



# Hardship Fund for Learners – Guidance for TEOs

This document, together with information on [our website](#), provides guidance to TEOs on the use and reporting requirements of the Hardship Fund for Learners.

## Purpose of the Hardship Fund for Learners

The Hardship Fund for Learners (HAFL) is now extended for the 2021 calendar year and to June 2022. This allows Tertiary Education Organisations (TEOs) the flexibility to support learners, as needed, in response to changing circumstances as a result of COVID-19.

The HAFL has two purposes:

### 1 - Hardship Purpose

- › The Hardship Purpose is to provide temporary financial assistance for learners who are facing barriers to continuing their study or training as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 2 - Technology Access Purpose

- › The Technology Access Purpose is to support learners and prevent them from experiencing technology-related financial challenges, by providing funding for technology-related costs that occur when COVID-19 restrictions remove the option for face-to-face study.

HAFL funding may be used for both purposes. If you are using HAFL funding for the Technology Access Purpose, please ensure that the use of funding is in response to a COVID-19 restriction as defined above. Learners must be enrolled to receive assistance from the fund for either purpose.

HAFL is a targeted fund and is designed to provide financial assistance to those most in need of support. This is similar to 2020, you can use this funding to complement any existing financial assistance initiatives at your organisation. You may rename your initiative to encourage more learners to seek the support they need.

## How can TEOs use/allocate HAFL Funding?

Similar to 2020, TEOs are expected to identify learners who are most in need and to prioritise funding accordingly to meet those needs. TEOs must not spend your funding by splitting it equally amongst a large number of learners.

### *TEOs can use the HAFL funding for the Hardship Purpose to:*

- › provide direct cash or in-kind payments for items like food, utilities (**including internet access**) or housing; and/or
- › purchase resources directly on the learners' behalf, excluding devices.

Please note that the Hardship Purpose covers hardship faced as a result of the lack of ability to pay for internet access. This does not need to be in response to COVID-19 restrictions.

### *TEOs can use the HAFL funding for the Technology Access Purpose to:*

- › provide direct cash or in-kind payments, including **but not limited to internet access** and related support;
- › purchase resources for learners to borrow while enrolled;
- › purchase suitable devices; and/or
- › provide other support that assists learners in engaging in technology-enabled tertiary education including spending money to refurbish devices for learners to borrow (the term other support does not include supporting TEO capability to deliver their provision online).

Please note, use of funding under this purpose must be made in response to COVID-19 restrictions.

### *TEOs cannot use HAFL funding to:*

- › provide general technology improvements for the TEO or capacity building that is not related to the direct provision of technology to affected learners;
- › pay any tuition fees, compulsory course costs or compulsory student services fees charged to a learner (including scholarships);
- › cover the cost of overseas travel including any costs for Managed Isolation and Quarantine;
- › bulk discounts, that subsidise provider-owned or provider-managed services (such as accommodation or cafeteria), without identifying and targeting individual learner needs;
- › in any other manner not stipulated in our funding agreement with you.

## What can the HAFL be used for?

The key principle for determining whether a cost would be appropriately met under the hardship fund is if it is a cost that the learner is not able to meet as a result of COVID-19, which will prevent them from continuing with their tertiary study. For example, if a learner is facing hardship while retraining to enter the workforce.

Please note that HAFL includes funding technology that was previously funded through the Technology Access Fund for Learners (TAFL). This is only for certain circumstances where face-to-face learning is affected such as by changes in COVID-19 Alert levels or when a learner is identified to be in a community cluster, is self-isolating and unable to return to study.

