

STATES OF JERSEY



INCOME SUPPORT FOR MATURE STUDENTS

**Lodged au Greffe on 23rd August 2019
by Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier**

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of opinion –

to request the Minister for Social Security to remove the requirement that Income Support recipients have to be actively seeking work in respect of mature students on low income studying on the Psychology with Criminology and Childhood Studies Foundation Degree courses at Highlands College.

DEPUTY G.P. SOUTHERN OF ST. HELIER

REPORT

In the [Common Strategic Policy 2018–22](#), the commitment of Ministers to training up our resident workforce is made very clear –

We will put children first ... by improving their educational outcomes ... (page 4)

We will create a ... skilled local workforce for the future ... to reduce Jersey's reliance on inward migration. (page 4)

We will reduce income inequality and improve the standard of living ... by removing barriers to and at work. (page 4)

We ... are committed to a progressive approach to achieving equity and fairness through inclusion and equal life chances. (page 8)

Skills and education remain core to both driving productivity and developing a workforce fit for the Island's future needs. (page 13)

We will help people to gain the skills they need to secure jobs that pay enough to thrive ... (page 16)

Over the years, Highlands College has developed a number of on-Island courses up to degree level that address the needs of the Island for a skilled workforce.

One particular course, the Access to Higher Education (“HE”) Diploma, is a prime example of this forward thinking. This is an intensive one-year course that enables students without the necessary academic qualifications to gain a level 3 certificate with ‘A’ level equivalency and to prepare them for degree level education.

Students must have a real desire to study and a commitment to attend. This course is for mature students who are at least 19 years old on 1st September. This is a really tough course. To obtain the equivalent of 3 ‘A’ levels in one year requires total commitment and dedication.

What does this course lead on to?

The Access to HE diploma opens up progression to a range of Humanities, Science and Social Science degree courses in UK universities for adult learners, applying via UCAS.

It is a direct progression route to the many Plymouth University degrees on offer at University College Jersey (“UCJ”), which provides a low-cost route to gaining a degree on-Island. It also provides an excellent foundation for the local Nursing Degree at the General Hospital, St. Helier.

For students under 25 years old, who are still regarded as the responsibility of their parents, the route is open to degree courses either in the UK or at UCJ. For mature students, however, the route is more difficult. For those with family or other responsibilities, who cannot just drop everything and go to the UK, their options are limited to courses at UCJ.

FdA Childhood Studies

Who is this course for?

This intensive 2-year (full-time) or 4-year (part-time) course has been designed with the Childcare sector in Jersey, and is aimed at those wishing to pursue a career in the Childcare sector at trainee manager level, or complete teacher training (Primary). The majority of students will progress onto BA (Hons) Childhood Studies at University College Jersey, or to jobs in the sector. The course includes the Licence to Practise, which means graduates are automatically qualified to work in the sector.

FdSc Psychology and Criminology

Who is this course for?

This 2-year degree programme is designed to suit students who are interested in a career as a practicing psychologist, criminologist, or a range of other related career paths, such as policing, probation service, social work, criminal lawyer or health care professional.

BSc (Hons) Social Sciences

Stage 3 is available full time 2019–20 and is aimed at students who have completed either Stage 1 and 2 Social Sciences, or FdSc Psychology with Criminology. The degree attracts students with an interest in the world and the society they live in. The degree covers Psychology, Criminology, Social and Economic history and Sociology, whilst exploring the themes common to all of the Social Sciences. Previous graduates of the programme have gone onto careers in a wide variety of sectors, including policing, social work, the public sector and politics.

BA (Hons) Social Work (Jersey)

This course is for anyone wishing to become a social worker and is part of the Government of Jersey's commitment to improve the support for children, families, young people and vulnerable adults in our community. Completion of this course will make you eligible to apply to the Health and Care Professions Council/Social Work England to become a registered social worker.

What are the entry requirements for the course?

There will be between 12 and 15 places on the course, and applications are welcome from anyone from Jersey or Guernsey who is over 18 years of age and who has the equivalent of 3 'A' levels. The course is open to school-leavers and to mature students with relevant experience. ***Adults on Income Support will be classed as key workers and may retain their benefits whilst training.*** Members will have seen on social media a recent e-petition regarding Income Support mature students who were unable to participate on the Social Worker degree and transferred psychology criminology degree. The former is on the critical skills list and the latter is not.

The petition asks for signatures to support low-income mature students to complete their education to degree level.

These are 5 of 6 students who have successfully completed the access course for Social Sciences with support from Income Support, and have applied for the social work degree but have been unsuccessful. They do have places on the Psychology/Criminology degree, but have been refused Income Support.

