



Australian Government

Department of Education and Training

OS-HELP

statement of terms
and conditions 2015



www.studyassist.gov.au

Important

The Australian Government has proposed changes to the higher education system. It is important that current and future students understand how these changes may affect them. Visit **www.studyassist.gov.au** for up-to-date information on these proposed changes.

YOU MUST READ THIS BOOKLET BEFORE SIGNING THE COMMONWEALTH ASSISTANCE FORM BELOW.

WHEN YOU SIGN THIS FORM, YOU DECLARE THAT YOU HAVE READ THIS BOOKLET AND THAT YOU ARE AWARE OF YOUR OBLIGATIONS UNDER OS-HELP.



USING THIS BOOKLET

- As you read through, you will notice that certain terms are highlighted in **purple**. These terms are defined in the glossary.
- If you have a specific question after reading this booklet, the contacts list at the end of this booklet will help you.
- More information about OS-HELP is available at www.studyassist.gov.au.

IMPORTANT NOTE: The Department of Education and Training 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.comlaw.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.

WHO IS THIS BOOKLET FOR?

This booklet is for eligible students who are enrolled in a course of study as a **Commonwealth supported student** and want to access an **OS-HELP** loan to undertake part of their course overseas.

This booklet is a summary of the key points a person accessing an OS-HELP loan needs to know.

As you read through this booklet, you will notice that each page has key words highlighted—refer to the glossary for an explanation of what these words mean.

If, after reading this booklet, you require additional information regarding OS-HELP, please visit the **Study Assist** website at **www.studyassist.gov.au**.

For information about **Commonwealth supported places**, see the ***Commonwealth supported places and HECS-HELP information for 2015*** booklet.

For information about loans for higher education students enrolled in fee paying places, see the ***FEE-HELP information for 2015*** booklet. For information about loans for higher-level vocational education and training (VET) courses, see the ***VET FEE-HELP information for 2015*** booklet. You can also refer to the ***CSP and HELP Handbook for 2015***.

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

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GLOSSARY

Accumulated HELP debt The consolidated total of any OS-HELP, HECS-HELP, SA-HELP, FEE-HELP or VET FEE-HELP debts you have incurred (including any Australian Government study loans incurred before 2005).

Approved institution (institution) In this booklet, this term means a university or other accredited higher education institution approved to offer CSPs and access to HELP loans to eligible students.

Asia Refers to the following countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Macau, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, North Korea, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vietnam.

ATO Australian Taxation Office.

Commonwealth supported student A student who is enrolled in a CSP at an institution.

CSP (Commonwealth supported place) A higher education place at an institution that is subsidised by the Australian Government. A student enrolled in a CSP only pays the student contribution amount, set by their institution, for their units of study.

CSP and HELP Handbook for 2015 A comprehensive handbook that contains information about CSPs and the various HELP loans available to assist eligible tertiary students with paying for their study.

EFTSL (equivalent full-time student load) How your study load is measured. One EFTSL is the load you will have when studying full-time for a year.

HELP (Higher Education Loan Programme) A suite of loans offered by the Australian Government that assists eligible students to pay their overseas study expenses (OS-HELP), student contributions (HECS-HELP), tuition fees (FEE-HELP or VET FEE-HELP) and the student services and amenities fee (SA-HELP). All HELP loans are repaid through the Australian tax system.

Higher Education Support Act 2003 The Commonwealth legislation that specifies the requirements to access a HELP loan and a CSP.

OS-HELP An Australian Government loan scheme that assists eligible Commonwealth supported students to undertake a portion of their study overseas.

OS-HELP debt confirmation The form that you must submit to your institution to apply for an OS-HELP loan.

OS-HELP Guidelines Guidelines made under the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* that specifically relate to the administration of OS-HELP loans and applicable OS-HELP limits.

Study Assist (www.studyassist.gov.au) A website providing information about options for financing your tertiary study, including HELP loans, institutions and courses, and student income support options.

