

Maximising Incomes and Outcomes

A Plan for Improving the Uptake of Benefits

Consultation Response Questionnaire



CONSULTATION RESPONSE QUESTIONNAIRE

We welcome your views, in any format, on the proposals set out in this discussion document. We have included a number of discussion points that you may find useful in framing your response.

The consultation period will run from **19 December 2012 to 26 February 2013**.

The document is available on our website www.dsdni.gov.uk/consultations or by contacting us at the address below. If you require an alternative format to suit your needs, please contact us.

The Department is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000. This means that we have to respond to requests made to us under the Act for information relating to responses made to this consultation.

Please send your responses by 26 February 2013 to:

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Maximising Incomes and Outcomes – A Plan for Improving the Uptake of Benefits

The questionnaire can be completed by a stakeholder, a member of the public, or it can be completed on behalf of a group or organisation.

Please indicate which section(s) you are providing feedback on:	
Summary of Discussion Points	
1. Do you believe that the Department should continue to invest in proactive approaches to encouraging benefit uptake?	
2. Do you think people in all circumstances (in and out of work) are in scope for improved awareness and information with higher investment and priority being given to those groups identified as needing more direct intervention in order to take up benefits they are entitled to?	
3. Do you agree that referral to a wider range of services and supports should be a key part of benefit uptake programmes?	
4. Do you agree with the vision and aims of the strategy?	
5. Do you believe that the 6 strategic priorities are right? Are there others that you would have expected to see?	
6. Do you agree that the main barriers to benefit uptake are listed? Are there other factors that may have a bearing on decisions about having an entitlement check or making a claim?	
7. In addition to those better targeting commitments set out are there others that you believe should be considered by the Department?	
8. In addition to those access and delivery commitments set out are there other improvements that you believe should be explored by the Department?	
9. What additional steps do you believe the Department could take to ensure that, at critical points of change in people's lives, they are aware of their entitlements to benefits, services and supports?	
10. How do you believe the Department could improve uptake of benefits through enhanced partnerships working with community level organisations?	
11. How do you believe the Department could improve uptake of benefits through innovation?	
12. Are there additional targets that you would like to propose?	
13. Any further comments, recommendations or suggestions you would like to make in relation to this plan	

Q1 . Do you believe that the Department should continue to invest in proactive approaches to encouraging benefit uptake?

Comments:

Yes but it was noted that some people would have concerns that if SSA were doing the benefits entitlement checks that the focus would be on reducing benefits. There was some cynicism in the room around the reasons behind the checks due to the current pressure on departments to reduce spend.

There was a feeling that people would be more inclined to uptake the offer of a full and confidential benefit entitlements check if it were administered by the independent advice sector.

It was felt that people in rural areas are less likely to be better off in employment due to the distance they would have to travel, the lack of good transport links & the cost of private taxis than people who had access to better transport links. Its important to offer people the Benefits Better Off assessments to reassure them that they are not putting further financial pressures on themselves by going for a job which was going to mean they were worse off financially.

Q2 . Do you that people in all circumstance (in and out of work) are in scope for improved awareness and information with higher investment and priority being given to those groups identified as needing more direct intervention in order to take up benefits they are entitled to?

Comments:

Yes happy with the selection however there is also an emerging group of people who should be offered support as they access benefits of any type including people who have been made redundant and migrant workers who are not accessing support from other organisations around this issue. The misconception that migrant workers “know how to work the system” should be blasted and the offer of benefits checks should be made available to everyone with the reassurances that these can be carried out by SSA or the Independent Sector.

Q3 . Do you agree that referral to a wider range of services and supports should be a key part of Benefit Uptake programmes?

Comments:

Yes as access to these other services can mean the difference between someone paying out heavily for heating which is being lost as a result of inadequate insulation etc.

Q4 . Do you agree the vision and aims of the strategy?

Comments:

It sounds good however the only way this is going to be achieved is if everyone is offered access to an independent benefits check and often the issue is the long waiting times to get an appointment. IT options should be considered as a means of allowing people to anonymously enter in their details to flag up if they may have additional entitlement to avoid having to wait only to be told there isn't anything else there.

Q5. Do you believe that the 6 Strategic Priorities are right? Are there others that you would have expected to see?

Comments:

Yes we were happy with the Strategic Priorities identified and noted that another area worth looking more into is changing the message around attitudes that if someone is on benefits they are a scrounger. Public messages identifying why people need or should access a benefit etc.

Q6. Do you agree that the main barriers to benefit uptake are listed? Are there other factors that may have a bearing on decisions about having an entitlement check or making a claim?

Comments:

People noted the negative attitudes they hear saying things like “Those foreigners get everything” and also noted hearing “sure disabled get enough benefits”. These attitudes (unchallenged) can affect people’s uptake of benefits.

Overall the fear people have about the purpose of the entitlement check as a means of cutting benefits was the big concern.

Q7. In addition to those better targeting commitments set out are there others that you believe should be considered by the Department?

