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2 Deputy T.A. Vallois of St. John of the Minister for Education regarding action taken to ensure that children in Jersey are prepared for economic diversification: [9524]

With the focus on jobs and growth in the States' Strategic Plan, could the Minister advise what action he is taking to ensure that children in Jersey are skilled for the future and are prepared for economic diversification, in particular employment in the digital sector?

Deputy R.G. Bryans of St. Helier: (The Minister for Education):

Thank you to the Deputy for raising this particular subject. The Education Department recognised well ahead of the U.K. (United Kingdom) that our old I.T. (information technology) curriculum was not fit for purpose. That is why we launched the Education I.T. strategy, 'Thinking Differently' in 2013 to national acclaim and provided £3 million of funding. We then rewrote the I.T. curriculum switching the focus away from the I.T. skills which might prepare someone for an office job, towards understanding computing in a way that would enhance the creative use of technology in all subjects and pave the way for careers in the digital sector. Our children can now expect to learn computing, which includes coding, from key stage one to start of primary school, to key stage 4, when they take G.C.S.E. (General Certificate of Secondary Education).

3.2.1 The Deputy of St. John:

I thank the Minister for his response. It sounds like there is a positive move forward, but how consistent is the curriculum in terms of coding and support in terms of I.T. infrastructure for the schools, particularly primary school where the children's brains are like sponges at this stage and are able to create and innovate from that point of view. Could the Minister explain whether there is consistency?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

Very happy to do so. The Deputy is quite right. Children, particularly at a primary age, are absolutely ready for this now. As part of the highly successful primary coding project, every state school has worked with specialists from Hautlieu. Teachers have been trained to deliver modern computing and our pupils have been learning a range of programming skills, system design and logical reasoning, using them to solve problems and, for instance, animate physical objects, like a robot. If you look at the secondary situation, they move then into a ... in September 2016 the new computing G.C.S.E. course starts in our secondary schools. We have also reviewed the new computing curriculum already after just 2 years to keep it up to date. It is worth mentioning Highlands, the I.T. for Business Foundation degree has seen a 40 per cent increase in applications this year. The degree continues to have outstanding employability with 95 per cent of students gaining employment in this sector on or before graduation before the 2 year programme. Plans are in place to offer a BSc (Bachelor of Science) top-up year on a part-time basis, so students can study at the same time as starting their first job. We continue to work with most of the major employers in the sector locally and have strong links with Digital Jersey. We are working more closely than ever with Digital Jersey and tech businesses and fully support Senator Ozouf's new digital policy framework which sets out a broader digital vision for the Island.

3.2.2 Deputy S.M. Wickenden of St. Helier:

About 12 months ago we had the innovation review and on recommendation 7 under the Education and Skills Policy there was a recommendation to set up an education business partnership which said the timelines to be in place would be by this month. Could the Minister for Education please inform us on the update for the education business partnership please?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

Yes, I can. In fact they are meeting today to discuss ways forward. It is on track and we will have finished by September this year.

3.2.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister inform Members whether money from the I.T. strategy has been diverted into funding the Pupil Premium and other education spending rather than I.T.?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

No, it has not.

3.2.4 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour:

Does the Minister agree or recognise that alongside the basics perhaps the most important skills to prepare our children for the future jobs are the soft skills that the industry seem to want and things like problem-solving skills. How is the Minister ensuring that there is space to teach these types of creative soft skills and problem-solving skills in a curriculum that is becoming ever more restrictive and time ever more squeezed in the schools?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

It is a very good point the Deputy makes. Soft skills are absolutely imperative as far as I am concerned, and have been adopted in the P.S.H.E. (Personal, Social and Health Education) that we now teach in our schools, which is not taught in the U.K. Equally, we have written it within our Jersey computing curriculum. So soft skills are there at the heart of it.

3.2.5 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

Does the Minister agree that language acquisition of a second language is a highly important skill for the future and also for economic diversification in the Island, be that a living foreign language or Jèrriais, our local language?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

I am a little confused how that relates to the computing curriculum.

The Bailiff:

It was quite cunningly done in relation to economic diversification.

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

Thank you for that clarification. Yes, learning a second language has been mentioned to me by, in fact, one of the speakers who is turning up today, one of the young ladies I met at the Isle of Man. When I was asking her why she had set about learning Mac, she said: "Because I am a code breaker. It gives me an extra resonance when I am going away to university. People want people like me who can take whether it is the coding language of computing or whether it is learning a second language." It is one of those skills, mathematical skills in particular. So I do agree.

3.2.6 Deputy M. Tadier:

On that basis, would the Minister state why he is cutting funding to Jèrriais in our schools by roughly some £29,000 a year at a time when they are already struggling to restart after delays, which can be put at the door of his department, when, if anything, we should be investing more in Jèrriais not reducing that grant?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

There are 2 sides to that particular thing. First of all, I do not look after Jèrriais anymore. That now falls under Senator Farnham's ministry. But equally what we have done in relation to French, in particular, is double the number of children who are learning French within our primary schools. Jèrriais is not our concern at this moment in time.

3.2.7 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Can I just press the Minister again on the problem-solving skills and those general skills? He said that they would be taught through P.S.H.E. but I think there is a feeling among the public that it is all subjects that are being squeezed into this very exam-focused approach and is there a focus on these skills across all subjects and are they being taught creatively to enable children to be innovative when they join our economy?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

Again, thank you to the Deputy for that question. Yes, they are. Of course she is absolutely right. Soft skills are not just in relation to computing or even languages. They are right across the board. I think the problem we have always had in the past is we never delineated them very well. If you were to ask a student what soft skills were, previously they would not have been able to identify them. But now they know, they understand what the soft skills are that we are looking for and they are to be found in every subject.

3.2.8 The Deputy of St. John:

In one of the Minister's answers he spoke about the work with specialists from Hautlieu. Can I ask the Minister: do we have enough resource and specialism within this area to serve the need and the actual demand that is currently increasing across all the schools in the Island?

Deputy R.G. Bryans:

Yes. In fact, we have just recently begun a review of our I.T. teaching and staff training. The next step is for our schools to work with education technology specialists, Aspire 2 Be, to ensure that we keep moving forward in this rapidly changing area. In September they will be carrying reviews on 12 of our local schools.