

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, SPORT AND CULTURE
BY THE CONNÉTABLE OF ST. JOHN
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 1st APRIL 2014**

Question

Further to the lack of reply to date from the Minister to an e-mail sent on 16th March 2014 would the Minister now respond to the questions raised in that e mail, namely -

1. Why is Jersey following the United Kingdom in deciding to charge for music lessons?
2. If charges are introduced what safeguards will there be for children from families who are in a middle income bracket and who do not qualify for lessons paid for by the States but who cannot afford to pay themselves and, if no safeguards are in place, would the Minister take action to rectify this imbalance?
3. Is the Minister's department recommending that some music lessons are moved to Saturdays and, if so, why was this decision taken when many students take part in sport activities which are beneficial for their health on Saturdays and will now have to choose between sport and music? Would the Minister agree to change the school curriculum instead to accommodate both?
4. Will the Minister undertake to review the decision to charge for music lessons and carry out a review of the proposed changes?

Answer

1. The rationale for this change was set out in P36/2013 Jersey Music Service: Introduction of 'user pays' charges, which was approved by the States on 30 April 2013. States Members voted 31 to 9 in favour of the proposition, with one abstention. A copy of the proposition is attached for information. I would also refer the Connétable to the Hansard record of the debate and the comments of the Scrutiny Panel that reviewed the proposal.

This matter had also been considered previously as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review and Medium Term Financial Plan so it has been in the public domain for some time.

2. The introduction of the charges was a difficult decision but it has been the catalyst for the JMS to review and update what it does. This excellent service will be reinvigorated and expanded as a result, while still providing the popular range of ensembles, orchestras and concerts it previously did.

To recap my position, I would like to continue to provide this service free of charge but that is no longer possible. ESC has to focus its expenditure on its core, statutory responsibilities. The lessons provided by the Jersey Music Service are not part of this. They are extra-curricular and, like many other hobbies followed by young people, are optional and followed by those who choose to do so.

The service is still heavily subsidised by the States. To assist middle income families the fees have been kept as low as possible and are generally less than the charges levied by private tutors. Also, there are appropriate safety nets in place that will ensure free or reduced price lessons to support:

- Families with more than one child using the service;
- Children from families that receive Income Support;
- Musically talented children from families with an income of less than £47,000.

The introduction of the user pays charge gives the JMS an opportunity to generate its own income (much as a fee-paying school does) rather than rely on a limited fixed budget. It can use the new income to recruit additional tutors and meet extra demand that it cannot currently cater for. The aim is that this, combined with the safety nets, will result in more children from a wider range of schools having access to the service.

3. Some – not all – lessons are being scheduled for Saturdays but only because parents have specifically requested to have them outside the school day. Other students will still be able to have them during weekdays as has always been the case. This is another improvement to the existing service, which has responded to customer demand. Lessons are optional and times/days are entirely a matter of parental choice. They can be arranged to best meet the needs of particular students and their parents and the JMS will try to accommodate requests if families raise concerns.

Music and sport will both remain part of the school curriculum that is taught during the school day.

4. P36 committed to reviewing the charging system after the first three years of operation and this will take place in the summer of 2017. In the meantime, the JMS managers will be monitoring the uptake of the service and reacting to customer requests.