

**DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE
ADVISORY BOARD
(NORTHERN IRELAND)**

ANNUAL REPORT

2004-2005

ANNUAL REPORT

of the

**DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE
ADVISORY BOARD (NORTHERN IRELAND)**

2004-2005

**Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board (NI)
Castle Court, Royal Avenue, Belfast BT1 1DF
Telephone: (028) 9033 6916
Fax: (028) 9054 2112**

This report is made to the Department for Social Development pursuant to regulation 2(1)(c) of the Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1991

BOARD MEMBERSHIP

Chairman

Mr Stanley Millar MBE JP (from 03/05/2004)

Deputy Chairman

Dr Gerry Millar

Members

Mrs Patricia Bray

Mrs Laura Collins (until 07/01/05)

Mr Patrick Convery (until 31/12/04)

Dr Michael Curran

Mrs Heather Fair

Dr Aleen Jones (from 19/07/04)

Mrs Molly Kane

Mrs Philomena McCrory (until 31/12/04)

Dr Clare Monaghan

Dr Charles Shepherd (from 19/07/04)

Mr Nigel Stratton

Dr Esme Whitehead

Secretariat

Secretary: Dr M Donnelly

Admin Support: Ms D McCafferty

Secretarial Support: Mrs M Kennedy and Miss M McCauley

FOREWORD by Mr Stanley Millar

I am pleased to provide a foreword to this Annual Report on the completion of my first year since my appointment as Chairman on 3 May 2004 for a five-year term.

During the period it has been possible to lay down business markers in respect of the way ahead. The Board has endorsed a framework of Corporate Governance which shapes how it is directed and controlled; the structures and processes for decision making and accountability; and the controls and behaviours of every member. I believe the evaluation and appraisal processes, which are now well established, will clearly demonstrate a high degree of commitment and integrity as the Board undertakes its business programme.

I have placed an emphasis on establishing sound working relationships with bodies that complement the Board's work. I value the opportunity to attend meetings of the DLAAB (GB) at the kind invitation of the Chairman, Mrs Anne Spaight. On a reciprocal basis, I was delighted to welcome Mrs Claire Poole to a meeting in Belfast on 19 March 2005.

Dr Anna Gavin, Director of the NI Cancer Registry has also given a commitment to share information on a regular basis and update the Board on cancer statistics which will be used to evaluate current, and plan new services.

During the year there have been changes in the membership. Mrs Laura Collins (carer member) resigned her post on 7 January 2005; Mrs Philomena McCrory (disability member) completed her term of office on 31 December 2004. Board members appreciated the advice provided from knowledge rooted in their areas of experience.

I wish to acknowledge the work of Secretary Dr Martin Donnelly for editing the contributions to this report and for his support and advice to the Chairman and members. Debbie McCafferty warrants special mention for her initiative in setting up an electronic mail system with members, and for her Administrative Support role.

In conclusion my sincere thanks to Deputy Chairman and Education Group Coordinator, Dr Gerry Millar; to Research Group Coordinator, Dr Michael Curran; to each individual member for their support and contributions; and to Department/Agency officials for their cooperation.

The Board is well placed to meet any challenges which may arise in the next year.

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Role of the Board.....	2
3. Work of the Board 2004-2005	2
4. Expenditure.....	7
5. Board's Plans for 2005-2006	8
Appendix 1: Profiles of Board Members.....	9

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board for Northern Ireland (the Board) is an independent statutory body under section 152 of the Social Security Administration (Northern Ireland) Act 1992. It advises the Department for Social Development (the Department) and the Social Security Agency on matters directly relating to Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance.

The Chairman and members are appointed by the Department.

- 1.2 The functions and powers of the Board are as follows:
- (a) to give advice to the Department on such matters as it may refer to them for consideration;
 - (b) to give advice to medical officers of the Department dealing with Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance on any cases or questions which they refer to the Board; and
 - (c) to present an annual report on its activities over the year to the Department.

The Board may consult persons or bodies on matters in respect of which, in the Board's opinion, those persons or bodies are especially qualified.

The Board's remit has been extended to include an educational role for decision makers in areas where the Board has expertise.

- 1.3 The membership of the Board is selected so as to provide a wide range of experience from individuals caring for the needs of disabled people, or who are themselves disabled and to fulfil the statutory requirements for the Board's membership.

