



# BRIEFING

## Student Visa Processing Update

<b>Date:</b>	21 February 2019	<b>Priority:</b>	Medium
<b>Security classification:</b>	In Confidence	<b>Tracking number:</b>	2384 18-19

Action sought		
	Action sought	Deadline
Hon Iain Lees-Galloway Minister of Immigration	For your information	N/A
Hon Chris Hipkins Minister of Education	For your information	N/A

Contact for telephone discussion (if required)			
Name	Position	Telephone	1st contact
Jeannie Melville	Assistant General Manager, Visa Services	Privacy of natural persons	✓
Karen Bishop	Acting General Manager, Visa Services		
John Goulter	General Manager, Stakeholders and Communications, ENZ		✓

The following departments/agencies have been consulted					
<input type="checkbox"/> Treasury	<input type="checkbox"/> MoJ	<input type="checkbox"/> NZTE	<input type="checkbox"/> MSD	<input type="checkbox"/> TEC	<input type="checkbox"/> MoE
<input type="checkbox"/> MFAT	<input type="checkbox"/> MPI	<input type="checkbox"/> MfE	<input type="checkbox"/> DIA	<input type="checkbox"/> TPK	<input type="checkbox"/> MoH
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other:		Education New Zealand			

Minister's office to complete:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Approved             | <input type="checkbox"/> Declined            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Noted                | <input type="checkbox"/> Needs change        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seen                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Overtaken by Events |
| <input type="checkbox"/> See Minister's Notes | <input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn           |

Comments:

PROMPTLY RELEASED

# BRIEFING

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<b>Date:</b>	21 February 2019	<b>Priority:</b>	Medium
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### Purpose

To provide you with an update on student visa application volumes and processing times during the peak period for international student visa applications.

### Recommended action

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) recommends that you:

- a **Note** that current student visa application volumes are high and this is impacting processing time. *Noted*
- b **Note** that in 2019 78.8 per cent of decided onshore student visa applications and 73.7 per cent of offshore applications have been completed within 30 days compared to 91.5 per cent and 90.0 per cent, respectively, in 2018. *Noted*
- c **Note** that low risk/low touch student visa applications are being prioritised and high risk/high touch applications are being queued and allocated in date order as capacity allows. *Noted*
- d **Note** that Immigration New Zealand's new Visa Processing Operating Model consolidates visa processing by product type which will deliver efficiency gains, particularly in low-touch visa applications. *Noted*
- e **Note** that Immigration New Zealand has the ability to move work around the visa processing network to manage peaks and surges in application volumes. *Noted*
- f **Note** that the volume of applications on hand and processing times for returning students will decrease towards the end of April. *Noted*
- g **Note** that Immigration New Zealand and Education New Zealand are communicating with international education stakeholders to ensure they are well informed about the status of visa processing. *Noted*



h **Agree** to the proactive release of this briefing. Any information which may need to be withheld will be done so in line with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.

*Agree/Disagree*

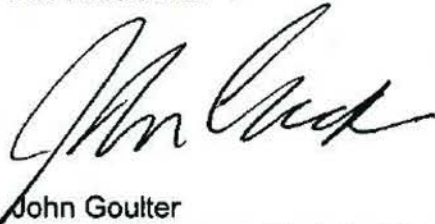


Karen Bishop  
**Acting General Manager, Visa Services**  
Immigration New Zealand, MBIE

21 / 2 / 2019

Hon Iain Lees-Galloway  
**Minister of Immigration**

..... / ..... / .....



John Goulter  
**General Manager, Stakeholders and Communications**

ENZ

31.10.2019

Hon Chris Hipkins  
**Minister of Education**

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## Background

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1. Immigration New Zealand (INZ) is currently experiencing high volumes of applications as it is the peak season for student visa applications which typically runs from late November to April.
2. The high volumes are impacting processing times for high risk/high touch<sup>1</sup> applications as INZ is prioritising low risk/low touch<sup>2</sup> applications to ensure the majority of high value students obtain their visas within 30 days of submitting their application.
3. This is the first student visa peak following the implementation of the new Visa Processing Operating Mode (VPOM) which aligned and consolidated visa processing by product type. Student Visas are now processed in three INZ offices – Palmerston North (primarily onshore students), Mumbai and Beijing (offshore students).
4. The consolidation is already delivering benefits and has enabled INZ to deliver a more consistent approach to student visa application processing, identify any inconsistencies in processing and policy interpretation and uncover fraud.
5. Markets and international education stakeholders are continuing to adjust to the consolidation of student visa processing. As a result, INZ is receiving a high number of queries from stakeholders and applicants regarding processing times and the status of individual visa applications.

