



Briefing Note: 2021 National Student Action Plan on COVID-19 and updates on work to support tertiary learners

To:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
Cc:	Hon Kelvin Davis, Associate Minister of Education Hon Aupito William Sio, Associate Minister of Education Hon Carmel Sepuloni, Minister for Social Development and Employment		
Date:	1 September 2021	Priority:	Medium
Security Level:	In Confidence	METIS No:	1269811
Drafter:	Jenni Barrett	DDI:	9(2)(a)
Key Contact:	Kieran Forde	DDI:	
Messaging seen by Communications team:	No	Round Robin:	No

Purpose of Report

This briefing provides you with:

- information on the letter and National Student Action Plan on COVID-19 (the Action Plan; **annex 1**) sent you to on 23 August 2021 by the leaders of 48 tertiary learner associations from across New Zealand, including the President of the New Zealand Union of Students' Associations (NZUSA) who you are meeting on 8 September 2021;
- updates on the work officials are progressing to ensure tertiary learners continue to be supported during the latest COVID-19 outbreak; and
- a draft response letter (**annex 3**) for you to sign and send to the leaders of the tertiary learner associations who sent you the Action Plan.

Recommendations

The Ministry of Education recommends you:

- note** the letter and Action Plan (**annex 1**), sent to you by the leaders of 48 tertiary learner associations, and the letter sent to you by the New Zealand International Students' Association (NZISA) on 28 August 2021 (**annex 2**)
- note** that you are meeting the President of NZUSA on Wednesday 8 September, and we will supply you with talking points early next week [METIS 1269865 forthcoming]
- note** that we will supply you with separate information and advice on NZISA's letter later this week [METIS 1270285 forthcoming]

- d. **note** that we have advised you of options for providing additional financial support for domestic tertiary learners during COVID-19, and you have agreed for officials to progress work on topping up the Hardship Fund for Learners (HAFL) by \$20 million, including sending you a draft Cabinet Paper this week [METIS 1269783 refers]
- e. **sign and send** the draft response letter (**annex 3**) to the tertiary learners who drafted the Action Plan
- f. **agree** that this briefing note is proactively released, once decisions have been made, and with any redactions in line with provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.

Agree / Disagree

Agree / Disagree



Kieran Forde
Acting Manager
Access and Participation Policy
Te Ara Kaimanawa
01 / 09 / 2021

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education
//_

Background

1. On 23 August 2021, the leaders of 48 tertiary learner associations sent you a letter and their '*2021 National Student Action Plan on COVID-19*.' The Action Plan outlines key issues faced by tertiary learners, and assistance sought from Government and tertiary providers, given renewed COVID-19 restrictions. Leaders of 44 learner associations sent you a similar Action Plan in 2020 and you sent them a response letter at the time [METIS 1225323 refers].
2. Tertiary student leaders have indicated they want to work with you to support tertiary learners and have requested a teleconference call to discuss their needs and requests. You are already scheduled to meet Andrew Lessells, President of the New Zealand Union of Students' Associations (NZUSA), on Wednesday 8 September from 3:30-4:00pm. We suggest you incorporate discussion of the Action Plan into this meeting and will supply you with talking points shortly [METIS 1269865 forthcoming].

Requests in the 2021 National Student Action Plan on COVID-19

3. There are five financial requests in the Action Plan, namely that Government:
 - a. implement a Universal Education Income for students;
 - b. increase funding for the Hardship Fund for Learners (HAFL), and ensure international learners receive hardship funding that is equitable to the HAFL;
 - c. increase mental health support for tertiary learners and young people;
 - d. fund providers to effectively transition to online learning; and
 - e. increase funding for providers' support services, especially disability support.
4. There are five non-financial requests in the Action Plan, namely that Government:
 - a. create targeted employment rights information for tertiary learners;
 - b. relax eligibility for StudyLink payments, so learners can continue studying if they experience a drop in academic performance as a result of COVID-19;
 - c. engage with learners on the COVID-19 vaccination rollout for learner groups;
 - d. ensure adequate, accessible transport to and from COVID-19 testing centres for learners and at-risk communities, including the disabled community; and
 - e. ensure communication about COVID-19 (including changes to Alert Levels and available financial supports) is timely, accessible, and clear.
5. The Action Plan also includes a range of financial and non-financial requests from tertiary providers. Tertiary student leaders have contacted providers separately and indicated that they intend to work with providers to address these requests.

Analysis of requests and updates of work to support tertiary learners

Financial supports

6. *Universal Education Income:* This was also suggested by tertiary student leaders in 2020 (in their 2020 Action Plan, and in NZUSA's post-election advice to you). In their latest letter and Action Plan, tertiary student leaders have requested you implement a temporary (or one-off) universal education income for 2020, as well as an ongoing universal education income for future years.
7. Our advice to you last year was not to pursue a universal education income because it is not well targeted, would be very expensive (an estimated \$720 million for 2020 only), difficult to implement and would create a significant fiscal pressure for Government to consider alongside other competing priorities for Government funding

[METIS 1225871 refers]. This advice still stands. We do not recommend implementing a one-off universal education income for this year either, as it will set a precedent for future years, and other work is progressing to provide learners with additional financial support, including the Hardship Fund for Learners (HAFL).

