

# Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel

## Student Finance Review

### Witness: The Jersey Student Loan Support Group

Monday, 26th February 2018

**Panel:**

Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier (Chairman)

Deputy T.A. Vallois of St. John

**Witnesses:**

Ms. N. Heath

Ms. J. Beaumont

Ms. F. Sharman

[16:17]

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier (Chairman):**

Thank you very much for being here this afternoon for the Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel hearing for our student finance review with the Jersey Student Loan Support Group. Thank you to those in the public gallery. Could I just ask everybody to make sure that phones are on flight safe mode or a mode that will not make it emit any noise of some sort? Just for the benefit of the tape, we will just go round and introduce ourselves. My name is Deputy Sam Mézec. I am the vice-chair of the Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel.

**Deputy T.A. Vallois of St. John:**

Tracey Vallois, Deputy of St. John and member of the panel.

**Scrutiny Officer:**

Andy Harris, scrutiny officer.

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Our chairman, Deputy Maçon, sends his apologies. Could you introduce yourselves, please?

**Ms. N. Heath:**

Nicola Heath.

**Ms. F. Sharman:**

Fleur Sharman.

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

Judy Beaumont.

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Thank you. Just one thing we have to point out: there is a notice on the table there just if you could take a moment to read and just confirm that you understand what it says. Okay. Thank you very much. Firstly, thank you for the submissions that you have made to us. Obviously, we have had an ongoing dialogue for quite a long time now and things have progressed. There is now the proposition which is before the States, which will be debated on 10th April. It is a proposal which is reasonably different from what was announced to the public at the end of last year. This is obviously something you have been looking at for a long time. Could I ask, I think to start the conversation, do you have any major concerns about what is being proposed at the moment?

**Ms. N. Heath:**

Not major, other than the fact that there is not any detail, I think. That is the thing that has come out the most from people is they are not quite sure exactly how this will work with the current regulations and which bits of the current regulations will be there and which ones will not because obviously there is no orders. So that is ... we are getting lots of questions like: "Will this happen? Will that happen?" That is the main thing, I think.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

It is how the policy fits around the funding?

**Ms. N. Heath:**

Well, yes, but it is questions like what happens if you have 2 students going at the same time. Is it going to be calculated as it currently is or is it going to be each student will have the same amount each? We just do not know. It is questions like that, really.

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

How do you feel broadly about the proposition in terms of comparing it to what the current system is? Because we know that you were campaigning for a loan option, which is not included in this. This is about uprating the grants. How do you think that compares to what you were campaigning for?

**Ms. N. Heath:**

Well, I think the thing that we discussed the other evening was that with a loan scheme in that sense everybody has the same opportunity, but with a grant scheme you have the issue where if you have a parent, say, who does not like the choice of the student or does not want to pay but can, they have no other option to access higher education if they are young. In that sense, that has not been addressed.

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

Or the family who do not earn enough and they cannot cover any extra.

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

So that it is based on the family's income rather than the student's income?

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

Yes.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

Yes, it is because you are looking at it ... you are looking at parental income all of the time. You are not looking at the student and the student's right of access to education. You are always looking at the parents all the time. You know, as we have discussed before, each family has a completely different makeup. It might be fine for one family earning the same level of income to be able to manage to send one, maybe 2, students. But for another family it is just not possible because of the type of circumstances that they have. That is what these schemes do not allow for.

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

One of the funding mechanisms that is proposed for this is to remove the higher child tax allowance from the year of tax assessment 2019. That will cover some of the funding that is required for this, but this will mean that those with children going to university will mostly be paying more tax than they otherwise would have anticipated they would be paying. Do you think that this is a better way of doing things to say to those families: "Okay, you will lose that tax allowance but the grant will be uprated"? For many of those families it will be uprated at a greater amount than the tax that they otherwise would have saved, but for families at the top it will not be that case. Do you think that is a sensible way of finding funding for this?

**Ms. N. Heath:**

I think it is one way of funding it. We have never commented on how to fund it because as a group of people we do not have access to that kind of information to say: "Well, actually, you could do this or you could do that" because we just do not have that access. Clearly, we have taken the H.T.A. (higher tax allowance) out so families that are around £165,000 income depending ... and this is another question we do not know is you have these steps. You do not know how you move between each step, whether it is on a gradient or whether it is a chunk, say, 170 to 180. It just has a jump but you do not know if it is worked out on the old formula of 20.25 per cent. So, we are sort of thinking around £165,000 to £170,000, if you take away the tax allowance they are worse off.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Which tax allowance, though? Because you have ...

