



Open Lines

No. 10

**Letters sent to Members of Parliament in June 1992
by Government executive agencies
in reply to Parliamentary Questions**

**with an introduction by
Paul Flynn MP**

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July 1992

Introduction

by Paul Flynn, M.P.

In successive issues of OPEN LINES, I have called for a return to the traditional practice of Parliamentary Questions being answered by Ministers themselves, not by officials. There is no sign of that happening. Ministers are, understandably, very happy with the new arrangement by which, under cover of the "Next Steps" agencies, they can avoid direct responsibility to Parliament for a wide range of public services.

But there is good news to report. The House of Commons Administration Committee, responding to the demand voiced by over 200 Members in an Early Day Motion, has decided that letters from agency chief executives in reply to Parliamentary Questions should be published daily in the section of Hansard

containing Ministers' written answers. This arrangement will commence when the House returns in October after the summer recess. In terms of public access to information, it will no longer matter whether a question is answered by a Minister or by a chief executive.

After a final issue covering the month of July, therefore, its main objective having been achieved, OPEN LINES will cease publication. In its modest way, it will have contributed as much to the preservation of our constitutional rights as many more august publications.

July 1992

Paul Flynn, M.P.
House of Commons

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Editorial note

We are grateful to the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust Ltd. for renewing its financial support, thus making it possible to continue publishing OPEN LINES pending arrangements for publication of chief executives' letters in Hansard.

As in previous issues of OPEN LINES, only letters from agencies in the fields of social security and employment are reproduced in this issue. Those from other agencies, or excluded because they are concerned only with individuals' benefit entitlements, are listed in the Appendix.

In every case, unless otherwise stated, the main body of the letter and any attached tables are reproduced in full, only the formal opening and closing paragraphs being omitted. Two of the tables were found to contain obvious arithmetical errors. In one case the corrected figures are shown and the agency has been asked to send the amended table to the Member concerned and to the House of Commons Library; in the other, we have drawn attention to the errors in a footnote on page 9.

BENEFITS AGENCY

Attendance allowance: speed of service

Mr Graham Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the trend in the speed of service at the attendance allowance unit since the introduction of disability living allowance.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 2 June 1992:

In April 1992 responsibility for processing Attendance Allowance claims passed from the Attendance Allowance Unit to ten Disability Benefit Centres around the country.

Performance measurements for April show that of claims cleared in Disability Benefit Centres 58% were cleared within 50 days of receipt.

The Attendance Allowance Unit remains responsible for handling reviews of initial and subsequent claims. 80% of reviews processed in April were cleared within 61 days.

Significant changes in the way claims to and reviews of Attendance Allowance would be determined were introduced in April. It is too early to assess trends in the speed of service but the changes in the adjudication of Attendance Allowance claims are intended to produce a speedier service.

Disability living allowance

Mr Graham Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications for disability living allowance (a) have been referred for a medical examination by the adjudication officer in order to assess the claim and (b) have included a request from the claimant for a medical examination.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 16 June 1992:

From the benefit's launch on 3 February to the end of May 1992, over 47,000 adjudication officer decisions were made relating to new claims. Of these, only approximately 4,000 involved the use of an examining medical practitioner. Information on the total number of new claims referred for a medical examination is only available at disproportionate cost.

New self assessment procedures place more reliance upon information provided by customers and the DLA claim pack does not direct applicants to request an examination. The information you request in the second part of your question is therefore not available.

Mr Graham Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the number of applications received by his Department for disability living allowance where the form was completed through the benefits inquiry line completion service; and what was the number and percentage of these resulting in an award of (a) higher-rate care component, (b) middle-rate care component, (c) lower-rate care component, (d) higher-rate mobility component, and (e) lower-rate mobility component; and how many were refused.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 16 June 1992:

Between 3 February 1992 and 31 May 1992, there were 4,628 claim forms completed via the Benefit Enquiry Line for both DLA and Attendance Allowance 65+.

Information is not available to show the outcome of these claims, nor of the rates awarded.

Disability benefits: waiting times

Mr Donald Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current average waiting time for dealing with claims for (a) attendance allowance, (b) mobility allowance and (c) disability living allowance and, in the case of (a) and (b), how those waiting times have varied over each of the last three years.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 24 June 1992:

The Benefits Agency introduced a standard performance measure across benefits some time ago. This is normally expressed in terms of clearance targets, shown as a percentage of cases cleared, rather than average waiting times as was previously the case.

As your question included MobA, I should also explain that this particular target remained unchanged and was still expressed in terms of the average length of time taken to process claims. This is because MobA was replaced by DLA from April 1992. In the case of AA, the new target format was introduced in the 1991-92 year.

Therefore, the information you require about average numbers of waiting days over the last three years is as follows:

	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92
AA	37.9	41.1	58.3% in 50 days
MobA	33.7	35.1	38.8

MobA and AA for people aged under 65 have now ceased with the introduction of the DLA. Claims from people with care and mobility needs are dealt with under the new benefit, whilst those aged over 65, may still claim AA. Claims to both benefits are assessed and adjudicated under the new rules.

A new target for AA of 60% of cases to be cleared in 35 days was introduced from April 1992. It will not therefore be possible to provide meaningful average performance figures over recent months until the target has been in place for a little longer. For DLA, on which we began to accept claims from February 1992, the target is for 60% of claims to be cleared in 30 days. The average percentage clearance of new DLA claims, up to and including the end of May 1992, was just short of 56%.

However, I should explain that it was always expected that there would be a backlog of applications to deal with in the early months of operation as a result of the advertising campaign . . .

..... [see footnote on page 3]

Indeed, from February to May, over 380,000 claims were received for AA and DLA. Claims therefore are currently taking longer to process than we would like.

..... [see footnote on page 3]

Social security offices

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about the number and organisation of social security offices.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 2 June 1992:

The Agency has almost 500 social security offices at present, clustered into 159 management units, or Districts. Customer views on the location of offices are taken into account when District Managers plan future service provision.

I recently wrote to all Members enclosing a copy of a new leaflet which gave further details about the structure and organisation of the Agency and I hope you found this useful. If you have any particular aspect on which you would like further information please let me know.

Local office staff: Newham

Mr Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many staff, full-time equivalent, were employed in each of the three local offices in the Newham district benefits agency for each quarter in 1991 in (a) income support, (b) contributions, (c) direct payments, (d) social fund, (e) fraud, (f) child support and (g) total; and what is the current position for the latest date for which he has figures.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 2 June 1992:

The number of staff employed in each of the offices of the Newham District (Canning Town, Plaistow and Stratford) for the final three quarters of 1991, and the first quarter of 1992, is

in the attached annex.

I am afraid that a similar analysis of staffing figures for the quarter ending March 1991 is not available owing to the reorganisation of the Newham District's offices at that time.

You also asked about staff engaged in contributions work. This is a matter for the Contributions Agency. However, I understand from Miss Ann Chant, the Chief Executive, that the information which you require is as follows:

	June 91	Sept. 91	Dec. 91	March 92
Canning Town	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL
Plaistow	6	6	6	6
Stratford	15	13	14	12
Total	21	19	20	18

Annex: Benefits Agency - Staffing in Newham District Branch Offices

Office	Quarter ending	Income Support	Direct Payments	Social Fund	Fraud	Child Support	Total Staffing
Canning Town	June 1991	26.00	1.50	6.00	2.00	3.50	54.50
Plaistow		68.50	6.00	9.00	7.00	5.50	125.00
Stratford		83.00	6.00	13.50	9.00	6.00	190.50
Canning Town	Sept. 1991	23.00	1.50	8.00	4.00	3.50	62.50
Plaistow		57.50	6.00	8.00	7.00	5.50	122.50
Stratford		74.50	4.00	14.50	10.00	5.00	185.50
Canning Town	Dec. 1991	22.00	2.50	8.00	4.00	3.50	61.50
Plaistow		56.00	6.00	8.00	7.00	5.50	115.00
Stratford		79.00	5.00	15.00	10.50	5.00	182.50
Canning Town	March 1992	23.50	2.50	7.00	4.00	3.50	62.00
Plaistow		53.00	5.00	12.00	7.00	5.50	116.00
Stratford		72.00	5.00	15.00	11.50	5.00	180.00

Social fund budgets: Leeds

Mr John Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will show the social fund budgets for all offices in the Leeds metropolitan district for grants and loans for each year since 1988 both at real prices and at 1992 prices showing the percentage increase or decrease on the 1988 allocation.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 16 June 1992:

I have provided details of the gross expenditure for loans and grants for each of the years 1988-89, 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92. These figures are compared to 1992-93 values and the percentage increase against 1988-89 values is shown.

For the years 1988 to 1990, details are given for the former Departmental offices of Leeds East, Leeds South, Leeds West, Leeds North and Leeds North-West. For 1991, details are given for the Benefits Agency's Districts of Leeds North and Leeds South.

Annex A gives information for grants, Annex B for loans.

Annex A: Grants outturn

Year	Office	Outturn (actual)	%increase (over 88-89)	Outturn (92-93 prices) *
88-89	A	220,718		284,594
	B	85,808		110,641
	C	89,705		115,666
	D	296,686		382,547
	E	148,484		191,455
89-90	A	246,089	11.5	297,694
	B	105,178	22.5	127,739
	C	142,053	58.4	171,842
	D	299,564	1.0	362,383
	E	173,158	16.6	209,469
90-91	A	252,257	14.3	282,074
	B	103,984	21.2	116,275
	C	154,249	72.0	172,481
	D	306,813	3.4	343,078
	E	168,998	13.8	188,974
91-92	F	629,911	59.0	658,257
	G	542,755	21.9	567,179

Annex B: Loans outturn

Year	Office	Outturn (actual)	%increase (over 88-89)	Outturn (92-93 prices) *
88-89	A	578,309		745,672
	B	232,949		300,364
	C	303,299		391,074
	D	599,962		773,591
	E	318,102		410,161
89-90	A	591,486	2.3	715,521
	B	239,513	2.8	289,739
	C	309,615	2.1	374,541
	D	698,759	16.5	845,289
	E	377,343	18.6	456,472
90-91	A	671,755	16.2	751,156
	B	247,493	6.2	276,747
	C	333,770	10.0	373,225
	D	810,115	35.0	905,871
	E	443,066	39.3	495,436
91-92	F	1,441,105	29.3	1,505,955
	G	1,535,738	37.3	1,604,846

Key: A - Leeds East B - Leeds South C - Leeds West
D - Leeds North E - Leeds North-West
F - Leeds South District G - Leeds North District

* Real terms figures have been calculated using the current GDP deflator and may alter.

