



22 December 2021

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dia.govt.nz

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Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

OIA request 21/22 0439 - Request for information relating to citizenship processing timeframes

Thank you for your Official Information Act (Act) request received by the Department of Internal Affairs (Department) on 29 November 2021.

You requested –

1. *Why it is taking so long to process the citizenship applications as I have seen people who applied in 2020 are still waiting for their outcome?*
2. *How many paper and online applications you received this year in first quarter(1jan -31st March) second Quarter (1st April-30june) and third quarter (1july-30thSeptember) in Auckland office?*
3. *How many paper and online applications have been processed in the above three quarters?*
4. *Which month's paper and online applications are being processed at present?*

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

Question one

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

The Department has been following the Ministry of Health COVID-19 guidelines; including physical distancing in the office which has limited the number of staff members who could physically be present in our workplace. There was limited citizenship processing during lockdown, as unlike birth or death registrations, it was not deemed an essential service and therefore it was not possible for full productivity to be maintained. This is because some key systems were not able to be accessed offsite due to privacy and security reasons, meaning that working from home was not a feasible option for many of our staff.

I can also advise that 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.

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 being 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 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.

Question two

Please see the table below for the number of paper applications received by the Auckland office.

Quarter	Number of applications received
1 January – 31 March 2021	1555
1 April – 30 June 2021	1712
1 July – 30 September 2021	1357

The portion of question two relating to the number of online applications received by the Auckland office must be refused pursuant to section 18(e) of the Act; that the document alleged to contain the information requested does not exist. This is because online applications come through a central online system and is then allocated to case officers throughout the country in order of received date, opposed to being submitted directly to a specific office.

Question three

Please see the table below for the number of paper and online applications processed across all offices.

Quarter	Paper-based applications processed	Online applications processed
1 January – 31 March 2021	2375	1812
1 April – 30 June 2021	1633	2667
1 July – 30 September 2021	922	2674

Please note: processed applications are the applications that have received a decision from the Minister or delegated decision-maker.

Question four

I can confirm that as at 17 December 2021, the citizenship trained staff are processing paper and online applications that were received in February 2021.

It may also be helpful for me to explain that the Department has begun publishing citizenship processing timeframes, including the current month being processed, on its website. You can find this information here; <https://www.govt.nz/browse/passports-citizenship-and-identity/nz-citizenship/how-to-apply-for-nz-citizenship/application-timeframes/>

The information is updated weekly should you wish to check current processing timeframes in future.

Further comments

I would like to assure you that the Department has initiatives underway in attempts to reduce the citizenship application backlog. This includes more training, investing in technology, and establishing a temporary workforce dedicated to working through these applications.

Although, we are unable to predict a specific date when the processing timeframes will reach the standard two to five months again, the Department is confident that the initiatives mentioned above mean we will have the skills and processes in place 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

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'J' and 'T' followed by a horizontal line.

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