



Videoconference of Expert Members of the Council for International Education

22 April 2020

On 22 April 2020, Expert Members met by videoconference to discuss issues stemming from COVID-19 and how the Council can support Australia's international education sector now and into the future. Expert Members firmly restated the important role international students and researchers play in Australian society, recognising the contribution they have made over many years to enriching Australian cities, towns and campuses, answering challenging research questions, and supporting Australian businesses and communities as consumers and workers.

Expert Members affirmed their strong support for international students during this difficult time and condemned in the strongest terms any discrimination or vilification. Expert Members commended the collective efforts across the sector to support international students as valued members of Australian communities who are not only dealing with the challenges of COVID-19 here, but also the uncertainty and fear about the situations of friends and families in their home countries. The proactive and empathetic approach being taken by education providers, StudyHubs, governments at all levels, student organisations, community groups and other key stakeholders to support international students during this difficult time was strongly supported by Expert Members. Members called for these initiatives, alongside the Australian Government's \$200 million community support package and state government initiatives supporting international students, to be brought together into a coherent story to allow better communication of the support available to affected international students across Australia. This will let current and future international students here and abroad know that Australia is committed to their health, safety and wellbeing.

Expert Members welcomed the range of Commonwealth and state and territory government commitments to support education providers, including the recent announcement of relief from regulatory costs for education providers announced as a part of the Australian Government's Higher Education Relief Package. Members welcomed the supportive approach taken by education regulators in providing flexibility in regulations to support providers and students as they face the unique challenges posed by COVID-19. Austrade's work bringing together positive messaging from across the sector under the #inthistogether hashtag was commended, as was the role of the Council's Global Reputation Taskforce in helping to drive and communicate the above actions.

Looking to the future, Expert Members considered ways to position the sector to respond once conditions improve. Members discussed the important role the refreshed *National Strategy for International Education* will play in this and ways to engage the international education sector in the refresh process, including through consultations and a discussion paper. Expert Members particularly noted the importance of a clear focus on student experience in a refreshed National Strategy, reflecting this being an ongoing priority for the Council. Members agreed to recommend consultations on a refreshed national strategy once health and economic conditions improve.