

Education and Skills Committee

Suggested questions from individuals for the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science 7 March 2018

David Hiddleston via Twitter

- What is planned to widen access in alternative university routes, such as Foundation Apprenticeships?
- What is planned for FE College and University partnerships, increase articulation agreements?
- What role will FE Colleges play in widening participation?

Lucy Hunter Blackburn via e-mail

What assessment has the government made of the impact on student behaviour of its decision in 2013 to reduce substantially its spending on means-tested grants, and rely more heavily on loans to provide living cost support for those at low incomes?

Scott Smith via Twitter

What does the minister believe lies behind the disparity in access to university for students from deprived backgrounds between England, where tuition fees are in place, and Scotland, where they are not?

Rachael Devanney via e-mail

What work is being carried out to ensure that students who obtain university places but remain at home and commute to university/work part time are able to access to full range of services offered by higher education institutions and other agencies (such as mental health facilities and financial advice) as most of the work seems to be focused on those who move away from home?

Although widening access to higher education is a key issue, statistics highlight that actually obtaining a qualification for those from deprived/less well off backgrounds is a major issue as well.

Background to my question:

As someone who spent 5 years at university (honours degree plus PGDE) but lived at home, worked part-time in my local area and commuted into Glasgow for classes/lectures, I often felt isolated and unhappy. I was very unsure of what help and services were available to me as I was still registered with my own doctor, lived with my parents etc.

This meant that the majority of my time in higher education is not a time I look back on fondly as I was clearly, at points, suffering from mild mental health my issues and often incredibly stressed about finances.

My parents combined wage meant that I did not qualify for any form of financial help beyond a basic loan (which before changes to the loans system meant I qualified for roughly £600 per annum in the first 3 years of my degree) however, due to their own financial constraints/issues, I self funded all of my travel to university and work, equipment, lesiure and activities etc.

This meant I ran into debt very quickly, leaving university with a sizeable overdraft, a small credit card and of course a student loan to repay despite the fact I didn't live a so called "typical" student lifestyle as I worked 14-18 hours per week.

Now a full time secondary teacher working within the Glasgow peripheral area, I can see from those pupils applying to university now that many of these issues still exist almost 5 years after I left Higher Eductaion myself and these concerns are still clearly felt by young people and their families, in similar situations, across the country.