



Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel

Quarterly Public Hearing

Witness: The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning

Monday, 2nd February 2026

Panel:

Deputy C.D. Curtis of St. Helier Central (Chair)

Connétable M. Labey of Grouville (Vice-Chair)

Deputy H.M. Miles of St. Brelade

Witnesses:

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

Deputy C.S. Alves of St. Helier Central, Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning

Mr. K. Posner, Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills

Ms. T. Jackson, Policy Officer

Mr. J. Williams, Programme Director

Ms. A. Munn, Head of Governance and Digital

[12:30]

Deputy C.D. Curtis of St. Helier Central (Chair):

Welcome to this quarterly hearing of the Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel. Today is 2nd February. I would like to draw everyone's attention to the following. This hearing will be filmed and streamed live. The recording and transcript will be published afterwards on the States Assembly website. All electronic devices, including mobile phones, should be switched to silent. I would ask that any members of the public who have joined us in the room today, do not interfere in

the proceedings and as soon as the hearing is closed, please leave quietly. I am Deputy Catherine Curtis. I am the chair of the panel.

Connétable M. Labey of Grouville (Vice-Chair):

My name is Mark Labey, Connétable of Grouville, vice-chair.

Deputy H.M. Miles of St. Brelade:

I am Deputy Helen Miles, member of the panel.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Deputy Rob Ward, Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning.

Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Deputy Carina Alves, Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning.

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Keith Posner, Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills.

Head of Governance and Digital:

Alexa Munn, Head of Governance and Digital, Children, Young People, Education and Skills.

Programme Director:

Jonathan Williams, Programme Director for Children, Young People, Education and Skills.

Policy Officer:

Tania Jackson, Policy Officer.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Thank you, everyone. We just have 1½ hours for this hearing and we have quite a lot of questions, so we will try to keep the questions and answers short if we can. The first questions are about higher education and Student Finance. Minister, we understand that the definition of financially independent student has recently been changed so that students with 3 years full-time work from the age of 18 qualify for independent assessment. This has been applied retrospectively for 2025-26 and publicised after the 31st December 2025 deadline. Please could you clarify any changes to this?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I think you summed up the changes in your question. Now you can qualify as an independent student after 3 years of full-time work or out of full-time education as long as you are working in Jersey. This will hopefully give access to those who at the age of 21 perhaps have been financially independent and gives greater access to university for that cohort. It is not a large number. It is a very small number, not quite the less than 5 where we do not give any information but it is a small number.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Thank you for that. Can you explain why it has been backdated to September 2025?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I think it is just a simple level of fairness. We have had a short time to make changes but we have made changes where we can. I will ask Tania very specifically if you want ...

Policy Officer:

It really just is capacity. There was not capacity to do the work and get it completed ahead of September. We would have had to announce it in August and there was not capacity to do that, so that is why it was announced on the date it was. We have backdated it because we wanted to make sure that anyone who would be eligible under the new criteria would be able to benefit from it straightaway. The alternative would be to delay it until September the following year. Anyone who might change their decision on whether to apply for university as a result of this change because they can now access more money will still be able to apply for September 2026. It just means anyone who is already studying ... some people have got a bit of extra money now, which just makes things a little bit easier for them.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Also the few students, and it is a few students, were contacted by Student Finance if they were potentially eligible for a higher grant. Effectively, we got it going as quickly as we can rather than waiting until next September. Deal with the small number of students it might affect this year and it will be in place then.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. What has Student Finance done to inform students and the public about this change?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

It has changed on the website, I believe. The information on the website has changed, which is our main portal for all of the information on that. We are obviously talking about it today and, as I said,

students who have been identified have been contacted. It is in the same way as we would have in other areas.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Do you believe the website is fully up to date?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, I believe it is.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

It does encompass all the changes?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes. I think when we are talking about higher education students, putting information there, I think it is accessible to them. If they have managed to get access to higher education, it certainly should be accessible to them. Also, I have to say that Student Finance are very, very accommodating when it comes to questions and I would encourage people to contact them if they have a query. They are extremely helpful. They are always busy but they are more than willing to help.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

The Education (Grants and Allowances) (Jersey) Law 2018 applies to individuals over the age of 16. However, the new definition will only apply to those over the age of 18. Please could you outline the reasons for this?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

We do not get 16-year-olds going to higher education, or very rarely.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Does that mean that if they start working at 16 or 17 that those years of work will not count towards their 3 years?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

At this stage the answer is yes, I believe.

Policy Officer:

Yes. The reason the education grants law applies to those who are over the age of 16 is because there are grants for further education in. Higher education would be 18 years old. There are skills

grants, there are skills bursaries for people who are over the age of 16 to under the age of 19. That is why it applies to people of that age group but higher education is generally people who are 18.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

But just to check, the 3 years of employment, does that only start from ...

Policy Officer:

It is 3 years as an adult.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

They could be working at 16 and 17 and that would not count?

Policy Officer:

Under other legislation, they would not meet the definition of an adult. There are various different laws where there is the definition of an adult and that is 18 years old and then there are certain ones where they reference people at the age of 16 to 18. The advice that we received from the Law Officers was that an adult under the majority of legislation is 18 years old, so when we went to apply the rule it made sense to apply the rule to those who are 18 years old and above.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

We just wanted that clarified, that if you are 17 and you are working for a year, that year will not count. Can I just ask what follows on from that then? Do you consider that there could be any claims for discrimination in this policy, for example where some courses, like dance for example, would be applied for at a younger age?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

No, I think we accommodate as much as we can. I think you are finding very, very specific individual cases, which we do try to accommodate. There is also funding, as we have said, for 16 to 18-year-olds and these are university courses that are defined in the higher education law as courses to be funded. If there are individual cases, then do contact us and if the law needs to change in the future because of those, I am sure it can be looked at, but this change is a positive change for those specific individuals. We do not have really any appeals, many appeals at all in this area.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

That is really understandable and that sounds good. It is just that we wanted to clarify the position for anyone who would be in that position, so we have got that clarified now.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I think going straight to a question on discrimination law is way beyond where we need to be, to be quite frank.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

At Scrutiny, this is the sort of questions that we are expected to ask. What is the estimated cost of this change in the definition of independent students?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

This year it is very, very little, very little indeed. Then we have had to estimate. If we estimate everybody who could possibly be, the lower range of the estimate is £200,000 a year but that is, I think, a massive overestimate, personally, because that is assuming that the reason that people have not gone to university is because of the funding. It may well be that students have not gone to university because they do not want to, they want to do something else, they have not got the qualifications, that is not the pathway they have chosen, et cetera. All we can do is take all of the numbers from year 10 and extrapolate up. It is not a very precise science if we get a maximum number. I do not think it will be anywhere near that. We have very few students who are in that situation. However, what it does say is that we have updated a law or a rule, a regulation, whatever it is, that has been there a long time and needed looking at, so we are pleased to have done that.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

How many students have retrospectively applied for this academic year?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Well, they have not.

Policy Officer:

It is less than 10 have become eligible since September 2025.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Have there been any additional costs as a result of the reassessment of some individuals?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

The estimate is about £1,000 in total. That is it, so it is not a very significant amount. Can I just say that it is not a significant amount but it is a significant change so that the laws are up to date.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

I just wanted to explore a bit more about the Education (Grants and Allowances) (Jersey) Law, specifically around appeals. If an independent student or a person who had applied to be an

independent student wanted to appeal a decision, Article 34(5) in the Education (Grants and Allowances) (Jersey) Law, relating to appeals, says that there must be a dispute of facts or of the law applied in reaching the decision, but you have not made a change to the law to reflect the policy change that you have made. I think our question is whether that puts students at an unfair advantage if they choose to appeal.

