



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

29 June 2022

Tēnā koe

On 16 May 2022, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

I respectfully request the following information relating to the last twelve (12) months to date:

- 1) A month-by-month breakdown on the average length of time it takes the Centralised Services Childcare Unit to complete:
 - i) Childcare Subsidy / OSCAR Subsidy reviews*
 - ii) Childcare Subsidy / OSCAR Subsidy applications*
 - iii) Change of Circumstances reviews**

To clarify, this would be from when a piece of work that's been submitted in a Client Event Note has gone from the status "Ready for Processing" to "Completed" specifically for the Centralised Services Childcare Unit. Other may also be an applicable category for the collation of the response relating to work that is placed into a relevant Work on Hold queue or is given the topic of Childcare Subsidy but is sent to an alternative business unit. Should this not be available, I kindly submit the Ministry instead provides any other data that may relate to timeliness around actions completed in the above categories.

- 2) The active number of "Ready for Processing" items of work available under the Client Event Note categories of the same mentioned in the first request that have been in this category for an excess of 10 business days.*

- 3) The number of Childcare Subsidies / OSCAR subsidies that have been suspended by SWIFTT system action (review not returned)*

- 4) Any available training manuals for Centralised Services Childcare Unit Staff, including through Doogle and other internal intranet systems, relating to the completion of childcare / OSCAR subsidy actions.*

5) *Whether the ministry still has a timeliness target of five working days relating to the completion of work that is otherwise ready for processing.*

6) *Whether the ministry considers that timeliness has become an issue within the Childcare Unit and if so, what program of work is being undertaken to allow more items of work to be met within the timeliness guidelines.*

7) *The number of emails received on a weekly basis to centralised_childcare_escalations@msd.govt.nz (or other such address as internal staff are able to escalate individuals cases to unit staff)*

The Ministry's Childcare Assistance Programme provides assistance to low-income parents/caregivers with pre-school or school-aged children, through the Childcare Subsidy and OSCAR (Out of School Care and Recreational Subsidy).

Childcare Subsidy is a non-taxable payment that aims to assist clients with dependent children to undertake and remain in employment, education or training. It also assists client's access to preschool care if they or their child are seriously disabled or ill.

OSCAR is a non-taxable payment that aims to assist low-income caregivers to enter and remain in employment. It can also be used for families where the principal caregiver, or the child/children of the principal caregiver are experiencing serious ill-health or disability.

More information about the Ministry's Childcare Assistance Programme can be found here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/childcare-assistance-programme/index.html.

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

1) A month-by-month breakdown on the average length of time it takes the Centralised Services Childcare Unit to complete:

- i) Childcare Subsidy / OSCAR Subsidy reviews*
- ii) Childcare Subsidy / OSCAR Subsidy applications*
- iii) Change of Circumstances reviews*

The Ministry is unable to provide the average length of time between the "Ready for processing" and "Completed" statuses for Childcare Subsidy (CCS) and OSCAR Subsidy applications and reviews due to the way the information is held within our systems.

This information is held in notes on individual case files. In order to provide you with this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review a substantial number of files. As such, I refuse your request under section

18(f) of the Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

I have considered whether the Ministry would be able to respond to your request given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested. I have concluded that, in either case, the Ministry's ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

To satisfy the intent of your request, please find **Table One** in **Appendix A**, which outlines the average number of working days for Centralised Services Childcare Units to complete CCS/OSCAR Subsidies Reviews and Applications broken down by month for the period 1 June 2021 to 27 May 2022.

This information details the number of working days between when the application or review first enters the work queue to when it is completed. This may include a number of days where the application or review is placed on hold whilst the Ministry awaits further information from the client to complete the application or review.

Please note that the Ministry is unable to separate out change of circumstances as an individual category of review as these are recorded in the same category as CCS and OSCAR Subsidy reviews.

2) The active number of "Ready for Processing" items of work available under the Client Event Note categories of the same mentioned in the first request that have been in this category for an excess of 10 business days.

There are currently no tasks in the "Ready for Processing" queue that exceed ten business days.

