



MEDIA RELEASE

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Students urged to apply early for visas

Immigration New Zealand is encouraging students to apply early for their visa in order to avoid processing delays, particularly in the peak processing months of February, March and July, when it receives an average of nearly 10,000 applications per month.

Head of Immigration Nigel Bickle says various improvements are under way at the Palmerston North branch that processes student applications and students can contribute to faster processing by:

- Applying as soon as their study is confirmed (but no earlier than 60 days before their course starts).
- Applying online, if their education provider is accredited with INZ as a Student Online Partner (INZ guarantees to assess online applications within 48 hours).
- Making sure, whether they apply online or manually, that they provide all the information/documentation required – 30 percent of all manual applications are incomplete, which means their processing is delayed while INZ seeks and receives the missing material.

Mr Bickle says INZ has various steps under way or planned to avoid processing delays, including:

- Granting interim visas to most students, effective from 7 February 2011. This is one of the changes in the Immigration Act 2009, and allows INZ to grant students interim visas while it processes their applications. This is part of a wider interim visa system.
- Extending the validity period for police and medical checks for fee-paying foreign students from the current two years to three years. This will also apply from February and will reduce the number of people whose application processing is delayed because they have not provided a medical certificate. It will also save students money.
- Greater profiling of applications, so that lower risk applications are processed faster and staff can devote more time to higher risk applications.
- Recruiting additional staff and seconding staff from other branches to process student visas at peak times.
- Using resources at other INZ branches when applicable.
- Paying closer attention to whether requests for urgency are justified.
- Undertaking a communications programme to advise education providers and students what to expect during the peak periods in terms of processing times.

He says INZ is committed to dramatically improving student application processing performance year-round, given the importance of international students to New Zealand's export education sector.

Further information on studying in New Zealand is available at <http://www.immigration.govt.nz/migrant/stream/study/>

For further information contact the DoL media line on 0274 422 141 or e-mail media@dol.govt.nz