



Australian Government

Department of Education,
Skills and Employment

Extending the Unique Student Identifier (USI) to Higher Education

Education Provider Information Pack



The Department of Education, Skills and Employment’s Higher Education Division has developed this information pack to help education providers communicate the introduction of the USI to higher education students, staff, and wider stakeholders.

Contents

Background	3
Key messages: for students	4
USI fact sheet: for students	5
Student FAQs.....	6
Education Provider FAQs.....	8
Social media suggestions.....	11
Student scenarios	12
Useful resources	14



Background

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to implement the Unique Student Identifier (USI) for vocational education and training (VET) students in April 2012. Since the USI initiative commenced on 1 January 2015, over ten million USIs have been issued.

As part of the 2019-20 Budget, the Australian Government committed to extending USI from VET to higher education students. This is a joint initiative across the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) and the Office of the Student Identifiers Registrar (OSIR).

The USI will replace the existing Commonwealth Higher Education Student Support Number (CHESSN), which will be gradually decommissioned from 2021. Replacing the CHESSN with the USI will reduce red tape for students and tertiary education providers, as it will reduce the number of identifiers issued by the Government to tertiary education students from two to one.

USIs will be extended to higher education students attending a provider recognised under the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011* (TEQSA). Amendments have been made to the *Student Identifiers Act 2014* (SI Act), the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (HESA), and the *VET Student Loans Act 2016* to support this initiative.

The SI Act was amended in March 2020 to enable the extension of the USI from VET to higher education students. The SI Act now allows higher education providers and tertiary admission centres to collect, use and disclose the student identifiers of higher education students, as reasonably necessary for the purposes of performing functions related to HESA and/or TEQSA.

Amendments were also made in June 2020 to the HESA so it is **compulsory** for new students commencing study from 1 January 2021 to apply for and obtain a USI in order to be eligible for Commonwealth assistance (specifically a Commonwealth supported place, HECS-HELP, FEE-HELP, and/or OS-HELP).

New higher education students (domestic and onshore international) who are not applying for financial assistance are **encouraged** to apply for and obtain a USI prior to enrolment. Education providers should record new students' USIs along with enrolment information.

It is important to note that from 1 January 2023 **all** students must have a USI to receive their higher education award, unless an exemption applies.



Key messages: for students

The following key messages are for providers to use when communicating with students about the USI extension:

- From 1 January 2021, if you are a new higher education student, you will need a Unique Student Identifier (known as a USI) to be eligible for a Commonwealth supported place (CSP) and Commonwealth financial assistance (HECS-HELP, FEE-HELP or OS-HELP).
- You should apply for and obtain your USI (or locate your existing USI) and provide it to your education provider before census date.
- If you are seeking Commonwealth support for the first time, you will need to record your USI on your electronic Commonwealth assistance form (known as an eCAF).
- From 1 January 2023 all higher education students, including those who commenced prior to 2021, must have a USI in order to graduate and receive their award.
- Applying for a USI is fast and free, and you keep the same USI for life. You can apply for a USI in as little as five minutes at usi.gov.au
- If you have studied a VET course in the last five years, including while at secondary school, you might already have a USI. Locate it easily at www.usi.gov.au/faqs/find-your-usi
- Extending the USI to higher education will create a single government identifier for your entire tertiary education journey. This will help simplify information management for both students and education providers, and strengthen the integrity and richness of data available to help improve education policy, programs and pathways.

For more information, visit: www.usi.gov.au/higher-education



USI fact sheet: for students

The Government is extending the Unique Student Identifier (USI) from vocational education and training (VET) to higher education students.

Applying for a USI is fast and free, and you keep the same USI for life. You can apply for a USI in as little as five minutes at usi.gov.au.

What is the USI?

The Unique Student Identifier (known as a USI) is a reference number made up of a combination of ten numbers and letters. Your USI is used to connect your student loan information to your personal details. You can log in and check or update your details at any time.

If you have studied a VET course in the last five years, you will already have an existing USI. Locate your USI easily at www.usi.gov.au/faqs/find-your-usi.

Why do I need to get a USI?

New amendments made in June 2020 to the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (HESA) means it is now **compulsory** for new students commencing study from 1 January 2021 to apply for and obtain a USI, in order to be eligible for a Commonwealth supported place and Commonwealth financial assistance (HECS-HELP, FEE-HELP, and OS-HELP).

