

Open Lines

No. 7

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

with an introduction by

Paul Flynn MP

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March 1992

Introduction

by Paul Flynn, M.P.

This issue of OPEN LINES - possibly the last - will be published in the midst of a general election campaign. The outcome of the election will affect the future standards of public services not just for the next five years but for decades to come.

At such a time, how Ministers deal with parliamentary questions may seem unimportant compared with the Government's record on the economy, health services, employment and education. Serious discussion of these issues, however, depends crucially on public access to information; and the publication of replies to parliamentary questions is one of the most important ways of ensuring such access.

Practically all the information published in the seven issues of OPEN LINES which have appeared since last summer would, in the past, have appeared in the official parliamentary report, Hansard. The Conservative Government has obstinately resisted the recommendation of the all-party House of Commons Procedure Committee for a resumption of that practice. If a change of government leads to its acceptance, the election will have achieved a small but crucial victory for democracy.

March 1992

Paul Flynn, M.P.
House of Commons

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Editorial note

This is the fifth issue of *OPEN LINES* for which generous financial support has been received from the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust.

As in previous issues, the letters reproduced are those from executive agencies in the social security and employment fields. This issue contains 54 such letters written in the month of February 1992. Letters on other subjects are listed in the Appendix.

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

BENEFITS AGENCY

Stratford office

Mr Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give details of the refurbishment programme for the Jubilee department of social security offices in Stratford, London E15.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 11 February 1992:

A meeting has been held between my estates staff and Property Services Agency (PSA), who are our agents in this matter, to take forward a feasibility study. The purpose of this exercise is to determine the best way to provide extra space in the waiting areas plus additional interview rooms and reception points. The study will also consider the phasing of the work and arrangements for decanting staff in order that an effective service to the public can be maintained.

Claimants: Leeds

Mr John Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will show for each year from 1987 to 1991 the number of people in the Leeds metropolitan district who claimed (a) family credit, (b) income support and (c) community charge benefit both (i) in total and (ii) by benefit office.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 28 February 1992:

The complete range of information you requested is not fully available. Some of the information that is available could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Family Credit was introduced in April 1988. Statistics of a local nature were not routinely collected until November 1989. Available statistics produced only show the number of recipients of Family Credit at a given point in time and not for a given period. Attached at Annex A are the available figures since November 1989.

Income Support statistics are collected on a local basis but are destroyed at regular intervals ranging from 18 months to 5 years. Records showing the number of Income Support claims made in the Leeds Metropolitan District are available from April 1988 and are attached at Annex A.

Community Charge Benefit (CCB) was introduced in England and Wales in April 1990 and is administered by Local Authorities. Information is therefore only available for 1990 and 1991. The figures available show the numbers in receipt at a given point in time, rather than the number of claims made for a particular period. The information available for 1990 shows the number of cases where CCB was awarded. The information for 1991 shows the number of cases and the number of persons these cases represent. It is not possible, except at disproportionate cost, to identify CCB recipients by Benefit Office. The available information is attached at Annex B.

Annex A Family Credit

Office	Date and numbers in receipt		
	24.11.89	30.11.90	29.11.91
Leeds North	1,212	1,216	1,296
Leeds North West	790	897	1,033
Leeds South	836	811	904
Leeds East	832	1,069	1,247
Leeds West	930	1,003	1,124
Leeds Metropolitan District totals	4,600	4,996	5,604

Income support

Totals are for complete years April 1988 until March 1991 and for the period April 1991 to January 1992.

Office	Year and number of claims received			
	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92
Leeds North	12,182	12,711	11,849	9,623
Leeds North West	13,655	15,277	13,883	10,651
Leeds South	6,705	7,913	6,842	6,052
Leeds East	12,738	14,088	12,542	10,718
Leeds West	8,669	10,298	9,287	8,232
Leeds Metropolitan District totals	53,949	60,287	54,403	45,276

Annex B: Community Charge Benefit

Number of cases in receipt in the Leeds Metropolitan District

August 1990 94,975

August 1991 98,656

The figure for August 1991 represents 127,629 persons. Information on a similar basis for August 1990 is not available.

Social fund: Leeds

Mr John Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in the Leeds metropolitan district (a) applied for social fund (i) community care grants, (ii) budgeting loans and (iii) crisis loans and (b) received community care grants, budgeting loans and crisis loans, shown (1) numerically and (2) in real cash terms every year from 1987 to 1991, shown both in totals and by benefit office.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 28 February 1992:

The information you requested is only available from April 1988 when the discretionary part of the Social Fund commenced. The information for 1989-90 is not readily available but will be forwarded to you shortly.

The other statistical information you requested is attached at Annexes A, B and C. The information does not give the number of applicants because it is not collected. Applicants can make more than one application during any statistical period. I have therefore provided figures of the number of applications.

Annex A: Leeds offices April 1988-March 1989 and April 1990-March 1991: applications made for Community Care Grants, Budgeting Loans and Crisis Loans

Office	1988-89	1990-91
Community Care Grants		
Leeds North	1,436	2,759
Leeds North West	1,001	1,764
Leeds East	1,209	2,496
Leeds South	657	1,062
Leeds West	561	1,293
Budgeting Loans		
Leeds North	3,835	5,187
Leeds North West	2,643	3,304
Leeds East	4,231	5,291
Leeds South	2,013	2,194
Leeds West	2,324	2,661
Crisis Loans		
Leeds North	1,777	2,075
Leeds North West	2,568	2,119
Leeds East	1,773	1,834
Leeds South	792	923
Leeds West	751	549

Annex B: Leeds offices April 1988-March 1989 and April 1990-March 1991: numbers of awards made for Community Care Grants, Budgeting Loans and Crisis Loans

Office	1988-89	1990-91
Community Care Grant Awards		
Leeds North	851	943
Leeds North West	368	392
Leeds East	746	772
Leeds South	272	336
Leeds West	232	373
Budgeting Loan Awards		
Leeds North	2,527	3,060
Leeds North West	1,500	1,742
Leeds East	2,813	3,041
Leeds South	1,270	1,147
Leeds West	1,444	1,449
Crisis Loan Awards		
Leeds North	1,725	1,964
Leeds North West	1,983	1,901
Leeds East	1,626	1,503
Leeds South	701	825
Leeds West	680	522

Annex C: Leeds offices April 1988-March 1989 and April 1990-March 1991: value in real cash terms of Community Care Grants, Budgeting Loans and Crisis Loans

Office	Actual 1988-89 Expenditure £	1991-92 Value £	Actual 1990-91 Expenditure £	1991-92 Value £
Community Care Grants				
Leeds North	296,803	366,867	280,590	300,231
Leeds North West	143,611	177,512	146,283	156,523
Leeds East	219,036	270,742	229,926	246,020
Leeds South	84,088	103,938	94,343	100,948
Leeds West	88,649	109,575	140,373	150,199
Budgeting Loans				
Leeds North	576,100	712,097	689,861	738,151
Leeds North West	298,458	368,913	361,859	387,189
Leeds East	555,905	687,134	571,134	611,113
Leeds South	205,455	253,955	205,578	219,968
Leeds West	301,264	372,381	305,532	326,919
Crisis Loans				
Leeds North	70,815	87,531	99,235	106,181
Leeds North West	70,747	87,447	76,247	81,584
Leeds East	61,980	76,611	80,040	85,642
Leeds South	30,259	37,402	36,695	39,263
Leeds West	24,874	30,745	21,063	22,537

Note: The Gross Domestic Product Deflator has been used to convert cash figures to real terms at 1991/92 values.

Social fund: York

Mr Richard Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will (a) state how many applications for social fund loans from the York local office were refused on the grounds of inability to pay and (b) show this figure as a percentage of all applications for loans from the York local office in 1988-89, 1989-90, 1990-91 and so far in 1991-92.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 27 February 1992:

Information for 1988-89 and 1989-90 is not readily available but will be forwarded shortly.

In April 1991, the York local office became a branch office of the Benefits Agency York District, which also comprises offices at Harrogate and Northallerton. Therefore, for 1990-91, the information provided is specific to the York office and, for 1991-92, to the York District as a whole.

For 1990-91, refusals on the grounds of inability to repay

totalled 25, which represents 0.5% of applications made. For the period April 1991 to 31 January 92, 113 such refusals were made, representing 1.7% of applications.

Benefit deductions: administrative cost

Mr Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the estimated administrative cost to his Department of making deductions from income support for community charge arrears;

(2) what are the administrative costs of making deductions from income support payments to meet claimants' debts.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 6 February 1992:

The administration of this work involves staff in many areas of District offices and it is not possible to separate out the exact cost of all these tasks.

However, so far in 1991-92, District offices have been allocated approximately £44,865,000 to administer Direct Payments work including direct payment of Community Charge.

Of this the administrative cost of making deductions from Income Support for Community Charge arrears amounts to approximately £28,543,000 in 1991-92.

It is, of course, for District Managers to deploy their resources in the way they consider will enable them to deal with the work in the most efficient and cost-effective way.

Pensioners over 80

Mr David Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security why the increase promised by the Secretary of State, in his statement on 21 October 1991, to pensioners over the age of 80 years, and which is to be effective from 1 April 1992, does not appear in newly issued pension books.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 21 February 1992:

From 6 April 1992, premiums for pensioners who are disabled or who are over 80 and who are receiving Income Support, will be increased, over and above the benefit uprating of 7 per cent, by £1 a week for a single pensioner or £1.50 a week for a couple. These increases will be included in those order books containing orders payable beyond that date.

In some instances where, owing to the particular circumstances of the case, re-assessment has not yet taken place, it will be necessary to make adjustments nearer the time.

