

STATES OF JERSEY

Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel Student Finance Hearing

TUESDAY, 24th JANUARY 2017

Panel:

Deputy T.A. Vallois of St. John (Chairman)

Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier

Witnesses:

The Chief Minister

Director of Resources and School Support:

Treasurer

[9:10]

Deputy T.A. Vallois of St. John (Chairman):

Are we all comfortable? Firstly, I think I have to apologise for the moving around and the lateness of the beginning of the hearing. If anyone wants to keep their coats and scarves on that is fine because it is freezing in here. Welcome, Chief Minister, to the Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel hearing on student finance. I have to give apologies for our chairman of this review, Deputy Maçon. He is in Planning today. First of all I will go round the table and ask everyone to introduce themselves and their titles.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier:

Deputy Sam Mézec, panel member.

The Deputy of St. John:

Deputy Tracey Vallois, panel member.

Scrutiny Officer:

Mick Robbins, Scrutiny Officer.

Director of Resources and School Support:

Christine Walwyn, Director of Resources and School Support, Education Department.

The Chief Minister:

Ian Gorst, Chief Minister.

Treasurer:

Richard Bell, Treasurer.

The Deputy of St. John:

Thank you. Just to make everyone aware, if you can make sure your phones are turned off or on silent I would appreciate that please. Also if we need to break at any point then we will do for 5 minutes or so. I will start off, Chief Minister, because this is clearly about student finance and of course your role as head of Government, and hence the reason why we have called you in after seeing the Minister for Treasury and Resources and the Minister for Education. I will start the questioning off with regards to the Education Law. The Minister for Education provides what is arguably a high quality education for children up to 16 years old. There is also provision in Jersey for any child that wishes to and has the prerequisite qualifications to continue on to A-level or equivalent, regardless of their financial status. Why does the Government not continue that policy into university education?

The Chief Minister:

I think because it is not in statute for the first instant. I think we all know that there is an issue with regard to people feeling that finance for some families is stopping them making the decisions that they would like about further education and the challenge that we face is how do we, if we wish to, preserve the benefits of the existing system while at the same time removing barriers from those who are making decisions, not either the individual themselves or het families, to say: "Well, we are going to decide although we might like to go to university we are not because we cannot afford it." That is the challenge that we have to overcome. Now we could argue that change in statute would help us overcome it and that might be something that the Minister for Education decides he wishes to do in time. But what you are doing, and what we are now trying to do, is focus on finding a solution to the problem.

The Deputy of St. John:

But many other jurisdictions do not have it in statute but yet recognise it as a huge priority, especially for long-term economics for their jurisdiction. So why would we need it in statute?

The Chief Minister:

I do not think we would and I think that with the pressures that the department has faced, and some of the challenges that the department has faced, they have been very much focusing on raising standards right across the education system. They are seeing some of that come to fruition. They have reorganised Highlands. We are seeing some excellent results coming out of Highlands now.

[9:15]

But this problem that your review is focused on, and the Ministers are now focused on, remains and needs to be addressed and I think that both the Minister for Education and the Minister for Treasury and Resources when they appeared before you have acknowledged that problem and also acknowledged that they want to work together to find a solution. But there is equally not apparently an easy solution.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

The costs of educating a child in Jersey up until the age of 18 are covered by the States and the living expenses are covered by whoever is legally responsible for that person before 18 years old. Why do you not just simply raise the age barrier there and say: "Maybe up until 25 we will continue to cover the costs of education, but the living expenses that is down to whoever is legally responsible for you" and obviously over 18 you would be legally responsible for yourself. Is that an option that has been thought about?

The Chief Minister:

I am not going to give you any answers to what the answer is going to be to this particular problem. There are a number of elements to it. There is the money that we are already using and are we using those to best effect. If you took the option that you just mentioned, then you would suggest that some of the living costs for the lowest income household third are being met, and that would then present a question of would we reallocate that to pay towards the fees of those who come from higher income households? In effect there is no option being taken off the table. But there is also the tax-related benefit. How does that work with the tax-funded benefit? Should we not think about changing those and saying: "This is actually the amount of money we spend on further education. Are we spending it in the right way?" There are fundamental questions. I imagine, from your question, they are the issues that you are addressing as well. But as far as I am concerned there is nothing ruled in or out.

