



Context briefing: disabled people

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The purpose of this short update is to highlight several recent significant policy changes in relation to disabled people and welfare conditionality since the publication of the initial briefing paper on this topic in September 2014 (<http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk/publication-category/briefing-papers>). Three noteworthy developments are outlined: the abolition of additional payments to those placed in the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA); the announcement of a new 'Work and Health Programme', and a recent amendment to the Housing and Planning Bill (2015-16) which will allow councils to offer ten year tenancies to disabled people.

The Welfare Reform and Work Act (2016): abolition of the additional WRAG payments

The government included proposals to abolish the WRAG component of ESA (and the corresponding 'limited capability for work' element of Universal Credit (UC)) in the Welfare Reform and Work Bill. Previously, disabled people placed in the WRAG of ESA received an additional benefit payment worth £29.05 per week more than Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). The Welfare Reform and Work Act (2016) abolishes these additional payments for new disabled claimants of ESA and UC from April 2017. Subsequently, disabled people who are not in the Support Group of ESA will be paid benefit at standard JSA rates. It is estimated that such claimants will receive approximately £1500 a year less in benefits (rf. Kennedy et al. 2016a, b for further detailed discussions). This policy change has attracted much criticism (see for example MENCAP, 2015) and was subject to challenge as the bill proceeded through the House of Lords. Nonetheless, the government has defended its approach by stating that the removal of the additional benefit previously paid to those in the WRAG will incentivise disabled people to search for paid work. They have also pledged additional funding to help disabled people move into work, in order to mitigate the impact of the change (Kennedy et al. 2016 b:10).

A new 'Work and Health Programme'

A new Work and Health Programme was announced in 2015. A collaborative project between the Department of Health and the Department for Work and Pensions, this will replace current provisions available under the Work Programme and Work Choice and provide specialist support into work for long-term unemployed people and incapacity benefit claimants (DWP, 2015). At present details of the programme are still being developed but it is likely to be a contracted-out service. The programme has been hailed by the Employment Minister as:

The start of genuine integration between the health and work sectors, with a focus on supporting people with health conditions and disabilities to return to and remain in work. (Patel, 2015)

It will include the launch of the Work and Health Programme in 2017, employment provision in 2017, an expansion of Access to Work, and “at least £115 million of funding for the Work and Health Unit, including a Work and Health Innovation fund” (Patel, 2015).

Ten year council tenancies for disabled people

Within the Housing and Planning Bill (2015-16) the government stated its intention to phase out lifetime tenancies in England and Wales for people in living in council housing and replace them with five year fixed-term tenancies. This move has proved to be contentious and has attracted much criticism and debate as the bill passes through the House of Lords. In response the government announced (April 2016) an amendment to the bill to enable tenancies up to a maximum of ten years for disabled people (Barnes, 2016). The expectation is that:

Those with longer term needs because of a disability or long term illness would be offered longer fixed term tenancies of up to 10 years, and would be offered a further social tenancy at the end of the fixed term, if their circumstances had not changed significantly (DCLG, 2016:5).

About the project

Welfare Conditionality: Sanctions, Support and Behaviour Change is a major five year programme of research funded under the Economic and Social Research Council's Centres and Large Grants Scheme, running 2013-2018. The project aims to create an international and interdisciplinary focal point for social science research on welfare conditionality and brings together teams of researchers working in six English and Scottish Universities: University of Glasgow, Heriot-Watt University, University of Salford, Sheffield Hallam University, University of Sheffield and the University of York, which acts as the central hub for this collaborative partnership.

Central to our work is a desire to inform international policy and practice through the establishment of an original and comprehensive evidence base on the efficacy and ethicality of conditionality across a range of social policy fields and diverse groups of welfare service users.

For further information about the project visit www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk or contact the Project Manager, Vici Armitage, on 01904 321299 or email info@welfareconditionality.ac.uk

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