



Mr. Sam Keenan
Committee Secretariat
Committee of Public Accounts
Leinster House
Dublin 2

4 August 2022

Your Ref: S0944 PAC33

Dear Mr. Keenan,

Thank you for your letter of 20 July 2022 requesting further information following the meeting of the Committee of Public Accounts on Thursday 30 June 2022.

Further information was requested in respect of thirteen topics and the Department's responses are detailed in the attached appendix.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely,

Joe Hackett
Secretary General

Appendix

Committee of Public Accounts, 30 June 2022

Response from the Department of Foreign Affairs to letter of 20 July 2022

1. A note on the complaints received by the Passport Service, including information on the following matters:

- **The reason(s) for the significant increase in complaints received in 2022 compared to 2019**
- **The suggestions made by the Ombudsman to the Passport Service, and**
- **Which of these suggestions, if any, were taken on board by the Passport Service**

Over 790,000 passports have been issued to date in 2022. By way of comparison, 935,000 passports were issued in the whole of 2019. Due to the high level of demand for passports, particularly first time passports, as well as challenges experienced by the Passport Service in the wake of pandemic-related restrictions over the last 2 years, there has been an increase in the amount of complaints received in 2022.

Complaints received by Passport Service 2019-2022

Year	No. of Passport Service complaints	No. of complaints raised with Ombudsman	Total no. of passport applications received	% (total complaints)
2019	77	6	956,258	0.008
2020	40	3	499,941	0.008
2021	371	61	772,772	0.048
2022 to end June	397	100	791,277	0.05

The majority of complaints relate to processing times for first time and complex applications, as well as difficulties in contacting the Passport Service.

All first time applications require the verification of identity and undergo processes by which entitlement to citizenship must be established. In the case of children, witnessed identity and consent forms are required to ensure that guardians have consented to the issuance of a passport for the child. In order to protect the child and their guardians, this witnessed consent

is verified by the Passport Service. Due to the complexity of such applications, they take a longer time to process than renewals.

The Passport Service has implemented a number of measures that have significantly improved customer service and efficiency in recent months:

- Over 602 staff have been assigned to the Passport Service since June 2021, with 240 new staff assigned since May of this year. There are now 865 staff assigned to the Passport Service.
- Thanks to a significant investment in staffing and resources in the Passport Service, the turnaround time for first time online applications has reduced from 40 working days to 25 working days since March of this year.
- Former contact tracing staff from the HSE have been assigned to work in the Passport Service Customer Service Hub, with the result that 44 additional staff started work in DFA offices in Limerick in June. As a result of additional staff assigned to the Customer Service Hub, the number of calls handled by the Customer Service Hub has risen substantially in recent weeks and a very high percentage of calls are being answered with very short wait times. The Customer Service Hub is currently answering an average of 2000 calls per day.
- In May the Passport Service released two online video guides that provide tips to ensure that [passport photos](#) and witnessed [consent forms](#) for children are correctly submitted. These easy-to-follow video guides are available on the Department's website and social media channels.
- The Passport Service has worked with An Garda Síochána to develop a process for verifying Garda witnesses on passport applications in cases where the Garda signature cannot be verified. This system assists in reducing the number of applications that are delayed due to a failure to verify witness details.

Complaints about the Department of Foreign Affairs represent 2% of queries received by the Ombudsman. The Passport Service has engaged directly with the Ombudsman in relation to the complaints received. Urgent and priority cases are highlighted to the Passport Service, and an early resolution is offered where appropriate. This does not affect the rights of any citizen who wishes to request a full investigation into an issue. This cooperation with the Ombudsman has been effective, and will continue.

During engagement with the Passport Service, the Ombudsman suggested that the Passport Service offer a number of channels through which applicants can interact with the Passport Service regarding complaints. Work is ongoing to examine options for an online channel for the submission of complaints.

Currently, customers can submit a complaint in writing to: Passport Complaints, Knockmaun House, 42-47, Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2, D02 TN83.

