



House of Commons
Work and Pensions Committee

**The Efficiency Savings
Programme in
Jobcentre Plus:
Government Response
to the Committee's
Second Report of
Session 2005–06**

**Second Special Report of Session
2005–06**

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The Work and Pensions Committee

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First Special Report

1. The Work and Pensions Committee agreed its Second Report of Session 2005-06, The Efficiency Savings Programme in Jobcentre Plus, on 8 March 2006. The Report was published on 18 March as House of Commons Paper No. 834.
2. We have now received the Government's Response to this report in the form of a memorandum from the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. This memorandum is printed as an Appendix to this Special Report.

Government response

INTRODUCTION

The Government welcomes the Second Report of the Work and Pensions Select Committee Session 2005/06 on the Efficiency Programme in Jobcentre Plus. The report commends the efforts of Jobcentre Plus staff in dealing with sometimes vulnerable people, but states that, in the Committee's opinion, too much is being done too quickly as organisational changes have overlapped with a wide ranging Efficiency Programme. The Government accepts that not everything has gone perfectly in Jobcentre Plus over the last year and that there were, and remain, some areas of difficulty. But the Government does not recognise the entirety of the picture painted of Jobcentre Plus by the Committee's report, particularly in its summary. Jobcentre Plus has, over the last year, continued to deliver the great majority of its services to time and budget; it has hit or exceeded the majority of its targets for 2005-06 and the overall satisfaction levels of its customers remain high. That reflects the very considerable efforts of the Agency's managers and staff.

Jobcentre Plus – an Executive Agency of the Department for Work and Pensions - plays a crucial role in delivering the Government's strategy. It has made an important contribution to the Government's achievements in reducing long-term unemployment and unemployment amongst young people, and is now at the forefront of the Government's drive to support more lone parents and people with a health condition or disability into work. The challenges for Jobcentre Plus include extending its services even further to those groups that are missing out on the benefits of economic growth, and at the same time responding to the rising expectations of customers - including access to those services through the use of new technology.

As the Committee said in its report, Jobcentre Plus is a major organisation with around 71,000 staff dealing with some 235 million customer contacts per year. Every working day it conducts 36,000 work-focused interviews with customers and pays out more than £100 million in working age benefits. The Government must balance the needs of customers of the service and the cost to the taxpayer. Jobcentre Plus, in common with all parts of the Department for Work and Pensions, has been asked to deliver the efficiency savings

announced in April 2004 and is on track to do so with major financial savings to the taxpayer.

The Government has recently made a considerable investment to modernise the Department for Work and Pensions and its Agencies, to begin to automate some of the labour intensive processing work, to remove duplication and rationalise its service delivery, and to manage with a smaller corporate centre and support services. Clearly, a transition of this kind requires major changes to the Department's IT systems, organisation and ways of working.

The Government accepts that this scale of change brings consequent risks to the quality of service offered by Jobcentre Plus in the short term. But the improvements under way will achieve a better customer experience overall through more cost effective means of delivery and concentrating proportionately more resource in customer facing areas. The customer will experience more professional and welcoming offices (which the Committee noted), more flexibility in the ways they can contact services, greater targeted support for those who need most help, and improved accuracy and timeliness of payments.

The Government accepts that there were short-term problems in the Jobcentre Plus Contact Centre network in 2005. However, prompt action was taken and service standards were restored to a level consistent with industry standards well before the Committee reported. Those problems should also be set in context. Jobcentre Plus continues to provide an excellent service for the great majority of its customers. From April 2005 to January 2006, it helped over 700,000 people into work, and exceeded its target for employer satisfaction. It has more than halved the amount of fraud in the benefits system since the baseline in 1998.

The Government has already achieved a great deal in providing benefit and labour market services more efficiently and with fewer staff. Jobcentre Plus has contributed to that by focusing on frontline staff while undergoing one of the biggest transformation programmes in Europe. Jobcentre Plus must maintain performance, continue the reduction in staff numbers, continue the transformation of the organisation, and most importantly, continue supporting many more customers to find work. Many lessons have been learned by Jobcentre Plus and implemented in the last year. These primarily address the risks to customer service as the Agency completed its organisational change and modernisation.

The Government acknowledges that some areas will need close management attention this year. In particular, Jobcentre Plus must make more progress in improving its benefit clearance times and has been set stretching targets to drive that improvement.

RESPONSE TO THE COMMITTEE'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We commend the efforts that have been made by Jobcentre Plus to avoid compulsory redundancies. We agree that this should be a method of last resort. We ask Jobcentre Plus to set out what proportion of the £500m set aside across the DWP for early retirement and severance schemes it expects to use. (Paragraph 27)

Jobcentre Plus was allocated early release funding of £99.4m for the 2005/06 financial year and has a provisional allocation of £50.93m for 2006/07, and expects to fully use this funding. The Department for Work and Pensions has provision of £176m for 2007/8, but

decisions have not yet been made on how much of this will be allocated to Jobcentre Plus or other DWP businesses.

2. We are concerned that the strictly temporary re-deployment of staff from Jobcentre Plus to the CSA may be bad for morale. Staff should have some choice in the permanent job they accept at the end of such a temporary redeployment, either in Jobcentre Plus or the Child Support Agency. (Paragraph 31)

Where transfers of staff from Jobcentre Plus to the Child Support Agency have taken place, they have been transfers to permanent posts, to make the best use of existing trained staff in these localities and to avoid compulsory redundancy wherever possible.

3. We conclude – and this is a theme which will recur throughout this report – that it is not enough for Jobcentre Plus staff simply to be placed in front-line roles, they must be trained properly and appraised carefully so they are able to help vulnerable people in a constructive way. This will be different from training staff who have been hired from outside DWP. We recommend that the DWP sets out the headlines of its staff redeployment strategy for the period until 2008, including its key milestones and targets, the amount it is going to spend, per head, on training staff who are redeployed and the number of Agency staff and contractors it expects to use. (Paragraph 36)

It is fully accepted that staff should receive the training necessary to enable them to execute their duties effectively, whether they are new recruits, or are transferred within or between Departments. DWP is committed to careful workforce planning to enable the fullest possible redeployment of staff. Jobcentre Plus will be investing an average of 6 days per person, per year, on learning and development in 2006-07. This is tailored to individuals' needs and recognises that some people will need more support than others, particularly when moving to new roles. Agency and contract staff will only be used to cover short-term gaps on an interim basis.

4. Jobcentre Plus has told us that it is on track to meet its target financial savings for 2005/06 by living within its budget. We ask the Department to supply this Committee with a memorandum setting out its unaudited performance against budget by the time the House rises for the 2006 summer recess. (Paragraph 41)

It is intended to have the unaudited accounts available, with a full comparison against budget by the time the House rises.

5. We are concerned that significant amounts of regular overtime should not be used as a way to compensate for job losses resulting from the efficiency savings programme and ask DWP to keep us informed of the cost implications. (Paragraph 44)

The unaudited accounts will include information on overtime costs. Overtime is generally used to address specific peaks of work (for example clearing backlogs) rather than to cover for staff losses or absences. It is not Jobcentre Plus policy to use overtime to cover for staff losses and reductions and it is not a feature of the Agency's workforce plans during the course of the efficiency review.

6. We have concerns about a number of aspects of the efficiency programme. Too much has been done too quickly, in our view, and services and programmes have suffered as a result. These may have been short-term problems, but while they lasted services suffered and, in our view, that is not acceptable. (Paragraph 55)

The Jobcentre Plus efficiency programme involves a wide range of initiatives, as described to the Committee in evidence, including many that are designed to improve or protect the customer experience. Payment Modernisation provides a more secure and convenient means of receiving benefits payments, while also saving staff time in handling the old style order books and girocheques. The Jobcentre Plus structural reorganisation will reduce the proportion of staff deployed on management and support tasks significantly. Like all major organisations, Jobcentre Plus does not get it right on every single occasion, however carefully changes are planned and implemented. Short-term problems were experienced in the Contact Centre network in 2005 but action was taken quickly which resolved this issue and the lessons learned from this experience have been built into future plans.

7. We therefore recommend that the pace of headcount reductions in Jobcentre Plus should be slowed until all Contact Centres are running the full Customer Management System process. We recognise that natural wastage will continue, and that some redeployment will be necessary to fill these posts, but we would urge that additional strategic redeployment and voluntary release schemes be put on hold. This time should be used to reassess the DWP's redeployment strategy and plan to ensure the poor performance of the Centres in Summer 2005 does not happen again in summer 2006. (Paragraph 56)

The Jobcentre Plus contribution to the Department for Work and Pensions' efficiency headcount savings is approximately 14,300 full-time equivalent posts. The majority of these headcount efficiencies, just over 10,000, had been made by the end of the 2005/06 financial year, in accordance with the profile agreed with the Department, leaving a net challenge of just over 4,000 over the subsequent two years. Further release schemes will only be considered once detailed workforce plans have been completed and all redeployment into known vacancies has been exhausted.

8. Departments have agreed to provide the Office of Government Commerce with quarterly updates on their progress against the efficiency challenge. We ask DWP and Jobcentre Plus to make those reports available to this Committee, if necessary on a confidential basis. (Paragraph 57)

The Department reports on performance to Parliament and the public in a number of ways including through the Budget, the Pre Budget Report, the Autumn Performance Report and Departmental Reports. The Government instituted quarterly reporting for Departments against their efficiency targets to enable the centre of Government to monitor and direct the achievement of those targets. The principle of confidentiality underpinning those reports is essential to ensure absolute openness and honesty in reporting and reports are not published by Departments. The Government believes that the disclosure of quarterly reports could be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.

