# ST HELENA LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

## Select Committee 1 of the Legislative Council

## Sixth Live Evidence Hearing

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# Friday 28th August 2025 at 10 am

# At the Council Chambers

## Labour Market Strategy (LMS)

## The hearing will focus primarily on the following:

- **Resolving inequities, both real and perceived, in St Helena's labour market;**
- **Increasing the population living and working on St Helena; and**
- **Preparing the workforce to meet the vision set out in the Sustainable Economic Development Strategy (SEDS).**

### Introduction

**The Hon, Robert Midwinter**

Ladies and gentlemen, and everyone listening via radio or live streaming, together with my colleagues, we bid you a very warm welcome to this, the sixth formal hearing of Select Committee 1, which I will refer to simply as SC1, from the Council Chamber at the Castle in Jamestown. With regards to our constitutional role, SC1 is the Select Committee of the Legislative Council, in accordance with Section 69A of the St Helena Ascension and Tristan da Cunha Constitution Amendment Order 2021, and the Select Committee's Establishment Order 2022. The function of SC1 is statutory. Its primary function is to objectively scrutinise decisions, policies, and activities of the St Helena Government. In particular, SC1 is responsible for review and scrutiny of the following sectors of government:

1. Health and Social Care;
2. Environment, Natural Resources, and Planning;
3. Education, Skills, and Employment.

SC1 acts independently of government and is not subject to the direction or control of the Governor, the Executive Council, or any other body or authority, and it has the power to compel the Chief Secretary and any Portfolio Director to attend the Committee meeting to give evidence orally. The chair may also request attendance of other public officers through the Chief Secretary or the relevant Portfolio Director and may invite persons other than public officers to attend and address the Committee with respect to any relevant matter being considered by the Committee. The scrutiny role of SC1 is seen as a mainstay of Good Governance, in terms of holding the St Helena Government to account.

## Membership

The composition of the Committee comprises the following four permanent members: myself as chairman, Councillor Robert Midwinter, Member Councillor Ronald Coleman, Member Councillor Denis Leo, Member Councillor Julie Thomas, Committee support is provided through the clerk, Mrs. Marita Bagley.

## Programme of Business

Turning now to the programme of business, as I have already noted, this is the sixth formal hearing of Select Committee 1, albeit the second live hearing following the general election last year. This live hearing has been scheduled to review the Government's Labour Market Strategy and associated policies, and questions will therefore be tabled to the Education, Skills, and Employment Portfolio at this session. Our inquiry today will focus primarily on the following thematic areas:

1. resolving inequities, both real and perceived, in St Helena's Labour Market;
2. increasing the population living and working on St Helena;
3. preparing the workforce to meet the vision laid out in the Sustainable Economic Development Strategy, or SEDS.

The Chief Secretary has also been invited to attend, noting that certain aspects of the Labour Market Strategy relate to SHG HR policies, and he may therefore be better placed to respond in certain cases.

Before proceeding further, because one of our questions relates to this region, I just wish to acknowledge the tragic events that have taken place on the border area between Tibet and Nepal over the past few days. Our thoughts are with those who have been adversely affected.

Representatives from the portfolio have already taken their place at the table, for the benefit of the listening public and for recording purposes. Please, could you state your name and position within the organisation that you are representing? Thank you.

**The Hon, Andrew Turner**
Good morning, everyone. I am Andrew Turner, the Minister for Education, Skills and Employment.

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**

Good morning, everyone. I am Angela Benjamin, and I'm Head of Lifelong Learning in Education, Skills, and Employment.

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
Good morning, everyone. Ian Todd, Chief Secretary and Head of the Public Service.

**The Hon, Robert Midwinter**
Thank you. I will now call for members to place on record any potential conflicts of interest.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
Good morning, Councillor Julie Thomas. Before we begin today's hearing, I would like to make a declaration in the interests of transparency.
From 2021 to 2025, I served as Minister for Education, Skills and Employment. In that capacity, I was responsible for progressing an update to the Labour Market Strategy during 2025, principally to ensure that it reflected and aligned with the intended and approved changes arising from the Immigration (Amendment) Ordinance 2025.
At that time, officers were also asked to review the existing Labour Market Strategy and update or remove information where necessary, so that the document was current as of 2025.
I think it is important to be clear, however, that no work was undertaken during my time as Minister to determine the longer-term strategic direction of the Labour Market Strategy. That work remained to be undertaken, with the Education Review subsequently taking priority.
Since being re-elected to Legislative Council, I have been appointed Children's Champion. I wish to make clear that, to date, I have had no involvement in shaping, developing or discussing the proposed way forward for the Labour Market Strategy in that capacity.
Finally, I wish to declare that my daughter will be progressing to post-16 education from September 2026.
I am making that declaration simply to ensure that this is known and transparent to the Committee, those appearing before us, and members of the public listening to today's proceedings.
I will, of course, approach today's hearing in my capacity as a member of Select Committee 1, with the purpose of scrutinising the strategy, its evidence base, its proposed direction and its implications for St Helena's workforce and wider community.
I make these declarations at the outset so that there is complete transparency about my previous ministerial responsibilities, my current role as Children's Champion, and my personal family circumstances.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
I'm Councillor Denis Leo, and Before we begin today's hearing, I would like to make a declaration in the interests of transparency.

I wish to declare that my son will be progressing to post-16 education from September 2026. I am making that declaration simply to ensure that this is known and transparent to the Committee, those appearing before us, and members of the public listening to today's proceedings.
I will, of course, approach today's hearing in my capacity as a member of Select Committee 1, with the purpose of scrutinising the strategy, its evidence base, its proposed direction and its implications for St Helena's workforce and wider community.
I make these declarations at the outset so that there is complete transparency about personal family circumstances.

**The Hon, Robert Midwinter**
Thank you, and I'd also like to place on record that prior to 2021, I was an Executive Director with Enterprise St Helena. I was a member of the Education Committee. Not education, sorry. I was a member of the Economic Development Committee, but I likewise have had no direct involvement in the development of this Labour Market Strategy. Okay, that's out of the way. Before handing over to my committee colleagues, I would just like to check if there is anything that you wish to say about the Labour Market Strategy in general, such as its original intent, how well you feel that it is meeting the desired intentions.

**The Hon, Andrew Turner**
Chair, I perhaps recommend that we proceed with the questions, and I think those themes will more than likely come out from there.

## Theme One

**The Hon, Robert Midwinter**
Okay, happy to do so. So, theme one is resolving inequities, both real and perceived, in St Helena's Labour Market. The Labour Market Strategy aims for a Labour Market that is competitive but fair, with equal access to employment, decent work, and equal pay for work of equal value. It also envisages career access St Helena or cash as a central mechanism for addressing skills mismatches and connecting people to suitable employment. So, I will hand over to my colleague, The Hon. Denis Leo.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
Thank You, Mr. Chair. Good morning, everybody. So, question one: Could you clarify the role of Career Access St. Helena, or we'll call it CASH, within the Labour Market Strategy, including how it supports job seekers, employers, and training providers, and how its effectiveness is measured?

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**
Okay. So, as Head of Lifelong Learning, Career Access comes under my section within Education. Career Access plays a role of being the provider or the service provider, then to assist people with having upskilling techniques, being able to see what is offered as employment opportunities. Also, they work with the unemployed to help with application writing, CV writing. If there is any vacancies that people are applying for, that is overseas, they also help in terms of giving advice where they need to go, what next steps they need to do to be able to acquire all the

required documents for this. Besides that, Career Access also works with the Online Registry in helping to show what employment is offered on St Helena for those who are offshore, with the intent of encouraging people to come back to the island through our website, this is done, as well as the big part of it being the sixth form programme. They are heavily involved in the sixth form programme with career guidance and also work placement. For our six formers, there are other areas that is included, such as casual work. If somebody comes in and just want casual work, they speak to employers and stakeholders to see where they actually, you know, have any of those vacancies or opportunities for people. So anyone who comes into the office on their weekly checks are then shown those opportunities that is available. Okay.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
So, is there any way that you guys measure the effectiveness of the scheme,

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**
as in data? You mean?

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
Yeah.

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**
So yes, we keep our data. I don't have it to hand here today to offer you, but we do keep data of the number of people who comes in, what areas of work that they are looking for, even as far as the online registry. We keep a data of who has viewed the vacancies that we put on there as well. We also have all of the data on our six formers and workplaces that they go into, the needs that we have at the end of the year, as well as we look at what the data for those who, at the end of their two-year programme, if they go into the full-time employment with the same organisation? Thank you.

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
I think Councillor Leo there's a wider point around evaluation as well, in terms of the Labour Market Strategy as a whole, and certainly one of the commitments of the current administration is to prioritise that evaluation. I think, from the plan that you can see before you, the strategy that's been in place since 2020, and as Councillor Thomas alluded to, updated in 2025, a large number of actions have taken place. Of course, understanding whether those actions have led to the desired outcomes and had the effect that we intended is something that we really need to measure and to understand. That's challenging across the Labour Market Strategy as a whole. It involves the economists, the statisticians, but also I think in terms of the employment part of Education, Skills, and Employment as a portfolio, it's an area that's relatively challenged in terms of the resourcing that's available to it. I'm hopeful that our incoming Portfolio Director, who I can't confirm at this stage because they're still going through the clearance process, but has a particular background in some relevant areas, particularly on engaging with the Labour Market around workforce planning and vocational training, in particular, to take people through education into employment. So, I think that that will bring some additional strategic oversight and leadership that we will be able to utilise to take this forward more effectively. But your point about evaluation, I think, is well made in relation

to CASH, but it's a much broader point in terms of how that fits in with the Labour Market Strategy as a whole, and it is something the current administration has committed to doing more effectively going forward.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
Thank you. Question number two: The Labour Market Strategy identifies a situation where some businesses cannot find workers, while some certain St Helenians cannot find suitable employment. What evidence does SHG now have that these skills and employment mismatch is being reduced, and how is cash measuring its impact?

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**
As I said earlier, we have people. We have the data for people who comes into the office on their weekly checks that they do. So that's how we keep our data on who, you know, is offered, what jobs is available there. However, like I said, I would have to get that data and be able to send to you for you to see anything further.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
Thank you. That's okay. Oh, sorry. Yeah.

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
I think one of the key indicators is that the unemployment rate on the island is extremely low. So, in terms of people being able to find jobs, then those options are available to them. I think my broader concern is whether the right people are doing the right jobs, whether people are going into employment simply because it's there because they need a role, or whether it's something that they're choosing to do that they want to make a career of that they can develop and progress through. And I think that's an area. And then looking at that from the other end, we also know that we have roles on the island that, at the moment, are filled by TCs because they are the only people who have the skills to be able to do them. But they are not roles, to my mind, that are so specialist that we couldn't ensure that locals are trained up to be able to do them the next time they rotate. The moment we don't have that succession plan and that link back from the workforce into education and ensuring that we have the right people trained up to move into those roles, so that we can reduce the reliance on TC. And as you will have heard me say many, many times. If we can then reduce the reliance on TC, that frees up additional funding to reinvest in the local workforce and local wages. That reduces the likelihood that when we do train people, they leave the island because they have greater opportunities financially elsewhere. It is a cycle that is inherent on this island, it has been for a long time. If it was easy to fix, somebody would have fixed it already. So, I don't underestimate the complexity. But if we keep doing the same thing in the same way, we won't get a different outcome. So, we do need to start thinking more radically about how we can break that cycle once and for all.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
Okay. So just a follow-up question: Do the private sector reach out to you guys can tell you what they're looking for, what type of Labour they're looking for.

