



17 February 2025

Tēnā koe

**Official Information Act Request,**

Thank you for your email of 17 January 2025, requesting information about the benefit application processes, including information sharing and residency requirements.

I have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). Please find my decision on each part of your request set out separately below.

- 1. A detailed explanation of the current processes and verification procedures the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) follows to assess and confirm an individual's eligibility for welfare benefits.*

Information on the Ministry of Social Development's (the Ministry's) eligibility requirements for all main benefits are publicly available through the following links:

- [www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/main-benefits/index.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/main-benefits/index.html)
- [www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/core-policy/requests-for-financial-assistance/application-for-benefit/guidelines-application-for-benefit.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/core-policy/requests-for-financial-assistance/application-for-benefit/guidelines-application-for-benefit.html)
- [www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/core-policy/requests-for-financial-assistance/index.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/core-policy/requests-for-financial-assistance/index.html).

The Ministry has also developed the following online tool which enables people to check their eligibility for all types of Ministry assistance, which is available here: [check.msd.govt.nz/](http://check.msd.govt.nz/).

- 2. Information on how MSD verifies the residency or visa status of applicants to ensure they meet eligibility criteria.*

The Ministry accepts various forms of evidence from applicants who are applying for a main benefit. These can be found through the first link provided above.

Evidence types can be found under the 'Qualifications' sub-heading for each main benefit.

In certain situations, some applicants are able to provide written consent to the Ministry to verify their visa and residency status directly with Immigration New Zealand.

- 3. A description of any systems or processes MSD has in place to share or cross-check information with other government agencies (e.g., Immigration New Zealand or Inland Revenue) as part of verifying benefit eligibility.*

The Ministry does not have a specific Information Sharing Agreement as part of the initial process of verifying benefit eligibility when an application is first submitted. However, the Ministry does have various other Information Sharing Agreements with other government agencies once a benefit has been granted to verify a client's ongoing entitlement. Information on these agreements can be found through the following links:

- [www.workandincome.govt.nz/about-work-and-income/privacy-notice/list-of-agencies-we-share-information-with.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/about-work-and-income/privacy-notice/list-of-agencies-we-share-information-with.html)
- [www.privacy.org.nz/privacy-act-2020/information-sharing](http://www.privacy.org.nz/privacy-act-2020/information-sharing).

I will note that, as stated above in the response to question 2, the Ministry is able to gain written consent from an applicant to verify residency and visa status directly with Immigration New Zealand. I have attached a internal Ministry intranet page to this response which outlines this process in further detail.

- *Immigration Status – less than two years residence.*

- 4. Clarification on whether these verification processes have changed over time, specifically comparing current procedures with those used historically (from 2015 to the present).*

The Ministry's process for verifying residency and visa status when an application for a main benefit is received has not changed since 2015, except for during COVID-19. The temporary changes to confirming visa and residency status during this time were related to evidence the Ministry could accept. The Ministry was able to accept either a scanned copy or photograph of a document outlined in the links provided earlier in the response (instead of an original document) or verbal confirmation from an applicant of visa and residency status.

- 5. Details on any safeguards MSD has to prevent ineligible individuals from receiving benefits.*

The Ministry is accountable for maintaining the integrity of its services and managing associated risks. This includes ensuring that the right individuals receive appropriate support from the correct date.

Within the Ministry, the responsibility for verifying these elements is divided between authentication and quality processes. As a safeguard, manual authentication is required for benefit and pension grants for clients who were not born in New Zealand. Authentication for this purpose provides a check by a second person to confirm the required documentation and evidence has been provided to then approve an action or release a payment.

Aside from requiring all applicants to meet all the qualifications for main benefits outlined through the links provided above, the Ministry also has information on its fraud policy - further details are publicly available through the following links:

- [www.workandincome.govt.nz/about-work-and-income/contact-us/report-suspected-fraud/index.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/about-work-and-income/contact-us/report-suspected-fraud/index.html)
- [www.workandincome.govt.nz/on-a-benefit/your-rights-and-responsibilities/fraud-and-investigations.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/on-a-benefit/your-rights-and-responsibilities/fraud-and-investigations.html).

I will be publishing this decision letter, with your personal details deleted, on the Ministry's website in due course.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact [OIA\\_Requests@msd.govt.nz](mailto:OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz).

If you are not satisfied with my decision on your request, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi nui

pp. 

Anna Graham  
**General Manager**  
**Ministerial and Executive Services**

## Immigration status - less than 2 years residence

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This page provides information for case managers when an application for a main benefit is received from a client who is born overseas and has resided in New Zealand for less than two years.

### Overview

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If a client has resided in New Zealand for less than two years and applies for a main benefit, you must confirm the client's immigration status by requesting supporting documentation in addition to their passport (i.e. Immigration Status Check form, letter from Immigration New Zealand on official letterhead).

In order to contact Immigration New Zealand (INZ) to have an Immigration Status Check completed, **you must first obtain written permission from the client**. Case managers need to ask the client to complete a personal details form giving permission and then record in CMS notes that the permission has been received.

The purpose of the Immigration Status Check is to:

confirm the clients immigration status

alert INZ of migrants applying for benefit (including those who may have been sponsored)

This will allow INZ to check the client's immigration conditions when approved residency in New Zealand was granted and for them to take any appropriate action where necessary.

### Client does not give permission

If the client does not give permission they must then provide us with the equivalent information that we would otherwise have received from Immigration New Zealand (INZ). This information must be provided on official INZ letterhead.

If the client does not give permission and cannot provide verified immigration status information themselves, then the case manager should decide whether there is enough information to make a decision. The decision made, and the reasons why that decision was reached need to be added into a CMS note. If a case manager requires help with making this decision they should discuss the case with Helpline.

[Administration process for Immigration Status checks \[http://doogole/resources/helping-clients/procedures-manuals/work-and-income/core-procedures/immigration/administration-process-for-immigration-status-check.html\]](http://doogole/resources/helping-clients/procedures-manuals/work-and-income/core-procedures/immigration/administration-process-for-immigration-status-check.html)

[Immigration Status Check - flow chart \(Image 75.84KB\) \[http://doogole/images/work-and-income/procedures-policies/immigration-status-check-flow-chart.jpg\]](http://doogole/images/work-and-income/procedures-policies/immigration-status-check-flow-chart.jpg)

[Sponsored clients \[http://doogole/resources/helping-clients/procedures-manuals/work-and-income/core-procedures/sponsored-clients.html\]](http://doogole/resources/helping-clients/procedures-manuals/work-and-income/core-procedures/sponsored-clients.html)

[Processing standards - applications \[http://doogole/resources/helping-clients/processing-standards/applications-01.html\]](http://doogole/resources/helping-clients/processing-standards/applications-01.html)