House of Commons
Work and Pensions Committee

Department for Work and Pensions: Delivery of Services to Ethnic Minority Clients

Fourth Report of Session 2004–05

Volume I

Report, together with formal minutes

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The Work and Pensions Committee

The Work and Pensions Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Work and Pensions and its associated public bodies.

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Highlights

- The Department will have difficulty meeting its duties under race relations legislation if it does not know the ethnicity of its customers or its staff. It will be unable to identify and measure any adverse impact of its policies on people from different ethnic groups and ensure equitable access to its services. We recommend that the Department takes urgent action to implement ethnic monitoring across the Department and its Agencies for all benefits and services.

- Once the extent of the use of DWP services by ethnic minorities is known it will be vital to assess the impact of DWP’s policies. In particular the Department should publish the statutory three year review of the Race Equality Scheme and the race impact assessment of the job cuts and relocations out of London and the South East. In the context of the current requirement to achieve efficiency savings, the Department should make publicly available the criteria used for selecting staff who will lose their posts and the ethnic breakdown of the staff who will be leaving the Department as a result of the job cuts. We also recommend that the Department gives serious consideration to the effect on staff ethnicity when deciding which staff will be selected for redundancy, particularly in London where 48% of the staff in the administrative grade and 37% of those in the executive officer grade is from an ethnic minority – five times the average across the whole Department.

- The assessment of the impact of specific DWP policies on ethnic minority clients will be assisted by the use of the Impact Assessment Tool and we recommend that it is urgently applied across the Department to all areas of service delivery as well as existing and new policies. The results of the impact assessment should be published and acted upon speedily to reduce inequalities for clients and staff in order to comply with the race relations legislation.

- The ability to communicate effectively is vital, particularly when dealing with ethnic minority clients. The Committee recommends that a larger range of translated information material should be made more widely available, updated frequently and put on public display. The Committee recommends that the Department amends and enhances the current staff language allowance to differentiate between staff who often use their linguistic skills and those who are ‘casual’ users.

- Training is crucial in overcoming cultural barriers and enhancing the race awareness of DWP staff. The Committee recommends that the Department undertakes a full assessment of race equality and cultural awareness training and ensures that staff receive up-to-date race equality training, with ‘refresher’ courses held for all staff on a regular basis. Training via printed and electronic media should not be used as a substitute for attendance at a training event. All staff training should be tested and evaluated to ensure that it meets the needs of staff and clients.
1 Introduction

1. Since the Work and Pensions Committee was appointed in 2001, a common thread running through our various inquiries and visits has been the adequacy, or otherwise, of the services provided by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to ethnic minority groups. The result was this inquiry.

The inquiry

2. The inquiry was announced on 31 March 2003 with the aim of examining “the standards of service delivery to ethnic minorities and the systems in place within the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure equal treatment and the elimination of discrimination.” The Committee specified that the following issues were expected to be included:

- standards of service towards ethnic minority claimants, and systems for monitoring;
- the ethnic make-up of customers and staff, and systems for monitoring;
- the information needs of ethnic minority claimants;
- cultural issues affecting delivery;
- systems for obtaining feedback from ethnic minority customers;
- how complaints of unfair treatment are dealt with; and
- employment of ethnic minorities by DWP.

3. The remit of the inquiry was subsequently widened to include service delivery to refugees.

4. Following the call for written evidence, 11 memoranda were received. This was a disappointing response but, interestingly, one which mirrored the Department’s own experiences of consulting on race equality issues.1 The Committee was keen to seek further evidence from representatives of, and those working directly with, ethnic minority groups. Consequently, further efforts were made to contact a range of organisations and local groups, resulting in a further 23 memoranda. The Committee wishes to thank the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) for their assistance in contacting these additional organisations.

5. The Committee held four oral evidence sessions between 22 October 2003 and 30 June 2004: two in Westminster; one in Wolverhampton; and one in Tower Hamlets, London. The Committee would like to thank Disability Alliance for their assistance in organising the latter session. Those giving evidence included the CRE, the Refugee Council, organisations representing local authorities, national voluntary organisations and a range of local and community groups. The Rt Hon Jane Kennedy MP, Minister for Work and DWP officials gave oral evidence in the final session on 9 February 2005.

1 Ev 130
6. In addition to the oral and written evidence, the Committee visited a Pension Service Centre and Jobcentre Plus office in Wolverhampton. The staff in these two offices gave the Committee a helpful insight into the issues of service delivery to ethnic minority groups and we learned of local initiatives undertaken to improve on this service. We are grateful to the staff who made the visit possible and who shared their experiences with the Committee. The notes of this visit are in the annex to this report.

7. The success of any inquiry depends upon the written, oral and informal evidence received. The Committee would like to thank all of those who contributed to our work, which was greatly enhanced by their detailed knowledge and experiences. We also wish to thank the DWP officials who assisted the Committee.
2 Background

The ethnic minority population

8. Figures from the 2001 census show that 7.9% of the population are from a black or ethnic minority group. Half of the total ethnic minority population are of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or other Asian origin, a quarter describe themselves as black Caribbean, black African or ‘other black’ and 15% of the ethnic minority population describe their ethnic group as ‘mixed’.2

9. The minority ethnic population tends to be younger than the general population. 16% of the white population is aged 65 or over compared with 9% of the black Caribbean group, the largest non-white group in this age category. 19% of the white population is aged under 16 compared with 38% of Bangladeshis and 55% of the ‘mixed’ ethnic group.3 As with the general population, the ethnic minority population is ageing, bringing additional issues that need to be addressed.

10. Nearly half (45%) of all black or ethnic minority groups live in London, where they comprise 29% of all residents. The second biggest concentration is the West Midlands (where 13% of ethnic minorities live), with a smaller proportion in the South East (8%), North West (8%) and Yorkshire and the Humber (7%).4

11. In recent years, the additional factor of ethnic diversity has emerged as a characteristic in its own right. Some areas, mostly in inner cities, may have dozens of different, small, minority communities living within them. Such areas require a more sophisticated and intensive approach even than that required by neighbourhoods with high concentrations of minority ethnic citizens from one or two backgrounds.

12. As with the rest of the population, minority ethnic groups will all come into contact with the DWP at some point in their lives, for example through entitlement to claiming benefits such as Income Support or disability benefits, through claiming the State Retirement Pension and Pension Credit or using Jobcentre Plus services. Research shows that ethnic minorities are more likely to be claiming benefits – 24% of ethnic minority families are in receipt of an income-related benefit, compared with 19% of ‘white’ families.5

13. Unemployment rates and economic inactivity rates6 are higher for some ethnic minority groups: 7.6% of the ethnic minority working age population are unemployed compared with 3.9% of the general population. Different ethnic minority groups are not homogenous and there are variations in employment and activity rates. The highest ethnic minority unemployment rates (at 9.7%) are for the black Caribbean and mixed groups, with Indians having the lowest rate, of 6%. A third (33%) of adult ethnic minorities are

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2 Census 2001, National Statistics
4 Census 2001, National Statistics
6 Economically inactive applies to those over the school leaving age who are neither employed nor unemployed, for example, those looking after the home, retired people, students and those unable to work through sickness or disability.
economically inactive compared with 21.2% of the overall population. Bangladeshis (48.5%) and Pakistanis (46.9%) have the highest rate of economic inactivity. The black Caribbean group has an economic inactivity rate almost equal to the national average of 21.3%.  

14. Ethnic minorities are also more likely to be living in poverty than the white population. 20% of those in the ‘white’ ethnic group are living in poverty compared with 69% of those in the Pakistani and Bangladeshi group and 46% of the black non-Caribbean group (see table 1).  

Table 1: Ethnic minority poverty rates  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic group</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian British</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of which</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistani/Bangladeshi</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or Black British</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of which</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Caribbean</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black non-Caribbean</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese or other Ethnic Group</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


15. Many areas with high black and ethnic minority populations also experience very high levels of population turnover: as many as one in three people move every year in some inner city neighbourhoods. This represents a very specific challenge in terms of service delivery.  

The Race Relations Act  

16. The Race Relations Act 1976, as amended by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, and the secondary legislation made under it, places a statutory general duty on public authorities to:  

a) have due regard to eliminating unlawful racial discrimination;  

b) promote race equality; and  

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7 Labour Force Survey, four quarter average to spring 2004  
9 Poverty is measured as those living in households with an income below 60% of 2002-03 median income, on an after housing cost basis.
c) promote good race relations.

17. Approximately 43,000 public bodies, including government departments and Ministers of the Crown, are subject to this ‘general duty’ which aims to make race equality central to the work of the listed public bodies by building race equality considerations into all aspects of their public services.¹⁰ Since public authorities must meet all three parts of the general duty of the Act, they must make sure they know how all their policies and services affect race equality.

18. Government departments, as public authorities, are also subject to ‘specific duties’ in the areas of policy-making, service delivery and employment which aim to improve the performance of the general duty. These duties required government departments to publish a Race Equality Scheme (RES) by 31st May 2002 that should list all functions and policies that are relevant to the duty to promote race equality and set out their arrangements for:

- monitoring policies for any adverse impact on promoting race equality;
- assessing and consulting on the likely impact of proposed policies on promoting race equality;
- publishing results of their monitoring, assessments and consultation;
- ensuring the public have access to information and services; and
- training staff on the general and specific duties.

19. The duties also require government departments to monitor, by racial group, staff in post and applicants for jobs, promotion and training. In addition, they must also monitor grievances, disciplinary action, performance appraisal, those receiving training and those ceasing employment.¹¹

20. According to DWP, their objectives for race equality are to comply with the general duty, as set out in the Act, and:

“…ensure that race equality is embedded into everything we do, from the development of new policies and supporting processes, through to the service we deliver to customers, encompassing the way we develop our staff.”¹²

**PSA target**

21. The Department has a Public Service Agreement (PSA) target to increase the employment rate of ethnic minority groups and significantly reduce the difference between their rate and the overall employment rate. This target was set in the 2004 Spending Review and is a continuation of a PSA target originally set in the 2000 Spending Review. Progress on the target will be examined in chapter 8.

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¹⁰ Ev 23
¹¹ Ev 23. Also see www.cre.gov.uk/duty/index
22. The publication of DWP’s Race Equality Scheme (RES) represented an important step forward for race equality for staff and clients of the Department. DWP published a draft RES for public consultation in May 2002. A revised RES was published in July 2003, after which all areas of the Department were obliged to implement their race equality action plans. A progress report on race equality was published in July 2004, summarising the action taken by the Department and outlining proposed objectives for 2004-05 onwards.

Is the DWP Race Equality Scheme adequate?

23. The DWP RES is a large document that includes 15 individual Schemes and action plans for all parts of the Department’s business together with information on how the Department’s Associate Bodies are approaching race equality. The Scheme outlines the current position of DWP in respect of race equality and identifies priority areas for action covering the period 2003-04. These focus upon clients’ access to DWP services; the delivery of DWP services; staff development; and business processes.

24. In evidence in October 2003, Trevor Phillips, Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) pointed out that the first problem with DWP’s Race Equality Scheme was that it was published a year behind schedule. The deadline by which the Department had to publish a RES was instead met by the publication of a consultation document which, as the Department admits, received a relatively small response. The Minister for Work, informed the Committee that delays to the publication of the draft and final RES documents were due to efforts to get the content right following feedback from the DWP’s Ethnic Minority Working Party.

25. Most of the written evidence to this inquiry was submitted before the Department published the draft RES in July 2003. The Committee therefore received limited responses specifically on the Scheme. The CRE and Disability Alliance, who had recently undertaken a comprehensive analysis of the RES, broadly welcomed the publication of DWP’s RES, but highlighted some shortcomings. In addition to these specific comments on the RES, much of the evidence received during the inquiry provided valuable insights into the issues covered in the RES publication.

26. In oral evidence, the CRE Chair pointed out that there is a difference between simply fulfilling the requirement to produce a RES publication and the actual delivery of a race equality strategy. He particularly criticised the DWP’s RES on the grounds that it did not focus on outcomes and there was insufficient detail on good practice. Disability Alliance

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13 DWP, Equality, Opportunity and Independence For All, May 2002
14 For example, the Disability Rights Commission, National Employment Panel, the Social Security Advisory Committee, the Health and Safety Commission and Health and Safety Executive.
15 Q 43
16 Ev 130
17 Qq 258-259
18 Disability Alliance (2003) Out of Sight: Race Inequality in the Benefits System
19 Q 43
welcomed the RES but in their report, which analysed the Scheme, called it a “lost opportunity” due to its complexity and apparent lack of urgency.\textsuperscript{20} In evidence, Vanessa Davis of Disability Alliance said that the language used in the RES appeared to suggest that it was aimed mainly at those with an intimate knowledge of the Department, rather than clients. She went on to say:

“\textit{We have our doubts that the Scheme will effect changes in the operational frontline, and…essentially that is what makes the difference: the Race Equality Scheme has to make a difference at the frontline, and, if it does not, then it is not working.”}\textsuperscript{21}

27. In evidence to the Committee, the DWP Director of Diversity responded that the Department invested time and effort into producing a workable RES and worked closely with the DWP Ethnic Minority Working Party to revise the content to make it more workable and outcome-focussed.\textsuperscript{22}

\textbf{The RES Progress Report}

28. The DWP Progress Report on Race Equality provides an update on the Department’s progress on the RES one year after its publication. It gives a breakdown of race equality objectives across the Department with a summary of progress and outcomes so far achieved. It also lists proposed objectives for 2004-05 onwards. While this is undoubtedly a helpful development, there is still a lack of a longer-term strategy for race equality, with few of the targets reaching beyond summer 2005.

29. \textbf{The Committee notes the Race Equality Scheme Progress Report and recommends that by 31 December 2005 the Department develops further targets to improve race equality beyond 2005.}

\textbf{Statutory three year review}

30. A further requirement of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 is that those who are subject to the specific duty to produce a RES must review their list of functions, policies and proposed policies for relevance to the general statutory duty every three years. This is to ensure that the Scheme is being properly implemented, kept up-to-date and relevant. The deadline the next review is 31 May 2005.

31. The CRE provides guidance on how a RES should be reviewed, which suggests the consideration of questions such as: whether there are adequate systems for monitoring the impact of existing functions and policies; whether an impact assessment of functions and policies has been undertaken; whether steps have been taken to address areas where race inequality has been identified; and whether access to all ethnic groups has been widened. In addition, all new functions and policies that have been introduced since the publication of the RES report need to be assessed. Any proposed functions and policies that are expected to be introduced within the next three years also need to be identified.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{20} Q 166 and Disability Alliance (2003) \textit{Out of Sight: Race Inequality in the Benefits System}
\textsuperscript{21} Q 166
\textsuperscript{22} Q 259
\textsuperscript{23} www.cre.gov.uk/duty
32. At the time of writing, the only part of DWP that has published a report on the three year review of the RES is the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate which has investigated a sample of local authorities’ compliance with the Race Relations Act as regards the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. The report shows that no local authorities were meeting all the criteria relating to the Race Relations Act; only 4 out of 15 had assessed the impact of proposed policies and monitored the impact of current policies on race equality. Furthermore, 2 authorities that failed to meet this requirement had a large ethnic minority population. Other findings were that 8 out of 15 authorities had not provided staff training on race and cultural awareness and only 2 authorities had conducted an annual review of facilities for ethnic minority clients. The report did identify some areas of good practice but noted that progress on complying with the race relations legislation had been slow.24

33. In line with the statutory requirement to review the relevant functions, policies and proposed policies contained in the Race Equality Scheme, the Committee recommends that the Department publishes on time, the statutory three year review of the Scheme to assess what progress has been made on race equality across DWP since May 2002.

4 Ethnic monitoring of DWP staff and clients

34. The importance of ethnic monitoring cannot be over-estimated. Without knowing who its clients and users are, how can a government department identify and measure the impact of its policies and the service standards delivered to its clients? Considering the near universal reach of DWP’s remit, ethnic monitoring of clients is crucially important. Ethnic monitoring of staff is a requirement of the general duty of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the ethnicity of staff may also affect the delivery of DWP services to ethnic minority customers.

Ethnic monitoring of staff

35. In addition to showing commitment to race equality, it is important that DWP demonstrates to clients that it places importance on employing a diverse workforce. Evidence from the West Midlands Caribbean Association suggests that the poor representation of minority ethnic groups among DWP staff leads to mistrust among ethnic minority clients. For example, ethnic minority clients living in an area with an ethnically diverse population may be put off if, when conducting their business with the Department, they rarely encounter ethnic minority staff.

