



wise group

Written Evidence for the Work and Pensions Committee Inquiry: “The Reform of Incapacity Benefit and Pathways to Work”



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Introduction

The Wise Group is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to supporting unemployed people and the economically inactive to find and sustain employment. With over twenty years experience of working with those who are furthest from the labour market, we believe we are in a strong position to inform the inquiry into the reform of incapacity benefits (IB) and Pathways to Work.

With considerably more people claiming IB than there are claiming unemployment benefits, the reform of incapacity benefit is key to tackling the financial, social and economic exclusion faced by large numbers of people with health issues and the economic and demographic realities that the UK economy will face over the next twenty years. The most appropriate way to do this is through the development of employment programmes that can provide comprehensive support and help people to move off incapacity benefits and into the labour market.

The Wise Group has a track record of developing a wide range of successful welfare to work programmes, the best known of which is the Intermediate Labour Market (ILM) model. The ILM helps unemployed and economically inactive people to gain the skills and experience they need to enter the labour market, whilst contributing to the wider regeneration of deprived areas. In providing training and work experience opportunities, an ILM boosts the economic output of a community, assists in the economic regeneration process and encourages community participation and improved skill levels.

Over our twenty-two years of operation, the Wise Group’s approach and programmes have developed and evolved in line with the substantial changes in the economy, labour market and amongst the unemployed population. Since 2002, we have delivered part of the government’s New Deal programmes and are the main provider of New Deal for Young People and a substantial element of the Employment Zone in Glasgow. Our Workable programme works with New Deal for Disabled People participants across Scotland and the North East of England and has enjoyed particular success in engaging with this client group. We deliver an

individually tailored combination of different interventions including paid work experience placements, skills development and supported employment and as a result, since 2002, we have helped over 1,500 people to move off incapacity benefits and into work.

The experiences of our NDDP job brokers confirm that most new claimants of IB have every intention of returning to work. However, the longer they are claiming the further their chances of a return to the labour market decreases. The development of further barriers to employment after this point is inevitable and many clients will approach the prospect of returning to work with anxiety, a lack of confidence and an erratic work history: in common with the 'mainstream' unemployed. This must be taken into the account in the development of new programmes that focus on employability - not disability.

The Wise Group welcomes the opportunity to inform the Work and Pensions Committees considerations on IB reform and Pathways to Work and hope you find our comments useful. We strongly believe that, for most disadvantaged and excluded people, finding and sustaining work is the best starting point for improving their lives.

Executive Summary

- The Pathways to Work pilots form a strong foundation for the reform of Incapacity Benefit with work-focussed interviews helping new IB claimants to return to work by providing clear channels of support and a co-ordinated approach to service delivery
- The pilots have highlighted the success of the New Deal for Disabled People programme, which has in itself been boosted by the mandatory element of the Pathways programme. Compulsion can be an effective tool and should be introduced for all but the most severely disabled claimants.
- Plans to introduce employment advisors into GP surgeries represent an effective and proven method of integrating health and employability approaches and of engaging the most difficult to reach clients with the labour market.
- In order to be truly effective this model must gain the trust of its clients - this is best achieved through the use of an intermediary delivery body, seen as distinct from statutory institutions such as Jobcentre Plus.
- Outsourcing is an effective means of delivering welfare to work programmes and non-governmental organisations can play a significant role in the delivery of Pathways and other IB related programmes
- The not-for-profit sector is best placed to delivery this kind of activity, as a result of its focus on beneficiary need over profit and the way in which they already actively engage with the most disadvantaged groups.
- Established and proven models, such as the Intermediate Labour Market, can play an important role in assisting the IB client group into employment, and should be considered as an effective routeway to the open labour market.

What lessons can be learned from the Pathways to Work pilots in shaping the reform of incapacity benefits?

The Pathways to Work pilots have been a pertinent addition to the available welfare to work provision for economically inactive people with health issues and have provided a strong foundation on which to build incapacity benefit reform.

