



Australian Government

Department of Education, Employment  
and Workplace Relations

# GUIDELINES

For the approval of Masters courses for  
student income support payments

## INFORMATION

for Higher Education providers

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## **THE PURPOSE OF THESE GUIDELINES**

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These guidelines provide advice to higher education providers, including universities and other higher education institutions, about the process for seeking approval for certain masters by coursework programs for Youth Allowance, Austudy and Pensioner Education Supplement eligibility.

# STUDENT INCOME SUPPORT

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## Youth Allowance, Austudy and Pensioner Education Supplement

### Background

Youth Allowance (for full-time students aged 16 to 24 years) and Austudy (for full-time students aged 25 years and over) are student income support programs which assist people to gain qualifications up to post graduate level of study, undertake training or complete an Australian Apprenticeship. The payments provided under these allowances are means tested to ensure that this support is provided to people most in need of assistance, particularly those from low income backgrounds and rural and remote areas.

The Youth Allowance and Austudy programs are legislated under the *Social Security Act 1991* and have academic and progress rules. These include the requirement for a student to be in full-time study in an approved course of study at an approved institution.

The Pensioner Education Supplement is a supplementary income support payment which is designed to assist disadvantaged pensioner groups, such as single parents, people with disability and carers, with the costs of undertaking approved study. Assistance is provided over a defined period to help recipients to gain an initial qualification, up to a postgraduate level, that would make them competitive in the labour market. The Pensioner Education Supplement is available to eligible students undertaking a full-time study load or a concessional study load of 25 per cent or 66 per cent.

From 1 January 2008 Youth Allowance, Austudy and Pensioner Education Supplement assistance has been extended to eligible students undertaking masters by coursework study, where:

- the course is required for entry to a profession; or
- the course is the fastest pathway to professional entry; or
- a university has diversified by restructuring its course delivery.

Previously, students could not be approved for any further student assistance through Youth Allowance and Austudy once they had attained a post graduate bachelor degree.

Where masters courses are approved in subsequent assessment rounds, students can apply for Youth Allowance, Austudy or Pensioner Education Supplement from the date their course is approved to continue and complete their masters degree.

Students in receipt of ABSTUDY are able to study at the masters and doctoral levels.

To extend Youth Allowance, Austudy and the Pensioner Education Supplement to masters programs, approved courses are to be listed under the "Determination of Education Institutions and Courses" sections 3(1) and 5d(1) of the *Student Assistance Act 1973*.

# 1 The Approval of Masters Courses

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## 1.1 What is it?

From 1 January 2008, Youth Allowance, Austudy and Pensioner Education Supplement have been extended to eligible students enrolled in an approved masters by coursework program which is:

- required for entry to a profession; or
- the fastest pathway to professional entry; or
- the only pathway provided by the higher education institution following a restructure of existing course delivery.

To be eligible for student income support through Youth Allowance and Austudy, students will still need to be studying full-time in an approved course at an approved institution and to satisfy all other Youth Allowance and Austudy program requirements, including personal, parental or partner income tests.

To be eligible for the Pensioner Education Supplement, students will need to be undertaking an approved full-time or part-time course at an approved institution. Pensioner Education Supplement may be available to students undertaking a full-time study load or a concessional study load of 25 or 66 per cent.

For the purposes of the approval of masters courses for student income support payments, a profession is defined as an occupation requiring specialised theoretical and practical knowledge gained through a specialised academic tertiary qualification. This qualification is essential for entry to, or employment in, the profession, as required for:

- accreditation by a recognised professional body; and/or
- admission to a profession; and/or
- registration with a State/Territory governing board; and/or
- employment, for example, with a State/Territory government agency.

## 1.2 Who will qualify?

From 1 January 2008, Youth Allowance, Austudy and the Pensioner Education Supplement, have been extended to eligible students who undertake masters study by coursework:

- where a masters degree is the minimum requirement for registration with a professional body and for entry to a profession; or
- where a masters degree is the fastest pathway, that is the shortest study route for a student at this higher education institution to attain an entry-level qualification for professional practice (see examples 1.4); or
- where a masters degree is the only pathway provided by the higher education institution which has diversified by restructuring its course delivery.

