



Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel

Quarterly Review Hearing

Witness: The Minister for Children and Education

Thursday, 28th September 2023

Panel:

Deputy C.D. Curtis of St. Helier Central (Chair)

Connétable M. Labey of Grouville

Connétable M. O'D. Troy of St. Clement

Deputy B.B. de S.DV.M. Porée of St. Helier South

Witnesses:

Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North, The Minister for Children and Education

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour, Assistant Minister for Children and Education

Mr. R. Sainsbury, Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills Department

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

Mr. J. Williams, Programme Director for Education Reform

Mr. D. Bowring, Associate Director of Mental Health and Well-being

[10:00]

Deputy C.D. Curtis of St. Helier (Chair):

Welcome to this quarterly hearing of the Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel. Today is 28th September 2023. I would like to draw everyone's attention to the following. This hearing will be filmed and streamed live. The recording and transcript will be published afterwards on the States Assembly website. Please switch all electronic devices to silent. So, if we begin with introductions, I am Deputy Catherine Curtis, the Chair of the panel.

Connétable M. Labey of Grouville:

My name is Mark Labey. I am Connétable of Grouville and the Deputy Chair of this panel.

Deputy B.B. de S.DV.M. Porée of St. Helier South:

I am Deputy Porée and I am a member of this panel.

Connétable M. O'D. Troy of St. Clement:

I am Constable Marcus Troy and I am a member of the panel.

The Minister for Children and Education:

Deputy Inna Gardiner, Minister for Children and Education.

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

Deputy Louise Doublet, Assistant Minister for Children and Education.

Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills Department:

Rob Sainsbury, Chief Officer, Department of Children, Young People, Education and Skills.

Programme Director for Education Reform:

Jonathan Williams, Programme Director for Education Reform.

Associate Director of Mental Health and Well-being:

Darren Bowring, Associate Director of Mental Health and Well-being.

Group Director, Education:

Seán O'Regan, Group Director, Education.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Thank you, everyone. I think we have 2 hours for this hearing, so if I could get on with the questions. Our first question is to do with C.A.M.H.S. (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services). We were looking out for the C.A.M.H.S. annual summary report and we see that was published yesterday so we have not really had a chance to look through it properly yet but still managed to look at it a bit. So, please could you advise why there was a delay in the publication of this report, which was originally going to be published in February?

Associate Director of Mental Health and Well-being:

Do you want me to ...?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes.

Associate Director of Mental Health and Well-being:

I think I reported at the last scrutiny there was discussion about whether we should amalgamate that with the wider strategy and update, and a decision was eventually taken for us to go alone and report the C.A.M.H.S. summary on its own. As you may be aware, there has been significant work needed around C.A.M.H.S. in terms of our data processes and it was only in 2021 that we appointed a quality and assurance manager and a data officer to begin us being able to extract better information and data to support a report. So while the report is complete, I would say it is a start and future years' reports are going to be significantly better and richer in data. So we have had some delays while we continued that process. Also we have had, and part of the issue which contributes to this with such a small team, but our quality assurance manager has been on parental leave so we have had other staff that have had to pick up the completion of it. It has been ready for a number of months as well and we have to go through the process of approval and then through comms to put it on to the relevant pack for the uploading. So that has caused a delay this time. As I say, next year we are going to be in much better shape and progress. It is going to be a better report and it will be ready to be published in quarter 1 next year, as will future reports in future years.

The Minister for Children and Education:

I think that I would like to say thank you to Darren because the work that happened in C.A.M.H.S. over the last year and the speed and recruitment and opening 5 new services, it was very intense. I know that there is still a lot of stuff to do, but the progression over the last year since he came into post is substantial.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

That is good. So you have the report out now so that is something to look back on for your next one and everything as well.

Associate Director of Mental Health and Well-being:

Yes.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

We did notice that the report details that C.A.M.H.S. received 19 complaints and 43 compliments during 2022 and notes that these are relatively small numbers. So how do you actually ask for feedback from service users?

Associate Director of Mental Health and Well-being:

Again, what we did not have originally was any system to collate feedback so we have worked with an organisation called C.O.R.C. (Child Outcomes Research Consortium) from the U.K. (United Kingdom), who advise other C.A.M.H.S. services about relevant measures. We have something called the children's E.S.Q. (experience of service questionnaire) feedback measure now, which is in place, and in reception at C.A.M.H.S. we have iPads with relevant feedback forms on it. We have one for under-12s, one for 12 to 18s and one for parents. So since April this year we have been collecting data from children, young people and their families on the C.A.M.H.S. service and we now have an ability to analyse and present that data, and we will to the Care Commission in the next couple of weeks when they come to inspect our service. So that is available and I am quite happy to share the amalgamation of feedback that we are currently receiving. It is information like that which will make future annual reports much richer, as well as some of the outcome measures that we have now got in place to measure young people's progress with their mental health support from a pre and post basis. So we do now have a robust system where we collect information.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

So the children or parents can get that from the desk at C.A.M.H.S.?

Associate Director of Mental Health and Well-being:

Yes.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Can they get it online as well?

Associate Director of Mental Health and Well-being:

Yes. We also have Q.R. (quick response) codes so they can access it remotely. We have little cards that we give out and people can do it when they get home as well. As we have found currently with the Jersey Care Commission, once we send things for people to do at home they do not tend to ... we get very few back. So we have now got the iPads and we are handing them out when people are finished their appointments to complete before they go home. We are finding we are getting higher volumes of feedback from that approach.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. That is good, although 2 of the reasons cited for complaints received last year was attitude and behaviour of staff. So has anything been done to review and address those complaints?

The Minister for Children and Education:

I will start. There are official complaints and there are unofficial complaints. What is really important is that once the complaints get to myself and people escalate it who have filed the complaints, it is

referred to the team. I know that every single complaint to C.A.M.H.S. that Darren personally got involved and connected to people and connected to parents to try and find a way forward. Sometimes it is complex. Sometimes it is very, very complex. If we are thinking about the numbers of complaints that were raised, and we had 1,210 referrals, we know there is lots of emotion involved and feelings. So I think that the first response is really to connect and to see how we can support. Sometimes it is the parent who needs support as well as the child, and this is our connection to the adult services to make sure that complaints can be addressed also from the adult side as well. We must work together with the Health Department because they are responsible to support parents as well.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes. So all the complaints are followed up?

Associate Director of Mental Health and Well-being:

Everything is registered on C.F.M.S. (Customer Feedback Management System), which is our system. Everything is investigated and there are actions on the back of them that we included in there. Our quality assurance manager oversees that whole process and makes sure any feedback gets fed back to staff and their line managers. We address any specific issues within supervision or operational and business as well.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. So could you provide an update on the plans to extend the service opening hours? I think there were plans to open from 8.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m. and more days of the week.

Associate Director of Mental Health and Well-being:

Yes. So we have staffing in place to extend our duty and assessment service from currently which operates between the hours of 9.00 and 5.00 to 8.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m. That is going to be 7 days a week. We have signed off the proposal document for that and a next stage now is our service manager is about to engage in the consultation with our permanent staff around the change to their hours. We have draft rotas all ready to go, which we have taken all the staff through, and there is no indication from any of the staff that there will be an issue with the consultation. We obviously have a process that we have to work through with that, but as soon as that is concluded and we have that in place we will be able to move towards that quite quickly.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

All right. So that was our questions around the report, I think. Please can you provide the panel with some detail about how the C.A.M.H.S. early intervention service is working with schools?

The Minister for Children and Education:

First of all, C.A.M.H.S. is offering support for mild to moderate - what we call - mental health need in school. There is an early intervention practitioner assigned to each school, or in each cluster of schools because obviously there is one practitioner to several schools, and offering consultation, advice and also, if needed, intervention conversations with children and young people. It is usually mild or neurodiversity need. If there is a request also coming from school ... so there is from C.A.M.H.S. going to school and providing it, but if there is a request coming from school with something urgent, the early intervention consultant will come to school and will support school as a reactive as well and not just proactive because it is going both ways. Also they are looking into the training of the staff because day to day there are some tools that teachers and teaching assistants can have to make that early intervention immediately, and the support is provided from C.A.M.H.S. to schools in training. The ultimate goal is really to see what can be done at school and it is connecting to a division that we are developing in very slow pace of the community school, that the services come into school and hopefully it will reduce in the future referrals to C.A.M.H.S.

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

Can I add about the schools as well that children do not need to have a diagnosis to receive support at school? Most of the schools are really good, I think, at just recognising when a child has needs in the classroom context and accommodating that.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay, thanks. So I note you mentioned that there was one assigned to each cluster of schools, so how many people are doing this?

Associate Director of Mental Health and Well-being:

We currently have a team of 10. Within our early intervention service we have 2 family support workers that are due to start in the coming weeks as well. Bear in mind this is quite a new service. This was launched in August last year. Our service manager did not commence until January, so it is still very early days, but we do now have staff attached to each cluster. I noticed on Twitter this week a head teacher described the early intervention service as a game changer for her school as well in terms of having immediate support around some of these issues. The hope is ultimately this will have an impact proactively and we will see a reduction in the significant volumes that continue to come into C.A.M.H.S. That is the idea of having early intervention, but we are still at an early stage for that. But that is certainly the intention.

Chief Officer, Department of Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Just to add to that, I think this is one of 2 parts of the service, which is quite different to what you would see within other jurisdictions, particularly the U.K. The ability for practitioners to interface with

schools prominently is really good, but in addition to that Darren's team also have a resident presence within the multiagency safeguarding hub and the early help hub. So you actually have a practitioner there so you are capturing the children's services and the education input at an early intervention opportunity. It is a bit game changing, but it is very early days for us. It is a new service.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Do you think that allows for better information sharing as well when it is necessary and when it is helpful?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Absolutely. I think one of the goals that we are working for the last year within C.Y.P.E.S., within Children, Young People, Education and Skills, is to have all senior leaders around the same table. When we look at the needs around the child, it looks from all sides and not as it was previously. Education and children's services were separated and education looked at education and children's services looked at children's services and C.A.M.H.S. looked at C.A.M.H.S. I cannot tell you that we are 100 per cent there but it is much better than what was a year ago. Because the vision and the delivery implementation is there. We are sitting around the table and looking around the child, yes.

