



Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny

Panel

Quarterly Public Hearing

Witness: The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning

Wednesday, 19th June 2024

Panel:

Deputy C.D. Curtis of St. Helier Central (Chair)

Connétable M. Labey of Grouville (Vice-Chair)

Deputy B.B. de S.DV.M. Porée of St. Helier South

Witnesses:

Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier Central, The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning

Deputy C.S. Alves of St. Helier Central, Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning

Mr. R. Sainsbury, Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills Department

Mr. S. O'Regan, Group Director, Education

Mr. K. Posner, Associate Director, Innovation, Transformation and Business Support

Ms. N. Mulliner, Head of Childcare and Early Years Services

[14:00]

Deputy C.D. Curtis of St. Helier Central (Chair):

Welcome to this quarterly hearing of the Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel. Today is 19th June. I would like to draw everyone's attention to the following. This hearing will be filmed and streamed live. The recording and transcript will be published afterwards on the States Assembly website. All electronic devices, including mobile phones, should be switched to silent. If we start with the introductions, I am Deputy Catherine Curtis, the chair of the panel.

Connétable M. Labey of Grouville (Vice-Chair):

My name is Mark Labey, Connétable of Grouville, and I am the vice-chair.

Deputy B.B. de S.DV.M. Porée of St. Helier South:

I am Deputy Porée, a panel member.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Deputy Rob Ward, Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning.

Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I am Deputy Carina Alves and I am Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning.

Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills Department:

Rob Sainsbury. I am the Chief Officer at the Department of Children, Young People, Education and Skills.

Head of Childcare and Early Years Services:

I am Nicola Mulliner, Head of Early Years within the department.

Group Director, Education:

Seán O'Regan, Group Director of Education.

Associate Director, Innovation, Transformation and Business Support:

I am Keith Posner, Associate Director for Innovation, Transformation and Business Support in C.Y.P.E.S (Children, Young People, Education and Skills).

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Thank you, everyone. We have 1½ hours for this hearing and I will start with questions about nursery care. The first question is: following the approval of the Common Strategic Policy by the States Assembly and with regards to the priority to extend nursery and childcare provision, please, Minister, could you share the top 3 actions that will be undertaken to move this priority forward?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Thank you. I am very pleased with where we are going with this. There are currently discussions underway with what we call a subset of headteachers on what changes can be made for provisioning September 2024. There are places in our States school nurseries available, so we want to utilise those but we have to develop some wraparound care around those. Those are a couple of actions

that have already happened. I anticipate being really clear on what change we can make by September by the end of this month, the end of June, so we will have something tangible, I really hope, by then. Realistically, the substantive change, the big change for that provision would not be until September 2025. However, I will say that if there is an opportunity and we can reflect some more, for example from January to June as the terms go on, to make new places, I do not want anything to stand in the way of that. I know that is difficult because we go from September to September in our year and places are available from June, but if we can make places available, become available and parents and families want them, then I am quite happy for us to do that. So those are the main actions that have been taken. We have also looked very carefully ... most importantly, I think, is the beginning part of that, which is a look at the number of nursery places that are available in our schools. Of course, I think I mentioned before the recommendation as regards the net funding has been agreed and so we do not have to negotiate that anymore and I think there is a positive relationship with all of the providers across the sector. I say it is an action but it cannot be underestimated how important that is as we develop into the longer term.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Would you say those top 3 actions are to use States school nurseries, develop the wraparound care programme but also to examine the number of nursery places and get that worked out? Is that it?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Well, the third one would be to try to increase the number of places for 2 year-olds, initially as many as we can to trial. We also want to ensure that we get this up and running and it is working. I do not think we want to go forward if it is not working. We have to be absolutely honest about it. From day one I have said I am not going to make an offer to parents that is not there. That is a difficult one at times because parents will be quite rightly saying: "We just want some hours." Absolutely, but we need the places and they need to be right because the care for our 2 year-olds early on is absolutely vital that we get it right. The standard of that needs to be of a high standard. It is and we want to ensure that, as we extend it, it continues to be of a high standard. I think I am right in saying that.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes, okay. So at our last hearing on 2nd May - you have already just mentioned it - you said there was already work going on around planning the wraparound spaces at the primary school nurseries. Could you describe what is involved in that work and what is being done?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Well, I will start and then if I miss anything please step in because I know there is an enormous amount that has gone on. Currently, school nursery places are school time only. Parents want

more than that. They want before and after school as well, that longer-term care. What we are trying to do is to extend that in I think it is 2 of our schools where there are spaces so that the spaces can be utilised to the full. I am not entirely sure how many spaces it would free up. I think it is around 30, something around 30. That would provide 3 year-olds' parents the opportunity to have that longer day at the States facilities. That may mean using staff from outside the school to engage in that provision. That is a good thing for a couple of reasons. First of all, it joins together the sectors. It means that the really highly qualified member of staff that is there, the teacher, can pass on good practice as well. I am not saying that there is not good practice but that sharing within that environment is very good. It also means it gives opportunities for those nurseries to be involved where they can be and may free up some 2 year-old spaces nearby. I do not really want to talk about specific schools because I do not want to get in the way of anything. The last thing I want to ... and I look at Nicola who is looking at me saying: "Do not spoil this", because there are some negotiations going on but I think they have been really positive. I would say thank you to the headteachers who have been engaged and I know others wanted to be and will be and thank you to the nurseries as well who want to be involved in that. That, I think, comes back to that really positive relationship. If we have got that we can build on it. We are all coming from the same place, we want the same thing, which is the best care for our children.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Can I ask then when you think you might be able to make an announcement about these 2 schools?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Well, I am hoping at the end of June, early July, some time around then. I have said in the Assembly though that if we are not managing I will also say something about that and give reasons why. I do not think there is anything negative in this, that is the thing. It is all very positive. It is just a question of can we get this done. I have got to say and I will admit, and I will not look at the people around me when I say it, I have pushed a little bit for us to go a little quicker, particularly saying about in January. I understand that puts pressure on people, but I think we all want the same thing and if we can get there I think it will be a really good thing for us to do.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

After these 2 schools, if that goes ahead, it is rolled out, then there will be work ongoing with other schools as well?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, particularly those that have places. I will not say which schools but there are schools that have places ranging from 24 spaces to 14 to 8 to 3 to 2, and if we can utilise those the best we can that would be great. Also within the nurseries that wraparound care - I think that is the phrase that is

used and I am not sure I entirely like that because it is a continuum of care for a longer day - I think could be useful for many parents anyway, particularly working parents who want that provision.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes, definitely. Okay, thanks for that. Could you confirm how many 3 to 4 year-old children are utilising school nursery places for the academic year 2023 to 2024?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I do have this and I looked it up earlier. Yes, got it. For 2023-24?

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

It is 464. In government schools?

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes, in the States school nurseries for 3 to 4 year-olds.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

It is 464, so there are 179 free spaces. There are 179 theoretical spaces in those schools if we were to fill every single nursery, but that is what gives us the capacity and that is what we have got to work with. I think that is the only beginning point we could have, short of building huge new nurseries, which takes a long time. This is the quickest, most effective use of the resources we have, I believe.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay, yes. Do you know what percentage of 3 to 4 year-olds that is? Do you have an idea of that?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

That is really difficult to say because not all parents want a nursery place or are registered for it. I am not sure how we would get that data. I suppose we could look at the birth rates but then we would have to assume that everyone who was here 3 years ago is still here. Unless you have a ...

