



Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel

Quarterly Hearing

Witness: Acting Minister for Education

Friday, 29th January 2021

Panel:

Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier (Chair)

Deputy M.R. Higgins of St. Helier

Witnesses:

Deputy J.M. Maçon of St. Saviour, Acting Minister for Education

Mr. M. Rogers, Director General, C.Y.P.E.S. (Children, Young People, Education and Skills)

Mr. S. O'Regan, Group Director, Education

Mr. K. Posner, Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S.

Mr. N. Jewell, Head of Governance and Resource Management, C.Y.P.E.S.

[10:02]

Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier (Chair):

Good morning, everybody and welcome to the quarterly public hearing of the Minister for Education. I will do some introductions first. My name is Deputy Robert Ward and I chair the Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel.

Deputy M.R. Higgins of St. Helier:

I am Deputy Mike Higgins, I am a member of the panel.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Minister, do you want to introduce your team and yourself?

Acting Minister for Education:

Yes, and for my sins I am Deputy Jeremy Maçon. I am the Acting Minister for Education and I will let the team introduce themselves.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Many other things as well.

Acting Minister for Education:

Many other things as well.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Yes, a very busy man.

Director General, C.Y.P.E.S.:

Good morning, Chair. Good morning, Deputy Higgins. Mark Rogers, I am the director general for Children, Young People, Education and Skills.

Group Director, Education:

Good morning, Minister, Deputies. Seán O'Regan, group director of Education.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Okay, is there anyone else? Keith.

Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S.:

Good morning, Chair. My name is Keith Posner. I am the head of office at C.Y.P.E.S.

Head of Governance and Resource Management, C.Y.P.E.S.:

Good morning, Chair. I am head of governance and resource management for C.Y.P.E.S.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Your name, sorry, just to tell people your name for the hearing.

Head of Governance and Resource Management, C.Y.P.E.S.:

Nicholas Jewell.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Brilliant, thank you, just so people know. Okay, welcome everybody, I think we will get started. Obviously the big topic is the return to school, so we will start off with some of the questions around

that. Considering the COVID circumstances and the emerging new variance of the virus, have any concerns developed as a result of schools opening full time to students?

Acting Minister for Education:

In the sense of do you mean medically or just generally?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Both really in terms of any spread, any concerns, anything that you have seen in the first 2 weeks of reopening.

Acting Minister for Education:

Generally, we have had a very good start back to schools. You will be aware of the attendance rates. Primary schools have been bobbing around 94 per cent, I think it is a little bit up from yesterday. Secondary schools around 80 per cent but I think that has gone up as well and that is partly due to, I think, the work of the department demonstrating kind of the measures that have been put in place, the head teachers doing a lot of work liaising with parents to address their concerns. Initially we did have ... obviously the delay was started in order to allow schools to prepare any extra measures, which Nick can go into detail about if you would like, that they implemented in the schools. We are talking about extra things like Perspex screens around desks if teachers wanted them and practical, so things like that have been going on. We know that there was also some concern in some of the schools, I think 20 of the schools did not raise this concern but 9 raised a concern about the heating, the temperature; the department and Nick's team have been working incredibly hard to help address that. I believe we do not have any complaints being pursued at the moment regarding temperature in schools. That is not to say that children might not feel a little bit of cold but obviously there are other measures going on, such as putting the heating up in schools or wearing a jumper. We know, from example, I have seen on social media and parents who have said: "Yes, the head teacher asked us to make sure that our child had an extra layer of clothes or jumpers on but then our son or daughter told us they took it off because they were too hot." I think that particular issue has been dealt with. Generally, it has been quite a positive return to schools. As you know, I have done about 3 visits to various schools within the Island. I was at Rouge Bouillon on Wednesday this week, so 2 days ago and, generally, the staff and the children that I spoke to were welcome to be back in schools, not to say that there was not any anxiety there but they are generally happy to be back in schools.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Okay, there are a number of things from that. During the first week I believe vulnerable children did not return, what provision was made for those children during that week?

Acting Minister for Education:

I believe that the normal oversight procedures were put in place, the same things that happened during half term and summer holidays, et cetera. I wonder, Seán, can you go into detail about that?

Group Director, Education:

Yes, I am very happy to, Minister and Deputy Ward. In that week, you are quite right, the original extension of the holiday was for 2 days, 4th and 5th January, but it was extended for 3 further days. In that period schools took responsibility, as they always do, for their children and young people. They submitted lists of all those deemed vulnerable. My director colleague, Mark Owers, who leads Children's Safeguarding and Pip Hesketh, our head of inclusion, liaise directly and stood-up services, so welfare calls were made, as well as the check-ins. Obviously those children are well known to social care because they have got a social worker, for example, who are under that duty of care right throughout the Christmas period. Schools did all they could to make sure those additional 3 days' closures were covered for vulnerability.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Okay. They opened a week late in order for the risk assessments to be undertaken and updated but those risk assessments were undertaken without any children in the schools. You mentioned Perspex screens and so on. Are you certain that all school staff are happy with the provisions that are in place? How are you checking that all school staff are happy with those provisions in place, i.e. they think they are working now that children are back?

Acting Minister for Education:

Sure, that is fine. The protocol of any concerns really from a teacher's perspective should be fed up to the head teacher. We also have weekly dialogues and meetings with the unions but if you want to go into any of the specifics I am sure Nick - I saw him pop up there ready to jump in - would be more than happy to comment.

Head of Governance and Resource Management, C.Y.P.E.S.:

Yes, Chair. We have regular meetings with the union membership and the representatives on a Friday. They also have direct contact into senior officers within the department, so I would deal directly with the representatives of all the union groups. Any issues that come up across all the schools and colleges, they are dealt with within less than 24 hours, where I will go directly to head teachers to talk about any mitigation, control measures or reviews that need to be conducted. During the process of developing our risk management framework we made sure that the unions, both U.K. (United Kingdom) and locally, were involved with that process. The schools have now got their hierarchy of control systems in place, so they look at elimination, substitutes and engineering controls and so on. Any members of staff that find any additional controls, which are site-specific to

their settings, they will speak to their senior leads or head teachers to make sure that they are implemented. As further mitigation from the department's perspective, we go into conduct inspections, compliance inspections against the guidance but also against the safety plans and risk assessments and as to date we have done about 140 inspections.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Within a school there is not social distancing, masks are advised, are they, for children to be wearing?

Head of Governance and Resource Management, C.Y.P.E.S.:

Yes, masks are encouraged for the students to wear across the school sectors and the schools themselves ...

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Is that add-in lessons as well? Sorry to interrupt, it is a difficult format this. And that is within classes or travelling around. Is that within primary schools as well or is that just within secondary schools?

Head of Governance and Resource Management, C.Y.P.E.S.:

It is in classrooms within secondary schools and circulation areas. Also, what we did recently just before Christmas, we brought in visors and masks for also primary school teachers.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Okay. Are they provided for children or are parents providing those masks? One of the things about any risk assessment would be to ensure that masks are used properly. If a child is wearing the same mask day after day without it being washed, for example, it could make the situation worse. It is that level of risk assessment that I am interested in seeing is working in schools.

Head of Governance and Resource Management, C.Y.P.E.S.:

We are following the mask guidance, which we follow from S.T.A.C. (Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell) and also the students bring their own masks in. Masks are available if they are broken or they forget to bring their masks in, so we can provide that for the students as well.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Is that happening on a daily basis in schools then?

Head of Governance and Resource Management, C.Y.P.E.S.:

Yes, it is.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I had a constituent who has contacted me to say that - I have not got the detail of this but perhaps you can tell me whether it is the case - they received a letter to say that children should be changing their clothes every day and if they do return in the same clothes the next day they may be sent home or they may be asked about that. Is that the case in schools, particularly in primaries?

Head of Governance and Resource Management, C.Y.P.E.S.:

I have not heard of that at all, Chair; that is the first I have heard of that one.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Mark, do you know about that at all or Seán?

Director General, C.Y.P.E.S.:

I have heard it said but I do not have anything more tangible than third-hand reporting back. I do not know, Seán, if you have more detail.

