

20.11.02

2 Deputy S.G. Luce of St. Martin of the Assistant Minister for Education regarding the arrangements for Jersey students to return to Jersey for Christmas (OQ.294/2020)

Will the Assistant Minister advise what arrangements, if any, are being put in place to ensure that Jersey students can return to the Island for Christmas?

Deputy J.M. Maçon of St. Saviour (Assistant Minister for Education):

I will be answering this on behalf of the Minister for Education. I am aware of the changes recently announced in the U.K. (United Kingdom) and Europe and would like to express my sympathy towards all families for any anxiety which these uncertainties will have caused. As Members are aware from my statement on 20th October, my department is currently running a survey for all Jersey students studying overseas to understand their intentions regarding travel home for the festive period. This survey runs until 9th October and up until the end of the last week we had received around 600 responses, so I would again encourage all students studying overseas to complete the survey. The C.Y.P.E.S. (Children, Young People, Education and Skills) officers form part of a travel cell established to closely monitor Jersey's connectivity as a second wave of the pandemic takes hold in the U.K. and across Europe. At present Jersey still benefits from commercial travel options and capacity to and from the U.K. However, the situation is dynamic and the cross-government travel cell will provide recommendations to Ministers across government on options for maintaining essential connectivity if commercial travel options diminish or cease all together, as was the case earlier this year. The lifeline contract with Blue Islands arranged by Government earlier this year remains in place and will ensure we retain airlinks if commercial air travel is not viable for a period.

4.2.1 The Deputy of St. Martin:

I am grateful to the Assistant Minister for his extremely comprehensive answer. He mentioned a survey. Is he aware or has he been able to correct the possibility that this survey cannot be emailed to students because of data protection and therefore how is he to give a comprehensive picture of exactly where students are to the travel cell?

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

As a data controller, the Deputy will be aware that when you take in information such as email addresses you can only use it for the purpose for which it was taken in. Officers did, however, manage to send the F.A.Q. (frequently asked questions) out to students and within the F.A.Q. it has highlighted strongly among that information that a survey is taking place. That is another avenue that my officers have pursued in order to communicate the survey that is going on.

4.2.2 Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier:

May I ask the Assistant Minister what action will be taken to communicate the travel possibilities to students directly? Within a dynamic changing situation, one of the things that causes most anxiety is not knowing how you will travel back. What action will he be taking to ensure that each Jersey student is clear about their options?

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

The F.A.Q. and travel advice on the government website will continue. As for emailing students directly, again we run up against the same data protection issues and I am sure the Deputy and other Members would not encourage myself or officers to breach that particular law.

4.2.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Does the Assistant Minister envisage that help will be given to students who may be, in the worst-case scenario, stranded in the U.K. and away from their families around that time? If so, what type of help does he envisage is possible?

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

This is why we have launched the survey so we can understand those types of issues. Officers are already, as they did in March, supporting families with information about logistical issues. If it gets to that particular case that the Deputy raises we will need to consider those issues on a case-by-case basis and at this time I am not in a position to write a blank cheque.

4.2.4 The Deputy of St. Martin:

I am being contacted by a great number of parents asking me questions about where their children can come back from, when they can travel and how they are going to get home. Can I ask the Assistant Minister to try to reinvigorate his efforts? Time is running out, these students need to come home next month and no arrangements are in place. Will he guarantee to the Assembly to put something in place very shortly so parents can be reassured that their children can get home for Christmas?

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

I am not entirely sure what the Deputy means. The commercial airlines are already in place. That already exists. The information that we have put out exists. We would encourage university students to have that conversation with their universities about whether they could return early. We know many have already switched on to online learning and therefore provided they get the permission from the university students can come home already. Some already have. I have been in contact in with parents around that already. We do have one smaller problem that there are some courses where, for example, the universities are not giving permission for students to leave early, which we continue a dialogue with them. Can I encourage the Deputy of St. Martin and any other Member who has any queries from parents, or concerns, or students to send them to us direct and we will respond to them as quickly as we possibly can?