



13 December 2016
Cody C
[fyi-request-3904-](#)
c35ff42f@requests.fyi.org.nz

120 Victoria Street, Wellington 6140
Phone +64 4 463 9360
Fax +64 4 382 3410
Website www.dia.govt.nz

Dear Cody C

Official Information Act 1982 request

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (Act) received by the Department of Internal Affairs (Department) on 21 November 2016.

In your request you asked for:

- *The most recent information on what has been changed in the last 5 years to ensure that the referee process used in assessing passport applications has been secured or improved (paying particular reference to incidences where passports have been obtained fraudulently with invalid, or otherwise, referees).*

We appreciate you working with us to refine the scope of your request from 'all information relating to the Identity Referee process' to 'improvements made in the last five years'.

For the purposes of this response the term Identity Referee refers to both Witnesses and Identity Referees so as to avoid confusion and simplify the response.

The Department has an excellent record of validating identity and this is reflected in the strong reputation held by New Zealand passports internationally and New Zealand passport fraud numbers, which are extremely low by international standards. Significant contributing factors are our high quality civil registration and records, along with the robust process by which the Passports Office validates identity.

Even so, the Department constantly reviews its policies and processes to ensure that this record is maintained and our processes and systems stay ahead of any attempts at misuse or abuse.

As you know, a key part of the passport identity validation process is the Identity Referee. The purpose of an Identity Referee is to help the Department to verify the identity of the passport applicant by linking another New Zealand passport holder to their application. The Identity Referee must be over 16 years of age, have known the applicant for 12 months or more (except in the case of infants), not live at the same address or be part of the applicant's family group. The Identity Referee, by agreeing to act as such, asserts that they know the applicant and by extension that the applicant is a real identity and that they are alive in the world. This is known as having a community footprint. Such a requirement is standard international practice and conforms to the New Zealand Evidence of Identity Standard, a best practice guide for companies or agencies that verify and validate identity.

Within the period you have specified the following changes have been made to this process:

- 1) The Department made some changes to passport application forms in October 2010. At this time it created an Adult Renewal form, to cater for applicants wishing to simply renew or replace a passport, as distinct from an Adult General form that is used by first-time applicants, for passports that have been lost or stolen and those changing their personal details such as names. This had the effect of creating two separate identity verifiers:
 - An Adult Renewal which requires an Identity Referee who must provide their personal details.
 - An Adult General which requires a Witness who must provide their personal details but also certify the applicant's photos and sign the form.
- 2) As part of our standard internal audit processes, an opportunity for improvement was identified and earlier this year we enhanced the Identity Referee section of the passport application form, both online and hard copy. The change was designed to strengthen the identity validation process and focussed specifically on missing information on passport applications. It was neither a result of any perceived failure of the Identity Referee process as a whole nor a reaction to a particular case or cases of fraud. A summary of the recommendation document is attached to this letter.
- 3) A separate addition to the online passport application form was also introduced 9 October 2016. A simple tick box was added to the Identity Referee section stating that the Identity Referee has consented to act as such.

You may also be interested to know that an extra section was also added to the Applicant Declaration section of the passport application form that requires an applicant to declare that they are not subject to arrest, court order or sentence that would preclude the issue of a New Zealand travel document. This addition was introduced as part of the Department's response to the Government Inquiry into matters relating to Phillip John Smith.

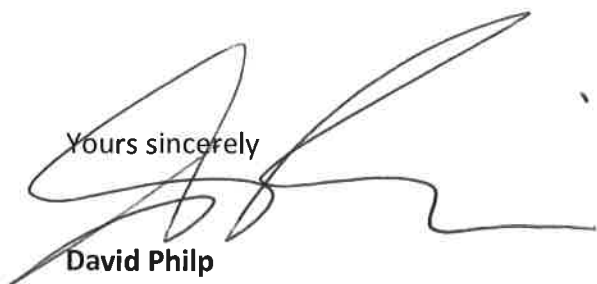
As a result of our focus on continually testing all aspects of our processes, the Department considers the Identity Referee verification process to be sound and the overall system used to verify identity and entitlement to a New Zealand passport is robust and not subject to systematic failure.

We trust that this information fully answers your request.

You have the right to request an investigation and review of the Departments response by the Ombudsman under section 28(3) of the Act, whose address for contact purposes is;

The Ombudsman
Office of the Ombudsmen
P O Box 10-152
The Terrace
WELLINGTON

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Philp', written over the words 'Yours sincerely'.

David Philp
General Manager
Identity and Passport Services
Department of Internal Affairs

Memo Summary

The paper analyses the current policy and practice in relation to witness/ID referee information. Specifically, the paper:

- Reviews the current policy and practice amongst (passport processing) teams in relation to witness/ID referee info not (initially) provided on a passport application form.
- Identifies that the process for physical forms does not match that of the Online Passport Service (OPS).
- Recommends that professional judgement is implemented when other fields such as contact details or the name fields are incorrect or incomplete.
- Recommends that the extra processing time is accepted in favour of ensuring a robust identity verification system.
- Notes that the referee verification process is supported by specialised photo-matching software that compares the applicant's current photo with the photo stored in the passport system.
- The recommendations may require an investment of time and resource as Passport Officers will need to have increased contact with witnesses, ID Referees and/or applicants.
- The recommendations are consistent with the transition of Passport Officers from reactive to proactive and can be seen as a positive move towards greater customer contact.

The exact ways in which the identity verification process has changed have been withheld as per section 9(2)(k) of the Official Information Act, in order to prevent the disclosure or use of official information for improper gain or improper advantage. However, the memo and the recommendations it proposes are designed to strengthen the identity verification process with the aim of increasing meaningful contact between the Department and passport applicants. Its overall purpose then is to give greater assurance to the Department that the referee verification process is as robust as possible.