

Direct Payments - ten years on

Direct Payments have been available in Northern Ireland since 1997 although it was 1998 before the first few people got started. In the early years the uptake of Direct Payments was slow, but more recently there has been a significant increase in numbers of people choosing this option. When CIL opened for business in March 2001 there were around 30 people using Direct Payments and a steady rise in the last seven years has seen the number rise to 1144 at the end of March 2008 (DSSS&PS).

It is clear that Direct Payments are making a significant difference to the lives of disabled people. They value the fact that they have the freedom to make their own decisions and choose how they live their lives. Direct Payments are giving people independence, dignity, confidence, and the chance to have a life in the community.

It is also clear that there are other people who might benefit from having more control over their services but perhaps have not heard of Direct Payments or think it might be too complicated. Therefore it is essential that everyone has the opportunity to find out about Direct Payments and know that they can get as much support as they need to make it work.

The latest development that is beginning to be discussed in Northern Ireland is the extension of the principles of 'choice and control' to Individual Budgets; these have already been piloted in other parts of the UK and give disabled people control over a wider range of support budgets. We look forward to the involvement of disabled people in the debate on the way forward for Northern Ireland.

**Merry Christmas and
Best Wishes for 2009
to all our readers.**



Minimum wage increase £

The Government announced the latest increase in the National Minimum Wage to take effect from 1 October 2008.

Workers who are aged 22 or older are now entitled to £5.73 per hour.

If you have employees who are aged 18 to 20, you must offer a rate of at least £4.77.

The minimum rate payable to 16 and 17 year olds who are above the compulsory school leaving age is now £3.53 per hour.

Foreign worker checking service



Employers are required by law to check the eligibility of potential workers from outside the UK to be employed in this country. The UK Border Agency has introduced a new service to help employers carry out the necessary checks.

If after the employer has made the initial checks (outlined on information sheet 33, available on request), he or she needs further verification, the UK Border Agency will provide this on receipt of a completed checking form which should be faxed to UKBA.

The UKBA's website includes an interactive guide to help employers to check a potential employee's entitlement to work in the United Kingdom.

You can get further information about the foreign worker checking service by visiting the UKBA website

www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk

Finding Staff

Finding Personal Assistants can be very simple if you already know someone who is available to work for you. However, it can be slightly more difficult if you aren't lucky enough to know anyone; in which case, you will need to advertise.

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Among the places you could advertise are your local press or community bulletin, your local shop, Post Office, Community Centre or your local job market. You could also consider placing your vacancy on the job market website or other internet recruitment sites. When placing your advert, you should keep it brief and to the point and be careful not to divulge too much personal information such as your home address.

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If you would like some support with finding staff, we can assist you with drawing up job advertisements, job descriptions and person specifications and preparing for interviews etc. There are sample documents on our website for you to tailor for your own use or you are welcome to contact your nearest CIL office and we will be happy to help.

Waiting time for POCVA checks shortens

You may decide, or your Trust may require you to carry out a Criminal Records check before you take on a Personal Assistant to check their suitability to work with disabled people. This is done through a POCVA check.

The checks are carried out by Access NI at the request of the Trusts. Due to a backlog and heavy demand, the checks have taken up to three months to complete. You may have experienced difficulty with recruiting staff due to these delays.

There is some good news for Direct Payments users attempting to recruit staff. According to their website, Access NI has reduced the waiting time for checks to just over five weeks.

More training scheduled

CIL organises a short series of workshops every year on the various aspects of employing Personal Assistants for Direct Payments users.

We intend to repeat the training on 12, 20 and 26 February 2009 respectively. The issues we will explore include employing staff, Tax & National Insurance and maintaining employer/staff relationships.

If you are interested in attending any of the workshops please contact us and we will send you a booking form.

FAQ's



Q. Do all employment terms have to be set out in my contract?

A. No. Terms can be written, oral, implied or a mixture of all three.

Implied terms might include those that are too obvious to be expressly agreed e.g. a term that the employee must accept reasonable instructions from the employer, those that are necessary to make the contract workable and those that are established by custom and practice. These are the things that you allow to happen in the course of a working day

Q. Will Direct Payments affect my benefit entitlement or the tax I have to pay?

A. Direct Payments do not affect your benefit entitlement or tax. This is because Direct Payments do not form any part of your ordinary income because they are separate funds provided to buy the care services needed.

For Your Benefit Project



Disability Action has recently launched a project to help disabled people to check their benefits entitlements.

The 'For Your Benefit' Project operates throughout Northern Ireland. If you would like further information, you should contact your nearest Disability Action office.

Belfast	028 9029 7880
Carrickfergus	028 9336 9367
Derry	028 7136 0811
Dungannon	028 8775 2372
Newry	028 3083 4205

Textphone	028 9029 7882
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www.disabilityaction.org

More new staff



CIL is delighted to welcome more members to the staff team. Rachel Harkness has been employed as Administrator in our Western office. Olivia Slean has joined the team in the Western office to provide maternity cover for Helen Anderson.

We welcome the two new members of staff and wish Helen good luck with her forthcoming happy event.

WWW.CILBELFAST.ORG

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