

STUDYLINK NEWS

A resource for education providers and student associations

DECEMBER 2013

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Kia Ora Tatou

I hope you are all looking forward to a relaxing break over the festive season.

At this time of the year, it's always good to reflect on what we've achieved in the last 12 months. 2013 has been a big one for us and I am sure it has been for you too as we all strive to deliver even better services for students.

We've made a number of changes over the last year and many of these have been based on feedback from yourselves as well as students. We have focused on improving our online services so that more students can help themselves. The most recent and visible change is to our website, with a new homepage, upgraded search engine and improved meta data so that more people will find what they are looking for more easily.

Our call to action campaign encouraging students to apply for their 2014 Student Loans and Allowances by 16 December is another initiative introduced in response to feedback from you.

Since the campaign kicked off we've received nearly 120,000 Student Loan and Allowance applications, that's 35% more than the same time last year. Your support to get as many students applying now is very much appreciated.

We're able to directly target returning students through emails (more than 480,000 sent) and text messages (more than 50,000 sent) but need any extra help in promoting first time students to apply as soon as possible. They don't need to know which course they'll be studying when they apply – they can let us know that information later.

The whole application process, which involves students, you and us playing our part and providing the information needed at the right time, can take around 8 weeks to finalise and it's important students understand this and don't leave it until the last minute.

Getting the applications early will put us in the best position to help students get sorted before their study starts.

During our busy period, we understand that there may be times where you are working with a student who is having difficulty getting things sorted and facing significant hardship. In these emergency situations, please refer the student to their nearest Outreach or Work and Income site or call through to the Helpline on their behalf. It is important that these calls only come through to the Helpline as a last resort as it is a channel to support you as

education providers, but it is a channel open to you if you have real concerns.

Earlier this year, when we reviewed the peak season with Universities NZ and other sector groups, it was clear that some of you had noticed some very different trends in student behaviour, for example leaving enrolments until later. If you notice any trends in student behaviour that seem to be different than usual around the application process, we would appreciate your feedback. Please call us on the Helpline.

Thank you for working with us this year to continue to improve the student support system. Together we can make a bigger difference.

Very best wishes for a happy festive season.

I look forward to working with you again next year.

Nga mihi nui



Susan Kosmala
General Manager

UPDATE

A NEW WEBSITE FOR EDUCATION PROVIDERS

In talking to providers through regional stakeholder meetings and the online services focus groups, we've identified some ways we can support you better online too.

We are now working on developing a new website for education providers where they will be able to access frequently used tools and resources, as well as messages from StudyLink.

We look forward to bringing you more information about this soon.

Changes to our website and online services

We've been focussed on making changes to our website and online services to improve the way we deliver services for students online.

We talked to students, providers and our staff about the experience students had with our website, MyStudyLink and Apply Online.

One of the key findings from this research was that students weren't finding information on our website quickly, and the search function didn't work like they needed it to.

As a result, we have made significant changes to the homepage of our website, which we've backed up with an improved search engine, making it easier for students to find the information that they need quickly.

Changes to our homepage include:

- changing tab names across the top of the page
- moving the search function to the front and centre of the page
- adding product buttons to the left hand side with links to the most searched for pages

- creating a new message space to communicate important information.

We are planning further improvements to the search function which will allow students to utilise features such as the suggested searches when they start typing.

MyStudyLink has also recently been updated so that it's easier for students to find information and make updates to their details. We've introduced changes such as including a calendar display instead of a drop-down date field when students need to enter a date, and moving information to reduce the number of pages students have to click through.

We are now working on our long-term vision for our online services – watch this space!



From the Helpline

Over the 2012/2013 summer season, education providers contacted the StudyLink Helpline by fax, email, phone or SAKBase over 18,000 times. So that we can resolve your issue in a timely manner, it's important to use the right contact channel in the right situation.

Contact channel	Background	Use when you ...
SAKBase	Available 24 hours per day at sakbase.studylink.govt.nz Most issues resolved in 8 working hours.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Want to advise that a student is not attending or meeting their course requirements. • Want to advise that a student has returned and is now attending and meeting their course requirements. • Have a VoS issue, or have sent a VoS response you need locked in place. • Have a query about a student's results of study or fee payment. • Have a question about a student's loan status that isn't shown in your Status Report.
Helpline phones	Available 8:00am-5:00pm on 0508 885 885 .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need your password to VoS Online or SAKBase reset. • Have an immediate query that needs less than one working day to be answered. • Have a complicated query that would benefit from a phone discussion.
Email	Available 24 hours per day at Studylink_Helpline@msd.govt.nz . Five working day resolution time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have a general question that isn't time-sensitive • You need to send an attachment or a screen shot (for example – when you have an error using the VoS Online website).
VoS Online	Available 24 hours per day at vos.studylink.govt.nz Responses generally applied within 1-3 hours.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Want to advise that a student has changed their enrolment (for example there has been a change in their course end date or a change in programme), has additional fees or has withdrawn from study.

Student calls

We ask that you do not request that we take calls from students. The Helpline is a dedicated service for education providers, and we need to make sure the service is available to you when you need it.

Students can use MyStudyLink to check the status of their applications, or submit queries through our 'Ask A Question' service at www.faqs.studylink.govt.nz. The StudyLink Contact Centre is open 8:00am to 5:00pm, Monday to Friday on 0800 88 99 00.

