

# Open Lines

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

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

**Edited and published by Tony Lynes, 92 Grove Park, London SE5 8LE**

**July 1991**

Paul Flynn, M.P.  
House of Commons

# Introduction by Paul Flynn M.P.

One of the most effective ways in which Parliament can probe the actions and policies of Ministers and their Departments is through Parliamentary Questions. In recent months, this vital constitutional procedure has been undermined by the creation of a large number of "executive agencies" (50 at the end of April 1991) to perform important functions of government. Ministers refuse to answer questions relating to those functions.

Instead, the question is passed to the chief executive of the agency, who writes to the MP. The reply is no longer published in Hansard, but a copy is placed in the House of Commons Library where, in theory, it can be seen by other M.P.s and members of the public.

In practice, as we found in the course of compiling this booklet, these arrangements are by no means trouble-free. The Library does not keep a record of the letters received. They are filed in alphabetical order of Members' names, not in date order. While this should make it possible to trace a particular letter, anyone wishing to see all letters received in a recent period or from a particular agency has to search through the whole box of letters received in the current session.

Even tracing a particular letter may prove impossible. For example, a question about measures to improve the level of service to family credit claimants, tabled by Graham Allen M.P., was wrongly printed in Hansard on 6 June 1991 under my name. Anyone searching for the reply from the Benefits Agency under the letter F would fail to find it. Another question by Michael Meacher M.P., to which the Benefits Agency replied on June 3, did not appear in Hansard at all, with the result that neither other M.P.s nor members of the public could know that the reply existed.

Even if the arrangements worked as intended, a large amount of information of public interest would reach far fewer people than in the past. This situation was criticised in a recent report by the House of Commons Procedure Committee. They wrote:

"We appreciate that one of the main purposes of establishing Executive Agencies was to remove their day to day operation from the direct responsibility of Ministers. Nevertheless, the fact remains that most Members expect to be able to read in the Official Report the answer to a question on a matter such as, for example, the management of local social security

offices, which is of importance to their own constituents just as much as to those of the Member who happens to have tabled a question on the subject. So long as questions relating to Executive Agencies remain in order, as we trust they will, Members should be entitled to receive a reply in the normal way by written answer.

*"We therefore recommend that, in future, replies from agency chief executives in response to parliamentary questions referred to them by Ministers should appear in the Official Report."*

The Government's response to that eminently sensible proposal is now awaited. Meanwhile, the letters from chief executives (or, more usually, their subordinates) are piling up unread in the Library. This booklet is intended to make some of these letters, written in the month of June 1991, available more widely. If necessary, letters written in subsequent months could be published in the same way, subject to a small charge to cover printing costs.

There were 42 letters written in June. Of these, 26 were on social security and employment matters and it was decided to limit this publication to these two areas, which are likely to be of most general interest. Twenty-three of those letters are published here (the other 3 were concerned only with an individual case or constituency). *In every case, unless otherwise stated, the main body of each letter is reproduced in full, only the formal opening and closing paragraphs being omitted.*

The 19 letters not included, 12 of which were addressed to one Member on one subject (management and computer consultancy contracts), are listed in the Appendix.

Like Ministers, executive agencies may, on occasion, seek to dodge an awkward question by answering a different one. In reply to a question by Barry Jones M.P. about the changes in social fund budgets since 1988-89, the Benefits Agency provided a table showing changes in expenditure - a much more favourable comparison from the Government's point of view. The table is, nevertheless, printed in full on pages 3-4.

Paul Flynn, M.P.  
House of Commons

# BENEFITS AGENCY

**Mr Michael Meacher:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what training Benefit Agency strategic planning teams with district management units are to receive before they draw up their strategic plans.

**Letter from Mrs Ann Robinson, Director of Policy and Planning, 3 June 1991:**

A range of training has been and will be available to District Office staff. Earlier this year all District Managers attended a seminar where planning was one of the key topics. Since then guidance to assist with the research stage of strategic planning has been issued closely followed by seminars which expanded upon that guidance.

A comprehensive Strategic Planning Guide is being produced and will be issued to all District Managers. This guide will be complemented by an office based training package. Further District Managers seminars are being held in July when once again strategic planning will be one of the key areas covered. We are also developing a series of Planning Workshops which will be attended by all District Managers.

