

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SECURITY
BY DEPUTY G.P. SOUTHERN OF ST. HELIER
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 24th SEPTEMBER 2013**

Question

Will the Minister advise what progress, if any, he has made in producing a claimant-friendly version of the Income Support calculator for publication on the Social Security website, to enable Income Support claimants to better understand their claim?

Will he also state whether the Income Support Policy Guidelines (version 2) to assist officers in assessing IS claims has been updated since its release in March 2009 and, if so, will he release the new guidelines to members who wish to understand the system or, better still, agree to publish the guidelines on the website?

Notwithstanding the responses to the above, will the Minister inform members of the rules concerning the treatment of household income as capital or income in the Income Support system and release to members any guidelines for staff involved in this particular area?

Answer

Good progress has been made on creating a web-based Income Support calculator. The Department is working closely with the gov.je website team and an external supplier to produce a calculator that will be accessible on a variety of different digital devices. A technical upgrade is currently in progress on the gov.je website and it is anticipated that the calculator will be available shortly after the upgrade has been successfully launched.

I should also note that the Income Support award letter was completely redesigned during 2012 in order to help claimants understand their claim. The letter now contains a detailed breakdown of the way a claim is calculated, and this change has been welcomed by both customers and outside agencies such as the Jersey Citizens Advice Bureau.

The Income Support Policy Guidelines document issued in 2009 provided an overview of the Income Support system. This document has been comprehensively reviewed over the last few months and will be reissued later this year. Subject to the outcome of the forthcoming States debate, the new version will incorporate the revised rules to be applied to failed jobseekers and individuals who leave paid employment. This document will be available on the Income Support website.

A series of detailed presentations and workshops on the Income Support system were provided to States Members and other key stakeholders during 2012, to coincide with the introduction of the updated award letter and application form. Feedback from Members who attended those sessions was very positive and I would be happy to organise additional sessions for any other States Members who would like to understand the Income Support system better. In addition, a briefing session for the proposed changes to the rules for jobseekers is being organised in advance of the debate planned for 8 October.

I can confirm that there are no situations where household income is treated as capital for Income Support purposes. There are situations where capital is treated as income, and these are explained in detail in Schedule 2 of the Income Support (General Provisions) Order 2008.

Income Support staff use a variety of internal procedures and guidelines. These are technical documents which are not designed for public circulation. The relevant section from the Income Support Policy Guideline issued in 2009 states:

“Deemed income from capital

If the Income Support Unit does have capital assets in excess of the disregards available, then a deemed income is calculated based on the excess amount. Given the same income, a household with capital assets has more financial stability than a similar household with no capital assets. So, capital needs to be taken into account when calculating a means tested benefit. “Deemed” income allows the benefit to be gradually withdrawn as the assets of the household increase. If a deemed income is calculated, any actual income from the asset is completely disregarded

For every £250 of excess capital, an income of £1 per week is included in the Income Support calculation.”

This policy is still current.