

15 July 2026

IMMIGRATION NEW ZEALAND INSTRUCTIONS: Amendment Circular No. 2026-19
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

U14.5 Requirements to be granted a pathway student visa

U14.10 Currency and conditions of pathway student visas

U14.15 Changing and complying with pathway student visa conditions

U14.20 Provider Requirements

Immigration instructions have been amended to reflect changes for Pathway Student Visa (PSV). These include:

- Allowing year 12 and 13 applicants to indicate an intended tertiary discipline when applying, without that discipline being specified as a visa condition. Visa conditions will continue to specify the tertiary qualification and education provider.
- Extending the maximum duration of English language study from 20 weeks to 30 weeks.
- Removing restrictions so that study leading to, and between, NZQCF Levels 1 to 4 is permitted as an acceptable study pathway.

E3.26.10 Varying the conditions of student visas

E3.26.15 Varying the conditions of Skilled Migrant Category interim visas

Immigration instructions for variations of conditions (VOC) have been amended to allow PSV holders who do not have a specified tertiary discipline to add their programme. A minor correction has also been made to ensure that holders of interim visas with study conditions can be granted VOCs to work part time up to 25 hours per week, rather than 20 hours per week.

Appendix 1: Amendments to Temporary Entry instructions effective on and after 20 July 2026

U14.5 Requirements to be granted a pathway student visa

To be granted a pathway student visa, an applicant must:

- a. be offered an eligible study pathway from a qualifying provider(s) ([U14.20](#)); and
- b. meet the general requirements to be granted a student visa as set out at [U3.1](#); and
- c. meet the additional evidential requirements for pathway student visa set out at U14.5.1.

U14.5.1 Evidence of meeting requirements

- a. In addition to meeting the general requirements to be granted a student visa as set out at [U3.1](#), when applying for a pathway student visa an applicant must provide:
 - i. where there is more than one education provider, a joint letter of support from pathway education providers; and
 - ii. an offer of place (or joint offer) for each programme of study that meets the requirements set out at [U3.5](#); and
 - iii. evidence that tuition fee requirements, as set out at [U3.10](#), for either the first programme of study or first year of study (whichever is shorter) have been met and satisfy an immigration officer that they have the ability to fund any remaining balance of the first programme of study and subsequent programmes of study on the intended pathway; and
 - iv. evidence that the maintenance funds requirements set out in [U3.20](#) for the first year of study on the intended pathway have been met and satisfy an immigration officer that they have the ability to fund any remaining balance of the first programme of study and subsequent programmes of study on the intended pathway.
- b. Despite (a)(ii):
 - i. second and subsequent offers of place for a pathway can be conditional on meeting pre-requisite programme of study entry criteria; and
 - ii. year 12 and 13 students are not required to specify a particular tertiary discipline, but must provide the intended qualification type and level, as well as a participating tertiary provider.
- c. Pathway student visa applicants from a country with a student visa decline rate of more than 20 per cent who intend a study pathway commencing with an English language programme of study and culminating in a qualification at Levels 1 to 8 on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework must:
 - i. submit an International English Language Testing System test (IELTS) (or equivalent internationally recognised proficiency test) at the time of application; and
 - ii. demonstrate that they only require an improvement of 0.5 of an IELTS overall band score (or equivalent) to meet the English language prerequisite for entry into the intended level 1 to 8 programme of study.

Note: The student visa decline rate for a country is based on statistics, generated over a calendar year (12 months), by Immigration New Zealand. The decline rate and the name of the country are published on the INZ website.

For the purpose of this instruction, the internationally recognised English language tests and corresponding IELTS equivalent test scores set out on the INZ website are considered acceptable.

U14.10 Currency and conditions of pathway student visas

- a. For the purposes of the pathway student visa pilot, a visa can be granted up to a maximum of five years.
- b. A visa may be granted to expire no more than three months beyond completion of the final pathway programme of study within the maximum currency of five years.
- c. Work conditions for the duration of the pathway student visa will only be granted where the first programme of study meets the requirements as set out at [U13.1](#), [U13.10](#) or [U13.15](#).
- d. If the second or subsequent programme of study meets the requirements set out at [U13.1](#), [U13.10](#) or [U13.15](#), a variation of conditions is required in order to be granted work conditions.
- e. Where (d) applies, a Variation of Conditions or Variation of Travel Conditions (INZ 1020) application must be completed and submitted with the required fee.
- f. The holder must make satisfactory progress on the pathway by:
 - i. meeting the conditional pre-requisites for enrolment into a second or subsequent programme of study ([E3.20\(d\)](#)); and
 - ii. commencing the second or subsequent programme of study on a pathway within a 16 week period of completing their earlier programme of study.
- g. Where a first time student has submitted an English language test result as set out at [U14.5.1 \(c\)](#) and been granted a pathway student visa to undertake an English language programme of study culminating in a qualification at Levels **1** to 8 on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework, the English Language programme of study must be completed within a **30** week period.