The Passport Service aims to resolve complaints as promptly as possible. Each complaint is examined upon receipt and acknowledged. The complaint will then be investigated and a response issued in writing. In addition, the staffing on the phone lines has been increased significantly resulting in over 2,000 calls per day now being answered.

Further details of the Passport Service complaints procedure can be found on the DFA website - www.dfa.ie/about-us/our-commitments/passport-complaints-and-appeals/.

The Passport Service is committed to providing a high quality, effective service to all of our customers and welcomes feedback on how the service can be improved. All feedback is dealt with in confidence and in an impartial manner.

2. The Department's timeline for reducing the processing time for Foreign Birth Registration applications to an acceptable level

Due to the complex nature of the Foreign Birth Registration (FBR) process, the large increase in applications received following the Brexit vote in the UK, and the pause in the Service resulting from necessary Covid-19 restrictions, applicants should allow over 2 years from the receipt of supporting documentation for processing of FBR applications at this time.

Arising from the Covid-19 restrictions, and the subsequent reassignment of FBR staff to assist in the provision of essential passport services, the FBR Service was paused for nearly 15 months across the 2020-2021 period.

The processing of FBR applications resumed in November 2021. FBR staff have since processed over 7,600 FBR applications while also continuing to provide support to passport services due to the unprecedented levels of passport demand.

The Passport Service has been scaling up resources to deal with anticipated demand for passports and FBR applications since June of last year. The Passport Service has taken on 602 staff since June 2021.

The unprecedented level of staff currently working in the Passport Service will be maintained in the months ahead. This will allow for the reassignment of additional staff to the processing of FBR applications with the aim of significantly reducing turnaround times for these applications by the end of this year.

3. A detailed not providing information in tabular form on the following matters related to each of the overseas properties leased by the Department:

- **What the State is paying,**
- **The length of each lease, and**
- **In each case, whether consideration was given/is being given to purchasing instead of leasing.**

Ireland's diplomatic and consular network continues to grow under the Government's Global Ireland strategy and now comprises 97 missions accommodated in 172 premises. Of those, 137 are leased and 35 (20%) are State-owned.

The Department's new Property Management Strategy 2022-2025 has set objectives in relation to looking at property purchase options in relation to providing modern and flexible

workplaces to support the delivery of mission business delivery needs and support the overall strategy of the Department.

The Department keeps options to purchase premises under constant review and recently completed the purchase of the official accommodation in Santiago, Chile. In addition, negotiations are at an advanced stage to purchase the official accommodation in Bogotá, Colombia.

The Department is currently developing State-owned office and official accommodation premises in an Ireland House construction project in Tokyo.

The Department will continue to review options to purchase property where the opportunity arises and the purchase make strong economic and strategic sense.

Table 1

Vote 27 Offices and Accommodations	Lease Expiry Date	Annual Rent (€)
Abuja Office	31/12/2023	157,836
Abuja Accommodation	31/10/2024	79,546
Addis Ababa Accommodation	31/01/2025	112,008
Amman Office	31/05/2029	74,610
Amman Accommodation	30/11/2025	144,540
Bogotá Office	30/04/2029	94,105
Bogotá Accommodation	14/01/2023	103,956
Freetown Office	04/02/2024	48,437
Freetown Accommodation	02/09/2022	43,165
Hanoi Office	28/03/2023	248,196
Hanoi Accommodation	30/09/2023	97,680
Kampala Office	14/10/2023	235,464
Kampala Accommodation	31/08/2023	50,040
Lilongwe Office	30/06/2025	53,052
Maputo Accommodation	30/11/2022	94,188
Monrovia Office	30/11/2023	55,923

Nairobi Office	31/12/2026	56,282
Nairobi Accommodation	30/09/2027	73,620
Pretoria New Office	30/09/2031	119,390
Ramallah Office	30/04/2023	45,158
Ramallah Accommodation	30/06/2024	98,288