To provide greater clarity for TEOs, below is a table of examples you can spend your HAFL funding on.

| Purpose                   | Examples of what funding can be used for  | Examples of what funding <u>cannot</u> be used for  |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| Hardship Purpose          | Covering learner's essential living costs such as: food, utilities, rent, university accommodation, medical fees, transport, clothing, internet connection. | Recreational activities such as concert tickets, flight tickets, travel, alcohol, as well as Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ) cost.                                     |
|                           | Covering a learner's ancillary living costs such as: visit to unwell family member, tangihanga.   | Tuition fees, compulsory course costs, compulsory student services fees, including any fee scholarships.  |
|                           | Covering costs incurred by family members if the learner is a main source of income in their family and has been impacted by COVID-19.                      | Bulk discounts, which subsidise provider-owned or provider-managed services (such as accommodation or cafeteria), without identifying and targeting individual learner needs. |
|                           | Running group initiatives, such as a food bank, that benefit a large group of learners who face difficulties meeting their essential living needs.          | Running initiatives, such as sports, leisure or other recreational activities for a large group of learners.  |
| Technology Access Purpose | Technology support such as internet connection, cost of refurbishing laptops for other learners to borrow.  | Upgrading your Student Management System to increase your organisational capability.  |
|                           | Technology-related support such as keyboard and mouse for learners to borrow.   | Upgrading Moodle, Blackboard, Canvas, or other course management services to increase online delivery capability.   |
|                           | Software subscription, not otherwise covered by course fees/costs that are essential for learner to complete their programme with.                          | Software that facilitates the TEO's ability to monitor the learners.  |

## Eligibility

### TEO eligibility

TEOs who receive funding through one of the following Funds may be offered a HAFL allocation:

- › Student Achievement Component – Provision at Level 3 and above on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework
- › Student Achievement Component – Levels 1 and 2
- › Youth Guarantee Fees Free
- › Literacy and Numeracy (excluding Workplace Literacy and Numeracy)
- › Specialised English for Speakers of Other Languages
- › Tertiary providers being funded under section 556 of the Education and Training Act 2020.

If you are a TEO that receives Funding from the Industry Training Fund (ITF), you may receive HAFL Funding for the Technology Access Purpose, during a prolonged period of lockdown.

As the funding for HAFL is limited, the TEC is adopting a targeted approach in allocating funding to respond to the varying needs of learners across New Zealand.

### Learner eligibility

Learners are eligible to receive payments or resources directly from the TEO through the fund if:

- (a) in respect of **a learner** who is:
  - (i) enrolled in eligible programmes for which you receive funding under the Relevant Funds(s); and
  - (ii) an eligible learner in accordance with the learner eligibility conditions of the Relevant Fund(s); or
- (b) to **support a group of learners** who are facing financial challenges, provided that the majority of the learners accessing the funding meet the learner eligibility criteria. Such support includes, but not limited to, providing funding to a student association to run a food bank for all students including international students.

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

## TEO reporting requirements and monitoring

TEOs who receive funding from the HAFL must periodically report to the TEC on how, where and when they used the funding. The TEC will use the information to update a public list on the TEC's website.

We require TEOs to keep records where cash payments have been made directly to their learners. While we do not expect TEOs to request from learners a receipt for every purchase (specifically items of low value), we expect TEOs to exercise their due diligence and keep a record of how much is distributed to each learner. TEOs must also retain the original receipts and invoices where HAFL funding has been used to purchase resources on learners' behalf. Records can be kept in an electronic form.

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

## Reporting

When you accept a funding allocation from the HAFL, we will provide 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 from HAFL, including the value of the assistance, when the support was provided, and their ethnicity, gender, and whether or not they are learners with disability.

The reporting deadlines are:

- › 15 October 2021, for the period ending 30 September 2021;
- › 21 January 2022, for the period ending 31 December 2021;
- › 15 April 2022, for the period ending 30 March 2022; and
- › 15 July 2022, for the period ending 30 June 2022 (Final Report).

Reports will be provisioned on Workspace2. Reports must be made on a cumulative basis for that calendar year. For example, 2021 reports must reflect cumulative expenditure in 2021. 2022 reports must reflect cumulative expenditure in 2022.

If there is no change to your HAFL use between reporting periods, please re-submit the data from your last report. While we have taken care to reduce the total number of reports submitted, we require you to submit subsequent reports even if you have fully allocated your HAFL funding to learners. Regular reporting is required by TEOs so that the TEC can monitor the expenditure process and be able to report that to other government agencies and the general public. We acknowledge that re-submitting subsequent reports is not ideal, but due to technical constraints and the risks associated with manual updates of individual TEO expenditure, we require you to submit your subsequent progress reports. We appreciate your understanding on this matter.

