Research context: Early process evaluation of new claims for Personal Independence Payment (PIP)

Personal Independence Payment (PIP) is a new benefit, replacing Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for eligible working age people nationally from June 2013. PIP is designed to better reflect today's understanding of disability - whereas DLA predominantly looked at physical disabilities, PIP looks at people as individuals and how their impairment or health condition impacts their ability to live an independent life. Similarly to DLA, PIP is a non-means-tested benefit intended to contribute to meeting the extra costs of disability and can be awarded to people both in and out of work.

This qualitative piece of research was commissioned in October 2013 as part of the Department's commitment to evaluate the implementation of PIP. It was designed to examine how the claiming process is working for PIP new claimants and to identify potential areas for improving delivery.

This small scale study comprised 36 qualitative interviews with claimants, and those who support them, together with 12 group discussions with Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) staff who are responsible for administering PIP's processes. The interviews and focus groups were conducted in late 2013 and early 2014.

The findings from the report have highlighted that although claimants were broadly satisfied with the experience of claiming PIP there were a few areas where the claimants and staff interviewed felt improvements in the process could be made, as is to be expected with the roll-out of a new benefit.

At the same time as this research was conducted, the Department was closely monitoring the implementation of PIP and taking actions to address any issues during the settling in period.

It is recognised that the findings are based on a snapshot at that point in time during the early implementation of PIP, are not necessarily representative of

the PIP processes as a whole and that progress has taken place since the study to address any issues raised. In particular the Department has made communications to claimants clearer, introduced a dedicated phone service for terminally ill claimants, made a series of improvements to the PIP IT systems and provided further training to staff.

The research findings continue to be discussed with policy makers and managers responsible for PIP, with the aim of improving the way that PIP is delivered to customers. The findings will also feed into to the first Independent Review of PIP, due to report in December 2014.

Progress update on IT improvements

This report cites a number of concerns and areas for improvement with the IT systems used in the administration of PIP.

Inevitably during the development of PIP IT some functionality had to be deferred until later releases, causing some additional work for our staff. Many tasks that staff had to undertake manually during the early days of PIP implementation have since been automated. Future IT releases during 2014 will deliver further improvements to work and task management, and payments processing, further increasing automation. DWP staff involved in the delivery of PIP have been and will continue to be involved in the testing of PIP IT releases.

In addition to these planned IT changes, the PIP Programme have actively sought out and acted on feedback from Operational staff. Thorough investigation of the issues staff have reported resulted in identifying 3 main causes – fixes required to the PIP IT to reduce workarounds, staff not using PIP IT in the most effective way and some capacity issues that are being addressed by a wider Departmental IT change programme.

Mirroring the approach used for processing other DWP benefits and pensions, PIP is delivered using a new automated way of processing claims which is based on tasks. This offers increased automation and optimises staff utilisation and work allocation by allowing more than one member of staff to progress different aspects of the claim simultaneously.

In response to feedback from staff we have run a series of master classes across our network of benefit centres on navigation and workflow management to help users get the best out of this new system. Our experience from these master classes has been used to identify best practice and to strengthen guidance and training.

Staff have subsequently reported seeing improvements to the PIP IT system and as users become more experienced, some have commented positively on the design, ease of use and increased functionality compared to its

predecessor. There is ongoing close liaison between Operations and the PIP Programme to gauge the success of the improvements and identify any new issues. As a result staff tell us they feel their concerns are being listened to and are fully engaged in driving through further improvements. Some recent quotes from staff are included below:

"A better (and simpler) way of moving from work queue to work queue has been introduced, which has proven to be a great help when allocating work and cleansing queues." Case Worker Team Leader

"[The ability to forward tasks] ... has cut down on time, hand-offs involving more than one person" Case Worker

"The facility to allow Case Workers to change allocation dates has been introduced – this saves time in creating a task/hand off to a Case Manager." Case Manager/Business Champion

"Good to see different strands of the business working together to deliver improvements" PIP Manager

While the Department recognises there are ongoing areas for improvement, this is not unexpected at this point in the delivery of a new benefit and development of new IT systems to support it. The performance and reliability of PIP IT is being addressed as a matter of the highest priority. The majority of the concerns highlighted in this evaluation report have been addressed since the research was undertaken and we are still actively looking for more improvements particularly in the work and task management area.