Extending the USI to higher education will create a single government identifier for your entire tertiary education journey. This will help simplify information management for students and providers, and strengthen the integrity and richness of data available to improve education policy, programs and pathways.

For more information about Commonwealth financial assistance visit www.studyassist.gov.au/help-loans.

When do I need to get a USI?

If you're a new higher education student from 1 January 2021, you will need to apply for a USI if you wish to be eligible for a Commonwealth supported place and Commonwealth financial support. If you are seeking Commonwealth support for the first time, you will need to provide your USI on your electronic Commonwealth assistance form (known as an eCAF).

From 1 January 2023, all students must have, and provide, a USI in order to graduate and receive their award.

For more information, visit www.usi.gov.au/higher-education.



Student FAQs

Key messages

The Government is extending the Unique Student Identifier (USI) from vocational education and training (VET) to all higher education students.

From 1 January 2021, new higher education students will need a USI in order to be eligible for a Commonwealth supported place (CSP) and Commonwealth financial assistance (HECS-HELP, FEE-HELP or OS-HELP).

Students should obtain a USI (or locate their existing USI) and provide it to their education provider before the first census date.

From 1 January 2023 all higher education students, including those who commenced prior to 2021, must have a USI in order to graduate and receive their award.

Where do I get a USI?

Applying for a USI is fast and free, and you keep the same USI for life. You can apply for a USI in five minutes at usi.gov.au.

If you have studied a VET course in the last five years, including while at secondary school, you might already have a USI. Locate it easily at www.usi.gov.au/faqs/find-your-usi.

Can someone help me apply for a USI?

Someone can create a USI on your behalf, as long as they have your permission and meet one of the roles or relationships outlined by the Office of the Student Identifiers Registrar www.usi.gov.au/create-usi-behalf-another-person.

Can my provider help me get a USI?

Education providers and tertiary admission centres can assist students applying for a USI, if they have your consent. Providers will need to use the USI registry system to apply for a USI on your behalf, and you will then receive a notification to set a password and activate the account.

Where do I provide my USI?

You might be asked to provide your USI when you apply to university, either directly from your provider or through a tertiary admissions centre. Higher education providers should request your USI as part of the enrolment process.

Students seeking Commonwealth support for the first time will be required to provide their USI on their electronic Commonwealth assistance form (known as an eCAF).



What about CHESSNs?

If you applied for Commonwealth financial assistance after 2005 you will have a Commonwealth Higher Education Student Support Number (CHESSN). Over the next three years, the CHESSN will be gradually decommissioned as the USI becomes the primary government identifier across higher education and VET.

If you have studied before, you can find your CHESSN on a past Commonwealth Assistance Notice (CAN) issued to you by your provider for that course. You can also call your past provider(s) and ask them for your CHESSN.

From 2021, once a student has provided a USI it will become their primary identifier and replace the functionality of the CHESSN. More information about the CHESSN can be found here

www.studyassist.gov.au/help-loans/your-chessn

What is a HELP loan?

A Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) loan refers to the various forms of financial assistance the Australian Government has available for students. If you are a domestic student you may be eligible for a HELP loan so you don't have to pay your tuition fees upfront. Find out more about HELP loans at www.studyassist.gov.au/help-loans.

What is the eCAF?

The eCAF is an electronic Commonwealth assistance form (eCAF) that you use to apply for a HELP loan to help pay for tuition fees, or to accept a Commonwealth supported place (CSP).

What do these changes mean for VET students?

From 2021, VET students will be required to provide their USI on the electronic Commonwealth assistance form (eCAF) when applying for a VET Student Loan (VSL). The USI will replace the CHESSN as the primary government identifier for all VET students.



Education Provider FAQs

What is a 'new' student?

For the purposes of extending the USI to higher education, a 'new student' is defined as a student who is applying for financial assistance for the first time and does not have an existing CHESSN.

If the student commenced prior to 2021 and has been assigned a CHESSN, they are not considered a 'new' student.

How do providers access the USI Organisation Portal?

Similar to registered training organisations, higher education providers will be able to access the USI Organisation Portal to support students. Read more information at <https://www.usi.gov.au/training-organisations/set-access-usi-registry-system>.

Eligibility for access to the USI system will include registration with the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), and a System Access Request (SAR) via the Office of the Student Identifiers Registrar.

Do providers need to verify the USI?

Education providers are not currently required to verify USIs, however they are able to do so if they wish.

USIs will be verified once they arrive in government systems, through the eCAF.

