

RESPONSE FROM STAN FARROW

I am very concerned about the possible impact that the Deputy First Minister's proposed introduction of higher levels of undergraduate tuition fee may have on certain groups of self-funding students. I therefore wish to contribute personally to the consultation process, as I note that comments are invited prior to 30th May 2005.

Firstly there are a number of students who drop out of university soon and then later apply to re-enter Higher Education. Some of these students may have initially chosen degree programmes that were inappropriate for their own skills and interests - sometimes because of external pressures from parents and others. Others may have left university because of illness, financial difficulty or other problems not of their own making. These returning students will be self-funding under the current arrangements if they choose to re-enter Higher Education in later life, and if they are charged a high level of tuition fees they may well be deterred.

Secondly, there are a number of students who progress to university via an HND. Often there is a mis-match between the HND and the degree that they eventually enter, and so it is not easy for universities to accept these students directly into third year of degree programmes. Such students are always at a disadvantage financially, and this group often includes the most financially-needy students. If the general level of tuition fees were raised then this group too would be greatly disadvantaged.

The third group of students that I am concerned about are those who embark on part-time study and pay the appropriate portion of the full-time fee. Only those who are in receipt of benefits or who are registered as unemployed currently receive fee-remission. If the general level of tuition fees are raised then the majority of this group too would be greatly disadvantaged, as they too may find the cost of university education escalating beyond their ability to pay.

All three of these groups include students from precisely those areas of society that we should be encouraging to enter Higher Education. I therefore urge the Scottish Executive to consider giving fee-remission to all Scottish-domiciled students entering Higher Education, and not just those who are not currently self-funding.