



Hardship Fund for Learners – Guidance for TEOs

This document provides guidance to TEOs on the use and reporting requirements of the Hardship Fund for Learners.

Purpose of the Hardship Fund for Learners

The purpose of the Hardship Fund for Learners (HAFL) is to provide temporary financial assistance for currently enrolled tertiary learners who are facing hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, Hardship means any suffering, deprivation or financial challenge faced by a learner due to the COVID-19 pandemic that is interfering with a learner's ability to progress with their study.

Hardship Fund for Learners funding is allocated directly to Tertiary Education Organisations (TEOs), who can then provide assistance to their learners who need it the most. TEOs are trusted to decide how, when and where the funding is used, within the guidelines provided by this document and the conditions of this fund.

Funding can be used to support initiatives from 23 March 2020, which is the date the move to COVID-19 alert Level 4 was announced, until 31 December 2020.

What can the Hardship Fund for Learners be used for?

TEOs can use HAFL funding to support learners facing hardship by:

- › Providing direct cash payments to learners; and/or
- › Directly purchasing resources on learners' behalf, where suitable.

Hardship Fund for Learners funding can be used to cover any basic living costs that the TEOs' currently enrolled learners are unable to meet, including, but not limited to, food, utilities, rent or other unexpected expenses. As the hardship can be in many forms, TEOs are trusted to exercise their judgement as to how they can best support their learners in a way consistent with the purpose of the Fund. We also have an expectation that TEOs will establish, or use existing, processes to ensure HAFL funding is prioritised towards learners who are facing the greatest hardship from the impacts of COVID-19.

For clarity, HAFL cannot be used to:

- › Provide access to technology-enabled tertiary education and training.¹
- › Fund bulk accommodation discounts for accommodation services that you provide.²

¹ TEOs are resourced separately to provide this support through the Technology Access Fund for Learners. Further details on this fund, including how to apply for funding, are on the [TEC's website](#).

² Cash payments for accommodation can be made to individual learners residing in TEO accommodation.

- › Meet your costs of administering the Fund.

Eligibility

TEOs who receive funding through one of the following Funds have been offered a HAFL allocation:

- › Student Achievement Component – Level 3 and above
- › Student Achievement Component – Level 1 and 2
- › Youth Guarantee (excluding Trades Academies)
- › Intensive Literacy and Numeracy
- › Intensive Literacy and Numeracy – Refugee English
- › Intensive Literacy and Numeracy - English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
- › Section 321 of the Education Act 1989

The Hardship Fund for Learners must only be used to assist learners who are funded through one of the above Funds. To be eligible, the learner must also:

- › Be an eligible learner as per the conditions of the Fund they are funded from; and
- › Meet any other relevant conditions of the Fund they are funded from.

The specific conditions for each Fund, including the conditions for the Hardship Fund for Learners, are [available on the TEC's website](#).

TEO reporting requirements and monitoring

TEOs funded from the HAFL must periodically report to the TEC on how, where and when they have used the funding. The TEC will use the information to regularly update a [public list on the TEC's website](#). We also require TEOs to keep records where cash payments have been made directly to their learners, and retain the original receipts and invoices where HAFL funding has been used to purchase resources on learners' behalf.

The below provides a summary of the reporting requirements. For the full reporting and monitoring conditions, please see the [HAFL conditions on the TEC's website](#).

We will publish a list of all TEOs who receive Hardship Fund for Learners funding

The TEC is required to publish, and regularly update, a list of all TEOs funded from the Hardship Fund for Learners. The list will include:

- › The total amount of HAFL funding that each TEO has received;
- › The amount of HAFL funding spent to date;
- › The type of support, and when it has been provided; and
- › The number of learners that have been supported.

Reporting

When you accept a funding allocation from the Hardship Fund for Learners, we will provision two reporting templates to your Workspace2. These templates ask you to record:

- › The total amount of your HAFL allocation spent to date, including a summary of what your HAFL allocation has been spent on; and
- › The National Student Numbers (NSN) of each learner who has directly received assistance with HAFL, including the value of the assistance, when the support was provided, and their ethnicity, gender, and disability status.

TEOs must update their reports every fortnight, up to 30 June 2020, and there-after every two months. A final report is then due in early 2021.

The reporting deadlines are:

- › 16 June 2020
- › 30 June 2020
- › 31 August 2020
- › 31 October 2020
- › 31 January 2021 (final report)

Note that all reports are cumulative and so should be updated to record total HAFL use year-to-date, with the final report being to the end of 2020. If there has been no change to your HAFL use between reporting periods, please re-submit the data from your last report.