Family credit claims

Mr Malcolm Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will take action to speed up the processing of family credit claims; and if sufficient resources are available to meet current levels of claims.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 8 June 1992: The Family Credit Unit participated in a review of policy and procedures during 1991/92. This resulted in important changes to the way in which Family Credit claims are assessed and took effect from 7 April 1992. The new method of deciding normal weekly earnings has greatly simplified the adjudication process.

It is hoped that this change will help the Family Credit Unit to

improve both accuracy and the clearance time of claims. I should also like to point out that the target for clearance of Family Credit claims has been significantly tightened up for the year 1992/93 to reflect our optimism in the success of the new procedures. In 1991/92 the target was to clear 60% of the claims within 18 working days, the actual clearance rate achieved was 64.4%. The target for 1992/93 has been improved to 60% in 13 working days.

If I may turn to your point about the level of resources. The Family Credit Unit currently employs approximately 900 staff which is an increase of 20% over last year's resource levels. This is a result of the anticipation of a rise in the workload for the years 1992/93. The additional workload stems from the changes in legislation introduced from April, ie the reduction in the remunerative work condition from 24 to 16 hours and the introduction of a £15 disregard on maintenance.

Disability living allowance claims *

Mr Jim Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give the current number of applications still outstanding for disabled living allowance on 1 April, 1 May and 1 June, together with the weekly average for that period of (a) applications submitted and (b) applications cleared.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 16 June 1992: You asked for information about the number of applications outstanding for Disability Living Allowance (DLA). I should explain that there are two categories of application. Firstly, there are applications from people who were not already in receipt of Attendance Allowance or Mobility Allowance when DLA was introduced. Secondly there are applications from people currently getting one of those benefits but who may be entitled to an additional amount under the DLA entitlement rules. These latter applications are known as "top-up" claims. The following information is split between the two categories.

<i>Number of new DLA claims outstanding</i>	
1 April	52,000
1 May	87,000
1 June	114,000

<i>Number of top-up claims outstanding</i>	
1 April	127,000
1 May	138,000
1 June	137,000

Clearly there is a very considerable amount of work outstanding. Because there was no phasing in of the new benefit it was always expected that there would be a backlog to clear in getting it up and running. The enormous success of the advertising campaign and other policy initiatives attracted a much larger number of applications at the outset than we had expected or indeed was forecast on top up claims. Also the pattern of receipt of new applications has been heavier than expected in the early months of the new benefit. This coupled with the initial inexperience of staff in dealing with an entirely new benefit and the fact that additional staff drafted on to this work have required training has contributed significantly to the backlog.

One other development which has affected the issue is that the DLA national publicity campaign and take-up campaigns of outside organisations has generated significant numbers of new claims to Attendance Allowance and Mobility Allowance. This has come at a time when staff were being released from these

* Much of the information given in this letter to Mr Cousins or in the letter of 16 June to Mr Paul Flynn (see page 6) is repeated in letters to other Members on the same subject. Where this occurs, either the whole or part of the letter is omitted and reference is made to this footnote.

benefit areas for re-training on the new DLA work.

You asked for information about the average weekly numbers of claims registered and cleared from 1 April. The details for April and May are as follows:-

	<i>Weekly average of new claims registered</i>	<i>Weekly average of new claims cleared</i>
April	11,600	3,600
May	10,400	4,200
	<i>Weekly average of top up claims registered</i>	<i>Weekly average of top up claims cleared</i>
April	4,000	1,600
May	3,100	3,300

I can assure you, however, that active steps are being taken to reduce the backlog and to significantly improve clearance times. In total some 2,000 staff have been trained to administer the new benefits at Blackpool and the 10 Disability Centres around the country. Extra staff are now being taken on and overtime is also being worked to a considerable extent. Our working arrangements already include acknowledging all claims as they are made and keeping the customer informed of progress as much as possible. We are in addition reviewing our working practices to ensure the most efficient and effective procedures are in place consistent with our customers needs.

These measures are beginning to bear fruit. The above figures indicate a marked improvement in output now compared with the early weeks of the new benefit. We expect this trend to continue and indeed to accelerate quite rapidly as a result of the increasing expertise of the staff involved and the other measures we have taken. For example the clearance rate for top up claims for the first week in June was 6,200, approaching double that of the average weekly clearance rate during May. But I am by no means complacent about this and we are currently looking at still further ways of clearing the backlog even more quickly.

Whilst we still have some way to go, therefore, before we clear the backlog of cases, I hope you will agree that the action we have taken clearly shows a significant move in the right direction. I shall, of course, personally be continuing to monitor the position very closely and if further steps prove necessary then these will be taken.

Mr Tim Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average time from submission of a claim for disability living allowance to its resolution.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 24 June 1992: The Benefits Agency introduced a standard performance measure across benefits some time ago. This is expressed in terms of clearance targets. Since the launch of DLA, the average performance has been 56% of claims cleared in 30 days compared with the primary target of 60% in 30 days.

..... [see footnote on this page]

Publicity spending

Mr Frank Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) pursuant to his answer of 2 June, *Official Report*, column 489, if he will make a statement on the variations in the estimated publicity spending of the Benefits Agency as announced in April and November 1991 and the outturn figure; (2) what was the publicity spending of the Benefits Agency during 1990-91.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 23 June 1992: I will answer each of your questions in turn.

Variations in publicity estimates & outturn figures

The figure announced in April 1991 (£8.7m) gave an estimate of the total BA publicity budget for the 1991-92 financial year.

In answer to your Parliamentary Question in November 1991, the following figures were provided:

Spending on TV, radio & press adverts	£NIL
Spending on information material	£4.8m

As your question requested figures for the estimated expenditure on advertising and promotional material, the figures quoted excluded planned expenditure on other non-promotional work such as communications research and the provision of display equipment and materials to Benefits Agency offices.

In answer to your Parliamentary Question in June 1992 on outturn figures, actual publicity spending during the 1991-92 financial year was provided:

Spending on TV, radio & press adverts	£NIL
Spending on information material	£6.55m

I am afraid these figures were not totally consistent with those provided on the earlier occasion as they related to the entire BA publicity budget ie. including non-promotional work. In addition, owing to an oversight, non-recurrent publicity expenditure was unfortunately wrongly excluded from the figure quoted in June. Non-recurrent expenditure is money spent on one-off work, specific to that financial year. Adding this non-recurrent expenditure to the figure of £6.55m gives a total BA publicity expenditure in 1991-92 of £7.377m.

I should explain that the difference of £1.323m between the April 1991 estimate of £8.7m and the actual spending during 1991-92 of £7.377m is accounted for by budget transfers to other non-publicity customer service projects within the Benefits Agency, and by projects which were cancelled during the year, including work cancelled due to the election.

BA publicity spending during 1990-91

As this period was before the start of the Benefits Agency (BA) there was no expenditure incurred under a BA publicity budget. At that time the budget for future areas of publicity work of the BA was then held by DSS.

Family Credit

Mrs Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many weeks elapsed between application and receipt of family credit for (a) employed people and (b) self-employed people in each of the years for which family credit has been available; and what is the current figure;

(2) if he will list the total number of appeals lodged by (a) employed people and (b) self-employed people against decisions not to grant family credit to applicants in each year since its inception; and if he will show the number of successful appeals in each year.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 2 June 1992:

I will answer each of your points in turn.

Family credit applications

The information which you requested is as follows:

Period	Average Clearance Time	
13/3/88 - 31/3/89	17.2 (all claims)	
	<i>Claims from employed people</i>	<i>Claims from self-employed people</i>
1/4/89 - 31/3/90	17.8	26.7
1/4/90 - 31/3/91	18.6	31.4
1/4/91 - 31/3/92	16.5	27.9
April 1992	14.3	24.6

All figures quoted represent working days.

For 1988-89 information is not available to show the average clearance time of applications from employed and self employed people separately.

Owing to technical difficulties, no statistical information was produced for the month of March 1990. Consequently the figures provided for 1989-90 represent an average over eleven months.

Family credit appeals

I am sorry that I am unable to provide the full range of information which you requested. This is because some of it is not collected as a matter of routine (ie the number of awards made on appeal by the Independent Tribunal Service) and statistical information is not available in order to divide the number of appeals lodged by employed or self employed people.

However, figures are available to show the total number of appeals lodged against Family Credit decisions in each year since its inception and these are as follows:

Year Ending	
31/12/88	5,396
31/12/89	12,609
31/12/90	14,719
31/12/91	15,921
Total appeals received	48,645

Of the total appeals received by the end of December 1991, almost 29,000 were lodged against decisions not to grant Family Credit. However, I am afraid that it is not possible to break this figure down further.

Social fund inspectors

Mrs Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he is taking to ensure that social fund applicants and potential applicants are made aware of the role of the social fund inspectors.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 17 June 1992: Social Fund Inspectors (SFI) are appointed by and answerable to the Social Fund Commissioner and are independent of DSS/BA. The Commissioner has produced posters and leaflets explaining the role of the SFI and these are displayed and issued in social security offices.

The Agency also issues a wide range of publicity material relating to the Social Fund which includes specific reference to the review procedures and role of SFI. Leaflet SFL2, in particular, which is directed at applicants and potential applicants, gives general information about the Social Fund and the role of SFI.

