

Briefing Note: Deafblind UK Participation in the Timms Review of Personal Independence Payment (PIP)

Purpose

This paper provides an overview of Deafblind UK's contribution to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Timms Review of the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) assessment process, highlighting the lived experiences shared by members and the key themes emerging from our consultation.

Background

The Timms Review has been commissioned by the DWP to examine how the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) process can be improved for disabled people who require financial support to meet the additional costs associated with disability.

Following completion of the DWP's *Workshop in a Box* facilitator training, the Advisory Board team organised consultation sessions to gather feedback from Deafblind UK members. Two facilitated workshops were held:

- **25 June 2026** (09:30–12:30)
- **29 June 2026** (13:00–16:00)

Members were also able to contribute through an online submission, and an individual telephone consultation was arranged to ensure accessibility for someone unable to participate online or via email.

Feedback from all participants was collated into **four formal submissions** to the Timms Review using the DWP's online consultation process.

Participants

A total of **nine members** contributed their experiences.

Key characteristics of participants included:

- All participants were aged 31 years or over, with representation across a range of adult age groups.
- Seven participants identified as women and two as men.
- All participants identified as White British and heterosexual.
- Participants reported a range of disabilities including:
 - Deafness
 - Blindness or sight loss
 - Physical disabilities
 - Mental health conditions
 - Long-term health conditions

Notably, only one participant was able to identify themselves as *deafblind* within the consultation form. Most participants instead selected separate hearing and vision impairments, highlighting a limitation in the consultation itself. Participants consistently emphasised that **deafblindness should be recognised as a distinct disability rather than simply the combination of deafness and blindness.**

Key Findings

1. Recognition of the Additional Costs of Deafblindness

Participants described a range of unavoidable disability-related costs that are not always adequately recognised through the current PIP system. These included:

- Accessible technology, including large-screen devices and specialist equipment.
- Smart home technology to improve safety, independence and communication.
- Increased transport costs, particularly reliance on private taxis where public transport is inaccessible or unsafe.
- Additional support worker or companion costs when travelling.

- Domestic support such as cleaning, gardening and accessible exercise opportunities.
- Increased household costs, including higher heating bills.

These examples demonstrate that the financial impact of deafblindness extends well beyond basic care needs and includes the additional costs required to remain safe, independent and socially connected.

2. Significant Barriers Within the Current PIP Process

Participants consistently described the application and review process as stressful, inaccessible and poorly suited to people with dual sensory loss.

Key issues included:

- The reliance on telephone contact at the start of the process excludes many people with hearing loss and offers limited accessible alternatives.
- Tight timescales for gathering supporting evidence create significant pressure and anxiety.
- The overall process feels intrusive, impersonal and investigative, with many participants describing feelings of dread before each review.
- Assessors frequently demonstrated limited understanding of deafblindness and its functional impact.
- Assessment questions failed to capture the cumulative effects of combined sight and hearing loss, including fatigue and the complexity of navigating daily life.
- Participants reported feeling compelled to describe only their "worst days" in order to receive an appropriate award, rather than presenting a balanced picture of fluctuating conditions.
- Much of the evidence requested already exists within government, NHS or local authority systems, resulting in unnecessary duplication and repeated requests for information.

3. Recommendations for Improving the System

Participants identified several practical improvements that they believe would make the process more accessible, efficient and person-centred.

These included:

- Introducing a **Disability Passport** or unique identifier allowing assessors to access existing medical and disability evidence held across government systems.
- Providing longer award periods for permanent or progressive conditions to reduce unnecessary reassessments.
- Ensuring assessments are undertaken by professionals with relevant knowledge of the claimant's condition, or by individuals with lived experience where appropriate.
- Allowing one-off capital payments for essential home adaptations without negatively affecting other benefits.
- Introducing a fast-track reassessment process for people experiencing terminal illness or rapid deterioration.
- Offering accessible face-to-face assessment options, with support from a companion or advocate where required.

Overall Reflections

No participant described the current PIP process as user-friendly or supportive.

The dominant emotions associated with reviews were anxiety, dread and depression. Participants consistently described the assessment process as something to be endured rather than a system designed to understand and support disabled people.

Those who reported relatively positive experiences generally attributed this to receiving external advice on how to complete application forms and describe the impact of their disability effectively. This suggests that successful outcomes often depend on understanding the assessment process rather than the process accurately identifying need.

Implications for Deafblind UK

The consultation reinforces longstanding concerns that the current PIP process does not adequately recognise deafblindness as a distinct disability and fails to capture the cumulative impact of dual sensory loss.

The findings provide further evidence to support Deafblind UK's policy and influencing work, particularly in advocating for:

- Recognition of deafblindness as a unique disability within benefits systems.
- Greater accessibility throughout the PIP application and review process.
- Improved assessor knowledge of deafblindness.
- Better integration of evidence across government services.
- A more person-centred approach that reduces stress while accurately reflecting the additional costs of living with deafblindness.

These findings will inform our ongoing engagement with the Timms Review and future policy discussions with the DWP and other stakeholders.