



NEW ZEALAND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION

MEDIA RELEASE

Left out of the support provided to the team of 5 million.

Have international students been forgotten once again?

Closure of the National International Student Hardship Fund

Closure of Emergency Benefits for temporary visa holders

No working hour flexibility for international students in most essential services

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Amidst the most recent COVID-19 lockdown, it has become evident that international students have yet again, been neglected by the Government as well as education providers. NZISA is extremely disappointed at the Government's and education providers' inaction and the lack of support for international students during this time of crisis. NZISA has received concerning reports from international students facing significant hardship during this prolonged lockdown, extenuated by the lack of employment opportunities available for foreign nationals, as well as the limited availability of culturally-responsive mental health support. The President of the

University of Canterbury Students' Association shared "International students are facing an exceptionally difficult time right now – many are isolated and away from their families". We pay extensive international student fees, support local economies, and contribute to the New Zealand job market. At the same time we are cut off from our families who are also struggling abroad. The closure of the National International Student Hardship Fund (which NZISA advocated for, and granted last year), has also been disappointing, especially given that most support programs for domestic students have been renewed. This disparity between the support given to international students and domestic students continues to drive a wedge between our communities. It goes to show that international students aren't a valued community in New Zealand and it shows a complete disregard for the immense contributions international students make to the country. We implore the Government to reconsider and explore options on re-opening up the National International Student Hardship Fund.

The Ministry of Social Development (MSD) has decided to close Emergency Benefits for temporary visa holders after the 31st of August 2021. It was reasoned to NZISA that the Emergency Benefits were only available to temporary visa holders as a "...short-term solution...while temporary visa holders arranged to return to their home countries or supported themselves through employment". However, the wide reaching effects of COVID-19 are far from short-term and most of our members deem it unrealistic to abandon their studies and return to their home country. As explained by an international student representative from the University of Otago, "the MSD needs to face the reality that temporary visa holders are struggling in other avenues of their life such as grocery shopping, rent, utilities which make up most of the reason why students apply for the hardship funds available in New Zealand." While seeking employment would ease the financial burdens, it has been ever more challenging in the middle of a nationwide lockdown with numerous work restrictions prescribed by Immigration New Zealand on our student visas. While we fully support the Government's decision to move New Zealand into lockdown, we cannot help but feel left out of the support provided to the team of 5 million. We urge the Government to extend the Emergency Benefits for Temporary Visa holders beyond 31st of August to cover the full Alert Level 3 and 4 period.

It is also very concerning to hear from our members that employers are discriminating against international students who work or want to work in essential services due to the 20 hours/week limit on the student visas. For example, several international students eager to support New

Zealand's pandemic response efforts applied to work in COVID-19 vaccination and COVID-19 response support teams, but were ignored by their local DHBs in favour of candidates without work restrictions. We believe that in the times of a national crisis, everyone in essential services should be treated equally regardless of their citizenship status. NZISA is therefore proposing for the Government to provide flexible visa conditions on working hours for all international students in essential services, as done for international students working in supermarkets. Immigration New Zealand could model the Canadian government's approach in removing the 20-hour cap for all international students working in priority sectors over lockdown. This policy change has enabled many international students to support themselves through the lockdown.

We appreciate the gravity and uncertainty of this COVID-19 lockdown, however international students' welfare must not be overlooked. There should be a focus on providing sufficient support for international students facing hardship in New Zealand during these uncertain times. NZISA's members wholeheartedly support NZISA's proposals to the government. "We stand with our international students at this time, and want to see them supported through this pandemic and successfully completing their studies in New Zealand". The international student community cares about New Zealand and we want to be given an equal opportunity to support the country's pandemic responses.

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