

Open Lines

No. 2

**Letters sent to Members of Parliament in July 1991
by Government executive agencies
in reply to Parliamentary Questions**

**with an introduction by
Paul Flynn, M.P.**

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August 1991

Introduction

by Paul Flynn, M.P.

Thanks for your letters of appreciation for the first edition of OPEN LINES.

MPs, civil servants and, above all, political, charitable and educational bodies who rely on Hansard as a unique source of information sent messages of support and have demanded this second issue. It provides information on a wide range of subjects, such as the reasons for refusing Social Fund payments; the number of claimants in each district having deductions made from their income support for unpaid poll tax; the services provided by benefit offices for non-English speakers; and the provision made for homeless people where DSS resettlement units are being closed.

In the cause of open government this issue is again being distributed free of charge - although this cannot continue indefinitely. Our ultimate success would be to cease publication by persuading the Government to publish in Hansard the answers received from executive agencies. This has been recommended by the Commons Procedure Committee.

In the past, when Ministers replied directly to Members the full answers were reported in Hansard. Now only the MP who asked the question sees the reply. In theory

copies should be available to the diligent and the determined from the Commons Library and Public Information Office. However, four of the letters reproduced here were not found in the Public Information Office. Copies of two had to be obtained from the executive agency concerned.

The first OPEN LINES contained letters written in June 1991. This issue covers July. Even though Members can table questions during the recess, the agencies are at present refusing to send answers until mid-October because, absurdly, they must wait until the Minister has formally "replied" to the questions. This applies even to questions tabled but not answered at the end of July, while the House was still sitting.

Thus the next edition will not appear until mid-November. And by then, if Ministers match their deeds to their rhetoric on transparency in government, further editions should not be needed.

Possibly it is unique for a publication to ask for its *raison d'être* to be removed. But this is not a job for private enterprise or philanthropy. It is a job for government.

Paul Flynn, M.P.

House of Commons

August 1991

Editorial note

At least 62 letters were sent to M.P.s by chief executives and their deputies in reply to parliamentary questions in July 1991: 38 from agencies concerned with social security, 10 from those concerned with employment and training, and 14 from a variety of other agencies. The 43 letters published here include all those from the social security, employment and training agencies (including the Northern Ireland agencies), except 5 letters from the Benefits Agency which are of mainly local interest. These, and the 14 letters from other agencies, are listed in the appendix on page 17.

The normal practice is for the chief executive's letter to

be sent on or very soon after the date of the ministerial answer to a parliamentary question. A number of the letters sent in July, however, are headed "July 1991", with no exact date. In these cases, the date of the Minister's reply to the parliamentary question has been inserted in square brackets - e.g. "[24] July 1991".

In every case, unless otherwise stated, the main body of the letter and any attached documents are reproduced in full, only the formal opening and closing paragraphs being omitted.

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BENEFITS AGENCY

Attendance Allowance

Mr Graham Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to revise leaflet DS668 in order to inform elderly people that they may qualify for income support when they receive attendance allowance.

Letter from Mr David Riggs, Finance Director, [24] July 1991: Leaflet DS668, which is sent with all decisions on Attendance Allowance, already includes a section headed 'Other Benefits you might be able to get', which amongst other things advises beneficiaries that they may qualify for Income Support when they get the allowance, even if they could not get it before. There is also a section headed 'Income Support' which is aimed at beneficiaries who are already in receipt of that benefit.

Currently the leaflet is being redesigned due to the forthcoming changes to Attendance Allowance from April 1992, following the introduction of Disability Living Allowance. As Attendance Allowance will then be a benefit exclusively for those aged 65 and over, it is proposed to have the leaflet printed using a larger typeface to ensure maximum clarity. In addition, it has been decided to cover all aspects of Income Support and its premiums under one heading to encourage full take up of that benefit by potential beneficiaries.

Client Interviews (Interpretation)

Mr Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what arrangements exist for interpretation at interviews with clients who do not speak English; how much interpreters are paid; and if he will make a statement.

Letter from Mr George Bardwell, Personnel Director, 25 July 1991:

Customer service is an Agency core value and if we are to provide the quality of service we want to all our customers we have to communicate effectively with them. As far as communicating with customers with little or no English is concerned, this is one of the factors our District planning teams are considering as they develop their strategic plans for the next five years. As I think you know, they are consulting widely with MPs, local organisations, and customers generally in order to be sure they know what their particular customer mix expects.

Because the spread of ethnic minority communities and population across the country is diverse, we think it right that our response to their needs should be flexible, and locally designed. At the moment, most offices providing a service for customers who have little or no English, and unaccompanied by an advisor, relative or friend able to interpret to and from English for them, look to their own staff to do so. Nearly two-thirds of our offices maintain lists of bi/multi-lingual staff able and willing to interpret for customers. This usually works well. In a few parts of the country with a large ethnic minority, for example the Leeds/Bradford area, a full-time interpreter and liaison service is provided.

There are arrangements to pay a Foreign Language Allowance to members of staff who are required to use one or more difficult foreign languages (defined as one other than French, German or Spanish) in the normal course of their duties. To qualify for the allowance staff must use one such difficult language extensively (at least 25% of the time). Where the language is the officer's native tongue, there is no requirement to pass a proficiency test, and in these circumstances the allowance is paid at half the usual rate.

The rates are:

Common European Language (French, German and Spanish)

- £380 per annum

Difficult European or other Language - £584 per annum

Half rate, for staff using their native tongue - £292 and £190 per annum

Reduced oral, for staff not fully fluent in speech and unable to write in the other language - £315 per annum

There are occasions when the most, or only, effective way to communicate with a customer - perhaps someone who can only speak and comprehend one of the rarer languages is to engage the services of a professional interpreter. Districts have wide powers to make suitable arrangements with local interpreter services, negotiating fees in the light of local circumstances.

For the future a development we are actively investigating and intend to test is Language Line. This service was established recently, and offers a telephone interpreting service in the following languages:

Bengali	Urdu	Hindi
Somali	Arabic	Turkish
Kurdish	Cantonese (on a limited basis)	

Apart from Cantonese the language service is guaranteed from 9.30 - 5.00 every working day. The scheme is currently under used and has the capacity to expand by about 80 calls per day. The costs are £1,000 p.a. for 100 calls per year.

Benefit Applications (Newham)

Mr Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many benefit applications in Newham offices were received from individuals claiming refugee status in each of the last 12 month periods.

Letter from Mr George Bardwell, Personnel Director, 25 July 1991:

Information on the number of refugees (i.e. people who have been granted such status by the Home Office) claiming Income Support is not available as this is not routinely collected by the Agency's offices. This is because claims from refugees are not identified separately. Payment is made on the same basis as the generality of IS customers.

Claims from customers who have recently entered this country from abroad and have no permanent right of abode in the UK are, however, treated differently for Income Support purposes. Present procedures require all customers in this category, who are known as Persons From Abroad (PFAs) to be interviewed when an initial claim to IS is made. The Newham District has received a large number of Income Support claims from this group recently and this has led to an increase in caller activity, particularly at the Stratford office. As you are aware, this has put a great deal of pressure on the caller area at Stratford. As a result, the District Manager has monitored the number of claims from PFAs at Stratford on an ad hoc basis. I am therefore providing this information as an appendix to this letter.

Income support claims received from persons from abroad at Stratford office

Period ending	Claims received	Period ending	Claims received	Period ending	Claims received
1991					
28 Feb	121	18 Apr	242	6 Jun	55
7 Mar	153	25 Apr	251	13 Jun	49
14 Mar	96	30 Apr	66	20 Jun	53
21 Mar	146	9 May	131	1 Jul	142
28 Mar	142	16 May	104	12 Jul	73
11 Apr	289	23 May	74	19 Jul	165

Social Fund

Mr Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants applied for grants or loans under the social fund during the financial year 1990-91 in each of the benefit offices of Newcastle upon Tyne; how many were turned down and for what reason; and what was the average size of the grant, crisis loan or budgetary loan in the year.

Letter from Mr David Riggs, Finance Director, [23] July 1991: Data concerning the number of customers applying for assistance from the Social Fund is not collected. I have therefore provided information relating to the number of separate applications.

The "reasons for refusal" quoted on the attached table are necessarily abbreviated for ease of presentation. For a more comprehensive explanation of the decision making process you should consult the Secretary of State's Directions and guidance published in the Social Fund Manual. You will note however, that the sum of the reasons for decisions does not equate to the overall figure for refusals. This is because some decisions are given for more than one reason.

1. Total applications 1990/91

	Type*	Applications	Refusals	Average award
Newcastle East	BL	4061	1784	195.82
	CCG	2153	1297	219.22
	CL	960	56	80.21
	Total	7174	3137	
Newcastle St James	BL	4409	1496	194.04
	CCG	2098	1281	302.79
	CL	1201	71	60.24
	Total	7708	2848	
Newcastle West	BL	4388	2179	173.67
	CCG	2185	1444	229.03
	CL	1751	243	42.05
	Total	8324	3866	
Grand totals		23206	9851	

* BL - Budgeting Loan
CCG - Community Care Grant
CL - Crisis Loan

2. Reasons for refusal

	Newcastle East			Newcastle St James			Newcastle West		
	BL	CCG	CL	BL	CCG	CL	BL	CCG	CL
Savings in excess of £500 meet the full cost	1	3	-	0	4	-	1	5	-
Not in receipt of Income Support	186	0	-	175	0	-	140	0	-
Not in receipt of Income Support for 26 weeks	430	-	-	351	-	-	400	-	-
Not in receipt of Income Support at present and unlikely to qualify	-	160	-	-	148	-	-	123	-
Items excluded by Direction	64	31	0	60	29	2	40	20	6
Applicant excluded by Direction	4	2	0	6	9	1	8	28	1
Applied for less than £30 (not travelling expenses)	17	16	-	14	11	-	29	14	-
Award would be less than £30 (not travelling)	18	2	-	24	5	-	23	3	-
Outstanding Social Fund Loans exceed £1000	3	-	1	0	-	0	1	-	0

	Newcastle East			Newcastle St James			Newcastle West		
	BL	CCG	CL	BL	CCG	CL	BL	CCG	CL

Previous application and decision for same item within 26 weeks	126	67	0	120	60	6	194	74	68
No serious risk to health/safety	-	-	34	-	-	38	-	-	53
Inability to repay	148	-	5	49	-	9	64	-	3
Help is available from another source	4	8	1	6	6	6	6	4	7
Insufficient priority	583	165	1	622	84	1	1262	103	0
Suitable alternative available	8	5	1	4	1	0	1	1	4
Loan refused because Grant awarded instead	189	-	0	85	-	0	119	-	0
Other means available to meet the crisis	-	-	1	-	-	2	-	-	0
Basic CCG criteria (Direction 4) not satisfied	-	822	-	-	911	-	-	996	-
Savings over £1000 meet part of cost (applicant over 60)	0	1	-	0	3	-	0	0	-
Others not covered above	163	50	14	86	44	8	60	96	103

"-" = Not applicable to the particular application type.

