



**Australian Social Trends  
2007**

**Article: International  
students in Australia**



EMBARGO: 11.30 AM (CANBERRA TIME) TUES 7 AUG 2007

# Australian Social Trends 2007

## Article: International students in Australia

**Susan Linacre**  
**Acting Australian Statistician**

ABS catalogue no. 4102.0

ISSN 1321-1781

© Commonwealth of Australia 2007

This work is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced by any process without prior written permission from the Commonwealth. Requests and inquiries concerning reproduction and rights in this publication should be addressed to The Manager, Intermediary Management, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Locked Bag 10, Belconnen ACT 2616, or by telephone (02) 6252 6998, fax (02) 6252 7102, or email <intermediary.management@abs.gov.au>.

In all cases the ABS must be acknowledged as the source when reproducing or quoting any part of an ABS publication or other product.

Produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics

## INQUIRIES

- General inquiries about the content and interpretation of statistics in this article should be addressed to:  
  
Director  
Social Analysis and Reporting Section  
Australian Bureau of Statistics  
Locked Bag 10  
Belconnen ACT 2616  
  
Telephone Canberra (02) 6252 7187
- Inquiries about the availability of more recent data from the ABS should be directed to the National Information and Referral Service on 1300 135 070, or refer to contacts listed at the back of this publication.

## SYMBOLS AND USAGES

billion	1,000 million
kg	kilogram
m	metre
n.a.	not available
n.e.c	not elsewhere classified
n.p.	not published
n.y.a.	not yet available
no.	number
'000	thousand
'000m	thousand million
\$	dollar
\$m	million dollars
\$b	billion dollars
\$US	American dollar
%	per cent
*	estimate has a relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution
**	estimate has a relative standard error of greater than 50% and is considered too unreliable for general use
. .	not applicable
—	nil or rounded to zero (including null cells)

Where figures have been rounded, discrepancies may occur between the sums of the component items and totals.

# International students in Australia

**Overseas visitor arrivals to Australia for education purposes more than doubled between 1995 and 2005 from 137,000 to 375,000.**

Over the last twenty years, there has been strong growth in transnational education. According to the OECD there were 2.7 million tertiary students worldwide enrolled outside their country of residence in 2004, an increase of 41% since 2000 (1.9 million students) and over 200% since 1985 (0.9 million students).<sup>1</sup>

Since the 1980s, Australia has become a major player in the international student market, offering globally recognised courses and qualifications. In 2004, Australia was the fifth largest destination for overseas students, attracting 6% of all tertiary students enrolled outside their country of residence.<sup>1</sup> In 2005, overseas students represented approximately 18% of all higher education students in Australia.<sup>2</sup>

The provision of education services to full-fee paying overseas students is emerging as an important industry for the Australian economy. Education services provided in Australia to international students were valued at over \$9 billion in export earnings in the financial year 2004–05. This was the third highest export for Australia, and generated more than wool (\$2.3 billion), wheat (\$3.2 billion) and beef (\$4.5 billion) in terms of value.<sup>3</sup> Full-fee paying overseas students are also an important revenue source for Australian universities. In 2005, revenue from full-fee paying overseas students represented 15% of all revenue within the higher education sector.<sup>2</sup>

As well as being an important revenue source, overseas enrolments can help educational institutions reach the critical mass needed to

## Data sources and definitions

This article draws on several sources to present data about international students in Australia. Data on overseas visitor arrivals for education purposes are from the ABS Overseas Arrivals and Departures Collection. Overseas student enrolments data are from Australian Education International's (AEI) International Student Data and include data presented in the AEI Research Snapshot Series. OECD data on tertiary education are from OECD indicators for education.

Unless otherwise stated, data in this article relates to students studying onshore in Australia.

