



PARLIAMENT
OF THE CAYMAN ISLANDS



PARLIAMENT OF THE CAYMAN ISLANDS
STANDING PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

IMPROVING EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS FOR CAYMANIANS

REPORT MAY 2024

*Official transcript relating to the Official Report of the
Standing Public Accounts Committee Meeting
held on 5 September, 2024*

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PRESENT WERE:

PAC Members: Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, JP, MP, Chairman
Mr. Joseph X. Hew, MP, Member
Ms. Barbara E. Conolly, NP, JP, MP, Member
Hon. Heather D. Bodden, OCI, Cert. Hon., JP, MP, Member

Audit Office: Ms. Angela Cullen, Acting Auditor General
Mr. Adrian Murenzi, Audit Manager
Mr. Innocent Mbaguta, Audit Project Leader
Andrew Browning, Audit Trainee

Witnesses: Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer
Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director
Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman

Ms. Lyneth Monteith, Acting Chief Officer
Ministry of Education

In attendance: Mr. Kenneth Jefferson
Financial Secretary and Chief Officer
Ministry of Finance and Economic Development – (MFED)

Mr. Matthew Tibbetts
Accountant General
Ministry of Finance and Economic Development – (MFED)

PAC Clerks: Ms. Susan Burke
Ms. Tishel McLean, Clerk-in-Training

APOLOGIES: Hon. W. McKeever Bush, JP, MP, Member
Mr. Bernie A. Bush, MP, Member

**OFFICIAL VERBATIM REPORT
STANDING PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE
THURSDAY
5 SEPTEMBER, 2024
10.16 A.M.**

**IMPROVING EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS FOR CAYMANIANS
(REPORT MAY 2024)**

Verbatim transcript of the Standing Public Accounts Committee Meeting held on Thursday, 5th September, 2024, at 10.16 a.m., in the Chamber of the House of Parliament; George Town, Grand Cayman

[Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Chairman, presiding]

The Chairman: Good morning, everyone.

I would like to welcome you all to this hearing of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). As is our custom, we begin with a prayer and I've asked Ms. Heather Bodden if she would lead us in that prayer this morning. Ms. Heather.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Thank you, sir. Good morning. Let us bow our heads.

Our kind, Heavenly Father, with grateful hearts, we humbly bow our heads in reverence thanking you for sparing our lives to see another day. As we prepare to move into the business of the country's work, we ask your protection, your guidance and wisdom. Guide and direct our paths that all we do and say today may be done to the glory of your name's sake. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Heather.

I declare that we have a quorum present with us today. We've had no apologies from members, so let me start off by welcoming everyone once again. I know summer is basically over and we are moving into the fall, so I hope everyone has had some opportunity to get summer vacation and refresh themselves as we return to work here now for the fall.

I'd like to acknowledge the presence of Ms. Angela Cullen, who is the Acting Auditor General; Messrs. Adrian Murenzi, who is the Audit Manager; Innocent Mbaguta, Audit Project Leader; and finally, Andrew Browning, who is a young Caymanian Audit Trainee. We welcomed him in our pre-meeting this morning—it is really good to see that we have someone Caymanian as a part of the Auditor General's Office, and so I say a special welcome to you.

I also acknowledge the presence of Messrs. Kenneth Jefferson, the Financial Secretary (FS) and Chief Officer in the Ministry of Finance and Economic

Development; Matthew Tibbetts, the Accountant General; and finally, for the benefit of everyone, we have a new Parliamentary Procedural Clerk whose responsibility is to look after the affairs of the Public Accounts Committee. She is Miss Tishel McLean, and I would like to say a special welcome to her. In due course, she will take her proper place here next to me in these hearings, but for this one, she is taking more of an observer role and seeing how things operate for us today. I welcome her to the Committee, and look forward to working with her.

This morning we are here to examine a report prepared and issued by the Auditor General. The report is entitled “*Improving Employment Prospects for Caymanians*”, and was issued by the Auditor General in May of 2004 (*sic* 2024). I am going to invite the Acting Auditor General to introduce the report; but at this point, I would like to acknowledge the fact that the Auditor General herself is unable to be here. Many know that she has been unwell and under doctor's care and treatment for many months; while she has returned to the island, she's still not able to be back at work here and be a part of it. I know we miss her this morning and I wish her continued recovery as she responds to the care and treatment that she is receiving.

Thank you, too, Acting Auditor General, for stepping in. I will turn things over to you now, and invite you to introduce the report we are considering today.

OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL

Ms. Angela Cullen, Acting Auditor General: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Members of the Public Accounts Committee, officials from Ministry of Finance and the listening public: Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to make some opening remarks; again, as Mr. Chairman has mentioned, I would like to send apologies from the Auditor General, who cannot be here with us today.

We are considering the report “*Improving Employment Prospects for Caymanians*” that we issued in

May and published on the 3rd of June, 2024. The audit covered three main areas:

1. Strategic direction and legal framework;
2. Performance; and
3. Barriers to, and opportunities for, improving employment prospects for Caymanians.

Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman, [which] I will refer to as WORC from now on, if I may, was set up in February 2019, and has a key role to play in employment; however, WORC cannot achieve this alone, and we, therefore, looked at the government's efforts to improve employment prospects for Caymanians in the wider sense. I will now briefly summarise our findings in each of the three areas.

I'll start with strategic direction and legal framework. Some individual strategies exist, which is good, but improving employment prospects for Caymanians needs a holistic approach, and there is no overarching strategy for employment. **"In its first four years of existence, WORC had four Acting Directors."** This led to gaps in leadership and a lack of consistency, stability and clarity for the organisation.

The legal framework which surrounds this area is sound, however, we noted that although WORC can *and does* refuse work permits, it cannot legally reject job adverts, even if it considers they are lacking in some way.

Moving on to performance. Firstly, the good news is that the Cayman Islands meets the global definition of full employment in each of the five years that we looked at and that is 2019 to 2023. Over the same period, the Caymanian unemployment rate also met the global definition with the exception of during the COVID-19 pandemic. Unemployment rate in Cayman also compared favourably to other countries— that said, there continue to be a number of unemployed Caymanians, so it will not feel like that to them.

WORC launched its online jobs portal, JobsCayman, in May 2020, and all employers, except the civil service, must use that portal to advertise jobs; however, users' experience with JobsCayman was not good. They told us, among other things, that it was not user friendly, it had technical glitches, and it was not optimised for mobile viewing. Despite these difficulties, the take-up of JobsCayman increased over time, and by the end of 2022, over 9,000 employers had registered, over 41,000 jobs had been advertised, and almost 128,000 job applications had been made through the portal. While we were doing our audit, the Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture was overhauling JobsCayman, and the new online service was launched on the 26th of July, after our report.

WORC and other government departments run a range of employment programmes, however, the effectiveness of these programmes is unclear. This is largely because outcomes are not measured, and by

that we mean that it's not known how many people who attended the programmes are now employed— the follow-through is not necessarily there.

The average completion rate of WORC programmes between 2019 and 2022 was 83 per cent, which is positive, however, less than half of programme applicants in 2022 were accepted, and of those that were accepted, over a quarter of them dropped out before they completed the programme. In particular, we noted that only 9 per cent of the people who applied for an apprenticeship were actually accepted, which indicates that there may not be enough apprenticeship places.

Other parts of government also run and fund programmes. For example, the Public Works Department runs an apprenticeship programme. The Ministry of Education also funds a local company to run training for mechanics, however, Ministry of Education did not have an agreement with that company, and so it was unable to hold it to account for the money that it spent.

Moving on to WORC's performance, we found it was difficult to measure because of incomplete data. In its first two years of existence, WORC did not set or monitor any Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). In June 2021, WORC started to collect and report against some indicators, but they could have been better. WORC had 14 KPIs that related to improving employment prospects; however, only 6 of those KPIs hit targets, and only 2 of them were actually met.

WORC's performance against its output targets and the approved budget statements is also mixed. In 2022, WORC met four of the eight targets that related to employment, however, we also noted that two of the output targets may need to be revisited because they were either unrealistic or unclear. As part of our audit, we also explored some of the barriers to, and opportunities for, employment prospects.

Some of the barriers we noted include a mismatch between what employers need and what jobs Caymanians want. For example, employers forecast almost half of future jobs will be in the (Information Technology) IT sector, but only 8 per cent of Caymanians expressed an interest in IT jobs— that's a huge gap that needs to be addressed; and if Caymanians are not willing or able to apply for those jobs, for whatever reason, employers may need to recruit overseas, or people on work permits.

Educational attainment is also a barrier to employment, with the majority of unemployed Caymanians having a high school diploma or lower. We did find that although more than enough jobs were available for those people, they were low-paid and therefore may not be attractive. The minimum wage has not kept pace with inflation, and we calculated that by the end of 2023 there was a 32 per cent gap between \$6 and where it would have been if it kept in line with inflation.

There's limited data on some of the social barriers to employment. For example, some people told us

that the lack of affordable childcare for single parents was a barrier.

Finishing on some opportunities, careers guidance programmes are in place for public schools and we noted a number of positives with those programmes, but we also noted some areas for improvement. For example, it does not cover technical and vocational education and training. Finally, we also noted that there is scope for more joined-up working across government.

We made ten recommendations in the report to the Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture, WORC, and the Ministry of Education, all of which were accepted. I have with me the team that worked on the audit, all of whom Mr. Chairman introduced earlier.

Thank you very much.

The Chairman: Thank you, [Acting] Auditor General.

At this point, we will move directly into the questioning of our witnesses. We are scheduled to interview three witnesses this morning, the first of whom is Mr. Wesley Howell, the Chief Officer for the Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture. I'd like to invite him into the Chamber at this time.

[Pause]

The Chairman: Good morning, Mr. Howell, and welcome to the Public Accounts Committee. [We are] grateful for your presence.

I know you have much going on in your Ministry, so I'm grateful to have you here this morning to participate in this hearing and answer questions that we have with regard to the Auditor General's report. I'm just going to ask you, when you answer your first question, you know the routine, please state your name and your position once for the official record.

MINISTRY OF BORDER CONTROL, LABOUR AND CULTURE

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer – Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning to you, your committee, the members from the Auditor General's Office, and to those who are listening and streaming. It's my pleasure to be here to talk about the very important topic of employability for Caymanians.

The Chairman: Thank you, sir. I have a brief preamble primarily for the benefit of those who are listening or watching these proceedings. I'm going to make that preamble, and then we'll open up the questioning to the members of the Committee.

The Auditor General published her report on the 3rd of June, 2024, entitled "*Improving Employment Prospects for Caymanians*". It's an important issue. We note from the report that the total unemployment rate

consistently met the global definition of full employment. The Caymanian unemployment rate also met this definition, except during the pandemic. I think this is really good news, however, at the last count, there were over 1,000 Caymanians unemployed, and so we need to think about how to get these people into employment.

As the [Acting] Auditor General notes, improving employment prospects is not an issue that Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman— or WORC, as we know it— can tackle alone; it needs effort and a joined-up approach. We are keen to hear your views on how we can achieve this, so we want to explore with you some of the more strategic issues and the Ministry's role in overseeing WORC.

We are pleased to note that you accepted the three recommendations that the Auditor General made to the government. You indicated that these are likely to be implemented later in 2025, so we appreciate that you may not have made much, if any, progress with them; however, committee members may want to ask you about some of them.

We're going to begin the questioning looking at the "strategic direction and legal framework" topic in the report. I'm going to turn things over to Mr. Joey Hew, who will lead that line of questioning this morning— and members, to remind you that you can step in and ask questions as well, if you so want to.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning. Good morning, Mr. Howell.

Mr. Howell, the Auditor General report highlighted that there is no overarching strategy for employment, and recommended that a National Employment Policy be developed. From the response to Recommendation 10, it is the Committee's understanding that you intend to develop a policy. You state a realistic timeline is Quarter four (Q4) of 2025 because you need reliable data to inform evidence-based assumptions, and you plan to engage with the relevant agencies and experts.

Mr. Howell, what is the data needed to inform such a policy, and can you say if this data is readily available or would [it] have to be formulated?

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer – Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture: Good morning again. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer for the Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture.

Mr. Chairman, I thank the member for the question and through you, I can say, that almost in parallel with the work that the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) did, there was work studying the Cayman Islands' labour market assessment which was done with funding through the Resilience, Sustainable Energy and Marine Biodiversity Programme (RESEMBID), out of the European Union (EU), which included UCCI and the Chamber of Commerce, as well as WORC and some other local partners.

They did a great deal of sampling of employers on the employment demand side in Cayman, as well as the supply side in relation to Caymanian workers and those seeking work. That report, along with the OAG's report, is great in relation to base-lining where we are, and what things look like, and what some of the barriers are. Some of the challenges that we have relate to what the forecasting looks like— i.e. what sectors are going to be the growth areas, what areas should we be developing or preparing our workers for.

In addition to unemployment, we want to look keenly at under-employment, where individuals are working in jobs and industries where they either have a desire to do better financially— and job-wise, developmentally; but they also want to be able to upscale in order to take on new and better jobs. All those areas are there. The timing for that piece of strategy in 2025 was also set based on the schedule of our political cycle. We understand that we're nearing the end of a four-year term now and about to start another four-year term next year, so we wanted to ensure that whatever we produced as a technical document, that would inform policy, would also have the blessing of whatever government is in place in 2025. Understanding the timing of those things, it is a bit of strategizing on our part, at the Ministry level.