Income Support

Mr Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of income support in each Newcastle social security office have arrangements for (1) direct payment of housing costs, (2) attachment of community charge, (3) direct re-payments to the social fund, (4) direct payments to the electricity companies and (5) direct payments to British Gas.

Letter from Mrs Ann Robinson, Director of Policy and Planning, 10 July 1991:

Three offices make up the Newcastle Upon Tyne District: Newcastle (East), Newcastle (West) and Newcastle St. James. Attached is a matrix showing the number of customers in the requested categories with deductions from their Income Support as at 31 May 1991.

The figures quoted for Social Fund deductions include deductions from Unemployment Benefit alone as well as Income Support. I regret that it is not possible to provide a precise breakdown of these deductions, except at disproportionate cost.

It is worth mentioning that some customers will have deductions from their Income Support for more than one reason.

Purpose of deductions	Office			Total
	Newcastle (East)	Newcastle (West)	Newcastle (St James)	
Housing costs:				
Mortgage	4	7	7	18
Rent	1040	890	1649	3579
Community charge	1	3	0	4
Social Fund	1970	1768	1871	5609
Electricity	868	930	1021	2819
Gas	719	904	913	2536
Total	4602	4502	5461	14565

Income Support

Mr Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the numbers of (a) claimants, (b) dependants and (c) total numbers dependent on income support in Scotland for each year since 1979.

Letter from Mr George Bardwell, Personnel Director, 25 July 1991:

The information requested has been taken from the Supplementary Benefit/Income Support Annual Statistical Enquiries and is as follows:-

	Customers	Partners	Dependants (aged under 19)	Total
Supplementary benefit				
1979	286,000	53,000	112,000	451,000
1980	304,000	56,000	122,000	482,000
1981	371,000	79,000	159,000	608,000
1982	423,000	95,000	187,000	705,000
1983	440,000	91,000	181,000	713,000
1984	468,000	102,000	202,000	772,000
1986	506,000	107,000	219,000	832,000
1987	535,000	102,000	225,000	862,000
Income Support				
1988	499,000	92,000	236,000	827,000
1989	486,000	81,000	232,000	799,000
1990	481,000	70,000	226,000	777,000

Note: All figures rounded to the nearest thousand.

No Annual Statistical Enquiry carried out in 1985.

Mr Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the number of Scottish children (a) in total and (b) as a percentage dependent on supplementary benefit and income support for each year from 1979 to the latest year for which figures are available.

Letter from Mr George Bardwell, Personnel Director, 25 July 1991:

The information requested has been taken from the Supplementary Benefit/Income Support Annual Statistical Enquiries and the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys and is as follows:-

	Total children (000's)	Children on SuppB/IS	Percentage of children dependent on SuppB/IS
Supplementary Benefit			
1979	1,254.4	109,000	8.7%
1980	1,222.3	119,000	9.8%
1981	1,188.5	154,000	13.0%
1982	1,161.4	183,000	15.7%
1983	1,132.7	177,000	15.6%
1984	1,106.2	195,000	17.7%
1986	1,062.2	212,000	20.0%
1987	1,042.9	216,000	20.7%
Income Support			
1988	1,027.8	226,000	22.0%
1989	1,021.2	223,000	21.9%
1990	1,021.9	217,000	21.2%

Note: All figures rounded to the nearest thousand.

No Annual Statistical Enquiry carried out in 1985.

Children are defined as under 16 years in both cases.

Welsh Language

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which leaflets and claim forms for social security benefits are available in the Welsh language; what percentage of social security offices employ Welsh-speaking counter staff and other officials who deal with the public; and what steps are being taken to improve services, information and advice in the Welsh language.

Letter from Mr David Riggs, Finance Director, [24] July 1991:

The leaflets and claim forms now available in the Welsh language are:

FB 2	Which Benefit
NI 196	Benefit Rates
CH 1	Child Benefit leaflet
CH 2	Child Benefit claim form
CH 7	Child Benefit leaflet - child 16 and over
CCB 1	Community Charge leaflet
CWP 1	Cold Weather Payments
BR 1	Retirement Pension claim form
AP 1	Agents and Appointees leaflet
	The National Insurance card

88% of our offices in Wales employ staff who are Welsh-speaking and provide a service for members of the public. A Freeline service has been set up to provide general Social Security benefit information in the Welsh language. A leaflet has been issued to all members of staff in Wales which summarises our Welsh language policy and provides guidelines for its use. I enclose a copy for your information [see below].

We are constantly looking at ways of improving our Welsh language service and there are numerous projects in the pipeline. We have invited tenders for a revised version of a poster to announce public holiday closing times which will include a Welsh language version.

There are three leaflets almost ready for issue in Welsh:

D 49	What to do after a Death
NI 255	NI Contributions by Direct Debit
IS 1	Income Support

At the moment, work is progressing on Welsh language versions of:

AG 5	Agency Benefits claim form
BF 57	Appointee letter
B 1	Income Support claim form
BO3B	Notification of Nil Entitlement - Income Support
BR 2121	Notification of results of Retirement Pension series claims
BW 1	Widows Pension claim form

A Welsh translation of many other forms can be made available on request.

Leaflet

A BILINGUAL POLICY GUIDELINES FOR THE STAFF

REVISED STATEMENT OF DSS WELSH POLICY (Resulting from the joint Working Party report of 1990)

This policy, which is the subject of ongoing review, applies to all offices of the Department of Social Security in Wales. Its aim is to respond positively to those people wanting to conduct their business with the Department in Welsh and to provide them that service up to the standard of the English equivalent. The policy is a bilingual one where Welsh and English have equal status. The preferred style of delivery is to have Welsh and English together, for example on the same document, but it may also be expressed by Welsh and English in separate format, whichever is more suitable depending on both the service and the practical criteria.

Because of the volume and the size of Social Security operations and the varied and wide-spread location of its Welsh speaking staff all parts of the policy may not be deliverable together or at once at a single place. Some aims will take longer than others to achieve, but delays will be kept to a minimum. Where a response in Welsh is not immediately available special arrangements will be made to provide one as soon as possible.

The main pillars of the policy are as follows:

- 1 It applies to all offices in Wales including full-time and part-time caller offices.
- 2 It provides for its customers to choose either Welsh or English for the conduct of business and for suitable early arrangements when this is not immediately possible.
- 3 It seeks continued and gradual progress to keep pace with newly emerging language developments including possible legislation.
- 4 It is built into the Department's Management Account, financed both locally and centrally by bids to the public purse and it is subject to ongoing accountability.
- 5 It is to be publicised and made well known to staff and public alike. Managers at all levels will give it their commitment to make sure that it works.
- 6 Resources permitting, whenever practical and possible, but depending on an especially commissioned survey, the Welsh language policy will also be deliverable via computer based operations.
- 7 The standard of bilingual or separate Welsh provision will match the standard of the English counterpart.
- 8 None of these foregoing considerations will be allowed to compromise the effective delivery of Social Security to the people of Wales.

This policy will be aimed at those points of activity where service is delivered. In particular:

- 1 Internal and external signposting to all Department of Social Security buildings and vehicles will be bilingual, a principle which will also be applied to the Department's corporate image including the logo. Managers will make local decisions concerning temporary signing and signing within staff areas in the light of domestic circumstances.
- 2 Every poster will be produced either bilingually or in a separate Welsh version to the standard and style and availability of the English counterpart.
- 3 A poster will be produced for prominent display in public waiting areas to make clear that the public may use the language of their choice when conducting business.
- 4 All forms and leaflets will be produced bilingually, given time.
- 5 The Department will aim to respond to all opportunities for interviews in Welsh including telephone calls in that language as a matter of course.
- 6 If it is not possible to respond at once the capacity will be available by appointment within a reasonable timescale using the resources of other offices.
- 7 Managers will maintain an up-to-date list of Welsh speakers willing and confident enough to provide a service in Welsh as part of their normal duties.
- 8 The list of Welsh speakers both local and Central (PRISM) will be kept up-to-date in respect of all existing and newly arriving Welsh speakers.
- 9 A customer once expressing an option to be dealt with in Welsh will henceforward be afforded that service automatically. The choice will be highlighted and designated on all appropriate records to prompt the preferred service at all times.
- 10 Once the application of this policy is confident the language choice will be invited by a suitably worded slip included with each first claim payment or next payment.
- 11 Welsh speaking staff will be encouraged to greet customers and to conduct interviews with them in Welsh but in general terms greeting members of the public in Welsh will be for local decision and implementation.
- 12 The Department will provide a Freeline service in Welsh

attended by Welsh media publicity and located in a predominantly Welsh speaking area to ensure standards and continuity of service.