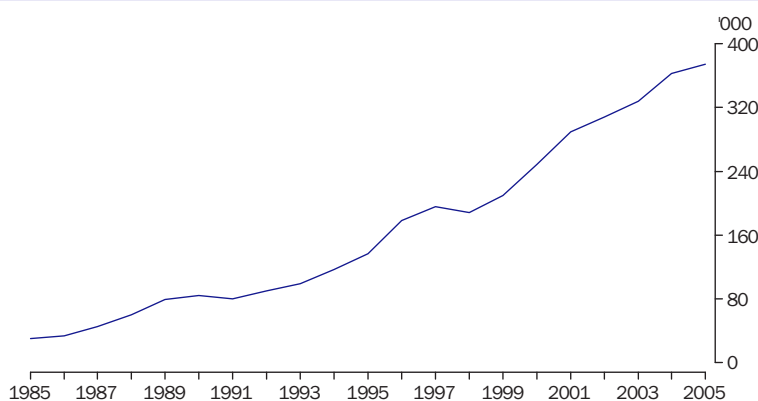
The OECD uses the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED–97) to define *Tertiary education* as Tertiary-type A education (ISCED 5A), Tertiary-type B education (ISCED 5B) and Advanced Research Programmes (ISCED 6). For more details on ISCED 1997 see *Classifying Educational Programmes: Manual for ISCED–97 Implementation in OECD Countries* (Paris, 1999).

*Overseas arrivals* refer to the arrival of overseas visitors through Australian airports (or seaports). Overseas arrivals data relates to the number of movements of overseas visitors rather than the number of overseas visitors.

*Long-term* arrivals are overseas visitors who intend to stay in Australia for 12 months or more (but not permanently), while *short-term* arrivals are overseas visitors whose intended stay is less than 12 months.

*Overseas visitor arrivals for education* refer to overseas arrivals where education has been nominated as the main purpose of the journey, without regard to whether a student visa is held. They include arrivals by New Zealand citizens and other people who do not require student visas (such as people undertaking short-term study). For more information, see *Overseas Arrivals and Departures, Australia* (ABS cat. no. 3401.0).

## Overseas visitor arrivals for education purposes(a)



(a) Annual data (i.e. total number of arrivals in the year).

Source: ABS 1985–2005 Overseas Arrivals and Departures Collections.

diversify the range of educational programmes offered to all students.<sup>1</sup> The presence of international students offers a further benefit to all students, as well as the community more generally – an opportunity to experience and expand knowledge of other cultures and languages.

## Trends in international student arrivals

In 2005, there were 375,000 overseas visitor arrivals to Australia for education purposes, more than double the 137,000 visitor arrivals to Australia in 1995 for education, and more than ten times the 30,000 education arrivals in 1985.



### Overseas visitor arrivals for education purposes: major countries of residence and proportion female

Selected countries of residence	1985(a)		2005(a)	
	Arrivals '000	Proportion female %	Arrivals '000	Proportion female %
China (excludes SAR)	0.4	24.9	63.6	52.9
Hong Kong (SAR of China)	1.5	41.7	22.5	49.8
India	0.3	13.7	16.7	20.3
Indonesia	1.7	36.4	18.6	48.7
Japan	1.0	64.5	25.6	65.6
Korea (Republic of South)	0.2	26.5	29.9	52.2
Malaysia	7.7	45.5	24.2	52.1
New Zealand	2.2	47.5	11.3	46.4
Singapore	1.3	42.3	20.0	52.9
Thailand	0.7	41.8	15.5	55.4
United States of America	2.2	58.5	29.1	60.2
<b>Total(b)</b>	<b>29.9</b>	<b>41.8</b>	<b>374.6</b>	<b>50.9</b>

(a) Annual data (i.e. total number of arrivals in the year).

(b) Includes other countries not listed and therefore components do not add to total.

Source: ABS 1985 and 2005 Overseas Arrivals and Departures Collections.

Most visitor arrivals to Australia for education are short-term arrivals (i.e. intending to stay less than 12 months). This in part reflects study in short-term courses such as some English language courses, as well as the travel intentions of overseas students who may plan to return to their home country for holidays during or at the end of an academic year. In 2005, there were 261,000 short-term visitor arrivals for education and 113,000 long-term visitor arrivals (i.e. intending to stay 12 months or more). The proportion of short-term arrivals has remained much the same (around 70% of all education arrivals) since 1985.

#### ...country of residence

The number of overseas arrivals from Asia for education purposes has increased over the past twenty years. In 1985, five of the top ten countries of residence for visitor arrivals were in South East Asia (Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore) or in North East Asia (Hong Kong and Japan) with arrivals from these countries representing 44% of all education arrivals for that year. In 2005, eight of the top ten countries of residence were from South East Asia or North East Asia representing 59% of all education arrivals.

