

**Senate Select Committee on COVID-19**

**QUESTION ON NOTICE**

**Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic - 19 May 2020**

**Outcome: Higher Education, Research and International**

**Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000001**

Senator Katy Gallagher on 19 May 2020, Proof Hansard page 2

***Governance Structure***

**Question**

Dr Bruniges: In terms of the governance structure?

CHAIR: Yes, that would be excellent. We have asked other departments for that. I don't think we've received it yet, but, if you're able to, that would be very useful.

Dr Bruniges: I am happy to take that on notice.

**Answer**

See DESE COVID-19 Governance Structure attached.



# DESE COVID-19 Governance Structure

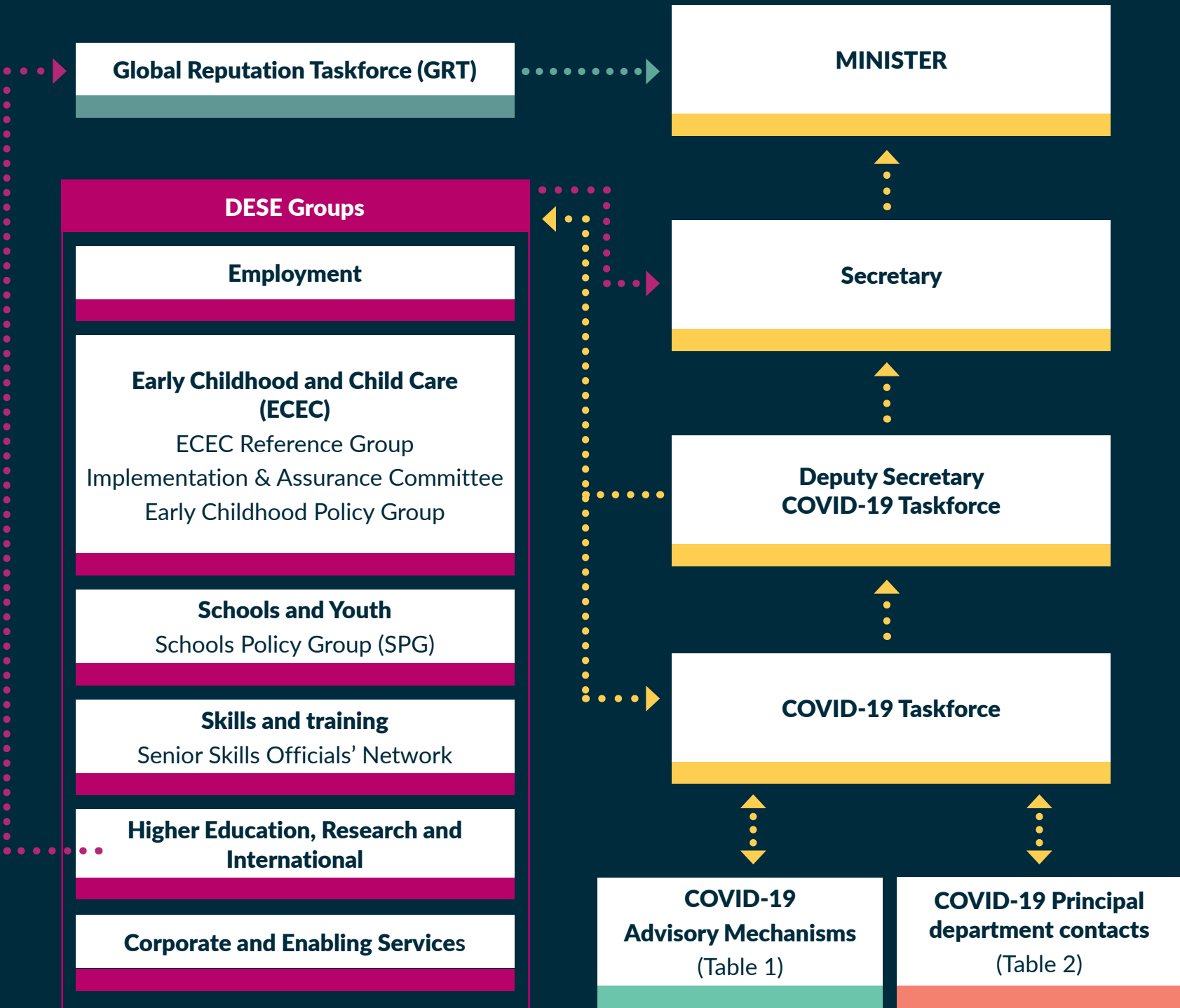


Table 1: COVID-19 Advisory Mechanisms	
<b>National Coordination Mechanism</b> (States and Territories, Emergency Management Australia, Home Affairs)	Provides advice to first ministers on work by all governments in non-health sector responses to COVID-19. Managed by Emergency Management Australia (Home Affairs).
<b>Education and Employment Sector Pandemic Preparedness Committee</b> (DESE, Treasury, PM&C, DISER, Health, NIAA, states and territories, education sector stakeholders, Jobs Australia, CYDA)	Weekly forum convened by DESE to share information and facilitate connections related to pandemic preparedness and response.
<b>Student Return Working Group (SRWG)</b> (DESE, Health, ABF, Home Affairs, state and territory education departments)	DESE established, meets fortnightly. Coordinates implementation of China Year 11 and 12 travel ban exemption.
<b>Global Reputation Taskforce (GRT)</b> (Chair, Phil Honeywood, DESE, Home Affairs, Austrade, Health, states and territories, international education sector stakeholders)	Advisory group on recovery of the international education sector from bushfire and COVID-19 crises.

National COVID-19 Coordination Committee
(PM&C Secretariat, Commissioners include Mr Neville Power – chair, Mr Greg Combet AM, Ms Jane Halton AO, Mr Paul Little AO, Ms Catherine Tanna and Mr David Thodey AO (Deputy Chair), and Secretaries of PM&C and Home Affairs)
Provides advice from non-government sector directly to Prime Minister and National Cabinet Secretariat within PM&C.

Table 2: COVID-19 Principal department contacts	
<b>Prime Minister and Cabinet</b>	Whole of Government coordination on activities considered and undertaken in response to COVID-19.
<b>Treasury</b>	Advice on eligibility of education provider categories for economic stimulus measures. Responsibility for early recovery and preparedness.
<b>Health</b>	Responsible for the government's health response to COVID-19, including advice to essential services (education). Liaises with AHPPC on DESE's behalf.
<b>Industry, Science, Energy and Resources</b>	Advice on supply chain matters including management of PPE supply chains and matching service for education sector to access essential cleaning and hygiene products.

**Senate Select Committee on COVID-19**

**QUESTION ON NOTICE**

**Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic - 19 May 2020**

**Outcome: Higher Education, Research and International**

**Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000008**

Senator James Paterson on 19 May 2020, Proof Hansard page 9

***Total value of Commonwealth support for universities***

**Question**

Senator PATERSON: Perhaps on notice you can provide the total value of Commonwealth support for universities?

Mr Heferen: I can sit here and add the numbers up or—

Senator PATERSON: On notice is fine.

Mr Heferen: We'll provide that to you.

**Answer**

Funding to universities is at a record high, with Commonwealth funding estimated to be around \$18 billion in 2020.

**Senate Select Committee on COVID-19**

**QUESTION ON NOTICE**

**Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic - 19 May 2020**

**Outcome: Higher Education, Research and International**

**Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000009**

Senator Murray Watt on 19 May 2020, Proof Hansard page 14

***University compensation for lost revenue from international students***

**Question**

Mr Heferen: Sorry, just to be clear, as far as I'm aware, universities have not come to the government and asked for compensation for lost revenue from international students.

Senator WATT: Could you take it on notice to advise us whether any universities have sought that?

Mr Heferen: Yes, I can take that on notice.

**Answer**

No universities have sought compensation.

**Senate Select Committee on COVID-19**

**QUESTION ON NOTICE**

**Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic - 19 May 2020**

**Outcome: Higher Education, Research and International**

**Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000010**

Senator Murray Watt on 19 May 2020, Proof Hansard page 15

***Risk of Insolvency - Universities***

**Question**

Senator WATT: I'm just about out of time, Mr Heferen. I might come back to JobKeeper a little bit later, depending on time. Just to wrap up here: have any universities informed the department in discussions that they are facing a risk of insolvency?

Mr Heferen: Insolvency, no. We've had discussions with a number of universities that say they are having challenges, definitely. The university you mentioned before—I had discussions with some of their officers—had definite challenges. So there is no shying away from the likely reduction in international students in semester 2 and possibly beyond having some quite significant challenges for universities to manage. But, on the insolvency point, I'm not aware of any university that has come to us and said that. Having said that, I'm not the only person who might be in receipt of that conversation. So, if it's okay, I'll take that on notice to confirm.

Senator WATT: If you could, that would be great. You've obviously thought a bit about insolvency. Beyond simply having challenges, is there any severity of financial consequences that universities have informed you of? It may not be that they've raised insolvency; perhaps they've put it in different terms—that they're at risk of collapsing or of campuses closing. What severity are we talking about that universities have informed you of?

