



Spinal Injuries Association (SIA)

Response to: Department of Works & Pensions 'No one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility' (Green Paper) – public consultation

Response deadline: 22/10/08

Sent to: welfare.reform@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

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Sent on behalf of: Spinal Injuries Association (SIA)

The Spinal Injuries Association (SIA) is a national user-led organisation supporting the interests of 40,000 people in the United Kingdom who have sustained spinal cord injury (SCI). SIA has an individual membership of over 5,000.

SIA has responded to the following questions put by Green Paper that we regard as relevant to people with a SCI:

Question 8

'When is the right time to require ESA claimants to take a skills health check?'

SIA – It must be recognized that with the onset of a traumatic disability e.g. a Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) a person may need a long period of rehabilitation and adjustment before they are ready to undertake retraining & returning to the workplace.

Question 9

'Should ESA customers be required to attend training in order to gain the identified skills they need to enter work?'

SIA – With the onset of a sudden disability (e.g. SCI) or the effects of a disabling condition it is likely that someone who wants to either remain in or return to the workplace will require some (or completely) retraining. SIA therefore welcomes the Green Paper for recognising that Disabled people may require support to attend skills training (paragraph 2.60). This must cover the following areas:

- accessible training environment (including toilets)
- transport
- extra care & support requirements

Question 12

'Are there any other circumstances where customers cannot get the skills they need to enter employment under present and planned arrangements?'

SIA – Access to Work & Structured Work Placements

SIA welcomes the proposal to double the Access to Work budget but would like to see the scheme expanded to those under-taking voluntary work and structured work placements as a stepping stone to paid work. Often disabled people who have been long-term unemployed or have to take another career path on the onset of a disability or long term condition find they can gain experience, confidence and build skills in the voluntary sector or through proper managed work placements (e.g. via Local Employment Partnerships). However many are put off partaking in such areas/schemes because of lack of specialised equipment, transport problems or no support available to manage their disability/condition while they undertake these roles.

"Access to Work will only cover, amongst other things, travel costs for those who have secured paid work. Often, Pathway to Employment clients are not ready for paid work and the work placement is the fundamental first step for them to get back into the routine of work. This often results in paid work. However, without the work placement, this outcome would be unachievable. It would be fantastic if I were able to access a pot of money for legitimate, structured work placements across West Berkshire." - Pathways to Employment Manager, West Berkshire.

Question 15

'What expectations should there be of people undertaking the personalised support we will now be offering in the Work Related Activity Group? Could this include specific job search?'

SIA – Anyone undertaking personalised support should expect to be given an equal chance of obtaining work (depending on their skills and qualifications) no matter what level of disability they have. This could be done by providing a financial incentive on a sliding scale for the agencies required to provide this support which would depend on the level of disability of a person they find a work placement for (as touched upon in paragraphs 3.45 & 3.46 of the Green Paper). This would ensure that such agencies do not just go for 'easy hits' to meet set targets.

Question 17

'What additional flexibilities in the system or forms of support would claimants with multiple and complex problems need to enable them to meet the new work-focused requirements proposed in this Green Paper?'

SIA – Expand Access to Work to also cover:

- Voluntary Work
- Structured Work Placements
- Permitted Work

NB – These are all recognized proven stepping stones back to full & part-time work.

Question 18

'What are the key features of an action planning approach that would best support employees and employers to take the steps for the employee to make a swifter return to work?'

SIA – The key features are to identify and remove any barriers to the following issues:

- Accessibility to the workplace
- Equipment needs
- Transport needs
- Care & support needs
- Retraining
- Reduction in or flexibility re: working hours
- Home working
- Ongoing treatment of condition

Question 21

'What are the next steps in enabling disabled people, reliably and easily, to access an individual budget if they want one? Should they include legislation to give people a right to ask for a budget or will the other levers the Government has got prove sufficient? What are the safeguards that should be built in? How can this be done?'

SIA:

- People should be given a legal right to ask for an Individual Budget (IB) and receive one if they meet the eligibility criteria.
- Good quality support/brokerage should always be available with an IB if required
- It is important that the method used to estimate an IB budget when taking into consideration care & support needs continues to take into account the actual hours required to ensure a reasonable reliability, as the vast majority of staff and agencies still charge/are paid by hourly or part-hour rates
- NHS Long Term Health Care Funding (non means tested) should be included in an IB if a person qualifies for it

Question 22

'Is a system based on a single overarching benefit the right long-term aspiration? How could a simpler system be structured so as to meet varying needs and responsibilities?'

SIA – If a system is simple then there is a danger of some people with complex needs losing out if the added costs of these needs are not factored into the Welfare Benefits they depend on. It is therefore important to design a system to take into account these extra needs. For Example:

- Extra heating to manage a long term condition
- Extra transport costs
- Dietary requirements
- Family & Caring responsibilities when the person has a disability or long term condition

Question 25

'Are lump sum payments a good way of meeting people's needs? Do they give people more choice and control? Could we make more use of them?'

SIA – Lump sums are often a good way for disabled people to overcome many barriers, giving them more choice and control. For Example:

- Housing adaptations
- Equipment provision
- Specialised transport requirements

In many cases it would be sensible to make more lump sums available for such things as:

- Home based work (including voluntary work) & further education costs that may not be obtainable via Grants and/or Access to Work (computer and other equipment, internet connections, work stations, etc)
- Start up money for disabled people wishing to start their own businesses

SIA - Other Suggested Comments

Permitted Work – those people who qualify for ESA because they have been assessed as having 'a severe disability' should be allowed to do paid 'Permitted Work' as a means of:

- Maintaining self-esteem
- Health & wellbeing
- Improving a person's financial position
- Moving back into permanent full or part time employment

Savings threshold for accessing care & support - To ensure that working disabled people who need direct payments & ILF for care and support, and are capable of demanding a high wage, are given the incentive to stay in work, or run their own business the savings threshold (currently £22,500) for accessing such funding should be increased substantially.

The Social Model of Disability - SIA welcomes the aims expressed in paragraph 3.51 of the Green Paper which moves away from the medical model of disability and towards the social model:

'These events will build on the existing 'Employ ability' media campaign which is engaging directly with employers and talking to them, in business terms, about the wider talent pool they might be missing out on. Key messages include:

- *people identified as disabled or having long-term health conditions should not be defined by their clinical diagnosis;*
- *equal treatment – each person should be judged as a unique individual, on the basis of their capability, characteristics and potential;*
- *and disabled people and people with long-term health conditions are an under-utilised pool of talent with skills and abilities of value to their business.*