TFN (tax file number) Your unique identification number issued by the ATO for everything tax-related, including making repayments on your HELP debt. TFNs have nine digits (eg 123 456 789).

1. THE OS-HELP LOAN SCHEME

More information about **OS-HELP**, including the eligibility requirements, is available from the **CSP and HELP Handbook for 2015** at www.studyassist.gov.au.

1.1 What is OS-HELP?

OS-HELP is a loan scheme that assists eligible students studying in a **Commonwealth supported place (CSP)** at an **approved institution (institution)** to undertake a portion of their studies overseas. These loans help students with a range of expenses, such as air fares and accommodation. Eligible students may also receive a supplementary amount to undertake language study in preparation for overseas study in **Asia**.

1.2 Am I eligible for OS-HELP?

To be eligible for OS-HELP assistance for overseas study, you must be enrolled in a **CSP** at an institution (refer to Appendix A of the *CSP and HELP Handbook for 2015*) and:

- be an Australian citizen OR a permanent humanitarian visa holder (check www.immi.gov.au for the list of humanitarian visa subclasses),
- be enrolled in a course of study as a **Commonwealth supported student** (i.e. studying in a CSP),
 - have already completed, as a Commonwealth supported student, units to the value of at least one **EFTSL** (usually one year of full-time study) in Australia that count towards the course you are enrolled in,
- be undertaking full-time study overseas,
 - have your overseas study count towards the course requirements for the Australian course you are enrolled in, and

- on return from overseas study, you must have units to the value of at least 0.125 EFTSL (usually one unit of study) to complete in Australia for the course you are enrolled in,
- meet the **TFN** requirements by giving your institution your TFN (or a completed *Certificate of application for a TFN* form),
- have been selected by your institution to receive an OS-HELP loan for a six-month period (contact your institution regarding the application process),
- have lodged a completed **OS-HELP debt confirmation** form with your institution,
- have not received more than one previous OS-HELP loan,
- will not receive a second OS-HELP loan for the same six-month period, and
- have not completed your overseas study before applying for the OS-HELP loan.

To be eligible for a supplementary amount for Asian language study in relation to a six-month period you must:

- have been selected for OS-HELP assistance for overseas study in Asia for that six-month period,
- be undertaking language study in preparation for undertaking that overseas study,
- have indicated on your *OS-HELP debt confirmation* form that you would like to receive a supplementary amount for Asian language study,
- have been selected by your institution to receive a supplementary amount for Asian language study, and
- have not yet completed the Asian language study before applying for the supplementary amount.

IMPORTANT NOTE FOR NEW ZEALAND SPECIAL CATEGORY VISA (SCV) HOLDERS

The Australian Government is seeking to amend the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* so that certain New Zealand citizens who are Special Category Visa holders can access a HELP loan. For more information about this proposed change, visit www.studyassist.gov.au.

1.3 How much can I borrow?

There is a limit of two OS-HELP loans over a student's lifetime. There is also a limit of one OS-HELP loan per six-month period. Students undertaking overseas study over two consecutive six-month periods may be eligible to access an OS-HELP loan for each of those six-month periods (i.e. for overseas study longer than six-months).

The actual amount you can borrow will be determined by your institution, but it must be within the limits set by the *OS-HELP Guidelines* and the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (available at www.comlaw.gov.au). The amount of OS-HELP assistance you are entitled to for a six-month period is the sum of the amount determined by your institution for the overseas study, plus any supplementary amount for Asian language study determined by your institution.

In 2015, the maximum OS-HELP loan amount for overseas study for a six-month period is \$7,635 for study undertaken in Asia, or \$6,362 for study undertaken elsewhere.

The maximum supplementary amount for Asian preparatory language study for a six-month period is \$1,018.

These amounts are indexed on 1 January each year.

1.4 Will I be charged interest?

Your debt will be indexed. **HELP** debts are indexed annually in accordance with the *Higher Education Support Act 2003*. In 2015, the Act provides for indexation, which is currently based on changes in the Consumer Price Index. Indexation rates are published on the **ATO** website, visit www.ato.gov.au.

