



From the Parliamentary  
Under Secretary of State  
for Work and Pensions

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Dear Lord Avebury

Thank you for your e-mails of 10 October and attachments of correspondence to the Minister, a further letter from Barbara Stark of Action for Home Education (AHEd), and previous correspondence with Stephen Timms, as well as the letter from the Advisory Council of the Education of Romanies and Travellers (ACERT). I am answering as Minister responsible for the changes we are proposing to implement for lone parents.

Your e-mail of 10 October asks that lone parents who home educate should be made exempt from these changes. The Government's position is one that whilst recognising the right of a parent to choose to home educate their child(ren), it does not provide them with the funding to do so. Lone parents who are currently claiming Income Support receive their benefit solely based on their status as lone parents and not as home educators. As such, we are proposing, subject to Parliamentary approval, that home educators should not be exempt from the changes. This was also the finding of the Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC).

However, we recognise that not all lone parents are able to look for paid work. As outlined in Stephen Timms letter, lone parents who are home educating a child who has a disability which qualifies them to receive the middle or higher care component rate of Disability Living Allowance, will be exempt from these proposals on the basis of their child's disability. Similarly, parents who receive Carers Allowance will also be exempt. In addition, safeguards will be in place for parents, including those who home educate, so they will not be penalised if they are unable to locate appropriate and affordable childcare.

The proposals are part of the Government's commitment to halving child poverty by 2010 and eradicating it by 2020. There are currently 2.8 million children living in poverty and to reach the halving target, this must be reduced to 1.7 million children. Paid work, for those who can work, is the most

sustainable route out of poverty. Children in lone parent families where the lone parent works part-time have a lower than average risk of poverty, at 19 per cent, whereas children in workless lone parent households have a much higher risk of poverty, at 58 per cent.

The Government's policies for lone parents are therefore, a balance between providing financial and other assistance to support his or her family, and wider responsibilities to lift families and children out of poverty. Consistent with the model of rights with responsibilities, the Government's proposals for Regulations demonstrate its commitment to the principle that once *children* are older, lone parents who are able to work and are claiming benefits should be expected to look for paid work.

The draft Regulations were subject to a public consultation exercise during the summer, to which a number of individual lone parents, including home educators and representative organisations responded. Stephen Timm's letter to you of 25 September outlined a number of amendments made to the draft Regulations following the consultation.

The proposals have also been part of regular (and ongoing) discussions between officials from the Department for Work and Pensions and representatives of a number of lone parent voluntary groups. We have also taken into account comments from Education Otherwise when drafting guidance for the new arrangements for lone parents that will be used by Jobcentre Plus advisers. As recommended by SSAC, examples of the situations facing home educators when looking for child care are included in the guidance for Jobcentre Plus staff. The new guidance will be issued to advisers at the end of October. Further reviews to assess the early impact of the Lone Parent Obligations are proposed for January, March and June 2009, and we will invite AHED and ACERT to participate.



KITTY USSHER