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

Can I add about early years as well - because, of course, that is when we want to intervene as early as possible - we do provide targeted nursery places for 2 to 3-year-olds. That is supported through the Jersey Childcare Trust as well.

[10:15]

We have increased those places and we are looking to further increase those, depending on whether we can resource it as well, because, of course, there needs to be staff there. So it is something that we are looking to support from early years as well.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. Now I just have some questions about the autism social communication inclusion team, which we read about. So that is a team that supports school staff in their understanding of pupils presenting with autism or related social communication difficulties. So could you clarify if this is part of C.A.M.H.S. or is it another service line in C.Y.P.E.S.?

The Minister for Children and Education:

It is through the inclusion. We have an inclusion programme and what is really important, what we have found out, is that even if there is a diagnosis it is something ... the numbers increased and the challenges within the schools increased, and what is really important is that the staff will get enough support for understanding and managing children that are presenting with autism or related social communication. It is not necessary it should be autism. Last year we have had lots of reports, especially from the reception and school nurseries, that children who come, because of the pandemic their social skills were very undeveloped. It was difficult to do sharing. It was difficult to play with other children. It was difficult to communicate. It is changing. In my last visit ... I have started to visit schools and on my visit last week to a nursery the centre is slowly changing, but we do have professionals who come to school and support and train and work with the staff to make sure that inclusion is happening.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. So it is not an autism social communication inclusion team, it is a social communication inclusion team?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Which also covers autism as well as other things?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay.

The Minister for Children and Education:

But this is how you make connections. The moment the child is diagnosed it still needs to get support to the schools. So C.A.M.H.S. has done the diagnosis. They have done the assessment. The child received the help, and it is moving into supporting the child with their progress within education and life in general.

Chief Officer, Department of Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

You can see how that connects to the early intervention and how inclusion and C.A.M.H.S. need to work together because many of the issues that are escalated to me relate to where there are challenges for children within school environments particularly related to behaviour. It is really clear

in lots of correspondence we get back the point of C.A.M.H.S., inclusion and the school team connecting is where we are able to get a better plan and solution. I think your new practitioner who has joined has clearly made a big impact. There is a lot of reference to where C.A.M.H.S. have been involved and working with the inclusion team, which has resolved a pathway that I think probably could have led to exclusion or where we might have had a different educational pathway. So we need to build on that. There is more to do. This is a really good step of joining the team together.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes. Great. So I think you have answered some of my questions that I had written down as well. So, how does the team measure the skills of the teachers or support staff that it works with? So is there a way of ... is data collected to see how things are going, how this is working?

The Minister for Children and Education:

I am a bit ... you mentioned how the inclusion ...?

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

This social communication inclusion team and working with the other groups as well, is there any way of assessing how well this is working?

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

Do you mean the performance of the staff on that team?

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes. So is any information or data collected which would show how well it is going and whether any changes need to be made?

The Minister for Children and Education:

I think it is something that we do need to work out and until we ... because for me it is not just this team. Because previously we had a school advisory team separate; still we have it. We have the inclusion team that also advises and supports schools. We have the multilingual learners team and now what we are working on is to bring it all together that it will be one clear process for supporting schools, merging it together, because we cannot ... the service has developed as reaction but what we have found is that now we are merging and this is the process. We need to get the full picture.

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

I think our primary way of getting feedback on services like this is the regular meetings with the head teachers as well, which we attend. They are quite frank with us when something is working or not working and we do listen to them.

Associate Director of Mental Health and Well-being:

I think the other thing to note is we recognise that there probably needs to be a dedicated performance dashboard which really focuses on this, but there are elements of our current performance assessment that also feed into the success of all of the teams together. So looking at children who are excluded or where there are part-time timetables or where you have absence from school particularly, they are all indicators that will feed into whether or not these services are making a difference. We need to build that into how we have oversight of how are they impacting on activity as well as obviously, as the Assistant Minister says, feedback.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes, I suppose, especially when you have quite a number of teams involved ...

Associate Director of Mental Health and Well-being:

Exactly.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

... working towards something, the assessment is really important, is it not?

The Minister for Children and Education:

To streamline it.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. I think that is questions for you now.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Yes, it is indeed. We are staying on the subject of C.A.M.H.S., Darren. I am sorry to keep coming at you. How many referrals has C.A.M.H.S. received for the year to date to its neurodevelopmental service?

The Minister for Children and Education:

I have ... and thank you for the question because it was lots of communication recently ...

Associate Director of Mental Health and Well-being:

In the press.

The Minister for Children and Education:

... in the press.

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

And the Youth Parliament asking ...

The Minister for Children and Education:

And the Youth Parliament asking about that. It all needs to get in context. If we are talking about 2020, we have 51 referrals to A.D.H.D. (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder) and 80 for autism, in total 131 referrals in 2020 in total. From January until August, in the first 8 months, we had 384.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

This year?

The Minister for Children and Education:

This year. In 8 months we had 7 times more referrals to A.D.H.D. and 184 referrals to autism. So we had 568 referrals for neurodiversity in 8 months. It is a massive increase. We did not raise our team but it is a massive change.

The Connétable of Grouville:

We noted that in the press in recent days. Obviously that is concerning.

The Minister for Children and Education:

What is really important to really separate ... I think in the press it was a bit of confusion between the adult services and children and young people. Because we are in a different place. We are in a different position. Our vacancy is in very, very good shape. We are not having this 30 per cent that the adult services have. If you are thinking about vacancies, we have 80 full staff equivalent and we have new posts. So we started in 2020 with 21 posts. We moved into the 61 posts ... I think 61?

Associate Director of Mental Health and Well-being:

Yes.

The Minister for Children and Education:

... last year, and now we have 80 posts. We are missing ... we have 2 locum psychiatrists and 8 agency, so we have increased the numbers from 20 to 80 and we are only ... we are recruiting well

and we are in a good position and trying to catch up. It is important to separate because I felt like in the press it was a really mixed picture.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Considering the pressures on C.A.M.H.S. staff and mental health staff globally, I think that you are doing a fairly good job. My next question is: can you provide an update on the work to develop a shared prescribing scheme between G.P.s (general practitioners) and C.A.M.H.S. clinicians, especially for A.D.H.D. medication?

The Minister for Children and Education:

That is challenging.

Associate Director of Mental Health and Well-being:

Yes. I do not think we have made any further progress since we discussed that before but, as I have said before, I think it is a crucial thing that we do look at. You have just heard the volumes of young people being referred for A.D.H.D. assessments, which by the way we are completing on average at the moment in about 30 weeks, which I would challenge any other local authority to be matching with the volume of referrals that we have. For every young person diagnosed that may well then between that young person and family decide that medication is a useful option, they are added then cumulatively to our caseload going forward, and because it is a controlled medication it can currently only be prescribed by our psychiatrists and it can only be prescribed on monthly prescriptions. We have a situation where we have our psychiatrists spending a significant amount of time every day writing repeat prescriptions and the inconvenience for families having to collect prescriptions from C.A.M.H.S. to take to the hospital pharmacy, particularly at a time when it is now closed on weekends and they have to do it in the week. So I think this is something that I would hope we can pursue collectively because I think not only will it improve capacity for C.A.M.H.S. and clinicians by taking some prescribing away from our staff to allow capacity for more assessments, it will also provide a better convenience and better for families who have to go through the process of managing the prescription process. So I am really keen that this is taken forward.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Yes, I think that is excellent because we have heard of issues regarding this and the waits at the hospital, et cetera, so we are all glad to hear that you are moving that forward. Minister, you have just intimated a few staff numbers there, but we are always constantly concerned about the amount of agency staff. I do believe you have mentioned a figure within C.A.M.H.S. Is that something you could intimate again for the record?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes. We have 8 agency nurses and 2 locum psychiatrists that are helping us with the assessments. Apart from this, we are fully staffed, I think, if I have that right. We have 2 family support workers joining in the coming weeks into 2 further post vacancies, but it is important to take into consideration that we had 60 posts last year this time when we talked about it, and now we have 80 posts. So to go from 60 to 80 it is new recruitment so it is not that we are missing. We have done the previous recruitment. We are just going into this extra capacity.

Chief Officer, Department of Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Yes. I think it is important to differentiate as well that I think again there had been some confusion recently about a third of posts being unfilled. That does not relate to this service. So the 8 agency nurses would be a low prevalence of agency to substantive ratio. The area where we obviously have a longstanding challenge is recruiting into the medical posts. That is a bit of a global challenge for everybody at this moment in time. This is not a service that we would class as having a high prevalence of agency, we are actually very low.

Associate Director of Mental Health and Well-being:

I will just say, though, compared from last year we now have 2 permanent associate specialist doctors. We have 2 permanent psychiatrists, which we did not have before. Our 2 locum psychiatrists have been with us for an extended period and are very capable, and we have adverts out for 2 permanent psychiatrist posts to replace them. So at the moment we are at a full complement of our doctor cover, which is good. The agency nurses as well have all been with us for over 2 to 3 years, some of them nearly 4 years, so it is not like we have people coming in and out. As we have recruited we have lost a lot of our agency positions and we have kept the ones that are capable and doing a good job. Once the consultation ends for our duty hours, our intention going back to next year is to begin to look to replace those agency nurses in our duty and assessment team. But I have tried to be quite measured. Because we have had such significant recruitment and we are having to embed people into the team and develop their skills and induct, it has been almost tactical to keep those core of agency staff that we have had for a while and replace them down the line when we have all the other positions filled, if that makes sense.

The Connétable of Grouville:

I think continuity has been an issue that we have had raised to the panel, individuals coming into the service do not want to be seen by lots of different people.

Associate Director of Mental Health and Well-being:

Absolutely, yes.

The Connétable of Grouville:

So it is good to hear that continuity is important. Thank you.

Deputy B. Porée:

I will be asking a question again with relation to C.A.M.H.S. So we have seen in the news that C.A.M.H.S. held its first foetal alcohol spectrum disorder clinic on 12th September. Please could you outline how the clinic fits into the diagnosed pathway of foetal alcohol spectrum disorder?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes. Again, congratulations to the service. I think the challenge that we have, and we had lots of discussion from since I have been elected to the post and since the panel, because I was on the journey to look into F.A.S.D. (foetal alcohol spectrum disorder), to learn myself about it. Now we have started the clinic, which we did not have. We have a clinical lead, Dr. Catherine Howden, and it is running weekly.