Policy Officer:

Minister, would you like me to answer that?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, because we have made a change to the rules and regulations around that, which is a positive change. Yes, would you like to?

Policy Officer:

The order, the law refers to financially independent, so a decision made to treat someone as financially independent falls in the scope of the order. It is just that outside of the order, we have provided a further clarification as what financially independent means. That still has the same standing because it is published guidance and that is why there was a Ministerial decision to document the change in the decision. A decision to award a grant is made under this order and if someone is determined financially independent or not that will determine their grant. Then the guidance that is published and has the same effect as a rule would then enable that person to appeal on that basis.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Would the appeal board view the rule and the order as the equivalent of what the law says?

Policy Officer:

They would view the rule that has been published that is linked to the order. By virtue of the definition of financially independent, they would consider that appeal. If a student wanted to appeal on the basis, they would be able to.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

They would be able to appeal but would the appeal board have their hands tied?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

That is up to the appeal board. No, they would not.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Would the appeal board have their hands tied because the law states one thing and the order says another?

Policy Officer:

The law, the order does not define financially independent. It references to someone who is financially independent but it does not define financially independent.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Thank you. The other thing that we are hearing around students is the housing issue and the housing guarantor issue for students in the U.K. (United Kingdom). We have got Jersey students struggling because guarantors are often required to be U.K.-based and a lot of the Jersey students do not have anybody in the U.K. that can act as guarantor. Have the Government undertaken any work to see if this situation could be alleviated for those students?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

First of all, how many students have you heard from?

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Well, it is common practice.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Very common practice.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

£51 per month is the normal amount that they are paying for a guarantor.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Okay. First of all, we have not had any appeals or complaints about the problem of securing accommodation. There are lots of different ways in which it is dealt with. That is an issue because you are in U.K. accommodation and our laws are different, of course it is. We have identified some challenges. Student Finance seeks guidance on the topic. They are generally using a guarantor company and pay rent up front or pay rent up front to secure accommodation. Student numbers do remain consistent, though, so it is not an issue that stops students applying or finding accommodation. People may have somebody in the U.K. Increasing numbers of universities with their overseas students are acting as guarantors themselves and that is one of the things, I think, that is being addressed there, but if there is an issue I would say to students to contact Student Finance and see if there is any way in which we can help. We cannot change the U.K. laws.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

No, but there are steps that potentially Jersey could take to help students and families to give financial assurance to landlords.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Well, I do not know, but £51 a month is what people are normally paying.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

They are not normally. Some are, some are not. My children did not pay that. It is just as much evidence as you ...

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Would the department consider surveying students and finding out what they are paying to gather that information?

Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I think that part of the issue is that we are not hearing on that. If people are coming to you, they need to be coming to us as well.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

I think some of them have, but would the department consider putting out a survey or trying to find out more about this?

Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I am sure we can look at doing something like that or maybe making it part of the process when people get in contact with Student Finance.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

We receive a lot of emails from the Student Loans Support Group, which is run by one person and that is fine, but ...

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

This information is from students about the £51 a month.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I would encourage them to contact us. If you have specific cases where that is an issue, then get them to contact us. We cannot know the unknowables.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

At the moment the Government has got a Student Finance team. Student Finance, the name basically talks about money. In your view, should the Government of Jersey have somebody who is directly accessible, a sort of dedicated higher education officer, who can support queries and issues and negotiations facing Jersey students who are in the U.K. or in Europe that are outside of finance? At the moment your Student Finance is just that. It is just about finance. It is not about accommodation issues, it is not about welfare issues, it is not about attestation, health and things like that.

[12:45]

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Well, there is a couple of things. I think a lot of the universities help students. They treat our students as foreign students in that issue. I know that is what happened with my children to help with finding accommodation, et cetera. We have 1,300 students each year across a different stage of higher education. We have had no current evidence that that is acting as a barrier and Student Finance have not received anything about not being able to secure accommodation. To employ somebody new to look at those issues I am not sure is the right thing to do.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

It is not just about accommodation. It is about having a higher education officer on this Island to serve those 1,300 students.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

But those students are members of a university. They are paying fees. We are paying their fees. Therefore, they expect a service from their university as well and we would expect that university to support them. There is a lot of support in universities.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

But I think the point is about having a dedicated higher education officer.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

That is the point you keep making but what I am trying to say to you is I do not think that ...

Deputy H.M. Miles:

That person can then act as a go-between.

Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I think ultimately if we are made aware that there is an issue that is going on, I do not think that is something that we would rule out. I think that is probably quite a good idea but at the minute we are just not aware that there is an issue and there is a need for that, if you see what I mean. If that is what the panel are receiving, again we need to be aware of it and then we can put things in place, like what you have just suggested. We would not rule that out.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Is the answer no then, Minister?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

To what?

Deputy H.M. Miles:

The question was: should the Government of Jersey have a directly accessible ...

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

You mean a single person as a liaison officer with 1,300 students with regard to accommodation, et cetera? We have that with Student Finance.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

But Student Finance are about finance, not about welfare, not about health, not about accommodation. How big is your Student Finance team?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I would suggest that what we do is what happens at the moment. We have an expectation of the services we are paying for at universities for students. They have student support that supports their students and they are specific to the university and the areas they are living in. For example, if you are living in Liverpool and at Liverpool University, I know there is student support there from my own experience of my children, one of my children. They were given support there, which was specific to the area.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

I am fairly sure that everybody in this panel could give you a different example where universities have not been supportive because the students are Jersey students.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

In those cases, let us know and then if I believe that there is a need for a specific officer to do that, an additional officer, then of course I would support that because that helps our students, but we give a lot of support as well.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

We do need to move on.

The Connétable of Grouville:

We are going on to the topic of online harms, Minister. The panel understands that C.Y.P.E.S. (Children, Young People, Education and Skills) new digital safeguarding and technology use policy was published on 24th November last year. Can you tell us about the implementation of that strategy in schools and what feedback, if any, the department has received so far?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

It was in November when the strategy was introduced. I think a lot of the work that has been done there is supported a lot by schools. Alexa, you helped write it. Do you want to give your initial impressions and then I will give my view?

Head of Governance and Digital:

Yes, absolutely. The policy was published and provided to the schools in conjunction with ... schools had feedback, as did different department areas, so it was a more collaborative approach to ensure the best possible policy that we could have. We have not received any negative feedback at all. It may take some time for all areas to implement it in its completion, but that is expected and we are there to support them on their journey to help develop the appropriate measures to ensure that they are meeting those practices.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I will also mention as well that one of the advantages we have in schools is that the networks are controlled, so it is a lot easier for us to have that sort of safeguarding in place. Obviously with the implementation - and the schools have done this very well, I believe - of not allowing mobile phones in schools, that has taken away another risk that exists elsewhere. It is a policy. We have a much wider conversation to have across our Island and that has started - well, it has been going on for some time - to look at that. This is just one ingredient of that, but I think it is a good step forward in what we are doing. I think what you are going to have to have is a policy that is iterative every month, the way in which technology is changing, A.I. (artificial intelligence) is changing, et cetera, but it has to be realistic about what we want to achieve with it, and I think there is a good balance there in what we have so far, but it can always be improved, of course, as we go forward because things are changing so rapidly.

The Connétable of Grouville:

It is indeed. My next question relates to recommendation 31 from our report, which was that: “The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning should support digital literacy for all and make efforts to embed digital literacy into any lifelong learning ambitions for the Island.” Please could you outline why this recommendation was only partially accepted?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes. Skills Jersey do deliver digital awareness across free online digital courses already. The Better Business support packages also provide opportunities for businesses to access and upskill their staff in the line of digital requirements for their business. There are working groups in primary and secondary schools, supported by the Institute of Directors, to develop a digital skills programme for staff and children. The partial acceptance was a recognition that a lot is already happening. Of course we can always do more, of course, because the world of digital - even the definition of it is quite interesting - is changing rapidly. That was the reason for partial because I wanted to recognise the work that is being done. We have a strange juxtaposition between the notion of us not allowing any access and then the need for digital literacy and I think for those 2 the balance needs to be there. It is easier within schools because we have more control over what is being accessed. I think in terms of lifelong learning, there is a lot of support for adults that is already there but, yes, of course, it can always increase.