From a data perspective, though, we really need to get into sector-specific bits. We work closely with the Economics and Statistics Office (ESO)— we have a statistician on board at WORC now, who is able to generate information as to what sectors are growing, what pay rates are, what qualifications are being asked for across the board— but to look forward at this, we really need to get into our partners in specific sectors. Financial services, tourism, construction, Chamber, Small Business Association... It's really that forward-looking bit that we have to pull out.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew: Thank you, Chief Officer Howell for that detailed response— and I appreciate your strategy on the timeline; so, your anticipation is to actually have a plan to present at the end of Q4 2025, or is that when you will begin the process of putting it together?

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer – Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture: Through you, Mr. Chairman.

Again, thank you for the question. Work is definitely underway on these topics. The Ministry of Education is engaged with our employment services team at WORC. They're strategizing ways that they can target scholarship incentives for areas where we see growth coming. They're already talking about TVET integration— some of the things that were recommended in the OAG's report; and Director Scott, who's on after me, has been onboarding folks who are data-driven in relation to being able to produce the data analysis necessary to have those plans concreted, so the work has actually been advancing quite a bit. I know one of the

fall backs of some of these reports is that, by the time they're discussed at Committee Stage, things have moved on time-wise. Indeed, that's part of the case in relation to this.

The Acting Auditor General spoke about the new jobs portal app, and I'm pleased to say that weekly, we are getting data in relation to the uptake of persons applying for what types of jobs and what persons employers are asking for [to fill] those jobs. That's all feeding into this overarching strategy in relation to employment, and I would expand that to say under-employment, in Cayman, as well.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew: Thank you for that, Mr. Howell. You spoke about a couple of reports including from UCCI, and about WORC providing some data. Are there any other agencies or experts that you would be engaging for the report?

Also, I would make a quick comment to suggest that the Scholarship Secretariat would be a huge part of this as well, because I'm a huge believer in rewarding persons who are going to go into fields where there are job opportunities for, so there should be separate levels of scholarships. In particular, niche areas such as court stenographers and the persons who take the minutes for these meetings in Parliament, medical technicians and others. These jobs are popping up everywhere and they are niche little jobs that require as little as nine months' training sometimes, that we could encourage our people to take advantage of.

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer – Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture: Thank you, again. Through you, Mr. Chairman, the Member is absolutely right. Looking at the ESO's data coming out of their census and the Labour Force surveys, the industries where Caymanians are the majority in terms of nationalities working within those sectors are typically not the growth or high-demand employment-generating industries.

For example, in the electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning, supply water and sewerage, Caymanians make up 82 per cent of the workforce, but there are only 424 persons in that industry. We have 5,200 persons working in a professional, scientific and technical field, of which 2,100 are Caymanians, so 40 per cent of the market. That's another growth area.

If we were to look at construction as an industry, as broad as that is, 8,827 jobs according to the ESO, and of that, 27 per cent were Caymanians— and this is 2022 data. Construction is one of those growth areas that we know is continuing on; if it's not outright building, it's renovating and redevelopment— and we've heard through the RESEMBID project that some of the skill sets are extremely difficult to get a hold of. Finish carpenters, engineers, et cetera, are all areas where yes, there absolutely is room for extra incentivising at the scholarship and internship level, to direct

students down that path and into areas where there is growth and actual demand for employment.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew: Yeah, sorry. Just a comment before we move on and yeah, your numbers align from my memory. We look at areas like construction and hospitality, it's always 30 to 40 per cent and if you open two new hotels, it's going to be 30 to 40 per cent Caymanians working there. If you start five more construction sites, it's going to be 30 to 40 per cent Caymanians working there, and it always baffled me.

Is it because of the types of jobs that Caymanians will take? I don't think the operators set out to say, "*Well, we're only gonna get 30 to 40 per cent Caymanians*", or "*We only want 30 to 40 per cent Caymanians*"; but if you look at the hotels across the island, for instance, it may go as high as 45 per cent Caymanians during the season, but it's normally between 30 and 40 per cent. You have to wonder: Are there barriers for them to gain other jobs, or is it that these are the jobs that Caymanians are willing or attracted to?

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer – Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture: Through you, Mr. Chair.

It is a number of those factors. The number of 1,000 unemployed was shared earlier. Despite the growth in our population— the growth in the number of Caymanians has been quite steady for years now— we have about 21 to 24,000 Caymanians employed, [meanwhile] we have upwards of 36 to 37,000 non-Caymanians employed, so we have a supply issue when it comes to Caymanian workers.

If we were to be very frank about the 1,000 number, it's understated for the number of people who are not working because we're using the sort of accepted definition of unemployment being persons who are actively seeking, and are able to work and who are actually seeking work. We have a pool of persons who may choose to work, but are not always actively seeking work so they're not even counted in that unemployed number— and there's a certain stigma to working within certain sectors.

One programme that is near and dear to my heart, because I started as an unpaid intern while I was in high school and worked with the civil service throughout, benefiting from scholarships and other things and I'm able to say those programmes helped to get me where I am, but I remember this graduating class.

A 16-year old high school graduate, sharp young man, gave the closing remarks for the Passport to Success Programme and he spoke about working at one of our fast food places during his internship and his friends came in, and he hid in the freezer until they left, because he didn't want to be seen working at a fast food place, because it didn't have the right sort of image that he wanted to portray. Now, he did close by saying he did an internship at one of our hotels and was very pleased to be working in the water sports section of the

hotel and they actually kept him on afterwards; but I thought, traveling to the US, that high school and college students are the ones who work in fast food, you know?

How can we change our mindset that no job is beneath any of us? Folks who know me, know that my father was a shoemaker and a musician. He worked on devices that people walked on, so for me, work is work and the ability to do great work and get great reward is important. I think part of what we have to do, and this is way beyond just our Ministry, is to get through to our Caymanian parents, and others, that good hard work is good, and [that] where you start really has no bearing on where you're going to end— and to instill that effort to get our Caymanians looking at the areas that they might think are beneath certain persons, but are there [available].

Going forward, in addition to the technical programmes and those other bits, I would really like to see a sort of cross-government support for a proud Caymanian, "Working wherever, you're working Programme", to help change hearts and minds to ensure that folks will take up those jobs.

That's sort of my personal plea as the father two young men who are chalk and cheese. I have one who is studying accounting, and another one who is doing a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Programme. I knew from their personalities, from the time that they were small, that the one who is doing auto mechanics, there was no way he was going to put on a tie and a jacket to go sit in an office. He's just not that young man, but I am absolutely similarly proud of both of them for following their desires and putting in the necessary work to develop themselves.

For me, personally, it is something that I am passionate about on more than one level. Personal and professional.

The Chairman: Mr. Howell, when giving those comparisons of numbers of people in various segments of the economy, were you reading from a schedule; do you have a schedule there, that you might be able to share with the Committee, because I found some of the things you were saying very interesting and insightful.

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer – Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture: Yes, Mr. Chairman, I was reading from a combination of the 2021 Census and the most recent Labour Force Survey, which is the fall survey. There's a wealth of information in there as it relates to forward planning and also with the audit. It looks at what is now and what came before, not where we are going. Our most challenging task, but one that we definitely want to do our best to get right is to forecast where we are going, and to ensure that our programmes and spending are aligned with that.

I'm happy to send the links of the documents I looked at, but it's the great work coming out of Mr. Jefferson's Ministry, that we're relying on as well.

The Chairman: That would be ok, sir. I know where to get them. Thanks.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew: Chief Officer Howell, moving on to legal framework. The Auditor General concluded that the legal framework is sound, however, the report states that WORC reviews and approves all job adverts posted in JobsCayman, but cannot legally reject them.

The Auditor General recommended that the Immigration Regulations be updated to rectify this, and we are happy to understand that you accepted the recommendation and intend to implement this, but not until Q4 of 2025. I suspect your response may be similar to the previous, but can you give us some clarification on the time scale for updating the Regulations?

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer – Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture: Thank you Member for the question.

Through you, Mr. Chair. Again, it is really a timing issue. I can say, despite the notification that, yeah, we can't reject job adverts. What we can do, from a decision-maker perspective is, if we see, at application time, that the advert was tailored to an individual and excluded persons who may otherwise be suited for it, then we can reject and refuse the application, so there is a nuclear option for that.

I must say, that the labour demand section is an area of WORC that we are still building out. When we are able to get individuals on board who are learned within particular sectors, we will be much more able to push back on specific job adverts and requirements because we will have individuals who understand the industry. It is very difficult for our administrators to be experts in all areas and in particular sectors. You know, if we are looking at the legal fraternity and we're making an appeal, we need to bring in a specific KC (King's Counsel) who has expert knowledge in a particular area.

If we were going down that road, if we were to look at that job advert, we are not experts in that office, in that field, to say, "*We think it is unnecessary for a KC designation for this.*" What we hope to do, is to be able to build that expertise and the collaboration with the industry to say, "*Yeah, this is reasonable and appropriate for this type of job*"; but suffice to say [that], although job adverts aren't necessarily being rejected, the decision makers are making prudent decisions as it relates to refusals.

Our refusals' process means that a refund is generated and, because all the revenue collected from fees, (our executive revenues), are signed off by the Minister, which means they are first reviewed by me, I can tell you that we are averaging somewhere around half a million dollars a month in refunds, because applications are being refused for a variety of reasons— including folks not giving Caymanians who have applied a fair shake.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew: Thank you for that answer and just to say, through you Mr. Chairman, that not only are there adverts that are designed, tailor-made, for a specific person; there are adverts designed to discourage Caymanians from applying.

You will see an entry level job that's advertising minimum wage, but wants twenty years' experience and a Bachelor's degree. You know that the person for whom they are applying for the work permit, may or may not have twenty years' experience, but probably doesn't have a Bachelor degree and probably won't be paid \$6 an hour either so, there's a flip side to that. Thank you for your response.

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer – Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture: Mr. Chair, if I may. Yes, absolutely spot on, and I think that actually opens up another side of Cayman employment and employability that is not actually covered here and it's entrepreneurship.

The vast majority of businesses in Cayman are small and micro-businesses owned by Caymanians, they're service-based or they sell retail. The unspoken truth is that Caymanians don't want to employ Caymanians in those small and micro-businesses because once they learn the business, they're free to compete. The fix for that is entrepreneurship training and small-business support; so that Caymanians who want to go into a field can open their own business, as opposed to these small and micro-businesses essentially training their competition that will come behind and know their suppliers, know their customers, know their pricing and be able to undercut them.

It is an area where we've seen such adverts designed around discouraging Caymanians because of that particular issue, and I think the fix for it is: let's put some more effort into Caymanians developing their small and micro businesses through incentives or supporting other things— and I know this is near and dear to your heart, sir, because the small Business Centre was something that you set up during your tenure. It is a reality, and it's a constant strife.

It also means that the folks who are seeking to exclude Caymanians are actually Caymanians, so again, I'm not sure how do we get through that, but it is more complex than it appears on the surface.

The Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Hew. We will now turn to Ms. Barbara Conolly, who will lead the line of questioning on employment programmes.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Through you to our witness.

The Auditor General's report highlighted that although the National Apprenticeship Programme has a high completion rate, only ten per cent of applicants is accepted. WORC told the audit team that this was due to a lack of places. We also know that there are no

targets for the programme and outcomes are not measured, such as how many people who have completed their apprenticeships are now gainfully employed?

My question is, do you have any plans to set targets and measure outcomes of the National Apprenticeship Programme?

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer – Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture: Thank you for the question. Mr. Chair, through you. I mentioned earlier that the report is a bit dated. I can say that significant ground has been covered in relation to the outcome recording.

To be clear, the Caymanians who interact with WORC apply through several different facets. Some register merely to be able to apply for jobs that are advertised on the portal, via the portal. Others sign up for more enhanced services which may include training and development, even counselling, to help them get over barriers to employment such as:

- Anger issues;
- Issues with childcare;
- Developmental issues in relation to their ability to do the work;
- Timekeeping;
- Substance abuse issues.

Those are also some factors, some barriers, why individuals are not accepted into programmes. They would need to meet a certain criterion before that's done; but I can say, and Director Scott comes after me, that they have made significant strides with that. We are seeing those numbers come through on the monthly reports coming in from the department in relation to outcomes and long-term assistance there so, yes, absolutely it was valid at the time of the audit, but significant work has been done and I'm quite proud of the team for what they've done there.

The Chairman: We turn next to Ms. Heather Bodden, who will take up the subject of JobsCayman.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, Mr. Howell. Good morning everyone, again.

Replacement for JobsCayman. Mr. Howell, the report states that “**the Minister of Border Control, Labour and Culture plans to update the user interface for JobsCayman.**” The government announced that the portal would cease to operate on May 29th, with a temporary system until the new portal launched on June 18th. We note that WORC launched a new jobs and online payment services portal on July 26th.