[10:30]

The assessment process for F.A.S.D. consists of 10 individual complex assessments. Depending on how much diagnosis was done previously, prior to the referral, because it might be something done before, based on this it will be determined how the assessment process will take place because it will be looked really at the child or young person and see what happened before and how much ... but generally it is 10 sessions. Without any previous assessment or diagnosis the process can take up to a year, but again it does not mean that the family and the child or young person will not receive support and guidance going forward during this time. Because it is not just about saying yes or no, it is also to give support as discussed.

Deputy B. Porée:

Thank you for that. Sorry, I did not quite get if you may have answered that or not. How many families or children have taken part so far on this particular programme?

The Minister for Children and Education:

I am not sure. We just opened it, so I am not sure if I have statistics. I did not hear statistics yet.

Associate Director of Mental Health and Well-being:

No, we have only been operating for 2 weeks. We have had our first 2 weeks and I am very encouraged that we now have this in place. To add to your question, we now have the ability to diagnose foetal alcohol spectrum disorder. Our intention as we progress now with the neurodevelopmental service is to ensure that everybody referred for a neurodevelopmental assessment is screened as well for foetal alcohol spectrum disorder. I think that will be something

very helpful to be done. As you heard about with the autism and A.D.H.D. numbers, this is a significant area where we need to work on and focus our resources going forward. It is going to take some additional resource and effort to expand what we do.

Deputy B. Porée:

Yes. I apologise if we are asking too quick about the numbers in the scheme so early but we just were trying to gauge the reaction, the response, but we are happy to come back to that at another time. Thank you. So I wanted to ask some questions about the children's services. So please could you provide the panel with details of the number of agency social workers currently working across children's services?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes, just a minute, I will find the numbers. This is one of the areas that we put lots of attention. You know that we started with more recruitment in the education space and we are in a good place in education. This area will continue to be challenging but we are looking into different ways. We are looking into working with different agencies, but generally we have under ... so we have ... our percentage of permanent social workers in the department is 51.5 and the agency social workers is 45 per cent. We are trying to recruit ... sorry, one social worker on board on permanent role, the percentage will change. So what has happened, because we went with this recruitment, the agency - we have approximately 12 people - have gone into the recruitment for the permanent. So it is in the process now and hopefully, if all going right, we would have 65 per cent of permanent. It is better than 51 but it is ...

Deputy B. Porée:

Fifty-five, yes. Okay.

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes, 65, 65.5 if we are going proper through all ...

Associate Director of Mental Health and Well-being:

When they on-board.

The Minister for Children and Education:

When they will be on board, because we are literally in the process of on-boarding these people.

Deputy B. Porée:

Thank you. This next question I am sure the panel has asked before, but can you please confirm if all your staff are based in Jersey when working with young people?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes. From my understanding it is, yes. We have several social workers that are based in the U.K. but they are looking after our children that are placed in the U.K. So we have children placed off Island, 17, and we need somebody who will continue to be in touch and make sure that they are okay, if they have any needs, and to monitor the quality of the care provision. So we do have them on the ground.

Chief Officer, Department of Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Yes, that is a very conscious change that we have made because there was a prevalence of staff working from the U.K. with Jersey caseload. We now have Jersey caseload only managed by Jersey practitioners. In response to some of the concerns and our assurance needs around the off-Island placements, there are dedicated staff who will now be working with the children in the U.K. They still have time in Jersey as well but they will visit the children in the U.K and that is across different levels and also requires senior leadership oversight for those placements as well. It is 17 children. We need assurance that they are being seen by our practitioners regularly. So it is a small number of people who will be doing that in the U.K.

The Minister for Children and Education:

It is a response for the challenge that we had also from the Children's Commissioner to make sure that our children are receiving the same care as they would be on the Island.

Deputy B. Porée:

So the senior leadership that is overseas, staff is based in Jersey?

Associate Director of Mental Health and Well-being:

The senior leadership is based in Jersey but they will have to have input and oversight for the children in the U.K. as well. So if there are discussions required with the contractors or with the placements that they are within, they will need that to be dealt with at a senior leadership level. They have to be based in Jersey, but they will have to interface with the U.K. as well. Our placements are across lots of different providers, so unlike a local authority where you have a brokerage system and a commissioning function that can contract and have all of that activity taken away, in Jersey it requires the chief social worker, the assistant director, the practitioners, to be able to have that direct interface with the provider, which is very different. So that must be maintained. That is usually virtual, it can be physical, in addition to the resident practitioners who will need to go and look at the children as well.

The Minister for Children and Education:

I will have a meeting in October, in a month, with the Minister for Children and Families in the U.K. to discuss more clarity, to create the guidelines and agreements between us, between the Governments, to make sure that every single question or area that there might be concerns before will be covered.

Deputy B. Porée:

Thank you very much for that. In terms of agency staff, are you able to provide a number that you have at the moment?

Associate Director of Mental Health and Well-being:

It is 38.

The Minister for Children and Education:

It is 38, yes.

Deputy B. Porée:

Thank you. Okay. I think I will leave that for now and I will ask about the Government ... the Government Plan is requesting new revenue funding in the sum of £1.7 million per year, which will be over the next 4 years, for new homes for the children's social care reform. Please could you provide us with some details about what exactly is planned for that funding of £1.7 million?

The Minister for Children and Education:

I think that it is important to make the clarification that it is not new homes. I opened this year as a response for the emergency situations 2 homes.

Deputy B. Porée:

So they are not new homes?

The Minister for Children and Education:

They were not. So when I needed to open 2 new homes this year, I did not have a budget so it was emergency budget put in place to be able to open and to run these homes, but both homes cost £1.7 million and we need to keep staff to keep these homes running. This is why I needed the budget that was allocated, but this is homes that were opened in February or March?

Chief Officer, Department of Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Yes.

Deputy B. Porée:

Okay. Thank you.

The Minister for Children and Education:

Therapeutic children's home we are progressing. I hope we are going to purchase the property that was allocated. The negotiation is ongoing and I hope in quarter 4 we will purchase and we will renovate. We have funds for this. It is in the previous Government Plan that continued through this year, and hopefully we will open the therapeutic children's home by the end of the next year ... end of 2024, beginning of 2025, depending on how the planning will progress. The plan is for 3 places for therapeutic, so in this case we can start to create ... to look into the children who have been off the Island because of their extensive needs and maybe some of them will be ready to come to the Island.

Chief Officer, Department of Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

I think that is a really important point because the position of children's services for residential provision was very well understood at the beginning of the Minister's term. The system was completely full and there was no capacity and there was a real heightened risk of children continuing to be placed off-Island in the U.K. Under this plan and the 2 homes opened, that has created effectively 7 additional places, which is a huge increase to the baseline that Jersey had. It is more capacity opened than the last 4 years collectively within a 12 to 18-month period. So it has made a really big difference to us in terms of our ability to find suitable placements for our children and it will have an impact on off-Island activity. That is already reducing. In the last year and a half we are seeing those numbers reduce a lot.

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes, from 77 children in my care I have ... 2 months ago ... usually I get the data by the end of the quarter. I need to get the data next week, but from previously I had 65 so we have from 77 to 65 children in the care ... I really, really hope that early intervention, early support for the families, will help us to reduce. My ultimate goal is to reduce children coming into care and they are staying with their family and the family get enough support at the right time.

Deputy B. Porée:

Thank you, Minister.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Just a supplementary, if I may, Chair, about the social care and social workers is that we do get issues about changing and having to be moved from one to another social care worker again and again. It is an issue so we are going to be on at you on this, I think.

The Minister for Children and Education:

Absolutely, and I think you will be absolutely right and I am on the ... challenging the team on a weekly basis. [Laughter]

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

If I could also just add a couple of questions, so those 3 places for the therapeutic positions, that is definitely not going to be there until the end of 2024 at the earliest?

Chief Officer, Department of Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

We need to assess when the building works can be completed because the revenue funding, as the Minister said, is already available. That is from within previous Government Plans. So once we understand how quickly the building can be completed, we can commence the recruitment. I think we are anticipating that is by the end of 2024 but we did move really quickly to establish the 2 homes in May this year, long before we anticipated to. We thought that would be effectively at the end of this year going into next year. So we are hoping similarly to bring the timeline forward but we need to assess that and we will obviously update the panel as soon as we have a plan.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Just one other quick question. That plan of the £1.7 million per year, that is just to cover the 2 new homes which have already been opened?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes.

Chief Officer, Department of Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Yes.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. Thanks.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Minister, my bit is the risk management in school buildings. Last month it was reported that there had been 50 serious fire risks identified in Island schools and you confirmed that these had either been resolved or mitigated before the start of the term in September. Can you provide us with an overview or summary of how health and safety risk is identified and reviewed in schools?

The Minister for Children and Education:

So we have a health and safety team. So, first of all, the first part is the head teacher. The head teacher is responsible to make sure ... we have support from Jersey Property Holdings and we must work with Jersey Property Holdings to rectify any risks that were identified. Currently, we have zero intolerable risks in school and library; however, when I talked about the mitigation, I did need to put mitigation in place to make sure that the risks are not classed as intolerable. I have 25 of these risks that will require further work to provide long-term mitigation. I will give an example. There are places in some schools, old schools, historic buildings, that would require planning permission, historic ... to address these risks there are things that need to be moved within the historic buildings. So currently, to make sure that risk is mitigated, we have ... watch?

Chief Officer, Department of Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Waking watch.

The Minister for Children and Education:

Waking watch, staff ...

Associate Director of Mental Health and Well-being:

A walking watch.

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes, walking watch.

Chief Officer, Department of Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Walking, sorry. We also have waking watches ... [Laughter]

The Minister for Children and Education:

Walking watches. So we have staff that walk every ...

Deputy B. Porée:

Literally walking watch?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Literally walking, yes, literally walking every ... and watching.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

We have been told about this, yes.

The Minister for Children and Education:

So, again, I would like ... this is the option that was accepted by the health and fire and safety inspectors. For them it is mitigation that we might ensure there is no spark from there, and we are waiting for the planning if it will be possible to change and address and to progress with the building.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Minister, what is an intolerable or a serious risk? How do you define that?

