



Benefit Delivery in the 21st Century

Report of Conference September 2006

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Contents

| | |
|-----------------|----|
| Opening session | 3 |
| Workshops | 5 |
| Panel session | 22 |
| Appendix | 28 |

Opening session

In 2006 CPAG's annual rights conference focussed on benefit delivery. Held on 7 September 2006 it was attended by over 130 delegates mostly working in the field of welfare rights.

The conference began with a keynote address from Dr Deborah Mabbett - Reader in Politics at Birkbeck, University of London - on **What might the government's 80% employment target mean for social security? Lessons from the Danish 'active society'**.

Looking to Denmark with its high employment, experience of 'activation' and low child poverty the following points were covered.

Scope of 'activation'

It started in early 1990s with a focus on young people. Unemployment highish – 10-12% - but older workers more likely to have a work history which put them in the Unemployment Insurance (UI) system, not the social assistance system. The UI system is separately administered – by the trade unions. People subscribe to UI while working, usually in conjunction with paying union dues. In early 1990s UI was quite generous financially and very generous in time limits – up to 7 years – so people with work history were not coming into the social assistance system. Furthermore, the social assistance system kept its loads down by arranging local authority work to re-qualify people for insurance (the UI 'carousel').

All changed now – no more 'carousel', shorter time limits for UI – but activation policies do not cover many people with work history who become unemployed for short periods.

The scope of activation was widened – older people, and reforms to disability benefit payment and adjudication. Central government created the *legal possibility* for benefit administrations that social assistance applicants of all ages, and then all capacities, could be required to take part in an activation process. Social assistance recipients have had a longer-standing right to *ask* for such assistance, but have not been

required to take it up.

How local authorities use their legal possibilities

Social assistance in Denmark is paid out by/delivered by the 275 municipalities. It is fully financed by central government, but part of the money is allocated by formula. Municipalities receive a partial case-by-case reimbursement and meet the rest of the cost out of formula-allocated funds, which are not ring-fenced. What this means is that a municipality which has a lower social assistance caseload or lower costs than the formula would predict has more money to spend on other things. Put another way, measures like free childcare to lone parents 'pay for themselves' if they reduce social assistance expenditure.

Once the legal opportunity was created, local policy committees for social assistance wanted to take up the possibility of activation insofar as they saw the possibility of benefit savings that could be used for more popular services.

These local policy committees are advised by their caseworkers – the staff who deal with applicants. They do not discuss named applicants, but they discuss the problems and issues that the caseload presents in general terms. In general, the caseworkers have been more cautious about widening the scope of activation than the policy committees.

Therefore, there is variation across municipalities in how the policy is administered, in large part because of different local circumstances – sailors with alcohol problems, immigrants with limited Danish etc. The policy process invites proposals from those who see the cases and allows them to vary by area.

Caseworkers do have the option of not activating people – they can pay social assistance long-term and they can put people on the early retirement/ disability pension.

Issues about formula funding and financial incentives:

- Fairness of a formula is always in doubt – cannot withstand too much tinkering by central government or gaming by local authorities.
- Local authorities have significant own resources which mean that they focus less on

year-on-year bargaining than they otherwise might.

- Guidance is issued on normal practices regarding activation; good deal of convergence to the mean, so local authorities end up spending pretty much what the formula suggests they should spend.

- Local decisions are subject to appeal to a central appeals board; this board also monitors the policies of the municipalities; this monitoring function has been strengthened as devolution has gathered pace (most recently with devolved disability decision-making).

Model in which there are incentives, but also constraints on how the different actors respond to those incentives.

Contrast with UI incentives - Government has tried to make its subsidy to UI more conditional on active job search and thereby put more pressure on UI recipients to find work, but has had only limited success. It is easy for UI offices to comply with the formalities. But also UI offices lack the networks of the municipalities, which undertake a wide range of activity – education, childcare, training programmes, rehabilitation, occupational therapy, libraries and resources, dentist and prescription refunds. These things continue to be done in-house; no great emphasis on using voluntary provision; have associations e.g. of/ for people with different illnesses and special needs, but these are seen as ways of ensuring corporate representation of their special interests, not as a route towards provision.

UI offices deal instead with the Public Employment Service, which is fairly detached from dealing with hard-to-place people, and tends to concentrate on providing a good service to employers, who pay for it.

Promoting employment and issues of job quality

Danish wage structure is more compressed than in the UK, and most workers work near to the modal hours of 35-37 per week, by contrast with the UK's bi-modal pattern of part-time (16-20) and full-time (39 hrs +) work.

In-work benefits are not heavily relied on, apart from the universal child benefit. The 'flexjob' scheme allows subsidies to be paid to employers; this is a new small scheme primarily intended for people with disabilities.

Thus, there are fewer obvious job creation 'quick fixes' in Denmark than in the UK, but in recent years employment has grown strongly.

Traditionally, Scandinavian model was that work was promoted because it was productive. This was the concept developed in Sweden in particular to back up policies to reduce the number of people engaged in low-productivity work in agriculture and promote industrialisation in the 1950s. The expansion of the public sector into care activities that might otherwise be done by women in the home was also seen as productive – quality of care was improved and professionalised, economies of scale were realised.

With the current very high employment rates, and the extension of policies towards people with disabilities, there is a shift of view towards work as a socially integrative activity – so-called 'social activation' rather than productive activation; work as social inclusion, emphasising social networks from work, etc. If the focus is social activation, then one might redefine work; this can be seen in UK in the reforms to incapacity benefit which seem to endorse a wide range of 'work-related activities'. Debate in Scandinavia about why only formal organised work is recognised, not informal activities in the home. Employment rate has stabilised and even fallen back in recent years.

Here there is even more scope for such a debate because we have a much larger raft of low-quality jobs - low-paid jobs with bad working conditions – anti-social hours, unpleasant working environments, etc - where one might seriously ask whether working in them is really so conducive to forming social networks and combating exclusion.

To sum up:

- the scope of Denmark's activation policies is wide, but there is also scope for municipalities to pay social assistance to those who they don't see as suitable targets;
- this flexibility comes from the funding and delivery model, which leaves a high level of local discretion about how to implement activation;
- activation policies are seen as a success, widely socially-endorsed; administered quite sanely – but at the same time, some attention is paid to the quality of work and the reasons for promoting paid work over informal activity.

A question and answer session followed, raising the following points:

Q: How much of Danish system is translatable to UK?

A: Politics is quite like UK but there are powerful influences to keep a decent social security system. Although, not all the benefits are better – the old age pension is like the UK's. Denmark has more institutional defences for people in poverty and poverty seen as more unacceptable in Denmark than in UK. The Danish system of delivery through municipalities would be very hard to reinvent in UK. Local authorities in the UK have been turned into weak agencies of Government. Denmark has not contracted out services like the UK has and there is also not much of a role for voluntary organisations in Denmark.

Q: What's the taxation system like in Denmark?

A: They have local income tax and high VAT at 25%. Social assistance is paid by the Government. Public finance reforms in the 1990s followed deficits – this reform helped local authorities to charge for services to get out of financial problems.

