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THE HON ALEX HAWKE MP
MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION, CITIZENSHIP, MIGRANT SERVICES AND
MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS

MEDIA RELEASE

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Visa changes to support the reopening of Australia and our economic recovery

The Morrison Government is making it easier for highly skilled migrants to remain in Australia and to continue working in critical sectors as Australia's economic recovery continues.

Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs Alex Hawke said these measures recognise the contribution of skilled migrants who remained here during the COVID-19 pandemic and encourage them to stay in Australia.

"Eligible skilled workers, already in Australia, will continue to support local businesses facing critical shortages, particularly in health, hospitality and our regions," Minister Hawke said.

"This recognises the economic value-add of these critical workers, and retaining them will greatly assist in Australia's economic recovery."

"The changes compliment the Government's recent announcement that fully vaccinated eligible temporary and provisional visa holders may enter Australia without a travel exemption from 1 December 2021," he said.

These visa changes will improve access to permanent residence for:

- Existing Temporary Skill Shortage (subclass 482) visa holders in the short-term stream
- Legacy Temporary Work Skilled (subclass 457) visa holders who no longer meet the age requirement.

“This is a special concession recognising those highly skilled migrant workers who chose to stay in Australia throughout the pandemic, while continuing to address Australia’s acute shortages. This allows them to stay here, with a pathway to Australian citizenship,” Minister Hawke said.

“There are currently about 20,000 primary Temporary Skill Shortage and 457 visa holders in Australia who may benefit from these arrangements. Most of these workers are employed in the highest-skilled occupations and the largest cohorts of workers benefiting from these changes include those currently employed in the health and hospitality industries, including many workers in regional Australia,” Minister Hawke said.

The Government will also extend visas for skilled regional (provisional visa) holders (subclass 489, 491 and 494) in recognition that this cohort has been adversely affected by COVID-19 related travel restrictions.

“Current and expired skilled regional provisional visas will be extended, providing additional time to meet regional work requirements for permanent residence,” Minister Hawke said.

“There are currently around 9,000 skilled regional provisional visa holders overseas. These visa holders can enter Australia from 1 December 2021, and they will also be eligible for an extension of their visa,” he said.

In recognition of ongoing border arrangements, the Government will also extend by a further six-months Visa Application Charge waivers for new Visitor visa applicants overseas where their visa expired, or will expire, between 1 January 2022 and 30 June 2022.

“This measure will support the tourism industry by welcoming back visitors once it is safe to do so,” Minister Hawke said.

The Government has announced further measures to support the return of international students and graduates, bolstering the international education industry by:

- Allowing Temporary Graduate visa holders, who have been unable to travel to Australia as a result of COVID-19 international border restrictions, to apply for a replacement visa;
- Increasing the length of stay on Temporary Graduate visas in the Masters by Coursework and Vocation Education and Training (VET) streams;
- Simplifying the requirements for Temporary Graduate visa applicants for VET sector graduates; and
- Extending the existing measure for student and temporary graduates to recognise time spent offshore studying online to count towards qualifying for a Temporary Graduate visa application.

These changes are consistent with the [National Plan](#) to safely reopen Australia and follow earlier changes which have seen us welcome home fully vaccinated Australians, permanent residents and their immediate family members.

For more information please visit the [Department of Home Affairs website](#).

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Further support for international education sector and international students

Ministers:

[The Hon Alan Tudge MP](#)

Minister for Education and Youth

[The Hon Alex Hawke MP](#)

Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs

The Morrison Government will introduce further targeted measures to support the international education sector to roar back, as international borders reopen.

More than \$37 million will be available to support those international education providers most affected by COVID-19. Extended regulatory fee waivers and additional grants are elements of this.

In addition, changes to visa settings will also provide much needed flexibility for international students as they set to return to Australia.

The new settings will extend measures to protect the post-study work rights of international students as well as **extend the temporary graduate visa from two to three years** for masters by coursework graduates.

Minister for Education and Youth Alan Tudge said the announcement would accelerate the COVID-19 recovery process for the 2022 academic year.

“This will help ensure the rapid return of international students,” Minister Tudge said.

“It provides clear incentives for institutions and students and ensures students are not disadvantaged from being prevented from coming to Australia earlier.

“The extension of the Innovation Grants will help English language providers who have been hit particularly hard by COVID.”

While the latest data (as at August 2021) shows international student enrolments are down 17 per cent overall compared to August 2019, the ELICOS sector has experienced the greatest decline in enrolments at 71 per cent for that same period.

Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs Alex Hawke said changes to visa settings for the international education sector gave students some much needed reprieve as Australia’s borders were set to reopen.

“The changes are targeted to not only support international students but are also a crucial component of our economic recovery and will help us retain and attract skilled workers.”

The package includes:

- \$27.8 million in regulatory fee relief for the duration of 2022, including certain fees for Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS) registrations, and the Tuition Protection Service (TPS) Levy.
- Extension of the current FEE-HELP loan fee exemption until 31 December 2022, benefiting around 30,000 undergraduate higher education students studying at institutes of higher education and public universities.
- An additional \$9.4 million to extend the Innovation Development Fund, delivering further short-term targeted support to private English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) providers to diversify their education offerings into online and offshore delivery.

The new visa settings mean:

- Temporary Graduate (subclass 485) visa holders who have been unable to travel to Australia as a result of COVID-19 international border restrictions will be able to apply for a replacement visa. This will allow current and former Temporary Graduate (subclass 485) visa holders whose visas expired on or after 1 February 2020 to re-apply for a new subclass 485 visa of the same duration as their original visa.
- Additionally, the Morrison Government will increase the length of stay on the Temporary Graduate visa from two to three years for Masters by coursework graduates, matching that of Masters by research graduates. Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector graduates will also receive a two year Temporary Graduate visa.
- The new visa settings will also extend existing measures for students and temporary graduates to recognise time spent offshore studying online to count towards qualifying for a temporary graduate visa.

These measures will support implementation of the soon-to-be-released *Australian Strategy for International Education*.