



Teleconference of Expert Members of the Council for International Education 4 February 2020

On Tuesday 4 February 2020, Expert Members met by teleconference to consider challenges posed to Australia's international education sector by the ongoing bushfire crisis and spread of the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV), following the first meeting of the Global Reputation Taskforce on 3 February. They also discussed the refresh of the National Strategy for International Education 2025 (National Strategy).

Noting that there are nearly 189,000 Chinese international students across Australia's education sectors and that 56% remain overseas, Expert Members acknowledged the human face of this rapidly evolving situation. They supported the ongoing collaboration between Commonwealth agencies, state and territory governments, providers and other stakeholders in providing a rapid and sympathetic response, and they committed to supporting this approach in the future.

This student-centred approach is evident in the commitment of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) to flexibly apply regulations about students' attendance and mode of study. Expert Members supported the deployment of a designated helpline (1300 981 621, 8 am-8 pm AEDT), the provision of information in-country through the Australian diplomatic networks and the launch of a dedicated email address [international.students@dese.gov.au].

Expert Members supported Austrade's development of a communication strategy to address effects of the novel coronavirus and bushfires. This will include bilingual communication materials for students in Australia and abroad, and education agents. Expert Members encouraged affected students, providers and other parties to visit the Australian Government's Study in Australia website [<https://www.studyinaustralia.gov.au/>] for the latest information on the novel coronavirus and how it affects study here.

Reinforcing that international students from China are valued members of our education institutions and local communities, Expert Members:

- encourage efforts by the Australian Government to support affected students, including when dealing with visa complications, applications and guidance on visa issues. This includes consideration of waiving fees when they reapply for cancelled visas or seek previously unforeseen extensions;
- welcome efforts by all levels of government to work with providers of overseas health cover and accommodation to provide appropriate support services and information to affected students;
- recognise efforts by several state and territory governments and study hubs to support self-isolated students, including those in homestays, by providing care packages and encourage other jurisdictions to follow their lead; and
- encourage providers to continue reaching out to their Chinese student cohorts already in Australia and ensure they have appropriate support, including mental health services, and current information about the conditions faced by their friends and family back in China.

Following on from the directive of ministerial members of the Council for International Education in late 2019 that Expert Members lead a refresh of the National Strategy, they agreed to continue working on this, noting that the current conditions faced by the sector may have a profound influence on challenges and opportunities in coming years. Expert Members undertook to work closely with the sector in ensuring the refreshed National Strategy remains fit for purpose and positions Australia to remain a world leader in international education.

Expert Members acknowledged convener the Hon Phil Honeywood's contribution over these difficult past weeks in advocating on behalf of the sector, including the reassurance he continues to provide affected students and providers through the media.