

## **THE QUESTIONS CAROLINE FLINT DID NOT ANSWER**

### **Administrator:**

Welcome to the 'In work, better off' Department for Work and Pensions webchat.

### **Mincs:**

What do the proposals mean for lone parents who have been left (not the leaver)?

### **Caroline Flint:**

We know that when a partner usually the father leaves the family mum and the children are often improvised as a result. Many women in these circumstances find they leave work not necessarily because they want to but because of all the associated stress and complications of a relationship breakdown. We want to do three things, think about what more we can do working with others to support mums to stay work but probably with greater flexibilities. To work with lone mums who've come out of work or who have never been in work, to find a way into the work place that meet their needs and their children's. To improve the way in which parents with children receive on a consistent basis child maintenance from the absent parent, and we have recently announced that parents with care will be able to keep more of their child maintenance without it affecting their benefits.

### **Rita Mooney:**

I feel it would be helpful to provide specialist childcare for disabled / children with special needs. A lot of parents with children like these would like to return to work, but it is hard to get the right childcare in place. I am myself a full time carer and work part time, I am one of a few fortunate parents to have a very good child minder, I know only too well that without her I would be unemployed.

### **Caroline Flint:**

Rita, I quite agree. We need to develop childcare provision that is more than 9-5 or 8-6 to meet the needs of parents atypical hours, but also which meets the needs of all our children including those with disabilities. For example I understand that parents can use their child care tax credits for registered childcare which comes to the family's home. This would help a family with a disabled child where by all the necessary equipment, favourite toys and familiar environment surround the child with the professional visiting the child not the other way round. Likewise we should expect nursery-based provision to be as accessible as possible. Local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure that the local child care market meets the needs of working parents, including those with children who are disabled or minority-ethnic groups. Families and other groups locally should lobby their local authorities so that we get access to a diverse range of childcare provision.

**Anon:**

What help are you going to provide for people in rural areas? There's often not many options for employment.

**Caroline Flint:**

One of the areas that's got the highest employment rates in the UK is the highlands of Scotland, but despite that, we're working with that predominately rural area to see what more can be done to create employment and particularly to encourage younger people to not move away to more urban areas. Job centre plus often provide out reach services to rural communities for example through children's centres in a village. As with anything there is not a one size fits all answer to the different problems different communities face to finding and staying in work. We are keen to ensure that villages, towns and cities can all benefit from our local employment partnerships and support whether it be in the form of childcare and or transport.

**Shena Deuchars:**

Why is it better for the government to help me pay someone else to look after my children than to help me do it myself?

**Caroline Flint:**

Shena, the reason why Government has prioritised support for childcare over the last ten years was in response to the many decades before when childcare was not a priority and many working parents found little provision and no financial support. It was on that basis that the Government developed its first national childcare strategy. Given the number of working parents access to affordable quality childcare will continue to be a priority but we also recognise that parents want flexibility to get the work/life balance right. In law we have provided the right to request flexible working arrangements for parents with children under six, children with disabilities under 18, and carers of adult dependants. As a result of this my understanding is that four out of five requests are granted. This demonstrates employers' attitudes are changing and we are discussing whether that flexibility should be extended to parents of children over six. Parents do make arrangements with each other as to who works and for how many hours and some have more choice than others. But we know that families without work totally dependant on benefits will never really be able to rise out of child poverty. The benefits system is a safety net, and for most people it shouldn't be a way of life. We know that where there is no work in a family there isn't just a material loss but often there are more health problems both physical and mental as a result. People in work are better off financially, healthier, have more social contacts and children respond well to an environment where work and its routines are present.

**Georgina Strumblehead:**

Will you confirm that the govt will continue to uphold the right of every parent, including single parents to educate their children at home?

**Caroline Flint:**

Georgina, people do have the right to decide if they want to home educate their children as long as it complies with the needs of the national curriculum I understand. As far as I know there are very few lone parents in receipt of income support who are home educating their children and would be affected by these proposals. The Government has to address in what ways can we justify tax payers' families and the family choices they make.

**Joelle Bradly:**

Most skilled jobs are not available on a part time basis. Family credit can only be taken advantage of if you earn under about 20K. What is being done with the employers to ensure jobs at all levels are offered on part time/job share basis, can offer flexible working hours or working from home and do not force parents to take their annual leave or unpaid leave when children are ill?

**Caroline Flint:**

Joelle, as I mentioned before we have extended the right to request flexibility and we are asking questions about whether to extend legislation further. I don't know your experience Joelle, but I meet many women in all sorts of jobs working part-time, term-time and other working patterns. Let me give you an example of how we have created employment which has particularly suited the needs of parents, before 97 many women voluntarily assisted in classrooms at their children's school. To support teachers we agreed that where appropriate classroom/teaching assistants become part of a paid and trained workforce. This has helped schools, children and given an opportunity to work for many mums on a term-time arrangement. Many lone parents on income support actually need help to improve their literacy and numeracy not just to get a job, but to look after their family and enhance their self-esteem. We now have over 100 employers who are working with us to provide job and work experience/trials for anybody who's on out of work benefits. Many of these employers already employ lone parents and there are inspirational stories of people who having started work at the lowest entry level have progressed both in terms of pay and skill level whilst retaining flexibility.

