

2020



Australian Government

Commonwealth supported places and HECS-HELP information

This booklet is about subsidised
university places and the
HECS-HELP loan to pay your
student contributions.

Visit

www.studyassist.gov.au

for up-to-date information.



Published March 2020



Commonwealth Higher Education Student Support Number (CHESSN): _____

My education provider: _____



You must read this booklet before submitting the *Request for a Commonwealth supported place and a HECS-HELP loan form*.

When you submit your form, you are declaring that you have read this booklet and that you are aware of your obligations as a Commonwealth supported student and under HECS-HELP.



If you do not submit your form or finalise your payment by the census date, your enrolment as a Commonwealth supported student will be cancelled. You can get more information about your census date from your provider.



The Department of Education, Skills and Employment has endeavoured to ensure that the information in this publication is consistent with the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (the Act) and guidelines made under the Act, available at www.legislation.gov.au. However, there may be differences between this publication and the Act or guidelines. If there is any inconsistency the Act will take precedence.

For more in-depth information about anything in this booklet, please check out the *Commonwealth supported places (CSPs) and Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) Handbook* at www.studyassist.gov.au.

WHO IS THIS BOOKLET FOR?

This booklet is for eligible higher education students enrolling in a CSP. Most undergraduate students at Australian public universities are enrolled in CSPs.

This booklet contains a summary of the key points a person enrolled in a CSP/using a HECS-HELP loan needs to know.

USING THIS BOOKLET

Some pages in this booklet will have words **highlighted**. Check the glossary for a definition of these words.

Contact your approved education provider for any questions about:

- enrolments
- **student contribution amounts** and upfront payments
- **census dates** and **administrative dates**
- the eligibility criteria for a **CSP** and **HECS-HELP** loan and how to apply
- your **CHESN** to check your **available HELP balance**
- withdrawing from study
- getting your HELP debt removed under '**special circumstances**'
- how to make a complaint.



The handbook and all HELP student information booklets are available at www.studyassist.gov.au.

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GLOSSARY

Administrative date—A date set by your approved education provider (before the census date) for submitting your *Request for a Commonwealth supported place and a HECS-HELP loan* form, making upfront payments of your student contributions or formally withdrawing from any units. You can still do this or withdraw from a course after the administrative date (but before the census date), but you may have to pay a late fee.

Approved education provider (provider)—In this booklet, this term means a university or other accredited higher education provider that has been approved by the Australian Government to offer CSPs and HECS-HELP loans to eligible students.

Australian Taxation Office (ATO)—The principal revenue collection agency of the Australian Government. It is responsible for managing HELP debt repayments.

Available HELP balance—This is your available borrowing capacity for HECS-HELP (and FEE-HELP, VET Student Loans and VET FEE-HELP [closed]) from 1 January 2020. View your available HELP balance via the *myHELPbalance* portal at www.myHELPbalance.gov.au.

Census date—This date is set by providers and it is the legal deadline for various requirements, like making an upfront payment of your student contributions, applying for a HECS-HELP loan or formally withdrawing your enrolment so you won't incur a HELP debt.

Combined HELP loan limit—This is the cap on what you can borrow under HECS-HELP (and FEE-HELP, VET FEE-HELP [closed] and VET Student Loans) from 1 January 2020.



Commonwealth Higher Education Student Support Number (CHESSN)—This is a 10-digit number provided by the Australian Government, to all students who are in receipt of a CSP or HELP loan.

Commonwealth Assistance Notice (CAN)—A notice from your provider given after the census date that gives you information about the Commonwealth assistance you have used for the study period.

Commonwealth supported place (CSP)—A place at a provider that is subsidised by the Australian Government. If you are enrolled in a CSP, you only have to pay the ‘student contribution’ amount for your study.

Course of study—In this booklet, this term means a course leading to a higher education award, like a bachelor degree.

CSP and HELP Handbook—A comprehensive handbook that contains information about CSPs and the various HELP loans available to help eligible tertiary students to pay for their study.

Electronic Commonwealth assistance form (eCAF)—An electronic version of the *Request for a Commonwealth supported place and a HECS-HELP* form you must submit to your provider to request a HELP loan and/or accept an offer of a CSP.

