

PRIVATE NOTICE QUESTIONS (PNQ)

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

2023 NATIONAL CERTIFICATE OF EXAMINATION – EXTENDED STREAM – RESIT CANDIDATES (05.12.2023)

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr X. L. Duval) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, following the results of the 2023 National Certificate of Examination (NCE) for the Extended Stream, she will state –

- (a) if this programme will be scrapped and replaced by a more relevant curriculum to be examined at the end of three years by way of an NCE (Technical) examination and certificate, and
- (b) the number of resit candidates from the Extended Stream who had originally failed last year's NCE exams and who have now succeeded in the said examinations.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me at the very outset to thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for this PNQ since it gives me the opportunity to clear the air about a number of misconceptions that have unfortunately clouded a sound understanding of the Extended Programme.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will be brief in going through the root of the Extended Programme. This Programme had been clearly announced and enunciated in the Policy Document, 'Inspiring Every Child' that my Ministry came up with in the early stages of the education reform agenda.

It is inextricably linked to the Nine-Year Continuous Basic Education introduced in line with our commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, more specifically, Goal 4 on Education. Indeed, we have committed ourselves to achieve the targets of Education 2030, one of which is to ensure the provision of 12 years of free, publicly funded, equitable quality primary and secondary education, of which at least nine years are compulsory, leading to relevant learning outcomes.

What does this convey as message? Simply, that all of our children must complete 9 years of quality basic education seamlessly and have the foundational skills and the right attitudes for upper secondary schooling.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to insist on the foundational aspect. We all know that our learners need a solid base on which to construct their future learning. A school should therefore be the engine room for establishing a strong foundation for today's learners to be future-ready, particularly so in a world that is increasingly seen as volatile and complex.

But there is always one reality in education that we have to contend with; not all students have the same learning pace. It is then imperative to create differentiated pathways such that the system can respond to the specific needs, talents and strengths of individual students as they progress through their learning journey.

It is this philosophy, Mr Speaker, Sir, that lies at the heart of the Extended Programme that Government introduced in 2018. As part of the Inclusion drive, a central pillar of the reform agenda along with equity and quality, it is absolutely imperative to cater for students who do not attain the required level of competencies at the PSAC assessment.

Rolling out the Programme meant that every secondary school (State and Private grant-aided) has at least one class of the Extended Programme. A new pedagogy is advocated, with small class size addressing the readiness, the learning difficulties, the ability level and the learning pace of the students.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition seems to be bent on condemning the entire Programme. To do so, he is simply looking at the percentage of results at the EP NCE Assessment but this is an erroneous scrutiny as we are dealing with learners who are not mere numbers, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Yes, 71 of the learners following EP last year, had been eligible to join the Regular Programme in Grade 10 in 2022 while, this year, 192 have met the criteria for the NCE.

What these figures do not reveal, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that we have 238 students of the Extended Programme who have met the criteria for promotion to Grade 10 next year and these students will be pursuing their studies up to Grade 11 and take the School Certificate. Some would tend to disparagingly add the word "only" to minify the achievement. I would rather say something else: these young learners have been able to create their own counter-narratives. And I see this as a major positive, Mr Speaker, Sir. Had it not been for the Extended Programme, the system would have lost them, depriving them of the possibility to pursue their schooling.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we, at the level of the Ministry, believe in these learners and in their potential and in their ability to succeed if given the right support. Thinking otherwise would be casting aspersion on Educators who have gone out of the way, who worked hard to fashion successful learners, particularly when these had previously not made the grade at PSAC level! And what about the parents who have stood by the side of their children, believing in them, encouraging them, propping up their morale and boosting their selfesteem?

