

Dear Deputy Doublet,

I wanted to respond to your request for comment concerning the plans to means test the free 20 hours nursery places, but did not wish to do so on a public forum. I feel that the threshold has been set far too low. This will not affect 'affluent' households, but middle earners - many of whom have taken the difficult decision for both parents to return to work after they have had their child/ren. With the average salary in Jersey being somewhere in the region of £35k, it doesn't take much to see that this will be affecting middle earning families. Those who work hard and take difficult decisions to try to build a future for their families, whilst increasingly feeling that they are being penalised for it from all sides. If the plans are unavoidable. How is nursery care not affordable for those who earn £74,995 p.a. But it is for those who earn £75,005 p.a.? A phased approach or sliding scale would surely be fairer. Surely also such a measure will discourage women (and some men) from returning to work after having had a child or children? Speaking from personal experience, having to fund two early years places will all but cancel out my salary (we would be just over the threshold). We cannot really afford for me not to work - but if the difference is negligible, why would I pay for someone else to look after my children? I also think it is desperately unfair to 'move the goalposts' for those who have already planned their families taking into account the free 20 hours. Again I speak from personal experience. My daughter will be 2 in July, and I am expecting another baby.

My husband and I worked out that we would only have 4 months where we would be paying for 2 full sets of childcare fees, which we could plan for by setting money aside whenever we can as it is on a temporary basis. Now that we face having 2 full sets of childcare fees for a further year, what are we meant to do now? We simply cannot afford it. I feel a phased in approach to reflect those already in the system would have been fairer. I really have to consider now whether it makes sense for me to remain employed once I have my second child, or whether I should stop working. This would put us under immense financial pressure. Taking a wider view however, it would also mean a reduction in social security contributions as I will not be working and paying contributions (neither would my employer), it would mean a reduction in income tax revenue as I would not be earning a salary to pay income tax on. And both my children would receive their free 20 hours (with me sat at home not working whilst they do). It would also impact on my ability to return to the workplace once my children were in full time education due to having to take a career gap. Our situation is far from unique and reflects that of many I know. These plans just make hard working, middle income families feel disempowered and penalised. Thank you for taking the time to read my response - I do not wish to be named, however please do feel free to use any of my comments if you feel they are in any way useful.

Kind regards