NOTE: The Australian Government is planning an interest rate pause on the HELP debts of primary carers of children aged less than five years old who are earning less than the minimum repayment threshold.

1.5 Is there a loan or application fee?

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

2. APPLYING FOR AN OS-HELP LOAN

More information about applying for **OS-HELP** is available from the *CSP and HELP Handbook for 2015* at www.studyassist.gov.au.

2.1 How do I apply for OS-HELP?

You must apply to your **institution** for an OS-HELP loan. As each institution runs its own application and selection process, you should contact your institution if you have any questions about this process.

To apply for an OS-HELP loan, you must submit a valid **OS-HELP debt confirmation** form to your institution. Many institutions will allow you to submit a specific electronic version of the form online. Check with the student administration/enrolments office at your institution if you are unsure about whether to submit a paper or electronic form.

If you want to use an OS-HELP loan to pay for your overseas study, you must submit your valid **TFN**, even if you do not have a job. This is because repayments on your **HELP** debt are made through the Australian taxation system. If you do not provide your own TFN on the form or you provide an incorrect one, your form will not be valid and you will not be able to use an OS-HELP loan.

If you do not have a TFN, you will need to apply to the **ATO** for one. When you do so, the ATO will, on request, supply you with a *Certificate of application for a TFN*. Even before you receive your TFN from the ATO, you can attach your certificate to your **OS-HELP debt confirmation** form. You must advise your institution of your TFN within 21 days of receiving it.

You must keep your TFN secure. Do not provide your TFN if you are only enquiring about a course. Your TFN should only be provided on the actual **OS-HELP debt confirmation** form (either paper or electronic) when requesting the loan to pay for your overseas study expenses.

2.2 How is an OS-HELP loan paid?

If you are selected for an OS-HELP loan, your institution will pay the loan amount directly to you. You will have a HELP debt immediately following this payment. Your institution will notify you in writing that you have been selected for the OS-HELP loan, the loan amount, and the conditions of receiving an OS-HELP loan.

3. KEEPING TRACK OF YOUR OS-HELP LOAN

More information about keeping track of your **OS-HELP** loan is available from the *CSP and HELP Handbook for 2015* at www.studyassist.gov.au.

3.1 Your Commonwealth Higher Education Student Support Number (CHESSN) and myUniAssist

You will be allocated a CHESSN when you first apply for admission to your **institution** or Tertiary Admissions Centre. The CHESSN is a unique identification number that remains with you during and after your studies. It helps you, your institution, and the Australian Government keep up to date with information about the Commonwealth assistance for tertiary study that you have used.

You can use your CHESSN (and other personal identifying details) to access myUniAssist at www.studyassist.gov.au. myUniAssist provides information on how much Commonwealth assistance you have received (but it will not display information related to study undertaken before 2005). In myUniAssist, you can refer to the OS-HELP assistance tab for information on your OS-HELP usage, and to the Commonwealth supported units tab for information related to your HECS-HELP usage.

myUniAssist is updated with details about your **HELP** usage as reported by your institution four times a year. Given the time delay in reporting data, you may need to add any units you have recently enrolled in/are currently enrolled in to the information shown on myUniAssist to determine your entitlements.

myUniAssist will not provide information about the current amount of your HELP debt as repayments are made to the **ATO** and myUniAssist does not record this information.

3.2 Your HELP account information statement

The ATO no longer automatically sends HELP account information statements. You can obtain account information, such as the balance of your account or your payment reference number (PRN) by:

- Logging onto your secure ATO online account, through myGov.
- Phoning the ATO at any time during the year. Be sure to have your TFN handy when you call. The ATO will ask you for it, for security purposes before they disclose any personal information to you.

3.3 Can I cancel my OS-HELP loan?

Once you have been paid an OS-HELP loan, it cannot be cancelled.

You will have to repay your HELP debt through the Australian taxation system, even if you fail or do not complete your studies (either the Australian or overseas portion of your studies).