Table 2

Vote 28 Offices and Accommodations	Lease Expiry Date	Annual Rent (€)
Abu Dhabi Accommodation	28/11/2022	105,238
Abu Dhabi Ireland House	31/10/2026	69,361
Ankara Office	31/03/2023	115,431
Armagh Accommodation	01/09/2023	12,000
Armagh Staff Accommodation	27/05/2023	114,222
Armagh Joint Secretariat Office Accommodation	25/02/2025	119,458
Athens Office	10/03/2026	85,496
Atlanta Office	30/10/2022	90,131
Austin - Ireland House	31/03/2025	79,343
Bangkok Office	15/12/2023	92,220
Bangkok Accommodation	20/09/2023	78,703
Beijing – Ireland House (Compound both Office + Accommodation etc)	31/12/2023	608,886
Beijing Visa office	31/03/2023	299,604
Irish Secretariat of the British Irish Inter-Governmental Conference, Belfast	31/01/2031	157,672
Berlin Office	31/12/2024	313,175
Berne Office	31/12/2022	67,011

Boston – Ireland House	30/06/2024	139,270
Brasilia Office	14/02/2027	50,004
Bratislava Office	31/01/2030	90,585
Bratislava Accommodation	31/10/2027	32,400
Brussels Embassy Accommodation	31/12/2023	93,099
Brussels, Deputy Perm Rep Accommodation	01/09/2022	74,388
Brussels PfP Office	31/03/2025	71,094
Brussels, PSC Accommodation	31/12/2022	57,144
Brussels Office	28/04/2030	1,107,682
Brussels, Perm. Rep. Accommodation	31/08/2029	78,000
Bucharest Office	01/03/2024	61,920
Bucharest Accommodation	31/03/2026	96,000
Budapest – Ireland House	31/03/2029	143,784
Budapest Accommodation	30/06/2023	92,709
Buenos Aires Office	31/12/2024	156,641
Cairo Office	31/10/2025	136,543
Cairo Accommodation – Temp	30/11/2022	51,818
Cardiff Office	22/04/2031	51,965
Canberra Office & Accommodation Compound (State owned buildings / land lease fee provided)	Owned	15,524
Chicago Office	30/11/2023	128,731
Edinburgh Office	27/11/2022	59,080
Frankfurt Office - Temp	31/12/2022	91,560
Geneva Office	31/01/2025	335,998
Geneva Accommodation	31/08/2023	94,771

Helsinki Office	31/12/2022	127,135
Helsinki Accommodation	01/03/2026	60,000
Holy See Office	31/08/2027	64,800
Holy See Accommodation	31/08/2024	72,000
Hong Kong – Ireland House	14/01/2023	358,884
Jakarta Office	28/02/2025	110,342
Jakarta Accommodation	18/01/2026	68,454
Kyiv Accommodation	30/09/2022	36,300
Kuala Lumpur – Ireland House	31/07/2023	66,000
Kuala Lumpur Accommodation	28/02/2023	37,265
Lisbon Office	01/07/2025	94,058
Ljubljana Office	01/12/2026	119,010
London Office	31/12/2033	587,000
London Consular Services Office	23/06/2031	272,711
London Accommodation	08/09/2023	450,076
Los Angeles Temp Office (moved out on 29/07/2022)	31/07/2022	57,000
Los Angeles Office	31/08/2032	193,874
Los Angeles Accommodation	24/06/2025	108,540
Luxembourg Office	31/01/2027	55,200
Luxembourg Accommodation	14/12/2022	48,000
Madrid – Ireland House	15/07/2023	219,718
Manchester Office - Temp	31/05/2023	40,537
Mexico Current Office	31/08/2023	155,668
Mexico New Office (fit-out underway)	28/02/2032	187,831