**Anon:**

Is it true that if you don't claim benefit then the opportunity places don't need to help you update your c.v.? that's the information I received form the job centre. I used to be a single parent on benefits, now in a relationship, he works I don't claim benefit, 2 kids with special needs and I'd like to work although were probably worse off financially.

**Caroline Flint:**

I am surprised that at the very least you weren't directed to the many free online resources available when creating a new CV or looking for work. Your regional Learning and Skills Council should be able to give you advice on skill and career opportunities, including CVs and what funding is available. We are currently discussing how we can bring the employment and skill agenda closer together. For example the future might see adult careers services co-located in job centres or at the very least working in partnership. Financial and entitlement advice is available in a number of ways, if you have a sure start children's centre nearby they should be able to help. Check for location with your local authority. We are looking across Government at how we can better support families in work (even if just one adult) to improve their employment prospects and earning power. In fact it's one of the questions we're asking for views on in the Green paper "In Work Better Off".

**Anon:**

It feels that when you reach the age of 40 you need to gain new skills. But you can't do so without support. What help can you offer?

**Caroline Flint:**

Years ago, certainly for my grandparent's generation, many people saw their careers as one job one employer for life. That isn't the case today and certainly won't be in the future. When my children laugh at the lack of technology when I was a child it brings home the accelerated pace of technological change and the skills necessary to keep up. Forty as far as I'm concerned is the new thirty and certainly updating our skills and enjoying life shouldn't be over. If you haven't already contact the Learning Skills Council for your area and or Learn Direct online. If you receive benefits there are a variety of skill and training opportunities available. As a Government we are very keen to ensure that employers are supported to upgrade the skills of their staff. One of the reasons why we think it is important that lone parents on benefits with older children should start to think about work is about tackling child poverty, but also about the future prospects and choices those women will have. It is about work/ self-esteem/ pensions and about being independent, which is something most women are concerned about.

**Janet Weil:**

In response to Caroline Flint's comments to Rita my local authority keeps a list of child care facilities all of whom say they can take child children with special needs - it is the same list you get for an enquiry for a child with special needs - to say you can use your tax credits income to pay for special toys is frankly not in the real world - the issue is not paying for the child care it is finding someone who will accept the child on the premises. I would pay anything but I need one to one support for my son for his safety and that of the other children.

The local authority when challenged simply suggest you sue each care provider for disability discrimination and wash their hands of you. I would invite the minister to go through the exercise of contacting her local authority and see how long it takes her to find child care for a hypothetical disabled child.

**Caroline Flint:**

Janet, just to put the record straight. I understand you can use your childcare tax credits to pay towards a registered childminder coming to your home. The point being parents of disabled children and parents who work shifts may find that a better childcare option and local authorities should look to developing different forms of childcare. Not as you suggest childcare tax credits for toys. And you're absolutely right local authorities need to be more imaginative about how stimulate childcare provision. I'm sorry I have to go now, please excuse any typos I missed and I look forward to continuing the discussion at a later date and reading more of your posts.

**Unanswered questions**

**Anon:**

I'd like to know what extra help you are going to offer to carers? I think they should get more advice about employment.

**Anon:**

There's not much childcare available for children aged 11 and over. What are you going to do about this?'

**Anon:**

How can I be sure that I will be better off when I start work?

**Kelloggs36 :**

I don't think you should be focusing only on lone parents. There are many two parent families out there suffering from poverty, who do not qualify for Working Families Tax Credits or help with childcare. The income figure is too low to make it a viable option for many families. If you want people in work then focus on where the money will be of most benefit.

**No name entered:**

I am really very interested in the USA system which has recently introduced time limited benefits. What for example should we do as a society with Mum A who has 4 kids to three different fathers, none of which contribute to the financial upbringing of the children because they are also on state benefits? And if she goes on to have another child - should I as a tax payer have to pay for her life choices?

**Julie\_noshoes :**

Should we really be putting children into Extended Schools between 8.00am and 6.00pm all year round, and taking them away from their parents and family? Who teaches morals and responsibilities to a child effectively? Are we not already seeing a society where there is a drop in social responsibility and a rise in crime and lack of manners and respect? Is this not linked to children and young people spending more time away from people who love and care for them?

**Arvensis:**

If the plan is to get all single parents out to work by the time their child is 7 isn't this going to cost the government a fortune? You need to employ more people to work in schools for a start as a lot of parents themselves work for free as playground helpers etc. You'll also need more and better child care facilities. Then there are obviously the after school clubs etc. seeing as not many employers need/want a person who can only work within school hours or cater for when children are ill.

**Georgie7842 :**

When I worked for an employer I was working 20 hours per week on as little as he could pay me. This meant that the Government had to top up my salary with Working Families Tax Credit so that I could afford to live. They very effectively saved him the bother of paying me a decent wage by bearing the cost for him. Assuming that the kind of jobs that most lone parents are going to get will be part time and low paid, is it fair to say that the Government will be paying out substantial amounts of Working Tax Credit, which effectively puts money into the hands of the well-off employment classes by footing a significant chunk of their labour costs?