Group Director, Education:

I am not aware of that but I would be very concerned to know offline, Deputy Ward, so that we can address that because that has not been brought to my attention or indeed is not a policy position. We know good hygiene across the piece is a really strong mitigation against the spread of COVID but that has not been the case. We have had some schools relax uniform policy around keeping warm and also the practicalities in this time of the year but I am not aware of that, so I would welcome that information.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I think we will follow that up then because I think it is important if that is the case, that that would be known by yourselves. Just to ask then about the tracking and testing response ...

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Chair, before we do move on ...

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Sorry, Mike, yes, go on, please, sorry.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

First of all, can you tell us what guidance you did receive back from S.T.A.C. regarding masks? Because one of the big concerns is the amount of viral load, is one of the factors with the infection. Obviously the more of the virus you get the deeper or the more harmful effects from the virus and

this comes into it about the cleaning of masks and so on. What guidance did you receive from S.T.A.C. on that? That is my first question. Secondly, I put forward proposals to the Minister for Health and Social Services and the Chief Minister regarding research that had been done, in fact things that have been done in America, of having ultraviolet light in ventilation systems and heating systems which kills the virus and is supposed to stop its recirculation. Has any work been done on that concerning the schools, rather than having to keep windows open for ventilation?

Acting Minister for Education:

Yes, Nick, are you able to comment on that?

Head of Governance and Resource Management, C.Y.P.E.S.:

I could comment on the heating and ventilation sites. We have done a big piece of work with our colleagues at Jersey Property Holdings. There have been no conversations to date about ultraviolet light being installed in any of the ventilation systems.

[10:15]

As you can understand, across the whole portfolio of our 31 schools we have various systems, whether in primaries and secondaries, some are at handling plants and some have gone through natural ventilation. But we have not had that conversation yet but that is maybe something I could pick up with our colleagues at J.P.H. (Jersey Property Holdings).

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

If you could because there is good research in the U.S. (United States) on that. What about the masks, what have we got from S.T.A.C.?

Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S.:

Whenever decisions are made for significant parts of guidance for going to school, we do go and ask S.T.A.C. or we go and speak with Dr. Muscat. We have taken advice about mask-wearing and followed that advice. That is where we initially started with mask-wearing on the school buses and that got extended to years 11 and upwards and then to years 7 in ancillary areas. Then it was felt that due to the prevalence of COVID on the Island and also to the more normalisation of mask-wearing anyway generally within the community, that it was appropriate then to extend into the classrooms. That is why if you walked into a secondary school now you would see mask-wearing across the whole of the school community.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I fully support that but what I am asking is in terms of if people are wearing the same mask and not washing them or replacing them, then there is more and more of the virus being gathered perhaps in the mask and, therefore, they become a danger, rather than a help. What guidance was given on that?

Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S.:

There is clear guidance about mask-washing and the amount of frequency of mask-wearing that is placed on gov.je within a whole section on masks but that has been provided to schools and then schools will need to be speaking about that with their pupils.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Do you know if that has taken place in the schools? Are they discussing that and discussing that with parents?

Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S.:

We would need to follow that up within each individual school basis but the expectation would be with something as significant as mask-wearing in schools that we would be hoping that head teachers would do that. This is concerns that have been brought to you by constituents or other Assembly Members, that is something we can certainly remind head teachers about and we have regular updates with them, so we can certainly include that in our head teacher update, again reminding them of the guidance in place where there is clear guidance about mask-washing.

Acting Minister for Education:

As Keith says, it is up on the website publicly available.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Yes, but again it needs to be reinforced through the schools and I would like you to follow through on that, please. Thank you.

Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S.:

No, that is absolutely fine and we can include that in today's head teacher update.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

A couple of things on that side just before you step in there, Seán, and this might help as well. First of all, I would like to ask, does anyone from C.Y.P.E.S. attend S.T.A.C. meetings? Second, in terms of whether the mask-wearing is working and whether they are being cleaned, surely that is part of the risk assessment process to show that the guidance that is being issued is being enforced. A risk assessment is a live, active document which must respond to given circumstance, not something

that is just written and put on a shelf and said: "There I go, I have ticked a box." Is that not part of that risk assessment process? If you did attend S.T.A.C., did you advise S.T.A.C. in any way?

Director General, C.Y.P.E.S.:

Keith is our lead officer in terms of S.T.A.C. but usually Seán and I would attend with him. I think probably on almost every occasion Seán and I have joined Keith as well. The reason Keith is the lead officer is when we need advice, it is not necessarily just about schools, it is because he is the conduit for the whole of the department services into S.T.A.C. and back out. Yes, so Keith goes to S.T.A.C. and Seán and I are usually there in support. In terms of the mask-wearing piece then, I suspect what Seán was about to say, was he does a daily update to head teachers and, therefore, the reminders about any aspect of our safety measures find their way into that daily update. Masks have been a regular topic of updates and discussion with head teachers. But we have not picked any of this up but what we could do is actively ask heads whether they are having any issues with youngsters not regularly washing, as advised, their masks. But at this stage that is not feedback that we have had. The kind of feedback we have had, for example, Nick has alluded to it earlier, it has been about issues like heating, for example. The wearing and the washing of masks at the moment is not something that we are hearing staff are feeding back to their leadership and their leadership is feeding back either to the trade unions or directly to us.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Okay. Do you give information and advice to S.T.A.C.? Do you provide evidence, if you like, I do not know what the word would be, to S.T.A.C.?

Director General, C.Y.P.E.S.:

I probably should let Keith say it but I have started, so I will carry on for a bit more. We go to S.T.A.C. when there are questions that we have that we are seeking medical advice on. S.T.A.C. does not invite Keith or Seán or me to go and provide them with advice per se. Sometimes we go and give them information to help with their deliberations, but almost always Keith, we have been to S.T.A.C. We have asked to go to S.T.A.C. because we wanted its opinion on a particular issue but that is the way the relationship works.

Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S.:

Yes, and it is also worth noting, Chair, that that is a route for often quite big decisions that need to be made. For example, when schools were closed and we were looking to reopen, we went to S.T.A.C. and S.T.A.C. then provide us with advice about how that could look or should look. But in terms of the guidance and on gov.ie, if you have been through it, there is a huge amount of guidance that is built over time.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Yes, and, as I say, I completely accept that but a risk assessment, I could have written risk assessments for every single experiment and they were very, very detailed but they were on a shelf and it would not have cut any ice if a child would have damaged himself because I should have known and actively implemented that risk assessment. It is the actions that you take with them that is important, so that is what I am getting at. Just a couple of things on that as well, in terms of the extra heating and the masks that are provided. Is extra funding available for schools to provide those or are they from normal budget?

Director General, C.Y.P.E.S.:

We have kept a running record through our finance business manager of additional COVID-related costs and those are then submitted as, effectively, claims against corporate reserves. For example, we have just closed the 2020 accounts, I think, and part of that closure will involve - I do not think it has occurred yet - a transfer of funds to reflect COVID costs.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Okay. One of the things ...

Acting Minister for Education:

Chair, I think Nick needs to respond to your question about risk assessments. I understand them to be updated fairly regularly. You might want to comment.

Head of Governance and Resource Management, C.Y.P.E.S.:

Yes, just to reassure the chair that our risk assessments are reviewed as part of the inspections, when we go into the safety plans and risk assessments that are updated on a regular basis; they are a dynamic risk assessment. The teaching staff union memberships have sight of these and they all have input into them as well and they are checked and reviewed as the team goes in, as I said before that you now know, business inspections.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Part of the process is the testing, tracking and tracing process to ensure that schools are safe environments to work in. It was said that that would be different because there is an issue with whole cohorts being sent home. How is that test, track and tracing system working and is it working as you anticipated?

Acting Minister for Education:

Just to say that over the period, of course, we know that disruption was a concern throughout the schools, so we did go back to S.T.A.C. and ask for further advice and working with the contract

tracing team to see whether it could be refined and better focused in any way, provided that was still medically acceptable. There was further advice from the contract tracing team and issues in the exact way things are done have changed, and I would let officers go into the detail. Mark, did you want to add to that first?

