

**April 2010**

**An analysis of the productivity of the  
Department for Work and Pensions  
2002/03 to 2008/09**

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# Summary

1. It is two years since the Department last published a report on productivity. That report described the DWP productivity measure and presented provisional productivity results for the SR04 spending review period to 2007/08.
2. This paper provides an update on developments since then, both in terms of continuing technical improvements in the measure itself, and in terms of the developing productivity story. In particular this paper describes how the Department has dealt with the recession in productivity terms.
3. The annotated graph below summarises the evolution of DWP productivity since the Department's formation. It shows that during the SR04 spending review, DWP productivity grew by 15%, with staff productivity growing by 20% over the same period. This was followed by a 10% increase in the first year of SR07 spending review with a 14% increase in staff productivity.

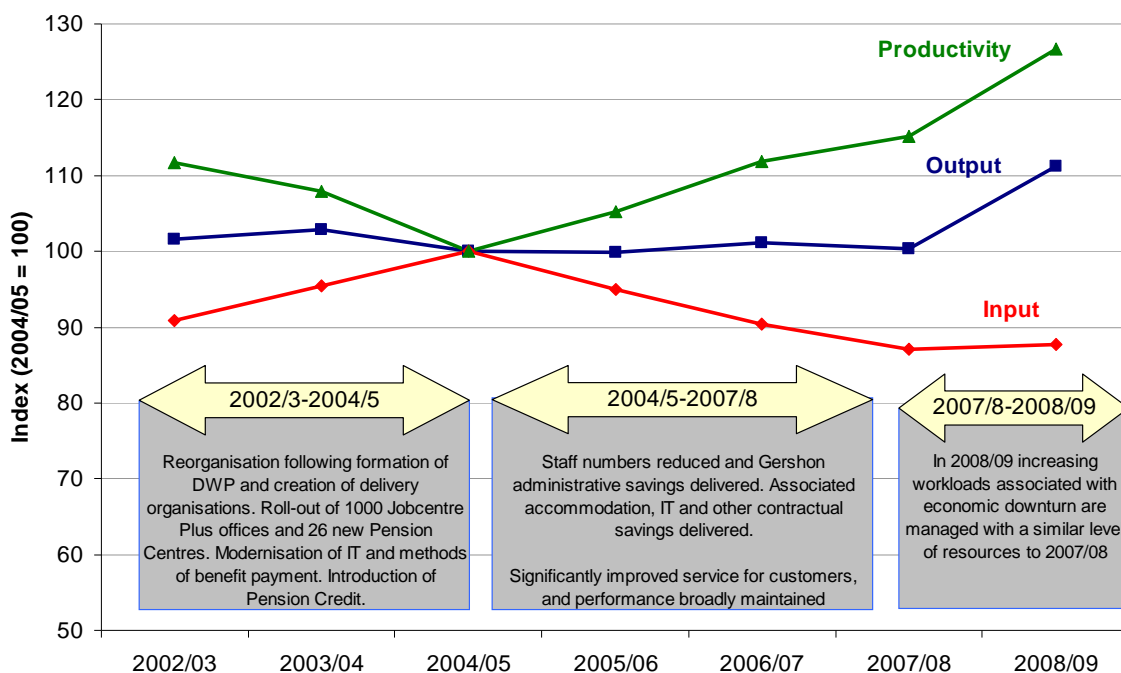


Figure 1 – Summary of DWP productivity story 2002/03 to 2008/09

# Context

## The Department and its services

1. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) was created in 2001, bringing together the then Department of Social Security, primarily responsible for the administration of social security benefits, with the employment elements from the then Department for Education and Employment.
2. The creation of DWP represented a move away from a passive benefit paying system to a far more active approach, working intensively with individuals to help them back to work. The Department's vision is to:
  - contribute towards fair, safe and fulfilling lives, free from poverty for children, people in work and retirement, disabled people and carers;
  - reduce welfare dependency and increase economic competitiveness by helping people to work wherever they can and helping employers to secure the skills and employees they need; and
  - provide greater choice and personalisation and higher quality of service for customers where it is in their interests and those of the taxpayers.
3. DWP services are thus the primary contributor to the social security administration and a major contributor to the economic affairs functions of Government within National Accounts. These services are delivered through Departmental Agencies (Jobcentre Plus and the Pension, Disability and Carers Service), Non-Departmental Public Bodies (for example, the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission and the Health and Safety Executive), and other public, private and voluntary sector providers (for example, delivery of Housing Benefit by Local Authorities). In addition to the delivery arms mentioned above, DWP also includes policy and corporate functions<sup>1</sup>.
4. Through this network DWP is the biggest public service delivery department in the UK, serving over 20 million customers. Every working day the Department conducts over 50,000 adviser interviews in Jobcentre Plus offices and take an average of 10,000 new job vacancies. The Department manages the UK's biggest job vacancy database via the DirectGov website.