Home visits

Mrs Maria Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give (a) the total number of home visits to claimants, (b) the total mileage covered in carrying out those visits and (c) the total travel expenses paid out for home visits by staff at the Maryhill road, Atlas road and Pitt street, Glasgow Department of Social Security offices, respectively, in each year from 1979 to 1991; and also give the total number of (i) staff employed, (ii) benefit claimants interviewed and (iii) benefit claimants serviced at those offices in those years.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 10 February 1992:

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 (eg visits to customers other than those in receipt of Income Support and Sickness Benefit), some is included in other data from which the cost of extraction would be disproportionately high (eg the identification of home visits as opposed to others, and the related travelling expenses) and other information is subsumed within more general figures

(eg benefit specific visitors to the offices within total callers which include those seeking advice and information generally and those attending in connection with National Insurance contributions and other matters unrelated to benefits). Also, I am afraid, overarching all of this is the fact that local records are destroyed at regular intervals as were those held at Regional level in the organisation in place before the foundation of the Benefits Agency.

Against this background, the only information which is readily available is the staffing levels of the offices concerned from April 1989 to date *ie*:

	Maryhill Road	Atlas Road	Pitt Street
1989/90	124	176.5	125.5
1990/91	118	183	118
1991/92	112	160	103

North Yorkshire

Mr Conal Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the expenditure and achievements of his Department in North Yorkshire during 1991; and what was the comparable position between June 1979 and May 1980.

[Miss Ann Widdecombe's written answer (*Hansard*, 19.2.92, col. 224) included the following: "The creation of the benefits and contributions agencies in April 1991 has provided the opportunity for further improving efficiency and quality in the administration of social security business. In particular, the agencies have focused on improving services to the public and have issued their own customer charters. Mr Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, and Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive of the Contributions Agency, will write to my hon. Friend about their agencies' achievements in north Yorkshire."]

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 19 February 1992:

Following the launch of the Benefits Agency in April 1991 the organisation of benefit offices changed from a "local office" to a District basis. In North Yorkshire, the local offices at York, Harrogate and Northallerton were brought together to form the North Yorkshire District. In addition to the three main offices, there are four part-time caller offices located at Malton, Richmond, Ripon and Selby.

The past year has seen the successful implementation of the Operational Strategy computer system for Income Support claims. The District is on line to achieve both Secretary of State's and local targets for benefit delivery and accuracy of payments as shown in the attached annex.

A number of initiatives have already begun, in line with Benefits Agency policy, to continually appraise and improve the District's service to its customers. As well as the network of local offices, the District is serving the rural community by the provision of a mobile information vehicle which regularly visits the more remote parts of the area. There is a full-time District Information Officer who, through a varied programme of public events, advises customers on benefit availability and entitlement. Customers also have the opportunity to comment on the service offered by contacting the Customer Service Manager.

The District Manager has forged good relations with the many council and welfare benefit organisations within the area. Principal amongst the initiatives has been the setting up of the North Yorkshire District Benefits Forum. The members meet on a regular basis to discuss a wide range of topics which are of concern to their clients, many of whom are customers of the District.

Annex

Clearance

Performance indicator (PI)	Target (working days)	Year to date performance
Income support claims	4 (5)*	4.1
Income support assessment reviews	2.5	2.5
Appeals	30.2	16.1
Sickness benefit claims	8 (9)	7.4
Retirement pension claims	21.1	13.3
Social Fund Community Care Grants	7.2 (7)	3.7
Social Fund Crisis Loans	1	0.2
Social Fund Budget Loans	6	1.2

Accuracy

Performance indicator (PI)	Target (% correct)	Year to date performance
Income Support claims	93.6 (93)	94.2
Sickness Benefit claims	97.2 (96.5)	97.6

* The figures in brackets are the targets set by the Secretary of State.

Private nursing care

Mr David Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what qualifications and training adjudication officers have in order to establish whether claimants in receipt of income support towards private nursing care (a) actually require such care and (b) are in receipt of it;

(2) what steps are taken by adjudication officers to confirm that in addition to residing in private nursing homes, claimants of income support towards private nursing care are (a) in receipt of such care and (b) actually in need of such care.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 11 February 1992:

District Health Authorities (DHA) are responsible for the registration of nursing homes. They advise local Benefits Agency offices on the level of care a particular home is able to provide. This information enables the AO to determine the amount of benefit applicable for residents of the home.

AO's do not have any specific training or qualifications to enable them to decide whether such care is required or provided. However, training is provided locally to ensure AO's have sufficient expertise to determine all questions that may arise when deciding claims for benefit. An AO awareness training package is available in all Benefits Agency offices. There is also detailed guidance available to aid the decision making process. This guidance advises AO's to seek the advice of the DHA if there is any doubt about the category of care being provided to the customer by a nursing home.

Social fund: Wakefield district

Mr David Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the remaining social fund budget of the Wakefield district Benefits Agency office.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 11 February 1992:

On 3 February 1992 there remained approximately £240,500 available for loans and £75,000 for grants.

Social fund budgets

Mr David Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action is taken to assist benefit agency offices when increased claims exceed social fund budgets during any financial year.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 11 February 1992:

The Benefits Agency carries out routine and continuing monitoring of the Social Fund. The Government has increased

the provision for the Social Fund by £49.6m within the last six months. The most recent allocation of £6,165,000 was distributed to Districts at the end of January 1992. This helps to ensure that available funds are focused on those most in need. There is a continuing commitment by the Government that the Benefits Agency monitors carefully the working of the Social Fund and responds to needs as they arise.

The Benefits Agency Districts are directed by the Secretary of State in Social Fund Direction 40 to control and manage the amounts allocated to them. This is to give priority to high priority needs throughout the period of the allocation. Districts continue to meet high priority needs in line with Direction 40.

Targets: North and South Tees

Dr Ashok Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the current targets for the North Tees and South Tees benefit areas are for meeting (a) delivery and (b) accuracy for benefits administered.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 10 February 1992:

The 1991/92 performance targets for North Tees and South Tees Districts have been published in the Districts' Business plans. Both Districts have the same targets. A copy of the targets are given in the annex to this letter.

Annex

Clearance times

Appeals	23.7 days
Social Fund	
Crisis Loans	1.0 day
Community Care Grants	7.0 days
Budgeting Loans	6.0 days
Income Support	
Claims	4.1 days
Assessment Reviews	2.5 days
Sickness/Invalidity Benefit	
Claims	8.0 days
Retirement Pension	
Claims	21.3 days
Load*	13.0 days

* Load includes any claim taken from files to answer a query after a final award has been made.

Accuracy rates

Income Support Accuracy	94.4%
Short Term Benefit Accuracy	97.5%

Social fund: North and South Tees

Dr Ashok Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many claimants applied for grants or loans under the social fund during the financial year 1990-91 and the first six months of 1991-92 in each of the benefit offices in North Tees and South Tees area;

(2) how many claimants were refused grants or loans under the social fund during the financial year 1990-91 and the first six months of 1991-92 in each of the benefit offices in North Tees and South Tees; and for what reason;

(3) under the social fund, what was the average size of the grant awarded for the year 1990-91 and the first six months of 1991-92 in each of the benefit offices in North Tees and South Tees area.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 10 February 1992:

The statistical information you request is attached at Annexes A, B and C. The information does not give the number of applicants because it is not collected. Applicants can make more than one application during any statistical period. I have therefore provided figures of the number of applications.

The figures relate to the Benefits Agency's North Tees and South Tees Districts. North Tees District covers an area which was administered prior to April 1991 by two former Departmental offices; Hartlepool and Stockton. South Tees District covers an area which was administered prior to April 1991 by three former Departmental offices; Eston, Middlesbrough and Redcar.

Annex A: North Tees District (former Departmental Local offices Hartlepool and Stockton prior to April 1991) and South Tees District (former Departmental Local offices Eston, Middlesbrough and Redcar prior to April 1991), April 1990 to September 1991 inclusive.

Applications received April 1990 to March 1991 inclusive

	Community Care Grants	Budgeting and Crisis Loans
Stockton	3,298	8,171
Hartlepool	1,692	4,635
Middlesbrough	4,970	11,242
Redcar	1,573	3,223
Eston	1,451	3,602

Applications received April 1991 to September 1991 inclusive

	Community Care Grants	Budgeting and Crisis Loans
North Tees District	3,722	7,149
South Tees District	5,287	9,606

Annex B: North Tees District (the former Departmental Local offices of Hartlepool and Stockton) and South Tees District (the former Departmental Local offices of Eston, Middlesbrough and Redcar), April 1990-September 1991.

		Stockton	Hartle- pool	Middles- brough	Redcar	Eston
Total number of applications refused*** April 1990 - March 1991						
	BL*	2,291	1,538	3,559	1,093	1,131
	CCG	2,449	1,157	3,556	969	937
	CL	149	78	169	49	18
Reasons for refusal**** April 1990-March 1991						
Savings over £500	BL	0	5	5	5	1
	CCG	4	8	7	7	3
	CL	0	0	0	0	0
Not receiving IS	BL	326	157	371	131	90
	CCG	0	0	0	0	0
	CL	0	0	0	0	0
Not receiving IS for 26 weeks	BL	470	346	753	208	226
	CCG	0	0	0	0	0
	CL	0	0	0	0	0
IS entitlement unlikely	BL	0	0	0	0	0
	CCG	248	112	339	94	67
	CL	0	0	0	0	0
Excluded item(s)	BL	102	41	115	65	41
	CCG	66	28	74	36	14
	CL	7	0	1	1	0
Excluded applicant	BL	2	0	3	4	3
	CCG	3	0	2	5	2
	CL	14	0	1	0	0
Applied for less than £30	BL	29	18	33	16	11
	CCG	19	13	24	8	6
	CL	0	0	0	0	0
Adjusted amount less than £30	BL	10	25	38	39	37
	CCG	2	1	6	8	0
	CL	0	0	0	0	0
Total debt over £1,000	BL	6	1	2	3	1
	CCG	0	0	0	0	0
	CL	0	0	0	0	0
Previous application for item	BL	146	81	214	87	78
	CCG	116	51	144	47	48
	CL	5	0	3	0	1

