

ANNUAL REPORT **2008 – 2009**

Devon Welfare Rights Unit

Suite One, Quintana Gate

Bartholomew Street East

Exeter EX4 3BH

THIS REPORT IS AVAILABLE AT
www.dwru.org

Consultancy tel/fax: 01392 431616

Training tel: 01392 274869

Quids 4 Special Kids tel: 01392 274869

e-mail dwru@citizensadvice.org.uk

www.dwru.org



STAFF LIST

Matthew Brown	Welfare Rights Officer Contracted Consultant (part time)
Nora Corkery	Unit Manager (full time)
Llinos Davies	Training Programme Administrator (part time)
Judy Francis	Unit Administrator (part time)
Jude Giddings	Welfare Rights Officer (full time)
Craig Henderson	Welfare Rights Officer Contracted Consultant (part time)
Angela O'Brien	Welfare Rights Officer (full time)
Rosalind Thomas	Welfare Rights Officer Contracted Consultant (part time)
Vincent Willson	Welfare Rights Officer (full time)

*Registered Office: Myddelton House, 115/123 Pentonville Road, London N1 9LZ
Company Registration No 1436945 Charity Registration No 279057*

The AIMS of CITIZENS ADVICE are:

- ❖ To ensure that individuals do not suffer through lack of knowledge of their rights and responsibilities or of the service available to them or through an inability to express their needs effectively.

and equally

- ❖ To exercise a responsible influence on the development of social policies and services, both locally and nationally.

The AIMS of DEVON WELFARE RIGHTS UNIT are:

- ❖ To improve the availability and quality of welfare rights advice and social policy work in Devon, by delivering training, consultancy and support to organisations providing advice to the public.

and

- ❖ To identify and act upon social security and social care issues which have implications for social and financial inclusion.

ANNUAL REPORT 2008-2009

This report outlines the main achievements, developments and challenges which Devon Welfare Rights Unit dealt with during the financial year 2008/09.

The written report provides a summary overview and is also available on the Devon Welfare Rights Unit website: www.dwru.org All agencies currently listed on our mailing list with an e-mail contact will automatically receive an e-mail providing the electronic link to the website.

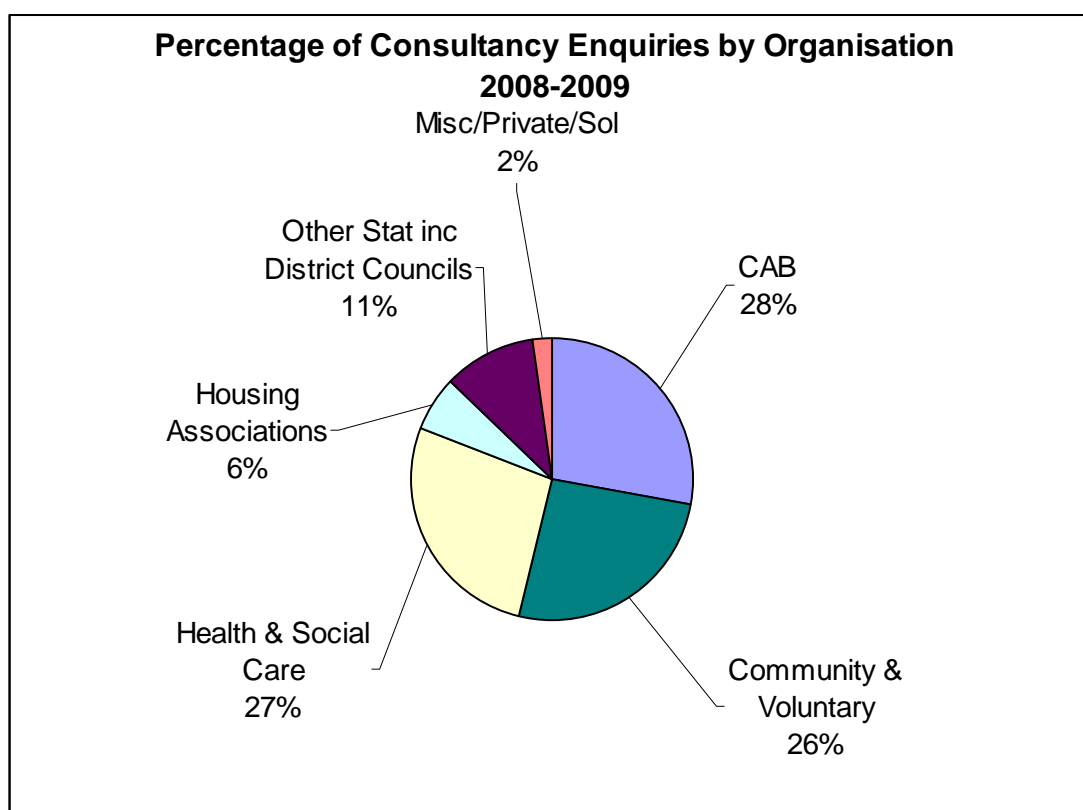


CONSULTANCY

We continued to provide a telephone/email/fax access consultancy service which dealt with a total of 467 enquiries during this period, compared to 518 during 2007/2008. This represents a 10% decrease on 07/08 but is a 16% increase on 06/07 when 402 enquiries were received. Some of the reduction in this years usage is caused by the Quids for Special Kids project for Families with Children with special needs as a number of clients are now referred to that project for direct support where previously they would have been assisted via their adviser with consultancy service support.