**Answer**

The department has had conversations with universities and no university has raised concerns about potential insolvency.

## Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

### QUESTION ON NOTICE

Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic - 19 May 2020

**Outcome: Higher Education, Research and International**

**Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000012**

Senator Rex Patrick on 19 May 2020, Proof Hansard page 18-19

#### ***University semester two predictions***

##### **Question**

Senator PATRICK: You mentioned at the start, I think, 41 universities—30 that were below the threshold and 11 that were above. That's not a lot of universities to pick up the phone to and have a conversation to build a picture for government.

Mr Heferen: Yes.

Mr Heferen: We have information from each university. Either they provide it to us directly or we pick it up through other channels.

Senator PATRICK: Sure.

Mr Heferen: We have that, and I can take it on notice to provide it to the committee. I don't have it in front of me.

Senator PATRICK: Perfect.

##### **Answer**

The primary source of information on university financial affairs is the Department of Education, Skills and Employment's higher education Finance Publication. This can be accessed, including with visual analytic tools, at: <https://www.education.gov.au/finance-publication>.

University finances are generally similarly structured from year to year and therefore the 2018 information provides a reasonable basis for understanding likely revenue expectations and expenses for 2020 prior to the effects of COVID-19 on the sector.

The department notes that there have been numerous reports, directly from universities and indirectly from other sources, on their estimated revenue reductions and staff matters. No university has shared with the department its methodology for estimating reductions in revenue or staff.

**Senate Select Committee on COVID-19**

**QUESTION ON NOTICE**

**Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic - 19 May 2020**

**Outcome: Higher Education, Research and International**

**Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000013**

Senator Perin Davey on 19 May 2020, Proof Hansard page 19

***Regional University loadings***

**Question**

Senator DAVEY: While regional universities specifically may not have taken as much of a hit due to a reduction in international students, the restrictions on travel have certainly had an impact on how they operate. The additional costs of servicing their students have also had an impact. Has any consideration been given to looking at the regional loading for those universities and what may be done to assist them?

Mr Heferen: That would be a matter for the minister. I will need to take that on notice.

**Answer**

On 12 April 2020, the Hon Dan Tehan MP, the Minister for Education and Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, announced the Higher Education Relief Package. In this package, the Government guaranteed \$18 billion in funding for the higher education sector in 2020, including \$7.2 billion in Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS) payments, regardless of any drops in domestic enrolments in 2020. This includes \$75.1 million in regional loading in 2020. This is an increase of \$1.3 million from 2019.

Consideration of policy changes, including in relation to the regional loading, is a matter for Government.

**Senate Select Committee on COVID-19**

**QUESTION ON NOTICE**

**Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic - 19 May 2020**

**Outcome: Schools**

**Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000014**

Senator Kristina Keneally on 19 May 2020, Proof Hansard page 22

***Compliance process for non-government schools getting their funding early***

**Question**

Senator KENEALLY: Could you provide on notice what that compliance process is and the percentage of schools you intend to actually check?

Ms Gordon: Yes.

**Answer**

Assurance for the early payment of the July recurrent funding entitlement will occur as a parallel check in the annual Census post enumeration (Census PE) process in 2021, with selected schools being required to provide evidence they met the eligibility criteria.

As outlined in the department's School Funding Assurance Framework, approximately 200 non-government schools, or seven per cent, are included as part of the Census post enumeration process.



**Senate Select Committee on COVID-19**

**QUESTION ON NOTICE**

**Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic- 19 May 2020**

**Outcome: Schools**

**Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000015**

Senator Kristina Keneally on 19 May 2020, Proof Hansard page 24

***Social distancing in schools***

**Question**

Senator KENEALLY: Did the department of education provide any advice to government in relation to the 1.5-metre social distancing at schools?

Ms Gordon: The department has been in regular contact with our Health official colleagues in terms of advice provided to the Education Council and indeed to the national cabinet, but I'd need to take on notice the specifics.

**Answer**

No. The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) has been responsible for advising government on the risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools.

**Senate Select Committee on COVID-19**

**QUESTION ON NOTICE**

**Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic - 19 May 2020**

**Outcome: Schools**

**Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000016**

Senator Kristina Keneally on 19 May 2020, Proof Hansard page 24

***Meeting with Education Minister, CMO and school heads***

**Question**

Senator KENEALLY: Stakeholders have informed the opposition that the decision was made following a meeting between the education minister, the CMO and the heads of some school systems, where system heads advised the minister and the CMO that physical distancing was too difficult to enforce and couldn't be resourced. Can you confirm that?

Ms Gordon: I wasn't involved in that meeting.

Senator KENEALLY: Is the department aware if the education minister had such a meeting?

Ms Gordon: I'd need to take that on notice.

**Answer**

The Minister and the Department of Education, Skills and Employment have met with a large number of stakeholders on matters related to COVID-19. The Department of Education, Skills and Employment has not participated in a meeting that meets this description.

## Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

### QUESTION ON NOTICE

#### Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic - 19 May 2020

**Outcome: Schools**

**Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000017**

Senator Kristina Keneally on 19 May 2020, Proof Hansard page 24

#### *Physical distancing not practical in schools*

##### **Question**

Senator KENEALLY: Did the education department warn the health department or the minister that it was not practical to practise physical distancing in schools?

Ms Gordon: There's been an ongoing conversation about the practicalities of what kinds of measures might be undertaken in schools, and the physical distancing component of that has been a regular part of those discussions.

Senator KENEALLY: That's not actually answering my question.

Dr Bruniges: I think it would be fair to say that I've had conversations with my colleagues, directors-general across the states and territories, where they did indeed raise concerns about physical distancing in schools and how to implement that.

Senator KENEALLY: I might put on notice if you could advise if any written advice was given to the minister or to the government more broadly from the department.

##### **Answer**

No. The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) has been responsible for advising government on the risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools.

**Senate Select Committee on COVID-19**

**QUESTION ON NOTICE**

**Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic - 19 May 2020**

**Outcome: Higher Education, Research and International**

**Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000018**

Senator Mehreen Faruqi on 19 May 2020, Proof Hansard page 26

***Hardship funds/options for international students***

**Question**

Senator FARUQI: That's not a hardship fund. That's still their own money. Can I just have a simple answer and then I'll let it go. Did the government look at a national hardship fund for international students?

Mr Heferen: I'll have to take that on notice.

**Answer**

This is a matter for Government.

## Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

### QUESTION ON NOTICE

#### Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic - 19 May 2020

#### **Outcome: Schools**

#### **Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000024**

Senator Perin Davey on 19 May 2020, Proof Hansard page 33

#### ***Boarding Schools***

#### **Question**

Senator DAVEY: .... With the offer to allow independent schools to bring forward a percentage of their annual recurrent funding, how does that apply to boarding schools? We heard from the Department of Health last week that boarding facilities are unique, so I just want to get a better understanding about how that applies to boarding schools and, indeed, whether boarding schools have taken up the offer and what implications there are for those boarding arrangements.

Ms Gordon: I don't have any data available on the number of boarding schools that have taken up the offer, so I'd need to take that particular question on notice.

#### **Answer**

76 boarding schools responded to the opportunity for early access to their July 2020 recurrent funding, met the criteria and requested their funding be brought forward.

**Senate Select Committee on COVID-19**

**QUESTION ON NOTICE**

**Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic - 19 May 2020**

**Outcome: Schools**

**Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000025**

Senator Kristina Keneally on 19 May 2020, Proof Hansard page 22-23

***Non-government school funding numbers***

**Question**

Senator KENEALLY: Am I correct that there are about 3,100 non-government schools in Australia?

Ms Gordon: I'd need to take the exact number on notice. The number I have here is 2,857 schools that could have been eligible for this bring-forward.

**Answer**

At 21 May 2020, 2851 non-government schools are approved to attract Commonwealth Recurrent funding under the *Australian Education Act 2013*. A further six new schools are currently undergoing the funding approval process.

## Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

### QUESTION ON NOTICE

#### Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic - 19 May 2020

**Outcome: Higher Education, Research and International**

**Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000028**

Senator Rex Patrick on 19 May 2020, Proof Hansard page 37

#### ***Effects on research and development***

##### **Question**

Senator PATRICK: I'm more interested not in the nitty-gritty but in whether universities are coming back and saying, 'We're having to pull back on some of those activities as a result of COVID-19,' and in understanding the magnitude of that pull-back. Maybe they've come back and said, 'It's a reorientation but we're all okay.' I'm just trying to get a sense—

Mr Heferen: I think it's more the latter. Again, there are probably others in the department—and indeed, the ARC—who may have closer contact. So could I maybe take that on notice? Unlike Dr Baxter, I don't think I'll be able to get a response in the next seven minutes, so maybe I could take it on notice and we'll endeavour to get that to you as quickly as we can

##### **Answer**

The Department of Education, Skills and Employment has been consulting with universities, peak university representative groups and student organisations. The Government's response to this feedback has been to provide funding certainty within the Research Block Grant program by extending the current funding transition arrangements by a further year. The Government also agreed to enable universities to extend the completion timeframes for higher degree by research students whose research has been adversely impacted by COVID-19. These changes were advised to universities on 1 May 2020 and are currently being progressed through amendments to the *Commonwealth Scholarships Guidelines (Research) 2017* and *Other Grants Guidelines (Research) 2017*.

