Ms. Eilis Fallon,
Committee of Public Accounts,
Leinster House,
Dublin 2.

Please Quote Reference Number on all Correspondence
Our Ref: DES-SG00559-2019
Your Ref: PAC32-l-1657

25th November 2019

Dear Ms. Fallon,

I refer to your correspondence of 13 November 2019 regarding the evidence required by SUSI in cases involving difficult family situations.

For student grants purposes, students are categorised according to their circumstances either as students dependent on parents or a legal guardian, or as independent mature students.

Section 16(4)(a)(ii) of the Student Support Act 2011 requires that in the case of a dependent student, the income of the applicant and his or her parents, as appropriate, shall be taken into account in calculating whether the limit specified annually is exceeded.

Article 21 of the Student Grant Scheme 2019 sets out the persons whose income is to be considered. Article 21 (2) states that where the dependent student’s parents are divorced or legally separated, or it is established to the satisfaction of the relevant awarding authority that they are separated, the reckonable income shall be that of the applicant and of the parent or parents with whom the applicant resides.

In circumstances where the awarding authority is satisfied that a student’s parents are separated, the student will be assessed on the income of the student and the parent the student resides with. The outcome of this decision is that a student who may not have ordinarily qualified for grant support may now qualify, or may qualify for a higher rate of grant. Therefore, it is important for the integrity of the scheme that corroborative evidence is provided by the applicant.
The type of evidence required is dependent on the applicant's individual circumstances. Evidence of separation must be provided to allow SUSI to fully satisfy itself that the conditions for the application of the exemption are met. SUSI, in assessing the evidence presented, will have regard to the particular circumstances in each case and the corroborative nature of the evidence available to support the claim of separation.

Ultimately, it is a matter for SUSI to determine what evidence it will accept as proof of separation. However, the scheme does not stipulate precisely how SUSI satisfies itself. This is to allow the applicant sufficient flexibility to provide the necessary corroborating evidence and likewise, to give SUSI flexibility in terms of its assessment process in these difficult cases.

SUSI provides a list of documents that are considered as evidence of separation. Ultimately, the onus is on the grant applicant to provide the necessary documentary evidence to support his/her application. Applicants are required to supply one or more of these documents as proof that their parents are living separately or where applicable, alternative corroborating evidence in support of their claim of parental separation. Upon receipt of the necessary documentary evidence, the applicant is assessed on his/her income only and that of the parent the applicant resides with.

I understand that SUSI has reviewed its processes and has decided to remove barring orders from its indicative list of documents to confirm parental divorce or separation.

I hope the above is of assistance in clarifying how such cases are treated by SUSI.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]
Seán Ó Foghlú
Secretary General