The Connétable of Grouville:

For school-age learners as well, those who may have ...

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, there is an awful lot that goes on in the classroom. I think you have delivered lessons yourself.

Head of Governance and Digital:

I have, yes.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Do you want to talk a bit about that?

Head of Governance and Digital:

Yes. Digital literacy is something in schools that is widely taught, particularly at primary level, to provide as a baseline for going forward. There is now a working group with both primary and secondary practitioners to support that further to have a framework, so that is seen as more of a

baseline and more equal across to support the foundations going into secondary school, certainly once all the children are working from the same level.

The Connétable of Grouville:

How does that progress into the adult learning sphere as well?

Head of Governance and Digital:

We are developing a framework in order to be able to look at all of those pathways.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

The 4 areas where investment is needed is in cybersecurity and digital resilience, which we have all been talking about recently. Equitable access to technology and digital inclusion; there is a good debate as to what that means. We recognise the need for a workforce capability particularly in the use of emerging technologies, which are changing all of the time, such as A.I. because A.I. can be useful in a workplace and we have a generation coming through that needs to understand how that is applicable in the workplace. What a sustainable digital infrastructure looks like, because it is such a changing world. There is an enormous amount going on. I think the key is to have a lot of communication and we are having good work with the Institute of Directors, with schools across our learning establishments, across the colleges and so on. That work is going on and I think it will continue. Well, it has to continue. It is a challenging area but I think there is a broad recognition of the need to adapt.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Minister, parents of the modern generation of children, is there support for them as well?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

That is certainly an area that we have improved but could be improved further. I think as well it is about understanding what the reality is for parents sometimes. I think they are not softer skills but they are different skills in terms of the management of children with digital devices and how you are going to do that, how you are going to say no with all the pressures that you have. I recognise that myself as parent but thankfully I missed that part. There is also some specific work. Do you want to ...

Head of Governance and Digital:

We have now launched our DigiSafe website, DigiSafe that the children named. That is designed to support young people and families and it provides scenarios that the children have brought forward to support parents in how to deal with some of those scenarios. That is an ongoing piece. It is a collaboration with a wide range of different parties but including Jersey N.S.P.C.C. (National

Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children), the Safeguarding Partnership Board and internal government and parents themselves and students.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

There is a lot of cross-government and cross-organisation work going on and the good thing about that site is it is with young people. I went to the event and sat and spoke to them all about it and they came up with the name. They came up with the reality of what this is and what it means. There is a really good section on there for parents. There is one for children of different ages that parents can look at as well. It is a really good source of information. It is a good layout as well. I do not think it is called that but I call it a layout. It is successful.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Thank you, Minister. We are going to go back to the recommendations and recommendation 37, which is: "To ensure that there is an equitable approach to online safety across schools and that investment is provided for technology infrastructure and resources that enable effective and inclusive digital." Can you describe why this was partially accepted again?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Again because of the work that is already ongoing and there is work ongoing. I do not think I am being finickity here. It was not that absolutely this work is not ongoing. We recognise the need for more. We recognise that we live in a technological world that will require investment and it will require investment if we are going to have equitable, safe access to digital education. There is inequity in our schools in terms of what can be afforded by parents, et cetera. That is why it was partially accepted again. Do you want to talk about some of the work that is going on? The other part of your question was, sorry?

The Connétable of Grouville:

The final part of it was what C.Y.P.E.S. is doing this year, in other words before December, to progress this?

Head of Governance and Digital:

We have invested in some infrastructure for schools, so certain technologies are out of date now and require some replacement uplifting. We have purchased the hardware to be able to implement that across the schools. That work has already begun and in the areas where the deficit was seen the highest were prioritised, but the plan is to roll out all of that across all of the schools to then give them greater access.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I have to say, as Minister, when you look at this, it does look like a digital arms race sometimes. No matter how quickly you are updating and replacing, there is more there, it is out of date. But I think the specific things we are doing improve that capability and if you improve that capability it will include access. It is no longer simply about how many laptops you have or how many iPads you have. It is much more complicated than that and about the access that can be given to children. When we look back at COVID times and there was a race to get everybody a digital device and now we are looking at whether or not we want people to have digital devices. The context will change as well, so it is complicated.

The Connétable of Grouville:

And contradictory.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

It is sometimes contradictory but it inevitably will be. I think we are getting into a discussion across the Island and across all of our organisations where I think there is a focus coming to really make sense of what we really mean together about the safety of our young people. That is a really healthy and positive thing that has come out of it.

Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Can I just add in there that part of the reason for the partial acceptance is because we need more money. There is a business case that has to be put forward for the next budget as well as we know technology costs.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Yes. I have just bought a new phone, Deputy Minister, and that is quite an investment. The next question is about the Government's policy on the use of educational technology in schools. We are back to that same question if parents are concerned, for example, about their child's screentime and children are being given homework to do electronically, et cetera. What is the Government's position on that?

[13:00]

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

There is some guidance provided by Public Health and that is on the DigiSafe Jersey website, which is very good. I was looking at that myself because it is really interesting. I get the questions and my children are grown up but I go into schools all the time to see what they are doing. I think there is a balance to be had and I think that if a parent is concerned, the first place is to speak to the school. Sometimes it is a bit of a catch-22 because parents see the accessibility and the simplicity of online

homework means we know what you are doing and we can track it, et cetera. However, we do have to be careful of screentime. I think if we look at the guidance carefully and ensure that that guidance is being adhered to, that is our starting point, but what we do into the future in terms of the changing world of that, we need to address really carefully. I think part of the issue is when children have had screentime at school and then go home as well and want to use screentime for relaxing. Now, it could be if you are a parent, you are setting up the safest environment you possibly can. Brilliant, well done, but they are still having screentime, so that is another issue that is being added on to it. I think the days where we go back purely to books in schools is going to be very difficult. I think also that online learning is very useful and accessible tool. It is just about getting the balance right and making sure that children are safe in all of this. I think as our discussions move forward, we do have the opportunity to get that right.

The Connétable of Grouville:

I think that yourself as Minister and teachers across the Island are also concerned about homework being created by A.I., et cetera.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes. I have controversial views on homework. I personally would ... I am not going to say that, it is too controversial. **[Laughter]** Young people would love it but I think sometimes homework is an extension of a lesson. Particularly for older students, it can be creative and I think there are other ways to do that. I think there is an expectation from homework from parents as well, and that expectation is a large piece of the workload. So things have been taken to make that simplified now, at that point where we have to say: "Okay, where is the balance in setting that homework?" We have to have that discussion again.

The Connétable of Grouville:

It aids research, which is very important for their later career.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes. Once you have get into A-level and G.C.S.E. (General Certificate of Secondary Education) exams, I think there are other questions to have about the well-being of our young people than making sure they get grades and making sure they are ... it is a very stressful time, but that is an exam system that we have used for a long, long time. If you take away continuous assessment, you end up with more exams.

Head of Governance and Digital:

Can I just add as well, the purpose of setting homework online is not because it is easy. It is because it sets up children's skill set to help them with digital exams that they are going to need going forward, so it is embedding that skill set. They are not on screens all day in school. They would ...

