

VOICES FROM THE FRONTLINE

Halt the roll-out of PIP in Scotland

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Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS), our 61 member Citizen Advice Bureaux, the Citizen Advice consumer service, and the Extra Help Unit, form Scotland's largest independent advice network. Advice provided by our service is free, independent, confidential, impartial and available to everyone. We are champions for both citizens and consumers and in 2013/14 the Citizens Advice Service in Scotland helped over 330,000 clients in Scotland deal with over one million issues overall.

Our series of briefings '**Voices from the Frontline**' show the reality of the impact of current welfare changes on the people of Scotland. We highlight the experiences of the thousands of clients advised by CAB in Scotland and make recommendations for change.

Summary

This briefing highlights the experiences of bureaux and clients so far in claiming Personal Independence Payment (PIP), the UK Government's new disability benefit which will eventually replace Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for people aged 16-64¹. Both PIP and its predecessor DLA are crucial benefits for many sick and disabled people. They aim to help with the extra costs of being sick or having a disability, such as additional heating, additional travel costs, special diets or specialist equipment.

Since its introduction, new claimants have experienced significant problems in claiming PIP, particularly as a result of delays in the assessment and decision process, and they have turned to their local CAB for advice and support. The majority of the 190,000 existing DLA claimants are due to be migrated to PIP between October 2015 and October 2017.

Given the problems and delays new claimants have had to face, and the future devolution of powers over disability benefits to the Scottish Parliament, CAS has called for a halt to the continued migration of existing DLA claimants in Scotland to PIP. CAS considers that in order to get the best outcomes for Scotland's citizens, we should not put disabled people through two benefit upheavals in a short space of time. In addition, we also believe all children (under 16 as of 6 April 2015) currently on DLA should remain on DLA until a new benefit is introduced in Scotland and not be classed a new claimant when they turn 16.

¹ There are no plans to replace DLA for children under 16 or for people aged 65 and over on 8 April 2013 but those turning 16 are invited to apply for PIP as a new claimant.

Roll-out of PIP in Scotland

PIP was introduced in Scotland in June 2013 for all new claims for people aged 16-64. In January 2014, the process of reassessment for certain existing DLA claimants began in some areas in Scotland². On 26 January 2015 this was extended to two more areas in Scotland, with a further five beginning reassessments from 23 February 2015³.

However, the majority of existing DLA claimants will not be invited to claim PIP until after October 2015. Under the current timetable, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) expects that all existing claimants will have been contacted by October 2017.

Impact on disabled people in Scotland

A central assumption behind the introduction of PIP was that it would reduce forecast working age DLA expenditure by 20 per cent⁴. These savings are expected to be achieved primarily through the new eligibility criteria for PIP, which should result in a caseload reduction (disabled people losing the benefit entirely) and a reduction in some entitlements (disabled people being moved from higher to lower benefit rates).

In 2013/14, approximately 343,000 people received DLA in Scotland⁵. Of those, 210,000 were of working age.

The Scottish Government has analysed the impacts of replacing DLA with PIP in Scotland, based on DWP data⁶. This analysis found that for working age claimants in Scotland:

- 190,000 existing DLA claimants will be reassessed for PIP
- of those 190,000, an estimated 105,000 (55 per cent) will lose some or all of their disability benefits by 2018 while 56,000 (30 per cent) will receive an increased award and 29,000 (15 per cent) an identical award
- including reassessed and new claims, approximately 66,000 fewer individuals in Scotland will receive DLA/PIP by 2018.

It is clear, therefore, that while some individuals may benefit from an increased award under PIP, the UK Government's aim of reducing both the DLA caseload and expenditure will have an overall adverse impact for sick and disabled people in Scotland. CAS believes in a welfare benefits system that is fair, equal and responsive to the needs of all citizens.

Moreover, benefit reassessments are inherently problematic and stressful for claimants. When the new Work Capability Assessment was introduced for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), ESA rapidly became the biggest issue for bureaux. We are seeing a similar trend with PIP, where there has been a 78 per cent increase in the number of new PIP issues dealt with by bureaux between July to September 2014 when compared with the same period in 2013⁷.