**Mr Martin Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applicants in the Doncaster area for severe disability premium are awaiting the decision of the appeal tribunal.

**Letter from Mrs Ann Robinson, Director of Policy and Planning, 3 June 1991:**

The information which you requested is not routinely collected centrally. However, I understand there are 78 appeals concerning entitlement to the severe disability premium outstanding in the Doncaster district. Of these, 25 are awaiting decisions by Tribunal Chairmen on whether a late appeal can be heard and 11 are awaiting a written submission from the adjudication officer to the Tribunal. The remaining 42 have all been submitted to the Social Security Appeals Tribunal and are awaiting a date for a hearing.

**Mr Martin Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is (a) the establishment of the Benefits Agency and (b) the annual salary for each category of employee; and what savings his Department is expected to make in connection with this agency.

**Letter from Mrs Ann Robinson, Director of Policy and Planning, 3 June 1991:**

On establishment of the Benefits Agency, the total numbers of staff issued in the year 1991/92 is 63549 staff years, which supports the various levels of staffing that will be required at various times in the year.

The annual salary for each category of employee is listed in the attached table [below].

## Salary by grade

Grade 5	42,210.00	AA	7,691.00
Senior Principal	37,497.00	Typing Manager	13,957.00
Principal/UG7	29,413.00	Typist	10,006.00
SEO	21,463.00	SG1	9,319.00
HEO	17,457.00	SG2	8,128.00
LO1	14,111.00	PES	12,962.00
LO2	10,397.00		

90/91 salaries including employer's national insurance contributions

Savings in connection with the Agency of 4,900 staff years are expected to be made in 1991/92 in respect of changes arising from the extension of new technology to cover all remaining District Offices. This is part of a planned exercise to reduce administration costs and improve service at the point of delivery.

**Mr Martin Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what change there has been in the numbers of claims and the time involved in (a) the assessment of a claim and (b) the notification of the assessment to the claimant in his Department's offices in the Doncaster area, following the installation of computer systems.

**Letter from Mrs Ann Robinson, Director of Policy and Planning, 4 June 1991:**

The number of claims to Retirement Pension received by the two Doncaster offices has remained relatively stable for the periods before and after the introduction of computers. Between April and December 1989 the number of claims received in both offices totalled 1900. This compares to 1877 claims for the same period the following year. In view of the changes in the method used to compile statistics in pension cases, I regret it is not possible to make a valid comparison in the time taken to process such claims pre and post computerisation.

With regard to Income Support, the Income Support Computer System (ISCS) was introduced into the two Doncaster offices between January and February 1990. Prior to computerisation, from April to December 1989, approximately 19000 Income Support claims were received. This compares to around 17000 Income Support claims for the same period the following year.

On average, claims to Income Support in these two offices were processed clerically in around five days. Immediately following the introduction of computers, this figure initially increased to around 6.75 days but as staff became increasingly familiar with the computer systems, the figure began to reduce. Income Support claims are now processed in around 4 days.

**Mr Allan Rogers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total cost of launching the Benefits Agency at (a) national, (b) area and (c) district levels.

**Letter from Mrs Ann Robinson, Director of Policy and Planning, 4 June 1991:**

I think it is important to consider the costs in the context of the objective of the launch event. This was to begin a dialogue between the new Agency and customer organisations and representatives at national and local level. Customer groups were invited to a working conference to meet the Agency's management teams and to put their views on the way ahead. With this in mind the costs were:

a. national event	£38,000
b. area events	£12,000
c. district events	£79,000

The costs for the Area and District events are approximate and based on the funds allocated for that purpose, as all the payments have not yet been processed through our accounting system. To gather an exact costing would incur a disproportionate cost.

**Mr Graham Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he is taking to improve the level of service to family credit claimants.

**Letter from Mrs Ann Robinson, Director of Policy and Planning, 6 June 1991:**

The Benefits Agency has taken over responsibility for Family Credit operational matters and a review of the management structural organisation is currently in progress with a view to

improving efficiency. Methods of dealing with claims are reviewed as part of an ongoing process with the object of introducing any changes necessary to improve the service given and to reduce the burden on claimants and employers.