In addition, other leaflets explain how dissatisfied applicants can ask for a review. Those who do so are offered an interview to discuss the decision. During this, they are advised of their right to seek a review by a SFI should the review not prove to their satisfaction. This is reinforced by the review decision letter which tells the applicant how to ask for a SFI review.

The SFI review is also covered in the Social Fund Officer's Guide which is a published document. Copies are available in social security offices for inspection by members of the public.

The Social Fund Commissioner has informed me that she also has taken steps to inform applicants about the work of her Inspectors. Regular meetings are held with organisations which represent applicants and with other interested groups. Nineteen such meetings were held in the last year. An information sheet describing the procedures involved in SFI reviews is also produced for representatives of applicants.

Social fund computer system

Mrs Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated cost and time scale for implementing any planned improvements to the computer system which are deemed necessary for the efficient operation of the social fund and the production of reliable performance data.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 17 June 1992: At present, the Social Fund is supported by stand alone systems in District Offices but the Agency hopes to replace these with a mainframe on-line system starting around the end of the financial year. The options, including financial and timescale, are now being evaluated and it is therefore not possible to provide the information requested at this stage.

Social fund: manpower

Mrs Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the level of departmental manpower absorbed by the social fund expressed (a) in numbers and (b) as a percentage of total departmental manpower for each year of its operation.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 17 June 1992: I am able to provide details of the number of staff allocated to Social Fund in each year of its operation. Allocations up to and including 1990-91 include management posts. From 1991-92 management posts are not allocated specifically to work areas so cannot be identified separately. The figures are also expressed as a percentage of the total Departmental manpower.

Total manpower figures for the Department of Social Security from 1989 are provided in the attached Annex. The figures for 1991-92 relate only to the Benefits Agency.

Departmental manpower figures for 1988 are not shown as these relate to the Department of Health and Social Security and are not therefore comparable.

Annex: Manpower figures

Year	SF staff	Staff in post	Percentage
1988-89	3,865	-	-
1989-90	3,677	81,623	4.5
1990-91	5,369	79,937	6.7
1991-92	5,088	66,175	7.7

Social fund: clearance times

Mrs Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the performance targets in working days which were set for (a) budgeting loans, (b) crisis loans and (c) community care grants and the actual average clearance times achieved in each of the years for which information is available; and if he will provide a breakdown by region.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 17 June 1992: Prior to the inception of the Benefits Agency in 1991, there were no formally agreed clearance targets. Average clearance times for the years of 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91 are published in the appropriate Secretary of State's Annual Reports and are shown at Appendix A.

The clearance targets agreed between the Secretary of State and the Benefits Agency for 1991-92, and the average clearance times for the same year, are shown at Appendix B. I have included the average performance for budgeting loans, though no formal targets were agreed.

Targets agreed for 1992-93 are shown at Appendix C. These targets appear in the Benefits Agency's Customer Charter which was published earlier this year. Each District is responsible for displaying formally agreed targets in public areas of their

local offices. Some Districts may also display other locally agreed targets.

Information on Social Fund application clearance times has not been kept on a regional basis.

Appendix A: Average clearance times (working days)

	Budgeting loans	Crisis loans	Community care grants
1988-89	13 *	1	7
1989-90	10 *	Under 1	8
1990-91	4.9 #	Same day	7

* This is an overall figure which does not take account of the time required to send and return the loan acceptance offer letter (assumed to be 5 days).

This is a net figure and takes into account the 5 day assumption.

Appendix B: Agreed targets and average clearance times for 1991-92 (working days) (provisional)

	Budgeting loans	Crisis loans	Community care grants
Agreed targets	N/A	Same day	7
Average clearance times	3.2 *	Same day	5.9

* This is a net figure which takes account of the time required to send and return the loan acceptance offer letter (assumed to be 5 days).

Appendix C: Agreed targets for 1992-93 (working days)

	Crisis loans	Community care grants
Agreed targets	Clearance on the day the need arises	7

Cold weather payments: Moray

Mrs Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many households in Moray constituency qualify for payments under the cold weather payments scheme.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 30 June 1992: Moray constituency is served by the Elgin office which is situated in the Highlands and Islands District. It is not possible to give an exact figure of the number of customers qualifying for a Cold Weather Payment except at disproportionate cost. However, based on figures for those claiming Income Support in November 1991 it was estimated that approximately 2,900 customers claiming from the Elgin office may have qualified for a Cold Weather Payment had their area triggered.

Leaflet FB31

Mr Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will publish the letter sent to Mr Martin Baillie of the Islington Welfare Rights Unit in reply to his letter of 9 January to the chief executive of the Benefits Agency concerning leaflet FB31.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 11 June 1992: It is, of course, open to recipients of correspondence from the Benefits Agency to publish that correspondence if they so wish. However, it is not the practice of the Agency to do so. As you will appreciate, many letters which the Agency sends will include confidential information that it would not be appropriate for the Agency to publish more widely.

If there are any particular points about this matter which you wish to raise, please let me know, and I will be happy to respond to them.

Mr Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action was taken as a result of the letter sent to the chief executive of the Benefits Agency by Mr Martin Baillie of the Islington Welfare Rights Unit on 9 January concerning leaflet FB31.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 22 June 1992: The implication of Invalid Care Allowance (on Severe Disability Premium) was addressed in the new April 1992 edition of FB31 *Caring for someone?* Under the section 'Invalid Care Allowance' (page 8), a paragraph was included advising carers to seek advice before they claim Invalid Care Allowance if the carer or the person they care for is in receipt of Income Support. It would have been unwise to be more specific than this as much depends on the personal circumstances of the individuals concerned and it would be impossible to outline every permutation.

If there are any further points you wish to raise concerning this matter please let me know and I will be happy to respond to them.

Disability living allowance claims

Mr Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether the target of clearing 60 per cent. of disabled living allowance claims within 30 days is now being met.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 16 June 1992: You asked whether the Agency's target of clearing 60% of new claims to Disability Living Allowance (DLA) within 30 days is being met. The average percentage clearance of new claims cleared within 30 days up to and including the end of May 1992 was just short of 56%.

I should explain that because there was no phasing in of DLA it was always expected there would be a backlog of applications to be dealt with in the early months of the DLA scheme. This will obviously initially affect our ability to meet the clearance target which is intended to represent the on-going situation. I would expect a fairer picture of the Agency's performance against the target would begin to emerge from October.

Indeed the success of the advertising campaign and other policy initiatives has attracted a much larger number of applications at the outset than was expected. This includes, of course, not only entirely new claims to DLA but also "top-up claims" (ie claims from persons already in receipt of Attendance Allowance or Mobility Allowance when DLA began but who may be entitled to an additional amount under the DLA rules) and new claims to Attendance Allowance from persons aged 65 or over. The total new DLA claims registered up to the end of May 1992 was over 160,000 with a similar number of "top-up" claims.

I can assure you that active steps are being taken to reduce the backlog and to significantly improve clearance times. In total some 2,000 staff have been trained to administer the new benefits at Blackpool and the 10 Disability Centres around the country. Extra staff are now being taken on and overtime is also being worked to a considerable extent. We are also reviewing our working practices to ensure the most efficient and effective procedures are in place consistent with our customers needs.

Although the figures for May show a marked improvement in clearance rates, because of the concentration of applications during March, April and May, these are not yet matching the level of intake. The average weekly clearance rate for new claims in May was running at 4,200 compared with 2,900 in March. We expect this trend to accelerate quite rapidly as a result of the increasing expertise of the staff involved and the other measures we have taken. This is borne out by the clearance rate for "top up" claims during the first week in June which at 6,256 was nearly double the average clearance rate during May.

I am by no means complacent about the number of applications still to be processed and we are currently looking at still further ways of clearing the backlog even more quickly. I am personally

monitoring the position closely and I can assure you that if further steps prove necessary these will be taken.

Social fund: Wales *

Mr Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the gross and net social fund budget for grants and loans respectively for each district in Wales, in total and per head of income support caseload, for each of the years 1990-91 and 1991-92, and the corresponding gross and estimated net total and per capita budget figures for 1992-93 based on the caseload at the latest date for which information is available.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 22 June 1992: Information on Social Fund expenditure for Wales in relation to Income Support caseload is shown in the attached tables, except for 1992-93 for which information will not be available until the end of the year.

Annex A gives details for grants in the year 1990-91, and Annex B provides the same information for loans. The information is given for each of the former Departmental offices in Wales. Figures for 1991-92 are shown by Benefits Agency District, at Annex C.

Annex A: Social fund expenditure - grants, Welsh offices, 1990/91

Local office	Expenditure	Per capita
Aberdare	126,412	19.60
Abertillery	52,995	19.32
Aberystwyth	51,535	7.89
Ammanford	40,054	12.41
Anglesey	87,882	13.45
Bargoed	99,673	19.81
Barry	85,661	12.12
Blackwood	64,305	17.16
Bridgend	132,666	11.06
Caernarfon	57,191	9.71
Caerphilly	149,785	24.73
Cardiff Central	140,246	15.03
Cardiff East	268,650	20.48
Cardiff West	194,004	17.73
Carmarthen	34,453	9.40
Colwyn Bay	71,243	9.83
Cwmbran	143,384	13.03
Deeside	72,093	13.80
Ebbw Vale	87,696	14.00
Haverfordwest	86,193	14.92
Llanelli	101,093	12.91
Merthyr Tydfil	98,221	13.15
Morrison	153,284	19.45
Neath	74,426	13.23
Newport Gwent	289,706	16.94
Newtown	45,067	9.26
Pembroke Dock	56,872	15.10
Pontypridd	107,241	16.47
Port Talbot	87,004	17.02
Porth	61,429	13.64
Portmadog	25,668	5.52
Rhyl	335,367	28.69
Swansea	373,251	20.70
Tonypandy	95,405	16.92
Wrexham	155,134	11.50

* Readers should note that, although Mr Flynn asked for information about social fund *budgets*, the tables supplied do not show the budget allocations but only the *expenditure*.