² Postcodes beginning DG (Dumfries and Galloway), EH (Edinburgh), TD (Galashiels), ML (Motherwell). People will be reassessed where there is a change in their needs, their fixed term award is due to expire, a child claimant turns 16 or an individual chooses to claim PIP instead of DLA.

³ Postcodes beginning G (Glasgow) and IV (Inverness) from 26 January 2015; postcodes beginning AB (Aberdeen), DD (Dundee), KA (Kilmarnock), KY (Kirkcaldy) and PH (Perth) from 23 February 2015.

⁴ [HM Treasury Budget June 2010 policy costings](#)

⁵ [The Smith Commission's Welfare Proposals](#) (Scottish Parliament SPICe briefing, 25 January 2015)

⁶ [Financial impacts of welfare reforms on disabled people in Scotland](#) (Scottish Government, August 2014)

⁷ [Snapshot Advice Trends in Scotland July-September 2014](#) (CAS, 2014)

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Problems with the PIP assessment process

Since its introduction in Scotland, bureaux have been helping clients with a number of problems relating to PIP. The most significant issue for clients has been considerable delays in the assessment process. Bureaux have also seen other issues such as clients being required to travel long distances for an assessment, and the short timescale (one month) that clients are given to return the 'How your disability affects you' (PIP2) form.

Delays in the assessment process

One of the key changes in the move from DLA to PIP is the introduction of a face-to-face assessment with an independent healthcare professional. Bureau clients have experienced considerable delays in arranging this face-to-face assessment.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has set a target of 16 weeks for the clearance of new PIP claims⁸. Data recently released by the DWP shows that the average clearance time peaked in June and July 2014 at 30 weeks⁹.

This reduced to 14 weeks for cases returned between 1 January and 25 January 2015. However, the DWP statistics take the median time as the average, which may not fully reflect those people who are waiting much longer times. The data itself shows that, on 25 January 2015, 110,100 claims (20 per cent) that had been referred to the assessment providers remained outstanding. Nine per cent of these claims were outstanding over 16 weeks.

CAS continues to receive evidence from bureaux about the considerable delays that clients are experiencing in claiming PIP.

- A South of Scotland CAB reports of a client who made a claim for PIP in May 2014 and had still not received an appointment for his assessment by December 2014. When the CAB called Atos, it was told that the client could expect a letter in January 2015 but Atos could give no indication of when the assessment might take place.
- A West of Scotland CAB reports of a client who applied for PIP in May 2014 and had still not received an assessment by November 2014. The CAB called Atos and was told that no date was available at the assessment centre in Glasgow.

There are particular problems for clients who require a home visit.

- A West of Scotland CAB reports of a client who applied for PIP in July 2014 and required a home visit. By January 2015, the client had still not received an appointment for a home visit. Atos could give no estimate of when an assessor would be available.

Although the most significant delays have been in the arrangement of the face-to-face medical assessment, bureaux have also seen delays in the DWP making a decision after the assessment and even in sending out the necessary forms to claimants.

⁸ This target applies to claims made under the normal rules, and not those claims made under the special rules for terminal illness. The time measured is from the point a claim is referred to an assessment provider to when it is returned to the DWP for a decision.

⁹ [Personal Independence Payment ad hoc statistics](#) (DWP, January 2015)

- An East of Scotland CAB reports of a client whose DLA was due to finish but despite a number of requests to the DWP, the necessary form for PIP was not sent out. The client's DLA then stopped and the client will now have to wait until she is assessed for PIP before she will receive any award. The delay by the DWP in sending out the form has resulted in a significant loss of income for the client.

Impact of delays

The delays in the assessment process are having a severe impact on bureau clients. Our survey of bureau advisers in August 2014 found that over half of advisers believe that the delays are leaving clients in severe hardship and unable to pay for living essentials.¹⁰ Nine out of ten advisers say the delays are causing additional stress and anxiety for clients, and nearly four in five advisers say clients' health is getting worse.

