

VISA PAK ISSUE 421 — 25 OCTOBER 2019

RELIGIOUS WORKER WORK VISAS

The purpose of this item is to minimise the risk of the incorrect work visa instructions being applied to applicants who should hold a visa under Religious Worker instructions (WM) and to remind staff that they should follow the correct instructions and relevant Visa Paks.

There is previous advice on these instructions and we have chosen to re-issue this advice and consolidate it in one article. There is no change to the content of the advice previously issued.

[Visa Pak issue 95: Religious Worker instructions](#)

Introduced in November 2011, Religious Workers must apply for temporary entry visas under the Religious Worker instructions at WM. Ops support has been advised that some branches are assessing applications for religious workers under essentials skills or specific purpose instructions and providing exceptions to these instructions (ETIs) if the religious worker is not eligible for a work visa under Religious worker instructions ([WM3](#)).

Instructions at [WM5](#). Conditions and currency of Religious Worker visas, limit the length of time a religious worker may be granted a work visa. It is therefore not appropriate to consider an application for a further work visa as a religious worker under Essential Skills with an ETI to overcome this limitation.

Religious Worker Instructions have a specific objective ([WM1](#) - see below) and detail the specific criteria persons applying for work visas to work as Religious workers must meet.

WM1 Objective

The objective of Religious Worker instructions is to:

- a. *provide New Zealand communities with the opportunity to practise, maintain and advance their religious beliefs; and*
- b. *maintain the integrity of the immigration system through clear guidelines for applicants to enter New Zealand and undertake genuine religious work.*

If you receive an application for someone who is clearly a religious worker, for which specific immigration instructions exist, they must be assessed under these instructions and not under essential skills or specific purpose or any other instructions as to do so would essentially undermine the objectives of Religious Worker Instructions in particular WM1 b.



[Visa Pak issue 349: Change of Sponsor – Religious Worker Visa](#)

Under Religious Worker immigration instructions the applicant must be sponsored by a religious organisation registered as a charity whose purpose is advancing religion.

Where a holder of a Religious Worker work visa wishes to change their sponsoring organisation, in most cases this will require a new Religious Worker work visa application accompanied by a completed sponsorship form from the new sponsor.

A variation of conditions (VOC) to change the sponsoring organisation stipulated on the existing work visa would only be appropriate in very limited circumstances - for example where there was a change to the existing sponsor's organisational structure (similar to where an employer changes their business name but is still the same core business).

It is important to note that any applicant for a Religious Worker work visa is still limited to a maximum of four years holding a Religious Worker work visa. Any time that the applicant has held a religious worker visa for any other religious organisation should be deducted from the maximum entitlement of the new religious worker visa. For example:

An applicant has held two previous Religious Worker work visas for a total of two years and one month. They have applied for a new Religious Worker work visa with a new sponsoring organisation. Given that instructions only permit a maximum visa duration of four years under this category, the applicant can only be issued a further visa for one year and eleven months.