Unite against COVID-19

(New Zealand Government, 2021b) [14 Jan 2021]

Border exception for some returning international tertiary students

14 Jan 2021

An exception class for 1,000 international tertiary students who began their study in NZ, but were caught offshore when borders closed, has been approved.

The exception will allow students to return to New Zealand in stages from April 2021.

Our top priority continues to be the health, safety and wellbeing of all people in New Zealand.

The need to carefully manage our borders is as critical now as at any time in the past nine months. We continue to learn more about the virus and adapt accordingly with stronger and more tailored border protections, depending on risk.

Within our safety-first framework, we also have a responsibility to carefully balance our decisions, to support New Zealand's economic recovery.

This border exception delivers on a part of the recovery plan for international education. It underscores the Government's commitment to the international education sector, which is important in the country's long-term economic recovery from COVID-19.

The students will return to New Zealand in phases, beginning with a cohort of 300 that will be able to return from April, with the remaining students returning throughout the year as MIQ availability allows.

The return of these students will not affect the ability of Kiwis to return home and it is balanced against the requirement for skilled workers to enter the country.

They will be subject to the same border rules and quarantine regime as all other arrivals – with any additional restrictions depending on where they come from.

Returning students will need to book their space through the allocation system and will be billed the standard charges for managed isolation. They also need to be able to do more to support themselves in New Zealand, with the living expenses that are required for international students to be granted a visa now raised to $20,000 – up from $15,000.

This system allows providers to welcome back students who have made the greatest commitment to New Zealand, and manage pressure on the MIQ system.

The Government remains committed to working with the international education sector to ensure options for the broader return of international students continue to be considered, and that opportunities can be taken as and when it is safe and there is capacity to do so.

The annual economic value of this group of 1000 degree-level international students is estimated to be roughly $49 million in wider economic contribution, including approximately $27 million in tuition fees.

Border exception details

Students with questions about this border exception should contact their providers. The Ministry of Education will continue to work with tertiary education providers to manage this process.

To be eligible for this border exception, students must

- hold, or have held a visa to study in 2020
- be studying towards a bachelor's degree level or above qualification
- have studied in New Zealand in 2019 or 2020 toward their current qualification
- be returning to study with their current provider
- need to be in-country to complete their study.

Priority will be given to students who are closest to graduation.