WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING BY DEPUTY I. GARDINER OF ST. HELIER NORTH QUESTION SUBMITTED ON MONDAY 27th OCTOBER 2025 ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON MONDAY 3rd NOVEMBER 2025

Question

"Further to the adoption of 'Higher Education Funding', as amended (P.12/2024 (Amd.)), will the Minister provide an update on progress against each part of the proposition, to include but not limited to specific milestones delivered to date, work currently underway and the timeline for delivery?"

Answer

a) agree to explore new additional funding options for distance learning courses

From September 2025, tuition fee and maintenance grants for distance learning students are aligned with those for campus-based students. The maximum grant available and the income thresholds that apply to means-tested grant awards are now the same.

Grants for distance learning are now calculated based on credits, enabling students to take full advantage of the flexibility offered by distance learning. They can pause or resume studies, switch between part-time and full-time modes, and receive funding adjusted to their course intensity and financial circumstances throughout their learning journey.

Students can now also exit a programme after completing modules without being required to repay part of their grant.

These changes create better conditions for students to move between distance and campus-based learning if their circumstances change or if they find one approach better suited to their needs. The flexibility to adjust financial support throughout their studies supports students to apply for recognition of prior learning, carry credit between modes of study and continue their learning without disruption.

b) review the classification criteria for an independent student, taking into account the criteria elsewhere in the British Isles, and consider the implementation of changes that would deliver enhanced targeted support

This work is ongoing. I expect to announce a change to the definition of an independent student by the end of the year.

c) consider the inclusion of 'related subjects' as eligible for a clinical component grant, if appropriate;

d) work with the Minister for Health and Social Services to review the scope for the clinical course allowance for 'related subjects', including consideration of the following areas, if appropriate –

I. Paramedic science;
II. Pharmacy;
III. Occupational Therapy;
IV. Podiatry; and

V. **Physiotherapy/Chiropractic/Osteopathy;**

Review Undertaken

A review was carried out to identify factors contributing to higher costs for certain subjects. This found that additional costs are not solely due to clinical placements. Key factors include:

- **Course duration**: Some courses extend beyond the standard three years.
- **Term length**: While a typical term is around 30 weeks, some courses run for considerably longer. Even within the same subject, term length varies between providers. For example, the term duration of nursing programmes reviewed ranged from 40 to 46 weeks in an academic year.
- **Placements**: Costs vary significantly depending on location and hours. Some placements require extensive travel or overnight accommodation, while others are accessible by public transport and operate during standard office hours. Placement duration can range from a few days to around half the academic year.

Issues Identified

- A fixed list of eligible courses is inflexible. The ability to reflect ongoing changes that arise from the evolution of course structures require legislative amendments which take time to implement.
- Additional costs vary widely. Applying a flat rate grant does not adequately reflect actual costs. For some students, support may be insufficient; for others, it may exceed costs and not represent good use of public funds.
- Universities differ in the level of detail provided about course structure. Combined with variation across providers, this makes it difficult to reliably identify which subjects incur extra costs or to quantify those costs.
- A formula is needed to tailor grants to factors such as course length, term duration, placement requirements, and associated travel or accommodation costs.
- These elements are not currently captured in the student finance application process, making it extremely difficult to model financial implications or ensure proportionate and affordable use of public money.

Action Taken

The student finance system has been recalibrated to capture more data that can inform future policy considerations:

- Students now confirm if their course exceeds three years and state the number of mandatory additional years. This distinguishes mandatory extended courses from optional additions, such as a placement year abroad.
- Applications now capture whether a course includes a mandatory practical placement of at least eight hours. Analysis of this data can then identify subjects where practical placements are required.
- An opt-in clause has been introduced in the application process to support future research. This allows students to be contacted about their experiences to inform policy development.
- These changes create the foundation for more reliably informed analysis and policy development in the future.

Joint Action on Skills Shortages

The comments accompanying P.12/2024 referenced "*The importance of these subsidies to students in related subjects cannot be overstated as we struggle to recruit and retain home-grown skills*"

In response, additional engagement has taken place with public sector colleagues responsible for training and recruitment. Actions include:

- Presentations on policy development in financial support for education and training.
- Explaining available financial support options.
- Creating a mechanism for colleagues to share insights on recruitment and training challenges to inform policy priorities.
- Outlining the role of Skills Jersey in promoting public sector initiatives such as internships and apprenticeships through careers events, careers advice and targeted recruitment of residents studying relevant subjects.

The Jersey Bursary eligibility criteria was expanded after discussions with colleagues in Social Care highlighted that staff could not access upskilling opportunities due to the previous requirement to study full time.

e) update thresholds for means tested funding in line with inflation and relative earnings in a sustainable and affordable way, subject to the necessary funding being allocated;

From September 2025:

- Income thresholds were increased by 5.2%
- The maintenance grant and the clinical component grant were increased by 2.5%
- In addition, the tuition fee grant was increased by 3.1% in response to the increase in university fee caps in England and Wales.

f) research and consider introducing a sliding scale for the amount of tuition fees that may be awarded;

After reviewing previous work on this topic and consideration of the benefits and disbenefits, a decision was made not to introduce a sliding scale for calculating tuition fee grants.

Affordability is shaped by local economic conditions. A focus on income thresholds was considered a better way to achieve the original aim of the proposition to make higher education more affordable. Income thresholds are already used to calculate entitlements for other grants including maintenance, clinical and disabled student allowance.

As a result, thresholds were reviewed and adjusted in line with local wage inflation. Increasing these thresholds raises entitlement for multiple grants and allowances, providing a higher level of overall support.

g) review the threshold for relevant assets detailed within Article 12A of the Education (Grants and Allowances) (Jersey) Order 2018, and to report back to the Assembly on the findings and recommendations of such review no later than December 2025

The original proposition suggested raising the asset threshold specifically where rental income from an asset that is a property is the household's only source of income. I have reviewed the threshold and do not intend to introduce changes. The reasons for this decision are as follows:

- Raising the threshold would undermine the policy intent of tailoring financial support to individual circumstances. It could result in two students with identical incomes receiving the same grant, even though one household owns an asset worth up to £500,000.
- There may be circumstances, such as a recent inheritance, where the value of assets is unexpectedly increased but the household has not yet been able to realise that value, for example by securing a sale. In these cases, the asset value may not accurately reflect a material change in financial circumstances during the assessment period. Articles 4(6) and 6(3) allow all or part of income to be disregarded where it would be unfair not to, this includes situations where an asset has been inherited but its value has not yet been realised.

h) work with the Minister for Treasury and Resources to assess the long-term financial viability of any student loan scheme for Island students and undertake a consultation if appropriate.

I have reviewed the previous scoping work undertaken to explore the long-term viability of student loans in Jersey. I do not intend to reintroduce student loans.

I outlined my concerns about student loans in my previous comments within the amended proposition (P.12/2024 (Amd.). My review of earlier work on this topic did not identify any substantive mitigations that address those concerns. These are summarised below:

- They place a significant long-term debt burden on the public purse, with high risk of unpaid loans.
- They are costly to administer, with funds better directed toward a more generous and targeted grant system.
- Practical challenges in enforcing repayment while students reside outside of Jersey. This may discourage graduates from returning to Jersey.
- Financial strain on young people who accumulate significant debt can have serious consequences. It may affect their mental health and overall well-being and limit their ability to access credit for important life milestones, such as buying a home.