

International Students: Academic Performance

The Australian government publishes annually data on progress rates for commencing bachelor degree students for Australia's 42 universities¹. The most recent publication of data on student performance in Australian universities was the publication in September 2024 of data for 2023.

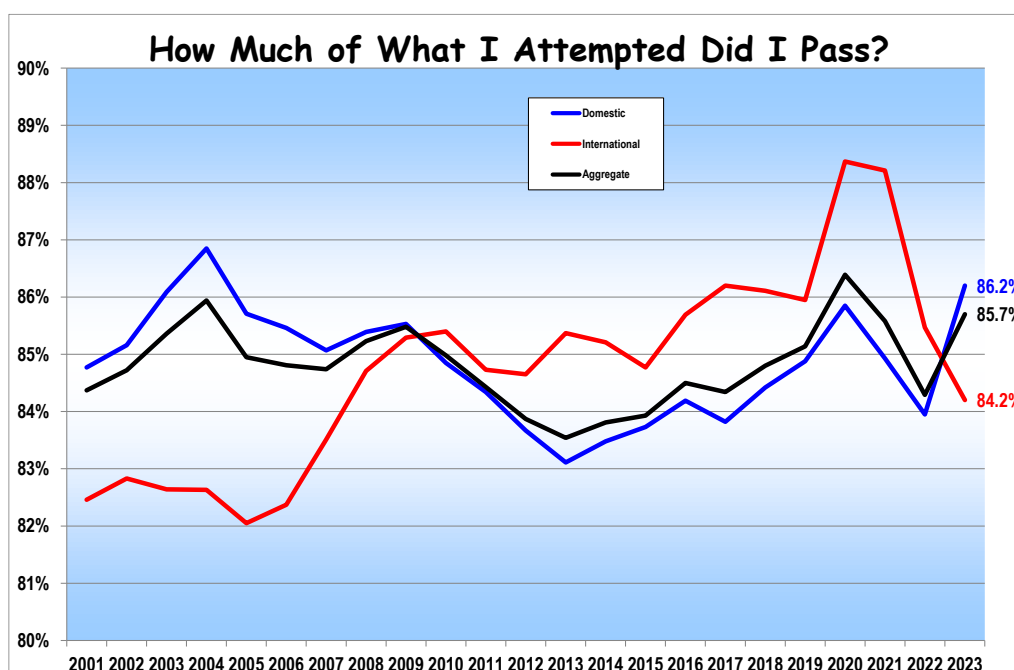
<https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/resources/2023-section-15-attribution-success-and-retention>

In Australian universities in 2023, for the first time since 2007, international students commencing bachelor degrees underperformed their domestic colleagues.

306,749 students commenced bachelor degrees in 42 Australian universities in 2023. 73% were domestic students, 27% were international students.

The 222,918 domestic students passed 86.2% of what they attempted, and outperformed the 83,831 international students, who passed 84.2%.

Student Progress Rates: Commencing Bachelor Students: Time Series



As the chart shows, there is a long history.

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. 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.

¹ The 42 universities in Australia include Australia's 37 public universities plus Avondale University, University of Divinity, Bond University, The University of Notre Dame Australia and Torrens University Australia Limited.

