

STATES OF JERSEY



COMPREHENSIVE SPENDING REVIEW: SAVINGS PROPOSALS – IMPACT ON EMPLOYMENT OF PUBLIC SECTOR STAFF

Lodged au Greffe on 29th June 2010
by Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of opinion –

- (a) to request the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture to reinstate the recruitment process for the appointment of 8 temporary modern foreign language assistants pending final sanction of the States in the Annual Business Plan debate in September 2010; and
- (b) to request Ministers, pending the debate on the Annual Business Plan in September 2010, not to take any action arising from the Comprehensive Spending Review proposals, which would cause or result in any reduction in the number of public sector jobs or job opportunities, pending the Ministers receiving sanctions to do so from the Assembly's 2010 Annual Business Plan debate.

DEPUTY G.P. SOUTHERN OF ST. HELIER

REPORT

Education

The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture is running the risk of subverting the powers of the States Assembly in his proposal to cut 8 temporary Modern Language Assistants contained in the Comprehensive Spending Review.

He appears to have presented what is in fact a *“fait accompli”* as an option which is out to consultation and subject to the sanction of the States in the debate on the Annual Business Plan (ABP) in September. His answer to Question No. 5456 on 22nd June reveals the truth. The consultation is a sham.

His answer was as follows –

“I can confirm that the temporary posts were advertised through the Alliance Française website, but the process was suspended shortly after advertising but prior to shortlisting. As in previous years, these posts were advertised in March/April for an October start, as the contracts run for an eight-month period from October to May. In the event that the States should decide in September 2010 not to accept the proposed spending reduction, the Department would investigate alternative arrangements for the academic year 2010/2011, possibly involving additional support from the Alliance Française.”

In other words, the appointments process has been suspended, and even if the States rejects this proposal in September, it will be too late to appoint the assistants in the normal way. Instead, there would have to be some other temporary (and almost certainly less satisfactory) solution put in its place.

The Minister knows that this will be a very controversial issue on an Island which is fiercely proud of its French-speaking traditions and heritage. The last time this move was proposed in 2002, it was soundly defeated, by my amendment, wholeheartedly supported on the day by Senator Ozouf.

The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture (ESC) should continue the appointments process and be ready in September to keep the posts. Anything short of that is an insult to the States and to the democratic process.

It is not for me here to rehearse the arguments for retaining the current provisions for MFL Assistants, but I point to parts of my 2002 report which illustrate the case simply as follows –

“Why is this so critical?”

The role of the Language Assistant is central to the delivery of effective teaching and ultimately to the standards achieved. Exam grades depend upon them. As one teacher put it to me “You cannot teach modern languages without an assistant”.

Unlike many ancillaries, they are teaching staff. They work in tandem with the class teacher or alone with small groups. They give invaluable attention to individuals and groups to stimulate genuine communication in the target language.

They bring the foreign country and its culture into the classroom. They are a cheap and effective way of providing native speaker input to language learning. This is especially important in the current climate where there are fewer trips to take staff and students abroad.”

Of particular relevance to the current proposed actions is contained in the following extract from 2002 –

“Jersey Head Teachers and Heads of Foreign Language Departments have an effective and efficient system for delivering a high-quality language experience in our schools through the centrally funded scheme. This move puts the whole system in jeopardy. If the Education Committee can properly justify its proposal to abandon central funding for Language Assistants let it do so. But let it do so over the coming year by consulting with all those concerned, and giving schools time to work out the alternatives and the consequences in good time for implementation in September 2004. The hasty decision to cut the 2003 is likely to have damaging consequences and should be reversed.”

Other Departments

Having discovered one set of decisions, those of ESC, which appeared to pre-empt decisions that should rightly be taken by the States Assembly in the September ABP debate, I wondered whether other Departments and Ministers had also embarked on the same route; hence the second part of the proposition.

For example, having announced very specific job losses in many areas, but having given almost 3 months for the consultation and scrutiny process, it seems to me that many employees will be starting to examine their options most carefully. Some will be looking to jump off the sinking ship. Others will be investigating what the current VR or VER schemes have to offer.