8. *Hardship funding for domestic learners:* We recently advised you of options for providing additional financial support to domestic learners during COVID-19, and you agreed for officials to progress work on topping up the HAFL by an additional \$20 million [METIS 1269783 refers].
9. *Hardship funding for international learners:* While the New Zealand International Students' Association (NZISA) broadly support this proposal for a hardship fund for international learners, they were not a signatory to the Action Plan. NZISA sent you a separate letter on 28 August 2021 (annex 2), in which they requested that the Government reinstate the International Students Hardship Fund.¹ We will supply you with further information and advice on NZISA's requests later this week [METIS 1270285 forthcoming].
10. *Mental health support:* Officials are continuing to ensure students have access to mental and physical wellbeing resources and tools during (and beyond) COVID-19. We are working with the Ministry of Health (MOH) on the implementation of the Budget 2020 Mental Health and Wellbeing initiative for learners enrolled in tertiary education institutes. Te Pūkenga has received an allocation of funding from MOH and will distribute funding across its subsidiaries. Te Pūkenga is currently working to put the first tranche of services in place. MOH, with the Ministry of Education, is continuing to work with wānanga, universities, and tertiary learners to determine how best to target funding over the coming years.
11. *Student support services and provision of online learning:*
 - a. While the HAFL doesn't go directly to providers to increase their student support services or capability for online learning, providers can use HAFL funding to support learners facing hardship. This includes providing cash or in-kind payments to learners for items such as food, utilities, or housing, and/or funding for technology-related costs, such as internet access, resources, and devices.
 - b. Work is progressing elsewhere to improve the system for all learners: In July, we released the new Education (Pastoral Care of Domestic and Tertiary Learners) Code of Practice, which comes into effect on 1 January 2022. The code sets expectations that providers (and schools enrolling international learners) must meet for their learners' safety and wellbeing. In September, the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) will release two new initiatives to encourage and support providers to take a proactive approach to improving outcomes for disabled tertiary learners. This includes new requirements for the creation of disability action plans and the new Kia Ōrite Toolkit.
 - c. In the medium to long term, you are considering a proposal that would give the TEC additional discretion over a small portion of existing volume funding, to better enable the TEC to support Government's strategic goals for tertiary education, as outlined in the Tertiary Education Strategy and Ka Hikitia.

¹ [International Student Hardship Fund » Education NZ \(enz.govt.nz\)](https://www.education.govt.nz/learning/teaching-and-learning/international-students/)

9(2)(f)(iv)

- d. For providers that deliver vocational education and training (VET), the learner success component of the unified funding system aims to improve outcomes for learners. 9(2)(f)(iv)

Non-financial supports

12. *Employment rights information:* Employment New Zealand² and Student Job Search have created a series of targeted social media posts for tertiary learners to understand their employment rights during COVID-19. The Ministry's 'School Leavers' Toolkit' also provides targeted employment rights information for recent school-leavers (including tertiary learners).³
13. *Eligibility for StudyLink:* Student Loans for living costs and Student Allowances will continue to be paid to learners if they are enrolled and remain studying. StudyLink may also be able to assist learners who face urgent or unexpected costs.⁴ If any actions taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in New Zealand impact a learner's ability to complete or pass their course, StudyLink will take this into consideration if the learner applies for a Student Allowance or Loan again in the future. We want student support to be responsive to our changing education system as a whole, rather than making isolated or sweeping changes. Any changes to student support settings would need to be considered alongside other spending priorities and wider commitments.
14. *Engaging with learners on vaccinations and testing:* MOH continues to focus on reducing barriers to testing and vaccination, including in disabled, Māori, Pacific, and rural communities. District Health Boards (DHBs) will work with local agencies (including schools and tertiary providers) to ensure those who require testing can access it. DHB cultural and communication liaison roles play a key role in planning and implementing approaches with Māori and Pacific communities, health leaders, and health providers to ensure accessibility of healthcare services, including vaccinations and testing. MOH will continue to monitor demand and open additional testing sites as required, including pop-up testing centres for areas and communities most in need.
15. *Communication:* Since 2020, we've heard strongly from tertiary student leaders about the importance of receiving timely, relevant, and accessible information and answers to their questions about the impacts of COVID-19 on their education, living, employment, wellbeing, and pastoral care during and after Alert Level changes. We have been working closely with national tertiary student leaders and officials from relevant agencies (including MSD, MOH, TEC, and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority) to gather, share, and disseminate information.
16. This has included meetings and correspondence at least once weekly with student leaders and government officials; daily Peak Bodies sector meetings; and regular tertiary bulletins to learners and providers. Learners have told us they value these

² [COVID-19 alert levels and the workplace » Employment New Zealand](#)

³ [My rights and responsibilities at work – School Leavers' Toolkit \(education.govt.nz\)](#)

⁴ [Urgent or unexpected costs – StudyLink](#)

meetings and opportunities for engagement, and we have committed to ensuring they remain ongoing until Alert Level 1, or as requested by tertiary student leaders.

