



Briefing Note: Cabinet paper talking points – COVID-19: Additional financial support for domestic tertiary learners

To:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
Date:	1 September 2021	Priority:	High
Security Level:	In Confidence	METIS No:	1270393
Drafter:	Mary Kuepper Miriam Ulrich	DDI:	9(2)(a)
Key Contact:	Kieran Forde	DDI:	
Messaging seen by Communications team:	No	Round Robin:	No

Purpose

This briefing note provides you with talking points to support a discussion on your Cabinet paper *COVID-19: Additional financial support for domestic tertiary learners* at the COVID-19 Ministers Group meeting on Thursday 2 September. This is scheduled for 10am.

Proactive release

The Ministry of Education will proactively release this briefing note once final decisions have been made, as per your expectation that information be released as soon as possible. Any information which may need to be withheld will be done so in line with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.



Julie Keenan
Policy Director
Graduate Achievement, Vocations
and Careers

01 / 09 / 2021

Talking points to support your discussion of the Cabinet paper

Summary

COVID-19 leaves **many learners in vulnerable situations** that may make it difficult for them to continue successfully with their studies. The **impacts of the delta outbreak, and the changes it means for our response, are causing greater uncertainty**, particularly for the Auckland region. Like last year, I want to ensure that **learners continue to be engaged in their education** and are supported financially to do so. [3-6, 9-10]

The **Hardship Fund for Learners (HAFL)** provides a **safety net for individual learners**, but **existing funding is running out**. I want tertiary education organisations (TEOs) to **disburse their funding during restrictions to learning when needs are likely to be most acute**, rather than holding onto remaining allocation. [17-20]

Today, I am seeking your approval **to alleviate hardship for learners who are most in need and address income continuity** by: [1, 7, 21-29, 42-44, recs 3-6, 11]

1. **topping up the HAFL** by \$20 million and **improving its accessibility** for learners, which I anticipate will **benefit around 15,000 learners**; and
2. giving the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) the discretion to **continue Student Loan living cost payments over an extended study break during COVID-19 restrictions**, consistent with continued student allowance payments.

It is unclear how many learners will not be able to study remotely and may therefore be on an extended study break. **Giving MSD the discretion now will allow them to act quickly** to ensure student living support payments continue, should the need arise. [15-16, 27, 28]

These supports, coupled with the support MSD can already give, will **address immediate financial pressures** to ensure learners can be supported during prolonged COVID-19 restrictions. This will **support learners to stay engaged in their education**. [11-13]

Having students remain engaged in tertiary education will **benefit not only students**, but also **minimise the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on their families and communities**. [2, 6]

Managing costs

I propose to fund the **\$20 million HAFL top up** within Vote Tertiary Education through **reprioritisation of Fees-free funding**. [33-36, recs 7-8]

I expect the costs related to the continuation of Student Loan living **costs to be very minimal** and well within the normal variability of Student Loan Scheme forecasts. I therefore propose that these be **met within existing Vote Social Development and Vote Revenue baselines**. [recs 12-13]

Communication and implementation

If you agree, officials will work with my office to develop a communications strategy **for quickly and appropriately communicating the changes to TEOs and learners**. [49]

I will direct the **TEC to administer the additional HAFL allocation**, following discussions with learner representatives and provider groups. **MSD will work with tertiary providers and the TEC to implement the continuation of Student Loan living cost payments**. [29-32]