



COVERSHEET

Minister	Hon Erica Stanford	Portfolio	Immigration
Title of Cabinet paper	Skilled Migrant Category – Proposals for Change	Date to be published	17 November 2025

List of documents that have been proactively released

Date	Title	Author
10 September 2025	Skilled Migrant Category – Proposals for Change	Office of the Minister for Immigration
15 September 2025	Skilled Migrant Category – Proposals for Change CAB-25-MIN-0321 Minute	Cabinet Office

Information redacted

YES / NO (please select)

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Some information has been withheld for the reasons of Confidential advice to Government and Free and frank opinions.



Cabinet

Minute of Decision

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Skilled Migrant Category: Proposals for Change

Portfolio **Immigration**

On 15 September 2025, Cabinet:

- 1 **noted** that in August 2024, the Cabinet Economic Policy Committee noted the Minister of Immigration's (the Minister) work programme, which included a review of skilled residence settings (including both the Skilled Migrant Category (SMC) Visa and the Green List) [ECO-24-MIN-0158];
- 2 **agreed** to create a new pathway for migrants in a skilled (ANZSCO 1 – 3) role with at least 5 years of skilled work experience in either the same role or a directly relevant role, made up of:
 - 2.1 at least 3 years of skilled work experience obtained either overseas or in New Zealand; and
 - 2.2 at least 2 years of skilled work experience in New Zealand at 1.1 times the median wage;
- 3 **agreed** to broaden eligibility of the SMC by creating a pathway for migrants that:
 - 3.1 are in a specified trades or technician occupation; and
 - 3.2 have a relevant sub-degree qualification, recognised by an International Qualification Assessment as being at least Level 4 and at least 120 credits on the New Zealand Qualifications and Credentials Framework; and
 - 3.3 have at least 4 years of skilled work experience in either the same role or a directly relevant role, with at least 1.5 years skilled work experience in New Zealand at the median wage;
- 4 **authorised** the Minister, in consultation with the Minister for Social Development and Employment and coalition partners, to make decisions about which trades and technician occupations are eligible for the sub-degree pathway;
- 5 **noted** that if decisions made in line with paragraph 3 above will significantly change the volume of migrants that may be eligible for residence as indicated in the paper under CAB-25-SUB-0321, the Minister will return to Cabinet to seek agreement;

- 6 **agreed** that the key design features of the two new pathways will be:
- 6.1 a high standard of evidence for offshore work experience, including requiring independent documents; and
 - 6.2 a strict approach to the relevance of previous work experience;
- 7 **agreed** to establish a red list that will exclude migrants in specified occupations from the new pathways, and require migrants to meet one of the existing skill proxies;
- 8 **agreed** to establish an amber list that will require migrants to meet additional occupation-specific eligibility requirements for the skilled work experience pathway;
- 9 **agreed** that, due to increased immigration risk (e.g. fraud, wage recycling, and exploitation), the roles listed in the paper under CAB-25-SUB-0321 will be on either the red or amber list;
- 10 **authorised** the Minister, in consultation with the Minister for Social Development and Employment and Coalition partners, to make further decisions in 2025 and 2026 about occupations on the red and amber lists and the occupation-specific eligibility requirements for the amber list;
- 11 **authorised** the Minister to regularly review and update the red and amber lists based on changes in immigration risk and/or changes to the skill classification of occupations on the National Occupations List;
- 12 **agreed** to a formal review of the new pathways in 2028 to ensure they are functioning as intended;
- 13 **agreed** that migrants that have not met the eligibility requirements, but could meet these within 12 months, can have their Accredited Employer Work Visa extended for this period;
- 14 **noted** that the decision in paragraph 13 above will result in extending the current maximum continuous stay on an Accredited Employer Work Visa of five years for eligible migrants;
- 15 **agreed** to increase the points for qualifications as follows:
- 15.1 6 points for a New Zealand-completed Master's;
 - 15.2 5 points for a New Zealand-completed Bachelor's, Honours and Post-Graduate Certificate, or Post-Graduate Diploma;
 - 15.3 4 points for an overseas Bachelor's or Post-Graduate Certificate;
- 16 **agreed** to reduce the length of New Zealand work experience required for:
- 16.1 4-point applicants, from 2 years to 18 months; and
 - 16.2 3-point applicants, from 3 years to 2 years;
- 17 **agreed** to remove the requirement for SMC applicants to be paid the relevant wage at residence application stage, instead requiring them to maintain at least the required wage throughout their required New Zealand work experience;
- 18 **invited** the Minister to issue immigration instructions to give effect to the decisions above;

- 19 **authorised** the Minister to make minor and technical policy decisions to give effect to the decisions above;
- 20 **agreed** that, in accordance with agreed coalition processes, New Zealand First will be free to differentiate publicly on the Government's decision to create two new pathways in the Skilled Migrant Category Visa for experienced and skilled migrants.

Rachel Hayward
Secretary of the Cabinet