



3 March 2022

Tēnā koe

On 23 November 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *How many declined wage subsidy applications have been appealed and how many ended up approved?*
- *For the applicants that appealed successfully, how many days were between first application and payment?*
- *Any internal documents from August 17th 2021 relating to the assessment of wage subsidy applications. This includes emails, training documents and memos. Just a note, I am looking for documents authored after August 17th – not a reissuing of previous documents.*

On 3 December 2021, the Ministry emailed you to clarify the third part of your request. You confirmed that you were looking for information related to the assessment of wage subsidy applications for approval and declines of applications as well as pre-payment checks. As such, this part of your request was rescoped to:

- *Any training documents or memos from August 17th 2021 relating to the assessment of wage subsidy applications in terms of approval or decline of applications as well as pre-payment checks. Just a note, I am looking for documents authored after August 17th – not a reissuing of previous documents.*

On 20 December 2021, the Ministry notified you that we would need additional time to respond to your request due to a large amount of information in scope.

The Wage Subsidy Scheme has enabled rapid support for thousands of New Zealand businesses during this time of uncertainty and has ensured that employees were able to remain connected to their employers during the COVID-19 lockdowns. The scheme has been set up on a high-trust model in order to quickly delivery funds to support workers, families and businesses.

For clarity, I will address each part of your request in turn.

- *How many declined wage subsidy applications have been appealed and how many ended up approved?*

When an applicant's COVID-19 Wage Subsidy or Leave Scheme applications are declined, they can lodge a review through the Review of Application (RoA) process. This is a review of the original application, not of the decision to decline and is not the same process as a Review of Decision - outlined in the Social Security Act 2018 (SSA). This is because COVID-19 Wage Subsidy applicants are not covered by the Review of Decision process under the SSA.

Applications were often declined for reasons such as:

- applicants applying more than once for the same subsidy;
- applicants missing the window of application by applying too early;
- the Ministry was unable to contact the applicant to discuss their application;
- the Ministry was unable to confirm that the applicant was self-employed or the business was operating in New Zealand;
- Inland Revenue (IR) confirmed the applicant was not self-employed;
- the application had lapsed as the applicant did not update their information with IR and their application information continues to not match.

Upon receipt of additional information, the Ministry was able to overturn declined applications in many cases. Applicants who applied too early also had their application overturned as a result of the review process.

Please find attached **Appendix One** providing **Table One** showing both the number of Review of Application forms received and overturned for COVID-19 Subsidy Schemes as at the end of January 2022. The figures provided are for all iterations of the Wage Subsidy and Leave Schemes since the wage subsidy scheme began in 2020.

- *For the applicants that appealed successfully, how many days were between first application and payment?*

I am unable to provide you with this information as the wage subsidy application process and review process (or appeal process) are separate systems. In order to determine how many days had elapsed for those who appealed, the Ministry would need to cross-reference between processes on individual case files.

As such, the Ministry would need to divert personnel from their core duties and allocate extra time to complete this task. The diversion of these resources would impair the Ministry's ability to continue standard operations and would be an inefficient use of the Ministry's resources. As such, I refuse your request under section 18(f) of 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.

However, in the spirit of being helpful, the Ministry is providing you with **Table Two** in **Appendix One** showing the average amount of days taken to overturn a declined application following the submission of a Review of Application form for COVID-19 Subsidy Schemes as at end of January 2022. Please note, this is not an average amount of days from the point of first application to payment, but the average timeframe for overturning a review form related to all iterations of the Wage Subsidy and Leave Schemes since the wage subsidy scheme began in 2020.

- *Any training documents or memos from August 17th 2021 relating to the assessment of wage subsidy applications in terms of approval or decline of applications as well as pre-payment checks. Just a note, I am looking for documents authored after August 17th – not a reissuing of previous documents.*

Please find attached the following documents released to you under the Act:

- *Pre-payment Assessment 80+ Employers – dated 19 August 2021*
- *REP/21/09/988: Wage Subsidy August 2021 – Update – dated 15 September 2021*
- *REP/21/9/1032: Update on Wage Subsidy August 2021 Pending Applications – dated 24 September 2021*
- *Memo: Declined Wage Subsidies Application – dated 27 October 2021*
- *HIYA Training Content including:*
 - *Answering questions about the Wage Subsidy*

- *COVID-19 Wage Subsidies*
- *Wage Subsidy actions*
- *Wage Subsidy and Leave Support EES information*

On 26 November 2021, you emailed the Ministry to inform us that you did not require staff names. As such, this information is marked as 'Out of Scope' of your request.

Some information is withheld under section 9(2)(h) of the Act in order to maintain legal professional privilege. The greater public interest is in ensuring that government agencies can continue to obtain confidential legal advice.

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 and attachments 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



George van Ooyen
Group General Manager
Client Service Support

Appendix One

Table One: Number of Review of Application (RoA) forms received and declined applications overturned for COVID-19 Subsidy Schemes as at the end of January 2022.

As at date	Number of RoA forms received	Number of overturned declined applications
31 January 2022	54,192	33,519

Notes:

- This is only a count of Review of Application (RoA) forms received not of declined applications in total.
- Clients may submit more than one review form for one declined application.
- If a client has submitted more than one review form for the same declined application, the overturning decision is made for one of the RoA forms received.
- COVID-19 Subsidy declines includes all iterations of the Wage Subsidy and Leave Schemes since the wage subsidy began in 2020.
- These data tables have had random rounding to base three applied to all cell counts in the table.
- The published counts will never differ by more than two counts.

Table Two: Average days taken to overturn a declined application following the submission of a Review of Application form for COVID-19 Subsidy Schemes as at end of January 2022.

As at date	Average days taken to overturn
31 January 2022	10.88

Notes:

- Overturning duration represents the length of time between RoA lodgement and overturning decline decision.
- This table is for RoAs received for all iterations of the COVID-19 Wage Subsidy and Leave Schemes since the wage subsidy began in 2020.