

Question on Notice

No. 745

Asked on 15 June 2021

MR J MCDONALD ASKED THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE, MINISTER FOR WOMEN AND MINISTER FOR THE PREVENTION OF DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE (HON S FENTIMAN) –

QUESTION:

With reference to delays in approving blue card applications which are inhibiting applicants employment opportunities —

Will the Attorney-General invest in more resources to ensure safety is maintained while processing delays are rectified?

ANSWER:

The Palaszczuk Government takes the safety of Queensland's children extremely seriously. That is why in 2020 the Government implemented its election commitment to introduce a 'No Card, No Start' scheme. The 'No Card, No Start' changes ensure that a person has been deemed eligible to work with children before they commence in a child-related role.

The Palaszczuk Government allocated \$17 million over three financial years to deliver its 'No Card, No Start' commitment (a critical safeguard for children) and significant IT system changes to modernise the previous paper-based blue card system.

To complement the 'No Card, No Start' policy, additional recommendations were actioned including:

- a modernised application process allowing people to apply for and renew their blue cards online with reduced processing timeframes for most people;
- an improved identity check process for people applying for blue cards and new cards issued now featuring a photograph of the cardholder;
- an online portal for organisations to electronically manage their blue card obligations and obtain real-time blue card status for their linked employees and volunteers;

I am pleased to advise that as at 31 March 2021, online applications with no police or disciplinary information were processed in an average of three business days. This is two business days faster than the five business day target, as recommended by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

I also note that online applications with less complex police information were processed in an average of 15 business days. The target is 21 business days.

Paper forms do take longer to finalise as they require manual processing and are impacted by peak processing periods. All blue card applicants are encouraged to take advantage of the online application processes whenever possible.

To make this process as easy and accessible as possible, Blue Card Services has call centre staff dedicated to assisting people to apply online. Pleasingly, I am advised that as at 31 March 2021, 80.93% of all applications were submitted online and over 5,339 organisations have been set up with access to the portal.

Typically, applications which encounter extended processing times relate to matters where the applicant has criminal history or disciplinary records which require further examination.

Applications of this nature, need to be carefully considered and the Palaszczuk Government supports and encourages all processes that enhance the safety for Queensland children. Although there can be no short cuts in undertaking a thorough assessment of applicants, I have asked the Department of Justice and Attorney-General to investigate options to streamline processes to obtain and assess criminal and disciplinary histories in a more timely manner.

Blue Card Services has already commenced work to review its assessment processes and identify where further efficiencies and service improvements can be made.

Blue Card Services has resources dedicated to supporting organisations to manage their obligations through the online portal. As more organisations transition online, it is anticipated that the average processing timeframes for all applications will continue to reduce.

Blue Card Services has also brought in resources to assist with reducing current workloads, particularly for the assessment of applications for people with more complex criminal history and also, to provide additional support to individuals and organisations engaging with the blue card system, including supporting them to transition to using online services.

The Government has further allocated an additional 3FTE over the next three years to continue to implement blue card reforms.