A number of disciplines are represented by Board members. These include:

- Care of Older People
- Community Nursing
- General Medicine
- General Practice
- Health Visiting
- Learning Disability
- Occupational Therapy
- Paediatric Medicine
- Palliative Medicine
- Physiotherapy
- Psychiatry
- Rheumatology
- Social Work

- 1.4 The Board comprises a Chairman and between 11 and 20 members, 3 of whom have personal experience of disability and 1 member cares for a disabled person. Profiles of the Board members are at **Appendix 1**.
- 1.5 Term of Office – The Chairman and other Board members shall hold office for a period of not more than 5 years, as the Department may determine; but any member shall be eligible for reappointment from time to time on or after the expiration of his term of office and may by notice in writing to the Department resign office at any time while remaining eligible for reappointment. The maximum period of office is 10 years.

2. ROLE OF THE BOARD

- 2.1 The Board acts in an advisory capacity in accordance with its terms of reference.
- 2.2 The Board gives advice to staff and to medical officers of the Department. Decisions on entitlement to Disability Living Allowance is the responsibility of decision makers in the Social Security Agency, who are not medically qualified and therefore rely on advice on medical questions from medical officers and from the Board. Decision makers have ready access to medical officers, who advise on general medical matters, on specific cases referred to them and on the preparation of questionnaires sent to general practitioners and consultants.
- 2.3 The Board also liaises with the Great Britain Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board (the GB Board) in assessing and advising on the content of the Disability Handbook, which gives guidance on most of the common medical conditions and how those conditions lead to disability.

3. WORK OF THE BOARD IN 2004-2005

- 3.1 This report covers the period from 1 April 2004 to 31 March 2005. The views expressed are solely those of the Board.

3.2 Full Board Meetings

The Board held 4 full meetings and 2 small Board meetings during the period of the report.

3.3 Disability and Carers Service

Throughout the year the Board was updated on the work of the Disability and Carers Service including the activity of the Active Case Management Unit. The Board welcomed the continuing updates regarding the progress of the activity in this area.

Board members had the opportunity to visit the Disability and Carers Service to view the IT and organisational changes that have taken place. The Board was impressed by the commitment of staff at all levels of the organisation and commends the streamlining of the claims process.

3.4 Recruitment

Mr Stanley Millar was appointed as Chairman following the end of office of Dr Agnes McKnight.

Dr Aleen Jones (Consultant Geriatrician) and Dr Charles Shepherd (Consultant Paediatrician) were appointed members following the end of appointments for Dr Jim Gilmore and Dr Christopher Corkey. An induction programme was provided for new members.

Mrs Philomena McCrory reached the end of her term of office and indicated she did not wish to be considered for a further term of appointment.

Mrs Laura Collins resigned as Board member following her appointment as Chairman of the Northern Ireland Carers Association.

A recruitment exercise is currently in progress.

A profile of the current membership is attached at **Appendix 1**.

3.5 Venues for Board Meetings

The Board reviewed its arrangements for meetings and agreed that one of the full meetings each year should be held outside Belfast. The June meeting for 2005 will be held in Londonderry. Other full Board meetings will be held in Castle Court.

3.6 Board Website

The development work for a Board website has been completed with the Department for Social Development. The layout of the site and the content has been finalised. The site is due to go live during April 2005.

The website address is www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/dlaab/htm .

3.7 Member Appraisal

In accordance with the practice in other Non-Departmental Public Bodies (Advisory) Performance Appraisal has been introduced. A pro-forma Appraisal form was considered and accepted by the members for the period 1 April 2004 to 31 March 2005.

Appraisals have been completed for the Chairman and three members. Other members will take part in the process in April 2005.

The completed forms will be held by the Department for Social Development. The 2005-2006 Appraisal will include details of members' attendance records to be recorded in the Annual Report.

3.8 Education Seminars for Decision Makers

In September, October and November 2004 the Board hosted 3 half-day seminars for decision-making staff of the Disability and Carers Service. The seminars had been arranged following an approach from the Disability and Carers Service management. The overwhelming majority of 101 decision makers reported very positively on the content and relevance of the seminars.

Topics covered were autism, cancer (side effects of treatment), mental health and traumatic brain injury. The Board wishes to express its thanks to Cecily Lavine (Benefit Advisor, Macmillan Cancer Relief NI), Heather Monteverdi (Macmillan Cancer Relief NI), Mary Braithwaite (Social Worker, Down/Lisburn Trust Brain Injury Team), Caroline O'Hara (PAPA & WELB), Dr Paul Millar (Consultant Psychiatrist) and Board members Mr Patrick Convery, Dr Michael Curran, Mrs Heather Fair and Dr Gerry Millar for their input to the programme.

Future seminars for decision makers are likely to cover subjects such as ageing and disability, diabetes in children, fibromyalgia, attention deficit disorder and severe mental impairment. The intention is to continue to update staff regarding current advances in the evidence base of clinical practice and relevant treatments.

