

2.9 Deputy A. Breckon of St. Saviour of the Minister for Social Security regarding the publication of monthly unemployment figures for 2006:

Would the Minister provide the monthly employment figures for 2006 and inform the Assembly how often they are published, and if not on a monthly basis, why not?

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

The registered unemployment figures for 2006 are as follows: January 477; February 444; March 402; April 409; May 420; June 418; July 392 and August 430. I would point out that there is no compulsion for any person unemployed to register with the department so these figures reflect those who choose to access the services of the department. The department has not routinely published unemployment figures but from time to time will issue press releases which are often, but not always, reported by the media. However, this situation changes at times of higher unemployment when monthly press releases are issued. We have not routinely published unemployment figures on a monthly basis in the past because we have not observed a demand for such information to be made readily available. However, on reflection, I have decided that in future every month statistics will be published on the States' website so that anybody can see those figures. I have also placed on Members' desks not only the monthly figures for this year but also for the 2 previous years so a comparison can be made.

2.9.1 Deputy A. Breckon:

Does the Minister agree that more information is required to those figures, the age group, the gender, the type of work or the qualifications people may have, the length of period of unemployment? As he has given an assurance, Sir, that this information will be available could he give an assurance that this will be provided within those figures on a regular basis?

Senator P.F. Routier:

Certainly the department does have those figures. They are very, very detailed and I think the Deputy will recall when he was on the committee we used to have pages and pages of these detailed figures. I do not know how practical it would be to release these as well but I will certainly ask the department to consider that matter. It is very, very detailed figures. But certainly if any Member wants them I am very happy to pass them on to them.

2.9.2 Deputy A. Breckon:

Part of the reason I asked that, would the Minister agree that if we are going to target the 18s to 25s then we have to know if we have a problem and where it is?

Senator P.F. Routier:

Yes, certainly we do need to be aware of that. As I say, if any Member wants to know those particular details I am very happy for them to have it. It is a matter of a balance between what you put out in the public domain and what Members generally have. We could fill up a web page with all the information that we have. It will be a balance to be struck, but certainly, any Member, I am very happy for them to have that information.

2.9.3 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Given the era of joined-up government in which we are all now proudly playing a part, would the Minister indicate whether his analysis of the figures has led him to the conclusion that jobs are being created at a good rate, but yet, unemployment is rising? What is the correlation between job creation and the gradual rise in unemployment?

Senator P.F. Routier:

Certainly, my department works very closely with the Economic Development Committee, and one of the things which I have been trying to impress upon the Economic Development Department is that when they are issuing Regulation of Undertakings licences that they do consider that there are local people who do have a need to have a job, and to ensure that the permits which are given out do reflect that and ensure that the pressure, to a certain extent, is put on the employers to employ local people. The correlation between the figures and the numbers of permits which are given have to be monitored very closely, and my department does work with the Economic Development Committee to ensure that happens.

2.9.4 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

The question was not answered. Would he tell me, as a result of that work his department is doing, what conclusions have they come to between this relationship? In other words, if more jobs are being created should unemployment be going down, for example?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I would certainly think that would be the wish that that would happen. We recognise that there are people in Jersey - local people - who are unemployed, and if the right types of jobs are made available - it is all about the right types of jobs, and people having the skills to meet the needs of the business community; it is the mismatch that

is the problem half the time - so what we have to do is to ensure that the new jobs which are made available do match the workforce's abilities.

2.9.5 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

We are told that the numbers in these tables are those people who have, in fact, registered with Social Security. Does the Minister consider that those numbers may rise substantially in the future when, under the new low-income support scheme, anybody actively seeking work would be entitled to apply?

Senator P.F. Routier:

That may well be the case, certainly.

2.9.6 Deputy A. Breckon:

Following on from that, could the Minister confirm that he has observed that the 2006 figures for every month are higher than 2005, and he also mentioned, Sir, that there is no compulsion. Could he give any indication of the hidden unemployed that may be out there in the community?

Senator P.F. Routier:

Yes, certainly. We are very aware that the figures are roughly about 25 per cent higher than last year. There is no getting away from that fact. With regard to these people just being the people who have come and registered, and there is no compulsion to respond, I am afraid we do not have any conclusion we can come to with regard to the people who do not register with us. It is not a compulsory thing to do, so I honestly cannot respond to that. The Statistics Unit, they do issue other figures about manpower on a regular basis, and they do occasionally give us more information, which helps us.

