

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

The Deputy Bailiff:

Very well. That brings that part of Oral Question time to an end. We now come to Questions to Ministers without notice. The first question period is for the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture and questions will start now.

4.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the new Minister now answer my previous question, what progress has he made in delivering C.S.R. savings that his predecessor failed to deliver and when will he be bringing any such measures to the House?

The Deputy of St. John (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):

There are no easy savings in E.S.C.'s (Education, Sport and Culture) budget and I have already said that I am not prepared to make any cuts that will affect the education of our children. The department has an annual budget of more than £100 million so I am undertaking a careful review of all expenditure but this does take a little time. However, to answer the last part of the Deputy's question, I have set myself a target for Easter for making preliminary decisions about funding and hope to advise the House in more detail by then.

4.1.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does the Minister consider that spending £20,000 on a consultative body to examine the terms and conditions of Jersey teachers in comparison with the U.K. was a complete waste of time since they failed to understand basic fundamental differences between Jersey and the U.K. and, in fact, the Jersey teachers and their representatives had to rewrite a substantial amount of their report because it was simply wrong. Was that not a waste of £20,000 of taxpayers' money?

The Deputy of St. John:

Any questions about the States employees' pay and conditions must, I am afraid, be referred to the States Employment Board, which is chaired by the Chief Minister, because they are the employer. I cannot pre-empt or speak for the States Employment Board on any matters to do with teachers' pay and conditions.

[11:30]

4.2 Deputy S. Pitman:

Does the Minister not recognise that the Youth Service provides informal education and could he tell Members what services are to be cut with the C.S.R.?

The Deputy of St. John:

First of all to deal with C.S.R., an amount of money has already been cut and one F.T.E. (Full-Time Equivalent) person has been removed from the service. There is another approximately £80,000 to £100,000 worth of C.S.R. savings to be made in the Youth Service. This is a decision that I have inherited from my predecessor and indeed the States Assembly who approved those cuts in the Business Plan. There are proposals that have been put forward that have involved moving 7 or 8 members of staff between various youth projects in the Island but no final decision has been made. As I have already said in Oral Questions my Assistant, Deputy Rod Bryans, has taken responsibility for this area and he will be talking to all of the people involved before plans are finalised and I hope to get back to Members with my decisions in a report within a month.

4.2.1 Deputy S. Pitman:

A supplementary. The Minister mentioned that a full-time member of the service is to be cut. Could he tell us what impact that will have on the service, and also the £100,000; where is that cut coming from in the service?

The Deputy of St. John:

I have not finally decided where the cut will fall and how it will fall. That will form part of my deliberation over the next month. The member of staff and the one F.T.E. has already been cut during 2011, so that has already gone from the budget. I hope that answers the question.

Deputy S. Pitman:

The Minister did not answer my question with regards to the full-time employee cut, what impact has that had on the service?

The Deputy Bailiff:

That is the second part of the question.

The Deputy of St. John:

Yes, I am sorry. I am assured by my department that that particular member of staff was in the management area and other people have taken on the responsibilities of that particular manager. It is not a front line position that has been cut. It is a management position and others have been moved to cope with it, and I am assured that it will not have affected the front line service in any way.

4.3 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Could the Minister bring the House up-to-date on the negotiations with the U.K. higher education bodies with regard to fees, and advise the House what impact it is going to have on his budget, with some figures hopefully, or an indication of, the cost of these higher fees and the effect it is going to have on his budget?

The Deputy of St. John:

Following negotiations we believe that most U.K. universities plan to treat Jersey students the same as English students from September, i.e. to charge them the same fees. We did publish a list in December on the States website that identified a number of universities that said that they would be setting either different or higher fees for Jersey students, but the changes in higher education funding in the U.K. are very far-reaching and quite profound. U.K. universities have moved from being Government controlled and funded to being commercial enterprises in the full sense of the word and they have significant discretion on charging different fees to different people and also different fees within their own institutions. They do not finalise their fees until March or April, so there is still some uncertainty and it is important... and I would stress that Jersey students and parents approach entry to university as if they would when they were purchasing any other type of goods or service. They will need to shop around and consider both price and quality and I would advise them to confirm with a university exactly what their fee will be. In short, it is still a fluid situation and it is unclear how it will affect our budgets. We do not think, however, that there will be any changes for the intake with various fees to students that are already halfway through courses or indeed we do not think that there will be any changes for the intake in September 2012. Certainly it is business as usual for students entering university in 2012 as far as my department is concerned.

