

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SECURITY
BY DEPUTY G.P. SOUTHERN OF ST. HELIER
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 13th MAY 2014**

Question

Will the Minister provide members with a breakdown of the reasons behind the 500 warnings issued to jobseekers for failing to actively seek work?

Would the Minister also provide a breakdown of those who were subject to sanctions (withdrawal of personal component) for a second or third breach along with the intervals between such breaches?

How many of these cases were appealed and found to be incorrectly applied?

How many have been subject to complete withdrawal of benefits?

Will he also supply a suitably anonymised list of the 71 “insufficiently good reasons” for leaving work which were also sanctioned and the length of employment in that job?

Will he further give details of those 10 cases where the application of sanctions was found to be invalid?

Does he believe that a 15% failure rate on these cases is satisfactory?

Do his departmental rules categorise the turning down of a zero-hours contract as reasonable for a jobseeker?

Answer

The Back to Work programme provides significant support to locally qualified jobseekers to both help them find and then stay in work. In 2013 Back to Work supported jobseekers to secure 1818 paid jobs.

It is simply not right that people should be able to rely on the taxpayer to fund their living costs when they are unwilling to uphold their end of the bargain and take reasonable steps to find work. This is why in October 2013 I introduced changes to Income Support legislation to strengthen the department’s ability to sanction people who fail to look for work and a sanction to deter people from giving up work.

The Departments Determining Officers will issue a Warning Notice in accordance with Income Support legislation and internal guidance when a jobseeker has not actively sought work. Between 15th October 2013 and 30th March 2014 506 warnings were issued. The most common reasons for Warning Notices to be issued is as detailed below;

- a. Failure to attend a prearranged appointment with the department.
- b. Failure to attend a prearranged training event organised by the department.
- c. Not producing enough evidence of Actively Seeking Work (ASW).

All of our employment support remains available throughout every stage of the process

Since the Income Support legislation was amended in October 2013 the following breach one, two and three ASW sanctions have been applied.

- a. Confirmation of ASW breaches by breach type

| | |
|---|-----|
| Breach 1 (2 weeks adult component removed) | 203 |
| Breach 2 (4 weeks adult component removed) | 93 |
| Breach 3 (all income support benefit removed) | 30 |

- b. Intervals of the breaches listed by breach, the 3 columns being independent and therefore do not reflect the history of any claim in the proceeding column:

| | Warning to Breach 1 |
|---------------|---------------------|
| 0 – 4 weeks | 147 |
| 5 – 8 weeks | 37 |
| 9 – 12 weeks | 9 |
| 13 – 16 weeks | 5 |
| 17 – 20 weeks | 4 |
| 21 – 24 weeks | 1 |

| | Breach 1 to Breach 2 |
|---------------|----------------------|
| 0 – 4 weeks | 74 |
| 5 – 8 weeks | 8 |
| 9 – 12 weeks | 7 |
| 13 – 16 weeks | 4 |
| 17 – 20 weeks | 0 |
| 21 – 24 weeks | 0 |

| | Breach 2 to Breach 3 |
|---------------|----------------------|
| 0 – 4 weeks | 25 |
| 5 – 8 weeks | 3 |
| 9 – 12 weeks | 2 |
| 13 – 16 weeks | 0 |
| 17 – 20 weeks | 0 |
| 21 – 24 weeks | 0 |

To date no ASW sanctions have been appealed and found to be incorrectly applied.

The total number of claimants who have not complied with Actively Seeking Work and have progressed to a breach 3 is 30. Under the previous sanctions regime we would have expected to see in the same period approximately 50 claims closed (average of 9 per month).

I am firmly of the view that people should not believe that they can give up paid employment without good reason and rely on public funds to support them. In October last year I introduced a new sanction for people who leave work without good reason. This sanction removes the Income Support adult component for 13 weeks, although payments for rent and children are still available.

From mid-October 2013 to the end of March this year, 71 people have been subject to the new sanction. The reasons and lengths of employment prior to the giving up work sanction being imposed is as follows;

| Scenario | Less than 6 months employment | Over 6 months employment |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Dismissed by employer | 20 | 8 |
| Left work voluntarily | 30 | 13 |
| Totals | 50 | 21 |

Not all of the individuals leaving work without good cause will have been placed into positions by Back to Work. However, to put these figures in context, over the same period between mid-October 2013 and March 2014, Back to Work supported jobseekers into nearly 1000 paid positions.

In 10 cases where this new sanction has been applied, claimants have subsequently provided further evidence (from the employer and/or the claimant) that was sufficient to change the outcome of the sanction decision. I do not see this as a failure rate – officers can only make decisions on the evidence presented before them at the time. This sanction only applies to the adult component and therefore other parts of the claim can still be paid once the claim is active.

I can advise that the Department does not apply different rules in relation to turning down an offer of suitable employment if that employment is based on a zero hour's contract. Employment enhances and develops skill sets, increases socialisation and is good for the individual and economy. Any employment opportunity is therefore encouraged and claimants are always better off financially in work.