



6 September 2021

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Daniel

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dia.govt.nz

Dear Daniel

Official Information Act 1982 request 2122-0125 –

Thank you for your Official Information Act (Act) request received by the Department of Internal Affairs (Department) on 9 August 2021.

You requested –

- 1. If a person applied his/her citizenship (by grant) in Dec 2020 or Jan 2021, then his/her application still comes under the processing time of 5-10 months or the latest timeline applies to his/her application?*
- 2. If a person applied his/her citizenship (by grant) in Feb 2021 or March 2021 or before 15 June 2021, then his/her application still comes under the processing time of 7-12 months or the latest timeline applies to his/her application?*
- 3. Is updated timeline 9-14 months applies to people who apply their citizenship application on / after June 15, 2021? (Page last updated: 15 June 2021)*
- 4. If the latest timeline applies to everyone who applied their citizenship from Nov 2020 to till, then why the timeline is increasing in every three months because as per the official release by the Citizenship Department or DIA, they received the lowest number of citizenship applications (by grant) in last year which is 20,343 and my friend got approval for the citizenship within 3 months timeframe in 2018 when the applications are higher (35,737) as compare to 2020? Please justify.*
- 5. How can future applicants be sure that the timeline will not change in future?*
- 6. Did Citizenship department send an official email regarding processing time change to the applicant who applied their citizenship application way back (for example Dec 2020 to May 2021) when the processing time changes on website? if no, please justify why not.*

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

Questions one, two, three, five, and six

I can confirm that the current processing timeframe of 9-14 months applies to all citizenship by grant applications. There is no way to determine that the processing timeframes will not change in future, as there are always several variables that can impact these timeframes.

The Department has not proactively updated customers each time the processing timeframe has increased. This is because these cannot be easily automated, and would therefore require team members to email each applicant. Updates such as these can also create further administrative delays due to time required to address the resulting communications from customers. Both the initial emails and responses would take citizenship trained staff away from processing applications.

Question four

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 supporting a fully online application process.

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. Productivity has 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 systems (online and offline). The inability for all staff to work at full productivity during COVID-19 also contributed.

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 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. Limited citizenship processing occurred during lockdown, as unlike birth or death registration it was not deemed an essential service, and it was not possible for full productivity to be maintained. This is because some key systems were not able to be accessed offsite due to privacy and security reasons, which meant working from home was not a feasible option for many of our staff.

Further comments

I acknowledge your frustration surrounding the current citizenship processing times and would like to reassure you the Department has initiatives underway to reduce the citizenship application backlog, speed up processing, and improve general customer experience.

In the immediate term this includes 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.

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 or freephone 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Julia Taylor', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Julia Taylor
Manager Operational Policy and Official Correspondence
Service Delivery and Operations