

Guidelines for enrolment of international PhD students who are overseas owing to COVID-19 travel restrictions

Background

In normal times, Victoria University of Wellington does not enrol PhD students until they have received a valid student visa and arrived in Wellington. These are not normal times. At present, no visas are being issued and it is not possible for international students to travel to Wellington, therefore no international student could enrol under the normal rules. We have over 100 international students with offers of a PhD place, some of whom may wish to begin their research; we will be making more offers throughout 2020. The border will remain closed for some months.

Victoria University of Wellington is able to charge international PhD students at the domestic fee rate owing to a generous co-funding scheme offered by the New Zealand Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) for international students who are in New Zealand. TEC has advised that it will allow an exemption to its rules to allow the University to enrol new PhD students who are outside of New Zealand. This will only be done where appropriate supervision can be provided at a distance, and where the student is able to access the necessary resources required to undertake their PhD studies.

Guidelines for the admission of new PhD students who are not based in New Zealand

For a PhD student who is not currently in New Zealand, the following criteria must be met:

- 1) The student has met all conditions of enrolment set out in their offer of place. Where we would normally require sight of original documents, we will accept electronic versions, to allow enrolment to proceed, and then confirm the validity of the documents when the student arrives in Wellington and formally registers on campus.
- 2) The supervision team has at least one supervisor who has depth of experience in PhD supervision and the primary supervisor is willing to work with the student at a distance.
- 3) A work plan is put in place and documented in the *International PhD students distance study due to Covid-19* form. This requires approval by the student, principal supervisor and Head of School.
- 4) The student's research can be conducted off campus for the first 12 months of registration and this claim is justified in the student's *International PhD students distance study due to Covid-19* form. While we expect that the borders will be open

well before 12 months have elapsed, we believe it best that a student be prepared to have to spend several months working off campus.

- 5) The student has an internet connection of good enough quality to support video conferencing through platforms such as Zoom, Skype or Google Hangouts, and that connection enables access to the online resources required to allow the student to do their research, including access to academic papers, library resources, and Victoria University of Wellington's student website.
- 6) The student is able to pay the enrolment fees from a distance, or, for scholarship holders, the fees can be paid by the relevant funder.
- 7) All requirements required on the *Confirmation of Provisional Registration* form (to be completed within one month of enrolment) are able to be met under remote working conditions.
- 8) For international students who do not have a visa for travel to New Zealand, the enrolment takes place on the condition that they will apply for a visa as soon as it becomes possible for them to arrange travel to New Zealand.

Note: The student must be informed of and accept the risk that they may not be awarded a visa and that this decision is out of the University's hands. If a student is declined a visa by Immigration New Zealand, then the student and the University will need to decide whether the student should move to paying international fees or whether the student's enrolment should end. If the student is not awarded a visa and their enrolment is ended as a result of this lack of award, then any fees paid will be refunded.

- 9) The student will travel to New Zealand as soon as practical after they have received their visa.

Offer of place

For students who are enrolling under these guidelines, the PhD offer of place will be modified and a letter of amendment sent out to affected students, which will incorporate the additional criteria set out at (8) and (9) above and the changes to scholarship payments set out below.

Additional considerations

Fee rate

International PhD students who commence their study overseas will be charged fees at the domestic rate (which, for the 2020 academic year, range between NZD \$7,440 and NZD \$8,666 depending on subject). The University reserves the right to change the fee rate to the higher international rate (which, for 2020, range between NZD \$28,525 and NZD \$37,539). Two of the conditions under which the university will consider doing so are: (1) If a student chooses not to travel to New Zealand as soon as reasonably possible; (2) If TEC changes its ruling on overseas students.

Full-time and half-time enrolment

International PhD students on a student visa living in New Zealand may enrol only as full-time students. International PhD students based overseas have the option of enrolling as half-time students (charged half the domestic fee) if they are not able to work full time on their research. Students are reminded that the minimum length of PhD registration is 36 months full-time equivalent (FTE). Half-time enrolment counts as 0.5 month FTE for each calendar month registered. Students registered half-time while overseas will need to change to full-time registration from the first day of the month in which they arrive in New Zealand.

Completing the PhD overseas

At present the University regulations do not allow a student to complete their PhD entirely overseas, therefore we are expecting students to travel to New Zealand as soon as it becomes possible for them to do so. The University is considering changing its regulations to allow completion overseas but students should not depend on this change, as it would require approval from several sources.

Information for those offered Wellington Doctoral Scholarships

Victoria University of Wellington has agreed that holders of Wellington Doctoral Scholarships can take up those scholarships while based overseas on the following conditions:

- 1) The University will pay fees at the domestic rate, as they would for a student based in New Zealand.
- 2) The University will not pay a student's stipend when they are overseas. Instead the University will backpay unpaid stipend when the student arrives in Wellington and formally registers on campus. This backpay will be capped at a maximum of 12 months' stipend.