

Controller's Preliminary Scoping Brief

Response	Immigration Response 2022	Date	2022-August-25
Prepared by		Approved by	Controller - Richard Owen

Problem Statement

There is significant concern being raised by key external stakeholders, MBIE and INZ leadership and employers across the NZ labour market that Accredited Employer Work Visas (AEWV) and visitor visas are not being processed in timeframes which meet expectations of our customers and system users.

Employers are challenged with not being able to secure migrant workers in timeframes that enable them to run their businesses in a tight labour market, with skill shortages in most sectors. The re-opening of NZ borders for tourists after Covid restrictions have been lifted has been challenging and requires some additional focus to process and expedite Visitor Visa applications in a more timely manner.

For AEWV, approximately 4,000 decisions have been made of 6,000 job check applications received, and approximately 180 decisions have been made of 2,500 work visa applications received. For visitor visas approximately 3,800 decisions have been made against 30,200 applications received.

The current situation is due to a combination of factors and is reflected in four main key focus areas -

- **People.** The immigration workforce does not currently have the capacity to process the volume of visa applications being experienced. The closure of off-shore processing locations reduced overall workforce capacity and capability and skill levels, with a large percentage of on-shore processing staff being new and with limited experienced of visa processing.
- **Policy.** New policy introduced in AEWV requires a programme of work to implement the systems, skills, and procedures to support operation. At the same time, some policy settings across visa products may be less than optimal and create inefficiencies.
- **Processes.** Current processes for visa approvals can be complex and rule based and can be particularly time-intensive when viewed from an end-to-end perspective. There are new processes being introduced in AEWV, and a new 'employer-led' approach which requires different behaviours from employers. A pragmatic risk-based approach to decision making has assisted in improving decision making for job check but has yet to be fully realised at the work visa stage.
- **Platforms.** A new online system (ADEPT) has been introduced and whilst the benefits will be realised over time, it is still in the early stages of operation. In addition, legacy systems are still being maintained while ADEPT builds to full operational capability, meaning staff must work across multiple systems – in other words the systems coexist in parallel. This is further compounded by the fact that paper processing must also be maintained for specific products.

The intent of this work is to further enable Immigration New Zealand to more rapidly process the visa applications in the queue and establish the mechanisms to get AEWV and visitor visa applications 'in flow' to build confidence with our customers and stakeholders in the immigration system both in the short term but also ongoing through systemic changes in approach.

Senior Leadership Team Guidance

- 1 Establish an IMT to identify, resolve and support visa processing timeliness
- 2 Make changes to people, policy, processes, and platforms to reduce the relevant visa queues to manageable and sustainable levels and get them in flow as quickly as possible

Controller's Intent

My plan is to take required actions to identify, deliver and improve relevant people, policy, processes, and platforms to assist in reducing queue volumes as quickly as possible to build confidence and assurance in approach to visa processing activities. In parallel, the plan is to build system improvements across all related products to improve and sustain results in the mid-term. During the period of the IMT, any new incoming products will be accounted for and incorporated into the changes if required.

Additionally, we will undertake analysis and prioritise improvement opportunities and will seek SLT endorsement of this prioritisation as an anchor for our planning. We will also assess, review and challenge existing quality check settings; and we will review the application value chain including any key constraints across our sites.

At the conclusion, in exiting from IMT structures and transitioning into BAU, plans will be established to adjust or confirm and embed any changes made during the response across people, processes, and platforms.

Response objectives

1. Reduce the queue of AEWVs to a (TBD) agreed level
2. Reduce the queue of visitor visas to a (TBD) agreed level
3. Establish a cadence and "in-flow" approach for AEWVs
4. Establish a cadence and "in-flow" approach for visitor visas
5. Establish in-flow performance levels for other top-10 visa products
6. Establish a reliable automated data set for regular reporting and to assist in identifying how continuous improvements are positively impacting visa turnaround times.
7. Transition maintenance of these performance levels to BAU operations
8. Restore and enhance confidence of Ministers, senior leaders, and customers

Scope and Authority Required

For governance and mandate, SLT is requested to discuss, agree and approve a final copy of this Controller Scoping Brief.

In scope:

- AEWV, and visa types identified as having related impacts
- visitor visa
- student visa
- ADEPT programme
- Visa Processing Taskforce
- New visa products that are implemented during the period of the IMT, where the agreed IMT objectives change.
- Establishing 'production/in flow plans' through workforce planning for branches.
- Establishing tolerance levels and thresholds for ongoing visa productivity.

Controller's Authorities and Delegations:

- Authority to direct the adjustment of (visa) risk levels.
- Authority to direct the adjustment of quality checks of visa products.

- Authority to direct change processes to all visa products.
- Authority to reallocate employees from any branch as required.

Assumptions and Critical Facts

- This response will be conducted in accordance with the CIMS Ed3 manual.
- SLT governance role is in accordance with the guidance contained within CIMS Ed3.
- Response will be conducted within normal business hours/days.
- Updates to SLT from Incident Controller will be Monday to Friday until Friday 2 September, with on-going schedule to be determined after that and in agreement with SLT
- Staff rostered to IMT will be full-time to the IMT for the agreed roster period.
- SLT acknowledge that roster IMT members are required to be relieved of their substantive duties, and other MBIE staff are required to fill these vacancies.
- A prioritised list of visa products will be established by the IMT (minimum top 10).
- Performance measures for products (e.g. queue sizes) will be established by the IMT.
- Variances to quality assurance thresholds may be determined by the IMT.

Information and Resource Requirements

The requested staff requirement is in the attached IMT Organisation Chart. Once the IMT is established, an ongoing rostering system will be established.