

2020.06.02

**4 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier of the Minister for Social Security regarding use of the local workforce during the Covid-19 pandemic (OQ.147/2020):**

Will the Minister advise what strategy is in place, or is to be put in place, to assist with the downturn in employment markets as a result of the COVID-19 crisis in particular in relation to the retraining and redeployment of the local workforce?

**Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier (The Minister for Social Security):**

This question is going to be answered by my Assistant Minister, Deputy Maçon.

**Deputy J.M. Maçon (Assistant Minister for Social Security - *rapporteur*):**

I thank the Deputy for this question and this area is of course departmental. Back to Work and Skills Jersey work closely together in this area. As the Government moves into the recovery phase a key priority for future economic well-being is to support Islanders back into employment as quickly as possible. Longer term strategies to maintain the skilled workforce for the future will be developed as part of the work undertaken by the Economic Recovery Political Oversight Group. Throughout the COVID period Back to Work teams have been supporting people who are out of work and this will continue as we move into recovery. Back to Work also provides support for retraining to get people into new employment. I am pleased to also say that the co-funded payroll scheme is helping Islanders in work and obviously return those displaced back into employment. From June, businesses can also recruit individuals who have been out of work for longer than 6 months and making a claim under the co-funded payroll scheme.

**3.4.1 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Are there any industries which are currently short of labour who would normally use seasonal workers? Would the Assistant Minister advise what plans, if any, to provide further encouragement to the businesses to employ local people, including those who might otherwise be claiming income support?

**Deputy J.M. Maçon:**

This is where the cross-departmental element comes into this. Both Back to Work and Skills Jersey are forming what is called the Skills Response Forum. This is currently and actively seeking intelligence from the business community to identify where skill gaps within the labour market are required, where courses may be required to develop in order to shift people from one industry into another. That work is currently being undertaken. There are monthly reports being produced by Skills Jersey in order to understand the requirements of the industry. For example, we know there are aspects where in construction and social care there is growing demand for people to go in their jobs. In the legal and finance area it is more of a status quo model. What does seem to be a rising concern is what will be available for school leavers and young people, and that is where the departments will need to concentrate the areas of development.

**3.4.2 Deputy G.J. Truscott of St. Brelade:**

The Back to Work initiative has been invaluable over the years, particularly since the last financial crash. It was so successful that we cut the funding while I was Assistant Minister. Can the Assistant Minister now advise whether they are considering bolstering the Back to Work initiative with extra funding?

**Deputy J.M. Maçon:**

That will be for the political oversight group to make that bid going forward. As of yet, it has not met so I cannot confirm that that has specifically been looked at. Of course we will be looking at many bids. The other aspect of course is to remember the type of recession and as we still understand the situation, some businesses will be able to get on their feet, some will require more support. So in the range of packages of economic recovery I would expect and I would hope that the Council of Ministers will look at retraining packages, whether that is through the Back to Work team or through the Skills team. I should also point out of course that Highlands College are doing a huge amount of work as well.

### **3.4.3 Deputy J.H. Perchard:**

I apologise if I missed this in the initial response. The original question asked what strategy is or would be put in place to deal with the downturn in the employment market. Did the Assistant Minister state that the strategy will be developed by the political oversight group for economic recovery or the Economic Council?

### **Deputy J.M. Maçon:**

It is a bit half and half. Because of the previous recession we do have some pillars of strategy already existing in place and that is obviously through things like Advance Plus, what is being done under Skills Jersey, so that aspect of strategy is already there. The Economic Political Oversight Group will be developing further policy. So the answer to the Deputy's question is both, and I hope that clarifies the situation.

### **3.4.4 Deputy J.H. Perchard:**

Is the Assistant Minister saying that both the political oversight group for economic recovery and the Economic Council will be responsible for strategising regarding a downturn in employment market?

### **Deputy J.M. Maçon:**

It is my understanding that the political accountability will reside with the political oversight group.

### **3.4.5 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier:**

In answer to the questions the Assistant Minister has talked about Highlands courses. Is it not the case that efficiency savings have been proposed for some Highlands courses on cost recovery grounds and would that not hinder the process of training up a new workforce?

