

POLICY

PPMF | TAFESA | 66

Title

TAFE SA Full Time Study Policy for recipients of Centrelink Student Benefits

Contact Officer

Name

Val McMahon

Phone

(08) 8226 2503

Position Title

Manager SIS Customer Service

Email Address

Val.McMahon@sa.gov.au

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TAFE SA Policies are issued under the TAFE SA Policy and Procedure Management. They are binding on all TAFE SA employees.

1 Purpose

This policy defines how TAFE SA provides its Centrelink Student Benefit Recipients with accurate information on what constitutes a full time study load for the qualification into which they have enrolled into or wish to enrol into. The study load requirements are defined in accordance with the relevant Social Security and Austudy legislation for full time study benefits and the published duration of the qualification

2 Outcome

TAFE SA students are provided with accurate information on the duration of a qualification for full time study prior to enrolment and are counselled appropriately when undertaking on line or external delivery subjects. TAFE SA students are issued with a Student ID card that accurately identifies their study load at the time of enrolment into the qualification. Students are also advised when they add or drop classes that this may affect their entitlement to claim full time study benefits.

3 Scope

This policy applies to all TAFE SA students who are in receipt of Centrelink benefits where the payment of that benefit is dependent upon the student maintaining a full time study load in the specified qualification.

Note: This policy relates to fulltime student benefits only. Recipients of other Centrelink benefits must comply with conditions relevant to their payment.

4 Definitions

ID card	The card issued to all TAFE SA students. The card provides access to TAFE SA systems and services and also acts as a photographic identification card.
Student Benefits	Centrelink provides benefits to students undertaking full time study in an approved qualification with an approved provider as defined in the Social Security and Austudy legislation.
Full time	The load that a student must undertake in order to complete a qualification within the published duration for the course
Duration	TAFE SA describes the duration of a course in terms of calendar periods such as weeks, months or years. The duration for full time study for all qualifications is published as part of the course information on the TAFE SA website.
SIS	The online Student Information System used by TAFE SA

Contact hours	TAFE SA uses the nominal hours of a curriculum/qualification as a guide to the number of contact hours in which a student is expected to participate.
Exceptional Circumstances	Where a training provider schedules classes in such a way that a student is prevented from undertaking a full time load, Centrelink may determine that the student is still entitled to receive study benefits provided they are undertaking at least 75% of the Full time load.
On line/External Study	Study where a student is not required to attend a campus and participates through self-directed study using on line or packaged materials. For Centrelink Student benefit purposes, students are to be advised of the duration and expected assignment submission and participation requirements to complete the unit(s) within the specified time for that unit

5 Associated Documents

PPMF TAFESA 63	TAFE SA Full Time Study Procedure for recipients of Centrelink Student Benefits
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6 Policy Details

6.1 Policy Mandate

This policy is issued in accordance with Social Security legislation and the National VET regulator standards for Vocational Education and Training Providers.

6.2 VET Students and Student Benefits

VET students are required to undertake 20 hours of contact per week to be classified as full time for Study Benefits to be paid. In exceptional circumstances, they may undertake 75% of a full time load and still be classified as full time. Exceptional circumstances include such matters as timetable conflicts and failure of the training organisation to offer the required unit of competence in the specified enrolment period.

6.3 The Student Information System (SIS) and ID Card

TAFE SA issues an ID card to those students who undertake a qualifying course. This card includes the student's date of birth, full name and where relevant, a Full Time Student Status. The Student Information System calculates a student's study load and reports that on the card, where the student has enrolled in a full time study load of a qualifying course. When a student amends their study load, by adding or dropping a class, the system provides an electronic message warning students that this action may affect their entitlement to full time study benefits. (Ideally, it requires students to acknowledge this information and audits such agreements and messages).

6.4 TAFE SA Course Information

In accordance with the standards stipulated by the National VET Regulator, TAFE SA provides accurate information on the duration of a course, for full time students. TAFE SA counsels students on the

requirements for full time study, especially in the case where a student undertakes some or all of their study through flexible delivery, on line or external delivery modes. TAFE SA does not advise students on their entitlement to study benefits as that information is provided by the relevant commonwealth department.