The Deputy of St. John:

In terms of what is happening in the U.K. (United Kingdom), for example, the majority of our students go to the U.K. for university education. I think it was 2011 that the U.K. Government announced the increase in fees to go up to £9,000. What did the Council of Ministers do at that time since then to try and assist individuals?

The Chief Minister:

I do not and hopefully would not expect to know all the details of what has happened in either the Education or Treasury Department going back that far. There is no doubt that the uprating of the thresholds for those who receive this particular benefit has not kept pace in the way that we would want and that is why, although we have not found a solution to the ongoing problem, in the M.T.F.P. (Medium Term Financial Plan) we put aside an extra £2 million, because we said to Deputy Maçon - sorry, that he is not here - that if we could not find a solution over that 12 months then we would come back and we would accept that in the short term we need to do that uprating while we thought about the bigger picture. It is fair to say that I do not know the detail of exactly what has been done but the reality is not enough has been done.

The Deputy of St. John:

But in terms of the priority that is placed on students going to university for such things as economic growth and supporting diversifying industries in the Island, the tax system in itself to help that particular cohort of the Island, is that really sufficient?

The Chief Minister:

As we sit here it is difficult to say until we have brought together I think all the financial amounts, however they are provided, and that is through the tax system as well, as I said, through the tax-funded benefit. Then we will have to decide how can we help the greatest number of people in the most appropriate way with allocating that money.

The Deputy of St. John:

As Chief Minister, do you think there has been sufficient effort put in to finding a solution to this?

The Chief Minister:

That is a difficult question because departments are extremely busy with a number of extremely important priorities. Particularly we have seen a lot of excellent work in the Education Department looking to raise standards throughout what we might consider to be the school-age cohort. They are doing some really great work there. Over the last probably 3, or 2 years certainly, this issue of affordability for those who do not get ... well, the middle third of families that get some support and the top third of families that get no support at all, it is becoming more and more difficult. Some of

that is connected with the economic conditions. Some of it is connected with the withdrawal of the use of the loan facility in the U.K., where some students were availing themselves of those loans, either appropriately or not, and those things have come together. That has led to the issue that we face that we know that we need to address. That people are struggling.

The Deputy of St. John:

From your answers, to me education seems to have been a poor relation for too long. Is that a fair assessment?

The Chief Minister:

I would not describe it in that way. I think that it is easy when things are going well just to let them roll on. But I know that ... I do not think anybody, either the heads or the team at Education, and certainly not the Minister, take the view that they are going to let things roll on because gradually over time the standard that our children are achieving across a number of subjects is not where we would want it to be. It has sort of dropped off. They are absolutely committed now to increasing that. So if by that you think those results indicate it has been a poor relation then you could use that argument.

The Deputy of St. John:

But is it a poor relation in relation to priorities to Government?

The Chief Minister:

I do not think it is anymore, no.

The Deputy of St. John:

So only because of this term we put it in the Strategic Plan that it is a priority?

The Chief Minister:

We have had the arguments about whether they have had more money or not and how you deal with demographics and the extra money that we put in for demographics, as well as other extra money. Now we are moving on and saying at the same time, which is your point, if you are prioritising what is in the statute have you prioritised and done enough work for those who are needing further education. I think the only answer we can say, as we sit here today, is we have not yet done enough on that, in that particular area. Because of all the other priorities, it has not been prioritised in the way that we are now doing and your review is helping us to do.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

When we have seen figures from the O.E.C.D. (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) that show that Jersey spends less on tertiary education as a percentage of G.D.P. (Gross Domestic Product) than almost anywhere else, do you see that as potentially being part of the problem, and is that something you think should be rectified?

