



VET Student Loans (VSL) Provider Newsletter - December 2021

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A word from Kathy

December is a good time to reflect on the year that has passed, recognise achievements and look ahead to the challenges and opportunities of the New Year.

The greatest achievement and challenge of 2021 was the transition to TCSI. I would like to recognise the efforts made by all of you to make this transition. In addition, new courses have been added to the program, loan caps increased and the VSL (Courses and Loans Caps) Determination updated.

Earlier this year we refreshed the VSL Provider Reference Group (PRG) membership which includes representatives from a range of small, medium and large providers and peak bodies such as TAFE Directors Australia, the Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia and Independent Higher Education Australia. This targeted consultative group provides valuable insight into a range of VSL matters.

I appreciate the time you have taken to engage, provide feedback and test solutions with us. Your input informs continuous improvements to promote streamlined service delivery and ensure the program is fit for purpose and provides the best outcomes for students.

Stakeholder engagement will continue to be a key part of next year's work. We are working on a more integrated and collaborative consultation approach across the VSL Program, with opportunities for all providers to contribute to program improvement ideas. I look forward to hearing your views.

2021 has also been characterised by state lockdowns and restrictions which have impacted your businesses and forged new ways of working. A reminder that the department will be closed from 12.30pm Friday 24 December 2021 until Tuesday 4 January 2022.

I wish you, your staff, and your students all the very best for the holiday season and the New Year.

Kathy Dennis

Announcements

VET Student Loans (VSL) Manual for Providers

The [VET Student Loans Manual for Providers](#) has been updated. Revisions have been summarised in the Change Register on page 6 of the manual. There are several new sections and some sections have been updated with more detailed information. You are encouraged to regularly review this resource to ensure program requirements are met. If you have queries related to the content, or to suggest improvements for clarity or for additional information, please contact the Program Operations and Payments team via the [provider enquiry form](#) or email VETStudentLoans@dese.gov.au.

VET Student Loans (VSL) application survey

The VSL Program Integrity team is committed to streamlining the application process and reducing red tape. This includes reviewing application requirements as well as the tools and information available to support you through the application process.

As part of our commitment to drive continuous improvement we are seeking your feedback from the 2021 application process. We want to hear about your end-to-end experience with the application process. If you wish to participate in the survey, please send an email to VSLProgramIntegrity@dese.gov.au by 10 December 2021. You will then receive a survey by email in December to complete by 28 January 2022.

VSL approvals

We are changing our process for accepting new provider applications. From 1 March 2022 onwards we will accept applications from organisations wanting to become an approved VET Student Loans provider at any time.

Interested providers can submit applications for assessment at any time from 1 March 2022 and they will be informed of application outcomes in writing. We aim to assess an application within 8 weeks of receipt. Providers must give the department at least 6 weeks' notice of the date they expect to submit their application via email to VSLProviderApprovals@dese.gov.au.

As an already approved VSL provider you can submit a request to VSLProviderApprovals@dese.gov.au for your conditions of approval to be varied at any time. This includes changes to fee limits and courses or to request approval of a third party arrangement.

Tertiary Collection of Student Information (TCSI)

TCSI scheduled validations

In late November we commenced releasing the next phase of Scheduled Validations to check data reported in TCSI during 2021.

These validations check for completeness and accuracy, ensuring no data specified in the VSL reporting requirements is missing after the deadline date.

TCSI permits optional reporting of some data elements prior to the deadline date which can result in missing data for a packet. Scheduled validations will start appearing on your notifications table which can be accessed via API's or through TCSI Analytics. These will remain on your notifications table until the

data has been provided. When you start receiving these validations please resolve them as soon as possible.

If a record is not complete, the department cannot submit the record to the Australian Taxation Office (ATO), as the ATO requires a specific set of elements before TCSI can transfer loan data to the ATO. For more information please refer to *Common Reporting Issues* in the [TCSI Newsletter November 2021 edition](#). It is important that you regularly refer to your notifications table and fix validation errors.

To see which scheduled validations are due to be released each week, check the release notes section of the [TCSI Releases and upcoming development page](#). These are updated each Tuesday morning. For a complete list of planned scheduled validations read the scheduled validations section on the [Notifications](#) guide.

Further information is also available at [TCSI Support – Help and Support](#). You will also find information on [Loan processing for HECS HELP, FEE HELP and VSL loans](#), [Tax File Number \(TFN\) mismatches](#), [Notifications](#) and [FAQs](#).

