



ACT
Government

Chief Minister, Treasury and
Economic Development

Freedom of Information Publication Coversheet

The following information is provided pursuant to section 28 of the *Freedom of Information Act 2016*.

FOI Reference: CMTEDDFOI 2021-167

Information to be published	Status
1. Access application	Published
2. Decision notice	Published
3. Documents and schedule	Published
4. Additional information identified	No
5. Fees	Waived
6. Processing time (in working days)	12
7. Decision made by Ombudsman	N/A
8. Additional information identified by Ombudsman	N/A
9. Decision made by ACAT	N/A
10. Additional information identified by ACAT	N/A

From: [REDACTED]
To: [CMTEDD FOI](#)
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: CMTEDDFOI2021-167 - FOI REQUEST – QTBS FOR RETURN OF INT. STUDENTS TO CANBERRA
Date: Friday, 9 July 2021 6:00:27 PM

Good evening,

RE: FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST – QTBS FOR RETURN OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TO CANBERRA

I write to request under the *Freedom of Information Act 2016* final Question Time Briefs for the Return of International Students to Canberra.

This request includes each version of the QTBS for December 2020 and February, March, May and June 2021.

Should you require any further information or clarification about my request, please contact my office on [REDACTED]

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]



ACT
Government

Chief Minister, Treasury and
Economic Development

Our ref: CMTEDDFOI 2021-167



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST

I refer to your application under section 30 of the *Freedom of Information Act 2016* (the Act), received by the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate (CMTEDD) on 9 July 2021, in which you sought access to:

“Final Question Time Briefs for the Return of International Students to Canberra. This request includes each version of the QTBs for December 2020 and February, March, May and June 2021”.

Authority

I am an Information Officer appointed by the Director-General under section 18 of the Act to deal with access applications made under Part 5 of the Act.

Timeframes

In accordance with section 40 of the Act, CMTEDD is required to provide a decision on your access application by 6 August 2021.

Decision on access

Searches were completed for relevant documents and two documents were identified that fall within the scope of your request.

I have included as **Attachment A** to this decision the schedule of relevant documents. This provides a description of each document that falls within the scope of your request and the access decision for each of those documents.

I have decided to grant access in full to six documents relevant to your request. The documents released to you are provided in Attachment B to this letter.

Charges

Processing charges are not applicable for this request because the number of pages to be released to you is below the charging threshold of 50 pages.

Online publishing – Disclosure Log

Under section 28 of the Act, CMTEDD maintains an online record of access applications called a disclosure log. Your original access application, my decision and documents

released to you in response to your access application will be published in the CMTEDD disclosure log after between 3-10 days of the decision. Your personal contact details will not be published.

You may view CMTEDD disclosure log at <https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/functions/foi>

Ombudsman Review

My decision on your access request is a reviewable decision as identified in Schedule 3 of the Act. You have the right to seek Ombudsman review of this outcome under section 73 of the Act within 20 working days from the day that my decision is published in CMTEDD disclosure log, or a longer period allowed by the Ombudsman.

We recommend using this form [Applying for an Ombudsman Review](#) to ensure you provide all of the required information. Alternatively, you may write to the Ombudsman at:

The ACT Ombudsman
GPO Box 442
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Via email: actfoi@ombudsman.gov.au

ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal (ACAT) Review

Under section 84 of the Act, if a decision is made under section 82(1) on an Ombudsman review, you may apply to the ACAT for review of the Ombudsman decision. Further information may be obtained from the ACAT at:

ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal
Level 4, 1 Moore St
GPO Box 370
Canberra City ACT 2601
Telephone: (02) 6207 1740
<http://www.acat.act.gov.au/>

Should you have any queries in relation to your request please contact me by telephone on 6207 7754 or email CMTEDDFOI@act.gov.au.

