

WELFARE REFORM COMMITTEE

THE FUTURE DELIVERY OF SOCIAL SECURITY IN SCOTLAND

WRITTEN SUBMISSION RECEIVED FROM NORMAN GRAY

I submit that while Welfare Reform is necessary the way it is currently being achieved has no respect for the individual and fails to recognise the needs of the claimant. Assessment for benefit reform seems to be target driven towards a level of savings rather than being driven by needs. So many benefits are attached by passport to certain benefits that the consequences of losing PIP, for example, stretch well beyond that one benefit and can lead to accumulating financial hardship and a loss of a realistic lifestyle. The Scottish Executive should take advantage of the Smith Agreement to re-examine the structure of the devolved welfare powers and how claimants are assessed. Where possible benefits should be divorced from each other and stand alone though this is contrary to the philosophy of "Universal Credit"

To support this submission I would like to address some of the current issues relating to DLA and PIP. I am familiar with DLA through my son who has Asperger's Syndrome (a condition on the Autistic Spectrum) and is awaiting a call for assessment for a PIP award) and my daughter who had to face the experience of a PIP award after an accident left her with a disability.

DLA as an award has served my son well since its assessment was flexible enough to take into account his actual needs and difficulties without straightjacketing them into tight "can do" criteria which is the hallmark of PIP. He has anxiously awaited for two years the move to a PIP assessment which was mentioned on his DLA letters since he believes the PIP assessment will not recognise his real needs. While he may meet the blanket need of the PIP criteria and score few points his problems remain unrecognised since they are more complex than the criteria statements cater for e.g. he can dress and feed himself but his clothing may not be appropriate and his eating none too healthy. Thus I would argue that the current PIP assessment does not assess an individual's need and is too crude a tool to be fair and effective.

The current PIP form is very difficult for an individual to complete with justice to one's difficulties and it is no surprise that Citizen Advice Bureaus are being inundated with calls for help. It takes someone with their experience to give a potential claimant a fair chance of the award. The problems of the form rest with the criteria which I would hope the Scottish Executive would have powers to amend.

The whole "Atos" assessment procedure needs amending since it is demeaning and cold. The assessor is more concerned with completing his form on his computer than listening properly to the client and teasing out their real difficulties and how these affect their everyday living. There is no reference at all to the original form which in my mind should be the starting point for the discussion on the client's difficulties. Clients are discouraged from expanding on the answers they give to the assessor's questions so the whole process is dehumanised. What is required is for the initial form to be a filter identifying what a claimant can do or can do appropriately and safely or cannot do. The results of this should then inform the face to face

assessment where required. To achieve this would require a new ethos to the exercise. Once an award is granted it should be deemed to be in force for as long as the need is likely to last - a factor determined at the interview stage.

The passporting of other benefits such as bus pass; medical exemption; council tax exemption should not be attached to a benefit but should be linked to the disability and payment made on a sliding scale dependant on income. This would recognise the particular difficulties resulting from a disability and a client's ability to pay.

Thus I would hope that the new powers would give the Executive the opportunity to right the wrongs about which the Welfare Reform Committee has heard so much and put in place a system which recognises the individual and their needs.

Norman Gray

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