



22 November 2022

Tēnā koe

On 26 October 2022, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *Can you please provide the below information for your contact centre/s by year for the past 6 years: 2022 year to date, 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018, 2017.*
 - *Total calls offered*
 - *Total calls answered*
 - *Total calls abandoned*
 - *Total calls transferred*
 - *Average speed of calls answered*
 - *Maximum wait time*
 - *Average handling time per call*
 - *Total emails received*
 - *Average handling time per email*
 - *Average wait time to answer an email*
 - *How you determine successful performance, and your score or result against this measure*
 - *The average pay for your frontline phone or email customer service teams for the same timeframe*
 - *The typical training duration for your frontline phone or email service teams for the same timeframe*
 - *Is your training delivered by an internal training team (are these trainers embedded within your Contact Centre teams, a standalone business unit or a contractor?)*

For clarity, I will address each part of your request in turn. Some sections of your request are grouped together.

- *For the past 6 years: 2022 year to date, 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018, 2017:*
 - *Total calls offered*
 - *Total calls answered*
 - *Total calls abandoned*
 - *Total calls transferred*
 - *Average speed of calls answered*
 - *Maximum wait time*
 - *Average handling time per call*

The Ministry has interpreted this section of your request relating to the contact centre calls to be for the Work and Income general enquiries line (0800 559 009). Please find attached **Appendix One** containing the following tables:

- **Table One:** The total number of calls to the Work and Income general enquiries line that were offered, answered, and abandoned from January 2017 to end of September 2022.
- **Table Two:** The average speed to answer calls, the maximum wait time and average handling time for calls to the Work and Income general enquiries line from 2017 to end of September 2022.

Should you require further information about other contact lines, such as the NZ Superannuation and Veteran's Pension number, please let us know and we would be happy to lodge this as a new request for information.

- *For the past 6 years: 2022 year to date, 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018, 2017:*
 - *Total emails received*
 - *Average handling time per email*
 - *Average wait time to answer an email*

The Ministry has interpreted this section of your request relating to the contact centre emails to be for emails to the Work and Income Helpline email address. Please find attached **Appendix Two** containing **Table Three** showing the total number of emails received by the Helpline email address from January 2018 to end of October 2022.

Please note, the Ministry is unable to provide the total emails received for 2017 as this information is held in one folder where responses and requests have been stored together. To assess which emails are received, the Ministry would need to review each individual email. 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.

Additionally for the average handling time and wait time to answer per email, this information is not centrally recorded by the Ministry and would require a manual assessment of each email chain received into the inbox. This section would also require the Ministry 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, these sections of your request are refused under section 18(f) of the Act, as they require substantial collation. 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 requests 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.

- *How you determine successful performance, and your score or result against this measure?*

The Ministry does not currently have a successful performance measure for our interactions through both email and phone channels. As such, this section of your request is refused under section 18(g) of the Act as the information you requested is not held by the Ministry and I have no grounds to believe that the information is either held by or closely connected to the functions of another department, Minister of the Crown or organisation.

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.

The Ministry operates several services to help improve caller experiences during busier times, including the communication of estimated wait times to all callers. We also offer a call-back service to all identified callers when expected wait times are greater than seven minutes. The call-back service provides callers with the option to either wait in the queue, or to automatically be called back by a Customer Service Representative (CSR) when their call would have been answered.

Due to the impact of COVID-19 and subsequent changes to the Ministry's operating environment (e.g. limited face to face interactions), as well as economic changes, we've seen an increase in demand for our phone-based services.

The Ministry has also made enhancements to the services offered through online channels, such as MyMSD and MyStudyLink, which are available to our clients 24/7 and offer support for many of the most common enquiries.

- *The average pay for your frontline phone or email customer service teams for the same timeframe.*

Please find attached **Appendix Three** containing **Table Four** showing the average annual salary for Ministry staff in frontline contact centre roles from 2017 to 2022.

Please note, this table only provides salaries for job roles where the main responsibility of the role is client-facing either through phone lines or email inboxes – specifically the CSR and Helpline Advisor roles. Both roles are combined to provide this average.

There may be other roles at the Ministry where frontline service is a responsibility of the role, however, this work may be on an ad-hoc basis depending on external factors – for example, during the COVID-19 pandemic where additional staff were required to assist with high call volumes.