6.5 TAFE SA & Centrelink Reporting

TAFE SA abides by Commonwealth legislation and reports the study load of all recipients of Student Benefit payments to the required authority (Centrelink) on a regular basis. For administrative purposes, Centrelink does not delay the issuance of a student benefit where a student is enrolled in a qualification with at least 10.5 hours of study contact per week. Centrelink does verify a student's entitlement to receive study benefits and issues an overpayment claim wherever a student has not undertaken the required level of contact to complete the qualification in the specified duration for full time study. In some cases, prosecution action for fraud may be instigated by the Director of Public Prosecutions.

7 Responsibilities

TAFE SA is responsible for ensuring that it provides accurate information on course requirements in its publications and interactions with students and prospective students. All TAFE SA staff and course information materials will accurately advise students on the study requirements for students who wish to be classified as studying full time.

TAFE SA is responsible for ensuring that it accurately reports student enrolment details to relevant departments and administrative authorities such as Centrelink, as defined by relevant legislation.

TAFE SA is responsible for ensuring that it only prints a Full Time status indicator on the TAFE SA ID card for those students who are enrolled in at least 15 hours of contact per week. The published duration of a qualification will be used to determine the expiry date of that status indicator.

Where TAFE SA determines that exceptional circumstances exist and that the student is undertaking at least 75% of the Full Time study load, a FT sticker will be issued to such students. TAFE SA Client Services Staff, in consultation with Student Services Staff will issue a Full Time status sticker to those students and will store the documentation and authorisation for the issuance of the sticker with the student records.

TAFE SA will ensure that the Student Information System accurately records the status of the student's study load so that in the event of an investigation by Centrelink, the audit trail of a student's enrolment hours, attendance and participation can be provided.

7.1 TAFE SA Students

TAFE SA students are responsible for ensuring that they understand the requirements and time commitment required of a full time study load.

TAFE SA students are responsible for notifying relevant authorities when their study load changes, if they are in receipt of student benefits that depend upon them maintaining a full time study load in a qualification.

7.2 Authentications

7.2.1 Approval of TAFE SA Policy

The Chief Executive, Office of TAFE SA approves TAFE SA Policy and Procedures.

TAFE SA policies will be recommended by the TAFE SA Policy Framework Steering Committee and endorsed by TAFE SA Executive prior to approval.

7.2.2 Review of TAFE SA Policy and Procedure

TAFE SA Policy will be reviewed by the TAFE SA Policy Framework Steering Committee every two years, but may be actioned earlier by the Policy Framework Steering Committee according to feedback and/or contextual changes.

8 Appendix 1 – Fact Sheet – Centrelink Full Time Study Load

What is a Full Time Study Load for Student Benefits¹ from Centrelink?

(ie Youth Allowance Student, Austudy etc)

Social Security legislation requires that students be enrolled in and undertaking a full-time study load* measured over a study period (or study periods). That is, students must be undertaking a sufficient load to be considered full-time over a term or semester, or, in the case of some short courses, over the course duration as defined by TAFE SA. Students not meeting study load requirements are not entitled to student payments.

Full-time study load is measured in terms of “normal amount of full-time study”.

For each of the student payments schemes administered under the Social Security Act, (Youth Allowance (YA), Austudy, and Pensioner Education Supplement (PES)) there is a section of the Act which defines the term "normal amount of full-time study".²

Where does Centrelink obtain information on the duration of a course?

Centrelink uses the TAFE SA Website to measure the duration of a course. This means that if course duration is defined on the website as 6 months full time, a student would be expected to enrol in all the units required to complete the course within that 6 months (one semester). Centrelink uses this duration to measure the period for which beneficiaries may continue to receive payments (“allowable time”). Allowable time varies between courses and payment types.

If a student enrolls as an external student or flexible delivery student for the above course, they would be expected to undertake all the units and be assessed in all the units within 6 months of enrolling, if they wish to meet the requirements for a Centrelink benefit as a full time student. External/ flexible delivery students often enrol in one unit at the beginning of a semester and then fail to enrol in further units, incurring large debts as a result.

What if a student enrolls in all the units to complete the course within the specified period but is granted RPL for some of the units?

Under current legislation a student is required to be enrolled in and **undertaking** a full time workload. RPL cannot be regarded as part of the workload for Centrelink purposes as the student would not be fulfilling the requirement to be **undertaking** this component within the course.