### **1.2.1 Who will not qualify?**

Students who are undertaking research degrees or coursework masters degrees which are not required for professional entry will not be eligible for Youth Allowance, Austudy or the Pensioner Education Supplement.

Students who are undertaking masters by coursework degrees will not be eligible for Youth Allowance, Austudy or the Pensioner Education Supplement, where a shorter pathway is available at that higher education institution for attaining an entry-level qualification to professional practice, for example, a postgraduate diploma (students are currently supported through Youth Allowance or Austudy up to, and including, this level of study).

The approval of masters courses for student income support does not support students undertaking coursework doctorates. Only courses verified as being at masters level, and which meet the criteria set out in these Guidelines, will qualify for student income support.

## **1.3 Masters as the minimum requirement for entry to a profession**

Students may be eligible for Youth Allowance, Austudy and the Pensioner Education Supplement where a masters degree is the minimum qualification required for practice in their chosen profession or where professional organisations have set masters qualifications as the entry requirement for professional accreditation. Courses will therefore be approved for the purposes of student income support where a masters degree is the minimum requirement for practice in a profession or where professional organisations have set masters qualifications as the entry requirement for professional accreditation.

- Organisations which have established a masters degree as a pre-requisite for registration for professional practice or bona-fide employment include the State and Territory Psychology Registration Boards and the Office of Hearing Services (Audiology).

## **1.4 Fastest pathway**

From 1 January 2008, Youth Allowance, Austudy and the Pensioner Education Supplement have been extended to eligible students undertaking a masters course at a higher education institution where this course provides the fastest route at that institution to professional entry.

The following examples outline situations where a course might meet the 'fastest pathway' criterion.

*(a) A person has a three year undergraduate degree. Instead of having to undertake a further three- or four-year undergraduate degree to qualify for a profession, this person may now be able to receive income support to undertake a two-year masters degree by coursework, as this is the fastest pathway to professional entry.*

*(b) A person who attends a university where professional entry-level qualifications are offered at both the one-year graduate diploma and two-year masters level, where both qualifications suffice for professional entry, will be able to receive income support for the graduate diploma only.*

(c) A person who has completed a generalist undergraduate degree such as a Science Degree and aspires to a career in nursing, for example, may be eligible for income support to complete a two year master of nursing degree, if this is the fastest pathway at that institution for professional entry to nursing.

(d) If a university offers a graduate diploma and a professional entry masters degree for the same course for the same length of time (eg one year), students could apply for income support for either course.

(e) Where a student is enrolled in cross-institutional study, the university that awards their qualification will be the institution against which the 'fastest possible route' will be measured.

## 1.5 University diversification and course restructuring

Youth Allowance, Austudy and the Pensioner Education Supplement have been extended to eligible students where higher education providers have diversified by *restructuring* their course delivery such that the masters by coursework program is the only pathway provided:

Restructuring may refer to:

- the reformulation of a university's entire structure for course delivery; or
- the reformulation of the courses of one or more faculties; or
- the reformulation of one course within a faculty.

## 1.6 Approval of part-time masters courses

From the 2009 approval round, applications may be submitted for masters courses that are only offered on a part-time basis. Part-time masters courses that are approved will only be considered to be an approved course for the purposes of the Pensioner Education Supplement. To be an approved course for Youth Allowance and Austudy purposes, the course must be a full-time course.

