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45 Pipitea Street, Wellington 6011

Phone +64 4 495 7200

dia.govt.nz

Emily Hughes

[fyi-request-16953-](mailto:fyi-request-16953-fcd22257@requests.fyi.org.nz)

[fcd22257@requests.fyi.org.nz](mailto:fyi-request-16953-fcd22257@requests.fyi.org.nz)

[fyi-request-16954-](mailto:fyi-request-16954-7b96a59a@requests.fyi.org.nz)

[7b96a59a@requests.fyi.org.nz](mailto:fyi-request-16954-7b96a59a@requests.fyi.org.nz)

Tēnā koe Emily

OIA request 21/22 0274 Request for information relating to citizenship processing delays

Thank you for your Official Information Act (Act) requests received by the Department of Internal Affairs (Department) on 30 September 2021.

You first requested –

- 1. As per your responses on FYI, you are telling people that you are working effortlessly on reducing the processing time for citizenship applications by implementing number of ways such as hiring more staff, etc. but as new page was added into Citizenship Website on 28 Sept 2021 (Link attached), it doesn't seem that the processing times are decreasing instead of that the processing timeline is increasing (13 to 16 months). Can you please explain why processing timeline is increasing after those efforts?*
- 2. Can you please also tell that currently Case Officers are working on which month applications? For Example: Jan 2021*

You then also requested –

- 3. As per the above official document, the total number for citizenship approved by grant is less in 2020. Does this mean these numbers reflect all applications received and processed in 2020?*
- 4. Citizenship applications received in 2020 are processed / completed fully?*
- 5. Is DIA started working on citizenship applications received in 2021?*

As advised in our email of 1 October 2021, because you made two requests on the same topic in short succession, the Department has combined your requests to provide a single response.

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

Question one

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

The Department is currently in the process of transitioning citizenship processing systems which has been a contributor to the delays in processing timeframes. 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 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 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.

In addition to the changes in systems, 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. 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. This limitation remains in our Auckland office.

Questions two, three, four and five

I can confirm that the oldest unassigned paper applications waiting to be allocated to a citizenship trained Life and Identity Services Officer (LISO) are from 25 November 2020 and the oldest unassigned online applications waiting to be assigned to a LISO are from 2 January 2021.

This means that early 2021 applications have now started to be allocated to LISOs for processing but that not all citizenship applications submitted in 2020 have yet been allocated, as there are still some paper based applications remaining.

I can confirm that the numbers which you reference in question three refer to the number of people who **gained** New Zealand citizenship in the year 2020. These are not necessarily applications that were received that same year.

Information on what month's applications citizenship trained staff are working on will be regularly updated on the Department's website here; <https://www.govt.nz/browse/passports-citizenship-and-identity/nz-citizenship/how-to-apply-for-nz-citizenship/application-timeframes/>.

Further comments

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 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. New staff need to be trained in systems and policy, and it can take several months before they begin to impact processing times.

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 or freephone 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi



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