2.9.7 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

Will the Minister advise the House, please, what consideration the department has given as to the reason for the approximate 25 per cent increase in these figures for the first 6, 7 months of this year?

Senator P.F. Routier:

Well, there is obviously a mixed bag of reasons for the numbers. Certainly, since the summer, there would have been a cohort of young people leaving education. That is obviously a great concern to us. We know, in the breakdown of age groups, that the 18 to 25 year-old age group, last time, I think it was about 35 per cent of the total figures, which is of concern to us. Sorry, could you just repeat that question?

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

Certainly. The question was what consideration the department has given to the increase in the unemployment figures for this year, and with particular regard to identifying the reasons why the increase has occurred, and if I may just add another...

The Deputy Bailiff:

No. I think you can just repeat the question. There is definitely a bout of short-term memory loss following the vacation.

Senator P.F. Routier:

Certainly. I have just had it again. You have interrupted. **[Laughter]** Do I have any idea why the figures are higher? Yes, certainly. Obviously, I think the reasons why, as I said in my introduction to the answer, was that it is varied reasons. Even the construction industry we have seen complaining that there is a concern that they are not getting jobs because perhaps immigrant labour are coming into the Island to take their jobs. I mean, there is a cross-section of reasons, and if we did a complete breakdown of all the people who came into the department and asked them, there is a very wide spectrum of reasons. We could probably work on that detail. It is the same as the types of businesses they are in. There are plumbers, carpenters, delivery drivers, social workers. It goes right across the spectrum of work opportunities, and to delve down a little bit deeper than that and to find out the reason for it, it is a multitude of things.

2.9.8 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Would the Minister not concede that, given the lack of clarity about the reasons and his inability or his department's inability to draw clear conclusions, how on earth are plans being formulated to address the training and education implications of the unemployment situation on the Island, given that they seem to have no clear idea about why these people are ending up at the department?

Senator P.F. Routier:

Certainly, the department does have a record of all of the types of employment that people are looking for, and are working very closely with the Economic Development Department, and we know that they are meeting on a regular basis and formulating a plan to ensure that the licences that they are being asked to give do try and match the skills of their local workforce. I mean, that work is going on. It is not that we are ignoring the situation. We know that that work needs to be done and it is being done.

2.9.9 The Deputy of St. John:

I wonder if the Minister would agree that the numbers of unemployed is extremely low, and it is quite difficult when you have such a small percentage to try and work out any tangible evidence as to why it is as it is, and also, can I suggest, Sir, that currently, the workforce in the Island has grown; the numbers of jobs have grown, I understand. Consequently, percentage-wise, you are going to have a few more unemployed, so it is perhaps not all gloom and doom. The size of the workforce became bigger, therefore obviously you are going to have maybe a slightly higher number of people that are out of work, and would he agree that that is possibly one of the reasons?

Senator P.F. Routier:

Well, certainly if you think back to the mid-1990s, when we had over 1,000 people that were registered with us, these figures are lower. The Deputy is quite right in making the point that if the overall workforce is growing, the percentage of unemployed is going to follow that sort of natural thing, but the question probably with regard to employment opportunities is really one that possibly should be directed at the Economic Development Department. **[Laughter]** It is their job to ensure that the jobs are there. Our responsibility is to ensure that people are supported in trying to find jobs. It is the Economic Development Department and the business community who are the ones who provide the jobs. We do not provide the jobs.

2.9.10 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

I believe it is doom and gloom for some of the construction workers out there looking for jobs at the moment. I would like to ask the Minister, does he believe that there is any connection between the number of Polish employed in the construction industry in the first quarter of 2005 - which was 143 - and the 375 who were employed in the construction industry for the first quarter of 2006, and the current unemployment figure that has indeed been rising by well over 10 per cent since April?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I certainly do not have any hard evidence for that, but I would imagine that would have had some impact on those people, certainly.

2.9.11 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does the Minister consider that the fundamental problem with employment on the Island is that under the new migration policy, we are aiming to have high skilled, high paid jobs and we have a skill shortage on the Island?