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<sup>1</sup> More information about how the Department is organised to fulfil its responsibilities is contained in the Departmental Framework. The latest version of the Framework was published in November 2008: [www.dwp.gov.uk/aboutus/departmental\\_framework.asp](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/aboutus/departmental_framework.asp)

## Responding to the economic downturn

5. The Department has a crucial role to play in helping support people through difficult times, providing flexible, responsive and targeted support to help people move into work as quickly as possible and to ensure that they are paid the right amount of benefits, at the right time.
6. The delays in the payment of student loans in 2009/10 caused by the rise in student loan applications demonstrated the effect that sharp increases in workload can have on an organisation's ability to maintain levels of service. The economic downturn placed significant pressure on the Department and its staff. The number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance doubled from the 835,000 claiming at the start of the current spending review period, with some months seeing rises in the claimant count of more than 100,000.
7. In response to the economic downturn, additional resources have been invested by DWP to ensure that every jobseeker can continue to have access to a dedicated personalised service, and to fund further support through initiatives such as:
  - the Six Month Offer which provides help to jobseekers who find themselves out of work for six months or more, and builds on the enhanced adviser support already available at six months. This substantial package of support includes access to recruitment subsidies, new training places and help to take up self-employment and volunteering placements;
  - the Young Person's Guarantee which guarantees all 18-24 year olds either a job, work placement or work related skills training from six months of their Jobseeker's Allowance claim; and
  - the Future Jobs Fund which now aims to create up to 205,000 jobs by March 2012 following the extension announced at Budget 2010. These new jobs will be targeted at young people on Jobseeker's Allowance.

## Productivity measurement within the Department

8. At a time of increased workloads and expenditure, there is a heightened interest in understanding whether the Department continues to deliver more for (relatively) less. One way to measure this is through productivity, by relating outputs to inputs.
9. Public sector productivity is calculated by dividing the volume of outputs by the volume of resources (inputs) consumed in producing those outputs. An important technical framework for this work was established by the Atkinson review of 2005<sup>2</sup>. This review provided the foundations for subsequent work in the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and in various Government Departments, including DWP.
10. As part of this work programme DWP has published two previous papers on the Department's productivity, the first in 2006<sup>3</sup> and the most recent in 2008<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, productivity measurement is used to help manage performance, support continuous planning within DWP and inform the Department's value for money reform programme, aiming to generate net cash-releasing savings of around £1.4 billion by 2011.

## Outputs

11. The Department's output index combines measures of its social security, labour market, and child maintenance outcomes through a cost-weighted sum, which is added to expenditure on employment programmes and the Department's policy and regulatory functions.
12. Social security outputs consist of cost-weighted volumes of benefit and pension claims processed and maintained, of future pension forecasts produced and the number of children benefiting from maintenance arrangements.
13. In the previous DWP productivity paper, the number of Job Outcome (JOT) points was used as a measure of the Department's labour market outputs<sup>5</sup>. Since the publication of the previous productivity paper, work has been undertaken to

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<sup>2</sup> Atkinson Review: Final Report, Measurement of Government Output and Productivity for the National Accounts, HMSO, 2005. Available online at [www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/PublicSector/Atkinson/downloads/Atkinson\\_Report\\_Full.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/PublicSector/Atkinson/downloads/Atkinson_Report_Full.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> An analysis of DWP productivity 1997/98 – 2007/08, available online at: <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2005-2006/rrep355.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> An analysis of the productivity of the Department for Work and Pensions 2002/03 to 2007/08, available online at: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/report3939.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> The Job Outcome Target, is a measure of job outcomes achieved which includes a system of weighted point scores so that a higher weight is given to job outcomes for disadvantaged groups, such as lone parents, those customers in receipt of a benefit due to a health condition or disability, and the long term unemployed, in line with the Government's priorities.

develop an efficiency based measure which better reflects the Department's labour market outputs, and which is more closely aligned with the Atkinson recommendations.

14. A cost-weighted activity index has now been developed which is based on the volume of activities delivered by the Department at different stages of the customer's time on benefit. This new labour market output measure has been combined with the existing social security administration output measure to calculate the productivity results contained in this paper.

## Inputs

15. In line with advice from the Atkinson Review, only certain categories of administrative expenditure are treated as 'relevant' for the purposes of measuring productivity. Housing Benefit subsidies and other payments to local authorities are excluded because they are covered elsewhere in National Accounts<sup>6</sup> where they are combined with other local authority funding.
16. Within the category of 'relevant' expenditure, the costs of administrative activity contributing to the delivery of the Department's outputs in a given year are described as 'relevant recurrent' costs. These recurrent costs form the basis of the Department's headline productivity measure. One-off investment is excluded, to more closely reflect the cost of delivering outputs in a given year.

