

## **Know the Score - on Welfare Reform - Edinburgh Conference**

The contributions to this conference were grouped under three headings:

- Information
- Campaigning
- Direct Action

### **Information**

The scale and impact of the proposed benefits cuts to individuals, their families and communities was presented by several speakers who warned disabled people must not think 'this is going to happen to someone else' not me mate! It is and it will unless you do something about it!

### ***Work Capability Assessments***

This medical assessment is being used to determine ability to work and was the most controversial topic discussed at the conference with considerable concerns over the competence of professional medical assessors.

### ***Challenges to Work Capability Assessments:***

In accordance with natural justice and basic human rights individuals called to Work Capability Assessments should be made aware they have a basic human right to pre-assessment information. Therefore:

- DWP should be issuing information leaflets in all mandatory correspondence to those on disability benefits with information on state funded, charitable and other support organisations
- DWP leaflet information to provide a freephone number, website address, mail address and possibly twitter, blog, facebook and/or similar contact details
- DWP leaflets to be made easily available at all medical practices and public sector buildings

In addition to the basic informational needs of those being assessed additional pre-assessment support is necessary to:

- Alleviate fears of assessment process with for example mock videos of actual process
- Alleviate fears of assessment forms by allowing self-assessment forms to be completed prior assessment – for example at home
- Alleviate fears of assessment questions – all questions to be asked at the assessment to be made available well in advance of the actual assessment

The main assessment fear was losing independence, mobility, health, social participation, family, friends and the ability to find work without the appropriate support mechanisms.

As a result, those called to be assessed must be aware of their rights:

- Right to be accompanied to an assessment
- Right to have assessment meeting conversations recorded and scripted
- Right to request Professional Medical Assessors are specialists in your disability field
- Right to insist Professional Medical Assessors are BMA registered
- Right to see your medical reports
- Right to contest your medical reports
- Right to authorise medical reports prior to their submission to DWP

### **Campaigning**

The main aims of proposed campaigns were to:

- Raise awareness of what is coming
- Recruit political support
- Research into coherent and credible alternatives
- Register comprehensive opposition .

The need to summon individual and party political support against benefit cuts was consider crucial to the overall success of the campaign - as was:

- Canvassing support of MPs, MSPs, House of Lords Members and even MEPs
- Canvassing support from British Medical Association
- Canvassing church and religious organisations
- Canvassing academia, juridical and press

These challenges should maximise publicity opportunism at various events including:

- BBC Question Time and similar
- BBC The Big Question and similar
- Scottish Parliamentary Elections
- Single Transferable Vote Debates
- Politicians' surgeries
- Channel Four Documentaries

The questions asked need to be direct, closed and repeated consistently to obtain a definitive reply and these closed questions should be available to all campaigners and activists via a central 'closed questions' database.

### **Direct Action**

There was widespread support for direct action with significant emphasis on better communication of protest demonstrations between activists using modern techniques as successfully used by other campaigning groups.

The effectiveness of Direct Action necessitates good informational foundations in correlation with effective campaigning strategies – all linked with a clear, concise and purposeful message.

**This Was A Real Wake Up Call.**