

2.14 Deputy K.C. Lewis of the Minister for Economic Development regarding the number of licences issued to companies to employ non-locals:

With 1,290 people in Jersey registered as unemployed, will the Minister be reducing the number of licences issued to companies to employ non-locals and, if not, why not?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean (Minister for Economic Development):

If I may, could I ask my Assistant Minister to deal with this matter.

Connétable L. Norman of St. Clement (Assistant Minister for Economic Development - rapporteur):

The concise answer to the question is yes; the marginally less concise answer is yes, I will and indeed have already done so.

2.14.1 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I thank the Assistant Minister for the reply. In future will the Minister and Assistant Minister undertake to work more closely with the Minister for Social Security to reduce this number drastically?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I do not know if we can work more closely because in recent months the Minister's Rottweiler - the Assistant Minister - has been invited as an adviser to the Migration Advisory Group meetings where the majority of decisions are made and, quite honestly, there would be no chance of ... well, put it this way, every application is dealt with with extreme rigour in the presence of the Assistant Minister and there is an excellent close, almost daily, working relationship between the Population Office and the Social Security Department to ensure that the majority of employment opportunities do go to people with local qualifications.

2.14.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

First my apologies, through you, to the Chamber for missing my opportunity to ask the question of the Minister for Health and Social Services previously; I do apologise. To follow up with the Assistant Minister, is the Minister content that his reduced grant for enterprise and business support is sufficient to grow the economy and bring this number of unemployed down?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Absolutely. It is very important that we work closely with business, because if we are going to increase employment - reduce unemployment - it is important that we support businesses as much as we reasonably can in the current economic situation.

2.14.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

If I may, can the Assistant Minister inform Members what initiatives he is currently engaged in to grow the economy?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

That is a question which I think should be directed to the Minister at the appropriate time. We are talking about the Regulation of Undertakings and Development here which I have particular responsibility for.

2.14.4 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

While delighted that the Assistant Minister has taken steps, I would like to ask if he would furnish us with the statistics demonstrating how that has occurred and whether or not he accepts 1,290 people registered as unemployed is not the 3 per cent number which is 1,700 that are currently unemployed. Will he also, please, cross-reference with the Minister for Home Affairs who has currently issued something in the region of 500 work permits?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

My understanding is the current official unemployment figures produced by the Social Security Department is close to 1,300 but to give the Deputy some statistics, over the last 9 months 365 permissions for licences for non-locally qualified staff were removed from existing licences and in addition another 265 additional non-locally qualified staff were refused when they were applied for by businesses. Of course I am always happy to discuss issues with the Minister for Home Affairs.

2.14.5 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

On a point of clarification, may I just explain to the Assistant Minister, the number I referred to 3 per cent is the recognised number of unemployed, not the number of registered people. The number of recognised unemployed in Jersey is 1,700 at the moment not 1,290.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I accept what the Deputy says.

2.14.6 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Can the Assistant Minister confirm that under the immigration policy and the new licensing, as housing qualifications come down to 10 years the non-local requirement for working is going to go up each year to 10 years so there is parity? Is this completely now abandoned or will the Minister, because of the unemployment problem, look into raising the non-locally qualified year-on-year until we are 10 years on both?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Yes, currently our 'qualified for employment purposes' is having been resident in the Island for 5 years. The Migration Advisory Group have recommended to the Chief Minister that that should remain. Do not forget we do have to support business. If unemployment is to go down we have to encourage businesses to become economically successful. We do not want to put too many burdens, too many hurdles in the way of businesses to increase their business and therefore create more employment opportunities locally.

The Bailiff:

I am sorry, Deputy, there are others who want to ask questions. Senator Perchard.

2.14.7 Senator J.L. Perchard:

The Assistant Minister said that his department has already taken action to reduce the number of licences issued to businesses and that one would assume should have filtered through or be filtering through into unemployment levels. Could the Minister estimate as to what the levels of unemployment would be had this action not been taken?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

During the past 12 months I can tell the Senator that locally qualified employment in the private sector rose by 390 while non-locally qualified employment fell by 420. I am sure the Senator can do his sums.

2.14.8 Deputy C.F. Labey of Grouville:

Could the Connétable indicate what percentage the non-local qualified employment figure has been reduced by and is the effect of his actions immediate?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Yes, the actions are immediate and the percentage reduction in the number of non-locally qualified people in employment is about 3 per cent over the last 9 months.

2.14.9 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

With 1,290 people registered unemployed and a potential 1,700 people unemployed generally, there will always be an element - usually for health reasons - who cannot work, but the overwhelming majority are actively seeking employment. The Minister for Economic Development grants licences to companies to employ non-local labour and the Minister for Social Security pays out millions of pounds a year in benefits to local unemployed. Does the Minister not see the opportunity here to reduce this number drastically?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Drastically or significantly and this is what we are attempting to do but of course there has to be a match between the skills required and the skills available. I think we are certainly finding in the construction industry they were having some difficulty with finding people with the appropriate skills and hospitality has always been traditionally a sector where it has been difficult for employers to find people with local qualifications who wish to make a career in that area. We are certainly working with Social Security to try and resolve those particular issues but there will also be a need, I have got no doubt, for a proportion of the working population to be non-qualified in the sense that we use that phrase.

The Bailiff:

Very well, question 18 falls as Deputy Shona Pitman is malade, so we move to question 19 which Deputy Le Claire will ask of the Minister for Treasury and Resources