

Media Release —

Independent Tertiary Education Sector Seeks JobKeeper Extension

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For Immediate Release

To ensure that the independent tertiary education sector has the capacity to support the economic recovery and salvage lost export opportunities, the Australian Government should commit to a limited extension of the JobKeeper scheme. That's the call from the Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia (ITECA), the peak body representing independent providers in the higher education, vocational education, training and skills sectors.

The extension of the JobKeeper scheme is particularly relevant to the **English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS)** sector. In any given year there are ≈180,000 students that undertake an English language program which may last from a few weeks to a year.

“As students with ELICOS providers complete the courses, few replace them. Without a reopening of international borders by end-2020, the sustainability of the ELICOS sector is problematic and it's in that context that the extension of JobKeeper to these providers has merit,” said Troy Williams, ITECA Chief Executive.

Independent **international education** providers that include higher education sector and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) are currently doing it tough as few new students are able to travel to Australia to replace those completing their courses.

“Independent providers with a focus on supporting international students are busy resizing their operations and preparing to take-on new students when borders reopen. A small number are reliant upon JobKeeper to help them through this transition phase, so its extension would be welcomed,” Mr Williams said.

Advice from ITECA's members in the **higher education sector** is that although enrolments have been relatively robust for most providers, the delivery has been hampered by social distancing measures to contain the Covid-19 virus. Here again, an extension of JobKeeper will support a vital contributor to workforce development.

“With the reopening of college campuses, the challenge is that delivery to previous student numbers in lectures is no longer possible, which presents some commercial challenges through to end-2020,” Mr Williams said.

With the Prime Minister signalling an expectation that the **vocational education and training** sector will play a lead role in the economic recovery, it's important that the capacity of the sector be retained – after all, independent RTOs support around 80% of the 1.5 million students in the sector.

“The JobKeeper initiative has played a critical role in ensuring the viability of independent RTOs, and also the 200,539 people employed by them. A sector-wide survey shows that around 60% of the nation's ≈3,600 active independent RTOs have accessed the JobKeeper scheme. It is clearly critical to preserving the capacity of the independent vocational education and training sector,” Mr Williams said.

ITECA's advocacy on this matter with parliamentary and departmental stakeholders is ongoing.

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Media Contact:

Michellé Mabile – ITECA Communications Director
e: media@iteca.edu.au m: 0436 522 189
[ITECA Ref: N4.10.2A]