Could the Chief Officer please say: what's the Ministry's role in updating JobsCayman?

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer – Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture: Thank you for the question. Through you, Mr. Chairman.

I am absolutely pleased to say that the new JobsCayman— actually, we are no longer calling it that; we are going to rebrand it, but that is for another announcement coming up. The new jobs portal is up and running. We took the time necessary to do it right, we interface very regularly with some of our key stakeholders' HR (Human Resources) professionals. The Ritz Carlton is a major employer, [as well as] Foster's Group and they were testing and revising user interfaces as we went through.

We also interacted with our job seekers and other persons who would be interacting with it from the job search perspective, and I'm pleased to say that the feedback has been overwhelmingly good. At this point, we are revisiting our requirements gathering for the next phase of our online services and we will be interacting more so with the Chamber, small business, and our job seekers to ensure that the next phase of that system builds out exactly to what our customers are demanding.

I had feedback the other day. Someone advertised for a position, not because they were trying to hire a work permit holder, but they were actually using that platform to seek Caymanian employees. They talked about the ease of re-advertising for another two weeks, and how it was essentially two clicks. That was music to my ears because, essentially, in addition to the security and integration with eGovernment, other things that are happening in the background [include] the ease of the user interface, the intuitiveness that has been designed into it. I am quite, quite, proud of the fact that the system is live now.

The usage of the online services is increasing, and will only get better as we build out the additional functionality there. It did take longer than we expected to get it out, but it's live now.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Thank you, Mr. Howell, for that update. Can you also assure us that the challenges with JobsCayman were considered when developing the new system?

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer – Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture: Yes, absolutely. Through you, Mr. Chairman, I can say that where I see it, I get it from all angles. When I go to the supermarket, I run into folks who are having issues; I hear it when MPs get it from their constituents— they usually flip me a WhatsApp in relation to the issues that they're having. I also look at the call centre stats, and when things aren't working and not working efficiently, the volume of calls goes up significantly, and I'm pleased to say that the number of calls is declining, which means that that process is now more streamlined and easier-going. It's not where I want it to be yet, but it will continue on.

Definitely, we employed the services of a user-interface design expert who spoke to stakeholders as they designed what the screen looked like— where the buttons are, what buttons were where; and that will continue to be tweaked, as we're getting feedback now from individuals, and the mobile device access, which was flagged as one of the issues, has been improved significantly as well.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Thank you very much, sir. Can you also say that the improvements that users can expect from the new system is quite encouraging?

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer – Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture: Yes, absolutely. Through you, Mr. Chairman, at this stage of user acceptance testing, the testing wasn't done only by the civil servants who were using the system on the back end. The user acceptance testing also included employees and individuals who were working on the employer perspective.

We were able to use the system in a pilot phase to get such testing ongoing before we went live; so happy to say yes, the usability and the feedback from folks who weren't happy with specific areas was all built into the way that the system was developed, and indeed how the system was rolled out.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Thank you very much, Mr. Howell, for that update.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Through you, Mr. Chairman, to the witness. Can you say whether you think that we should have some sort of training for the public for that portal, because I know the other one was very, very complex and there were many issues with regard to accessing it. Is there any appetite to have some sort of training sessions for the public in terms of the usage of that portal?

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer – Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture: Absolutely. Mr. Chair, I'm happy to say, as well, that the development team used what they call "user stories" to walk through the process from end to end. The team at WORC are able to train large companies on how to use it. Self-help videos, et cetera, are there as well; but I'm happy to say that the user interface is so streamlined and intuitive now, that most persons who use it don't actually require additional training.

The job search aspect is open to persons who aren't even registered to search, so any anybody can search. The vast majority of persons searching are Caymanians, but PR (Permanent Residency) holders and other persons are searching [as well], and that aspect is quite streamlined. We have integrations with eGovernment that are designed to work and play well with the unique identifier for the National ID when that comes live and the registration process does involve some back and forth with the eGovernment system.

We've done our utmost best to simplify the process from our perspective, requesting only information that we need to validate the user and be able to deliver services to them— that work we did with guidance from the Ombudsman's Office and the process is working really well; so, yes, there are user guides and some training is provided, but the feedback that I've gotten is that the system is quite user-friendly now and doesn't require a significant amount of training to get through, so I'm smiling because of that.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Mr. Chairman, through you, to the Chief Officer.

I would like to continue with the cost of JobsCayman and its replacement. The Auditor General's report highlighted that the previous platform for JobsCayman cost \$1.2 million, with annual maintenance costs of \$500,000. The Ministry wrote off around \$1 million in relation to this platform in 2022. The report also states that the new system will cost around \$3 million with \$1.5 million spent during 2023.

Could the Chief Officer give us reasons for the write off of \$1 million in 2022?

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer – Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture: Thank you; that's a really important aspect to cover.

The system that was being used was really a workflow engine and pay-per-use system whereby each application effectively had a cost associated with it, so we spun it down and wrote it off. In web-facing applications, particularly those that are transactional, their useful life is somewhere around 3 to 5 years before they have to be completely overhauled either because the technology is now obsolete, or the user experience has moved on to different looks and feels. We were less than a year premature in writing off the system in relation to its depreciation cycle, but from a cost perspective, we've actually saved the transaction fees that happened every time an application was put through the system.

The platform on which we have developed the new system took much more background work because we are using the same platform as the eGovernment services; and we took the time to ensure that we were tightly coupled with eGovernment. For example, if you sign up for an online service from general registry, or DVDL, or any of the numerous government services that are online, we are now plugged into the root of that system and thus, we are able to move quickly in the additional phases and not have to do rework as it relates to one-stop-shopping within government. That took some time.

What we were also faced with, was that much of this work was being done when we were rapidly moving services online coming out of COVID, and folks demanding to be able to do their stuff without going to offices. That was not just a Cayman thing but a worldwide thing, so resources such as database administrators,

user interface design engineers, developers, were really hard to get hold of. Our pay rates within government were not sufficient to attract persons to apply at that level, so we effectively had to buy those services on the open market worldwide. The cost of labour was quite significant for those high-tech jobs, particularly on the platforms that the eGovernment system uses, which drove that expense.

Also included in the development cost was porting data from a number of different systems to the new platform. That's where we were but, in my view, the decision to end the system usage on a per-transaction-fee was the right one to make.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Thank you, Chief Officer. Could you also give clarification on the estimated cost of the new system and how much has been spent to date?

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer – Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture: Yes.

Before I do, something the OAG covered in the report was the work that WORC is doing in relation to employment services, but the report doesn't cover the magnitude of the other areas. Those are out of scope. They captured all the expenses, but not all the revenue, so I want to go through those, if you would give me the latitude to do so.

Upwards of 60,000 applications go through the WORC system per year. There are many transient workers who are here for short-term usage, and last year the revenue generated from those applications across the board—and this is the executive side—totalled over \$110 million. When we add the department level revenue, which is reported on, we are looking at just shy of \$140 million going through, so the systems are actually quite complex; there's significant work going on in the background.

In the context of a system that managed \$140 million in revenue last year, the \$3 million spend is in keeping with the work necessary to ensure that we have the auditing and reporting functions and the data analytics, all built in. That's part of why it's not a straightforward, simple, application process—we are now building in the reports and other things, hence why the spend is a bit more; but I think it is a reasonable spend in the context of the volume of work that's going through, and the level of built-in automation.

The other bit to look at as well is that, despite the growth in demand, hiring within the department of WORC hasn't changed significantly in the last three years although the number of applications and the amount of work that we are doing has; so, the system usage is actually delivering significant savings as it relates to not hiring additional personnel on the processing side.

As this goes forward, and more systems work online, we foresee that we will be able to redeploy staff from processing paper to doing higher intellectual,

more demanding work in other areas of the department. Therefore, yes, the spend is necessary to ensure that we have a secure system that can meet the demands, deliver auditable financial track trails, and ensures that we can keep up with the volume of work that is coming through.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Thank you very much for that update.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew: Mr. Chairman, through you. Chief Officer Howell, were Mr. Tibbetts and the eGov team, the project leader on either the previous system or the new one?

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer – Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture: The first system predated eGov and the current rollout isn't led by eGovernment, but we work in tandem. The way that it works, when we use their platform, we essentially have to run all of our code through their teams and they deliver the results in relation to, *"Yes, this can go forward in production, or it can't go forward."*

We also work very tightly with the CISO (Chief Information Security Office) as well, so every lock, step and barrel we are running tests. We are in development moving into test. We use user acceptance testing and production. At every step we are walking hand-in-hand with eGov and our Security Office, but the project management was actually at Ministry level.

That was a strategic decision that we took in-house—a dedicated project management team to manage this through, working very closely with Mr. Scott, the Director of WORC, and his team as well; but yes, for this rollout, we are locked-step with eGovernment all the way through, including the same platform they are using.

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you, members of the Committee. Mr. Howell, we are going to turn now to WORC's performance and use of resources, and I'm going to lead that questioning.

First question I have, is that I note—and the Auditor General highlighted it in the report—that in its four years of existence, there were four different Acting Directors of WORC. I mean, it must have presented huge challenges to the whole WORC operation, so I wonder if you could speak to that for us. Particularly, about the challenges that arose from the changes in the WORC leadership during that period.

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer – Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Absolutely. I think we all have some level of PTSD from the changes that have gone through.

I spoke about it recently, when we welcomed on board Customs and Border Control (CBC) Director, Bruce Smith. With the split between immigration functions going to WORC and the border control functions

going to CBC, we lost two levels of senior leadership in what was the Department of Immigration. Hence, at the time of the formation of WORC, no Directors or Deputy Directors came across with WORC, and it has taken us this long to stabilise and develop our fully Caymanian Director at Deputy Director level at WORC. It was a painful exercise, and one that I do not wish to repeat. Succession planning is part of what the Deputy Governor [covers] when he does his annual assessments with me.

Key hiring at WORC is now complete. That was another thing that was outdated in the report— a number of vacancies at the senior management level are now filled. The only one pending is “Head of Boards and Applications” and, though we have a number of Caymanians acting in that position, we want to ensure that they are ready and fit for that level of leadership, as well as [having] technical skills when it comes around.

Director Scott is doing absolutely amazing work in relation to building team spirit; developing his team; giving them reign to improve. They've worked very closely with the Management Support Unit at POCS (Portfolio of the Civil Service). They're now engaged in senior management coaching and ensuring that they're building skill sets. The department is a leader in LinkedIn learning across the government, as Director Scott shares my vision of continuing to pour into our employees and push them forward into areas of further development.

Just recently, a long-standing, highly skilled manager reached retirement age. Director Scott negotiated with the individual for them to stay on because they had viable skill sets, but they agreed to come back in a junior position, allowing a Caymanian to be promoted to Manager so we went through an internal recruitment process, allowing it to happen. I am pleased to say that the senior management team is complete and sound.

As it relates to customer service, they're firing on all cylinders in relation to time in and out of the office for handling applications. Fantastic work is going on in the employment services team and the data being generated from the labour force team is great, as well. Compliance is fantastic, and recently we have seen in social media some of the work they have done in partnership with other law enforcement agencies within the Ministry, as well as the police.

On the decision-making side, significant work has been done to reduce backlogs, which is one of the reasons the call rate is coming down as well. Director Scott will be able to talk about that in much more detail than I; but I'm pleased to say, that all the Director and Deputy Director posts within WORC are filled with capable individuals who are firing on all cylinders.

My goal with succession planning, which is a priority area for the Portfolio of the Civil Service as well, is that we never again get into a situation where a department loses its top-two leadership rungs, because it

is extremely time-consuming to fill and painful to stabilise from.

The Chairman: Glad to hear all those positive news because it is a welcomed and refreshing change, but can you talk about yours and your Ministry's role in holding WORC to account for its performance?

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer – Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture: We play a tight role as it relates to customer feedback. I surprised the Director of WORC when I shared with him that his “happy-or-not” scores are part of my performance assessment with the Deputy Governor (DG), which is one of the reasons I keep a close eye on the number of calls and complaints coming in— because I have to answer for them.

We work quite collaboratively with the agency. The performance targets that the OAG's office flagged as not fit for purpose— i.e. we were measuring the wrong things— are being replaced by targets that hold folks more accountable. The monthly reporting platform, which ultimately goes to Cabinet, reports on our key performance metrics as they relate to employability numbers, job placements, backlogs and other figures. We're working quite well in relation to performance targets, not just for WORC but all of our departments, including a broad range of avenues, and those targets are at the level that we manage on and that I hold folks accountable for.

I can say, though, in quick succession, that Director Scott is very proactive; we have bi-weekly touch points that are getting less and less deep in relation to the issues because he and his team are empowered to find the areas that need improvement, and to go about fixing them.

Just this past week, our Ministry leadership team were saying that it is time to offer process improvement training to all of our departments again. When we do, because it is not only for IT professionals but from officers on the front lines all the way up to senior management, we get a culture of individuals saying, *“I can see what's wrong and I know how to fix it; let me go ahead and make a recommendation”* or *“I'll go ahead and do it”*, if it's within their power.

We are most definitely monitoring the metrics across the whole platform of services being delivered; solving those issues as they come up, and looking for improvements wherever we can find them.

