

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

#### **The Bailiff:**

That concludes questions on notice. So we now come to questions to Ministers without notice and the first period is to the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture.

#### **3.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:**

Can I ask the Minister for Education what input he has had into the economic growth plan as the education skills and flexible minds of our work force is obviously vital to the future prosperity of the Island? What role has your department played in this exercise?

#### **Deputy P.J.D. Ryan of St. John (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):**

No direct role other than obviously, as the Deputy states, the question of skills - and skills development is very high on my agenda, as it is on the Council of Ministers' agenda. So there is input there but no direct consultation other than through the Skills Executive and the Skills Board on skills development generally. That is part of the strand of the growth plan.

#### **3.1.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:**

Can you go to the extent of what provision you have made for increasing the skills of the workforce to achieve the ends in the economic growth plan?

#### **The Deputy of St. John:**

This will become very apparent in the Medium Term Financial Plan, which details the spending plans for the department for the next 3 years. It would be difficult for me to talk about it at this stage because that plan is not yet finalised, as the Deputy knows, but I know that it will be very shortly. If the Deputy could save his questions until then I would be more than happy to answer.

#### **3.2 Deputy J.A. Martin:**

Has the Minister canvassed his staff on the reaction to the 1 per cent consolidated pay increase from the very high earning civil servants to the, say, teaching assistants and the lunchtime supervisors because my argument always is 1 per cent of a lot is something to have, 1 per cent of hardly anything is not worth having either. Has the Minister consulted his staff?

#### **The Deputy of St. John:**

It would be extremely inadvisable and inappropriate for me to canvas my staff. That is, as the Deputy knows, very firmly in the remit of the States Employment Board, which is led by the Chief Minister.

#### **3.3 Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

Given that it demonstrates unequivocally that there are huge flaws in the way we allow inappropriate people to become Jurats, will the Minister for Education finally agree to release the Sharp report to all States Members so they can fully understanding this important, very worrying, issue?

#### **The Deputy of St. John:**

I think the Deputy is asking me again, repeating questions that he has asked me in terms of oral questions in the recent past. I think my answer then remains pretty much the same, that I have taken advice. This was a report which contains much information and evidence from people who are covered by strict legal confidentiality agreements. So I would be against the law if I were to release it. There is a suggestion from the Deputy that possibly a redacted version could be provided but my advice also legally is that the report was never intended to be a public domain document and hence it is not written in the terms that would make it in any way readable if it

were to be a redacted version. However, I have no wish to stand in the way of a Member who is carrying out his legitimate duties by way of a potential proposition. What I will say to the Deputy is that I will revisit that advice that I had been given, particularly about the redacted version, but I do repeat that my advice is that it is likely to be a pretty nonsensical report once it has been completely redacted and it would also be a fairly expensive exercise to undertake. But I do undertake to review that once again.

### **3.4 The Connétable of St. John:**

Will the Minister give information; given £75,000 was given to the rugby club, will this have any impact on his sports budget from within his department? I am aware that it came via E.D.D. (Economic Development Department) but going on from year on year, which is likely to happen, does he believe this may impact on his budget some time in the future?

#### **The Deputy of St. John:**

I will answer the last question first, which is no, it should not impact on my sports budget at any time in the future. I would like to say that I would absolutely support the rugby club and the high profile it creates for Jersey. Any sporting endeavour that attracts visitors or business is obviously good for the Island. I also think that the E.D.D. sponsorship of the rugby club highlights the 2 very different contributions that sport can make to the Island. The Education, Sport and Culture Departments focuses on the health, community, and social advantages that sport and participation in sport can bring. We continue to support sport in all its guises. E.D.D. however is looking at the issue from a very, very different angle.

#### **The Bailiff:**

Minister, if you would not mind a reasonably concise answer. This is questions without notice and Members, I am sure, will have questions.

#### **The Deputy of St. John:**

The reason it was a little bit completed was because it was a multi-faceted question.

### **3.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

My understanding of what happened in this House was it agreed to suspend the reduction in grants to fee-paying sector of education pending the arrival of the results of the consultation process in the Education Department White Paper: where is that White Paper and when will we see it?

#### **The Deputy of St. John:**

The first 6 months of my tenure have been very intensive for me. First of all with resolving the C.S.R. (comprehensive spending review) in general and, secondly, on the M.T.F.P. (Medium Term Financial Plan). It has taken me a little longer than I had hoped to complete those 2 exercises. The question of the White Paper will be the next ... there might be a series of White Papers and/or Green Papers and that will be my next focus over the next 3 to 6 months. There will be a report published after the summer break, which will précis, shall we say, all of the responses from the consultation exercise earlier in the year.

### **3.6 Senator L.J. Farnham:**

In relation to fee-paying schools, could the Minister confirm the current position? I understand from a recent statement he plans to take no action in reducing funding to the fee-paying schools for 4 years. But what does he propose to do after 4 years and does he not agree that it would be a good idea if there are going to be proposals to reduce funding to fee-paying schools that he thinks about giving notice to schools now?

