

## **Professionalism in Decision Making and Appeals (PIDMA)**

*Delivering a first class service to Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Attendance Allowance (AA) customers*

**Pauline Thompson**, Head of PIDMA, provides a further update on the innovative work based learning programme, designed and developed by (P)DCS in partnership with the University of Chester. The programme leads to accreditation and higher education awards for DLA/AA decision makers (DMs) and their HEO DM Managers. Background information on the programme was covered in the [April edition of Adjust](#)

By the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009, approximately 150 staff from the decision making community will have been accredited.

**Accreditation** - there are three levels of accreditation:

**Foundation** - Entry point: DMs who have completed their initial training and have a minimum of one year's experience in DLA/AA decision making practice. Students successfully completing the programme are awarded a Certificate of Achievement in Professionalism in Decision Making and Appeals (Work Based and Integrative Studies).

**Higher** - Entry point: DMs who are experienced in DLA/AA decision making. Students successfully completing the programme are awarded a Professional Certificate in Professionalism in Decision Making and Appeals (Work Based and Integrative Studies).

**Advanced** - Entry point: HEO DM Specialist Managers who have undertaken DM initial training and have decision making experience and some expertise in the HEO role. Students successfully completing the programme are awarded a Graduate Certificate in Professionalism in Decision Making and Appeals (Work Based and Integrative Studies).

*Part of our programme's overarching objective* is to significantly improve standards in DLA/AA decisions and follows a work based learning approach where 'students' evidence their practice, building on existing knowledge

### **The work based learning programme**

This is on the job learning and staff learn from and at work rather than learn theory and then try and apply it at work. Students critically reflect on their daily practice, and move their practice on to reach professional standards. Critical reflection itself is the vehicle for developing considerative skills.

### **Assessment**

Critical reflection is used in the assessment of professional capability. Students are assessed using a combination of both spoken and written reflection based on their work in the workplace. For written work, students are engaged in activity based on their own practice in the workplace. Students also evidence their work via storyboards they present to each other and

tutors. The subject of the presentation will typically address a business problem or issue within the workplace on which the DM manager is working.

Independent evaluation of the programme was undertaken in August which highlighted significant qualitative benefits for decision making staff and their managers. For quantitative benefits, we can only measure trends at this stage in roll out, and these benefits will only be apparent when we have sufficient numbers through the programme.

## **Evaluation - decision makers and their line managers have said**

### **Foundation level DMs**

*"PIDMA makes you think outside of the box, no two cases are the same, it certainly makes you think of the case as an individual not a disability, i.e. how one person deals with arthritis is completely different to another person."*

*"On the whole I am more self sufficient, informed and confident in my decision making following my participation in PIDMA."*

### **Higher level DMs**

*"I'm able to pass my knowledge onto colleagues who come to me for advice. It's a worthwhile programme as it gives you a better insight and a more holistic approach to decision making. It also makes you think more about the actions and decisions you make and the repercussions and effects of them"*

*"People know I've been on the programme and as a result they ask for advice on more difficult cases, I can honestly say my desk is always busy! I've also noticed more discussions in the room around PIDMA which helps to get the best out of people to help the customer"*

### **HEO DM managers**

*"The main benefit of the programme for me is that it takes you 'back to your roots'. As a HEO DM you see cases everyday and although you don't necessarily make the decisions you need to understand the decision making process and complex cases to be able to advise, coach and mentor your DMs. The programme really is great for that, along with the complementing modules such as leadership and management skills, which give you a more strategic and reflective approach to managing staff"*

*"I have four DMs currently undertaking the higher programmes at the moment. They're getting on well and the difference in them personally and the improvements in their work and the influence they have the team is already evident"*