

#### **4. Questions to Ministers without notice - The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture Development**

##### **4.1 Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

Could the Minister clarify why, especially in an election year, the political websites of elected States Members cannot be accessed by young people in schools or youth provision? Why is it that organisations such as the *Jersey Evening Post*, who are quite happy to smear people, are accessible? Will he do something to create a level playing field?

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

I am currently reviewing the policy with regard to how we manage the election process and I am more than happy to enter into discussion with Deputy Pitman or indeed his panel about how we might provide that level playing field that he is seeking.

##### **4.2 Deputy J.M. Maçon:**

Touching on what I was going to ask the Minister, with the publication of the Scrutiny Report into Political Education, can the Minister explain what has been put in place to facilitate the Senatorial hustings for students and specifically comment on the promotion within schools of the event, arrangements of buses and the liaison between the Education Department, the Constables and other parties when setting the hustings dates?

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

I am not sure if I have got all of those different areas, but I am sure the Deputy will remind me if I miss any. In general terms we are extremely keen to encourage our young people to get involved in the election process. Much is being done throughout the year and every year to ensure that that is the case. We know that the States Greffe are co-ordinating a campaign to encourage registration to vote and turnout on the day. We are also keen to engage with Privileges and Procedures Committee and the Greffier to provide the greatest opportunity for our young people to be actively engaged. What we are not prepared to do is to see individuals promoting a particular political agenda within our schools.

##### **4.3 Deputy A.E. Jeune:**

I really cannot resist raising again the good news story of the class of 2010, the vocational educational programme which a select few young people in this Island are on and which you and the Minister for Treasury and Resources were able to visit and assess for yourself last week. Can the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture inform us how he plans to expand on this project to take it forward? Will he look at providing a technical college on the Island, which will enable more Island students to benefit from this excellent educational programme? **[Approbation]**

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

I am grateful for the Deputy raising the fact that there are some very good good news stories with regards to the provision of education on this Island, in particular with efforts being made regarding vocational education for the more practically minded individuals that we are required to provide education for. Currently we have 100 youngsters on a pilot scheme and we are and will be assessing the benefits of the vocational training that we are currently providing and looking to further develop it in the future. I would say that any views on technical colleges and the like perhaps are slightly premature. In the first instance, we need to make sure that we utilise all available facilities both within our 11 to 16 secondary schools and at the premises at Highlands.

##### **4.4 Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:**

Is the Minister satisfied with the pupil teacher ratio at St. Martin's primary school? Are there any health and safety concerns about the current classroom sizes? If there are, would he consider constructing a further temporary classroom to assist with the overcrowding?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

The Senator is asking detailed questions that perhaps I have not got sufficient information to respond to. However, I can speak in general terms. There are policies in place that determine the maximum class sizes within both primary and secondary schools. In relation to that there is a link to pupil/teacher ratios. However, solely focusing on pupil/teacher ratios does not necessarily give you the whole story, because it is likely that teaching assistants could also be used.

**4.4.1 Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:**

I appreciate it is quite a long question, but the Minister has not responded to the question I asked about health and safety. If classroom sizes are too large and given the state of the building, is he concerned about health and safety and would he consider the construction of a further temporary classroom?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I would suggest that the Education Department is extremely aware of all issues revolving around health and safety. If the Senator is suggesting that our current policy of maximum numbers in a class is inappropriate in a particular school then I hope that he would come and speak to me about it and I will investigate further. I am sure that the department or the school would choose to lay themselves open, if you like, to issues to do with health and safety, just because of our desire to accommodate young people within a school environment.

**4.5 Deputy S. Power:**

My question to the Minister is related to the secondary provision in the west of the Island. The Minister will be aware that there is a provision for £8 million-plus in the capital estimates. I think it is planned for 2015 for an extension and renovation of Les Quennevais School. Would the Minister not agree with me that it might be better to look towards building a new state-of-the-art secondary school in the west of the Island, as to spend £8 million on a 1960s building in a largely congested residential area may be appropriate?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

A property review is currently being undertaken by my department in conjunction with Property Holdings, to look at all the facilities that my department administers, including all the schools. Currently information that we have suggests that the capital expenditure that it has been identified is required at Les Quennevais School, and indeed should have been undertaken far earlier than the 2015 time limit that there is currently included within the Business Plan.

**4.5.1 Deputy S. Power:**

Can I just ask if there is any study going on within the Education Department at the moment in conjunction with Property Holdings, as to a possible alternate site in the west of the Island for a new state-of-the-art secondary school, given the numbers attending Les Quennevais School and its original design capacity?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I am not aware that any such exercise is being undertaken.

**4.6 Deputy M. Tadier:**

Perhaps it could be built at Noirmont to complement the buildings going on at Portelet. The question is: does the Minister agree that students who are 16 on Election Day but not on Nomination Day should be allowed to be included on the register to vote?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

It is not my decision; it is a matter that the Deputy should bring up with the Privileges and Procedures Committee.

