

#### **4. Questions to Ministers Without Notice - The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture**

##### **The Deputy Bailiff:**

That brings question time, 2 hours, to an end and we now come to the questions without notice to the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture.

##### **4.1 Deputy K.C. Lewis of St. Saviour:**

Does the Minister agree that the closure of Fort Regent Swimming Pool was a mistake and will the Minister work towards ending the contract with the Waterfront and refurbishing the Fort Regent Swimming Pool in time for the 2015 Island Games that will be hosted by Jersey? If not, why not?

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

I think much discussion has taken place regarding the decision to close the Fort Regent Pool and the subsequent decision to provide an additional facility on the Waterfront. Those decisions were made by this Assembly at the time and as such we are required to live, I would say, with those decisions. That does not mean to say that we should not make sure that the arrangements now in place with regard to funding of the new pool are adequate and, where possible, reduces the liability of the States to provide the facility. I can assure Deputy Lewis that the facilities that we have on the Island, the swimming pool facilities we have on the Island, are more than adequate to support the swimming community. We have 2 25-metre pools, 6-lane pools, one at the Aquasplash, the other one at Les Quennevais Sports Centre and I believe as such ... and that is without considering other private facilities on this Island.

##### **4.1.1 Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

I thank the Minister for his reply, but I think the pools, although good pools, are woefully inadequate. Does the Minister believe that the £2,500 subsidy per day given to the Waterfront pool is value for money?

##### **The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

The subsidy is made up of a number of elements. In fact, my department since being given responsibility for the pool, which was back in 2005, has since entered into and renewed the agreement with the current operator to ensure that the subsidies are maintained at a more acceptable level. I cannot change the 21-year agreement that was entered into by W.E.B. (Waterfront Enterprise Board). The only thing I am able to do as a person who is responsible for the Education, Sport and Culture Department, is to make sure that the agreement for now is fit for purpose.

##### **4.2 Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

When the Minister was elected he talked of the unfairness of the current student loan scheme, particularly when you get parents who both work and earn a relatively high joint income. What progress is being made to review and amend this?

##### **The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

One of the areas that I chose to review was the area of financial support for higher education. This is coming to a conclusion, I might add, and as such we are currently preparing a White Paper that will be circulated widely to the members of the public which will identify options and issues which I believe need to be addressed to ensure a fair more equitable system.

##### **4.3 The Deputy of St. Martin:**

This is a follow-up of a question I asked the Minister 3 months ago. A member of his department has been suspended since August last year and it appears that from the inquiries I have made that the reason no decision has been reached is through the tardiness of the Crown

Officers and the States Police. Has the Minister himself taken any steps to see why this person is still suspended and if not, why not?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

As a Minister for Education, Sport and Culture I am responsible for the general welfare of my staff. However, overall responsibility for all States employees rests with the States Employment Board. I have made inquiries on behalf of the Deputy of St. Martin regarding this particular case and it does grieve me to see that the time required to deal with this matter has been particularly long. I would hope, and I have encouraged all those involved, to conclude this matter to everyone's satisfaction and I hope that that would still be the case.

**4.4 Deputy S. Power of St. Brelade:**

I wonder if the Minister is aware that it is over 25 years since remedial works were carried out to the granite work of Elizabeth Castle? Is he happy, or does he know, if the Ancient Monuments Fund has sufficient funds in it to carry out remedial works to the granite work of Elizabeth Castle and when was the last time he received a report, if ever?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I am well aware that our heritage sites need to be properly maintained and managed. Elizabeth Castle is one of our main heritage sites on the Island. It absolutely fits into that category. With regard to the funds that are presently available, to my knowledge, they were never designed to deal with major capital projects and that was highlighted by the arrangements that were provided for the refurbishment, if you like, redevelopment or improvements at Mont Orgueil a number of years ago. As such, Elizabeth Castle and projects of that nature would be required to fulfil and meet the States capital programme and be required to be prioritised in a similar manner to that of a school, prison or even a housing estate.

**4.5 Deputy M. Tadier:**

The Minister may be aware that in the past there was an initiative called Sports for All, which took place, I believe, up at Les Quennevais, which enabled members of the public of all ages to participate in various different sports, many of which they may have never tried in the past. Is the Minister minded to reinstate this initiative?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

To my knowledge, our department actively encourages sports for all in many different shapes and sizes and we know of many organisations that provide and support all ages across the Island. As such, I believe that, together with our Active Card membership, we do a lot to provide for and help the healthy lifestyle that we all aspire to.

