



30 March 2021

Maximilian Munker

fyi-request-14770-df34afad@requests.fyi.org.nz

Ref: DOIA 2021-1636

Dear Mr Munker

Thank you for your email of 25 February 2021 to the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA), the following information:

- *Could you please provide the latest numbers of how many SMC applications were assigned to Case officers as well as approved for January and February?*
- *Could you please also provide an overview how many SMC*
- *How many NON-priority SMC applications were allocated to a case officer during January and February 2021? How many priority SMC applications were allocated to a case officer during January and February 2021?*
- *What is the lodgement time for the oldest SMC application in the backlog which is still waiting for allocation to a case officer? Could you please provide a monthly overview of all open applications in the queue?*
- *What is the reason why the non-priority queue didn't move the last 3 weeks?*
- *After closing your offshore Visa centres in Mumbai, Manila, Pretoria and Beijing this year, what are the plans for increasing the NZ based Immigration capabilities and how will this affect the existing SMC backlog?*
- *What directions did you get after Immigration Minister Kris Faafoi's announcement to review the skilled migrant residency programme? Do you still work on applications or what is going to happen with the existing applications?*

On 8 March 2021 you were contacted by Penny Hazlett to clarify your request and on 9 March 2021 you confirmed your request as:

1. *Could you please provide the latest numbers of how many SMC applications were allocated to Case officers as well as approved for January and February?*
2. *Could you please share an overview of how many SMC applications in the non-priority queue are still not allocated to a case officer for every single month until March 2021.*
3. *How many Non-priority SMC applications were allocated to a case officer during January and February 2021?*
4. *How many priority SMC applications were allocated to a case officer during January and February 2021?*
5. *What is the lodgement time for the oldest SMC application in the non-priority queue which is still waiting for allocation to a case officer? Could you please provide a monthly overview of all open applications in the non-priority queue?*
6. *What is the reason why the non-priority queue didn't move the last 3 weeks?*

7. *After closing your offshore Visa centres in Mumbai, Manila, Pretoria and Beijing this year, what are the plans for increasing the NZ based Immigration capabilities and how will this affect the existing SMC backlog?*
8. *What directions did you get after Immigration Minister Kris Faafoi's announcement of 25 February 2021 to review the skilled migrant residency programme? Do you still work on applications or what is going to happen with the existing applications?*

Our response

Immigration New Zealand (INZ) does not have a specific Skilled Migrant Category (SMC) queue but one for skilled residence applications. These applications are SMC and Resident from Work (RFW) and are all processed in INZ's Manukau office. The applications are split into two separate queues based on the stated priorities as per Immigration Instructions A16.1.

All of the data in our response below is for skilled residence applications as defined above.

Question 1 - Could you please provide the latest numbers of how many SMC applications were allocated to Case officers as well as approved for January and February?

The number of onshore skilled residence applications allocated for the months of January and February 2021 is 588 and 520, respectively.

Your request for the numbers of approved skilled residence visas is being refused in reliance of s18(d) of the OIA as this information is publically available on the Ministry's website at the below link:

https://mbienz.shinyapps.io/migration_data_explorer/

Question 2 - Could you please share an overview of how many SMC applications in the non-priority queue are still not allocated to a case officer for every single month until March 2021.

As at 20 March 2021, the total number of onshore skilled residence applications in the non-priority queue was 11,396. Please refer to Appendix A for the monthly breakdown.

Questions 3 and 4 - *How many Non-priority SMC applications were allocated to a case officer during January and February 2021? How many priority SMC applications were allocated to a case officer during January and February 2021?*

Allocation of onshore skilled residence applications

	Non Priority	Priority
January 2021	407	170
February 2021	372	139

Question 5 - What is the lodgement time for the oldest SMC application in the non-priority queue which is still waiting for allocation to a case officer? Could you please provide a monthly overview of all open applications in the non-priority queue?

As at 20 March 2021, the oldest onshore skilled residence application in the non-priority queue waiting to be allocated for processing is 2 August 2019. It is noted that the second part of your question is a duplicate of question 2, as such please refer to Appendix A.

Question 6 - What is the reason why the non-priority queue didn't move the last 3 weeks?

All skilled residence applications are paper based applications and are processed in INZ's Manukau office. In February 2021 the office Auckland went back into Alert Level 3 and impacted INZ's ability to allocate and process paper-based applications as these cannot be taken out of the office due to information security and privacy concerns.

In the most recent escalation to Alert Level 3 in February 2021, the Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT) building was identified as a location of interest. As the INZ processing office is located in the same building, a cautious approach was taken to any staff returning to the office until site clearance was received on 3 March 2021. This was in line with Ministry of Health and MBIE guidelines. Following site clearance, Auckland staff were allowed to access offices under Alert Level 3 with appropriate Health and Safety measures in place, in order to work on paper-based applications only. However, only a small number of staff in Manukau were able to work from the office given that the MIT building was a location of interest. As a consequence allocation numbers were significantly reduced due to the reduced processing capacity.

Question 7 - After closing your offshore Visa centres in Mumbai, Manila, Pretoria and Beijing this year, what are the plans for increasing the NZ based Immigration capabilities and how will this affect the existing SMC backlog?

INZs Beijing office is the only office of the four currently processing visa applications (Visitor and Student Visas). The Mumbai and Manila offices have been closed since early 2020 due to the pandemic; and no visa processing is completed out of the Pretoria Office. As skilled residence applications are only processed in INZs Manukau office, the closure of the offshore offices is not anticipated to have an effect on processing.

INZ anticipates that its current onshore staffing will likely increase over the 2021/2022 financial year.

Question 8 - What directions did you get after Immigration Minister Kris Faafoi's announcement of 25 February 2021 to review the skilled migrant residency programme? Do you still work on applications or what is going to happen with the existing applications?

A review of the SMC, to ensure that it is effectively contributing to the skills that New Zealand needs in the medium and long term, is one of the priorities for this term of government and has been factored into work planning. However, no decisions have been taken on the scope or specific timing of the review, nor have any decisions been taken on how to handle already-received applications.

Until policy changes have been made to Immigration Instructions, processing of skilled residence applications will remain as it is currently.

I trust you find the information helpful.

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.

If you wish to discuss any aspect of your request or this response, or if you require any further assistance, please contact Penny Hazlett, Senior Business Advisor penny.hazlett@mbie.govt.nz.

Yours sincerely



Nicola Hogg
General Manager – Border and Visa Operations
Immigration New Zealand
Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment

Appendix A

Onshore skilled residence applications pending allocation to an immigration officer in the non-priority queue by month as at 20 March 2021.

Month accepted	Onshore Non Priority
August 2019	351
September 2019	595
October 2019	650
November 2019	778
December 2019	772
January 2020	591
February 2020	959
March 2020	964
May 2020	91
June 2020	1,605
July 2020	1,164
August 2020	210
September 2020	735
October 2020	426
November 2020	475
December 2020	276
January 2021	409
February 2021	195
March 2021 (up to 20 March 2021)	150
Total	11,396