		Stockton	Hartle- pool	Middles- brough	Redcar	Eston
No serious risk	BL	0	0	0	0	0
	CCG	0	0	0	0	0
	CL	94	54	105	44	12
Inability to repay	BL	156	63	94	70	33
	CCG	0	0	0	0	0
	CL	11	15	10	3	1
Help available elsewhere	BL	13	16	34	20	2
	CCG	6	21	23	16	4
	CL	2	4	11	4	1
Insufficient priority	BL	998	708	1,708	476	565
	CCG	282	25	670	64	70
	CL	5	1	3	0	0
Alternative available	BL	7	5	25	3	4
	CCG	2	6	18	4	1
	CL	2	0	2	1	0
Loan refused, CCG awarded	BL	195	102	266	85	72
	CCG	0	0	0	0	0
	CL	1	1	2	0	0
Enough money for crisis	BL	0	0	0	0	0
	CCG	0	0	0	0	0
	CL	9	13	6	1	1
Direction 4 not satisfied	BL	0	0	0	0	0
	CCG	1,694	863	2,212	697	686
	CL	0	0	0	0	0
Savings over £1,000	BL	0	1	0	1	0
	CCG	0	0	0	4	0
	CL	0	0	0	0	0
Other reason	BL	120	58	277	16	72
	CCG	70	53	150	11	55
	CL	11	5	43	1	1

		North Tees	South Tees
Total number of applications refused*** April-September 1991	BL	5,232	3,446
	CCG	3,235	4,142
	CL	194	80
Reasons for refusal**** April-September 1991			
Savings over £500	BL	3	1
	CCG	4	3
	CL	0	0
Not receiving IS	BL	272	282
	CCG	0	0
	CL	0	0
Not receiving IS for 26 weeks	BL	681	745
	CCG	0	0
	CL	0	0
IS entitlement unlikely	BL	0	0
	CCG	257	258
	CL	0	0
Excluded item(s)	BL	90	99
	CCG	84	70
	CL	0	2
Excluded applicant	BL	2	10
	CCG	2	4
	CL	23	0
Applied for less than £30	BL	25	32
	CCG	12	25
	CL	0	0
Adjusted amount less than £30	BL	30	38
	CCG	3	7
	CL	0	0
Total debt over £1,000	BL	7	2
	CCG	0	0
	CL	0	0
Previous application for item	BL	214	239
	CCG	157	178
	CL	4	5

		North Tees	South Tees
No serious risk	BL	0	0
	CCG	0	0
	CL	140	56
Inability to repay	BL	172	72
	CCG	0	0
	CL	5	4
Help available elsewhere	BL	14	26
	CCG	7	28
	CL	4	2
Insufficient priority	BL	1,789	1,759
	CCG	454	553
	CL	3	0
Alternative available	BL	5	7
	CCG	2	6
	CL	2	3
Loan refused, CCG awarded	BL	165	343
	CCG	0	0
	CL	0	1
Enough money for crisis	BL	0	0
	CCG	0	0
	CL	2	2
Direction 4 not satisfied	BL	0	0
	CCG	2,303	3,029
	CL	0	0
Savings over £1,000	BL	1	0
	CCG	3	5
	CL	0	0
Other reason	BL	30	64
	CCG	36	53
	CL	7	4

* BL = Budgeting Loan. CCG = Community Care Grant. CL = Crisis Loan.

** IS = Income Support.

*** The "Numbers of applications refused" figure can be less than the total of the figures given under "Reasons for refusal" because the decision not to make an award may have more than one reason.

**** The definitions for "reason for refusal" are necessarily brief. Please consult the Social Fund manual for a more detailed explanation of the decision making process.

Annex C: North Tees District (the former Departmental Local offices of Hartlepool and Stockton) and South Tees District (the former Local offices of Eston, Middlesbrough and Redcar), April 1990-September 1991.

Average Community Care Grant award April 1990-March 1991

Office	Average award
Stockton	£300.94
Hartlepool	£289.66
Middlesbrough	£288.34
Redcar	£325.51
Eston	£236.66

Average Community Care Grant award April-September 1991

District	Average award
North Tees	£186.89
South Tees	£243.46

Severe hardship allowance: North and South Tees

Dr Ashok Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many severe hardship allowance payments were made to young people for the year 1990-91 (a) in North and (b) in South Tees benefit area; and how many have been made in the first six months of 1991-92.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 10 February 1992:

The information regarding the number of payments made is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, information is available concerning the number of awards (as opposed to payments) of severe hardship allowance made to customers aged 16-17 in these areas. This is detailed below.

North Tees

1990-91 (April 1990 - March 1991) 203 awards

1991-92 (April 1991 - September 1991) 203 awards

South Tees

1990-91 (April 1990 - March 1991) 433 awards

1991-92 (April 1991 - September 1991) 189 awards

Disability working allowance

Mr Gordon McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated administrative cost of disability working allowance for 1992-93.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 4 February 1992:

The estimated cost of administering the benefit during 1992/93 is £11,723,000.

Paisley office

Mr Gordon McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what arrangements he has in place to relocate staff temporarily when the Paisley office is closed for development; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when he expects works to start on the Paisley Piazza site; when he expects these works to be completed; and what arrangements he has in place to ensure the efficient operation of services at the Paisley office of his Department during the intervening period.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 4 February 1992:

The Paisley office is not being closed for development, although some upgrading work is being planned by the owners of the building. If upgrading work on the site were to cause sufficient disruption to necessitate temporary movement of staff and customers, local management would look at maintaining an efficient service by initially containing any movement within the Paisley office and, if necessary, by making use of space available within the Johnstone office.

A date has yet to be set for the commencement of works on the Piazza site. I understand discussions between the Department of Environment (Property Holdings) and the landlord are continuing.

Johnstone and Paisley offices

Mr Gordon McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if the Johnstone office of his Department is Crown property; (2) if the Paisley office of his Department is Crown property.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 19 February 1992:

The building occupied by the Johnstone office is Crown Property, whereas the building occupied by the Renfrew office (formerly Paisley) is leased and not Crown Property.

Mr Gordon McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is his strategy for the development of services provided from (a) the Paisley office and (b) the Johnstone office; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he has any plans to run down, close or recategorise the Johnstone office of his Department.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 19 February 1992:

The Paisley and Johnstone offices are part of the Renfrew District. The strategy is to continue with the transfer of administration work for the whole District to the Paisley office. Paisley and Johnstone will continue to provide public caller facilities and there is a commitment to maintain a high standard of service to customers whilst seeking to develop and enhance that service. There are no plans to run down, close or recategorise the Johnstone office, and it will continue to offer customers the full range of services. Its operation will be evaluated after it has run as a caller access point for a sufficiently representative length of time.

While this reply deals with Benefits Agency offices in Paisley and Johnstone I understand that Miss A Chant, Chief Executive of the Contributions Agency (CA), is writing separately to you on the question of the location of CA offices in Renfrewshire.

Mr Gordon McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will publish a table showing the number of staff located at the Johnstone office in each year since 1980; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many staff from the Johnstone office (a) have been transferred to the Paisley office since 1989 and (b) will be transferred to the Paisley office this year; and if he will make a statement.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 19 February 1992:

The introduction of the Benefits Agency was followed by a service planning exercise in the Renfrew District (this comprises the Johnstone and Paisley offices) to establish the needs of our customers in the Renfrew area. The information obtained was used to plan improvements in customer service. One planned improvement was the movement of work and staff from Johnstone office to the Paisley office in order to provide a faster, more efficient service.

Following full local consultation with local groups, representative bodies, MPs, staff and trade unions the centralisation of work in Paisley office has been progressed in stages, the first of which took place on 4 March 1991, while the final move took place on 16/17 November 1991.

Johnstone office is now a caller access point where customers who call at the office have access to the full range of services provided by the Renfrew District Office, including Social Fund Crisis Loan payments.

In 1989 and 1990 one member of staff was transferred from Johnstone to Paisley in each year. During 1991 67.5 other members of staff were transferred from Johnstone to Paisley as part of the planned movement of work I have described. There are no plans at present to transfer any more staff from Johnstone to Paisley.

Information on the numbers of staff located at the Johnstone office prior to April 1988 is not available.

However, the number of staff located at the Johnstone office in each year since April 1988 is as follows:

April 1988	108
April 1989	85
April 1990	87.5
April 1991	74.5

At present there are seven staff located at the Johnstone Caller Access point.

Contributions Agency staff are not included in the above figures.

Centralisation of services

Mr Gordon McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what instructions he has issued to district managers of the Benefits Agency regarding the centralisation of services and the development of caller offices.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 19 February 1992:

You will probably be aware that, from April 1991, the network of almost 500 separately managed local offices was replaced by 159 Districts. The effect of this was to reduce the number of management units from almost 500 to 159. The purpose of this exercise was to provide the framework for an improved management structure.

As managers were appointed, they were asked to carry out a comprehensive service planning exercise to establish how they could provide the best possible service to their customers within the newly revised districts.

Where it seemed to the manager that it would be more efficient to bring certain functions together in one location rather than having them spread around the district, he would need to be satisfied that this was consistent with the Agency's core values. Customer Service remains first among the core values, and the guiding principle is that work will never be transferred if the level of service to our customers is adversely affected. Managers were asked to consult widely with local groups, representative bodies, MPs, staff and trade unions before putting forward proposals.

Local consultation was fundamental to this exercise, and consequently there was the minimum of central direction.

Paisley office

Mr Gordon McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are his plans for the development of a new Paisley office; and when he expects works to commence and be completed.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 20 February 1992:

The purchase of the proposed site for the construction of a new District Office in Paisley is now under negotiation. If the purchase is successful, then subject to the availability of funds, it is hoped that a start on site will be made early in 1993 for completion in late 1994.

