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To whom it may concern:  Prof. P Alston  or  one of his Team,

I am writing in response to a suggestion, brought to my attention earlier today, that it is appropriate for me to submit details of how progress has been LIMITED comparatively recently in my quest for realistic TRANSFER from Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

I am in the age-group, which was between 60 and 64 at the time when the “change-over” process was being designed and prepared for;  I am now aged 66.

I have followed processes and procedures as set out to maximise effectiveness and efficiency through all elements of the transfer procedures.  As time has elapsed, it has become more and more clear that elements of the changeover from DLA to PIP were NOT designed to maximise efficiency alongside fairness, but to pit claimant against claimant (apparently on a “divide-and-rule” basis.)

I emphasise the prevalence of AVOIDING elements of fairness.  My concerns are set out in the numbered paragraphs below:

1. Concern that DWP should have taken exhaustive “inaction”, to remain as certain as possible that my age would count against progress being made with certain “angles” of appeal (specifically, those that relate to MOBILITY;
2. Concern that DWP took specific action to place my age-group LAST in order of work to make the transfer from DLA to PIP, so that a good many of those people would, automatically, be unable to make a full claim against consideration of BOTH columns of data (“mobility” and “personal care”) because of their age.  ***There can be no reason other than some sort of desire to “divide and rule” to take action which will, AUTOMATICALLY, lead significant numbers of EXISTING BENEFICIARIES OF DLA to LOSE that entitlement.  The oldest claimants should, quite clearly, have been handled FIRST, so equality of standing could remain throughout the processes.  If it is necessary to reduce outgoing benefit payments, this should, surely, be done as fairly as possible, rather than building up accrued poverty AND distributing it illogically (eg why should someone whose medical case is worsening exponentially, who has been a proven benefit-claimant, suddenly lose most of his entitlement?  I was told that it is because everyone gets “OLD”, and cannot receive benefit for that process.  But, CONTINUOUSLY IGNORED BY DWP, THOUGH CONFIRMED BY THE MEDICAL PROFESSION, the worsening of my condition is caused by spasticity, NOT by age-ing.***
3. Concern that, whilst at least one of the DWP HQ Senior Officers considers it appropriate to consider my handicap in terms of “handicap regarding fulfilling various day-to-day activities” [ie the “personal care column”], rather than limitations regarding the number of steps or metres I can walk before needing to pause, this Officer’s view is not supported or given a fair “airing” in the response I received from DWP.  I built a thorough appeal upon precisely this mode of consideration, and, other than confirming that they had received it, DWP TOTALLY ignored it, with absolutely no reference to it, proceeding as though it did not exist!   ***Another element of absent training:  if a “new” focus of concern emerges, moves must be taken to rise to the challenges that come into existence.  More training is implicated.***
4. Concern that a “distant” and “un-engaged” manner of working, inter-acting and proceeding is used CONTINUOUSLY by DWP and Capita.  I stressed the importance, (and the current total lack) of the use of professionally supportive, empathic approaches to ongoing contact between DWP and their (potential and actual) clients regarding benefit. ***DWP employees in this area NEED to be trained in handling customers/claimants, treating them as individuals with needs, rather than as abstract entities, no more than a National Insurance Code!***
5. Certainty that the situation referred to in (iii) above should lead to details regarding impaired capacities to move about effectively being considered under the “personal care” category, rather than as “conventional” AGE-ING.  This leads to a completely “refreshed” view of the “balance” of the content of the appeal I was making at that time, in which I refer to the fulfilling of MANY tasks as being EXTREMELY slow, thereby, by the process of continuously pushing a proportion of tasks into “the future”, creating an ever-growing mass of unfulfilled activities.  This is the basis for an appeal to provide enough means for “practical, day-by-day, task-by-task support” of my spastic status to prevent the continuing GROWTH of that mass of uncompleted (or, at times, completely shelved) tasks.
6. A final observation in this list emphasises the importance of FAIRNESS, OPEN-NESS, and THE CLEAR AVAILABILITY OF DETAILS TO ALL PARTIES INVOLVED IN AND AROUND DECISION-TAKING.  I was not informed about the “rule” that benefits relating to mobility cannot, in law, be paid to people over 64.  But it was never clear whether this applies only to new claimants at that age, or to everyone.  It was stated from somewhere on the DWP Switchboard, that there is a VERY SLOW pace of walking, which is so SLOW that it counts as being completely unable to walk at all.  There are various medical opinions on this contention, but, it would appear, no hard fact.  My maximum walking pace is close to 3/8 of 1m.p.h. or 0.6 of 1k.p.h.  But no-one has been willing to venture clarity on the details or facts surrounding this contention.  DWP seem to be frightened by the prospect of showing signs of real concern for claimants who have (and for a good many years have had…) proper cause to claim benefits that have, over long periods of time, been available and, in reality, paid.
7. One finds little understanding of a range of factors concerning how a “shortfall” (or otherwise…) should be judged.  Factors relating to speed of onset or worsening velocity of movement, level and/or intensity of pain, and MANY other factors are combined in vague ways.  At NO stage in the process of transfer from DLA to PIP are, it seems, judgements made against common-sense and realism.

Of course, there is much more that I could say.  However, without larger numbers of specific examples being necessary to prove my points, my experiences with the Department for Work and Pensions lead me to a conclusion that it (that organisation) is unfit for purpose;  unless, of course, the purpose is solely and BLINDLY to save money without due considerations being made.

I am in the midst of a multi-element process of appealing against DWP judgements which are made, appealed against, repeated with “no-change” verdicts, (etc).  I am heading now towards an additional level of appeal made available by Her Majesty’s Courts and Tribunals Service.  It does not provide any great speed of consideration, but it is certainly more “independently” run than the appeals regarding their decisions that are mounted by the Department for Work and Pensions themselves.

This process is unlikely to find its head rising above the parapet (so-to-speak) within the next few weeks, but, despite this, there may be more details that I could provide.  If you care to ask further questions, I am willing to respond and answer them.  Should you wish to gain more “personal” (rather than organisational) details, I would be pleased to help supply them.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Burrows