**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 GAVIN ST. PIER**

Question 1

'Live' lessons via video conferencing were limited during the recent lockdown. One reason cited for this was that it was not possible for all students to be able to access the lessons simultaneously, due to a 'digital divide' (defined as the gap between students that have access to modern information and communications technology, and those that do not or have restricted access.) In the event of any future need to deliver distance learning, what plans and actions have the Committee taken to close this gap so as to not disadvantage any pupil? Which private, public or third sector agencies are the Committee working with to secure appropriate devices and bandwidth so that each pupil has appropriate access to a device and can access their lessons? Is any further assistance needed from the community to close this gap?

Answer

During the most recent period of distance learning around 150 households were provided with mobile Wi-Fi and over 600 mobile devices were loaned to children and young people to support their learning. Working with the Sure Community Foundation and the Social Investment Fund, plans are in place to further develop the provision of mobile Wi-Fi and devices to households where there is an identified need. Our education settings continue to work with families to understand the need at home and ensure that the wider aspects of access to an internet-connected device (including online safety and cyber security) are understood.

In addition, the delivery of the Digital Roadmap which features as one of the Committee's priority workstreams for resource allocation as part of the Government Work Plan process, will increase the ratio of education-appropriate devices in schools, enabling a greater number of learners to have access to an individual device. This increase in availability will be supported by professional development opportunities for educators in the use of digital technology both in- and out-side the classroom.

The availability and affordability of superfast broadband presents a further barrier to the ease of participation with Distance Learning. In a recent survey conducted by one of our primary schools, only a small minority of households had access to superfast broadband and a substantial majority had only the most basic package. This disparity, which appears not to be solely income-related, provides a further barrier for some families. The recommendations of the [Committee *for* Economic Development's Telecoms Strategy](#) include upgrading the island's broadband capability.

Question 2

Given the emotional, pastoral and educational impact of the periods of lockdown, what proposals and plans do the Committee have to provide extra support to pupils as may be required to mitigate these impacts? What, if any, additional educational or emotional-support resources are being provided to schools and/or pupils, (e.g. sessions after the school day or in the holidays)? If so, how long does the Committee anticipate such extra resources will be required?

Answer

With regard to emotional support, it is important firstly to note the support provided during lockdown, the purpose of which was to minimise the extent of the impact of lockdown on students. Guidance provided for all schools and other settings during Stage 1 made it very clear that pastoral support was central to the provision. Schools used a range of mechanisms to provide this support, including regular 'keep in touch' communications with children and their parents/carers, on-line tutorial sessions and regular surveys to monitor engagement and provide feedback. These mechanisms were appropriate to the age and stage of the students.

Learners who were identified as the most vulnerable were able to attend their school throughout the lockdown period, including during school holidays, and to receive in-person support relevant to their individual circumstances and needs. Within our special school settings, all parents/carers and where appropriate students, received a regular wellbeing phone call.

The Guernsey Institute's Student Support Team identified students who would likely require an additional level of support to engage with remote learning and to manage the pressures of the restrictions. When necessary, Learning Support Assistants provided one-to-one support to students. Progress Coaches interacted with students in a variety of ways, including video meetings, to offer support with any social, emotional and mental health challenges that students faced. A duty rota was in place during the February half term with the Progress Coach Team available for students during this period and we are currently assessing the need for this to continue through the Easter period. For students undertaking full-time nursing courses, even before the pandemic a comprehensive wellbeing programme was in place as the courses are recognised to be particularly challenging. These interventions have continued, and will for the foreseeable future. The wellbeing programme has been included as a case study on the UK Council of Deans of Health website.

Schools used existing two-way digital communication tools, such as Seesaw, Class Charts and Google Classroom to communicate with parents and students as well as to post work.

When schools and other settings prepared for the return of all learners as restrictions were eased, via an on-line system accessed by all Headteachers and Principals, significant resources from the Educational Psychology Service were made available for use across all school settings. The Service also provided bespoke training sessions for school staff as well as large group sessions conducted via MS Teams, the focus of which was how to support staff and learners following lockdown. School settings have been made aware that

additional bespoke support is available for staff and learners as and when specific needs are identified.

For The Guernsey Institute's students, resources have been shared with Tutors for use in students' Personal Development Programmes covering subjects related to the pandemic such as "Will learning ever be the same again?" and "Vaccines and Misinformation" to better help students understand and contextualise the current situation.

With regard to post-lockdown educational support, working closely with schools, staff within the Education Office will use the first half of the summer term to assess the cumulative educational impact of the two local lockdowns before making recommendations about the most appropriate way to bridge any gaps, which is likely to vary based on the age of the student.

With regard to the options that might be pursued, we note that [research on summer schools from the Education Endowment Foundation](#) has found that other approaches, such as ensuring that during normal schooling children are receiving high-quality feedback or receive small group tuition, are more effective means of raising attainment than putting on summer provision. The research also shows that, in order for a summer school to be effective, it needs to be staffed by teachers. We also note that the children most likely to benefit from a formal summer school are often those least likely to attend it.

We are very mindful that a further consequence of lockdown for our children and young people was the lack of access to other activities, such as formal clubs and groups or informal events such as birthdays and playdates, that promote social interaction with their peers. Such social interaction is foundational both for learning and for positive mental health and well-being. The extent of the need for compensatory social opportunities for children and young people is also being assessed not only because it is important in its own right, but because it underpins successful academic learning.

Question 3.

What has been learned from the second lockdown that could improve preparation for and provision of distance learning in the event of any future requirement to deliver distance learning?

Answer

The Committee has already indicated to States Members that its soon-to-be-finalised Education Strategy has a strong focus on continuous improvement with our education system, and this applies equally to distance learning. To enable this, surveys of parents, staff and pupils have been rolled out and their findings will inform a retrospective review of Distance Learning. The data from these surveys, which will also capture queries raised direct with schools, will enable the strengths and weaknesses of the Distance Learning offer to be assessed and for it to be adapted as part of the process of planning for the future.

Plans are also in place to look at the evidence of effective distance learning practice internationally to inform the further development of what is likely to become a longer-term approach to some aspects of curriculum delivery.

Where, as a result of the surveys or because there is evidence of better practice elsewhere that is appropriate for our context, our distance learning offer should be improved, our Distance Learning Policy and Guidance will be adapted.

Training will be provided to help teachers further improve their technological and pedagogical skills in teaching in this new way. The policy will also give guidance to school leaders about the best tools to quality-assure the distance learning provision.

In order to ensure that all settings are well prepared in advance of any future need to deliver distance learning they are each being asked to nominate a Distance Learning Champion. These Champions will work with the Education Office and will contribute to future iterations of our Distance Learning Policy and Guidance.

It has already been recognised that a blended learning offer is beneficial for some students and for some types of provision and, where appropriate, a blended learning approach will be maintained and enhanced.

Question 4

Has any analysis been or will any analysis be undertaken to compare the States' schools preparedness for, provision and quality of distance learning with that of the grant-aided colleges?

Answer

As part of the review of distance learning outlined in response to question 3, officers will engage with a range of parties and reflect on their input when reviewing and developing our Distance Learning Policy and Guidance. We welcome any contributions the grant-aided colleges might want to make to this process and our officers have liaised with colleagues in the grant-aided colleges throughout the Covid-19 Response period, and will continue to do so.

With regard to The Guernsey Institute's distance learning package, a review meeting has taken place with a college in the U.K. to compare approaches to distance and blended learning and to quality assure the local offer.

It is, however, important to acknowledge both the similarities and differences of various settings, and to ensure every distance learning package is appropriate for its particular audience.

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