Next Steps

17. In the coming week, we will supply you with advice and talking points for your meeting on Wednesday 8 September with Andrew Lessells, President of NZUSA [METIS 1269865 forthcoming]. We will also supply you with further information and advice on NZISA's letter to you [METIS 1270285 forthcoming].
18. Officials will continue meeting and communicating regularly with tertiary student leaders until Alert Level 1, or as needed.

Annexes

- Annex 1:** Letter from tertiary student leaders, including their 2021 National Action Plan on COVID-19. This is attached in a separate PDF document.
- Annex 2:** Letter from NZISA. This is attached in a separate PDF document.
- Annex 3:** Letter of response to tertiary student leaders who sent you the Action Plan.

Hon Chris Hipkins

MP for Remutaka

Minister for COVID-19 Response

Minister of Education

Minister for the Public Service

Leader of the House



13 September 2021

Andrew Lessells
National President
NZUSA

Renata White and Nkhaya Paulsen-More
Tumuaki Takirua
Te Mana Ākonga

Jaistone Finau
National President
Tauira Pasifika

Alice Mander
President
National Disabled Students' Association

By email to president@students.org.nz

Ref: CH7197

Dear Andrew, Renata, Nkhaya, Jaistone, and Alice

Thank you for your email of 23 August 2021 about support for tertiary learners in response to the impact of COVID-19. I appreciate you developing and sharing the 2021 National Student Action Plan on COVID-19 and acknowledge your dedication to ensuring tertiary learners across the country receive the support they need during this time.

The Government understands the level of anxiety and uncertainty that exists among our learner communities. The health, safety, and wellbeing of all New Zealanders is our top priority, and we continue to take decisive action to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our communities.

I understand Ministry of Education officials have already been in contact, and you are meeting with them regularly. They will keep working with you to ensure the wellbeing of tertiary learners is supported, and to provide timely, accessible, and clear relevant information and answers to key queries.

The Government wants to provide tertiary learners with certainty as soon as possible to ensure learners feel supported and able to remain engaged in their study. As you will have seen, the Government has announced a further increase of \$20 million to the HAFL, to be paid out through providers from September. Based on the number of learners who received support from the Hardship and Technology Access Funds last year, we anticipate the additional \$20 million will provide assistance to around 15,000 learners, some of whom may not benefit from other Government supports. The additional funding will allow providers to address current need and offers cover in case of future COVID-19 restrictions.

Learners who are enrolled in tertiary education and remain studying will continue to receive their Student Loans and Student Allowances. If any actions taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in New Zealand impact a learner's ability to complete or pass their course, StudyLink will take this into consideration if the learner applies for an Allowance or Loan again in the future. StudyLink may also be able to assist learners who face urgent or unexpected costs, and MSD has a range of benefits that tertiary learners may qualify for. You can find more information at workandincome.govt.nz/covid-19/index.html and studylink.govt.nz/in-study/urgent-costs/index.html.

The Government shares your concerns for the increasing pressure COVID-19 places on the mental health and wellbeing of tertiary learners. As announced in Budget 2020, the Government is expanding the provision of health and wellbeing services for learners enrolled in tertiary education institutes. Te Pūkenga is currently working to put the first tranche of services in place

across its subsidiaries. Together with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education is continuing to work with wānanga, universities, and tertiary learners to determine how best to target funding over the coming years. A range of tools and resources that may be of assistance to tertiary learners at this time can be found at health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-health-advice-public/covid-19-mental-health-and-wellbeing-resources.

Employment New Zealand and Student Job Search have released targeted employment rights information to ensure tertiary learners understand their rights during (and beyond) COVID-19. The Ministry of Education's School Leaver Toolkit also contains information and resources which will be useful for school leavers transitioning into study and work. You can read more at employment.govt.nz/leave-and-holidays/other-types-of-leave/coronavirus-workplace and school-leavers-toolkit.education.govt.nz/en/getting-a-job/my-rights-and-responsibilities-at-work.

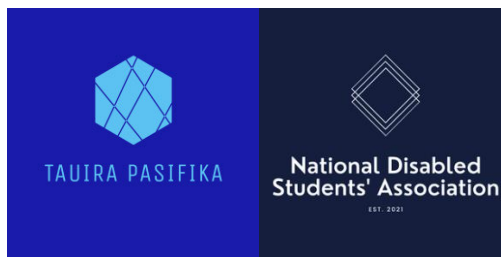
The Ministry of Health continues to focus on reducing barriers to COVID-19 testing and vaccination, including for disabled, Māori, Pacific, rural, and learner communities. District Health Boards (DHBs) will work with local agencies, including tertiary providers, to ensure those who require testing can access it. DHB cultural and communication liaison roles play a key part in ensuring healthcare services, including vaccinations and testing, are equitable and accessible for everyone in New Zealand. The Ministry of Health will continue to monitor demand and open additional testing sites as required, including pop-up testing centres for areas and communities most in need.

