



16 APR 2021

On 18 March 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development's (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information regarding the Ministry's contact centre services:

1. *Can you please under the OIA, advise what the monthly service target level is in 2021, and how this is being met.*
2. *Can you further advise what percentage of calls to the contact centre are unanswered after 1 hour, and what percentage of calls are abandoned due to nobody answering them?*
3. *How many contact centre phone staff are employed at any one time in normal business hours?*
4. *How many call centre phone staff have resigned since March 2020?*
5. *How many permanent call centre phone staff have been hired (a) internally and (B) Externally since March 2020?*

The Ministry delivers services to an increasing number of people over the telephone and take over 100,000 phone calls per week. Demand for the contact centre's services has increased as it has evolved to provide a wider range of assistance, such as hardship assistance. As part of changes to provide better service for clients, contact centre representatives now do more over the phone to ensure clients get everything they are entitled to without needing to call again or book an appointment.

For clarity, I will respond to your questions in turn.

1. *Can you please under the OIA, advise what the monthly service target level is in 2021, and how this is being met.*

While the Ministry does not maintain a published monthly service target, we aim to answer all calls as quickly as possible. As services have transitioned online and the role of the contact centre has diversified, the Ministry aims to resolve issues with clients on the one phone call, regardless of the call time.

It is worth noting that the Ministry has an internal service target of achieving 70 percent of calls answered within 30 seconds. We acknowledge that our wait times have increased significantly over the past year, particularly due to increases in caller demand due the COVID-19 pandemic.

To help reduce wait times and improve caller experience during busy times, we have implemented the following enhancements to our phone service:

- an increased recruitment programme to hire additional contact centre staff to respond to increased demand
- a call-back service where callers can choose to be called back rather than waiting on the phone to be answered
- an automated announcement of the current estimated wait time played to every caller
- enhancements to the services offered through online channels such as MyMSD and MyStudyLink, which are available to our clients 24/7
- personalised messages to callers advising of upcoming payment details and scheduled appointments without having to wait to speak to us
- the ability for service centre staff to assist answering contact centre calls when changing alert levels cause service centres to be closed

2. *Can you further advise what percentage of calls to the contact centre are unanswered after 1 hour, and what percentage of calls are abandoned due to nobody answering them?*

From 1 March 2020 to 23 March 2021, approximately 2.2 percent of calls to the contact centre were answered after the client was waiting for over one hour. A further 1.1 percent of calls were abandoned after one hour.

The total abandonment rate for the same period was approximately 23.4 percent, however, it is worth noting that one third of all abandonments are callers waiting less than two minutes, and half of all abandonments are callers waiting less than five minutes.

Between 1 March 2020 and 23 March 2021, the Ministry's contact centre staff answered 21,686 calls on average, Monday to Friday, and 3,004 calls answered on Saturday.

3. *How many contact centre phone staff are employed at any one time in normal business hours?*

The contact centres operate for 11 hours per day during weekdays, and 5 hours on Saturday. As these hours are greater than a full-time working week, not all staff are scheduled to work at any one time.

As at 23 March 2021, the Ministry employs over 1,200 contact centre staff in total.

During peak-times, which are 10am-11am on Mondays, there is approximately 65 percent of the contact centre workforce on the phone.

4. *How many call centre phone staff have resigned since March 2020?*

The Ministry has received 183 resignations from contact centre staff between 1 March 2020 and 23 March 2021.

Resignation refers to a staff member who has left the Ministry and resignations are only recorded in our system against someone who is no longer employed by the Ministry. Therefore, the above figure does not reflect staff members' internal movements, as an internal hire is not considered a resignation from their 'home' organisation (the Ministry).

Please note, staff members may move on from their contact centre position for other reasons such as abandonment of position, dismissal, end of employment contract, medical retirement, and retirement. These movements are not reflected in the figure provided above.

5. How many permanent call centre phone staff have been hired internally and externally since March 2020?

The Ministry has hired 810 contact centre staff between 1 March 2020 and 23 March 2021. Of these 810 staff, 124 have been recruited internally and 686 are external hires. 450 are permanent staff and 360 are fixed term. Please note, a person may be counted more than once, if they have been hired more than once, i.e. a person hired on a fixed term contract who then may move to a permanent contract.

The principles and purposes of the Official Information Act 1982 under which you made your request are:

- to create greater openness and transparency about the plans, work and activities of the Government,
- to increase the ability of the public to participate in the making and administration of our laws and policies and
- to lead to greater accountability in the conduct of public affairs.

This Ministry fully supports those principles and purposes. The Ministry therefore intends to make the information contained in this letter available to the wider public. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter on the Ministry of Social Development's website. Your personal details will be deleted, and the Ministry will not publish any information that would identify you as the person who requested the information.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz.

If you are not satisfied with this response to your request regarding the Ministry's contact centre services, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi nui



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