

2.4 Deputy M. Tadier of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding the fairness of the grant system for higher education:

Is the Minister satisfied that the grant system for higher education is fair and, if not, what steps is he taking to make it fairer?

Deputy J.G. Reed of St. Ouen (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):

I believe the current arrangements are generally fair in that the scheme of means-tested support against gross family income ensures that the financial support offered to students is distributed according to need. As with all such schemes, however, improvements can be made. I am aware, for example, that some parents are disadvantaged in the support they receive when compared with the support given to parents who claim single-parent status. I intend to make improvements to the current scheme in this respect once the research findings are available. I have also ensured and asked for a review to be carried out into the level of student grants for 2009 and will be looking to see if support can be increased later this year. Thank you.

2.4.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

I have had a lot of correspondence in the last 2 weeks on this issue. Can the Minister comment specifically whether he thinks it is fair that some wealthy parents who may be separated are abdicating their responsibility and are playing the system, in some cases, to get a full grant for their children while not paying anything in maintenance?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I have already highlighted that this area is to be addressed to endeavour to find a more equitable solution.

2.4.2 Deputy K.C. Lewis of St. Saviour:

I have a number of constituents whom I would refer to as professional, whereby due to financial constraints only the first child may go to university. My question, is the Minister pursuing the United Kingdom educational authorities to achieve parity in university fees with their U.K. (United Kingdom) students? Thank you.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I am constantly in discussion with the islands of Guernsey and the Isle of Man to look at the way that this Island and others are treated in relation to the charging of university fees. Clearly, there are some discrepancies, which I believe, personally, are unfair and I will be aiming to raise these issues yet again in conjunction with the other islands to the U.K. Government. Thank you.

2.4.3 Senator J.L. Perchard:

Does the Minister agree that it would be just and fair if his department assessed the joint income of a student's biological parents, a student who is seeking to access a grant for further studies at university? Does the Minister agree that it would be just and fair to assess the joint income of a student's biological parents?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

That is just one of the options that are open and available to me and we will be looking at that and the issue of considering household income as an alternative.

Senator J.L. Perchard:

I wonder if the Minister would answer the question whether he considers it just and fair that the joint income of a student's biological parents should be assessed when that student is seeking funds for university grants?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

As I said before, we are considering this matter at the moment. I have not come to a conclusion.

2.4.4 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

With regard to separated parents or divorced parents where one is the one responsible for paying maintenance and is very well off, as Deputy Tadier referred to, has the Minister considered discussing this with the Law Officers to ensure that such provision is made when the orders for maintenance are paid in the court?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

No, not as yet.

2.4.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

Simply to re-ask the last part of my question, what concrete steps does the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture envisage to make the system fairer?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I have committed to reviewing the system and I will aim, by the end of this year, to have new and hopefully more equitable provisions in place.