The Chairman: What is yours and the Ministry's role in setting WORC's output targets?

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer – Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture: That's an area where we've been quite stringent in the last few years.

Being a former Minister for Finance, you know that a significant amount goes into just balancing the numbers as they relate to our financial targets, and

once the numbers are done, we go back to start preparing the documents which is usually at the end of a long, protracted argument around what we're going to deliver.

Traditionally, we have designed our outputs based on what was previously there but [since] what is ultimately approved through the appropriations process doesn't always line up with what was originally asked for, we've now taken a task towards the final process, of reviewing and going through all of the performance targets in the output document before the budget document is assembled to come to Parliament.

Happy to say as well that we are very pleased that the Ministry of Finance is looking at outcome-based budgeting because, ideally, that is where our numbers ought to be and essentially that's what the OAG report flagged— *"Yeah, you've trained X number of Caymanians and you have a pass rate of 80-odd per cent; but how does it relate to in terms of long-term, sustained employment for those persons who passed? How has it changed their lives?"* That's the outcome aspect, and I'm pleased to say that we are actually looking at them now.

All the performance management targets which are part of the hundreds of pages that make up the budget document are being reviewed and assessed by us, and now form part of employee/directors employment agreements and are targets they need to meet.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, sir, for those answers. We turn now to the final area of questioning for you, which is barriers to and opportunities for employment. Mr. Hew will lead that line of questioning.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, through you.

Chief Officer Howell, the Auditor General's report highlighted a range of these barriers. We chatted extensively about those earlier, but I'd like to draw your attention to exhibit 18 on page 43, which provides an illustration on these mismatches.

Amongst other things, what is interesting to me is that you'll see IT, Accounting and Finance as jobs that Caymanians desire, then very little in between, and you go all the way to customer service representatives where again, you see a spike in jobs that Caymanians desire. There's a huge gap between accounting and customer service and a range of career opportunities that Caymanians don't seem to be aware of, or interested in.

We talked about the strategy coming up. My question to you is how do we reduce that gap and make Caymanians aware of those opportunities; and encourage and make employers take part in training and encouraging Caymanians to participate in those careers.

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer – Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture: Thank you, sir. Through you, Mr. Chairman.

I don't use the word "wicked" very often, but that's one of the wicked problems that we have in relation to how we fix this because it is so multifaceted. How do we drive interest in particular professions, is a very challenging one. You heard me share earlier our difficulties in attracting IT [professionals] to develop our own systems and having to buy those services on the world market and pay higher rates for them than we were paying internally. We can continue to do that work in partnership with offering incentives through enhanced scholarship opportunities and improved internships.

Something that we've put in legislation to help provide this, is to ensure that we have no data protection issues. We've asked departments such as Education, to share their intake of persons coming up on graduation, and folks studying in particular areas on a regular basis as a matter of law, so it can be built into things like business staffing plans that have aspects where, essentially, the government is approving a business plan for a period of four/five years. Then we can build on the fact to say, *"in three years, we'll have X number of Caymanians coming back whom we are training in..."* whatever the topic of that particular day is.

The Ready to Work Programme which, again, was introduced under your administration, is another initiative by which the government effectively provides childcare funding through the Ministry of Education, to ensure that parents who otherwise would be at home with small children, can have their children cared for while they re-enter the workforce. Probably most important, the Programme has a cost-sharing mechanism whereby the government will pay for the individual to work for a private entity for the period of time that it takes to train them.

Say you are a small business with three employees. If you take on one more, you've added 25 per cent to your payroll, which is not something many small businesses can do very easily, so the government says: *"For the six months that it's going to take for somebody to get up to speed and be productive for you, we're gonna cover their salary, health care, et cetera, so you got a resource that you can build and pour into. Even if they don't stay with you, they will then have transferable skills."* We have take-up on that, and I can tell you that many of the folks that enter the doors get up to speed so quickly, that when [employers] have an opportunity to bill the government for the cost they say, *"No, it's okay; we are happy to pay for this resource"*.

Those things are there, and are not unique to Cayman, these are factors that are affecting a number of countries. Bermuda, our sister Overseas Territory, have been quite regimented in their immigration policies. I saw recently that they were offering a shortened

residency product for nurses, teachers, actuary accountants and some of the skill sets that they now realise they need to meet their demand. It is an area where I think we all can do a bit more work, but we'll strategise with our stakeholders, both inside and outside of the Ministries, and start early. I am pleased to say that the work we've been doing through our job fairs, particularly on the law enforcement side, has delivered massive results.

We had an overwhelming response for our CBC and Coast Guard recruitment— even the prison. We have more Caymanians applying for those jobs than ever in the past so it is bearing fruit, and we're actually starting earlier and earlier with those job fairs starting at primary school level and continuing into high school. I think all of those things would be fair game for a National Policy that would include changing hearts and minds as well as providing the programmes and the funding necessary for those to happen.

I did a bit of math as I was looking at the unemployed numbers in relation to the spend we're incurring in terms of programmes. If we have 1,000 people, using what we did for the tourism stipend during COVID period, it is \$1,500 a month, times 12 months: \$18,000 per year. Times four years, totals \$72,000 in that period. That is \$72,000 per person for no productivity. If we can increase our spend on programmes, scholarships, and other interventions to allow those persons to become self-productive citizens, that's a massive savings not necessarily in our budget, but for the country as a whole.

We also have to cast our minds to the fact that some folks who are seeking employment have significant barriers— mental health, anger issues, substance abuse— that are serious barriers to sustained employment.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew: Through you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for that, Chief Officer.

You know, I picked up many great things that you said and I go a little backwards talking about your overwhelming response to Coast Guard, CBC, government, et cetera. I happen to know because I got involved with some persons who applied, and you would know, you've probably gotten reports, that many Caymanian applicants are falling short on just the basics— their presentation, understanding tests, et cetera.

As a government, how do we take it a step further to catch, in particular, those school leavers and say, *Ok, you didn't make it, and perhaps you fit everything else. You did the physical, your attitude, everything is great; but we would like you— on our dime— to go back to UCCI and take these courses. We're going to have a recruitment in nine months, twelve months, whatever. We're gonna give you a mentor from CBC, from Coast Guard; they are gonna mentor you, and bring you back in nine months, twelve months' time, when we have another recruitment drive.* I think these are the sorts of programmes that government could do

to ensure that those who are willing and want to work, succeed.

You know... we can blame the parents, we can blame the education system, but people are falling through the cracks. The kids are falling through the cracks— there's no two ways about it. We have to find a way to help them.

When we look at that report, you see things like IT and Project Management, Compliance, technical roles— job opportunities for Caymanians. Something you should incorporate and we could incorporate it through WORC as well, is that— whether through government or private sector— when persons are looking at the options of studying or taking training or accepting scholarships to study or train in these particular areas, is a clear pathway for them— because that is what scares some people.

They have friends who studied IT, for instance, and came home with an IT degree and just can't get through the door because of lack of experience— and you can't get experience unless you get a job. You're not going to get IT experience at Burger King or bartending, other than some of the really sophisticated Point of Sale systems they have. What is the pathway for them? What's the clear pathway? *"I'm gonna take a risk. I want to be an accountant, lawyer, doctor, whatever. I'm gonna take a risk and go down this road."*

Look at Compliance. I remember when we were in office, and we faced a budget from the Monetary Authority for another 213 compliance officers and we were like, *"Where are you even gonna house them?"* I think they ended up having to outsource it through other firms. Why don't we have three hundred Caymanians studying compliance immediately?

Immediately, with a clear pathway whereby, *"This is what you're going to do when you complete. We are going to take you in. We're going to place you, maybe in some of the apprenticeship programmes you spoke about. We're gonna place you in these firms that are now using compliance officers who are in Australia, New Zealand and all over the world, to do compliance in the Cayman Islands."*

Actually, I don't have a question. It was just a rant

[Laughter]

Mr. Joseph X. Hew: Good thing the good Speaker isn't here; he would have cut me short. I thank you for your response, Chief Officer.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Through you, Mr. Chairman, to our witness. I want to speak to social barriers; you mentioned that some of those challenges are going to be incorporated into the National Employment Strategy and Policy.

The Auditor General's report highlighted a range of social barriers that may affect Caymanians' employment prospects. One example given was the

lack of affordable childcare— you mentioned that the Ministry of Education provides some financial assistance towards children going to preschool— with 7 per cent of unemployed people citing this as a reason that they're unemployed. The report also said there was limited data on some of the social barriers, for example, unemployed people with learning difficulties, mental health issues or addiction problems.

Do you have any plans to gather data on social barriers to employment that can be used to inform policy decisions across government?

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer – Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture: Thank you for the question, member. Through you, Mr. Chairman.

That data is most definitely being collected and I think, as we continue to improve our collaboration with what is now the Needs Assessment Unit (NAU), soon to be rebranded, and the other agencies, we will be able to catalogue them.

I remember a medium-size business owner who came to me— it was pre-COVID, so it would have been four or five years ago— and essentially lit a fire under me by saying, *“I don't know what your people are doing in government, you know, because I have created my own list of individuals who you've sent to me over the years, and I can tell you which ones are addicted to alcohol, which ones have anger issues, which ones have learning issues, because you keep sending me the same individuals I've had before.”*

It presented an opportunity for us to do a better job of ensuring that we are:

1. Preparing people properly before we send them out the door for employment; and
2. Wrapping around them the services it is going to take, to help them have the best opportunity.

However, it is not something that the government can do by itself. It is an area where I think we can partner not just with government agencies, but private sector agencies and I know some of the service clubs are also involved in those areas as well.

I was almost moved to tears when I went to the Inclusion Cayman breakfast a couple of months ago— and full disclosure, my wife works there. There was a young man working for A.L. Thompson's whose entire life has been changed by having meaningful work, an employer willing to take on someone with disabilities. The way that he dressed to go to work, you know, always neat; and the joy that came from him and his employers, literally brought me to tears.

We had a pilot project which we are now funding on a regular basis, where high-risk individuals, persons whom we would otherwise be caring for in His Majesty's Prison are selected for specific jobs within construction, water sports, and other areas. Part of that programme was actually covered on page 50 of the OAG's report. It talks about us giving individuals a stipend to cover lunches and transportation, and their

side of the bargain was to not test positive for drugs, and other things that would prevent them from being employed at the end of the programme. I can say that programme, in particular, covers a whole range of barriers to employment including issues of abuse, disabilities, substance addiction and others.

It would be great to be able to scale it all the way up to capture all of those areas, but funding-wise, it is extremely resource intensive and [requires], I think, not just government spending but other stakeholders' input as well to solve, because those are significant challenges. The persons with barriers to employment are resource-heavy, but the benefits and the reward of seeing those individuals succeed is absolutely fantastic.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you to the witness for that information; I'm very happy to hear it. In terms of the pilot programme, can you indicate how many people are involved in it?

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer – Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture: Mr. Chair, if I may, I would defer that question to Director Scott who will be on after me; he is bringing his employment services' team with him and I'm sure they're armed with all of that data because they have been collecting it and waving their successes through it and other programmes.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew: Thank you. Through you, Mr. Chairman.

Chief Officer Howell, we are schoolmates and I consider you a good friend but I have to ask you: Can you give us an update on the new committee for the minimum wage?

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer – Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture: Politics aside, the documents that go back to Cabinet, specifically in relation to a sectoral approach to minimum wage, are nearing completion, and it is essential to look at that. As an MP moving around, I think you would have gotten significant feedback in relation to affordability, particularly from [homeowners] who employ individuals within their households, and the fact that the increases would be very detrimental to families who rely on caregivers and others.

The report that was given to the current Minister of Labour was requested by a previous Minister of Labour, and Minister Seymour is quite keen to have a sectoral approach to minimum wage, including some more ground work in relation to affordability, particularly for households who employ individuals— caregivers— for their children, elderly and shut-ins.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew: Thank you for that, Chief Officer Howell.

It is interesting how all these things correlate with each other. We talked about barriers and challenges earlier, and because we are not the society we used to be, where it takes a village to raise a child; where you had grandparents or parents in your house, or just down the street or in the same yard, who could take care of your child while you were working...

Unfortunately, we live in a society where there are many, many single parents. Child care has become a real issue, and in many instances persons truly cannot afford domestics to take care of their children. They are working to pay the domestic, and minimum wage is one thing... We have a moral responsibility to persons—no matter where they come from—to ensure that they are living above the poverty standard and a huge part of that is addressing the lack-of-childcare-issue, in particular, for single mothers.

This also leads to some of the challenges in other areas of employment that Caymanians are not taking because if you are in housekeeping, if you are a steward, or are working in the kitchen at one of the major hotels you have to go on shift work and said shift work could be from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. or 6 p.m. to 11 p.m.; and people just don't have the means to work for \$7-7.50 an hour—with gratuities, maybe up to \$8—to then pay \$6 or \$7 an hour for childcare.

Then the helper has to come one hour before you leave, and wait one hour until you get back. You're working at a deficit. Something to consider in your report.

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer – Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture: Absolutely, and thank you for that. Mr. Chairman, totally agree with that observation. Again, it is a piece of work that has to be done.

