

Welfare Reform Bill 2011 equality impact assessments: General introduction

To accompany the statement made by the Chancellor on 20 October 2010 on the Spending Review 2010, HM Treasury published 'An overview of the impact of the Spending Review 2010 on equalities' http://cdn.hm-treasury.gov.uk/sr2010_equalities.pdf. This set out HM Treasury's approach to considering the equality impacts. For tax and welfare measures, HM Treasury undertook a screening exercise and the overview published high level impacts of the Spending Review on groups protected by equality legislation. HM Treasury also indicated that after the statement on 20 October, full impact assessments would be considered and published by relevant departments in due course.

Where appropriate, therefore, the Department for Work and Pensions has assessed the impact on equality of the proposed changes which are now contained in the Welfare Reform Bill. Proposals have been assessed in line with the current public sector equality duties which require the Department to show due regard when developing new policies or processes to the impact of the proposals on race, disability and gender (including gender reassignment).

Wherever possible, we have also anticipated the new public sector duty being introduced by the Equality Act 2010 which comes into force from 6 April 2011. In some equality impact assessments, we have therefore considered the additional protected characteristics of age, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity and religion and belief.

If relevant, definitions have been amended to reflect the implementation of changes introduced by the Equality Act 2010 from 1 October 2010. This, for example, covers the definition of disability, where we use the definition contained in the Equality Act rather than the overtaken Disability Discrimination Acts 1995 and 2005.

The Department uses an equality impact assessment tool and processes which are designed to help to ensure that:

- the Department's strategies, policies and services are free from discrimination;
- the Department complies with current equality legislation;
- due regard is given to equality in decision making and subsequent processes; and
- opportunities for promoting equality are identified.

Data with regard to the new protected characteristics

In advance of the new public sector duty taking effect from 6 April 2011, the Department has not routinely collected certain data – for example on customers' religion or beliefs or sexuality. The Department is currently

exploring what information it can collect on the additional protected characteristics of age, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, religion or belief, marriage and civil partnership and pregnancy and maternity. Where these data have not been recorded by the Department, policy makers will look at using alternative sources of data as well as consultation and involvement to examine the potential and real impacts of its policies.

Consultation and involvement

The Department has well-established mechanisms for engaging with organisations that work with and represent its customers. Briefly, these comprise:

- the quarterly DWP Policy & Strategy Forum, which is used as a vehicle for consulting with policy officers of key national organisations that work with and represent our customers, as we develop our thinking and our policies; organisations represented include Citizens Advice, Local Government Association, Age UK, and a wide variety of disability organisations and those that work with our most disadvantaged customers;
- the Equality Schemes Customer Reference Group which helps the Department involve customers specifically on equality matters and acts as a consultation group for the Department's Equality Schemes. The Group usually meets twice a year and has representatives from each of the equality areas;
- our Customer Representative Forum programme – three larger-scale events (the Annual Forum in London, Welsh Annual Forum in Cardiff and Scottish Annual Forum in Edinburgh/Glasgow) that are designed to allow engagement with representatives of the frontline organisations that work with our customers at regional and local level; these include a wide variety of advice and support organisations from the voluntary sector, as well as health and social services.

In addition to these standing consultation arrangements the Department regularly holds discussions with key stakeholders about current issues and new initiatives.

In advance of the Chancellor's statement on 20 October 2010 on the Spending Review, the Department published a consultation paper '21st Century Welfare' seeking views on the future of the benefit and tax credit system [21st Century Welfare - DWP](#). Further consultation papers have been published since 20 October on Disability Living Allowance reform [Disability Living Allowance reform - DWP](#) and child maintenance [Strengthening families, promoting parental responsibility: the future of child maintenance – public consultation - DWP](#). Full details of public consultation papers are given at [Consultations - DWP](#).

Further engagement with both internal and external stakeholders about the measures proposed in the Bill has also taken place since 20 October. For

example, the Policy & Strategy Forum on 16 November 2010 considered a number of Spending Review measures, including the Disability Living Allowance Mobility Component measure, as did the Scottish Annual Forum on 4 November. The Equality Schemes Customer Reference Group considered Disability Living Allowance reform on 7 October.

Where further engagement and involvement with stakeholders has taken place, details are contained in the relevant equality impact assessment.