Data reporting requirements

2022 reporting requirements

All VET Student Loan (VSL) providers that are approved under the *VET Student Loans Act 2016* are required to report data for the VSL Data Collection. The Secretary's Notice issued under subsection 53(1) with the VSL reporting requirements for 2022 was emailed to your Chief Executive Officer on 16 November 2021. The Notice and reporting requirements are available on [TCSI Support – VET Student Loans](#).

On time reporting

The Tertiary Collection of Student Information (TCSI) Data Reporting requirements are shown in this table and in the updated version of the VSL Provider Manual.

Table 1: Data reporting timeframes

| Data type | Reporting timeframe |
|--|--|
| Student enrolment data | Event based reporting. Within 7 days of the student enrolling in a unit of study. Loan information is required within 14 days of the census date. |
| Course completions (Course outcome, and course outcome date if students have completed) | Event based reporting. Within 7 days of a student taking a leave of absence, completing the course or ceasing enrolment in the course. Course outcome date required within 7 days of student completing the course. |
| Unit of study completions (Unit outcome status and unit outcome date) | Event based reporting. Within 7 days of the student enrolling in a unit of study. Within 7 days of when the updated completion status becomes available. |

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| Revisions | All corrections and updates to data that have already been reported must be made: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - before the initial reporting deadline or - within 7 days of the information needed to make the correction or update becoming available, whichever date is later. |
|------------------|---|

The following information is relevant to providers that were approved for VET FEE-HELP.

The *VET Student Payment Arrangements (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act 2021* contains measures relating to the closure of the VET FEE-HELP scheme.

The effect of these provisions are as follows:

- providers have until 31 December 2021 to report any previously unreported outstanding VET FEE-HELP loan amounts that have census days in 2018
- it is no longer possible for providers to report previously unreported outstanding VET FEE-HELP loan amounts, and increases to loan amounts, that have census days from 2009 to 2017 (as the reporting deadline was 30 June 2021)
- the deadlines above will be supported by TCSI validations
- for providers that have access to TCSI, VET FEE-HELP records may be deleted, re-credited or revised to a lower amount if appropriate and required.

Student withdrawals and deferrals

Managing withdrawals and deferrals

You must have processes and procedures for a student's withdrawal from a unit/course. Although these may vary between providers, you are required to comply with certain provisions relating to VSL (refer section 4.8.7 Processes and procedures relating to a student's withdrawal from a course of the [VSL Manual for Providers](#)).

If a student withdraws or defers, on or before the census day, no tuition fee/loan is incurred. If a student defers or withdraws from study after the census date for a unit, the student becomes liable for the fee for that unit provided the student was genuinely engaged up to the date of withdrawal - the tuition fee charged, and loan amount will have been detailed in the VET Student Loan Fee Notice (refer section 4.7.3 Determining genuine students of the [VSL Manual for Providers](#)).

There should be no barriers to withdrawal and no withdrawal fees may be levied. Procedural information should be clear to students as to whether the fees/debt have been incurred. If the student wishes to re-enrol after the withdrawal, you must obtain the student's written permission to their re-enrolment. You should also note provisions regarding cancelling a student's enrolment after the census day, which includes a requirement to give students 28 days to initiate grievance procedures before the cancellation takes final effect (refer section 4.8.8 Processes and procedures – provider cancelling enrolment after the census date of the [VSL Manual for Providers](#)).

The periodic issuing of Progression Forms in the eCAF system manages the student's access to a VSL, and there are certain TCSI elements that must be updated.

Managing withdrawals and deferrals in the eCAF system – Progression Forms

Although there are fixed progression points (refer section 4.7.3 Determining genuine students of the [VSL Manual for Providers](#)), you may trigger progressions at the individual student level. You can issue progressions to manage the student's access to a VET Student Loan when they withdraw or defer their studies. This is ideally completed in conjunction with your internal withdrawal/deferral process. In their progression response, the student can indicate their study intention, for example, withdraw or defer. In the Progression Form the student will also enter their deferral/withdrawal date. The student should enter the date when they formally advised you they were deferring or withdrawing from their studies.

When students request a return to studies (in writing) after a withdrawal or deferring their studies, the student does not need to submit a new eCAF if they are continuing to study the same course with the same provider – even if there has been a break in the student's study.

When a student recommences their study, waiting for the next fixed progression point may lead to non-payments of earlier census days. You should issue a Progression Form at the time of resumption so the student can submit a 'resuming' response, thereby allowing payments to be made for subsequent census dates (census dates that occur after the student's resumption of studies). In the Progression Form the student will be required to enter a resuming date. The student should enter the date when they resumed their study after their break. If students enter the initial course commencement date instead of their resumption date, this will lead to a non-payment errors and you should contact us using the [Provider Enquiry Form](#) for resolution.