Two independent research studies commissioned by the Department are in progress at present. One into the self-employed and Family Credit and the other into the impact of the benefit more generally. Both will involve interviews and discussions with claimants and potential claimants and should provide a wide range of information which will contribute to consideration of improvements in the level of service.

Extensive efforts have been made to increase the awareness of Family Credit amongst those who may be eligible and encourage them to claim, and especially to inform people about the levels of income they can have and still be entitled to the benefit. There have been several major advertising and take-up campaigns since April 1989 vested in television, radio, newspapers, posters and benefit awareness enterprises and with the help of public services. An explanation of Family Credit and individual advice on entitlement has been included in all recent Child Benefit books and in notices associated with Automated Credit Transfer payments of Child Benefit. The number of claims has increased to and remained at about 21,000 per week. Average payments are over £30 per week.

**Mr Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims for family credit have been refused since April 1988; and what proportion of new claims in each of the months April and May 1991 was unsuccessful.

**Letter from Mrs Ann Robinson, Director of Policy and Planning, 6 June 1991:**

Our records show that, of the claims for Family Credit cleared during the period April 1988 to 31 May 1991, a total of 938,124 were unsuccessful. I should point out that unsuccessful claims include those which were withdrawn or were invalid in some way, in addition to those where it was decided there was no entitlement to benefit.

You also asked about the proportion of new claims which were unsuccessful during the months of April and May 1991. I can tell you that, of the new claims for Family Credit cleared during the months of April and May, the percentage which was unsuccessful was as follows:

April 1991 42.9%  
May 1991 39.6%

Again, withdrawn and invalid claims are included.

**Mr Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the gross and net budgets of the social fund for each of the local offices in Wales for each year since 1988-89, under the headings of (a) crisis loans, (b) budgeting loans and (c) community care grants, showing the change in real terms since 1988-89 in each case.

**Letter from Mrs Ann Robinson, Director of Policy and Planning, 6 June 1991:**

Local allocations are made on a gross basis only. Budgeting and crisis loans are paid from a single loans allocation.

The attached figures show the gross expenditure on loans and grants for local offices in Wales, and the change in real terms over the period from 1988/89 to 1990/91.

#### Total loans expenditure for offices in Wales

	1988/89	1989/90	1990/91	Incl/Decrease in real terms 1988/89-1990/91
Aberdare	272,285	282,404	308,509	- 3,119
Abertillery	115,929	118,337	126,613	- 5,463
Aberystwyth	73,176	91,010	100,338	+ 14,366
Ammanford	78,941	78,688	91,289	+ 706
Anglesey	162,591	176,466	192,051	+ 4,968
Bargoed	224,486	227,925	246,640	- 9,299
Barry	187,415	213,836	216,898	+ 1,823
Blackwood	126,933	141,985	141,137	- 3,795
Bridgend	258,652	293,014	326,948	+ 26,601
Caernarfon	126,794	136,835	143,080	- 1,961
Caerphilly	322,401	344,932	381,130	+ 10,125
Cardiff Central	282,636	299,344	327,028	+ 2,687
Cardiff East	529,591	502,368	565,058	- 36,593
Cardiff West	369,462	398,682	488,879	+ 57,072
Carmarthen	74,354	85,314	100,033	+ 12,922
Colwyn Bay	147,035	170,970	181,871	+ 11,643
Cwmbran	320,544	334,783	343,942	- 20,464
Deeside*	N/A	140,802	149,113	N/A
Ebbw Vale	197,968	201,536	216,602	- 8,989
Haverfordwest	176,371	186,162	182,254	- 17,359
Llanelli	228,327	240,752	248,511	- 11,508
Merthyr Tydfil	257,728	287,852	296,402	+ 875
Morrison	296,076	320,838	354,639	+ 13,337
Neath	145,937	169,094	189,133	+ 19,076
Newport	632,865	718,589	757,045	+ 27,637
Newtown	77,423	90,512	109,331	+ 17,965
Pembroke Dock	116,012	126,286	125,235	- 6,748
Pontypridd	223,120	224,577	244,748	- 9,584
Porth	127,077	132,721	156,532	- 9,493
Porthmadog	62,509	64,086	75,568	- 3,422
Port Talbot	170,939	183,076	206,279	- 9,034
Rhyl	282,903	254,776	308,375	- 13,854
Swansea	583,230	587,600	642,498	- 22,688
Tonypandy	214,054	210,646	228,753	- 14,473
Wrexham*	397,512	371,803	398,530	N/A