Group Director, Education:

Are you talking about the actual cohort of that year? It is about half.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, okay, about half. That is interesting

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

I do not know if you have any targets for increasing that percentage. Clearly if you are going to do wraparound care it will probably increase it.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, it may well do. I think the focus really is increasing to 2 year-olds as many as we can to begin with and really embed that so it is there across our nursery provision. We do have a range of sectors. We have private nurseries, States nurseries, grant-funded ... third sectors is the phrase that is used now, but all of those providers come together and we have had some good work on the early years stuff that went on. I think it is about utilising all of those nurseries. I am going to say it, we are a 9 by 5 Island. They are relatively close together and even when we talk about there is a school out in St. Peters, if we can get something for children on their way into town, I am not entirely sure they all have to be in town, I have to say. I think we need to be creative in the way we create spaces because the distances are not enormous and it is more about the quality of that provision. As a parent, I think if I had to travel a couple of miles for the best quality provision for my child I would certainly do that.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes, for those who can I suppose it is good. I know you have already mentioned some timescales about the wraparound care. Do you have a timescale for the 2 year-old provision?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I am hoping that we can have, certainly within this term, the rest of the 2 years, a significant provision in place because if we can utilise all of the 3 year-old spaces, for example, we may have some other nurseries come in online in the longer term, then certainly by the end of this term I would like to be in a position where we can make the free hours offering by the end of this term. That is a challenge. I know it is a challenge but even if it is for those that are available at that time at least we know ... because we will be on, if you like, a trajectory to say that this is possible, it is just a question of time. So if by 2027 we can say we think we will be there by 2028 and we can start to offer something, that would be really, really positive. We need to do it as soon as we can but it has to be the right provision. We do not want to be in a position where we have rushed something and it is just not good and children are not safe. I do not think we will get to that stage, but it is about quality because of the importance of those early years.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. At our last public hearing we had an interesting question that was put to us by a member of the public, which was an idea that there should be strategic policy work to consider the economic case for a change relating to the extent of financially subsidised nursery provision, which I think was greeted positively. Can you tell us is there an update on this work?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Specific work I am not sure I can, but what I will say is in the dialogue over the development of the Government Plan and that sort of challenge that we are putting in very strongly to provide our C.S.P. (Common Strategic Policy) commitments, that is certainly something I think is being increasingly understood around the Council of Ministers and beyond. For example, when we look at the need to train and have our economy being used to its full productivity - is the general term that is used, that is getting people into work when they want to be - the role of having decent nursery provision is understood. I think it is very difficult to directly measure the economic impact of that. I think initially it is an assumption that it is a positive thing to do and I think we agree on that. How you would say how much the Island makes per hour of nursery provision ... I am not sure how you would do that. I am not sure whether that is possible. I am sure some economic boffin would be able to do it somewhere along the line but I would suggest it would be positive. Even with the cost of the N.E.F. (Nursery Education Fund) I think we would get that money back, so to speak, with the impact because there are a number of variables, just to add. It is the improvement for the children; it is their improvement longer term, their ability to deal with schooling when they first go to school; it is the ability for parents to get back into work; it is the tax take from that from people working again; it is the quality of life, the spend in our economy.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes, there is quite a lot of research, is there not, about the benefits to children? This was, I think, thought of as maybe some work that could be done around the economic perspective but you think that is not taking place really?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Well, I would not say it is not.

Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

It may possibly come under the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development. I had a meeting today about the future economy programme, so that is possibly something that would come under that remit and I am happy to take that back.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes, I expect so and then with the information from this department.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I think it is also very important to say that this is not in isolation. We cannot be having government in isolation, so C.Y.P.E.S. will do this. We have an impact elsewhere on the sustainability of our economy. We have an impact on health and we have an impact on children for the children's remit. Education, I think, has an impact on every single other department, to be quite frank. I would say that, of course I would say that, but I think there is a truism in there in terms of the impact of nursery care, for example, so that is why I think it is difficult to measure one indicator from it. I think they are wider but, yes, we do have to do that and I think that would be a good conversation.

[14:15]

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes, okay. So if we just ask some more questions mainly about the Nursery Education Fund now. Minister, can you explain to the panel the process by which private nursery providers receive money from the Nursery Education Fund?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes. However, I am going to ask Nicola to do it because I think I would take about 20 minutes going through this. I think you will sum it up in about 2, so I think that is a much more effective use of that, if you are happy.

Head of Childcare and Early Years Services:

That is absolutely fine. The condition is that an early years setting is registered with the department. Under the Day Care of Children (Jersey) Law they have to be a registered provider. They then make a formal application. That application is endorsed by our team. There are certain conditions that they have to agree to, a formal declaration to meet those conditions and then, in partnership with Customer and Local Services they are then part of the scheme. The partnership agreement that they to sign up to is an annual agreement that they again sign up to to agree those conditions.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. So when they make their application, do they say how much funding they think they need or how does that work?

Head of Childcare and Early Years Services:

Do you want me to carry on?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, you can. I know the answer to that one but you carry on.

Head of Childcare and Early Years Services:

Go on then, you do that.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

The N.E.F. funding is set per child, effectively. So they will get ... currently from September 2024 it will be £8.30 an hour for the N.E.F. funding and that will increase by R.P.I. (Retail Price Index) from December 2024, R.P.I. for the next 3 years. That is the agreement we had. So it is per hour of free childcare for the parent but paid for via the N.E.F. funding. Is that correct? Okay.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. That is just completely to do with the number of children that they have?

Head of Childcare and Early Years Services:

Yes. They send in headcount forms and then as part of the regulatory process that falls within our remit, we hold them to account. Our governance arrangements are that we make sure that those children are actually in the setting and then we look to see that parents are not charged top-ups, so the conditions again of charging parents free to access those hours of nursery care. That is part of our regulatory process to audit the N.E.F. but also the quality. As the Minister quite rightly pointed out, it is that standard of quality that they will have to meet. We have reviewing officers that go and check on the compliance aspect but then we also have quality development officers that look at the provision and the quality of provision that those children are receiving.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Can I just add to that? I think that is a positive process though. It is not about ...

Head of Childcare and Early Years Services:

It is very different to the English model, the Ofsted inspection model.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

It is not about catching out. It is about saying "these improvements" and then we will support that improvement well, I believe.

Head of Childcare and Early Years Services:

We have honest engagement and I think we have a relationship where we can positively challenge that and we work collaboratively with providers to make sure that they are able to meet those

conditions. If children and parents want a place there, it is our duty to make sure that that place is as good as it can be.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Great. How often would these officers check on compliance normally?

Head of Childcare and Early Years Services:

We have an annual cycle of engagement. We are out doing it at the moment for our quality development visits, our moderation process, but also we have a cycle of review. We will look at settings every other year but if we need to look at settings sooner than that, with the capacity that the team has we can bring those forward at any time.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay, thank you. Are there any requirements for the day nurseries to pay staff a living wage?

Head of Childcare and Early Years Services:

No.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

No.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

So, could this become a stipulation?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

If the Government develop a living wage, as the C.S.P. suggests, then it will be and there will be help put in place for employers with regards to living wage, and I think that is quite important, but I think it is important in another area for nurseries. That is for, if you like, the profession of those carers, those childcare workers. A living wage ... well, the name says it all, it is a living wage. It is a level of wage where you can actually have a standard of living. I think they are much more likely to keep staff. We can also work on training and we do want to provide that training. Certainly it is something that we do supply for private nurseries as well. We are more than happy to do that and that is a really positive thing. What we need is we need that to be a vocation that people want to stay in that they can survive in financially. I think the problem we have had in the past, as with many areas of the care profession, is we have not had that and then you end up with transient staff, which I personally believe is much more expensive in the long run anyway. So I think there is a positive to the living wage that we need to be thinking about. As long as the support and the structures are right, that could really help our workforce and that is what we need to do.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

If that is to come into place, do you think it might do at a particular time or what would the plan be?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I believe it will be in the next Government Plan. I am not trying to pass it on to someone else but that is my remit, that one. I will certainly be supporting a living wage but that will be part of the next Government Plan, I believe. Is that correct? Yes.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Great. With the Nursery Education Fund, where is it administered? Is it in Treasury or is it in C.Y.P.E.S?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Sorry, go on. That is a good question.

Head of Childcare and Early Years Services:

It is through Customer and Local Services.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. I think you have answered this one a bit already but I have got: what oversight or input does C.Y.P.E.S. have over the specific use of the N.E.F. money? You have already said it is per pupil. You have got your people going to check on compliance, the quality standards. Is there anything else to add to that?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I was just going to say - I am worried I might get it wrong now - it follows the child. So this a payment for the child's provision of nursery. So, if you like, it does not go directly to parents. It goes to the provider but it goes to the provider because of the child being in that provision. I think in some jurisdictions they might give vouchers. We were talking about this before. I do not think we want to do that. I think it is a simpler version for us to do it this way, so that is where it goes.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Can you tell me how many children in private nurseries are being supported by the Nursery Education Fund for the academic year September 2023 to August 2024?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I have a figure of 359 children are funded through the N.E.F. Is that for private nurseries?