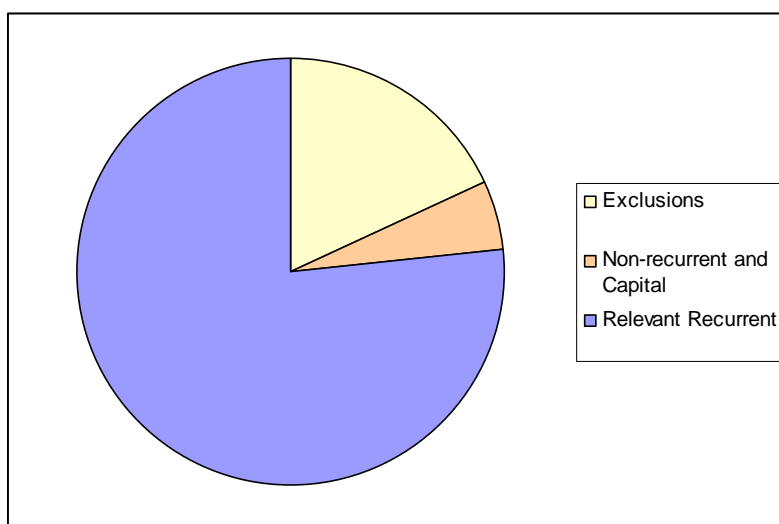


Figure 2 - DWP expenditure by category for 2008/09

17. Annex A provides more detail on the DWP productivity methodology.

<sup>6</sup> Although DWP has policy responsibility for Housing Benefit, delivery responsibility lies with Local Authorities. For this reason, Housing Benefit output is not included in the DWP index.

# Productivity results for the Department of Work and Pensions

18. The period 2002/03 to 2004/05, following the formation of DWP saw the creation of delivery organisations and the roll-out of 1000 Jobcentre Plus offices and 26 new Pension Centres. It also saw modernisation of IT and methods of benefit payment as well as the introduction of Pension Credit. This period of major investment saw an initial productivity fall.

## Productivity results during Spending Review 2004

19. During the Spending Review 2004 period from 2004/05 to 2007/08 the Department was at the forefront of the Government's drive to increase efficiency.

20. Over this three year period, DWP inputs fell by 13% as headcount reduced by over 30,000 full-time equivalent staff, at the same time as the Department's workloads remained broadly stable. As a result, total DWP productivity increased by 15% and staff productivity by 20%.

21. This productivity increase supported the Department's delivery of £1,446 million of value for money savings in this period, against a target of £960 million.