The recent research update on the pathways pilots has demonstrated the value of work-focussed interviews in helping new IB claimants to return to work by providing clear channels of support and a co-ordinated approach to service delivery¹. With the support of New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP) job broker services, many people who claim incapacity benefits have been encouraged to see the benefits of work as a means by which to improve their quality of life.

The pathways to work pilots have helped to highlight the encouraging results of the NDDP programme. Figures show that there has been 6,660 NDDP registrations within Pathways, of which 4,300 (65%) have gone onto to successfully secure employment.² The mandatory element of the Pathways pilot gives a significant boost to the NDDP programme, which whilst it is delivering results, as an entirely voluntary regime it is unlikely to reach the large numbers of inactive people currently claiming incapacity benefit.

We welcome the extension of compulsion from February 2005, to people who have been on incapacity benefits for up to three years and we would suggest that this should precede the introduction of mandatory participation for all but the most severely disabled claimants when reform is introduced in 2008. Findings from the DWP's Research Report 259³ revealed that many of the participants involved in the Pathways pilots did not object to being asked to attend a Jobcentre Plus office for a work-focussed interview and often considered it to be a reasonable condition of receiving benefit. It would therefore be wrong to assume that

¹ Incapacity Benefit Reforms Pilots: Findings from a longitudinal panel in clients. Department of Work and Pensions Research Report No. 259

² DWP Statistics – August 2005

³ Incapacity Benefit Reforms Pilots: Findings from a longitudinal panel in clients. Department of Work and Pensions Research Report No. 259

compulsory participation in work-focussed support will incite a hostile response from claimants; for some people this may actually provide the impetus they need to instigate a return to the labour market.

Mandatory programmes can be helpful in terms of incentivising people who have been economically inactive for a long time and who are demoralised, isolated or lacking in confidence. We would caution against failing to engage existing claimants in active labour market support, as this will effectively leave a large proportion of the 2.7million people on IB to “languish” on a passive benefit system.

How can healthcare professionals be further engaged in the reform of the incapacity benefits system?

Our experience suggests that further engagement of healthcare professionals should involve the creation of a more integrated approach and a greater degree of joint working between the employment and healthcare services. Signifying a move in the right direction, plans to introduce employment advisers into GP surgeries were detailed in the DWP’s Five-Year Strategy and this should encourage more effective support for economically inactive people with health difficulties.

As highlighted in the Five-Year Strategy⁴, the Wise Group currently delivers intermediary employment support for people with health problems in the Glasgow area. Since January 2004, [the Compass project](#) has worked with over 60 General Practitioners to provide economically inactive patients with a joint service of employability support and professional, health-related advice. Patients who participate in the Compass programme receive a customised package of support based on their current level of employability, the physical and psychological challenges they face and their aspirations for work. The project has enjoyed particular success with 78% of clients improving their employability, 22% reducing their medication and 49% into full-time paid employment.

An independent evaluation of the Compass project found that the involvement of primary health care professionals to be critical to its success. Beneficiaries believed that the team’s knowledge of their medical history led to a realistic assessment of their capacity to work. For the majority of participants a positive

⁴ The Department of Work and Pensions Five-Year Strategy – Opportunities and security throughout life, page 45.

employability assessment from the GP convinced them to take a positive approach to the support on offer from the Compass team. Moreover, clients did not feel less trust towards their GP if they did not succeed. The researchers concluded that this was because Compass acted as an intermediary between the Jobcentre and the health service and did not attract any of the prejudice or scepticism that clients may have felt towards statutory employment agencies.⁵

The Compass model requires partner organisations to be 'invisible' to the client with all support branded as 'Compass'. When working with the Compass team, staff from partner organisations such as Jobcentre Plus, presented themselves to clients as part of Compass. This was found to be extremely important, as some clients expressed very strong views on their negative experiences of other employment initiatives and their negative perceptions of some of the agencies involved in employability.⁶ We would suggest that the findings of the Compass evaluation have implications for the government's approach to programme development for the IB group and would recommend that intermediary bodies, like the Wise Group be used to deliver active labour market support.

