



CIS/CIPS Social Policy Records Quarterly Report

Citizens Information Services /
Citizens Information Phone Service
Social policy records quarterly report

January 2005 – March 2005

Introduction

This quarterly report contains a selected representative review of the social policy records compiled by Citizens Information Services (CIS) around the country during the first quarter of 2005. The data provided by Citizens Information Services and the Citizens Information Phone Service in social policy reports allows Comhairle to examine the nature of the problems as described in case studies experienced by callers for information and advice. Any views and/or recommendations contained in this report are those of the CIS concerned and have not been subject to any broader policy analysis.

The number of social policy records received from the Citizens Information Service and the Citizens Information Phone Service for the first Quarter in 2005 was 391 (again an increase on the first quarter of 2004 where 330 social policy records were received). Comhairle would like to take this opportunity to thank all CIS and CIPS staff for taking the time to complete and submit work on social policy records. We are aware that the constraints of time and resources place considerable demands on CIS workers and we appreciate your efforts in this regard.

A large and growing proportion of the queries to CISs with a social policy implication relate to employment and in particular employment rights. Non-compliance with statutory legislation particularly in the area of minimum wage and holiday entitlement, lack of proper documentation and problems relating to work permits, including the cost of work permits being deducted from employee wages and employers delaying applying for permit renewals, feature frequently in social policy records in this quarter.

Issues relating to Social Welfare Assistance include disincentives to work while collecting assistance payments and the fact that a claimant for Unemployment Assistance or Unemployment Benefit will be disqualified if they are willing to do part-time work only. A number of social policy records from around the country describe long delays (a 7 to 8 month waiting period quoted in one record) in processing applications for One Parent Family Payment.

One of the main issues this quarter in the housing category was difficulties experienced with the Scheme of Community Support for Older People. This scheme provides grants to improve the security and social support of vulnerable older people. The problems identified include shortcomings with the application process, difficulties in meeting the payment of the annual monitoring charges and gaps in the geographical coverage of the Scheme.

Rent Supplement is still a cause of concern for clients of the CIS particularly in relation to the lack of registration of Landlords. This is causing hardship for tenants who cannot avail of Rent Supplement where the Landlord is not registered.

Under the category of Social Welfare Insurance, social policy records illustrated that a number of clients over the age of 66 were not aware of their

eligibility for either the Living Alone Allowance or the Household Benefits Package when they applied for the Non Contributory Old Age Pension. Citizen Information Services also recorded long delays when attempting to make contact with the Sligo Pensions Services Office on behalf of their older clients.

Under the category of health, criteria for qualifying for a Medical Card continues to cause difficulties. Clients with a disability who do not qualify for a Medical Card have difficulties in meeting monthly medical bills. Low-income families have difficulties taking up part time work because of the potential loss of the Medical Card. There was also concern that as and from January 1st 2005, income from Home Help was being treated similar to income from any other source. CIS/CIPS clients who are currently working as Home Helps are fearful that they will lose their Medical Cards when they renew their Card and may have to cease working as Home Helps.

Other issues that came to the fore were difficulties in meeting annual bin charges particularly amongst older people and concerns over Grandparents rights to social assistance when they are caring for their grandchildren full time. The Habitual Residence Condition is causing delays in processing applications for means tested payments. EU nationals who come to Ireland to work experience difficulties when a problem arises with their employment within two years of the commencement date. One CIS reported on a situation where people had become homeless because they could not keep up the payments on their accommodation with the wages they were receiving.

CISs are also continuing to document problems contacting the telephone service at the Dept. of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in relation to citizenship queries. Also applications for family reunification continue to be refused even where it is apparent that an individual would be in a position to support his/her family in Ireland.

In the education category the CIS asked for more flexibility within local authorities when allocating supports for third level students in particularly difficult circumstances.

1. Employment

1.1 Employment Rights

20.01.05 Westmeath (Athlone CIC)

A client has been working for a company for the last 11 months and passed his probation period of 6 months without any problem. However his employer recently informed him that he would be let go for a period of 1 week before his employment period reached 12 months. He would then be re-employed in his usual position in the company. His employer made it clear that he was breaking his service on purpose because after 12 months employment the employee would have "more rights" than the employer.

