

2.8 Deputy J.A. Martin of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding the teaching of cookery skills to young people.

Would the Minister advise whether he will be following the example of the United Kingdom Education Minister who will be issuing all schoolchildren between the ages of 11 and 14 with a cookery book containing recipes for basic, healthy meals and has also given an undertaking to increase cookery lessons to 4 hours a week by 2011 under a programme aimed at tackling obesity, and if not, why not? Thank you.

Senator M.E. Vibert (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):

As always, we will keep any initiatives introduced by the U.K. or other jurisdictions under review, but I would like to assure Members we are already very active in this area. Jersey schools currently provide lessons in health-related areas in key stage 3; that is pupils aged between 11 and 14. These lessons include food technology, physical education and personal, social and health education. All Jersey secondary schools are committed to work towards the national healthy schools programme. In conjunction with the health promotions unit, schools have recently audited practice and have shown strong evidence in most areas. The pupils will attend food technology lessons in all 3 years of key stage 3. These lessons focus on the planning, preparation and evaluation of healthy meals cooked with fresh ingredients. This is inclusive with ingredients being provided for those pupils unable to bring their own. Over the 3 years, the pupils build a portfolio of healthy recipes. An interesting aside, Sir, as one of our initiatives software is provided in our schools which allows pupils to analyse the content of the food they are preparing. By inputting data regarding type of food and quantity, the software will provide information about calories, fat, salt, sugar, et cetera. This raises awareness of different foods and the impact on health. All pupils have the option to carry on with food technology into key stage 4. These studies culminate in a G.C.S.E. (General Certificate of Secondary Education) qualification. In conclusion, Sir, I would advise that Education, Sport and Culture will continue to closely monitor the provision in the United Kingdom, but on the basis of the work that is already being done in our Island schools I do not believe it is necessary for us at present to adopt exactly the same measures as are proposed for the U.K. Both Jersey and the U.K. share common goals in promoting healthy food and reducing obesity, but I believe it is right that the Island should remain free to determine its own approach in dealing with these issues as indeed it does in other areas of the curriculum.

2.8.1 Deputy S.C. Ferguson:

The proposal by Deputy Martin appears to take up some 12 per cent of school time. Would the Minister not consider it better to increase the sport element of school which is currently a minimum of 5 per cent or something in the order of 1 and a half hours a week suitable to discourage obesity?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

We, in our schools, try to offer a balanced curriculum which includes sport and also includes personal social and health education with information about food and obesity and our schools, as well as having the sport within the curriculum time all offer sports outside curriculum time as well and of course healthy activities are encouraged during the playtimes and the lunchtimes.

2.8.2 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Supplementary, Sir, maybe it is not worded correctly. In the U.K. the 4 hours a week are mainly outside of the school curriculum. Like we do with sports over here, we do not offer cookery outside school lessons. The other point the Minister stood up and made a very great play that we already do X amount of sports per week. Again, this was interesting, Sir. In the U.K. when asked how much time was taken up out of that hour in doing sports, mainly it was about between 25 and 30 minutes because of walking to changing rooms, getting changed and then having to shower and be ready for the next lesson. So, it is not 2 hours; it is around an hour if they are allocated 2 hours. So, I think the cookery could be added like say sports after school or before and I think we need to be a lot more "out of the box" thinking, Sir, and I am quite disappointed in our Minister for

Education, Sport and Culture just reeling off things that we do not do and his straightforward answer could have been “no” to my question which apparently it was. Thank you, Sir.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Your question now, Deputy, is?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Sorry, Sir, could he confirm that his assumption that we already carry out sports in the curriculum is not as much as we could be doing because of what I have pointed out about the changing and getting ready and then getting ready for the next lesson and it is quite disappointing really.

Senator M.E. Vibert:

Sorry, I will try and think “out of the box” but I did not understand what the Deputy was asking, first of all. Regarding sport, yes, children have to get changed for sport and so on. The U.K.’s figures might be quite low of course in the time spent - much lower than ours - partly because they have sold off most of their school playing fields which we have not done and we have got a much better record, I am pleased to say, than the U.K. in encouraging sport in schools, and that is shown by the high quality of our school sports and how we achieve in that area. I can assure you that if cookery lessons are required after school we will look at it. The question did not say that; the question said “increasing lessons” so perhaps if the questions were framed better we would be able to answer them better, Sir.

