

Ministerial Statement
to
The Honourable The House of Assembly
by
the Hon. Santia J. O. Bradshaw M.P.
Minister of Education, Technological and Vocational Training
on
The Resumption of Payment of Tuition Fees by the Government of
Barbados for Undergraduate Students of Barbados at the University
of the West Indies (UWI), Barbados Community College (BCC) and
Erdiston Teachers' Training College (ETTC)
24th June, 2018

The Cabinet of Barbados has authorized me to deliver this Ministerial Statement concerning the payment of tuition fees by Government on behalf of Barbadian undergraduate students at the University of the West Indies, Barbados Community College and Erdiston Teachers' Training College (ETTC).

Mr. Speaker, Barbadians of all walks of life and of all political persuasions regard as a cornerstone of our social and economic development our access to free education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

The right to education is a basic human right. Furthermore, investing in our most abundant resource, that is our people, makes sound economic sense.

Thus, we regard facilitating access to education through state subsidies as both a moral obligation and an economic strategy.

The noted rankings that Barbados has consistently enjoyed on the United Nations Human Development Index, the progress that we have made in economic diversification and development since our Independence in 1966, either these would not have been a reality at all or would not have been a reality in the timeframe that they did become so, if successive Governments had not adhered to the policy of free education for our citizens.

Some voices over the years, while recognizing all that I have just said, have nevertheless argued that continued free education is untenable at the tertiary level because of the scale of the cost and that it is no longer justifiable because of the general performance of the students. I recall, Sir, that in 1996 there was the report of the Shorey Commission where the leader of that Commission advocated that students should meet the cost of their tuition and the members of the Commission considered that they should meet half the cost of the tuition.

The Government, however, rejected both positions and remained faithful to its commitment to subsidise the cost of tertiary tuition for Barbadian students at UWI.

That said Government now continues consistent in its policy because we consider that the same logic that justified it in 1996 and that justified it five decades ago, continues to justify it.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, the Government of Barbados will take urgent steps to restore free tertiary education at UWI for Barbadians, a fundamental support which was withdrawn from our citizens, and mostly women, in 2013.

Sir, as you may recall, it was on 13 July 2013 when the then Minister of Finance presented his Annual Financial Statement and Budgetary Proposals. Inter alia, the Minister stated, "... our macro-economic programme has gone off-track and needs to be brought back into line with what we believe is consistent with the objectives required for economic sustainability characterized by growing international reserves, exchange rate stability, sustainable and balanced economic growth and adequate yet affordable social services provision".

In the said Statement, the Minister noted that the Cave Hill Campus had expanded its intake considerably in 2003 so that there were, according to the statistics that he then quoted, approximately 3,568 Barbadian students in 1997, by 2007 there were approximately 6,718 and by July 2013, roughly 7,200. This rising number, the then Minister argued, translated into increased contributions payable by the Government of Barbados. He further stated that in 1999, the Government had paid 51 million dollars in tuition fees, 79.3 million in 2007, and in 2008 120.5 million.

In summing up, the former Minister stated that since 2006, Government's "total contributions" to UWI had surpassed the combined payments for Nursery, Primary and Secondary Education as well as the Barbados Community College and the then named Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic.

Further arguing that Government's perspective, he told this House that they "cannot continue to preside over a situation where the growth and development of the non-university component (of the) education system is severely retarded. The country needs to be able to build capacity at all levels."

The Minister then proceeded to announce, as a measure to respond to the scenario that he had just described, that with effect from 2014 Barbadian students at UWI would be required to meet the costs of their tuition themselves directly from the 2014/15 academic year onwards, while Government would continue to pay the economic costs. In anticipation of the effect of this historical change in Barbados' educational policy, the Minister informed the House that the Government would create a Means Testing Mechanism to address the circumstances of certain income groups and that they would also adjust conditions for access to loans and repayment terms under the Student Revolving Loan Fund.

That response measure, Mr. Speaker, is not the response that this Government now in office will support, as we stated all along while in Opposition. We understand that the Government at the time had to take steps to deal with the

drastic debt that confronted and still confronts this country. We understand that the rising tuition subsidy was pressuring an increasingly small public purse. However, to then place further pressure on students, parents and guardians of students who would have to meet those costs is not a response that we consider from a social or economic perspective to be justified or appropriate.

Sir, when citizens already have little in their pockets, when the economy is already depressed and consumers are not spending because they do not have the wherewithal or are fearful of future austerities, when you accept that capacity must be built “at all levels”, then this Government cannot agree to withdraw the tuition subsidy from Barbadian tertiary students at our university.

