HELP
Newsletter
2015 April Edition

Welcome

Welcome to the 2015 April edition of the HELP Newsletter and Happy Easter to you all. If you have questions about the information contained in this newsletter, please email TSEnquiries@education.gov.au.

It is important to note that people who receive this newsletter are listed as contacts in HITS. If an employee in your organisation wants to receive this newsletter please have their details added as a contact in HITS.

Status of the Higher Education and Research Reform Bill

As you are all aware in the 2014-15 Budget, the Australian Government announced a comprehensive package of reforms to Australia's higher education system that will boost competitiveness, expand opportunity and ensure sustainability. The Higher Education and Research Reform Bill 2014 was rejected by the Senate on 17 March 2015. The Government remains committed to the higher education reforms and plans to bring back the reform package for the Parliament to consider in the winter 2015 Parliamentary sittings. The Government will continue to work with Senators and others who wish to be part of a constructive discussion regarding the higher education reforms. We will continue to provide updates on the status of the Bill on our provider website at http://www.education.gov.au/help-noticeboard.

Reforms to strengthen the VET FEE-HELP loan scheme

On 12 March 2015, the Assistant Minister for Education and Training, Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham, announced that the Australian Government will make important reforms to the VET FEE-HELP scheme to improve the quality and effectiveness of the scheme and to better protect students taking out a VET FEE-HELP loan.

The Government is targeting eight key areas as part of its reforms which will:

- Stop training providers from offering inducements to students, like cash and laptops, to get them to sign up to courses that they don't need, or are not capable of completing

- Stop marketing agents and brokers 'freelancing' to sign up as many students as possible, often without being covered by any regulator,

- Give students more information that helps them understand that VET FEE-HELP loans are real debts that impact their credit rating and have to be repaid,

- Make it impossible for training providers to levy all fees in a single transaction, giving students more opportunity to consider their options before VET FEE-HELP debts are incurred, and

- Protect vulnerable students by requiring training providers to properly assess student capabilities before enrolment.

A factsheet for students has been released to assist students to make informed choices about undertaking VET courses.

More student information is available on the *Study Assist* website at www.studyassist.gov.au.

More information about the Government's reforms is available in the VET FEE-HELP Reforms Factsheet. Updated information for VET FEE-HELP training providers will be posted on the Department's dedicated VET FEE-HELP Reforms page or you can email TSEnquiries@education.gov.au for assistance.

Ban on inducements that encourage VET FEE-HELP student sign ups

On 1 April 2015, Senator Birmingham announced the commencement of the VET Guidelines 2015 that bans VET FEE-HELP training providers or their agents/brokers from offering inducements to potential students that encourage them to sign up for a training course and take out a VET FEE-HELP loan.

The practice of offering such inducements to prospective students has resulted in many people, including disadvantaged Australians, ending up with a substantial debt with limited or no training outcomes. Others have been placed in a course they are either not suited to, or which is beyond their capability to complete.

The Guidelines ban inducements like offers of free IPADs, meals, vouchers and prizes. The amendments ensure that students choose their training provider and course of study on the basis of quality, content and cost, not inducements. The Guidelines will still allow training providers to give students the use of required learning tools and materials while they participate in their training.

The department will enhance its monitoring and audit arrangements to ensure that training providers are complying with the new Guidelines. These amendments are the first step in a process to strengthen the administration of the VET FEE-HELP scheme.

In addition, the new Australian Skills Quality Authority's Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015 also came into effect on 1 April 2015. These new Standards strengthened the requirements for RTOs to individually assess each prospective student to ensure they have the capability, existing skills and competencies to be able to complete the training programme.

Over the course of 2015, a number of other improvements and changes will be made to the VET FEE-HELP scheme with the assistance of a high level Working Group of skilled Vocational Education and Training practitioners. The Working Group will be chaired by John Hart, Chief Executive Officer of Restaurant and Catering Australia.

More information about the Government's overarching package of reforms is available in the VET FEE-HELP Reforms Factsheet. Updated information for VET FEE-HELP training providers will be posted on the Department's dedicated VET FEE-HELP Reforms page or you can email TSEnquiries@education.gov.au for assistance.

VET FEE-HELP approved provider training

The department will continue to conduct training sessions for approved VET FEE-HELP providers throughout 2015. This training is suitable for recently approved VET FEE-HELP providers or existing VET FEE-HELP providers that wish to refresh their knowledge. For more details on how to register including schedules of dates and venues please visit the department website at http://www.education.gov.au/help-approved-provider-training.

Training dates

Tuesday 7 April 2015	VET FEE-HELP approved provider training - via webinar
Tuesday 5 May 2015	VET FEE-HELP approved provider training - via webinar
Wednesday 10 June 2015	VET FEE-HELP approved provider training - Canberra

HITS/I:AM

A reminder that the department has updated the HITS user guide, the new guide can be found at http://education.gov.au/help-it-system-hits-user-guide.

In conjunction with the HITS user guide the department has created online training videos. These videos provide step by step instructions on how to perform specific tasks in HITS and the I:AM system. Please view our short training videos on the Department's website at http://education.gov.au/help-it-system-hits-user-guide.

Note that HITS and I:AM is now compatible with Internet Explorer 11 (IE11). The department recommends using either IE11 or Firefox when accessing HITS and I:AM. Institutions not using recommended browsers may experience technical issues, for example - if you use Google Chrome you will not be able to reset your password or update any field where a date is required, such as a date of birth field.

Contact information in HITS

The department experiences a number of returned letters and emails and incorrect telephone numbers when attempting to contact people nominated by institutions to administer HELP matters.

HITS is the only contact list utilised by the department when sending providers important information. This may include information regarding any changes to how payments are managed, which is essential to be aware of so that HELP payments are not affected.

All VET and higher education institutions (including universities) should ensure that correct contact details are entered into HITS. This includes contact details for HECS-HELP, FEE-HELP and VET FEE-HELP administrators, staff managing estimates and payments, and external auditor or accountant details if nominated by the provider.

Please regularly review your staff contact details in HITS so that the right people receive the information.