

**REPLY BY THE PRESIDENT OF
THE COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION, SPORT & CULTURE
TO QUESTIONS ASKED PURSUANT TO RULE 14 OF THE RULES OF
PROCEDURE BY DEPUTY L QUERPEL**

Preamble

There was an article published in the Guernsey Press on the 18th of February this year, in which Connie Armstrong, the Division Secretary for the Guernsey Branch of the National Education Union and Chris Keates, the General Secretary of the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers, expressed their concern about, and dissatisfaction with, the levels of communication displayed by the Committee for Education, Sport and Culture (ESC) in relation to the recently announced attainment and behaviour policies in our schools. Ms Armstrong is reported to have said in the article, 'It is our understanding that all schools have behaviour policies already so we were a little surprised to read in the Guernsey Press that these initiatives were being introduced'. She went on to say that 'Until now, communication between the States and teachers has been a bit scant'.

Ms Keates is reported to have said, 'It is regrettable that these policies were introduced without any consultation with the NASUWT. The committee and the department both appear to be unwilling to engage with the workforce over critical developments'.

Therefore, in relation to those comments made by Ms Armstrong and Ms Keates in the Press article, I ask the following Rule 14 questions:

Question

- 1) *Did ESC undertake comprehensive consultation with teachers and their unions in relation to the recently announced attainment and behaviour policies?*

Answer

It is perhaps helpful first to recall the reasons why the policies were drafted in the first place. The then Committee was directed by the States in early 2016 to draft policies in respect of both these areas. This came about because of the removal of selection at 11. There was a substantial body of opinion in the States which was concerned about behaviour and attainment in non-selective schools. Whilst the Committee does not believe such concerns to be justified, it had to respond positively to the concerns expressed by a majority of elected members.

Officers carried out extensive consultation with education professionals in schools during the drafting of both policies. Consultation was predominantly within the mainstream secondary phase because it was the removal of selection at 11 which prompted the work. All secondary teachers in mainstream schools were invited to participate in discussion forums on one of four policies, including behaviour and attainment. In addition, in each mainstream secondary school there were focus groups comprising key staff nominated by their head teachers. The final policies reflected feedback from these two

phases of consultation. The draft policies were then shared with all head teachers. Several head teachers sent responses for which we were very grateful and almost all their comments were incorporated into the final policies.

Question

2) Upon reflection, do you think ESC could have made more effort to communicate and consult with the teachers and their unions on these issues?

Answer

On reflection, although there was extensive consultation with the teaching profession, it would have been better if head teachers had been provided with a little more time to respond to the policies while they were in draft form and if unions had been advised of the policies prior to general publication.

Question

3) If the answer to Question 2 is 'yes', are you able to give me an assurance that ESC will review their levels of communication on a regular basis in the future and make improvements where necessary?

Answer

Yes – we are pleased to provide such an assurance. In a very visible demonstration of its commitment to this, the Committee has just signed off a comprehensive communications plan which includes wide stakeholder engagement. The plan covers the entire Programme, including the 11-18 School and further & higher education work streams, and sets out a detailed timetable for stakeholder events, including sessions dedicated to meeting with Unions and staff. The Committee is currently seeking the views of education professionals on the new inspection framework and also on a new Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy. The feedback will then be considered by the Committee and the documents amended where necessary before they are published.

Question

4) Regards Ms Keates saying 'The committee and the department both appear to be unwilling to engage with the workforce over critical developments' are you able to allay her, and my, concerns that that is not the case and that ESC are only too willing to engage with the workforce over critical developments?

Answer

I hope that my letter of the 28th February 2019 to the Unions, acknowledging the shortcomings in the consultation process, combined with the comprehensive communications plan, demonstrates that the Committee is indeed very willing to engage

with the workforce. In fact, a number of staff and Union engagement sessions have already taken place over the past six months or so, including a meeting with Union representatives in October 2018. Union representatives have also been invited to produce joint responses to questions from staff and the Secondary Education Transformation for Staff (SETS) steering group was established recently, which includes both Union and staff representatives. Following these meetings, updates will be sent to staff.

Question

5) Did Ms Armstrong and Ms Keates relay their dissatisfaction and their concerns to ESC prior to announcing them in the media?

Answer

No, Ms Armstrong and Ms Keates did not contact the Committee prior to announcing their concerns in the media.

Date of receipt of the Question:

7th March 2019

Date of Reply:

22nd March 2019