



COVID-19 - Measures to assist international students and graduates

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated global travel restrictions have presented major challenges to the international education sector. Attracting international students and graduates back to Australia and facilitating their entry when travel restrictions allow, will be critical to the sector's recovery.

The Government is committed to ensuring Australia remains a competitive, high quality and welcoming destination for international students and has announced a package of student visa measures. These measures will support the international education sector through the current impact of COVID-19 and help them to recover after its immediate effects have passed.

The new student visa measures are:

- recommencing visa grants for student visa applications lodged outside Australia where all requirements are met;
- a fee waiver for students to apply for another student visa if they cannot complete their course within their original visa validity due to COVID-19;
- allowing time spent studying online to count towards qualifying for a post-study work visa for students affected by COVID-19;
- making available an option to apply for and be granted a post-study work visa outside Australia for students affected by COVID-19; and
- allowing additional time for applicants to provide results for English language testing, biometrics collection and health checks, where COVID-19 has disrupted access to services.

Offshore student visa grants

- While the Department of Home Affairs has continued to process applications, we will recommence visa grants for student visa applications lodged outside Australia where all requirements are met.
- Student visa holders outside Australia will not be able to travel to Australia until COVID-19 travel restrictions have been relaxed. Travel restrictions are set by the Australian Government and are reviewed regularly.

Student visa fee waiver

- A visa fee waiver will be available for international students to lodge a further student visa application to complete their study, if they were unable to complete their course within their original visa validity due to COVID-19.

Relaxing eligibility requirements for a post-study work visa

- The following eligibility requirements for a post-study work visa (Temporary Graduate visa) (TGV) (subclass 485) will be relaxed for those who have been impacted by COVID-19:
 - online study undertaken outside Australia as a result of COVID-19 travel restrictions will be counted towards the Australian Study Requirement for existing and new student visa holders; and
 - graduates affected by COVID-19 travel restrictions will be able to apply for and be granted a TGV outside Australia (where they have met all the requirements).

Studying online

- Students should contact their education provider to discuss the requirements for studying online.
- For more information see the:
 - Joint TEQSA and ASQA statement relating to flexible delivery (20 March 2020) at www.teqsa.gov.au/latest-news/articles/joint-teqsa-and-asqa-statement-relating-flexible-delivery; and
 - TEQSA website at www.teqsa.gov.au/search/covid-19.

Providing additional time for English language testing and other requirements

- The Department of Home Affairs will allow additional time for applicants to provide English language test results if they are unable to take a test because of COVID-19. Additional time will also be provided to undertake biometrics collection and health checks where COVID-19 has disrupted access to services.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why are these measures being introduced?

- The Government is committed to ensuring Australia remains a competitive, high quality and welcoming destination for international students.
- The COVID-19 pandemic and associated global travel restrictions have presented major challenges to the international education sector. Attracting international students and graduates back to Australia and facilitating their entry when travel restrictions allow, will be critical to the sector's recovery.
- These student visa measures will provide assistance to Australia's international education sector and support its recovery, noting the sector employed nearly 250,000 people and was worth around \$37.6 billion to the Australian economy in 2018-19. The measures will also have flow-on effects for many other businesses, including accommodation services, hospitality, retail and those who employ international students.
- Granting visas to international students who have met all requirements will provide them with the reassurance that they will be able to enter Australia when travel restrictions are relaxed.

What other visa changes have been made to support international students?

- The Department of Home Affairs has taken a flexible approach in relation to visa conditions where COVID-19 and associated travel restrictions have prevented study conditions being met, such as attendance at class or use of online learning.

- There has also been a temporary relaxation of work limitations for student visa holders working in critical sectors to ensure the provision of essential goods and services. These arrangements are reviewed regularly based on specific labour market needs, with further information at covid19.homeaffairs.gov.au/staying-australia.
- Student visa holders must continue to meet all other visa conditions.

When will the new measures come into effect?

- The Department of Home Affairs will recommence visa grants for student visa applications lodged outside Australia where all requirements are met with immediate effect.
- Allowing additional time for applicants to provide results for English language testing, biometrics collection and health checks, where COVID-19 has disrupted access to services, will take effect immediately.
- Legislative changes are required for the student visa fee waiver and to enable eligible graduates to apply for a post-study work visa outside Australia. Further information will be provided when available at covid19.homeaffairs.gov.au/staying-australia.