### **We will publish a list of all TEOs who receive HAFL funding**

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

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

### **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.

If, during the funding period, a significant amount of your HAFL funding is unspent we may discuss with you whether any of your funding could be returned; this is so we can reallocate funding to other learners across New Zealand where demand may be greater.

## Submitting a Strategy to the TEC

The HAFL funding can be used for both the Hardship Purpose and the Technology Access Purpose. There are two types of Strategies, the Learner Technology Support Strategy and the Hardship Strategy.

We have provided a table to help you understand if you need to submit a Strategy to us, depending on which purpose you intend to use funding for. You may need to submit both Strategies if the circumstances below apply.

|   | You need to submit this Strategy  | You do not need to submit this Strategy  |
|---|---|--|
| <b>Hardship Fund Strategy (HFS)</b>               | <p>If you</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have not previously provided a HFS</li> </ul> <p><b>or</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provided the HFS in either 2020 or 2021 and wish to make significant changes to your approach on the use of this funding.</li> </ul> <p>Please submit this Strategy <b>within 15 working days</b> of you receiving your payment.</p>   | <p>If you</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have previously provided the HFS and received HAFL funding in 2020 or 2021</li> </ul> <p><b>and</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are not making any significant changes to your approach on the use of funding.</li> </ul> <p>We will rely on your 2020 or 2021 Hardship Fund Strategy.</p> |
| <b>Learner Technology Support Strategy (LTSS)</b> | <p>If you</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>want to use HAFL funding for the broader Technology Access Purpose on top of the Hardship Purpose.</li> </ul> <p>We understand that you may need time to consider whether you will use the HAFL funding for the Technology Access Purpose. Therefore, you are required to submit this Strategy <b>within 15 working days of COVID-19 restrictions being in place</b>.</p> <p>Although we require a Strategy from your organisation, our priority is to assist learners as quickly as possible. With that in mind, when an event occurs (e.g. someone goes into quarantine) you may use the funding for technology access purpose, and you do not need to wait for us to approve your Strategy. We will review your Strategy and contact you if we have any questions. Please contact us if you are unsure at any time around this process.</p> | <p>If you</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>only want to use HAFL funding for the Hardship Purpose.</li> </ul>  |

If you wish to provide financial assistance to your learners to include just internet access, you do not need to complete the Learner Technology Access Strategy (LTSS). If you wish to provide technology support beyond internet access, for example refurbishing devices under the Technology Access Purpose, you must complete the LTSS.

## Learner Technology Support Strategy

A copy of the Learner Technology Support Strategy (LTSS) template has been uploaded on your Workspace2. The template is also available on the [TEC website](#).

The LTSS is a document containing a short series of questions that help us understand your organisation's planned approach to using your allocation. The LTSS template sets out:

- (a) how you will plan to use the HAFL funding for the Technology Access Purpose to respond to COVID-19 restrictions that remove the option for face-to-face study;
- (b) how you will prioritise which learners receive assistance with accessing technology-enabled learning; and
- (c) how you will keep track of costs incurred to ensure that HAFL Funding is used in compliance with these Funding Conditions.

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

Please email the Strategy back to our Customer Contact Group [customerservice@tec.govt.nz](mailto:customerservice@tec.govt.nz) with the Subject Line:

**[EDUMIS] – Learner Tech Support Strategy 2021**

## Hardship Fund Strategy

A copy of the Hardship Fund Strategy (HFS) template has been uploaded on your Workspace2. The template is also available on the [TEC website](#).

The HFS must include information on:

- (a) how you will identify the learners who are facing hardship
- (b) how you are prioritising learners who are in greatest hardship
- (c) how you are planning to use the HAFL funding; and
- (d) how you will keep track of costs incurred to ensure that HAFL Funding is used in compliance with these Funding Conditions.

Please email the Strategy back to our Customer Contact Group [customerservice@tec.govt.nz](mailto:customerservice@tec.govt.nz) with the Subject Line:

**[EDUMIS] – Hardship Fund Strategy 2021**

## Frequently asked questions

### What has changed in this year's Hardship Fund for Learners?

There are now two purposes for the 2021 Hardship Fund for Learners; the Hardship Purpose and the Technology Access Purpose.