9. We note the Department's new contract with EDS. We are sceptical that EDS and the DWP can both make financial gains from it. We intend to conduct further scrutiny of this contract as it progresses to ensure that the promised savings and performance improvements have been delivered, and recommend that the Department reports progress to us on an annual basis. We also ask the DWP to supply the Committee with further information on the details of the contract, if necessary on a confidential basis. (Paragraph 61)

10. Given that the new telephony contract is so important to the delivery of efficiency savings, we ask the Department to agree to provide us with annual progress reports. (Paragraph 63)

The Department will report progress on the EDS and Telephony contracts to the Committee on an annual basis from Spring 2007. Additionally, the Department is happy to try to meet any requests from the Committee for further information, in confidence, on the key features of the contract.

11. We welcome the Minister's assurance that there is no intention to take any of the Department's business overseas at present. We would expect this Committee to be informed at an early stage if any such plans were made. (Paragraph 69)

In order to make the Department more efficient in delivering good quality services to our customers, the Department will continue to explore the opportunities for outsourcing/contesting where these provide good value for money for the taxpayer. However, the Department has not moved any of its jobs off-shore and has no intention of doing so.

12. We recommend that in future the DWP and Jobcentre Plus ensure that the links to the publicly available performance information are working and that the information is kept up to date. (Paragraph 72)

Performance against Jobcentre Plus' main targets is made available on its website. Job Entry Target, Customer Service Target, and Employer Outcome Target reports are all available on a quarterly basis around a month after the end of the quarterly performance period. Performance against the Business Delivery and Monetary Value of Fraud and Error targets is delayed until the performance has been validated which can take from 9 to 12 months. In the light of the Committee's findings Jobcentre Plus will review the presentation of performance information on the Jobcentre Plus website during the first quarter of 2006-07 to improve presentation of the performance data and reflect changes to Jobcentre Plus targets. As part of this, the website will show when the next set of data will be published.

13. We note the recent modest improvement in performance against the job entry target, and commend the efforts of Jobcentre Plus staff in achieving it. We hope that the performance against profile will continue to improve and reverse the trend. We intend to monitor the implications of the introduction of the Job Outcome Target and will return to this later in the year. (Paragraph 79)

The Committee's acknowledgement of progress is welcomed. Efforts to maximise Job Entry Performance to the end of the year continued, with the final position being an achievement of 97.1% of the 2005-06 target. This shows a recovery in performance from being 7% below target profile at the mid-year stage.

14. We are seriously concerned about the 90,400 rise in the claimant count over the last year, although we note that there was a modest fall (2,000) between December 2005 and January 2006. If the increase in the claimant count continues it will undermine the efficiency savings programme. There is a question to be answered about the extent to which reductions in employment and training programmes, and other Jobcentre Plus activity, have contributed to this. We recommend the DWP confirms that the forthcoming feasibility study on assessing the impact of Jobcentre Plus on macroeconomic variables will include its impact on the claimant count and, if not, commission specific research on this point. (Paragraph 86)

The macro-economic evaluation has the aim of assessing the impact of the policies that are delivered by Jobcentre Plus rather than the effect of changes in the numbers and methods of delivering those policies.

It will also focus on all client groups and not just JSA customers. Therefore, it is unlikely to be able to answer the Committee's question directly. However, before the study starts in the Summer of 2006, the Department will ensure that it takes as full account as possible of the views of the Committee.

DWP has undertaken a considerable amount of analysis of the rise in the claimant count. Claimant unemployment has risen by 126,500 to 945,500 between February 2005 - when the rise began - and April 2006 (the latest seasonally adjusted figures). Yet, the latest employment figures for the year to January-March 2006 show a rise in employment of 217,000 to 28,679,000. Also, the numbers on incapacity and lone parent benefits have fallen by 79,000 in the year to November 2005.

15. We commend the overall good performance of Jobcentre Plus against the employer outcome target. (Paragraph 89)

The Government is pleased that the Committee recognise the overall good performance of Jobcentre Plus on the employer outcome target.

16. We are not surprised that the performance figures for Contact Centres were so bad, given the volume of evidence we received on the events in Contact Centres in the summer of 2005, on which we expand in the next section of this report. But they are exceedingly poor. In this case the average concealed huge variations in performance, and we are disappointed that Jobcentre Plus did not draw this to our attention. (Paragraph 93)

The Committee commented on Contact Centre performance against the Customer Service Target. This target is measured on a sample basis, using "Mystery Shoppers", and is calculated to give a statistically valid score for Jobcentre Plus as a whole, each quarter. Performance scores below national level are not statistically valid for any subsets of the

organisation, and significant fluctuations from the average are expected. For other reasons connected with sample size and timing, the Contact Centre performance scores will not necessarily properly reflect performance at individual Contact Centre level. It is for these reasons that Jobcentre Plus did not draw the figures to the Committee's attention.

17. The DWP has acknowledged that the efficiency savings programme is having “a detrimental impact” on accuracy levels and that its task as far as Income Support accuracy is concerned is “halting the slide”. Stabilising accuracy levels must be a high priority for Jobcentre Plus and we recommend that the DWP sets out its recovery plan with targets and milestones until March 2008. (Paragraph 104)

The latest available performance information on Income Support Accuracy, subject to validation through the case checking process, gives the interim cumulative position to the end of March 2006 as 89.4% against the 90% target. The final performance position for 2005-06 is expected in October 2006.

The Department publishes targets and milestones in the business plans of both the Department and its Agencies. Jobcentre Plus publishes annual performance targets for Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance and Incapacity Benefit accuracy as part of the Business Delivery Target in its annual business plan. Validated performance against those targets is also published in the Agency's Annual Report and Accounts.

Jobcentre Plus will improve Income Support (IS) accuracy in 3 phases:

Phase 1: Short term measures – halting the decline in the worst performing Districts through revised Improvement Plans;

Phase 2: Medium term measures – stabilisation of performance where the decline has been halted, through introducing a Standard Operating Model and additional management checks;

Phase 3: Longer-term measures – reducing the variation in performance between Benefit Delivery Centres.

18. While the current set of performance indicators for Jobcentre Plus correctly tries to come at the problem from different points of view, we have three particular concerns which the DWP and Jobcentre Plus should address. The first is that key headline indicators are measured in national averages. As we saw with the Customer Service Target, this can conceal huge variations in performance across the organisation. The second is that two key aspects of the current set of Jobcentre Plus performance indicators are changing this year. The Monetary Value of Fraud and Error is to be measured against a new baseline, and the Job Entry Target is being replaced. There will therefore be a lack of continuity in measurement over the efficiency savings period. The third is that there is a lack of clear, accessible, public reporting on the Agency's performance against its efficiency challenge, with little detail in the Autumn Performance Report. The presentation of its performance data on the website should also be improved and kept up to date. (Paragraph 109)

On the first point, it is important that headline performance targets are clear, simple and reflect performance accountability at a national level. Where possible, and subject to statistical validity, there is transparent public performance reporting at Regional, District and Business Unit level that allows performance comparisons to be made. The position varies from target to target, depending on measurement systems and sample sizes. For example, for the Monetary Value of Fraud and Error (MVFE) target, performance is reported down to Regional level, whereas Job Entry data is published at Business Unit level.

On the second point, the new baseline for the Monetary Value of Fraud and Error (MVFE) target, due to be set for year ending March 2006, does not jeopardise the continuity of the target. The present fraud and error measurement system for Income Support and Jobseekers' Allowance was developed almost ten years ago. Since then, the benefit system, its procedures and delivery mechanisms have changed. Also, the methodology for measuring fraud and error has improved over time in line with greater understanding of the causes of fraud and error. It is therefore recognised that there is a need for a new baseline to incorporate these factors. During 2005/06, Jobcentre Plus are running two parallel measures – the original methodology to report against the SR02 target which expires in March 2006; and the new methodology to set the baseline to report against the SR04 target which starts from April 2006. This has been done in consultation and agreement with the National Audit Office.

Achievement of the new Job Outcome Target (JOT) will be measured using more comprehensive information about people finding work, including those who find work through new channels. This will encourage the most cost effective use of new self-service channels for those customers who can help themselves, and enable Personal Advisers to focus intensive support on the hardest to help. It will also reduce the time spent by staff on activities to capture, measure and validate current job entry performance. Historical data is available for job outcomes following the introduction of JOT, so continuity of information will be available.

On the third point, the Government set out the efficiency targets to be achieved by Departments in its 2004 Spending Review (Cm 6237). The measures used to assess efficiency gains are set out in published Efficiency Technical Notes. The Government agrees that there should be parliamentary and public accountability for the delivery of the agreed efficiency targets, but also recognises that Departments need to have the flexibility to manage efficiency gains across time and across their business areas.

19. We are not convinced that the current measurement system is sufficient to prove positively that performance is not deteriorating and ask the DWP and Jobcentre Plus to expand on the comment in the Department's Efficiency Technical Note that their output measures will be adjusted to reflect qualitative factors. (Paragraph 110)

The Government believes that the measures in the Efficiency Technical Note already demonstrate that performance is not deteriorating. The output index for Jobcentre Plus benefit processing takes account of quality by excluding cases which are not paid correctly, so if average accuracy falls, so too will the measure of output. Supporting quality information will include clearance time and customer service measures and the level of fraud and error.