**Ms. N. Heath:**

The H.T.A.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Yes, but there are 2 applications of it, is there not?

**Ms. N. Heath:**

Yes, that ...

**The Deputy of St. John:**

At about £165,000, depending on family makeup, will more than likely be in a 20 means 20, so it would be 20 per cent of £6,000.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

So it is a bit less?

**The Deputy of St. John:**

So it is the bit less, but that is over a 4-year period because, of course, the higher tax allowance ...

**Ms. N. Heath:**

Yes, that is why you have to multiply it by 4 and divide by 3 to get an average over 3 years.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Yes.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

So, yes, depending on the circumstances you could have that loss, but obviously one would have that loss anyway because, you know, the 20 per cent rate will not be more than 26 on much higher incomes because everybody at the moment gets the H.T.A.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

There was a concern around the original proposal before this one came out, which was just announced under the consultation, over the issue of the grant for lower income people and taking away the higher child allowance as well. With the new proposal, do you think that has been sorted out? Do you think people feel a bit more confident or do you think there is more that could be done there?

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

I think there is still an issue with people who are on really low incomes. I mean, I was a single parent, not earning an awful lot, and by that I mean literally around about £20,000. But I got the H.T.A. put on. That will have gone now and the funding does not cover the full amount for the student going away, plus I will now be paying tax. So I am actually worse off if my ... he finishes this year, but if he was continuing I would be worse off now.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Okay. Is that because of the size of the maintenance?

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

The difference, because I would start paying tax as well because of the level that is taken out ... that is added on now, that has gone, so I would be actually in a tax ...

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Are they not looking at keeping the additional personal allowance on?

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

Well, yes, but I did not know it was for definite yet. I thought it was just ... I hope so.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Okay.

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

Because that definitely needs to kick in for people who are on ...

**The Deputy of St. John:**

The single parents.

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

... yes, single parents or really low amounts because you have no other way of funding your child because you are paying rent and whatever else you are getting. You are never going to get a loan from anywhere. Nobody will give you a loan, and now they have even taken away the NatWest loan that was at least some sort of a break to help you along the way.

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

I was going to ask about this NatWest loan. How do you think that will affect families' ability to get funding upfront which they have the freedom to decide how it is spent? By that I mean with the tuition fees grant you do not get a choice on how that is spent. That goes straight towards paying the tuition fees, whereas with the loan you could decide does that go on funding the ferry with the belongings over there. Is that something you anticipate will cause hardship to people, that they will not have access to that?

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

Yes, I think so.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

The other issue with it is because none of this fully covers the full cost anyway. It does not matter what income you are on, you are still having to fund the difference. Certainly, people that are using that NatWest loan now, particularly on the lower incomes but even some of the middle incomes, and if they have more than one child as well, the NatWest loan allows them to spread some of the cost over a longer period of time, which obviously you are losing as well.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Like a cash flow thing, is it not?

**Ms. N. Heath:**

Yes, sometimes it is a cash flow issue.

**Ms. F. Sharman:**

But there was also an element that the NatWest loan gave the student the opportunity to take on the responsibility of going to university and taking on that form of loan in their own name, taking on the responsibility of that loan, so choosing the right course for them because that was ... you know,

there was an element of us promoting a loan because we did not think there was money to amend the grant system in the first place, but part of taking on the loan was it was becoming ... the student was taking much more responsibility as opposed to expecting or having to have their parents fund it. So they are making much wiser choices and now they no longer have any option for any loan in their own right, in their own name.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Treasury have stated that it is feasible to have a loan but not for this September. That is one of the arguments that they have made. So, would you still want to pursue a form of loan system?

**Ms. N. Heath:**

I think it is certainly ...

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

I think as a backup, something to support the other part, you know, to the grant system. I just think it is so difficult for some people, because my son used to work in the summer and raise as much as he could, £2,000 or £3,000 that he never touched, but he still could not get together enough for the difference. So it would make it more accessible for those people as well to just help along the way.

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Is there a worry that if there is a loan scheme that it provides future Governments a good excuse to then cut back on what will be an enhanced grant scheme if they think they cannot find the money or if they argue times are tough, and that with a loan scheme you may eventually see the undermining of the grants and moving everything to a loan? Is that something that you would see as a risk?

