

23.07.04

15 Deputy R.J. Ward of the Chair of the States Employment Board regarding the recruitment and retention crisis (OQ.132/2023)

Will the chair explain whether it is his or her assessment, regarding who is answering, that the recruitment and retention crisis was being fuelled by below-inflation pay deals mixed with an unsustainable increasing workload, as recently reported?

The Connétable of St. John (Vice-Chair, States Employment Board - rapporteur):

Jersey, like other jurisdictions, faces a challenge rather than a crisis when it comes to recruitment and retention of teachers. We have worked hard in recent years to recruit additional teachers and additional teaching support. Pay for teachers and headteachers has gone up more than any other group, apart from nurses, in that period of time. We have also invested heavily in training. Another feature around retention was around career development, a further £1.2 million has been invested in professional development. We are doing many things in many areas to both recruit and retain staff.

3.15.1 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can I ask the Assistant Minister whether he will sit down with teachers, headteachers, all of the representatives of the teaching profession that are being driven to strike and telling them that he does not agree that there is a crisis and explain why consistent below-inflation pay deals and a sustainable workload is not something they should worry about?

The Connétable of St. John:

We, as the States Employment Board, meet with all representative bodies on a quarterly basis. Our next scheduled meeting with teachers is scheduled for this Friday, where we look forward to exchanging with them. Teachers' pay has increased since 2013 by 22.5 per cent on basic pay against inflation of 24.1 per cent. As I have mentioned earlier, we have recruited additional teaching assistants. The Delivery Unit have worked tirelessly to ensure there are no vacancies currently for teaching assistants. We agreed at our last quarterly meeting with the teachers, when they raised the fact that their terms and conditions had been due to be reviewed in 2019, that we would do a review of terms and conditions and that work has already started.

3.15.2 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Does the vice-chair consider that the most recent offer made to teaching staff constitutes a real-terms pay cut?

The Connétable of St. John:

We believe that the pay offer made to teachers, the same is made to other public sector workers, is a reasonable approach. In fact one of our offers would have seen some teachers' salaries rise by 12.1 per cent with a flat pay across the board; that offer was rejected and we are still at the table. We invited the unions to join us at conciliation. We went to conciliation; 2 days after that conciliation we were told by one of the unions that they were going to take strike action while we were in conciliation. When we heard about the strike action we offered arbitration. We are still waiting to hear back from one of the unions but one of the other unions has said it is premature.

3.15.3 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

It is just going to be the same question again because it was not answered. It may well be that a pay offer can be considered reasonable by some but reasonableness can be subjective. My question to

the vice-chair was, and still is, does he regard the pay offer that has been made to teachers, that is at the centre of this dispute now, to be a real-terms pay cut?

The Connétable of St. John:

The pay offer is a fully consolidated pay offer of 7.9 per cent. It does not match the rate of inflation, the current rate of inflation, but we have got a responsibility to make sure that things are affordable and sustainable. We are trying to put more resource, more investment into education and that is what we are aiming to do.

3.15.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

The Constable said that the offer is reasonable. Is he suggesting that teaching staff who are balloted to take industrial action are, therefore, being unreasonable?

The Connétable of St. John:

In terms of ballots, one of the unions had a 51 per cent turnout and out of the overall membership around 43 per cent of staff voted in favour of strike action. Certainly the mood among teachers is mixed. I do not believe it is unreasonable for trade unions to take action when they feel it is necessary. I would much prefer them to sit around the table with our negotiating team and carry on the dialogue.

[11:45]

3.15.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does the Assistant Minister not consider that the words “affordable” and “sustainable” mean what he takes them to mean and they are weasel words that say in fact if you want a pay rise your terms and conditions will be reduced, because that is the reality, is it not?

The Connétable of St. John:

The reality is that we have improved the terms and conditions and have committed to negotiating further the terms and conditions. Investing over £1 million, additional £1 million, in professional development is not about reducing terms and conditions. Investing £1.9 in maternity and paternity leave is not reducing terms and conditions. The teachers still benefit from a final salary paid pension scheme, the only group on our pay list.

3.15.6 Deputy M.B. Andrews:

Taking into account if teachers received the real wage, how much more would payroll expenditure be?

The Connétable of St. John:

Sorry, could you repeat the question?

Deputy M.B. Andrews:

If teachers received an index increase in their earnings in line with inflation, how much more would payroll expenditure be?

The Connétable of St. John:

The pay claim is for the cost of living, plus 5 per cent, that is what the pay claim is and currently the pay offer is 7.9 per cent. The cost of the pay offer is some £5.1 million, which is fully consolidated.

3.15.7 Deputy M.R. Scott:

Does the Assistant Minister have comparative figures for the pay increases in the private sector?

The Connétable of St. John:

I was interviewed recently by a journalist and after we finished the interview I asked them how much they had had as a pay rise and their answer was they had not had a pay rise. The private sector is offering various amounts, it depends on the industry, so I have not got a comparative figure globally. But we have to try our best not to impact more on inflation and we will have to live within our costs.

3.15.8 Deputy R.J. Ward:

It is difficult to know what to make of those answers. For successive Governments I have approached the issue of teachers' pay where the pay envelope and this Government is no different from the last 3 or 4 in doing so. Does the Assistant Minister agree that that pay envelope, giving more to some - apart from my last written question by the way - make a much smaller proportion of the workforce, giving more to them but much less to the most experienced staff is just fuelling the lack of retention of more experienced staff by saying to them, as has been clear with these answers today, you are not really worth it and we do not want to give you it?

The Connétable of St. John:

I do not agree with that at all. In fact the Deputy will be aware that this States Employment Board has introduced quarterly meetings with all representative bodies so that we can listen and understand the challenges that they face, whatever the profession. In terms of teachers, we have listened. They have told us their terms and conditions had been agreed to be reviewed in 2019; that had not been done. This States Employment Board has agreed to do that and I believe that we are trying to work collaboratively with all the trade unions across all of the sectors.