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Tēnā koe Sun

**OIA request 22/22 0330 Request for Updated information on Citizenship Processing time frames**

Thank you for your Official Information Act (Act) request received by the Department of Internal Affairs (Department) on 19 October 2021.

You requested –

- 1. As covid-19 is the main reason of backlog. We are still in level 3. Also its not a essential work as per department despite thousands of backlog. Will the timeframe increase?*
- 2. Since when New Zealand has change timeframe to give Citizenship in 6.5 year to 7 years. Isn't a long time for someone who has spend 5 year plus 2 years in waiting to get citizenship?*
- 3. As you say new system is second most reason for backlog. I want to know more about this system as it is almost 2 years old system now.*
- 4. Since in every response department is not guaranteed of reduction of timeframe. Then how come the steps and remedies department has took is impacting in positive way?*
- 5. Most of staff been hired is for clearing backlog of paper application however Paper application are still being received then when the online application will get preference?*

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

**Questions one, three and four**

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

The Department has been following Ministry of Health COVID-19 guidelines including physical distancing in the office, which has limited the number of staff who could physically be present in our workplace. Limited citizenship processing occurred during lockdown, as 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 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.

While Covid 19 restrictions imposed by the Director-General of Health may ease over the coming weeks in Auckland, we cannot be sure of what this impact will have on the processing of citizenship applications. There is also no way to determine how the processing timeframes will change in future, as there are always several variables that can impact these timeframes.

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 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**

I can advise that the legislative requirements for the grant of citizenship have not changed, only the time frame for processing applications.

#### **Question five**

The Department has hired additional temporary staff who will focus on reducing the backlog of paper applications, freeing up most existing staff to work exclusively on online applications. This means that there is significantly more resourcing to focus on clearing the backlog in both online and paper channels.

We also expect that the time taken for staff to process in the online system should reduce as they become more familiar with our new system. The Department is continuing to develop this new system and train more existing staff to process citizenship applications. Taken together the range of initiatives in place 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](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or freephone 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi



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