



Global Reputation Taskforce initial recommendations

The Global Reputation Taskforce (the Taskforce) was formed to help protect Australia's reputation as a welcoming destination for high-quality education following the bushfire crisis and in response to the coronavirus.

Lessons learned from each of these events will contribute to developing strategies for addressing not only the immediate challenges posed by the bushfires and COVID-19 outbreak, but also future events. While it is impossible to predict the exact nature of any future emergency or crisis situations, it is unlikely they will directly replicate the challenges of current circumstances. Both the government and the sector should develop these responses carefully to ensure any long-term measures can be adapted to future events.

The Taskforce recommends that government and the sector focus efforts in the following areas:

Crisis response

The government and sector must learn from these crises to be better positioned for the future. The Taskforce recommends:

- 1) The establishment of a sector-wide crisis management committee, building on the Council for International Education's Collaborative Marketing Framework, to ensure appropriate coordination mechanisms, data and shared messages can be activated and are available to respond to critical incidents. The membership of the committee would be targeted and would be drawn from relevant peak bodies, industry representatives and the Australian and state and territory governments, and chaired by a senior representative from the sector.
- 2) That learnings from these events and the sector's collective response be incorporated into the refresh of the *National Strategy for International Education 2025*.

Communication

The international education sector and international students need access to timely, coordinated and culturally appropriate communication material during a crisis. The Taskforce recommends:

- 3) Governments and stakeholders work together, through the crisis management committee where appropriate, to ensure communication material and data made available during a crisis is clear, consistent and accessible for international students and other stakeholder groups, including the use of local language, subtitles and translations where possible.

Enhancing our reputation

Governments and the sector must continue to work together to ensure Australia is a welcoming place for international students to study. The Taskforce recommends:

- 4) Consideration of increased funding levels for marketing in response to crises, including options for co-investment from governments and the sector, and outreach to agents as a critical pathway for student enrolments.
- 5) That state and territory governments continue to work with Austrade on a data-led and digital first approach to ensure improved alignment of messaging and reach in global markets. This should include positive messaging to assure international students they are welcome in Australia, including developing and sharing good news stories and examples of students facing hardship and how they have sought and received help.
- 6) Governments consider opportunities to promote the excellence of Australian education and stimulate interest in studying with Australia, including through student mobility programs.

Mental health and wellbeing

Governments and stakeholders must work together and build on existing materials to continue to provide international students access to support services (academic counselling, mental health support etc.) to assist them during and following crises. Material should be made freely available where possible. The Taskforce recommends:

- 7) Coordinated activities from governments and education providers, in partnership with the health sector, to improve awareness and accessibility of mental health services for international students. This should take into account that there is no single preferred mode for delivery of mental health information for international students—a variety of mechanisms is important, including print, online, social media, peer-to-peer and individual support.

Flexibility in regulation

Education regulators and providers should continue to work together to ensure appropriate flexibility in regulation relating to international students during a crisis. The Taskforce recommends:

- 8) The Australian Government and all relevant regulators establish processes to ensure providers have sufficient flexibility during crises, including consideration of regulatory burden on providers and relief from regulatory costs where deemed appropriate as they seek to manage and recover from the disruption.

Visas and other border measures

The Australian Government should ensure, wherever possible, that international students affected by travel restrictions during a crisis are not disadvantaged with respect to their visa and immigration status. The Taskforce recommends:

- 9) Consideration of fee waivers for students who need to reapply or extend their visas as a result of travel restrictions.
- 10) Flexibility when calculating time in Australia for students affected by travel restrictions if they wish to take up post-study work visas or apply for permanent residency.
- 11) That immigration risk ratings for education providers are not affected by the inability of students to commence or complete study as a result of travel restrictions.

Flexibility in education delivery

The sector should work to capitalise on the effort and investment in high-quality online learning and expand offerings for international students located offshore. The Taskforce recommends:

- 12) Providers implement flexible online learning options where effective and appropriate, to support students and minimise disruptions to study programs.
- 13) The Australian Government and providers promote the benefits and quality of Australia's online learning offerings with international students and partner countries, and reduce barriers to the uptake of online learning and recognition of academic credit and qualifications.

Supporting positive community sentiment

The sector and governments should work together to make clear that Australia is a welcoming destination that does not tolerate racism. The Taskforce recommends:

- 14) The international education sector, in collaboration with the Council for International Students Australia (CISA) engage proactively on this issue, including with existing anti-racism frameworks and campaigns to support international students experiencing racism and other forms of discrimination.

Industry resilience

To build its resilience to future shocks, the Taskforce recommends:

- 15) That providers have access to appropriate, timely and accurate data to support them during and following crises.
- 16) Providers continue to consider the risk profile of their student source country, course and location mix.
- 17) The Council for International Education, through the refreshed National Strategy for International Education 2025, consider proactive strategies to support the sustainability of the international education sector.
- 18) Government agencies, including Austrade, continue to assist providers in identifying, developing and consolidating new and nascent markets.