

3.4 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding the delay in the formation of detailed options for early years education:

Would the Minister account for the delay in fulfilling the pledge contained in the draft proposals for early years education, entitled *Investing in Our Future*, that following the consultation period, which ended on 30th September 2005, all the responses received would be used to assist in the formation of more detailed options for the future which were to be published later in 2005? Or even the Assistant Minister?

Deputy J.B. Fox of St. Helier (Assistant Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):

The Connétable is accurate in drawing attention to the fact that proposals have not yet been published. *Investing in Our Future* clearly indicated that significant additional funding would be necessary to make early years education and care more affordable, particularly if the option to provide free access for all nursery children 20 hours per week, 38 weeks per year was chosen. As the Constable will appreciate, this is a complex piece of work, partly because it involves predictions based on significant uncertainties, including the availability of additional States funding, but also because any resultant model needs to be dovetailed with a new income support system due to be introduced in 2007. Discussions are underway between the Department of Education, Sport and Culture and the Social Security Department to develop proposals, which will be presented to the States in due course.

3.4.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

It appears from that answer that this represents a substantial delay because Low Income Support is not due to be in place until 2007. Is that the timescale he is actually working on for childcare?

Deputy J.B. Fox:

Not at this particular time, that is one ingredient. As I said, it would be in due course that the States would be considering it. We intend it to be brought to the States and discussed this year.

3.4.2 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Can I first of all just explain for the record, Sir, that I do have a child in private nursery and I could be said therefore to have a direct pecuniary interest in the outcome of this debate. However, I have so little hope **[Laughter]** that anything will be done by the Minister about it that I do not think there is any real conflict there, certainly not in the lifetime of my family. Would the Assistant Minister not confirm that the current inequitable system forces parents to make difficult and painful choices about nursery places for their children, lacks transparent or equitable criteria for the expenditure of taxpayers' money and is frustrating the efforts of private sector nurseries to provide their more flexible and more family centred services?

Deputy J.B. Fox:

That was a long one, was it not, for reply? The answer is probably yes, but clearly Education, Sport and Culture, when it was at Committee, recognised that and took it on board and hence the very complex process that we are now going through with the other Ministries, which obviously include the Social Security Department. It will also involve the Treasury Department and the Minister and will involve Health and Social

Services, so it is a bit like - on a Parish level - trying to sort out residents' parking: it takes longer than we would all desire. **[Laughter]**

3.4.3 Deputy J.A. Martin:

In my former life, when I was on Education, Sport and Culture with the Assistant Minister, the 'Investing in Early Years' was going to look at the provision of new nurseries and I also see here, Sir, that the Education Department is steaming ahead with a new nursery at St. Peter. I really cannot square the 2 together because I want to know if the people out there in the nurseries or child care facilities do want the 20 hours, 38 weeks a year that everyone gets at a States nursery. Now, this is what Early Years is promising. It will be done through - I was told - a service level agreement. Can the Assistant Minister answer us why we are then still carrying on building States nurseries in St. Peter, with the lack of money we have, when we do actually have enough places. But we need to look at the funding differently and who gets the education for that amount of hours and it should be for everybody. Could the Assistant Minister answer that please?

Deputy J.B. Fox:

I do declare that the Deputy already knows the answer as she was on the Committee. It is the fact that we are following, at the current time, the continued States policy that was made years ago. There are 15 nursery provision schools at the moment and as was quite rightly said, in 2006 there will be a new one at St. Clement and 2009 will be the last one in the States policy for the new St. Peter's. There are not any planned intentions for the other 5 remaining schools that do not have such nurseries and in relation to the equity of it, part of this process that we are going through at the moment - with the discussions with Social Security and obviously with Treasury - is to find a way forward to bring to the States recommendations that will bring parity through the public and private sectors in the various things, from the education of early years to the childcare wrap-around care, et cetera. But this is in a process at this time and, as I say, my information is that it is intended to come to the States this year where it will be fully debated and discussed with all the alternatives.

3.4.4 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

The Assistant Minister has just answered quite in depth, the ongoing process in regards to achieving parity. Will this process, in an ongoing method, take into account that everybody's lives are different, everybody's needs therefore are different for their children and that possibly a way forward would be a means-testing system to provide places where children and parents want them to be - whether private or public - so that private places can be subsidised where the means are not sufficient, and where public places can be charged for where the means are more than sufficient?

Deputy J.B. Fox:

Yes, this was part of the 130 responses to the original Jenny Spratt report and yes, this will be part of the options that will be brought to the States, subject to, obviously, the discussions that are currently taking place with Social Security, Treasury, et cetera., but I believe that that type of option will be included. I have got no doubt that, if they are not, a Private Member will be making an amendment anyway, so I would imagine we will be including them. But, at this present time, I obviously cannot speak for the Minister.

3.4.5 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Would the Assistant Minister not agree that the Department of Education, Sport and Culture could do well to follow the example set by the Parish of St. Helier in keeping in touch with people who have responded to consultation documents such as the one published last year. I would remind the Assistant Minister that the residents' parking people who have been consulted have all had more than one letter from the Parish telling them about the progress that has been made towards that nirvana of residents' parking across town that we all hope to see. Would he not agree therefore that his Department, at the very least, should provide some feedback with some timetables to all of those who have responded to the *Investing in Our Future* document?

Deputy J.B. Fox:

Yes, well one of your employees is actually on a steering group and certainly, I have been involved with feedback with the Parish Finance Officer and, indeed, the submission submitted by the Parish is 6 pages long and goes into great depth and detail. I would suggest to you at the moment that having looked through this in-depth document that there are still things that cannot be answered because they are still in the process and once that process has been afforded and considered, I am quite sure that the Minister will be able to respond. There have been responses made, I would suspect, more of a direct nature as opposed to that going via the Connétable, because of having representations on the working group, et cetera. Thank you.