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**
So yes, we do have private sector who contact us and say I'm looking for a laborer, or we're looking for shop assistants. So yes, they do reach out to us.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
Right, how is SHG ensuring that cash is reaching those who are underemployed, economically inactive, or otherwise not captured by official unemployment figures, rather than focusing only on people registered as unemployed. You understood that.

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**
Okay, so we actually offer for people to come in and do various training courses and that with us that is advertised quite frequently however again the uptake is very low on that to the point of like over the past year just one person have, on the other hand, those who are also unemployed sometimes do the drop-in sessions which we have. So, they come in and they look what is there. Other than that, it's not much more we can actually put out there besides what it is that we have available.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
Thank you. The Labour Market Strategy envisages CASH as a centralised island-wide employment resource, helping to connect people with suitable opportunities across all sectors. However, the Career Access section of the SHG website appears to provide limited visibility of job opportunities outside SHG. What steps is SHG taking to ensure that CASH actively and consistently advertises vacancies across the private, public, and third sectors, so that St Helenians have a comprehensive view of available employment opportunities and employers can assess the widest possible pool of local applicants?

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**
So, the adverts that we have at the moment is limited to basically more what is on Saint Helena. We do have links with the Falklands, with Ascension Island, even some that were in UK. We have had previously, but those links people do more on their own; they don't direct it through us. However, we have been only just this past month. We have been having meetings and sending out emails to people to say, "Listen, we are here. We are the hub. Come and use us to be able to advertise through us.

**The Hon, Andrew Turner**
If I may, one of the areas I think we need to just be conscious of when we talk about, for example, marketing and advertising of opportunities, of course, is that piece about potential competition with the private sector, in the sense that there are obviously media organisations, and obviously that's the background I come from, whose primary mode of income comes from advertising of services, and we have seen that debate occur in the past, particularly around the tourism sector, as to how far Government should go to market opportunities versus how far private sector, you know, how much to interfere in the private sector market. There, yeah. So that's just a point to bear in mind in that debate.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
Thank you. The strategy acknowledged that it will never be possible for St. Helena to provide local training for every sector that will be important to economic growth. Could government set out which sectors are currently

supported by local training provision, which sectors require training to be sourced overseas, and how it determines where local training should be prioritised?

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**
We do a yearly training needs analysis, and the priority is taken with majority of the courses that is required. So, we do have a look at those, and we do actually offer through SHCC. We do offer online training, which I know at times not everybody can access online training. So, we do try as much as we can to also have the face-to-face. But in all honesty, that has proven difficult, depending on what it is that is being requested, so that sometimes can be very difficult. So, in terms of what it is that education is doing, we are actually having a few, not few. We are having meetings now of where we're looking at the priority areas, and again, it would have to be within our budget that we can probably have somebody remotely deliver courses, or if there is the possibility to bring someone in.

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
I think, Councillor, it's difficult to differentiate by sector because it's very it can be very specific to individual job roles. So, if you looked at health and social care, for example, there are a large number of roles within health and social care that we could train, develop, and give careers to local people. There are some specific roles within health and social care. So, it's not beyond our ability to support people to become doctors, for example. But on an island of 4,000 people, we will never be able to produce enough doctors to to meet our demand. So there are some skills that are highly specialist, require a very tailored training, development, or academic or vocational package to be able to take those roles. And obviously, because we are delivering potentially delivering those in such small numbers, it's the financial viability of doing that. But the converse is, of course, those are exactly the roles at the moment that we require TCS to fill, and the long-term cost of repeatedly using TCS might well turn out to be disproportionate to being able to develop our own people on islands, so better understanding that cost-benefit analysis of the investment in training on islands versus the cost of having to utilise TCs, I think, is an important one. But it also requires us to create the right conditions, which means that when people undertake that training and development, they are paid appropriately to stay on the island and to fill those roles. But it also requires a degree of, you know, what might be termed as a social contract with the population as a whole. If people want this island to thrive, to survive, the population to bottom out and then increase, there has to be a commitment from people to stay on the island as well. Trying to change the shape of the Labour Market so that it's more attractive is not something that can be done overnight. And if, as we develop people into those specialist roles, there is still a tendency for them to immediately leave because there are higher salaries elsewhere. Then we won't be able to break that cycle. So, I would suggest that if we want to do something radical, there is a period of pain that we may need to go through to break that cycle. That can't be done by politicians alone. Can't be done by the public service alone. It has to be done in collaboration with the population as a whole, and an understanding of, if we want a better future, then we may have to go through a period of pain together.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
Thank you for that. Number six, how proactive is cash in engaging with employers and other actors to identify current and upcoming vacancies, and how does Cash use this information to proactively match individuals registered with its services to suitable employment opportunities?

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**
Okay, as I said before, we do show what we are, what is available there, and again, going out to stakeholders and other wider community and organisations with what they have to offer. Like I say, it is them now to use what is there available to us.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
What support does cash provide to individuals who want to work but do not currently qualify for the available vacancies? And does cash provide or facilitate advice, training, or support to help such individuals pursue micro enterprise or self-employment opportunities such as window cleaning, yard maintenance, gardening, vehicle cleaning, or childcare services.

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**
Okay, I'm smiling because yes, we do, we do talk to people about these kinds of roles that is available, and believe it or not, the interest is not there.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
Okay then. In addressing current Labour Market challenges, the first step outlined the LMS will be striving to ensure everyone in St Helena who wants to work has the opportunity to work. This aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals target to achieve full and productive employment, and decent work for all, and equal pay for work of equal value by 2030. What progress has SHG made towards this objective, and is the island on track to achieve the targets set out, including ensuring that everyone who wants to work has the opportunity to do so?

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
So, I think, Councillor, I mean, there is certainly progress in that direction. I've already alluded to the unemployment rate is very low, so the availability of work to people who want it is generally there. Whether it's the work they would preferentially choose to do, and whether it's the roles that add the most value to the local economy is, as I think, a slightly different question. I think the part of the difficulty, as you allude to, is when you talk about equal pay for work of equal value. Exactly what we mean by that, because we know at the moment we have an environment where, if somebody is trained, developed, and goes into a role from a local background, they may be on a different set of terms and conditions from somebody who's come in from overseas to take essentially the same role. Is that an inequality? Is that an unfairness? It's something that we do need. We need to close the gap, and I've already spoken a little bit about how challenging that is, but, how important it is to do that. But we have to reflect that if we do not have people to do critical roles on the island, we have to bring people in from outside. We can't, not have a doctor. We can't, not have a paramedic. We can't, not have teachers. And of course, to bring people in from outside requires us to make them an offer that would entice them to come here. So, there is a differentiation. I think one of the key things that we are looking at is traditionally you've had the local market, and you've had the UK market, which primarily is the TC route. But for some areas now, much more focus on international recruitment, so that we can bring people with particular skill sets without paying the size of differential that we've had to do in the past. And in some areas, such as the care sector, without having to pay any differential, actually, we're bringing people in from overseas with some enhancements to make it attractive to come here, but with a salary that isn't really any different from the local salary. So, there's you know there are

opportunities to close that gap, but I think the perception of unfairness and inequality, you know, is a structural one, but it's based on what we need at the moment because we need to fill those roles. The way of addressing that is to be able to fill more of those roles with people from a local background and to effectively redistribute the wealth of the overall wage bill from the TC towards the local.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
Okay, I will direct this question towards you. I hope it's not going off topic, but let's say a person getting out of prison. Does government have a role in helping to rehabilitate them back into society?

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
Absolutely. You know, when people are released from prison, there are generally there may or may not be conditions around their release. Of course, you know, we have a probation service, an offender management service, and actually one of the most evidence-based interventions in people being released from prison, not becoming recidivists and ending up back in prison is to find them meaningful employment, and that's a proven intervention worldwide. So, it's in our best interest to make sure that we support people from prison back into the workplace. Of course, depending on what their offences were, how recent they were, the nature of them, it may be that the Labour Market has restrictions. There may be particular offences that will preclude people from entering certain roles. But do we need to ensure that, as part of that rehabilitation process, we seek to find meaningful employment for people leaving prison? Absolutely.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
Thank you. Number nine. Could SHG explain what is meant by the Casual Labour Roster in the Labour Market Strategy, including how it operates in practice, who can register, and how individuals are matched with employers and short-term work opportunities?

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
I think we might struggle to be able to give you a meaningful answer to that one. I know that certainly there has been more of a commitment to Casual Labour in the past, and it's something that we spoke about at a separate meeting earlier on in the week. I think the availability, the accessibility of that seems to have reduced significantly in recent years. I suspect that may be partly a number of reasons. So, even if somebody is working for us on a casual basis, we need to ensure that they are vetted and cleared to the appropriate standard to make sure, if they're working with children, for example, or access to vulnerable adults, that they are suitable to be undertaking that work, and that involves quite a quite a lot of effort for what may be a limited return, depending on how many hours a casual worker is able to commit to. I think also there are examples like the road scheme, for example, in the past, which I think have worked effectively. But we have a limited budget at the moment for how much road maintenance work we can do, which includes the basic materials to do the roads maintenance. So, we could have lots of people who are available to do the work, but not have the products to enable them to undertake it in a meaningful way. So, I think it is something that I hadn't previously given much consideration to until we had conversations about it earlier in the week. I think it's something we can commit to having a look at and understanding why that change appears to have taken place over a period of time, and whether that's something that was done consciously for a good reason, or whether it's something where you know we have potentially taken

our eye off the ball and we can reinvigorate. I can't give you a clear answer to that at this point in time, but we can certainly look at that for you.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
Question 10, how is SHG ensuring that local workers are not disadvantaged by the recruitment of overseas workers, while still addressing genuine skill shortages that cannot be met locally?

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
Again, the intention is always to try and seek local appointments to a role where we can. Sort of saying first is the approach we take for the majority of our roles at the moment. I think I'm sure there'll be some wider questions around the TC programme and the perceived inequalities as we go through the session, so I won't jump ahead to where I suspect you might be going. But we do need to do some work around that going forward and look to probably more of a local, regional, and international based approach. There are some roles where we know that going to international recruitment is the only sensible thing to do. If I advertised for a doctor locally every time I needed a doctor, that would be a waste of time, quite frankly, because it is unlikely that there are any on the island that we don't already know about and could speak to directly if that were the case. So, we need to balance our approach, which is we want saints to do jobs on the island wherever they are available, skills, qualified, experienced enough to be able to do them. But we also need to be pragmatic in you know whether or not those people are likely to be available. So, there's a constant balancing act. But my commitment is that if we have locally qualified people who have the skills to do a job, then my preference would be to take those at first instance before we go out to the international or UK market, because even doing that incurs a cost, which if we can avoid so much, the better.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
In relation to workforce planning, skills development, and recruitment, is the relationship between HR and the Education portfolio considered an effective working relationship? And how do the two work together to ensure that education and training provision reflects the future workforce needs identified in the Labour Market Strategy.