4. REPAYING YOUR HELP DEBT

More information about **HELP** repayments, including how the **ATO** calculates your compulsory repayment, is available from the *CSP and HELP Handbook for 2015* at www.studyassist.gov.au.

4.1 When do I have to start paying back my loan?

Your **OS-HELP** debt becomes part of your **accumulated HELP debt**. The minimum repayment threshold for compulsory repayment is adjusted each year. In the 2015–16 income year, you will be required to make a compulsory repayment if your income is \$54,126 or above. Repayments made through the Australian taxation system are called compulsory repayments and continue until you have repaid your whole debt.

NOTE: The Government is taking steps to recover HELP debt from Australians living overseas to assist in securing the HELP loan scheme into the future. This change is simply imposing the same HELP repayment obligations to Australians living overseas as currently apply to those who remain in Australia.

4.2 How much will my repayments be?

The amount you repay each year is calculated as a percentage of your repayment income. The repayment percentage increases as your income increases, but is capped at 8 per cent of your income. The ATO will calculate your compulsory repayment for the year and include it on your income tax notice of assessment.

Table 1: Repayment rates for the 2015–16 income year

Repayment income	Repayment % rate
Below \$54,126	Nil
\$54,126 - \$60,292	4.0%
\$60,293 - \$66,456	4.5%
\$66,457 - \$69,949	5.0%
\$69,950 - \$75,190	5.5%
\$75,191 - \$81,432	6.0%
\$81,433 - \$85,718	6.5%
\$85,719 - \$94,331	7.0%
\$94,332 - \$100,519	7.5%
\$100,520 and above	8.0%

4.3 Can I make a voluntary repayment?

There are several ways you can make a voluntary repayment, including via BPAY and credit card. For more information on making a payment, go to www.ato.gov.au/howtopay.

Current arrangements

Voluntary repayments of \$500 or more receive a 5 per cent bonus. This means your account will be credited with an additional 5 per cent of the value of your repayment, not 5 per cent of your outstanding debt. For example, if you make a voluntary repayment of \$500, the bonus increases the value of your repayment so your account will be credited with \$525.

Proposed arrangements

If the proposed changes are approved, voluntary repayments would no longer be eligible to receive a bonus. For example, if you made a voluntary repayment of \$500, your account would be credited with \$500.

4.4 Are repayments tax deductible?

Compulsory repayments are not tax deductible. Voluntary repayments made by you or someone other than your employer are not tax deductible.

Your employer may be able to claim a tax deduction for voluntary repayments it makes on your behalf, but it may also be liable for fringe benefits tax on the repayments. For more information, contact the **ATO**.

CONTACTS AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Your institution

The student administration/enrolments office at your **institution** will be able to help you with:

- the eligibility criteria for **OS-HELP**
- applying for an OS-HELP loan
- its application process.

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

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

- **HELP** loans available in both the higher education and vocational education and training sectors
- courses and institutions that offer Australian Government assistance
- student income support and Australian Scholarships and Awards.

The CSP and HELP Handbook for 2015

If you are seeking more information about OS-HELP, **CSPs** or about HELP loans in general, this handbook provides detailed information. It is available from the Publications page under the Helpful Resources section at www.studyassist.gov.au.

Department of Education and Training

The department can help you with **information about:**

- OS-HELP
- other loans available under the HELP scheme
- other forms of Australian Government assistance.

Contact details:

- visit **www.studyassist.gov.au** (you can submit an online query from this website too)
- call the student enquiry line on **1800 020 108** (+61 3 9938 2545 from outside Australia)
- If you are deaf, or have a hearing or speech impairment, contact us through the National Relay Service. For more information visit **www.relayservice.gov.au**.

Australian Taxation Office (ATO)

The ATO can help you with:

- your **accumulated HELP debt**
- compulsory repayments
- voluntary repayments.

Contact details:

- visit **www.ato.gov.au**
- 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
- write to: Australian Taxation Office PO BOX 1032, ALBURY NSW 2640.

Important note: Do not send voluntary repayments to this address.

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ISSN 1449-9282

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