

4.10 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier of the Chief Minister regarding the recruitment and training of local residents:

Given the anticipated increase in construction activity, what steps if any is the Population Office taking to ensure that increasing demand for skilled labour in that industry will be met by increased recruitment and training of local residents rather than by immigration?

Senator I.J. Gorst (The Chief Minister):

It is essential that increased activity in the construction industry supports the employment of 'Entitled' and 'Entitled to work' people. The Population Office will prioritise local people and contractors through the use of the Control of Housing and Work (Jersey) Law. If specialist contractors are needed, time-limited licences will be issued wherever possible. We will continue to provide training and advice for jobseekers. The Back to Work team helped 258 jobseekers into the construction industry in 2013 and the Trackers scheme currently has 57 construction apprenticeships.

4.10.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Thank you. Could the Chief Minister inform the House what the actual policing of this will be and is he at the moment aware of the profile of the major companies involved? For example, is the profile one of apprenticeships and people moving up through the organisation or is the profile one largely of labour having been imported?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

This is part of the process that Members were made aware of of how we are going to try and deliver on policies over the next 2 years looking at exactly these profiles and bringing them more into alignment but if we take the industry overall or in the 2013 manpower return for June, it was employing 4,940 staff. Of that, 4,720 were Entitled or Entitled to work so it is making sure that when there is a growth back in that industry that that growth is populated by Entitled and Entitled to work. I received information from his own department in answer to this question that they are proposing 25 to 30 new construction apprenticeships during 2014. I do not think that that is ambitious enough. I think we are going to need to do more.

4.10.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does this mean an end to what is called short-term contracts in this particular area in construction where short-term meant up to 2 years wherein subcontractors or contractors could import labour almost willy-nilly?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

There are 2 sorts of licences here. Local companies are issued with licences every 3 years alongside other companies and obviously non-resident businesses apply for a licence for each contract and that is where the idea of subcontractors comes in. As I have said, it is making sure not only the local companies with their 3-year licences who are, I think it is fair to say, working closely with Social Security, with the Population Office and doing their part with regard to training. It is making sure that subcontractors' licences are appropriately controlled on a time-limited basis and that they support the overall purpose of the Population Office.

4.9.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

A supplementary if I may. Is the Chief Minister confident that when construction takes off, we have, let us say, the next 1,000 workers in the construction industry ready and waiting to go or will a proportion of those be imported inevitably because we have not got enough staff?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

As I said, the construction industry is currently engaged with Social Security. The number I gave out right at the top of this answer shows that they have been doing so over the last number of years but they know that they are committed to increasing specialist schemes, I suppose, to deal with construction. Let us be clear that the construction industry will not see a simple spike in activity. It will spike in activity over the next 2 or 3 years and I was talking to the new Housing Chairman about this only yesterday so we have got some latitude in time to do that. Social Security are bringing forward new schemes as we speak. I believe that we are going to see the same and greater results from those schemes and we have got to remember that some of the increase in construction is going to be driven by public sector spend. We already have in the procurement process, which the Skills Executive and Skills Board fought for, the need to provide local training opportunities for those tendering for States projects. So all those pieces of work are going to be aligned. They are going to be increased. As I have said, I think Trackers needs to get more people in and they need to be more ambitious in the number of apprenticeships that it is working with the Construction Council in delivering.

4.10.4 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

My concern is how is the Chief Minister going to deal with the “white van man” scenario that is going to arise here because presumably he is aware that it is not unusual for the construction industry to employ subcontractors for just a week or so of plaster or whatever and we also remember some time ago when Social Security decided to do a raid on the Waterfront but when they arrived, it was like a public holiday, everybody had gone and came back later that day. How is he going to monitor the situation and ensure that we do not have a large influx of immigrant workers who are not known to Social Security, do not pay I.T.I.S. (Income Tax Instalment Scheme) and so forth?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

That is one of the reasons that we have brought in the new law. Those individuals will now have to be appropriately recorded at the Social Security Department. They will have to have their new card and we will be checking up on employers and those who are making use of subcontractors to make sure that they are complying. We have got more people ... I see the Deputy next to the Deputy who asked the question appears to be nodding his head not in a favourable manner but he knows that more resources have been put in and he should be pleased about that because that is one of the issues that he has been banging on about for a number of years. Ministers have listened, the department has listened, and we are committed to making sure that a difference is made in this particular regard. It is important. I would just say that when I was Minister for Social Security, we did send people from time to time down to the harbour to check on “white van” people coming so that we could see a trend of what was happening.