The Labour Relations Commission confirmed that the employer could do this once but if he intentionally broke the employee's service again the two periods could be added together and an unfair dismissals case could be taken. The LRC also confirmed that the employee could take his case to a Rights Commissioner. When the client realised that the employer must be informed of any Rights Commissioner case he stated that his employer would then not re-employ him after the period of a week.

He realises that he can wait until he is re-employed to take this case but he does not want to break his service as he does not feel that he has done anything to warrant being let go, regardless of the length of time for which he is being laid off. He felt that it is unjust that he can be treated like this and that the law seems to protect the employer

27.01.05 Mayo (Castlebar CIC)

A client who worked for a builder and was laid off had a great deal of difficulty getting a P45 from his employer. He was also owed €1,500 for work he had done. The employer said that he would not pay him the money and the accountant said he could not issue the P45 until the money matter was settled.

Consequently, the client could not sign for Unemployment Benefit nor could he get his tax sorted when he subsequently took up employment with a new employer. This situation went on for 12 months. Following a visit to the CIC, the accountant issued the P45 straight away but with incorrect tax deductions.

1.01.05 Carlow (Carlow CIC)

A man who had worked full time for the past 5 years received only 2 weeks holiday pay during this time. The information provider advised him that he was entitled to 4 weeks for each year and gave him a form to fill out for the Labour Relations Commission.

1.01.05 Meath (Navan CIC)

A client called into the CIC. Aged 23 and on €5.20 per hour in a local supermarket. This adult worker was not being paid correctly for a long period of time, had asked for increases but could not get the appropriate wage. The information provider commented, 'surely, this should not occur when laws are in place to protect employees'.

1.2 Work Permits

17.01.05 Roscommon (Roscommon CIC)

The client is from Belarus and works in a supermarket in County Roscommon, on a work permit. The permit is due for renewal in March. Her employer has not yet confirmed that the permit will be renewed.

The client approached the CIC to find out if it would be possible to get a work permit for another job. In the course of the interview, it emerged that the client - and four of her colleagues - were being charged the €500 work permit fee via deductions from her wages.

This client wishes to remain in Ireland. She said that she would prefer if her employer would tell her whether or not the permit is being renewed but that she was afraid to approach him.

When it was explained that charging employees for the permit fee was against the law, the client was surprised but felt that there was no way she and her colleagues could complain about this because they would be afraid of losing their jobs which would mean they would have to return to Belarus. She also pointed out that it would be fairer on the workers if they held their own permits.

This CIC has pointed out similar abuses regarding work permits in Social Policy Records throughout 2004.

23.02.05 Dublin City Centre North West Information Service

A woman from Ukraine is working in Ireland on a Work Permit. A renewal application was lodged in September 2004. As of today 23.2.2005 she still has not received her Work Permit. She tried on numerous occasions to get the employer to check with the Dept of Enterprise, Trade and Employment but to no avail.

When the Information Officer phoned the Work Permit Section it was discovered that the application was lodged in October 2004 but, obviously because the employer had not checked up on it, it had not been processed to completion. When asked if there was anything further required from the client to complete processing, the Information Officer was told that the employer would be contacted if there was.

When this new Permit is issued it will start from the date of expiry of the last Permit, meaning by the time she receives it, it will have just seven months left to run. This shows yet again that the balance of control lies with the employer and the employee is depending on him to deal with issues, even though, it is the employee's livelihood and immigration status which depends on it.

2. Social Welfare Assistance

2.1 One Parent Family Payment

18.02.05 Carlow (Carlow CIC)

A lone parent had her 3rd child and notified the Dept. of Social and Family Affairs of this 5 months ago and still has not received her updated book.

21.01.05 Donegal (Donegal Town IIU)

A single parent approached us for advice in respect of her Rent Supplement entitlement. It then came to light that she had applied for One Parent Family Payment in October 2004 but her claim had still not been processed. She was receiving Supplementary Welfare Allowance for a few weeks but this had ceased as she had returned to part-time work. Therefore, she was in a situation where she was living on part-time earnings only with no assistance from the Community Welfare Officer. This delay in the processing of One Parent Family Payment is unacceptable.

30.03.05 Carlow (Carlow CIC)

A client was waiting for he One Parent Family Payment to be processed since September 2004. Phoned Lone Parent Section and was advised that there is a 7-8 month waiting period for processing claims.