Head of Childcare and Early Years Services:

That is correct, yes.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

So it is 359 children.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

This would be the 3 to 4 year-olds, would it not?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes. I will just say that that is currently £7.44. The increase will not come into play until September 2024.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

That will be £8.30?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, it will be. It is for 30 hours a week, 38 weeks per year for the maximum payment at the moment of £8,481.60.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Thank you. You have just mentioned the amount paid per child. How many private nursery providers receive payments from the Nursery Education Fund?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

How many receive payments? I think there is 25 private nurseries that receive funding, 25 nurseries on the Island that receive payments.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Do any of them receive payments of over £75,000 per annum in total?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, they do. There are, I believe, 17 settings that receive over £75,000 a year and that is due to the number of the children they take and the hours that those children have. If you think about it that a child in full-time N.E.F. funding would receive that £8,000 whatever I figure I gave you just now, you add that together and it soon adds up. Yes.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. I am just checking through my questions. You mentioned 17, so presumably they have to provide copies of their financial accounts to Government?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

The answer to that is no and the reason is that it is not a grant-funded scheme. N.E.F. follows the child and it is paid to them because it is a payment to the child not a grant as would be any other grant-assisted provider, which if they get over £75,000 they have to provide their accounts. So, no, they do not have to do that. If we changed that it would have to be a contracted service, is that correct, rather than a grant because of the nature of the N.E.F. funding itself? It is not a set amount each year because of the number of children and the number of hours. Parents do not have to take up the 30 hours if they do not want to. They can use 10, 20, whatever. It is paid termly, which I think is a very important part. They know what they are getting and it is in tranches of money.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Although this follows the child, the money is paid to the nursery provider?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Do you think that they should be providing details of their accounts to Government?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

The honest answer is I do not know because we have to accept they are private institutions, they are private businesses, and what does Government want to do with private business accounts? I think it would be a positive relationship to be open about accounts and I think we have a positive relationship at the moment because we do not have that structure in place. I think we would rather spend that time with the nursery provision and building that and building that relationship and getting it right than creating issues over accounts. As I say, they are private businesses. That is the structure that has been set up.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

With other private businesses who receive more than £75,000 per annum from the Government, as per the requirement in the *Public Finances Manual*, they do have to provide copies of their financial accounts.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, but that is because, as I said, they are in receipt of a grant and that is part of the Public Finances (Jersey) Law. It is a semantic difference but I think it is an important one in terms of the law. If we were to change that we would have to change the Public Finances Law, I believe. Personally, that is not something I would want to be involved in. I know my way around the Public Finances Law as far as I need to for this role. In terms of changing it and the impact that might have on wider implications elsewhere, I do not know what that would mean, but that is specifically for grants and that is an accountability level for grant funding. I understand what you mean by the N.E.F. but there is a C.L.S. (Customer and Local Services) payment, like other C.L.S. payments, for the provision of a specific service to our children. I am afraid that is as far as I can answer on that one.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. Why is a more detailed breakdown of how the Nursery Education Fund is paid not included in the States annual report and accounts?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

How it is paid? I do not know is the simple answer.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Who gets it or how ...

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I really do not know. The mechanism for its payment is clear in terms of a parent making an application for N.E.F., a nursery has those hours, makes that application and C.L.S. then gets the payment for that. I think that is as far as we can say unless there is anything else that anyone can add to that. That is the mechanism and that is clear. I do not know what else we would report.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

It is something maybe the panel can look into more as well. Are you able to provide the panel with a breakdown of financial details in writing after this hearing?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Of?

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

To do with the nursery education funding.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Do you mean where it goes in terms of which nurseries it goes to?

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I believe so. We could do that, yes.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

So that would be in confidence or any of it in public format?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I think it would be best to do that in confidence to begin with because, as I say, they are private businesses, commercially sensitive and they are private businesses. Whatever your attitude might be to that in terms of the provision, I think we have to be respectful to that and we are trying ... we do work together very well I think.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

I just have a few more questions about this subject. Comparing to school nurseries, what are the differences between the funding formula used for calculating financial support provided to the school nurseries and the calculation used to provide the support to private nurseries through the N.E.F.?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

To put it in its simplest way, and please stop me if I am wrong here. It is an interesting question, a really good question. The private nurseries receive N.E.F. funding, full stop. That is per child and that is their funding from us. If they want other services they have to charge for that, such as meals, et cetera. For school nurseries, each school nursery, the school funding formula applies, which will be one teacher, 2 nursery officers and that is up to a capacity of 30. If capacity is changed obviously the numbers change. I will give you a general one here: one additional nursing officer lifting it up to 40, which is currently at 3 of our nurseries; a lunchtime supervisor and 0.22 full-time equivalent nursery lunchtime cover is provided, plus all the overheads, premises, utilities, resources are funded at a whole-school level and not by year group. There is, effectively, funding for that provision of the nursery within the school funding formula of the school in the nursery section of it. Is that a good summary? See, I have been listening. Okay, okay.

[14:30]

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Earlier you confirmed that there were 464 children aged 3 to 4 in States school nurseries, which is more than the 359 children in the private nurseries.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

However, we note that the 2024 budget for nursery classes in the 21 primary schools is £3.05 million, which is less than that year's budget for the N.E.F. which was £3.421 million. It seems there is proportionately much more funding going to support a child in the private provision than the school one.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

But that could be due to the number of hours, could it not?

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

It says "when the basis is on 30 hours per week of term time during the year" on my notes.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Do you want to address it?

Group Director, Education:

If it is helpful, Minister, through the chair. The calculation of funding is just a very different model. The nursery in a primary school, 21 of our 22, non-fee charging primary schools. As was noted, 21 of our 22 non-fee charging primary schools have nursery classes. The elements that benefit the nursery like the headteacher, the school secretary, are in the core funding formula for schools, so that would not be counted. It is very hard to get the unit spend on a child in an N.E.F.-funded nursery class as a 4 year-old and a school nursery. What we do know is that we have given the right ratios and the right balance of care in early education.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I think the other element for the States-funded nurseries is the premises, they are not charged rent for their premises. The utilities, the electricity for example, the resources such as outside, such as other resources that are used day to day within the classroom are provided as well. There is an additional provision that is not just directly a financial fund in the same way as the N.E.F. is, but in private nurseries they only receive the N.E.F. funding, not those other utilities and resources. I will say, though, that if we do have wraparound care, one of the attractions to that is they do become part of the school nurseries and there is no extra cost for the nurseries, for the private nurseries. It

is that there is a benefit there and I think that is one of the reasons we can get this working really well.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay, because I thought you said there were extra costs at the school nurseries.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

No, sorry, the overheads are included, yes.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes, so with the overheads being included, I would not have thought that more would need to be allocated to the school nursery than ...

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Okay, okay, I got this now, because the overheads are provided by the school in general they are not part of the financial allocation. You would have the allocation for your nursery place, plus your overheads, which is not in that figure. The premise is the resources, the utilities, et cetera, which would be a significant amount, I would imagine.

Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills Department:

Yes, it is, in the same way as it would be in the private business with the things that they collect.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes. For example, if we were to say we are going to take the cost of your rent and utilities and so on off the N.E.F., which we are not going to do, before there is any headline on that. It is not what I am saying. Just by example, the N.E.F. rate would go down significantly because that is what probably a lot of it is used for, so that is not a like-to-like comparison in that way.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

In certain cases not States school nursery funding ...

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, simply because they are using their buildings, yes.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Each child in the States school nursery is allocated a smaller amount of funding administered by the ...

Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills Department:

Probably just worth coming in, I think that it is quite difficult to compare, as Seán was alluding to, because there are different funding models here, if schools are fixed-funded, so the classroom is fixed. I am not sure of the figures you quoted but I would imagine they would probably relate to the class being full as well; that is not always the case when classes are full. The Minister has already pointed to capacity and, therefore, opportunity within those classes. They are quite difficult comparisons to make between the N.E.F.-funded nurseries and the school nurseries, which are just funded on a completely different basis.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes, just that we want to find out more about how it works and what the reason is for differences.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I think one of the things would be really beneficial to do would be to visit one of the States school nurseries and visit one of the private nurseries to see the comparison. They compare very, very well in terms of what is being delivered there and the space and the care for the children, for example. Then when you put everything into the mix in terms of the N.E.F. funding and the costs that are for the private nurseries and the funding that goes to the school with the school funding model, plus the use of the facilities, et cetera, I would hazard a guess that I think that probably if you could in some way put them together would be quite similar.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Maybe if the panel could see some sort of breakdown with how this works out, because it would be good to have more understanding of how this compares.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes. The only problem is I do not know if we can provide a comparison in the way that you want it because I do not think they are comparable but we can provide something.

