

22.03.01

12 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of the Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture regarding a 4-day working week (OQ.38/2022)

Will the Minister advise what work, if any, he or his department have undertaken to research a potential trial of a 4-day working week in Jersey; and what potential benefits, if any, have been assessed, including in relation to productivity and well-being?

Senator L.J. Farnham (The Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture):

The 4-day working week trials in other jurisdictions such as that undertaken in Iceland showed that a reduction in working hours had no negative effect on productivity and in many cases productivity improved. Participants in this trial also reported a better work/life balance. Other similar trials such as the pilot scheme in the U.K. are currently taking place. Improving productivity and economic well-being is a key objective of the work being undertaken as part of the Future Economy Programme. The outcomes of this programme are due to be published in the current term of the Government. While a 4-day week is not currently part of this work, I do expect it to form part of the conversation as this work develops. However, in any consideration of a 4-day working week, it will be important to fully understand the medium to long-term implications of such a move. We know that this may not be appropriate for all sectors, for example. Individual businesses will need to determine whether a reduced week would be of benefit to them. It is worth also mentioning, and we have all seen, the change to recent working habits now with the improvements to technology, which allow much more flexibility around people's livelihoods.

3.12.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

The Minister quotes many of the countries that I was about to quote to him, so I am pleased that he is aware of these. If he is supportive of some companies in Jersey perhaps trialling this, how would he see this working? I believe in the U.K. it is being run by academics and a campaign group. How would he see this working in Jersey if a trial does happen? Could any Government support be given to firms who wish to trial this?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

I would expect the work to be led primarily by the team working on the Future Economy Programme. I would certainly encourage businesses to take part in trials. Ultimately I would not seek to impose that upon a business but look for businesses that wish to volunteer to trial it. As for Government support, again it is a bit too early to tell, but I certainly would not rule it out because we want to make sure we explore every opportunity or every option to improve our economic well-being. So not a full answer to the Deputy, but I hope that gives an indication of the direction of travel.

3.12.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Since we want to make the maximum effort, how about the largest employer on the Island committing one of its departments, or many departments, to a 4-day week and experimenting by leading for a change.

Senator L.J. Farnham:

That is something I shall certainly bring up with the new chief executive officer, who I know will be wanting to improve the structure of the public sector. I know from working within the Government

that best practices around flexible working are also being encouraged. But I would certainly support the public sector leading the way wherever it is practicable to do so. But I do reserve my position, I want to make it clear, on the 4-day week at this stage because we do not know enough about it. But early indications from other jurisdictions suggest there is something in it.

3.12.3 Deputy C.S. Alves of St. Helier:

Is the Minister aware of any current employees within the public sector who are working 4-day weeks and, if not, would he be willing to undertake some work to see how many are currently working 4-day weeks and what effect that has on them and maybe collect some data around that?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

I am not aware of any businesses working to a strict 4-day week in their practices. I am aware of many businesses being extremely flexible with employees and giving employees leeway to work a set amount of hours over not a set period of days, so there are employers, some large, who are saying as long as you can complete your hours and the work allocated to you, there is complete flexibility over when that is done. Again, we will bring that up as part of the work on the Future Economy Programme. I am not sure how we would do that. I will undertake to speak with Jersey Business, who works closely with business. It might be quite straightforward for them to undertake some sort of a survey to see if they can get a flavour of what is going on, on that front.

3.12.4 Deputy C.S. Alves:

I did refer to the public employees within our public service because I am aware that there are some who do work 4-day weeks.

Senator L.J. Farnham:

I am not aware of that. But I am aware the same applies with many public sector employees being allowed and in fact encouraged to work flexibly to suit their own circumstances.

3.12.5 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Would the Minister report back to Members on his discussions with S.E.B. and Jersey Business as to the outcomes of those discussions please?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

I will.