

3.11 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Social Security regarding zero-hour contracts: [1(275)]

In light of the latest labour market survey, will the Minister advise what proportion of jobs advertised through her department are zero-hour contracts; how many jobseekers, if any, have been placed in such jobs; and how many sanctions, if any, have been issued for those leaving zero-hour jobs?

Deputy S.J. Pinel of St. Clement (The Minister for Social Security):

The labour market survey, published at the end of last week, shows continued strong performance in the labour market and the wider economy. The positive increase in private sector employment was predominantly due to increases in the number of full-time employees, and the number of zero-hour contracts has remained flat. Jobs advertised through Social Security are placed on the Jobs in Jersey website directly, based on information that employers submit. We do not hold robust information on how many of the roles advertised are zero-hour contracts, as many employers advertise without specifying the contract type. Since the start of the year, 85 of the 598 job starts in Back to Work have been zero-hour contracts, providing a positive first step into employment for many. However, details about types of employment contracts for individuals, who give up work, is not recorded. However, regardless of contract type, it remains a fundamental aspect of Income Support that anyone who walks out of paid employment is subject to a penalty if they try to claim benefit straightaway.

3.11.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I am surprised that the Minister has admitted that she does not know such factors. I find it quite astonishing that the Minister does not know what proportion of jobs advertised through her department are zero-hours contracts, because she does not specify whether they are full-time, part-time or zero-hours. Surely, does the Minister not agree, she should know this data and that, similarly, she should know how many people, who try and make a go of zero-hours contracts, find it too difficult and leave that work and are subject to sanction as a result? Why does the Minister not investigate those 2 factors and come up with some robust detail?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

As I said, the details are not recorded of the contracts that are made available, because it is down to the employer and the employee. As the Deputy will well know, the next thing on the agenda after the family-friendly rights for the Employment Forum will be looking into zero-hour contracts, as was requested by the Scrutiny Panel.

3.11.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

Would the Minister agree that it should be something that she is interested in finding out about: why people leave jobs, who are potentially subject to sanction in her department? Does she think that could be recorded automatically from now on?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

When somebody leaves a job of their own accord, which they have been helped to get into by Back to Work, or Actively Seeking Work, if they leave, because they just do not wish to be there, then there is a sanction applied after several warnings. It would not be applied in the case of a redundancy.

3.11.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

I thank the Minister for that answer. It does not address the question, though. Essentially, should she be recording why people leave those jobs; at least the reason they give for having

left, which could be the work is too hard, it is a zero-hours contract, or simply: “I do not like the job”, irrespective of whether that does entail a future sanction.

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

There is only so much recording the department can do and, as I said in the previous answer, that we will be looking into the whole episode of zero-hours contracts after the family-friendly rights.

[11:00]

3.11.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Congratulations to the Minister for echoing the Minister for Health in saying it is not his responsibility. Surely, it is the responsibility of Social Security to monitor the prevalence of zero-hours contracts, given that they are somewhat contentious and certainly to monitor and investigate how many people get sanctioned as a result of not being able to cope with the terms and conditions involved in a zero hours contract? I will ask again, will the Minister engage to record this information so that we know what we are talking about when we come to investigating further?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

I said in my opening remarks that, since the start of the year, 85 of the 598 job starts have been zero-hour contracts, so we do monitor the amount of zero-hour contracts and the reasons why people leave work is a separate issue.

The Bailiff:

We are unable to deal with question 13 because Deputy Higgins is *en défaut* and so we come to Questions to Ministers without notice. The first question period is the Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture.