



National Audit Office

DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS

Using leaflets to communicate with the public about services and entitlements

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Using leaflets to communicate with the
public about services and entitlements

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



1 The Department for Work and Pensions provides services to some 28 million people. It communicates with them face to face through more than 1,000 local offices and around 70 contact centres and through letters, leaflets and its websites. Despite the development of new technology, printed materials, in particular leaflets, play an important role in ensuring that customers are informed of services and entitlements. It is vital that customers can rely on the accuracy of this information to make informed choices about their lives.

2 This report examines how effectively the Department manages the risk of providing inaccurate information in its leaflets. It also considers whether the Department communicates clearly and effectively about benefits and services in the leaflets it issues to customers (such as those in **Figure 1 overleaf**). In particular, it asks:

- how the Department manages the risks associated with producing and issuing inaccurate leaflets (Part 1);
- whether it can ensure that the information in leaflets is accurate and accessible (Part 2); and
- whether leaflets are easily available for customers (Part 3).

The Department has already made progress in these areas and our work shows how it could further improve these functions for the customer and highlights areas for further efficiency savings.

3 The report does not examine other means of communicating with the public such as contact centres on which we will report separately.

The importance of accurate and complete information easily available to citizens

4 **Government needs to communicate effectively with citizens.** Successful and efficient dealings between citizens and government departments require clear and accurate information to flow both ways. Government departments must understand the needs of citizens and so should, for example, have suitable ways of gathering and handling information such as well-designed forms.¹ In order to be able to provide this information, citizens must know what services are available and how to access them, and be aware of their rights and responsibilities. Often citizens obtain such information through published leaflets.

5 The need to convey often complex information in accessible formats is a constant challenge for the Department, on the one hand ensuring that information is complete and accurate, but on the other, that often complex information is concise and accessible. Our report *Dealing with the complexity of the benefits system* (HC 592, 2005-06) found that good communication is one way to help customers better understand the benefits

¹ Our report *Difficult Forms: How Government agencies interact with citizens* (HC1145, 2002-03) showed the importance of well designed forms.

system. The Department designs leaflets to encourage customers to claim benefits to which they may be entitled. The claim process is designed to ensure the Department gathers the relevant evidence and correctly establishes a customer's entitlement. When a customer becomes entitled to benefit, they are advised of their responsibility to notify the Department should they have a change in their circumstance. Providing inaccurate or out of date

information in any communication can have consequences for both customers and the Department (**Box 1**). These are not theoretical risks. In the 1990s, for example, the Department's failure to inform the public following a change in legislation about the Inherited State Earnings-Related Pension Scheme (SERPS) led to people being misled about their future pension entitlement, with a total cost to the Government of lost savings of £8 billion by 2050.²

1 Core Department for Work and Pensions leaflets for key customer groups

The work you want, the help you need (JPS1) – October 2004

451,000 copies printed in 2004-05

Produced for: All working age customers

This 65 page guide to benefits and services is produced by Jobcentre Plus and includes details of the services offered to working age customers through Jobcentre Plus and other agencies across government.



Access to Work: Information for Disabled People (DS4JP) – July 2004

51,000 copies printed in 2004-05

Produced for: Disabled workers

This leaflet provides details of the Access to Work scheme available to working age customers with a disability who are about to start work or are in work.



Pensioners' guide – England and Wales (PG1) – October 2004

300,000 copies printed in 2004-05

Produced for: Current and future pensioners

This 64 page guide produced by The Pension Service provides information on the range of benefits and services available through The Pension Service as well as across Government.



Bringing up children on your own? (LP15) – February 2005

428,000 copies printed in 2004-05

Produced for: Lone parents

A six page leaflet providing information about the New Deal for Lone Parents programme.



Source: Department for Work and Pensions

2 State Earnings-Related Pension Scheme: The failure to inform the public of reduced pensions rights for widows and widowers (HC320, 1999-2000) and Improving Service Quality: Action in response to the Inherited SERPS problem (HC497, 2002-03).

BOX 1**The impact of inaccurate and incomplete information**

Providing inaccurate and incomplete information can impact on the efficiency of the Department. This can include:

Inappropriate decisions by customers – Inaccurate information may lead to customers making inappropriate decisions about their future financial plans, as demonstrated by the Inherited SERPS problem, or customers not claiming something to which they are legitimately entitled.

Inappropriate claims by customers – Failure to correctly advise customers of the rules of entitlement may lead to some customers claiming something to which they are not entitled. This could lead to unnecessary and wasteful processing of claims and decisions by the Department.

Social exclusion and confusion – Lack of awareness of services and poor availability of information in different languages has been shown to contribute to low take-up of benefits.

Sources: State Earnings-Related Pension Scheme: The failure to inform the public of reduced pension rights for widows and widowers, HC 320 1999-00; Tackling Pensioner Poverty – Encouraging the Take-up of Entitlements, HC 37 2002-2003; Delivering benefits and services for black and minority ethnic older people, Department for Work and Pensions Research Report 201, 2003; and Department for Work and Pensions Channel Strategy, 2005

6 Written documents still play an important role.

Despite increased use of new technology, including through contact centres, established means of communication – in particular, in the form of letters or leaflets – remain essential. In many cases, the Department may need to provide a customer with detailed written information as confirmation of a discussion, and some people may wish to have a document they can keep for reference. Even the introduction of contact centres has not ended the need for leaflets because the result of many telephone contacts is that the Department sends out information in written form. The Government is aiming to make services available online although the internet will not always be a suitable alternative for all of the Department's customers. A previous National Audit Office report³ highlighted that there are potential savings for Government from the development of e-services but use varies significantly according to characteristics such as age, income and location.

7 To fulfil its responsibilities, the Department needs to make a range of information available to the public.

It does this on a large scale and currently provides information using 245 separate leaflets. These include general information products, such as *A Guide to State Pensions*, and leaflets for specific issues, such as *Getting*

Help with your Council Tax. In 2004-05, the Department printed over 24 million leaflets. This suggests that there are likely to be many millions of leaflets held or retained by customers or available to them in a variety of public places. The Department spent around £110 million on communication activity in 2004-05. The total costs associated with the preparation, revision, storage and circulation of material are not known exactly but we estimate them at £31 million a year (**Figure 2 overleaf**). On average leaflets cost £385 per thousand for English versions and £1,580 per thousand in Welsh.

8 The information provided must be accurate and up to date.

A key objective of the Department for Work and Pensions is to ensure that accurate and timely information is provided to its customers and the wider public. Welfare and employment policies are unlikely to work if target groups such as lone parents, jobseekers and pensioners do not know about their rights and responsibilities. Ensuring accuracy and completeness is not straightforward. The laws and regulations governing work programmes and benefits can be complex and can change frequently, meaning that leaflets must be updated. The Department also has to decide what information is relevant to particular groups and make sure they balance accuracy with the need not to overburden readers with overly technical and legalistic language. It must also take account of the requirements of an increasingly diverse population.

9 Communicating with the public involves a large amount of staff resource and activity to ensure up to date leaflets are in stock.

Leaflets are held at over 1,000 offices which the public can visit (including Jobcentre Plus and Social Security offices), as well as many of the Department's contact centres. Jobcentre Plus recently published Customer Information Display Standards on how information materials should be placed in offices. However, this guidance does not yet identify which of the 245 different Departmental leaflets each office should have available for all of the Department's customers. Staff at local offices decide when to order more leaflets and are responsible for maintaining the currency of the stock they hold. To conserve the stocks of some leaflets, and to prevent local stock piles, some leaflets have restrictions on the number that can be ordered at any one time. The Department is now working on revised arrangements that would allow business users of printed products, including leaflets, to access supply arrangements through a single provider or network of providers. It plans to award a contract in Autumn 2006.

3 *Progress in making e-services accessible to all – Encouraging use by older people* (HC 428, 2002-2003).

2 Cost elements of leaflets



Source: National Audit Office

How does the Department manage the risks of misinforming the public?

10 All government departments are now required to identify and record their key risks in order that they can manage them. The Department for Work and Pensions identifies and records its risks via a strategic risk register, which is reviewed routinely by its Strategic Risk Review Board. This register lists “providing unreliable advice or information to the public” as one of its 17 key corporate risks.

11 At the time of our study, the Department was considering the risks around the accuracy of verbal and written information provided to the public and how to mitigate these. We held a workshop, attended by a wide range of Departmental stakeholders, to examine the key risks along the leaflet life cycle, building on workshops held by the Department. The key risks identified were:

- a lack of clarity regarding responsibility for communicating with the public;
- a lack of clarity as to responsibility for ensuring the effective distribution and availability of leaflets once the content is agreed;
- weaknesses in managing the review process to ensure that the information contained in leaflets remains correct;
- a lack of understanding by operational staff about their responsibility for ensuring the leaflets they make available to the public are up to date;
- information in leaflets not always being fit for purpose or not being understood by those using them; and
- complex supply arrangements for both internal and external customers with a lack of corporate knowledge and control of products and lack of standard process leading to waste and duplication.

12 The Department as a whole has recognised the risk of issuing inaccurate information. It has introduced a number of actions to mitigate these risks including the recent development of a single Department wide corporate communications strategy; a redesign and rationalisation of working age leaflets based on customer research; and a review of the variety of brands used on information products. The Department is also currently concluding a complete review of the processes intended to ensure accuracy. Work is now ongoing at a strategic level to establish a better understanding of the Departmental risks associated with communicating with different customer groups, and to better define the responsibilities of everyone involved in the production, distribution, and accessibility of leaflets. The Department acknowledges that there is a potential risk of providing inaccurate or incomplete information and is developing action plans to ensure that these are addressed across individual agencies. In addition, the Accounting Officer has, since July 2005, allocated responsibility for managing the overarching risk for the whole Department to the Director of Communications, who provides assurance to the Department's Executive Team that the risk is managed effectively.

Are leaflets reliable and accurate?

13 The Department manages the risks of providing inaccurate information through the introduction of its Accuracy of Information content review process, established following reports by the National Audit Office and Committee of Public Accounts in 2002. This requires each leaflet to undergo a review every six months, in time for reprinting in April and October.

14 **Although reviews take place, they could be more valuable.** We examined the reviews carried out on 20 key leaflets and concluded that, whilst covering the substantive issues, improvements could be made by:

- ensuring reviews are implemented consistently across the Department;
- ensuring all reviews are well documented, so that it is always possible to identify the source of changes or whether key information owners have been consulted;

- reviewing leaflets according to risk;
- ensuring the consistency of the key messages across all leaflets rather than focussing on individual products; and
- ensuring the continued need for specific leaflets is reviewed consistently.

15 Only eight of the 20 leaflets we examined had been reviewed every six months. We recognise that given the current large number of leaflets, and a need to consult a range of individuals to check the accuracy of specific pieces of information, undertaking frequent reviews can be resource intensive. A review may take six to eight months a year. Where updated leaflets are not available on time, there is an increased risk that staff and customers will refer to out of date versions of leaflets they may already hold. Identifying the severity of risk and likelihood of each leaflet being inaccurate would help to determine which leaflets must be reviewed twice a year and which could, where resources were not available, be reviewed less frequently. From April 2005 Jobcentre Plus started to stagger the reviews of its leaflets to spread the workload throughout the year and to try to ensure that those leaflets containing benefit information will be reviewed for April and October reprints. Other leaflets will continue to be reviewed every six months throughout the year.

16 **Some parts of the Department are tackling the problem in different ways.** Focusing on making sure pieces of information rather than leaflets are correct is the most sensible approach. The Pension Service has taken the most comprehensive approach and has demonstrated good practice in managing the risks of inaccuracy. It has developed a Content Management System to hold details of all the leaflets and information products across government departments containing references to pensions information, more than 1,000 products. The system records who is responsible for pieces of information, as well as different products. This has enabled its review team to identify where changes made in one leaflet will impact on others and initiate review activity where necessary. In April 2005 Jobcentre Plus transferred responsibility for monitoring and coordinating the review process for all working age leaflets to five Marketing Account Managers.

Are leaflets easy to understand?

17 It is essential that the information in leaflets can be understood by customers from a wide range of backgrounds and levels of education. We conducted in-depth interviews with a small sample of the Department’s customers to explore with them the accessibility of the information provided by the Department, using 11 of the Department’s leaflets. During interviews, customers were asked to complete simple tasks using the leaflets as sources of information. We found that:

- **Some simple design measures would make some leaflets easier to understand.** Many of the leaflets examined as part of our review, in particular, recent ones such as the new Jobcentre Plus leaflets, displayed elements of widely recognised best practice, as suggested by the Plain English Campaign and the Basic Skills Agency. However, interviewees frequently said the information presented in the leaflets was very useful to them but the layout made it more difficult to access information. Improvements could be made in signposting; for example: contents pages were not always used even for very long leaflets; and titles and front cover images sometimes do not make it clear who the leaflet is for and what is in it (**Box 2**). The Department has guidance about design standards, but no mechanism for ensuring they are followed. We asked 28 customers to complete simple tasks using the information provided in leaflets appropriate to their customer group. Only four of the 16 tasks were successfully completed by these customers. This indicates that the information in leaflets may be inaccessible to some intended readers. Often, simple improvements such as the addition of a contents page or clearer headings would have made a big difference.
- **The readability of the text in leaflets may also cause difficulties.** The Department works closely with the Plain English Campaign to ensure that its information products meet the standards required for the Crystal Mark and that information is accessible to its customers. However, the use of some words, specific to the Department’s business, for example disability, incapacity and entitlement, can have an impact on readability. During our

examination, and to complement our sample of in-depth interviews with customers, we used an internationally recognised readability test, SMOG (Simple Measure of Gobbledegook),⁴ to test the readability of 13 core leaflets. The Department for Education and Skills⁵ estimates that 56 per cent of the adult population has literacy skills lower than those needed to obtain good GCSE passes (grades A-C). Around 16 per cent, over five million adults in the UK, have literacy skills equivalent to that expected of an 11 year old. Our test revealed that all 13 leaflets required a reading age higher than the national average and that eight required a reading age of at least 16, or equivalent to five years of secondary schooling. This in part could be due to the words the Department needs to use and although it has plans to review all of these leaflets as part of its ongoing programme, it is unlikely that all of the words used could be simplified. Overall, we consider that some information will not always be accessible to many of the Department’s customers, for example, those for whom English is not their first language.

BOX 2

Customers’ views on the design of leaflets

Customers liked leaflets where:

- Information help-line was on front cover
- Leaflets had a clear contents page
- Important information was in bold
- Information was in the form of questions and answers
- A glossary of terms was included

Customers disliked leaflets where:

- The title was misleading or unclear
- The leaflet was long
- No contents page was included
- Pale headings were used or white text on coloured background
- Inappropriate images were used

⁴ The Simple Measure of Gobbledegook (SMOG) is a readability test designed to match the reading level of written material to the ‘reading with understanding’ level of the reader.

⁵ *Skills for Life: Annual Review 2003-04*, Department for Education and Skills.

Are leaflets easy to obtain?

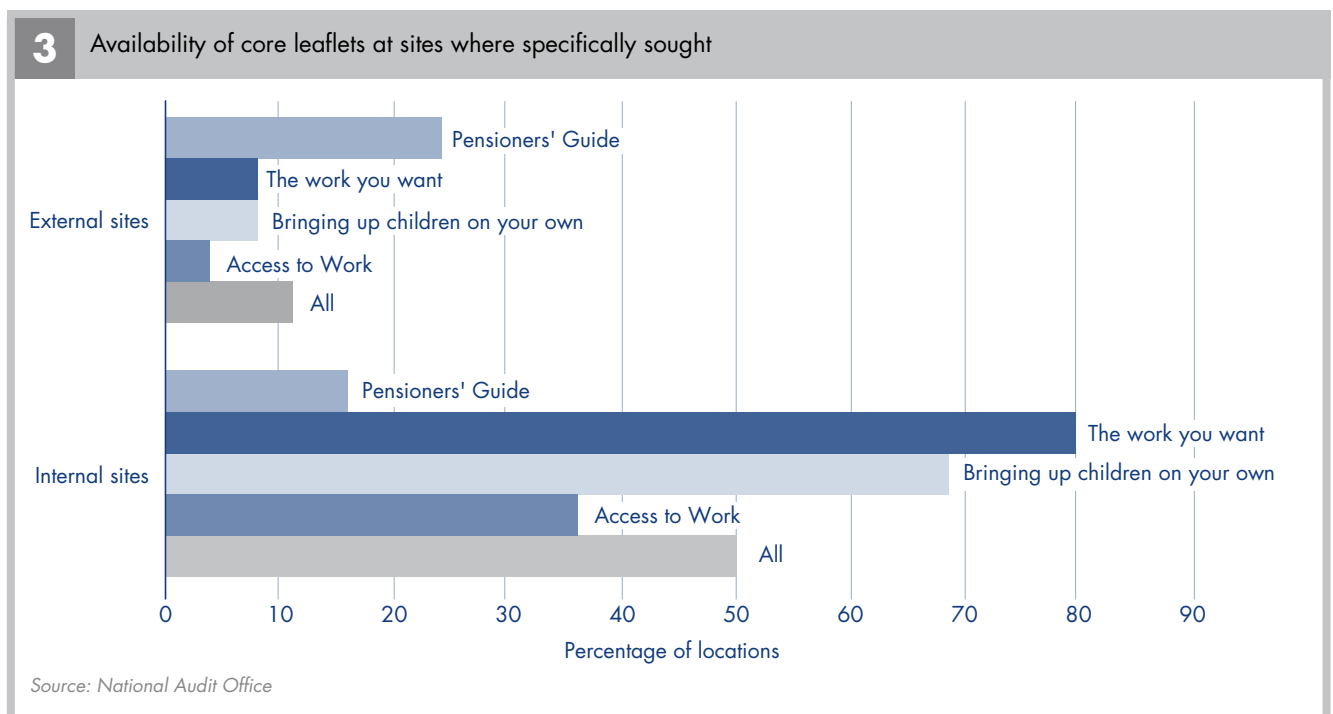
18 We selected four of the most important leaflets containing vital information for customers, one for each of the Department’s main client groups (pensioners and those planning to save for a pension, people of working age, disabled people and people with children), and tested their availability at 100 Departmental outlets (Jobcentre Plus offices, Jobcentres and Social Security Offices), as well as 100 other sites where customers might seek information throughout Great Britain, such as libraries. We found that:

- **Many of the leaflets were not available at the Department’s sites, and were difficult to obtain elsewhere (Figure 3).** Key leaflets for pensioners and disabled people were available at around 20 per cent of all sites, and 26 per cent of the Departmental sites where we requested them. However, we have noted that Jobcentre Plus does not expect all of the leaflets tested to be widely available in its offices.
- **In the majority (83 per cent) of the Department’s offices, leaflets were easily accessible to the public.** In the majority of the Department’s offices we visited, we found that the leaflets were well laid out and physically accessible. Overall, customers could easily reach the leaflets they wanted, although we found that in a minority of them (25 per cent) it would be difficult for customers in wheelchairs to

access leaflets without help. At around three quarters of the Department’s sites, leaflets were available to customers without first having to speak to a member of staff.

- **Even where leaflets were available, they were not always up to date.** This was a particular problem for the leaflet aimed at lone parents which we tested, where in March 2005 the correct February 2005 edition was only available at four of the 44 locations which stocked this leaflet. In general, leaflets for working age customers and those which had not recently been revised were more likely to be up to date. We also found that six of the 60 Jobcentre Plus offices we visited held different versions of the same leaflet.

19 Senior management attention has had an impact. In 2003-04, out-of-date stocks of leaflets were a particular problem in The Pension Service, and over 60 per cent of the leaflets distributed to customers from the seven Pension Centres visited by Internal Audit were out of date, some by up to two years. In response to this problem, the Chief Executive nominated herself as a ‘leaflets champion’ and guidance has been issued to staff locally on how to manage stock. Subsequent visits to Pension Centres have seen significant improvements in the currency of the leaflets held, with some 90 per cent being up to date, indicating the success of such direct action by senior managers.



20 Problems with the availability and currency of leaflets result from a number of factors relating to ordering, printing and distribution processes. The Department for Work and Pensions inherited different arrangements from predecessor bodies which have not been revised. The Department is now working on revised arrangements that would allow business users of printed products, including leaflets, to access supply arrangements through a single provider or network of providers. This provider would be responsible for sourcing, managing and maintaining the Department's stock of information products. It plans to award the contract for this in Autumn 2006. Until the contract is let, those ordering leaflets must navigate a number of different systems. The main problems are:

- **staff locally may not always know how to obtain leaflets.** During our research we visited a selection of 200 of the Department's offices, voluntary bodies and other government departments. We found the leaflets we required in half of the Department's 100 sites we visited. In the remainder, staff found it difficult to help customers to obtain leaflets where they were not available off the shelf, and none were able to provide a copy at the time of the visit. On four occasions staff offered to obtain and post the leaflet on and a further 19 sites provided a range of telephone numbers from which customers could have tried to obtain leaflets. At the remaining 27 sites, staff had difficulty providing customers with any information on how to obtain leaflets beyond those published by their own business area or they were unaware of how to obtain them if they were not on display. This is despite customers being advised in leaflets that they are available from Jobcentre Plus and informed on the Department's website to contact Jobcentre Plus to obtain leaflets. We are pleased to note that the Department is already acting on the findings of this review and is undertaking a full examination of all its information channels to ensure accuracy of signposting information for the public.
- **there is no mechanism to ensure that leaflets are up to date.** There is no single up to date list of which products are available and most current. We found the electronic catalogue on the Department's internet site was incomplete and referred to some out-of-date products.
- **distribution of leaflets to internal and external sites is not based on any agreement on what should be available at local level.** Except for specific campaigns, such as the one for Pension Credit, local staff order and maintain stocks of leaflets as required. There are agreements between the Department's agencies to provide basic information on each other's services, but the standards Jobcentre Plus has set for customer displays in its offices only refer to leaflets aimed at its own customers.
- **failure to agree the content of leaflets in time for reprinting.** In April 2005 for example, only one of The Pension Service leaflets was signed off in time to be reprinted despite close monitoring by the Chief Executive. Where updated leaflets are not available on time, there is an increased risk that staff and customers will refer to out of date versions of leaflets that they may already have.
- **the supply arrangements are complicated, and printing arrangements have become fragmented.** The Department has contracts with two printers and has access to others through framework agreements. It underwrites three months of stock of each leaflet at its two main printers. A distribution company manages stocks for ex-Employment Service offices. Not all printing is managed within these arrangements, however, leading to duplicate stocks being maintained. This also means the Department is not using its full buying power, and makes stock more difficult to manage. The Department has, for some time, been examining how to reduce duplication of storage arrangements and expects that efficiencies will be made with the appointment of a single provider during the next financial year.

- the ordering system is inflexible, giving rise to waste.** Neither internal nor external customers can always obtain the number of leaflets they want. Some leaflets have to be ordered in batches of 50. Offices may therefore maintain excessive local stocks to meet occasional individual requests. External customers, like internal ones, have to navigate a variety of routes to obtain different leaflets. Stocks of leaflets held centrally for distribution are run down and destroyed when they become out-of-date. Recycling out-of-date leaflets has cost the Department around £800,000 each year since 2002. In some instances the availability of leaflets will, where budgets are held by information owners rather than centrally, depend on owners having sufficient funds to reprint leaflets to replenish stock. Again the Department expects that the appointment of the single provider will enable greater efficiencies in the leaflet life cycle.

21 In contrast to the Department’s system for distributing information (a ‘pull’ approach) we found that those private and public sector organisations we examined actively distributed leaflets to sites as necessary (a ‘push’ approach) (Figure 4). Branches, offices and other users of information are told what leaflets they should have and what they should do with them. Leaflets sent to local branches are accompanied by guidelines to staff locally on whether these replace previous stock or are new products.

4 Private sector and Departmental management of leaflets		
	Private sector	Department for Work and Pensions
Consultation	Customer panel receives samples of new leaflets – views sought by interview	Leaflets not required to be tested before launch. Some campaign specific leaflets are tested. Some leaflets now include customer feedback forms
Printing	Service Level Agreements with selection of external printers	Contracts with two main printers and additional printers through framework agreements. Some ad hoc printing arrangements developed where printing not managed through existing contracts
Distribution	Leaflets distributed to branches at set times with instructions on how to display. Quantities based on central assessment of demand. Distributor checks that correct quantities received	Each local office decides what the local need for leaflets is and orders as required. Each office is responsible for ensuring stock is available and current
Re-order	Forms to re-order leaflets available on staff intranet	Separate arrangements depending on supplier
Audit	Internal audit spot-checks	Internal audit checks introduced successfully in The Pension Service
Maintaining stock up to date	Centralised database of information in leaflets used to identify when they need updating	Changes identified through leaflet review process. Central stocks of old leaflets destroyed. Local offices decide which new leaflets to order

Source: National Audit Office



RECOMMENDATIONS

22 The Department makes considerable efforts to provide the public with detailed information about its services, and ensure it is accurate and made available. It spends more than £100 million on communications, including more than £30 million on producing leaflets. However, information can be difficult for the public to access, and the Department is not yet effectively managing the risks that it is inaccurate or out of date. In particular, it lacks data about the quantity of leaflets in circulation, costs, their location and how they are used by customers.

23 Consequently, there is a risk that the material is not put to effective use and does not fully serve its purpose of ensuring efficient and effective contacts between the Department and its customers. Tackling these issues would make better use of the resources invested and reduce misunderstandings amongst the public about rights and responsibilities. The Department should:

- a** **Review the need for each of the current leaflets and significantly reduce the number published.** The Department should review all the leaflets it currently produces and identify scope for rationalisation. It is hard to believe it needs nearly 250 separate products and a smaller range would be cheaper to maintain. The Jobcentre Plus working age leaflet review has gone some way to reducing the number of leaflets published, reducing the number of working age leaflets from 212 to 87. Subsequently, there should be regular reviews to ensure that there is a continued
- b** **Consider cheaper and more easily updated alternative products.** The new tier 3 leaflets being introduced by Jobcentre Plus offer an opportunity to make use of IT and printing facilities available in local offices to provide an on-demand service for customers wanting leaflets. The Department should consider whether this approach could be introduced across all businesses for all core leaflets. This could substantially reduce the printing cost of £385 per thousand leaflets, and reduce the risk of leaflets being out of date locally.
- c** **Ensure all its agencies treat inaccurate and incomplete information as a key risk.** The Department must better identify the risks associated with communicating with the public and ensure all its agencies include the issue on their risk registers and monitor actions to manage the risks regularly. Agencies should oversee the risks throughout the entire leaflet life cycle, from conception to disposal, allocating clear responsibility for reporting on action to mitigate the risks at each stage and for the process as a whole.

- d Improve the management of information products.** The Department should establish a central database of all its leaflets to enable it to identify which have been reviewed, by whom and when a review is overdue. It should use the Content Management System to allow more efficient management of the accuracy of the information in its leaflets, shifting to managing the information itself rather than specific products, to avoid duplication of review effort. Using The Pension Service model, it should develop a single database to ensure changes made to individual leaflets are identified and made, as required, in other products. The Department should also make it easier for local offices to know when leaflets have been changed and must be re-ordered, perhaps through having a dedicated space for this on the Department's internet site. Having a single database of leaflets should help staff identify which are the most up to date versions available.
- e Adhere to agreed design standards.** The Department should agree a set of core standards, based on the needs of each agency, and ensure that the design of all new products adheres to them. Responsibility for quality assuring the design of each new product should be given to a central team and existing products should be reviewed and redesigned as necessary. Standards should be overseen by a senior manager with the ability to challenge decisions and resolve disputes.
- f Carry out leaflet reviews based on risk.** The Department should assess the potential risks and significance of inaccuracy in each leaflet and (once the Content Management System permits) each piece of information, to enable it to prioritise the review timescales and schedule an appropriate review period.
- g Clarify what material should be held in local offices.** Whilst impractical and wasteful for each office to stock every leaflet available, the Department should make clear which core products should be available at all times. Other leaflets should be available for staff to print locally, as needed, so they can respond quickly to customer requests. Practical guidance should be issued to all local offices on the standards for displaying leaflets and how to manage stock and respond to requests for core and non-core products. References to sources of further information in printed material should reflect these agreements.
- h Take short-term action to deal with out-of-date and missing stocks.** Following the success of the direct action taken by the Chief Executive of The Pension Service, other senior managers should follow suit to highlight the importance of what may be regarded by some staff as a mundane issue. The Department and its agencies should regularly monitor progress in achieving improvements in providing information to the public, drawing on the current mystery shopping programmes. They should assess whether this work provides sufficient evidence of the distribution and availability of leaflets, and consider extending its scope along the lines undertaken in the past by The Pension Service.
- i Rationalise supply and distribution arrangements.** The Department is already planning to use a single provider to source information products and manage print contracts. In order to achieve efficiency savings the Department needs to ensure that it:
- ends duplicate supply arrangements;
 - reviews distribution arrangements to cut out duplicate stock holding;
 - ensures printing is done under centrally negotiated contracts;
 - undertakes print runs based on assessment of need, not uncontrolled ordering; and
 - replaces some stocks with web-based fact-sheets which can be printed in single copies on demand.
- This may need to be done by a separate team working closely with the proposed single provider to ensure that leaflets are widely available to customers and that they are the most up to date versions, using the most appropriate distribution strategies.
- j Spread good practice within the Department.** There are many high quality products issued by the Department but others could learn from them. Our work has identified key elements of good practice at each stage of the process (Annexes A and B to the Executive Summary).

ANNEX A

Actions to improve the accessibility and availability of leaflets

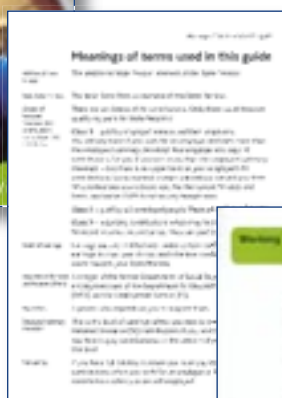
<p>1</p> <p>Concept: is there a need to provide information?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Consider the need for all new products using a full needs analysis and customer research in line with an overall communications strategy ■ Review existing leaflets regularly to determine whether they meet business and customer needs ■ Base the frequency of review on assessed risk associated with inaccuracy
<p>2</p> <p>Assessment: how should the information be communicated?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identify through customer research how best to communicate new information to the intended audience ■ Identify how best to communicate key messages in the format chosen, in particular in relation to the language and layout of the information ■ Using information on local demographics, assess the likely demand for the leaflet
<p>3</p> <p>Design: what should the leaflet look like?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Design leaflet according to the needs of the target audience as part of an overall communications strategy ■ Pilot leaflets with selection of target audience ■ Use established best practice principles when designing new leaflets as demonstrated below ■ Convert all leaflets into printer and web friendly versions for customers and staff to access
<p>4</p> <p>Production: how should it be produced?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Make full use of existing printing contracts to ensure value for money ■ Establish a clear and efficient supply chain, making sure that leaflets are available without unnecessary delays ■ Arrange for sufficient leaflets to be printed to fulfil distribution to each office and expected demand
<p>5</p> <p>In use: how should it be made available?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Make hard copies of leaflets easy to obtain internally and externally by using existing printing and distribution network ■ Make sure staff locally know which leaflets should be available to the public, covering all the Department's agencies, and how they can obtain them ■ Make all leaflets accessible electronically to enable staff locally to print copies of leaflets as requested by customers
<p>6</p> <p>Disposal: how and when should it be withdrawn?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Establish clear procedures locally for maintaining the currency of leaflets and regularly check compliance ■ Make sure that staff and third party organisations are informed when leaflets are superseded or are no longer in circulation ■ Actively distribute up to date leaflets to offices and third parties at set times

ANNEX B

Example of best practice found in some of the Department's leaflets



Front page makes it clear what the leaflet is about

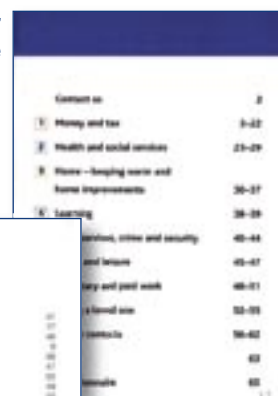


Include a glossary of key phrases and words used in the leaflet

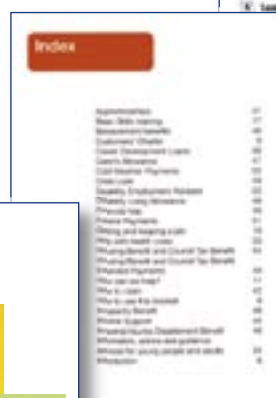


Use large plain text with important information in bold

Include a clear contents page



Include an index if the leaflet is long



Use a consistent design to show that leaflets are part of a series



PART ONE

Managing the risks of not communicating clearly



1.1 The Department for Work and Pensions is a major financial services institution. It provides a wide range of services to 28 million people through more than 1,000 offices and around 70 contact centres. Each year the Department has over 70 million contacts with customers over the telephone or face to face. The success and efficiency of the relationship between the Department and its customers depends on a number of elements. Failure to communicate effectively gives rise to significant costs in ineffective contacts and reworking of applications.

1.2 Citizens should be able to rely on the accuracy and completeness of information provided by all government departments. Citizens use the information government departments supply to judge the performance of schools and hospitals, make benefit claims, make arrangements to travel abroad, complete tax forms and much more. Written communication (in particular leaflets, letters and paid-for advertising) is regarded by the public as the most trustworthy source of information from Government.⁶

1.3 A key objective of the Department for Work and Pensions is to ensure that accurate and timely information is provided to its customers and the wider public. The need to convey often complex information in accessible formats is a constant challenge for the Department, on the one hand ensuring that information is complete and accurate, but on the other, ensuring that often complex information is concise and accessible. Our report *Dealing with the complexity of the benefits system* (HC592, 2005-06) found that good communication is one way to help customers better understand the benefits system. Welfare and

employment policies will not work if target groups do not know what services are available, and existing customers must know about all of their rights and responsibilities.

1.4 The Department needs to communicate with its customers or potential customers (as well as those who help customers) at various times. It needs to inform them of the existence of services or entitlements, advise them how to apply for them, deal with applications and changes of circumstances, maintain contact with existing customers and deal with queries. Sometimes it needs to alert customers to rules which affect them, including changes to these rules. The Department communicates with the public in a number of ways, including face to face contact through personal advisers, the internet, direct mailing and advertising. It has rationalised the number of offices it has open and has placed an increased emphasis on telephone contact via contact centres.

1.5 Nevertheless, printed materials, in particular information leaflets, continue to play an important role. Verbal contact with customers may need to be supported by detailed information, for example, calls to contact centres often lead to a leaflet being sent out. Some customers may not be able to take in all the information provided and may want to retain it in written form. Despite the availability of the internet, leaflets will continue to be a key source of information for some groups. Although access to the internet has generally increased, many of the Department's customers are less likely to use the internet to access services than the population as a whole.⁷ It is therefore important for the Department to be able to offer information in different forms, including leaflets.

⁶ An Independent Review of Government Communications, Chairman, Bob Phillis, presented to the Minister for the Cabinet Office January 2004.

⁷ *The General Household Survey 2003*, Office for National Statistics.

1.6 Research underlines the importance to the achievement of the Department’s objectives of effective communication by leaflets. Our report on *Tackling Pensioner Poverty*⁸ showed that pensioners who are most reluctant to use the telephone or visit an office to talk to The Pension Service, also often experienced problems obtaining relevant information about benefits. Pension Service customer research indicates that providing leaflets in simple, understandable form is important to pensioners. Other research for the Department has shown that leaflets helped form people’s impressions of child support reform, and poor availability of leaflets in other languages was a barrier to ethnic minority customers accessing services.⁹ The Department produces an extensive range of literature. It currently provides information to customers using 245 separate leaflets, including general information products, such as ‘*A Guide to State Pensions*’, and leaflets for specific events, such as ‘*Getting Help with your Council Tax*’ (Figure 5). Each is the responsibility of the relevant Agency.