U14.15 Changing and complying with pathway student visa conditions

See also *Immigration Act 2009* ss 49, 52, 56

- a. If a pathway student visa holder wishes to move to a different education provider or to a lower level programme of study at the same provider than specified in their visa conditions, they must apply for a new student visa and meet the requirements set out at U3.40, unless the applicant can demonstrate that the proposed change is due to circumstances beyond the applicant's control (see E3.26.10)
- b. A variation of conditions, for the purpose of changing a programme of study at the same education provider will only be granted if an immigration officer is satisfied that:
 - i. the applicant meets the student requirements set out at U3.1; and
 - ii. the applicant has not breached their visa conditions as set out at E3.20; and
 - iii. the original student visa would have been granted for the proposed programme of study; and
 - iv. the applicant remains a bona fide applicant (see E5.1); and
 - v. the proposed programme of study is at the same or higher level on the New Zealand Qualifications and Credentials Framework as the original programme of study or the applicant can demonstrate that the proposed change is due to circumstances beyond the applicant's control.
- c. Factors that an immigration officer may take into consideration when determining (b)(iii) and (b)(iv) above include, but are not limited to:
 - i. the time elapsed since the original visa was granted; and
 - ii. whether the level and/or subject area of the proposed programme of study are significantly different from the original programme of study; and
 - iii. any relevant information held about the previous application(s) including advice from the original issuing branch (see E7.1.1).
- d. Students who have received New Zealand scholarship funding within the two years prior to their application to change programme of study must also provide evidence that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade supports the change of programme of study and that any scholarship continues.
- e. A pathway student visa holder whose visa does not specify a tertiary discipline or programme of study (see U14.5.1(b)(ii)) may be granted a variation of conditions to ensure their visa accurately specifies their course of study (see E3.26.10(d)).

U14.15.5 Breaching visa conditions

- a. A pathway student visa holder will be considered to be in breach of visa conditions where:
 - i. they fail to meet conditional pre-requisites for enrolment into a second or subsequent programme of study (E3.20(d)); or
 - ii. the time between the completion of one programme of study and the start of a second or subsequent programme of study on a pathway exceeds 16 weeks; or
 - iii. they have submitted an English language test result as set out at U14.5.1(c) and their intended pathway is an English language programme of study culminating in a qualification at Levels 1 to 8 on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework and the English Language programme of study is not completed within a 30 week period.
- b. A breach of visa conditions is "sufficient reason" to make a temporary entry class visa holder liable for deportation, and may result in the issue of a Deportation Liability Notice (E3.60).

U14.20 Provider requirements

U14.20.1 Pathway pilot entry criteria

To qualify for entry to the Pathway student visa pilot, an education provider must:

- a. be invited by Immigration New Zealand to be a pilot participant; and
- b. have signed the Pathway Student Visas - Pilot Participation Declaration agreeing to the requirements as set out at U14.20.10; and
- c. be either a school, a university or hold a Category One or Two rating under New Zealand Qualifications Authority's (NZQA) External Evaluation and Review framework; and
- d. have a minimum 90% student visa application approval rate over the 2014/15 financial year or 2016 calendar year (12 month period); and
- e. comply with the legislative requirements as set out under the Education and Training Act 2020 to offer programmes of study to foreign students ([U5.5](#) to [U5.20](#)); and
- f. be a signatory to the Education (Pastoral Care of Tertiary and International Learners) Code of Practice 2021.

U14.20.5 Eligible pathways

- a. All pathways must demonstrate academic progression to the second or subsequent programme of study building on the previous study.
- b. All consecutive programmes of study that demonstrate progression are eligible to be included in the pilot.
- c. Breaks between consecutive programmes of study must not exceed 16 weeks.
- d. English language study or programmes must not exceed 30 weeks.
- e. Only education providers who meet the requirements set out under U14.20.1 can offer a joint pathway in conjunction with one another.

U14.20.10 Formal agreement between qualifying education providers

- a. To ensure a student's pastoral care needs are met, qualifying education providers who intend offering an education pathway in conjunction with one another must enter into a formal agreement.
- b. The formal agreement must include and set out the following processes and arrangements:
 - i. the application process; and
 - ii. pastoral care obligations; and
 - iii. handover arrangements in transition periods between programmes of study/education providers; and
 - iv. the process if a significant gap exists between completion of a programme of study and the start of a second or subsequent programme of study or in the event some papers are failed and cannot be repeated within a 16 week period; and
 - v. the process if conditional entry requirements for second or subsequent programmes of study are not met; and
 - vi. the process if the student fails to attend and/or make satisfactory progress ([E3.20\(d\)](#)); and
 - vii. the process if the student wishes to leave intended pathway; and
 - viii. the obligation to notify INZ where a pathway student:
 - requires additional time to complete a programme of study and time required is likely to exceed 16 weeks; or
 - fails to meet the conditional entry requirements for a second or subsequent programme of study; or
 - fails to enrol for a subsequent programme of study; or
 - fails to attend and/or make satisfactory progress; or
 - has their enrolment in a programme of study terminated.
- c. The signed formal agreement does not have to be submitted with a pathway student visa application, however it must be made available to INZ if requested.