Conducting ethnic monitoring

36. Ethnic monitoring enables employers to examine the ethnic make-up of staff and investigate the causes of any inequalities. Monitoring should extend to personnel practice and procedures such as opportunities for staff training, career progression and disciplinary action.

37. Ethnic monitoring of DWP staff does occur, although the Department admits it has experienced difficulties in conducting it. According to the Department, 8.5% of its workforce comes from an ethnic minority group. The traditional method of staff ethnic monitoring is to conduct a staff survey. However, this has proved to be unreliable owing to a high non-response rate – the 2001 staff survey had a response rate of 68%. In 2004, DWP conducted a targeted survey with the 45,000 staff for whom ethnicity data was missing and the Department now has ethnicity data for 88.2% of staff. Further to improve upon this figure, from September 2005 the Department plans to introduce an IT system called ‘Resource Management.’ This will enable staff to access and update their own personal data, including diversity information, that is held by the DWP Human Resources department. This style of ethnic monitoring was also suggested to the Committee by the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) in oral evidence.

25 Qq 242-243
27 Ev 110
28 DWP, Progress Report on Realising Race Equality July 2004
29 Q 20
Ethnic minority staff

38. 11,435 of DWP’s 133,932 staff are from an ethnic minority.\(^30\) According to PCS, DWP is the largest single employer of minority ethnic staff in the civil service yet they are underrepresented in all but the most junior grades (see table 2). The Department has set ‘aspirational equality targets’ to improve the representation of ethnic minority staff in the Department by 2005. As the table below shows, the targets at the middle grades have been exceeded but there is still progress to be made at the higher levels.

39. It should be noted that there are also two lower grades where representation of ethnic minorities is above the census level of 8.3% of the working age population. 9.6% of administrative officers and 10% of administrative assistants are from an ethnic minority and consequently have no ethnicity target set. Two-thirds of the ethnic minority staff working for DWP are in these two grades, which are frequently in the ‘frontline’ of DWP’s work.

40. Frank Bonner of the PCS argued that it is important to achieve better representation of ethnic minorities at the higher levels within the Department and its Agencies, rather than just at the frontline, as this is the key to cultural change and recognition of ethnicity issues.\(^31\) The need for DWP to employ more senior ethnic minority staff was raised by several other witnesses,\(^32\) with Sedhev Bismal of the Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group saying: “…the workforce at all levels should reflect the communities they serve…”\(^33\)

Table 2: Representation of DWP ethnic minority staff and the equality targets\(^34\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DWP ethnic minority staff</th>
<th>At 30 September 2001</th>
<th>At 30 September 2004</th>
<th>Target – 31 March 2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior Civil Service</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6/7</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Executive Officer</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Executive Officer</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Officer</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Officer</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Assistant</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{30}\) Ev 209
\(^{31}\) Qq 21, 23
\(^{32}\) Qq 31, 242,
\(^{33}\) Q 242, (Mr Bismal)
\(^{34}\) Ev 110
41. Although the most recent figures (for September 2004) on staff ethnicity show that the Department is still falling short of the equality targets at the higher staff levels, in evidence the Minister for Work said that the targets were set to be stretching, but achievable. PCS said that the equality targets were based on the 1991 rather than the 2001 census figures and need to be amended appropriately. As yet, no new targets have been set beyond March 2005.

42. In addition, as a Departmental official pointed out, a relevant issue regarding the staff equality targets is that the Department is undergoing “a significant downsizing exercise.” He went on to say: “We are not actually recruiting large numbers of people from outside just at the moment, for obvious reasons.” The issue of staff reductions, to which he was referring, is addressed below.

43. The Committee recommends that by 31 December 2005 the Department sets long-term and challenging targets for the improved representation of ethnic minority staff, particularly at senior levels, beyond 2005. The Department must improve its own knowledge of its workforce by more effective ethnic monitoring. We believe PCS could do more to assist with this process.

Career progression

44. The over-representation of ethnic minorities in the lower staff grades contrasted with the under-representation at higher grades and the limited external recruitment suggests that efforts could be made to enhance career progression of existing ethnic minority staff. PCS stated that, although the Department has used direct recruitment to improve ethnic minority staff at senior grades, promotion from the lower levels appears to taper at middle management. DWP does have initiatives in place to improve staff development and, in evidence, the Minister for Work said:

“We firmly believe that we need to encourage and develop staff with an ethnic minority background so that they can move up through the organisation and move into the upper echelons of the civil service.”

45. Since 1998 the main development programme for ethnic minority staff is ‘Realising Potential’ which assists participants in developing their skills to enable them to compete for promotion. Over two years, each participant has access to a range of training courses and a £2000 bursary. According to the Department, over half of the 26 people (out of the Department’s over 11,000 minority ethnic staff) who participated in 2001-2003, achieved at least one promotion. The RES Progress Report states that ‘Realising Potential’ has now been reviewed and relaunched as a Management Development Scheme that will focus exclusively on addressing under-representation in management grades.

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35 Ev 12
36 Q 266
37 Ev 12
38 Q 261
39 Ev 148
40 DWP, Progress Report on Realising Race Equality, July 2004, pg 47
46. In evidence, the Minister for Work also informed the Committee of other initiatives aimed at boosting the prospects of ethnic minority staff. These include ‘Breaking Through’ where 48 of the 55 participants have achieved at least one promotion; and a new recruitment system that is under development to enable higher executive officers to reach grade 6 management level.41

47. Although schemes such as Realising Potential and Breaking Through are to be welcomed, the limited number of places available contrasts sharply with the large number of ethnic minority staff in the Department. This could give the impression of only token effort being made and suggests that further steps need to be made to increase the promotion prospects of ethnic minority staff.

48. PCS suggested a range of steps that should be taken by the Department to enhance the career progression of ethnic minority staff. These include setting area-based targets on the number and grades of minority ethnic staff; abolishing performance pay and special bonuses as they adversely affect minority ethnic staff; comprehensive ethnic monitoring of staff training courses, development programmes, appraisals, vacancy filling, reasons for leaving and recruitment and all senior management posts to have the advancement of ethnic minority staff as a key work objective.42 In addition, the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) recommended ‘fast-tracking’ minority ethnic staff in the lower grades and implementing a mentoring scheme.43

49. The Committee recommends that the Department undertakes by 1 May 2006 a full review of staff procedures to assess their impact on race equality, taking account of factors such as access to training and reasons given for resignation and that it develops an action plan to address any adverse effects of its procedures upon ethnic minority staff. We also recommend that the Department provides substantial further support for existing ethnic minority staff in career progression and takes immediate action to recruit ethnic minority staff at senior levels.

Staff efficiencies: the impact on staff ethnic diversity

50. One issue of real concern to the Committee is the effect of the staff efficiencies and the transfer of jobs away from London and the South East, where almost half of all non-white people in the country live. Following the Gershon Review and Lyons Review in 2004, the DWP is now committed to cutting 30,000 staff – from a staff complement of 130,000 – by 2007-08. A further 10,000 posts are to be redeployed to frontline roles and 4,000 are to be relocated out of London and the South East.44 The 2004 Pre-Budget Report states that DWP has already relocated 2,050 posts and reduced the workforce by over 6,000.45

51. In evidence, Frank Bonner from PCS warned that the job cuts and relocation plans will have a significant impact as so many of the staff in the lower grades of the Department’s
Agencies are from an ethnic minority group. PCS informed the Committee that 48% of the staff in the administrative grade and 37% of those in the executive officer grade in London are from an ethnic minority – five times the average across the whole Department. Mr Bonner said: "In many offices a white face on the frontline is unusual."

52. PCS is concerned that the job cuts will both reduce the number of ethnic minority staff employed by the DWP and diminish the quality of service available to ethnic minority clients due to the lower number of staff available with multi-lingual skills and the social and cultural knowledge required to assist customers claim benefits and find work. This view was also expressed by the Local Government Association (LGA) who commented that any reduction in ethnic minority staff in London will impact upon the Department’s quality of frontline services and outreach work. They argued that efforts will need to be made to raise cultural awareness of staff and that greater access to interpreters and translators (so far uncosted by the Department) will be required. The move across DWP to provision of services through call centres rather than local offices and the consequent effect on services to ethnic minorities was also raised by many of those giving evidence. These issues will also be addressed in following sections of the report.

53. PCS pointed out that not only is the ethnic minority unemployment rate higher than the overall rate, but that London has a higher level of unemployment and worklessness than any other region in the country. PCS stated that around 20% of staff – many of whom are likely to be ethnic minority women – work part-time, due to childcare and other caring responsibilities, and therefore are restricted as to where they can work. Consequently, the relocation of civil service posts outside of London and the South East will make it very difficult for them to find alternative employment. In written evidence, PCS recommended that DWP should instigate area-based ethnic minority staff targets based on the population of the local area.

54. In evidence, the Minister for Work admitted that the “efficiency challenge,” the requirements presented by the Lyons report and the large scale reconstruction of DWP and its Agencies have resulted in a time of turmoil. The Minister went on to say that DWP is conducting a race impact assessment for each of the Department’s Agencies, most of which will be published “by the end of the [current] financial year”. At the time when this Report was agreed, with less than a fortnight remaining of the financial year, the race impact assessments were not available for the Committee to consider.

55. Responding to the question of how the job cuts and relocations will affect the ethnic diversity of the workforce, the Business Strategy Director of Jobcentre Plus said:

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46 Ev 127
47 Q 21
48 Ev 127
49 Q 41
50 See, for example, Ev 5, 11, 48, 123, 126, 199, Qq 21-22.
51 Ev 127
52 Ev 9
53 Q 263
“We have an overall efficiency challenge which is for Jobcentre Plus to achieve its part of the targets for staff reduction set by the Chancellor. That means change. Those changes are…broken down into a whole set of component parts…One part of that plan, for example, is centralising the benefit processing work in different parts of the country. Another part of the plan is to complete the roll-out of Jobcentre Plus …We have to subject every element of that plan to a race impact assessment to address exactly the question you ask: How does that impact, if it does impact differentially, on the different parts of Jobcentre Plus and the make-up of staffing? We will go through that process and we are going through that process and we will publish a race impact assessment. It is important to understand that, as far as the centralisation of benefit processing is concerned, a lot of that was done, as far as London is concerned, in the early nineties…We are not going to change the fundamental geography of the frontline offices. There will still be frontline offices dealing directly with customers in every single part of London as there are now. To the extent that we are making further changes, it will be with the backroom staff…But we will be putting every single element of this plan through the proper race impact assessment process.”

56. The Minister for Work accepted that the migration of jobs out of London and the South East would affect the ethnic balance of the Department and the prospect of meeting all of the staff ethnicity targets. She also told the Committee that the Department has agreed with the trade unions an ethnic monitoring process of staff leaving DWP. The Minister went on to say that the Department has commissioned:

“…an in-depth analysis of the selection criteria that is going to be used when we are selecting staff for early release or redundancy, either voluntary or any other form of redundancy. We hope this will identify whether any aspects of the criteria that we are using…creates any bias against any particular group.”

57. The Committee is concerned that proposed job cuts and relocations will have a disproportionate impact on black and minority ethnic employees, which could contribute to a worsening of relative unemployment levels. The Committee recommends that by 1 May 2006 the Department publishes the race impact assessment of the job cuts and relocations out of London and the South East; the criteria used for selecting staff who are likely to lose their posts; and also the ethnic breakdown of the staff who will be leaving the Department as a result of the job cuts. We also recommend that the Department gives serious consideration to the effect on staff ethnicity targets when deciding which staff will be selected for redundancy.

**Ethnic monitoring of clients**

58. Most of those submitting evidence to the inquiry highlighted the importance of ethnic monitoring of clients and its centrality to assessing the service standards to ethnic minorities. Frank Bonner of the PCS said that the lack of data on client ethnicity leads to a
lack of hard evidence and that such data is also important as it “concentrates people’s minds on a day-to-day basis.”\textsuperscript{58} He went on to say:

“…we can have the greatest equal opportunities policies in the world but if they are not part of the day-to-day experience of what is going on, almost second nature, then they get lost in the pressures of delivery.”\textsuperscript{59}

59. The importance of ethnic monitoring of benefit claims has long been recognised and was a recommendation of a joint pilot study conducted by CRE and the Benefits Agency in 1992/3.\textsuperscript{60}

60. In evidence to this inquiry, both the CRE and Disability Alliance stated that the Department will have difficulty meeting some of its duties under race relations legislation on the basis that if an organisation does not know the ethnicity of its customers, it will be unable to identify and measure any adverse or beneficial impact of its policies on people from different ethnic groups and ensure equitable access to services.\textsuperscript{61} This was reinforced by other evidence submitted to the inquiry suggesting that the Department’s failure to conduct ethnic monitoring has resulted in an information vacuum, with little hard evidence available on issues such as the quality of service received by minority ethnic people; the comparative level of benefit take-up; the impact of specific policies; and the identification of best practice.\textsuperscript{62}

61. DWP itself acknowledged that the gathering of customer ethnicity information is crucial in its progress towards compliance with the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2002 but, when submitting evidence in May 2003, admitted that data on the ethnic composition of DWP clients was patchy.\textsuperscript{63} More recently, in the Race Equality Progress Report, the Department admitted:

“Monitoring has proved to be one of the most difficult areas for us…mainly due to the size and complexity of the Department, and the huge number of customers that we serve across the UK. Achieving the level of monitoring we require relies on an ambitious programme of data linking for ethnic minority customers, and cross-departmental working to align the IT necessary to monitor all our staff functions.”\textsuperscript{64}

62. In May 2003, the CRE, said that, at that time, the DWP had no reliable data on the ethnicity of the vast majority of its customer base (eg, those using the Disability and Carers Directorate, the CSA, the Pensions Service and the Appeals Service).\textsuperscript{65} More recently, in evidence, the Minister for Work said ethnic monitoring is largely confined to Jobcentre Plus and is specific to certain areas of delivery, such as the New Deals and Jobseeker’s Allowance. However, the Department aims to collect ethnicity data on all working age

\textsuperscript{58} Q 1
\textsuperscript{59} Q 3
\textsuperscript{60} Ev 24
\textsuperscript{61} Ev 24, Q 100
\textsuperscript{62} Qq 1-9, 62,151,
\textsuperscript{63} Ev 131
\textsuperscript{64} DWP, Progress Report on Realising Race Equality, July 2004
\textsuperscript{65} Ev 24
clients by 2006. The Minister also stated that the Pension Service have had difficulties in undertaking ethnic monitoring due to issues around customer consent and the necessary changes to IT systems that prevented ethnic monitoring being implemented along with the introduction of Pension Credit.\textsuperscript{66}

63. The RES Progress Report outlined ongoing work on improving ethnic monitoring across DWP including preliminary work to combine data from different sources within the Department. The report also stated that ethnic monitoring of Pension Credit via postcodes now takes place.\textsuperscript{67} When questioned on when full ethnic monitoring will take place within the Pension Service, Barbara Burford, the DWP Director of Diversity said:

“There is a great deal of information, not collected operationally but collected almost on a project basis. We have used what we have to make sure it helps us to inform the services and the Pension Service, but we have to wait until we install the proper large databases before we can collect that information operationally. In the meantime, we are trying to learn what you do with the information, because it is not just good enough to collect it and tick the box; we have to learn how we turn that information into the knowledge to act.”\textsuperscript{68}

64. DWP has undoubtedly made some progress in introducing ethnic monitoring of clients since the Race Relations (Amendment) Act was passed, but there is still a long way to go. The Committee is concerned at the lack of speed shown by the Department in recognising the importance of ethnic monitoring of clients to measure the quality of service delivery and the impact of policies. We are very surprised that the ethnic monitoring of its client base was not introduced at the time of the inception of the Pension Service. We are also concerned that the paucity of ethnicity data across DWP makes it very difficult to measure whether the Department is meeting all of its duties under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

65. The Committee recommends that the Department takes urgent action to implement ethnic monitoring across the Department and its Agencies at both entry point and exit point and for all benefits and services. We also recommend that the Department works closely with the DWP Ethnic Minority Working Party, the Commission for Racial Equality and other representative bodies to ensure that full and proper use is made of the information gathered through ethnic monitoring.