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

That makes sense. It is just like, even in my own constituency meetings, I have had parents, and not the campaigners as well, saying that they print out what is sent on the screen, because they do not want their children on the screen.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I think the thing to do there is to contact the school and make that clear and I am sure we can make that change. If I was a teacher and setting homework online ... I know some years ago, we did not set much and that was wanted by a parent and that is no problem whatsoever. That is about dealing with individual needs and individual ...

Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I think even we used to set physical homework, I would often get students who had lost their sheets and have to come to see me beforehand to get another copy.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Oldest excuse in the book.

Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes. Teachers are quite flexible and if parents want to have physical copies instead, it is ...

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

The relationship between schools and parents is really important. We keep saying that.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Just a final one from me. The Online Harms Inter-Ministerial Group, have you attended recently? What educational input have you put into that group?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

The original meeting was with regards to the response to the review as well. Yes, in terms of the educational input. It is the sort of discussions we are having now, in terms of I am pleased to be able to say: "Look, we have a controlled wi-fi access by not having mobile phones and being accessible." We can control what is accessible, what is not, even what sites are used, so there is a model there. That takes an enormous amount of work from teachers as well, if they are going to

use safely the resources they have. There is a lot of checks and balances in place. So those are the types of input. The other input is to just understand the range, because we are talking about children who are very young to children who are young people, I would say, 16 to 18 who are going to university. So the expectation and rules around those might be very different. They might be less stringent later on than they are at the beginning, which I think is really important. So it is context as much as anything.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

I have got some questions now on early years. Minister, with the acknowledgement that the additional funding for 2 to 3 year-olds has only been running for a month, can you confirm if this currently going to plan or as anticipated?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes. The application form remains on track to go live in February. It is also on track to make the first payments in April. Further information has been available to parents via the gov-je site and will be updated as the scheme goes live. The supplementary guidance has been issued directly to the settings with input from J.A.C.C. (Jersey Association of Child Carers). The J.C.C.T. (Jersey Child Care Trust), you would have seen a piece in the news today, actually, which was sent to me just before this hearing, which is really positive, about a financial support service for parents who cannot pay in advance and the service will be launched in February to go live. I think we have worked very ... I have got to say, I do not know if this is the theme but we have been hearing so much criticism recently - I am going to get on my high horse for one second, if I may - of civil servants and the civil service and so on. I have to say that the work that has gone on in the background to get this working at speed with possible changes has been remarkable. I think there needs to be credit given for those who have worked behind it, for the dedication and work that they have put in to enable this to happen, because that will make the difference to people's lives later on. So I think we need to give some credit every so often.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

It must have been enormous amount of work to get this organised so quickly.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I will just say there were things in place because we had back-up plans. You have to look at scenarios. It is because we spent a lot of time, we thought we had a different ... we had things come to the Government Plan that changed, but we had this in the background already and we could very rapidly ... Jonathan, do you want to just very briefly ... that is true is it not?

Programme Director:

I think it is an accurate reflection, yes. The important statement for me is that the work to create and to launch the scheme and the associated cost and time are all as planned. There is always a risk you come across something significantly, the equivalent of finding asbestos in a building, it stops you in your tracks. You slip, as they say, but at the moment, as the Minister said, we are on track for the key milestones as previously advised.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

I do not know if you know this yet, but has the funding helped parents find new spaces for the children or is the funding supporting those who already had nursery places? Do you know?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I would say the vast majority is for those who already have places. It was 90 per cent?

Programme Director:

Yes. It is too soon to say in the context of actual applications. I think that is something we could say in much more detail around the first half of this year, by which time we should have the first round of payments through and processed. As the Minister said, the working assumption remains, given that the majority of parents have said they had some form of childcare, but it is supporting existing costs as opposed to necessarily creating new demand. But these are the metrics that we will keep a very close eye on.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I think one of the side benefits - I do not know if that is the right phrase - of the work with the Jersey Child Care Trust is that will inform us about those who perhaps would need it who may not have been accessing, because there is now a real support mechanism there. I think that input would be really beneficial for some families. I think that is a real sea change for us and a really positive part of the scheme, as is, and a good use of Government money, I would say.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Could you outline the evidence base for adopting a universal entitlement rather than targeting the offer to families who need the help most?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

From my point of view it is the simplicity of it. I think it is about fairness for families, because having a child is an expensive process. Nursery is an expensive process. There are a lot of people here who, perhaps on paper, it does not look too challenging but the reality is that those costs are significant. Any support we can give to those families helps a great deal. I also think that money

goes back into our economy, so it is a positive thing to do. Jonathan, do you want to add anything to that? I spoke very vaguely there, sorry.

Programme Director:

Just to add to that, at the start of this work we commissioned a firm to do some research into national, by which we mean, typically nations of the U.K. but also international evidence around what makes a difference both in terms of childcare development but also to parents accessing the schemes, which I think is underpinning your question. There was evidence to say that universal schemes led to better access, particularly for those groups you might be most concerned about. That paper is published, I can share that with you. It is on gov.je. I think it is called the evidence refresh document, because it looks to say we understood this to be the case but before we embark on the next round, we ought to go back and check our understanding still. It was the greatest driver of access, particularly for those cohorts of the population for which there might be the greatest need. That is why ... that is the evidence piece we use to the universal approach.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Can I ask now about the operational side that is dealing with the repayments to parents? Can you confirm how many payments ... well, you have not made any payments to date, have you?

Programme Director:

Payments are not due. We have made a commitment from April to have the payments out.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

That will go back to the start of January?

Programme Director:

Correct. Indeed.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Can you tell us what are the criteria for the support from the Jersey Child Care Trust? Presumably, people just do not go to say: "I need some help with the finance." What do they have to do?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

This is what they were talking about today with that news story, because we have commissioned J.C.C.T. to do this work. Do you want to talk about some of the very specific areas?

Programme Director:

The first thing is, helpfully, this has been something that the Jersey Child Care Trust have been doing for some time under their schemes, so it so not new capability developing, a whole new experience they have to develop. This is something in which they have good practice. It is a version, a variation of what we might be familiar with in the context of an income support review. It is not income support. It is their version of that. It looks at the extent to which something could be afforded, so there is a budget planner put in. They do seek to understand committed costs and income, and then they will take a view as to whether that is something they feel they should be supporting and they are working that out on an individual basis, so each customer gets looked at.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

So people would give an outline of their costs and their income?

Programme Director:

Yes.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

It is not just limited to people who might be on income support. Other people could if their expenses are very high?

Programme Director:

Correct. That was just an example of the kind of eligibility mechanism they are going through and they can just assess that.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I think we will keep it there. What was said there by Jonathan was that J.C.C.T. just does not start from nothing. They have a relationship with lots of parents, lots of families, where that encouragement, that support which has been put there in the past, there is a trust there as well, so it is a positive thing for them to be able to do. I think that there may be more likelihood of parents who are genuinely struggling to go to an organisation that they trust in order to get that help. Then we get the quality nursery allowance for their children and in the end, that is what we want, so I think there are positives there.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Is C.Y.P.E.S supporting the Jersey Child Care Trust with that financial support?

Programme Director:

Yes. So the idea is, at the moment, we are going to take a view on the extent to which that can be managed through their normal cash flow and the extent to which it causes any kind of pinches in

their cash flow. We are standing ready to make sure that at no point is the normal operation of J.C.C.T. compromised. So we are going to look at whether it is a weekly or monthly recompense between Government. But there is no loss that will be ... or no risk of loss of J.C.C.T., either in a cash flow sense or a loss of money. So Government is fully covering. It is just the order and the frequency that we are invoiced and we make payments.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, they will get the money back from the nursery because that is what money is for.