The Chief Minister:

We want to deal with the reality of where we are and what families are experiencing. We know that because of the makeup of our economy it is never a straightforward correlation between what we spend as a percentage and what other economies, which are made up in a very different way, spend. But, having said that, there are problems that families are facing that we need to address, and we owe it to them to address because it cannot be right for all the reasons that, Chairman, you have just said about competitive advantage and what our economy needs. But people are making a decision which is not what they want to make and may curtail them reaching their full advantage because they cannot afford to go to university.

The Deputy of St. John:

But is a real state of affairs if we have got a position where we are saying prioritise education and raise standards. We are putting money into raising standards across the board yet by the time a child gets to university education their parents cannot afford it and therefore they cannot go. Is that a waste of money?

The Chief Minister:

No, it is not a waste of money but there is more that can be leveraged from that money if people are in a position to be able to make the decision that they can go to university and they are not curtailed by money. Because people will always make hopefully the best decision they can at the time about their education, dependent on what career path they want to follow, and what we - and it is difficult this - do not want to be in a position of is that they are making that decision based purely on finances rather than on their meeting their full potential.

The Deputy of St. John:

If we talk in terms of supply and demand, then the society that we live in in the western world there is an expectation on having a degree and from what we are hearing it goes further than that. There is the Masters degrees, the professional ... all those postgraduate degrees as well but yet we are not supporting as a state those individuals being able to access that need in order to get a job.

The Chief Minister:

That is not right, is it? There are some. We have got to be careful in our words because a third of those that currently go to university receive great support. They receive support not only for their

fees, minus their £1,500, I think it is, but also for their living expenses, which plays back into Sam's point. Are we using that money that we are paying for those towards their living expenses, is that the best use of their money or should we be using it for fees elsewhere? So there is a third that our system is doing really well for. Then you have the next third that for some families in that third they struggle because we are only meeting a small part of their cost. Then you have got the other third where we are not meeting any of their costs. It is probably the middle third, that people that would fall into that category are having to make the really difficult decisions about whether they go or whether they do not go. But when it comes to other postgraduate courses, I do not have the numbers in front of me, but the department does support some of those courses and people to study those courses.

The Deputy of St. John:

You keep referring to this one-third, one-third, one-third situation. You seem to think that we support fully those on the lower third. We have heard that there are difficulties because of the assessment of their income from Income Support or their housing component are taken away as soon as the child moves to university so they lose that housing component for the week because they have got that extra bedroom. Is that really supporting those because we found that they are struggling as well?

The Chief Minister:

If we compare our system to some other places where they just have loan systems and everybody has a loan and they leave university then with debt, the system that we have got in place for that lower income household third is currently superior, I would suggest, to that. But if there are issues being faced by those lower income families in that third then we are happy to consider how we can support them as well. The point you make is that of course Income Support would then provide a housing component for the number of bedrooms being used. If that is part of the equation that we need to look at and that your review is raising as a concern then I see no reason why that cannot be put into the equation as well and considered.

[9:30]

The Deputy of St. John:

We have identified that there are many young people that have not undertaken higher education for financial reasons. Just from your point of view, Chief Minister, the lack of local skills that that would end up with, how would that impact on the Jersey economy?

The Chief Minister:

Ultimately we want everybody to reach their full potential, whether that is going off to university, whether it is going to a firm and doing a professional exam to the standard or equivalent of a degree or a Masters, whichever way it is structured. We are about people reaching their full potential. That is the fundamental aim, I think, of the system that we have got in place. If those individuals want to go off-Island to study at university we do not want ultimately finance to be a barrier to that but equally, because we need the higher skilled workforce that we can because we know that our people are our competitive advantage and we know that the workplace is changing.

The Deputy of St. John:

Just going back to the spending power within the public, the economies of scale that we have, if people are having to remortgage their houses, use their pension pots, to pay for their children to move on to university, how is that likely to impact on Jersey in the future on other policies across the States?

