

4.10 Deputy S. Pitman of St. Helier of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding the overall cost of young people attending university in 2011:

Will the Minister advise the overall cost of young people attending university in 2011 and provide a breakdown of the fees met by parents and those met by the States?

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan of St. John (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):

The overall cost of sending Jersey students to university is currently in excess of £20 million a year. That is the overall cost. This is met by the States, by parents or by a combination of both, depending upon parental income. The States contribution in the financial year 2011, is approximately £8.2 million, of which around £5 million goes on tuition fees and the remainder on maintenance grants, for living expenses including accommodation, food and books. Where parents earn less than £26,750 per annum all tuition fees are paid by the States and a maintenance grant in addition of £5,200 is also awarded by the States. Where parents earn more than £52,429 the States makes a contribution to tuition fees, depending upon the parental income in excess of that but no contribution is made towards maintenance.

4.10.1 Deputy S. Pitman:

What actions has the department taken to reduce the costs to parents and students?

The Deputy of St. John:

The United Kingdom University charging system is going through a huge change at the moment. There is another question later on from Deputy Rondel, which addresses this particular item directly. Suffice to say that with such a lot of change going on it is difficult to know exactly where this is going to end. My department and I feel that we certainly need to wait in the short term to see what settles down. But I think the whole question of tuition fees and costs for further education is a subject that I will want to review over the next 6 to 12 months and the Deputy can rest assured that I will be looking for opportunities to reduce costs wherever possible.

[10:45]

I have not had the time to do that yet, and I hope that the Assembly and parents will have a little bit of patience to give me time to look at all of these areas and report back in due course.

4.10.2 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Could the Minister please inform us how many children in 2011 or young people, the £8.2 million of the taxpayers' money represented, and compared to other Island jurisdictions, is it good value? Do we contribute more, less, about the same? I think the Minister will get the gist of the question.

The Deputy of St. John:

That is not a statistic that I have to hand at the moment, but I will endeavour to provide that information to the Deputy and the Assembly later on in the course of today. As regards whether we are contributing about the same amount as our sister Island or indeed the Isle of Man, my assumption is that we are, but again I will confirm that in writing in a short period of time.

4.10.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Notwithstanding the contribution of, I think, £8.2 million that the States make towards tuition and maintenance, does the Minister acknowledge that there is still a large proportion mainly of middle class children who do not go to university because the parents either do not have the money or refuse to support the tuition and maintenance costs of them going to university, and therefore they lose out on university or higher education experience? Will the Minister say what his response is and what steps he is taking to look into that issue?

The Deputy of St. John:

Our longstanding principles that understand Jersey's approach to higher education are (1) that no young person who can benefit from higher education should be denied access due to financial constraints and also (2) the choice of course should be governed by aptitude rather than cost. These are the 2 guiding principles, and those are principles that I wholeheartedly support. As I say, over the course of the next 6 to 12 months I will be reviewing whether that is still the case. These principles are being covered by our policies and again, in due course, I will form an opinion and I will be able to inform the Assembly of what that opinion is and if there are any adjustments that we need to make in the course of time.

The Bailiff:

I think the question, Deputy, is whether you feel that there are people who are unable to go to university because their parents will not pay or cannot pay.

The Deputy of St. John:

That indeed is a question that I will want to address in the course of the next 6 months to 12 months. I will specifically look at that one, in addition to everything else.

4.10.4 Deputy S. Pitman:

Could the Minister tell Members if Jersey is still considered by the relevant authority in the U.K. as "overseas", and because of this... one of the highest fees in the world? If so, what action will he take to try and persuade the U.K. Government that we are just part of them?

The Deputy of St. John:

I am hoping that we do get around to question number 17 from Deputy Rondel.

The Bailiff:

It all depends how many supplementaries there are.

The Deputy of St. John:

It does indeed. I will say, with the danger of taking some of the wind out of the Deputy's sails, I will answer this question obviously as a supplementary. What we have found so far in the main is that we are being treated in the same way in cost terms as local U.K. students are. The overwhelming responses we have had from universities leads me to believe that we are indeed being treated as a domestic U.K. case in the main. There are a few anomalies to that and I can give the Deputy that information separately. What I will say, though, is that we will be in a position to publish the results of our negotiations with U.K. universities and intend to do that on 20th December on the States website, and that will give chapter and verse.

Deputy T. Pitman:

Sir, I thought you had seen my light, but could I just ask if the Minister would circulate those figures he gave earlier because I could not write quite as quickly as he spoke.

The Deputy of St. John:

Yes, indeed.