



27 June 2025

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act request

Thank you for your email of 27 May 2025, requesting information about Student Allowance Entitlement Limit Extension applications.

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.

When approving or declining Student Allowance Entitlement Limit Extension applications what legislation, regulations, and case law do StudyLink (and the Ministry of Social Development) rely on? Please provide me with full copies of all the above.

When determining whether a student meets the specific circumstances to be granted an extension to their Student Allowance entitlement limit, the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) is governed by the Student Allowance Regulations 1998 (SAR 1998).

Clause 20 of the SAR 1998 details the maximum length of Student Allowance a student is entitled to while clause 20(7) and clause 20(7A) highlight consideration of extending the maximum Student Allowance entitlement period where special circumstances exist.

Clause 30(3) of the SAR 1998 further details that where the Chief Executive (CE) gives a direction under subclause 2, the student concerned may receive payments for their allowance for a further period that may exceed the maximum period of eligibility. This regulation does not apply to secondary students. You can find the SAR 1998 at the following link:
www.legislation.govt.nz/regulation/public/1998/0277/latest/whole.html#DLM260357.

While the Ministry receives direction from the SAR 1998 when determining Student Allowance entitlement limit extension applications, the 'special circumstances' exception provides discretion to make an entitlement decision based on the intent of the regulation, the limitations of the wording of the regulation, and the facts of the particular situation.

Special circumstances are very limited in scope and normally only apply to situations where personal circumstances do not allow a student to complete their study within the 92/120/200-week limit. These personal circumstances would generally not be able to be anticipated by the student and would be beyond their control. For example, there has been an illness, injury, accident, bereavement, or

personal difficulty that has prevented the student completing their study programme within the 92/120/200-week limit. For more information on 'special circumstances' in relation to Student Allowance limit extension applications, please visit the following link: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/students/student-allowance/special-circumstances-01.html.

Please provide me with any additional information or guidance that staff members rely on when making a decision to approve or decline a request for a Student Allowance Entitlement Limit Extension.

The Ministry's Manual and Procedures (MAP) contains useful information on Student Allowance extensions and is publicly available at the following links:

- www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/students/student-allowance/the-92-week-limit-for-secondary-school-study-01.html.
- www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/students/student-allowance/the-120-200-week-limit-for-tertiary-study-01.html.
- www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/students/student-allowance/special-circumstances-01.html.
- www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/students/student-allowance/the-120-200-week-limit-for-tertiary-study-01.html.

I have also identified some information from the Ministry's intranet. I have enclosed this information in the attached **Appendix 1** with this letter.

In the last seven years (broken down by year), how many Student Allowance Entitlement Limit Extension applications have been received? Of these, how many have been accepted and how many have been declined?

Please refer to the table below which provides the approved number of student allowance limit extension applications by study start year between 1 January 2018 and 31 December 2024.

Year	Total
2018	132
2019	138
2020	153
2021	189
2022	183
2023	168
2024	144

Notes:

- To protect confidentiality, the Ministry of Social Development uses processes to make it difficult to identify an individual person or entity from published data.
- These data tables have had random rounding to base three applied to all cell counts in the table. Random rounding does not round down to zero, a value of one or two will be rounded to three.
- The impact of applying random rounding is that columns and rows may not add exactly to the given column or row totals. The published counts will never differ by more than two counts.

Please refer to the table below which provides the declined number of student allowance limit extension applications by study start year between 1 January 2018 and 31 December 2024.

Year	Total
2018	207
2019	219
2020	246
2021	186
2022	168
2023	159
2024	162

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- Only one decline per student per year is counted.

Please provide me with full information for all Student Allowance Entitlement Limit Extension applications that have been approved in the last two years. I expect a copy of each application, the client's file, and full case notes etc.

I am refusing your request for this information under section 18(f) of the Act, as substantial manual collation would be required to collate this information. The information you have requested is contained within individual client files, which would each require manual review to respond to your request. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

I have considered whether the Ministry would be able to respond to your request given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested. I have concluded that, in either case, the Ministry's ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

In the last seven years, how many clients have submitted a Review of Decision for a declined Student Allowance Entitlement Limit Extension application? Please also provide all associated information related to this, including the outcome of any Review of Decision applications.

Please refer to the following table providing the information you have requested.