Yours sincerely,



Daniel Riley
Information Officer
Information Access Team
Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

23 July 2021



ACT
Government

Chief Minister, Treasury and
Economic Development

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST SCHEDULE

WHAT ARE THE PARAMETERS OF THE REQUEST	Reference NO.
Return of International Students to ACT – Each version of QTB's from Dec 2020 to June 2021	CMTEDDFOI 2021-167

Ref No	Page number	Description	Date	Status	Reason for Exemption	Online Release Status
1	1	QTB December 2020		Full Release	N/A	Yes
2	2	QTB February 2021		Full Release	N/A	Yes
3	3-4	QTB March 2021		Full Release	N/A	Yes
4	5-6	QTB May 2021		Full Release	N/A	Yes
5	7-8	QTB June 2021		Full Release	N/A	Yes
6	9-10	QTB June 2021		Full Release	N/A	Yes
Total No of Docs						
6						

Return of International Students to Canberra

Talking points:

- The ACT Government remains committed to the return of international students when it is safe to do so; however, the priority at present is supporting the return of Australian residents.
- Canberra based universities are estimating there are a maximum 5,300 international students offshore seeking to return or commence studies in Canberra in 2021.
- The Australian National University and the University of Canberra have developed a proposal for the return of international students.
- The ACT Government is working closely with the Australian Government in order to ensure that the proposal is consistent with the national protocols and preconditions.
- The pace at which students could return will be contingent on the success of the initial pilots, lessons learned from the pilot flights, and the overall COVID-19 situation both at home and abroad.

Key Information

- Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, international education was Canberra's largest export, valued at \$1 billion by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- The ACT's Student Return Plan is currently being developed by ANU and UC.
- If the ACT's Student Return Plan is agreed by the ACT Government and the Australian Government, returns will begin with pilot flights to test the overall reliability of the arrangements. The pilot flights will be evaluated and if appropriate, could gradually give way to the broader return of international students.

Background Information

- The federal Minister for Education, Dan Tehan, wrote to states and territories on 6 November 2020 to provide the Commonwealth Government with plans for the return of international students by 30 November 2020.
- However, on 13 November 2020, the Prime Minister indicated that only student pilots would be permitted to proceed while the Government prioritised the return of Australian citizens and permanent residents. This announcement has created some uncertainty in the sector and we continue to work with the Australian Government to address this confusion.

Return of International Students to Canberra

Talking points:

- The ACT Government remains committed to the return of international students when it is safe to do so.
- Canberra based universities are estimating there are a maximum 5,300 international students offshore seeking to return or commence studies in Canberra in 2021.
- Many students are continuing their enrolment and remaining engaged with their studies online, until they are able to return in person.
- The Australian National University and the University of Canberra are developing a proposal for the return of international students.
- The ACT Government is working closely with the Australian Government in order to ensure that any proposal is consistent with the agreed protocols and the national objectives to return Australians from overseas.

Key Information

- Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, international education was Canberra's largest export, valued at \$1 billion by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- The ACT's Student Return Plan is currently being developed by ANU and UC.
- If the ACT's Student Return Plan is agreed by the ACT Government and the Australian Government, returns will begin with pilot flights to test the overall reliability of the arrangements. The pilot flights will be evaluated and if appropriate, could gradually give way to the broader return of international students.

Background Information

- Then federal Minister for Education, Dan Tehan, wrote to states and territories on 6 November 2020 to provide the Commonwealth Government with plans for the return of international students by 30 November 2020.
- However, on 13 November 2020, the Prime Minister indicated that only student pilots would be permitted to proceed, while the Government prioritised the return of Australian citizens and permanent residents.
- You wrote to the Prime Minister on 9 December 2020 proposing a pathway that would allow for the return of international students alongside the return of Australian residents. The Prime Minister replied your letter later that month advising that returning Australians remain the priority with international student returns scheduled for discussion at National Cabinet in February 2021.

