



COVERSHEET

Minister	Hon Erica Stanford	Portfolio	Immigration
Title of Cabinet paper	Delivering the Going for Growth International Education Plan	Date to be published	30 March 2026

List of documents that have been proactively released

Date	Title	Author
February 2026	Delivering the Going for Growth International Education Plan	Office of the Minister of Immigration
16 February 2026	Delivering the Going for Growth International Education Plan CAB-26-MIN-0040 Minute	Cabinet Office

Information redacted

YES / **NO** (please select)

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Some information has been withheld for the reason of confidential advice to government.

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Office of the Minister of Immigration and Minister of Education

Cabinet

Delivering the Going for Growth International Education Plan

Proposal

- 1 In June 2025, Cabinet agreed to the International Education Growth Plan with the goal of doubling the economic contribution of export education to \$7.2 billion per annum by 2034. As part of the plan for growth Cabinet agreed to a new six month work visa for international graduates who do not already qualify for the Post-Study Work Visa (PSWV) [ECO-25-MIN-0099 refers]. This paper seeks agreement to the detailed specifications of the visa which has been designed to ensure appropriate safeguards are in place to mitigate risk, along with a multi-agency monitoring and reporting regime. The paper also seeks agreement to extend eligibility for the Post-Study Work Visa (PSWV) to Graduate Diplomas at Level 7 of the New Zealand Qualifications and Credentials Framework (NZQCF) and delegated authority for decisions Confidential advice to Government

Relation to Government priorities

- 2 International education is an important part of the Government's Going for Growth Plan. In June 2025, Cabinet approved the Going for Growth International Education Plan (the Plan) and its associated actions under the 'Promoting Global Trade and Investment' pillar, aiming to double the international education sector's economic contribution to \$7.2 billion by 2034. An agreed action included the introduction of a new short-term work visa for international graduates who do not already qualify for the Post-Study Work Visa (PSWV) [ECO-25-MIN-0099].

Background

- 3 The Plan sets out that, alongside universities and schools, growth will also be needed at sub-degree level qualifications (certificates and diplomas) at Private Training Establishments (PTEs) and Polytechnics to achieve our growth goal.
- 4 In July 2025, the Plan was publicly announced, including the introduction in 2026 of the short duration work visa of up to six months for sub-degree qualifications that do not currently qualify for the Post-Study Work Visa (PSWV)¹. The new visa provides the opportunity for these students to gain short-term work experience in New Zealand and/or time to seek employment under the Accredited Employer Work Visa pathway. This will support sustainable growth in sub-degree courses, while managing risks and ensuring the settings of the past which saw a proliferation of low-quality courses and people motivated by labour mobility rather than study are not repeated.

¹ Students studying at degree and above level already have access to more generous post study work rights ranging from 1-3 years.

- 5 I also sought advice from officials on extending existing PSWV eligibility to all Graduate Diploma NZQCF Level 7 qualifications. Since 2022, eligibility has been limited to those who have completed programmes of study on the approved PSWV list aligned with Green List occupations. International education stakeholders have strongly advocated for PSWV eligibility to be extended to all Graduate Diplomas to support growth of the sector, they consider a Graduate Diploma broadly comparable to a bachelor's degree.

Growth brings both benefits and risks that need to be managed

- 6 International Education makes a significant contribution to New Zealand's economy. The sector now contributes \$4.52 billion per annum, up from \$3.6 billion in 2024 and ranks among New Zealand's top 10 exports. From January to August 2025, 83,535 international students enrolled, representing a 14 percent increase compared to the same period in 2024 and already surpassing last year's full-year total.
- 7 The Short Term Graduate Work Visa (SGWV) has been designed to ensure we don't repeat the mistakes of the past when more permissive immigration settings, particularly at the sub-degree level, compromised education quality, incentivised fraudulent or unethical provider behaviour, and led to graduates competing with New Zealand workers for low-skilled, low-wage jobs.
- 8 This visa is more targeted than previous pre-COVID settings and its design aims to support a balanced, sustainable approach to growth of international student numbers and retaining skilled graduates. Growing the international education sector cannot come at the cost of significantly increased risk and the loss of social licence. These trade-offs were explicitly considered by Cabinet through decisions on the Plan last year. Significant differences between this visa and previous more permissive settings include that previous visas provided work rights for partners and the ability to bring dependent children. They were also for a longer period of either 12 or 24 months and included Level 4 courses.

