

## **March 2008 Letter from MP to lone parent constituent who is home educating**

“Thank you for your e-mail about welfare reform and single parents. As I understand it, single parents who are educating their children at home are not exempt from the changes in entitlement to income support which are being brought in over the next two years.

As you know JobCentre Plus invite people for an interview to talk about future training and employment opportunities and if your son is over 12 then I think you would be expected to attend such an interview in the future.

In the future, if you go onto JSA and there was some doubt about your availability for work, then a JobCentre adjudicator would make a decision about your entitlement to benefit. If you did not agree with the decision you would of course be able to appeal.

Alongside new measures on benefits, there is also more support for single parents to help make the transition from benefits to work or training, for example the "In work Credit" available from next month. If you are touch with your single parent advisor at JCP she or he would be able to give you more details. “

### **Points you may wish to include in your reply**

1/ The Government White Paper Ready for Work published in December 2007 said “It was strongly felt that increased conditionality was not appropriate for:

- parents with disabled children or whose children had additional needs;
- carers of both disabled children and adults;
- mothers fleeing domestic violence; and
- parents who choose to home educate"

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/welfarereform/readyforwork/readyforwork.pdf>  
<http://tinyurl.com/228k2b> page 117

2/ Work focused interviews are mandatory. I am arguing that I should be exempt from Work Focused Interviews. If I didn't attend a WFI my benefit would be cut. What I am saying is that because of my full-time home education responsibilities I will not be available for work in the same way as a lone parent whose child is in school from 8-6 ( full school day + extended school wraparound care with breakfast club and after school sessions ).

### 3/ The Government's Work and Pensions Committee Report March 2008 stated

“We are concerned about the impact of the Jobseeker’s Allowance sanctions regime on children and family poverty. On Income Support the sanction is 20% of the personal benefit while on Jobseeker’s Allowance it is up to 100%.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmworpen/42/42.pdf>

<http://tinyurl.com/2fsouc> page 109-110

DWP needs to review sanctions levels on Jobseeker’s Allowance and develop a strategy on sanctions which takes account of the interests of children. Moving lone parents onto JSA will only be effective if appropriate childcare is in place for them to use. We received evidence that lone parents are currently struggling in many areas to find appropriate, affordable childcare. We agree with Jane Kennedy that “It would be a pretty draconian system” if child care was not available for lone parents and yet the level of income they received was predicated on them finding a job.

Conditionality should be linked to the availability of childcare and before and after school care. If a lone parent claims that appropriate affordable childcare is not available, it should be for the Department to show that such childcare is available.”

“The Government’s child poverty strategy must have the child’s welfare at its heart and we have received strong evidence that the churn of parents moving in and out of work impacts adversely on both children’s wellbeing and their belief in the value of work. Both contribute to intergenerational worklessness and poverty. The effect of parents moving in and out of work may be more damaging for children than continuous unemployment.”

### 4/ Personal circumstances + proof that home education WORKS

- Here are a few of the reasons why it would be impossible for my child/children to go to school.
- Here are a few of the reasons why it would be impossible for my child to go into formal childcare provision outside the home, even if such childcare were available.
- As you will be aware, home educated children are saving the taxpayer thousands of pounds in school funding per year.
- Research has shown that home educated children flourish both educationally and socially with one-to-one support for their learning outside the school system .

### **References for research:**

<http://www.dur.ac.uk/p.j.rothermel/Research/ESRC/PipsBaseline.htm>  
[Paula Rothermel Durham University 2004](#)

“Whilst the home-educated children outscored their school counterparts, those from lower socio-economic groups outperformed their middle class peers. It appeared that a flexible approach to education, and a high level of parental attention and commitment, regardless of their socio-economic group and level of education, seemed the most important factors in the children's development and progress.”

[http://www.primaryreview.org.uk/Downloads/Int\\_Reps/6.Curriculum-assessment/Primary\\_Review\\_RS\\_3-3\\_report\\_Primary\\_Curriculum\\_Futures\\_080208.pdf](http://www.primaryreview.org.uk/Downloads/Int_Reps/6.Curriculum-assessment/Primary_Review_RS_3-3_report_Primary_Curriculum_Futures_080208.pdf)  
<http://tinyurl.com/2hubzt>

Cambridge University Primary Review February 2008 Primary Futures . This academic report considers the evidence base for educational alternatives. “Studies of home schooled children show clear and substantial evidence of high (and above average) performance. “ “One constant in the midst of much complexity is the better than average performance of home schooled children when compared to age cohorts in the general population. Rudner's (1999) study illustrated that those in grades 1-4 who are educated at home, on average, perform one grade level higher than their public and private school counterparts. Lest this be thought as an effect of early nurture likely to dissipate later in the child's development, it is striking that the performance gap expands as the student progresses so that by 8th grade such children are performing at four grades above the national average in the US.”

5/ Please take up my concerns with Stephen Timms the Minister of State for Employment and Welfare Reform

6/ I look forward to hearing from you

### **March 2008 Email from home educating lone parent whose MP wrote to Minister Stephen Timms**

“My MP enclosed a letter from Stephen Timms, who states he believes 'that there are sufficient flexibilities within the Jobseekers Allowance regime to cater for the needs and personal circumstances of lone parents while they look for work of 16 hours or more per week. This includes those who wish to educate their children at home. [he] would expect Jobcentre Plus advisers to give due weight to the needs and circumstances of all parents when they are making benefits decisions.'

He goes on to say that he believes that 'home educators are capable of greater flexibility than those who send their children to school, because they are not restricted by times of attendance or term dates. In addition, on entering work, lone parents will have access to the additional flexible package of measures we have put in place to support lone parents and ensure they have the ability to remain and progress in work.'

