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THE POST-PANDEMIC CLASSROOM

Navigating a new era in international education



The post-pandemic classroom Navigating a new era in international education

In 2024, international education across many countries is undergoing a global downturn. Following the sharp dip and catchup rebound of student arrivals, universities are now facing headwinds akin to those endured at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Like the pandemic, these headwinds are varied and systemic, driven by market fundamentals, economic conditions, and most significantly, policy settings.

Through a combination of reduced visa grants, capped places for international students, and generally less attractive and less welcoming regulations, the international education rebound has come to an abrupt halt.

There are few silver linings under the present conditions, and universities will face hard decisions as they contend with the fiscal fallout. However, the slowdown in student recruitment does provide one important benefit: it should allow institutions to take the time to assess and respond to the changing and growing needs of this next generation of international students that have been arriving on campus.

The pandemic's profound impact on education systems reverberate to this day

The COVID-19 pandemic precipitated significant disruptions across all facets of society, with few sectors experiencing as seismic a shift as primary and secondary education. As classrooms emptied and campuses shuttered, schools were forced to pivot to online learning modalities, often with just days' notice.

The global disruption to education caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is without parallel, and its effects on learning have been severe. The crisis brought education systems across the world to a halt, with school closures affecting more than 1.6 billion learners.

- The State of the Global Education Crisis, A Joint UNESCO, UNICEF, And World Bank Report, 2021

The major disruptions to previously stable systems have taken a heavy toll. A swathe of post-pandemic publications, conducted by researchers, multilateral organisations, and governments alike, has uncovered the many and varied impacts of the pandemic on students, both as it occurred and its longer-term implications.

Post-pandemic challenges faced by international students have not received sufficient attention

While there has been substantial research on the impact of the pandemic on education systems, much of this research has focused on challenges faced by domestic students at the school level. Less research is available on the challenges and impacts for international students as they progress to higher education in a foreign country.

International students are a unique subset of the education sector. Over 6 million students leave their hometowns each year to find opportunities abroad to learn and grow.¹ Upon entering a foreign country, international students can face a host of challenges, including navigating unfamiliar cultural norms, language barriers, and adapting to a new educational system.²

While the challenges for domestic students during the pandemic were significant, these challenges were exacerbated for international students. Unable to return home and unable to work, international students often found themselves without sufficient social, emotional, and financial support structures.

The international education community will need to be more attentive to the increasing needs of students

The characteristics of international students have been fundamentally altered by the pandemic. Seeking to understand the impact of COVID-19 on international students, Navitas presents this report which draws on the available academic and grey literature, and relevant global datasets. It is complemented by a survey of the Navitas network of educators, support staff and administrators from 9 different destination countries. Our research highlights that international students are arriving with three key risk factors associated with the pandemic:

- 1. Pandemic learning loss and academic under-achievement
- 2. Decreased student engagement and shifting attitudes to learning
- 3. Impacts on mental health and wellbeing.

These three risk factors are discussed in turn in the following sections.

1. Pandemic learning loss and academic under-achievement

There were extended school closures in many countries where international students come from

There is in fact a well-developed literature on the impact of short-term disruptions on educational progress and academic achievement.

As it turns out, COVID-19 and the associated lockdowns have been the most severe disruptions to schooling ever seen. UNESCO estimates that globally schools were closed either partially or fully for an average of 5.5 months.³ Accounting for school holidays, students in both South Asia and Latin America experienced normal in-person schooling for less than 5 per cent of the academic calendar across two whole years.

Figure 1 below provides a snapshot of how school closures disrupted academic life for students between Q1 2020 to Q1 2022. Overall, these global disruptions to schooling affected 1.6 billion students, 463 million of whom could not be reached by remote learning.⁴



Figure 1 | UNESCO reported status of school closures over the course of the pandemic

Source: UNESCO Global Monitoring of school closures caused by COVID-19 - Country Dashboard

These extended school closures have resulted in pandemic learning loss and academic under-achievement

Learning loss, unfinished learning and forgotten learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic have occurred in most countries. Early on, UNICEF, UNESCO, and the World Bank's joint report setting out the state of the global education crisis identified the correlation between the degree of learning loss and the length of school closures.

Even high-income countries possessing the resources and inclination to rapidly mobilise online learning alternatives during school closures still suffered substantial learning losses. Attempts to offset the impact of school closures via online learning platforms, take-home print packages, and educational television and radio broadcasts suffered from initial deployment and uptake issues. In general, these resources proved mostly inferior, if not substantially inadequate when compared to in-person learning.

