



13 December 2021

45 Pipitea Street, Wellington 6011

Phone +64 4 495 7200

Ghai

dia.govt.nz

[fyi-request-17576-](mailto:fyi-request-17576-6efdf4e3@requests.fyi.org.nz)

[6efdf4e3@requests.fyi.org.nz](mailto:fyi-request-17576-6efdf4e3@requests.fyi.org.nz)

Tēnā koe Ghai

Official Information Act 1982 request 2021-0412 – Citizenship processing timeframes

Thank you for your Official Information Act (Act) request received by the Department of Internal Affairs (Department) on 15 November 2021.

You requested –

- 1. Which month/year citizenship applications are currently getting processed? In which month/year was that application made? Please provide information on both paper and online applications.*
- 2. Please provide with the information - Which is the oldest month/year, from which a citizenship application is still awaiting a case officer assignment? Please provide information on both paper and online applications.*
- 3. In which month/year was the decision made to do the transition from paper to online system? Was it known at that time that the transition is going to be done on an iteratively released application? With every iteration, how many hours or days of training was planned for the staff pre-pandemic? I understand that pandemic may have affected the training schedules for the staff.*
- 4. I am assuming by reading your responses on other requests, that by Law/legislation, your staff can not access private information of applicants while working from home. Does that mean during pandemic your staff was not allowed to access work computers from home using VPN or other technologies?*
- 5. Am I correct in assuming that your staff was only able to do a little work from home or in some cases no work at all while being on work from home arrangement because of the legislation? I understand that pandemic was an unforeseen event and work from home may not have ever got considered by Department of Internal Affairs before this.*
- 6. What measure have been taken since pandemic to consider effective work from home for your staff?*
- 7. Has any consideration been given into modifying the legislation to incorporate situations like pandemic and thus providing access to your staff to access work computers and thus work like they are in office with same efficiency and throughput?*

8. *Please state any other considerations that Department of Internal Affairs has worked on since pandemic or planning to work to incorporate better work from home arrangements to achieve pre-pandemic like throughputs/delivery from staff?*
9. *Is it now possible for your staff to access the information on an application from their homes while working from home?*
10. *Is it possible for Department of Internal Affairs to publish every month the information that from which month/year oldest applications are currently under processing and have been assigned a case officer to? Both paper and online applications.*

In response to your request I can provide you with the following information, please note that I have numbered your questions for ease of response.

Questions one, two and ten

I can advise that timeframes for processing citizenship by grant applications are regularly updated at [Application timeframes | New Zealand Government \(www.govt.nz\)](https://www.govt.nz/application-timeframes). The Department also intends to publish further statistics regarding citizenship processing timeframes in the near future. Therefore, I must refuse these parts of your request under section 18(e) of the Act; that the information requested is or will soon be publicly available.

Question three

As you are already aware, 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.

The decision to transition to the new platform was made in December 2016 as a part of a wider programme to transform the way the Department does its work. The citizenship by grant service is the first service to be built on the new platform.

The new system is being designed iteratively, with new features and functionality being developed progressively. This was intentional, and it was expected that staff would be constantly upskilling and training in the new system, with no fixed period of training time, to ensure they are using it as efficiently as possible.

It may also be helpful for me to explain 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. 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).

Questions four, five, six, seven and nine

It is 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. 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 some key systems are not able to be accessed offsite due to privacy and security reasons. 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 a measure that is not legislated but has been taken by the Department to ensure the safety of our staff, and the information they work with.

It is also important to explain that all staff who process citizenship applications had devices which enable them to do some work remotely (subject to the internet availability in their home) and they continued working through lockdown to the extent that they were able.

Question eight

While I must reiterate that citizenship applications are not able to be processed in a working from home environment, I can advise that 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 the 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. Together, this 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.

Ngā mihi



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