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Call to Bring International Education Back from the Brink

Australian university business schools, who graduate more than half of the country's international university students, are calling on the Federal Government to act urgently to bring our international education sector back from the brink.

The President of the Australian Business Deans Council, Professor David Grant, says a swift response is needed to stem the haemorrhaging of the 40 billion dollars that the higher education sector contributed to the Australian economy last year.

'Currently, there are half a million international students still in Australia and tens of thousands studying online from overseas in response to the current travel restrictions.

'Our first priority must be to show unequivocally how much we value the personal, cultural, social and economic contributions international students make to Australia.

'Otherwise, by year's end, we stand to lose tens of thousands of students who will rightly feel let down by a country that has been all too ready to take their money but has shown no willingness to help them in their time of need,' Professor Grant says.

'Australia's hard-won international reputation for high-quality education and research is at risk.

'Our concerns go to the heart of how we want to position Australia globally; our trustworthiness and leadership in the Asia-Pacific region; our strengths as a vibrant, diverse society; and our ability to care for those we have previously welcomed into our home,' he says.

'Many universities, state and local governments, businesses and community organisations are trying to assist students who have lost their jobs but have been excluded from the types of hardship assistance being offered to international students in other countries, like Canada and New Zealand.

'Those efforts show how the Federal Government's baffling and callous 'if-you-can't-afford-to-be-here-go-home' rhetoric is out of step with the views of many in the community,' Professor Grant says.

The Government and universities need to come together to design and implement a package that:

- Provides international students with at least some of the financial and other forms of support currently available to those impacted by COVID-19. This is a humanitarian, ethical and strategic issue.
- Puts in place measures that enable new and current international students to enter Australia, using systematic testing and quarantining as we are doing for Australian arrivals from overseas.
- Counts those studying online with Australian universities from overseas as if they are still present in our country so their time away does not impact their post-study work rights once they can physically be in Australia.
- Mount a concerted and co-ordinated recruitment and marketing campaign for the sector that highlights the advantages of studying in Australia.

Further information: Leslie Falkiner-Rose, ABDC Communications. comms@abdc.edu.au +61 418 995240