Arrivals from China were the largest group of overseas education arrivals in 2005 representing nearly one-fifth (17%) of all visitor arrivals for education purposes, up from just over 1% in 1985. Other major

#### Transnational tertiary students

In 2004, there were almost 2.7 million tertiary students studying outside their own country of residence. Australia has 6% of the total market share of these international students behind the United States of America (22%), the United Kingdom (11%), Germany (10%) and France (9%). However, overseas students represent almost 17% of all tertiary students in Australia, compared with the United Kingdom (13%), France (11%) and the United States of America (3%).

#### Tertiary students(a) studying overseas — 2004

Destination country	Overseas tertiary students '000	Proportion of total tertiary students %
Australia	167.0	16.6
France	237.6	11.0
Germany	260.3	11.2
Japan	117.9	2.7
United Kingdom	300.1	13.4
United States	572.5	3.4
<b>Total(b)</b>	<b>2 651.1</b>	<b>..</b>

(a) Enrolled outside their country of residence.

(b) Includes other countries not listed and therefore components do not add to totals.

Source: OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2006.



countries of residence for education arrivals in 2005 included South Korea and the United States of America (both with 8% of visitor arrivals) Japan (7%) and Malaysia (6%).

Increases in the numbers of Asian students studying in Australia over the past two decades may be due to changing social and economic policies in their home countries. It has been suggested that the emergence of a larger middle class in countries in east Asia which have long placed a high value on education has provided a ready source of students.<sup>4</sup>

Although the majority of overseas visitor arrivals for education are from Asia, Australia attracts international students from across the world. In 1985, visitor arrivals for education came from 113 different countries, rising to 176 countries in 2005.

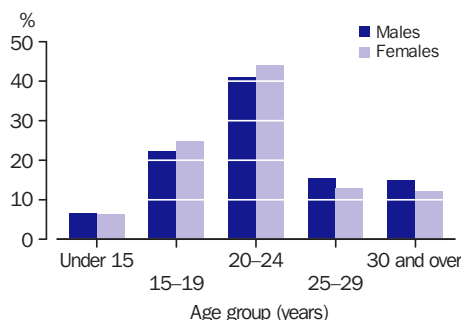
### ...age and sex

In 2005, the peak age group of overseas visitor arrivals for education purposes was 20–24 years (43%). This reflects the fact that most visitor arrivals were studying in the higher education sector. A further 27% were aged 25 years or over, 24% were aged 15–19 years and the remainder (6%) were aged less than 15 years.

Over the last two decades there has been a steady increase in the proportion of female overseas arrivals for education purposes. In 2005, 51% of education arrivals were female, up from 42% in 1985.

There are some marked differences in the proportion of female visitor arrivals for education according to country of residence. For example, just 20% of all education arrivals from India in 2005 were female, while 66% of education arrivals from Japan were female. While the proportion of female visitor arrivals for education increased for most countries over the last twenty years, the proportion of

### Overseas visitor arrivals for education purposes, by age and sex — 2005



Source: ABS 2005 Overseas Arrivals and Departures Collection.

### Overseas student enrolments

AEI student enrolment data is derived from the Commonwealth Provider Registration and International Student Management System.

*Student enrolments* are the number of course enrolments by overseas students studying in Australia on student visas.

Student enrolments do not represent the number of overseas students in Australia on student visas as students studying more than one course will have enrolments recorded for each course they are studying. In July 2005, there were 270,000 overseas students studying in Australia on a student visa.<sup>5</sup> These students were enrolled in 320,000 courses across all education sectors.<sup>5</sup>

Student enrolments data are also different to the number of overseas students studying in Australian institutions. Whilst recording enrolments for each course of study the data excludes enrolments by: overseas students studying on non-student visas; sponsored students (including AusAID, Defence, Endeavour International Post Graduate Research Scholarship); and students studying in off-shore courses. When these exempt categories are included, the number of overseas students studying onshore or off-shore in Australian institutions was estimated to be 415,000 in July 2005.<sup>5</sup>

### Education sectors

Since 2002, enrolments have been allocated to education sectors on the basis of their course level with the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF).

*Higher Education* includes Associate Degree, Bachelor Degree, Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Masters Coursework, Masters Preliminary, Masters Research, Doctor of Philosophy and Higher Doctorate Qualifying Programme.