[16:30]

**Ms. N. Heath:**

Well, it is interesting actually because I was looking back at the last time when the NatWest loan was introduced and one of the comments from somebody, I think it was Peter Troy who was the Deputy of St. Brelade, he said: "I hope that in the future we do not see that a higher proportion of fees might be passed on to students because I think there could always be the temptation for Education to leave their grants at the same levels or not increase them by inflation and so on, so that you would up with a real drop in the grants available in real terms and then students would be picking up higher levels of fees" which is exactly the position we are in now, 11 years on, because the system was not ... he said: "I would hate to see this become a mechanism for us to take more and more money out of the students over future years. I hope the Minister can confirm that there are no intentions to pass further costs over beyond this sort of limit." That was just introducing the

£1,500, which, of course, we now have lost anyway. The grant was never kept up to date, so we have over ... just since 2007 that was debated, we have got to the situation we are in now.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Sorry, there was one other thing that you mentioned in here that I want to ask.

**Ms. F. Sharman:**

The terms of review was also something that concerned us a little bit in terms of them saying that every 5 years it was to be reviewed, it could be reviewed, but we feel that it should be reviewed more frequently than that. We felt that it could be associated more towards the M.T.F.P. (Medium-Term Financial Plan) and reviewed every 3 years to keep pace with the changing situation in the U.K. (United Kingdom) and keeping it a much tighter priority, really. That was one thing that alarmed us a little bit with it.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

We do not know why it was 5 years. It says in the proposal to review it every 5 years and it just seems quite a long period of time.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Yes. The M.T.F.P. is a 4-year cycle.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

Well, yes, but even then if you have it ...

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Depends on when it falls, does it not?

**Ms. N. Heath:**

Yes, because if you want to review higher education and it is going to adjust the funding in any way, that is useless if it falls ...

**The Deputy of St. John:**

When you have already agreed the M.T.F.P. and you have no money.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

Yes, because then you are looking at maybe 9 years, are you not?

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Yes.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

Then that puts us almost in the position we are in here, which is 11 years on.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Now, okay, that makes sense.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

So it is very easy for this to fall ... you know, but it works both ways, does it not?

**Ms. F. Sharman:**

It could work either way if fees are cut.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

If the U.K. decided to cut fees and applied it to our students as well ...

**The Deputy of St. John:**

But what you are saying is it should be a fundamental part of the M.T.F.P. process?

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

Yes.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

So it should just come into consideration in terms of assessing for inflation or changes in the U.K. Government ... changes to fees.

**Ms. F. Sharman:**

Being updated.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

I do not know why it is 5 years and why it would not need looking to be reviewed more frequently than that.

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

In terms of the change in the policy following the consultation, do you think that the product that they have come up with now is better than what they initially proposed?

**Ms. N. Heath:**

I think it probably is, yes. I think it probably ... certainly from, you know, reading some of the consultation responses, there were obviously people that were not happy about the level that the grant had been set at, where it went to half fees, and they obviously looked at that and decided to review it and put it down to a lower figure. But like we said at the beginning, it does not help those students that have parents that will not pay.

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

They also in these changes increase the maintenance amount, which I think came about following a discussion we had with them that they had noticed in their modelling that with the abolition of the higher rate child allowance and the amount extra that was being suggested then in maintenance, for certain families it was not making the difference there and they would be worse off. In terms of the people that are worse off under this system than the current system - I think you mentioned around £160,000 a year or something - have you spoken to anybody who has looked at this proposal and identified that they would be a family that would be worse off?

**Ms. N. Heath:**

There are definitely people that have popped up and said: "Well, that is not as good for me because I am losing the H.T.A."

**Ms. F. Sharman:**

Again, that is okay if you are looking at possibly sending one student through university, but if you are looking at multiple children accessing higher education that is when it does cause a problem.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

The other major ones have been people that have been in this current scheme now and have put children through university and I think they are feeling a little bit aggrieved that it has taken so long to get to this point and they have had to pay more of the cost. But then that could happen with lots of things.

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

A lot of people have had to do drastic things like cashing pensions, using inheritance for other things.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

We saw some of the consultation responses, so yes, it is horrendous some of the things people have had to go through to fund their children going to university.

