



The VET, Schools and Non-award Sectors (Recommendations 3.4, 11, 12, 14 and 15)

The following information provides further detail on the Knight Review changes to the student visa program.

Frequently asked questions

What changes are being made to assist the Vocational Education and Training (VET), Schools and Non-award sectors?

A number of the Knight Review changes will assist the VET, Schools and Non-award sectors including:

- streamlined visa processing for students who package their non-university courses with an eligible university course including for students coming for semester or year long non-award courses, for example, as part of an agreed student exchange program (VET and Non-award sectors)
- allowing Schools sector (subclass 571) visa holders subject to Assessment Level 3 or above to study English for up to 50 weeks (Schools sector)
- removing the English language test requirement for Schools sector visa applicants subject to Assessment Level 4 (Schools sector)
- the development of an integrated policy in relation to the award of scholarships and the management of visa arrangements, in particular, for awardees with a disability or HIV for AusAID or Defence (subclass 576) visa applicants (any sector)
- support for high-quality Australian vocational education and training (VET) providers to expand their offshore training services through programs such as Austrade's Export Market Development Grants Scheme (VET sector)
- reductions in financial requirements for Assessment Level 3 and Assessment Level 4 student visa applicants
- the inclusion of prepaid homestay fees in the financial assessments of student visa applicants.

In addition, the review of the student visa assessment level framework will examine ways to improve or reform risk management in the student visa program. The review will give particular consideration to an education provider risk model which recognises and rewards high-quality education providers. It is expected that the department will report the review's findings to government in mid-2012, and on completion of the review, the government will consider options for the interim implementation of its findings to apply to a small number of high quality training and education providers ahead of the full implementation of the review's findings by 2013.

The government recognises that high-quality, low-risk education providers operate across all education sectors, including those outside the university sector. Considering a provider-based risk management approach will enable the government to identify these high-quality providers to ensure they benefit from measures to facilitate the competitiveness of Australia's international education sector, such as the streamlining of visa applications from certain students.

See: www.immi.gov.au/students/pdf/tor-assessment-level-review.pdf

Reductions in financial requirements

How have the financial requirements for higher risk Assessment Level 3 and Assessment Level 4 student visa applicants changed?

From 5 November 2011, the financial requirements for Assessment Level 3 and Assessment Level 4 student visa applicants were reduced in the following way:

- evidence of funds for Assessment Level 4 applicants reduced from 36 to 24 months and, if evidence is being presented as a cash deposit, their savings history reduced from six to three months
- evidence of funds for Assessment Level 3 applicants reduced from 24 to 18 months.

This reduces the financial requirements by up to approximately AUD36 000 for an Assessment Level 4 applicant and up to approximately AUD18 000 for an Assessment Level 3 applicant.

These changes apply to applications for visa subclasses 570, 571, 572, 573, 574, 575 and 580 made on or after 5 November 2011.

What are assessment levels?

Currently, assessment levels serve to align student visa requirements to the immigration risk posed by applicants from a particular country studying in a particular education sector. Assessment Level 1 represents the lowest immigration risk and Assessment Level 5 the highest. The higher the assessment level, the greater the evidence an applicant is required to demonstrate to support their claims for the grant of a student visa.

See: www.immi.gov.au/students/student-visa-assessment-levels.htm

Why have the changes been made?

The changes will help increase the competitiveness of the international education sector by reducing the requirement for financial evidence. The Hon Michael Knight AO noted during his strategic review of the student visa program that a number of genuine students are unable to meet the student visa criteria without spending a lot of time and effort in re-arranging their finances, or sometimes even by resorting to fraud.

How will the integrity of the student visa program be maintained?

The genuine temporary entrant (GTE) criterion has been introduced as an upfront integrity measure. The GTE will help to ensure that only those who genuinely intend a temporary stay in Australia for the purpose of study would be granted student visas.

See: www.immi.gov.au/students/pdf/2011-genuine-temporary-entrant.pdf

Streamlined processing

What is the streamlined processing?