The Compass programme has demonstrated the value of a partnership approach when working with people with health issues. Discussions with the evaluation team illustrated that participants did not regard Compass with the same suspicion that they felt towards statutory employment services. Compass was not viewed as being part of 'the system' in the same way as the partner agencies are often viewed and clients continually cited the benefits of having Compass operate within the GP practice, perceiving the primary health care team as being the last to get involved in this type of project.⁷

Our experiences with the Compass project would lead us to strongly recommend that the introduction of employment advisors into GP surgeries be undertaken with the involvement of the not-for-profit sector. An independent brand such as Compass works because it does not stimulate the same levels of mistrust amongst participants, as statutory agencies are liable to do.

⁵ Compass Evaluation Final Report for NHS Glasgow

⁶ ibid

⁷ ibid

Have the private and voluntary sectors been successfully involved in the Pathways pilots?

To date there has been limited opportunity for the private and voluntary sector to be involved in the Pathways to Work pilots. Responsibility for Pathways delivery currently lies with Jobcentre Plus and any involvement of other organisations has been restricted in the main to NDDP service provision. As stated earlier, the NDDP programme has been instrumental in the success of the Pathways pilots. This suggests that there should be greater involvement of non-statutory organisations in helping people who claim IB to enter the labour market.

The outsourcing of government employment initiatives, such as the New Deal and Employment Zone, illustrate that competition in service provision helps to create more efficient and effective programmes. Outsourcing has proved to be a successful way of enhancing local control over service delivery by decreasing the role of more centralised government bureaucracies.

However, this approach is not without its drawbacks. As private sector organisations have started to deliver these programmes, conflicts can arise between welfare to work provision and the acquisition of profit, with the susceptibility of the “profit motive” to supersede the needs of beneficiaries.⁸ We would therefore suggest that not-for-profit organisations are the most appropriate providers of employability support to the IB population.

Investor-owned delivery organisations are driven by the need to provide a return on investment to their shareholders. This is not a negative in itself, in fact the desire to make a surplus can increase motivation to perform on key targets. Although a non-profit making organisation, operating in a competitive market, the Wise Group is driven by the same pressures of cost efficiency and the desire to make an annual surplus as for-profit companies. The fundamental difference is that not-for-profits generate a financial return that

⁸ Freedman et al (2002) Uncharted Terrain: The Intersection of Privatisation and Welfare, Welfare Law Centre.

aims to ensure the long-term sustainability of socially beneficial provision and is ultimately reinvested for the good of our beneficiaries.

The not-for-profit sector has been identified as particularly able to help those people who are furthest from the labour market and is expected to play a significant role in service provision for IB claimants after the reform of the benefit. According to Minister for Work, Margaret Hodge, *“for a lot of the inactive in the labour market, the voluntary sector, in particular, has a strong role to play.”*⁹ The Wise Group agree with the Minister for Work that not-for-profit organisations are most effective at reaching out to marginalised groups and this is largely because they are not subject to the distraction of profit margins faced by their for-profit counterparts.

For-profit service providers

There is a risk that private sector providers of welfare to work programmes face pressures in delivering profit margins that can lead to numerous shortfalls in the delivery of welfare to work provision; and these are primarily felt by beneficiaries.

Any organisation has an incentive to avoid delivering “unprofitable” programmes that have the potential to become a financial burden. However, if an organisation is also expected to offer a return on investment to its shareholders, that incentive is magnified. There are numerous examples from the US of the advantages of not-for-profit organisations and the shortcomings of for-profit companies in the delivery of welfare services.

Studies have shown that because of the nature of commercial business, for-profit providers are inclined to work with beneficiaries from whom they have the best chance of making a profit.¹⁰ Marmor, Schlesinger and Smithey¹¹ found that for-profit providers of healthcare in the US tended to work with lower numbers of people on lower income and under-insured patients who were unable to pay for care and were therefore

⁹ Financial Times – *“Private agencies and voluntary groups likely to be given sickness benefit role.”* 15th September 2005.