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

I have bypassed mine. I have handed ... all mine from my parents have gone straight to my son, so I have nothing now. So now I look at my old age, which is not that far away, and think I have nothing to support that, except for hopefully my son.

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Who will have a degree.

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

Hopefully. [Laughter]

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Looking at the proposal that the States are going to be debating, are there any changes that you would like to see to it before it comes for debate that you think would enhance it, that you think the States would be able to deal with?

**Ms. N. Heath:**

No one has come up with anything particularly, have they?

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

No.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

The comments seem to be because they do not understand or none of us understand what the orders are going to be and how the thing will work. I think once that is out there then you might find people will pop up saying: "No, that is not going to work for me." Clearly, those that have students in London with the more expensive costs, there are gaps there. Post-graduate pops up quite often.

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

Oh, yes, that was going to be my next thing.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

The integrated master-type courses where you have 3 years funded but you do not have the fourth year funded at all. How do you cover that cost? Some of those courses are the sort of S.T.E.M. (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and engineering type ...

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

I think that is worth asking the question. I did a 4-year course that had degree plus another year's qualification added, but it was a package. I did not get to pick to do the 3 year and then the one

year. It was 4 years from the outset, and my funding arrangement was the same every single year for that. So I do not know if that has been translated to this new system where ...

**Ms. N. Heath:**

It depends on what it is as well because professional qualifications are funded, you know, like P.G.C.E. (post-graduate certificate in education) and like law.

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

G.D.L. (graduate diploma in law).

**Ms. N. Heath:**

They are, but other types of things, if they do not consider it to be a professional qualification ...

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

I do not think my son's is.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

Yes, that is architecture, is it not?

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

Yes, architecture, and he has 2 years. He has 2 years of masters with 2 years of working between. So he has done his degree this year but he has another 4 years to go with work one year, his P1, then his P2, so we still have that to go yet.

**Ms. F. Sharman:**

For instance, when my son took on his degree, he signed up for really a degree but then he realised when he was ... after his first year he would like to do a year abroad, so he bolted on a year to his degree. We did get a little bit of funding from the current system and we did get the funding continued throughout the 4 years, so presumably that is something that again with the new proposal would happen, but we do not have the exact detail to say: "Yes, we will move to that." But the opportunity that that year abroad gave him was phenomenal, so he did not ... we did not let him not do it. So, knowing that the funding would be there with the new proposal for something being extended to a 4-year degree, it would be good to have that clarified as well.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Can I ask because you mention in your submission about the data protection side of things? Can you expand and explain?

**Ms. N. Heath:**

Well, unfortunately we do not have Mr. Anderson here because he is the data protection guru chap. But basically as the system currently is, you send in your H.E.2 (higher education 2) form with ... because it has some of the tax information on there that you would give the tax office, and then they contact the tax officer: "Oh, yes, that is right, this is the income" and they stamp it. But now what is being asked is that student finance now want you to send the student finance department your notice of assessment, which is a bit different. Because obviously student finance only need to know your income for the purposes of your grant. They do not need to know the rest of your tax affairs because they have no requirements to have it, to need it. It was just that was flagged up by one of our people that notices things about data protection and so we are not sure whether that is compliant.

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

He also said that they would not be sworn in at finance like they are in the tax office.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

Yes, he was talking about tax officers ...

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Yes, tax officers have to take an oath, yes.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

So, of course, it is obviously the security of the information. If for some reason you change the information with the tax office department, student finance will not have that. They will then no longer have data that is up to date. But, you know, I am not a data person.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

There is a bigger fundamental issue here, though, is there not, with the tax side of things? It is not just necessarily the sharing of information because it is one Government, really. We want to ensure that we are helping people at that point rather than going backwards and forwards with information.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

Oh, I can understand the reason why they may be doing it.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Yes, I understand that. I think one of the bigger issues is, is it not, with a lot of people still on the year behind with their tax as well? So their income situation in current year of assessment ... well, current year when their child is going to university may not be the same as the previous year.

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

That is right.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

That also causes issues with people who are self-employed. Because especially if they do contract work, they might have a year where they have a very good year and then they might spend 4 months where they are not working, but they still have the outgoings for that student that year and it is based on an income from the year before. So, that is quite difficult for them. There does not seem to be much ... even in the current regulations there is not much there for fluctuating incomes.

