

The Scottish Parliament

CROSS PARTY GROUP ON DEAFNESS

*Meeting Notes of the Cross Party Group on Deafness
held in the Scottish Parliament, Holyrood, Edinburgh
on Wednesday 12th March 2014 at 1.00 pm*

PRESENT: Jenny Marra MSP (Convenor)
Mark Griffin MSP
Annabelle Ewing MSP
Jackie Slater (Deaf Action)
Katie Rafferty (NDCS)
Graham Duff (BDA Scotland)
Bert Smale (ATLA)
Dennis Arnold (Dumfries and Galloway Hard of Hearing Group)
Carol Thomson (BATOD)
Graham Findlay (NESS)
Alana Trusty (Deaf Links)
Elizabeth Adam (Tayside Deaf Forum)
John Denerley (Deaf Connections)
Carly Brownlie (SASLI)
Rachel O'Neill (University of Edinburgh)
Mandy Reid (SCoD)
Janis McDonald (SCoD & CPGD Secretariat)

Also in attendance: Ross McKenzie (Jenny Marra's Assistant), Jacqueline Brown (Partnership Development Manager DWP), a foreign student observer, Andrew Dewey, Yvonne Waddell (BSL/English Interpreters) and Mel Coulter (Notetaker).

CPGD/405 **WELCOME REMARKS:** The Convenor welcomed everyone to the meeting.

CPGD/406 **APOLOGIES:** Apologies for non-attendance had been received from Dennis Robertson MSP, Dr Richard Simpson MSP, Jim Edwards (Signature), Delia Henry (AoHL), Alan Dalziel (AoHL), Willie Macfadyen (Hayfield), Sheila Mackenzie (SSC), Janis Sugden (SSC), Donald Richards (Donaldson's), Fiona Jarvis (RCSLT), Rebecca Norton (Hearing Link), Linda Sharkey (Hearing Link), Carole Lyons (Deaf Connections).

CPGD/407 **WELFARE REFORM:** Jenny Marra MSP introduced Jacqueline Brown from the DWP. Jacqueline told the meeting that she would speak about Universal Credit and give a brief update on Personal Independence Payment. She and her colleagues are willing to speak to community groups and others throughout Scotland about the changes being made to the benefits system – please do contact her. SCoD has her details.

Universal Credit (UC) is for people who are unemployed as well as those in work. It is paid monthly and if people really cannot manage their money on a monthly basis, there are other arrangements in place to support them – personal budgeting support. Housing costs are now paid to the person rather than the landlord.

The 16 hour per week barrier to work has been removed so that people can take up employment on a part-time basis if this suits them.

Universal Credit replaces Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit and Housing Benefit. There are a huge number of people who are in low paid jobs who will receive UC.

Within UC, there are a number of elements that can be included – a child element, child care cost element, additions for disabled children, additions if someone is looking after a disabled child and an addition if you have a disability or health condition. There is more information about UC on the gov.uk website - <https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit> and the toolkit - <https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit-toolkit-for-partner-organisations>

The DWP ran a Pathfinder in the North East of England in preparation for the introduction of UC and the benefit is being introduced in a planned way throughout the country. In Scotland, 18 – 24 year old people living in the Inverness area who are single and unemployed are claiming UC. In July 2014, the introductory postcode areas will start taking claims from couples, then in October 2014 families will be invited to claim. This planned process allows each process to be checked for against the support services and IT usage.

Three pilots run by the DWP and three pilots run by the Scottish Government have looked at different aspects of UC and potential supports needed for claimants. These have now all ended and are being evaluated; the findings will influence UC delivery. There is an overarching partnership agreement between the DWP, Scottish Government and COSLA – this means that information will be available on the COSLA website. There should be local authority support for people through the community planning partnerships.

The DWP are developing digital job centres and “in work progression” pilots. The digital job centres will mean people have a greater access to technology to help them find work – plan their CV, update their job matches, and learn computer skills at the same time. There is an ongoing issue being looked at – security and privacy.

An addition to UC is Claimant Commitment. This is being brought in for everyone making a new claim for Job Seekers Allowance or the

Returning to Work Programme, as well as UC. All frontline staff have undergone training in soft skills and how to be work coaches. This work coaching will look at skills and personal circumstances to help people look for suitable work. So questions may be – do you live on a public transport route? Do you have a driving licence but cannot afford a car? Do you have alternative arrangements for childcare in the evening? Do you have to care for elderly parents? Do you need lessons in English? The work coaches will then support the person to look at possible solutions to allow them to take up work. They will also look at what training needs are and can they be met locally or do special arrangements have to be made. There will be more contact so that if, for example, someone is going to miss an appointment or be late because their childcare arrangements have failed, then as long as the person contacts their named person in the job centre, no sanctions will apply.

Q: Staff dealing with deaf claimants do not seem to be deaf aware and may need training. What is being done about this?

A: The DWP has a strategy where staff can go on courses to look at how they should work with people with sensory impairments or mental health conditions. There is an escalation route for dealing with problems if they are not being addressed at a local level. The Claimant Commitment encourages people to bring along a support worker, a friend or a family member to their face-to-face meetings.

Q: It has taken years for interpreters to be recognised as the correct communication route. Bringing family/friends to a meeting is a backward step and a human – rights issue.

Q. Escalation should not be seen as a substitution for equality of access. Are you going to provide interpreters that are impartial? Will the DWP look at the jobcentres having local partnership connections with deaf organisations so that deaf people are receiving the best service possible?

A: The DWP have a District Provision Tool that all frontline Jobcentre staff have access to. The Tool lists all local organisations that can help support a claimant; the local lists will be checked to make sure they have local deaf organisations' details listed. The option to bring family or friends with you is only one option and each claimant has the choice.

