



JobBridge Complaints Procedure

JobBridge Complaints Procedures

Guidelines for the JobBridge Unit and Divisional Staff

Introduction

JobBridge, the National Internship Scheme, aims to keep unemployed people close to the labour market by providing them with the opportunity to gain some work experience and prove their competence to prospective employers. To avail of the programme, Host Organisations must adhere to strict Terms and Conditions - these can be viewed at www.jobbridge.ie.

All complaints in relation to the operation of JobBridge shall be fully and expeditiously investigated and any breach of the conditions shall be treated seriously. The sanction imposed on a Host Organisation will depend upon the nature and severity of the breach, up to and including termination of an internship and banning the organisation from any further participation in the scheme. The name of an organisation that is banned from participating in the scheme may also be furnished to third parties on request and published. The latter could result in reputational damage to the organisation that could have potentially serious consequences.

These Guidelines outline how complaints in relation to JobBridge should be investigated and decided. They are intended to assist the central JobBridge Unit and Divisional staff and facilitate consistency and transparency in the process. They should be read in conjunction with the Department's Complaints Handling Procedures (see Appendix 1).

It's important that all complaints are dealt with in an effective, efficient and timely manner, and in line with best practice.

Where no formal complaint has been received, but potential breaches of the conditions come to light during the course of a monitoring visit, the same procedures will apply.

Overview of complaints procedure

- Complaints may be made by an intern or concerned third party. This is to facilitate investigation where an intern may be reluctant to report non-compliance, misuse or abuse of the scheme.
- All complaints will be acknowledged, notified to all relevant parties and the results of investigations and decisions will be recorded.
- Investigations shall be conducted by local (case) officers who will ascertain the relevant facts of the case. All relevant parties should be interviewed and afforded the opportunity to respond to the issues raised. Where possible and appropriate, every effort should be made to attempt to resolve a dispute and/or quickly rectify any shortcoming with the consent of both parties. At all times, the investigating officer should be mindful of the best interests of the intern, while ensuring adherence to fair procedures and due process in respect of the Host Organisation.
- The local officer will submit a sufficiently comprehensive report to the Compliance Officer in the central JobBridge Unit to facilitate a formal decision on the complaint.
- A Compliance Officer in the central Policy Unit shall make a decision on the complaint having regard to the facts of the case. If a breach of the conditions is deemed to have occurred, the Compliance Officer shall determine an appropriate response. In the case of minor infringements, this might involve an instruction to rectify the shortcoming and/or issuing a warning in relation to the need to strictly comply with the Terms and Conditions of the scheme in future. This response might be appropriate in circumstances where both the intern and Host Organisation are satisfied that the matter can be addressed and are happy to continue with the internship once the breach has been addressed. In the case of more serious breaches, an appropriate sanction should be applied having regard to the nature and severity of the breach. This may include:
 - Immediate termination of an internship

- Suspension of participation in the JobBridge scheme for an appropriate period, from 6 months to an outright ban on further participation in the scheme.
- Sanctions must be proportionate to and commensurate with the offence. Factors to which the Compliance Officer should have regard include the nature and severity of the breach, intent (whether the breach was unintentional or willful), the benefit accruing to the Host Organisation, the impact on the intern and any employees of the organisation, and whether the offence constituted a fraud. Higher sanctions should obviously apply to willful breaches of conditionality and/or gross abuse of the scheme. Regard should also be had to the balance of power between the intern and Host Organisation.
- The Compliance Officer is wholly independent in the exercise of the deciding officer function and shall make a decision having regard to the facts of the case and mindful of the obligations to ensure fair procedures and due process – particularly the right of all parties to be heard and to be notified of the decision, of the grounds for the decision and the right to seek a review of the decision.
- The Compliance Officer must ensure that all relevant information to facilitate a decision is presented and may request the investigating officer to supply additional evidence if considered necessary/appropriate.
- The Compliance Officer will issue notification of the decision to the intern, Host Organisation and local investigating officer. The notification will outline the nature of the complaint, the grounds for the decision and the the right to seek a review of the decision within 21 days of the date of the decision.
- In the event of a decision to ban a Host Organisation from further participation, the organisation should be informed that the name of the organisation may be forwarded to third parties on request.
- Where a decision to suspend a Host Organisation from further participation for a specified period/idefinitely, the Compliance Officer will notify the National

Contact Centre in order to ensure that appropriate controls can be applied to give effect to the decision.

- In the case of complaints raised by concerned third parties, the complainant should be notified that the complaint has been investigated and that the allegation has either not been substantiated, or that it has been substantiated (in whole or in part) and that appropriate action has been taken – whichever is appropriate.
- Requests for a review of a decision may be made to “The Assistant Principal, JobBridge Unit, Department of Social Protection, Goldsmith House, Pearse Street, Dublin 2.” The Assistant Principal will examine the case and decide the case on its merits. The reviewing officer may uphold the original decision, or revise the decision/sanction in the event of an error having been made, or in light of new facts or evidence. All relevant parties and the local investigating officer must be informed of the result of the review.
- All notification of complaints, details of investigations, decisions made and sanctions imposed shall be recorded on the JobBridge Monitoring site.
- Where it is necessary to terminate an internship, every effort should be made by the local case officer/Intreo team to support the former participant.
- In cases of minor infraction and where the Compliance Officer has decided that the internship should be allowed to continue (with the agreement of the intern), or that the Host Organisation should be allowed to re-apply to participate following a period of suspension, regular monitoring visits should be undertaken to ensure on-going compliance.

