

I have been a member of the Student Loan Support Group almost since its inception, and currently act as one of the admins for the page.

During the past five years, I have come across frequent cases of parents trying to get information and or answers or are unhappy about some part of the student finance grant system.

I have found most are unaware of the appeal system.

Some have no idea there is a complaints panel, I have sign posted them to both options.

Student Finance have improved by adding to their letters etc that these processes exist in a more obvious way.

I have some limited experience of the Student Finance appeal system, and the complaints system.

A parent was having difficulty with Student Finance who withdrew an element of the grant system without warning for that coming academic year, and on which the student's higher education and future career would depend, they had agreed beforehand that this funding was available.

This additional bursary was never made that obvious to parents as to its availability.

I went with the parent to the appeal. People present who ought not to have been there because they dealt with the application were there, (contrary to the departments own regulations on appeals) and formed part of the complaint made. The department did not follow their own appeal process by ignoring this aspect.

This made it uncomfortable for me as an observer/ emotional support to the parent but much more so the parent.

Following rejection of the appeal by that panel, it was taken further to the complaint panel.

The panel were marvellous in fast tracking it as they were aware that there was a time limit in regard to the student starting the course only a few months later. The student was also stressed as it was exam time too, though the parent did her best to keep as much of what was going on away from the student to minimise the stress.

I found ████████ of the States Greffe, to be very helpful, considerate, and I always felt I knew what to expect the process would entail.

██████ made it as easy as possible and as stress free as anyone could make these things to be. As did the members of the panel who clearly listened, and it was very obvious they were interested in what the complainant and the department had to say, in a fair and objective manner.

The government department however were far less so in their replies, and even when the complaint was upheld, the parent still had difficulty getting a timely confirmation that the department would carry out what they had originally promised several months ago.

This was delivered only a week before the course was due to start, by the minister the letter was unclear as to the funding of future years.

This added further stress.

I do feel that the Complaints panel could do with more 'teeth'!

It is marvellous that complaint panel members do these important roles for our society, even though they are unpaid honorary positions, clearly, they must spend a considerable amount of their own time on these cases on behalf of the public.

I do feel that some more formal recognition / thanks of what they do should be made.

Over the past five years or more I have frequently pointed out to those ministers in charge of student finance, and the student finance officers, of the missing information, the incorrect information on the student grant system on the website, booklet given to parents and now online.

After considerable effort eventually they have addressed most of these and did also include a link to the section of the law / regulations of the grant system which had been requested several times over a long period.

Why it should take so much effort to get this done is beyond me. I particularly don't understand when we now have a communications department that it takes as long as it does.

When incorrect information is published or missing it leads to parents and students having the following issues.

1. They do not receive the correct amount of grant or allowance/s.
2. They discover it exists, it then takes more department time to correct it, or sometimes it's too late and the student either misses out on a course, or in some cases has to wait until the next year.
3. They don't go on to higher education at all.

The various scrutiny panels are aware of these complaints as I have routinely included them in emails of the requests for information or corrections to errors found.

Some mention of this is in previous submissions to that Education and Home Affairs scrutiny panel.

It would be helpful if all staff understood the regulations they are using when dealing with the public. I have had a pretty poor experience of when they do not, and I know from reading another complaints panel report in relation to a student grant that this had been highlighted before, but these kinds of actions still continued after that report.

When raising a question issue on social media platform Twitter, tagging gov.je or to a post they have made, they often don't answer.

Emails to State members are variable in their reply response, some never, some occasionally, others are very timely.

They do usually pass on queries to their departments, sometimes you get an answer sometimes never, or you chase them a few times for it.

The reason for mentioning this is if I were to complain about every unanswered email or query, I'd be very busy, I do not have the time, and I expect it may be the case for others. They just give up.

If you explore the gov.je website for complaints, it leads to a feedback page, makes many references to customers, I find the use of that word inappropriate as members of the public, islanders, people is much more accurate description.

People complaining are rarely customers of the government, but service users/ receivers of a service. The information is poorly laid out under 'Complaints process' it has a link to 'Customer feedback policy'.

Which takes you to a policy written by the Customer and Local Services department which might imply it's only that department?

It's not user friendly, or clear unless you read a mountain of information to further policies, and guidelines for various departments as to what those department process may be or differ from other departments.

Perhaps it would be better to have a separate page titled Complaints, and each department with a link to their particular complaint process and omit the use of the word feedback and customer, as feedback does not necessarily mean complaint.

If a member of the public is unhappy enough to want to complain, adding further hurdles will not make them happier; they are far more likely to become frustrated, angrier and / or give up. This will not help improve services as government say they want to do.

Perhaps when people send an email which includes a complaint or query outside of the complaint link webpage, perhaps the following maybe a better way:

Treat it in the same way as using the complaint process of that department. Or at the very least a reply in a timely fashion, with a link to the complaint process, if the aim is to improve services.

It's unclear how members of the public without access to a website know these processes exist or are able to use the online form.

If Customer and Local Services remain closed to walk ins, as they have announced, this leaves even fewer opportunities for members of the public to complain.

What will be in place if say a member of the public makes a phone call to complain?

How can a member of the public know the complaint is lodged, and follow the process without email access?