To what extent have managers started to address these issues with their staff, either as individuals or as groups of workers? There appears, as ever in Jersey, to be a mass of rumours circulating. I do know, however, that no formal discussions or consultation has taken place with States employee representatives over any of the service reductions, let alone the potential redundancies. Even the new VR scheme which the Minister for Treasury and Resources says will replace the current VR scheme has not been subject to consultation with representatives.

As Deputy Chairperson of the Health, Social Security and Housing Scrutiny Panel, I am currently engaged in examining exactly what the proposed actions of the 3 Ministers will mean for jobs and services. I assume all other Scrutiny Chairpersons will do the same. Included in such scrutiny will be the question of what timescale we are working to, especially in view of the application of VR, VER schemes or non-replacement policies.

Of course it may well be that all other Ministers have refused to sanction any moves which might pre-empt States' decisions in September; in which case, part (b) of the Proposition will be redundant but harmless. If the decision on MFL assistants turns out not to be a singular exception, I believe the Assembly must ensure that it retains its right to take the appropriate and relevant decisions in September.

Financial and manpower implications

This proposition has no direct financial or manpower implications for the States.

APPENDIX 1

WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, SPORT AND CULTURE BY DEPUTY G.P. SOUTHERN OF ST. HELIER ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 22nd JUNE 2010

Question

“Can the Minister confirm that under the savings proposal ESC-4 ‘re-defining core business for schools’ he plans to axe the employment of Modern Language assistants in secondary schools, and state how many posts this will involve and what other measures are included under this ‘re-definition’?”

Will he also state what proportion of the £298,000 saving this measure accounts for?

Will he assure the Assembly that such a cut will not reduce the standards achieved in foreign language examination grades achieved by our students especially in spoken French which is a proud and unique part of our Jersey heritage?

Can he state what impact this will have on the much-heralded initiative at Hautlieu School to introduce the International Baccalaureate (IB) which requires high standards in a second language study beyond the age of 16?

Will the Minister also state whether the posts have been advertised, but that shortlisting and the interview process has been suspended? When were appointments made in previous years in order to allow appointees to take up their places for the start of the new academic year in September?

Has any decision of the States on this matter in September been pre-empted by his Department’s actions?”

Answer

Yes, I can confirm that the savings proposal ESC-4 will result in the cessation in the employment of the 8 temporary Modern Language Assistants. The permanent posts will be unaffected by this change.

This saving accounts for £76,495, or approximately 25% of the total saving of £298,000 identified under the proposal ESC0-4 ‘re-defining core business for schools’. The other measures relate to the stopping of initiatives now embedded in the school system, without impacting on front line services. These include the Solution Oriented Schools programme, and the training of school governors.

I am confident that schools will be able to organise their provision to ensure that standards can be maintained through this change period. It should be remembered that all pupils are taught by highly qualified and experienced modern language teachers within well-resourced departments. Other academic departments achieve the appropriate results without any additional support. I should add that technology has vastly improved since the original provision of language assistants, and a great deal of support is now available to all pupils through the advancement in hardware and software packages.

It is expected there will be no impact on I.B. Modern Languages at Hautlieu School, as alternative provision will be made using new technologies and existing staff within the Modern Languages Department.

I can confirm that the temporary posts were advertised through the Alliance Française website, but the process was suspended shortly after advertising but prior to shortlisting. As in previous years, these posts were advertised in March/April for an October start, as the contracts run for an 8-month period from October to May. In the event that the States should decide in September 2010 not to accept the proposed spending reduction, the Department would investigate alternative arrangements for the academic year 2010/2011, possibly involving additional support from the Alliance Française.

In the longer term, we are discussing with interested parties ways in which we can provide further support for Modern Languages.

APPENDIX 2

Report and Proposition in 2002

In responding to my questions on the basis for cuts made to the Education budget, the President of Education revealed that some £490,000 had been redirected to certain 'priority areas', including ICT replacement. Part of this re-allocation of funds involved the removal of central funding for peripatetic language assistants amounting to £51,500. This service is now to be funded out of already stretched school budgets.

I believe that this decision was wrong and endangers standards in language teaching in all our secondary schools.