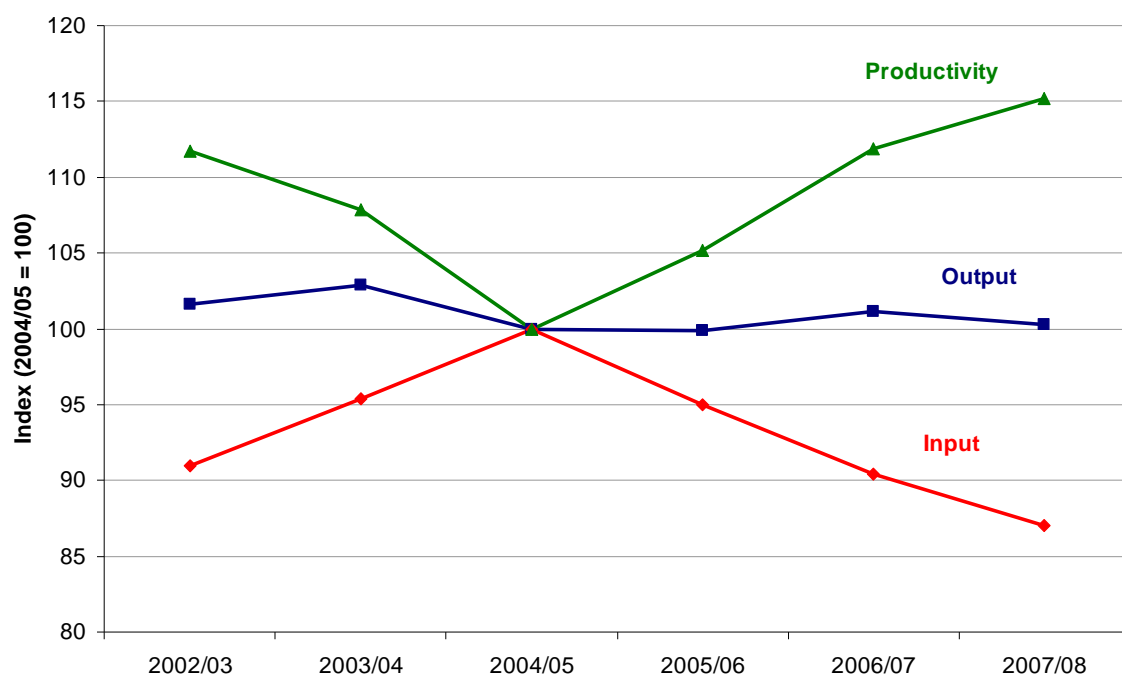


Figure 3 - SR04 Inputs / Outputs / Productivity



## Productivity during Spending Review 2007

22. In 2008/09, the first year of Spending Review 2007, DWP outputs increased markedly, as workloads related to Jobseeker's Allowance grew in response to the economic downturn.
23. At the same time, inputs for 2008/09 were very close to those of 2007/08 in real terms. The Department therefore managed significantly higher workloads with a similar level of resources, resulting in a further DWP productivity increase in the region of 10% in 2008/09 compared to 2007/08.
24. Additional investment has been made in staff and non-staff resources in 2009/2010, in response to the economic downturn and current estimates are that the DWP will deliver a further productivity increase in this year.

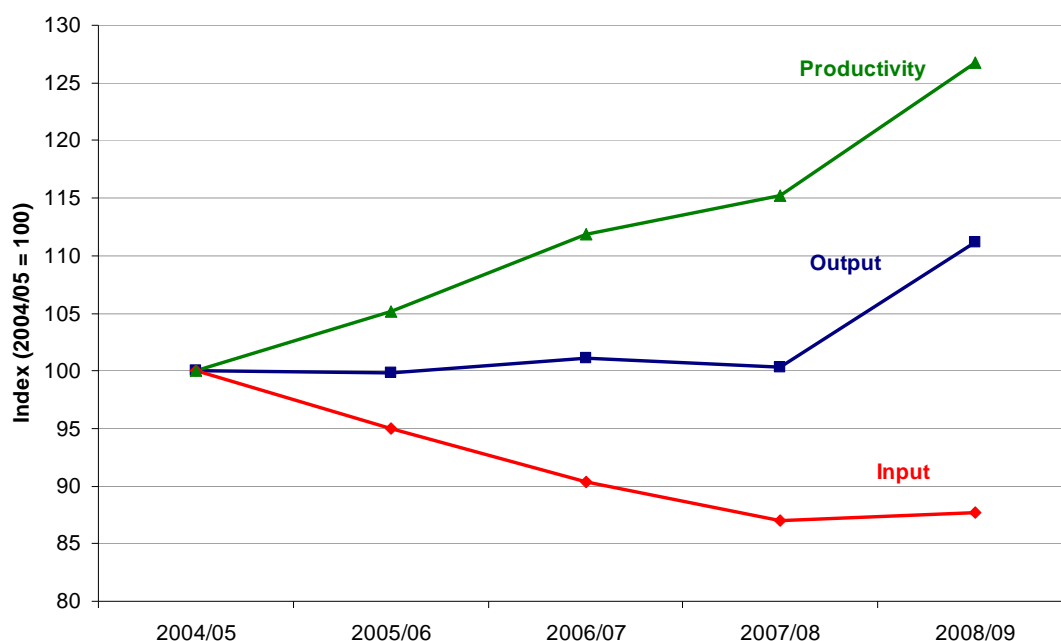


Figure 4 - Inputs / Outputs / Productivity 2004/05 to 2008/09

25. The rapid increase in productivity to date in SR07 has been delivered, in part, through efficiencies of scale associated with the greater workloads, for example making greater use of relatively fixed resources such as estates and IT. The contribution from these factors may tend to reverse once the economy recovers and Jobseeker's Allowance volumes.
26. In addition, there are also a number of ongoing initiatives that can be expected to deliver improved customer service, as well as providing lasting productivity gains, through process improvements, including:
- the use of SMS texts to remind customers of appointments – this has shown increased attendance rates, thus reducing waste and increasing productivity;

- the Department's Lean programme which is significantly increasing our capability to be more customer focused and responsive. Lean is a management system which focuses activity, people and resources on serving customers and eradicating waste. One example concerns improvements to the "rapid reclaim" process for people reclaiming Jobseeker's Allowance following a short spell in employment; and
- the increasing use of more efficient online customer service channels. More than 100,000 claims have now been processed through the Jobseeker's Allowance on-line site. The on-line Benefits Adviser service had, by December 2009, received 1.3 million visits, giving customers an estimate of which benefits they may be entitled to and enabling them to put in 'what if?' scenarios so that, for example, they can very quickly see how starting work or increasing their working hours may affect their benefit.

