

MINISTERIAL RESPONSE

to the

TENTH REPORT

OF THE

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON

MINISTRIES, STATUTORY AUTHORITIES

AND STATE ENTERPRISES

(GROUP 2)

ON

THE GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE FOR TUITION

EXPENSES (GATE) PROGRAMME

Submitted by
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Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training
September 10, 2013

Introduction

A report entitled “Tenth Report of the Joint Select Committee of Parliament on Ministries, Statutory Authorities and State Enterprises (Group 2), on the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE) Programme” was laid in the House of Representatives on July 3rd, 2013 and in the Senate on July 9, 2013.

Standing Order 71B(13) and 79B(13) of the Senate and House of Representatives respectively, require that the Minister with responsibility for the Ministry/body reported on by a constitutionally established Joint Select Committee, to present to each House, a paper responding to the recommendations/ comments contained in the Report.

This report prepared by the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training on behalf of the Honourable Fazal Karim, Minister, is submitted for the consideration of both Houses.

Response to Observations/Findings

Objective 1

To determine the criteria for students receiving GATE

The Ministry shares the concern of the Committee that there are no minimum academic criteria for the receipt of GATE funding. However, the criteria for students receiving GATE have been based on the requirements of the programme. Some programmes do not require five (5) CSEC passes for matriculation. The Ministry has been concerned that students have been accepted into programmes for which they have not been properly matriculated. During the auditing process, the auditors review qualifications (copies of certificates) from the Students' files at institutions.

Objective 2

To determine what measures are in place to ensure proper management and implementation of the programme

Since 2009, private institutions have been mandated to keep attendance registers. However, as noted in the meeting with the Joint Select Committee of Parliament on Ministries, Statutory Authorities and State Enterprises (Group 2), the FGAD does not have the resources to verify attendance by each student who has signed the register.

Objective 3

To establish what percentage of GATE payments are allocated to academic subjects and technical/vocations subjects respectively; what amounts for the disparity in funding and what were the consequences of this disparity.

The Standing Committee on the GATE Programme is working to ensure that TVET programmes are given priority in respect of the new programmes for GATE funding. However, these TVET programmes must meet the quality standards of the ACTT and NTA as well as priority areas of the Country.

Objective 4

To identify the mechanisms which are in place to deal with abuse of the programme, for instance, by delinquent students or those students who have not completed courses or failed them repeatedly.

The absence of a formal Monitoring and Compliance Unit has hampered the proper management of the GATE programme. The Ministry will be making recommendations for the establishment of such a Unit in the near future.

Objective 5

To ascertain what measures are in place to ensure graduates of the programme fulfill their contractual obligation of work in the public or private sector.

The Ministry is mindful that an appropriate mechanism must be put in place to ensure that beneficiaries of the programme fulfill their obligation to provide a period of compulsory service to the Country and this responsibility will fall under the remit of the Monitoring and Compliance Unit. In the interim, the Funding and Grants Administration Division is preparing a document for the implementation of such a mechanism to be presented to the Standing Committee on the GATE Programme.

Response to the Recommendations

AUDIT UNIT

I External Auditors

Independent reviews of the GATE Programme have been conducted by the Auditor General's Department in accordance with the Exchequer and Audit Act [Chap. 69:01]. These audits are independent and objective reviews of the activities of the GATE Programme.

II Expansion of the Audit Unit

The Ministry is supportive of such a measure and will be taking necessary steps for the expansion of the Audit Unit.

MONITORING AND COMPLIANCE

III As stated earlier, the Ministry supports the establishment of the Monitoring and Compliance Unit and will be taking the necessary steps.

GATE CLEARANCE

IV In September 2012, the Gate Clearance policy was introduced at all public institutions. Consequently, the Gate Clearance policy is now applicable at both public and private institutions.

V Since the implementation of the GATE Programme in 2004, the policy has been 'no repeats' for programmes less than two years. The Standing Committee on the GATE Programme has recommended that students should no longer be eligible for GATE funding for 'repeats'. No final decision has been taken.

VI In the GATE agreement between the Ministry and private institutions, the private institutions are mandated to keep attendance registers. Further, payment to private institutions is only done after review of the attendance registers for a six week period commencing at the start of the programme.

GRADUATION RATES

VII Although the provision of graduation rates has been part of the agreement with private institutions since 2011, this information has not been supplied to the Ministry in most instances. The Ministry has now implemented an Online Institutional Profile Data system for the collection of data from institutions.

TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION TRAINING

VIII A comprehensive review of programmes that may be classified as TVET programmes is currently on-going by the Funding and Grants Administration Division in conjunction with the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago and the National Training Agency. This review will assist in the determination of programmes that are of strategic socio-economic importance to the Country and should therefore be approved for GATE funding.

OBLIGATORY SERVICE

IX The Standing Committee on the GATE Programme will, as a matter of urgency, develop a strategy/mechanism to ensure that beneficiaries provide compulsory services.

X The Standing Committee on the GATE Programme will consider the suggestion of a mandatory guarantor for GATE funded students. However, it should be noted that students in lower socio-economic group may be unable to find guarantors thereby reducing accessibility for some students.

SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROGRAMME

XI The Standing Committee on the GATE Programme is mindful of the cost of the GATE Programme and the issue of sustainability of GATE as a financial support system and investment in higher education in Trinidad and Tobago. In this regard, the Standing Committee on the GATE Programme will be continually reviewing the operations of the GATE programme and recommending measures, where necessary, to ensure the sustainability of the programme.