The department is aware that some universities have decided to temporarily close access to their labs and other facilities. The department is also aware through the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS) program that a number of facilities located within universities have paused some of their research endeavour to focus effort on work to support the development of a vaccine, as well as the development of protective equipment.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2018 higher education expenditure on Research and Development (HERD) data, released on 20 May 2020, shows that total university expenditure on research and development is growing, increasing from \$10.9 billion in 2016 to \$12.2 billion in 2018 (an increase of 12 per cent). Expenditure by type of activity remained largely unchanged compared with 2016, with 48 per cent of expenditure on applied research (down 1 per cent), and 23 per cent on pure basic research (up 4 per cent). Expenditure on university research as a proportion of GDP remained stable at 0.62 per cent over the two year period.

**The Australian Research Council (ARC) has provided the following response.**

The ARC is aware through discussions with the higher education sector that there is concern about the impact of COVID-19 on research projects funded by the ARC. The ARC has issued advice to the higher education sector to allay concerns about the ARC's approach to those impacts on current funded projects. The most recent advice is at:

<https://www.arc.gov.au/news-publications/media/network-messages/update-arc-ceo-professor-sue-thomas-arc-grants-processes>.

The ARC has adopted a flexible approach advising universities to delay submitting project variations until the full impact of COVID-19 on research activity to be undertaken in 2020 is known. Consequently, the impact of COVID-19 on research funded by the ARC will not be known until early 2021, when universities start reporting on projects.



**Senate Select Committee on COVID-19**

**QUESTION ON NOTICE**

**Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic - 19 May 2020**

**Outcome: Higher Education, Research and International**

**Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000030**

Senator Murray Watt on 19 May 2020, Proof Hansard page 38

***Data request on how many Uni employees could have claimed JobKeeper***

**Question**

Senator WATT: What does 'quite a few' mean? Have you got numbers?

Mr Heferen: We could take it on notice. I'm a bit reluctant to say, because the idea of actually saying, 'We're not going to count half the revenue—

Senator WATT: If you haven't got the numbers to hand, I'm happy for you to take it on notice.

Mr Heferen: Yes, I'll take that on notice.

Senator WATT: Similarly, I'd be interested to know how many employees would've been eligible for JobKeeper if the government hadn't exempted universities from the 15 per cent revenue threshold available to other registered charities.

Mr Heferen: Yes, we'll take that on notice.

Senator WATT: You don't have that here?

Mr Heferen: No, I don't have that on hand, but we could take it on notice.

**Answer**

The Department of Education, Skills and Employment cannot make these estimates as it does not have access to current financial information on universities' cash flow in 2020 and does not collect information on a monthly or part year basis from which to extrapolate.

## Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

### QUESTION ON NOTICE

#### Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic - 19 May 2020

#### Outcome: Employment

#### Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000054

Senator Rachel Siewert on 19 May 2020, Proof Hansard page 26

#### *Numbers in each stream into employment*

#### Question

Senator SIEWERT: But not for those who are fortunate enough to find work. Maybe you can take on notice, because I know I've got limited time, the numbers in each stream. How are they being assessed? Are they going through the normal assessment process to allocate into the streams?

Mr Smyth: They're not. One of the key things that we needed to do was stop the JSCI being undertaken. It's normally undertaken by phone by Services Australia and then the participant is allocated to an employment services provider. To free up Services Australia staff to totally focus on connecting people to the income support system, once people are connected to income support system they flow onto our online employment services system and, whilst they're in the online employment services system, we ask them to voluntarily undertake the jobseeker classification instrument online. The vast majority of people are doing that. The streaming then occurs from that, the JSCI that's conducted online. We've got research that indicates that the performance and the outcomes of the JSCI online are equivalent to normal phone based JSCIs. That's how we're starting to stream people into employment service providers and Transition to Work and other programs.

#### Answer

As at 17 May 2020, there were 1,395,804 participants on the jobactive caseload, including the New Employment Services Trial regions and Online Employment Services.

<b>Stream</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Stream not determined	50,525	3.6%
Stream A Volunteer	11,556	0.8%
Stream A	900,872	64.5%
Stream B	326,413	23.4%
Stream C	106,438	7.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,395,804</b>	

**Senate Select Committee on COVID-19**

**QUESTION ON NOTICE**

**Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic - 19 May 2020**

**Outcome: Higher Education, Research and International**

**Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ20-000055**

Senator Rex Patrick on 19 May 2020, Proof Hansard page 19

***Chronology of events post CMO advice 20 January 2020***

**Question**

Senator PATRICK: ... Maybe you—or, in fact, even the secretary—could go back and provide a chronology of significant events that occurred within the department of education. When you first got notified, what you then did—I'd like just a sequence of events as to what happened.

Dr Bruniges: Certainly, Senator. We have been very thorough in keeping that chronology, right from 20 January—in fact, the formation of both the committee that Mr Heferen chairs and, indeed, our internal taskforce—so I'm happy to go away and provide the chronology.

Senator PATRICK: Can I direct you to the Department of Health's chronology, which was very good. That's what you've got to try to beat as a standard.

**Answer**

See chronology attached.

## Department of Education, Skills and Employment COVID-19 Timeline

The following timeline seeks to identify key COVID-19 related meetings, events, and announcements with respect to the DESE portfolio and, in particular, the DESE COVID-19 taskforce.

Key		
<i>External events/announcements</i>		
<i>Major events, formal meetings and milestones relating to DESE portfolio</i>		
<i>Government Announcements relating to DESE portfolio</i>		
<i>DESE Internal activities</i>		
January 2020	Event or announcement	Description
20 January	<i>National Incident Room activated</i>	The National Incident Room (NIR) activated to coordinate the health sector's emergency response to COVID-19 under the direction of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC).
21 January	<i>Minister Tehan convenes roundtable and announces the establishment of the Global Reputation Taskforce</i>	<b>Purpose:</b> to discuss the impact of the bushfires on the sector and to announce the Global Reputation Taskforce to address student concerns and the perception of Australian education resulting from bushfires. On 3 February 2020 the remit of GRT was extended to consider the impacts of the coronavirus on the sector. Stakeholders including university and TAFE representatives and public/private sector peak bodies.
23 January	<i>Enhanced border measures commence at international ports</i>	Enhanced border measures applied at Australia's international ports including enhanced ill traveller screening, pre-recorded announcements and electronic signage.
25 January	<i>First confirmed case of COVID-19 in Australia</i>	First case of COVID-19 in Australian confirmed by Victorian health authorities.
26 January	<i>International Division receives first COVID-19 related tasking</i>	Work on international education impacts of COVID-19 including the expansion of GRT remit.
27 January	<i>First health advice circulated to education providers</i>	Sector specific fact sheets published for institutions across all education sectors.
29 January	<i>Joint press conference/ media release - Minister Tehan, Minister Hunt and Chief Medical Officer</i>	Providing update on latest medical advice. Advised those who had been in Hubei Province to self-isolate.
February 2020		
1 February	<i>Travel restrictions on persons travelling from/transiting through mainland China come into effect</i>	The Government accepted and gave immediate effect to the advice of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee to impose travel restrictions with exemptions in certain circumstances, including on compassionate grounds and for critical business. As at 1 February 106,680 Chinese students were outside of Australia.

1 February	<i>Minister Tehan wrote to Universities Australia (UA) Chair</i>	Minister Tehan wrote to UA Chair advising of travel restrictions on entrants from mainland China.
1 February	<i>DESE published further fact sheets for students and providers on DESE website</i>	Fact sheets related to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advice for international students</li> <li>• FAQs aimed at international students</li> <li>• Student wellbeing information</li> <li>• Regulatory information for state authorities and schools</li> <li>• Regulatory advice for VET, ELICOS and Higher Education providers.</li> </ul>
1 February	<i>International Students Hotline and inbox initiated</i>	Secretary initiated work to establish a central contact point for international students.
3 February	<i>Phone lines opened (first weekday after announcement)</i>	Originally, phone lines were open 12 hours a day, 7-days a week. As call volumes decreased this has been reduced to standard office hours (Mon-Fri, 9am to 5pm AEST). As at 12 May, departmental officers had answered 667 calls to the hotline and responded to 890 emails.
3 February	<i>First Global Reputation Taskforce meeting held</i>	<b>Purpose:</b> Formed to help protect Australia's reputation as a welcoming destination for high-quality education following the bushfire crisis and response to the coronavirus.
3 February	<i>Minister Tehan met with Universities Australia Board</i>	<b>Purpose:</b> To explore options to minimise the impacts of the coronavirus outbreak on tertiary education in Australia.
4 February	<i>Ongoing – Deputy Secretary Rob Heferen initiates daily COVID-19 meetings with key staff</i>	<b>Purpose:</b> Daily catch-up on issues with respect to COVID-19.
4 February	<i>Meeting of Expert Members of the Council for International Education</i>	<b>Purpose:</b> Regular meeting of the Expert Members group which reports to the Council for International Education.
5 February	<i>Australian Government Crisis Committee meeting</i>	<b>Purpose:</b> Due to impacts on the international education sector, senior DESE officials attended AGCC meetings on 5 and 11 February.
5/6 February	<i>Drawdown of first DESE posted officers</i>	DESE's two officers attached to the Australian Embassy in Beijing were withdrawn back to Australia (5 and 6 February respectively) and undertook 14 days of self-isolation.
7 February	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Education and Care Reference Group (ECECRG)</i>	<b>Purpose:</b> Ongoing meeting that provides the key consultation and engagement mechanism for the department with representatives of the early childhood education and care sector. Matters relating to COVID-19 were discussed from early February 2020. During March onwards, members agreed to hold weekly meetings focused on sector issues arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and implementation of measures to assist the sector. Meetings held 7, 28 February; 6, 13, 20, 23, 24, 27 March; 2, 9, 17, 24 April; 1, 8, 22 May.