\textsuperscript{66} Qq 272-276
\textsuperscript{67} DWP (2004), Progress Report on Realising Race Equality, July 2004, p 62
\textsuperscript{68} Q 273
5 Service standards received by ethnic minority clients

66. In order fully to comply with the duties of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, DWP must take account of race equality in the services it delivers and the policies applied. The DWP Race Equality Scheme (RES) states:

“It is always the intention of the work of the Department that the policies we develop, the ways in which we implement them and the services we provide are accessible equally to all members of society, whatever their race, nationality or cultural background.”

67. This chapter will review the evidence submitted on the service received by ethnic minority clients.

The experience of ethnic minority clients

68. Most of those submitting evidence to the inquiry criticised many aspects of DWP’s service delivery to ethnic minorities. Citizens Advice systematically monitored advice cases dealt with by their bureaux on benefit administration problems in order to examine the quality of DWP service delivery. The general problems included errors and lost papers, delays in processing claims, confusing letters about benefits and inaccurate advice. They found that these problems are often more intense for ethnic minority clients, especially those who have a poor level of English. However, as noted in chapter 4, it is difficult to analyse how widespread these issues are, and the full impact of them, due to the lack of ethnicity data on DWP’s clients. Some of the key areas that were raised during the Committee’s inquiry as disproportionately affecting ethnic minorities are discussed below. These do not represent a full analysis of the Department’s work and the service standards delivered to ethnic minorities, but they do highlight some areas where action is necessary to improve upon the service delivered by DWP to ethnic minorities in order to ensure full compliance with race relations legislation.

Discretionary decision-making

69. Several organisations cited problems for ethnic minority clients where discretionary decision-making is used. The Local Government Association (LGA) identified the Social Fund as a problematic area for ethnic minority applicants which needs reviewing to assess ethnic minority clients’ access to the Fund and the way in which it is administered by the Department. Research conducted by the Department has identified Asian families as least likely to apply for help from the Social Fund, although, as chapter 4 suggests, DWP’s

69 DWP, Realising Race Equality in the DWP, July 2003, p 10
70 The language barrier is covered in chapter 7.
71 Ev 36 and 115
72 Ev 36
failure to conduct comprehensive ethnic monitoring of clients means that it is hard to assess exactly how ethnic minority groups’ access the Social Fund and how widespread the main problems are. In evidence, the Business Strategy Director of Jobcentre Plus agreed that the Department does not possess sufficient information on the differential experiences of the Social Fund by ethnic minorities but that such an exercise was necessary.\footnote{Q 328}

70. The ‘habitual residence’ test was also identified as disproportionately problematic for ethnic minorities. The test was introduced in 1994 and applies to Income Support, income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance, Pension Credit, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. To be entitled to these benefits a claimant has to prove that they are habitually resident and have a ‘settled intention’ to make a temporary or permanent home in the UK.\footnote{Some groups such as European Economic Area (EEA) nationals, refugees and people who have been granted ‘exceptional leave to remain’ are exempt from the habitual residence test.} The test should only apply if the claimant has been in the country for two years or less. Temporary periods abroad do not result in losing habitual residence status.\footnote{CPAG (2004) Welfare Benefits and Tax Credits Handbook}

71. In evidence, the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) stated:

“The habitual residence test is a good example of how the exercise of discretion can often lead to discrimination.”\footnote{Ev 115}

72. Hitslink were concerned that the test is applied arbitrarily\footnote{Ev 111} and it was suggested that, because it is applied to those who have travelled abroad, it disproportionately affects those with family overseas and who may spend longer periods abroad dealing with family matters.\footnote{Q 249} Consequently, evidence suggests that the test is applied in a “draconian” manner and has led to increased discrimination against minority ethnic groups who may experience “extreme questioning” upon returning to the UK.\footnote{Ev 10, 111, 115, 187, 190, Q 27} It was suggested that ethnic monitoring of cases refused under the habitual residence test should be established to assess whether discrimination is taking place.\footnote{Ev 111} Newham Social Regeneration Unit and Hounslow Welfare Benefits Unit were both of the view that the poor administration of the habitual residence test, leading to incorrect refusals of benefits, was due to the lack of staff training.\footnote{Qq 53-54} The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union argued that the Government should review its policy on the habitual residence test.\footnote{Ev 10}

73. These are just two examples of policy areas that need a full assessment of the way in which they are delivered to ensure that no ethnic group receives unequal treatment. A key component of any assessment is that the clients need to be monitored for ethnicity to establish the extent to which certain groups receive unequal treatment. Further steps must
then be taken to address this. The end of this chapter will examine the Department’s use of impact assessment.

74. The Committee recommends that the habitual residence test and the Social Fund discretionary decisions are subject to ethnic monitoring to establish whether there is a differential impact upon ethnic minorities, and whether those tests are applied differently.

**Identification requirements**

75. Evidence received during the inquiry suggests that ethnic minorities often experience difficulties due to the identification requirements when claiming benefits and this is more likely to affect older ethnic minority groups and refugees. For example, when making a claim for state retirement pension, one qualifying condition is confirmation of date of birth. Where a woman is claiming on the national insurance contributions of her husband, proof of marriage is required. This proof is not needed if benefits have been claimed previously with prior verification.

76. During the inquiry, it was pointed out that ethnic minority older people may not possess their birth certificate or marriage certificate. Indeed, in India until the early 1960s, often these certificates were not even issued. It was also suggested that, although there are alternative methods of verification that can be used by DWP, there is some reluctance by staff to explore alternatives. During the Committee’s visit to the Pension Service in Wolverhampton, staff brought the issue to our attention, saying that the necessity of two forms of identification proved impossible for some claimants and was also frustrating for staff wanting to progress a claim.

77. When questioned on this problem, the Business Strategy Director of Jobcentre Plus said that steps have been taken in recent years to tighten the evidence of identity required, but pointed out that claimants could use a range of evidence, such as a driving licence or rent book to prove their identity. For proof of marriage where it had taken place in a country without the administrative infrastructure, DWP staff should refer cases to the Validity of Marriage Unit based in Newcastle-upon-Tyne whose responsibility it is to advise on whether a marriage or divorce is valid. The Unit has a target to clear 90% of cases within 215 days and interim arrangements are in place to ensure that claimants receive financial assistance while waiting for their data to be verified. In 2003-04, the Unit received 6638 referrals and the average clearance time was 79 days.

78. The Committee recommends that the Department reviews the identification requirements needed to pursue a benefit claim and ensures that staff are fully trained in the identification requirements including the process of referral to the Validity of Marriage Unit.

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84 Ev 6, 201
85 Ev 165
86 See Annex and Q 248
87 Q 247, Ev 36, 201
88 Q 329
89 Ev 166


**Payment of benefits when abroad**

79. Some benefit payments stop if the claimant spends more than four weeks abroad and a new claim has to be submitted on return. Several of those submitting evidence highlighted this as particularly problematic for ethnic minority older people as the cultural norm, or family requirements or expectations may be to spend a much longer period away from the UK, for example to deal with family events such as weddings and funerals. With regard to Pension Credit, Age Concern argued that the four week period after which Pension Credit stops if the claimant is abroad, should be extended to at least 13 weeks. The Department estimates that this would cost an additional £5million a year. In evidence, the Minister for Work stated that the Department was considering what the implications would be of an extension to the period during which payments might be made while a claimant is abroad.

80. In evidence to the Committee’s Pension Credit inquiry, Citizens Advice suggested that payment of Pension Credit should be suspended, rather than cancelled, provided the pensioner returns to the UK within a year. This would be one way in which the Department could introduce a service delivery-based solution to the problem, rather than a wider-ranging policy change.

81. The Committee recommends that the Department examines the option of suspending rather than cancelling payment of benefits while abroad for a time-limited period. We also reiterate our recommendation that, by 1 April 2006, payment of Pension Credit during a temporary absence abroad is brought into line with Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit and is paid for up to 13 weeks.

**Cultural issues affecting service standards**

82. Evidence received during the inquiry pointed to a cultural gap between ethnic minority clients and many of the DWP staff delivering services to them. This gap was thought to be wider for some ethnic minority women and also for older ethnic minority groups.

83. Commenting on the cultural barrier, Vanessa Davis of Disability Alliance gave an example that in some languages there is no word for ‘carer.’ In addition, female Asian claimants may be deeply averse to being interviewed by male DWP staff, particularly when claiming disability benefits.

84. Junior Hemans of the West Midlands Caribbean Parents’ and Friends’ Association argued that staff show a lack of cultural sensitivity in dealing with ethnic minority clients and fail to understand how culture affects the way in which services might need to be delivered to ethnic minorities. Consequently, the issues outlined above are not always

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90 Qq 24 (Ms Poku), 79, 249
91 Ev 201
92 HC Deb, 21 October 2004, col 911w
93 Q 331
95 Qq 24, 159, 162, 226
96 Q 228
addressed by staff when providing a service to ethnic minority clients and suggest that improved training on race equality and cultural awareness is needed.

85. These issues are further explored in chapter 6.

**Staff training**

86. The Department’s supplementary memorandum states that all the Department’s staff who deliver frontline services should have up-to-date training in race equality and multicultural awareness. Nonetheless, the evidence presented during the inquiry, including the examples given above, suggests that DWP could improve upon its service delivery to ethnic minorities by expanding the existing training and ensuring that staff are fully trained in race equality awareness and the requirements of the race relations legislation. It is also necessary to monitor the impact of the training to ensure it remains effective. Jeremy Vanes, Chief Executive of Wolverhampton Citizens Advice, argued that the volume of DWP ethnic minority clients is a real argument for the mainstreaming of ethnicity and diversity services and adequate training is required to do that.

87. Commenting on the importance of improved staff training and the monitoring of that training, Sedhev Bismal, Chairman of the Wolverhampton Inter-faith Group, said:

> “The first thing is that the Department needs to win the trust of the ethnic minority communities, and that can be done only if the officers are sensitised…there should be regular training programmes to raise their awareness levels of different cultures, but unless we monitor the impact of that training on their practice, and monitor the difference it is making in their day-to-day practice, their training is not going to change any attitudes. That has been my experience. We can talk about discrimination and equality issues, but unless we look at the impact on people’s practice and then do something to support them to implement what they have learnt through their training, these changes are not going to take place.”

88. In their report on the Race Equality Scheme, Disability Alliance recommended that staff training needs to relate to the “real world” and needs to be supported, not undermined, by other policies. They highlight three requirements of staff race equality training. First, the training aims should be deliverable. For example, to provide a better service to someone who does not speak English, staff may need to spend more time with them and jeopardise the office waiting time targets. Second, “training by circular” should be avoided: staff who receive a multitude of newsletters and emails will not necessarily prioritise race equality written guidance. Finally, training should be relevant to the ethnic diversity of the locality in which the staff work. In evidence, Vanessa Davis of Disability Alliance added that it is imperative that cultural and race awareness training is tested by

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97 Ev 164
98 Qq 104-105, 162, 243
99 Q 243
100 Q 243 (Mr Bismal)
101 Disability Alliance (2003) Out of Sight: Race Inequality in the Benefits System
clients and their representative organisations to ensure that it is making a difference to the delivery of services.102

89. Referring to staff race awareness training, the Minister for Work stated that:

“…we do need to keep up the effort because raising the levels of cultural competence of our staff…is going to be really important if we are going to achieve our targets and our objectives.”103

90. She acknowledged that it is crucial that staff are fully aware of areas of delivery where client behaviour may be attributed to ethnicity or culture. For example, staff need to understand that there are some religious objections to taking out loans and that may result in resistance to applying for the Social Fund. The Minister went on to emphasise the ‘Diversity Toolkit’ as a sophisticated product that is crucial in training staff in race awareness.104 The RES Progress Report states that this toolkit:

“…includes a comprehensive module on race issues, and encompasses cultural awareness, with case studies, training modules and links to other useful sites, videos and publications. This will be available to all staff and is intended to raise awareness of race and cultural issues and increase staff capability in dealing with ethnic minority customers.”105

91. The Minister for Work also acknowledged that the Diversity Toolkit needs to be kept up-to-date and efforts need to be made to ensure that staff use it.106

92. The RES Progress Report makes several references to the Diversity Toolkit across the main service delivery areas of the Department, such as the Pension Service and Jobcentre Plus. Further references to staff training appear to be limited to staff being “briefed” on the Race Relations (Amendment) Act with specific training only being identified for senior managers, “key staff”, or those who are members of “race equality action groups”.107

93. Training is crucial in overcoming cultural barriers and enhancing the race awareness of DWP staff. The Committee recommends that:

a) the Department undertakes a full assessment of race equality and cultural awareness training, in consultation with external experts, such as the Commission for Racial Equality;

b) the Department ensures that staff receive up-to-date equality training, with annual ‘refresher’ courses for all staff;

c) training via printed and electronic media is only used to supplement attendance at a training event;

102 Q 162
103 Q 327
104 Q 328
105 DWP, Progress Report on Realising Race Equality, July 2004, p 64
106 Q 328
d) **all training is tested and evaluated to ensure that it meets the needs of staff and clients.**

**Impact assessment**

94. Evidence received during the inquiry indicated that there is a need for the Department to assess their policies, and the way they are delivered, for their impact on ethnic minorities. This is a requirement of the race relations legislation. The Department’s RES Progress Report does admit:

> “Impact assessment is another area in which we have experienced difficulties. When drawing up our RES, a screening of our functions and policies was carried out to help us to prioritise them for any potential effect on ethnic minorities, and to action plan accordingly. We realised, however, that we needed to put in place a much sturdier system by which we could effectively assess the impact of our policies on ethnic minority customers and staff.”

95. Consequently, DWP has worked with the Home Office and CRE to develop an Impact Assessment Tool (IAT) which in July 2004, the RES Progress Report stated, was in the final stages of development. In answer to a Parliamentary Question in December 2004, the Minister for Disabled People said that the impact assessment tool has been produced and is a “priority function” in the Department and “has been used to assess several high profile policies, and is now in general use across the Department.”

96. Although the focus of this inquiry was upon service delivery and we have not examined in detail the impact of specific DWP policies upon ethnic minorities, examples of policy areas where a differential impact is experienced by ethnic minorities were touched upon in evidence. It is crucial that the Department applies an impact assessment to all areas of its work and acts upon the results.

97. **The Committee recommends that the Impact Assessment Tool is urgently applied across the Department to all areas of service delivery as well as to existing and new policies and that the results of the impact assessment are published and acted upon promptly to reduce inequalities for clients and staff and to meet the race relations legislation.**

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109 HC Deb, 21 Dec 2004, col 1729w
110 [www.cre.gov.uk/duty/reia](http://www.cre.gov.uk/duty/reia)
6 Benefit take-up

98. The Committee wished to consider how DWP service delivery affected the take-up of benefit by minority ethnic groups compared with take-up by the population as a whole. As benefit take-up was most commonly raised during the inquiry in connection with pensioners, this section primarily considers the take-up rates among ethnic minority pensioners as a case-study, focussing in particular on the efforts of the Pension Service to encourage take-up of Pension Credit. Pension Credit came into force in October 2003, replacing the Minimum Income Guarantee as the main means-tested benefit for pensioners.111

99. Reliable take-up statistics on Pension Credit in the first six months will be available in autumn 2005.112 The most recent figures that are available indicate that in 2002/03, between 63% and 74% of those entitled to the Minimum Income Guarantee actually claimed it.113 The Pension Service does not currently record a person’s ethnic origin,114 so estimates of take-up by ethnic group are not yet available. However, the fact that ethnic minority groups are over-represented amongst the poorest pensioners in Britain115 suggests they may be more likely than other poor pensioners to be entitled to means-tested benefits.

