

# 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 international 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. The University has developed these guidelines to allow students who are overseas to enrol.

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 a temporary exemption to its rules to allow the University to enrol new PhD students who are outside of New Zealand who are unable to travel to New Zealand owing to border restrictions but have the intention to do so when restrictions are lifted. **This will only be done where appropriate supervision can be provided at a distance, where the student is able to access the necessary resources required to undertake their PhD studies, and where the research can be conducted effectively overseas for a substantial period.**

The University has been advised by TEC to plan for the case that no students will be able to enter New Zealand until 2022. While it is possible that a small number of students will be able to enter in 2021, it is not guaranteed that any particular student will be able to do so. We therefore need to plan that every international PhD student who is overseas might need to work overseas into 2022.

These guidelines have been drawn up to allow students and supervisors to understand the constraints and challenges of enrolling international PhD students under these conditions. Students who enrol while overseas, and their supervisors, need to agree to these guidelines.

## 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 sighting 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, Head of School (or their delegate), and the Dean of the Wellington Faculty of Graduate Research.
- 4) The student's research can be conducted off campus and this claim is justified in the student's *International PhD students distance study due to COVID-19* form.
- 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. Please be aware not all scholarships cover the Student Levy (which is a separate cost in addition to the enrolment fees) and this remains the responsibility of the student. Please check conditions of your Scholarship. In particular, the Wellington Doctoral Scholarship does not cover the Student Levy.
- 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.
- 9) The student will travel to New Zealand as soon as reasonably practical after they have received their visa. (See also additional considerations under "Fee rate", below.)
- 10) The supervisor and school will make their best efforts to guide the student through the provisional to full registration process. As with students enrolled on site, the requirement is that the student will achieve full registration status before the end of 12 months of full-time registration.
- 11) Supervisors commit to being the key point of contact for both academic and pastoral care of the students. Supervisors commit to regular (at least fortnightly) meetings conducted by Zoom or similar platform. Supervisors commit to flagging any concerns as early as possible.
- 12) The student and supervisors keep a record of their meetings that documents progress and concerns. These records will be available on request to the Head

of School or their delegate, the Associate Dean (PGR), and the Dean of Graduate Research.

Assessment of applications to enrol at a distance are considered on a case-by-case basis. An application may not be approved. Notwithstanding the qualities of the individual applicant, there are certain subjects that are not appropriate for study at a distance.

### 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 practical; (2) If TEC changes its ruling on overseas students.

Students applying to study by distance are expected to financially support themselves through their course of chosen study. The University Hardship Fund is not able to provide ongoing support to students based overseas.

#### Visa Fee Requirements

To apply for a New Zealand Study Visa, there are certain fee requirements associated with your visa application. To find out more on the cost of applying for a visa, and financial evidence needed, please go to the Immigration New Zealand website.

<https://www.immigration.govt.nz/>

#### Full-time and half-time enrolment

International PhD students on a student visa living in New Zealand can only enrol as a full-time student. 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 and pay any adjusted fees from the first day of the month in which they arrive in New Zealand.

#### Completing the PhD overseas

The worst-case scenario is that the New Zealand border remains closed to students into 2022 and beyond. In this case, students may be faced with completing their PhD

entirely overseas. The *International PhD students distance study due to COVID-19* form requires students to outline a “Plan B” for this scenario.

At present, we expect that the borders will open and that students will be able to travel to New Zealand. Under circumstances where students can travel to New Zealand, the current 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 reasonably practical for them to do so.

### Support

The supervisor is the primary source of academic and pastoral support. Supervisors, research groups and schools are encouraged to develop ways to incorporate overseas students into the academic life of the University and to work to form peer-to-peer support where possible.

Students enrolled overseas have access to a range of support services provided by the University. More information can be found here:

<https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/students/support>

### 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. NB: The Wellington Doctoral Scholarships does not cover Student Levies.
- 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 pro-rata.