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The GST Consultation Team

We are writing to you on behalf of the three Catholic Church Schools that provide for the educational needs of some 1800 Jersey children. The purpose of this letter is to put the case for exemption from the forthcoming GST on school fees.

The three schools, Beaulieu, De La Salle and FCJ exist in the Island to provide religious education which was forbidden in States schools by the Loi sur l'Instruction Publique (1912). FCJ was founded in 1912, De La Salle in 1917 and Beaulieu in 1950.

Our schools are obliged to charge fees because unlike most European Governments Jersey does not provide "displacement funding" for religious schools equivalent to the amount that would have been spent on the pupils concerned had they attended state schools.

This was the very point made in the Cooper and Lybrand's Report (1998) on the Education Service in Jersey. The recommendation of that Report was that the Committee (as it then was) should "consider whether the impact of obliging Catholic schools to charge fees is desirable within the context of the States education system as a whole." The response of the Committee was that though there was "considerable merit" in the recommendation, it would be far too expensive.

The Report noted that "large numbers of (presumably Catholic) Portuguese children do not attend Catholic schools, and [the authors] would be surprised if this were a conscious decision on their parents' part." Perhaps in the future this could happen also with the growing Polish community.

Like the authors of the report we do not know how many other parents who would like their children to receive a Catholic education do not do so because of the fees charged. Human pride and sense of dignity would make even an estimate difficult to establish. We do know that the "number of sources" for funding to which the Report refers are now either so small or have dried up completely that they are insignificant.

And so we argue that religious education is available only to those families who can afford it and that the imposition of a 3% on fees which the schools are obliged to charge would tend to exclude even more families. It could even result in some families withdrawing. We see the tax, therefore, as a levy on the parental right to a religious education and hence an infringement of the laws of natural justice. We ask you, therefore, to consider carefully whether this is something the States of Jersey really want to do.

Canon Nicholas France
Catholic Dean of Jersey.

John Sankey
Representative of the Church Schools

Catholic schools

EXTRACT FROM THE COOPERS + LYBRAND
REPORT ON THE EDUCATION SERVICE 1998

1007 First, the arguments concerning a religious education. It is generally agreed in Western democracies that schools run entirely by the state should not be religious. Indeed, the constitution of the USA, for instance, strictly forbids any state investment in schools with a religious foundation.

1008 Other governments, however, do not usually take that line. Rather, most European governments are prepared to provide "displacement funding" to religious schools which agree to follow the curricular and other standards laid down for state schools: that is, they provide the schools with a grant equivalent to the amount that would have been spent on the pupils concerned had they attended state schools.

1009 Within the UK, for instance, this grant covers all the running costs of the schools (as it might be expected to), and 85% of the necessary contribution to capital expenditure. Within France, for another instance, the position is slightly different since the communes, which partly fund state schools, do not fund Catholic schools. Nevertheless these schools receive the full salary costs of their teachers funded by the French Government, which leaves parents to meet around 10-15% of the annual cost.

1010 It is in this context that we would suggest the States of Jersey's position is anomalous. It is not prepared to deny the Catholic schools any funding (the USA model), but is only prepared to pass on to them half²⁴ the saving it makes through Catholic pupils being taken out of the state system.

1011 Moreover, there is the effect on pupils and their parents to be considered. It is not entirely clear to us whether any pupils whose parents would like them to receive a Catholic education do not do so because of the fees charged; certainly there are a number of sources to which a concerned, low income parent could turn for help, and we could believe that few native Jersey residents are turned away. We do note, however, that large numbers of (presumably Catholic) Portuguese children do not attend Catholic schools, and would be surprised if this were a conscious decision on their parents' part. Our main point, however, remains one of consistency: that at present the States are, in one sense, making a considerable saving out of parents' opting for a Catholic education for their children.

1012. We therefore **recommend** that the Education Committee consider whether the impact of obliging Catholic schools to charge fees is desirable within the context of the States education system as a whole.

²⁴ A quarter, in the case of primary schools.