2.8.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Two-part, if I may. Can the Minister assure the House that his reluctance to issue this healthy food booklet has nothing to do with the fact that he would have to pay 3 per cent G.S.T. (Goods and Services Tax) on it and, secondly, what priority does his department have over the quality and quantity of healthy food options in the tendering process for the supply of food to schools and what powers does he have to adjust that without the tendering process?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

Within the tendering process we insist and all the providers must provide a certain quality and quantity of healthy food, and we have ongoing ability to discuss anything in the service of agreements. We have them regarding this and I am pleased to say that the take-up of healthy food within our schools is increasing all the time and that is done because our children through our curriculum are learning that that is the right thing to do, Sir.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Deputy Ferguson, do you wish to ask another question?

2.8.4 Deputy S.C. Ferguson:

Yes, Sir. We have heard of children leaving school without basic skills. Can the Minister, in the context of more activity as a good weapon against obesity, give us the assurance that the sports curriculum supports the - I think you call them “rabbits”, Sir - the “rabbits”; the people who are less able at sport, but who are enthusiastic? We talk about the people who do well, but what about the provision for the lower down because the sport is far more important than cookery lessons to stave off obesity?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

I think keeping healthy involves what you eat and your exercise, so I think both are important. I certainly would not refer to people who are less able at sport in the same way that the Deputy has. Our whole sports curriculum is designed so that everyone can learn basic skills and I urge the Deputy to come in and see in primary school and secondary school the type of lessons we do which

is aimed to ensure that everyone is involved and everyone gets an opportunity to learn the skills and to keep healthy.

2.8.5 Deputy S.C. Ferguson:

I am sorry if I have offended anybody about the use of the word “rabbit” but speaking as a “rabbit” at sport myself, I was in the fourth hockey team and I played goalie because I could not run very fast, but I still think that it is a much more important component of a fight against obesity; would the Minister not agree?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

I thought I made clear - and our Medical Officer for Health is in support of this - that it is a combination of exercise, healthy living and healthy eating and it is important that the 2 go together. It is wrong to single one out in my view as more important than the other. It is a combination of both and that is what we try to and we do successfully get over to young people in our schools that you need to eat healthily and to exercise if you want to have the best chance to have a healthy life.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Final question, Deputy Martin.

2.8.6 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Yes, Sir. Given the glib answer about U.K. compared to Jersey and how long it takes to prepare and then unprepare for a sports lesson, would the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture take on a review over the next 6 months on all our primary and secondary schools to see how much our pupils do physical exercise? It is not good enough to say they have 2 hours a week allocated. I would like to know, and so would all parents, how much they do physical sports? Thank you, Sir.

Senator M.E. Vibert:

It was not a glib answer; it was an accurate answer and I am sorry the Deputy did not appreciate it as such. The review of primary schools, we have got our Business Plan and we have got a lot to do, but I am quite happy to try to ascertain and to ask - it should not take too long - what the timings are. It is not just the lessons; there are games afternoons and there is much organised outside of school. I am very proud of what we achieve in our sports and P.E. (Physical Education) and I believe that the whole of the Island should be, and is borne out by the fact that we have very high take-up of young people involved in sport and who are achieving really well in sport, but not just the higher achievers, but the take-up over all round. I would urge the Deputy and others to look at things like the mini rugby at the rugby club which attracts hundreds of young people. The football clubs who have now got all contacts with schools so that people can do it so we, not only in school, but throughout the community were trying to encourage our young people to get involved in a healthy lifestyle, Sir.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

The Minister did not answer. Apart from what every Tom, Dick and Harry is doing, will the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture tell us how many hours a week actual exercise all our pupils get? It was a simple “yes” or “no”.

Senator M.E. Vibert:

It is not a simple “yes” or “no” as the Deputy should well know, having been a member of the Education, Sport and Culture Committee. It will vary because it depends for example if you are talking about minutes, how close the changing rooms are to the sports areas, et cetera, but I will try to ascertain and get some information on this so the Deputy can be satisfied that we are providing a good quality and adequate, within the curriculum, sports provision.