Cost of appeals (*House of Lords question*)

The Countess of Mar asked Her Majesty's Government: What was the average administrative cost to the benefit agency of appeals to a social security appeal tribunal during the quarter ending 31st December 1991.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 5 February 1992:

The average administrative cost of an appeal to the SSAT during the quarter ending 31 December 1991 was £55.30. This cost takes into account the following: the receipt of the appeal, the actions required to obtain further information, the preparation of the submission, the presentation at the Tribunal and the implementation of any revised decisions.

Business reply envelopes

Mr Michael Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of DSS agency offices have withdrawn business reply envelopes; how many people were affected by the withdrawal of business reply envelopes; and what are the estimated savings for the agency in the year 1992-93 from the withdrawal of these envelopes.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 28 February 1992:

I am sorry that the information to answer your question fully is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

We have identified improving service to the public as a priority and as the Customer Charter makes clear, we are committed to providing a service which is accessible for all our customers.

Each District Office controls its own postal arrangements so as to meet the customer needs within that area. Business Reply envelopes are usually available from Agency offices, Post Offices and other outlets according to local arrangements. How far these arrangements extend and what class of postage is used is for District Managers to determine according to local circumstances.

Social fund reviews: Sheffield

Mr Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total number of applications for review to social fund officers for the year 1991-92 to date in the Sheffield East and Sheffield West districts; and for each district how many of those were (a) community care grants, (b) budgeting loans and (c) crisis loans; of those applications what was the total number revised wholly in favour of the applicant; of the total number of applications for review to social fund officers in Sheffield how many were reviewed partially in favour of the applicant; and what number of applications for review by social fund officers in Sheffield had the original decision confirmed, giving all answers by district and by type of application.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 24 February 1992:

Because of the way the statistical information is recorded, it is not possible to differentiate between decisions that were partially revised and those that were wholly revised in the applicant's favour. I have therefore provided figures for the number of awards made or increased on review and for the number of loans converted on review to grants.

The information available for the year to date at 31 January 1992 is in the attached Annex. Both Districts had carried forward a number of uncleared review requests at the beginning of the period.

Annex

	Sheffield East	Sheffield West
Applications for review		
Budgeting Loans	951	591
Community Care Grants	926	615
Crisis Loans	79	40
Total	1,956	1,246
Awards made or increased on review		
Budgeting Loans	377	273
Community Care Grants	223	205
Crisis Loans	31	9
Loans converted on review to grant		
Budgeting Loans	17	11
Crisis Loans	5	8
Decision unchanged on review		
Budgeting Loans	540	356
Community Care Grants	686	405
Crisis Loans	43	18

Sign language

Mr Terry Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many staff in Department of Social Security offices have sign language skills.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 26 February 1992:

I am sorry that the information to answer your question fully is not held centrally, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. I am, however, aware of several offices, including Shoreditch, Edmonton, Deeside and two in Sunderland, who have sent staff on training courses to learn sign language so that they can communicate with people who are deaf or hard of hearing. In one of the Sunderland offices nine members of staff have completed a 20 week course (two hours a week), and refresher meetings have been arranged. The scheme has been so successful that a further seven volunteers have come forward. The office has informed all local welfare groups and advice centres about the initiative. In Deeside, two volunteers have attended a local school for the deaf.

Some offices have also run training sessions about sign language. Both Sunderland offices have combined to do this, as well as others in Peterlee, Newcastle and Rotherham. A Leeds office has a member of staff with a basic knowledge of sign language and have arranged with the Centre for the Deaf for an interpreter to be provided. A Newcastle office has received an offer of assistance from a member of the public.

Other initiatives are being taken forward at a local level to improve services to people who are deaf or hard of hearing. For example, many offices have installed induction loop systems. This provides a link between the interviewer and the customer, and eliminates background noise. Most hearing aids can easily be switched over to the loop.

The Agency subscribes to the Sympathetic Hearing Scheme, and information packs have been distributed to all offices. Some offices have an electronic visual display unit which, sited in the reception area, has proved useful for getting messages over to the hard of hearing. Others use a portable terminal with a display screen and a memory facility for creating and storing messages.

As the Agency's Customer Charter makes clear, we are committed to providing a service which is accessible for all our customers. We recognise that disabled people have particular needs and we will continue to look for ways to make our services easier to use.

Disability benefit training

Mr Ted Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what training and advice has been given to staff in preparation for the introduction of the new disability allowances on 15 April.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 11 February 1992:

The delivery of the new computer systems for Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Disability Working Allowance (DWA) has offered opportunities to build on the Benefits Agency's core value of Customer Service, and the training of staff has been designed with this in mind. Similarly we have involved disabled people and their representatives and organizations in producing materials and some of the training sessions.

A full programme of training has been under way for some months now which includes some 42 different technical courses for Benefits Agency staff who will be processing claims for these new benefits. This includes staff in Blackpool and Preston as well as staff in the new Disability Benefits Centres across the country. These courses, the first of which began in the autumn and involved training staff as trainers for the start of the major programme, have been designed to prepare staff to deal with claims. Areas of work covered have been for example disability awareness sessions, the new adjudication process, claims processing, use of the new computer systems, handling enquiries and an emphasis throughout on customer service. All grades of

staff have been included in the training programme. To supplement the training we have also prepared and issued a full range of operational codes of instructions for all the new benefits.

We are adopting a similarly detailed approach in preparing staff in our District Offices which for many people will continue to be the main point of contact. Although these staff do not need to know in detail how claims are to be processed it is important that they are equipped to handle queries as they arise. We have provided explanatory booklets on which staff can draw in providing help and advice to customers. We have issued detailed technical briefing notes for operational issues in which District staff are directly involved and material to assist the promotion of the new benefits locally. Posters for display in staff areas provide information about the rates of the benefits, helpful telephone numbers and details of the part which Districts can play in administering these benefits. For internal training and use in briefing outside organizations we have also made available a Presenter's Brief which covers the background to the introduction of the benefits and detailed content about the entitlement conditions and administration of the benefits. A variety of desk-aids are also being provided.

These arrangements represent a comprehensive training and advice programme. They are designed to ensure we are ready for the introduction of the new benefits. In addition there will be a range of advice lines available whereby staff can obtain immediate help from colleagues who are administering the new benefits and who will have direct access to the DLA and DWA computer systems.

Supplementary benefit: Lerwick and Kirkwall

Mr James Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many (a) claims have been received and (b) payments made in respect of claims for back payments under the additional requirement provisions for supplementary benefit at (i) the Lerwick and (ii) Kirkwall benefit agency offices in the last 12 months.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 12 February 1992:

The relevant information for the Lerwick and Kirkwall Benefits Agency offices is listed below. The table shows the number of applications received for a review of entitlement to additional requirements under Supplementary Benefit provisions. The number of payments made as a result of these reviews are also shown.

	<i>Applications</i>	<i>Payments</i>
Kirkwall	Nil	Nil
Lerwick	41	13

Included in the above figures are two applications still awaiting a decision at the Lerwick office.

Welsh language

Mr Dafydd Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will state what progress has been made since April 1991 with the Welsh language implementation programme, established in his Department in Wales; what specific changes of policy in his Department on this issue have taken place during 1991; and if he is satisfied with the progress that has so far been made.

Letter from Mr Michael Bichard, Chief Executive, 5 February 1992:

The Department published its revised Welsh language policy in May 1990, which provided that customers in Wales should have the choice of using either English or Welsh for the conduct of their business. The Welsh Language Implementation Team was

set up to steer the Department's policy through. When the Benefits Agency (BA) was formed in April 1991 a Welsh Language Unit was formed as part of the Wales Directorate.

In December 1991 the Agency published a progress report, "Bilingualism in Wales" (I understand a copy has already been sent to you) which outlined the achievements of the previous 18 months. These included:

- the establishment of a Welsh Freeline Service;
- the arrangement for staff to be available in all offices in Wales capable of conducting interviews in Welsh;
- the production of a number of forms and leaflets either in Welsh or in a bilingual format, including those with the largest usage in the Department;
- the provision of bilingual signs and logos in all offices in Wales.

The report recognised that much remains to be done and that completion of the task would take many years.

As you know, the DSS/BA has worked closely with the Welsh Language Board. In its report published in 1991 the Board described the implementation of the Department's bilingual policy as "impressive and effective". In a recent example of our continuing collaboration with the Board, 28 government departments and public bodies in Wales have been invited to a seminar to share at first hand and take advantage of the experience gained by the Benefits Agency.

I think this shows significant progress but there is no room for complacency and I am aware that there is a lot more to do. I should be delighted to pass on to the Welsh Language Unit any suggestions you may have.

CONTRIBUTIONS AGENCY

North Yorkshire

Mr Conal Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the expenditure and achievements of his Department in north Yorkshire during 1991; and what was the comparable position between June 1979 and May 1980.

[See page 3 for Miss Ann Widdecombe's written answer and letter from Benefits Agency]

Letter from Miss Ann Chant, Chief Executive, 18 February 1992:

The Contributions Agency came into being in 1991 following a year as the Contributions Unit, and maintains a presence in most local offices occupied by the Benefits Agency, although the management structure has been streamlined. The offices in York and Harrogate are now under one Area Manager based in York, and that at Northallerton is linked with Darlington and Bishop Auckland, with the Area Manager at Darlington.

One of the Agency's main priorities is to improve service to its customers. It has produced charters for both contributors and employers, and set a target to reply to 95% of customer enquiries within 10 days. This figure is being exceeded in North Yorkshire. Initiatives are also being taken to make our customers more aware of our business and staff in the offices serving North Yorkshire have been involved in seminars and exhibitions aimed at employers and employers' organisations.