I had the interesting opportunity to look at job pay rates for warehouse workers in the United States—distribution centres that gather goods from all over, repackage them and send them out and they were working three shifts. What caught me by surprise is that I would have thought that the midnight to 6 a.m. shift would be the highest-paying one but it isn't—the highest paying shift is the 3-11 shift.

When I stopped and thought why would that be, it hit me: if you are working 3 to 11 you don't get to see your family, because your kids come home from school while you're at work; and when you come home, they have gone to bed so nobody wants to work the 3 to 11 shifts. During COVID, we had a number of Caymanians who were displaced from the tourism sector and some of them transitioned into 9 to 5 jobs and they find it really difficult to go back to a three-shifts-a-day programme, and I don't know what our industry is paying for that 3 to 11 shift but that means sacrificing time with your loved ones other than your day off.

Real complex issues; I don't think that we can solve it through policy. It is what the market is demanding in relation to servicing customers, but it comes with other significant costs.

Ms. Heather Bodden: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Through you to the Chief Officer.

Speaking of social barriers, could the Chief Officer say whether the availability of affordable accommodation is considered—is it a barrier to employment? You mentioned being moved to tears; I guess you're probably hearing the stories we hear of how work permit holders are here, yet are not provided with proper accommodation. We would like to know how that is being monitored.

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer – Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture: Thank you, Member, for the question. Through you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairman, we collect information on work permit applications which relate to where individuals are staying at the time that the application is submitted, but we're not an agency that actually monitors that nor whether the accommodation is fit-for-purpose or otherwise.

A couple of years ago I had the pleasure of being an election observer in Jersey, in the Channel Islands, and if I changed the name on their newspapers, the issues that they're having in relation to housing would be exactly the same issues that we're having. The advent of Airbnb is taking rental housing off the domestic market [and] putting it on a higher return from visitor rentals. Through that perspective, we are experiencing the same issues as many other countries: the growth in property purchasing, and the expense that comes from limited supply and increasing demand.

I know that significant work has been done in that area through the Premier's Office under the previous Premier, and there were a number of [considerations] including looking at higher density housing on lots, et cetera, but it is a growing issue. Some of the major [construction] projects being considered—and I know this from what I read in the media—are also including worker accommodations and other things as part of their site preparation process but yes, it is extremely complex.

I think there's probably more we can do across the government, but it will mean significant changes to the planning laws and maybe other incentives. The role we play in this is to capture the information at the source, as to where individuals are staying which currently involves sign off by the employer, the employee, and the landlord, but yeah, it is worrying.

The Chairman: Mr. Howell, thank you for being such a gracious witness today—I appreciate your candidness and honesty in responding accordingly. I know we've probably taken up more than your time; we had intended to conclude in about an hour and it has been

two now, so you can be dismissed from the Committee. I wish you well, and thank you, once again, for appearing before us.

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer – Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I extend thanks to the Office of the Auditor General for the piece of work they have undertaken. They've made significant strides into dissecting some of the issues as it relates to unemployment and under-employment. The accepted recommendations are being actioned; and we look forward to improving our service delivery, and improving employment options for Caymanians.

Thank you very much for having me.

The Chairman: As you depart, sir, I'll go ahead and invite our next witness, Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director of WORC, to join us in the Chamber.

[Pause]

WORKFORCE OPPORTUNITIES AND RESIDENCY CAYMAN (WORC)

The Chairman: Good morning, Mr. Scott. Welcome to the Public Accounts Committee. I see you came well-armed this morning. When we get into the questioning, we always ask, that before you answer your first question, you state your name and official position for the record—you only have to do it that one time.

Mr. Scott, the Auditor General published a report on the 3rd of June, "*Improving Employment Prospects for Caymanians*". It is an important issue and an important piece of work, and we acknowledge that, although it (the work), has a really significant role to play in this issue, it can't achieve it alone, it can't do it on its own. We mentioned that and heard as much this morning.

We heard from the Chief Officer earlier, as we just concluded our discussions with him, and now we want to ask you some questions. We may cover some of the same issues but in doing so, we want to hear what is WORC's perspective—not necessarily the Ministry and the Chief Officer's. We want to hear it from you and the troops on the ground.

We're going to begin with the strategic direction and legal framework, and for that I'm going to turn to Mr. Joey Hew.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Through you, and good morning Mr. Scott, and to your team. Thank you for joining us this morning.

Mr. Scott, the Auditor General reported that the legal framework is sound. The report also notes that further changes are planned highlighting the Cayman Islands Identification [Card] Act, 2022 and the Financial Assistance Act, 2022. I wonder if you could elaborate

on how the aforementioned Acts might help WORC in improving its employment prospects for Caymanians.

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): Good morning, Mr. Chair—and good morning to the members of the Committee and to the Acting Auditor General and her team.

Jeremy Scott, Director of Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman. Thank you for the question. In answering your question, the framework that is actually mentioned and identified within the Auditor General's report provides a basis. When we are dealing with Caymanian job seekers, what is currently a challenge is actually providing services to Caymanians with, I guess, limitations financially; but also factoring in the minimum wage factors.

Looking at the Financial [Assistance] Act, there is a conflict where we have barriers and issues as it relates to our job seekers and participants' ability to actually participate. There is a conflict in relation to the wage being offered, compared with the financial aid being offered. I think the Auditor General's report identified that the higher demand is actually within certain industries that attract lower wages.

If you have a minimum wage criterion in the majority of the jobs that are advertised, that we are seeing coming in, a job seeker is not going to be attracted to those jobs if in fact they are able to qualify for assistance which is actually more, from an income basis, than what the minimum wage offers are in the demand. As it relates to that, I think it is a challenge for us. In fact, I believe that it will assist as well, if we have those matters addressed.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew: Thank you for that, Mr. Scott. Through you, Mr. Chairman. I wonder—I speak specifically about the Cayman Islands Identification Act... and we're all anticipating the National ID Programme. Do you anticipate that that specific Act, or the implementation of the National ID Programme, will assist your department in improving prospects for Caymanians?

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): Mr. Chair through you. The National Identification—we are currently challenged with having a clear indicator and identifier. We have more info and clarity as to how many foreign workers are here and in what occupations and their status of employment, versus appreciating and having accurate data in our hands to make informed decisions as to who we have as Caymanians and their work status. That creates a barrier for us.

What we are doing is operating and forecasting based on data that we are actually collecting of who is actually coming to us for aid; or asking for assistance when it relates to training and job opportunities, but we

do know that is not necessarily an accurate pool as it relates to the entirety of our Caymanian populace.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew: Thank you. Sticking on the legislation and legal framework. You raised the point that we know more about work permit holders—it's extensive; we know where they live, how much they're paid, blood type, everything about them. Unless a Caymanian registers with WORC, we really know nothing about them.

I've always wondered, and always thought, that one area that could be used to gather data, as well as for enforcement, would be the Pensions office. Do you know, or would you be able to tell us whether there are discussions about changes in legislation that would allow [WORC] to exchange information with the Pensions office; because if you think about it, we could gather quite a bit of data on where Caymanians are working and how much they're making through the Pensions office.

We could as well on the enforcement side, because I don't think it is any secret that we have an issue with people working either outside of their work permits or working on their own. A friend has gotten a work permit for them so they're not paying pension or insurance at least for periods of time. That data could be used quite well for enforcement,

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): Mr. Chair, through you. Thank you for the question.

As it relates to any changes in legislation, I wouldn't be privy to whether or not that is on the table. I can assure the Member, and the Committee, that we currently work together sharing data, especially under the Data Protection Act, from a law enforcement investigator standpoint. It's actually very, very helpful as it relates to assisting with the tracking and identifying of Caymanians, et cetera. I'm sure any amendment or changes to legislation would also assist in the process.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew: Through you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Director Scott, for that response. Moving on to—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Joseph X. Hew: Sorry? I was just going to ask about the adverts.

Moving on to the Auditor General's report, which noted that WORC reviews and approves all job adverts posted on the new job portal, I guess, but cannot legally reject them. The Chief Officer spoke about it and gave us examples of how, whilst you cannot reject the ads, you can enforce it at the application level.

My question to you is: Is this an issue that you have identified, and do you anticipate improvements or the ability to reject ads in the future?

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): Mr. Chair, through you. This is very near and dear to our hearts I would say, recognising the legislation that is currently in place, and has been in place for quite some time, requiring job opportunities and adverts to be placed.

Currently, we have a team of mainly customer care that process, I think it's something like 16 to 1,700 applications through the portal on any given month, and the feedback on it. I think just recently, with one of the stop gap solutions until we launched our current portal, we had our employment services team and manager—who is actually with us today—identified very clearly that there were instances where applications and job descriptions; and qualifications and requirements were, in fact, in their view, unreasonable or not in accordance with standards. It is very clear that if we don't have standards that are regulated, it's an open market and an ability for employers to craft job descriptions and requirements to the like of, I guess, an anticipated employee.

It would make our life much, much easier, to have regulations that afford us the ability to stop that from the initial advertisement stage. The reason I'm saying this, is that with an advertisement that's running in the portal for 14 days, many times, if the requirements are inflated, you have Caymanians who just don't apply for it despite the fact that without an inflation or a variation to what we would say would be "standard requirements" for that job, you may in fact, have Caymanians who would have applied independently, or through the direct assistance of our employment service officers, again, increasing the opportunities, increasing the ability for them to be viable candidates.

Failing that, with the submission of an application that's not vetted in that way, it does get to an authority, a decision maker, whether it be a delegation by me or be it a decision by the requisite board handling the application. They do, on many occasions, pose questions or defer applications for clarity as to why the request for specific requirements are attached to an application or a job, which doesn't always lead to a justified refusal, as we are mandated under the remit of the legislation and general considerations that we can render a decision which we have to abide by.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew: Through you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the response, Mr. Scott.

The Chairman: Going to turn now to the employment programmes part of the report, and for that line of questioning, I'm going to turn it over to Ms. Barbara Conolly.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Through you to our witness.

The Auditor General reported that WORC, with partners, provides several unemployment programmes, but their effectiveness is unclear. The report states that **"WORC did not have detailed data from**

2019 to 2021” for its programmes. I want to explore some of the Auditor General's findings with you in more detail; and I will cover completion rates, acceptance rates, dropout rates, targets and outcomes.

We are pleased to note, that the average completion rate of programmes delivered from 2019 to 2022 was high, at 83 per cent; however, looking at the 2022 data in Exhibit 14, on page 36 of the Auditor General's report, the average completion rate was 73 per cent and it varied significantly by programme. Can the witness say what the reasons for the various programmes' different completion rates are, and what are your views on how to improve them?

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): Thank you for the question.

We do offer quite a range of programme services and training offers and, as identified within the report, the completion rate is about 73 per cent depending on the training offers. I think it's fair to identify that. Speaking of barriers and issues that impact the higher completion rate, upon acceptance we do encounter applicants who have challenges [and] barriers.

Without going into detail, I think it was mentioned [that] there could be trauma, there could be counselling issues, there could be child care issues, there could be transportation [issues], there could be issues with substance abuse, et cetera. I'll preface by saying that at this point in time we're actually doing much better with tracking within our programmes and understanding the causes of the dropout rate; we're currently tracking that as well. It's fair to say and identify that most of the time those are major factors.

Within the last two years we have continued to improve in identifying those barriers. Say, for instance, if there are transportation or child care issues, we offer stipends that are part and parcel of the programme to increase the completion rates; but I would say there are a variety of factors that contribute to a lower percentage completion rate within the programmes.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you for that information, Mr. Scott.

In terms of acceptance rates, the Auditor General's report states that in 2022 less than half of all [programme] applicants were accepted. Excluding the National Apprenticeship Programme, where only one person applied and was accepted, acceptance rates range between 9 and 66 per cent. Can you give some reasons for the low acceptance rates for that programme?

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): Thank you for the question. I think the quickest and most accurate answer I can give you on this is that, as you can see from the statistics, some of the programmes are actually be-

ing applied for much more than others. There are limitations in offers and slots which obviously encompass and reflect funding.

In addition to that, depending on the spots, we want to ensure that when individuals are accepted into those programmes we have somewhat of a vetting criteria as well to ensure that at the start, there is a forecasting of a higher completion rate; and that again, goes into identifying whether or not there are significant barriers that would prevent someone from starting and completing those programmes, ensuring that we have that return on investment as well from the cost perspective. That in and of itself [means] significant limitations with availability of spots that we can actually offer at any given time.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you for that response, Mr. Scott.

Moving on to the dropout rates. The report states that over a quarter of people accepted onto all programmes in 2022 dropped out before they finished. Almost a third of the people did not complete the specialised training and industry certifications. Can you indicate to this Committee the reasons for people dropping out of the programmes before they finished?

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): Thank you for the question again.

It may be a repeat on the completion rates, but again, there are those significant barriers and issues that persons face upon commencing these programmes. We will also identify that, in addition, a significant factor of the dropout rate is actually consideration of employment. For instance, we have participants who actually start the programmes, but these programmes don't necessarily come with a full salary; they come with a stipend, and participants have a basic requirement to sustain themselves and their families.