The reasoning behind the current Centrelink policy is that students seeking RPL for a particular competency are claiming that they have, through previous experience, already achieved the required skills and hence do not need to undertake any further study/practical experience in that area. They must provide evidence for their claims to achieve the competency, but this does not constitute study/ work/ etc as this has already been done. Although they are enrolled in the unit, they are not **undertaking** it, and it is therefore not part of their current study load.

Although TAFE SA staff recognise that RPL is more involved than a credit transfer agreement/mutual recognition arrangement - and sometimes requires a student to invest as much time in preparing their evidence for RPL as it would to undertake the unit, **Centrelink does not consider RPL as part of a full time load.**

It is similar to granting credit from previous study. Centrelink would not count the workload of the study that has been granted credit.

Why does Centrelink ask for Student Enrolment Details when Auditing a Student's Entitlement to Benefits?

Historically, nominal/ curriculum hours were used by Centrelink as a means to calculate study load, independent of the mode of course delivery (face-to-face, distance learning, etc).

The nominal hours for the units of competency are provided by the BUIS unit. To determine study load for enrolments since 2007, Centrelink takes the modules/ units in which a student is enrolled in a given number of weeks, and divides the sum of the module hours by the number of weeks.

Why did DFEEST enter into an administrative arrangement with Centrelink regarding 10.5 hours being Full Time?

Many courses do not require a student to be enrolled in 20 hours per week to complete the course within the published duration for full time study in the course. To avoid unnecessary administrative processes (where staff and students were required to submit documentation to Centrelink to prove that they were full time students) DFEEST entered into an agreement with Centrelink. As a result, Centrelink only requests student enrolment details where the student is enrolled in fewer than 10.5 hours a week (or 75% of this). However, as part of normal auditing processes, Centrelink will review a person's entitlement to a benefit. In checking student entitlements, Centrelink will review the participation of a student by checking enrolment details and results. Where a result has not been given for a unit, Centrelink will assume that the student has not been participating in the unit as if they had been participating, results would have been entered. They will therefore reassess the entitlement and make a determination on whether or not a student has misrepresented their entitlement to student support benefits.

Why do students receive overpayment notices from Centrelink?

Where a student intends to complete a qualification as a full time student and enrolls in sufficient units to meet that requirement but then decides to only participate in a couple of units at a time for example, they will not be able to demonstrate that they are full time. Entitlement to a student support benefit will therefore be false and an overpayment will be raised.

What action will Centrelink take if a student claimed benefits as a full time student but enrolment details show that they were not full time?

Students who falsely claim that they are studying full time and fail to notify Centrelink of any changes to their enrolment as a full time student, will be issued with an overpayment (if indeed they are not full time students) and may well be prosecuted. It is absolutely critical that staff in TAFE SA provide students with accurate information about what constitutes a full time study load in a course and assist them to enrol in the appropriate units to complete the qualification within the duration specified on the web for that course. Under no circumstances should TAFE SA staff provide students with information on whether or not they are entitled to claim a Centrelink benefit as a full time student. It is absolutely crucial that staff **do not advise students to enrol in only 10.5 hours** (or 75% of that load) as per the administrative arrangement that has been made between DFEEST and Centrelink to meet the full time study load commitment. Such advice could lead to an overpayment and possible prosecution of the student if in fact, the course cannot be completed within the duration specified on the web regardless of the fact that the student has enrolled in 10.5 hours per week (or 75% of that load).

*(*concessional study loads – students should check with Centrelink)*

¹ *This fact sheet is not relevant for other Centrelink Benefits and what constitutes full time study*

² *The sections are: YA - subsections 541B(2) & (3); Austudy - s.569E; PES - s.1061PF.*

569E. Normal amount of full-time study

569E.(1) For the purposes of this Subdivision, the normal amount of full-time study in respect of a course is: (a) if: (i) the course is a course of study within the meaning of the Higher Education Support Act 2003; and (ii) there are Commonwealth supported students (within the meaning of that Act) enrolled in the course;

the full-time student load for the course; or

[for TAFE SA](b) if the course is not such a course and the institution defines an amount of full-time study that a full-time student should typically undertake in respect of the course—the amount so defined; or

(c) otherwise—an amount of full-time study equivalent to the average amount of full-time study that **a person would have to undertake for the duration of the course in order to complete the course in the minimum amount of time needed to complete it.**

569E.(2) Without limiting subsection (1), the normal amount of full-time study in respect of a course is an average, taken over the duration of the period for which the person in question is enrolled in the course, of 20 contact hours per week.