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Tēnā koe Moustafa

OIA request 22/23 0257 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 24 September 2022.

You requested –

I am aware about at least a case who has submitted his citizenship application in November 2021 and that has been granted the citizenship for him and his family on June 2022 although other applications are still waiting in the queue not even assigned to a case office since August 2021 so they can't be deemed being delayed for having issues in their applications that might cause delays

As I understand from the news, that the new system was not in place at the time of submission of the above referenced application in Nov 2021

So my questions are:

- What are the exact conditions and process for selecting the citizenship applications pending in the queue for the old system?*
- Why are some applications being selected months ahead of other applications with the same apparant conditions?*
- Why the online applications in the older system are not processed using the new system as long as the submitted application is the same?*
- What is the Service license agreement time frame for processing the applications?*
- Need the applications count with reference to the submission month from June 2021 to August 2022 broken down into the following:*
 - total number of submitted applications*
 - total number of applications under processing*
 - number of processed applications*
 - number pending applications2*
 - average waiting in the queue for the processed applications in months*
 - Which applications are being processed through the new system?*

- Does the DIA see the way of allocation a fair way providing equal opportunity across all applicants?

Please refer to Appendix A attached alongside this letter for response to the data portion of your request.

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

I have interpreted the portion of your request relating to the Service Licence Agreement to be a request for the Service Level Agreement (SLA). An SLA is the target for processing applications. I can confirm that the SLA timeframe for processing citizenship by Grant applications is 50 working days.

I can also confirm that all paper applications are manually 'digitised' into our new system and put in the same queue as online applications, in order of date received. As such, all applications are now being processed in the new system.

In an effort to reduce the backlog of New Zealand citizenship by grant applications and speed up processing where possible, the Department has moved to assessing applications using more automated checks. An example of these automated checks includes matching the information the applicant supplies with Immigration New Zealand (INZ) records. We can then use the INZ information to confirm whether an applicant meets the presence requirement.

These automated checks mean that some applications are now processed more quickly than others, as they require fewer checks to be made by a citizenship trained Life and Identity Services Officer (LISO), making them simpler to process and can therefore be worked on by LISOs who are more recently trained. These applications that are identified using automated checks for a streamlined processing are grouped together, and then processed based on the date they were received. I note that the majority of LISOs processing citizenship by grant applications are still working on the earliest-submitted applications first.

It is also important for me to note that it is of top priority for the Department to provide a better service for all applicants overall, and that this work is allowing us to work towards reducing timeframes for everyone. I can confirm that the average time to process applications is decreasing along with the backlog already having decreased by several thousand applications over the past several months. These changes are expected to continue to reduce not only the backlog of applications awaiting allocation to an officer, but also the longest time applicants wait before their application is allocated.

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 black 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