At times, you will find that participants will opt out because of having temporary or full time job offers, and that continues to be a challenge for us. The team and the coordinators continue to work with those participants to try to persuade them that, for long-term gain and a future profession, it may be best to stay in the programmes; but there are immediate needs that participants face. Based on reporting, those are factors that would cause dropout rates to increase.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you, Mr. Scott, for that response. I move on to targets and outcomes.

The Auditor General's report states that WORC spent \$2.2 million outsourcing its training programmes, however, outcomes are not measured and there are no targets for placements, internships, and apprenticeships—for example, how many people who completed their apprenticeships are now gainfully employed.

Are there any plans to introduce targets for programmes or to measure outcomes, and how does

WORC ensure value for money when outsourcing its training programmes?

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): Thank you again for the question.

Appreciating the scope period of the report; that we are a new department; and that through certain periods there were challenges, between 2023 and this year, we have vastly improved tracking targets and expected outcomes. Appreciating, again, that there are costs associated with ensuring that contracts for outsourced programmes have stipulations within them with expected targets that, too, is being tracked as we speak. That becomes part of our monthly report—which is also fielded to the Ministry; and part of the performance agreement for the specific managers and team members within those units.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: In terms of the apprenticeship programmes, do you have any figures as to how many people have been gainfully employed?

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): I'll crave your indulgence, just to speak with my team.

[Pause]

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): Through you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for allowing me to consult with my team. Depending on the apprenticeship programme at hand, they can run a year to two years. We had five who commenced the programme, and out of those five, three gained employment at the end of the apprenticeship.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Can Mr. Scott indicate why only three out of the five were given employment? I mean, I would have thought that all five would have been employed by those institutions. Give some reason why they weren't employed. Do you all ask those questions?

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): I crave your indulgence again.

[Pause]

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): Through you, Mr. Chair.

The reasons for those two not being hired upon completion of the apprenticeship programme were: For one, due to health considerations; the second opted out to pursue other opportunities.

The Chairman: Mr. Scott, I want to go back briefly to the acceptance rates—if you answered this question when we were talking about it, I didn't hear. Do you have any plans to increase the number of places available to better meet demand in terms of the employment programmes?

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It was identified in the OAG's report that we did not have a strategy in place, so this may actually answer a forecasted question as it relates to our strategy. We are currently looking at completing one and having it as a first draft for January, 2025 implementation. We will have that in place by the end of October, as part of the strategy and goals and focuses for that.

I think the report says that we are highly under demand. Not having enough slots available on any of those programmes for interested parties is also a significant barrier to the interest of our Caymanians, so we are looking at proposing further funding which would enable us to meet demand at a greater rate.

The Chairman: Thank you, sir. Okay, let's move on to next section, JobsCayman. For that, I turn to Ms. Heather Bodden.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Through you to the Director of WORC. Mr. Scott, good afternoon, sir.

The report highlighted a range of problems with the JobsCayman portal, one example being that it was not user friendly for job seekers or employers. The report also stated that WORC had not assessed whether JobsCayman had achieved its aims. Could the Director say what impact the problems with JobsCayman had on effective operations; and what actions have been taken by WORC over the past few years, to address such problems?

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): Thank you for the question.

The JobsCayman portal came into force in 2020 and we've had a series of difficulties with it. Many times it had to do with user-friendliness as well as the stability of the portal and, given the numbers identified within the report, one can imagine—with it being the primary portal highly and centrally used by all employers and all job seekers—that it created a large need for support services on the back end.

I believe Chief Officer Howell mentioned that there was a high demand on both our call centre and our IT support through that process. I'm very grateful to be at this juncture, as of the end of July, and seeing the launch of our new portal; and I'm happy to report that at this point in time, within the last year and definitely as of the launch, we've seen a significant decrease in

the requirement and the need for assistance to the public at large in utilising the system.

As one would expect, there will be iterative development stages within the system, but overall, the feedback we're being provided with from customers and key stakeholders has been a breath of fresh air, for lack of a better description. It does give greater availability of our resources in being able to focus on strategy and delivering quality of service throughout the department.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Thank you, Mr. Scott. That's encouraging news, and I'm sure it makes you happy to hear those good reports.

Moving on to Caymanian job-seeker registrations. The report states that the use of JobsCayman increased between May 2020 and December 2022. We note that by the end of 2022 over nine thousand employers, and almost five thousand job seekers were registered on the portal; however, we also note that as of Fall 2023, 42 per cent, or less than half of unemployed Caymanians, were registered on the portal. Can the Director give us reasons that unemployed Caymanians are not registering on the portal?

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): Thank you, again, for the question.

The cause of such decrease eludes me at this point in time. I will venture to say that the continued complications and difficulties that users faced when registering, from an operability standpoint, may have contributed significantly to a decrease. I think that is the fairest answer that I can provide to the Committee.

I have some stats that relate to post-launch of the new portal, which I will submit at this point in time. As of the launch of the new portal, and we are only speaking of a month in scope period, we have had an uptick of two hundred and eleven new job seekers who registered with us. As it relates to Caymanian jobseekers, within merely a month one hundred and eleven new job seekers have registered with us, again pressing the point regarding ease of operability and user-friendliness.

My desire and intention regarding continued monitoring in comparison to last year's rates of registration—and, I guess, the traffic of user ability; I'm optimistic that we will have a significant increase, which is important for me because it allows us to service a greater part of our Caymanian populace who is in need of our assistance, our programmes and services.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: That's encouraging news as well, Mr. Scott. The next question concerns—

[Inaudible interjection]

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Sorry. I have a question. Through you, Mr. Chairman to the witness.

In terms of job seekers who register via the portal, particularly Caymanians, does WORC know their success rate in terms of obtaining jobs? Does WORC keep a record, or some sort of register, of those who have been successful?

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): Thank you for the question.

I think the answer would be in two parts. I think we have three different categories of job seekers, but I'll reduce it to two:

- An independent job seeker registering in the past and current system. From an independent standpoint, there are limitations in being able to categorically say whether or not they have secured a job through the portal;
- Job seekers who are assigned to, and assisted by, employment service officers. I'm able to confirm that we accurately monitor how many of them actually retain employment through referrals and job assistance.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Through you to the Director, the report also states that WORC does not have data on the number of job seekers who have gained employment through the portal. The Auditor General recommends WORC collect outcomes data and use it to improve its services, and you agreed to implement this recommendation by December 2024.

Can you give us an indication of plans to improve the outcome data, including the types of outcomes?

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): Thank you. As mentioned earlier, we have enhanced our ability and tracking mechanisms to allow us to identify the outcomes of those job seekers who are registered in the portal and are, in fact, assisted by our employment service officers. We do note that, and it is currently in play.

We'll continue to work with the iterative development of capabilities from a reporting standpoint on the system to enhance that ability, especially for job seekers using the system independently; and being able to track outcomes of whether or not they have been able to secure employment without our staff's direct assistance.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Thank you, sir.

The Chairman: Okay. We're going to move now, Mr. Scott, to WORC's performance.

This morning we heard from the Auditor General that in its first four years WORC had four different Acting Directors. I wonder if you could speak to the impact that such continuous changes in leadership had

on WORC's ability to perform effectively and deliver on its objectives.

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In essence, I think the number is three, myself being counted as two separate persons in my acting stint; however, I think it is a fair identification that it obviously would have posed significant difficulties in the transition or creation of WORC. I think Chief Officer Howell mentioned that we lost significant senior members who made up legacy immigration leadership and much of that experience was not transferred. We really started from the ground up.

I continue to share with my team that if they're joining the organisation of WORC expecting a red-carpet experience, it's not going to be one of those. They normally come in with a hard hat and gloves and building from the ground up, and that is exactly what I've been a part of and I'm proud to have been a part of the creation of WORC in understanding the importance of service delivery and what we're providing to the public and partnerships throughout.

I think it's also fair to say that last year was the first time, as of the creation of WORC, that we had a full complement of full-time senior leadership. We had myself as Director; as of March last year, we brought on a Deputy Director for Business Operations who has a vast amount of responsibility, as one can imagine—that is human resources, IT, business operations, customer care; and we were also able to recruit for my previous post as Deputy Director for the Compliance unit, so as of last year we had a full complement of senior leadership.

We continue to be strategic in that we were focused on recognising that we were operationally challenged, but we also needed to be dedicated to strategic directives and implementation, and for that reason we commenced our partnership with a consultant as of December last year.

I'm very excited, and I think I mentioned it before, that we are three-quarters of the way complete with having a very robust strategic-implementation plan—which I believe is very much delayed but very well warranted—that will set the path for us for the next five years. Obviously, as part of this Committee, we are looking at and talking about employment opportunities for Caymanians but holistically, the strategic plan will, in fact, look at all of our service lines and deliverables. We've taken a very collective approach.

One would say that it has taken us nine months at this point in time, but that's actually dedicating a full day to come together, whether once or twice a month. We have a new senior leadership team and a new mid-management team, and our approach is a very collective one whereby all stakeholders and specialists within our department have contributed to the structure of this

implementation plan and I believe, optimistically, that we are set on a path for future success.

The Chairman: I'm glad to hear that you're well on the way towards completing the strategic plan for the next four to five years; but can you speak to your plans to improve monitoring and reporting on your performance?

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, sir, we are well on our way as well.

As mentioned, having had our engagements with the Auditor General's team as of last year and this year, and recognising the areas of improvement, especially as it related to key budgeted outputs; making sure that we were capturing those on a monthly basis via a reporting mechanism; as well as ensuring that those key outputs were being reported accurately through our Ministry's annual reports. Additionally, ensuring those key outputs form part of our staff's performance agreement within those key roles.

I think applying that approach holistically, and looking at ensuring that those statistics and our performance are actually publicised on our website would, in fact, elevate our accountability measures.

The Chairman: Could you also speak to your plans to review and improve WORC's output targets?

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In reviewing the Auditor General's report, it was recognised that a few of those output reports may have been overstated as well, and may have been... I guess, consolidated with numbers of participants versus number of programmes. That has been in our discussions in prep for attendance here. It was discussed most recently, and I've been assured that those outputs have actually changed.

What is imperative is understanding and appreciating trends and understanding where those outputs may not meet the expectations and demands. Having those amended by 2025 is the actual plan, and also forms part and parcel to key deliverables and targets that are set under our strategic plan.

The Chairman: Thank you, sir. I appreciate those answers. Next, we are going to turn to barriers to, and opportunities for employment, and I am going to turn to Mr. Hugh for that line of questioning.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Through you to the Director.

Director Scott, Exhibit 18, on page 43 of the Auditor General's report highlighted that there is a mismatch between what employers need and the jobs that

Caymanians want. We went through that with Chief Officer Howell— I think between the two of us we exhausted discussions on it, but if you would like to add anything, I would certainly encourage you.

The report also highlights that WORC does not prepare labour forecasts that consider historical trends and future labour demands over the 5 to 10-year period. The Auditor General recommended that WORC prepare long-term labour forecasts and publish these, and we note that you accepted the recommendation and plan to both expand the labour market unit within WORC and enhance the publication of the labour market assessment reports.

As I said, if you would like to, please comment on that table, but I can confidently say that Chief Officer Howell and I exhausted that discussion. If you could also tell us the time scale that would be covered by the labour market assessment report, and whether there are plans to prepare long-term forecasts to be included therein.

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): As a response, I will add, at the latter, that those reports mandated by legislation were not completed within the scope period of the audit and that's correct.

I think in the First Quarter of 2022 (Q1/22) our organisational design was intended to hire a labour market manager and an industry partner analyst. We brought on our labour market manager, who's actually with us today, and as soon as he commenced the employment he started completing the labour market assessments with job postings and labour market assessments, and from that period we've continued to actually publish those.

In discussions with the labour market manager, as of yesterday, we spoke of forecasting and how long those could be forecasted; again, appreciating that forecasting is looking at long-term trends, if those assessments commenced from 2022 to present, we are still in the infancy stages of looking at what would be fair and accurate forecast trends within the labour market.

For that reason, right now many the labour assessments are based on current trends, but I've been assured that as we continue to measure and assess the labour market, we will be better informed to accurately forecast what the labour market looks like, you know, within the next five years.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew: Through you, Mr. Chairman, I thank Mr. Scott for the response and update.

Mr. Scott, can you inform the Committee as to whether or not there are any vacancies still in the expanded labour market unit?

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): Through you, Mr. Chair.

My team behind me has shown me some numbers by fingers.

[Laughter]

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): We have two, I believe, that have been identified at present. Those vacancies were not as a result of never being filled, but by leavers within the last year or two. One of my goals for the last year has been ensuring that any resource gaps are recruited for as soon as possible, understanding the demands of the day and understanding that the lack of resources in key positions impact service delivery.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Through you, Mr. Chairman, I'm going to speak to the social barriers.

The Auditor General's report highlighted a range of social barriers that may affect some Caymanians' employment prospects. One of the examples given was lack of affordable childcare. The report notes that WORC provides stipends and assists those in need to register with the Ministry of Education's Childhood Programme, but the audit team was told that there are insufficient places to meet demand— WORC spent \$31,000 in independent childcare institutions to assist participants in some of its programmes.