In October 1991 the Agency had its own stand at an Institute of Personnel Management exhibition in Harrogate. The exhibition

provided an opportunity to offer guidance and advice to employers and to help in improving local liaison. The Social Security Advice Line for Employers runs periodical seminars and several have been organised within the North Yorkshire catchment area.

It has been possible during 1991 to devote more resources towards advising employers and monitoring their payment of National Insurance contributions with a view to safeguarding the NI Fund and employees' benefit entitlement. As a result, the offices within North Yorkshire are progressing favourably towards achieving their targets for the 1991/92 year as follows:

	Annual target	Profile target to 31.1.92	Performance to 31.1.92
Identification of Class 1 underpayments	£178,800	£149,000	£265,171
Number of surveys to employers	945	746	900

Arrears of Class 2 contributions discovered as a result of survey up to 31 January 1992 amount to £209,037 compared with £107,668 for the year ending 31 March 1991.

Local offices

Mr Gordon McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish his definitions of (a) field offices, (b) inspector outstations and (c) customer access points in relation to the Benefits Agency; if he will list by category the offices within Renfrewshire; and what plans he has to recategorise any of these offices.

Letter from Mr George Bertram, Deputy Chief Executive, 25 February 1992:

Your Parliamentary Question regarding Field Offices, Customer Access Points and Inspector Outstations in Renfrewshire mentioned the Benefits Agency specifically. The subject matter is in fact appropriate to this Agency. ...

As an Agency we have a high level commitment to provide information and assistance as well as satisfactory levels of service to all our customers - both contributors and employers. This commitment is shown in the Charters recently issued by the Agency. Copies of them are enclosed for your information.*

In line with this commitment we have recently reviewed the effectiveness of our activities in local offices of the Department with the aim of combining the best use of resources with a service that meets both customer and business needs.

The customers of the Agency consist of employers, the self-employed and individual contributors. An analysis of customer traffic at offices indicated that the provision of a dedicated Contributions Agency presence at every outlet is not the most effective means of service delivery and in many cases is unnecessary on a full time basis. Employers and the self-employed rarely conduct their business with the Agency by calling at the Department's offices, whilst contributors do so in relatively small numbers.

The Agency has as a result re-designed its Field Operations organisation. The key element of the revised organisation is the Field Office. These offices will be staffed to provide an efficient and effective customer service in locations determined by the level of customer demand from both employers and contributors. It is intended that face to face customer service will be provided at these Field Offices and at Customer Access Points. Where necessary, immediate appointments can be arranged at a Field Office. Generally, Customer Access Points will be established

* Copies of the Charters are available from the Customer Services Manager, Contributions Agency, Room D2814, Longbenton, Newcastle upon Tyne NE98 1YX

at those departmental locations not served by a Field Office and will provide face to face customer service by appointment. But the existing provision for appointments to be made at a convenient location for the customer will continue to apply. In addition it may be appropriate to outstation a small number of inspectors away from the Field Office with clerical support where necessary to serve employers. These Inspector Outstations may also serve as Customer Access Points.

In Renfrewshire a Field Office will be established alongside the Benefits Agency in the Paisley Office. Customer Access Points will be created at the Greenock and Johnstone offices also alongside Benefits Agency. We have no plans to establish Inspector Outstations in the area.

I have advised the Contributions Agency Divisional Manager, Mr Cowden, of your enquiry and he will be pleased to discuss with you any further information you may need ...

Sign language

Mr Terry Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many staff in Department of Social Security offices have sign language skills.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant, Chief Executive, 27 February 1992:

At present we do not know how many staff have sign language skills, but we are currently carrying out a survey of staff which, amongst other things, ask staff to give us such information. This is of course entirely on a voluntary basis. When the results of this survey are available in a few weeks time, I will write to you again.

We are very keen to try to establish ways in which we can assist both our staff and customers who have disabilities. The survey should tell us about the size and nature of our staff's problems and then we can tackle them more effectively. Customers who use sign language and call at our local offices are likely to need an interpreter and where appropriate this is arranged by the Agency which has contacts with local services. But for the benefit of those with hearing difficulties we are for instance investigating the potential usefulness of installing the special Minicam 7 telephone system.

RESETTLEMENT AGENCY

Resettlement units

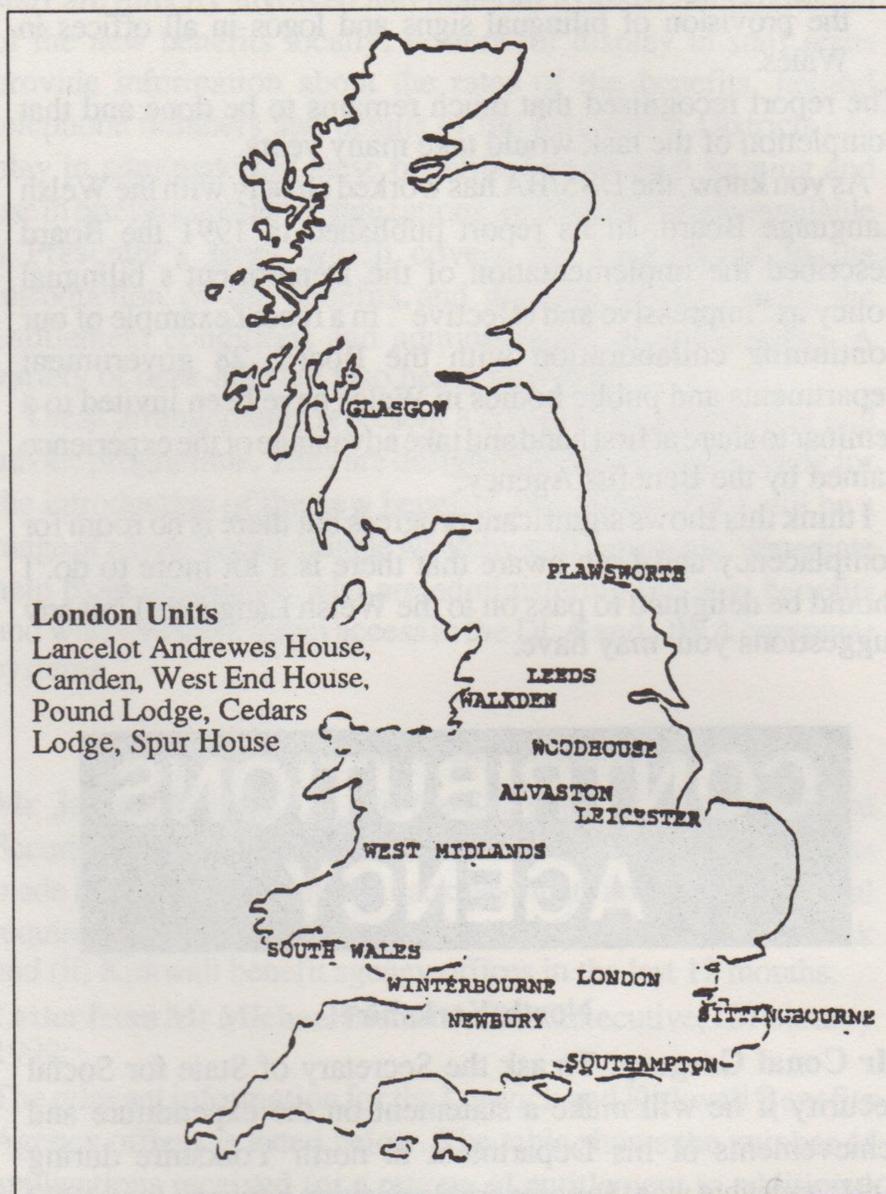
Mr Archy Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many places are currently available in resettlement units throughout the United Kingdom, showing the location of each unit and the number of places in each unit.

Letter from Mr Tony Ward, Chief Executive, 5 February 1992:

I enclose a map indicating the location of the units and list below the number of bed spaces in each unit as at 16/1/92.

Unit	Bedspaces
Alvaston - Derby	35
Bishopbriggs - Glasgow	77
Camden - London WC1	40
Cedars Lodge - London SW4	110
Lancelot Andrewes House - London SE1	72
Leeds	96
Leicester	87
Newbury	78

Unit	Bedspaces
Plawsworth - Chester-le-Street	74
Pound Lodge - London NW10	94
Sittingbourne	80
Southampton	80
South Wales - Bridgend	47
Spur House - London SE13	192
Walkden - Manchester, Salford	58
West End House - London W1	129
West Midlands - Stourbridge, Worcester	114
Winterbourne - Bristol	20
Woodhouse - Sheffield	93



Mr Archy Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what sums have been allocated in his Departmental budget to provide resettlement unit places; and what plans he has made for the next three years.

Letter from Mr Tony Ward, Chief Executive, 5 February 1992:

The Resettlement Agency Business Plan for 1991/92 shows planned expenditure in resettlement units of £15.515m. Financial provision for the next three years will shortly be published in the 1992 Departmental Report, and detailed spending plans for 1992/93 will appear in the Agency's Business Plan to be published by April 1992.

I enclose a copy of the Agency annual report for 1990/91 and the Business Plan for 1991/92.*

Mr Archy Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what research has been undertaken to investigate the need for places in resettlement units.

Letter from Mr Tony Ward, Chief Executive, 5 February 1992:

Resettlement units have a specific remit to provide people without a settled way of life temporary lodgings with a view to

* Copies are available from the Resettlement Agency, Room 1422, Euston Tower, London NW1 3DN

influencing them to lead a more settled life. The government decided in 1985 that these facilities would be better supplied by voluntary organisations or local authorities. The Resettlement Agency is required to fund these organisations and to run the existing units until they are replaced.

There has been no research undertaken to investigate the need for places in these units, but I can say that our six units in London are virtually full most nights, whereas those in the provinces usually have vacancies.

