

STATES OF JERSEY

Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel Political Education Review

WEDNESDAY, 5th MAY 2010

Panel:

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier of St. Saviour (Chairman)

Deputy C.F. Labey of Grouville

Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade

Witness:

Deputy T.M. Pitman of St. Helier:

Present:

Mrs. E. Liddiard (Scrutiny Officer)

[16:38]

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier of St. Saviour (Chairman):

Okay, Deputy Pitman, I would like to welcome you to our hearing. For the purpose of the tape we will put our names down. Roy Le Hérissier, Chairman, Political Review Panel, Education and Home Affairs.

Deputy C.F. Labey of Grouville:

Carolyn Labey, Deputy of Grouville.

Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

I am Montfort Tadier. I am a Deputy from St. Brelade.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Our officer is Elizabeth Liddiard. Deputy Pitman, you are very familiar with the witness statements.

Deputy T.M. Pitman of St. Helier:

I am.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

I think we will now move on. Thank you very much for attending. Sorry, my apologies, if you would like just to introduce yourself for the tape.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I am Deputy Trevor Pitman but I requested to come here because I was a professional youth worker, and I felt that I may have something of value to say.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Thank you. As you can see, we have got very broad questions and you are well experienced in these things so I am sure it will move along very easily. But I wonder, just to kick things off, Deputy, could you tell us what you would see as the aims of political education within the Youth Service, and indeed if you have got any views within education in general?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Especially with young people now who can vote at 16 and voting turnout being disastrous in Jersey, I think we cannot really criticise young people if they do not understand what we are asking them to engage in. So I see it as a key part of education, just like other issues. You know, you teach young people about maths, you teach them about the history, you would hope how to function in everyday life. Politics is essential to everyday life so I think it is about giving young people information. It is not about telling them who to vote for or what they should vote for, which direction. It is just another part of making sure they can make informed decisions, and that is key to youth work to anybody.

The Deputy of Grouville:

When you say political education has been disastrous in Jersey; can you expand on that?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

It is disastrous, I think, in the fact that we have not really done it in recent years. I mean for me in the 20 years I have been working with young people if you go back in time you probably had the great taboo, it used to be talking to young people about drugs, then you probably can, still to a degree it is about homosexuality, and in Jersey - it is not the same in the U.K. (United Kingdom) - but politics is a big no-no for a lot of education staff.

The Deputy of Grouville:

Why do you think that is?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Fear. Because people at the top do not want to take it on board.

The Deputy of Grouville:

Do you think it is fear or do you think it is because a lot of the trainers do not know how the political system works themselves?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I think that is a fair point, certainly in schools, but it is probably not a fair point in the Youth Service because most of the staff are local people. I think nearly all the professional youth workers, which is obviously a much smaller team than teaching, but nearly all of them were Jersey people so they did understand the system. What you say is certainly true in schools.

The Deputy of Grouville:

So what are they actually frightened of?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

They are frightened because the message comes down from the top that this is a taboo. That was certainly the case under, as far as I am concerned, the previous Minister for Education. It may be different now.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Why is it taboo? Is it in the sense that political influence, is that the ostensible reason?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Well, look, a good example, some years back I did a question time event which was really successful. It took a lot of hard work to do it but we had about 60 people. We were given no support to do that. It was very successful. We had 6 politicians, a variety of politicians we invited. It was filmed. It was hugely successful, as I say, and then the message came down I could never do it again. I do not want to name the person because they are still working, but it was said from the top, from the politician at the top, that they did not want the wrong sort of people getting access to young people who were likely to be influenced.

I just think that is appalling because we trust ... as I say you trust a youth worker to talk about drugs and give information, not advice. You trust them to talk to someone about contraception. You give information, you do not tell them what is the answer for them. It should be the same with politics. You tell them this is how this works, this is what a Constable is, this is what a Deputy is, this is how the States work, but unfortunately too many people were not trusted to do that. If you did you really went out on a limb which was probably just myself, maybe another one.

Deputy M. Tadier:

In your view, what would be the ideal state for teaching politics? What should the curriculum be? What kind of things should we be teaching?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Obviously I am not the expert on schools but obviously young people used to feed back to me from schools and they say: "Well, we rarely ever see a politician." I know they saw some but that seems to be based on the link that that politician might have with the school, maybe that has changed, I do not know. From what I know now as a politician it seems as if that is still in place. As Deputy Labey said, there is the problem that a lot of the teachers do not actually know how the system works and so on, if they are coming into the Island.

But young people would say: "Well, if you do not get people coming to schools how do you expect us to know?" I think that is the key to it. Certainly when I worked in Leicester all the parties went into schools. Not to preach but so people could be questioned. It should be on an equal basis. As I say, you cannot criticise young people for not making informed decisions if they do not even know what they are being asked to vote on.

