

3.15 The Connétable of St. Mary of the Chief Minister regarding compliance with the requirements of Control of Housing and Work cards:

It follows on particularly well from the last one, I think. With the introduction of control of housing and work cards, what steps, if any, are being taken to assist long-term residents to comply with the new requirements whose employment or contribution history may not be continuous due, perhaps, to departmental procedural reasons? Will arrangements be made to assist students seeking holiday jobs to obtain their necessary confirmations of attendance centrally from Education, Sport and Culture Department records?

Senator P.F. Routier (Assistant Chief Minister - rapporteur):

I thank the Constable for this question. I think it is very timely. Customer service is an absolute priority and of the 1,500 cards issued so far the substantial majority were issued straight away. However, we must have proper controls and checks in place so that entitled cards are only issued to those with 10 years' residence. We enacted a range of measures to achieve the best service we can, including pre-qualifying nearly 40,000 individuals within the system in advance of the new law coming into place. The Population Department officers have met with the E.S.C. (Education, Sport and Culture) Department and Social Security to supplement the processes that we had in place on day one. I can say that with proper safeguards we expect to have a process in place in time for when the schools break up. This will enable cards to be issued immediately to students when E.S.C. confirms to Social Security that the student is entitled.

3.15.1 The Connétable of St. Mary:

I am grateful to the Minister and interested especially to hear about the pre-qualification. I have had several people contacting me since my question went in. The Minister is aware that my question arose because someone with 20 years-plus residence, a Jersey passport holder, a house owner with 4 children born and educated here, was given only a limited card because there were several months missing in their contributions, which had, in fact, been paid but returned by the department to them because of a procedural change. This person - and I am sure there are others because I have been contacted - felt the experience was so bad that they would have, if they had no children here, been on the next plane back to the United Kingdom. I just ask: is the Minister going to make someone available, a sort of one-stop-shop for these people who have a problem that can be identified in the department to be helped immediately to have their status confirmed if pre-authorisation has already been a target?

Senator P.F. Routier:

The departments have been working extremely hard in trying to get as many people pre-qualified as possible. I think they have done particularly well by getting 40,000 people pre-qualified. I am very sorry to hear about the experience that the person had that went into the department and I can only apologise if she was not satisfied with the service. We have bolstered the team within the Social Security Department. We have employed additional staff and the person who had particular expertise and knowledge about housing qualifications over many, many years is based at the Social Security Department and can troubleshoot for any particular individual case. These are early days. It has been a very, very difficult time for the staff to get things in place for day one and they are learning as they progress. I would like to put on record my sincere thanks to all of the staff, and I am sure this Assembly would want to join me in thanking the staff who have worked extremely hard in the early days of implementation. They are committed to provide an excellent service and I hope that the public will be able to receive that service. If there are any particular problems there is a dedicated person there to help resolve them.

3.15.2 Deputy C.F. Labey of Grouville:

Is the Minister aware that some people are being turned away from Social Security because they are unable to prove that they have been here, notwithstanding the fact that they take their birth

certificates, for 10 years? In one particular case I am aware of, the person and the school was unable to produce the relevant records so they were sent to the archive where they had to pay a fee of £30 to access their records. There is some work to be done, I would say, but having said that I think that they have done a very good job to have issued 40,000 cards so far. But I think there is a bit more work to be done here.

Senator P.F. Routier:

I thank the Deputy for the question. First I would just like to pick up that I think she may have misheard me or misunderstood what I said about 40,000 cards being issued. There are 1,500 cards which have been issued. There are 40,000 within the system that have been identified as being people who are entitled, so if those other people come into the department they can automatically get their card immediately. The issue with regard to a person taking along the right information to prove that they have been qualified is very important. I think Members would be probably pretty aggrieved if we did not do appropriate checks and issued cards to entitled people who were not entitled. I think it is a 2-edged sword here. We really need to do those checks very, very carefully and there is very clear information on the website of the sort of information that people need to take along to the department to ensure that they have the right information there. I know it can be an issue for them if people have gone to the department and been turned away because they have not had sufficient information, but we have to do those checks carefully. We are not going to issue cards for people who are not entitled.