M. le président, la confiance en soi reste primordiale.

I, for one, believe that we should refrain from developing a negativity bias, but should rather congratulate these students along with the Educators for their efforts. Agreed, many may not have fared very well in one or more of the core subjects like English, French and Maths, but the performance has been remarkable in some other subjects. An analysis of the results subject-wise for the 2022 EP-NCE and this year's edition shows a marked and clear improvement in most of the subjects.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the performance of students in Social and Modern Studies, in ICT and Technology Studies exhibits the highest percentage of increase, suggesting notable advancements in these subjects. 75% of students have passed Art and Design. 66.8 % of the EP students have passed ICT. In subjects like English, Mathematics, Science, ICT, Business, and Modern Studies, substantial improvement in performance has been noted.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the number of students scoring 'Pass' in English has been of 25% and of 20% in Maths. But in Science, for the EP students, 36.7% have passed. 46.9% have passed in Technology Studies.

We need to remember, Mr Speaker, Sir, that building self-esteem is a gradual process, and consistent support from Educators, peers, family members and the community can make a significant difference in helping students develop the confidence in their abilities. Recognising and appreciating the efforts of students is crucial for their well-being and motivation. Undermining their efforts can indeed have a negative impact on their *confiance en soi* and confidence and this is the recipe to undermine teachers in the fulfilment of their noble tasks.

Besides, and that is the crux of the matter, their forte may not lie in their academic results, but consider for a moment the gains they have secured in terms of grooming received, the life skills and gains in terms of healthy living as well as psycho-social support. In terms of knowledge, Mr Speaker, Sir, they have gained knowledge.

I will also not make an abstraction, Mr Speaker, Sir, of the nudge provided by the Fortified Learning Environment (FLE) Programme. This programme is meant to better support learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, thereby seeking to nix, counteract and mitigate the negative impact of poverty and other adversities on educational outcomes. Pedagogically, it also works on a small group 'pull-out' system by FLE-EP Tutors who have received necessary professional development by the MIE.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would also wish to thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for giving me the opportunity through this PNQ to dial down another cliché that has gained currency in some quarters. *À force de marteler une idée, on finit hélas par l'intérioriser, M. le président.*

People keep on saying that these students cannot even read or write. But when we look at the results, we realise that the belief that a large majority of students of EP, in fact, do work hard and do succeed. It is a fallacy to say that they cannot read or write.

Of course, I do not deny that some students do have some literacy and numeracy issues, but if the students can score well in other subjects, why should they not be able to do equally well in Maths and languages? It is all a question of providing the right support to them.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the mode of assessment of the Extended Programme is being reviewed so as to integrate the School-based Assessment component. Allow me to briefly expatiate on this new type of assessment being introduced.

A Committee set up at the level of my Ministry to monitor the Extended Programme, has recommended that a School-based Assessment (SBA) component be introduced in the evaluation structure for EP. The National Certificate for Education Assessment for EP will thus take on board a School-based Assessment alongside the written paper as from academic year 2024.

This new assessment mode, Mr Speaker, Sir, will allow EP students to take part in school-based evaluations which will thus contribute to their grades in NCE certification. The SBA will carry a weighting of 40% with 60% for the written paper. The students of EP will undergo continuous school-based assessment which will be monitored by the Mauritius Examination Syndicate. Successful students will be awarded a certificate under the appellation NCE-EP allowing either their promotion to Grade 10 or their transition to vocational training. This measure was unanimously endorsed and lauded by Educators.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the new Assessment mode has already been approved by Government. It will be recognised that the current cohorts of EP students had not had the benefit of the Early Support Programme initiated 5 years ago in the primary sub-sector. This takes the shape of special coaching during school hours for pupils requiring additional support through differentiated pedagogies for remediation by trained Support Teachers. Certainly, the outcomes will be visible in the near future. But, in the interim, there is a host of measures being taken and resorted to, to provide EP students with adequate support in their studies –

- the Resort to the FLE Environment Tutors;
- the increase in the number of facilitators, and
- right now, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has come up with a Bright Up Programme.

My Ministry, in collaboration with the MITD, the NSIF and the Mauritius Sports Council, is introducing a Programme to students who have sat for, but have not been awarded the National Certificate of Education. This will take effect as from 2024. It will provide for life skills preparation for responsible citizenship, outdoor education and sports and it will lead to the world of work through the National Certificate 2 and will lead to a National Certificate Level 3 and the National Apprenticeship Programme. And this, Mr Speaker, Sir, will be the right time for them to join technical training.