Functionality is planned for [Tertiary Collection of Student Information](#) (TCSI), later in 2021, to allow USIs to be verified via B2G APIs and the TCSI Data Entry portal. If verification of the student's USI fails, the education provider will be sent a notification, similar to when TFN verification fails.


The USI Registry system will be adapted to allow higher education providers to verify USIs through their own Student Management Systems (SMS) or the web-based USI Organisation Portal. Read more information at www.usi.gov.au/training-organisations/using-usi-registry-system/verify-usi.

Can providers retrieve a USI on behalf of a student?

Providers can search for a student's existing USI using the USI Organisation Portal, provided they have the student's permission. Read information on how to do this at www.usi.gov.au/training-organisations/using-usi-registry-system/existing-usi-search-locate-usi.

What about CHESSNs?

If a student applied for Commonwealth financial assistance after 2005, they will have a Commonwealth Higher Education Student Support Number (CHESSN). Over the next three years, the CHESSN will be gradually decommissioned as the USI becomes the primary government student identifier across higher education and VET.



From 2021, once a student has provided a USI it will become their primary identifier and replace the functionality of the CHESSN. Read more information about the CHESSN at www.studyassist.gov.au/help-loans/your-chessn.

If a student only has a CHESSN, can they graduate?

Yes, if the student completes their studies and confers before 1 January 2023 they can graduate with their award. From 2023 all students, regardless of commencement date, will require a USI to be able to graduate and receive their award.

How will the CHESSN be decommissioned?

From 2021, USIs will gradually replace CHESSNs as the primary government identifier for tertiary students.

TCSI will automatically allocate and manage CHESSNs for new and continuing students in the system for quality control until the transition to USI and TCSI is complete. Read more about how the CHESSN is managed in TCSI at <https://www.tcsisupport.gov.au/support/chessn-management-in-tcsi>.

New students must obtain and provide a USI if seeking a CSP or Commonwealth financial assistance. These students will be automatically allocated a CHESSN in TCSI for government administration purposes until the transition to USI and TCSI is complete. Continuing students may continue to use their CHESSN until they provide a USI.

When do international students require a USI?

Onshore international students will require a USI in order to receive their Higher Education award from 1 January 2023 onwards.

Will international offshore students require a USI?


At this stage there is no requirement for an offshore international student to obtain a USI.

What identification can an international student use to obtain a USI?

Onshore international students can use their passport with a valid Australian visa, or an Australian driver's licence to apply for a USI. The student must have arrived in Australia and have had their visa validated by customs before it can be used as a form of identification. Read out more information at www.usi.gov.au/about/forms-identification.

Will the department be making changes to the eCAF?

The Department of Education, Skills and Employment is in the process of making changes to the electronic Commonwealth assistance form (eCAF) for 2021. This will include a field to capture the USI as well as a verification process, and potentially other changes in the context of Australian Government legislation and policy.



The training environment featuring USI changes will be made available for information in October 2020. The Government's approved 2021 eCAF will be released to providers in the final quarter of 2020.

Can we continue to use our eCAF or do students have to submit a Government eCAF?

While there is no current requirement for providers to use the Government's eCAF, provider systems must replicate the Government eCAF. Providers may need to adopt the Government eCAF system while adapting their business processes to accommodate the introduction of the USI. If a provider is considering moving to the Government eCAF, we are here to assist the transition. Please reach out to the team at USItohighered@dese.gov.au.

If a student has already enrolled for 2021, will they need to submit a new eCAF?

Yes, from 1 January 2021, new students seeking Commonwealth assistance will be required to complete a 2021 eCAF providing their USI.

Will the USI be required on a higher education transcript?

At this stage there is no requirement for the USI to be printed on a student's transcript or testamur.

Will higher education qualifications appear on the USI transcript?

Higher education qualifications are not available on the USI transcript system.

What legislative changes have been made?

Amendments were made in March 2020 to the *Student Identifiers Act 2014* to extend the USI from VET to higher education students, and to allow higher education providers and tertiary admission centres to collect, use and disclose the USI for purposes relating to HESA and/or TEQSA.

Amendments were made in June 2020 to the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (HESA), making it **compulsory** from 1 January 2021 for new students to have a USI in order to be eligible for a Commonwealth supported place and Commonwealth financial assistance (HECS-HELP, FEE-HELP or OS-HELP).

What do these changes mean for VET providers?

From 2021, the USI will be a required field on the electronic Commonwealth assistance form (eCAF) for students applying for a VET Student Loan (VSL). The USI will replace the CHESSN as the primary government identifier for all VSL students.