5 Categories of leaflets used by the Department		
Target Group	Number of leaflets	Examples of leaflets
Working age	134	Services for those seeking work. Benefits for working age, disabled people and families. Services for employers. General information about Jobcentre Plus.
Pensioners	41	Benefits and services for pensioners. Pensions advice for future pensioners. General information about The Pension Service.
Child Support Agency customers	38	Information about old and new child support schemes.
Other	32	Information about social security rules across customer groups.
Total at April 2005	245	

Source: Department for Work and Pensions

1.7 The Department estimated that it spent around £110 million on communication activity in 2004-05. The total costs associated with the preparation, revision, storage and circulation of material is not known exactly but we estimate it is £31 million a year (Figure 6). This includes printing over 24 million copies of the Department’s leaflets at a cost in 2004-05 of £10.3 million. On average leaflets cost £385 per thousand for English versions and £1,580 per thousand in Welsh.

It is important that information used by customers is accurate

1.8 It is vital that the information provided by the Department is accurate so that members of the public can rely on it to make informed choices about their lives. Providing misleading and inaccurate information can be costly both for the Department, for example, in terms of paying compensation or receiving negative publicity, and for individuals, not obtaining assistance when they most need it. A previous failure by the Department to update a leaflet (the Inherited SERPS problem) highlighted the very serious consequences of incomplete and inaccurate information (Box 3).

1.9 Where inaccurate or out of date leaflets are available there are also risks that:

- customers may make inappropriate claims, for example customers:
 - not claiming something to which they are legitimately entitled; or
 - claiming something to which they are not entitled
- staff and/or independent advisory bodies base their advice on inaccurate information;
- costs will be incurred where leaflets have to be withdrawn and re-issued quickly;
- costs will be incurred through compensation payments and the need for re-work by staff; and
- the Department will receive adverse publicity.

⁸ *Tackling Pensioner Poverty: Encouraging take-up of entitlements*, (HC37, 2002-03).

⁹ The Department for Work and Pensions Information and Analysis Division reports 201: *Delivering benefits and services for black and minority ethnic older people*, 205: *The Pension Service Customer Survey 2003*, and 232: *Child Support Reform: the view and experiences of CSA staff and new clients*.

BOX 3**Providing inaccurate information – State Earnings-Related Pensions Scheme**

In our reports *State Earnings-Related Pension Scheme: The failure to inform the public of reduced pensions rights for widows and widowers* (HC320, 1999-2000) and *Improving Service Quality: Action in response to the Inherited SERPS problem* (HC497, 2002-03) we reported on the then Department of Social Security's failure to update a leaflet following a change of legislation in 1986 which led to people being misled about their pension entitlement. As a result of the information provided in the leaflet an unknown number of people may have made decisions about their future pension provision based on inaccurate information. Once identified, the Government was forced to alter the law in 2000 and an estimated £8 billion of anticipated savings will not be made.

1.10 The recommendations from our reports on the Inherited SERPS problem¹⁰ were initially taken forward by the Department's Accuracy of Information project, before responsibility for ensuring accuracy was devolved to each of the Department's agencies. However, recent Internal Assurance reports and the work of the Social Security Advisory Committee (Box 4, page 27) indicate that there remain problems. In 2004¹¹ the Committee expressed doubts about the depth, quality and consistency of the assurance process within the Department for printed materials. This report examines what the Department for Work and Pensions does to ensure that the written information it provides to customers as leaflets is accurate and up to date. It is part of a wider focus on how the Department interacts with citizens. Our approach is outlined in Appendix 1.

6 Costs to Department of producing leaflets

	Estimated cost relating to leaflets £m
Staff Costs	
Communications activity	2.2
Contract teams	0.3
Local staff time	1.0
	3.5
Non-staff communications costs	
Market research and external designers	7.5
Central Office of Information costs	1.8
Helplines	3.0
	12.3
Printing Contracts	10.3
Distribution Contracts	0.1
Office Services Contracts	0.1
Warehousing/Storage Contracts	4.7
Total	31

Source: National Audit Office

The Department recognises that providing inaccurate information to the public is a key risk

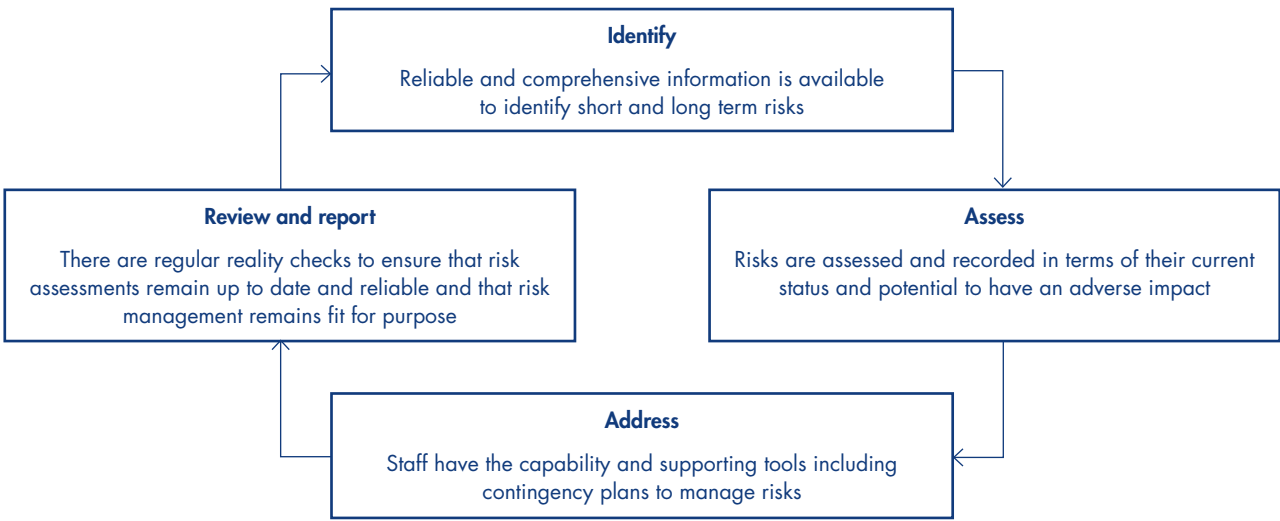
1.11 The Department recognises that providing unreliable advice or information to the public is a key risk across its operations – it is one of 17 risks identified in its strategic risk register. As at April 2005, the risk was assessed as 'Amber', indicating its significance, with a likelihood of occurring sometimes, even if existing controls continue to operate normally. The Accounting Officer has, since July 2005, allocated responsibility for managing this risk for the whole Department to the Director of Communications, who provides assurance to the Department's Executive Team that the risk is managed effectively.

1.12 We welcome the fact that in November 2004, the Department's Corporate Governance team issued guidance to staff on Risk Management Standards and the common use of a good practice risk management model supported by the Treasury (**Figure 7 overleaf**). Although risk management is an operational matter where agencies can be expected to take different approaches, they should follow common principles. Our report *Managing Risks to Improve Public Services* (HC1078-1, 2003-04) found that in order to successfully use this model, each stage needed to be well supported by robust processes.

10 *State Earnings-Related Pension Scheme: The failure to inform the public of reduced pensions rights for widows and widowers* (HC320, 1999-2000) and *Improving Service Quality: Action in response to the Inherited SERPS problem* (HC497, 2002-03).

11 Social Security Advisory Committee (2004) *17th Report*.

7 Four key stages to risk management¹



Source: National Audit Office

NOTE

¹ There are different models of risk management. This Figure reflects the key stages of risk management set out in the Treasury’s Orange Book.

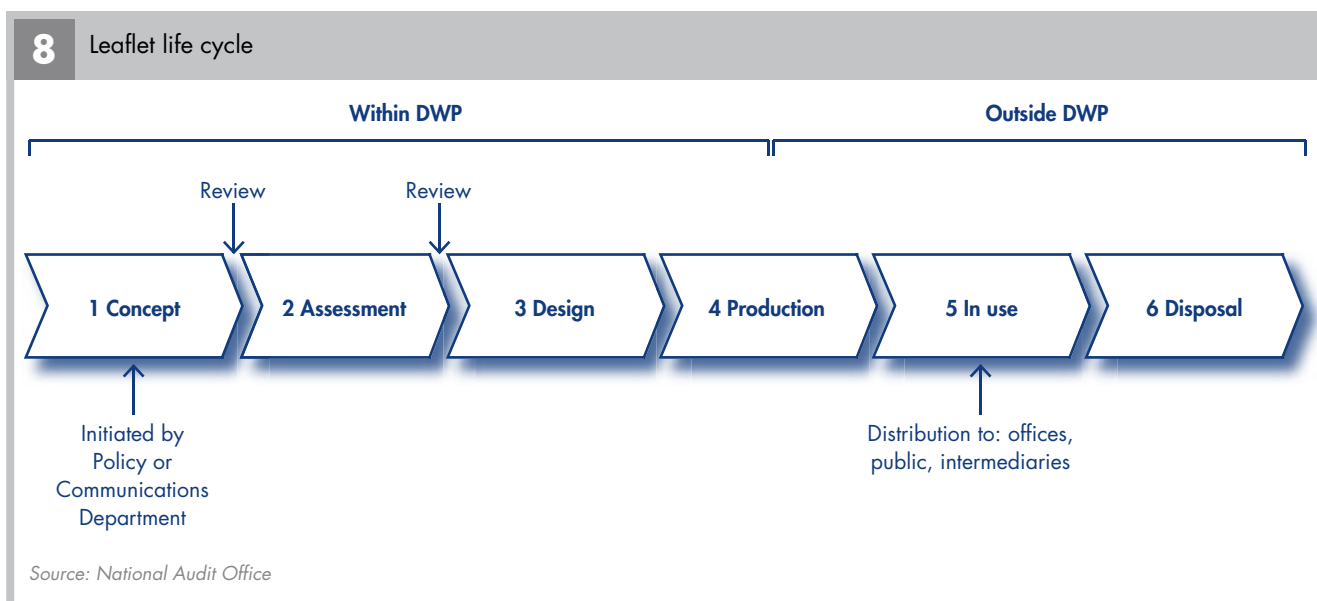
There is no consistent approach to managing the risks across the Department’s agencies

1.13 The Department’s guidance issued to staff follows many best practice principles of risk management. However, the risk registers for each of the Department’s agencies do not yet follow consistent principles in respect of the issue of accurate and complete information. For example, the risk registers for the Communications Directorate and each of the agencies appear to be conceived independently from each other and only Jobcentre Plus has specifically identified the risk that information is inaccurate and misleading on its risk register. In addition, there is inconsistency in the scales used to measure the likelihood and impact of risks materialising, making it difficult to determine which are most significant and which might need escalating.

The life cycle for leaflets follows a normal manufacturing life cycle with key risks at each stage

1.14 The life cycle for leaflet production follows a normal manufacturing life cycle as shown in **Figure 8**. This is one way in which the risks to the accuracy, accessibility and appropriateness of leaflets can be identified for each stage of a leaflet’s production. A detailed risk register, completed during this examination, can be found at Appendix 2 which maps out the risks that we have identified using this life cycle. The risk register emphasises the importance of the early part of the life cycle to enable the Department to operate a low risk process of supplying accurate and timely leaflets.

8 Leaflet life cycle



1.15 The Department's leaflet review process, introduced following the Inherited SERPS problem (Box 3) to ensure the accuracy of leaflets, covers some of the risks at the **concept stage**, including the timing of the reviews and appropriate sign-off arrangements, and **design and production stages**. At present, this is the only risk management tool used by the Department as a whole and is designed to ensure that information in leaflets is legally and technically correct. However, it fails to address any of the risks associated with the **assessment** and appropriateness of leaflets, their **use** and **disposal**.

1.16 Our workshop, attended by a wide range of Departmental stakeholders, identified six high level risks specifically related to the production, use and dissemination of leaflets (**Figure 9 overleaf**).

Responsibility for providing information to the public is very dispersed with no ownership over the entire life cycle

1.17 A key objective of the Department's Communications Directorate is 'to ensure accurate and timely information is provided to the public and customers.' However, no single part of the Department currently has overall ownership of leaflets (**Figure 10 on page 21**). The Department is currently introducing an initiative which aims to achieve a single communications network for the whole Department, led by the Director of Communications (now a member of the Department's Executive Team), with accountability for the strategy, planning, co-ordination, delivery and evaluation of all communications across the Department. The spread of communications activity reflects the organisational structure of the Department. Different parts have an interest in the production of information, but the dispersal of responsibilities means it is difficult to identify and ensure the management of all the key risks. It also makes it difficult to provide a joined up message for customers, although Account Directors in the central Communications Directorate consider how to deliver important strategic messages to each major client group.

9 Key risks associated with the management of leaflets

Key strategic risk	Current management of the risk	Improvement to risk management
<p>Lack of governance over the ownership of communicating with the public <i>(at the concept stage of the life cycle)</i></p>	<p>Up to August 2005 no single communications strategy existed in which leaflets could be placed.</p> <p>New products are often pushed out to customers as part of a high profile campaign which attracts marketing activity.</p> <p>Recurrent products rely on local offices knowing what is available and how to get them (a "pull" approach).</p>	<p>A single Public Information Policy for the whole Department.</p> <p>Leaflets should be given a clear purpose and this should be realistic. Leaflets are unlikely to succeed in explaining the complexity of the welfare system. Leaflets should provide general background and 'sign-post' to more detailed advice.</p> <p>A single communications budget used to provide accurate and timely information to the public.</p>
<p>Lack of governance over the ownership of leaflets once the content is agreed <i>(at the design and assessment stages of the life cycle)</i></p>	<p>Focus is on the mechanics of ensuring that information is factually correct, not on whether customers are able to access the information.</p>	<p>A need for clear stewardship of leaflets throughout their life.</p> <p>More systematic checking of the standard of information available to customers.</p> <p>A co-ordinated distribution strategy to ensure that key information is available in at least the Department's own public offices.</p>
<p>Unable to manage the review process to ensure that information is correct <i>(at the design stage of the life cycle)</i></p>	<p>Relies on being able to identify the appropriate information owner. Relies also on taking assurance that the same information is correct in all the products it appears in. As information owners change it can be difficult to ensure that responsibility is transferred.</p> <p>Where leaflets are cross-government it can be difficult to ensure all stakeholders are identified.</p>	<p>An on-line database of all leaflets to show who is responsible for each product and each piece of information. Keeping this up to date could be the responsibility of a Chief Information Officer.</p> <p>The database needs to also include those information owners outside of the Department.</p>
<p>Operational staff do not understand their roles and responsibilities to ensure leaflets are available and up to date <i>(at the disposal stage of the life cycle)</i></p>	<p>A local office issue.</p> <p>Very little testing of availability both internally and externally.</p>	<p>Clearer processes for maintaining stock locally with easy to access information on what exists and how to obtain it.</p>
<p>Information in leaflets is not understood by those using them or not fit for purpose <i>(at the assessment and in use stages of the life cycle)</i></p>	<p>Some campaign specific literature uses customer research to inform the content.</p> <p>No critical review of whether products are still needed.</p>	<p>A needs analysis for each leaflet to determine whether it achieves what is intended.</p>
<p>Complicated and fragmented supply chain for both internal and external customers <i>(at the production stage of the life cycle)</i></p>	<p>Lack of corporate knowledge and control of all printing and information products.</p> <p>Supply chain is complicated partly as a result of inherited legacy systems and further complicated by a lack of a standard procurement process for printing.</p> <p>Considerable waste within the system and duplicate storage facilities.</p>	<p>A simplified supply chain making full use of the current contractual arrangements.</p> <p>A single ordering and distribution point for all information products.</p>

Source: National Audit Office

10 Responsibility for the leaflet life cycle



Source: The National Audit Office

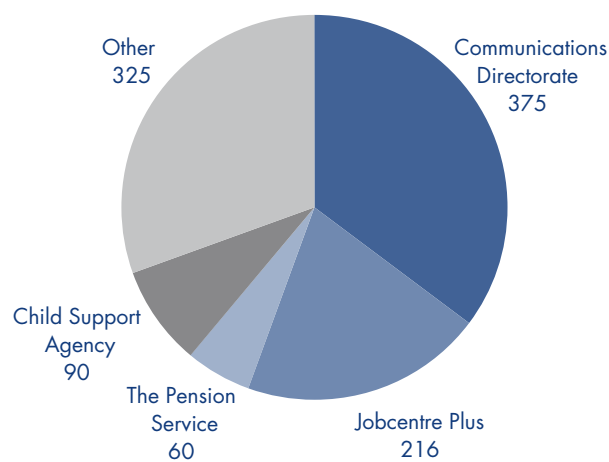
NOTE

The leaflet life cycle stages are: concept; assessment; design; production; in use and disposal (see figure 8)

1.18 The budgets used for communications activity are also fragmented. They are often held within the Client Group Directorates (policy) and, where this is the case, it can be difficult to make sure resources are available for strategic communication priorities. This can lead to a plethora of campaigns and marketing activity that may not necessarily be in line with key Departmental objectives. For example our report *Welfare to Work: Tackling the Barriers to the Employment of Older People* (HC 1026, 2003-04) found that the communication and marketing of services for older workers varied locally.

1.19 This fragmentation also makes it difficult to get an accurate picture of the level of resources being devoted to communication across the Department. At present, the Department estimates there are over 1,000 people in roles that include some responsibility for communications, of whom 375 work within the Communications Directorate (Figure 11). Without an accurate picture of the roles and responsibilities of all those involved in communication activity, the Department is unable to determine the extent of duplicated effort along the leaflet life cycle and ensure efficiency.

