



1 April 2025

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act request

Thank you for your email of 6 March 2025 in which you requested information regarding calls made to StudyLink, and the number of staff employed by StudyLink.

I have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). Please find my decision on each part of your request set out separately below.

- *Under what circumstances are callers told their call cannot be taken?*

The Ministry aims to answer all calls to our 0800 services as quickly as possible. We've seen a significant increase in demand for our phone-based services due to our peak season for welfare and student support assistance across Work and Income, Seniors and StudyLink.

The Ministry has several systems in place to help manage our contact with clients as efficiently as possible. In particular, we provide callers with an estimated wait time so they can choose to either wait in the queue or call back during off peak hours.

We also have "CallMe"- a call back system where clients can request a call back without losing their place in the queue. To be offered a callback, wait times need to be greater than 7 minutes, and callers need to be phoning from a disclosed number (ie: not withheld/private). Although the time to receive a callback may be long, it does mean that callers can hold their place in the queue without being physically tied to their phones. We attempt to make two callback calls and, if someone misses both and they called from a cellphone, our system will send a text message advising that they can call back, and we'll hold their place in the queue (ie: prioritise their call).

The Ministry has also extended the operating hours to assist with higher peak call demands. From Saturday 8 March StudyLink Contact Centre extended their existing operating hours Saturday 8:00am -1:00pm to 8:00am to 5:00pm and Monday to Friday 7:00am to 6:00pm to 7:00am -8:00pm. This week Monday 31 March StudyLink's operating hours have reduced to 7:00am to 7:00pm, and Saturday returns to our normal operating hours of 8:00am to 1:00pm as the call demand reduces.

It is important to note, however, that we can only offer call backs when our resourcing levels allow us to and when clients have identified themselves in our

phone systems. We are unable to offer call backs during times when there is a very high demand (such as during lunchtime period) and if it is evident we would not be able to return the call on the same day. This is when callers are played a message advising that we are extremely busy but to please try again later, then their call is disconnected.

- *How many times did that occur in each of the past 3 weeks and how many calls were affected?*
- *What sort of call volume is the cut-off point for refusing calls*

The Ministry does not record the information you have requested above as we cannot track the number of calls that cannot get through to our 0800-line queue. As such, I am refusing your request for this information under section 18(g) of the Act. The information you had requested is not held by the Ministry and I have no grounds to believe that the information is either held by or closely connected to the functions of another department, Minister of the Crown or organisation.

- *How many staff are employed as of this week to respond to Studylink customers and how many were employed for this purpose at the same time last year?*

In October 2024, we had 126 Customer Service Representative's (CSRs) trained and ready for the start of StudyLink's peak period, which commenced in November 2024. In March 2024 we had 119 staff trained to handle StudyLink demand. As at 4 March 2025, we have 114 CSRs handling StudyLink calls. The reduce staffing numbers is due to natural attrition over this time in the Contact Centre. It is important to note that we have also reallocated staff from other parts of the business to support processing due to increased demand.

I will be publishing this decision letter, with your personal details deleted, on the Ministry's website in due course.

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 my decision on your request, 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

pp.



Anna Graham
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Ministerial and Executive Services