# VET Student Loans (VSL) Provider Newsletter – October 2020

**Note** – if you did not receive this newsletter and would like to, please include your name and email address as a contact in the HELP IT System (HITS).

# 2020-21 Budget updates

## Extension of loan fee exemption

The Australian Government has further extended the exemption of the 20 per cent loan fee for full fee-paying VET Student Loan (VSL) students. On 12 April 2020, the Australian Government announced a six-month exemption of the loan fee applied to VSL amounts incurred on census days between 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2020. This exemption has now been extended to include VSL amounts incurred on census days between 1 October 2020 to 30 June 2021.

All VSL amounts incurred on census days between 1 April 2020 to 30 June 2021 will not incur the usual 20 per cent loan fee. Providers and students will not need to do anything for the exemption to be applied. Providers should **continue** to report the loan fee as if it was still applicable, as has been occurring since April – the department will give effect to the exemption so that student VSL records with the Australian Taxation Office will automatically reflect the loan fee exemption.

## VSL Tuition Protection levy

The Government will waive collection of the 2020 VET Student Loans Tuition Protection levy, providing significant relief for 140 approved VET providers.

The Australian Government will provide $2.7 million into the Tuition Protection Service in lieu of the levy collection, to ensure protection for VSL students continues to be maintained.

The waiver follows the expansion of the successful Tuition Protection Service for international students to include similar protections for domestic students accessing a VSL, for a FEE-HELP or HECS-HELP loan at a private education provider from 1 January 2020.

According to a joint ministerial statement from Minister Tehan and Minister Cash, the fee waiver will benefit the cashflow of businesses and help ensure their continued operation.

## Extension of VET FEE-HELP redress measures

Eligible students will have more time to have their VET FEE-HELP debt re-credited after the Government committed $11.9 million to extend the VET FEE-HELP Student Redress Measures to 31 December 2022.

The Redress Measures were due to cease on 31 December 2020. Now eligible students will have an extra two years to submit their claim.

# General Updates

## Approval times

All VSL provider approvals are time limited. Assigning a time limit is an integral part of the VSL approved course provider assessment methodology. It is applied to all applications, from initial approvals to subsequent re-approvals, in order to ensure the integrity of the VSL program. The maximum amount of time a provider's approval can be in effect (before re-applying) is 7 years.

The department is currently receiving applications from Registered Training Organisations (RTO) interested in becoming approved VSL approved course providers. The department coordinates rounds based on a standard 10 weeks for a normal assessment timeframe. This enables approvals to be in place and ready for the new year or new semester, (some applications may take longer if additional information or processing is required). In the case of the current round, the assessment timeframe will coincide with the end of this calendar year and allow providers to commence teaching VSL approved courses in 2021.

When applicants receive notification that they have been successful, they will also be informed of the time limit associated with their approval. Some applicants may find that their approvals have been assigned less than the full 7 years. If you receive notice that your length of approval is less than 7 years, you will be given an explanation and further information about how to address any conditions that may be associated with your approval. It is not uncommon to receive a shorter period of time and it should not be seen as a negative outcome. Length of approval is just one of the conditions the department can use to ensure that approved providers are supported, monitored and managed in such a way as to minimise risk to both the participant and the department.

## VET Student Loans Annual Report – 2019

The VSL Annual Report Jan–Dec 2019 and the VSL Annual Report Jan–Dec 2019 - Table 1 to Table 6 Addendum have been published on the VSL website.

The annual statistical report provides an overview of VSL activity for the 2019 calendar year, including information on the number of students accessing a VSL, the amount of VSL accessed, and provider level statistics.

Enquiries regarding the report should be emailed to:  VETDataRequests@dese.gov.au.

## Updating contact details in HITS

The department is unable to assist any provider enquiry from staff that are **not** listed as a contact in the HELP IT System (HITS). Due to privacy reasons, the payments information and student records are in-confidence between the department and approved officers listed as contacts within HITS.

For steps on updating the Contact List in HITS for your organisation, please refer to the HITS User Guide for assistance with this. Information about adding, deleting or updating the Contact List commences at page 53. Information about updating the Key Personnel list commences at page 100.

## Contacting the department

Just a reminder that any queries about VSL and provider approval should be submitted using the online form on the VSL website.

There are two drop down fields to assist approved providers direct their enquiry to the appropriate section:

1. Provider Operations
2. Notifiable Event

### Provider Operations

- Condition variations (Fees or Courses)
- Third party arrangement request
- System - access and passwords
- Enrolment requirements
- Other variation requests
- Student engagement and progression form
- Payment and reporting
- General administration
- Publishing and marketing

### Notifiable Events

- Notice - Changes to our organisation
- Notice - Fee period exemption
- Notice - Ceases to offer or provide course
- Notice - Other
- Notice - Annual forecast/financial statements

# Data reporting requirements

## Tertiary Collection of Student Information (TCSI) Update

VSL providers are required to fully transition to TCSI by **31 March 2021**. The department recently issued a survey to help support providers' transition to TCSI. The department will be reaching out to those providers that have not yet completed the survey asking them to complete it as soon as possible. The department will also be reaching out to some providers who indicated they will be using the TCSI Data Entry portal to gain a better understanding of some of the survey answers.