2.2 Unemployment Assistance

21.02.05 Roscommon (Boyle CIC)

The client has a family, is working full-time and recently started a PLC course. She found that she was unable to continue with her familial and work responsibilities as well as her course work. She offered to work part-time but this did not suit her employer. She was aware that she would not be able to draw UB for nine weeks if she voluntarily left her job.

The client's main point of contention was that a claimant for UA or UB will be disqualified if they are willing to do part-time work only. Consideration should

be given to the notion that perhaps those willing to do part-time work should be paid at least a half-rate of UB/UA while unemployed, and that an exception should be made by those who either have family responsibilities or who are undergoing further education.

If the further education was completed and improved the client's career prospects, then it could be argued that the half-rate UB would possibly be recouped in additional taxes later on.

The position of the family and the special position of the mother in Constitutional terms should also be considered in the light of the above. However, equality legislation in terms of service provision may mean that it would not be possible to introduce this provision for mothers only, or even for mothers and fathers only.

The bigger picture in relation to the above is that many mothers of young children are being forced to declare that they are available for full-time work when what they really would be willing to do is part-time work, given their desire to care for their children themselves, and the exorbitant cost of private childcare.

3. Housing

3.1 Security for the Elderly

06.01.05 Carlow (Carlow CIC)

A client wants to apply for a pendant alarm in January 2005. The closing date is August of each year. So she will not receive her alarm until Jan/Feb 2006.

18.03.05 Longford (Longford CIC)

An elderly person over age 80 feels that the annual charge relating to her security / safety pendant is unfair for persons like her who have little means.

An allowance payable towards the cost of this would be helpful for those with low income.

16.02.05 Tipperary (Thurles CIC)

Over the winter months we have had numerous enquiries from older people regarding security systems for older people, particularly, house alarms. Under the scheme "Community Support for Older People" funding is not available for the installation of conventional intruder alarms. We have found an increased demand by the elderly (particularly those living in rural area) for

such alarms but the cost is prohibitive for a great number of people. It is essential that house alarm systems be included within this Scheme so that elderly people can be reassured regarding their personal security in their declining years.

3.2 Rent Supplement

21.01.05 Donegal (Donegal Town IIU)

A single parent approached the Centre regarding her Rent Supplement entitlement. She was working on a part-time basis and waiting for her claim to One Parent Family Payment to be processed. In the meantime, she claimed Rent Supplement. However, her landlord had not registered the tenancy and, on this basis, she was not entitled to Rent Supplement. She was, therefore, surviving on part-time wages and having to pay her full rent out of this as well as bring up her child.

The issue here is: who is responsible for ensuring that the landlord registers the tenancy?

If the Health Board requires the landlord to be registered is there no system in place to assist them to chase this up with the landlord, rather than the tenant running the risk of putting themselves in a difficult position with the landlord by pursuing the matter themselves.

4. Social Welfare Insurance

4.1 Household Benefits Package

30.01.05 Louth (Dundalk CIC)

A man called into Dundalk CIC, he has been on Invalidity Pension for the last 7 years. He is claiming for his wife as a Qualified Adult. Nobody else is living with them. He wanted to know if he could work part-time and if he did how it would affect his Invalidity Pension.

The Information Officer explained to him that he needed an exemption from Social Welfare before he could take up part-time work. The Information Officer also explained that his secondary benefits like his Household Benefits Package would not be affected as long as he was still in receipt of his Invalidity Pension.

The man informed the Information Officer that he is not receiving the Household Benefits Package. He didn't know about the package and the first he had heard of it was when the Information Officer mentioned it to him.

This man filled out an application form for the Invalidity Pension. On that form he would have given all his details to Social Welfare. He has lost out on his entitlement to the Household Benefits Package for the last number of years because he did not know he should have applied for them.

26.02.05 Louth (Dundalk CIC)

A man called into the office to enquire about his entitlement to Household Benefits Package. He is aged 68 and has a Contributory Pension.

During a recent conversation with a friend he realised that he was entitled to the Household Benefits Package but did not know he had to apply for it separately, he had assumed that if he were entitled, the Department would have informed him when he received his Pension.

