

WHAT IS A DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT (DFG)?

A DFG is a grant that is provided by the local authority to help meet the needs of a disabled person by adapting a property to enable the disabled person to continue living there (ODPM, 2003).

The current limit of a DFG is £25,000. The local authority can give a discretionary payment to meet any short fall.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

A DFG can be applied for if you are disabled, or someone living in the property is and:

- The person is either the owner or the tenant, including licensees of the property.
- The disabled person intends to live in the property for the grant condition period, which is currently five years; this period may be shorter, depending on the individual's health.
- That the property is the person's main residence.

Some occupiers of caravans and houseboats are also eligible.

A landlord may apply on behalf of a disabled tenant.

THE ROLE OF THE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

An Occupational Therapist (OT) is needed to assess and recommend any adaptations, they will establish if the adaptations are necessary and appropriate, to establish if the works are practical and reasonable is not the role of the OT (Bull, 1998).

The OT process will commence with the initial assessment, the client will need the OT's skills in breaking down the activities of daily living and devise an intervention that will help them to regain their home and resume their life (Lutton et al, 200).

The College of Occupational Therapist Specialist Section in Housing (COTSSH) was established in 1994 to address the need to link all British OTs working in both purpose built housing and the adaptation of existing properties (Bull, 1998).

A specialist section is a group of OTs, students, support workers and other individuals who have an interest in a similar area of work and work to promote this area (College of Occupational Therapists, 200).

DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT

REVIEWING THE DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT PROGRAMME

The review resulted from growing concerns regarding the DFG means test, in particular the impact on children and adults who are of working age, increasing demand and long waiting lists and the inequality between housing tenures. The research involved widespread consultation with professionals and service users (ODPM, 2005).

The means test for children was abolished in December 2005; this was welcomed by the COT (Richards, 2005).

STRENGTHS OF THE DFG

- The existence of the mandatory equality-based grant with the backing of a ring fenced budget.
- Co-operation of housing staff and occupational therapy staff, problem solving approaches by builders and professionals and the work of the Home Improvement Agencies (HIA).
- Existing structures that allow for the development of good innovative practice, for example use of the DFG for re-location (O'Brien, 2004).

WEAKNESSES OF THE DFG

- The maximum amount of a DFG, which is £25,000, is not sufficient in most areas to provide an extension, the adaptation that is most frequently required for severely disabled people.
- In 2003-4, 47% of all housing authorities had insufficient funds to meet their DFG applications.
- There is, in some areas, a serious shortage of community OTs to complete the required assessments.
- Information to service users and potential service users is mostly extremely poor, for fear that their needs cannot be met.
- There is a severe shortage of housing stock suitable for re-housing as an alternative to adaptations. A wait of three years or more would be likely in 70% of all authorities (ODPM, 200).