The release of the OECD's 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results confirmed industry expectations of lost learning globally since the pandemic. PISA measures student performance as the extent to which 15-year-old students near the end of their compulsory education have acquired the knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in modern societies, particularly in the core domains of reading, mathematics, and science. The 2022 test was the first large-scale study to collect data on student performance after the COVID-19 disruptions with a comparable pre-pandemic baseline.

The 2022 PISA test results, comprising over 700,000 students globally, show "an unprecedented drop in performance". Out of 71 countries that participated in both 2018 and 2022, the large majority saw a drop in scores in mathematics (80%) and reading (70%). On average, mathematics scores fell by 15 points, the equivalent of three-quarters of a year of learning; this decline is three times greater than any previous change. Reading fell by half a year. While this decline cannot solely be attributed to school closures — PISA results had been on a longer-term moderate downward trend—many factors impacted learning during the pandemic including the quality of remote teaching and levels of support given to students.⁵





As a result, one-in-four 15-year-olds is now considered a low performer in mathematics, reading, and science across OECD countries. This means they can struggle to do tasks such as use basic algorithms or interpret simple texts. This trend is more pronounced in 18 countries and economies, where more than 60% of 15-vear-olds are falling behind.

Mathias Cormann
OECD Secretary-General.
2022 PISA Results (2023)

Source: OECD (2023), PISA 2022 Results (Volume I): The State of Learning and Equity in Education

Prospective international students experienced higher rates of pandemic learning loss than their destination country peers

The relative impact of school closures on prospective international students was often more severe than those of their destination country counterparts. In the advanced economies where international students tend to go to study, strong social safety nets and welfare programs for the unemployed meant that schools were able to remain open when businesses were forced to close. In the emerging economies from where students originate, the absence of such payments and programs meant that livelihoods were at stake and schools were often closed while businesses were allowed to continue to trade.

As Figure 3 shows, of the "big four" major–English speaking destinations, school closures were more severe for the average international students than their peers residing in Australia, the UK, and Canada. Students in the USA experienced longer school closures, but these tended to be extended periods of partial closures rather than full school closures.



Figure 3 | Comparison of school closure between destination countries and top 10 source markets (closure period between 16 Feb 2020 to 31 March 2022)

Source: Navitas analysis based on UNESCO Global Monitoring of school closures caused by COVID-19 - Country Dashboard, UNESCO Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students

International students may be entering classrooms with upwards of one year of lost learning

Recent analysis by the World Bank isolated the impact of school closures on educational progress, further illustrating that the longer the closure, the worse the impact.⁶ Using multi-regression analysis, the World Bank found that countries with the shortest closures (~3 months) experienced learning losses equivalent to 5 months of learning, countries with average length of school closures (~9 months) experienced losses of 7 months of learning, and countries with the longest closures (~18 months) experienced losses of up to 12 months of learning.

The graph below illustrates how this translates to learning loss within key source markets for international students globally. Indian students for example had one of the longest school closures which resulted in them experiencing, on average, between 9–12 months of learning loss.

Figure 4 | School closure and learning loss estimate for key international source markets globally⁷

Key International Student Source Market	UNESCO Number of Weeks of School Closure	World Bank Closure Category	World Bank Learning Loss Estimate
India	92	Longest	9-12 months
China	34	Very Short	6 months
Pakistan	61	Long	8-9 months
Nigeria	24	Shortest	4-6 months
Nepal	87	Longest	9-12 months
Vietnam	50	Average	7 months
Kenya	37	Very Short	4-6 months
Bangladesh	86	Longest	9-12 months

Source: UNESCO Global Monitoring of school closures caused by COVID-19 – Country Dashboard, World Bank working paper on School Closures and Student Learning Outcomes (2024)

This all translates to international students arriving to destination markets with potentially a substantial amount of learning loss. Applying the World Bank learning loss estimates to the average closure length for international students across the "big 4" major-English speaking destinations, students arriving to Australia may have lost upward of one year of learning, and those to the UK, Canada, and the USA may have lost over 8 months of learning.

Figure 5 | Learning loss by World Bank closure length (focus on "big 4" major-English speaking destinations)





Source: Navitas analysis based on UNESCO Global Monitoring of school closures caused by COVID-19 – Country Dashboard, UNESCO Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students, and World Bank working paper on School Closures and Student Learning Outcomes (2024)

While many international students come from relatively privileged backgrounds, which may have mitigated the effects of pandemic induced learning loss to some extent, the likely implications of pandemic related learning loss for the hundreds of thousands of international students arriving on university campuses in the coming years cannot be underestimated. The international cohort is a diverse one with students coming from varied socio-economic and educational backgrounds. We can expect many to find the transition to being an international student much harder than it would otherwise have been. For the students coming directly from high school, it would be fair to assume that few have achieved their full potential.

