

2024.04.16.

4.16 Deputy M.B. Andrews of the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning regarding new Skills Development Fund (OQ.53/2024)

Following the adoption of P.116/2022, will the Minister advise what progress, if any, has been made in creating a new Skills Development Fund, and how many individuals, if any, have benefited from this fund?

Deputy R.J. Ward (The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning):

Again, from the Government Plan that we have inherited on pages 98 and 99, it does say the Government will establish a Skills Development Fund that uses both the current budgets for this purpose, and contributions from philanthropists - I got that word out - 2(1)(e)s, et cetera. To avoid delay, in 2024 this will form part of the C.Y.P.E.S. (Children, Young People, Education and Skills) departmental heads of expenditure.

[11:45]

I understand that a formal fund was not established by the previous Government for specific reasons in terms of it being simpler to not do so. I cannot account for the actions of the previous Government; however, a new Skills Development Fund, formerly the Business Licensing Skills Fund, was established at the beginning of 2024 to meet the objectives of a Skills Development Fund and monies have been put aside for a number of projects. To answer the second part of the question, and I have highlighted the answer separately, nearly 50 individuals have already benefited and it is anticipated there will be more applications and the delivery of sector-specific training courses during the remainder of the year, so there have been some actions taken.

4.16.1 Deputy M.B. Andrews:

Does the Minister envisage any changes will be made for future years to the Skills Development Fund to provide Islanders with upskilling and reskilling opportunities?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Yes, I would say to the Deputy one of the things I tried to add to the remit was this notion of lifelong learning because we have to address that, and so this will become incorporated into a much wider piece of work into lifelong learning. Indeed, having separate funds does show that we are separating this notion away from our everyday work. I wonder whether it should be integral to what we do in terms of education, not just up to the age of 18, although that is still not compulsory but we are working on that, but beyond into the lifelong learning so that we skill people on this Island as is appropriate for need. I will say to the Deputy in terms of the individual accounts that was mentioned and amended in 7 parts of it, my political steer on that would be that we have to be very careful with that. Just like nursery funding, let us make sure that provision is in place before we set up funds, give people false promises which then they cannot act upon. I do not think that is good for any Government to do that, but we need to be realistic and take on the difficult challenges and put the training in place first.