

2019.09.10

13 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Social Security regarding the ability of mature students undertaking courses at Highlands College to access funding from Income Support: (OQ.202/2019)

Obviously, I am directing this at the Assistant Minister. What assessment, if any, has the Assistant Minister undertaken of the long-term savings that would be generated if mature students could access degree-level employment after a 2-year course during which funding from Income Support was available, rather than remaining on income support, or in lower-paid employment for a long period?

Deputy J.M. Maçon of St. Saviour (Assistant Minister for Social Security - rapporteur):

I thank the Deputy for his question. Income support claimants are free to undertake study at any level and still claim income support, on condition that they continue to meet any work requirements required under the income support legislation, which will vary depending on circumstance. As Assistant Minister for both Education and Social Security, I have a particular interest in this area. Both ministerial teams, along with the Council of Ministers, are committed to supporting the new post-16 education strategy. The analysis requested by the Deputy has not been undertaken, as there are no courses offered by Highlands College, or University College Jersey, that would award a degree after only 2 years. The income support system does support students undertaking 3-year courses that lead to degrees in nursing, teaching, or social work. There is a shortage of local candidates to meet job vacancies in each of these areas and these degree courses lead directly to employment in the chosen professions.

3.13.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Education Department lays on courses at degree level and yet there appears to be no communication with Social Services on behalf of these mature students that tells them that they cannot access an education grant, they are dependent upon staying on income support. The demand that they either work 25 hours a week, or 35 hours a week, in order to qualify for income support makes the level of study that they are talking about absolutely impossible. Does he not think it is about time that we had some joined-up thinking between Social Security and Education on this particular sensitive area?

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

I would disagree with the assertions made by the Deputy in that the critical skills list held by the Social Security Department is informed by the professionals in the States and from the Education Department itself as well as advice from H.A.W.A.G. (Housing and Work Advisory Group). This is an example of joined-up government policy and not the opposite, which the Deputy is asserting.