



## Meeting of Expert Members of the Council for International Education 4 October 2019

On Thursday 3 October 2019, Expert Members held a policy discussion with a range of stakeholders, including peak bodies and representatives from the higher education, vocational education and training and schools sectors, hosted by Charles Sturt University at its Darlinghurst campus. This session built on Expert Members' commitment, as agreed at the July meeting, to enhance communications with the broader sector.

Expert Members provided updates on the work of the Latin America Working Group, China Working Group and India Reference Group and sought feedback on key issues from stakeholders. Stakeholders also provided advice on key priorities to be implemented as part of delivering on the *National Strategy for International Education 2025* (National Strategy) over the next five years. This included actions to ensure ongoing risk monitoring and management in particular in the vocational education and training sector, and efforts to enhance the international student experience with a focus on mental health and wellbeing. Expert Members are developing a work plan that will be provided to the Prime Minister as part of the Council for International Education's annual implementation report and feedback from stakeholders will inform this work plan.

On Friday 4 October, the Hon Phil Honeywood convened an Expert Members meeting, also in Sydney. A key focus of the meeting was consideration of current policy issues, as well as strategic policy priorities to inform the future work plan and this year's report to the Prime Minister. Expert Members noted the resignation of Prof Kent Anderson from the group to work as an advisor to the Minister for Education, the Hon Dan Tehan MP, and expressed thanks to Prof Anderson for his service to the Council since 2016.

Mr Brett Blacker led a discussion on international students' English language ability and academic success. Expert Members noted analysis from Mr Blacker highlighting that international students have higher success rates than domestic students, in terms of both progression and retention. Expert Members also discussed risks in the sector, including potential fraud in English language testing, and the interplay between international student performance and their health and wellbeing. Expert Members agreed the importance of education providers being able to make clear statements about their admission and student support processes. Expert Members encouraged education providers to consider communication approaches to build community engagement with international education, and to provide assurance of the quality of education and support being provided, including through best practices examples. Expert Members also agreed that once current research into pathway data is complete, this analysis be made available through a research snapshot from the department.

Ms Karyn Kent provided advice on the role of the Enabling Growth and Innovation (EGI) program sub-group, including Ms Kent, Mr David Riordan and Mr Ahmed Ademoglu, in providing advice to inform the Minister for Education's commissioning of strategic research under the EGI program. Acknowledging the legislative and other frameworks around procurement, including processes to manage conflict of interest, the

sub-group will work with the Department of Education to identify potential areas of work ahead of Ministerial decision-making; identify relevant experts to assist with project review, development and implementation where required; and work to communicate the benefits of the funded projects and explain the funding process.

Expert Members discussed key issues to be raised at the full Council meeting, with Ministerial members, in late 2019. Expert Members built on their planning session in July and discussed priority work to be progressed over the next five years, with a focus on the future sustainability of Australia's international education sector. Key actions areas include short, medium and longer term actions to encourage diversification in the sector, to improve the student experience and to ensure regulation is responsive and fit-for-purpose. Expert Members placed particular emphasis on understanding visa settings for emerging partner countries, enhancing industry engagement and aligning with tourism, monitoring the success of ongoing scholarship and visa initiatives in regional Australia and championing enhanced access for outbound programs such as the New Colombo Plan.

Expert Members participated in a discussion with Austrade on the development of Australia's new Nation Brand and considered how education providers will be able to engage with the brand concept. The Department of Education then briefed Expert Members on its key activities to support the sustainability and diversity of the international education sector. These include work to develop strategies for enhancing the focus on the English language training and schools sectors, plans to develop a transnational education sector strategy, progress of the University Foreign Interference Taskforce, potential Ministerial visits to important partner countries, the Department's role in developing the UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications to promote recognition of Australia's higher education qualifications, and upcoming workshops in Vietnam and Mexico to build policy understanding of how online learning can be quality assured.

The Department of Education also briefed Expert Members on its new education agent data analytics platform to be released for providers, noting that the majority of education agents delivered positive outcomes for students and that the platform is particularly effective in identifying outlier agents that may not always operate in the best interests of students. The platform acknowledges the significant proportion of international students who are recruited through agents. By empowering providers to make data-informed decisions about which education agents they work with, the Australian Government aims to help them recruit and retain genuine students and improve the student experience. Expert Members provided feedback on how practitioners could best use this data, and ways to improve its accessibility and functionality.

Expert Members confirmed the value of the stakeholder engagement session and have committed to similar meetings on a periodic basis, as well as continuing use of existing communication channels to disseminate the National Council for International Education's work. Expert Members began planning their meeting with Ministerial Members of the Council for International Education in late November or early December 2019. Among other items and announcements, at this meeting Ministerial Members will consider and provide advice to the Prime Minister and endorse the Expert Members' forward work plan to achieve the objectives of the National Strategy by 2025.