Sending students' information/evidence to StudyLink

If a student asks you to send items to StudyLink on their behalf, please include on a cover page, StudyLink client number if known, full name, current postal address and phone number details. If the item already has an address on it, they just need to indicate that it is current.

Having a confirmed address helps us when checking whether the student already has a record with the Ministry, and in creating a record if they don't. Having their contact details enables us to contact the student if no applications have been made by the time StudyLink receives the evidence.

Updates to SAKBase

StudyLink has been working to implement several changes to its SAKBase service to ensure you and your students' information is secure.

Following changes made in June and September, the final step in this security process requires all passwords to be of significant strength. This means passwords need to be a minimum of eight characters in length.

Passwords need to meet at least three of the following criteria:

- at least one lowercase character
- at least one uppercase character
- at least one special character, for example ! or %
- at least one number.

The next time you log in you will be prompted to change your password if your existing password doesn't meet the criteria.

If you encounter any issues you can contact us at studylink_helpline@msd.govt.nz or on **0508 885 885**.

SAKBase categories

Categories	Use when you...
Work requirements/ attendance	Need to advise that a student is not meeting course work or attendance requirements or if they are now meeting those requirements.
Request VoS-Lock	Require a particular VoS response locked on to a Student Allowance or Student Loan, for example when you've needed to send a blank VoS because your system's automated responses will give different dates.
Results of Study query	You have a query about the results you've submitted through the Single Data Return, or about a Statement of Satisfactory Progress.
Student Loan	You have a query regarding the student's Loan not covered by the other categories, for example when fee payment has been delayed.
Update provider code	You operate more than one education provider and a student has entered the wrong one on their application. Please note, we're unable to change the provider to or from one not operated by you.
Update student ID	A student has given an incorrect or no student ID number, and you're unable to correct this by returning a VoS response.
VoS Issue	Have a query regarding a VoS.

Files on VoS Online over the Christmas period

Files posted on VoS Online (including VoS requests, status reports and payment schedules) are normally held on the site for a period of 14 days. If your office is closed over the Christmas/New Year period, you may not be able to access these files before they are removed from the site.

We have extended this period to 30 days which means that the files will not be deleted until 30 days after they have been posted on the site. This should allow you to access the required files when you return.

This interim period will be changed back to 14 days in the New Year.

Additional SDR file

Student Loan applications have been performance tested since 1 January 2011. We match data directly with the Ministry of Education (MoE) to obtain students' results. In cases where MoE does not have a student's results, or

we are unable to match a student, we will send a Statement of Satisfactory Progress (SSP) form to the student. The student can either send us their results or take this form to their provider, and ask them to complete it.

You can reduce the number of SSP forms that you receive by submitting voluntary course completion files before the next Single Data Return (SDR) return is due.

Some providers opted to do this last year, with successful results. If you choose to submit voluntary course completion files, it's best to do this before 1 January 2014, or as soon as possible after this date, as we are currently processing applications for 2014 study.

For more information on submitting a voluntary course completion file, or if you have any questions, please contact the StudyLink Helpline.

If you have any technical questions regarding processing and updating your SDR files please contact the MoE

Sector Service Desk either via email sector.servicedesk@minedu.govt.nz or phone **0800 422 599**.

If you have any questions regarding the performance-linked funding or the publishing of performance information please contact the TEC Service Centre either via email servicecentre@tec.govt.nz or on **0800 601 301**.



STUDENT LOAN SCHEME ANNUAL REPORT 2013 TABLED

The Student Loan Scheme Annual Report 2013 was tabled in the House of Representatives on Thursday 5 December.

The report provides data and information about students who borrowed from the loan scheme in 2012, including costs, repayments, and overall trends. This data is collected from the Ministry of Education, Inland Revenue, the Ministry of Social Development and Statistics New Zealand.

The report shows that has been an increase in the amount of people choosing to enrol in higher education, with a total of 201,187 (73 % of eligible students) having borrowed from the loan scheme in 2012, compared with 207,000 in 2011.

Loan repayments have increased by 37.3% in the last year as borrowers took advantage of the voluntary repayment bonus scheme which ended on 31 March 2013. In the last three years the percentage of overdue loans has fallen from 20% to 15%.

The full report is available on the Ministry of Education's website:

www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2555.

UPDATE FROM STUDENT JOB SEARCH

Demand at Student Job Search (SJS) is at its annual peak as students look to secure employment over their summer break. Summer jobs are extremely important – not only will they help finance students through 2014, but long term they will also enhance the student's post-graduation employment prospects by enabling valuable work experience.

In November, SJS welcomed their new Chief Executive, Kay Nelson, to the organisation. Prior to joining SJS, Kay was working on contract with the Ministry of Education helping the Cook Islands to develop their own stand-alone Tertiary Institute. Prior to this she spent a four year tenure as Chief Executive of Aoraki Polytechnic.

Kay brings a wealth of experience, understanding and enthusiasm to her new role at SJS. "I'm passionate about customer service, growing economies and working with tertiary students," says Kay.

Kay joins the organisation at a good time too – as SJS has just won the 'Kenexa Best workplace' award for 'Most Improved Business' in its category. A proud moment for SJS and a positive reflection on the efforts and attitudes of the wider SJS team.



BUDGET 2013 UPDATE

The Student Support changes that were announced in the 2013 Budget have now been updated in our system and online services. All current students have now been alerted to the changes by email.

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 come into effect from 1 January 2014.

More info on the changes can be found on our website at **studylink.govt.nz**

