



**Support for RMIT students
through COVID financial hardship grants**

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What's next...

COVID-19 implications for students

Challenges for students' retention and success



Shift to **online learning**- students ill-prepared for participation off campus, with concerns re access to resources including technology



Severe financial hardship: some must pay student fees in the context of failing to get employment or losing income with cuts to employment/ hours



May have multiple, complex, simultaneous **personal issues**, including distress and mental and other pre-existing or new health concerns



Uncertainty, anxiety, and multiple issues and transitions to navigate



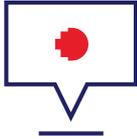
Changes to **accommodation and associated stresses**- required to move home; left paying rent with other tenants departed



A lack of **government income support for some**, with limited, precarious, and low-paid or no employment, leads to poverty and insecure housing

COVID-19 implications for students

The student voice on the challenges they face...



“Without a job I am struggling to pay my rental expenses alone with bills. I use adobe suite software and technology that is provided at the university but I cannot afford to purchase for at home.

I am currently relying on my family as I am temporarily staying with them at home for food costs but they also do not have any income at the moment so it would be greatly beneficial to have some extra money to help me support my own food costs.

I am still paying rent each month of \$980. And am still paying bills.”

Financial and wellbeing support

Our response: a grants scheme in addition to usual services...



COVID Grants #1

\$10m hardship support:

- Technology grants (up to \$1000)
- Emergency financial grants
- Eligibility: demonstrated COVID impact and financial hardship



COVID Grants #2

- Requirements aligned to Victorian govt scheme: for international students resident in Victoria, studying and working in March, with loss of paid work
- RMIT also funded domestic students
- \$1100 per student, co-funded (for international students)



Professional support and advice

Assessors referred students for contact by Students Group staff to provide advice, resources and support on their myriad issues

Information, support and resources available from the RMIT Students webpages

Partners and collaborators

So many contributed to the 'whole-of-RMIT-community' response...



- **Funding and governance:** VCE, CIMT , Students and DVCE Office, Finance, Risk
- **Design and delivery lead:** Equity and Inclusion Unit in Students Group
- **Systems and comms:** Communications, ITS, Learning Analytics, Students Group
- **50+ staff volunteered for weeks to complete assessments: read detailed student statements, undertake a rigorous assessment of personal and financial circumstances, and make decisions against prescribed criteria**
 - DVCE: Students Group (Equity and Inclusion, Wellbeing, Student Support, Student Life, Students Group office), ARG, DVCE Office, Learning Analytics, Studios
 - Schools and Colleges, Research, Strategy, Risk, People
- **Wellbeing support for students:** Student Support and Wellbeing teams, Students Group, provided individual support



Thanks!

Financial hardship support: COVID Grants #1

Our outcomes: April- 31 July 2020



Demand and resourcing



Students supported



Personal responses



Funded items



Total impact

17,923
Applications processed

7,889
Student recipients

873
Student service referrals for individual support and advice

\$5,028m
Tech grants: for laptops, other hardware, data, software

\$9,234m
In approved grants

12,352 U
nique students

4,041
International students

Issues: mental health, accommodation, finances, isolation, stress

\$4,206m
Emergency grants: for rent, food, utilities

\$1,165
Average grant

50+ staff on assessment, many more in comms and support

243
Recipients from refugee background

Financial hardship support: COVID Grants #2

Our outcomes: June- 31 July 2020



Demand and resourcing



Students supported



Personal responses



Funded items



Total impact

2,013
Student applicants

894
Student recipients

269
Student service referrals for individual support and advice

\$1,100
All applicants received the maximum capped value

\$983k
In approved grants

12 staff on assessment, many more in comms and support

758
International students

Issues: mental health, accommodation, finances, isolation, stress

649
Ineligible; many referred for other support

Financial hardship grants

Our Impact



"Thank you for the \$1000 covid-19 payment, I really needed the money and feel like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders."

"Thank you for your support me and my daughter. This is a very difficult time for us. I am thinking of the equipment for both of us to do online learning. It would never let you down with this support. Thank you again."

"Thank you. Very, very much. I was so stressed and overwhelmed. You helped so much. Exactly when I needed it."

Student support in a crisis

Some Learnings and Recommendations



- Wonderful collaboration among staff- we can mobilise quickly and effectively to deliver practical support at scale across the breadth of student support needs including financial, wellbeing, tech to support participation in learning
- Draw upon operational expertise and strengths with distributed responsibilities
- Collect, analyse and utilise data to inform additional services and supports (eg promote RMIT software provision, design future grants and support schemes)