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Workers' Party of Ireland

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Press Release : Plans for Means Test for VEC Grants Criticised by WP

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THE WORKERS PARTY

6 January 1992



P R E S S R E L E A S E

PLANS FOR MEANS TEST FOR VEC GRANTS CRITICISED BY W.P.

The Workers' Party Spokesman on Education, Deputy Tomas Mac Giolla, has criticised reported plans by the government to means test maintenance grants for students entering third level vocational education colleges.

Deputy Mac Giolla said that the change would represent a further obstacle to equality of opportunity in third level vocational education and would be particularly hard on the children of middle income families.

"Means testing of grants for those attending universities has resulted in a disproportionately high number of students from farming, professional and self employed backgrounds and a lower number of students from PAYE families, as was confirmed by the Clancy Report. The self-employed, farming and professional sectors are able to artificially deflate their incomes in a manner not open to those on PAYE. The vocational sector have been an important source of third level places for those on middle and lower incomes, but if this means test is introduced it will certainly mean a reduction in students from the PAYE sector".

"The income threshold levels for university grants are already ridiculously low. A family of four on the average industrial wage of around £13,500 does not now qualify for a university grant. If the same income limits are applied for the vocational sector, the consequences will be very serious indeed."

"The Minister for Education may try to argue that as there are already means tests in the University area that equity requires a similar arrangements for the third level vocational sector, but the reality is that this a cutback, introduced with the primary aim of saving money".

"Third level education should be open to all on the basis of need and ability, rather than capacity to pay. In the longer term we must move towards a system of third level education which would be free of tuition costs and which would provide a comprehensive grants scheme to meet realistic maintenance costs", Deputy Mac Giolla said.

ends

Tony Heffernan - Press Officer

THE WORKERS PARTY / PAIRTÍ NA hOIBRÍ

PRESS OFFICE: LEINSTER HOUSE, DUBLIN 2

TELEPHONE: (01) 766554/789911 EXT 462 FACSIMILE: (01) 789119