[10:45]

The Minister for Children and Education:

I will say my understanding but I am happy to ... for example, evacuation route. The evacuation route needs to be specific ways and we had coats in the corridor in some of the schools. The moment that coats moved the children could be evacuated easily in bigger numbers, so these small things. There are computers. You have permanent computers in the corridors because this is the space; we did not have spaces in the old schools. Because of the electricity and sparks and that that can create a fire we needed to close these rooms. We had the libraries in a room where it was very difficult to evacuate children from the library, which needs to go through 2 or 3 rooms. So we needed to close down this inner room for a library. It is all about how we are really making sure that evacuation can be done safely.

Group Director, Education:

If it is helpful, Constable, Jersey Property Holdings, the landlord of all of our schools, commissioned an independent expert in fire safety, who came over. As the Minister has said, where there was a collection of factors that could collectively lead to a risk to life if there were a fire, that was deemed to be an intolerable risk. Schools have evolved over time. Most of our schools were built before the invention of the computer, before well-being rules were established, so schools have evolved to meet need. Some of that has had the impact ... as the Minister said, libraries, internal rooms within rooms, the fire load of coat pegs, so all of those intolerable risks were mitigated and resolved either short term or with longer-term work for the building and fire escapes, for example, with a clear plan so that all schools could open safely at the beginning of this term.

The Minister for Children and Education:

We have a programme in place which will last approximately, I hope, 12 months, depending again on the laws connected to the planning, how we will progress. We might be able not to have a walking watch in another 6 or 12 months.

Chief Officer, Department of Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

For the people-related mitigation that we put in, a reasonable timeframe that we could sustain that activity for is about 6 months. So where we are reliant on the walking watches or where you need people-related mitigation, we require a long-term plan to be in place. We probably have about 50/50 in terms of the risks that relate to the building and the compartmentalisation particularly and then the issues that relate to all the things the Minister has listed, like the laptops and the computers, storage, coat hooks.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

So we know you have old stock and new stock, but how do there come to be 50 risks categorised as serious? How often does C.Y.P.E.S. receive reporting on health and safety risks from property services or any other agencies?

The Minister for Children and Education:

I think it was again some miscommunication in the press that we did not put it right. The 51 risks was back in August 2022. For the summer we had 28 because some of them required building work that was put in place and done during the summer over the 2 months, and it was planned.

Chief Officer, Department of Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

The discovery of the risk was part of an assessment process led by Jersey Property Holdings and the Infrastructure Department. So they are assessing all of the estate. They looked at our estate in 2022 and, as the Director mentioned, they brought over a specialist fire assessment team person and that has led to this. So that is part of a rolling programme that the Government has across the whole estate.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

So how often, assuming everything is sorted, thereafter would you be having these health and safety reports and risks from property services?

Chief Officer, Department of Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

So we brought the same assessor back to look at the mitigations we put in place to make sure that they are also assessed as mitigating. We would need to sustain this kind of assessment as part of our normal annual risk oversight now. Now that we have had that specialist view we have a clear plan in terms of when we address the building risks. We will need to revisit that on a continual risk-monitoring basis and an annual oversight as well.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

So we have talked about the estate, some being old, some being new. Are there particular properties that have a high number of risks?

Chief Officer, Department of Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

They are spread across the entirety of the estate. As the Minister said, it is not just schools. We looked at the whole C.Y.P.E.S. estate, so the library and Highlands as well that we have needed to put mitigation in. There are very obvious buildings that are much older that, as the Minister said, require some physical changes, but they are pretty spread across in all honesty. Where you have schools that are very full and particularly where you have some additional need within the school and you can see where they have needed to have additional rooms being used to support emotional well-being, you can see that they have had to make lots of different mitigations. So we do see that within some of the primary schools particularly, but they are pretty spread across. It was across the whole of the estate that we have been working on.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

So you have nothing that you are particularly worried about as far as ...?

Chief Officer, Department of Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Well, we have been worried about them all, wherever there is an intolerable risk. **[Laughter]**

The Connétable of St. Clement:

A building that you think ...?

Chief Officer, Department of Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Any of the risks that were deemed intolerable for us were seen as an immediate requirement. That is what we have worked really hard with schools over the summer to address. We did not want to be in a position in September where they reopened with that level of risk.

The Minister for Children and Education:

Not just as a Minister, as a St. Helier Deputy, I know that it is nothing to do with the fire risk. As I said, the fire risk is spread across really the estate, but if we are speaking about the old estate within St. Helier it does require ... and we all know that we require 2 new schools and we are progressing.

The Connétable of Grouville:

I particularly think that the library at Victoria College ... good luck with moving that, but that to me has always been a fire risk because of the egress from that particular building. So I wish you luck.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Minister, there has been news in the U.K. about building safety risks related to the use of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete, R.A.A.C. In a hearing with the Minister for Infrastructure, officers from

the Infrastructure Department advised that they did not believe that R.A.A.C. had been used for buildings in the public estate but stated that this was still under review. Could you confirm what discussions C.Y.P.E.S. has had with Jersey Property Holdings as your corporate landlord about R.A.A.C. and whether the landlord's review is complete for C.Y.P.E.S.-occupied buildings?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Thank you for the question. We do have ongoing conversation since it has been raised in the media from the U.K. They do believe that we do not have it on the Island because they have been in touch with local building engineers and to local suppliers of concrete. All of them reported that the material never was fabricated on the Island. They also believe that the material was not imported. However, there are a number of schools that were constructed when the R.A.A.C. was used in the U.K. and they currently are under review. I mean they are reviewing it. They do not think it is there but because I said: "Are you sure? Can you give me 100 per cent assurance? Please double check" ... because we do not have any evidence. We do not have anywhere in the documentation so the suppliers and the builders and everyone do not think but ... so they are doing a review now and I hope by the end of October at the latest I will get a report.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Okay. If Property Holdings is not the landlord of the entire estate, is there any other landlord that you would need to contact, too, in this regard? Or does Property Holdings supervise your entire estate?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Probably when we sent ... I am not sure about the private schools because we would not go into the private schools, but any parish schools, even though they are in the official ownership of the parish but they are part of our ...

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Under your jurisdiction.

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes, under our jurisdiction, yes.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Those have been checked as well?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Could you confirm whether there is a database that records factors like building materials? If a safety risk is identified, can you explain the process taken by C.Y.P.E.S. to address that? We are probably thinking of things like asbestos.

The Minister for Children and Education:

Jersey Property Holdings is responsible for this and they have their log where we do have asbestos, but again we all know that asbestos, if you do not do a repair and you do not touch it, you do not need to address it immediately. But they do have this record, but it is within Jersey Property Holdings.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

It is in Jersey Property Holdings so it is not recorded in C.Y.P.E.S.?

Chief Officer, Department of Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Where there are risks that translate over to C.Y.P.E.S., so for things related to the estate like trees and the fences and where you see that they relate to people as well, we also have a log of that. But in relation to building material and the physicality, the fabric of the building, that risk is held within J.P.H. (Jersey Property Holdings).

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Minister, you mentioned a moment ago the new schools so my questions are about here. With reference to the new Government Plan, can you please outline how the Government's plans for developing the town schools are being progressed, like a timeline for projects, for example?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Thank you for that question. The key project for the next 4 years, and I say 4 years because I think for me it is really important to look into the 4 years ... before I go to the first year it is important to emphasise that Mont à l'Abbé extension project will be completed on time, December 2023. Once it is completed it will be good also to invite and to visit to see what we have built. Now, going back to schools within 4 years, Mont à l'Abbé secondary school, we have a design brief. We are going into preparing the planning and planning should be submitted in 2024. East of St. Helier school that we discussed - probably we might need to call it St. Helier central school because it is in the centre - we had previous discussions and we are going to open ... and I am happy to say to the public it will be an architectural design competition for the architects and for the young people. The communication about this will be shortly, in the next couple of months. From there we will progress to full design, planning application, so 2024 is the year. 2024-25 is for the planning application,

tender, and hopefully the build will commence in 2025, sometime in 2025. Le Squez Youth and Community Centre, it is all in the budget. It is in development. We do have designs. It will be a phased approach but we know that all this area needs to be redeveloped. I am sure that we all know that the Rouge Bouillon needs to be replaced to the new school. It is tricky because there are several things involved, but the money is there and we have a meeting of the Future Places. I am sure the Future Places in St. Helier will be affected by the latest news. We need to really see how it is going, but we are not building anything until the place for Rouge Bouillon will be finalised. Completion of the St. John field, its playing field, and also in the Government Plan I have funds for the First Tower playing field. We need to finalise the purchase. At Le Rocquier we will have a 3G pitch as well. So that is the progress over the next 2 years for the fields. Plus, and this is really plus, we do need to upgrade St. Aubin's Fort. We do have funds for this over the next ... that is why I am saying over the next 4 years. What I found out is that I can plan that I would like to deliver in 2023 enough that if one of the projects did not progress because of the planning or because of some other things that happened, it is important if this project has not progressed and maybe that project was planned to start in 2025 but the plans are ready, it is no reason why we will not bring it forward once the other project needs to resolve. It is really important to have the envelope and to work within the envelope.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Thank you. I understand that, but our question was about the town schools in particular. You mentioned that the money is there for the Rouge Bouillon school replacement, so is the money there for what is called the east of St. Helier school?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes, absolutely.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

The money is there as well?

[11:00]

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes. We do have funds but what is happening is we know that we need to go through the process. When you are going through the planning process the major funds is when you start to build and the major funds when we start to build is in 2025, 2026 and 2027. The Rouge Bouillon school is likely to start to build in 2026 because you need to go through the process to move the estate around.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

You did also mention the Le Rocquier sports field and you think that would be in place in about 2 years?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes. I am starting ... okay. Le Rocquier, let us make it clear. We had a meeting with Le Rocquier and my officers would progress with upgrading the sport hall because we need to do disability access; we need to add some things. We need to bring it to the modern standard. It will not be new build, even though I wish we had a new build, but we do not have money for the new build. Saying this, we must bring it to the modern standard. Second, it is to have a playfield at La Rocque. The moment that I ask to put the plans together, it is a feasibility study, then it needs design, it needs to go through the planning, so to progress with this one it is all ready, but the officers do start work on the plans.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

I just have a question on something a bit different now. It is about dyslexia. Please could you advise whether any work is being done in Jersey schools to specifically support students with dyslexia? If I give a bit of background to this, we saw the information on an organisation I think called Made By Dyslexia and how all these people from New York, for example, have had the full training, which is free for teachers. We were just wondering what is the position in Jersey at the moment.