Moscow – Ireland House & Accommodation	31/12/2022	226,010
Mumbai – Ireland House	31/12/2028	176,850
New Delhi Office	30/04/2028	314,001
New Delhi Accommodation	31/12/2025	231,910
New York, Ireland House	31/12/2024	852,954
New York, Con. Gen. Accommodation	31/12/2023	310,590
New York, PMUN Office	01/05/2034	1,004,636
New York, PMUN Office (additional space leased for Ireland’s membership of the UN Security Council)	28/02/2023	471,029
Nicosia Office	23/12/2026	42,000
Nicosia Accommodation	23/12/2026	42,000
Oslo Office	28/02/2027	247,556
Ottawa Current Office	30/04/2023	58,871
Ottawa New Office (fit-out underway)	31/01/2037	86,577
Paris, OECD Accommodation	31/05/2024	102,696
Prague – Ireland House	30/11/2025	145,000
Rabat Office - Temp	31/12/2022	49,930
Riga Office	09/04/2026	28,210
Riga Accommodation	30/09/2024	54,000
Riyadh – Ireland House & Accommodation (State owned buildings / land lease fee provided)	Owned	29,477
San Francisco – Ireland House	30/05/2030	1,175,628
Santiago Office	01/07/2029	103,000
São Paulo – Ireland House	12/08/2026	36,863
Seoul – Ireland House	30/11/2022	148,973
Seoul Accommodation	26/09/2022	126,000

Shanghai – Ireland House	31/05/2023	292,631
Singapore – Ireland House	31/12/2024	152,493
Singapore Accommodation	21/09/2023	204,094
Sofia Office	31/12/2025	65,016
Sofia Accommodation	15/03/2024	95,628
Stockholm – Ireland House	31/08/2025	183,000
Stockholm Accommodation (State owned apartment / service charge fee provided)	Owned	4,510
Strasbourg Accommodation	30/04/2026	73,328
Sydney – Ireland House	08/10/2024	262,897
Tallinn Accommodation	03/09/2030	30,000
Tallinn Office	05/11/2029	64,062
Tel Aviv Office	31/01/2027	137,550
Tel Aviv Accommodation	31/08/2026	173,987
Tokyo – Ireland House	16/03/2023	354,808
Tokyo Accommodation	31/03/2023	676,626
Valletta Office	02/11/2025	64,868
Valletta Accommodation	14/10/2023	84,000
Vancouver Office	31/10/2029	227,679
Vienna Office (Embassy & OSCE)	31/12/2030	182,160
Vienna Accommodation	01/10/2025	127,078
Vienna, OSCE Accommodation	30/07/2037	69,439
Vilnius Office	30/04/2027	58,875
Vilnius Accommodation	16/10/2024	60,000
Warsaw – Ireland House	14/12/2024	180,572

Warsaw Accommodation	31/12/2024	121,200
Wellington Office	31/07/2029	99,258
Wellington Accommodation	19/12/2022	46,885
Zagreb Office	22/12/2024	68,843
Zagreb Accommodation	30/11/2022	61,175

4. A note on the Department's workforce planning, including the promised review of the ratio of temporary and permanent staff in the Passport Service.

The Department's workforce planning has prioritised the resourcing of the Passport Service. A key part of the Passport Service's strategy in recent years has been a focus on implementation of service improvements. As part of that, the staffing requirements were considered in light of the forecasted demand, deferred demand for passports as a result of the pandemic and the need to reduce the turnaround times for the processing of passports.

To address the forecasted passport application needs, in the last 12 months the Passport Service has held two temporary clerical officer recruitment campaigns with a view to doubling staff numbers since June 2021. The Department also worked closely with the Public Appointments Service to recruit and assign additional staff. Altogether, the Department ran 11 competitions in 2021-22 specifically to address staffing needs in the Passport Service, either through the Public Appointments Service, or under the Department's own licence.

The Passport Service operational planning uses modelling software to monitor and predict levels of passport applications based on demand in previous years and taking into account renewal dates of passports already in circulation, as well as the level of citizen demand for international travel. The Passport Service uses workforce planning software to assign staff resources to the areas of highest demand. This is continuously monitored by Passport Service management.

The Passport Service will continue to assess and forecast the resourcing needs in line with the operational requirements which will feed into the wider approach to the Department's workforce planning. In addition, there is a peak season for passport applications, normally from January to mid-summer in pre Covid-19 years. During this peak season of passport applications, the Department has sought and received sanction from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to hire temporary staff, to meet these seasonal operational needs. Over the last two years, the impact of international travel restrictions and national Covid-19 public health restrictions meant that it was very difficult to estimate demand levels and match additional staff provision accordingly. The Passport Service workforce planning is looking at the optimum staffing levels to deliver the optimum service in future years. This will include a review of the ratio of permanent to temporary staff employed in various roles in the Passport Service which will be completed before the end of this year.