<sup>1</sup> High risk/High touch: applicants who (for example) demonstrate risk indicators for potential fraudulent documentation, future exploitation and insufficient documentation to meet immigration instructions.

<sup>2</sup> Low risk/Low touch: applicants who (for example) are likely to be bona fide applicants, have sufficient funds for their studies and maintenance and have a lower risk of providing fraudulent documentation.



6. INZ has communicated to the international education sector that applicants should apply for their visa at least eight weeks before their intended travel date (or course start date for those already in New Zealand).
7. Education New Zealand (ENZ) and INZ are working together to engage with key stakeholders, both onshore and offshore, and developing a coordinated communications approach to help providers, students and education agents understand the current situation.

## **Application volumes and processing times**

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8. As at 17 February 2019 the total number of student visa applications currently being processed (undecided) by INZ offices is approximately 7,500 applications<sup>3</sup>. This is high when compared with the volume prior to the start of the peak season of approximately 3,800 undecided applications (at 5 November 2018).
9. There has been a significant increase in international student visa applications from Indian applicants with a 41 per cent growth (an additional 1,169 applications submitted between 1 November 2018 and 31 January 2019 compared to the same period last year).
10. There has also been an increase in international student visa applications from Chinese applicants with a 13.4 per cent growth (an additional 350 applications submitted between 1 November 2018 and 31 January 2019 compared to the same period last year).
11. The increase in student visa application volumes has impacted overall processing times for applications from students onshore compared to last year:
  - Of the applications decided in January and February 2018, 90.5 per cent were decided within 30 days<sup>4</sup>.
  - Of the applications decided in January and February 2019 (to 14 February), 78.8 per cent were decided within 30 days.
12. Forecasts indicate that INZ will continue to receive high volumes of student visa applications in February and March. However, these are likely to be from onshore returning students which will be quicker to process than offshore students.
13. More detailed data on application volumes and processing times is included in the annexes.

## **INZ's approach to risk management**

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14. Following the launch of INZ's 'Striking the Balance' strategy in October 2018, INZ is placing greater emphasis on striking the balance between facilitating migration and protecting migrants and New Zealand.
15. Having coordinated and consistent processing and verification practices through the consolidation of student visa processing has improved INZ's ability to identify issues with cohorts of applicants, including fraudulent documentation.
16. INZ has developed tools to identify fraudulent documents. Consolidation of processing has made it easier to implement these tools in the visa decision process.
17. This has already yielded results with fraud detected in some markets, for example a recent detection of fraudulent bank statements being provided by student visa applicants from the Prejudice investigation market.

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<sup>3</sup> In addition to approximately 1,000 applications approved in principle (pending evidence of funds, offer of place, passport).

<sup>4</sup> Days between an application being submitted to INZ and decided by INZ.



## International education market and stakeholder engagement

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18. Education New Zealand (ENZ) is the government agency responsible for marketing and promoting New Zealand as an education destination internationally. ENZ is a key partner of INZ, given the role that INZ has in deciding student visas for prospective and current international students seeking to study in New Zealand.
19. In a highly competitive international environment, prospective students have choice.
20. The New Zealand International Education Strategy, to which both INZ and ENZ are contributing agencies, aims to grow the economic value of the industry to \$6 billion by 2025. It also states that high-quality study should be incentivised through immigration settings.
21. ENZ hosts regular events (for example seminars and fairs) in priority markets. These events are directed at specific target groups, such as students, parents, teachers and education agents. INZ will attend these events where possible. As part of this initiative, ENZ and INZ have jointly attended and are planning to arrange further webinars for education agents to provide locally relevant updates on visa processing.
22. INZ and ENZ jointly host quarterly meetings with education peak bodies<sup>5</sup>. The purpose of this Peak Body Forum is for peak body representatives to engage with each other and representatives from ENZ, INZ, New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and the Ministry of Education (MoE). In the most recent meeting on 6 December 2018, INZ provided an update on student visa issues, including processing times and volumes.

## Actions to manage high volumes

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### Visa processing

23. INZ is prioritising low risk/low touch applications, i.e. applicants who are likely to be bona fide applicants, have sufficient funds for their studies and maintenance and have a lower risk of providing fraudulent documentation, to ensure these are processed as quickly as possible. Most of these applications are for students studying at schools and universities.
24. Applications which are high-touch and/or high risk have been joining a queue and are processed in order of receipt. Our focus on prioritising lower risk, higher value students has meant that higher risk applications, and those that may not meet immigration instructions, will take longer to process.
25. INZ has the ability to move work across the visa processing network when peaks or surges appear. To respond to the student peak other INZ offices will be utilised when volumes are above manageable levels, including moving onshore student applications to offices such as Beijing who are experienced with student processing.

