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NEAS Australia Submission to:

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)

Submission to the Trade Subcommittee: Joint Standing Committee of Foreign Affairs (JSCFADT)

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PURPOSE AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

To report to the Joint Standing Committee of Foreign Affairs (JSCFADT) on the inquiry into Australia's International Tourism and Education sectors; specifically in response to (ii) International Education and a focus on the following Terms of Reference:

1. Challenges associated with the loss of international student numbers as a result of the significant disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and effective measures to attract and retain students to Australia.
2. Online innovations in education delivery and potential opportunities to strengthen the sector's resilience.
3. Initiatives to ensure positive international student experience and support pathways to build their skills and contribute to Australia's prosperity.
4. Opportunities for international education to support strategic and foreign policy objectives.

The report will also inform the Committee on NEAS's role as the leading quality assurance body for English Language Teaching (ELT) in Australia and globally, specifically within the ASEAN region.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- NEAS ELT centre members, in spite of the challenges associated with the loss of international student numbers during COVID-19, remained loyal to NEAS and have continued to be guided by the NEAS Quality Assurance Framework in their operations and program delivery.
- NEAS supported online innovations in education delivery and the resilience of member centres through the development and application of fit-for-purpose quality standards.
- As international education is commencing a recovery after Australia experienced two years of border closures, pathways for international students to build their skills and contribute to Australia's prosperity have been reopened.
- NEAS works closely with stakeholder and regulators in international education by providing its quality assurance expertise and insight; especially in the areas of online courses, transnational delivery, and the onboarding and training of ELT professionals.

BACKGROUND

NEAS (www.neas.org.au) is a global leader in quality assurance for the English Language Teaching (ELT) sector. NEAS Australia quality endorses more than 200 individuals and organisations in Australia, ASEAN, China, and the Middle East. As an independent, non-governmental, quality assurance specialist for the ELT community, NEAS endorses ELT centres and courses in universities, high schools, vocational colleges, independent colleges, and online providers. NEAS has expanded its quality assurance services to include endorsement of education agents, ELT professionals and innovative products and services.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH THE LOSS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT NUMBERS AS A RESULT OF THE SIGNIFICANT DISRUPTION CAUSED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND EFFECTIVE MEASURES TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN STUDENTS

The focus of this response to the [Inquiry into Australia's Tourism and International Education Sectors](#) is on [International Education](#) only. However, it is important to note that the two sectors are linked. International students on working holiday and tourist visas study at NEAS member centres to improve their English language skills. They have traditionally serviced the tourism industry by being a significant part of the hospitality workforce, while also being customers of the tourism industry. International students make a vital contribution to the Australian economy.

Since Australia has re-opened its borders, international education has commenced its recovery, yet problems persist:

- There is currently a shortage of ELT practitioners, and this is impacting ELICOS providers in their recruitment of English language teachers and Academic Managers.
- Hospitality has been adversely affected by a lack of international student workers.
- Parts of the economy have contracted due to lower spending.
- Student visas can take many months to be processed.
- Difficulties for students finding work.
- Accommodation choices can be limited and are often expensive.

NEAS is addressing the challenges of a lack of ELT practitioners by supporting neophyte teachers transitioning from other occupations, as well as investing in the continuous professional development of ELT practitioners to enhance further their managerial capabilities.

NEAS Quality Endorsed Members follow the [NEAS standards](#) for the employment of teachers and Academic Managers. In the context of the prevailing skills shortage, NEAS is assisting Member Centres by:

- providing qualifications checks of prospective teachers,
- proposing structured professional development plans to support the onboarding of new teachers and Academic Managers,
- issuing a formal Assessment of Qualifications to document the checks conducted and prior work experience recognised, as well as the program to be implemented for the ELT practitioner's continuous professional development.

In other areas NEAS assists to maintain quality in:

- student support– NEAS Quality Framework [Area B](#) The Student Experience and [Area J](#): Education Agents,
- online learning – [Area H](#): Online Delivery was developed to ensure quality of online courses being developed and delivered,
- student recruitment and promotion – see [Area E](#): Promotion and Student Recruitment and [Area J](#): Education Agents.

ONLINE INNOVATIONS IN EDUCATION DELIVERY AND POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES TO STRENGTHEN THE SECTOR'S RESILIENCE

The NEAS Quality Assurance Framework includes Quality [Area H: Online Delivery](#), which focuses specifically on best practice in virtual learning. This ensures that courses delivered online and offshore will have been through a rigorous assessment and have met international standards. By promoting their Quality Endorsed status (e.g., by displaying the NEAS endorsement tick) on their websites, posters and displays and in their correspondence, ELT centres are not only be showing that they are quality assured but help grow a culture QA visibility.

During COVID-19, NEAS promoted resilience among its members by:

- Continuing to innovate and expand the Quality Assurance Framework by developing [Area M: Transnational Delivery](#), to support best practice and new business models in cross-border educational delivery.
- Assessing and Quality Endorsing the many models of online delivery, guided by a clear framework that promotes aspirational standards in virtual learning.
- Strengthening Australia's competitiveness in a crowded global marketplace by using a dedicated Trade and Investment Queensland grant to Quality Endorse eligible VET and ELICOS providers on achieving aspirational quality standards in Online Delivery.