Insights from the Navitas network highlight the effect the pandemic has had on international students' academic capabilities

Higher education institutions need to prepare for a cohort of international students that have experienced pandemic related learning loss. Research across the Navitas network highlights the extent to which this is already occurring. The 2023 Navitas Educator Survey, which canvassed the views of 200 Navitas educators from nine destination countries, found that students are arriving with lower academic capabilities.

As shown in Figure 6, educators noted an across the board decrease in key skills and competencies, including study habits and time management, critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, and in teamwork related skills. Over 60% reported a decline in overall academic preparedness.

Navitas Educators also reported seeing decreases in English verbal and written communication, which is especially concerning given that language proficiency is a key determinant of success for international students across multiple domains.

Quotes from the Navitas Educator Survey 2023:



l am finding that students are requiring more

scaffolding. I'm having to spend more time preparing them for assignments."

"Students appear to be more overwhelmed with course requirements and often become overwhelmed by stress."

"[There has been a] **significant decline in ability to cope with studies**, given a return to in-person instruction."

Figure 6 | Educator perception about changes post-pandemic to student academic preparedness

Q: To what extent have you observed changes in the following areas related to student academic preparedness?



Source: Navitas Educator Survey (2023)

The 2024 Navitas Agent Perception Survey corroborates these concerns. Now in its 8th round since 2020, the Agent Perception Survey captures the opinions of over 1,000 agents across the Navitas network. When asked about student needs post-COVID, almost 60% of agents agreed or strongly agreed that students have an increased need for academic support due to extended school closures.

Figure 7 | Agents' perception about changes to student academic support needs post-pandemic

Q: Indicate the extent you would agree to the following statements regarding changes in student needs and choices before and after COVID.

AREA: Students have an increased need for academic support due to extended school closures

3%	12%		27%		44%	14%
S	trongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	

2. Decreased student engagement and shifting attitudes to learning

Engagement in learning has also decreased post the pandemic

Engagement in the classroom is less easily measured than some other key markers of pandemic learning loss, but no less critical in a student's educational journey. Sporadic attendance, poor classroom behaviour, reluctance to interact with instructors and other students, over-reliance or dependence on technology, and inadequate commitment to take-home assignments can all be indicators of disengagement.

While there is not the breadth of literature on student engagement as in other areas of post-pandemic complications, many countries have tabled rising difficulties with behaviours and absenteeism since COVID-19.

Recent results from the US Institute of Education Science's 2022-23 School Pulse Panel survey have uncovered several key insights from a survey of public schools.⁸ Chronic absenteeism was reported by 72% of the schools canvassed. Gaps in behavioural development were identified by 83% of schools, while 42% of schools recounted increased occurrences of unauthorised use of technological devices, influenced by time spent in lockdown where many students had a heavy reliance on their smartphones and tablets to offset feelings of boredom and isolation.

Behaviour in schools in England have also deteriorated since the pandemic. A survey in late 2023 by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) found that over two-fifths (42%) of teachers said pupil behaviour had worsened since the pandemic.⁹ Ofsted, in their annual report to parliament, highlighted the urgent need to address absenteeism and disruptive behaviour to counter pandemic learning loss.

Since the pandemic, pupils and teachers are seeing more disruptive behaviour in school. This is affecting both their experience of school and their ability to learn or teach. This is especially true of persistent low-level disruption in class, such as pupils refusing to do as they are told, talking back to teachers or using social media in class.

- The Annual Report of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2022/23

Navitas educators report a decrease in international student engagement

The Navitas Educator survey finds that across the globe international students are arriving with more issues related to motivation and engagement. Over 60% of educators surveyed reported that students' focus and attention had decreased and that students were less inclined to attend class in person.

Anecdotal survey feedback suggested that students had simply not formed the skills to interact with teachers or classmates, and previously firm boundaries and adherence to behavioural expectations had fallen by the wayside due to the lack of maturity and understanding of acceptable social standards.

GG When I ask them to talk with their classmates, they often look horrified."

— Educator, Canada

GG [Students] behave in a very casual way, and teachers have to work much harder to set up clear boundaries and expectations."

— Educator, Australia

BB Recent cohorts are less engaged and 'excited' about learning."

