

**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 LESTER QUERPEL**

Preamble

In May this year, Ladies College Principal, Daniele Harford-Fox, called on the States to introduce a ban on Smartphones for under 16 year olds. She said in the media that there's growing evidence that Smartphones are restructuring brains and leading to problems such as anxiety and depression and also social functioning and emotional regulation. She went on to say that we've created a massive experiment where we've just given our children this technology. She also clarified that she wasn't talking about banning ALL mobile phones, just the ones enabled with Smartphone technology.

On June 7th, you responded to Ms Harford-Fox in the Guernsey Press and said that banning Smartphones for under 16's is unrealistic because an outright ban would be an overly simplistic response to a complex issue. You then went on to say that a 'balance' needed to be struck, because as with many things, overuse, misuse and abuse, create negative outcomes, and this is where we need to provide a structure and guidance for our young people. However, since you said that, I'm not aware of any further comment, or statements, from your committee, or your department, on the issue. Having said that, I sincerely apologise if your committee or department have issued them and I've missed them. So my questions are as follows:

Question 1

Have you and your committee discussed the issue?

Answer 1

The President's comments were in response to a direct approach from the Guernsey Press. The Committee *for* Education Sport & Culture has not considered the question of an outright ban on the use of smartphones by children and young people under the age of 16, as such matters do not fall within the Committee's mandate.

Question 2

If you have, are you able to tell me the outcome please?

Answer 2

See the answer to question 1 above.

Question 3

If you haven't, then can you please tell me if you intend discussing it in the near future?

Answer 3

The Committee has no current plans to discuss/progress an outright ban on smartphones for children and young people under the age of 16, as it has no mandate to do so.

However, the Committee does have a responsibility to ensure the curriculum used in our education settings assists children and young people to have a balanced approach to the benefits and disbenefits of smartphones/online technology.

With regard to the use of smartphones by children and young people in education settings, please note that as part of our Education Strategy, the Committee empowers leaders to lead and make decisions about the operation of the education settings for which they are responsible. This means the Committee's usual stance is not to interfere in operational matters that are best addressed by education professionals, but it does have a policy oversight role.

In our role as Interim Governors of education settings, Committee members are able to satisfy ourselves that operational policies/procedures are in place and are being adhered to in respect of States-maintained primary and secondary schools. Our school leaders, collectively, take a pragmatic and proportionate approach to the use/possession of smartphones by learners on school premises.

Our hope in widening out governance roles to parents/carers and members of the community local to each school is to hear from other voices with a stake in the education of our children & young people and our community.

In States-maintained primary schools, if it is necessary for a learner to bring a smartphone to school (for example to support communication with parents/carers pre- and/or post-school), the process is that the smartphone is handed in to school staff at the start of the school day, and returned to the child at the end of the school day.

In States-maintained secondary schools, the policy is that smartphones are 'off and away' during the school day unless a member of school staff directs otherwise in a specific circumstance.

It is our view that there is a role for parents/carers to monitor and manage their child's use of smartphones/other smart devices beyond the school environment, and to ensure that both they and their children are aware of the potential risks associated with unmonitored access to the internet and social media.

We encourage parents/carers to have frequent and open discussions with their children on this topic, and facilitate sessions in schools to support parents to keep up to date in this regard.

To inform and assist discussions beyond school, children and young people attending States-maintained schools receive age-appropriate information/guidance as part of the PSHCE and computing curriculum, which is built up sequentially over the key stages of education, covering topics such as:

- Knowing about the benefits of having a balanced approach to spending time online;
- Knowing the need for on-line safety rules, understanding the law and that websites and online platforms have rules about their use (*e.g. age limits*) that should be followed;
- Knowing that there may be people online who could upset or harm them and how to recognise abusive relationships when others are using manipulation, persuasion or coercion or online harassment and how to respond, knowing who to talk to if they have concerns about something an adult does online or if something on a device worries or frightens them;
- Knowing that other people's online identity can be different from that in real life and knowing ways to identify risk and manage personal safety online, and where to get help;
- Knowing about different types of online intimacy and the indicators of positive, healthy relationships and unhealthy relationships, including online, and what support services are available;
- Knowing how to seek, give, not give and withdraw consent (in all contexts, including online) and how to recognise abusive relationships when others are using manipulation, persuasion or coercion or online harassment and how to respond;
- Knowing about the unacceptability of prejudice-based language and behaviour, offline and online and about the need to promote inclusion and challenge discrimination, and how to do so safely, including online;
- Knowing how to recognise peer influence and to develop strategies for managing it, and knowing the legal and ethical responsibilities people have in relation to online aspects of relationships;
- Knowing how to evaluate ways in which their behaviours may influence their peers, positively and negatively, including online and how to recognise the unwanted attention of others (*such as online harassment and stalking*), and knowing ways to respond and how to seek help;
- Knowing about the impact of attitudes towards sexual assault and to challenge victim blaming, including when abuse occurs online; and
- Knowing the skills to challenge or seek support for financial exploitation in different contexts, including online.

Date of receipt of the Question: 30th July 2024
Date of Reply: 14th August 2024