

## **OPEN LETTER TO PARENTS AND FAMILIES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: APRIL 2020**

Dear parents and families,

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for all of us – disrupting how we work, how we study, and how we connect with each other socially. I wish to offer you information around what the University is currently doing to support your child or loved one who is currently studying with us.

Our international students are a vital and much-valued part of our Western Sydney University community. They contribute to our diverse, vibrant on-campus culture and significantly enrich the learning experience for all our students.

We want to assure you we are doing everything we can to support our international student community through this difficult time. We are encouraging our international students to stay connected with us at every stage of the journey, so we can help and respond quickly to their needs.

We are providing regular updates to students via their student email accounts and through the online learning system, vUWS.

There are a wide range of measures we have implemented for our international students, to help them to continue to enjoy a safe and rewarding experience at Western. Here are just some of the support services we have in place to help our international student community.

### **Student hardship fund**

We know that many students have suddenly found themselves in financial or accommodation distress, with no part-time work, and no access to any form of government financial assistance.

The University has established a student hardship fund to assist any of our students who find themselves in great financial distress because of the COVID-19 situation.

This financial support helps our onshore international students with basic living expenses and is primarily in the form of grocery vouchers for those who are eligible. There is also a capped pool of funds available for a limited number of hardship financial payments for students experiencing extreme financial hardship.

Our onshore international students can find out more information and submit an application for assistance via the **[Onshore International Students COVID-19 Financial Hardship Support Application webpage](#)**.

Senior staff across the University are contributing to the student hardship fund, donating up to 20 per cent of their salary to the fund for the next three months, and other staff from across the University will also have the opportunity to donate to the fund.

### **Other financial support**

In addition to the student hardship fund, we are also supporting our international students in the following ways:

- Students studying onshore who are having trouble paying their Session 1 tuition fees can request a payment plan.
- A 10% fee reduction is being applied to student records. Students will have the option of applying for this reduction as a refund if they require access to funds.

### **Western Success program**

The Western Success program is a new initiative we launched this year which provides support for our students throughout their time at Western. Each international student will be assigned an advisor who will regularly phone the student to provide support for them throughout the year.

### **Wellbeing support**

All Western students can access free and confidential counselling support. Students are encouraged to speak to someone about any stress or issues they are experiencing. Further information about the support available can be found on our [wellbeing webpage](#).

### **Emergency accommodation support**

We are also providing assistance for our international students with emergency accommodation, especially if students need to self-isolate. We will also do everything we can to find accommodation for those who cannot keep up rental payments.

### **Employment support**

For students who have suddenly lost work, the University can provide employment help, too. This includes helping students with identifying transferrable skills, upskilling through online resources and training, and proactively matching students to vacancies.

### **Online learning support**

The University has moved to full online delivery for the remainder of the Autumn, 1H, Term 1 and Quarter 2 teaching sessions. This includes practical classes and labs. Any units that cannot transition will be deferred. We are anticipating that the current situation will continue for some time yet, so we are working hard to consider transitioning the curriculum for online delivery for the second half of the year (Spring, 2H and Quarter 3). We are continuing to work hard to find new and innovative ways to keep our students engaged in their learning and also connected with their fellow students and the broader University community.

### **Changes to exams and assessments**

The COVID-19 situation and the transition to online learning means we have also adjusted our assessment and examination practices. These include:

- Fewer exams this session and many alternative assessments. A small number of exams that require fully online examination conditions will continue to run.

- Assessments will continue to be graded and, upon receipt of final results students can choose to have a final passing grade converted to a non-graded pass. This will not count for their grade point average.
- Students also have the opportunity to withdraw from units without academic penalty at any stage during the session.
- In the unlikely event that a student attempts all assessments and fails the unit, the fail grade will be recorded as a withdrawal and will not be included in their grade point average calculations.

Our dedicated Coronavirus Support Hotline provides assistance and advice, linking students to the support they need. To contact the Hotline phone +61 2 9852 5399, Monday to Friday from 8am to 5pm AEST, or email [coronavirussupport@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:coronavirussupport@westernsydney.edu.au)

Thank you for taking the time to read this update. We know this is a distressing time for many of our students, and being away from home and their social networks can't be easy, either. We know your ongoing support is greatly valued and contributes significantly to our students' wellbeing and success.

On behalf of the Western Sydney University community, I wish you all the best during this challenging time.

If you would like to learn more about how the University is responding to the Coronavirus pandemic, please stay in touch with our latest updates by visiting <https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/coronavirus-information.html>.

Kind regards,

Professor Barney Glover AO  
Vice-Chancellor and President