Short Term Graduate Work Visa (SGWV) detailed requirements

- 9 Cabinet previously agreed that the visa duration will be for six-months to support some non-degree international graduates who are not eligible for a Post Study Work Visa, to be able to work for up to six months [ECO-25-MIN-0099]. This provides the opportunity for these students to gain short-term work experience in New Zealand and/or time to seek employment under the Accredited Employer Work Visa (AEWV) pathway.
- 10 It continues to be a Government priority for New Zealanders to have the first opportunity for jobs. Where a graduate seeks to remain in New Zealand in the medium term they would only be able to be granted an AEWV where the employer has not been successful in recruiting a New Zealander for the role.
- 11 Some competition with domestic jobseekers could be expected, however there will be safeguards in place such as requiring at least 30 weeks of full-time study, a strict six-month visa limit and strengthened AEWV labour market test requiring genuine

employer engagement with MSD² for lower skilled roles. This will be closely monitored. The other key specifications and safeguards are set out in table one on page four.

- 12 Based on historic trends, demand for this short-term visa is expected to be moderate (less than 8,000 annually) and derive particularly from students completing sub-degree qualifications in IT, hospitality, business, and social services. This estimate is based on previous visa settings³ which saw students choose shorter, lower-cost courses that enable faster entry into the workforce.
- 13 Immigration New Zealand (INZ) has well-established processes to identify and manage immigration risks, including assessing whether student visa applicants have a genuine intent to study. Sub-degree programmes are assessed using the same verification and risk-assessment approach as other student visa applications. As part of this process, immigration officers consider a range of matters, including the type and quality of evidence provided by an applicant. Where an application is triaged as high risk, there will be further verification checks and, where necessary, interviews to confirm bona fides. Where concerns about risk cannot be addressed or mitigated then a visa application will be declined. Last year INZ declined 10% of student visa applications.
- 14 In addition, since the surge of student numbers experienced from the period 2010 to 2018, lessons have been learnt and the quality assurance and controls for education quality have been strengthened to address the proliferation of low-value or low-quality education. For example, NZQA works closely with INZ and other agencies to gather intelligence and data to identify areas of risk. When risks are identified, such as programmes or providers with a rapid increase in international learners, NZQA carries out monitoring activities and responds as appropriate.
- 15 In addition to INZ’s existing verification and risk assessment, the proposed SGWV will have the following design parameters to address and mitigate issues experienced under previous settings, as outlined in table one below.

Table one: SGWV design settings

Design setting	Description
Course exclusions	Excluded: Level 4 courses, ESOL, foundation programmes, and micro-credentials, as these prepare students for further study as opposed to preparing them for work, or are not full qualifications. This approach reduces the risk that students use non-vocational courses solely as a pathway to work and supports better employment outcomes with clearer links to the labour market. Other courses could be reconsidered in the future if trends or behaviours of concern emerged.
Time spent studying in New Zealand	Minimum time spent studying of at least 30 weeks of full-time study at NZQCF Level 5-7 at an approved NZQA provider ensures work rights are proportionate to the duration of genuine study, discourages short, low-value

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³ Under previous settings, over a ten-year period, the uptake of the PSWV at non-degree level ranged from the low thousands, peaking at around 16,300 at the peak of student numbers.

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	courses, and provides a sufficient period of learning for students to gain meaningful skills. This approach reduces the risk of visas being used as a quick route into the labour market rather than for genuine study, strengthening system integrity and helps prevent resurgence of low-quality short courses targeted at gaining work rights rather than genuine study.
Partners and Dependents	No work rights for partners (would need to apply for any visa based on own merits) and any dependents will be treated as international students for study purposes. This approach does not create expectations or signal that the visa is a pathway to longer-term settlement or family migration. This approach also reduces pressure on schools, health systems, and social services.
Open work rights	Grant open work rights for six months to provide stability, flexibility and time to seek further employment in jobs not taken, ensure continuity for students already employed during study, and minimise exploitation risk by employer-dependency and pressure to find work in a particular industry (a known risk factor in temporary visas linked to employers). The six-month duration means that students are not guaranteed long-term access to the labour market unless they secure an AEWV for a role that has not been filled by a New Zealander.
Second SGWV	Not permitted. No extensions or second SGWV. Graduates who do not secure an AEWV or a different visa within six months must leave NZ. They may apply for a new student visa for higher-level study This approach prevents visa misuse and churn where graduates cycle through lower-level study to remain in New Zealand and addresses previous issues with settings that enabled prolonged participation in lower waged, lower skilled jobs and reduces incentives for providers to market courses as migration pathways rather than education. Encourages progress to skilled employment or higher level and value study.
Application timing	Applicants must apply for the SGWV within three months of their student visa expiry to encourage a timely transition between visa categories or leaving New Zealand.
Health and character	Applicants must show \$5,000 in funds and must meet standard health and character requirements. Applicants would be exempt from a character check if previously completed and still valid, otherwise new character check will be required. This approach ensures that individuals can support themselves during the six-month period (particularly if they have not found work immediately), reducing exploitation risk. Health and character checks reduce risks to public safety and public health pressures.

