



Comments from Imtac on Disability Living Allowance
Reform – a consultation by the Department for Work and
Pensions

February 2011

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About Imtac

- 1 Imtac is a committee of disabled people and older people as well as others including key transport professionals. Our role is to advise Government and others in Northern Ireland on issues that affect the mobility of older people and disabled people.
- 2 Our aim is to ensure that older people and disabled people have the same opportunities as everyone else to travel when and where they want.
- 3 Imtac receives support from the Department for Regional Development.

General Comments

- 4 Imtac welcomes the opportunity to respond to the current consultation on reform of Disability Living Allowance. Disability Living Allowance is a vital benefit to 182,423 disabled people in Northern. DLA provides invaluable support for disabled people across the UK in meeting the additional costs of living with an impairment including transport and getting around.
- 5 The Committee is not opposed to reform or some of the ideas emerging in the consultation document. We agree that the benefit should be easier to understand and apply for. We also agree that mobility should be interpreted with a broader perspective to include other issues that make getting around difficult.
- 6 We do, however, feel the current approach to reform is fundamentally flawed. This approach is based on the stated desire of Government to reduce current claimants by 20% without providing any recognition of the impact on disabled people affected. The approach is based on the incorrect perception that DLA is a work related benefit rather than a benefit open to disabled people of all ages to assist with the day to day cost of living. The approach is based on the perception that

people currently in receipt of DLA are in some way not entitled to it. This is despite all available evidence that indicates fraud of DLA is much lower than other benefits.

- 7 From the perspective of Imtac the greatest flaw in the approach to reform is the assumption that amongst other factors legislation has in some way eased the barriers faced by disabled people in everyday life. This is in part used to justify reducing the numbers of people currently claiming the benefit. As a Committee of disabled people we believe there is little evidence to support this assumption. Take for example access to employment, all the available evidence indicates that disabled people are still much more likely not to be in employment than non-disabled people. The consultation over simplifies the reasons for this.
- 8 The experience of our members and other disabled people we speak to indicates that many of physical and attitudinal barriers that prevent disabled people participating in everyday life are as relevant today as they were when Disability Living Allowance was created. Given this we can only assume that reducing claimants by 20% will have a significant negative effect on the lives of those disabled people excluded from the future scheme.
- 9 Considering the broader environment the reform proposals have the potential to impact further on disabled people. No additional support measures are being proposed to assist disabled people into employment for example. Wider spending constraints mean that disabled people are already experiencing a reduction in the levels of support currently available to them. Restricting access to benefits can only contribute to what already is a difficult situation and push more disabled people into poverty and greater exclusion.
- 10 Imtac does not propose to respond to all the questions asked by the consultation as they do not relate specifically to our transport remit. We would like to make the following general points:

- Many of the proposals are based on a stereotypical medicalised view of who disabled people are and what their needs are
 - Far from making claiming more straightforward many of the proposals contained in the consultation document will make the future benefit more complex and more difficult to claim
 - Many of the proposals will reduce the independence of disabled people by restricting choice on how people use future benefits
- 11 DLA currently does provide assistance for many disabled people in paying the additional costs of transport and getting around in general. People use the mobility component to pay directly for travel. The benefit also provides passport to other schemes such as the Blue Badge Scheme which directly contribute to the mobility of disabled people. Imtac recommends that in the future the benefit should continue to provide this passporting function.
- 12 Imtac notes in paragraph 23 of the document contains proposals to stop the payment of Mobility Component of Disability Living Allowance for people who have to enter residential care. Imtac believes this measure is unfair in that it fails to recognise that people in residential care can and do travel and face the same costs in doing this as other disabled people. We recommend that Government scrap this proposal.
- 13 It is vital that any future benefit addresses the additional costs experienced by disabled people getting around. Whilst Imtac welcomes in principle the proposal to consider mobility in a wider sense than an individual's ability to walk the consultation does not contain enough detail to assess whether the proposed new benefit will be effective in doing this.

Conclusion

- 14 Imtac welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the current consultation. We are not opposed to the principles behind the reform process. However we believe the approach to reform is flawed and in practice many of the proposals will result in a benefit that is more complex, harder to obtain and results in less choice for many disabled people. Most of all we believe that excluding 20% of claimants who currently receive DLA will increase poverty and exclusion for many disabled people. With regard to getting around any new benefit must include support to assist disabled people to get around (including people living in residential care) and retain passporting links to other benefits and schemes.

Contact us

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