



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMY AND GENDER AND ECONOMIC EQUALITY
Ms Leanne Castley MLA (Chair), Ms Suzanne Orr MLA (Deputy Chair),
Mr Johnathan Davis MLA

Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2020-2021 ANSWER TO QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE 3 March 2022

Asked by LEANNE CASTLEY MLA on 3 MARCH 2022: ANDREW BARR MLA took on notice the following question(s):

[Ref: Hansard Proof Transcript 3 March 2022, Pages 111-112]

In relation to: International Student Support

THE CHAIR: I would like to ask about international student support. On page 119, I think it is table 35, it is revealed that \$225,000 was reallocated from the Study Canberra budget to support international students experiencing hardships during lockdown. How many students accessed those funds?

Mr Barr: We will get the exact number but the reason we had to do that was that those students were entirely abandoned by the Australian government.

THE CHAIR: But you will take on notice to get the numbers?

Mr Barr: What a way to welcome international students to our country!

THE CHAIR: Just within the ACT.

Mr Barr: It was just as well that the ACT and other state and territory governments provided support for those students.

THE CHAIR: What was the eligibility criteria, Chief Minister, for those students to access the support?

Mr Barr: Not being able to access any other support because the Australian government did not provide any.

THE CHAIR: Was it a one-off payment or was it a weekly payment to get them through that tough time?

Mr Barr: A combination of supports.

THE CHAIR: Can you talk me through what they were?

Mr Barr: Yes, including payments, including concessional access to particular ACT government supports and support that was provided by community service organisations, by the universities

themselves. We can give a full list of all the things that we did, because those students were abandoned by the Australian government.

ANDREW BARR MLA: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:—

1. How many students accessed the international student support funds?

522 international students accessed the funds over the course of the program with some of these students accessing multiple one-off payments.

2. What was the eligibility required to access this support?

To access this support, students needed to:

- a. Hold a student visa and be enrolled in a tertiary institution within the ACT;
- b. Demonstrate they were experiencing genuine financial hardship as a result of COVID-19 related restrictions and had sought assistance from the institution where the student was enrolled;
- c. Demonstrate they had an immediate need for financial assistance;
- d. Provide 30 days of statements for all bank accounts in their name; and
- e. Provide supporting documentation for the requested amount.

3. Was it a one-off payment or an ongoing payment?

Students were able to access multiple payments, provided they continued to meet the eligibility criteria.

4. Can you talk me through what they [full list of supports available] were?

Aside from the dedicated hardship support referred to above, international students were able to access a range of ACT Government community support programs. These included:

- Jobs for Canberrans - for people in the casual or semi-skilled workforce who lost their jobs or had been significantly impacted due to COVID-19, with those ineligible for Australian Government support (e.g. Jobkeeper, Jobseeker) prioritised.
- Community Support Package – a \$7 million package for vulnerable members of our community, including food relief and mental health.
- Rental support – the ACT Government made changes to help private tenants who had lost their job or had their income significantly reduced due to COVID-19, including a moratorium on evictions and rebates of Government fees and charges to enable landlords to reduce rent.

Study Canberra, in conjunction with the ANU and University of Canberra, also ran a summer connections program over the 2020-21 end of year break. This program was aimed at keeping students who had to remain in Canberra due to domestic and international border closures engaged with their institutions, other students and support mechanisms. There were 411 attendances across eight different programs.

Students were also directed to the various support programs available from their tertiary education institution (typically small grants, food vouchers, emergency loans and hardship scholarships) and the limited Federal Government support that was made available, such as

accessing superannuation and removing visa restrictions on working hours in certain sectors at certain times.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Economy and Gender Equality

Signature: 

Date: 19.3.22

By the Minister for Economic Development, Andrew Barr MLA