

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SECURITY
BY THE DEPUTY OF ST. JOHN
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 20th FEBRUARY 2018**

Question

Will the Minister advise –

- (a) how many instances over the last 3 years there have been of Jersey's Social Security Department overpaying and underpaying Income Support payments to Islanders;
- (b) how much was overpaid / underpaid; and
- (c) how much is due to be repaid?

Answer

- (a) how many instances over the last 3 years there have been of Jersey's Social Security Department overpaying and underpaying Income Support payments to Islanders;**

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 alternative would be to provide payments in arrears, which could cause hardship to vulnerable clients.

The most common reason for an adjustment (an over or under payment) is a change in employment/ earnings. This could either increase or decrease the level of Income Support payment. In some cases, all the details of the change will be known in advance and the claim can be amended to pay at the correct rate for a future date.

However, there is often a short delay before the claimant provides all the details to the Social Security Department; this is the responsibility of a claimant when accessing Income Support. When this change is processed, an adjustment will be included to take account of the underpayment or overpayment during this time.

Over the last 3 years, the number of overpayments and underpayments adjustments is as follows:

Year	Overpayments	Underpayments
2015	4797	5557
2016	5046	6049
2017	4889	5680

The most common reasons for a payment adjustment to an Income Support claim include:

- change of income or employment
- change of accommodation;
- receipt of an additional benefit; and
- change in the membership of an Income Support Household.

It should be noted, a significant number of larger underpayments are generated by the award of impairment components for long-term illness and disability. These awards require information from both the claimant and the claimant's GP and the collation and assessment of this detailed information commonly takes several weeks. The award is then backdated to the date on which Income Support received the initial application, which can often result in a large underpayment being paid.

The processing of many changes is completed at the front desk. The benefit of this method is that changes are completed with the customer present, the changes in rate can be explained in full to the customer and written confirmation is handed to the customer regarding their change of circumstance. This helps customers understand the impact changes can make on claims.

Online forms are also available for Income Support so that customers can complete change of circumstances online at a time convenient to them, reducing the time taken to communicate and action a change of circumstance.

The Department provides an assisted digital area within the main reception. Two computers are available for customers to use with help available from the Customer Service Centre staff as needed. This helps customers who do not have access to their own PC or need support completing forms or changes to claims

Back to Work and Income Support teams also liaise closely so that a customer starting work has their claim adjusted with the minimum of delay.

All Social Security applications forms and customer letters detail the terms and conditions regarding Income Support and the responsibility of claimants to notify the department regarding changes to circumstances.

(b) How much was overpaid / underpaid?

Year	Average median Overpayment	Average median Underpayment
2015	£158.27	£112.70
2016	£164.36	£106.92
2017	£159.57	£109.25

(c) How much is due to be repaid?

All overpayments are due to be repaid either through deduction from benefit or if the Income Support claim has closed we offer a repayment plan.