The proposed job-broking index is the total number of job entries (or outcomes) achieved, weighted by the points scores, which Jobcentre Plus uses to signal to staff the value placed on outcomes achieved. Analysis has shown that although the point scores were designed mainly to incentivise staff rather than as measures of social and economic value, they broadly reflect the net fiscal benefit to the Exchequer of moving a customer off welfare and into employment. Thus the index measures the contribution of Jobcentre Plus outputs to the Government's priorities.

20. In the light of our comments on the current performance measurement system and in particular the need to improve the way service quality is measured, we recommend that the DWP should commission six-monthly reports on how Jobcentre Plus is proceeding with its efficiency savings programme as a supplement to its quarterly reports to the Office of Government Commerce. The preparation of these reports should involve the Agency's wider stakeholder community. The reports should be made available to members of the Committee and members of the House. (Paragraph 116)

As stated in response to Recommendation 8 of the Committee's report the Government believes that the principle of confidentiality must apply to Departments' efficiency reports to the centre of Government.

21. We conclude that the service delivered by many Jobcentre Plus Contact Centres to their customers suffered a catastrophic failure in the summer of 2005. This led to additional hardship among the most vulnerable in society. A mix of IT problems, staffing issues and poor change management planning was to blame, in our view, and we do not accept that this was purely a staffing problem. (Paragraph 147)

22. It is clear that Jobcentre Plus staff at all levels have worked hard to recover service levels since the summer, and we sincerely commend the sum of their individual efforts. But the current system, with some Contact Centres operating adjusted processes, is not sustainable or robust, and adds significantly to staff costs until the problems are solved. Recovery in Contact Centres from the problems of 2005 will only be complete when all Centres are running CMS successfully. (Paragraph 157)

Jobcentre Plus have learnt key lessons on Contact Centre management from its experiences last Summer in particular on forecasting demand and matching with staffing. These were implemented successfully to meet the expected peak of claims in January 2006.

However, the Government does not accept that "catastrophic failure" is a measured assessment of the short-term problems which occurred in 9 Contact Centres in the Summer of 2005, particularly within the overall context of Jobcentre Plus' record in helping millions of people into work and extending work-focused support to many more customers than ever before. It is a central part of the Government's welfare to work approach to make customer access to benefit services as convenient as possible, ensuring accurate and prompt payments whilst including a work-focused approach to all working age customers. The use of CMS is integral to delivering this by allowing for the single, accurate capture of information at the front end of the process Jobcentre Plus continues to develop CMS to improve the support it provides to staff and customers and its robustness.

23. We are, to say the least, surprised that neither the Chief Executive or Minister saw fit to mention to the Committee that there had been a national CMS failure the week before they appeared before us, and that this information was only revealed to us as we were finalising our report. We expect an explanation for this serious omission. (Paragraph 158)

The national CMS failure on 18 January lasted just under one hour and resulted in the Middlesbrough Contact Centre adopting contingency clerical procedures for 10 minutes. This is set within the context of a series of occasions in December and January when short term CMS problems were experienced. Neither the Minister nor the Chief Executive were aware of this incident at the time and therefore were unable to provide such detail to the Committee at the hearing, although this was provided subsequently in supplementary questions in correspondence.

24. We look to DWP and Jobcentre Plus to keep the Committee informed as the migration back to CMS continues and recommend that they issue a Written Statement to notify the House when and if the process is complete. (Paragraph 159)

Jobcentre Plus will write to the Select Committee to advise of progress. Considerable progress has already been made in this area and Jobcentre Plus is currently planning the recovery action for the remaining Contact Centres. The aim is for all sites to be operating fully as soon as it practicable and safe to do so and no later than the end of October. The Government will consider the most appropriate means of communicating completion to the House.

25. The poor performance of the processing systems for Income Support and Jobseekers Allowance claims is rightly a matter of concern for Jobcentre Plus. We ask for a detailed progress report as soon as possible after the release of CMS 3.5. (Paragraph 166)

A progress report will be provided to the Committee by Summer recess.

26. The fact so much money - £362m - has been, or will be, spent to take forward a system which is now set to be replaced as part of another major project, is of concern to us. We recommend that Jobcentre Plus and DWP explain precisely when the different parts of CMS are being replaced, and the overall timetable for the BPRP/WATCH2 project. We would also question whether the risks and expense of this part of the project are worthwhile given the Department's recent track record with the CMS project, and believe that DWP should consider whether a more incremental approach of smaller-scale modular improvements may prove more manageable, less risky, less costly and, ultimately, have a higher chance of success. (Paragraph 171)

The Department fully supports an incremental approach to change delivery in order to reduce risk and increase the likelihood of success. The Department has also to keep pace with technology advances, giving the best possible support to business change which makes it necessary to replace systems at the appropriate point in the life cycle.

In the light of the requirement to implement a new Employment Support Allowance, announced this January in the Green Paper 'A New Deal for Welfare: Empowering People to Work', and as part of the Department's normal governance processes, the Department has decided to make the introduction of the new Employment Support Allowance first priority for the Benefits Processing Replacement Programme. Existing IT systems will be employed as far as possible to deliver this. The rest of the Programme will make maximum use of existing capabilities and systems including CMS. Therefore it is likely that elements of CMS will be improved and retained for some time to come.

27. The need to replace CMS immediately after such an extensive redevelopment project raises two further questions. Firstly, has the large amount of public money spent of redeveloping CMS simply been wasted – could this have been incorporated in a single project? Secondly, will the planned new system (if it is implemented successfully) mean that significant additional efficiency savings will be available from the Department in due course? (Paragraph 172)

CMS was designed to provide more accurate data capture for benefit claims. It is a project supporting the transformation of Jobcentre Plus and as a pathfinder project leads the way in providing modern service delivery for our customers. In this way, CMS is a forerunner of the benefits change programme and such an incremental approach to IT change projects maximises the chance of successful delivery of both cultural and IT changes.

28. We conclude that the script does not prevent misinformation and that a certain level of knowledge of the benefits system is needed to prevent customers being given misleading information about potential entitlement. We therefore recommend that Jobcentre Plus increases the level of training for those who join Contact Centres without a knowledge of the benefits system, recognises the value of experience with benefits advice of some of its First Contact Officers and works both to refine the script and to accept a certain amount of deviation from it. (Paragraph 182)

Learning for all Contact Centre staff is planned and delivered based on individual needs. This means that the amount of learning any individual undertakes can be flexible to meet their level of knowledge or experience.

29. We are also concerned about the impact on claimants from errors made when data is entered incorrectly or for inappropriate entitlements. The decision-making and appeals systems must ensure that errors made at that very first stage can be corrected expeditiously. (Paragraph 183)

Where errors in entitlement are identified, decision-making legislation and processes enable them to be corrected immediately. Accuracy is an important consideration as Jobcentre Plus continues to improve its processes.

30. Given DWP's client base, it is self-evident to us that a welcoming, local, face-to-face presence needs to be part of its delivery strategy. We welcome the Chief Executive's admission that not enough has been done to help those customers who go into Jobcentre Plus offices to make a claim and we ask Jobcentre Plus to set out how it will

revise its strategy in future and ensure that this is adhered to on the ground. (Paragraph 194)

The Government is committed to making best use of resources to provide an effective service to customers, which recognises and responds to their different needs. Face-to-face services are the most resource-intensive and it is important they are used effectively. The Government recognises the important role of the Jobcentre network in providing a face-to-face service, especially for those customers who are unable to use self-service or telephone channels. It has invested in modern customer-friendly offices, and the rollout of these will be substantially complete by July 2006.

Customers who are unable to make a claim by telephoning a Contact Centre (including someone acting on their behalf), can make a claim in person, by post or, if necessary, by an arranged visit at home or other location.

The Department is reviewing its Business and Channel Strategies to inform current and future service delivery. This review will include clear messages for customers, staff and intermediaries on the services available, how they can be accessed and suitable alternative channels for those customers for whom the preferred route is not appropriate.

In revised Customer Service Standards, introduced from 3 April 2006, the Government sets out the level of service customers can expect. Customer service measures and targets are being reviewed to ensure that service delivery levels and customer satisfaction across all channels can be fully measured. Messages have been provided to ensure staff understand the requirement to provide a flexible, professional service, which meets the customer's need.

31. We welcome the clarification by Jobcentre Plus that Warm Phones can be used for calls to Contact Centres and that facilities for customers to take outbound calls from Contact Centres will be made available in every Local Service Outlet. (Paragraph 195)

The Government welcomes the Committee's comments.

32. We recommend that Standard Operating Models for the major benefits be completed as a matter of urgency. (Paragraph 197)

The design of a single Standard Operating Model across all major benefits, and some others, is nearing completion. Implementation of these standard processes is linked to the Government's commitment to transform operations and reduce performance variations. As part of the rollout of the new Jobcentre Plus service, which is in the final phase, the standard model for people making new and repeat claims to Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance and Incapacity Benefit has been in use since January 2005. The standard model for maintaining benefit claims that are already in payment, covering the processes required to handle changes to customers' circumstances and the processes around decision making and appeals, will be mandatory in all benefit delivery centres as they are rolled out from April 2006.

