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Tēnā koe Louis Houlbrooke

On 19 August 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *Using the Wage Subsidy Employer Search tool, I Notice that the following employers are no longer listed as Wage Subsidy recipients:*
 - *E Tū Incorporated*
 - *First Union Incorporated*

Why is this? Have they repaid the Wage Subsidy? If so, was this the result of an audit? What was the total amount received (and repaid) by each of these two employers?

The Wage Subsidy scheme was set up on a high-trust model. Even though some employers have repaid money to the Ministry, this does not mean they did not follow the rules. We have found that, in most cases, employers are doing the right thing. In many cases where entitlements have been wrongly claimed, it is due to uncertainty about the eligibility criteria rather than deliberate attempts at deception.

The Ministry informed employers that they could apply for the COVID-19 Wage Subsidy if they thought they would have a financial downturn as a result of the pandemic. If they did not experience a significant downturn, then they were informed that they would need to repay the money.

It is important to note that some repayments were made voluntarily and that not all repayments shown in the dataset were requested by the Ministry. You can find further details regarding when an employer needs to repay some or all of the 2020 COVID-19 Wage Subsidy at the following link: www.workandincome.govt.nz/covid-19/2020-wage-subsidy/repayments.html.

In regard to your request, both E Tū Incorporated and First Union Incorporated voluntarily repaid the Wage Subsidy as their circumstances had changed since applying. Both companies repaid the Wage Subsidy in instalments and therefore would have still shown on the Wage Subsidy Employer Search Tool until the last payment was received.

As at 19 August 2021, the companies received and repaid:

- E Tū Incorporated - \$984,005.20
- First Union Incorporated - \$617,145.60

The principles and purposes of the Official Information Act 1982 under which you made your request are:

- to create greater openness and transparency about the plans, work and activities of the Government,
- to increase the ability of the public to participate in the making and administration of our laws and policies and
- to lead to greater accountability in the conduct of public affairs.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz.

If you are not satisfied with this response in regard to the Wage Subsidy Employer Search tool, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi nui



George Van Ooyen
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