Learner wellbeing and safety is a shared responsibility that includes Government, education providers, learners, whānau, and the wider community. I encourage you and your members to share examples of where providers are showing good practice responding to learners' needs at this time.

My officials will continue to work closely with you and other Government agencies to support tertiary learners to remain engaged in their study during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you again for writing on behalf of tertiary learners in New Zealand.

Yours sincerely

Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education



Monday 23 August 2021

Dear Hon Chris Hipkins, Hon Carmel Sepuloni, Hon Kelvin Davis and Hon Aupito William Sio
CC: Iona Holsted and Debbie Power

Re: National Student Action Plan on COVID-19

We are student leaders and representatives from forty-eight students' associations, councils, and organisations. Together, we represent hundreds of thousands of tertiary students in polytechnics and universities across Aotearoa New Zealand, who are concerned about the wellbeing of our tauria during this incredibly uncertain time.

Firstly, we want to acknowledge the leadership of the Government at this very uncertain time for all of us. We thank you both and your Cabinet colleagues for your steadfast leadership.

We know that you are working around the clock to ensure that the needs of New Zealanders are met. However, the purpose of this letter is to send you the **National Student Action Plan on COVID-19** which we have developed, as a collaborative group of forty-eight associations, over the past week. The Action Plan, attached below, outlines some clear requests from the Government (financial and non-financial) and also from our tertiary providers, whom we have contacted separately.

COVID-19 leaves students in very vulnerable and precarious situations. Many of us have lost our part-time or casual jobs and are unable to cover essential weekly costs. This is simply because the current amount that we receive through StudyLink each week is insufficient. It is also not accessible to all students. Beyond this, our debt (from Living Costs and Student Loan payments) will continue to increase despite our classes being paused.

- **We ask that as a temporary measure, that the Government extend income support from StudyLink to all domestic students as a temporary Universal Education Income.**

The \$20 million Hardship Fund for Learners that was introduced in 2020 helped to alleviate the significant hardship that students face. Students welcomed this fund last year and believe it is crucial to supporting the wellbeing of students through COVID-19. But we have serious concerns that it simply isn't large enough to support tauria through another prolonged lockdown.

- **We ask that the Government significantly increase resources allocated to the COVID-19 Hardship Fund to ensure that all students have the financial support they need to make it through lockdown.**

We don't have to dwell on the stories and statistics regarding the poor mental health of young people and students, you will be aware of these. However, the uncertainty of COVID-19 exacerbates the anxiety and poor mental health among our cohort.

- **We ask that the Government increase the mental health support for tertiary students and young people, in a period where poor mental health is exacerbated by social isolation and uncertainty.**

In addition to these financial requests, we also ask that the Government:

- Work with students to ensure that COVID-19 testing is accessible to all learners, particularly disabled taura.
- Relax eligibility for StudyLink payments for semester two and 2022, to reflect the likely negative impact that COVID-19 will have on our academic performance. This change would allow tertiary students to continue studying even they face an unexpected drop in academic performance as a result of COVID-19.
- Engage students and their communities in the COVID-19 vaccination rollout and work with us to help counter misinformation and vaccine hesitancy

We know that you are working incredibly hard at this unprecedented global time. However we really hope that you take our requests seriously.

We want to work with you to support students during this time, and would appreciate it if there is any way that we can organise a teleconference call to discuss our needs as students at this time during the coming weeks.

Ngā manaakitanga

Tertiary students of Aotearoa New Zealand

SIGNATORIES

New Zealand Union of Students' Associations (NZUSA)
Taura Pasifika (TP)
National Disabled Students' Association (NDSA)
Albany Students' Association (ASA)
Auckland University Students' Association (AUSA)
Auckland University of Technology Students' Association (AUTSA)
Lincoln University Students' Association (LUSA)
Massey at Distance (M@D)
Massey at Wellington Students' Association (MAWSA)
Massey University Students' Association (MUSA)
Manakau Institute of Technology Student Council (MITSC)
Otago University Students' Association (OUSA)
Students' Association at the Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology (SANITI)
Students' Association at UCOL (SAU)
Students' Association at Wintec (SAWIT)
Younited Students' Association (EIT)
Unitec Student Council (USC)
University of Canterbury Students' Association (UCSA)
WellTec and Whitireia Student Connection

Auckland University Pacific Islands Students' Association
Fale Niu AUT Pacific Island Student Association
Lincoln University Pacific Island Students' Association
Massey University Pasifika Students' Association
New Zealand Tongan Tertiary Students Association
Niuean Tertiary Students' Association New Zealand Pacific EIT (PEIT)
Pacific Island Students of Ara
Tuluma Tokelauan Students' Association
University of Otago Pacific Island Students Association