Year Application Received	Dispute Code	Status	Overturn Reason	Total
2017	120 Week limit	Overturned	Discretion	3
			Further evidence	3
		Upheld		6
		Withdrawn		3
	200-week extension	Overturned	Further evidence	3
				3
		Upheld		3
		Withdrawn		3
2017 Total				18
2018	120 Week limit	Overturned	Discretion	3
			Further evidence	3
		Upheld		6
		Withdrawn		3
	200 week extension	Overturned	Discretion	6
			Further evidence	3
		Upheld		3
		Withdrawn		3
	92 week limit	Overturned	Discretion	3
2018 Total				27
2019	120 Week limit	Overturned	Discretion	3
			Further evidence	3
		Upheld		3
		Withdrawn		3
	200 week extension	Overturned	Discretion	3
			Further evidence	3
		Upheld		3
		Withdrawn		3
	92 week limit	Overturned	Discretion	3
Further evidence			3	
2019 Total				21
2020	120 Week limit	Overturned	Discretion	3
			Error	3
			Further evidence	3

		Upheld		3
		Withdrawn		6
	200 week extension	Overturned	Discretion	6
			Error	3
			Further evidence	3
		Upheld		3
		Withdrawn		6
	2020 Total			27
2021	120 Week limit	Overturned	Further evidence	3
		Upheld		3
		Withdrawn		6
	200 week extension	Overturned	Discretion	6
			Error	3
			Further evidence	3
		Upheld		3
		Withdrawn		3
	92 week limit	Overturned	Further evidence	3
	2021 Total			27
2022	120 Week limit	Overturned	Discretion	3
			Further evidence	3
		Upheld		3
		Withdrawn		3
	200 week extension	Overturned	Discretion	3
			Error	3
			Further evidence	3
		Withdrawn		3
	92 week limit	Overturned	Further evidence	3
	2022 Total			15
2023	120 Week limit	Overturned	Discretion	3
			Further evidence	3
		Withdrawn		6
	200 week extension	Overturned	Discretion	3
			Error	3
			Further evidence	3
		Upheld		3

		Withdrawn		3
2023 Total				18
2024	120 Week limit	Overtured	Further evidence	3
		Pending - further comments		3
		Upheld		3
		Withdrawn		6
	200 week extension	Overtured	Discretion	3
			Further evidence	3
		Upheld		3
		Withdrawn		6
	92 week limit	Overtured	Error	3
		Withdrawn		3
2024 Total				27
2025 (as at 30 May 2025)	120 Week limit	Overtured	Discretion	3
			Error	3
		Withdrawn		3
	200 week extension	Overtured	Discretion	3
		Withdrawn		3
		Underway		3
	92 week limit	Overtured	Error	3
2025 Total				12
Grand Total				186

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In the last seven years, how many clients have submitted an appeal to the Student Allowance Appeal Authority for a declined Student Allowance Entitlement Limit Extension application after an unsuccessful Review of Decision? Please also provide all associated information related to this, including the outcome of any Student Allowance Appeal Authority applications.

In the last seven years there has been no appeal lodged by any student relating to Student Allowance Entitlement Extension.

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
General Manager
Ministerial and Executive Services

Student Allowance limit extension process

SAL will automatically determine when a student has reached their Student Allowance limit and stops their Student Allowance payments. When the student is close to reaching their entitlement, SAL sends them a letter telling them when their payments will stop.

This is what happens when we receive a Student Allowance extension application:

- If we decide the student has special circumstances, they can get extra weeks of Student Allowance so that they can finish their course.
- When the student has reached the end of their Student Allowance extension, SAL assesses and declines the application. SAL automatically issues a letter to tell the student their extension has run out.

Special circumstances

To qualify for an extension, students must complete a Student Allowance extension form and have special circumstances that stopped them completing their qualification within the lifetime limit of Student Allowance weeks.

If we can determine that a student hasn't passed papers because of special circumstances, we may be able to consider giving them an extension. The length of the extension would be the same number of weeks as the failed papers.

For more information on what we consider as special circumstances for Student Allowance extensions, see:

[Special circumstances \(Map\)](#)

How limited full-time affects extensions

Although the criteria for limited full-time (LFT) study and Student Allowance special circumstances are similar, we assess Limited full-time study and Student Allowance extensions separately. Therefore, we can't guarantee that students with Limited full-time will get an extension.

Assess the Student Allowance extension application on its own merit.

For more information on Limited full-time study, see:

[Limited full-time study \(Map\)](#)

Student doesn't qualify for an extension

A student may run out of Student Allowance entitlement before they finish their study even if they don't have special circumstances. In this case they may still qualify for other financial assistance, such as living costs or Accommodation Supplement.

For more information about living costs and Accommodation Supplement, see:

[Qualifying for Student Loan payment types \(StudyLink Knowledgebase\)](#)

[Accommodation Supplement \(StudyLink Knowledgebase\)](#)

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