

Higher Education Supplementary Grant (HESG) summary description:

National, government-funded scheme to allow students enrolled in Australia-based higher education courses to apply for grants/bursaries/rebates

The money can be claimed only for specific purchase types and the students can only claim 'actual' expenses, evidenced with a receipt.

The scheme is aimed at supporting students from lower-income backgrounds who might not otherwise be able to fund their own studies, and is means-tested

Students can claim the money by registering themselves on a DSS website and applying online for refunds for specific expenses by entering the expense details and uploading a copy of the receipt(s)

The scheme has come in for a lot of negative press recently, with numerous media articles describing how students - many of whom are financially stretched - have found the website buggy, unreliable, difficult to use and prone to errors; the process for reimbursement is slow and it's difficult to get a view of progress of submitted claims - and there is a backlog of unprocessed claims (with errors and/or missing information required) which the DSS's staff are struggling to cope with

News Article: HESG Scheme Fails Again:

Despite spending \$5 million, the new HESG website launch yesterday has made the plagued system even worse. Students have been reporting they can still not log in to the system, and those who are able to access the system are unable to submit documents, and experiencing frequent time-outs.

Claire Besos, a second-year student from UABK told us that "it's stressing me out, I need to claim for textbooks to pay my rent, and I've spent hours attempting to submit my documents, and the website keeps failing". Her comments were supported by Luke Pitsberg, a first-year Economics student at GLCU, who told us, "every time I attempt to click submit on documents, I receive an error that says that my documents have not been uploaded, when they have been. Eventually after four attempts the website just logs me out. It's a waste of time".

A HESG spokesperson said, "we are aware of a number of students having issues regarding the website. We are working to rectify this as soon as possible, and we are partnering with external vendors to do this as quickly as we can. In the meantime, students can come into our office, where we can process claims". Mr Pitsburg was unimpressed by this suggestion, remarking "they've suggested we go to the office, but there is only one office in Australia, and it's in Sydney. How does that help us in Victoria?!".