- 13 The mobile information unit in Wales will carry forward Welsh language policy in terms of the signs, leaflets, forms and advertising displayed. Wherever possible it will be manned, in Welsh speaking areas, by Welsh speaking staff, volunteered from suitable offices if necessary.
- 14 When confident and professional with its Welsh role the mobile information unit will visit events in Wales having a national significance.
- 15 The Regional Information Office will aim to put out press releases and other aspects of public relations work in bilingual style as far as possible.
- 16 The role of Welsh speaking managers in publicity broadcasting will be developed.
- 17 Welsh speaking information officers will be identified and encouraged to take up opportunities for information giving in Welsh.
- 18 Staff publications will include articles in Welsh.
- 19 Any correspondence received in Welsh in Wales will be answered in Welsh. This will include responses to Welsh written letters, the receipt of a form completed in Welsh and a specific preference expressed by the customer whether orally or in writing.
- 20 Wherever possible simple and straightforward Welsh correspondence received in Wales will be handled locally.
- 21 Difficult or complicated Welsh correspondence will be referred for a central reply using the Welsh office translation services if necessary.
- 22 Correspondence in Welsh received by Central Offices outside Wales will be replied to in Welsh provided a reply is needed.
- 23 Where Welsh replies are delayed, for any reason including translation time, the courtesy of an acknowledgement in Welsh will be afforded pending issue of the full reply.
- 24 The Department's local and Central Office letterheads will be fully bilingual and a similar principle will apply to compliment slips, warrants and other official addresses in Wales programmed, as a matter of routine, on word processors.
- 25 The Welsh Office translation service will be the main source of the department's translations work providing this is possible but outside translators will be used as a fall-back if necessary.
- 26 Existing facilities to encourage people to learn Welsh and to help Welsh speakers improve their fluency will be brought to the attention of staff.
- 27 In predominantly Welsh speaking areas management posts will be advertised Welsh speaking desirable.
- 28 Managers in predominantly Welsh speaking areas will always consider the ability to speak Welsh alongside other relevant features when filling public interface posts.
- 29 Where pronounced Welsh skills are required to properly discharge a job's function, ie where Welsh is an unavoidable qualification, the post will be advertised Welsh speaking essential.
- 30 That it can be a practical objective of the Department's service ethic to provide a computer bilingual facility (including a payment one) to Wales will be considered at the appropriate level by those having the suitable expertise and authority.
- 31 Management will be responsible and accountable for Welsh language policy including guiding through its implementation.
- 32 A comprehensive statement about the Department's Welsh policy will be given to every staff member in Wales irrespective of grade, existing and prospective.
- 33 An ongoing campaign to publicise the department's Welsh policy using Welsh media outlets will be undertaken.

Attendance Allowance Unit, Blackpool

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will take steps to ensure that his Department's attendance allowance unit, North Fylde Central office, Norcross, Blackpool FY5 3TA, responds with expedition to correspondence from members of the public; and if he will ensure that an acknowledgement card is sent at an early date;

(2) what is the average wait a member of the general public experiences before a reply is received from the attendance allowance unit, Department of Social Security, North Fylde central office, Norcross, Blackpool FY5 3TA.

Letter from Mrs Ann Robinson, Director of Policy and Planning, 10 July 1991:

Every effort is made by the Attendance Allowance Unit to respond to all correspondence as quickly as possible. Given the complexity of the Attendance Allowance system which generates an extremely wide range of correspondence, combined with the level of customer-generated post - currently running at an average of 8,000 pieces per week - it would not be cost-effective to issue acknowledgements automatically.

However, items of correspondence are examined on receipt and acknowledgements are issued where it is apparent that immediate clearance cannot be effected, for example if papers have to be obtained or if the results of medical examination are awaited. Letters of complaint are vetted at Higher Executive Officer level and acknowledgements or interim responses are issued pending research into the nature of the complaint.

I am afraid that information about the average time taken to deal with all correspondence throughout the Unit is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. But the standards expected of the Unit are tied into the standards required for the delivery and maintenance of benefit at all stages. The published targets for clearance of first claims to Attendance Allowance is 37 days and for reviews of awards, 12 weeks.

Social Fund

Mr Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) why the standard letter, DL/SF14, sent to applicants whose application for review of a social fund officer's decision has been rejected, no longer informs them that they can ask for a social fund inspector to decide whether the decision to reject the application was correct;

(2) why his guidance to social fund officers, in paragraph 4156 of the social fund manual, was amended to exclude the reference to payment of a crisis loan by means of a voucher.

Letter from George Bardwell, Personnel Director, 25 July 1991:

(i) Food Vouchers

The reference to food vouchers was removed from the guidance in the Social Fund Manual following the discontinuation of the voucher system. The main reasons for this were a declining number of retailers who were willing to accept them, a considerable customer aversion to their use because of the perceived stigma attached and the availability of a suitable alternative. A girocheque can be issued payable to a third party where this can be clearly identified as being in the applicant's or dependant's interest.

(ii) Standard letter DL/SF14

This letter was revised to exclude the reference to a Social Fund Inspector review because the original version included this sentence in error. Questions relating to whether a review application has been properly made, within the specified period,

are made on behalf of the Secretary of State and not by Social Fund Officers, who are independent decision makers. Social Fund Inspectors are only empowered to review decisions made by Social Fund Officers and therefore such aspects fall outside their remit.

Benefit Cheques

Mr John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has any plans to change the arrangements so that claimants can more easily cash benefit girocheques for more than £75.

Letter from Mr George Bardwell, Personnel Director, 2 July 1991:

Coincidentally, on the day you tabled your question my officials were discussing precisely the same issue with colleagues in Girobank plc during one of their periodic liaison meetings. It was recognised that the current £75 level does sometimes cause inconvenience to our customers, although, of course, that has to be balanced with the need to prevent fraudulent encashment.

At present Postmasters are required to ask for evidence of identity for all encashments over £75. Below that level, it is for them to use their discretion - in any case of doubt it is clearly in the taxpayers interest that they should err on the side of caution. We hope to reach an early decision on whether to increase the level. I will write to you again as soon as a decision has been made.

Benefits, London

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of people claiming (a) income support and (b) family credit at each office in London for the last two years.

Letter from Mr David Riggs, Finance Director, [24] July 1991:

The information requested is not available, except at disproportionate cost. This is because the information routinely gathered by the Benefits Agency only shows the position at particular points in time. This means that, for the years in question, a count will not include those claims terminating before the count is made, nor will it include claims made after the count has taken place.

However, some information is available and is attached at Annex 1.

Annex 1

Number of income support customers in London

District	Offices in District	31.5.89	31.5.90	31.5.91
Ealing	Ealing	43,398	39,730	45,586
	Acton			
	Southall			
	Notting Hill			
Euston	Euston	53,135	52,966	55,801
	Finsbury Park			
	Highgate			
	Paddington			
Barnet	Barnet	20,770	21,627	27,185
	Hendon			
	Edgware			
Leaside	Tottenham	37,592	40,271	47,960
	Edmonton			
	Wood Green			
Hounslow and Kingston upon-Thames	Kingston-	26,804	28,908	33,832
	New Malden			
	Hounslow			
	Twickenham			

District	Offices in District	31.5.89	31.5.90	31.5.91	10.11.89	20.4.90	2.11.90	19.4.91	
Palace	Camberwell	45,348	44,064	51,703	Euston	306	298	285	255
	Peckham				Finsbury Park	278	289	287	287
	Crystal Palace				Fareham	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
London	Kensington				Greenwich Park	310	309	346	295
	Bloomsbury	8,676	8,816	10,159	Hackney	330	330	338	366
Central	Westminster				Harlesden	272	273	271	275
Southwest	Balham	40,728	41,486	49,610	Hendon	218	222	262	271
	Battersea				Highgate	302	326	360	345
	Streatham				Hither Green	46	38	39	37
Thames	Wandsworth				Hoxton	232	241	268	285
	Kennington Park	21,053	20,112	18,059	Kennington Park	199	197	204	197
	Southwark				Kensington	156	151	177	182
	Thames North				Lewisham	285	296	323	348
North Surrey	Thames South				Leytonstone	334	361	357	502
	Croydon	32,573	35,253	42,119	Neasden	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Mitcham				Notting Hill	262	265	214	165
	Sutton				Oval	51	54	63	50
Lea-Roding	Wimbledon				Paddington	306	314	387	405
	Ilford	35,238	37,128	45,895	Peckham	474	491	475	455
	Walthamstow				Plaistow	327	357	377	395
City East	Leytonstone				Poplar	481	502	538	572
	Poplar	24,903	24,686	25,456	Shoreditch	242	269	281	281
	Stepney				Southwark	262	274	267	303
Newham	City				Stepney	894	998	993	1076
	Woodgrange Park	28,694	31,813	40,252	Stoke Newington	484	519	528	560
	Plaistow				Streatham	174	162	184	192
	Canning Town				Thames North	3	2	2	3
Hackney and Islington	Thames South				Thames South	0	1	N/A	N/A
	Hackney	43,430	45,075	41,705	Tottenham	357	390	379	393
	Shoreditch				Walthamstow	364	N/A	420	435
Thameside	Stoke Newington				Wandsworth	252	235	243	249
	Hoxton				Westminster	230	232	256	273
	Woolwich	28,056	30,985	34,516	Wimbledon (1)	238	222	248	265
Neasden	Bexley				Wimbledon (2)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Neasden	27,843	29,303	33,968	Woodgrange Park	514	576	612	622
	Harlesden				Wood Green	202	216	223	231
Brixton	Cricklewood				Woolwich	454	474	482	526
	Lewisham	47,681	44,033	51,094					
	Greenwich Park								
	Hither Green								
	Brixton								
	Oval								

Note: This information shows the position at each District Office (comprising 2 or more Branch Offices) covering areas with a London Post-Code and may include some Branch offices outside London.