10 February	<i>DESE Meeting with University Vice-Chancellors, Deputy Chief Medical Officer and Australian Border Force</i>	<p><b>Purpose:</b> DESE Secretary and departmental staff met with a number of VCs to discuss COVID-19. The meeting included the DCMO Dr Paul Kelly to discuss health issues in the context of universities and Deputy Secretary Malisa Golightly PSM (ABF) to cover border restrictions.</p> <p><b>Outcome:</b> Discussed implications for universities of the travel restrictions and health protocols imposed as a result of the novel coronavirus outbreak.</p>
11 February	<i>Australian Government Crisis Committee meeting</i>	<p><b>Purpose:</b> Due to impacts on the international education sector, senior DESE officials attended AGCC meetings on 5 and 11 February.</p>
12 February	<i>Global Reputation Taskforce meeting held</i>	Formed to help protect Australia's reputation as a welcoming destination for high-quality education following the bushfire crisis and response to the coronavirus.
14 February	<i>Australian Border Force Interdepartmental committee meeting</i>	<p><b>Purpose:</b> Mr Heferen participated in 3 IDCs with ABF on border control measures on 14, 20 and 27 February.</p>
17 February	<i>Government initiates the first stage of the COVID-19 Plan</i>	Australian Health Sector Emergency Response Plan for Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19 plan) endorsed by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee.
20 February	<i>Australian Border Force Interdepartmental committee meeting</i>	<p><b>Purpose:</b> Mr Heferen participated in 3 IDCs with ABF on border control measures on 14, 20 and 27 February.</p>
20 February	<i>Global Reputation Taskforce meeting held</i>	Formed to help protect Australia's reputation as a welcoming destination for high-quality education following the bushfire crisis and response to the coronavirus.
22 February	<i>Announcement – Year 11 and 12 students from China offered exemptions from travel restrictions</i>	The Government announced year 11 and 12 students from China who are completing their senior secondary schooling in Australia (excluding those from Hubei) can apply for an exemption to the COVID-19 travel restrictions applied to foreign nationals who have been in mainland China. The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee provided advice.
24 February	<i>Student Return Working Group (SRWG) first meeting</i>	<p><b>Purpose:</b> This group facilitated the year 11 and 12 student exemption process announced in response to the travel ban on persons travelling from/transiting through mainland China travelling to Australia.</p> <p>It has since expanded its remit to be a broader opportunity for Commonwealth agencies (Health, Australian Border Force, Home Affairs and DESE) and state and territory school education representatives to discuss issues around year 11 and 12 international students studying in Australia during COVID-19.</p>
25 February	<i>PM announces activation of Emergency Response Plan for Communicable Disease Incidents of National Significance: National Arrangements</i>	The National CD Plan formally activated at the request of the Chief Medical Officer, in consultation with the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and Home Affairs.
27 February	<i>Australian Border Force Interdepartmental committee</i>	<p><b>Purpose:</b> Mr Heferen participated in 3 IDCs with ABF on border control measures on 14, 20 and 27 February.</p>

27 February	<i>Mainland China travel restrictions extended</i>	DESE international student and provider fact sheets updated.
28 February	<i>Meeting with Deputy Vice-Chancellors (Corporate)</i>	Deputy Secretary Rob Heferen met with DVC-Cs to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on the university sector.
28 February	<i>Minister Tehan convenes a teleconference with State and Territory Education Ministers</i>	To discuss the potential impacts of COVID-19 particularly with respect to schools.
28 February	<i>Global Reputation Taskforce meeting held</i>	Formed to help protect Australia's reputation as a welcoming destination for high-quality education following the bushfire crisis and response to the coronavirus.
28 February	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Education and Care Reference Group (ECECRG)</i>	<b>Purpose:</b> Ongoing meeting that provides the key consultation and engagement mechanism for the department with representatives of the early childhood education and care sector. Matters relating to COVID-19 were discussed from early February 2020. During March onwards, members agreed to hold weekly meetings focused on sector issues arising from the COVID- 19 pandemic and implementation of measures to assist the sector.
March 2020		
1 March	<i>Travel restrictions on persons travelling from/transiting through Iran come into effect</i>	DESE international student and provider fact sheets updated.
2 March	<i>Secretary establishes DESE COVID-19 Taskforce</i>	Initially 11 staff, currently 24 across teams responsible for policy and coordination, financial viability, communications and sector recovery. Whole of portfolio responsibilities and key DESE contact point for COVID-19 issues.
4 March	<i>DESE Pandemic Continuity Plan updated</i>	To cater for the emerging COVID-19 threat.
5 March	<i>Travel restrictions on persons travelling from/transiting through Republic of Korea come into effect along with enhanced screening on passengers from Italy</i>	DESE international student and provider fact sheets updated.
5 March	<i>National Coordination Mechanism commissioned to coordinate Australia's approach to COVID-19 in non-health sectors</i>	<b>Purpose:</b> The Government commissioned the National Coordination Mechanism to coordinate non-health related activities across jurisdictions and ensure a consistent national approach to providing essential services across a range of critical sectors and supply chains. Cross sectoral responsibility, including education.
6 March	<i>Global Reputation Taskforce meeting held</i>	Formed to help protect Australia's reputation as a welcoming destination for high-quality education following the bushfire crisis and response to the coronavirus.



6 March	<i>First meeting of Education and Employment Sector Pandemic Preparedness Committee (ESPPC)</i>	<p><b>Purpose:</b> Group comprising state and territory education and employment services policy counterparts as well as representatives from regulators and key sector representative bodies.</p> <p>ESPPC has supported broader intergovernmental coordination efforts under the auspices of the National Coordination Mechanism (NCM).</p> <p>Initially focused on education issues across early learning, schools, VET and higher education but has expanded to include employment services sector stakeholders (including federal, state and territory officials and sector representatives).</p>
6 March	<i>DESE Continuity Management Team commences</i>	<p><b>Purpose:</b> Commenced meeting weekly to provide central coordination of the department's internal corporate response to COVID-19.</p>
6 March	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Education and Care Reference Group (ECECRG)</i>	<p><b>Purpose:</b> Ongoing meeting that provides the key consultation and engagement mechanism for the department with representatives of the early childhood education and care sector. Matters relating to COVID-19 were discussed from early February 2020. During March onwards, members agreed to hold weekly meetings focused on sector issues arising from the COVID- 19 pandemic and implementation of measures to assist the sector.</p>
10 March	<i>National Coordination Mechanism meeting – Education sector</i>	<p>The first NCM meeting on 10 March 2020 was focused on the education sector and was chaired by Caroline Millar (PM&amp;C) and co-chaired by Deputy Secretary Rob Heferen representing DESE.</p>
11 March	<i>Education and Employment Sector Pandemic Preparedness Committee (ESPPC) held</i>	<p>2nd meeting.</p>
11 March	<i>Travel restrictions on persons travelling from/transiting through Italy come into effect</i>	<p>DESE international student and provider fact sheets updated.</p>
12 March	<i>Global Reputation Taskforce meeting held</i>	<p>Formed to help protect Australia's reputation as a welcoming destination for high-quality education following the bushfire crisis and response to the coronavirus.</p>
12 March	<i>\$17.6 billion first economic support package announced</i>	<p>The Government announced a \$17.6 billion plan to keep Australians in jobs, keep businesses in business and support households and the Australian economy.</p>
12 March	<i>Letter to employment services provider CEOs</i>	<p>Letter to employment services provider CEOs from the Deputy Secretary (Employment) to provide information on employment services arrangements.</p>
12 March	<i>Announcement - \$1.3 billion Supporting Apprentices and Trainees wage subsidy announced</i>	<p>The Government announced \$1.3 billion to allow up to 70,000 small businesses to retain around 117,000 apprentices and trainees across the country in work and training.</p>