#### Total grants expenditure by office in Wales

	1988/89	1989/90	1990/91	Incl/Decrease in real terms 1988/89-1990/91
Aberdare	117,197	122,816	126,412	- 6,906
Abertillery	38,120	51,933	52,995	+ 8,117
Aberystwyth	34,077	41,905	51,535	+ 10,886
Ammanford	34,209	38,176	40,053	+736
Anglesey	48,865	69,582	87,882	+ 27,810
Bargoed	52,154	92,738	98,673	+ 33,936
Barry	61,364	80,396	85,660	+ 13,372
Blackwood	32,145	57,867	64,305	+ 23,959
Bridgend	103,105	118,474	132,665	+ 12,642
Caernarfon	52,270	56,575	57,190	- 2,373
Caerphilly	128,478	153,598	149,784	+ 2,205
Cardiff Central	125,774	140,860	140,246	- 3,414
Cardiff East	199,950	231,124	268,650	+ 34,440
Cardiff West	159,245	172,301	194,004	+ 10,018
Carmarthen	31,676	32,706	34,453	- 1,617
Colwyn Bay	54,688	66,602	71,243	+ 7,470
Cwmbran	84,657	125,035	143,383	+ 40,441
Deeside*	N/A	69,423	72,092	N/A
Ebbw Vale	44,312	76,240	87,695	+ 32,200

	1988/89	1989/90	1990/91	Incl/Decrease in real terms 1988/89-1990/91
Haverfordwest	67,753	82,203	81,608	+3,448
Llanelli	55,956	100,071	101,092	+ 32,244
Merthyr Tydfil	48,666	105,441	98,220	+ 37,028
Morryston	124,445	145,222	153,283	+ 9,290
Neath	50,933	68,429	74,426	+ 14,002
Newport	277,648	299,496	289,706	- 24,887
Newtown	25,362	40,892	45,067	+ 13,958
Pembroke Dock	49,530	50,745	56,871	+ 88
Pontypridd	95,805	106,788	107,240	- 2,241
Porth	37,273	58,941	61,429	+ 16,322
Porthmadog	20,824	16,558	25,668	+ 1,571
Port Talbot	73,345	89,259	87,004	+ 2,564
Rhyl	122,702	108,618	120,366	- 17,686
Swansea	247,674	283,015	373,251	+ 77,978
Tonypandy	71,645	86,532	95,405	+ 11,593
Wrexham*	159,584	147,622	155,134	N/A

#### Notes

The Gross Domestic Product Deflator has been used to convert cash figures to real terms at 1988/89 prices.

\* Deeside Local Office was opened during 1988/89 and took over part of the area previously covered by Wrexham.

**Mrs Gwyneth Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many telephone and fax lines are available at the Belfast office of his Department dealing with benefit claims from applicants in London;

(2) what is the average time taken before claimants receive substantive replies to queries from his Department's office in Belfast sent in by (a) fax and (b) telephone;

(3) what is the cost of the system of phone referrals of local calls from London to his Department's office in Belfast for the year 1990-91.

**Letter from Mr David Riggs, Finance Director, 10 June 1991:**

The Social Security Centre in Belfast handles the work which does not require face to face contact with the public from two areas in London - Lewisham and Brixton district and Neasden district. A vital component in this arrangement is a modern multi-site telecommunications network service provided by RACAL Data Communications Network Limited, known as Centrex.

This system was installed to ensure that the staff are able to communicate effectively with our customers and with each other at the different locations. The Centrex system provides calls at no cost within the Centrex network, charges at local rates for all calls, in either direction, between the SSC and the London call area, and resilience against circuit failure by the automatic re-routing of calls.