¹⁰ Marmor, Schlesinger and Smithey (1987); Gilman, M. (2001); Bendick, M (1989)

¹¹ Marmor, Schlesinger and Smithey (1987) “Nonprofit Organisations and Health Care” in *The Nonprofit Sector Handbook* New Haven: Yale University Press, 221-239

perceived as “unprofitable”. They report that this has meant that the success of for-profit companies may be at the expense of the significant needs of more disadvantaged groups. We would suggest that the same problems are likely to be encountered in the for-profit provision of welfare to work programmes in the UK, with their being a temptation to ‘park’ the “unprofitable” hardest to help clients in favour of those who are closer to the labour market and therefore more likely to generate profitable job outcomes. There are clearly economic and moral issues surrounding the idea of ‘writing off’ of sub-sections of the workless population.

This is demonstrated for example by research into the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families programme in the US, which has found that for-profit companies focus their support on those people who more “work-ready” and therefore considered to be potentially more lucrative.

The case of TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families)

The introduction of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (PRA) in the US allowed non-profits to deliver a greater proportion of the welfare to work provision, but it also opened the door to large for-profit organisations to enter into the delivery of the welfare to work programme, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF).

Inherent to the corporate structure of for-profits is a need to generate a significant financial return and this increases the incentives for profit-seeking organisations to implement cost-cutting savings. Research into the delivery of TANF by for-profit companies has found that the desire to make a profit led to reductions in resources and a tendency to help only those persons most easily placed into jobs.¹²

Furthermore, Crew and Lamothe (2003)¹³ used data on employment outcomes and satisfaction among clients to compare government, for-profit, and nonprofit providers of welfare services in Florida. The study

¹² Gilman, M. (2001) Legal Accountability in an Era of Privatized Welfare, 81 Cal. L. Rev. 569

¹³ Crew, R. (2003) Evaluating The Efficiency Of Private Sector Organisations in Helping Welfare Beneficiaries Find Employment . *Eval Rev.* 2003; 27: 151-164

indicated that nonprofits and public agencies are more successful than for-profits in finding unsubsidised employment for welfare clients,

Studies suggest that for-profit firms have an incentive to minimise quality of care (unless this will harm their business), minimise staff costs and minimise spending on non-profitable activities (including particular services and client groups).¹⁴ This observation is consistent with the findings of Bendick, who examined the efficacy of the privatisation of publicly delivered social services within a framework of public financing¹⁵. He indicated that not-for-profit deliverers had a better record in providing services in the interest of clients beyond what was precisely specified in contracts. Accordingly, where problems are complex, such as welfare to work programmes, he recommended the privatising of programmes to the not-for-profit sector rather than to the for-profit sector, an approach he refers to as the "empowerment of mediating institutions".¹⁶ On the basis of these findings the Wise Group would suggest that the higher efficiency savings that for-profit companies are impelled to make do have a significant impact on the quality of service provided.

Not-for-profit organisations like the Wise Group do generate a 'surplus' of revenue over costs, but we are at liberty to use this money in ways that propagate value for public investment. This includes subsidising programmes that whilst unprofitable, provide a social return on expenditure. This means that innovative projects that would be ruled out by private companies purely on a cost basis can be developed by not-for-profit organisations to the benefit of groups in need of specific support. One such programme would be the Compass project, as detailed above. Compass has no pecuniary benefits to the Wise Group; however, the evaluation of the project demonstrates the many other positive outcomes for people with health issues. As a not-for-profit organisation, the Wise Group is therefore in a position to offer supplementary employability support to people on incapacity benefits that for-profit companies are not motivated to do.

¹⁴ Raisa, B. (2002) Delivering Health Care Services: Public, Not-For-Profit, or Private? University of Toronto, August.

¹⁵ Bendick, M (1989) "Privatizing the Delivery of Social Welfare Service." Privatization and the Welfare State. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

¹⁶ *ibid*

How can voluntary and private sector be further involved in the reform of incapacity benefits?

As stated above, we would recommend that non-statutory agencies continue to be involved in the provision of welfare to work support for people who claim incapacity benefit. Organisations such as the Wise Group have the experience and knowledge to deliver such programmes, and can add value to them through the wealth of other activity that they already deliver.