11 Communications staff by location



Source: The Department for Work and Pensions

1.20 The Department is a highly complex organisation with millions of customers and a wide range of responsibilities and relationships. Excluding distribution and some print costs, the Department spent around £110 million on communication activity during 2004-05, including producing leaflets. Staff costs were around £35 million. As budgets are dispersed and often relate to more than one type of communication, it is not possible to identify the total costs of leaflets alone (Figure 2). The cost for printing leaflets in 2004-05, based on the estimated number of leaflets produced, was around £10.3 million. In addition, the Department also has contracts with a distribution warehouse worth £2.2 million and a courier service, both of which handle leaflets. The Department's marketing and publicity budget, which may also be used to produce and distribute leaflets, was £35 million in 2004-05 (Figure 6, page 17).

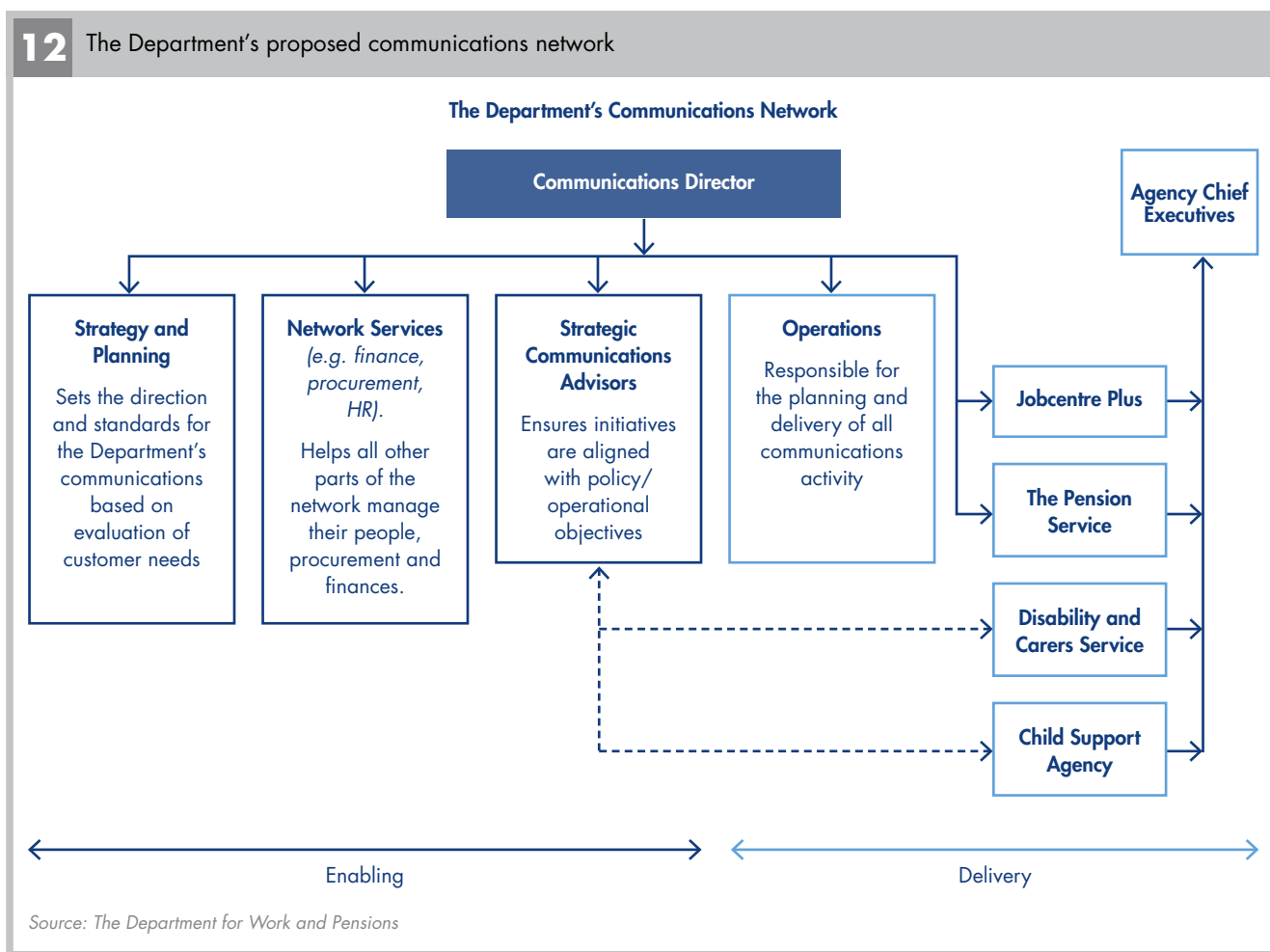
The Department is identifying the risks associated with communication products and defining responsibilities

1.21 The single communications network being developed as part of the Improving Communications Initiative is not expected to be in place fully until 2008 and its actual design and shape is likely to evolve, but **Figure 12** defines the high level structure and relationships to be achieved. The new structure means the central communication team will have greater scope to influence communications within individual agencies. This should result in a more consistent and joined up approach and better targeting of communications activity to customers.

1.22 As part of the initiative, the Department has developed a single Department wide corporate communications strategy. This was finalised and published in August 2005. Its key feature is that communication will be based around the customer experience rather than business streams. It aims to ensure that every customer is given the most appropriate information for their particular circumstances regardless of which part of the Department they make contact with.

1.23 To identify its key communications risks, including those associated with leaflets, Jobcentre Plus, together with Governance colleagues, led risk workshops in February and May 2005. The Department's Communications Directorate also established an information forum, bringing together key communications and marketing staff, and the Social Security Advisory Committee, to improve communication between the different business units.

12 The Department's proposed communications network



PART TWO

Ensuring the accuracy and accessibility of information in leaflets



2.1 This part examines the Department's approach to ensuring the accuracy of the information in leaflets and whether this provides the required level of assurance that accurate and complete information is provided to the public. It also examines whether the Department's leaflets are in an accessible format that reduces the likelihood of misunderstanding.

Managing the content of leaflets

The Department expects every leaflet to be checked regularly for accuracy

2.2 To minimise the likelihood of the Department's leaflets containing incorrect information the Department introduced the Accuracy of Information content review process (**Figure 13 overleaf**) to ensure all leaflets issued to the public are legally and technically correct.

2.3 The review requires that:

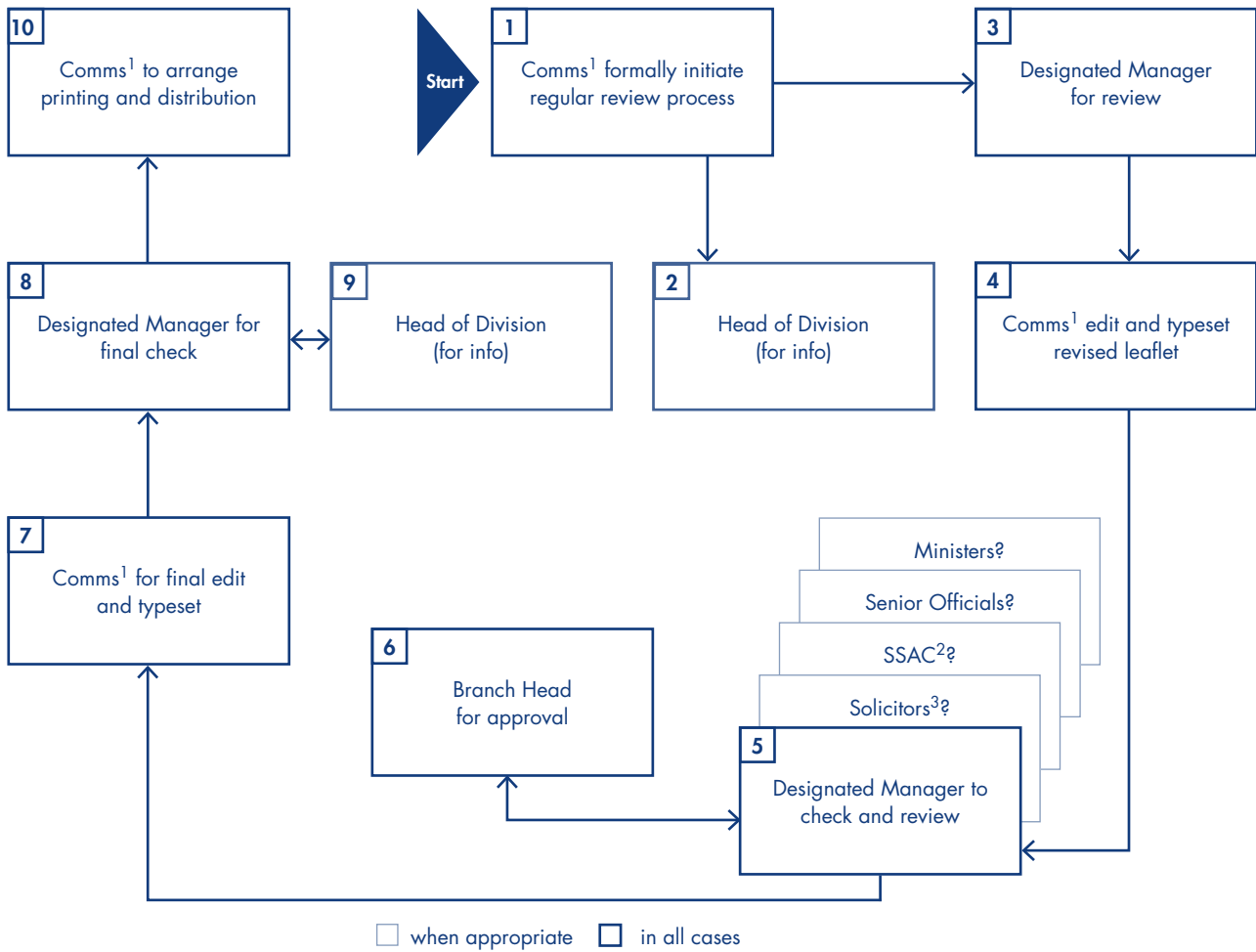
- every leaflet owned by the Department be reviewed every six months, in time for reprinting in April and October;
- each leaflet has an assigned manager to complete the review, contacting everyone with an interest in it and revising the information as necessary; and
- each review is signed off by the head of division who in doing so, declares that the review complies with the conditions of the process.

2.4 The Communications Directorate and agency communications and marketing teams are responsible for the procedures involved in the leaflet review, but responsibility for the accuracy of the content lies with senior managers within the agencies, often within policy divisions. The Department's sign-off arrangements properly reflect the importance of securing the integrity of information placed in the public domain.

2.5 We selected 23 leaflets and examined the reviews carried out on these managed by The Pension Service (6), Jobcentre Plus (7) the Child Support Agency (6) and the Disability and Carers Service (4). Overall, we found:

- the process was not implemented consistently across the Department;
- the quality of reviews varied and were not all well documented;
- leaflets are reviewed on an individual basis and not according to risk;
- the review focuses on the contents of individual leaflets rather than consistency of information across the Department; and
- there is no review of the continued need for each individual leaflet.

13 Accuracy of Information content review process



Source: National Audit Office

NOTES

- 1 Comms = The Department’s Communications Directorate and agency specific communication teams.
- 2 SSAC = Social Security Advisory Committee.
- 3 Solicitors = The Department’s Solicitors Branch.

The review process is used inconsistently across the Department

2.6 Details of the designated managers for each Departmental leaflet and the timetable for review are not recorded in a single list (although some agencies hold this information separately) and the information as a whole is not always up to date. We were unable to review three of the leaflets we had selected as the designated manager was unavailable and had difficulty initially reviewing two others as the designated manager was on a career break. Whilst the involvement of a senior civil servant at the end of the review process provides some assurance of

the content, it requires them to be proactive in ensuring that the review is undertaken regularly. Leaflet ‘owners’ are expected to ensure that information from other policy areas included in their leaflets has been agreed at a senior level before signing off any changes or review.

2.7 We found that reviews are not always carried out to the same frequency, both across and within agencies, and often without clear reasons. Only eight we tested had clearly been reviewed every six months and a further five had been reviewed at least annually. Many of the Child Support Agency’s current leaflets are only now being reviewed for the first time despite being in circulation for over two years.

The Agency does not consider it likely that the information in its leaflets will be technically or legally incorrect but it accepts that some material, such as contact details, may be out of date. Only two of the five Child Support Agency leaflets we tested had been reviewed, one of these being completed in October 2004 and not reviewed since.

2.8 The Department relies on each designated manager to follow the leaflet review process and assure the accuracy of the content. However, completion is not monitored centrally and at present the Department cannot easily identify when a leaflet has not been reviewed. In addition, our examination found that the extent of consultation with key stakeholders varied considerably. In some cases, managers had consulted widely with external stakeholders, whereas others had not consulted beyond the specific policy team.

2.9 In April 2005 Jobcentre Plus transferred responsibility for monitoring and co-ordinating the review process for all working age leaflets to five Marketing Account Managers. These Account Managers, who represent the five sub groups of the working age population (for example, lone parents), provide advice to policy leads on communication strategies including the use of appropriate channels. This can include designing leaflets and ensuring they are printed. In addition to this advisory role, Account Managers are now responsible for liaising with designated managers to ensure that reviews are carried out on time and signed off at the appropriate level. Now that all five are in post, Account Managers are expected to ensure that accessibility guidelines are adhered to and that there is a continued need for each leaflet.

The quality of the reviews we examined varied and often had poor audit trails

2.10 Those responsible for initiating the leaflet review are not responsible for monitoring the quality of the review process. They often have little knowledge of whether the process has been followed correctly and instead rely on the senior managers' involvement to quality assure it. In some cases, senior managers have been robust in their examination of the review process, but this is not always evident and in some cases has been delegated.

2.11 Content review and sign-off should be carried out by technically competent staff but a Social Security Advisory Committee examination of 19 information products during 2003-04 (**Box 4**) concluded that the quality of the products continued to vary in terms of clarity, accuracy and completeness, although none appeared to contain misleading or inaccurate information. The current process relies on each designated manager being able to identify the

staff able to confirm information in the leaflets. As parts of the Department continue to change and staff move teams, this can prove difficult.

2.12 Even where leaflets have undergone review, on occasion errors can still be found. For example, an incorrect reference by the Department to deficiency notices being sent out by the Inland Revenue (now HM Revenue and Customs) from 1996-97 to 2001-02 had not been identified by the Department and corrected even though the leaflet review had been completed regularly and the mistake had been present since 1998 (**Box 5**).

BOX 4

Role of the Social Security Advisory Committee

The Social Security Advisory Committee is an advisory non-departmental public body, established in 1980, that provides the Secretary of State with impartial advice on social security matters. Following a report by the National Audit Office, in April 2000, at the Secretary of State's request, the Committee's role was extended to include scrutiny of the Department's public information strategy, including scrutinising the content of information products.

BOX 5

Leaflets continue to contain incorrect information even where they have been reviewed regularly – examples of errors identified by the Department

A Guide to State Pensions

Before 1998, annual notices, known as deficiency notices, were issued by the Inland Revenue (now HM Revenue and Customs) after every financial year to inform people that they had not paid or been credited with enough National Insurance Contributions to make the tax year count towards their basic state pension. However, deficiency notices were not sent out for the tax years 1996-97 to 2001-02. Despite going through the Department's review process, the leaflet on State Pensions continued to state for four years that the Inland Revenue would send deficiency notices out. The leaflet was amended during the October 2003 review and Inland Revenue (now HM Revenue and Customs) has now resumed sending out deficiency notices. The Department's leaflet now reflects this fact.

A Guide for Lone Parents

Even with extensive research and review prior to the launch of this new working age leaflet an error occurred misstating lone parents' entitlements to financial help when trying to get back to work. The original leaflet stated that customers claiming Income Support 'may also be entitled to other financial help such as an extra **two** weeks of mortgage interest' when this should read four weeks. This was corrected on the internet version quickly but amendments to the printed version were included in the scheduled six monthly review scheduled for October.

2.13 The Social Security Advisory Committee also expressed concern that much of the material presented to it was handled at a junior level by staff who may not always be aware of the bigger picture or the procedures for consulting relevant parties. Where this is the case, and where adherence to the process is not regularly checked, there is a risk that reviews are not always carried out correctly. The Committee's Annual Report for 2004¹² was particularly critical on this issue, stating that the risk management and compliance approach seemed to have been diluted and be little understood by some of the officials with whom it had worked.

Leaflets are reviewed on an individual basis and reviews are not initiated according to the risk and likely impact of them being inaccurate

2.14 The Department estimates that reviewing the content of leaflets can take between 12 and 16 weeks to complete, depending on the size of the product, the number of internal and external stakeholders to be consulted and ease of identifying appropriate information owners. Thus, where reviews are carried out every six months leaflets may be under review for between 6 and 8 months a year.

2.15 Given the current large number of leaflets, undertaking frequent reviews can be resource intensive. Where teams are unable to allocate this time there is a risk that reviews will be completed less rigorously, may not be completed at all, or not in time for printing in April and October. If the Department identified the severity and likelihood of each leaflet being inaccurate, it would help to determine which leaflets must be reviewed twice a year and which could, where resources were not available, be done less frequently. Where leaflets contained vital information, such as benefit rates, where the impact of this being incorrect would be significant, these would need to be reviewed regularly.

2.16 As the Department widens the content of its leaflets there will be an increased need for wider and more regular consultation during the review process to ensure that all the information is accurate. Many now offer advice about services across government departments, where there is an increased likelihood that information will need updating during every review, and reprinted every six months. The Guide for Lone Parents, launched in April 2005, and already undergoing

a scheduled review, needed to be reprinted in October to take account of more up to date information being provided to the Department from other bodies.

