

A COVIDSafe Corridor – National Protocols for the Resumption of International Student Travel

IHEA welcomes the National Cabinet's *Roadmap to a COVIDSafe Australia* including consideration of the conditions under which international student travel can recommence.

All Australians benefit from the contribution international students and their families make to our economy. It is critical that the international education industry can bounce back in the next major student commencement period for Australian higher education in early 2021.

IHEA proposes a COVIDSafe Corridor for international student travel comprising four elements: national protocols; pilot programs; provider principles; and participation of independent providers in pilots.

Australia's high quality independent higher education providers have the capacity to implement national protocols, the essential characteristics for international student support and success, and are well placed to participate in successful pilot programs.

International education is Australia's third largest export industry contributing \$38 billion to our national economy and generating 250,000 jobs. A resumption of student travel is critical to the recovery of Australia's economy and the jobs and livelihoods of Australian workers and their families.

1. IHEA proposes national protocols to establish a COVIDSafe Corridor to facilitate the safe entry of international students to Australia.

Development of a 'COVIDSafe Corridor' that establishes the conditions for international student travel to resume is essential and needs to be based on agreed national protocols. The health and safety of Australians and our visitors is paramount and IHEA proposes that national protocols for a COVIDSafe Corridor include:

- AHPPC advice to underpin all international education operations including travel, visas, quarantining and teaching arrangements
- Safe campus operations and face-to-face teaching arrangements having commenced for domestic students and onshore international students
- Use of the COVIDSafe App by student visa holders
- Quarantining and compulsory health testing of all international student arrivals

2. IHEA proposes pilot programs of targeted cohorts be considered for implementation in late 2020 to inform careful planning and testing of the COVIDSafe Corridor.

Resumption of international student travel needs careful planning and management. Pilot programs of targeted cohorts enable testing and validation of the success of national protocols in ensuring the safety of the Australian community and international students.

Pilot programs before the end of the year are essential to demonstrating that comprehensive safety measures can be implemented in advance of a broader expansion of student travel in 2021.

3. IHEA has endorsed principles for our member institutions seeking to participate in COVIDSafe Corridor pilot programs and the resumption of international student travel.

The successful resumption of international student travel will require all higher education providers enrolling international students to implement safe practices and procedures in accordance with national protocols.

IHEA members enrolling students arriving through a COVIDSafe Corridor will:

- Implement AHPPC advice
- Meet students at domestic airports and provide transfers
- Provide and manage quarantining for all international students with support sought from State and Federal Governments for the costs of health and security services
- Require quarantined students to agree to COVID testing by State Public Health Units (PHUs) and PHU management of any positive cases
- Commence campus student support and wellbeing services during the quarantining period
- Undertake real-time monitoring, information sharing and formal evaluation processes for pilots
- Establish COVIDSafe Campus plans including sanitisation regimes and safe practice timetabling, social distancing, transport and campus event arrangements

IHEA's guiding principles for members implementing the COVIDSafe Corridor and participation in pilot programs are outlined in the *Guiding Principles for IHEA Members - An Appropriate and Measured Return to International Student Arrivals via a COVIDSafe Corridor*.

4. Independent higher education providers are particularly well positioned to participate in COVIDSafe pilot programs.

IHEA members are well positioned to successfully implement a COVIDSafe Corridor pilot student intake. In addition to the capacity to implement IHEA's proposed national protocols and member guiding principles, independent providers offer flexible delivery timetables including late year admission dates, small classes, and nation-leading QILT results on a range of measures including student support and learner engagement.

Quotes attributable to Simon Finn – IHEA CEO:

“National Cabinet’s Roadmap to a COVIDSafe Australia includes consideration in Step 3 of the conditions under which international student travel can recommence.

“All Australians benefit from the contribution of international students and their families to our national economy. The international education industry needs to be fully operational in time for Australia’s major annual student commencement period in early 2021 for Australia to be competitive with northern hemisphere education destinations commencing classes later in the year.

“Continued travel restrictions on international student travel beyond the early 2021 intake will result in further job losses and longer-term unemployment for thousands of Australians.

“IHEA proposes that nationally agreed protocols underpin a ‘COVIDSafe Corridor’ to facilitate the safe entry of international students to Australia. These protocols must be predicated on AHPPC advice and the resumption of domestic campus operations.

“Pilot programs for targeted student cohorts should be implemented in 2020 to inform planning for the full resumption of Australia’s international education intake next year.

“IHEA’s high quality independent higher education members are perfectly placed to facilitate a limited trial intake of international students in a pilot program, where late-year admission dates and small class sizes enable them to provide a flexible, high quality learning experience while monitoring the health of the students under their ongoing care.

