



Beyond the Campus: Business Implications of Shifting International Student Mobility



www.emerging-strategy.com
info@emerging-strategy.com
Ph: +1 (202) 386 6303
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Executive Summary

Recent policy shifts in traditional English-speaking countries—namely the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia—are reshaping global student mobility patterns. Stricter immigration and visa regulations in these nations have prompted international students to seek alternative study destinations that offer quality education, affordability, and favorable visa policies.

This trend has significant implications not only for host universities but also for a variety of businesses and organizations that support the overall international student mobility space. A change in student flow patterns will necessitate strategic adaptations from educational institutions, businesses, and policymakers to sustain and grow in this evolving landscape.



Implications of Shifting Student Flows

The evolving landscape of international student mobility necessitates a comprehensive examination of its effects on various stakeholders.

For stakeholders based in the U.S., Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia, beyond the obvious educational institutions themselves, numerous businesses and organizations are integral to the international education ecosystem.

These entities, ranging from housing providers to test preparation companies, will experience significant impacts due to shifting student flows.

Understanding these changes is crucial for developing effective strategies to navigate the current challenges and capitalize on emerging opportunities.

Universities & Colleges

Impact: A decline in international student enrollment can lead to significant revenue losses for universities and colleges, as these students often pay higher tuition fees. This financial strain may result in budget cuts, reduced course offerings, and potential layoffs. Additionally, decreased international diversity can diminish the global perspective within academic communities.

Strategic Response: Institutions should diversify their recruitment efforts by targeting emerging markets such as Vietnam and enhancing support services to attract and retain international students. Developing online programs can also tap into students unable to relocate. Strengthening partnerships with foreign institutions for exchange programs can maintain international engagement.

Housing & Accommodation Providers

Impact: Reduced international student numbers can lead to increased vacancies in student housing, affecting rental income and property values for companies such as American Campus Communities and Greystar. This is particularly concerning in cities such as Boston or London that are heavily reliant on student tenants.

Strategic Response: Providers should diversify their tenant base by marketing to domestic students and young professionals. Offering flexible lease terms and enhancing amenities can attract a broader demographic. Enhancing amenities such as co-working spaces or community events, and exploring alternative uses for properties, such as short-term rentals – perhaps in partnership with platforms like Airbnb may open up alternate revenue streams and mitigate financial losses.

Learning Management Systems (LMS) & Virtual Classrooms

Impact: A shift towards online education, accelerated by the pandemic, has increased demand for LMS and virtual classroom solutions. However, reduced overall higher education enrollments due to fewer international enrollments may limit the growth potential in this sector.

Strategic Response: Companies should innovate by integrating advanced features like AI-driven analytics and personalized learning paths to enhance user experience. Expanding services to corporate training and continuing education markets can also diversify revenue streams.

Online English Learning Platforms

Impact: With fewer students traveling to English-speaking countries, demand for online English learning within platforms such as Duolingo and Babbel may decline. However, individuals seeking to improve language skills for career advancement may sustain some demand.

Strategic Response: Platforms should tailor offerings to professional development, focusing on business English and industry-specific language skills. Collaborating with corporations to provide employee training can open new markets. Leveraging AI to offer personalized learning experiences can enhance engagement and retention.

Pathway & Bridge Program Providers

Impact: Programs like INTO University Partnerships and Kaplan International Pathways, which help prepare international students for admission to universities, may experience decreased enrollment due to fewer students pursuing study-abroad opportunities into traditional markets.

Strategic Response: Providers should adapt by offering online preparatory courses accessible globally and adapted for emerging destination countries such as Germany, Malaysia and Japan. Partnering with universities to create integrated programs that guarantee admission upon completion can attract students. Expanding services to include career counseling and internship placements can add value.

Student Visa Services & Immigration Consulting Firms

Impact: Stricter immigration policies and reduced student mobility can decrease demand for visa and immigration consulting services such as Fragomen.

Strategic Response: Firms should diversify by offering services for alternative destinations with favorable immigration policies, such as Germany and Malaysia. Providing comprehensive packages that include cultural orientation, career counseling and settlement services can attract clients. Staying updated on policy changes and offering timely advice can position firms as trusted advisors.

Student Loan Providers

Impact: Companies like Prodigy Finance and MPOWER Financing, which specialize in lending to international students, could face a smaller market as fewer students head abroad to traditional markets.

Strategic Response: Providers should explore offering loans for online education programs, financing within emerging destination countries, and for domestic students in the U.S. Collaborating with educational institutions to offer in-house financing options or “study now, pay later” options may help maintain relevance.

Test Preparation & Tutoring Companies

Impact: Reduced international applications may lead to decreased demand for test preparation services offered by the likes of Kaplan and The Princeton Review for exams like TOEFL, IELTS, SAT, and GRE.

Strategic Response: Companies should diversify offerings to include preparation for alternative assessments and certifications relevant to emerging markets. Partnering with schools and universities to offer integrated test prep programs, including options for remote or hybrid learning, can maintain enrollment. Developing digital resources and adaptive learning platforms can attract a global audience.

English Language Learning Providers

Impact: Language schools and programs such as EF English First and Berlitz, with large physical presences, may experience lower enrollments due to decreased international student mobility if fewer students seek in-person English training.

Strategic Response: Providers should pivot to online platforms, offering flexible and accessible language courses. Developing specialized programs for business English and industry-specific language skills can attract professionals. Collaborating with corporations for employee language training can open new revenue streams.