The Chief Minister:

It comes back to Sam's point about are we allocating the money that we have got appropriately, who is responsible for the living component costs. We absolutely admit that for some people they are making incredibly difficult decisions about remortgaging their home, about using their capital in their pension, and for some they are having to make now difficult decisions about what they are going to do, even in a couple of years' time, because they are thinking they have got to be in the U.K. for 3 years before they can access the loan system. Their children are in education and they are thinking about moving ... a case in hand that I can think of back. One person who is a Jersey person married somebody from the U.K. and they are having to think about moving back now because they know in 3 years' time they cannot afford it now and they will not be able to afford it in 3 years' time. These are really difficult decisions. There has always got to be some element of personal responsibility but we should not be, I think, putting people in the position where they are having to make such difficult fundamental decisions about that and the lives about where they choose to live about using everything that they are providing for a safe and secure future.

The Deputy of St. John:

There is an even bigger issue there, though, is there not? I mean if people are spending their pension pots to send their children to university the long-term effects on the States later on will mean that we end up spending money anyway. So would it be better to upfront the cost or just wait until it happens?

The Chief Minister:

There is not going to be one answer for all of that because some people in our community will have substantial pension pots and therefore drawing down some of it would be an appropriate answer for

them in providing for education. For others who have smaller or are remortgaging later in life and therefore it puts extra strain on that family on the amount of time that they have to work throughout their life or having to take a second, third or fourth job, some of those strains automatically cost a community anyway in health issues, in stress issues, in ultimately maybe needing to fall back on Income Support. So it has all got to be put into the balance.

The Deputy of St. John:

What about the risks of not being able to employ the right candidate, say, from the U.K. in Jersey to do a specially-skilled job purely because they know that they cannot send their child to university later on knowing that they will have issues?

The Chief Minister:

I think all these things fit together. It of course is a consideration for people when they are coming to Jersey, just in the same way as having a good health service is a consideration, in the same way as having a good education system throughout the years, in the same way as having a good transport link is. All these things are part of how people make their decisions about whether they are going to come here. Of course part of the calculation and when we get them wrong it does put people off coming.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

The question about the effect on our economy of having difficulties with our funding for higher education, there are some people who would suggest that there should be an in-built connection in our funding system directly connected to our economic needs. The suggestion that is sometimes made is that there should be more funding for people who are going to study subjects, that there is a tangible benefit to Jersey for having more people with those particular qualifications. But conversely there are people on the other side who would say that the funding mechanism should be based on the individual's aspirations not the needs of the economy, even if that individual's aspirations are to get their qualification, leave Jersey, never come back and never spend any money here. On principle, which of those 2 sides do you think is the one worth pursuing?

The Chief Minister:

I do not think it is straightforward like that. I would go naturally for the intrinsic value that the person is going to get from the education that they receive but lots of western economies, and I do not see why we should not be any different, but it is a greater cost to us, is why should there not be greater encouragement for people who want to go away and study medicine and things like that where we know there is shortages, where we know we are always going to need surgeons, doctors, nurses here? Why should we not have a system that might encourage that in some way? Which is not directly that we want lawyers and accountants and bankers questions, which you were not actually

saying, but some people drive at that. But I think there are bits of our economy where we could say and others are thinking about this, how do you encourage more those areas which are fundamental, we all are going to need, and yet at the same time are more costly because of the length of time it takes. Going to your point: it does not ... I take the view that we want everybody here to reach their full potential. I know we can get into this and then we want everybody to come back again. Yes, of course, I want people to come back but that is not why we are training them and giving people an education and investing in them. We are investing in them because that is the right thing to do so that they can reach their potential. It is sort of swings and roundabouts that people go off to England or to Europe, or wherever it is, for their education. Is it 54 per cent eventually come back? Something like that. But some of them bring their partners or husbands and wives with them, who also have degrees. So we can benefit in more ways than just expecting and wanting everybody to come back. We should not just want everybody to come back. We want people to come back for all the right reasons.