Q: Do the Trade Unions operate as a coalition?

A: The Trade Unions do operate collectively in influencing policies. As such, the Government has not been able to change the Unemployment Insurance (UI). However, it is easier to dismiss workers than in most European countries. If the UI scheme was curtailed then the Trade Unions might request greater protection against dismissal for workers.

Q: What is the dominant tenure in Denmark and does it have the equivalent to UK's housing benefit?

A: Denmark has a lot of owner-occupation. No in-work housing benefit scheme.

Q: What are the benefit levels and can municipalities set benefit levels at different rates?

A: There is a national personal allowance that is set nationally but the municipalities can add amounts related to non-discretionary household expenditure (eg – if household has to pay cost of satellite TV in block of flats this can be added as a non-discretionary expenditure, as can mortgage payments).

Q: What are the public attitudes to poverty?

A: There are lots of right-wing Danes who think in a similar way to their British counterparts. Institutional factors such as the strength of the Trade Unions are more important in terms of their positive influence over policies that affect poverty.

Q: What is childcare provision like and how does this impact on the absence of part-time work?

A: More childcare provision than in UK and there are strong public attitudes towards the importance of such provision. Childcare is often charged for except for those in activation programmes, but this varies by municipality.

Q: Are there any welfare to work schemes for disabled people?

A: Up to 2003 there was a separate disability benefit system, with eligibility decided at County level by a medical board. Government changed this - now the municipalities determine disability and have incentives to get people into work. Not possible to say whether this has got more people into work.

Q: What difference does the smaller size of population make?

A: The IT system works! Each municipality has its own system and an effective way of transferring data between systems – this choice of system probably has more to do with fitting their devolved structure, based on municipalities, than due to their population size. As such, even though the population is smaller, there is no reason why this could not be replicated in UK. It is a paradox that the UK retains a highly centralised approach despite its large size, while tiny Denmark operates a highly

devolved structure.

Q: Do people have to have worked for a period of time to get UI and for same employer?

A: Yes – contributions have to be paid for 1 year but need not be for same employer (not sure how moving across sectors (and therefore different Trade Unions) might affect payment since UI is administered by Trade Unions).

Q: Is there more stigma associated with claiming social assistance than UI?

A: Because social assistance scheme is seen as social worker oriented then many unemployed people do not see it as relating to them. They can be made to seem like someone with a problem rather than someone who has, say, lost a job due to economic down-turn. So there is a stigma related to social assistance but not sure how much that affects take-up.

Q: What are the attitudes of employers to those with mental ill-health?

A: Employers are quite resistant to taking on workers with mental health problems. Current policies around welfare reform involve employers having to look at offering what are known as “softer” jobs. Not sure what impact this is having.

Conference delegates then attended workshops aimed at generating debate on a range of delivery issues. Set out below are the main points raised by the facilitators and delegates in each of the workshops.

Technology: improving or undermining?

Eddy Graham – Welfare Rights Worker CPAG

Beth Lakhani – Welfare Rights Worker CPAG

This workshop gave participants the opportunity to examine the extent to which technological changes aid or undermine the delivery of benefits. The following points were raised and discussed:

- What's happening
 - Tele-claiming.
 - Internet for information, claims and forms.
 - Computerisation of decisions and processes.

- Why
 - **It's possible** – a fresh start for Tax Credits.
 - **Cost** – a popular business model because call centres are cheaper to staff than local offices.
 - **Convenience.**
 - **Normality** – people are used to interacting with businesses like this. If benefits don't use this model too then this will mark claimants out as different to working people.
 - **Preference.**
 - **General government policy.**
 - **Equity.**

Advantages

- Technology enables information sharing between different agencies. This helps with partnership work.

- 60% of claimants would prefer to claim by phone.

- Helps people to get all the benefits to which they are entitled, especially passported benefits.

- For people who are able to interact with the system, it can work well.
- The new system works well for people who are:
 - Richer – have phones and computers at home.
 - More articulate and computer savvy.
 - Those who find filling in forms difficult.
 - Those who are in work.
- The new technology means there can be specialised centralised services (like Welsh language) for certain groups.
- People who perceive themselves as being prejudiced against in society like the objective and non-judgemental decisions made by computers.

Disadvantages

- Attempts to mimic the private sector with call centres and remote processing. The business model cannot be applied to benefits.
- Technology will improve the process for those who can access the system, but those left behind will be even worse off. The excluded groups are changing, but a core remains.
- It will lead to a two-tier advice sector. Local authorities will have access to data but independent advice agencies will be left outside the technological loop. If voluntary sector agencies get more closely involved, do they risk losing their independence?
- 25% to 30% of people do not understand instructions about what paperwork to bring to an interview at the Job Centre. These are the people who are vulnerable under the new system. Technology will widen the gap between those who can manage to access the system and those who cannot.
- New system makes it harder for advisers. The timing of call-backs etc.
- The computer becomes the source of authority, rather than social security legislation.
- It is easier to ignore emergencies over the phone. No personal intervention.
- If the phone line is engaged then it is not possible to make a claim.
- The phone lines are not free.

- The use of technology de-personalises the service. Strictly defining the rules in order to programme the computer gets rid of the grey area where marginal and difficult cases can fall. It will make it more difficult to argue a case.
- Some groups cannot use (or find it difficult to use) the phone: deaf people; those with mental health problems; non-English speakers.
- Technology drives the rules. The limitations of the computer system dictate the changes to the legislation.
- It is not imperative to streamline benefits *and* change the technology at the same time.

Changes that are needed

- More flexibility and responsiveness: home visits; face-to-face interviews; DWP staff doing outreach work.
- More recognition of the knowledge of DWP staff. Greater empowerment of staff, rather than de-skilling.
- Focus on the payment of benefit first, before moving claimants into work.
- DWP staff need to be trained to identify other entitlements. Not just call centre staff working through a script.

Tax credits: the model for benefit delivery?

Katie Lane – Social Policy Officer (Benefits and Tax Credits) Citizens Advice

Vince Groome – Head of Business Architecture and Design, Benefits and Credits Office HMRC

This workshop looked at the delivery of the tax credit scheme and considered the extent to which it offers a good model for how benefits should be delivered. It looked at the advantages and disadvantages of the tax credit model of delivery including the

scope for mitigating the weaknesses in the model.

Centralised contact centre model

- Geographical consistency and potential for efficiency.
- No need for individual caseworkers (who cannot always be available) all advisers can access client records electronically.
- Lack of initial resources for dealing with written correspondence.
- Not all client records are visible to contact centre advisers.
- Lack of case ownership and accountability.
- Lack of specialists result in failure to offer accurate advice on complex issues. (Creation of specialist teams in the Tax Credit Office can/is help(ing) address this.

Automation and reliance on IT

- Ability to deal with large volumes of claims quickly; scope for software to cross-match data for inconsistencies and avoid errors – but not always fully achieved.
- Limits the degree of personalisation of communications.
- Limited flexibility for manual intervention – e.g. to provide explanations of overpayments. The system will not recognise an overpayment as anything special (particularly if in-year). No ability to send award notice to intermediary.
- Automatic debt collection with no warning no scope for explanation of causes.
- Introduction of system changes require long lead-in times.