Programme Director:

If I may add to the previous question in the context of how Jersey Child Care Trust are looking at eligibility for support anyway but also reinforced by this new measure. The teams in Employment, Social Security and Housing are also working with J.C.C.T. to identify if the support from Government that families are missing out on, that J.C.C.T. identify. It is a very good collaboration and co-working, subject to the customer saying: "Yes, please", between Government and the charity, beyond just the 2 to 3 support.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

I have a question now about childcare and the early years service. The panel understands that the childcare and early years service requires health declarations for various individuals working with children in registered childcare settings. However, this extends to voluntary committee members of these settings. Please could you advise why this is the case?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I did not think they did require volunteer committee members to complete a health declaration. "A form must be completed by any person who wishes to become registered to provide child care [this is what is says on the form] manage a childcare facility, work as a child minder or as a practitioner in a registered childcare setting. This form is part of the process to ensure the suitability of care ..." Let us check that because I am not entirely sure ...

[13:15]

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

I have got the form here and it is for anyone volunteering they have to state whether, for example, they have diabetes, if they take medication for heart problems, depression, and it seems a bit over the top.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Sorry, is that volunteering to provide childcare? It may just be the wording of a committee member that I have got to think through here. Yes, we do not want any obstacles. Is that ...

Programme Director:

No, so our understanding is that the intention is about ...

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

That surprises me.

Programme Director:

... volunteers actively providing childcare as opposed to volunteers who might not be providing childcare but might be providing administrative support or duties. We can take that as an action to double check, if you like.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, let us double check that for you and get some clarity. Thank you.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

I am thinking about maybe a mother and toddler group or something and volunteers helping. Are they expected to describe their health issues and ...

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

We will come back to you on this.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, but thanks for raising that.

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

You are talking specifically about people who are working directly with children.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

That is not quite what the form says. It says: "Volunteers/committee members of registered settings."

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, let us check that because we do not want to get in the way of anything.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

I think that is being enforced by police.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes, so you will get back to us on that, will you?

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Yes, we will get back to you on that.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. Thank you. Okay, I think that is you, Helen.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Thank you. I had some questions about school funding. At the end of 2025, following the publication of a freedom of information request, it was reported that there are significant debts across Island schools as at 31st October. Can you describe what the position was at 31st December for both primary schools and secondary schools, please?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Schools are not in debt.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Deficit I said.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Oh, I thought you said debt.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Yes, deficit.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Deficit. Do you want to ... you have been absolutely on top of this.

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Your question is: what was the position at the end of December?

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Yes, how many primary schools recorded a year-end deficit and how many secondary schools recorded a year-end deficit?

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Thirteen primary schools were in a deficit or overspend position at the end of the year. Nine provided primary schools were in a surplus or breakeven position. In terms of government secondary schools, all were in a deficit position, although the position at Les Quennevais, Haute Vallée and Hautlieu was only a small amount. For the fee-charging schools, Victoria College and Victoria College Prep School were in a deficit overspend position while J.C.G. (Jersey College for Girls) and J.C.P. (Jersey College Preparatory) broke even, but we also had an overspending position in our special schools.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

It is the special ...

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Can you clarify how you are going to be addressing those deficits please?

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Do you want me to carry on?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, please do.

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Absolutely. We have been, during 2025, establishing our financial systems to support schools because we do recognise that there are financial challenges in schools. We have set up a finance board essentially and a series of finance boards for those schools that are in deficit or significant deficit. We keep a very watchful eye on those that may be creeping into that position as well and we report on that on a monthly basis. Officers from C.Y.P.E.S., alongside education professionals, including other headteachers, are working with the headteacher and the senior leadership of those schools to look at their planning, the curriculum planning, their staffing, with a particular emphasis around inclusion, because we know that is one of the drivers in schools for overspending position, so we can understand: are these factors unique to those individual schools? Is it systemic? Also, in partnership with other schools, is there anything we can do to start mitigating some of these financial challenges by schools working more closely together? Also, centrally and then within partnership and groupings of schools how they can potentially work together to, as I say, mitigate some of those issues as well. There is quite a lot going on in that space to try and support but we do recognise, obviously, the overspend.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I think this emphasises 2 key things that we have been very open about. One is the challenges from S.E.N. (special educational needs) and we have commissioned reports. We have taken the full front of that report and are quite open about that. Also, about the way in which we need schools to collaborate more together and share the skills that they have. Staffing is the vast majority of schools. We have really good skills out there and good practice. A benefit of that is you share that good practice more. Also, as demographics change over the next 10 to 15 years, we will have to address these things anyway. The work that needs to go on post-16 also will address some of these issues. That is one of the challenges we have.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Can you describe the changes that are going to be made to the funding formula for 2026 and any of the reasons for these?

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

I will pass to Jonathan, who is the expert in this space.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

School funding formula, yes.

Programme Director:

There has been very, very little by way of change in the funding formula for 2026. From memory, the only substantive change was for a school that was moved towards funding on the basis of a blended early years as opposed to a separate reception and nursery, which is a consequence of very small numbers in both those settings. Other than that, what we will be doing when we publish is just reflecting some of the recommendations from the Secondary Funding Review. For example, I think recommendation 9 was about making clear which roles were mandatory. Another one, possibly 11 - let me look at my notes, yes - was the date of the last rate increase. We will make some structural changes to the report to reflect those recommendations, otherwise very, very little change.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

When will the formula be published for 2026?

Programme Director:

I am aiming by the end of Q1 this year, so end of March.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

April 2026.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Will there be any political or Ministerial input in signoff before the election period on that?

Programme Director:

The budgets are approved and they are issued to the formula in November-December of the prior year. We have already gone through that route. This is simply the publication because we committed to be transparent and just share the workings.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Is there sufficient wriggle room in that to make sure that any special or additional educational needs will have been identified and have got adequate time to have the funding catch up with them?

Programme Director:

There is always a challenge. I think Keith and the Minister have referenced the inclusion pressures. We are trying as much as possible to frontload and align planning as it relates to identification of the need, the extent to which that need might generate additional funding, advising the school, then giving the school enough time to perhaps recruit or rejig their resources before the child arrives, particularly in those transition phases. It is absolutely not perfect by any means and some of our challenge at the moment is around better planning earlier and better aligned. We are just going to keep doing that until we get it as slick as possible.

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

I think it is probably fair just to say on that that we absolutely recognise that is one of the biggest challenges to school budgets in terms of ...

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Yes. Does the funding follow the child?

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

It does do, but the pace that it does can cause schools to be almost overstaffed in one area and understaffed in another area because of children moving around that require that staff and support.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Yes, so what actions have been taken to address that blockage?

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

We are looking at the funding at the moment and whether the way we allocate special educational needs funding is the right way to enable us to close that gap, but also, I mentioned earlier about schools working more closely together and potentially sharing resources to manage those movements between children to different schools.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

We know that not every child with a special need or additional need has a record of need. Is a record of need an absolute necessity in order to access the additional funding?

