

2.3 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire of the Minister for Economic Development regarding what measures, if any, were being taken by Economic Development to improve the employment prospects of the unemployed in Jersey:

May I ask the Minister what measures, if any, are being taken by Economic Development to improve the employment prospects of the unemployed in Jersey?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf (The Minister for Economic Development):

I have published a number of strategies to help the employment opportunities for local people. Firstly, the Jersey Apprenticeship Scheme, which provides structured employment opportunities and supports the employer's costs of recruiting and employing trainees. Over 150 local young people are employed on the scheme. Secondly, the Jersey Undergraduate Scheme in 2007, providing 97 local undergraduates with jobs through their university summer periods. Thirdly, the building of a skills' centre at La Moye Prison to provide enhanced training facilities for inmates to help them in secure employment following their release. Fourthly, the funding and delivery of the Jersey Cadet Nursing Scheme, with Health and Social Services, a 2-year training scheme. There are currently 15 cadet nurses enrolled on the scheme. We recognise that we need to do more. That means that we are working now in partnership with Education, Sport and Culture and Social Security to the development of a Skills Executive with the purpose of achieving a better alignment between the skills needs of businesses and the requirement of businesses in Jersey. Once formed, this employer-led body - the details will be announced next week - will bring together the resources of the 3 departments with 3 key objectives: demand capture, careers information and advice, and the further and higher education training provision.

2.3.1 Deputy S.C. Ferguson of St. Brelade:

Given that these are all programmes designed for the young and given that Highlands does not provide any retraining for adults sort of 30-plus wishing to re-skill or change their skills, would the Minister describe the efforts he is making in this area and how he will be working with Education, Sport and Culture to provide for this retraining?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I am not sure that it is entirely true to say that Highlands only provides opportunities for the young. I think Highlands provides opportunities for training and retraining at whatever stage of life people find themselves. The fact is the Deputy makes an important point and the importance is that we are going to be joining together the initiatives for skills and employment opportunities between the 3 departments of Social Security; Education, Sport and Culture; and Economic Development. That is why we are announcing the formation of the Skills Executive to do exactly what she says. The future prosperity of Jersey depends upon a highly skilled workforce, a mobile workforce and job opportunities for all.

Deputy S.C. Ferguson:

Will the Minister confirm that he will give his attention to this very much neglected and totally overlooked area?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I have said in this Assembly, not for the first time, that I regard the skills issue as being the number one issue for Economic Development and that is why I will be chairing the Skills Executive with my colleagues of the Minister for Social Security and Education. Skills are top of the Economic Development agenda and it is vital that we raise the productivities and skills for everybody in Jersey as high as we can.

2.3.2 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Faced with pressure from a sector to import skilled labour, will it be the Minister's policy, or that of the bigger group, to order that sector to put its training in order before it allows more skilled migrants to come in?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I think the Deputy knows the answer to that question because he was good enough to come and spend some time with the Minister of Housing and Deputy Gorst and myself and receive a briefing on how we deal with Reg. of Uns. He will know and he will have heard that every application for non-qualified labour is rigorously researched by the department. Every time there is an application for more non-qualified labour, the first call is made to Highlands and other education providers to see whether or not there are local people that are available to work in that. We are difficult to convince on non-locally qualified labour and I hope the Deputy will have been convinced that we are doing enough. That is why we have seen job opportunities for local people rise by 1,200 in the last 12 months.

2.3.3 Deputy K.C. Lewis of St. Saviour:

Further to that, Sir, as the Minister is no doubt aware, there is future anti-discrimination legislation in the pipeline that would make it illegal, punishable by a fine of up to £10,000, to discriminate against anybody on the grounds of race or ethnic origin, which, on the face of it, is very good news. How does the Minister reconcile that with the fact that since the beginning of time Jersey businesses have always been encouraged to take on local applicants?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I see no conflict. The fact is we do discriminate to some extent between resident people and non-resident people. That has nothing to do with their gender, their race, their sexual orientation or anything at all. The fact is we do discriminate and we are allowed to discriminate between those people who are here. My job is to ensure that there are opportunities and good opportunities for local people. Only when we are convinced that all of the local applicants are found in work then we will allow non-qualified. I see no conflict between the general issues of discrimination and the policies that we must ensure to secure the Island.

2.3.4 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

While I am delighted with the answers that have been given this morning, I would like to pick up on a point that was made by Deputy Ferguson in relation to re-skilling and ask the Minister if he would undertake to look into public/private partnership initiatives for re-skilling adult people who wish to re-skill, such as is being done at the moment in Enfield in the United Kingdom with the Skills Club. Will the Minister undertake to look into that and, if necessary, contact me for those details?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I have said that we are doing a lot, but we need to do more. That is why we have decided to create, the Council of Ministers endorsed last week, the Skills Executive. That will be a triumph of its Ministers with responsibility for skills, but underneath that it will be employer-led with an independent chairman Skills Executive to do the things that I have said. So, yes, there are good examples of where local authorities and other countries have put in place re-skilling opportunities for people later on in life and that is what we will be focusing on. Members will be hearing a lot more about that in the coming days.