Sir, let me speak to the effect of the measure announced on 13 July 2013.

The drastic decline in Barbadian student intake at UWI as a consequence of the decision of the previous administration was witnessed as we all expected.

At the beginning of September 2014, the Registrar at the Cave Hill Campus, had observed at the time that 1,468 Barbadians had registered by the start of the academic year as opposed to the 2,240 that had been recorded in the 2013 academic year. A 45% drop in graduate students was also noted with 477 in 2014 as opposed to 875 in 2013.

The impact on working mothers, an important strategic group in the socio-economic advancement of women and girls, has been the worst affected student category according to a survey done by the Cave Hill Campus two years after the decision of the former Government was announced. Working mothers in their middle to late thirties, according to that study, was the biggest casualty. The Principal of the Cave Hill Campus, Professor Eudine Barriteau, told us in April this year that the Faculty of Social Sciences saw the average age of the student drop from 37 to 27. She informed that “Normally, this more mature student would be one who does not yet have a degree but may be seeking one to advance in their career or support their families better, and in most cases these are single women.”

You may recall here, Mr. Speaker, that in April 2015, Professor Sir Hilary Beckles had described the then Government’s decision as having set the Cave Hill Campus back 20 years and of being “nothing short of an assault on working-class women.”

Mr. Speaker, we must also bear in mind that at the Cave Hill Campus, 72 percent of the undergraduate students and 70 percent of the post-graduate students are from Barbados. Women make up 67% of the student population.

Approximately 57% of the students at Cave Hill require loans for tuition, text books or other services related to their studies.

And while I have made reference mostly to this Campus, we also have to remember that the drop in intake of Barbadian students was registered across all Campuses.

The Ministry of Education had introduced a Higher Education Support Grant with effect from September 2015 to cushion the impact of this measure. This Support was disbursed with certain conditions attached relating to income, academic performance and area of study. The sum of \$15,000,000 was provided to be disbursed over three academic years. Despite these mechanisms, Sir, the decision of the previous Government has had a deleterious effect.

Our concern about the declining student enrolment was consistently stated while we were in opposition. We noted that the Barbados student intake at the Cave Hill Campus had dropped by as much as 40% in the first year after Government had imposed tuition fees on citizens. Less than 1,100 Barbadians were able to register for courses for the semester beginning September 2016 despite 2,500 having been accepted and despite the Government having said in the Budgetary Proposals announced in June 2015 that bursaries and 5 million dollars in scholarships would be made available to assist Barbadian students with tuition fees.

When we visited communities and talked to the people, constituents would lament this decision of the former Government. Many Barbadians felt that the norms of the social contract had been ignored when the tuition payment was suspended.

Sir, it is not simply a case of reduced intake. Some students that mustered the money to pay a semester's tuition were then challenged to pay the following semester and found themselves barred from taking examinations until they could pay, even though they may have been allowed to still attend classes. Students pursuing online "e-learning programmes" had been similarly frustrated.

The experiences of many families have been painful as parents have had to choose which child they would finance to have a university education or the parent has had to choose whether she or he would continue with her or his own university education or curtail it so that the child or one of the children can go to university.

And, while our primary concern is the student, it should also be noted that some lecturers, full-time and part-time, have effectively found themselves without a job because of the lower Barbadian intake.

Let me make it clear, Sir, that this Government is mindful of Barbados' severe indebtedness and that Government has to control expenditure. However, cuts and austerities cannot be indiscriminate. They have to be done within a framework that respects our longstanding commitment to human development, that appreciates the current social and economic circumstances of our citizens, and that is consistent with our goals to stimulate the economy and promote growth.

We regard the restoration of the service by Government to pay the tuition fees for our students at UWI as one of the critical measures that needs to be adopted to halt social decline, alleviate suffering and build the foundation for new national growth. A stagnant economy cannot be revitalised without a trained, empowered, equipped workforce nor can it be revitalised with heavily indebted consumers.

Not only do we wish to see a graduate in every household in Barbados yet again, but we intend to see an entrepreneur in every household in Barbados. And now that the UWI has managed at the Cave Hill Campus and other Campuses to offer the region a range of programmes in entrepreneurship, in business, in management, leadership and so on, this is not the time to complicate access to UWI but to facilitate it.

Therefore, with effect from September 2018, as part of this Government's Mission Critical Agenda No. 2 and No. 14, we will resume payments of tuition fees for our citizens who are accepted to study at UWI.