In order to ensure that effective programmes of support are in place for the increased number of mandatory referrals that will be provoked by reform, it is important that creditable methods of intervention are used in parallel with innovative programmes. We would recommend the expansion of Intermediate Labour Market (ILM) to provide IB recipients with an employment continuum that facilitates their transition from benefits into unsupported work.

“Innovative approaches for the future will need to learn from some of the cutting edge work in ILMs, which provide pathways to work through Community based activity.” (Blunkett, 2000). The Wise Group pioneered the Intermediate Labour Market (ILM) model in the UK and continues to operate programmes twenty years on. Research has shown the ILM to be a valuable tool for helping the long-term unemployed and those furthest from the labour market into employment. The success of the ILM in helping different client groups is widely acknowledged and the Government has adopted the model, which forms an integral part of the New Deal programme.

As the main provider of New Deal for Young People in Glasgow, we have found that the ILM continues to be a crucial form of work-based training and experience for people who have been out of work for a significant period of time and effectively need to bridge the gap between welfare and work. In addition to our NDYP clients, we currently have over one hundred NDDP participants gaining valuable work experience or training on our programmes and we would argue for the further expansion of this programme to give more IB claimants the appropriate support to find employment.

There are a number of reasons why the ILM is an appropriate intervention for the IB group and these are detailed below.

It provides 'real' work in a supported environment. The ILM has shown that the best way to engage people who are furthest from the labour market is to offer them a wage and meaningful work. With the added support and capacity building that is incorporated into an ILM programme, progression in terms of soft skills development and overall employability naturally follows from participation. The emphasis is on preparation for work but the package includes training towards a qualification, personal support, career planning and aftercare support. For IB claimants who require a supported approach to work, the transitional nature of the ILM is ideal because it gives participants the opportunity to 'test' work and identify what type of employment they are best suited to, any additional support they may need and crucially, help to alleviate any fear they may have of the working environment.

It is an integrated model that targets a wide range of client groups; removing the disability label. The overall aim of the ILM is to provide the necessary support for people who are distanced from the labour market to help them find meaningful, paid work. Participants therefore come from different backgrounds and face various barriers to employment. As much as possible, an ILM should reflect a real work environment, programmes are not (and should not) be developed to cater solely for one client group, such as disabled people, but should include participants of different ages, backgrounds etc. With its primary focus on employability, the ILM therefore removes the disability label with IB claimants working in mixed teams where the only common barrier amongst participants is their employment status. In effect, the ILM puts all participants on a level playing field and removes the damaging and often unmerited association between disability and incapacity to work.

It is a flexible model that can be structured as either a demand or supply-led intervention. The flexibility of the ILM means that it can be easily adapted to suit different client groups and different local labour markets. The traditional ILM provides paid work experience and training for a period of sufficient length to ensure that clients can make the transition from benefit to stable employment, whilst delivering work that has other community benefits. This programme was, and continues to be, most appropriate and highly effective for people who have been out of work over an extended period of time, given that they often require more intensely supported work experience in order to become job ready. Many IB claimants

will need concentrated support in order to help them find work and this model is particularly suited to this group.

The demand-led ILM intervention delivers a variety of projects in direct partnership with local employers, offering beneficiaries closer to the labour market a range of work-based learning opportunities. Unlike the traditional ILM, work experience is provided independently of the ILM provider, with employers providing mentoring support to beneficiaries whilst on placement. Demand-led programmes seek to guarantee beneficiaries interviews for employment, and are fundamental in ensuring engagement with public and private sector employers on a sectoral basis. In addition, they tend to be shorter and therefore less expensive than the traditional ILM. Demand-led programmes will work well for some IB clients who are keen to work and with the correct support could quickly find employment. The further advantage of this model is that it requires employer buy-in and therefore encourages further commitment from employers to tackle disability discrimination in the workplace. The Wise Group currently operates [the WHIGG project](#) (Working for Health in Greater Glasgow) which was developed in response to employment opportunities in the NHS and aims to widen the labour market, improve the diversity of the NHS workforce and improve the health of new recruits. We have just begun the second phase of the initiative, which, having helped 95 out of the 149 trainees into work in 2004, has been expanded and we expect to offer opportunities for employment this year to 350 long-term unemployed people.