33. Those eligible for Crisis Loans are, by definition, already in circumstances of extreme hardship. We believe, therefore, that it was unwise to pilot a revised model of

Social Fund applications at the same time as major systems changes to the benefits application process were underway. The claims process must reflect the vulnerability of this client group and a choice of application methods must be made available. We also recommend that DWP should commission research into the fall in the number of Crisis Loan applications and the extent to which this is linked to the new application model. (Paragraph 203)

Social Fund legislation was changed in October 2002 to enable Crisis Loan applications to be taken by telephone, offering customers better access. This is an additional facility. Customers who are unable or unwilling to make their applications by telephone may still apply and receive decisions face-to-face at Jobcentre Plus offices, or apply by post. Since 2002 the number of applications for Crisis Loans has remained broadly the same at 1.3m per year. The Government monitors the figures and would consider examining the reasons for any significant variation.

Jobcentre Plus is developing a Standard Operating Model for the Social Fund. This will be introduced across the organisation as centralised Benefit Delivery Centres are rolled out. As part of this work a standard telephone-based process for handling Crisis Loans was piloted in Wales in 2004/05. The pilot was small scale – the office concerned handles only 0.5% of national Crisis Loan applications – and there is no reason to believe that the pilot had any effect on the overall number of applications to the Fund.

34. If Jobcentre Plus is moving from being a free access, face-to-face based service towards being primarily a Contact Centre organisation, it does not seem fair for the cost of access to its key services to be chargeable to clients. We welcome the news that a pilot is proposed that would mean benefit claimants calling an 0800 number. We are surprised that this was not brought to the Committee's attention earlier. We ask DWP and Jobcentre Plus for further details of the pilot, including areas, timings and projected costs, and a explanation of how the system will reflect the needs of those with pay-as-you-go mobiles. (Paragraph 208)

The current business model agreed since Jobcentre Plus's inception in 2002 is that the customer makes contact with Jobcentre Plus via a Contact Centre. They make a short call to the Contact Centre and the majority of the information is then gathered when the customer is called back. Contact Centres take claims to benefit and provide information on jobs. Jobcentre Plus continues to provide free, face-to-face jobsearch advice and support through the extensive Jobcentre network. Jobcentre Plus is currently piloting a revised process for handling new and repeat benefit claims, designed to improve access and to improve speed and quality. The 0800 number is free from landlines, so customers in the pilot are encouraged to use landlines to claim benefit whenever possible. The pilot started for customers in Grimsby, Scunthorpe, Barton-on-Humber and Immingham on 24 February and extended to customers covered by Jobcentre Plus's Central London District on 24 April. The pilot is scheduled to run until the end of July when it will be evaluated and a decision on further rollout made. The projected cost of setting up and running the pilot is estimated at £300,000.

35. We ask Jobcentre Plus to set out its strategy for the development of a secure web application facility for the major benefits, and to include in that strategy plans for

ensuring that those with low incomes and those least likely to use the internet will be able to access such an additional facility. (Paragraph 213)

Further to the Prime Minister's commitment made in the Modernising Government White Paper of March 1999, the Department has introduced new benefit claim services online. This allows customers to both complete and submit an e-enabled claim form to each of its four main Businesses - The Pension Service, the Disability & Carers Service, the Child Support Agency and Jobcentre Plus (in a limited number of regions). The service became available to the public on 20 March 2006.

In order to build up this service in a sustainable fashion, the Department has initiated an incremental rollout with low-key publicity. However, from Summer 2006, the service will be more widely publicised and, as part of this, it will be made clear that it can be accessed from Public Libraries and similar outlets. A number of Customer Representative Groups, including Citizens Advice Bureaux and Local Authority Welfare Rights Advisors, have had the opportunity to contribute to the development of the service.

36. We are concerned at the impact the closure of Local Service Outlets is having in both urban and rural areas both on local networks and on individual claimants in terms of the cost and inconvenience of additional travelling time. We have noted the points made in evidence to us that many claimants have to access the system via remote centres outside their area, for example London, and consider that people in need should be able to access Jobcentre Plus facilities near to them. (Paragraph 221)

37. We recommend that DWP and Jobcentre Plus publish the criteria which have been developed for deciding which offices should be closed, and a list of the offices which it plans to close (a) as the new model of Jobcentre Plus offices is rolled out and (b) as a result of changes in demand together with details of whatever new local facilities are planned to replace them, if any. (Paragraph 222)

38. We ask for clarification of two written answers that appeared in December. One stated that "very few" customers should have to travel more than five miles "other than in the most remote rural areas" to access Jobcentre Plus services; the other used the same wording for 20 miles. We ask Jobcentre Plus to define what is meant by "very few" in each case. (Paragraph 223)

Jobcentre Plus aims to provide services that are readily accessible to people who need them and is introducing a network of offices more suited to delivery of its new business processes. This network is kept under close review, as more services become accessible by telephone and Internet. Many of the 1500 offices which Jobcentre Plus inherited from the former Agencies were unsuitable – physically or geographically - for delivering its new business. Many were unsuitable for conversion. In some locations services could be rationalised into a single building. In others, new space had to be acquired in order to deliver the integrated services. In each District, detailed service delivery planning exercises were undertaken in consultation with local stakeholders, identifying sites suitable for conversion to the new standard, together with those sites that would close.

The network – when complete - will comprise around 850 Jobcentres, with “outreach” or “flexible services” delivered from around a further 180 locations, together with a network of Contact Centres and Benefit Delivery Centres (processing centres). These “outreach” or “flexible” services are in response to a need for services in particular locations and will vary according to local need. In some places, they consist of interview or advisory facilities (provided on a part-time appointment, or ad-hoc basis), a touch-screen Jobpoint displaying the full range of Jobcentre Plus vacancies, and a customer access telephone to facilitate access to the nearest office or Contact Centre.

Altogether, by the end of the programme, Jobcentre Plus expects to have closed some 630 offices as a result of this activity. A list of sites planned for closure as the new model is rolled out was provided in response to a Parliamentary Question tabled on 13 February. The sites are listed in Annex A, which also lists the 35 sites that will close as a direct consequence of the centralisation of benefit processing work. In addition, as part of the ongoing efficiency programme for Jobcentre Plus, there will be a continuing review of the viability of the number of sites in the light of changing demand for front-facing services and increasing availability of new channels for accessing services.

Where customers are likely to be affected by office closures, the closure is only undertaken after extensive local consultation. District Managers are asked to consult a wide range of stakeholders, including local MPs, MEPs, MSPs, Members of the National Assembly of Wales, local councillors, employers and customer representative groups.

When undertaking service delivery planning and in all other closures (including those arising as a result of efficiency and changing demand) managers consider the availability of public transport and any additional costs likely to be incurred by customers, as well as journey times. In general, customers are not expected to have to travel more than one hour by public transport to the nearest local office.

Where customers are expected to attend a Jobcentre every fortnight as a condition of receiving Jobseekers Allowance, postal signing facilities can be considered if the journey is more than one hour door to door or if they would be absent from home for more than four hours if they travel by public transport. If a customer is asked to attend an interview on a day when they do not normally attend the office, financial assistance with transport costs can be offered. Special arrangements can also be made for people with disabilities or mobility difficulties.

Precise national information on the distance that customers have to travel to reach one of its offices is not available. However, based on local knowledge, it is Jobcentre Plus’s view that only a small number would have to travel more than five miles, and that an even smaller number – in the most remote locations (where there are generally already flexible outreach services in place for meeting their needs) – would have to travel twenty miles or more.

In addition to travel considerations, there are a number of other criteria that are taken into account when considering the viability of an office, including business volumes, resources, costs and the ability of other offices to absorb the extra work.

These criteria are used as a framework for informing closure decisions. No single criterion will necessarily be the determining factor – rather, they are weighed and assessed before a recommendation to close is made.

There are long established rules for reimbursing travelling costs for Jobseeker's Allowance customers attending a Work Focused Interview, principally where the interview does not fall on their normal signing day. For normal fortnightly attendance to sign-on, customers are expected to meet the cost of their journey to the office. Where the closure of an office means customers having to travel over an hour to the nearest office, Jobcentre Plus will consider if postal signing is appropriate. Customers in receipt of Income Support and Incapacity Benefit can claim for reimbursement of their expenses in a similar way when requested to attend the office.

39. We also recommend that changes of opening hours and services offered should also, where these amount to a significant reduction in the services offered, always be subject to consultation with local advice agencies, community groups, customer representative groups and Members of Parliament. We ask Jobcentre Plus to set out the criteria they use in deciding whether or not a proposed change is significant. (Paragraph 224)

Jobcentre Plus Offices will normally open from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm every working day with a later opening one day per week to support staff development. The day of the week will vary from office to office depending on local circumstances. (There are a very small number of offices, which operate fewer hours meeting local needs, and these are gradually being phased out). Key stakeholders are consulted on how customer services will be delivered when major changes of opening hours are proposed. Jobcentre Plus has completed reviewing the criteria for changes to opening hours and an update will be made available to the Select Committee by Summer recess.