3) The number of Childcare Subsidies / OSCAR subsidies that have been suspended by SWIFTT system action (review not returned)

If a client is receiving childcare payments for their child, these payments are reviewed every 52 weeks. The purpose of this review is to check that:

- the client still qualifies for the subsidy
- all of the child's absences are recorded and
- the correct rate of subsidy is being paid.

The Ministry sends Childcare Subsidy and OSCAR Subsidy recipients a review form a few weeks before the review is due. If this form is not returned, the Ministry may suspend the subsidy depending on the client's circumstances.

Please find **Table Two** in **Appendix A**, which outlines the number of CCS/OSCAR Subsidies suspended by SWIFTT System action with a reason of

'Renewal not returned' broken down by month for the period 1 June 2021 to 27 May 2022.

4) Any available training manuals for Centralised Services Childcare Unit Staff, including through Doogle and other internal intranet systems, relating to the completion of childcare / OSCAR subsidy actions.

Due to the significant number of documents which would fall under this request, the Ministry has provided a summary of the available documents to satisfy the intent of this request, as enabled by section 16(1)(e) of the Act.

The Ministry spends approximately three weeks training Central Processing Officers in Childcare Assistance and OSCAR Subsidies, including one week of theoretical training focusing on policy, legislation, and how to use the Ministry's systems, and two weeks of live practical training. This is followed by eight weeks of follow-up support and periodic check-ins to ensure the Officers can receive any assistance in their new work as required.

Please find attached *Learner Guide: Foundations to Childcare Assistance*, the primary reference document used for Childcare Assistance and OSCAR Subsidy training. Throughout the training, the Ministry's Capability Developers use a large number of exercises, presentations, and scenarios to ensure the Officers have practical experience in applying their learned knowledge and are prepared to process applications immediately. Officers also have access to a large internal folder of resources to assist them in processing Childcare Assistance applications.

You will note that a small amount of information regarding is withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act in order to protect the privacy of natural persons. The need to protect the privacy of these individuals outweighs any public interest in this information.

Entitlement to Childcare Assistance is legislated by Social Security Regulations 201. Policy guidelines to staff based on the legislation administered by the Ministry can be found here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/childcare-assistance-programme/childcare-subsidy.html.

When processing Childcare Assistance applications, Officers must adhere to Ministry processing standards to ensure we assess and grant the correct entitlement to the right person or household, at the right time, from the right date. These standards are the basis of checking by site, regional and national quality teams, and Audit New Zealand to ensure we are meeting our requirements. Please find attached *Processing standards – Quick reference guide* which provides a summary of the Ministry's processing standards. If you require further information on specific processing standards, I invite you to make a follow-up request with further detail.

5) Whether the ministry still has a timeliness target of five working days relating to the completion of work that is otherwise ready for processing.

When measuring the timeliness of applications and reviews, the Ministry requires all actions to be completed within five working days from receipt of the last piece of information required to complete the action.

It should be noted that through COVID-19, the Ministry is focussing its resources on supporting New Zealanders by administering welfare support during this unprecedented time. Resources within our business units were limited as some of the normal functions of business units were delayed to aid in the Ministry's COVID-19 response. As a result, the Ministry may have experienced backlogs in some areas, and may experience similar backlogs in the future due to other extenuating circumstances.

6) Whether the ministry considers that timeliness has become an issue within the Childcare Unit and if so, what program of work is being undertaken to allow more items of work to be met within the timeliness guidelines.

For the Official Information Act 1982 to apply, the information must already be held by the agency concerned. With the exception of providing a response to a request for a statement of reasons about a decision made about a requestor (section 23 of the Act), there is no obligation on an agency to form an opinion or create information to answer a request in the form of questions or interrogatory. In accordance with this advice from the Office of the Ombudsman, the Ministry is not required to answer this part of your request, as it does not specifically qualify as a request for official information.

I refer you to my response to question one and two of your request to satisfy the intent of your request.