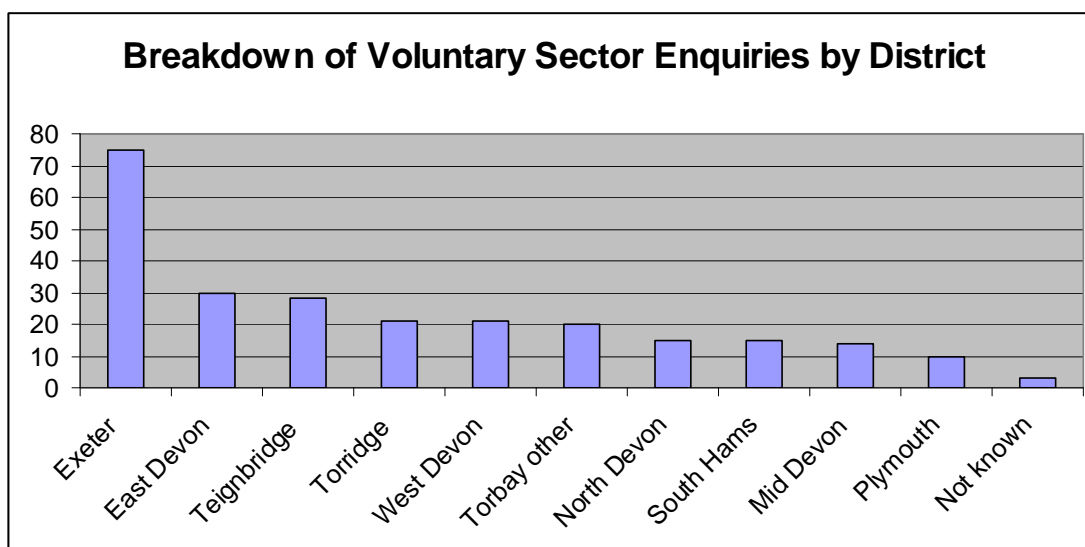
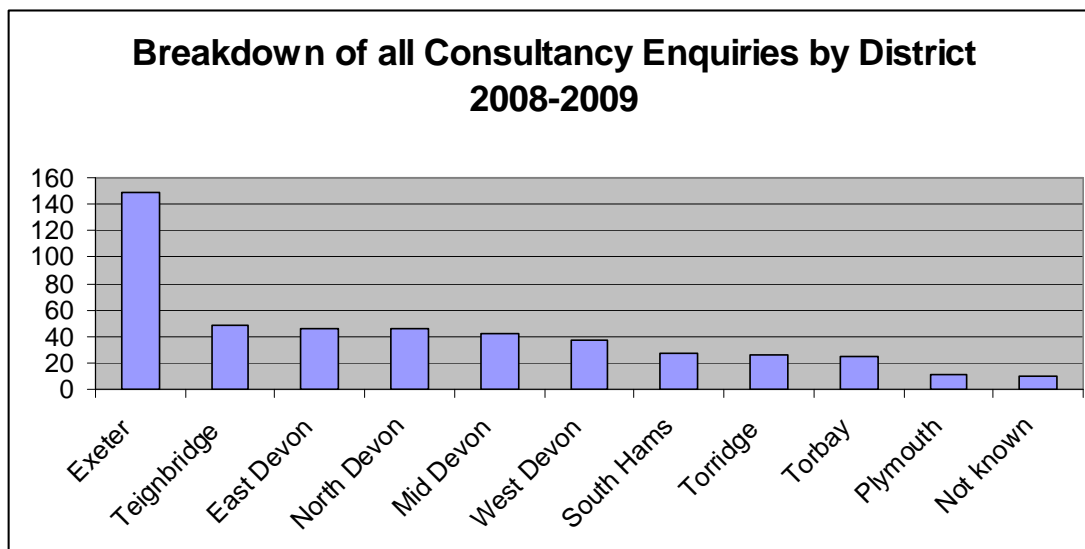
Chart 1 and the table below demonstrate the breakdown of consultancy enquiries dealt with by organisation, as compared to 2007/08.

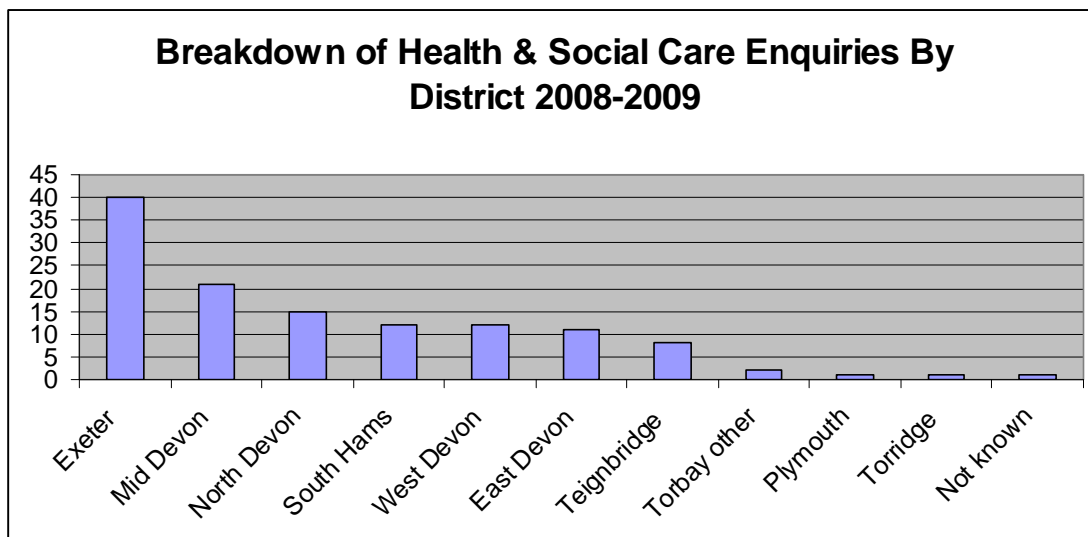
Chart 1



2007/2008		2008/2009	
CAB	176	CAB	130
Community & Voluntary Sector	132	Community & Voluntary Sector	122
Health & Social Care	110	Health & Social Care	125
Housing Associations	40	Housing Associations	30
Other Statutory Sector inc District Councils	36	Other Statutory Sector inc District Councils	50
Miscellaneous	19	Miscellaneous	10