13 March	<i>International Students working conditions extended</i>	The Government announced international students currently employed at the major supermarkets are able to extend their working hours to help meet high demand for essential items. Ordinarily international students are subject to a maximum 40 hours a fortnight during term.
13 March	<i>Australian Education Senior Officials Committee (AESOC) regular quarterly meeting</i>	A national approach – AESOC endorsed a range of measures to support the education sector to respond to the rapidly changing nature of COVID-19.
13 March	<i>Skills Senior Officials Network (SSON) COVID-19 working group</i>	Ongoing SSON discussions to support 3 April COAG Skills Council consideration of COVID-19 emerging issues for the VET sector and national policy responses. Meetings commenced 13 March and then occurred on 16, 19, 20, 23, 26 and 30 March.
13 March	<i>National Cabinet announced</i>	The Council of Australian Governments agreed on 13 March 2020 to establish a National Cabinet to coordinate Australia's Coronavirus Response across State and Territory Governments and the Commonwealth Government ('National Cabinet').
13 March	<i>DESE published fact sheets for job seekers and employment services providers on DESE website</i>	Fact sheets related to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information for job seekers and participants in employment services</li> <li>• Information for employment services providers</li> </ul>
13 March	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Education and Care Reference Group (ECECRG)</i>	<b>Purpose:</b> Ongoing meeting that provides the key consultation and engagement mechanism for the department with representatives of the early childhood education and care sector. Matters relating to COVID-19 were discussed from early February 2020. During March onwards, members agreed to hold weekly meetings focused on sector issues arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and implementation of measures to assist the sector.
13 March	<i>Announcement – Community Child Care Fund (CCCF) Special Circumstances Grant opportunity</i>	The Government announced that the \$14 million Community Child Care Special Circumstances Fund was available to assist child care services which had their viability impacted by COVID-19. Services could apply for grant funding to cover business costs, including wages.
16 March	<i>DESE Continuity Management Team meeting</i>	Ongoing - provides central coordination of the department's internal corporate response to COVID-19.
16 March	<i>DESE Designated business continuity officer</i>	SES Band 1 taken offline from 16 March to 30 April 2020 to coordinate business continuity arrangements for COVID-19.
17 March	<i>National Coordination Mechanism meeting – Education sector</i>	Second meeting on education issues.

17 March	<i>Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPCC) advice for schools</i>	Advice - pre-emptive school closures are not proportionate or effective as a public health intervention to prevent community transmission of COVID-19 at this time. Boarding schools are at high risk of transmission of COVID-19 due to close and shared living arrangements.
17 March	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Policy Group</i>	Meetings between department officials with responsibility for ECEC matters. Frequency of meeting increased to discuss COVID-19 related impacts on the sector, including government measures announced as part of the COVID-19 response. Meetings held 17, 23, 27, 28, 29, 31 March; 2, 7, 14, 16, 21, 28 April; 5, 12, 18 May.
18 March	<i>Additional Support for International Student Health Care Workers</i>	The Government announced international students currently employed by aged care providers are able to extend their working hours to ensure the care of senior and vulnerable Australians. Ordinarily international students are subject to a maximum 40 hours a fortnight during term. Expanded on 24 April to include all student visa holders enrolled in health care related courses supporting the health effort against COVID-19 as directed by health officials.
18 March	<i>Education and Employment Sector Pandemic Preparedness Committee (ESPPC) held</i>	3rd meeting.
18 March	<i>Universities Australia board meeting</i>	Minister Tehan met with the Universities Australia (UA) board to discuss the needs and concerns of the university sector.
19 March	<i>Universities Australia and Vice-Chancellors meeting</i>	DESE convened a meeting of UA executives (CEO Catriona Jackson and Chair Deb Terry) and university Vice-Chancellors to discuss pandemic preparedness across the sector.
20 March	<i>Global Reputation Taskforce meeting held</i>	Formed to help protect Australia's reputation as a welcoming destination for high-quality education following the bushfire crisis and response to the coronavirus.
20 March	<i>Remote working trial</i>	The department successfully trialled remote working arrangements for around 2000 staff.
20 March	<i>Travel restrictions on all foreign nationals come into effect</i>	DESE international student and provider fact sheets updated.
20 March	<i>Announcement – Additional Flexibility for jobseekers</i>	The Government announced changes to servicing arrangements, removing the need for face-to-face contact in line with advice from health authorities and reducing job search requirements in line with softening labour market conditions.
20 March	<i>DESE Continuity Management Team meeting</i>	Ongoing - provides central coordination of the department's internal corporate response to COVID-19.
20 March	<i>First CEO address to employment services providers</i>	Livestream address to employment services provider CEOs to provide updates on employment services arrangements and operation during the pandemic and respond to questions from providers.

20 March	<i>Letter to employment services provider CEOs</i>	Letter to employment services provider CEOs from the Deputy Secretary (Employment) to provide information on employment services arrangements.
20 March	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Education and Care Reference Group (ECECRG)</i>	<b>Purpose:</b> Ongoing meeting that provides the key consultation and engagement mechanism for the department with representatives of the early childhood education and care sector. Matters relating to COVID-19 were discussed from early February 2020. During March onwards, members agreed to hold weekly meetings focused on sector issues arising from the COVID- 19 pandemic and implementation of measures to assist the sector.
20 March	<i>Education Council meeting</i>	Education Ministers decided that NAPLAN will not proceed in 2020.
22 March	<i>\$66.1 billion second economic support package announced</i>	The Government announced changes to servicing arrangements, removing the need for face-to-face contact in line with advice from health authorities and reducing job search requirements in line with softening labour market conditions.
23 March	<i>National Coordination Mechanism</i>	NCM met to discuss employment sector issues with the meeting co-chaired by Mr Nathan Smyth, Deputy Secretary (Employment).
23 March	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Education and Care Reference Group (ECECRG)</i>	<b>Purpose:</b> Ongoing meeting that provides the key consultation and engagement mechanism for the department with representatives of the early childhood education and care sector. Matters relating to COVID-19 were discussed from early February 2020. During March onwards, members agreed to hold weekly meetings focused on sector issues arising from the COVID- 19 pandemic and implementation of measures to assist the sector.
23 March	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Policy Group</i>	Meetings between department officials with responsibility for ECEC matters. Frequency of meeting increased to discuss COVID-19 related impacts on the sector, including government measures announced as part of the COVID-19 response.
24 March	<i>Announcement – Suspension of mutual obligations for job seekers</i>	The Government announced that mutual obligation requirements would be lifted across all employment services programs until 31 March 2020.
24 March	<i>CEO address to employment services providers</i>	Livestream address to employment services provider CEOs to provide updates on employment services arrangements and operation during the pandemic and respond to questions from providers.
24 March	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Education and Care Reference Group (ECECRG)</i>	<b>Purpose:</b> Ongoing meeting that provides the key consultation and engagement mechanism for the department with representatives of the early childhood education and care sector. Matters relating to COVID-19 were discussed from early February 2020. During March onwards, members agreed to hold weekly meetings focused on sector issues arising from the COVID- 19 pandemic and implementation of measures to assist the sector.

24 March	<i>First tranche of child care legislative changes enacted to support the sector and families</i>	Amendments to Minister's Rules under Family Assistance Law (FAL) were made to allow: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) a 'period of local emergency' to be enacted for services directed to close on public health advice, allowing subsidies to continue to flow to impacted services;</li> <li>b) an additional 20 allowable absence days (increased from 42 to 52) in 2019-20;</li> <li>c) unlimited additional absence days for COVID-19 related reasons without medical evidence (from 25 March to 31 December 2020); and</li> <li>d) waiver of the obligation for services to enforce a payment of gap fees from families if a service is directed to close on public health advice.</li> </ul>
25 March	<i>Letter to employment services provider CEOs</i>	Letter to employment services provider CEOs from the Deputy Secretary (Employment) to provide information on employment services arrangements.
25 March	<i>Education and Employment Sector Pandemic Preparedness Committee (ESPPC) held</i>	4th meeting.
25 March	<i>Creation of a new National COVID-19 Coordination Commission (NCCC)</i>	The Government announced establishment of a new National COVID-19 Coordination Commission (NCCC) to coordinate advice to the Government on actions to anticipate and mitigate the economic and social effects of the global coronavirus pandemic. The NCCC is based in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.
26 March	<i>Further Announcement – CCCF Special Circumstances Grant opportunity, \$10k – \$50k grants available to services</i>	Further to 13 March announcement, the Minister clarified the COVID-19 impacted services could apply for grant funding of between \$10–\$50k to cover business costs, including wages.
26 March	<i>Announcement – supporting sole traders</i>	Sole traders can use work in their own business to meet their mutual obligation requirements.
27 March	<i>DESE Continuity Management Team meeting</i>	Ongoing - provides central coordination of the department's internal corporate response to COVID-19.
27 March	<i>DESE Global Reputation Taskforce meeting held</i>	Formed to help protect Australia's reputation as a welcoming destination for high-quality education following the bushfire crisis and response to the coronavirus.
27 March	<i>Jobactive providers offered a six-week advance payment of administration fees</i>	The department wrote to all jobactive providers and offered them a six week advance payment of administration fees to support providers while changes were made to streamline connecting job seekers to employment services.
27 March	<i>CEO address to employment services providers</i>	Livestream address to employment services provider CEOs to provide updates on employment services arrangements and operation during the pandemic and respond to questions from providers.



