

2024.09.10

2.8 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade of the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning regarding introducing Portuguese as a language option during the regular school day in Jersey's state schools (OQ 162/2024):

Given the sizeable population of Portuguese speakers in Jersey, are there any plans to introduce Portuguese as a language option during the regular school day in Jersey state schools, and if not, why not?

Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier Central (The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning):

All G.C.S.E. (General Certificate of Secondary Education) options differ year-on-year, depending on the pupil cohort, the staff that are available to teach them, and the decisions on G.C.S.E. options sit with individual schools as exam centres because they know the best options for their schools. This is a flexible approach; it gives pupils and schools the opportunity to match the curriculum offer to what is appropriate to their schools. There are no plans to centralise decision-making with regard to G.C.S.E. Portuguese.

2.8.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

I am not asking for centralisation of decision-making, What I am asking for is, given the fact that surely there must be both a high actual demand and also a high latent demand for Portuguese as a G.C.S.E., not by just those who already speak some Portuguese but those who do not, would it not be preferable that such an important language for Jersey - and I hope the Minister recognises the importance of Portuguese - should be available as an option during the school day, rather than perpetuating what some would call a system of apartheid, where Portuguese speakers are forced to learn their own language after school, rather than it being an option alongside common languages like French and Spanish, that are offered routinely in the school day as an option.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I would say to the Deputy, actually one school - Haute Vallée - does offer G.C.S.E. Portuguese during the school day. There are 2 others who offer G.C.S.E. Portuguese. I understand about running the G.C.S.E. after school; it is an option that is given. There is no standard language that is offered in any school; it often is matched to what is available to teach that language at G.C.S.E. level. I would support the teaching of G.C.S.E. Portuguese as an option. Anything beyond that, then we have to think about what other options are lost. That is what I would answer the Deputy on that one.

2.8.2 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:

The Minister has referred to one of the factors being pupil demand. I know that my son, who is at a state school, had wanted to study German and was told that it did not matter how many people in the school wanted to study German, that option was not going to be available. I think that the system as it currently sits does not seem to have an overarching vision for the role of languages in the Island, and also the response to Deputy Bailhache's proposition suggests the same. I wonder whether the Minister could perhaps expand on his thoughts and give us a vision for the role that he sees foreign languages playing in the Jersey education system, and then we can perhaps put his attitude to Portuguese into that framework.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

It is quite a wide-ranging question. I think it is wrong to say there is no vision for languages; I think it is just fundamentally wrong. Languages are delivered across schools. Many languages are delivered across many schools. I cannot comment on what the Deputy's son was told at school. It may well simply be a practical matter and practical matters in schools matter, because you have to deliver. If there is nobody to teach German to G.C.S.E., then it will be difficult for a school to deliver that. You can add that to physics teachers, you could add that to other teachers in the school. It is unfortunate, but it is a reality of modern schooling. In terms of a vision of languages, of course they are important,

but so is the wider curriculum. We are trying to offer a tailored curriculum to every child, particularly in state schools, so they can achieve what they want to achieve. Anything that is made compulsory in school will remove something else, and that is the debate that perhaps we need to have. But that is where I stand.

2.8.3 Deputy J. Renouf:

I do not think compulsory has been mentioned at all. But I think the point I am trying to get at is that we are a connected Island, we are a multinational Island, we are trying to make our way in the world, and a vision for how languages would fit into that might be something that would encourage provision, encourage teachers to come forward who might want to learn and add to the capacities within schools and so on. At the moment it just feels very much like we are stuck with what we have got and there does not seem to be this really strong, passionate desire to increase that language.

The Bailiff:

Deputy, firstly, that really is a speech and not a question. Secondly, it is rather straying outside the original question. I allowed your first question as a supplementary, but we are talking about the teaching of Portuguese in secondary schools in Jersey. I wonder if you could focus any supplementary question on that.

Deputy J. Renouf:

I will ask the question. Could the Minister consider at least the expansion of the provision of Portuguese, given the number of native speakers in the Island who speak Portuguese, and see it in that wider context?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

First of all, I absolutely reject the narrative that has been created that language teachers in our schools are not committed and have a vision to language teaching, because they certainly do. They work hard to deliver that every single day, every single week and every single month. They actually deliver it. Yes, absolutely expand Portuguese provision. It happens with the Camões Agreement between Portugal and Jersey, which we are about to renew and in negotiations around that, and the way that will be delivered will be happening. But like it or not, there is a practicality in delivery. You have to have someone to deliver it. You have to have children who are interested in doing it and you have to have the time and space within a school curriculum to do it. If we can magic up time, that would be great. But that does not mean there is not a vision and support for languages in schools.

2.8.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

I feel like we are speaking at cross purposes because this is not about magicking up new time. This is about allocation of choice to our students in Jersey. Given the fact that Portuguese is a language which you can commonly speak and practise in Jersey, and given the fact that perhaps 10 per cent of our population are Portuguese and maybe, I do not know, 15 or so per cent of the school population already speak Portuguese. The simple question is: why is the example of Haute Vallée, which has Portuguese in the curriculum, not being extended? Or possibly, why would not it be extended to the other 3 or 4 state schools that we have in Jersey?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

It would be extended if it was possible to deliver it within the curriculum time, but if we add something to the curriculum as an option, something else needs to be removed. Young people will be asked: "Do you want to learn Portuguese G.C.S.E. in school time, or do you want to learn one of the other subjects and cover them?" When Haute Vallée have been offering it in year 9, it offers a G.C.S.E., and then those young people can go and do an additional G.C.S.E. later on, which is beneficial to them. Other schools are offering G.C.S.E. Portuguese. I agree in terms of the time in which it is offered, but then other schools are offering other options outside the school timetable or other languages in order to extend the provision. I am quite happy to look at the provision of languages, but it needs to be practical and real for schools. We cannot just magic up staff. We are looking at time, because if you put that into the standard timetable, you have to remove something else as an option for those children. That is

the reality of the way schools work. I am quite happy to take the Deputy around some of our 11 to 16 schools to talk to headteachers and discuss that. That might be a way forward.