Group Director, Education:

We can provide the fixed costs for our sector. We just would not have that comparable data for the private sector.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Because the funding is different. It is not N.E.F. funding done alone; it is funding plus all of the utilities and resources. We do not charge our nurseries rent in our own schools; that would not make any sense.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Just going back to governance and oversight, how much analysis was undertaken on the additional costs that private nurseries incurred? You said that this impacts on the difference in calculations. What analysis has gone on that?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

One of the difficulties there is the fact that the accounts are not necessarily published, so it would be difficult for us to analyse in that way. Those discussions are had and it depends on the nursery itself. Some nurseries may be paying more rent, less rent, may not be paying any rent, they own the facility itself. There are huge variables. Nicola, you have had more direct control of this I think.

Head of Childcare and Early Years:

I think one of the ... and we have never done it before was the Early Years Survey that was conducted at the end of 2023. The private nurseries have an organisation called J.E.Y.A. (Jersey Early Years Association) and they were part of the make-up of that survey. Questions like that were asked in an independent forum, so that providers could share that information. We would gain an understanding in terms of the percentage increase of, say, insurance. We know anecdotally but this provided some hard data for us, some evidence of where those increased costs would be, whether it was food, whether it was cleaning, whether it was insurance. That was the first attempt at gathering that data, which J.E.Y.A. were part of and included in the questions to ask, so we have got that information.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I think a recognition of those costs was made in the increase to the N.E.F. rate and I think it was a response to in part and to value the sector and to value the provision and to give stability perhaps longer term to what is being provided in the increase in the N.E.F. and the link in to R.P.I. because I think that is what they are facing and that, hopefully, the R.P.I. might not be as high for all of us, which would be good.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Thank you. That is the questions about that and it has given us quite a lot to think about. I think now it is over to you.

The Connétable of Grouville:

It is over to me. You have got me for the next half an hour; you are lucky. Education and skills, Minister, can you advise the panel on your top 3 ambitions with developing an on-Island qualification and on-Island skills?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

A specific on-Island qualification, that is a difficult one because they do exist. We have the Progression Qualification at the Highlands, for example. But all of our other qualifications, the G.C.S.E. (General Certificate of Secondary Education), I.G.C.S.E.s (International General Certificate of Secondary Education), A-levels, B.T.E.C.s (Business and Technology Education Council) are verified. What is the word I am looking for? It is verified, is it not, or ...

Group Director, Education:

Validated.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Validated by off-Island and so the universities in the U.K. (United Kingdom), the examples, O.C.R. (Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations), A.M.. (Assessment and Qualifications Alliance), I cannot remember the other one ... and Excel is the other one. That gives the validity to the qualification itself. I think for us to have our own validation to that form of qualification I do not think is valuable for us to do; they already exist, so we can deliver them. In terms of the skills provision, that is something we are working on very specifically. One of the things we want to do - well, I think we are really moving forward in that - we had an extremely positive meeting the other day and I am very positive about this. We put it into the C.S.P. about lifelong learning and that remit. One of the things that we have to do is identify where those skills needs are and there are a number of different segments to that I think. I will take you to one example of that: the critical skills list currently exists in the law of social security law. What I would like to do is to remove the list from the law, just have it named in that law and that list becomes my responsibility so that we can be very flexible with what are the skills needed on this Island. Currently - and I was quite surprised when I found this - we have to go to the Assembly just to change the content and that means a proposition, 6 weeks, it might be voted and it might not, who knows? That is not a flexible way to deal with our workforce. I will say that if we look at Jersey as an economy, we have really relatively few major sectors; so we should be able to address the need in those sectors quite effectively and efficiently. I am very keen, and both areas of Highlands College and Skills Jersey are very keen, to be working more closely together and that is certainly something that is going to be happening and to put that structure in place, to identify the skills needs and then identify what we have now, what can we provide now. Construction, a whole list of courses here, lots and lots and lots of courses; I will not read them all out to you. Then to try to identify where are the needs in our economy in the coming years. Working with the Economy Department and giving the advice from their work on that, so that we can then start to direct those courses to where that need is and train our young people and our middle-aged people and our older people and people like me who are somewhere in the middle there or like about that, so somewhere towards the end perhaps but there you go. For example, to give a really general example, in construction hopefully we will build a hospital at some point. To do that we are

going to need skilled people. We know what is coming down the line. We know what skills we need. How many of those can we train on Island and how can we direct the skills training college, Highlands College, to provide that training? That is an effective and targeted use of money to areas of need for the Island and I think that is what we want to develop in terms of skills training on the Island. That is the model we are looking at to target the money where it is needed and it has the most effective outcome, also by controlling that critical skills list. To be honest, we will be successful when we do not have a critical skills list, when we have covered all of the needs but we need to be flexible with it. For example, if we train all of our ... whatever I say now is going to cause a problem, one area of that list, let us just say one area of that list, we say we have got enough of those people now, we are absolutely sorted for the next 30 years but we are short of another area. Then we can change that list and we can start to target our training towards that area. One of the areas is going to be nursery nurses and nursery care. As I think I have said to you before, there will be young people coming through Highlands but there may be people who want to return to work, they have brought up families, they have skills in that area and with the right training they can be targeted to work the hours that are flexible for them and we can increase that workforce.

The Connétable of Grouville:

How confident are you, Minister, about getting the tutors that you expect for these courses? Because obviously we have a manpower shortage in many respects.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Highlands College have a number of tutors who can train in that area. I think they are really quite strong. We also have organisations that would help with that. Third-sector organisations do a lot of training and a lot of support. I do not think it is the training that I am particularly worried about, those trainers. It is just finding the people and getting them to train and then keeping them in the workforce, which is the real key. I will go back to I think that will be helped by things like a living wage, by us addressing the importance of the area to the Island. There is something really simple about saying to people “what you are doing is really important for us as an Island” and I do not think we do that enough. That is not just vague niceties, that is a really important part to: “There is a value to what you are doing, we will train you, we will pay you and you will have a role in for the future development of our children.”

Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Education:

Sorry, just adding to that, my work as Assistant Chief Minister is looking at the Control of Housing and Work Law and we have a political oversight group that we call H.A.W.A.G. (Housing and Work Advisory Group) Plus, which the Minister sits on, as does the Minister for Social Security, as does the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development, the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs, I have probably missed somebody out.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I think that is it.

Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Education:

But it is quite important that the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning has a seat in that group in order to be able to have this connection and bring forward these issues and maybe provide some support in order to address ... provide some evidence, I suppose, to support any changes that we may need in the Control of Housing and Work Law in order to ensure that we have the skills that we need on Island.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

That might be, for example, if you do need more trainers, the more highly skilled people, making it easier to get people in to train, which is more effective, I think, than simply bringing in people to provide the actual roles themselves who may not stay here for a long time because of the nature of that type of transience in the workforce.

[14:45]

The Connétable of Grouville:

Are you also confident enough, Minister, to say that you will have the right provision within the Highlands campus and other places to achieve this training?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I would say, yes, I think there is the provision there. I think if you spoke to Islanders they would say they always need more provision, but this is one of the other areas of targeting. If we want to train in different areas and we need to provide those facilities, then there is an absolute reason to do that. I think that investment in that - and it is an investment - can be made. We are much more likely to get that than, for example, a whole new campus, which is going to be a real challenge financially but we can apply what we have already. Yes, I am confident we can deliver the things that we need to and that is because we will target where the need is and have the biggest impact and I think that is the most important thing.

The Connétable of Grouville:

You previously told the panel about what was described at the time as green skills courses.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Please could you tell us more about what those involve?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, I think they came from the Skills Fund. For example, it is heat pumps, they are training to install heat pumps. Perhaps training on servicing electric vehicles because there are some specifics on that I think. I do not know much about them. I think areas around insulation of homes ...

Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Education:

Renewable energy.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Renewable energy sources, mainly heat, I think it is heat exchanges most of the time. It could be solar as well.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Can I ask is any of this happening now and training for these?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, I believe it is. The heat pumps is happening and I believe the stuff in E.V. (electric vehicles) cars is happening in the part of the mechanics course.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay, thank you.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Thank you very much. What types of apprenticeships are on offer in Jersey and could this be expanded?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes. In terms of apprenticeships, do you want a list or do you want ...

The Connétable of Grouville:

I think you could provide the panel with a list of all ...

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, have you got that with you now or can we provide that later because there is quite a few of them?

Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills Department:

There is a lot, yes.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Yes, but we are happy with the list.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes. I have been to Highlands a number of times and I am going to meet very soon the person who runs the apprenticeships up there. There is an enormous amount going on for carpentry. Classic ... well not classic, traditional perhaps viewed apprenticeships like carpentry, plumbing, heating, engineering, those types of things, which is all provided for the Island, electricians, et cetera, but also apprenticeships around the areas of early years. I keep saying childcare but I mean early years and other areas such as around sports coaching. Is that the degree? That is the degree, I think, but there are a number of different apprenticeships. What we want to do is to ensure that those apprenticeships are understood. We understand ourselves what we mean by apprenticeships because most of them are part-time paid apprenticeships. They are working full time, coming in perhaps one day a week, which is why the comparison with other areas of education is quite difficult because it is not the same model, but what I think we need to do is to ensure that the apprenticeships that we are running are effective. I believe they are working very well. They are very successful. We have to adapt to changes that are coming through. For example, I am aware in the coming years of degree apprenticeships that are happening in the U.K. These are apprenticeships that go all the way through to degree level and they will impact on what we do and we have to be prepared for them. It is a question of understanding what we have now, the need that I talked about just now and look at what is coming into the future.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Can I just ask, is there any difficulty in finding employers to take part in apprenticeship schemes?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Not that I know of. I think employers more approach Highlands to say we have an apprenticeship. Where somebody wants to take on an apprenticeship, employers want to provide training. I think Highlands provide a really good service there because not only do they provide the teaching but they also provide the provision for the examinations and the assessments. For an employer I think that is the most difficult part because an employer knows what they want from their worker in their workplace but assessment and examination are a very specific thing in education and have to be

run in a particular way, so that is where the service really works. But in terms of, is there a problem for employers? Not that I am aware of.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

There is not a shortage of ...

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I do not believe so. I think it is more of a question of: are we targeting the right areas and are there things that are hidden out there that we have not seen yet? That is what we hope to uncover in the coming months and years with the projects that we are taking on. That is about getting Skills Jersey really there, closely, closely linked to Highlands so they know exactly what the provision is as we develop that.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Right, big question now. Please could you confirm whether an increase to the age of compulsory education from 16 to 18 years will be proposed under this new Government?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I hope that by the end of this term I can propose that. However, like with the Nursery Fund, I want to ensure that we have the right provision in place so that it is an effective thing to do. For example, as we go through the next 2 years, if there is evidence to say by doing that it makes absolutely no difference whatsoever and you are completely wasting your time, I will listen to that evidence. I am minded at the minute to say I think it is important that we have that in place but we have to be careful. For example between 16 and 18, are we doing the right thing for those children? If a child is in an apprenticeship, does that count as full-time education if it is one day a week? Then it would, so we have to be careful in which way we do that, we produce that law. This is not cynical, even though it might sound that way. Sometimes I think if we pass a law what happens is we end up saying, okay, we are going to have to abide by the law and it can hide ... and I am not saying that we would do that but I think it has happened in jurisdictions to say nobody can be not in education or training, employment or training, so, therefore, we will not have anybody and they are hidden somewhere. I want this to be much more open about that. We have a number of young people who are not in education and training and we are producing a number of different courses in order to address that issue. However, I think we need to improve that and I would like to see that in place before we pass the law because then that becomes a very powerful law. Everything is in place, we are now going to say that is going to happen. My aim is, yes, but it has to be for the right reasons.

The Connétable of Grouville:

You have already answered 2 of the questions relating to the law. If I may, you have already mentioned Skills Jersey there and I would like to pursue that a little bit more.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes.

The Connétable of Grouville:

At our last quarterly public hearing you confirmed that Skills Jersey was in the process of reorganisation but that it was not complete and that the future structure was not clear at the time.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Can you give us an update on where you think that project currently sits?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, I have some notes on this because I wanted to be very specific about it.

Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills, Department:

Page 14.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Page 14, I am way off. See that is why we put numbers in, he says. Okay. They did go through an organisation process in 2016 which brought all of the areas together. It was using something called Gatsby Benchmarks. That would not be my specialist subject in Mastermind, if I am honest, as to what those benchmarks are. If you want them I shall have to pass that on to someone else, but I know there was a framework. That was a recognised framework for which reorganisation was put within. I think what is provided by the service of careers guidance, skills development, skills mentoring, et cetera, is now very clear as to what is provided. What I want to do now is to take that provision, which has become much clearer, and make it much closer to Highlands College itself, the main provider on the Island. I think - and this is not a criticism, it is an observation - there is a growing gap between the 2. I think everybody involved would say the same thing. If you like, they were buying such commissioning services. I do not like that model. I think they should be working very closely together. In other words, Skills Jersey can carry on with its careers guidance, skills development and skills mentoring, provide contact points for those who have left education, help with C.V.s (curricula vitae). All of the things that they do they do in absolutely close oversight of

Highlands College so they know precisely what is available. I think it is a very effective way to do it. I think the teams there are very keen to work together in that way.

The Connétable of Grouville:

As the result of the reorganisation, Minister, have any of their services been changed, the services to the public?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

From previously I would suggest it is fine-tuning more than anything else. Are there any radical changes?

Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills Department:

The only main change is that the student finance transaction element has moved over to Customer and Local Services. All of the core offer of Skills Jersey, as it was established, remains in situ and the reorganisation of staffing is now completed and that is concluded, so the core offer is still there.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Excellent.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

It is difficult for me to evaluate something that happened some time ago as to its effectiveness and before that. What I would say is what we want to do is just make what we have now as effective as possible. I think there has been enough change. We now need to just get on with delivering some things and they do deliver. That is what we want.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Do you believe there is at this stage any further redevelopment of the Skills Jersey offering and what timeline are we looking at to complete that?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, I will say this. One of the things about a good organisation, and we used to have this in education, about a good department is one that is self-improving and looks at what it is doing and how it will do it. I think that any change that we will see is because Skills Jersey will say: "This is not the way we want to do this. We want to do this better because we know the provision that we have got that we can now use. We know the link with Highlands College. We know the link with everything that is going on. If we did it in this way it would be better." I think the changes if they were going to happen would come in that way but I do not want to establish another overall change. I do not want another review. We do not want another overall plan. We have had enough of that.

They have got people working really hard, really committed to what they are doing. Let us let them get on with their job and let us trust them to do their job.

The Connétable of Grouville:

The Chief Minister mentioned in the Assembly on 21st May the Skills Development Scheme. Is that allied to this or is that something completely different?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes. The Skills Development Scheme was the Skills Development Fund. It was not set up as a fund because the quantity of money was too small but some of the money was put aside as part of the scheme. That Skills Development Scheme, I believe, is what is funding the green initiatives, for example, that we just talked about.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Okay, yes.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

There is other monies that were suggested in that scheme that have not quite been obtained yet. I think there was donations from 1(1)(k)s but I am not sure we have seen that yet.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Okay.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

That scheme does exist. My view on that, I think what we do need is a sustainable approach to the way that we fund what we are doing, targeted money and, effectively, use it. Whether it comes from the Skills Development Scheme or just a proper method of funding, it does not matter, as long as it is working.

The Connétable of Grouville:

A little bit of a departure here, Minister, if I may.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Can you provide the panel with some details about what Jersey's schoolchildren are learning about the more recent Jersey and Channel Island histories?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

The more recent ones?

