

2.4 Deputy G.P. Southern to the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding progress in negotiations with teachers' representatives over pension arrangements and terms and conditions of employment:

Would the Minister inform Members what progress, if any, he has made in negotiations with the Island's teachers' representatives over pension arrangements for current teachers - and for new entrants to teaching - in Jersey concerning terms and conditions, for example, protected time, lunch duties, et cetera - and on pay - and would he state what measures he envisages in relation to these issues to ensure recruitment and retention rates into the future?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

First, I must inform Members my wife is a teacher. I think it is important that you realise that when I am answering questions of this nature. I believe Deputy Southern is in the same position with his wife as a teacher, but I do not believe there is a conflict of interest in answering these general questions. Members will recall that in July of this year, the States approved amendments to the Teachers' Superannuation Law, which - subject to Privy Council approval - will enable the Chief Minister, not myself, to make Orders regarding the administration of contributions to and benefits provided by the fund. Detailed Orders are being prepared for the Chief Minister, and as part of the ongoing consultation with the teachers' associations, copies of the draft Orders have been provided for their comments. In respect of terms and conditions, a standing group comprising teachers' representatives, head teachers, and officers of my department has been established to review terms and conditions, taking account of what is known as a workforce reform in the U.K. A formal agreement was signed in March 2006, but work is continuing to ensure arrangements which support effective practice. On pay, a formal offer consistent with the States pay strategy has been put to the teachers' associations and we are awaiting a response. Such issues do, of course, constitute only part of this, which makes the Jersey Education Service an attractive environment for teachers. These include higher salaries than the U.K., excellent opportunities for advancement, high standards of achievements, appropriately-sized classes, trust in the profession, and excellent physical infrastructure. It is my intention that these characteristics are maintained to ensure that Jersey continues to be an attractive place to teach.

2.4.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

What consideration has the Minister given to the serious concerns expressed by 6 teaching unions - united - that the changes to pensions in particular will result in Jersey teachers having far worse conditions than those in the U.K., where we largely recruit from, and the effect of this on retention and recruitment rates?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

I have given serious consideration to that. I regret that the 6 teachers' unions have come together at this stage when the Law was passed in July, when we had been consulting with the teachers' unions for over 4 years on this issue, and they had not responded in this way before. When the States Members, of course, discussed that Law they were fully informed of the issue. Teachers, new entrants to the profession, will be exactly the same in Jersey as any other member of the public service. Their

pension arrangements will shadow the P.E.C.R.S. (Public Employees Contributory Retirement Scheme) pension arrangements and I contend that this idea that they will have the worst pension arrangement in Europe is highly improbable, if not impossible, because they have considerably higher salaries to start with and their pensions will reflect the considerably higher salaries that they have to start. So I am taking the issue seriously. My department will be meeting with the unions to get to the bottom of their concerns, but really these concerns should have been expressed before the Law was passed, after 4 years of consultation, rather than in the few months since the Law has passed and the draft Orders have been circulated.

2.4.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is the Minister prepared to consider delaying changes to pension conditions from January 2007 to September 2007, which will affect relatively few people, but to give time for proper negotiation over this issue, and not just consultation when one side of them is prepared to listen?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

I am afraid the problem was the teachers' unions did not respond in the whole of the time - the years - that we were discussing this. We have listened. I am prepared to consider delaying, but in fact, that question should be better addressed now to the Chief Minister, who will be the Minister making the Orders, as was decided in the legislation passed by the States. But I think the Chief Minister and myself - for me to advise him - would need very good reasons, because the States have decided that this should be the pension provision in the future. The unions had considerable time to consider it; they delayed and delayed; and now they want further delay. They will have to produce very good evidence and be able to persuade us that this delay is necessary.