



14 March 2022

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Tēnā koe Sebastian

### Official Information Act request 2122-0577 – Citizenship timeframes

Thank you for your Official Information Act (Act) request received by the Department of Internal Affairs (Department) on 9 February 2022.

You requested –

- 1. Is the new system good now, if not how much further time will it take to fix the system issues and can the financial costing in tax-dollars on fixing these delays be shared to the tax payers? Any new IT system that increases the processing time 4 times as compared to the older system and cannot be fixed in two years would be a 'disaster' in an ideal IT practice.*
- 2. What plan does the department have to achieve the said 'goal' of processing all backlog by mid-2022 considering the current low rate of turnaround?*
- 3. In some replies - some applications for the months of May-July and Aug-Sept 2021 are being processed as of Feb2022. ref:*

<https://aus01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.dia.govt.nz%2Fdiawebsite.nsf%2FFiles%2FOIA-releases%2F%24file%2FOIA-2122-0439.pdf&data=04%7C01%7CSDOOfficialCorrespon%40dia.govt.nz%7C%27f475a5a3e4cd1ba3208d9f2434e3f%7Cf659ca5cfc474e96b24d14c95df13acb%7C0%7C0%7C637807193152819647%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWlloiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTiI6Ikl1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&data=E5PHajExU2JHJXmHvX1MLpzOnuwhxVP3MxunUMUfIEE%3D&reserved=0>

*Can the department please let the people know - what type of applications are those?*

4. *Confirming that the data on this page is never updated properly*

<https://aus01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.govt.nz%2Fbrowse%2Fpassports-citizenship-and-identity%2Fnz-citizenship%2Fhow-to-apply-for-nz-citizenship%2Fapplication-timeframes%2F&data=04%7C01%7CSDOOfficialCorrespon%40dia.govt.nz%7Cc27f475a5a3e4cd1ba3208d9f2434e3f%7Cf659ca5cfc474e96b24d14c95df13acb%7C0%7C0%7C637807193152819647%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLiAwMDA%7C%7CoiV2luMzliLCJBTil6lk1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=WrfukWhQwWjp%2BCIAYNV%2FAB8qY9bpAYiur3%2Fu7Pf7pJI%3D&reserved=0>

*on top of the page it states - "The oldest applications now being assessed were submitted in March 2021." and in the table below it shows pending Jan-Feb 2021 numbers.*

*Can the precise simple month wise breakdown be provided on this website - Month || Paper Unallocated - Paper processed || Online unallocated - Online processed? for next six months?*

5. *Is the department considering providing applicants a possible month wise ETA for their applications in future?*

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

**Question one**

As you are already aware, the Department has transitioned 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.

It is important to explain that this new system has at no point been broken. The new system is being designed iteratively, with new features and functionality being developed progressively, allowing for improvements to be made as and when is seen fit. 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. New features that have been and will be released will automate more aspects of the process and subsequently provide faster processing times.

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).

### **Question two**

As stated on the [www.govt.nz](http://www.govt.nz) website, the Department anticipates that the current citizenship waiting times will reduce by mid-2022. This does not mean that the backlog of citizenship applications will be cleared by this time.

However, it is important to explain that the Department has several initiatives underway to reduce the citizenship application backlog, speed up processing, and improve general customer experience.

In the immediate term this has included hiring additional temporary staff who focus on reducing the backlog of paper applications in our old system, freeing up most existing staff to work exclusively on online applications.

We expect that the time it takes for staff to process applications in our new online system will reduce as they become more familiar with it. We are also continuing to develop this new system and train more existing staff to process citizenship applications. We expect this range of initiatives to result in a significant decrease in the backlog in coming months.

### **Question three**

You have indicated that the proactively released response you included in your request stated that some applications received in the months of May-July and August-September 2021 are being processed as of February 2022.

I can advise that while the proactively released response does not specify this, all the applications detailed in this response, both online and paper-based, are applications for citizenship by grant.

### **Question four**

You have indicated that while the webpage shows that the oldest applications now being assessed were submitted in March 2021, the table further down the page displays pending January-February 2021 application numbers. I must clarify that this table details the number of unallocated citizenship applications as at the end of January 2022, not January 2021.

The application timeframes information webpage provides our customers with the most up to date information available. The table 'Unallocated citizenship applications by month' was last updated with the numbers as of 31 January 2022, which means it is due to be updated with the numbers ending February 2022.

The Department has chosen to publish data that provides the best overall picture of the number of unallocated citizenship applications. By keeping this information straightforward it ensures clear messaging for our customers, with additional detailed breakdowns being available via several proactively released responses published on our website.

### **Question five**

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 the Department is unable to provide an exact timeframe we believe that citizenship applications will be processed in.

### ***Further comments***

It is important to explain that unlike during the COVID-19 lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, when citizenship processing was not deemed an essential service, citizenship processing is now categorised as such. In addition to this, the COVID-19 Protection Framework red-light setting allows all citizenship trained staff to be present and working in the office.


The Department has taken precautionary measures to ensure a safe working environment for staff, to allow the continued delivery of priority identity services such as citizenship by grant processing. These measures include the distribution of staff at our offices in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch across the available working space, focusing on the physical separation of staff who complete the same tasks across floors, and by creating zoned working areas.

While the Department's essential services will continue to be delivered during the current red-light setting with these precautions in place, it is likely that the changing landscape will have an impact on these services. This has been factored into the planning the Department has undertaken and continuing to provide services to our customers remains a priority.

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](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or freephone 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi



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