5. The starting salary for a clerical office in the Department.

Salary scales in the Civil Service are set by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

The starting salary for a Clerical Officer in the Civil Service is €485.60 per week (as of 01.02.22).

6. Irish Aid's most recent annual report for its aid programme.

The link to the most recent Irish Aid annual report, the 2020 report is <https://www.irishaid.ie/media/irishaid/publications/Irish-Aid-Annual-Report-2020.pdf>

The 2021 annual report will be published shortly.

7. Whether a dedicated phone-line, temporary or otherwise, can be made available to MPs in Northern Ireland regarding passport queries for Irish citizens

Elected representatives of Irish citizens, including those from Northern Ireland, can make formal representations to the Minister in relation to passport applications by submitting enquiries directly to his office.

In each case raised by an elected representative, the Passport Service reviews the application in question. However, applications can only be expedited in cases of genuine emergency such as a need for urgent medical treatment overseas or the death of a family member abroad. Such applications are expedited through the Travel Emergency service, which is available to all citizens who require an expedited passport due to such an emergency.

In cases where the estimated issue-by date has passed and all required supporting documents have been submitted, the Passport Service will prioritise the application to ensure that no further delay is experienced.

Passport applicants can also track the status of their passport application online via the Passport Tracker which is available on my Department's website - www.dfa.ie/passporttracking/. The information on the tracker has recently been upgraded, and is an excellent guide as to the status of an application in the system.

The Passport Service is developing an online portal to replace the temporary Oireachtas phone line that will allow elected representatives to query the status of passport applications on behalf of their constituents.

The testing element of this project has not yet commenced. Once the online portal is finalised, the Passport Service expects to roll it out during the autumn of this year.

Consideration is being given to facilitating access to this portal for all elected representatives of Irish citizens, including those from Northern Ireland.

8. The cost of running the Passport Service ten years ago, compared with the current cost of running the Service

The Passport Service salary and direct costs in 2011 and 2021 are outlined in tabular form below.

Direct costs relate to costs incurred in Passport Service operations, training, passport book and cards, postage, bank charges and other direct costs.

These costs do not include building costs as some buildings are state-owned and others are rented with the rent being paid by OPW. A number of Passport Service buildings are shared with other DFA units. Other overhead costs, such as utility costs, central ICT services, central corporate services, etc., are not reallocated to the Passport Service.

Salaries and direct costs:

	2011	2021
Salary	12,964,478	18,508,734
Direct Costs	9,158,423	19,455,019

9. The current percentage of passports not being issued within the expected turnaround times

The current turnaround times for processing applications are:

- 10 working days for online adult renewals
- 15 working days for online complex/child renewals
- 25 working days for online first time applications
- 8 weeks for An Post's *Post Passport* service

It is important to note that the turnaround time begins once the Passport Service receives any required supporting documents, not on the date that applicants complete the online application.

In July 2022, 90% of complete and correct applications are being processed within these advertised turnaround times. Applications that are incomplete and/or incorrect require further action by the applicant and will take longer.

10. A list of countries that Irish Aid determines as being in sub-Saharan Africa.

When administering official development assistance, the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) methodology is followed. Based on this, the following countries are considered to be 'Sub-Saharan'.

Sub-region	Intermediate Region	Country or Territory
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South of Sahara	Eastern Africa	Burundi Comoros Djibouti Eritrea Ethiopia Kenya Madagascar Malawi Mauritius Mozambique Rwanda Somalia South Sudan Sudan Tanzania Uganda Zambia Zimbabwe
	Middle Africa	Angola Cameroon Central African Republic Chad Congo Democratic Republic of the Congo Equatorial Guinea Gabon Sao Tome and Principe
	Southern Africa	Botswana Eswatini Lesotho Namibia South Africa
	Western Africa	Benin Burkina Faso Cabo Verde Côte d'Ivoire Gambia Ghana Guinea Guinea-Bissau Liberia Mali Mauritania Niger Nigeria Saint Helena Senegal

		Sierra Leone Togo
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11. Why the metric for online passport application completion was changed from 10 days to 20 days in 2020, and whether the metric has been adjusted back to 10 days.

