

2024.05.21

Deputy H.M. Miles of St. Brelade of the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning regarding the International Baccalaureate programme delivered by Hautlieu School. (OQ.90/2024)

Will the Minister provide an update on the status and future of the International Baccalaureate programme delivered by Hautlieu School?

Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier Central (The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning):

I thank the Deputy for her question. In October 2023, after reviewing the suitability of the curriculum, Hautlieu School made a decision to discontinue the International Baccalaureate, the I.B., due to there being fewer students interested in the course. However, students who have enrolled in the I.B. diploma in September 2023 - current year 12s - and September 2022 - current year 13s - will complete their I.B. diploma, but there are no current plans to restart the I.B. programme at this time.

3.5.1 Deputy H. Miles:

I thank the Minister for his response. Does the Minister think that a potential reason for the lower take-up is the policy of some secondary schools to allow students to give up a modern foreign language at G.C.S.E. (General Certificate of Secondary Education) level?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

There are numerous reasons why the I.B. is not popular. One of them may well be linked to languages, but it also may be linked, for example, to what keeps giving so much to us, which is Brexit, because that has changed, for example, the cost of going to university in Europe. It used to cost 2,000 euros to go to one of the Netherlands universities. Post-Brexit, we are all foreign students now, and that has gone up to around 12,000 to 15,000 euros. There are numerous reasons. I would also say when we talk about languages and schools, we have to be very careful about what we can supply and looking at the curriculum itself, which is very, very full.

3.5.2 Deputy I. Gardiner:

Following the announcement of Hautlieu that they will not continue with I.B. back in October 2023, there were initial informal discussions with the secondary heads of other A-level colleges; it was initial informal discussions. Obviously, we did not have time to progress. Would the Minister consider to speak with the secondary heads and to find out if there is any way to save I.B. on the Island and to allow students to do I.B. if they wish on the Island?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I do thank the Deputy for that. Yes, the initial informal discussions could mean anything. A letter was not sent to heads at that time. A recent email has been sent to headteachers to ask their interest. Yes, I would encourage headteachers from across our post-16 provision to look together as to whether there is a way to provide the I.B. One of the numbers I have in my head ... I am not an expert in I.B. I do have a friend who is though, so he sends me lots of messages. But really you need between 50 and 75 students undertaking the I.B. diploma, which is the more academic, although a combination with the I.B. career progression may help. To get those numbers of students really would require, I believe, co-operation across our 6th-form providers.

3.5.3 Deputy I. Gardiner:

I am grateful for the Minister for his answer and it would be really helpful to also engage with our European communities who live on the Island, that we do have high numbers, and they are able to study at European universities, and because the I.B. would not be possible we are taking this choice from the young people to go to Europe. Would the Minister also engage with the European minorities on the Island and to see the views of the student and the parent?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

The I.B. is not the only route to European universities. A-levels are a very popular route as well and they are accepted by universities across the world. So not having the I.B. does not stop that route. But we get back to the main point, which is we need to be able to provide the I.B. in a sustainable way. Hautlieu School has a significant number of students, has their staff, the A-levels that are there. The only way this will happen is to work across our 6th-form provision. That is not happening as much as we would like it to at the moment. It does happen, and that is not a criticism of the schools, but that is a way forward with the I.B. The enrichment parts of the I.B., though, can be used across our curriculum, and they are very, very useful. But I do not think not having the I.B. stops access to European universities. As I mentioned before, I think the biggest problem has been Brexit for U.K. (United Kingdom) students. For European students, that is not as difficult.

3.5.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Minister perhaps agree that one way to look at the demise of the I.B. is that that is a symptom of a wider problem and that we have a fragmented 6th-form provision in Jersey, and that perhaps the only viable way of bringing back the I.B. were to have a 6th form college in Jersey where I.B. is the only syllabus that is provided post-16?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

That is a very interesting thought. One of the first things I did when entering the Assembly as a chair of the Children and Education Scrutiny Panel was produce a post-16 report that recommended a 6th-form college because of the nature of the type of provision. However, to have a 6th-form college that offers only I.B. would be a really significant step. We need to think that through very carefully. Personally I believe it is not just about I.B., it is about A-levels, it is about B.T.E.C. (Business and Technology Education Council). We have to be cognisant of what happened in the U.K. with T-levels, which are academic vocational qualifications, because if they take hold we will need to respond to them. The landscape in education and qualification changes constantly. What we need to do is be aware of it and adapt to it, but we also need to be proactive in getting those 6th-form providers to work together.

