

Education New Zealand
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10 June 2024

s9(2)(a)

Dear s9(2)(a)

Official Information Act 1982 request – Manaaki New Zealand Scholarship Programme bond deferral policy queries

I refer to your Official Information Act request (OIA), received by Education New Zealand (ENZ), on 15 May 2024.

- 1. Has any recipient of an MFAT scholarship, who has requested that they not be required to refund the scholarship, been granted that request? If so, what were their circumstances, including why was their request granted?*
- 2. Has any recipient of an MFAT scholarship, returned to their home country at the end of their study, but a member of their family who accompanied them has been allowed to either remain in or return to New Zealand before the end of the 2-year “exclusion” period, and the recipient has not been required to refund the scholarship? If so, what were their circumstances, including why was their request granted?*

We understand you also submitted the same request to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) on 16 May 2024, which you clarified on 24 May 2024 to be for:

- 1. Has any recipient of an MFAT scholarship awarded in the period 7 September 2022 to present date, who has requested that they not be required to refund the scholarship, been granted that request? If so, what were their circumstances, including why was their request granted?*
- 2. Has any recipient of an MFAT scholarship awarded in the period 7 September 2022 to present date, returned to their home country at the end of their study, but a member of their family who accompanied them has been allowed to either remain in or return to New Zealand before the end of the 2-year “exclusion” period, and the recipient has not been required to refund the scholarship? If so, what were their circumstances, including why was their request granted?*

ENZ will use the same interpretation as MFAT for the purposes of responding to this request, including interpreting ‘MFAT scholarship’ to be regarding the Manaaki New Zealand Scholarship Programme (MNZSP).

On 1 November 2022, the administration of the MNZSP transferred to ENZ from MFAT. Accordingly, in responding to this request, ENZ will provide data from 1 November 2022 – present.

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We will respond to each of your questions in turn.

1. *Has any recipient of an MFAT scholarship awarded in the period 1 November 2022 – present, who has requested that they not be required to refund the scholarship, been granted that request? If so, what were their circumstances, including why was their request granted?*

There have been 29 bond (period) deferrals approved since ENZ started administering the scholarship from 1 November 2022-present. No scholar has been granted a bond dismissal. We will not provide further detail on their personal circumstances, under section 9(2)(a) of the OIA, privacy of natural persons.

2. *Has any recipient of an MFAT scholarship, returned to their home country at the end of their study, but a member of their family who accompanied them has been allowed to either remain in or return to New Zealand before the end of the 2-year “exclusion” period, and the recipient has not been required to refund the scholarship? If so, what were their circumstances, including why was their request granted?*

Since 1 November 2022, we have permitted two dependent family members to remain in New Zealand at the end of the scholarship and released the family members from their bond obligations, noting that the scholar who undertook the scholarship is still expected to honour their bond commitments. We will not provide further detail on their personal circumstances, under section 9(2)(a) of the OIA, privacy of natural persons.

Please note the following in regard to the above questions.

When we receive a request for a bond deferral, the request is assessed on a case-by-case basis taking the following non-exhaustive list of factors into consideration:

- *is the situation sudden, exceptional and outside the parameters of prescribed policy;*
- *is the situation outside of the scholar’s control;*
- *will returning as scheduled put the scholar in danger (disaster or civil unrest); and*
- *is the situation likely to change within the next 12 months?*

We understand that MFAT proactively released to you a copy of the MNZSP bond deferral policy for your information. We hope this was useful to you.

Information about how to make a complaint is available at <https://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz/> or freephone 0800 802 602.

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Please note that it is our policy to proactively release our responses to official information requests, where possible. Please contact us if you have any questions about this.

Yours sincerely

Di Solomon
General Manager
Government Relations