**Ms. F. Sharman:**

Yes, exactly. Nothing has changed in that respect. It is like that now and under the new proposal it is also like that.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Okay. Looking at this proposal that is on the table, would you say it is sustainable in terms of if people are thinking their children ... I mean, I know that there were responses to the consultation from people whose children are still at primary school.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

Well, they are thinking ahead.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Yes, of course they are, but I think from my point of view, looking at the expectation that has been put out there and then what is on the table, in terms of how parents feel about the future of support in terms of university, that is where I am coming from. You know, is it sustainable in that respect?

**Ms. F. Sharman:**

I think with the proposal, if it gets put through and it is reviewed frequently and the States have shown a commitment to invest in education, I think people would have faith in the system and feel that we are never going to have a perfect system that fits everybody, it is not possible, but I think people will have ... they will be able to know that they have the element of support and they will be able to manage finances beforehand and be able to support their children accordingly because they will have a much more fixed knowledge as to what they are being helped with and not. I feel personally that it could be a sustainable proposal.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Okay, that is good.

[16:45]

**Ms. N. Heath:**

As long as it is kept under play because part of the funding for this is coming from underspends, and I did a rough total of the amount of underspends from I think it was 2008, and it was I think £12,312,000 underspent on the higher education budget since 2008 to 2016. That is in the States annexed ...

**The Deputy of St. John:**

So that was from not long after they introduced the last system.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

So I do not know what 2017 will be, but basically those underspends represent really what parents have had to contribute in addition. So it takes it out of our economy as well, does it not? If parents do not have that money because they are sending it out, they are not there spending it ... apart from the loans and whatever else.

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

It also takes out the support coming back in from the students because I really believe that they take it on board that they have not been helped and feel that they owe this Island nothing. Unfortunately, a lot have stayed in the U.K. and elsewhere because of it. I know they have.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

Yes, that was a comment actually made in 2007 was that ... they were talking about that young people are the future wealth and probably the most important asset the Island has, apart from water because I think water at that time was a big thing.

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

It falls out of the sky, there is plenty there. **[Laughter]**

**Ms. N. Heath:**

Not this year. But what is happening is that without proper succession planning for our future we will end up with a huge population increase of (j) category, that very poorly qualified local workforce will tend to drift out of the Island and not return because they do not feel part of their Island. We have heard that from students.

**Ms. F. Sharman:**

Very much so.

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

Yes.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

If you have had any, what is the feedback you have had from students or children looking to go towards university? Has there been a bit more ...

**Ms. F. Sharman:**

I think they are feeling a lot more enlightened by the proposal. They are feeling a lot more ...

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

Supported.

**Ms. F. Sharman:**

I work with colleagues who are feeling a massive relief if things do come to fruition. If they do not, then we are back to square one and worse. But the general feeling I get is that people are feeling that we are all being finally listened to and that it will be ... it could be much more doable and workable for the benefit of the Island in the long run.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

I think the students as well, certainly when you talk to them, they feel guilty.

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

They do.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

They feel guilty to see what their parents are doing. So the opportunity to have a better grant for them actually is a sense of relief because they are not feeling as guilty about the money that it is costing. You are also adding pressure on to them as well because it is, you know, if they go and do anything: "Do not forget how much this is costing me." You know, it is those sorts of things that they also have. The problem now is with the students that are doing A levels. They have had some really big changes in A levels. They have an awful lot of pressure because now they have an exam at the end of 2 years rather than AS/A2 sort of stuff. Coupled with that they are making applications to U.C.A.S. (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) and they do not know what is happening.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

What the position is, yes.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

The later that this has gone on the more pressure is added there. Then you have parents who do not want to talk about it to their children because they do not want to add stress to the children. Then they are thinking: "Well, if this does not happen, how am I going to tell them now because we cannot afford it?" Those are the sorts of pressures that are there, and I do not think the students are that stupid not to realise it. By and large, I think they see it, yes. They just do not like talking about it.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

It is easier not to talk about than to talk about, is it not?

**Ms. N. Heath:**

Yes, especially if you are feeling guilty.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Yes. In terms of what you are saying, right at the end when they are applying for all these things, the U.C.A.S. and all those, you have mentioned on here about relevant income and the tax assessment forms having to be in by a certain time, what the regulations say. What are your views on that? Because, of course, we are not actually debating this until after 31st March.