The fee and levy will align with the existing PSWV fee and levy

- 16 The SGWV will carry the same fee and levy as the PSWV - a visa fee of \$320 and a levy of \$1,350 (total \$1,670). These charges reflect the processing effort, and the broader benefits and risks associated with the visa category.

Extending Post Study Work Visa eligibility to Graduate Diploma NZQCF Level 7

- 17 Since the 2022 policy change to limit PSWV eligibility to fields aligned with New Zealand's skill needs, approvals for Graduate Diplomas have dropped significantly, from 4,800 in 2019 to 1,400 in 2024 and 976 in 2025, with a shift toward programmes such as teaching (teaching accounts for 58 percent of the total approved visas for Graduate Diplomas in 2025).
- 18 Graduate Diplomas are designed for upskilling, broadening knowledge, or career changes, typically requiring a bachelor's degree for entry. There are some exceptions to this, and some providers may also accept relevant work experience or lower-level qualifications. Graduate Diplomas are generally one year of full-time study.
- 19 A sample of 62 first time student visa applications who intend to undertake a Graduate Diploma found 93.6 percent declared a previous degree with their Graduate Diploma application. As expanding eligibility could risk a return to more generalist courses with flexible entry criteria, potentially undermining education quality and immigration integrity and impacts for domestic jobseekers I propose to limit PSWV eligibility to bachelor's degree holders, alongside other safeguards. These are:
- Limit PSWV eligibility to bachelor's degree holders to ensure applicants have a verifiable academic background, reducing visa misuse and low-value enrolments. From an immigration risk perspective this approach is preferred as work experience is harder to verify and therefore more open to abuse.
 - Align visa duration with course length (usually one year); exception for New Zealand bachelor's followed immediately by a Graduate Diploma (up to 3 years), consistent with existing PSWV settings and disincentivises enrolment in a shorter Graduate Diploma course just to gain access to longer duration PSWV rights
 - Require full Graduate Diploma to be completed in New Zealand on a valid student visa to maintain integrity and quality. This approach helps to maintain visa integrity by ensuring full onshore engagement with New Zealand's education system and protects the PSWV by preventing eligibility through offshore or partial study with lower oversight.
 - Do not allow cross-crediting from lower-level qualifications to prevent students from using prior, potentially unrelated or lower-level study to shortcut the qualification, which could undermine its value and increase the risk of low-quality enrolments aimed primarily at securing work rights.

Monitoring, reporting and strong oversight is essential in the context of growth

- 20 Overall responsibility for monitoring of the Plan and associated impacts, sits with the Ministry of Education.
- 21 MBIE and MSD will review the SGWV and the PSWV extension to Graduate Diplomas 12 months after implementation. To support this, MBIE and NZQA will provide six-monthly reports to the Ministers of Immigration, Education, Social Development and Employment, Universities, and Vocational Education. These

reports will track student volumes and profiles, visa approvals and declines, and summarise provider quality and sector responses to the changes, to identify and address emerging issues.