40. We recommend that Jobcentre Plus ensure that a private interview space is made available in all locations where its services are delivered. (Paragraph 227)

It is Jobcentre Plus policy to make an appointment for customers who request an interview in private surroundings. All new Jobcentre Plus offices take full account of the need for privacy as well as accessibility and safety for customers and staff. The provision of private interview facilities in third party premises is largely dependent on what can be made available by the third party host. While Jobcentre Plus will try to secure this facility, there will be some locations in which it will not always be possible for a customer to be interviewed in a private room. Jobcentre Plus aims to handle all interviews with care and sensitivity.

41. We will continue to monitor the impact of the benefits processing programme over the next two years. We ask Jobcentre Plus to set out its timetable for the reduction in the number of sites processing benefits. (Paragraph 231)

In September 2004 benefit processing took place in approximately 650 sites. The current number of sites processing claims has reduced to approximately 450. The first Benefit Delivery Centre opened in April this year. On current plans, processing will be centralised

into 77 sites by March 2008. The latest estimate is that around 50 Benefit Delivery Centres will be in place in 2006/07 with the balance due to come into operation in 2007/08.

42. We share the disappointment of Jobcentre Plus management that staff satisfaction in Jobcentre Plus is so low, and note the impact that this is likely to have on service quality and error rates. We are concerned that action is only now being taken to address low staff morale strategically and we recommend that there is a serious effort to re-engage both with employees and the unions, and that Jobcentre Plus sets out a strategy for this, with targets for improvement in the 2006 staff survey. (Paragraph 239)

The Government appreciates that, as in any major organisational transformation, some staff will experience uncertainty at a time when so many Departments are undertaking substantial change programmes to deliver more efficient services for customers and the taxpayer. The Government believes, however, that the majority of staff are committed to serving their customers and their Departments, as reflected in the significantly improved absence rates in the Department for Work and Pensions and its agencies.

The Government acknowledges the need for Jobcentre Plus, and indeed all Departments and agencies, to engage effectively with employees and the trade unions. Jobcentre Plus recognises the need for practical activities designed to involve staff positively in shaping changes that affect them. It has introduced a programme to build line management capability, focus on team development and develop shared accountability, at all levels, for effective service delivery.

In addition, in response to the Department for Work and Pensions Staff Survey 2005, a new interactive process for gathering direct staff feedback and highlighting priorities for action has been introduced. The Jobcentre Plus management board provide regular progress reports, so that staff can identify links between feedback given and action taken.

43. We recognise that Adviser Administrative Support Officers are crucial to the smooth running of the system of Personal Advisers, particularly given the large workloads of many Advisers, which are higher than originally intended. We are concerned that administrative support staff do not appear to have been recruited yet and we ask Jobcentre Plus to set out its timetable for providing additional administrative support to Personal Advisers. (Paragraph 246)

Proposals to introduce Administrative Support Officers to support Adviser managers and their Advisers are being implemented. The basic principles have already been agreed and are currently being tested to ensure the model is workable across varied office structures. Directors have been asked to ensure that all new Band D Advisory Services Manager and Jobcentre Manager posts are in place by the end of September.

44. We acknowledge the importance of performance measurement and note that the performance system will have to be redesigned when the new Job Outcome Target is introduced. It disturbs us that what would seem to be an overly simplistic performance management system is in place to monitor staff performance. The current system places a third of Advisers on 'Red' and in some areas we were told by PCS – though this

was denied by Jobcentre Plus – that poor performers are placed in a Club Zero. (Paragraph 257)

The Red, Amber, Green (RAG) tool was developed to baseline and measure Advisers' performance against their job entry target. It highlights those Advisers needing additional management support to meet their individual job entry target.

It was intended to be used with other tools to support Advisers' development and performance. These include the Quality Assurance Framework and the Skills Assessment Tool that enable Adviser Managers to develop an individual learning and development plan for Advisers.

From April 2006 a new tool, the Adviser Achievement Tool has been introduced to support the new Job Outcome Target. It adopts a more balanced approach encompassing both quantitative and qualitative measures to give a more rounded picture of Adviser achievement and is being communicated strongly as an aid to support and develop Advisers. Further refinements of the tool will be issued as more is learned about how Advisers work with the new Job Outcome measure.

45. We question the extent to which this can be regarded as a positive motivational tool and whether the system as it stands only encourages Advisers to help short term, easy to place in work cases, instead of longer term claimants perhaps needing more intensive help from Advisers. We ask Jobcentre Plus to set out how the work done by Advisers to help those furthest from the labour market to move towards work will be recognised and incentivised when the Job Outcome Target is in operation. (Paragraph 258)

Unlike the current Job Entry Target the new Job Outcome Target cannot be allocated down to individual Adviser level, thus encouraging a team approach to achievement of targets. This encourages Advisers to recommend alternative job search channels for job ready customers, where these are appropriate, such as the Internet, and frees up Adviser time to work with those customers who most need help to return to work. The new Adviser Achievement Tool with its balanced approach will support this work. Jobcentre Plus has also introduced new management indicators to measure Adviser activity in both quality and quantity, which ensures customers furthest from the labour market receive the most help.

46. If once the new Job Outcome Target has been introduced, large numbers of Personal Advisers remain in 'special measures' we ask the Department to investigate and report back to the Committee whether this is because (a) the staff performance system standards have been set unrealistically high or (b) staff need more or different training or (c) staff are of insufficiently high calibre and need to be replaced. (Paragraph 259)

From April 2006 a new tool, the Adviser Achievement Tool (AAT), has been introduced to support the new Job Outcome Target. This uses a balanced score-card approach encompassing both quantitative and qualitative measures. It will help Adviser Managers monitor Advisers' achievements against national standards, which are set at the minimum an Adviser is expected to achieve. In addition, other activities such as mandatory

observations from the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) will be undertaken on a regular basis.

Jobcentre Plus does not expect that large numbers of Advisers will remain in the lowest bandwidth as the tool is supported by individually tailored Improvement Plans that managers and Advisers will use jointly to address development issues. It is not a substitute for the Performance and Development System, but helps to inform managers' views as to how Advisers have performed throughout the year. If however, large numbers do remain in the lowest bandwidth, Jobcentre Plus will report back as the Committee requests.

The Adviser Achievement Tool may be refined throughout the year as more is learnt about the impact of the new Job Outcome Target.

47. We were concerned at the evidence we received that there had been a serious failure in Jobcentre Plus's engagement with employment and training providers, but we recognise that there has been an effort by Jobcentre Plus to rectify this. Jobcentre Plus, we hope, is moving towards a recognition that the current procurement process is deeply flawed, and needs to change to match best practice in the public sector and industry, for example to have longer term contracts that can enable private and voluntary sector providers to plan and manage their own resourcing capability. We recommend that DWP works as a matter of urgency to review further its contracting procedures for all employment and training programmes to ensure that accountability is achieved without compromising provider flexibility, so that higher quality and more efficient outcomes are achieved, and to report to us what progress has been made. (Paragraph 278)

The Government acknowledges that, during 2005, Jobcentre Plus communications with employment and training providers fell short of what providers had a right to expect. Until decisions had been made on how to manage this expenditure in the light of the efficiency challenge, Jobcentre Plus' communications with providers could not contain the detail about future plans that providers sought. This led to a breakdown in the relationship between some providers and Jobcentre Plus, which it is now seeking to rebuild.

All DWP/Jobcentre Plus procurement functions are aware of best practice in public sector procurement. Jobcentre Plus' procurement process follows DWP, Government and European principles of fair and open competition and of accountability. The Government does not agree that this process is "fundamentally flawed". Most major Jobcentre Plus contracts are let for two or three years. This is considered to be of sufficient length to enable providers to plan and manage their resources effectively.

Jobcentre Plus does recognise that there may be merit in awarding contracts of longer duration to high-performing providers. Jobcentre Plus is interested in exploring this possibility together with the scope for purchasing more flexible and more output-based provision and for exploiting further the potential for simpler, electronically based, methods of procurement. A balance is required between the need for best procurement practice and the essential flexibility that Government needs. This is an area in which the UK is acknowledged as a world-leader.

The Government acknowledges the reasoning behind the Select Committee's call for a further review of contracting procedures for employment and training programmes. Jobcentre Plus aims to improve further the delivery of externally contracted labour market programmes. To that end it established, towards the end of 2005, a Provider Task Force to look at improvements in contract terms, procurement and management. The Task Force examined the procurement strategy Jobcentre Plus has put in place. The issues the Task Force focused on include:

- the length of contracts;
- incentives for performance including payments for outcomes and performance-related contract renewals;
- procedures for letting and ending contracts;
- communication between Jobcentre Plus, the Department and providers;
- the optimal scale of contracts geographically, by financial size and by breadth of content.

Jobcentre Plus has established a Provision Forum, both to continue the work of the Task Force on ensuring that procurement practices meet the needs of providers as well as those of the Department, and to ensure that providers can be consulted whenever possible on the delivery aspects of the Government's programme of welfare reform.

48. We note that work is ongoing within DWP and Jobcentre Plus to minimise the risk that the Prime Contractor approach does not squeeze out high quality smaller providers. We recommend that the Department reports back to us once the current round of contracts is complete on how this new methodology has worked in practice and, in particular, what the impact has been on smaller providers. (Paragraph 279)

The Department will report back, as the Committee recommends.

49. The decision to reduce the scale of the piloting of BoND, in this Committee's view, is a mistake. We recommend that the Government sets out its thinking – in detail – on the next steps for BoND. (Paragraph 287)

The Government's plans for BoND remain under review, in the light of the Welfare Reform Green Paper and the resources available. It was originally intended that each Jobcentre Plus Region would have the opportunity to operate a BoND pilot. However, in the light of the available resources, the Government has decided to limit any piloting of BoND to seven areas. This reduction in numbers will not compromise the ability to carry out robust evaluation. A sufficient sample size can be achieved using seven areas, and those sizes will enable the detection of performance differences of 1 percent or more between pilot and control areas.

50. While we note that elements of the Ambition programme are being taken forward on an ad hoc basis, we are disappointed that the system as a whole is not being rolled forward and we recommend that this decision is reviewed by Jobcentre Plus. We also

ask for a clear statement of the Department's overall assessment of the success of Ambition. (Paragraph 296)

The Ambition programme was introduced as a fixed term trial to stimulate a more demand-led approach to equipping those moving from welfare to work with the skills employers need. It also had the aim of incorporating lessons learned from the trial into the way both Jobcentre Plus and employers collaborated in future, and sharing costs more equitably between Jobcentre Plus and employers. The aim of Ambition was for 60% of those who started on the programme to enter an Ambition job; and, for 70% of those job entrants to remain in employment in the sector for at least 6 months. Final performance figures showed 56% of starters progressed into Ambition employment and 76% remained in employment within the sector for 6 months. The main lesson learned was the importance of focusing on employers' identified areas of skill shortages and offering Jobcentre Plus support in addressing these in partnership with employers. Jobcentre Plus is ensuring that the good practice learnt about employer engagement features in the programme provision. The Ambition strand, as part of Jobcentre Plus' work, finished with the final course (Domestic Gas Installer) ending in March 2006.

As examples of the approach taken to embedding lessons learnt from Ambition, there have been discussions with the Department of Health on using lessons from the pilots across NHS employers' recruitment, and discussions with the Learning & Skills Council to develop a successor programme for Domestic Gas Installers funded by LSC as part of their mainstream provision. This initiative is currently being piloted through the LSC's joint access programme trials. Any further activity will be subject to local planning discussions.

51. We note the undertaking from the Permanent Secretary that the New Deal programmes will continue to be funded and delivered as originally envisaged, and that the Minister has commented that action is being taken to address problems with funding in the New Deal for Young People in London. We find it difficult, however, to reconcile the Permanent Secretary's remarks with the evidence we have received, and we ask DWP and Jobcentre Plus to take urgent action to ensure that provision of the various New Deals is maintained nationwide. (Paragraph 302)

The Government's commitment to the funding and delivery of the New Deal remains and will continue to support nationwide provision throughout 2006/07 as follows:

- Gateway to Work provision as required for all those on the New Deal for Young People (NDYP);
- 13 week mandatory provision for NDYP (including all four of the Environment Task Force; Voluntary Sector; Full Time Education and Training; and Employment Options in each Jobcentre Plus District); and a 13 week mandatory Intensive Activity Period for New Deal 25 plus participants;
- Adequate and accessible provision to meet the needs of lone parents and others.

Planning and budget allocation systems have been revised to strengthen the link between projected client flows and resources available to Jobcentre Plus managers at regional and

district level. Budgets will be monitored month by month to ensure that allocations continue to reflect business need.

The Government is determined not only to deliver the New Deal but also to secure further improvements in performance. Accordingly new approaches to measuring and monitoring the performance of contracts will also be developed in 2006/07.

52. We also have concerns about the Permanent Secretary's statement that the reduction in entries into the New Deal for Lone Parents is related to Advisers becoming better at identifying training needs. We recommend that Jobcentre Plus and the DWP set out the criteria which Advisers use to determine whether specific training is necessary for a customer to progress towards work, and how these have changed over the last two years. (Paragraph 303)

The Department does not set criteria for Advisers to use to determine whether specific training is necessary for a customer to progress towards work. Personal Advisers are expected to agree an action plan with each individual customer, tailored to their needs and aspirations and on how close they are to the labour market. To improve the skill of Advisers in this area, improved Learning and Development and new tools have been provided for Advisers to use in their interviews with customers and for managers to use during coaching reviews. The underlying principle is to encourage improved one-to-one relationships between the Adviser and their customer and improve the skills and judgement of Advisers, to offer an individually tailored service. These help the Adviser:

- identify barriers to work;
- concentrate advisory time and job search resources on those areas where the customer needs more support;
- monitor distance travelled over time, i.e. the progress a customer has made towards work;
- gain customers' commitment, through listening and questioning;
- improve their local labour market and Industrial and Occupational knowledge; and
- improve their knowledge of the resources available to customers.

53. While we welcome the clarification that Adviser Discretion Fund awards of £300 remain available for childcare, we are concerned about the reduction in the number and average amount of ADF awards to lone parents. We agree with the evidence we have received that small discretionary awards of this type will save money in the long run and we recommend that Jobcentre Plus re-introduce a general ADF limit of £300. (Paragraph 310)

Currently Advisers have the ability to access awards of ADF of £300 and above. However, to ensure appropriate financial control, any award of above £100 must be fully detailed in a business case and endorsed by local managers. Following a recent Departmental audit report, the Government is reviewing whether the financial limit for which a business case is required can be further relaxed.

54. We note with concern the reduction in Work-Based Learning for Adults, which seems to run contrary to the emphasis placed on skills training in the recent welfare reform green paper. We ask the Government to set out its long-term strategy for this type of provision, along with indicative total budgets for the next five years. (Paragraph 318)

The Department for Education and Skills has the main responsibility for the skills strategy in England and delivers the majority of skills provision. The priority for Jobcentre Plus, in supporting those seeking work, is to get them a job and there is strong evidence to support the “work first” principle and to show that postponing entry to a job in order to train can be counter-productive.

For those who require training, DWP will be spending some £400 million next year on the New Deals – programmes for people disadvantaged in the labour market.

The level of funding commitment DfES makes towards basic skills provision for Jobcentre Plus clients remains unchanged at £23 million a year.

Plans beyond 2006/07 are being considered as part of the process to draw up implementation plans for the latest DWP Spending Review settlement.

55. Vacillation about the future of BoND, small-scale adoption of Ambition, uncertainty over New Deal funding, a reduction in the use and scale of the Adviser Discretion Fund, major reductions in Work-Based Learning for Adults and the 2005 contracting problems, are significant issues in themselves. The cumulative impact is even more considerable. We are concerned that some good provision – which saves money in the long run – could be lost. We recommend that DWP and Jobcentre Plus should commission an independent overall review, with significant stakeholder involvement, of its provision of employment and training programmes, the effectiveness, costs and benefits of those programmes, and how funding is prioritised. The results of the review should be made available to the Committee. (Paragraph 321)

The Government has already set in hand a review of employment programmes and associated activity as part of the implementation process for the Departmental SR07 settlement announced in Budget 2006. The Government conducted a comprehensive review of its employment programmes to inform the development of the Building on New Deal¹ strategy. The review considered evaluation evidence on programmes, cost effectiveness, and the views of clients, staff, programme providers and employers. The Government concluded that there was a clear case for flexibility in delivery and greater devolution to staff. It proposed that back- to- work help should be tailored for individual need and selected from a menu of flexible provision.

The Government still considers that the flexible tailored approach, as opposed to rigid programme provision, delivered through a single gateway, is the best way to support

¹ Building on New Deal: Local solutions meeting individual needs – published June 2004 – ISBN 1-84388-292-2

people of all client groups to overcome obstacles to moving into work. The proposals in the Welfare Reform Green Paper² are built upon this principle.

The Government currently invests significant analytical resource in assessing the effectiveness of Jobcentre Plus programmes and interventions. Appraisal of current and future policies forms a major part of that ongoing analytical programme. A revised Cost Benefit Framework has been developed to bring that evidence together into a single coherent assessment of the relative cost effectiveness of different interventions, allowing us to make sensible comparisons across programmes. This evidence will be used to inform its decisions on how funding is prioritised. The Government is also currently reviewing its specialist disability employment services and intends to carry out a public consultation on the proposals later in the year.

56. We note the Government's strategy to increase the involvement of the private and voluntary sectors in service provision, which is currently subject to consultation as part of the welfare reform green paper. We will continue to monitor progress in this area closely. (Paragraph 326)

The Government intends to build upon the experience of using private and voluntary sectors in welfare to work delivery during the phased delivery of Pathways to Work primarily by the private and voluntary sectors, and will be happy to keep the Committee informed.

