

STUDYLINK NEWS

A resource for education providers and student associations

OCTOBER 2013

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Kia Ora Tatou

Over the past few months we have been preparing for our 'peak season', when we receive the majority of student applications.

This means welcoming and training a large number of new staff to assist with the increased volumes of applications and making improvements to services.

We have really valued the feedback you have provided on what students find challenging about applying for their student support.

Coupled with some research recently undertaken directly with students, we have some solid evidence to support where we can make enhancements.

Changes like personalised text messaging to students, enabling students to track documents received via MyStudyLink and simplifying parental evidence requirements are already in place.

We are using all of the feedback to make improvements to our online services and will progressively roll out changes.

We want to make it easy for people to find and do what they need online and reduce the large volume of calls that we get through peak season.

Also underway are changes to support the delivery of new Student Support policy announced in the 2013 Budget. A flyer outlining these changes for students has been created and is now available for you to request, and on our website www.studylink.govt.nz.

It's important to raise awareness of these changes so students who are impacted can make informed choices about their study plans for the next year and ahead.



Soon we will be reminding students to apply for their financial help for next year's study.

This year you'll notice some changes to our messaging. To ensure we get

as many applications as possible in early, we're promoting 16 December as the date for students to have their 2014 applications in by. This date is after results dates for the majority of returning students and will put us in the best position to help students get their application sorted in time.

Your support to help students do this will make a big difference during such a busy time of the year.

Thank you for your feedback and continued commitment to working with us to provide better services for students.

Nga mihi nui

Best wishes,



Susan Kosmala
General Manager

HELPLINE NEWS

VOS ONLINE CHALLENGE QUESTION

Did you know that you can reset your own password on VoS Online? All you need to do is set up a challenge question.

The Helpline team assisted with nearly 400 VoS Online password reset requests between May 2012 and May 2013. Currently, only around 10% of VoS Online users have a challenge question set up.

We urge all VoS Online users to set up a challenge question and use it should they forget their password. This will help free up the Helpline staff to respond to your other queries.

To set up a challenge question, simply log into the VoS Online site and go to the 'Change Details' page.

STUDYLINK OUTREACH SITES

StudyLink Outreach sites operate on an 'appointment only' basis.

If you identify that one of your students is in extreme financial hardship, please refer them to their nearest Outreach office or Work and Income Centre.

The StudyLink website has a list of the Outreach sites and the hours that they are open. You can find this page at:

<http://www.studylink.govt.nz/about-studylink/contact-us/locations.html>

Gearing up for peak



The busiest time of the year is almost upon us. In preparation, we've done a lot of work with students to understand what will encourage them to get their applications in early, which is important to ensure we have sufficient time to complete their application with them before they start study.

This year's communication activity responds to their feedback.

The date

Students told us that we need to give them a date to apply by to gear them into action. Our campaign this year will focus on getting students to apply by 16 December 2013.

This date is after results dates for the majority of returning students so there are no barriers to applying. It is not a closing date, but by applying by 16 December students put us in the best position to help them get their application sorted in time.

Generally it takes 3 to 4 weeks to finalise a Student Allowance or Loan application. However, some complex applications can take twice as long if other information, such as parental income, is required.

New students, and those who haven't yet used 1.6 EFTS of Student Loan, should start applying now.

How providers can help

The thing students told us was most likely to encourage them to act was support from their education provider.

There are lots of ways you can help support our call to action. Please

- ensure the information on your website is up-to-date and encourages students to apply by 16 December 2013
- check that all links to StudyLink are up-to-date and working correctly
- contact us for web tiles or banners to place on your site – we are happy to get these sized to your requirements

- make sure all your communications material clearly explains that students can apply now even if they haven't decided what they'll be studying or don't have all their supporting documentation together yet.

The campaign

You'll see our online advertising on Facebook, Trade Me, TV3 On Demand and YouTube, as well as hard copy posters and floor decals on campus.

Students also told us that, following information from their education provider, the next best ways to get them to act are lots of reminders by email, text and phone.

Returning students make up 73% of applications each year, so to support the campaign we'll be sending regular email reminders to those that still haven't applied for 2014, increasing in urgency as we near the 16 December date.

Online survival guide

To reduce pressure on our 0800 number we need to continue to actively encourage students to self-serve online wherever possible.

