

3.4. Deputy K.C. Lewis of St. Saviour of Minister for Education regarding student loans, student grants and other assistance for people in higher education: [9741]

Will the Minister update the Assembly on what progress, if any, has been made regarding the provision of student loans, student grants or any other form of assistance provided to people in higher education?

Deputy R.G. Bryans of St. Helier (The Minister for Education):

Thank you to the Deputy for allowing me to bring Members up to speed on where we are with this issue. An additional £600,000 will be added to the higher education budget for 2017 to increase the maintenance grant and threshold levels from September next year. That means more students will receive more funding help from the States. Next week our officers and others from Guernsey and the Isle of Man are having a joint meeting at the U.K. Department of Business, Innovation and Skills to discuss higher education issues. A meeting has also been arranged with a representative of the student loan company to discuss possibilities for extending the scheme to Jersey students. We continue to work on the Campus Jersey concept providing more degrees on Island, and we also recently visited Caen University, increasing our links with a view to making it a real, viable alternative to Jersey students, not least because the degree tuition is free. I also welcome a Scrutiny review in this area.

3.4.1 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I thank the Minister for his reply. The £600,000 is very good news, indeed. There was a problem a while ago with local families applying for student loans in the U.K., some actually receiving them. Could the Minister inform the Assembly whether these loans are safe or do they have to be repaid immediately?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

In relation to the loans: at the time when this first became an issue we wrote to all parents to say not to accept these loans because we felt they were in breach or could breach the requirements of the Student Loan Company. Some people chose to ignore that situation and took out those loans. At a further juncture the Students Loan Company then realised the mistake that had happened and began to ask for those loans back. We then said to anybody who had been in that situation to come back and discuss with us to see if there was anything we could particularly do for them at that point in time. We only had one family at that point come back to us.

3.4.2 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

The Minister mentioned the possibility of courses at Caen University because they are free. Has he taken into effect a possible Brexit, and what effect that might have on those free courses?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

Yes, we have. Thank you very much for the question. We asked that question of them and they seemed very surprised that we were even concerned about it because they take in a huge intake of international students right across the board. The prospect of Brexit means there are potential changes in opportunities for Jersey. Members may not be aware but the U.K. Student Loan Company have said that from September 2018 students from Europe will no longer be eligible for the loans. So we would be asking whether there is now scope for the Jersey students to join. One suggestion is for the States of Jersey to underwrite loans for our students by paying in the money we spend on higher education annually instead of having a Jersey-based grant system.

3.4.3 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

The Minister mentioned a series of meetings and of course you will be aware that the Scrutiny Panel is doing a review into higher education as well. Will the Minister give an undertaking to make available to Scrutiny the minutes of those meetings as and when they get them?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

Of course we will.

3.4.4 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

It is extremely sad that I have heard recently in the British Isles at the moment parents are absolutely convinced that their children will not be better off than they are. This is the first time this has happened since the war; that the children will not be better off than the parents. They need all the assistance they can get. My final supplementary: in his negotiations will the Minister also be discussing the status of Jersey students regarding local or overseas or national status?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

Our status remains the same except for 3 universities, which is Cambridge and Imperial; I cannot remember the third one now.

[10:00]

We are having discussions with Cambridge in the next month, I believe. Every other university has now accepted the fact that we are a U.K. student, so there are not any problems in those areas.