandemic show that we need to build back better,” he said. “Going forward, the key concerns include visa processing times, motivation of student applicants and diversity of source countries.”

Currently international students have no limit on the hours they work since the Morrison government removed the previous 40 hours per fortnight restriction in an effort to ease labour

shortages.

However this has raised concern that international students are being attracted to Australia by the prospect of working to earn money in a high wage economy rather than coming to study.

If the Albanese government does not move to reinstate the work hours restriction there are fears it could damage Australia's reputation for quality education.

**TIM DODD**

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Tim Dodd is The Australian's higher education editor. He has over 25 years experience as a journalist covering a wide variety of areas in public policy, economics, politics and foreign policy, including reporti... [Read more](#)

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