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

That is right.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

So, what have the conversations been or what have you heard or what are your views about the position everyone is finding themselves in right now? Because we have nothing concrete at the moment. The regulations, the policy, you are saying you are not sure whether it is the same or whether it has changed.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

People are doing these applications blind. Some people are not really aware that with the new proposals they would actually be able to get a grant, so they may not make an application at all. There are a few people that have popped up on Facebook and we have said: "Go and make an application. Even if you do not get anything, at least you are registered anyway and it helps with your social security."

**Ms. F. Sharman:**

But I also think there are a lot of people that think it is not just a proposal, they think it is already happening and it is already all fine, and some people are going along with an emotion that, yes, everything is good, they can let their children apply. Then there are people that just put it to the back of their mind to the point that they are not pursuing any application.

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

Because I do not think it is clear enough half the time what they are supposed to do. I mean, I went in completely blind to it all. I did not understand what I was supposed to be doing.

**Ms. F. Sharman:**

The information coming back to our parents at the moment is shocking, absolutely shocking.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

Atrocious, absolutely atrocious.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

In what ways? What is exactly happening?

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

Misinformation.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

If you phone up - and we did send something to your scrutiny officer - you can have 3 different versions from student finance of one situation. This particular case, the parent was told 3 different versions and because this letter came through about the tax thing and I thought: "Well, I do not have one of these H.E.2 forms so I had better give them a ring" and while I was at it I asked about this particular situation about the student bursary. They went through: "Well, is it post-graduate?" and I said: "No, that is the next paragraph down." "Is it the medicine and vets?" "No, that is the paragraph above." "Well, I do not know what it is then." So if we are told constantly that we do not need to have information on the webpages, and your review picked up the fact that information was a problem, that we should contact the department and they would be able to supply the information needed, and it is not working. I mean, it is this cycle of funding but it does not help ... you know, that was a case about funding, but it does not help if you have ... you cannot blame the staff but they need to be trained in the system and the regulations that they are in charge of. There was a complaints board and that highlighted regulations ...

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Yes, I read that.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

... and the staff not understanding the regulations, and that was last year. This is still happening. This is happening now.

**Ms. F. Sharman:**

You also have the fact that Highlands' prospectus has announced that they will ... you will know how much you will be paying when they know what the outcome of the proposition is. They have even printed in their prospectus about fees.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

They will put their fees up.

**Ms. F. Sharman:**

They will put their fees up should the proposition go through.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Oh, really?

**Ms. F. Sharman:**

That is printed in their prospectus. So, therefore, that is ...

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Spinning money around.

**Ms. F. Sharman:**

... local people, say, wanting to stay on Island.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

But they are not a private business, they are a States-run entity.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

So, yes, they want to increase ... if the proposal goes through they will increase their fees but there is an issue with that if they do because Highlands ... people might want to go and do a second degree, perhaps a career change or something like that, and they will not have a grant. Anybody who is ineligible for a grant would then be paying a higher fee cost than they currently would.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

There is a huge risk there, though. If people want to reskill or change careers and they need to do a certain type of degree or something in that area, they are going to be paying even higher.

**Ms. F. Sharman:**

Yes.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

If they have families, of course, they are more inclined to want to do something local if they can. So it is going to cost them more if that is the case. I do not know why ... you know, if students need that level of funding why are they not doing that now? There are obviously universities in the U.K. that have fees at £9,250. That was an unintended consequence of the U.K. Government saying: "That is going to be a maximum fee level" and they all went: "Oh, okay" and they all chose the maximum. That in a sense is a very similar thing: if you can get a grant for that amount, we will put our fees up to that amount. But in the U.K. you can have a satellite college to a main university and they often charge fees a lot lower than the main university campus. In that sense, Highlands with its links with Plymouth and South Bank are satellite university campuses, are they not? They do not have the overheads that Plymouth will have with their massive engineering and all those sorts of courses.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

It is a very different set-up, is it not?

**Ms. N. Heath:**

Yes, it is and, of course, they are doing desk-based courses mainly at Highlands. They are not doing the expensive medical, engineering, science degrees which require masses of ...

**The Deputy of St. John:**

But the idea of the fees in the U.K. was the competitive side of things, which never really materialised. But what is competing with Highlands other than the International Business School?