The Deputy of St. John:

There is an intrinsic link to population policy as well, is there not? So in terms of the amount of people that are going out and then you have to obviously get the specific skills in. So does that work within a population policy or does it work within your population policy? Do we have one? Is the interim one still working?

The Chief Minister:

We have a population policy. We talked about how it is working. We talked about how it was being refined and Education is doing a good piece of work around the database that they have of following people who go off to university, that they work with employers and working with the London office as well. So that if there are specific skills that employers are wanting they can tap into that database, and make that connection to see if those individuals want to come back and take those jobs. That for some employers has been really exciting. In fact, some inward investment businesses, I can think of at least 2 offhand, that that is one of the reasons that helped seal the deal that they had come here because they know that wherever they are in Europe skills is a difficult issue. But that connection that education is now keeping is a strength to why they wanted to come here.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

This is obviously an issue which has provoked a lot of contributions from the public. There has even been a campaign group that has been formed about it. The public profile of student finance has been raised significantly since we started doing this work. It is understood that a group has been set up to look into this matter. How is that group constituted?

The Chief Minister:

Yes, we took the view that Education produced their report, Treasury were looking at funding but they needed to be brought together to make sure that they worked together and they understood the constraints and we looked at the whole amount of money available. We looked at the educational outcomes that we were trying to achieve. So we set up a subcommittee of the Council of Ministers on which I sit, the Minister for Education sits, the Minister for Treasury and Resources sits, and Deputy Pryke, in her role as Assistant Minister for Education, sits as well. As we sit here they are in the process of collating further information from both of those departments to help ultimately inform any answers that we might work on. I am hopeful that your report, together with your excellent expert adviser, who is going to also help inform and think about solutions that we consider, and we hope to continue to work with you even after you have produced your report. Andrew is in the room. I know he is also keen particularly on some form of loan scheme. We hope to work with him and engage with the work that he has undertaken. In that regard, there are no easy answers about a loan scheme but we are prepared to look at all the options.

The Deputy of St. John:

Does this group have a terms of reference or a timeline in which they are expected to find a solution of some sort?

The Chief Minister:

They are in the process of creating a formal terms of reference and a timeline. We met for the first time because I had made contact with an individual in Jersey who has got experience of funding higher education bursaries in Australia, and I invited those other Ministers to come and have a conversation to see if there was anything that we could learn from that experience. So that was the first meeting of the subcommittee. Then we, at our next one, which I think is in our diaries, will do the formal bit as well about terms of reference and the timeline. But this is ... I would have ideally hoped that we could have had something coming forward before this September but I think we would need to engage with yourselves. You will want to consider any options or option that we might bring forward. So it is unlikely that there is going to be any changes in place for this September.

[9:45]

The Deputy of St. John:

So anything unlikely until the next Council of Ministers really.

The Chief Minister:

No, because we do the work there and are committed to doing the work this year, coming forward with an option this year, and hopefully getting approval for it this year, because otherwise it would

then fall to not only 2018 but 2019 by the time we got it sorted and agreed by the States. That is far too long.

The Deputy of St. John:

Can I just ask why this group was not set up after the report by Education had been produced?

The Chief Minister:

Basically because both Education and Treasury have lots of other priorities and I felt towards the end of last year that this was an issue that people were really experiencing now and feeling now, and I took the view that we needed to sit down together and find a solution to it rather than perhaps, as sometimes the case, one department saying: "This is my section of the problem" and another department saying: "This is my section of the problem" and those 2 particular solutions or bits of the problem never coming together to be solved.

The Deputy of St. John:

Can I ask what your view is on the higher education funding report in terms of the options that have been laid out?