The Minister for Children and Education:

It is something that we are in the process because there is a conversation if dyslexia needs to be diagnosed and, if yes, in which stage, and does it make a difference in early years if it is diagnosed or not. From my understanding, what is really important to understand is that there are literacy difficulties which are described in different ways. The terms “dyslexia” and “specific learning difficulties” are often interchangeable. If you are thinking about the word “dyslexia”, it is coming from 2 Greek words, “dys” meaning “difficulty”, “lexica” meaning “words.” What teachers train at school - S.E.N.C.O.s (special educational needs co-ordinators), it is not that all teachers are S.E.N.C.O.s - they train how to recognise what are the difficulties in learning, reading, spelling and how to find the right tool to address the difficulty that the child is facing and how they can progress. The new co-offer for 2023-24 - we do have a co-offer for 2023-24, this academic year - it is to train in assessment, including a specific literacy assessment, which we call the J.L.A.I. (Jersey literacy assessment and intervention) tool. All S.E.N.C.O.s have been trained to use their J.L.A.I. tool and follow this assessment. They can create a programme which will suit a child’s need to progress with the difficulties in learning and spelling. A S.E.N.C.O. can administrate tests, but also more complex cases going to the educational psychologist. So there is initial testing and from initial testing, an initial intervention. If it did not progress, it would go to the educational psychologist.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay, I see that diagnosis part. This actual free online training is championed by Richard Branson, who is dyslexic, so there are not any plans to look at that or anything ...

The Minister for Children and Education:

I am happy to look at it. I did not hear about this before. I will take it and I will speak with our Associate Director for Inclusion. To be honest, I personally welcome this new J.L.A.I. tool that was introduced this year because it was not a cohesive approach. It is really important to see what is dyslexia, what does it mean, yes. Seán wanted to add something.

Group Director, Education:

A strong theme at the Scrutiny hearing has been early intervention, early help. The Chief Officer mentioned our early help and the Associate Director about the C.A.M.H.S. early intervention team. The word “dyslexia” is helpful but it tends to be assessing later in life because young humans, children, learn to read and to write and to process at different rates, so the point is to get in early. Earlier this week the Minister presented certificates to 5 new reading recovery teachers and we have got Master’s level training for all of our S.E.N.C.O.s, who are referenced in this tool. But that intervention gets in early, to the 5 and 6 year-olds who are the lowest performing class, the 16 to 20-week programme we put in the middle, and they do not drop back. Most dyslexia assessments would be after the age of 8. We want to get in really early. It may be with all those interventions a child or a young person still has a difficulty, even into adulthood, and you would assess it. So dyslexia can be a useful term, but it is a catch-all and we want to get the specific literacy needs of a child and get in early, so a lot of that work is teacher-led and with S.E.N.C.O. and reading recovery teachers providing in-school expertise.

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

The whole ethos I think of this ministerial team and in the department is very much along the lines of this inclusion. That is our main piece of work and the values behind that work spread throughout the department. Just like the A.D.H.D., even if a child does not have that diagnosis of dyslexia, the support should already be provided by the school for the specific needs. But yes, that training sounds really interesting, does it not? We will look into it.

The Connétable of Grouville:

My questions are more about the language skills that are being taught to our children. Please could you provide the details of which schools the Alliance Française currently provide French language teaching to?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Sure. It is great that we have started to look into the languages. I will first answer the question but I would like to add something else about the languages. Support for schools from the Alliance Française is as follows: Les Quennevais 4 hours G.C.S.E. (General Certificate of Secondary Education); Grainville 3 hours G.C.S.E.; Haute Vallée 3 hours G.S.C.E.; La Rocque 3 hours G.C.S.E.; Hautlieu 13 hours G.C.S.E. to A-levels, J.C.G (Jersey College for Girls) 8 hours G.C.S.E. to A-levels. As we know, French is one of the official languages of the Government, of the States, along with English and Jèrriais, and currently the only compulsory language to be provided in schools at key stage 2 as per the Jersey curriculum document. About general multilingual learners, I do not think that we discussed the strategy that was lodged by the department in May 2022. We are coming to 2 years in 2024. In October - and it has been advertised already in the press, but we are going to put in more advertising - the British-Irish Council are coming here for 2 days, 19th and 20th October, and the first day will be dedicated to Jèrriais and the teaching of Jèrriais in Jersey, and the second day will be dedicated to a multilingual learners' approach in Jersey. We will have representations from the universities and from all British-Irish Ministers and officers coming to us to the conference.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Thank you very much. My next question relates to how time has progressed with language teaching. What you currently have in place, how does this compare with pre-COVID levels of language teaching? In other words, how has it changed?

The Minister for Children and Education:

I was not aware how it was before, pre-COVID, because I was not there, but maybe Seán can help.

Group Director, Education:

A substantial change, if I may, in the teaching of modern language happened a bit before the COVID period. In 2016 we more than doubled the compulsory French teaching. It used to be a minimum of year 5 and 6, the top 2 years of all primaries, and we went throughout key stage 2, so every child in years 3, 4, 5 and 6 get French teaching as part of the compulsory curriculum, but more than that, each year 5 class in the Island - the children who start the year 9 and become 10 year-olds - have what we call the French experience, an immersive 6-week half-term block, where up to half the weekly lessons are taught in French. That has a huge impetus, which we resource centrally, but with very strong support from schoolteachers, upskilling teachers as well as full-time specialists and a part-time teacher of French in our schools. That has been a great springboard for children into secondary education. That was the big change. Now, obviously visitors to schools in COVID stopped. Peripatetic staff, whether it is the music service or multilingual languages or the Jèrriais team, in COVID stopped going in, but that is now fully back in place since last September, so we have had a year of being back in full support.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Excellent. The other question I was going to ask was about the funding of that provision. Is that centrally funded or do you rely on the head teachers or each individual school or is it centrally supported?

Group Director, Education:

It is centrally supported, as indeed - as the Minister has referenced - is the language assistance. Both those we fund directly and through the Alliance that go in to support the verbal conversation piece for G.C.S.E. or A-levels in our schools by us.

The Minister for Children and Education:

But it is funded centrally.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Yes, excellent. Just to back that up, I just wanted to ask how that is reflected in this year's G.C.S.E. results in French language compared to previous.

Group Director, Education:

The data of the G.C.S.E.s taken, 86.1 per cent of Jersey students who took French got a grade 4 or above and some got very high grades; 76 per cent in England for all G.C.S.E.s got good results. It was higher in French than the average G.C.S.E. performance. It is not a compulsory subject, but of those students who took it we have got specific data that we can share on the government schools, but all G.C.S.E.s are still subject to appeals and re-marks, so the 2 private schools will give us their data when those are completed. We can happily share with the panel precise numbers by grade and school if that would be useful to you.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Yes, it would, Seán. One thing I would like supplemental to that is are fewer ... like you are saying, it is non-compulsory, but have you seen numbers drop or rise in that respect?

Group Director, Education:

Obviously, since the olden days when it was compulsory, the numbers have dropped, but they are now in the option choices, so young people are actively choosing to study. You have asked about French, but of course we have a range of other modern languages ...

The Connétable of Grouville:

Yes, that was my next question.

Group Director, Education:

... being taught, so we have a greater diversity of languages being taught. Some schools are looking at bringing in some languages, for example, Portuguese, that used to be an ancillary subject, coming into the option blocks to give it a better status to be taught in the day. One of our schools is looking to use technology in the future to almost allow any language to be taught. That is an ambition. It is a bit further ahead from us, but the choice has improved. The compulsion is not there, so the children doing - the young people, sorry ...

The Connétable of Grouville:

Voluntarily.

Group Director, Education:

... at 14 to 16 are actively choosing.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Yes, marvellous. Thank you very much. Obviously we have had a great deal of emphasis in the States Chamber about the Jersey and Normandy link. Please can you provide any further details about that and how the joint working with Normandy schools is progressing?

The Minister for Children and Education:

The good news is that visits have started to happen again after the pandemic. Many Jersey schools hosted visitors from Normandy in Jersey, in particular I would say 100 students from Granville visited La Rocquier School and our primary school hosted their partners through the summer term. It was a meeting with a representative from Condor Ferries that left us hopeful that for more schools in Jersey day trips will be available for 2024, because it is not just to go for several days, it is to go for a day trip. The link between also J.C.P. (Jersey College Prep) and the primary school in Hambye is a particular highlight. The delegations also from Guernsey and [Skills Finance] and Jèrriais have gone together and visited in May, where they visited an exhibition by French students of the legend of Hambye, to which our La Hougue Bie story is connected; there is a connection. I have been to the University of Caen and renewed our memorandum of understanding to enable support for students studying in Jersey to continue their language and high education in Caen.

[11:15]

We will promote options for Caen University early in 2024. We have the language adviser as also the member of the group and we have this continued engagement. It is not just Normandy. I also went to the Rennes School of Business in Brittany. We started to communicate about options for

very attractive Master's in business that connected to agriculture, that connected to A.I. (artificial intelligence), that connected the things that we know that we need these skills. It is in early stages, but I think with much more activities, this ...

The Connétable of Grouville:

It is ongoing.

The Minister for Children and Education:

It is ongoing.

The Connétable of Grouville:

That is another one of my questions, is to ensure that progress is being made.

The Minister for Children and Education:

Absolutely.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Excellent. We had, I think, 60 students visit Grouville from Port-Bail and we took them to the zoo and they had a wonderful day, so it is ongoing. Thank you, Minister.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Can I just add a quick question? If I just add a question to that, I understand that the Alliance primary school programme stopped during COVID and that they wanted to start again. Are there any plans to take that up?

Group Director, Education:

If I may, sorry, Minister.

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes, sure.