Senator P.F. Routier:

We certainly have a skill shortage for some of the business opportunities in the Island. I have a particular concern of people who have perhaps lower skills, who do need to have work opportunities as well, and I want to ensure that the job opportunities which are available do give a good cross-section of skill needs for the whole of the population. It is all very well the Island looking at developing the business for high skills, but I keep reminding the Minister for Economic Development that part of the reason for giving out of Regulation of Undertakings permits will also be to ensure that people with lower skills have opportunities as well, and I will continue to bang that drum as long and hard as I can.

2.9.12 Senator F.H. Walker:

Would the Minister confirm that the figures of the Statistics Department, which show that there are 700 more locally qualified people in employment in the private sector in December 2005 than there were in December 2004, and would he therefore confirm that it is by no means all doom and gloom for local employees?

Senator P.F. Routier:

If my Chief Minister tells me those are the figures, I will agree with him, but I do not have them in front of me, but certainly he is right in saying that it is not all doom and gloom. I think the Deputy of St. John had the same view. It is not doom and gloom across the whole of the community. We have to say, some of the people who register with us may not even want to find a job, so there are those as well. Those figures are figures, is what I would say, but there are people who do want jobs, and we have to ensure that we do give them the support that they need, and hopefully with the help of the Economic Development Committee in giving the correct Regulation of Undertakings permits, we can get that match going. Also, I will drag in the Education Department as well to ensure that our school children leave the education service with the skills that are required for the jobs which are available in the community.

2.9.13 Deputy J.A. Martin:

A question to the Minister of Social Security: he seems to be saying that he is working very closely with the Economic Development Department, and that they work very well in providing the skills to match the jobs. I have real great concerns - and also

hearing, Sir, what the Chief Minister has just said - that we have 700 more locally qualified people unemployed than we did before. Under the new migration policy, the licence will pass to the employer, and they will be the person, and it could be a person who has just walked on the Island. Unless they have rewritten the migration policy - I understand it fully - and I would be concerned if I was the Minister of Employment and Social Security, the working relationship they have now with EDD (Economic Development Department) will fall away. They will issue the licences to the employer, the employer will employ the staff without any other say to the department. Well, I sit down, Sir, to have the question ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Deputy, your question is?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Is this not the case? Is there not a concern that the licences passing onto the employer will stop the great working relationship between the 2 Ministers of EDD and Social Security?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I am sorry, Sir, but the Deputy's understanding of the new migration policy lacks a little bit of understanding. The 5-year rule stands. It does not go away. It will always be there, so her impression of what is happening with the new migration policy is, I am afraid, a little bit awry. Our close working relationship with the Economic Development Committee will continue and we will ensure that we do all the best we can to ensure the right jobs are available for the skills of the Island.

2.9.14 Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Just to underline the Minister's point, would the Minister agree with me that there is absolutely no complacency on the Council of Ministers - or on his behalf or on my behalf - about the issue of jobs and unemployment figures. To underline that point, would he think it helpful to confirm to the Assembly that the Council of Ministers spent a whole half day on the whole issue of skills, where we debated this whole issue of how to match the requirements of the economy with the requirements of people, and local people having work, and does he think that that is a step in the right direction of unified corporate government in understanding these issues? Would he agree?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I can confirm that we did have that whole half-day meeting, and I believe it is the right way forward for the States.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Very well. I did say 2 final questions, but Deputy, you were the original question, so if you want to ask another one.

2.9.15 Deputy A. Breckon:

I was trying to get in before. I wondered, there has been some comments; the Deputy of St. John and the Chief Minister have made the thing that the numbers are low and perhaps we are doing okay, but I would like to ask the Minister, Sir, what assurance you can give perhaps to someone who is long-term unemployed and feels that nothing is being done for them. These figures do not reflect that, and I would ask that he gives that some serious attention, with the soft questions he is getting from his fellow Members.

Senator P.F. Routier:

Certainly, long-term unemployed people are a concern for us. We do take that responsibility very seriously, because we have a section within our side of our responsibilities work-wise, which help to ensure that people have increased their skills to get back into the workforce. There are issues with regard to long-term unemployed, and we believe that we are doing all that we can to assist them.