

3. Questions to Ministers Without Notice - The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture

3.1 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Further to the news that the United Kingdom Government will be cutting back on university places and funding with three-quarters of England's universities facing budget cuts of £449 million, will the Minister be looking to other countries for university placements?

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

The existing policy of the Education, Sport and Culture Department is that eligible students are able to attend any university in the world, providing he or she can produce evidence of the quality of degree obtainable from the university is considered by the U.K. authorities to be of at least equal value to a similar named degree from a U.K. university. Careers Jersey is able to advise students on how this evaluation can take place. Furthermore, students wishing to study at institutions outside the U.K. would be eligible for the same level of support as if they had applied to a U.K. university. Currently, there are a small number of Jersey students studying in New Zealand and Australia. Universities in these countries were represented at the recent higher education fair held in Jersey.

3.2 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

The Minister has submitted a written reply on the ticketing system. When will the project be completed and would the Minister tell us what the current spend to date is on the project and would he confirm whether the ongoing annual licensing payments to Databox were included in the estimate of £46,000?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

The ticketing system, as I am led to believe, is due to be completed within a period of 4 to 6 weeks. I know that progress is being made in seeking to train those operators and users of the facility so that once it is fully operational everybody will be online at the same time. Regarding the cost of the project to date, I have no detailed information of that, apart from the fact that - as I provided in my written answer in part 3 - my answer to the written question that the overall cost is approximately £46,000 to £48,000 and, as such, it will be delivered within that budget. Thank you.

3.2.1 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Would the Minister find out what the figures are and circulate them to Members?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Absolutely, and I would be pleased to answer many of the detailed questions that States Members choose to raise at my department in a more appropriate manner than this.

3.3 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Far from most 16 year-olds being uninterested in politics or being incapable of making informed decisions, is the Minister aware that a hugely successful question time of over 60 teenagers was run at Grouville Youth Project in 2005. This initiative was prevented from being repeated by his predecessor. Could the Minister confirm that he will be supporting such positive and constructive awareness raising initiatives?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I think the department has already demonstrated that and I see no need to change.

3.3.1 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

It is specifically about question time initiatives. It is not a difficult question so I would appreciate an answer.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I thought the answer was obvious; if it is a good initiative we will maintain it and continue to support it. Thank you.

The Deputy of St. John:

Just before I put my question, could the Ministers supply answers for the questions that were not answered, so from 17 to 24 in writing to those Members who put them, Sir?

The Deputy Bailiff:

Under Standing Orders the questions that have not been reached are deemed to have been withdrawn. It will be a matter for the Ministers as to whether they ...

The Deputy of St. John:

Therefore, could I ask the Member, for mine, which I think was 19, to be answered in writing? Thank you.

The Deputy Bailiff:

No doubt the Minister has heard that.

3.4 The Deputy of St. John:

Can I put this following question to Education? Given the teachers at La Moye School are given credits to use the photocopier machine, is this impeding on the education of the children, in particular the children's homework, and if so what action is the Minister taking?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

The day to day management of schools and what teachers are, or are not, required to do is a matter for the schools themselves. The Deputy indeed raised this question with me only yesterday and I believe I answered his question, and I see no point in responding.

3.4.1 The Deputy of St. John:

On a point of order, the question was raised by parents and I think it should be out in the public domain what the Minister told me, therefore I will request a response, not to fluff.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

It is not a case of managing photocopying. The school is responsible for managing its budget and also using a variety of forms to provide homework and material to students. In this case, there was an issue that related to the view, as being expressed by a parent, that their particular child had not had a piece of homework printed on a sheet of paper.

3.5 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Minister confirm that his policy put to the Council of Ministers of ring-fencing higher education funds has indeed been accepted? Would he also tell the House how he intends to deal with the apparent anticipated increase in top-up fees which the U.K. Government is on the brink of bringing about?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Currently discussions are ongoing with the Minister for Treasury and Resources on a number of matters to do with the Education Department and pressures that we identified nearly 12 months ago. In this respect, part of my response to the pressures was to instigate a review into higher education funding and this is still my objective.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisssier:

I am wondering if the question could be answered. Have the funds now been ring-fenced?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

No. As I said quite clearly it is a discussion that is ongoing with the Minister for Treasury and Resources.