Take-up of Pension Credit and other benefits

100. The Government has set targets to have 3 million households receiving Pension Credit by 2006 and 3.2 million by 2008.116 At the end of December 2004, there were 2.65 million recipients of Pension Credit including 2.08 million receiving Guarantee Credit.117 DWP says it is on course to meet its 2006 targets.118

101. Since the publication of the Committee’s report on Pension Credit, DWP has provided further information on the amounts which it estimates that those not claiming means-tested benefits (Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and Minimum Income Guarantee) were missing out on in 2001/2 and 2002/03. These figures suggest that:

- Although take-up of Housing Benefit is comparatively high (with only around one in ten not taking up their entitlement),119 those not claiming were often missing out on significant amounts. For example, 13% were missing out on £50 or more per week and

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111 Pension Credit is made up of a Guarantee Credit (almost identical to MIG) and a Savings Credit (which aims to ensure that those who have some private provision for retirement will be better off than those who have not).
112 Work and Pensions Committee, Pension Credit, Third Report of Session 2004-05, HC 43-11, Ev 126
114 HC Deb, 15 November 2004, col 1179w
115 Ev 138
116 HM Treasury, 2002 Spending Review, Cm 5570, July 2002, para 18.2; and HM Treasury, 2004 Spending Review, Cm 6237, para 19.6. Within the overall target, there are targets to be paying Guarantee Credit to 2.1 million pensioner households by 2006 and 2.2 million by 2008.
117 HC Deb 3 Feb 2005 col 68W5
118 DWP, DWP Autumn Performance Report: Progress against Public Service Agreement Targets, Cm 6397, December 2004, p 46
119 DWP and National Statistics, Income Related Estimates of Take-up in 2002/03, Table 2.1. Take-up of Housing Benefit by caseload was between 84% and 90%
when entitlement to MIG and Council Tax Benefit were also taken into account, this increased to 35%.\textsuperscript{120}

- Although take-up of Council Tax Benefit is lowest with around 40% not claiming their entitlement, those not claiming miss out on relatively small amounts;\textsuperscript{121} 62% of that 40% were missing out on less than £10 a week in Council Tax Benefit and only 2% on £20 or more. When entitlement to MIG and Housing Benefit were also taken into account those missing out on £20 or more rose to 32%.\textsuperscript{122}

- Between 26% and 37% of those entitled to MIG did not claim their entitlement.\textsuperscript{123} Some of those not claiming were missing out on significant amounts, with 17% missing out on £50 per week or more of MIG. When entitlement to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit were also taken into account the proportion missing out on £50 or more rose to 26%.\textsuperscript{124}

102. These figures provide some useful indications of where the Department should focus its efforts if it is to concentrate on pensioner poverty. For example, although take-up of Housing Benefit is comparatively high, some of those not claiming are missing out on large weekly amounts, particularly where entitlement to other benefits is included.

103. In its Pension Credit report, the Committee recommended that the Family Resources Survey should be used to gain a better understanding of overall take-up of means-tested benefits by pensioner households (including Pension Credit, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit) in order that resources to increase take-up could be focussed on those who are missing out on the largest amounts. The Department is currently exploring options for improving the capacity of the Family Resources Survey to be used for analysis of ethnic minority groups.\textsuperscript{125} The Committee recommends that a breakdown of take-up of means-tested benefits by pensioner households should also be provided by ethnic group.

\textsuperscript{120} Ev 205, tables 3 and 4
\textsuperscript{121} DWP and National Statistics, \textit{Income Related Estimates of Take-up in 2002/03}, Table 3.1. Take-up of Council Tax Benefit by caseload was between 56% and 62%.
\textsuperscript{122} Ev 205, tables 5 and 10
\textsuperscript{123} DWP and National Statistics, \textit{Income Related Estimates of Take-up in 2002/03}, Table 17. Take-up of MIG by caseload was between 63% and 79%.
\textsuperscript{124} Ev 205 tables 1 and 2
Figure 1: Percentage distribution of MIG, HB and CTB Entitled Non-Recipients, by band of weekly unclaimed amounts of MIG, HB and CTB respectively, 2001/2 – 2002/3

Source: Ev 205

Notes:

1. 2% of those not claiming Council Tax Benefit are missing out on £20 a week or more

2. This chart shows: i) the percentage distribution of unclaimed MIG among entitled non-recipients by size of weekly entitlement; ii) the percentage distribution of unclaimed HB among entitled non-recipients by size of weekly entitlement; iii) the percentage distribution of unclaimed CTB among entitled non-recipients by size of weekly entitlement.

3. To allow a reliable breakdown by pensioner groups, estimates are based on a combination of two years’ worth of data. Therefore, estimates may differ from published statistics.

4. Estimates have not been corrected for the biases that may be inherent in modelling entitlement to income-related benefits and so should be treated with some caution. In particular, a significant proportion of those appearing to be entitled non-recipients (ENRs) will not be true ENRs, and a significant proportion of true entitled non-recipients will not be captured in our modelling.

5. Because of these uncertainties, breakdowns are presented as percentages rather than numbers of ENRs.
Figure 2: Percentage distribution of Council Tax Benefit, Housing Benefit and MIG entitled non-recipients, by band of total unclaimed amounts of income-related benefits (MIG, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit) 2001/2-2002/3

Notes:

1. When entitlement to missed Housing Benefit and MIG is also taken into account 32% of not claiming Council Tax Benefit are missing out on £20 or more.

2. This chart shows: i) for MIG eligible non-claimants, the percentage distribution of total unclaimed income-related benefits (MIG, HB and CTB); ii) for HB pensioner eligible non-claimants, the percentage distribution of total unclaimed income-related benefits (MIG, HB and CTB); for CTB pensioner eligible non-claimants, the percentage distribution of total unclaimed income-related benefits (MIG, HB and CTB).

3. To allow a reliable breakdown by pensioner groups, estimates are based on a combination of two years’ worth of data. Therefore, estimates may differ from published statistics.

4. Estimates have not been corrected for the biases that may be inherent in modelling entitlement to income-related benefits and so should be treated with some caution. In particular, a significant proportion of those appearing to be entitled non-recipients (ENRs) will not be true ENRs, and a significant proportion of true entitled non-recipients will not be captured in our modelling.

5. Because of these uncertainties, breakdowns are presented as percentages rather than numbers of ENRs.

6. The table shows bands of total unclaimed entitlement. For example, the £30-39 band for MIG would include a pensioner entitled non-recipient of MIG claiming £20 HB but not claiming £25 MIG and £10 CTB.

104. Research published by DWP in 1998 estimated take-up of Attendance Allowance to be between 40% and 60%, and take up of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to be between 30% and 50% for the care component and between 50% and 70% for the mobility component.126

105. A report published by Disability Alliance in late 2003 argued that research was needed to determine whether apparent underclaiming of DLA by ethnic minority groups was an accurate reflection of need or “an indicator of systemic deficiency.” Without such research, it argued, our knowledge of ethnic minority disability and carer benefits experience would continue “to be descriptive, and the gaps in our knowledge vast.” 127 In evidence, Vanessa Davis of Disability Alliance argued that information needed to be collected statistically so that it is possible to work out how to address the issue. 128

106. DWP research on service delivery to ethnic minority groups found there was uncertainty about what Attendance Allowance was for and who is eligible to claim it. Complaints were made about the length of time it took to complete claim forms for these benefits. The questions were felt to be “extremely personal, detailed and intrusive.” 129 DWP says that “simpler and better focussed” Attendance Allowance claim forms were introduced nationwide in October 2003. 130 The Department says that the development of Joint Teams in the Pension Service (see paragraph 125) appears to have contributed to an increase in the number of pensioners taking up their entitlement. 131

107. In its recent Pension Credit report, the Committee recommended that “the Government undertakes and then publishes research providing estimates of eligibility for Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance, and of the potential impact of this on Pension Credit eligibility, and soon thereafter announces a take-up target for disability benefits.” 132 The Committee further recommends that research on the estimates of eligibility for Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance should look specifically at eligibility among ethnic minorities.

Take-up of Pension Credit by ethnic minority pensioners

108. The Pension Service has conducted research aimed at callers to the Pension Credit Application Line which found that callers from ethnic minority groups “closely matched and in most cases exceeded the census ethnic mix levels.” Further work is being considered to examine take-up by those using other routes, such as the Local Service. 133

109. There are also plans to collect data on ethnicity through new information technology being introduced as part of the Pension Service’s Pensions Transformation Programme. 134 DWP told us that the first opportunity for including the required IT changes will be in late 2006. In the mean-time, the Pension Service is examining census data to ‘monitor how Pension Credit is working in this respect.’ 135

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127 Wayne N, Out of Sight: Race inequality in the benefits system, Disability Alliance (London: 2003), p 5
128 Q 161
129 Barnard H and Pettigrew N, Delivering benefits and services for black and minority ethnic older people, DWP Research Report No 201, p 120
132 Work and Pensions Committee, Third Report of Session 2004-05, Pension Credit, para 113
134 Qq 272 [Mr Fisher], 279
135 Qq 272-273
110. The Committee recommends that the Pension Service collects data on the ethnicity of its customers from late 2006.

**Barriers to take-up by ethnic minority pensioners**

111. Research by the National Audit Office identified a number of specific barriers to take-up of benefits by ethnic minority pensioners. For example:

- Being less likely to speak English.

- Being less likely to read or write English.

- In some cases, being less likely to read or write their own first language.

- Experiencing greater administrative difficulties, for example, in providing acceptable evidence to support claims, such as marriage certificates. Subsequent DWP research also identified concerns about the impact of claiming on residency status and difficulties arising from not having a National Insurance Number (which particularly affected Asian women).136

- Reluctance to visit Benefits Agency offices, because of the possibility that they might not be understood by staff.

- Being less likely to have come into contact with the benefits system and more likely to rely on informal advisers than to have direct contact with statutory agencies.

- For some minority ethnic groups, being more likely to live in extended family households. This has been shown to have an impact on take-up, with some communities having strong negative perceptions of claiming benefit.137

112. Research subsequently published by DWP also highlighted literacy problems, ignorance about the benefits system (and sometimes of the concept of benefits) apprehension about contact with statutory service providers, reluctance to use the telephone and difficulties in communicating in writing.138 It looked at the needs of pensioners of different ethnic groups. It identified, for example, specific difficulties facing Asian women, some of whom were not used to handling their own finances or interacting with people outside their social circle.

113. These research findings were reinforced by evidence received during this inquiry which pointed to some of the reasons for low take-up of benefits among ethnic minorities. This can partly be attributed to the stigma attached to claiming benefits among some ethnic minority groups – and particularly older people. It was pointed out that, for some, the culture within their home countries was for independence and self-sufficiency with older people supported by their extended families and this leads to a reluctance to claim

136 Barnard H and Pettigrew N (2003), Delivering benefits and service for black and minority ethnic older people, DWP Research Report No 201, Leeds: CDS


138 Barnard H and Pettigrew N (2003), Delivering benefits and service for black and minority ethnic older people, DWP Research Report No 201, p 2
their benefit entitlement even when encouraged to claim.\textsuperscript{139} In their report on DWP and race equality, Disability Alliance referred to a real reluctance to claim benefits because of the “culture of stigma and shame” experienced by ethnic minority benefit claimants.\textsuperscript{140} Evidence also pointed out that some ethnic minorities find the benefits claiming process hostile and are fearful of rejection.

The Pension Service’s take-up strategy

114. The Pension Service was launched on 1 April 2002, taking over the work previously done by the Benefits Agency in delivering state pensions and benefits to pensioners. It is a largely telephone-based service. Applications are made via the Pension Credit Application Line and processed by Pension Centres, who have telephony staff to take calls about the process of applications. For pensioners unwilling or unable to contact the Pension Service by phone, the Local Service provides Information Points (formerly known as ‘surgeries’), conducts home visits and works in partnership with local organisations to encourage take-up.\textsuperscript{141}

115. In its first report on Pension Credit, the Committee registered some concerns about how the Pension Service model would work for people for whom English was not a first language. It recommended, for example, that adequate provision be made at all call centres to cope with pensioners from ethnic minorities, for whom English is not a first language.\textsuperscript{142} Steps taken by DWP to encourage take-up of Pension Credit by ethnic minority pensioners include targeted press and media activity and Local Service take-up initiatives.\textsuperscript{143} The Pension Service has also conducted a number of ‘hard-to-reach’ pilots, aimed at those older people less likely to respond to Pension Credit media advertisements and direct mailings, for example, because of physical, psychological, cultural or geographical reasons. These demonstrated that a variety of approaches was needed to target the hard-to-reach customers.\textsuperscript{144}

Contacting the Pension Service

116. Age Concern argued that the emphasis on contacting the Pension Service by phone created difficulties and barriers for some ethnic minority older people, especially where their first language is not English. Many were not confident in using the telephone, perceiving that they would not be understood by Pension Service staff.\textsuperscript{145} Representatives of community organisations in Wolverhampton agreed that ethnic minority older people were particularly likely to want a face-to-face service.\textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{139} Qq 24, 163, 243 [Mr Hemans]
\textsuperscript{140} Disability Alliance (2003), \textit{Out of Sight: Race inequality in the benefits system}, London
\textsuperscript{141} Work and Pensions Committee, Third Report of Session 2004-05, \textit{Pension Credit}, Chapter 4
\textsuperscript{145} Ev 200
\textsuperscript{146} Q 241
117. Age Concern emphasised the importance of such pensioners being able to contact the Pension Service locally, both at the time of making an application and for follow-up inquiries once an application had been made. It argued that regular surgeries, both at appointment-based and drop-in locations, were particularly important in enabling older people from minority ethnic groups to “feel comfortable about asking for advice and information about benefit entitlements.”

Age Concern also said that while local surgeries are welcome, these should be in addition to a permanent Pension Service high street presence. The Pension Service has recently reduced the number of Local Service ‘information points’ – from 2,566 in April 2004 to 1,598 in December 2004. The number of customers seen at Information Points each month fell by 10,000 to 15,802. DWP says that:

“now that local partnerships are in place, local services are focussed on identifying eligible Pension Credit non-recipients predominantly through direct one to one contact.”

118. While there has been an increase in the number of home visits conducted by Local Service staff, some of these have been in connection with moving people from order books to Direct Payment.

119. The recent emphasis in the Local Service on home visiting and the reduction in Information Points suggests that it may be more difficult to contact the Pension Service at a local level in future. Recent DWP research highlighted uncertainty among potential claimants about the fact that a home visit can be requested. As part of its duties under race relations legislation, the Pension Service should evaluate awareness among ethnic minority pensioners about how to access the Pension Service at local level, determine whether the arrangements in place are sufficient to meet their needs and by 1 October 2006 report on the results.

Partnership working

120. Ethnic minority older people are often included in the category of pensioners described as ‘hard-to-reach’. Dr Sadhu Singh, Chairman of the Sikh Gurdwaras in Wolverhampton told the Committee that some ethnic minority elders were quite isolated:

“…because of the language and culture barrier they are [too] shy to go out so they just sit at home and do not know what … facilities are available.”

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147 Ev 200
148 Ev 200
151 There were 48,720 home visits in November 2004 compared with 42,220 in April 2004. Work and Pensions Committee, Third Report of Session 2004-05, Pension Credit, HC 43-II, Ev 119
155 Q 226
121. A number of witnesses mention distrust of statutory service providers such as DWP.156

122. However, as Sally West of Age Concern told the Committee, so called ‘hard to reach’ people are not isolated from everybody – they visit GPs, for example, and attend hospital appointments.157 Vanessa Davis of Disability Alliance commented:

“It is not necessarily that [ethnic minorities] are harder to reach; it is perhaps that we are not looking in the right places.”158

123. She went on to argue that as many ethnic minorities may already be in contact with, for example, doctor’s surgeries, hospitals or social services, professionals working within these areas are in a position to provide information and advice and could be appropriately trained.159 This strategy was also endorsed by the Local Government Association (LGA) who also said that local authorities have an important role to play in working closely with ethnic minorities as they provide a gateway to a range of services which ethnic minorities may already be using.160

124. Voluntary and community organisations are an important point of contact for many older people from ethnic minorities. The Policy Research Institute on Ageing and Ethnicity said voluntary and community organisations were often acting as “primary providers” in providing advice and referrals to other services.161 Richard Wilson of Help the Aged said that local community groups were often the “first point of call”, because they are trusted and “that is where they go for all their other translation and support needs.”162 Vanessa Davis of Disability Alliance also stated that local community or religious groups usually have one or more people whom the ethnic minority community use as a contact point for information and advice. Such people can be a useful way of getting information into a local ethnic minority community. Other witnesses pointed to the important, and common, practice among ethnic minority groups of passing information by word of mouth.163

125. DWP research found that strategies to encourage take-up were found to be most effective when developed in partnership between the Department, the local authority and with the community and voluntary sector.164 Pension Service works in partnership with outside organisations in a number of ways. For example, it has developed:

- Joint Teams, made up of Pension Service, local authority and, in some areas, voluntary sector staff who operate as a single team, undertaking home visits and taking claims

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156 See, for example, Qq 223, 228, 243
157 Qq 185 and Work and Pensions Committee, Third Report of Session 2004-05, Pension Credit,
158 Q 156
159 Q 185
160 Qq 73, 97
161 Ev 176
162 Q 55
163 Ev 126 and Qq 89, 155
across the range of benefits and, at the same time, undertaking financial assessments for services.165

- A Partnership Fund which offers short-term (maximum of two years) funding to local and national partner organisations to: improve take up of benefits by, and promote the independence of, older people; improve access to services and gain a better understanding of the needs of older people, including ethnic minority elders.166

- Local Service staff also work in partnership with other organisations on take-up initiatives.