An application was made for the gentleman to receive his entitlements unfortunately it is two years later.

28.01.05 Louth (Dundalk CIC)

Caller to Dundalk CIC, this lady's husband died in December 2004. She called in to enquire about the Free Schemes. Her husband had the electricity allowance, TV licence and phone allowance. She needed help filling out the application form in her name.

The information officer (IO) filled out the application for her. She contacted Eircom for the client to change the phone bill into her name. She waited 25 minutes to get through to Eircom to inform them that this lady's husband had died and to change the name on the bill into this lady's name. This lady tried phoning Eircom herself but could not get through.

The Household Benefits Package in this case had been granted to this lady's husband a number of years ago. Surely it would be simpler for the client and Social Welfare, when someone in receipt of the Household benefits Package dies, and their spouse/partner sends back the pension book and are applying for the Widow's/Widower's Pension that Social Welfare could amend the name on the Household Benefits Package at the same time.

The delay in getting bills changed into the partner's name causes stress to clients and duplicate paper work for Social Welfare. Someone in Social Welfare has to process the application for the Widow's/Widower's pension. Surely it would save time if the Household Benefits Package could be processed at the same time as the Widows/Widower's pension.

4.2 Pensions

10.01.2005 Kilkenny (Kilkenny CIC)

An information officer tried to obtain information about Pensions Forecasts from Sligo Pensions Office.

She was left on hold for 5 minutes - eventually had to hang up without succeeding to obtain the information.

Provided telephone number for local Social Welfare office to client as an alternative.

1.03.05 Cork (Hollyhill/Knocknaheeney CIC)

This concerns a number of queries to the Pension Services Office in Sligo regarding OAP (Old Age Pension).

Over the last 2 weeks I have had to ring these sections a number of times and not only have been left on hold for long periods of time, but on getting through to a person have ended up being cut off. This has happened on about 4 occasions. Then of course I have to go through the entire procedure again - which means it can take up to 1 hour to get one small query sorted out.

I enquired if there was a problem with their phone system but no one seems to know. It is extremely frustrating and time-consuming.

21.01.05 Galway (Galway CIC)

The Widow's and Widower's Pension as a Social Welfare payment is unavailable to a cohabiting couple in the event of a death of one of the partners.

The Dept of Social & Family Affairs recognises cohabiting couples and assesses same as married couples for every other payment.

4.3 Disability Benefit

23.03.05 Westmeath (Athlone CIC)

A man came into the Centre to ask about his Disability Benefit. On inquiring how long he had been on Disability Benefit he answered that he had been in receipt of it for three years. This man had a condition that would mean he would not be returning to work in the foreseeable future. I explained to him about Invalidity Pension, and he was shocked and annoyed to think he could have been on this payment for the past two years and that Social Welfare had not informed him about it. The man has since qualified for Invalidity Pension.

11.02.2005 Mayo (Claremorris CIC)

Client who was in receipt of Disability Benefit and Child Dependent Allowance for 2 children for 18 years had her Dependent Allowance decreased. Her children were in full time education and she had had the necessary forms completed and forwarded to the Dept. of Social and Family Affairs.

During the course of conversation it transpired that she was not in receipt of a Qualified Adult Payment for her husband even though she would have been entitled to it. Her husband wasn't employed, nor in receipt of a payment. He farmed a small-holding of land but received very little income from it. The reason she was not in receipt was twofold, she didn't know that she could receive a payment for her husband and also her misinterpretation of the Social Welfare ruling that a person cannot be in receipt of two Social Welfare payments. She, her husband and a 3rd party discussed her husband's eligibility for Farm Assist but they were under the impression that if he received a payment she would lose hers.

I contacted the Dept regarding her initial application for Disability Benefit and the decrease in Child Dependent Allowance. I was informed that it was stated on her application that her husband was employed as a farmer but it wasn't stated that he was in receipt of income from it. She acknowledged this to be true. The Dept forwarded her a new application form for DB. On receipt of her application form, Social Welfare informed her that she was entitled to back payment, but didn't specify for how many years

5. Health

5.1 Medical Card

3.03.2005 Dublin, (Liberties CIC)

A woman came into the Centre on Tuesday, 1 March 2005. She was on a Widow's Contributory Pension. She has a Medical Card and also has some serious ongoing health conditions. She wanted to know if she got a job as a Home Help with the Health Board would it affect her Medical Card.