### **Deputy J.M. Maçon:**

Yes, and certainly my Minister for Education has made exactly that argument. Certainly any progression on the areas of efficiency savings at Highlands College have not progressed and that is part of the argument we need to make around the Council of Minister's table.

### **3.4.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Will he ensure that such cost recovery charges do not proceed in future?

### **Deputy J.M. Maçon:**

We need to do an examination of the specific courses. So for some cases, some of the financial sector courses, for example, perhaps there is a case that costs could go up there. Other areas, for example, social care where we desperately need more development, I think that there is an argument that we should not be doing that. What we are keen to do is to get that feedback from industry to understand their position but certainly we will be making the argument that there are

some course rises where it just would not be any common sense to increase fees at the moment. But the argument I suppose is it will take a sectorial response.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

So that is yes and no?

**Deputy J.M. Maçon:**

Correct.

**3.4.7 Deputy K.F. Morel:**

Could the Assistant Minister please explain how political accountability will rest with the political oversight group given that the political oversight group clearly contains members of the public who are not accountable to the States Assembly? So why does political accountability reside with the P.O.G. (political oversight group) and not with the Minister?

**Deputy J.M. Maçon:**

Perhaps I have misunderstood how it works. It was my understanding that the political oversight group would be made of Ministers and therefore there would be that political accountability there.

**3.4.8 Deputy K.F. Morel:**

The political oversight group has been named and while Ministers are on it there are also members of the public.

[10:15]

Perhaps the Assistant Minister could help us understand how members of the public will be held accountable.

**Deputy J.M. Maçon:**

I do not know exactly how the governance of that group will work. I do not know whether these individuals will be, for example, non-exec members, how the voting aspects will work within that body but I would imagine that regardless the politicians on that group will remain politically accountable.

**3.4.9 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Seeing as the Assistant Minister has responsibility for training and H.E. (higher education), can I ask him for his vision on what he would like to see as the response to the downturn in the economy and the retraining of our workforce accordingly?

**Deputy J.M. Maçon:**

I will be making those comments during the in-committee debate later today where I have more freedom and it is not just restricted within the confines of this question.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Could he give us *précis* perhaps or some idea of how that links in with the political oversight group?

**Deputy J.M. Maçon:**

As I say, I will reserve my position for the in-committee debate.

**Deputy K.F. Morel:**

Can I raise a point of order, Sir? The answers given to Deputy Ward just now were clearly not answers to the question, they were actually a refusal to answer the question. I do not understand how that sits within Standing Orders. Essentially the Deputy has no right to reserve his answer.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

The obligation is to give a concise and relevant answer under Standing Order 65. I think that is right, and I can understand that in this context, Deputy Maçon, you feel entitled to reserve your position until the debate, which Members are going to enjoy later on today or some time tomorrow, but the Standing Orders do require you, when asked a question to answer concisely and relevantly obviously in relation to a matter that is within your responsibility. I think in the circumstances, and bearing in mind that answers are supposed to be brief, you ought to give a brief summary as requested by Deputy Ward.

**Deputy J.M. Maçon:**

But that also means I have to answer within the areas that I have political responsibility. There are things where you need to do stuff in Economic Development which would not fit within my political responsibility remit so I am confined.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

Yes, I agree that you are confined to matters within your responsibility but you still must answer the question as opposed to decline to answer the question.

**Deputy J.M. Maçon:**

Very well. As I say, I would like to see further support for training courses, short-term courses, part-time courses that react and respond to industry need.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

Is that all you wish to say?

**Deputy J.M. Maçon:**

Yes, thank, you, Sir.

**3.4.10 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

The question in time and answers now showed clearly that there is a confusion about political responsibility and accountability. This question was submitted first to the Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture and transferred to the Assistant Minister to answer. Would the Assistant Minister go back and come back to the Assembly so that we will have a clear understanding who would be responsible politically to develop a strategy to assist with the downturn of the employment market?

**Deputy J.M. Maçon:**

Yes, I give the Deputy that undertaking.