



Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny

Panel

Quarterly Hearing

Witness: The Minister for Education

Friday, 2nd October 2020

Panel:

Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier (Chair)

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour (Vice-Chair)

Deputy T. Pointon of St. John:

Witnesses:

Senator T.A. Vallois, The Minister for Education

Deputy J.M. Maçon of St. Saviour, Assistant Minister for Education

Mr. S. O'Regan, Group Director, Education

Ms S. Famili, Director, Skills and Lifelong Learning

Mr. K. Posner. Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S. (Children, Young People, Education and Skills)

[12:46]

Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier (Chair):

Good afternoon, everybody. Welcome to the quarterly hearing of the Minister for Education. We will do some brief introductions. I am Deputy Rob Ward and I chair the Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour (Vice-Chair):

Deputy Louise Doublet, vice-chair of the panel.

Deputy T. Pointon of St. John:

Deputy of St John, Trevor Pointon. I am a member of the panel.

The Minister for Education:

Senator Tracey Vallois, Minister for Education.

Group Director, Education:

Sean O'Regan, group director of Education.

Director, Skills and Lifelong Learning:

Saboohi Famili, director for Skills and Lifelong Learning.

Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S.:

Hello, I am Keith Posner. I am the head of office at C.Y.P.E.S.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Okay, well get started. We have an hour and a half, we have plenty to talk about. Minister, to start with, we will start with the return to schools in September. With schools having opened full-time to all students in September have any key concerns developed since that reopening?

The Minister for Education:

Thank you, Chair, for the questions and I am grateful to be here today with regards to this. It is extremely important to note that I have not been made aware of any particular key concerns. What we do do though is make sure that our detailed health guidance is properly developed and communicated to all the schools and colleges and it is also posted up on the gov.je website. The guidance is regularly reviewed and updated with colleagues at S.P.P.P. (Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance) and S.T.A.C. (Scientific Technical Advisory Council) as and when we receive questions or queries about schools' operational requirements.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

What are the additional or new processes being followed with regards schools opening full-time? Will there be a difference between primary and secondary as well, I would imagine?

The Minister for Education:

We have got a risk management framework that has been developed, so all schools have site specific safety plans and their risk assessments. So these have been reviewed. All schools are certificated as a safe place of work. We have a cleaning strategy that has been developed for all schools and the department work places. We have a delivery and implementation team formed to support and hold schools to account also. We provide a daily communication sent to all key

stakeholders, predominantly the head teachers, and the risk management framework is developed in co-ordination relatively with the head teachers and the unions as well.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

What is the department doing to get the voice of the children, which is something we have talked about a lot as a Government, in respect of returning to school, to find out how they are feeling?

The Minister for Education:

Part of the return to school, as you will know, we started this process back in June, albeit it was fairly sporadic, depending on whether you were primary or secondary schools. Of course, we all know that teachers know their children best in the schools. We have some children who are predominantly more vulnerable than others so of course we have got a fantastic team in our early intervention and inclusion team. We also have our psychology team as well who support the schools. So what we did put in place was a form of support process to return back to school, which we identified through what we call a recovery curriculum. So it was helping them to manage 5 losses associated with the extended period away from school, things like routine, structure, friendship, opportunity and freedom to reconnect with their work. Recognising and understanding some of the concerns that not just the pupils had themselves but of course the parents have as well. So we kept that communication open, particularly with the schools. The department supported them and we listened in terms of their concerns and tried to put in place the necessary support framework for them.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

The teaching staff as well, they are obviously facing additional pressures and concerns because of the change in routine, any additional health issues that they are having to face. What additional pressures do you see them having to face under the current circumstances?

The Minister for Education:

Mostly it is, particularly in the secondary schools, where the requirements for the distancing and the requirements around cleaning and all the extra requirements that we have on top because of the COVID risk management framework we have got in place. But of course that is to keep everybody safe. There is also the additional work in terms of trying to support students who may have fallen behind during lockdown. So that will probably be adding pressure in certain areas, particularly those schools where children are probably slightly more disadvantaged backgrounds. That is where I see probably most likely the pressures coming from. I do not know whether Sean wants to add on to that because he may have heard more recently straight from the unions and the head teachers himself.

Group Director, Education:

Yes, as you note, one of the strengths of our response to this ever-changing pandemic in the school setting is having really good working relationships with the unions and the professional associations, not just of teachers but all grades of school staff. We meet weekly with Keith, who is on the meeting, and myself. Clearly these are unusual times. Staggered starts in the morning and after school. I think the general uncertainty that, relating to your previous question, Deputy Ward, about children and students, attendance has been really high. The schools have welcomed children back and children have looked to their teachers to provide that stability. But of course the uncertainty of the changing situation is a challenge for our teachers. But, as I say, by keeping strong, open communication with their unions and representatives we have been managing issues as they have arisen.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I wanted to say, while we have got a public hearing, I was of course at one of the primary ... I used to do the fantastic reading programme that they do, I go and do some readings; best part of my week actually. It was made clear to me that the school had closed for effectively one day since the pandemic started because their staff were in, they were working, they were with the most vulnerable children. A phenomenal amount of work that has gone on in that primary school was recognised and it must have put pressure on teaching staff who all volunteered to be going in, et cetera, in the holidays. I just wonder what you are doing to just ensure that those staff as they come into this really long term now, I remember well this term is the hardest - and I think in previous guises we have talked about this, Sean - what you are doing to make sure that they do not burn out before the end and how you are supporting them given the different circumstance they are in.

Group Director, Education:

If I could pick that up directly. I share with you this huge respect and admiration for the whole workforce. As you say, we did stay open to the children of critical workers, vulnerable children, staff volunteered and kept open in the Easter holidays and May half-term. You are reading volunteers, I understand, with E.C.O.F. (Every Child our Future) visits to Janvrin School in the summer holidays. E.C.O.F. volunteers came in for the 3 weeks of the summer work there and worked at Rouge Bouillon, d'Auvergne and other fine primary schools. We do have a well-being programme around teachers as well. We found a supply who gave an online trainee support vehicle organised through our inclusion team that the Minister has referenced and the psychology and well-being experts, that small but very valuable team we have in the department. So of course we are monitoring the well-being of staff. As you say, there is a run-up and one of the initiatives we are taking, of course, with our colleagues in the Health Department is making sure that the seasonal flu vaccine is given to all of our teachers and workforce, just to add that little bit of resilience. It is a separate thing to COVID but it appears the medical evidence is that if you protect yourself from the normal seasonal flu bugs

that go around that can help with your wider well-being. So we are keeping a very strong eye on that.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

The health guidance has been communicated to schools, as was mentioned. Ultimately it is the heads that decide on the school processes to follow to comply with the health guidance. I am right in thinking that. So therefore how are you supporting heads to risk assess and implement those guidance measures so that they are not overly restrictive on teachers or so the teachers have got buy-in to the processes because they are being asked to use them, et cetera.

Group Director, Education:

Again, Minister, if I might take that. You will be aware that we have a strong, but very small, facilities governance management team, they number 3 in total, including the leader, Nick. So we stood up other colleagues in other teams and trained them in that risk management framework, and they went out and visited every single school. That is a dynamic situation. This week the team have been out in schools looking at supporting head teachers, exactly as you suggest. For example, I mentioned earlier the staggered starts. There are traffic flow systems in schools and head teachers have done their best to interpret where we have had concerns from the public or parents or the heads themselves saying: "Can you come and check this with us?" We send people out and stand in the lanes with them and assess and review to further improve their implementation of the health guidance.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

How are you checking the teaching staff and the staff in schools are okay, are getting through the return, are you talking to them or are you relying on going via head teachers? Just as a brief answer to that.

Group Director, Education:

We do not just do it through head teachers, although they are an important source. We do get people contacting the department senior adviser in schools but I think it is the weekly union meetings; the one practical example, teachers who take their own food into the staffrooms, staffrooms have been socially distanced according to the guidance. We had advice that suggested they could not use microwaves, for example, to reheat their own food. We got that feedback. We instantly looked at amending the regulations, enhanced cleaning to make sure those practical devices, kettles and the like in staffrooms, and we fixed it so that people could have warm food rather than cold food over lunchbreaks. So it is those mechanisms through the weekly union meeting.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

That makes sense. Just a couple of practical things. We have had talk about the masks on school buses and so on, and I think we got a picture of it is one of the measures to help stop infection spreading. I wanted to ask you about exemptions in that regard. So there will be young people who for all sorts of reasons may really struggle to wear a mask. What are you doing to ensure that they are not being picked on about it? We know what young people and children can be like at times. They may just be joking but they can be hurtful without realising at times. Is there an awareness, a conscious effort, to get young people to understand others might have a problem with that?

[13:00]

Group Director, Education:

I think it is a well-observed point and I will start but perhaps my colleague, Keith, who has led the liaison with Public Health and LibertyBus around the bus system. The Minister herself said it already, our schools and teachers know their students best so the exemption piece is done by the schools. So if a child has an anxiety, a special educational need, a respiratory problem, some young people with autism spectrum conditions will find it upsetting to wear a mask. So those exemptions are made clear. The bus drivers have been really proactive under the LibertyBus management in raising any concerns with the schools that can be nipped in the bud. We have heard stories of adults being harsh to other adults on buses or trains in the U.K. (United Kingdom) or even on aeroplanes in and out of Jersey. The evidence so far is the children have been much more supportive of one another but it is the bus driver liaising with the school who gets straight in with the families. Keith, I do not know if you want to add anything else on our dealings with our colleagues in the bus service?

Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S.:

No, I do not have a huge amount more to add apart from we have had an update from LibertyBus this week, through our colleagues in Public Health, and the move towards wearing of masks has been a positive one. As we hoped and expected really, people started adhering to the new guidelines that have been put forward and we have not heard of any disruption of any kind. As Sean said, we do have mechanisms in place to hear about them and if we do we will obviously support schools as best we can because we can understand it is a tricky time, particularly for young people and for schools, but we are really pleased with how this has been taken on.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

There are 2 questions on this: there has been a long period, 5 months, where there has not been any normal schooling. I will not say out of the school system because I know there has been a real attempt for home learning and online learning. But how much has attainment been affected and do you think that we are going to have to rethink what that attainment looks like over the next couple of

years? Because it simply will not be comparable to what was there before. I do not just mean how many levels or grades. I mean in terms of how we are identifying the gaps and will they stay with us and will they genuinely be caught up? Five months of difference has got to have an impact, has it not?

The Minister for Education:

I agree, there will be of course, as you would expect, some concerns around attainment levels. When I refer to attainment levels I just do not mean grades. I mean their progression as students. The thing is that teachers assess and address gaps every single year in terms of attainment anyway. So this will no doubt be a focus and continues to be a focus. I know, for example, one particular school may be offering extra classes, extra time, whether that is after school or during lunch periods depending on what is suitable for the individual students. It is a regular thing for teachers to do, to look at where the attainment is at certain points in the year. Of course they will put in place relative targeted interventions where they think it is necessary, following that gap analysis, that they would have identified through the assessment of the attainment.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Deputy Doublet, did you have a question? I lost the chat for a moment then so apologies for that.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I just wanted to follow-up on what you were asking about children catching up. Where in the U.K. perhaps some subject areas had been trimmed or things have been cut - I think there is mention of cutting the study of poetry in English literature and things like that - Minister, I just wanted to know what you will do to ensure that while teachers are helping children to catch up with the key areas of perhaps English and maths, that the creative subjects are not neglected while children are being caught up with the key subjects.

The Minister for Education:

Absolutely. I do not want to see the creative subjects being removed in any shape or form. We have to recognise of course that English and maths is extremely important for these students, whether that is in primary or secondary school, for their future prospects in terms of the workplace. Of course that is always going to be a key important theme for us. But saying that, music helps develop those areas in English, things like the poetry, bits and pieces that you mentioned, have an impact on other subjects as well. So we will continue to monitor, as we always do, and we will work with the senior advisers should we identify any issues. But we certainly do not want to see any of the creative subjects be removed. I do not know whether Sean has got any comments on whether there have been any concerns raised, but there has not directly with me around this area. But I

would hate to see that removed in the situation that we are in, especially around well-being for children.

Group Director, Education:

I would make 2 points. We mentioned in previous discussions with the Scrutiny Panel that the main drive in returning to school was not a focus on the taught curriculum or certain subjects, whether they are the core or more broadly, but on the well-being of children because a happy learner is a better learner. You are not going to have a happy learner with a really narrow curriculum just in maths, English, then English, then maths and round. So the breadth of the curriculum is really important. In terms of your broad question about making up learning loss. What we want to do is give extra not less so we are working on models, as we trialled in certain schools in the summer holidays, doing some additional small group work, some additional one-to-one tutoring models in addition to the main working day, to better use information technology and devices to enhance home learning outside of the normal taught hours. We are developing those models at pace because, as you rightly say, we will not know the depth and breadth of the learning lag for some time. What we want to be doing is addressing it as best we can now but I do think this needs to be for the longer term, not just an instant fix.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Just as an aside, this is not on the question paper, do you think this will have a longer-term effect in the nature of learning, i.e. having perhaps more home learning via the internet or having more facility to do stuff online even within schools? Because that sort of hybrid system of education for some has worked very well, I think, because they have had that control over their own learning and become a little more self-reliant even, become more self-directed learners, which has been a holy grail of education for years. Do you think this could have a positive impact in some ways? Just a brief answer because I am getting a little philosophical.

The Minister for Education:

I think we are already seeing some of that, Chair, in terms of Highlands College at the moment, they are doing a type of hybrid system for the students, which seems to be working fairly well. But there is no reason why we cannot take some of the things that have been positive, that we have learnt throughout COVID. You are aware that we have done a big education conversation, we have the independent school funding review, we are looking at our education reform programme; some of these things we can implement around those things and ensure that we have got a positive learning experience for all students. We saw from the survey that we did with the children, that some of them were coming back and saying how much they preferred working in a home learning environment. So we have got to take those comments on board.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I just wanted to follow on from something that Sean was saying about providing extra and I just wanted to know what that will look like. Would it be extra lessons after school or in the school holidays? How will this be funded, the extra that is being provided?