126. DWP has also conducted research into barriers to take-up and awareness of and attitudes to Pension Credit. Recent research found that more needs to be done to: clarify the levels of income and savings at which people may be entitled to Pension Credit: raise awareness of the fact that people aged 60-64 are entitled to Guarantee Credit; and highlight that certain circumstances do not mean people cannot claim (such as home ownership and receiving financial support from family members).167

127. Research on delivering benefits and services to black and minority ethnic older people found that it was important to have a specific strategy aimed at understanding each individual community and providing services tailored for that community. Community and statutory organisations in the three Asian communities studied felt these strategies needed to take account of the particular difficulties facing women.168 Evidence to the inquiry underlined the importance of doing this. Terry Patterson, a representative of the LGA, spoke of the need to think things through “community by community...in terms of the approaches made.”169 Jeremy Vanes of Wolverhampton Citizens Advice Bureau thought DWP needed to break down the target communities on the basis that every community was made up of different groups and had different ways of working. In order to know this,

“…you have just got to be there…you cannot be a successful deliverer of anything unless you are perceived to be a successful friend of the community or whoever you are serving.”170

128. Dee Springer, Director of Frontline Housing and Advice, recommended a pilot with DWP working in collaboration with small ethnic minority organisations to collect such information about the numbers of ethnic minority pensioners, who they go to and how to access them and provide suitable information.171

165 Department for Work and Pensions, Link-Age. Developing Networks of Services for Older People. www.dwp.gov.uk
169 Q 99
170 Q 244
171 Q 42. Also see Ev 76
129. There are a wide range of organisations and local groups already working closely with ethnic minorities and witnesses to the inquiry felt that more needed to be done to build links with these organisations. Junior Hemans of the West Midland Caribbean Parents’ and Friends’ Association told the Committee that “the plugs into the channels of networks do not exist, or have never been fully developed”. 172 In addition, Mahmood Kahn, a representative of Wolverhampton Mosques, said:

“We have been doing things in our communities…clients, individuals from the BME [black and minority ethnic] community have always gone round members of the community to work out how to take them services and do things. The DWP should recognise that, and rather than us creating our own new system, let us work with the systems that already exist within the community and let us make access points. Let us do outreach services, where those services already exist. I think that would add value and benefit, while supporting a lot of the voluntary sector groups in there that are struggling to support them; but at the same time who are carrying out the services anyway. We are doing some of that frontline stuff that you are talking about. For me, it is important that if we can work in partnerships that are less contractually-based and much more focussed on getting the shop window of the Jobcentre Plus out there in the communities and making people feel comfortable and happy with the processes – it is a stepping-stone to moving on. For example, they would start within a community, and they know that this person is potentially working with the jobcentre, and then when they get to advice, they are in a position where they are really confident and comfortable within the jobcentre environment.”173

130. It was emphasised during evidence that it was possible to build up these links with community organisations but it took time and persistence. Sending leaflets to community organisations was not enough. 174 Work done recently by the Pension Service was welcomed. Jeremy Vanes of Wolverhampton Citizens Advice Bureau praised the improvement in claim forms for pensioners and on the outreach work that had been done, although he emphasised the importance of consistency in the staff undertaking this work.175 Age Concern welcomed the proactive efforts being made to reach all older people.176

131. Evidence to the Committee’s recent Pension Credit inquiry suggested that partnership working is more successful in some areas of the country than in others.177 The Committee recommended that the Pension Service should monitor the partnership working of the Local Service and, by 1 July 2006, develop a plan for improving partnership in areas where it may be found to be weak.178
132. Evidence to that inquiry also showed emerging concern about the impact of the requirement to achieve efficiency savings across DWP. There were concerns that this was reducing the capacity of the Local Service to play an active role in local partnerships. Paul Vizard of the Pension Service trade union side, told the Committee that:

“What we have seen now, and please bear in mind that we are at the very early stages of the cuts, is that in a lot of the Joint Team areas the Pension Service partners are walking away and saying, “We cannot possibly deliver that any longer”. The good work that has been done in building up those relationships and starting to get the Joint Teams working is patchy across the country. In some areas it has been very successful, but the Pension Service now seem to be saying, “Because we have got to deliver these cuts we can no longer deliver that sort of service. We are not going to try and deliver that level of outreach work any longer”. I think that leaves very vulnerable people with nowhere to go at all.”

133. The Committee was told that the number of Partnership Liaison Managers in the Local Service had been cut by approximately a third, to 203. We were told that the aim was to increase the number of Customer Liaison Managers in order to focus on one-to-one contact.

134. There were concerns that staff who had previously been involved in high-quality outreach work are now being required to ‘cold call’ pensioners on the basis of computer generated scans in a drive to meet take-up targets. There were also concerns that this activity was not generating ‘good returns.’ The Chief Executive of the Pension Service said that she recognised that:

“staff did not like it, because they enjoy the face-to-face customer contact, they enjoy that activity, but we have to balance out what delivers in terms of results for us in terms of the take-up as well.”

135. There is an important question as to whether this type of approach is likely to be successful in encouraging ‘hard to reach’ pensioners, including ethnic minority pensioners, to claim. The NAO report suggested that local outreach work, though more resource-intensive, was more successful in this respect. Jeremy Vanes of Wolverhampton Citizens Advice Bureau provided an example of the sort of resource intensive approach needed to reach certain pensioners:

“...a telephone system whereby a certain group of people...ring up pensioners on a regular basis. The conversations revolve around, 'have you cut the lawn lately?' 'How is your daughter?' 'Have you fed the dog? Does it need to go to the vet?' In the back of those conversations is information: 'Do you know about this benefit; do you know

179 Work and Pensions Committee, Third Report of Session 2004-05, Pension Credit, HC 43-11, Q 314
181 Work and Pensions Committee, Third Report of Session 2004-05, Pension Credit, HC 43-11, Q 318
182 Work and Pensions Committee, Third Report of Session 2004-05, Pension Credit, HC 43-11, Q 235
183 Work and Pensions Committee, Third Report of Session 2004-05, Pension Credit, HC 43-11, Q 417
about that?…The only people that the elderly people are going to talk to are the people they already have an inbuilt trust for.”

136. Local Area Agreements, currently being piloted by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister with local authorities, offer an excellent opportunity to bring together all local agencies to enable them to focus on meeting community needs, including benefit take-up, income maximisation and anti-poverty strategies. It is essential that local councils take the opportunity to match such strategies to the ethnic profile of their populations, but the resource demands upon those with the most diverse and mobile communities will need to be taken into account.

137. When asked about the extent of outreach and partnership work that the Department undertakes, the Minister for Work replied:

“I think I would acknowledge that we are not the sole repository of wisdom in how we approach and connect with people, so with some of our hardest to help customers we appreciate we need to use other organisations with whom the customer is more comfortable. That could be a religious or faith group…it could be an ethnic group, some form of local organisation with whom the individual is already more at ease.”

138. The Business Strategy Director of Jobcentre Plus thought that it is important that the Department uses the voluntary and community sectors to help them reach out to ethnic minorities. The Ethnic Minority Outreach (EMO) Project has helped in this endeavour, although it is chiefly concerned with ethnic minority employment. The EMO project is examined in more detail in chapter 8.

139. The Committee considers local partnership schemes to be essential to the success of the Pension Service and therefore we recommend that areas with higher-than-average ethnic minority populations get additional resources and support for partnership development.
7 The language barrier and information dissemination

140. The problems faced by some ethnic minorities, and refugees, who have difficulties in understanding the English language were widely identified during the inquiry as a substantial barrier to accessing DWP services and an area where improvements need to be made. This chapter will examine information and advice dissemination by DWP and how the language barrier can best be tackled by the Department.

Information needs

141. The previous chapter highlighted the effect of a lack of information upon benefit take-up among ethnic minority pensioners. The information needs of ethnic minorities may differ from those of the rest of the population and the Department, under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, is responsible for ensuring that these needs are met.

142. Lack of awareness of the benefits that are available plays a key role. Katie Lane from Citizen’s Advice stated: “You can only ask for something if you know it exists.”186 Vanessa Davis of Disability Alliance expressed a similar view and commented:

“The Department seems to think…that language leaflets are the way forward. Yes, it is better to have them than not…but the problem is that…leaflets [in various languages] are only useful for people who know they are there and who know which leaflet they need to get hold of, and it is the step before that where the gap is.”187

143. A further assumption made regarding older ethnic minorities is that their younger family members will help and support them in accessing benefits and services, yet it was argued by Wolverhampton Council of Sikh Gurdwaras that younger Asian people are becoming more westernised and less involved with the family. Consequently their older relatives require information on benefits and support from other sources.188

144. The Department is responsible for ensuring adequate publicity and engaging in outreach work in ethnic minority communities. As chapter 2 outlined, most ethnic minority groups are more likely than the population overall to be economically inactive or unemployed and are more likely to be living in poverty. Consequently, there can be no doubt that ethnic minorities are in need to access DWP’s services.

145. The Department’s written evidence outlines the work of the Communications Directorate in meeting the information needs of ethnic minorities. This includes defining the needs of ethnic minority groups; evaluating the success of communications; defining which media to use; and ensuring communications are in accessible language and convey positive images.189 DWP’s Race Equality Scheme (RES) Progress Report identified some

186 Q 24
187 Q 158
188 Q 226
189 Ev 144
progress within the Communications Directorate that involved: closer links with ethnic minority media; working to ensure customer information “in all appropriate minority languages;” and commissioning research into the language needs of customers, leading to targetting of languages in different regions.\(^{190}\)

**The language barrier and the client experience**

146. For those who do not speak and understand English, or for whom English is a second language, the language barrier to accessing DWP services is hugely significant and undoubtedly impacts upon benefit take-up rates and the employment prospects of those affected. The evidence received during the inquiry placed great emphasis on the relationship between poor service delivery and the language needs of customers. For example, Citizen’s Advice stated:

> “the failure of Jobcentre Plus staff to assist claimants with English language difficulties in completing application forms is the most frequent issue reported to us by CAB about clients from ethnic minority communities.”\(^{191}\)

147. This was reinforced by the Rotherham Welfare Rights Service, who said that the lack of language support offered at DWP offices results in their own advisers’ time being taken up with helping DWP clients with straightforward administrative aspects of claims.\(^{192}\) Several organisations referred to the unsatisfactory, but common, practice of children or other family members having to act as interpreters for parents leading to confusion, mistakes and embarrassment.\(^{193}\) A frequent complaint was that DWP staff only communicate in English, even when it is evident that the client is unable to understand, and staff do not appear to consider the potential communication problems the client might experience.\(^{194}\) Criticism was expressed of a failure to offer, and use, interpretation services and the lack of DWP staff awareness of available translation services, particularly Language Line.\(^{195}\) Even when Language Line is used, it was pointed out that they are only interpreters and cannot explain the benefit rules or terminology.\(^{196}\)

148. Another problem highlighted was that claimants with English language difficulties are sometimes given claim forms to take away and fill in on the assumption that they will have access to informal translators. This can then result in delayed or failed claims.\(^{197}\) Staff were criticised by Warwickshire Welfare Rights Service for refusing to speak with representatives of ethnic minority clients, even though permission had been given by the client.\(^{198}\) Attention was also drawn to the issue of some ethnic minority people being unable to read their own language.\(^{199}\) Finally, a major barrier highlighted by many of those

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\(^{191}\) Ev 2

\(^{192}\) Ev 187

\(^{193}\) Ev 2-4, 115, 187, 189

\(^{194}\) Q 5, Ev 2-4, 180, 189-190

\(^{195}\) Ev 197-198

\(^{196}\) Ev 187

\(^{197}\) Ev 184

\(^{198}\) Ev 187

\(^{199}\) Qq 72, 154, 233,
submitting evidence was the potentially detrimental impact of the increased use of telephony, particularly in the Pension Service, upon ethnic minorities whose first language is not English.\textsuperscript{200}

149. It should also be pointed out that unfamiliarity with spoken or written English does not affect all ethnic minorities who may need to access DWP services. Many are from families that have been in the UK for several generations and whose first language is English. Nonetheless, for those who are not fluent English speakers, the barriers posed can be extremely problematic. It is notable that a large proportion of the evidence submitted to the inquiry focussed very heavily on the language issue. Yet at the same time, there was discussion around the extent to which the language barrier obscures other issues which are equally important in helping to improve the service delivery to ethnic minorities.\textsuperscript{201}

**DWP strategies to help overcome the language barrier**

150. Mahmood Khan, a representative of Wolverhampton Mosques, said in evidence:

“DWP…has a duty to make sure the appropriate communication channels are there for the user.”\textsuperscript{202}

151. The Department does acknowledge that for some clients there is a language barrier that has to be overcome. Consequently, a range of strategies is in place to help address the issue. That said, it is surprising that the RES Progress Report makes very little reference to the language barrier experienced by some ethnic minority clients.

**Translated material**

152. One of the more conspicuous methods of addressing the language needs of clients is through the provision of translated materials. Some of the Department’s key leaflets and publicity material are available in different languages: Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Gujarati, Punjabi, Somali, Urdu, Vietnamese and Welsh. The RES report said that the Department was researching whether the currently used languages are appropriate. More recently, the DWP Diversity Director said that the range of languages has been brought up-to-date and the Department is looking at introducing some material in some of the Eastern European languages. In addition, information videos are available in French, Somali, Cantonese and Sylheti.\textsuperscript{203}

153. Several organisations criticised DWP for only producing the bare minimum of translated material and restricting its actual availability.\textsuperscript{204} Disability Alliance commented that translated material is usually not on public display and called for a Departmental strategy for information and advice delivery designed around the realities of minority ethnic peoples’ lives.\textsuperscript{205}

\textsuperscript{200}Ev 6-7, 200-201, Qq 81, 132, 239-241

\textsuperscript{201}Q 24

\textsuperscript{202}Q 236

\textsuperscript{203}Q 310

\textsuperscript{204}Ev 48, 121, Q 157

\textsuperscript{205}Disability Alliance (2003) Out of Sight: Race Inequality in the Benefits System
154. The Committee recommends that a larger range of translated material should be made more widely available and that translated material should be updated frequently and put on public display.

**Interpreters and translators**

155. One of the major areas where the evidence indicated that the Department does not adequately meet the needs of those who require language support is in the use of interpreters and translators. Some of these difficulties are outlined in paragraphs 146-148. In light of the evidence received during this inquiry, it was surprising to hear the Business Strategy Director of Jobcentre Plus state that research conducted on behalf of the Department found no examples of clients failing to obtain interpreter services when needed.206 This was not borne out by the evidence received by the Committee.207

156. Wolverhampton Citizens Advice were not alone in arguing that staff training is needed to ensure that they recognise when a client needs language assistance and that clients receive interpreter services when required.208 When asked how staff identify clients who need help from an interpreter and what procedure is then followed to obtain appropriate services, the Business Strategy Director of Jobcentre Plus said that a standard part of the training received by staff is how to identify those who might need such support. If it is thought that the client needs access to an interpreter a range of options is available.209 These include a combination of locally based face-to-face interpreters; telephone interpreting through Language Line; and using multi-lingual DWP staff. Increased centralisation and the use of contact centres means that some Agencies depend more upon Language Line. Jobcentre Plus is the biggest user of Language Line compared with other DWP Agencies (See table 3).210

| Table 3: DWP expenditure on Language Line by Agency211 |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------|
| **Business**    | **Nov-04**| **Dec-04**|
| Debt Management | £38.00    | £0        |
| D&CS            | £721.70   | £914.20   |
| Appeals Service | £8.00     | £0        |
| CSA             | £5,147.95 | £3,579.25 |
| Pensions Service| £6,346.60 | £4,975.90 |
| Jobcentre Plus  | £89,536.75| £83,986.95|
| Other           | £8,714.70 | £5,404.05 |

206 Q 289
207 See for example, Ev 3-4, 7, 48-50, 184, 187
208 Q 243
209 Qq 289-293
210 Ev 106
211 Ev 106
In spite of the translation and interpretation services available to staff, the evidence suggests that staff often fail to utilise them and use either informal translators or voluntary and community groups instead.\textsuperscript{212} Citizen’s Advice stated that Jobcentre Plus offices have a tendency to refer clients in need of an interpreter to Citizen’s Advice and that this is a huge cost burden on the organisation.\textsuperscript{213} Furthermore, the Language Line service is only available for access by DWP staff.