The Deputy of Grouville:

What would you like to see in the Youth Service as a political education programme?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Well, there is absolutely no reason that we could not invite ... sorry, I am talking as if I am still there, there is absolutely no reason that politicians could not be invited into youth settings. It is just an evening, that is all. 16:45] It is even better then in a way because the young people will stay if you engage their interest where in schools they are a sort of captured audience. Maybe it is a lot harder within the Youth Service but there is absolutely no reason that a local politician could not be invited in to talk about problems.

If you look at the question time thing I was saying, young people were really up in arms at the time because their bench had been moved from somewhere where they gathered. Another example is when the smoking law changed. It had been 18 then it was 16 and then it was 18 again, which they thought was completely bizarre. It is just about willingness to engage. Like I said, it is almost a taboo. I personally believe there are certain people in power that do not want people to vote. They do not want young people to vote. There are too many ... I know I am probably preaching to the converted here, but there are too many politicians who do not think young people are capable of voting.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Is it fair to say it is not just about young people? I mean we know voting is an issue right across the board, so low turnouts. Probably partly due to the fact that our system is very complex and opaque. It is not easy for even an adult to understand. So, can that be extended down to the children, I suppose.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I think absolutely. I mean, we know the system is very complicated. Ideally it would be a lot easier if we were all M.P.s (Members of Parliament) I expect. That would take a lot of work but I mean that is taking it quite a few steps down the road. I think the initial thing is to make information more user friendly. I mean the youth service did improve this last election. There were posters, there were leaflets coming, explaining how you could vote. It did not go into huge depth, but it has got to be ongoing. It has got to become a regular part of life and help young people see that politics is a part of life and it influences everywhere. But, as I say, it is a taboo. It really is.

The Deputy of Grouville:

Do you know of any youth leaders, say in the past year, that have approached the structure of the Youth Service or Education to ask or to say that this is what they plan to do? They are planning an evening with a few politicians.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I do not know anyone like that. To be fair, I shall say this, since I have left I have almost been frozen out of contact with young people, which again I think is very sad because I have given a large part of my life to it.

The Deputy of Grouville:

But what about the youth leaders themselves? Have they been proactive in saying: "I am going to have an evening doing this or that with politicians"?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

It has happened with at least one other ... Ted Paphitis certainly has done some good work about trying to engage young people. You have got to have that support from the top and certainly under the previous Minister and President, as he was, it was not there.

The Deputy of Grouville:

What about the current Minister?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I have not worked under him so I could not tell you.

The Deputy of Grouville:

But you do not know of any youth leaders that have approached him with a view to ...?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I do not.

Deputy M. Tadier:

I am very interested in this whole allegation of political interference both before you were a Deputy and since you have been you feel like you have been frozen out. Can you tell us a bit more about how that has manifested itself?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Well, I just think, as we know, there are double standards in politics. I mean we have got the Minister for Home Affairs who was a Magistrate and it is not too close for him to be the Minister for Home Affairs yet for no apparent reason I know, whether people like my politics or not, I have got a lot to offer young people, yet I have not been asked to participate in anything to do with young people. I know Deputy Shona Pitman is not involved in anything with young people yet she was on the committee at Grand Vaux.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Is there anything to stop you being involved or do you just think the word has gone down somewhere?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I mean I still meet a lot of young people but I cannot go and just invite myself on to things.

Deputy M. Tadier:

We were discussing this earlier with the previous contestants, for want of a better word, the interviewees, and part of the problem is, it is not necessarily lack of will on the part of the politicians to come into schools or youth centres, it is just we cannot simply stroll into a school. We have to be invited in. So how do we get round that? How do we make sure that on the one hand we have got a legitimate reason to go into school without being seen to be influencing unduly?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I think as politicians we have to make an issue and flag up that huge void that is there. As I say, I strongly feel that most politicians do not want young people to be involved so if they only thought that through, so young people will not vote unless they are made aware. When I think back to the question time event people were very ... these were, I do not like to use the words “class” but working class kids, they were mainly from the State schools and you have probably seen there is a huge difference in some of the fee paying schools because they seem to engage more, parents probably talk to them more about politics.