3.9 Training of Doctors Undertaking Assessments for Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance

Board members have also inputted to the training of newly recruited doctors for benefit assessments. Mrs Patricia Bray has spoken on the disabled person perspective of the assessment and Mrs Heather Fair on the Assessment of Locomotor Function.

3.10 Medical Support Services Review

In September 2003 the Social Security Agency had advised the Board it was undertaking a review of the functions provided by Medical Support Services as part of the wider Welfare Reform and Modernisation Programme. The Board Chairman, Mr Millar, and Secretary, Dr Donnelly were invited to participate as members of the Review Steering Group.

The Social Security Agency in November 2004 provided an update on how the work had progressed and advised on some of the changes made and planned to enhance customers' experience of the services provided by Medical Support. Importantly these services are now covered in both the Agency's Customer Charter and Complaints Leaflet. The Agency also undertook a customer satisfaction survey which gave valuable pointers to areas for improvement.

Appointment Letters

The appointment letter will be amended to include a reference that the doctor will produce an Identity Card upon arrival at the customer's home. All examining doctors will be reminded to introduce themselves and provide Identity Cards. In addition a leaflet was produced which clearly sets out why assessments are required and what a customer can expect to happen during a medical assessment.

Assessment Centres

Staff have been reminded of the importance of including a copy of a map of the centre with the appointment letter. The client help desks have an increase from two to three members of staff and there will be a process to put in place a monitor of calls to ensure that this practice is adhered to. All staff have been reminded that it is Agency policy to provide their name at the beginning of a call.

Explanations for Delays in Assessments

Medical Attendants have been advised to provide regular updates to customers on potential delays. The Senior Medical Attendant will issue reminders on a regular basis. Posters are displayed in all centres advising of potential delays.

The Complaints Procedure

The appointment letter clearly sets out how to make a complaint. The letter has since been amended and complaints information highlighted. Complaints posters are displayed in all medical centres and complaints leaflets are readily available.

The Chairman, Mr Millar said he valued the opportunity to be able to make a contribution to the work of the Review Team. He expressed a confidence that the changes will make a positive difference for the customers and enhance their confidence in the Agency's Customer Care role.

3.11 NI Cancer Registry

Dr Anna Gavin, Director of the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry addressed the Board on 9 March 2005. She outlined the background to the Cancer Registry since its establishment in 1993. The publication of a comprehensive report highlights the relevant statistics on the burden of cancer in NI, the patterns of cancer in NI and the effects of preventative measures on the outcomes in Northern Ireland between 1994-2001. It now provides accurate local information which is being used to plan and evaluate the provision of services in NI. The Cancer Registry is now recognised as one of the best in Europe and beyond.

Comparisons were also provided with cancer rates between GB and the Republic of Ireland. Already remarkable benefits have accrued from the use of such a high quality public health tool for the population in the Province. More clinical research has been supported, cancer services are being evaluated again and surveillance improved. Clinicians are now able to equate and analyse outcome measures of their work against national and international standards.

The NI Cancer Registry website address is www.qub.ac.uk/nicr .

3.12 Liaison with the GB Board

The NI Board was represented by the Chairman and/or the Secretary at full meetings of the GB Board on 8 June 2004, 12 October 2004 and 8 February 2005. The meetings are held in The Adelphi in Central London.

Mr Millar accepted an invitation to address the February 2005 meeting and present an overview of the work undertaken by the NI Board. Those present had indicated a particular interest in the effects of “the troubles” on the incidence of sensory disabilities and the volume of DLA claims.

Attendance at the meetings provides an opportunity for an exchange of information on how the Boards conduct their business.

The GB Board uses a “News and Update” publication as a means of directly informing decision makers of changes that are new or brought to the Board’s attention. Copies of the papers are now circulated to NI Board members. Reports on meetings of the GB Board are provided to the NI Board by the Chairman.

The Chairman, Mrs Spaight accepted a standing invitation for a representative of the GB Board to attend meetings in Belfast. Dr Claire Poole attended and addressed the March meeting and stated she was impressed by a visit to the Disability and Carers Service in Castle Court and the use of IT in streamlining the service.

3.13 Meeting with the Chief Executive of the Social Security Agency

On 29 September 2004 the Chairman and Secretary met Mr Gerry Keenan Chief Executive of the Social Security Agency over an informal lunch in Dr Donnelly’s office.

Mr Keenan indicated he was anxious to retain a contact with the Board and accepted an invitation to attend a future meeting with Board members. The Chairman reported the initial discussion had been constructive.

3.14 Social Security Agency Standards Committee

The Chairman and Secretary attended a meeting with Professor Eileen Evason and members of the Social Security Agency Standards Committee on 11 January 2005.

