

23.11.07

3 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of the Chair of the Privileges and Procedures Committee regarding training for Ministers on answering oral questions (OQ.222/2023)

Will the chair advise what consideration, if any, has been given to facilitating training for Ministers on answering oral questions in the States Assembly in accordance with Standing Order 63(7)(b), that requires responses to be “directly relevant to the question asked?”

The Connétable of St. Clement (Chair, Privileges and Procedures Committee):

I thank the Deputy for his question. The committee has not considered facilitating a training session for Ministers on answering oral questions in the States Assembly. While information about questions, both written and oral, was included in the induction programme, this was more about the process in general and not specifically about how an oral question should be answered. Although the committee is always open to discussing training and development opportunities for Members, specific training for Ministers would normally be for the Government to organise.

2.3.1 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Could I thank the chair for an answer which was directly relevant to the question that I asked?

[10:00]

Could I ask her to perhaps consider liaising with the Government about what kind of training could be offered to Ministers, and perhaps tap into some of the resources that may be available through the C.P.A. (Commonwealth Parliamentary Association), for example, because it feels to me like this Assembly has wasted enough time in recent weeks when we have not had direct answers to very clear questions?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Can I assure the Deputy that P.P.C. (Privileges and Procedures Committee) will be very happy to do this?

2.3.2 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Part of my question was taken. Would the chair consider having contact with the C.P.A., in particular the C.P.A. Academy, and it is developed, because we can tailor courses using that huge worldwide facility that we have a great involvement with?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Yes, I will confirm that we will contact C.P.A. and get some advice on the training courses.

2.3.3 Deputy M.R. Scott:

Could the chair please advise whether there are any sanctions available in respect of Ministers who are persistent in not giving relevant answers?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I am not aware that there are any sanctions at the moment for Ministers who do not give relevant answers. I would just encourage everybody in the Assembly to give relevant answers.

2.3.4 Deputy L.V. Feltham of St. Helier Central:

Would the chair undertake, within her discussions with the Government, to ensure that Ministers are, within that training or within those conversations, given information about the importance of question time to the democratic process?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Yes, I think P.P.C. would be very happy to do that.

2.3.5 Deputy A. Curtis of St. Clement:

Just on the topic of advice on questions, would the chair consider giving advice to question askers to ensure they follow Standing Orders, in making sure questions, do not ask hypothetical propositions or ask opinion and not fact?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Yes, I would like to say to the Deputy, we will look into that as well and offer advice.

2.3.6 Deputy S.G. Luce of Grouville and St. Martin:

Would the chair accept that, while it is extremely frustrating to not receive an answer to your question, that it is all part of the political circle of whoever is answering trying their best, where possible and if necessary, to avoid answering the question. It is just part of politics. Would the chair accept that?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Yes, I would accept that. But I think we can only try to improve things in the Assembly. It will be up to the individual whether they do circumnavigate the question or not. But P.P.C., we are here to try and help with training and things like that, so we will do all we can to try and get, maybe in some instances, clearer questions and much better answers.

2.3.7 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does the chair not accept that repetition of questions in order to seek an answer is one that wastes a lot of time in this Chamber, and it would be appropriate if we could be more efficient?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I, for one, would be really delighted, as chair of P.P.C. and as an ordinary Member, if we could avoid so much repetition and get on with the business in hand. But I do not have a magic wand or anything, so I do not think that is going to be happening in the near future. But this is my hope that we can progress more efficiently.

The Deputy Bailiff:

You have had a question, Deputy Scott, in this session already.

2.3.8 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Would the chair give consideration to perhaps a change to the Standing Orders, which would enable a situation where when questions and answers are limited by time, such as questions without notice, when they are limited to 15 minutes, that when an incident happens where a Member raises an objection to a question having not been answered in a way, which is relevant and direct, and the Bailiff agrees with that and asks the Minister to re-answer the question, that the time taken up by that should not count towards the 15 minutes?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Yes, I will ask to have this and other questions that have been raised this morning to be put on the agenda for the next P.P.C. committee, and the committee will discuss all this and get back to the Assembly.