The actual cost of phone referral of local calls from London to Belfast is not separately identified. These costs are subsumed in the rental and service tariff charges. At Belfast, there are ninety telephone lines available, of which 6 are used for facsimile machines. The Centrex system monitors the average time taken to answer telephone calls at the switchboard in Belfast. During the months of April and May, 221,889 calls were received at Belfast. Of these 26% were answered within 15 seconds, 16% between 15 and 30 seconds, 22% between 30 and 60 seconds and 36% between 60 seconds and 5 minutes. We are keen to see this response time improve and a recent work study has suggested a number of improvements to methods and procedures in Belfast which will have an immediate effect.

We do not keep statistics on the time taken before a customer receives substantive replies to queries sent in by facsimile or telephone. However, the agreement we have with the Chief Executive

designate of the Northern Ireland DHSS Benefits Agency is that the desirable response time for the switchboard in Belfast is 10 seconds and the provision of information to resolve telephone enquiries from the Branch Offices in London is 1 minute. The latter will be measured during the year by sampling.

**Mrs Irene Adams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many single parents receive income support in the constituency of Paisley, North.

**Letter from Mrs Ann Robinson, Director of Policy and Planning, 11 June 1991:**

The information you requested is not routinely collected as any such counts are made on the basis of the geographical area covered by local Benefits Agency offices. These areas do not necessarily equate with the areas covered by parliamentary constituencies.

However, a recent study has shown that Paisley North constituency is wholly contained within the area covered by Paisley District Office and amounts to about half the population served by the office. On this basis it is estimated that the number of single parents in receipt of Income Support in the Paisley North constituency is approximately 1,250.

**Mrs Alice Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average delay that a claimant for family credit experiences between applying for the benefit and receiving an award; how many claimants there are for family credit; and what measures are proposed to improve service to the low paid and in need.

**Letter from Mrs Ann Robinson, Director of Policy and Planning, 11 June 1991:**

The average time between receipt and determination of claims cleared during May 1991 was 19.88 working days. Of this, just over 7 working days was for work within the Family Credit Branch. The remainder of the time was taken up with waiting for responses to enquiries, mainly from employers.

At the end of May, there were 300,096 families actually in receipt of Family Credit. A further 78,627 claims were awaiting determination. The latest available figure for the caseload, including back-dated awards is 322,000 at the end of February 1991.

With regard to the service provided by the Family Credit Branch ... [the rest of this letter is in identical terms to Mrs Robinson's letter of 6 June to Mr Graham Allen - see above, pages 2-3].

**Mr Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what monitoring is undertaken by his Department of the expenditure of the social fund in local offices.

**Letter from Mrs Ann Robinson, Director of Policy and Planning, 12 June 1991:**

The Benefits Agency has a proactive approach to the management of Social Fund allocations in its districts. The District Managers are required to carry out regular monitoring of expenditure in order to ensure there will be sufficient funds to meet the requirements of those people in greatest need throughout the year.

Additionally, an overview of expenditure is maintained at each tier in the Agency organisation. Senior officials monitor national expenditure and brief the Chief Executive on any developments.

	1988/89	1989/90	1990/91	Incl/Decrease in real terms 1988/89-1990/91
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Additionally, an overview of expenditure is maintained at each tier in the Agency organisation. Senior officials monitor national expenditure and brief the Chief Executive on any developments.

**Mr Michael Meacher:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what date the strategic planning guide will be delivered to staff who are drawing up strategic plans for their area; and if he will send a copy to the hon. Member for Oldham, West.

**Letter from Mrs Ann Robinson, Director of Policy and Planning, 12 June 1991:**

The Guide is being produced to enable all units in the Agency to draw up their strategic plans. It will give non-prescriptive guidance on all aspects to be considered in the planning process. At the moment the Guide is still being prepared and it is not therefore possible to give a definite date for its delivery to the field.

I have noted your interest in the Guide. It is essentially an internal management document and not something we would normally expect to publish more widely. However, I will consider your request when the Guide is finalised and write to you again at that point.

**Mr Alfred Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) for each year since 1986 what is the average time taken for processing an application for (a) attendance allowance and (b) the higher rate of attendance allowance;

(2) whether the independent living fund is unable to process an application for assistance without the applicant first receiving confirmation of eligibility for the higher rate of attendance allowance; in how many cases the delay in processing the higher rate of attendance allowance claims has led to the blocking of hospital beds in spinal units; what steps he will take to ensure that attendance allowance claims are speeded up; and if he will consider introducing an additional question on the attendance allowance claim form to identify those people who have applied to the independent living fund.