Family credit

	10.11.89	20.4.90	2.11.90	19.4.91
Acton	259	250	214	177
Aldershot	589	575	600	669
Balham	328	333	331	365
Bloomsbury	346	346	349	360
Brixton	85	107	109	116
Camberwell	300	288	284	301
Canning Town	118	126	141	148
City	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Cricklewood	122	119	136	166
Crystal Palace	242	233	244	231
Ealing	214	222	236	350
Edmonton	468	454	513	525

Note: This information shows the number of families receiving Family Credit who, at the time the award was made, were living in the areas of each Branch Office with a "London" prefix in its name.

The information is given on an approximately six monthly basis.

Executive Agencies

Mr McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the last annual report for the Benefits Agency was published; and when the next one is due.

Letter from Mrs Ann Robinson, Director of Policy and Planning, 10 July 1991:

The Benefits Agency was launched in April this year. The first Annual Report will therefore be published after the end of the current year. The published Framework Document states that the Agency will publish its Report in October 1992.

Mr McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the first degree obtained by the chief executive of the Benefits Agency; and from which university or polytechnic it was awarded.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, 17 July 1991:

The first degree I obtained was an LL.B Honours, awarded by Manchester University.

Benefits, Scotland

Mr Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) which local offices in Scotland had to apply budgetary control measures in 1990-91; and to which budgets the restrictions applied; (2) how many claimants, partners and dependants were reliant on income support in Scotland in 1990; and how many of these were children under 15 years;

(3) how many income support deductions are currently being made in Scotland for (a) poll tax arrears, (b) social fund loan payments, (c) fuel payment arrears and (d) any other purposes; and what percentage of total claimants this represents in each category; (4) what was the total notional level of social fund per claimant allocated to Scotland in each year since its inception in (a) cash and (b) constant prices;

(5) how many, and what percentage of income support claimants in Scotland (a) aged over 60 years, (b) aged under 60 years and (c) in total are repaying social fund budgeting loans or crisis loans by deductions from their benefit payments.

Letter from Mrs Ann Robinson, Director of Policy and Planning, 18 July 1991:

I will reply to the different matters in turn. Where possible I have drawn information from the Income Support Annual Statistical Enquiry, 1990. Otherwise, I have used the Agency's management information statistics, which are less detailed but more up to date.

(i) Budgetary control measures

All Social Security offices in Scotland applied budgetary control measures in respect of their expenditure on administration in 1990/91. These measures applied equally to all UK Social Security offices to ensure expenditure remained within the amounts voted by Parliament. Within the overall budget for administrative running costs managers decide locally the expenditure for individual budgets.

As far as the Social Fund is concerned every office is required to apply budgetary control measures. Whilst the Benefits Agency is concerned with operational aspects of the Social Security system, Ministers remain responsible for policy. Their view is that the scheme should be subject to cash limits and they believe that this is the best way of ensuring that resources are targeted on the most vulnerable in society.

(ii) Numbers reliant on Income Support in Scotland

The only source of information on partners and dependants is the Income Support Annual Statistical Enquiry which itself is a count taken at one point in time (31 May 1990).

Information contained in the latest Income Support Annual Statistical Enquiry showed the following breakdown:-

481,000 customers
70,000 partners
206,000 dependants (aged under 15)
20,000 dependants (aged 15 and over)
Total = 777,000

(iii) Deductions from Income Support

The most recent information available, dated 31 May 1991, has been taken from the Benefits Agency management information statistics and is at Annex A. Please note that some customers will have deductions from their Income Support for more than one reason.

(iv) Notional Social Fund levels

The figures I have provided relate to levels of Social Fund expenditure and the number of Income Support claimants.

	1988/89	1989/90	1990/91
	£	£	£
Cash value	57.72	72.49	88.20
Real terms (1988 prices)	57.72	68.15	76.95

(v) Income Support customers repaying Social Fund loans in Scotland

The latest available information, drawn from the Income Support Annual Statistical Enquiry, May 1990 is at Annex B.

Annex A: Deductions from Income Support

Total Income Support customers in Scotland = 500,705 (as at 31 May 1991)

	Numbers	% of total
A Community Charge	29,661	5.9
B Social Fund	87,608	(see notes)
C Fuel Direct	54,975	10.9
D Others:-		
(1) Mortgage Interest	172	0.03
(2) Rent arrears/amenity charges	10,204	2.0
(3) Residential care and Nursing Homes	459	0.1

Notes:

1. Social Fund statistics are collected in a slightly different way to Income Support statistics. This figure represents the total number of loans being repaid from Income Support during the month of May, rather than at the 31st. Consequently, it would not be appropriate to express this number as a percentage of Income Support customers as at 31 May 1991.

2. This figure also includes a number of repayments being made from Unemployment Benefit. The figure is likely to be very small, but it is not possible to express it precisely.

Source: Management Information Statistics (31 May 1991)

Annex B: Income Support customers repaying Social Fund loans in Scotland

	Aged 60 and over	Aged under 60	Total cases
Customers repaying SF by an IS deduction	3,000	72,000	75,000
Total customers	167,000	314,000	481,000
Percentage of IS customers repaying SF by deduction	2%	23%	16%

Source: 1990 Income Support Annual Statistical Report

Direct Payment of Benefits

Mr Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, further to his reply of 7 December, *Official Report*, column 232, regarding payment to claimants' bank accounts [*where automated credit transfer (ACT) is not available*], if he has now issued the guidance; and if he will send a copy to the hon. Member for Oldham West.

Letter from Mr David Riggs, Finance Director, 3 July 1991: I am enclosing a copy of the guidance which we issued earlier this year to local office staff dealing with Income Support claims. We shall shortly be issuing identical guidance in respect of other benefits for which ACT is not currently available.

Circular IS(OS) 1/91 [*parts of this circular dealing only with matters of internal administration and the table of contents are not reproduced below*]

Payment of Income Support direct to banks or building societies

Introduction

1. This circular explains an alternative method of paying Income Support. If the claimant is being paid weekly by giro, or by order book it is possible to make payment of IS, or combined payment of IS and another benefit, direct to a claimant's bank or building society. Payments must continue at the normal frequency,

unless the beneficiary agrees. This method of payment is only possible if the IS section is responsible for the payment. Do not use this method if payment by giro is to be made prior to C2 payment.

2. The circular includes:

(1) details of special arrangements when it is necessary to pay IS by giro payable to the claimant, but sent direct to a bank or building society; and

(2) the draft letters to be issued when:

(a) enquiries about Automatic Credit Transfer (ACT) are received; and

(b) payment of IS are made direct to a bank or building society.

Who should read this circular

3. This circular should be brought to the attention of all IS staff.

Action

4. Follow these instructions on receipt of this circular.

Enquiries about ACT or payment direct to a bank or building society

6. Issue the draft letter at Appendix A:

(1) in reply to a general enquiry about ACT; and

(2) if a specific request is received for IS to be paid directly into a bank or building society, and it is not immediately apparent from the letter or existing information that:

(a) the claimant may have real difficulty in getting to the post office; and

(b) has no one who could act for them as an agent or, if appropriate, appointee.

7. If the claimant replies to the letter indicating a specific problem with getting payments, see para 8.

When to consider payment direct to a bank or building society

8. If a request is received from a claimant or their representative for payment of IS to be sent directly to a bank or building society, consider:

(1) appointee action;

(2) agent action; or

(3) bulk payment action, which could be taken, eg if the owner or administrator of a residential or nursing home asks about a more convenient means of obtaining benefit for people whom they already act as appointee or signing agent. See IS(OS)M Part 2 - People appointed to act on behalf of IS claimants and Claimants unable to collect their own benefit.

9. If none of the actions in para 8 are appropriate consider:

(1) known health/mobility problems;

(2) whether the claimant lives alone;

(3) whether there is any indication of a 'carer', or regular visitor; and

(4) whether a change of post office would help.

10. If the LO1 decides that payment direct to a bank or building society is the only means of overcoming the special problems of the case, send the letter at Appendix B to the claimant. Direct payments can only be made if:

(1) the bank or building society agrees to the arrangement; and

(2) the claimant has been reminded of the costs the bank/building society may charge.

How to make payment

11. Make payment by clerical giro payable to the claimant, but posted to their bank or building society. . . .

12. Complete and send:

(1) the giro with Appendix C letter to the bank/building society; and

(2) form O7 with DLIS(OS)/212 to the claimant to show

payment has been made.

Ask claimant on form O7 if this method of payment is still needed.

Return to normal method of payment

13. Monitor the case at each payment to check whether the special arrangement should continue. If it is reasonable, restore one of the normal methods of payment as soon as possible.

Central Instructions Unit,

Red Rose House,

Preston

January 1991

Appendix A: Letter to be issued in reply to payment of benefit direct/ACT request/enquiry

Thank you for your letter of (a) in which you asked about payment of Income Support directly into a bank account.

You may already know that the Department is undertaking a major computer project which involves all our local offices. This computer system will enable us to offer additional services such as payment direct to a bank or building society account by means of Automated Credit Transfer (ACT).

Unfortunately we cannot offer this service yet. This is because the transfer of payment is done by computer produced magnetic tapes and this facility will not be available until 1992 at the earliest.

If you are having problems in getting to the post office to cash your benefit payment we may be able to arrange for you to have someone you know acting as an 'agent' for you. This means that they can collect your benefit from the post office by cashing your girocheque or order book.

If you would like to make some other arrangement for getting your benefit please let us know. If you want someone else to go to the post office for you, please give us their name. We will then send you a form to sign authorising them to collect your money.

