

Dealing with Centrelink

Centrelink offers a variety of financial support for students, however often students aren't sure of the rules and can find themselves in trouble or debt for not properly disclosing their circumstances. Here are some suggestions for when dealing with Centrelink:

1. Claim as soon as possible! – Contact Centrelink as soon as possible when you decide to apply for study allowance and lodge your application within 14 days. Your first payment may then be backpaid to the first day that you were eligible (possibly the day you lodged your intent to claim). **Thanks to technology, you may not have to set foot in the Centrelink queue, as most claims can now be lodged over the Centrelink website.** If you are unsure whether to claim or not, always lodge a claim as you may otherwise miss out on a payment that you are eligible for (including any scholarships you may be eligible for)

2. Know your rights.

- Your right to access information held by Centrelink about you;
- Your right to dispute any decisions that you feel are wrong (through proper channels);
- The confidentiality and privacy rules surrounding your personal information and tax file number.

You should contact Centrelink if you have any questions about your rights and confidentiality.

3. Keep Centrelink up to date about your personal circumstances – You need to inform Centrelink within 14 days if any of the following has happened:

1. Earned or received any income or other payments;
2. Your partner has earned or received incomes or other payments;
3. If your or your partner's income details have changed;
4. If you have stopped studying or changed the number of hours you are studying;
5. If you have changed courses or the institution that you are studying with;
6. You have moved or changes addresses;
7. Left Australia permanently or temporarily; or
8. If you have become partnered or separated from your partner.

Centrelink defines 'partner' as someone you are currently living with, or usually live with and are:

- Married;
- In a registered relationship (opposite-sex or same-sex); **or**
- In a de facto relationship (opposite or same-sex)

If you are classified as a dependent to your parents, you will also need to inform Centrelink if:

- Your parents' income changes;
- Your parents' relationship status changes
- You have a brother or sister that returns or leaves home; or
- If you return or leave home

If you fail to let Centrelink know of any changes, you may incur a debt which will need to be paid back in full.

4. Keep your own records of contact made with Centrelink – When you make contact with Centrelink for any reason, make sure that you keep records of:

1. The date/time of contact
2. The name of the person you spoke to
3. The advice that you received and/or the information that you provided.

If you contact a Centrelink call centre to change your details, make sure you get a receipt number to record the changes made.

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5. **Understand the steps in appealing a decision** – If you are not happy with a decision made by Centrelink and you would like to appeal it, you need to take action as soon as possible. The following are the steps in the appeals process, if you are unhappy at any level; you progress along to the next level.
1. Review by the original decision maker (you can skip this step and go directly to step two if necessary);
 2. Review by an Authorised Review Officer (ARO) at Centrelink;
 3. Application to the Social Security Appeals Tribunal (SSAT);
 4. Administration Appeals Tribunal (AAT)
 5. You can appeal an AAT decision to the courts on a question of law. First the Federal Court, then the High Court as a final option.
6. **Be aware of all the services that Centrelink offers** – You may be eligible for assistance in addition to payments. Centrelink offers the following services to individuals that may suit your needs:
- **Social Workers** – Offer counselling and support for people who are experiencing difficult personal or family issues.
 - **Workplace modifications** – if you have a disability, Centrelink may provide funding to an employer for required workplace modifications so that you can do your job.
 - **Legal Aid** – Government funded legal service that assists people who may not otherwise have access to legal assistance.
 - **Homelessness or Risk of Homelessness** – Centrelink has procedures in place to help people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

For more information about any of these services or more, you can contact Centrelink directly. Alternatively, you can contact a Welfare Officer on 07 4631 2372 or email welfare@usq.edu.au.

7. **Ask for help** – If you don't understand something from Centrelink, don't be afraid to ask for help.
- **USQ Welfare Officer** – via Student Services. If you have any questions, you can come and speak to a Welfare Officer at USQ who may be able to direct you to the right person to speak to, or contact a relevant Centrelink Officer directly. Please note, the Welfare Officer will not be able to discuss your personal details with Centrelink and cannot provide specific advice about your circumstances.

07 4631 2372

Email: welfare@usq.edu.au

- **Centrelink** – Contact Centrelink directly regarding your personal circumstances, questions about payments or decisions made.

www.humanservices.gov.au

13 24 90 - Youth and Student Services

13 23 17 – ABSTUDY

- **Basic Rights Queensland:** An independent community legal services and provides information and assistance with appealing Centrelink decisions.

www.brq.org.au

1800 358 511

Email: brq@brq.org.au