SOCIAL SECURITY AGENCY (NORTHERN IRELAND)

Disability

Mr Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have (a) 40 per cent or more disability and (b) 80 per cent or more disability; and how many in each category are aged (i) 60 to 65, (ii) 65 to 70, (iii) 70 to 75 and (iv) over 75 years in Northern Ireland.

Letter from Mr Alec Wylie, Chief Executive, 24 February 1992: I regret that the information you requested is not available.

Attendance allowance

Mr Eddie McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make arrangements whereby all social security and benefit interviews will be conducted in private.

Letter from Mr Alec Wylie, Chief Executive, 14 February 1992: Each benefit office already has private interviewing facilities and customers are given the opportunity, if they wish, to be interviewed in privacy. There is, of course, room for improvement and, as part of our future plans, we are examining ways of upgrading facilities for the public in this and other respects. I place a high priority on customers being able to conduct their business with us in privacy and you can be assured that the Agency will do all it can in this regard.

Deductions from income support

Mr Eddie McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many claimants in receipt of income support were having deductions made for (a) social fund loans, (b) fuel costs, (c) in respect of assumed rent and rate contributions from other members of the household and (d) other deductions on 1 January at each social security agency in Northern Ireland; and what were the figures on 1 January 1991 and 1 January 1989.

Letter from Mr Alec Wylie, Chief Executive, 24 February 1992: I am unable to give you the details you requested as no information is held about the numbers of Income Support claimants having deductions made for Social Fund loans or in respect of assumed rent and rate contributions from other members of the household.

The remaining information on direct payments is not available in the format you requested. However, I am able to give you the total number of direct payments for fuel costs and other debts made by each Social Security Office during each of the quarters ending 31 December 1988, 1990 and 1991. The information is in the attached table.

Direct payments made during quarters 31 December 1988, 31 December 1990 and 31 December 1991

Social security office	Fuel (electricity and gas)			Others		
	31.12.88 §	31.12.90	31.12.91	31.12.88	31.12.90	31.12.91
Andersonstown	1,090	1,154	1,295	1,118	1,668	1,341
Antrim	463	474	320	1,243	845	801
Armagh	109	127	84	394	510	478
Ballymena	303	292	281	666	620	562
Ballymoney	111	74	42	357	365	328
Ballynahinch	29	28	10	138	120	119
Banbridge	124	131	118	263	356	331
Bangor	234	210	188	464	550	360
Carrickfergus	245	201	161	278	339	392
Coleraine	294	178	85	612	569	551
Cookstown	45	37	45	259	301	340
Corporation St	1,634	1,690	1,661	1,062	2,183	1,266
Downpatrick	137	45	29	332	308	313
Dungannon	107	122	96	346	463	469
Enniskillen	197	153	149	327	325	351
Falls	1,541	1,258	1,276	1,321	1,735	1,788
Holywood Rd	767	760	720	740	1,308	917
Kilkeel	27	27	34	64	99	55
Knockbreda	383	344	325	348	371	452
Larne	72	63	61	326	247	332
Limavady	132	87	123	435	408	373
Lisburn	332	423	500	748	803	676
Londonderry	1,685	1,457 *	744	2,130	2,531 *	1,633
Lurgan	422	319	276	683	738	695
Magherafelt	73	65	39	270	332	295
Newcastle	28	22	14	129	139	125
Newry	409	419	439	924	838	732
Newtownabbey	642	524	342	707	690	689
Newtownards	196	174	151	377	471	383
Omagh	171	169	123	385	392	431
Portadown	151	226	106	359	587	288
Shaftesbury Sq	573	596	509	708	833	676
Shankill	786	1,010	698	704	1,241	652
Strabane	170	136	77	337	686	652
Lisnagelvin	-	-	191	-	-	537
Total	13,686	12,995	11,312	19,554	23,971	20,383

*Details included are for quarter 30 September 1990: no information is available because of industrial action for quarter 31 December 1990.
§ Editor's note: The figures in this column do not add up to the total.

Unemployed claimants

Mr Michael Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many, and what proportion, of supplementary benefit and income support claimants in Northern Ireland were in receipt of benefit because they were unemployed for each year since 1979.

Letter from Mr Alec Wylie, Chief Executive, 27 February 1992: Details of the numbers of unemployed claimants in receipt of supplementary benefit and income support in Northern Ireland and the proportion of these to the overall numbers receiving these benefits for each quarter during 1979 to 1991 are attached.

Unemployed claimants in receipt of supplementary benefit/income support and their percentage to the overall numbers receiving these benefits

Year	Quarter ending February	Quarter ending May	Quarter ending August	Quarter ending November
1979	37,619 31.8%	34,938 30.4%	49,466 38.3%	35,619 30.9%
1980	37,083 31.6%	37,000 31.8%	57,128 41.7%	49,805 38.6%
1981	54,444 40.6%	39,168 39%	63,565 45.6%	67,756 45.2%
1982	70,778 46.2%	72,662 46.6%	82,761 49.7%	80,277 48.7%
1983	82,832 49.2%	83,382 49.2%	90,695 50.6%	86,833 49.8%
1984	88,422 49%	86,795 49.2%	95,296 51.3%	88,393 48.9%
1985	90,602 49.4%	89,507 49.1%	97,471 51.4%	91,014 49.4%
1986	93,106 50.5%	92,991 50.6%	103,151 52.5%	95,673 50.4%

Year	Quarter ending February	Quarter ending May	Quarter ending August	Quarter ending November
1987	96,476 50.7%	93,010 48.8%	100,198 50%	93,207 48.5%
1988	82,901 43.7%	85,655 46.6%	89,254 48.1%	
1989	83,927 45.2%	81,762 44.6%	89,785 46.7%	80,416 42.7%
1990	82,156 42.9%	78,704 41.7%	86,369 44%	73,033 41.2%
1991	75,575 41.8%	83,205 42.4%	87,741 43.6%	87,090 43.4%

Details are not available for quarter ended November 1988 and are incomplete for quarter ended February 1988, November 1990 and February 1991.

Social fund reviews

Mr Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases were referred to the social fund inspectors seeking a review of decisions made by social fund officers in each of the past two years.

Letter from Mr C Thompson, Local Operations Director, 20 February 1992:

The numbers are as follows:

1990	1,302
1991	1,785

Fraud

Mr Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his estimate of the cost of social security fraud to his Department of Health and Social Services in each of the last five years.

Letter from Mr Alec Wylie, Chief Executive, 25 February 1992: The amount of benefit paid as a result of social security fraud which was detected is as follows:

1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
£668,924	£640,924	£621,109	£814,637	£894,140

I should also explain that from 1990 this information has been recorded on a financial year basis. The figure quoted for 1990 therefore represents the 15 months period from 1 January 1990 to 31 March 1991.

Mr Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people were charged with social security fraud in each of the last five years.

Letter from Mr Alec Wylie, Chief Executive, 25 February 1992: In 1990 the number of people charged with social security fraud was 3,542. Corresponding figures for earlier years are not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Mr Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been jailed as a result of being found guilty of social security fraud in each of the last five years.

Letter from Mr Alec Wylie, Chief Executive, 25 February 1992: The number of people jailed as a result of being found guilty of social security fraud in each of the last 5 years for which the information is available is as follows:

1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
4	5	8	3	9

The number of suspended sentences imposed is as follows:

53	75	35	29	28
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EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

Travel-to-interview scheme

Mr Jim Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table showing the regional distribution of uptake and costs of the travel-to-interview scheme for 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Letter from Mr M E G Fogden, Chief Executive, 10 February 1992:

The table attached shows details on a regional basis of the uptake and costs of TIS for 1989-90 and 1990-91.

You may be interested to know that, as part of the on-going review of the eligibility rules for TIS, the upper salary limit was increased on 2 January 1992 from £16,500 to £25,000. It is expected that this will increase the number of people helped.

	1989-90		1990-91	
	Uptake	Total cost £	Uptake	Total cost £
Northern	3,724	123,476	2,566	78,900
Yorkshire & Humberside	2,974	68,758	2,422	56,432
East Mids Eastern	1,656	32,456	2,076	38,475
London & South East	1,589	36,000	1,806	41,560
South West	1,450	32,879	1,783	43,994
Wales	1,777	36,218	1,695	40,102
West Midlands	1,203	24,797	1,335	19,682
North West	5,868	146,709	4,267	95,207
Scotland	5,495	169,848	4,162	114,033
Total	25,736	671,141	22,112	528,385

Jobs and benefits centre: Thornaby

Mr Tim Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress is being made with the provision of a new integrated jobs and benefits centre in Thornaby; and if he will make a statement.

Letter from Mr M E G Fogden, Chief Executive, 18 February 1992:

You will be pleased to know that plans for the new integrated office are well advanced. Premises have been obtained in Ingram House, Thornaby and the office is due to open in the late summer. This office will complement the already fully integrated office at Stockton and I am sure you will agree that the people in your constituency will benefit from this new and improved one-stop service offering the full range of ES services to help them back to work.

Disability working allowance

Mr Gordon McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what training will be given to disablement resettlement officers to enable them to advise individual claimants about their entitlement to disability working allowance and its impact on their finances.

Letter from Mr J W Cooper, Director of Field Operations, 3 February 1992:

We consider it important that DROs have sufficient information about Disability Working Allowance (DWA) to enable them to identify clients who may be eligible to claim, and to give those clients information about their likely financial position if their claim is accepted. We therefore plan to give them written guidance,

supplemented by an introductory booklet to the allowance. The booklet has been produced by the Department of Social Security (DSS) for its local office personnel. It has been suitably amended, where necessary, for our needs and will be issued shortly.

My people are also discussing with the DSS the issue of ready reckoners, with instructional notes. These will enable DROs to give advice to clients about their likely financial position on DWA. We have also agreed with the Benefits Agency to draw on their Customer Service Managers to deliver local training to DROs and others within our disability services (for example, the new Placing, Assessment and Counselling Teams (PACTs) and Employment Rehabilitation Service (ERS) personnel).