27 March	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Education and Care Reference Group (ECECRG)</i>	<b>Purpose:</b> Ongoing meeting that provides the key consultation and engagement mechanism for the department with representatives of the early childhood education and care sector. Matters relating to COVID-19 were discussed from early February 2020. During March onwards, members agreed to hold weekly meetings focused on sector issues arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and implementation of measures to assist the sector.
27 March	<i>Education Council meeting</i>	Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic discussed. The ongoing provision of quality ECEC services was discussed, including the economic measures announced and the need for urgent advice on regulatory, funding and viability measures to be reported back to Education Council. Impact of COVID-19 on senior secondary assessments and university admissions also discussed.
27 March	<i>Further Announcement – Suspension of mutual obligations for job seekers</i>	The Government announced that mutual obligation requirements would remain lifted across all employment services programs until 27 April 2020.
27, 28 and 29 March	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Policy Group (3 separate meetings)</i>	Meetings between department officials with responsibility for ECEC matters. Frequency of meeting increased to discuss COVID-19 related impacts on the sector, including government measures announced as part of the COVID-19 response.
29 March	<i>DESE staff advised to work from home</i>	The Chief Operating Officer advised staff to work from home wherever practicable, in accordance with APSC advice.
29 March	<i>Commercial and residential tenancies</i>	Important for international students - a moratorium on evictions over the next six months for commercial and residential tenancies in financial distress.
30 March	<i>First DESE secondees to Services Australia</i>	
30 March	<i>Third economic support package announced (JobKeeper)</i>	The Government announced a new JobKeeper payment to keep Australians in a job. Eligible workers will receive a flat payment of \$1,500 per fortnight through their employer, before tax.
30 March	<i>Letter to employment services provider CEOs</i>	Letter to employment services provider CEOs from the Deputy Secretary (Employment) to provide information on employment services arrangements.
31 March	<i>CEO address to employment services providers</i>	Livestream address to employment services provider CEOs to provide updates on employment services arrangements and operation during the pandemic and respond to questions from providers.
31 March	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Policy Group</i>	Meetings between department officials with responsibility for ECEC matters. Frequency of meeting increased to discuss COVID-19 related impacts on the sector, including government measures announced as part of the COVID-19 response.
31 March	<i>Out of session Education Council paper on boarding schools circulated</i>	Discussed the issues due to closure of boarding schools due to the impact of COVID-19.

Late march/early April	<i>Further drawdown of DESE posted officers</i>	In late March, decisions were taken to withdraw other DESE posted officers back to Australia. This included two officers posted to India (22/3) and one each from Brazil (23/3), Indonesia (15/3), Japan (27/3), Vietnam (3/4), Malaysia (24/3) and Mexico (23/3).
<b>April 2020</b>		
1 April	<i>Education and Employment Sector Pandemic Preparedness Committee (ESPPC) held</i>	5th meeting.
1 April	<i>Announcement – New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS) participant access to Coronavirus Supplement</i>	The Government announced that NEIS participants can choose to access the Coronavirus Supplement if they are in receipt of an eligible income support payment.
1 April	<i>CEO letter to NEIS providers</i>	Letter to NEIS provider CEOs from the Deputy Secretary (Employment).
2 April	<i>Announcement - Apprentice and Trainee Re-engagement Register</i>	As part of the Supporting Apprentices and Trainees measure, re-engagement of apprentices and trainees is being supported by a new Government funded 'Apprentice and Trainee Re-engagement Register' managed by the National Apprentice Employment Network.
2 April	<i>Commencement of the Supporting Apprentices and Trainees wage subsidy</i>	Employers were able to begin submitting claims for wage subsidies through the Supporting Apprentices and Trainees measure.
2 April	<i>Announcement – Early Childhood Education and Care Relief Package and cessation of CCCF Special Circumstances grant round</i>	The Government announced \$1.6 billion to support child care services to remain open to support families in the wake of COVID-19. Payments made to services apply from 6 April to 28 June 2020, with four week and 12 week reviews to be undertaken prior to considering an extension.  Given the announcement of the Relief Package, the Government indicated applications for the CCCF Special Circumstances grant round would close from 9am, 3 April.
2 April	<i>Announcement – Jobs Hub</i>	Jobs Hub provides an up to date list of businesses and organisations that are currently hiring, and how to contact them. Employers with critical skill and labour needs can also receive support to connect with retrenched/stood down workers and employment services.
2 April	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Education and Care Reference Group (ECECRG)</i>	<b>Purpose:</b> Ongoing meeting that provides the key consultation and engagement mechanism for the department with representatives of the early childhood education and care sector. Matters relating to COVID-19 were discussed from early February 2020. During March onwards, members agreed to hold weekly meetings focused on sector issues arising from the COVID- 19 pandemic and implementation of measures to assist the sector.
2 April	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Policy Group</i>	Meetings between department officials with responsibility for ECEC matters. Frequency of meeting increased to discuss COVID-19 related impacts on the sector, including government measures announced as part of the COVID-19 response.

2 April	<i>Education Council meeting to discuss ECEC service provision</i>	Ministers agreed that ECEC services would remain open for families who require care, and that future decisions would be consistent with advice of the AHPPC. Critical state regulatory authority actions prioritising health and safety of children were also discussed, with regular updates to be provided to Education Council.
3 April	<i>Announcement - Preschool funding guaranteed for 2021</i>	An additional \$453.2 million for preschools announced under an extension of National Partnership arrangements for 2021.
3 April	<i>Global Reputation Taskforce meeting held</i>	Formed to help protect Australia's reputation as a welcoming destination for high-quality education following the bushfire crisis and response to the coronavirus.
3 April	<i>Continuity Management Team meeting</i>	Ongoing - provides central coordination of the department's internal corporate response to COVID-19.
3 April	<i>COAG Skills Council</i>	The COAG Skills Council agreed to drive a national approach to securing capacity in Australia's national training system through the VET sector three key priority areas: - critical skills and workforce availability, with a focus on ensuring training can continue and to support skills for workers in areas of critical needs - vocational education and training (VET) provider viability, to maintain training capacity, and - supporting students to ensure as many VET students as possible are supported to continue their training in the event their training providers temporarily or permanently close during the COVID-19 pandemic.  The Council also agreed to establish the Australian Industry and Skills Committee (AISC) Emergency Response Sub-Committee to support essential skilling requirements during the COVID-19 crisis.
3 April	<i>CEO address to employment services providers</i>	Pre-recorded address to employment services provider CEOs to provide updates on employment services arrangements and operation during the pandemic and respond to questions from providers.
3 April	<i>Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) advice on ECEC</i>	AHPPC released a statement noting the ECEC was considered an essential service that should continue, but with risk mitigation measures in place. The statement included practical strategies to minimise risk of transition.
4 April	<i>Announcement – new visa arrangements for Seasonal Worker Programme and Pacific Labour Scheme</i>	Seasonal Worker Programme and Pacific Labour Scheme workers will have visa conditions relaxed and be given an option to extend their stay for up to one year.
5 April	<i>Second tranche of child care legislative changes enacted to support the sector and families</i>	Amendments to Minister's Rules under FAL were made to: a) allow business continuity payments to be made under the ECEC Relief Package from 6 April to 28 June 2020; and b) to broaden previous gap fee measure (announced on 24 April) to apply where a service is open and a family has chosen to keep child at home due to COVID-19.
7 April	<i>CEO address to employment services providers</i>	Livestream address to employment services provider CEOs to provide updates on employment services arrangements and operation during the pandemic and respond to questions from providers.

7 April	<i>Letter to employment services provider CEOs</i>	Letter to employment services provider CEOs from the Deputy Secretary (Employment) to provide information on employment services arrangements.
7 April	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Policy Group</i>	Meetings between department officials with responsibility for ECEC matters. Frequency of meeting increased to discuss COVID-19 related impacts on the sector, including government measures announced as part of the COVID-19 response.
7 April	<i>Education Council meeting</i>	Agreed students will be able to achieve a Senior Secondary Certificate of Education this year and that ATAR results will be released in a nationally consistent window of dates. Endorsed a set of national principles for the consideration of the National Cabinet to support continued delivery of high-quality school education for all students during COVID-19.
8 April	<i>Education and Employment Sector Pandemic Preparedness Committee (ESPPC) held</i>	6th meeting.
8 April	<i>AISC Emergency Response – Sub-Committee meeting</i>	First meeting of the AISC Emergency Response Sub-Committee established to support essential skilling requirements during the COVID-19 crisis.
9 April	<i>Global Reputation Taskforce meeting held</i>	Formed to help protect Australia’s reputation as a welcoming destination for high-quality education following the bushfire crisis and response to the coronavirus.
9 April	<i>Continuity Management Team meeting</i>	Ongoing - provides central coordination of the department’s internal corporate response to COVID-19.
9 April	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Education and Care Reference Group (ECECRG)</i>	<b>Purpose:</b> Ongoing meeting that provides the key consultation and engagement mechanism for the department with representatives of the early childhood education and care sector. Matters relating to COVID-19 were discussed from early February 2020. During March onwards, members agreed to hold weekly meetings focused on sector issues arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and implementation of measures to assist the sector.
11 April	<i>Funding to Red Cross</i>	\$7 million in funding allocated to Red Cross to provide emergency relief to temporary visa holders. Part of the broader \$200 million Community Support Package.
12 April	<i>Announcement – Higher Education Relief Package</i>	Includes guaranteed Commonwealth Grants Scheme funding for 2020 regardless of any drop in domestic enrolments; delayed recovery of overpayments; VET Student Loans fee relief; funding for new short courses and \$100 million in regulatory relief for education and training providers.
14 April	<i>CEO address to employment services providers</i>	Livestream address to employment services provider CEOs to provide updates on employment services arrangements and operation during the pandemic and respond to questions from providers.



