

1 October 2026

IMMIGRATION NEW ZEALAND INSTRUCTIONS: Amendment Circular No. 2026-28

AMENDMENTS TO THE IMMIGRATION NEW ZEALAND OPERATIONAL MANUAL

Introduction

This circular outlines changes to administration instructions. A copy of the amended instructions is attached.

All immigration officers dealing with immigration applications should read the amendments and operate in accordance with the amended instructions from the effective date.

Note

The amendments described in this circular will be published in the Immigration New Zealand Operational Manual in due course.

Description of changes

A16.1 General Instructions as to the order of processing visa applications

Amendments have been made to the general instructions relating to the order and manner of processing of visa applications. The specific Parent Resident Visa category provisions have been removed.

Appendix 1: Amendments to Administration instructions effective on and after 5 October 2026

A16.1 General Instructions for the order of processing visa applications

For the avoidance of doubt, general instructions are to be read alongside and subject to any immigration instructions specifically addressing order or manner of processing visa applications.

For the purposes of this general instruction, residence class visa applications are categorised in groups. Groups consist of either application types within a particular overarching policy, a category with different but associated visa policies, or specific applications that are grouped together in the Immigration New Zealand Operational Manual. Current groupings are found at [A16.5](#).

Under section 26(4) of the Immigration Act 2009 and acting under delegated authority from the Chief Executive of the Ministry of the Business, Innovation, and Employment, I give the following general instructions as to the order and manner of processing of visa applications, effective from: **5 October 2026**.

Residence applications

- a. Applications of the same group should generally be processed in lodgement date order unless specified below.
- b. Despite (a) above, applications in the following residence class categories may be grouped by like characteristics, and those groups prioritised for processing at the discretion of the designated and authorised immigration officer in the role of Deputy Chief Operating Officer, Director Visa, Operations Director (Central/Southern), or Operations Director (Northern/Pacific).
 - i. Within the Business Residence group, Active Investor Plus category
 - ii. Within the Family Residence Group, Parent Retirement category
- c. When the order of processing for residence class categories at (b) is determined by like characteristic groups, the Deputy Chief Operating Officer, Director Visa, Operations Director (Central/Southern), or Operations Director (Northern/Pacific) must:
 - i. Inform the Deputy Secretary, Immigration of the grouping; and
 - ii. Ensure the publication of details and rationale for the grouping on the INZ website.

Note: Examples of like characteristics for grouping may include, but are not limited to, applications that have been submitted with all mandatory documentation and adhered to the acceptable investment information guide published on the INZ website, or Active Investor Plus applications changing investment category between Growth or Balanced.

- d. Within the Skilled Residence group, applications will be prioritised where:
 - i. applicants are employed or have been offered employment in an occupation listed in Tier 1 of the Green List; or
 - ii. for the Skilled Migrant Category (Points-based pathway), applicants qualify for six points without work experience.
- e. Within the Family Residence group, Partnership and Dependent Child Family applications will be prioritised.
- f. Within the Refugee (and other special visas) Residence group, applications for the following permanent resident visas will be prioritised:
 - i. Refugee and Protection Category
 - ii. Refugee Quota Family Reunification Category
 - iii. Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship Category Pilot

Temporary entry applications

- g. Applications should generally be processed in lodgement date order unless specified below.
- h. Job Check applications and Accredited Employer Work Visa (AEWV) applications will be prioritised where the application is based on a job offer or employment in an occupation listed on the Green List (Appendix 13).

i. Unless (i) above applies, applications in the following temporary entry categories may be grouped by like characteristics, and those groups prioritised for processing at the discretion of the designated and authorised immigration officer in the role of Deputy Chief Operating Officer, Director Visa, Operations Director (Central/Southern), or Operations Director (Northern/Pacific).

- i. AEWV (Employer accreditation, Job Check and Accredited Employer Work Visa)
- ii. Partner of an AEWV holder
- iii. Dependent of an AEWV holder
- iv. International student visa categories:
 - English language studies
 - Exchange student
 - Full-fee paying
 - Pathway
 - Scholarship holder
- v. Partner of a student visa holder
- vi. Dependent child of a work visa holder (who is a partner of a student visa holder)
- vii. Dependent child of a student visa holder
- viii. Guardian of a student visa holder

j. When the order of processing for temporary entry categories at (j) is determined by like characteristic groups, the Deputy Chief Operating Officer, Director Visa, Operations Director (Central/Southern), or (Northern/Pacific) must:

- i. Inform the Deputy Secretary, Immigration of the grouping; and
- ii. Ensure the publication of details and rationale for the grouping on the INZ website.

Note: Examples of like characteristics may include but are not limited to sector, employer, occupation, course of study, education provider, or applications where all the information required to make a decision is or is not present.

Applications generally

k. Where INZ accepts applications through both the Enhanced Immigration Online system (known within INZ as ADEPT) and other submission channels, applications will be processed separately by submission channel. Applications submitted through the Enhanced Immigration Online system will be processed in lodgement date order relative to other Enhanced Immigration Online applications, while applications submitted through any other channels will be processed in lodgement date order relative to applications submitted through other channels. Exceptions to date order processing set out in other provisions within this instruction apply regardless of submission channel.

Note: The initial stage of processing applications submitted through Enhanced Immigration Online is "gathering information", during which activities take place to collect the information required for an immigration officer to undertake their assessment.

l. These instructions do not prevent immigration officers according urgency to the processing of any particular visa application when the individual circumstances so warrant that.

Note: Processing timeliness of applications generally, as well as those particular applications assigned priority over others in their group, will vary based on factors including resourcing, availability of relevantly trained immigration officers, system capacity, volumes, typical complexity of the application and can change depending on circumstances.

The prioritisation for allocation set out above does not affect the date the application is made. An application is made on the date the application is submitted in accordance with the applicable immigration regulations.

On 5 October 2026, the previous General Instructions dated 24 August 2026 as to the order of processing of visa applications made under section 26(4) of the Immigration Act 2009 are revoked.

Jeannie Melville
Acting Chief Operating Officer
Immigration New Zealand

Signed 30 September 2026