**Letter from Mrs Ann Robinson, Director of Policy and Planning, 12 June 1991:**

Entitlement to the higher rate of Attendance Allowance (AA) can arise either from an initial claim or from a request to review an award of the lower rate. Every effort is made to ensure that claims are dealt with as quickly as possible. The Attendance Allowance Unit has a target of 37 working days from the date of receipt for the clearance of new claims to AA. During 1989/90 and 1990/91, the only years for which figures are available, the average clearance times were 33 days and 35 days respectively. The target clearance time is kept constantly under review.

I understand from the trustees that one of the criteria for help from the Independent Living Fund (ILF) is that the applicant should have received confirmation of eligibility for the higher rate of AA. I am not aware of any cases where a delay in processing a claim to AA has led to the blocking of a hospital bed in a spinal unit. It would not be appropriate to add to the length of the AA claim form by including a question to identify people who have applied for help from the ILF - of some 400,000 initial claims to AA each year only a very small proportion are from people who have applied for help from the ILF.

**Mr Alun Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list those allowances administered by his Department in regard to which applications are (a) fully dealt with by local offices in all but exceptional circumstances or when there is a formal appeal, (b) dealt with entirely by non-local offices on a national or regional basis and (c) dealt with through a mixture of local and national/regional means.

**Letter from Mr David Riggs, Finance Director, 17 June 1991:**

As requested I have broken down the information into three areas, district offices, central offices and those that are dealt with by both - mixture. The information has been tabulated and recorded below:

<i>Allowance</i>	<i>District</i>	<i>Central</i>	<i>Mixture</i>
Income Support	*		
Housing Benefit	*		
Community Charge Benefit	*		
Unemployment Benefit	*		
Maternity Allowance	*		
Sickness Benefit	*		
Invalidity Benefit	*		
Severe Disablement Allowance	*		
Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit	*		
Constant Attendance Allowance	*		
Reduced Earnings Allowance	*		
Pneumoconiosis, Byssinosis and miscellaneous disease Benefits	*		
Widows Payment	*		
Family Credit		*	
Child Benefit		*	
One Parent Benefit		*	
Guardian's Allowance		*	
Exceptionally Severe Disablement Allowance		*	
Industrial Death Benefit		*	
Attendance Allowance		*	
Invalid Care Allowance		*	
Mobility Allowance		*	
Vaccine Damage Lump Sum		*	
War Disablement Pension		*	
War Widow's or Dependents Pension		*	
NHS Benefits		*	
Retirement Pension			*
Retirement Pension (over 80)			*
Widowed Mother's Allowance			*
Widows Pension			*

**Mr Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has for the future of the Thames South, Southwark, Kennington, Peckham, Camberwell and Dartford offices of his Department.

**Letter from Mr David Riggs, Finance Director, 19 June 1991:**

In the West Kent District, a new building to rehouse the Dartford office is very close to completion and will be ready for occupation by staff in August of this year. The new building will represent much improved facilities for the staff and the public and customers will be advised of the new arrangements as soon as a definite opening date is available.

In the Fulham District, the possibility of a new building at Peckham to house the present Camberwell and Peckham offices is under consideration.

As far as the Southwark District is concerned, all four offices will remain at their present sites for the next two years, when the situation will be reviewed. In the meantime, the district management team will be looking at ways to rationalize benefit on a district-wide basis. In particular, they will be looking at ways to improve caller waiting area facilities.

# CONTRIBUTIONS AGENCY

**Mr Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the total percentage of applicants for family credit who were turned down in each of the most recent 24 months for which figures are available.

**Letter from Mr David Riggs, Finance Director, 27 June 1991:**  
The total percentage of applicants for Family Credit who were turned down in each of the 24 months for which figures are available is as follows:

Month	Per cent
<b>1989</b>	
June	58.6
July	48.1
August	41.7
September	35.5
October	30.6
November	32.5
December	36.4
<b>1990</b>	
January	38.9
February	39.5
March	33.3
April	26.0
May	26.2
June	30.4
July	34.8
August	30.4
September	32.7
October	33.5
November	36.3
December	30.5
<b>1991</b>	
January	30.8
February	31.4
March	33.5
April	25.3
May	24.7

I should point out that unsuccessful claims include those which were also withdrawn or invalid in some way.