Hardship Fund Strategy

All TEOs who accept HAFL funding must complete a Hardship Fund Strategy (HFS) and return it to us within 15 working days of receiving their funding. The HFS template is available on the [TEC website](#).

The Hardship Fund Strategy template has a short series of questions which help us understand your organisation's planned approach to using its allocation. The Hardship Fund Strategy template sets out:

- › how you will identify which learners are facing hardship from the impacts of COVID-19;
- › how you will prioritise learners who are facing the greatest hardship from the impacts of COVID-19;
- › how you plan to use your Hardship Fund for Learners funding allocation (for example, information relating to direct cash payments that you plan to provide, and resources for learners that you plan to purchase); and
- › how you will ensure that Hardship Fund for Learners funding is used in compliance with the Funding Conditions.

If you make any significant amendments to your strategy throughout the year, you must provide us with an updated copy of it.

Completed or updated HFS can be sent to customerservice@tec.govt.nz with the following Subject Line:

[Your Provider#] – Hardship Fund Strategy

The TEC may recover unused or incorrectly used funding

The TEC will use your progress reports, and other monitoring as needed, to monitor how you are using funding from the Hardship Fund for Learners. We may recover any funding that is being used contrary to the Fund conditions or to the approach set out in your Hardship Fund Strategy. If during the Funding Period a significant amount of your HAFL funding is unspent and we consider that it is unlikely that you will spend all of your allocated HAFL funding, we may discuss with you whether any of your funding should be returned so that it may be allocated elsewhere.

Frequently asked questions

How did you calculate my Hardship Fund for Learners allocation?

HAFL funding has been automatically allocated to all eligible TEOs using a formulaic model. This model takes into account each TEO's funding allocation, with additional weighting based on factors such as estimated need. An explanation of the model is available on the [TEC website](#).

How can we apply for HAFL funding or for additional funding?

As all Hardship Fund for Learners funding has been allocated, we do not currently have an additional funding round planned. However, if funding does become available, either due to TEOs not accepting, or returning unused funding, we will let the sector know and seek to re-allocate it.

Is there a limit on what we can spend per learner?

There is no cap on how much support can be given to any one learner. However, we have an expectation that TEOs spend the funding responsibly and in a way consistent with the purpose of the Fund.

Please note, you are required to keep records and report the amount of money given to each learner. Your total spend and the number of learners supported will also be published and periodically updated on the TEC's website.

My organisation has already implemented a hardship initiative with our own funding – can we retrospectively use the HAFL funding for it?

Yes. If you have an existing COVID-19 hardship initiative that was announced on or after **23 March 2020** (the date the alert level 4 plan was announced) and it meets the conditions and guidance in this document, then you may use the funding for it. However, the use must be reported as per the reporting guidelines.

If your organisation had already established an initiative to help learners facing hardship from COVID-19, but the initiative does not meet the HAFL conditions, we would be happy to discuss whether HAFL funding can be used for it. Please contact us at customerservice@tec.govt.nz.

Can HAFL be used to fund initiatives that benefit many learners, such as food banks?

Yes, if you believe that such initiatives are the best way to support your learners. While we do not expect you to take the details of every learner who used such a resource, you will need to keep records of the initiative, and report the expenditure and approximate number of learners assisted.

What is the purpose of the Hardship Fund Strategy?

The purpose of the Hardship Fund Strategy is to help us to understand how you intend to spend your HAFL allocation, and ensure that assistance is provided to your learners which need it the most.

My organisation is not going to use all of its Hardship Fund for Learners allocation – can we return it?

Yes. As there is only limited funding available, if you do not think you are going to use all of your Hardship Fund for Learners allocation please contact us at customerservice@tec.govt.nz so we can re-allocate the funding to help learners at other TEOs.

Are students who are funded under Māori and Pasifika Trades Training (MPTT) eligible to receive support?

Yes, as MPTT funding comes from either Student Achievement Component – Level 1 and 2, or Student Achievement Component – Level 3 and above, these students are eligible. Students who have received Learner Success Funding through MPTT are still to receive HAFL funding, and vice versa.

Why have tertiary education organisations been chosen to manage the money?

As most TEOs have the infrastructure already in place to identify their learner's need and provide support, the Hardship Fund for Learners allows learners to receive assistance quickly. TEOs are also best placed to understand the hardship needs within their student populations, which enables them to prioritise the funding effectively. The Hardship Fund for Learners also supports learners to maintain their relationship with providers during this challenging time.