

IHEA Welcomes Support for COVIDSafe Corridor to Pilot International Student Travel

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Independent Higher Education Australia (IHEA) welcomes the Prime Minister's announcement today that the Australian Government is working with the States and Territories to establish pilot programs for international student travel to recommence this year.

IHEA recently presented a COVIDSafe Corridor plan to Leaders in the National Cabinet which proposed conditions for the establishment of small-scale pilot programs of international student travel to be implemented this year.

IHEA's COVIDSafe Corridor plan includes national quarantine and public health protocols for safe international travel, with pilot programs in 2020 informing the ongoing safety requirements for a wider resumption international student travel in 2021.

International students know that Australian independent higher education providers and public universities provide a world class education and career opportunities. IHEA members are high quality independent higher education providers and are perfectly placed to participate in pilot programs. The late-year admission dates and small class sizes offered by many independent providers will enable them to provide a flexible, high quality learning experience to students this year, closely monitor the health of students under their care, and demonstrate the effectiveness of quarantine and public health protocols through successful pilot programs.

Data released today by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment indicates that tens of thousands of international students have their study plans on hold and have deferred their studies as a result of the COVID crises. These students have made a commitment to studying in Australia and are waiting for the availability of safe travel arrangements to commence their studies.

Today's data shows a massive increase in international student deferments through the COVID crisis with 20,682 deferments in March and 22,277 in April this year, a year-on-year increase on 2019 figures by 450% (March) and 610% (April) respectively. These students are awaiting the resumption of face-to-face teaching in Australia and IHEA's COVIDSafe Corridor plan proposes safety conditions which will enable these students to commence their studies in Australia in 2021.

International education is Australia's third-largest export, with export income increasing by 14% from 2018 to 2019 to a value of \$40.3 billion according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The establishment of pilot programs will allow this critical export sector to be back in operation as soon as possible and protect the 250,000 full time Australian jobs created by the industry.

All Australians benefit from the contribution of international students and their families to our national economy. The international education industry needs to be operational in time for the student commencement period in early 2021 to ensure Australia remains competitive with northern hemisphere education intakes later in the year.

Pilots of international student travel in 2020 are essential to Australia realising the economic benefits of this industry in 2021.

All comment attributable to Simon Finn, CEO, IHEA

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