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**2 Deputy M.R. Higgins of the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding the rationale behind the decision to grant £100,000 to the Jersey College for Girls Foundation for marketing the school to Chinese students: [OQ.12/2019]**

Will the Minister explain the rationale behind her decision to grant £100,000 to the Jersey College for Girls Foundation for marketing the school to Chinese students and the process by which the bid was made, identifying the Ministers and senior officers involved; and will she state what other bids, if any, were considered at the same time and not prioritised?

**Deputy S.J. Pinel of St. Clement (The Minister for Treasury and Resources):**

The Assistant Minister will answer this question.

**Deputy L.B.E. Ash of St. Clement (Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources - rapporteur):**

Firstly, I think some of this question probably belongs in the realms of Education or International Relations, but I shall endeavour to answer it as thoroughly as I can. The original request for funding was made by the Education Department and it was previously considered by the E.D.G.D.P. (Economic Development and Growth Drawdown Provision) officer group in October 2017 and then again in June 2018. The group comprised the Chief Executive Officer, the Treasurer of the States and the Chief Economic Adviser and an economic assessment was then carried out. It would be fair to say that the application was progressing very positively but there were certain processes still to be completed. Following creation of the I.A.B. (Investment Appraisal Board), this body then reconsidered the request. Their role was to (a) determine funding availability as part of the contingency funding and (b) review the continued strategic fit. The board consists of 4 officers who made recommendations to the Chief Executive Officer and the States Treasurer who then make recommendations to the Minister for Treasury and Resources herself. The Minister agreed with their recommendations that there was a good range of evidence to support the pilot. The request has been put forward with the knowledge of the Minister for Education and background information has been provided to 2 Scrutiny Panels. Finally, in accordance with the Public Finances Law, which delegates the Minister the authority to allocate funding from the contingency, she does so on the basis of well-researched advice from officers who I can assure you will testify that the Minister, and anyone who knows her would agree with this, does not exercise her delegation lightly or without many questions of her own. As to the rationale, I have not the time allocated to run through this; this is the rationale. As you can see, it is quite substantial. It is not just sticking a finger up and making a decision. I will give you some of the highlights though.

**The Bailiff:**

You are supposed to answer within 90 seconds and you have already taken 2 minutes.

**Deputy L.B.E. Ash:**

I will come back to the rationale then later, should I be asked.

**3.2.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:**

First, the question was about the rationale. We had 2 minutes of waffle. Can I ask the Assistant Minister, should the States be funding what is largely a private education establishment to go into business? It is not education and were any other education bids rejected or delayed at the same time to enable this one to go through?

**Deputy L.B.E. Ash:**

There were 4 questions initially asked and I answered about 3 of them. Obviously, as I said, there are international relations to be considered. There is the whole quality of the education that we can offer the children at J.C.G. (Jersey College for Girls) and beyond. I will now give you the rationale, as I have got time. This is if it works, which obviously that is why we are marketing it. Money will come into Jersey economy and into tourism from wealthy overseas individuals; international experience for our students; investment into facilities, in particular S.T.E.M (science, technology, engineering and maths) at the college; income to the college to invest in providing additional scholarship for Jersey low-income families to access and enhance education; heighten the importance of positive international relations; enhanced opportunities for all students to target global universities; deliver education events and resources open to all young people in the Island. Also it will give Chinese students the opportunity to come over here and maybe we can build some bridges and they can tap into the school of excellence that we have with over 50,000 hospital planning advisers.

**3.2.2 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier:**

Is the Assistant Minister aware that we, in Jersey, have well-established language schools which struggle to find host families, particularly in the summer, but they operate all year round, and that this trial could well make their job much more difficult and threaten their livelihood, and could result in unfair competition subsidised by the States?

**Deputy L.B.E. Ash:**

That question was indeed considered. Questions were asked about the potential impact this would have on those other organisations that use homestay for their students. The arguments that are put forward by J.C.G. though are that numbers will be relatively low, particularly in the initial stages. We are not talking about hundreds of people arriving. Due to the differences in the duration of courses J.C.G.'s course will be a full year. Other providers are generally short courses. They would not necessarily be in direct competition with other providers. They also expect to be able to recruit homestay providers that are not already taking in students for other schools, i.e. current J.C.G. parents or those who might be attracted to the longer-term arrangement and were not previously attracted to shorter term arrangements with the other schools.

**3.2.3 Senator K.L. Moore:**

Does the Investment Appraisal Board, when providing its rationale to the Minister, inform the Minister what proposals have been turned down by the Investment Appraisal Board so that the Minister might appreciate what is not receiving funding when determining what should receive funding?

**Deputy L.B.E. Ash:**

I know some that have been turned down, others not. There are over 100 requests and some are still being processed. There is no definite list of people who have been turned down yet because other people will still ... as you can see from this. To sort through 100 requests takes quite a lot of hard work and with 4 people doing it, it is not that easy just to quickly say: "This one, not that one." Particularly as people have put quite a lot of work into putting these things together. It is also worth stressing as well that these are contingency budgets. These are budgets that are up and above what has been asked. All these departments have already been given substantial sums of money. It is just that occasionally people will come back with, to put it in an educational thing, an extracurricular sum that is needed.