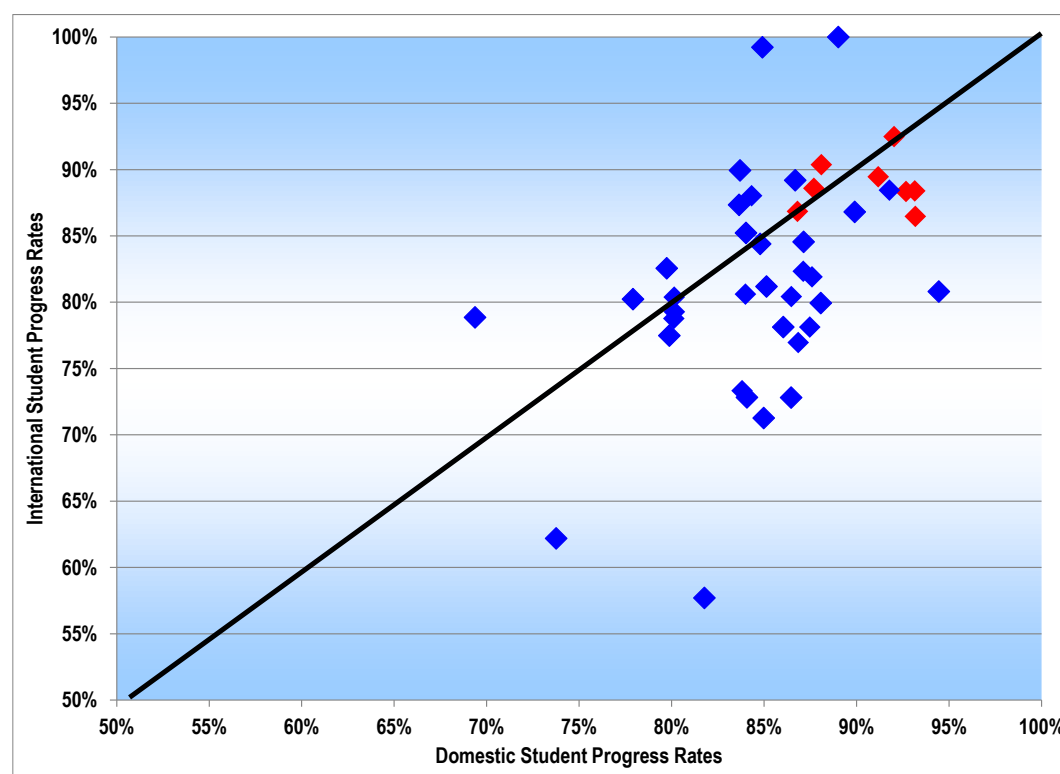
The results from 2013 to 2022 can be interpreted as showing that increasing numbers of Australian universities set and maintain entry standards, including English language entry standards, for international undergraduates that lead to successful outcomes, prepare international students better in English 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.

Then, in 2023, international students commencing bachelor degrees underperformed their domestic colleagues. International freshers passed 84.2%, domestic freshers passed 86.2%.

2023 was a boom year for international students in Australian universities. The number of international students commencing bachelor degrees jumped 19.0% from 2022 to 2023, while the number of domestic students commencing bachelor degrees dropped 2.2% from 2022 to 2023. Are university entry standards a factor in numbers of bachelor degree offers and acceptances, as well as in academic success rates?

In 11 of 42 universities in 2023, commencing international undergraduates did better than domestic students. In 25 universities domestic students did better. In 6 universities, there was no difference (less than one percentage point) as in the chart. Group of 8 universities are in red

Student Progress Rates: Commencing Bachelor Students: 41 Universities



Postgraduate Research Completions

At the other end of the higher education spectrum, 43.0% of higher degree research completions in Australian universities in 2023 were by international students.

In Australian universities in 2023, 11,333 degree completions were higher degree research completions. 43.0% of higher degree research completions were international students.

Postgraduate Research Completions 2022		
Field	Completions	International %
Science	2,669	47.3%
Society/Culture	1,994	26.6%
Engineering	1,992	67.3%
Health	1,797	28.2%
Management/Commerce	681	57.0%
IT	525	68.4%
Education	490	32.2%
Creative Arts	447	18.1%
Agriculture/Environment	395	45.8%
Architecture	143	44.8%
Total	11,333	43.0%

From the table, 43.0% of postgraduate research completions were by international students, including 68.4% of IT research completions and 67.3% of Engineering research completions.

Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2023 Student data from the Australian Department of Education published in September 2024 includes

<https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/resources/award-course-completions-pivot-table-2023>

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