### Stakeholder communications

26. INZ has developed a communications plan to manage stakeholder expectations during this peak volume period.
27. Stakeholders are being advised that INZ will take longer to process applications where additional verification or information is required. This includes applications where risk indicators for potential future exploitation are present.
28. INZ has communicated to the international education sector that applicants should apply for their visa at least eight weeks before their intended travel date (or course start date for those already in New Zealand).

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<sup>5</sup> Peak Bodies representation in these meetings include: Universities New Zealand, ITP International, Independent Tertiary Education New Zealand (ITENZ), Quality Tertiary Institutions (QTI), English New Zealand, Schools International Education Business Association (SIEBA), Independent Schools of New Zealand (ISNZ).



29. INZ has set up a dedicated email address, to which education agents can direct queries regarding specific visa applications.
30. ENZ is assisting INZ to help increase awareness of this channel, through its own communication with agents. ENZ is assisting INZ to distribute information and updates on visa processing through channels such as ENZ's fortnightly newsletter to international education stakeholders, E-News.
31. ENZ is coordinating with education agents under the ENZRA (Education New Zealand Recognised Agency) programme to ensure that they have access to updated visa processing information.

## **Next steps**

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32. INZ will continue to manage the volume of student visas on hand and the expected high volumes of tendered applications in February and March using detailed resource planning models and extra processing capacity of other offices as required.
33. INZ will continue to prioritise the processing of low risk/low touch student visa applications.
34. INZ will continue to advise new student visa applicants to apply at least eight weeks before the start of their course for the foreseeable future.
35. Following the peak student period (end of April) INZ expects on hand volumes of onshore student visas to reduce and timeliness to return to approximately 90 per cent completed within 30 days.
36. INZ has developed application volume and timeliness reports for education peak bodies and large education providers, including universities. These reports will be sent out fortnightly.
37. INZ is continuing to work with ENZ to ensure stakeholders are aware of processing times and to encourage applicants to apply for their visas as early as possible.
38. ENZ will continue to assist INZ with the distribution of communications and updates to international education stakeholders.
39. ENZ is monitoring market reaction to visa processing changes and will raise emerging issues to INZ.

## **Annexes**

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Annex One: International student visa application volumes

Annex Two: On hand application volumes

Annex Three: International student visa application processing times

## Annex 1 – International student visa application volumes

### Tendered and accepted fee paying international student visa applications tendered offshore

By education provider type:

Provider type	Tendered 1 Nov 2016-31 Jan 2017	Tendered 1 Nov 2017-31 Jan 2018	Tendered 1 Nov 2018-31 Jan 2019	Percentage change from last period
Total tendered – all provider types	15,796	15,742	16,758	6.5%
Schools	3,709	3,516	3,557	1.2%
Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics	2,705	2,636	3,436	30.3%
Private Training Establishments	4,072	3,823	3,719	-2.7%
Universities	5,192	5,670	5,896	4.0%

By applicant nationality – top five nationalities in order of 1 Nov 2016-31 Jan 2019 volume:

Applicant nationality	Tendered 1 Nov 2016-31 Jan 2017	Tendered 1 Nov 2017-31 Jan 2018	Tendered 1 Nov 2018-31 Jan 2019	Percentage change from last period
Total tendered – all nationalities	15,796	15,742	16,758	6.5%
India	2,999	2,850	4,019	41.0%
China	2,805	2,619	2,969	13.4%
Japan	1,081	1,102	1,247	13.2%
United States of America	1,352	1,241	1,148	-7.5%
South Korea	629	745	816	9.5%



### Completed fee paying international student visa applications tendered offshore

By education provider type:

Provider type	Completed 1 Nov 2016-31 Jan 2017	Completed 1 Nov 2017-31 Jan 2018	Completed 1 Nov 2018-31 Jan 2019	Percentage change from last period
Total completed – all provider types	14,130	14,408	13,585	-5.7%
Schools	3,738	3,532	3,518	0%
Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics	2,074	2,145	1,960	-9%
Private Training Establishments	3,866	3,648	3,054	-16%
Universities	4,336	4,988	4,987	0%

By applicant nationality – top five nationalities in order of Nov 2018-31 Jan 2019 volume:

Applicant nationality	Completed 1 Nov 2016-31 Jan 2017	Completed 1 Nov 2017-31 Jan 2018	Completed 1 Nov 2018-31 Jan 2019	Percentage change from last period
Total completed – all nationalities	14,130	14,408	13,585	-5.7%
China	2,659	2,412	2,816	16.7%
India	2,374	2,287	2,163	-5.4%
Japan	1,059	1,086	1,220	12.3%
United States of America	1,220	1,231	1,141	-7.3%
South Korea	595	731	819	12.0%