**Beatrice Buxton:**

How many of the children who will be having to exchange the loving care of a parent for a state babysitting service have been consulted on these proposals?

**Sinics:**

If this Minister (on behalf of our government) wants to address anything; I'd ask her to address the disparity between work hours and school hours, and make it possible for mothers to both work and raise their children.

**Georgina Strumblehead:**

Will this Government continue to uphold the right of all parents including lone parents to educate their children at home?

**Sinics:**

Are lone parents who can't get a job because of some form of discrimination (e.g. racism) entitled?

**Mincs:**

Are lone parents with children with special needs entitled?

**Mincs:**

Are disabled lone parents entitled?

**Mincs:**

What are lone parents with mental health issues entitled to?

**Fiona Nicholson:**

I home educate my son. I am also on Income Support as a lone parent. What will happen to home educating lone parents in my position?

**Monika Dutta:**

In view of the proposed policy being applicable to all lone parents with children aged 12 and over and later aged 7 and over, does the Government intend to make alternative provision for lone parents who are home educating?

**Fiona Berry:**

I find that many single parents who home educate their children may be significantly worse off in work than on benefit. Will single parents caring for challenging children with autism or other problems have the power to refuse work if they can demonstrate that accepting a job will make them worse off financially?

**Denise McCallum:**

I would like to know how the government is going to address childcare issues for families with disabled children? I tried for over a year to find someone to look after my son for 16 hours a week while my husband went to work and got one reply from someone that wasn't suitable.

**Allyson:**

Will lone parents who are home educating their children be made to change to jobseeker's allowance or will there be recognition in the proposals that they are already doing a full-time job, albeit unpaid?

**Peter Williams:**

What help is given to a home educator and his children to help the parent return to work?

## **Unmoderated unanswered questions**

### **Sinic:**

What will happen if a lone parent does not get a job when their child reaches seven? Will their benefits be stopped. What will the strategy be?

### **Clare Murton:**

Please correct the misinformation on this record that will become a public archive, that home educators have to comply with the National Curriculum.

### **anon:**

is the issue of the effect on home education for lone parents going to be addressed?

### **Clare Murton:**

In response to Georgina, are you saying that because there are only a few home educating families on income support (which I think you'll find is not true) that they can be ignored and made to stop home educating and seek other employment because in your opinion it is not a wise use of taxpayers money to allow single parents to choose this legal education option?

### **Mina Lawton:**

would the minister please answer Shena Deuchars' question properly

### **Mandy Burton:**

I am a single parent on income support, and I also home educate my children. When they get to the age that is being put forward, how will we be affected?

### **Shena Deuchars:**

This feels more like an appearance of being available. If you were on the radio (for example) you'd have answered several questions by now. Why don't you answer the remaining questions and send the answers by email to everyone who has tabled a question?

### **Shena Deuchars:**

Why does the government not realise that services should be optional - why are those of us who choose not to use them being described as "service-resistant" and being regarded as worthy of suspicion?

### **Clare M:**

What provision are you making for those lone parents who already have a full time unpaid job home educating their children?

### **Shena Deuchars:**

With so much worry about disaffected young people, why do you think it is so important to break further the family ties?

**Shena Deuchars:**

Well, this is exciting... 30 mins in and only one question answered. And it doesn't work with Firefox!

**Janet Weil:**

As the mother of child with special needs and one of the only 15% of mothers with a disabled child that works I would like to ask what will be done to support the parents of children with special needs. I cannot decide currently if the problem is lack of resources i.e. it does not exist or if it is simply so hard to find out what help there is you just give up - I spent 2 days on the phone last week trying to find a holiday club for my 5 year old son for summer 2008. The current assumption appears to be if you have a disabled child you must be on benefits and so have no need of care.

**Sharon Fullerton:**

On the parents centre message boards, Ms. Flint states lone parents who are also carers for disabled children won't be forced back to work. Can Ms. Flint please tell me why the staff who conduct work focussed interviews aren't aware of this and why they continue to pressurise lone parent carers? Also, where does Ms. Flint stand on forcing lone parents who home educate back to work? The money these parents save the government in school places and one to one help for SEN pupils often outweighs what they are paid in benefits.

**Allyson:**

How do we join the webchat or see what is being written by the minister?

**Mr D Simpson:**

We, a right wing society, are worried about obesity, values & standards with youth and marriage. Why do we push people, in particular mother, married or single, into work? They are too tired to discipline, feed properly or have time with their children. Is it not time that you, the labour government sort this out, after ten years in power?

**Monika Dutta:**

I emailed a question to the webchat this morning and would like to know if the issue of home educators will be addressed

**Georgina Strumblehead:**

Educating and nurturing the next generation is THE most important contribution anyone could possibly make. The problem is that you don't value it because you can't measure it in terms of £'s when it is being provided by parents. Do you agree?

**Mincs:**

Are lone parents who cannot obtain childcare due to over demand entitled

**Mincs:**

Are lone parents who home educate entitled