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Tēnā koe Mohamed

### OIA request 21/22 0076 Request for information on citizenship processing timeframes

Thank you for your Official Information Act (Act) request received by the Department of Internal Affairs (Department) on 27 July 2021.

You requested –

- 1. Number of processed applications in 2019/2020/2021 first half*
- 2. Numbers of case officers allocated in each year and if there have been a reduction in the case officers numbers*
- 3. reasons for these delays beyond 8 weeks of lockdown in NZ with as the processing time has increased far beyond 8 weeks of delays.*
- 4. What is the DIA plan to resolve these delays and*
- 5. by when this plan should be deployed?*
- 6. what is the targeted processing time after deploying this plan?*

As advised in our interim response of 24 August 2021, pursuant to section 15(1)(b) of the Act, the Department gave notice of its decision to provide you with the information you sought. However, as we were still working to prepare the Information for release, we advised we would provide it as soon as practicable.

I can now provide the following information in response to your request.

Please find below a table showing the number of citizenship by grant applications processed and the average number of citizenship by grant trained full time employees (FTE) for 2019, 2020 and the first half of 2021.

Year	Number of grant applications processed	Average number of citizenship by grant trained FTE
2019	32,991	41.7
2020	21,422	44.0
First half of 2021	8,784	46.8

### ***Caveats on data***

- The accuracy of this data is subject to human error. Therefore, although it has been collated to the best of our ability, it may have a small variance to any alternative publications.
- When we refer to the number of applications having been processed, this is when the Minister or delegated official has made a decision on whether or not to approve the grant of citizenship to an applicant. I note that in most cases where the decision has been made to approve grant of citizenship to an applicant, this is still pending their attendance of a citizenship ceremony. I also note that each application could have been allocated to a citizenship trained staff member for processing at any time, and not necessarily that same month.
- The number of citizenship by grant trained FTE was not available for April and December 2020, and March and April 2021. This was due to various reasons which resulted in Team Leaders not having the capacity to collate these numbers at the time. It was therefore not possible for the number of FTE for these months to be taken into account when calculating the average number for each year, which may have had an impact on the data provided.

I can confirm that there are several factors that have contributed to the current processing timeframes for citizenship applications.

The Department is currently in the process of transitioning citizenship processing from a paper-based application system supported by aging technology, to a modern customer-centred case management system which supports a fully online application process.

I note that with the introduction of this new system, there has been a reduction of output in the period of the new system being introduced and the old one phased out. Processing timeframes have been further impacted by the training requirements of staff on the new system, staff becoming proficient in the new system and the need for staff to work across both the online and offline systems. I also note that the inability for all staff to work at full productivity during COVID-19 also contributed.

It is important to explain that the new system is being designed iteratively, with new features and functionality being developed progressively. New features that have been and will be released will automate more aspects of the process and subsequently provide faster processing times.

It is also important to explain that limited citizenship processing occurred during Covid-19 lockdowns, as unlike birth or death registrations, it was not deemed an essential service. Some key systems are not able to be accessed offsite due to privacy and security reasons, which meant processing applications from home was not a feasible option for many of our staff. In addition, the Department followed Ministry of Health COVID-19 guidelines including physical distancing in the office, which limited the number of staff who could physically be present in our workplace to undertake their work.

I can assure you that the Department has been endeavouring to reduce these timeframes as a top priority, working hard behind the scenes to create and implement strategies to decrease the long wait times currently effecting citizenship applicants. This includes more training, investing in technology changes to speed things up, and establishing a temporary workforce dedicated to working through these applications.

It may be of interest to you to know that a team of temporary staff has been brought on to process the approximately 9,000 cases that remain in the old system, freeing up existing staff to increase proficiency and speed in using the new system. Although we are unable to predict a specific date citizenship by grant processing timeframes will reach the standard two to five months again, the Department is confident that the above steps taken mean we will have the skills and processes in place early next year, to ensure we can slow the backlog and begin to reduce it by mid-2022.

As this information may be of interest to other members of the public, the Department has decided to proactively release a copy of this response on the DIA website. All requestor data, including your name and contact details, will be removed prior to release. The released response will be made available here: <https://www.dia.govt.nz/Official-Information-Act-Requests-2>.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or freephone 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi



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