Director General, C.Y.P.E.S.:

Sorry, Minister, yes, I nearly jumped in early. I think it is probably Keith's specialist subject. We have not, as you know though, had a great deal of children or staff identified as being positive since the return of term. We have not had to practise the new arrangements regularly but Keith can take you through how they have been tightened up.

Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S.:

There was a lot of work that has obviously been put in there since the return of schools after the summer break and it is certainly built upon the practice that has been there. I think the key differences that have happened from the learning experiences of last term has been the identification of groups of students that are direct contacts, particularly within secondary schools. Where before there was a concern about who that confirmed case would have been in close proximity to, that the safer option was to identify more direct contacts with better intelligence provided by the school to contact tracing team, they have been able then to refine the direct contact process and identify that student. We have seen that happening at the beginning of this term where we have only had a limited number of cases, but where we have seen those cases we have seen small numbers of direct contact. That has been really good and really positive because obviously isolation of more students is something we do not want to see, so the practice of the school really and the links with contact tracing have been tightened up.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Just to delve into that a little bit deeper, in terms of testing, how are you going through that testing process? There has not been mass testing in the last 2 weeks and when you say "close contact", what are you defining differently? Because I will give you an example: in a primary school they may be in a group of 25 or 30 children all day, so you have got the close contacts all day. Would you count all those as a close contact because they are in the same classroom? In a secondary school you would move between lessons, so a child may have English, maths, science, art and history in a day and be in close contact within a classroom through a number of students or are you saying that you have very clearly defined seating plans that children are not allowed to move from and that is the close contact? I just need a picture in my mind of how that is working.

Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S.:

It is a bit of all of that really ...

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Just to be precise, sorry to push it but I think it is very important that people understand it, yes.

Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S.:

In terms of then defining direct contacts, there is a basis of being within 2 metres and 15 minutes of someone for a period of time. You are absolutely right, when you are walking through a corridor you will not be within 2 metres of somebody but you will not be in contact with them for 15 minutes either. That will be taken into account by contact tracing, as will be where you are sitting within a classroom. Also, the additionality of wearing masks has played a big factor in deciding what is a direct contact or not a direct contact as well. You mentioned seating plans, schools will have seating plans; they will know where their pupils would be. We are also limiting to year group bubbles, therefore the kind of across ... I do not know what the word is but the direct contact being from one year group to another is then reduced if those year groups do not come into contact with each other. Then there is the identification of things like friendship groups as well; you add into that things like ventilation on top of that and then contact tracing would take all of that into account. They will then make an assessment based on the information that is then provided back to them. Was the teacher wearing a mask or a visor, has been with a student? Yes, they are. Where were they sat in the classroom and so on? They would then create the picture of how many direct contacts that they will then assume will be related to that confirmed case. But there is a lot of intelligence that is now passed over from the school to contact tracing for them to make that assessment. I believe Seán really kind of wants to come in, I think.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Seán, do you want to add to that?

Group Director, Education:

Yes, if you do not mind, Deputy Ward. What has been hugely impressive is the work that schools, teachers, leaders, support staff have done in growing the evidence base. As well as putting in high mitigations like mask and visor-wearing across primary and secondary, for example, for our staff quite early on, if it is helpful to you, Keith and myself have a weekly meeting now with contact tracing where we work through every single case of the previous week to better understand mitigation transmission when doing that meeting immediately following this hearing. Last week we learnt, for example, and as Mark Rogers has said, very few cases, thankfully, so far since we reopened on 11th January. Then one of our primary schools, where once we would have sent the whole class or even the year group bubble, we were down to single figures of direct contacts because the intelligence from schools about who sat where and how swiftly we grabbed it. This week we have had a secondary school and you are right, as students move between, so the quicker we are

informed of a positive case, the sooner the staff, led by the head teacher, can provide contact tracing intelligence and define the direct contact. It has been a dynamic learning situation where we have listened to students. I had a student tell me: "My teacher is always 2 metres in front of the front row, I am in the back row; I was nowhere near the teacher who was a positive case." From that intelligence and feedback we have built much more refined models and so much better at this system.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

How are you identifying those cases?

Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S.:

That would be through the contact tracing process.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

No, I mean the original cases from which you contact trace. How were they identified? Was that through a family recognising their child was ill or ...

[10:30]

Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S.:

I think that would be a question back to contact tracing. I do not think I could answer that ...

Deputy R.J. Ward:

What I am saying is that it seems like a very good process of all of that intelligence but if you do not know where the cases are in the first place, you have lost your beginning of that process. Are you testing in schools at a level when children are mixing 30 in a class, 200 in a year group, so that you can identify those cases, particularly those that may be asymptomatic but may spread the virus? At what point will that testing happen or will it not happen?

Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S.:

Minister, do you want to take this first part of the question? I guess you are asking about the lateral flow device-testing in schools, Deputy Ward.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I am asking about testing in schools really, about how regularly is testing of students and staff being undertaken? I ask because this is the very beginning of that contact tracing process. It is great that that is happening but you have got to identify it in the first place, so that question about testing in schools. Sorry, Minister.

Acting Minister for Education:

Yes. As you will probably be aware, at the very beginning, I think it was New Year's Day, just after New Year's Day, we started P.C.R. (polymerase chain reaction) testing for all staff that wanted it and I think that was above 90 per cent; it was taken up very well. We then offered it, I believe, to I think years 11 and above; that was about 50-odd per cent, I believe. That is the initial testing that we did, of course that is a snapshot in time. We do have then the 8-week workforce testing, which of course carries on. In addition to this, as you will be aware, we have introduced the lateral flow testing for years 11 and above initially. We have lodged that with S.T.A.C. to continually review whether other years should be included in that programme. The advice of that from Dr. Muscat ...

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Okay, sorry to interrupt you there, Minister ...

Acting Minister for Education:

If I can just finish this point, the advice from Dr. Muscat was that if you needed to start somewhere it was better to start with the older students, as they would have the higher number of a student receptors and, therefore, would be more likely to catch COVID and, therefore, that is where the advice was to start.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Okay. The last mass testing ended on 10th January in schools and that was of staff and that was of 54 per cent of years 11 to 13. There has not been any mass testing in schools since then. Yes, that was the last date, according to the website. It says that voluntary P.C.R. testing 1st to 10th January and then goes to numbers and how many cases. That period of 10th January was after a period of schools being closed over the Christmas period for 2, nearly 3 weeks, so there was no mixing in schools before that. Do you think that there should be a repeat of that mass testing now so that we get a proper snapshot of what is happening in schools in terms of the virus?

Acting Minister for Education:

I think this all has to be governed by S.T.A.C. advice and what they suggest. My personal preference would be to test much more regularly but of course we have to be guided by the medical advice and how that progresses. Seán, did you want to come in there?

Group Director, Education:

I think it is about definitions, Deputy Ward; you are absolutely right. Up to Sunday, 10th January, there was the P.C.R. testing of almost all staff in all schools, private schools and private nurseries and, as you say, just over half of the years 11 to 13. Thankfully, after the best part of many

thousands of tests, a very small number, fewer than 5 in both the staff group and young people. Since then the intermediary point for the next P.C.R. testing of all of those people in the half term is the utilisation of the lateral flow tests. I know Keith has the examples but having visited schools this week and talked with all head teachers, we have worked our way through primary schools. The incremental mass testing over Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday of this week of our workforce and stepping up the different methods of years 11, 12 and 13, which has some challenges because they are very different numbers in an 11 to 16 school, say, and the very large 6th forms at Hautlieu and Highlands. But we are in the groove now for that roll-out of continuous testing.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

An incubation period of the virus is, what, 2 weeks, a week? There has not been any testing in that time in schools and you are rolling out the testing now. Do you not feel that there is a period there where we have not tested in schools and so we cannot really have data that says clearly the spread of virus within the schools?