When students apply they receive a confirmation email that includes our Seven steps to student finance explaining the application process. This year, we'll also be running an additional email campaign to reinforce this, explaining what they can do online and why certain parts of the process take time.

For more information, or to request tiles for your website, please contact us at studylink_communications@msd.govt.nz

Budget 2013 update

STATUS REPORT UPDATES

Due to the changes, some updates have been made to your status report that will be effective 30 September 2013.

A new state – 3YRPR has been added which is similar to the existing 2YRPR but includes the new 3 year residency requirements.

This state will be automatically added to your status report. If you would like the new state removed please contact us on 0508 885 885 to request this.

A new context FFYG has been added to the decline reasons:

- DECLB (Decline before VoS cycle started)
- DECLV (Decline after confirmed VoS cycle)
- DECLP (Decline after first payment)

FFYG will generate when a student is under 18 years of age and is studying a fees-free or Youth Guarantee course.

New state = 3YRPR

Description = (For study from 1 Jan 2014 on) the student has not yet held Permanent Residency for three years. We'll reassess their application once they do.

New Context = FFYG

Description = Indicate whether they are studying a Fees Free or Youth Guarantee course.

We are well underway with changes required to implement the changes to Student Support which were announced in the 2013 Budget. To recap, these changes were:

- a reduced Student Allowance limit for students aged 40 or over
- removal of Student Allowances for students aged 65 or over
- extension of Student Allowance and Student Loan residency requirements
- students under 18 studying fees-free level 1 or 2 programmes will not be able to receive a Student Loan.

These changes will come into effect from 1 January 2014.

A flyer has been developed which outlines these changes and how they affect students. If you would like copies of these flyers please call the Helpline **0508 885 885** or email studylink_helpline@msd.govt.nz.

You can also view it online at www.studylink.govt.nz/about-studylink/forms-and-brochures under 'Brochures'.



Changes to our forms

New Student Allowance entitlement limit form

Currently we have separate extension forms for the Student Allowance life-time limits of 92 weeks for secondary school study and 200 weeks for tertiary study.

With the introduction of the reduced 120-week limit for students aged 40 years or over on the date they start study (for study starting on or after 1 January 2014), we are developing a new Student Allowance extension form which will incorporate all entitlement limits for Student Allowance.

If students meet the relevant criteria for an extension to any of the entitlement limits, they will fill out this form. The new Student Allowance entitlement limit extension form is expected to be in production from the beginning of October.

Change to Masters/Unpaid practical work extension form

We are making a change to this form to clarify who at the student's education provider needs to fill out the statement at the back, on page five.

We currently ask for it to be completed by the student's Unpaid Practical Work Coordinator or, if the student is applying for a Masters or Doctorate extension, their Head of Department.

We will now be asking for this to be completed by an authorised staff member at the student's education provider's enrolment office. This ensures that we are getting the information from a staff member who can verify the student's enrolment details and send through an updated Verification of Study if required.

Passport renewal information

From 7 October, the Department of Internal Affairs will start sharing with Inland Revenue the contact details from adult passport applications and renewals. These will be matched against Inland Revenue's database of overseas-based student loan defaulters and child support

liable parents who are in arrears or have out-dated contact details, so that Inland Revenue can contact them to discuss their accounts or arrange repayment of arrears.

Foundation Focused Training Opportunities (FFTO) & Youth Guarantee changes

Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment Minister Steven Joyce recently announced all foundation education would be fees-free for under-25s from next year.

The move is aimed at those youths who do not gain a level 1 or 2 qualification, such as NCEA, at high school.

Mr Joyce said anyone under 25 would now be able to obtain a level 2 qualification fees-free, whether that was at a secondary school, in a youth guarantee programme, or at a tertiary provider such as a private training establishment.

FFTO

The Government-funded foundation focused training opportunities programme will be replaced with different courses from 1 January 2014. Courses will be focused on getting beneficiaries into work, such as shorter

duration training providing industry skills or other employment or training programmes.

The number of places at these types of programmes will rise by around 2,000 to 4,000 per year.

Funding will increase for English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programmes with an additional 1,420 places in these programmes in 2014/15. There will also be an increase for intensive literacy and numeracy courses creating an additional 1,350 places in 2014/15.