### **3.2.4 Deputy M. Tadier:**

The Assistant Minister expanded the merits of this scheme, which I have to say are axiomatic. Of course there will be positives to this scheme. But that is missing the point. Can the Assistant Minister clarify whether this scheme is likely to make money for the school and the Foundation? If it does make money in excess of £100,000, will it be expected that any of that grant or all of that grant should be paid back?

### **Deputy L.B.E. Ash:**

At the moment, it is a pilot scheme so it is very much in its infancy. I certainly would hope that the grant, should it be a success - and I think we would all hope it is a success - would be paid back. But that is all still to be discussed at the moment.

### **3.2.5 Deputy M. Tadier:**

Does the Assistant Minister accept that when we are giving money in this order of sum to what is essentially a fee-paying school, an argument could easily be made why we should not be giving similar amounts to States schools, for example, Rouge Bouillon, Haute Vallée, to make equivalent links with Portugal, with Poland, with many other countries in the world, which could be equally valuable and that there is a risk, given the fact that other grants have been made, which could be perceived to be going along a class interest system rather than one to do with merit?

### **Deputy L.B.E. Ash:**

I think the main answer to your question there is that they can apply. Anyone can apply. There is nothing stopping these schools applying, whether they want China, Russia, wherever, and it will be judged on its merits.

### **3.2.6 Deputy K.F. Morel of St. Lawrence:**

Could the Assistant Minister confirm when he was reading from the rationale whether that was a bid document provided by J.C.G. Foundation or the actual decision rationale from the officers as to how they made their decision? Regardless of that answer, would he be happy to make the decision-making rationale available to States Members?

### **Deputy L.B.E. Ash:**

This is the summary business case that I showed you earlier by the States.

### **Deputy K.F. Morel:**

So it is not the rationale, it is the bid document?

### **Deputy L.B.E. Ash:**

Yes, that is correct.

### **The Bailiff:**

The second part of the question is: would you circulate that to Members?

### **Deputy L.B.E. Ash:**

I think until the full process has been gone through, no, we would not be putting anything out until all the rationales have been seen from all the other bids. It would be wrong just to put one bid out there with a rationale until we have finalised the whole process.

### **3.2.7 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Given the time in which some students would be here could be an entire course of their education is it a requirement that parents who are caring for these children enter into the same process as fostering? So has any impact been undertaken as to the effect on the current fostering services, where there is a huge shortage of families for foster carers and whether or not this decision will reduce that pool and therefore make the situation worse for other Islanders?

**Deputy L.B.E. Ash:**

I have to say that I have no knowledge that we have gone into any research as to how it would affect existing fostering families should we get 2 or 3 Chinese students over here.

**3.2.8 Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

If the numbers are low how will this particular policy improve S.T.E.M.? Is the Assistant Minister not aware that more is being done in a fantastic programme in States primary schools, which is being supplied free by a 2(1)(e) resident? Is that not better value for money and should we perhaps not be looking at that more than a few people in a particular organisation?

**Deputy L.B.E. Ash:**

I do take the Senator's point but we are looking at this as merely education. There are international things that we can hopefully build, there is a whole process that this can lock into it in a roundabout thinking. It is not just merely education. There are other international affairs. As I said at the beginning, it is education and international. The finance side is all that the Treasurer is dealing in. So as far as the benefits that the education or international are getting, that would have to be a separate question.

**The Bailiff:**

Deputy Perchard and final supplementary.

**Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

I am sorry, Sir, I did have a ...

**The Bailiff:**

I am sorry, we have been going on for nearly 15 minutes already.

**3.2.9 Deputy J.H. Perchard of St. Saviour:**

Apologies, I was a bit unclear on the Assistant Minister's response to Deputy Ward's question pertaining to fostering. Can the Assistant Minister confirm that international students coming to J.C.G. will be fostered by local families and not in a typical homestay in which safeguarding requires them to move every 28 days? If that is the case, why has a study not been done into the impact that it is going to have on local foster carers and the need for local children to be fostered and the impact on things like the drain on social workers' time, *et cetera*?

**Deputy L.B.E. Ash:**

I think that from the initial pilot scheme that we are looking at, the idea is not to foster people out, it is merely to put them with existing families of parents. There will be, obviously, all the full safeguards put in but it will not be part of Jersey's fostering community, if you like. That is, as I understand it at the moment, and that is all I can comment on.

**Deputy J.H. Perchard:**

Sir, may I ask a quick supplementary question? Can I just have clarification?

**The Bailiff:**

I just refused Senator Ferguson, Deputy. You can, go on then, clarification. **[Laughter]**

**Deputy J.H. Perchard:**

Does this mean, if the students are not being fostered, that they will be rotated every 28 days, as is recognised as good safeguarding practise?

**Deputy L.B.E. Ash:**

I will just say I am not familiar with the fostering side of this arrangement. It is really Education who would have to answer on that, as it has merely been a Treasury decision.

**3.2.10 Deputy M.R. Higgins:**

One of the questions I was asking: were any other bids turned down or not deemed to be priorities? There were bids, other Education bids.

[11:15]

Did the Minister consult with the Minister for Education about whether this was her top priority or the other education items were priorities? What consultation took place?

**Deputy L.B.E. Ash:**

As I think I said earlier, it comes through the Investment Appraisal Board, so, no, we did not consult as our body. It comes through the Investment Appraisal Board and any other education project would be put to the Investment Appraisal Board and they would judge it on its merits.