*Vocational and Technical Education (VTE)* includes Advanced Certificate, Associate Diploma, Certificate I–V, Certificate, Advanced Diploma and Diploma.

*School* includes Kindergarten Studies, Primary School Studies, Junior Secondary Studies and Senior Secondary Studies.

*English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS)* enrolments are treated differently, with all courses identified as 'English Language' allocated to the ELICOS sector irrespective of the AQF level of course, whether or not also studying in another sector.

Courses not covered by the AQF are allocated to *Other*. These courses include Enabling Courses, Foundation Studies and Non-Award courses.

female visitor arrivals from China more than doubled (from 25% to 53%) and almost doubled for South Korea (from 27% to 52%) over the period.



## Enrolment patterns

International students in Australia study across a wide range of education sectors and in a variety of courses and fields of study. Some restrict their study to a particular sector while others study across multiple sectors. For example, study in both the English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) and higher education sectors is a common study pathway for many overseas students.

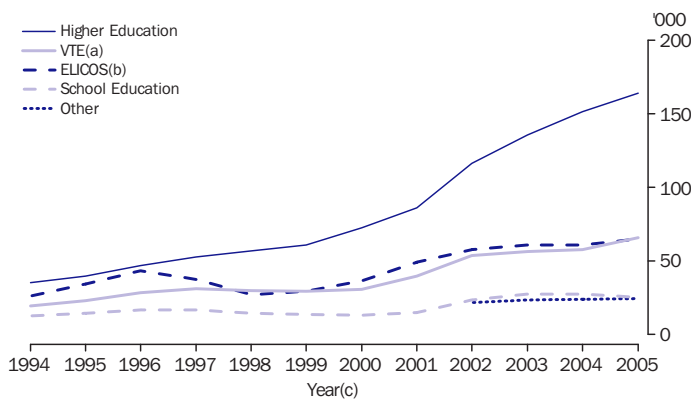
### ...enrolments by sector

In 2005, there were 345,000 overseas student enrolments in various courses across all sectors, more than triple the 111,300 overseas student enrolments in 1995, according to Australian Education International (AEI).

While all sectors grew between 1995 and 2005, the major driver of growth in overseas student enrolments was Higher Education which increased fourfold and contributed around half (53%) of the total enrolment increase over the period. In 2005, Higher Education enrolments comprised almost half (48%) of all enrolments. This was followed by Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) and ELICOS (each 19%).

Of the 164,000 international students enrolled in Higher Education in 2005, almost one in four were from China (24%), followed by India (14%) and Malaysia (9%). More than half of all enrolments were for bachelor degrees (59%) followed by masters by coursework (33%). In addition, more than half (55%) of enrolments were in either 'Business administration and management' or 'Computer science and information systems'.<sup>6</sup>

## Overseas student enrolments by sector



(a) Vocational and Technical Education.

(b) English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students.

(c) There was a break in the series between 2001 and 2002. For further information please contact [aei@dest.gov.au](mailto:aei@dest.gov.au).

Source: AEI International Student data.

## Overseas student enrolments by nationality — 2005

Nationality	Total enrolments '000	ELICOS(a) as proportion of total enrolments %
Brazil	7.1	56.0
China	81.2	19.9
India	27.7	4.7
Japan	19.0	42.4
Malaysia	19.3	1.5
South Korea	26.3	42.7
Taiwan	9.6	34.3
Thailand	16.5	32.0
<b>Total(b)</b>	<b>344.2</b>	<b>18.9</b>

(a) English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students.

(b) Includes other countries not listed and therefore components do not add to total.

Source: AEI International Student Data.

VTE was the second largest sector with 66,100 enrolments in Australia in 2005. Almost one in five student enrolments were from China (18%), followed by Hong Kong (8%) and Thailand and Japan (7% each). The majority of VTE enrolments (80%) were at either Diploma or Advanced Diploma level, with the remaining 20% enrolled at the Certificate I through IV level. The top three fields of study in 2005 were 'Business administration and management', 'Services hospitality and transport', and 'Computer science and information systems'.<sup>7</sup>

In 2005, there were 65,000 ELICOS enrolments, most of which were in non-government institutions (69%). One quarter of ELICOS students were from China (25%), 17% were from South Korea and 12% were from Japan.<sup>8</sup>