The Chief Minister:

There is not one solution. What the departments are trying to do about encouraging lower cost university provision elsewhere other than the U.K. is a good option for some people but it is not for everybody. Improving the number of degree places and the quality of those degrees available at Highlands is a good option and it is right that the department is doing that, but again it is not for everybody for all sorts of reasons because going off to university is not always just about education. It is about growing as an individual as well, being away from a secure environment and learning to be self-sufficient and independent. Therefore, what the report says is that they are looking at all of those things and they are all good and they are all positive. But that does not mean that they will eliminate this issue. There will still be some companies for whom this is a big issue and we need to be providing solutions to it.

The Deputy of St. John:

So in terms of the actual report itself you see as a ... whatever the solution is, it is likely to be a blended solution?

The Chief Minister:

It is because it needs to have all those ... those pieces of work that Education are doing are good and will help some people. But the other bit of the issue about some people who want to go to the U.K. for all sorts of reasons, who are struggling to afford it, we have to think about how we are

allocating the existing money to see if we can make more from it and if we need more money or we need some other system.

The Deputy of St. John:

Is it a case of having a form of optimal finance solution to offer the individual whatever choice they make the opportunity to go down that route?

The Chief Minister:

That is how I see it, yes.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

I am apprehensive about asking this question given what happened in the States last week. But there is obviously a balancing act in terms of having a system which completely enables that no young person is prevented from achieving their potential in the education system because of financial reasons, but on the other hand the States borrowing money can be a bit of a risky business. We know that with the argument that is being made for a student loan obviously there would be a liability that the States would have to take on as a result of that. What thought has been given to this idea and to what extent is there a political will to adopt that sort of system? Is it purely pragmatics that have got in the way so far or is there a political view on it as well?

The Chief Minister:

Borrowing money does not need to be a risky business because you go to the market, you get your bond and you can have a fixed rate. It is the risk between thinking about it and making the decision. That is where the risk is because you do not know then whether when you initially thought it might cost you this and you get to the market and it costs you something else. So that is where the risk is. The chairman asked a question of the Minister for Treasury and Resources on Wednesday night, I think it was, and that was: was the quantum of borrowing being proposed for the hospital funding within the law as it currently stands? The answer to that of course was yes, it was. "Yes, it is." If there were to be, and it is a big "if" for all sorts of other reasons, if there were to be that sort of student loan that required borrowing against assets, be it whatever that were, then the current legislation, as I understand it, although this is just a high level and I am not *au fait* with all the detail, the current legislation would need to be changed. That is no different from the approach that the Treasury took when they were thinking about the hospital bond and why they asked the question of the law officers in the way that they did, because they looked at the law and thought: "If we are going to borrow that much we are going to need to amend the law." For all sorts of reasons that we rehearsed last week, the legal advice was they did not need to in that instance but if we are going to come back with something like this then, as I understand it, that law would need to be amended. But I think that there was no political dislike for a loan, it was the practicalities of getting a loan

system in the marketplace and finding banking institutions that thought it was the right approach and something that they could offer.

The Deputy of St. John:

We know that officers have been to meet with the Student Loans Group in the U.K. but as we understand it from the Minister for Education there has been no political interaction with regards to the specific issue about the potential for them to assist us. Have you made any political interaction with the U.K.?

The Chief Minister:

You are right; there has been officer interaction from the Department of Education. That interaction, as I understand it, was quite clear in that the current U.K. law I think is written clearly that the Crown Dependencies do not have access to the U.K. student loan scheme. So we have had that conversation at officer level with the Student Loan Scheme. It is my understanding that there was a meeting to be arranged because there had been an introduction made for a political level meeting with, I think, the chairman of that particular scheme. I do not think that meeting has taken place yet. There is not at this point been any political approach to the Department of Education or the Universities Minister but I fully expect that during the course of the work of the subcommittee that such conversations would take place.

The Deputy of St. John:

Do you believe there is potential, not necessarily using their system, but them assisting in terms of administration?

The Chief Minister:

I think it is too early to say whether that will be possible or not.

The Deputy of St. John:

But it would be part of your discussion?