**Ms. N. Heath:**

So, yes, that was an interesting aside. If Highlands needs better funding, then they need to be better funded, but you can sort of say this is a circulatory route for improving their funding.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Well, it sounds like the housing issue all over again in the States where you have the Treasury paying for a loan with the money from Income Support that is paying for the tenants to live in housing, and it is wooden dollars that go round in a big circle. That has been going on for years.

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Since Highlands has been mentioned, in the report which came out in 2016, which offered 5 potential solutions for higher education access, of which the current solution was not one of them, so they spoke about student loan schemes and about savings, expansion of Campus Jersey and closer links with the European universities. When that report came out, did you look at any of those proposals and think that they were if not the best way forward but something to be looking at anyway? Do you have any disappointments that some of these options, like Campus Jersey and European universities, might fall off the agenda as a result of the uprating of grants?

**Ms. N. Heath:**

I do not see why they should fall off the agenda, really. There is a place for Highlands to be here and our group has never been about access to a particular university as being here or there. It has always been about making sure whatever choice people make is the right choice for them because people are entering education at different times in their life. It is not always young students. Sometimes you have more mature students and there is no reason why they should not have access to higher education to improve their skills. If you have family, you are not going to be able to pop off to the U.K. when you need to do a course. Equally, there are those E.U. (European Union) courses which we might not have in the U.K. or there is going to be areas in the E.U. that might be more beneficial, so we have always just steered clear of where people should be pushed to study, but it should be up to them to make the right choice for them, really.

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Anything else?

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Unless there is anything we have missed or there is anything you want to particularly focus on?

**Ms. F. Sharman:**

I would just like to add that as a group we are really heartened by the proposal and we are very pleased that something is finally, hopefully, fingers crossed, going to be happening with it. Because there are so many families out there that feel that there is going to be a turnaround and allow their children access to higher education that they would not have necessarily been able to. So we are very pleased in a sense with the overall proposal. Obviously, as we have said, there is lots of detail

that we would have liked to have seen, but in general terms just knowing that there is finally some kind of support from the States that this could turn people's opportunities around.

[17:00]

**Ms. N. Heath:**

It certainly is much, much better than we currently have. That is obvious, but you are never going to be able to have a perfect system.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

No, nothing is perfect.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

There is always going to be ... you know, because it is all individual circumstances there is always going to be someone somewhere that it is not going to quite fit.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Okay. So in regards to what really needs to happen immediately is understanding the policy, the regulations, and how it is going to work fundamentally and for whom?

**Ms. N. Heath:**

Mm.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Okay.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

Yes, of all of the comments where we said: "We will go and speak to scrutiny in its review. Do you have any comments to make? Send us an e-mail", blah-blah-blah, and actually it was not about the proposal. It was about how the proposal works with the system as it is. That is where the questions were.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

The uncertainty.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

Of course, we cannot answer them and you cannot either.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

We might get answers for you on Thursday. You never know, miracles happen sometimes.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

But it is like these orders go through at the end of an Order Paper but nobody ever ...

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Yes, it is the Minister that signs them off.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

I know, but that is also another area because things change in there but nobody debates it. There is no discussion over it. It was like ... here is another one. Highlands last year, on-Island students had their maintenance grant cut by 50 per cent. That was part of the M.T.F.P.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

That was part of the M.T.F.P.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

You do not know with this proposal whether Highlands students are going to be getting, you know, if they are a low income family, £7,500 maintenance grant or whether they are going to be getting half that.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Okay.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

So that is different.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

That is interesting.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

That is the sort of thing that is in the orders that is not in the proposal.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

So it is understanding what is going to be taken away and what is going to be added and making it clear. It is an accessibility issue, is it not?

**Ms. N. Heath:**

We do not know what is staying and what is changing and what is leaving, and until we have those there are questions, really.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Okay. That was great, unless there is anything else that you want to add?

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

No.

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Thank you very much for your continued communication and a lot of the points you have raised are certainly going to help inspire what we put in our comments towards the end of this, so that has been really helpful. Some of what you have raised we will be making sure we bring up on Thursday and try and get answers there. But just to reiterate, your contributions have been really valuable and helpful to us, not just for this specific review but over the few years that this has been an issue.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Absolutely.

**Ms. N. Heath:**

Thank you.

**Ms. J. Beaumont:**

Thank you.

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Thank you very much, and I call the hearing to a close.

[17:03]