



[Publications](#)

[About us](#)

[What's New](#)

[What we do](#)

[Our work by sector](#)

[Guidance and good practice](#)

[Careers and Jobs](#)

[Conferences, events and training](#)

[Doing business with us](#)

[Home](#) > [What's New](#)

Press Release - Department of Work and Pensions: Communicating with customers

May 7 2009[Full Report - Department of Work and Pensions:
Communicating with customers](#)

The Department for Work and Pensions has made progress in reducing the number of leaflets that it produces for its customers and in making application forms simpler and shorter, a National Audit Office report has today found. The Department has significantly changed the way in which it provides information in recent years with a growth in telephone enquiries and in online provision, although there is still progress to be made in moving services online. Some forms are still unnecessarily long and guidance notes are complicated and the Department's computer generated letters are overly long and confusing for customers.

Since the Committee of Public Accounts (PAC) reported on government forms in 2004 and the use of leaflets in 2007, the Department, in line with PAC recommendations, has reduced the quantity of leaflets that it produces for customers, from 208 different leaflets in 2005 at a cost of £10.3 million to 53 leaflets in 2008 costing £1.7 million. It has also reduced the length of its forms. However, some of its application forms and standard letters are still too lengthy, such as the application form for Disability Living Allowance which is 45 pages long.

The Department has put telephone calls at the centre of its application process. It is also increasingly using the internet to communicate with customers. In response to the rise in applications for the Jobseeker's Allowance, up by 81 per cent in the six months to January 2009, the Department plans to implement systems giving customers the option of full online applications for contributory Jobseeker's Allowance from summer 2009, rather than February 2010 as originally planned. More efficiency gains from online provision are possible,

but investment in the new systems necessary is expected to take a number of years.

The Department has realised cost savings of almost £9 million by reducing the volume of printed leaflets. But cost efficiencies from online provision have still to be realised fully. Though forms can be downloaded from the internet it is not yet possible to apply for most benefits online, meaning that staff and customer time is taken up handling claims over the telephone or face to face.

Tim Burr, head of the National Audit Office, said today:

"The Department has made a determined effort to reduce reliance on burdensome long letters and piles of leaflets and has improved the efficiency of its communications with customers. It could, however, improve performance further by moving more of its services online. Where paper forms and letters are still necessary, it should make them more straightforward for the customer, particularly for the elderly and other vulnerable people."

Notes for Editors

1. Press notices and reports are available from the date of publication on the NAO website, which is at www.nao.org.uk. Hard copies can be obtained from The Stationery Office on 0845 702 3474.

2. The Comptroller and Auditor General, Tim Burr, is the head of the National Audit Office which employs some 850 staff. He and the NAO are totally independent of Government. He certifies the accounts of all Government departments and a wide range of other public sector bodies; and he has statutory authority to report to Parliament on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which departments and other bodies have used their resources.

Press Notice 28/09

All enquiries to Sarah Farndale, NAO Press Office:

Tel: 020 7798 5350

Mobile: 07985 274 421