

Media Release —

COVID-19 Sees Student Numbers Drop At One In Four Independent Providers

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For Immediate Release

New data from independent providers in the higher education, vocational education, training and skills sectors shows that one in four providers are seeing students cancel or postpone their studies due to the Novel coronavirus (COVID-19). According to the sector's peak body, the Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia (ITECA), a number of independent providers have advised that the COVID-19 outbreak now threatens their viability.

"Australia's independent tertiary education providers enjoy a reputation internationally for providing high quality education and training. This reputation endures, however, an increasing number of providers are saying international students are either postponing or cancelling their studies in Australia," said Mr Troy Williams, ITECA Chief Executive.

A survey of ITECA members shows that 10% of providers supporting international students have experienced students cancelling their enrolment, and 24% of providers have students that have postponed their enrolment. As travel restrictions on students from China continue, the impact on international providers is expected to grow.

"The sector is facing some real challenges right now as providers experience a significant decrease in student numbers. Should the travel restrictions on Chinese students endure, the impact on the mid-year intake will be catastrophic for many providers," Mr Williams said.

ITECA notes the willingness of the tertiary sector's regulators, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) to support providers, including those gearing up to support students via online learning. The challenge, according to ITECA, is that many courses simply don't transition well to online delivery.

"Online delivery is great for some disciplines, but for many courses that have a practical hands-on component, online training isn't an option. From aviation, construction, commercial cookery to hospitality it's simply not possible to provide training and assessment online," Mr Williams said.

Data collected from ITECA members indicates that around 12% of independent providers have assessed the impact of COVID-19 as being of sufficient magnitude to impact their financial viability.

"Independent tertiary education providers have a track-record of supporting not only domestic students, but also those from overseas. It's imperative that as the Australian Government considers a package of measures to support Australia's \$39billion international education sector, that the role of independent tertiary education providers is acknowledged and reinforced," Mr Williams said.

There are approximately 140 independent higher education providers and some 3,500 independent vocational education and training providers. The *ITECA State Of The Sector Report* notes that international students with independent tertiary education providers contribute more than \$3.5 billion to the Australian economy.

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