

VISA PAK ISSUE 668 — 10 APRIL 2026

Self-Employment on an open Work Visa

Context

From 20 April 2026, employment conditions for some open work visas are changing to ensure they are consistent, transparent, and aligned with the intent of each visa category and the definitions of employer and employee under the Immigration Act 2009.

Previous advice had inconsistent interpretations which created confusion for visa holders and advisers. These changes provide certainty and help prevent unintended breaches of the Immigration Act and are designed to help migrants clearly understand their visa conditions and work rights in New Zealand.

From 20 April 2026, open work visas must be issued with one of two employment conditions, those are;

1. *"The visa holder may undertake any work, in any occupation, anywhere in New Zealand".*

This condition permits self-employment such as a sole trading or business owner and will apply to the following visas:

- Eligible partners of a work visa holder
- Partner of a student visa holder
- Partners of holders of student visas who are supported by the New Zealand scholarship programme funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- Post Study Work Visa
- Partners of New Zealand citizens or residence class visa holders
- Partner of a Military visa holder

OR

2. *"The visa holder may undertake any employment, in any occupation, anywhere in New Zealand".*

This condition permits work under an employment agreement or a contract for services and will apply to the following visas:

- Victims of Domestic Violence
- Victims of People Trafficking
- Migrant Exploitation Protection Visa
- Asylum Seeker
- Working Holiday Schemes

Open work visa holders, other than Business Investor and Entrepreneur visa holders, cannot employ other people (this includes New Zealand citizens and residents as well as temporary visa holders) —either directly, or indirectly through a business they operate as an owner (including where the business is the named employer). No open work visa holder can undertake the provision of sexual services, operate or invest in a New Zealand business of prostitution.

Open work visa holders who have been undertaking self-employment on a visa which will explicitly prohibit it from 20 April may continue working in self-employment until their current visa expires.

This gives visa holders time to understand their visa conditions and take any steps needed, such as adjusting work or business arrangements, before applying for their next open work visa.

These changes have been communicated directly to existing open work visa holders, in addition to having been available on the INZ website for some time. The onus is on open work visa applicants to understand the restrictions relating to self-employment and ensure they are compliant with the work-related conditions of any subsequent visa they are granted.

Specific advice in relation to Partner of a Business Investor Visa holder, and Partner of an Entrepreneur Visa holder is being produced and will be released shortly.

[Next steps](#)

Changes to the relevant immigration instructions have been certified by the Minister and will go live on 20 April 2026. An Amendment Circular advising of these changes will be released prior to this.