

Response to PIP proposals by Oxford Diocesan Council for the Deaf

Oxford Diocesan Council for the Deaf does not welcome the proposed new benefit "Personal Independence Payment" (PIP), which will be replacing Disability Living Allowance from 2013. We believe that many deaf people over the age of 16 who currently receive DLA, and genuinely need benefit, will lose it when PIP is introduced.

In particular, we should like to comment on PIP consultation questions 1,2,3 and 4.

Question 1 – What do you think of the Government's latest ideas about the daily living activities? Does the Government need to make more changes to this?

There is concern that only deaf people who communicate solely in BSL are likely to receive PIP. However, Case Study 9 in the 'PIP: second draft assessment criteria and consultation document' actually contradicts this criteria.

The case study focuses on Trevor who often goes to see movies with subtitles and keeps in touch with friends by text. His preferred method of communication is BSL and some of the people he sees regularly have learnt a few essential signs to help with communication.

Trevor does NOT communicate solely in BSL. He relies on subtitles (not a BSL interpreter) to enjoy movies. He can read and write because he uses texts with his friends. He does not need a BSL interpreter to translate the texts for him. The case study states that his **preferred** method of communication is BSL. It does not state that it is his only or essential method of communication. One could argue that people could simply write things down on a piece of paper instead as Trevor can read and understand English (as shown by his ability to watch subtitled films).

In this case study, Trevor is awarded the standard rate Daily Living component despite BSL not being his sole method of communication support.

Therefore, the DWP cannot discriminate against deaf people who may have other preferred methods of communication or mixed methods of communication. Deaf people whose main language is not BSL still have great difficulty with communication and accessing information.

Many deaf people require special equipment for their individual use such as personal and portable radio-aids that work with their hearing aids or cochlear implants to aid with communication in settings such as noisy restaurants, evening/day classes, church groups. Radio-aids are very expensive – costing around a thousand pounds for a kit and have to be purchased by the individual if the equipment is for their personal use (i.e.: not in employment settings). Such equipment has to be maintained, repaired or replaced as and when necessary.

Page 35 of the 'PIP: second draft of assessment criteria – Activity 7: Communicating' has the statement 'Communicate continues to be defined as conveying and understanding information in the individual's native language'. Many deaf people require speech to text (STT) translation to be able to understand and access information being given out – particularly at meetings, places of worship, informal ad-hoc social groups, evening and day classes. Obtaining SST support is often much more difficult than obtaining BSL support therefore deaf people relying on SST are at a substantial disadvantage.

The Government must consider ALL methods of communication support for deaf people and the scoring system should not differentiate or favour one method over another.

Question 2 - What do you think of the Government's ideas about the points allowed for daily living activities and the points you need to get this component? Does the Government need to make more changes to this?

We believe that the proposed scoring system is unfair and will mean that many deaf people will see their benefit scrapped even though they require assistance every time they wish to communicate. Under the new system only those receiving 8 points will qualify for standard rate PIP and only those receiving 12 points will qualify for enhanced rate PIP. We recommend that points d) and e) should be scored at 8; and point f) should be scored at 12. We urge the UK Government to change the assessment to take account of environmental factors that affect deaf people's ability to communicate such as background noise, group conversations, people standing in front of windows, different accents and unfamiliar speakers (as outlined above).

Question 3 - What do you think of the Government's latest ideas about the mobility activities? Does the Government need to make more changes to this?

We are concerned that the Government has not taken account of a deaf person's difficulties in planning and following a journey. Deaf people face many barriers when travelling, particularly on public transport where they often miss announcements and have difficulty in communicating with staff.

What deaf people find particularly difficult is the announcements that might happen half way through a journey - like "this train is unable to go any further - please get off at....and go to platform 5 where there will be a train to take you for the rest of your journey" - ie impromptu messages.

What also affects "mobility" and how confident a deaf person might be to travel alone is;

1. If they go to loos in a public building they might not hear the fire alarm and therefore be in danger - if they were with a friend that person would somehow make them aware - a note under the door, for example.
2. Likewise with lifts - if they break down could they use the emergency phone in there?
3. Many deaf people will not go out at night - they cannot see very well to lipread/sign. And unfortunately might not see muggers approaching.
4. Deaf people are unaware of bicycles approaching from behind (a common problem with many shared paths now). A companion is needed to warn them.
5. Even though a lot of people wear hearing aids/CIs etc one problem is that they amplify all sounds so a deaf person might not realise what is traffic noise and what isn't - ie their discrimination of sound is not very good.

Question 4 - What do you think of the Government's ideas about the points allowed for mobility activities and the points you need to get this component? Does the Government need to make more changes to this?

We feel that the proposed points system is unfair and will mean that many deaf people who currently receive the mobility component of DLA at the lower or medium rate will not score the necessary 8 points under PIP to qualify for a standard rate mobility component. We urge the UK Government to change the assessment to take account of the factors (outlined above) that affect deaf people's ability to travel without the assistance of another person.