

WELFARE REFORM COMMITTEE

THE FUTURE DELIVERY OF SOCIAL SECURITY IN SCOTLAND

WRITTEN SUBMISSION FROM QUARRIERS

Introduction

Quarriers is one of Scotland's largest health and social care charities supporting thousands of disadvantaged people each year. We support vulnerable children, young people, adults and families who face challenging circumstances such as homelessness, learning and physical disabilities and epilepsy. We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Welfare Reform Committee's call for evidence on the future delivery of social security in Scotland.

Question 1: Personal Independence Payments, Disability Living Allowance Attendance, Allowance and Carer's Allowance

- a. Should Scotland replace or improve these benefits?**
- b. What are the main priorities for improving/replacing these benefits to make sure people are supported equally and with dignity and respect?**

We welcome the Smith Commission proposals to give the Scottish Parliament increased powers over benefits for people with a disability and carers. Quarriers believes the welfare system should ensure that people with a disability are empowered to lead active, productive and dignified lives whether in or out of employment. The reality, however, is that people with a disability have been subject to a disproportionate amount of cuts in their benefits which is undermining their human rights and preventing them from participating fully in society.

We do not believe, however, that replacing the current benefits architecture with an entirely new system is the answer. We have concerns about the technical and financial challenges this could pose and the timescales it may entail. Rather, we think the best approach is to make improvements to the existing system. Central to this is ensuring that people with a disability and their carers have an adequate level of income to ensure that they have their rights safeguarded and are supported to live with dignity and respect.

A major concern with the current system is the length of time it currently takes for PIP claims to be processed and to transfer from Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to Personal Independence Payments (PIP). The uncertainty caused by these delays can be stressful and causes anxiety among the people we support and their families and carers. In our experience, reducing the time it takes to process claims would make a big difference to people.

The transfer of power over DLA and PIP to the Scottish Parliament is an opportunity to develop a more sympathetic and supportive assessment process. At present, people are being required to travel long distances to attend PIP assessments which can be impractical, expensive, and stressful. Furthermore, we hear anecdotal evidence from the people we support that the assessments themselves are flawed and do not always give an adequate account of a person's level of impairment. More consideration needs to be given as to how to assess fluctuating conditions such as Bipolar Disorder. There is also a need to review the criteria used to determine mobility requirements.

2) Universal Credit (housing element and administrative arrangements arrangements) and Discretionary Housing Payments

a. What are the main priorities for improving these benefits to make sure people are supported equally and with dignity and respect?

The powers to vary some of the practical arrangements around Universal Credit, such as frequency of payments, paying housing elements directly to landlords, and varying the under-occupancy charge (Bedroom Tax) and local housing allowance rates, eligible rent, and deductions for non-dependents provide real opportunity for change.

The new administrative powers over Universal Credit could be used to design payment cycles that help people budget. For example, people could be given a choice of fortnightly payments rather than monthly ones. Individuals could also be given the choice as to whether the housing element gets paid directly to the landlord to avoid the risk of their getting into arrears.

Housing element of universal credit should include payments for the first week of claim which it currently does not cover. The experience of people we support is that at present the length of process from application to first payment is too long and they are forced to rely on short term advances which they then have to repay.

3) The Work Programme and Work Choice

a. After these programmes have come to an end, what should be put in place to support people into work?

We think that any redesign of the work programme in Scotland should include greater flexibility to accommodate the needs of different groups. Access to employability support and work related activity is important for the people we support, but it is essential that opportunities are tailored to the individual and their specific abilities. There also need to be more emphasis on in-work support for those who have found employment but may have barriers which make it more difficult for them to sustain it. An emphasis on skills development, equality and workplace health should be integral part to this.

A redesigned work programme should place employability support within a local context and policy in line with other devolved areas of responsibility. For example, the Scottish Government will be able to develop policies linking employability to areas such as housing, where an individual's ability to find and sustain employment is key. Links should also be made with local area based employability initiatives, as well as regional economic development activity.

4) Delivery of benefits

a. How can the Scottish Government's departments work better together in promoting positive outcomes for people who access benefits?

Effective communication between and within Government departments is essential to make sure claims are processed quickly and effectively. There also needs to be effective channels of communication between the Scottish Government, DWP and other organisations who work with individuals claiming benefits.

It is also crucial that we improve relations with frontline staff. These are too often based on suspicion and compliance rather than trust and cooperation. Where the Scottish Government has the responsibility we must foster a social security system built on trust between individuals and the services that support them. The system must focus on supporting and empowering disadvantaged people rather than stigmatizing and penalising them.