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7 Deputy L.B.E. Ash of St. Clement of the Chairman of the Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel regarding the prospect of Scrutiny review of applications from students at States schools to Oxford or Cambridge Universities: [OQ.34/2019]

In the light of the news that 41 students from Brampton Manor Academy (a comprehensive in Newham, East London) obtained places at Oxford or Cambridge, will the panel undertake an inquiry into how the Island's schools compare in this matter?

Deputy R.J. Ward (Chairman, Economic and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel):

First of all I would like to thank the Deputy for the question. It is nice to see Scrutiny being recognised for the importance of the work it does and carries out, and it is important as a component for the governance of this Island. The panel is not looking to undertake a specific review into the number of students from Jersey schools who go to Oxford and Cambridge. This is mainly because the question itself can be answered by requesting the relevant figures from the Minister for Education about how many students go from Jersey and study at both of these universities. As such, it is a very narrow Scrutiny topic. We can ask the question through the scrutiny panel for the Deputy or I can talk to him about the wording if that helps. The wider issue of comparison with this particular school would be difficult given that Jersey does not have one single fee-paying or non-selective school that covers the complete year 7 to 13 range, although I did find out that the school the Deputy mentioned takes 300 students from around 3,000 applications in its sixth form. So it could be said to be selective itself. I do not think that Scrutiny is here to look at a single indicator of performance at any individual school, we need to look at the provision as a whole trying to address specific areas that could produce constructive outcomes. The Deputy may be aware that the panel is currently conducting a review of post-16 education, which is looking at all provision available to young people once they finish compulsory education at the age of 16. This review will look to establish the pathways and opportunities for young people who were taken into higher education and employment and whether what is available meets the needs of all students in the Island. This much wider review is more appropriate for Scrutiny. The review would also look at what is available to students in other countries, including but not limited to the United Kingdom. We are currently carrying out a survey of local students which runs until 1st March.

The Bailiff:

Chairman, there is a 90-second rule for answers.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Sorry. Could I just take one liberty to thank the work of Scrutiny officers who do superb work and make my concerns about funding of Scrutiny now and into the future.

3.7.1 Deputy L.B.E. Ash:

I thank the chairman for his answer. In the past, Oxbridge entry was very much the preserve of the public schools and the entry requirement could be difficult to assess. It was once said, I think, to get into Teddy Hall at Oxford you were passed a rugby ball, if you caught it you got in, if you drop-kicked it back you got a scholarship. But those days have changed now, it is very much a meritocracy and would the chairman feel as part of putting children first it is very much our job to allow the brightest children the very best chance of entering these institutions.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

It is difficult to know how to answer this as a Scrutiny chair rather than just a Member but I would suggest that Oxbridge is not the only indicator of success where our students go. We have to be really careful with narrow indicators and narrow pathways. What we need to ensure in our education system is that we are not stopping entry to any university if that is what students want. The move forward in funding in university education has helped with this, in particular for those with low incomes because the financial barriers are one of the greatest barriers for young people going to university. In terms of the academic achievement, I would suggest that, yes, we are addressing that in the post-16 review to see the provision we have across the board. It is not just about Oxford and Cambridge.

3.7.2 Deputy R. Labey:

Do we gather from the first answer of the chairman that Scrutiny are going to look at whether it is right for a child to have to sit an entrance exam to get into one of the private schools which are subsidised?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

That is a very good question. We have a pathway through, if you like, what we are going to take on in Scrutiny and that would certainly be an interesting issue for us to look at. There are a number of legacy issues that we want to deal with as well, recruitment and retention and also Home Affairs. I must take this opportunity to say we are limited by the resources that we have in Scrutiny. We have one Scrutiny officer for the panel who works incredibly hard. I know other Scrutiny Panels are in the same position. Yes, we would love to undertake all of these but we will be limited by the resourcing that is available.

3.7.3 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

The Auditor General in the U.K. has commented that advice available to students - and in my experience careers advice as well - is less than optimal for students. Is the Scrutiny Panel including the careers advice available to our students as well in its review?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Thank you for the question. Yes, we have taken a submission from Skills Jersey who look at careers advice and some of the questions that are going out to students - about 1,000 students - will be about how much they know about their pathways. So, yes, we are addressing that issue but as part of a wider context. Again, with Scrutiny we have to have ... it is a balance between a wide investigation into the number of factors that will affect outcomes in the long term and specifics within that. I think we have got that balance, yes.

3.7.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Scrutiny chairman believe that there may well be professionals and teachers out there listening to this question in a quite bemused manner when they have pupils coming to school who perhaps have not had breakfast, who have no lunch money, who may be struggling with literacy and with difficult home situations, to face potential comparisons with a highly selective school in the U.K. which is sending students to what is still a very elitist system? Does he think that might send the wrong message out and if, in fact, the Deputy who is asking the question wishes to find out a comparison there is no need for a Scrutiny review, simply he needs to ask the Education Department for the figures and he can make his own comparisons?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Again, answering as a Scrutiny chairman is going to be a difficult one. I will refer you back to something I said when I answered the original question; we need to look at the provision as a whole, trying to address specific areas that produce constructive outcomes. That is what we do in Scrutiny. Yes, we have an issue across our Island and across many other jurisdictions about access to education that is way beyond just a few exclusive universities. It goes right back to day one in schools in terms of children being able to have the right sort of standards of living. That to me is what is putting children first, that we give genuine access to the education that they want and that we need. We do not need everyone to go to Oxbridge, we need people to be nurses, teachers and professionals in all sorts of ways in our Island if we are going to function as a society so we need to look at the widest possible scrutiny of our education system.

3.7.5 Deputy J.H. Young:

In congratulating the panel chairman on their review of what seems the education opportunities for our young people, could the chairman comment on whether or not the current system of 14-plus selection is a factor that needs to be considered as part of such a review and whether that has any bearing on people's achievements?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

There is something called the scoping document. You have to be very careful that we stay within the scoping documents to get the outcomes and recommendations for the actual scrutiny we are undertaking. We have said post-16 scrutiny. Yes, the 14-plus transfer is an issue in our education system. Does that allow genuine access post-16, does it get in the way of that? That is something that will be considered but I think that is something for later. It will touch on to this post-16 review and I would be very interested to see what you think about the recommendations and the outcomes of that review. Yes, all of these factors will impinge upon that review but we are focusing on what happens post-16 across the Island as well. All of it is post-16 provision.

The Bailiff:

The question was about Oxbridge entry and the questions are now going wider and wider and wider. They are going to come back again shortly, I hope. Final supplementary? Thank you very much.