

20.11.17

20 The Deputy of St. Martin of the Assistant Minister for Education regarding travel arrangements for Jersey students returning to the Island for Christmas (OQ.326/2020):

Will the Assistant Minister update the Assembly on his plans for travel arrangements for Jersey students returning to the Island for Christmas?

Deputy J.M. Maçon (Assistant Minister for Education):

I am grateful to the officers who have been working with a number of key issues to facilitate the return of students who need assistance. Late on Wednesday night the competent authority Ministers agreed 3 key enabling sets of actions. The first being the triple testing method, so all those arriving from green, amber or red, countries on day zero, 5 and 10, and what this allows for is a reduced isolation period. The second decision was to put in place isolation units and the third was to get approval to put on extra flights with our partner agency Blue Islands. So I appreciate and thank the Deputy for his continued interest in this matter. It certainly helped provide extra pressure on this matter. All I would conclude by saying, we did send out another survey yesterday directly to students from the Student Finance. We got around the data protection issues and we managed to do that in a legal manner. So we are just waiting for that final data. Because the U.K. changed its travel corridor for students we just need to know their plans before we issue anything. Other than that we will be ready to go.

[12:00]

4.20.1 The Deputy of St. Martin:

I thank the Deputy for his answer. The question was not about isolation but about travel. He will be aware that the number of commercial flights is reducing on a daily basis almost as the crisis has affected the U.K. Does the Assistant Minister realise the urgency of putting the extra flights on and of telling students and their parents when these flights will be and where the aircraft will come from?

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Yes.

4.20.2 Deputy R.J. Ward:

From the last question, at what point will parents and students know when they will travel, where they will travel from? Can the Assistant Minister guarantee that all students wanting to return home will be able to in the time that they have available to them?

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

On the first part of the question, we are sending out the survey now, there will be an analysis of that by the end of the week, but the survey closes Friday. Of course we already have some intelligence by then. We will then intend to announce the flights by next week so then parents can make their decisions ideally earlier in the week. So that is the plan. Then there was a second part to the Deputy's question, I wonder if you could just repeat it for me?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

It was where the flights will come from.

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

The flights will come from Jersey. Well it depends, because it is with Blue Islands, so I do not know specifically where they might come from. If he means where they will depart from, which is a completely different question, which of course I will answer. We anticipate that it will likely be somewhere from the north, the midlands and the southwest. But we are just waiting for the survey results to come back in order to confirm that.

4.20.3 The Deputy of St. Peter:

While the Minister is doing exceptionally good work in helping to get our students back for Christmas, may I ask him to extend that brief slightly and look into other families who have working children who are obviously adults, probably over the age of 22 or 23, who would also like to return to Jersey for Christmas, although the time that they wish to be here is probably shorter because they are working elsewhere? I think there are significant numbers that fit into this category.

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

I thank the Deputy for his question. That would help with the viability of the flights of course. But I think we will be following a similar method to that of Guernsey, which is where they gave priority to students in the first instance and then did open it up for other people. So I think we will be following a similar method.

4.20.4 Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat of St. Helier:

What other airlines other than Blue Islands have been considered?

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Because the Government of Jersey already has a contract with Blue Islands, therefore we have that relationship where we can organise things. I know that the travel cell have, for example, explored talking to Guernsey through their routes and other airlines to see what could be done. Looking at the finances, the Blue Island option came out to be the quickest and most financially viable method. That is why I believe it was chosen.

4.20.5 The Deputy of St. Martin:

I know the Minister has already given this answer to Deputy Ward, but can I seek absolute clarity because this is a vital issue? The Minister said, and can he confirm, that where these flights are coming from and when they will come from the U.K. airports will be confirmed by next week?

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Yes.