



11 AUG 2021

Dear

On 8 July 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *The criteria for getting an extension for the student allowance*
- *The number of student allowance extensions requested, and the percentage that are granted.*
- *Is there more benefit in trying to change the policy or would granting an extension to those students who find themselves in this position solve the problem?*

On 14 July 2021, the Ministry contacted you in order to refine your request. You advised that you were wanting to know the impact of the policy change and the number of Student Allowances declined each year for reaching the 120-week limit.

A student usually has a maximum of 200 weeks entitlement to a Student Allowance for tertiary study, or if aged 40 or over at the date they start study, a maximum of 120 weeks. It may be helpful for you to know of the background regarding the changes made for students aged 40 or older. In 2014, the 120-week Student Allowance limit was introduced. The intent was to re-focus Student Allowances more on students from low-income families and the early years of study, which was what the Student Allowance was originally designed for. It was also noted that a bachelor's degree, considered sufficient to find good, sustainable employment, would generally be achieved in three years, or 120 weeks of full-time study.

The Student Allowance can be granted for a longer period if the student experiences significant events that prevent the student from completing the study within the time limit.

This includes:

- Illness that puts the student out of action for some time (i.e. glandular fever)
- Accident and hospitalisation
- Other special circumstances, (i.e. Civil Defence emergency, like a flood or earthquake.)

Requests for an extension to the 120-week limit are paper based and applications are processed manually. Applications for extensions to the 120-week limit and any decision to decline the application is held in the notes of individual case files. In order to provide you with this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review hundreds of files. As such, this aspect of your request is refused under section 18(f) of the Act. The

Page 1 of 3

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.

However, approved applications for an extension to the 120-week limit are indicated by a flag in the system, therefore, the Ministry can provide this information.

Please see Table One below which shows how many applications for extensions were approved beyond the 120 and 200-week for the years 2019 to 2021.

Table Two below which shows the number of Student Allowances which have been cancelled for reaching the 120-week threshold.

Table One: The total number of Student Allowance extensions approved for the years 2019 to 2021, broken down by application type.

Application type	2019	2020	2021
120-week extension	48	45	24
200-week extension	90	105	75

Table Two: The total number of Student Allowances cancelled for reaching the 120-week threshold for the study starting years 2019 to 2021.

Assistance	2019	2020	2021
Student Allowance	354	375	279

Notes for tables:

- The years 2019, 2020 and 2021 refer to the year the study was started.
- Figures for 2021 include the period up to 30 June 2021.
- To protect confidentiality, the Ministry uses processes to make it difficult to identify an individual person or entity from published data. This data table has had random rounding to base three applied to all cell counts in the table. The published counts will never differ by more than two counts.

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
- 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 available to the wider public. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter on the Ministry of Social Development'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 student allowance extensions, 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.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jason Dwen', written in a cursive style.

Jason Dwen
**General Manager, Centralised Services
Service Delivery**