Annex B: Social fund expenditure - loans, Welsh offices, 1990/91

Local Office	Expenditure	Per capita
Aberdare	308,509	47.82
Abertillery	126,614	46.16
Aberystwyth	100,338	23.73
Ammanford	91,290	28.28
Anglesey	192,052	29.40
Bargoed	246,641	49.02
Barry	216,898	30.68
Blackwood	141,138	37.66
Bridgend	326,949	27.26
Caernarfon	143,080	24.30
Caerphilly	381,130	62.91
Cardiff Central	327,028	35.05
Cardiff East	565,058	43.07
Cardiff West	488,880	44.68
Carmarthen	100,034	27.29
Colwyn Bay	181,872	25.09
Cwmbran	343,943	31.24
Deeside	149,114	28.53
Ebbw Vale	216,602	34.58
Haverfordwest	182,254	31.55
Llanelli	248,512	31.75
Merthyr Tydfil	296,402	39.67
Morrison	354,640	45.00
Neath	189,133	33.61
Newport Gwent	757,045	44.28
Newtown	109,332	22.47
Pembroke Dock	140,235	37.23
Pontypridd	244,748	37.59
Port Talbot	206,280	40.34
Porth	156,533	33.30
Porthmadog	75,569	16.24
Rhyl	308,376	26.38
Swansea	642,499	35.64
Tonypandy	228,754	40.72
Wrexham	398,531	29.53

Annex C: Social fund expenditure - Welsh offices, 1991/92

District	Expenditure	Per capita
Grants		
Cynon, Merthyr & Rhymney Valley	543,845	20.21
Ogwr Afan Nedd	384,952	16.07
North Wales Coast	375,022	14.54
South Gwent & Islwyn	396,345	17.83
Swansea	480,074	18.10
Taff Rhondda	299,648	16.43
West Wales	369,112	14.26
Mid Wales & Maelor	299,042	15.17
North Gwent & Brecon	356,982	16.86
Gwyneddigion	313,897	13.95
South Glamorgan	719,226	16.70
Loans		
Cynon, Merthyr & Rhymney Valley	1,426,087	52.98
Ogwr Afan Nedd	968,304	40.43
North Wales Coast	883,183	34.24
South Gwent & Islwyn	1,210,471	54.46
Swansea	1,099,201	41.43
Taff Rhondda	815,030	44.69
West Wales	967,751	37.23
Mid Wales & Maelor	727,608	36.91
North Gwent & Brecon	957,954	45.24
Gwyneddigion	774,551	34.43
South Glamorgan	1,881,287	43.69

Disability living allowance

Mr Neil Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many claims for disability living allowance remained to be decided as of 1 June;

(2) what is the average delay between the approval of a claim for a disability living allowance and the claimant being paid;

(3) in what proportion of decisions on disability living allowance have appeals against the decision been made; and in how many of these cases the appeal has been determined in favour of the claimant;

(4) how many claims for disability living allowance had been decided by 1 June.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 24 June 1992:

I should explain that there are two categories of application. Firstly, there are applications from people who were not already in receipt of Attendance Allowance or Mobility Allowance when DLA was introduced. Secondly there are applications from people who were in receipt of one of these benefits but who may be entitled to an additional amount under the DLA entitlement rules. These latter applications are known as "top-up" claims. Details of the number of outstanding and processed claims, split between the two categories, are as follows:

Number of new DLA claims outstanding at 31.5.92 = 114,000

Number of "top-up" claims outstanding at 31.5.92 = 137,000

Number of new DLA claims processed at 31.5.92 = 48,000

Number of "top-up" claims processed at 31.5.92 = 24,000

The success of the advertising campaign and other policy initiatives has attracted a much larger number of applications in the early stages than was expected. In the first 4 months of live operation more than 161,500 new claims were registered and 28,500 awards made. Over the same period some 160,000 "top-up" claims were also received.

..... [see footnote on page 3]

At Blackpool as part of the arrangements for the introduction of DLA we have installed a central Enquiry Handling Service to provide easier telephone access for our customers who want to make enquiries about their claims. Calls are charged at local BT rates and enquiries can be transferred to sections throughout Blackpool and Preston or to any of the 10 Disability Benefit Centres. The staff on this service have access to computer terminals so they can establish the current situation for each enquiry while the customer is on the telephone. An average of 8,000 calls daily are currently being handled. I accept, however, that there are real difficulties, in view of the increasing number of calls, in getting through the main switchboard. We are currently urgently reviewing the problems of access by telephone and hope to see real improvement in the near future.

You asked for information about the proportion of decisions on DLA where appeals against the decision have been made and in how many of these cases the appeal has been determined in favour of the customer. Only 12 appeals had been registered up to 31.5.92 and, to date, none have been heard. It is, therefore, too early to provide further information on this aspect at this stage.

You also asked about the average delay between the approval of a claim for DLA and the customer being paid. This information is not available in the form requested, however we have introduced a standard performance measure expressed in terms of clearance targets. Since the launch of DLA, the average performance has been 56% of claims cleared in 30 days compared with the primary target of 60% in 30 days.

No fixed abode

Dr Charles Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what arrangements are made for the payment of benefits to those of no fixed abode.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 25 June 1992: In general, customers with no fixed abode are paid in the same manner as other benefit recipients ie. by way of girocheque or order book depending on their circumstances and nature of claim. Such payments are made via Benefits Agency (BA) local services and where the customer is registered as unemployed, the Employment Service Jobcentre. In many cases, girocheques and notifications to collect order books from the Post Office are handed to the customer over the BA or Jobcentre counter. In other cases they are posted to addresses nominated by customers.

Disability living allowance

Mr Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many claims have so far been received for the disability living allowance, broken down by regional disability benefit centre; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what percentage of those claims for disability living allowance requiring further medical evidence necessitated the claimant undergoing a medical examination, broken down for each of the regional disability benefit centres; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what is the average length of time taken to decide each claim for disability living allowance, broken down for each of the regional disability centres; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what percentage of claims for disability living allowance so far adjudicated on have been awarded benefit; at what rate this benefit has been awarded, broken down for each of the regional disability centres; and if he will make a statement;

(5) what percentage of claims for disability living allowance have been able to be adjudicated as they were received; what percentage required further medical evidence or opinion, broken down for each of the regional disability centres; and if he will make a statement;

(6) what percentage of claimants for disability living allowance opted to undergo a medical examination rather than use the self-assessment form, broken down for each regional disability centre; and if he will make a statement.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 30 June 1992: I will deal with each of your points in turn.

Number of claims

Since the benefit's launch in February 1992 to the end of May, over 160,000 new claims have been received, some 5,500 or so of these at the DLA unit at Fylde. A breakdown of claims received at the DBCs (excluding those claims made under the Special Rules for the terminally ill) is given at Annex A.

Time taken to determine applications

The Benefits Agency introduced a standard performance measure across benefits some time ago. This is expressed in terms of clearance targets, rather than average waiting times, as was previously the case. Since the launch of DLA the average performance has been 56% of new claims cleared in 30 days, compared with the primary target of 60% in 30 days. A breakdown across the ten DBCs is attached at Annex A.

I should explain that it was always expected there would be a backlog of applications to deal with in the early months of operation as a result of the advertising campaign.
[see footnote on page 3] From February to May, over 380,000 claims were received for Attendance Allowance and DLA.

. [see footnote on page 3]

Claims adjudicated upon on receipt and those requiring further medical evidence

From February to the end of May almost 48,000 new claim decisions were made. Of these, over 24,000 (51%) were based upon information provided on the claim form, whilst in excess of 14,000 (30%) required further medical evidence or opinion. A breakdown across the ten DBCs is given at Annex B.

Self-assessment form

One of the primary aims with the introduction of DLA, was to reduce the need for medical examinations. New self-assessment procedures place more reliance on information provided by customers. The DLA claim pack does not direct applicants to request an examination. The information you require as to the numbers of cases where people have opted to undergo a medical examination, is therefore not available.

Successful claims and rates of benefit

The table at Annex C gives a detailed breakdown of the numbers and rates of awards made, with the comparative success rates shown at the foot of the chart.

Annex A: New claims

Disability Benefit Centre	New claims received	Average clearance times (% within 30 days)
Edinburgh	18,276	45
Newcastle	11,562	58
Leeds	17,791	68
Manchester	12,282	50
Bootle	13,051	38
Birmingham	22,173	61
Bristol	9,121	72
Cardiff	12,209	51
Wembley	17,459	69
Sutton	14,639	75

Annex B: Claims adjudicated upon on receipt and those requiring further medical evidence

	% requiring further medical evidence	% of column (A) requiring a medical examination	% claims adjudicated on upon receipt
	(A)	(B)	(C)
Edinburgh	48	28	38
Newcastle	49	38	41
Leeds	19	24	61
Manchester	51	13	32
Bootle	36	41	41
Birmingham	17	36	65
Bristol	17	10	59
Cardiff	27	34	57
Wembley	25	28	56
Sutton	22	14	54

Column A gives the percentage of claims determined where some medical evidence was required.

Column B gives those claims where the claimant underwent a medical examination, as a percentage of claims where some medical evidence was required.

Column C gives the percentage of claims which were able to be adjudicated upon at an early stage, using information supplied on the statement of disability.

Note: All figures are based on the total number of cases cleared at the DBCs and the DLA Unit at Fylde.