Mr Millar addressed the Committee on the role of the Board. Professor Evason, the recently appointed Chairman outlined the remit of the Standards Committee. In the course of a discussion a comparison was made of the different roles of the two bodies.

Professor Evason said she would be very willing to share her Annual Report with the Board at a date to be arranged in the latter part of 2005.

3.15 Away Day

The Board held an away day on 16 February 2005. The away day afforded members the opportunity to meet with representatives from the Social Security Agency and learn about new initiatives and developments occurring within the Agency, and to plan a work programme for the incoming year.

Mr Brian Davis, Operations Director, Social Security Agency and Mrs Anne Flanagan, Assistant Director, Disability and Carers Service attended. Mr Davis outlined the priorities for the Disability and Carers Service over the next 2-3 years.

Mrs Siobhan Martin from the Corporate Customer Services Unit presented the findings from the evaluation of the Benefit Advisor Pilot. The evaluation showed that the role was highly valued by individuals and that contact with the benefit advisor increased the likelihood of individuals making an application for benefit and the benefit being awarded. The Board commended this initiative and was pleased to be informed that the Agency is considering further development of outreach schemes.

3.16 Board Structure

The Board has agreed to a participation structure which will be based on three areas of responsibility. The structure will offer all members a much greater opportunity for taking part in the Business Programme and a greater corresponding measure of satisfaction.

The Chairman was pleased to confirm that members had volunteered to accept responsibility as coordinators:

Education Coordinator – Dr Gerry Millar

Research Coordinator – Dr Michael Curran

Resources Coordinator – (to be appointed)

3.17 Other Presentations to the Board

Dr Michael Curran provided an overview of the Statistics Report from NI Statistics and Research Agency.

4. BOARD EXPENDITURE 2004-2005

4.1 The Board does not have an actual budget for its work. It appreciates the resources provided by the Social Security Agency (Disability and Carers Service) to cover its work. The Board expenditure for 2004-2005 was as follows:

Board members' fees and expenses:	£15,467
Accommodation:	£ 388

5. BOARD'S PLANS FOR 2005-2006

5.1 The Board's plans include:

- Development of a programme of work with the Disability and Carers Service;
- Input to the education and training of decision makers of the Disability and Carers Service;
- Producing a series of reference notes for decision makers;
- Input to the training of doctors undertaking assessments for Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance;
- Liaison with the GB Board;
- Completion of outstanding recruitment and any upcoming vacancies with Social Security Policy and Legislation Division together with the induction programme for new members;
- Review of Publication Scheme;
- To receive the 2004/2005 Annual Report of the Social Security Agency Standards Committee;
- Launch of the DLAAB website.

PROFILES OF BOARD MEMBERS

APPENDIX 1

CHAIRMAN

Mr Stanley E Millar, MBE JP

Former Chief Officer of Western Health and Social Services Council (the “watchdog body” in the west of the province). Took early retirement in 2003 after 39 years in the NHS to free up time to undertake voluntary work as Honorary Treasurer of the Omagh Branch of Alzheimer’s Society, Coordinator of Sargent Cancer Care for Children local support group and President of the Western Branch of Association for Spina Bifida And Hydrocephalus. Awarded the MBE in 1995 for “Services to Education and Community Relations in Co. Tyrone”. He retains a conviction of the opportunity to address ill health through tackling poverty.

Appointed: January 1998

Reappointed: January 2002

Appointed Chairman: May 2004

DEPUTY CHAIRMAN

Dr Gerry Millar, MB BCh BAO DGM DCH DFFP DRCOG MRCGP(Dist) FRIPHH

In general practice in Moy, Co Tyrone with his wife. He is also a member of the Macmillan Southern Area Lead Cancer Team. He lectures widely on Egyptology and the history of medicine.

Appointed: March 2001

MEMBERS

Mrs Patricia Bray, BA(Hons)

In community work for the past 17 years. For the last 14 she has worked in Disability Action’s Londonderry Office in a number of positions, currently as Statutory Duty and Policy Officer. She is a founder member and current Chairperson of the North West Forum of People with Disabilities, a human rights organisation, and her main drive is to create opportunities for disabled people to develop power over their own lives and within their communities, in particular, personal and economic power.

Appointed: March 2001

Ms Laura Collins, RGN RSCN

Member of Carers Northern Ireland (formerly CNA) Committee. She has more than 20 years experience in the voluntary sector, particularly disability and caring organisations, and for a similar period as full-time family carer across a range of disabilities.