Detailed Breakdown of Consultancy Enquiries by District 2008-2009





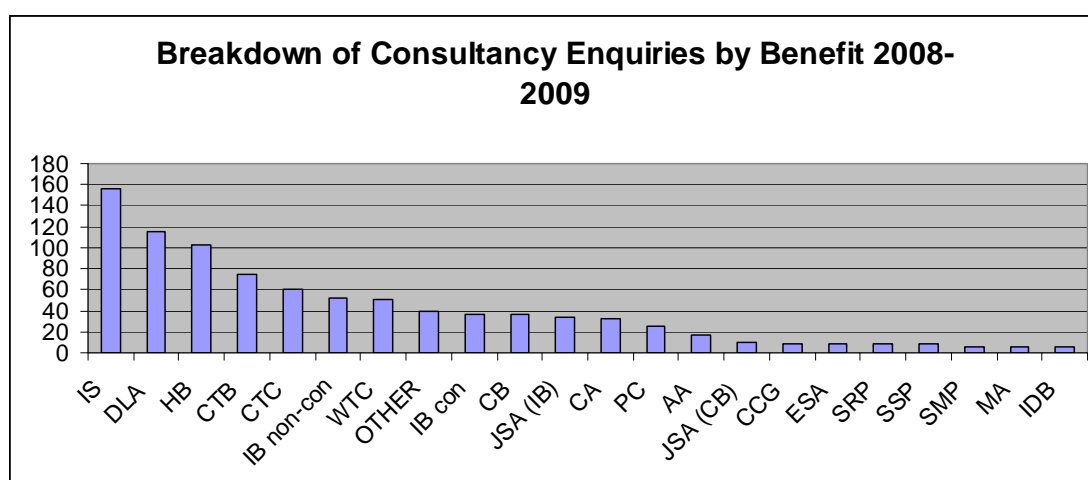
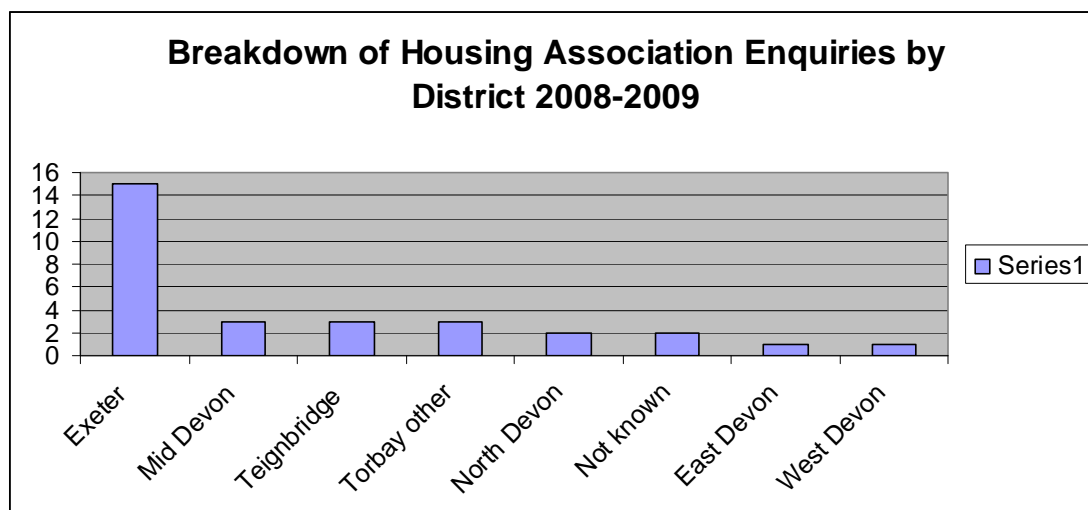
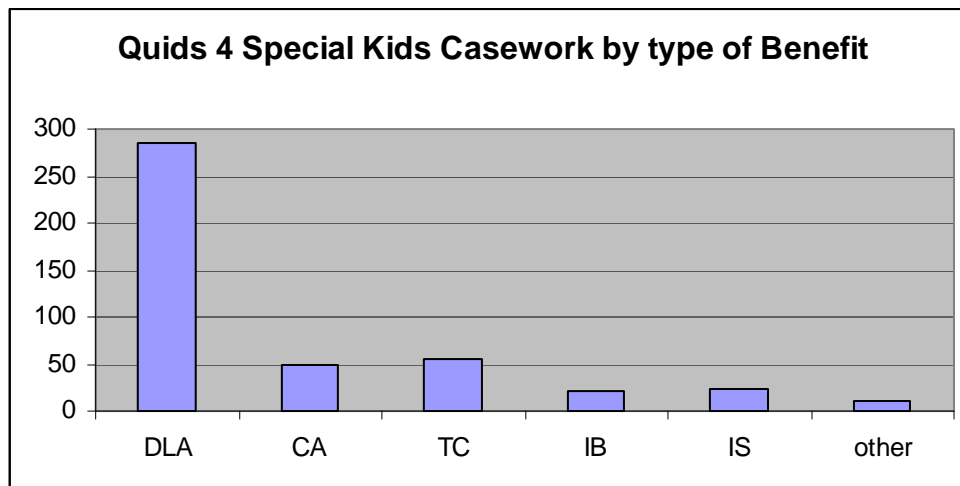


