

2.12 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding recovery of subsidies from undergraduates withdrawing from courses:

Would the Minister advise Members of the system that is in place to claim money back from undergraduates who withdraw from a course without completing it?

Senator M.E. Vibert (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):

If a student withdraws from their course, the department requests a refund of at least one term's maintenance and travel grant. If the department only makes a contribution towards tuition fees, it will ask for a refund of at least one term's fees. An invoice is sent to the parents or student and they are required to forward the refund to the Treasury Department. If a student withdraws for health reasons, provided the department receives evidence from the institution and a doctor, the department does not ask for a refund.

2.12.1 Deputy F.J. Hill of St. Martin:

Is the Minister able to inform Members of roughly how many a year withdraw from their courses? Is it a common thing or is it quite a rarity?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

We have a very low dropout rate. It is an average of about 20 students per year out of an overall number of students of over 1,000, which is under 0.2 per cent.

2.12.2 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

The House was advised recently by the Minister that for the years 2001 to 2005/06, a total of 107 undergraduates had withdrawn from their courses, at a cost to the department of £695,000. Will the Minister now advise the House of the sum that remains outstanding, and additionally, what happens to the funds that are received back?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

Sorry, Sir, I did not understand the whole question. The refunds are paid back into the Treasury Department, because they have been allocated for funding for university students, and if they are not required they go back into the Treasury Department. The re-funding. I am sorry, Sir, if the Deputy would like to repeat the first half of the question; I was not sure ...

2.12.3 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

The first part of the question is to advise the House of the sum which remains outstanding, if any.

Senator M.E. Vibert:

It does vary, Sir, from year to year, but the overall cost is in the region of £100,000 out of a student funding budget of £9 million.

2.12.4 Deputy C.J. Scott Warren:

Does the Minister agree that not many undergraduates withdraw from a course lightly, and it would often be inappropriate, as has been mentioned regarding health reasons, to seek a return of funds?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

Absolutely, and that is the line we take on it. We have realised that we try to prepare our students well, and there are usually very good reasons why people drop out. It is not something that a young person does lightly, to give up their course.

2.12.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

In referring to a low dropout rate, the Minister, I believe, was unwittingly misleading the House by saying 20 in 1,000. That is the entire student cohort. Surely he should have said 20 in a year - in an annual intake - which would be a much lower number.

Senator M.E. Vibert:

We have a number of students away at any time, and the overall number of students we have away at any time is over 1,000.