Annex C: Decisions on new claims for period February to May 1992 (inclusive)

	Edinburgh	Newcastle	Leeds	Manchester	Bootle*	Birmingham	Bristol	Cardiff	Wembley	Sutton*
HR Care	53	33	52	65	40	77	54	45	208	133
MR Care	38	33	88	64	29	83	75	55	189	165
LR Care	210	427	426	246	259	317	228	218	580	209
HR MOB A	332	674	947	382	545	787	428	1,042	1,064	454
LR MOB A	162	175	242	129	168	322	305	203	711	464
MR Care & HR MOB A	260	207	431	248	230	427	346	190	528	227
HR Care & LR MOB A	12	21	27	25	33	22	31	15	87	55
MR Care & HR MOB A	73	81	176	59	96	144	137	182	255	173
MR Care & LR MOB A	41	70	132	54	68	88	126	89	248	198
LR Care & HR MOB A	142	296	372	80	237	249	195	334	495	130
LR Care & LR MOB A	460	302	854	391	368	673	400	290	1,232	690
TOTAL	1,783	2,319	3,747	1,743	2,037	3,189	2,325	2,663	5,597	2,898
<i>Rejections</i>										
Medical Grounds	1,175	2,905	1,391	1,774	940	792	848	1,100	1,695	1,459
Lay Grounds - R & P	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	5	3
Lay Grounds - Age	348	412	751	442	368	236	467	337	903	810
Lay Grounds - Other	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	2	1	1
TOTAL	1,524	3,318	2,142	2,216	1,311	1,028	1,317	1,439	2,604	2,272
Total AO Decisions	3,307	5,637	5,889	3,959	3,384	4,217	3,642	4,102	8,201	5,170
Success Rate (%)	54	41	64	44	61	76	64	65	68	56

Note: HR = Higher Rate MR = Middle Rate LR = Lower Rate R & P = Residence and Presence

Post office payment limit

Mr Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the effect on the availability of cash at post offices of the maximum limit of three months' pension which can be collected at one time; and if he will review this limit.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 8 June 1992:

Some 85% of Social Security benefits expenditure, averaging about £763 million a week during 1990-91, is paid out over Post Office counters using order books and girocheques.

Post Office Counters Ltd are provided with funds on a daily basis which represents the estimated value of pensions and allowances expected to be drawn nationally on a given day since this agreement ensures the most efficient use of cash. The distribution of cash throughout the extensive Post Office network is controlled and closely monitored by Post Office Counters Limited to ensure that adequate amounts of cash in the correct denominations of notes and coins are available in individual post offices.

The three month limit on order book encashment is required to minimise the risk of fraudulent encashment and to enable the annual appropriation accounts to be published immediately after the end of the summer recess.

Social fund: Lambeth

Ms Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications for social fund loans in the London borough of Lambeth were refused on the grounds of inability to pay; and if he will show this figure as a percentage of all applications for loans in Lambeth.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 4 June 1992:

Social Fund statistical information is recorded by Benefits Agency District, the boundaries of which are not always the same as those of individual boroughs. In this case, there is no statistical information for the Borough of Lambeth alone. I am therefore providing information for the South West Thames,

Bankside and Lewisham/Brixton Districts, each of which deals with part of the Borough of Lambeth as well as other boroughs.

The number of loans refused in these Districts in the year ending 31 March 1992, on grounds of inability to repay, is 1,123. This represents 2.4% of all loan applications in these Districts.

Benefit claims: Lambeth

Ms Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the latest annual figures for the London borough of Lambeth for the number of claims for (a) housing benefit, (b) income support and (c) family credit; and what those figures were one year ago and two years ago.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 5 June 1992:

The complete range of information you requested is not fully available except at disproportionate cost. This is because statistics of a local nature relating to Family Credit show only the number of recipients at a given point in time rather than the number of claims for a particular period.

Listed below are the figures available for each benefit. The totals may include customers in receipt of more than one of the three benefits.

Housing Benefit

The administration of Housing Benefit is a matter for Local Authorities. The information in the table below shows the number of cases in receipt of Housing Benefit in the London Borough of Lambeth. It is not possible to give the number of individuals as claims from couples are counted as one claim. I understand the large increase between November 1990 and November 1991 is primarily due to the clearance of a backlog of outstanding claims. The data has been obtained from the Housing Benefit Management Information System.

Number of recipients of Housing Benefit

November 1989	November 1990	November 1991
22,955	29,380	40,248

Income Support

The figures quoted are from the following offices: Balham, Brixton, Kennington Park, Oval, Southwark, Streatham and Thames South. The figures for Brixton and Oval Branch Offices

* Editorial note: Some of the figures in these columns do not add up to the totals shown.

are included in the overall figures for Lewisham/Brixton District, which also includes an area outside the Borough of Lambeth. It is not possible to break these figures down any further. This is because the Benefits Agency boundaries do not correspond with those of the London Borough of Lambeth. These figures have been supplied by the Income Support Management Information System.

Number of claims (year ending)

<i>March 1990</i>	<i>March 1991</i>	<i>March 1992</i>
68,063	74,763	80,249

Family Credit

The figures quoted have been supplied by the Family Credit Branch. The data was selected from the same offices as for the Income Support figures. Again the boundaries of the Branch Offices do not correspond with those of the Borough of Lambeth.

Number of recipients of Family Credit

<i>22.3.90</i>	<i>22.3.91</i>	<i>6.3.92</i>
1,345	1,429	1,608

Attendance allowance and disability living allowance

Mr Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what investigations he has made of the causes of the length of time taken to process claims for attendance allowance and disability living allowance; and what plans he has to increase the funding of the Benefits Agency in order to reduce the time taken.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 16 June 1992: We always knew that a major effort would be required to get the new arrangements up and running.[see footnote on page 3]

.....Our working arrangements already include acknowledging all claims as they are made and keeping the customer informed of progress as far as possible.[see footnote on page 3]

Disability living allowance

Mr Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average time for processing claims for disability living allowance.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 29 June 1992:[see footnote on page 3]

Mr Gerald Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applicants for disability living allowance are currently awaiting a decision; and if he will explain the reasons for the time taken.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 25 June 1992:[see footnote on page 3]

Mr Archie Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement concerning delays in the introduction of the new disability living allowance and the financial difficulties caused to those people who previously claimed disability benefit.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 16 June 1992: There were no delays in the introduction of DLA. Trained staff, accommodation and an on-line computer system were all ready for accepting claims to DLA on 3 February 1992 prior to its introduction on 1 April 1992.

We always knew that a major effort would be required to get the new arrangements up and running[see footnote on page 3]

In the first 4 months of live operation more than 161,500 new claims were registered and 28,500 awards made. Over the same period some 160,000 "top-up" claims were also received. Our working arrangements include acknowledging claims as they are made and doing our best to keep the customer informed of progress.

....[see footnote on page 3] We have over 200,000 new claims for DLA and Attendance Allowance being processed in the Disability Benefit Centres and a similar volume of work at Blackpool.

.....[see footnote on page 3]

At Blackpool as part of the arrangements for the introduction of DLA we have installed a Central Enquiry Handling Service to provide easier telephone access for our customers who want to make enquiries about their claims. Calls are charged at local BT rates and enquiries can be transferred to sections throughout Blackpool and Preston or to any of the 10 Disability Benefit Centres. The staff on this service have access to computer terminals so they can establish the current situation for each enquiry while the customer is on the telephone. An average of 8,000 calls daily are currently being handled.

I mention all of this to illustrate the size of the task we are facing at present. I can assure you that I am personally monitoring the position closely and if further steps prove necessary these will be taken.

Social fund: client groups

Mr Martin Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the percentage of (a) budgeting loans and (b) community care grants which were awarded to each of the 15 client groups defined by his Department for the Doncaster area; and what were the comparable national figures for the financial years (i) 1989-90, (ii) 1990-91, (iii) 1991-92 and (iv) 1992-93 to date.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 9 June 1992:

I have provided figures, by client group, for the number of budgeting loan and community care grant awards made both in the Doncaster area and nationally. For the years 1989-90 and 1990-91, figures are provided for the former Departmental offices of Doncaster East and Doncaster West. For the years 1991-92 and 1992-93, figures are provided for the Benefits Agency's Doncaster District.

The figures for 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92 are attached at Annexes A and B.

From April 1992, the Benefits Agency has adopted a simpler method of recording client groups. Information relating to the year to date can, therefore, be found at Annex C.

Annex A: Budgeting Loan awards, showing awards by client group as a percentage of total awards - Doncaster and national figures - 1989/90, 1990/91 and 1991/92

<i>Client Group</i>	<i>1989/90</i>		<i>1990/91</i>		<i>1991/92</i>	
	<i>Don.</i>	<i>Nat.</i>	<i>Don.</i>	<i>Nat.</i>	<i>Don.</i>	<i>Nat.</i>
Over 80 with Higher Pensioner Premium	0.5	0.4	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1
60-79, Disabled, Higher Pensioner Premium	0.3	0.6	0.5	0.8	0.5	0.7
60-79, Ordinary Pensioner Premium or over 60 without Pensioner Premium	2.1	3.5	3.0	3.4	2.4	2.8
Lone parent with Disability Premium	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.5	0.3	0.6
Family with Disability Premium	1.1	1.6	2.2	1.8	1.3	2.0
Others with Disability Premium	3.8	4.2	3.8	4.5	3.4	4.6

Client Group	1989/90		1990/91		1991/92	
	Don.	Nat.	Don.	Nat.	Don.	Nat.
Lone parent without Disability Premium	43.1	48.6	43.8	51.2	46.7	49.4
Unemployed, signing quarterly with Family Premium	0.4	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.1
Unemployed, signing quarterly, without Family Premium	2.3	1.8	1.4	1.3	0.7	0.7
Unemployed or with Training Allowance with Family Premium	25.0	15.7	24.4	14.6	24.0	15.8
Unemployed or with Training Allowance without Family Premium	17.9	18.4	16.8	17.5	16.1	18.8
Others with Family Premium	1.2	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.9	1.5
Others without Family Premium	2.1	3.0	2.7	2.8	2.6	2.9
No Income Support in payment, involved in trade dispute	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Not in receipt of Income Support	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Annex B: Community Care Grant awards, showing awards by client group as a percentage of total awards - Doncaster and national figures - 1989/90, 1990/91 and 1991/92