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Additional funding is provided to schools through the formula in terms of a base inclusion funding and on top of that we do have funding for records of need. We are looking at the whole funding model at the moment because we need to ... sorry, Minister.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

That is all right. No, no, you are in full flow. I was trying to say this is exactly what we need to address. We have had a model that is sort of analogous to the digital but in a very different way. There has been change, a real recognition of change. Recognition of need and the formula and everything that goes behind it, the record of need that you talk about and that method of funding, that needs to be looked at very carefully. I think in the longer term we will have to make an investment. There is an opportunity for that investment because as school numbers go down, if you keep the money in the system, you can use it more effectively. You can use it more effectively if you work across schools as well. It will not be extra money, but it will be money that is there so that there is money available to give the best possible support that we can. I think that dialogue over what we mean and what schools have to address in terms of S.E.N. across the board is one that is open now. Whenever you open a dialogue like that, you are going to have challenge at the beginning. That is okay. That is good but you have to come to some sort of agreement in the long term and change that will work for everybody so that everyone wants to do better. I think everyone's intention - teachers, parents, certainly the department as well - is in the right direction.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

There were a lot of media reports last year about La Passerelle School. Can you outline the changes that that school has faced and explain exactly what steps have been taken to address them?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, there were a number of challenges in terms of ... well, I would say that the first issue for the school, I think, is the actual accommodation itself. That needs to be addressed and we are addressing that.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

We had a visit up to La Passerelle and we were quite stunned by the condition of the physical buildings.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, we have been up there, and we spoke to their students as part of the post-16 review. The new build is on track, and it is something that people mentioned there are always little ruts in the road. We found a few in terms of buildings of that age with asbestos. You have to be extremely careful but that is still on track to be up and running so that is good. In terms of staffing, there has been some change and there has been some addressing of the way we structure that. I think that becomes part of the wider look at the way in which we deal with children with all types of need. It is a challenge because we are dealing with individuals, we are dealing with children and we are dealing with change, but I think that the changes that are being made now are for the positive and there is a real opportunity there to get things very right. Do you want to ... I do not want to talk about individuals because I do not think that is fair. We need to look forward to where we are now. I want to hope that the children and the parents can have confidence in where they are, pride in that school, because it is their school, particularly as we develop new buildings and we look carefully about the way that will be adapted. Also, remember La Passerelle Primary is still in portacabins and if we get on with the school in town, they will have specific facilities as well, which is really important and it sends the right message: we do care. We are trying to do the right things here.

Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Just to give you a bit of a date update, the completion date has been pushed back and the new school, we are looking to open it at the start of next term following the Easter holidays. It was due to be completed, obviously, before January but there is ... I am happy to go through the issues but there is probably no need,

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

It might be better to do those offline because there are some very specific things.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes, okay. All right.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Minister, you accepted the panel's recommendation in the Secondary School Funding Review published in 2024 that: "The Government should define measurable outcomes for providing a 'first

class education service' to students in government provided schools." Can you provide an update on the status of that work?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

As we go through the review of where we are across our schools as we have changed the structure in terms of bringing people into the department and headteachers into the department, the notion of what we mean by that becomes clearer and clearer. How we define that is the challenge for all education systems. A lot of the work that we have been doing over post-16 work and a lot of the work we have been doing in terms of the structures of our schools will feed directly into that, and I think it is a much wider piece. We have completed consultation with students. We published a report on post-16. We are looking at the modernisation of the Highlands campus and that is in an actual plan with a number of sites that could be available. Am I missing anything? Do you want to add anything to that?

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

I think the question was about measurable outcomes being defined.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

We will always measure by outcomes in terms of results. We will have to. That is meaningful but one of the really key things we are doing is looking at publishing all of our data so that it is much more open. That is a key thing in terms of looking at a way in which those outcomes will be defined. It is very, very difficult to say: "This is the number that makes a school great." We also have the School Review Framework, which has changed, which is looking very specifically at the quality of a school in a much wider context. I know those 2 words are contradictory, but they are not. If you are looking at what the school does overall, not just exam results, I think you get a much better picture of what a school does. There is a specific view to say we cannot reduce down the school's performance simply to a set of data in terms of its results. We want our children to do well, of course we do.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

That is really good, but you said something then about publishing more data. Can you mention what data that would be?

[13:30]

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

What we have heard in the past is whenever we publish anything, we end up with a million F.O.I.s (Freedom of Information) just asking for sets of data completely out of context. What we want to do

more on our sites is publish all data around school numbers, results, et cetera, but what that requires is it requires people to understand context, and we will give context to that data. I have said this before, one of the biggest problems we have with our data is it is a very small dataset and comparison is really, really difficult. I am tired of the department having to look like it is protecting itself all the time. I do not think that is fair. I think there is so much success with our young people, we need to get that out there and then we need to put the context in place so that people can understand that better.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Sure. Has a decision been made about the future funding of the fee-paying schools and whether they will move totally on to the funding or if they will remain partially on the average weighted pupil unit calculation?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

No, there has not been a decision made on that yet.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Thank you. Thank you for being honest, Minister.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

It is all right.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Okay. One of the panel findings from the Secondary Education Review related to the lack of investment in information technology in schools - we have already mentioned that - over an extended period of time. The Minister accepted at that time the panel's recommendation to consider how greater investment in technology could be made available. What is the Government's current policy position on this?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

First of all, I maintain what I said before, we do need to look for more investment. However, we also need to be very aware of the context that we are in as an Island at the moment and the discussion around online safety, digital safety, et cetera, and we need to come to some conclusions as to where we are going to be with that. For example, let us give 2 extremes of the outcome. One outcome is we have no digital access in school. As an Island, we decide we will not put anything in there and it simply will not happen. Well, we would not be investing anything at all.

The Connétable of Grouville:

A Faraday cage.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

A Faraday cage, there we go. Buy one big Faraday cage. The other end of the ... and we are talking extremes here. By way of example, the other extreme is that we have a huge investment and everything is online, et cetera, and that would be a different need. Somewhere in the middle there will be a successful investment into our digital access across our schools and our organisations. It is what we talked about before in terms of the investment, where it is now and where we need to go forward. The problem with I.T. (information technology) is it is not a bottomless pit of money.

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

No. At the moment we are understanding the future costs and what investment is going to be needed within those 4 areas that the Minister mentioned earlier.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Those costs need to be targeted appropriately as to what we want to provide in the longer term following our discussions with online safety as well, because I think it will change it.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Sure, and that was my next question about the plans, but you have already answered that question.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay, so I have some questions now about school staff vacancies. Minister, what are the current teaching staff turnover rates for both primary schools and secondary schools and how have they changed over the past year?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

The turnover rate overall is 4.78 per cent.

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

That is correct, yes.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

That is the correct figure?

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

That is correct, yes.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I am just making sure I read my graph correctly. It was 4.97 per cent in 2024. To give a comparison, the Government of Jersey overall turnover is 7.2 per cent. I will say, though, I could now sit back and say: "That is great." Let us put it in context now and I know about this very, very well, having been a head of department. This time of year, there are fewer vacancies because now is not the time of year. It is the May half term that you tend to have changes because that is the time to finish by the summer term, to hand in notice by the summer term. We do not predict huge numbers ... you will have to wait and see obviously. If you are head of department, you are hoping you are keeping all your staff, particularly the really good ones. Vacancies that exist now may well be due to retirement or people moving on and people wanting to advertise early to get the best possible person in post or if you promote internally at this time of year, for example, then you leave a post for May and that is an opportunity perhaps to get less experienced teachers in to give that new blood.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

That figure you just mentioned, is there a difference between the primary schools and secondary schools?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Secondary is 5.46 and primary is 2.84.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay, great. Are there any specific areas of concern that need to be addressed, do you think, or not?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I can answer that in 2 ways. Overall, in the teaching world, physics, maths, those subjects, perhaps language teachers as well, I know they are like hen's teeth. If you know a physics teacher, let us know. In terms of where we are, there are some vacancies around science, for example.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. That has been like that for a long time, has it not?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes. It is a difficult subject.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay, so are there any permanent roles currently covered by agency staff?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

There is one permanent role covered by agency staff where the school has been able to recruit successfully at this time, 5 agency staff for long-term absence such as illness and parental leave, so there is one post where we have not been able to recruit. I cannot tell you specifically what that is at the moment, but I can find out for you.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

That is only 6 agency staff in total.

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Five covering illness ...

Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Illness and parental leave.

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

... parental leave, one covering a permanent role. There are only 6.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. What would be the equivalent cost of a member of agency teaching staff if they were employed on a permanent basis?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Is it okay to give daily rates? I suppose it is fair.