2.17 Where a large number of interested parties, such as the Solicitors Office, need to be consulted or where it is difficult to identify appropriate information 'owners' the deadline for reprinting in April and October is often not met. In April 2005, only one of The Pension Service leaflets was signed off in time to be reprinted despite close monitoring by the Chief Executive. Where updated leaflets are not available on time, there is an increased risk that staff and customers will refer to out of date versions of leaflets they may already hold. From April 2005, Jobcentre Plus expect its leaflet reviews to be staggered throughout the year. Only those leaflets containing benefit information will be reviewed for April and October reprints. Other leaflets will continue to be reviewed every six months throughout the year.

The focus is on the content of individual leaflets rather than ensuring information is consistent across the Department

2.18 Each designated manager is responsible for ensuring that the information in their leaflet(s) is correct. As reviews are undertaken leaflet by leaflet, there is a risk that the Department is:

- duplicating the resources needed to ensure information is accurate as individuals in key policy areas are approached by designated managers independently; and
- unable to ensure that significant changes made in one leaflet appear in other leaflets and written material to ensure consistent messages.

2.19 We were pleased to note that the Department is developing a Content Management System, although currently this is only in use in The Pension Service. It holds details of all the leaflets and information products across government departments referring to pensions, more than 1,000 products. This system has enabled The Pension Service to identify where changes made in one leaflet will impact on others and initiate review activity where necessary. Work is currently underway to develop this system more widely across the Department to become a database of information and facts and to make each information owner responsible for ensuring it is up to date.

12 Social Security Advisory Committee (2004) 17th Report.

2.20 Doing this would remove the current need for designated managers to know what information is owned by whom and for them to initiate reviews. This would also enable the Department to manage any single changes to information that may affect a number of different products across a range of communication channels. For example, a change in a particular benefit rate could trigger a number of products to be reviewed, including leaflets, guidance and letters.

There is no regular review of the continued need for each individual leaflet and how this fits with the wider agency or Department agenda

2.21 Reviews are undertaken on the assumption that each individual leaflet is still needed. The process does not consider the appropriateness or continued need for individual leaflets or whether the product is promoting the Department's key messages correctly. There is a risk that resources are spent on reviewing and reproducing leaflets that contain duplicate information or information that is no longer needed by customers.

2.22 The number of leaflets that the Department produces continues to expand despite exercises to rationalise them. In 2002, The Pension Service reviewed all its leaflets and tried to rationalise them. It identified seven that could be discontinued or merged with others, although in three cases, policy staff decided on retention. The Pensions Client Group was satisfied at the time that the right number and type of leaflets were available to customers. The Department's electronic ordering catalogue, the most complete list of information products and forms available, lists over 700 different versions, including those available in Welsh or large print.

The design of leaflets

2.23 Working with a small number of the Department's customers, we examined the accessibility of the information provided in a number of leaflets. We contracted with NOP World to test the level of understanding of the information in core Departmental leaflets, using an internationally recognised readability formula and a series of in-depth interviews with 28 customers, seven from each of the Department's main customer groups. Customers were asked to complete simple tasks using the leaflets as sources of information (see Appendix 1). We also discussed with representatives from a number of voluntary organisations how useful and accessible they found the information.

The design and layout of some leaflets does not follow best practice standards

2.24 Many of the leaflets we examined, in particular recent ones such as the new Jobcentre Plus leaflets (see Box 8), displayed elements of widely recognised best practice, as suggested by the Plain English Campaign and the Basic Skills Agency (**Box 6 overleaf**). However, we found evidence of some leaflets where such standards had not been applied. Many are simple design features and not difficult to apply. The main problems were:

- **Contents pages are not always used:** The standard and layout of the leaflets varied and some failed to signpost readers to information relevant to them. This is particularly problematic where leaflets are long or where customers access the information on the internet. Four of the 11 leaflets were over 50 pages long, and some customers felt they would be unlikely to pick them up at all. Although some did contain both or either a contents or index page, many did not, despite in one case, *Financial help if you work or are looking for work*, the leaflet being 60 pages long.

Quote from a customer looking at:

Sick or Disabled

"I can't imagine anyone would be interested in more than a quarter of this. So spending time on signposting and the structure of the leaflets is really important"

- **The titles of leaflets do not always make clear what is inside:** This is a particular problem when trying to identify relevant information using lists of leaflets or the Department's website to track down leaflets. Where titles were clear in their aim, for example *Financial help if you work or are looking for work*, they were positively received. However, others (for example *Sick or Disabled*), did not give any indication of what specific information it contained. Some suggested to us that this leaflet in particular failed to appeal to those customers who did not consider themselves sick or disabled (for example, those losing their sight), even though it was relevant.

- **Images on front covers can initially put customers off:** The images provoked strong reactions from customers. Many promoted a positive outlook and appealed directly to the target group, making it clear who the leaflet was for and encouraging them to pick it up. For example, the image used on *New Deal for Young People* clearly shows a young person in work. However, we found examples where customers were unlikely to pick up the leaflet because the image used on the front suggested it was not relevant to them. Some misunderstood the purpose of the working age leaflet, *The work you want*, *The help you need*. Jobcentre Plus is currently looking to change the front cover of this leaflet which they hope will make it clearer for customers at whom it is aimed.

Quotes from customers looking at:

For parents who live apart

"It looks friendly and not so serious. It feels more user friendly. The impression I get is that it's an easy read"

The work you want, The help you need

"It looks like it's meant for one parent families"

2.25 Voluntary groups also found that information was not always accessible as the design and layout of leaflets did not follow basic standards. Attention did not always appear to be given to target groups when considering presentation and the use of colours and text. Many of the leaflets targeted at elderly customers were presented in standard font size and would not be easily read by those with poor eyesight. Whilst some leaflets are produced in large print we did not find they were widely available.

Quotes from customers looking at:

Access to Work: Information for Disabled People

"The back cover depends on your eyesight. White doesn't show up on yellow very well. It's hard to read"

Financial help if you work or are looking for work

"It's quite dull, not very eye-catching, and the picture doesn't make you want to look at it to be honest"

New Deal for Young People

"It's superb really. The pictures are all young people getting stuck in to work, instead of cheesy pictures"

2.26 The Department's Communications Directorate produces guidance on the standards for external communications, but there is currently no monitoring to ensure consistency and information owners may favour their own designs over Departmental standards. As a result leaflet owners are not accountable for their decisions on designs, many of which exist in their original

BOX 6

Designing leaflets to improve accessibility – some examples

- Use a type size appropriate to the intended reader – a type size of 12 point is ideal for most if space is limited but should be no less than 10. For readers likely to have difficulties with their eyesight type should be at least 14 point – as recommended by the Royal National Institute for the Blind
- Use a 'friendly font' – a very plain font for example
- Keep it simple – don't switch from font to font
- Do not underline text – lines can appear as unnecessary clutter
- Do not use italics too often – continuous italics can be difficult to read
- Use plenty of white space – too much text can be a deterrent to getting started on the reading
- Avoid using upper case for entire words – it is less likely to be read than lower case words

Source: The Basic Skills Agency (www.basic-skills.co.uk), The Plain English Campaign (www.plainenglish.co.uk)

format, as re-branded Benefits Agency or Employment Service leaflets. Where leaflet owners and policy leads use experts from outside the Department when designing new products, there is even less control. Where teams use the Central Office of Information outside of the usual procurement route, for specific campaigns or on an ad-hoc basis, there is no way of ensuring that such products comply with Departmental standards and messages. Communications staff are often engaged late in the process when policy staff have already decided how they want their products to look or designs have been agreed with external contractors.

Key information in leaflets may not be accessible to those who need it

2.27 The results from our work with customers (Appendix 1) confirm that the information in leaflets can be inaccessible to intended readers. Only four of the sixteen tasks we asked customers to undertake were successfully completed during the interview. For example, customers were often unwilling to persevere with the task when information was not immediately accessible and had to be encouraged to continue. This was often where leaflets were very detailed and had no contents pages or where contents pages were misleading and unclear. Others had difficulty seeing the text where this is a different colour or against a different colour.

2.28 Customers relied heavily on contents pages (where they existed) to complete the tasks. In some cases, however, contents pages failed to make clear where key information would be in the leaflet being used. For example, despite being favourably regarded in terms of layout and design (in particular, putting telephone numbers in bold and text being well spaced), none of the seven customers looking at *The work you want, the help you need* were able to find out how to claim Jobseeker's Allowance. This appeared to be due to the contents page not being clear (see Box 7).

2.29 The Department works closely with the Plain English Campaign to ensure that its information products meet the standards required for the Crystal Mark. However, we found overall that information in all 11 leaflets we tested was not well understood or accessible. The UK has relatively high numbers of adults with low levels of literacy compared with other countries. The Department for Education and Skills¹³ estimate that over five million adults in the UK, around 16 per cent of 16-65 year olds, have literacy skills equivalent to that expected of an 11 year old. A further 40 per cent have literacy levels below those required to obtain a good GCSE pass (grades A-C). Our report *Skills for Life: Improving adult literacy and numeracy* (HC20, 2004-05) found that many of those in receipt of benefits and those who were unemployed had significantly lower literacy levels than others.

2.30 Using a simple readability test, SMOG¹⁴ (Simple Measure of Gobbledegook), we found that none of the leaflets tested were likely to be accessible to those with low literacy levels. Eight of the leaflets we measured were most likely to be understood only by those with a reading age equivalent to or higher than a 16 year old, or customers who have completed at least five years of secondary schooling and reached GSCE level. At this level, it is also unlikely that information would be accessible to many of those for whom English is not a first language. However, the use of some words, specific to the Department's business, for example, disability, incapacity or entitlement, can impact on the assessment of readability. Therefore, we consider that the information contained in the leaflets will not always be fully understood by customers, especially those who have low literacy levels or do not have English as their first language. The majority of customers interviewed during recent research using some of Jobcentre Plus' new Tier 2 leaflets found the language that had been used was pitched at the right level.

¹³ *Skills for Life: Annual Review 2003-04* Department for Education and Skills.

¹⁴ The Simple measure of Gobbledegook (SMOG) is a readability test designed to match the reading level of written material to the 'reading with understanding' level of the reader.

BOX 7

Examples of customer responses to tasks

a) Seven respondents using *The work you want, the help you need*

Task

How would you go about claiming Jobseeker's Allowance?

Response

Overall customers failed to answer the question and instead suggested that they would visit their Jobcentre (all seven respondents had regular contact with Jobcentre Plus)

Problem

Customers tended to begin by looking at the contents pages which included the following headings:

How to claim	42
Jobseeker's Allowance	44

All but one customer turned to page 44, but did not find the information on that page. The explanation was in fact on the previous two pages and applies to all working age benefits.

Solution

This could easily have been prevented by making the contents page clearer, for example:

How to claim	42
What is Jobseeker's Allowance	44

b) Seven respondents using *Sick or Disabled*

Task

If you wanted to find out more about Working Tax Credit, what would you do next?

Problem

The answer to the question is provided on Page 10 – immediately after the information on eligibility for Working Tax Credit.

Response

Most respondents found the eligibility information but failed to turn over the page as information on Working Tax Credit appeared to end at the bottom of Page 9 with the statement in bold text: 'if YES, you may be able to get Working Tax Credit' followed by a white blank space.

After the phone number on Page 10 readers are directed to Page 19 to find out how to claim. This caused confusion amongst readers as there was no mention of Working Tax Credit unless the reader turned over again to Page 20.

Solution

Respondents would have liked the phone number at the beginning of the section, not at the end and over the page.

2.31 Although many of the Department's leaflets are available in other languages these tend to be translated on demand rather than available 'off the shelf'. Leaflets were available in languages other than English in 30 per cent of Departmental sites we visited. Guidance now requires staff commissioning new leaflets to consider whether there is a specific need to have alternative versions readily available. To assist local offices the Department provides summaries of key leaflets for staff to access on its Intranet and print when required.

A lack of corporate identity makes the Department's key products difficult to identify

2.32 When the Department was formed, many of the existing Employment Service and Benefits Agency leaflets were re-branded as 'Department for Work and Pensions'. However, the Department considers that its executive agencies should have their own brand identities, appropriate to their customers. 'DWP' is not intended to be a brand and customer research (as well as our interviews) suggests that customers do not recognise it as such. However, over 40 leaflets are still branded as 'DWP' and our programme of visits to local offices found 97 copies of these available, some of which referred to the former Department of Social Security. During a review of the branding used across all its products, the Department identified over 250 customer brands being used by its offices, making it more difficult for its products to be recognisable to members of the public. This review of branding is nearing completion and it is expected that the guidance on the naming of products coming out of this review will ensure that all new products will be branded appropriately, including leaflets.

2.33 Work is now under way to re-brand these products according to client groups. Jobcentre Plus has carried out an extensive review of customer needs leading to the redesign and rationalisation of leaflets into a three tier structure, phased in from April 2005 (see Box 8), which will supersede some of the 'DWP' branded leaflets. Other parts of the Department are considering a similar structure but have not yet undertaken research.

The Department does not regularly evaluate the use of leaflets by customers to test the accessibility of the information available to them

2.34 Despite the volume of leaflets printed each year, the Department cannot be sure that customers are able to use the information they have available to them and does not regularly assess customers' use of its leaflets; or whether information in its numerous leaflets, is always provided in accessible formats. Some of the most recent leaflets include feedback forms but there are few mechanisms giving customers the opportunity to provide comments routinely. The new working age leaflet for Lone Parents was not piloted before its launch. Instead, the Department is evaluating the use of the leaflet using the customer feedback form. However, in our view this may not capture the views of key customers, especially those with lower literacy skills or those who were unable to access much of the information in the leaflet in the first instance.

2.35 A review of four of the recently launched Jobcentre Plus Tier 2 leaflets commissioned by the Department found that the booklets were positively received by customers. In particular, the improved signposting in leaflets, including contents pages, enabled customers to locate the information they needed to complete the tasks they had been set. The evaluation found that leaflets not only met the needs of the intended audience but also provided customers with additional information and guidance.

BOX 8

New Working Age leaflet portfolio

Purpose

With the amalgamation of the Employment Service and Benefits Agency in 2001 a project was initiated to review the information available to working age customers. Independent research confirmed that leaflets are still relevant as a primary source of information, but the leaflets did not deliver the type of information customers expected and wanted. The review examined specifically:

- How customers want to obtain information?
- What information is most useful and when?
- What are the best channels to trigger awareness of information?
- What format, style and level of detail is the optimum?

The review identified 370 core leaflets, including staff guidance documents and documents owned by other departments. The review established 212 core leaflets owned by Jobcentre Plus.

Findings

The research found that customers wanted fewer leaflets and more specific targeting. In particular, customers wanted more concise leaflets and wanted information tailored to their own customer group.

Proposed revisions

There are currently **134** published working age leaflets in circulation, plus a further 22 available on-line only. The new hierarchy will consist of around **87** leaflets in three tiers:

- Tier 1 leaflets – Up to five leaflets, including one corporate Jobcentre Plus leaflet and others including the customer charter and customer comments leaflet.
- Tier 2 leaflets - Four leaflets targeted at core working age customer groups: lone parents, sick, disabled people and their carers, school and college leavers and those out of work.
- Tier 3 leaflets - delivered to the customer when they are more aware of the services and assistance they might be eligible for and cover a specific subject (e.g. a benefit or service).

Current position

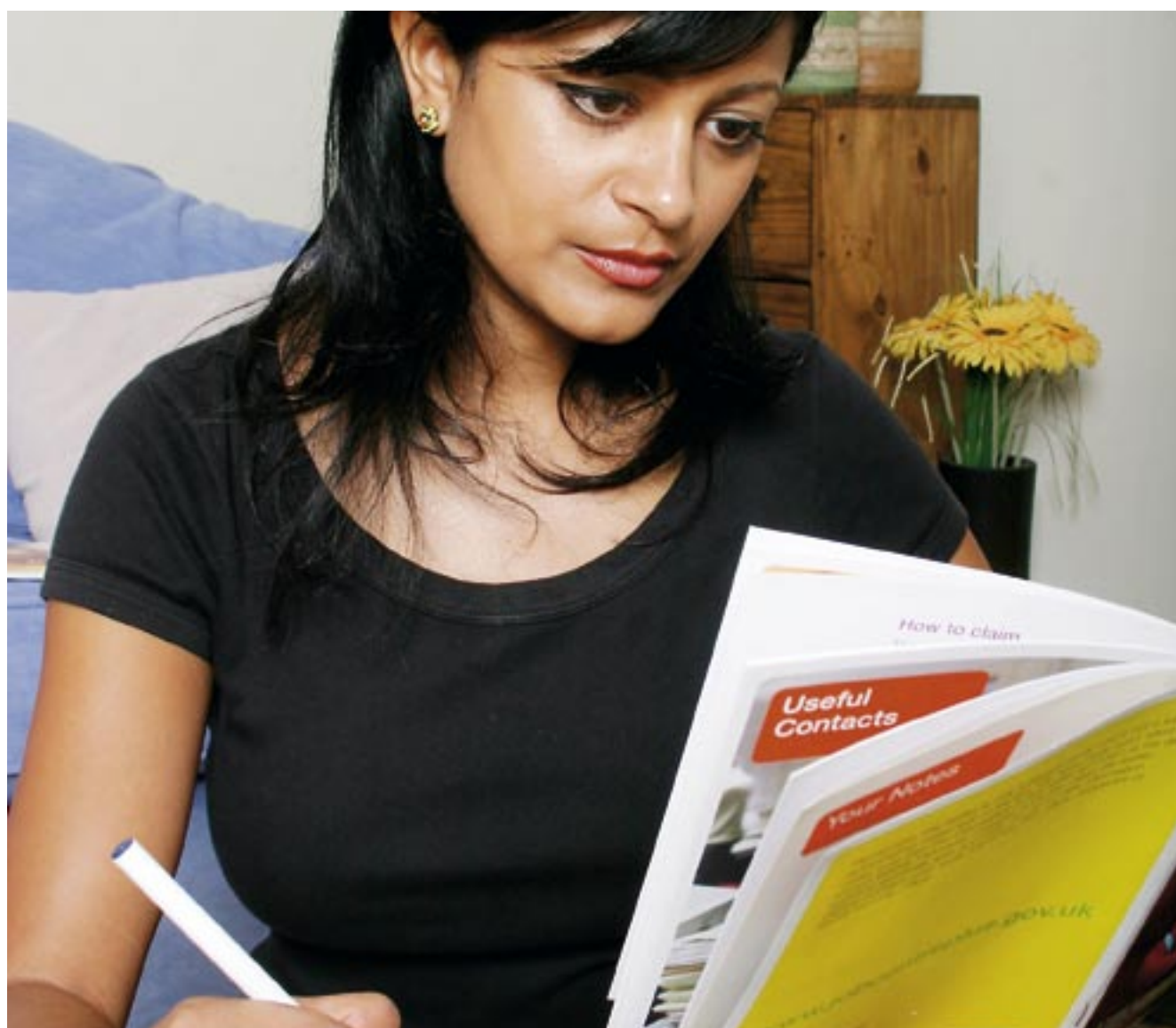
All of the tier 2 leaflets are now available on the Department's internet site and printed copies have been available since October 2005. The first tier 3 leaflets were launched in December and all will be available in 2006.

