

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SECURITY
BY DEPUTY S. PITMAN OF ST. HELIER
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 20th APRIL 2010**

Question

“Will the Minister accept that the treatment of those on Income Support wishing to undertake educational/training at Highlands or elsewhere has led to inconsistent advice being given to applicants in some cases? Will he produce a definitive list of what courses are acceptable and ensure that all Income Support staff and applicants are made aware of it?

Will he also ensure that the “access to Education” course, successful completion of which is bound to improve a student’s earning capacity, is accepted on this list, and if not why not?

Will he further commit himself to review the guidance on access to child care components which precludes parents with children under five years of age from accessing child care in order to study?”

Answer

There are clear guidelines regarding the treatment of those on Income Support (IS) wishing to undertake education /training. Officers in the department work closely with Careers Jersey and Highlands College to support potential applicants. The application forms individuals are required to complete when applying to enrol on a course at Highlands College include information regarding Income Support.

Support is provided depending on the individual circumstances and the course proposed needs to be appropriate to the current education, background and potential of the applicant. For this reason it would not be practical for the department to produce a “definitive list”.

Highlands College provides two courses designed for adults wishing to return to education. There is a Return to Study course for individuals who left school with few, or no, qualifications and an Access to Higher Education course for those who already have some qualifications and work experience. As stated above individual prospective students must be considered on their own aptitudes and should seek personal advice which is available from Highlands College and Careers Jersey. The statement that “successful completion of (the Access to Higher Education course) is bound to improve a student’s earning capacity” is an educational matter rather than a benefit issue but it is clear that for some individuals this course will be appropriate, but for many others it will not.

Parents with children under the age of 5 who are able to make childcare arrangements without the need for additional financial assistance are supported through IS and may choose to study and continue to receive IS benefits.

The additional cost of including childcare within the IS benefit to support a parent of a child under 3 for 39 weeks of full time study (September to June) would be up to £7,712.25. This support is not usually provided, although exceptional circumstances will always be considered. Such support was not available under the previous benefit system and the Department would need to seek additional funding to extend Income Support to all applicants in this situation.

Following the introduction by Education, Sport and Culture of 20 hours free term time nursery provision to 3 and 4 year olds from September 2009, the opportunities for parents with children just below school age to be able to make arrangements for their own study has increased.

There are alternative options for study for parents with children under the age of 5 as course fees for distance learning may be paid through an IS Special Payment.

This matter will be considered in the IS review to commence in the second half of 2010.