

19-21 Broad Street | St Helier
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Deputy Catherine Curtis
Chair, Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel

BY EMAIL

17 April 2023

Dear Chair,

Re Student Finance and grant payments

Thank you for your letter of 6th April.

Ordinarily the summer maintenance grant is sent via BACS on the Thursday prior to first Monday in April, to credit students' bank accounts on the first Monday in April (3rd April). This is for all dependent students and the independent students that have provided their actual income for the previous year.

There were two elements to this incident:

- The main payment run was paid one day late on Tuesday 4th April, with 626 students impacted, valuing £1,168,020.
- The independent students were paid two days late, on Wednesday 5th April, with 22 students impacted, valuing £46,947.

Answering each of your questions:

- 1. Please could you confirm whether the reason for the administrative error has been identified and advise if it has been addressed? Please provide us with further details about this, where possible.**

Regarding the main payment run, while the administration of the Student Finance grant moved from CYPES to CLS, the approval of the payments remained with CYPES. Unfortunately, on this occasion, the authorisation was not completed in time to make the payment date. Steps are now being taken to transfer the payment authorisation from CYPES to CLS.

For the Independent students the external administrators of the Student Finance system, misunderstood the instruction on which students were to be included in the payment run. They have acknowledged the error and taken steps to avoid this happening again.

All students were actively updated throughout Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, through the Student Finance [facebook page](#), by email and phone calls.

2. Please could you confirm the total amount (in £GBP) of payments made to higher education students ahead of the summer term? a. What was the total amount (in £GBP) of the payments delayed?

The total amount of payments made to higher education students ahead of the summer term was £1,214,967 - the same as those impacted. There are continuing, subsequent ad hoc payments as students continue to provide their information.

3. If possible, please could you provide a copy of the applicable procedure, policy, or payment checklist that Customer and Local Services uses to make payments to higher education students? If no specific document is available, please could you provide further details.

Please find attached the existing internal checklist used to process payments. In the interests of maintaining the confidentiality and security of our process, I ask that this is not published.

4. In a letter sent by the Minister for Children and Education to the Panel on 4th October 2022, it was indicated that Customer and Local Services was working to deliver improvements in the Student Finance service. Please could you outline the changes that have been made and provide details of any future changes?

I am pleased to confirm a number of improvements that CLS have delivered since Student Finance moved in July 2022. These include:

- In the first quarter of this year, telephone call handling is 96.7% (against a target of 95%) and the time to answer calls is within 19 seconds.
- Emails are answered in real time.
- Moving the application process to online forms.
- Scanning all students' files directly to the database and thereby eliminating all paper files.
- Proactive communications and reminders to students through the year plus the launch of the Student Finance Facebook page.
- More frequent payment runs with Treasury.
- Training more colleagues on the process to build resilience within the service and provide additional support at peak times.

Please let me include just a couple of the many positive comments the team received in response to how they managed the delays last week:

"I cannot thank you and your team enough for all your help this week. It's been so so lovely to deal with you and I hope you guys get the recognition you deserve for these efforts you've made for everyone."

“Everyone makes mistakes and it’s how you deal with them that makes the difference. I really welcome you using Facebook for communication, it’s a great way to let students and parents know what is happening and was definitely reassuring to us yesterday when the payments hadn’t been received.”

I would be pleased to facilitate a Panel visit to meet the Student Finance team if you’d like a more detailed overview. Please ask your Panel Officer to contact my Private Secretary if you would like us to arrange this for you.

The team are continually listening to students’ feedback and implementing ways to improve the process.

I am pleased to see that their team efforts to provide a prompt resolution alongside effective communication, is appreciated by so many students and their families.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Inna', followed by a horizontal dash.

Deputy Inna Gardiner
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