Equivalent full-time student load (EFTSL)—This is how your study ‘load’ (or amount of study) is measured. For one year, a full-time student is normally enrolled in one EFTSL of study.

HECS-HELP—The loan scheme that helps eligible Commonwealth supported students pay their student contributions. Before 2005, this was known as HECS.

Higher Education Loan Program (HELP)—Australian Government loans to help you pay your student contributions (HECS-HELP), tuition fees (FEE-HELP or VET Student Loans/VET FEE-HELP [closed]), overseas study expenses (OS-HELP) or the student services and amenities fee (SA-HELP). HELP loans are repaid through the Australian tax system once you earn above the compulsory repayment threshold.

HELP debt—The total of any HECS-HELP, OS-HELP, FEE-HELP, VET FEE-HELP (closed)/VET Student Loans or SA-HELP debts you have incurred (including any Australian Government study loans from before 2005). It will also include any applicable loan fees and any indexation that has been applied to your debt.

Higher Education Support Act 2003 (the Act)—The Commonwealth legislation that outlines the requirements for getting a CSP, HECS-HELP loan and other Australian Government assistance.

myHELPbalance (www.myHELPbalance.gov.au)—This portal will allow you to log on and view your available HELP balance entitlement. You will also be able to see your study history, as well as view any repayments to the ATO that credit your available HELP balance.

New Zealand Special Category Visa (NZ SCV)—If you arrived in Australia using a New Zealand passport, in the absence of another valid Australian visa, you will have automatically received a SCV provided you met certain security, character and health requirements. It is a temporary visa that expires as soon as you leave Australia, but it remains in place for as long as you remain in Australia.



Request for a Commonwealth supported place and a HECS-HELP loan form—The official name of the form you must submit to your provider to accept an offer of a CSP. If you are eligible, you will also use this form to request a HECS-HELP loan. This form is usually completed online, as an eCAF.

Special circumstances—Specific requirements that you must meet for your HELP balance to be re-credited, and your HECS-HELP debt to be removed, as outlined in the Act and its associated guidelines.

Student contribution amounts—The amount of fees you will pay as a Commonwealth supported student enrolled in a CSP.

Study Assist (www.studyassist.gov.au)—This website provides information about how you can pay for your tertiary study. It includes information about the types of HELP loans available, a list of providers that offer HELP loans, and student income support options.

Tax file number (TFN)—Your unique identification number from the ATO for everything tax-related. You need a TFN if you want to get a HELP loan and to make HELP debt repayments.

COMMONWEALTH SUPPORTED PLACES (CSPs)

What is a CSP?

In a CSP, the cost of your study is split into two parts:

- the Australian Government pays a share of the costs directly to your provider—this is your subsidy amount
- you pay your share of the costs—and this is called your student contribution amount.

If you are eligible, you can use a **HECS-HELP** loan to pay your student contribution amount.

If you are not enrolled in a CSP, you will be enrolled in a fee paying place. Fee paying places are not subsidised by the Government so these students will pay full tuition fees. CSPs are usually cheaper than fee paying places. If you are enrolled in a fee paying place, please read the FEE-HELP information booklet for more information about what assistance may be available to you.

Where can I get a CSP?

CSPs are available at all public universities (listed under Table A in the Act). You can also get a CSP at some private higher education providers (a provider that is not listed under Table A in the Act) in national priority areas like nursing or education.

Most CSPs are for undergraduate courses of study, but some CSPs are available for postgraduate courses.



You can check which providers offer CSPs at www.studyassist.gov.au.

Can I get a CSP?

To be eligible for a CSP you must:

- be an Australian citizen who will complete some of your course of study in Australia, **or**
- be a New Zealand citizen, permanent visa holder or permanent humanitarian visa holder who will be in Australia for the duration of your study, **and**
- have completed all the necessary steps to secure your CSP by the census date.



Being eligible for a CSP does not mean you will get one. You still have to meet your provider's entry requirements.

How do I apply for a CSP?

You apply for a CSP through the Tertiary Admissions Centre in the state or territory where your provider is located. You may also be able to apply directly to your provider. Your offer of enrolment will say whether you have been offered a CSP or a fee paying place.

