

## **2.10 Deputy K.C. Lewis of St. Saviour of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding efforts to negotiate a better deal for university students in respect of fees and grants:**

Would the Minister update Members regarding his efforts to negotiate a better deal for university students in respect of fees and grants?

### **The Deputy of St. Ouen (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):**

Although I cannot offer immediate help, I have recently gained an undertaking from the Minister for Treasury and Resources and the Council of Ministers that they would work with me to explore a way of meeting the challenge faced by potential increases in higher education top-up fees as the department has no control over this matter and any significant increases could not be met within existing resources. A further undertaking was also given to review, as soon as possible, higher education funding in relation to the erosion of financial support for students since 2001 and to ensure that the outcomes were properly considered in the context of the comprehensive spending review to be carried out in 2010. The aim is that this would allow the States to consider the resources available from January 2011 and enable any changes to be introduced from September 2010, if appropriate. As a result, I have recently announced a complete review of financial support for students following programmes for higher education and will be making proposals of student grants in light of that review's findings.

### **2.10.1 Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

I thank the Minister for his reply and indeed his efforts to improve the grant system. However, is the Minister aware that many families that have contacted me have openly stated that, even with both partners working full-time, that only the first child can be funded at university, and even then many couples now have to take out further loans on their homes to pay towards university costs.

### **The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I am well aware that some parents are finding it extremely difficult to provide for the higher education of their children and when I have spoken to them personally I have told them to contact the department and, where possible, we will try and provide any assistance that we are able to. Again because of this issue and because I have come to recognise these difficulties, it is the main reason for carrying out the review on the whole area of higher education funding so that we can properly deal with the matters raised. Thank you.

### **2.10.2 Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

Has the Minister been able to establish why the United Kingdom has rated us higher from the point of view of university fees than, for example, the Cayman Islands which only pay university fees on a much lower basis?

### **The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

The agreement goes back quite some way and although we are treated differently to - let me get this right - overseas territories, we are classed as a Crown Dependency and, as such, we are treated differently by the U.K. in a number of aspects; not only with regards to university funding and education. I have already had discussions with the Minister for Education from Guernsey and I am meeting the Minister for Education from the Isle of Man within the next week to discuss this matter and see whether any

progress can be made collectively, because it is an issue that affects all 3 Islands, to make further representations to the U.K. with regards to providing a more level playing field.

**2.10.3 Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

Could I ask the Minister, who I generally think is doing an excellent job by the way - only generally - the Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel are shortly to begin a review of higher education; in light of what the Minister said, should we pre-empt him with finishing a report and make some recommendations, would he be prepared to act even more quickly than he has just indicated?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I well acknowledge that the Scrutiny Panel is keen to look at this area, as I am. I think there is a general discussion to be had with the panel and how we manage the review to ensure that we end up with some proper, robust evidence which we can consider as an Assembly.

**2.10.4 The Deputy of St. Martin:**

Will the Minister confirm that the way in which the Channel Islands are being discriminated against is partly a concern of human rights and the matter is being pursued by a private individual in Jersey?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I can confirm that I have had discussions with an individual; I am not suggesting it is as the Member would state, a human rights issue; it is more of, I believe, an equal opportunities issue and, as such, we are continuing to work with the individual and consider how best we might be able to pursue this particular issue.

**2.10.5 Deputy M. Tadier:**

I do not want to pre-empt the findings of the review which Scrutiny - my panel when I am chairing it - will carry out on higher education fees, but I would like to ask the question whether the Minister has considered negotiating fees with other European countries, such as France and Germany, so that we can find better deals for our students rather than slavishly necessarily having to go to the U.K. all the time.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

Our students have an opportunity to explore and take up higher education not only in the U.K. but in many other countries, including Australia and New Zealand; indeed, we have agreements with those countries and I am well aware of certain students that have taken up that opportunity to undertake their higher education within those areas. So I would suggest that the Member would talk to me in perhaps more detail and I could provide the additional information.

**2.10.6 Deputy M. Tadier:**

I will do that. I would just ask the Minister does he recognise that there is a difference between the students of their own volition finding opportunities in Europe and the department engaging in discussions with counterparts in Europe and actively encouraging students to seek perhaps cheaper, more value-for-money placements within the European Union.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

Much effort is placed into promoting the opportunities that exist for students to undertake and where they choose to undertake their higher education; indeed, they are directed to where best they can access and improve the qualifications that they require. We also actively promote other countries' universities within our university and careers programme. So I believe that students are well aware of the opportunities that exist.

**The Bailiff:**

Deputy Lewis, do you wish to ask the final question?

**Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

Just to wish the Minister well with his negotiations with the U.K. authorities.