

3. Questions to Ministers without notice - The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture

3.1 Deputy J.A. Martin:

In written questions this morning to the Constable of St. Helier: Question 3 - "Would the Education Minister indicate whether he intends to fulfil the pledge made in the consultation document called *Investing In Our Future: A Vision for Early Years*" and the final line of the answer says it is sort of being looked into but the aspiration was to take effect in 2008. Could the Minister square this with the Strategic Plan which, under "skilled and motivated and qualified local workforce, able to meet the Island's economy and social objectives and increasing more people back to work" he states - and I am assured that this document was written by our 10 Ministers with a very small officer input at the L'Horizon over a weekend - at 2.6.1: "Bring proposals to the States in 2006 for an earlier strategy which will increase the number of children with access to affordable early years education and care." Now, could the Minister tell us which is the correct statement, please? Thank you, Sir.

Senator M.E. Vibert (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):

Certainly, Sir. Both. I intend to bring proposals in 2006. It is very complex and in the document it was an aspiration for those proposals to take effect from 2008.

3.2 Deputy S. Pitman of St. Helier:

Members have heard much from Ministers about the willingness of the Executive to co-operate and work alongside Scrutiny Members. If this is to be taken at face value would the Minister for Education advise the House as to why, after requesting a report namely the BMI Stress Audit 2001 4 times and then requesting it again at a Scrutiny Meeting a month ago, I have not yet received a copy?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

I can only apologise, Sir. I asked for a copy to be provided. I will chase it up.

3.3 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier:

In his answers to written questions at the last sitting, the Minister said that the decision was taken to commission the work at St. Peter's Primary School nursery in February of this year, yet in his answers today, when I asked for the exact date - I meant the day of the month - he takes us back to 1997. Could he please enlarge upon the decision that was taken this month that that capital project should go ahead and give us the exact date when it was taken, please?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

I cannot remember the exact date offhand but, of course, it will be in the Ministerial Decisions on the website and that was when I signed the plans and the contract. But the decision to go ahead with a nursery class at St. Peter was taken by a previous Education Committee which had been considering it for some time and it had been in the plans because it was part of States policy for some time and then the date given was when it was put forward for inclusion in the Capital Programme.

3.4 Deputy S. Pitman:

In light of the Privileges and Procedures Committee and the Council of Ministers seeking

methods to attract more Islanders to vote, does the Minister see any correlation between the lack of local cultural and - even more pertinent - local political education in the school curriculum?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

Yes, I do and I have been acting accordingly. I am pleased to inform the House that I am seconding an experienced teacher from the beginning of June to work on a programme of study for citizenship in Jersey and his brief will be to construct a programme of study for all key stages in schools that gives a structured delivery of citizenship in Jersey. That will include the political dimension and, in fact, in his brief it is envisaged that he will need to meet a range of stakeholders that will include local politicians, the Connétables and the Bailiff, et cetera.

3.5 Deputy A.E. Pryke of Trinity:

Could the Minister provide any information to Members regarding the potential action of University lecturers and how this may affect our University students with their end-of-year exams, especially those completing their degrees?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

I regret that there has been action in the U.K. that has caused some disruption. The information that we have is that it was hoped that it would go away and will not have a great affect. We are trying to monitor the situation but, of course, when action like this takes place they do not often give notice. Of course, it is all students attending University that are affected. I am concerned about it and I have asked for an eye to be kept on it but unfortunately it is not something we can influence.

3.6 The Connétable of St. Helier:

In his comments to the *Jersey Evening Post* on 24th January 2006, the Minister promised to tackle the inequity between private and public sector nursery provision and I quote: "We hope to get this resolved in the next few months" he said. That was in January. Could the Minister account for the fact that in February, one month later, and notwithstanding the comments and chorus of concern from the private sector nurseries, he went ahead and signed an order for another private sector nursery to commence?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

Unfortunately, trying to find an answer to inequity in early years provision, particular education as opposed to care - and there is a difference - has proved a very difficult issue to resolve and a very wide issue. We are in discussions with the Department of Social Security and trying to tie-in with the income support system there. While this is happening there is an extant States policy and that is to provide nursery classes attached to primary schools when they are redeveloped. That is why I have signed an agreement that there should be a nursery class provided at St. Peter's School. It will provide a wonderful early years education which is a great investment in the future for children who attend and in the catchment area of St. Peter's School.

The Connétable of St. Helier:

Could I make a point of clarification? I should have said another public sector nursery, not private sector.

3.7 Senator B.E. Shenton:

The Minister has been building-up the number of States nurseries and he has also been increasing the number of teachers employed by the Island at the time when there is a Pensions Fund black hole in the Teacher's Pension Fund. Does he think it is wise to build-up the number of teachers before sorting out this problem?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

Yes, Sir, I think it would be absolutely irresponsible not to provide the correct number of teachers we need for teaching our children on the Island and I hope that would have the support of every Member of the States.

