

Criminal injuries compensation authority

Disability equality scheme

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1. Introduction

CICA is a non-departmental public body which administers the criminal injuries compensation scheme throughout England, Scotland and Wales, considering applications from people who have been the victim of a violent crime and paying financial compensation to those who are eligible under the scheme. We also provide certain advice and practical help to UK residents who have been the victim of violent crime in another EU country and who wish to apply for compensation under that country's compensation scheme.

This disability equality scheme reflects the particular nature of CICA's business, the way in which it is conducted and how the Authority is staffed.

2. Background

CICA's objectives

Our objectives are to:

- Process efficiently, fairly and consistently all claims for compensation made to us;
- ensure that applicants are treated with consideration and in accordance with Citizen's Charter principles;
- ensure proper accountability for, and use of public funds;
- achieve progressive improvement in the efficiency, effectiveness and economy of our operations; and
- support staff to achieve their full potential in terms of skill and performance.

Staffing

In considering CICA position with respect to the disability equality duty regarding employees, it is necessary to understand that we do not employ any staff. We depend entirely on our sponsors, the Home Office and Scottish Executive, to assigning staff they employ, to support our operations. Consequently, the two employing organisations, not CICA, bear the statutory responsibilities towards their staff with disabilities.

The Authority undertakes to comply with the policies, procedures and other arrangements that the Home Office and Scottish Executive put in place to discharge their responsibilities.

Communications

Currently the compensation scheme is administered from offices in London and Glasgow. Most enquiries from potential applicants are handled on our free phone helpline. We publish a range of guidance material in printed form and on our web site. Our Glasgow office is the receiving point for all new applications. We maintain contact with applicants by post, telephone or e-mail. Neither the London nor Glasgow office is open to public callers.

Except at appeal hearings where fewer than 5% of cases are determined, decisions on applications are made on the basis of documentary evidence and there is normally no face to face contact with applicants or their representatives. The independent Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel is responsible for the oral hearing of appeals and for all related arrangements concerning the needs of appellants who attend hearings.

Service users

The Authority's service users are individual applicants from throughout Great Britain, and the bodies such as Victim Support, Citizens Advice, Trade Unions and legal. Representatives who assist applicants and who often also act as intermediaries. - Only a very small proportion of the general population fall victim to violent crime and the relationship between CICA and its customers is unusual in that the vast majority of those who apply for compensation do so only once in a lifetime. Applicants for compensation may have a disability that is unconnected with their being a victim of violent crime, or the criminal injury may have been the cause of their disability.

Anyone who suffers a personal injury as a result of a crime of violence is normally referred by the police to Victim Support (VS), a charity which provides a free, confidential service, including information, emotional support and practical help. All VS branches in England and Wales provide information about the compensation scheme and offer help to complete the application form. Approximately ninety per cent of branches also have staff who will act as a named representative on behalf of the applicant.

Victim Support conducts the application for compensation on the victim's behalf in nearly 22% of all cases. Although applicants are not required to have legal representation, around 30% opt instead to have a solicitor to represent them. With other applicants using the services of trade unions or receiving assistance from bodies such as Citizens Advice, only the minority (22%) of applicants deal directly with the Authority.

We believe that improving access to our service by disabled people involves not only making it easier for them to deal with us directly, but also helping intermediaries to provide access to criminal injuries compensation, particularly when this may be one of an integrated range of services to victims of crime.

3. Involvement of disabled people in the development of the scheme

Since individual applicants rarely use our services more than once and since we are not presently able to identify a representative sample of applicants with disabilities, this scheme is based largely on consultations with the main organisations who act as intermediaries to our applicants, and with the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB). However, our action plan includes measures which should improve our ability to obtain representative contributions from applicants directly.

4. Assessing the impact of our policies and practices

We have a duty, under the legislation, to describe how we will assess the impact (or the likely impact) of our policies and practices on disabled people.

We have been reviewing the impact on disabled people of our policies and procedures as part of a wide-ranging business review, whose key aims are to better meet the needs of all our customers, including those with disabilities, and to increase efficiency.

