

Tressa Burke
Deputy Chair
Disability and Carers Benefits Expert Advisory
Group

19 December 2019

Dear Tressa

YOUNG CARER GRANT, EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Thank you for the Group's input to the Equalities Impact Assessment approach for the Young Carer Grant. I was pleased to read the positive comments about carer engagement for the Young Carer Grant, and note your comments on wider equalities issues in respect of disability and carer benefits. I am sorry it has taken me so long to reply.

Equalities data and real life experiences

You asked about the application of equalities data across the formulation of social security policy, and how information about the reality of people's lives, particularly those with Protected Characteristics, will inform carer and disability benefits policy.

As you may be aware, we began mandatory collection of data on equalities as part of the benefit application process on the 9 December 2019, with a 'prefer not to answer' option. This should improve the response rates for the data on protected characteristics and help us improve information available on equality groups and how these intersect. Furthermore we will be undertaking an 'all client' survey in 2020 and this will include the Equality Monitoring and Feedback questions, allowing us to identify issues across protected characteristics and benefits.

While quantitative data is key (and sometimes the only way) to answer questions on reach and representativeness, we do not view it as our only focus.

Our Experience Panels are central to ensuring that the reality of people's lives underpins policy and design decisions on our benefits. We have built this programme in a way to support disabled people, people with caring responsibilities and people with English as a second language to participate. We have also worked

to ensure that the distinct experiences of ethnic minorities are explored, both within the main panels, and as a standalone strand of work. And our ‘seldom heard’ work with specific sensitive, marginalised and dispersed groups gives voice to a range of groups who face specific barriers to public services. In the design of individual benefits, where particular groups are missing from panel members who have volunteered to take part in testing, we recruit in other ways to ensure our service is accessible to all. This work will be mirrored by research with clients going forward, to ensure continuous improvement of delivery by Social Security Scotland.

Furthermore, a key focus of evaluation will be to explore questions that have been identified in the Equality Impact Assessment, and to update the assumptions that we made. Our evaluation strategy for the first wave benefits was recently published and is available [here](#). For the disability and future carer benefits, work is currently underway to identify the key outcomes of interest, which will help us to update our evaluation approach. This will be shared in due course.

Integration across impact assessments, monitoring and evaluation

You also asked about integration across monitoring, evaluation, and impact assessments in policy development.

As you will know from the presentation at the last meeting of Expert Advisory Group, Social Security Scotland have introduced an Equality Impact Assessment Process and are currently consulting on Draft Mainstreaming Equality outcomes. One of the outcomes focuses on Data Collection: '*Social Security Scotland uses the equality data (evidence) collected from clients, our people and other sources to respond to feedback and continually improve the service provided to all clients*'. We look forward through this consultation to developing this outcome and the actions that underpin it to ensure we are using data effectively to monitor impact across all protected characteristics.

In terms of wider policy, we take account of all of the sources of information described above. Each policy decision will lean on a different mix of evidence according to the issue that is being considered, and the availability of that evidence. As the Group has noted in the past, it is not desirable to take a mechanistic approach to how evidence is used, and we do not intend to do so. We do intend that it be clear how we have taken evidence in account, and where necessary we will gather more information before finalising our approach.

Further, using the 78 measures in the Charter Measurement Framework as a starting point over the next 12 months, we will be undertaking work to consolidate and make consistent all the monitoring activity across Social Security Scotland and Scottish Government. The result of this is likely to be a comprehensive map of measurement activity, which will allow in-depth scrutiny of our measurement regimes and the identification of any gaps that may emerge.

Future input and practical suggestions

Thank you for your offer for further input to our monitoring and evaluation, as we welcome scrutiny of our evaluation process. We would be pleased to have your

comments on our published evaluation strategy and how its approach can be adapted to disability and future carer benefits, should you be able to fit this within the workplan of the Group. In addition, the relevant lead staff would be happy to invite you to participate in engagement groups, both for the wider evaluation strategy, and specifically for Young Carer Grant, should you wish to.

In respect of your practical suggestions on staff awareness and understanding, we will take these into account as we develop our learning and development plans.

Thank you again for your input.

Your sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ann McVie".

Ann McVie
Deputy Director, Social Security Policy Division