

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, SPORT AND
CULTURE BY DEPUTY G.P. SOUTHERN OF ST. HELIER
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 1st NOVEMBER 2011**

Question

Will the Minister explain to members why he has removed support for holiday clubs and confirm that this facility will no longer be available to working parents?

Will he further state –

- (a) how much money has been saved by this measure?
- (b) how many staff are involved?
- (c) how he expects parents to be able to continue to work during the school holidays without this support?
- (d) how the removal of this service promotes any of the aims supported by this Assembly in the Strategic Plan 2009-2014?
- (e) what estimate he has for the cost per child of replacing this service for families who must continue to work through school holidays?

Does the Minister accept that the removal of this service to working families may tip the economic balance between work and non-work?

Answer

I can confirm that although Activity Clubs will no longer be run by my department, other options will be available for working parents. This was identified as a saving for 2012 and was agreed by this Assembly as part of the 2012 Business Plan. The ESC department will continue to run a wide range of increasingly popular holiday activities, for a large number of young people, either directly, or in partnership with clubs, associations and private providers.

The decision to cease the ESC activity clubs was arrived at as they were no longer cost-effective, and did not provide equal opportunities for all children. Furthermore, there are a range of providers who are able to meet the needs of this particular group of young people and parents.

The Education department used to be the sole provider of Activity Clubs formerly known as Education Play schemes, which were run in ESC facilities during the school holidays. This is no longer the case.

In future, Activity Clubs will be provided in partnership with existing childcare companies, charities and specialist voluntary organisations. The existing registered child care providers have confirmed that they are able to accommodate all children, and will work closely with the department to ensure that this provision will continue to be available to all working parents.

At present children attending ESC Activity Clubs are subsidised by the taxpayer as the service runs at a loss, whereas the children attending clubs run by private registered providers receive no subsidy and are expected to pay the full cost. ESC has been competing unfairly with these providers who do not have the same access to facilities and subsidy from the States. I am

confident that the range of services available will meet the needs of all young people in the 4 to 12 age group.

The charge per hour for ESC activity clubs was £2.80. In order to cover the full cost of the service the charge to parents would have needed to increase significantly in line, if not above, other providers whose costs start at £3.10 per hour and go up to £4.50 per hour dependent on the activities on offer.

In addition the numbers attending the ESC clubs has reduced in recent years making them even less viable. This demonstrates that more parents are choosing to use one of the many alternatives available.

Parents who qualify for childcare under Income Support, or Childcare tax exemption, will, as now, continue to receive assistance when accessing alternative registered providers.

In answer to the specific questions;

- a) The overall saving will be £80,000 per year.
- b) There is one full time member of staff who has taken Voluntary Redundancy. There are 26 part time staff who work during the school holidays. Of the 11 weeks on offer most staff, who are mainly students, will work an average of 3 or 4 weeks. It is anticipated that students will still be required to assist in clubs operated by private providers.
- c) Parents will be able to continue to work during the school holidays, as there is sufficient capacity offered by other providers. If there is extra demand for facilities the Department is committed to work with them to provide access to suitable premises, if required.
- d) Changes to the service are consistent with the aims contained in the Strategic Plan 2009 – 2014, specifically priorities 3 and 4 which is to reform the public service to improve efficiency and also to ensure sustainable public finances.
- e) On average children attended the ESC activity clubs for two and half weeks per year. Dependant on the club selected by the parents and the range of activities offered, the increased cost to a parent will range between £26.25 and £159.92 per year.

I do not accept that this will tip the economic balance between work and non-work as parents will still be able to access a wide range of holiday clubs. Low income parents or children with special needs will continue to be supported as now. Following discussions with Autism Jersey they have agreed to take on the administration and funding of the service for this particular group and the specialist provision at Mont a L'Abbe will continue.

Ultimately, the changes proposed will allow the more experienced private sector providers to improve the overall quality of service and offer more choice and flexibility of activities and venues.

Extract from the Draft Annual Business Plan 2012 (P.123/2011): Thirteenth amendment (P.123/2011 Amd. (13))---Comments presented to the States on 9th September by the Minister of Education, Sport and Culture.

(5) Play schemes and Outdoor Education

The Deputy of St. Mary has requested the Department's budget shall be increased by £54,990 with respect to the "Play schemes and Outdoor education" line in the Department's service analysis in order to maintain the value of funding in this area.

ESC activity clubs were initially established as no other provider offered this service in Jersey. Now there are a number of providers delivering a similar service across the Island.

The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture aims to work closely with the private and voluntary sector organisations to ensure activity clubs remain affordable and available to parents who rely upon them.

Activity Clubs provide an important contribution to childcare services in Jersey. The Minister is keen that all children requiring a place receive one, and that the place is affordable and that quality in childcare services continue to increase. It is proven that working closely with the voluntary and private sector (e.g. with the Nursery Education Fund) has improved quality and delivered a more cohesive and flexible service for parents (e.g. increased choice of providers and locations).

Private sector providers are well placed to deliver childcare of high quality and flexibility and more choice of activities and venues for children.

Meetings have already taken place with parents to inform them of proposed changes, and discussions have been ongoing with existing providers over the use of Education, Sport and Culture facilities to expand their provision in appropriate locations.

Specialist activity clubs for children with special needs will not be affected. At this time, parents receiving the Childcare Component of Income Support to access activity clubs will continue to receive this support.

As part of the requirement placed on the Department to reduce expenditure, this proposal will make an ongoing saving of £80,000 from 2012.