Our methodology for the customer focus part of the review is:

1. to analyse the routes and processes by which victims of violent crime come to apply for compensation, access information about the progress of their application and learn of its outcome
2. to consult victims and other stakeholders about other routes and processes that they would prefer
3. to consider the feasibility and cost of offering these other options and
4. to implement or pilot those which appear practicable, affordable and unlikely to reduce significantly our operational efficiency

Opportunities for improving the service we provide to disabled people which are identified as part of this wider exercise will be the subject of consultation with relevant bodies and individuals, so that we can select the most cost effective improvements and get the design and implementation right.

For the longer term, an internal impact assessment will be undertaken whenever a change in policy or procedure is being considered which appears likely to affect significantly how we communicate with applicants and/or the information that we intend to ask them to provide.

If the change appears likely to have a major effect, we will consult the main bodies that represent applicants and those concerned with the interests of disabled people.

We will monitor developments in technologies that assist disabled people to communicate so that we can take them into account when reviewing our policies, procedures and systems.

5. Acton plan

Our business review is not due to be completed before the end of April 2007. However the work which has already been undertaken on how we serve disabled people has identified a number of issues, lines for enquiry and ideas for further development and testing, These form our action plan.

Our free phone helpline for potential applicants and the fact that every applicant is provided with the direct line number for his or her caseworker facilitates access to information.

However our dependence on text documents and the need to complete an application form makes it more difficult to for anyone who is visually impaired to deal with us unaided.

Since 2003/04 when we revised the content and presentation of our existing publications all new leaflets are checked by Government agency COI Communications to ensure that they meet the needs of visually impaired customers. And some of our publications are available on request in large print and audio tape formats.

However, the advice of NIB is that some of the text on our current printed application form is too small. Therefore we aim, by 31 March 2007, to either publish a new standard form or one in an alternative format, which meets NIB guidelines, or to offer potential applicants with visual impairments more direct assistance in completing the necessary paperwork.

The business review has also shown that our website lacks certain features which enable people with visual impairments to view text more easily or convert it to spoken word.

Consequently some may be unable to use the site's on-line application facility. To remedy this we aim by 31 March 2007 to complete a feasibility study and technical specification for the upgrade of our site to improve its usefulness for those who are visually impaired. The new features will be put in place as soon as technical and financial resources permit.

Applicants are able to obtain information about the progress of their cases simply by telephoning their caseworker. However when the formal decision is reached about whether an applicant is eligible for compensation, and how much is to be offered, it is communicated by means of a letter. This formality is unavoidable but, subject to technical feasibility, human resources and cost, we aim by 31 March 2007 to offer people with visual impairments the option of receiving letters in large text format.

One complication in implementing the previous undertaking is that unless the applicant's disability is the subject of the application for compensation, we may not be aware that he or she has a disability. With this in mind we intend to consult those who represent applicants, and other stakeholders, about the likely benefit of including in our application forms a section in which the applicant may self-declare a disability and indicate how we might help them. We will aim to complete the consultations by 31 March 2007

From 2007-08 onwards we plan to have regular meetings with our stakeholders, at which services to disabled applicants will be a standing agenda item.

6. Gathering evidence on progress

About every two years we commission a survey of the views of recent applicants on various aspects of the service that we provide. Commencing in 2007, we will seek to obtain a separate breakdown of responses from applicants with disabilities.

If our proposal (see action plan) to invite applicants to tell us about any special needs they may have proceeds, then we will consider surveying such applicants separately in future. The change should also enable us to measure statistically changes in the proportion of disabled applicants who are applying independently. Unfortunately, since some intermediaries hold stock of forms, there may be a significant lead time between publishing a new application form and its use in a high proportion of our intake of new cases.

7. Monitoring and reporting

Our Head of Communications will be responsible for monitoring progress and will report to our Policy Board quarterly on progress on our action plan, on any alterations to the plan and on other developments relating to how we serve applicants with disabilities. From 2006-07 onwards, a summary of progress and developments will be published in our annual report.