Table of Abbreviations

AA	Attendance Allowance	IDB	Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit
CA	Carers Allowance	IS	Income Support
CCG	Community Care Grant	JSA	Job-Seekers Allowance
CTB	Council Tax Benefit	MA	Maternity Allowance
CTC	Child Tax Credit	PC	Pension Credit
DLA	Disability Living Allowance	SRP	State Retirement Pension
ESA	Employment Support Allowance	SSP	Statutory Sick Pay
HB	Housing Benefit	SMP	State Maternity Pay
IB	Incapacity Benefit	WTC	Working Tax Credit

CASEWORK

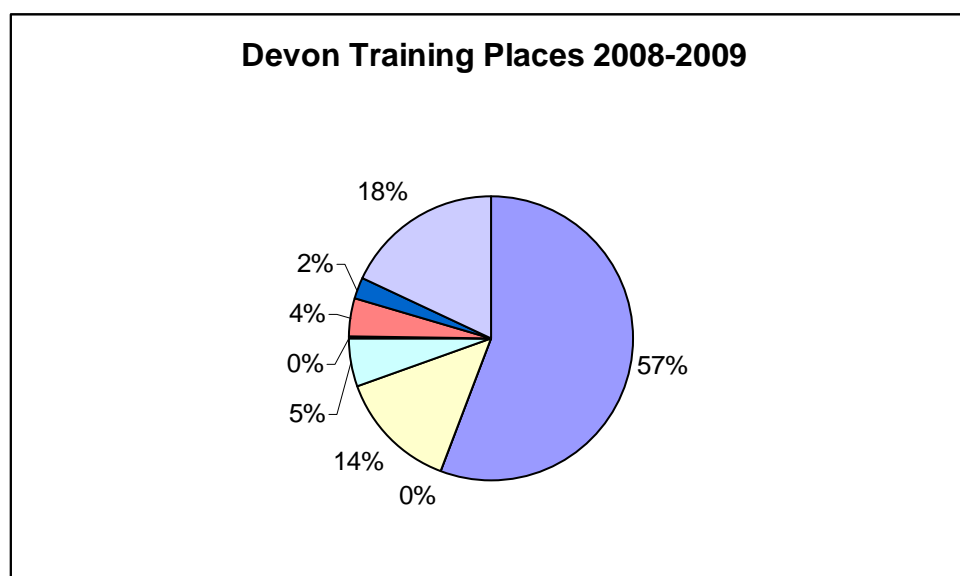
The unit dealt with 73 pieces of indirect casework (compared with 78 2007/2008) and dealt with 6 general direct cases during this period (compared to 15 2006/2007). In addition the unit dealt directly with 577 Quids 4 Special Kids cases (of which 322 resulted in additional benefit gains).



TRAINING

We delivered 82 (1 more than 2007/08) different benefits training events at local venues across the county, through our Devon Strategic Partnership funded training programme, providing training to 1,219 participants (as compared with 1,119 in 2007/08) from both the voluntary and statutory sector in Devon. This year followed a 3 year funding agreement with local authorities in Devon. The uncertainties surrounding the re-organisation of local government in Devon meant that local authorities were not in a position to commit to another 3 year agreement and, consequently, financial support was, in the main, agreed for this financial year alone.

	2007/2008	2008/2009
Total number of training events	81	82
Total number of training places	1,119	1,219

