

Hon Chris Hipkins

MP for Remutaka

Minister for COVID-19 Response

Minister of Education

Minister for the Public Service

Leader of the House



23 April 2021

Jenn Bestwick
Chair
Tertiary Education Commission
PO Box 27-048
Wellington 6141

Dear Jenn

Delegation to fund the Hardship Fund for Learners

I am writing to advise you of my delegation to the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) of responsibility for administering the Hardship Fund for Learners. This fund replaces the delegations from 2020.

Purpose

The first purpose of the fund is to provide temporary financial assistance for currently enrolled tertiary learners who are facing hardship and barriers to continue study during a period impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Hardship Purpose). Hardship means any suffering, deprivation or financial challenge faced by a learner during the period impacted by COVID-19 that is affecting a learner's ability to access and continue with their study.

In particular, the funding for the Hardship Purpose must be used by tertiary education organisations (TEOs) to support learners facing hardship or financial challenges:

- providing direct cash or in-kind payments for items like food, utilities (including internet access) or housing; and/or
- purchasing resources on learners' behalf, excluding devices.

The second purpose of the fund is to help tertiary education organisations (TEOs) to support learners and prevent them from experiencing technology-related financial challenges by providing funding for technology-related costs (Hardship Technology Access Purpose). This reflects a situation where COVID-19 restrictions remove the option for face-to-face study for learners, such as Alert levels applying throughout New Zealand, or to a regional area, or where learners at a provider are linked to a community cluster.

In particular, funding for the Hardship Technology Access Purpose must support access to:

- direct cash or in-kind payments including for internet access and related support; and/or
- resources for learners to borrow while enrolled; and/or
- suitable devices and related support including refurbishing devices returned by learners to enable other learners to use them offsite; and/or

- other support that assists learners in engaging in technology-enabled tertiary education (the term 'other support' does not include supporting TEO capability to deliver their provision online).

Note that TEOs must not use this fund for more general technology improvements or capacity building that is not related to the direct provision of technology to learners.

Key expectations of the TEC

The financial impact of COVID-19 on learners, and the learners' need for technology support, will be felt more by some TEOs than others due to characteristics of learner groups that a TEO enrolls, or the targeting of the COVID-19 restrictions that apply (such as a geographic area). Given this, I expect the TEC to adopt a targeted approach in allocating funding under this delegation to respond to different situations.

The TEC can allocate funding through this delegation for the following purposes:

- the Hardship Purpose, and/or
- the Hardship Technology Access Purpose.

Having one fund enables a flexible approach for TEOs and the TEC to respond to the needs of learners over the year, especially if circumstances change due to COVID-19.

The amount of funding allocated to each purpose must be determined by the TEC, as it considers appropriate, or as directed by any future funding decisions made by the Government.

The TEC must design processes for allocating funding to TEOs, taking into account the purpose of this fund.

The TEC must also ensure transparent reporting on how the funding is allocated by the TEC and used by TEOs.

Fund settings

TEO eligibility

TEOs receiving funding from the following funds may receive funding for the Hardship Purpose and the Technology Access Purpose:

- Student Achievement Component – Provision at Level 3 and above on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework
- Student Achievement Component – Levels 1 and 2
- Youth Guarantee Fees Free
- Literacy and Numeracy (excluding Workplace Literacy and Numeracy)
- Specialised English for Speakers of Other Languages
- Tertiary providers being funded under section 556 of the Education and Training Act 2020.

TEOs that receive funding from the Industry Training Fund (ITF) may receive funding for the Hardship Technology Access Purpose only. The TEC may provide funding to TEOs in receipt of the ITF where there is likely to be a prolonged period of COVID-19 restrictions that impact on trainees' and apprentices' ability to continue with their training.

Learner eligibility

Learners are eligible to receive payments or resources directly from a TEO through the fund if:

- they are enrolled in programmes funded by the TEC, through one of the funds specified above under the heading 'TEO eligibility', at the TEO; and
- they meet the respective learner eligibility criteria for that fund, for example, within most tertiary provider-based funds, this will be domestic tertiary students.

The TEO may also use the funding to support a group of learners with financial challenges, such as funding for a student association's food bank, when the primary group accessing it are eligible learners (such as domestic tertiary students).

Funding amount

Funding available within the Vote Tertiary Education Access to Tertiary Education appropriation for this fund will be set by budget processes and the Government's decisions.

Specific uses

For the avoidance of doubt, no funding within this allocation can be used to pay any tuition fees, compulsory course costs or compulsory student services fees charged to a learner.

Delegation to the TEC

I delegate to the Tertiary Education Commission under section 409(1)(j) of the Education and Training Act 2020 authority to pay funding:

- to TEOs to provide support for learners for the Hardship Purpose or the Hardship Technology Access Purpose; and
- to TEOs eligible for the funding, as specified above; and
- up to financial limits set through budget processes and the Government's decisions.

I expect the TEC to:

- ensure funding is applied towards assisting tertiary learners who are impacted by the restrictions from COVID-19 that apply to the learners in their area; and
- publish guidance to support TEOs to understand what the fund can be used for; and
- be transparent with how the funding is allocated; and
- report to me regularly on the TEOs it has funded and learners that are being supported; and
- collect information from TEOs on their strategy and approach to identifying need and (if they are using the Hardship Technology Access Purpose) which learners need technology support; and
- develop and publish funding conditions that include a condition or conditions to state that funding may be recovered from TEOs if it has not been, or is not being, used or used appropriately; and
- publish information on the TEOs it has funded, including a public list of each TEO that receives funding, on the funding used, nature of supports provided to learners, and number of learners it has supported and their demographic profile.

Timeframes

This delegation applies from the date of this letter for the 2020/21 and 2021/22 financial years.

The TEC may exercise any of its administrative functions as required to give effect to this delegation outside of those dates.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'CH', written in a cursive style.

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education