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Commission pours cold water over University stipends

Study says it is 'doubtful' whether stipends increase enrolment at university



MATTHEW VELLA

MALTA is spending too much on university students, and not getting enough university graduates in return, a study by the European Commission has revealed.

The study, prepared by the directorate-general for economic and financial affairs, found that Maltese university education is producing "far less efficient outcomes" – namely, low enrolment rates and poor results in educational attainment, for the money it spends on undergraduates.

It found that the relatively generous stipends paid to undergraduates "while increasing public spending, appear to be delivering less than satisfactory outcomes."

In 2009 the government will spend €21 million in student maintenance grants – stipends for post-secondary and university students.

Malta remains a unique case in a time where the major trend in foreign universities is for students to share part of the cost of their education.

The EC study's authors claim that Malta should spend its money more efficiently because stipends are granted indiscriminately and not related to merit or success.

They claim that at 44% of the present spending levels per student, the same level of undergraduates can be still be expected to enrol at university.

"The extent to which the cost incurred by government in giving maintenance grants leads to further increase participation in tertiary education, is doubtful," the authors say.

They also say that although the number of women per 100 male graduates is higher than the EU average, more women could be drafted for university education if it weren't for cultural barriers hindering them from pursuing further education.

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