

2.4 Deputy J.M. Maçon of St. Saviour of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding the education of first-time voters:

With the possibility of a by-election, what is the Deputy doing to educate first-time voters on the voting process and what provisions, if any, have been put in place in order to support this?

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

Whether or not a by-election is called much is being done within our schools to educate first-time voters. In advance of the first elections in 2008 where 16 year-olds were eligible to vote, the schools and colleges team met with all of the heads of personal, social and health education to ensure that the citizenship programme was preparing our young students for their first voting experience. This, I am pleased to say, has continued ever since that time and specifically the key stage 4 curriculum covers areas such as the reasons for voting, the ability to have a say, current law, how to vote and active citizenship. In advance of the 2008 elections a leaflet was also produced and distributed to all schools entitled *Are you 16 or over: do you know how to vote?* It is the department's intention if and when an election is called to make the leaflet available to all students eligible to vote.

2.4.1 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Can the Minister outline what is done to educate new voters, especially on the electoral register, how to get on it and before an election is called will the Minister make available at school receptions an electoral register for students to access and sign it so that they can get on the electoral register?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

It is acknowledged that new electors have the right to be informed about the nature of the electoral process. We also believe that all information should be presented impartially without supporting particular candidate groups or a party. As such, we deal with the general nature of the electoral process and therefore encouraging our young people to sign up and submit their names to an electoral register is very much part and parcel of that process.

2.4.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Whenever the next election is called, be it this year or in 2011, will candidates be able to put their manifestos in schools so that they can make sure that 16 year-olds understand why they are voting? Will candidates be allowed to visit schools and show their wares, as it were?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Head teachers are in possession of guidelines issued by the director of my department on how schools should manage access to schools by candidates in a run-up to an election. It is accepted that pupils who are eligible to vote have the same opportunities as all other members of the electorate to attend public hustings in their own time. Individual election candidates are not allowed to campaign in schools during school time. This is specifically to ensure fairness to all candidates, avoid disruption to the curriculum and avert any potential concern about pupils being placed under undue pressure.

The Deputy Bailiff:

There are numbers of lights flashing. I know this is a subject which Members will be interested in and the Minister is subject to questions without notice later on. The Deputy of Grouville.

2.4.3 Deputy C.F. Labey of Grouville:

The Minister has stated that the citizenship programme was devised but does he know which schools actively participate in the programme and could he highlight if there is an issue with training the trainers?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I do not believe there is an issue with training the trainers. I think that the guidelines are clear. Much time has been spent on developing our citizenship curriculum and I believe that it meets all requirements. Equally it is relayed to all schools and I know from experience that all schools fully utilise the opportunity that citizenship curriculum provides.

2.4.4 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisser:

While not totally pre-empting the findings of a Scrutiny Panel which is about to start work on the subject, would the Minister not acknowledge that the directives of his department at the previous election showed a real fear of controversy and entering into any controversy and, as a result, any enjoyment, any useful controversy was totally removed from the process in favour of rather boring descriptions of the make up of the States of Jersey and such like?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I am not necessarily of that view and, indeed, I welcome the Deputy's desire to review political education within our schools, and I am sure, as he is, we look forward to having a constructive review that produces some evidence that we can rely upon.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisser:

Supplementary. Could the Minister answer the question?

2.4.5 Senator J.L. Perchard:

Does the Minister agree that he faces a huge task to educate 16 and 17 year-olds about the importance of voting as all but just a handful of 16 and 17 year-olds are simply not interested? Does he agree that the States made a huge mistake when agreeing to give 16 and 17 year-olds the vote?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I cannot comment and I would not comment on the decisions made by this Assembly. The fact of the matter is that 16 year-olds are able to vote and my department will do all we can to encourage them. With regards to whether or not our young people are engaged; much effort - and I underline that fact - is being placed into encouraging our young people to participate and, indeed, the evidence was quite clear in the Youth Assembly last week where we had over 50 of our 6th formers demonstrating quite clearly that they had a better grasp of this States process than many Members in this Assembly. [Approbation]

2.4.6 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Does the Minister acknowledge that the electoral register is neutral and therefore cannot influence a way that a person will vote for an individual candidate and,

therefore, having an electoral register or the form to apply to be on the electoral register should be available at receptions in secondary schools so that 16 year-olds can participate whenever an election is called?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I believe that 16 year-olds are young adults and as such they should be treated in the same manner as we do with all other adults who are required to engage in the process, to use their own views and opinions and seek to engage in any electoral process that comes about. Indeed, one of those areas will be seeking out and ensuring that their names are on any electoral register which I am sure the Privileges and Procedures Committee will, when an election happens, be promoting.