Group Director, Education:

As I mentioned, we have been working on a bid as part of the wider Government of Jersey COVID-19 recovery for the education elements of that. So we are working up models that are not yet finalised because obviously we are still in a position of securing the funding with colleagues in Treasury as well as working models up with the profession and the unions. But you are quite right, we did pilot half days voluntary, but many families took it up for year 1 and 2 children at Janvrin School in the summer to see what summer learning was like. d'Auvergne School was doing their own project, Rouge Bouillon. So it is broadly in those areas of offering extra out-of-hours provision, which could be after school, one to one or small group additional work that we would obviously need to fund separately because we are not piling additional duties on the teaching workforce. Also the better use of technologies. As Deputy Ward has said, a child has always been doing homework of some form or another, depending on their age and stage. But we found the remote learning has been one of the advantages of that blended learning approach. We have all got better at using I.T. (information technology) for teaching and learning. So we are working up those models and obviously as soon as we get to some finality we will share that with Scrutiny more broadly.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Just briefly, you mentioned workloads and there has been a previous commitment from the Minister to reduce workload. Is that commitment still in place and what are our workloads like at the moment and how will they be impacted by this extra provision?

Group Director, Education:

For example, we wanted teachers who knew the children and know the children really well to do this programme. It was all voluntary. I went in myself to that particular school piloting it for us and there were some teachers who wanted to work 2 whole weeks out of the 3, some people just wanted to do a day or 2. It was for them. We were able to look at volunteers. We also were able to use some supply teachers who, as you know, they were impacted by the closing of school. So it is looking at expanding the workforce, not getting a short-term gain with a long-term loss of exhausted teachers; that would be short-sighted and I think the Scrutiny Panel would agree with that.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

There are a couple of things. I am pleased to hear you talking about I.T. for learning as opposed to just I.T. as a process. I think that is something that is really important to point out, is the different

process using I.T. for education. The thing I want to ask: we have talked before both in this panel and in the Minister for Children and Housing, regards the well-being concerns that might be highlighted on students returning and there may be ... because schools play such an important role in that well-being issues, that often students go and talk to their teachers, they talk to their form tutor, for example. Now that students have come back, have you in the first 4 or 5 weeks of them being back seen an increase in referrals and children needing help that was perhaps expected after the COVID situation and not being at school? Has that materialised, I suppose the phrase is?

The Minister for Education:

I have not been made aware of an increase. We were already aware that there was support. Psychology and our well-being services have been supporting over 350 children with anxiety and mental ill health at home during the lockdown. So they were doing that through regular telephone check-in conversations with a nominated officer. For many children that consisted of a daily call but others with low levels of anxiety, they may have had a 3-weekly check dependent on the need. But in terms of the increase since being back, I have not been made aware of that, so I would ask Sean to comment on that.

Group Director, Education:

I would comment in a couple of parts. Obviously we really benefited by getting primary children back in early June and a phasing return of secondary children. Obviously schools in England, for example, sometimes had nobody back so they saw a big spike in September. So welfare concerns were, we felt, under-reported during the broader lockdown until we started opening up schools but we saw that pick-up in June. But it meant that we could put in welfare support of the right time initiative so we can get support to individual students and families right through. We did a big piece of work of that throughout the summer. This September felt not like the big return because we had had that in a phased way in secondary and more fully in primary in June. It meant we could put good things in place. Not just the school level I mentioned, within pooled partners like Beaudet(?) running summer schools to support groups of children and young people. I do not have the mass referrals and the sharp end to hand, and maybe that was covered in your scrutiny with the Minister for Children and Housing earlier, but we softened the curve because we got children back in June.

[13:15]

At that point we did see, as you say, teachers in schools play such an important part. By meeting children face to face each day we had a much clearer picture of need.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I am going to pass on to Deputy Doublet to talk about some of the early years questions to begin with.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Just for transparency, I am a member of the Early Years Policy Development Board, while we have not been meeting during the pandemic but just for transparency I will state my membership of that board. I want to ask about private nurseries please. Minister, how many private nurseries are currently operating in the Island?

The Minister for Education:

I do not have the exact number in front of me. Maybe Keith or Sean may have that number. I do not have the exact number, I can get that to you though if that is helpful.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Perhaps more importantly then, what I wanted to know was how many of the nurseries or what proportion of those private nurseries remained open during the stay-at-home measures?

The Minister for Education:

In terms of the numbers, I do not have those numbers in front of me, but we had a number of them because we were working directly with Jersey Early Years Association throughout, regular conversations with them, because we needed to support them in terms of risk management, P.P.E. (personal protective equipment), the requirements around looking after any particularly vulnerable children as well. We were extremely grateful for them providing the support, which we would not have been able to, especially for those children under 3 years old because we do not have that provision in education. So I think we worked extremely well with the private sector during COVID, regular contact, regular support. So in terms of from that point of view, we had 12 nurseries, as I understand it, roughly, remaining open to take the critical workers and vulnerable children. Of course they are all different sizes.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I think the private nurseries that did remain open will be really grateful for that public acknowledgement that you have just made of how important they are. Would you agree with me that private nurseries are, in fact, essential infrastructure and that has been made very clear by the fact that they were able to support essential workers by looking after their children so that the workers could go out and perform these essential services?

The Minister for Education:

There is absolutely no doubt that our private nurseries are absolutely essential to the working of the Island. Even though there was some form of work from home for some people being able to work from home and having your children at home is not exactly the easiest thing to do. Also it is not fair on the children either. So having that ability to have these private nurseries open during lockdown was extremely helpful and essential, and I think especially for parents and families own well-being as well around being able to work during an extremely tense and uncertain time.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I think we are all aware that there was at least one nursery that did go out of business because of the impact of the pandemic. Given your support for the nurseries, Minister, and the essential nature that you agree that they are an essential service, what kind of increased support can you offer private nurseries going forward to ensure that that essential infrastructure and that care system remains in place?

