

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, SPORT AND CULTURE BY
DEPUTY J.M. MAÇON OF ST. SAVIOUR
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 2nd JUNE 2009**

Question

Given the current economic situation what plans, if any, does the Minister have to help middle Jersey families pay for their children's university fees?

Answer

The support provided to local families to assist with university fees takes many forms. Firstly, support towards tuition fees and maintenance costs are provided on a means tested basis to all eligible families. This support ensures that families earning less than £26,750 pa have all tuition fees paid and receive £5,000 pa towards a student's living costs whilst at university. The sliding scale of support also ensures that a family would have to earn more than about £55,000 pa before parents were asked to make a contribution towards tuition fees. A family earning in excess of (£76 500 might be expected to pay the full cost of tuition for less expensive university programmes although all families receive support towards the most expensive programmes such a veterinary science or medicine, regardless of their income.

Furthermore there is a student loans facility available in Jersey to assist students in meeting their contribution towards the variable fee (tuition fee) element of university charges. This provides a student with up to £1,500 per year at an interest rate of only 1% above base, currently therefore the cost of the loan to local students is one and a half percent – a significantly more advantageous arrangement than that which exists in the UK.

Additionally, the DfESC, in partnership with the Island Authorities of Guernsey and the Isle of Man negotiate hard with the UK universities representative body (UUK) to ensure that Islands tuition fee rates are fair and appropriate. This year, for example, the agreed increase in tuition fees has been kept between 0.5 and 1.0%. Universities have also agreed that, in cases where individual universities offer discounted rates to overseas students, the lower overseas rate should apply to Islands students also.

Finally, on a personal level, I negotiated a change in taxation last year to ensure that families are able to maintain tax relief during the year in which their child graduates, regardless of the graduate's income. I also gained a commitment from the Minister of the Treasury to work with the DfESC in reviewing tax allowances for families with children at university. I understand a consultant has been appointed to carry out this work within a wider review of parental contributions.

As Minister for ESC I am fully aware of the costs of higher education and mindful that the contribution made by families is significant. My department keeps a close eye on States and family expenditure on higher education and the level of support made available is constantly under review to ensure that the contribution towards costs from students, their families and the States are fair and affordable.

With regard to specific support during the economic downturn, the level of family contribution is generally determined by reference to the previous year's gross income. Families who find that their income fell last year will automatically receive greater support from the States. In instances where family income has fallen by more than 20% this year, there is provision within the Education (Discretionary Grants – General) (Jersey) Order 2008 Paragraph 4 (3) to assess family contribution against current year rather than previous year's income. This should be of assistance to families who find that one or both parents lose their employment.