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Absolutely.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

It is in the public domain. The agency staff rates range from £335 to £380 per day. Locally-based supplier's top day rate is £333, so they are similar at the lower rate. The average cost of a local

supplier is £310 per day, so it is slightly more expensive for agency staff. I will say, though, that we had had a situation where agency staff have been very good and taken a permanent position, I believe, which is good as well. They do tend to be around specific areas of the curriculum. I will not say, because I do not know, but if I was a betting man I would put it around something like physics or maths or one of those subjects that it has been difficult to recruit for but that is a low number. I agree with you, it would be better to perhaps not have any agency staff, although it gives us flexibility, but the numbers I believe have gone down.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

We are just trying to get the numbers. My next question is: how many agency teachers are currently employed? Is that any different from the permanent roles?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

It is 6, is it not?

Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

It is 6, yes.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Six.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

It is 6.

Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Ranging between 5-week and 38-week long contracts.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes. Can I just say, we do have some more specific data of how much ... a comparison of a permanent teacher and an agency teacher including social security, but I think we should give that to you afterwards, if that is okay.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. Yes. Are delays in approvals from C.Y.P.E.S. for permanent recruitment a factor in the employment of agency teachers? This is around missing the recruitment window when teachers have to resign by a certain date. Does this complicate the matter and then agency teachers end up getting employed when otherwise not?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

The answer overall is no, but people do have to remember their resignation dates and stick to them so it gives us time to recruit. They are just before Christmas and at the Easter term for the summer, for example, so that gives the school time to recruit. The recruitment freeze is not affecting front line teachers.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

You say that the recruitment freeze is not affecting front line teachers but is there still a bureaucratic process behind that in order to be able to recruit?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, of course there is.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Is that acting as a factor?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, I know exactly what you mean. It is a lot better than it was, let me put it that way. It brings back memories of my frustration. It is a lot better than it was. I will be honest with you, Keith, it is a lot better than it was.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Still room for improvement.

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

I have not heard that it has led to any agency teachers being recruited, although if there has been frustration at a pace of something, I would understand.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Is that frustration coming through to the department then because of the central people services forms that need filling in?

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

It is just part of the process of recruiting in the Government of Jersey.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

In a recruitment freeze.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes.

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

At this particular time, yes.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I think as well, just to say, the better communication between the department and the schools will highlight that quicker than it ever had before. That is a really key thing. The main issues with recruitment are around finding the right person because we still have to find the right person. The worst-case scenario for a head of department is to have a field of one because they may be okay but it may not be what you want and that is a really difficult decision.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

All right. I will just ask a question now about the teachers' terms and conditions. The last budget included additional funding of £1.8 million per annum for the teachers' terms and conditions and it was advised that this would be used to increase the time available to teachers for planning preparation and assessment. Can you describe how the effectiveness of this increased P.P.A. (planning, preparation and assessment) time will be evaluated?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes. First of all, this is starting from January, and we know that terms start in September. However, I believe when we spoke to the union and said: "Do you want us to wait until September?", they said no, and we did not want to wait until September. It may well be that some schools have already been making this P.P.A. time but now there is some money to cover that, which is a good thing, which might be part of the deficit issues, but we have already addressed some of those. In terms of its evaluation, we would need to see some sort of clarity over the whole piece in terms of the way in which that has been effective. Keith, you have been doing a lot of work with the unions as well.

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Yes, we are trying to accelerate this as quickly as possible. The budgets have been delegated and passed to schools, so schools are now actively looking to recruit. Jonathan may have some updates on numbers there. We continue to meet with our unions regularly and they give us feedback on how it is feeling on the ground. We also have the opportunity to survey staff throughout the year just to understand whether there is an impact and a feel that this is resulting in improved working conditions and improving their time for planning.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

This is also the first time there has been any money put directly to this and it is in January. Is it perfect? Absolutely not. Of course not. However, there is an opportunity here for us to do what we can and to learn from it and that is exactly that type of follow-up. I am sure there will be issues somewhere along the line, things will not be recognised, or it may not be used as effectively as perhaps we want. The thing about a department is it needs to recognise that and then make that change. Ofsted used to define an excellent department as one that is self-improving. I am not a great fan of Ofsted, however if we are self-improving from what we learn in our experiences of this, then that is a good thing as we go forward.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay, maybe this would help towards reducing staff turnover, if people feel better able to do their work.

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

I certainly think it would help. The aim is to help improve with workload by providing more planning time.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. Have you received feedback from the teaching unions and, if so, what is it?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes.

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

No, no, I am more than happy to.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

No, no, go on. I will say my piece after.

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

I commented on it earlier. As I said, the money has been passed to schools. It is about now the pace of how we can recruit staff into those roles to enable teachers to have that additional hour of P.P.A. I think unions are just encouraging us to do all that we can alongside school leaders to make this happen as quickly as possible. As we are aware, this is going to happen throughout this spring and into the summer term, but we want to get this up and running as quickly as possible.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay, so the unions are supportive of this change.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, and I think that we all recognise you could always have more and we want to do this, but I would say, and I think the understanding is: "Look, we have got to make the best of what we have here." This is a model for where we go into the future. This is genuine money into the system for the first time. We have a good relationship with the trade unions, and I think that co-operation and that reality of where we are will help us build for the future, so that is important and I thank them for that.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay, and this is like a starting point to try and get it right?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes, absolutely.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

There may be adjustments in the future then?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay, thank you.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Thank you. I have got some more questions about the Jèrriais funding and teaching, please.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

The last budget saw the Government make a commitment to ringfence the £670,700 funding for Jèrriais in the education budget. Can you tell us how much of that funding is allocated to secondary and how much to primary, or is it all in the same pot?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

It is all in the same pot, yes.

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

It is all in the same pot. We can provide more information to you outside of here about the allocation of time, if that would help?

[13:45]

Deputy H.M. Miles:

That would be helpful. Is any of that funding allocated to adult education at all?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes.

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Within that, there is a commitment to support the heritage aspect of delivering Jèrriais. We are looking at the moment quite actively about how we can define those 2 areas to keep the teaching part for teaching and the heritage part for heritage. We are in the process of formulating plans, which the Minister is considering at the moment.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Okay. What progress has been made with renewing the Jèrriais Strategy that expired in 2025?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

There is a meeting going on as we speak. There have been drafts of it so, yes, it is on its way. Again, it is not just about strategies. It is about the other things that we do as well but, yes, it is on its way.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

In the non-staff budget for 2025, there was an allocation of £105,000 but only £30,000 of that was spent. For example, Jèrriais developments, the budget was £5,000 but only £9 of that was spent. What are the plans for the department to spend the budget that is allocated to their non-staff this year?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

We go back here to the delineation - I think is the word - between the teaching and the other elements. Some clarity there will help with that spend to help with: where is this money going? What

do we want to use it on? Why was that used? That budget may not have been spent but areas that address the things that that budget may have been used for may have been addressed. I personally would be very ... if I was a head of department and I had so many different lines of budget, I would find that very confusing because when you are delivering something across the piece, they often interlink. I think we need to look at that structure as well but, yes, if you have got the money, spend it, of course.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

I am just interested in this relationship between C.Y.P.E.S. and education heritage/art culture.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Exactly.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

How is L'Office du Jèrriais funded? Is that funded from within your C.Y.P.E.S. budget?

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

It is.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

It is, yes.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

All the money towards Jèrriais comes from Economic Development and it goes to C.Y.P.E.S.

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

No, it is funded into our base budget.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

It is funded into your base budget and then anything that L'Office du Jèrriais wants or anything through heritage, they have to get it from your budget; is that correct?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

They are allocated that from our budget, yes.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

They are allocated. How much are they allocated?