The Minister for Education:

I do recognise that there was one nursery by name but it was 2 settings that closed down. Fortunately we have had one new one set up, Little Squirrels, which is good because we recognise the lack of provision in terms of nursery out the west side of the Island. There was extreme concern from a lot of parents and I received many emails around that time. In terms of going forward, you are aware because you are sitting on the Early Years Policy Development Board, but a lot of our work unfortunately was stalled because COVID became the focus and the priority. A lot of officers got moved off to focus on that, understandably. In terms of the recommendations of the Early Years Policy Development Board, which is a focus around not just what we call the nursery education funding, the 3 to 4, we are looking at 0 to 5 years or should I say pregnancy as well. The work on that has been delayed unfortunately. We have been looking at bringing a detailed report to be shared with the Council of Ministers for debate and discussion by end of October, beginning of November. The current focus has been trying to get the independent school funding review resolved and through the Council of Ministers alongside the Government Plan, which has been a quite hefty piece of work as well. We hope there will be funding, should the States agree to the Government Plan that is due to be lodged on 12th October, for further support in terms of nurseries but we will have to have those direct conversations, especially with the private nurseries as well, once we have managed to take the report from the Early Years Policy Development Board to the Council of Ministers for that discussion. This will be not just one hit. I think we need to look at this in the same way that we are looking at education overall. There is a short, there is a medium, there is a longer-term impact because, like education, the nursery, the care offering that we have for our younger children, is equally and vitally important.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Thank you, Minister. You mentioned that you had met with J.E.Y.A. (Jersey Early Years Association), which, for those watching, is the group that represents the private nurseries, have you also met with other groups such as the Jersey Child Care Trust or the Best Start Partnership? Have you met with those groups or any other groups concerning early years and are there any particular concerns that have been raised to do with early years and the private sector in early years? Not just the private sector, just early years generally.

The Minister for Education:

In terms of meeting directly with those groups I have not yet, no. I know that the Best Partnership, where Cathy Hamer is part of that partnership, she does sit with us on the Early Years Policy Development Board. But what will happen is in terms of the early years policy, the Best Partnership and the Children's Strategic Partnership will be the forum for establishing a detailed delivery plan and establishing working groups to deliver the policy and ambitions and the principles of the policy development board in full collaboration across government departments, agencies and sectors because we have to be aware this is not just education. That is why we have the Minister for Children and Housing on the Early Years Policy Development Board. Helpfully my Assistant Minister, Deputy Maçon, sits between Health, Social Security and Education. So the accountability side for achieving the positive outcomes for the children in the early years will be achieved through aligning early years policy development with wider Education Department recommendations as well. You will be aware, and I have mentioned it already, the big education conversation, the independent school funding review, and ultimately what we hope to achieve next year will be a new piece of legislation in terms of education. But we will be working and being supported by the Right Help, Right Time approach as well because of course education now comes under a wider remit in terms of Children, Education, Young People and Skills.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Just to go back to the question: as you see it, what are the main issues or problems that have arisen in early years recently, if any?

The Minister for Education:

In terms of concerns or issues, the one concern or the issue that is raised regularly around nurseries, in particular, is of course the amount that we provide for the Nursery Education Fund hour rate. So that is one of the big concerns. Also around the skills offering, the quality of the qualifications and the support that we can provide in terms of what we call C.P.D. (continuing professional development), so that regular training offering. But our fantastic team at Skills Jersey, Stuart Penn, you have probably heard, has worked with Jersey Early Years Association to see what we can do around supporting areas such as C.P.D. Our own early years team, Nicola and that team, do a fantastic job working directly with these private nurseries. Of course we take the advice of Cathy

Hamer as well, a regular person who advises us of any particular issues. But the Early Years Policy Development Board identified some of the issues that I have just mentioned, particularly around the funding and the quality of the qualification or how we will move forward with regards to that.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can I ask a quick question, sorry? You mentioned about funding, perhaps it might be an opportune moment to ask about the childcare subsidy and whether the Minister thinks it should be subsidised beyond 20 hours and perhaps earlier on as well. Within the Government Plan the early years budget was based on 30 hours per week.

The Minister for Education:

Was that a direct question to me or were you asking Louise to ...?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I was asking you actually. I can guess Louise's answer.

The Minister for Education:

When you scrutinised me on the Government Plan last year what happened was we had to put in a case but the problem was the Early Years Policy Development Board was not at a point of providing the policy options and the ambitions that we were expecting to achieve. There was a lot of data and a lot of work going on behind the scenes to inform how we were going to take the early years policy forward. So the amount that we requested was based on primarily an option that could be taken by the Early Years Policy Development Board but of course we recognise that Jersey Child Care Trust, as an example, provides a really good offering for special educational needs children from the age of 2, in terms of the offering that they get to support them in mainstream education going forward. So there may be room to manoeuvre around that area to support the Jersey Child Care Trust more fully with that offering, preparing our more vulnerable children for school or for nursery when they get into the nursery phase, that age 3 to 4. There were a variety of how options in terms of one of the biggest concerns around the amount, the hourly rate that we provide through the Nursery Education Fund. Like I have said to Deputy Doublet is unfortunately COVID delayed, like it has done on many of our streams of work, however we will hopefully have that report to the Council of Ministers where we can then drive that forward. It might be a case, depending on where we are with that, we will either go forward with an increased hourly rate, there may be increased hours, but until we have had that discussion around the Council of Ministers I cannot confirm absolutely what that will look like.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Sorry to interrupt you, Louise. I just thought it was an opportune moment, that was all.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

That has brought my questions to an actual conclusion and the remainder of the early years questions, if you could address those, Chair, please.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I think we have covered most of them. The one concern we have is that there is no reference been made in work regarding early years in the 6-month progress review report from the Government. We have looked through that on the Government Plan and there was no reference at all to the work. It always concerns us and myself when things simply are not referenced, that they may have been forgotten about. Will we see anything coming through in this Government Plan that will address that?

The Minister for Education:

So the Government Plan that was agreed last year, you will not see it as ... when you see the new Government Plan what you will see in terms of funding, they are talking about growth funding for 2021, the 2020 Government Plan already put in place funding bids, a growth bid for the early years requirement. Now apologies for not mentioning it in the 6-monthly report but one of our main officers was taken away from the Early Years Policy Development Board to focus on the COVID side of things, so it is more than likely just an oversight. We are hoping, like I said, that report will go to the Council of Ministers end of October, beginning of November.

[13:30]

The funding that was bid for last year will remain in place as long as the States Assembly agree that position, come December.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

There was just a question regards the staggered hours for nursery children, which could reduce the 20 hours they have because it can take ... I believe staggered drop-off time, so I get my numbers right here, can reduce 10 to 15 minutes per day, which would take off the 20 hours. Is that a concern there? It is a slightly technical issue and I realise we have to be flexible but I just wondered whether you are aware of that and whether that is the case or is it just a consequence of what is happening at the moment?

The Minister for Education:

It is a consequence of what is happening at the moment. I believe somebody has raised this directly with me and I raised it with the early years team. I am not sure whether Sean would like to express any concerns particularly he has around that area.

Group Director, Education:

Thank you, Minister, you are quite right. It was raised and we have been in regular dialogue, weekly dialogue in fact, with J.E.Y.A. that Deputy Doublet mentioned, and indeed myself and the director general met in March. The last face-to-face meeting we had before the lockdown was with J.E.Y.A. and much more recently. The main driver was to get children back and the entitlement has not been compromised. If somebody has a later drop-off they will be the later pick-up children, so we are working with settings to make sure that the full entitlement is given and there have to be adaptations to open at all because of the risk assessment work around keeping children and their staff safe. We have got no strong evidence at all of a major impairment to anyone's entitlement because that 20 hours is their right.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

You are saying that some are not losing time?

