

27 October 2026

IMMIGRATION NEW ZEALAND INSTRUCTIONS: Amendment Circular No. 2026-32
AMENDMENTS TO THE IMMIGRATION NEW ZEALAND OPERATIONAL MANUAL

Introduction

This circular outlines changes to immigration 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.

Information about these changes is available on our website www.immigration.govt.nz

Description of changes

U3.1 Summary

U5.1 Status of education providers and programmes

U13.15 Work conditions for students enrolled at a tertiary institution or private training establishment

Changes have been made to immigration instructions related to student visas to:

- strengthen immigration officers' ability to consider English language ability and request evidence where required when assessing whether an applicant is bona fide
- enable the suspension of processing for student visa applications associated with providers that are being investigated for non-compliance with education or immigration obligations, and
- align work rights for Masters-by-Research students with standard student visa settings so that visa holders can work up to 25 hours per week while studying and full-time during vacations.

U6.30 Currency of student visas

Changes have been made to immigration instructions to enable visas to expire two months after a course end date for students whose study lasts less than a year, or whose study begins at any time during the year.

All changes are effective 27 October 2026.

Appendix 1: Amendments to Temporary Entry Instructions effective on and after 27 October 2026

U3.1 Summary

See also *Immigration Act 2009* s4

- a. Unless otherwise specified, to be granted a student visa to attend a programme of study of more than three months, applicants must:
 - i. have an offer of a place or, if returning to continue a programme of study, a confirmation of enrolment in an approved programme of study with an education provider in New Zealand that meets student visa requirements (see [U3.5](#), [U3.10](#), and [U5.1](#)); and
 - ii. be exempted from or have paid tuition fees; and
 - iii. if aged under 18, meet accommodation requirements (see [U3.15](#)); and
 - iv. have fulfilled the purpose and met the conditions for any previous or current temporary visas held as set out in [E3.15](#) and [E3.20](#); and
 - v. meet the conditions set out in [E3.20](#); and
 - vi. not be the holder of a current visitor visa granted under Guardians accompanying students to New Zealand instructions (see [V3.100](#)); and
 - vii. hold insurance (see [U3.45](#)), unless they are a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) student or a student holding a New Zealand scholarship administered through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
- b. All applicants must meet the requirements under Generic Temporary Entry Class instructions for:
 - i. lodging an application for a temporary entry class visa as set out at [E4](#); and
 - ii. bona fide applicants as set out at [E5](#); and
 - iii. health and character as set out at [A4](#) and [A5](#).
- c. To determine whether an applicant is likely to breach the condition of a student visa (see [E5.1.b\(ii\)](#)) that the holder must make satisfactory progress in their proposed programme of study, an immigration officer may:
 - i. consider whether the applicant has English language ability consistent with the level and nature of that study; and
 - ii. request the applicant provide evidence of their English language ability as part of this assessment.
- d. Applicants who have not completed, or will not be completing the programme of study endorsed on their student visa and who wish to change their programme of study and/or education provider must:
 - i. meet requirements (a) and (b) above; and
 - ii. meet the requirements set out at [U3.40](#).

Note: Applicants who are progressing to further study, for example a student in Year 13 who is progressing to tertiary studies, will not need to meet [U3.40](#).

