

3. Questions to Ministers without notice - The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture

The Bailiff:

Now we come to questions without notice and the first period is indeed to the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture.

3.1 Deputy S. Pitman:

Can the Minister advise the Assembly whether he is confident that E.S.C. (Education, Sport and Culture) will be able to support the aspirations of all young people wishing to go to university next year?

The Deputy of St. Ouen (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):

Yes, I am confident that I can support the aspirations of those wishing to go to university with the one proviso; that I am restricted within the current financial conditions attached to providing support for those individuals.

3.1.1 Deputy S. Pitman:

Could the Minister advise as to what the figures are on the amount of students going to university? Is there a reduction now that the university fees have been reduced?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

We do not currently have the completed figures or the accurate figures regarding the students going to university. However, indications show that there will be an increase this year.

3.1.2 Deputy S. Pitman:

When would these figures be available?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

The actual figures will not be completed until we have the positions confirmed for all students entering university, which is likely to be October-November this year.

3.2 Senator B.E. Shenton:

Will the Minister give an undertaking to publish the G.C.S.E. (General Certificate of Secondary Education) and 'A' Level results for the non-fee-paying schools and can we assume from his failure to answer my written questions that the results were not very good, as I believe they were not very good?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

First of all, I refute that the results of our non fee paying schools are poor. The one thing that I will say is that I did elect to not answer the question posed by the Senator for the simple reason that I do not believe - and it is current department policy - that producing league tables to identify particular schools is particularly helpful either to students, parents, schools, teachers or indeed this Island as a whole. As such I am not prepared to publish league tables in the fashion that has been proposed.

3.2.1 Senator B.E. Shenton:

I am not asking for league tables. I am asking for the specifics. We spend a lot of money on education. We spend a lot of money on the education for people that cannot afford to go to fee paying schools. If we are failing the children that go to non fee paying schools the politicians of this House should know about it and it should not be covered up by using the good results of the fee paying schools to cover up our failings at non fee paying level.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Please, it is absolutely not a cover-up. Indeed I think that the Senator is naïve in the extreme that he puts all his emphasis and effort, and he suggests that education should do the same, on academic achievement only. We have a full range of individuals that we are responsible for and provide an education for. That education is to meet and enable those individuals to achieve their maximum potential, whatever that may be. Yes, we do have some very bright individuals both in the fee paying and non fee paying schools. Equally, we have others that are better able to focus on the practical vocational skills. The suggestion that we should simply ignore those individuals and treat them as second-class citizens just because they do not achieve an academic result is ridiculous. I want and I am aiming to identify the proper performance measurements that can show, year-on-year, how schools are performing, whatever their mix and their make-up will. That is important; to show how we can add value, that we are meeting the needs of our individuals. As such I am going to, with my department, place every effort to do that. I would just add, finally, that league tables and the statistics that are being suggested by the Senator have been tried and failed in many other countries. Indeed there are clear indications that Wales, Scotland, Ireland and many other places who have followed the route as proposed by Senator Shenton in the past have decided and realised that it is detrimental to the education system. As such I will not support or produce those figures. I have offered the Senator and others access to those figures within the department because clearly we do monitor them internally.

3.3 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

On the back of the Senator's question, would the Minister tell us, therefore, how as a parent, or how indeed does he himself, assess the performance of these schools; whether they are doing well or not doing well, as the case may be? How is a parent meant to assess the performance of these schools?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Parents can have access to the school's performance. They can seek comfort in the fact that in most schools we have boards of governors who act as the oversight committee, if you like, to the school and ensure that the school is performing well. We have independent inspections on an annual basis that require the schools to properly identify and demonstrate how well they are performing and providing the education that this Island expects. We also introduced a system of professional partnering which encourages schools and individuals to challenge and support each other in this process. That is how we will develop our education system. That is how we will meet the needs of our children, which surely must ultimately be the aim.

3.3.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Minister commit himself to publishing, for example, the inspection reports on schools?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I would need to check departmental policy and current policy on this but all I will say is that I will look into it on behalf of the Deputy and come back to him with an answer as soon as I have one.

3.4 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Can the Minister inform the Assembly whether he is still in negotiation with the U.K. authorities, in consultation with the other Channel Islands, with regard to identifying Channel Islands students as home students and not overseas students when it comes to university fees?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

This is very much an ongoing topic and concern that the department has raised over many years and now I have inherited. I will seek, together with Guernsey and the Isle of Man, for this issue to be addressed. Unfortunately the position that the U.K. authorities take is that they believe that

the present agreement is “fair” and so that is where, if you like, the problem lies. Until we get a clearer acknowledgement from the U.K. that indeed we form part of the British Isles and, as such, that we should be considered like that, then it is going to be difficult to move forward on this matter.

