

Association of Consulting
and Engineering

Level 11
79 Boulcott Street
Wellington 6011

PO Box 10247
Wellington 6140
acenz.org.nz



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Hon Michael Wood
Minister of Immigration

By email only: m.wood@ministers.govt.nz

Kia ora Minister Wood

I am writing to you in my role as Chief Executive of the Association of Consulting and Engineering New Zealand (ACE New Zealand).

ACE New Zealand is a firm-based membership organisation representing over 250 professional services firms working across the built and natural environment – from large global firms to employee-owned SMEs. Our members employ approximately 14,000 staff, including engineers, project managers, planners, scientists, architects, surveyors and other technical disciplines. Our teams work together to advise, design and deliver on critical technology, policies and practices, and construction and infrastructure across the built and natural environment in Aotearoa.

Our members will be instrumental in helping with the recovery and rebuild in the wake of the recent weather events and devastation caused by Cyclone Gabrielle.

Current issues

As you are aware, our sector is already facing a significant skills shortage. The most recent survey carried out by ACE New Zealand, Civil Contractors New Zealand, Te Kāhui Whaihanga New Zealand Institute of Architects, and Registered Master Builders Association identified more than 3000 vacancies across 135 firms.

The immigration reset last year and border openings have provided pathways for the skills we need to recruit internationally to supplement our efforts to grow domestic talent, but our members still experience challenges with visa processing, and increased attrition due to delayed OEs which means vacancy numbers are not shifting downwards. Our shortages remain, and will be exacerbated as the country moves into the recovery and rebuild phase of the response to the damage caused by the recent weather events.

While we welcome the introduction of the six-month Recovery Visa, it won't be enough to enable our members to respond efficiently and effectively to recovery rebuild efforts. The recovery and rebuild will take years and we will struggle to attract the professional services talent we need unless we can provide certainty of pathways to residency from the outset and make immigrating to New Zealand as easy as possible. While we note the Recovery Visa allows for Visa holders to apply

for other visa types once onshore, it does not provide any certainty to people considering relocating themselves and their families to New Zealand for both the immediate and long term recovery.

International recruiters HainesAttract, who we have been partnering with on an international recruitment campaign for engineering and consulting (nextstopnz.com), have processed over 2000 applications through the campaign since September. They are telling us we are losing candidates to Australia who have a much more efficient and simpler application process. They are also hearing that, given the significance of relocating to New Zealand, applicants want assurance that when they arrive they will be able to stay, and their investment moving across the world will be sustained.

What we need

We're asking the government to look again at the immigration processes and settings for opportunities to provide that certainty to the professionals we need to support the recovery and rebuild, for the immediate and long term. We're also looking for quicker processing times from Immigration NZ. Ideally, what we would like to see is for the criteria applied to the Recovery Visa extended to engineering and consulting professionals entering on the Green List in circumstances where the work being offered is directly related to the recovery. In particular,

- No requirement for the employer to be accredited
- No police check or medical requirement for the candidate
- A faster Immigration New Zealand decision timeframe on visa applications
- The refunding of the application fee to successful applicant.

Conclusion

Unless we can provide certainty to residency we will not attract the skilled workers we need to support the recovery and rebuild over the coming months and years.

ACE New Zealand is asking the Government to direct Immigration New Zealand to review the immigration settings to make it easier for our members to attract the talent and allow for a smooth and efficient immigration processes.

We appreciate your consideration and would welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you further.

Nga mihi,



Helen Davidson

Chief Executive