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**
Yes, so we do work together as in HR and Education through the Community College. We actually have what we call our appraisal systems, and they have their training needs come through there. That is then shared with us, and then again, like I said before, we look at what is priority, how we can best find the training for that person. I mean, our training is not limited just to any specific ones, but a lot of our training sites are math's and English that is taught face to face is online. So yes, HR does communicate with us, and we also get all of their adverts every time they are advertising for any careers.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
Thank you. What progress has been made in standardising SHG HR policies and practices, particularly in relation to recruitment, promotion, paper aggression, and the treatment of local and overseas applicants.

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**

So, I think there has been quite a lot of progress. I don't think it's as fast or as comprehensive as I would like. And as the Committee will be aware, we've recently appointed a new, what's now called Head of People, formerly Head of HR and OD, who comes with a very strong background, but also a different approach to the way that people management should operate. We are not in a position that I would want to be in, where our policies and procedures are not always completely clear. There are kind of new versions and old versions. Ideally, we would have moved comprehensively from the old to the new, where we have some new policies but some old policies, and that can be unhelpful and confusing. Obviously, the international recruitment strategy specifically plays to the point you talk about in terms of looking for skilled resources from places other than the UK and outside of the TC programme. And there are conversations with the UK Government about the way in which the TC protocol operates going forward as well. So, I think there is progress in train. I think we need to speed it up. I think we need to be comprehensive. We need to take a different approach as well. So, I am a strong advocate of a principles-based policy that tells you what you're looking to achieve and gives an indication of how that can be done without being extremely bureaucratic, extremely process-driven, and full of large amounts of detail. Those kinds of policies are generally counterproductive. They tie you up in bureaucracy rather than achieving the right outcome, and what we need here is the right outcome, rather than compliance for the sake of it. So, I think there's quite a large cultural change that I would like to see happen. I would like to lead ultimately. That's my job across SHG as a whole. That is not a criticism of HR. HR do a good job in challenging circumstances, but of course they are the owners of those policies. That does not mean they are responsible for implementing those policies, which are often done by line managers in portfolios. One of the challenges of I think fit for the future and the centralisation of certain services is there may still not be a full understanding within portfolios of the balance between what should be done by line management and what should be done by a central service, and I think HR falls into that trap. So, working together more effectively is something that we need to do across portfolios and across the support services, so a positive direction of travel, more to do. I think is the summary, Councillor.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
The LMS identifies perceptions of unfairness and a belief among St. Helenians that the system is stacked against them, as factors contributing to emigration, are these perceptions supported by evidence? And if so, what specific actions have been taken to address them? And how is SHG measuring whether confidence in the local Labour Market is improving?

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
So I'm kind of at risk of repeating myself a little bit, I think. But we are, as I say, in the process of reviewing our workforce strategy comprehensively. That is targeted towards the desire to fill far more roles on island with locals wherever we can, to use international resources where we need to, but international resources that is ideally coming from the places where it's best placed to come from. People have the right skills, the right qualifications, the right grasp of the English language, whatever it might be, to operate safely, but we don't need to bring people from the UK to do a large number of the roles that, at the moment, we can't fill locally. So, the more that we can access the international market, the more scope we have within our financial envelope to then start to redeploy that funding to towards the local community, I completely understand. I mean, you know, I recognise the irony here. You know, I am by virtue of my job one of the most highly paid TCs on the island. It is, you know, that puts me in a difficult position because I can see the perceived inequality where, as you've alluded to, you have people doing

effectively the same job but being paid different amounts of money, but where you have to draw somebody here from overseas, that is at the moment a necessary evil. You can't just address that inequality by standardising the salaries, because if you reduce what you're paying to people from overseas, they won't come. If you increase everything locally to be the same as you would pay in the UK, that's problematic itself because tax rates are different. There are, you know, there are huge differentials. But also, we don't have enough money in the budget to be able to do that. What we need to do, and it does take time, unfortunately, is to reduce the reliance on one as we increase the reliance on the other, but also make sure that as we start to reduce reliance on, particularly TC being the most expensive element, that we do make a really conscious decision. And I know, ministers and the current Government are alive to this, that saving on the TC budget is reinvested in local salaries because we've got to break that cycle, as I've said previously.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
Right. Thank you for that. Could SHG explain the purpose of the sixth form programme, who it is intended to support, and what education, training, and employment pathways it provides for young people after they leave compulsory education?

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**
Okay, so the sixth form programme is focused on the school leavers after year 11. So, in our sixth form programme, we have four routes. One is academic, where they continue in school studying their A levels. Then we have the blended route, which again is another level three course with some work placement. The vocational, which is level two courses with work placement and supported, given the route of level one in functional skills, or being full-time within the workplace, because of course we do have some who are more practical rather than academic. So that is our four routes within the sixth form programme. That is focused. So, all students are given the opportunity to make a choice of which route they would like to take, and that is done earlier on in the year. However, once we get the results, like we had last week, and which I'm happy to say I'm overjoyed this year because we can actually progress these students who are on the sixth form this year. We're not having as many having to come in and do math's and English, if I can count, it's probably just on one hand this year, which is a great achievement for us. And we can now give further courses in the areas where the students want to actually develop their careers. So, it's focused on our sixth form students from sixth form, which is two years, so then we go on to the 18-year-old. So then, of course, they're leaving school. So, the opportunity is there that if they've studied their A levels and have the required UCAS points that they're going to need to go into university, and of course again because we don't have any control over scholarships like we used to have, students are able to apply for scholarships overseas and in the areas of their choice. Again, because they are the ones who are funding it, we can't have anything on it to say, oh no, you can only study in these areas, but we make them aware of what is in within our Shortage Occupation List. So, we link that to them. We show them that, and then they're given the chance then to say if that is an area they would like to study. But if they want to go and do something in aerospace or whatever, that's something that we can't control. So that is going off to university. If they're choosing to return once they've achieved their degrees, we then move on to the graduate scheme, which is a two-year programme again. Give them the skills and work experience in in the area that they've got their degrees, and then also they're given the chance to go around. So, they move around to all the different areas within SHG. They do some HR, they do finance, they do procurement. Also, within their actual workplace, they're given like you know you shadow a

manager and everything like that. So it's given the relevant skills to be able to either do succession planning, which we've already for the past two years. Now we're coming up to the second year for the group that we have now. We've already got one of our graduates, our student, our scholars who has come back and is actually doing a succession plan for one of our TC officers. So, that is what we have in place after our sixth form programme.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
Okay, I hope that this is not going off topic. But say if I was a carpenter, what happens to me when I hit 18?

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**
So then, of course, we are hoping that within that time that you're in your workplace, that you've excelled and been able to show the organisation that you're working for that they would have a work placement for you, or it could then be that if you feel confident enough, that you be encouraged to probably start your own business.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
Right. Thank you. 16, how will SHG ensure that the Labour Market strategy's commitment to a competitive but fair Labour Market is reflected in the experience of young people entering employment through the sixth form programme. I think you might have just touched on that. Yeah. We go into the next one. How does SHG ensure that the students on each route? That's right. What I'm doing. Yeah. Sorry, got confused here. How does SHG ensure that students on each group have generally equal access to meaningful qualification, work experience, and progression opportunities, rather than the route they enter, determining their long-term employment prospects?

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**
So yesterday, this is a question that I could have answered yesterday. To be honest, we sat as a whole group of us after last week and having our results and everything. And as I said previously, the applications are done earlier in the year, so they're done around February, March, because we do the early intentions. And then the students are then actually saying which route they would like to go in. However, when they get their results, that determines the actual route they are. So, for an example, we have some students who were able to go back to school but chose not to. So, they've already got their GCSEs in math and English, which is at level two for us. So, we now moved them up. They're not going to be vocational as they've chosen. We are going to be placing them in the blended route, and then we have a progression route there for them. So, if they're in blended, so they're studying, say, a level three course, because of course blended is all level three. They're doing a level three course. Then, if that is one that can be achieved within one year, we then would be progressing them to another one, as well as we would also look at what is required from the workplace to give them the qualification in the workplace or the career that they have chosen, and likewise for the vocational. Once they have achieved, there is only some who have to do one component, perhaps within their math or English. If they've achieved that, and they've got the math and English at level two. We would then progress them onto the blended route because they would then be offered a level three course.

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
Okay, I think we do need to recognise that different routes are different.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
Yeah,

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
There is no better route or no worse route. There has there's been a long, long culture back in the UK of you know there is an academic route and the people who aren't good enough to get on the academic route do the vocational. That is absolutely unacceptable as a view. They are different things for different people depending on your ability, but also your desire, the type of the type of work that you want to go into, we need to be really clear that blended and vocational training, apprenticeships, whatever it might be, are as good as A levels. Degrees and the academic route they are just a different route for different people. One of our biggest constraints across SHG at the moment is in terms of our capital infrastructure, our building programme. The thing that slows it down the most, and we've just seen this around you know around the primary reorganisation, one of the biggest challenges we have is having enough capacity in the construction industry to be able to keep up with what we want to do when we have the capital EDIP funding. So, people going down the vocational route into construction and trades, for example, have a really good employment prospect at the end of it. That is not a second class employment opportunity. That's something this island desperately needs. So, I want to be really clear that academic, blended, and vocational are all of equal value. They are just different.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
Okay. Would you spoke about some levels. Could you explain, what is level three or level one, level two?

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**
So, level three is studying at A level, and level two is studying at GCSE.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
Okay, thank you. The sixth form policy states that equal opportunity for school leavers to access education and training is a core value. Is this being achieved in practice, and how is SHG assessing whether young people with lower attainment, additional learning needs, or other barriers, are receiving equitable access to six form routes and subsequent employment opportunities?

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**
So again, as I stated before, we've got the supported route. That's there for anybody who falls within that area. We do have some people or some students who actually have disabilities, but they are actually given two years extra within school, being supported at the secondary school for their two years, and then from there they then move on to the occupational therapy, who support them going into work placements and being having the one-to-one care or one-to-one assistance, then. So that's how we work with our supporter group.

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
And I think, Council, we've already seen as part of the move, or in fact, even prior to the move towards COBIS standards, but our commitment towards those with additional educational needs, the specialist resource we've got in place to be able to support those learners right the way through their education journey has certainly moved

forward over recent years. So, I think the commitment to supporting that particular more vulnerable group in society is there throughout the education system.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
Yeah,

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
Basically, because you have said that, Chief Secretary, I know education is flying when it comes to that side of it. What happens beyond the educational journey with supporting employees then with additional needs?

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
I think that is that is more challenging. That dedicated support, to go through school, potentially through sixth form. People then make their way into the world. You know, we do have great support from people like Shape, for example, from a third sector perspective, who are able to give us that kind of support. I think there is probably more we can do. We know that some of those unemployment figures probably relate to people who may not be able to work, may not ever be able to work, but there will be others who can be supported into employment. So, making sure that we give them every opportunity, you know, to be able to access roles, careers, opportunities that are suitable to their particular requirements, given their individual circumstances, is something that is important to take forward. I think that may be an area where we do need to do a bit more work.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
Right, number 18. What mechanisms are in place to ensure that sixth form work placements provide genuine training and career development, rather than simply filling low-paid or low-skilled Labour shortages?