**Ms Dawn Primarolo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list (a) the number of employers in the south-west region, and (b) nationally, defaulting on payments into the national insurance fund, (c) the number of employees involved, (d) the cost to the fund, and (e) the number of prosecutions made for the offence, for each year since 1988-89.

**Letter from Mr G Bertram, Director of Field Operations, 4 June 1991:**

I do not hold details of the number of defaulting employers in South West Region alone, but I have got details of such employers in the DSS region of Wales and South West. The following table shows, both nationally and also for Wales and South West, the number of employers who were prosecuted (both civil and criminal) in the years 1988/89, 1989/90 and 1990/91.

		No. of cases	Amount £
<b>Wales and South West</b>			
Civil	88/89	198	511,480
	89/90	256	715,323
	90/91	291	769,354
Criminal	88/89	3	660
	89/90	2	13,021
	90/91	4	Nil
<b>National</b>			
Civil	88/89	1,522	4,815,269
	89/90	1,743	5,872,651
	90/91	1,760	5,969,386
Criminal	88/89	6	8,010
	89/90	39	75,218
	90/91	14	14,560

Of course, not all criminal prosecutions necessarily involve the recovery of unpaid National Insurance contributions. Employers can be, and are, prosecuted for offences under Section 58 of the Social Security Act 1986, including wilful delay or obstruction of an inspector, refusal or neglect to furnish information to an inspector and failure to produce documents to an inspector.

All employers who default on payment into the National Insurance Fund are not necessarily prosecuted. Some will have made genuine errors in the calculation of their NIC liability and pay in full on request; others may agree to pay arrears by instalments and others may not be pursued because they have been given misleading advice about NIC liability.

No records of the number of individual employees is kept and such information could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.



# EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

**Mr Michael Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the number of disabled people who have been assisted in finding employment by his Department in each of the last 15 years.

**Letter from Mr M E G Fogden, Chief Executive, 12 June 1991:**

Although the information is not available in the precise form requested, I am able to provide the numbers of people with disabilities placed into employment by Jobcentre advisory services:

1976/77	Figure not available	1984/85	42,600
1977/78	53,844	1985/86	47,400
1978/79	58,738	1986/87	48,000
1979/80	59,736	1987/88	55,900
1980/81	39,468	1988/89	46,700
1981/82	35,470	1989/90	38,300*
1982/83	Figure not available	1990/91	34,300
1983/84	38,300		

(\* Figures for 1989/90 onwards exclude Community Programme placings as the scheme ceased from September 1988.)

The figures in the list do not take account of people with disabilities placed through Jobcentres' self-service displays of vacancies. Moreover, they do not reflect other forms of assistance given to people with disabilities, for example, assessment, rehabilitation, training and Jobclubs to help them find suitable employment. Since there were, for example, Jobclub places available in the later 1980s, but not earlier, and more adult training places available then also, time series comparisons need to be highly qualified.

**Mr Alfred Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the future of the provision by Woodlee employment rehabilitation centre in Egham of residential assessment and rehabilitation for people with disabilities.

**Letter from Mr M E G Fogden, Chief Executive, 12 June 1991:**

It might be useful if I set out our intentions for the future of the provision currently offered at Egham in the context of the plans for the development of all of our employment rehabilitation and assessment services.

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 (in West London, Bristol, Birmingham, Nottingham, Leeds, Manchester, Newcastle, Cardiff and Glasgow) will provide services to clients but 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 around 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 developments in our services for people with disabilities will lead to the phasing out of most of the existing Employment Rehabilitation Centres, including the centre at Egham, over the next five years as the new local teams are established and the centres of excellence are developed and as more agency rehabilitation provision is put into place. You can be assured, however, that assistance for people who currently require residential places at the Egham Employment Rehabilitation Centre will be maintained. The new local teams will be able to provide specialist assessment and guidance. The greater availability of local agencies will be of real benefit to many. For those who still need residential rehabilitation, we are confident that their needs can be met through agencies who have suitable premises and facilities.