Foundation courses will be fees-free for 20-24 years from 1 January 2014.

Youth Guarantee

The government established the Youth Guarantee scheme in 2008 for students who find the traditional classroom environment challenging and are at risk of dropping out of school.

It provides fees-free Level 1 and 2 qualifications at tertiary institutions and at trades and services academies, encouraging students to gain practical qualifications that will set them up for a range of career options including in priority trade areas such as carpentry, engineering, horticulture, plumbing, gas-fitting, and brick-and block-laying.

The Youth Guarantee programme is currently available to 16 and 17 year olds, 15 year-old students with early leaving exemptions, and 18 year-old teen parent beneficiaries. It will be expanded to 18 and 19 year olds from 1 January next year.



Correct study details

Staff from different faculties or departments may currently be setting the dates for Christmas vacations, summer school and 2014 study.

It is important that these dates are passed on to the staff that submit Verification of Study (VoS) responses to StudyLink, and that any changes are notified as soon as possible. Where incorrect study information is reported overpayments can be created for students.

We recently reviewed some of these overpayments and identified that the problem was generally caused because staff from the faculties or departments who were determining these dates were not communicating this information effectively to the staff that were submitting the VoS details.

Please ensure that all staff are aware of the importance of ensuring that VoS information is accurate, and is returned to StudyLink in a timely manner.

Updates to VoS documents

Updates have been made to the two main VoS documents that are under the reference menu on the VoS Online site.

The VoS Business Rules document has now been renamed VoS Rules and Processes for Education Providers. This document is effectively a 'how to guide' for VoS and is designed for administration and enrolments staff that will be involved in VoS processes.

The VoS Operating Manual has been renamed the VoS Technical Guide for Education Providers. This document covers the technical side of the transfer of VoS information for education

providers that are using the full electronic transfer method. These are education providers that receive files through the VoS Online site, process them into their enrolment system, then upload VoS response files back onto the website.

This document is designed for technical and IT staff at education providers.

Neither of the documents contain any major changes to rules, processes or procedures. They have been re-written so that the purpose of each document is clear, and so that they are more user-friendly.

The documents will be available under the 'Reference' menu on the VoS Online site from Monday 30 September 2013.

It is important that you familiarise yourselves with these documents, and refer to them when dealing with any VoS related issues.

HELPLINE NEWS

CALLING THE HELPLINE FOR 'STUDENT QUERIES'

On occasion, education provider staff call the Helpline team with student queries. These are cases where the education provider staff member has a student with them, and the student has a question or concern about their Student Allowance or Student Loan.

These are generally cases where the student should be using the website, MyStudyLink, or calling the StudyLink Contact Centre (0800 88 99 00).

Between May 2012 and May 2013, the Helpline received 1,700 calls that fall under this category.

The Helpline role is to assist providers with VoS and education provider related queries, and it is staffed accordingly.

We understand that there may be times where the student may not be able to find the information that they require, or they cannot get through on the 0800 number.

In cases like this, where the student is facing significant hardship you can call through the Helpline, but it is important that these calls only come through to the Helpline as a last resort, as this takes a Helpline staff member away from their regular duties.

The Helpline staff member will discuss the case with you to determine the best course of action. This could include taking the call, arranging for someone to call the student back, or advising the student what actions they may need to take.

Reminders on having the right Student Loan deductions



There are things students with income from salary or wages and/or Student Allowance, NZ Super/Veteran's Pension or income-tested benefit payments need to know to ensure they pay the right amount towards their Student Loan.

Working for salary or wages

These borrowers need to use a tax code with the "SL" repayment code. This ensures their employer deducts the correct amount of Student Loan each time they get paid.

- Use either the "M" or "ML" tax code with the "SL" repayment code for the main source of income (the job they earn the most money from).
- Use one of the "S" tax codes (SB, S, SH or ST) with the "SL" repayment code for secondary income (income from any other job where earnings are less than the main source of income).

Those starting a new job or who need to change their tax code should fill in a Tax code declaration (IR 330) form and give this to the employer for their records.

Receiving NZ Super/Veteran's Pension or Student Allowance payments

The Ministry of Social Development (MSD) will update their tax code to

include the "SL" repayment code, and deduct Student Loan repayments from the NZ Super/Veteran's Pension or Student Allowance payments when a borrower earns over the pay period repayment threshold, eg \$367 per week. The amount to be deducted will depend on whether NZ Super/Veteran's Pension or Student Allowance is the main or secondary income.

