

3.10 Deputy T.A. Vallois of St. Saviour of the Minister for Economic Development regarding a delay in publishing a skills strategy, as agreed within Strategic Aim 4 of the economic growth and diversification strategy approved by the States Assembly in 2012:

Could the Minister advise why there has been a delay in publishing a skills strategy, as agreed within Strategic Aim 4 of the economic growth and diversification strategy, approved by the States Assembly last year and how much of the allocated £0.75 million has been expended”

Senator A.J.H. Maclean (The Minister for Economic Development):

I respond to this question as former Chair of the Skills Executive who approved the draft skills strategy, to which the Deputy refers, last year. However, given the importance of skills development in tackling the consequences of the current difficult economic issues, it is important that this strategy completes a rigorous States due diligence process, which has resulted, unfortunately, in the delay in the publication to which the Deputy refers. Nevertheless, while this process is completed it has not stopped the progression of the essential skills agenda to ongoing programmes such as the historical apprenticeship scheme, the Undergraduate Internship programme and Enterprise Education, plus the new Trackers apprenticeship scheme run by Education, Sport and Culture, which continued to be delivered under the supervision of the Skills Jersey Board. To date approximately 10 per cent of the Economic Development allocated budget for skills in 2013 has been expended, although I would correct the Deputy that the figure is not in fact £0.75 million, in fact it is £588,000.

3.10.1 Deputy T.A. Vallois:

Could the Minister explain what that rigorous process is?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

Most recently the strategy went to the Council of Ministers who felt that further economic advice would be valuable in terms of determining the final shape of the strategy and so it has gone to the Economic Adviser. We hope to have that feedback fairly shortly and be in a position, I understand, for the publication.

3.10.2 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Can the Minister tell us that obviously you do not develop a skills strategy in a vacuum, we know there are certain skills that are essential for all jobs but which direction do you see the economy going in the future and which skills are you going to be training-up the population to do? In other words, can you tell us what your vision is ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Through the Chair.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Through the Chair, could the Minister tell us the vision the Council of Ministers have for the future of our economy and the skills that we require for it?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

That was a wide-ranging question. Clearly, first of all, the Deputy is right. There needs to be a connection between what business requires and the skills that the Government feels should be put in place. That was the purpose for the introduction of the Skills Board and the Skills Executive, recognising that more than one department was involved in the delivery of effective programmes to support this area. In terms of which skills are going to be required, largely, as I have said, that is going to be guided by what enterprises are requiring. We are seeing now a lot of work, for example, of Digital Jersey and their tag groups that are looking at areas that are going to be applicable to the development of a digital economy, which we are working on. We

are trying to tie-in the necessary skills base to be able to support that, as one example, but it is pretty broad-based. We are seeing apprentices going into health. We are seeing care assistants. We are seeing a pretty broad-based application of the skills agenda.

3.10.3 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Coming back to the idea of the diversification strategy, besides Digital Jersey, what other skills do you think are required by our population, bearing in mind that the Council of Ministers' policy on diversification and the areas that they think we should be going into?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

It is not just skills, it is also upskilling that is important. We have seen some very good work happening with regard to hospitality, encouraging local people to go into hospitality and get appropriately trained and upskilled to take on those particular roles. One of the key elements of the strategy is trying to reduce the need for additional migration. What we are seeking to do is ensure that our local young people have the necessary skills. There is going to be quite a demand across a broad base of industries as we seek to diversify. We have seen some very interesting developments through inward investment, for example, with the cluster built up around the mining sector. That provides, in the future, opportunities for geology, other skills and examination results to be developed that would ensure that those activities can be undertaken on Island.

3.10.4 Deputy T.A. Vallois:

I, myself, find it unacceptable that it has taken to this point that we still do not have a skills strategy published. Could the Minister explain then for the Assembly, firstly, whether he believes it is acceptable where we are at the moment and whether he is still able to meet the target or meet the expectations within the economic growth and diversification strategy?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

I certainly do not find it acceptable that we have not published the strategy to date. No, it has fallen behind. It should have been published. Having said that, many of the initiatives and the direction in which the strategy is going and the activities are being undertaken at the moment. It is not as if nothing is happening at all in this very important area. There has been investment and that will continue to happen. I cannot really add very much more to that. I think the Deputy asked a second part of the question, so if she could perhaps repeat that.

Deputy T.A. Vallois:

The second part of the question was whether the Minister believes he is still able to meet the requirements under the economic growth and diversification strategy of Strategic Aim 4.

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

Is the Deputy so referring specifically to skills or just the economic growth and diversification strategy aims and objectives at key 4 that were referred to?

Deputy T.A. Vallois:

Strategic Aim 4 relates to, I think, about 4 different areas or 3 different areas and they have all had target datelines, which is why I am asking the Minister whether he believes he is still able to meet the requirements under that strategy.

The Deputy Bailiff:

There you have it, Minister, you are asked to address a variety of matters.

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

Yes, Sir, I realise that. All I can say is, yes, we are working hard in order to do that. It is more difficult than it was because it has slipped behind but I believe there is every opportunity to catch up. The skills accelerator, for example, which is one key element that is coming through on our skills strategy, is being progressed and I am very hopeful that that will be in a position to be launched shortly.