Communication with claimants

- Standardised communications, able to handle large volumes quickly, but limited scope for personal detail or explanation.
- Most claimants want less information on their award notices but a minority plus advisers want more.
- Lack of a face-to-face service - difficult for complex entitlement.
- Telephone readily available to give advice and transact business. Many customers switching to that channel for renewals, for example. But barriers for some claimants unable to use the telephone.
- Duplication of award notices.

Communication with Intermediaries

- Lack of local presence removes the potential for local relationships between department and intermediaries/service users. This limits mutual understanding and communication.
- Lack of caseworker and segmentation can make resolution of case problems more difficult.

The discussion was then opened up to the floor and the following points were

made:

- HMRC model places a high level of responsibility on claimants to know the rules and act correctly.
- Tax credits are very complex – award notices contain a high level of complexity and are often incomprehensible.
- The complexity of tax credits makes it difficult to deal with over the phone.
- Complexity of system itself causes problems for centralised delivery.
- Complexity tied to benefits for those on a low income because of means-testing, whereas HMRC would not attempt same level of detail in income tax for higher earners.
- Highly automated – highly discretionary.
- Great contrast between the sometimes obsessive checking of accuracy of information given for DWP benefits compared to laissez faire approach for tax credits.
- Tax credits delivery has particular challenges because of the range of people claiming – from the lowest incomes to fairly high incomes.
- Feels hit and miss whether a claimant will get a good service – could ring helpline to report change of circumstances but it not be recorded on some occasions and on others it would. Due to this have to advise claimants to keep a full record of date/time of call and who spoke with and what said.
- No trust in the tax credit system.
- Call centre model pre-supposes that claimants are able to communicate by phone and have a high level of understanding – many cannot communicate this and many do not have this level of understanding.
- The processing system is de-humanised.
- People think about things on a weekly basis – the yearly system makes it much harder for people and is out of sync with everything else.
- People find it hard to understand an annual system that is based on annual income which means that the amount of TC you get at one time in the year

may not reflect your income at that given time.

- Call centre model assumes a certain degree of communication – they need to be staffed by those who are highly skilled rather than working to a script.
- Quality of information provided by helpline is poor.
- There is a lack of information between sections within HMRC.
- The process of HMRC accepting advisers authority to speak on behalf of their clients has now improved.
- Staff on the adviser line are knowledgeable and helpful.
- Couldn't the renewal period be linked with the P60 return period – which is end of May?
- Could some things be taken out of automation and be dealt with manually?
- Could still have a centralised system but with local area offices where people who cannot use the phone or cannot afford to could go for face-to-face help.
- Face-to-face help has more of a human touch and therefore enables an environment of trust. People feel they are being listened to and it could also increase the possibility of early dispute resolution.
- Easier to organise phone support to be open longer hours.
- Less accountability with phone – it allows staff to duck out of taking responsibility.
- Accountability also affected by a fact that mainly IT based - not clear where checks and balances are in a completely computer based system.

Some possible future directions were suggested and opened up for discussion:

More phone and more self-service, eg- via internet

- Some things are better done in writing, eg – financial statements have been requested over the phone and this is difficult for the claimant.

- Need more personalised letters.
- Phone-based system only fine for those who can communicate well.
- System seems designed for those whose lives have fewer changes and are better able to access phone services. Mismatch with real claimants, many of whom are vulnerable, circumstances change frequently, and find dealing with Tax Credit Office confusing and difficult.
- Face-to-face better for those whose first language is not English.
- Levels of poor literacy (or functional literacy) is under-stated and we need to bear this in mind when devising tax credit systems and literature.
- Need to recognise that one size does not fit all. Need to empower decision makers. Need to be able to overrule the computer – rather than being computer led.

Segmented services to target pro-active and responsive help at the most in need

- No local liaison so how would make benefit of this service?
- Is there any scope for HMRC to join up with Jobcentre Plus and have advisers in Jobcentre Plus offices?
- There should be a choice of methods for claimants including face-to-face.
- The phone itself is not the problem but the process at end of the phone needs to improve.
- Letter is good as it gives people evidence of communication with HMRC which they may need later to rely upon.
- Some of the demand for face-to-face is false and could be dealt with by an improved phone service and some is true because some need this method of access.
- The tax credit system needs to be more pro-active. This might be better achieved but arguably could be achieved by phone service.

- System needs to be more pro-active earlier on rather than waiting until things go wrong.
- If move to integrated one- stop shop, would need to become more automated to link IT systems.
- It would help those on a low-income who are vulnerable to have more tax credit services delivered through Jobcentre Plus. Needs better co-ordination and resourcing of link between Jobcentre Plus and HMRC.
- Do we think tax credits and child benefit data should be linked up? Fine to link up data provided the mess from tax credits is not transferred to child benefit – child benefit works extremely well and may be all the claimant has to rely upon due to problems with tax credits.

Co-operation in delivery: impact upon independent rights advice

John Wheatley- Senior Social Policy Officer (Welfare) Citizens Advice

Paul Treloar – Policy Officer London Advice Services Alliance

This workshop looked at developments that could be seen to ‘extend benefit delivery’ beyond state-providers and consider their implications for the provision of independent advice. The facilitators papers are in the appendix of this report.

The arguments over compromising independence

Ideological issues

- State departments should do the work of the state – it is not the job of the voluntary and community sector to replace those functions
- Already causing rifts between public sector unions and voluntary sector,

especially in terms of “creeping privatisation” – divide and conquer?

- Is VCS seen as an appropriate provider due to ability to deal with hard-to-reach clients OR is it actually because they are regarded as the cheaper option?
- Also, hard-to-reach clients aren't born hard-to-reach, they are made that way by systemic complexity and confusion. Joining that system risks undermining that relationship.
- Mission and values of VCS organisations could be distorted through bending to meet contract conditions.
- Further, advice provision that challenges decisions of the state to improve or maintain living conditions is not necessarily compatible with advising people on how to access employment opportunities, which is the underlying thrust of welfare reforms.
- Perceptions of independence amongst client base could be undermined, if people begin to perceive VCS advisers as agents of the state
- Campaigning, policy work and lobbying could be undermined – biting the hand that feeds you.

Practical issues

- Confidentiality – client trust built on this assurance, what are the implications for sharing client details with statutory services?
- Certifying claims or evidence – does this blur the lines of accountability?
- Further, if client's claim is refused on evidential basis, for example, and they contend that they gave evidence to "independent adviser" to verify, where does client access advice to challenge veracity of their claim?
- Compulsion – the mandatory nature of welfare reforms runs counter to the ethos of independent agencies that look to work with clients holistically
- Diversity/threats to funding – local authorities seeing the opportunities to simply fund the statutorily approved service, or even not to fund any advice as DWP should be
- Changes to government policy – could risk being left high and dry, without the trust of clients and the funding of government
- Temptation to cherry-pick clients – the nature of contracting means that agencies are often required to meet challenging number-based targets, thus providing an incentive to take the easiest and quickest cases at the expense of more complex and/or time-consuming ones.
- Campaigning, policy work and lobbying could be undermined – pressures to deliver to outcomes causing emphasis on service delivery against more strategic work
- Volunteers – will they agree with essentially doing public services for no reward?

