



Bulletin – Tertiary Students (Domestic)

14th April, 2020

COVID-19 Update: Ensuring continuity and adequacy of student support

Education Minister Chris Hipkins today announced a support package to financially assist tertiary students whose study has been affected by Covid-19.

“The Government wants to give certainty to students as soon as possible so that they can continue to be engaged in their education and will be supported adequately until such time that tertiary education providers can put in place alternative ways of delivering teaching and learning. This short-term tertiary domestic package will be available from Wednesday 15 April,” Chris Hipkins said.

“Key measures include:

- helping to cover extra costs by increasing student loan course-related costs from \$1,000 to \$2,000 on a temporary basis
- continuing support payments for students unable to study on-line for up to 8 weeks to allow providers sufficient time to make alternative arrangements to enable distance learning
- technical changes to ensure study being discontinued in 2020 as a result of Covid-19 does not affect student loan life-time limits and students’ Fees Free entitlement.

These measures, together with the support the Ministry of Social Development can already give, aim to provide an immediate response to the financial impact Covid-19 is having on tertiary students.

More information is available at <http://education.govt.nz/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-3/> and <https://www.studylink.govt.nz/>.



About the package:

- **Who does this package apply to?**

It applies to all fulltime domestic students studying at university, polytechs, or private training establishments this year whether they are enrolled already or planning to enrol.

- **Why are these changes needed?**

These changes are to ensure income **continuity and adequacy for tertiary domestic students** during the Covid-19 outbreak. Many students' incomes have been impacted because they have not been able to continue part-time work. Others have had to move from cities during the lockdown. Some are facing additional costs to connect to the digital technologies they need to continue studying their programmes in different ways.

- **What do students have to do to apply for support?**

Information regarding how to apply for support will be available from StudyLink (MSD), the Ministry of Education and your provider.

- **Why is the extended study break only for eight weeks?**

It has been extended from a period of 3 weeks to 8 weeks, because students' study has been interrupted while providers reorganise their courses. At this stage, we expect all students to be continuing their studies within 8 weeks.

- **Do students have to extend their allowance or loan?**

No, StudyLink will advise all affected students about the continuation of their student loan payments and provide students with an option to 'opt-out' if they do not wish to continue drawing on their student loans.

- **Do these supports apply to students who have withdrawn recently?**

We have been advising students to stay enrolled so that they can access assistance packages such as this. If students have already withdrawn before 14th April, this package won't be available to them. But, for students who were receiving Fees Free this year, their study so far will not affect their eligibility for their Fees Free entitlement in the future.

- **Does this package include support for additional costs for studying remotely?**

Officials are still exploring some of the challenges that students are facing accessing study remotely. The additional \$1,000 is to spend on course costs to support learning at home, for example on internet costs and increased energy consumption.

- **What if my parent's income has reduced because of COVID-19?**

StudyLink (MSD) has flexibility to reassess the support available to you based on your parent's expected income. If your parent's income has decreased because of COVID-19, then you may be able to access more financial support through StudyLink. You can find out more here [StudyLink hyperlink].

- **What additional support is available for students' mental health needs?**

Students can access mental health support services through their providers. The way these services are delivered may have changed, for example interviews may now be online or by phone. Students should talk to their providers regarding how to access these services.

There is a range of other support available to New Zealanders. This includes online resources like the: [Low Down, Mental Health Foundation](#) and [Ministry of Health's website](#).

- **Does this package apply to international students?**

International students cannot access direct financial assistance in the same way as domestic students. In usual circumstances, international students are required to have supports in place during their study. Government is concerned to make sure that international students have access to the essential services that can provide for their basic needs so international students can use

- **COVID-19 Wage Subsidy Scheme:** available to temporary work visa holders whose full-time or part-time employment has been affected by COVID-19 (although this will have limited effect for international students)
- **Temporary Accommodation Service:** suitable for foreign nationals in need of temporary accommodation during the lockdown period or until assisted departure options become available (most likely tourists and working holiday makers but could include some international students).
- **Civil Defence Emergency Management support:** welfare assistance to foreign nationals (including accommodation support, transportation and essential goods and services) provided by community and NGO providers, paid for by local authorities and reimbursed under the Guide to the National Civil Defence Emergency Management Plan 2015.
- **Community Response Package:** funding to boost community/NGO provision of emergency support to people impacted by and in vulnerable situations due to COVID-19; (however, the majority of this funding bolsters NGO services unlikely to meet foreign nationals' needs (e.g. family violence, disability support services) but may have some impact for international students).

- **COVID-19 related healthcare:** available free-of-charge for anyone in New Zealand, regardless of their visa status.

International students can also speak to their provider and to their embassy as they may be able to offer support too.

- **Did Government consider the request in the NZUSA Action Plan for a universal benefit?**

Government considered a range of requests and advice before announcing this package. At this stage, we wanted to move quickly on providing relief so decided it was better to use existing mechanisms such as course related costs, and student loans and allowances, rather than wait till a new process, which could take some time, was set up. Another reason we preferred not to explore a universal benefit is because different students will be needing help with different things. Some may choose to access an increase to their cost related costs, others to extend their student loans.

- **How soon can students expect to see the course-related costs in their bank accounts?**

Government is moving quickly on this and wants this processed promptly. Information about how to access the supports announced today, and when the payment will be processed, will be available from [Studylink](#), or talk to your provider.

- **If the lockdown is extended, are you planning on boosting student allowances?**

These are unprecedented times and it's not clear how long the impact of COVID 19 will be with us. One of our main concerns is to keep students in study as soon as we could. This package gives assistance that students can access now when many have different costs they need to meet so they can learn from home, and while providers make plans for how they will deliver programmes over the next few months.

- **Will I receive a refund for my stay at the halls of residence?**

Students in halls of residence have signed contracts with their provider. As these contracts differ between providers, it's best to check your contract and then talk to your provider about what arrangements might be available to help you.

- **Is the government planning on releasing any information outlining employment rights' information for tertiary students?**

Government is working to make sure that any entitlements and allowances – for study, for hardship, for employment – are transparent and readily available. MBIE is updating information on what support is available for employees and this is likely to cover information relevant to students who are studying part-time.

- **Will there be any extra support for students who have lost their part-time jobs?**

This package is designed to keep you in study now. Further work is continuing to find out what options may help priority groups of learners but this is in its early stages.

Things change quickly so stay up to date by following the links below:

For answers to questions about Student Allowance and Living Cost payments refer to StudyLink's website <https://www.studylink.govt.nz/>.

For health advice, refer to the Ministry of Health's website <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus>

For official Government information about COVID-19 (novel coronavirus), including health advice and travel restrictions visit <https://www.govt.nz/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/>

For more advice for students, visit the Ministry of Education website <http://www.education.govt.nz/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-3/>