The Committee recommends that the Department soon carries out an urgent and fundamental re-consideration of:

a) its plan to address the language needs of clients;

b) the services it offers to assist clients needing language support; and

c) its plan to improve awareness amongst senior management.

Language Line is currently the contracted provider of telephone interpretation for DWP. In written evidence, Language Line themselves commented that take-up of their service fluctuates across different DWP offices and posited that the reason for this may be the prioritisation of resources at a local level.\textsuperscript{214} The cost of using Language Line is £8 for the first 5 minutes, £13 for 6-10 minutes, £17 for 11-15 minutes and £2.25 per minute thereafter. Between 2000/01 to 2002/03 the DWP expenditure on Language Line doubled each year and has since levelled out (see table 4). For the past three years DWP has spent around £1 million per year on Language Line services.\textsuperscript{215}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dept</th>
<th>2000/01</th>
<th>2001/02</th>
<th>2002/03</th>
<th>2003/04</th>
<th>2004/05</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DWP</td>
<td>£280,048.48</td>
<td>£521,380.15</td>
<td>£1,113,422.75</td>
<td>£954,125.35</td>
<td>£1,002,418.50</td>
<td>£3,871,395.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An important issue raised in evidence was that DWP fails to identify those who may require ongoing language support in subsequent communication with the Department. When questioned on this issue, the Minister for Work and Departmental officials indicated that those submitting new benefit claims using a contact centre would have any language needs logged on the IT system. However, it appears that this does not apply to existing clients or those accessing services via a DWP office.\textsuperscript{218} Paradoxically, because of a greater tendency to dislike telephone contact (see paragraph 116), it is likely that a higher proportion of ethnic minority clients access services via a DWP office or Information Point.

\textsuperscript{212} Ev 121, 187, Qq 25, 117,
\textsuperscript{213} Q 25
\textsuperscript{214} Ev 117
\textsuperscript{215} Ev 106
\textsuperscript{216} Year runs from 1\textsuperscript{st} April to 31\textsuperscript{st} March
\textsuperscript{217} Ev 106
\textsuperscript{218} Qq 261-269
161. One suggestion, raised by the Hounslow Welfare Benefits Unit, was that DWP letters should incorporate a reference to Language Line.\textsuperscript{219} It was also suggested that, if the Department knows that a client cannot read English and requires written communication to be translated, that correspondence with the client should be translated by DWP as a matter of course. CPAG argued that all benefit claim forms should include a question asking which language the client wishes to communicate in and that all subsequent correspondence should be written in the client’s language of choice.\textsuperscript{220} The Minister and officials admitted that the current IT and processing systems do not enable this to happen but said that the Department should investigate the issue further.\textsuperscript{221}

162. \textbf{The Committee recommends that the Department develops a language marker on the appropriate IT systems to identify clients needing ongoing language support. We also recommend that clients are given the option of requesting that they receive correspondence in the language of their choice.}

\textit{Multi-lingual staff}

163. The evidence gave mixed views on the use of multi-lingual DWP staff. The Local Government Association (LGA) claimed that they are sometimes exploited by the Department,\textsuperscript{222} whereas the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union suggested that staff able to converse in other languages are discouraged from using them and told to use Language Line instead.\textsuperscript{223} During our visit to Wolverhampton, staff at the Pension Service informed the Committee that staff fluent in other languages frequently take client telephone calls which their colleagues cannot deal with as the client is unable to converse in English.\textsuperscript{224} At that time, staff were eligible for a language allowance of £250 per year if they spent more than 25\% of their time using a second language, although this percentage was for staff to substantiate. The RES Progress Report states that this payment has since increased to £500. More recent evidence from the Department clarified that, at July 2004, the language allowance is now worth £520 per year. In addition, a reserve rate of £260 is set for staff providing cover for those on annual leave.\textsuperscript{225}

164. Currently, only 134 staff are claiming the allowance out of around 130,000 DWP staff. When asked if there were any difficulties for staff in accessing the language allowance, the Department said that this was a new initiative and would be reviewed along with other staff allowances.\textsuperscript{226}

165. \textbf{The Committee recommends that the Department further reforms the current staff language allowance and differentiates between staff who frequently use their linguistic skills and those who are ‘casual’ users; and that staff who spend more than}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{219} Ev 49
  \item \textsuperscript{220} Ev 116
  \item \textsuperscript{221} Qq 318-320
  \item \textsuperscript{222} Ev 36
  \item \textsuperscript{223} Qq 34-36
  \item \textsuperscript{224} See Annex
  \item \textsuperscript{225} Ev 107
  \item \textsuperscript{226} Qq 294-302, Ev 107
\end{itemize}
25% of their time using a second language should receive a substantial annual allowance, and that those who use their language skills less frequently should be entitled to an annual allowance of at least £520.

Staff reductions in London and the impact on language support

166. As discussed in chapter 4, the effect of the DWP staff efficiencies will involve 4,000 staff relocating from London and further reductions in staff numbers to contribute to the overall reduction in staffing within the Department. As nearly half of administrative staff and more than a third of staff at the executive officer grade in London are from an ethnic minority, there are real concerns that this will reduce the number of multi-lingual staff. It may also lead to a reduction in the social and cultural knowledge of the remaining staff and thus impact upon the quality of service to ethnic minorities in London.227

167. Referring to the Jobcentre Plus contact centre for the Hounslow areas moving to a location in Pembroke Docks, South Wales, the Hounslow Welfare Benefits Unit said:

“Customers contacting the call centre need to know that they can speak to someone in their own language. The officers in Pembroke Docks will be unlikely to know the area here, and need training to make sure that the needs of ethnic groups and refugees are fully understood.”228

168. When questioned on the staff reductions in London and the effect on the language support provided to clients by multi-lingual staff, the Business Strategy Director of Jobcentre Plus said:

“The changes we are making do not generally affect the customer-facing officers. There will still be a Jobcentre Plus office in the relevant part of London providing the service. This is about backroom functions.”229

169. Regarding the Pension Service, he said that the London Pensions Group had been providing pension services for the London area out of Newcastle-upon-Tyne for some time. Significant changes are taking place with the roll-out of Pension Credit and the Pension Service that will provide a local service. Regarding the increased use of contact centres across DWP, he said:

“Clearly we are expecting customers to ring contact centres to make the claim to benefit…and those contact centres will be around the country...When somebody rings up a contact centre, we need to provide a professional service with appropriate translation services in that contact centre. It does not actually matter where that contact centre is located. I recognise fully that when you are dealing face-to-face with customers, outreaching into the communities, it is better to have people from the relevant group in those situations, but we will be providing services in those

227 Ev 48-49, 126-127
228 Ev 49
229 Q 304
situations from those groups from offices sited in the communities and through outreach into the communities.”

170. Further evidence submitted by the Department explained that, as part of the efficiency review, each Agency is examining possible costs and efficiencies whilst also maintaining access to services for all clients.

171. The Committee is concerned that the staffing cuts and relocations outside London will have a detrimental effect upon the service ethnic minorities can expect to receive from DWP and that this will be particularly problematic for those with language needs. We recommend that the Department by 31 December 2005 conducts an audit of the languages spoken by staff in London together with an impact assessment of the staff efficiencies; and that by 1 October 2006 a strategy is developed to ensure that clients in London who require language support are not disproportionately and adversely affected by the staffing efficiency measures.

The language barrier and outreach work

172. It was strongly argued that the Department needs to make further efforts to fulfil the information needs of ethnic minorities through closer working with representative organisations and community groups. LGA argued that translated materials are never a panacea to solve all information needs as they need to be backed up with active outreach. Salford Welfare Rights commented that there is often an assumption that simply disseminating information results in the needs of ethnic minorities being fulfilled, whereas in reality, dissemination needs to be supplemented with direct links with the people it is aimed at and their representatives. A similar example was given in evidence by the Wolverhampton Council of Sikh Gurdwaras who also criticised DWP for passing translated leaflets to community groups, mosques and so on, even though the leaders of religious and cultural groups may not have the knowledge to pass on the information to their communities. The leaflets were not always understood and there was no way of monitoring the extent to which the information was disseminated within the community. They argued that DWP should go into the communities themselves to explain what the information means, who is entitled and how to claim. Dr Sadhu Singh told the Committee:

“Leaflets are sent, but nobody has chased them up – ‘did you receive the information; has the information been passed?’ If we can hold some kind of seminar on a regular basis, or an officer goes there every week so that he is sitting there and people get to know him and build a relationship, then they can talk and information can get passed properly, and it can be monitored.”
173. Another suggested method of distributing advice and information on DWP services, which also counteracts any language barrier, is the use of videos or DVDs. In addition, the LGA pointed out that there are many ethnic minority radio stations and other media, both local and national, that could be used to disseminate information. Other outreach strategies that the Department might employ were suggested during the inquiry and are also explored in chapter 6.

174. The Committee recommends that by 1 May 2006 the Department develops a coherent ethnic minority outreach strategy and works in close partnership with local and community groups in order to meet the information needs of ethnic minorities. The Committee also recommends that a thorough review is undertaken of capacity within advice services serving communities with high minority populations, and other indicators of social need.
8 Ethnic minority employment

175. The ethnic minority employment rate has been a focus of concern within DWP, and its predecessor Department, for some years. According to the DWP Annual Report 2004, the gap between the ethnic minority employment rate and the overall rate has remained largely static, at around 17%, for the last decade.238 Since the Spending Review in 2000 there has been a Public Service Agreement (PSA) target to “increase the employment rate of ethnic minorities, taking into account the economic cycle, and significantly reduce the difference between their employment rate and the overall rate.” This has led to a number of initiatives, led by DWP and delivered by Jobcentre Plus, to address the issue although it is recognised that the catch-all heading of ‘ethnic minority’ conceals a very wide variation between groups.

Progress on the PSA target

176. The current PSA target on ethnic minority employment is from the 2002 Spending Review and covers the period until 2006. This target was carried over from the 2000 Spending Review and has again been taken forward in the 2004 Spending Review to cover the period 2005-2008.

177. For the 2002 PSA target, the baseline ethnic minority employment rate is 57.8% and the baseline figure for the gap between this and the overall employment rate is 16.9%.239 The most recent figures, from Spring 2004, show that the employment rate of minority ethnic groups is 59.4% – a 1.6 percentage point increase from the 2002 baseline. The gap between the ethnic minority employment rate and the overall rate has decreased 1.4 percentage points to 15.5%.240

178. Prior to the release of these new figures in the Department’s Autumn Performance Report, progress on the PSA target had not been evident in the statistics and had actually been static for several years. The Department’s Annual Report 2004, published in April 2004, noted “some slippage” in this target yet in the DWP Autumn Performance Report 2004, published in December 2004, it states that the Department is now “on course to meet this target”.

The strategy to increase the ethnic minority employment rate

Ethnic Minority Employment Taskforce

179. In March 2003, the Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit produced a report on ethnic minorities in the labour market.241 One recommendation from this report was to create the Ethnic Minority Employment Taskforce to develop policies to improve ethnic minority employment and to ensure that government departments work together and make the

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238 DWP, Departmental Report 2004, April 2004, Cm 6221
240 DWP, Autumn Performance Report: Progress Against Public Service Agreement Targets, December 2004, Cm 6397
241 Cabinet Office, Ethnic Minorities and the Labour Market, March 2003
most of existing expertise in the private sector and non-departmental bodies. The Taskforce was set up in September 2003 and is chaired by the Minister for Work. Other members include a range of Government Ministers and representatives from stakeholder groups.

180. In November 2004, the Taskforce published a progress report outlining areas where developments have been made to work towards the PSA target on minority ethnic employment, including: more flexibility and targeting of the New Deals within local areas; incorporating lessons learnt from the Ethnic Minority Outreach (EMO) project into Jobcentre Plus strategy; building partnerships between social housing providers and Jobcentre Plus; and restructuring the Jobcentre Plus points system to boost activity in wards with high levels of minority ethnic unemployment. The Taskforce Progress Report concludes with a commitment to drive forward a co-ordinated effort to tackle ethnic minority employment across government departments and to ensure that departments mainstream race issues.

Cross-government working

181. The DWP Annual Report 2004 outlined the Department’s strategy to increase ethnic minority employment through tackling each of the three main causes of unemployment: lack of human capital skills; residency in deprived areas; and the ‘ethnic penalty’ of discrimination. A similar approach was contained in the Ethnic Minority Employment Taskforce Progress Report. Both reports point to the importance of partnership working with other Government departments. For example, the Taskforce Progress Report states that progress on increasing human capital is mainly implemented through the Department for Education and Skills’ Aiming High strategy which aims to improve the attainment of ethnic minority pupils. To tackle discrimination, DWP is working closely with the Department for Trade and Industry to address employer discrimination with the Home Office to address institutional racism in the public services and to ensure that race equality is delivered.

182. According to the Department and the Taskforce, geographical disadvantage is addressed primarily through Jobcentre Plus, but also through working with the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (based in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister). Progress includes focussing resources in areas of high unemployment and higher numbers of ethnic minorities; and increasing the flexibility of programmes such as the New Deal.

The DWP strategy

183. The Department identifies several areas where progress has recently been made on increasing the minority ethnic employment rate. These include: focussing resources on areas with high concentrations of minority ethnic groups and higher than average unemployment, with an additional funding allocation of £8 million; pilots to tackle worklessness in areas with a high proportion of minority ethnic groups; an extension to the Ethnic Minority Outreach project; more Specialist Employment Advisers to work with
employers; and development of a new ethnic minority flexible fund. The Department estimates that the current ethnic minority employment strategy has contributed about one half of a percentage point to closing the ethnic minority employment gap.

184. It should be pointed out that the different rates of unemployment among ethnic minorities need to be properly addressed. It is not sufficient to identify the overall ethnic minority unemployment rate – the differences between ethnic minority groups, and between ethnic minority men and women, need to be recognised and may require a different approach if the ethnic minority employment rate is to be tackled properly. The DWP Annual Report does state that the Department wants to improve its ability to meet the PSA target by spending in critical areas of delivery and by directing resources at the ethnic minority groups that experience the greatest levels of inactivity. For example, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women have the lowest employment rate of around 25% compared with a rate of 52% for ethnic minority women and 70% women overall.

**Ethnic Minority Outreach and the flexible fund**

185. The Taskforce Progress Report comments that the Ethnic Minority Outreach (EMO) project and the flexible fund are based on the “assumption that support and advice on work and training does not always reach some ethnic groups.” This assumption is also backed up by evidence from this inquiry. The EMO project has tested different ways that voluntary and private sector organisations can attract more ethnic minorities into the labour market and provides a link to Jobcentre Plus services. The flexible fund enables Jobcentre Plus district managers to create local solutions to tackling ethnic minority unemployment. Both of these initiatives enable district managers to decide how their allocation is spent and delivery is devolved to voluntary and private sector organisations that have links with ethnic minorities.

186. According to the Department, the period 2004-2006 will see a total increase of £14 million for ethnic minority outreach services. The Taskforce Progress Report commented on the achievements of the EMO project:

> “The contribution of Ethnic Minority Outreach to the overall number of job placings for Jobcentre Plus is marginal but not insignificant. Over 3,000 jobs were gained from Ethnic Minority Outreach in the years 2001-2004. With a more jobs-focussed second phase, a further 1,500 jobs are expected in 2004-2005.”

187. Research on the EMO project, commissioned by the Department, was recently published. Some of the key findings are as follows. The EMO project had a major impact on increasing ethnic minorities’ awareness of the training and employment opportunities available. This was particularly the case for Indian and Pakistani women who were the key

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244 DWP, *Departmental Report 2004*, April 2004, Cm 6221


246 Qq 253-251


beneficiaries of the language and outreach skills of the EMO employees. Jobcentre Plus services were increasingly used by ethnic minorities, although not all EMO clients wanted to register with Jobcentre Plus. EMO did show results in moving ethnic minorities closer to the labour market. Although those who were furthest from the labour market remained at a significant disadvantage and frequently required a year or more to find employment, rapid improvements were made in their confidence and soft skills. Those who moved into employment more quickly tended to be those who were already closest to the labour market. The research also found that a pressure to achieve job outcomes resulted in providers prioritising those who were easier to help and closer to the labour market. Similarly, providers worked with employers who were more receptive to diversity issues.249

Targetting resources

188. The improved targetting of resources on areas with large ethnic minority populations and high unemployment has been assisted by the introduction of an improved structure of the target points system within Jobcentre Plus which gives incentives to performance in these areas.