U5.1 Status of education providers and programmes

- a. All education providers must certify in their offers of places to foreign students (see [U3.5](#)) that the programme of study or training scheme offered complies with foreign student requirements for different kinds of education providers (see [U5.5-U5.20](#)).
- b. All education providers offering places to foreign students must be signatories to the Education (Pastoral Care of Tertiary and International Learners) Code of Practice 2021.
- c. Any queries on the status of programmes or training schemes offered by private training establishments should be referred to the Service Delivery Unit, Quality Assurance Division, New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), PO Box 160, Wellington.
- d. Students will not be granted a student visa to undertake a programme of study or training scheme offered at an education provider that holds a Category Four status under the NZQA's External Evaluation Review (EER) quality assurance system.
- e. Immigration New Zealand (INZ) may suspend the processing of applications for student visas for study at an education provider where at least one of the following applies:
 - i. the offered programme of study or training scheme does not comply with foreign student requirements as set out in [U5.5](#) to [U5.20](#);
 - ii. the education provider is not complying, or is under investigation by INZ for non-compliance, with its obligations under the Immigration Act, immigration regulations, or immigration instructions;
 - iii. the education provider is not complying, or is under investigation by education agencies for non-compliance, with its obligations under the Education Act and education regulations including the Education (Pastoral Care of Tertiary and International Learners) Code of Practice 2021;
 - iv. the education provider is under investigation for a matter that may result in it:
 - no longer being recognised as being able to provide New Zealand qualifications by the relevant regulatory agency; or
 - the programme of study or training scheme the applicant is seeking a visa to study may no longer result in a qualification recognised in New Zealand.

Note: for the purposes of these instructions, "education agencies" include any agencies identified by the Ministry of Education, as well as the Ministry of Education itself – see [Education agencies - Ministry of Education](#)

- f. Where (e) above applies, INZ may:
 - i. suspend processing for an initial period of up to six months while awaiting the outcome of the investigation of the provider, and if the investigation has not been completed within that period, extend the initial suspension period to allow for the outcome of the investigation; or
 - ii. continue processing any such applications where INZ is not satisfied the requirements of immigration instructions have been met and decline the application.
- g. Depending on the nature of the non-compliance or potential non-compliance, processing may be suspended for
 - i. all applications to study at the provider; or
 - ii. applications to study particular programmes at the provider; or
 - iii. a group of applications to study at the provider that share one or more common characteristics (such as education agent) relevant to the non-compliance or potential non-compliance.
- h. Before a decision is made to suspend the processing of student visas, the following will be taken into account:
 - i. evidence of the non-compliance; and
 - ii. reasons for the non-compliance; and
 - iii. the duration, frequency, and severity of the non-compliance.
- i. INZ may resume the processing of student visas if it is satisfied that the education provider is complying with its obligations.

U5.1.5 Applicants whose applications are suspended due to provider non-compliance or investigation

- a. If the processing of a student visa application is suspended where U5.1(e) above applies, the applicant may submit an Offer of Place to study with a different education provider (see (c) below) or withdraw their application.
- b. Processing may be suspended on any application that has not been completed through the grant of a visa, decline, or withdrawal by the applicant. For avoidance of doubt this includes applications that have been approved in principle where a visa has not been granted.
- c. Processing may resume if the applicant provides a new Offer of Place for a programme with a different education provider, provided:
 - i. the new offer of place meets all relevant requirements for the grant of a student visa; and either

- ii. the Offer of Place is for the same programme; or
- iii. the immigration officer is satisfied that there is a valid reason for the Offer of Place being for a different programme (for example, the programme is not offered by another provider).

U6.30 Currency of student visas

Student visas may be granted for the following periods:

- a. for holders of full scholarships and fees scholarships who do not meet the requirements under U6.35, the period of the student's award (up to a maximum of 4 years); and
 - i. for fee-paying foreign students who do not meet the requirements under U6.35, the period for which the student has paid the tuition fees (up to a maximum of 4 years); and
 - ii. for fee-paying foreign students and full scholarship students, who meet the requirements under U6.35, for the length of their programme of study, regardless of the period for which they have paid tuition fees (up to a maximum of 4 years).
- b. If the programme of study is based on the New Zealand academic year, the visa may be granted for the academic year for which the student has paid, to expire on 31 March of the following year.
- c. If the programme of study lasts for less than one year, or can begin at any time during the year, the visa may be granted to expire no more than two months after the period for which the student has paid.