4.3.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

A supplementary. Could the Minister give us an indication on a worst case scenario based on tuition fees of £9,000 per annum what sort of figures, judging the number of students who have been going to university from the Island, what the impact is going to be on the department's budget?

The Deputy of St. John:

With respect to the Deputy's question I have already said that it is still very fluid and I cannot say what a worst case scenario or a best case scenario at this point might be. We are still formulating.

It is too early. We will be in a position halfway through this year as part of a review of further education to be able to provide the kind of information that the Deputy is looking for, but it is still unclear at the moment and I do not want to start hares running by making pure guesses. I am afraid that is not my style.

4.4 Senator A. Breckon:

Regarding the school population, can the Minister tell the House if there are more or less students now than was predicted in September 2011? If not, can he provide the information and say which schools have more or less students than were predicted then?

The Deputy of St. John:

The Senator is asking me questions about demographics. At the moment there is a small reduction in secondary numbers heading over the next 3 to 5 years but there is an increase in primary pupil numbers. There is a bulge in other words. This bulge goes through the education system on an annual basis. So, in 3 to 5 to 6 years' time the bulge that is currently in primary will work its way into secondary. That is as far as I can see ahead, approximately to just before 2020.

4.4.1 Senator A. Breckon:

That was a very interesting answer but it was not the question I asked. It was to do with the prediction in the school population for September 2011 and whether the current education population is more or less than was predicted in 2011.

The Deputy of St. John:

I think it is about the same. I do not think that there have been any changes between 2011 and what we now know. Is the Senator talking about in the primary sector or in the secondary sector? I am unclear.

The Deputy Bailiff:

You are the one who has got to answer the questions, Minister. Connétable of St. Lawrence.

4.5 The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

From a cultural perspective what plans, if any, does the Minister have to recognise or indeed to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee?

The Deputy of St. John:

I thank the Constable for that question. There are a number of initiatives being discussed by the Bailiff's Consultative Panel, of which I am a member, but it would be right for that particular panel to give out whatever information. I know we are getting to the point where that panel is going to release information and plans but although I have been involved in the discussions, it would be wrong for me to pre-empt that.

4.6 Senator L.J. Farnham:

Could the Minister just update the House as to the current state of play in relation to the funding proposals or any changes in funding proposals to the Island's States-funded private schools?

The Deputy of St. John:

The States made a decision last year to put all the questions of changes to grants to private schools, the fee paying sector, on hold and they also made the decision to put on hold the same kind of funding for the non-fee paying sector. That is where we are at the moment. Via another question from Deputy Southern I was asked about C.S.R. The 2 are linked and I have already said that I am not prepared to do anything that will affect the education of our children, and that includes very much the fee paying sector as well as the non-fee paying sector. The 2 are, in our system, inextricably linked and that is where we stand.

4.6.1 Senator L.J. Farnham:

Just a further clarification; he said that the States had agreed to maintain the *status quo*. Is he sure that is for all fee paying schools? Could he just clarify the position with the preparatory private schools, St. George's and St. Michael's?

The Deputy of St. John:

The States excluded deliberately St. Michael's and St. George's and there are some changes there. In the case of those schools, we are applying a graduated grant cut; in the case of St. Michael's over 5 years and in the case of St. George's a proposal was made to the Minister for Treasury and Resources for an invest to save one-off payment to St. George's School in lieu of reducing the grant over a period of time. This is specifically for St. George's to be able to purchase their buildings and land and by so doing we have in fact stabilised that school whose future was looking under threat due to increases in various costs because they did not own their property.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Minister, your time has now expired. We have talked it out and we now come on to the second ... [Aside] yes, not very many. Six Members placed questions and there were 2 supplementaries. So, I take the opportunity of reminding both those who ask questions and those who answer them that their questions and the answers are required under Standing Orders to be succinct.