

2016.06.28

13 Deputy J.M. Maçon of St. Saviour of the Minister for Education regarding the number of people who could not pursue higher education despite wanting to do so: [9526]

Given the department's policy that all who can benefit from higher education have the opportunity to participate in it, regardless of the cost of the chosen subject, can the Minister explain how the department currently calculates the number of people who are not pursuing higher education, despite wanting to do so, and whether they also establish the social and financial background of such people and, if not, why not?

Deputy R.G. Bryans (The Minister for Education):

Thank you to the Deputy for raising the issue. It is still our ideal to send as many Jersey students as possible to university. As Members will know, unfortunately, the policy quoted by the Deputy has been undermined by the U.K. Government decision to raise average tuition fees to £9,000 and the fact that our students cannot access the U.K. student loan system. We are well aware that, unfortunately, financial pressures are likely to be affecting the numbers who pursue higher education. It is of concern and, as my Assistant Minister hinted previously, we will be announcing good news later this week in the M.T.F.P. The source of information about the Jersey undergraduates is the Student Finance Office. They only have information about students who apply for grant support and/or register with them. U.C.A.S. (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) figures provide some additional information.

3.13.1 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Just to confirm then, those students who do the figures themselves, calculated from home, and decide that going forward they will not be able to afford going into higher education, therefore, the department does not have that information and the department is unable at this time to establish what exactly those figures are. Is that a correct understanding of the situation?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

That is correct.

3.13.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is it not the case that there are currently around 100 fewer 18 year-olds going off to university than was the case some 5 years ago?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

Thank you to the Deputy. Families with a household income above the upper threshold often apply to university direct, without making contact, because they believe they will not be eligible for States funding. Similarly, those who feel they cannot afford to go will not make an application to student finance, so there will be no formal record of their decision, the reason for it, or their personal financial circumstances. Numbers have fallen and we have reported this in the higher education funding report. Some is due to increased availability of degrees in Jersey. Some will be due to cost. Affordability means different things to different families. For some it might involve lifestyle changes; they have to forego holidays, private schools, large mortgages, in order to afford university. For others, the cost of £20,000 a year is completely unaffordable and means not paying rent or affording basics like food.

3.13.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister address the question, which was: is it not the case - and I think I read it in his own higher education report produced by external advisers as a separate piece of research - that there were approximately 100 students fewer at 18 going away to university than was the case 5 or 10 years ago?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

Yes, there are fewer students.

3.13.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

The Minister talked about good news which he will be announcing shortly for university students. Can he, therefore, confirm that he will no longer be freezing grants and that there are no plans to cut funding for on-Island provision of degrees?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

As I did say earlier, we will be disclosing what we have come up with, working very closely with Treasury, in the M.T.F.P. To resolve this issue, we continually try to review every element of higher education. Members need to know that we have not given up. We will continue to work with Treasury. We will continue to work, talking to banks and lenders. We will continue talking to universities. We will continue looking at increasing our local offerings and we will continue looking at ways to resolve this problem.

3.13.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

I will ask the question again in a supplementary, even though it wastes my supplementary. Is the Minister planning on freezing grants and cutting funding for on-Island degrees?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

As I said before, the Member will have to wait until we disclose everything that we are attempting to do in the M.T.F.P.

3.13.6 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Given that the Minister has acknowledged that the existing policy of the Education Department has been undermined - his words, not mine - when, therefore, will the Minister be bringing a new policy to the States Assembly for States Members to analyse and debate?

[11:15]

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

As I said, we are continually reviewing our situation. It is a very fluid situation. As Members will be aware, Brexit has also thrown a new flavour into our review. So, we will always look at this situation trying to resolve it and hopefully Members will be pleased with what we have to say in the M.T.F.P.