4.10.5 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

The Chief Minister will not be surprised at the amount of scepticism in this House over the population policies and their ability to control in the past. As far as construction is concerned, we are told that, yes, the industry is expecting increased orders not least from the States. How much training has the Chief Minister and his Ministers engaged in in training proper plumbers, carpenters and all the others for the construction industry that we require over the last 2 or 3 years so that when the demand does come, it can be met from within the Island because the truth of the matter is if the demand comes faster than the training that you are talking about doing in the future, then you will immediately abandon this policy and allow anybody in to get the jobs done. Is that not the case?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Absolutely not. The Deputy knows that. If he was listening to my answer at the top of the question, he would know that we are absolutely committed to it. As I said, there are a number of apprenticeships that will be coming on-stream during 2014. No, the Deputy - I will not say on purpose - seems to be not remembering the numbers that I gave but we need to be more ambitious and that is absolutely right but I have no doubt and I am confident that that is exactly what Social Security, what the Education Department and what the Skills Executive are absolutely committed to. They were the ones that wanted to get training into the procurement for the States system in the first place. We have done it, we are starting to deliver. Sometimes it would be nice if the Deputy recognised the hard work that many members of staff are doing to deliver on what is his priority and what are Ministers' priorities as well.

4.10.6 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Supplementary. The Minister still really has not answered the question. What training has the Chief Minister and other Ministers done during the recession because it is a collective thing of the Council of Ministers? We have a situation where Social Security does a lifting course or a first aid course. Where is the real training going on not just a few apprenticeships but training for people for the industry? What is the Chief Minister going to do to try and deal with what will be a supply bottleneck of skilled workers when the recovery does come?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

That is the first time I have heard the Deputy in this Assembly in all the time that he has been elected to be positive about Jersey's future. **[Approbation]** I am absolutely ... in fact, I am perhaps overwhelmed that the Deputy now thinks that we are going to see an economic boom and I am pleased to be able to acknowledge his comments about the positive future that Jersey has. I would like to say to the Deputy perhaps he would like to go and visit the Minister for Social Security and see the great work that they are doing, the training that they are giving people. I said at the opening of the question 258 people entered construction in 2013. That does not happen by accident. That happens by a lot of hard work from the department and from those individuals who are out of work taking advantage of those training courses, of that investment, and getting into work. Perhaps he would like to go and visit the Education Department and see the work that they are doing with the Construction Council in getting people into apprenticeships, real apprenticeships, along the lines that the Deputy wants, builders, people into the construction industry.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

How many plumbers and carpenters?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Perhaps he would like to go up to Highlands and see the great work that is happening day in, day out on training people to get ...

The Bailiff:

You are going to give a concise answer to this?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I am, Sir. Perhaps he would like to go and see the work that is already being undertaken that we are expanding and increasing to deal with the issues that we know are around the corner.

4.10.7 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

There is a very big developer on a St. Saviour site who has a big sign saying: “£1 million spent on trainees and graduates” which is good but can the Chief Minister confirm that there will be required of each major contractor on the major States contracts that are now lining-up a training plan required and that it will be policed so that we do not follow the easy resort of immigration?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

It is somewhat ironic that the Deputy is asking me to intervene in his own department when he is in the position to do exactly that. I support his intervention. I hope that he will hold his department and the Skills Executive’s feet to the fire to ensuring that that is exactly the case. The Skills Executive, as I said earlier, already have successfully lobbied for ensuring training opportunities in States procurement processes and I hope that they will continue to do that and that there will be proper plans in place when those procurement contracts are being delivered upon and I have no reason to doubt that that is happening right now today.