Director General, C.Y.P.E.S.:

Some of this I would prefer to be answered by Ivan or Patrick, to be honest, but they are not on the call, so we will do our best. I think it is important to kind of zoom out first of all and look at the overall picture of infection in the Island because that is where S.T.A.C. starts. Its advice ...

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Sorry, Mark, I do not want to do that, we want to try and focus in on schools and testing and we have got a limited time.

Director General, C.Y.P.E.S.:

Okay, I know you do ...

Deputy R.J. Ward:

With testing in schools, obviously it is going to be built around lateral flow testing, yes, which will commence soon and, as you say, you have started that roll-out in schools. Can I ask the Minister, what are the stages of that lateral flow testing in schools? What does it look like, the process?

Acting Minister for Education:

What do you mean, about how they take the test?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Yes.

Acting Minister for Education:

Okay, sure. We have done the testing within schools, we have had the nurses in. We have produced a step-by-step guide for students, which they can work. Have we shared that with the Scrutiny Panel yet?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I do not believe we have seen it, no, that is why I asked ...

Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S.:

No, but we can do, it has only been produced this week.

Acting Minister for Education:

Yes. In the interests of time we will send that across to you but we do have a step-by-step guide which is very child-friendly.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Out of interest, how many stages are in that process?

Acting Minister for Education:

It is 2 sides of A4 but that will include some very basic things, like open the packet, put your discarded things in the bin, that type of stuff. While it might look long it is because it is detailed.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Okay. It is just that we have only processed the more steps there are the more opportunity there are to make mistakes at each step and so I am quite interested in the number of steps. Are you expecting children to perform the test on themselves in order to collect data?

Acting Minister for Education:

I went to D'Auvergne School and I was able to have the opportunity to see the team that are helping support schools in this and the head nurse there made it very clear that for anyone taking the test that it has to be supervised for their validation purposes, and that includes staff. It all needs to be overseen and observed. I believe that students do take the swabs of themselves themselves and that is why they need to be supervised to make sure that the swabs are taken as far up the nose enough in order to collect enough substance - that is the word I am searching for - and the number of times they have got to twirl it around and then add that into the various other apparatus and then distil that and then put it into the test tray. The answer to your question is, yes, but it is all supervised in order to make sure that there is a valid result.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Is that supervised by medical staff then who are ensuring that it is working properly?

Acting Minister for Education:

My understanding is that the team has been training up teachers in order to be able to do this; it is quite a simple process to observe. Is that correct, Keith?

Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S.:

Yes, I can come in here. These tests have been designed to be self-administered but to improve the accuracy of the test, Deputy Maçon is absolutely right. But the observation by another person that the test has been carried out correctly improves accuracy, and that is why it has been set up that way. But school staff have been taught how to do this; it is very, very simple steps that are taken within the test. The testing team have been in all schools this week bar one, which they are going in on Monday. As of next week, the roll-out will then be like a full roll-out with the testing team continuing to go in and support school staff over the next 2 weeks up until half term and then from after half term we will see how things are going and they should be able to then manage this themselves.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

When children perform the test, do they prepare the test as well? The 6 drops of extraction and buffer into extraction tube and try to avoid touching the tube with the bottle. Do children do that or now they are trained, staff do that?

Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S.:

In terms of looking at flows of students through because obviously you want to minimise the impact on the school as much as possible but obviously you want to test a cohort as well. That is the kind of thing that they are talking about, absolutely. It may be different in different schools but what we think will be the quickest way is exactly what you suggest. Things are prepared, the student comes along, the droplets are already in there and the actual administration of the test is a matter of moments really and then ...

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I am sorry to push you but I think it is very important for consistency because the research into the accuracy of lateral flow tests said they were accurate when they were performed by medical specialists, not when they were performed by people in their own homes. If the solution is being prepared by staff and that all that the children are doing is putting the swab up their nose and then into a test tube, that is very different from asking children to prepare the solution as well. I am an ex-science teacher, I know how difficult it is to get children to accurately prepare solutions. How big

a drop, Sir? Is that 6 drops, Sir? I could write you a list of questions that you are going to get. We need some definites in the process itself. Will that solution be prepared for the children or will they prepare it themselves? Sorry to be pushy but it is really important that we understand, I think.

Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S.:

No, that is absolutely fine. But, as I said, the testing team has been into all schools this week. This is the feedback I am receiving from them. It has not been at the moment mandated that a support staff will be providing the 6 drops into the phial for the student but that is being strongly recommended for lots of reasons; the exact reasons that you say and also in terms of speeding up the process, then more pupils can be tested quickly. But there are also the tests are undertaken with observation by other members of staff, so that the testing can be as accurate as possible. But we can feed back to you further, Deputy Ward, on the success of this week and of next week and of the week after about exactly how this is looking and it will be slightly different, potentially, in different schools due to the numbers as well.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Okay. I am very happy to go into one of the schools and watch that happening, even help prepare. I do have some skills in that area and it would be interesting to see that happen and perhaps, as Scrutiny, we kill 2 birds with one stone there. I do think though my concern would be if there is not consistency in the way that this is administered, there will not be consistency in the accuracy of the results. I would voice that publicly from the Scrutiny Panel to you for us to be dealing with.

Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S.:

If I could just add on that, just to try to reassure you, there has been that consistency of the testing team supporting schools to do that. It is the same team, it is the same leadership within that team going to all schools, so the messages will be the same.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

When can we expect that to be rolled out and to who?

Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S.:

As of next week, as of Monday, all staff in schools, primary and secondary schools, will be able to take the test and I have to say a number have already taken it this week. It is just we have not been able to collect that data because there is an absolution that saves a huge amount of time on administration and makes the process really simple; that has gone live yesterday and it is working really well. In terms of them recording the data; that will start from next week. As of next week all teachers will have the opportunity to take a test and all years 11, 12 and 13 students will be able to take a test as well. Next week, I guess, you could say is the first kind of 4-week of roll-out, although

in preparation to address all of the issues that you have raised with us for the last couple of weeks and particularly this week, there has been a lot of work done with the schools to get them into the position where they can go for full roll-out.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Minister, can I ask you, do you have any concerns regards legal responsibilities of a member of staff performing what is, effectively, a medical test with children for the future? Are we putting staff into any difficult positions in terms of if their test is false or does not work, et cetera, et cetera, or there is an allergy or they stick the tube too far up their nose and hurt themselves? Are staff legally covered for that situation?

Acting Minister for Education:

Thank you, Deputy. I would not know that level of detail. I wonder if Seán and Mark are able to advise.

Director General, C.Y.P.E.S.:

I think the whole purpose of having supervised roll-out by the team that Keith has referred to is what mitigates against that risk. Of course, ultimately, you can refuse; it is a voluntary programme.

Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S.:

Just to be clear, the test itself administered and you would consent to take the test.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

There is a formal consent from parents.

[10:45]

Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S.:

For 15 year-olds; 16 and above can consent themselves, yes.

Acting Minister for Education:

This is also partially why we started with years 11 and above because 16 year-olds do not require parental consent, below that they do. I believe we have just had that for 15 year-olds parental consent has been sought but that is also why we started at those particular year groups.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

In terms of the staff who may be doing that, are they covered while they do it? Do they wear P.P.E. (personal protective equipment)?

Acting Minister for Education:

Yes, so there is advice that they should be wearing an apron, mask, gloves, et cetera, and there is guidance about how they should change it and dispose of it and that has all been fed through.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

All of the swabs, when they are finished, et cetera, all that stuff is treated as medical waste.

Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S.:

Yes, that is correct. They are provided with a particular type of grade of refuse sack, which then, I believe, is collected and taken away for incineration.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Just one question on masks that I missed out that I was asked to ask. Are masks being worn in early year settings by staff?

Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S.:

We have guidance for staff that they choose to wear them. We can see that it is a barrier to communication, so staff are made aware of their option to wear a mask if they wish but it is their choice. It is recommended to them they do and often staff are using visors. But sometimes if a particular ... depending on the class, they do not have to wear them, no.