Overview

The present system has been in place for the past 27 years, and has always been organised and funded centrally. Over the years several language advisors have considered modifications but have always concluded that the centralised system is effective. As recently as July 2000, the then Assistant Director, Quality Development, Mavis Snowdon, confirmed to the full-time assistants that all head teachers were in favour of central allocation as in previous years. I believe that is still the case.

This sum of money funds three full-time assistants who divide their time between 2 or 3 schools, who each work 24 hours a week. There are also 2 part-time assistants. Between October and May each year there are also several French assistants from the University of Caen and a German assistant from the Central Bureau, who work 12 hours a week. The full-time and part-time assistants have vast experience behind them – in one case 27 years, in another 22 years.

What will change?

Under the new system, as is pointed out in the letter from the Department informing Heads of the change –

“As of September 2003 Foreign Language Assistants will no longer be funded centrally. Therefore, if you wish to continue using an assistant this will constitute a charge on your budget.”

The Heads are asked to tick boxes labelled –

I will require the following Language assistants for the year 2003/4 and am willing to fund this service from my budget.

I will not require Language assistants for the year 2003/4.

Heads are then asked to indicate which subjects they require and for how many hours. The letter also gives the rates –

Permanent Assistants (2 French, 1 Spanish)	£20 per hour
Temporary Assistants	£16 per hour

These costs include travelling time. What about preparation time? Who will pay? At a time when school budgets have been effectively cut, and desperate Heads are looking to make savings just to survive, how tempting is this form? A few hours less? What about using the cheaper alternative? In the Departmental bidding war that breaks out each year between departments as they seek what they consider to be their “fair share” of diminished resources, what will become of the Language Assistants?

Why is this so critical?

The role of the Language Assistant is central to the delivery of effective teaching and ultimately to the standards achieved. Exam grades depend upon them. As one teacher put it to me “You cannot teach modern languages without an assistant”.

Unlike many ancillaries, they are teaching staff. They work in tandem with the class teacher or alone with small groups. They give invaluable attention to individuals and groups to stimulate genuine communication in the target language.

They bring the foreign country and its culture into the classroom. They are a cheap and effective way of providing native speaker input to language learning. This is especially important in the current climate where there are fewer trips to take staff and students abroad.

The nature of the oral examination is such that the assistant plays an essential role in preparing students for the presentations, role plays, reporting tasks, and prescribed questions and texts. This oral contribution is essential to the delivery of high exam grades. The oral is today a substantial part of examinations at GCSE, AS and A2 levels –

GCSE	25%
AS Level	35%
A2 Level	35%

They save hours of teachers’ and invigilators’ time by conducting mock oral examinations at all levels, and because of their experience and training they also conduct actual examinations in most schools.

Jersey Head Teachers and Heads of Foreign Language Departments have an effective and efficient system for delivering a high-quality language experience in our schools through the centrally funded scheme. This move puts the whole system in jeopardy. If the Education Committee can properly justify its proposal to abandon central funding for Language Assistants let it do so. But let it do so over the coming year by consulting with all those concerned, and giving schools time to work out the alternatives and the consequences in good time for implementation in September 2004. The hasty decision to cut the 2003 is likely to have damaging consequences and should be reversed.

This amendment has no additional financial or manpower implications for the States. in the estimates of revenue expenditure of the Education Committee – the estimate of peripatetic, psychological and welfare services be increased by £51,500 from £568,200 to £619,700 by reducing the estimate for ICT support from £1,624,400 to £1,572,900.

Members present voted as follows –

“Pour” (38)

Senators

Horsfall, Le Maistre, Stein, Syvret, Norman, Walker, Kinnard, Le Sueur,
Le Claire, Lakeman.

Connétables

St. Martin, St. Ouen, St. Brelade, St. Mary, St. John, St. Peter, St. Clement,
Trinity.

Deputies

H. Baudains(C), S. Baudains(H), Trinity, Duhamel(S), Breckon(S), Huet(H),
St. John, Le Main(H), St. Peter, St. Ouen, G. Baudains(C), Dorey(H),
Troy(B), Scott Warren(S), Farnham(S), Ozouf(H), Fox(H), Bridge(H),
Martin(H), Southern(H).

“Contre” (1)

Deputy

Voisin(L).

One member abstained from voting.