## Wider measures of performance

27. Productivity figures alone do not, of course, tell the whole story of the Department's progress over the SR04 and SR07 spending reviews.
28. In this period, the Department improved outcomes for individuals, and modernised many of its services to customers. For example, the creation of Jobcentre Plus brought together the payment of benefits and help in looking for work into one single, modern network. More recently, in the new Pension, Disability and Carers Service, customers can now apply for multiple entitlements (State Pension and Pension Credit) in one telephone call taking around 20-30 minutes. This represents a considerable improvement in service compared to the pre-transformation, paper-based process for claiming State Pension and receiving a decision which could take several weeks. A National Audit Office Report<sup>7</sup> concluded that "these are changes which help the Department to provide a more responsive service to customers."
29. The additional funding made available to the Department in response to the recession has enabled Jobcentre Plus to recruit additional employees and maintain quality of service, despite a doubling in the number of new claims to Jobseeker's Allowance in this period:
- Jobseeker's Allowance claims are cleared in ten days, on average (an improvement from sixteen days in 2006); and
  - over 80% of customers are seen for their first advisory interview within three working days of making a claim.

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<sup>7</sup> Department for Work and Pensions: Communicating with customers, National Audit Office, 2009. Available online at: [http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/0809/communicating\\_with\\_customers.aspx](http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/0809/communicating_with_customers.aspx)

30. The increase in staffing has ensured that everyone looking for work receives advice on finding a new job, help to write a new CV and complete job applications and help and advice on skills and retraining. Thanks to these and other measures, despite the recession, most jobseekers still spend only a relatively short time on benefits before moving back to work.
31. Over half of new claimants still leave Jobseeker's Allowance within three months, over 70 per cent within six months and around 90 per cent within a year. When the effect of the recession on the labour market was at its height, in the first half of 2009, off-flow rates from Jobseeker's Allowance fell back significantly, but remained higher than during the recession of the early 1990s despite the larger fall in GDP this time. There are now signs that off-flow rates from Jobseeker's Allowance are improving again as the economy begins to emerge from recession and the number of new vacancies becoming available has started to increase.
32. Performance in respect of the Department's Public Service Agreements and Departmental Strategic Objectives has, in general, held up well despite the recession. The most recent assessment against the Department's seven strategic objectives can be found in the Department's 2009 Autumn performance report<sup>8</sup>.

## The Future

33. As the Department moves beyond the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review period, the fundamental approach to securing greater DWP efficiency and value for money will be to:
- reduce expenditure as and when the labour market improves;
  - further increase the range of services offered over the internet where there is no need for face to face or telephone contact with our customers; and
  - continue to reduce the cost of back office functions by taking full advantage of cross-Government opportunities, not least to reduce duplication and deliver more joined up services to customers.
34. In 2007 DWP established a Departmental wide Change Programme, in order to transform the way services are delivered, developing and delivering new integrated services. This means that DWP customers will have a greater choice on how they access our services, for example through automated telephone systems or via the DirectGov website. By increasingly providing such self-service

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<sup>8</sup> As published in the DWP Autumn Performance Report 2009, available online at: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/autumn-performance-report-09.pdf>

options for customers who wish to use them the Department will be able to better focus face-to-face and telephony advisor support towards those who most need it.

35. The Department is also seeking to reduce the costs of its major contracts. For example the Department recently announced a new IT contract for Desktop Services. As well as delivering significant savings it will further transform DWP's desktop estate with the proposed use of 'thin client' desktop technology. This provides a number of benefits, for example reducing maintenance requirements and also reducing power consumption to support our sustainability agenda.
36. As the recession abates the Department will still face a formidable work programme over the coming years. There is always a lag between economic recovery and reductions in unemployment counts, and a further lag to reducing workloads - as much labour market activity is focused on those people who are longer term unemployed. However as and when workloads do reduce in the future DWP will need to once again drive down its fixed and variable cost base if recent productivity increases are to be maintained.
37. In meeting the challenges ahead productivity measurement is a vital tool that helps the Department understand both its current cost base and future resource requirements. The productivity work programme feeds into the continuous planning process and thus helps ensure that the Department makes best use of its available resources.

# Annex A: Measuring the Department for Work and Pensions' Productivity

1. Productivity is calculated by dividing the Department's outputs by the resources (inputs) it has consumed in producing those outputs.
2. This annex provides details that explain how input, output and productivity indices are constructed so that changes in the Department's productivity can be measured on a consistent basis over time.
3. The methodology has been developed through work with the Office for National Statistics, building on recommendations from the Atkinson Review. Whilst only a part of the Department's productivity measure is currently used in National Accounts, work to develop an overall measure for the Department has been shared with the Office for National Statistics, and aims to follow the principles established by the Atkinson Review.

## Inputs

4. The Department's expenditure is divided into two parts: Annually Managed Expenditure (AME) and Departmental Expenditure Limits (DEL). AME is primarily demand-led expenditure incurred on making benefit payments and is agreed as part of the Budget and Pre-Budget Report process. DEL provision is settled with HM Treasury, for example during the Spending Review process. DEL is spending within the Department's direct control and which can therefore be planned over an extended period.
5. Following the recommendations of the Atkinson review, only administration (DEL) expenditure is used in the Department's input productivity measure. Benefit expenditure (AME) is excluded. In 2008/09 DEL was approximately £8bn, whilst AME expenditure was over £135bn<sup>9</sup>.
6. Only expenditure on pay and pensions costs of staff employed, current expenditure on goods and services, including hire of consultants and contractors, and 'consumption' in respect of capital assets is treated as 'relevant' for productivity purposes.

