

2024.04.30

3.10 Deputy K.M. Wilson of St. Clement of the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development regarding artificial intelligence in Jersey's economy (OQ.74/2024)

Will the Minister advise what approach, if any, the Government is taking to optimise the benefits of artificial intelligence in Jersey's economy?

Deputy K.F. Morel of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity (The Minister for Sustainable Economic Development):

It is a really interesting question because there is no question in my mind that artificial intelligence will be a key technology to helping the Island address its main economic challenges, especially around the issues of increasing the productivity of our economy but also many other areas. To fully benefit from artificial intelligence and optimise its benefits, at the moment we are focusing on the adoption of artificial intelligence as a tool by companies, particularly small and medium enterprises. We are also looking at the adaptation of our legislative framework where necessary to ensure a safe and innovative ecosystem. In that respect, I think we need to look towards places such as the European Union that have brought in a wide range of initiatives around that. Also we are focused on creating an environment where particularly innovative companies are able to develop artificial intelligence-based innovations that put Jersey at the forefront of technical innovation as part of our technology setup.

3.10.1 Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Thank you to the Minister for his answer; it is encouraging to hear. Could I ask the Minister whether he thinks there is going to be an impact on the Island's workforce and what he might do about this, how he will prepare the workforce for the introduction and development of A.I. (artificial intelligence) across the Island?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

There is no question that artificial intelligence has the capacity to create significant changes in the workforce and have significant impacts on the workforce, but these can be very positive in many different ways, freeing people up to focus on other, often more creative tasks than they are engaged in today. There is no question in my mind, financial services, legal profession, anywhere in the technology sector, the medical sector and the health sector, these are areas where you will find artificial intelligence both enabling greater processing and therefore creating greater evidence, particularly in the healthcare sector ... enabling greater analysis, is what I mean, of the situation in Jersey. In areas such as the financial and legal sectors, it could speed up and potentially have an impact on jobs in the administration areas of all those areas. There is a great deal written about the impact of artificial intelligence on employment and I do think it is something that, as we look back over history, whenever technology has come in and changed the workplace, we, as people who have moved on to engage in different jobs and adapt to those changes, there has not been a technology that has particularly put everyone out of work and then work not to be available afterwards, which is often the great fear of artificial intelligence. I subscribe to the view that jobs will change rather than jobs will disappear for ever.

3.10.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

We talk of A.I. as if it is something that is going to happen in the future, but of course we know that A.I. is already with us and it is just developing at an incredible rate. Does the Minister believe that Government is ready in terms of government structures but also the impact that artificial intelligence will have on government structures itself to make sure that we are all ready for those changes that it might bring about?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

I am not well placed to know whether Government as a whole is ready. What I do know is that Government is beginning to adopt the use of artificial intelligence in different areas. The use of tools such as those packaged with our existing Microsoft products that enable quicker processing of emails,

things like this, that is beginning to take place within Government. My impression, but it is only an impression, is that we as a Government have a long way to go before fully understanding how we could use artificial intelligence within the administration of the Island and the impacts that it could have, but I may be mistaken because I am not best placed to have that view.

3.10.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

In terms of the economy, we are often told that, and I suppose the economy and taxation, people pay taxes, not companies, generally in Jersey. If we are moving to a situation where there is more productivity but because of A.I. and artificial intelligence are doing some of the jobs, has any consideration been given to how we tax work that might be being done by A.I. and the profits that might be created through A.I. which might have been ending up in people's salaries before may not happen in the future? Has consideration been given to that?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Another fascinating question. Unfortunately, as taxation does not fall under my remit, I am not aware of any work that has been done in that area. The Minister for Treasury and Resources may be more aware of that but certainly I am not aware of any work in that area, but it is an interesting question and one that I believe as politicians the Assembly probably does need to think about.

3.10.4 Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Could I ask the Minister if he would give some consideration to some sort of a taskforce or policy think tank of some kind to explore all of the issues that have just been raised through these couple of questions?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Absolutely. We will be publishing the digital economy strategy next month, and part of that refers to artificial intelligence. I agree with the Deputy that having a range of minds looking at this would be a good idea. I do believe that in Jersey we have so many people who are already experts in this field or using artificial intelligence in different ways that we almost certainly have a lot of that expertise on-Island. I do think that is a good idea and I will look to progress that.