Te Mana Akonga (TMĀ)
Kokiri Ngatahi
Manawatahi
Mātātupu
Ngā Taura Māori
Ngāi Taura
Te Akatoki
Te Awhioraki
Te Roopū Māori
Te Roopū Tautoko
Te Tira Akonga
Te Waiora
Titahi ki Tua

Auckland University Disabled Students' Association
Otago Disabled Students' Association
Victoria Disabled Students' Association
University of Waikato Disabled Students' Association
University of Canterbury Disabled Students' Association

University of Auckland Postgraduate Students' Association
University of Otago Postgraduate Students' Association
Victoria University of Wellington Postgraduate Students' Association



National Student Action Plan on COVID-19

August 2021



OVERVIEW

The students' associations and councils party to this plan are supportive of the Government's efforts to eliminate the spread of COVID 19 in the community. However, we believe that there has to be continual focus on the needs of tertiary students during this latest outbreak. Across Aotearoa, students at universities, polytechnics, wānanga work based providers and private training establishments, are finishing their academic year in the worst possible way, with Alert Level rises causing significant disruption to their education and lives.

The Government and tertiary providers cannot let recent lockdown impact the rest of our learners' journey through the tertiary education system.

There are currently over 400,000 students in New Zealand. Their study is crucial for the continued progress of New Zealand's economy, research and design, health care and environment.

This Action Plan is intended to assist in decision making for student support. It contains simple requests of the Government and our tertiary institutions to ensure that students can continue studying during a time of great uncertainty. The appeals in this plan are not radical, they are simply pragmatic and necessary. They need to be met so that our taura can survive and thrive in a time of crisis.

The urgency of this request arises from the difficult and often harrowing experiences of tertiary students during lockdown. New Zealand Union of Students' Associations (NZUSA), Te Mana Ākonga (TMĀ), Taura Pasifika (TP), the National Disabled Students' Association (NDSA) and the New Zealand International Students' Association (NZISA) want to partner with Government and tertiary providers to ensure that the experiences of 2020 are never repeated for our taura.

The National Student Action Plan on COVID 19 has been designed by students for students. It is supported by 48 students' associations, councils, and groups across Aotearoa.

The purpose of this National Student Action Plan on COVID-19 is to:

- Outline the key issues that tertiary students face in light of COVID 19, and
- Identify the assistance that tertiary students need from the Government and tertiary institutions during this public health crisis

The Action Plan is divided into four areas:

1. Financial support (provided by Government)
2. Non financial support (provided by Government)
3. Financial support (provided by tertiary institutions)
4. Non financial support (provided by tertiary institutions)

GENERAL PRINCIPLES



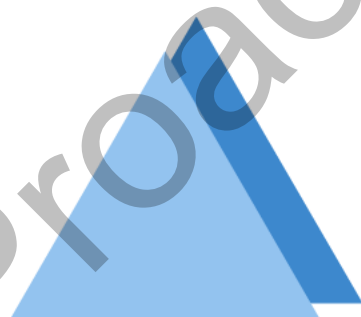
Consistent, clear, and accessible communication

- We support a consistent and united approach to communication being taken by tertiary institutions across New Zealand to avoid confusion among students.
- We support the Government working with tertiary institutes ensuring there are clear and accessible communication channels to students.



Collaboration and partnership

- We support the Government working with tertiary institutions to deliver tertiary institution specific requests.
- We support tertiary institutes and the Government working with local and national student representatives. This ensures the needs and experiences of students are effectively heard and actioned at all levels of decision making.



Equity

- We acknowledge there are students, especially taura Māori, Pasifika, international and disabled taura, who will be disproportionately affected by COVID-19. We support models of response and delivery that are equitable.
- We also support a forward-looking approach which acknowledges long term issues the delta outbreak will cause for students. This is especially important for disabled taura who are less likely to return to campus in lower alert levels.

A blue-tinted photograph of three students in a study setting. A young man on the left is looking at a book. A young woman on the right is pointing at a laptop screen. A young man in the foreground is typing on a laptop. A large, diagonal watermark reading 'Proactively Released' is overlaid across the image.

1

Financial Support

(provided by Government)



FINANCIAL SUPPORT (PROVIDED BY GOVERNMENT)

All financial support provided by Government should be available to these domestic tertiary students:

- Full time and part time students;
- Undergraduate and postgraduate students;
- Students who currently receive StudyLink payments, and should include a grace period for students, not currently receiving StudyLink payments, to register for StudyLink.

1. Temporary Universal Education Income

- a. The Government should implement a Universal Education Income (UEI), to ensure that students, regardless of background, age or level of study, have the support they need to succeed.