Group Director, Education:

That is my understanding. As the Minister said, we immediately reverted to the Childcare and Early Years Service who are working directly to help manage these arrangements. Just because you spread out the drop-off to the cohort of young children by the different age groups coming into the different rooms in a private or voluntary sector nursery you can still make that child, who is the one dropped off 15 minutes late, be picked up 15 minutes later. So in the staggering you do your best to make sure there is a fair allocation of the time.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I would ask you to check that because we have heard some information that some children, and it may well be by consequence of change, are losing out on some of their time, and 20 hours is not a huge amount anyway so any loss of time is proportionately important. If I could ask you to check that.

Group Director, Education:

Certainly.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I think that is all of the questions in that area so can we move on to Deputy Pointon who has been sat there quietly, which is unlike him, to ask some questions on the B.T.E.C. (Business and Technology Education Council) students?

The Deputy of St. John:

As you know, Chair, this is not my specialist area so we leave it to others who know more about it. But I am going to ask questions about the B.T.E.C. students and the B.T.E.C. experience. The panel was made aware that B.T.E.C. students had experienced issues in relation to receiving their exam results and relevant information despite the results having been released. This caused distress to students and the parents involved. What was the cause for the delay in getting the results information to students?

The Minister for Education:

Absolutely it was not a perfect situation by any means but the U.K. Government, Ofqual and each of the colleges, so around 30 awarding organisations, constantly issued consultations, lengthy guidance documents, new requirements and policies. These were inconsistent and continuously changing. The exams, registry and M.I.S. (management information system) teams who work all year round responded to all these challenges and changes that were happening at the time. Unfortunately I do not have authority to regulate over such things as the Ofqual and the awarding organisations so we were in a position of having to follow it up and meet the challenges and the changes as often as it was happening. I am not sure whether Saboohi can expand on this particular area. I am not sure whether Deputy Maçon has managed to make it into the hearing.

The Deputy of St. John:

He is with us, yes.

Director, Skills and Lifelong Learning:

I am happy to add to the points that you made very well. My apologies for the dark glasses. I do suffer from migraine and hopefully you will forgive me. Deputy Pointon, the issue has been the changes that were made to G.C.S.E. (General Certificate of Secondary Education) results, which was then followed through by other institutions and awarding bodies that would issue a similar or equivalent qualification at B.T.E.C. level 2. The reason for the delay was that although the responses and the results were shared we were told not to distribute those, at the very last minute, because at the very last minute G.C.S.E. results were changed and therefore B.T.E.C. wanted to adjust their grading so there was comparative analysis possible between level 2 and 3s and what would have been G.C.S.E.s and A levels. As the Minister said, we followed more than 30, 40 awarding bodies that Highlands College offers courses on and we have been able to, in the end, provide students with their results. Specifically those who have progression going from one course

to another, we made sure that they were not delayed in their progression and in their enrolment for any new provision. Hopefully that will provide assurance to you that we have made the very best that we could from a very unfortunate situation, due to the lack of decision-making by the Government in the U.K., which is the main awarding powers and bodies that we have students studying on.

The Deputy of St. John:

How long did they have to wait for their results?

Director, Skills and Lifelong Learning:

They were quite rapidly, about one week we had the results. It is similar to what happened with G.C.S.E. results and I do not know, Sean, if you want to come in with any inputs in that.

Group Director, Education:

Thank you and, Deputy Pointon, you raise a concern we all had. I vividly remember Wednesday, 19th August, the day before G.C.S.E. results and other level 2, of which these B.T.E.C.s were a part, because I was in direct contact in a few of our secondary schools but with head teachers and leadership teams. After the announcement about 4.30 that afternoon, leaders across our secondary schools went back into school to redo results, as my colleague, Saboohi has said. But I would reemphasise that point. Where a young person who got their results on the 20th, G.C.S.E.s and B.T.E.C.s, needed to know a sense of their results to get on their course at Highlands or to join the 6th form at Hautlieu, we did not stop any of them making that progression. It is true that they had to wait a week for their final results but heads were in that evening and from 6.00 the next morning physically opening envelopes, writing provisional figures, even resorting to Tipex and pens to give the young person that envelope from 8.00 a.m., 9.00 a.m. when young people were going in to celebrate getting their results for all their hard work and then going straight up to Highlands or Hautlieu, for example, for our level 16s. While we had no control, as the Minister rightly said, over the issuance of the results, we made sure it did not impair a young person both being able to celebrate on the day, get a strong sense of their B.T.E.C. result, to be confirmed a week later, but most importantly use it for their next steps.

The Deputy of St. John:

This was a particularly anxious time for students and their parents, or anxiety-making time. Many of them tried to contact Highlands to find out what was happening both by telephone and by emailing but unfortunately they did not get replies to their efforts to try and contact the college. Why was this the case?

Director, Skills and Lifelong Learning:

If I may offer, Minister, if you want me to take this to shed light on some of the challenges that we had with getting in touch with our students. Highlands College does not have the same system that we have within schools to be able to email parents and students directly. So you can imagine the sheer volume of the calls and requests for information that was received had meant that because we did not have a robust answer there and then, and we were not sure what the circumstances were, we have directed people into the college website with the information being updated there and providing the information for students and young people so they know what is happening with their grades. As Sean said, the most important part of that was for them to not remain anxious, thinking that because they do not have their grades that in any way is going to impact their progression from one course to another. You will be pleased to hear that we are looking at the management information system at Highlands College and that is under review, hopefully we would be able to address that access to data and information, which would be underpinning our communication strategy with parents and students, would enable us not to have this issue in future. I can only offer my apologies to students and parents, carers, who may have contacted Highlands College and were unable to get through. Hopefully we would be able to provide responses to them in the future much more promptly.

The Deputy of St. John:

Is there a timeline for the implementation of that information management facility?

Director, Skills and Lifelong Learning:

The procurement has started and we hope to be able to have the system implemented throughout the second academic year. We will be running a tool management information system at Highlands to make sure that while introducing a new system we do not lose some of the essential records that need to be made that are kept across both systems. Hopefully from the next academic year it would be able to start under a single platform and single M.I.S. system. But as I said, the procurement has started and the procurement would have started before COVID but due to COVID we had to delay that process. But this is happening now and we would be able to implement it as soon as possible.

The Deputy of St. John:

Thank you for that answer. Just finally, have you in place sufficient assistance for students who need or needed to make student finance applications because I think there is a significant concern about that particular aspect of applying for university placements in the U.K.?

Director, Skills and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, under student finance, as you are aware we have a grant system and the administration of it would start within March time of the year, before the students are going to the classroom. That coincided with COVID lockdown and we have found ourselves with a very positive means of having

25 per cent more students applying to go to university and we were in a situation where we were unable to access the system because the system was not able to work remotely from our staff home places. Due to staff underlying health and individual circumstances we were unable to have more than one person in the office at a time. That however meant that we created the rota system starting from 6.30 in the morning and finishing 6.30 in the evening, where we had round-the-clock support and administration trying to get to where we needed to be in terms of our students' applications being processed. With having said that, we found ourselves to receive further applications at a later part of the process, mainly anticipated as a result of young people receiving their G.C.S.E. results and their B.T.E.C. results and deciding to go to university where previously they probably would not have done so. You have seen and heard that the results have been one of the best ever, and that has been very encouraging.

