



## Visa Processing Improvements (Recommendations 3, 5, 6, 18, 38 to 40)

The following information provides further detail on the planned Knight Review changes to the student visa program.

### Frequently asked questions

#### How is the government intending to improve visa processing?

A number of the Knight Review changes that have been implemented will help simplify and improve the student visa application process and the processing of student visas. These changes include:

- streamlined visa processing for applicants of eligible universities
- flexibility for the department's case officers to grant student visas in advance of four months before the start of the course.
- reductions in financial requirements for Assessment Level 3 and Assessment Level 4 student visa applicants
- stopping the Pre-Visa Assessment (PVA) policy.

In addition, the department will regularly review and update the living cost component of the student visa financial requirements.

### Financial requirements reduction

#### How have the financial requirements for higher risk Assessment Level 3 and Assessment Level 4 student visa applicants changed?

From 5 November 2011, the financial requirements for Assessment Level 3 and Assessment Level 4 student visa applicants were reduced in the following way:

- evidence of funds for Assessment Level 4 applicants reduced from 36 to 24 months and their savings history reduced from six to three months
- evidence of funds for Assessment Level 3 applicants reduced from 24 to 18 months.

This reduces the financial requirements by up to approximately AUD36 000 for an Assessment Level 4 applicant and up to approximately AUD18 000 for an Assessment Level 3 applicant.

#### Where can I find more information on the financial requirements reduction?

More information is available.

**See:** [www.immi.gov.au/students/pdf/2011-vet-schools-non-award.pdf](http://www.immi.gov.au/students/pdf/2011-vet-schools-non-award.pdf)

## Streamlined processing for applicants of eligible universities

### What is the streamlined processing?

From 24 March 2012, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (the department) will assess student visa applicants with a Confirmation of Enrolment (CoE) from a participating university as though they are lower migration risk (similar to the current Assessment Level 1), regardless of country of origin.

### Where can I get more information on streamlined processing?

More information is available.

**See:** [www.immi.gov.au/students/pdf/2011-university-sector-streamlined-processing.pdf](http://www.immi.gov.au/students/pdf/2011-university-sector-streamlined-processing.pdf)

## Flexibility to grant student visas in advance of four months before the start of the course

### Why would student visas be granted outside Australia four months in advance of the start of the course?

This change will help to provide more flexible visa arrangements for international students who need to arrive in Australia earlier.

The department still has to be satisfied that these applicants satisfy the legislated criteria for the grant of the visa, including adequate arrangements for health insurance for the length of the visa.

### Which student visa applicants are be affected by this change?

This change applies to all student visas subclasses from 24 March 2012.

### What happens to unfinalised student visa applications that were lodged before 24 March 2012?

These applications will be assessed under the new arrangements, that is, they will be able to be granted in advance of four months before the start of the course.

### Are student visa applicants required to provide any further documentation in support of their applications?

The department needs to be satisfied that the applicant has made adequate arrangements for health insurance cover for the duration of their intended stay in Australia as the holder of a student visa. The department may also request further information in relation to requests for an early grant of the student visa.

### Does this mean that student visa holders can start working earlier?

No. As is the case currently, students or their dependents are not allowed to work until they have started their course.

## Annual update of the cost of living amount

### Why would the cost of living amount for student visa holders be reviewed regularly?

A regular review of the cost of living amount would help the department set reasonable financial requirements relating to the funds students need to have to contribute towards their living costs.

### How would the department review the cost of living amount?

In order to better reflect the true cost of living for overseas students, the department would review annually the cost of living amount and where necessary adjust the figure in reference with the Consumer Price Index or a similar measure of cost of living in Australia.

### When is the next review of the cost of living amount?

The department will be reviewing the cost of living amount in mid 2012.

### Where do I go for more information?

More information will be provided on the department's website as it becomes available.

**See:** [www.immi.gov.au/students/knight/](http://www.immi.gov.au/students/knight/)

## Pre-Visa Assessment (PVA)

### What is PVA?

PVA was a student visa processing policy where prospective international students in Assessment Level 3 and Assessment Level 4 groups were required to apply for a student visa on the basis of a letter of offer of a place in a course. The student visa applications were initially assessed by the department and, if the PVA assessment was successful, students were issued a PVA letter to present to their education provider in order to obtain a Confirmation of Enrolment (CoE).

The intention of PVA was to assist education providers by providing an initial assessment of a student visa application before a CoE could be issued. This ensured that some higher-risk students who were refused student visas did not have to apply for a refund of their enrolment fees from education providers.

However, this policy resulted in lengthy visa processing times. Also, an application that was progressed through the PVA process was inappropriately considered by some prospective students as a guarantee of a visa grant, whereas in fact applications were able to be refused post-PVA assessment.

### What does the cessation of PVA arrangements mean?

From 5 November 2011, Assessment Level 3 and Assessment Level 4 student visa applications made outside Australia need to include CoEs as part of their student visa applications. Education providers will no longer require a PVA letter before issuing CoEs to these students.

This change is intended to reduce the time it takes to process a student visa.

## Why cease the PVA arrangements?

Ceasing PVA arrangements reduces double handling of student visa applications and should result in quicker visa processing times, provided that applications are complete when lodged.

## How will the department process student visa applications that were lodged prior to 5 November 2011 that have not been given a PVA?

The cessation of PVA arrangements, and therefore the issuing of PVA letters, only applies to student visa applications lodged on or after 5 November 2011. Student visa applications made outside Australia and lodged prior to 5 November 2011, will be processed under the previous PVA arrangements. This means students eligible for PVA will be issued a PVA letter once their application's initial assessment is finalised.

CoEs provided to the department with student visa applications that were lodged prior to 5 November 2011 and prior to the applicant receiving a PVA letter will be processed without issuing a PVA letter.

## What happens to student visa applicants who have paid their enrolment fees and are then refused their student visa?

These applicants need to seek a refund from the education provider.