— Educator, UK

Figure 8 | Educator perceptions about changes post-pandemic to student engagement

Q: To what extent have you observed changes in the following areas related to student engagement?



Source: Navitas Educator Survey (2023)

Educators observe that students' relationship with technology has changed, decreasing engagement and increasing breaches of academic integrity

An unhealthy relationship with technology is an emerging theme post the pandemic. Navitas educators globally have identified that students' dependence on digital devices have led to decreased engagement both inside and outside the classroom.

Concentration span is shorter. Students struggle with focus,
cannot stay off their digital device, will be multi-tasking in
class with different tabs open, one tab will be social media
or non-learning content."

- Educator, Australia

We have also heard from a lot of host families that students spend much more time on their phones and socialize less than they had previously experienced."

- Administrator, New Zealand

They tend to have a very short attention span, with an almost addiction to their phones."

— Educator, Canada

The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) platforms post-pandemic has also resulted in students increasingly compromising their academic integrity with higher instances of cheating and plagiarism recorded in the higher education setting. Over 60% of our surveyed educators note an increase in plagiarism incidents post the pandemic.

Whilst institutions are cognisant of the important role AI will play in the future of education, the industry must strike a balance that allows students to leverage the power without restricting their own learning and personal growth.

8

3. Impacts on Mental Health and Wellbeing

Young people and those from lower income countries were disproportionately at risk of the mental health repercussions of the pandemic

A significant consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic was a sharp deterioration of individual's mental health and wellbeing. The Global Burden of Disease 2020 study estimated that the COVID-19 pandemic led to a 28% increase in cases of major depressive disorder and a 26% increase in cases of anxiety disorders.¹⁰

Young people's mental health was worst hit among population sub-groups.¹¹ Thrust into a virtual learning world, and often lacking the tools and experience to deal with such changes, young people experienced high degrees of social isolation, fear of illness or loss, family economic hardship, academic pressure, and general uncertainty about the future. A Save the Children report revealing that 83% of children experienced heightened negative emotions during the pandemic underscores the widespread impact of its mental health effects on young people.¹²

The ability to respond to the crisis of mental health, both during the pandemic and post pandemic, varied widely across countries due to a number of reasons, for instance resource availability, existing system governance, and the cultural norms around mental health service uptake. In terms of access to mental health professionals — a vital pre-requisite to responding to mental health challenges — the pandemic laid bare the disparity between high and low income countries. The 2020 Mental Health Atlas study by the World Health Organisation (WHO) reports that high income countries (as defined by the World Bank) had 62.2 mental health workers per 100,000 population, but low income countries only had 1.4 workers. Even between upper-middle income countries and high-income countries there remained a sizeable gap.

While comparing the impact of the pandemic across countries is difficult as the majority of studies were conducted in higher income countries, evidence does illustrate that many low- and middle-income countries were majorly affected.¹³

Many prospective international students sit within the intersection of population subgroups most impacted by the mental health consequences of the pandemic

Recognising the disparity in mental health service availability is important in the international education context. When looking at global student flows to the "big 4" major English-speaking destination countries (Australia, UK, USA, Canada) for example, while less than 2% originate from low income countries, over 60% are from middle income countries. Additionally, more than half of middle-income student flows are from lower-middle income countries.

As the graph below shows, Australia has the highest proportion of students from lower-middle income countries (at 50%) while the UK has the highest proportion of students from high-income countries, although this is rapidly shifting as a result of Brexit.

11% 20% 35% High income 45% 39% 55% 53% Upper middle income 31% 28% 14% 50% Lower middle income 30% 24% 25% Low income UK USA Average Australia Canada (across 4 major destinations)

Figure 9 | Proportion of international students from World Bank country income categorisation (for Australia, UK, Canada, USA)

Source: Navitas analysis based on UNESCO Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students, World Bank country classification by income levels

As many international students are from higher socio-economic households, this likely helped to mitigate some of the pandemic related mental health consequences. But of course, not all international students come from wealthy families. Furthermore, the sheer disparity of mental health service provision between high income and lower- and middle-income countries will mean that it is more than likely that many students from key source markets were less able to seek assistance to cope with the mental health impacts of the pandemic.