[13:45]

We are welcoming an increase in the student finance but what we had to do is bring about, as additional support, Student Finance to pick up the phone calls and respond to the emails. I am pleased to say that we have now added an extra weekend and evening administrative support for the Student Finance team and we have the expertise and the capability to be able to deal with the applications that are still outstanding. Yet again, as much as I do appreciate and understand, and I am grateful for the understanding of students and parents while we have been dealing with this additional volume of applications, there has been reduction of staffing within Skills Jersey, Student Finance team, where although we have been successful in appointing the individual we have not been in a position to have her starting due to parental leave. However we are now in a position that we have created additional capacity, we have introduced new administrative support, and we work closely with the student loan support group in order to be able to cascade the message across and address the queries that they have as soon as we can.

The Deputy of St. John:

Thank you very much for that. That leads us very nicely on to the chair going to ask questions about university entry.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

It does, it segues nicely. I take it from what you said that the numbers of students entering tertiary education in September 2020 has increased because of the increase in results and they have got their places?

Director, Skills and Lifelong Learning:

That is just speculation on my part. I think the fact that we now have a system that people are aware of, and through the encouragement that we do through our career advice and so on, more people are considering going to university, which is very good news. However, knowing that more people have received higher grades I speculated that could possibly be a contributing factor.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Have we had more uptake for university from this September 2020, do you know? I know it is difficult to compare raw data because numbers fluctuate anyway, but have you seen an increase in numbers who are going to university in applications for student loans, for example?

Director, Skills and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, we have. About 25 per cent increase on numbers and that is in comparison to the last year. What we do, we would compare the total applications that are registered against what we have on the books. We have had an extra 130 applications sort of towards the end of the process, basically those who have received their results and they have decided that they wish to apply for university. Usually we receive everybody's application as part of U.C.A.S. (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) well in advance and therefore we are aware and we can attribute the additional 130 applications to results being better.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Would that have an impact on the funding position, i.e. the funding may run out? I was going to ask if there was a surplus of funding because less had gone but now it seems a 25 per cent increase could have a real pressure on funding, could it not?

Director, Skills and Lifelong Learning:

What we have is a contingency fund - it might not be the right terminology, so apologies if I am calling it not the right thing - in terms of the guarantee of students receiving their funding that is required when this new funding was put in place. We have not been spending the money that we have in this budget fully over the last 3 years and we still are not completely utilising the funding with the additional 25 per cent. So just to answer your question: is this going to create a pressure on funding? As it stands, no, because that additional allowance for higher education funding that has been put in the Student Finance budget is still seeing us through.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Is there any situation regarding students returning in the system with online tuition? Many universities are offering online tuition. Have our students been able to access that? Are many of them staying here to access that? Do you know, do you have those figures?

Director, Skills and Lifelong Learning:

My understanding is, and mainly to do with the officer on site and also conversations with students, that students, who have been offered a university post or place, they have travelled to the university. Some of those, as you know, and you hear in the news, are self-isolating within their home situation, if it is a university campus dormitory or if it is a private property that they have rented. In terms of universities and what they do, obviously each university is an individual, independent company and business and they would do things differently. Our advice to our students has been follow what is expected of you. In terms of universities providing things online and therefore, in some respects, students and parents and carers considering that not to be the full experience of higher education for themselves, is something that is being debated at this moment in time. You have seen some students petition going up asking for tuition fees to be returned because they are not receiving the full experience and so on. We have created a multidisciplinary group from various government parts, which would be involved in providing advice and guidance to students and their parents. That goes from matters related to their income. Many students would have student work and jobs to do, and now with the COVID impact they might not have that. Much is related to travel and you know that there has been in the news about Christmas and what is going to happen, and also health matters and so on. So we are actively working above the curve, if you like, ahead of the curve for us to be able to proactively offer advice and guidance to parents, students and so on.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I think Deputy Maçon wanted to say something there. I have another question on university funding, so go ahead and I will ask that afterwards.

Assistant Minister for Education:

Just for the transcriber, I am Deputy Jeremy Maçon, Assistant Minister. Thank you, Saboohi, for answering all those operational questions. Just one point to make the panel aware of, while Saboohi did go through the figures accurately, just to remind the panel that not every student, because their income might exceed it, necessarily register with Student Finance. There will be a small number of students in addition to the ones we are aware of. So while Student Finance encourages every student to register with them, we know not everyone does. But they are a smaller number. That means that not necessarily we will know them but I think just for accuracy I wanted to add that.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Thank you, that is helpful. While you are there, that leads us on to about Student Finance. A group was formed to lead a review of the current Student Finance system with work anticipated to be completed by September 2021 and a new scheme by September 2022. How has that been impacted by COVID? Are we still looking at those targets? Are we still looking at that review, looking for a new scheme for 2022?

Director, Skills and Lifelong Learning:

What we have recommended is for that timeline to be extended. I do not know, Jeremy, if you want to talk on that or do you want me to answer the question? But we are looking at 2023 for the new scheme to be operational, giving ourselves some further time to be able to not only assess the impact of COVID but also looking at the different structures in terms of economy and course needs on-Island that is going to be looked at. There is an extension request on that and we are looking at 2023.

Assistant Minister for Education:

Just to add to that one. It is also wrapped up, as you saw, the production of the 16-plus strategy which came out. It was looking about how we could adapt our higher education provision on-Island as well. Also, while we had done some initial work, we had had some initial reviews looking at our system, building on from the scrutiny work we had done when we were there. So that work has been done but, as Saboohi commented there, we wanted to have a better understanding of the data over more years to understand how this system was impacted on students and just so we had more to work with. Yes, that has led to a delay in initially what we want but we are hoping, with things settling down now, we have tasked Saboohi with putting that as an appropriate piece of work.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Just a couple of final things on that, just to get clarity. In that case, the scheme would come to the Assembly, I would imagine, by 2022 so would it be before the next election, probably not? So the ongoing work would be happening during the time of perhaps change?

Assistant Minister for Education:

I think whatever the time there will be, I think the important thing is to say it needs to be well before September where obviously the academic year starts. Ideally, if we could have it late 2021 or early 2022, for obvious reasons, that would be best. What we would want to avoid is obviously what happened to us this term of how the new scheme was decided, snap, just before an election, and that was May, and that did not give parents or students a lot of time to prepare themselves. U.C.A.S. wanted to know what was going on. There was a significant change in how this was going to work. So obviously we want any change that might be coming along the line, definitely it would need to be debated ideally the end of 2021, at a push at the beginning of 2022.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

And there would be a clear transitional period, so students are already in the system so they would stay on the old scheme, I would imagine, as we move forward.