14 April	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Policy Group</i>	Meetings between department officials with responsibility for ECEC matters. Frequency of meeting increased to discuss COVID-19 related impacts on the sector, including government measures announced as part of the COVID-19 response.
14 April	<i>Ongoing – DESE ECEC COVID-19 Response Implementation and Assurance Committee established</i>	The IAC Committee is an internal decision-making body comprised of ECCC Division senior officers with responsibility for overseeing the implementation, monitoring and reporting of the ECEC COVID-19 response program of work, including the ECEC Relief Package and the return to Business as Usual strategy. Meetings held 14, 17 and 24 April, 5 and 20 May.
15 April	<i>Expansion of In Training to suspended and cancelled apprentices</i>	Expansion of In Training support delivered by Australian Apprenticeship Support Network providers to support suspended and cancelled apprentices.
15 April	<i>Announcement – Repurposed MySkills Website</i>	The Government launched the improved and repurposed My Skills website, which focuses on online training for Australians looking to upskill during the COVID-19 pandemic.
15 April	<i>AISC Emergency Response – Sub-Committee meeting</i>	Second meeting of the AISC Emergency Response Sub-Committee established to support essential skilling requirements during the COVID-19 crisis.
15 April	<i>Education and Employment Sector Pandemic Preparedness Committee (ESPPC) held</i>	7th meeting.
16 April	<i>Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPCC) advice for schools</i>	Advice on reducing the potential risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools – advice for schools, including regular cleaning of high-use surfaces, cleaning of hands, and practical social distancing measures such as staggering start times and lunch breaks.
16 April	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Policy Group</i>	Meetings between department officials with responsibility for ECEC matters. Frequency of meeting increased to discuss COVID-19 related impacts on the sector, including government measures announced as part of the COVID-19 response.
16 April	<i>National Cabinet agreed a set of seven National Principles for School Education</i>	
17 April	<i>Global Reputation Taskforce meeting held</i>	Formed to help protect Australia’s reputation as a welcoming destination for high-quality education following the bushfire crisis and response to the coronavirus.
17 April	<i>Continuity Management Team meeting</i>	Ongoing - provides central coordination of the department’s internal corporate response to COVID-19.
17 April	<i>CEO address to employment services providers</i>	Livestream address to employment services provider CEOs to provide updates on employment services arrangements and operation during the pandemic and respond to questions from providers.
17 April	<i>COAG Skills Council</i>	Council met to continue work on the set of urgent national actions agreed at the 3 April meeting, including delivering critical skills during the COVID-19 pandemic and preserving the capacity of Australia’s training system.

17 April	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Education and Care Reference Group (ECECRG)</i>	<b>Purpose:</b> Ongoing meeting that provides the key consultation and engagement mechanism for the department with representatives of the early childhood education and care sector. Matters relating to COVID-19 were discussed from early February 2020. During March onwards, members agreed to hold weekly meetings focused on sector issues arising from the COVID- 19 pandemic and implementation of measures to assist the sector.
17 April	<i>Ongoing – DESE ECEC COVID-19 Response Implementation and Assurance Committee meeting</i>	The IAC Committee is an internal decision-making body comprised of ECCC Division senior officers with responsibility for overseeing the implementation, monitoring and reporting of the ECEC COVID-19 response program of work, including the ECEC Relief Package and the return to Business as Usual strategy.
21 April	<i>Announcement – additional funding to support mature aged job seekers announced</i>	The Government announced \$41.7 million for the establishment of a separate funding source for the Career Transition Assistance program to help mature age job seekers access training and support to improve their digital literacy, job opportunities and identifying transferrable skills.
21 April	<i>Letter to employment services provider CEOs</i>	Letter to jobactive, New Employment Services Trial and Career Transition Assistance provider CEOs from the Deputy Secretary (Employment) to provide information on employment services arrangements.
21 April	<i>AISC Emergency Response – Sub-Committee meeting</i>	Third meeting of the AISC Emergency Response Sub-Committee established to support essential skilling requirements during the COVID-19 crisis.
21 April	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Policy Group</i>	Meetings between department officials with responsibility for ECEC matters. Frequency of meeting increased to discuss COVID-19 related impacts on the sector, including government measures announced as part of the COVID-19 response.
22 April	<i>Education and Employment Sector Pandemic Preparedness Committee (ESPPC) held</i>	8th meeting.
22 April	<i>Announcement – bring forward Employment Fund credit for Stream A job seekers</i>	The Government announced that the Employment Fund credit for the most job-ready job seekers would be brought forward to be available immediately, rather than after 13 weeks (4 May – 30 June).
22 April	<i>Letter to employment services provider CEOs</i>	Letter to employment services provider CEOs from the Deputy Secretary (Employment) to provide information on employment services arrangements.
22 April	<i>Letters to stakeholders about the Supporting Apprentices and Trainees measure</i>	Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business wrote to key stakeholders announcing an extension to the Supporting Apprentices and Trainees measure for Group Training Organisations with host employers in receipt of JobKeeper.
22 April	<i>Further Announcement – Suspension of mutual obligations for job seekers</i>	The Government announced that mutual obligation requirements would remain lifted across all employment services programs until 22 May.

23 April	<i>Student Visa Conditions</i>	The Government announced student visa holders studying relevant medical courses were able to temporarily work more than the 40 hours per fortnight usually allowed, if they are working in support of COVID-19 efforts and at the direction of the relevant health authority. Student visa holders working for registered disability service providers will also be able to work more than the usual 40 hours.
24 April	<i>Revised advice on Schools</i>	National Cabinet agreed with updated Australian Health Protection Principal Committee advice on schools.
24 April	<i>Global Reputation Taskforce meeting held</i>	Formed to help protect Australia's reputation as a welcoming destination for high-quality education following the bushfire crisis and response to the coronavirus.
24 April	<i>Continuity Management Team meeting</i>	Ongoing - provides central coordination of the department's internal corporate response to COVID-19.
24 April	<i>CEO address to employment services providers</i>	Livestream address to employment services provider CEOs to provide updates on employment services arrangements and operation during the pandemic and respond to questions from providers.
24 April	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Education and Care Reference Group (ECECRG)</i>	<b>Purpose:</b> Ongoing meeting that provides the key consultation and engagement mechanism for the department with representatives of the early childhood education and care sector. Matters relating to COVID-19 were discussed from early February 2020. During March onwards, members agreed to hold weekly meetings focused on sector issues arising from the COVID- 19 pandemic and implementation of measures to assist the sector.
24 April	<i>Ongoing – DESE ECEC COVID-19 Response Implementation and Assurance Committee meeting</i>	The IAC Committee is an internal decision-making body comprised of ECCC Division senior officers with responsibility for overseeing the implementation, monitoring and reporting of the ECEC COVID-19 response program of work, including the ECEC Relief Package and the return to Business as Usual strategy.
27 April	<i>Announcement – more support for childcare services and children</i>	An additional \$27 million in grants of up to \$10,000 to child care services to ensure they can continue providing care to children of essential workers.
27 April	<i>Commissioned research published on DESE website</i>	Five pieces of commissioned research that found students from disadvantaged backgrounds or otherwise vulnerable are more likely to have their learning outcomes negatively impacted by remote education. (The Final piece of research, by Dr Alan Finkel AO was published on 4 May).
28 April	<i>AISC Emergency Response – Sub-Committee meeting</i>	Fourth meeting of the AISC Emergency Response Sub-Committee established to support essential skilling requirements during the COVID-19 crisis.
28 April	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Policy Group</i>	Meetings between department officials with responsibility for ECEC matters. Frequency of meeting increased to discuss COVID-19 related impacts on the sector, including government measures announced as part of the COVID-19 response.

