

2022.04.25

7.1 Deputy K.G. Pamplin of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding ...

Thank you for allowing this question. This is in light of our mental health review and the information received very late on Friday. Will the Minister state the reasons for the sudden conclusion of the contract with a U.K. university for the award of an on-Island mental health nursing degree, given the degree was only announced last year and started in September 2021; and will he explain what actions are being taken to mitigate the impact this will cause?"

The Deputy of St. Ouen (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

The department was notified of the intention to bring the contract to a conclusion by the University of Chester in March 2021. It is not a sudden conclusion as suggested by the question. The reason for the notice to end the contract relates directly to a strategic review and redirection of the focus of the university activity, which meant that the university wanted to allocate its resources to health education within England. I confirm there has been no issue with the way in which the partnership has worked, which has been successfully running since 2013. It is not the case that this course started in September 2021. What happened then was that the whole course was able to be delivered on-Island as opposed to the previous arrangements where some of the course was delivered off-Island. The regulator, the Nursing and Midwifery Council, is fully aware of the situation and in terms of the impact of the change no students have been able to enter new programmes run through the partnership with Chester University since January this year and all students who have commenced programmes with the university prior to January will be able to complete their programmes and graduate with their awards from the University of Chester. The process of finding a new university partnership is underway. The contract involves a tendering process to ensure providers can meet the requirements of the on-Island degree programmes and we intend to secure another provider in time for the September 2022 start of a new course.

7.1.1 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

I thank the Minister for his response. The use of "sudden" was the fact that the press release from the Government was announced in February and the Minister has just confirmed that the contract concluded in March, that is where the reference to "sudden" is. Was the Minister aware of any agreements going on or in place given the timeframe of that decision to conclude so quickly after it was announced in February?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

No, as far as I am aware we were not aware in February of the strategy being worked through by the university, which was announced the following month. So this is a decision by the university post entering into the agreement with ourselves and we have been supported by the university throughout this transition.

7.1.2 Deputy K.F. Morel:

Would the Minister advise the Assembly as to whether there are courses available to Islanders at a level lesser than a degree level, which are aimed at encouraging development of professional skills in mental health services or is there only this degree course available?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I do not have the knowledge of the availability of courses to answer that question. Mental health nursing is a specialism. To practice as a doctor or nurse in mental health I believe that

a degree is required but there may be other qualifications within the mental health field which set out alternative routes but I am sorry I have not been prepped precisely on that issue.

7.1.3 Deputy K.F. Morel:

With that response in mind, would the Minister advise the Assembly as to what work is being undertaken to fully understand the range of qualification needs for providers who are interested in working within the mental health area?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

We are anxious to provide a fully comprehensive service in adult mental health services so this will include more than just doctors and nurses posts, it will include therapists, it will include counselling courses and the like. Some of these courses can even be run by trained volunteers, they are low-level mental health needs which can be met by trained volunteers, and are being met by trained volunteers, and there are differing levels of need for which different qualifications will be required. In H.C.S. and through our partners in the mental health field we are seeking to deliver a comprehensive service.

7.1.4 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

The Minister talked about the off-Island need but actually this was a 3-year full-time programme billed as a mental health nursing degree without needing to go off-Island to study, provided on-Island by a team of nursing tutors. Will the Minister confirm that this will still be the case and if there cannot be a similar university found to deliver such a degree as so desperately needed on-Island, what would be the outcome as he has been briefed?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

There are many universities within the United Kingdom that offer pre-registration nursing programmes that lead to award and graduate status and professional eligibility for registration within the Nursing and Midwifery Council. As I stated, we are in a tender process to agree a new contract with those universities, universities that are expressing an interest, and I am confident that we will find a replacement by September.