It is an added-value model with wider regeneration benefits. The ILM is an added-value model - as well as delivering jobs and qualifications and increasing participants' overall employability, the ILM model has a social, economic and often a physical impact on the local area in which they operate. In providing training and work experience opportunities, an ILM boosts the economic output of a community, assists in the economic regeneration process, encourages community participation and improves skill levels. The effects of the ILM extend far beyond employment and training benefits to the positive influencing of the wider economic, social and environmental dimensions that are deemed essential in improving the quality of life for both individuals and communities throughout the UK.

The ILM is often criticised for being a costly intervention even though the funds needed to deliver an ILM programme are relatively small when the results and added value of the programmes are taken into account. As Marshall and MacFarlane argue, *"compared with other initiatives for the same target group, ILM programmes offer equivalent or better value for money through higher job placement, durability of*

employment rates and the higher incomes gained". In order to calculate the real costs of an ILM place it is important to consider the costs of no intervention. Researchers at Northumbria University¹⁷ suggest that it costs an average of £10,426.44 per annum to keep somebody on Incapacity Benefit. This is calculated by adding the average annual amount of Incapacity Benefit (£84 per week) given to one person to the annual amount lost to the exchequer in terms of taxes and National Insurance (based on the national average full time wage of £26,903) plus the cost of administering the Incapacity Benefit system itself:

Average IB payment (£84)	£4,368.00
Lost Taxes and NI payment	£5,918.66
Administrative costs	£139.78
Total	£10,426.44

We would suggest that this is a rather conservative estimate, as it does not include the additional benefits that many IB recipients claim such as council tax benefit, housing benefit and income support.

The average cost of a place on an ILM programme ranges is estimated to be between £7,000 and £14,000, we would suggest that the annual cost is approximately £10,000, therefore costing less than it would for an individual to stay on benefits for the year. As stated in the Five-Year Strategy, once a person has been on Incapacity Benefit for 12 months, the average duration of their claim will be eight years. Therefore with no intervention after twelve months the government can expect to spend £83,411.52 on an IB recipient. It is clear therefore that the ILM is a highly cost-effective means of intervention even without considering the added value of the ILM that results from the physical and economic regeneration that ILM programmes create.

¹⁷ Source: A feasibility study by Northumbria University of behalf of Finchdale Training College:
http://online.northumbria.ac.uk/csru/worddocs/finchdale_final_draft.doc

Conclusions

The Pathways to Work pilots have signified an important early stage in the reform of IB and the creation of a welfare to work system that enables those most removed from the labour market to access opportunities. It is important that this model links to other examples of best practice in order to provide a comprehensive system of support. The success of the New Deal for Disabled programme and its contribution to the Pathways pilots must be acknowledged and the element of compulsion introduced through the pilots should be extended to cover most IB claimants.

The Wise Group's Compass model demonstrates that plans to introduce employment advisors into GP surgeries are likely to be highly successful. However key to the model's success will be the use of intermediary delivery organisations such as the Wise Group, that provide a safe and trusted forum in which participants can explore their employment options.

We support the idea of outsourcing for the delivery of programmes targeted at the IB client group and would advocate that the not-for-profit sector be considered a major potential provider. Many voluntary sector organisations have trusted and well established relationships with disabled people, and are able to engage with the most difficult to reach groups. The not-for-profit sector provides a high quality of service, and are motivated to assist even the most difficult clients, un-fettered by the limitations of the profit-motive, that limits the lengths to which many private sector organisations are willing to go.

The Wise Group strongly supports the increased emphasis on employment as a route to improve the lives of people living on IB. We believe that employment is the best way to move people out of poverty and social exclusion and would welcome the opportunity to further comment on these issues in discussion with the Work and Pensions Committee.

The Wise Group is a not for profit organisation whose key focus is helping those outside of, or disadvantaged within, the labour market to change their lives through improving their labour market position. We operate throughout Scotland and the North East of England.

The Wise Group is managed by a voluntary Board of Directors which consists of:

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