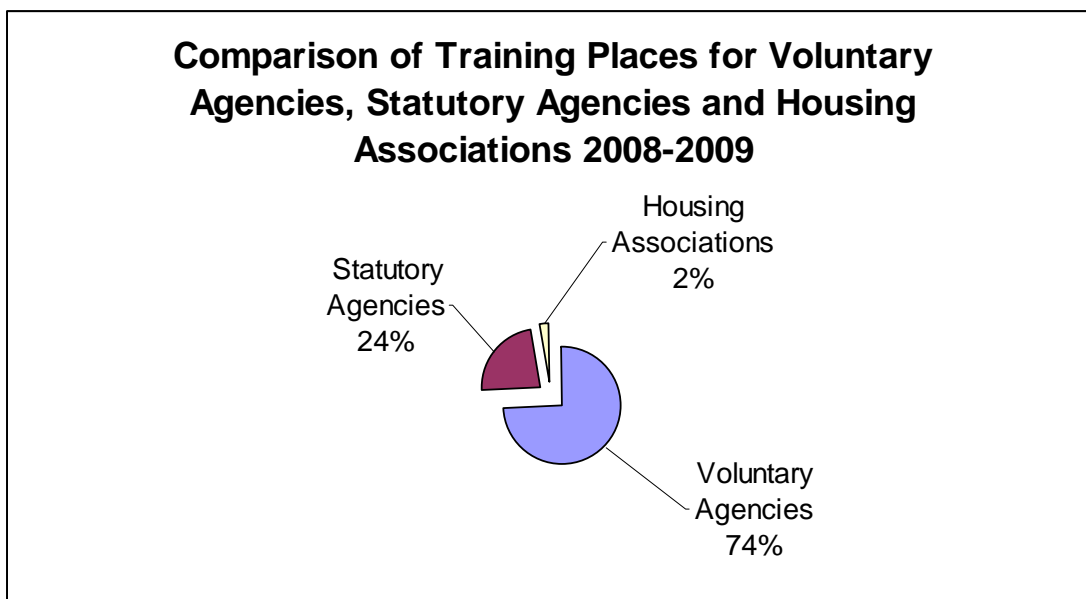


Devon Training Places 2008-2009 Booked/Attended

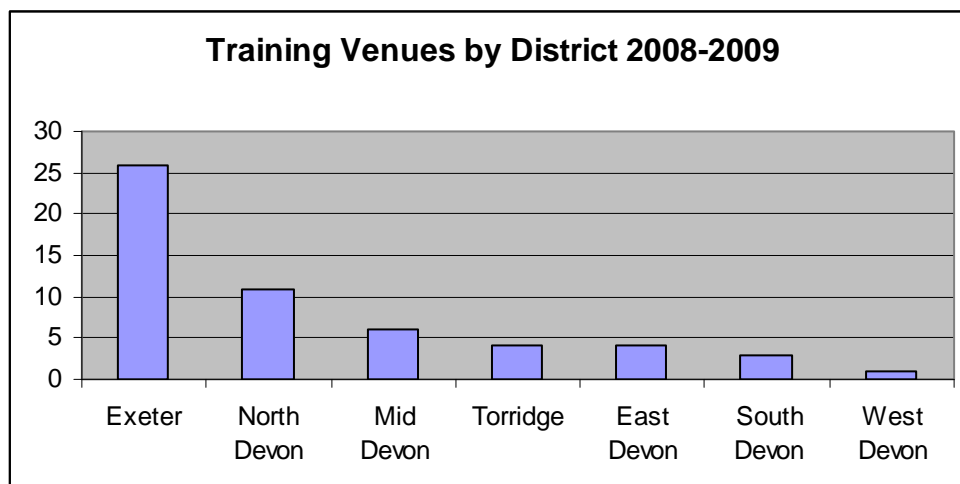
	Places
Community & Voluntary Sector	679
Health & Social Care	65
CAB	219
Devon County Council Other	166
District Councils	51
Housing Associations	30
Other Statutory	6
Private Sector	3
Total	1,219

There were some interesting variations when comparing this year's take up of training places against the previous years. The take up by Voluntary & Community Sector organisations rose from 41% of the total in 2007/2008 to 56% of the total in 2008/2009. The take up by County Council staff increased by 53 (the equivalent of about 4 additional training events) but the number of Health & Social Care staff fell from 18% of the total in 2007/2008 to 5%. There was also a decrease in the attendance of the number of District Council and other statutory staff attending training. The number of CAB staff increased by 35.

The overall increase of 100 on the previous year's figures, points to the continuing demand for benefits training and the Unit will strive to meet this demand across all relevant sectors.



Voluntary Agencies	898 places
Statutory Agencies	288 places
Housing Associations	30 places



**Some feedback received from Delegates attending Training Courses
2008-2009**

'Excellent course'

'Good, concise course, good pricing'

'very well presented, very personable trainer, very impressive level of knowledge and experience, very good training skills'

'I learned a LOT!'

'Lots of myths dispelled'

'Thank you, feel better prepared to deal with concerns'

'A very thorough and well prepared presentation'

'presentation first class, handouts excellent and a good future resource'

'Thank god you are here! X'

'Down to earth, no jargon, well done'

'Tutor made a dry subject interesting'

'excellent, made it clear, worked at a reasonable pace for us all, made the course interesting and fun'

'I thought it was going to be a rather dry and difficult day but I was completely wrong, it was really interesting'

'Many thanks - most enlightening!!'

'Excellent communicator with a passion for her subject'

'I found this great food for thought and raised my awareness considerably'

'As always, delivery of information and its content was brilliant - well done DWRU - keep up the good work!'

'Very good, I will not just send people to local DWP Jobcentre but to the CAB now'

QUIDS 4 SPECIAL KIDS

Devon Welfare Rights Unit operates a Quids 4 Special Kids project which provides a full, confidential and independent benefit check service to families living in Devon with a child with special needs, a long term illness or a disability and to young people between 16 and 21 living in Devon with special needs, a long term illness or a disability. Families and young people can self refer by telephone (01392 274869) or via our website www.dwru.org or they can be referred by people working with them if they have previously given their permission to contact us.

In addition to offering benefit checks, Welfare Rights Officers from Devon Welfare Rights Unit visit families in their homes to help with the completion of Disability Living Allowance forms and assist with the appeal process if this becomes necessary.

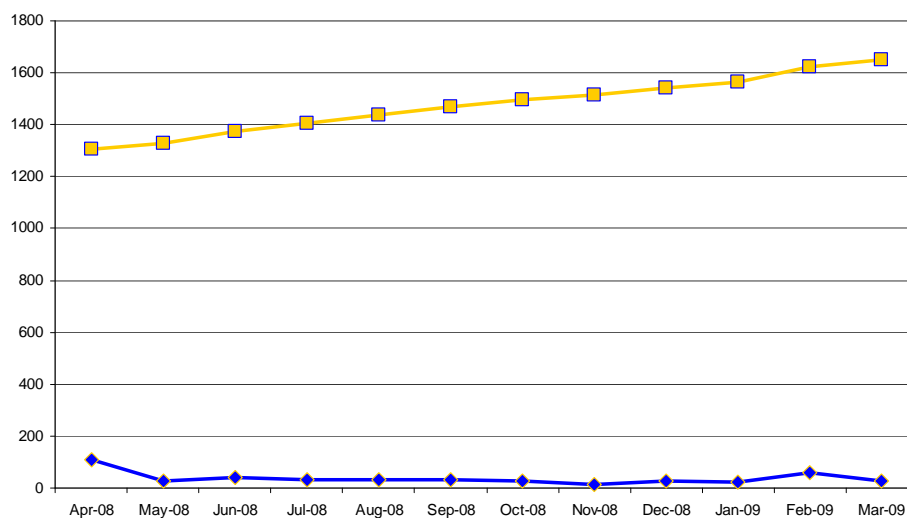
During 2008/2009 Devon Welfare Rights Unit worked closely with the Joint Agency Team to ensure that as many families of children with special needs in Devon were aware of this valuable service.