U14.20.15 Non-compliance with formal agreement requirements or when under active investigation by Immigration New Zealand

Where non-compliance, other than of a minor nature, with any of the matters agreed to in the Pathway Student Visas - Pilot Participation Declaration, or where the pathway education provider is under active investigation by INZ for offences committed under part 10 of the Immigration Act 2009 the following process may occur:

- a. INZ will suspend the processing of any student visa applications related to an existing pathway agreement immediately.
- b. The non-compliant pathway education provider(s) will be advised in writing of the suspension and will be sent a report detailing the non-compliance, and will be given 30 days to remedy the non-compliance.
- c. Resolution (or satisfactory progress towards resolution) of the non-compliance to the satisfaction of INZ within the 30 day period will see the suspension lifted and processing of related pathway student visa applications will resume.
- d. Where a resolution is reached, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment or the New Zealand Qualifications Authority may conduct an investigation three to six months later to assess the effectiveness of the remediation undertaken. If the remediation is deemed inadequate or ineffective, the suspension can be re-imposed or the provider may be removed from the pathways pilot and current pathway student visa holders may become liable for deportation.
- e. If INZ is not satisfied that the non-compliance has been addressed or satisfactory progress has been made towards resolution within the 30 day period, the suspension of related student visa processing will continue (until resolution occurs).
- f. Failure to address or make satisfactory progress towards resolving the non-compliance may result in removal from the pathways pilot, and current student visa holders becoming liable for deportation.

Note: INZ may rely on the advice of the Ministry of Education and/or the New Zealand Qualifications Authority in determining whether resolution has been reached or satisfactory progress has been made towards resolution.

E3.26.10 Varying the conditions of student visas

- a. Holders of student visas may be granted a variation of conditions to allow them to work in line with the requirements at [U13](#).
- b. Student visa holders with conditions specifying they may work for 20 hours a week who want to increase their work entitlement to 25 hours per week must apply using the online form for this purpose.
- c. Holders of student visas may be granted a variation of conditions (see U3.40) to allow them to change their programme of study to a programme of study of the same or higher level provided the proposed programme of study is being undertaken at the same education provider specified on their visa.
- d. A pathway student visa holder whose visa does not specify a tertiary discipline or programme of study may be granted a variation of conditions to ensure their visa accurately specifies their course of study.
- e. Variations of conditions will not be granted to allow a student visa holder enrol in a lower-level programme of study or to enrol with a different education provider.
- f. Despite (e) above, a variation of conditions may be granted to allow a student visa holder to enrol with a different education provider if the student visa holder can demonstrate that the change to the new provider is for reasons beyond the student visa holder's control (for example, but not limited to, circumstances where the education provider has closed or is going to close or circumstances arising from compliance action undertaken by NZQA).

E3.26.15 Varying the conditions of Skilled Migrant Category interim visas

For the purposes of meeting E3.26.15 instructions, 'Skilled Migrant Category' (SMC) is defined as those set out in SR3 instructions. SMC interim visa conditions may only be varied in accordance with these (E3.26.15) instructions.

- a. Holders of SMC interim visas with employer-specific work conditions may be granted a variation of conditions to change employer, occupation, location of employment, or a combination of these. A variation of conditions may be granted if:
 - i. the SMC interim visa holder meets the requirements set out in E3.26.1.20; and
 - ii. the employment is paid at or above the median wage (\$35.00).
- b. Holders of SMC interim visas with student conditions may be granted a variation of conditions to allow them to work for up to 25 hours in any given week and full-time in specified vacation periods (see [U13.10](#) and [U13.15](#)) if the interim visa holder:
 - i. meets the applicable requirements at [U13](#); and
 - ii. is aged 16 or older; and
 - iii. has written permission from their parents and education provider (if they are enrolled with an education provider) if they are aged 16 or 17 years old; and
 - iv. is included in an SMC resident visa application as a dependent child, if they held a visitor visa directly before being granted an SMC interim visa.
- c. Holders of SMC interim visas with visitor conditions may be granted a variation of conditions to allow them to hold open study conditions and/or work for up to 25 hours in any given week and full-time during specified vacation periods (see [U13.15](#)) if they are:
 - i. aged 18 or older; and
 - ii. included as a dependent child in an application for a Skilled Migrant Category resident visa.

Notes:

- The median wage rate for Variations of Conditions of Skilled Migrant Category interim visa holders is \$35.00 and reflects the June 2025 quarter publication of median wage data by Statistics New Zealand.
- Where the SMC application includes the requirement to have a job or job offer which meets the definition of skilled employment, applicants seeking a variation of conditions will be responsible for ensuring that the planned new employment still meets the SMC application criteria.