Distribution

Jobcentre Plus is planning to distribute copies of all tier 2 leaflets to all Jobcentre Plus offices through the Department's distribution company. Initially batches of leaflets will be sent based on the size of the office and its previous demand for leaflets. Re-ordering will then be through existing ordering systems (see figure 16, page 43). Jobcentre Plus plans to provide floorwalkers, based within each local Jobcentre Plus office to help customers with initial queries, with instructions on how to display and distribute these new leaflets.

PART THREE

Ensuring that leaflets are available for customers



3.1 This part examines how widely available information is to the Department's customers. In particular, it examines how well the Department is using its own and other distribution channels to ensure that customers have easy access to information when they want it.

3.2 Since the Department was created in 2001 the number of places where customers can obtain information and pick up literature has been reduced. The majority of face-to-face interaction between customers and the Department is now through one of around 1,000 Jobcentre Plus, Jobcentre or Social Security Offices across England, Wales and Scotland. These are predominantly aimed at working age customers seeking employment. For others, the Department has moved towards a more telephone based service, limiting the opportunities for these groups to walk in and pick up information.

The Department's leaflets are not widely available

3.3 We identified four leaflets which contain vital information for customers, one for each of the Department's main client groups, and tested availability at 100 Departmental outlets. We collected all the leaflets available at each Departmental site and where necessary asked specifically for the core leaflets. Although Jobcentre Plus does not expect its leaflets to be widely available in external sites, we tested the extent to which the Department's leaflets as a whole were more widely available. We visited 100 other sites where customers might seek information (**Box 9**).

BOX 9

National Audit Office test of leaflet availability

We identified four core leaflets (all recognised as significant leaflets and which contain vital information for customers), one for each of the Department's main client groups, and tested the availability of these at 100 Departmental outlets (Jobcentre Plus (60), Jobcentre (25) and Social Security Offices (15)) and 100 external sites (Citizens Advice Bureau (34), libraries (33) and Inland Revenue (now HM Revenue and Customs) Enquiry Centres (33)).

The leaflets selected were:

- JPS1: *The work you want, the help you need*
– 451,000 copies printed in 2004-05
- DS4JP: *Access to work: Information for Disabled People*
– 51,000 copies printed in 2004-05
- PG1: *Pensioners' Guide – England and Wales*
– 300,000 copies printed in 2004-05
- LP15: *Bringing up children on your own*
– 428,000 copies printed in 2004-05

Each of the leaflets were specifically requested at 50 locations overall – 25 Departmental sites and 25 external sites. They were also collected as part of the overall exercise where they were on display.

3.4 Core leaflets on services for jobseekers and lone parents were available at most of the Department's sites, but those aimed at pensioners and disabled people were more difficult to obtain (**Figure 14**). Leaflets were rarely stocked by external sites; the leaflets we tried to obtain were available at just 11 per cent of all places we visited. The Pensioners' Guide, in particular, was found in just 16 of the 200 sites visited and overall was the most difficult leaflet to obtain despite its importance. Jobcentre Plus does not expect this leaflet to be widely available at its offices, but the low number found elsewhere suggests that customers would find it difficult to obtain. Awareness of the Pensioners' Guide at all sites was low and our customers specifically seeking it were frequently told that it was not available or that it did not exist. Overall, 31 per cent of the 200 locations we visited were able to provide customers with the core leaflet that they were trying to obtain in comparison to 50 per cent within Departmental locations.

3.5 Those undertaking visits on our behalf were asked to request a leaflet where it was not available off the shelf. On only four occasions where it was asked for at the Department's offices did the member of staff offer to order and post the leaflet on to the customer, of which two arrived. At a further 19 of the Department's offices the customer was given a telephone number to ring to obtain the specific leaflet. In total, 13 different telephone numbers were offered. Responses to direct requests for leaflets can be seen in **Box 10**.

Those leaflets available are generally well laid out in offices

3.6 In the majority of the Department's offices we visited, our contractors thought the leaflets were well laid out and physically accessible. Only 16 per cent of customers felt their experience had not been pleasant (see **Box 11**), with those least popular sites being Social Security Offices, which are due to be replaced by Jobcentre Plus offices by 2006.

3.7 Although overall customers could easily reach the leaflets they wanted (83 per cent), at 22 per cent of the Department's offices they felt it would be difficult for those in a wheelchair to access leaflets easily. Leaflets at Jobcentre Plus sites were the most accessible to wheelchair users, although in seven out of the 60 Jobcentre Plus offices we visited wheelchair users would not have been able to reach the leaflets at all without asking for assistance from staff.

3.8 At around a quarter of the Department's sites, leaflets were not available to customers without first having to speak to a member of staff. Whilst this may, in some cases, help to ensure that customers obtain the most relevant leaflets to them, the responses offered by staff when asked for specific core leaflets suggest that this may not often be the case (**Box 10**).

BOX 10

Response by staff when leaflets specifically requested

Examples from Jobcentre Plus

- Customer was told the leaflet was no longer available [the Pensioners' Guide]
- Customer was given the wrong leaflet
- Told customer to get the leaflet from the Post Office (see para 3.24)

Examples from Jobcentres

- Member of staff had no record of the leaflet in catalogue list [Access to work]
- Another member of staff was sent to find it but had not returned after 40 minutes
- Customer was told that all available leaflets were on display

Examples from Social Security Offices

- No record of leaflet [Access to work]
- Customer told to try the Jobcentre
- Had not heard of the leaflet [Access to work]

BOX 11

Assessments conducted by customers on the environment in which leaflets were displayed

At each of the 200 sites we visited, an assessment was carried out on the environment in which leaflets were displayed. In particular, this considered the presentation of leaflets, the ease of finding and accessing the leaflets required and the extent to which the customers' experience had been pleasant.

Customers were asked to note:

- How leaflets were displayed
- How many leaflets could be displayed
- Whether they would be accessible to wheelchair users
- Were leaflets accessible without speaking to a member of staff
- Were leaflets on display in languages other than English

Where leaflets were available they were not always up to date

3.9 Just 60 per cent of the 27 different leaflets we collected across the Jobcentre Plus network were the most recent versions. Many of the Department's core leaflets and those listed in the Customer Information Display Standards guidance (Box 14, page 39) were not up to date versions (Figure 15).

3.10 Although the Department's leaflet *Bringing up children on your own* was available in more places than many of the other leaflets we looked for (44 locations), the majority (91 per cent) were out of date. Overall, those most likely to be the correct version tended to be working age based leaflets or those with more distant publication dates. A leaflet reprinted the month before our examination was not widely available in its new format, indicating delays in getting up to date versions out to customers.

14 Availability of core leaflets

Leaflet ¹	Of 25 Departmental sites where specifically sought (per cent)	Of 25 external sites (per cent)	Total number collected from 200 sites (per cent of sites leaflet was collected)	Total collected at 100 Departmental sites	Total collected at 100 external sites
<i>The work you want, the help you need</i>	20 (80)	2 (8)	61 (31)	59	2
<i>Access to work: Information for Disabled People</i>	9 (36)	1 (4)	20 (10)	19	1
<i>Pensioners' Guide – England and Wales</i>	4 (16)	6 (24)	16 (8)	11	5
<i>Bringing up children on your own</i>	17 (68)	2 (8)	44 (22)	40	4
Total	50 (50)	11 (11)	141 (71)	129	12

Source: National Audit Office

NOTE

1 Jobcentre Plus Customer Display Standards advise local offices to stock all these leaflets except the Pensioners' Guide.

15 Percentage of leaflets found to be correct at 200 sites

Expected to be available across the Jobcentre Plus network	Code	Most recent version ¹	Number collected across 200 sites	Percentage correct
The work you want, the help you need	JPS1	Oct 04	61	92
Financial help if you work or are looking for work	WK1JP	Oct 04	22	77
Access to work: Information for Disabled People	DS4JP	Jul 04	20	75
New Deal 50+	NDFLY1	Mar 04	6	83
Pensioners' Guide – England and Wales²	PG1	Oct 04	16	69
Bringing up children on your own	LP15	Feb 05	44	9

Source: National Audit Office

NOTES

1 Based on fieldwork results not the information listed on the Department's internet site.

2 Not listed in the Customer Display Standards.

3.11 Some of the leaflets collected were several years out of date. At one Jobcentre Plus office we found a copy of one leaflet, *Attendance Allowance*, which was four years out of date. At six Jobcentre Plus sites we also found examples where two differently dated versions of the same leaflet were available. At one external site we found a copy of a pension leaflet, *Occupational Pensions – your guide*, which was over three years out of date. This confirms other research. For example, in over half (54 per cent) of the 2,214 visits to local pension surgeries completed up to December 2004 as part of The Pension Service's mystery shopping exercise (see paragraph 3.14) either no leaflet was available or an incorrect leaflet was provided to customers.

3.12 In 2003-04, Internal Audit reviews completed at five Pension Centres, where pensioners speak with officials over the telephone, also found that around 60 per cent of the leaflets available for distribution to customers were not the correct versions, being on average a year, and in some cases up to two years, out of date. In the five centres visited in the first half of 2004-05 up to 90 per cent of the leaflets were out of date. This appeared to be due to: no formal checks carried out on leaflet stock; a low priority given to leaflet management locally; a lack of awareness of how to check whether leaflet stock is current; uncertainty about how to obtain leaflets and the requisitioning process; and insufficient stocks being available from the central distribution and storage point when ordered.

3.13 Where senior management have shown particular interest, there have been considerable local improvements. In October 2004, The Pension Service Chief Executive nominated herself as 'leaflet champion' to tackle the increasing problem of out of date leaflets at Pension Centres and local surgeries. Subsequently, the Communications Directorate held workshops with staff to offer practical guidance on how to manage stock locally and how to identify the latest versions using The Pension Service's intranet. Senior managers are now required to report monthly to the Chief Executive on their efforts to tackle the problem. These relatively simple steps have led to improvements. Recent visits to three Pension Centres by Internal Audit have found up to 90 per cent of leaflets being the correct version.

The Department carries out limited testing of the currency of the leaflets available to the public at its own offices

3.14 Since April 2002 Jobcentre Plus has carried out a limited mystery shopping programme in offices visited by customers to test service quality, including the availability of some leaflets (see **Box 12**). In April 2004, The Pension Service also started to use mystery shopping to test the accuracy and availability of leaflets (see **Box 13**) although this has now been suspended.¹⁵ There are currently no equivalent programmes for the Child Support Agency or the Disability and Carers Service.

3.15 The results of The Pension Service mystery shopping exercise are reported to its management board. This includes testing the accuracy and availability of a number of the most popular leaflets (five in 2004-05) at the local outlets.

BOX 12

Jobcentre Plus mystery shopping exercise

Jobcentre Plus uses mystery shopping to test performance in meeting customer service standards and commitments across Jobcentre Plus offices, as well as contact centres and Employer Direct. Every quarter, an external contractor visits each local office, approximately 1,000 sites. At each site the availability of two mandatory leaflets is tested, the Customers' Charter and a leaflet entitled *How do I comment or complain*. As Jobcentre Plus service delivery is now delivered primarily face to face, through Personal Advisors, it is not possible to test the information that is provided at this level through this mystery shopping exercise. Instead each office, contact centre and Employer Direct site receives four phone calls to test the response they offer for a set of scenarios. The results of these exercises enable Jobcentre Plus to report to Ministers against a customer service target broken down into four key elements of speed, accuracy, proactivity and quality of the environment.

¹⁵ The Pension Service is currently unable to conduct mystery shopping in local surgeries as these have now moved to an appointment rather than drop-in system. This means that pensioners will be unable to obtain leaflets at these centres without first making an appointment. The Pension Service is now looking to redesign the exercise and until then will not conduct any local visits.

A number of factors contribute to leaflets being out of date and not widely available

3.16 A number of factors lead to poor availability of leaflets or leaflets being out of date. The specific problems include:

- staff locally not always knowing how to obtain leaflets;
- no mechanism for staff to ensure that the leaflets they hold are up to date;
- distribution of leaflets to internal and external sites not being based on any agreement on what should be available at local level;
- the supply arrangements for both internal and external customers being complicated, and printing arrangements becoming fragmented; and
- the ordering system being inflexible, giving rise to waste.

Staff are not always clear how and where leaflets can be obtained

3.17 Customers are advised on the Department's internet site to visit Jobcentre Plus offices to obtain single copies of leaflets. In December 2001, the Department's senior management endorsed a number of agreements between each of the agencies on handling shared customer services. This included responding to 'callers', providing basic information on each other's services and maintaining stocks of key information products. Jobcentre Plus supports this policy but told us that the availability of leaflets in its offices will always be limited by space and business priorities. Overall, our fieldwork indicates that customers would find obtaining information on a range of services difficult.

3.18 Jobcentre Plus issued Customer Information Display Standards (see Box 14) to all offices in January 2005 setting out what information and leaflets should be available to customers and how these should be displayed. However, this does not include any references to leaflets other than those aimed at working age customers.

BOX 13

The Pension Service mystery shopping exercise

The Pension Service mystery shopping was an ongoing programme of 700 visits performed every three months. From April 2004 to January 2005 approximately 2,100 mystery shopping visits were made to pension surgeries, where customers can talk face to face with Pension Service staff in locations such as libraries and civic centres. The mystery shopping visits were further restricted to those pension surgeries which allow informal access without a pre-arranged appointment. Each of these 700 visits examined the response to one of five scenarios which detail typical customer enquiries where a leaflet exists that should be provided appropriate to each scenario. These five scenarios were re-considered every quarter and revised if necessary. Some of the scenarios used during 2004-2005 were:

- My mother is expecting to go into hospital soon. What effect will this have on her benefits?
- Can you give me some information on Pension Credit?
- My [relative] has been told that they must have their pension paid into a bank account but they want to continue using the Post Office. What can (s)he do?

Where the latest version of the appropriate leaflet for a scenario was not obtained during a visit this was reported. The mystery shoppers provide detailed reports of each visit for use by the local service managers, who must formally respond with their priorities for improvement.

BOX 14

Jobcentre Plus Customer Display Standards

In January 2005, Jobcentre Plus marketing issued guidance to all Jobcentre Plus offices on how information and marketing materials should be placed in all offices. The guidance includes information on 'how' and 'why' offices should display information and how staff can obtain leaflets. The guidance sets out the agency's obligation to provide customers with information that is accurate, accessible and up to date.

District Marketing Executives are responsible for ensuring all offices in their districts comply with these standards. Marketing executives should visit offices on a regular basis to give advice and support, working with office staff to maintain these standards on an ongoing basis.

There is no single up to date list of leaflets available to staff or external partners to help them identify which products are available or where new versions exist

3.19 The Department no longer produces a hard copy catalogue of leaflets for staff or external parties to use to identify which leaflets they might want. As the volume and frequency of changes made to leaflets made this difficult to maintain, an electronic catalogue was introduced. This includes all information products, including leaflets, but is difficult to locate on the Department's internet site and is not completely accurate. The Department is now looking to make an electronic catalogue of leaflets available for staff on its intranet site, with information downloaded directly from its electronic ordering system (see paragraph 3.32).

3.20 In addition to the leaflets listed within official guidance, offices are expected to decide locally on what products to stock to help them meet their local performance targets. The Department relies on local offices to identify which 'recurrent leaflets' – those leaflets not associated with a current campaign – they need and obtain them.

3.21 In all we collected around 400 different leaflets across 100 Departmental sites. But in the absence of a complete and accurate list of leaflets it is difficult to see how staff would be able to identify all those appropriate to customers, maintain up to date versions of those they have, or obtain specific leaflets on request. Indeed, customers were told on several occasions that the leaflet they had asked for was not listed on the catalogue. Even where lists of leaflets did exist, staff locally were not always aware of them and did not always know how to use them. During The Pension Service workshops, undertaken to improve the currency of leaflets locally, staff were often unaware of the separate Pension Service list of products available on the intranet.

3.22 It is not easy to identify where changes to leaflets have occurred or where new leaflets exist. Changes are sometimes communicated through the Department's quarterly magazine, *Touch-base*, distributed to around 90,000 individuals and organisations. Staff may be notified by email where a significant change is made, but it is left to individuals to decide whether the new versions should be ordered.

The Department does not have a distribution strategy for recurrent leaflets that ensures that core leaflets are widely available beyond its sites

3.23 At present, the Department relies on customers and local offices to order leaflets that they require. Offices re-order leaflets according to need, or to respond to customer requests. This is known as a 'pull' system (where local offices decide what they need) in contrast to the alternative, used by the Department for some specific marketing campaigns, which is to 'push' information out to users. This pull system makes it difficult for the Department to control what information is available to the public as it cannot control what stocks are held locally.

3.24 The Department's customer research has pointed to the importance of information being available in a range of accessible sites, such as supermarkets and doctors' surgeries. Our interviews suggest that customers were not sure where they could go to get information, with the exception of working age clients who would contact a local Jobcentre Plus office. Some groups, especially pensioners, also cite post offices as somewhere they would like information to be available. Until April 2004, the Department had a contract with the Post Office to hold and display a number of its leaflets and forms. This has now expired, and the Department has not agreed new contract terms to offer value for money, or replaced it with any alternative channel.