Director General, C.Y.P.E.S.:

Visors are the preferred option with early year staff over masks, just because of the visibility.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Yes, okay. In terms of recovery quickly; I note the time and may come back to it. Deputy Higgins, do you have any other questions in that area before we sort of move on a little?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

No, I am happy at the moment, thank you.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

In terms of the recovery curriculum, we talked about that, there was £9,004 allocated in the Government Plan for 2021 for the recovery curriculum, is that being spent? Is that being activated? Is that being implemented? Minister, do you have an overview of what is going on with that money?

Acting Minister for Education:

As we know, the initial recovery curriculum was overseen by Pip Hesketh and that obviously concentrated on a well-being focus to settle children back into school. I believe officers are developing the programme further. Seán, are you able to comment further on that?

Group Director, Education:

Yes, certainly. A key component of that recovery work is to do additional tutoring support to individuals and small groups. In the last few weeks of the December term it was not possible to enact some of the planning we had, for the simple fact that we were seeing higher absence rates. It is much, much improved since January. At my last briefing at the beginning of this week we have recruited 500 school staff, teachers and support staff, for the tutoring programme with a really high take-up to give a very high coverage of additional support before school and after school, in breaks and some weekend working. We are now exploring with colleagues in skills, those young students, for example, who are on teacher-training courses and who cannot go back to the U.K., cannot get the face-to-face experience of being in schools to utilise their skillset while they are still on-Island as tutors, that will have the added benefit, not just to the young people who get the additional support but to those students it gives them some face time, as it were, suitably distanced in school. Indeed, it allows head teachers to look at the next cohort of students coming through who are looking to return to our Island and be part of the teaching workforce. We have got very high take-up and I am assured by the head of the standards team, the Standards and Advisory Service, David Berry, that we will be able to fully spend the resource allocated in 2021 for this work.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

That includes the £224,000 put aside for the OLEVI teaching programme, is that being used?

Group Director, Education:

Absolutely. I was in one of our primary schools this week and one of the core team on the senior advisory was doing the OLEVI training. They are rolling out that training model, which is very well tested and evidence-based, so the added investment has been hugely welcome, so very positive feedback from teachers participating in that.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Okay. We noted that, I will say just £13,000 for I.T. (information technology) support, that is for the programme, that is okay; I have answered my own question there. If we move on to talk a little about well-being of staff, what consultation, if any, has there been with children that have returned to school regarding their concerns over their well-being? We are referring to children, first of all.

Acting Minister for Education:

Obviously we have the normal processes, which is if there are concerns, then students should be raising that with teachers and we know that they have been, particularly parents on their behalf have also been doing that. We have also had produced a TikTok video, which has sought students' use back and that has had about 300 responses so far about the return to school, about the lateral flow testing, so that is partly how we are gathering feedback from students. Have I missed anything, Seán?

Group Director, Education:

You have covered a great deal, Minister, thank you. Obviously as Deputies Ward and Higgins will be aware, one of the strengths of our emerging focus on well-being pre-COVID was having emotional literacy support assistance in all of our schools, dedicated teacher assistance giving specialist training and ongoing supervision by our psychology and well-being team. They are at the front end of working with children and young people and they have given some feedback recently. I know the Minister shared in his address following the visit to Rouge Bouillon School earlier this week. E.L.S.A. (Emotional Literacy Support Assistants) is the acronym that we use, reporting a great deal of positivity from children about the very fact of being back at school. Yes, there are anxieties and worries; of course there are at this difficult time. But very strong feedback of children and young people being very happy to be back at school, especially those with cousins in the U.K. or other places who are not. We have had genuine and strong positive feedback in that regard.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Teaching staff are facing additional pressures and concerns and I make the point that they have been working throughout this time at home and the classrooms come into their homes, which I know a number have contacted me to say that that has been a concern. What additional pressures and concerns do you think staff are having to deal with under the present circumstances, the return to school, in the environment that we still have COVID on the Island, et cetera?

Acting Minister for Education:

For example, we visited Rouge Bouillon and speaking to one of the teachers there, and when we went to D'Auvergne as well, again, it has been extra pressures but obviously, for example, drawing up the seating plans, knowing where the students are, all those sort of things; it does add extra time into what teachers have to do. Obviously being aware of the mitigation processes, being aware of what they need to report back, for example, has had extra demand on the staff time, although I would like to take this opportunity to praise staff for how they have behaved, how they have grappled with the issues going forward. Again, many of the staff, I think all of the staff that I spoke to, expressed the importance of having children back in school, how it is very good for them and how some of the teachers were quite happy to be back in school themselves doing what they need to do. I do not know, Seán, if there is anything you need to add on that.

Group Director, Education:

I would certainly endorse the Minister's acknowledgement of the day-by-day ordinary and often unseen hard work and grind of teachers. It is absolutely a more challenging job of what is already a rewarding but very challenging role to do so in the pandemic. But as recently as the school visits the Minister alludes, we have had feedback from teachers that being back in school, especially with the mitigation, the Minister was very direct and challenging. Has the department given you good advice? Has it been clear? Is it followed through? Very good questions to be asked, challenging and very positive feedback. But the feedback from teachers saying that in the lockdown I had ... because teachers are often parents too: "I have had to home-school my own children and try and meet the needs of my children and welfare of course." It is much easier to do the very hard work of being a teacher if you are physically in school with the support you can give and as good as the technology can be to assist this, it does not replace face-to-face teaching and learning. I would not underestimate for a moment how very hard the role is in the pandemic period. We have not done everything right perhaps but we are doing better than most in having schools back so fully with so few cases prevalent at the moment, thankfully.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

It is good that you recognise as an acknowledgment of the hard work that has gone home with teachers as well. Minister, given that support for teachers, will you be representing them by promoting a decent pay rise for them this year?

Acting Minister for Education:

As much as I would like to, as you well know, Deputy Ward, employment matters to do with pay and terms and conditions are dealt with by the States Employment Board and it is for them to arrive at their conclusions appropriately. I think that the matter of pay across public sector workers throughout the pandemic, and also those who have kept us going in care homes and the retail sector, I think all of them, their steadfastness needs to be acknowledged through this time. I would add States Members as well because we have had to work incredibly hard too.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Regarding that as well, do you think in terms of the vaccination priority list, what consideration will be given to including teachers? Perhaps those of a certain age - I can speak as a man of a certain age myself - that might be on the priority list with the vaccine so that we can continue to have a protected workforce there.

Acting Minister for Education:

Yes, thank you. I have given this some consideration. I had formulated a letter when I was just Minister for Children and Housing but subsequently becoming Acting Minister for Education, I have incorporated teachers into a letter I have sent to the Minister for Health and Social Services, trying to represent the position of the department on people within the department. That is not just teachers; that is social workers, that is youth workers, et cetera. I would just add that obviously, as we know, the Minister for Health and Social Services decides the priority list for the vaccination programme. As you know from your original question, Deputy Ward, that they are following the advice from the U.K. body, which is interesting, as I understand, while they have established their first phase, given the situation that the U.K. is in, they may actively be reconsidering where teachers are being positioned on that particular list when they do their next round of advice. But I think the imminent priorities that have been given, the most vulnerable and the most elderly, I believe is the correct route to follow in the very first instance. But I acknowledge that maybe not for medical reasons but for stability and to prevent the disruption of education, other services that the department requires, there is a good reason why those workers should receive some form of high priority. But, again, it then becomes very difficult to start ... because, effectively, when you start with that you are pushing someone else down the list and I do not envy the Minister for Health and Social Services in being in that situation. The response to my letter, I believe, is being now considered by the newly-formed Jersey version for the vaccine advisory group and I believe they should be responding to my letter next week.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

This leads me on to the question, this is obviously a very important topic, so we have spent some time on it, regarding a proactive response for schools, if circumstances change within schools, and we hope they do not and we want to be very clear here, we really hope that they do not and we hope we continue to have a drop in cases and we get lucky and it disappears; of course we all hope that. But if there is an increase in cases and, as you test, you may uncover that because we are not testing at the moment in schools, what work is being undertaken to monitor that situation and act proactively, rather than reactively?