Managing withdrawals and deferrals in TCSI

TCSI data must be updated within 7 days of the student's withdrawal.

A student's withdrawal from a unit requires updates to the *Unit Enrolment Packet* as follows:

- amend the unit of study status code (E355 – code 1 for withdrew without penalty or code 6 for withdrew due to medical reasons)
- amend the unit of study outcome date (E601 – to indicate the date that the student formally withdrew from the unit)

Where the student has withdrawn from the course, update all units as above, and make the following updates to the *Course Admissions Packet*:

- amend the course outcome code (E599 – code 2 for withdrawn).

You are reminded any units with a census day on or after the withdrawal date entered will not be paid. Also, the issue with outcome date validations (E601) advised in the [VSL Provider Newsletter June 2021](#) edition is pending correction in TCSI.

You will find further information to assist you at [Reporting withdrawals in TCSI](#).

Special circumstances – COVID-19 vaccinations

You must have processes and procedures in place relating to re-crediting of HELP balances, including relating to applications under section 68 of the *VET Student Loans Act 2016*, where students are seeking a re-credit of their HELP balance and remission of the debt due to special circumstances (refer section 4.8.15 Processes and procedures relating to re-crediting a HELP balance of the [VSL Manual for Providers](#)).

Circumstances are 'special circumstances' under the Act if a student can demonstrate, to your satisfaction, that their circumstances were:

- beyond the student's control
- did not make their full impact on the student until on or after, the census day for the course, or part of the course and
- made it impracticable for the student to complete the requirements for the course, or part of the course, during the student's enrolment.

We provide the following information which may assist you in your consideration of special circumstances applications received from students impacted by COVID-19 and requirements which may be in place regarding vaccinations.

For example, you may receive special circumstance applications from students who cannot complete their studies due to the need to obtain a vaccination. The inability to receive the vaccination may be by choice or due to medical reasons.

We expect you to adhere to public health orders in the jurisdiction in which you operate. You should also, where possible, offer flexible delivery to students so they can continue to undertake the course they are enrolled in aside from any restrictions due to their vaccination status. We acknowledge that the public health orders are regularly updated and subject to change at short notice, so it is important that you remain alert to any changes.

There is no definitive guidance regarding scenarios given applications made following section 68 require consideration of the individual circumstances of each student. As section 68 decisions may be subject to 'merits-review' another decision-maker may take a different approach depending on the circumstances of the student. In assessing such an application from an unvaccinated student, some factors to be mindful are:

- checking the currency of the public health order and confirm its restrictions
- whether the requirement to be vaccinated was imposed on or after the relevant census day
- whether the student has had sufficient time to comply with the requirement to be vaccinated
- whether there is a genuine need for the student to attend onsite training, or whether the training can be delivered remotely
- alternatively, if it is feasible for the onsite training to be deferred for a period when the restrictions may be eased
- whether the student was able to access a vaccination or had an appropriate reason (for example, a medical reason) for not being vaccinated and
- any other relevant matters raised by the student.

Reminder about handling information

During lockdowns caused by COVID-19, there is potential for an increased risk of fraudulent and malicious online activity. Staff are operating with limited supervision in locations outside of the office and may be accessing areas, systems and information outside of normal working hours. It is important to maintain security of information, especially when working from home, or under different working arrangements.

As an approved VSL provider, it is your responsibility to ensure staff comply with the *VET Student Loans Act 2016*, the VET Student Loans Rules 2016 and the *Privacy Act 2018*. All staff should be aware of the correct processes and procedures in relation to handling information. These measures protect students and maintain the integrity and reputation of Australia's VET sector. Providers should note there are offences under the *Privacy Act 1988* in relation to the misuse of personal information. This includes obtaining VET information in the capacity as a VET officer and using or disclosing that information to another person or using that information for a purpose that is not permitted.

For further information on record keeping requirements, refer to the [VET Student Loans Manual for Providers](#) (refer section 4.1 Compliance and section 4.12 Retaining information and documents), as well as the [Quick Guide – Record Keeping](#) which provides information on the record keeping requirements for VSL.

2022 indexed course caps

The indexed VSL course cap amounts for 2022 have been released.

The course cap is the total amount of loan an eligible student may access for a particular course. The course cap amounts are indexed annually.

New and continuing students will have access to the following maximum loan amounts for any census days that occur from 1 January 2022:

- Band 1 (Part 1, Schedule 1) \$5,406
- Band 2 (Part 2, Schedule 1) \$10,813
- Band 3 (Part 3, Schedule 1) \$16,221
- Specific (Schedule 2) \$81,111

The factsheets for providers (including details of the calculation) and students are available on the department's website.