To accept your CSP offer, you need to submit a valid CSP and HECS-HELP eCAF to your provider by the **census date** (or earlier **administrative date**). Your provider will give you instructions on how to do this. If you don't do this by the correct date, you will lose your CSP and will have to re-apply for it in the next study period.

Your provider will assess whether you meet the eligibility requirements for a CSP. Please contact your provider if you require more information about this process.

What if I make a mistake on my eCAF?

If you realise you have made a mistake, you should correct it with your provider as soon as possible. You only have six weeks after the census date to correct any errors to ensure your CSP is not affected. This period is not an extension to the census date. You must meet the CSP citizenship and residency requirements by the census date.

How much will my student contributions be in 2020?

Your student contribution amount depends on what you study. The Government groups different areas of study into 'bands' and sets a maximum amount that can be charged per year for full-time study in each band. Your provider gives each unit an **EFTSL** value, as a way of deciding how many units would be considered full-time study. 'Full-time study' is usually around eight units. See **Table 1**.

Table 1. 2020 student contribution amounts for full-time study

Student contribution band	2020 student contribution range (per EFTSL)
Band 3: Law, dentistry, medicine, veterinary science, accounting, administration, economics, commerce	\$0 - \$11,155
Band 2: Computing, built environment, other health, allied health, engineering, surveying, agriculture, mathematics, statistics, science	\$0 - \$9,527
Band 1: Humanities, behavioural science, social studies, education, clinical psychology, foreign languages, visual and performing arts, nursing	\$0 - \$6,684

Your provider can charge any amount within this range. Most providers charge the maximum amount.

Be aware that your course may include units from different bands. For example, some education courses (Band 1) may include science units (Band 2).



To calculate how much your student contribution for a unit will be, multiply the amount set by your provider with the **EFTSL** value of the unit. Ask your provider if you are unsure of what these are.

For example:

In 2020, Cooper enrolls in History A01 as part of his Bachelor of Arts.

History A01 is a Band 1 unit of study. The maximum rate a provider can charge for a Band 1 subject in 2020 is \$6,684 (per EFTSL).

The EFTSL value for History A01 is 0.125.
Cooper's student contribution amount for History A01 = \$6,684 x 0.125 = \$835.50

How do I pay my student contributions?

You can either pay it upfront to your provider, or if you are eligible, you can apply for a **HECS-HELP** loan.

If you are not eligible for, or don't want, a HECS-HELP loan and will pay your fees upfront, you must make your upfront payment by either:

- the **administrative date** so you aren't charged a late fee
- the **census date** so your enrolment is not cancelled.

Ask your provider for these dates.



If you don't pay your student contributions upfront or apply for a HECS-HELP loan by the census date, your enrolment will be cancelled.

HECS-HELP

What is HECS-HELP?

HECS-HELP is a loan you can use to pay your student contribution amounts. If your provider has offered you a CSP, it can also offer you a HECS-HELP loan for your course.

Can I get HECS-HELP?

You can only get HECS-HELP if you are enrolled in a CSP. You must also be either:

- an Australian citizen who will complete some of your course of study in Australia
- a NZ SCV holder who meets the long-term residency requirements and who will be resident in Australia for the duration of your study
- a permanent humanitarian visa holder who will be resident in Australia for the duration of your study.

You must also:

- meet the TFN requirements
- have enough available HELP balance to pay your student contribution amounts
- have read this booklet
- have submitted a valid CSP and HECS-HELP eCAF to your provider by the census date (or earlier administrative date).

What is my visa status?

Your provider will need proof of your visa status to check if you are eligible for HECS-HELP. If you don't know your visa status, you can check it on the Department of Home Affairs website at www.homeaffairs.gov.au/vevo.

NZ SCV residency requirements

If you are a NZ SCV holder, you may be eligible to access a HECS-HELP loan if you meet **all** of the following requirements:

- you first began to be usually resident in Australia at least 10 years before the test day*; and
- at that time, you were a dependent child** under the age of 18 with no spouse or de facto partner; and
 - you have been in Australia for at least:
 - a total of eight years out of the last 10 years immediately before the test day; and
 - a total of 18 months out of the last two years immediately before the test day; and
 - you are otherwise eligible for HECS-HELP.