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

This sort of comes about as well because I attended a meeting held by researchers into the occupation and Alderney and so on. There were a lot of groups there and experts, but there was complete agreement in that room that they would be all keen to see more done for Jersey children in schools around this, trips up to the slave workers' memorial and things like that.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, absolutely. Yes, I attend that service every year and a very poignant thing and a really significant part of our history. The Jersey curriculum does address the programme of study that deals with local history. The Jersey curriculum really is key stage 3. History after that would be a G.C.S.E. Whether there is any local history in one of the bought-in G.C.S.E.s is always going to be a problem. However, I think that in G.C.S.E. history World War II is still part of that, so I imagine the occupation would be part of that. World War I is certainly part of that curriculum. They are addressed, the German occupation is addressed in the Jersey curriculum, I believe, in the history syllabus at key stage 3. There are other areas, such as the Battle of Jersey, I believe, is talked about. I would support any organisations that want to be involved in providing and being involved in that enriching of what happens in the Jersey curriculum. As much as anything, it is really interesting to have your local history; you know where you are. I would absolutely encourage that. At key stage 4 I think we have to do something more specific out of the G.C.S.E. modules because I would guess - and history is not my strongest point in terms of the G.C.S.E. content - that there is very little Jersey history in a G.C.S.E. because they tend to be ... but then G.C.S.E.s - I did O-levels, if I am honest - would be probably the history of medicine, World War II, the Holocaust, those really significant parts in their history like that that will be studied, yes.

[15:00]

The Connétable of Grouville:

Thank you very much, Minister. I would like to move on now to higher education funding, if I may.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Could you share your thoughts about financial support that is currently available for Jersey's residents pursuing higher education?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

There is a couple of things I will point out. We still have a grants system, which is really significant. The money that is allocated to students going to university is not a loan. It is a grant, so it does not have to be paid back. I think that is a really important part and we need to keep that. I think they made a huge error in other jurisdictions where they have got their young people in vast amounts of debt before they start their life. It is quite interesting, I think it was the Netherlands who started the loan system and then cancelled it after, I think, at least 2 years, might have been 4 years. The first thing is that I want to put it in context that that is a system that does help enormously. In terms of the levels of it, we have made some changes recently to certain areas of it. I think the system of application is being administered better all the time. There are still points that have to be improved, but that is true in any system but I think we are getting there. There are some things that we are doing because of P.20, was it?

Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills Department:

P.12.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

P.12, it was out my head. That we are addressing in terms of income thresholds and distance learning and we were talking about just this morning. I will be coming forward with some changes as soon as I can, before September. That is the general view as to where we are. In terms of whether it is adequate to deal with absolutely everything, probably not because higher education is expensive. However, the paying of tuition fees, if people qualify for that ... and it is quite a high level to get tuition fees. Full tuition fees - I cannot remember the name off the top of my head, I should do, I have done so much stuff on it recently - the lower income threshold for tuition fees is £110,000 and for the maintenance grant £50,000 with the upper threshold. You still receive some help with tuition fees up to an income of £200,000, which I think is quite significant.

The Connétable of Grouville:

That is generous.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Up to £90,000 for the maintenance grant. That is the system that we have in place.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Just one extra, what is your opinion on providing Jersey students who are not eligible for a grant with the opportunity for a student loan?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I do not believe that student loans work and I think they do not work for 2 reasons. I think in a small jurisdiction such as ours it would probably be more expensive to administer and give those loans than it would be to extend the grant system, but that is an argument for the States Assembly. Do you want to put more money towards that? That is something you would have to vote on yourself. I think the U.K. system is fundamentally flawed. You have got students who are paying absolutely nothing of their loan back because of the amount of interest they are paying on it, even when they are paying back. I do not want to see our young people having to do that. I also think that financially there is not a lot of support for a loan system because of the reasons I have said. Regardless of what side of the political spectrum you come from, I think if you look at the economics of a student loan there is also real issues in recouping that money. One of the reasons you cannot take out a student loan in Jersey from a U.K. student loan is because they have no jurisdiction to take that money back from Jersey. We would have the same problem for anybody who moved away from Jersey in recouping that money. We have to look at the practicalities of a loan system. It sounds simple; it is not and I do not think it is effective.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Can you tell us about the financial support that is currently available to support postgraduate students?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, postgraduate schemes have to qualify to be the right postgraduate scheme, I believe. That is a real issue that we have encountered. I do not think it is clear. It is something about it leading to a professional qualification. We are doing some work on that right now. I was talking about it earlier today. It is one of these things that as soon as you start to look at the law you realise how many laws it affects and how difficult it will be. Do we produce a list of postgraduate courses that will qualify? That could be restrictive. Do we reclassify what we mean by a postgraduate course? Do we direct them towards the needs of the Island? Perhaps. But postgraduate courses are funded. There is also a bursary system. It is this information about the Jersey bursary, you can apply for Jersey bursary up to £10,000, is it not? Postgraduates can apply to that. I have a list here and just to give some idea of the range it is nearly 2 sides of A4 in a list ranging from molecular cell biology, to translation, to fine art painting, to journalism, to public history and cultural heritage and we can give you that list from the bursary.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Thank you.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Is the system perfect? No, it is not.

The Connétable of Grouville:

It is good to know, Minister, that you are reviewing it and that was the thrust of that question.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, absolutely, yes.

The Connétable of Grouville:

What changes, if any, will be made to the Higher Education Law under your tenure as Minister?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Okay. We have a number of things that came from P.12 that I want to prioritise. The 2 first things are about distance learning and about income thresholds. We are working on that, so I do not want to ... anything I say today I want to be clear that that is not necessarily the final outcome. We are looking at a way of addressing distance learning that is more targeted, particularly in terms of the validity of the qualification itself. One of the reasons I opposed part of P.12 was I do not believe it is right to say all distance learning will be funded. There is an absolute range of quality out there, an absolute range of what you can do with it out there. We need to have some sort of controls in place in order that we are directing people to the right place. I will give you an example and you might want to look it up yourself. If you look at the Open University, I think they are a gold standard for online learning and they have won awards, whatever they mean. If you look at what they are doing, the support that is given for distance learning and their history of delivering, it is a really good organisation. Other organisations may not have that and I think we have to be careful post-COVID that a lot was developed with COVID and is kept because it has been so useful, but is that the right thing and what to do? That is one of the things we are going to do. Then we need to look at the funding: do we fund it as a set fund, a proportional fund in terms of the number of hours? Do we fund the number of units of work that are undertaken, the number of points if it is a point access? There are things that we are looking at and I will come to the Assembly with some proposals. I will let the panel know beforehand as well because I think it would be interesting to see what you think of those proposals and their work. It is always good to get another set of eyes on things.

The Connétable of Grouville:

We get a lot of feedback from the subject.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes. We have got a really superb officer working on this. The policy officer has really got herself engrained in this. I had a fantastic meeting this morning. I had a massive headache at the end of it trying to keep up with what was going on, but we will come forward with something.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Okay.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I think we have got the model of something that could be extremely effective for distance learning. In terms of the income thresholds, we have got to think about what we are going to do with those. Are we going to link to inflation, average incomes, average earnings? Is there going to be a one-off increase in those? Are we going to keep them the same? But, again, I will be back with something. I committed to doing something before September 2025 and that is still on track.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Okay, thank you, Minister.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Those are the 2 priorities at the moment with other things being worked on in the background.

Deputy B.B. de S.DV.M. Porée:

Minister, I think it is my turn and I am going to be asking you a few questions about disability, as the panel is really interested to see what support the Education Department has put towards students with disabilities. Please could you describe how the Education Department supports schools with any identified needs for their students?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

When you say disabilities, can I ask because it is a very broad range, are you talking about physical disabilities or are we talking about ... when we talk about neurodiversity, are we classifying that as a particular disability or just a range of needs?

Deputy B.B. de S.DV.M. Porée:

For physical disabilities, so will focus on practical things.

Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Education:

Physical.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, physical disability?

Deputy B.B. de S.DV.M. Porée:

Yes.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, okay. There are a few things that I can say here. In the newer schools it is certainly easier because, to put it simply, the corridors are wider, they have more access. We were at Les Quennevais School recently, were we not?

Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Education:

Yes.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

It was wonderful visiting the lab again. There was a really magnificent solution which was so ridiculously simple. If somebody was in a wheelchair there is a desk at the back, it is just a desk that has a section where it just moves up and down to the right height.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

We have seen that, have we not?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Incredibly simple solution and, therefore, may I say that that disability is removed from the classroom and that is accessible and that is magnificent, exactly the way we want to do it. I have seen that in other schools. When I was teaching we had to buy a new desk for somebody but it just meant buying a new desk; those are simple things. In terms of hearing disabilities, for example, I was involved with Soundfields when it first began, which was the sound loop in the rooms, a brilliant device. By the end I was using it all the time because you could simply talk at this level and every child could hear you in the room.

Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Education:

I need to show it was beneficial to everybody.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

You saved your voice as well. There are other benefits that come from these things. I will say this also highlights the need for a new primary school in the centre of St. Helier because we have old buildings that are not as accessible as they should be for children with disabilities. One of the other

benefits to new builds is that they can be designed appropriately and that building will be designed appropriately so that, regardless of what disability you have, you will have access to your education and it is another reason why we need to invest in those buildings.

Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Education:

Sorry, just another point that all 4 of the secondary schools now have a generic A.R.C. (Admissions and Release Committee), so it is no longer a case that only one caters to physical disability. It is catered for across the board.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, good, very good point, yes.

Deputy B.B. de S.DV.M. Porée:

I was just going to ask you more in terms of family and the budget, how are these changes funded?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Can you, yes, because you know more?

Associate Director, Innovation, Transformation and Business Support:

I can come in there, yes. You are talking about physical adaptations in schools. We have funding that we hold centrally. There are disability audits which are done and identify some of the things the Minister was just speaking about. For example, access, hearing loops. Lighting is another very big thing as well. We hold a budget of £700,000 centrally, which the team that I work with manage and work with the schools and prioritise different aspects. We are able to increase the spend if we need to. The Deputy just mentioned about the A.R.C. centred in secondary schools. They are increasing at primary schools, again which is creating the right type of learning environment for children with particular needs and disabilities. Again, we provide central funding for those as well.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Can I ask, is that part of the inclusion budget or is that separate from inclusion?

Associate Director, Innovation, Transformation and Business Support:

That will be separate. Yes, that is separate. It is a kind of a minor capital budget that we hold, which then goes to support the schools for different elements. Obviously, the area that you are asking about, Deputy, is an area that we obviously focus on to provide funding.

Deputy B.B. de S.DV.M. Porée:

Yes, and thank you for that. The Minister has answered some of the questions I wanted to ask. What about in terms of networks of support in terms of good practice within the different education sectors? Is there a way where you are now sharing those practices?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

That is a very, very good question because that certainly should be something that has happened. I believe ...

Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Education:

We have got the inclusion team now, have we not? What is that framework that we recently had?

Group Director, Education:

Inclusion charter.

Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Education:

Yes, that was it, the inclusion charter as well. That kind of coming together and sharing of good practice going forward should be happening a lot more regularly than it was before because now we have that charter in place.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I think as well there is something to be said for if a school faces a challenge in terms of how are we going to meet the needs of this person with a specific disability? They tend to solve that challenge. There is something in the nature of education that challenge gets solved, where other schools see that as anything that is not as insurmountable as we thought it was. Then it builds a sort of culture of saying we can deal with anything and they will. I think that is a really positive part of what has been going on. The simple example of that desk, for example, it is so simple, the solution. The Soundfields example, I think, is a really good one. That has changed an enormous amount of children's lives, I think.

Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Education:

I think also ensuring that members of staff are adequately qualified in that is it universal across all of the secondary schools, because that was not an area that was highlighted by the review as an area for improvement. I believe as well that there are meetings that are held centrally now with the S.E.N.D.Co.s (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Co-ordinators) from the various secondary schools. I do not know if Seán wants to ...

[15:15]

Group Director, Education:

If I may, you asked about sharing good practice and expertise. Every school has always had a S.E.N.D.Co. but through the inclusion work we have made sure that every single one across all schools, the non-provider schools and those government schools, are trained to master's level. They meet regularly, they all have protected time and we have now insisted that there is a seat at the top table, so the senior leadership team of every school will have that lead person. The provision for children and young people with disabilities or special educational needs is much more central to the agenda and they are well supported by the central teams. We have got experts, the A.S.C.I.T. (Autism and Social Communication Inclusion Team) team on autism and so have communication issues, the social mental health teams. They are the conduits through the S.E.N.D.Co.s in every school, so we have got very strong networks.

Deputy B.B. de S.DV.M. Porée:

That is good to hear and equal to that, I suppose, in sharing facilities around their mental health as well. Thank you. Just carrying on in terms of modernising the schools, the Minister has already kind of alluded to the town schools. My first question to you along those lines would be, following the States Assembly approval of the Common Strategic Policy, please can you describe the next steps that the Government are taking to modernise the whole of the States schools in town?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes. This is more the capital projects that may be slightly separate from the C.S.P. We are looking at priorities and we are looking at ways in which we can get things done. I think there were a couple of things that happened in the past with capital projects in that we have planned to do huge numbers at the same time and, effectively, none of them have got done. I want to change that and I want to have some outcomes. One of the ones I do want to focus on - and I am pushing very hard for - is the secondary La Passerelle site. There are too many children ...

Deputy B.B. de S.DV.M. Porée:

Your main priority?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

At this moment I would say that ... well, let me explain why that is a main ... I would not say it is my main priority because if we could do it tomorrow I would build Gas Place tomorrow, but in terms of the practicality of what can be done and where we are, that project is, effectively, doable very quickly.

Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills Department:

It is an immediate priority.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

It is an immediate possibility more than anything else. If we can get that done that will have an impact. La Passerelle secondary, which is the old Dolce House site ... we also have the other building that is there as well, can be completely refurbished. We have the cost of it. It could be ready by October next year. That will provide a really good environment for up to 60 young people, who I think there are too many that are currently having provision that is not in schoolwork because they do not cope in school or it is not their environment. I think the provision for them ... and I know everyone is trying incredibly hard to make that provision but they need support so that can happen. I think that would be a project that can happen very, very quickly.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Can I just check, is that going to be the same place as La Passerelle primary is in?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, it is next door to it.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

It is, yes.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Absolutely, it is next door to it. La Passerelle primary, the reason why Gas Place is so important and we still want ... this is not a criticism, this is an observation, okay. I will say this is a genuine observation of that what has happened in the last few years. We have not got the planning permission because you have not got the site and that seems to have stopped. One of the things that we need to do is we need to get that in tune. The phrase I have used is we need some certainty around that project. We need to have that certainty in place but certainly before the next election so we know it is going to happen. If we can build it and start building it then let us get on with it.

Deputy B.B. de S.DV.M. Porée:

That leads me to my next question. Can you please describe how Government staff and resources will be utilised to further this aspect of the policy, please?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes. The line I would take is if we have a number of projects that are up and ready to go. I will try and prioritise those in the order in which we can get them done; let us get some done. For example, if we can have La Passerelle ready, Gas Place ready but you are going to have to wait. We are going to get the planning permission. We have got to do this first. It is going to take at least a year or so before we can even start that but we could get another project built. Let us get on with the

ones that we can get built. It is not about your priorities change, it is about the practicalities change and that can have an impact on our education estate. We can make some improvements in our other schools, for example, very quickly because they are ready to go and building another classroom on. I think that is the smart way forward. I think we ...

Deputy B.B. de S.DV.M. Porée:

You mean that across different departments and ...

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, absolutely. For example, if other departments have projects that they cannot get on with then let us not just sit the money somewhere, let us get on with the ones we can get on with. One thing I will say about the Education Department is we do have a number of projects we can be getting on with. I would come back to the panel, I would really hope that I can come back to the panel and say: "Okay, this is one of the projects that is starting and so that is the one we are going to do." I think before we have been very stuck in our approach to projects. I do not know, I may be wrong here. We want to do this project. It is not ready yet, yes, but that is the one we made a priority, so let us just stick to that. We need some flexibility in what we are going to deliver.

Deputy B.B. de S.DV.M. Porée:

Would you be prepared, Minister, to come back to us with the detailed updates in terms of timescale and modernisation of those works?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, absolutely, yes.

