

18 August 2020

Select Committee on COVID-19
Committee Secretary
Department of the Senate
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Canberra ACT 2600
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Go8 Response to Select Committee on COVID-19's Request for Further Information

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Select Committee's inquiry into the Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As you are aware, the Group of Eight (Go8) made a written submission on the 29 May 2020, and Professor Margaret Gardner AC, Vice Chancellor of Monash University and the Acting Chair of the Go8, gave evidence to the Committee on the 28 July 2020.

Following this hearing, the Go8 was requested to provide the following information:

1. Domestic undergraduate applications received by July 30;
2. Domestic undergraduate applications received by this time in 2019;
3. Projected domestic undergraduate enrolments in 2021; and
4. Projected international student enrolments for 2021.

The Go8 has consulted with our member universities to try and compile the best estimates that we can for these data. However, this has been difficult given the large number of uncertainties, including:

- Variations in the dates at which different state and territory based Tertiary Admissions Centres (TACs) open for undergraduate applications each year (eg., the South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre, SATAC, does not open for applications until August so will have no data for questions 1 and 2);
- Variations in load planning projection cycles conducted annually by each member university; and
- Significant uncertainties in terms of when Australia will re-open its borders to international students.

All of the above mean that any projections for 2021 must be viewed as indicative only, and subject to change.

Domestic undergraduate applications received by July 30, 2020

Please note that the estimates for applications received by July 30 in both years (2019 and 2020) should be viewed with a **high degree of caution**, given:

- As noted above, SATAC does not open for applications until August each year and so no applications were recorded by the 30 July deadline;
- The University of Western Australia has advised that applications received in 2019 are not comparable to 2020, given that a new and different early admissions process has been introduced this year;

- Data provided by one member was for significantly different timeframes, involving applications from the 1 – 30 July in 2019 compared to the 1 April – 30 July in 2020.

Data provided by our member universities estimate there were around 16,904 applications across the Go8 by the 30 July 2020.¹

Domestic undergraduate applications received by this time in 2019;

Noting the caveats outlined above, we estimate there may have been around 7,564 applications by 30 July, 2019.²

Projected domestic undergraduate enrolments in 2021

Please note that projections are provided in Equivalent Full Time Student Load (EFTSL), not enrolments, and should be viewed as indicative only at this stage.

Preliminary projections suggest that there could be around 129,820 EFTSL in domestic undergraduate load across the Go8 universities in 2021.³

Projected international student enrolments for 2021

There are many factors that could potentially impact demand from international students for Australian higher education services next year.

Considerable uncertainty exists over when international borders could open. A pilot developed by the Australian National University, University of Canberra and the ACT Government to allow small numbers of international students to return to Australia under strict protocols and quarantine conditions, due to commence in July, was postponed due to the outbreaks in Victoria and NSW. Prime Minister Scott Morrison has recently suggested that borders may not be able to open before Christmas.⁴ As long as cases of COVID-19 continue to recur in both Australia and overseas nations, including the previously virus-free New Zealand,⁵ uncertainties over international travel are likely to remain.

In the meantime, many universities, including Go8 members, have switched to online delivery to support international students located overseas. To date this appears to have been reasonably successful, however there remains a question over how long students who have sought an international, face to face experience will be prepared to continue online when competitor nations such as the UK, now allow students to enter the country.⁶

Factors such as these are hindering universities' capacity to provide accurate projections of international student numbers for next year, and any projections supplied at this time should be viewed within this context.

¹ Estimated based on input from Go8 member universities.

² Estimated based on input from Go8 member universities.

³ Estimate is calculated pro-rata, based on responses from six member universities.

⁴ <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/latest-news/coronavirus-australia-border-restrictions-could-stay-in-place-until-christmas/news-story/664e8caefba323e3903c6e06a8a0c1a4>

⁵ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-08-13/new-zealand-records-13-more-community-coronavirus-cases/12553526>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-travel-corridors>



Given the above caveats, preliminary projections suggest that there could be around 85,361 EFTSL in total international student load in 2021.⁷

It may be possible to update these figures later in the year; however please note that considerable uncertainties are likely to remain for some time.

Yours sincerely

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⁷ Estimate is calculated pro-rata, based on responses from six member universities