



Assistant Secretary
David Atkins (Dr.)

His Excellency Mr D.D.M. Senarath B. DISSANAYAKE
Acting High Commissioner
High Commission of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
61 Hampton Circuit
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Your Excellency

Re: TPN No.29/D/2020 Sri Lankan students in Australia

Thank you for your correspondence to the Australian Government of 30 March 2020, which has been received by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. I am very happy to provide you with information on Australia's response to COVID-19 and assistance provided to international students directly and indirectly by this Government and Australian education providers.

Firstly, let me take this opportunity to acknowledge the concerns raised by your Embassy for the welfare of Sri Lankan international students in Australia amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic is a challenging situation for international students and may cause for concern or distress for them and their families.

Australia's Minister for Education the Hon Dan Tehan MP has indicated on Twitter on Saturday 4 April a strong message of solidarity, saying that international students are our friends, our classmates, our colleagues and members of our community.

The Australian Government is making a number of changes to temporary visa holder arrangements during the coronavirus crisis in order to protect the health and livelihoods of the community, support critical industries, and assist with the rapid recovery when the pandemic abates.

The Australian Government knows that COVID-19 is affecting international students in Australia. Accordingly, these changes include increased flexibility of a number of regulations to make it easier for international students to continue their studies in Australia should they wish to do so.

The Government will be flexible in cases where Coronavirus has prevented international students meeting their visa conditions (such as not being able attend classes).

Students are encouraged to rely on family support, part-time work where available and their own savings to sustain themselves in Australia. As part of their visa application, international students have had to demonstrate that they can support themselves completely in their first year.

There has always been an understanding that temporary visa holders are able to support themselves while in Australia. The recently announced changes will help facilitate this for those who may be stood down or lose work hours as a result of the coronavirus.

Students who have been here longer than 12 months who find themselves in financial hardship will be able to access their Australian superannuation.

International students are able to work up to 40 hours per fortnight. International students working in aged care and as nurses have had these hours extended to support these critical sectors. International students working in the major supermarkets have also had these hours extended to help get stock on shelves during the high demand. From 1 May, their hours will return to the maximum 40 hours a fortnight. Further information is available on the Department of Home Affairs website at <https://covid19.homeaffairs.gov.au/> or by calling their Global Service Centre on 131 881.

The Government continues to work with universities and the international education sector to minimise the impact of COVID-19, and that includes finding practical ways to support international students. Numerous institutions have put in place measures to assist international students who are facing hardship with crisis payments, fee assistance, other grants or changes to tuition requirements and critical dates. The majority of providers have moved to an online or remote learning model. These are just a few examples. International students are also able to access mental health support through their education provider.


We recommend international students contact their education provider for assistance and information regarding their studies. In addition they may refer to the Department of Education, Skills and Employment's website www.dese.gov.au for regularly updated factsheets or access the department's dedicated email and hotline: international.students@dese.gov.au and 1300 981 621.

Students may also wish to visit Study Australia's website www.studyinaustralia.gov.au for more information on support services available to them.

Updates on measures specifically supporting international student visa holders, will be available on the Department of Home Affairs website: www.homeaffairs.gov.au/news-media/current-alerts/novel-coronavirus.

I want to assure you of the Australian Government's commitment to international students now and following the COVID-19 pandemic. I welcome continued communication with Your Excellency and government, as the Australian Government's response will continue to evolve to meet the needs of the community during this pandemic and its aftermath. I would also like to wish you and your colleagues at the High Commission of Sri Lanka all the very best during this difficult time.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'D' followed by a series of loops and a final flourish.

David Atkins (Dr.)

9 April 2020