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<sup>9</sup> *DWP 2008-09 Resource Accounts*, available online at: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/resource-acs-2008-09.pdf>

7. The Department's headline productivity measure is then based on its recurrent expenditure on administrative activity. One-off expenditure (the cost of investment and other one-off change) is excluded from this, to closely reflect expenditure on the delivery of current outputs. Categories of expenditure excluded for productivity purposes are:
- capital – to include this would result in double counting because depreciation is included;
  - transfer payments, these are costs that are picked up elsewhere in the National Accounts, e.g. Housing Benefit Administration payments to local authorities;
  - costs that are in effect benefit payments to individuals, e.g. Independent Living Fund;
  - subsidies to companies, e.g. Remploy, where we pay part of the salary costs of disabled employees;
  - payments to individuals, e.g. New Deal makes payments to individuals, for example for child care to enable attendance to the new deal training;
  - exchange rate gains and losses for the European Social – clearly to include these would not reflect 'real' productivity changes;
  - non-recurrent expenditure (one-off investment) is excluded to closely reflect the cost of delivery in a given year; and
  - we also currently exclude Government Direct because it represents development of a collective output across government.
8. Within the productivity calculation we deflate the expenditure series, so that we can measure changes against prices in a base year. Separate deflators for staff costs and for goods and services are used.

An analysis of the productivity of the Department for Work and Pensions  
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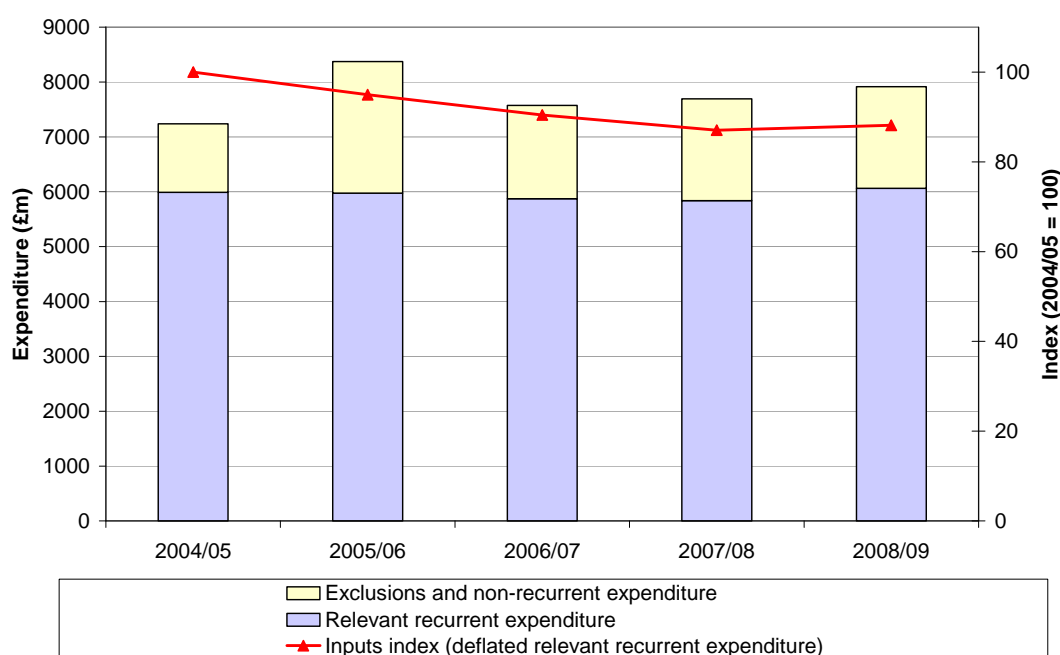


