

3. Questions to Ministers without notice - Minister for Education Sport and Culture

3.1 Deputy S. Pitman:

Given that the Social Affairs Panel received the Youth Service Strategic Plan on 27 November, not in September as expected, in the holiday period, it allows the Panel to undertake a full scale review of a 5 year strategy only in 2 to 3 weeks. Sir, if we are to accept at face value that the delay on the Minister for Education Sport and Culture's part in delivering the Youth Service Strategic Plan to the Panel was not intentional then I am sure he will agree that it is only right that the Panel is granted an extra 3 months to undertake its review; the 3 months that was lost from when we originally expected the plan?

Senator M.E. Vibert (The Minister for Education Sport and Culture):

With pleasure, Sir.

Deputy S. Pitman:

Can I just say thank you to the Minister for his co-operation.

3.2 Deputy S. Power of St. Brelade:

The Minister will be aware of the excellent standards of teaching that has occurred at Les Quennevais School given the resources it has, and the Minister will be aware that the resources at the school - and indeed secondary schooling in the west of the Island - is not in keeping now with some of the newer schools, such as Haute Vallee and Le Rocquier. What plans does the Minister have, long term or otherwise, to put Les Quennevais on a par with the secondary schools in the St. Helier, St. Saviour and St. Clement catchment areas?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

Yes, I totally agree with the Deputy about the quality of the education in all our secondary schools, including Les Quennevais. We have long-term plans which roll-out over 30-odd years for the improvements in our schools and, after the other 11 to 16 schools are now just about finished, Les Quennevais will be the one we have got plans for. We carried out some work a few years ago, but there is more work to be done to bring them up to the same excellent standards in terms of accommodation as our other schools, and I will be putting forth capital in the next capital programme round plans to improve Les Quennevais.

3.3 Deputy A.D. Lewis of St. John:

In some countries around the world local radio and television stations are obligated to play a small percentage of locally produced material, with particular reference to minority languages and music. Could the Minister advise if the Assistant Minister responsible for culture has progressed further the suggestions that some form of agreement with the local media should be reached in respect of giving air time to locally produced music in particular?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

I declare an interest in that I used to be an employee of the B.B.C. The B.B.C. is very particular about not being dictated to by any government, and I think the best way forward is to encourage the production of excellent local music, which all the local media will want to play, not be forced to play by some dictat. We are not in some communist state where we force the media to do as we say. What is important is we encourage them and we encourage the production of excellent local music. I think that is the way ahead, not trying to dictate to the local media.

The Deputy of St. John:

I agree, I am not suggesting we dictate it, but I just wanted to know whether the Minister has perused further the suggestion that may be some form of mutual agreement should be sought.

Senator M.E. Vibert:

We have a very good relationship with the local media. They will play things, and they do produce things that are done locally, and of course we have recently made improvements to our Sounds Workshop, which will enable our young people to have better facilities to produce local music.

3.4 Deputy J.A. Martin:

The Minister stated on 10th October that of the 1,038 students who left compulsory education at 16, there were 156 basically unaccounted for. He was not sure whether they had gone to work, they may be at home, but he was working closely with the Minister of Social Security, he even said, Sir, that some may have left the Island. He did assure the House he would keep tracking this number and he would let us know what has happened to these 156 children over the age of 16. Could he now inform the House if he has carried out his promise?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

I have asked this to be done, Sir. It has proven quite difficult. I have not had a report back on it yet, but I will wait for the report in the New Year.

3.5 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

An interesting question from the Deputy of St. John, and a more interesting response from the Minister in relation to whether or not we are giving the opportunities to the people who do present well-produced music an opportunity for an audience. I wondered, while we would not want to dictate to the broadcasting companies what they play, has consideration been given to granting licences, as in the United Kingdom, whereby if, for example, a petition of 5,000 people is raised a local radio licence is granted to that individual group? Has thought been given to granting licences to alternative radio stations so that the overall majority of what is effectively a monopoly situation can be challenged?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

I think we are very fortunate having 2 local radio stations for an Island our size. If a petition of the sort was raised I would certainly look into it. It is the first time anyone has suggested to me that there should be, if you like, a community radio station, but I would certainly look at it and I would welcome Senator Le Claire's musical talents being displayed more fully on it.

3.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:

What measures does the Minister have in hand in order to meet the 3.4 per cent claim of the Jersey teachers and, if none, will he return to the House and seek the budget to meet this claim because they have fallen behind inflation over recent years; will he seek the budget from the budget next year?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

The Deputy appears to be living in the past. All employees are now employed centrally, not by individual Ministers and departments, and it is a matter for the States' Employment Board to negotiate pay claims with all groups.

3.7 Deputy S. Power:

My question is related to my first question on Les Quennevais School. The Minister will be aware that Les Quennevais School sits in a very confined site in a residential area, does the Minister or his department have a view that any long-term development potential for the school would be on the existing site or does he have another site in mind?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

No, Sir, I do not have another site in mind, and lots of parts of the Les Quennevais School are of excellent size and condition. We would like to improve it still further. We will be looking at that site and to see how we can make best use of it.