Acting Minister for Education:

The department has already formulated a number of scenarios. They are theoretical. For example, if cases were to stay the same or were to increase or were to decrease, what would we do and how would we respond? We do have drafts of those plans in place already. Mark, is there anything you would like to add?

Director General, C.Y.P.E.S.:

Not particularly. I think, Minister, you have covered it. If there are any kind of supplementaries, Chair, happy to chip in.

[11:00]

Deputy R.J. Ward:

The answers we get are that it is linked to wider COVID infection around the Island, et cetera, et cetera, and so if you do identify a number of cases in schools, we have got the track and trace system and people will isolate, given the information that you have said you would gather, that will be the response. Will there be a stage in which you think we would need to rethink the opening of schools? What type of timescale would parents get if that was the case? With any risk assessment you have to take the worst-case scenario, so I think it is important that we consider.

Director General, C.Y.P.E.S.:

We have definitely looked at what we would do in worst-case scenarios, Chair. That was something we prepared for the former Minister and it is still relevant for us now. You are right, there are a number of factors that if they came together leads to Keith and Seán and I going back to S.T.A.C., if S.T.A.C. did not initiate it itself, saying we think the context has changed. But at the moment with what is happening to rates of infection in the Island presently, and we know that that can change, we are holding the course that we are on. If, either through the testing that we are doing in schools, the P.C.R. testing every half term, and eventually the weekly lateral flow testing, we see indications of infection which we have not previously seen then, clearly, the analytical cell in S.T.A.C. will look at that very quickly and very closely and give us advice as to whether we need to change anything. But right now at least the feedback we are getting from both the schools' testing that is being rolled out on a weekly basis and any other testing that staff or children could be subject to because they present, say, to healthcare, none of that at the moment is suggesting that we need to do anything differently. But I think, as the Minister said very early on, all of this remains under regular review. To be fair, we could go to S.T.A.C. this afternoon or tomorrow if we needed to, if there was something urgent and unforeseen.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Minister, can I ask, is there a level of infection that you feel is acceptable in schools and at what point is that level of infection not acceptable in your sort of view?

Acting Minister for Education:

I do not have an official 40 per cent here or whatever, that has to all be guided by the S.T.A.C. advice and also feedback from head teachers because obviously they have responsibility for ensuring the safety within schools. To answer your question, do I personally have levels that I think would trigger certain phases? I personally do not. Of course that will be led by the advice from S.T.A.C. and officers.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

So there is not a particular level, it will be a sort of moving feast, at which point you say: "There is an issue here and we may have to act" so in terms of timescales, that could be a week in terms of reaction. I note what happened in Guernsey because they suddenly had a huge explosion of cases and acted very rapidly to close schools proactively. Would you envisage that that would happen here?

Acting Minister for Education:

It may well be needed. As you know, Deputy Ward, the process is that the education nurse needs to seek advice from the Minister for Health and Social Services and from ... is it the chief medical officer? Whichever of them handles it, I forget their title exactly, but then that needs to come back if, for example, we needed to close the whole schooling system. If individual years and classes within schools need to be closed, then of course the head teacher can make that decision, and as we saw previously, were making those decisions. Of course I think it is important to say that we all recognise that short-notice decisions are inconvenient for parents and for students and for teachers and so on, but we are in a pandemic and sometimes we need to react quickly. We have to do what is right at the right time.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Minister, will you be visiting secondary schools as well to gauge how that is working?

Acting Minister for Education:

As much as my diary allows. I am trying to have a regular visit of schools. So far it has just been primary schools. We know that the previous Minister for Education was able to visit a secondary school. I appreciate that was not with all the students in it at the time, but yes, it is part of my plans. Of course should the States Assembly perhaps choose a different Minister, then that will be for them to decide what to do.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Moving on, because I am conscious of time. In terms of national exams in 2021, are you able to provide an update regarding national exams and what will be going ahead for Jersey this year?

Acting Minister for Education:

Yes. As you can understand, this is something that I think we have all been concerned with the news from the U.K. As people know, the vast majority of our examination boards go through the Ofqual process and are overseen by the U.K. and therefore the policy is decided in that jurisdiction. Of course we do have some other qualifications which are not overseen by Ofqual, such as the

I.G.C.S.E. (International General Certificate of Secondary Education), but with all of these situations the Department for Education has launched, I believe, a consultation on what they are planning to do regarding how the current cohort of students are going to receive their qualifications and how it is going to be assessed. The department has picked that up. We are already supporting colleagues, head teachers, in providing a response to that consultation, but that again is the Ofqual procedure. We have already highlighted with officers what is happening with I.G.C.S.E.s and B.T.E.C.s (Business and Technology Education Council), for example, where they have a slightly different regime, to avoid the situation that we saw last summer, the awful situation where students who had gone through their qualifications for B.T.E.C.s and whatever did not know what their results were. Clearly that is not good enough for any student, especially considering the stress that this whole period would have caused them. To answer your question, this is something which the department is very much on. It is something we are pursuing and liaising and contributing to the U.K. colleagues as appropriate.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

When do you think you will have a finalised process agreed and be clear on how results are going to be calculated? Because time is passing and time goes very quickly in the educational year. When do you think you will have that finalised process?

Acting Minister for Education:

I believe there is an indicative one which has been published by the U.K. I do not have it to hand. I do not know if officers have that in front of them who are able to comment.

Group Director, Education:

Happy to contribute. At the local level, Deputy Ward, on 13th January we stood up a monthly meeting of what we are calling the Secondary Heads Examination Group that will take cognisance of and indeed feed into Ofqual's consultation as well as monitoring, as the Minister said, the providers of I.G.C.S.E.s and A-levels and Cambridge and others. The situation will be to examine the International Baccalaureate, of which we have 2 qualifications now at Hautlieu. We are part of those wider national and international systems, but we are standing that up as a monthly group and we will meet immediately if new announcements fall out of that monthly cycle, so that we will share our position obviously as soon as we have finalised it, but we are in the hands of others.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Does that include the sort of moderation process for teacher-awarded grades across the Island and support for teachers in that?

Group Director, Education:

Absolutely. We found it salutary that the U.K. Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson, when he first announced the delay, said I think a term - I do not want to misquote the Honourable Member of that Parliament - that he would trust teachers, not algorithms, and very much in that spirit we will hone our local support for the moderation of teacher-assessed grades and the like.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Talking about university students as well, because obviously that is going to be difficult, what help is being given to university students in the U.K.? There are circumstances, for example, where some students who would supplement their incomes by having a job cannot work and are stuck in the U.K. really having run out of money and families not being able to support, for example. Is any consideration or any information being gathered on students who may be in that situation, i.e. stuck in the U.K. and really struggling?

Acting Minister for Education:

That type of information or signals are being collected by Student Finance at the moment. What I would say though is we are working very closely with our colleagues in Customer and Local Services to see if there are any mechanisms to support individual cases as and when they arise. We are looking to other mechanisms to support students who might find themselves in desperate circumstances. I know Deputy Higgins, for example, has already flagged a case to me and I think we found a potential route for that particular student as well, so we are aware of it, but that is how we are handling it at the moment, but it is something which I have asked officers to give further consideration to.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Sorry, Deputy Higgins, you have a question?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Yes, I was going to thank the Minister for the fact he is looking at that one because it is urgent. Many of these cases are urgent and we cannot wait weeks to try and find solutions. Another problem that some of the students are finding as well, those who have not gone back to university but are operating from the Island perhaps online, are finding they have still got to pay their rents back in the U.K. Has any sort of look been done at what is happening about they have still got expenses over here, maybe not accommodation, but they have other expenses, and then still paying their rents? Is this whole problem of students who are not in university doing their courses being looked at?

Acting Minister for Education:

Again, this issue has been brought to our attention and I have flagged it with officers. I know some of the initial feedback, part of the problem is because universities are individual institutions, some of

them are waiving fees, some of them are trying to get as much money out of our students as they possibly can. We have highlighted this with External Relations and we are working with officers in that department in order to raise it as an issue. It seems particularly unfair if students are being charged for a service which they are not receiving, and those are the representations which of course we are making, for example, to the Department for Education in England.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I want to just go back slightly to do with the well-being of students. I would like to ask you what extra provision you have put in to help with, for example, those in special needs or vulnerable children who are not getting as much of the support that they would have had before. Can you tell us what you are doing, for example, to support these children and the staff and what resources are being put into it?