As far as we knew a person on a Social Welfare payment, with a Medical Card, was allowed work as a Home Help with a Health Board for 10 hours a week and still retain their Medical Card. We phoned Lord Edward Street to confirm this and were told that as of the 1 January 2005 that this had been withdrawn and that income from Home Help was being treated the same as income from any other source and was being means tested as such. This means that if the woman went to work as a Home Help for 10 hours a week now she will lose her Medical Card.

This has serious implications:

It means that all the people who are currently working as Home Helps and have Medical Cards will lose their Medical Cards when they come up for renewal or will have to leave their jobs.

This will put pressure on the Home Help system and reduce the pool of people available to work as Home Helps.

19.01.05 Louth (Drogheda CIC)

A 68 year old man who is seriously ill with several life threatening conditions applied for a Medical Card last May (2004), he was refused because of his means. He is €60 over the means test because of a small pension. His son came to our office in December 2004 to reapply for a Medical Card on his father's behalf. On 14 January he received another refusal.

The Community Welfare Officer in the area asked for medical evidence which was supplied by his GP and consultant in Beaumont Hospital. He has had his leg amputated and is on kidney dialysis and will need a multitude of appliances when he comes home to live with his son. We have appealed this decision and are awaiting an answer.

6. Social Welfare General

6.1 Child Benefit

18.01.05 Offaly (Tullamore CIC)

Co Offaly CIS have found recently that it is extremely difficult to access the Child Benefit Section by phone. I was on hold for over twenty minutes on two occasions last Friday and my staff report to me that this is normal.

Client also reported on Friday that they could never get through to the Section. This makes the service inaccessible and costly and acts as a barrier for a citizen who wishes to enquire about Child Benefit claims.

8.01.05 Donegal (Dungloe IIU)

Complaints that Child Benefit increases in the Budget are not coming into effect at the same time as other Social Welfare Increases.

This is a frequent anomaly which crops up with Budget changes. It seems to have become the norm now that there is always a delay in the Child Benefit increases being implemented compared to the increases in other Social Welfare Payments.

6.2 Companion Pass

14.03.05 Tipperary (Thurles CIC)

The Companion Free Travel Pass is available to people if they satisfy certain conditions. One of those conditions is that the person be aged 75 or over and be medically unfit to travel. This age threshold should be reduced to 70 years for people who do not satisfy the other conditions.

Frequently we find people between 70-75 with medical conditions, who are unable to travel alone to doctors and specialists without being accompanied by a companion. The age threshold is too high at the moment and needs to be reduced.

7. Migration

7.1 Habitual Residence Condition

25.01.05.1 Meath (Navan CIC)

EU Nationals living in Ireland less than six months found themselves homeless. They could not afford to continue to pay for accommodation. However due to the Habitual Residence Condition they found help very difficult to obtain from any quarter.

03/01/2005 Donegal (Donegal Town IIU)

A client came to the Centre querying the delay in payment on her husband's Unemployment Assistance claim made 6 weeks ago. They had to complete a Habitual Residence Condition form. This has been sent to Dublin for a decision and payment of the UA claim has been delayed until the local office receive a decision on this matter.

As both the claimant and his wife originate from England and have been resident in the Common Travel Area for their whole lives they should satisfy the HRC. Surely this decision could have been made in the local office without the need for them to complete an HRC1, most of which would have been irrelevant to their circumstances. It is unsatisfactory to have their claim delayed for so long on this basis.

In addition, the literature suggests that there is an appointed Deciding Officer in the local office who would make the decision on habitual residence and this does not seem to be the local practice.

7.2 Visas

29.01.05 Kildare (Newbridge CIC)

A number of clients have expressed total dissatisfaction with the service provided by the Dept. of Justice in relation to applying for Citizenship. This telephone service is only available two days per week from 10 am - 12 noon.

Most of our clients are working and find it difficult to be this restricted in accessing this service. Also when they get an opportunity to telephone they are usually cut off. The service does not have any way of letting you leave a message, nor will the reception desk take a message.

Our clients feel that this service is highly inaccessible to them and would like to see major improvements in the service that is being provided.