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**
So, at the start of our sixth form programme, before everybody goes out into the workplaces, we actually do a training development plan, and on that training development plan is where the work placements or workplaces then would have to list what is going to be covered within that that first year, and then from or and actually set targets for those two. From there, we actually do quarterly monitoring, plus we do like a monthly call to say how's the student doing, or even like you know if there's any issues, are they meeting their targets? Anything that has any barriers to them. So, we do a call as well as monitoring in face-to-face.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
Thank you. Has SHG considered increasing the compulsory school leaving age to 18, and could this help to remove some of the barriers currently surrounding access to sixth form education, while also supporting skills development and preparing young people for the future workforce.

**The Hon, Andrew Turner**
So that it's a discussion we've had, but it's not something we are putting under direct consideration at the moment. I think something that has been generally sort of been in reference throughout this discussion, but not directly addressed yet is the work that we're instigating in terms of review of our post-16 offering. Now, the whole ethos

behind that piece, and it so interrelates with what we're talking about today in the Labour Market Strategy, is because we want to look at that whole life journey of education. You know, sort of that cradle to the grave, as it were, looking at where you fit through right from the education into the skills into the employment side of the organisation, and I think that point that addresses some of the points you've raised around particularly Additional Educational Needs, but also how you do that career guidance. How do you sort of plant the seed early on that there are opportunities, and it's worth you know being a part and contributing to the island early on, so I think you know we're looking at that whole life journey, and that is, it may not directly answer the question as to whether where compulsory school ageing should end, but I think you have to look at the whole picture of how do you get somebody from education into the workforce, you know, to contribute through to society as a whole life journey.

**The Hon, Denis Leo**
I think that comes to the end of my question. So, thank you.

## Theme Two

**The Hon, Robert Midwinter**
Thank you, Hon. Leo. Theme two is increasing the population living and working on St Helena. The Labour Market Strategy recognises the working-age population is declining, and identifies retention of St Helenians, return migration, and inward migration as essential to reversing this trend. It also recognises that population growth must be balanced against pressures on affordable housing and other scarce resources. So, I will now hand over to my colleague, The Hon. Ronald Coleman.

**The Hon, Ronald Coleman -**
Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, the Labour Market Strategy identifies population growth as essential to the island's economic future. What is SHG's current target for the number of people living and working on Saint Helena, and what evidence supports that target as being both economically beneficial and sustainable.

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
Off the top of my head, I'm not sure that there is a specific target. I think it's we know that this is an incredibly challenging area. We have saints overseas who we would very much like to return, but we have to be able to offer them the right opportunities to make that a viable option for them. We have started to see some of the International Recruitment Strategy bring people over to this island who may have a desire to stay longer term. I think that's in the very early stages, and we don't know for certain whether that will follow through or not. We don't know what the consequences of the BIOT agreement might lead to. That may or may not see migrants come here who could fulfil meaningful roles on the island and then go on to add value, have families here, and start to increase the population again. You know, I do think this is a particularly challenging area. I think the first step, or one of the most important steps, is to stop the reduction rather than before, you can increase the number coming back. Well, no, we need to ensure the number leaving is reduced, and at the same time try and increase the number coming back. I think it may be easier to reduce the number leaving than it is to encourage more people in.

But that is an instinctive gut feel, rather than anything I could put any evidence behind. Minister Turner might have a view.

**The Hon, Andrew Turner**
I just think a specific numerical target around immigration, and I know some figures have been bandied around before, but they can be a bit of a double-edged sword, in the sense that right now the thing we know for certain is the population is declining. We know we are going in the wrong direction to the one that the Labour Market Strategy outlines. There, I think, needs to be a degree of monitoring and evaluation as to why the actions that have been implemented haven't led to an increase in population and to why that decline has occurred. But it's very easy to just bring in a specific numerical figure and say we could, you know, get 5000 people into the island, for example. But would they be in the right places, the right positions, the right jobs, fulfilling the right roles we need? So, it's a lot more complex than say targeting a specific population figure of say seven, 8000 people on the island.

**The Hon, Ronald Coleman -**
Thank you. So, the Labour Market Strategy proposes measures to encourage Saint Helena's living overseas to return to the island. Given that the employment, housing, and relocation support measures are still being phased in, what is SHG's planned timeline for the full implementation of these measures, and when does SHG expect to be in the position to assess whether the overall package is sufficient for make returning to St Helena an attractive and sustainable long-term option?

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
I think, Councillor, it's something that can't be done in isolation from the wider workforce piece, and I think we are rapidly understanding that that workforce planning piece is wider. As I've said, we have issues with local recruitment. We have the International Recruitment Strategy. We have the TC protocol, which we're working closely with the UK Government on around the future, and then we have the opportunities to try and encourage Saints overseas to return. I think we need to have made very significant progress on that by the end of this financial year. There are some concerns about the operation of those programmes at the moment. I mean, we need to look at some elements more quickly than that, and I think you'll see some potential changes over the coming weeks to months. But I think we need to have a much clearer plan on the comprehensive workforce piece, including that element, by the end of this financial year.

**The Hon, Ronald Coleman -**
Yeah. So that was going to be part of my other question: Is when does SHG expect to have sufficient evidence to evaluate whether it is achieving its objectives in encouraging St Helenians to return and remain living and working on St Helena?

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
Thank you, Councillor Coleman. I think it is difficult. I mean, we're running a survey at the moment to engage with Saints overseas to try and understand the barriers to coming back. We work on the assumption that there are a significant number of Saints overseas at the moment, who want to come back? It depends why they're overseas in the first place. If they're working in a sector where there is no employment on this island, if they feel that the

education pathways for their children, in particular circumstances, can be better delivered overseas, if they believe that they have healthcare requirements or social care requirements that can be better delivered overseas, they may be in a position where now is not the right time for them to come back, and they don't have that desire to do so. We need to create the right environment so that if a Saint overseas wants to come back, and particularly where there is meaningful employment for them that we encourage them to do that, and as we've spoken about before, particularly supporting their relocation costs, their flights, the container or equivalent to be able to bring their possessions back, in the same way that we might do for other overseas recruitment is a very sensible way forward. Will that give us the numbers that we want or the numbers that we expect? I think that is difficult to judge at the moment, but we are continuing to monitor that. We look to see where that happens. We are doing surveys to try and understand the barriers at the moment. When will we have a definitive answer? I don't know because we need to understand. If nobody comes back, does that mean the policy has failed, or does that mean that it didn't matter what we did? No one was going to come back anyway. In some ways, you're trying to prove a negative, and that can be quite challenging. So, but it is something we keep under review on an ongoing basis, and we want to create an environment where, if a saint wants to come back for meaningful work, then we will encourage that and treat them fairly and in line with what we would do for other overseas recruitment.

**The Hon, Ronald Coleman -**
Thank you. You may have answered some of this question, but how will SHG ensure that efforts to attract overseas workers do not unintentionally reduce opportunities for residents, particularly our young people competing with the sixth form programme and entering the Labour Market for the first time.

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
Well, thank you, Councillor. I think it really is the answer I've given previously, which is our preference will always be to take suitably qualified and skilled individuals locally into roles where we can. If we can bring Saints back from overseas to fill those roles, then so much the better. Our intention in terms of going out to International Recruitment, including via the TC route, is very much intended to be there for roles that we cannot fill by any other route, and we need to focus on that. We do need to focus on that. We can't go to International or TC Recruitment by default because we can't afford it. We cannot make the changes to the system we need to make if we continue to employ large numbers of people on relatively high salaries that then eats up a large part of the of the funding that the island has available to deploy into its workforce. So, that continued focus on local first wherever that's possible I think is right, and then it plays into what Minister Turner has already spoken about, which and I've alluded to, where we have, we know we have roles at the moment. I approved a number yesterday where we're going to TC recruitment for a number of roles within Health. I do not believe that a number of those roles are not amenable to developing locals into them, but of course we have to start that development pathway early enough that somebody is qualified to be whatever it might be-a biomedical scientist at the point at which we need them. So, we need to match the skills of the people on island, the education, the academic, the vocational pathways to produce the people we need at the point when we need them, so that we can reduce the reliance on overseas recruitment, because that is the desire I think of everybody around this table.

**The Hon, Ronald Coleman -**

Thank you. Which has covered my other question. So, how will the Labour Market Strategy and the sixth form policy work together to retain young people on St Helena after they complete sixth form, particularly those undertaken academic or blended routes, and may otherwise leave the island for higher education.

**The Hon, Andrew Turner**
So I think that's a question that very much again. And I risk using this as an answer quite a lot, but I think that very much goes to the core of what I was talking about earlier in terms of the whole life strategy in the post, you know, in the Post-16 review. Because I mean, you're absolutely right. It's about that whole transitional journey, right? Right the way through. This isn't just about schools, education, and which path you do. It's actually getting the ultimate aim, of course, is to get people from education through into the workforce, you know, to contribute to society throughout their whole life.

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
And I think you know that there are potentially more opportunities. You know, we talk about people leaving the Island for university now. University brings a number of skills over and above just the academic element of it. You know, I think back as it turns out a very long way now to my time at university and you know that was my first opportunity to move away from home to live on my own to have to kind of manage myself as a person. So going away to university is not necessarily a bad thing, and often people in the UK will go to a university that's in a different part of the country from where they've been brought up for that exact experience. But there are huge technological advantages now that wouldn't have been in there in the past. The opportunities potentially, and we would have to find the right partner, and we would have to find the right funding model. But to bring a kind of university college type model to the island, so that people might have academic opportunities at university level without having to leave the island and making sure that the availability of courses was aligned with the skills that we think we will need in future on the Island, as I say, very much aspirational at this stage. But I do think the development of technology gives us the opportunity to start thinking about some of those things in a way that we maybe wouldn't have had the opportunity to do before.

**The Hon, Andrew Turner**
And I think you also need to look at the wider point because the key point there is opportunities. We tend to look at the sort of the pathway of the one person again through schooling and into the world of work, but you've also got to think about their families and everyone else around them by providing opportunities for young people, whether those young people ultimately stay on the Island or not, that is a crucial deciding factor in parents deciding where they're going to live. You know, this is part and parcel of the work of the Education Review as a whole. Is that by providing opportunities on the Island, whether those young people ultimately stay or not, it is their parents see opportunities here, so they come and they become part of our workforce. So, you can't just look at the one individual; you have to look at all the sort of again the whole picture.

**The Hon, Ronald Coleman -**
Thank you. Can I just ask if there's any specific measures being taken to ensure that young Saint Helenians who leave the island for education or employment remains connected to Saint Helena, and are encouraged to return.

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**
So yes, through Career Access, we are always in contact with the students who have left to go overseas for studies, and again before they go and during the time that they're there and coming up to their return, we are always pushing forward on our graduate scheme. This is what we have to offer. This is what you would have to do. So, through Career Access, we do keep in contact and make sure that they are aware of what is available if they choose to return.

