

CORONAVIRUS — INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

745. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Premier:

I refer to reports that the state government met with vice-chancellors of Western Australian universities yesterday to discuss welcoming back international students in 2022.

- (1) Does the Premier concede that his failure to communicate with universities earlier and release a plan for reopening has seriously jeopardised our chances of getting the 5 000-plus international students back on campus in semester 1?
- (2) How are universities supposed to start planning properly without a date set for the reopening of our border?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

- (1)–(2) It is true that the Minister for Tourism, the Minister for Education and Training and other ministers have been holding round tables, as I said that we would do a few weeks ago, with important industries around the state with a view to working out exactly how we transition back to having open borders with New South Wales, Victoria and internationally. Yesterday afternoon, the Minister for Education and Training had a round table with a range of education providers in the Aboriginal People’s Room upstairs and I went and visited. What I said to them was that we announced our safe transition plan last week and that the border with New South Wales, Victoria and internationally will open at some point in late January or early February, which we will define in early December and, therefore, they can plan for having students back for the first semester. Just so that members know, universities and TAFEs take in their students, and university starts in late February, so, obviously, if borders open in late January or early February, there will be plenty of time for them to get students in and to plan for that now. I would have thought that was a statement of common sense and, frankly, the bleeding obvious that that is possible. But I went and met with them and told them that we wanted to work with them to encourage the return of international students into Western Australia. Obviously, the universities and some of the private colleges have had a difficult time and we want to make sure that we get back on our feet as quickly as possible.

One thing I said to them, which they all wholeheartedly agreed with, is that when we are trying to sell an education system and courses to students and parents around the world, what better selling point do we have than this has been the safest place in the world for the last two years. If my children were going overseas to study and I was looking at where they could go, would I not say, “Western Australia is a magnificently safe place with fantastic health outcomes”? When we look at other comparable countries and states around the world, they have had nothing similar to us. So it is a great opportunity for Western Australia to springboard out of the COVID pandemic and ensure that we get great outcomes for both our higher education and also our tourism and other providers.