The metric for online passport application completion was adjusted from 10 days to 20 days in 2020 to allow for the processing of first time applications submitted online. Passport Online was rolled out for first time applicants in November 2019. Prior to that date, Passport Online was only available to renewal applicants, which are relatively simple applications to process given that the applicant has already held an Irish passport.

First time applications take longer to process than renewal applications for a number of reasons. First time applications are necessarily complex as, in many cases, they are applications for Irish citizenship. The Passport Service must validate the identity of the applicant and take measures to ensure the applicant's entitlement to citizenship. It is the statutory responsibility of the Passport Service to protect the integrity of the Irish passport. Accordingly, a rigorous analysis process is in place to verify the identity and citizenship status of first time applicants.

In order to protect the rights of children and their guardians, the consent of guardians for minor applications must also be thoroughly validated. Due to the intensive analysis and extra measures undertaken by highly trained and experienced staff, first time online applications are currently taking 25 working days to process.

The current turnaround times for processing online applications are:

- 10 working days for online adult renewals
- 15 working days for online complex/child renewals
- 25 working days for online first time applications

Almost half of all online adult renewals are processed within 2 working days.

Due to pandemic-related restrictions, processing time for first time online applications increased to 40 working days in 2021. The Department has made a significant investment in the Passport Service and, as a result, turnaround times for first time applications have been reduced by 40% from 40 working days in March 2022 to 25 working days in June 2022. The Passport Service is working to further reduce this turnaround time to 20 working days.

Passport Online is now available to 97% of all Irish citizens worldwide.

12. The cost of having a passport printing facility in Cork

The Passport Service estimates the initial capital cost of purchasing and installing a new high security passport printing machine, automated mailing despatch machine, and related facilities to be between €5m and €6m.

The machines themselves will cost approximately €3m. In addition to this, the infrastructure required to install and operate these machines are considerable and include structural work to the building in which they are to be located such as anti-vibration reinforced concrete flooring, the construction of a secure stock room with a vault and a separate plant room for the chiller, compressor and chalk filter, as well as plumbing, draining and duct work. A sophisticated cooling system is also required as the machines must operate in an air-controlled environment. Due to the specialised nature of these industrial machines, spare parts must also be purchased in advance and kept on-hand so that any downtime is limited when or if the machines experience a fault. The installation of the machines and provision of the related infrastructure is estimated to cost an additional €2m.

In addition to the capital investment, these highly sophisticated machines require expert engineers to be on-site while the machines are in operation to maintain and service the machines and repair them when necessary. The annual cost of operating and maintaining these machines is estimated to be €600,000 per year.

In the relatively small number of cases where citizens need to travel urgently and do not have a valid passport, the Passport Offices in Dublin and Cork offer an Urgent Appointment service for passport renewal. The Passport Service offices in Dublin and Cork have processed over 9,000 Urgent Appointments to date in 2022. These Urgent Appointment applications represent just 1% of the total 860,000 applications received by the Passport Service since January of this year.

13. A breakdown of the €6million spent to date on the UN Security Council seat.

The Security Council term has required increased staffing in our Permanent Mission to the UN in New York, and this has involved some additional expenditure on salaries, postings supports, rent of additional office space, promotional activities and other costs. Some additional costs linked to our Security Council term have also been incurred at HQ and in other Missions.

Please see below a detailed breakdown of membership costs, using the latest available figures.

	Year 2020 (18th June to 31 December)	Year 2021
	€	€
Payroll Cost - HQ staff assigned overseas	469,873	1,516,343
Posting support costs (rent, travel, etc)	420,253	920,476
Payroll Costs - HQ staff	230,935	1,208,950
Local Staff Costs	72,503	672,009
Travel & Subsistence Costs	-	62,710
Office rental costs	-	536,035
	1,193,564	4,916,523