2. COVID-19 Hardship Fund

- a. The Government should increase funding to the COVID-19 Hardship Fund for Learners (HAFL) to recognise increased need due to the lockdown.
- b. HAFL should provide relief for tertiary students seeking cover for emergency COVID-19-related costs, including but not limited to:
 - i. Emergency transport costs;
 - ii. Bereavement costs;

- iii. Basic living costs;
- iv. Rental relief for private rental accommodation and tertiary provider accommodation (e.g. halls of residence);
- v. Health services costs.
- c. The specific criteria for receiving this Hardship Fund should be developed in partnership with student leaders and must be built with equity at the fore.
 - i. Providers should collaborate with student organisations on the administration of the fund.
- d. The criteria for the Technology Access Purpose portion of the HAFL must be flexible to allow for novel solutions to access and connectivity issues.
- e. There must be a dedicated hardship fund for international students to ensure that they have access to financial support and this fund must be equitable with the HAFL.

3. Mental Health

- a. The Government must increase the mental health support for tertiary students and young people. We know from the 2020 lockdown that social isolation and uncertainty exacerbates poor mental health. Greater and more diverse forms of mental health support should be implemented to meet this need now and after the heightened COVID-19 response subsides.
- b. The Government must make proper provisions in mental health services for taurira Māori, with special consideration for the cultural practices that enhance the mana of our taurira.
- c. Mental health support funded by Government must be culturally competent and be accessible for all diverse learner groups.

4. Transition to Online Learning

- a. The Government should fund tertiary institutions to properly transition teaching to quality online provision rather than simply adapt content to emergency delivery.
- b. This funding must have real focus on making online content accessible and meaningful to all learners, especially those with disabilities or a lack of digital literacy.

5. Increased Funding for Student Support Services

- a. Many tertiary institutions have faced a significant financial impact due to COVID-19 and this has adversely impacted the support services they can provide to students. The Government should resource institutions so that students receive the support they need, and are not impacted by their provider's poor financial position,
 - i. The funding for these services must be designed in conjunction with student communities, to ensure that it meets their needs.
- b. We know from 2020 that online learning raises new and unique issues for students, especially disabled students. In conjunction with this, disability support services around the country have recently seen a massive increase in student enrolment. The Government should meet this need with extra funding to ensure disabled students are not underserved.
 - i. The design and utilisation of this extra funding must be designed in conjunction with student communities, especially disabled student communities.

2

Non-Financial Support *(provided by Government)*



NON-FINANCIAL SUPPORT (PROVIDED BY GOVERNMENT)

1. Employment Information

- a. The Government should create targeted employment rights information for tertiary students and disseminate this information through Employment NZ channels, including social media, websites and phone lines.

2. StudyLink Eligibility

- a. The Government should relax the eligibility for StudyLink payments. This will allow tertiary students to continue studying if they face an unexpected drop in academic performance as a result of COVID-19

3. COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign

- a. The Government should engage with students on plans to roll-out the COVID-19 vaccination campaign into student communities.
 - i. There should be a strong focus on how the campaign engages with immunocompromised students.

4. COVID-19 Testing

- a. Ensure there is adequate and accessible transport to and from testing stations, so that students are able to access this service.
- b. There should be a strong focus on safe and accessible transport to testing stations for at-risk communities, including the disabled community.

5 Communication

- a. Ensure communication and updates about the outbreak and alert levels are timely, accessible, and clear.
- b. Ensure communication about extra financial support offered in light of the COVID outbreak is also timely, accessible, and clear.
- c. All communication should be available in Te Reo Māori, New Zealand Sign Language, and EasyRead formats.

A blue-tinted background image of a graduation ceremony. Graduates in gowns and caps are visible, with several caps being tossed into the air. The scene is captured from a low angle, looking up at the graduates.

3

Financial Support

(provided by tertiary institutions)

FINANCIAL SUPPORT (PROVIDED BY TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS)

1. Employment

- a. Tertiary institutions should keep paying all students employed as staff, including lab assistants, tutors, research assistants, and residential assistants, even if they are unable to continue working during this period.
- b. The remuneration of Residential Assistants (employed by a tertiary institution) should reflect the extra hours that they work during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Flu Vaccinations

- a. Tertiary institutions should work with the Government, to ensure that all immuno-compromised tertiary students receive free flu vaccinations.

3. Scholarships

- a. Tertiary institutions should allow flexible extensions to research time for postgraduate students and for scholarships.
- b. This includes reinstatement of university scholarships to those whose scholarships have recently lapsed.





4. Hardship Funds

- a. Tertiary institutions should increase the availability of hardship funding for their students. Increased information about the Hardship Funds should be made available. Applications and inquiries to the Hardship Fund should be moved online.
- b. Tertiary institutions should set aside additional pūtea for tauira Māori in accordance with Te Tiriti obligations to tangata whenua. Autonomy should be given to Māori student bodies so that Hardship Funds intended for Māori are handled by Māori.
- c. Tertiary institutions must recognise that many students are parents or caregivers, and hardship grants should reflect this in the support provided.
- d. Tertiary institutions must have funding in place to ensure that international students have equitable access to hardship support and must ensure that international students do not suffer financial hardship because they are not eligible for the HAFL.