## Offshore fee paying international student visa application decisions

By applicant nationality – top 10 nationalities in order of 2018 total decision volumes:

Applicant nationality	2016		2017		2018		2019 (to 10 Feb 2019)	
	Total decided applications	Approved applications	Total decided applications	Approved applications	Total decided applications	Approved applications	Total decided applications	Approved applications
All nationalities	46,194	34,255 (74%)	44,731	38,106 (85%)	42,827	37,533 (88%)	7,011	6,459 (92%)
India	15,031	6,586 (44%)	9,914	6,890 (69%)	8,883	6,845 (77%)	1,268	1,052 (83%)
China	7,999	7,410 (93%)	8,325	7,782 (93%)	7,824	7,458 (95%)	1,542	1,502 (97%)
Japan	2,214	2,195 (99%)	2,271	2,259 (99%)	2,498	2,489 (100%)	374	371 (100%)
United States of America	1,812	1,783 (98%)	2,559	2,523 (99%)	2,292	2,251 (98%)	551	547 (99%)
Thailand	1,514	1,457 (96%)	1,707	1,595 (93%)	1,701	1,581 (93%)	346	338 (98%)
South Korea	1,539	1,505 (98%)	1,619	1,575 (97%)	1,657	1,637 (99%)	395	390 (99%)
Brazil	1,359	1,298 (96%)	1,664	1,513 (91%)	1,640	1,463 (89%)	248	227 (92%)
Germany	1,555	1,546 (99%)	1,334	1,329 (100%)	1,551	1,544 (100%)	111	111 (100%)
Philippines	1,502	1,063 (71%)	1,617	1,217 (75%)	1,256	1,044 (83%)	152	120 (79%)
Colombia	763	719 (94%)	1,083	937 (87%)	1,076	859 (80%)	116	96 (83%)

By education provider type:

Provider type	2016		2017		2018		2019 (to 10 Feb 2019)	
	Total decided applications	Approved applications	Total decided applications	Approved applications	Total decided applications	Approved applications	Total decided applications	Approved applications
All provider types	46194	34255 (74%)	44731	38106 (85%)	42827	37533 (88%)	7011	6459 (92%)
Schools	6904	6636 (96%)	7352	7074 (96%)	7211	6945 (96%)	1328	1302 (98%)
Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics	8676	5736 (66%)	8512	6547 (77%)	7970	6369 (80%)	1099	955 (87%)
Private Training Establishments	20020	11965 (60%)	15560	11915 (77%)	14024	11383 (81%)	1454	1205 (83%)
Universities	10169	9692 (95%)	13006	12378 (95%)	13343	12633 (95%)	3083	2963 (96%)



## Annex 2 – On hand application volumes

The following data is based on international student visa applications for onshore and offshore students.

**Number of student visa applications in INZ offices with assessment ongoing or pending allocation by tendered month (as at 17 February 2019, by provider type)**

Applicant nationality	Tendered month											Total
	Jan-18	Feb-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18	Nov-18	Dec-18	Jan-19	Feb-19	
Schools							1	5	10	46	542	650
Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics					1	3	4	113	583	1,252	672	2,628
Private Training Establishments	4			6	6	14	27	122	380	852	702	2,113
Universities		2	7	1	2	2	3	29	71	314	859	1,290
Not Recorded							1	5	10	46	542	604

**Number of student visa applications in INZ offices with assessment ongoing or pending allocation by tendered month (as at 17 February 2019, specific nationalities by on hand volume)**

Applicant nationality	Tendered month										Total
	Jan-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18	Nov-18	Dec-18	Jan-19	Feb-19		
India	4	5	3	7	18	128	701	1,449	740	3,055	
China			1	2	4	11	35	262	1,156	1,471	
Nepal				1	1	37	66	133	55	323	
South Korea						3	5	44	240	292	
Sri Lanka				5	6	33	47	85	48	224	
Colombia			1			4	24	56	71	156	
Brazil						2	3	32	99	136	
Chile								16	33	49	



## Annex 3 – International student visa application processing times

The following data demonstrates the number of student visa applications decided each month and the proportion of those applications which were submitted less than 30 or 60 days prior to the decision. It is further separated by applicants who applied from offshore and those who applied while in New Zealand.