Social media suggestions

- Are you a new student in 2021? You'll need a USI to be eligible for a Commonwealth supported place and a HELP loan. USIs are easy to create and you keep the same number for life. Check if you have an existing USI, or create yours at www.usi.gov.au
- Are you a new student in 2021? Don't forget to get a USI! Apply at www.usi.gov.au/your-usi/create-usi
- Starting university in 2021? You will need a USI to apply for a HELP loan. If you've previously studied VET, you may already have one. Visit www.usi.gov.au/faqs/find-your-usi to check!
- From 1 January 2021 new students will need to obtain a USI to be eligible for a Commonwealth supported place and financial assistance. Visit www.usi.gov.au/higher-education for more info.
- If you're applying for a Commonwealth supported place or a HELP loan for the first time in 2021, you will need to provide your USI along with your TFN. Visit www.usi.gov.au/higher-education for more info.



Student scenarios

Scenario 1: Sally – new student studying anthropology

Sally is starting university for the first time in 2021. She will need a USI before census date, and if she is seeking commonwealth assistance, is required to provide her USI on the eCAF.

Sally's university records her USI on enrolment. Sally also provides her USI and TFN when applying for Commonwealth financial assistance.

When Sally graduates in 2024, her USI is already recorded and she can receive her award.

Scenario 2: David – international economics student

David is an international student coming to study in Australia in 2021.

David can apply for his USI once he arrives in Australia, using his passport and Australian Visa for identity verification.

David's course goes for three years and he is eligible for graduation in December 2023. David can receive his award if he obtains and provides his USI to his education provider.

Scenario 3: Shiba – current arts and law student

Shiba is a current student who started study in 2019 and has been paying all her fees upfront. She has not previously received Commonwealth financial assistance.

In 2022 Shiba is accepted into an exchange program in Berlin. Shiba applies for OS-HELP to contribute to the cost of studying abroad.

Shiba must apply for and provide her USI on the OS-HELP loan form to be eligible for Commonwealth financial assistance.


Scenario 4: Nicole – from VET to higher education

Nicole studied at TAFE in 2019 and has a VET Student Loan with a CHESSN, as well as an existing USI.

Nicole is now enrolling in a Bachelor of Arts, commencing in 2021. When Nicole applies for a HELP loan, she will provide her USI which will replace her CHESSN as the primary government identifier for her loan information.

Scenario 5: Leigh – current student who has been paying fees up front

Leigh started studying his engineering degree in 2019 and has been paying his fees up front each semester. Due to COVID-19, Leigh has lost his job and is unable to continue paying his fees. From semester one 2021 he intends to apply for a HELP loan.



As Leigh has not previously received Commonwealth financial assistance, he does not have a CHESSN. Despite not being a strictly 'new' student, Leigh must obtain a USI and provide it on his eCAF in order to submit his request for a HELP loan.

Scenario 6: Sarah – year 12 graduate planning to apply for a VET Student Loan

Sarah has just finished high school and wants to study a Diploma of Beauty Therapy. Sarah intends to apply for a VET Student Loan (VSL) to help cover the cost of her course fees.

Sarah will need to apply for a USI and then provide it on the eCAF when applying for a VSL, in order to be eligible for the loan.

Scenario 7: Tim – new student in a Commonwealth supported place (CSP)

Tim is starting university for the first time in 2021. He has been offered a Commonwealth supported place studying a Bachelor of Nursing.

Tim intends to accept the CSP and pay his student contribution amount up front. He fills out an eCAF to accept his CSP and includes his USI on the form.

When Tim graduates in 2024, his USI is already recorded and he can receive his award.



Useful resources

More information

For more information about USI in higher education visit www.usi.gov.au/higher-education

For more information about HELP loans visit www.studyassist.gov.au/help-loans

To create a USI for the first time visit www.usi.gov.au/your-usi/create-usi

To check if you already have a USI visit www.usi.gov.au/faqs/find-your-usi

Sign up for the USI News Bulletins www.usi.gov.au/subscribe-news

Details about legislation changes

In order to extend the USI to higher education, legislative amendments were made to the following Acts:

- *Student Identifiers Act 2014*:
www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/bd/bd1920a/20bd072; and
- *Higher Education Support Act 2003* and *VET Student Loans Act 2016*:
www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bld=r6561

Questions?

Email USItoHigherEd@dese.gov.au