- 22 In addition to the data and insights gathered through the six-monthly reporting, a 12-month review will assess how effectively the design safeguards are managing risk and examine whether there are any negative labour market impacts has occurred, such as displacement of New Zealand jobseekers. The 12-month review will determine whether any policy or operational adjustments are needed, including tightening of settings.
- 23 In January 2026, NZQA's Evaluative Quality Assurance Framework (EQAF) was replaced by the integrated Quality Assurance Framework (iQAF). Consequently, the External Evaluation and Review (EER) ratings 1-4, used by INZ for student immigration product decisions⁴, have ceased.
- 24 NZQA's iQAF aims to strengthen regulatory oversight through a risk-informed approach. The iQAF will enhance intelligence gathering and data sharing, particularly with INZ and other agencies, to identify emerging risks and inform NZQA's quality assurance activities. The iQAF will enhance intelligence gathering and data sharing, particularly with INZ and other agencies, to identify emerging risks and inform approval and accreditation decisions. For example, NZQA may apply conditions on programme approvals and carry out monitoring activities such as site visits and checks after the first year of delivery and first graduating cohort.
- 25 2026 will be a transition year while the iQAF embeds and INZ will grandparent existing EER ratings for 12 months, using each provider's latest 2025 rating. This approach aligns with TEC's⁵ approach and provides consistency and certainty for the sector during the transitional period.
- 26 To support the implementation of iQAF, NZQA will work with agencies in 2026 to implement a three-tier system describing each TEO's overall quality. In addition, NZQA will continue to collaborate with INZ and other agencies to optimise the level of detail and frequency of sharing of TEO risk and quality information. NZQA will work with INZ on details such as confirming educational quality thresholds that would trigger visas to no longer be granted, formal referral mechanisms, the availability of a list of 'poor' providers (risk profiles), inter-agency sharing of risk factors, and operationalising combined INZ and NZQA unannounced visits.

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⁴ Included eligibility for in-study work rights, Pathway Student Visa, and the Primary Sector Trainee Work Visa.

⁵ TEC used the EER ratings for funding related decisions. ENZ has used the EER ratings to decide provider participation market promotional activities and listing on the Study with New Zealand website.

⁶ Australia uses an evidence level system under the Simplified Student Visa Framework to determine visa processing and evidence requirements, Canada requires attendance at *Designated Learning Institutions* and

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- The aim is to incentivise high-performing providers, maintain system integrity without duplicating NZQA’s role, and provide clear public signals to inform student choice.

Work is underway to make it easier for international students to apply for multi-year visas

- 29 New Zealand offers two multi-year student visas: the Pathway Student Visa introduced in 2015 for up to three consecutive programmes, and the General Student Visa, which is less used due to upfront costs. Uptake of the Pathway Student Visa uptake has grown modestly despite design barriers. In 2023, 2,623 Pathway Student Visas were approved (6.4 percent of total student visas) and in 2025 as at 3 December, there were 6,124 approved (7.7 percent of total student visas).
- 30 Multi-year visas reduce administrative burden and boost student appeal but due to reduced oversight can risk immigration integrity, education quality, and immigration revenue loss from fewer renewals. Further work to support a unified multi-year visa will develop risk-based eligibility, strengthen compliance, clarify provider roles, and assess financial impacts, including options to offset lost revenue

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Implementation

- 32 Rather than create an entirely new visa category, the new SGWV will be incorporated as a subcategory of the existing PSWV. Implementation timing for the SGWV and the extension of PSWV eligibility is scheduled for the second half of 2026 to align with the timing with the PSWV transition to ADEPT.

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Cost-of-living implications

- 34 There are no cost-of-living implications associated with the proposals.

Financial Implications

- 35 There are no financial implications. Costs associated with processing additional visas will be recovered through immigration fees and levies.

considering introducing a *Trusted Institution Framework* to reward high performing providers, and the United Kingdom mandates *Student Sponsor Licences* with strict requirements affecting visa eligibility.

Legislative Implications

36 There are no legislative implications associated with the proposals.

Regulatory Impact Statement

37 This paper does not require a Regulatory Impact Assessment as it has no direct legislative implications.

Population Implications

38 There are no population impacts associated with the proposals.

Human Rights

39 The proposals within this paper are consistent with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 and the Human Rights Act 1993.

Consultation

40 The Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Education, New Zealand Qualification Authority, Tertiary Education Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Education New Zealand were consulted. DPMC were informed.

41 The Ministry of Social Development and Ministry of Education initially raised concerns about expanding immigration settings to support growth in the sub-degree sector and the risks to education quality and domestic job seekers. This feedback was taken into account when designing the visa specifications and safeguards as well as the monitoring and reporting requirements.