You must give your provider evidence that you first began residing in Australia as a minor at least 10 years before the test day. You can do this by requesting your International Movement Record from the Department of Home Affairs.

*‘test day’ means the first day you successfully applied for a HECS-HELP loan for a unit that formed part of the same course of study as an eligible NZ SCV holder. Otherwise, the ‘test day’ is the day you submit your CSP and HECS-HELP eCAF.

**a ‘dependent child’ is someone who is aged under 18 and does not have a spouse or de facto partner.

How much HECS-HELP can I borrow?

Combined HELP loan limit

From 1 January 2020, there will be a ‘**combined HELP loan limit**’ on what you can borrow for your study (this replaces the previous FEE-HELP limit). The combined HELP loan limit includes all previous FEE-HELP, VET FEE-HELP (closed) and VET Student Loan amounts you have borrowed. It will also include any HECS-HELP loans for units with a census date from 1 January 2020 and onwards.

For 2020, the combined HELP loan limit will be \$106,319 for most courses and \$152,700 for certain medicine, dentistry and veterinary science courses which lead to initial registration to practise in one of these fields. Certain aviation courses are also eligible for the higher limit. Talk to your provider for more information.

Will I be charged interest?

There is no interest charged on your HELP debt but indexation will be applied to the portion of your debt that is 11 months or older on 1 June each year. Indexation maintains your debt's real value by keeping it in line with the cost of living, as measured by the consumer price index. You can check current indexation rates at www.ato.gov.au/indexation.

Your available HELP balance

From 1 January 2020, you will have an '**available HELP balance**' (which replaces the FEE-HELP balance). Your available HELP balance is your remaining loan entitlement for HECS-HELP, FEE-HELP and VET Student Loans (including the closed VET FEE-HELP loan scheme). That is, your available HELP balance is the difference between the combined HELP loan limit and the amount of relevant HELP loans you have already received.

It is your responsibility to keep track of your HELP loans and repayments to ensure you have enough available HELP balance to pay for your study.

Any compulsory or voluntary repayments made to the ATO on your HELP debt, from the 2019–20 income year onwards, will be re-credited to your available HELP balance (i.e. making HELP repayments will increase the available HELP balance you have to undertake further study).

How do I check my available HELP balance?

You can check your available HELP balance at www.myHELPbalance.gov.au. To log in, in addition to your personal details (date of birth, first and last name), you will also need your CHESSN and student ID number at your provider.

For more information on the *myHELPbalance* portal, the combined HELP loan limit or your available HELP balance, please visit www.studyassist.gov.au/help-loans/2020-loan-limit-changes.

What is my CHESSN?

It is a unique, personal identification number that was allocated to you as part of your first application to study or enrolment process. Your CHESSN is an important identifier used to monitor and manage your Commonwealth assistance, especially for identifying whether you have reached the combined HELP loan limit. You should only have one CHESSN for the duration of your studies—even if you change providers, start a new course a few years after completing your first course, or change your name.

The best way to ensure you only have one CHESSN is to keep a safe record of your CHESSN and give it to your provider when you enrol in a new course. If you have studied before in a CSP or received a HECS-HELP, FEE-HELP, VET FEE-HELP (closed) or VET Student Loan in the past, you can find your CHESSN on a past **CAN** issued to you by your provider for that course.

You should also use your CAN to ensure your information on the *myHELPbalance* portal is correct. You will receive your CAN within 28 days of your census date. If you think there are errors on your CAN, you have 14 days (from the date of the CAN) to contact your provider and ask for a new, correct one. If you can't find your CAN or CHESSN, ask your provider.

If you have more than one **CHESN**, there is a greater risk that you could exceed the **combined HELP loan limit**. If this is the case, your provider may seek payment of your student contribution amount directly from you.

One way to tell if you have more than one CHESN is by logging into the *myHELPbalance* portal. The portal should show you all of the courses for which you have received a HELP loan (or a VET Student Loan). If you can't see past study on your account, you may have another CHESN. You can verify this by checking the CHESN on a CAN from your past course(s).