Group Director, Education:

The Alliance have been very supportive when we introduced the French immersive experience we launched in 2016, prior to the COVID period. We used to have a small number of their language assistants, who on an annual basis had come to Jersey and worked for a year. Most of the focus of our work with the Alliance is at the secondary schools for that work. As we piloted and then embedded in our funded resource for primary French, we simply needed the Alliance lesson primary

and used them in the secondary education, so there was not a private programme as such after 2016. They were a contributory part of the wider French experience.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

So there are not any plans to use them in primary?

Group Director, Education:

The Alliance are a very valued partner, but we will use them as the strategic plan for advancing languages continues.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay, thank you.

Deputy B. Porée:

I am going to be asking some questions about school uniforms. Minister, can you please provide us with an update on the work the Government are doing to assess or action the recommendations of the J.C.R.A.'s (Jersey Competition Regulatory Authority) report on school uniforms, which was published last April?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes, thank you for the question. It is work in progress. I have accepted the recommendation. I am engaging with the businesses who supply uniforms. Yesterday I had a meeting with one of the suppliers and the Chamber of Commerce. We discussed how we progress forward. Next week I will be publishing a questionnaire survey to the public because before I am finalising the policy and finalising the guidance, I would like to get more feedback from the public. I will really encourage the public's response to the questionnaire. It will help me to get more insight what the public feel, what parents feel, what children feel and understand. It will inform the final decision, how we progress with the policy and the guidance. It will be published in several languages as well, so it will be accessible for parents that English is not their first language. What is really important for me once I am developing this policy and practice is to hear the voices of everyone to bring it together. From one side we have suppliers - we have limited numbers of suppliers - and from the other side, it is clear for me that the ultimate goal is to reduce cost of school uniforms, as we hear from the public every August/September before the beginning of the academic year. It will be a process because some schools do not have compulsory or do not have branded and they are already there. Some schools do work and some schools will need to go some way from the number of branded items and it will be a process. I cannot say that immediately we will go from zero to 100. Probably it will take 2, 3, 4 years to make sure, but the most important, that gradually we will reduce the cost of the uniform.

Deputy B. Porée:

Thank you for that. So obviously you really are looking to have the public feed back ...

The Minister for Children and Education:

Absolutely.

Deputy B. Porée:

... on how they feel about that and you have mentioned some schools are closer or further away from where you need to be. You also did mention the suppliers, so I have got a question about the suppliers. Have you received any feedback about the impact of the timing on the suppliers at this stage?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Absolutely. I have engaged with 2 major suppliers. Because of my foot, I visited only one. I plan to visit the second one. This business is a very complex business. It is the numbers of the items and the stock that needs to be in. It is enormous. It is each school has a different approach: different logos; different sizes; different years. It is complex. This is why I am thinking when we are introducing the policy - and the new policy will be in place from September 2024, following the J.C.R.A. recommendation - it will take a gradual approach of implementation to make sure that we have a balance, reducing gradually the cost of the uniform and making sure that businesses are able to phase out and to adapt. From my understanding from the businesses, they need to place an order well in advance and any changes will take place. We also need to consult to make sure that we work with the head teachers, so it is a complex piece of work, but we will work together and I will find the balance between introducing policy and the implementation period.

Deputy B. Porée:

Thank you. So timing is very important for you to liaise with businesses. When do you expect to be able to provide an update about school uniforms for September 2024 school year?

The Minister for Children and Education:

By the end of this year I will publish my policy and the guidance.

Deputy B. Porée:

End of the year, okay. That is very good. Thank you for that.

The Minister for Children and Education:

I might be able to do it earlier, but I will need to speak with the head teachers and it depends how the whole conversation goes.

Deputy B. Porée:

Thank you. Minister, with regard to your plans to update the Education (Jersey) Law, does that include any clauses or guidance about school uniforms?

The Minister for Children and Education:

It is separate.

Deputy B. Porée:

Completely separate?

The Minister for Children and Education:

It will be separate, yes.

Deputy B. Porée:

Can you provide some details of that, how you are going to be ...

The Minister for Children and Education:

Of the Education (Jersey) Law?

Deputy B. Porée:

Yes.

The Minister for Children and Education:

In the Education (Jersey) Law there are several items that I need to work out. One of the items is the school autonomy, another item is around the governance arrangements with, for example, Highlands. There are lots of other items where questions and concerns have been raised with me and I need to work over the year to make sure that ... and I need to work together with the public and teaching staff.

Deputy B. Porée:

Thank you. Presently the current law includes clauses for the Minister to provide suitable clothing or footwear where the child does not have access to these. How often is that used?

The Minister for Children and Education:

First of all, we do have Jersey Premium support and the head teacher has the money of the Jersey Premium. This money definitely should and could be used to support children to buy a school uniform when there is a problem. There are funds that come in from the Government.

Deputy B. Porée:

That takes place often?

The Minister for Children and Education:

It does. If it does not take place I would like to know, but from my conversations with the head teachers, I have been told that it is happening. On top of this, we know there is Variety. I know it is a charity, but they are definitely making a big contribution towards the school uniforms. There is one school that decided on the first blazer, because the blazer is one of the most expensive pieces of the uniform. They give for free to every student that starts secondary school, so it was a head teacher decision, so the first blazer would be given free. There are options, but again, if you have feedback, I would like to know.

The Connétable of Grouville:

If I may, Chair, my feedback from my own school in Grouville was really around timing. They were concerned about their supplier because they restock at this time of year, after the big influx of the August holidays and the start of term. Their stock levels go like this and then they restock a year in advance so that it is all about timing. I think your feeling is correct, that you tell them well in advance so that they are not going to be lumbered with a lot of unnecessary stock and you know what that will do.

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes, and this is the conversation, that we are working together and we had the meeting.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Yes, it is very important. It is all about timing.

Deputy B. Porée:

Minister, do you have any idea of costs on this particular availability you have to provide uniforms if you see that a child or a family is not capable of purchasing? Have you got any idea of that pot of money that is being used or is there to be used for that purpose?

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

Yes, so there are charities that help with that. I think it is Variety.

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes, but from Jersey Premium, because each school has different ... this is the problem, that we do not have ... we have one school cost of the uniform is very, very different. It can be half from the other school uniform, and each school needs ... we need to make sure the child does have a school uniform. There is another thing that 80 per cent of the schools and I personally do use myself. It is the second-hand uniform, which if we are speaking about small children, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, they grow so fast, and it is good for the environment also to reuse. But I do not believe that any child needs to come to school without a good standard uniform, if it is brand-new or good second-hand.

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

I know it is difficult for parents to raise concerns about this sometimes because of the stigma attached to perhaps not having the funds to be able to buy a uniform, but I would encourage parents to talk to the school and let the school know, because I think people do not always tell the school when they are struggling and they should tell the school.

The Minister for Children and Education:

I received a report from the head teachers and we know that some schools have more Jersey Premium children compared to other schools. There are differences in Jersey. The conversations that I had with head teachers at schools, they said: "We can see ourselves that the child struggled and we did not wait for a parent to ask, we just got it."

Deputy B. Porée:

That is fine. I mean, it would be good at some point if you could gather some data around those costs because it will be a really good way to gauge which families - the numbers in terms of money - are not able to purchase those uniforms and therefore to understand the sense of this change in the law. If you can find that data at some point, we probably would like to come back to you again.

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

Sure.

Group Director, Education:

Yes, so our Education Welfare Service, who support families where attendance is a problem, check registers and work with schools. They oversee the relationship, both hardship funds we hold and with Variety for uniforms around primary and secondary, so I am sure we can go and look at the data.

The Minister for Children and Education:

It would be good to have the data together and the figures to understand.

Deputy B. Porée:

If possible, yes, just to give that awareness.

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes, it will help.

Deputy B. Porée:

Thank you.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Can I just point out something? From time to time the parish halls will help, so if anybody falls between the cracks, does not get in touch with Variety or whatever, we have done that sort of thing before. I cannot speak for parish halls, but there are some that do.

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

There is a new charity being set up that I have only just become aware of this week. I cannot remember the name of it, but there is a charity that is collecting donations of uniform to provide for free. A lot of the schools will have the second-hand uniform very cheap, but there is also this other option now that is in the community, someone who is organising it, which I think is great.

The Connétable of Grouville:

We have a second-hand shop for uniforms at Grouville. When there is an open fair, it is like bees around a honeypot if you see the second-hand store.

The Minister for Children and Education:

It is much better to buy for 2 or 3 parents than to pay that.

Deputy B. Porée:

But if you have the community taking those forward steps, again it is a kind of indicator that people are struggling with that and they are taking the initiative, which is really good. Thank you.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

My turn, Minister. How has the Isos report on early childhood education and childcare, which was published in June, informed the Government's early years policy development?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Is it okay if I hand to my Assistant Minister? Deputy Louise Doublet has full responsibility for early years and the Isos report.

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

Yes, thank you. So this evidence refresh is the first phase of the early years policy development and it was looking at national and international approaches to early years provision. So the insights within this report, it is very important to me that any work and any policy that I commit to is evidence based. So this is going to input into some roundtable events initially that are being held with stakeholders from across the sector in November and January.

[11:30]

These are really critical because any development of medium and long-term policies for the early years sector must be done in partnership with the sector, so I will be listening to those present and asking them what they think about the evidence in that report. We will be reflecting on that together. I am going to bring some policy options to those roundtables and I am also going to listen to ideas from those present and make sure it is all considered as part of the policy development.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Do you have an initial assessment of this report?

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

An initial assessment of it?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Yes, yourself.

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

What do you mean?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Well, if you have the report, have you an assessment of how you feel it should be taken forward?

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

It does not contain recommendations. It has outlined some of the evidence, so some of the key messages are that participating in early childhood education can have transformative positive effects on children. One of the really interesting points that was raised within that report was the difference between childcare and child education and the different outcomes from those different types of

education. There are some things that we need to be mindful of that were raised in that report, for example, expanding early childhood education and childcare without being mindful of quality could be detrimental to children, so quality is always at the forefront of anything, any policy, that I think of within childcare. It also looked beyond childcare at the family situation. For example, our paid parental offer in Jersey is already much better than many other jurisdictions. Having been part of that, it is something that I am very proud of, that Jersey has that in place, and of course that it is also equal because a mother or father can access it. Families who are economically disadvantaged, there is a relatively low use of formal childhood education, so this is something that is comparable with other jurisdictions, and that because we have a very high level of percentages of families where both parents are in full-time employment, a feature of our childcare sector is that a high level of children are in formal childcare rather than informal childcare.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Can I just add on to that? The Isos report, which you described as an evidence refresh, it cost more than £15,000 for this report. Do you think it added anything new to the reports that were already available from the last few years?