Citizens Advice made the following points and highlighted an example of Bureaux partnership work under the Pension Service Partnership Fund – full details of this work is set out in the paper in the appendix.

Funding and independence

- There have been misunderstandings about the funding Citizens Advice received for computerisation.
- Arguments about loss of independence should not be dismissed – but are typically hypothetical.
- In practice, it is possible to maintain independence.

Partnerships

- Partnerships between CABx and DWP are often driven by need to meet client needs or to get diverse funding.
- CABx have asked Citizens Advice to be more flexible and pragmatic in approach.
- Partnership work can bring genuine benefits for clients.

For the future

- Further work is underway to investigate online access for advisers to client information held by DWP.
- Citizens Advice has been approached by Shaw Trust to consider delivering benefits advice.

The discussion was then opened up to the floor and the following points were made:

- There is quite a lot of tension (in terms of the pressure to be involved in joint working) between local advice agencies and the national body supporting them.
- Working age benefits tend to be more complex than pension age benefits. It is then even more crucial to have access to independent advice – where are people to go if the only local advice agency is working in partnership with the DWP?
- Current partnership working is being done in climate of job losses within the

DWP. Is partnership working just a way of getting home visits done at the lowest cost?

- In relation to joint team working project in Devon – targeted at local authority home care clients. This sort of group is often described as “hard to reach” and targeted by such projects. This is a sloppy use of the term “hard to reach” and does not necessarily accurately describe such clients (who are already in touch with local authority and therefore not hard to reach).
- We have to be aware of why there is an interest in partnership working – economically driven. It is also in the context of DWP etc withdrawing from face-to-face contact with clients (e.g. tax credits, Pension Service). Government would rather decide on policy and let someone else deliver the service.
- Partnership working does compromise CABx independence – will skew targets to meet “partnership” targets, possible to the detriment of other areas of work. Very important not to lose sight of organisation’s fundamental aims and objectives.
- Partnership with the Pension Service seems one-sided.
- Partnership is more a case of funding someone else to do something they are not going to do.
- Joint working initiative could have worked with the Local Authority, without the need to involve the Pension Service.
- Not so much about co-operation in delivery – it’s more about those who should be administering looking for a cheaper option.
- Less to do with partnership and more to do with becoming a contractor to the state. Similar to developments in funding where the emphasis is on funders, like the Legal Services Commission, stating this is the service we want and you have to compete to be the provider of this service – as opposed to days when an advice centre could approach funders with their ideas for a service.
- The Prime Minister’s letter to John Hutton regarding the need to reform welfare delivery specifically pointed to involving the voluntary sector in such reform

- There could be conflicts of interests in Joint Teams, e.g. challenging fairer charging decisions if also part of having carried out the fairer charging assessment.
- The Government wants to also involve private sector in its welfare reform programme – this sector would not have same qualms in whether to get involved as voluntary sector.
- Debate over independence can be over-simplified. Many advice centres receive statutory funding and often find themselves having to be sensitive to Local Authority decisions in order to preserve funding – the real issue that we should concern ourselves with, when debating the threat to independence, is whether the independent sector should involve itself in the delivery of benefits – this is how independence is undermined.
- The compulsion elements of welfare reform are likely to be controversial and so any involvement by the independent sector could create perceptions that the service is not independent.
- Staffing levels in DWP likely to worsen – how far can Joint Teams and similar initiatives be insulated from this and not be tarred with the same brush.
- Person was accredited to verify documents and deal with appointeeship applications for one Joint Team but that accreditation was not recognised when moved to a similar post in a different area.
- An example was given of a Joint Team which has created a two-tier system for clients. The Joint Team staff are not trained to deal with complex cases or to provide a holistic service, e.g. they only deal with pension credit and attendance allowance but not housing benefit and council tax benefit. So a client who uses the Joint Team service as opposed to the local welfare rights service will get a worse service. Clients assume the Pension Service will give correct advice and so will not think to go anywhere else.
- DWP do not see voluntary sector lobbying role as compromised if get involved in joint working initiative.

Welfare reform: the latest

Sarah Clarke – Solicitor CPAG

Simon Osborne – Welfare Rights Worker CPAG

This workshop looked at the main benefit proposals in the welfare reform Green paper and some of the most important implications of those proposals.

Overview

- New benefit structure – Employment and Support Allowance.
- Conditionality.
- ‘transformed’ PCA.
- Pathways to Work national by 2008.

What’s Going?

- Incapacity benefit.
- Income support on incapacity grounds.

What’s New?

- Employment and Support Allowance.
- Contributory and income-related.
- Basic allowance.
- Housing costs and Disability premiums (income-related).
- Work-related activity component.
- Support component.

Personal Capability Assessment

- New name.
- Reformed descriptors, especially mental health.

Work-focused health assessment

- Looks at work task ability + health interventions for return to work.
- Conducted by health professionals.
- Report sent to personal adviser.

Conditionality – from 2008

- Adoption of Pathways to Work.
- Work-focused health-related assessments.
- Work-focused interviews.
- Engagement in ‘work-related activity’.
- Exemption from compulsion for those with ‘most severe’ disabilities and conditions – ie in support group.
- Existing claimants to be migrated later.

Work-related Activity

- **‘Work tasters’** eg voluntary or permitted work.
- **Condition Management Programmes**, NHS Expert Patients programmes.
- **Improving employability**, eg basic skill programme, Jobcentre Plus or external training programmes.
- **Jobsearch** assistance, eg contact with NDDP, Disability Employment Advisers.
- **Stabilising life**, eg cognitive behavioural therapy, assessing childcare options.

Welfare Reform - Why reform IB?

- 2.7 million claimants
- regional variations in claiming IB
- dominance of back pain and mental health problems
- claimants on IB for 2 years likely to remain on it
- over 1/3 claimants come not from work but from other benefits
- “gateway” poorly managed – you get the benefit before you’ve been assessed
- “perverse incentives” – you get more money the longer you claim
- nothing is expected of claimants
- “incapacity” benefit sends a negative message
- lower employment rates for 50 +
- lower employment rates for lone parents

Welfare Reform – Aspirations

- Reduce number of claimants by 1 million.
- Fewer claimants but those remaining get more.
- Reduce numbers leaving work because of illness.
- Increase numbers leaving benefits.
- Employment rate 80% of working age population.

Working with employers

- Healthier workplaces.
- Better absence management.

Working with GPs and health professionals

- Revised format of medical certificate.
- Incentives in primary care contracts.
- Employment advisers in GPs' surgeries.

Pathfinders

- Pathfinders show 8% come off IB and 8% into work.
- Less for over 45s and claimants with MH problems.
- Works best for those already motivated to return to work – don't mind compulsion and welcome support.
- Less successful for those who do not see return to work as possible or desirable – see scheme as interfering and punitive.

