

2015.03.24

4.2 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding Higher Education grants in 2014:

Following the release of figures by the department which reveal that only 20 per cent of students - 247 out of 1,213 undergraduates - were in receipt of a full grant in 2014, can the Minister inform Members how this figure compares with previous years?

Deputy R.G. Bryans of St. Helier (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):

For the 5 past academic years the proportion of students that receive a full grant has been between 20 and 24 per cent. A further 50 per cent receive a contribution from the States but not the full amount. So every year about three-quarters of our university students receive some financial assistance from the taxpayer. So going back to 2009-2010 a full grant was given to 20 per cent; 2010-2011 23 per cent; 2011-2012 24 per cent; 2012-2013 22 per cent; and 2013-2014 23 per cent.

[9:45]

4.2.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Can the Minister inform Members when the income thresholds for receipt of grants on which grants are calculated were last adjusted for inflation or otherwise?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

I think back in 2006 was the last time that the threshold was considered. The household income at the moment must be below £26,750 but has not been adjusted ... actually not 2006 but 2001. But average earnings have risen so the ratio stakes to family funding has changed over that time.

4.2.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Would the Minister not accept that this is in effect allowing the grant system to atrophy, with no regard to the threshold for calculations of grant over the past 9 or 14 years? When is the Minister going to do something about this lamentable state of affairs?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

The Deputy has got a good point. I think I said at the last Assembly that we are reviewing this at the moment. I was hoping to have a meeting with Treasury last week. Unfortunately my Chief Officer in relation to this was ill so we have had to postpone that meeting. But it is under review, as all the funding relating to student loans, particularly, are under review. I had a pan-Island meeting with Guernsey and the Isle of Man who are equally in the same position. They have a very similar system to ourselves and are equally struggling with the diminishing budget and trying to relieve the pressure on families. So at the moment we are in a situation; we are going into consultation - we have already done that with parents and students to some extent - but we are carrying on that so we can address the problem of what he calls atrophy.

4.2.3 Deputy J.M. Maçon of St. Saviour:

Deputy Southern asked what I wanted to ask. But given that in the last M.T.F.P. (Medium-Term Financial Plan) as Assistant Minister, then the Minister will know that the department had drafted a growth bid to the Treasury Department in order to grow the living allowance of the grant, will the Minister be putting that same growth bid back towards Treasury for this M.T.F.P. given that the work has already been drafted and it is already there?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

Originally Deputy Reed back in 2010 decided to unfreeze the maintenance grant. It was increased by 2 per cent and the same has happened every year since then. So that element of the grant will

continue to be under an annual review. We are looking at the Medium-Term Financial Plan. We have put in a bid in relation to this but again it goes in with all the other bids.

4.2.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Since we have been clearly informed by the Minister for Treasury and Resources that there is no money in the kitty to create a loan scheme, so that avenue looks fairly closed, what assurances can the Minister give to parents and potential students that something will be done to improve this lamentable state of our grant system in the coming months or years?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

I would repeat again that we are going out to consultation. We are going to have those meetings with Treasury. I know it is difficult. I think it was reported in the press, I am not necessarily sure it was a correct reporting of a statement, but we are having discussions and we are discussing it further. It is under review.