



18 October 2021

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Tēnā koe Thayr

OIA request 21/22 0152 Request for information relating to citizenship processing timeframes

Thank you for your Official Information Act (Act) request received by the Department of Internal Affairs (Department) on 17 August 2021.

You requested –

- *According to previous requests, the main reason for the slower application process is implementing and using a new system. Can you provide which particular parts or issues of the new system cause this big delay?*
- *The average of application processed was 2600 per month in 2019, 2018, but the average of application processed between January-May 2021 is 1300 application, Why even after more than one year of implementing new system average number of application proceed per month between January-May 2021 much less than 2018 or 2019 ? even though the number of people who are working processing applications are the same or even more.*
- *Why didn't DIA decide to go back to using the old system if it was much faster and took less to process an application after one year of trying the new system for the whole year?*
- *DIA said it will hire more people to help clear the backlog in August, did newly hired people start working on processing applications or not yet?*
- *Can you provide number of processed application from June 2021 to August 2021?*

As advised in our interim response of 14 September, 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.

You then responded to our letter the same day, requesting the following –

- *Because you postponed answer Then Can you provide number of processed application from June 2021 to September 2021?*

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

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

As you are aware, the Department is currently in the process of transitioning citizenship processing systems. This transition is 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 acknowledge 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 note that the inability for all staff to work at full productivity during COVID-19 lockdowns has 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.

I can confirm that a team of 10 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.

Please find below a table showing the number of citizenship by grant applications processed between June to September 2021.

Month	Number of applications processed
June 2021	1,670
July 2021	1,179
August	1,511
September 2021	909

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 lower number of applications processed in September is due to the Covid-19 lockdown. As explained earlier in this letter, citizenship is not deemed an essential service. This results in it not being possible for full productivity to be maintained, as some key systems are not able to be accessed offsite, which meant working from home was not a feasible option for many of our staff.

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.

Ngā mihi



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