

STATES OF JERSEY



DRAFT ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN 2011 (P.99/2010): SECOND AMENDMENT

Lodged au Greffe on 4th August 2010
by Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier

STATES GREFFE

PAGE 2, PARAGRAPH (a) –

After the words “withdrawn from the consolidated fund in 2011” insert the words –

“except that the net revenue expenditure of the Education Sport and Culture Department shall be increased by £67,000 in order to maintain the level of modern foreign language assistants in secondary schools and not proceed with that element of the Comprehensive Spending Review proposal on page 62 of the Plan ESC-S4 “Re-defining core business for schools and colleges at ESC” and the net revenue expenditure of the Treasury and Resources Department shall be decreased by the same amount by reducing the allocation for restructuring costs.”

DEPUTY G.P. SOUTHERN OF ST. HELIER

REPORT

Members will recall an earlier debate on the appointment of 8 temporary Modern Language Assistants (MLAs) for the academic year 2010/2011 (P.91/2010), which was debated on 21st July 2010. They will recall that the proposition to maintain these posts was defeated by the narrow margin of 23 votes to 20 in a late sitting of the Assembly when several members had already left the Chamber.

I believed at the time that the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture was running the risk of subverting the powers of the States Assembly in his presentation of what was, in fact, a “fait accompli” as a CSR option out to consultation, and subject to the sanction of the States in the debate on the Annual Business Plan (ABP) in September 2010. In his answer to Question 5456 on 22nd June 2010, the Minister stated that he would have options ready for this coming October should the States reject this proposal contained in ESC-S4.

His answer was as follows –

“I can confirm that the temporary posts were advertised through the Alliance Française website, but the process was suspended shortly after advertising but prior to shortlisting. As in previous years, these posts were advertised in March/April for an October start, as the contracts run for an eight-month period from October to May. In the event that the States should decide in September 2010 not to accept the proposed spending reduction, the Department would investigate alternative arrangements for the academic year 2010/2011, possibly involving additional support from the Alliance Française.”

In other words, the appointments process had been suspended, and even if the States were to reject this proposal in September, it would be too late to appoint the assistants in the normal way. Instead, there would have to be some other temporary (and almost certainly less satisfactory) solution put in its place.

At the time, I believed that this was a decision which would harm the quality of the modern language experience in our schools, and ultimately lead to a reduction in standards in our schools. I still believe that is the case. I promised the Minister that I would bring this back to the States Assembly to decide whether it wished to pursue this cut to front-line services. During the debate, several members stated that they were reserving their position, and that the September ABP debate was the correct time to decide; hence this proposition.

My approach this time is to accept the arguments put forward by the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture that there is no need for MLA input in primary schools. The new initiatives in primary French teaching make such input superfluous. As members will see later in this report, the primary element only accounts for 24 hours' MLA input out of 186 in total, or 13% of costs. This proposal adds £67,000 to maintain the full MLA input for secondary schools only.

In the previous debate on P.91/2010, the Minister implied that classes could be covered by the 4 permanent Modern Language Assistants; and many seemed impressed by the additional resources that have been put into primary French language teaching. The facts are otherwise, as shown in Table 1 below.

The 4 permanent MFL assistants teach up to 22 hours per week plus travelling time. Their total input was 84 hours per week in 2009/10. With this number of assistants to be spread between 7 schools, it is unlikely that any school will be able to claim more than 11 or 12 hours per week. The plan currently is only to use assistants in exam classes. The exception might be Hautlieu, where every class is an examination class and they have initiated the IB course with its compulsory language element.

With only 4 FTE assistants, input into secondary schools will be markedly reduced. If those schools who teach to 'A' level continue to have a greater share of the MLA assistants, then input into other schools will be significantly reduced. Le Rocquier may be down to a mere 6 hours.

The temporary assistants contribute 102 hours per week, 78 of which are in secondary schools and only 24 hours are in primary schools. If the Minister believes that the reduction of 42% in conversation and oral skills will not have a damaging effect on standards, he is to be admired for his optimism.

Table 1 Language Assistants Allocation 2009/10

		Haute Vallée	Grainville	Les Quennevais	Le Rocquier	Hautlieu	JCG	VC	Primaries	Total
MLA1 (Fr)	P				11	11				22
2 (Fr)	P	9					13			22
3 (Sp)	P					7	7	8		22
4 (Sp)	P	3	4	1						8
5 (Fr)	P	10								10
SUB-TOTAL		22	4	1	11	18	20	8		84
A (Fr)	T		12					5		17
B (Fr)	T		5				7			12
C (It)	T					2	4			6
D (Fr)	T			12				12		24
E (Fr)	T					5			12	17
F (Fr)	T					3			12	15
G (It)	T		2							2
H (Sp)	T			1	2	6				
TOTAL		22	23	14	13	34	31	25	24	186

The Minister knows that this will be a very controversial issue on an Island which is fiercely proud of its French-speaking traditions and heritage. The last time this move was proposed in 2002, it was soundly defeated by my amendment, wholeheartedly supported on the day by Senator Ozouf.

The States has the opportunity now to tell the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture that he should continue the appointments process. This year there is already funding in the previous budget for the period October 2010 to January 2011. Acceptance of this proposal would restore funding from January 2011. In the absence of any firm proposals for alternative input and staffing for modern language classes, one cannot tell how the Minister will cover the missing assistants. One option would be to restart the appointments process, but instead of running from an October start through to May, as has been the practice, a start date of January 2011 could be set.

It is not for me here to rehearse the arguments for retaining the current provisions for MFL Assistants, but I point to parts of my 2002 report which illustrate the case simply as follows –

“Why is this so critical?”

The role of the Language Assistant is central to the delivery of effective teaching and ultimately to the standards achieved. Exam grades depend upon them. As one teacher put it to me “You cannot teach modern languages without an assistant”.

Unlike many ancillaries, they are teaching staff. They work in tandem with the class teacher or alone with small groups. They give invaluable attention to individuals and groups to stimulate genuine communication in the target language.

They bring the foreign country and its culture into the classroom. They are a cheap and effective way of providing native speaker input to language learning. This is especially important in the current climate where there are fewer trips to take staff and students abroad.”

Of particular relevance to the current proposed actions is contained in the following extract from 2002 –

“Jersey Head Teachers and Heads of Foreign Language Departments have an effective and efficient system for delivering a high-quality language experience in our schools through the centrally funded scheme. This move puts the whole system in jeopardy. If the Education Committee can properly justify its proposal to abandon central funding for Language Assistants let it do so. But let it do so over the coming year by consulting with all those concerned, and giving schools time to work out the alternatives and the consequences in good time for implementation in September 2004. The hasty decision to cut the 2003 is likely to have damaging consequences and should be reversed.”

Financial and manpower implications

This amendment is revenue-neutral.