Monthly decisions and timeliness for student visa applications submitted by applicants offshore												
Decision Month	2016			2017			2018			2019		
	Applications Decided <sup>6</sup>	% Decided in 30 Days	% Decided in 60 Days	Applications Decided	% Decided in 30 Days	% Decided in 60 Days	Applications Decided	% Decided in 30 Days	% Decided in 60 Days	Applications Decided	% Decided in 30 Days	% Decided in 60 Days
January	5,874	92.4%	97.1%	5,999	88.4%	98.3%	6,308	90.2%	98.5%	5,651	74.9%	94.9%
February	4,477	93.4%	97.7%	3,966	86.2%	96.7%	3,830	90.9%	97.2%	1,220 <sup>7</sup>	68.0%	94.8%
March	3,761	94.1%	97.9%	3,518	82.4%	96.2%	2,775	88.3%	95.6%			
April	2,997	93.2%	97.4%	2,484	85.6%	94.3%	2,420	91.5%	96.7%			
May	4,778	95.7%	98.4%	4,348	92.3%	96.8%	4,230	95.1%	97.9%			
June	5,476	92.9%	98.7%	4,724	95.5%	98.4%	4,637	96.8%	99.2%			
July	4,224	76.4%	98.2%	3,487	89.5%	97.7%	3,725	94.6%	98.6%			
August	4,107	71.9%	95.2%	2,730	81.2%	95.6%	2,586	91.1%	98.1%			
Sept	3,318	84.0%	95.1%	2,499	71.7%	94.8%	1,894	89.1%	97.4%			
October	2,447	91.9%	97.1%	2,310	82.6%	96.8%	2,267	77.9%	97.1%			
November	3,227	93.3%	98.1%	3,611	94.2%	98.4%	3,784	80.5%	98.0%			
December	5,316	94.8%	99.2%	4,764	96.7%	99.2%	4,267	87.8%	97.4%			
<b>Total Decisions</b>	<b>50,002</b>	<b>89.7%</b>	<b>97.6%</b>	<b>44,440</b>	<b>88.4%</b>	<b>97.3%</b>	<b>42,724</b>	<b>90.0%</b>	<b>97.8%</b>	<b>6,871</b>	<b>73.7%</b>	<b>94.1%</b>

<sup>6</sup> Does not include applications where the time to decide the application was recorded as -1 or 0 days.

<sup>7</sup> Data as at 14 February 2019.



Monthly decisions and timeliness for student visa applications submitted by applicants onshore												
Decision Month	2016			2017			2018			2019		
	Applications Decided <sup>8</sup>	% Decided in 30 Days	% Decided in 60 Days	Applications Decided	% Decided in 30 Days	% Decided in 60 Days	Applications Decided	% Decided in 30 Days	% Decided in 60 Days	Applications Decided	% Decided in 30 Days	% Decided in 60 Days
January	2,202	83.2%	96.9%	2,469	64.0%	86.9%	2,941	90.7%	98.3%	2,651	74.9%	90.2%
February	5,589	93.5%	97.8%	6,980	85.7%	95.1%	6,405	96.5%	98.8%	1,182 <sup>9</sup>	88.4%	95.1%
March	8,585	89.1%	98.5%	11,141	95.5%	98.8%	10,160	95.7%	99.2%			
April	5,275	54.5%	96.8%	3,786	87.9%	98.7%	4,422	88.7%	99.0%			
May	4,035	32.2%	87.8%	3,335	74.1%	94.7%	2,638	85.7%	95.5%			
June	3,405	64.8%	81.7%	2,747	68.2%	94.5%	2,625	92.6%	97.2%			
July	5,048	82.4%	93.5%	5,697	83.7%	97.3%	5,144	96.1%	99.1%			
August	5,065	69.5%	95.3%	4,904	91.2%	98.0%	4,679	92.5%	99.1%			
Sept	4,329	51.9%	90.6%	2,908	82.1%	95.0%	2,637	84.3%	97.2%			
October	3,227	73.9%	92.1%	2,389	84.1%	94.3%	2,083	86.3%	96.2%			
November	2,468	82.1%	93.2%	2,574	92.2%	97.6%	2,287	84.3%	96.4%			
December	1,761	68.6%	93.0%	1,560	92.2%	97.4%	2,115	87.6%	97.2%			
<b>Total Decisions</b>	<b>50,989</b>	<b>68.8%</b>	<b>93.4%</b>	<b>50,489</b>	<b>87.4%</b>	<b>96.3%</b>	<b>48,136</b>	<b>91.5%</b>	<b>98.2%</b>	<b>3,833</b>	<b>78.8%</b>	<b>94.9%</b>

<sup>8</sup> Does not include applications where the time to decide the application was recorded as -1 or 0 days.

<sup>9</sup> Data as at 14 February 2019.