While almost one in five (19%) of all overseas student enrolments were in the ELICOS sector, there were some differences according to nationality. For example 56% of all student enrolments from Brazil and 43% of all student enrolments from South Korea were in ELICOS. Although a quarter of all ELICOS enrolments were from China (25%), only one in five Chinese students attended an ELICOS course. A small proportion of all student enrolments from India (5%) and Malaysia (1%) were ELICOS enrolments.<sup>8</sup>





In 2005, there were 26,000 overseas student enrolments in Australian schools. Most student enrolments were in Secondary schools (91%), with just 9% in Primary schools (including Kindergarten). In addition, 61% of student enrolments were in non-government schools and 39% in government schools.<sup>9</sup>

### ...study pathways

There were just over 100,000 overseas students who commenced studying in Australia in 2002 and who continued their studies through to 2005. Two-thirds (66%) of these students studied in one sector only over that period and the remainder (34% or 34,000 students) were multiple sector students. Most (74%) of these multiple sector students were enrolled in two sectors over the period. A further 23% were enrolled in three sectors, and the remainder were enrolled in four or more sectors.<sup>10</sup>

The most common study pathway for multiple sector students was an ELICOS-Higher Education pathway (21%), followed by ELICOS-VTE (15%) and VTE-Higher Education (13%). The next most common pathways were Other-Higher Education and ELICOS-VTE-Higher Education (both 8%). Almost one-third (31%) of multiple sector students did not undertake an ELICOS course.<sup>10</sup> A similar amount (32%) of multiple sector students were from China. Students from Hong Kong, South Korea and Indonesia together comprised a further 27% of all multiple sector students.<sup>10</sup>

More than one-quarter of all Chinese multiple sector students (29%) followed an ELICOS-Higher Education study pathway with 40% of Thai and 34% of Taiwanese multiple sector students following the same study pathway. ELICOS-VTE study pathways were recorded for 42% of Japanese and 28% of Thai multiple sector students, while 26% of both Malaysian and Indonesian multiple sector students and 22% of those from Hong Kong followed a VTE-Higher Education education pathway.

### Exporting education

In 2005, export revenue raised through the provision of education services to international students studying in Australia was valued at \$9 billion. International students spent almost \$3.8 billion dollars on fees (up from \$1.8 billion in 2000), with 67% of this spent in the higher education sector. Expenditure by students on goods and services (\$5.3 billion) was more than double that in 2000 (\$2.2 billion).

### Remaining in Australia after study

International students who have obtained an Australian qualification may apply for permanent residency onshore, providing they meet the selection criteria, under the General Skilled Migration Program. In 2004, there were 42,300 overseas students who had completed their higher education course. Of these, 34% (14,400 students) were approved for permanent residence onshore under

#### Students(a) studying in Australia by sector — 2002–2005

Sector	Students '000	Proportion of all students
		%
Single sector	66.1	65.9
Higher Education	31.8	31.7
VTE(b)	6.7	6.7
ELICOS(c)	11.6	11.5
School education	3.4	3.4
Other	12.7	12.6
Multiple sector	34.3	34.1
<b>Total overseas students</b>	<b>100.4</b>	<b>100.0</b>

- (a) Who commenced study in 2002.  
 (b) Vocational and Technical Education.  
 (c) English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students.

Source: Australian Education International Research Paper, *Study pathways of international students in Australia, 2002 to 2005*, Number 2006/1.

#### Expenditure by international students in Australia — 2005

Sector	Type of expenditure		
	Fees	Goods and services	Total
	\$m	\$m	\$m
Higher education	2 509	3 722	6 231
VTE(a)	481	644	1 125
ELICOS(b)	255	281	536
School education	287	400	687
Other	234	222	456
<b>Total(c)</b>	<b>3 793</b>	<b>5 324</b>	<b>9 117</b>

- (a) Vocational and Technical Education.  
 (b) English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students.  
 (c) Includes New Zealand and other non-award students.

Source: DIAC visa data; DIAC overseas arrivals and departures data; DEST student fees data; DEST Survey of International Student Spending; *Consumer Price Index, Australia* (ABS cat. no. 6401.0).



### Australian tertiary students studying overseas

In 2004, there were 9,400 Australian tertiary students studying overseas, representing less than 1% of all Australian tertiary students. Of these students, 29% were studying in the United States of America, and a further 28% in New Zealand. Australian students predominately chose to study in other English speaking countries.