Please let us know if you cannot get to the post office on a regular basis and have no one who can go for you.

Notes for LO: (a) insert date

Appendix B [part only reproduced]: Letter to claimant to seek details for payment

You have asked us to send your Income Support payment to your bank/building society. Before we can do this your bank/building society must agree to the arrangement. Please contact your bank/building society to get their agreement. Any payment sent may be subject to bank charges and you may have to allow time for the payment to be cleared. When they have agreed, please sign the statement below.

I confirm that I have obtained the agreement of my bank/building society to this arrangement.

Signed:

Date:

Appendix C: Letter to accompany girocheque sent direct to bank/building society [not reproduced]

Income Support

Mr Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of people at each social security office who are (a) having deductions made from their income support to cover poll tax arrears and (b) were having such deductions three months, six months, nine months and 12 months ago.

Letter from Mr George Bardwell, Personnel Director, 25 July 1991:

The information requested is at Annex A.

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Signed:

Date:

Appendix C: Letter to accompany girocheque sent direct to bank/building society [not reproduced]

Income Support

Mr Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of people at each social security office who are (a) having deductions made from their income support to cover poll tax arrears and (b) were having such deductions three months, six months, nine months and 12 months ago.

Letter from Mr George Bardwell, Personnel Director, 25 July 1991:

The information requested is at Annex A.

Annex A: Number of customers with deductions from their Income Support for Community Charge arrears

Area	District Offices in AD	Aug 90	Nov 90	Feb 91	May 91
Scotland and North Territory					
Tyneside,	Northumberland	-	15	106	219
Teeside	Newcastle	-	1	2	4
	North Tyne	-	-	-	-
	South Tyne	-	614	2478	4209
	North Durham	-	231	370	877
	South Durham	-	-	2	3
	Wearside	-	1	183	227
	South Tees	-	-	-	1
	North Tees	-	1	347	1095
South Yorkshire and Humberside	East Yorkshire	24	137	172	368
	Hull	-	28	125	557
	South Humberside	-	-	45	161
	Barnsley	1	-	3	28
	Doncaster	-	-	25	154
	Rotherham	-	-	-	56
	Sheffield East	-	-	-	nil
	Sheffield West	-	-	-	nil
North and West Yorkshire	Bradford	-	-	-	-
	Halifax	1	-	16	72
	Kirklees	-	-	19	62
	Leeds North	-	-	15	111
	Leeds South	-	-	-	156
	Wakefield	-	1	11	9
	North Yorkshire	-	3	458	73
Glasgow and Paisley	Glasgow Anniesland	594	781	940	924
	Glasgow City	483	621	810	806
	Glasgow Laurieston	517	887	2069	2325
	Glasgow Southside	29	1732	1852	1722
	Glasgow Shettleston	1213	1896	1805	2787
	Glasgow Springburn	1439	1975	2007	1738
	Paisley	18	496	1680	2520
North, Central and West Scotland	Ayr	323	384	501	1261
	Clydebank	313	778	1007	1085
	Coatbridge	444	1750	2812	3523
	Greenock	153	727	1013	1070
	Inverness	-	-	1	51
	Irvine	75	667	1534	2085
	Motherwell	679	1257	2515	3258
	Stirling	2179	2215	1977	2432
East of Scotland	East Lowlands	308	493	538	512
	Lothian Central	-	-	-	1
	Lothian West	65	67	136	118
	Fife	237	788	983	1365
	Teyside	12	41	47	78
	Grampian and Shetland	-	1	1	-
Wales and Central England Territory					
East Midlands	N Derbyshire	-	-	-	-
	N Nottinghamshire	-	-	-	148
	E Nottinghamshire	-	-	48	193
	W Nottinghamshire	-	-	115	323
	E Lincolnshire	-	56	130	159
	W Lincolnshire	-	-	32	180
	N Leicestershire	-	-	6	63
	S Leicestershire	-	-	-	-
Midlands South	B'ham Chamberlain	-	-	7	183
West	B'ham North West	-	-	14	220
Area Directorate	District Offices in AD	Aug 90	Nov 90	Feb 91	May 91
	B'ham Heartlands	-	-	-	89
	B'ham South East	-	21	99	231
	B'ham South West	-	-	36	145
	Hereford and Worcs	-	9	222	437
	Warwickshire	1	5	39	364
	Coventry	-	-	63	40
West Mercia	Central Derbyshire	-	-	10	-
	South Derbyshire	-	-	-	-
	Sandwell	-	-	-	-
	Shropshire	-	2	6	16
	Central Staffordshire	-	-	2	-
	North Staffordshire	5	-	55	253
	Walsall	-	-	46	248
	Wolverhampton	-	-	-	-
	North Worcestershire	-	-	96	379
Wales	Gwyneddigion	-	-	-	44
	Mid Wales and Maelor	-	-	72	408
	Cynon, Merthyr and Rhymney Valley	-	17	100	694
	South Glamorgan	-	37	320	608
	West Wales	-	-	5	61
	Swansea	-	-	427	394
	North Wales Coast	-	-	10	87
	Ogwr Afan Nedd	-	-	-	165
	Taff Rhondda	-	21	357	708
	South Gwent and Islwyn	-	-	-	83
	North Gwent and Brecon	-	-	1	331
Merseyside and Cumbria	Knowsley	-	44	1389	3542
	Liverpool Central	-	-	2	1
	Liverpool North	-	-	-	278
	Liverpool South	-	119	403	561
	Sefton	-	11	86	440
	St Helens/W Lancs	-	35	312	470
	W and S Cheshire	-	22	670	1020
	Wirral	-	-	-	-
Greater Manchester	Manchester Central	-	-	-	-
	Manchester North	-	-	-	-
	Manchester South	-	-	-	-
	North Cheshire	-	6	628	1290
	Oldham	-	-	-	-
	Sale/E Cheshire	-	-	-	23
	Salford	-	-	-	58
	Stockport	-	-	-	1
	Tameside	-	-	-	-
Lancashire and Cumbria	Blackburn	-	-	7	226
	Blackpool	-	-	7	20
	Bolton	-	-	-	-
	Burnley	-	-	57	303
	Bury/Rochdale	-	-	192	489
	Lanc/South Cumbria	-	-	3	4
	North Cumbria	-	-	2	360
	Preston	-	-	9	242
	Wigan	-	-	1	455
Southern England Territory					
Anglia	Northampton	-	-	5	11
	Norwich	-	2	4	17
	Suffolk	-	-	107	388
	N and E Herts	-	-	1	5
	West Herts	-	-	13	33

Area Directorate	District Offices in AD	Aug 90	Nov 90	Feb 91	May 91
Chilterns	Cambridge	-	-	39	89
	Leaside	-	-	-	140
	Harrow and Hillingdon	-	-	-	5
	Euston	-	-	-	-
	Ealing	-	-	-	1
	Bedfordshire	-	-	6	55
	Buckinghamshire	-	-	1	2
South London and West Sussex	Barnet	-	-	-	18
	Oxfordshire	-	-	-	1
	South Downs	-	-	-	22
	West Sussex	-	-	-	1
	Thames	-	-	1	-
	London Central	-	-	-	-
	S W Thames	-	-	1	18
West Country	Bankside	-	-	-	-
	North Surrey	-	-	-	6
	Brunel	-	-	-	19
	Severnside	-	-	-	-
	Cornwall	-	-	28	63
	Dorset	-	6	49	203
	Exeter and N Devon	-	-	24	51
E London, Essex	Gloucestershire	-	-	7	14
	Somerset	-	-	-	7
	South Devon	-	43	-	1
	Essex South East	-	-	-	-
	Essex North	-	-	11	19
	Essex South West	-	-	-	2
	Newham	-	-	12	47
SE London, Kent	Barking and Havering	-	-	-	19
	Hackney and Islington	-	-	-	13
	City East	-	-	39	215
	Lea-Roding	-	-	-	-
	Canterbury Thanet	-	-	-	-
	Channel	-	2	20	116
	North Kent	-	1	12	134
Wessex	East Sussex	-	9	60	283
	Thameside	-	-	-	1
	Neasden	-	-	-	-
	Lewisham and Brixton	-	-	-	2
	West Kent	-	6	21	35
	Wiltshire	-	16	129	215
	Berkshire	-	-	7	25
Wessex	Surrey Downs	-	-	-	8
	Hampshire North	-	-	1	35
	Solent and Forest	-	1	83	153
	Hounslow and Kingston	-	27	59	130
	SE Hants and Wight	-	8	17	40

Social Security Fraud Investigation Staff

Earl Russell asked Her Majesty's Government: How many officials are currently investigating social security fraud; what are the grades of these officers; and what is the current establishment.

Letter from Mrs Ann Robinson, Director of Policy and Planning, [22] July 1991:

Information on the numbers of staff engaged on anti-fraud duties is collected in the form of the number of days they spend on this work. The latest figures available are for 31 May 1991. On that date 2,658 full-time equivalent staff were employed on

duties relating to Social Security fraud. Of this figure, 2,086 were primarily engaged on investigation duties and they are in the executive officer grade. The remaining 572 staff comprise a mixture of management and support grades. To various degrees these staff will also become involved in investigation work.

The establishment figure for the executive officers primarily employed on investigation work is 2,482 posts; the establishment figure for fraud staff in management and support grades is 728 posts.

Family Support

Mr Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the most recent estimate of the number of families in receipt of (a) income support, (b) family credit and (c) one-parent benefit in Wales.

Letter from Mrs Ann Robinson, Director of Policy and Planning, [23] July 1991:

On the basis that a family includes a lone parent or a couple in receipt of an Income Support family premium, the figures for Wales are as follow:

(a) Income Support

In May 1990, there were approximately 71,000 families in receipt of Income Support.

(b) Family Credit

At 30 November 1990, there were 21,300 families in receipt of Family Credit.

