

STATEMENTS ON A MATTER OF OFFICIAL RESPONSIBILITY

6. The Greffier of the States (in the Chair):

We come now to a statement to be made by the Chairman of the Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel.

6.1 The Deputy of St. Martin (Chairman of the Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel):

In December 2006 in response to the publication of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture's proposals for financial support for students in higher education, the Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel decided to examine this topic to ascertain if there was scope for review. The Panel reviewed available documentation, including *inter alia* the initial green paper and results of consultation. From the outset it was noted there was extremely tight timescale as it would be necessary for whatever funding measures were adopted to be in place in good time to assist students starting university in autumn 2007 with payment of top-up fees. Further clarification was requested from the Minister concerning other possible options for funding and requesting details of why these options had been rejected. The Minister was also invited to discuss this matter when he attended a regular Panel briefing on 5th February 2007. As a result of this process the Panel has decided that there will be very little benefit in the Panel undertaking a general review of the Minister's proposal at this time for the following reasons. The optimum time for general review to be undertaken would have been at the time of issue of a green paper. Unfortunately, at that time the Panel - in its earlier guise as the Social Affairs Scrutiny Panel, which had a remit covering 5 departments - already had a full work programme and did not have the capacity to undertake such a review. In view of the urgency of implementing a robust scheme in time to benefit the next student intake, there is not realistically enough time for a meaningful review of the proposed introduction of student loans to take place. Thirdly, public consultation had been carried out and there is some evidence that the results had been incorporated into the background paper supporting the Minister's proposals. However, the Panel is concerned that a number of questions raised during the consultation process remain to be addressed. Discussions with the Minister on several specific areas which concerned the Panel have revealed that these areas are still under consideration by the department. These areas are local business bursary schemes, tax incentives and defining a family in relation to parental contributions. It has been agreed with the Minister that the Panel should be kept informed of work done in these areas and it is noted that the input of Scrutiny to this ongoing work would be welcome. The Panel, therefore, considers that the important area of further education funding should be kept under general consideration. The Panel will not be reviewing the general principles of the introduction of student loans but notes that the possibility of a formal review being undertaken into one or more of the detailed aspects of general funding is still under consideration. The Panel will also keep a watching brief on the student loans scheme itself as it develops and will monitor the effect its implementation has on the students, their families and number of students entering further education over the next one or 2 academic years.