3.25 The 'pull' system adopted by the Department is not favoured by other private and public sector organisations to whom we spoke. Financial institutions send branches core information with instructions how to obtain more if they are needed. The quantities of each leaflet sent out is based on the known customers of that branch and on previous demands (**Box 15**). Although the Department has a much larger number of outlets than these organisations, the approach used by them could help simplify the Department's distribution of core products.

BOX 15

Private financial sector example (Building Society)

Background

The Building Society we examined has 188 branches in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland and produces between 150 and 200 different kinds of products which are distributed to offices. These range from leaflets to posters and internal information about products. Production of all leaflets and marketing materials is carried out centrally by the marketing team. If another part of the organisation requires materials, for example, if they are introducing a new product, then this will go through the marketing team.

Printing

A selection of external printers are used and Service Level Agreements are agreed for each separate item printed. The average print times are between two days and a week, depending on a number of factors such as the complexity or urgency of the order.

Distribution

Information is pushed out to each local branch to ensure that they have the right information. When storing and distributing leaflets, they:

- use a separate company to their printers, which packages and then sends leaflets to branches;
- typically, have printed items arriving at the distributors on a Wednesday, to be distributed on Thursday, and arrive at branch on Friday, ready to be put out on Monday;
- have a database of branches' requirements which they use to look at what branches have and what they re-order;
- monitor demand on a weekly basis, focusing on products which have peak seasons such as ISAs in March/April; and
- print enough leaflets for initial distribution, and have three to six months supply (no more than six) of additional leaflets. A minimum volume is set and when this is reached the central marketing team are informed and make a decision on whether to reprint.

Informing branches

All 188 branches receive the same leaflets, but in differing quantities depending on factors such as size of branch and previous demand for similar products. Local branches will also:

- use the Intranet which provides briefs as to what they are going to receive, when to put it out and what it is replacing; and
- receive more detailed information if it is a new product, including separate briefs around what the products are, tips on selling, and how promotional material is to be displayed.

Re-order

When re-ordering, branches can use the Intranet-based replacement ordering system to print out forms for ordering and can identify leaflets which are coded, including a date to show which version they are. If there is particularly high or low demand, then this is investigated by the central marketing team.

Management

The management of stock in branches is monitored in the following ways:

- distributors will ring up to check materials have been received;
- branches will communicate with head office if expected materials are not received; and
- because they act under Financial Services Authority rules, internal auditors will do spot checks to ensure correct information is displayed.

When a change is required, for example, through a change in interest rates, a central team is able to ensure all appropriate materials are updated as spreadsheets are maintained which identify where this information is kept.

Leaflet consultation

A customer panel is in place that receive sample leaflets and members are then interviewed in their homes to gauge their reaction to the leaflets.

Overall

The system used is simple because communication channels are open and there are clear reporting lines into head office. Staff are also able to use the Intranet to access information on the orders placed and to seek guidance on what should be displayed. Branches understand the regulatory codes that the organisation is bound by and the need to meet these.

3.26 When specific publicity campaigns for benefits or services are utilised to 'push' information out to target groups, the Department can use its publicity register to identify suitable organisations from the 90,000 listed. This was done, for example, to distribute information on Pension Credit. However, campaigns are often not joined up with others. The Winter Fuel Payments campaign, run each year, uses direct mailing to doctors' surgeries as one way to reach the target group, but does not distribute other leaflets appropriate to those customers at the same time. The use of distribution agencies is not co-ordinated to ensure that different parts of the Department and communications teams make full use of these opportunities. Our private sector comparator (Box 15) uses a single distribution company to receive products from printers, package and dispatch them, and check that materials have been received. Our voluntary sector comparator (**Box 16**) maintains a database of those interested in stocking their leaflets and invites them to apply for new products.

3.27 Where a leaflet is associated with a specific campaign, for example Pension Credit, a separate helpline may be established which responds to requests for further information. Each helpline will often have a corresponding warehouse supplying the leaflets as required. These are separate from the Department's main warehouses and print direct facilities. At present there are over 30 help lines that could be contacted and asked to distribute leaflets.

The Department is making more leaflets available on-line but these are not easy to locate and access

3.28 Not all of the Department's leaflets are available online and those that are available online from agency-specific sites are not all available from the Department's main catalogue of information products. We located 115 leaflets available online in June 2005. Those that are available are not always easy to find and access. Online pages aimed at customers do not provide a listing of leaflets or information products or enable customers to search for specific items. Using those pages aimed at customers, and more specifically working age customers, we were unable to find a core leaflet, *Financial help if you work or are looking for work*. The online catalogue of the Department's products, located within those pages aimed specifically at 'Advisors and Professionals', lists leaflets according to their reference code rather than title, making it difficult to locate specific leaflets or relevant titles for customers. The version of *Financial help if you work or are looking for work* we were able to locate using this list was not the most recent version.

BOX 16

Voluntary sector example

Background

The National Families and Parenting Institute (NFPI) is an independent charity which was set up to provide a national focus on parenting and families. The Institute's role is to bring together organisations, knowledge and know-how to enhance the value and quality of family life, to make sure that parents are supported in bringing up their children and in finding the help and information they need.

Distribution

The NFPI does not send out leaflets randomly. The NFPI have no branches or offices from which to distribute leaflets and instead distributes products through agencies (such as Local Authorities) and occasionally through mass channels such as supermarkets. The Institute has also undertaken specific campaigns using private sector companies such as Vodafone to distribute leaflets in their shops. A 'Baby Book' produced by the Institute is also distributed through registrars which every parent gets when they register the birth of their child. The NFPI recognise that it is difficult to manage leaflets when they have left the boundaries of the organisation and consequently use caveats as appropriate in their leaflets.

3.29 In addition, those that are available have not all been converted into internet friendly versions, making them more difficult to access. In particular large leaflets and those relying on colours and graphics do not convert easily and can be difficult and expensive for customers to print.

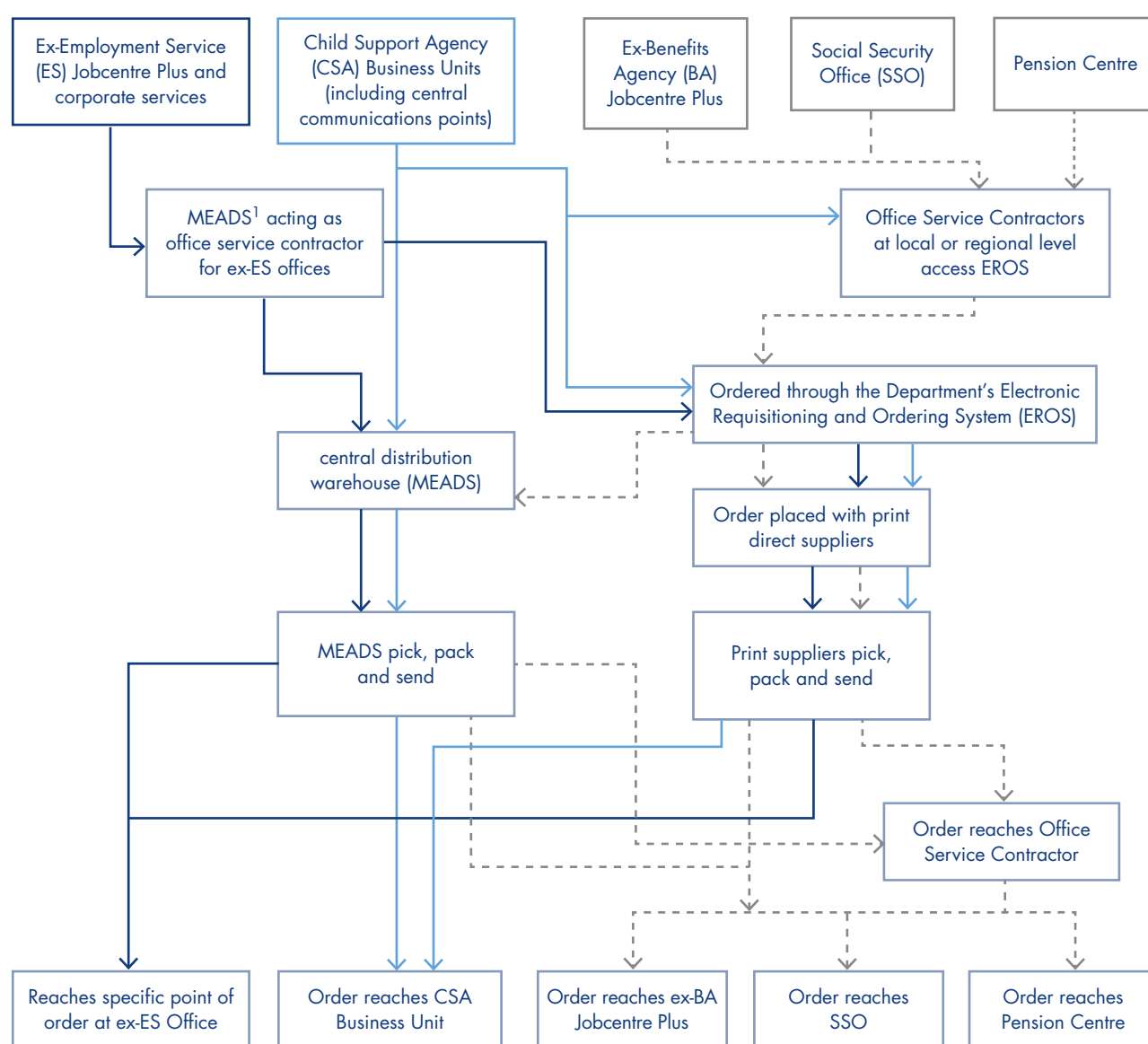
3.30 The information available to customers and advisors online is managed by a number of specific internet teams, located within the Communications Directorate and working with each of the agencies. This information should be updated in line with the leaflet review process and designated managers are expected to consider the information they have available on the internet when updating printed leaflets, but old versions of leaflets still exist online. The Department is now looking at how to increase the accessibility of this information, in particular, whether 'printer friendly' versions of leaflets could be produced. Some 19 of the Department's leaflets are only available online and the Department is currently looking to increase the use of internet only versions for leaflets aimed specifically at external benefit advisors.

The supply chain has become complicated and arrangements for printing leaflets have become uncoordinated

3.31 The Department's supply chain for printed materials is complex, owing to a number of different approaches across the Department to the design, production, delivery, storage and distribution of printed materials. The fragmented and often duplicate systems are partly a legacy from previous arrangements within the Benefits Agency and Employment Service which have not been

replaced. Those ordering leaflets must navigate different systems depending on who they are, which leaflet they want, where this originates, who owns it, how it is printed and where it is stored. Customers requiring a number of leaflets, covering a range of client groups, may have to place three separate orders (Figure 16). The Department is now looking into the possibility of having a single ordering line for customers as part of the proposed revised supply arrangements expected to be in place by 2006 (see paragraph 3.42).

16 Ordering and supply chain for internal customers of the Department



Source: Department for Work and Pensions

NOTE

1 MEADS is a commercially owned warehouse used by the Department.

3.32 Rules for ordering and receiving goods depend on which part of the Department leaflets are ordered from. In particular:

- staff in former Benefits Agency and Social Security offices, as well as Pension Centres, order through an office service contractor. These are collated and entered into the Department's Electronic Requisitioning and Ordering System (EROS) which holds a complete list of the products available across the whole Department. Orders are passed electronically to one of the Department's main printers which supplies copies on demand to the office service contractor or to the local office direct;
- former Employment Service offices place demands directly with a commercially owned warehouse, MEADS. Where leaflets are not held by MEADS they order material through EROS on behalf of the local office and this office takes receipt of the products when they arrive; and
- since 2004, the Child Support Agency's leaflets have also been held at MEADS for central distribution.

3.33 The Department's printers guarantee dispatch of the leaflets within five days of the orders being placed on the EROS system and in 2004-05, achieved it in 98 per cent of orders. To do this, they maintain the equivalent of 12 weeks supply of leaflets at any time. However, where local offices depend on office service contractors to place orders and distribute them, there may be additional delays. Unlike our private sector comparator (Box 15), the Department does not currently have service level agreements with office services providers to ensure quick ordering and distribution.

3.34 The Department has large contracts with two main printers but also has access to others via framework agreements. The Department underwrites three months of stock for each leaflet at MEADS and with each of the main print contractors. Stocks are regularly reviewed and replenished when they fall below this level.

3.35 Not all printing is managed under existing contracts. For example, many specific campaign leaflets have separate arrangements with other publicity material, even though they often use the same printers. Where this is the case, the Department may be failing to make full use of its buying power as well as complicating the supply chain. Additionally, where leaflets are held outside of the Department's main distributor, storage and distribution will be paid for at least twice (**Figure 17**).

3.36 Printing leaflets outside of the standard contractual arrangements also makes it difficult to ensure that orders from central points can be fulfilled and stocks maintained. Leaflets printed under separate contracts are stored and distributed direct to the public from separate warehouses, often through a specific helpline. To fulfil internal orders, a quantity of these, decided by the policy team, will also be held at MEADS. To maintain levels of stocks the central team, when informed by the warehouse they are needed, can initiate reprinting. Where leaflets are managed outside of the standard procedure they are not able to do this, and individuals must ensure these stocks are maintained.

3.37 When specific campaigns finish and the associated leaflets become one of the Department's many recurrent products, it may be difficult to identify the owner and initiate printing as staff move on to new areas. This is a problem when stock then runs low. It also makes it difficult for teams centrally to manage stock once they are responsible, and for the Department to evaluate how much is spent on leaflets.

The ordering system leads to increased waste and the risk that out of date leaflets will be stored locally

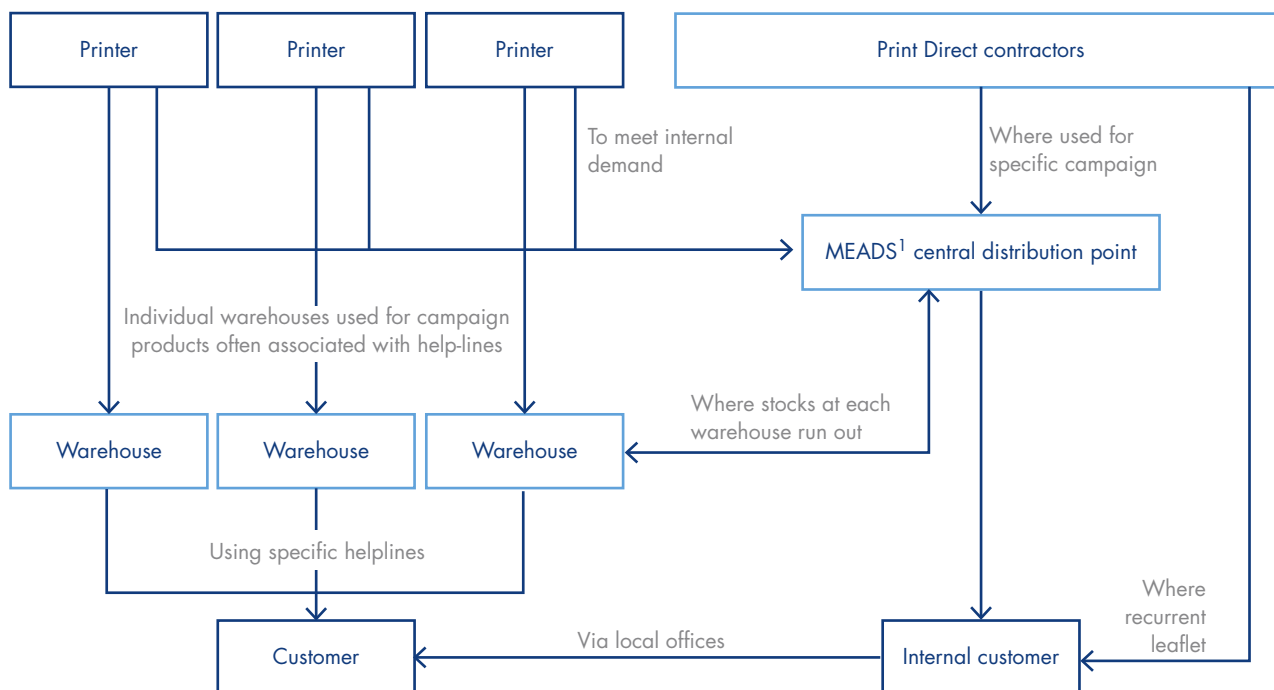
3.38 The responsiveness and ability of the Department's distributors to act on individual orders varies. Whilst some leaflets can be ordered in the required quantity, others have to be ordered in batches or units of 50. The rates of issue are set by the information owners and may reflect an expected high demand or use rate for a particular leaflet. However, where local offices respond to requests by individuals to obtain single leaflets a local office may receive a minimum of 50. Where this happens, there is an increased risk that unused leaflets will become out of date and up to date versions will not be ordered until stock has depleted at local level.

3.39 Individuals and third party interest groups can also order copies of the Department's leaflets, but again, there is no single ordering point. External customers requiring fewer than 50 copies, excluding Child Support Agency and New Deal leaflets, are asked to contact a local office. Larger orders are made through the Department's helpline, which receives around 1,500 orders each month.

17 Supply of leaflets where printing is arranged outside of existing contracts

Printing for specific campaigns arranged under separate contract even though they may use the same printers

The majority of the printing for recurrent products uses one of two main printers using the existing Print Direct contracts



Source: National Audit Office

NOTES

1 MEADS is a commercially owned warehouse used by the Department.

2 Light blue boxes indicate where the Department is paying specifically for storage. This does not include those leaflets held at local offices or with office service contractors.

