



Personal Independence Payment user centred design

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Background and methodology

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is introducing a new benefit called 'Personal Independence Payment', to replace Disability Living Allowance (DLA) from 2013, for people aged 16-64 years. Alongside a broader programme of consultation to influence the design of the new benefit, IFF Research was commissioned to carry out a programme of user-centred design (UCD) research.

This research programme involved a series of individual projects, conducted between 2011 and 2013, each of which concentrated on understanding users'/potential users' views in relation to a specific aspect of the Personal Independence Payment claim process or its products (forms, letters, leaflets etc.).

Views were sought through a combination of focus groups, and one-to-one in-depth interviews conducted either face-to-face or by telephone. Research participants were drawn from a pool of 1,000 people recruited to join a research panel. The panel consisted of:

- current recipients of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) with a physical/mental disability or impairment;
- non-DLA recipients with a physical/mental disability or impairment;
- people without any disability or impairment; and
- formal representatives of DLA recipients.

The remainder of this report describes the key overall themes that emerged from these various research exercises.

Pre-claim communications

Individuals were shown a leaflet introducing new claimants to Personal Independence Payment; and letters inviting current DLA claimants to make a claim for Personal Independence Payment (including follow-up letters advising of the consequences of not making a claim). These were perceived to be clearly worded, appropriate in length and tone, and compared favourably with previous experiences of letters relating to benefits claims. Based on feedback in earlier testing, the 'call to action' in the letter inviting DLA claimants to make a claim had been strengthened, and the tone of the final version was felt to be appropriate.

During the final round of testing, further improvements were identified, including: reassuring those with mental, cognitive or learning conditions that their needs would be covered by the claims process; clarifying the different steps and associated timescales involved in the application process; and including a clearer explanation of the purpose and intended advantages of Personal Independence Payment.

Starting the claim

To make a claim for Personal Independence Payment, individuals are required, wherever possible, to make a short telephone call to DWP. This involves answering some initial eligibility questions (e.g. age, and nationality). A paper version of these questions will be made available to those who are unable to use the telephone. It was clear from the invitation letter that there was a need to make a phone call; and the questions covered by the call were felt to be non-controversial and easy to comprehend.

However, a claim process of two stages was not logical for individuals and the amount of information requested within this call was greater than anticipated: this led some to assume that this phone call was the whole claim process. There was a need, therefore, to explain more clearly the purpose of the initial call and why so many questions are asked. The need to provide bank details at this stage was controversial, and more credible reassurances were needed.

Giving more details about personal circumstances in the form

Individuals will then be sent a form, to allow them to give more detail about their personal circumstances. This will be accompanied by a covering letter and an information booklet to support individuals in filling in the form.

The form, letter and information booklet were seen as a highlight of the claim process: they were perceived to be relatively short, very clearly worded, easy to use, written in a friendly and supportive tone of voice, and – critically – enabled individuals to express their day-to-day support needs. In these respects, they were felt to be a considerable improvement on experiences of DLA, and implicitly communicated the intended advantages of the new benefit.

The form's combination of 'open text' boxes and 'tick box' questions was perceived to work well,

by providing a structure and an easy means of conveying information (through ticking boxes); and an opportunity to give further detail and record information that did not exactly fit the questions asked (by writing detailed responses in the 'open text' boxes). The answer options used for many of the 'tick box' questions (i.e. 'Yes', 'No' and 'Sometimes'), combined with the 'open text' boxes, was perceived to allow individuals with variable conditions to express their situation fully.

Examples given of aids, appliances and types of help gave individuals an understanding of the types of information wanted by DWP and prompted them to record issues that they might otherwise have 'taken for granted'. Individuals with sensory impairments emphasised importance of these in assisted translators in accurately translating the content of the form. The definition of 'help' was revised following feedback on an early draft, to mention 'supervision, prompting, encouraging or reminding': this reassured individuals with mental, cognitive or learning conditions that the claims process covers their needs.