While academic achievement is an important aspect, the true goal of education goes far beyond grades and examinations. It is about equipping children and learners with skills, knowledge, values and a mindset that will prepare them for a successful and fulfilling future. Herein lie the key elements that contribute to making children future ready.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it goes without saying that a well-rounded education goes beyond the award of the certificate. It is, in fact, about equipping our learners with tools, values and skills necessary for them to thrive and contribute positively to society. Thus, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have absolutely no intention of doing away with the present system. In fact, we firmly believe that children after their primary schooling should not be channelled to technical education or prevocational programmes at the age of 10 or 11, Mr Speaker, Sir.

They should complete their basic education, which gives the foundational skills to embark on such programmes. It is a *sine qua non* for them to complete the cycle of basic education before they move on to technical training. These learners go through the proper

formal education; they have to go through the proper formal education before going for technical training, and this is very much in line with what UNESCO, the World Bank and other international agencies advocate.

Mr Speaker, Sir, may I remind the House that technical education today has significantly evolved. It is a technology-based technical education and students need to have a good grounding in literacy, numeracy and science as well as other subjects before embarking on such programmes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, coming to part (b) of the question, with respect to the number of resit candidates from Grade 9+, there were 335 students who had sat for the exams again, and I am informed that 54 candidates have succeeded the NCE.

Mr X. L. Duval: Only 54?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: 54.

M. le président, ces enfants n'avaient pas pu avoir le niveau en Grade 6, mais ils ont quand même réussi en Grade 9+. Je ne doute pas de la bonne foi de l'honorable leader de l'opposition, mais il nous faut faire preuve de patience. Il faut faire de sorte à ne pas briser la confiance en soi de ces jeunes. Il faut croire en eux. Et c'est bien pour cela qu'on ne peut *scrap the Extended programme*. Nous insistons sur le contraire. Ils ont le potentiel et avec l'encadrement voulu, ils réussiront, et il nous faut leur donner le temps, M. le président.

Merci.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, if I understand well, only 138 children from the cohort 2019 have passed the 2023 examination. You said yourself there were 192...

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: 192.

Mr X. L. Duval: ...of which 54 are resits. So, from the 2019 cohort, – it is arithmetic – it is 138. Now, my question, Mr Speaker, Sir, is this: the basis for the Extended Programme and for the Nine-Year Schooling was “No Child Left Behind”. Now, in the 2018 and 2019 cohorts, including the resits, 6,477 children originally joined, 6,214 have failed, 260, including the resits, have passed. This is why, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are saying it is not the children who have failed, it is the system that has failed them. It is inappropriate. The system is vastly inappropriate for these children.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I just underline one thing. We have just stated that our aim is to ensure that all children do get the opportunity to get the nine years of continuous basic education, that is, to get the foundation for them to build on their future learning. And, talking about figures, if you are going to tell us so many students entered the

system and so many failed, I am going to say that we have given the opportunity for all these students to carry on with their schooling, to get the opportunity to sit in school for nine years and to learn, to develop their abilities, their skills, and to ensure that they get the knowledge required for them to be able to carry on with their future training. We are not simply talking about certification, Mr Speaker, Sir.

What are they proposing? That we take children of 10 or 11 years and ask them to go for technical training? And what type of technical training? I have just stated that today, when we talk about technical training, we are talking about technology-based technical training. When you send someone to study plumbing, this learner has to have a good grounding of science, should be able to figure out what pressure difference can do. So many different concepts have to be acquired before launching, before embarking on such training. We are not talking about *al fer enn ti zafer* or *al bat enn ti peu* ou *al faire un peu de jardinage*. No! We want our young students, our young learners to come out of the system, to learn about new agri-tech, to learn about new technology, to be able to act at another level. When we look at the construction industry, when we look at the various other spheres of life, things have changed.