**The Hon, Andrew Turner**
I think to add to that, this is obviously something where the circumstances have changed over the years, because of course when St. Helena Government was offering fully funded scholarships, you know there was a degree of bonding, and there was obviously that constant connection for the entire time while you were away, that there was an expectation and that you would be coming back to the island, and it was something that was facilitated by SHG, so that connection remained. Obviously, since students have had to go for student finance, that connection doesn't exist in the same way. One of the pieces of work we have begun is looking at a Scholarship Trust that would sort of be a bit of a hybrid between the two. That would obviously one of the issues, as we all are aware, with the current model is that St. Helenian students have access to funding for their courses, but not for the maintenance and sustenance while they're away. So, we are looking at models that would address that gap. Obviously, one of the considerations of that model would be what bonding connections would you have to ensure, or to look at encouraging students when they have done their courses to come back and deploy those skills on the island.

**The Hon, Ronald Coleman -**
Thank you. So, we had quite a few answers on the Labour Market situation, and now. On the types of crafts or trades that Saint Helena is requiring, and how are we going to go and fill those gaps with those types of vocation and workforce needs? But if the island succeeds in attracting more people to live and work on Saint Helena, what assessments has SHG made for the additional demand that will create for housing, health, education, transport, and other public services.

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
I think it's a very good question, Councillor. And you see this all over the world. You know, I would use the education example not necessarily on Saint Helena, but certainly from my background, you know what the child birth rate is. You have four to five years advance warning of whether you need a school place for those children, and yet in the UK they regularly run out of school places, you know, in the right place at the right time, despite having had a significant leave time. I think it is challenging because you know the demands on Health and Social Care, on Education, on the Benefit System, on kind of all of the wider aspects of SHG depend on the numbers. Depends who comes, when they come, whether they come alone with families, with children, so you know we are. It is something that we keep under constant review. You know the statisticians, economists look at that on a regular basis. But you're right, there is no output and specifics. For example, under BIOT, we have put particular infrastructure in place for those individuals should they come. But that infrastructure then remains at the end of the agreement, whether they have come or not, and creates more capacity for us on the island. So, we're not expecting to see. I think if we said we have 500 extra people coming next year, then we have significant

infrastructure that we need to put in place to deal with 500 people. We are talking about a shift over time here, reversal of a trend, and by definition, a trend has to happen over a period of time. Otherwise, it's a step change, not a trend. So, we are unlikely to see, I think, changes that are so significant in any short period that we can't deal with the infrastructure requirements to go alongside that as and when we start to see those changes happening.

**The Hon, Andrew Turner**
I think there's an element of that wouldn't those be good problems to have in the sense that you know we quite often find ourselves in discussing the things we can't do because the numbers just simply aren't there to make something worth doing. So, I think as the Chief Secretary said when we're not expecting these things to change overnight you wouldn't expect 500 people to suddenly turn up, but if we are going to grow the population, you can grow the infrastructure along with it.

**The Hon, Ronald Coleman -**
So, I heard what you say, but the world is changing, and so is our Immigration Ordinance and Immigration Policy. If we did have a rapid growth influx, how would we handle it?

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
I think, with respect, Councillor, that's hypothetical, and I think it's difficult to answer. What we don't have at the moment is a funding envelope that would allow us to make significant infrastructure changes on the basis of something that may or may not happen. You know, we are having to cut our cloth very, very carefully from one year to the next, and make some difficult choices about what we can invest in and what we can't. As I've already said, in relation to BIOT, that gives us an additional funding stream, which is helping us to build infrastructure, particularly around accommodation. That accommodation will continue into the into public ownership beyond the end of the BIOT arrangement, so that gives us opportunities around housing, you know, investment elsewhere from BIOT in supporting our Health needs and gaining new and additional equipment, particularly that allows us to do more diagnosis on islands to reduce the costs of having to send people overseas, which means we have more money retained in the local economy, and some key changes in education around EDIP funding for the primary school reorganisation, physical infrastructure, but also around COBIS from predominantly BIOT funding, where you know being sure that if we get larger numbers of people coming here with children, that we are delivering a high quality education for them. So, it's partly about having the space to do it. It's also about the quality of the provision of those services should need them, but as I say, the funding is not there to make a predictive step change in our infrastructure for something that, at the moment, we don't have certainty about. We keep those numbers under review. If we see that the Immigration Ordinance starts to make a significant change, then we will act on that as soon as we see that that change starting to happen. We just are not in a position where we can jump the gun on that in terms of investing large sums of money that, quite frankly, we don't have.

**The Hon, Ronald Coleman -**
Thank you. And my final question on this: what is the contingency plan if the population growth assumptions is not achieved, particularly if the island continues to experience net outward migration, despite efforts to attract returning saints and overseas workers.

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
I think I might be straying into the political space. I probably already have strayed into the political space, which is not my role. But I, mean, that's an existential question for the island for the island as a whole. You know, people are very passionate about this island, and it's quite clear that people want a long term sustainable future for this Island, if we continue to lose people from the island who don't return, then of course it creates an incredibly challenging environment. And you know the figures that you can see in the Labour Market Strategy and elsewhere show that if you continue to depopulate, then you know we have to look at the services that we can offer, the funding that we have available to deliver that. You know the risk is that you are in a gradual decline, and if you can't reverse that, at what points does it become unsustainable? That I was going to say that's an existential question that's beyond my pay grade. If it's beyond my pay grade, they are. I'm going to hand that one to a politician.

**The Hon, Andrew Turner**
I think, to be honest, they are existential questions that we need to ask, not just as politicians, but in a community as a whole. There's a big question in front of all of us as to what do we want Saint Helena to be? What is it we're actually trying to attract people to come back to? You know, one of the things for me that I've always been a proponent of is that, for sure, we don't compete with the UK, the Falklands, anywhere else on salaries. But we have certain things that are very precious to us that the rest of the world can't compete with. We have a lifestyle here that is incredible that doesn't exist elsewhere in the world. We have a degree of safety that doesn't exist elsewhere in the world, and I think that's something that, as a community, we really need to all get behind and actually start pushing more. Because maybe speaking from a personal perspective, but certainly when I open, for example, social media and things like that, these the posts and the messages that are getting out to our population overseas, and to be honest, there isn't a lot of positivity on there, and that's something we all have a role in addressing. And I think if that's going to be showing our community, you know, our community overseas what there is to come back to, we're certainly not putting our best foot forward, are we?

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
I think it plays back, Councillor, to what I was talking about earlier in terms of the kind of social contract we need to have with the population as a whole. As a government, SHG can improve the opportunity. We can create the right conditions to allow people to stay on the island, to work on the island, have children on the island, you know, to contribute to the island, and potentially to start that regeneration and that regrowth. But even if I could give you those conditions tomorrow, that does not automatically mean that people will take those opportunities and want to stay. As I say, we can only ever deliver a degree of healthcare on this island because of its size. There are some things where we can only deliver to a certain point, and if people are committed to going to university overseas, to going overseas because of healthcare options, whatever it might be, then it may be that even if I can create the opportunities that people don't want to take them. That's what I mean about the social contract. It's like, as Minister Turner says, we need the whole population to be behind this. The government cannot increase the population on the island.

**The Hon, Andrew Turner**
And I think just to build on that, if we're being really honest, we are always more than likely going to have a gap in our population. You know, you ask most 15/16, 17/18-year-olds, where they want to go. You know, they want to

experience something different. They've grown up on the island. They want to experience being able to go to the cinema or arcades or nightlife in London, for example, and you know, name one small community that doesn't have the issue of its young population spending a few years in the big cities. You know, that is normal. That is the problem we have of course, is that they aren't for most of these populations, when you hit that sort of 25 to 30 range, when you're looking to settle down, when you're looking to start your career, find a safe place to raise your children, they come back. That's the bit we don't have yet, and that's where I think again it's that lifestyle piece that we really need to be much more encouraging of, and actually make sure that we protect. Because if you're looking at where to settle down, where to raise your family, I can't think of a better place than St Helena in a lot of ways because we have relative safety, because we have that community support. Yes, there are gaps. That's why we want to bring in the International Education Standards and raise those. And I think that is something that we can compete with the rest of the world on. But we need the community on board as a whole on that. That's something we all need to build.

**The Hon, Ronald Coleman -**
Thank you to the panel, and thank you to Mr. Chair.

**The Hon, Robert Midwinter**
So, thank you, Hon. Coleman, and I think it's time to take a comfort break. Can we aim to be back by half past? Is that okay? Yeah. Thank you.

## Theme Three

**The Hon, Robert Midwinter**
Welcome back, everyone. Theme three is preparing the workforce to meet the vision laid out in the Sustainable Economic Development Strategy, or SEDS. The Labour Market Strategy explicitly links the future workforce to education, training, succession planning, the shortage occupation list, and the SEDS priority sectors. The sixth form policy, in turn, says that its purpose is to meet current and future workforce needs, and offers four routes with work-based training and qualifications. So, I will now hand over to my colleague, The Hon. Julie Thomas.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
Thank you, Mr. Chair. Okay, I have to say thank you to the panel because I'm hoping that some of these questions will disappear because we've spoken quite a lot about the sixth form programme. But I will start with the first one, which is how does SHG ensure that the skills and qualifications being offered through the sixth form programme are aligned with the future workforce requirements identified in the Labour Market Strategy and the priority sectors of the SEDS, rather than simply reflecting current training capacity.

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**
Currently, the courses that is being studied is actually the choice of the students. We do give career guidance on what is the need for the island from the Labour Market Strategy and the Shortage Occupation List, which I believe there is one in the Shortage Occupation List, however, I believe everything is now being said to be a shortage. So, there is no specific list, although there is one that is set in immigration. I guess you know for their purposes, but I

know that it's being said now that it's going to be everything is a shortage. So, we do make students aware of this. We do ensure that they get to know what is out there, what jobs are there. We look at what vacancies are there. You know when we do our career talks. However, I will say for this year, again, is well done to the students for how they've come through and the subjects they've chosen. But career guidance this year was not as popular as we would normally do it, and that actually is due to us not having the qualified or the staff to be able to deliver it, but we have we are in the process of employing a careers guide lead. So, I can see that going forward for the next year, we will have career guidance as a proper programme right from primary through to secondary.

**The Hon, Andrew Turner**
I think there's a wider political, if not philosophical, question that your question raises there, and that is obviously Post-16 education is part of our non-core offering, and this is something that the government essentially chooses to do, because it is the right thing for the community as a whole. So, the question becomes then: to what extent do we want to guide students down a particular path, or leave it open to the students to choose their own path in life? And this is one of those questions that I really want to be explored as part of the Post-16 review, because I think it's fundamental to how we provide Post-16 education going forward. Do we want to be the government that says exactly these are the jobs we need to train into them, or are we going to be the you know the government, the community that says you can be who you are?

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
Thank you. I think the question has been answered, but the concern I think again I'm talking from Children's Champion as well is the availability of courses for the post-16 offering, because it is one thing to be able to talk about filling workforce availability, etc. But can I ask a more direct question as to do we think as an education portfolio that we are providing the courses that the students need to be able to fulfil their aspirations? Because I'll just use an example because I've been listening to what has come so far, and I we talk a lot about the workforce, which is extremely important, but is there accessibility for young people to have the necessary skills to, for instance, start their own business and become entrepreneurs, as an example?

**The Hon, Andrew Turner**
I think that that very much comes back to the same point because particularly now with the advent of online courses and their increasing availability, it becomes that fundamental question you need to ask: Is the education service, the post 16 education service, going to be something that is entirely student led, entirely government led, or where on that spectrum do we want to sit?