3.15.3 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

I am deciding which way to go. I will follow what the Deputy of Grouville has said. Does the Assistant Minister think it is right that local people who have to go and get certain documents, perhaps from the archive, because their school has closed down or something and the documentation is no longer there, they will have to pay £30 simply to go back to another Government department, which is the Population Office, in order for that department to say: "Yes, you are a Jersey person"? Does the Assistant Minister think that is fair or does the Assistant Minister think we should introduce some sort of reimbursement system for these local people who have absolutely every right to be here?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I am concerned that somebody has not been able to get their information from the Education Department. That is the resolution which we have tried to resolve over the last day or so to ensure that people can get access to their school records, and hopefully that is now resolved. If somebody has not been able to get their records from the Education Department and gone somewhere else, I find it unfortunate because the second line of recommendation we would make to somebody who was not able to get their school records is that they would get personal references from any member of the community, as they used to do for ordinary housing qualifications, just to get somebody who has known them for a long time, sufficient years, to just write to the department to clarify that. I think going to the archives was probably a step they need not have done. There were other options for them which would not have cost them anything.

3.15.4 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

In that case, given that I know people have approached the Population Department, will the Assistant Minister ensure that when people approach the Population Department that these other methods are made absolutely clear to these people so that they do not have to go down that route? Because people have found themselves in that situation where they have had to go to the archive to get their school records, for example.

Senator P.F. Routier:

It is already very clear on the information which is in the public domain about the processes. Nowhere do we say about going to the archive department on our literature at all. It just talks about getting primary school, school holidays ... or family, friends and neighbours, or a Connétable of the Parish would do it for free.

3.15.5 Deputy J.H. Young:

Sorry, I apologise to the Assistant Minister, I may have missed it, but could he tell us is there some kind of appeals or special procedure for those people that are not able to get themselves properly registered on the grounds of missing information?

Senator P.F. Routier:

Yes, as has been always the case under the old system of trying to get housing qualifications, it is a matter of just being able to prove and then a decision would be made.

3.15.6 Deputy J.H. Young:

Can I ask for clarification? Where do they go to then if that is the situation when they come to the position where they cannot get anywhere with this?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I cannot recall a circumstance where that has been an issue. It is always dealt with within the Population Department.

The Bailiff:

Very well, that brings questions ... oh, I do beg your pardon, I am so sorry, Connétable.

3.15.7 The Connétable of St. Mary:

I would like to say you have cut me off at the knees, but if I get any shorter I will disappear completely. [Laughter]

[16:15]

I would just like to focus on the second part of my question and I know the Minister has said that arrangements are in hand to try and get some sort of centralised registry up. It is just that I cannot reiterate strongly enough ... I have been contacted by someone from the recent careers fair to say that when a candidate comes for a job, if they cannot get their card immediately and the next candidate can, that person is going to lose out on a job. It is essential that we streamline this, especially for the youngsters who are coming out of school and they have got that resource immediately. This should be something that we have all done as a part of their leaving package from their secondary school, probably, to target that straight away. I think that is really important. Can the Minister assure me that that will be taken on board? Also just to say that, like him, I have got no qualms with the quality and the services given by his staff. I just hope that we can get the procedures that they are working through streamlined to enable them to do their job more satisfactorily. Thank you.

Senator P.F. Routier:

I could not agree more with the Connétable about how essential this is to have this in place and we recognised that over the last few weeks and the department have been working exceptionally hard to resolve it. In part of that investigation in the initial days of looking into this we were advised that it is the duty of a secondary school to issue a student with a letter when they leave school. But I believe that may not have been happening. But I do think that this is something that the secondary schools should do for each student that leaves school.