29 April	<i>Education and Employment Sector Pandemic Preparedness Committee (ESPPC) held</i>	9th meeting.
29 April	<i>Announcement – Non-Government schools early payments</i>	Non-government schools have the option to apply for early payments of their July 2020 recurrent funding (up to \$3 billion), accessing up to 25 per cent of their total annual recurrent funding early.
29 April	<i>Schools Policy Group special purpose teleconference</i>	Meeting to discuss impact of COVID-19 on jurisdictional compliance and reporting with national agreements and other requirements.
<b>May 2020</b>		
1 May	<i>Continuity Management Team meeting</i>	Ongoing - provides central coordination of the department's internal corporate response to COVID-19.
1 May	<i>CEO address to employment services providers</i>	Livestream address to employment services provider CEOs to provide updates on employment services arrangements and operation during the pandemic and respond to questions from providers.
1 May	<i>Global Reputation Taskforce meeting held</i>	Formed to help protect Australia's reputation as a welcoming destination for high-quality education following the bushfire crisis and response to the coronavirus.
1 May	<i>Announcement - Early Childhood Education and Care Relief Package - expansion of eligibility for additional supplementary payments</i>	The Government announced that ECEC providers, including non-government schools, large charities and not-for-profit organisations which are not eligible for JobKeeper Payments are eligible for an Additional Supplementary Payment under the ECEC Relief Package. Family Day Care and In-Home Care Educators which are not eligible for JobKeeper will also be eligible for an Additional Supplementary Payment, so long as Educators apply for an ABN by 1 June 2020.
1 May	<i>Legislation enabling stimulus measures came into effect</i>	
1 May	<i>COAG Skills Council</i>	Update to Skills Council on progress for the three key priority areas of critical skills, provider viability and student support.
1 May	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Education and Care Reference Group (ECECRG)</i>	<b>Purpose:</b> Ongoing meeting that provides the key consultation and engagement mechanism for the department with representatives of the early childhood education and care sector. Matters relating to COVID-19 were discussed from early February 2020. During March onwards, members agreed to hold weekly meetings focused on sector issues arising from the COVID- 19 pandemic and implementation of measures to assist the sector.
1 May	<i>Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) advice on Boarding Schools</i>	A risk assessment should be undertaken for reopening of boarding facilities, focusing on strategies including a reduction in numbers of students staying at the facility.



4 May	<i>AISC Emergency Response – Sub-Committee meeting</i>	Fifth meeting of the AISC Emergency Response Sub-Committee established to support essential skilling requirements during the COVID-19 crisis. <i>The Subcommittee agreed to the development of resources supporting the rapid rollout of nationally consistent training and assessment by Registered Training Organisations delivering point of care testing (PoCT).</i>
4 May	<i>Early action to establish the National Skills Commission</i>	The Secretary announced the Department has undertaken an internal restructure to consolidate all labour market analysis and skill demand forecasting functions under the leadership of the interim National Skills Commissioner, effective 4 May.
4 May	<i>Chief Scientist's research report published</i>	Rapid Research Information Forum, chaired by Dr Alan Finkel, report on differential learning outcomes for online versus in-class education published on DESE website.
5 May	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Policy Group</i>	Meetings between department officials with responsibility for ECEC matters. Frequency of meeting increased to discuss COVID-19 related impacts on the sector, including government measures announced as part of the COVID-19 response.
5 May	<i>Ongoing – DESE ECEC COVID-19 Response Implementation and Assurance Committee meeting</i>	The IAC Committee is an internal decision-making body comprised of ECCC Division senior officers with responsibility for overseeing the implementation, monitoring and reporting of the ECEC COVID-19 response program of work, including the ECEC Relief Package and the return to Business as Usual strategy.
6 May	<i>Education and Employment Sector Pandemic Preparedness Committee (ESPPC) held</i>	10th meeting.
8 May	<i>Continuity Management Team meeting</i>	Ongoing - provides central coordination of the department's internal corporate response to COVID-19.
8 May	<i>Global Reputation Taskforce meeting held</i>	Formed to help protect Australia's reputation as a welcoming destination for high-quality education following the bushfire crisis and response to the coronavirus.
8 May	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Education and Care Reference Group (ECECRG)</i>	<b>Purpose:</b> Ongoing meeting that provides the key consultation and engagement mechanism for the department with representatives of the early childhood education and care sector. Matters relating to COVID-19 were discussed from early February 2020. During March onwards, members agreed to hold weekly meetings focused on sector issues arising from the COVID- 19 pandemic and implementation of measures to assist the sector.
8 May	<i>Schools Policy Group regular quarterly meeting</i>	Meeting to discuss COVID-19 and Australian Government education funding conditions and obligations funding arrangements for 2020 in light of COVID-19.
8 May	<i>Ministerial decision</i>	Minister for Education made a determination to provide accountable authorities with the ability to 'opt-out' of A to E reporting requirements for Semester 1 2020 due to the COVID-19 situation.
9 May	<i>Planning for staff returning</i>	The department commenced planning for the transition to the office-based workplace.

11 May	<i>COAG Skills Council</i>	<p>On 11 May, Skills Council agreed to three new national infection control skills sets for these sectors.</p> <p>The skill sets empower workers by teaching them the skills and knowledge they need to decrease risk and transmission of infection while carrying out their daily duties.</p>
12 May	<i>CEO address to employment services providers</i>	Pre-recorded address to employment services provider CEOs to provide updates on employment services arrangements and operation during the pandemic and respond to questions from providers.
12 May	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Policy Group</i>	Meetings between department officials with responsibility for ECEC matters. Frequency of meeting increased to discuss COVID-19 related impacts on the sector, including government measures announced as part of the COVID-19 response.
13 May	<i>Education and Employment Sector Pandemic Preparedness Committee (ESPPC) held</i>	11th meeting.
14 May	<i>Further Announcement – Suspension of mutual obligations for job seekers</i>	The Government announced that mutual obligation requirements would remain lifted across all employment services programs until 1 June 2020.
14 May	<i>Letter to employment services provider CEOs</i>	Letter to employment services provider CEOs from the Deputy Secretary (Employment) to provide information on employment services arrangements.
14 May	<i>Early action to establish the National Skills Commission</i>	<i>On 14 May 2020 introduction and second reading of the National Skills Commissioner Bill 2020 by Minister Ley in the House of Representatives.</i>
14 May	<i>Announcement – Special Circumstances – School Hygiene Assistance fund</i>	Up to \$10 million in Special Circumstances funding available to eligible non-government schools for 2019-20. Funding can be used for soap, hand sanitiser, classroom cleaning supplies and additional cleaning services.
15 May	<i>COAG Skills Council</i>	<p>Council met to progress actions to continue to meet Australia's skills and training needs and to support the recovery of the Australian economy as COVID-19 restrictions begin to ease.</p> <p>Infection Control Training Fund - Council agreed to establish a joint Commonwealth-state \$80 million Infection Control Training Fund.</p> <p>Council also agreed to expand the AISC Emergency Response Sub-Committee's Terms of Reference to include work to meet critical skills necessary for economic recovery.</p>
15 May	<i>Continuity Management Team meeting</i>	Ongoing - provides central coordination of the department's internal corporate response to COVID-19.
15 May	<i>Global Reputation Taskforce meeting held</i>	Formed to help protect Australia's reputation as a welcoming destination for high-quality education following the bushfire crisis and response to the coronavirus.

15 May	<i>AISC Emergency Response – Sub-Committee meeting</i>	Sixth meeting of the AISC Emergency Response Sub-Committee established to support essential skilling requirements during the COVID-19 crisis and to support economic recovery.
18 May	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Policy Group</i>	Meetings between department officials with responsibility for ECEC matters. Frequency of meeting increased to discuss COVID-19 related impacts on the sector, including government measures announced as part of the COVID-19 response.
18 May	<i>ECEC Relief Package Four Week Review Summary Report released</i>	Summary Report released on DESE website.
19 May	<i>CEO address to employment services providers</i>	Livestream address to employment services provider CEOs to provide updates on employment services arrangements and operation during the pandemic and respond to questions from providers.
19 May	<i>Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 – DESE Public Hearing</i>	
20 May	<i>Education and Employment Sector Pandemic Preparedness Committee (ESPPC) held</i>	12th meeting.
20 May	<i>Ongoing – DESE ECEC COVID-19 Response Implementation and Assurance Committee meeting</i>	The IAC Committee is an internal decision-making body comprised of ECCC Division senior officers with responsibility for overseeing the implementation, monitoring and reporting of the ECEC COVID-19 response program of work, including the ECEC Relief Package and the return to Business as Usual strategy.
20 May	<i>Announcement – Response to the child care review – additional funding for improvements to the ECEC Relief Package</i>	The Government announced an additional \$12.8 million in funding to support services to continue to provide care for essential workers and vulnerable children, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ \$12 million for child care services that have 30 per cent or more of full-time equivalent staff ineligible for the JobKeeper Payment.</li> <li>○ \$800,000 to increase the level of funding for In Home Care providers.</li> </ul>
22 May	<i>Ongoing – Early Childhood Education and Care Reference Group (ECECRG)</i>	<b>Purpose:</b> Ongoing meeting that provides the key consultation and engagement mechanism for the department with representatives of the early childhood education and care sector. Matters relating to COVID-19 were discussed from early February 2020. During March onwards, members agreed to hold weekly meetings focused on sector issues arising from the COVID- 19 pandemic and implementation of measures to assist the sector.
22 May	<i>Continuity Management Team meeting</i>	Ongoing - provides central coordination of the department’s internal corporate response to COVID-19.