**4.5.1 Deputy M. Tadier:**

A supplementary, if I may. I share the Minister's zeal for sports and I acknowledge the Active Card is doing very well. Would he give an undertaking to look into when and why this initiative was stopped, as I think it was very successful, and would he come back to me with those answers and whether or not he thinks it would be a good thing to pursue in future?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I am more than happy to look into that and discuss it further with the Deputy.

**4.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

In answer to a question in the previous session the Minister said that the modern foreign language assistants process of appointment was suspended shortly after advertising but prior to short-listing and then went on to say that should the States decide in September 2010 not to accept the proposed spending reduction the department would investigate alternative

arrangements for the academic year 2010-2011. Does the Minister not think that he has created a fait accompli that these modern language assistants will not be appointed this year, which is the normal routine, for a start in October - September will be too late to get people of reasonable quality to fill those posts - and that he has pre-empted the decision of the States on this particular issue, modern foreign language assistants?

[12:00]

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

No, I do not believe that that is the case.

**4.6.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Will he then explain what alternative arrangements he has in mind for filling these places which require careful vetting and assurances that the right people are in place to provide this essential service?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

Discussions are ongoing with a number of different organisations and I am sure, dependent on the decision that the States make regarding the Annual Business Plan, we will be able to, if required, provide the assistants necessary.

**4.7 The Deputy of St. John:**

The question will not be about Victoria College. Will the Minister give details of grants where students go off to university and some of these courses run into many tens of thousands of pounds, is there a ceiling within these grants where the parents would not be expected to pick up the maximum of the fees?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

Could the Deputy repeat that question?

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

Is there a ceiling on the grants, Deputy?

**The Deputy St. Ouen:**

Yes, Sir. [Laughter]

**4.7.2 The Deputy of St. John:**

That being the case, could we be given details, please?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I cannot remember off the top of my head what that ceiling is but I am quite happy to provide it to the Deputy.

**4.7.3 The Deputy of St. John:**

As the Minister is killing time, could he give us details, please, of how it works? We do not have to have specifics, just where there is a cut-off.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

Minister, can you add to your previous answer?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

Yes, Sir. It is based on the income of the individual and the ability to pay.

**4.8 Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

Although I would never say it myself, it is often said that the world over royalty thinks the world smells of paint. Does the Minister think it is appropriate or indeed the right way forward that with the royal visit areas around Grands Vaux youth project were painted, walls were made good, sign writing was done? Does the Minister really think that that is the way to do things?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

We will take every advantage we can to improve our facilities and I thank their Royal Highnesses for visiting this Island. [Laughter]

**4.8.1 Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

Supplementary, Sir, as we are all in jovial mood. Some years ago when the same royal couple visited, and I obviously support that, at the time the former principal youth officer had died recently. I was allowed £65 to erect a plaque in honour of a man who was really the father of professional youth work in the Island. At the same time I believe the department spent £900 on a lovely marble plaque at St. Aubin's Fort. Does the Minister think we have got our priorities right?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I am not aware of this particular issue so it is very difficult for me to comment. I do think the department does have its priorities right because ultimately, with regard to the youth of the Island, we are here to serve them and provide them with the support necessary so that they can enjoy a full range of activities. I am sorry to hear about the Deputy's acquaintance and I am happy to speak to him later.

**4.9 Deputy D.J. De Sousa:**

With the U.K. increasing university fees is the Minister, in the many reviews that have been undertaken by the Education, Sport and Culture Department, looking at offering university level provision on the Island?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

Yes, we are very keen to and continue to explore alternatives to provide higher education and further education courses on this Island where appropriate. Indeed, we have a number of foundation degrees being offered presently at Highlands. Also I am quite keen to discuss with the new private provider to see how best we can improve on the overall education for all ages and all abilities.

**4.10 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:**

In the Minister's submission for the Comprehensive Spending Review there is approximately £1,300,000 which is not itemised because it is awaiting detailed reviews. Can he tell us how he reached that sum of £1,300,000 and in his view what are the items that are likely to be hit? This is an enormous unspecified sum

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

Either the Deputy is deaf or he does not pay attention [Members: Oh!] and I do not say that lightly but I have attended a number of public hearings in front of his panel and discussed this matter in great detail. The remaining sum identified in the Business Plan is calculated on the basis of 2 per cent minus the level of savings that I have already identified in detail. With regards to how that sum and the additional sum might be made up, I have explained at length that while I am completing and conducting some major reviews I am not prepared to second guess the outcomes of those reviews and as such the decisions based around the savings will be led by the results from those reviews.