² A new deal for welfare: Empowering people to work - January 2006 - Cm 6730

Annex A

Jobcentre Plus - List of Planned Office Closures as a result of Jobcentre Implementation Planning

REGION	SITE NAME	Planned Closure Date 1
East England	Hertford SSO, Sovereign House, Hale Road	30/06/2006
East England	Cambridge JC, Henry Giles House, 73-79 Chesterton Road	24/03/2006
East England	Peterborough JC, Frobisher House	20/03/2006
East England	Peterborough Park Road SSO	20/03/2006
East England	Great Yarmouth, Yarmouth House, 30 Yarmouth Way	31/12/2007
East England	Kings Lynn SSO, Bishop Lynn House	31/12/2007
East Midlands	Boston, 136 West Street	20/03/2006
East Midlands	Holbeach, 55 High Street	03/04/2006
East Midlands	Horncastle JC, The Old Courthouse	04/04/2006
East Midlands	Lincoln, High Street, 280-281 High Street	31/12/2007
East Midlands	Mablethorpe JC, Tennyson Road	04/04/2006
East Midlands	Oakham JC, 1st Floor PO Building	03/04/2006
East Midlands	Skegness, 3/5 Briar Way	04/04/2006
East Midlands	Spalding, Holland House, Holland Road	20/03/2006
East Midlands	Mansfield ONE Office, Victoria Street	06/06/2006
East Midlands	Mansfield, Byron House, St. Peters Court	27/06/2008
East Midlands	Netherfield JC, 143 Victoria Road	29/12/2006
East Midlands	Beeston Caller Office, Crown Buildings	24/02/2006
East Midlands	Newark SSO, Mill Gate	06/03/2006
East Midlands	Nottingham, David Lane, Basford	29/12/2006

East Midlands	Nottingham Castle Court, 59 Castle Boulevard	29/12/2006
East Midlands	Nottingham Castle Boulevard, 1 Castle Boulevard	29/12/2006
East Midlands	Nottingham Castle Gate, Gate House, 70 Castle Gate	29/12/2006
East Midlands	Nottingham Victoria Centre, 50 Milton Street	29/12/2006
East Midlands	Ollerton ONE Office (above Gordon Davis Chemist) Forest Rd, New Ollerton, Newark	05/05/2006
East Midlands	Watercourt JC, 116-118 Canal Street	29/12/2006
London	Euston SSO, 30 Euston Sq, 194 Euston Road (1 Melton Street)	01/04/2006
London	Kensington JC, High Street	30/06/2006
London	West End JC, Wardour Street	14/02/2006
London	Westbourne JC, Harrow Road	30/06/2006
London	East Ham, Heron House, Heigham	16/05/2006
London	Plaistow, Francis Ho, 760 Barking Rd	16/05/2006
London	Poplar, 307 Burdett Road	28/02/2006
London	Shoreditch, 57 Kingsland Rd	03/05/2006
London	Stoke Newington SSO, 52-58 Arcola Street	30/09/2006
London	Battersea, Beechmore Road	24/03/2006
London	Putney, Putney Bridge Road	24/03/2006
London	Ilford JC, Cranbooke House	13/04/2007
London	Barnet SSO, Raydean House	14/03/2006
London	Romford, St Georges House	31/03/2006
London	Edmonton, St Georges Chambers	19/04/2006
London	Hendon, 2A Rundell Crescent	03/04/2006
London	Tottenham JC, Scotland Green House, 624 High Road	30/09/2006
London	Wood Green JC, 128 Mayes Road	To be Confirmed
London	Beckenham JC, 2 Beckenham Road	To be Confirmed

London	Bromley JC, Chelsea House (ground, 1st & 2nd floors)	22/09/2006
London	Bromley SSO, 1 Westmoreland Street	22/09/2006
London	Colliers Wood JC, 105/109 High Street	11/08/2006
London	Croydon SSO, Concord House	31/03/2008
London	Crystal Palace SSO, 9 Cargreen Road	To be Confirmed
London	Kingston, Eve House	07/04/2006
London	Mitcham JC, 246/248 London Rd	12/05/2006
London	New Addington JC, Field Way	28/07/2006
London	Sutton JC, 240 High Street	07/04/2006
London	Wimbledon SSO, Ravensbury House	To be Confirmed
London	Bexleyheath JC, 304 The Broadway	29/09/2006
London	Catford JC, 62-66 Rushey Green	29/09/2006
London	Erith JC, 7 Queens Road	29/09/2006
London	Greenwich Park SSO, 110-114 Norman Road	29/09/2006
London	Sidcup DO, Craybrook House, 9 Sidcup High Street	29/06/2007
London	Woolwich Riverside JC, 115 Powis St	07/06/2006
London	Woolwich Arsenal JC, 15 Spray Street	To be Confirmed
London	Notting Hill SSO, Westbourne House, 14-16 Westbourne Grove	30/06/2006
North East	Barnard Castle JC, Mission Hall	17/03/2006
North East	Durham SSO, Millburngate House	To be Confirmed
North East	Newton Aycliffe JC, Churchhill House	16/06/2006
North East	Stanley SSO, Townley House	To be Confirmed
North East	Middlesbrough Grange Rd JC, Ground Floor, 36 Grange Road	19/03/2007
North East	Middlesbrough, Crown House	19/03/2007
North West	Chester, Norroy House, Nuns Road	29/08/2006

North West	St Helens, College Street JC, 63 College Street	01/02/2007
North West	Walton JC, Church Road	31/08/2006
North West	Accrington, Melbourne House	31/08/2006
North West	Burnley, Bankfield	31/08/2006
North West	Great Harwood, Hesketh Street	31/08/2006
North West	Thornton JC, 21/23 Fleetwood	30/05/2006
North West	Openshaw, Old Lane	03/03/2006
North West	Rusholme, Great Western Street	03/03/2006
North West	Sale SSO, Dalton House, Dane Road	03/03/2006
North West	Salford JC, Trafford Rd	To be Confirmed
North West	Salford Action Team, 8th Floor, St James House	25/08/2006
North West	Swinton JC, 16 Station Rd	To be Confirmed
North West	Ashton Under Lyne, Crown Buildings, 2 Booth Street	03/03/2006
North West	Bolton Great Moor Street JC	31/12/2007
North West	Middleton JC, Othen House	14/06/2006
North West	Failsworth SSO, 160 Oldham Rd	03/03/2006
North West	Hindley JC, Liverpool Road	01/04/2006
North West	Leigh JC, 1 Twist Lane	17/05/2006
North West	Stockport, Wellesley House	27/02/2006
Scotland	Ayr JC, Carrick Street	01/11/2006
Scotland	Castle Douglas JC, Carlingwark Street	10/02/2006
Scotland	Cumnock SSO, Glaisnock Street	To be Confirmed
Scotland	Cumnock JC, 33/43 Townhead	To be Confirmed
Scotland	Dumfries SSO, 124 Irish Street	To be Confirmed
Scotland	Girvan SSO CSP	17/02/2006
Scotland	Irvine SSO, Bank Street	To be Confirmed

Scotland	Newton Stewart JC, 6-8 Queen Street	24/02/2006
Scotland	Sanquhar JC, Queensbury	10/02/2006
Scotland	Stranraer SSO, Ashwood Drive	21/04/2006
Scotland	Troon JC, 93 Templehill	31/03/2006
Scotland	Leith JC, 1/3 Leith Walk	03/03/2006
Scotland	Portobello SSO, 275 Portobello High Street	To be Confirmed
Scotland	Portobello JC, 21/23 Windsor Place	03/03/2006
Scotland	Torphichen Street JC, 24/26 Torphichen Street, Edinburgh	28/02/2006
Scotland	Cowdenbeath SSO, 12 Factory Road	To be Confirmed
Scotland	Dunfermline JC, 79/83 High Street	17/03/2006
Scotland	Falkirk JC, Graham House	28/02/2006
Scotland	Inverkeithing JC, 25 Hope Street	17/03/2006
Scotland	Leven SSO, Walton House	17/03/2006
Scotland	Stirling JC, Wallace House	24/03/2006
Scotland	Auldhouse JC, 43/47 Cogan Road	To be Confirmed
Scotland	Central JC, 50/58 Jamaica Street	27/11/2006
Scotland	City JC, 87/97 Bath Street	27/11/2006
Scotland	Drumchapel JC, 67 Kinauns Drive	To be Confirmed
Scotland	Laurieston SSO, 159-181 Pollockshaws Road	To be Confirmed
Scotland	Laurieston JC, 101/109 Devon Place	To be Confirmed
Scotland	Maryhill SSO, 1455 Maryhill Road	To be Confirmed
Scotland	Pollok SSO, 590 Nitshil Road	To be Confirmed
Scotland	Dumbarton JC, 6-8 Bridge Street	09/08/2006
Scotland	Fort William SSO, 10 Tweedale Buildings, High Street	21/04/2006
Scotland	Inverness, Metropolitan House	28/04/2006
Scotland	Blantyre JC, 1 Boswell Drive	14/04/2006

Scotland	Cambuslang JC, 24/32 Somerwell Street	30/09/2006
Scotland	Carluke JC, 33 Hamilton Street	17/04/2006
Scotland	Cumbernauld, Fleming House, 2 Tryst Road	31/03/2006
Scotland	East Kilbride SSO, Murray House, Murray Road	To be Confirmed
Scotland	Larkhall JC, 47-49 Claude Street	14/04/2006
Scotland	Motherwell JC, 8 Mason Street	31/03/2006
Scotland	Uddingston JC, 51 Bellshill Road	14/04/2006
Scotland	Clydebank SSO, 245 Kilbowie Road	29/03/2006
Scotland	Wick SSO, Girnigoe Street	01/03/2006
Scotland	Lanark SSO, Atholl House, Bannatyne St	19/04/2006
South East	Newbury SSO, Hill View House	30/05/2006
South East	Milton Keynes, Lloyds Court, 9 North Tenth Street	To be Confirmed
South East	Lymington, 55 High Street	16/06/2006
South East	Portsmouth (Central), Lake Road	To be Confirmed
South East	Portsmouth, Guildhall Walk	To be Confirmed
South East	Southampton B, 119 High Street	To be Confirmed
South East	Southampton C, 61/64 High Street	To be Confirmed
South East	Woolston, Hazel Road	To be Confirmed
South East	Deal JC, 16-18 Queens Street	To be Confirmed
South East	Faversham JC, 3 Queens Parade	30/06/2006
South East	Gillingham JC, 5 High Street	To be Confirmed
South East	Gravesend JC, 51-53 New Road	28/04/2006
South East	Maidstone SSO, Medvale House	31/01/2007
South East	New Romney JC, 75 High Street	28/02/2006
South East	Rochester, 7-9 Crow Lane	27/03/2006
South East	Banbury, 47 The Green, South Bar Street	28/04/2006