The mental health impacts of the pandemic on international students are likely to compound existing stresses faced by international students

Even under normal circumstances, international students are more prone to mental disorders (e.g. depression).¹⁴ This reality is compounded with multiple studies indicating that international students are either unaware or not utilising available mental health services. The 2021 International Student Barometer (ISB) found that only 16% of students used counselling services, and close to a quarter of surveyed students (22%) did not know how to access counselling.¹⁵

Research from Student Minds, the UK's higher education mental health charity, found that fewer international students reported mental health challenges than UK-domiciled students, yet international students experienced higher rates of anxiety compared with UK-domiciled students. This research further found that international students had lower levels of engagement with mental health support than UK-domiciled students.¹⁶

While this data clearly indicates that more is needed to tackle mental health challenges among international students, there is one silver lining. Research from IDP's *Emerging Futures* series found that 86% of students in a survey of 11,000 reported that the mental health support they had been provided had met or exceeded expectations.¹⁷ The challenge therefore is to ensure students are aware and able to engage with these services in the first place.

The Navitas agent network and Navitas educators indicate that students across destinations are struggling more with mental health challenges following the pandemic

Navitas' research with our network corroborates the findings of other organisations around the impact of the pandemic on student mental health and wellbeing.

Close to 60% of the international education agents that responded to the 2024 Agent Perception Survey 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the proposition that "students have an increasing need for social and mental health supports due to lockdowns".

Figure 10 | Agent perceptions about changes to students' social and mental health support needs post-pandemic

Q: Indicate the extent you would agree to the following statements regarding changes in student needs and choices before and after COVID.

AREA: Students have an increased need for social and mental health support due to lockdowns

4%	13%		25%		40%	18%
Str	ongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	

Our educators at the coal face are also witnessing the mental health impacts of the pandemic. Close to 60% of our educators surveyed noted a decline in the mental health of students post-COVID-19, suggesting that the challenges first experienced at school-age during the height of the pandemic are translating to a tertiary education setting. Poor mental health is presenting in the classroom as lack of concentration, moodiness and irritability, fatigue, and the inability to take tasks to completion.

Figure 11 | Educator perceptions about changes post-pandemic to student mental health

by stress."

Educator, Canada

Q: To what extent have you observed changes in the following areas related to **student wellbeing?** (% of responses) AREA: **Mental health**



— Manager, USA

health challenges that students may not be willing to admit hamper their success."

- Administrator, Canada

Source: Navitas Agent Perception Survey (2024)

Implications for the international education sector

1. The international education community should prepare for the effects of the pandemic to manifest in classrooms into the future

The impacts of disrupted schooling on academic achievement, engagement and mental health and wellbeing are unlikely to subside in the short term — this is likely to be a generational phenomenon. As the *State of the Global Education Crisis* report emphasises, even when students do return to school, "additional learning losses could accumulate".¹⁶ This stands to reason given that learning is a cumulative process, with new skills building on a prior foundation. Research of other disruptive events have highlighted how extended school closures have a long-term impact on students' learning trajectories.

Figure 12 below illustrates how an individual's learning trajectory may be fundamentally altered post the pandemic. School closures resulted in a level of forgotten and foregone learning that, if not adequately addressed, could push students towards a post-pandemic learning trajectory that takes them well off course from their pre-COVID potential.



Figure 12 | Disruption to learning journey post COVID-19 (UNICEF, UNESCO, and World Bank, 2022)

Schools closing Schools opening

Source: UNICEF, UNESCO, and World Bank (2022)

While school systems have the capacity to put students back on an accelerated learning journey, international education practitioners and leaders should be alive to the fact that this will not occur for all students. In fact, the World Bank's analysis of efforts to improve learning post COVID-19 finds that relatively few countries have implemented evidence-based policies to address learning gaps, and many had returned to a 'business-as-usual' approach. Only 1 in 5 countries analysed had an explicit and comprehensive strategy to recover and grow learning post reopening.¹⁹

Mental health impacts and learner engagement is also likely to be impacted into the future. While it is too early to observe through empirical data, psychologists and mental health experts across the world have already sounded the warning to expect mental health impacts to persist long after the pandemic is over. For instance, in the UK, a group of leading public health specialists warned in the British Medical Journal that "the mental health impact of the pandemic is likely to last much longer than the physical health impact".²⁰ If history is any predictor, as another expert explains, "we should expect a significant 'tail' of mental health needs that continue long after the infectious outbreak resolves."²¹

2. New methods and investment will be required to bridge the effects of the pandemic

The primary response of the higher education sector to-date has been increased flexibility and generosity when it comes to entry requirements. While this appropriately placed less emphasis on final test scores for those who endured life in lockdown, it can be more problematic than it first appears.²² For a student with unfinished learning or pandemic learning loss to be successful in a course that is no less rigorous than it was previously, they will need access to additional academic scaffolding, social support, and mental health services.