Interim Chief Officer, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

I do not know. We would need to come back to you on that.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

We need to come back to you on that but that is exactly the conversation we are having at the moment because that should be clear. It should be clear not only ... okay, there are levels of clarity here. Not only we can say how much has been allocated but also what it is specifically for, what it is hoping to achieve, how many teaching hours we can have, how many delivery hours should be in the classroom from each teacher. There are teaching terms and conditions, for example, so that is different. We would have certain expectations and that clarity needs to be put together ...

Deputy H.M. Miles:

I understand that from a C.Y.P.E.S. perspective but when you have got money from C.Y.P.E.S. that is supposed to be going to L'Office du Jèrriais to fund adult teaching or wider community teaching and what, certainly, I am being told is that money is not filtering from C.Y.P.E.S. into heritage.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

First of all, I do not think that is the case. Second, this is exactly the work that we are doing at the moment so there is that clarity so we do not have to have that discussion about that money not being there because then, just to say, in terms of the adult education, for example, there can be certainty as to what that delivery looks like and where the money is coming from.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Is the 2025 funding then that has historically been passed into L'Office du Jèrriais going to be maintained in order to maintain the staffing complement they have at the moment for the adult education?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

The adult education will be maintained, yes. The model of how we do that will depend upon the negotiations and the discussions as to what the best structure between those 2 parts are.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Will people who are receiving Jèrriais lessons online in the same ways they have been for the past few years ...

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Online?

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Some of it is online. The adult education is practically all online and it is very successful, 40 or 50 students. Will those 40 or 50 students continue to be able to receive their Jèrriais lessons?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Yes. We would not want to stop adult education. If the model of adult education changes, that might change anyway because if you lose a member of staff or someone changes their mind, you have got to be adaptable.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

The funding will be forthcoming from your C.Y.P.E.S. ringfenced budget into L'Office du Jèrriais in order for them to maintain their online teaching.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

It would be to maintain their teaching. Whether that is online or not is up to the decision-making processes to the best delivery of Jèrriais teaching.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

I am just worried about the delay because you have said the discussions are ongoing at this point in time. What about the students and the teaching staff who are contracted to deliver it?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

They are not changing at the moment, but we do have to look at what we are doing with Jèrriais in terms of those 2 things. It has been too complicated for too long. I think everyone agrees that we have to have this distinction between the delivery of teaching and the other areas of Jèrriais which might be wider and more to do with heritage. That discussion has been going on. It has been very positive. I think we are very close to a point where we can make that really, really clear and really distinct and then everyone knows what they are doing, everyone knows where the money is going and knows how it will be spent.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

When is that likely to ...

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

That is going to be very, very soon. I was hoping by the end of this week.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

This week. Okay.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

However, it has to be the right thing. We cannot just ... when you say it has been very successful, we need to check that that is the case. You asked me to define success before, and we have to do the same with our Jèrriais teaching. Yes, there is a lot of money going into it, £600,000-something, and we want to make sure it is being spent appropriately. We are doing the best we can in order to keep the language going, revive the language and get to a new generation of the language. Key areas, I am sure, are behind the strategy.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

When will the strategy be completed?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I believe the strategy has been completed. It is just signoff really because there are a number of departments involved.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Okay. Thank you.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

All right. Yes, and the panel is really interested to keep following this up because we brought the successful amendment to ringfence that funding for Jèrriais.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Indeed.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Now, this is our last public hearing as we all are at the moment. We wanted to ask, Minister, what are your overarching reflections on this term of office and any commitments that remain unfinished? What would you want to be progressed by the next Minister? What are your overarching reflections?

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Overarching reflections. Well, it has only been 2 years, not a full term. We have had to work very quickly. When I took over the role, the entire teaching profession was on strike. It was not within a week, so we have moved that forward. Relationships are much better now. There is a 3-year pay deal. We have got money for terms and conditions for the first time ever, probably never as much as anyone wants, but we are there so I think that is positive. We have not been afraid to take on the difficult challenges and the difficult things such as the review into S.E.N. I think the department

itself has got much more clarity in it in roles. They have taken people in from schools, so they know what they are doing. C.Y.P.E.S. understands schools more; schools understand C.Y.P.E.S. more. That is an ongoing process which needs to happen. I have seen, and I will say this, a growing confidence in the department across the department in terms of the work we are doing because there is clarity in what people's roles are. A classic example of that is the 2 to 3 year-olds. That has happened very rapidly. We took on pilots in the first year and then we got the money. I thought that would be the most difficult thing. We won that money and then got on with it and now it is being delivered. Some other highlights are obviously the school meals, which have been absolutely excellent, a great thing to do. There has been ... what else is there? I am very proud to have taken on the role. It is a massive challenge because everybody knows about education because everyone went to school, so everyone is an expert, which is absolutely fine. I get that, but it is always an interesting challenge. It is a shame we only had 2 years and not 4 years because we could have done a lot more. I am very proud of the work we have done on post-16 and going and talking to young people. We have had huge amounts of engagement with young people, be it the Jersey Youth Assembly, Youth Parliament, the groups that we have spoken to. We have gone and spoken to young people about mobile phones. We have spent a lot of our time in schools, and I am really pleased that that voice is being heard because we, at our peril, ignore the voices of young people. That is a huge error because they are the future of this Island. There have been some difficult decisions, some decisions which I have taken, such as the letter regarding mobile phones in schools and trying to support schools to say do not have them in schools. I noticed that the U.K. are finally following suit with the same thing. That was an interesting Radio 4 morning when I listened. I thought: "We have already done that here. I wonder if they will mention Jersey", but they did not. In terms of future Ministers, there are 2 things here. First of all, whoever is in the role next, whoever it is, should have just been on the doorstep talking about their manifesto and their beliefs and what they want to stand for. It should be very easy for them to walk into the post and have a clarity in what they want to do, otherwise what have they been campaigning on? That is my first thing. Second, would I tell them what to do? I do not think that is the right thing to do because it would probably be ignored. My advice is very strongly please address post-16 because if you get post-16 right, everything before it falls into place. Please make sure that you try and keep the money in the system even though demographics decrease because you will get better outcomes for everybody and for the future of this Island. Apprenticeships are really important and working towards a sustainable method of statutory apprenticeships is really, really important. Piecemeal changes and just throwing a little bit more money here and there does not work. You will be hearing about the Green Skills Academy that is being set up at Highlands in conjunction with Jersey Electricity in the next few weeks, which I think is an excellent model for future training on Island for an entire industry. It is a really good co-operation between our provider and industry and that is the type of thing we need to look forward to in the future. What else is there? I do not know. Anything you want to add? I think I have covered quite a lot.

Assistant Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I would just say that I think the separation of the role from the Minister for Children has enabled us to really focus in key areas and policy and things like that. It is a massive portfolio in itself and when you combine it with Children as well, it is a lot for one person to take on.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

One final thing, I will mention the work we have done on higher education because there have been small changes, a bit at a time. When I walked into the role, I did face quite a few propositions that wanted to define what I was going to do, but we had to address that and we tried to cover those. We have done it in a piece-by-piece way, in a controlled way, in a meaningful way from the really good work that has gone on with officers, so that is a sustainable change long into the future. That is the key message for anybody. It is okay to do things quickly, but it is a really good idea to do things and think 4, 5 years ahead: "Will they still be working then?" If you think they will not, then you have made a small piecemeal change, and I would advise you not to do it. However, that is just a piece of throwaway advice for anyone who wants to listen to it.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. All right. Well, I think we have come to the end of hearing then.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Thank you very much.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Thank you, everyone.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning:

I would just say thank you to you as well. It has always been ... it is funny sitting this side after all these years.

[13:57]