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

Yes, definitely.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

You do?

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

Because we have this shared evidence base now. I mean, there has been very little emphasis on, I think, the formal policy development behind early years in previous governments. There is a fantastic operational team in early years that are supporting the private nurseries and supporting the States nurseries and reception classes, the early years phases within the schools, but in terms of looking ahead for the long term and thinking about what kind of system we want to craft for our children, before the Early Years Policy Development Board, which is very much an initial first step, there was not anything. So it is absolutely critical that we took that first step and looked at the evidence across jurisdictions and across the academic research base to make sure ...

The Minister for Children and Education:

It did help because it is not to do another review, another review and another review. We have had lots of reviews done over the years, but this is clear evidence which will progress to the roundtable. We need to be prepared for the submission for the Government Plan in April, so it is very fast, based on this evidence what we need for the childcare for the early years investment. So this evidence

base helped the proper discussion with all stakeholders to create the policy and to create the business case and submission for the early years.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay, thanks.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Minister, with reference to the announcement of additional funding grants to support both existing and new childminders, could you please outline what uptake there has been for the grant, i.e. how much grant funding has been paid out in total and how many individuals has this been paid out to?

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

Sure, yes. So the childminder grants, that was in direct response to the feedback from parents, so of course we all know that parents have been citing that they are finding it hard to find some childcare spaces. While of course I am supporting the nursery sector, the childminders are also a really valued form of childcare and I personally wanted to try and support them. So there is some governance arrangements around that because of course we cannot just hand out public money to people without having some governance around it. Jonathan, do you want to say more about that?

Programme Director for Education Reform:

Yes, indeed, Assistant Minister. In conjunction with that group we have agreed a number of initiatives, either around support for the existing workers or those who are willing to become workers in that sector. The instruction now to officers has been to create that governance process so that we can ensure the appropriate spending of government money, while also making, if you like, the application process as easy as possible. So that is the stage that we are at now. We do not have an uptake figure either in terms of numbers applying for either the £500 for existing or the £1,200 for new. That is part of the data that we track and will be able to provide, I think by year end, because this expenditure is going to be based on an annual financial year basis. At the governance process stage it is making sure we spend the money wisely and we have easy access, an easy application process, and we will report back at year end, if that is suitable, in terms of the uptake numbers.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

When is your year end?

Programme Director for Education Reform:

The financial year at the end of December.

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

But it is not going to stop people from receiving the start-up grant, so it will be slightly backdated so that those who are new, within a certain number of weeks or months, will still be able to get that full start-up grant.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Okay. Are there any conditions attached to the grant, i.e. do they have to support a certain number of children or prove that they have used the money for certain purposes?

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

Yes. I did ask that there were ... so what I do not want is people taking the grant, setting up and then not seeing it through and providing any childcare spaces. I did ask that they would provide, I think, at least 2 years of service and if they did not stay in the sector for that amount of time, it would have to be paid back, so yes.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

What evidence do you have that this was the most appropriate use of government funding for this sector?

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

I did extensive consultation with the sector. I am in direct communication with the chair and the vice-chair of the Jersey Association of Child Carers and I asked them a lot of questions about support. This is not the only support that we are providing. It is not just financial support, but also trying to help their structure as an organisation because the 2 individuals that run that organisation, they provide a lot of training and I think informal support as well. That is something that I have strengthened from within our department, that they are supported more so that they can then support the childminders as well. I really hope that people do come forward and join the profession, because from what I have seen there is such a wonderful community there. I went to one of their playgroups and they support each other. Although as a childminder you can be a lone worker and in your home, they all kind of go out and about and they do trips together and meet up, they have things like sports day in the summer and there are 2 playgroups a week I think that they run themselves that are also open to the public. They provide such a fantastic service and I think it is really important that we support them.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Assistant Minister, at the last hearing you advised that the additional funding, £288,000 of the Nursery Education Fund, had been absorbed by costs that nurseries were facing. Does the Government have any long-term plans for supporting the early years nursery sector with these cost pressures?

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

Yes. This is something that has been raised with us and I think repeatedly raised with us. I would like to see more investment in early years. I think it would be too early to just inject more money directly into the nurseries, I think first of all because we would need to have more information about the nurseries. That is something that is part of the work that I am doing and my team are putting together a survey for the nurseries to give us more information about ...

The Minister for Children and Education:

I think it is important to look from several aspects. We all know there is the cost of living and cost of running businesses and it has increased. It is like we are facing increased bills at schools; they are facing increased bills at nurseries. It is very clear where we are all headed. This is an option to support direct to nurseries or there is an option to support parents with the cost of the nursery. For the long term, this work that Deputy Doublet mentioned previously that we are developing, it is for the long term, how the early years will be funded going forward. Short term, I am sure that you have seen in the Government Plan that we gave extensive tax relief, that the threshold has gone up for tax relief for working parents, so this is in a different way, but it is direct support for the parents who work with the cost of the childcare through the tax relief.

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

That is something where I had to approach the wider ministerial team, so I had to go to the cost of living ministerial group, because it is not something within the budget for early years or C.Y.P.E.S. that we have the money for, to give more money directly to families, although I would love to do that. I had to go through a process where I presented different options to the cost of living ministerial group and one of the options that they did approve, and it is in the Government Plan, is that childcare tax relief. Now, I would like to go back to them and I will go back to them. I think it is fair to say that I do think we should be supporting the childcare sector more once I have a concrete plan and that will come out of this, the roundtable of the policy formation.

The Minister for Children and Education:

We supported through the tax relief for 2024. There is a plan to submit submissions for the Government Plan for 2025. There is extra funds that we have allocated from the gross to support more targeted support 2 to 3. I think it is almost double from last year; we will double in 2024. The work that currently we are doing with the economy department - we had several reports and we are working through them - it is about to make a case for the future economic benefits of people going back to work with support for their childcare. We might be able to do something within 2024, like targeted practical small adjustments, but the bigger piece, it will come hopefully from 2025.

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

Yes, and I am timing this policy work so that the findings and the plan that comes out of that will be ready in time for me to seek that financial back-up to implement it for the next Government Plan.

The Minister for Children and Education:

The question of how much we put money into the nurseries or we are giving money to the parents, it is a question, but what we do with the nurseries, we support them, we can get the support of the training, of the education, but then include it in our professional development.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

You mentioned the survey that you are going to do for the nurseries. When do you think that will be ready for them?

Programme Director for Education Reform:

We are just at the final stages now of developing which different data people want to ask for. We also need to be very cognisant of the fact that in many cases Government already holds the data, so it might be questions to other departments to avoid asking the nursery sector for information they have provided under a different guise. The intent is to have that ready for the input to the roundtable either in the November round or the January round. It is most likely to be done to align with the school census, which is around the November time for publication of results. So if we can get those moving parts to align, that will be ideal. Certainly the Assistant Minister has instructed us to have it as an input to one of 2 roundtables so that data can be considered by the group which are developing policy. I think that is a definite end of November or January commitment.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

You mentioned just before about the training, which was my next question. Highlands offers various childcare courses at different levels to get qualifications for working in childcare. Could you tell us how many spaces there are each year for new entrants?

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

We did request this data, but because there is industrial action ongoing, we have not been able to gather that data from the college. What I have got is for the early years education courses. I have some information on how many students have enrolled in that course. Would you like to hear that?

[11:45]

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes.

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

In 2021 it was 14 students, in 2022 again 14 students. In January 2023, 28 students were enrolled on those courses, and in September 2023 another 20 students were enrolled.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Do you know what percentage of people completing these courses at Highlands go on to work in the early years sector?

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

No, but I have asked.

The Minister for Children and Education:

This is one of the pieces of information that we will need to chase. Once we receive it, we will share.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay, so we can maybe get that later, yes. The only other question on that is: do you have any data which reflects how long people work in the early years sector?

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

That is something that the survey that is being crafted will, I think ... yes, because that is something again I would like to know and to explore the reasons why people stay or do not stay so that we can try to help the sector to retain staff.

The Minister for Children and Education:

I think there is a discussion that needs to be held. We have so much diversity in approach within the school and it is how we make diverse childcare. If there are different approaches, different training, because we know that we really progressed and we need to look into the current demand and the needs within the population. Not every one course and one type of childcare fits everyone.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay, thank you for that.

The Connétable of Grouville:

I think staff turnover is an indicator of many things.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes.

Deputy B. Porée:

That will be really good for you to look into that because I have been receiving feedback and it would be interesting to see where your data comes in with regards to those qualifications. That will be really good, yes.

The Minister for Children and Education:

We have just started; we are the beginning. Yesterday we had a discussion. We need to start to expand different options for the training. They are available, I think.

Deputy B. Porée:

Yes, and it is necessary because obviously the staff need to adapt and the less they take part in these trainings ... my understanding is there has been quite a lot of stresses put on the staff in order to stand for the demand of a new diverse way of teaching, let us say that. That will be really good to have that as well.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Okay, we are moving on now to higher education and student finance. Minister, there has been a ministerial decision signed in July which incorrectly listed the fee increases at Highlands College at 10.4 per cent. This was rescinded in August and the percentage increase was corrected to 5 per cent. Please can you provide details about the process used to determine that percentage increase?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Thank you, Connétable, for your question. You are absolutely correct. The first ministerial decision was signed in my absence by Connétable Vibert on 12th July to raise the fee. It became apparent that it was administrative oversight in my private office and when I got back we adjusted ... we corrected the error. To correct the error I needed to sign another ministerial decision, which was signed to correct the error. It is important to understand that the current cost of delivering higher education on the Island is 37 per cent more costly than the similar higher education that is provided in England. The specialist accountant review found that the student finance funded by English providers is on average 15 per cent higher than the Island provides, so we are talking about the fees that were in excess. I will give an example: B.A. (Bachelor of Arts) childhood studies was £8,295. With 5 per cent added, it will be £8,709. When I went to Southampton University, because we are developing and looking into possible strategic partnerships, I asked what are their fees and the fees in England, most of them it is around £9,250. We know that the higher education costs more in Jersey. We can retain the talent in Jersey and it is just right that we will meet the cost, because the student finance paying to the U.K., we did allocate the £9,250 mark for the fees for higher education. I think it is just right that we will gradually address that.