Assistant Minister for Education:

I think the commitment myself and the Minister have always given over this particular matter is we would prefer absolutely or want to put in place a grandfathering scheme. Those on the existing regime would continue to have that except in cases where perhaps the new system might be a benefit or maybe better proffering to the students, and to give them that ability to transfer from the old scheme to the new scheme and felt that would be an appropriate way forward.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

We are going to move on to the next set of questions. Deputy Doublet, do you want to? We have allocated you the exam results questions; would you like to carry on with those?

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Yes, happy to. Minister, can you give an overview of what the exam results were like this year in comparison to the previous year please?

The Minister for Education:

I can indeed. In terms of the G.C.S.E. results for 2020 grade A, or as we know 7-plus, now that they have changed those gradings, was at 35.2 per cent compared to 25.4 per cent in 2019. Grade C, or as we know 4-plus, Jersey 2020 results 85.8 per cent compared to 2019 74.4 per cent. G.C.S.E. grade G, or 1-plus, 99.6 per cent for 2020 and 97.9 in 2019. Would you like the A-level results as well?

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Yes, please.

The Minister for Education:

Jersey 2020 was A star 19.9 per cent compared to 8.7 per cent in 2019. A was 44.3 compared to 29.6. B was 74.8 compared to 59.5. C was 92.7 compared to 82.7. D was 98.6 compared to 95.3. E was 99.6 compared to 98.8. U, 100 per cent it states there both years.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Thank you, I think Deputy Ward wants to ask a clarification.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I think that is grades above U of 100 per cent. But with the G.C.S.E.s is that 5 grades of 4 and above or just English and maths are 4 and above, i.e. which benchmarks are we comparing there?

[14:00]

Or is it just a grade of 4 and above; do you know?

The Minister for Education:

Sean, if you can explain the gradings and how it is explained for the G.C.S.E.s.

Group Director, Education:

The results the Minister just shared with you are the actual examinations, G.C.S.E.s available as taken by grade. The caveat is obviously that we have compared the 2020 results with 2019 and 2018 and they are much higher, the outcomes. But we have the very important caution that 2019 students took examinations and 2020 did not. But what I would say is these results can only go up because we have a number of students who have elected to do examinations in October/November. There was no appeal system once Ofqual had decided to go with centre assessed grades, the teacher assessments. But when you ask about fitting 5 good G.C.S.E.s, including English and maths, we have got the best ever results Jersey has seen, the 2020 results, but obviously ...

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Sorry, Sean, to interrupt. Was that what those figures were, 5 ...

Group Director, Education:

No, those were the proportion of all exams taken that were A star or 8 or 9 or AA, 7, 8, 9 or the proportion that was a 4 or a C or better. So the Minister has just shared what we have as known facts of what is done so far, but of course students who choose to sit an examination in the next few weeks can get to keep that grade or if they do even better in the examination it will go up.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Have you got many who are going to do that retake?

Group Director, Education:

We do not have many at all. I can share that data. For A levels there will be 35 examination entries. That could be if one person does 3. It is not 35 students. The total G.C.S.E. entries across our 7 Government of Jersey schools is 62 and there will be 13 papers sat by students in the International Baccalaureate, the A-level equivalent, which as you know is only offered at one of our schools. We sit many thousands of G.C.S.E.s every summer; 62 of them will be the subject of a retake, with every school admitting at least one but 3 of our schools are just entering one student for one paper. So there is a range within those 62.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Those figures, as you have just said, Sean, show a massive increase in terms of the grades achieved. Can I just ask whether you have looked at the U.K. and has there been a similar jump in the U.K. and how does it compare to Jersey's results between 2019 and 2020?

Group Director, Education:

Absolutely there was a significant uplift predicated on the new methodology because the exams were cancelled by the U.K. Prime Minister on 18th March. Jersey was already, in G.C.S.E. outcomes by grade measures at A level and G.C.S.E., above England and the gap has widened further - we are further ahead, if you like - but all jurisdictions that change methodology did see an uplift. You will be aware there is a big debate now about the 2021 examination series and what is to be done. Obviously, as the Minister said in answer to an earlier question, the examination boards and their regulatory body, Ofqual, are domiciled in another jurisdiction; we are not in charge of that. We just follow the rule book and our students did particularly well.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I understand that. I am not sure. Just to reiterate the question, is that uplift the same or comparable in Jersey as the uplift has been in the U.K.?

Group Director, Education:

The uplift in Jersey appears without the final data, because obviously until we get everything validated and the examinations done, the uplift seems a little higher in Jersey than the uplift in England.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

What reasons would there be for that?

Group Director, Education:

We know from our value-added measures, you look at A levels, for example, our schools with A levels have a very good track record of adding value. So when results were pumped out by the algorithm initially and then based on the centre assessed grades, our students had done the work that led their teachers to assess them at the grades that were eventually the ones awarded after Ofqual's decision. It appears teachers are teaching and students are learning at increasingly stronger levels of performance.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Is there any difference between the results from private schools and from our state schools?

Group Director, Education:

Until we get the November results this will not be finalised but we have got the spread of results across all of our schools because we have ... while we are not the data owner of the private schools in this sense, that is Beaulieu Convent School and De La Salle College, but they had, as with all Jersey schools, significant uplifts. We will have to see how ... before we could compare and obviously all the schools have different intakes and different thresholds for entering courses, but all schools have performed stronger than previously.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

If we could possibly have that data and any further analysis that you do on that data, if you could please share that with the panel we would be grateful.

Group Director, Education:

We certainly will. Our data team is doing the analysis with schools and we do have a regular cycle where we compile all of the Island-wide data and we share that, as well as schools publishing results on their websites. But as soon as it is collated, once the autumn exam series is over, we will certainly share that with Scrutiny.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Are any teachers going to be subjected to performance improvement plans as a direct result of any of the exam results this year?

Group Director, Education:

No.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

What impact has COVID had on Highlands and Hautlieu regarding the intake of students for September considering the exam and the grading process?

The Minister for Education:

I will take this one, if that is okay. Hautlieu have seen roughly 14 more pupils and Highlands have seen roughly 17 more than last year.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Are there more students applying for university places as a result as well?

The Minister for Education:

I believe Saboohi answered that question before. From what we can see, because we do not have the data, but I have seen a number somewhere of what we have got registered. I think there is just over 700 that are registered as first years but, Saboohi, if you can confirm that.

Director, Skills and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, you can understand that there are some that we are still receiving applications for but that as a part figure is correct.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Thank you. Sorry if I missed that previous answer. I have got one more on this. Considering the magnitude of the impact of not being able to undertake the exams, considering the impact that has had on students and schools and teachers, Minister, do you think that we should be considering alternative methods of assessment in embedding alternative methods into the curriculum to avoid a repeat of this in the future? Does our system need to adapt and change?