Return of International Students to Canberra

Talking points:

- The ACT Government remains committed to the return of international students when it is safe to do so.
- Canberra based universities are estimating there are a maximum 5,300 international students offshore seeking to return or commence studies in Canberra in 2021.
- Many students are continuing their enrolment and remaining engaged with their studies online, until they are able to return in person. Applications and acceptance numbers over the summer period were reported slightly higher than previous years.
- The Australian National University and the University of Canberra are developing a proposal for the return of international students.
- The ACT Government is working closely with the Australian Government in order to ensure that any proposal is consistent with the agreed protocols and the national objectives to return Australians from overseas.

Key Information

- Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, international education was Canberra's largest export, valued at \$1 billion by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 2019.
- The ACT's Student Return Plan is currently being developed by ANU and UC.
- If the ACT's Student Return Plan is agreed by the ACT Government and the Australian Government, returns will begin with pilot flights to test the overall reliability of the arrangements. The pilot flights will be evaluated and if appropriate, could gradually give way to the broader return of international students.

Background Information

- Then federal Minister for Education, Dan Tehan, wrote to states and territories on 6 November 2020 to provide the Commonwealth Government with plans for the return of international students by 30 November 2020.
- However, on 13 November 2020, the Prime Minister indicated that only student pilots would be permitted to proceed, while the Government prioritised the return of Australian citizens and permanent residents.
- You wrote to the Prime Minister on 9 December 2020 proposing a pathway that would allow for the return of international students alongside the return of Australian residents. The Prime Minister replied to your letter later that month advising that returning Australians remains the priority, with international student

returns scheduled for discussion at National Cabinet in February 2021. This has not been listed on the agenda for National Cabinet to date.

- Federal Education Minister Tudge has also indicated in recent media that the vaccines will be an important factor and consideration in return efforts.

Portfolio/s: Economic Development

Return of International Students to Canberra

Talking points:

- The ACT Government recognises the social and economic value of international education to the ACT, and it remains committed to the return of international students when it is safe to do so.
- The ACT Government has been providing financial relief during the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is providing payroll tax deferrals and program funding to save and create new jobs in the education and research sectors.
- The ACT Government has been working with the universities and Australian Government to facilitate the safe return of international students for many months. The ACT Government was prepared to accept returns of international students as early as June 2020.
- The ACT Government has also endeavoured to work with the sector, accommodation providers, and the Commonwealth to host repatriations alongside international student returns.
- The Chief Minister wrote to the Hon Alan Tudge, Minister for Education and Youth on 22 March 2021 with a proposal that would see the continued repatriation of Australian citizens and also allow for the return of international students. The ACT is yet to hear back from Minister Tudge on this matter.
- To date, the Australian Government has not supported the ACT Government's proposals.
- The Prime Minister has asked for further work to be done on quarantine arrangements and reopening Australia following the vaccine rollout, and the ACT Government is contributing to these conversations.
- Planning and preparation for the eventual return of international students continues to progress and the ACT will continue to work to seek a pathway that will be supported by the Australian Government.

Key Information

- Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, international education was Canberra's largest export, valued at \$1 billion by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 2019.
- The Australian National University (ANU) and University of Canberra (UC) have worked closely with the ACT Government to develop international student return strategies since late-May 2020.
- As of 27 April 2021, the ACT has repatriated a total of 936 Australian citizens and permanent residents and facilitated 1,852 diplomats and government officials in a combination of home and hotel quarantine.

Background Information

- You wrote to the Prime Minister on 9 December 2020 proposing a pathway that would allow for the return of international students alongside the return of Australian residents. The Prime Minister replied to your letter later that month advising that returning Australians remains the priority.
- On 9 April, the Prime Minister announced that National Cabinet has asked for further work to be done involving Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) on quarantine arrangements and reopening Australia following the vaccine rollout to the most vulnerable Australians (phase 1A and 1B).

