GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

STATEMENT

Tel: (284)468-2730
Official Government Website:
https://gov.vg

Statement by Premier Wheatley - RATED Programme

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Madam Speaker, the Government of the Virgin Islands acknowledged the existence of unemployed and underemployed individuals within the Territory who experience difficulties supporting their families and meeting living costs. These individuals often rely on limited social welfare and support from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). The government also recognized the occasional need for temporary workers in both public and private sectors to address short-term workforce gaps. As a result, the RATED programme was established to provide temporary employment opportunities, along with pathways for training and skill development, to enhance participants' employability.

Madam Speaker, the RATED progamme is currently being administered by the Ministry of Financial Services, Economic Development and Digital Transformation and offers opportunities through temporary, short-term employment in government departments requiring additional resources; apprenticeships paid via stipends in partnership with public and private sector organisations; and training, education, and skills development.

Madam Speaker, in 2025, three million dollars ($3,000,000) was allocated to the RATED programme to cover payments to the participants, training, and contributions to Social Security, NHI and payroll tax. As a result, of the four hundred and nineteen (419) applications received, three hundred and eighteen (318) persons were assisted, of that amount two hundred and ninety-seven (297) persons were placed in temporary employment for roadside cleaning and eleven (11) Apprentices. In addition, twenty-one (21) Apprentices were also trained.

Madam Speaker, the benefits of the programme have been evident through its achievements, which include:

1. Numerous participants gaining practical work experience, improving their skills, confidence and employability.
2. The experience gained from the programme has allowed some participants to qualify for and secure full-time positions with various Ministries and Departments. To date nine (9) individuals have successfully transitioned to permanent employment following participation in the programme.

3. Twenty-one (21) young participants also benefitted from a job-readiness training session, delivered in partnership with HireBVI.

Madam Speaker, while these achievements are commendable there are areas for improvements, which are being addressed through updating the programme's mandate, amendments to the policy, instituting accountability, safety and performance evaluation mechanisms, improvement in the financial processes, increased public outreach, closer collaboration with partners/stakeholders etc.

Madam Speaker, looking ahead we intend to expand the programme into additional sectors, including agriculture, technology, marine services, hospitality, construction, utilities, and landscaping, in order to create broader pathways to employment and skills development across the Territory. We are also engaging professionals to better assess the capabilities, interests and developmental needs of applicants to offer them more tailored and individualised assistance to fulfilling their career and personal aspirations.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to welcome the assistance of Honourable Stacy Mather who brings decades of committed, passionate and dedicated experience in youth development to elevate the impact of the RATED programme. Since joining the Government, Honourable Mather has hit the ground running with the RATED programme and his impact will soon be felt and seen as we prepare to relaunch RATED under the direction of an Advisory body headed by Honourable Mather.

Madam Speaker, the RATED programme continues to provide a vital avenue of support for those for whom it was designed, while addressing critical workforce gaps within the Territory. We therefore remain committed to strengthening the programme and making it more robust with a view to more effectively reduce unemployment and underemployment by equipping participants with the skills, training, experience and support necessary to help them develop so they can secure sustainable, permanent employment and business opportunities within the Territory.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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For Additional Information Contact:

Angela U Burns
Information Officer II
Premier's Office
Government of The Virgin Islands
Tel: +1 284 468 9445
Email: aburns@gov.vg
Website: https://gov.vg/
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/BVIGovernment/

Additional Documents or Media

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