Deputy B.B. de S.DV.M. Porée:

Yes, thank you. Okay, now my other question, Minister, is: can you provide your assessment on the working relationship between C.Y.P.E.S. and Jersey Property Holdings in terms of ...

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, we have a relationship with Jersey Property Holdings, which is positive. Our expectation of Jersey Property Holdings as a landlord is high. I think there have been some issues, let us be honest about it, in terms of what is being delivered. I know there is discussions and I have been involved in discussions over service level agreements and trying to improve those and get them updated and know clarity as to what we are meant to be doing and what Jersey Property Holdings is meant to be doing. I think perhaps those lines have become a little bit blurred in the past. I think if we can redefine those it will be a lot easier for us to say our expectation is you will get this done and then it will get done.

Deputy B.B. de S.DV.M. Porée:

On that note, Minister, are you aware of any property maintenance or property management issues that have been unresolved for longer than one year and if you are aware, would you let us know? Would you share those with us?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I could not list them here, but I think we could look for whatever ones there are. Unfortunately ... well not unfortunately but what tends to happen, I think, if they are unresolved we just do something about them. We have a very specific role in schools and what comes first and foremost is safety of children. For example - I am making this one up - if a fence falls down, yes, we are not going to say ... if Jersey Property Holdings say, and we have been here: "We are not going to be able to get that done for a while", we say: "We have to replace the fence" and we will get the work done. That may be us having to use a budget that we did not want to have to do but we have to keep our children safe. Subsequently, there are pressures on us, as an Education Department, and perhaps there are not elsewhere, and it is very nice to be able to sit here and say that. I hope everybody around the Council of Ministers is listening, that there are pressures on us to do that and we will deliver those because we have to keep children safe.

Deputy B.B. de S.DV.M. Porée:

Thank you for that. In respect of obviously those buildings' issues that come across time and again, in terms of fire escapes or ensuring that the building comply with fire regulations, can you please describe to us the process that C.Y.P.E.S. goes through to resolve those issues, so we can better understand?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes. That is an extremely good question for a number of reasons. There was a review of the C.Y.P.E.S. estate, which I think was very, very thorough, if I can put it like that - that is the most diplomatic thing I have said for years - thorough in terms of the problems that it found in terms of fire risks within the schools. None of us are going to put children at risk. However, I have to say I think some of the things that we have had to do are over-zealous in terms of the need for those changes and one might look at them and say: "Is that really a necessary review?" I would like to look at that again. I would like for us to review that to have a specific Jersey-based approach to that rather than bringing in an external person to look at it. New standards that perhaps are slightly different, that does not mean they are going to put children at risk. The first thing that will happen is if we need to spend money on keeping the schools safe we will spend that money, of course we will. Again, I will mention again, the simplest way to do that is to build the new premises, which will be absolutely at

the highest possible standard in terms of fire, et cetera, et cetera. That is why you need to replace the estate sometimes.

Deputy B.B. de S.DV.M. Porée:

Thank you, Minister. Just going back about C.Y.P.E.S process, would it be fair to say, would you be able to say at this point that the process is suitable?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

It is, it is and it is very thorough. Would you like to say something on this for ...

Associate Director, Innovation, Transformation and Business Support:

We work really, really closely with Jersey Property Holdings here. There is kind of a dual aspect to this because, as the Minister said, they are the landlord of the buildings. A lot of the responsibility for the physical changes in the building rests with the landlord. They have the expertise to do that, though we do have expertise as well in our department, so we are able to support that. But there are also a number of changes which have to happen from a management side, which are the responsibility of the tenant, our schools. There are changes we have to make or adaptations that we have to make, which I think the Minister is kind of alluding to, that can have a real impact on the school day. We want to minimise that as much as possible. We go through a process of these audits. We make the changes; we do checks; we have a compliance system set up; we are making sure that any changes are continued. We are also working, as I say, very closely with Jersey Property Holdings to make sure that the sequence of changes to be made across the schools where they have to be made, whether they are physical changes, are programmed in and they are carried out. It is a significant amount of work that is in this place because, as the Minister says, we need to obviously keep our children safe.

Deputy B.B. de S.DV.M. Porée:

You have referred to changes, you are talking about improvements that you need to take ...

Associate Director, Innovation, Transformation and Business Support:

Yes, absolutely, things before that have been identified as risk through the audits. Some of them can be quite simple changes, for example, removing ... it is called fire load. It could be the storage of either equipment or paper or whatever in a corridor that is a fire exit and things like that just have to be changed and schools adapt. Some of them it is a bit more challenging where we have to change the construction of the school by creating new fire escapes, either from top floors or from ground floors. They are the bits that require planning and further work.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Some of those have been a real challenge and I think we do need to look again at some of the specifics there because a significant amount of money has been put aside to do this.

Deputy B.B. de S.DV.M. Porée:

It would be good to come back to you once the further changes take place with the extra finances to see what you hope to achieve.

Associate Director, Innovation, Transformation and Business Support:

We can detail out all of the changes that have been put in place and the ones that are going to be happening throughout the second half of this year and into next year as well and the mitigations that we are putting in place to keep schools safe at the moment as well.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

A lot of work is going on during the summer holiday because that is the time when it can be done, but thank you for the question because it is certainly something that I know I have raised and it is for the level of that mitigation and what we could do about that.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

I think you asked that one.

Deputy B.B. de S.DV.M. Porée:

Yes.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

I think you also asked if we could have a list of any property maintenance and management disputes that have been unresolved for longer than one year.

Associate Director, Innovation, Transformation and Business Support:

We can come back to you with that.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, we can do that. We can do that certainly, yes.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes. I have just got a question about online safety, just one question. Does the Minister think that Jersey children should be afforded the same protection as U.K. children, as offered by the Online Safety Act?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

There are 2 things here. There is a problem of adopting laws from the U.K. and that we lose control over any change or adaptation of that law. The nature of our Parliament is we want to be in charge of our own laws. I think that is one of the reasons why that law was not adopted. I have got to say it is not my ministerial role to adopt or not that law, but I can give comment on it. In terms of the protection from it, I would hazard one word of caution on that as to what protection that is going to offer. Looking at that Online Safety Law from the U.K., it talks about the main providers, internet providers and what they were doing or if they get things wrong. Let us see them do that before we start to say that it really offered young people protection. I do not think it is fair to say I am cynical but I would just like to see some evidence if that is the case. In terms of what we do in Jersey, yes, I think we do need to have online safety laws. However, it would be very difficult for us to pass a law and it controls certain providers because they are not providers that come from this Island. The nature of the internet provision is that it is based, a server, somewhere in the middle the unknown, the American desert or somewhere else. I do not know what we can do about providing the safety that is linked to that. We have to think very carefully about what type of Online Safety Law we pass. I would like to see something, yes. I believe it is for the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development but I would be happy to give my views to him about the type of things that we need to do. I think the issue of online safety now is wider than just a law. I think it is about the approaches that we take. I will say that schools do a lot to try and educate in online safety, both children and parents, and that is an issue that is going forward.

[15:30]

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Just bearing in mind that you are cynical about how this would work in the U.K. ...

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I said that I was not cynical. I said one might be called cynical but I do not think I am. I am just looking for some evidence that it will work, yes.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

If you find evidence that it works at some point, just to come back to the question, do you think Jersey children should be afforded the same protection as U.K. children as offered by the online safety net?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, I would say that because we need something to work and we know what we are doing with it. There is always going to be this issue of whether we adopt U.K. law on our Island because of the

nature of our Parliament. We often reflect U.K. law when we do but we also have quite significant differences to the U.K. law but, yes, I think this is an area we need to work on. It may well be that I simply do not know enough about how we would control online safety by a law because I am not a lawyer and I am not a specialist in that area. We could pass a law to say we will prosecute one of the main internet providers if so and so happens. Will we be able to do that? I do not know. We have got to be careful that we do not think because we have passed a law we are safe. It is about the application of how our children are being protected online in all its forms and the way that we educate our children to be online safely.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay, thank you. The panel will continue to work on this subject.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

We have reached the time for us to finish. It has been such a good time.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Time has flown by.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes. We did have just a few more questions, so if we could send that to you in writing, if that would be okay.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, please do, yes.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Otherwise we are all done then.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Okay, thank you very much.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Thank you very much, everyone.

[15:32]