- An East of Scotland CAB reports of a client who submitted her PIP claim eight months ago. She had made two follow up calls to find out what is happening but has heard nothing. She now has to consider returning to work early despite having had two operations.
- An East of Scotland CAB reports of a client who had been waiting over ten months for an assessment for PIP. As a result, the client was in financial difficulty, with rent and Council Tax arrears of almost £2,600.

Delays in PIP also have an impact on other forms of support, as PIP is a passport to many other benefits including Carer's Allowance, disability premiums for other benefits and the motability car scheme.

Why halt the roll-out of PIP in Scotland?

Under the Smith Commission agreement, and subsequent UK Command Paper and draft clauses, powers over disability benefits, including DLA and PIP, are to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament. On 15 January 2015, CAS wrote to the Secretaries of State for Scotland and the DWP calling for a halt to the migration of all existing DLA claimants in Scotland to PIP¹¹ for three key reasons.

1. Detriment

With the possibility of a new system of disability benefits in Scotland once powers are devolved, CAS does not want to see sick and disabled claimants having to go through changes in their benefits payments twice in a short period of time.

2. Cost

The UK Government is currently incurring the costs of the migration from DLA to PIP, with the possibility that individuals in Scotland will then shortly be moved to a new system. This seems a waste of resources, which CAS believes would be better used to address the existing problems with the PIP assessment process.

¹⁰ [Voices from the frontline – Personal Independence Payment](#) (CAS, October 2014)

¹¹ [CAS calls for a halt to the introduction of PIP](#), 20 January 2015

3. Process

The migration of 190,000 existing DLA claimants in Scotland to PIP is a massive undertaking and, as we have seen with the roll-out of PIP for new claims, could take a significant amount of time. It has already been nearly five years since the policy was announced¹².

Moreover, given the UK Government's intention to achieve a 20 per cent reduction in DLA expenditure, continuing with the roll-out as planned could mean that when powers are devolved this will not be alongside appropriate funding arrangements. This could significantly constrain the ability of the Scottish Parliament and Government to have full autonomy in determining the structure and value of devolved benefits, as envisaged by the Smith Commission agreement¹³.

This call to halt the migration sits alongside our recommendation that no policy or funding decisions (outside operational matters) should be taken by the UK Government on any benefit that is to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament. Equally, we believe no funding changes should be made to any benefits that are to be devolved between now and the point of devolution¹⁴.

CAS therefore believes that existing DLA claimants in Scotland should continue to receive their DLA award until such time as a new Scottish system is established. This should apply to all existing DLA claimants in Scotland who, as of 6 April 2015, have not begun the process of reassessment. This includes those with fixed term awards that are due to expire. The halt should also apply to all children in Scotland receiving DLA who are under the age of 16 on 6 April 2015. We do not believe they should be classed as 'new claimants' for PIP when they become 16; their needs are very unlikely to have changed simply because they go from being 15 to 16 and we believe they should be allowed to continue to receive DLA until a new system is established in Scotland, at which time they can be reassessed.

Conclusion

The evidence we have received from bureaux shows that too many people are still experiencing problems in claiming PIP, including significant delays in receiving any money. This is causing considerable distress for many sick and disabled people in Scotland, often leaving them facing severe hardship and unable to meet basic living costs.

Moreover, given the proposed devolution of powers over disability benefits to Scotland, it is both uncaring and unnecessary to put thousands of people through the distress and uncertainty of two benefit upheavals in a short period of time. Resources would be better used on fixing the problems with the current system for new claims before continuing with the migration of existing DLA claimants in Scotland to PIP.

¹² HM Treasury announced the Government's intention to reform DLA in the June 2010, it was introduced by the Welfare Reform Act in 2012, and the process of migration is currently due to finish by 2018.

¹³ [The Smith Commission Report](#), November 2014, para 51.

¹⁴ CAS Submission to the Devolution (Further Powers) Committee: Implementing the Smith Agreement - The UK Government's Draft Legislative Clauses. Welfare Benefits. (CAS, March 2015)

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