



21 June 2022

Tēnā koe

On 29 May 2022, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *What advice has there been on potential extensions of the Winter Energy Payment scheme, in particular to students?*

The Ministry has interpreted your request as advice to Ministers on extending the Winter Energy Payment (WEP) to students, or those getting student allowance/loans.

When the WEP was established in 2017, it was one component of the Government's Families Package. For your information, I have enclosed links to two documents provided to the Minister for Social Development that discuss the WEP, and that mention extending assistance to students, which address your request. The reports are publicly available. Links are provided below.

Joint Report T2017/2415: Families Package: Key design issues – 3 November 2017 – Families Package Information Release – The Treasury:

www.treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2018-04/fp-3803996.pdf

This 3 November 2017 joint report sought ministerial decisions on key design issues for the major components of the Families Package. The WEP was one of the elements included within this package. The WEP is targeted at beneficiaries and superannuitants. The WEP is discussed on pages 15-19.

At paragraph 38, the report noted that eligibility for the WEP is limited to those in receipt of a "main benefit or NZ super". At paragraph 39, the report discussed whether to extend the WEP to clients in receipt of a Student Allowance. The report noted that Student Allowance is not included in the definition of "main benefit" under the Social Security Act 1964.

Please also see the second report:

Joint Report T20172495: Families Package: Winter Energy Payment – Detailed Design – 10 November 2017 – Families Package Information Release – The Treasury:

www.treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2018-04/fp-3903009.pdf

This 10 November 2017 report from the Treasury and the Ministry sought Ministerial confirmation of the WEP's detailed design.

In paragraphs 6-8 of the Recommended actions for Ministers, Ministers agreed not to extend eligibility to the WEP to sole parent students. The rationale for this decision was discussed in paragraphs 19 and 20 of the report. It noted that:

"You requested advice on extending eligibility to sole parent students to ensure that the benefit system is not more financially generous than the student system for sole parents. However, the proposed \$50 per week increases to student allowance (and student loan living costs) mean that students will be able to access higher income support through the student support system than through the benefit system (even with WEP taken into account). Therefore, officials do not recommend extending the WEP to students, including sole parent students."

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 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 about the WEP and students, 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 'Bede Hogan', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Bede Hogan

Policy Manager

Welfare System and Income Support Policy