5. Course Withdrawals

- a. Late withdrawal fees should be waived for all students, especially students who are disproportionately affected by the sudden switch to online learning. This includes neurodiverse students, students with family commitments, essential workers, and students with inadequate digital literacy.



4

Non-Financial Support

(provided by tertiary institutions)

NON-FINANCIAL SUPPORT (PROVIDED BY TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS)

1. Online and Recoded Courses

- a. As an urgent and temporary measure, all tertiary courses (lectures, classes, tutorials, workshops, seminars) should be recorded and made available online. Where this is not possible, tertiary institutions should make urgent alternative arrangements.
- b. All online teaching should be accessible to students with disabilities. This includes, but is not limited to, adequate captioning of lectures, requirements on academics for lectures to include PowerPoints or notes, and the availability of shared note taking.

2. Digital Literacy

- a. Tertiary providers must ensure that students are able to access and engage effectively with digital learning tools (for example, supporting students in improving their digital literacy skills).

3. Assessments

- a. Tertiary institutions should implement alternative assessment arrangements (for example, take home tests as an alternative to examinations).
- b. Tertiary institutions should adopt assessment tools that respect the privacy and dignity of students and are accessible to students with disabilities.



iii. Tools such as ProctorU, or alternative artificial intelligence that invasively collect students' biodata, have significant equity issues and should not be used.

c. Tertiary institutions should only use aegrotats and pass/fail grades as a last resort.

d. Tertiary institutions should be more flexible with assessment accommodations and extensions to reflect current uncertain and stressful times. This should particularly be considered for students disproportionately impacted by the switch to online learning such as disabled students, students with family commitments, essential workers, and those with poor digital literacy.

4. Student Support Facilities

a. Student support facilities, including health services and student advocacy services should remain available to students online and in person where possible.

b. The modes for the delivery of these services must reflect the needs of students, particularly those with disabilities and accessibility challenges, and tauira Māori.

c. Institutions should increase the visibility of these services by creating targeted messaging, which is clear, accessible, and informs students of the services available.

5. Support for Staff

a. Tertiary staff, both academic and allied, need to be supported and clearly communicated with by providers. Those in flexible working arrangements, such as student tutors are particularly in need of this support.

6. Accommodation

a. Tertiary institutions should ensure that all institution-owned or institution-managed accommodation remains open, with current services (including catering) continuing.

b. Students, staying in tertiary provider owned accommodation, who wish to return home should not be charged for time that would otherwise be spent at the hall of residence.

c. If there is an Alert Level rise, rebates should be provided to those who wish to no longer stay in student accommodation for whatever reason.

d. Students who do stay in student accommodation should be provided adequate pastoral care to recognise the added stress and mental health implications resulting from the restrictions in social interaction during this time.

e. Tertiary institutions should provide adequate pastoral care for Residential Assistants or Leaders, ensuring that they receive a similar level of care to the tauira they are supporting.

7. Health

a. Tertiary institutes should provide up to date information to students of where they can go to get medical attention if they are experiencing flu-like symptoms.

b. They should also provide clear, concise information to students of where they can access health services for existing and new health conditions, outside of COVID-19.



c. Health services must be accessible to all students and offer differing methods of engagement to reflect the diversity of students. This must include non-face-to-face health support options with family commitments, essential workers, and those with poor digital literacy.

8. Communications

a. Communications to students should be proactive, clear, and accessible. Students should know how changing Alert Levels impact their study, access to campus, and assessments.

b. Students who are nearing the end of their qualification and have handed in their final assignment must still receive communication from their providers.

c. Information about access to online mental health support during lockdowns should be made clear and obvious to students.

SIGNATORIES

New Zealand Union of Students' Associations (NZUSA)
Te Mana Akonga (TMĀ)
Taura Pasifika (TP)
National Disabled Students' Association (NDSA)
Albany Students' Association (ASA)
Auckland University Students' Association (AUSA)
Auckland University of Technology Students' Association (AUTSA)
Lincoln University Students' Association (LUSA)
Massey at Distance (M@D)
Massey at Wellington Students' Association (MAWSA)
Massey University Students' Association (MUSA)
Manakau Institute of Technology Student Council (MITSC)
Otago University Students' Association (OUSA)
Students' Association at the Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology (SANITI)
Students' Association at UCOL (SAU)
Students' Association at Wintec (SAWIT)
Younited Students' Association (EIT)
Unitec Student Council (USC)
University of Canterbury Students' Association (UCSA)
WelTec and Whitireia Student Connection

Kokiri Ngatahi
Manawatahi
Mātātupu
Ngā Taura Māori
Ngāi Taura
Te Akatoki
Te Awhioraki
Te Roopū Māori
Te Roopū Tautoko
Te Tira Akonga
Te Waioira
Titahi ki Tua