Figure 5 – Graph of expenditure, exclusions and expenditure index

## Outputs

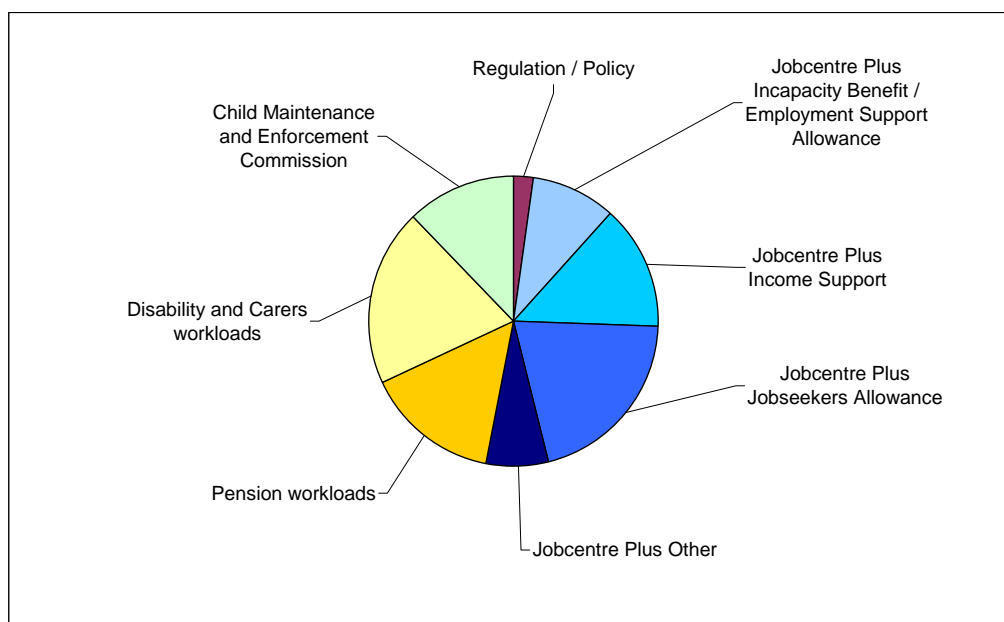
9. The Department's output index combines measures of its social security, labour market, and child maintenance outcomes through a cost-weighted sum, which can be added to expenditure on the Department's policy and regulatory functions.
10. All related activity costs have been mapped onto these output measures. This means, for example, that the provision of associated information and advice is included, even though output is not measured separately.
11. In order to express outputs in a common currency, each output volume is multiplied by the unit cost of producing it. These unit costs include apportioned overhead, corporate and support costs, and are described as 'total factor' unit costs. The application of the unit costs converts individual output volumes into cost-weighted outputs. These can then be added together to form a cost weighted sum of outputs based on a Laspeyres index to produce a single measure of the Department's output.
12. Over time the mix of outputs delivered by the Department can change, for example because of changing priorities or through the realisation of efficiencies in delivering individual types of outputs. This has implications for the relative sizes of the unit costs. To accommodate such changes, the unit cost of each output is updated annually. Following Office for National Statistics practice a process called 'chain-linking' is used to join later output measures to the baseline output measure. This ensures that the output measure consistently reflects prices in the baseline year, while growth from each year to the next is assessed as accurately as possible.

## Social security outputs

13. Volumes of benefit and pension claims processed and maintained, and of future pension forecasts produced, are added together in a cost-weighted sum to form the Department's social security output measure. Details were provided in the first DWP productivity paper<sup>10</sup> and are summarised below:

- Jobcentre Plus: working age benefits (Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance, Incapacity Benefit / Employment Support Allowance, Social Fund) processed and maintained;
- the Pension, Disability and Carers Service: pensioner benefits (State Pension, Pension Credit, both at home and overseas) processed and maintained, future pension forecasts produced, disability and carers benefits (Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance, Carer's Allowance) processed and maintained; and
- the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission: The number of children benefiting from maintenance collection or maintenance arrangements.

14. These measures have been developed and agreed with the Office for National Statistics. They are used by the Office for National Statistics to report growth in public sector output in National Accounts, and combined with measures from other Government Departments to measure social security administration productivity<sup>11</sup>.



**Figure 6 – Breakdown of Social Security Administration outputs in 2008/09**

<sup>10</sup> An analysis of DWP productivity 1997/98 – 2007/08, available online at: <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2005-2006/rrep355.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> With the exception of the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission measure of the number of children benefiting, which has not yet featured in the ONS Social Security Administration measure.



## Labour market outputs

15. In the DWP productivity paper of 2008, Job Outcome (JOT) points were used as the output measure for the Department's economic affairs activity<sup>12</sup>.
16. JOT points represent an outcome measure, as opposed to an output measure and are thus affected by wider economic factors, making them less suitable as a measure of DWP output. In line with output measurement convention, and facilitated by an improved time-series of Activity Based Management data, an improved DWP economic affairs productivity measure has now been developed, which:
- more accurately represents DWP productivity performance; and
  - is a cost-weighted activity index, consistent with the Atkinson methodology.