Appointed: March 2001

Resigned: January 2005

Mr Patrick Convery, DipCOT SROT Cert MHS Dip HSSM

Occupational Therapy Services Manager with Foyle Health and Social Services Trust. He has responsibility for mental health, paediatric, acute and community services within the Trust. He is a member of the Advisory Committee for Allied Health Profession (ACAHP) and is also a member of the Northern Ireland Board of the British Association of Occupational Therapists. He is a member of the Mental Health and Learning Disability Review Steering Group.

Appointed: January 1998

Reappointed: January 2002

Appointment ended: December 2004

Dr Michael Curran, MB FRCPsych MBA

Consultant Psychiatrist with responsibility for individuals with a Learning Disability, Foyle Health and Social Services Trust. Specialist areas of interest include treatment of epilepsy, sleep disorders, assessment of autism, behavioural problems in childhood and psychosocial aspects of mental health and social anxiety disorders.

Appointed: January 1998

Reappointed: March 2003

Mrs Heather Fair, BSc MCSP SRP

Senior Physiotherapist with Down Lisburn Trust where she is a member of the Community Brain Injury Team. She is past Chair of the Northern Ireland Association of Chartered Physiotherapists with an interest in neurology. She is an assessor and trainer of the multi-disciplinary functional assessment measure.

Appointed: February 1996

Reappointed: March 2001 and March 2003

Dr Aleen Jones, MB BCh BAO FRCP(UK) Dip Palliative Medicine

Qualified at Queen's University Belfast and completed higher medical training in General and Geriatric medicine. Appointed Consultant Physician with an Interest in the Elderly at South Tyrone Hospital in Dungannon in 1985 developing rehabilitation and palliative care services. Since the merger of South Tyrone Hospital with Craigavon Area Hospital in 2000 she now works as a full time Geriatrician between the two sites and is involved in the areas of acute stroke medicine, orthogeriatric care, rehabilitation and community care. Honorary lecturer in geriatric medicine for Queen's University, enjoys student teaching. Actively involved in Southern Health and Social Services Board and Armagh/Dungannon Health and Social Care Group planning and commissioning groups for the elderly.

Appointed: July 2004

Mrs Molly Kane, BSc(Hons) Dip.N(Lond) RGN RMN CPN RNT

Works as a Senior Nurse Advisor in the Northern Health and Social Services Board and has particular responsibility for planning and commissioning mental health and learning disability services. She is also participating in the ongoing regional review of mental health and learning disability. Molly is committed to promoting and developing community services which can support individuals to remain in their own home.

Appointed: March 2003

Mrs Philomena McCrory, BSc

A wheelchair user who has been working in the area of disability for the past 17 years to promote rights and choice for disabled people. Has previously worked for Disability Action and the Cedar Foundation. Currently Manager of the Centre for Independent Living – Belfast, an organisation that provides information, advice, training and advocacy to disabled people who choose to manage their own personal assistance, using Direct Payments.

Appointed January 1998

Reappointed January 2002

Appointment ended: December 2004

Dr Clare E Monaghan, MB BCh FRCPsych

Consultant Psychiatrist in General Psychiatry and Psychiatry of Old Age. Since 1990 Consultant in Armagh/Dungannon. Special interests include care in the community and pre-senile dementia. Member of Downs Syndrome Association.

Appointed: March 2001

Dr Charles W Shepherd, MB BCh BAO FRCP FRCPCH MD

Consultant Paediatrician, Craigavon Hospital since 1991 with a special interest in children with epilepsy, Tuberous Sclerosis Complex and Neurofibromatosis. Outside interests include football, golf and mountain climbing.

Appointed: *July 2004*

Mr Nigel Stratton, BSc MA CQSW

Principal Officer for Learning Disability Services in Homefirst Community Trust. Extensive Social Work experience. He manages Social Work, Day Care and Residential Services for adults with severe learning disabilities. He has a particular interest in the development of disability services and the promotion of user involvement in service planning. Maintains his professional skills by working as an out-of-hours Service Coordinator, Emergency Social Worker and Approved Social Worker (Mental Health).

Appointed: *January 1998*

Reappointed: *February 2004*

Dr Esme Whitehead, BSc MD FRCP DCH

Consultant Rheumatologist with the Northern Health and Social Services Board. The population covered is over 400,000 and the service is based at Antrim Area Hospital with a secondary centre at Coleraine Hospital. There are satellite clinics in the Waveney and Moyle Hospitals. Special interest in management of inflammatory arthritis such as rheumatoid arthritis. She is involved with patient support groups for Young Arthritis Care, Raynaud's Disease and Scleroderma in Northern Ireland, and the National Osteoporosis Society.

Appointed: *March 2001*