



24 August 2021

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Dear Nick

Official Information Act 1982 request 2122-0088 – 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. *How many applications were received in October 2020 for the following three categories?*
 - *In-person applications received (Please provide a breakdown by the city of application):*
 - *Online applications received:*
 - *Postal applications received:*

2. *How many applications received in October 2020 have been processed? Please provide a breakdown as per the three above-mentioned categories.*
 - *In-person applications processed (Please provide a breakdown by the city of application):*
 - *Online applications processed:*
 - *Postal applications processed:*

3. *Statistics on the processing times of applications received in October 2020 by the three above-mentioned categories:*
 - *Mean, median, maximum, and minimum processing time of In-person applications processed (Please provide a breakdown by the city of application):*
 - *Mean, median, maximum, and minimum processing time of Online applications processed:*
 - *Mean, median, maximum, and minimum processing time of Postal applications processed:*

4. *Do you maintain a single queue for processing all citizenship applications regardless of which method is used for submission? If you prioritized one application category over another, then how do you plan to redress the discrepancy? Given that all applicants pay the same application fee, it is unfair that the application method should dictate how quickly the application is processed.*
5. *When will you start processing online applications received in October 2020?*
6. *Why does the Citizenship website not provide statistics on applications that have been received to date, the average processing time by category, and the median processing time by category? This is a simple update to the website. The counter can be updated daily providing greater accountability, transparency, and clarity on how applications are being processed. The statement - It takes 9 to 14 months to find out if your application to become a New Zealand citizen has been approved - does not provide much detail.*

In response to your request, I can provide you with the following information.

Questions one, two, and three

Please refer to Appendix A, attached. Appendix A provides you with the following information for citizenship by grant applications received:

- *Table one – Breakdown of online and paper applications received in the month October 2020*
- *Table two – Breakdown of processing times for total number of paper applications received in the month October 2020*
- *Table three – Breakdown of processing times for paper applications received in the month October 2020, by office location*
- *Table four – Breakdown of processing times for total number of online applications received in the month October 2020*
- *Table five – Breakdown of processing times for online applications received in the month October 2020, by office location*

It is important to explain that the Department does not track how many of the paper applications are received via post or over the counter. Because of this, I am only able to provide you with the total number of paper applications received, and a breakdown of their processing times.

Question four

Paper and online applications are both processed in order of payment, however they are managed through two different systems.

The Department recently introduced and transitioned to a new Customer Centred Management System (CCMS) that supports a fully online process. This is a centralised system so does not differentiate between office location and a case officer picking up new work, will take the next available application in the queue.

The applications that are received via paper however, are processed through the Department's old application system called COS. Paper applications are entered and processed in COS throughout three office locations in New Zealand, Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch.

It is helpful for me to explain that the Department is currently in the process of hiring additional temporary staff who will focus on reducing the backlog of paper applications, freeing up most existing staff to work exclusively on online applications.

We expect that the time taken for staff to process in the online system should reduce as they become more familiar with our new system. We are also continuing to develop this new system and train more existing staff to process citizenship applications. Taken together the range of initiatives should see a significant decrease in the backlog in coming months.

However, I note that the current change in COVID-19 alert levels does impact the Department's ability to recruit new staff, train existing staff, and process citizenship by grant applications.

Question five

I can advise that as at 19 August 2020, the Department is working on citizenship by grant applications that were received in mid to late October 2020.

Question six

I appreciate that the information currently available online is not as comprehensive as it could be. The Department is currently looking into providing updated statistics and information about citizenship processing timeframes on our website, as ensuring accessibility of information and transparency for our customers is a priority. While I am unable to provide an exact date for this, we are planning to do this as soon as possible.

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 or freephone 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely



Julia Taylor
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Service Delivery and Operations