Q. Is there provision in the BSL Bill for interpreters to be provided?

A. Mark Griffin MSP – the BSL Bill is a Scottish Bill, whereas the DWP is UK-wide and subject to reserved matters. Scottish government agencies must provide interpreters.

SASLI is working with the Deaf Community to discourage them from using family and/or friends because of the potential for misinformation and miscommunication as they will not necessarily have the skills needed to translate complex information and providing the wrong information could cost the person their benefit.

Annabelle Ewing MSP – there is an issue of confidentiality if family/friends are used to interpret.

Jacqueline will take the comments and information regarding interpreters back to the DWP.

Q. What progress is being made on the PIP delays? Some delays are five or six months long.

A. Firstly, ATOS is still assessing people for PIP. The reporting in the media is about the contract ATOS has for the Work Capability Assessment. ATOS are carrying out Quality Assurance Monitoring on all of their cases and this has resulted in a backlog – they are looking at how to clear the backlog and move the process forward. There are few statistics as yet. The DWP are continuing to look at how to move the claimant process on.

Q. Some deaf children will lose up to £1500 per year as they will lose out on the higher rate of PIP so will also have a reduction in their disabled child allowance. What conversations has the DWP had with local authorities and government to mitigate the impact on families?

Q. Is there a budget for communication support for young people in transition between school and employment, and are there still disabled employment advisers?

A. Disabled Child Allowance is to be part of Universal Credit. When this is trialled for families, this allowance and possible impacts will be looked at in more depth. Disabled Employment Advisers do still exist and should be playing more of a role in transitions for young people. Access to communication support – will take this back to the DWP for further discussion.

Jenny Marra asked that the DWP write to the Cross Party Group before the AGM on 11th June 2014 with answers to the questions raised that need a more in-depth answer.

CPGD/408 **MEETING NOTES FROM 3RD DECEMBER 2013**: The Convenor stated that she thought these to be a comprehensive record. The meeting agreed that these are an accurate record.

CPGD/409 **MATTERS ARISING:**
409a **Ref: CPGD/398c: Scottish Lipreading Strategy Group:** Bert Smale gave an update. The group appointed a research assistant in December 2013 to find evidence on what lipreading class provision there is at the moment in Scotland and how the strategy could be taken forward.

CPGD/410 **BSL BILL UPDATE:** Mark Griffin MSP gave a brief update. The draft Bill is still with the legal draughtsman and the legal team at the NGBU. It is hoped that the Bill will be introduced to the Parliament in June 2014. JD raised a concern that the Bill may be delayed due to the referendum and other activities such as the Commonwealth Games; and is there a need to put in place a similar group that supported Mark with his consultation. Mark Griffin responded that there is no need for such a sub-group at the present time as there is no formal role for him or a sub group in drafting the legislation as this is done by an independent legal draughtsman who has the analysis of the consultation responses. Mark Griffin told that meeting that there will be no delay due to the events mentioned. The Bill is scheduled to be introduced to Parliament in June for a Stage 1 debate. Mark will continue to update the Cross Party Group.

CPGD/411 **THEMES FOR FUTURE MEETINGS:** The Convenor asked for possible themes to consider for this year's meetings.

1. Language rights for deaf children – Rachel O'Neill as a speaker. Invite Alasdair Allan, Minister for Languages?
2. See Hear – Joint Sensory Impairment Strategy – possibly a joint Cross Party Group meeting with Visual Impairment?
3. Post school transitions: University of Edinburgh has carried out a piece of research looking at academic attainment and what the gaps are in outcomes for deaf children – invite the Minister for Youth Employment to respond to this? AoHL have a transitions project and Delia Henry would like to speak on this.
4. Lack of awareness in health settings about the needs of deaf people, including accessibility of wellbeing/information and empowerment and confidence.
5. Data collection – number of deaf children/people; the numbers of deaf people accessing services, linked with health inequalities. Anne McKinnon in NHS Tayside is leading on data collection re deaf children.
6. Education for deaf children in mainstream schools and the quality of that education; and how deaf children access their deaf peers – invite Mike Russell, Minister for Education?
7. The Referendum and access to information for Deaf people – BDA are having a session on this. But what of political parties and access to information about them and campaigns to make information accessible? – Graham Duff to speak to this?

The Convenor and the Secretariat will look at the list and set themes for the meetings, and invite people to speak to the theme. Members were asked to consider how information can be shared among the group. A lot of time is taken up in the meeting sharing information. There may be other ways of sharing this information that leave more time for debate at the meetings themselves.

A member asked that the minutes be produced in BSL and all papers circulated before the meeting. JM told the meeting that this would be looked at. It was suggested that the Parliament should be able to translate the minutes to make sure they are accessible as there are only four meetings per year. Members to look at other possible solutions and to share these with Jenny Marra as Convenor.

CPGD 412 AOCB:

412a ATLA – Bert Smale referred to a letter from ATLA saying that the organisation will no longer support his attendance at the meetings as the meetings seemed to concentrate on Deaf issues rather than all deaf issues. There was some discussion on this. Bert Smale asked if he could continue to attend as an individual member. Bert was thanked for his contributions over the years and it was agreed that he could continue to attend as an individual.

It was agreed that Annabelle Ewing MSP would write to the Chair of ATLA on Bert's behalf.

412b Teachers of the Deaf – Carole Thomson reported that a piece of research was published recently that states that six teachers of the deaf in Scotland have been in post for over five years but have no qualifications. What can be done about this? Jenny Marra suggested that some PQs be submitted on the subject.

CPGD/413 DATES OF NEXT CPGD MEETING: The Convenor and the Secretariat will meet to discuss these as well as the themes. The next meeting will include the AGM which needs to take place before the 11th June 2014. Dates will be emailed out to members.