



18 July 2023

Tēnā koe

On 19 June 2023, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *How many audits of course-related costs have been conducted in each of the years 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 (so far) to ensure that the course-related costs are being used for their intended purpose?*
- *Of the above, please indicate how many instances of students claiming course-related costs in each of those years revealed that the payments were not being used as intended.*
- *Of the above, please indicate whether any of this money was required to be paid back, if so, how much and by how many different individuals?*
- *What is the process for determining whether or not to audit a student who has claimed course-related costs?*
- *Please provide the job title of the person responsible for deciding whether or not to audit course-related costs.*
- *For all instances of course-related costs that were found to have been spent improperly, please provide all details held by the Ministry and/or studylink in relation to what it was spent on.*

Course-related costs are part of the Student Loan Scheme. The borrower is required to pay the money back, as it is a loan.

StudyLink encourages students to borrow only what they need and use their loan for the purposes intended. Students do not need to provide evidence when they claim their course-related-costs, because it is generally accepted that students who are studying full-time have a variety of costs associated with studying, and most will need to use the money as intended.

There is no separate audit process on this expenditure. Ensuring that students are aware of their obligations and responsibilities when they borrow from the Student Loan Scheme is an integral part of the application and approval process.

The Ministry has the authority to ask for evidence. In certain circumstances we may use this authority, for example if someone enrolled in study, accessed the course-related costs payment, then withdrew from study. If the Ministry noticed a pattern like that, we may put monitoring in place for that student to look at any future Student Loan applications, part of which may be asking for evidence of course-related costs expenditure.

Should StudyLink have concerns about a student's course-related costs claims, the student may be contacted to confirm their costs, and can be asked to provide evidence. Information about those who are asked for further information to support their claim, or to provide evidence, is not recorded centrally. I am unable to provide you with this information as it is held in notes on individual case files. In order to provide you with this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review a substantial number of files. As such, I refuse your request under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

I have considered whether the Ministry would be able to respond to your request given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested. I have concluded that, in either case, the Ministry's ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

The principles and purposes of the Official Information Act 1982 under which you made your request are:

- to create greater openness and transparency about the plans, work and activities of the Government,
- to increase the ability of the public to participate in the making and administration of our laws and policies and
- to lead to greater accountability in the conduct of public affairs.

This Ministry fully supports those principles and purposes. The Ministry therefore intends to make the information contained in this letter and any attached documents available to the wider public. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter on the Ministry's website. Your personal details will be deleted, and the Ministry will not publish any information that would identify you as the person who requested the information.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz.

If you are not satisfied with this response regarding course-related costs, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman.

Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi nui

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'K. Heddle-Baker', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kate Heddle-Baker
General Manager Centralised Services
Client Service Support