INITIATIVES TO ENSURE POSITIVE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND SUPPORT PATHWAYS TO BUILD THEIR SKILLS AND CONTRIBUTE TO AUSTRALIA'S PROSPERITY

Many ELICOS students have pathway packages into VET or other higher education programs upon completion of their English language studies. In this way, there can be a correlation between ELICOS providers and the identified priority employment fields.

NEAS contributes to the enhancement of the international student experience through the application of quality standards that support best practice in student recruitment. NEAS promotes Quality Endorsement of Education Agents and lists those agents that have demonstrated reliability, credibility and quality in performance. Quality Endorsed Education Agents can be viewed [here](#) and the Quality Principles for assessing them can be viewed [here](#). NEAS continues to work closely with the International Student Education Agents Association ([ISEAA](#)) for the achievement of quality practices by education agents.

NEAS member ELT centres remain dedicated to ensuring a positive international student experience. We have developed different types of QA activities to support members – self assessments,

management meetings, endorsed online delivery, endorsed foundation programs and transnational delivery, multi-sector reviews and professional development for teachers and academic managers.

Please see our dedicated Quality Principles to promote best practice in important areas of international education:

- Area B: The Student Experience
- Area D Administration, Management and Staffing
- Area L ELT Professionals
- Area M: Transnational Delivery and
- Area N: Foundation Programs – areas M and N promote and support best practice in Transnational Delivery and Foundation Programs. This enhances further the pathways for international enrolments to build their skills and contribute to Australia's prosperity

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION TO SUPPORT STRATEGIC AND FOREIGN POLICY OBJECTIVES

NEAS continues to work closely with Australian stakeholders such as English Australia, University English Centres Australia (UECA), and the International Student Education Agents Association (ISEAA), and government departments and authorities such as the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) and the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA).

NEAS has in recent years been the recipient of grants and other support from Austrade, DESE and other bodies, and continues to seek the support of targeted grants to grow further the mutually beneficial educational engagement with National Ministries of key neighbours. We have recently worked with Vietnam and Thailand on important projects:

- **The NEAS Australia – Vietnam Workshop Series**. This activity received grant funding from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade under the Australia-Vietnam Enhanced Economic Engagement Grant Program 2021.
- **Thailand Workshop Series**. This activity was supported by the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) and the Australian Trade and Investment Commission.

With support from Austrade's Export Market Development Grants program, NEAS also participated in ICEF in Berlin and the Asia-Pacific Quality Network Academic Conference in Singapore in November. We are also progressing dialogues for structured quality assurance initiatives with the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), Dubai, and the ASEAN University Network. NEAS has recently extended a long-standing MOU with the Vietnamese Ministry of Education to provide advice and support for quality assurance in English language teaching.

NEAS also promotes Quality Assurance activity through its professional development (PD) program, delivering over 150 events, workshops, webinars and online courses, to more than 3,700 participants in Australia and abroad.

The flagship international event, the NEAS Management Conference, will be held 3-5 May 2023, and streamed live from Doltone House Sydney. As usual we are expecting attendees from all over the world. Last year's conference attracted more than 1,400 participants from Australia, Colombia, Cyprus, Fiji, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, South Africa, Thailand, United

Kingdom, United States and Vietnam. The 2023 Management Conference promises to be an even larger event with the focus on the theme of The Profession, the Professional, Professionalism in English Language Teaching.

NEAS is a Thought Leader and indispensable participant shaping strategy in international education. NEAS welcomes the opportunity to support strategy and foreign policy further by being consulted regularly and providing up-to-the-minute developments regarding the sector.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

All Areas of the NEAS Quality Assurance Framework have been developed in the pursuit of aspirational standards and best practice within the international education sector. NEAS is perfectly aligned to DFAT's intentions for international education in Australia. It is the opinion of this submission that ELT centres that have achieved NEAS Quality Endorsement are in a strong position to support the sector going forward. The reasons for these are as follows:

- NEAS Australia and its member centres have risen to the challenges associated with the loss of international student numbers as a result of the significant disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and have implemented effective measures to attract and retain students. See [Area B: The Student Experience](#), [Area E: Promotion and Student Recruitment](#), [Area H: Online Delivery](#), [Area I: ELT Qualifications](#), [Area J: Education Agents](#), [Area L: ELT Professionals](#).
- NEAS Australia and its member ELT centres have supported online innovations in education delivery and provided opportunities for the sector to strengthen its resilience. See [Area G: Strategy, Risk and Governance](#), [Area H: Online Delivery](#), [Area M: Transnational Delivery](#).
- NEAS and its member centres have introduced initiatives to ensure a positive student experience and supported pathways to build their skills and contribute to Australia's prosperity. See [Area B: The Student Experience](#), [Area D: Administration, Management and Staffing](#), [Area J: Education Agents](#), [Area L: ELT Professionals](#), [Area M: Transnational Delivery](#), [Area N: Foundation Programs](#).
- NEAS Australia and its member centres strive for best practice in operations and program delivery in international education and thereby support strategic and foreign policy objectives.

NEAS encourages DFAT and the regulators to continue its close working relationship and engagement with NEAS and NEAS members when developing and introducing legislation pertaining to international education. In particular, NEAS offers its quality assurance expertise and insights for online courses and offshore delivery, as well as the onboarding and training of English language teaching professionals.