He finally says 'we think that there are good reasons why those lone parents who qualify for benefit solely on the grounds of being a lone parent should be subject to this change, even if they are home educators.’”

### **Points you may wish to include in your reply**

- Please give me more information about the flexibilities in the JSA regime.
- Is this a new policy?
- Has it been cascaded down to local JobCentres ?
- Will JobCentres be introducing more flexibility in line with recommendations from the DWP White Paper December 2007, One Parent Families, Citizens' Advice Bureau and other major charities?
- What is Minister Stephen Timms' position on the recent report from the Government's Work and Pensions Committee March 2008 which strongly urged greater flexibility in the JSA regime particularly with regard to conditionality and benefit sanctions?
- Please ask the Minister for his views on the December 2007 consultation report and White Paper from his own Department of Work and Pensions which stated that "it was strongly felt that increased conditionality was not appropriate for: parents with disabled children or whose children had additional needs; carers of both disabled children and adults; mothers fleeing domestic violence; and parents who choose to home educate."
- Does this not suggest that lone parents who home educate are not receiving Income Support "solely on the grounds of being a lone parent" but on the grounds of being unavailable for work because of their full-time home education responsibilities ?
- Please challenge Stephen Timms' assertion that home educators are capable of greater flexibility than those who send their children to school. Is the Minister aware that local schools are prioritising their own pupils for extended schools initiatives and that wraparound care from 8-6 is not available to home educated children. The home education support charity Education Otherwise has more information on this area.
- Is the Minister aware that for every child who is not in the state school system saves the taxpayer thousands of pounds a year?
- Is the Minister aware that research has shown that home educated children and young people outperform their peers? There is an assumption that formal schooling is beneficial to children and that having parents in paid work is beneficial to children. This is not true across the board and it is certainly not applicable where parents take full-time responsibility for their children's education.

### **References for research**

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- I look forward to hearing from you

### **USEFUL QUOTES AND LINKS**



### **1/ Work and Pensions Committee Report March 2008**

Conclusions p.108-109

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmworpen/42/42.pdf>

“We agree with the Government that getting lone parents into sustainable work, that takes them and their children out of poverty, is vital if the Government is to reach its poverty targets.

Whilst we accept the case for greater conditionality on lone parents to seek work, we are not convinced that the JSA regime is flexible enough for their needs.

There are real concerns that JSA conditionality cannot be adapted to reflect the complex realities of lone parents' lives. We strongly recommend that the Government, through Personal Advisers, applies personal conditionality with the intention of supporting lone parents to enter sustainable employment.

Sanctions should never apply when there is proven lack of affordable and suitable childcare or where the lone parent is engaged in work related education or training.

We are concerned about the Government’s plans to exempt only parents who are entitled to claim Carers’ Allowance from the requirement for lone parents to work. The proposal does not reflect the reality for families with disabled children, particularly those with the most sick and vulnerable children.

Lone parents of disabled children should receive every support to help them to work, but a broader definition is needed for those exempt from the requirement to work. We recommend that the Government engages in further deliberation on this matter with the relevant stakeholders and seriously consider a wider group for exemption.

We are concerned about the impact of the Jobseeker's Allowance sanctions regime on children and family poverty. On Income Support the sanction is 20% of the personal benefit while on Jobseeker's Allowance it is up to 100%.

DWP needs to review sanctions levels on Jobseeker's Allowance and develop a strategy on sanctions which takes account of the interests of children. Moving lone parents onto JSA will only be effective if appropriate childcare is in place for them to use. We received evidence that lone parents are currently struggling in many areas to find appropriate, affordable childcare. We agree with Jane Kennedy that "It would be a pretty draconian system" if child care was not available for lone parents and yet the level of income they received was predicated on them finding a job.

Conditionality should be linked to the availability of childcare and before and after school care. If a lone parent claims that appropriate affordable childcare is not available, it should be for the Department to show that such childcare is available."

"The Government's child poverty strategy must have the child's welfare at its heart and we have received strong evidence that the churn of parents moving in and out of work impacts adversely on both children's wellbeing and their belief in the value of work. Both contribute to intergenerational worklessness and poverty. The effect of parents moving in and out of work may be more damaging for children than continuous unemployment."

"Mini jobs of less than 16 hours a week can be a vital first step into work, particularly for those furthest from the labour market. We recommend that the Government increase the earnings disregard for out of work benefits to improve the incentives for people to work mini jobs."

## **2/ Government White Paper Ready For Work December 2007.**

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/welfarereform/readyforwork/readyforwork.pdf>

Consultation report from the Department of Work and Pensions page 113-114

"There was a strong feeling that the system should not penalise those who have a genuine need to stay at home and care for their children, regardless of their age. There was a strong sense that support was needed long before entitlement to Income Support ceased. Support should be flexible enough to deal with changes of circumstances and individual families' needs, and focused on progression and training as well as retention." It was strongly felt that increased conditionality was not appropriate for:

- parents with disabled children or whose children had additional needs;

- carers of both disabled children and adults;

- mothers fleeing domestic violence; and

- parents who choose to home educate"

### **3/ Academic research which shows that home educated children do well**

<http://www.dur.ac.uk/p.j.rothermel/Research/ESRC/PipsBaseline.htm>

[Paula Rothermel Durham University 2004](#)

“Whilst the home-educated children outscored their school counterparts, those from lower socio-economic groups outperformed their middle class peers. It appeared that a flexible approach to education, and a high level of parental attention and commitment, regardless of their socio-economic group and level of education, seemed the most important factors in the children's development and progress.”

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