Receiving an income-tested benefit

Work and Income automatically uses the "M" tax code. Borrowers can't use the "SL" repayment code for their income-tested benefit, and won't have Student Loan deductions taken from their benefit payments.

This means that for any other income earned while receiving an income-tested benefit, borrowers must use one of the "S" tax codes (SB, S, SH or ST) and add the "SL" repayment code.

If borrowers stop receiving an income-tested benefit and start working, they need to use an "M" or "ML" tax code with the "SL" repayment code for their main source of income.

Significant under-deductions

Those who haven't had the right amount

HELPLINE NEWS

SAKBASE UPDATES

StudyLink is continuing to look at enhancements for our services and as a result have made an update to SAKBase, which took effect from 19 September 2013.

The update introduces two new features, designed to ensure you and your students' information is secure:

- SAKBase will now time out after 30 minutes if no actions have been taken.
- Your access will be locked for 30 minutes if you enter an incorrect password six times.

Also included in this update are fixes based on your feedback following the SAKBase update made in July:

- You are now able to search using an issue ID, rather than just students' details.
- Text advising that dates need to be entered in the format 01-Jan-2013 (dd-mmm-yyyy) has been added.

of Student Loan repayments deducted from their salary or wages or payments from MSD may end up with significant under-deductions on their Student Loan. In this case, Inland Revenue will send a "Student Loan compulsory extra deduction notice" which requires employers to make compulsory extra deductions. This also applies to current students who are receiving Student Allowance payments from StudyLink, as this is considered income.

Compulsory extra deductions are made on top of the standard Student Loan deductions each pay period. These extra deductions will only be made in the pay periods with a standard Student Loan deduction (when a borrower earns over the pay period repayment threshold) and will continue until the amount that's been underpaid has been recovered.

Repayment deduction exemption for full-time students

Full-time students can apply for a repayment deduction exemption if they expect to earn less than the annual repayment threshold (\$19,084). They don't have to use the "SL" repayment code while they have the exemption.

They must provide their employer the repayment deduction exemption certificate so they won't have Student Loan deductions made from their pay. A repayment deduction exemption certificate can last up to a full tax year (1 April to 31 March).

Special deduction rate for those with two or more jobs

Borrowers with more than one job who earn less than the pay period threshold from their main job (for example, \$367 if paid weekly) can apply for a special deduction rate. With a special deduction rate the Student Loan deductions from the secondary earnings will be deducted at a reduced rate.

Borrowers can apply for the special deduction rate through their myIR secure online services account. Once Inland Revenue accepts the application, they'll send the borrower a special deduction rate certificate. This certificate needs to be given to the employer so they can deduct Student Loan repayments at the rate shown on the certificate.



The value of experience

Student Job Search has recently completed a research programme with both employers and students. Interestingly, when employers were asked to rank the relative importance of qualification, experience and attitude when hiring graduates, they placed the greatest emphasis on attitude (50%), with work experience and qualification evenly spread at 25% each.

Dean Jervis, Sales and Marketing Manager for Student Job Search said that the mismatch showed that students tended to place a lot of weight on a relevant academic background or industry knowledge and many believed their qualification alone would be a ticket into the workforce.

As Dean says, "Degrees and grades remain important, but in many cases they are only a part of the equation when it comes to securing employment.

Employers however, tend to be risk adverse when it comes to recruiting staff – they want to be sure that applicants will be able to easily fit into their existing team, put in a full day's work and be able to work through differences with a customer or colleague."

"We can't say enough about the value of having a work history and workplace experience. It provides a practical component to support the student's academic record and demonstrates a

healthy and motivated attitude towards work", Mr Jervis said.

Student Job Search lists tens of thousands of jobs each year, and employers cite their main reason for listing with them is to help students. The roles are specifically suited to undergraduates providing them with ample opportunity to build up their work history, gain invaluable experience and at the same time earn a few dollars – improving their employability once they graduate.

For further information on Student Job Search, please visit their website at <http://www.sjs.co.nz>.

STUDENT JOB

SEARCH

Te Roopu Rapu
Mahi Taaura