Client Group	1989/90		1990/91		1991/92	
	Don.	Nat.	Don.	Nat.	Don.	Nat.
Over 80 with Higher Pensioner Premium	2.0	5.5	1.2	5.8	2.2	5.8
60-79, Disabled, Higher Pensioner Premium	3.7	5.1	3.0	7.3	5.0	7.3
60-79, Ordinary Pensioner Premium or over 60 without Pensioner Premium	8.4	15.1	7.7	14.8	6.8	13.1
Lone parent with Disability Premium	1.1	0.9	0.6	1.0	1.0	1.3
Family with Disability Premium	3.3	3.3	3.2	3.7	3.4	4.4
Others with Disability Premium	9.6	12.6	7.0	13.2	9.2	14.2
Lone parent without Disability Premium	28.4	25.4	35.8	25.4	32.0	24.2
Unemployed, signing quarterly with Family Premium	0.6	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.2
Unemployed, signing quarterly, without Family Premium	1.6	1.1	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.5
Unemployed or with Training Allowance with Family Premium	18.1	8.5	19.1	8.2	17.9	9.1
Unemployed or with Training Allowance without Family Premium	15.1	12.9	15.1	11.7	12.7	11.6
Others with Family Premium	3.8	2.1	2.9	2.2	4.0	2.7
Others without Family Premium	3.8	5.9	3.4	5.6	4.6	5.7
No Income Support in payment, involved in trade dispute	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Not in receipt of Income Support	0.6	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding

Annex C

Budgeting Loan awards, showing awards by client group as a percentage of total awards - Doncaster and national figures - 1992/93 Year to Date (April)

Client Group	Doncaster	National
Lone parent	44.5	47.7
Any category, with Disability Premium	6.5	7.3
Unemployed or with Training Allowance	40.5	36.9
Over 60	2.7	3.1
Over 80	0.0	0.1

Client Group	Doncaster	National
Others in receipt of Income Support	5.8	4.9
No Income Support in payment, involved in a trade dispute	0.0	0.0
Not in receipt of Income Support	0.0	0.0

Community Care Grant awards, showing awards by client group as a percentage of total awards - Doncaster and national figures - 1992/93 Year to Date (April)

Client Group	Doncaster	National
Lone parent	41.4	23.9
Any category, with Disability Premium	9.9	20.3
Unemployed or with Training Allowance	28.4	22.1
Over 60	9.3	19.6
Over 80	1.9	5.3
Others in receipt of Income Support	9.3	8.8
No Income Support in payment, involved in a trade dispute	0.0	0.0
Not in receipt of Income Support	0.0	0.0

Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Benefits: Doncaster

Mr Martin Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list each of the benefits for which his Department is responsible in the Doncaster area during the current year, giving in each case (a) the total number receiving the benefit and (b) the cost in a full year of that benefit; and if he will give comparable figures for (i) 24 months, (ii) 36 months and (iii) 48 months ago.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 16 June 1992:

The complete range of information cannot be obtained except at disproportionate cost. This is because statistics relating to the number of recipients of some benefits are not routinely collected on a local basis. To obtain the relevant information it would be necessary to examine all claims made nationally for the individual benefit concerned. You will also wish to note that statistics relating to amounts of benefit paid are not collected on a local basis.

The information available shows the number of recipients of each benefit quoted for the three offices covering the Doncaster District. The figures quoted in the attached Annex show the number of recipients at a given point in time rather than the total number for a specific period. This information has been obtained from local Management Information Statistics and the Family Credit Unit.

Annex: Customers claiming benefits in the Doncaster District

The Doncaster District comprises of the following offices: Doncaster East, Doncaster West and Mexborough.

Benefit	May 1989	May 1990	May 1992
Family Credit	N/A	1,584	1,945
Income Support	22,513	22,332	27,416
Invalidity Benefit	*	*	11,933
Maternity Allowance	78	99	80
Severe Disablement Allowance	1,863	1,945	1,851
Sickness Benefit	13,061	14,363	2,573

* The Invalidity Benefit count was combined with Sickness Benefit for 1989 and 1990.

Attendance allowance

Ms Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how long claims on the new style self-assessment form for attendance allowance are taking to process and payments to commence; how long the old-style claims, where a doctor visits to make an assessment, are taking to clear and payments to commence; what are his Department's target times to deal

with each kind of claim; and how many claim applications have been waiting for longer than the target times;

(2) of the cases adjudicated under the new procedure in relation to self-assessment for attendance allowance, how many have been decided; how many were successful; how many were turned down; and how many were awarded (a) the higher rate and (b) the lower rate.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 24 June 1992: You asked for information as to the numbers and outcomes of claims determined under the new adjudication arrangements and how long these cases are taking to process as compared with those made on the old style application forms.

Firstly, it may be helpful if I explain the changes which took place with the onset of the new adjudication structure. Under the old scheme, all customers were examined by a member of the medical profession. The target time for dealing with cases was 70% in 50 days. With the introduction of new self assessment procedures in April 1992, many claims are now able to be determined using information provided by the customer. This is reflected in an enhanced target time of 60% of cases to be cleared within 35 days.

As you will appreciate, cases were at various stages of processing when the new system came into being. Claims therefore, were dealt with according to their particular circumstances, with those cases which had not already been referred for a medical examination, being issued with a self assessment questionnaire for the customer's completion. From April onwards, all claims are being processed under the new rules.

Since April, almost 55,000 claims have been processed in total. A breakdown of outcome types is not available in the format requested for the month of April, but May's statistics show that of the total number of decisions processed by the computer system, almost 17,300 were successful claims, whilst just under 6,500 were disallowances. Of those cases awarded, nearly 7,500 were at the higher rate, with almost 9,800 lower rate awards.

As to the relative times taken to process cases, it is not possible to distinguish between applications made on the new and old forms, nor indeed at this early stage, as to the different types of evidence used in making decisions, for the reasons outlined above. Payment is however, normally issued within twenty four hours of the Adjudication Officer's decision being input on to the computer system. These arrangements have not altered with the advent of the new adjudication procedures.

The success of the advertising campaign and other policy initiatives surrounding the launch of the new disability benefits has attracted a much larger number of applications in the early stages than was expected. This has resulted in higher than normal numbers of outstanding claims at the Disability Benefit Centres. At the end of May, this total stood at around 133,000. Obviously with such a large number of cases outstanding, a significant proportion have been waiting for longer than the target times.

I can assure you however that active steps are being taken to reduce this backlog and to significantly improve clearance times. Extra staff have been deployed and overtime is being worked to a considerable extent. We are also reviewing our working practices to ensure the most efficient and effective procedures are in place, consistent with our customers' needs. I am by no means complacent about the length of time our customers are having to wait for their claims to be determined and I am personally monitoring the situation very closely.

Ms Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures are being taken to keep claimants informed of the progress of their claim for attendance allowance and of the time they should expect to wait.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 24 June 1992: Our working arrangements provide for an acknowledgement to be sent to all customers on receipt of their claim and further letters are also sent if the adjudication officer requires further information either in the form of a factual report from a General Practitioner or a medical report.

There have been major changes in both workload and working arrangements that have occurred on AA this year. Since February the introduction of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for people disabled before age 65 (AA continues for people disabled after age 65), coupled with the different claims and adjudication arrangements which underpin the new benefit, has meant dealing with claims made under the old scheme and processing the new style claims at the same time.

The first quarter of this year has seen a significant increase in the number of claims made. AA claims have risen by some 54,000, which represents an increase of 41% over the same period last year.

The administration of a new benefit as well as the maintenance of the old ones is a challenging task for the Agency. I am sure you will appreciate that that will inevitably lead to some administrative problems in the early stages until staff become more familiar with the new criteria and working practices. Add to this, the extraordinarily high but rewarding level of interest that has been shown in the benefits, prompted by a major publicity campaign and the surge of claims that has resulted, we naturally faced early problems.

I can assure you however that active steps are being taken to ensure that people do not wait longer than absolutely necessary for a decision on their claim and Benefits Agency staff are taking positive action to minimise delays as they are identified and to ensure that claims are processed effectively and as quickly as possible.

In total some 2,000 staff have been trained to administer the new benefits at Blackpool and the ten Disability Benefit Centres (DBC) around the country. Extra staff are now being taken on and overtime is being worked to a considerable extent. In addition, a Customer Service Manager is available at each of the DBC's to answer customer enquiries.

The figures for May show a marked improvement in clearance rates. Some 32,000 AA claims were processed during the month which represents an increase of more than 9,000 on the previous month. We expect this trend to continue as a result of the increasing expertise of the staff involved and the other measures we have taken.

Attendance allowance reviews

Mr Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many reviews for attendance allowance are outstanding as a result of the introduction of disability living allowance; and what is the target time for the processing of these reviews.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 16 June 1992: You asked for information as to the numbers of reviews outstanding as a result of the introduction of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and the target time for processing them. Firstly I should explain that in the main, the numbers of cases outstanding did not increase directly as a result of the launch of the new benefit.

It will perhaps be helpful if I explain a little about the changes

which took place with the onset of the new adjudication structure: With the introduction of DLA from 6 April 1992, all outstanding AA reviews in respect of people aged under 65 were transferred to the DLA Unit for processing under the new adjudication system introduced at the same time. This was because any award of AA spanning 6 April for this group of people would automatically become the Care Component of DLA at that point in time.

Cases in respect of people aged 65 or over were retained within the AA Unit for processing as they would not be subject to the change to DLA, but would continue to receive or apply for AA. The change in the adjudication system which applied to DLA was also introduced for AA.

