

Dear X

DWP Reforms – distressing and discriminatory impact on Lone Parent Families.

I am a single parent and I home educate my child. Although I am currently able to work part time, this is only possible because a number of family members provide unpaid child care, and my situation regarding work is somewhat precarious. I have been lucky – so far. However most lone parent home educators that I know are simply not available for work, and I was therefore extremely worried to hear from a number of friends that “job advisors” in job centres are telling them that they have to send their children to school - or else have their benefits cut.

I responded to the "In work Better Off" consultation document last year and expressed exactly these concerns. I was somewhat reassured when I read the report which came out after the consultation that said that ***“There was a strong feeling that the system should not penalise those who have a genuine need to stay at home and care for their children, regardless of their age. ... It was strongly felt that increased conditionality was not appropriate for ... parents who choose to home educate.”*** Also, John Hutton said last year that:

***“we have been very clear that we are not proposing to force lone parents into work, nor cut lone parent benefits - this would be wrong in principle and damaging to the health and well-being of children. It is a matter of individual choice for each lone parent as to whether they look to move into work or continue to claim benefits.”***

It's becoming apparent that this message has not filtered through to front line staff, some of whom are not even aware of the legality of home education. I would therefore be very grateful if you would ask the relevant minister for reassurance that:

- lone parents who are educating their children at home and claiming income support will be regarded as “not available for work”, and therefore be protected from this potentially discriminatory benefit cut; and
- that this message will be **effectively** shared with staff in job centres.

Yours sincerely