3.40 Where changes are made to leaflets during the Department's leaflet review or where policy changes impact on leaflets, stocks are destroyed to prevent them from being distributed from the central warehouse. Since 2002, stocks of printed material to the value of over £2 million each year have been destroyed or recycled. During 2004-05 we estimate that recycling out of date leaflets cost the Department around £800,000. This only includes those leaflets held centrally and does not include copies held locally, at separate warehouses or at local office contractors.

3.41 Where a leaflet is likely to change substantially, information owners are required to inform the central procurement team three months in advance so that existing stock can be used up and no further printing initiated. Where minor changes are made these can be done directly between the leaflet owner and the printers. However, changes made to leaflets are not recorded in terms of significance, making it difficult for local offices to make informed decisions about whether stocks should be replaced

or existing stocks can be used. In most cases, this decision is made by the leaflet owner and acted upon by the warehouse or printers directly, but only stocks held at these locations will be able to be destroyed. Elsewhere, they are unlikely to be destroyed and will continue to be used.

The Department is working towards a simplified supply chain

3.42 The Department is now working on revised arrangements that would allow business users of printed products, including leaflets, to access supply arrangements through a single provider or network of providers. This provider would be responsible for sourcing, managing and maintaining the Department's stock of information products and there would be framework arrangements covering other marketing and publicity-related procurement. It plans to award a contract in autumn 2006.

APPENDIX 1

Methodology

1 We used a variety of methods in our examination to test how effectively the Department for Work and Pensions is managing the risks that the literature it issues to citizens is inaccurate and misleading. The main methods we adopted were:

Review of the end to end process of producing leaflets

2 We commissioned Vivas risk management consultants to assist us in mapping the Department's current process for producing new products, or amending existing products, through to distributing these to the public. We also asked Vivas to identify where significant risks exist within this process, and how best the Department could mitigate these.

3 We held a workshop attended by a selection of staff within the Department and its agencies to discuss the Vivas findings. Attendees were chosen to ensure coverage of the different parts of the leaflet production process and included representatives from the Department's Communications Directorate, Marketing, Corporate Governance Team, and the Commercial Estates Division, as well as a representative of the Social Security Advisory Committee secretariat.

Test of the leaflet review process

4 We selected a sample of 23 leaflets that should have been through the leaflet review process in time for reprinting in April and October 2004, and examined documentary evidence to determine how well the leaflet process had been adhered to. The sample included leaflets targeted at each of the four client groups including nine Jobcentre Plus leaflets, six Pension Service leaflets, five Child Support Agency leaflets and three Disability and Carers Service leaflets. These numbers were chosen to reflect the volumes of leaflets produced by each of the business streams.

Interviews with key Departmental staff

5 We conducted interviews with senior managers and staff within the Department and its businesses. These included staff from the Communications Directorate, policy teams (information owners and Account Directors), Marketing, the Commercial Estates Division as well as individuals responsible for leaflets within each agency. We used these interviews to identify roles and responsibilities assumed by different parts of the Department.

Interviews with the Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC) secretariat

6 We had discussions with the Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC) secretariat regarding their role in scrutinising the Department's Information Strategy and products. We also obtained their views on the Department's management of the risk of inaccurate information being given to members of the public.

7 We reviewed previous reports produced by SSAC on the Department's Information Strategy and examined SSAC papers relating to their scrutiny of the content and design of a sample of leaflets.

Consultation with third parties

8 We held a workshop attended by representatives from voluntary organisations that work with some of the Department's client groups. This workshop was used to establish to what extent these third parties used the Department's leaflets, and to determine how useful and accessible the information provided in leaflets is to their customers. The workshops also explored the extent to which these stakeholders were consulted on the content and design of Departmental information products.

9 The workshop was attended by representatives from: Association of Retired People and People over 50; Child Poverty Action Group; Elderly Accommodation Council; Help the Aged; and the Royal National Institute of the Blind.

In-depth interviews with customers

10 We commissioned NOP World to undertake 28 in-depth interviews with customers from the Department's four main client groups – seven respondents from each of: working age; pensioners; families with children, and disabled people in work. Respondents were selected to cover a range of social backgrounds and age groups.

11 Each interview involved discussion around three core leaflets specific to the particular client group. To test the accessibility of information within leaflets, respondents were given a scenario and asked to provide solutions based on the information in the leaflets. Overall views on the design of leaflets were also sought.

12 The tasks were designed to cover typical queries that users of the leaflets might have and were deliberately straightforward. They were:

The work you want, the help you need

Task: How would you go about claiming Jobseekers Allowance?

Task: Which telephone number would you have to ring (to claim JSA)?

Financial help if you work or are looking for work

Task: If you needed financial help in an emergency or a disaster, under what circumstances would you qualify for a loan?

A new start – New Deal for young people

Task: Who qualifies for New Deal?

Your opportunities and responsibilities while on the New Deal

Task: What does IAP mean? [IAP is used throughout the leaflet]

Task: How much is the New Deal Allowance?

Access to work – Information for disabled people

Task: What can Access to Work help pay for?

Sick or Disabled

Task: Based on the information in this leaflet, do you think you would be likely to qualify for Working Tax Credit (WTC)?

Task: If you wanted to find out more about Working Tax Credit, what would you do next?

Pension Credit. Pick it up. It's yours

Task: If a single person aged 65 or over has a weekly income of £125, and savings of £10,000, would they be likely to qualify for Pension Credit?

Inheritance of SERPS pension

Task: Could you explain in your own words your understanding of what SERPS is?

Task: From April 2004, what is the maximum amount of SERPS a spouse can inherit?

For parents who live apart

Task: How is the amount of child maintenance to be paid worked out?

Task: How much would a non resident parent (who has no children living with them) with an income of £400 per week expect to pay in child maintenance for one child living with the other parent?

Child Support Reform

Task: How long will it take to get child maintenance?

How to appeal

Task: What information do you have to provide if you want to appeal against a child support decision?

13 To further test accessibility of information in the 11 leaflets used in these discussions, NOP conducted a desk based review exercise to compare the content of these leaflets against best practice standards. These included: the use of plain English; the use of colour; the existence of a clear publication date and details of how to obtain further information. The Simplified Measure of Gobbledegook (SMOG) readability formula was used to assess the readability

of the information in the leaflets. SMOG testing, recognised by both The Basic Skills Agency and the National Literacy Trust as the most simple readability test, attempts to match the readability level of written material to the 'reading and understanding' level of the reader. A SMOG readability level under 10 should, in most cases, be understood by the majority of people.

A review of leaflet availability

14 We commissioned NOP World to undertake a review of leaflet availability at a sample of 100 of the Department's managed outlets and a further 100 non-Departmental sites between March and April 2005. The sample covered 50 different geographical areas across England, Scotland and Wales, chosen to correspond with Jobcentre Plus districts. In each of these geographical areas, two Departmental and two non Departmental sites were visited.

15 The sample of the Department's sites included 60 Jobcentre Plus offices, 25 Jobcentres and 15 Social Security Offices. Our sample was restricted to Jobcentre Plus offices, Jobcentres and Social Security Offices, as these are now the only permanent local offices. The non-Departmental sample targeted Citizens Advice Bureaux, libraries and Inland Revenue (now HM Revenue and Customs) Enquiry Offices in equal proportions. These were chosen as outlets to which the public have access and where they might expect that benefit leaflets would be routinely available.

16 A category of leaflets (i.e. working age, pensions, families and children, and disabled and carers) was assigned at random to each site. At each of the Department's sites we visited, leaflet collectors were required to pick up a copy of every leaflet on display. In addition, collectors were required to request from site staff a pre-determined core leaflet for their subject area if this was not on display. All leaflets collected were then checked against the Department's published list of up to date leaflets to determine what percentage were not current versions, and to ascertain which leaflets are not currently available at local offices.

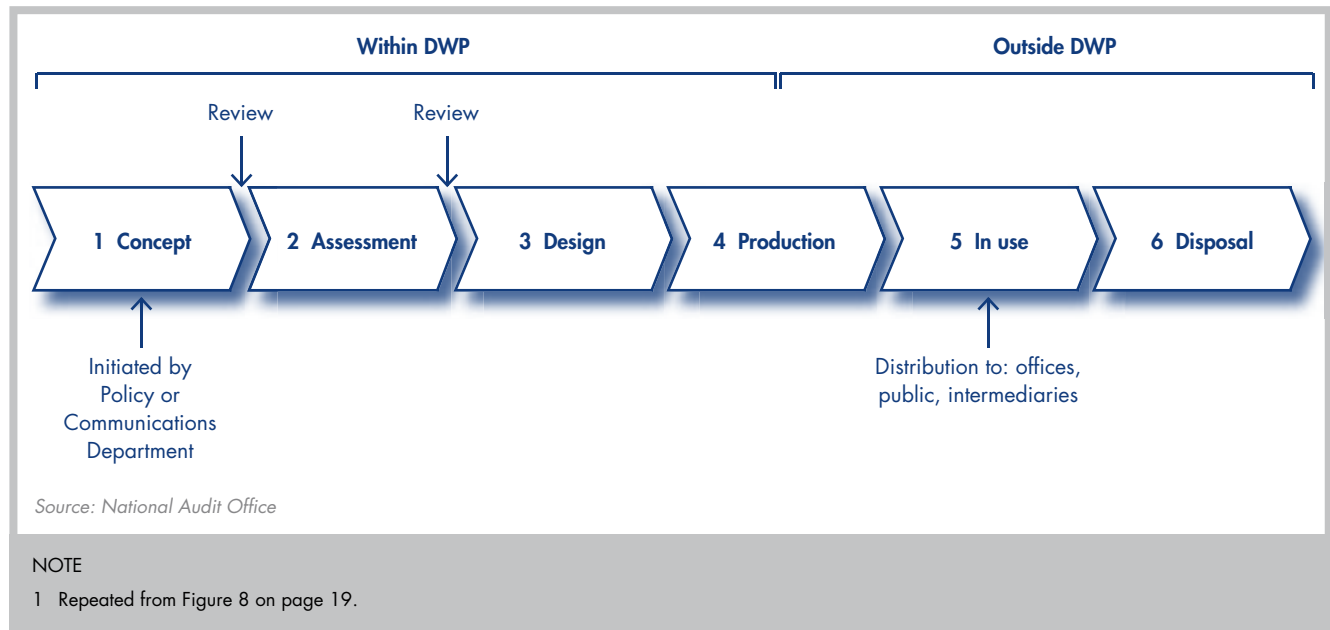
17 Collectors were also required to complete a site questionnaire covering items such as signposting, the ease of finding leaflets, and the height and presentation of the leaflet display. The questionnaire results were used to make an assessment of the accessibility of the leaflet displays in the local offices. We also obtained and analysed the results of the Department's own mystery shopping exercises which examine customer service more generally.

External benchmarking exercise

18 We commissioned PriceWaterhouseCoopers to undertake an external benchmarking exercise to compare the Department's practices against other organisations which have a similar need to keep existing and potential customers up to date with the latest products. This focused on the design of leaflets; the review of the accuracy of information in existing leaflets; the production of leaflets; and the distribution of leaflets to target groups. PriceWaterhouseCoopers benchmarked against two national building societies, Citizen's Advice, and the National Families and Parenting Institute.

APPENDIX 2

Risks along the leaflet life cycle



Top level risk: that the Department's literature is inaccurate or misleading.

Risks are arranged under the six headings of the leaflet production life cycle: Concept, Assessment, Design, Production, In use and Disposal.

Accuracy risks are indicated amber ●. Accessibility risks are indicated red ●. Appropriateness risks are indicated green ●.

Risk ID	Risk description
1	Concept
1.1	● Accuracy
1.1.1	Failure to identify key facts
1.1.2	Failure to identify key changes
1.1.3	Complexity too great for user understanding (e.g. two parallel streams of leaflets in Child Support Agency)
1.1.4	Failure to identify ownership for leaflets and responsibility for their content accuracy and failure to escalate risks up and down the corporate structure of the Department and its agencies (because leaflets are low priority)
1.1.5	Failure to appreciate the additional risks involved in cross-departmental leaflets having inaccurate information
1.2	● Accessibility
1.2.1	Failure to consider information flows to beneficiaries
1.2.2	Failure to consider updates with the right frequency
1.3	● Appropriateness
1.3.1	Failure to develop an appropriate communication strategy and to define the place of leaflets in it
1.3.2	Failure to consider appropriate communication methods for beneficiaries
2	Assessment
2.1	● Accuracy
2.1.1	Failure to measure existing baseline understanding among users
2.1.2	Failure to tailor the content to the requirements of different user groups
2.1.3	Failure to track the level of understanding of previous or related benefits
2.2	● Accessibility
2.2.1	Failure to track the usage of leaflets by different user groups
2.2.2	Failure to assess where different user groups will look for information
2.2.3	Failure to assess the timeline for information dissemination correctly

Risk ID	Risk description
2	Assessment <i>continued</i>
2.3	● Appropriateness
2.3.1	Failure to conduct adequate needs analysis
2.3.2	Failure to track the understanding of rules by different user groups
3	Design
3.1	● Accuracy
3.1.1	Failure to present information simply and accurately
3.1.2	Failure to update information with a frequency in step with changes to policy and regulation
3.2	● Accessibility
3.2.1	Failure to give contact points for assistance clearly
3.3	● Appropriateness
3.3.1	Failure to write leaflets in language appropriate to intended users
3.3.2	Failure to sign off changes at a high enough level to ensure consistency of presentation across leaflets
4	Production
4.1	● Accuracy
4.1.1	Failure to proof read leaflets accurately
4.2	● Accessibility
4.2.1	Failure to deliver right quantities of leaflets to the right places at the right time
4.2.2	Failure to rationalise an over-complex supply chain (leads to inefficiency and high costs)
4.3	● Appropriateness
4.3.1	Failure to consider value for money of production run (including efficient and effective storage and distribution)

Risk ID	Risk description
5	In use
5.1	● Accuracy
5.1.1	Failure to ensure advisors (both formal and informal) are trained to work with the leaflets (includes staff training and processes)
5.1.2	Failure to identify changes that result in obsolescence, inaccuracy, or non-conformance with users' requirements.
5.1.3	Failure to agree accountability and responsibility for ownership once original leaflet signed off and failure to escalate risks up and down the corporate structure of the Department and its agencies (because leaflets are low priority)
5.2	● Accessibility
5.2.1	Failure to ensure leaflets always available at point of need
5.2.2	Failure to display the available leaflets for users to take
5.3	● Appropriateness
5.3.1	Failure to detect that material does not meet user requirements
5.3.2	Failure to ensure leaflets fit in to an overall communication strategy with beneficiaries
6	Disposal
6.1	● Accuracy
6.1.1	Failure to inform staff and advisors that leaflets have been updated/discontinued
6.2	● Accessibility
6.2.1	Failure to remove outdated leaflets from circulation
6.3	● Appropriateness
6.3.1	Failure to train advisors to ensure beneficiaries are no longer referring to outdated leaflets
7	Across life cycle
7.1	Risk that budget silos paying for the leaflets are not matched to the needs for leaflets and failure to manage costs in relation to the value of and need for products

REPORTS BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL, SESSION 2005-2006

The Comptroller and Auditor General has to date, in Session 2005-2006, presented to the House of Commons the following reports under Section 9 of the National Audit Act, 1983. The reports are listed by subject category.

		Publication date
Cross-Government		
Home Office: Working with the Third Sector	HC 75	29 June 2005
Joint Targets	HC 453	14 October 2005
Culture Media and Sport		
Procurement in the Culture, Media and Sport sector	HC 596	30 November 2005
Defence		
Driving the Successful Delivery of Major Defence Projects: Effective Project Control is a Key Factor in Successful Projects	HC 30	20 May 2005
Managing the Defence Estate	HC 25	25 May 2005
Assessing and Reporting Military Readiness	HC 72	15 June 2005
Major Projects Report 2005	HC 595	25 November 2005
Education		
Securing strategic leadership for the learning and skills sector in England	HC 29	18 May 2005
Extending access to learning through technology: Ufi and the learndirect service	HC 460	4 November 2005
Employers' perspectives on improving skills for employment	HC 461	14 December 2005
Improving poorly performing schools in England	HC 679	11 January 2006
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs		
Lost in Translation? Responding to the challenges of European law	HC 26	26 May 2005
Environment Agency: Efficiency in water resource management	HC 73	17 June 2005
Law, Order and Central		
Public Guardianship Office: Protecting and promoting the financial affairs of people who lose mental capacity	HC 27	8 June 2005
Home Office: National Asylum Support Service: The provision of accommodation for asylum seekers	HC 130	7 July 2005
Returning failed asylum applicants	HC 76	14 July 2005
National Offender Management Service: Dealing with increased numbers in custody	HC 458	27 October 2005

Publication date**National Health Service**

Innovation in the NHS: Local Improvement Finance Trusts	HC 28	19 May 2005
The Refinancing of the Norfolk and Norwich PFI Hospital: how the deal can be viewed in the light of the refinancing	HC 78	10 June 2005
A Safer Place for Patients: Learning to improve patient safety	HC 456	3 November 2005
Reducing Brain Damage: Faster access to better stroke care	HC 452	16 November 2005

Overseas Affairs

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Consular Services to British Nationals	HC 594	24 November 2005
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Public Private Partnership

Progress on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link	HC 77	21 July 2005
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Regulation

The Office of Fair Trading: Enforcing competition in markets	HC 593	17 November 2005
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Revenue departments

Filing of Income Tax Self Assessment Returns	HC 74	22 June 2005
Corporation Tax: companies managed by HM Revenue and Customs' Area offices	HC 678	13 January 2006

Transport

Maintaining and improving Britain's railway stations	HC 132	20 July 2005
The South Eastern Passenger Rail Franchise	HC 457	2 December 2005

Work and Pensions

Gaining and retaining a job: the Department for Work and Pensions' support for disabled people	HC 455	13 October 2005
Department for Work and Pensions: Dealing with the complexity of the benefits system	HC 592	18 November 2005
Department for Work and Pensions: Using leaflets to communicate with the public about services and entitlements	HC 797	25 January 2006

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