How long will the new measures be in place?

- The measures are targeted to assist international students and graduates adversely affected by COVID-19 and to support the recovery of the international education sector.
- The measures are temporary and will continue for as long as necessary, as determined by the Government in consultation with the international education sector.

Am I eligible for the student visa application fee waiver?

- If you have been unable to complete your study within your original visa validity due to COVID-19, you may be able to apply for a further student visa without a visa application charge.
- Further information on the commencement of this measure, as well as eligibility requirements for the fee waiver, will be provided when available at covid-19.homeaffairs.gov.au/staying-australia.

Can I apply for a post-study work visa if I am outside Australia?

- Eligible graduates will be able to apply outside Australia once the required legislative change has been made, with further information to be provided when available at covid19.homeaffairs.gov.au/staying-australia
- Graduates will be able to apply outside Australia if they have graduated from an Australian education institution and have been unable to return to Australia to apply for a post-study work visa because of COVID-19 travel restrictions.
- Student visa holders will also be able to count online study undertaken outside Australia towards the Australian Study Requirement for a post-study work visa.

Test centres in my home country are closed. Can I still apply for a student visa?

- The Department of Home Affairs will allow additional time for applicants to provide English language test results if students are unable to take a test because of test centre closures due to COVID-19. The Department will also provide additional time for biometrics collection and health checks where COVID-19 has disrupted access to services.

- Where a student is required to submit an English language test result as part of their visa application, they can lodge their application and provide their test result later through ImmiAccount. Similar arrangements will apply to biometrics collection and health checks where COVID-19 has disrupted access to services.

When will international students be able to return to Australia?

- Arrangements for the return of international students to Australia will be implemented once it is safe to do so, and in a way which ensures the protection of public health.

What can I do if I am experiencing financial difficulties?

- It is a condition of your student visa that you have access to funds to support yourself for the duration of your stay in Australia. If you are unable to support yourself, you should consider making arrangements to return to your home country.
- However, the Government recognised that some international students were in financial difficulties and allowed those who had been in Australia for 12 months or more to access up to \$10,000 of their superannuation in the 2019-20 financial year (applications closed 30 June 2020). Further details can be found on the Australian Taxation Office website at www.ato.gov.au.
- In addition, the Government introduced a \$200 million community support package for temporary visa holders, supplementing support from education providers and State and Territory Governments for international students.
- Student visa holders are encouraged to stay in touch with their education providers about the range of support available to them.
- Many universities and education providers are offering support to students including deferring fees, deferring studies or payments, food and accommodation support as well as mental health and other medical support.
- Study Australia's website www.studyinaustralia.gov.au provides more information on support services available to international students.

I am unable to return to my home country due to COVID-19. What do if my student visa is about to expire?

- You will need to lodge a new application if your visa is expiring.
- If you are continuing studies in Australia, you should apply for a new student visa before your existing student visa expires.
- If your study in Australia is ending and you cannot depart Australia, you should apply for another visa such as a visitor visa before your student visa expires
 - Information on extending your stay if you are unable to depart is available at covid19.homeaffairs.gov.au/staying-australia.

Other visa options

- If your study in Australia is ending and you cannot depart Australia, for example because of travel restrictions or the unavailability of return flights, and you are ineligible for any other type of visa such as a visitor visa, you may be eligible for the Temporary Activity (Subclass 408) Australian Government Endorsed Event stream (COVID-19 Pandemic Event) visa.
 - You will need to demonstrate in your application why you cannot meet the requirements of another visa. This could include a statement and evidence that you do not have access to sufficient funds to pay a further visa application charge (VAC).
 - Information on the COVID-19 Pandemic event visa is available at immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/getting-a-visa/visa-listing/temporary-activity-408/australian-government-endorsed-events-covid-19.

Where can I get more information?

- Information for international students is available across a range of Government agencies, including:
 - the latest visa information on COVID-19, including travel advice, on the Department of Home Affairs website at covid19.homeaffairs.gov.au;
 - the Australian Government COVID-19 website with the latest news, updates and advice at www.australia.gov.au/;
 - the Department of Education, Skills and Employment website at www.dese.gov.au/covid-19 and their hotline for international students at international.students@dese.gov.au or 1300 981 621 (9am to 5pm AEDST Monday to Friday); and
 - information on support services available for international students on Study Australia's website www.studyinaustralia.gov.au/.