Other groups

Lone parents

- Duty on local authorities to secure sufficient childcare.
- Increase WFIs for LPs.
- New premium for workseeking LPs.
- More intensive support in first year of claim.
- Work tasters.

50+

- Pension reform.
- Align employment support for 50+ and younger age groups through New Deal.
- Face to face guidance.

- Improve back to work support.
- Work with employers.

Generally

- Nicer Jobcentres.
- Private and voluntary sector providers.
- Improve skills.
- Rationalise funding arrangements.
- Greater inter-agency co-operation.

Also in the Green Paper...

- Taxpayers will gain as bills for benefit dependency fall.
- Benefit simplification.

Issues

- Does focus on work adequately identify and value the contribution of sick and disabled people?
- Are employers willing to employ people who are sick or disabled?
- Will lower rates of benefit before assessment increase poverty – how long will assessment process take?
- Will benefit sanctions increase poverty?
- If lower benefit rates increase poverty, how will that impact on sickness and disability?
- How will parenting responsibilities be taken into account for claimants who are sick and disabled?
- Will these measures simplify the benefit system?
- Do decision makers have adequate skills to make decisions on entitlement and sanctions?
- Do personal advisers have adequate skills to advise on options for sick and disabled claimants?
- Should the voluntary and commercial sectors be involved in exercising state

functions?

The following questions were raised:

What is the timescale from here?

The Bill will be going to committee stage in October. MPs have been promised regulations before then. Will be scrutinised by SSAC as some regulations will be made outside the six month period.

Will appeal rights be migrated from the old benefit?

There is little in the green paper, but it suggests that they will remain as they are now. It is less clear what the appeal rights will be for new aspects.

How easily will a person be able to move between the groups as their condition improves or deteriorates?

The policy intention is that it will be possible to move between groups without going through the assessment process again.

Will there be set intervals for Work-Focussed Interviews?

There is very little in the Bill about work-focussed interviews. The intention is to use the Pathways to Work system in which they are they are standardised and regular.

What are the details of the sanctions?

There will be sanctions for not going to interviews or taking part in work-related activity.

Appeals -v- mediation

Stewart Wright – Legal Officer CPAG

Tony Boorman – Principal Ombudsman Financial Ombudsman Service

This workshop considered the following issues from the perspective of a rights worker and the ombudsman who resolves disputes in relation to financial

services:

- Are oral appeal hearings the best way of deciding a person's entitlement to benefit and tax credits, or could a more paper based system (including less face-to face contact) be a better model?
- What works well with oral hearings and what works less well, and are oral hearings necessary in all cases?
- Settlement procedures in tax credit appeals.

Why oral hearings?

Case against

- Access.
- Formality.
- Not effective.
- Court like.
- Cost.
- Delay.

Dealing with the case against

- No need for oral hearings in all cases.
- Cost – scepticisms (cost in all cases) – better initial decisions.
- Accessibility – must inform all dispute resolution procedures.
- Formality and court like – work in progress – displays integrity and independence of process.
- Effectiveness – more specialist adjudication – better initial decision – proactive work by Tribunals Service?

Case for

- Article 6 right to an oral hearing.

- Makes independence obvious.
- If used correctly, cost effective.
- Paper based models do not work – paper vs oral success rates – Social Fund Inspector model not a parallel (and less volume) – poor initial paper decisions – access issues.
- Party present and can be asked questions (more effectively than on paper).
- Easier for appellants to explain orally than on paper (literacy).
- Gather new and better information.
- Give appellant his or her say.
- Better acceptance of failure (because decided by court).

Appeal adjudication - areas to improve

- Better initial decisions.
- Proper revision after appeal made – informed consideration of new information.
- Proactive work by Tribunal Service (eg, telephone contact (but role of advisers) – consideration of papers before hearing).
- Reporting back of decisions.
- More senior Presenting Officers.
- More specialist decision-making.

Tax credit appeal settlements

- In principle not contrary to fair hearing.
- But, all settlements need to be approved by Tribunals Service.
- Clear and public guidance on settlement procedures – including time limits.
- Need for all tax credit “appeals” to be logged with Tribunals Service.

The Ombudsman approach

- Is 'no surprise service': preliminary view is communicated to parties with a chance to put forward more arguments before final decision made.
- Helps appellants to construct their complaint. Adjudicator makes argument for them, so appellant doesn't need to know any of the rules. Have an inquisitorial jurisdiction.
- All adjudicators are based in one site and therefore can have a more predictable, consistent system of decision-making.
- Answers are fed back publicly – case-studies are published. Firms and regulators are also informed. Regulator can take action against persistent problems.
- Have power to require firms to pay for medical evidence though normally no need to gather further evidence.

The discussion was then opened up to the floor and the following points were made:

- Concern expressed about unnecessary tribunals, ie, cases that are clearly likely to succeed and should have been reconsidered properly before getting to the appeal stage. There should be a way of scrutinising cases more effectively at the pre-hearing stage, and also more feedback to decision-makers.
- Medical Services very poor (poor service and poor evidence). There should be a way of medical evidence, if available, being considered at an earlier stage – a call for more interlocutory stages and better decision-making (no "ownership" of decisions, so no-one paying much attention to "their" decision being overturned at appeal).
- Many social security appeals are about disputed facts or the claimant's actions (eg, overpayments cases). In light of this, the opportunity of an oral hearing seems very important.
- If there was no appeal process for benefits there would be no opportunity for

an oral hearing at all (unlike, for example, the Financial Sector Ombudsman process where people remain entitled to pursue their case through the courts, regardless of the Ombudsman's involvement).

- Should all appeals be lodged directly with the Tribunals Service - would be a better system, provided initial decision-making/ revision process works properly.
- The government department should be responsible for its own decision-making and should have proper quality control.
- Adviser who is an appeal representative and helps clients complain to the Financial Ombudsman Service noted slowness of the service sometimes. Clients relying on benefits to live on cannot afford to wait.
- A 'one service fits all' model is not what's needed. Must be flexible so that if oral hearing required can take place.
- The Financial Services model appears similar to having a more pro-active Tribunals Service.
- In benefit appeals it is often the case that medical evidence is crucial but often difficult for client to obtain.
- General theme that came up through comments was the importance of improving initial decision-making (ie, of appeal tribunal decisions being meaningfully fed back to decision-makers) and of greater use of interlocutory stages to resolve cases where possible without an oral hearing.

Panel Session

Chaired by Kaliani Lyle - Chief Executive Citizens Advice Scotland

Kate Green – Chief Executive at CPAG

Spoke about:

- Threat to 'independent advice'.
- The importance of good delivery system on child poverty rates.
- The importance of a 'rights-based approach' to welfare provision and how a strong rights-based advice sector provides a 'check' on Government policies through its role in challenging policies.