English Language Assessment Providers

Impact: Providers like IELTS and TOEFL may see reduced test-taker numbers, especially if U.S. demand falls, given the high volume of students taking these tests specifically for study in English-speaking countries.

Strategic Response: Expanding test acceptance to more destinations and developing remote proctoring capabilities can increase accessibility. Offering bundled services, including preparation materials and mock exams, may enhance value and improve market penetration.

Other Assessment Providers (SAT, ACT, GRE, GMAT, etc.)

Impact: Decreased international applications may lead to reduced demand for standardized tests offered by organizations such as ETS and The College Board.

Strategic Response: Providers should adapt by offering online testing options and expanding acceptance of their assessments in emerging markets. Developing preparatory resources and partnering with educational institutions can drive usage. Exploring assessments for alternative education pathways, such as vocational training, can diversify offerings.

Health Insurance Providers

Impact: Fewer international students result in decreased demand for student health insurance plans tailored to foreign nationals, offered by the likes of ISO Student Health Insurance and Allianz Partners.

Strategic Response: Insurance providers should diversify by offering plans for online students and domestic students. Developing comprehensive packages that include mental health support and telemedicine services can add value. Flexible coverage options for shorter stays could appeal to students in new study formats. Partnering with educational institutions to offer group plans can also be beneficial.

International Payment Processing

Impact: Reduced international student numbers can lead to a decline in cross-border tuition payments, affecting payment processing companies such as Flywire and Western Union.

Strategic Response: Companies should expand services to facilitate payments for online education and alternative study destinations. Offering competitive exchange rates and lower transaction fees can attract a broader customer base. Developing user-friendly platforms with robust security features can enhance customer experience.

Employers in STEM & Research-Driven Fields

Impact: A decline in international students can lead to a reduced talent pool for employers in STEM and research-driven fields, including Google, Pfizer, and Tesla. Many international students pursue degrees in these areas and contribute significantly to innovation and development. Their reduced presence may result in talent shortages, potentially hindering research initiatives and technological advancements.

Strategic Response: Employers should invest in developing domestic talent through partnerships with educational institutions, offering internships, apprenticeships, and scholarships to encourage students to enter STEM fields. Additionally, companies can explore global talent acquisition strategies, such as remote work opportunities, to tap into international expertise without the need for relocation. Advocating for policies that facilitate the hiring of international graduates can also help mitigate talent shortages.

Conclusion

The evolving landscape of international student mobility presents both challenges and opportunities for businesses and organizations connected to this sector. As traditional destinations implement stricter immigration and visa policies, emerging study locations are gaining prominence, leading to a redistribution of international student flows. Stakeholders must proactively adapt to these changes by diversifying their offerings, embracing technological advancements, and exploring new markets. By implementing strategic responses tailored to their specific contexts, these entities can not only mitigate potential negative impacts but also capitalize on new opportunities arising from the shifting dynamics of global education.



Winners & Losers

WINNERS

Category	Explanation
Learning Management Systems (LMS) & Virtual Classrooms	Increased reliance on online learning and hybrid education models presents growth opportunities, as institutions and companies continue to invest in scalable virtual learning solutions.
Online English Learning Platforms	Despite lower study-abroad numbers, demand for business English and professional development remains, especially as students prepare for remote or online international opportunities.

MIXED FORTUNES

Category	Explanation
Test Preparation & Tutoring Companies	Decreased demand for some standardized tests (e.g., TOEFL, GRE) as fewer students apply to traditional destinations, but new opportunities arise in emerging study locations and alternative certifications.
English Language Learning Providers	Language schools focused on study-abroad prep may struggle, while those offering business English or remote, career-oriented courses can benefit from continued demand in professional markets.
International Payment Processing	Decline in cross-border payments to the U.S., U.K., Canada, and Australia may affect transaction volumes, but there are opportunities for new revenue streams from online and alternative destination payments.

Winners & Losers

LOSERS

Category	Explanation
Universities & Colleges	Declining international student numbers reduce revenue from higher tuition fees, which can lead to budget cuts, program reductions, and a diminished global perspective in the student body.
Housing & Accommodation Providers	Fewer international students result in higher vacancy rates, impacting rental income and property values, especially in cities highly reliant on student tenants.
Pathway & Bridge Program Providers	Fewer students choosing traditional study destinations affects these programs' enrollment numbers, as students may seek alternative destinations or online preparatory options.
Student Visa Services & Immigration Consulting Firms	Stricter visa policies and reduced student mobility decrease demand, particularly in traditional study destinations, though there may be opportunities in alternative destinations with favorable policies.
Student Loan Providers	Fewer students studying abroad reduces demand for international student loans, impacting providers heavily focused on financing education for international students in traditional destinations.
English Language Assessment Providers	Decline in test-takers for English proficiency exams like TOEFL and IELTS due to fewer students seeking entry into the U.S. and U.K.
Other Assessment Providers (SAT, ACT, GRE, GMAT, etc.)	Decreased international applications to traditional destinations lead to reduced demand for these tests, although there is some growth potential in emerging markets and alternative testing formats.
Health Insurance Providers	Lower international student enrollments reduce demand for specialized student health insurance plans.
Employers in STEM & Research-Driven Fields	Reduced international student pipeline impacts talent availability in STEM and research fields, creating a potential talent shortage in sectors that rely on skilled graduates from top universities.