42 Targeted engagement consultation was undertaken with International Education Peak Bodies, immigration professionals and business representatives on the SGWV design parameters. Views were mixed on how permissive or strict settings should be. Generally International Education Peak Bodies, support more permissive settings, including a longer 12-month visa duration, while some immigration and business stakeholders favour tighter restrictions to manage risk and ensure labour market alignment. Universities New Zealand see limited relevance for universities, and English New Zealand supports excluding ESOL courses.

43 International Education Peak Bodies, including those representing universities support changes to make Graduate Diplomas eligible for existing PSWV.

Communications

44 I will publicly communicate soon after any decisions are taken. Further information and detail on any changes will be made available on the INZ website.

Proactive Release

45 This paper will be proactively released after announcements are made, subject to withholdings as appropriate under the Official Information Act 1982.

Recommendations

The Minister for Immigration recommends that the Committee:

- 1 **note** that in June 2025, Cabinet approved the Going for Growth International Education Plan, aiming to double the international education sector's economic contribution to \$7.2 billion by 2034 [ECO-25-MIN-0099]
- 2 **note** that in June 2025, as part of the Going for Growth International Education Plan, Cabinet agreed to introduce a short term work visa of up to six months to support some international graduates, not otherwise eligible for post-study work rights, to seek employment and transition to the Accredited Employer Work Visa [ECO-25-MIN-0099]
- 3 **note** that growth in international education brings both benefits and risks that need to be carefully managed
- 4 **note** that permissive immigration settings can risk education quality and labour outcomes, but the proposed changes are more targeted and include safeguards to prevent a repeat of issues that emerged under previous settings
- 5 **agree** to the introduction of the six-month Short-Term Graduate Work Visa with the following design settings:
 - 5.1 applicants must have completed at least 30 weeks of full-time study at NZQCF Level 5-7 at an approved NZQA provider;
 - 5.2 English Language (ESOL), foundation programmes, and micro-credentials courses are excluded from eligibility;
 - 5.3 no work rights for partners and any dependents will be treated as international students for study purposes;
 - 5.4 grant of open work rights for the six-month duration of the visa;
 - 5.5 no eligibility for a subsequent Short-Term Graduate Visa on expiry of the first Short-Term Graduate Work Visa or subsequent Short-Term Graduate Visa following further study;
 - 5.6 provision to apply for a second student visa if the applicant is pursuing a higher-level qualification that qualifies for a Post-Study Work Visa;
 - 5.7 applicants must apply for the Short-Term Graduate Work Visa within three months of their student visa expiring;
 - 5.8 applicants must provide evidence of \$5,000 in funds to demonstrate they can financially support themselves during their stay in New Zealand and complete a health check; and
 - 5.9 applicants must meet standard health and character requirements
- 6 **agree** that the fee for the Short-Term Graduate Work Visa will be set at \$320, and the levy will be set at \$1,350
- 7 **agree** to extend Post-Study Work Visa eligibility to Graduate Diploma holders to support growth in the international education sector
- 8 **agree** to the following safeguards to manage risks associated with extending Post-Study Work Visa eligibility to Graduate Diploma holders:

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- 8.1 limit Post-Study Work Visa eligibility for Graduate Diplomas to applicants who hold a bachelor's degree
 - 8.2 visa duration to align with current PSWV settings, matching the length of the applicant's course
 - 8.3 require the entire Graduate Diploma to be completed entirely in New Zealand on a valid Student Visa
 - 8.4 no cross-crediting from lower-level qualifications
- 9 **direct** the Ministry of Business, Innovation, and Employment, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority and Ministry for Social Development to provide six-monthly reports to the Ministers of Immigration, Education, Universities, Social Development and Employment, and Vocational Education every six-months on responses to the proposals in recommendations 5 and 7, highlighting any emerging concerns for early intervention
- 10 **direct** the Ministry of Business, Innovation, and Employment and the Ministry of Social Development to undertake a review of the Short-Term Graduate Work Visa and extension of Post-Study Work Visa eligibility to Graduate Diplomas at 12-months from implementation with view to policy and operational changes if required
- 11 **note** that the Minister of Immigration has directed Ministry of Business, Innovation, and Employment officials to progress work on changes to make it easier to apply for multi-year visas, Confidential advice to Government
- 12 Confidential advice to Government
- 13

Hon Erica Stanford
Minister of Immigration