Charlotte Argyle – Benefits Advice Co-ordinator Macmillan Cancer Support

Spoke about:

- 'Access' issues in relation to call-centre model and who affected:
 - people who are deaf or hard of hearing;
 - people with speech impediments;
 - people whose first language isn't English;
 - hospital inpatients;
 - people without access to a telephone – on low income, homeless etc;
 - people with mental health problems; people with fluctuating conditions e.g. cancer – in and out of hospital.
- Operational issues regarding Jobcentre Plus:
 - accessing paper claim forms;
 - clerical claim forms not being accepted;
 - getting through to call centres; shortages of visiting officers;
 - high staff turnover;
 - getting accurate holistic benefits advice from call centre operatives.
- One model for all does not work for some client groups.
- Delivery system needs to cater for all and needs to be funded properly if it is going to work.

- Impact of welfare reform agenda on sick and disabled people.

Judge Michael Harris – President Appeals Service Tribunal

Spoke about role of the appeals system in delivery of benefits and tax credits:

- New Tribunals Service – with the old system there was a good deal of duplication. Sees this as an opportunity to improve the existing service. Benefit appeals are doing well with regard to meeting hearing date targets. Immigration tribunals are more formal so it would be tempting to shift upwards and make benefit hearings more formal but he is determined to maintain the informal atmosphere of benefit tribunals.
- Tax credits: that the Tribunals Service does not know what settlements are reached; that there should be appeal rights against tax credit overpayments; that tax credits should be included in the Social Security Advisory Committee's remit.
- On welfare reform – envisages an increase in appeals at the beginning but a decrease over time. Believes the Tribunals service will cope with any increases as have done with past influxes.
- Presenting officers - still an absence of them at hearings and no sign of this improving.
- Using alternative dispute resolution – there could be scope for this as there are disputes that should be resolved before getting to a tribunal and believes there must be ways to tackle this. There are plans for a Pilot – not yet started – to explore whether it is possible to reduce the number of cases that come to appeal. Will consult the sector as to the form it should take.

Lord Kirkwood of Kirkhope

Spoke about the adequacy of benefit delivery for families on low incomes and provided a 'critical' overview of delivery issues over the last two decades:

- changes made for changes sake and not always resulting in improvements - loss of experienced staff along the way.

- The pros and cons of a system based on a yearly assessment as against a weekly system.
- Government is not easy and it is important to understand the pressures Departments are under.
- The default position is often responding to things that occur and there are often missed opportunities to create a system that is long-term and sustainable.
- The financial context we currently face is difficult – it has been easier. The DWP cuts – it is not clear whether the cuts will fall equally across agencies. Does not see things getting easier following the Comprehensive Spending Review.
- Too many changes in Ministers in the DWP over the recent period which has led to a delay in welfare reform.
- If Gordon Brown becomes leader: is committed to abolishing child poverty, which is good, but also very committed to means-testing; we can expect him to be more hands-on with policy and less consultative.
- UK is very centralised – need to de-centralise to do something about areas with high deprivation.
- Need to spend more time looking back at operational and delivery issues. A Bill could be worthless if the operational stuff is not sorted.
- On pushing delivery to the voluntary sector – does not think that the voluntary sector should be too quick to say no to this as it could be doing its clients a disservice. Likes to think it could be done, provided independence is retained.

A question and answer session followed, raising the following points:

- System is complex but significant simplification can only be done with significant expenditure unless large numbers lose out.
- Legislation should be in loose-leaf form. It is sheer laziness on the part of legislatures to create new Acts on top of existing provision rather than replacing old with new.
- It is unacceptable to go down road that leads to a lot of losers. Should move

away from means-testing towards universal provision – need to talk-up the importance of universal benefits. Have to recognise complex system to respond to complex range of needs but need to make it simple at the front face – so claimants have a simple claiming experience, regardless of how complex in the back room.

- Many claimants have no voice – how might the voluntary sector help them to have a voice and less of a subsistence existence?
- Would the development of a localised system with regional democratic committees give people more of a voice?
- Is there not a disparity in the welfare system in not being able to appeal against a tax credit overpayment?
- Home visits are most effective form of providing claimant advice – pleased to see that CAB is doing this.
- There is a problem with our constituency electoral system – safe seat system can reinforce problems. Single transferable vote system would overcome this and would also get more women into Parliament and the latter would also help to move policy in this area in a positive direction.
- Need to be pro-active and reach out to the “harder to reach” groups through places they attend and communities they are involved in. Current benefit delivery system is good for the majority but they overlook these groups.
- HMRC philosophy is very different from DWP’s.
- Culture in HMRC is insensitive to the needs of those in receipt of, what are in effect, benefits. HMRC used to negotiating with a person’s accountant – tax credit claimants are not in an equal bargaining position. Only so long HMRC can go on thinking they are different and only so long that people will have faith they will handle cases well. Need to extend authority to include tax credits in SSAC’s remit.
- Voluntary sector continually having to justify it does good work to Local Authority funders. Why can’t funding for voluntary sector be ring-fenced.
- Funders constantly want something new despite need for and excellence of existing services, eg, one organisation applied to the Pension Service for

funding and even though they met the criteria exactly they were turned down because they weren't a new service.

- Old benefit system still had its problems but seemed to be better at getting more client information at the start. Current IT processes do not seem to be good at getting this upfront information.
- System increasingly complex (weekly benefits system and annual tax credit system). Funding reductions mean that people cannot easily get help with accessing the system. System is going to have to be made simpler. The rates for means-tested benefits are similar to contributory benefits which means that the latter make little difference to claimants.
- Voluntary sector should not be too quick to say yes to involving themselves in delivery. The decision will be very difficult - may want to get involved so as to influence the direction of welfare reform but need to think about the impact this will have on the independence and the mission of the organisation. Before we know it we will be subsumed into the functions of the state.
- Some funders are better than others, eg – Big Lotteries which will consider bids for existing services.
- No political party will wipe the slate clean and build a new system.
- A simpler system must be an adequate one.
- Increasingly difficult to get core funding. There needs to be greater recognition of what welfare rights work achieves in terms of its impact upon wider society – on health on local economies. Don't understand why it is so hard to get funding for this sort of work.
- The involvement of non-state providers in delivery is going to happen anyway – will get private companies involved.

In response to the final question - *what one thing would you change in the benefit system to make it fit for the 21st Century* – the panel said:

A: Extend the gateway to anyone who wants to use a welfare-to-work programme

and fund it so that it is able to support everyone. (Lord Kirkwood)

A: Start with a clean sheet. (Judge Harris)

A: Make the system more flexible and accessible to all. (Charlotte Argyle)

A: Rebalance the system from means-testing towards universal provision. (Kate Green)

CPAG would like to thank all those who attended the conference and helped to create lively and interesting discussions.

About CPAG

CPAG is the leading charity campaigning for the abolition of poverty among children and young people in the UK and for the improvement of the lives of low income families. CPAG aims to: raise awareness of the causes, extent, nature and impact of poverty and strategies for its eradication and prevention; bring about positive policy changes for families with children in poverty; and enable those eligible for income maintenance to have access to their full entitlement.

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APPENDIX

Paul Treloar's handout for the Co-operation in delivery workshop

Financial pressures on advice sector

I want to use three examples – the actuality of the situation is much more complex but this gives a good idea of the variety of pressures.