In relation to some of the other social barriers, we are pleased to note that WORC has run specific cohorts in some programmes for single parents and people with learning difficulties. Earlier, the Chief Officer spoke to a pilot programme— I'm not sure if that is what this relates to, but you can clarify that.

We noted that one of your contracted training providers reported that some of the participants could not find jobs after completing the programme because of drug-related problems. Can you indicate the extent of challenges in finding employment because of social barriers?

Also, [regarding] the insufficient places to meet the preschool demand. Can you expand on that a bit? I think we need some clarity as to why we don't have space in this area to meet the demands of those children. Thank you.

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): Mr. Chair through you. In addressing that question, I will say that testing stage involved ten participants through that programme; eight of which passed and completed the programme and five secured employment through the programme.

Understanding the barriers or difficulties, I guess those three— the difference [between] the eight passing or completing, and the five gaining employment— were as a result of dependence and based on drug testing did not test out with our partner vendor. Obviously, that caused concerns from a performance

indicator [perspective] and being able to adequately meet our stakeholders' as well as employers' needs, in ensuring that their recommendation of being a viable employee was not necessarily meeting those expectations.

We, from the employment services team, have an assessment criteria and an assessment process which carries the job seeker through to assess and determine whether or not there are barriers or any limitations in referring them to jobs. Something that we want to ensure is a continued level of branding and quality of what we do, and how we provide assistance to job seekers and recommendations for employers.

What we do not want is for what was happening years prior to continue, whereas with limited means of vetting, job seekers would be referred to employers who automatically were faced with major challenges upon their initial intake for that employment. To avoid that, these are some of the processes, performance indicators and performance standards that we, as well as the vendors, have to account for before we are able to introduce them into the labour market.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: I don't know if you can answer the question regarding insufficient places to meet demand. Maybe I need to address it with the Acting Chief Officer of the Ministry of Education when she's here later today.

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): Thank you for the question.

I don't think I would be able to answer that. What I will add, is that at times there are limitations as it relates to our continued funding where it is a need. You have the availability of space, versus availability of funding to be able to continue to support the needs of participants who may, in fact, need funding through childcare.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you, Mr. Scott, just one last question. Based on the fact that this programme seems to have been quite successful, are there any plans to run future cohorts for disadvantaged or vulnerable unemployed Caymanians?

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): Mr. Chair through you.

Our programmes continue to be modified based on interest and persons who engage with us as job seekers. As they are assessed and determined, and based on the demand and forecasting, we do see a need for specialty programmes that address barriers and issues that Caymanians actually have.

I think it's also fair to say that many of our programmes have built-in components to accommodate those, but where there are significant novelties that a

Caymanian may face, we do separate those programmes and customise those modules in programmes to fit the needs of our participants; but also to ensure that there is a higher rate of success at the end of it.

Speaking of special programmes, I will share one of my many experiences within the last couple of years in becoming acquainted with participants. I had the joy of attending our local cinema and as you enter to go enjoy a movie, many of the ticket agents there are actually part and parcel to our programmes; so, every time I'm attending there, every time I go to a local service store as well, I cross paths. The beauty is that they don't recognise me—I guess maybe with a hat or casual wear, but seeing them in operation and seeing the level of service that they're providing to us is a breath of fresh air and whether it's one or two, I think we are doing a really good job.

I understand the importance of what we do, and appreciate its importance [and] that we have much more to do. We have a greater demand to meet. At the end of any given year, we would like to say that we have dropped the unemployment rate by 2 to 3 per cent, you know; but I will say that our continued service and efforts, and steps of progression, have made a difference.

The Chairman: We come to the final line of questioning, which is on collaboration, and for that, I will turn to Ms. Heather to lead the questions.

Ms. Heather Bodden: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, we are almost done with you now, Mr. Scott.

Collaboration: The Auditor General's report highlighted that WORC cannot improve employment prospects for Caymanians alone. Exhibit 23, on page 52, identified some of the gaps in collaboration between WORC and other stakeholders and some areas for improvement. Could the Director please tell us what plans there are to improve collaboration across government and with other public sector entities.

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): Mr. Chair, through you. Thank you for the question.

Again, I'll provide an answer as it relates through our strategy. It's very clear that we have much stake in ensuring employment prospects for Caymanians, but we can't do it alone. For instance, I know that a discussion point was identified in relation to scholarship recipients.

One of the measures that I would love to see come to fruition is what I call "the red-carpet approach", whereas we ensure the forecasting of returning Caymanians who are on scholarships. It's anticipated that we know what their specialty is, and we've engaged with leaders in those industries, anticipating their arrival and giving them that red carpet experience versus what we are currently encountering [which] is that at times

persons, (as in our Caymanians returning), are left to identify opportunities on their own. Enhance the ability, the branding and acceptance, so that we are able to assist them in that transition.

However, for success, I think it is inherent that we bridge the gap in communication with the Scholarship Secretariat and the Ministry of Education, and have policies and agreements in place that allow us to know exactly who is out there, who's coming back. We're looking at improving our branding as well. We are not there for the unemployment line, but to service our educated Caymanians. Obviously, we have the knowledge and the information in relation to all the jobs that are available— who better to serve our returning students into the labour market.

Ms. Heather Bodden: Thank you, Mr. Scott. We anticipate that as well, especially for our returning Caymanians. Thank you very much for all your answers to our questions.

The Chairman: Mr. Scott, this includes our examination of you as a witness before the Committee. I want to thank you for attending this morning. I truly appreciate what I perceived to be the very candid way in which you answered the Committee's questions, and I thank you for that.

You and your team can be dismissed now, from the Committee, and I wish you continued success with your work. Thank you, once again.

Mr. Jeremy Scott, Director - Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the Committee members and the Auditor General's team. I will say that holistically, the report in and of itself, and its findings, has been very helpful in identifying our performance to date. It serves to focus on specific goals to be achieved within the next couple of years. As mentioned, the recommendations were accepted, but it does give us a good foundation to deliver services in the future, so thank you.

The Chairman: Members of the Committee, it is 1 p.m. We are precisely one hour behind schedule and it is time for lunch. I'm going to suggest that we take thirty minutes for lunch and get back here at 1:30 to interview our final witness under this report so, let's have lunch and be back at 1:30.

Thank you all.

Committee suspended at 1.02 p.m.

Committee resumed at 1:42 p.m.

The Chairman: Let's go ahead and reconvene the meeting for the afternoon session. We are down to our final witness, so I'd like to invite Ms. Lynette Monteith to enter the Chamber.

[Pause]

The Chairman: Good afternoon, Miss Monteith, welcome to this Public Accounts Committee hearing. Before I get into the actual questions that we have for you on the Auditor General's report, I believe you know the drill— first question, state your name and your position for the record. I'd like to launch right into the questioning, but have this brief preamble for your benefit.

You're aware that the Auditor General published a report on the 3rd of June, 2024. Improving employment prospects for Caymanians is an important issue. This morning we heard from the Chief Officer of the Ministry of Border Control Labour and Culture and the Director of WORC. We want to follow up on some issues with you, as Chief Officer of the Ministry of Education, which has a key role to play in improving employment prospects for Caymanians.

We note that several of the Auditor General's recommendations were made to the Ministry of Education, and we're pleased to note that you accepted all of them; committee members may want to ask you about the progress made, or planned, with regard to such recommendations. The first area we want to explore with you in terms of the report, are strategic direction and the legal framework, and to lead that line of questioning, I'm going to turn to Mr. Joey Hew.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew: Thank you, Mr. Chairman through you. Good afternoon to Acting Chief Officer Ms. Monteith and your team. Thank you for attending the Committee.

The Auditor General's report highlighted that there is no overarching strategy for employment, and recommended that a National Employment Policy be developed. This needs to take a holistic approach, so the question is: What role will the Ministry of Education expect to take in developing this National Employment Policy?

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Ms. Lyneth Monteith, Acting Chief Officer - Ministry of Education: Good afternoon, Lyneth Monteith, Acting Chief Officer in the Ministry of Education. Through you, Mr. Chair.

The Ministry is responsible for providing scholarships for persons to gain qualifications in careers that are seen as nation-building, so in terms of our scholarship offerings, we would be working closely with WORC in identifying what are, or appear to be, the popular areas. We have been collaborating with them in terms of our scholars and when they are coming back; so obviously, we'll be looking at what the data is saying from WORC and looking at our scholars and looking at return dates for them, so we would have an integral part of providing information for that national strategy, which would be developed by the WORC.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew: Thank you and through you, Mr. Chairman.

Deputy Chief Officer, we discussed this at length with the Chief Officer, and a bit with the Director of WORC. If you were to go to page 43 of the report, and look at Exhibit 18, there's a table that identifies the jobs that are desired by Caymanians and the jobs that are held by work permit holders that are available, then, for Caymanians.

[Given] your assistance in developing a National Employment Policy, would you be able to say in what ways you would encourage Caymanians— and you spoke about scholarships earlier— to participate in the industries shown as opportunities available, versus those that Caymanians have generally chosen as a career path.

Ms. Lyneth Monteith, Acting Chief Officer - Ministry of Education: Through you, Mr. Chair, I spoke about scholarship offerings, but I think I might need to go back to our schools' offerings.

Those jobs in high demand by employers— the IT (Information Technology), construction, the finance industry, et cetera— are subjects that are taught in our high schools. We follow up with offerings at UCCI, where they can go on to higher levels in these subjects, so we do encourage our students to take up these interest areas. I would like to add at this point, that this year we introduced what we are calling our TVET dual-entry.

Prior, our dual-entry Programme was an academic programme, but we recognise that we have scholars who have TVET interests and persons might think that IT doesn't fall in the TVET [category]. They commonly look at construction or electrical, et cetera; so, this year we've established a TVET dual-entry Programme in collaboration with UCCI.

This offering is for students who are still in the secondary schools, who have that affinity for those subjects. We introduced it with IT and construction to start with, and we had a number of students who entered that programme. In the recent UCCI graduation group we had eleven of our secondary students and I think that's significant because these students have not graduated high school yet so, they are able to enter that programme and they graduate from UCCI with a certification in one of these subject areas.

They also have industry-standard qualifications. For example, the IT scholars have a certification in CompTIA, and then, in October, they will also graduate from their high school with their external examination passes, so we start from the high school [and] partner with UCCI to continue with the subject offering— and they do partner with us. We have discussions as to the areas that would be beneficial to the country and these areas, the finance area, construction, IT, certification in customer service, et cetera, all of these areas are represented by programmes that continue from the secondary school.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew: Thank you for that answer. You actually led perfectly into, and answered, one or two of my other questions. Continuing on the TVET.

The report notes that challenges previously existed with students receiving scholarships to TVET courses— and I assume these are some of the courses that you just spoke about. We were pleased to note that the Ministry approved a new policy in September, 2023, that aims to provide scholarships for short to medium-term career-based courses. This means scholarships are now available for all of the local private TVET institutions. Can you say what the take up on those scholarships has been to date?

Ms. Lyneth Monteith, Acting Chief Officer - Ministry of Education: Through you, Mr. Chair.

I spoke about the dual-entry TVET Programme, but there is another programme through which we target the out-of-school population. We have some students who leave school, and may not leave with the requisite skills so they are able to apply for a TVET grant separate from the programme I mentioned before.

We have eight registered institutions and this year to date, between January and August, we have had sixty-six individuals granted TVET grants to take up short-term courses— not longer than eighteen months, at any one of those eight institutions; and I mentioned registered institutions because there may be other institutions that are not registered, but the requirement is for all educational institutions to be registered with the Ministry of Education.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew: Thank you for that, and thank you for the clarification. It may be too early, but are there any measured outcomes of the scholarship recipients? If it is too early— I suspect it may be— can you confirm that you plan to measure those?

Ms. Lyneth Monteith, Acting Chief Officer - Ministry of Education: Yes. Through you, Mr. Chair, we do have requirements in terms of whether the scholarship recipients take up the programme and also, at the end of the programme. We're able to collaborate with the institutions to check on how the scholarship students are doing, if there are any issues, any other support that is needed. We do keep in contact with the institutions in terms of how the students are progressing.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew: Do you have any early data on the students' success rate so far?

Ms. Lyneth Monteith, Acting Chief Officer - Ministry of Education: Through Mr. Chair. I will ask Jerome McCoy, who is the Deputy Chief Officer with responsibility for adult education to provide that data.

The Chairman: I'm not able to allow you, [Mr. McCoy], because you're not here as a witness. I would need for you to give Ms. Lyneth the information and let her provide it for the Committee.

Ms. Lyneth Monteith, Acting Chief Officer - Ministry of Education: Apologies, Mr. Chairman.

Through you, Mr. Chair, we don't have definite figures in terms of numbers, but to date we have had about 60 per cent completion rate.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew: Thank you.

The Chairman: We now move on to employment programmes, and for that I will turn to Ms. Barbara Conolly to lead the questioning.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman through you to our witness.

