

s.21(1)(a)

s.21(1)(b)



Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés et Citoyenneté Canada

Deputy Minister

Sous-ministre

Ottawa K1A 1L1

F-1151178

PROTECTED A

MEMORANDUM TO THE MINISTER

TWO-STAGE PROCESSING OF STUDY PERMIT APPLICATIONS

FOR DECISION

SUMMARY

- The purpose of this memorandum is to provide you with information on the two-stage study permit process that ended on September 15, 2020, and to seek your decision on the way forward for continued study permit processing.
- The Department continues to prioritize processing of study permit applications for students destined to designated learning institutions (DLI) with an approved COVID-19 readiness plan so that students may travel to Canada and begin their studies.
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BACKGROUND:

- Starting in March 2020, international students were subject to travel restrictions and could only travel to Canada under a previous Order in Council (OIC) if their study permit was approved prior to March 18, 2020. A temporary two-stage process was implemented in summer 2020, as a facilitative measure to support the fall 2020 enrollment for international students, due to the uncertainty surrounding the border re-opening to international travel, the temporary closure of VACs, and the uncertainty of obtaining required documentation in host countries. The two-stage process ended on September 15, 2020 to coincide with students beginning studies in the fall.
- The two-stage eligibility assessment process provided a degree of reassurance to students who could not provide all of the required documents or information needed to finalize the assessment of their study permit application, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The process provided students with a notification once they had passed the preliminary eligibility assessment (stage 1) and once students submitted their biometrics and missing information, officers would finalize the application (stage 2).

s.21(1)(a)

s.21(1)(b)

- While these applicants benefited from facilitative measures which ensured time spent studying virtually from their home country would count towards an eventual Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP), some applicants who received stage 1 approval were concerned that their study permit applications would be refused once they provided all supporting information and a final decision was made on their file, thus preventing them from eventually obtaining a PGWP.
- On October 20, 2020, the travel restriction exemptions were significantly expanded under the OIC amendment, allowing international students to travel to Canada to study at a Designated Learning Institution (DLI) which had a COVID-19 readiness plan in place approved by their province or territory (P/T). The Department is informed by P/Ts when a DLI has an approved COVID-19 readiness plan and updates and publishes a list of approved DLIs bi-weekly. Study permit applications for students destined to a DLI on the approved list are currently being prioritized for finalization.
- In order to ensure that only those students destined to a DLI on the approved list would travel to Canada, the Department de-activated travel documents for students whose DLI was not on the approved list, and then re-activated travel documents for those whose DLI was added to the list as part of a bi-weekly update.

CURRENT STATUS:

- Out of the current inventory of approximately 123k applications, the Department is currently prioritizing the processing and finalization of study permit applications for students destined to a DLI on the approved list, as these students are exempt from travel restrictions and can travel to Canada immediately.
- Applications for students attending a DLI without an approved COVID-19 readiness plan will not be finalized, as they are not able to travel. However, as P/Ts notify IRCC that additional DLIs can be added to the approved list, the Department will then work towards finalizing the applications for students destined to those institutions.
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- As of December 1, 2020, 709 of the 1,277 (56%) active DLIs are on the approved DLI list. The number of approved DLIs continues to grow. Nine provinces are accepting international students in the K-12 sector and have issued blanket approvals for these students. The

Department continues to receive updates from P/Ts to add DLIs to the approved DLI list and updates the list on a bi-weekly basis. When these DLIs are approved, study permits for students destined for these institutions are prioritized for processing.

- Issues that previously prevented clients from submitting complete applications, such as the availability of biometrics collection, continue to be resolved in key markets.

CONSIDERATIONS:

- The impact on students of not extending the two-stage eligibility assessment process would be low. Applicants whose DLI is not on the approved list continue to benefit from facilitation measures that provide eventual access to the PGWP program while they study virtually from abroad. These measures were expanded in October to allow some clients who complete their entire program via distance learning to be eligible for a PGWP, with measures being extended to April 30, 2021.
- The re-opening of VACs in key markets such as India will continue to free up significant numbers of study permits for finalization. Given that there are up to 1,900 appointments available daily at VACs in the India network, more of the India caseload will be available for assessment and finalization through the month of December. Operational resources should therefore focus on processing that cohort.
- As of December 15, 2020, there are nearly 34k study permit applications (27% of the total study permit application inventory) destined to a DLI for the winter semester that cannot be finalized, as they are pending biometrics. When considering sub-activities like medicals or security, the number of applications that cannot be finalized may grow.

OPTIONS:

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Option 2: Complete two-stage processing on the approximately 34k applications (or 27% of the total inventory) who are destined to a post-secondary DLI for the winter semester and whose application cannot be finalized as they are pending biometrics, medicals, or security.

- Processing resources in the Networks are currently fully engaged with delivering priority lines of business. Thus, resources for two-stage processing, which is a heavy-touch process, would have to be redirected from the processing of students who are ready to travel to an approved DLI in January.
- This will mean that the department will be unable to finalize an approximately equivalent number of applications for those who have already submitted complete applications and are ready to travel to an approved DLI in January.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- The de-activation/re-activation initiative associated with study permit applications has required a significant level of resources. From October 6 to November 23, 2020, a total of 540 full-time employees were required to complete 161,122 de-activations and 10,476 re-activations. The estimated cost of the de-activation/re-activation initiative is \$1,143,520 (including FTE and overtime costs).
- By continuing to finalize and prioritize processing complete applications (and not extending the two-stage eligibility assessment), the Department can maintain its efforts on processing study permits for students who are able to travel to an approved DLI.
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COMMUNICATIONS IMPLICATIONS:

- Earlier during the pandemic, two-stage processing was received positively, giving study permit applicants a sense of progress with their applications even though travel restrictions remained in place. Since the change in travel restrictions in October, few inquiries have been made through the media or social media regarding two-stage processing. With an increase in applications being finalized and students being able to travel to Canada, there has been a decrease in social media inquiries from students as of November.

s.21(1)(a)

s.21(1)(b)

-5-

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- No further communications from the Department regarding two-stage processing is needed at this time. If a decision is taken in the future to change how study permits are being processed, the Department would consider options in communicating about it.

NEXT STEPS:

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Caroline Xavier
Associate Deputy Minister

e-approved by DM Tapley on 2020-12-16

Catrina Tapley
Deputy Minister

Option 2: two-stage processing for some cases

I do not concur



The Hon. Marco E.L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P.