(c) One Parent Benefit

In December 1989, there were 34,000 families in receipt of One Parent Benefit.

Fraud and Special Investigations

Mr Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing for each administrative region within Wales what the target savings are for the year to date, and the year to date achieved savings, of the fraud and special investigator sections within Department of Social Security offices; whether the statistics in each area are compiled on a comparable basis; and if he will make a statement.

Letter from Mr George Bardwell, Personnel Director, 25 July 1991:

You raised a number of points about savings in benefit payments achieved from fraud investigations. The attached table shows comparisons between the targets set for Wales and Great Britain and the latest recorded savings achieved against those targets. We do not have specific targets for each administrative region within Wales, there is simply one overall target for the whole country.

You also asked for comparable figures for fraud officers and special investigators. The table shows targets and recorded savings achieved by these staff for Great Britain as a whole. These statistics are collected on a uniform basis across the whole of Great Britain.

I would add that the Benefits Agency's primary responsibility is to pay social security benefits to those who are entitled to them. Failure to deter those who seek to defraud misdirects benefits to those who are not in need and discredits the system. The fraud savings target system is designed to support these responsibilities.

Fraud savings targets and achievements for April-June 1991

A WALES

	£
Target figures	7,136,160
Savings achieved	7,408,896

B ENGLAND, SCOTLAND & WALES COMBINED

	£
Target figures	92,551,040
which include:-	
Fraud Officers	45,812,064
Special Investigators	46,738,976
Savings achieved	104,086,888
which include:-	
Fraud Officers	55,467,008
Special Investigators	48,619,872

CONTRIBUTIONS AGENCY

Executive Agencies

Mr McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the last annual report for the Contributions Agency was published; and when the next one is due.

Letter from Mr G Bertram, Director of Field Operations, 11 July 1991:

The Agency was established on 2 April 1991 and its first Annual Report will be published in October 1992.

Mr McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the first degree obtained by the chief executive of the Contributions Agency; and from which university or polytechnic it was awarded.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant, Chief Executive, 16 July 1991: I do not have any degrees.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICES AGENCY

Departmental Agencies

Mr McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much was spent on events and publicity surrounding the launch of each agency in his Department as an executive agency; and whether the cost was borne by his Department or the new agency.

Letter from Mr F J Kenworthy, Chief Executive, 16 July 1991: ITSA was launched on the 2nd of April 1990 and the amount spent solely on publicity and events was £2760. This amount represents the cost of a small reception and an advertisement announcing the launch in "Government Computing" magazine.

There were also a number of in-house activities which took place at the time of the launch. These included the preparation of the Agency framework document, reprinting of stationery and staff directories and a number of activities aimed at making my staff aware of the changes taking place. These obviously incurred additional but necessary costs.

All of this expenditure was borne by ITSA.

Executive Agencies

Mr McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the last annual report for the Information Technology Services Agency was published; and when the next one is due.

Letter from Mr F J Kenworthy, Chief Executive, 16 July 1991: The first ITSA Annual Business Plan, for 1990/91, was issued in April 1990. The second Annual Business Plan for 1991/92, was issued in May '91. Copies of both of these have been lodged in the House of Commons Library and the Public Information Office.

The first ITSA Annual Report, reviewing the Agency's achievements from its inception in April 1990 to the end its first full year, is scheduled for release in October 1991. Copies will of course be placed in the Libraries of the House of Commons and the Public Information Office.

Mr McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the first degree obtained by the chief executive of Information Technology Services Agency; and from which university or polytechnic it was awarded.

Letter from Mr F J Kenworthy, Chief Executive, 17 July 1991: I obtained an Honours Degree in Economic and Political Studies from the University of Manchester in 1966 and entered the then Administrative Class of the Home Civil Service by open competition in the same year.

RESETTLEMENT AGENCY

Plawsworth Resettlement Unit

Mr Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many places for men are currently provided at the Plawsworth resettlement unit; how many are occupied; and if he will list the numbers and locations of the replacement facilities for men within the Northern region.

Letter from Mr Tony Ward, Chief Executive, 15 July 1991: Plawsworth Resettlement Unit provides accommodation for up to 74 men a night. In the year ending 31 March the average nightly occupancy was 52 beds.

The replacement scheme for the unit aims to provide a total of 100 beds, of which 79 will be for men. Of these, 21 beds are to be in North Tyneside, 18 in Newcastle, 18 in Middlesbrough, 4 in Stockton and 18 in York. A further hostel in North Tyneside will provide 21 beds for women.

Resettlement Facilities

Mr Fishburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what factors influenced the decision to close Bridge House resettlement unit; what alternative provision the Resettlement Agency made for the residents; and what plans the Resettlement Agency has for the disposal of the building.

Letter from Mr Tony Ward, Chief Executive, 23 July 1991: Bridge House was originally a Territorial Army Centre, built in the mid-1930s. It opened as a DHSS reception centre for single homeless men in 1975, being renamed a "resettlement unit" five years later to reflect its role more accurately. At that time the property formed part of the Civil Estate and responsibility for its maintenance thus rested chiefly with the Property Services

Agency (PSA). However, from 1 April 1990, responsibilities changed and the property was transferred to the DSS, as part of the "Departmental Estate". The consequence of this is that although we have retained the PSA as agents all decisions on the property now rest with me on behalf of the DSS.

The decision to close Bridge House on 28 March was the result of various long standing concerns. They culminated in the discovery last year during refurbishment of some of the Unit's toilet facilities that serious problems with the drains were likely to represent a significant health risk to those living and working in the Unit. The drains were cleaned out using high pressure water jets. This was followed by an examination of damage, established by passing a closed circuit television camera through the drains. On 20 November 1990 representatives of the Resettlement Agency met PSA officials to discuss the numerous problems associated with the condition of the site. At the meeting the film of the damage was shown. This illustrated a catalogue of serious problems such as displaced joints, cracks and unacceptable water levels due to ingress from soil. The most acute problem was associated with the drain which runs from front to rear of the building under the main corridor. It was the opinion of PSA officials that the drain needed to be opened to investigate the extent of the problem, which could have included damage to the building foundations. This would have meant the Unit's temporary closure.

Other problems with the property were the poor condition of the kitchen roof, window frames, and the plumbing work throughout. In addition, the premises would have needed urgent refurbishment to meet the local authority environmental standards on health and safety, taking into account that the building was classified as a hostel as opposed to a lodging house. PSA, to whom we have contracted maintenance work, estimated the cost of essential work to be £1.5m, plus their fees and value added tax, bringing the cost to at least £2m. I felt it would not have been good value for money to incur such costs in view of the Government's general policy of replacing and closing Resettlement Units, especially as the extent of the repairs would have meant full or partial closure of the Unit. I decided that the only sensible course to protect the health and safety of the residents and staff was to close the Unit. To ensure that no bed capacity was lost, beds were made available in other Units in and around London, and with Ministerial approval, the intention to close Bridge House was announced on 11 March.

You will no doubt recall receiving a letter from Mr Winstanley on 11 March as did many others with a local interest. Senior Agency staff visited the Unit and gave residents help and counselling for the move to alternative accommodation of their choice. All residents were offered alternative accommodation in other Resettlement Units. On 25 March the last residents left Bridge House to alternative accommodation. On 28 March the premises were closed and secured pending final disposal.

The Resettlement Agency continues to have about 16 unoccupied beds per night in its London Units. Also, 300 new direct access bed spaces had opened in London by March of this year by reason of the Government's current rough sleepers initiative. The number of new bed spaces will increase to about 400 by the end of July and about 1,000 by the end of November.

On the subject of disposal of the empty building, it is to be sold on the open market.

Executive Agencies

Mr McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the last annual report for the Resettlement Agency was published; and when the next one is due.

Letter from Mr Tony Ward, Chief Executive, 12 July 1991: The Resettlement Agency has not as yet published a full annual report, however, it published a financial statement and accounts for 1989-90, on 31 October 1990. Copies of this were placed in the Library.

I am, however, planning a full annual report for 1990-91 and this will be published by 31 October 1991. Copies will also be placed in the Library.

Executive Agencies

Mr McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the first degree obtained by the chief executive of the Resettlement Agency; and from which university or polytechnic it was awarded.

Letter from Mr Tony Ward, Chief Executive, 17 July 1991: I did not in fact attend either a university or polytechnic and I do not have a degree.

Resettlement Unit, Notting Hill Gate

Mr Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the estimated cost of repairs to drains and sewers at the Notting Hill Gate resettlement unit before its closure; and what was the charge made by Dyno-Rod for solving the problem.

Letter from Mr Tony Ward, Chief Executive, 18 July 1991: The cost of bringing Bridge House Resettlement Unit (Notting Hill Gate) up to a standard acceptable for living and working in including major repairs to drains and sewer was estimated at over £1.5m. The Agency has at no time sought advice from Dyno-Rod.

SOCIAL SECURITY AGENCY (NORTHERN IRELAND)

Social Security

Mr Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of income support hardship claims by claimants whose benefit had been suspended for not actively seeking work; and what were the numbers of such claims for each social security office since September 1989.

Letter from Mr A Wylie, Chief Executive, 23 July 1991: Central statistics are not available for the period prior to June 1990 but since then until June 1991 there were 6 claims as follows:

<i>Social Security Office</i>	<i>Number of Claims</i>
Armagh	2
Corporation Street	1
Kilkeel	2
Knockbreda	1

Departmental Agencies

Mr McAllion: to ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will list the new forms of working patterns introduced into each agency in his Department since its establishment; and if he will break down by grade the numbers of staff taking up each new working pattern; (2) how many staff were in post on the date that each agency in his Department was established; and how many staff are now in post;

(3) what group bonus schemes are in operation in each agency in his Department;

(4) if he will list those new facilities for staff which have been introduced in each agency in his Department since establishment;

(5) whether any appointments from the private sector have been made to any agency in his Department at grade 7 or above since its establishment.

