

POSTGRAD PERSPECTIVES

International student policy shifts in 2024.
What does this mean for postgrad student recruiters?



Postgrad Solutions has been delving deeper into the recent international education landscape, which is experiencing a period of significant transformation propelled by the post-pandemic surge in student mobility, concerns about affordability, infrastructure and immigration levels. The following top-line facts give a useful global insight to postgraduate recruiters into how government

changes are affecting the 'Big Four' English-speaking destinations (UK, USA, Canada and Australia).

Mounting scrutiny and quality control

Australia: In July 2023, stricter regulations were implemented for education agents in Australia, aiming to curb unethical practices and improve student experiences. The vocational education and training sector (VET) also underwent reforms, with students no longer able to switch seamlessly between higher education and lower-cost VET providers via concurrent confirmation of enrolments (COEs). This ensures a more consistent quality experience and protects students from misleading marketing tactics. Additionally, financial requirements for student visas in Australia jumped by 17% in August 2023, potentially discouraging applications from individuals lacking genuine financial capacity.

Canada: Recognising the need for robust quality control, the government in Canada mandated universities and colleges to directly confirm every applicant's letter of acceptance with immigration authorities as of January 2023. This move safeguards against letter-of-acceptance fraud, which has been a significant concern in Canada in recent years. Furthermore, a new framework is set to launch in Autumn 2024, rewarding institutions with a proven track record of excellence in supporting international students with faster visa processing. This incentivises quality over quantity and promotes best practices within the sector.

Policy shifts towards tightening access

Canada: While Canada remains a welcoming destination, a potential review of the Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP) programme announced in 2023 could introduce stricter criteria. Graduates lacking 'priority skills' might face reduced access to work opportunities, potentially impacting mobility and career prospects. The timeframe for this review remains unclear, adding to the uncertainty for students considering Canadian institutions.

UK: After experiencing a post-Brexit surge in non-EU student enrolments, the UK government under Prime Minister Sunak has taken a more restrictive approach. The controversial decision to ban dependants on the study visas for non-research international postgraduate students, implemented in January 2024, has already triggered a

decline in applications from this crucial demographic. Adding to the uncertainty, a review of the Graduate Route, offering two-to-three years of post-study work rights, was announced in October 2023. The potential reinstatement of the unpopular six-month limit could significantly impact employment prospects for recent graduates, jeopardising the attractiveness of UK education for many.

Affordability concerns and rising costs

The UK, Canada and Australia are all grappling with a significant housing affordability crisis, and this is impacting both domestic and international students. Finding suitable and affordable accommodation is a growing challenge in these countries, potentially deterring future enrolments.

UK: Visa fees for international students increased in October 2023, adding to the financial burden. Additionally, the minimum salary requirement for Skilled Worker visas and Family visas are both being raised to £38,700 – this could further restrict access for some potential applicants.

Competition and the US factor

While Australia, Canada and the UK navigate policy adjustments, the US presents itself as a potential alternative for international students. A recent survey suggests the US currently leads the 'Big Four' in student satisfaction, fuelled by a more welcoming political climate and renewed focus on international recruitment efforts, particularly targeting the lucrative Indian market. This shift could see a portion of student mobility redistributed, affecting the competitive landscape.

Uncertain future and emerging trends

The international education landscape remains in flux, with the potential for further policy changes and adaptations.

Governments are seeking a delicate balance between attracting valuable international talent and addressing domestic anxieties about infrastructure, affordability and perceived strain on public services. Increased regulations and quality control measures aim to protect students and uphold the integrity of international education systems.

Further reading

[US leading Australia, Canada and UK](#)

Australia: visa rejection spikes

Australia cuts post-study work visa

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