30th April 2020

Dear Professor Brigid Heywood,

At this terribly challenging time, we understand that your role as the Vice Chancellor of the University of New England must be highly demanding. However, we ask that you consider a particular cohort of your students who are at particular risk during the COVID19 crisis. We ask you to authorise particular actions to help lessen the risk that they will be unable to remain enrolled in their courses, or face destitution.

Refugee and asylum seeker background students (students on Temporary Protection Visas, Safe Haven Enterprise Visas or Bridging Visas) who are subject to the current government’s harsh asylum seeker policies are unable to access any Centrelink support. This has been the case for several years and remains so, despite the current crisis. They are also largely in casual work, as the only means of supporting themselves through their studies, and losing these casual roles in the current economic crisis leaves them with no means of support. This, in turn, puts pressure on them to remain circulating in the community as the only mean of survival, and puts them at extreme risk of homelessness.

There are several steps we are calling on universities to take. These include to:

1. **Allow all humanitarian/asylum-seeker scholarship holders to study part time or to suspend their studies without penalty or loss of their scholarship place**. For those on Temporary Protection Visas, or Safe Haven Enterprise Visas, this will allow them to apply for Special Payment, which they are denied if enrolled in any course of longer than 12 months duration.
2. Authorise equity/student support staff to **provide free student accommodation to any who are facing homelessness.**
3. Authorise scholarship staff to **release all monies set aside for scholarship holders** to be accessed by them now, to help them through the current crisis.
4. Allow asylum-seeker/refugee scholarship students to access special grants to help them set up for online learning in their home environment, including funds to pay for a home wifi plan, or sufficient data allowances on their mobile plans to be able to study online.

While we are aware of the pressure being placed on all university resources, we believe that this particularly vulnerable cohort of students are due particular consideration by their universities, sitting as they do, outside of all other safety nets being provided at this time, and having been impacted profoundly over the past seven years, by exclusionary and harsh policies. We are also aware of the generous and considerable investment that a wide range of donors across the country have made in these very students, and believe the above measures are necessary to safeguard this investment in the future of these young people and our community’s social cohesion.

In solidarity in these difficult times,

[Refugee Interest Special Interest Group Steering Committee](http://refugee-education.org)

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