Portfolio/s: Economic Development

Return of International Students to Canberra

Talking points:

- The ACT Government recognises the social and economic value of international education to the ACT, and it remains committed to the return of international students when it is safe to do so.
- The ACT Government has been working with ACT based universities and the Australian Government to facilitate the safe return of international students for many months. The ACT Government was prepared to accept returns of international students as early as June 2020.
- The plan announced by the NSW Government on 10 June 2021 is a significant achievement and an important step to safely return international students across all Australian jurisdictions. ACT officials are in regular contact with NSW officials and will continue to be in the coming weeks to ensure shared learnings from this pilot.
- We are also encouraged by the Commonwealth's recent endorsement of South Australia's quarantine plan for international students, and we look forward to any learnings from this program.
- The Hon Alan Tudge, Minister for Education and Youth has also written to me welcoming the ACT's efforts in planning for the return of international students to the Territory and acknowledging plans to return students to the ACT as part of the New South Wales International Student Arrival Plan.
- There are currently 32 Government officials undertaking quarantine on campus at ANU in Davey Lodge. This is due to the lack of any single hotel provider in the ACT being able to meet both national hotel quarantine criteria and the capacity required.
- While this does not alone set a precedent for the return of international students, we will assess the outcomes of this arrangement to inform any future considerations on the return of international students.
- At this time the best way for the universities to facilitate the return of international students is to enter into a commercial arrangement with a hotel provider that meets the required standards, and seek approval from the Commonwealth.

Key Information

- On 9 June 2021 you were briefed in regard to the Prime Minister and his accompanying delegation, returning to the ACT following an official visit to the United Kingdom and France for G7 and other meetings.
 - On 10 June 2021 representatives from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C), ACT Health, the Australian National University (ANU),

the University of Canberra (UC) and Economic Development attended a walkthrough at Davey Lodge at ANU to assess its suitability to quarantine returning VIPs.

- There are currently 32 Government officials from PMC&C, the Prime Minister's Office, the Australian Federal Police, Defence and the media undertaking quarantine in Davey Lodge. PMC is working directly with the ACT Government and ANU officials to facilitate the required arrangements.
- Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, international education was Canberra's largest export, valued at \$1 billion by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 2019.
- The Australian National University (ANU) and the University of Canberra (UC) have worked closely with the ACT Government to develop international student return strategies since late-May 2020.
- As of 27 April 2021, the ACT had repatriated a total of 936 Australian citizens and permanent residents and facilitated 1,852 diplomats and government officials in a combination of home and hotel quarantine.

Background Information

- You wrote to the Prime Minister on 9 December 2020, proposing a pathway that would allow for the return of international students alongside the return of Australian residents. The Prime Minister replied to your letter later that month advising that returning Australians remains the priority.
- On 9 April 2021, the Prime Minister announced that National Cabinet had asked for further work to be done by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) on the implications for quarantine arrangements and reopening Australia following the vaccine rollout to the most vulnerable Australians (phase 1A and 1B).
- Discussions at Senior Official level are ongoing with the Australian Government to understand how the ACT's proposal for international student returns might be progressed. Any opportunity for the ANU's proposal to use existing student accommodation for quarantine, will be considered in this context.
- Davey Lodge at ANU, operated by UniLodge, was selected by the Commonwealth as the quarantine facility to accommodate 19 members of the G7 delegation who could not quarantine at home. This was due to the lack of any single hotel provider in the ACT being able to meet both national hotel quarantine criteria and the capacity required. While multiple hotels could have been used, health officials were concerned about the risks such an arrangement could have posed to community safety.
- On 18 June 2021, the Commonwealth approved a plan submitted by South Australia in May to quarantine up to 160 international students at a time in existing, non-hotel accommodation at Parafield Airport in Adelaide's north.

Portfolio/s: Economic Development

Return of International Students to Canberra

Talking points:

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- The Chief Minister wrote to the Hon Alan Tudge, Minister for Education and Youth on 22 March 2021 with a proposal that would see the continued repatriation of Australian citizens and also allow for the return of international students. The ACT is yet to hear back from Minister Tudge on this matter.
- Planning and preparation for the eventual return of international students continues to progress and the ACT is continuing to work with all stakeholders to seek a pathway that will be supported by the Australian Government.

Key Information

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