South East	Folkstone JC, Palting House, Trinity Rd	01/03/2006
South East	Worthing, Hazelwood Close	28/02/2006
South West	Hayle JC, 52 Fore Street	To be Confirmed
South West	Plymouth, 2-4 Buckwell Street	06/10/2006
South West	Plymouth, Durley House, 5-11 Millbay	To be Confirmed
South West	Plymouth, 4 Hoegate Street	22/09/2006
South West	Bournemouth JC, 181/187 Old Christchurch Road	To be Confirmed
South West	Bournemouth, Bracken House, 14-16 Christchurch Road	To be Confirmed
South West	Bournemouth SSO (Incl. MEC), 20-28 Cotlands Road	To be Confirmed
South West	Bridgwater, West Quay House	28/04/2006
South West	Taunton, Quantock House (incl. MEC)	03/03/2006
South West	Gloucester JC, 37/41 Southgate St	To be Confirmed
South West	Stroud JC, 54/56 London Road	24/03/2006
South West	Bath, Strahan House, James Street	03/05/2006
South West	Bristol Central, 22 Nelson Street	20/04/2006
Wales	Cefn Mawr, Crane Street	31/03/2006
Wales	Conwy JC, 13 High Street	31/03/2006
Wales	Denbigh JC, 34-36 Vale Street	28/02/2006
Wales	Flint SSO, Chapel Street	28/02/2006
Wales	Holywell JC, Crown Bdgs, Coleshill St	28/02/2006
Wales	Llangollen JC, 32 Castle Street	31/03/2006
Wales	Llanrwst JC, 6 Denbigh Street	28/02/2006
Wales	Prestatyn JC, 129 High Street	28/02/2006
Wales	Wrexham JC, 16 Lord Street	31/07/2006
Wales	Bargoed, Oldway House, Gilfach	30/06/2006
Wales	Blackwood, 81 High Street	31/05/2006

Wales	Newbridge JC, Ashfield House	31/05/2006
Wales	Pontllytyn, 10 River Road	30/06/2006
Wales	Risca, 66/67 Tredegar Street	31/07/2006
Wales	Ammanford, Crown Buildings Hall	31/01/2007
Wales	Lampeter PCO	31/03/2006
Wales	Lampeter JC, Gvmnt Bdgs Pontfaen Rd	31/03/2006
Wales	Llandysul, Bizerta House	19/05/2006
Wales	Llandysul, co located with above	19/05/2006
Wales	Morrison JC, 52/54 Woodfield Street	31/07/2006
Wales	Pembroke Dock, Devonshire Road	31/03/2006
Wales	Pontardawe JC, 25 High Street	28/02/2006
Wales	Swansea SSO, Oldway Hse, Rutland Place	31/08/2006
Wales	Tenby JC, Ruabon House, South Parade	28/02/2006
Wales	Abertillery SSO, Portland Street	15/03/2006
Wales	Colwyn Bay JC, Coed Pella Road	22/03/2006
West Midlands	District Managers Office, 4th Floor, Louisa House, Quay Place, 92-93 Edward St, Birmingham	02/02/2007
West Midlands	Erdington JC, 196 High Street	To be Confirmed
West Midlands	Erdington SSO, 224/232 High Street	28/03/2008
West Midlands	Heartlands JC & DO, Aston	To be Confirmed
West Midlands	Northfield Jobshop, 821 Bristol Road	To be Confirmed
West Midlands	Cradley Heath, Whitehall Rd	To be Confirmed
West Midlands	Darlaston JC, Pinfold Street	To be Confirmed
West Midlands	Halesowen, Little Cornbow	To be Confirmed
West Midlands	Merryhill Jobshop, Unit 16A	17/02/2006
West Midlands	Smethwick SSO, Church Hill Street	31/03/2008
West Midlands	Wednesfield JC, 49 High Street	24/09/2006

West Midlands	Wolverhampton, Burdett Hse, 20-31 Cleveland St	To be Confirmed
West Midlands	Wolverhampton, Derwent House	14/11/2008
West Midlands	Cheylesmore JC, Friars Road, Coventry	30/06/2006
West Midlands	Coventry, Copthall Hse, Eaton Road	20/12/2006
West Midlands	Coventry, Bankfield House	27/10/2006
West Midlands	Burslem, Duncalf Street	To be Confirmed
West Midlands	Burton, Crown House, New Street	12/05/2006
West Midlands	Cannock JC, Beecroft Road	26/11/2008
West Midlands	Cheadle JC, 57 Chapel Street	31/05/2006
West Midlands	Hanley, Cannon Street	To be Confirmed
West Midlands	Lichfield SSO, Guardian House	16/06/2006
West Midlands	Newcastle-u-Lyne JC, Blackburn House	23/06/2006
West Midlands	Stafford, Victoria Park House	23/06/2006
West Midlands	Stoke, Fleming Road	01/01/2007
West Midlands	Stone, 35 High Street	18/08/2006
West Midlands	Droitwich, Clarendon House	07/04/2006
West Midlands	Evesham JC, 23 Vine Street	14/06/2006
West Midlands	Hereford JC, Bath Street	06/06/2006
West Midlands	Ledbury JC, Bye Street	07/04/2006
West Midlands	Ludlow, Castle Street	28/04/2006
West Midlands	Redditch JC, Threadneedle Street	28/06/2006
West Midlands	Stourport JC, 29 Bridge Street	07/04/2006
West Midlands	Worcester Elgar House, 2nd Floor Elgar House	07/04/2006
Yorks/Humber	Doncaster JC Princegate House	17/05/2006
Yorks/Humber	Doncaster BA Area Training 1st Floor Duke St.	14/02/2006
Yorks/Humber	Hoyland JC, 2nd Fl Town Hall	14/04/2006

Yorks/Humber	Rotherham SSO, Portland House, Mansfield Rd	14/02/2006
Yorks/Humber	Bradford Law Russell Hse SSO, 63 Vicar Lne	31/03/2006
Yorks/Humber	Bradford Vicar Lane JC	To be Confirmed
Yorks/Humber	Beverley Caller Office	24/02/2006
Yorks/Humber	Hull Essex House JC Manor Street	24/02/2006
Yorks/Humber	Leeds 2 Great George Street	To be Confirmed
Yorks/Humber	Scarborough SSO 19 Market Street	24/02/2006
Yorks/Humber	Pontefract Enterprise Hse Horsfair	20/03/2006
Yorks/Humber	Pontefract Newgate, Hirst Yard	20/03/2006
Yorks/Humber	Pontefract King Charles II House	20/03/2006
Notes:		
1 - Dates accurate as at 13/2/06 and subject to change.		

Sites planned for closure as a consequence of Benefit Processing centralisation

REGION	SITE NAME
East England	Braintree, Government Buildings, Panfield Lane
East England	Southend, Victoria House, 47 Victoria Avenue
East England	Stevenage SSO, Brickdale House
East Midlands	Worksop SSO, Crown House Newcastle Avenue
North East	Bishop Auckland SSO, Vinovium House
North West	Kirkby, Webster House, Cherryfield Drive
North West	Salford SSO, Aldine House, New Bailly
North West	Bury SSO, Humphrey House, Angouleme Way
Scotland	Kirkcaldy SSO, 26 Victoria Road (incl MSEC)
Scotland	Perth SSO, Mill Street
Scotland	Coatbridge JC, 3-5 Circular Road
Scotland	Hamilton SSO, 19 Douglas Street
South East	Ashford JC, Kent House, 81 Station Road
South East	Chatham JC, Brook House, 9-11 The Brook
South East	Sittingbourne JC, St Michaels House
South East	Tunbridge Wells SSO, Vale House
South West	Cheltenham SSO, Riverhill House
South West	Trowbridge SSO, Homefield House
South West	Bath, Kingsmead House
South West	Bristol South, St Catherines Hse
South West	Weston Super Mare, Carlton House

Wales	Rhyl SSO, 64 Blighton Road
Wales	Wrexham DMO, Imperial Buildings
Wales	Barry SSO, Provincial House, Kendrick
Wales	Cardiff Eastgate House SSO
Wales	Aberystwyth, Crown Buildings
Wales	Carmarthen SSO, Ty Myrddin Dan Y Banc
Wales	Neath SSO, Percival Hse, London Rd
West Midlands	Northfield SSO, 946 Bristol Rd South
West Midlands	Washwood Heath SSO, St Margarets Rd
West Midlands	Dudley SSO, Trident House, Wolverhampton St.
West Midlands	Walsall Glebe St SSO
West Midlands	West Bromwich SSO, Parham House 416 High Street
West Midlands	Longton JC, 11-15 Market Street
West Midlands	Shrewsbury, Whitehall, Monkmoor Rd