



27 March 2025

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act request

Thank you for your email of 23 February 2025, requesting information about a breakdown of client complaints regarding staff conduct and of call wait times.

I have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). Please find my decision on each part of your request set out separately below.

For clarity, my response to questions 1 to 4 provides information on the wait times for clients accessing Work and Income contact centre services.

Question 1: The average wait time for customers to connect with a Work and Income case manager via phone call over the past 12 months.

Our wait times fluctuate throughout the year, largely due to caller demand. Over the past 12 months (1 March 2024 to 28 February 2025), Work and Income had an average wait time of 7 minutes, 37 seconds. This ranges from a low of 6 minutes and 9 seconds in September 2024, to 9 minutes and 57 seconds in February 2025 (our seasonally high period).

Question 2: The longest recorded wait time for a customer to connect with a case manager in the past 12 months.

The longest wait time between 1 March 2024 to 28 February 2025 was 2 hours, 7 minutes and 37 seconds. This occurred on the afternoon of 11 December 2024 on our main General enquiries line.

Question 3: The target or expected wait time for customers to reach a case manager.

We aim to answer our calls as quickly as possible, but there are no set targets.

Question 4: Whether there is currently a backlog in calls, and if so, the size of the backlog and any measures being taken to address it.

There is a constant queue of people waiting to speak with us, the size of which varies day to day, hour to hour. We offer a callback service to as many eligible callers as possible to prevent people having to wait on the line. Our online services are available to anyone who can complete their transaction online and we also have self-services available through our phone system which can provide callers with basic information such as their next benefit payment, or their debt balance.

We work closely with our Customer Service Representatives (CSRs), encouraging them to manage their calls as efficiently as possible to make the most of our client's

time. Our CSRs try to help callers as completely as they can to prevent the need for clients to call back, and that can sometimes mean longer phone calls which, in turn, can impact wait times.

Question 5: The total number of complaints received by the Ministry of Social Development in the past 24 months.

Question 6: The number of these complaints specifically related to interpersonal skills or staff attitude.

From 1 February 2023 to 31 January 2025, the Ministry received 16,707 complaints.¹ Of these, 5,355 (32.1%) were determined to be most closely related to Interpersonal skills/Staff Attitude.²

We manage hundreds of thousands of interactions with clients every year, across a variety of channels; for example, in 2023/2024, our contact centres answered 3.89 million calls. We aim to provide a high standard of service, and welcome feedback when clients have had an experience below our expectations. We take all complaints seriously.

Question 7: The number of MSD staff who have undergone a disciplinary process due to customer complaints in the past 24 months.

All complaints are reviewed, triaged, and resolved in different ways. For example, some complaints relating to staff are simply expressions of dissatisfaction which are resolved with the complainant at a low-level (this could be an apology). Others may help us identify areas where training is required, or individual performance needs to be managed.

Where the Ministry has determined that a more formal outcome might be warranted due to seriousness or repeated behaviour, the complaint is escalated to the Employment Relations Consultancy team. It is due to this triage process that there is a notable difference between the number of complaints received versus the number of complaints escalated to a disciplinary level.

During the period 1 February 2023 to 31 January 2025, 54 complaints were escalated with 43 resulting in a disciplinary process and 11 being deemed to be unsubstantiated following further investigation.

Question 8: The number of MSD staff who have lost their jobs due to proven misconduct in the past 24 months.

No staff have lost their jobs due to proven misconduct following a client complaint in the past 24 months.

I will be publishing this decision letter, with your personal details deleted, on the Ministry's website in due course.

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

¹ These figures are from the Ministry's HIYA complaints system, which does not include any StudyLink complaints. Figures have been random rounded to base three, as per the Ministry's confidentiality policy.

² The Interpersonal Skills/Staff Attitude category is determined by Ministry staff based on the content of a client complaint. Ministry Staff assess each complaint and classify it according to the most relevant complaint type category available.

If you are not satisfied with my decision on your request, 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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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anna Graham', written over a horizontal line.

Anna Graham
General Manager
Ministerial and Executive Services