



12 February 2021

Rawiri Piahana

By email: fyi-request-14201-4e3a0d51@requests.fyi.org.nz

Tēnā koe Rawiri

Official information request for information around University Hall accommodation advice during lockdown due to COVID

I refer to your requests for information under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) dated **25 November 2020**.

Your requests, and the University's responses, are set out below.

"I am requesting information around the University halls being shut and students impacted from halls during lockdown this year.

Did the University receive legal advice around sending the initial email to students - from accommodation services - "Subject: Communication to all hall students COVID-19 - returning home" on the 23rd of March this year.

If the University received legal advice, are you able to provide a copy of the advice?

Did the University receive legal advice when the decision was made and an email was sent around the 24th of April to start charging for accommodation even though students who were not in their halls would not be able to return because of the lockdown level?

If the University received legal advice, are you able to provide a copy of the advice?

The University received advice on a range of matters relating to these issues. Under s9(2)(h) of the Act this information is withheld in order to maintain legal professional privilege.

"Am I able to get all correspondence related to the making of this decision, including who heads the department or division ultimately?

Am I able to all get correspondence related to the change in direction and the overturning of this decision to charge a fee to students who would not be able to return?"

The relevant unit is Student and Campus Living, which is headed by Rainsforth Dix (Director Student and Campus Living). Ms Dix reports to Mark Loveard, the University's Chief Operating Officer. As a member of the University's Senior Leadership Team, Mr Loveard reports directly to the Vice-Chancellor.

Given that these decisions were made when the nationwide level four lockdown was already in place, there was a higher than usual amount of email correspondence taking place between University staff at this time. Due to the substantial amount of work that would be required to research and collate the information you have requested, we are refusing your request under section 18(f) of the Act.

“...can you tell me how much the University has had to cover/pay because students were not in their halls and thus were not required to pay their fees over lockdown? - I would not expect this to include any costs for advertising to fill empty beds, grants that covered accommodation fees, wages for staff positions that have not existed previously, depreciation and such. - I would expect this loss calculation to include savings due to lower catering costs, power costs, staff departing and not being paid, cleaning cost savings (if they were not paid) and such.”

Accommodation support from the University

In terms of accommodation support, students in University-owned halls of residence were not charged any accommodation fees during alert levels 3 and 4 and were given until 15 May to cancel their hall contract without financial penalty. In addition, students who opted not to return to their hall of residence until Trimester 2 were not charged any fees until they returned. These fee discounts have cost the University \$6,872,560. In addition, the University provided students living in Stafford House, which is managed and operated by UniLodge, with a four week full rent rebate over the alert level 4 period, regardless of whether they remained in the hall in that period or had left to stay with family or friends. This was at a cost of \$270,750 to the University. This total only takes into account the amount of fees discounted and paid as part of the rent rebates.

Information relating to “*savings due to lower catering costs, power costs, staff departing and not being paid, cleaning cost savings (if they were not paid) and such*” is not included in this calculation. Researching and providing this information would require a substantial amount of work in order to fulfil this aspect of your request. Therefore, we are refusing your request under section 18(f) of the Act.

“Has the University received or used any grants to cover accommodation costs for students while they were not in halls?”

Funding received from the TEC's Hardship Fund for Learners (HAFL)

The University received \$912,173.49 from the HAFL to distribute to students experiencing financial hardship in 2020. This information is [publicly available](#).

Please see the table below which sets out the amount of funding from the HAFL that has gone to cover student accommodation, broken down by hall.

Hall	Total HAFL support for student accommodation costs by Hall
222 Willis	\$3,272
Boulcott Hall	\$3,468
Capital Hall	\$16,080
Cumberland Hall	\$9,580
Education House	\$6,491
Everton Hall	\$3,035
Helen Lowry	\$8,811
Joan Stevens	\$5,671
KJ Hall	\$9,334
Stafford House	\$1,953
Te Puni Village	\$11,004
UniHall	\$692
Victoria House	\$2,000
Weir House	\$14,183
Whānau House	\$21,918
Total	\$112,578

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

If you wish to discuss this decision with us, please feel free to contact me at oiarequests@vuw.ac.nz.

Yours sincerely

Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington