

24.02.06.

9.10 Deputy I. Gardiner of the Minister for Children and Education regarding implementation of the Further Education and Skills Actionable Agenda. (OQ.19/2024)

Regarding the C.Y.P.E.S. (Children, Young People, Education and Skills) publication *Further Education and Skills Actionable Agenda*, published in December 2022, will the Minister explain his plan for implementing the technical education action to raise the participation age to 18, with a corresponding entitlement and requirement for all young people to be in full-time education, or employment with training?

Connétable R.P. Vibert of St. Peter (The Minister for Children and Education):

The question will be answered by the Assistant Minister who will be shortly the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Yes.

Deputy I. Gardiner:

Apology, Assistant Minister. It is skills agenda. If I understand it correct, the skills agenda will be under the Minister for Children and Families and Skills.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Do you want to shed any light on that?

Deputy I. Gardiner:

If I am wrong, I am happy to be corrected.

The Connétable of St. Peter:

No, we are happy that it falls under the Minister for Education, Sir.

The Deputy Bailiff:

All right. Are you content to accept an answer from Deputy Rob Ward? He has obviously prepared an answer.

Deputy R.J. Ward (Assistant Minister for Children and Education - rapporteur):

I thank the Deputy for the question. There is a context to this answer. In 2019 when I chaired the education panel, one of the first reviews was in post-16 education and recommendation 14 at that time was to increase the school leaving age to 18 for formal education. In the question, the *Further Education and Skills Actionable Agenda* it is recommendation 1, that is from December 2022. I am in support of the principle of raising the age of participation to 18, but there obviously have been obstacles in the 4 years since the first recommendation of this happening. I think this is a juxtaposition between the provision that is available for young people and the regulation or legislation that may be needed. For context again, over 80 per cent of our young people do continue to 18, or as we would call it, key stage 5, but that smaller but significant number perhaps do not, and there is a lot of evidence to say that keeping people in education to 18 definitely improves outcomes and is better for all of us.

9.10.1 Deputy I. Gardiner:

Thank you to the Assistant Minister for his answer and it is reassuring that the Assistant Minister is willing to extend education to 18. The Assistant Minister mentioned legislation and he mentioned provision but the Assistant Minister did not mention funding. Will the Assistant Minister be preparing a business case for submission to the next Government Plan to assure that funding can be put in place to provide education or training provision for young people up to 18?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I thank the Deputy for the supplementary. In the 2024 Government Plan there is, I believe, £3.85 million put aside to address those key targeted areas who do not carry on into education until 18. Yes, there will be a requirement for funding into the future, but I think we have to look at the provision that we have now and I think we have 2 choices in addressing this. We can try to change the legislation, which may take some time because legislative drafting is one of those things that happens, or we can change by regulation. The Education Law 1999, part 1, section 2, part 3, does say that this can be changed by regulation by the States Assembly. That might be a quicker pathway. But that will come with a requirement for funding. However, there is a lot in place already which may be available. It also comes with some perhaps knock-on effects to other laws and legislation, so we have to be cognisant of that. The preparation work has been done though in many areas there and I await policy options that we can be taking forward. I will say, in the first week, it is probably not necessarily on my agenda this week.

9.10.2 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Does the Assistant Minister agree with me that as well as extending the education entitlement upwards to 18, we should also be looking to extend children's education entitlement downwards and offering universally to all 2 to 3 year-olds in the Island?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

This question is about 16 to 18, which I certainly agree with. In terms of the provision downward, yes, that would be an ideal situation for us on this Island. However, we have to think about what we mean by formal education. Education in the form of play, in socialisation, I believe is just as important as any formalised assessed education at that age because that is so important for our young people. To get back into the 16 to 18 agenda, there are some real benefits and they are recognised in jurisdictions around the world. Just to give one piece of information on that, which I have found interesting from research, if you leave school at 16 you are very unlikely, but about 16 per cent of those people who did not reach the basic standards that we would require in terms of literacy and numeracy, for example, reach those levels. If you stay until 18, 60 per cent of those people will get a second chance and do that. So it is an investment in our future. It is an investment in our Island and it is certainly the best thing to do if we are genuinely looking at lifelong learning and having a skilled population.

9.10.3 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I am delighted the Assistant Minister agrees with my ethos around play-based care and education and would he commit to pursuing the extension of this entitlement downwards as well and to pursuing the funding to action this?

The Deputy Bailiff:

It is a question in relation to age 18; it is not an early years question, but do you want to add anything, Deputy?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Yes, it just will not be as prepared an answer. In principle, yes, that is exactly it. But there is some detail to be looked at there: can we provide that provision, how do we provide it, where do we provide it? But I am glad that the Deputy and I agree that play-based is the key. The last thing I would want to see is the sort of formalised education that started in the U.K. where children were assessed at some ridiculously young age and then from that level onwards were given a target or a flight path which they had to in some way continue along for the rest of their educational existence. That does not work. It is not the best thing to do in education, and it is not what is best for our children.

9.10.4 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

Will the Assistant Minister outline what he believes is required to be done to meet all the actions from the published actionable agenda from December 2022 to ensure that all young people up to the age of 18 have equal opportunity to access education and training?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

As I mentioned before, that over 80 per cent already do that. But it is sounds hard to get numbers beyond that 80 per cent are the key things. There are a whole myriad of things that need to be addressed there. First of all, we need to keep young people in school to the age of 16 and help them find that they are successful. We have a significant but small group who do not find mainstream school perhaps the best opportunity for them. That needs to be addressed. But then there are a number of things that happen through the Next Steps programme, for example, which provides support prior to statutory leaving age to try to encourage young people to stay in the education system and access education. That can be through careers, from mentoring, things like the Princes Trust even. There are a whole myriad of things here, ongoing support for your chosen pathway, for example, and that specialised pathway for young people who perhaps do not fit into our traditional education system I think is the way in which we encourage people to stay in education, succeed in education and training, and succeed both in the workplace and in our society. Because the option is, if that does not happen, it is much more expensive in the long run, much more damaging and much less successful for our economy and our productivity in the long term, if these young people do not stay and do not succeed in education.

9.10.5 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

Will the Minister just confirm, because it was a bit confusing at the beginning, that obviously some of this actionable agenda also has recommendations for skills, including adults, and will the Minister be responsible also for those actions as well?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

One of the things I wanted, I am not particularly interested in titles, but lifelong learning I think is a very important key, which links into our sustainable economy, for example. So, yes, I thank the Deputy for mentioning that. We do need to look at the future of accessing education and training, career changes, for example. I know people who have made a very brave decision to change their career as they get older and it is not easy. If we can enable that, training our own is the way forward to be successful on this Island, to be more productive and to use our education to its fullest. But, yes, that will need some thought. That will need some investment. But it also needs some smart use of the skills that we have. We have very talented people in our post-16 provision, both in all of our schools and at Highlands College in particular, and we need to use their skills to the best we possibly can and support people throughout their life and working life to succeed where they can.

[16:45]

9.10.6 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:

I wonder if the Assistant Minister could give an early indication about his willingness to look into T levels as a way of really helping young people for whom the right choice is not A levels, but it is really good, and now I notice that the U.K. is rolling out, there is an oven-ready plan with a curriculum for T levels in all sorts of exciting areas, which have a benefit. I think he knows the answer. Will he put that one on steroids?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I am very pleased to be able to put down any notes and talk about T levels. How long have I got? T levels are technical qualifications which are intended to bridge the gap between vocational and academic education. Personally, I think there is a false dichotomy between technical, between vocational and academic education. In any profession, medicine for example, yes, there is a huge academic need, but there are huge vocational needs. I want somebody who knows their way around the human body if they are my doctor but I also want him to have a good bedside manner, for example. T levels though are being tested in U.K. One of the obstacles that we will face with T levels is the need for specific and very long and detailed work placement examples. Now I personally believe, and this is not policy on the hoof, but I have looked into this and had quite extensive conversations before with people when I was doing the Education panel, that we could perhaps offer some of these, if they fit in, in certain sectors of our economy, but we have an opportunity to see whether they are successful first in the U.K. We also have to be very cognisant of the fact that B.T.E.C. (Business and Technology Education Council), the traditional vocational route, may not be continuing if T levels take over in the U.K. However, B.T.E.C. could still exist in an international form. So there are some big choices ahead but the knowledge of T levels, the knowledge of vocational education, and the knowledge of examples, for example, is something that I can bring to this role and I hope that we can anticipate and be ahead of the game before we need to make those decisions, because that is the important thing that we have to do.

9.10.7 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:

Is the Minister aware that the U.K. has already started, in September 2022, T levels in accounting, design, finance, maintenance, insulation, management and administration, and now in 2023, last year, agriculture and land management, animal care, all these things, all things that are highly relevant to skills sought in Jersey, and would he use his new position, with his Minister and the rest of the Council of Ministers, to get some pilot T level qualifications? I am delighted to hear that his enthusiasm is like the previous Minister's, it is almost exactly the same thing, because the last Minister was just as excited about T levels when I mentioned them. But we have to start rolling them out because they are the solution and will he commit to putting them on steroids and getting at least some courses up and running as fast as possible?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I thank the Deputy. You can also add a very important T level, which is in health and social care, which is very useful for the Island. I do not think we should commit in that way yet; we need to take advantage of the fact that we can see how they work. They have just started. We need to see whether they are successful, how successful they are, whether they fit our economy, whether they fit our provision, whether they fit our employers, whether they fit our young people. Because, if they do not, then we could be going down a pathway where we lose what we have now that works without replacing it. I would be supportive of trials when we come up with the information that that is possible and I think that we have a number of areas of our economy where these trials could work very well. Just one final thing on this, we need to be sure that those levels give access to further education beyond there as well, they are accepted by universities, not just in the U.K., but Europe-

wide and worldwide. That is a mistake that could be made if we are not careful, and that would be a very bad mistake for our young people going into the future.

9.10.8 Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Could the Minister outline what engagement he will have with economic partners to develop an alignment with the skills development and economic requirements of the Island?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

That is a very good question from the Deputy. One of the things I hope is happening in this Government is also an alignment with other Ministers. There is a Minister for Sustainable Economic Development and I think it is very important that we understand where the need is as much as anything on this Island, where the need is both in terms of our economy from employers and, as somebody who has dealt with health, would know that, for example, nursing and training our own in nursing, training healthcare professionals, training health assistants, for example, is one really good example of that. So engagement with those people who can provide the training, provide the opportunities, and have the need, I think is a very important part of solving the issue we have with some recruitment areas in this Island. If we train our own and we do it well to a high standard using everything that is available, we have a much better chance of retaining those staff because they have buy-in on the Island and every penny spent on that, and this is my bid in advance, I look across at the Chief Minister, where every penny spent on that is a huge return on that investment for this Island.

9.10.9 Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Does the Minister consider that this will be necessary to contribute to the wider development of the workforce plan for the Island and how does he intend to feed his work into the development of that plan?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Yes, absolutely. To stand here 5 days in, to tell you how precisely I am going to feed in that into the workforce plan would be slightly difficult for me. However, the key principle of making sure we know where the gaps are, what provision we have now, because there is provision now. There is provision across our education system, they are very successful. We have huge successes with our young people going forward. But what we need to do is fine tune that, use the best economy as it changes, and what we must remember as well, if we got to a point where it is 100 per cent correct and we have solved the problem, the world will constantly change, so we will need to constantly change our education system with it. What we do not want to do to it is throw change at educators. The worst thing you can do for teachers and educators is to have sudden change and uncontrolled change because they are fed up with it. They have seen it with curriculum for too many years, they have seen it with assessment for too many years, and they have seen it with the way in which they are meant to teach for too many years. So, yes, it needs to be a controlled, intelligent approach. It is integral to our workforce that we get education right for those people.

9.10.10 Deputy I. Gardiner:

I am delighted to hear answers from the Assistant Minister just to the clarity and my understanding and the Assembly's understanding going forward. *Further Education and Skills Actionable Agenda* has 37 actions, which are divided into 16-19 technical education, skills and education post-19, apprenticeship, higher technical and professional education, higher education, department structure and employee engagement. The question to the Assistant Minister, if he will be responsible for deliverable actions from the actionable agenda or this will be divided and, if it will be divided, how the officer would know with whom to work on it.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

That is exactly the question we have been addressing. Yes, that is a good question. The delivery of course in education establishment will be my remit because that is what education is about. In terms of which parts of the deliverable agenda are people responsible for, I would say this, I do not think myself or the Minister for Children would want to pass anything on to anyone else and avoid accountability. It may well be that we take on too much accountability for some areas. The fine tuning of that accountability is less important than the fine tuning of delivery of the outcomes from this actionable agenda. I will say again, I started off by answering a question that, to be quite frank, was spoken about 4 years ago. This report was produced over a year ago. We need to get on with starting to deliver some of these deliverables from these reports rather than worrying about just who is accountable and what officer is doing it.