The Chief Minister:

It is exploring what they do, what we do, is there any way, and I know that at the time that the loans position was closed to our students, Education spoke with them back then. So if there is a way that they think that they could support and help then we would obviously appreciate it.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

How does all of this fit in with the Strategic Plan? So education is one of the Council of Ministers' strategic priorities, how is what you are doing at the moment fitting in with that strategic priority and how are things getting better?

The Chief Minister:

In relation to ...?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Higher education. Wanting our young people to get the best qualifications that they are capable of getting and making sure that the States infrastructure enables them to do that. How are things getting better?

The Chief Minister:

You are asking me what is strictly I know that things are getting better. I know the results, in particular across the education system, is improving. I know that the work that Highlands is doing and people who are re-sitting G.C.S.E. (General Certificate of Secondary Education) is improving no end. They have had some phenomenal results over the last exam period. But we were quite clear in M.T.F.P.2 that we did not yet have a solution to this particular narrow issue that we are dealing with here, which is why we put an extra £2 million in, to alleviate to some extent in the short term some of the issues that families were facing, recognising that we needed to do this bigger piece of work that your review has again highlighted.

The Deputy of St. John:

Would it be fair to say that the public have not really had it made clear to them exactly what priority is being given to this specific area? In one instance they are told there is no more money for higher education. Next minute an extra £2 million is coming in after a report that they see did not really offer any solutions, it just offered options.

The Chief Minister:

If that is the case that is unfortunate because, you are right, we did find that extra money. It was a priority for Ministers to do that. I am convinced, and hopefully you will have been convinced when the Minister for Treasury and Resources and the Minister for Education came before you, that they now recognise that this is a concern for a number of families and they want to prioritise finding a solution.

The Deputy of St. John:

But in terms of the actual Strategic Plan and how it fits into business plans and follows through into business plans in terms of a whole term of the Council of Ministers, there is nothing in the Strategic

Plan that specifies university, there is nothing in the Education business plan that specifies university, so how can anyone know or appreciate or understand the priority that the Council of Ministers are giving to this specific issue?

The Chief Minister:

That is a good question and I do not exactly know the answer to it because I think you are right. I think this is one of those issues that over the last number of years people have found more and more difficult. Therefore it was not directly raised in the Strategic Plan but it is a concern and it is an issue and sometimes in politics you deal with those as they arise.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

I think you have probably alluded to this previously in terms of the group you have established but is collective responsibility getting in the way of progress at all? You shake your head so I assume that you would think that Ministers are united in the eventual goal of having a fit-for-purpose funding mechanism, but are there differences in priorities in terms of how that work is achieved?

The Chief Minister:

I do not think there is. I accept the point that the chairman made about how do people know it is a priority. That is one of the reasons why I said that we should set up the subcommittee to ensure that it does remain a priority.

[10:00]

The Deputy of St. John:

In terms of the collective responsibility side of things though, what responsibility do you have as Chief Minister to ensure that there is a timely and effective manner in which something is resolved rather than letting it just kind of carry on below the water, if you get what I mean? This has been quite a big topic for the public since before the elections and has been during the last 2 years but yet you have only had the group set up for a short while, as I understand. What responsibility do you have?

The Chief Minister:

One generally expects Ministers to get on with their portfolio and where there are issues that arise in their portfolio they will deal with them and liaise with ... if there is an independence with the other department liaise with the other department and the other Minister in delivering solutions to that problem. Sometimes for all sorts of reasons that does not necessarily happen in the way that one would like and it requires the Chief Minister to say: "Look, we need to sit down round a table and find solutions." That is where we are with this particular issue.

The Deputy of St. John:

Is there anything else that you would like to add, Chief Minister, or anything that we may have asked you?

The Chief Minister:

No, thank you. I look forward to receiving your report and I hope that this is one of those areas where we are going to be able to work closely together and we will come back when we have got your report and we have done all these pieces of work, probably with a number of solutions and for you to think about those as well.

The Deputy of St. John:

Thank you very much for your time.

[10:02]