



**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)