The Connétable of Grouville:

I just wanted to know how that error occurred, considering ...

The Minister for Children and Education:

I think that ...

The Connétable of Grouville:

How was the error discovered?

The Minister for Children and Education:

It was discovered that basically it did not ... something that ...

The Connétable of Grouville:

It did not add up?

The Minister for Children and Education:

It did not add up because it is not something that we discussed, yes.

The Connétable of Grouville:

It created a great deal of disquiet.

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes, it was an error. It was an administrative error.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Thank you very much.

The Minister for Children and Education:

It was discovered very quickly.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Next question. It has been reported that Highlands College recently cancelled a level 3 tourism and hospitality diploma due to low enrolment numbers. Please could you confirm why low enrolment numbers impact the running of a course?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes. I think what has really happened there, we needed ... we are taking learning from this. It was less than 5. Because it is less than 5 people who enrolled - I cannot tell you the exact number, if it was one, 2, 3 or 4 - so I must say less than 5 and it was less than 5. Now, what was not communicated and we did not pick up on time is that they are all students who enrolled into the hospitality course and they were offered a level 3 option. One of the options is hospitality supervision, so it is a course within the hospitality. It is a different type of course and it is an extensive course that includes also the food and beverage. It was an alternative provided for all less than 5 candidates within level 3 and one of the options was hospitality supervision course. It economically was difficult. When you have less than 5 people it is difficult to run, but there are alternatives and it was communicated. It just happened that it was not communicated in the press. To be honest, their communication things I am taking very seriously. We do have a constant conversation and we must improve our communication on several levels. I can see it coming in various areas of the department, not just in this one.

The Connétable of Grouville:

The next question was if it had been related to funding, but clearly if there were other things ... okay.

The Minister for Children and Education:

No, it is nothing relative to funding, but when you have ...

The Connétable of Grouville:

Is there a formal policy in place regarding the period of notice for course cancellation?

Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills Department:

We are working on that.

The Minister for Children and Education:

I asked to define it. It was not in place.

Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills Department:

We have requested a notification to the department's senior leadership team, as a formal notification from the college, from the principal. We then take that to the ministerial team for a ministerial decision effectively in relation to cancel or not cancelling. We tie that in then to our communication plan. That is what we needed to tighten up.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Because if there is not a minimum time ... I think we all believe there should be because I think a lot of the stress is caused ...

Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills Department:

Absolutely.

Assistant Minister for Children and Education:

Absolutely.

The Connétable of Grouville:

That is just what we are saying. Thank you.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Sorry, through the Chair, can I just ask a second question? Can I be clear that you had a course which was a tourism and hospitality diploma and you had a supervisors' course?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Were those students all integrated into the supervisors' course?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Because they are less than 5, I am happy to provide detail - of course not to disclose - but they have all been offered.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I am ex-hospitality and I did a diploma for 2 years at Highlands College and I made a career out of it, so I would not like to lose people in hospitality.

The Minister for Children and Education:

From my understanding, some of them took this option and some of them decided to move to a different option.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Fair enough.

The Minister for Children and Education:

But all of them have ...

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Have an option.

The Minister for Children and Education:

They have options and they started their studies, yes.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Fantastic, thank you.

Deputy B. Porée:

Minister, we are going to be asking a few questions about the student finance. What feedback, if any, have you received about the online application process for student finance?

The Minister for Children and Education:

I think there is a mixed picture because I know there is some miscommunication and there is some dissatisfaction. At the same time, I have to be honest, it is much, much less than I had last year, so I can see the improvement that has been made. I do receive now a weekly update in numbers how many applications are received, how many H1 received, how many H2 received, how many was awarded, how many outstanding and what are the reasons for outstanding. So in my email I have weekly reports, so I can see the difference compared to the last year. We are still not 100 per cent, but I will just give you an example. For example, award letters sent now, it was 993 compared to 647 last year, so the speed of the reaction is much quicker, but it is not always perfect, so we are still finding ... there was a longer way the department used to work. There was decision-taking and different ways, and as you remember you raised with me last year about disregard or including second income, it took me a couple of months to create a process. Now the process is in place, so I can monitor what type of appeals where I do have a discretion. I had approximately 50 appeals from March and I already will make changes for the next year, because I can see how I can put clear guidance to a decision that can be made on officer level to make sure. So because we have learned some of the process, we understand how it would work, so it will be more ... another one, there is some dissatisfaction, which I completely understand. It cannot relate to the decision, it is related to dissatisfaction with the current order, for example. So there are places where I do have discretion. I have a discretion to disregard second income; I have a discretion around the residential lengths. We know that awards will be given for young people, for students whose parents were here 5 years and above. There are various situations. I did have several appeals and I do have a discretion to make changes. I found the thing that really frustrated me is where I am not allowed to make my own decision, so I do not have any discretion, even though I personally would sign the discretion. I will give you some of the examples: a student who lives independently for 2-plus years and by September the student did not reach 3 years. If the student would go to university this year, all

studies for all 3 years will be assessed on the parents' income when the student does not live at home for 2-plus years. It is something that I cannot ... I believe that somebody who lived independently for 2-plus years and just did not meet the deadline on September for 3 years, I think it would be right to have discretion, but I do not have it, so I cannot. There are several things that now I am putting together and we are going to look at what can be done. The challenges that I am facing - and we had several conversations - some changes are done quickly because it was easier to do such. We know that from this September we have a London component that we did not have previously. From this September we have sliding scales that we did not have previously. From this September we have met the increase with cost of living, but for 4 years it did not happen, so there are changes that I can do, but I understand that it does not meet the need. We have families that are really on a low income and even with full grant of maintenance and full grant of fees, still they need to find some funds. We have families that are not meeting our threshold, they are above our threshold, but have 3 children or 2 children that need to go to the university, and have a mortgage, but they are not meeting the threshold and we do not have other options for the provision. It is a much bigger piece of work. For example, the second property, if somebody owns a second property, £500,000 and above, they are not entitled to get a student grant.

[12:00]

But what was £500,000 in 2018, today it is different, but again, I do not have any discretion to adjust anything. We realise it is a much bigger piece of work that needs to be done. I feel that it maybe will be some mix between the grant system and the loan system. We need to work it out, what is required for the Island and how we can support. I can see that people are not satisfied, but sometimes I also have this law that needs to be fully reviewed.

Deputy B. Porée:

Of course, and I can see there is a great need for you to keep an eye on monitoring that situation. In the beginning of your response, you did mention regularly looking at your emails to check, maybe I think you said weekly you tend to monitor that process and the progress.

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes.

Deputy B. Porée:

Okay, that is good. My next question is about the training and the staff and the student services. How much training have they received for reviewing an initial application? Because we understand the beginning was not so ...

The Minister for Children and Education:

We still need to continue to train. What happened at the beginning, it was completely overwhelmed. It was the paper and you have seen the folders.

Deputy B. Porée:

That is right, yes.

The Minister for Children and Education:

So now it is all digitalised. I have 2 members of staff that are fully trained, but because they need to get the support during the big application, the support in place, we are finding out what training worked well this year and what training did not work well this year. We are in a better place, but definitely I know the areas for the next year, when we are preparing support from C.L.S. (Customer and Local Services) we need to extend some of the training. The more complex cases, when you have the business account connected, when it is complex ... if it is straightforward, it ...

Deputy B. Porée:

It is quite extensive training, were you saying?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes.

Deputy B. Porée:

Yes, and you are providing that training to staff members or they have ...

The Minister for Children and Education:

We have provided, but we found out what other training ... we are learning, so it is better this year, but it definitely needs to be added to, extra training needs to be added around more complex cases that we are discovering.

Deputy B. Porée:

Okay. That is good to hear.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Excuse me for a moment. We have reached the time, midday. Can we carry on for a few minutes? Is that all right?

Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills Department:

I am afraid Seán and I do need to go.

The Minister for Children and Education:

I have a school visit, but if it is something ...

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Just another 5 minutes?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes, 5 minutes is fine.

Deputy B. Porée:

Do you want to pick any particular question we have not had a chance ...

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Can you confirm how many appeals have been received in relation to higher education student grants this year?

The Minister for Children and Education:

I personally received 50 appeals, but not all of them progressed. We have informal appeals that come to me. I think approximately 85 per cent - I did not calculate it - are upheld and some of them progressed to the formal appeals.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Is there a formalised policy for the appeals process?

The Minister for Children and Education:

It is a formalised policy on the appeals process and it has been, I think, updated. The first appeal is not a formal appeal, it is a review, because I do not think we need to create a panel to appeal if I can review. It is in my discretion and I can sign it off, so the first appeal is not formal. If I decided that it is not right to uphold this appeal informally and the parents and the students would like to progress, they progress to the formal appeal.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

That is the grants appeals panel, so where can people see this formalised procedure? Where can they see how it is supposed to work?

The Minister for Children and Education:

It has been published, updated and sent, the student finance higher education funding. Chair, I have received your email. I did not have a chance to look into this. I will work on it, about the new publications on the website.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Thank you. Just one quick question then. I know that some of this goes across different departments, I think, but who has the ultimate responsibility for the administration of student finance? Would that be you, Minister?

The Minister for Children and Education:

It is joint. It is C.L.S. C.L.S. do it.

Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills Department:

It is C.L.S. From an accountable officer perspective, it is within the C.L.S. function operationally. The Minister is the responsible Minister.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

So you would have overall responsibility ...

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

... but the operational side is done by C.L.S.?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Operational with C.L.S. but they connect in to me all the time, so this is the emails that I receive. I receive emails from them, yes.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Thank you. We did have a few more questions. Can we do that by writing?

The Minister for Children and Education:

Yes, please. Sure.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. It is just a few more. Great.

The Connétable of Grouville:

It is only another 30 or so.

The Minister for Children and Education:

It is okay, we got used to it. Always welcome, and thank you, and there are some good ideas that I will take time to work through until the next public hearing.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay, thank you very much.

Deputy B. Porée:

Thank you so much for your time, appreciate that.

[12:05]