Appendix 1

Comments and Complaints Handling in the Department of Social Protection

Introduction

These guidelines are designed to ensure consistency in how comments and complaints are dealt with across the Department. However, there may still be variance in how complaints are dealt with according to local circumstances and this should be clarified with the line/section manager.

The public are entitled to a high standard of service and we, as providers of services, should try our utmost to meet that expectation. Comments, complaints and suggestions provide the Department with a good measure of whether or not we are delivering a good service.

Customer Service Standards

Guidelines to the standards of service we must provide to our customers are outlined in the Customer Charter which can be viewed at:

http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Policy/CorporatePublications/HowWeWork/Documents/customer_charter.pdf

Definition of a Complaint

The Department's definition of a complaint is:

“An expression of dissatisfaction, measurable by reference to service standards, and requiring a response”

Issues covered by the comment and complaint system include delays, mistakes and poor customer service. The comment and complaint system does not cover instances where a person is dissatisfied with a decision on their claim. In these instances the Deciding officer should try to explain how the decision was made and where appropriate, advise the person of their right of appeal to the Social Welfare Appeals Office. However, if a complaint is about how we deal with a case in connection with an appeal e.g. failure to advise the customer of the appeal procedures, or being unhelpful in doing so, it would fall to be addressed under the comment and complaint system.

Dealing with a complaint / comment

Complaints /comments can be received in person, over the phone, via the web, by email or letter or on behalf of the customer. Complaints received in writing or by e-mail should be sent directly to the appropriate Designated Officer / Complaints Officer.

It will not always be clear if a person wishes to make a complaint. Someone may be clearly unhappy with the service but may just wish to comment on same. If unclear, the staff member must verify with the customer whether or not a complaint is being made.

If the complaint is regarding a staff member, the customer should be referred directly to the person's manager (see Appendix 1).

Consider the customer's position

More often than not the person you are dealing with will be complaining about the Department and, as far as they are concerned, **you** are the Department. In such instances you should:

- Try and look at the situation from the customer's point of view,
- Listen carefully,
- Show empathy and understanding.
- Remain impartial - avoid any bias towards either the Department or the customer.

If the person is angry you should:

- Try and de-fuse the situation by remaining calm,
 - Allow the person say their piece without interruption.
 - Try and de-personalise the situation (recognise that you are not the subject of the complaint).
 - **Do not take any abuse** - be firm and tell the person that you will not deal with them if they continue.
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- Take your time - avoid jumping to conclusions or blaming people.
 - Examine the complaint thoroughly, even if it looks as though nothing has gone wrong, dealing with all of the customer's concerns.
 - Ensure that you understand correctly the details of the case.

Procedures to be undertaken in the event of an assault or threatened assault are outlined in Appendix 2, Page 7.

Record the comment / complaint

The basic information to record is:

- date and time of receipt (if made by telephone)
- the customer's name, address, telephone number and PPS Number
- brief details
- action taken: e.g. actions taken to resolve the complaint on the spot
- if the complaint was dealt with on the spot, ask the customer if they wish to receive an acknowledgement and reply
- where the complaint cannot be dealt with on the spot register it on CCH system and assign it to the appropriate person .

Acknowledge the complaint (when a complaint is not dealt with immediately)

- Confirm that the complaint has been received, and is being dealt with
- Provide a contact telephone number and if possible say who is dealing with it
- Say when a response is likely to issue (complaints are to be dealt with within **15 days** of receipt).

In investigating the complaint you may need to:

- contact the customer if there is not sufficient information
- refer to appropriate person(s) to deal with
- examine relevant records
- seek advice on technical issues

Once you have investigated the complaint you should make a note of:

- what action you have taken to investigate the case
- who you have talked to and what records you have checked, and
- your conclusion - was a mistake made? Is the complaint justified?

Putting Things Right

- Once you **have fully identified the reason for the complaint**, take steps to **resolve the complaint**. For example, where there has been an unacceptable delay in issuing a payment, make sure the payment is made.
- Check that there are no further unresolved problems or hidden issues. Have all aspects of the claim been dealt with, any secondary entitlements due? Avoid any oversight that could cause problems later.
- Customers will just want an assurance that appropriate steps have been taken to address the cause of the mistake and to prevent a recurrence (to them or to anyone else).

Reply to the complaint

- Re-state the substance of the complaint
- Answer all points of concern, including how they were addressed
- Include an apology where a mistake has been made, and advise what is being done about it. (e.g. if the person was treated badly by a staff member, advise that the staff member is being sent on customer service training and that their behaviour will be monitored)
- Avoid using jargon, and always include a contact name and phone number
- Ask the customer if they have any further questions
- If the complaint cannot be resolved for any reason beyond our control, **explain why**.

If the customer doesn't accept the response

- Refer them to the Manager who will:
 - review the decision made locally,
 - decide if the view taken was fair and reasonable, and
 - reply appropriately.

If the customer is still not satisfied

- Advise them that this is the final decision but that they have a right to contact the Office of the Ombudsman if they wish to pursue the matter further.

Learning lessons from complaints information

Your initial written record of the complaint, along with the response letter and the investigating officers report, will become the "complaint" file. This will be held by the Designated Officer / Complaints Officer. Periodically s/he will collate all the complaints received and carry out an analysis to identify any problems or weaknesses in procedures, which need to be addressed and arrange for appropriate changes to be implemented.

Benefits for the Department

- If we are made aware of what we are doing wrong, it will allow us to address the problem, reducing the possibility of other complaints / comments on the same issue.
- It shows that we are an organisation that is willing to listen, leading to greater co-operation with our customers.