DROs and their clients will also have access to advice from our Claimant Advisers and to the DSS' freephone Benefit Enquiry Line and the DWA Central Telephone Answering Service.

Job centre, Stanford-le-Hope

Mr Michael Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will consider re-opening the Stanford-le-Hope job centre.

Letter from Mr M E G Fogden, Chief Executive, 27 February 1992:

As you know the decision was taken to close the office in January 1991 after a formal consultation process and we have no plans to re-open the office at Stanford-le-Hope at this time. Clients in the Stanford-le-Hope area now have access to wider job markets and improved advisory services at my integrated office in Tilbury where the full range of ES services are available under one roof and from my larger offices in Grays.

We believe that by concentrating its resources on these larger offices the ES can do more to help those people living in Stanford-le-Hope back to work. Anyone living six miles or more from their nearest office has the option of signing by post and clients invited into pre-arranged advisory interviews, to help them in their search for work, will have their fares refunded in full.

It is important to emphasise that the Employment Service is charged with providing a comprehensive, good quality service to all its clients while, at the same time, making the best use of the resources at its disposal.

Sign language

Mr Terry Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what sign language facilities are available to allow deaf persons to take up employment in the Employment Service.

Letter from Mr M E G Fogden, Chief Executive, 26 February 1992:

There are no specific sign language facilities available. However, under our Equal Opportunities policy deaf candidates are encouraged to apply for posts on an equal footing with all other candidates. We would also encourage them to bring some one along to the selection interview who can sign for them. If the candidate is successful special aids/adaptations can be provided as required.

Mr Terry Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many staff employed in jobcentres have sign language skills.

Letter from Mr M E G Fogden, Chief Executive, 26 February 1992:

Although there are no statistics kept I am aware that my people in Jobcentres have undergone sign language training of their own accord. Some of these are Disablement Resettlement Officers (DROs) who are likely to come into regular contact with deaf people in the course of their work.

With respect to our services for people with disabilities most DROs are trained how to identify the type and degrees of deafness, the effects on employment and also local sources of help available. They are also involved in developing contact with local organisations which provide support and assistance for people with disabilities including Social Services.

Most of my Jobcentres operate the "sympathetic hearing scheme" to make it easier for those with impairments to communicate with my people. The scheme requires some limited training in the simple steps that can be used to overcome communicating with people who have hearing problems. In addition, many of my offices have been issued with induction loops to help my people, in particular DROs, to communicate with hearing impaired clients who have the appropriate facility on their hearing aid.

Some of my offices use a "text terminal service" eg; minicom or have access to a minicom help line. This makes it possible for profoundly deaf and speech impaired people to communicate from home with the Jobcentre.

Restart courses

Ms Clare Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, for each region and for Great Britain as a whole, how many unemployed people have been referred to restart courses by employment service counsellors since June 1991; how many of them were unemployed for over two years; how many attended and completed the course; what were the outcomes of the participants; how many had benefit penalties imposed for not attending or failing to complete their attendance at the restart course; and if he will make a statement.

Letter from Mr M E G Fogden, Chief Executive, 25 February 1992:

In October 1991 you asked a similar question about Restart Courses, seeking information for the period January to June 1991. In my reply I explained that Restart courses are short courses aimed at helping people who are having the most difficulty returning to work, and are not an alternative to regular job search or other employment or training programmes. Essentially they provide people with the opportunity to explore all the options open to them and give them confidence to take the next step back to work.

Since December 1990 people who have been unemployed for 2 years or more who at their Restart interview refuse or fail to take up a place on a Employment Department employment or training programme are asked to attend a Restart Course.

As your question has raised a number of specific points, I am setting out the information you have asked for in the tables attached. Table 1 shows all Restart Course attenders. Table 2 shows just those covered by the requirement to attend. We collect at Regional level the number of people who are referred to the course who are also unemployed for 2 years or more. We do, however, feel it unnecessary to keep similar figures for all those referred. The Benefits Agency make the decision on whether an individual's benefit should be reduced for failure to attend or complete the course. Their figures are compiled by their Districts which have different boundaries to our Regions. To avoid confusion, I have given the national figure only.

Table 1: All Restart Course Attenders July - December 1991

	Northern	Yorkshire & Humberside	E Midlands & Eastern	London & South East	South West	Wales	W Midlands	North West	Scotland	Total
1. People referred to Restart Courses	not available	not available	not available	not available	not available	not available	not available	not available	not available	not available
2. Starters	6,538	7,400	4,299	10,038	3,208	3,089	7,865	13,010	10,587	66,034
3. Total completers	6,147	6,837	3,755	8,994	2,784	2,721	6,648	11,865	9,549	59,300
Completers who arranged to follow up:										
Jobs	1,116	1,668	1,207	1,761	537	714	1,622	2,528	5,114	16,267
ET	564	716	535	1,797	473	542	1,696	1,747	1,012	9,082
Jobclub	574	490	444	1,807	388	454	752	1,418	571	6,898
Other employment, training and related opportunities	3,918	3,940	2,276	4,892	1,547	1,463	3,062	5,663	3,854	30,615
4. Total number of people with an outcome to follow up	5,484	5,632	3,392	8,131	2,381	2,310	5,979	10,108	8,480	51,897

Table 2: Restart Course Attenders Unemployed for 2 years or more July - December 1991

	Northern	Yorkshire & Humberside	E Midlands & Eastern	London & South East	South West	Wales	W Midlands	North West	Scotland	Total
1. People referred to Restart Courses	9,275	11,315	5,636	11,337	3,498	4,052	8,598	25,756	18,005	97,472
2. Starters	5,922	6,453	3,080	6,230	1,970	2,108	4,936	11,527	9,743	51,969
3. Total completers	5,585	6,009	2,689	5,618	1,718	1,842	4,205	10,556	8,826	47,048
Completers who arranged to follow up:										
Jobs	997	1,353	857	1,094	283	476	975	2,200	4,801	13,036
ET	494	592	323	1,023	231	273	892	1,515	874	6,217
Jobclub	512	408	268	1,003	103	282	355	1,244	478	4,653
Other employment, training and related opportunities	3,541	3,616	1,715	3,011	734	978	1,965	5,056	3,518	24,134
4. Total number of people with an outcome to follow up	4,967	4,903	2,387	4,970	1,444	1,474	3,545	8,414	7,626	39,730
5. People for whom a reduction in Income Support was made by Benefits Agency										2,195

not available by ES region

Job interview guarantee

Ms Clare Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) for each region and for Great Britain as a whole, how many unemployed people have taken part in the job interview guarantee scheme since September 1991; and how many participants have secured full-time employment with their sponsoring employer; (2) for each region and for Great Britain as a whole, how many unemployed people have participated in job interview guarantee work trials since September 1991; and how many participants have got full-time employment with their work trial employer.

Letter from Mr M E G Fogden, Chief Executive, 25 February 1992:

You asked how many unemployed people have taken part in JIG since September 1991 and how many participants have secured full-time employment with their sponsoring employer. Annex A attached sets out this information for the period 5 October 1991 to 3 January 1992.

You also asked how many unemployed people have participated in JIG Work Trials since September 1991 and how many participants have got full time employment with their Work Trial employer. This information is shown at Annex B.

Annex A

Job Interview Guarantee participants and placings for the period 5 October 1991 to 3 January 1992 are as follows:

Region	Number of unemployed people who have participated	Number placed into jobs
Northern	1,169	424
Yorkshire and Humberside	1,272	448
East Midlands and Eastern	1,216	408
London and South East	12,878	4,357
South West	2,362	920
Wales	2,207	797

Region	Number of unemployed people who have participated	Number placed into jobs
West Midlands	4,091	1,124
North West	2,139	1,017
Scotland	3,115	1,452
Total in Great Britain	30,449	10,947

Annex B

Job Interview Guarantee Work Trials participants and placings for the period 5 October 1991 to 3 January 1992 are as follows:

Region	Number of unemployed people who have participated	Number placed into jobs
Northern	11	6
Yorkshire and Humberside	7	5
East Midlands and Eastern	10	4
London and South East	27	11
South West	8	1
Wales	38	15
West Midlands	45	17
North West	10	6
Scotland	72	64
Total in Great Britain	228	129

Restart interviews

Ms Clare Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people, for each region and for Great Britain as a whole, have attended a restart interview since 1 April 1991; and what were the results of those interviews, broken down in the same way as the reply given in his answer to the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr Lee) of 18 December 1990, *Official Report*, column 148.

Letter from Mr M E G Fogden, Chief Executive, 25 February 1992:

The information you asked for is given in the attached table. As you will appreciate, these figures reflect only the *direct* results of Restart. We do not know how many people subsequently take up a job or a place on an employment or training programme as a result of the guidance given to them at their interview.

The Restart programme should not be seen as a placements programme, but as part of a coherent system of help and advice which we offer to long term unemployed people. This process is continually being developed. We now have in place the additional help for people who do not find work within thirteen weeks of becoming unemployed, announced by the Secretary of State in March 1991. The majority of clients are now interviewed by a Claimant Adviser when they cross the 13 week threshold of unemployment to review their Back To Work Plan and to see what further support and guidance would be of benefit to them.

We have also introduced three new programmes to help people get back to work. These are a Job Referral service to match people against vacancies, Jobsearch Seminars to help improve jobsearch techniques, and Job Review Workshops, to help those who wish to change their career and reassess the opportunities available to them within the job market.

Between 1 April 1991 and the end of December 1991 we have placed 181,080 long term unemployed people into jobs. A further 179,330 people have started on Employment Training or in a Jobclub. This demonstrates that the support and guidance we are offering is proving effective in helping back into the labour market those people with the greatest difficulties.

