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Tēnā koe Rakesh

OIA request 21/22 2088 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 4 October 2021.

You requested –

The application processing time taken is causing a great frustration among all the applicants .it is surprising that still people who applied in 2020 are waiting to know the outcome of their application.

Will you please tell that :

- 1. Is there any staffing issue that is causing delays?*
- 2. Is it processing time taken which is causing delays?*
- 3. Why even allocation to a case officer is taking several months?*
- 4. Which month applications are being processed now?*
- 5. How many applications you received from 1.1.21 till 30.9.21 (both online and off line) in all the offices throughout the country?*
- 6. How many online and offline applications in all the offices have been proceeded this year since 1.1.21?*
- 7. How many staff members are working every month and how many applications are processed by an office on a average per month?*

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

Questions one, two and three

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 for 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.

Question four

I can confirm that as at 4 November 2021, the oldest paper application waiting to be allocated to a staff member for processing was from 4 December 2020, and the oldest online application waiting to be allocated for processing was from 6 January 2021.

Questions five, six and seven

The portion of question five relating to the number of online applications received per 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 are then allocated to case officers throughout the country in order of received date, opposed to being submitted directly to a specific office.

I can I can advise that pursuant to section 15(1)(b) of the Act, the Department has decided to provide you with the information you seek for the portion of question five relating to the number of paper applications received per office, and questions six and seven. However, we are still working to prepare the Information for release and will provide it as soon as practicable. We anticipate having the requested information to you no later than 17 November 2021.

In the meantime, you may be interested in other responses that have previously been published on this topic. You can find earlier requests at www.dia.govt.nz/Official-Information-Act-Requests-2.

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



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