

2024.07.16

2.15 Deputy M. Tadier of the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development regarding the acquisition of additional languages in Jersey (OQ.145/2024)

Will the Minister advise whether he considers that the acquisition of additional languages is important for the strategic economic development of the Island, and provides cultural benefits to Jersey?

Deputy K.F. Morel of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity (The Minister for Sustainable Economic Development):

I thank the Deputy for a very interesting question. There is no doubt in my mind that having a skilled and adaptable labour force is fundamental in fuelling productivity and growth opportunities in what we know is a changing and challenging labour market. There is no doubt to my mind that additional languages can be an incredibly useful skill for attaining personal and professional development and the value of additional language skills quite simply goes beyond the purely economic. It is true that in our increasingly interconnected and international economy, language skills play an important role in creating new connections. There is no doubt that the Future Economy Programme, one of the key elements there is about the Island has to be international in its outlook. Talking through some of the cognitive benefits of language skills, there is no doubt that language skills, having more than one language, improves memory. It also has the benefit of delaying the onset of dementia. It also helps us with our cultural awareness and seeking social opportunities which in an international economy is something that we need. Multilanguage individuals often have better job prospects. They have often higher earning potential and, from an Island perspective, they are more open to global business opportunities. In response very simply to the Deputy's question, the answer is yes; a resounding yes.

2.15.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

Jersey is largely, in real terms, an English-speaking Island. We know that French is an official language of Government and of the Assembly, and that Jersey is also looking to do more direct dealings in its own right with France, but also the wider continent of Europe. Does the Minister think that there is a window of opportunity at the moment for us to really up our game as an Assembly and as a Government to make sure that languages are put more to the forefront of importance, both in the curriculum potentially, but also in government policy?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Again, I have to agree with the Deputy; there is no doubt in my mind that there is a window of opportunity here. I have seen with my own eyes how having French speakers engage with our counterparts in Brittany and Normandy and France, at the national level as well, has helped us warm relations quite considerably. I think we are now in a really good position with regard to our relationships, particularly with Brittany and Normandy. As I have said before, the Future Economy Programme makes it very clear that the Island has to be international in its outlook but we also have to have a really strong and deep skills base as we go forward. Therefore, it is really important from my perspective that at the education level multilingualism is encouraged in many different ways. Certainly, I would always say that European languages are where we should start because Jersey is a European Island.

2.15.2 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:

Est-ce que je peux demander si M. le Député ait l'avis que la connaissance de la langue française par les citoyens et les écoliers de Jersey est assez important et, en fait, au niveau qui est nécessaire pour l'avantage de l'Île dans les importance que relations entre Jersey et la France?

TRANSLATION: May I ask whether the Member is of the opinion that knowledge of the French language by the citizens and schoolchildren of Jersey is quite important and, in fact, at the level which is necessary for the benefit of the Island in the important relations between Jersey and France?

The Deputy Bailiff:

I think the current practice is that you then produce a brief translation for those who did not follow what you said.

Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:

I was going to do Jersey French but ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Well try English first.

Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:

Okay. [Laughter] I ...

Deputy M. Tadier:

Sorry, can I have a point of order? Just a point of order. I do think, and I do say this as President of the Assemblée Parlementaire de la Francophonie, that when we insist on a translation for what is just another official language of the Assembly [**Approbation**] we are in danger of setting a hierarchy of language, and that our French needs to have an equal statute to English in this Assembly because we do not ask for a translation of English speeches into French and we should not be doing this from French into English. I do not necessarily ask you to change your ruling, but I do ask that it be given consideration in future, because my understanding was that we did do that for Jèrriais but French has been a long-standing language of the Assembly before English ever was.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Well I entirely take your point. I will discuss it with the Bailiff but I think I am acting in accordance with current practice, which is to ensure that, not only people here but people listening, most of whom have English as a first language, can understand what is going on in the Chamber, so a brief translation.

Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:

Je pourrais demander un point d'ordre ; si l'ordre que vous avez fait, M. le Député-Bailli, est en effet la règle que vous devriez dire à un Membre de l'Assemblée qui a la capacité de parler français s'il veut?

The Deputy Bailiff:

Yes. Well please just produce a short translation to your question.

Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:

I meant to ask whether or not the point of order was a point of order, whether or not it was a requirement to translate, I will do, but I take the point that the President of the A.P.F. (Assemblée Parlementaire de la Francophonie) makes. What I wanted to ask was: was the

Minister of the view that Islanders' knowledge of the French language was good enough in advancing our interests in relation to economic matters to do with France? That is why I asked it in French, and I meant it in French, and I will repeat it in French, if necessary.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

For brevity sake, I will answer in English. I appreciate Deputy Ozouf asking the question in French, and the ability to speak in this Assembly in French is something that I will absolutely defend. In my view - and it is only my view, certainly not a Government view - I am concerned about the level of language-speaking in the Island, particularly with regard to French. I have said this before, there is a reality about Jersey's geography, we are right next to France; that is never going to change. We have to have good relations with France. In my view, the fact that we have lost our southern supply routes is a massive strategic mistake for this Island and it is something that I am trying to rectify. It helps a great deal if we can go over and speak in French to our counterparts in France. There is, I must say, no doubt in my mind though, that as we are talking in huge generalisations here - I am talking about the general level of language-speaking in the Island - I do not believe it is where it needs to be. That is my perspective, I may be wrong, but it is my perspective.

[12:00]

I would say as well, my experience in France is that most of the either politicians, civil servants or business people I speak to, their level of English has increased dramatically over the past few decades which makes it in itself easier to engage when we have people in the party who perhaps do not speak French, as was the case when I travelled to France a couple of weeks ago. There were people in my party who did not speak French but it is a lot easier now because the level of English in France has increased greatly from my perspective.

The Deputy Bailiff:

That brings the time for oral questions to an end, unfortunately, so I am sorry you did not get a supplementary; I am sorry I did not get to your question.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Do I not get a supplementary?

The Deputy Bailiff:

No, the time has expired a minute ago. I let the Minister finish his answer, so I do apologise you did not get your ... **[Laughter]** or the point of order, one of the 2.

Deputy S.M. Ahier:

Sorry, before you move on to questions.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Yes, we were, Deputy, I was going to deal with your oral question now, as you have been communicated with, but the Minister did not get the message so we will need to deal with that oral question after questions to Ministers without notice. All right? So we will need to turn to that. The first period of questions without notice are for the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs and the first question is from Deputy Ahier.