There is no doubt that obtaining this degree will enable these students to find work within the social or health sector, such as social work, policing and mental health. Equally, there can be little doubt that possession of this degree will raise these students' earnings in the long term.

The Assistant Minister with responsibility for this area has responded as follows –

“In relation to your request for degree programmes other than Social Work Degree to be deemed ‘Critical Skills’, I am afraid this is not possible at this time.

As you are aware as of August 2017 4 courses are deemed by the Social Security Minister, following advice from or discussion with other Ministers or relevant bodies, to meet a need for certain ‘critical skills’ needed in the Island’s job market. This decision is only made in exceptional circumstances, and these courses are generally restricted to full-time vocational courses with a strong possibility of work at the end. There may also be a working requirement outside term-time.

The list of critical skills courses is restricted to the following:

- *the nursing degree offered by the Health and Social Services Department (including mental health nursing)*
- *the Access to Science (Nursing) course required for progression to the Nursing degree*
- *the Jersey Graduate Teacher Training Programme*
- *Social Work degree offered by Highlands/Health & Social Services (available from 2018 onwards)*

For a course to be deemed “Critical Skills” it has to not only increase the employability of the participant but, it has to be an essential qualification that will almost guarantee a job that is in demand in Jersey as a result. Such courses address a skills gap in the Island which cannot currently be met. The reason that the Income Support rules are restrictive in this way is because Income Support doesn’t have a budget to support adults (25+) returning to education full-time. We will support you with retraining through back to work, and you can take courses in the evening and/or part-time, but the expectation is that adults who are able to look for work will be asked to do that unless they are accepted to study on a Critical Skills course.

In specific the provision FdSc Psychology with Criminology offered by Highlands College, although this programme will equip those who graduate from it with the skills that are beneficial to those choosing a career in mental health field, it does not exempt the participants for the key qualification they should obtain and as such this programme is not deemed to be on the “Critical Skills” list. Those choosing a career in mental health still require to achieve a degree dedicated to mental health and in this field. As a result this programme does not meet the criteria to be added to the “Critical Skills” courses.

I appreciate that this is not the response you were looking for. However, as explained above the alternative degrees offered to you do not meet the criteria for “Critical Skills” courses and as such are exempt from the support provided through Income Support provision.

This is an issue that I want to pursue in future in the retraining strategy however this will be not be done in time for the upcoming academic year.”

Financial and manpower implications

There are no manpower consequences arising from this proposition. In the short term, the difference in the level of Income Support between having a mature student in degree-level study, or in full-time work at or around the minimum wage rate, would be of the order of £250 weekly, or £13,000 annually. Over the long term, successful graduation to degree-level employment could remove the need to claim any Income Support at all.

Income Support Guidelines

3.6 Undertaking approved education or training.

Anyone aged under 19 who is studying full-time in the sixth form of a school in Jersey (including Highlands College) is undertaking approved education. Anyone who is studying a degree level course and is receiving financial assistance from the Education Department with the cost of tuition fees is also undertaking approved education, providing they commenced the course before their 22nd birthday.

Regardless of the person's age at the start of the course education may be approved for students on courses the Minister deems to supply 'critical skills' to the Island, or for people aged under 25 (at the start of their course) who are either care leavers or who have otherwise experienced severe disruption to their secondary education.

Other courses may be approved following discussion with Department staff. People over pensionable age (as defined in section 3.2) and those with the main care of a child under nursery age do not need to work to qualify for Income Support.

However, if someone in one of these categories chooses to attend a training or education course, they will not normally be able to claim any additional financial assistance; in particular, they will not generally be entitled to an Income Support childcare component. However, people with children may be eligible for assistance with the cost of skills courses or distance learning.

Anyone who is claiming or intends to claim Income Support, and is considering starting a full time course, should always seek advice from the Department before making any firm commitment. Those who do not do so run the risk of financial penalty if they do not meet any jobseeking requirements that would be expected of them in future. Jobseekers are always encouraged to undertake work-related education and training courses, providing these do not interfere with their ability to look for work, and do not prevent them from accepting any suitable work that is offered to them.

Critical skills courses

Some courses are deemed by the Minister, following advice from or discussion with other Ministers or relevant bodies, to meet a need for certain 'critical skills' needed in the Island's job market. This decision is only made in exceptional circumstances, and these courses are generally restricted to full-time vocational courses with a strong possibility of work at the end. There may also be a working requirement outside term-time. Students who fail to attend the course or any work placement will be treated as failed jobseekers.

Additional courses will be considered for this list based on a recommendation to the Minister that the course can meet a critical need for that qualification in the Island's job market.