From 24 March 2012, students who undertake a non-university courses as a prerequisite to an eligible university course at a participating university will be eligible for streamlined processing provided that both:

- confirmation of enrolment for all courses in the package (ELICOS and the eligible university course) are provided when the student visa application is lodged
- the non-university course is provided by an educational business partner nominated by the student's university providing the eligible course.

This means that the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (the department) will assess these applicants as though they are lower migration risk (similar to the current Assessment Level 1), regardless of country of origin.

Where can I get more information on streamlined processing?

Information on streamlined processing can be found on the department's website.

See: www.immi.gov.au/students/_pdf/2011-university-sector-streamlined-processing.pdf

Fifty weeks English study for Schools sector visa holders

How have the English language study restrictions for Schools sector (subclass 571) visa holders changed?

On 24 March 2012, the maximum period of time a Schools sector visa holder subject to Assessment Level 3 or above can study English was increased to 50 weeks. This compares to the previous arrangements where Assessment Level 3 students were restricted to 40 weeks and Assessment Level 4 students to 30 weeks.

Would this change affect applications lodged before 24 March 2012?

No. This change only applies to new applications made on or after 24 March 2012.

Removal of the English language test requirement for Schools sector visa applicants subject to Assessment Level 4

I am applying for a Schools sector (subclass 571) visa. How does this change affect me?

From 24 March 2012, applicants for a Schools sector (subclass 571) visa subject to Assessment Level 4 will no longer be required to provide the department with evidence of an English language proficiency test to support their claims for the grant of a student visa.

This is consistent with the assessment of Assessment Level 1, Assessment Level 2 and Assessment Level 3 applicants for Schools sector visas, who must provide evidence of their English language proficiency to their proposed education provider rather than the department.

Does this change affect applications lodged before 24 March 2012?

No. This change only applies to new applications made on or after 24 March 2012.

Homestay arrangements

What policy has changed?

Prepaid fees for formal boarding arrangements with education providers for student visa applicants are taken into account when assessing whether an applicant meets the financial requirements for a student visa.

From 5 November 2011, prepaid fees for formal homestay arrangements through education providers were assessed the same way.

I want to apply for a student visa. How does this policy change affect me?

This affects students who have prepaid some or all of their fees for formal homestay arrangements organised through their education provider. In particular, if you have prepaid your boarding or homestay fees, the amount you have prepaid may be deducted from the living costs component of the financial requirements for your student visa application. The department must be satisfied you have provided appropriate evidence of this payment.

What documentary evidence is required?

Student visa applicants are required to supply evidence in the form of a contract or an authorised receipt of payment from the education provider. This evidence must clearly identify the portion of prepaid school fees that is attributed to formal boarding or homestay.

How does this work?

Example: A student visa applicant at Assessment Level 2 who is intending to stay in Australia for at least one year needs to show evidence that they have AUD18 000 to cover the living costs component of the financial requirements associated with their application. The student provides evidence that they have prepaid AUD7000 for formal homestay arrangements that have been organised through their education provider. The student will therefore only need to show a further AUD11 000 in funds to cover the living costs component.

How is payment of rent on private accommodation treated?

Formal boarding and homestay arrangements do not include private boarding or homestay arrangements or rent on accommodation. Payment of rent on private accommodation arrangements is therefore not deducted from the living costs component of the financial requirements. This is because these arrangements are not formally administered by education providers.

I lodged my student visa application before 5 November 2011. Does this change affect me?

If you lodged a student visa application prior to 5 November 2011 and are awaiting a decision, your application can be processed under the new arrangements. If you have prepaid homestay

arrangements in place, you may provide this information to your case officer or the departmental office processing your application so that this information can be taken into consideration when assessing your application.

AusAID and Defence scholarship applicants

What is the department doing to ensure an integrated visa arrangement for scholarship awardees?

The department is working closely with all relevant government departments to ensure visa arrangements for awardees are well integrated and managed effectively. The department has provided additional, tailored information about the health requirement to AusAID students.

Where can I find more information about the health requirement?

More information can be found about health requirements including how they apply to student visa applicants can be accessed on the department's website.

See: www.immi.gov.au/allforms/health-requirements/

Where do I go for more information?

More information will be provided on the department's website as it becomes available.

See: www.immi.gov.au/students/knight/