### On-boarding to TCSI

Early adopters can commence on-boarding in December 2020. Providers who expect a transition date in December will be contacted shortly to confirm their intention to be an early adopter.

Providers that do not intend to adopt early, can begin the transition to TCSI after they have completed reporting for the previous month in HEPCAT. Based on current production scheduling, VSL providers should transition to using TCSI by April 2021, following completion of reporting March 2021 data. VSL providers must cease using HEPCAT and start using TCSI for all data from 1 April 2021. Providers can, therefore, continue to report January to 31 March 2021 census dates via HEPCAT using the 2019 structures, elements and codes. VSL providers may report March 2021 census days in HEPCAT until 7 April 2021. Thereafter, TCSI must be used for all data reporting using 2021 TCSI structure, elements and codes.

Once a provider uses TCSI – either by portal upload or API, they cannot go back to using HEPCAT. When using TCSI the 2021 structure, elements and codes must be used.

### Preparing to transition

In the lead up to TCSI going live, all providers should be preparing to transition by:

- catching-up on the latest information on TCSI - watch the 16 September 2020 webinar available at TCSI Support – Training
- verifying migrated data – checking how certain elements have been transferred (for example, E609/E610 – deriving citizenship effective dates), making sure the data (including core details) in TCSI matches provider's student management systems

### Resources

All documents about the timeline and transition period can be found on TCSI Support – Transitioning to TCSI. These documents will continue to be revised and updated until TCSI has replaced HEPCAT and delivered us to the *new world* of data collection and management. If you have any specific questions on TCSI that are not answered by this information please email TCSIsupport@dese.gov.au.

VSL reporting updates, including links to data elements, are available on VSL Data Reporting Updates.

## Content updates to HEIMS Online and TCSI Support websites

On the HEIMS Help website, information regarding 2020 and 2021 reporting requirements has changed. The former sub-heading *TCSI Resource 2020 Reporting Requirements* has been renamed and restructured.

On the HEIMS Help website, under the sub-heading TCSI Resources providers will find information and links to TCSI reporting requirements under the renamed tab - *TCSI Resource – 2020/21 Reporting Requirements*, or refer to the TCSI Support website for this information (see below).

Documents that have been removed from the former sub-heading can be found under the *Archive* tab (including Final 2020 Data element specifications, VET Student Loan Collections, Final VSL Data framework and element list and 2020 VET Student Loans Secretary notices).

For further assistance and links regarding VSL 2020 reporting requirements, refer to the VSL Data and Reporting Updates page and refer to HEPCAT and HEIMS information at HEIMS Help Support.

On TCSI Support, providers will find help and guidance in reporting for the VET collection in TCSI. TCSI Support is a searchable website. If you need assistance with finding information, please use the search text box.

## TCSI Webinars - 13 August 2020 and 16 September 2020

Thank you to providers for attending the TCSI webinars on 13 August 2020 and 16 September 2020. For providers that missed either webinar, recordings of both are available on TCSI Support - Training.

VSL providers should already be aware (see VSL Newsletter – August 2020) the CHESSN will be phased out as a mandatory element in the VET data collection, and the Unique Student Identifier (USI) will become a mandatory element.

During the webinar held on 13 August 2020, the TCSI Support team discussed the expansion of the USI to higher education. While this webinar focused primarily on the effect on higher education, VSL

providers were able to ask questions and give feedback. Please read the item on Unique Student Identifier – FAQs for the department's response to provider's questions.

# October Spotlight

## Publishing tuition fees

The second instalment of the 'Spotlight' series focuses on the requirement for VSL providers to publish tuition fees for each part of an approved courses they offer on their website and My Skills (refer MySkills User Guide - Add/Edit Course Price Information). Publishing this information is not only a legislative requirement, but is also important so that students are clear about their responsibilities, obligations and rights if they apply for a VSL.

### What are the legislative requirements?

Information regarding tuition fees should be at either the *Unit of Study* or *Unit of Competency* level in accordance with section 57(b) of the *VET Student Loans Act 2016* and section 98(1)(a) of the VET Student Loans Rules 2016 (VSL Rules).

These provisions require information to be provided to students prior to enrolment to ensure they are fully informed of the tuition fees and any other fees that apply to the course, among other things. Section 57 is a civil penalty provision. A provider must also give prospective students information about how to access the tuition fees for the course on its website (paragraph 98(2)(m)(i) of the VSL Rules).

Under section 115 of the VSL Rules, providers must give course fee information to the Secretary prior to enrolling students in a VSL approved course. This is accomplished by uploading up to date course fee information, including tuition fees and other fees for VSL approved courses, on My Skills.

### Where to find further detailed information about publishing tuition fees

Further information about providing information before enrolment, including publishing tuition fees, is available in the VET Student Loans Provider Manual (section 4.8.10).

