

Home education and lone parents

Lone Parents who are currently on Income Support

Lone parents who are currently on Income Support and whose youngest child reaches the age of 10 before October 26th 2010 will cease to be entitled to Income Support on the week following the child's 10th birthday. This applies to all lone parents who are claiming Income Support solely on the grounds of being a lone parent. Some lone parents will meet other eligibility criteria for Income Support, such as lone parents who are caring for a child or adult receiving Disability Living Allowance medium rate or above. Lone parents who are caring for a foster child will also be entitled to remain on Income Support, as will lone parents who receive Incapacity Benefit or National Insurance credits for incapacity for work.

From October 2010 to April 2011 existing lone parent claimants on Income Support with no additional entitlement will only be able to continue claiming if their youngest child is under the age of 9. From April 2011 the age limit will be lowered and lone parents will only be eligible for Income Support if their youngest child is 7 or under.

Lone Parents who make a new claim for Income Support

From October 2010 lone parents with a child over the age of 7 will no longer be entitled to Income Support as new claimants. Lone Parents Receiving Carer's Allowance are still entitled to Income Support. The only parents permitted to remain on Income Support will be those who receive Carer's Allowance. Entitlement to CA is only triggered by being the official carer for someone entitled to Disability Living Allowance (DLA) at medium or high rate. Education Otherwise is a professional member of Benefits and Work and specialist guides to claiming DLA and ESA are available on request to EO members.

<http://www.benefitsandwork.co.uk/-about-us/feedback>

What happens before the end of entitlement to Income Support?

Income Support claimants will receive mailshot letters advising them of the changes to their benefit entitlement. Jobcentre Plus will contact the lone parent 8 weeks before their Income Support is due to stop. They will tell them when their last payment will be and invite them to an interview with an adviser. The adviser will explain what they need to do to make a claim for another benefit. These interviews are voluntary but all lone parents are encouraged to attend in order to resolve questions about benefit entitlement.

Are home educating lone parents entitled to any other benefits?

Yes. The main alternative benefit is a specially modified form of Jobseeker's Allowance for lone parents. At the start of the JSA claim, lone parents will sign an agreement to say they will look for a job of 16 hours a week or more. "Looking for a job" involves activities such as keeping an eye on the Job Bank at the JobCentre and applying for relevant posts advertised in the local and national press as well as conducting online job searches. For lone parents, the job does not have to be more than 16 hours a week. Lone parents are entitled to refuse a job offer or to leave a job if there is no appropriate or affordable childcare.

Are there any special conditions for home educating lone parents?

The regulations for home educating lone parents are the same as for all other lone parents. However, Education Otherwise has been involved in high level stakeholder discussions with the Department of Work and Pensions and the guidance prepared for JobCentre staff says that home educators should be treated sensitively, not least because home educating lone parents will have to take their children to the JobCentre and it is important that the children do not become distressed. Staff at the JobCentre should not suggest using school or older siblings for childcare purposes so that the home educating lone parent can take a job. Nor should staff at the JobCentre suggest that children may be left alone while the parent goes out to work. If there

is no appropriate affordable childcare, the home educating lone parent is entitled to turn down a job offer or to leave the current employment.

Are home educating lone parents available for work?

Home educating lone parents who take the view that home education is a full time job and that therefore the parent is not in any conceivable circumstances available for paid work will not meet the requirements of Jobseeker's Allowance. Home educators who refuse to consider any options for childcare in order to be available for work will not meet the requirements of Jobseeker's Allowance.

Essential reading: Guide from the Department of Work and Pensions

<http://www.freedomforchildrentogrow.org/www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/lone-parent-pack.pdf>

Summary from the Department of Work and Pensions May 2010

<http://www.parliament.uk/briefingpapers/commons/lib/research/briefings/snsp-05532.pdf>

Other possible options for home educating lone parents: Part Time Employment or Self Employment

This Information Sheet is addressed to home educating lone parents who switch from Income Support to income-based Jobseeker's Allowance. However, some home educating lone parents begin part-time employment or self-employment of 16+ hours a week and are able to claim Working Tax Credit.

http://www.adviceguide.org.uk/b_working_tax_credit.pdf

<http://www.cafamily.org.uk/TaxCreditsSelfemployed.pdf>

Employment Support Allowance for people with a disability

Other lone parents on Income Support may find that their Lone Parent Advisor recommends they make a claim for Employment Support Allowance.

<http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/FinancialSupport/esa/index.htm>

The nuts and bolts of claiming Jobseeker's Allowance

The Department of Work and Pensions has produced an information pack with details about the changes to the benefit system. The links are here <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/advisers/lone-parent-changes.asp>

Income Support is paid weekly and JSA 2-weekly. Lone parents will be eligible to take out a repayable loan until they receive their first JSA payment. At the start of a new claim for Jobseeker's Allowance, the claimant is required to attend an interview where the Jobseeker's Agreement will be drawn up and signed by the claimant.

Normally, JSA claimants are expected to sign on 2-weekly and have an Action Plan for seeking employment of at least 16 hours. This is called the "fortnightly job review" or FJR. At the fortnightly signing-on or FJR, claimants are expected to indicate what activities they have undertaken in their quest for work. This could include writing a CV, speaking to a potential employer or going to a job interview. Claimants will also be asked to sign a statement saying that they have been looking for and are available for work, have been doing the things set out in the Jobseeker's Agreement and that nothing has changed that may affect the JSA payments. The longer lone parents are on JSA, the more the employment services will step up attempts to get claimants to consider different jobs outside their preferred or specialist field and to investigate other childcare options etc. The first year will be in-house at the JobCentre but the second year will be with privatised employment services.

Can benefits be cut?

Jobseeker's Allowance is made up of the Personal Allowance and the Child Tax Credit element. For a lone parent with one child on income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, the Personal

Allowance is around £60 a week. Any sanctions to benefit made if the claimant does not comply with JSA requirements (for example by not "signing on") will apply solely to the personal element of JSA, not to the Child Tax Credit. If benefit is cut, lone parents are automatically entitled to claim a hardship grant worth a maximum of 60% of the benefit which has been cut. Child Tax Credit replaces any payments for children made as part of the previous Income Support claim with roughly the same amount again added to the benefit for the dependent child in the form of Child Tax Credit. For lone parents with more than one child, the personal allowance will remain the same but the amount added for dependent children will increase proportionately. Child Poverty Action Group publishes a guide to benefit rates here

http://www.cpag.org.uk/publications/extracts/CPAG_WBTC_handbook_1011_rates_samplechapter1.pdf

Work Focused Interviews

While on Income Support lone parents will be called to regular Work Focused Interviews. In most circumstances attendance is mandatory and benefits will be cut if claimants do not attend the interview.

Ending Income Support for lone parents with children over 5?

The coalition Government has announced a single Work Programme to replace all the current back to work welfare schemes. This is expected to be introduced by summer 2011. Changes will be posted on this web page from the Department of Work and Pensions

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/welfare-reform/lone-parents/>

Education Otherwise publishes the following Information Sheets, which are also available as pdfs to download from the EO website at <http://www.education-otherwise.net>

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