3.6 Senator J.L. Perchard:

Did the Ministers watch on television the England v. France 5 Nations rugby match last Saturday which was held in Paris? Did he, in particular, notice the passion and volume in which the crowd sang La Marseillaise? My question is can the Minister imagine Jersey people ever singing Jersey's miserable hymn-like proposal for an anthem with such enthusiasm and passion?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

First of all, no, I did not watch the rugby match. However, I would totally disassociate myself with the comments that the Senator has made about our Jersey anthem written, I hasten to add, by a Jersey resident, not some English or U.K. person or French person who we have, somehow **[Interruption]** ... no I am not. Who we somehow believe now and associate our nationality with songs that were produced by those individuals. We have just experienced, most recently, the new anthem being recorded and sung by over 800 individuals. I am sure that when you are able to hear the recording you will fully appreciate it. Furthermore, maybe Senator Perchard might choose to watch the television, but I am aware that at the last Island Games in Aland, our Jersey anthem was sung at many of the award ceremonies throughout that competition and it was appreciated by all.

3.7 Deputy D.J. De Sousa:

My original question was asked but I do have another. Bearing in mind the previous Minister announced free nursery places for all under 3 year-olds, currently there are, at least, 197 families unable to use this facility. What is the department doing to address this issue?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I am extremely grateful for the Deputy raising this matter because there is one thing that I must put completely and utterly to bed. It is totally false that 197 people cannot access pre-school facilities. Only last year, in September 2009, this Assembly approved a proposal to provide 20 hours of free preschool provision for rising 4 year-olds. Prior to that only 50 per cent of our young people of that age were able to access places within the States nursery schools. So, the current situation is - and I want to make it clear to everybody - that all children are able to access pre-school places. We have initially allocated, in the last couple of weeks, places to our States facilities. Equally the Jersey Child Care Trust and the partnership that we have formed between the private providers and ourselves, are also identifying other options for those who, for various reasons, have not been able to access their first choice. This does not mean just because they have not been able to access the first choice that they cannot access the 20 hours free nursery education that we are providing and have been since September 2009.

3.7.1 Deputy D.J. Sousa:

Can I just have a supplementary please? I believe that what the Minister is saying their first choice, so if their Parish may not be available then you have to go elsewhere on the Island. That being the case, if the parent cannot get to them, they cannot accept the place, so the place is absolutely useless.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

This is nonsense, absolute nonsense. There are many providers within St. Helier and elsewhere, apart from the States facilities, that have places available. In fairness, a number of parents have

accessed the private providers prior to their children becoming 4 year-olds because they are required to do so because a lot of parents now both work. The idea that just because some individuals cannot access their first choice that the provision we are offering to parents is wrong is totally false.

[12:00]

3.8 Deputy S. Pitman:

The income support adult component has substituted the educational grant that 16 to 18 year-old students were getting for higher education. Given that this is just one component of several put together as a household's income support, which can be used to pay most or all of that household's rent if a States tenant, is this congruous to the Strategic Plan objectives to encouraging young people to take up further education when they may not see a penny of this income support component to support their education?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

First of all, I am aware that changes have been made but, equally, I am not aware of any particular situation where individuals have found themselves disadvantaged by it. If that is the case, I would certainly be prepared to meet with Deputy Shona Pitman and the Minister for Social Security so that we can review the matter and, if necessary, make new proposals.

The Deputy Bailiff:

One supplementary and then we are in stoppage time for the Deputy of St. Martin.

3.8.1 Deputy S. Pitman:

As Minister for Education, Sport and Culture can I suggest that the Minister should be aware of this and it should be him taking the initiative to be collecting information from the Social Security Department as to how many students are affected by this?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I cannot be aware unless individuals contact me and highlight their concerns and, from recollection, I have had no one contact me about this matter.

3.9 The Deputy of St. Martin:

In a written answer to question 18, which the Minister gave regarding a suspension, he said that the way in which a suspension was conducted in August last year was satisfactory. Will the Minister agree, then, that the person who was summoned without notice, was asked to attend at 9.30 a.m., and was then seen by his senior officer and immediately suspended without the opportunity of being accompanied by someone and without also being given the reasons for suspension, would he agree, then, that is the correct procedure, the correct policy for suspending someone?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I cannot comment on the correct procedures because I am not directly involved with such matters. In the written question, it clearly states that it is a matter that my Director is responsible for and, equally and ultimately, the States Employment Board.

The Deputy Bailiff:

That brings the questions of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture to an end.