



3 June 2020

Contact
Telephone

Clr Steve Christou
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The Hon Dan Tehan MP
Minister for Education
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister

UNIVERSITIES RECOVERING FROM COVID-19

I write in relation to the enrolment of overseas students in our public universities, particularly during COVID-19 and its devastating impact on university revenue.

As one of the largest Councils in Western Sydney, our Council was amalgamated by the NSW Government in 2016. We service approximately 240,000 residents and within our community, around 13,200 of our residents attend university.

Compared to other local government areas, we are ranked 14th when it comes to residents attending university and we share the average for Greater Sydney (around six per cent).

I note with interest, a report^[1] released this month by the Australian Population Research Institution, which talks about the growing reliance on enrolment of international students.

The report highlights that the fee revenue from Australian university international students has more than doubled from 2012 to 2018, increasing from \$4.1 billion in 2012 to \$8.9 billion in 2018.

Universities are struggling right now as a result of COVID-19. By their own admission, they stand to lose around \$3-4.6 billion in revenue from international students in 2020 and more in 2021.^[2]

This overreliance on international students and the fees they pay has not only hit universities hard financially, but the Government has been expected to step in and provide additional financial relief for international students.

^[1] <https://tapri.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Oseas-students-Covid-crisis-final.pdf>

^[2] <https://www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2020/05/25/how-universities-came-to-rely-on-international-students.html>

I acknowledge that universities have been given a great deal of autonomy when it comes to determining how many overseas students they enrol and the fees charged.

However, I would argue this operating model, which relies heavily on international students, has been seriously compromised by the circumstances created by COVID-19.

As an elected representative, I believe Cumberland residents and indeed all Australians, who wish to pursue higher education, should be afforded every opportunity to do this. I think public universities and the Federal Government can and should do more to ensure Australians are given priority places and reduce the reliance on international students and the fees they pay.

Can you please advise what work is underway to support the higher education sector as they attempt to recover from COVID-19? I also ask if the Federal Government will be taking any action to address an overreliance on international students.

Thank you for your consideration. Should you have any enquiries or require further information, please feel free to contact me on my mobile 0419 651 187 or via email steve.christou@cumberland.nsw.gov.au.

Yours faithfully



Clr Steve Christou
MAYOR