Comments:

Channel the message through people working in the community with target groups already (with older people, disabled people etc)

Use Social Workers as a means of getting the information to people in need

Use register of families in receipt of free school meals

Billboard advertising

Don't forget the access issues for people who are blind, deaf or have literacy or learning difficulties. Target the message specifically for people in these groups.

Use the Benefits Checker software to bring out to older peoples groups to facilitate people do an anonymous benefits check which doesn't involve them putting in their National Insurance no/personal details to reassure them that this is not about cutting benefits.

Q8. In addition to those access and delivery commitments set out are there other improvements that you believe should be explored by the Department?

Comments:

Information and letters coming out from SSA can be quite wordy – consider easy read versions.

As above train community workers to reassure people on the process, which will reduce the workload for Benefits advisors.

Use an anonymous on line resource (Benefits Checker) with people

Q9. What additional steps do you believe the Department could take to ensure that, at critical points of change in people's lives, they are aware of their entitlements to benefits, services and supports?

Comments:

Link with Births, deaths & marriages to identify people who are going through changes in their lives. Use of the postcodes to trigger a letter to ask people if they would like to uptake a benefits check to ensure they are aware of their entitlements as a result of the recent changes to family circumstances.

The CAB and local advice centres/workers are all working to capacity at present due to the huge changes in Welfare Reform and as a result of changes in Health & Social Care therefore more needs to be done to filter people through the process and this could be done via engaging community/voluntary sector to support people.

Q10. How do you believe the Department could improve uptake of benefits through enhanced partnerships working with community level organisations?

Comments:

Targeted email contacts
Telephone links
Information sessions at various community sites
Posters and PR Material
Flyers into newspapers
Engage with radio programmes such as On Your Behalf

Q11. How do you believe the Department could improve uptake of benefits through innovation?

Comments:

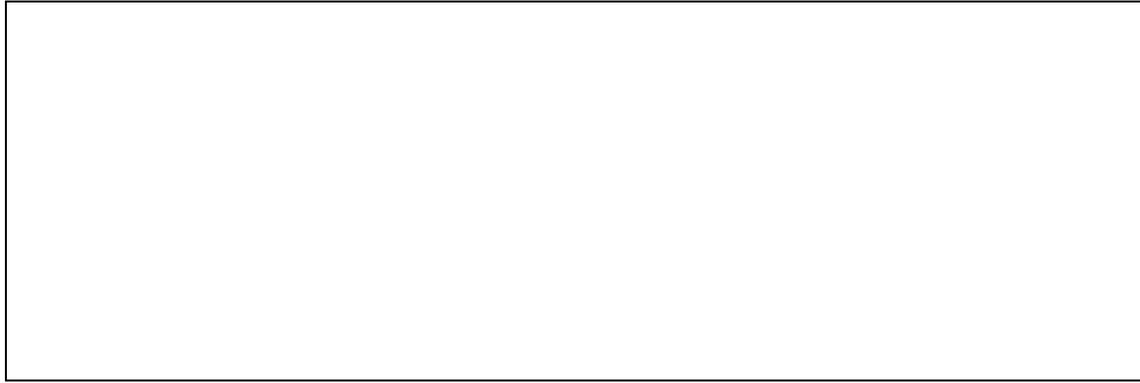
Use the learning from the Innovation Fund and resource orgs to provide supports targeted at the people who are identified as least likely to uptake benefits.

Establish firm statistics to bridge the gap in the Family Resource Survey (FRS) to reassure people about your motivations for this work as there is still scepticism about this.

Q12. Are there additional targets that you would like to propose?

Comments:

The case studies at the back of this consultation are very effective in showing where people might have entitlements they had not considered.



Q13. Please use the box below to insert any further comments, recommendations or suggestions you would like to make in relation to this plan.

Comments:

**Please return your response questionnaire by 26 February 2013.
Thank you for your comments.**

Appendix 1

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 – CONFIDENTIALITY OF CONSULTATIONS

The Department will publish a summary of responses following completion of the consultation process. Your response, and all other responses to the consultation, may be disclosed on request. The Department can only refuse to disclose information in exceptional circumstances. Before you submit your response, please read the paragraphs below on the confidentiality of consultations and they will give you guidance on the legal position about any information given by you in response to this consultation.

The Freedom of Information Act gives the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority, namely, the Department in this case. This right of access to information includes information provided in response to a consultation. The Department cannot automatically consider as confidential information supplied to it in response to a consultation. However, it does have the responsibility to decide whether any information provided by you in response to this consultation, including information about your identity should be made public or be treated as confidential.

This means that information provided by you in response to the consultation is unlikely to be treated as confidential, except in very particular circumstances. The Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the Freedom of Information Act provides that:

- the Department should only accept information from third parties in confidence if it is necessary to obtain that information in connection with the exercise of any of the Department's functions and it would not otherwise be provided
- the Department should not agree to hold information received from third parties "in confidence" which is not confidential in nature
- acceptance by the Department of confidentiality provisions must be for good reasons, capable of being justified to the Information Commissioner

For further information about confidentiality of responses please contact the Information Commissioner's Office (or see web site at:

<http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk/>). For further information about this particular consultation please contact Simon Stuart (contact details are shown on page 1).

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