The Minister for Education:

This is a slightly difficult one, and the reason why I say that is because of course we utilise the awarding bodies and, of course, Ofqual being the regulator in the U.K. our hands are slightly tied. I have had regular conversations with the director of Education, Sean, around the possibility of looking at other awarding bodies. We know, for example, Wales are slightly moving away from the similar ... what is happening in terms of education in England. I think there are wider opportunities for us to look at different ways of awarding grades, if that may be the case going forward. But I also recognise that there is a view and a need for more vocational offerings as well in the Island. Different assessment methods reviewed selected the summer, it has unintentionally highlighted the need for pupils to return to previous methods of sitting examinations. Like I say, it is a slightly difficult one for me to determine how we would go forward with regards to a different assessment method when we are using those awarding bodies.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Shall we move on to some general questions? Louise, do you want to ask them or shall I just carry on?

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I do not mind if you want to ask a general one first and I will go next. That is fine.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

It is a very general question we were going to ask perhaps at the beginning but we will leave it to the end. What tangible changes have been implemented since the beginning of your term of office

so far? We understand the implications that COVID has had on so many things. What things can you track as changes that have happened in the education system?

The Minister for Education:

It is a very strange term that we have been in because of course the Government Plan, which determines our priorities as a Council of Ministers, only really began this year and of course COVID hit. So what came out of that Government Plan is a tangible outcome I suppose would be the growth funding that we achieved for reading recovery. That is working with E.C.O.F., Every Child our Future; sorry, I have to stop using just the letters and explain it fully. There is that. There is also the French offering we have, I believe it is for year 5 students. It is a more intensive programme carried out by a very capable small team who provide a more intensive offering around French learning. So that would help with languages going forward, especially for students moving into secondary school and choosing that option. The remainder of the growth funding that we had in that Government Plan was predominantly around demographics, the largest bulk of that money was around student finance, of course, because of the States decision for the new finance scheme. Also the demographics for, of course, the children in the schools. They are, I suppose from the point of view of saying this term and from what I could offer in terms of the Government Plan, I would have liked to have done more but COVID hit. That is not an excuse. It should not be an excuse but there are only so many people and so many resources in place. But we are hoping to make up for that next year.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I mentioned yesterday there have been reports of the real desperate needs of some of our primary schools, particularly town schools, to improve their facilities. I know of a couple I have seen and one I go to quite frequently. There is a desperate need to improve the facilities for young people there. Can anything be done rapidly to improve that? We have seen reports in the newspaper recently where a head teacher has had to speak out, which I am sure was difficult for him to do.

The Minister for Education:

I am disappointed that we are in a position where we have a primary school in such a state. We know, across Government, we are not very good at looking after our estate. We have been improving the school estate over many years, and it has taken many years. I think one of the particular difficulties at the moment, and I expressed this in response to members of the public via social media last evening, because they were explicitly asking me, and understandably so. I think it was very welcome for the head teacher to speak out because I think that is really important. It is open and transparent. People need to be aware of the position that we are in. But fundamentally hands are tied when it comes to asking or requiring another department and priorities taking place over others. That should not be the case. But in terms of us looking forward with regards to the

Government Plan that is due to be lodged, we are looking at our town schools more closely. We recognise that there is more demand and highly likely to be more demand going forward with regards to more homes, housing requirements in St. Helier. Of course town schools have a particular demand for vulnerable children, disadvantaged children, children who live in low socioeconomic households, which brings with it a greater need and a greater level of support, and they need the right environment to work in for that.

[14:15]

Ideally, I would love to have the old police site where the fire service currently sits. But as we know, with everything that goes on in terms of our property portfolio in the States, these negotiations and moving between areas can unfortunately take time. So I am hoping that an overall estate strategy will be produced soon that we will all be able to identify how we put this jigsaw puzzle together better and look after our wider property estate for the benefit of all Islanders.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I am conscious of time but, Louise, did you have another question you wanted to ask?

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Could the Minister just provide a brief update on the progress of the revised plans for safe singing in early years, primary and secondary schools please?

The Minister for Education:

Yes, not a problem. We have had an updated guidance sent round to Ministers this week. I have literally responded to our policy officer today just asking to make it explicitly clear around the secondary school pupils offering in that guidance. It is made clear in the guidance around the early years, which was a discussion that you and I had with the key stakeholders and the Minister for Health and Social Services, which was extremely helpful. Thank you for that. We are hoping that that will be published shortly. We are just waiting for, I think, agreement from other Ministers. I have heard back from our policy officer, that should be out shortly.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I do want to thank you once again, Minister, for listening and for agreeing to revise the policy. It shows that you do listen, so thank you.

The Minister for Education:

I think the thanks goes to the Minister for Health and Social Services as well because he was part and parcel of that. It is a team effort. It is not an easy time. Uncertainty for everybody. There is a

lot of tension and our officers are working day and night to try and make clear the thoughts for the public. I am glad that we were able to help in the way that we have.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can I ask one final question, just before we go? We asked earlier some of the questions of the Minister for Children and Housing: what is your view on the perhaps increased employment of tasers, which could affect children, if that is the case.

The Minister for Education:

It is an out-of-the-box question. Thought process on it. I can see both sides of the arguments that I am hearing. I do have concerns around how they may be used, especially young teenagers, young students. However, then there is also the argument about it is a better system to have rather than having firearms requirements and bits and pieces like that. I have not thoroughly thought it through, as maybe I should be. I am looking forward to having the briefing from the Minister for Home Affairs and listening directly from others. I think there is a balance and there always is a balance to these types of policies and types of legislation that we have in place. I think we have to recognise the safety of the public, but the safety of our staff at the same time. I am sorry that is not a clear enough answer. I have not really properly determined the balance of risk with this one. But there are concerns that sit in the back of my mind.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Deputy Maçon, did you want to say something? Sorry, I missed the chat again.

Assistant Minister for Education:

Just briefly, when you were talking about what has been the tangible things in your term. I just wanted to add in of course the launch of the Digital Academy, which of course has been a great asset and has gone very well. I think the other change of course, the Minister made the point to address some of the stats issues and remove some examinations in order to remove the stress from students, which I think shows her commitment in that area as well. Because you wanted concrete examples and I think those should have been put in. As for the issue around Rouge Bouillon, just to say that I have been, through my time as a member of Scrutiny and during ministerial questions, constantly advocating for the expansion of the Rouge Bouillon site, and I have a history of questions in the States, which anyone can look at. Thank you.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Is there anything anyone else wants to raise because we are over time a little but that is okay?

The Deputy of St. John:

No, I have not.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Not from me, but thank you to the Minister and Assistant Minister and all the officers for their time.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Thank you and I reiterate that. Thank you. Is there anything else anyone wants to say, Minister, Assistant Minister, any of the officers just briefly at the end of this before we finish?

The Minister for Education:

No, there is nothing more to add, Deputy. I am grateful for you having us in the Scrutiny hearing. It is important to, of course, hold us to account with regards to what we are doing. I can send you through a number of additional information with regards to the questions, whether that is data that has been asked for throughout the meeting. But on my behalf and officers' behalf we want to thank you, as well, for your time.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Thank you very much. With that I call the hearing to an end.

[14:21]