Educators across the Navitas network have begun to trial a range of strategies to build academic capability, improve student engagement, support student wellbeing, and reduce breaches of academic integrity. Examples of strategies noted in the Navitas Educator Survey span four broad areas:

- New approaches to teaching: educators have increased the amount of support to students to increase their general academic preparedness around study, writing and referencing skills
- New approaches to assessment: educators have begun to experiment with human-AI collaboration to facilitate student learning
- New strategies for mental health: educators have begun to set one-to-one online meetings with all students to check on their wellbeing
- New approaches to academic integrity: educators have developed comprehensive guidelines on Generative AI for students and tutors

Whatever strategies are developed and deployed, it is important that these are fit-for-purpose for the specific challenges and circumstances of the diverse international cohort.

3. There is an increasing role for embedded university pathway colleges to help prepare international students for the rigours of university

Given the increased needs of students across multiple domains as outlined in this report, it is imperative that the international education community ensures students are well supported to meet the rigours of world-class university programs. One way that universities can ensure international students are appropriately prepared is to direct candidates to embedded university pathway colleges and programs. Such programs were originally pioneered to allow suitable candidates to make up for gaps in their education and to succeed in the face of the significant transition in becoming an international student.

The value of pathways to international student success is clearly established. For example, the report *Pathways to Success in International Education* by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE) at the University of Melbourne (commissioned by the Australian Department of Education) showed that the vast majority of first-year pathway students successfully progress into second-year. When analysing the Weighted Average Mark (WAM) of second-year students at a research-intensive university, the CHSE research also found that those that had completed a Foundation Studies Program had a significantly higher mean WAM (for their first two or three semesters) than those entering via Direct entry from an overseas secondary school.

Insights from the 2024 Navitas Agent Perception Survey highlight how, even as the pandemic recedes, the need for pathway programs is increasing. When asked whether there had been a change in the number of students requiring a pathway program over the last 12 months, 43% of agents indicated there had been moderate growth (5–10%), and 13% of agents indicated strong growth (10+%). Regions that showed particularly strong need include Sub–Saharan Africa, South Asia, Middle East and North Africa, and South East Asia, where over 60% of agents expected either moderate or strong growth in pathway programs.

These findings from the 2024 Agent Perception Survey are reflective of results from the 2023 survey and highlight the need and value of pathway programs to help prepare international students for university in light of the effects of pandemic learning loss.

Figure 13 | Agent perceptions about the change in need of students requiring a pathway program



Q: In your opinion, has there been a change over the last 12 months in the number of students requiring a pathway program?

Source: Navitas Agent Perception Survey (2024)

4. Increased support should not just be afforded to students, but educators as well

While attention and investment is needed to address increasing student needs, care should also be given to the wellbeing of educators. The increased needs of students has taken its toll on educators. Research funded by The Open University in the UK found for instance that teachers reported a range of wellbeing challenges including increased levels of emotional stress, social isolation, loneliness, depression, and financial stress.²³

Educators across Navitas colleges and campuses report similar impacts on their wellbeing and they identified multiple areas of additional support including increased professional development workshops, greater mental health resources, and more flexible work arrangements.

Prioritising the response to pandemic learning loss will increase the competitive advantage of universities and destination countries

Research across Navitas' agent network has demonstrated that, post-pandemic, students are much more likely to apply to multiple destination countries, and multiple institutions within each destination. Agents indicate that students are also more willing to switch institutions in search of a better personal fit.

Agents note that a key reason students would be willing to switch would be to move to an institution that has 'more suitable academic demands'. While this does not suggest that institutions should compromise on academic standards, it does reinforce the point that students will gravitate towards universities and tertiary systems that provide them with increased levels of support.

The ongoing effects of the pandemic must therefore be kept front of mind in the development of institutional and national strategies. Pandemic learning loss, mental health challenges, and lower engagement must continue to be carefully monitored, and investment must continue to be made to ensure these effects are ameliorated.

International students are an incredibly resilient and committed group. They leave the comforts and supports of home to throw themselves into a very different world - while going through formative coming-of-age developments. They will continue to do the same in the coming years; but the international education community will need to be alert to the fact that this next generation will need even more support to succeed.

Moving forward, the higher education sector will need to think carefully about how to provide this additional and vital support. By acknowledging and investing in systems to alleviate the pandemic's effects on students, we will not only assist the current cohort of international students but also pave the way for a more student-centric - and therefore more globally competitive - approach to international education.

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