

WELFARE REFORM COMMITTEE

THE FUTURE DELIVERY OF SOCIAL SECURITY IN SCOTLAND

WRITTEN SUBMISSION FROM PSYCHOLOGISTS AGAINST AUSTERITY (SCOTLAND)

We are acting on behalf of Psychologists Against Austerity (Scotland), a group of psychologists, service users and allies concerned with the impact of austerity (including welfare reform) on people experiencing psychological distress as well as the impact of welfare reform on wider society within Scotland. The Scottish branch of Psychologists Against Austerity formed just prior to the UK general election in May 2015. We now have over 280 members including psychologists from across a range of contexts such as front line NHS, local authority and academic settings.

The group last met on 25th August 2015 and we decided that we would like to highlight the following points to the committee concerning the Future Delivery of Social Security in Scotland:

1. Many of us working in the NHS and other front-line contexts have seen first hand that the current system of assessment for Personal Independence Payments, usually implemented by ATOS, is very much focussed on the impact of physical health problems and is very poor at assessing the impact of mental health problems. Furthermore, many of the questions used at assessment (and the PIP application form itself) service users report to be often both confusing and irrelevant to the day to day struggle that is a reality of their lives. We would recommend that this system of assessment is changed to accurately reflect the impact of mental health problems on a person's functioning (including activities related to daily living and mobility).

2. Many members have reported instances in which the dignity of service users is not respected when undergoing PIP assessment. There are frequent reports of people feeling frightened, humiliated and shamed by the process of assessment and correspondence received. In some instances, this appears to have led to a significant worsening in the person's mental health. We would recommend a wholesale overhaul of the system to ensure that it is more person centred, respectful and fit for purpose in 21st century Scotland. By involving people with lived experience of long term mental health problems or psychological distress in the re-design of the assessment process (for example through consulting with disability rights or service user groups), there is greater likelihood that the process of assessment will be experienced as respectful, humane and dignified.

On a societal level, Psychologists Against Austerity Scotland are concerned about the potential detrimental psychological impact of Welfare Reform and the widening inequality associated with this. Psychologists Against Austerity have produced an evidenced Briefing Paper on the Psychological Impact of Austerity which is accessible at <https://psychagainstausterity.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/paa-briefing-paper.pdf>

PAA Scotland would be happy to provide more detailed feedback on request.