If you have more than one CHESN, please contact your provider for assistance. For further information on CHESNs, please visit www.studyassist.gov.au/help-loans/your-chesn.

APPLYING FOR A HECS-HELP LOAN

Is there an application or loan fee?

No. There is no application or loan fee for HECS-HELP.

How do I apply?

You will need to submit your CSP and HECS-HELP eCAF (the same eCAF will provide access to both items). Your provider will give you instructions on how to do this as it must be done before your provider's **census date** (or earlier **administrative date**).

You must give your provider your TFN, name, date of birth and address. Your details must match the information held with the **ATO**. If the details in your application don't match ATO records, you won't be able to access a HECS-HELP loan until you correct the error.

The most common way to apply for a TFN is at a participating Australia Post outlet. If you don't have a TFN, you can give your provider a *Certificate of Application for a TFN*, which you can ask for when you apply for a TFN. To get this, you must apply for a TFN and get the certificate from the ATO. You must give your TFN to your provider within 21 days of receiving it or your access to HECS-HELP may be affected.

Your provider will assess whether you meet the eligibility requirements for a HECS-HELP loan. Please contact your provider if you require more information about this process.



You have to provide your TFN because your HELP debt is repaid through the Australian tax system.

What is the census date and administrative date?

The census date is the last day you can submit your CSP and HECS-HELP eCAF or withdraw from a unit without incurring the debt for that unit. If you haven't paid your student contributions upfront, or correctly requested a HECS-HELP loan by the census date, then your enrolment in the CSP will be cancelled (and you will have to re-apply for it in the next study period).

Providers set their own census dates so each provider will be different. Each unit of study also has its own census date—contact your provider for more information.



The census date is the most important date for you as it is a legal deadline.

The administrative date is set before the census date and it is your provider's deadline for you to complete certain requirements such as submitting forms, withdrawing from study or finalising payments without getting charged a late fee (non-universities can't charge a late fee). Not all providers have administrative dates. Check with your provider.

What if I make a mistake on my eCAF?

If you realise you have made a mistake, you should correct it with your provider as soon as possible. You only have six weeks after the census date to correct any errors to ensure your loan is not affected. This period is not an extension to the census date. You must meet the HECS-HELP citizenship, residency, and TFN requirements by the census date.

WITHDRAWING FROM STUDY

To withdraw from a unit or course without getting a HELP debt or losing an upfront payment, you must complete your provider's formal withdrawal process by the census date.

If you are enrolled with more than one provider, you will need to withdraw from each one individually.

Special circumstances

If you withdraw from a unit of study after the census date because you become seriously ill or because of another unforeseen event, you can apply to your provider to request a refund of your upfront payment or a re-credit of your available HELP balance. To do this, you will have to meet specific criteria set out in the Act called 'special circumstances'. To meet special circumstances, you will have to demonstrate to your provider that what happened to you:

- was beyond your control
- did not make its full impact on you until on or after the census date
- made it impracticable for you to complete the requirements for your unit(s) of study.

You will need to apply to your provider within 12 months of your withdrawal day (or your provider may allow you more time). If your **available HELP balance** is re-credited, your HELP debt for the unit will also be removed.

This process does not apply if you have successfully completed your unit of study, or you changed your mind about studying, or you failed the unit.

REPAYING YOUR HELP DEBT

For the most up-to-date information on HELP debt repayments, check the ATO's website at www.ato.gov.au/Individuals/Study-and-training-support-loans/When-must-you-repay-your-loan.

How do I check my HELP debt?

Your *myGov* account will show you a consolidated total of your HELP debt and what your repayments have been. If you don't have a *myGov* account, you can set one up following the instructions at www.my.gov.au. You can then call the ATO on 13 28 61 to assist you with linking the 'ATO online services' to your *myGov* account so you can view your ATO account balances, for example, your HELP debt and superannuation accounts.



myGov only shows information from 2014 onwards. If you want information prior to 2014, call the ATO to request an account information statement.

When do I start paying back my HELP debt?