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
I think, Angie, you have confirmed that there is a Shortage Occupation List. Whether it is a short occupation list or a long occupation list now is to be determined. But how frequently is it reviewed and circulated to ensure that all businesses and organisations remain informed after the current skill shortages?

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**

Going back two years, I can actually say that there was a group of us who met to go through the list, and we contacted all the different organisations to find out if there was any shortages that they had and what areas that they were looking for. So since then, I know it's been two years that it was actually last done.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
Thank you.

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
I think if I may, Councillor, I think also does something about mindset as well and thinking about what do we mean by shortage occupations, and I think there's a real risk that we constrain our thinking and we kind of approach it from the perspective of you know what roles could locals do and versus the availability of those roles, I'm not sure we're being aspirational enough. I see on a regular basis things that come through the TC monitoring group, where the justification is we don't have anyone who could do this, therefore we need a TC. That might be right, but that is not the same as saying we couldn't produce our own in this area. It's simply that we haven't so far. But I think sometimes the language that's used is not done very carefully, and the assumption is because it's been a TC in the past, it should always be a TC in the future. Rather than this is telling us that we need to focus training and development in this area because we could move this off the TC list, but as I say, for most of these things there is a lead time, and we need to get ahead of the curve. But I wonder, and I don't know. I mean, I'm speaking off the top of my head and entirely without any evidence base. But I wonder whether the shortage occupations list would include those sorts of roles, or whether we're actually constraining our thinking at the outset in a way that might be unhelpful to us.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
Thank you, Chief Secretary. I think that's what I was getting to when I asked my supplementary question, because it's about the availability on the GCSE, or level two and level three, if we are going to look at the longer term for succession planning, so based on the fact then that we've got the shortage occupation list, although it's probably not the predominant document now, how quickly can the sixth form provision respond when new skill shortages, if they are coming up, emerge?

**The Hon, Andrew Turner**
So, if I can answer that from very much a high level, I mean, it's very dependent on what that skills shortage would be. Obviously, there are certain areas of education where, if where we would need, for example, specialised teachers and specialised equipment. You know, if it's one of those areas, it would take up a lot longer than if it was something we could say offer via an online course. The online courses obviously allow us a greater degree of flexibility, but there are always going to be some things that are incredibly difficult to deliver via that medium, where they do need a specialist instructor, where you do need that ability to be able to discuss the finer, nuanced concepts of a particular problem.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
Okay, the question I'm going to ask now, Angie, I'm going to ask it, and then I'm no doubt you're going to tell me you'll take it away. But I'm going to ask it anyway because it is data, and you have said this data. What proportion of

the sixth form students are currently undertaking training or work placements in occupations identified as shortages, so we are just saying it's long. And what target has government set for increasing this proportion? Now, I don't suspect you've got all that detail with you, but that's something as a takeaway. If not,

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**
Yes, Julie, I will need to take that away.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
No problem. Then we move on to the how is government measuring where the sixth form graduates actually progress into sustained employment in the sectors and occupations for which they have been trained?

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**
So currently, we had four students who returned back to the island. Sorry, can you repeat that question? Because I think I'm getting confused with graduates.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
I think you are, but so it's the six forms. Who, when they're doing the blended or supported routes, etc. How many at the end of the two years actually then become employed by wherever they're doing the work experience?

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**
Okay, so again, that would be our data that I would have to reflect to on that. So I'll get that to you.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
I won't ask any more about the different routes because I think we covered that quite nicely with Councillor Denis Leo. So I'll leave that one, and I also think I'll leave 39 as well because that's talking about particularly where the qualifications again are intended to support future sets, and I think we've just said that that's a long list now, and it's more about availability and accessibility. But how is the sixth form programme being used to address the specific skill gaps identified by employers, rather than simply providing qualifications without a clear link to available or emerging employment opportunities, and I'm going to say employment and business opportunities because there's a business element to it as well.

**The Hon, Andrew Turner**
I think, if I may, not to sound like I'm beating myself too much, but again, it fundamentally raises that question as to how student-led you're going to be. Because one of the risks, of course, of being entirely student-led, is that if this person, you know, if students don't want to do things that are relative to relevant, sorry, to the future of the island, then you are going to end up with people not ending up in those kind of shortage occupation jobs. On the other end of the spectrum, if you say overly regulate that, then you will get people out and into those jobs very effectively. But of course, then that comes back to, for example, the wider piece around job satisfaction, you know, well-being, etc.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**

I think then, as we've got the Chief Secretary here, I'm going to cheekily say, do we think we are doing all that we can as St Helena Government? And I know you're not the only employer, so caveated with that. Do you think we're doing all that we can to ensure that the collaboration between education, HR, etc. is working to a point whereby those with the skills are being considered. I know they have to apply for the roles, etc. Because I know in the past, as was said, two years' experience in such and such. Well, if you're coming out of school, you won't have two years. So, are we looking at changing those parameters?

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
No, I think you're absolutely right. We have to. So, I think it does work reasonably well. I think Minister Turner is right. You have a debate about you know what's the value of education in and of itself. So, I am a part-time student. Do I need the qualification that I'm getting? Not in a million years. I'm doing it because I happen to be interested, and people will choose to do particular things that interest them that may or may not be of much value to the Labour Market on the Island. You know, is that a good thing or is that a bad thing? Is education, for the sake of education, actually a laudable goal? And it doesn't matter what subject you're studying. And I would argue that it is a valuable thing, but it doesn't necessarily contribute to the Labour Market Strategy. So, the two things may not be kind of directly linked. I think you're right. We need to make sure that we create the opportunity. So, I think there's a differentiation as well. If you look at bringing in TCS, I would equate a TC effectively with a consultant. You are bringing in somebody who is well paid to do a specific role. I would expect them to be the finished article when they arrive. They can do that job from day one out of the box to the required standard. If you're looking at the local Labour Market or any normal Labour Market, what you would do is you would think about those roles on a continuum. So, you will bring somebody into a role who meets the minimum requirements. They've gone through the application process, the interview process. You are confident that they can do that role, but they will grow into that role over the first year or two or three, and they will develop their skills, and then they will become the finished article, and they will give you good service as the finished article for a number of years, and some of them will go beyond that, and you will start to develop them for the next opportunity because you can see that they've got management or leadership potential, or that they can become a subject matter expert, whatever it might be. So, you have a differentiation there. So, it may well be that you say, if I want a TC for a role, I want someone who's got two years' experience because they've got to be able to do the job the day they arrive on the island. Might be for local workforce that you're quite happy to take somebody straight out of sixth form. In the knowledge that they will need some development throughout the first couple of years to get to that same stage, I think there's probably more to do on that, and more. As I said earlier, I think we need a different culture, a different mindset. I think we're starting to see that within the HR team, with some of the changes that we've made to the leadership within the last few weeks, I want to see that follow through into a more flexible discretionary approach. It's always difficult because you, you know, one of the guiding principles of HR and how you treat your people is that it should be consistent. But sometimes a bit of discretion, a bit of flexibility, is the right thing to do. You're looking for a quality of outcome, not necessarily a quality of input and process. So, I think there's more to do. I think we're moving in the right direction.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
Thank you, Chief Secretary. That's encouraging to hear. The sixth form policy requires each student to have a training development plan with targets, timelines, and monitoring. What information is collected from these plans,

and is it used to assess whether the sixth form programme is successfully building the workforce required by the Labour Market Strategy?

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**
So yes, the targets are set, and it also gives the credibility of being able to move into the second year with us. So, targets set for the first year must be met before they can move on. However, again, it also depends on where they're actually working, and if it does fit in with the requirements from the Labour Market Strategy, which it would, because it's going into employment, but it would be monitored closely to see where students are achieving and how they're able to move on and progress in their careers.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
Thank you. So, at a constituency meeting in October last year, concerns were raised about the limited post-16 education, training, and employment opportunities available to young people with disabilities or autism specifically, was mentioned, including reluctance among some employers to employ neurodiverse young people. It was agreed that the minister would work with HR and Career Access to assess the interests and capabilities of young people with disabilities or autism who had recently left school or were due to leave school, with a view to identifying suitable employment opportunities, alongside exploring greater employer awareness and training. What progress, if any, has been made on these actions to date? How many young people have been assessed or supported through this work, and what practical employment, training, or work placement opportunities have been identified as a result.

**The Hon, Andrew Turner**
So, this is a piece of work that's straddling a few areas, but obviously one of the sort of the more recent additions to the Education Skills and Employment Portfolio is a dedicated what was called a Special Educational Needs and disabilities coordinator. We're now using the term Additional Educational Needs because that is much more in line with modern thinking and international standards. She has been absolutely incredible, I will say, in the depth to which she is getting into tackling these issues. It's becoming part of how we're looking at that whole life journey, particularly in the post-16 review, because one of the areas I think was identified particularly well in that meeting, I must say, is that essentially when you sort of end school, a lot of the support mechanisms, a lot of the evidence base that's built up around you and how best to support you just ends. That's something that obviously needs much more wider buy-in than just Education, Skills, and Employment. You know that has cross-cutting across Health and Social Care. It has cross-cutting in HR, and of course, ultimately engagement with the private sector and businesses as well. So that is a piece of work that's progressing as part of the Post-16 review.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
Thank you, Minister. I think that's important to say that it is part of the post-16 review, and I know it's been delayed, but at least the listening public will know it hasn't been forgotten. That was kind of why I added the supplementary earlier, whereby I know education is doing quite a lot, but what happens after our young people leave school? Just as a point of information for the listening public, as Children's Champion and a member of the Safeguarding Board, I've also been having conversations with the lead from social services or Children's Services now, and I know

they're quite keen to start moving in that direction, in line with Education and the Additional Educational Needs programme.

**The Hon, Andrew Turner**
Sorry to interrupt, but I think it's really worth actually at this point noting the work of the Autism Awareness Support Group and the absolute buy-in and the collaboration we're having with them in terms of our AEN strategy has been absolutely incredible. I am aware that they are looking to expand into more into sort of the realm of general neurodiversity, rather than specifically into sorry, remaining specifically with autism, and I think that's it's huge for us to be able to work with the community in that way because this is something that goes beyond education, beyond government. It is a whole Island approach. You know, we need employers in general to be aware of these conditions and how best to help and support them, and you know actually the advantages that they can bring into the workplace as well. And I think that's it's one of those collaborations that I think is worthy of note.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
Thank you. So, we've been talking about succession planning and workforce development, and I think listening to both, well, all three on the panel, I think that's work in progress. We're talking about the workforce strategy, etc. So, I won't label that anymore. But can I move on to how is SHG preparing young people for the new employment and business opportunities identified in the Labour Market Strategy, including those arising from improved connectivity and the fibre optic cable, and what is being done to ensure they are equipped to benefit from both digital and wider economic opportunities enabled by these developments.

**The Hon, Andrew Turner**
So again, that one, I think, to a degree, falls into that post-extreme review work because you've absolutely hit onto one of the sort of the crucial issues, which is that progression into the new era. We need to think of employment almost entirely differently to the way we do now in some respects, because there are now credible opportunities for young people, for example, or to be honest, anyone on this island to work for companies that are not based on Saint Helena, for organisations that are not based on Saint Helena. Obviously, that is a piece that goes far wider than just educating people into those roles. There's, for just off the top of my head, have we established how tax protocols for working for overseas companies work. You know, do we have access to the banking systems that would enable people to get paid? But it opens a floodgate to a lot of different opportunities that could actually fundamentally change the nature of employment on the island. So, it’s a vital one to address.

