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Dear Daniel

Official Information Act 1982 request 2122-0213 – Citizenship processing

Thank you for your Official Information Act (Act) request received by the Department of Internal Affairs (Department) on 7 September 2021.

You requested –

- 1. Are the key systems department using are not capable of giving remote access to the staff or DIA cannot rely on the staff (While working from home) fully in context for using the systems? If key systems are used in office by the same staff then they can access any information in office as well as at home.*
- 2. From the above context and past history of the Citizen applications, the aging system (was 3 months process) of yours was much faster as compare to this new system (9-14 months process). and obviously as people we will prefer the faster process. Is this new system in coming months or years will process the citizenship applications in less than 3-4 months?*
- 3. Can you please explain, why staff is not getting familiar through the system from last one year?*
- 4. And I can see citizenship department still gives option of paper applications, then how the backlog will reduce? People will apply and the backlog will increase day by day. What measures department taking to reduce the paper backlog?*
- 5. As press release, you guys get the less application in 2020, then why backlog?*
- 6. Can you please tell the number of applications are in the backlog (by grant)?*
- 7. Paper Applications in backlog and from which year and month.*
- 8. Online Applications in backlog and from which year and month.*
- 9. Currently which month applications are in processing or assigned to case officers?*

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

Question one

As I advised in my response to your request OIA 2122-0125, 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.

Citizenship processing continued to occur during lockdown, but 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 our citizenship system, which holds highly secure and privacy protected data about individuals and their families, is only accessed from our security-controlled offices. This is not a reflection on the Department's trust in its staff, but a measure to ensure the safety of our staff, and the information they work with.

Questions two and four

The Department is currently working to reduce the backlog of citizenship applications, and we expect to be reducing the backlog by the middle of next year. We are prioritising this and have created a specific programme of work to improve it. This includes more training, investing in technology changes to speed processing up, and establishing a temporary workforce dedicated to working through applications.

However, it is also important to explain that there is no set standard processing timeframe for citizenship application because every application is different. For that reason, there is no 'normal' timeframe.

The processing timeframe covers the entire application process, which starts when an applicant submits their application. The application then undergoes an assessment, a recommendation, review of the assessment and recommendation and a decision on the outcome is made. Only when an applicant receives their Citizenship certificate (or confirmation that their application has not been approved) is the process complete.

This means that I am unable to provide you with an exact timeframe we believe that citizenship processing will be reduced to.

Questions three and five

I must reiterate what was advised in response to your request OIA 2122-0125, that there are several factors that have contributed to the current backlog of citizenship applications.

The Department is currently 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, as detailed in response to question one of this request.

It is also important to reiterate that the new system is being designed iteratively, with new features and functionality being developed progressively. This means that staff are constantly upskilling and training in the system, to ensure they are using it as efficiently as possible. New features that have been and will be released, will also automate more aspects of the process and subsequently provide faster processing times.

Questions six, seven, eight and nine

In response to these parts of your request, please refer to Appendix A attached. Appendix A provides you with the following information:

- Table one – Breakdown of unallocated citizenship by grant applications from October 2020 to September 2021.

I can advise that as at 1 October 2021, the majority of citizenship by grant applications the Department is currently working on were received in late November 2020.

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.

I note that the Department is currently preparing responses to an additional two requests that you have submitted regarding citizenship, further to your previous requests. It is important to explain that the Department has no further information to provide regarding the citizenship backlog and processing timeframes, and considers the responses already provided to you to have been comprehensive.

Because of this, the Department does not believe any further information can be provided to you beyond what already has been released.

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



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Service Delivery and Operations