**Mr Alun Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment

(1) how many individuals were disqualified from unemployment benefit (a) in Wales as a whole and (b) by each employment office in Wales under section 20 of the Social Security Act 1975 in each of the last five years.

(2) how many individuals were disqualified from unemployment benefit 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.

(3) how many of the individuals disqualified from unemployment benefit in each county or district in Wales under section 20 of the Social Security Act 1975 in each of the last five years were disqualified (a) for six weeks or less, (b) for more than six weeks but under 13 weeks, (c) for 13 to 20 weeks and (d) for over 20 weeks.

**Letter from Mr M E G Fogden, Chief Executive, 18 June 1991:**

I am afraid that a lot of the detailed information you have requested is unavailable because records of this type are not kept. In particular I am unable to give you separate information for each employment office, county, or district in Wales, as the figures are not available separately from those for Wales as a whole.

The numbers of individuals in Wales, disqualified from receiving unemployment benefit under section 20 of the Social Security Act 1975 are:

1986	17,584	1989	11,841
1987	17,632	1990	9,357
1988	15,230		

These figures are published in "Unemployment Benefit Statistics - Quarterly Analysis of Decisions of Adjudication Officers", a copy of which is always placed in the library of the House.

Furthermore, no separate records are kept which would enable me to provide you with the length of disqualifications imposed by adjudication officers.

**Mr John Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list by address all the job clubs (a) in Leeds metropolitan district and (b) in Leeds, West constituency.

**Letter from Mr M E G Fogden, Chief Executive, 26 June 1991:** Currently there are 7 Jobclubs in the Leeds Metropolitan District [their addresses are listed in the letter but not reproduced here].

My people in our Area Office in Leeds, are at present involved in a tendering exercise for Jobclubs, which will result in a further Jobclub opening soon.

Following the Secretary of State's announcement to the House on 19 June 1991 about a further substantial increase in the measures the Government is making available to help unemployed people back into work, the Employment Service has been asked to provide help for a further 40,000 people in Jobclubs this year and 60,000 next. We are urgently considering how these extra places should be allocated, but it is probable that some will go to Leeds.

**Mr Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide a table showing expenditure in 1989-90, broken down by regions, with Greater London shown as a separate region, for job clubs, the Employment Service, and jobcentres.

**Letter from Mr J W Cooper, Director of Field Operations, 27 June 1991:**

I attach a table which shows the total Employment Service expenditure by Region for 1989-90. Unfortunately, I cannot break these figures down to show expenditure on Jobcentres and internally-run Jobclubs because we do not monitor expenditure on individual functions at regional and national levels. The table does, however, show the amount of expenditure within the total which relates to Jobclub provision contracted out to external providers, who ran around two-thirds of the total number of Jobclubs in 1989-90. I cannot give a separate breakdown for Greater London because this would involve local level information which is only retained for the current and the immediately preceding financial year. Therefore the figures given are for the entire London and South East region.

**Employment Service spend in 1989/90 (£'000)**

Region	Total	External Job Clubs
Northern	37,855	1,698
Yorkshire & Humberside	49,952	1,038
East Midlands & Eastern	45,914	1,628
London & South East	158,273	4,393
South West	39,770	1,160
Wales	31,013	830
West Midlands	54,217	2,001
North West	77,086	3,014
Scotland	66,679	2,192
Regional total	560,760	17,953

**NOTE:** The "total" column represents total Employment Service expenditure by region for the financial year 1989/90.

The "external Jobclubs" column represents the amount of expenditure by region on Jobclub provision contracted out to external providers.

# Appendix

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

Member	Agency	Subject
Mr David Clark	Intervention Bd.	Expenditure on fruit and vegetables under CAP
Mr Tam Dalyell	Met. Office	Deviation from norm of sun's radiation
Mr Tom Cox	Employment	No. of job vacancies, Tooting
Mr Paul Flynn	Defence Research	Test firings for RAYO
Mr John McAllion	12 Agencies	Management and computer consultancy contracts
Mr Henry McLeish	Benefits	Constituent's benefit claim
Mr Martin Redmond	Benefits	Social fund applications and other information relating to Doncaster area
Mr William Ross	Met. Office	Wind directions, Northern Ireland