SIGNATORIES

Auckland University Pacific Islands Students' Association

Fale Niu AUT Pacific Island Student Association

Lincoln University Pacific Island Students' Association

Massey University Pasifika Students' Association

New Zealand Tongan Tertiary Students Association

Niuean Tertiary Students' Association New Zealand

Pacific EIT (PEIT)

Pacific Island Students of Ara

Tuluma Tokelauan Students' Association

University of Otago Pacific Island Students Association

Auckland University Disabled Students' Association

Otago Disabled Students' Association

Victoria Disabled Students' Association

University of Waikato Disabled Students' Association

University of Canterbury Disabled Students' Association

University of Auckland Postgraduate Students' Association

University of Otago Postgraduate Students' Association

Victoria University of Wellington Postgraduate Students' Association

Proactively Released

*Authorised by A Lessells 1/204 Willis Street, Te Aro, Wellington
Commissioned by the New Zealand Union of Students' Associations, Te Mana Ākonga, Tauria
Pasifika and the National Disabled Students' Association, 2021
Designed by E Dixon*

NEW ZEALAND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION



28 August 2021

Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education
Private Bag 18888
Parliament Buildings
Wellington 6160

By email: c.hipkins@ministers.govt.nz

E te Minita,

Tēnā koe, I am writing on behalf of the New Zealand International Students' Association (NZISA), the peak body for international students studying in New Zealand and offshore. We hold the mandate to represent all international students at New Zealand Universities and several major ITPs and Polytechnics under the Te Pūkenga umbrella. As you are aware, international students are a major contributor to the New Zealand economy. We pay extensive international student fees, support local economies, and contribute to the New Zealand job market. At the same time we are cut off from our families who are also struggling abroad, and we are in a country that to many of us has not been the most welcoming during this COVID-19 crisis (especially our Asian students who have experienced a significant increase in racist comments and confrontations).

We and our members are extremely disappointed at the Government's inaction and lack of support for international students since the COVID-19 lockdown on the 17th of August 2021. NZISA has received concerning reports on international students facing significant hardship during this prolonged lockdown, extenuated by limited employment opportunities for foreign nationals, and limited availability of free mental health counselling during lockdown. The closure of the National International Student Hardship Fund has also been disappointing, especially when considered alongside the support that domestic students are receiving. This disparity of support between international students and domestic students continues to drive a wedge between our communities, and disregards the immense contributions by international students. We implore the Government to reconsider and explore options on re-opening up the National International Student Hardship Fund.

Our discussions with the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) have also been rather disappointing. MSD has decided that the Emergency Benefits for Temporary Visa holders will not be extended beyond the 31st of August 2021. MSD stated that the Emergency Benefits were only available as a "...short-term solution...while [temporary visa holders] arranged to return to their home countries or supported themselves through employment". Our members deem it unrealistic to return to their home country (and thereby forfeiting their paid international fees) due to financial hardship experienced over lockdown. Therefore, the only realistic option for international students is seeking employment. However, the wide reaching effects of COVID-19 have made seeking employment as an international student extremely difficult. While we fully support the Government in its decision to move New Zealand into lockdown, we cannot help but feel left out of the support provided to the Team of 5 million. We urge the Government to extend the Emergency Benefit for Temporary Visa holders beyond 31st of August to cover the full Alert Level 3 and 4 period.

NEW ZEALAND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION



International students are keen to support themselves through working and contributing to essential service providers. Sadly, we continue to receive complaints that employers are discriminating against international students who work (or want to work) in essential services due to the 20 hours/week limit prescribed by their student visas. Due to this visa restriction, employers are more inclined to provide essential work to citizens rather than international students. We believe that in times of a national lockdown, those in essential services must be valued equally regardless of their residency status. NZISA proposes for the Government to provide flexible visa conditions on working hours for all essential services, not just supermarkets. Immigration New Zealand could model its visa conditions based on the Canadian government's approach in removing the 20-hour cap for international students working in all priority sectors during their lockdown. In Canada, this policy change has enabled many international students to support themselves throughout lockdowns and contribute to the national effort to eradicate COVID-19. NZISA has discussed this approach with Immigration New Zealand and we hope that international students (especially those working in the healthcare sector) will be given equal opportunity to support New Zealand throughout this challenging period.

We appreciate the gravity and uncertainty of this COVID-19 lockdown, however international students' welfare must not be overlooked. There should be a focus on providing sufficient support for international students facing hardship in New Zealand during these uncertain times. Such action would send a clear signal that New Zealand is a country that values its international students, and help build New Zealand's reputation as one of the top international education providers in the world. NZISA endeavours to continue collaborating with the Government, therefore we and international student representatives would appreciate the opportunity to be consulted on in decision-making processes to also ensure that the support to be provided is appropriate for our members.

Nāku noa, nā

Afqah Ramizi
National President
New Zealand International Students' Association

Cc: Hon Carmel Sepuloni, Minister of Social Development
Hon Kris Faafoi, Minister of Immigration
Hon Andrew Little, Minister of Health
Hon Priyanca Radhakrishnan, Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Ethnic Communities