National

The Legal Services Commission (LSC) has recently issued a new strategy for the Community Legal Service, *Making Legal Rights a Reality*, as well as their *Preferred Supplier strategy* consultation. Additionally, Lord Carter's Review of Legal Aid Procurement final report has recently been published, leading to a consultation paper from the Department of Constitutional Affairs, *Legal Aid: A sustainable future*.

Whilst much of the finer detail is still to be thrashed out in respect of these major changes to the civil legal aid system, it is clear that the Commission are only looking to contract with larger suppliers in the future, as well as expecting suppliers to diversify the areas of social welfare law that they work in.

Additionally, civil legal aid contracts will be let on a fixed fee basis, meaning those agencies that can deal with large numbers of clients are at an automatic advantage. Further, contracts are to be unified so that solicitors and not for profit agencies work to the same conditions. Whilst making administrative sense for the Commission, this does favour solicitors, who can bolster legal aid work with private fees – this is not an option for not-for-profit agencies.

These changes, allied to the fact that previous contracts have not even included a basic annual cost of living increase and an approach from the LSC that forced many agencies to specialise in certain categories of social welfare law, has caused a great deal of disquiet amongst current not-for-profit suppliers about their future within the legal aid scheme.

And it is not just about contracting. The Quality Mark (QM) is being phased out, and audits below Specialist Level have essentially ceased. Many funders have, however, taken up the QM as a compulsory proxy requirement of quality and agencies are increasingly reporting difficulties in obtaining funding due to an inability to obtain a QM.

Regional

Fundamental changes to the grants scheme of the Association of London Government (ALG) have brought about a change in approach to funding for voluntary and community groups, from open bidding for grant funding towards a system of commissioning of specific pan-London services. Currently, there are some 79 projects receiving funding under the legal advice section of the grants programme, along with many others under other sectors such as health and social care, women's, etc. Additionally, the ALG provide core funding for three of the second tier advice agencies working in London.

In future, boroughs are to be given much more say in what services the ALG grants scheme should be funding. The ALG Leaders Committee will be setting service priorities for future commissioning of services later this year, based on recommendations of the GC, and there can be no guarantees that legal and advice services will be seen as priority services.

Further, the newly elected Conservative majority on the Grants Committee (GC) have clearly decided to make their mark – at the first meeting of the GC in July, they wanted to recommend to Leaders Committee that there be a 33% reduction in the overall grants budget, in order that savings can be spent by boroughs at a local level. Given the fact that legal advice provision is not a statutory service for local authorities, this could well undermine the legal advice sector in London.

Local

From April 2007, all local authorities should have a local area agreement (LAA) in place, which sets out the vision for improving services to local people, based on local needs and priorities. Rather than central government

saying what the priorities are and the targets that need to be met, LAAs offer an opportunity for local authorities and other local partners to negotiate their own set of targets and performance indicators.

In general, LAAs do not offer new money to local authorities, (except where there is a negotiated 'reward element'), but instead bring together a range of existing funding streams such as the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund. Local authorities and partners can also identify other streams of funding that they would like to be included.

The LAA should be agreed by the local strategic partnership (LSP) and in most cases will focus around four blocks of central government funding that flows into the area:

- children and young people;
- safer and stronger communities;
- healthier communities and older people;
- economic development and enterprise.

Each LAA contains an 'outcomes framework' which sets out the outcomes agreed by partners – eg 'Reduce crime', 'Build respect in communities and reduce anti social behaviour', 'Improved health and reduced health inequalities'. It seems clear that unless advice-related outcomes are included within these frameworks, the opportunity for local advice agencies to secure funding from their local authority will be greatly diminished.

Additionally, the Legal Services Commission's proposals for Community Legal Advice Centres also look to tie up all local authority funding for advice provision into a single advice centre, greatly threatening the diversity of provision locally.

Third sector and public service delivery

In the past few years, Government interest in, and support for third sector, or voluntary and community sector (VCS), organisations has been unprecedented. Examples of this interest can be seen in proposals for:

- modernising the legal and regulatory framework for ‘charities and the wider not-for-profit sector’¹;
- facilitating third sector involvement in public service delivery²; and
- local regeneration and civil renewal schemes³.

However, along with the undoubted potential opportunities to access additional funding, the drive for VCS organisations to move into public service delivery also creates many challenges for these organisations.

To date, attention has mainly been focused on the barriers to VCS organisations taking on public service delivery, in terms of the practical steps needed to facilitate the transfer of public services to the VCS, such as improving the process of contracting.

But it is equally important that we also develop a clear understanding of *why* the government wants VCS organisations to take on public service delivery, and equally importantly, for both the government and the VCS, why it is that many VCS organisations do want to take on public service contracts.

If government is not clear about what it wants to achieve by working with the sector and if it does not properly understand what benefits the sector can bring, then it is unlikely to put in place the right mechanisms to achieve the real transformation in public services that everyone wants to see.

For example, at a recent conference organised by Community Links when launching their Living Values report, the point was made that the government often refer to VCS organisations more effectively engaging with “*Hard-to-reach*” clients than many public service providers. Yet, these “*Hard-to-reach*” people are not born “*Hard-to-reach*”, nor do they consider themselves “*Hard-to-reach*” – it is simply the case that current systems and public services are

¹ Strategy Unit 2002, *Private Action, Public Benefit* Cabinet Office

² HM Treasury, 2002, *The role of the voluntary and community sector in service delivery: a cross-cutting review*; HM Treasury, dti and Home Office, 2005, *Exploring the Role of the Third Sector in public service reform* The Stationery Office

³ For example, Civil Renewal Unit, 2005, *Firm Foundations: the Government’s framework for community capacity building* Home Office

not designed in such a way as to facilitate access or engagement, thus making them “*Hard-to-reach*”.

Unless this crucial point is understood, simply commissioning VCS organisations to deliver existing models of delivery will inevitably mitigate against actually reaching out to the very people that the government want to be better engaging with. Commissioners need to review what it is they value in service delivery, and how that is recognised and rewarded through the procurement process, if they are not to drive out many of the very characteristics and benefits that VCS organisations at their best can bring to public service delivery.

Insofar as the work of VCS advice agencies is concerned, I feel the challenges are actually even greater. Not-for-profit organisations, as they are termed by the Legal Services Commission (LSC), have been involved in contracting with the Commission to deliver social welfare advice for the past 10 years.

Yet, contrary to many of the fine governmental intentions towards full costs recovery from any contracting undertaken, through to longer term assured funding regimes, and up to ensuring that VCS organisations are not punished for failure to meet pre-imposed targets, it is clear that the LSC operate in a completely separate universe to many of these initiatives.

And after 10 years of striving to achieve Quality Marks, of running contracts that haven't even covered basic cost-of-living increases, and of being forced to concentrate on specific areas of social welfare law, rather than taking holistic approaches to clients, the whole playing field is being turfed up as we speak and completely reseeded.

