



**An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection**

**www.welfare.ie
http://twitter.com/welfare_ie**

Statement from Minister Varadkar on Lone Parents and Educational Supports

It is policy not to comment on individual cases for reasons of confidentiality and data protection.

However, I am concerned that a lot of inaccurate information has recently entered the public domain due to a high profile individual case that might cause lone parents to pass up educational opportunities in the mistaken belief that there are no supports available to them.

The Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) exists so that people who receive their main income from social welfare do not lose their income if they return to education for a period of time, e.g. an unemployed person who goes back to school or college. Family Income Supplement (FIS) does not count as a qualifying payment as it is never someone's main income; rather it is a top-up to one's earned salary or wages. It would not be possible to allow anyone who wanted to give up their job to attend college and immediately receive a social welfare payment of €188 per week from the state. It would be wide open to abuse.

However, lone parents can receive support. Lone parents can apply for the Jobseeker's Transition Payment (JST). This payment was created as part of the reforms brought in by my predecessor Joan Burton. It is a payment available only to lone parents, whose youngest child is between the ages of 7 and 13, to enable them to make the transition from full time parenting to the world of work and self-sufficiency.

Under this payment, lone parents can receive €188 per week while attending a course or college. In addition, they receive an extra €29.80 per week per child and Child Benefit. They may also receive the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance and can qualify for the Fuel Allowance. That's five separate payments from my Department.

A lone parent can also work part-time while studying and can earn an extra €90 per week on top their welfare payments and keep half of anything earned above that.

Once in receipt of JST for nine months a lone parent can claim the Back to Education Allowance at that point for up to four years, for example, if they decide to do a degree course after completing a university based access programme. I think, any fair-minded person will agree that this is a considerable level of support from the taxpayer. It is much more than is available to the average student or family.

Given the myriad supports and targeted payments available to people, the social welfare system can be complicated and hard for people to figure out. For this reason, my Department funds the Citizens Information Board which gives people the information and advice they need by phone, on-line and at their many offices around the country. Individual appointments to discuss the social welfare supports and options available can also be arranged at my Department's Intreo Centres.

ENDS

17th August 2016