



Update on the education sector's response to coronavirus Global Reputation Taskforce

I commend the efforts of the Australian education sector working with the government to minimise the impacts of the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV), after three meetings of the Global Reputation Taskforce.

The Taskforce's paramount challenge, led by the Hon Phil Honeywood, convener of the Expert Members of the Council for International Education, is to support affected students through this difficult time.

Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham, Minister for Trade and member of the Council for International Education and I were pleased to learn from the Taskforce their experiences and the wide range of efforts to support students, staff, and their families to date.

Study hubs around Australia have told me how they are supporting their Chinese student communities. Not only are they providing care packages to students who are responsibly sitting out the 14 day period of self-isolation, they are ensuring that all international students are aware of the support services available, including mental health support.

I was pleased to hear the success stories being experienced in our schools, of the early groups of quarantined students returning to their schools with assemblies and morning teas organised to welcome them back.

Austrade has made available through studyinaustralia.gov.au, a database of what each provider in Australia is offering in the way of support for students, as a one-stop-shop for information for students, providers and others affected by this epidemic.

The government continues to work with the Taskforce and higher education providers to address important visa issues. The Department of Home Affairs continues to give priority to both individual cases and wider policy issues.

Providers across the sector have been actively engaged in connecting with and rallying around international students in Australia and who remain abroad. From clear messaging around inclusion – such as reminders that viruses don't discriminate, to practical support such as extension of dates for tuition fees, extended no-penalty withdrawal periods and hardship scholarships.

Supported by government, providers are also adapting delivery models to minimise the impact of coronavirus mitigation measures on students' academic progress, incorporating online delivery, alternative course programming and delays of commencement for courses where appropriate.

With the wellbeing of our international students at the centre of discussion, I am pleased the Taskforce developed a shared sector statement of support and concern for those affected:

The Australian international education stands with international students who have been affected by the novel coronavirus outbreak.

Australia is proud of its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and international students are a core element of our strong multicultural society. International students enhance our classrooms, our workplaces and our communities.

While we know this outbreak has affected China more than any other nation, this medical condition knows no borders and does not discriminate. And nor should we. We recognise the contribution of our shared student community and are committed to working together with all affected nations to contain the impact and inconvenience of the measures taken to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus outbreak.

Our support goes to all affected students – those who are unable to travel to take up study in Australia at this time, those in Australia who have friends and family in affected areas, and even those who were planning to study in China, but cannot. And many more.

We thank them for their understanding, flexibility and patience at this time as relevant authorities in our countries work together to take the necessary steps to contain the further spread of the virus.

I encourage the sector to share this message among their networks.

The Government is firmly committed to supporting the sector to continue to provide the assistance needed to those affected. As the Chair of the Council for International Education, I thank the Taskforce for their advice to date and look forward to their continued advocacy for the needs of our international students during this time.

The Hon Dan Tehan MP

Minister for Education

Chair of the Council for International Education