**4.6.1 Deputy M. Tadier:**

But it is a matter which affects students throughout the Islands. Most 16 year-olds will be in full-time education and it was one of the recommendations, I believe, of the Scrutiny Panel, to do with Political Education. But there is an issue with regard to students who are 16 at the time of the election or before, but not on nomination day, whereby Parish Halls would seem to be sending the applications back to them, whereas you can certainly pre-register for a driving licence. Does the Minister really not have any comments on this important issue for many 16 year-olds?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

My comment remains the same. This is a matter absolutely for Privileges and Procedures Committee to consider. If there are any issues or difficulties then I would expect that those are ultimately brought back for this Assembly to decide upon.

**4.7 Deputy J.A. Martin:**

Staying with 16 year-olds and a commitment from the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture and not to get political, I totally understand. P.P.C. are looking at having registration forms in the library and just a box to pop them in. Would the Minister give urgent consideration - given that all 16 year-olds will be leaving at the end of May/mid June, after taking exams - that he could do this in all schools and also at Highlands. P.P.C. would undertake no extra work, but P.P.C. would arrange that these are sorted and delivered to the right Parish Halls.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

The whole point of changing the voting age from 18 to 16 was to recognise that at 16 young people are adults and able to make their own decisions. As such they are and should be treated as adults, as any other individual of the population. Yes, we should support them. Yes, we should encourage them to get involved in the election process. But I do believe that they have and they should be encouraged to make their own decisions about whether they should register or otherwise. We can make the information available and that is what we will do.

**4.7.1 Deputy J.A. Martin:**

Supplementary, Sir? For somebody who is absolutely the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture I cannot believe he will make information available, but is refusing to have registration forms in his school, for young adults who spend the majority of their time in the school and may not be able to get to their Parish Halls. [Approbation]

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I am sorry but, as I said before, we will do all that we can. But it is important to recognise that our voters once they reach the voting age have a responsibility to themselves to involve themselves in the process. That requires them to undertake certain tasks, which includes filling in and accessing and collecting a registration form.

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

Would the Minister consider reintroducing the Queen's Speech on Commonwealth Day given by States' Members as happened historically, on my time on the Education Committee, given that I understand it no longer is given by a States Member. Yes, I understand it is no longer given by a Member of the House and I believe it would be useful for Members to make contact with the various schools. Would he give that some consideration?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I think it would be more appropriate to speak to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Members and the committee that exist within this Assembly.

**4.9 Senator T.J. Le Main:**

I wonder if I could ask the Minister about the swimming pool at Fort Regent, which is now clad with scaffolding. I know that the Minister will agree that the swimming pool structure is only fit for knocking down. Can you give us an assurance or advise the Assembly, what is the cost of scaffolding? Is the scaffolding going to be another St. James' and is it going to cost virtually hundred of thousands of pounds in being scaffolded and not demolished. When are the plans to demolish this awful falling-down structure?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I, like the Senator, am extremely frustrated at the fact that nothing is currently being done to deal with the vacant swimming pool site at Fort Regent. I would assure the Senator that I am the chairman of a steering group that has been tasked by this Assembly to bring a report to the States about the future of the facility. Much work has been undertaken between my department and others, including Property Holdings, to identify the best way forwards. We are expecting to complete our work by July and I am hopeful that part of that work will include proposals of how we can deal with that site and others and provide a sustainable future for the pool.

**4.10 Deputy J.A. Martin:**

It is a bit of a follow-up from the answer given to Deputy Shona Pitman this morning by the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture. Can the Minister inform the House whether in actual fact there are delegated responsibilities, i.e. there would be a delegated Assistant Minister with responsibility for Sports and an Assistant Minister with a delegated responsibility to Culture? Is that the way in which the Minister is performing his duties? In other words, are the Assistant Ministers given delegated responsibilities?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

First of all, myself and the 2 Assistant Ministers work very much as a team. I would suggest we share responsibilities rather than particularly delegate official responsibilities to an Assistant Minister. Currently we have had Deputy Dupré, who is generally responsible for and oversees Culture. Deputy Vallois has been involved in Sport. But we all share the duties of the department equally.

**The Bailiff:**

Very well. I am afraid that brings questions without notice to the Minister to an end.

**The Connétable of St. Ouen:**

Could I point out for the element of any doubts that what Deputy Tadier said about being able to acquire driving licences before the age of 16 is incorrect?

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

Sir, can I clarify? I did not say that. What I said is that one can submit an application, let us say when you are 16 and it will be processed after your 17th birthday. I have heard anecdotal evidence that that has been the practice at certain Parish Halls. If that is incorrect, that remains to be proven.