



Australian  
National  
University

# Submission to the COVID-19 Response Inquiry

15 December 2023

The Australian National University (ANU) appreciates the opportunity to contribute its perspectives on the management of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic created an unprecedented set of circumstances requiring governments to address a wide array of public health, social policy and economic issues. We accept that decisions must be made based on input from

many sources and in the interests of all citizens, but have provided the perspective and experience of the University to help policymakers assess the overall pandemic response and contribute to future preparedness.

1. More than 30 ANU health experts were seconded to commonwealth, state and territory governments to advise on health and community safety measures. In addition, the ANU established the National COVID Health Response Advisory Committee (NCHRAC). The availability of this vital source of expertise demonstrates the value to the nation of universities and the importance of a sustainable research ecosystem. Without funding and independence to pursue new knowledge and discoveries, there would not be expertise to call on.
2. The application of border closures, lockdowns and other restrictions on liberty at jurisdictional level resulted in major inconsistencies across Australia. This had a major impact on ANU and its students, many of whom found themselves trapped either unable to return to Canberra to continue their studies or isolated in Canberra away from friends and family interstate. This imposed significant financial cost and emotional distress for many.
3. The decision not to enable universities to access JobKeeper exacerbated the financial effects from declining tuition fee income and on-campus commercial activity. At ANU more than 400 jobs (almost ten per cent of the total workforce) were lost when the university was forced to restructure its operations in 2020-21.
4. The decision not to provide any support to international students living in Australia, and instead direct them to return home, has damaged Australia's standing as a leading international education destination in key markets. The sector's attempts to diversify and become less reliant on China as a source of student fees has been set back as a generation of potential students has been forced to consider competitor destinations such as Canada and the UK.

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