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AUSTRALIA ANNOUNCES IMPORTANT VISA CHANGES TO SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The Australian Government is making a number of changes to student visa arrangements to ensure Australia remains a priority destination for international students as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic.

International students are extremely important to Australia and our economy (our fourth largest export sector), contributing \$40 billion annually and supporting 250,000 jobs. Many also go on to become great Australian citizens.

These five visa changes will ensure international students are adversely affected due to COVID-19 and that Australia remains competitive with other countries.

The changes include:

- ✓ **The Government will recommence granting student visas in all locations lodged outside Australia.** This means when borders re-open, students will already have visas and be able to make arrangements to travel.
- ✓ International students will be able to lodge a further student **visa application free of charge**, if they are unable to complete their studies within their original visa validity due to COVID-19.
- ✓ Current student visa holders studying online outside Australia due to COVID-19 will be able to use that study to count towards the Australian study requirement for a post-study work visa (485 visa).
- ✓ Graduates who held a student visa will be eligible to apply for a post-study work visa outside Australia if they are unable to return due to COVID-19.
- ✓ Additional time will be given for applicants to provide English language results where COVID-19 has disrupted access to these services.

The Government has previously relaxed work restrictions for international students working in the health, aged and disability care sectors during the COVID-19 pandemic. It has also been flexible in cases where the COVID-19 pandemic has prevented international students meeting their visa conditions, such as not being able attend classes in person.

Please note these changes have been announced, but the legislation / criteria has not been published yet. We will publish updates on our website as soon as they are available.

COVID-19 and impact on student visas

The outbreak of COVID-19 has caused drastic changes to the policies and laws regulating student visas in Australia. Many international students are unable to return to Australia to continue their studies due to border closure.

In order to ensure the continuation of the courses, universities are conducting many of their courses online. While there were plans put in place by universities and state government to bring back international students for the start of the second semester, these plans are set to a halt by the second outbreak of COVID-19 in Victoria.

Student Visa Holders in Australia

Data shows that across all education sector in Australia, there is a decline of 4.7% of international students from March 2020 to June 2020. This may be because foreign students were unable to fly back into Australia before the border closure in March. The table below details the result:

Flexibility of the rules

In light of COVID-19, the government is taking a more flexible approach to the rules and laws regulating student visas. Students are unlikely to break these visa conditions if they are affected by COVID-19 restrictions:

- Have an approved course deferred
- Studying online
- Work for more than 40 hours per fortnight in specific critical services.

Deferral

Students who are unable to continue their studies in Australia may defer their study. Deferral will not affect their visa status.

Studying Online

A flexible approach has been taken for students who are studying online. Students who are studying online due to COVID-19 is unlikely to breach their visa condition.

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