3.8 Deputy S. Pitman:

Given the essentiality of States Departments achieving best practice and value for money, as the Minister responsible for the Youth Service, would he advise the House whether he feels the current ratio of a 4-strong management team to just 12 professional youth workers is best use of limited resources particularly in light that often youth projects run under-staffed?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

We did a review of this and this was the suggestion that was needed because it is not just the 12 full-time youth workers. Of course, there are numerous volunteers and so-on and, of that management team, some of the time is designated to be spent on front-line activities. I know the Deputy has a great interest and a great knowledge of the Youth Service and, of course, the Scrutiny Panel is to undertake a review of the Youth Service and we can discuss it then.

3.9 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

In previous answers, the Minister has alluded to the fact that he is well-informed on the strategic training and education needs of the finance industry. I wonder, Sir, if he could tell me what his understanding is of what these key needs are and how his department is responding to them?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

My understanding is that we will need to maintain a very close relationship with the finance sector so as we can keep abreast of their changing needs because they do change depending on how the finance industry in the Island is developing. We have got in our schools at the moment - in 2 schools in particular - 2 qualifications working with the finance industry that we have set up. We are also working very closely with the finance industry at Highlands. A number of senior people in the finance industry are on the Highlands Board of Governors so that they can keep Highlands in particular well informed of what is required. Also the Higher Education Development Group is contacting and consulting with the finance industry so that we can be assured and we can have good lines of communication so that as and when the finance industry needs change we can react to it.

3.10 Senator J.L. Perchard:

Would the Minister advise the Assembly of his opinion as to whose departmental responsibility it is to provide education within the prison?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

I think it is the Island's responsibility to provide education within the prison and the whole idea of trying to work together as a Council of Ministers should be to resolve problems like this. I am

working very closely with the Minister for Home Affairs and I was able to write a letter the other day to say that with re-arrangement of our alternative curriculum I hope to be able to provide her with a post for a Head of Prison Education from this September. How we are going to fund underneath that is a matter we need to look at together. In the U.K., for example, it is the Home Office which provides education within the Prison Service funding and the Department of Education and Skills then supply what is required and it is funded by the Home Office. But I do not think it is a territorial matter. I think the prison is an issue and the shortcomings at the prison which need to be addressed is an issue that we should address as a whole, as a Council of Ministers and as a States. It is not something that we can be proud of and it is something that we should all work to resolve.

3.11 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

Can the Minister confirm that it is in fact his department's responsibility to educate children under 16 who are in custody or serving a term in Greenfields? Thank you.

Senator M.E. Vibert:

Yes, Sir, it is and we do.

3.12 The Connétable of St. Helier:

I hope I may be permitted to ask a question about the newly-announced Cultural Co-ordinator while you are in the Chair? I would just like to ask the Minister to confirm with regard to the new post - the choice for which many of us applaud - his previous undertaking that that is being made possible by compensatory staff savings and could he indicate which part of his organisation those savings were made in?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

Yes, Sir, I can confirm. Though it may have upset you somewhat, I am very pleased - exceptionally pleased, in fact - about the new Cultural Development Officer we have appointed and I can confirm that it was a result of internal savings of posts. I have not got the exact nomenclature of the posts but I will provide them to the Constable, because I would not wish to mislead him in any way. But I can assure him we will provide, if he wishes, the details of the posts. It was half a post in one area and half a post in the other. But, as I have said and am quite prepared to stand by, we did not create another post, we made savings. I hope as a supporter of culture that he applauds this and that we are putting more effort and energy into culture and I hope he applauds the appointment of a new Cultural Development Officer.

3.13 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

The Minister has just confirmed to the House that it is indeed his department's responsibility to provide education to the under-16s. Can he please tell us exactly what he intends to do about that?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

We intend to fulfil our obligation. When we are informed that people below statutory school-leaving age are in custody we make arrangements for their education to be provided for. Sometimes it is very difficult because of the reaction of the young people concerned but we do our best. Of course, once the new Greenfields comes onto line we will be better equipped to deal with such issues and the new Greenfields is an example of a number of departments working together to deliver a common good.

3.14 Deputy S. Pitman:

Would the Minister advise the House as to what progress, if any, has been made on securing a replacement facility for the “Move On” youth café?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

There is a group working on looking at the possibility of providing a replacement for the “Move On Café” in a vessel to be stationary-moored in a part of the harbour area. That is progressing. I have given an undertaking before, and I give the undertaking again, that I will insist as much as I can that the commitment given that there will be youth provision in that area will be met. I am adamant about that - I will do everything I can about that. At the moment the area we are looking at, as the Deputy knows, is the provision of a “Move On Café” type replacement in a vessel which will be moored - but not in the water (so it is stationary) - in the harbour area.

The Bailiff:

I am afraid the first question period has now expired.