But once you have engaged those young people you could not stop them up. I mean that event went on for more than an hour longer than it was meant to because once they got fired up about the issues that concerned them, and it might not be issues that we feel about, like the smoking issues, that is what they wanted to talk about, buses, et cetera, et cetera. It is showing them that politics is relevant to their lives. That is the real key to it for me. I think we are failing them badly.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

When, Trevor, you were told that this is not to continue, were you given any reasons or was it just a sort of blanket sort of “no”.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

As I said, I mean I was told that it was because at the top there were concerns that the wrong people would get access influencing students. I am not going to name that person because they are still in the job. But it was confirmed to me by another politician, going back to the committee system, that event happened shortly before we changed to ministerial government, yet it was a great way of engaging young people. It proved it could work. We have still got the film of it somewhere.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Is education in itself going to necessarily lead to a turnout in participation in voting?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I think education will encourage voting if you can show young people it is relevant to their lives, that is what it comes down to.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Presumably I think it is fair to say you are in favour of electoral reform, just the whole constitutional reform in the States, and I think you probably also agree that our current system, there is no real link between the vote and what you get but if that is the case, I mean, we teach students about a system which we, or some people think is broken, it is hardly going to inspire them to vote. Do you think ultimately what it boils down to is a need for some kind of reform in the States, not just for young people, so that voting and politics is more accessible? I do not want to put words in your mouth but ...

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

No, no. You are probably entirely right, that there is very little link between what someone sees as their vote and policy, I believe. Now our (JDA) job is to advocate

party politics. I mean I have not come here to preach about party politics but I think that is fact. Currently people can see if they vote for someone and they do not keep their word ... it is very easy for you or me to stand here and say: "Well, I tried but I could not convince 26 others to support me."

For me, I think where you have got to start from is actually making young people realise, like I say, I keep repeating it, that it is relevant to their lives, that there is a link and we are not all just some stuffy old gits in suits. To be fair, it is difficult for education staff. I mean the last 18 months I was a professional youth worker I was also chairman of the J.D.A. (Jersey Democratic Alliance) so it was a fine line to walk between if someone asked me about politics I had to make quite sure, even more sure than I normally would, so I could not be said to be influencing them.

But, as I say, we are trusted to do it with life or death matters, like sex education, et cetera, drugs. I mean before I came back here I was a street worker ... not street walker, in Leicester doing drugs work. Those are just as life essential as politics. Why can we be trusted to talk to people about contraception? Why can we be trusted to talk about drugs, et cetera, but not politics?

The Deputy of Grouville:

So the way forward in Jersey, how would you like to see the Youth Service ... I will not say "put on" but deliver political education?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Well, I think it has got to work hand in hand with formal education as well. I would like to see a lot more related work. I would like to see some sort of handbook which explains in clear and simple language about the way the system works, that things like party politics do exist, Independents exist(s), and I would like to see inviting politicians in to youth projects to talk to young people would become a regular part of life, you know. I do not see why that could not happen once a month.

With the Youth Service it is great because if people do not want to talk to you they will not come and you cannot make them. But I think we should be going the same way. You look at formal education it should not be down to whether you have got a very good relationship with the head teacher of your school, that should not be dependent on that. Roy should be invited in on the same basis as Montfort should be invited in. Not because you are the right sort of person, and it does seem to be the right sort of people who get invited in. Which probably explains why I have never been invited in.

The Deputy of Grouville:

Roy is invited in. [Laughter] The same with me.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

There was some discussion with a witness who was very involved with the P.S.H.E. (Personal, Social, Health Education) curriculum development and one of the points she made was the difference between small "p" and big "P" politics and small "p" I think also involved things like running school councils where you actually got experience at political machinations and so forth, and of course we are told in the Youth Service the youngsters are sometimes quite involved in the running of a club

but do you think that that is ... I mean I am not trying to say: "Well, that is politics taken care of" but you are part of the way there, are you not, by involving them that way?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Absolutely. I mean I was one of the first to introduce that to the project I ran but there is also a lot of different interpretation. It is no good me giving you power but if you are going to mess it up, I am just standing there I can take it away from you, that is not power and too much within, I believe, in education and in youth settings, that is what happens. It is not real power. I mean we had young people on our committees when the question time event was organised.

Those young people decided which politicians came, the one exception was we had to have Deputy Fox who had responsibility for the Youth Service. So that was sort of something we had to concede and then the Minister invited himself, but the rest were young people. If I think back who came we had Deputy Martin because I think she was involved at Education, Deputy Southern was invited. I had never met him then but he was known to some of the young people because he had helped their families, that is why he was put forward; then we found out he was a former teacher as well. Senator Syvret was invited because he was on our management committee and young people knew of him. I think Senator Ted Vibert because he was quite high profile and he had upset a lot of young people about smoking issues at the time.

As I say that is real power to young ... you cannot give power and take it away. Young people either have got power or they have not and some of this is just a myth. I think it is nice to say we are going to give Joe Bloggs at 16 he can run the club and the money but if you are not really giving him that responsibility then it is more damaging than not. But I fully take on board what you are saying. Youth forums are great and they can help but they have got to have real power. Sadly, what you see on the youth forums is that again it is the more capable young people who tend to gravitate towards on that and they will dominate it. Again, it comes down to a lack of confidence. Yet we saw at that event, once those young people, working class young people, get fired up they have often got the most insightful things to say, and I think that is the sort of barrier we have got across.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Can I ask what I call a reversal; what would we do if we did not want to get people involved in politics? If we did not want to engage young people? We did not want them to vote, what would we do?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Carry on as we are probably.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Okay.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

You see the shocking turnout for the senatorial hustings for young people. Now I know teachers who say that that was never even put to them. That that was never advertised, which I think is an absolute disgrace. We got 3 times that number to an

event we organised, which was Deputy Shona Pitman and myself working with 4 or 5 young people. Schools cannot even make it accessible enough for young people to get more than ... I think there were more candidates than young people at that hustings.