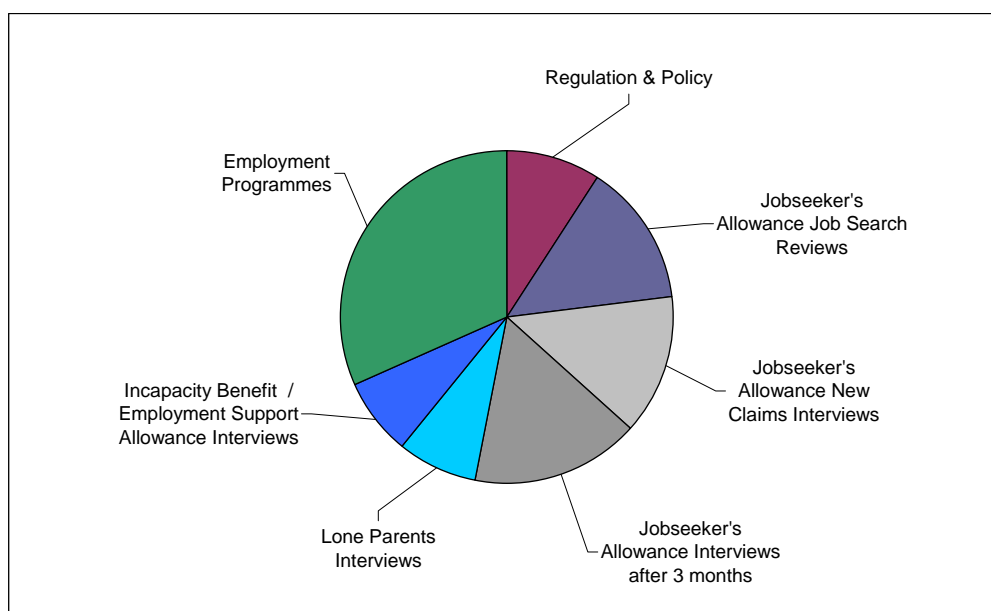


Figure 7 – Breakdown of Economic Affairs outputs in 2008/09

17. The aim has been to move away from an outcome based measure to one that better reflects the Department's labour market service, by aggregating the underlying activities and their contribution to establishing outcomes. This is a two-stage approach, considering separately the efficiency with which DWP delivers its intervention regime and then how effective the regime is at achieving job outcomes<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> An analysis of the productivity of the Department for Work and Pensions 2002/03 to 2007/08, available online at: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/report3939.pdf>. The Job Outcome Target is a measure of job outcomes achieved which includes a system of weighted point scores so that a higher weight is given to job outcomes for disadvantaged groups, such as lone parents, those customers in receipt of a benefit due to a health condition or disability, and the long term unemployed, in line with the Government's priorities.

<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that this discussion is only concerned with the use of JOT points as an output measure, in-line with Atkinson requirements. The Job Outcome target itself remains an important strategic target, underpinned by a set of operational key management indicators.

18. At present, the efficiency part of the equation has been addressed, through the development of a cost-weighted activity index. Volumes of activities delivered by DWP (interviews, etc.) are recorded in the Department's Activity Based Management information system, and these activities can be grouped, by customer and time on benefit.
19. Activities delivered by external providers, for example New Deal, are more varied and may be targeted at very specific groups of customers. As with all external provision there are agreed pricing mechanisms within the contracts, with an element of performance based payment. Thus in effect there are market prices for acquiring these services and the output of employment programmes can be measured on an output=input basis.
20. The effectiveness question is essentially one dimension of 'quality' adjustment and DWP are currently investigating various data sources to develop a quality adjustment (outlined in Annex B). As this is not yet complete, the results in this paper represent unadjusted DWP productivity figures.
21. More detail on the labour market output measure was provided in a recent paper given to the ONS / NIESR International Conference on Public Service Measurement<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Papers available here: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about/newsroom/events/ukcemga-and-niesr-conference/ukcemga-and-niesr-international-conference-papers/index.html>

## Annex B: Quality adjustment

1. In general, public sector productivity measures are based on changes in the quantity of outputs produced for a given volume of inputs. However, changes in the quality of outputs can also contribute to productivity improvements. For example, processing claims in an average time of 10 days rather than 15 days would represent a quality improvement from a customer point of view and should be considered more productive.
2. DWP output measurement currently meets the standard convention of measuring changes in the quantity of outputs, although this does not mean that output quality has been ignored thus far. Firstly, as far as possible quality is captured through the choice of output indicator measured, for example measuring claims completed rather than claims received. Secondly, as with this paper, DWP productivity is generally presented alongside other measures as part of a broad performance management framework.
3. DWP is investigating various ways to incorporate output quality into productivity calculations more explicitly. Quality dimensions under investigation include: customer satisfaction, accuracy, timeliness and effectiveness in generating successful job outcomes.
4. Quality adjustment is a major area of research across all areas of public sector productivity measurement, and the subject of many of the papers at the 2009 ONS / NIESR conference<sup>15</sup>. The ultimate goal in all cases is to understand the link between outputs and incremental contributions to generating outcomes.

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<sup>15</sup> Papers available here: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about/newsroom/events/ukcemga-and-niesr-conference/ukcemga-and-niesr-international-conference-papers/index.html>