Letter from Mr A Wylie, Chief Executive, 11 July 1991:

As you may know, the Social Security Agency was established on 1 July 1991 and you will not be surprised to learn that in this short period we have not yet introduced any new working patterns or facilities for staff nor have we recruited staff at grade 7 level or above. We do have a group bonus scheme under which special bonuses can be awarded to individuals or groups for exceptional performance. The payments take the form of taxable non-pensionable lump sums. The scheme was already in operation in the Department of Health and Social Services and was adopted by the Agency.

As regards the staffing levels of the Agency, we are still in the process of adjusting posts between the Agency and the Department. Although final figures are not yet available it is estimated that on 1 July 1991 there were 5495 whole time equivalent posts in the Agency and on the 8 July we had 5436¹/₂ posts.

Mr McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what first degree was obtained by the chief executive of each agency in his Department; and from which institution.

Letter from Mr A Wylie, Chief Executive, 11 July 1991:

... degrees held by Chief Executives (none in my case) ...

Publications

Mr Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total cost of printing and distributing the Social Security Agency's framework document and business plan for 1991-92; and who was awarded the printing contract.

Letter from Mr A Wylie, Chief Executive, 11 July 1991:

The printing costs of the documents were as follows:

Framework Document	£7,890.86
Business Plan	£16,202.89

In addition, the Agency decided to publish a short version of the Business Plan for distribution to its staff and customers and the printing cost of this was £9,155.27. I cannot give you figures for the distribution costs of the documents because most copies were delivered through the Agency's courier service or by hand on the day of the launch. The sums involved, therefore, would be quite small.

As regards the printing contract this was awarded through Her Majesty's Stationery Office to Delta Print and Packaging Ltd, Kennedy Way Industrial Estate, Blackstaff Road, Belfast.

EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

Rehabilitation Centres

Mrs Heal: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he has given any further consideration to the number of employment rehabilitation centres required in London and the south-east.

Letter from Mr M E G Fogden, Chief Executive, 15 July 1991:

It might be useful if I set out our intentions for the future of employment rehabilitation provision in the context of the plans for the development of all of our services for people with disabilities.

You will be aware that the Secretary of State announced recently that the plans for employment assessment and rehabilitation set out in the Government's consultative document, "Employment and Training for People with Disabilities", are now to be implemented.

This will mean that employment rehabilitation, over a period of around the next five years, will be improved and developed by a major extension in the use of voluntary organisations, local authorities and others to provide rehabilitation on an agency basis and through the establishment of nine Employment Service centres of excellence across the country.

The greater use of agencies will mean that we can call on the very considerable breadth of experience and skills in the voluntary sector and elsewhere to help people across a broader range of disability types. It will also mean that we can offer a rehabilitation service to many more people in their own localities. The Employment Service centres of excellence will provide services to clients and will also be developed to take on a teaching hospital style of operation. The centres will focus particularly on developing new techniques in rehabilitation and will be able to assist in the training and development of staff from agencies.

These plans for employment rehabilitation go hand in hand with those for the development of specialist assessment services. Over the next 12 to 18 months we will be setting up more than 50 local Employment Service teams which will offer to individuals specialist advice, assessment and help in finding and keeping jobs. The teams will also advise and encourage employers and help them in applying good practice. The teams will be involved closely in supporting and monitoring the network of rehabilitation agencies.

The plans for specialist assessment and rehabilitation services are a continuation of a development programme which has seen increasing numbers of people with disabilities benefiting from shorter, higher quality courses of assessment and rehabilitation. Around 27,000 people were helped by the Employment Rehabilitation Service in 1990/1991.

The implementation of the new plans, as announced by the Secretary of State, will mean that local coverage of specialist assessment and rehabilitation will be substantially increased and the service provided will be more coherent, professional and effective. We will see major improvements in the quality of service to individuals and to employers. We will be able to help more people to find and keep suitable jobs.

The details of the changes to the local delivery of our services for people with disabilities are now being taken forward in working groups of my managers in each region. There is a wide range of issues for the working groups to address. These will include the establishment of timetables for the setting up of the new local teams, the development of the centres of excellence and the rundown of the existing network of employment rehabilitation centres. I must stress that, at this stage, no decisions have been taken about the timing of the closure of particular centres or about the size and shape of the new centres of excellence.

The London and South East region possesses something like a quarter of the entire population of the country and you have my assurance that we will ensure that employment rehabilitation provision in London and the South East is both of a high quality and will be able to meet the substantial demand in the region. The precise organisation of any centre of excellence to serve this very large region has still to be worked out and will clearly need to reflect the travel patterns of its clients.

Job Search Seminars

Mr Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many job search seminars have been held in each of the counties of Wales.

Letter from Mr M E G Fogden, Chief Executive, 19 July 1991: Jobsearch seminars are a new service aimed at helping unemployed people with their search for work. They have recently been tested on a pilot basis throughout the country. The following seminars have been held in Wales as part of the pilot exercise:-

County	Number of seminars
Dyfed	3
West Glamorgan	3
Gwent	3
Mid Glamorgan	6
Clwyd	1
Total	16

Following the success of the pilot exercise, seminars are being introduced more widely with contracts for 2166 places being entered into for the period ending March 1992. All counties in Wales will benefit, though I am afraid a breakdown by county is not yet available.

The seminars form part of a wider package of measures which Ministers have asked the Employment Service to introduce in order to help unemployed people. A central feature of the package is a review of all claimants at the 13 week stage of unemployment, with most also having an interview with a claimant adviser. This review and interview process is supported by the jobsearch seminars, which will help people to improve their jobhunting skills and widen jobsearch activity. A job referral service is also being introduced for people who are likely to benefit from further help with job placing.

Following the Secretary of State for Employment's announcement on 19 June there is to be a further major expansion of measures to help unemployed people into work. We are delighted that among these, resources are to be made available to provide 60,000 extra places for jobsearch seminars in 1991/92, making a total of 100,000 for Great Britain as a whole. Plans are at present being made to allocate these places and although precise figures are not yet available I expect there will be some 3000 extra places available for Wales.

Holloway Job Club

Mr Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if the Employment Service guarantees the funding of the Holloway job club.

Letter from Mr M E G Fogden, Chief Executive, 16 July 1991: The Employment Service recognises that employment can have an important influence on the prospect of a prisoner resettling in the community and is committed to helping equip prisoners with the skills and resources necessary for jobsearch by providing the Jobclub at Holloway, in partnership with Nacro and the Prison Service.

The Jobclub contract runs until October 1991 when the results achieved will be evaluated to see if there are grounds to extend this service further. We can give no guarantee that the Jobclub will continue in its present form until we have established whether this is the best way of helping prisoners while making the most effective use of resources.

We are, meanwhile, looking at other methods of helping prisoners and are developing a new pre-release course in partnership with the Probation Service and the Home Office.

This will combine features of both Jobclubs and Restart Courses and will aim to prepare prisoners for re-entry to the labour market and to provide a bridge into ED provision in the community.

We are also helping some prisons to set up their own Jobclubs by providing them with guidance, material and Jobclub leader training for their prison officers.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was (a) the number of staff dealing with unemployment benefit claims in each of the standard regions, (b) the number of unemployed people claiming benefit in each of the standard regions and (c) the staff-to-claimant ratio in each of the standard regions, as at 1 March 1990 and 1 May 1991.

Letter from Mr J Turner, Deputy Chief Executive, 1 July 1991: I am unable to answer your question in precisely the form you requested because we do not keep any records of staffing or numbers of unemployed people by standard regions, however I attach a table showing the information by Employment Service administrative regions.

	March 1990			May 1991		
	Benefit staff units	Unemployed persons (million)	Ratio	Benefit staff units	Unemployed persons (million)	Ratio
Northern	1320	.115	1:87	1330	.130	1:98
Yorks & Humberside	1920	.164	1:85	2090	.208	1:100
East Mids and Eastern	1500	.140	1:93	1840	.200	1:109
London and South East	4020	.356	1:89	5310	.621	1:117
South West	1140	.099	1:86	1560	.156	1:100
Office for Wales	1010	.090	1:89	1090	.113	1:104
West Midlands	1780	.155	1:87	2010	.223	1:111
North West	2600	.254	1:98	2820	.301	1:107
Office for Scotland	2330	.215	1:92	2330	.219	1:94
Total	17620	1.588	1:90	20380	2.171	1:107

Notes

- (i) The regions are Employment Service Administrative regions, staffing records are not available for the standard regions.
- (ii) The staff figures are staff units used during the months of March 1990 and May 1991 and not the staff in post. They include a small element for the payment of Training Allowances.
- (iii) The figures for unemployed persons are rounded and so the total may vary slightly from that published in the DE Gazette.

Detached Duty Workers

Mr McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of detached duty workers recruited and the numbers now operating in the south-east, south-west, London, East Anglia and east midlands dealing with unemployed people claiming benefit; what were the standard regions from which the detached workers were recruited; and what are (a) the total and (b) the additional costs of employing them including travel, overnight allowances, salaries and any other premium payments, for each month between 7 December 1990 to 31 May 1991.

Letter from Mr J Turner, Deputy Chief Executive, 1 July 1991: As you know from Mike Fogden's letter of 8 March, two of our Regions (London & South East, and South West) decided it was necessary to bring in experienced staff to deal with the increase

in new claims to unemployment benefit. This was regarded as a temporary measure until new people could be recruited and trained. This process is now well underway and the detached duty exercise in both Regions has ended. There has been no detached duty working in our East Midlands and Eastern Region.