The Quality Mark is quietly being dropped, leading to difficulties with securing funding for some groups; the Preferred Supplier strategy is explicit in that it is looking towards contracting with larger suppliers that can deliver across many areas of law; and, the introduction of fixed fees could encourage suppliers to view clients as units to be dealt with as quickly as possible. This drive to efficiency severely threatens the ability of the very VCS organisations that are

working with the “*Hard-to-Reach*” clients mentioned earlier on to effectively consider, let alone undertake, publicly-funded legal advice work.

Yet, as the National Council for Voluntary Organisations notes, VCS organisations have, quite rightly, endeavoured to become more professional in the way they deliver services but this also has resulted in some confusion. Government and statutory funders need to understand that being more business-like in the way an organisation is managed does not mean being more like business in all respects. VCS organisations are different from both the public and the private sectors. Whilst prudent use of resources is important, they are not seeking a return on shareholder value.

Instead, VCS organisations are mission driven: their objective is to achieve a social, environmental or economic impact. This difference is reflected in their governance structure and the roles and responsibilities of trustees. They do and should operate differently because they are operating with different objectives and different stakeholders. If there are to be new approaches to public service delivery, then statutory partners need to understand and value these differences because they are an important part of the reason why VCS organisations can play a crucial role in helping to achieve the transformation of public services.

Paul Treloar, July 2006

John Wheatley’s handout for Co-operation in delivery workshop

Pension Service Partnership Fund

Background

The Pension Partnership Fund was designed to target Pension Credit claimants. This it has done but the work has resulted in more claims for benefits like Attendance Allowance and DLA than Pension Credit claims according to the data supplied by the

23 bureaux In England and Wales that are project leaders. (Incidentally, there are countless other bureaux involved in Partnership Fund activity but they are “hidden” because they are not named project leaders!)

The Pension Service (PS) data retrieval system is in 3 parts: Start Up reports, monthly statistical data and six monthly written reports. The monthly statistical data is also in three parts and requests information on (1) numbers of activities undertaken, (2) staff hours involved and (3) Outcomes (e.g. how many benefit claims made). This report is based on a combination of all of this information. The Partnership Fund data does not currently require information on numbers of successful claims or actual amounts of money received by claimants. Bureaux **are** required to supply personal details of all new claimants to the PS on a monthly basis. The theory is that the PS match up claims with actual successful claimants thereby producing figures on successful claims and amounts of money received. I understand, however, that the DWP does not currently have enough staff to collate this or any of the other data bureaux supply. The figures given here by bureaux relating to amounts of money successfully claimed are probably accurate but they should still be treated with some caution.

Activities undertaken

As might be expected the range of activities are vast. These range from bureau based activities to external advice sessions and from advising the clients who contact the bureaux to mail shots and home visits.

Some examples of results of activities:

- Darlington CAB, in one month, sent out 240 letters to clients via one local surgery. This resulted in 367 client contacts. In that period one couple had their income increased by £250 per week. In that one month the bureau maximised the income of clients by £19,700.
- NE Derbyshire CAB appointed a caseworker to make contact with “older people in the District of Bolsover. From April to October 2005 the bureau dealt with 230 clients over 60. 119 new benefit claims were submitted and 82 awards were made: 22 x AA, 24 x PC and 16 CTB. The bureau estimates that this equates to over £2000 per week in new payments.
- Grimsby CAB in November 2005 contacted 165 new clients that resulted in 76 claims for benefit.

- Tadley CAB runs a Toppit-Up campaign. For the month of January 2005 the bureau estimates successful benefit claims at £10,250.

Hard to Reach groups

Bureau have engaged in a lot of activity aimed at hard to reach groups. The list of activities has included:

- Aiming local newspaper press releases specifically at the over 75s
- Engaging in partnership with local GP surgeries
- Displays in shopping centres and major shops e.g. Asda
- “Open days” held in local rural towns
- Sessions at libraries, mobile libraries, retirement homes, sheltered accommodation, community centres, retirement group meetings, hospitals and Neighbourhood Watch meetings
- Articles in Parish Newsletters
- Production of leaflets and posters specifically aimed at H to R groups
- Disability Awareness days
- Older Person’s days and Elders Conferences
- Sessions at Patient Participant Groups and over 50s Forums
- Piggy backing on distribution of travel tokens (Tadley)

Partnership Activity

As expected bureaux have made many partnerships arrangements with external agencies. The list includes:

- Local GP surgeries
- Social Services- Occupational Therapists, CPNs, Social Workers
- Housing Associations
- Local Authorities
- Age Concern
- PCTs
- OPAG
- Over 50s Forums
- DIAL
- Library Service
- Mental Health Teams
- Sheltered Accommodation Wardens
- Warm Zones
- District Hospitals
- Community Nurses
- Pension Service

Good news (All figures are approximate)

- A snapshot of 5 bureaux chosen at random during November 2005 shows a total of approx 10,300 mail shots, 196 home visits, and 230 surgeries held. 200 benefit checks were carried out. Approx 320 clients were contacted. As a result 41 PC claims were made and approx 150 claims for a range of 5 other benefits. (Note of caution: in this sample, and in the returns of all bureaux, the numbers of AA claims eclipse the number of PC claims made, by 2 to 1 generally, and 3 to 1 in some places)
- One client was in receipt of £109.45 per week. After CAB intervention her income rose to £195.50 plus full CTB.
- Bureau completed over 125 claims for benefit resulting in £119,000 new money received. (South Holland)
- One client whose only income was SRP, claimed PC and her income rose to £109.45 per week. (Swale)
- One client discovered she was entitled to backdated HB. She received £3,000 in backdated benefit. (Swale)
- Client visited for advice on the Blue Badge scheme. Adviser told her she could be entitled to higher rate AA she successfully received. Client's son also advised to claim for Carers allowance that was successful. (Swale)
- 50 benefits checks carried out in six months, the majority of clients were entitled to Pension Credits. (Swale)
- Elderly couple that had not claimed Attendance Allowance as they thought it would effect the DLA they were receiving. Bureau helped clients to claim Attendance Allowance and Carers allowance for both of them. In turn this meant that they were entitled to Pension Credits and full Housing Benefit. They were also referred to Warm Zone for an assessment. (Alnwick)
- Client received backdate of Severe Disability Premium to 1999. (Salisbury)
- Client received backdate of Severe Disability Premium to 2002. (Salisbury)

- Within a six month period a total of £63,000 worth of benefits had been gained for clients. (Salisbury)
- Couple helped to claim Attendance Allowance and Severe Disability Premium on an existing claim. This gave them entitlement to a Carers Premium, full Housing Benefit and Pension Credits. (Salisbury)
- Within a six month period £36,786 worth of benefits arrears was gained for clients. Projected gains for a 12-month period are £218,971. (North Liverpool)

And last but not least the added value.....

As the Caseworker in the Partnership work was also an adviser with RBL . Many clients therefore got more than just state benefits. One client (although there are many more!) got a new cooker, fridge freezer, TV, stair lift, and a two week holiday!!!

Sam McQueen
National Development Officer
Thursday, 09 February 2006

END