04/03/2005 Galway (Clifden CIC)

A client from Pakistan has been in Ireland on a work permit since March 03. He wanted to bring his wife to Ireland and is in a position to support her financially. He had a letter from his employer to confirm this and relevant bank statements to support his application for a visa for her. The application was refused on 'finance' grounds, and this was not explained in any detail, simply saying 'finance'.

Considering the applicant's income, the fact that his wife was not coming to Ireland to look for work, and the obvious support from his employer, this seems somewhat harsh. Other unsatisfactory aspects of the situation are the difficulty in getting through to the DJELR (Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform) and the cost involved in applying for such visas. Our client commented that he knew of other work colleagues who were in similar situations.

8. Consumer Issues

8.1 Bin Charges

17.01.05 Cork (Hollyhill/Knocknaheeny CIC)

A client came into our Centre today enquiring about the new bin charge system and wondering whether she would have to pay as, although she is in receipt of an OAP, she has a nephew living with her who is on a Disability Allowance. As she has the nephew living with her, however, she will not be entitled to a waiver as she is not living alone - even though their only income is a Social Welfare payment. If the other person living with her was in receipt of an OAP she would however be entitled to the waiver on the bin tags.

Surely this is inflexible and an anomaly in the system as the income coming into the house is still low and similar to the income coming in if both parties were in receipt of an OAP. This is a new system so it remains to see long term how it will end up affecting people, but it needs to be highlighted and noted by City Council officials. Our centre will be monitoring this issue and will be highlighting the issue to the City Council if we continue to come across this problem.

5.01.05 Longford (Longford CIC)

Our client was aggrieved about the cost of bin charges. Elderly people and those who are less well off would benefit from the introduction of a waiver scheme for privately operated bin charges. This scheme, if in operation, would help low income families and old age pensioners greatly. Currently the waiver only applies to local authority bin charges.

9. Family Issues

9.1 Grandparents Rights

22.02.05 Westmeath (Mullingar CIC)

Clients presented (male and female grandparents) re issues with the break-up of the marriage between their daughter and son-in-law. The oldest child of the family - a boy aged 14 - was traumatised and his social behaviour was causing a problem for school and other authorities.

The grandparents arranged a trip to the UK for this youth and the youth's father refused to let him travel. Without both parents consent the airline would not carry the youth on this trip with the grandparents. Issues with regard to passport also arose. My clients stated that the youth's father was very vindictive. They had found access to the children difficult for some time.

9.02.05 Westmeath (Mullingar CIC)

This lady has not had contact with her grandson for a long time. Her relationship with her daughter (the grandchild's mother) has deteriorated over time. Also, the child's father appeared to sustain the division in relations between the family.

The client stated that she was worried about the daughter's health and wished to know how she could intervene or what was the legal position on the matter. We advised her to contact Treoir and the Mediation Service.

9.2 Maintenance Payments

14/02/2005 Dublin (Blanchardstown CIC)

Client is the mother of 3 young children - one a two month old baby. She receives a reduced Rent Supplement due to maintenance from her estranged husband.

In December and January her husband was out of work due to illness. No maintenance was paid. The woman notified her Community Welfare Officer (CWO). She had supplied the CWO with all the documents requested including a solicitor's letter but the CWO has not responded. For the second month she does not have enough to cover rent. The family is rapidly sliding into debt and poverty and the SWA (Supplementary Welfare Allowance) system appears unable to respond although it is intended as a safety net to keep people above the poverty margin.

10. Education

10.1 Third Level Supports

15/02/2005 Wicklow (Bray CIC)

Students whose parent or guardian holds a current Medical Card are exempt from payment of Leaving Certificate examination fees. This does not appear to extend to CAO application cost and costs of Mock examinations (presumably as these may be seen as optional).

If the state has a policy of trying to encourage wider participation in third level education and retention of increasing numbers to completion of Leaving Certificate this needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Bray CIC, Bray Adult Guidance Centre and Bray Partnership are all trying to support a mother in receipt of OPFP (One Parent Family Payment) who is struggling to find disposable money to support her daughter complete her Leaving Certificate and apply for a third level course. The pressure being put on both mother and daughter may result in daughter not completing second level.