About Superior Auto: The Auditor General's report highlighted that the Ministry of Education paid Superior Auto \$600,000 between 2019 and 2023 to run a training programme for aspiring mechanics; however, the Ministry did not have a purchase agreement with the company, nor did it track programme participants' outcomes therefore, it could not hold the company accountable for the funding provided.

This Programme is widely supported by all Members of Parliament and we are very aware of these students' success stories, however, my question is whether a purchase agreement has now been put in place, as I think it is very important that we track the outcomes of the programme's participants.

Ms. Lyneth Monteith, Acting Chief Officer - Ministry of Education: Through you, Mr. Chair, we indicated in our response that we acknowledge the concerns raised with regards to the lack of a Purchase Agreement. We have begun the process to formalise the grant process by implementing a Purchase Agreement with this institution.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Through you, Mr. Chairman to the witness. Once the Purchase Agreement has been finalised, do you anticipate tracking the outcomes of the programme's participants?

Ms. Lyneth Monteith, Acting Chief Officer - Ministry of Education: Through you, Mr. Chair.

Purchase Agreements typically have a series of outcomes that we require the institution to adhere to, [as well as] timelines such outcomes should adhere to. We require reports from the institution indicating, for example, persons in the programme, how many persons completed it and their qualifications when they completed. We also monitor via in-person checks, to see the programme at work.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you to the witness for that information.

I think many of you don't know that timelines are my thing. Can you indicate whether there is a timeline for this Purchase Agreement to be finalised and signed off?

Ms. Lyneth Monteith, Acting Chief Officer - Ministry of Education: Through you, Mr. Chair. We indicated at the end of September, for the Purchase Agreement to be signed and approved.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Okay. Moving on to barriers to and opportunities for employment.

The Auditor General's report states that educational attainment is a barrier to employment. Exhibit 19 on page 44 of the report shows that the majority of unemployed Caymanians are educated to a High School diploma level or lower. The exhibit shows that 566 unemployed Caymanians were educated to High School diploma level or lower in 2022. High School diploma was the highest educational level for 460 of these people.

In the same year, data from WORC showed that about 9100 jobs requiring a High School education level or equivalent were advertised on JobsCayman. Exhibit 20, on page 45, goes on to show the number and percentage of students in public schools who achieved the expected national attainment standard over the past five years.

My question, through you to the witness, is what are your Ministry's plans to improve educational attainment levels for our Caymanian students.

Ms. Lyneth Monteith, Acting Chief Officer - Ministry of Education: Through you, Mr. Chair.

There is a plethora of measures that we will be taking in our schools in terms of closing gaps for students, whether they enter primary or secondary school with gaps. We have employed assistant teachers—special assistant teachers who do interventions; and we have specialists in math, which is one of the weaker areas. We will also be looking at teaching and learning, because quality teaching means optimising the learning. Across the system, there are many different approaches.

[We are] looking at leadership as well; so, we look at leadership, we look at teaching, we look at the interventions that are needed, and employ as needed for students, as well as providing schools with targets. Year-on-year we look at what results occur in our schools and use that data, plus yearly data, to plan for improvements in our system, so it is a continuous improvement focus.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Through you, Mr. Chairman to the witness.

I know that the Ministry introduced summer school for some of the primary school students because my granddaughter attended at Joanna Clarke School in Savannah, and she benefited from that. Is that something you will be doing on a yearly basis for our primary school students?

Ms. Lyneth Monteith, Acting Chief Officer - Ministry of Education: Through you, Mr. Chair.

It is definitely the plan to continue, and I would like to say that for the 2024 Summer School, we made some changes. First, we offered places identified by students on where their gaps were from Year 4, so we had Years 4, 5 and 6 in these placements and we extended the time. The first year that we implemented Summer School, it was two weeks; in 2024 it was three weeks, so it is definitely an initiative that we will continue going forward.

I would like to say that the Year 6 students actually had their summer school programme at their home high school, and as it was conducted by the high school teachers they had an introduction to the teachers they would meet once they started [High] School as well as high school routines, et cetera, so it was a two-fold benefit for the students.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you, Mrs. Monteith. I know [the Ministry] just employed math specialists in primary and, I think, secondary as well. Am I correct?

Ms. Lyneth Monteith, Acting Chief Officer - Ministry of Education: Through you, Mr. Chair.

The math specialists were employed for the primary schools because the math teachers at secondary are not specialists— they are math teachers. We employ math teachers for the secondary school subject. The specialists are placed in our primary schools.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Okay.

In terms of the recruitment of teachers, do you have any stats on the jurisdictions that these teachers are recruited from? Do you have any breakdown of the various countries?

Ms. Lyneth Monteith, Acting Chief Officer - Ministry of Education: Through you, Mr. Chair.

I don't have that information readily available. I would say that our advertisement is global so we advertise in the Caribbean, in the United States, in the United Kingdom... but I don't have exact stats or breakdown of persons employed.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you. Through you, Mr. Chairman: [Can I have an undertaking from you that you could provide this Committee with a breakdown of all of the teachers and the jurisdictions they are coming from, please?](#)

Ms. Lyneth Monteith, Acting Chief Officer - Ministry of Education: Through you, Mr. Chair, just for clarity: Are you speaking about our 2024 recruitment cycle?

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: I think overall; for primary as well as secondary. I think the public needs to be aware of where all these teachers are coming from. I think it has been an issue in the public domain and this Committee as well as the public on the whole, would like to have that information at hand.

Ms. Lyneth Monteith, Acting Chief Officer - Ministry of Education: Through you, Mr. Chair, just so I understand. You are asking for the 2024 recruitment cycle—namely, the teachers that we employed for 2024; or are you asking for a breakdown of teachers in the system generally?

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: In the system generally, ma'am. Thank you.

One more question. Do you have any stats on the results for the CXC Math and English for this year?

Ms. Lyneth Monteith, Acting Chief Officer - Ministry of Education: Through you, Mr. Chair.

I'm afraid I didn't bring stats for this year's results, but if I'm required, I will make an undertaking for our preliminary—I'm going to use that word because in August, when the results come in, they are preliminary results pending any queries from students or the schools. [I can undertake to send preliminary results to the Committee.](#)

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you to the witness. Yes, we will accept the preliminary results at this stage. Thank you very much.

I move on to the career guidance in schools. The Auditor General's report states the Ministry of Education provides career guidance to students from Years 9 to 11. While the report notes positives for the career guidance, it also notes some gaps. For example, it is not mandatory or consistently provided. The report also highlighted that it focuses on white-collar jobs and does not cover TVET-related opportunities.

We note from your response to Recommendation 7 that you are planning to produce a comprehensive career guidance policy by September 2024—that's actually by the end of this month. Can the witness give any progress update on the career guidance policy and whether it's on board to be provided by the end of this month?

Ms. Lyneth Monteith, Acting Chief Officer - Ministry of Education: Through you, Mr. Chair.

The career guidance policy is in progress for completion by the date stated (the end of September), but I'd like to perhaps give some context to career guidance in our schools.

Students are introduced to careers in the primary schools whereby each school holds a career fair. It might be a little different from the secondary because, obviously, it is age appropriate.

For the secondary schools, there is a Careers' Unit. It is a unit of three that provides guidance to all of the secondary schools and the Cayman Islands Further Education Centre (CIFEC).

Part of the CIFEC programme is an internship through which students are matched [into jobs] per their interests. They could be white collar jobs, but many students also have an interest in TVET-related jobs, so they are placed accordingly. Additionally, at the Cayman Islands Further Education Centre there are TVET subjects that students can take, apart from the internship. We also have construction apprenticeships with the PWD, et cetera.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Through you, Mr. Chairman. Can you give this Committee assurances that career guidance will be mandatory, provided consistently, and cover the entire range of potential careers, including TVET roles?

Ms. Lyneth Monteith, Acting Chief Officer - Ministry of Education: Through you, Mr. Chair. It continues to be an evolving area, but it is an area that is in place as well.

In terms of more context, from Year 7 in secondary school, there are interest surveys that the students take, which help guide them not only in their exam subjects, but what they aspire to do afterwards. Hence, this career guidance is in place already, but as with anything else, we constantly review for any improvements that need to be made.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Through you, Mr. Chairman, you mentioned that you introduced career fairs in primary school. At what grade do you do actually introduce the career fairs?

Ms. Lyneth Monteith, Acting Chief Officer - Ministry of Education: I think there's an element, right through. As I said, they are age appropriate, so on career day the very little ones may come dressed as whatever their little heart desires at the time— "*I want to be a fireman, I want to be a lawyer*"... but it goes through the entire primary school curriculum, with each primary school having a dedicated career fair.

They would invite persons, whether they take those persons from their parent group or invite persons from the community. They also join the secondary school Career Fair so they are a part of that on a larger scale.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you very much to Mrs. Monteith for that information. Really appreciate it.

The Chairman: Ms. Monteith. I have a question I want to go back to in terms of the apprenticeships. Do you have any plans to partner with other private companies to provide more apprenticeships than what exists now?

Ms. Lyneth Monteith, Acting Chief Officer - Ministry of Education: Through you, Mr. Chair.

Certainly. Each year there's discussion and dialogue with the private sector in terms of bringing more and more persons and actual courses on board.

As I mentioned before, that is in addition to the internships and the relationships we have there; but the students are actually able to have an apprenticeship Programme which is part of their actual educational programme. For example, I mentioned construction, but we have the diving industry, sailing, electrical and automotive; so yes, we constantly look to see how we can add to those offerings.

The Chairman: I will be a bit more specific then. Have any new ones been added for this next school year?

Ms. Lyneth Monteith, Acting Chief Officer - Ministry of Education: I don't have that information. I will check. Instead of giving a definite answer, I will reach out to the leadership at CIFEC to see if they've added any.

The Chairman: It would be helpful, thank you.

We now turn to the final section here, and that is on collaboration. I'm going to turn to Ms. Heather Bodden to lead the questioning.

Ms Heather D. Bodden: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon, Ms. Monteith.

Collaboration. The Auditor General's report highlighted that WORC cannot improve employment prospects for Caymanians alone. Exhibit 23, on page 52, identifies some of the gaps in collaboration. For example, it states that the Ministry of Education and WORC do not collaborate in promoting TVET in schools, or identifying the required TVET skills in the labour market.

It also mentions challenges in sharing scholarships and education data. Can the Acting Chief Officer say if there's any plans to improve collaboration with WORC on developing TVET skills needed for the future?

Ms. Lyneth Monteith, Acting Chief Officer - Ministry of Education: Through you, Mr. Chair, work has started and we have continued dialogue with WORC in terms of their programmes and their offerings. As recently as summer interns, there was a discussion held on interns coming back and the programmes that they are offering and that we could include our interns.

Apart from that, through our electronic system we are able to produce reports that indicate exactly how many students are completing and in which areas, and I'm happy to announce that yes, that information is in

the process of being shared with WORC. We are increasingly improving such collaboration because we see it as essential for us to have our end destination for our scholars according to what data WORC has collected.

Continuing, collaboration is not just with WORC, we also collaborate with POCS, particularly during the period when interns are back to place interns within CIG entities, et cetera. Some more WORC will be done as well, with sharing information in terms of courses and students who are in those courses and particularly ahead, perhaps even a year ahead, when students are finishing their courses.

The Chairman: Thank you, ma'am.

The Chairman: Any other questions from members? Okay. Well, Ms. Monteith, that concludes the line of questioning that the Committee has for you.

I want to thank you for attending, I'm sorry for the late start after lunch; but I think we've just about made up all of the time as well, so thank you, again, for being here and for the forthright way in which you dealt with the questions and provided the answers. We look forward to receiving the information that you have committed to provide to this Committee in due course. Thank you all, and you are excused at this time.

Ms. Lyneth Monteith, Acting Chief Officer - Ministry of Education: Thank you, too, for providing us with this opportunity to offer some context in some places and expounding on them further.

[Pause]

The Chairman: Members of the Committee, that brings us to the conclusion of today's hearing. We are going to adjourn now, and spend a few minutes in the large committee room to deal with some of the administrative matters concerning the Public Accounts Committee but before we do, I mentioned this morning, and introduced you all to our new Parliamentary Procedural Clerk, Ms. Tishel McLean.

That also means that we are sadly having to say goodbye to our current Parliamentary Procedural Clerk, Ms. Susan Burke. Susan has been our Clerk since January of 2022, so two and three quarters of the year, actually; and I do know that while she is leaving the Committee, she is actually remaining with Parliament and transitioning into a new role as Communications Officer for the Parliament.

I just want to say to you, Susan, thank you for your years of service. I have grown to appreciate you and all that you have committed and delivered to the Public Accounts Committee; and thank you, again, for always, too, looking out for me and keeping me on the right path and keeping things straight for us. You've been a tremendous help. I say that seriously and gen-

uinely. You've been a tremendous help and a tremendous resource to me and, I think, to the wider Public Accounts Committee, so I thank you.

We do wish you all the very best in your new role and we hope that, even though you are transitioning into a new role within the Parliament, that we will continue to see you over here from time to time, and that you won't disappear from us completely. I wish you all the very best and thank you again for all of your work and your commitment to the PAC.

We can consider ourselves officially adjourned, and we'll finish up the business of the Committee at this time.

The Committee adjourned at 2:21 pm.