### Australian tertiary students studying overseas — 2004

Destination country	'000	%
Canada(a)	0.6	6.9
Germany(b)	0.3	3.5
New Zealand	2.6	27.6
United Kingdom	1.5	16.0
United States of America	2.7	28.9
Other	1.6	17.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>9.4</b>	<b>100.0</b>

(a) Year of reference 2002.

(b) Excludes tertiary-type B programmes and advanced research programmes.

Source: OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2006.

selected skilled categories (880, 881 or 882).<sup>11</sup> More than one third of these students were computing professionals (36%) and over a quarter were accountants (28%).<sup>12</sup> Just 5% of overseas students granted permanent residence were tradespersons.<sup>12</sup>

### Endnotes

- 1 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2006, *Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators 2006*, Paris.
- 2 Department of Education, Science and Training, *Higher Education Report 2005*, DEST, viewed 13 February 2007, <[http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher\\_education/publications\\_resources/profiles/highered\\_annual\\_report\\_2005.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_resources/profiles/highered_annual_report_2005.htm)>.
- 3 Australian Bureau of Statistics, International Trade in Goods and Services Collection, ABS, Canberra.
- 4 Department of the Treasury 2006, *Australia's Services Exports - Treasury Submission to House of Representatives Economics, Finance and Public Administration Committee public inquiry*, Canberra, viewed 25 September 2006, <<http://treasury.gov.au/>>.
- 5 Australian Education International 2005, *Research Snapshot Number 1: Explanatory notes for International Student Numbers*, AEI, viewed 5 April 2007, <<http://aei.dest.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/Snapshots/Default.htm>>.
- 6 Australian Education International 2006, *Research Snapshot Number 8: International Student Enrolments in Higher Education in 2005*, AEI, viewed 5 April 2007, <<http://aei.dest.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/Snapshots/Default.htm>>.
- 7 Australian Education International 2006, *Research Snapshot Number 9: 2005 International Student Data in Vocational and Technical Education*, AEI, viewed 5 April 2007, <<http://aei.dest.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/Snapshots/Default.htm>>.
- 8 Australian Education International 2006, *Research Snapshot Number 6: International Student Enrolments in the ELICOS Sector*, AEI, viewed 5 April 2007, <<http://aei.dest.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/Snapshots/Default.htm>>.
- 9 Australian Education International 2006, *Research Snapshot Number 5: International Student Enrolments in the Schools Sector in 2005*, AEI, viewed 5 April 2007, <<http://aei.dest.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/Snapshots/Default.htm>>.
- 10 Australian Education International Research Paper, 'Study pathways of international students in Australia, 2002 to 2005', AEI, viewed 10 November 2006, <[http://aei.dest.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/ResearchPapers/2006\\_1\\_Pathway\\_pdf.pdf](http://aei.dest.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/ResearchPapers/2006_1_Pathway_pdf.pdf)>.
- 11 Birrell, B 2006, 'Implications of low English Standards among overseas students at Australian Universities', *People and Place*, Vol. 14, no. 4, pp 53–64.
- 12 Birrell, B et al. 2006, *Australia's Net Gains from International Skilled Movement – Skilled Movements in 2004–05 and earlier years*, Centre for Population and Urban Research, Monash University.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION . . .

*INTERNET*      **www.abs.gov.au** the ABS website is the best place for data from our publications and information about the ABS.

*LIBRARY*      A range of ABS publications are available from public and tertiary libraries Australia wide. Contact your nearest library to determine whether it has the ABS statistics you require, or visit our website for a list of libraries.

## INFORMATION AND REFERRAL SERVICE

Our consultants can help you access the full range of information published by the ABS that is available free of charge from our website, or purchase a hard copy publication. Information tailored to your needs can also be requested as a 'user pays' service. Specialists are on hand to help you with analytical or methodological advice.

*PHONE*      1300 135 070

*EMAIL*      client.services@abs.gov.au

*FAX*      1300 135 211

*POST*      Client Services, ABS, GPO Box 796, Sydney NSW 2001

## FREE ACCESS TO STATISTICS

All statistics on the ABS website can be downloaded free of charge.

*WEB ADDRESS*      [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)