



Executive Summary

The Commission

The Commission on the Future of Social Security led by Experts by Experience ('the Commission') was established in late 2018 with the aim of producing a White Paper, setting out proposals for changes to the United Kingdom's social security system. A significant feature of this project is that it is led by people with lived experience of the welfare benefits system.

The Commission's operations have been supported by two grants from the grant-making foundation Trust for London, first in June 2018 and then in March 2020. The fundholder for the project is the Institute for Employment Research (IER) at the University of Warwick.

During the Commission's inception phase the Project Inception Group, a group of people with lived experience of using the social security system, agreed by consensus to adopt a Commission of Inquiry model for the project, to be supported by a Secretariat. The group also decided on the project's principles, including the expectation that Commissioners would represent their individual organisations, though there would not be prescribed rules as to how they would consult with and feedback to their organisations. It was decided that the Commission would develop 'organically', led by these Experts by Experience.

Creating better lives for all by involving Disabled people and service users.

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In Phase One, the Commission developed a Green Paper with proposals for public consultation. As part of this process the Commission held a public Call for Solutions. This Call was launched to the public on May 29th 2019 and generated nearly 1,000 responses.

The Green Paper was released for public consultation on August 12th 2020 and received over 900 submissions from across the UK. Phase Two activities then commenced, including analysis of those public responses and preparations for the development of the White Paper.

In January 2021, Shaping Our Lives was commissioned to conduct an independent review of the Commission's work to date. Its purpose is to document the Commission's genesis and evolution, assess whether the Commission's current form is 'fit for purpose', and make recommendations on actions to ensure the Commission's future growth and sustainability.

The Review

Shaping Our Lives conducted extensive research into the Commission's work and influences. Methods included –

- A listening event with the current Co-Chairs, the Secretariat and the fundholder's representative;
- Desk research of all available documentation relating to the Commission's work;
- In-depth, one-to-one interviews with all participants, canvassing their perspectives on a range of themes; and
- A review of similar projects, organisations and related literature to influence recommendations for a future operating model.



The Findings

Interviews helped to identify key themes across people's experiences working with and within the Commission.

- There was unanimous agreement that the aim of the Commission was to create a fairer social security system designed by people with lived experience.
- The Commission's ambitions for organic, user-led development have been in conflict with a time limited project grant with specific outputs.
- However, Commissioners had different opinions on whether they were part of the Commission to represent their communities, their organisations, or their own lived experience and expertise.
- There were also differing perspectives on the roles of the funder and the Secretariat. Some said that the funder's role was to provide resources and access support; others said that it was to provide feedback and mediate the Commission's activities. Some thought that the Secretariat's role went beyond one of core practical support: that they led or assisted with project management, public relations and/or structuring policy ideas and priorities.
- The majority of Commissioners said that the Commission's governance was very good. Commissioners reported that the activities the Commission undertook were useful to its aims, and that the Secretariat and funders considered and respected everyone's access needs.
- However, a number of people said that the Commission's organisation could be too open-ended and reactive, and that decision-making was sometimes opaque or taken out of Commissioners' hands with insufficient explanation.
- There were different perspectives on who was responsible for organisation and governance: the funder, the



fundholder's representative, the Secretariat, the Co-Chairs, or everyone.

- When asked, the majority of Commissioners were eager to continue their work with the Commission, into Phase Two and potentially further.
- The majority of Commissioners believe that the Commission needs deeper representation from and consultation across a number of different communities.
- The research identified a number of significant achievements, highlighting the strength of the Commission's work to date. These achievements included the adoption of an innovative, user-led Commission model, and the use of that model to develop both a Call for Solutions and Green Paper for public consultation, both of which generated considerable public response.
- The research also identified moments where a change in the Commission's governance, activities or make-up took place. These moments may have warranted a response at the time, and may inform decisions about the Commission's future structure.
- These moments also indicated that some governance structures were not in place from the start, and that this contributed to difficulties when consensus could not be reached or conflicts arose.

The review of the external environment explored organisations that seek change in national government policy and the different structures they employ. The research identified existing allies in the sphere of influence, along with potential future collaborators and other organisations with both similar and competing calls for welfare reform. Practical steps were identified for the creation of a simple, user-led structure, one that would enable the Commission to build its capacity and resources and reach its full potential.



Recommendations

The Commission has had considerable achievements to date, especially considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Further investment and development is needed to realise the Commission's considerable potential.

The key recommendations of this report:

- Time and resources must be made available to ensure that appropriate governance structures are agreed before project work commences. This includes explicit role descriptions and conflict resolution processes.
- This may necessitate funding for a dedicated project worker to oversee day to day administration. Ideally, this could be one of the Commissioners themselves.
- That the current Project Facilitation Group lead on the remainder of the Phase Two activities with Commissioner's engaged remotely.
- That the current Secretariat and Commissioners co-produce a future governance and operational structure, with roles and responsibilities clearly defined.
- That development of the future structure is based on further qualitative research on the critical success features and characteristics of user-led change operations.
- That specialist support is used to establish the purpose, aims and position of a new structure and these are communicated accordingly.