Technology has pervaded all spheres of life and we need to ensure that all our children, all our learners do get the opportunity to enter the world of work, and we need to make them future-ready. The hon. Leader of the Opposition will be aware that the people at the OECD, the experts are saying that the jobs of tomorrow have not been created yet, that 80% of the jobs of tomorrow do not exist yet. So, how do we prepare our young people? How do we prepare our learners? We train them, we give them the skills, we give them the right knowledge for them to be able to cope later on. They have to adapt to the evolving world, and this is what we are trying to do, Mr Speaker, Sir.

We will have to give time to the Extended Programme and I have just stated, these students sitting for the Extended Programme today did not receive any additional support when they were in the primary sector. When we came in in 2014, we have recruited massively; support teachers, holistic teachers in large numbers to ensure that children in primary are properly supported, that they not only develop their academic...

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, surely I can...

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: ...knowledge, they have other support.

Mr X. L. Duval: ...have some supplementary questions. Isn't that normal? Is the Minister just going to use it as a platform to explain her deficiencies in her system and no chance to ask a supplementary question, Mr Speaker, Sir?

(Interruptions)

Is that how we are going to run a PNQ?

Mr Speaker: Did you notice the way you asked your question?

Mr X. L. Duval: Hmmm!

: There was not even a question; it was a statement. Minister, continue!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, what I am trying to put forward is that we have a system which is trying to help and cater for all our learners, that these students who are finding it hard to complete the Extended Programme (EP) are students who had never received any support earlier. We have come up with a system, providing support, and we are hoping and we know that as the years pass on, there will be fewer students in such situation, and we are trying to ensure that each and every child, as we said, gets the right support; no one being left behind.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, are you going to give some additional time?

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Aret koz boku do!*

Mr Toussaint: *Ala plaigne la!*

(Interruptions) **Mr**

Speaker: Do your work, I'll do my work!

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: Are you going to give some additional time... **Mr**

Speaker: Do your work, I'll do my work!

Mr X. L. Duval: ...because the Minister has taken all the time at the moment!

Mr Speaker: Do your work, I'll do my work!

Mr X. L. Duval: Okay, let us see how you do your work!

(Interruptions) **The**

nation is watching you!

Mr Speaker: The nation is watching you also!

Mr X. L. Duval: The nation is watching you!

(Interruptions)

You are aware of that!

(Interruptions) **Mr**

Speaker: The nation is watching...

Mr X. L. Duval: You are aware of that!

: Do not threaten!

(Interruptions)

Please, do not threaten the Speaker! You do not have the right to threaten a Speaker!

Mr X. L. Duval: I am telling you the nation... **Mr**

Speaker: Apologise for that!

Mr X. L. Duval: I am not apologising!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: If you do not apologise, I will not allow you a question!

(Interruptions) Apologise

first!

Mr X. L. Duval: I will not apologise because the nation is watching you!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: You do not have the right... **Mr X.**

L. Duval: You should be aware of that!

Mr Speaker: ...to threaten a Speaker!

(Interruptions) **Mr X. L.**

Duval: I am not threatening you! I am telling you!

Mr Speaker: You are threatening the Speaker!

Mr X. L. Duval: It is a fact!

Mr Speaker: You have to apologise!

(Interruptions) You

decide!

Mr X. L. Duval: I am not apologising! It is a fact!

Mr Speaker: And there is no question!

Mr X. L. Duval: I will continue with my question. It is a fact... **Mr**

Speaker: I will stop your mic!

Mr X. L. Duval: ...that the nation is ashamed of you.

: I will stop your mic! No question if you do not apologise!

(Interruptions)

Mr Toussaint: *Maye, maye, maye!*

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: *Li menace tout dimoune tous les jours !*

Mrs Luchmun Roy: The nation is watching you!

An hon. Member: *Aler, aler, aler!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: So, Madam Clerk, could you move to the next item? Prime Minister's Question Time!

An hon. Member: The nation is watching you!

Dr. Boolell: *La honte sa !*

An hon. Member: You too!