The legislative provisions are section 57 *Publishing tuition fees* of the *VET Student Loans Act 2016* and section 98 *Providing information before enrolment* and section 115 *Fees for approved courses* of the VET Student Loans Rules.

# Communications

## VSL Forum

The inaugural VSL Forum was held on 22 September via webinar with 158 VSL providers. The VSL Forum was established to communicate specific information relevant to all VSL approved providers. It is an opportunity to raise awareness of any upcoming changes to the VSL Program and discuss any potential impacts on provider operations. The VSL branch is seeking suggestions for content to ensure participants get the most opportunity from the webinars.

A main topic for the first Forum was the extension of the USI to the tertiary sector. Forum participants had the opportunity to ask questions about how this extension will impact student and business operations. Answers to those questions are at [Unique Student Identifier – FAQs](#).

Thank you to those providers who have recommended ideas for improvements to the next Forum. Your feedback is welcomed, useful and consideration is currently being given to the suggestions.

Future Forums will be held between publication of the VSL newsletter. It is anticipated that the next forum will be held in November.

## Launch of the Your Career website

The Australian Government has launched the Your Career website to help Australians, no matter what age or career stage, with clear and simple careers information.

[Your Career](#) includes:

- career quizzes to explore your future career, or your options now
- education or training options to help you upskill or reskill
- tips for successful job searching, including resume writing
- links to support services to help you find employment, manage your wellbeing and understand your rights at work, and
- an A to Z of occupations, including detailed career descriptions, average pay and jobs in demand**.**

Your Career is delivered by the National Careers Institute and powered by labour market intelligence from the National Skills Commission.

# Questions from providers

## Unique Student Identifier – FAQs

**Will the eCAF system be modified to include USI and will CHESSN be made non-mandatory in the eCAF system?**

The USI is a required field in a VSL electronic Commonwealth Assistance Form (eCAF), although currently 'optional' due to possible exemptions. From 1 January 2021, all VSL eCAFs must include a USI. The department is in the process of making changes to the eCAF which will apply from January 2021. These changes will include making the USI a mandatory field. With the changes, the field will remain optional for provider enrolment uploads, but mandatory for the student. If the provider does not include the USI in the enrolment upload, the student will need to input their USI prior to eCAF submission.

The eCAF training environment should be made available in October 2020 and the full capability will be released to providers in the final quarter of 2020.

With the phase-out of the CHESSN, from 1 January 2021, CHESSNs will not be required for new students (new eCAFs).

**What is being done to promote the USI to students (for example, Year 12 students this year) ahead of this requirement?**

The department has been working with the Office of the Student Identifiers Registrar to communicate these changes to students and providers. More information can be found at USI: extending the USI to higher education.

**Will the USI be required on CANs and other financial statements?**

Under the VET Student Loan Rules 2016, it is currently a requirement that VSL providers include the USI in the VSL Statement of Covered Fees, VSL Fee Notice and Commonwealth Assistance Notice (CAN). This will continue.

**Will students with USI exemption be able to access HELP loans?**

USI will be compulsory for students seeking Commonwealth financial assistance. Since 2017, the USI has been required to be provided by all students when requesting a VSL – this change will therefore only impact those students that were previously exempted from having a USI. Although students may still apply for an exemption from having a USI, from 1 January 2021 all students wishing to access a VSL (that is – wishing to submit a VSL eCAF) must have a USI and it must be included in the VSL eCAF. Therefore, if a student chooses to obtain an exemption, they will not be eligible to receive Commonwealth financial assistance and will need to fund their own tertiary education journey.

**What happens if documents provided to create a USI do not match Australian Taxation Office (ATO) records – would this lead to verification errors when applying for a VSL?**

The USI is not used to verify the student's TFN.

TCSI will verify the TFN by checking that the student's personal details match the student's ATO record. Where the details do not match, student debt records will not be processed by the department for payment.

Providers can report updated student personal details through TCSI to trigger the TFN verification process based on the updated details.  Students are able to update their details with the ATO through MyGov.

Students can edit the details associated with their USI at any time at [Unique Student Identifier](#), using a valid form of identification. New students creating a USI should be encouraged to ensure their details remain the same across all applications. If a student has provided different details in their TFN application to those used for their USI application, they should be encouraged to log in to their USI account and correct the difference.

**No new CHESSNS will be issued to VET students (as well as Higher Education)**

From January 2021, providers will not allocate CHESSNs for students.

TCSI will automatically allocate and manage CHESSNs for VSL providers for new and continuing students. Please see information at [TCSI Support: CHESSN management in TCSI](#).

As the USI is already on documents (CAN, Statement of Covered Fees etc) the CHESSN managed by TCSI can be treated as a backend/system value and will just be used to link to the ATO.

Transition information regarding phasing out the CHESSN will be provided in the coming weeks.

**How long will the 'grace period' be for new students with early 2021 Census Dates?**

For VSL, all loan applications made on or after 1 January 2021, must include the student's USI.

**Note:** Providers can contact the VSL Program for clarification about the extension of the USI, using the [online form](#) on the VSL website.