

## Federation wins special considerations for IEC staff and students



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The COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect our lives, testing us like nothing ever before. The challenge of living in a crisis, with the associated stress of lockdowns and social restrictions, disproportionately affects those who are most disadvantaged in our community, including families from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

Federation has put the needs of our Intensive English Centre (IEC) students and teachers at the forefront of our representations to the Department of Education, since the start of this crisis. This began with the racism that surfaced at the beginning of the pandemic, and has continued on as a priority ever since.

In the ever-changing environment the COVID-19 response has created for schools, the transformation of education provision, from face-to-face delivery to remote learning platforms, was a demanding task.

Federation recognised the additional difficulty in providing remote learning to many of our newly arrived students, as intensive English lessons are challenging to provide outside the face-to-face model. Without the support of expert teacher-modelled and guided lessons, along with the support of bilingual aides and other specialist teachers, our IEC students' language acquisition is at risk of becoming seriously affected in some settings.

While we know this group of young people is resilient and resourceful, many of our IEC students are at a heightened risk of disengagement and disconnect from school. For some, this disruption to learning may mean that they will not develop or acquire their English language skills at the rate usually expected.

For others, the transition from an IEC into a mainstream high school — critical to their ongoing success — will not be possible at this time. Trauma-affected students, and those with visa classifications that preclude them from welfare support and adequate medical care, have the potential to experience further exacerbation of their hardships; another factor that will negatively affect their academic achievement and language acquisition.

With the world's borders closed, resulting in the ban on travel for international students, migrants and asylum seekers, IECs are now further affected by the increased uncertainty of enrolment numbers.



This incredibly complex and unique context set the scene for Federation action before the end of term 1. Strong union representation was made to the Department, backed by the professional expertise of Federation Representatives and IEC leaders, who are best placed to assess the learning and transitional needs of their students.

This action resulted in Federation securing a hold on current IEC staffing levels, extensions of time in IEC settings for students and a continuity of support for students and their families.

The resolution achieved by Federation was communicated to all IECs and their host-school principals, and was for the duration of term 2.

Further to these commitments for term 2, Federation has also secured the guarantee that by the end of term 2, assessments of student learning needs are to be conducted to ascertain the requirement for possible further extensions of time in their intensive English setting, along with additional support before exiting.

With the Federal Government alluding to Australia's borders being closed for the year, at a minimum, and with reductions in future immigration numbers inevitable, further representations to the Department have continued with a focus on securing IECs across the state as specialist regional provisions.

The protection of students and teachers in our IECs will ensure the ongoing provision of Intensive English Programs for eligible students, when the world's borders re-open and newly arrived students return to access the support required for their settlement and education needs in public education.

A Federation meeting with the leaders of our IECS has been convened, as a first step in addressing these emerging issues. The specialist provision of IECs is at the heart of Federation's social justice principles.

Access and equity, as well as social inclusion and cohesion, will always be at the forefront of what we do.