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
I think that's right, and I think it gives us great opportunity going forward. I think we need to be, if I'm honest, I think we need to be slightly cautious about where we are at the moment. The cable provides us with a huge opportunity. It creates a huge amount of bandwidth at a high speed, but any network is only as fast as its slowest point. And at the moment, the provision that we have in general across the islands from somebody's home or office, with some fibre connected exceptions, to that cable mean that the opportunities may not be quite as good as we talk about, what do I mean by that? My internet connectivity, the stability of that connectivity, the speed, the latency, the number of times that I, you know, that my connection at home drops out and comes back in, are not where I would expect them to be if I were in a different jurisdiction. So, the cable provides us with the opportunity. We continue to

work with Sure as our current supplier to look at improving the home to cable connectivity going forward, so that everyone can gain the full benefit of that. I do not believe we currently have that in place.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
Thank you. I'm going to skip kind of two, but ask a question in one because of something Angie said earlier about the availability of training courses, etc. And a lot was spoken about online training, but the costs associated, etc. Can I just ask a direct question? What about the number of trainers that are available for certain training courses? Is that a concern for yourself as the portfolio as well?

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**
It definitely is. We are very limited. I mean, we did a course. I want to say at least 10, maybe 15 years ago, where myself included became a train the trainer, and for keeping myself up to date with the current training, that how it's improved and that, and how it changes, it's basically myself and just another one who's able to do it. So that is where we are at the moment.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
Thank you. So, I kind of knew the answer to that, but I wanted to do it so I can ask this question: What measurable outcomes for SHG use by 2030 and 2035, to demonstrate that the sixth form programme and wider workforce development initiatives are producing the capable, flexible, and resilient workforce envisaged by the Labour Market Strategy and required to deliver the Sustainable Economic Development Strategy.

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
So, I don't have specific indicators or targets in front of me, and in fact I don't think they're planned to that degree. But in line with the current administration's strategy vision and delivery plans, we are working up the KPIs for the next for the next three years that align with the three-year funding settlement from UKG links in with the log frame that they use to monitor us as well and aspects of conditionality that release additional funding. So those KPIs are being worked up at the moment. There is a further meeting in relation to those on the 7th September, and hopefully we should have a suite of KPIs going forward after that.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
Thank you. And then, if I turn to the Minister as well, because obviously we've just spoken about the post-16 education review. I know that's currently underway, but how is that expected to impact the implementation of the Labour Market Strategy, particularly in relation to ensuring that education and training provision is aligned with the Island's future workforce and skill needs?

**The Hon, Andrew Turner**
Well, I mean, it's obvious that the two have to interrelate, and one of the fundamental questions around the post-16 offering that we have indeed touched on many times today is that fundamental point of are we getting young people from school into work? You know that it's almost the same question being asked at two different levels, and I don't see that as a bad thing, actually, because I think if you address it at both levels, it gives you a better chance to align the two, and the two, in a sense, have to align. The Labour Market Strategy does need some

monitoring and evaluation. It does need, in my opinion, and I will share as opinion to go perhaps a bit further than the current version does in terms of looking at the sort of the wider workforce and Labour Market needs of the Island, and then I think the post-16 efforts have to sort of sit under that. But it is a bit of chicken and egg that you'd love to be able to do both in parallel. That would be the ideal solution. I don't think we're in a position to be able to do that. We are obviously focusing on the post-16 review first, and I think as the Labour Market Strategies, monitoring and valuation continues, the one shall inform the other.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
Thank you, Andrew. You mentioned earlier about the Labour Market Strategy Online Registry. If you can just give our listeners and those interested how they register for such a thing and how it is utilised and the type of data that you're collating regarding that. And I don't expect you to provide the data today, but is that something as it is built that will be put into the public domain, so people can understand where there's these gaps.

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**
So yes, we will. We, what should I say? It's in it's not in baby stages, but it is still being developed because, of course, it's not being one that started at the initial start of career access, so it's starting to be developed now. You know, further to what it was, and it's basically more or less using an email that we provide on the site that people can come through. But I do know that we are looking into actually having a proper form that has to be completed online that can be sent through to us, almost like how we do our school admissions of the sort of on that route that we would use.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
Thank you. So, will you be able to provide again, not today, but a little bit more information so people know how to go about that process?

**Mrs Angela Benjamin, Head of Lifelong Learning**
Yes, we will provide that once we are up.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
Thank you.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
This one is about SHG HR policies, Chief Secretary, and I think you've mentioned this as well, being under review now with new management, etc. So, I don't expect a big answer to this, but it was brought up because I think it's important if we are looking at reviewing the Labour Market Strategy. It is said through consultation that some existing SHG HR policies and practices do not adequately serve the needs of the community. With concerns raised about inconsistent application of policies and inadequate communication, leading to confusion and disappointment, what specific changes is government planning to make to address these concerns, and more importantly, the timelines associated. I'll leave. I'll ask that question first, and then I'll talk about the community HR community of practice.

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
Thank you, Councillor. So, I think, as I said earlier, some of those policy reviews have already taken place through the code of management and staff handbook, there are some yet to be done, and we are looking at maybe how we approach those more generally to make them more user friendly, more straightforward, more simple, but also more principles based. It's always a fine balance, as we spoke about before, about consistency versus flexibility and the ability to use some discretion, and it's the outcome that's the most important thing, not necessarily the process that's followed to get there. You talked a little bit about inconsistency in the application of policies. That isn't in itself necessarily an HR issue, unless it's the policy that's been drafted in a way that causes that inconsistency because it's not clear. It may be around the development that's in place for the line managers within the portfolios, making sure that they understand the policy and that they're applying it effectively. So, I'm a big advocate of giving people a degree of flexibility and a degree of discretion within bangs, because I think that helps you to get to the right outcome. So that work is ongoing. I think Mahmood, as the new Head of People, is looking at a variety of things that need to change in that particular area. So, we don't have a definitive timetable on it yet.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
Thank you. And then the follow-up question was: When all of this work is kind of implemented, done, and progressing, is it still the intention, as the Labour Market Strategy currently proposes, is that will there be an Island-wide HR Community of Practice to bring together SHG and other employers to share best practice and address common challenges in the areas of recruitment, hiring, and compliance with Labour laws, including issues such as succession planning, leadership development, and compensation, is that still the direction of travel?

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
I think, given where we are at the moment in terms of the work that we need to do internally, I'm not sure that that's something that we're viewing actively as a priority at the moment. But I still think that it has significant potential. It can be challenging because, of course, employment through the public service and through private sector employers, the rules are not always the same. There will, there can and necessarily might be differences between those, and we need to make sure that we don't bring people together and start learning the wrong things from each other rather than learning the right things from each other. But I do think that gives us an opportunity. I think within such a small community. You know, one of the challenges we have is that we're often poaching people from each other on a regular basis. And if we can develop that into a more structured way, and potentially even a rotational way, where people throughout their careers come into public service, move out into the private sector, develop there, come back into the public service. You know these kinds of opportunities are strong and utilised in other jurisdictions. So, it's something I think we would certainly want to look forward to when we're at the right stage internally. But I don't think we're there yet.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
I think that is appreciated. Just as a point of information, Angie. When we spoke about the Labour Market Strategy Online Registration, I forgot to mention that we have been advised by people who were viewing it that the link on the website does not work at the moment. So, I'll just make that comment. I don't expect you to really say anything about that. Moving on, then; as the Labour Market Strategy spans housing, immigration, tax, education, health,

investment, and technology, it is dependent on policies outside the direct control of the Labour Market programme. So, who is accountable for each dependency, and what happens if the supporting policy is not?

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
So ultimately, that has to be me, mainly because ultimately I'm accountable for everything in SHG. Thank you for the question, Councillor. So, I mean, obviously, I think at the moment, there's a little bit of a not a lack of clarity, but a question about how this fits together. Obviously, we have a portfolio that is Education, Skills, and Employment. The clue is in the title, but there is a very, very heavy focus on education at the moment for understandable reasons. We've got the primary reorg going on. We've got COBIS standards. We've got following through that into Post 16, into potential university offer. You know, I think it's fair to say that the resource that we have dedicated to employment works incredibly hard, but that it is a very limited resource. I do think the new Portfolio Director, providing we are successful in securing him onto the island, will bring us some additional strategic capability and capacity in that area. But you're right. This involves HR. It involves Economic Development. It involves you know probably every Portfolio within SHG, and therefore the only person that can ultimately be accountable for it is me because I have to ensure that the portfolios all work together successfully to be able to deliver this as one SHG, which is what we should be, and that things don't fall down the cracks between the different Portfolios. So, thank you for your question. I'll take full responsibility.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
Thanks for the responsibility, sir. Mr. Chair, I just noticed that one of the questions I'm asking is about agriculture and fishing, and I have to say I didn't realise that until now. So, I will declare a further interest that my husband is a commercial fisherman and has been for 30 years. So, I'll just put that on record. I didn't realise that one was coming. Does agriculture and fishing remain part of the future workforce development agenda? And what participation has there been in these sectors? And what evidence supports continued investment?

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
So, I don't see why they wouldn't. I mean, obviously, the current administration is undertaking both a fisheries review and an agricultural review, and I think the outcome of those will be instrumental in determining how we see those industries continuing to thrive on the Island and what development opportunities and workforce opportunities they bring us going forward. So, I think it would be dependent on the outcome of those two reviews in the first instance.

**The Hon, Andrew Turner**
I think at this point, I'd also just like to sort of draw attention to some of the work that happens, particularly in St. Helena Secondary School, in terms of trying to develop young people who have an interest in, particularly farming. You know, I'm sure she might be mentioning, but Barbara Osborne's done some incredible work, and I think we've all been to see the Centre down at Harper's, and you know, that's probably actually an example that shows where Education can teach you things like you know your math, your English, and your science in a way that suits individuals who maybe don't get the best out of sitting in a classroom because they obviously they do different experiments, for example, using different soil mediums to grow their produce, they treat it to a degree as a business, which they then reinvest in being able to do more down there. So, I think that's one of those courses that

we should probably highlight a bit more in terms of showing how you can develop essentially traditional education with traditional industries.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
Thank you. Given St Helena's ageing population, which we all talk about, and the potential loss of experienced workers from the workforce, how many key roles have currently been identified as requiring succession planning? How many individuals are currently being trained or developed to provide succession cover for those roles, and has government established a list of roles where succession planning is considered imminent or particularly urgent? May not be the numbers right now, but I'm sure we've had conversations regarding the ageing population in our workforce.

