

## **2.7 Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier of the Minister for Social Security regarding entitlements to a Job Seekers Allowance.**

You are popular today, Minister. Will the Minister outline how young jobseekers are presently advised of their entitlement to a jobseeker's allowance - I think this is around £80 per week - in their own right under the Income Support scheme and advise the Assembly whether this entitlement will be more widely publicised once the Skills Executive staff are based at the Social Security Department, which I also think starts today. Thank you, Sir.

### **Senator P.F. Routier (The Minister for Social Security):**

I have to say this is another one of these questions that I have a difficulty with because there is no such thing as a jobseeker's allowance, so I honestly do not know what the question is about.

#### **2.7.1 Deputy J.A. Martin:**

When questioning the Minister - and I have it on transcript - he referred to it as a jobseeker's allowance. It is an entitlement to children in the households who have left school, 16, 17, 18, who are unable to find a job. It is quite simple. The Minister, Sir, is being evasive. I have asked him about this question and I do know because children or young adults are coming to me and asking me: "Where do I go now? I have done an extra year at college" or: "I have just left school" and I say: "Well, you can go down, you get advice at the careers office", which now will be based at Social Security. You know in your own right, you are Income Support unit. I want to know who is telling the youngsters this because at the moment nobody is. Now I hope the Minister understands the question.

### **Senator P.F. Routier:**

Yes, thank you for that. I think that probably makes it a bit clearer, certainly. There is a jobseeker's allowance in the U.K. but there is not one in Jersey. We have our Income Support system which does support people with disabilities, it supports people who are looking for work, and if the Deputy is suggesting that that is the title of a particular section of Income Support ... we have no sort of literature or anything about jobseeker's allowances. What we have is a benefit within Income Support which is available to people who are in the process of finding work. So if we are focusing on that, fair enough, I can understand that is what the question is about. With regard to any benefits within Income Support, we have leaflets within our department and we are happy for people to come and apply for them. Certainly if the people coming into the Skills Executive, which started work last year but only officially opened last night, the people will be coming in and being in the same place. It is obviously going to be a lot easier for them to have a direct contact and be shown from one section of the building to the other to get income support if it is appropriate for them, certainly. So I am sorry if I did not pick up the question in the first place, but that is how it was written and I could not follow what was being asked originally.

#### **2.7.2 Deputy J.B. Fox:**

Would the Minister be able to provide greater publicity on exactly what is available? In the last 48 hours I have heard or been approached on a number of instances where young people ranging from 16 to 19 are finding difficulty in finding work and increasingly, which I was planning to talk to you about anyway later on today, there seems to be a hiccup in the system for people to be able to earn an income. I was very concerned with the Minister's first answer that there was not a provision. Therefore, would the Minister give some written clarification to at least States Members and hopefully wider as to exactly what is available or the process that one needs to do to be able to give some certainty to the many questions that are being asked at this moment in time? Thank you, Sir.

### **Senator P.F. Routier:**

I thank the Deputy for his question. I would suggest that coming along to the Social Security Department, into the Skills Executive, you will find a number of leaflets and information available to the general public. I can ask my department to see if they can get a bundle of leaflets available

for any Member that is interested, certainly, so that they can see them, but I would recommend that if anybody is able to pop along to the department and see the Skills Executive which was opened last night, it is a brilliant set-up and people can go from the work zone to the Social Security benefits to the careers office and get the assistance they would need. I recommend that to Members.

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

Does the Minister accept that one of the defects with any income support scheme is the lack of take-up from potential recipients of such a scheme? Does he further accept that despite his repeated assurance that he would expand his P.R. (public relations) and his publicity for what benefits are available to ensure that take-up was maximised, he has singularly failed to do so so far, of which the example of 16 to 18 year-olds unaware that they can claim up to £80 a week is a prime example of his failure?

### **Senator P.F. Routier:**

I do not believe that we have failed to publicise the Income Support system. There are over 8,000 households who are benefiting from the existing scheme. New people continually come to us on a regular basis. I have forgotten what the latest figures are but certainly there was a time when we were sort of getting 60 to 80 new applicants each week, which I think is a good, sound amount of people coming to the department to make application. So it is not as if the door is closed and we are saying that there is nothing available; people are finding out about what is available to them and making use of our services and the benefits that are available.

### **2.7.4 Deputy J.A. Martin:**

I am sorry, I do still think there is some confusion. The Minister answered in his reply to me: "I am sure if people now go to the Skills Executive, if they are appropriate for Income Support hopefully they will get it." Well, sorry, that is not good enough. Firstly, they should be guided straight from if they are going to careers advice to Income Support, and would the Minister not confirm he is being evasive here? You can be an individual in a household, the household may be owned by your parents, your parents may have an income of over £50,000, £60,000, £70,000, £80,000; you are an individual seeking work on no income, brings you into the low income support and you are entitled to this amount of money. It is totally silent, it is not advertised, and I am surprised between the Skills Executive now that people are not directed. They do have to be a jobseeker, they do have to go for interviews, but this is the only way we will get 16 to 18 year-olds where we want them, and that is looking for work. Can the Minister please clarify that this is a benefit to an Income Support unit and it is appropriate to most people who are not working, whatever age?

### **Senator P.F. Routier:**

I am struggling to remember the actual age we start at for Income Support, I am afraid. Sorry, I think I will need notice of that before I confirm the actual age, but the principle, certainly the Deputy is quite right that a young person within a household is able to make a claim in their own right. So if they are looking for employment or making their own way in life, they can make an application. I am sorry I faltered on the age there, but I just need to be 100 per cent sure before I make a statement about it.