At the beginning of April, there were about 16,200 review applications outstanding relating to people under 65 and around 30,000 within the AA Unit, for those over 65 years of age. Applications for review in respect of AA decisions made before 6 April averaged about 1,800 a week thereafter. Unfortunately, it is not possible to tell you how many of the original cases transferred to the DLA Unit are still outstanding. This is because statistics do not distinguish between AA and Mobility Allowance cases transferred to the DLA Unit and the additional cases received since 6 April.

Although a range of targets relating to the processing of AA and DLA cases exist, it was not possible to get meaningful measures for this specific work. These AA and Mobility Allowance cases are often complex to determine, involving as they do, a change in the adjudication arrangements and the need to consider entitlement to the new lower rate of the appropriate component. By its very nature, this type of work will not be a permanent feature of DLA operations and will last only for the first few months following the introduction of DLA. Priority is of course being given to these cases and every effort is being made to ensure speedy clearance. I do not however underestimate the nature of the task.

Disability living allowance

Mr Iain Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he is taking to improve the speed and efficiency of dealing with claims for, and appeals against decisions on, disability living allowances.

[The letter from Mr Bichard, dated 18 June 1992, replying to this question, adds nothing to the information given in his letters to Mr Gerrard and Mr Kirkwood, on pages 7 and 10 above.]

Community care grants

Ms Joan Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the social fund community care grant to meet the needs of claimants in Stoke on Trent; what targets have been set; and if he will give a breakdown of the levels of outstanding claims; and if he will make a statement.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 9 June 1992: Stoke on Trent is served by the Benefits Agency's North Staffordshire District which also includes Newcastle. Information is kept relating only to the District.

The Social Fund scheme is monitored carefully at both national and local level. The needs of applicants in the North Staffordshire District are reflected in the guidance issued by the Area Social Fund Officer (District Manager). This complements the Directions and guidance given by the Secretary of State for Social Security and published in the Social Fund Officer's Guide.

North Staffordshire District has published targets for clearing applications to the discretionary part of the Fund. These targets are five days for budgeting loans, seven days for community care grants and, for crisis loans, applications are to be cleared by the day the need arises. Latest statistical information suggests that applications are currently being cleared well within these targets.

As of 5 June 1992, uncleared applications at North Staffordshire District for budgeting loans, community care grants, crisis loans, maternity and funeral payments were, respectively, 118, 136, 0, 19 and 10.

Severe hardship payments

Mr Dafydd Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidelines exist for deciding entitlement to severe hardship payments for 16 and 17-year-olds; and if he will publish those guidelines.

Letter from Mr M Bichard, Chief Executive, 2 June 1992:

The Secretary of State has the power to direct that, where unavoidable severe hardship would result if benefit were to be withheld, a young person will be entitled to Income Support even though that young person would ordinarily not be so entitled.

Examples of factors which may be considered include: the young person's health and vulnerability, including the threat of homelessness; the availability of any income or savings; the prospects of a speedy entry into a Youth Training Scheme; the availability of casual work; whether the person has any friends or relatives who can offer accommodation or other assistance; and the financial commitments of the person and the prospect of postponing any payments.

Such decisions are made by officials authorised to act on his behalf. Each case is considered on its individual merits and in the light of its particular circumstances. Fixed criteria could not cover all possibilities of a customer's individual circumstances and is therefore inappropriate. You will, however, wish to note that guidance to Adjudication Officers is provided by the Chief Adjudication Officer in the Adjudication Officers' Guide, a copy of which is in the Library.

CONTRIBUTIONS AGENCY

Plastic cards

Mr David Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many plastic national insurance number cards have been issued; and how much each national insurance number card costs.

Letter from Mr G Bertram, Deputy Chief Executive, 12 June 1992:

The plastic National Insurance Numbercard was introduced in November 1983 and from then until May 1992, 9,731,364 cards have been issued.

The cost of production of these cards was last calculated in July 1991 when it was 10.88p per card. In addition, there was the cost of second class postage for most issues.

RESETTLEMENT AGENCY

Resettlement units

Mr John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what criteria his Department uses to approve closure of resettlement units; and which of the remaining 15 are currently being considered for replacement.

Letter from Mr Tony Ward, Chief Executive, 12 June 1992: You asked what criteria are used to approve closure of resettlement units. The Resettlement Agency can proceed to full closure when:

- (a) the number of replacement beds operational at the time of closure are at least equal in number to those in normal use at the unit to be replaced; and
- (b) by the closure date, provision will have been made for, or suitable alternative accommodation offered to, each resident still remaining in the resettlement unit.

The Agency also endeavours to give a year's notice of closure to all its staff to ensure sufficient time is allowed to address and resolve the personnel issues associated with the closure.

You also asked which of the remaining 15 resettlement units are currently being considered for replacement. The replacement and subsequent closure of Stormy Down (South Wales) and Southampton units by 31 March 1993 was announced by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Social Security in a Written Answer on 6 March 1992 col 319. No other unit has approved replacement proposals and most, but not all, of those remaining will be subject to the process announced also by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Social Security by Written Answer on 5 February col 210.

The resettlement unit at Bishopbriggs (Glasgow) will be for replacement but as yet has no approved replacement proposals.

SOCIAL SECURITY AGENCY (NORTHERN IRELAND)

Disability living allowance

Mr Eddie McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the average time taken to process an application form for disability living allowance.

Letter from Mr Alec Wylie, Chief Executive, 23 June 1992: You asked about the average time taken to process a claim for Disability Living Allowance (DLA). Performance on claims received in the first few weeks of the new scheme has held up quite well. At 17 June the position was as follows:

- i. 1,740 new DLA claims had been decided and of these 89% were cleared within 30 days.
- ii. 3,500 Top-Up claims (ie claims for DLA from existing Attendance Allowance and Mobility Allowance beneficiaries) had been decided and of these 37% were cleared within 30 days.

Following the launch of DLA and the success of the advertising

campaign there are however a large number of claims still on hand. From February to 17 June this year over 16,000 claims have been received of which 5,240 have been decided. In addition maintenance and renewal action is continuing on 15,200 Attendance Allowance and 17,000 Mobility Allowance claims transferred to DLA Branch.

Adjudication Officers are still coming to terms with the new adjudication system but the rate at which they are able to deal with cases is beginning to improve. A specialist adjudication section has been set up to deal solely with the claims on hand, extensive overtime is being worked and additional staff have been recruited.

Our current estimate is that outstanding Top-Up claims, of which there are around 3,500, will be cleared by mid-August and outstanding new DLA claims, some 7,500, by the end of September. This is rather longer than I would have liked but the fact is that so many claims received over such a short period has stretched resources considerably.

EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

Unemployment benefit disqualification

Mr Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many unemployed people were disqualified for unemployment benefit and for what periods, under each paragraph of section 20(1) of the Social Security Act 1975, in the area covered by the Newport, Gwent unemployment benefit office in the week commencing 8 June; and if she will place this information in the Library;

(2) what information is available to her, and from what sources, as to the lengths of periods of disqualification for unemployment benefit imposed under section 20(1) of the Social Security Act 1975.

Letter from Mr M E G Fogden, Chief Executive, 5 June 1992: You may recall that Mr Johnson wrote to you on 11 May during my absence in response to a similar question. At that time the information you requested had not been published. I am now able to provide this information although, as Mr Johnson explained, it is not available in the form that you have requested. During the quarter ending 31 December 1991 the number of people in Wales disqualified for receiving unemployment benefit under Section 20(1) of the Social Security Act was as follows:-

Leaving employment voluntarily without just cause	1,399
Employment lost due to misconduct	544
Refusal of employment without good cause	2
Neglect to avail oneself of an offer of employment	4
Refusal to comply with written instructions	NIL

Although voluntary termination of approved training without just cause, misconduct while on approved training, refusal of an offer of approved training without good cause and neglect to avail oneself of approved training are also disqualifications under Section 20(1) no record is kept of the number of disqualifications under these sub-heads.

I can confirm that a record is not kept of the length of disqualifications periods imposed under Section 20(1) of the Social Security Act 1975. To collect the information you requested about the number of disqualifications imposed under Section

20(1) of the Social Security Act, and length of each disqualification period, in my Newport Gwent office during week commencing 8 June would require a detailed examination of all benefit claims. This could only be done at disproportionate costs to public funds.

Mr Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether she will instruct the manager of the Newport, Gwent, unemployment benefit office to report how many unemployed people were disqualified for unemployment benefit and for what periods, under each paragraph of section 20(1) of the Social Security Act 1975, in the area covered by that office in the week commencing 15 June; and if she will place this information in the Library.

Letter from Mr A G Johnson, Director of Finance and Resources, 11 June 1992:

You may recall that Mike Fogden wrote to you on 5 June in response to a similar question. I can confirm that a record is not kept of the length of disqualification periods imposed under Section 20(1) of the Social Security Act 1975. To collect the information you seek about the number of disqualifications imposed under Section 20(1) of the Social Security Act, and length of each disqualification period, in the Newport Gwent office during week commencing 15 June would require a detailed examination of all benefit claims. This could only be done at disproportionate costs to public funds.

Income support: 16 and 17-year-olds

Mr Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what evidence she has received of incorrect advice being given by unemployment benefit office staff to unemployed 16 and 17-year-olds regarding their entitlement to income support.

Letter from Mr M E G Fogden, Chief Executive, 23 June 1992: While no specific instances of incorrect advice being given have been reported to me, I am aware that this issue has been raised in recent reports, including one published by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (NACAB). Indeed, I recently met with officials from NACAB to discuss, among other things, services to 16 and 17 year olds.

It may be helpful if I explain the procedures which my people use when advising 16 and 17 year olds of the benefits and

allowances which may be available to them.

My Local Offices have comprehensive instructions on such benefits. These explain that every young person who wishes to, may make a claim for Income Support (IS) under the severe hardship rules. To remind staff of this, an instruction was sent to all offices in April of this year.