You start repaying your HELP debt through the Australian tax system once you earn above the compulsory repayment threshold. The compulsory repayment threshold is different each year. For the 2019–20 income year it is \$45,881. The more income you earn, the higher your repayment will be (see **Table 2**).

To manage repayments, your employer will withhold some of your pay to go towards paying your tax, which includes your HELP debt repayments. Although these amounts are withheld from your pay throughout the year to offset your compulsory repayment—your compulsory repayment won't be processed until your tax return is processed.



This is because your compulsory repayment is calculated from a number of different sources on your income tax return, including:

- your taxable income
- reportable fringe benefits (reported on your payment summary)
- total net investment loss (including net rental loss)
- reportable super contributions
- exempt foreign employment income amounts.

What if I go overseas?

If you go overseas and have a HELP debt, you still need to make repayments as if you were living in Australia. If you live or plan to move overseas for 183 days or more (about six months) in any 12 month period, you must complete an *Overseas Travel Notification*. You must also update your contact details through ATO online services within seven days of leaving Australia.



For more information, visit www.ato.gov.au/overseasrepayments.

How much will my repayments be?

The amount you repay each year is calculated as a percentage of your world-wide income. The more income you earn, the higher your repayments will be. When you do your tax return, the ATO will calculate your income for the year and tell you on your tax notice of assessment how much your compulsory repayment will be. Compulsory repayments are not tax deductible.

Table 2: Repayment rates for the 2019–20 income year

Repayment income	Repayment % rate
Below \$45,881	Nil
\$45,881 - \$52,973	1.0%
\$52,974 - \$56,151	2.0%
\$56,152 - \$59,521	2.5%
\$59,522 - \$63,092	3.0%
\$63,093 - \$66,877	3.5%
\$66,878 - \$70,890	4.0%
\$70,891 - \$75,144	4.5%
\$75,145 - \$79,652	5.0%
\$79,653 - \$84,432	5.5%
\$84,433 - \$89,498	6.0%
\$89,499 - \$94,868	6.5%
\$94,869 - \$100,560	7.0%
\$100,561 - \$106,593	7.5%
\$106,594 - \$112,989	8.0%
\$112,990 - \$119,769	8.5%
\$119,770 - \$126,955	9.0%
\$126,956 - \$134,572	9.5%
\$134,573 and above	10.0%

In addition to your compulsory repayment, you can also make a voluntary repayment at any time.



For more information on voluntary repayments, visit www.ato.gov.au/voluntaryrepay.

What if I can't make my compulsory repayment?

If you are struggling to make a compulsory repayment, there may be some options to relieve the stress. Depending on your situation, you may be eligible to apply to the ATO to request an amendment or deferment of your compulsory repayment.



For more information, visit www.ato.gov.au/Individuals/study-and-training-support-loans/overseas-repayments.

FURTHER CONTACTS

Study Assist website (www.studyassist.gov.au)

This website provides information about options for financing tertiary study, including:

- HELP loans available in both the higher education and vocational education and training sectors
- a list of providers that offer HELP loans
- student income support options and available scholarships.

myHELPbalance portal (www.myHELPbalance.gov.au)

You can log into this portal to see your study and loan information, so you can keep track of your available HELP balance.

Australian Taxation Office

It can help with:

- your HELP debt
- compulsory repayments
- voluntary repayments
- overseas levy repayments.

Contact details:

- visit www.ato.gov.au/getloaninfo
- for information on viewing your loan account online, visit www.ato.gov.au/onlineloanbalance
- use its online services to view loan accounts and other information such as your Payment Reference Number and voluntary repayment options
- call 13 28 61 for information about your HELP account and personal tax topics
- call 13 36 77 TTY or 1300 555 727 TTY for hearing or speech impaired students.

Services Australia

It can help you with Youth Allowance, Austudy, ABSTUDY and other payments and services.

Visit www.servicesaustralia.gov.au and keep up to date by subscribing to news for students.

It can also get information and ask questions at facebook.com/StudentUpdate or [@StudentUpdateAU](https://twitter.com/StudentUpdateAU) on Twitter.

Department of Home Affairs

It can help you with visas and Australian citizenship.

Visit www.homeaffairs.gov.au or call 13 18 81.

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