Decision notification letters and post-decision contact

After returning the form (and, in many instances, taking part in a face-to-face consultation with a health professional), individuals will be notified of the decision on their claim by a letter. For those not awarded Personal Independence Payment, or awarded a lesser amount than they currently receive on DLA, attempts will be made (by the DWP Case Manager who made the decision) to phone them, so that they can ask questions and discuss the decision (this is known as the 'explanation call').

Individuals felt that, taken together, the letters and the explanation call displayed transparency, by giving a clear explanation of how the decision had been reached; were helpful and supportive, in giving an opportunity for discussion (by phone) and listing other benefits the individual may be

eligible for (in the letter); and communicated personal ownership of the decision by a specific Case Manager.

The decision notification letters succeeded in communicating their intended messages. A section explaining the decision in detail (called 'Decision Maker's Reasoning') was felt to have potential to 'prove' that the DWP had properly understood the individual's situation and to help individuals decide which, if any, aspects of the decision they might wish to challenge.

Early drafts of the letters did not explain enough about the structure of Personal Independence Payment. An explanation of what was meant by the different rates and components was added in later drafts and was perceived to be effective.

The letters successfully communicated to individuals that they could ask the DWP to reconsider its decision, and that they could only take their case to an independent appeal after asking DWP to reconsider first. For many, the process of DWP reconsidering the decision fulfilled what they currently think of as 'an appeal' and was perceived as less intimidating than going to HM Courts & Tribunals Service.

For the explanation phone call (to those who have not been awarded Personal Independence Payment or who had been awarded a lesser payment amount compared with DLA) to be as effective as possible, there was a perceived need for clarity about the intended purpose of the call – in particular, the extent to which the Case Manager should request additional evidence / information or suggest to claimants that they may wish to ask DWP to reconsider the decision.

Information about the scoring system

In earlier rounds of testing, the decision notification letter was the first time any reference to scores was made, which was felt not to be sufficiently transparent. As a result, later drafts of the various products (letters, leaflets, etc.) included information about the scoring system used within Personal Independence Payment claims, using a 'seeded' approach, whereby scores are explained in increasing detail as the application process progresses.

All of the scoring information was felt to be clearly explained. Its inclusion in the leaflet introducing new claimants to Personal Independence Payment and letters inviting current DLA claimants to make a claim was felt to be appropriate, as it helped prepare individuals for understanding how the decision on their claim had been reached. The inclusion of more detailed explanations in later drafts of the information booklet and the covering letter accompanying the form was also felt to be appropriate (as the form is the point at which the claimant starts to submit the information on their support needs that will ultimately be scored).

Individuals ideally wanted to know the total number of points that it is possible to score for each day-to-day activity used within the Personal Independence Payment process, as a means of putting the scores they had been given into context; and deciding whether or not to dispute scores (as seeing the total possible score for an activity would give an indication of whether 'their' score was relatively low or high).

Conclusions

The programme of user centred design research helped to inform a number of positive outcomes in the design of the Personal Independence Payment claim process and its associated products (leaflets, letters, forms etc.):

- Pre-claim communications were perceived to be clearly-worded;
- Explanations of scoring were felt to be clear, in an appropriate level of detail and contributed to transparency in helping individuals understand how the decision on a claim had been reached;
- The form and information booklet were felt to be relatively short, clearly worded and easy to use; with a number of specific features that assisted individuals to recognise and express their situation and support needs (i.e. the combination of 'open text' boxes and 'tick box' questions; the option to answer 'Yes', 'No' or 'Sometimes' to many of the questions; the examples of aids and appliances; and the definition of 'help');

- The decision notification letters were felt to be clearly worded and gave detailed explanations of how the decision on a claim had been reached, in such a way as to 'prove' that the DWP had fully understood the individual's circumstances, whilst also helping the claimant to decide which, if any, aspects of the decision they might wish to contest.

The testing also highlighted that there was also the potential to make further improvements around utilising communications to clarify the different elements of the end to end process; highlight the purpose and intended advantages of Personal Independence Payment; and add further context to the scoring system. These are currently being addressed by the Programme and are highlighted in the body of the report.

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The full report of these research findings is published by the Department for Work and Pensions (ISBN 978 1 908532 36 6. Research Report 837. April 2013).

You can download the full report free from: <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrs-index.asp>

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