189. When questioned on the sudden progress made on the ethnic minority employment target in the last year, compared with a consistently poor level of improvement, the Business Strategy Director of Jobcentre Plus stated:

“My own view on this is that the single most important thing we have done is to change the way we deploy resources around Jobcentre Plus. We used to do this on the basis of districts…but by focusing on wards, that is…the 272 wards across the country where there is more than three times the national average of ethnic minorities, and giving district managers extra points in our target system for job entries from those wards, that is clearly having a significant effect.”250

190. Finally, in recognition of the need to evaluate the new employment strategies that have been established to contribute to the PSA target, the Business Strategy Director of Jobcentre Plus went on to say:

“We need to evaluate all of this because although it is looking good we do not know precisely which of these components is being most effective so we need to do more evaluation and be absolutely clear what is working, but it does look like this is working.”251

191. The Minister for Work was also keen to praise the concerted and enthusiastic efforts made by Jobcentre Plus in pursuing the initiatives that have helped raise the employment levels of ethnic minorities.

192. After years of a lack of progress, the Committee acknowledges the steps forward that have recently been made in increasing the ethnic minority employment rate and the initiatives that have contributed to this. It is crucial that DWP continues with the initiatives

250 Q 338
251 Q 338
it has been pursuing, such as the EMO project and targeting resources on areas with high concentrations of minority ethnic groups and high unemployment. The Department should also conduct a full evaluation. DWP must not become complacent about the progress needed to reduce the gap between the ethnic minority employment rate and the overall rate. The Committee recommends that significant additional resources are allocated to promote increased participation in the labour market in the 272 most disadvantaged wards in the UK.
9 Refugees and DWP service delivery

193. It is impossible to address the issue of DWP’s service delivery to ethnic minorities without examining how the Department addresses the needs of refugees. First, it is necessary to define what is meant by the term ‘refugee’ and distinguish it from the term ‘asylum seeker.’

Who are refugees and what are their needs?

194. Asylum seekers are those who have made a claim for asylum in the UK but whose case has not yet been decided. They receive financial support from the Home Office and are not allowed to work. Consequently, they fall outside the responsibility of DWP. If a positive decision on their asylum claim is received, they become a refugee and are granted Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK. Refugees are the responsibility of DWP rather than the Home Office. They have full employment rights, may claim benefits and are eligible to join DWP’s employment programmes.252 There are around 350,000 refugees in the UK, most of whom are living in London. The national origins of refugees reflect international conflicts so, for the past three years, most asylum applications were from people from Somalia, Zimbabwe, Iraq and Afghanistan.253

195. The Government is currently reviewing the asylum process and has recently outlined plans to grant refugees temporary rather than Indefinite Leave to Remain. The proposal is that a refugee would only be granted permanent status in the UK if, after 5 years legal residence in the UK, the situation in his or her country of origin was assessed as not having improved sufficiently to allow that refugee safely to return there.254

Benefits

196. The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) provides financial support and accommodation for asylum seekers. If they do not live with friends or family, asylum seekers receive a package of support which includes accommodation in an area they are allocated and weekly subsistence payments worth 70% of income support. Those living with friends or family receive the subsistence payment only. When refugee status is granted single adults and couples are obliged to vacate the NASS accommodation within 28 days. At this point, refugees become entitled to claim benefits and to enter paid work.

Employment

197. The Refugee Council strongly argued that refugees want to work.255 Yet DWP estimates that refugees have an unemployment rate of 36% – more than six times the

252 Some asylum claims that are not successful may still grant leave to remain on the basis of their protection needs and they will also have access to benefits and employment support. In addition, some asylum seekers who have been in the system for some time may have a protected right to work or receive Income Support.

253 www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/infocentre

254 Home Office, Controlling Our Borders: Five year strategy for asylum and immigration, Cm 6472, February 2005

255 Qq 187 & 192
national average. To assist in the development of an employment strategy for refugees, in 2001 the Department commissioned research on the employment barriers faced by refugees. The research findings suggested that refugees have untapped economic potential but require substantial support in helping them move into paid work. For example, prior to arriving in the UK 42% of refugee adults were employed; 21% were studying; and 56% had educational qualifications, with 23% being educated to degree level or above. Although on arrival in Britain 83% spoke English only slightly or not at all, this improved after arrival so that for those adults granted asylum, this figure was 40%. Finally, the research illustrated that in addition to the problem of unemployment, refugees who were in paid work were likely to be under-employed. More than a third (37%) of those working at the time of the research said that they had skills they were unable to use in their current job. The most commonly under-used skills were in information technology, mechanics, the textiles industry, the building trade and accountancy.

198. This point was also argued in evidence from the Refugee Council. In addition, a recent report from the Council for Assisting Refugee Academics found that there are around 1,500 refugees who were doctors, dentists and other health workers in their country of origin but only a few are employed in this area in the UK. A further 2,000 refugees trained in engineering, science, computing and education are not being employed to their trained level of expertise.

199. The Refugee Council highlighted a range of barriers preventing refugees from finding paid work including: lack of knowledge of entitlements; inadequate English language skills; lack of recognition of overseas qualifications; confusion over permission to work documentation; unfamiliarity with the UK jobsearch culture; lack of UK work experience; and negative attitudes of employers.

The refugee experience of accessing DWP services

200. Evidence received during the inquiry identified the period when NASS support ends and refugees become the responsibility of DWP as a crucial time for intervention. Pointing out that it is the responsibility of DWP, through Jobcentre Plus, to advise refugees on benefits and tax credits as well as helping them into employment, the Refugee Council commented that “…many refugees never get that far. They do not even know that Jobcentre Plus exists.” They drew the Committee’s attention to the massive upheaval created in the transition from asylum seeker to refugee where financial and housing support from NASS ends with 28 days notice. This means that in some instances refugees find themselves in an area to which they have been dispersed with no family and friends, with nowhere to live and an unlikely prospect of accessing social housing, and with no income or information on how to access employment or benefits.

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257 Q 187
258 Q 193 & 211
259 www.bbc.co.uk/news, 14/03/05, ‘Britain wasting refugee skills’
259 Ev 68-69
260 Qq 78, 193-195, 220, 245, Ev 4, 115
261 Q 193
262 Qq 193 & 211
201. The lack of knowledge of what assistance they are entitled to was highlighted as particularly problematic for new refugees. 263 Refugees depend very much on informal networks as a source of information and are more likely to turn to friends and relatives or local and community groups for help rather than statutory agencies. 264 In evidence, the Refugee Council said that there are too many agencies with responsibility for providing advice and support to refugees, particularly at the transition point from asylum seeker status. They argued that the Home Office and DWP should work together with voluntary sector organisations to enable them to provide sign-posting services and support for refugees in a more welcoming environment. 265

202. There was concern that DWP staff lacked knowledge of asylum and immigration issues and that this resulted in poor quality advice creating a barrier to claiming benefits and moving into employment. 266 The Swansea Welfare Rights Unit gave a number of examples of where advice was not forthcoming from Jobcentre Plus staff; where incorrect advice was given; where assumptions on the refugees’ situation or their abilities were made; and where a lack of cultural sensitivity was shown by staff. 267

203. Criticism was also expressed by the Refugee Council of the Government amendment to the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants etc) Act 2004 which removed the right of refugees to claim back-dated payments of benefits to the date of the claim for asylum. This decision was seen to remove resources from refugees at a crucial time 268 and has now been replaced with a Refugee Integration Loan.

204. A further problem identified during the inquiry was with obtaining a National Insurance Number (NINO). The NINO requirement was cited as particularly problematic as refugees may not have the documentation required to progress a benefit claim, causing delays and subsequent hardship for them. 269 Since this evidence was submitted, the Government has tackled the issue and, since April 2004, refugees receive their NINO with their asylum decision documentation. 270 However, in evidence the Business Strategy Director of Jobcentre Plus admitted that a backlog in NINO allocations was again building up and required further action. 271

205. Language difficulties were cited, both in evidence and by the Department’s refugee employment strategy, as a particularly difficult barrier for refugees in accessing Jobcentre Plus support, benefits and employment. 272 Research found that, even when taking length of residency into account, English language proficiency is the most common barrier to work: 51% of refugees who spoke English fluently were working compared with 31% of those

263 Q 202, Ev 91,
265 Q 195
266 Ev 49, 182-183, 185, 188
267 Ev 181-185
268 Q 216
269 Ev 36, 114-15, Q 78
271 Q 346
speaking it fairly well, 14% of those speaking English slightly and 11% of those not speaking English at all. DWP is developing a strategy to refer Jobcentre Plus clients to appropriate English language classes.

**Refugee employment strategy**

206. DWP published a preliminary refugee strategy in September 2003 that acknowledged a range of barriers to employment for refugees and identified language difficulties and unfamiliarity with the UK labour market as particularly problematic. The preliminary strategy outlined development work within DWP, and in partnership with the Home Office and the Department for Education and Skills, for 2003-2004. This included: developing a clearer route from NASS support to Jobcentre Plus provision; setting up appropriate language courses and interpretation services; working more closely with community groups to help with planning provision and also to raise staff awareness of refugee issues; and working with employers to increase the refugee employment rate.

207. Publication of DWP’s final employment strategy for refugees was delayed several times and was finally published in March 2005. One of the foundations of the strategy is the research finding that over half (54%) of refugees who are looking for work had used Jobcentre Plus and just under half (49%) had heard of any of its programmes. Consequently, the strategy’s stated aims are to introduce measures to: move more unemployed refugees into Jobcentre Plus support quickly after they receive refugee status; and ensure that Jobcentre Plus gives them the help they need to find sustainable work. The strategy lists the measures that have been put in place since April 2004 to meet these aims. These include: a skills audit conducted by the Home Office; the introduction by the Home Office of Immigration Status Documents; notification of a refugee’s NINO at the same time as their Home Office decision letter; partnership working with the Home Office and voluntary sector to ensure that refugees access Jobcentre Plus services as soon as possible; a voluntary refugee ‘marker’ on the Labour Market System; screening all customers for literacy, numeracy and language needs and work-focused English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programmes for those who need it; and financial incentives for those taking up Jobcentre Plus basic skills and ESOL training.

208. The refugee employment strategy also outlines further measures that are underway including: a pilot of specialist employment support for newly recognised refugees; a handbook for new refugees with information on a range of issues; a pilot support scheme for refugees in the 28 days following the issue of their positive decision letter, including support from a caseworker; a review of Jobcentre Plus interpreter and translation services; the introduction of Refugee Integration Loans; policy development to increase volunteering opportunities for refugees; and guidance for refugees who want to become self-employed.

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209. The Department’s refugee employment strategy acknowledges that local partnerships are critical to the success of the refugee employment strategy and comments that voluntary sector organisations are particularly important in delivering services to refugees.\textsuperscript{277} The Refugee Council are a key provider of services and, in evidence, outlined some of their services to the Committee.\textsuperscript{278} In evidence, the Minister for Work said that the refugee employment strategy was developed in partnership with voluntary sector partners through the National Refugee Integration Forum. The Forum provides advice and will be monitoring the progress of the report.\textsuperscript{279}

210. The Committee welcomes the progress the Department has made in developing the refugee employment strategy. As the Refugee Council said in evidence, the strategy covers the right issues, but the Department is not taking forward the work as quickly as might be hoped.\textsuperscript{280} The Committee recommends a targeted spend-to-save increase in resources to assist qualified refugees to find suitable work. The Committee also recommends increased support for specialist voluntary sector and not-for-profit organisations providing tailored training courses for refugees to assist them to be able to compete in local labour markets.

\textsuperscript{277} DWP Working to Rebuild Lives: A refugee employment strategy, March 2005, p10
\textsuperscript{278} Q 187
\textsuperscript{279} Q 343
\textsuperscript{280} Q 190
10 Conclusion

211. This report has outlined the standards of service delivery by DWP to black and ethnic minority clients. The evidence presented during the inquiry leaves no doubt that ethnic minority clients do experience differential treatment. However, there is a real lack of hard evidence due to the Department’s failure to conduct comprehensive ethnic monitoring. The legislative requirements of the Race Relations Act mean that the Department should already know how all their policies and services affect race equality. Efforts are being made to widen ethnic monitoring across DWP, but progress remains far too slow and must be significantly speeded up.

212. Ethnic monitoring of clients should form the basis of a full impact exercise so that the Department can assess how their policies and services affect race equality. An Impact Assessment Tool has now been developed and the Committee urges the Department to apply the Tool across the Department now and act upon the results as a matter of urgency.

213. The importance of ethnic monitoring also applies to DWP’s staff. In spite of efforts to increase the representation of ethnic minority staff, they remain disproportionately at the lower staff grades. Much more effort needs to be put into recruiting ethnic minority staff at higher grades and helping ethnic minority staff move up through the grades. The Committee is also very concerned that the DWP staffing efficiencies will have a detrimental impact on the ethnic composition of DWP staff and action needs to be taken to prevent ethnic minority staff from being disproportionately affected.

214. DWP’s Race Equality Scheme, published in 2003, provided a useful starting point enabling the Department to consider how race equality could be implemented across the Department. Some progress has been made and the Department is now obliged to review the Race Equality Scheme. The Committee expects the statutory reviews to provide the impetus needed further to progress race equality within DWP for ethnic minority clients and staff: clients who are amongst the most in need, and staff who, for the most part, are in the frontline and poorly paid.
Recommendations

1. The Committee notes the Race Equality Scheme Progress Report and recommends that by 31 December 2005 the Department develops further targets to improve race equality beyond 2005. (Paragraph 29)

2. In line with the statutory requirement to review the relevant functions, policies and proposed policies contained in the Race Equality Scheme, the Committee recommends that the Department publishes on time, the statutory three year review of the Scheme to assess what progress has been made on race equality across DWP since May 2002. (Paragraph 33)

3. The Committee recommends that by 31 December 2005 the Department sets long-term and challenging targets for the improved representation of ethnic minority staff, particularly at senior levels, beyond 2005. The Department must improve its own knowledge of its workforce by more effective ethnic monitoring. We believe PCS could do more to assist with this process. (Paragraph 43)

4. The Committee recommends that the Department undertakes by 1 May 2006 a full review of staff procedures to assess their impact on race equality, taking account of factors such as access to training and reasons given for resignation and that it develops an action plan to address any adverse effects of its procedures upon ethnic minority staff. We also recommend that the Department provides substantial further support for existing ethnic minority staff in career progression and takes immediate action to recruit ethnic minority staff at senior levels. (Paragraph 49)

5. The Committee is concerned that proposed job cuts and relocations will have a disproportionate impact on black and minority ethnic employees, which could contribute to a worsening of relative unemployment levels. The Committee recommends that by 1 May 2006 the Department publishes the race impact assessment of the job cuts and relocations out of London and the South East; the criteria used for selecting staff who are likely to lose their posts; and also the ethnic breakdown of the staff who will be leaving the Department as a result of the job cuts. We also recommend that the Department gives serious consideration to how it will meet the staff ethnicity targets when deciding which staff will be selected for redundancy. (Paragraph 57)

6. The Committee recommends that the Department takes urgent action to implement ethnic monitoring across the Department and its Agencies at both entry point and exit point and for all benefits and services. We also recommend that the Department works closely with the DWP Ethnic Minority Working Party, the Commission for Racial Equality and other representative bodies to ensure that full and proper use is made of the information gathered through ethnic monitoring. (Paragraph 65)

7. The Committee recommends that the habitual residence test and the Social Fund discretionary decisions are subject to ethnic monitoring to establish whether there is a differential impact upon ethnic minorities, and whether those tests are applied differently. (Paragraph 74)
8. The Committee recommends that the Department reviews the identification requirements needed to pursue a benefit claim and ensures that staff are fully trained in the identification requirements including the process of referral to the Validity of Marriage Unit. (Paragraph 78)

9. The Committee recommends that the Department examines the option of suspending rather than cancelling payment of benefits while clients are abroad for a time-limited period. We also reiterate our recommendation that, by 1 April 2006, payment of Pension Credit during a temporary absence abroad is brought into line with Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit and is paid for up to 13 weeks. (Paragraph 81)