7) The number of emails received on a weekly basis to centralised_childcare_escalations@msd.govt.nz (or other such address as internal staff are able to escalate individuals cases to unit staff)

The internal email centralised_childcare_escalations@msd.govt.nz is no longer in use. Internal escalations now occur on a case-by-case basis and are first escalated to a Service Manager who refer to Centralised Services as needed. The Ministry's general phone line is also capable of directing clients directly to the Childcare Unit when the unit's assistance is required. I am unable to provide you with the number of escalations weekly as it is held in email correspondence of individual staff members. In order to provide you with this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review a substantial number of files. As such, I refuse your request under section 18(f) of the Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

I have considered whether the Ministry would be able to respond to your request given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested. I have concluded that, in either case, the Ministry's ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

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 and any attached documents available to the wider public. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter on the Ministry'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, 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

Tania Otukolo

Tania Otukolo
Manager Centralised Services
Service Delivery

Appendix A

Table One: The average number of working days for Centralised Services Childcare Units to complete CCS/OSCAR Subsidies Reviews and Applications, broken down by month for the period 1 June 2021 to 27 May 2022.

| Month | Number of working days | |
|----------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | CCS/OSCAR Subsidies Applications | CCS/OSCAR Subsidies Reviews |
| June 2021 | 12 | 8 |
| July 2021 | 13 | 7 |
| August 2021 | 13 | 10 |
| September 2021 | 14 | 6 |
| October 2021 | 12 | 6 |
| November 2021 | 11 | 8 |
| December 2021 | 10 | 6 |
| January 2022 | 11 | 8 |
| February 2022 | 14 | 12 |
| March 2022 | 14 | 12 |
| April 2022 | 17 | 7 |
| May 2022 | 11 | 10 |

Notes for Table One:

- CCS is Child Care Subsidy.
- OSCAR is Out of School Care and Recreation.
- Child Care Subsidy's payable hours is the hours payable after deduction of 20 hours of free Early Childhood Education (ECE) hours.
- ECE is provided by the Ministry of Education.
- CCS and OSCAR can be paid to partners and primary clients in their own right.
- CCS/OSCAR Subsidies reviews include 'Childcare Assistance Review' and 'Childcare OSCAR Dec' Client Event Notes.
- CCS/OSCAR Subsidies applications include 'Childcare Assistance Application' Client Event Note.
- Only Client Event Notes completed by the below Centralised Service Childcare Units are included:
 - Auckland Childcare Processing Centre
 - Central Processing Unit
 - Specialised Processing Services Whangarei
- Only Client Event Notes that have been placed in the queue are included.

Table Two: The number of CCS/OSCAR Subsidies suspended by SWIFTT System action with a reason of 'Renewal not returned', broken down by month for the period 1 June 2021 to 27 May 2022.

| Month | Number of Suspensions |
|----------------|------------------------------|
| June 2021 | 1,356 |
| July 2021 | 2,839 |
| August 2021 | 1,435 |
| September 2021 | 1,478 |
| October 2021 | 2,589 |
| November 2021 | 1,247 |
| December 2021 | 1,214 |
| January 2022 | 2,193 |
| February 2022 | 3,414 |
| March 2022 | 1,959 |
| April 2022 | 2,107 |
| May 2022 | 1,556 |

Notes for Table Two:

- CCS is Child Care Subsidy.
- OSCAR is Out of School Care and Recreation.
- Child Care Subsidy's payable hours is the hours payable after deduction of 20 hours of free Early Childhood Education (ECE) hours.
- ECE is provided by the Ministry of Education.
- CCS and OSCAR can be paid to partners and primary clients in their own right.
- CCS/OSCAR Subsidies reviews include 'Childcare Assistance Review' and 'Childcare OSCAR Dec' Client Event Notes.
- CCS/OSCAR Subsidies applications include 'Childcare Assistance Application' Client Event Note.
- This is a count of CCS/OSCAR subsidies records suspended actioned by system, excluding any manual suspension actions.
- This is not a count of clients or children. The same client or children may appear more than once.
- These records may no longer be suspended.