Policy Statement

Domestic status for new international PhD students from 1 January 2006

Introduction

In the 2005 Budget the government announced that new international PhD students enrolling after 1 January 2006, where they are supervised by leading researchers in New Zealand universities, will pay the same fees as New Zealand domestic students for their PhD studies.

All New Zealand universities have agreed to abide by the policy and to implement it as set out in this statement.

The government has agreed that international PhD students who have enrolled or will enrol, after the date of the announcement on 19 April 2005, will also be covered by the domestic student exemption by being permitted to be considered as domestic students in New Zealand universities from 1 January 2006.

Definition of “leading researcher”

It is the prerogative of each university to determine precisely what "a leading researcher in the student's field of study" means. The New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee (NZVCC) expects that this will reflect an assessment by the university that the researcher given supervisory responsibility for any new international PhD student enrolling after 1 January 2006 will be of very good national, or international standard, and will have a research record appropriate to the student's field of study.

It is the responsibility of each university to determine appropriate criteria for assessing the status of their researchers, including those who are new and emerging of high potential, and those who have been recently appointed.

Admission standards and supervision

Each of New Zealand's eight universities have comparable but non-identical regulations pertaining to the admission of students, both domestic and international, to their PhD programmes. In general, each university requires a New Zealander to have a first or second-class Honours or Masters degree.

For international students, universities will assess their undergraduate capabilities by a variety of means, all of which involve a stringent approval process through faculty admissions offices, departmental supervisory panels, approval from the Head of School and/or approval from postgraduate or doctoral research advisory committees.

Those international students for whom English is a second language must also present the results of an IELTS or TOEFL test. The minimum score required varies a little from university to university and, to a lesser extent, on the subject area in which the PhD qualification is being sought, but appropriate literacy abilities are a necessary prerequisite for admission to a postgraduate degree in a New Zealand university.
University Vice-Chancellors have assured the Government that these standards of admission for international PhD students will be maintained once the new policy is introduced and that once admitted, the appropriate levels of supervision and support will be provided to the students. Every endeavour will be made to ensure a successful completion of the course.

Monitoring

A periodic monitoring report on the implementation of the scheme at each participating university will be undertaken by the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit (NZUAAU) and reported to the Ministry of Education and NZVCC.

Implementation

The Minister of Education will enact the policy, under section 159(1) of the Education Act, through a notice in the New Zealand Gazette specifying a new category of students as exempt from treatment as foreign students. Universities will then classify these students, through the Single Data Return reporting process, as a separate category of domestic status PhD students to generate domestic levels of student component funding through the tertiary funding system.

Related policies

The dependent children of all international PhD students will be classified as domestic students in New Zealand state schools from 1 January 2006. The Minister of Education will enact this policy, under section 2(e) of the Education Act, through a notice in the New Zealand Gazette specifying a new description of persons to be treated as if they are not foreign students.

The partners of all international postgraduate students are able to apply for an open work permit valid for the duration of the student’s course of study. This policy change came into force from 4 July 2005.

Signed

Hon Trevor Mallard
Minister of Education

Professor Stuart McCutcheon
Chair of the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors’ Committee