3.5 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

When the Minister was a candidate for his position he made much of how much effort he was going to put into sport within the department. Can the Minister inform the House what developments he has made within this specific area?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Personally, not a lot. I find myself with very little time being able to actively engage in any sport at present. However, there is an ongoing commitment that the departments makes to sport. We are working with the various associations and organisations to encourage the further development of sport, both in schools and to the wider community. Development officers have become a great success in developing the sport. We have seen cricket flourish, rugby flourish and many other organisations. We have finally found a solution for the special gymnastics, although it is not perfect. They have a base that they can rely on for the short-term, although we are still looking and need to identify a proper base to meet the long-term future of all gymnasts on this Island. This is being actively pursued. All I can say is that within the resources available I believe that we are aiming to meet the needs of those that seek to enjoy sports on this Island.

3.6 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

I would comment, with regard to Deputy Le Hérissier’s question - and ask the Minister to think about it very carefully - that all inspection reports for schools in the U.K. are published for anyone to read. However, I would also like to ask when he produces the figures for university entrants will he also include the subjects being read and the universities being attended?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I will take the comments made by the Senator into account when I produce the figures.

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

The second half of my question, please?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I meant all comments that the Senator had made during her question.

3.7 The Deputy of Grouville:

As Education, Sport and Culture cannot adequately fund cultural and heritage organisations now, could the Minister inform the Assembly if he intends approving the *pro rata* cut as proposed in the Business Plan?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

The Deputy questions the ability to support our heritage and cultural organisation on the Island. This has been one of the main issues that I have been required to consider since my time as Minister for Education, Sport and Culture. Since that time I have spoken and been in discussion with the Council of Ministers and the Minister for Treasury and Resources and indeed the Jersey Heritage Trust in order to find a solution which is appropriate and ensures that the provision of services are maintained where possible. In recent times, very recently I would hasten to add, I have received a commitment from the Council of Ministers, including the Minister for Treasury and Resources, that they will work with me in order to find a solution within the very near future to meet some of the issues that Jersey Heritage Trust have identified and face. With regard to the *pro rata* cut, because of the Council of Ministers’ commitments that they have personally made

to both me and my Assistant Ministers regarding the ability to deal with pressures that we have previously identified, I, like all other Ministers, will be agreeing to the *pro rata* cut as proposed in the Business Plan.

3.8 Deputy T.M. Pitman of St. Helier:

As the message of anti-discrimination and equality that we send out to young people as a Government is so very important, will the Deputy, as Minister for Education, Sport and Culture, be actively supporting the civil partnership proposals?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I would hope that the Deputy has already read the comments that come from the Council of Ministers, who I am part of, that it accepts that there is a need to introduce civil partnerships.

3.9 Deputy A.E. Jeune:

Given the Minister's somewhat defensive answer to the first question today, is he suggesting that youngsters who aspire to examination success but frankly will not achieve such aspirations are being encouraged to undertake such exams rather than being encouraged to undertake that which is achievable?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

This is particularly an issue that relates to not publishing league tables. As soon as you introduce competition- which league tables do - between schools then you encourage greater selectivity with regards to whether a pupil is able to not achieve a result at academic level. As such, I absolutely would not follow that route. We need to be encouraging all individuals, no matter what their ability, to achieve the potential they can and indeed to give our young people a chance.

3.10 Deputy D.J. De Sousa:

Sorry to take the House back a step but on the subject of our culture and heritage, several times I know the Deputy of Grouville has raised the issue that culture is being swallowed up and not getting the input that it should be getting because it is in such a big department and there are spending pressures on that department. Does the Minister not feel that it should be taken out of his department and put elsewhere, where it can get the backing that it needs? It is vital we keep our heritage and our culture. It is important to the future of the Island and to all the children that are growing up now. They are the future of the Island.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I absolutely agree with the Deputy's views on the importance of our culture and heritage. Do I believe that it should be transferred to another department? No. Do I believe that the spending pressures that are faced by our cultural and heritage organisations need to be dealt with? Absolutely. Am I prepared to do that? Yes. I gave that commitment when I became Minister for Education, Sport and Culture and that has remained consistent and constant up until now. There is, I believe, a renewed enthusiasm - I hope - from both the Council of Ministers and the States generally to ensure that we provide the sufficient resources to maintain this particularly excellent resource that we all rely on. This is ultimately who we are. It identifies who we are and, as such, it needs to have that sort of importance placed on it.

The Bailiff:

Very well. That concludes question time to the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture.