

2.11 Senator J.L. Perchard of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding the number of students transferring from the fee-paying to the non fee-paying schools should there be an increase in fees:

Would the Minister advise what estimates, if any, have been made by his department as to how many students will transfer away from fee-paying to non fee-paying schools should his proposal that will result in an increase in children's school fees be implemented?

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

It is noted in my response to part 2 of the written question 5715. I am not proposing any fee increase, although I accept that following the work being undertaken between my department and the fee-paying schools the cost of educating a child at a fee-paying school could rise. For the avoidance of doubt again, it is the governing bodies of the fee-paying schools who set the fees on an annual basis. As Minister for Education, Sport and Culture I have no direct involvement in determining the fees set by the schools apart from Victoria College and Jersey Girls' College, where I am required to approve the fees proposed by the governors. Work has been done to model the costs and savings associated with any potential transfer from fee-paying to non fee-paying schools. It is however difficult to model the precise impact without making assumptions about a school's capacity to reduce costs and the level at which fees will be set by the governing bodies of each individual school. This is one of a number of questions that is still unanswered at present.

2.11.1 Senator J.L. Perchard:

The Minister keeps repeating the same argument that it is dependent on the schools as to what fees they charge. Can the Minister explain to me and the House how he can expect to halve the subsidy paid to fee-paying schools without them having to put up charges to parents?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Let me make one thing absolutely clear if it is not already so. We are dealing with private schools that I have no control over. They have governing bodies who are absolutely and totally responsible to the parents and the children in their charge. As such, I am unable to recommend what those schools may or may not choose to do or how they might manage any proposed reduction in subsidy. This is something that my department is working constructively with those schools to determine. We have offered and will continue to offer our full support to those schools as they seek to minimise the impact of the reductions.

2.11.2 Senator F. Du H. Le Gresley:

Given the controversy caused by this proposal to reduce the subsidy over the period 2011 to 2013, will the Minister bring forward for debate a separate proposition on this matter so that all States Members can be involved in the final debate?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Let us just make it quite clear and just think back, because it seems that some Members have short memories. In the Draft Business Plan proposal 2011 it was stated by my department that additional savings of £1.2 million would be delivered once reviews were complete. Also at that time we had individual Members including the Chairman of P.A.C., and indeed the Chairman of the Scrutiny Panel that oversees

my department bringing forward amendments to reduce support to fee-paying schools. At that time I also made public statements to the effect that I was not prepared to take and accept *ad hoc* amendments to a Business Plan without following due process. This is what I am doing and that is what I will continue to do. As to this House debating whether or not the proposals should be extended in 2012 and 2013, we will be debating and quite properly debating the 2012 Business Plan in July next year and if it is the States Members' wish that the phased reduction in subsidies is not maintained then they are quite at liberty to amend that particular plan.

2.11.3 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

The Minister has already stated that Les Quennevais and Le Rocquier are full. Should children have to relocate, which schools would have availability, and should parents require a faith education, there is literally nowhere else to go that is free in the U.K.; does the Minister not agree?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

No. I am sorry. We have 3 excellent faith schools who are determined to continue to provide education for the youngsters on our Island and parents; and as for choice, I would like to remind the States Member that there are on many occasions parents who cannot achieve a place in their preferred fee-paying school as the places are full and there are waiting lists attached to those schools. With regard to the other schools, it is quite clear we have 4 secondary schools and Hautlieu; so it stands to reason that all those other schools have spaces available.

2.11.4 Deputy T.A. Vallois of St. Saviour:

As the Minister has mentioned that fees could rise as a result of the examination by his department and this would be seen as more of a user pays option, will the Minister therefore be considering the possible impact of user pays against tax rises in the forthcoming budget within his examination?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Fee-paying schools by their very nature require parents to pay for the education of their child. As such I do not believe that this is a user pays charge. This is simply a matter of considering whether the appropriate funding is being provided to those schools and whether that amount should be reduced. The impact of that, as I say, will be the ultimate responsibility of the school.

2.11.5 Deputy A.E. Jeune of St. Brelade:

Would the Minister please confirm that his department has made all the possible efficiencies and savings that they can within his budget and therefore removing or reducing subsidies from the private schools is a last resort?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Everybody believes that efficiency savings somehow start from one point. It has been the case that over a number of years all departments have been required to seek efficiencies and perhaps some departments have been more successful than others. The particular challenge that I am faced with is that I am required to deliver £11.1 million as a reduction to my budget. I am absolutely determined that frontline services will not be affected. Yes; difficult decisions will have to be made. Yes; there will be reductions in a number of areas. However, I am not and will not see any negative impact on the services we provide.

2.11.6 Senator J.L. Perchard:

Last week a Member described this whole process as a shambles. I think it is going from bad to worse. The Minister this morning was not prepared to confirm that private fee-paying schools provide good value to the taxpayer; he is not prepared to bring this proposal to the States for approval. I am worried by this. My question to the Minister is a simple one: will the Minister consider resigning?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

No.