“IHEA’s proposed pilot programs will enable the COVIDSafe Corridor for international student travel to be tested and evaluated to ensure the safety of all Australians and our visitors in advance of the resumption of broader student intakes in early 2021.”

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**An Appropriate and Measured Return to International Student Arrivals via a COVIDSafe Corridor
National Protocols and Guiding Principles for IHEA Members**

The National Cabinet's *Roadmap to a COVIDSafe Australia* includes in Step 3 consideration of the conditions under which international student travel may resume.

As Australia's third largest export industry, international education contributes \$38 billion to the national economy and employs 250,000 Australians. The safe resumption of international student travel is in the national interest.

IHEA members understand that a resumption of international student arrivals needs to be predicated on advice from health experts that it is safe to do so and that a pre-condition for restarting onshore international education is the safe and effective re-opening of campuses for domestic students and international students already in Australia.

IHEA members recognise that national economic considerations will also inform conditions for the restart of Australia's international education industry.

National Protocols for a COVIDSafe Corridor

IHEA proposes the establishment of agreed national protocols – in consultation with Commonwealth, state and territory governments, and the higher education sector – to facilitate a 'COVIDSafe Corridor' in advance of the future arrival of cohorts of international students.

Guiding Principles for IHEA Members

IHEA members endorse the following principles for the resumption of international student travel through a COVIDSafe Corridor and recommend their inclusion in national protocols.

Health and Safety

The health and safety of all Australians and our visitors is paramount.

- IHEA members will comply with AHPPC advice in all their operations

International Student Visas

The issuing of visas provides students with certainty of entry and clarity of entry conditions.

- IHEA recommends that processing of student visas recommence
- IHEA recommends that consideration be given to requiring the use of the COVID-Safe App
- IHEA recommends that students be advised that if they leave Australia during the course of their visa they will be subject to a subsequent period of quarantine

Quarantining

Onshore quarantining for the period recommended by the AHPPC is essential for all international student arrivals.

- IHEA members will arrange and manage quarantining for student visa holders enrolled at their institutions
- IHEA members propose the establishment of student quarantining facilities at shared expense with the provider contributing the costs of accommodation and meals and the government contributing the costs of health and security services
- IHEA members seek equal access for the independent sector to any government funded programs to offset quarantining costs
- IHEA proposes that COVID testing of students in quarantine and the management of any positive cases be provided by State Public Health Units

Student Health and Wellbeing

The quarantine period provides opportunity to support the transition of students during a difficult period.

- IHEA members will commence student support and orientation programs during the quarantine period including access to health advice, cultural awareness services and English language support

International Travel

The ability for students to access flights creates significant challenges and requires the leadership of government to establish international agreements and logistical arrangements.

- IHEA proposes the Australian government develop a travel program in conjunction with airlines and supported by international agreements to enable students to access flights
- IHEA proposes that all higher education providers with the capacity to implement agreed national protocols have access to arranged travel places
- IHEA proposes that the costs of student flights to Australia be met by the sector/students
- IHEA members will provide domestic travel arrangements for students arriving in Australia including meeting students at airports and transferring them to quarantine facilities

A COVIDSafe Campus

The ongoing health and safety of all students, staff and the wider community is paramount and requires safety-first operational procedures.

- IHEA members will implement comprehensive sanitisation regimes across all campus facilities
- IHEA members will implement safe practice timetabling, social distancing, transport and campus event arrangements

ESOS Requirements and Tuition Protections

IHEA members will at all times comply with the requirements of the ESOS Act.

A Graduated Resumption of International Student Travel – COVIDSafe Corridor Pilot Programs

IHEA recognises that recommencing international education travel will require pilot programs to measure the effectiveness of the COVIDSafe Corridor and National Protocols to manage health resources, economic impacts and community expectations. Independent providers with their flexible delivery models, late-year admission dates, smaller classes and leading QILT ratings for student support are ideally suited to pilot programs.

In the event of pilot programs of a COVIDSafe Corridor being developed, IHEA proposes that:

- Independent higher education providers, with the demonstrated capability and capacity to manage such pilots, be eligible to participate.
- Provider participants in pilot programs be required to contribute to real-time monitoring and information sharing of the roll-out of the pilot as well as formal evaluation processes.
- Eligible student cohorts might include those who have already commenced their study either previously in Australia or online, small cohorts of new students and those who demonstrate high levels of financial capacity.

IHEA recommends that where AHPPC advice permits, pilot programs be considered for 2020 to best prepare for the expansion of international student travel in early 2021.

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