

Dear officer:

Thank you for taking the time with this submission. I am writing to point out some serious issues that lots of international Ph.D. students are currently facing.

A large number of Ph.D. students are waiting hopelessly for their student visas (subclass 500) to be processed. The waiting time is much longer than the average time indicated on the website, and it happens to most of them, rather than just a few cases. Please see some statistics first.

### 1. Is the data true and reliable?

The figure below is the visa processing time shown on the DHA website, it says that 90% of visas are finalized in 9 months and student visas application from applicants outside Australia are being prioritized.

Visa	Stream	25% Of Visas Finalised	50% Of Visas Finalised	75% Of Visas Finalised	90% Of Visas Finalised	Additional Information
<a href="#">500 - Student visa (subclass 500)</a>	Postgraduate Research Sector	22 Days	38 Days	3 Months	9 Months	Student visa applications from applicants outside Australia are being prioritised and processing times for this cohort are faster. In August 2022, 75 per cent of applications where the client is outside Australia were finalised in 78 days.

But the real case is that numerous students have been waiting for their visas for more than 1 year, some even **more than 2 years, and 3 years**. It is not appropriate to say that they are all in the 10%.

Please see the following two figures, these data are provided by DHA. The upper one is the number of applications lodged through the Internet by Chinese students outside Australia (postgraduate research sector), and the lower one is the number of visas granted.

2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23 to 30 September 2022
844	992	1,072	1,106	1,122	977	1,143	357
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75	211	160	168	90	69	141	52
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919	1,203	1,232	1,274	1,212	1,046	1,284	409

  

2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23 to 30 September 2022
801	1,018	934	862	730	1,040	595	249
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72	201	144	148	93	80	76	55
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873	1,219	1,078	1,010	823	1,120	671	304

It is clearly shown in the figure that in 2019, the grant percentage is 67%, it might be true that some of the visa processing might be delayed until 2020. But in 2021, the grant percentage is **52%**, and till September 2022, it is still very low, if we plus the number in 2021 and 2022 to eliminate the excuse of those visa delays (as indicated by DHA that 90% are in 9 months), the grant percentage is **36%**, **far lower than** what is claimed by DHA that more than 98% of the Chinese students' visas are granted.

### 2. They have been waiting for so long!

Till now, at least **240** Chinese Ph.D. students are waiting hopelessly for their visas to be processed, and to my knowledge, some Iranian, Indian, and Nepal students are facing the same issue. They are losing their scholarship due to a long time waiting for their visas. It is hard to understand why the Australian government and universities are providing funding for outstanding international students to support their research in Australia, but DHA is then forbidding (not entirely forbidding, but very close to that) them from entering Australia, it is just a contradiction. Some of the students moved on and found other positions in other places, making contributions to other countries. However, most of the students put their

lives on hold and receive nothing but anxiety and career disruption.

According to the data, the majority of students whose visas are being delayed are engineering students, especially in computer science, electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, and civil engineering. Engineering students are suffering from endless waiting for their visas, here what I meant by endless is not only for just 1 year, so many students lodged in **2019** and got no notifications since then. They had to ask their universities to defer the start date again and again, but their scholarship has an expired date, and the school may not let them defer anymore, leading to them withdrawing their visa application. However, when it comes to non-engineering Ph.D. students, such as social science and business, they can usually get their visas within one or several months. And the visa processing time is just so **random**, some students are waiting since 2019, and some who withdrew their applications and submitted them again received their visas in just a few days, this happened many times at the beginning of this year.

### **3. No update and no useful reply!**

The reason is that engineering students have to go through a complicated security check and interior check compared to students from other backgrounds. This situation has gone worse since the critical technology regulation (8208) was implemented on 1 July 2022. Many engineering students are marked with **1221bug** (1221bug refers to the situation that students already uploaded Form 1221 but the system asked them to upload again and they received no email notifications from visa officers), no students who have been marked 1221 bug this year have been issued visas. **NONE OF THEM!** And the most frustrating part is when they try to make an inquiry about their visa status through emails/phones/website inquiry forms, what they receive are just some **ambiguous replies** asking them to wait without any useful information or just no reply. What shows on the immiaccount page is always received/further assessment and a yellow flag (1221 bug indicates action required). They can do nothing but wait, listen to the same useless answers to their visa status, and give up.

In this seesaw battle, DHA only needs to prolong the visa processing and wait until all engineering students withdraw their applications, they still have very nice visa grant statistics, because they do not count these figures! And for the visa grant time, it is so tricky that what DHA published is the time that those who have been granted need, what about those who have been waiting for 3 years? DHA behaves the same way since 2019, not affected by complaints from students, universities, and news from the media. Whether applications from engineering students are being processed or not just thrown away is really doubtful.

### **4. Their voice.**

It is understandable that DHA is facing numerous cases every day, but should they ensure the justice of visa processing? And please give visa applicants some useful updates and replies to increase the transparency of visa processing. Ph.D. students chose Australia to continue their research career because they are willing to make contributions to the Australian academic area, many of them are spending the best few years of their life waiting for their visas, why do they have to suffer from this? **Please do not betray their trust and their effort!**

Thank you again for spending time reading this submission.

Yours Sincerely,  
Elika