

2.8 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian of St. Lawrence of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding the minimum term of residency required for eligibility for funding towards university costs:

Will the Minister advise the Assembly what plans, if any, he has to amend the minimum term of residency that is currently required before becoming eligible to receive funding towards university costs?

Senator M.E. Vibert (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):

I have no plans at present to amend the 5-year minimum term of residency that is currently the normal requirement before a person or family can become eligible to receive funding towards university costs.

2.8.1 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

I would like to thank the Minister for his response and to ask whether he has discretion to amend the term of residency required, and if he does have that discretion, to provide an example of how he would be able to employ that discretion.

Senator M.E. Vibert:

Under Article 51 of the Education (Jersey) Law 1999, the Minister has the advantage of financial assistance by way of mandatory or discretionary grant or loan, so the discretion does exist. The minimum term of residency for a person to be eligible for States' support was introduced at a time - in consultation with officers from Employment Social Security - when the U.K. terminated grant-aid to its own students, and we were in a situation where we were aware of a number of students moving to the Island simply to obtain financial assistance for university study. But the discretion is in the Law; an example being that a young person recently returned to the Island from another country, who - because of circumstances beyond their control - had not had the residency, but it was recognised as a genuine case and grant-aid was forthcoming. My Assistant Minister, Deputy Fox, sits on appeals panels for these sorts of things and we take individual circumstances into account, but you will excuse me if I do not go into any great detail. It would not be right to identify the individual concerned.

2.8.2 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Can I ask the Minister how great a problem is it? Do we have a tremendous number of youngsters who are denied this opportunity or is it quite an infrequent one?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

The only evidence we would have would be if young people appealed to get a discretionary loan if they felt they were not able and we have very few of those each year. The eligibility rule - the 5-year rule - was introduced because there was evidence of academic migration to the Island, and as the situation still exists in the U.K. where there are no grants available, I have no specific plans to change this requirement, because that has not changed. But as to the numbers, we get a whole variety of reasons for appeals, some of which may be length of residence - but very few - but we do not appear to have had any evidence since we introduced this rule of academic migration to the Island for the purpose of getting grants. It appears to have closed that loophole.