

**REPLY BY THE MINISTER OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY DEPARTMENT
TO A QUESTION ASKED PURSUANT TO RULE 6 OF THE
RULES OF PROCEDURE BY DEPUTY L B QUERIPÉL**

Question

For the period of time that the States Relief Scheme was in existence it provided meaningful if short term employment for many Islanders who unfortunately found themselves out of work. The numerous tasks that were undertaken via the Scheme were to the benefit and enhancement of the Islands community.

Whilst acknowledging the back to work programmes, including the CEPS initiative, that the Social Security Department have launched, have the Department considered reintroducing the States Relief Scheme?

If not, what are the barriers preventing the reintroduction of the States Relief Scheme?

Answer

The Social Security Department ('the Department') provides various work rehabilitation services and funds a number of return to work initiatives to support jobseekers back into work. The Community and Environmental Projects Scheme (CEPS) is one of the initiatives which fall under this umbrella. CEPS replaced the Fieldwork Scheme in 2003, the precursor to which was the States Relief Scheme.

The aim of CEPS is to provide work and training opportunities for people who are not working due to unemployment or long-term illness in order to improve their chances of finding work. Project work is selected with training opportunities in mind so that people learn new skills during their placement. CEPS placements are for periods of 8 weeks and the scheme can accommodate approximately 20 people at any one time. Candidates are paid at the minimum wage rate. If a person is unemployed and turns down the opportunity to take up a CEPS placement without good cause, they may be disqualified from claiming benefit for up to 8 weeks. The scheme undertakes a variety of project work on behalf of charitable organisations and States Departments. The Scheme does not take on work that private contractors might otherwise undertake.

In its March 2012 States Report (Billet d'État V of 2012) the Department put forward a number of propositions relating to work incentivisation and the States approved these. One of these propositions concerned mandatory work and the Department will be introducing this new provision during 2014. Initially, mandatory work will be aimed at jobseekers using current legislative provisions, however the Department is seeking to amend the legislation in order to extend this provision to other categories of working age people in receipt of benefit.

Mandatory work placements will be unwaged, but a person's benefit will remain in payment throughout. It is likely that the work placements will involve a form of meaningful community-based activity outside the participant's home area. For some mature, long-term jobseekers, appropriate placements might be found by community or volunteer-run organisations.

People who participate fully with the Department's requirements will not necessarily be expected to undertake a mandatory work placement. However, people who have remained unemployed for a least six months, or for whom some form of re-engagement with the workplace is considered to be a priority, may be required to take part. While it is hoped that work placements would often include a development-focused aspect, it may, in some cases, be most important just to encourage people to gain a regular routine and to do something productive within the community. If people fail to engage in mandatory work without good cause an appropriate sanction will be applied to benefit payments.

In conclusion, the States Relief Scheme was of its time and there is no doubt that it successfully met a need during its period of existence. However, the approach to work rehabilitation has changed significantly over the intervening years and the Department feels that the future combination of CEPS and mandatory work will meet the work rehabilitation needs of both the short-term and long-term unemployed. The Department will monitor this situation alongside the level of and trend in unemployment and take steps to modify this approach if it appears necessary.

Date of Receipt of the Question: 13th December 2013

Date of Reply: 27th December 2013