

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SECURITY  
BY DEPUTY G.P. SOUTHERN OF ST. HELIER  
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 17th JULY 2012**

**Question**

In the light of the large numbers of under and overpayments of Income Support (IS) he refers to in the answer to question 6972 of 26th June 2012 and the potential for these to cause hardship, will the Minister detail for members what measures, if any, he has in place to monitor and respond to those predictable changes of circumstances brought about by specific birthdays for members of IS units which lead to a difference in IS payable such as 16th, 19th, 25th, 60th or 65th birthdays?

Is such monitoring built into the computer programmes which are used to administer IS, or does it require a manual check?

Given that Section 13.1 of the IS policy guidelines states that IS claims are reviewed once a year and that 'working claimants' can expect to receive reviews 'several times a year, will the Minister inform members how often claims from working claimants are currently reviewed and whether this adequately meets his department's duty of care to its claimants?

**Answer**

As noted in the response to Question 6972 Income Support benefit is always paid in advance, on either a weekly or four-weekly basis. Any change of circumstance that occurs after a payment has been made and during the period paid for, which affects the value of the claim rate, will result in the need for a payment adjustment in respect of the over or under payment.

The response also confirmed that a change in earnings was the most common cause for an underpayment or overpayment under the Income Support system, and that the average (median) value of overpayments in 2011 was £138.

It is the duty of each adult within an income support household to notify the Department of changes in their earnings and any other change in their circumstances which could affect their income support entitlement. Failure to do this may result in an overpayment which will need to be repaid, or, in the most serious cases, the individual facing prosecution under the Income Support law. The duty of the Department is to administer the laws under its control correctly and fairly.

Operational processes regularly monitor the ages of income support claimants. Eligibility is reviewed prior to key dates including 5th birthday, 12th birthday, compulsory school leaving age, 19th birthday and 65th birthday. These processes include both automatic and manual interventions. In addition, the opening and closing of contributory benefit claims, including old age pensions, is monitored to enable income support claims to be reviewed as necessary.

Income support claims for all working age claimants are also reviewed on a quarterly basis against employed earnings information provided by employers and unexplained differences beyond a reasonable tolerance are followed up with claimants and investigated further, resulting, where appropriate, in revised benefit payments.