- *The typical training duration for your frontline phone or email service teams for the same timeframe.*

Learning and development for Ministry staff is ongoing, based on the needs of each individual learner, the nature of the work they are doing in their role, and their career goals and aspirations. Therefore, there is no 'typical' training duration for our people. However, when a person first starts in a CSR role, we provide a programme of welcoming, orientation and induction to build their confidence and capability as they commence in their new role.

The duration of this programme depends on the learners, as we take a learner-centred approach to all our development and adjust the timing, structure and flow of each programme to meet the needs of our people. However, a typical induction would be on average 8 weeks long in duration, extending up to 12 weeks when you include the ongoing support and coaching that is done 'in the mahi', side by side with our people. This time duration has been consistent over previous years, with a focus of 'in the mahi' support (versus classroom-based learning) featuring more dominantly over the last two years.

Following this more formal induction period, our Capability Developers continue to provide support, coaching and guidance to all CSR's in their respective sites. This is ongoing and can be on a 'pull for support' basis, or targeted development based on the goals of the learner or identified gaps in their knowledge or practice.

- *Is your training delivered by an internal training team (are these trainers embedded within your Contact Centre teams, a standalone business unit or a contractor?)*

The learning and capability development for our Contact Centre teams is provided by a dedicated team of Capability Developers, based at each Contact Centre site. Our Capability Developers have strong knowledge and experience of our Contact Centre environment, and the Ministry's products, processes and systems, with most having previously been CSRs in our Contact Centre sites.

Our Capability Developers practice a tuakana-teina approach when working with our learners, where observations and reflections allow learning to be continual and mutual. This happens whether we are in a formal 'classroom' environment or working shoulder to shoulder, in the mahi, providing capability coaching, support and guidance to our learners.

Recognising the important role that our leaders have in developing and supporting our staff, our Capability Developers partner with Contact Centre leaders to strengthen the building of capability of our people, providing learning opportunities and solutions that support their development goals.

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

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Geoff Cook
General Manager
Contact Centre and Digital Services

Appendix One:

Table One: The total number of calls to the Work and Income general enquiries line that were offered, answered, and abandoned from January 2017 to end of September 2022.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022 (to end of Sept)
Calls Offered	4,644,402	4,655,039	4,901,661	5,697,845	5,603,285	3,828,133
Calls Answered	3,806,189	4,044,229	3,703,833	4,391,255	4,300,128	2,499,229
Calls Abandoned	838,213	610,810	1,197,828	1,306,590	1,303,157	1,328,904

Notes:

- This count is only for calls to the Work and Income general enquiries number (0800 559 009).
- This table does not cover the other client-facing contact channels, such as the NZ Superannuation and Veteran’s Pension line.

Table Two: The average speed to answer calls, the maximum wait time and average handling time for calls to the Work and Income general enquiries line from 2017 to end of September 2022.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022 (to end of Sept)
Average Speed to Answer (mins)	6:31	4:27	13:30	15:04	14:39	27:00
Maximum Wait (mins)	82:14	84:40	90:19	136:58	150:10	224:20
Average Handling Time per call (mins)	5:51	5:49	8:00	10:05	12:45	14:33

Notes:

- These times are only for calls to the Work and Income general enquiries number (0800 559 009).
- This table does not cover the other client-facing contact channels, such as the NZ Superannuation and Veteran’s Pension line.

Appendix Two

Table Three: The total number of emails received by the Helpline email address from January 2018 to end of October 2022.

	Total number of emails received
2018	25,690
2019	26,057
2020	58,154
2021	41,596
2022 (up to end of Oct)	47,733

Notes:

- This count only includes emails received to the Helpline email address.
- This count also includes emails forwarded from other mailboxes, the Ministry's website, Query from a General Benefit and Query from Other Enquiries.
- Some emails may also be from internal Ministry staff when emails need forwarding to another area of the business for response.
- This count does not include emails into other client-facing email inboxes, such as emails to International Services, unless they have been forwarded to the Helpline email address.

Appendix Three

Table Four: The average annual salary for Ministry staff in frontline contact centre roles from November 2017 to November 2022.

	Average annual salary (\$)
2017	51,756
2018	52,272
2019	54,023
2020	53,801
2021	57,376
2022	58,635

Notes:

- This count is a combination of Customer Service Representative and Helpline Advisor salaries where contact centre responsibilities (general enquiries line and Helpline inbox) are the main responsibilities of the job.
- This count only includes salaries from staff on nominal role, excluding staff on secondment.
- This count does not include roles at the Ministry where frontline service is an ad-hoc responsibility of the role - for example, staff assisting with frontline work during the COVID-19 pandemic to assist with high call volumes.