A total of 454 new referrals had been received by the third week of March 2009 and 175 of them had confirmed increases in entitlement by the same date. In addition, 45 families who received help during the first phase have had further gains confirmed, bringing the total additional income generated in the year to third week of March to £1,025,725 including arrears and lump sums of £64,487.

Devon Welfare Rights Unit had already met the three agreed targets for 2008/09:

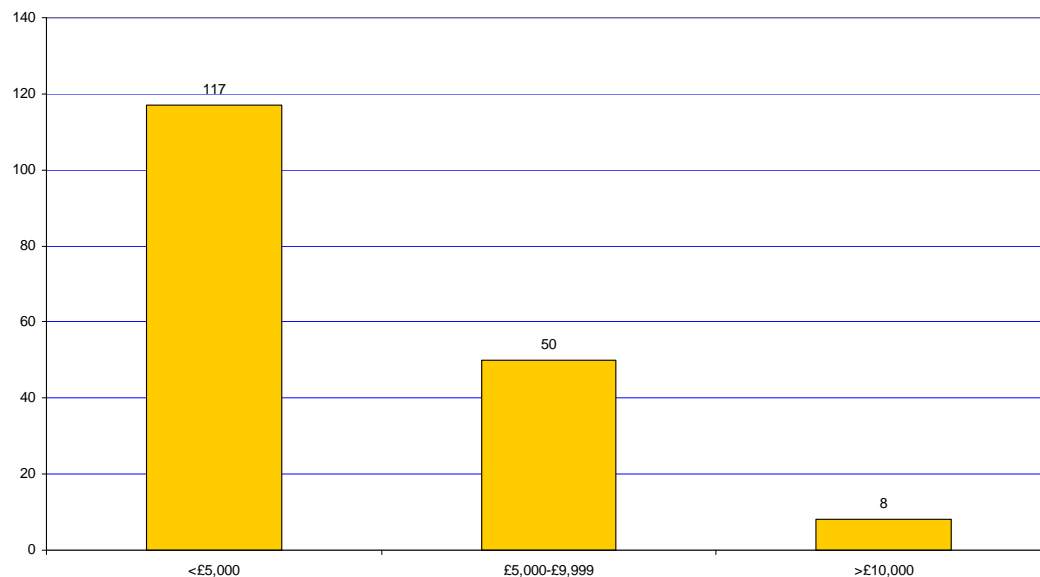
Target	Status at 31.01.09
• Provision of 1000 training places	<i>exceeded</i>
• A total of 770 families with benefit gains	<i>775</i>
• £3.4 million for Devon families	<i>£3.669 million</i>

REFERRALS 2008/09

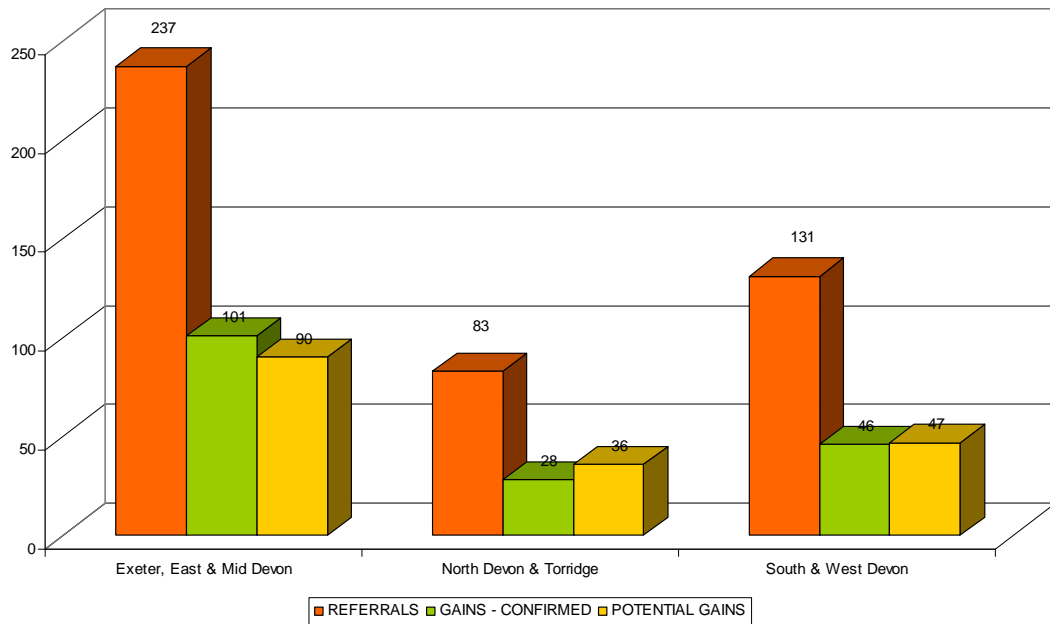


	Apr-08	May-08	Jun-08	Jul-08	Aug-08	Sep-08	Oct-08	Nov-08	Dec-08	Jan-09	Feb-09	Mar-09
REFERRALS BY MONTH	109	25	43	32	33	32	29	15	28	21	60	27
REFERRALS TO DATE	1304	1329	1372	1404	1437	1469	1498	1513	1541	1562	1622	1649