3.5.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Minister agree that fundamentally the benefit of the I.B. is that the A-level system, which is effectively a U.K. model applied in Jersey, does demand specialisation and very narrowing of the syllabus very early on compared to most countries, including European countries around the world? Would he take steps to look at whether there are mechanisms to bring back the I.B. in a manageable and sustainable form?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I do not think A-levels are just the U.K. here. A-levels are used worldwide. Yes, there is a need to make choices at A-level early on. It does depend what A-level you do. Some teachers of A-levels would say they are certainly not narrow, they are very broad. The balance between academic and vocational and other education is always going to be an issue that we have to address. Yes, I would like to take steps to ensure that the I.B. is possible, but partly we have to have young people wanting to choose that route for their education. That needs to be proved as the most valuable route for them. The only way we are going to be able to do that is to get our 6th forms to work together, and we are working on that and I would encourage that. That is one of the things I will take forward in the short time we have left in this Assembly.

3.5.6 Deputy J. Renouf:

I wonder if the Minister is disappointed about the loss of the I.B., particularly in the context of a sort of trend towards homogenisation in higher education offer, and that Jersey really could see itself, if it wanted, as a place that offered variety rather than homogeneity? I appreciate that that might be a longer-term project, but I am just interested in his philosophical approach, if you like.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I am very happy to talk about philosophical approach. I believe this is all due to what I would refer to as the G.E.R.M., the Global Educational Reform Movement, that has commoditised our education. By commoditising, it just means that you can put things in tables, and you can make it something to buy and sell, like a bag of crisps. We want to move away from that, and true education does include revision of things such as the I.B., B.T.E.C.s, H.N.D.s (high national diplomas), those wonderful qualifications that serve our communities, and indeed A-levels. A-levels, too, are a great qualification, a proven qualification, but what we need to do is have the right qualification available at the right time, and that will mean that we perhaps, in the long term, and perhaps it is not for this Assembly but for the future, have to break down some of the barriers that exist in our education system in terms of the provision that we have.

3.5.7 Deputy J. Renouf:

I might almost feel a strategy coming on, but perhaps that will have to wait until the next Assembly. Could I urge the Minister to stick to those principles and ask him to continue to argue for those cases and argue for that approach in the further education of our students?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I would actually say, I think what we have had in the past are too many strategies and not enough principle in our education system. Educationalists around the world, particularly in the U.K. actually, have suffered from strategy after strategy telling them how they should deliver, what they should deliver, rather than respecting the profession and allowing to deliver the right thing at the right time for the right people for the right reasons. So I would want to do that, thus I have added the lifelong learning part to the Education Ministry because we have to take it not just in post-16 but throughout the lifetime of people on this Island as we change course sometimes, as all of us have done in our careers.

3.5.8 Deputy H. Miles:

I thank the Minister for his very comprehensive answer to the questions. There are Members in this Assembly that have actually studied the I.B. diploma and, as a parent, both of my sons studied the diploma very, very successfully. Really, my final question is: what reassurance can the Minister give to parents who are really concerned about the lack of educational choice at 6th form for those students who are looking to progress to higher education?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

That is a very, very good point to make. There are 2 things here. First of all, I am not going to stand and say that there is not a range of provision in post-16. The work that is done, all of our post-16 providers, is of an excellent quality and teachers work incredibly hard to deliver. But what we do need, is we need to break down some of the barriers that we have that have been set up over many, many years because of the structure of our post-16 education and indeed before that. If we want to work that way together, we will need a conversation of this Island to talk about whether we want to change some of the things that have been deeply embedded on this Island. The way I see it, is that that will become as a reaction to the needs of this Island for its education into the future. At some point, what we do now will simply not fit, and we will have to change. We do that in one of 2 ways.

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We do it reactively or we do it proactively. I assure the Deputy and parents, we want to try and do that proactively and provide everything that we possibly can and every choice for the young people on this Island.