Acting Minister for Education:

Sure. I think that will be picked up by our inclusion team, but also Children's Services. Mark, would you want to expand on that?

Director General, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

I think Seán has explained a little bit earlier about the kind of oversight we have anyway of all of our so-called vulnerable children. I think now that they are returned to school, they are benefiting from the kind of usual additional support they will get and then the supplementary input that is coming through, for example, the OLEVI programme, which the chair referred to earlier. I think the combination of collaboration between the inclusion team, the social work team under Mark Owers, means that we have had pretty good sight of vulnerable youngsters and that they are getting particular attention when they kind of return back to school through the normal support mechanisms of those schools and then the additional emphasis that is being placed on settling them back in and ensuring that they catch up, like all of the others. Seán, I am not sure, is there any more to say on the approach that is being taken?

Group Director, Education:

I would absolutely endorse what you have said. I think the single biggest thing we could do was get the schools reopened safely as early as we did because it is around school, because the additional care that ... for example, the joint work we might do with Eden House or Autism Jersey for the same young people in our mainstream schools, special schools or the additional resource centres attached to mainstream is so much better when the open school is the locus of that support for the individual students and their families. I think that has been the single biggest thing we have succeeded in doing.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Accepting that fact, if we have to close the schools, what provision have you got in? For example, we know that not all children have the technology, they do not have the support. What have you done and how are you financing it?

Acting Minister for Education:

Deputy Higgins, as you will know, those systems were stood up last time.

[11:15]

So we explained that they were able to get other staff in to support the vulnerable children, which would allow the regular teachers to carry on teaching their class and not have to do it in a hybrid system, which for the younger years is particularly important. Those systems are in place. We have already tested them out. If there are issues of vulnerable children or those that require extra support, they could be stepped into schools, where we would have that process in place. But I think you are trying to get to equipment issues, just an opportunity for Seán to comment on anything further there.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I might add that I have asked a written question on this, as you know, and I would like to know how many children, for example, do not have access to technology and how we are trying to fill that gap and meet their needs, because as this thing goes on we have a wider gap in the education these children are getting. We know that in future lives, they are going to be paying for this and therefore we have got to make sure that we do as much as we can to support all those who, first, do not have the technology and the parents do not have the skills to help them at home. I would like to know what you are doing about this because, as I say, it is a problem we are going to face in the future and these children will be affected by it.

Acting Minister for Education:

Effectively if you are talking about the digital divide, that is something which has been flagged within the department, of course. We are in a better situation at the moment because schools are open and therefore regular teaching has been able to resume. There are of course a few cases. For example, La Rocque is having to do shift year teaching due to staff absence, which the majority is not to do with COVID, there are other issues going on there, but it is something which has been flagged by the department which we are working on. I do not know if Seán or Mark Rogers are able to comment on that at the moment. I do not want to stifle Scrutiny by saying it is policy under development, but I would want to give the panel the assurance that it is certainly something which the department has not let go.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I think, if I can just interrupt again, one of the things that concerns me is the fact that we know that children, for example, if they are dyslexic or they have learning difficulties, even if they are in school, finding the time with everything else the teachers are doing at this time and trying to manage, it is very, very hard for them to get the support that they need. They need extra support. Again, if you can elaborate on that, please.

Acting Minister for Education:

Yes, so I will pass that one to Mark or Seán.

Director General, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Let me say a few words about the issue of devices and connectivity and then perhaps respond to Deputy Higgins in relation to some of the work that Pip Hesketh has been doing around mobilising some extra resource for schools that maybe need to fill gaps in around some of their vulnerable children. Deputy Higgins, I think you will recall last year that as the Council of Ministers reviewed all of the business cases for COVID-related funding, there was one that the department put forward which was about the catch-up programme, which we have already referred to, but also included in it was some minor investment in the Youth Service in Highlands and then a proposal to invest in a significant step-up in the purchase and distribution of devices for children. At that time, as C.O.M. (Council of Ministers) was looking at the Government's finances, it agreed to the catch-up programme and the much smaller investment I think in remote learning devices for the Youth Service and some investment in a new monitoring system in Highlands. It did not support the financial request to invest in additional devices. We have now returned to that topic and there is an active piece of work underway whereby Seán's school improvement and advisory team has reworked the numbers in relation to how many devices we think we need and what kind of devices and how they are distributed across primary and secondary. We have just refreshed that data. I am working with Modernisation and Digital on what the procurement would need to look like for those devices, and I am also working - because this is what was asked by C.O.M. - with Kevin Lemasney to look at whether there is a joint high-net-worth and Government-funded solution to the purchase of those devices. So that is work in process.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

How many students? What is the gap? How many students are we talking about that need support?

Director General, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Just give me a very short moment in time, because I have probably got the numbers in my notepad here. My recollection is in the first phase of this, split between primary and secondary, we need in the region, Seán, of probably 300 more devices in the primary phase and I think probably double

that in the secondary, Deputy Higgins. Sorry, rather than me rifle through my notes, I could give you a more accurate answer offline.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

If you can come back to us on that. It is important. I will hand over to Rob.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Just to say on that in terms of devices, children accessing on their phones is really not adequate, so I hope you mean proper learning devices. I was going to say to the Minister, I heard something on the radio the other day that struck me, where somebody said that in a modern society a household without broadband is the equivalent to a household without running water. Would you agree that that is the case in terms of a modern forward-thinking society and a digital technology-based society that Jersey will inevitably and must inevitably become?

Acting Minister for Education:

I think definitely in this day and age it is an important and essential education tool. I would not want to totally brand my constituents who hate technology and do not want such a provision in their home to force it upon them because that is that element of individual choice, but as for supporting students and education, I think that is an accurate statement.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

We have a number of questions on the starting school age, but I think we will cover those in another hearing. Just some ones to finish with. I do need to ask you about priorities and workstreams and policy areas you will be focusing on in your role as Minister for Education and the department is looking to focus on this year. What are those priorities?

Acting Minister for Education:

I hope you are not giving me a little bit too much credit at the moment, because of course we do not know who the new Minister for Education will be. What we do know is obviously what is in the Government Plan, which of course the department is working on, so that will be the education reform programme. That will be the inclusion review and, as you know, my particular passion is the retraining strategy, which needs to be taken off the ground and I think is even more critical as we move throughout this year and supporting people, any potential change in the economy coming forward.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Will there be legislation coming forward?

Acting Minister for Education:

I am not aware of any at the moment, say within the next couple of quarters from the Education Department. There are one or 2 regarding from Children's, but Seán or Mark, is anything from Education legislation-wise coming through?

Director General, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

I think the short answer is no, not at the moment, but I think that is partly because, as you have said, Minister, we are waiting for the permanent ministerial arrangements to fall in place and then we can revisit previous ministerial intentions. We are taking nothing for granted that they necessarily carry through.

Acting Minister for Education:

Sorry, the only thing that might come through might be the Higher Education Order, but then that is tweaked and changed on a regular basis anyway.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I know, Deputy Higgins, you have a question, but before you ask that, can I just ask: do you have any notion of when you will know about future roles and when we will know about future roles? We have written to the Chief Minister, but we have not received a reply as to when the decision will be made. We have to plan our workstream as well.

Acting Minister for Education:

Yes, absolutely. Under Standing Orders, I believe now that the Chief Minister has notified the Assembly of the resignation of the Minister for Education, the election for the new Minister for Education will be on the next States sitting, the normal next States sitting, which is 9th February.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Okay. Deputy Higgins, you wanted to ask something, sorry.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Yes, I have got 2 questions. I will ask one just following on from that. The Children's Commissioner has put forward the view that she believes that the Minister for Children and Housing and the Minister for Education should be one and that the housing portfolio should be moved over to someone else because of the importance of children. Assuming that you are nominated as the Minister for Education - which I think is highly likely - would you support taking on the children's portfolio, which you have also been working on as an interim?