GAINS BY VALUE AND NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS



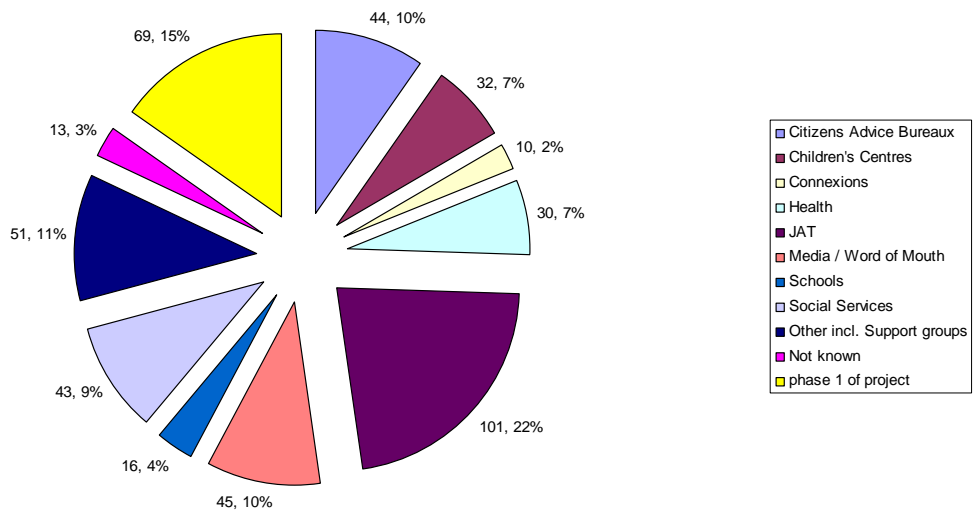
REFERRALS & GAINS BY JAT DISTRICT



Note:

Potential gains recorded those referrals where a decision on entitlement was awaited and those with visits or other action diarised but not yet completed at the end of March 2009.

REFERRALS TO 20.03.2009 BY SOURCE



FAIRER CHARGING

Devon Welfare Rights Unit continued to be commissioned by Devon County Council to process-manage the Devon Joint Finance and Benefits Team and to coordinate Citizens Advice Bureau Finance and Benefits Team Visiting Officer contracts in Devon. This year a reduction in the County Council Budget meant that the bureau contract in East Devon CAB was not renewed and in October it was agreed to discontinue the contract with West Devon CAB when the visiting officer post fell vacant. The loss of these two posts has meant that Devon County Council has had to increase the visits provided from within its Client Finance Services Team. Throughout the period the Unit has also been represented on the Joint Team Strategic Management Board.

In 2008-2009, the visiting officers all received training on Safe Guarding Adults and Employment Support Allowance. The visiting officer's lone worker policy was reviewed with an aim to produce one policy that could be used by 7 different employers (6 CAB and DCC). The need to improve visiting officer's personal safety was agreed, with Devon County Council providing funding in October 2008 for the Process Manager to commence Suzy Lamplugh Trust training to become an accredited Personal Safety Awareness trainer. Provision of a call back monitoring service for the visiting officers is also being considered.

In July, agreement was reached with Swansea Pension Service that they would verify benefit awards for all cases where an authority form signed by the client was received. The visiting officers began asking clients to sign authority forms whenever they identified increased or new benefit entitlement. The first batch of these was sent to Cardiff in September. For this year it has still only been possible so far to verify 532 outcomes from 1519 individual benefit claims.

In 2008 -2009 The Devon Joint Team delivered a financial assessment and benefit check service to 3830 Social Services service users in their own homes. 75% (2882) of these were visited within 10 days of the referral being received. The reduction in the percentage of visits made within 10 days on last year has been caused by a 40% increase in monthly referrals in the months January to March. A total of 829 households have been assisted to make 1519 claims. The verified outcomes of 532 cases has yielded **£1,321,776.40**. If the remaining 987 met with similar success the estimated total would be **£3,774,019.40**.

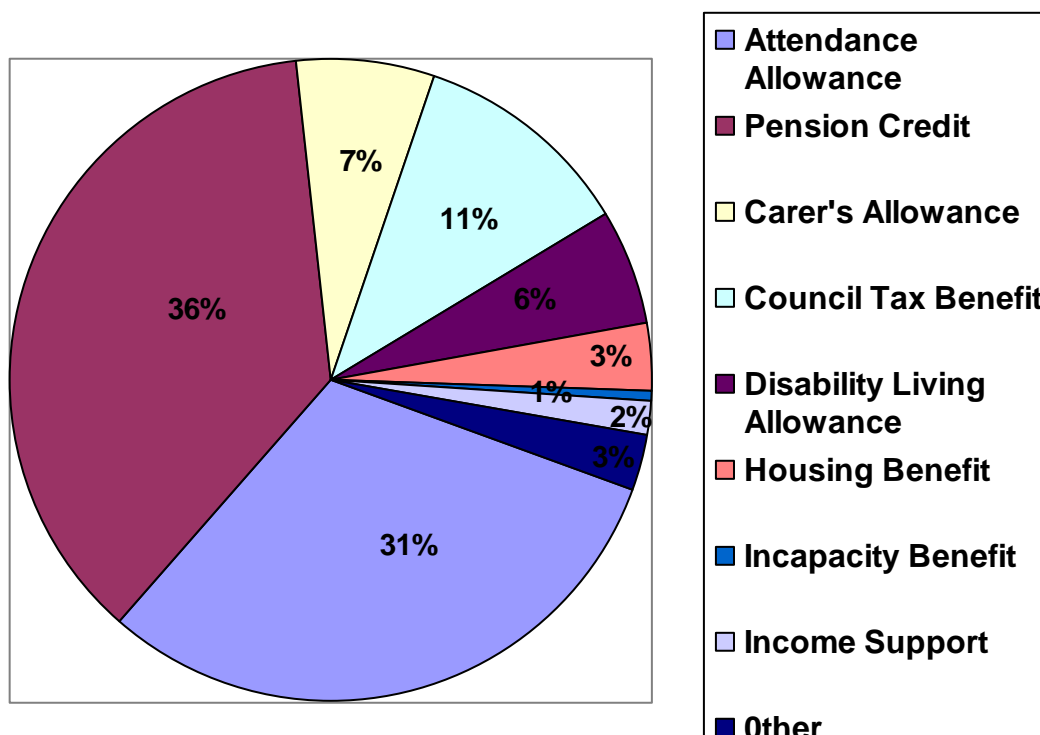
Finance and Benefits Joint Team Benefit Take-Up Analysis April 2008 - March 2009

In the 12 months April 08 - March 09 **1519** new or increased benefits were identified for **829** separate households.