Outcomes of restart interviews: April-December 1991

Region	Interviews	Placings	ET*	Jobclub	Restart	EAS
Northern	97,159	591	4,780	4,429	10,195	226
Yorkshire & Humberside	128,485	794	5,750	4,507	11,266	395
East Midlands & Eastern	122,162	1,777	4,270	5,579	6,641	459
London & South East	354,648	5,195	10,863	18,898	13,818	1,675
South West	81,877	827	3,282	4,198	4,330	542
Office for Wales	72,705	1,091	4,047	3,909	4,735	320
West Midlands	135,376	1,130	6,027	6,095	10,230	485
North West	222,734	1,767	6,411	10,553	20,181	653
Office for Scotland	155,130	1,943	7,236	8,036	15,656	483
Great Britain	1,370,276	15,115	52,666	66,204	97,052	5,238

Job clubs

Ms Clare Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, for each region and for Great Britain as a whole, how many people have joined job clubs; how many have left; how many leavers got jobs; how many entered another positive outcome; and if he will give the information broken down by the ethnic origin and gender of participants.

Letter from Mr M E G Fogden, Chief Executive, 25 February 1992:

Table 'A' attached shows for each region and nationally the numbers who have joined Jobclubs between 30 September 1991 and 27 December 1991 together with information during the same period of those members leaving. Leavers who are shown as going into other positive outcomes have gone on to either training, full time education or self-employment.

Information on the ethnic background and male/female characteristics of Jobclub leavers is collected on a quarterly sample survey basis. Tables 'B' attached show the estimated performance between 30 September 1991 and 27 December 1991 for male and female Jobclub members and by ethnic origin separated on a regional basis and Great Britain as a whole. The

basis of this information has been arrived at by using the results of the survey carried out during the period.

Table A: Jobclub entrants and leavers information
30 September 1991 - 27 December 1991

Region	Jobclub entrants	Jobclub leavers	Leavers into jobs	Leavers into jobs %	Leavers into other positive outcomes	Leavers into positive outcomes %
Northern	2,877	2,978	1,127	38%	371	50%
Yorkshire & Humberside	3,858	3,634	1,586	44%	612	60%
East Midlands	4,028	3,750	1,759	47%	625	64%
London & SE	13,294	11,726	4,540	39%	1,835	54%
South West	3,258	2,934	1,472	50%	491	67%
Wales	2,767	2,427	1,242	51%	404	68%
West Midlands	4,906	4,046	1,855	46%	808	66%
North West	6,903	6,654	2,959	44%	801	57%
Scotland	4,801	4,740	2,135	45%	645	59%
Nationally	46,692	42,889	18,675	44%	6,592	59%

Table B: Jobclub leavers information by ethnic group and male/female characteristics
30 September 1991 - 27 December 1991

	Leavers into jobs	Leavers into other positive outcomes	Total leavers
National			
White	16,374	5,570	37,118
Black/Afro Caribbean	949	446	2,474
Indian/Pakistani			
Bangladesh/Sri Lanken	918	452	2,429
None of the above	316	98	585
Preferred not to say	118	26	283
Total	18,675	6,592	42,889
Male	14,547	5,178	34,235
Female	4,128	1,414	8,654
Total	18,675	6,592	42,889
Northern			
White	1,098	336	2,897
Black/Afro Caribbean	0	24	45
Indian/Pakistani			
Bangladesh/Sri Lanken	15	0	11
None of the above	0	0	0
Preferred not to say	14	11	25
Total	1,127	371	2,978
Male	957	323	2,558
Female	170	48	420
Total	1,127	371	2,978
Yorkshire & Humberside			
White	1,403	567	3,228
Black/Afro Caribbean	15	15	45
Indian/Pakistani			
Bangladesh/Sri Lanken	168	30	346
None of the above	0	0	15
Preferred not to say	0	0	0
Total	1,586	612	3,634
Male	1,220	507	3,004
Female	366	105	630
Total	1,586	612	3,634

	<i>Leavers into jobs</i>	<i>Leavers into other positive outcomes</i>	<i>Total leavers</i>
East Midlands & Eastern			
White	1,574	491	3,257
Black/Afro Caribbean	34	89	143
Indian/Pakistani			
Bangladesh/Sri Lanken	151	45	334
None of the above	0	0	16
Preferred not to say	0	0	0
Total	1,759	625	3,750
Male	1,407	476	3,035
Female	352	149	715
Total	1,759	625	3,750
London & South East			
White	3,183	1,184	8,134
Black/Afro Caribbean	689	241	1,770
Indian/Pakistani			
Bangladesh/Sri Lanken	392	329	1,251
None of the above	202	66	401
Preferred not to say	74	15	170
Total	4,540	1,835	11,726
Male	3,331	1,323	8,776
Female	1,209	512	2,950
Total	4,540	1,835	11,726
South West			
White	1,405	491	2,839
Black/Afro Caribbean	45	0	54
Indian/Pakistani			
Bangladesh/Sri Lanken	11	0	27
None of the above	11	0	14
Preferred not to say	0	0	0
Total	1,472	491	2,934
Male	1,082	382	2,258
Female	390	109	676
Total	1,472	491	2,934
Office for Wales			
White	1,212	404	2,393
Black/Afro Caribbean	0	0	0
Indian/Pakistani			
Bangladesh/Sri Lanken	15	0	17
None of the above	15	0	17
Preferred not to say	0	0	0
Total	1,242	404	2,427
Male	1,008	364	1,994
Female	234	40	433
Total	1,242	404	2,427
West Midlands			
White	1,556	663	3,351
Black/Afro Caribbean	120	65	278
Indian/Pakistani			
Bangladesh/Sri Lanken	120	48	293
None of the above	59	32	93
Preferred not to say	0	0	31
Total	1,855	808	4,046
Male	1,331	614	3,058
Female	524	194	988
Total	1,855	808	4,046

	<i>Leavers into jobs</i>	<i>Leavers into other positive outcomes</i>	<i>Total leavers</i>
North West			
White	2,897	789	6,423
Black/Afro Caribbean	16	12	82
Indian/Pakistani			
Bangladesh/Sri Lanken	46	0	122
None of the above	0	0	0
Preferred not to say	0	0	27
Total	2,959	801	6,654
Male	2,521	673	5,664
Female	438	128	990
Total	2,959	801	6,654
Office for Scotland			
White	2,046	645	4,596
Black/Afro Caribbean	30	0	57
Indian/Pakistani			
Bangladesh/Sri Lanken	0	0	28
None of the above	29	0	29
Preferred not to say	30	0	30
Total	2,135	645	4,740
Male	1,690	516	3,888
Female	445	129	852
Total	2,135	645	4,740

Vocational training

Ms Clare Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether unemployed claimants who are receiving unemployment benefit who participate in European social fund vocational training courses provided either by (a) voluntary organisations or local authorities, or (b) training and enterprise councils or local enterprise companies, are required to be available for and actively seeking employment.

Letter from Mr M E G Fogden, Chief Executive, 28 February 1992:

People who participate in training courses, including European Social Fund vocational training courses, and who do not receive a training allowance, may wish to continue to claim unemployment benefit. Undertaking such a training course does not, in itself, preclude them from receiving benefit but to be eligible they must be available for, and actively seek employment.

This means that they must be available to start work immediately; must not place such restrictions on the work they are willing to do as to leave them with no real prospect of finding a job; and must take those steps, each week, that offer them the best prospects of obtaining work. In addition, they must be willing to attend interviews and, if necessary, give up their course to enable them to take up an opportunity of employment.

Many unemployed people in need of training, or retraining, to help them back to work are encouraged to attend approved courses, such as those sponsored by Training and Enterprise Councils. People who attend these courses get a training allowance payable at a rate of ten pounds above the rate of benefit they would otherwise receive. Whilst on such a course and receiving such a training allowance they are no longer treated as unemployed. As a consequence the training allowance is not subject to the same conditions as unemployment benefit and participants are not required to satisfy the availability or actively seeking employment conditions in order to receive payment.

Matching unemployed to vacancies

Mr James Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps his Department has taken to ensure that

jobcentres build up sufficient caseloads of clients' skills to facilitate the matching of the unemployed to appropriate vacancies; what priority is accorded to matching in his Department's activities in helping unemployed people; and if he will make a statement.

Letter from Mr J W Cooper, Director of Field Operations, 3 February 1992:

The Employment Service operates a very long established matching service for people with disabilities. Furthermore, in many areas local Jobcentres offer matching services operating according to the needs of the local labour market. Recently, matching services have been enhanced by two significant new measures, the Job Interview Guarantee Initiative and the Job Referral Service.

The Job Interview Guarantee initiative (JIG) is designed for jobseekers who have been unemployed and claiming benefit for over six months, along with some other disadvantaged groups.

They need to be "job ready", that is able to enter employment without significant requirements for skills training or confidence building measures. JIG works by matching these clients with employers who have guaranteed interviews to people the Jobcentre selects for them.

Following successful pilots in inner city areas, as of April 1991 JIG was expanded to cover most areas of the country, though without giving it full national coverage.. However, its continued success throughout last year has meant that we intend to expand the resource available for JIG by approximately 50% from April of this year.

The Job Referral Service (JRS) is an additional service offered to claimants who have been unemployed for 13 weeks. Following an interview with a Claimant Adviser claimants who are job ready can be referred to JRS for further job placing help. Using vacancies notified to the Jobcentre and speculative approaches to employers efforts are made to put the client in touch with a potential employer.

Appendix

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

Member	Agency	Subject
Dr David Clark	Intervention Board	Sheep variable premium and beef premium schemes EC intervention stores in UK
Mr Archy Kirkwood	Meteorological Office	Minimum night temperatures at Boulmer and Eskdalemuir weather stations
Mr Gerry Steinberg	Forensic Science Service	Use of DNA profiling in crime detection
Mr James Wallace	Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency	Number of pressure stock licences
Mr Nicholas Winterton	Benefits Agency	Constituency case

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March 1992