



## Petitions Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

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Paul Johnson  
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18 November 2015

Dear Mr Johnson,

The Petitions Committee recently considered an e-petition entitled “Assess full impact of all cuts to support & social care for disabled people”, which has now been signed by over 31,000 people and has received a response from the Government. The petition reads as follows:

*Assess full impact of all cuts to support & social care for disabled people*

Govt has ignored calls for a full assessment of the impact of Welfare, Social Care & NHS reform on disabled people and their families. The number of households with a disabled family member living in “absolute poverty” increased by 10% between 2013 & 14.

Since WOWpetition collected 104,000 signatures the Government claimed IFS said it was too difficult to do a CIA, IFS subsequently contradicted the claim and said it could be done. EHRC and Social Security Advisory Committee have also called for a CIA of how cuts have affected disabled people and their families. A Cumulative Impact Assessment undertaken by Landman Economics and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research proved disabled people have been hit the hardest by cuts.

Since the IFS is named in this petition, and there seems to be a doubt about its position on this matter, I wanted to write to give you the opportunity to clarify this point. The Government did not address this question in its response, other than to say that “it is not possible, using the Government’s existing analytical tools, to produce a cumulative assessment of the impact of policies on disabled people.” The full response has been published at: <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/106068>

In due course, I will be placing this letter and your reply in the public domain.

Helen Jones MP

Chair of the Petitions Committee

E-mail to Helen Jones MP, Chair of the Petitions Committee, from Paul Johnson, Director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, dated 22 November 2015.

Dear Ms Jones,

Thank you for your letter of 18th November. I welcome the opportunity to clarify our position on this issue.

The IFS has for many years maintained a tax and benefit microsimulation model that enables us to calculate the average direct cash gains or losses from tax and benefit changes for different groups of households. This model uses data from detailed household surveys and typically operates at the household level. Until recently, the datasets we used contained a number of variables that could be used to identify people with disabilities but did not contain variables that enabled us to identify those who are disabled according to the statutory definition (which asks whether people have a physical or mental health conditions or illnesses that has lasted, or is expected to last, 12 months or more, and reduces their ability to carry out day to day activities). Thus, although we were able show average losses from tax and benefit changes among households containing someone on a disability benefit (see for example Table 2 of <http://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/bns/bn150.pdf>), these results would be somewhat different if a different definition of disability were used, and do not in any case correspond to the statutory definition that is relevant for a formal impact assessment. We communicated this view to an official at the Department of Work and Pensions when asked, and the department subsequently used this in press briefings.

More recently, one of the datasets we use (the Family Resources Survey) has included variables that enable us to identify individuals who are disabled according to the statutory definition. This has enabled us to calculate average losses from direct tax and benefit changes for households containing an individual who is disabled according to the statutory definition, and compare this with losses for other households (see for example Table 3.2 of <http://election2015.ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/bns/BN159.pdf> and Table 3.1 of <http://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/comms/R111.pdf>). This analysis gives a sense of whether disabled people have been disproportionately affected by the government's tax and benefit changes.

It inevitably falls short of a comprehensive impact assessment of government policy in a number of respects: it only takes account of changes to taxes and benefits, ignoring how departmental spending supports disabled people, and it only looks at the impacts on people's incomes, not other outcomes of interest such as whether the government's changes make it easier or harder for disabled people to manage their conditions, find work or participate in society.

I hope this is clear.

Best wishes

Paul

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