HAFL funding for the Hardship Purpose now also includes funding for internet access, regardless of COVID-19 restrictions.

HAFL funding for the Technology Access Purpose includes funding technology that was previously funded through the Technology Access Fund for Learners (TAFL). This is only for certain circumstances where face-to-face learning is affected such as by changes in COVID-19 Alert levels or when a learner is identified to be in a community cluster, or is self-isolating and unable to return to campus for study.

Regardless of which purpose funding is used for, we expect providers to prioritise and allocate funding according to learner needs.

### How did you calculate my Hardship Fund for Learners allocation?

Our methodology prioritises funding to TEOs based on the proportion of learners who came from decile 1 to decile 3 schools. For funding allocated in September 2021, we also prioritised Auckland-based learners. We have also considered whether previous allocations to TEOs were accepted and fully used. For smaller TEOs, we have also set minimum allocations based on their level of funding. You can find more information about our allocation methodology [here](#).

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

There is no application process for the HAFL funding. Payments are made directly to TEOs. TEOs are best placed to decide how, when and where the funding will be prioritised to support the learners most in need.

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

There is no strict cap on how much support can be given to any one learner. However, we expect TEOs to exercise sensible discretion, and to identify and prioritise learners who are in greatest need.

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 on the TEC website.

### Is there a limit on how much I can spend under the Hardship Purpose or the Technology Access Purpose?

There is no strict cap on how much you can spend under either purpose of the Hardship Fund for Learners (HAFL). We expect providers to prioritise and allocate funding according to learner needs, noting that the funding can only be used for the Technology Access purpose in the event that COVID-19 restricts the ability to provide face-to-face learning.

TEOs retain the flexibility to allocate some HAFL funding for the Technology Access Purpose in the event of COVID-19 restrictions that hinder face-to-face learning.

### My organisation has an ongoing hardship initiative with our own funding – can we retrospectively use the HAFL funding for it?

No, you cannot retrospectively use the HAFL funding. The HAFL funding period is specified in your funding letter.



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

Yes, if your organisation views that these initiatives are the best way to allocate HAFL to learners facing the greatest need. All learners, including international students, will be able to access the initiative as long as the primary group accessing it are eligible domestic 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 Learner Technology Support Strategy?**

The purpose of the Learner Technology Support Strategy (LTSS) is to help us understand your approach in providing technology-related support to your learners while ensuring that funding is adequately prioritised.

We understand that you may need time to consider whether you will use the HAFL funding for the Technology Access Purpose. Therefore, you are required to submit this Strategy **within 15 working days of COVID-19 restrictions being in place**, should you decide to use some HAFL funding for the Technology Access Purpose.

Although we require a Strategy from your organisation, our priority is to assist learners as quickly as possible. With that in mind, when an event occurs (e.g. someone goes into quarantine) you may use the funding for technology access purpose, and you do not need to wait for us to approve your Strategy. We will review your Strategy and contact you if we have any questions. Please contact us if you are unsure at any time around this process.

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

Yes. Please contact us at [customerservice@tec.govt.nz](mailto: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 funded learners are also funded under 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 eligible to receive HAFL funding, and vice versa.

## **Why have TEOs been chosen to manage and distribute the money?**

Similar to 2020, we place trust in TEOs to identify learners in need. Most TEOs have the infrastructure in place to identify learners' needs and provide support, so they have the ability to provide assistance to learners quickly. You are also best placed to understand the hardship needs within your student populations, which enables you to prioritise the funding effectively. This also supports learners to maintain their relationship with you during this challenging time.

## **Are we able to use HAFL to fund travel for learners?**

Yes, HAFL may be used to fund travel in limited circumstances. For example, if the learner had a family emergency, or if a regional lock-down meant having to travel to a different campus. This **does not** include holiday travel.

## **Are industry trainees eligible for HAFL?**

Industry trainees are eligible for the Technology Access Purpose of HAFL, subject to funding being made available to their TEOs. TEOs that receive industry training funding may be allocated funding for the Technology Access Purpose during a period of prolonged COVID-19 restriction that hinders face-to-face training.