- [VET Student Loans Course Caps Indexed Amounts \(for providers\)](#)
- [VET Student Loans Course Caps Indexed Amounts \(for students\)](#)

The indexed amounts are applied automatically for new and continuing students with approved loans (that is, approved VSL eCAFs) in respect of units with census dates after 1 January.

For any student commencing a course in 2021, irrespective of a 2022 census date, the approved forms are 2021 eCAFs. 2021 eCAFs have been approved for students commencing a course in 2022, until the department releases the final 2022 eCAFs.

December Spotlight

Compliance

Compliance under the VET Student Loans (VSL) Program

Compliance is a key element of ensuring a fair and equitable VET loans sector for students, providers and taxpayers. The [VSL Compliance Strategy](#), available on the department's website, sets out the department's compliance requirements, goals and objectives and strategies for preventing, detecting and responding to non-compliance to ensure VSL program requirements are being met.

Provider compliance responsibilities

The [VET Student Loans Act 2016](#) (the Act) and the [VET Student Loans Rules 2016](#) (the Rules) set out the legislative requirements that underpin the VSL program. If you offer VSL you must ensure you meet all legislative and program requirements. We remind you it is a requirement under the Act that you regularly review internal administrative processes as well as the processes and procedures published on your website. We also recommend that, if required, you seek your own legal advice to ensure compliance.

The consequences of non-compliance are intended to target and mitigate unscrupulous behaviour and protect the integrity of the program, while avoiding interference with the operations of legitimate and reputable providers. Failure to meet requirements under the VSL program may result in serious consequences including civil penalties, strict liability penalty units, or suspending or revoking your ability to offer VSL. Where we take compliance action, the Secretary may publish (or require you to release or publish) information on compliance actions to ensure the interests of students are protected and all stakeholders in the VET sector are aware of our approach to compliance. Further information about our [compliance activities, actions and results](#) is available at [VET Student Loans Compliance](#).

To remain compliant with legislative and regulatory requirements, we encourage you to utilise the information available on the department's website including the [VET Student Loans Manual for Providers](#) and the Compliance Checklist at Appendix L of the manual.

Current compliance activities

In conjunction with other compliance monitoring activities, we undertake a program of provider compliance audits. Compliance audits assess your compliance with the requirements of the Act and Rules and whether students are eligible and genuine as defined in the Act and Rules. The first tranche of provider compliance audits for the 2021/22 program year commenced in November.

We also undertake regular surveying of students to identify emerging compliance risks, trends and to inform the compliance audit program. The survey results provide an indicator of student engagement with courses and valuable insight into the student experience.

For further information about VSL compliance or our compliance activities please visit [VET Student Loans Compliance](#).

Communication News

Information for students

There are several resources developed specifically for students who are planning to access a VET Student Loan. You can direct students to the various resources on [Information for VET Student Loans Students](#). These resources have been developed to support the [VET Student Loans Information Booklet](#) and include videos and fact sheets.

The VET Student Loans - Part 1 video advises students about using the eligibility tool on the [My Skills](#) website, tracking their HELP balance on [myHELPbalance](#) and repaying their loan through the taxation system.

The VET Student Loans - Part 2 video advises students about applying for a VSL through the eCAF system, the necessity for a tax file number and the requirement to complete progression forms.

More detailed information is in these fact sheets for students:

- eCAF Fact Sheet
- Student Obligations Fact Sheet
- Student Progression Fact Sheet
- Tax File Number (TFN) Fact Sheet

The checklist of information you must provide to students prior to enrolment can be found at Appendix B of the [VET Student Loans Manual for Providers](#).

VSL Forum

The VSL Forum will return in 2022. We encourage you to send items for discussion that are relevant to all providers to VSLProviderReferenceGroup@dese.gov.au at any time.

Key 2021 and 2022 dates

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| Revocation of approval of all remaining VFH providers | 1 July 2021 |
| VSL Application Survey – expression of interest due | 10 December 2021 |
| Department Christmas closedown | 24 December 2021 |
| Reporting deadline for VFH units – census dates in 2018 | COB 31 December 2021 |
| Department re-opens | 4 January 2022 |
| VSL Application Survey closes | 28 January 2022 |
| Submit applications to become approved VSL provider | 1 March 2022 onwards |

Subscribing to the VSL Provider Newsletter and VSL Forums

Do you know someone who would like to subscribe to the VSL Provider Newsletter or receive invitations to the quarterly VSL Forum? The newsletter and the VSL Forum are how we let you know about program updates and reminders about the program administrative requirements.

Let your colleagues know they can subscribe the newsletter and VSL Forum invitations at [VET Student Loans – subscribe](#).