## 2 The Application Process

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- 2.1 It is intended that there will be an annual process undertaken in June-July each year. This annual process may be supplemented by additional processes, if required.
- 2.2 There is no limit to the number of masters by coursework programs a university might submit for approval. An application form must be submitted for each course. Applications must comply with the criteria set out in these guidelines and provide evidence that each of the masters by coursework programs nominated for approval meet the criteria.
- 2.3 The university Vice-Chancellor or a person duly authorised by the university or higher education provider must verify that the information provided in the set of course application forms submitted by the provider meets the criteria set out in the Guidelines.
- 2.4 Applications must be submitted on the application form accompanying these guidelines. Applications must provide evidence that the nominated masters by coursework programs meet the criteria set out at 1.2 to 1.5 in the Guidelines and include evidence of professional accreditation where relevant.
- 2.5 Once a course has been approved it will not need to be further approved unless accreditation expires or unless the course is substantially changed such that it may no longer meet the criteria required for approval for student income support.
- 2.6 Providers will need to submit applications for new courses.

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**Footnote:** Where a higher education institution has campuses in different States/Territories approval may be granted on application on the State/Territories basis, in particular where requirements for professional entry may vary across State/Territories.

## 3 Application Forms

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- 3.1 Applications meeting the requirements of these guidelines should be submitted on the application forms provided by DEEWR.
- 3.2 One original application signed by the Vice-Chancellor or the person duly authorised by the university or higher education provider is required. An electronic copy should also be provided to assist in the administration of the application.
- 3.3 Applications must demonstrate how each nominated course meets the criteria set out at paragraphs 1.2 to 1.5 in these guidelines and relevant documentation should be provided.

Any further questions or information required may be emailed to [mastersapps@deewr.gov.au](mailto:mastersapps@deewr.gov.au) for immediate response by DEEWR.

- 3.5 Inquiries may also be directed to:

Masters Applications  
Income Support Payments Branch  
(02) 6240 8084

- 3.6 The hard copy application should be mailed or preferably faxed to:

Fax (02) 6123 6098

Mail Masters Applications  
Income Support Programs Branch  
Location Code: C50MA3  
GPO Box 9880  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

- 3.7 The electronic copy should be emailed to: [mastersapps@deewr.gov.au](mailto:mastersapps@deewr.gov.au)

## 4 The process for the approval of masters by coursework for student income support payments

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### How the process operates

- 4.1 Each year universities and higher education providers will be invited to submit applications to DEEWR. The annual application process may be supplemented by additional processes, if required.
- 4.2 Submissions must be lodged with DEEWR in hard copy (by post or preferably by fax) and forwarded electronically to [mastersapps@deewr.gov.au](mailto:mastersapps@deewr.gov.au). Submissions must address the eligibility criteria as outlined in paragraphs 1.2 to 1.5 inclusive and be signed by the Vice-Chancellor or other authorised officer.
- 4.3 DEEWR will seek further information from the higher education provider where an application appears to be incomplete.
- 4.4 DEEWR will coordinate the approval process and provide a consolidated list of courses to the Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for approval.
- 4.5 The Minister will approve the courses and issue a revised listing of the approved masters by coursework programs under the “Determination of Education Institutions and Courses under subsections 3 (1) and 5d (1) of the *Student Assistance Act 1973*”.
- 4.6 Universities and higher education providers will be advised of the masters by coursework programs in their individual institutions which have been approved.
- 4.7 Where a course is not approved, a higher education institution may write to the Minister to seek reconsideration of the decision.
- 4.8 Ongoing courses that already have the Minister’s approval will not require further approval once they have been approved.
- 4.9 Any new course will require approval. Any course that is changed so that it may no longer meet the criteria for approval will need to be resubmitted for approval.
- 4.10 Any courses higher education providers wish to have removed from the approved course list should be notified through the course approval process. Courses which are being phased out will remain on the list of approved courses until existing students have completed their courses.
- 4.11 DEEWR will ensure Centrelink is informed of the release of each new listing of approved courses for masters study and provided with a copy of the new “Determination of Education Institutions and Courses under subsections 3 (1) and 5d (1) of the *Student Assistance Act 1973*”.
- 4.12 A revised listing of approved masters by coursework programs will be available on the DEEWR website for student income support once approved.

## Process for the approval of masters by coursework for student income support