In London and South East Region, a total of 147 people came on detached duty between 7 December 1990 and 31 May 1991 (75 in London and 72 in the South East). They were recruited from the North West (33), Wales (8), Northern Region (40), Scotland (39) and Yorkshire and Humberside (27).

In the South West Region, ten people came on detached duty (8 from Scotland and 2 from Wales). Two of those ten people worked on detached duty for less than four weeks.

The table below shows the estimated salary and additional costs for the detached duty workers in London & South East and South West Regions:

Month	Salary (est)	Travel & subsistence (est)	Total (est)
Jan. 91	£95,000	£38,242	£133,242
Feb. 91	£42,000	£67,060	£109,060
Mar. 91	£14,267	£51,080	£65,347
Apr. 91	£4,065	£25,349	£29,414
May 91	£1,000	£32,617	£33,617
Est. total	£156,332	£231,212*	£387,544

* Includes some outstanding expenses claims.

The total estimated cost of the detached duty exercise, therefore, is £387,544, and the estimated additional cost (travel and subsistence payments) is £231,212.

Youth Training

Mr McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the number of young people on bridging allowance for each of the employment service administration regions by providing a comparison of change and percentage change for the period January 1991 to May 1991 and January 1990 to May 1990, including the totals and the average.

Letter from Mr MEG Fogden, Chief Executive, 11 July 1991: As you may know the Employment Service is responsible for paying Bridging Allowance to young people under 18 who have left a Youth Training (YT) course or a job but are seeking a further YT place. Payments are made via our network of local offices. The information you requested about the numbers receiving Bridging Allowance during the period January to May 1991, by comparison with the same period in 1990, is provided in the attached tables.

Numbers in receipt of Bridging Allowance by ES Region

	Northern	Yorks & Humberside	East Mids & Eastern	London & South East	South West	Wales	West Mids	North West	Scotland	Total
Jan 90	602	1048	1000	1423	588	563	927	1587	1205	8943
Jan 91	694	1118	1197	2385	985	656	1186	1657	1266	11144
Difference	+92	+70	+197	+962	+397	+93	+259	+70	+61	+2201
% diff	+15.3	+6.7	+19.7	+67.6	+67.5	+16.5	+27.9	+4.4	+5.1	+24.6
Feb 90	957	1481	1426	1908	790	763	1320	2207	1781	12633
Feb 91	928	1502	1785	3728	1424	919	1716	2390	1787	16179
Difference	-29	+21	+359	+1820	+634	+156	+396	+183	+6	+3546
% diff	-0.3	+1.4	+25.2	+95.4	+80.3	+20.4	+30.0	+8.3	+0.3	+28.1
March 90	972	1450	1490	1990	787	704	1332	2179	1838	12742
March 91	1099	1872	2155	4585	1480	977	2143	2690	2096	19097
Difference	+127	+422	+665	+2595	+693	+273	+811	+511	+258	+6355
% diff	+13.1	+29.1	+44.6	+130.4	+88.1	+38.8	+60.9	+23.5	+14.0	+49.9
April 90	840	1365	1275	1628	653	585	1268	2011	1813	11438
April 91	1052	1813	1898	3980	1217	890	2024	2535	2537	17946
Difference	+212	+448	+623	+2352	+564	+305	+756	+524	+724	+6508
% diff	+25.2	+32.8	+48.9	+144.5	+86.4	+52.1	+59.6	+26.1	+39.9	+56.9
May 90	834	1205	1094	1462	597	526	1091	1772	1968	10549
May 91	929	1549	1644	3298	977	804	1729	2260	2449	15639
Difference	+95	+344	+550	+1836	+380	+278	+638	+488	+481	+5090
% diff	+11.4	+28.5	+50.3	+128.7	+63.7	+52.9	+58.5	+27.5	+24.4	+48.3

Average number per month in receipt of Bridging Allowance by ES Region

	Northern	Yorks & Humberside	East Mids & Eastern	London & South East	South West	Wales	West Mids	North West	Scotland	Total
Jan-May 90	841	1309	1257	1682	683	628	1188	1951	1721	11260
Jan-May 91	940	1571	1736	3595	1217	849	1760	2306	2027	16001
Difference	+99	+262	+479	+1913	+534	+221	+572	+355	+306	+4741
% diff	+11.8	+20.0	+38.1	+113.7	+78.2	+35.2	+48.1	+18.2	+17.8	+42.1

Unemployment Benefit

Mr Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what percentage of applicants for unemployment benefit were disqualified for the maximum 26 weeks under section 20 of the Social Security Act 1975 in each of the last five years (a) in Wales as a whole and (b) in each county or district in Wales. (2) what percentage of those applicants for unemployment benefit who were disqualified for any period were disqualified for the maximum 26 weeks under section 20 of the Social Security Act 1975 in each of the last five years (a) in Wales as a whole and (b) in each county or district in Wales.

Letter from Mr M E G Fogden, Chief Executive, 22 July 1991: I am afraid that no separate records are kept of the lengths of disqualifications imposed under section 20 of the Social Security Act 1975. Nor are figures kept on a county or district basis. I hope, however, that the following will be helpful.

	<i>Number of claims made in Wales</i>	<i>% disqualified under Section 20</i>
1986	279,190	6.2
1987	263,255	6.6
1988	234,905	6.4
1989	205,381	5.7
1990	214,228	4.3

Jobs (Travel and Subsistence)

Mr Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will institute a study into the numbers of registered unemployed in receipt of travel and interview expenses to pursue work in other areas of the country who are subsequently offered employment, but are unable to accept it due to the lack of funds for travel to the place of work and subsistence, pending their initial pay packet.

Letter from Mr M E G Fogden, Chief Executive, 15 July 1991: The Employment Service operates the Travel to Interview Scheme (TIS) which helps people to attend interviews beyond normal daily travelling distance of their home area by paying travel costs and any necessary overnight subsistence.

There are no plans at present to carry out a study of those who cannot afford to take up work they gained as a result of the scheme. Research carried out after the first year of operation of the scheme, in 1987, showed that 37% of applicants under the scheme were offered jobs, with 26% accepting. Of the 11% who declined, only a fraction of 1% gave cost of travel as a reason.

I understand that the Department of Social Security are replying to you regarding a similar question, tabled on 8 July, to explain what help is available through them for back to work costs.

Disablement Advisory Service

Mr Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what appeal procedure is available to disabled people who are dissatisfied with the decisions of the local disablement advisory service manager regarding aids and equipment for employment.

Letter from Mr M E G Fogden, Chief Executive, 15 July 1991: We take the following action when a person with a disability is dissatisfied with a decision given by a Disablement Advisory Service Manager (DASM) about their application for the loan of special aids to employment. We first invite the applicant to give us the reason(s) for their dissatisfaction in writing. This enables the DASM to consider, in consultation with colleagues in the DAS team and with the regional technical consultant, whether there are additional factors which were not known when the application was first considered and which might change the original decision.

At this stage, if the DASM is satisfied that the original decision stands, or is doubtful about it, they refer the matter to head office for examination and consideration. At both stages, the client's reasons for appealing are taken into account and the application is checked to ensure that all relevant information has been obtained and fully considered.

I can assure you that in considering applications our people take great care to establish the client's employment needs and to reach agreement with them, the employer, technical and medical advisers, about the most suitable and cost effective equipment to meet the need. Our aim in providing equipment is to enable the person with a disability to do their job effectively and to provide help to as many people with disabilities as possible within the available financial resources.

TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT AGENCY (NORTHERN IRELAND)

Departmental Agencies

Mr McAllion: See questions to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland by Mr McAllion on pages 12-13.

Letter from Mr J S Crozier, Chief Executive, 18 July 1991: You asked about the operation of group bonus schemes. Within the Training and Employment Agency we have not as yet sought to introduce a specific group bonus scheme other than those schemes which apply to the Northern Ireland Civil Service as a whole. The need for a distinct scheme within the Agency will be kept under review.

Similarly, we have not so far deemed it necessary to initiate new forms of working patterns not already found within the Northern Ireland Civil Service. These are already quite varied and include facilities for flexible working hours, part-time working, job-sharing, and career breaks. Again however the situation will be kept under review.

You also enquired about the number of staff in post. At the date of its launch on 2 April 1990, the Training and Employment Agency had some 1,700 staff in post; the current figure for staff in post is 1,660.

Facilities within the Agency are essentially the same as for the Northern Ireland Civil Service as a whole. Since the Agency has been in existence improvements have been secured to accommodation in a number of locations and detailed training is being drawn up for the entire organisation. Financial resources permitting, new facilities will be considered where they are viewed as beneficial for staff and likely to contribute to the effectiveness of the Agency.

You asked about appointments from the private sector to posts above Grade 7 level. The Training and Employment Agency, to date, has made one such appointment at Grade 5 level.

As to my first degree, I am a BA (Hons) graduate in History of Queens College, Cambridge.

Appendix

Other letters written to M.P.s by chief executives in July 1991

Member	Agency	Subject
Mr Tony Banks	Benefits Agency	Social Fund statistics, Newham
Mr David Bellotti	Benefits Agency	SHAP homes (two letters)
Mr Paul Flynn	Chemical & Biological Defence Estab.	Porton Down: protection of butterflies
Ms Mildred Gordon	Benefits Agency	No. of families receiving Family Credit, Tower Hamlets
Mr Tom Graham	Companies House	Scottish companies in receivership
Mr John McAllion	7 agencies	Working patterns, staff facilities, bonus schemes, performance indicators, appointments, staff in post, launch costs, chief executive's degree and salary, and annual report
Mr Gordon McMaster	Benefits Agency	Johnstone Benefits Office
Mr Keith Vaz	UK Passport Agency	Transfer of applications to Belfast; unopened post

Letters sent to Members of Parliament in July 1991
by Government executive agencies
in reply to Parliamentary Questions

with an introduction by
Paul Flynn, M.P.

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