#### **The Deputy of St. John:**

I have said some 3 weeks ago that the reduction in grants to fee-paying schools was not part of my C.S.R. proposals and Members will be aware that that is extended from 2013 to 2016 by agreement with the Council of Ministers because some of the savings in the C.S.R. are over that timescale. Members and the public are now aware that there is nothing in that period to 2016 which includes cuts to grants. The question was: should I be talking to the schools about it now? I think one of the most important things for our education system is stability and that is something that I have tried to re-establish after a period of somewhat instability over the last 3 years.

### **3.7 Deputy J.H. Young:**

Will the Minister be releasing the former d'Hautree site to Property Holdings as surplus for future use in the best interests of the Island and could he update Members on his review of the asset state of the Education Department, and his intentions regarding releasing those sites?

#### **The Deputy of St. John:**

The d'Hautree site was included by the previous Minister retained for educational use in the last Island Plan. That position at the moment has not changed because we are still considering the whole future of education and there is the possibility that at this stage... although there is nothing specific that I can talk about, but it is part still of the Education portfolio with the possibility of some future use. There will come a point in time though that if we finally decide that it is not suitable for educational use in the future that it will be handed over to Property Holdings, yes.

#### **3.7.1 Deputy J.H. Young:**

Could the Minister perhaps update us on how many years we have been holding that site for education purposes, and it has been in the same situation as he has just described?

#### **The Deputy of St. John:**

Since the previous Island Plan.

### **3.8 Deputy J.M. Maçon:**

At a recent Scrutiny hearing the Minister advised that the Gigabit Jersey initiative and skills that go along with that will be a key branch of the department's skill strategy going forward. Can we expect a specific I.T. (information technology) skills development strategy and when is that expected to be delivered?

#### **The Deputy of St. John:**

Again, the Deputy is asking me questions which are covered in the Medium Term Financial Plan. Again, unfortunately, as the Deputy knows - he has seen the draft Medium Term Financial Plan - there are strands in that on I.C.T. (information and communications technology) strategy so we will have plenty of time to debate that in the future, I am very sure.

### **3.9 Connétable J. Gallichan of St. Mary:**

Can the Minister advise me whether it is included in the curriculum a basic understanding of the major world religions and would the Minister be surprised to learn that there are children leaving our schools who do not know the Lord's Prayer?

#### **The Deputy of St. John:**

Yes, I would be surprised if there are children leaving our system who do not know the Lord's Prayer. Also one of the areas that I am considering, as part of the overall future of education, is the question of faith-based education into the future.

### **3.10 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

I thought we had plenty of faith-based education on the Island. What plans or even thoughts does the Minister have in mind for how teachers can contribute to the modernisation, which we hear so much about, of delivery of the education service?

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Once again, I am afraid that this falls into the area of the States Employment Board, which is part of the Chief Minister's Department. Also I would say that whatever thoughts I have should remain in my head until they become concrete plans.

**3.10.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Can the Minister attempt to answer how he sees in the general terms how teachers can contribute to modernisation of the public service that he leads, which is the Education Service?

**The Deputy of St. John:**

My officers will obviously be talking to the States Employment Board on their views on that but I am sure the States Employment Board will have their own views on that.

**3.11 Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

Working with my very good friend the previous Minister for Education, Sport and Culture the Deputy of St. Ouen, we seem to be progressing to finally do something about improving access to Fort Regent. Could the Minister advise the Assembly where exactly that possibility is now and has hopefully not been abandoned?

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Jersey Property Holdings were asked to prepare a report on the development options for Fort Regent and Jersey Heritage were also asked for a report on enhancing the historic aspects. Obviously the Property Holdings side includes the access to the Fort. The issue is being moved on by a reconstituted steering group, led by Deputy Eddie Noel in his capacity as Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources with responsibility for Jersey Property Holdings, as this is primarily a property management matter. The next meeting, as I understand it, is scheduled for the end of July and one of my Assistant Ministers certainly will be attending.

**3.12 Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

The Minister talked about modernisation and so on, and the teachers inclusion in this being part of the States Employment Board. Surely though, if you are having modernisation of education, your teachers must be an integral part of it. How can the Minister say that it is nothing to do with them?

**The Deputy of St. John:**

I did not say it was nothing to do with us. What I said was that it was under the remit of the States Employment Board and I am not going to be drawn at this stage of a particularly sensitive point in time.

[11:45]

**3.12.1 Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

We are talking policy here. Education policy devolves upon the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture. Surely this is something that he must be considering?

**The Deputy of St. John:**

I may be having my own thoughts, but I do not have any concrete plans. As the Senator well knows, I cannot talk about States employment terms and conditions and modernisation at this point in time.

**Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

I was not talking about just terms and conditions, I was talking about the broad picture.

**The Bailiff:**

You have had your 2, you can come back if you want a third one.

**3.13 The Connétable of St. John:**

Nice and short, the Minister's response to faith education; were his comments to be taken in the positive?

**The Deputy of St. John:**

Yes.

**The Bailiff:**

Senator Ferguson, if you wish to answer another question...? No, you are too late. **[Laughter]**

**Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

Touché, Sir.