10. The Committee recommends that:

   a) the Department undertakes a full assessment of race equality and cultural awareness training, in consultation with external experts, such as the Commission for Racial Equality;

   b) the Department ensures that staff receive up-to-date equality training, with annual ‘refresher’ courses for all staff;

   c) training via printed and electronic media is only used to supplement attendance at a training event;

   d) all training is tested and evaluated to ensure that it meets the needs of staff and clients. (Paragraph 93)

11. The Committee recommends that the Impact Assessment Tool is urgently applied across the Department to all areas of service delivery as well as to existing and new policies and that the results of the impact assessment are published and acted upon promptly to reduce inequalities for clients and staff and to meet the race relations legislation. (Paragraph 97)

12. The Committee recommends that a breakdown of take-up of means-tested benefits by pensioner households should be provided by ethnic group. (Paragraph 103)

13. The Committee further recommends that research on the estimates of eligibility for Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance should look specifically at eligibility among ethnic minorities. (Paragraph 107)

14. The Committee recommends that the Pension Service collects data from late 2006 on the ethnicity of its customers. (Paragraph 110)

15. As part of its duties under race relations legislation, the Pension Service should evaluate awareness among ethnic minority pensioners about how to access the Pension Service at local level, determine whether the arrangements in place are sufficient to meet their needs and by 1 October 2006 report on the results. (Paragraph 119)

16. The Committee considers local partnership schemes to be essential to the success of the Pension Service and we recommend that areas with higher-than-average ethnic
minority populations get additional resources and support for partnership development. (Paragraph 139)

17. The Committee recommends that a larger range of translated material should be made more widely available and that translated material should be updated frequently and put on public display. (Paragraph 154)

18. The Committee recommends that the Department soon carries out an urgent and fundamental re-consideration of:

   a) its plan to address the language needs of clients;

   b) the services it offers to assist clients needing language support; and

   c) its plan to improve awareness amongst senior management. (Paragraph 158)

19. The Committee recommends that the Department develops a language marker on the appropriate IT systems to identify clients needing ongoing language support. We also recommend that clients are given the option of requesting that they receive correspondence in the language of their choice. (Paragraph 162)

20. The Committee recommends that the Department further reforms the current staff language allowance and differentiates between staff who frequently use their linguistic skills and those who are ‘casual’ users; and that staff who spend more than 25% of their time using a second language should receive a substantial annual allowance, and that those who use their language skills less frequently should be entitled to an annual allowance of at least £520. (Paragraph 165)

21. The Committee is concerned that the staffing cuts and relocations outside London will have a detrimental effect upon the service ethnic minority clients can expect to receive from DWP and that this will be particularly problematic for those with language needs. We recommend that the Department conducts an audit by 31 December 2005 of the languages spoken by staff in London together with an impact assessment of the staff efficiencies; and that by 1 October 2006 a strategy is developed to ensure that clients in London who require language support are not disproportionately and adversely affected by the staffing efficiency measures. (Paragraph 171)

22. The Committee recommends that by 1 May 2006 the Department develops a coherent ethnic minority outreach strategy and works in close partnership with local and community groups in order to meet the information needs of ethnic minorities. The Committee also recommends that a thorough review is undertaken of capacity within advice services serving communities with high minority populations, and other indicators of social need. (Paragraph 174)

23. The Committee recommends that significant additional resources are allocated to promote increased participation in the labour market in the 272 most disadvantaged wards in the UK. (Paragraph 192)

24. The Committee recommends a targeted spend-to-save increase in resources to assist qualified refugees to find suitable work. The Committee also recommends increased
support for specialist voluntary sector and not-for-profit organisations providing tailored training courses for refugees to assist them to be able to compete in local labour markets. (Paragraph 210)
Annex

Visit notes – 30 June 2004

Wolverhampton Pensions Centre

Discussion with Jane Whitaker (Centre Manager), Pension Centre staff and Suki Herian (Wolverhampton Elderly Asian and Disabled Group)

Suki Herian commented that pensioners she represents commonly experience delays when making new claims. The perception is that staff don’t know what is happening as there have been so many changes in pension policy. Language problems are a key barrier to services and are particularly problematic with the increasing reliance on telephone services. The Wolverhampton Elderly Asian Group is only funded for one year and the suggestion was made that the service would benefit from a funded worker provided by the Department.

Pension Centre staff working in the Local Service Partner Liaison Team support minority ethnic pensioners through local surgeries. The service is usually tested in an area for three months and may be extended if sufficient people use it. The service was established before the Pension Service was set up and difficulties were experienced in the transitional period. Home visits are given when the customer asks.

Customers telephoning the Centre frequently use an English-speaking relative to establish initial contact. A range of languages is spoken by the Pension Centre staff and calls are often passed onto them. Staff using their additional language skills are given an extra payment of just £250 in recognition of their skill, although the payment is currently very difficult to obtain as it is difficult to prove how much staff time is spent using other languages. It was commented that staff do need more of a financial reward for their language skills but that many do it as a mark of good will. Staff also have access to Language Line, although Wolverhampton Pension Centre does not make much use of the service due to the skill of its staff. It was noted that standard letters do go out in English to all clients and many go on to contact voluntary sector services for help in translating them.

It was noted that the majority of minority ethnic staff at the Pension Centre are at the lower grades and therefore many are not eligible to conduct face-to-face business, in spite of their language skills. It was also pointed out that some Pension Centre offices do not necessarily deal with cases in their own area, therefore existing staff language skills may be unused.

The culture change apparent in DWP whereby benefit take-up is promoted rather than clients fearing that their benefits will be cut was welcomed.

The Pension Centre has successfully worked in partnership with the voluntary sector and both are concerned that about the lack of long-term sustainable funding for voluntary sector services.

The outreach team were asked about their work with pensioners. One effective way to reach all pensioners was to take outreach and pensions surgeries to supermarkets. In terms
of work specifically to reach minority ethnic pensioners, they told us the importance of using local knowledge and the need to get a foothold in the locality, for example, in luncheon clubs, temples and mosques. It is also important to ensure that the outreach work offers some degree of privacy to pensioners wishing to inquire about pensions and benefits.

Advertising Pension Centre services is important in addition to relying on word of mouth. The outreach workers have only a limited budget for publicity and previously made their own posters. The publicity budget is not locally held. Outreach workers use the national staff intranet to share best practice.

It is difficult to establish the proportion of the local pensioner population that is being reached by the Pension Centre as no figures are available. A researcher is currently working with the Centre to examine the diversity of the local pensioner population.

A key problem identified by one the Centre’s team leaders was that of verification of dates of birth and of marriage. A widespread problem is that those born in India before 1961 were often not issued with birth or marriage certificates. Clients need to provide two forms of identification and as they may not have a birth certificate there are limited options. Staff recommended that just one form of identification should be accepted. It can take up to a year to verify a marriage which can significantly delay pensions applications.

**Chapel Court Jobcentre, Wolverhampton**

*Discussion with Graham Rigby (Deputy District Manager), Gary Egginton (Action Team Project Manager), Tina Feakes (Business Manager) and staff from Action Team for Jobs and Sure Start.*

Action Team for Jobs (ATfJ) was set up three years ago and covers 10 out of 20 council wards locally. Nationally, some ATfJ projects are run by external organisations but in Wolverhampton is Jobcentre Plus led. ATfJ is a community outreach service helping jobless people, with a primary focus on the minority ethnic community. ATfJ also helps fund services such as Neighbourhood Nurseries.

ATfT is working with organisations involved in local economic regeneration to help find jobs for those who are unemployed, with a particular focus on those who are furthest from the labour market. It was felt that there needs to be more investment close to people’s homes and that there is a real need for advice within the community. ATfJ is putting more advisers into the community and works from 13 units across the city. In addition, a mobile unit helps to target areas in need of employment advice. Most of the focus is upon four or five wards with very high unemployment and a large minority ethnic community.

It was noted that Wolverhampton has received a relatively large number of asylum seekers and refugees in recent years and investment has been made into specific services to cater for their needs. More specialist advice is needed as more than forty languages are now being spoken locally. One suggestion is that refugees need to be trained to help work with DWP (and other service providers) and their own communities. This would help to raise the standard of translation available and provide a more personal touch.
The issue of childcare is particularly problematic among minority ethnic communities where using formal childcare is not the norm. It was strongly felt that a lead-in time is necessary for part-time childcare to be made available for a month or so before a parent starts work to enable the child to get settled and for the parents to be confident that the service is adequate. The Advisers Discretionary Fund can cover this, but it is not always used. Other problems identified included children falling outside the remit of Neighbourhood Nurseries, parents not qualifying for childcare tax credit and how to provide adequate childcare during school holidays.
Formal Minutes

WEDNESDAY 23 MARCH 2005

Members Present:
Sir Archy Kirkwood, in the Chair
Miss Anne Begg
Ms Karen Buck
Mr Andrew Dismore
Mr David Hamilton
Rob Marris

The Committee deliberated.

Draft report (Department for Work and Pensions: Delivery of Services to Ethnic Minority Clients), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 and 2 read, combined and agreed to (now paragraph 1).

Paragraphs 2 to 8 (now paragraphs 2 to 7) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 9 (now paragraph 8) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraph 10 (now paragraph 9) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 11 (now paragraph 10) read, amended and agreed to.

A paragraph – (Karen Buck) brought up, read the first and second time and inserted (now paragraph 11).

Paragraphs 12 and 13 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraph 14 read and agreed to.

A paragraph – (Karen Buck) brought up and read the first and second time and inserted (now paragraph 15).

Paragraphs 15 to 27 (now paragraphs 16 to 28) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 28 (now paragraph 29) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 29 and 30 (now paragraphs 30 and 31) read and agreed to.

Paragraphs 31 to 34 (now paragraphs 32 to 35) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraph 35 (now paragraph 36) read and agreed to.

Paragraphs 36 and 37 (now paragraphs 37 and 38) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 38 to 41 (now paragraphs 39 to 42) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 42 (now paragraph 43) read, amended and agreed to.
Paragraph 43 (now paragraph 44) read and agreed to.
Paragraph 44 (now paragraph 45) read, amended and agreed to.
Paragraph 45 (now paragraph 46) read and agreed to.
Paragraph 46 (now paragraph 47) read, amended and agreed to.
Paragraph 47 (now paragraph 48) read and agreed to.
Paragraphs 48 and 49 (now paragraphs 49 and 50) read, amended and agreed to.
Paragraph 50 (now paragraph 51) read and agreed to.
Paragraphs 51 to 53 (now paragraphs 52 to 54) read, amended and agreed to.
Paragraphs 54 and 55 (now paragraphs 55 and 56) read and agreed to.
Paragraphs 56 and 57 (now paragraphs 57 and 58) read, amended and agreed to.
Paragraph 58 (now paragraph 59) read and agreed to.
Paragraph 59 (now paragraph 60) read, amended and agreed to.
Paragraphs 60 to 71 (now paragraphs 61 to 72) read and agreed to.
Paragraphs 72 and 73 (now paragraphs 73 and 74) read, amended and agreed to.
Paragraph 74 (now paragraph 75) read and agreed to.
Paragraph 75 (now paragraph 76) read, amended and agreed to.
Paragraph 76 (now paragraph 77) read and agreed to.
Paragraphs 77 and 78 (now paragraphs 78 and 79) read, amended and agreed to.
Paragraphs 79 to 87 (now paragraphs 80 to 88) read and agreed to.
Paragraph 88 (now paragraph 89) read, amended and agreed to.
Paragraph 89 (now paragraph 90) read and agreed to.
Paragraph 90 (now paragraph 91) read, amended and agreed to.
Paragraph 91 (now paragraph 92) read and agreed to.
Paragraph 92 (now paragraph 93) read, amended and agreed to.
Paragraph 93 to 95 (now paragraph 94 to 96) read and agreed to.
Paragraph 96 (now paragraph 97) read, amended and agreed to.
Paragraph 97 (now paragraph 98) read and agreed to.
Paragraphs 98 to 100 (now paragraphs 99 to 101) read, amended and agreed to.
Paragraphs 101 to 109 (now paragraphs 102 to 110) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 110 (now paragraph 111) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraph 111 (now paragraph 112) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 112 (now paragraph 113) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 113 and 114 (now paragraphs 114 and 115) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 115 (now paragraph 116) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 116 and 117 (now paragraphs 117 and 118) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 118 (now paragraph 119) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 119 to 122 (now paragraphs 120 to 123) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 113 (now paragraph 124) read, amended and agreed to.

A paragraph – (Karen Buck) brought up and read the first and second time and inserted (now paragraph 125)

Paragraphs 124 to 136 (now paragraphs 126 to 138) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 137 (now paragraph 139) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraph 138 (now paragraph 140) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 139 (now paragraph 141) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraph 140 (now paragraph 141) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 141 and 142 (now paragraphs 143 and 144) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 143 to 145 (now paragraphs 145 to 147) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 146 (now paragraph 148) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 147 to 151 (now paragraphs 149 to 153) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 152 (now paragraph 154) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 153 and 154 (now paragraphs 155 and 156) read and agreed to.

Paragraphs 155 and 156 (now paragraphs 157 and 158) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraph 157 (now paragraph 159) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 158 (now paragraph 160) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 159 and 160 (now paragraphs 161 and 162) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 161 (now paragraph 163) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraph 162 (now paragraph 164) read and agreed to.
Resolved, That the Report, as amended, be the Fourth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chairman do make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That the provisions of Standing Order No. 134 (Select Committees (reports)) be appended to the report.

Several papers were ordered to be appended to the Minutes of Evidence.
Ordered, That the Appendices to the Minutes of Evidence taken before the Committee be reported to the House – (The Chairman)

[The Committee adjourned to a day and time to be fixed by the Chairman.]
Witnesses

Wednesday 29 October 2003

Ms Katie Lane and Ms Fosuah Poku, Citizens Advice, Mr Richard Wilson and Ms Dee Springer, Help the Aged, Mr Frank Bonner, PCS and Mr Roland Biosah, Black Members Committee, DWP.

Mr Trevor Phillips, Commission for Racial Equality.

Wednesday 16 June 2004

Cllr Laura Willoughby and Mr Terry Patterson, Local Government Association.

Ms Uma Gupta, Greenwich Welfare Rights Service, Ms Rosalind Ambrose, Hounslow Welfare Benefits and Money Advice Unit and Ms Rita Davies, London Borough of Newham Social Regeneration Unit.

Wednesday 23 June 2004

Ms Vanessa Davis, Disability Alliance

Ms Maeve Sherlock, Ms Bharti Patel and Mr Deng Yai, The Refugee Council

Wednesday 30 June 2004

Mr Sehdev Bismal MBE, Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group, Mr Junior Hemans, West Midlands Caribbean Parents’ and Friends Association, Mr Mahmood Khan, Wolverhampton Mosques and TLC College, Dr Sadhu Singh, Council of Sikh Gurdwaras and Wolverhampton Citywide BME Community Forum and Mr Jeremy Vanes, Wolverhampton Citizens Advice Bureau.

Wednesday 9 February 2005

Rt Hon Jane Kennedy MP, Minister for Work, Dr Barbara Burford, DWP and Mr Mark Fisher, Jobcentre Plus
List of Written Evidence

1. Citizens Advice   Ev 1
2. Help the Aged    Ev 5
3. Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) Ev 7
5. Local Government Association Ev 30
7. Hounslow Welfare Benefits and Money Advice Unit Ev 48; 185
8. London Borough of Newham Social Regeneration Unit Ev 49
9. The Refugee Council Ev 67
10. Supplementary note to oral evidence, DWP Ev 105
11. Consulate General for The Republic of Turkey Ev 111
12. Hitslink Advice Centre Ev 111
13. Colleges from the Black Country Ev 112
14. Child Poverty Action Group Ev 113
15. Language Line Ev 116
16. Salford Welfare Rights Service Ev 120
17. Further memorandum from PCS Ev 122; 126
18. DWP Ev 128; 163; 165; 167; 205
19. Policy Research Institute on Ageing and Ethnicity (PRIAE) Ev 174
20. National Debtline Ev 179
21. Stonham Housing Association Limited Ev 180
22. Blakenhall Community Advice Centre Ev 181
23. City and County of Swansea Ev 181
25. Warwickshire Welfare Rights Advice Service Ev 188
26. Greenwich Community Law Centre Ev 189
27. Janine Lishman-Peat Ev 190
29. Newham Social Regeneration Unit Ev 193
30. Latin American Womens Rights Service Ev 197
31. Latin American Disabled Peoples Project Ev 197
32. Leeds City Council Ev 198
33. Age Concern Ev 199
34. Wolverhampton Citizens Advice Bureaux Ev 202