09/03/2005 Dublin (Northside CIC - Northside Partnership)

A client of the Northside Partnership's Higher Education Support Scheme moved to Ireland from America in 2003. He had been living in the US with his mother since he was five. He has an Irish passport. Things hadn't been going well between his mother and her partner so he moved home to live with his

grandmother in 2003. He has been attending a local PLC college since September 2003 where he has been doing very well.

The problem is that John hasn't been eligible for a local authority grant since starting college. To qualify for a local authority grant, the parent/guardian has to have been resident in the state from the 1st of October of the previous year. John's mother, although Irish, is a permanent US resident. His grandmother's income details will not do because she is not his legal guardian. Although 21 years of age, this guy is too young to make a mature, independent application (according to the rules, mature students must be 23 years of age by January 1st of the year in question).

Surely, it is not unreasonable to expect more flexibility from the local authorities in these kinds of situations. Two feasible alternatives appear to be possible:

1. The acceptance of his mother's US. tax/welfare documents
2. The acceptance of a mature, independent application from John

Otherwise, John, who is of Irish nationality and has overcome considerable barriers to remain in further education, is facing another year without the support of a local authority grant. This year he'll be moving on to third level to study at an Institute of Technology. You can imagine the pressure this puts on both his widowed grandmother and himself.

Over the past year, I have come across three others in the same predicament - two of these are siblings in the same family. One applicant's appeal to the DES was unsuccessful.

11. Tax

11.1 Cohabitation and Tax Credits

28.01.05 Sligo (Sligo CIC)

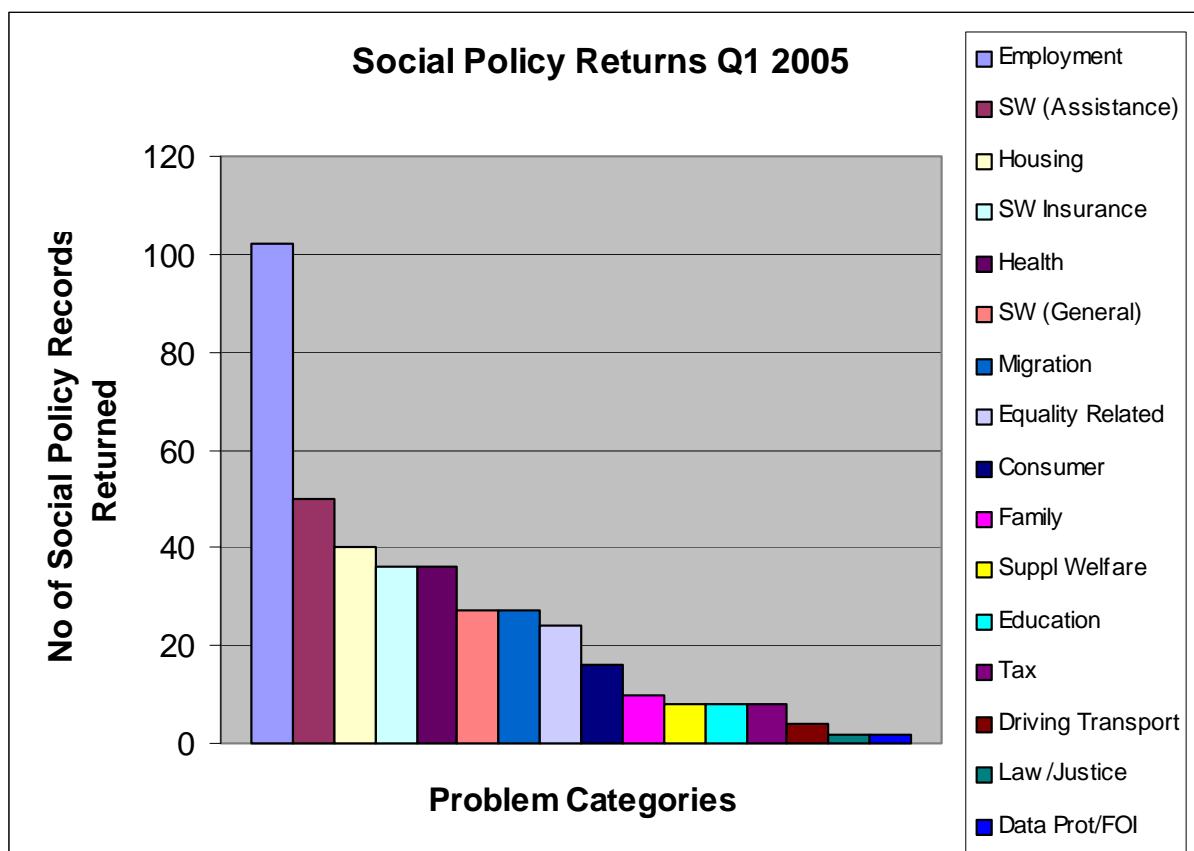
A young couple called into our Centre about being assessed as a married couple for Social Welfare and not assessed as a married couple for tax, where they could benefit a lot more.