The Deputy of Grouville:

They did not know about it. My 2 children did not know about it.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

No. I think the key to it is having a Minister who is committed to young people.

The Deputy of Grouville:

They had a bus to catch at that time anyway.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

I think that has been very ... and I am very sorry, Deputy, that we have rushed you slightly because we did start slightly late so we are being a bit naughty but we will have the wrap up questions from the panel and then we will ask the witness for any final statements.

The Deputy of Grouville:

Again, in an ideal way forward, even if this is not proactively encouraged by Education at the moment, how can the Youth Service proactively go about organising political education now?

[17:00]

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

It would be very easy, would it not? This is the strange thing, most youth centres or projects, certainly the States funded ones have got a States Member on the committee or I think they are trying to call them advisory groups now, so why do they not use those to engage more with young people generally? That is the way forward. Make a politician be seen as part of the community.

The Deputy of Grouville:

Why do they not? I sit on Gorey Youth Club Advisory Panel, why do not ...

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

And you have never been invited?

The Deputy of Grouville:

No.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I come back to the fear. The Youth Service I do not think any longer even have a staff representative since I left because of fear. It takes a person to go out on a limb. I am sorry but Education is a very bullying department and that is a fact. It may have changed totally but it certainly was when I was there, which is why reports highlighted the fact. At one point we lost a third of professional youth workers due to stress related illnesses. The staffing was not there until one politician started to push

for support staff. It is a bullying department. As far as young people in politics, it is failing. I think, like I said, it had increased slightly for this past election but it is a long way to go.

We need to make politics a part of young people's lives so they can understand it and they can either engage with it or not. That is their choice, as for the rest of us. But we are not giving them the information to make those informed decisions yet we do it with drugs, we do it with relationships. It is only 10 years ago that Education tried to set up a project, a gay and lesbian helpline. The professional who did that health work, his house was attacked, it was all covered with graffiti, all literature had been already prepared, posters, calendars, that was all destroyed. They backed down on that and it was never used.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Is that the one where the Deputy of St. Ouen's was going to man the helpline, is that a different line we are talking about?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I think that must be a different one. But that is where we were. I thought you were going to suggest that he attacked the house, I am glad you did not.

Deputy M. Tadier:

No, no. A couple of questions, obviously ... sorry, to try and think of my question. You will be aware of the initiatives like where primary schools come into the Chamber, I am guessing you think that is a positive thing. I mean I think the rest of the panel does. Are there any other things that could be done for the Chamber itself and we as a collective government to engage with the students or young people?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Again, I come back to that question time again, things like that could be run more regularly. You could have a people's meeting or young people's meeting. Or for the 3 of us here we took part in a debating session with young people, some of which I believe you have just seen, and sadly it was badly advertised, not many people went, but the quality of the debate was excellent. Now in one way that is sad because they were from the fee paying schools, I think, so there would be some work done to try and spread that out to the State schools, but there is some hugely capable ... personally I think the best politicians in the States now are the ones who came from a peasant background, like myself.

The Deputy of Grouville:

Do you? [Laughter]

Deputy M. Tadier:

Gone from peasant to pleasant. Would you be in favour of something like getting students in to watch question time? Do you think that is a worthwhile thing?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Absolutely. I mean I think you would have to have health warning, you know. Definitely. Why should not schools come down? Why could there not be a rota system where schools came and took a party of young people to watch a States

sitting? We could even spot which Senators talk to the media about States efficiency and then disappear to their day job, that would be really illuminating I think.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Okay, very interesting. I am going to put a line under it and I am going to ask the witness ... Trevor, have you got any final comments you wish to make?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Just that I hope something good will come out of this. I mean, I would have liked to sit on the panel myself but you know why I did not. Young people, to use a cliché, are the future. We all want a big turnout next time so that the Government, whoever they are, can say that they represent people. When we are dealing with like 29, 30 per cent, it is difficult. As I say, we have made that problem. It is up to us, I think, to give young people the information so they can decide whether to engage or not. Maybe they will not want to, but that is the same choice all of us have got. At the moment schools and the Youth Service are not doing enough to give young people that information, and I think that is what we have got to tackle.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Thank you very much. I think we are very impressed by your commitment and passion about the subject, and obviously you will be seeing our report in due course. Thank you.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Thank you.

[17:05]