



6 September 2022

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Tēnā koe Sebastian

OIA request 22/23 0111 Request for

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

You requested –

Most people are keen to know why some applications are being held up to 13 months while some are being processed in 3-4 months.

- 1. Does the department find this justified and as part of their customer experience? If not then when will the maximum wait period come down to 3-5 months maximum.***
- 2. Being a concerned Kiwi, I'm keen to know what is the exact criteria that some applications were being picked up out of turn while others are being held up in a miserable queue? Please share the entire criteria for public information that the automated system is looking for.***

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

Question One

Reducing the current backlog of citizenship by grant application and the time customers are waiting for a decision is a priority for the Department. There are several initiatives underway to reduce the citizenship application backlog, speed up processing, and improve customer experience. Some of these initiatives have included more training, ongoing system improvements, and hiring more staff in a temporary capacity.

We have consistently reduced the number of unassigned applications waiting in our queue over the past five months and are focused on continuing to reduce this.

We do acknowledge that the reintroduction of ceremonies from August 2022 has added to the overall average time taken to get citizenship due to the need for applicants to be allocated into a ceremony held by their local authority.

At this time the Department is only able to provide you information around the reduction of unassigned applications (due to data limitations). Therefore, I must refuse this part of request under 18(e) of the Act; that the document alleged to contain the information requested does not exist.

Updated information for timeframes is posted on our website every 3-4 weeks – please see here <https://www.govt.nz/browse/passports-citizenship-and-identity/nz-citizenship/how-to-apply-for-nz-citizenship/application-timeframes/> for the most up to date information.

Question Two

When applications are received, our systems run a series of preliminary automated checks which are used to triage them into different queues. Each queue is managed with the oldest application in that queue being picked up first.

Currently, our system checks for whether the citizenship requirements have been met, whether an application can be automatically matched to a record held by Immigration New Zealand, whether there are any alerts or conditions associated with the record, and whether there is any other information in the application that would suggest further manual intervention might be needed.

Newer staff are allocated to the applications that have clearly met more of the preliminary checks, whereas our more experienced staff members are able to pick up the applications that have not met one or more of the automated checks and may involve more complex assessment. We are continuing to upskill our people so they are able to process our more complex applications, which will help to address the disparity in processing times between different queues.

We are continuing to analyse the characteristics of the applications waiting to be processed, with a view to identifying further opportunities for streamlined processing.

Even when an application passes automated checks, it still needs to go to a staff member for an overall assessment of the applicant's eligibility (in other words, the decision-making is not automated). That staff member then makes a recommendation for the Minister's approval about the applicant's eligibility for citizenship. Where the applicant meets the requirements, the Minister's authority is delegated to the General Manager, Services and Access.

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 circular scribble followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

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