I am also aware that my colleagues in Benefits Agency are producing a leaflet on the availability of IS under the severe hardship rules to increase awareness of this for young people.

Job search seminars

Ms Clare Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the role, purpose and cost of job search seminars and which unemployed people are eligible for their assistance and for Great Britain and for each region (a) how many job search seminars have been established, (b) how many people have been helped by those seminars, (c) how many people have been directly placed into jobs and (d) how many have been directly placed in other outcomes; and if she will make a statement.

Letter from Mr M E G Fogden, Chief Executive, 10 June 1992: Job search seminars were introduced in August 1991 as part of a wider package of measures to help people unemployed for 13 weeks. The main objective of the seminars is to provide information on how and where to look for a job and to increase the level and effectiveness of the participants' job search activities.

The seminars last for 2 days during which participants are shown how to seek out job vacancies and the best ways of applying for them. They are given help to prepare a CV, which is then typed and copied for them. Following attendance at a seminar access to resources and further support is available for half a day a week for 4 weeks. Participation is voluntary.

During 1991/92, 34,646 people attended job search seminars, and a breakdown by region is given in the attached annex. Total cost was approximately £2.8 million. We expect to provide 105,000 places in 1992/93 at a cost of around £6 million.

Numbers shown as placed relate only to those who found work during the 5 week period which covers attendance at the seminar and subsequent access to resources and further support. Because the seminars focus directly on finding work, statistics are not collected on people going on to other outcomes.

Job Search Seminar cumulative performance - August 1991 to March 1992

	Northern	Yorkshire & Humberside	E Midlands & Eastern	London & South East	South West	Wales	W. Midlands	North West	Scotland	Total
1. Seminars held	279	365	367	1,240	436	264	383	523	516	4,373
2. People helped	2,039	2,637	2,887	10,371	3,850	1,957	2,727	3,890	4,288	34,646
3. People placed into jobs	290	367	383	1,411	794	277	533	904	758	5,717

Job referral teams

Ms Clare Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the role, purpose and cost of job referral teams and which unemployed people are eligible for their assistance and for Great Britain and for each region (a) how many job referral teams have been established, (b) how many people have been helped by those teams, (c) how many people have been directly placed into jobs and (d) how many have been directly placed in other outcomes; and if she will make a statement.

Letter from Mr M E G Fogden, Chief Executive, 10 June 1992: It may be helpful if I explain that in order to help unemployed people back to work as quickly as possible, we provide a coherent and structured advisory service which starts from the first day of

unemployment. As a development of this we now contact all our clients who do not find a job within thirteen weeks in order to provide practical help to those who may be in danger of slipping into longer term unemployment. This enables us to discuss clients' jobsearch activity, offer advice on alternative methods of jobsearch and provide access to a range of programmes aimed at helping people back into work.

This job referral service supports the work of our advisers. It helps people if they have the skills and experience which are in demand and would benefit from more intensive action aimed at placing them directly into a job. The purpose of the service is, therefore, to give additional support to clients in order to increase their chances of finding a job. The additional cost of the service is £4.3 million per annum.

The attached table shows the national and regional figures for the number of people providing this service; how many people have been helped by it; and how many people have been directly placed into jobs. I am unable to provide figures for any later periods as statistics are no longer collected separately. They are included

in the placing figures for our advisers whose activities they support. You also asked for numbers of clients placed directly into other outcomes but as you will appreciate from the above description of the service, no such placings result from this work.

	Job Referral Service - performance July 1991 - March 1992									
	<i>Northern</i>	<i>Yorkshire & Humberside</i>	<i>E Midlands & Eastern</i>	<i>London & South East</i>	<i>South West</i>	<i>Wales</i>	<i>W. Midlands</i>	<i>North West</i>	<i>Scotland</i>	<i>Total</i>
Resource - staff unit years, 1992/93 operational year	18.9	35.3	39.6	123.1	34.1	20.6	35.1	48.7	37.6	393
Number of people helped	1,548	1,966	3,619	10,700	5,033	2,354	2,986	8,929	5,445	42,580
Numbers placed into jobs	97	342	164	1,268	3,370	632	1,364	1,129	824	9,190

Job review workshops

Ms Clare Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the role, purpose and cost of job review workshops and which unemployed people are eligible for their assistance and for Great Britain and for each region (a) how many job review workshops have been established, (b) how many people have been helped by those workshops, (c) how many people have been directly placed into jobs and (d) how many have been directly placed in other outcomes; and if she will make a statement.

Letter from Mr M E G Fogden, Chief Executive, 10 June 1992: Job Review Workshops were introduced last August to help newly unemployed people review their career path and set clear job goals suited to their skills, experience and preferences.

The programme is particularly suitable for professional, managerial and executive jobseekers who want to consider alternative careers. The workshops are normally offered to people who have been unemployed for about 3 months, though any unemployed person claiming benefit or credits is eligible to

attend. Programme participation is voluntary.

During the workshop, which normally lasts 2 days, participants are helped to identify their transferable skills and assess their suitability for a range of jobs using a computer assisted occupational guidance program. The workshop leader is able to offer individual guidance. All workshops are run for us by outside organisations from both the private and public sectors.

During 1991/92 15,358 people attended workshops at a cost of around £1.5 million. In 1992/93 we plan to fill 40,000 places at a cost of some £3.6 million.

I attach an annex which gives the most recent statistical information requested by you. The programme is about choosing alternative job goals rather than placing people directly into jobs. We do not therefore ask how many people have moved directly into jobs. That is the function of some of our other ES programmes and services. However, we do ask participants to tell us how helpful the workshop has been. Up to the end of March 98% of participants said that attending the workshop had been useful or very useful to them.

Job Review Workshop - cumulative performance - August 1991 to March 1992										
	Northern	Yorkshire & Humberside	E Midlands & Eastern	London & South East	South West	Wales	W. Midlands	North West	Scotland	Total
1. Workshops held	68	108	135	744	136	68	86	113	123	1,581
2. People helped	530	1,000	1,263	7,137	1,312	846	793	1,198	1,279	15,358

13 week interviews

Ms Clare Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment for Great Britain and for each region how many people have been called in to attend 13-week Employment Service counselling interviews; how many people have actually attended such interviews; and of those who attended (a) how many have been directly placed into jobs, (b) how many people have been placed in what other outcomes and (c) how many have had their benefit stopped or suspended and for what reasons; and if she will make a statement.

Letter from Mr M E G Fogden, Chief Executive, 10 June 1992: It may be helpful if I explain that everyone who has not found work within 13 weeks of becoming unemployed is contacted. The purpose is to tell them that an initial review of the steps they have been taking to find work will be conducted when they next attend our local office. This initial review takes place when the client attends to "sign on" and involves a discussion on how far the client has been able to implement the "Back To Work Plan" agreed at the new claim stage and what further help they may need. Those clients who are identified as requiring more advice are asked to attend a review with one of my advisers. The

purpose of this more in-depth review is to provide practical help to those people who may be in danger of slipping into longer term unemployment. It enables us to discuss jobsearch activity, offer advice on alternative methods of finding a job and provide access to a range of programmes aimed at helping people back to work. These programmes include Jobsearch Seminars, to help people improve their jobsearch techniques, and Job Review Workshops to help people who need to change their careers and re-assess the opportunities available to them.

The information you requested about the number and outcomes of reviews is attached.

13 week interviews - claimant adviser performance July 1991 - March 1992

	Northern	Yorkshire & Humberside	E Midlands & Eastern	London & South East	South West	Wales	W. Midlands	North West	Scotland	Total
Number of 13 week reviews	20,460	33,314	31,383	120,332	30,539	35,428	35,340	59,121	51,443	417,360
Job placings	98	228	287	2,219	527	389	309	467	586	5,110
Job Referral Service interviews	1,548	1,966	3,619	10,700	5,033	2,354	2,986	8,929	5,445	42,580
Jobsearch Seminar starts	1,812	2,078	2,553	7,509	2,713	2,240	1,650	3,412	3,646	27,613
Job Review Workshop starts	185	313	442	1,501	248	217	218	414	347	3,885
JIG starts	17	39	63	391	145	53	283	90	150	1,231
Jobclub starts	123	329	381	907	293	275	416	302	373	3,399
ET starts	86	470	197	605	334	480	318	272	484	3,246
Restart Course starts	6	15	41	104	17	32	208	14	10	447
EAS starts	10	25	31	160	95	69	40	48	53	531
EA starts	6	16	7	88	41	25	22	29	23	257
Disallowed by independent adjudication authorities for not being available, actively seeking or refusing employment	11	49	4	148	29	7	13	37	21	319

Interwork programme

Ms Joan Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will give the allocation for 1991-92 and 1992-93 for the interwork programme; how many disabled people were budgeted for under this programme in 1991-92 and for 1992-93; and of those how many disabled people are benefiting from the programme in Stoke on Trent.

Letter from Mr M E G Fogden, Chief Executive, 9 June 1992:

Remploy is not separately funded for the Interwork element of its sheltered employment provision; it falls within the overall total of 8,650 people with severe disabilities which the company, on average, employs.

At 30 March 1992 Remploy employed 539 people in Interwork placements, and currently expect to provide around 675 places on average in 1992/3. There are currently 4 Interwork placements in Stoke on Trent.

Appendix

Other letters written to M.P.s by chief executives in June 1992

Member	Agency	Subject
Mr Frank Dobson	H M Stationery Office	Printing contracts
Mr Tim Devlin	Benefits Agency	Constituency cases (2 letters)
Mr Robert B Jones	Benefits Agency	Constituency case
Mr Ken Livingstone	Chemical & Biological Defence Establishment	Genetic engineering
Mr Tony Lloyd	Benefits Agency	Constituency case
Mr John McAllion	Chemical & Biological Defence Establishment	Experiments with physostigmine
	Various agencies	Cost of launch and Chief Executive's salary and first degree
Mr Anthony Steen	Benefits Agency	Constituency case