U13.15 Work conditions for students enrolled at a tertiary institution or private training establishment

- a. For students enrolled at a tertiary institution or private training establishment, a student visa may be granted with conditions to allow the holder to work during the academic year, and during any scheduled vacations, including within the academic year.
- b. Students aged 16 or 17 years of age enrolled at a tertiary institution or private training establishment must have written permission from their education provider and written parental consent to be granted conditions allowing work.

U13.15.1 Work conditions for up to twenty-five hours in any given week

- a. A student visa holder may be granted with conditions to work for up to 25 hours in any given week during the validity of the visa if the student is:
 - i. undertaking a full-time programme of study (see U6.1.1) of at least two academic years' duration; or
 - ii. undertaking a full-time programme of study, culminating in a New Zealand qualification at level four or higher on the New Zealand Qualification Framework; or

Note: Micro-credentials are not qualifications, even if they are listed on the NZQCF. They are therefore excluded when assessing eligibility for work rights under (ii).

- iii. undertaking full-time study as part of an approved tertiary student exchange scheme (see E11.45); or
- iv. engaged in a full-time programme of study of at least 24 teaching weeks duration; and
an immigration officer is satisfied that the primary purpose of the programme of study is to develop English language skills; and
the student can provide acceptable English language test results, as set out at U13.15.20 (no more than 2 years old at the time the application is lodged); or
- v. undertaking full-time English language study of at least 14 consecutive weeks' duration at an education provider that:
is a university; or
holds Category One status under the NZQA EER quality assurance system; or

Note: When assessing eligibility for work rights under (v) for an applicant who holds a current student visa, all consecutive previous English language study undertaken on this and any previous student visa can be counted towards the 14 consecutive week period provided the programme of study the applicant is applying for:

- follows directly from their current study and
- is with the same provider as that on their current and any previous student visa.

- vi. undertaking a full-time Study Abroad programme under a study abroad partner agreement with a New Zealand Tertiary education institution.
- b. Despite E7.10(a)(ii), immigration officers may apply these instructions to any eligible student visa application that was submitted before 3 November 2025 and as of that date had not been decided.

U13.15.5 Full time work rights during Christmas-New Year vacation period

A student visa may be granted with conditions to allow the holder to work full-time during the Christmas-New Year vacation (summer vacation) period provided that the student is:

- a. studying full-time (see U6.1.1); and
- b. enrolled in a programme of study that has a minimum duration of at least two semesters during a period of at least eight months.

U13.15.10 Full time work rights during scheduled vacations

- a. A student visa may be granted with conditions to allow the holder to work full-time during all scheduled vacations, if the student is undertaking a full-time programme of study (see U6.1.1); and of at least one academic year's duration.
- b. Despite (a) where scheduled vacations are more than one third of the programme of study duration for programmes of study offered by tertiary providers other than universities, full-time work rights may not be granted.

Note: An academic year means a programme of study of a minimum of 120 credits during a period of at least eight months (minimum of two semesters)

U13.15.15 Work conditions for doctoral students

A student visa may be granted with conditions to allow the holder unlimited work rights if:

- a. the student is undertaking a Doctoral degree, and
- b. the qualification is awarded by a New Zealand tertiary institution.

U13.15.20 Acceptable English language test results

The following English language test results are acceptable:

Test	Minimum score required
International English Language Testing System (IELTS) - General or Academic Module	Overall score of 5.0 or more
Test of English as a Foreign Language Internet-based Test (TOEFL iBT)	Overall score of 35 or more
Pearson Test of English Academic (PTE Academic)	Overall score of 36 or more
B2 First (First Certificate in English) (formerly Cambridge English: First (FCE)) or B2 First for Schools (First Certificate in English) (formerly Cambridge English: First (FCE) for Schools)	Overall score of 154 or more
Occupational English Test (OET)	Grade C or higher in all four skills (Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking) *

* A score of Grade C or higher in all four skills is required for the OET as there is no overall grade for this test.