Outcomes

Total	Outcome Not Known	Outcome Known	Benefit Awarded	No Award	No Claim	No Decision
1519	987 (65%)	532 (35%)	341 (64%)	83 (16%)	96 (18%)	12 (2%)

Benefits Identified



Reasons Outcome Unknown

987 cases do not have an outcome recorded:

309 = No result received

219 = Housing/Council Tax benefit claims

32 = client deceased

427 = Were not sent to TPS as were identified prior to TPS arrangement and/or no authority forms were signed.

Benefit Awards

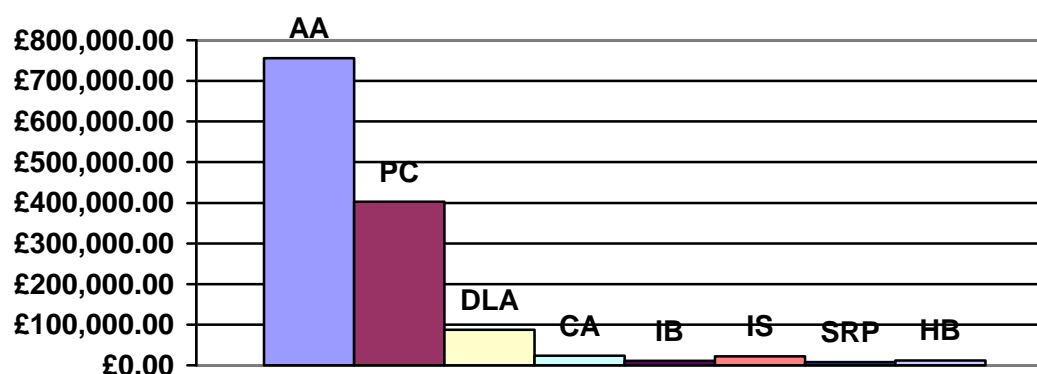
In 341 claims benefit was awarded:

Attendance Allowance: 177 claims (52%)
 Pension Credit: 125 claims (37%)
 Carer's Allowance: 11 claims (3%)
 Disability Living Allowance: 17 claims (5%)
 Income Support: 6 claims (2%)
 Incapacity Benefit: 2 claims (0.5%)
 Housing Benefit: 2 claims (0.5%)
 State Retirement Pension: 1 claim (0%)

Benefit Award Totals

Benefit Type	Backdate Award	Weekly Award	Total Award (annualised)
Attendance Allowance	£221,388.05	£10,279.01	£755,896.57
Pension Credit	£117,075.46	£5,501.03	£403,129.02
Disability Living Allowance	£22,442.45	£1,240.65	£86,956.25
Carer's Allowance	£2,675.55	£402.00	£23,579.55
Incapacity Benefit	£4,462.50	£127.50	£11,092.50
Income Support	£4,008.20	£340.70	£21,724.70
Retirement pension	£2,854.17	£92.07	£7,641.81
Housing Benefit	N/K	£226.08	£11,756.16
Total All	£374,906.38	£18,209.04	£1,321,776.40

April 2008 - March 2009 Verified Benefit Take-Up Totals



Summary Annual Report Overview

As you will see from this summary report, this year has been another extremely busy and productive year for Devon Welfare Rights Unit. We have maintained our core specialist second tier activities of providing telephone, fax and email benefits consultancy queries and supported casework.

Our direct caseload has continued to include the Quids for Special Kids cases we have dealt with this year and in total we managed 583 cases directly as well as supporting advisers from other organisations with an additional 73 cases. The Quids for Kids cases taken resulted in over a million pounds of additional benefit income for families in Devon during the year.

The training programme has continued thanks to being subsidised through funding contributions from Devon County Council and most of the other Devon local authorities, allowing 1,219 participants to access the programme this year. This programme plays an essential part, along with the consultancy service, in raising awareness of the Benefit and Tax Credits system among both third sector and statutory agencies across the county and furthering the county's social and financial inclusion strategies.

The unit has retained a process management role for the Devon Joint Finance and Benefits Team, managing and supporting 7 Visiting Officer staff, based in Devon County Council and Devon CABx, carrying out an average of 75 client visits a week. Verified outcomes indicate that over 2 million pounds of additional benefit income has been identified for social care service users in Devon.

Devon Welfare Rights Unit has taken on a lead partner agency role this year in the first phase of the Devon Local Area Agreements, principally in relation to LAA 15(a) "Working towards the economic inclusion and social integration of vulnerable populations". Key elements of this strategy include the promotion of a "life events model", building clear pathways to advice in Devon by working towards a "no door the wrong door" approach through the development of a strong partnership between the key third sector advice providing agencies in Devon. This strategy is evolving from a traditional benefit take –up model to encompass a much broader agenda of debt and money advice provision as well as improved access to affordable financial services.

As ever, the key challenges facing the unit are the same as those facing all of our voluntary sector partners, revolving around issues of resources and funding. We would like to express our gratitude and appreciation to Devon County Council and all our partners, both in service delivery and funding and strategic development. In addition it is important to recognise the outstanding level of commitment and dedication demonstrated by the staff of Devon Welfare Rights Unit without whom our achievements during this period would simply not have been possible.

Nora Corkery, Manager, Devon Welfare Rights Unit