

FROM THE MINISTER



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**Our Ref: SUB/056/13**

8 February 2013

Dear

*Alban*

**QUESTION TIME 29 JANUARY 2013 - FOLLOW UP TO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION**

Following your recent supplementary question on the impact of freezing fees on student numbers, I committed to write to you to quantify the figures.

By way of background, the higher education funding deal, agreed by the Executive in September 2011, froze fees for Northern Ireland students in Northern Ireland at current levels subject only to inflation (£3,465 for September 2012). Unlike other parts of the United Kingdom, where the maximum tuition fee rose to £9,000, Northern Ireland took a different approach: one that continues to maintain the current balance between public funding and user contribution.

Part of the package agreed with the Executive allowed for an increase in supply across higher education providers. The 700 additional places introduced during the CSR period will help to meet the expected increased demand from local students. In recognition of the importance of being responsive to the needs of industry and business in Northern Ireland, those places are targeted at Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects only.

In November 2012, following my successful bid to the Executive's Economy and Jobs Initiative, I announced an additional 500 undergraduate places in STEM. This will help boost the local economy and will be on top of the 700 new places announced in December 2011, bringing the total increase in student places to 1,200 by 2015. A breakdown of the increased places over the current CSR period is as follows.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	Totals
University of Ulster	73	208	207	84	572
Queen's University	137	145	146	60	488
Further Education Colleges	23	47	46	24	140
Total	233	400	399	168	1200

Following the 15 January 2013 deadline for the majority of course applications through UCAS for 2013/14 entry, the latest figures have recently been published. These data provide an indicator of demand for higher education and the headline information in terms of Northern Ireland domiciled students is encouraging.

The data show that the number of NI domiciled applicants to NI Institutions has *increased* by almost 1,200 from 16,171 in 2012/13 to 17,353 in 2013/14. This equates to an increase of **7.3%** on applicants between 2012/13 and 2013/14. This cohort makes up the largest part of the overall increase in applicants to NI institutions, which experienced an increase of just over 1,400 (**6.9%**) additional applicants over the year bringing the total number of applicants to higher education institutions in Northern Ireland to 22,345 in 2013/14.

For the same time period, the data show that the number of NI domiciled applicants to institutions in other parts of the UK has also increased, albeit at lower absolute numbers to each country compared to NI.

However, when comparing the number of applicants from NI domiciled students to institutions in other parts of the UK between 2011/12 before the introduction of the higher fee and 2013/14, a different picture emerges:-

- the number of NI domiciled applicants to English Institutions has decreased by 989 (**8.9%**) from 11,059 in 2011/12 to 10,070 in 2013/14;
- the number of NI domiciled applicants to Scottish Institutions has decreased by 25 (**0.4%**) from 6,039 in 2011/12 to 6,014 in 2013/14; and
- the number of NI domiciled applicants to Welsh Institutions has increased by 18 (**1.6%**) from 1,104 in 2011/12 to 1,122 in 2013/14.

It is worth noting that, during the same period, there was an increase in NI applicants to NI institutions of 940 (5.7%) from 16,413 in 2011/12 to 17,353 in 2013/14.

The data confirm that the combination of the decision by the Executive to freeze tuition fees and the additional places which I have made available is having a positive impact on the number of applications from NI students to NI institutions.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Farry', written in a cursive style.

**DR STEPHEN FARRY MLA**  
**Minister for Employment and Learning**

Cc: The Speaker's Office  
NIA Library