Acting Minister for Education:

I think it is fair to say that there are definitely synergies in the role of education and children. I know the first part of the Children's Commissioner's letter, basically it begins by saying: "I would like one entity, which is the Minister for Children, to do that" but I would accept that it should move across to Education so that C.Y.P.E.S. is one department. I think there are great merits in that proposal and I know that the Chief Minister is actively considering that.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Secondly, I just want to go back to something you said with regard to higher education and training and so on. One thing that the pandemic has resulted in is more homeworking. Offices are being stripped out pretty well in terms of staff working from home. We also know too that many firms are looking to ... they have adopted this technology earlier. We are probably going to see greater unemployment going forward because we are seeing the rise of greater technology being used and also we are going to be seeing some major changes in the world of work and our economies. For example, we are seeing more in technology. We are going to have, I think, going forward, higher numbers of unemployment. What active steps are you taking? What research are you doing into the new world of work and the new skills that people are going to require?

Acting Minister for Education:

I suppose it is important to say that that is why the C.O.M. established the Economic Recovery Oversight Group, is it? Anyway, one of them to kind of deal with the economic response and of course myself and the former Minister insisted that Education were part of that particular group because I think the points you make are relevant and are definitely something that needs to be considered. We know that, for example, young people have already disproportionately been affected in many ways by the pandemic. It will be no surprise, given my skills remit. All the incidental things that young people would have had on their C.V.s (curriculum vitae), the Saturday job, the after-school jobs, whatever they might have had, they just will not have had them. I am incredibly concerned in this area. It is certainly something which behind the scenes I have been raising. What I can say - if it is of comfort to the panel - is Skills Jersey has been very proactive in its already existing contacts with employer groups and they are already collating needs where ... some businesses do see growth kind of after the pandemic. We know, for example, there are aspects within the finance industry where they do see growth within their sector, but again, it is providing support and platforms for students to gain those skills to go into this and how we work with them. That information is being collated by Skills Jersey at the moment, which I think answers your question, but are we going to need more support in this area? I think we absolutely will.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

When will we start seeing some papers? We know all these talks are going on. When is the conversation going to be made known to the community and also within the States? Because it is

a pressing issue that needs to be dealt with now. The more I read about the changes to what is going on in the world economy, what is going on in terms of technology, they are items that we need to address at this time, so when will these papers be forthcoming?

Acting Minister for Education:

Thank you. It just reminded me also I should add that of course Highlands College also have that feedback into the sector and do shift and change their courses as it is coming along. I do not have a timeline with me today, but I am more than happy to go back to the department and get one for you in order to answer that question, but you are right, it is a piece of work which needs I think a bit more focus than it does currently have.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I would just make one final comment on that. If we look at the changing nature of the world of work, what we are going to see in the next phase is the change to the professions, whether it be doctors, lawyers, accountants, all those professions that have been considered safe and good earning jobs are under threat with the technology. We are going to have to really rethink our economy, what we are providing and also how we are going to pay for these things, so I would just make that point. I will hand over to the chairman, thank you.

Acting Minister for Education:

I think those are some very perfectly valid strategic points you are making there.

[11:30]

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Thank you. Can I ask then - we are coming towards the end - there was money put in the Government Plan for projects in Education, increasing funding, a lot of it obviously to make up for deficits that existed. What of that money has been spent and what are the plans on spending that, even with the transition in terms of your temporary role? I will not say like a cover teacher waiting for a full-time contract, but how are we going with that spending? Because we are a month into the year and there is an urgent need to use money and get it into schools.

Acting Minister for Education:

We raised this point and we had this conversation, I think, with the head of Rouge Bouillon. Some of it has already been unlocked and is going into the schools. There is a phased approach. Some more of it will go in in September, but Seán, you are close to that. Are you able to comment?

Group Director, Education:

Thank you, Minister. Yes, Deputy Ward, you are absolutely right. The biggest single area of activity for all of us will be the Education Reform Programme. We have now appointed a programme director. That process was held up by COVID. We have had formal induction meetings yesterday; myself and Keith and Anne Homer, who will lead the work with her expert colleagues on the framing of new funding formulae for our schools. That programme is very much good to go and we will be starting to recruit stakeholders, including school leaders, reference to the unions for the workstreams that will see that really valuable resource committed by the States Assembly in approving the Government Plan for the 2021 spend. You are quite right, we are a few weeks into the year, but it was right to get the programme director who will lead this very complex, involved piece of work over the 3-year period of the reform programme, but we are keen to get that 2021 spend commitment out and into school budgets.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

It is a shame it is coming to the end, but in terms of advice that you have got with regards the school funding review, how much of that do you see being implemented this year?

Group Director, Education:

You will know from the phasing that the overall sum, while very generous, is still lower in 2021 than 2022, 2023 and 2024, but the point for addressing the structural deficit, the £5.5 million per annum recurring, is constant so it is the larger part of the 2021 commitment. By 2024 it is less than half because of all the other involvement and resource that we need to do that work, so we will be getting that money out. We have got to get the funding mechanisms. Schools have been notified already of their school budgets for 2021 under the old system, often ubiquitously known as the age-weighted pupil unit - that is almost the nickname for the formula - but we are looking for additionality on things like low prior attainment as we roll out the work that we are doing starting now in quarter one.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Minister, some of the significant outcomes of that school funding review in terms of the funding of the private schools and the 14-plus transfer, do you have any opinions on those that you feel you would want to achieve in the remainder of this term of the Assembly?

Acting Minister for Education:

I think that that will be left for the new Minister, whoever they may be. I have not had a chance to really consider them in great detail at this stage. As you can imagine, I have many balls to juggle at the moment.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Yes, but they are really important issues that need to be faced, so we hope that they will be addressed as soon as possible. I note we are at time for the hearing and we all have other things that we need to go to, so I just thank everybody for their time. I do not know if there are any other questions, Deputy Higgins, before we go.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I was just going to ask a question about the scope of the new director who has been appointed to implement the changes that Seán was talking about.

Acting Minister for Education:

Yes, we can get that in writing to you, if that is okay.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Yes. If there are questions that we have not managed to cover, we will put them to you in writing anyway. Is that okay, Deputy Higgins, if we do that?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

That is fine, yes. Can I just - again, I know we are finishing - thank everybody for their time?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Yes. Are there any questions that you want to ask us? I think it is important that we give that opportunity as well.

Acting Minister for Education:

Yes, thank you. I was just going to ask what your current work programme is. I know there are some things coming from Home Affairs as well. I wonder if you could just give us an idea about that, please.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Yes, it is very full and it is very ... Mike is smiling and I am smiling and Andy is probably pulling his hair out, but it is very full. It is mainly Home Affairs this year because we did focus a great deal on Education last year, with 2 significant reviews on post-16 and recruitment and retention, so we have got a number of things coming through from the Home Affairs panel. We have a huge amount happening at the moment and they are all movable feasts because we do not know when the legislation is coming through. That is one of the reasons we asked about Education from yourselves, from C.Y.P.E.S. If you do have any of that, the earlier that we get it the better, because that will help us with our work programme, which is very full. Yes, we have a very full work programme, but it is mainly Home Affairs this year.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I might add though it does not mean we are going to let you off the hook.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Oh, absolutely not, no.

Acting Minister for Education:

Chance would be a fine thing. No, the other issue which I just want to flag with you, appreciating that, I think we have one or 2 consultations which we might be developing. We just need to do the background work with them and of course I would like to just run them past the panel before they go out, just as a sense-check type thing. I appreciate that might take some of your time, but just to notify you that one or 2 might be coming.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

That is useful to know as well. I just thank you, Minister, and thank all the officers for their time this morning. I am glad that we did take time to have this hearing, otherwise it would have been far too long before we had a public hearing, whatever the situation is regards the role, so I am pleased to manage to do that this morning. With that, I say thank you very much and I will call the hearing to an end. Thank you very much.

[11:36]