

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SECURITY
BY DEPUTY G.P. SOUTHERN OF ST. HELIER
QUESTION SUBMITTED ON TUESDAY 1st JUNE 2021
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 8th JUNE 2021**

Question

In relation to Income Support payments made since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, will the Minister inform members –

- (a) how many applicants have been in receipt of overpayment of benefits;
- (b) what the current total is of overpayments; and
- (c) what arrangements, if any, are in place for the recovery of any overpayments?

Answer

A detailed response about levels of Income Support overpayments was submitted as part of the answer to Written Question 78/2021. That information covers 2020 in full.

This question refers to “payments made since the start of Covid 19 pandemic”. This is taken as the beginning of March 2020. Note that although the question refers to the start of the pandemic it requests information across all benefit claims made during that time.

All statistics for overpayments must be understood within the context of the way that Income Support is designed to function. The Income Support system is designed to provide payments in advance to low income households. Paying in advance ensures that vulnerable households are not left without funds to support their basic needs immediately following a decrease to their household income, particularly when first claiming benefit or in situations where employment ends unexpectedly.

This policy was particularly important during the Covid-19 pandemic, as some households faced sudden and unexpected decreases in income. The facility to pay Income Support in advance meant that these households were better equipped to meet their immediate needs.

A system designed to make payments in advance will always have a delay in catching up with situations where a household’s income has increased. This is the cause of many small overpayments of Income Support and represents a trade-off that is viewed positively by most customers. Benefits that pay in arrears are often criticised for being slower to recognise decreases in income.

- a) As at 28/05/21 the total number of Income Support claims with an overpayment being recovered was 1452. This relates to all active overpayments within the Income Support system and does not record the number of overpayments that were repaid prior to the reporting date.

It is not possible to provide specific detail on the reason for each claim with an overpayment as this would require claims to be looked at manually and potentially over several years history, so the figure provided is the total number of overpayments in the Income Support system

- b) As at 28/05/21 the total value of outstanding overpayments was £3,879,640. This figure relates to all overpayments within the Income Support system, including those that were generated prior to 2020.
- c) In situations where Income Support has been overpaid, a household has received more benefit than it is entitled to. This must be repaid and will be recovered by a set weekly amount from

future payments of benefit, or via an instalment agreement where the household stops getting Income Support.

Each case is considered individually by an officer, who will set a repayment level that recognizes the household's ability to repay. Officers will consider the household's current income and whether there are any additional costs they face. Officers will also consider any current overpayment or loan repayment on their claim. Taken together these will determine the period over which an overpayment is recovered and any arrangements for repaying it.