
**Q & A WITH CELIA COOMBES, SECTOR STRATEGY MANAGER
IMMIGRATION NEW ZEALAND**

Tuesday 12 May

Visa Processing Update

Offshore student visa applications are not being processed. Both offshore offices (Beijing: China, Mongolia, Japan, Korea; and Mumbai: Indian Subcontinent, Vietnam) are closed. Seconded NZ staff have returned to NZ. Local overseas staff are not able to work remotely.

Onshore applications have been processed remotely in limited numbers during Levels 4 and 3. Level 2 will enable staff to return to the office and there is confidence that the on-hold visa applications will be cleared more quickly.

What is the Palmerston North contact?

educationproviders@mbie.govt.nz

When can we expect INZ to be processing offshore?

There is currently no timeline for this. It will depend on the state of the country where the office is located and when border restrictions ease. INZ will support the government's approach to any opening of the border.

Can applications be sent to offshore offices to 'get in line' for when they reopen?

It is not recommended to submit offshore applications as documentation such as chest x-rays may become out of date waiting for the offices to reopen. INZ may make changes to that applicants are unable to lodge applications offshore until processing resumes.

Will INZ consider extending the current visa expiry date for students who may not be able to enter NZ because of the border restrictions?

No, the epidemic notice extensions only applied to students who were in NZ. INZ is not able to extend visas for those offshore. If their visa expires before they are able to enter NZ, they will have to apply for a new visa.

Will INZ prioritize processing specific student visa applications?

No as INZ is not processing any offshore applications. Onshore applications are being processed in order of date received.

If the border does reopen in July does INZ have the capacity to process applications?

Yes, if we are instructed to do so, we will make it happen, but this scenario seems unlikely.

Will there be capacity to bring offshore applications onshore?

Yes. Online applications will be able to be transferred to Palmerston North. BUT paper applications will not be able to be processed. They need to go through third party VACs which currently are not open.

Is it ok for students offshore to continue studying online with schools?

Yes. There is no requirement for a student to hold a visa if they are studying online, offshore.

Is there any chance that the visa extensions will be extended further?

Not at this stage but could be considered closer to the time if warranted. Meanwhile students should be submitting student visa applications if they wish to continue studying or remain in NZ.

What will happen if students are unable to return home in July and their visas expire in August?

Firstly, strongly encourage students in this situation, and their families, to be contacting their embassies, consulates or other representation in NZ to communicate this intention to return home in July and ask for assistance if there are no commercial flights available.

If a student chooses to continue studying at the school, they need to apply for a Student Visa. If they do not intend to continue studying, they will need to apply for a Visitor Visa.

What is the school's responsibility if a student, at the end of their enrolment, cannot return home and chooses to no longer study at the school?

A provider's responsibility under the Code is for the period of enrolment. SIEBA will work closely with MOE and NZQA to seek further clarification with regards to accommodation and pastoral care.

Can someone on a student visa that expires in August apply to change to a working holiday visa or another student visa under another provider?

Yes, students can apply for a different visa eg a change of provider. However, many Working Holiday Schemes have been suspended.

We have students who have studied for 12 weeks on visitor visas and have been unable to return home and wish to continue studying. We have applied for online visa, but they have not yet been granted. Can the students continue to study?

Students cannot continue to study until the Student Visa is approved. Schools are advised to contact the Palmerston North office and check the status of an application with a view to possibly moving it up the allocation.

Up until now, Level 4 and 3 restrictions have prevented students from obtaining some of the necessary documentation for their visa application including getting a chest x-ray. What should they do?

The student should submit the rest of their application with a cover letter explaining that they were unable to provide the documentation because of Level 3 & 4 restrictions. If this is urgent ie impacting students who are waiting to commence their study, schools should contact the Palmerston North office to discuss what can be done.

If a student went home because of Covid fears, but wants to come back as soon as possible, do I have to ask INZ to cancel their visa?

INZ will NOT cancel the visas for these students. They will remain valid, and students will be able to re-enter NZ once borders reopen.

Schools are required to inform INZ using the online form provided to update INZ on students whose status has changed due to Covid-19 so that INZ can update their record. *[See SIEBA FB and Hub posts 7 May for more information and link]*

This form should be used to inform INZ of student deferrals and students who have completed their study but hold a valid visa that has been extended due to the epidemic notice.

Where students ended their enrolment early and do NOT intend to return to NZ to finish their term of study, you should inform INZ of this using their normal termination of enrolment form.

Are Variation of Conditions for permission to work part time being processed?

No, VoC for students to work part time are not being processed at present. Priority is being given to VoC applications for change of provider or course.

Term 1 was only 8 weeks... can a student on a visitor visa study for another 4 weeks in Term 2 if they re-enrol?

Yes. Students are able to study on a visitor visa for up to 12 weeks in a 12 month period.

What kind of evidence will INZ require as 'proof' that a student has remained engaged in study under Lock Down and remote learning conditions?

INZ will show a pragmatic approach given the circumstances and they will accept whatever format schools can provide for attendance and progress and will accept a school's judgement.