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
Yes, certainly, and I don't think we necessarily have those numbers? Succession planning, I think, is something that's incredibly important for the overall workforce strategy, regardless of why that turnover is happening. Now, obviously, there is a particular issue around the ageing population, and we know that you know there is a large cadre of people who are heading towards, or indeed well beyond, in some instances, retirement age, and continuing to fulfil really important roles on the Island, and we are certainly working towards succession planning for those particular roles to make sure that when the individuals retire, you know that we have the resource available to us for some. To step into those roles, but succession planning should be there regardless. We should be looking towards succession planning when people are promoted, when people go on maternity leave, whatever it might be. You know, right the way through the workforce, not just thinking about in terms of you know people at the upper end of the age range retiring. I don't think we retain specific numbers around that because, as I say, it's something that I would want to be embedded in every aspect, and also particularly in the TC roles. There's a different type of succession planning there, which is one of the fundamental principles of the TC role is that your time on the island is supposed to be used developing people to be able to step into those roles when you need. So that kind of succession planning might be at any points during the you know during the age demographic.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
Thank you. When recruiting workers from overseas, what systems are utilised as part of the vetting and due diligence process to assess prospective recruits? And can you explain how and at what stage this information is checked, and which either safeguarding or security checks are undertaken before an overseas recruit is approved to work on St Helena.

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
So, in general, the same principles would apply that we would use whether we bring some, whether we are somebody locally or somebody from the UK. So, we will undertake kind of police checks, criminal records checks with the local authorities in the country that they're coming from, and for a number of years before that, if they've rotated between different countries, we do the standard checks that you would expect in terms of immigration checks, watchlist checks, depending on the country and whether we have access to that information, reference checks with current and previous employers. So, broadly, it is the same pathway that you would use for any recruit, but of course, it does need to vary slightly depending on which country they're coming from and what the

availability of those documents is. But it is absolutely fundamentally important to us, not least because often things like Education and particularly Health and Social Care, where we are bringing people internationally, and these are people who will have access to the most vulnerable people in society. So, ensuring that they're checked and vetted properly is important. It's done at the end of the process because it can be time-consuming and it can be expensive, either for us or the individual. So, we don't put people to that challenge until we've got them far enough through the recruitment process that we want to offer them a job on the island. And depending on where they're coming from, it can be extremely slow, and that is often a criticism that's laid at our door. And there are certainly things we can do to improve our processes, depending on the administration that we're talking to. Getting those records from a third-party country, sometimes you know it's a thirty second job on a computer. Sometimes it can be months of correspondence waiting to get that information back, and there's nothing that we can do to speed it up.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
Thank you. I think that's quite a comprehensive answer, and I think the listening public will be keen to hear that. This goes back to what Mr. Chair spoke about earlier. During our recent call for information, the Committee received representation regarding the possibility of recruiting workers from Nepal in areas such as nursing and residential care, noting that Nepal and the UK already share strong ties. How does SHG determine which jurisdictions to recruit from, and has consideration been given to recruiting skilled workers from Nepal as part of the International Recruitment Strategy, taking into consideration what has just happened in Nepal, I guess that's a different element. If so, what assessment has been undertaken of the feasibility, benefits, costs, and potential challenges of recruiting from Nepal?

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
So, I mean, I would just echo the condolences that you expressed at the beginning of the meeting for the people of Nepal and the appalling situation they find themselves in the at the moment. It's a country I've been to as a mountaineer. It's a country I've been to a number of times, and one that I have a very close affinity with. And you're right that you know it has traditionally very strong links to the UK, not only through the Gurkhas and the military representation, but also you know because of our you know often difficult colonial past. So, I think it does create opportunities. I know that the private sector, in particular, were looking to engage Nepalis through a sort of recruitment consultancy type arrangement, and I know that an individual came and spoke to me about that. I'm not sure what progress he made with that. I'm not aware of any specific progress that's being made directly within the public sector in relation to that community. I think for me, we need people who have the right skills, the right training, who can go through the right vetting processes? Who can operate safely and who can speak the English language sufficiently, depending on the environment they're coming into? But particularly Healthcare, Education, for example, you've got to be able to communicate safely, and Nepal is a potential route for that. We know that we've looked at Thailand, the Philippines, parts of Africa previously. If this gives us an additional opportunity to bring individuals, then I don't think it's an opportunity we wouldn't want to miss. But as I understand it, the current progress in that particular area comes from an individual within the private sector rather than within SHG.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**

Thank you. I hope that this will be the last question I ask specifically about plans for the future regarding the Labour Market Strategy. But I think it is an important question to talk about the direction of travel and the timeline. So, the Labour Market Strategy sets out a range of actions and targets to address St Helena's Labour Market challenges. How is SHG currently monitoring progress against these commitments? How frequently is performance reported, and will regular reports be made publicly available so that progress, delays, and any changes to targets can be independently scrutinised.

**The Hon, Andrew Turner**
So, I think this is one we're quite keen to address because, as one of our key actions, and I believe it was actually set out in the Vision Strategy as well, we want to develop and implement a comprehensive sort of monitoring, develop monitoring and evaluation plan for the Labour Market Strategy. A lot of the actions from the original LMS have been implemented, and there are some encouraging signs. You know, we have had wage growth, etc. However, there are other signs that are less positive. The ultimate one being, as we discussed earlier, the fact that the population is still declining. I think it's important to understand of all the actions that have been taken, which have been effective. So, I think yeah, you've got to start at that point of monitoring and evaluation of the current strategy with a with a view to review. And I think, as that work's taking place, you know, we still need to carry on doing work to strengthen the Labour Market, as it were, under the current strategy. You know, this is not to say that you pause work on the Labour Market Strategy while you do a review of it, I think the two have to go hand in hand because we cannot afford to lose the ground also of not continuing to develop under the current Labour Market Strategy while we monitor and evaluate the success of the actions taken so far.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
On that particular one, will the monitoring and evaluation plan, when you obviously pick up momentum with that, will that be somehow put into the public domain so people can see what is being achieved, what still needs to be achieved, and if there is a direct a change of direction?

**The Hon, Andrew Turner**
I think part of the development of that monitoring and evaluation plan is exactly that it's how do you do the reporting mechanisms to ensure that you can keep track of the progress on it.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
Okay, thank you. Oh, sorry. Go ahead.

**The Hon, Robert Midwinter**
Just again for public information, the clerk did actually ask a question around this, and we did have a response from the portfolio, because when the Labour Market Strategy was first put in play, there was an initial report, but there hasn't been any subsequently. So, I think it's important just to note that was the intent that there would be regular reporting. One was produced, and then no further reports, but of course, things have moved around as to who was ultimately responsible for the Labour Market Strategy and the implementation of.

**The Hon, Andrew Turner**

Chair, you're absolutely right, and that's exactly why I think you need that monitoring and evaluation plan exactly to sort of, bottom out those issues in terms of where responsibility sits, where role sits, and I suppose importantly, where resources sit to be able to do that work. Completely agree.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
Thank you. Slightly different topic, but all to do with Labour. Given the seasonal nature of employment in sectors such as hospitality and agriculture, has SHG considered developing and maintaining a calendar of seasonal employment opportunities across different sectors, so that individuals can combine seasonal roles. For example, moving between agriculture, hospitality, and tourism, to secure more continuous employment throughout the year and help address seasonal Labour shortages.

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
Thank you, Councillor. Not that I'm aware of. Something we could certainly look at going forward, see whether that has potential opportunity to support people.

**The Hon, Andrew Turner**
I think there is perhaps a wider question in terms of how you would implement that in relation to, for example, the new Immigration Ordinance and how that could be facilitated under it, or whether there would potentially need to be further amendments to make something like that happen. Obviously, these are probably questions that would need to be done in conjunction with the Economic Development Department, who I'm sure will be aware of those issues from those areas of the economy.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
Thank you. We're coming to the last two, believe it or not. What guidance or support, and you've touched on it earlier, Chief Secretary, but I think it's important to say what guidance or support has government, or will government, or are you considering giving, providing to the private sector to strengthen employment practices across the wider community, but especially I think with new businesses popping up and employment law, I think it is a lot more we could be doing to educate regarding employment law.

**The Hon, Andrew Turner**
Can I maybe address part of that? Just obviously, my previous role before in the in the previous term of council was as chair of the Employment Rights Committee, and there was some work being developed under that Committee to look at, for example, yes, exactly that guidance for employers on how they can best employ the current Employment Rights Ordinance. There was also some work that was initiated to look at how, if and how we should be applying the International Labour Organisation standards, for example, on things like work times, etc. It's an area that needs a lot of development, and it's one that the ERC work through essentially the Education, Skills, and Employment Portfolio to deliver, but ultimately the legal responsibility for the sort of the update of employment law and its engagement with the public and private sector on how best to do that ultimately does rest with that with that with that Committee.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**

Finally, the Shortage Occupation List, we started there we'll finish there. Acknowledges that some vacancies remain unfilled because available workers may not be interested in the terms and conditions offered, and that this can contribute to skills leaving St Helena, or that's the perception. What consideration has SHG given to reviewing and renegotiating the terms and conditions of employment for these roles, particularly where local workers have left the island due to the terms offered, only for SHG or employers to subsequently recruit internationally at a potentially higher overall cost.

**Head of Public Service, Mr. Ian Todd -**
No, I think that's a very fair question. And as I said previously, you know, unfortunately, we're not in a position to be able to standardise the packages across the piece in one fell swoop. But you're right. So, I can think of one role in particular, and I won't identify the role because obviously that relates to a particular individual as well. But where we went out to recruitment a number of times and were unsuccessful, and fundamentally it was the terms and conditions of that offer that meant we just couldn't find anybody. Now we had two options: we could either look at the terms and conditions locally and see what we could do to enhance them to make it attractive, or we could go and get a TC. And actually, enhancing the terms and conditions locally is a much cheaper option for the island as a whole than having to go and get somebody on a TC who would almost certainly have been on the higher salary, but then we'd have been paying for flights, we'd have been paying for containers, and we would only have had the certainty that they would be with us for probably a maximum of five years, and usually on a shorter term contract than that initially. So, I think that's right, the sensitive use of kind of what we generally call market forces allowances. You know, sort of nobody will do this job on the terms and conditions offered, and therefore, what do we need to do to make it attractive without having to go to the full cost of international recruitment? Is something we're starting to use more flexibly. Now we need to make sure that doesn't get out of hand, that the wage bill doesn't get completely out of hand as a result of doing that. And again, we need to try and keep some type of consistency so that we don't have people in very differently graded jobs, as they would be described normally, who are earning very disproportionate salaries compared to one another, but I think we're starting to deploy that flexibility more effectively than we have done previously, and we need to continue to do that.

**The Hon, Julie Thomas -**
Thank you to the panel. That's all my questions, Mr. Chair. Back over to you.

**The Hon, Robert Midwinter**
Thank you, Hon. Julie Thomas. So that does conclude the Select Committee's questions and our programme of business for today. But before we draw a close to this, and I thank you for your responses today, is there anything else that the portfolio or the Chief Secretary wishes to add or clarify? Okay. So, in which case, I would like to thank the Chief Secretary and members of the Education, Skills, and Employment Portfolio for attending and giving responses to the questions asked. The Committee will now evaluate today's proceedings and respond further to the Minister and his Acting Portfolio Directors as we deem appropriate. We will then ultimately submit a report to Legislative Council, along with any recommendations shortly thereafter. And in closing, we thank you, the listening public, for your interest in the work and activities of the select Committee, and we express our gratitude to the South Atlantic Media Services for providing this live radio coverage. So, take care and enjoy the rest of your day. Thank you.