3.8 Deputy A. Breckon:

I wonder if the Minister knows whether there is any length of residence required to attend a course at Highlands College and, if there is, what it is?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

We are currently reviewing courses, and Highlands offers a whole range of courses from a whole range of students from the age of 14 through to... I think, the oldest I heard of recently was 88. It is difficult to give a blanket comment because many of the courses, depending on what they are, have different requirements. But as far as I am aware, certainly anyone of compulsory school age who is legally resident in the Island we will provide education for, as is our statutory duty. We always try to accommodate as many people as possible who are legitimately in the Island on any course we can, but because of the whole variety of courses offered at Highlands in different areas I cannot give a blanket assurance that none of the courses have any such restrictions.

3.9 The Deputy of St. John:

I am sorry to mention it again to the Minister, but I do not think I had an answer to my question posed. Would he consider discussing the issue that I raised earlier with the media to come to some kind of memorandum of understanding or agreement that locally produced excellent music and other such productions are given local air time. I am simply asking would he consider discussing that with the media and reaching some kind of agreement. It is not an attack on his department, it is simply a question which I think a lot of people in the Island are quite interested in.

Senator M.E. Vibert:

I will ask my Assistant Minister with responsibility for culture, the Deputy of Grouville, Sir, to take up the Deputy's suggestion.

3.10 Deputy S. Pitman:

Jersey schools are bound by strict staff-to-pupil ratios to ensure both safety of child and employee, and in order that quality assurance in obtaining value for taxpayers' money is delivered. Why is there absolutely no mention of this fundamental aspect of educational policy within the Youth Service Strategic Plan, and so would the Minister agree the current Education Sport and Culture policy of hanging this issue solely on youth workers' judgement is wholly at odds with modern employment health and safety guidelines?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

We currently have just out a draft Youth Service Strategic Plan, which I have just agreed the Social Affairs Scrutiny Panel can have 3 months to review, and I look forward to such suggestions where there may be lacunas in it so that we can take them on board if we feel they are merited. It is a strategic plan, of course, not a business plan or an annual plan and not everything of detail will be included in it.

3.11 Deputy S. Pitman:

Sir, could the Minister answer the question please? I think this is very important as schools have this policy in place, why do youth workers not have this policy in place? This has been the same for many years and there is absolutely no mention of it in the Strategic Plan. It is an important issue, Sir.

Senator M.E. Vibert:

As I said, I will take it up and I will look forward to the comments of the Social Affairs Scrutiny Panel. I know of the Deputy's great interest in youth work and I welcome any comments she has to make.

The Bailiff:

Deputy Mezbourian. Before you ask your question, Deputy, can I just alert Deputy Martin to the fact that the continuing red lights causes me to put Members' questions at the bottom of the list and so I will come to Deputy Martin but only if she looks at the Chair to catch the Chair's eye and does not flash her red light continuously.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

I am sorry, Sir, that is what I thought the red light was for, and I have now learnt my lesson and I will look at you, thank you.

3.12 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian of St. Lawrence:

The Minister, in his response to Deputy Breckon's question, referred to people being able to go to Highlands College if they were legitimately in the Island, and I wonder whether the Minister would be able to expand on that distinction please, Sir?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

Yes, I was referring to young people below statutory school leaving age of 16, and for a young person to be legitimately in the Island they have to either have their parents with them or an appointed guardian or close member of the family. If they are in the Island without such people they are not here legitimately for educational purposes.

3.13 Deputy J.A. Martin:

It is always a pleasure to look at you anyway, Sir. I was trying to get my figures and my question right. It is a follow-up to Deputy Hilton's question, again of 10 October of the Minister. Deputy Hilton stated there was 28 places on the construction courses and 80 youngsters applied. The Deputy asked the Minister, Sir, would he look into increasing the numbers, and his reply was: "Yes, Sir." Could he tell us where we are, because I think a lot of these unemployed youngsters are looking to go into constructions courses?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

Yes, Sir, in fact I had a meeting with representatives from Highlands yesterday on various matters, including the way forward for the college as a whole. One of the difficulties we have is the physical space for teaching construction and one of the plans we are looking at is increasing that physical space for teaching construction, because it is an area where you have to have the facilities to teach it. You cannot teach construction in a basic way in the classroom for the skills concerned, and we are looking to see how we can improve and increase the space so that we can increase where necessary the number of places on offer.

3.14 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Thank you, Sir. The Youth Service has developed a partnership agreement with 5 Parishes, what steps, if any, has the Minister taken to develop similar agreements with the other Parishes?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

Yes, I am very pleased that our previous youth strategy was so successful in developing these policies of partnerships with the Parishes, and I thank the Parishes involved. We are in discussion with at least 3, if not 4, other Parishes about developing their areas of youth service and we are getting good responses. I thank the Constables and the representatives of the Parishes

concerned for being in negotiation with us and we are seeking, where possible, to provide increased youth facilities all over the Island in all of the Parishes. Of course we are constrained by resources as everyone else, but the Parishes are being very cooperative.

The Bailiff:

I am afraid that brings the first question period without notice to an end.