

Summary of the twelfth Welfare Working Group meeting, 26 November 2010

The day

- Welfare Working Group business
- Release of the OWptions Paper
- Next steps for the Welfare Working Group
- Meeting with Philip Patston

Welfare Working Group business

The Welfare Working Group (WWG) agreed the minutes from their eleventh meeting (12 November 2010). Paula Rebstock declared a new interest.

Release of the Options Paper

The WWG discussed the release of the Options Paper. The Welfare Working Group thanked the people who helped to prepare the paper. There was a discussion of the media coverage that the report has received and the issues and debate that have followed its release. The options included in the Options Paper were discussed throughout the day.

Next steps for the Welfare Working Group

The WWG discussed the next phase of its work including its remaining meetings and workshops. The WWG also considered how submissions will feed into the Final Report, and the information and modelling that will be required to enable a careful assessment of the potential options. It noted the work the Treasury has done modelling the “guaranteed minimum income” and social insurance.

Meeting with Philip Patston

Philip Patston joined the WWG to discuss the chapter in the Options Paper on the Sickness and Invalid’s Benefits. A number of issues were raised and discussed by Philip with the WWG.

Philip began the session with a discussion of his personal perspective on the benefit system. In this opening discussion he began by discussing his personal experience with the benefit system that involved coming on to the Invalid’s Benefit at a young age, before leaving the benefit system to be employed, then self-employed and now an employer of people, many of whom experience disability.

He also referred to international discourse on the disabling effects of capitalism and industrialism on people with impairment.

Philip emphasised the importance of understanding the workplace and workplace culture, and how it impacts on the work capacity of people with impairment. There was a discussion of how difficult it can be for someone with an impairment to enter a workplace and need to change the workplace culture. While there is some support available at present, at times, intervention is often not provided over a long enough period to effectively change workplace culture and provided without an in-depth knowledge of workplace issues. He stressed that any investment in assessment and increasing capacity of individuals may lack return if there is not a similar investment in the workplace culture and environment.

There was a discussion of the needs of people with permanent impairment and those with temporary impairment and the need for approaches to allow for this diversity.

Philip suggested a potential “Civic Contributors scheme” whereby people who could not sustain consistent employment could choose to have their benefit payments diverted to enable them to be employed by social profit (not for profit) organisations to make a meaningful contribution and gain status.