To clear up any doubts, I will state the concrete arrangements, as follows:

- *The Government of Barbados will pay directly to the UWI tuition fees for Barbadians enrolled in undergraduate courses of study.*
- *Government however will only cover the tuition fees for a second undergraduate degree if Barbadian students gained at least upper second-class honours or if the second undergraduate degree will be of significant relevance to national development.*
- *As happened previously, we will pay tuition fees for Barbadian students pursuing a Legal Education Certificate granted by the Council of Legal Education of the Commonwealth Caribbean.*
- *Government will also pay the tuition fees for Barbadians pursuing post-graduate studies if they gained at least upper second-class honours in the first degree or if the post-graduate studies will be of significant relevance to national development. A full list of the national development programmes will be considered for the 2018/19 academic year will be made known by Friday 3rd August, 2018.*
- *We will reach out to Barbadian students who have dropped out and encourage them to resume their tertiary studies.*
- *The Government will allow an additional year beyond the normal period of the course of study, in consideration of unforeseen circumstances that may force students to repeat a year. In other words, if you are pursuing full time studies, Government will cover tuition fees for three years plus one i.e. four years and for part time studies, four years plus one, i.e. five years.*
- *There will be safeguards against an explosion of enrolment and as the Prime Minister had also noted in the presentation of budgetary measures on 11 June, 2018, Barbadian students must "give back" in recognition of these services provided by the State. Full time students will be required to "give back" by providing 150 hours of approved community service per year, whereas, part time students will be required to give back 100 hours of approved communitiy service per year. A Cabinet Subcommittee comprising*

the Minister of Home Affairs, the Minister of Youth and Community Empowerment, the Minister of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs and myself as Minister of Education, Technological and Vocational Training, will propose a regime for these actions of volunteerism that will be agreed upon in consultation with the Social Partners and the general public. The modalities will be made known before September 2018.

The administrative arrangements will proceed in similar fashion to what obtained before: My Ministry will pay the UWI tuition fees upon presentation of a requisition from the campuses with the list of enrolled Barbadians.

Any eligible students who may have already gone ahead and paid any portion of their tuition fees will be reimbursed directly by the Ministry.

In the past, while there may be policies or intention for safeguards to accompany tuition support, they may not have been enforced at all or consistently. We will, nevertheless, through the condition that I have just explained, seek to streamline arrangements with the application of clear guidelines based on values of equity and service.

I will also take this opportunity to say to you, Mr. Speaker, that this Government is sensitive to the current and recent lobby to bring Barbadians enrolled in undergraduate degree programmes at the Barbados Community College and Erdiston Teacher's College in line with their fellow Barbadians at the University of the West Indies, as far as the tuition payment is concerned.

We consider that there is a strong justification for a consistent tuition-support policy in tertiary education and training. Indeed, it is only logical and fair. The Government of Barbados remains committed to its vision of having a graduate in every household and it is on this basis, that this Government holds the position that the said provision offered to Barbadian students at the UWI should also be offered to other Barbadian tertiary students undertaking undergraduate programmes at both the Barbados Community College and the Erdiston Teachers' Training College with immediate effect. However, we must bear in mind the current state of our economy and the reduced scope that the Government has for spending. Therefore, all fees paid by Barbadians for the 2018-2019 academic year at either of these institutions will be credited in full during the course of the upcoming academic year 2018-2019.

Equally, Mr. Speaker, both full time and part time students at both the Barbados Community College and the Erdiston Teachers' Training College will also "give back" in recognition of these services provided by the State.

The measures that I have outlined for tuition support for Barbadian students at UWI or pursuing the Legal Certificate must be seen in the context of our decision to at least restore provision and arrangements that were in existence prior to 2014.

Mr. Speaker, we have a plan to deal with the national debt. We explain it in our Mission Critical Agenda No. 2. And that plan includes the re-profiling of the

debt, a step which will allow the Government the much needed space to meet certain commitments that are required to put the social and economic agenda of this country back on track. The savings that will be achieved from the reprofiling, and from other funds and savings, will be used towards paying our students' tuition fees at UWI as well as other services on our Mission Critical Agenda.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have already declared that at the core of our development model will be our commitment to and reform of Barbados' system of education and training. We are committed to setting Barbados on a new development trajectory, where every Barbadian matters and in which every Barbadian will be given the chance to be the best that they can be and prepare them to be global citizens.

We intend to lead in Education and with Education.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION OF 2018 – 2023

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by the Hon. Santia J. O. Bradshaw, M.P.
re the resumption of payment of
tuition fees.