24.01.05 Longford (Longford CIC)

Client is a working mother with two children. She is co-habiting with her partner, they both returned from the USA five years ago. Her partner is not working and he never claimed any Social Welfare benefits as he had some savings from his previous employment in the US which he has lived off until

recently. Client earns approximately €570 per week, some weeks this is higher due to overtime. She is paying tax at 20% and at the higher rate when her income exceeds the cut-off point due to overtime earnings.

She feels aggrieved that she is not eligible for the 'married tax allowance' as she is, at this stage, providing for her partner and two dependant children. Also, she has decided to work and live with her partner and children as a family instead of living separately and claiming One Parent Family Payment from Social Welfare. She feels that her only option is to get married in order to get what she feels she is entitled to under the PAYE system as it exists.



Number of Social Policy Records returned to Comhairle by
Citizens Information Services and the Citizens Information Phone
Service during January to March 2005.

CIC	No.
Carlow (Carlow CIC)	67
Cavan (Cavan CIC)	12
Clare (Kilrush CIC)	4
Clare (Shannon CIC)	4
Cork (Cork (South Mall) CIC)	3
Cork (Hollyhill/Knocknaheeny CIC)	13
Cork (Mayfield CIC)	1
Donegal (Ballyshannon CIC)	1
Donegal (Carndonagh IIU)	5
Donegal (Donegal Town IIU)	9
Donegal (Dungloe IIU)	11
Donegal (Letterkenny IIU Information Line)	2
Donegal (Letterkenny IIU)	2
Dublin County (Dun Laoghaire CIC)	2
Dublin County (Swords CIC)	1
Dublin Postal Codes (Blanchardstown CIC)	14
Dublin Postal Codes (City Centre North West Information Service)	4
Dublin Postal Codes (City Centre (Dublin) CIC)	2
Dublin Postal Codes (Clondalkin CIC)	5
Dublin Postal Codes (Crumlin CIC)	1
Dublin Postal Codes (KARE CIC)	3
Dublin Postal Codes (Liberties CIC)	3
Dublin Postal Codes (Northside CIC - Northside Partnership)	1
Dublin Postal Codes (Northside CIC)	3
Galway (Clifden CIC)	3
Galway (Galway CIC Outreach Gort)	1
Galway (Galway CIC Outreach Loughrea)	2
Galway (Galway CIC)	4
Galway (Tuam CIC)	2
Kildare (Maynooth CIC)	4
Kildare (Newbridge CIC)	3
Kilkenny (Kilkenny CIC)	10
Laois (Portlaoise CIC)	3
Leitrim (Carrick-on-Shannon CIC)	5
Leitrim (Drumshanbo CIC)	10
Limerick (Limerick CIC)	9
Longford (Longford CIC)	13
Louth (Drogheda CIC)	7
Louth (Dundalk CIC)	12
Mayo (Ballina CIC)	3
Mayo (Castlebar CIC Outreach	1

Charlestown)	
Mayo (Castlebar CIC)	10
Mayo (Claremorris CIC)	2
Meath (Navan CIC)	37
Monaghan (Monaghan CIC)	4
Offaly (Tullamore CIC)	23
Roscommon (Boyle CIC)	2
Roscommon (Roscommon CIC)	11
Sligo (Sligo CIC)	13
Tipperary (Thurles CIC)	6
Waterford (Waterford CIC)	6
Westmeath (Athlone CIC)	2
Westmeath (Mullingar CIC)	3
Wexford (Wexford CIC)	3
Wicklow (Bray CIC)	2
Total	391